

Lt. Col. Brian Madden

6th Battalion, The Black Watch

The following is Chapter 1 from Lt Col Brian Madden's account of the 6th Black Watch in Italy. It covers March 10th to April 16th 1944. Our thanks to Henry McKenzie Johnston for his editorials and photographs, and for obtaining permission from Black Watch H.Q. for the society to publish Mr. Madden's account.

Four days after landing from Egypt at Naples on March 6th we were in action three thousand feet up in the snow. This was on a hill called Ornito, which together with several neighbours formed the bridgehead over the River Garigliano, which had been seized a few weeks earlier—a very formidable feat of arms.

The bridgehead was very shallow, perhaps two miles in depth, the mountains rising steeply up from the river bank. The approach to it led in from one side down a villainous four hundred yards called Sun Track. This four hundred yards was completely open to enemy view and by day vehicles went down it well spaced out and only very few at that were allowed. Even then the occupants had their hearts in their mouths until the Bailey bridge over the Garigliano was reached. After crossing this bridge, the road bent left and ran for a few hundred yards under the lee of the mountains until roadhead was reached at a place called "Skipton."

Here were found the mule lines and the route then led over the foot-hills to drop down into a narrow and enclosed valley—Valle di Sujo. This was reached in little over an hour's walking and brought us to a supply point called "Harrogate," where the MDS [Main Dressing Station] was situated. A pause was made here before the really stiff climbing began. Two hours of this and we reached a little terraced re-entrant known as "Cheshire," which was the mule-head. Here all supplies were unloaded and stacked ready to be carried forward to the front line by porters.

Every two hundred yards down the track to "Skipton" was a stretcher-bearer post, and the system was that casualties were passed from post to post, thus bringing the lift within the powers of the black porters. It was a long business, however—one of several hours to get a man down from the top.

Owing to the formation of the hills and the tiny amount of flat space to be found at these heights, "Cheshire" was practically speaking in the front line itself, and the way forward to the Battalion went curling round the slopes below the crests in a roughly parallel line with the front, which was on the top of the crests. Along this thousand yard track passed unceasingly porters—black and white. The black ones—Basuto boys—were responsible for carrying up the rations and water, which was scarce in its proper place; the white ones were our own anti-tank gunners and carrier crews, who brought up all the other supplies. It was hard work and many of the men were not built for it, but they stuck to it manfully over the rough and muddy track with (so far as could be overheard) no more than the usual quota of epithets.

This description has given a fairly clear picture of the method of supply. All our "jeeps" bar two were taken off us to form the Divisional supply train from railhead to "Skipton." The two "jeeps" left with us did yeoman service bringing up any extra unit equipment and little comforts we needed. For instance, B Echelon used to bake scones and cakes for us and send them up by the hundreds each night.

At "Skipton" lived the Second-in-Command with a small staff and some Pioneers under Sgt. Laird. These latter spent all their days sweeping the orange groves of mines, and the result of their risky but completely successful labours was an orange a day per man the whole time we were up on the hill—a great addition to our diet. This party was responsible for seeing that our stores got as far as "Cheshire"—two or three men being kept at "Harrogate" to take over the guarding of the mules over the second half of the trip.

At "Cheshire" lived our porters and, as has already been said, they carried the stores forward to Battalion HQ where OC S Coy and the CQMSs [Company Quartermaster Sergeants] made the distributions down to Companies. At this final supply point lived two battalion cobblers, who worked flat out the whole time keeping our boots (and so our feet) in good order.

Life in the front line was unpleasant, but usually not too unpleasant, except for night sentries who froze. The ground being rocky, digging was impossible, so sangars were erected and covered over with bivouacs (and even heated with Valor stoves in a few cases). The chief worry was the shelling of our most forward positions, which were occupied by A Coy. Overhead cover was eventually provided for them in the form of angle irons laid across the tops of the sangars and then heaped over with rocks.

Right out on the point of their feature was a forward OP [Observation Post] looking down on the result of a German attack made earlier on a Guards battalion. It had been touch and go, but the Guards had won and the Boche had gone back leaving many dead. There they remained, neither side relishing the task of risking casualties bringing them in. Telephones were insufficient in numbers to provide one for the OP, and one famous shoot was conducted by the OP writing corrections on a piece of paper, wrapping this round a stone and throwing it over to his Platoon Commander. The latter telephoned it through to his Coy Commander, who passed it on to the CO, who gave the gunners the result.

If A Coy was isolated, B Coy on the right was little better, being tucked away in a fold in the mountains with the Boche on two sides of them and an area of No Man's Land on a third.

Occasionally the mist would come down and then these isolated Companies had to 'stand to' as the Boche used to like patrolling in these mists. But mists can lift as quickly as they come down, and not all Boche patrols were safely under cover in time. B Coy had an extraordinary view into the back of the German position facing the Royal Fusiliers who were on Cerosola—a hill on the right of ours (Ornito).

C Coy on Ornito itself could also look down on to Cerosola and could see both sides clinging to the hill-side just below the crest. So close were they to each other that rabbit wire was erected just out of sight of the Boche to catch the grenades they threw over and prevent them rolling down on our positions.

On one occasion also a dead Boche was recovered from over the crest by a home-made grapnel which was flung over the top several times until it caught in the Boche, when he was dragged over to our side. Another view C Coy had was a distant one of Monte Cassino, and the bombing of the monastery on March 17th was a fine sight.

D Coy were all right backing up behind A Coy and responsible for stopping Boche patrols getting in on Battalion HQ. The mortars lived behind the latter and had the time of their lives firing off on the Boche whom B Coy so often saw moving about on Cerosola. The amount of movement they did was a revelation to us after North Africa when nothing was ever seen, and it considerably

lowered our estimation of them, but it also led to some heart-burning on the part of the porters who had to carry up the ammunition required to replace that which had been loosed off by the mortar platoon.

But our part in the bridgehead was to hold what we had and not to try and advance further as the supply position could not stand it. The French were busy making a jeep road right up to "Cheshire," but this was nothing like ready, though it eventually made possible the big advance in May. At the present time, the Army plan was to force the way forward through Cassino, and the New Zealand Corps were trying to do it. If they had succeeded we were to have moved forward a little as our immediate opponents would have had to go back. A complicated system of code words was introduced to meet this eventuality, but the NZ attack only achieved limited success and nothing came of it.

The least pleasant part of our life, perhaps, was the constant patrolling that had to be done every night. As usual it resulted in a number of casualties, but at least one patrol had a very successful encounter one night.

As we came to know the ground we grew more ambitious and eventually put a sniper out in No Man's Land for a whole day to spy out the Boche positions. On his report several "recce" patrols were sent out on three successive nights and eventually a fighting patrol with mortar support was organised. Every care had been taken and it should have been a success, but, alas, part of the patrol lost its way owing to a fall of snow and we suffered some casualties.

A vivid memory of our life up there was a snowstorm one night which nearly led to a disaster for the portering party. They could not see where they were going—they often could not stand upright—and it was a very tired body of men who eventually got back, having been fired on without hurt by D Coy as they came in from the wrong direction.

Another memory was being caught in the glare of a warship's searchlight directed on to A Coy's hill from the sea far below us to the left.

Eventually the time came for us to hand over and we withdrew one night to "Harrogate," getting a wonderful view of Vesuvius erupting 60 miles away. The journey down was long and tiring, but nothing compared to that coming up, which had been done in two stages on successive nights.

We stayed two or three days at "Harrogate," being shelled there one night to the intense disgust of those whose bivouacs were in the line of fire. A considerable rearrangement of bivouacs was to be noticed next morning, but nobody was hurt. During these days the men had sulphur baths near "Skipton," and much of our stores were loaded on to mules and sent back.

Then on the night of March 22nd we set off to march back across the Garigliano and up to a village called San Carlo high up on the other side of the valley. It was a terribly tiring march of four or five hours over a rough track in stygian darkness. When we finally got in we found a message waiting for us to say that our move to the Adriatic Sector (already ordered) had been cancelled and we were to move only a few miles to the east to have a short rest before going into a new defensive position near St. Elia.

The latter was yet another bridgehead, this time over the Rapido to the east of Cassino. Conditions of supply were, however, easier. We were on a hill it is true, but there was a perfectly good road as far as Battalion HQ, and though mules were used to supply two companies, they were only in limited numbers.

Nevertheless, this brought us an added complication, as with so few mules they were not run by Division, but put under command of the Battalion. An officer who had been inadequately trained in North Africa in mule management was, naturally enough, made OC Mules.

Now the experienced muleteer knows that the proper method of loading is to lay out all mule loads first and then load the animals simultaneously, or as near as maybe. Not so our OC Mules. He preferred the platform system. The first mule of about twenty was brought forward and given his load, and then sent away while the second was loaded, and so on. By the time number ten had been reached, number one had collapsed in a dead faint, shortly to be followed by numbers two and three. All this being by the light of the moon alone did not help matters, but eventually all twenty mules were lined up and inspected by OC Mules. As he said afterwards, if mules' looks could kill he would have fallen dead on the spot.

However, to return to our story. We had a week's rest before coming up to this area, and the way up was first of all through a deep and very narrow gorge, christened by our predecessors "L'Inferno." Down this gorge, which was untouchable by enemy artillery, had once flowed a stream, but the French had somehow or other diverted it or dammed it up and made a road instead, which could at a pinch take 15-cwt trucks.

The road curled about and wherever a subsidiary channel came in from the side, tents could be seen where various administrative parties and HQs had found room to park themselves. Sometimes high up on either side of the gorge could be seen a ledge and here again bivouacs and their owners clung to the hillside.

Eventually after about two miles the end of the gorge was reached and a road led from there to Battalion HQ three or four miles away. This road was again in full view of the Boche and was unusable by day, though the original "recce" party had to take the risk owing to lack of time and got away with it.

They had had to go up to take over from the French but had not been allotted an interpreter, the authorities rightly believing that we should manage somehow or other. All the same, the CO's "ou êtes votre tête-derrière?" did not at first produce the position of the French HQ from the Algerian soldier who was asked.

But if the language carried difficulties, and oh! those French passwords for Scottish tongues, the change-over of all weapons and stores caused a good deal more. The British were responsible for equipping the Polish forces but the Americans had taken on the task for the French, and consequently none of their equipment (bar 'jeeps') was the slightest value to us. This meant that in one night the whole of our equipment and ammunition had to be transported down the "Inferno" (a very crowded artery) and up to Battalion HQ and so forward to Companies. To save noise we tried to do the job in 'jeeps' from the "Inferno" forwards, but it soon became evident that it was going much too slowly and 15-cwts were brought into service. As they ground their way in low gear up the last mile of winding hill road, they seemed to make enough noise to wake the dead, and certainly the Boche reacted but nobody was hit, and by a really stupendous effort the job was completed in time. The only casualty was a ditched 'jeep,' whose owner had to make his way back by a roundabout route across country next day. This 'jeep,' and also a French one left behind by our Allies, was eventually recovered and we remained one 'jeep' up for the rest of the War.

The French were excellent except from 2 pm to 4 pm when they lay down to recover from lunch (served with several wines) and let the War look after itself. Their drawings and intelligence were first-class, and they did all they could to help.

The lay-out of the area was most extraordinary, judged from pre-War standards, and on a TEWT [Tactical Exercise Without Troops] would certainly have earned the sack for the officers who produced it as a solution. Apart from anything else we were completely overlooked on three sides. To the south we looked across the open plain to Cassino and Monastery Hill, about four miles distant. To the west, on 10th Brigade front, Pt 856, one of the foot-hills of Monte Cairo, was half held by the Boche and looked down on us from some three thousand yards away across the valley—the line of sight being over the top of 10th Brigade. But the chief bugbear was the 3,000 ft high Cifalco to the north which towered 2,000 ft above anything that we possessed and was only 1,500 yards from our forward positions. Beside Cifalco but dwarfed by it was Pt 461, which was directly in front of B Coy and above and to the right of C Coy. Battalion HQ was established in the Monastery of Casa Lucienne, a long white-washed building; with a Chapel at the eastern end. It had received hits from shells up to 150 mm. calibre during the French occupation, but it was substantially built and offered a life of some comfort with spring beds and mattresses and plenty of tables and chairs. It was not hit by the Boche again while we were there, despite the fact that it was in view from all the hills mentioned, except Pt 461. [The 'Pts' are in metres] It was most amusing at 8 pm each night in the Monastery to see the queue which assembled in the passageway waiting for the moment it got dark enough to go outside. Then off went the various parties—some to draw water, others to visit the ammunition dump, others on errands to the various Companies. In the middle of all this the 'jeep' train would arrive, be unloaded and move off as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, the long-suffering mules had been brought up from their hide and were loaded for C and D Coys, whilst porters carried to B Coy, and A Coy and Battalion HQ collected for themselves.

On the right of the Monastery, Pts 403 and 520, foot-hills of Cifalco, rose steeply up, and these were held by the Battalion on our right—the Royal Fusiliers. A wooded ravine ran up from the Monastery to the north and on the left of it was a long narrow ridge, also wooded at the top. B Coy, the right forward Coy, was astride the ravine, with a platoon at the head of it 600 yards from Battalion HQ, and also held the ridge with two platoons one forward and one back. B Coy HQ was in a house at the south end of the ridge, close to Battalion HQ, and had with it one platoon of A Coy for counterattack purposes, which also manned two standing patrols in the ravine. Two detachments of MMGs [Medium Machine Guns] were in the ravine in B Coy area, bringing cross-fire to bear on the open terraces at its head.

Left of B Coy ridge, the ground dropped sharply down to the Rio Secco valley, where two roads led north-west through farms and orchards to Belmonte and Atina. In this valley were the houses in which C Coy lived. There was a large gap between B and C Coys, but the gap was in reality a very steep and rocky slope over which movement would have been nearly impossible. C Coy's position was a very strange one, overlooked on all sides and with the enemy only a little over 100 yards from them. He was certainly no more than this on their right, where he occupied houses on the lower slopes of Pt 461. Yet C Coy was very little troubled by the enemy, having to contend only with slight shelling and mortaring and annoying but ineffective rifle grenade fire which caused no casualties. However, they did receive most attention from enemy patrols and were worried by an uncharted French and German minefield to their front and right which precluded much retaliatory action on their part. Movement, of course, was nil by day and as

little as possible by night, particularly as the moon was approaching the full. Cooking was by "Tommy" to prevent any possibility of smoke.

D Coy (on C's left) had a platoon in the two houses astride the more westerly of the two roads. The other two platoons were on the steep spur of Pt 290 on the left of the valley and on the subsidiary pimple to its right.

Hands and knees were the easiest way of getting up to these eyries. On D Coy's left the hills ran steeply up to 10th Brigade area. D Coy HQ was in a farm house about 400 yards back at the foot of the hills, and just above them to the left rear were the remaining two detachments of MMGs firing up the valley.

A Coy was about 300 yards down the track to the right rear of Battalion HQ, and the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] (now equipped with an especially converted 'jeep' ambulance) was in the same area, with the mule lines hidden away still further back. In the valley behind C Coy lived our A-Tank Guns, and C Coy's orders were to let enemy tanks pass through if they came.

The main point about the lay-out was the number of men in houses. Only A Coy was entirely in sangars or slit trenches, for the ground was soft in the woods.

The journal of our ten-day stay reads very much the same all through—patrols at night, hosts of visitors in the evening, reports of occasional rifle grenades, mortars and shell fire.

But an important patrol very early on discovered that a house 100 yards to the right of C Coy was strongly occupied. This at once led to the fear that the enemy might infiltrate into the rear of C Coy's position and even occupy some empty houses there. This would have been a definite threat to C Coy, and orders were accordingly given for all empty houses to be searched and cleared before first light, and a standing patrol from A Coy was sent down to occupy some of these houses each night. Later we were sent a flight of an RAF Regiment to gain battle experience, and this flight was used to replace A Coy's standing patrol.

This was really, however, the quietest area we were ever in and we only had one man wounded. Our orders were to keep the sector as quiet as possible, as the intention was to hold it with a much smaller force when regrouping for the big spring attack on Cassino took place. Our most energetic action perhaps was on stray dogs in caves which barked and gave away the movements of our patrols. These caves were accordingly cleared but besides the dogs, booty consisted only of a copy of Virgil.

One valuable experiment tried out in this area was the importation of an extra officer to Battalion HQ as Patrol Master, responsible for organising, briefing and interrogating patrols—this lifting a considerable weight off the shoulders of the CO and RIO [Regimental Intelligence Officer].

The CO was called away for a day to attend a conference on training with tanks, but got back on the evening of the 8th to hand over to The Royal West Kents, A Coy having slipped away the night before to get things ready for us in the little mountain village of Viticuso, a few miles back, where we were to carry out training with a Canadian Tank Regiment. The background to our departure was this time provided not by Vesuvius but by the nightingale singing in the moonlight among the oaks below the Monastery—a suitable finale to a very quiet stay.

The tank training was carried out successfully and the Battalion was also bathed, their ablutions being slightly disturbed by counter-battery fire on a troop of our 3.7AA Guns firing in a ground role from a position close to the bath unit.

There is little more to record about the Battalion's stay in Viticuso except for a picturesque service held among the ruins of the twisting streets, with the Padre installed on a balcony above; and an expedition the same evening to the south-west slopes of Monte Maio made by the CO and a few officers. They had a wonderful panoramic view of the battlefield from S. Vittore right across to the Garigliano bridgehead, and on the other side, over to the snow-capped Matese and the Abruzzi national park to the south and north respectively of the upper Volturno valley.

"A poor world this if full of care^[1]_{SEP} We have no time to stand and stare."

Lt. Col. Brian Madden was Commanding Officer of the 6th Black Watch. The following chapter is an extract from his complete history of the Battalion's actions throughout the war published privately. The first extract, "Chapter 1, March 10th- April 16th" appeared in the Spring issue of our supplement. Our thanks to Henry McKenzie Johnston for obtaining permission from Black Watch HQ to include the excerpts in the society's supplement and for his editorials.

Chapter 2, April 21st – May 4th, "In Cassino Town"

On April the 17th joined once again by Majors Macrae (who had been ill) and Pollok-McCall (back from England with terrific stories of preparation for the "Second Front"), we left for Dragoni in the plains, where we were to practise boating operations under Captains McArthur and Hutchison who had for the last fortnight been planning the training for us. There we teamed up with two other important members of the Battalion—a donkey and its baby, evacuated from a garden in C Coy's area in the last position. It seemed a shame to leave them to be eventually killed by mortar fire, and great thought and care was expended on their removal. The baby rode a mule with the mother following behind, the journey lasting two nights to truck head or mule bottom via Battalion HQ where a day's rest was spent in the Monastery. At truck head (in the "Inferno") they were both got on to a 15-cwt. truck by using stretchers as ramps, and so transferred to the pleasant banks of the Volturno.

This river is both swift and deep and, it being best to draw a veil over our watermanship, it will be sufficient to say that quite a number of people took impromptu bathes, with the more expert spending most of their time diving for lost weapons and equipment.

But everyone enjoyed living once again in cornfields and water meadows while preparations were made to move into Cassino town, which we were due to do in a few days' time. The final episodes at Dragoni were a night river-crossing exercise which was chiefly remarkable for the colossal smoke screen produced from large generators and a Pipe Band practice attended by an American spectator who, on being asked if he had any tune he would like to hear, chose somewhat unconventionally "Tipperary" and "Chatanooga Choo-Choo."

The first move towards getting into Cassino was to send our Advance Party into the town for one night primed with questions as to the mode of life in that most unhealthy spot. They returned to us twenty-four hours later and Friday, April the 21st, saw our final conferences before we moved in the afternoon to a lying-up area at San Pietro, a few miles back from Cassino. Here we had a

meal, put sandbags on our feet and drove on to the debussing point just under the shoulder of Monte Trocchio.

The march then began with D Coy leading, while B, A and C followed at half-hour intervals, enabling D Coy. (which was to be left-hand forward Coy) to have an hour's start on A (right-forward Coy) and B (right rear Coy) to have an hour's start on the left rear Coy (C Coy). Despite the long walk into Cassino from Trocchio (chosen as debussing point because of shelling in the area of the 2nd Coldstream's roadhead the previous night) and the resultant wearing through of the sandbags on the men's boots, the take-over went almost without a hitch. Battalion HQ arrived in the Cathedral Crypt (joint HQ for two of the Battalions holding Cassino) at 2230 hrs. and the Coldstreams handed over command at 0145 hrs. the following morning. The only tragedy was the loss of L/Sgt Wilson of D Coy, who was badly wounded by a 'short' smoke-shell from our own guns, and was taken to hospital almost immediately after his arrival in Cassino. His age was 55—he can have had few rivals, though we also owned another MM of the 1914-18 War in L/Sgt Clarence.

One feature of the relief was that the men carried with them rations for 48 hours to prevent the congestion on the roads which would have been caused had our porters been added to the number of those entering and leaving Cassino that night. The only porters were those carrying water for the following day and these men came in with the Battalion to learn the routes, and act as additional guides for the porters on the following night. All accommodation stores, such as lamps, were taken over in situ from the Coldstreams, as also were telephones, 18 [wireless] sets and Fiats. Stretchers were taken over in the RAP. situated in the Crypt, but both the incoming and outgoing companies took stretchers with them in case of casualties en route, as in fact entering or leaving Cassino was in many respects more dangerous than living there. A vast accumulated store of rations was also handed over to us.

Cassino was held by parts of three Battalions with a further Battalion on the left in the area of the Station. The Castle, when we first took over, was also held by a separate force—but we shall return to the subject of the Castle later. Of these three Battalions, ours was the centre. Battalion HQ was in the Cathedral Crypt, which was shared with the left-hand Battalion, and we had two Companies forward in the town. The other two Companies with rear Battalion HQ were fully a mile back, across the Rivers Gari and Rapido. Strengths in Cassino were as follows: Right-hand Coy (A) 65, Left-hand Coy (D) 55, Battalion HQ 17 (CO, RIO, MO and 2, Signal Sergeant and 4, Police Cpl, 4 Pioneers, Intelligence Cpl, CO's batman).

The Adjutant with his office truck and staff stayed at A Echelon to attend to correspondence but attached to Battalion HQ were two company runners, a protective section from D Coy, which also served as a small immediate reserve of 2 and 5; three Brigade signallers, a Tank Officer and one Other Rank (for liaison with two tanks situated in the left Battalion's area) and an RA Officer and two Other Ranks. The Tank Officer was supplied, first by the New Zealanders and then by the Canadians, and the RA Officer belonged to the Ayrshire Yeomanry of the 6th Armoured Division, who were relieved by 11 Canadian Field Regt, RA.

The strength of the HQ of the left Battalion did not bring the total personnel in the Crypt up to as much as 50. The RAP was shared and the left and centre Battalions took it in turns to supply the staff, while the same arrangements existed with regard to the Signals Officers, only one Battalion at a time bringing theirs up, the other Battalion bringing their Signal Sergeant. We had no Padre as ours was on a course at Bari during this period.

The Crypt was quite a comfortable HQ, tons of rubble on top making it capable of withstanding hits, even by 210 mm. shells which landed on it from time to time. Ventilation was strangely good but all light was artificial.

On two occasions footsteps were heard overhead in the early hours of the morning. They were tense moments as we were rather like rats in a trap, the entrance being by a hole in the ground. The Boche, of course, knew all about the Crypt and how to get into it—they had constructed it. But in each case the footsteps were friendly, Companies having forgotten to tell us they were coming.

Not all the men lived in the same vault; the protective section, Pioneers and Police Corporal living in another one to the rear, which was used as a collecting post for all men arriving at or leaving Battalion HQ.

A telephone had been installed and the Police Corporal checked people in and out, keeping the Battalion Command Post informed. His time of greatest worry was the nightly portering period. The signallers, with their exchange, lived in a nunnery, a large ruin attached to and south of the Cathedral, which also held a Company of the left Battalion and a reserve ammunition dump. One signaller was later brought into the Command Post to work the 18 set. No movement was possible between the various parts of Battalion HQ by day, for sniping was prevalent in the area.

The men lived in sangars and dugouts, in most cases inside, but in some cases outside, ruined buildings in the town. They were in very cramped conditions in close proximity to the enemy, with very limited fields of view, and liable at any moment to become out of communication with the rear; and, worst of all, they were, to all intents and purposes, isolated as far as help by cross-fire from neighbouring posts was concerned. The reason for this was the existence everywhere of enormous piles of rubble, which effectively blocked view and interfered with fields of fire. The town was also literally pocked with shell-and bomb-craters, some of them as much as 40 ft across and with 6 or 7 ft of water in them. These craters and the rubble effectively blocked the road against the passage of vehicles.

Large areas of the town had become swamped, flooded by the overflowing of the Gari River, and these were also impassable. When we first took over, the route between D Coy's left forward and right forward platoons lay across such a flooded area and the only means of passage was a half-submerged sheet of corrugated iron. The shell-holes had one advantage, they supplied water which, after chlorination, could be used for washing. Water supply shell-holes had to be carefully distinguished from the ones which after dark received the contents of the refuse bins and sanitary buckets. The town was supposed to be full of putrefying bodies, but we did not experience so much trouble as was expected, though a supply of disinfectants and bleach was laid on in case of need.

Summing up, it may be said that the physical conditions of Cassino were pretty bad, and these, combined with the nervous tension, were such as to make it inadvisable to allow the men to spend more than four days in the very foremost positions or much more than eight in the town in one continuous stretch. Conditions for the enemy must have been much the same, except that their part of the town, which roughly consisted of a fringe of tightly-packed houses running round the foot of Monastery Hill and Castle Hill, was much less damaged by the American bombing than our part, which had been flattened. Our 'houses' had really been selected by the

New Zealanders, who captured this part of the town, as being the only buildings with still something in the nature of walls standing.

The supplying of the troops in Cassino was done by road from A Echelon up to the cemetery. Rear Battalion HQ and the rear Companies could thus be supplied directly by road. To minimise noise and avoid blocking narrow side roads, 'jeeps' and trailers and 15-cwts were used, and these left A Echelon in time to pass Monte Trocchio at last light. The porters for the forward elements in the town travelled in these vehicles, dismounted at the cemetery and went on foot down to Route 6 [the main road through Cassino to Rome] and the Crypt. One night our porters would leave first, and those of the other Battalion left first the next. Route 6 was in a very bad condition, torn and cratered, and with no metalling left. There were four improvised bridges on the way across the Rapido and Gari, for in both cases a detour had to be made round the original bridge and the river had to be crossed by means of a supplementary one.

This had arisen from the constant shelling of these bridges by enemy guns and towards the end of our stay shell-fire had wreaked havoc with the additional bridges as well. The section of the porters' route which lay along Route 6 was the worst part for them, both as regards the going and the continual possibility of mortar, shell and MG fire. Our predecessors had had much trouble with a MG in the station area which used to send occasional bursts across Route 6, but this gun (nick-named "Spandau Joe") did not bother us very much during our stay, perhaps owing to the attention of our artillery and MMGs. Total porter casualties were only one, although they experienced rather a nasty bout of mortaring on the bridges one night.

On arrival at the Crypt, where they were checked in, porters waited until permission was received from the forward Companies for them to go up. This permission was usually conditional on the state of the smoke screen which was put down nightly by the RA from 2000 hrs onwards until portering was complete, to cover the movement and drown noise. The RA Officer in the Crypt had great difficulties with the screen, particularly if there was any wind. He had to work with six predetermined points of origin, and arrange his screen according to the conditions prevailing. The whole situation was made very difficult by the line of flight and the position of the Castle, which collected all the 'overs' and prevented the screen being pushed further away from our own FDLs [Forward Defence Localities]. These were continually complaining and suffering occasional casualties from the 'shorts'. The smoke task was allotted to differently sited regiments in order to try and remedy the defects, but the position remained unsatisfactory. The expenditure was fantastic, never less than 1,000 rounds a night, and on the occasion of the takeover by the Royal Fusiliers of the Welsh Guards' positions, the smoke screen was kept up all night, with a total expenditure of 7,000 rounds.

To return to our porters, these consisted as far as possible of the 'Left out of battle' personnel of rifle companies, helped out by certain HQ personnel, including the CSM, CQMS, MT Sgt and Sanitary Cpl. Major Gordon, Capt. Smith, Lieut Christopher, the MTO and RSM took turns as Commander of the porter party. S Coy were left out of the portering almost in toto and remained back at B Echelon for training, as up till now, excepting the mortar platoon, they had had practically no practice in their own job. The latest draft was also left out of the battle and remained at A Echelon to train in fieldcraft and the use of weapons under Major Coates.

During our stay in Cassino we subsisted very largely on fresh rations. The idea was adapted from the Coldstreams, who had discovered that fresh rations take up very little more space than dry, and can be just as easy to carry, besides being infinitely more interesting. Accordingly, the

meat was cooked at A Echelon and sent up cold, when it could be re-heated if necessary. Potatoes were also sent up cooked, bread came up daily, and cakes were baked at A Echelon and sent up. Cooking at the front was done on stoves where circumstances permitted, otherwise by 'tommy' cookers, of which there was a liberal supply.

The rear Companies were far enough back to live in reasonable comfort in undamaged houses (one of which was shared by an Italian family, undeterred by the nearness of the front), set amid a beautiful countryside of woods and orchards, cornfields and vineyards, where the vines were trained over the living Elm in the traditional way. A limited amount of movement was possible by day, and they had a good water supply ready to hand.

Casualties were dealt with by the RAP in the Crypt. A 'jeep' would be despatched to a point some way up the cemetery road to meet stretcher bearers coming back. Stretcher-bearing from Crypt to rear was done by twelve porters (the two Battalions taking it in turns to supply them), who stayed behind at the collecting post after delivering their loads and remained until 0300 hrs. or until given permission to go. They were thus able to collect all casualties incurred during that night and the previous day. It was laid down that as far as possible no evacuation of casualties would take place by day for fear of disclosing positions, and, in fact, we were never compelled to send back anyone during daylight. Our Red Cross was apparently respected by the Boche, and they made continual use of theirs, often it was suspected for illicit ends. We did not interfere with them, as our casualties in the Castle could not be evacuated except under the Red Cross flag, a fact which the Germans probably realised and took advantage of. All the Battalion stretcher bearers were armed with flags. We had the usual trouble of stretchers being sent back and not returned or replaced, and our stock in the Crypt dwindled. Total casualties incurred by the Battalion in Cassino were twenty, and in addition B Coy in its tenure of the Castle position sustained three casualties.

Just as at St. Elia, communications were the greatest worry. There were telephone lines to the forward Companies and again forward from them. These were duplicated by 18 set and 38 set. There was lateral telephone communication, mended night about from either end, and 18 set communication to the Battalion on the right and to 5 RWK [Royal West Kents] in the Station, while a telephone line to Brigade ran through the exchange of the right-hand Battalion. Rear Battalion HQ possessed an exchange serving the rear Companies and the ambulance post, and they could occasionally be spoken to via the Brigade exchange. There was also 18 set communication to rear Battalion HQ, opened up every hour. The usual 22 set communication to Brigade prevailed, and here we scored by having two Battalion HQs together, for there was a spare set. As regards the telephone, however, both Battalions used the same exchange, which was adequate. Both HQs used the same telephone, which was found to be a trifle inadequate on occasions, but could easily have been remedied if necessary.

In Cassino we came to regard the telephone as a luxury. The line was always being broken, and the heroic mending efforts of Sgt. Hubbard and his staff were often insufficient to keep pace with the breakages. No line parties, of course, could go out by day, and the anxiety caused by the very real danger to our lines was far greater than that caused by the very remote danger to ourselves during the periodic bouts of shelling. Without communications one felt completely helpless, as there was no observation and, what was worse, one had continual fears for the forward troops, who, for all we knew, were in trouble, while one could do nothing to help. After our unfortunate experience with 17 platoon, of which more will be said later, testing of lines and wireless sets was very strictly supervised, and a rough drill laid down by which the moment either party suspected a break in the line, the wireless was immediately switched on.

Routine (at any rate in the Crypt) was as follows. We slept until 1200 hrs. (the Boche evidently did the same, as his harassing fire did not start until about 1400 hrs. as a rule), and had breakfast at midday, tea at 1530 hrs., dinner between 1800 and 1900 hrs., and at 2000 hrs. what was known as 'Exercise Flurry' began. The smoke-screen started, and directions from the RA Officer had to be given over the Brigade 22 set, and passed on by Brigade to the regiment concerned. Reception was bad at nights, and endless repetitions and corrections had to be bandied to and fro. A groan of relief went up when the message was passed back at last from the other end correct in every detail.

While the smoke shoot was thus causing trouble, the porters would arrive, shortly after 2100 hrs., causing a spate of conversations over the telephone to the Collecting Post, and the Companies of both Battalions. Runners would arrive and depart, line parties sally forth, visitors arrive, porters enter the Crypt with rations, Collecting Post and Signal Office personnel come in to collect their rations, until the place was a milling mass of sweating humanity, all very hot from scrambling over the rubble. Then suddenly towards midnight, on a normal night, all would quieten down, and there would be very little for the next twelve hours except the routine departure of the stretcher bearers at 0300 hrs.

The first day passed very peacefully, the main item of interest being the shelling of an immobile German tank in the Continental Hotel. An 8-in. Howitzer, a most remarkable American weapon, was directed, by a forward platoon officer of 3rd Grenadier Guards, and was so accurate that corrections of "Right—10 yards, Left—5 yards" and so forth were being given and complied with to the yard. The tank was left in a sorry state, but even after this the Boche made continual efforts to recover it.

'A' Echelon had the pleasure of witnessing an air battle in which a German plane was brought down, crashing and burning for hours in the hills above the "Inferno," which was now over to their right.

Our companions in the Crypt (3rd Grenadier Guards) were relieved by 1st RWK on the night 23rd /24th April, and 2nd RF [Royal Fusiliers] relieved 3rd WG [Welsh Guards]. 12th Brigade thus was responsible for Cassino, with 5th RWK still on the left in the Station. We were under command of 8th Indian Division, of which this latter Battalion formed part.

The morning of the 24th was by all appearances a quiet one, and nothing else was reported for the day. Indeed, at 1900 hrs. our report to Brigade was "very quiet day, nothing to report," but at 2100 hrs. we received a very rude shock, for D Coy rang up and the first words that the CO, who answered, heard were "the Boche is in 17 platoon position." A counter-attack was immediately set in operation. Lieut Stillie, D Coy rear platoon, was sent forward, while the artillery lay ready to fire on call on the houses in front of 17 platoon position, which was the closest they could fire with safety. The porters, who were late already, were held up at the Collecting Post (they did not finish portering until about 0300 hrs, and the smoke went on until 0400 hrs that night), and the protective section at Battalion HQ was rushed up to guard D Coy's HQ in Lieut Stillie's absence. Lieut Stillie went forward, keeping in touch by 38 set, and was back again by 2300 hrs. reporting the house clear of Boche but untenable, as it was on fire and the dug-outs had been smashed in.

A readjustment of the positions was then made. The Pioneers went up to lay a gun-cotton booby trap on the path between 17 and 16 platoons, and they supplemented this with 'S' mines the following night. A position for a standing patrol was found in the Botanical Gardens to cover

the gap now left in the line (this position was in course of time developed), while A Coy (left forward platoon) was instructed to knock a hole in their left-hand wall so that a Bren could fire across the front of this position. Both D and A Coys reconnoitred positions for Brens in their rear localities with arcs of fire to cover the right flank of 16 platoon, while 1 RWK promised to do their bit to cover the left flank. The CO asked for a Liaison Officer to come up from Brigade to be put in touch with the situation and this was done. By dawn the situation was in hand.

The full story was as follows. 17 platoon position was the worst of all—in very close contact with the enemy, with no view and a big heap of rubble directly in front of it providing a perfect covered approach for the Boche. He had, in fact, already caused trouble to the Scots Guards Coy which had been there before us by securing a foothold in their building early one morning and throwing grenades down. Profiting by the experience gained on this occasion, he had gone one better against us and set light to the building with incendiary grenades.

On the morning of the 24th April at about 0600 hrs, ie broad daylight, when the change-over from night to day sentries had been made, the Boche had rushed Platoon HQ, which was close in under the heap of rubble. They had overwhelmed them before they could get out of their dug-out or even get a wireless or telephone message back, but evidently not before the look-out managed to give a good account of himself with the Bren, as a survivor declared he had seen 7 or 8 dead Boche in the area. This was confirmed by the Boche after we had taken Cassino three weeks later. Having dealt with Platoon HQ, they then tried to come round by the ruins of the upper storey to attack the right-hand section, but the first man over the top (identified as a Parachutist Lance-Corporal) was shot by Cpl. MacArthur and the rest were kept off with grenades. The dead man had some very vulgar propaganda leaflets in his pocket.

Throughout the day this section, which like the left-hand one was outside the building, heard the noise of blasting from the direction of Platoon HQ, followed by crackling and exploding ammunition as the Boche set the place on fire. Also a MG was set up somewhere above them to the right, and another one to their left fired on a wounded man who was crawling back to the next platoon. When darkness came, some of the section made their way back, while others stayed and were picked up by Lieut Stillie, and it was from Cpl MacArthur that Capt Hutchison, OC D Coy, first heard that anything was wrong.

Meanwhile, the left-hand section, under L/Sgt Kemp, was presumed missing, but there was great joy when they returned the following evening. They had been pinned all the previous day in their dug-out and frequently grenaded, but they had retaliated with grenades and Tommy guns, and the enemy had been unable to close with them. They could not return the first night because of the flames, and could not contact Lieut Stillie, who did not know that they were there. The strange thing about the whole incident was that it was not heard by anyone, not even the neighbouring platoon. Once, indeed, during the morning, it was thought that our own artillery had set off an ammunition dump, and at about 1400 hrs. Lieut Mulvie, 16 platoon, reported that he thought he heard a wounded man groaning.

Although we were out of touch with Lieut Mathers, we had heard no noise of trouble, and as he had a stretcher bearer with him, it was thought that he was quite capable of deciding the best way of dealing with the odd casualty in his platoon, apart from the fact that a stretcher party might endanger more lives by disclosing positions. Altogether, out of 28 in the platoon, 11 (including the platoon commander and platoon sergeant, a signaller and a stretcher bearer) were missing, and one of the survivors was wounded. [They were all taken prisoner, Mathers being badly wounded but well treated medically by the Germans and survived.]

Apart from the return of L/Sgt Kemp, Tuesday 25th April brought little of interest; a lesson against the indiscriminate use of smoke being given when an artillery shoot was nearly laid down as a result of 2 RF ranging with smoke. We had two casualties that evening in A Coy, one from a 'short' smoke canister, the other from a mortar splinter.

Despite the fact that nothing outstanding was reported on this and subsequent days, there was continual activity on both sides by guns and mortars of all calibres. Sometimes our guns would fire at the tank already mentioned, or at another between Hotel Continental and Hotel Des Roses. At other times we were provoked by excessive mortaring to call for a 'morepork' (a code word taken over from the New Zealanders, meaning Screech Owl), on which a complicated fire plan by a considerable number of guns came into operation. As this rarely had the desired effect, we concluded that the Germans were wise enough to have changed their mortar positions since the occupation of Cassino by the New Zealanders. Latterly we adapted the policy of retaliating on the Hotels, which was much more to the point, or bringing down an artillery shoot for harassing effect on the Boche houses. Both courses had a considerable success, and quietened the enemy down. Nebelwerfers [multi-barrelled German mortars] and (reputedly) rockets troubled us from time to time, but the 'nebels' were dealt with by the single code word "Nebel-blitz," and if they had not already been spotted immediately from the very excellent OP on Trocchio, then they received a considerable weight of HE.

It rained on the 26th, but this was hardly noticed as most people were underground. That night, however, the darkness resulting from the thick clouds, and the mud which obscured all traces of the tracks to forward Companies, wrought great confusion among the porters and among D Coy, who were relieved by C Coy. The A Coy porters had to return twice to the Crypt, and it was not until the third attempt that they found A Coy HQ. This gives some indication of how difficult it was to find one's way in Cassino. A Coy HQ cannot have been more than 200 yards from the Crypt down what had once been a road. Finding the Cathedral, was, however, usually an easy matter because of its great ruined silhouettes.

Matters were made worse this night through the absence of smoke for the flashes of the smoke-shells as they burst with little 'phuts' high up in the air gave a very useful light. The authorities had decided that the expenditure of smoke was becoming alarming, and we were particularly requested not to call for it except in an emergency. Of course, this had a considerable effect on the nerves of the Boche, as the smoke was by now a tradition, and all through the night he kept putting up flares and loosing off occasional bursts of MMG. Just before the relief of D Coy's forward platoon, something must have made the enemy particularly suspicious, because he brought down a very smart mortar shoot just in front of our FDLs, but caused no casualties. By 0300 hrs. portering was completed, and the last stragglers had been rounded up, while all D Coy returned without mishap. We went two nights without smoke, but it had to be resumed again from 28th 29th onwards as the moon was then beginning to give a lot of light.

The same night saw B Coy. take over the defence of the Castle. The Coy was divided into four platoons, each of which did a total of 48 hours in the Castle itself—more than that was considered above what men could be expected to stand, so foul were the conditions. There were always two platoons in the Castle, the other two being back at a rear HQ in the area of La Villa, and reliefs were staggered so that one platoon only of the Castle garrison was relieved at one time. B Coy was under command of 2 RF during this period, and they moved out finally on the night of 30th April/1st May.

The 27th was remarkable for a considerable success on the part of 11 Canadian Field Regt RA, who in the course of retaliatory fire obtained direct hits on several selected houses (all houses were numbered on a plan as it was the only way of identifying them quickly), sent a shell down the mouth of a tunnel or dug-out in the hillside, made a very satisfactory registration of another house where an MG was suspected, and landed a shell on the road in front of a small party of Boche who had just come out of a house.

On occasions such as this a great watch was kept for German stretcher bearer parties, which used to be continually active in the area of this house [in order to assess the extent to which our activity had affected the enemy and to try to ensure they were not using the Red Cross as a cover for armed activity]. The enemy was, in point of fact, extraordinarily careless in the matter of movement, and used always to be seen about 0430 hrs. moving from his night positions to his day ones around the house. He refused to learn by experience, and it was unfortunate that our facilities for observation were not better. Just before the changeover of Battalion HQ, Lieut Lamond (who had taken over from Lieut Mulvie) asked for a ladder to enable him to reach a point of vantage inside his 'house.' A signal ladder was obtained from Brigade, after a good deal of interrogation on their part, as they could not understand why a ladder should be needed in Cassino of all places, and this enormously increased the platoon's field of view, and reports came flowing in.

Apart from a scare in the early morning, when enemy MGs fired on Lieut Lamond's position, and the artillery were warned to stand by for a defensive fire task, the 28th passed quietly enough; and that evening Battalion HQ changed places with rear Battalion HQ, Major Stewart, Lieut McDonald and Lieut McKenzie Johnston (Signals Officer) replacing the CO, RIO and Sgt Hubbard. At the same time the RMO of 1 RWK and his staff came up to relieve our RAP, our doctor going back to take over control of the Ambulance Post. The relieved Battalion HQ arrived back without incident, except that what may have been a 'dud' shell whistled down and landed amongst them as they were slowly climbing over the wrecked bridges. Incidentally, one of the porters distinguished himself that night, after being wounded in the hip on the way up, by going right forward to his Coy with his load before returning to the RAP to have his wound dressed.

The programme for reliefs had been originally to have two Companies and a skeleton Battalion HQ forward and the same amount back, and to change them over after six days, but the Castle responsibility was thrown at us at the last moment, leaving us with only three Companies available to juggle with. D Coy accordingly spent four days in Cassino and were relieved by C Coy (commanded by Capt MacArthur), who spent the remaining eight days there. A Coy spent eight days in Cassino and then were relieved by D Coy, who spent another four days there. Apart from this, Companies made periodic changes-over amongst their platoons. Each Battalion HQ had six days. When the full twelve days were completed the Battalion was relieved by the Coldstreams again.

Nothing of significance occurred at rear Battalion HQ during Major Stewart's stay there. The tactical position was very vague. The Companies were there to counter-attack if need be, but no proper "recce" could be made, and immediate counter-attacks would have been a very difficult business. There was also the anti-penetration role which Major Stewart spent some time reconnoitring. The roof of rear Battalion HQ provided an excellent OP, but was a trifle far from Cassino, and the view was often obscured by mist or by smoke generators at the bridges. After a quiet day on the 29th during which the CO visited Brigade, rear Battalion HQ was abolished, and all personnel (barring the MO who remained at the Ambulance Post, two signallers who worked the exchange and had not been up at the front, one of the Intelligence Section, and one

cook who also had not been at the front) went back on the morning of the 30th to A Echelon, and from there to B Echelon.

After a day spent at B Echelon in bathing and reorganisation (1st May), they went off with B Coy, who had come out of the Castle on the night 30th April/1st May, to a leave camp in the Naples area. Capt Hutchison was left to supervise the remnants of rear HQ, while Major Coates took D Coy. into Cassino for their second spell.

Life at forward HQ went on much the same after the changeover. Though the strain on everyone was just as great, the only item of special interest was the eruption of a German into the house of C Coy's left-hand platoon, commanded at that time by Lieut Nicol. The German blundered in and was shot. Some others following behind threw smoke grenades and recovered the wounded man. This occurred at 0315 hrs. on the 2nd May. Later in the night Cpl Seeley of the same platoon thought he heard men moving out in front, and gave several bursts of a Bren. His suspicions were confirmed by stretcher bearing activity still in progress at first light.

The whole Battalion moved out of Cassino on the night 4th /5th May and on the 5th May came down to B Echelon (now removed from Dragoni to an area just west of Baia)—command of the central sector of Cassino being handed over by Lieut-Col Madden to the CO of the Coldstreams at Positano, south of Naples, where both were on leave at the time!

Chapter 3, May 11th – May 20th, “The Final Battle” (Part 2)

Part 1 of Chapter 3, May 11th — May 20th, “The Final Battle”, appeared in the Winter 2006 supplement. Lt. Col. Brian Madden was Commanding Officer of the 6th Black Watch. Chapter 3 is an excerpt from Col Madden's complete history of the Battalion's actions throughout the war published privately.

Our thanks to Henry McKenzie Johnston for obtaining permission from Black Watch HQ to include the excerpts in the society's supplement and for his editorials.

It is impossible to say how many counter-attacks were put in during the rest of the day. B Coy on the right had an excellent field of fire and were not troubled, but A Coy were repeatedly counter-attacked, as was Battalion HQ, while C Coy had trouble in their wood. A Coy had good long-distance observation and could detect enemy forming up, but there was a lot of dead ground over which the enemy could approach their positions. Fortunately, before they could get to A Coy they had to cross an open piece of ground, and here A Coy did great execution.

Battalion HQ was only weakly defended, and owing to hedges and trees could be approached without much difficulty. One or two observation points were found, but the situation was undoubtedly tricky. An amusing incident occurred about this time. Some seven German prisoners were held at Battalion HQ and were put to the task of digging slit trenches for Battalion HQ and themselves. After a short time, it was noticed that fire was coming into Battalion HQ from the rear. To start with it was thought to be enemy fire, and then it was realised that a Bren gunner of C Coy was responsible. What was happening was that as a German prisoner in a slit trench was digging, his head appeared over the hedge behind Battalion HQ and the Bren gunner then opened fire at him, evidently not being in possession of the facts. Urgent representations were made to OC C Coy on this matter.

All this time the tanks were hard at work firing at any movement, and the reserve tank, which was with C Coy, was brought in to help Battalion HQ. This tank was on the other side of the road, as has been said, and could not be approached as the road was covered by a MG. To start with, the tank was communicated with through C Coy, Battalion HQ getting C Coy on the 18 set and saying what was wanted. Later another method was tried. Battalion HQ on its 18 set rang up the rear link tank, which had now returned to the original starting point of the early morning advance. This tank then rang up the tank with C Coy and gave it its instructions. A roundabout method of communication of 3 or 4 miles to a tank, at most 40 yards from Battalion HQ. This tank used to cruise down the road and shoot up Germans trying to get into Battalion HQ. It would then return to its hide and wait further requests.

For a time all went well, the 18 set communication working splendidly. It will be remembered there was no 22 set, and the 18 set link to the gunners in rear was the only means of getting artillery support. The reason for this is as follows.

Once the objective had been secured, orders were sent back by wireless for the supporting arms to come forward, and with them the gunner OPs who had got bogged in the early morning advance. But these arms were unable to get through as the Battalion was completely surrounded by the enemy, and they also suffered casualties from shell-fire.

Nevertheless, with the 18 set, artillery fire was brought down with much success, directed by OC A Coy, who had, as already mentioned, good long-distance observation.

Meanwhile the enemy must have brought up A-Tk Guns, for suddenly two tanks were knocked out. After a pause, two more were also set on fire and finally the fifth one, and we were left with only the reserve tank. This continued its peregrinations in support of Battalion HQ until it too was hit and we were left without any A-Tk defence at all except Piats [an infantry hand held anti-tank weapon].

Though no enemy tanks appeared, it was now that counter-attacks on Battalion HQ became most serious, and eventually B Coy had to be asked for help, and despatched a section, under Lieut. N B Stranger, to the rescue.

All the time casualties were mounting up from enemy mortars and shell-fire and also from snipers and MG fire, and requests for ambulances and more tanks were sent back over the 18 set, it being hoped that the Boche would let the ambulances through. A troop of tanks was sent, but could not find the Battalion and were eventually withdrawn. The ambulances fared little better as the party was captured on the way, though they were released after a long palaver, shortly before dark. The MO had been wounded trying to get up to the Battalion, and everything devolved on the Stretcher Bearers, who worked heroically under fire. All Company Commanders had been given some morphia phials before starting, and the worst cases were given this assistance, but nothing else could be done for them, and a serious shortage of shell dressings began to occur.

At last, in the evening, 1 RWK, who had been on our left in the morning's advance, but had been held up, put in a further attack with tanks and relieved the situation. This attack was most uncomfortable for us, as the tanks fired at our positions not knowing exactly where they were. With the use of the white flag, the CO approached them and put them into the picture, and eventually things were straightened out.

After dark, the ambulances arrived. Lieut Lamond with a party had been sent back as a guide, but on the other side of the wood C Coy was in he was challenged and shot at by a German sentry. He returned and tried again behind 1 RWK positions, getting through safely. During the night C Coy cleared the wood. The ambulances were not able to come within a mile of the position as the tracks did not allow it, but carriers were brought up, and all through the night the casualties were evacuated on these carriers to the ambulances and so back to hospital. Amongst these casualties were the RIO (Lieut Gillies), RSM Dyce and some of the tank crews.

For the next two days we remained holding on to our hard-won ground, no longer troubled by snipers or counter-attacks, but subjected to very heavy shelling and mortaring. Casualties were not high, however, as men were well dug in. One severe loss was Sgt Paterson of D Coy, but fortunately he was only slightly wounded. The CO had a direct hit on his slit trench, but had a tiny piece of overhead cover which covered about 10 per cent, of the trench. The shell actually hit this cover and did no one any harm, though it blew up the 22 set, while the CO required dusting when he was later released.

Meanwhile, on left and right other troops were attacking, and suddenly, in the early morning of 17th May, it was found that the enemy was pulling out. A carrier patrol was sent out to search for enemy and reported the ground clear for some distance, and the Battalion was sent forward in conjunction with the rest of the Brigade to cut Route 6 and the way of escape of the Germans in Cassino.

This advance was carried out without interference—one prisoner being taken—and dispositions astride Route 6 and the railway line were taken up. In the afternoon one paratrooper gave himself up, and reported that what was left of the Cassino garrison was going to try and get out that night. This information was at once passed back to the Brigadier.

Sure enough, the attempt was made as soon as darkness came, but the Battalion, being on the left of the Brigade, got no spoil. Battalions of the 10th Brigade, and the other two of our own Brigade were far too alert and no one got as far as ourselves before being captured.

Next day Cassino fell to the 10th Brigade, and in the afternoon the CO and Company Commanders paid a visit to the town. It was possible to pick out some of the positions we had held when previously defending Cassino, but the devastation was so severe that it was impossible to be certain of them all when looked at from the enemy side. Booby-traps and mines abounded, and care was taken not to wander off the track, but even so some of the German defences were found. One in particular consisted of a steel cupola sunk into the ground with an air-conditioning system within it worked with pedals.

Chapter 4: June 5th—29th

June started with the Battalion still in their rest area at Faicchio and Goioa, and no move likely before the 7th. However, on the 2nd orders were received that the Division was to move north on the 5th and packing up was begun at once. On the night of the 2nd a shattering accident occurred when a truck containing CSM Anderson, CSM Thomson, CQMS Oram, Sgts Matthews, Fletcher and Savage, L/Sgt Hutt and Cpl Farmer was involved in a bad smash on the Naples road. The driver, Pte Cardus, was killed and CSM Anderson died later. All the others except Cpl Farmer were more or less seriously hurt and it seemed that the whole of A Coy's WOs and NCOs, to which all bar L/Sgt Hutt belonged, had been eliminated in one fell swoop. It was a most tragic affair and was apparently due to a French 'jeep' which did not stop. In trying to avoid the 'jeep' our driver swerved across the road and ran into an American truck coming the

opposite way. CSMs Anderson and Thomson were a real loss to our fighting strength, having been magnificent in battle. The others, fortunately, came back to us after some months.

The C.O. decided that there was nothing else to be done but to disband one Company, and D Coy, having far the fewest of the old men, was drafted to A Coy, who were given two NCOs, Sgt Cotterill and Sgt Smart from the Carrier Platoon, to bring them up to strength in Platoon Sergeants.

On 5th June at 1330 hrs the Battalion left their rest area and drove north on the long road up Route 6 through Cassino and Arce and into a concentration area near Ceprano. The move was uneventful except for the last part of the column which was directed up a road to the left shortly after crossing the River Melfa. About this time it came on to rain and a part of the road up a hill became impassable to all but the best cross-country vehicle. A Scammell appeared on the scene and laboriously towed two vehicles at a time up the hill, but the delay caused was incredible, though eventually all arrived safely.

Next day, June 6th, the CO was warned that the Battalion would be required to act as Advanced Guard to the Brigade in a projected pursuit of the retreating enemy. A plan of tactical loading was at once produced and put into effect, the Battalion not being required to move for 24 hours. Indeed, no movement was really possible in any case as Route 6 was filled with an unbroken stream of vehicles, head to tail all the way up to Valmontone, all trying to get through to the Roman plain to take up the chase of the Boche.

June 7th saw conditions only slightly better, but the Division had to get through somehow as it was required to act as flank guard to the 6th Armoured Division moving on Route 4, east of the Tiber.

At half-past one, the Battalion was forced into the traffic on Route 6 and from there to Frosinone, 15 miles away, took 2½ hours. Thereafter things got much better and the move through Ferentino, Valmontone and down to the concentration area just short of Palestrina was completed in the next hour and a half, and in nice time to get everything laid on before darkness. This laying-on largely consisted in putting the various supporting arms into their right places in the Battalion column. Some of them had joined us on the march, but the tanks arrived while we were in the new concentration area. Altogether we had a Battery of Mountain Guns, a Battery of Field Guns, a Squadron of Tanks, and a Platoon of REs with a Bulldozer. A Platoon of 4.2 Mortars were also to be in support of the Battalion, but did not arrive until later.

After a quiet night, the CO and a Battalion "recce" party were sent for at short notice at 0700 hrs to go forward to yet another concentration area, this time due west of Tivoli. This area was a little in front of Divisional HQ, and a stop was made there to learn the latest situation. It was found that 4th Reconnaissance Regt and 10th Infantry Brigade were advancing on S. Angelo Romano and Montecalio, and 12th Infantry Brigade was unlikely to be employed that day. That evening, however, orders were received that a start was to be made at 0500 hrs next day (9th June) to advance up towards Route 4; 12th Infantry Brigade to be on the right of 10th Infantry Brigade. That night sappers of 59 Fd. Coy cleared part of the road of mines to give the Brigade a good start, and at the stipulated time next morning the Battalion set out as Advanced Guard to the Brigade, with all its supporting arms, including the Platoon of 4.2 Mortars who had arrived about one o'clock in the morning. The advance was by Palombara and Moricone, with A Coy (Major G McP Smith) in the van, preceded by a troop of Reconnaissance Tanks.

To start with all went well, and soon an Air OP had reported that the inhabitants of Palombara were streaming out to greet the “recce” tanks. Consequently it was decided to continue the advance on vehicles until just short of Palombara and then to dismount to search the village.

It might here be stated that our supporting tanks were a Squadron of 142 RAC of 25th Tank Brigade. The squadron consisted of two troops of Shermans and two troops and a HQ troop of Churchills. A Coy were carried on the Shermans and two 3-ton lorries, B Coy on the Churchills, and C Coy on five TCVs.

Accordingly, short of Palombara, A Coy got off their tanks and carriers and in due course reported the village clear, though it was rumoured that there were 7 Germans in one house, and a section with a tank was despatched to bring them in — the tank being there to discourage any attempt at resistance. While this was going on the “recce” tanks reported they were held up at a demolition about 1½ miles beyond Palombara, and the RE Platoon, plus bulldozer, was passed up the column to be ready to deal with it as soon as the infantry arrived at the demolition and could protect them.

But directly the leading elements of A Coy arrived, the Boche started shelling the demolition and the road behind it on which the tanks had closed up. During this shelling the Armoured Car with the Van Guard, which was carrying the No 22 Wireless Set, received a direct hit, killing the driver and operator, and wounding two other occupants. The road now began to fill up, with visiting gunners and sappers infiltrating into the small spaces between the tanks, and it was scarcely surprising that casualties began to occur amongst all units. A Coy got off the road and the transport began to open out a bit, but it was obviously impossible to put the bulldozer to work as it would have been hit at once.

The Division at this time owned only two bulldozers altogether, and the one with the 12th Infantry Brigade was in fact hit during this operation. Meanwhile the Brigade Commander had sent for the CO and told him to send a Company on to the high ground on the right of the road so as eventually to look down on Moricone and to direct another Company on to Moricone itself. It was decided that B Coy should be sent on the right of the road and A Coy on the left, with C Coy in reserve. B and C Coys, had by this time dismounted short of Palombara and were moving up on foot.

However, it soon became evident that it would take A Coy too long to start and so C Coy was ordered to go forward on the left and A Coy was brought into reserve. C Coy was told by the CO to make for Moricone.

After considerable delay while FOOs [Forward (Artillery) Observation Officers] got their wireless sets off their vehicles and on to their backs, and the infantry collected their tools, the move forward started at 1020 hrs, while A Coy moved on to a nearby feature with a good long distance view of Moricone and reorganised.

The tanks meanwhile were making a “recce,” but it was soon found that the country on both sides of the road was impassable to them except along one track which was mined. The Sappers and Pioneer Platoon of the Battalion were got on to the job of clearing mines and by the time they had finished the Pioneers had lifted 66 Tellers — a good bag. Most of the lifting, however, took place during the following night, and the remainder of the story of this day’s action as far as the Battalion was concerned belongs entirely to the three Infantry Companies — no supporting arms being able to get across the country other than the FOOs on foot. The CO went to A Coy, while the Adjutant remained back with the rear link wireless set to Brigade.

To start with the advance went smoothly, with A Coy following up C Coy, but it was soon found to be most difficult country to get over. The thickness of the country did not stop the Boche getting good observation from his commanding positions. Often we were out of his sight, but open parts of the country had to be crossed and here he could see us. We, on the other hand, had little observation whilst moving forward, and we had to avoid the open bits of country as much as possible. His positions were virtually impossible to pick out until we were practically on top of them, by which time the two sides were too close to allow artillery fire to be brought down. Finally, wireless aerials had often to be taken down whilst going through woods, and communications got broken at these points.

Shortly after the advance had started, Brigade rang up to order the right-hand Company to be directed on to the high ground northeast of Moricone, another Company to cut the road north of the village, and the third Company to get east of the village. This latter task was represented to Brigade by the CO as being impossible as it meant crossing the Palombara-Moricone road in full view of the enemy. Accordingly, the CO ordered B Coy to try and get as far forward as was desired and A Coy to go to the west of Moricone. The CO then left A Coy and moved to join C Coy, who had been held up short of the village. Whilst he was doing this, B Coy reported that they were held up on the right by MGs and were trying to get through, but despite all their efforts they were never able to get any further, being up against a German Coy position as was discovered later.

A Coy, swinging left of C Coy, were getting on all right, and the problem now became to extricate C Coy so as to comply with the Brigadier's orders. With the help of artillery fire this was done with difficulty but only three casualties, but after they had got clear some casualties were caused by shell and mortar fire in an orchard which the Boche must have seen them going into. The casualties were collected and put into one of the steep ravines, and C Coy was reorganised for a further advance.

Now A Coy rang up to say that they were getting on slowly, but were being fired on, and it became evident that a still wider swing to the left must be attempted if the order to get through and cut the road north of Moricone was to be carried out.

So C Coy and Battalion HQ veered left and had not been going long when it met two tanks moving down to a track they had managed to get to. This track, which led back on to the main Palombara-Moricone road, was known to be mined and the tanks were stopped. With them was found to be a South African POW who had escaped some months previously and had been hiding ever since.

He stated that it was impossible for the tanks to get any further across country, but that he could lead the infantry. This he started to do about 2.15 pm and from then onwards C Coy's progress was uneventful as far as German interference was concerned. Nevertheless, the advance was foul in the extreme. It was very hot and undulations of the country were extremely steep in places, and a circuitous route had to be taken to avoid being seen. The Battalion had been going since 3.0 am and walking since 10 am, and the strain began to be felt.

All the time messages asking where we were kept coming in, but after having been previously beautifully clear, interference now made hearing most difficult, and the continual "say again" began to get on everybody's nerves who had to do with the wireless in their overheated condition.

Suddenly A Coy, who had always been reporting slow progress, announced that they were being attacked, but nothing could be done to help them, nor did they ask for it, and the CO was intent on getting C Coy through behind Moricone.

After a while, A Coy reported success despite casualties, and they were ordered to hold what they had got, while C Coy pressed on. An FOO with this Coy had previously, by the way, brought down a shoot on enemy positions reported by our South African POW, and this was found out later to have been successful — at least two killed being reported by the Italians next day.

When C Coy had reached due west of Moricone and were getting very thirsty and tired, Brigade rang up to order the Battalion to consolidate where it had got to, and it being realised that time did not allow the Company to get right round as had been hoped, this order was complied with regretfully from one point of view, though a rest was more than welcome.

A good position was found, which included a cherry orchard, and once digging in had been completed, the Company slaked its thirst and its appetite on the most magnificent cherries any of us had ever seen. The ex-POW obtained water through some friendly Italians, and Brigade were informed where we were. This they declined to believe for some time, but eventually they decided we must be as far as we said we were and apologised.

A simple little code involving the Christian names of officers was then fixed with A Coy, and the two Companies exchanged locations and found they were within 500 yards of each other when a meeting was arranged. It also became obvious that 10th Brigade on our left were very close as German MG fire could be heard about 300 yards to the left of C Coy. It seemed therefore as if the Division had now got a front which offered a direct threat to Moricone and its communications, and this proved to be the case as the enemy withdrew during the night — 24 hours earlier than they had intended, according to the Italian inhabitants who were seen next day.

Before they went they blew up several ammunition dumps, but still left an immense quantity behind them. B Coy had really bad luck during the night. A "recce" patrol found the Boche in front of them loading vehicles, and a fighting patrol was sent out which arrived just too late.

Next day (the 10th) the battlefield was searched and it was found that B Coy had killed 4 and A Coy 1 officer and 10; this total of dead (exclusive of those caused by artillery fire) exactly equalling the loss that was suffered by the Battalion. The Battalion wounded amounted to 3 officers and 55, many of them slight, and it is to be hoped that the Boche had as many, as ambulances were seen in use on at least three occasions after artillery fire had been brought down. The strength of the enemy holding this strong rearguard position was reported as 200 by the Italians. Lieut B L F Fennell, L/Sgt Blane, a magnificent NCO, and Cpl Sharp were amongst the killed, and Lieuts Cox, Alexander and Whiley (all very slight), and Sgt Cotterill and L/Sgt Wincup were included in the wounded. Sgt Cotterill, another first-class NCO, unfortunately died later.

Before leaving 9th June there are a number of incidents worth recording. The first concerns B Coy's advance when they were moving through a cornfield. Suddenly two Germans rose and put their hands up. Our men who had started firing were told to stop by their officer (Lieut. Fennell), when suddenly Boche MGs opened up from several directions, killing Lieut Fennell and one or two other men. Whether the surrendering of the Boche was part of a trap cannot be definitely said, but the possibilities are there.

The second case was in A Coy's area, though it actually affected a section of C Coy who had got attached to A Coy. As they were moving forward under Sgt Innes, a German Officer and two soldiers suddenly appeared and shouted "Hands up, surrender." Sgt Innes and his men flopped and opened fire as did the Boche. Three or four of our men were wounded, whilst in return the Boche Officer and one of his men were killed.

The third matter of interest is of the South African POW (Sgt Dickson) who had guided C Coy so far and then obtained water for them. He then volunteered to go back to Palombara to guide up ration parties — he being the only person who could possibly undertake to find C Coy's position in the dark. (A compass march through the type of country involved was a virtual impossibility). This he set off to do and at 0300 hrs returned with the ration party, himself carrying a load. It was a wonderful effort by a man who might well have considered his turn had come for freedom and peace.

There was little we could do to make some return to Sgt. Dickson for all he did for us, but he paid us a visit next day and he could not but realise how grateful everyone was.

10th June saw the Fusiliers and West Kents pass through Moricone on their way to Route 4, which was reached without any further interference from the enemy. The Battalion was drawn into Moricone and spent the night there.

We were then told that the Division was to move west of the River Tiber to exploit the success being achieved by the South African Armoured Division in its advance north of Rome. As a preliminary, 12th Infantry Brigade were to move to a concentration area about 5 or 6 miles west of Palombara, and a start was made from Moricone at 1045 hrs. It was hot walking, but on arrival we found we were in an olive grove which offered a certain amount of shade, and there we spent the rest of the day and the next night.

On 12th June, at 1300 hrs, the Battalion left for their next concentration area, some 8 miles north of Rome. We were divided into two columns, one going through Rome and the other round it. As many men as possible were put in the convoy going through Rome, whilst the carriers and 'jeeps' were sent the other way together with an enormous lorry and trailer which was a joke in the Division and was only allowed on the roads at certain specified times.

The amount of interest seen in Rome was a little disappointing as the route avoided St. Peter's, the Coliseum and other famous places, but at least we had got there and hoped for a few days' rest when visits might be paid.

Not a bit of it. The few days' rest were available, but Rome was put out of bounds to Eighth Army Troops, whilst Fifth Army Troops were allowed in, apparently at will. Certainly there were large numbers of Americans, and as usual the American Red Cross had taken over buildings for welfare purposes, whilst the British had done nothing. The result bid fair to be the same as elsewhere previously — prices forced up by the time the British got there, and nowhere laid on for people to go and stay for a night.

At about 1500 hrs, the Battalion arrived in the new concentration area. It was found that Brigade had put us around a very smelly farmyard with virtually no shade, but the CO "recce'd" a very attractive wooded glen on the other side of the road and only about a mile away, so by tea time the Battalion had moved there and was busy "settling in." The new site had an added advantage in that in the centre was a wide stretch of turf, suitable for a football pitch; and in the evening, in

lovely weather, a football match took place between the Battalion team and a team from the 77th Fd Regt, RA, resulting in a win for the Battalion by 4—0, amid great enthusiasm.

The following day the whole Battalion spent the morning on a route march, the route being through Capena, and totalling a distance of about 12 miles. Although not a long march, it was found to be rather a trying one, partly due to the heat, and also because we had got rather out of practice, having had to occupy more or less static front-line positions during the previous two months, such as Cassino.

That evening there was another football match, this time against the Divisional REs who were disposed of by 6 goals to nil. A small draft of 2 officers and 32 other ranks (Lieut W Tulloch and Lieut H J Falconbridge) joined us, but in spite of this we were still over 100 below strength, and with only 3 Rifle Companies.

We now received the news that for our next operation we would have co-operating with us A Squadron of the 14th Canadian Tank Regiment, who had up to now been with 10th Corps. Major Taylor, commanding the squadron, came to stay with us, while the rest of the squadron with their tanks were expected to arrive a few days later.

Company training continued on the 14th-15th and still no word came through of any impending move. By this time Viterbo had been taken, and the continuing swift advance had again left us well over 50 miles behind. In the evening the Pipes and Drums played "Retreat" in the Battalion area, but a football match which had been arranged with the Canadians unfortunately fell through, for operational reasons, orders having just been received that the Division (including the tanks) was to move to a concentration area a few miles north of Viterbo, 12th Infantry Brigade being ordered to set off on the morning of 17th June.

Our last day in this area was spent in packing up and loading vehicles preparatory to the move, and in the evening there was another game of football, this time against 12th Field Ambulance, the Battalion team again emerging the victors by 3 goals to 2, after a stern struggle.

The next morning at 0530 hrs, the Battalion moved by TCVs to our new concentration area north of Viterbo, by way of Riano, Civita Castellana, Nepi and Viterbo, the distance being just over 50 miles. On route we were struck by the number of burnt-out and abandoned Boche vehicles of all kinds lying around. Also in our area there were numerous German guns (particularly 88 mm), SPs (including 2 "Grizzly Bears" and 2 "Ferdinands"), and even "Tiger" and "Panther" tanks, not to mention other material, abandoned by the Boche. When we arrived at our new area, which was in an olive plantation and beside a burn, we found out that the front line was at least another 35 miles further on. However, we did not appear to be required as yet, so the Battalion settled down again, this time with its squadron of Canadian tanks; the Canadian officers — very welcome guests — sharing our mess.

Leave to Rome was now started for the Division and the Battalion was allotted 35 vacancies per day, beginning on Sunday, the 18th. The trip was now one of sixty miles instead of the ten it could have been earlier. Furthermore, at that time we had plenty of time to amuse ourselves, now we were on the point of becoming operational.

Unfortunately, almost as soon as we arrived in the new area, the weather broke, beginning at Church Parade on the Sunday morning and continuing to rain torrentially for the next four days, making training almost impossible. The whole Battalion area became a sea of mud, and the tanks did not improve the situation.

On Monday, 19th June, a large and very welcome draft of reinforcements arrived, consisting of 6 Sergeants and 94 other ranks, from the SLI [Somerset Light Infantry], and E Surrey Regiments. They had a dismal first night with the Battalion, for their bivouacs were almost literally washed away in the floods.

Thanks to the new arrivals, the CO now found himself able to form a fourth Company — a new D Coy — consisting of the new draft complete, plus a few NCOs from the rest of the Battalion. Major Pollok-McCall, as before, was in command, Capt. Hutchison was 2 i/c, and CSM Davies was Sergeant-Major.

As we were still short of officers, the CO with the approval of the NCOs introduced a new scheme. Senior Sergeants who were due for promotion to C/Sgt were in fact promoted, but given command of platoons as they could not be spared from the fighting with their experience. Junior NCOs, such as Company Clerks, were made L/Sgts and did the job of CQMSs. Three of these were Young, O'Neill and Murray, and O'Neill finally became ORS [Orderly Room Sergeant]. It worked very well. RSM Dyce was now back with us, and the Rifle Company CSMs were Sinclair, Duffy, Paterson and Davies — all five magnificent fighters.

At this time it was expected that we would not relieve 78th Division for another week at least — in fact, we were told officially by Brigade that it would be on the 30th June — but suddenly that evening Division received orders that 28th Brigade were to move up to a forward area at 0400 hrs the following morning, to take over from 36th Brigade (the left-hand Brigade of 78th Division) that night. The rest of 4th Division was to move during the next two days to a forward concentration area near Citta Delia Dieve, preparatory to taking over from the remainder of 78th Division, although this was not expected to take place for some days.

The Battalion accordingly moved by TCVs on 23rd June, starting out at 0500 hrs for a concentration area beyond Citta Delia Dieve, a distance of about 50 miles. On nearing the latter place, however, it was found that the concentration area had been changed to an area a few miles in the rear, near a village called Piegaro. Later it was found that this had been caused by the bombing of the original area the previous afternoon. This new area had obviously been hastily chosen, there being few tracks or parking places for the transport, and it was some time before places could be found. Battalion HQ and HQ Coy were established in a small and rather pleasant wood by the roadside, while the rest of the Battalion went into a wood about 300 yards along the road towards Piegaro and started to readjust loads for the expected cross-country move to come. For these operations we always cut down the Carrier Platoon and gave a carrier each to the RAP [Regimental (medical) Aid Post], Signals and Pioneers as they had no tracked vehicle of their own. What we would have liked was a number of medium-sized trailers equally capable of being towed by any type of vehicle and some half-tracks to pull our A/Tk guns and carry our Vickers MGs. Coys, had their own carriers.

Chapter 5, Italy: June 29th – July 25th

Our thanks to Henry McKenzie Johnston for obtaining permission from Black Watch HQ to include the excerpts in the society's supplement and for his editorials.

The situation now on our immediate front was that the enemy had formed a strong line running between Lake Trasimeno and Lake Chiusi, and 4th Reconnaissance Regiment and 28th Brigade had been put in on the left of the Division to relieve a Brigade of 78th Division. This latter Brigade was then moved across to the right so that 78th Division could put in a full-blooded attack against the Boche line just west of Castiglione. The intention was for 78th Division to make the

breakthrough and 4th Division then to continue the pursuit with 12th Brigade on the right and 28th Brigade on the left. 78th Division's attack, however, conformed to by 28th Brigade on their left, made only limited progress, and after three days 10th Brigade was put in to relieve 28th Brigade, 12th Brigade still being left to go in on the right when 78th Division had got through. Still, however, this did not materialise, and on the night of the 29th June, 12th Brigade was finally switched over to the left to add weight to the 10th Brigade — in fact, the Trasimeno Line was being dealt with by two Divisions.

All this had taken several days, which were spent in training, including marching and an experimental demonstration of infantry being towed on sledges by tanks. Those who were lucky enough to get a ride found it the best fun since riding on the scenic railway at the Glasgow Exhibition in 1938.

This bit of entertainment being over, when 12th Brigade were put in on the left, 1 RWK was the leading Battalion, with 2 RF next, and the Battalion in reserve. To everyone's surprise it was found that 1 RWK's advance was unopposed, the Boche having at last decided to retire, and no contact with them was made until late in the evening, the Battalion moving in bounds behind in TCVs.

Next day, 30th June, 2 RF were put through on the right of 1 RWK, but almost at once ran on to Boche positions, and neither of the two Battalions was able to get forward during the day. The Battalion was still held in reserve, but had its TCVs taken away during the day, as further advances were to be made on foot. This movement of transport was done with a good deal of caution as the enemy were shelling nearby and any clouds of dust raised were certain to bring down fire. However, all went well, and in the evening the CO was sent for and told that the 10th Brigade had got forward a little on our right and that next day 2 RF and 1 RWK were to try again, while the Battalion moved in bounds behind them.

Sure enough, when the Brigade advance started again in the early morning of 1st July, the Boche was found to have pulled back again, though only for a short distance. Soon both Battalions found themselves held, and the CO was ordered to make a sweep round on the left and attack a feature in front of 1 RWK.

The country here was composed of a series of ridges, with flat but thick country on the left, and it was up this country that the Battalion was to go until due west of their objective, when they were to swing right and get on to it, supported by 1 RWK, as far as the latter could.

A further objective was also given to the Battalion to take after success on the first one had been achieved. These two objectives were known as "Birmingham" and "Bewdly" respectively, and it will be convenient to refer to them by those names.

The Battalion was brought forward to an area just north of Valiano, and at 1800 hrs B Coy started off with one troop of tanks, followed at a discreet interval by A Coy and the other two troops of tanks. C Coy was held in reserve to move down the main Valiano-Foiano road in bounds as the situation developed.

The advance of the leading two Companies was apparently undetected, but watercourses and ditches made progress very slow as the tanks had to be got across them. Eventually, as darkness was coming on, the tanks ran on to an obstacle they could not cross, and B Coy was ordered to go on without them, though supported by their fire as far as possible. A Coy was ordered to follow up B Coy, but not to get involved without orders.

As B Coy reached "Birmingham" they were fired on by MGs, and a delay was caused while a "recce" was made for the best way in. This "recce" party heard a truck drive away and a patrol was sent in to find the few enemy who had been there had gone. The position was then occupied by the Company.

Orders were now given for A Coy to send a patrol with a wireless set to "Bewdly" to find out if it was clear or not. If it was clear it was to be occupied by A Coy at once. C Coy was moved up to the road junction south-west of "Birmingham," and a deep patrol consisting of Lieut Brown's platoon was sent hot-foot to the bridge east of Foiano on Divisional orders. Included in this patrol were some Pioneers to clear the mines, and the objects were to prevent the enemy blowing the bridge and to have it cleared for our own troops the next day. They arrived, however, to find the bridge had already been blown.

Meanwhile, A Coy was moving to "Bewdly" which was clear, and then more patrols were ordered out—one for C Coy, up the main road as far as the road junction north-west of "Birmingham," and one for B Coy, to the next feature to the north of "Birmingham," which was known as "Bognor." Both the patrols found no enemy and it appeared that he had pulled out. A carrier or two was with amusement and difficulty got across a canal where a bridge had been blown, and up to A Coy with supplies.

Early next morning, 1 RWK was put through on tanks to the bridge reached by Lieut. Brown's patrol, while the Battalion was given the task of clearing the high ground in front of them, with 2 RF on their right.

1 RWK took Foiano with virtually no opposition, and by midday the Battalion had completed their task and found no trace of the enemy at all. We were therefore ordered to cross the canal and continue the advance on the right of 1 RWK, 2 RF being held in reserve.

Just as we were about to start, the Brigadier rang up to say that an unexpected bridge, which was unblown, had been discovered across the canal about a mile north of the main crossing reached by Lieut. Brown's patrol the night before.

A Coy were accordingly mounted on two troops of tanks, B Coy on another two, and C Coy ordered to follow on foot. But on approaching the bridge along a long straight bit of road, heavy shelling was encountered and the infantry quickly got off the tanks. The shelling was most accurate and unpleasant, but fortunately on both sides of the road were deep ditches up which troops could move on foot, and the only casualties were the CO with a bit in his arm and Pte Arnott of the Pioneers with a few bits in his back. Some NF [Northumberland Fusiliers] machine gunners were not so fortunate and had several casualties, including a number killed, and everyone was glad when the bridge and three others beyond it had been finally crossed.

A Coy in front made excellent progress with two platoons, but the third platoon had fallen back a bit and taking a wrong turn in Foiano moved down a road parallel to the remainder of A Coy.

B Coy, following up, started going wrong also, but spotted their mistake and got back on to the right axis. C Coy were still a long way behind but were hurrying as much as possible. It was very hot and everyone was now getting tired.

Both portions of A Coy ran into the Boche about 4 pm, by which time Brigade had ordered the cessation of the advance for the day and consolidation to take place. It had now been discovered what had happened to the third platoon of A Coy, and orders were got through to them to come back through 1 RWK (who were behind them) and rejoin the Battalion. They had ,

however, walked into a good deal of trouble and only a few were able to get back, the remainder being lost in the cornfields where they had taken cover from MG fire. Eventually, after dark, most of them made their way back, but Lieut Mulvie was reported missing at the end, believed to be a prisoner by some of those who returned, as indeed he was, while Sgt Liddle had unfortunately been killed.

The main part of A Coy also had a brief encounter, suffering a few casualties and inflicting as many, and both parts of A Coy captured parachutists, three all told. Cpl Farmer, in turn, was believed by OC A Coy to be taken prisoner, which was a great loss. The country was so thick that men just disappeared into it and could be easily trapped by any well-placed Boche.

C Coy had now arrived at Foiano in a very exhausted state, but were ridden on tanks for the last two miles to get them up for the consolidation, which was put in hand very quickly.

Meanwhile, the Pioneers under Sgt Bonella were dealing with about five minor demolitions on the Battalion's L of C [Lines of Communication] from Foiano forwards, and by dint of most excellent work had them passable to food trucks by 1900 hrs. This was a very good effort, conducted entirely on their own initiative.

Just before dusk the Boche put down two or three heavy mortar concentrations on our area, causing one or two casualties which would have been more if digging had not progressed well. At the same time, shelling of Foiano was carried out frequently, and there were a certain number of casualties to drivers and crews of vehicles passing through, though nothing serious. The cook's trucks all arrived safely and with them Major J A M Stewart to take over command of the Battalion from the C.O. The two were to meet again in hospital only two days later. The night was peaceful, and C Coy who sent a "recce" patrol forward approximately 1,000 yards made no contact.

The next few days continued in very much the same way. Each day some miles were gained, the chief obstacles being the innumerable canals, all of which had had the bridges over them blown. Movement across country was difficult also and very hot going, and ambushes had always to be taken into account. Indeed, on one occasion, Major Stewart and the Battalion's 'O' Group nearly got caught, eventually managing to extricate themselves under cover of fire from the 75s of the tanks which were supporting one of the Companies.

It was now that we ran into the Italian partisans for the first time, and the result was not altogether a success, as after they had volunteered their services to take an important road junction just west of Montealtuzzo they returned and said they couldn't do it. This caused a very considerable delay and nearly upset the whole Brigade plan. However, Major Macrae concocted a new plot and we just got the junction in time to allow another Battalion to pass through and up the secondary road to the left so that the Brigade could get on to a two-Battalion front.

Major Stewart had now been wounded and Major Lindsay had taken over command, and under his directions a move was made to secure the high ground at a village called San Pancrazio. This was the key to the whole Boche line. Given that that place was in our hands, we looked down into the Arno valley for the first time and forced the Boche to clear out of Arezzo, a few miles to our right.

We very nearly succeeded, 1 RWK, on our left, got level with the village and only a demolition and mines prevented them getting into it with their tanks. We, on our part, were trying it frontally and got to within a quarter of a mile with C Coy. Then the Boche succeeded in stopping us and it

was soon plain that they were very strong on the ground. Eventually we were ordered to hold good positions 1,000 yards further back, and C Coy was withdrawn accordingly.

Casualties for the day had been fairly heavy and yet another CO in Major Lindsay was wounded, whilst Captain Irons, one of the best and oldest members of the Battalion, was killed, with Capt. Duncan (RIO) and Lieut Nicol wounded. Major Macrae took over command of the Battalion. His orders were not to attempt any move forward—the Corps plan being now to break the line on the right.

It must be remembered that the whole Army was by now on very extended supply lines, and to bring up even a Division as reinforcements meant a delay of some days whilst sufficient supplies for them to operate with were got forward. As a result, Divisions like ourselves had had to be kept continually in the van of the advance, and the strain of this in midsummer was beginning to tell. Furthermore, our casualties were causing a considerable depletion in Company strengths, and on 7th July the CO, who had just arrived back at A Echelon, decided to reorganise the Battalion.

D Coy, whom it will be recalled had been newly formed and left behind to get cohesion through training, was brought into the line. C Coy, with no officers left, was temporarily split up—one platoon each reinforcing A and B Companies and the remainder being sent back to A Echelon to rest. Command of the Battalion was taken over by Major Pollok-McCall and Major Macrae was also sent back to rest. Major Walter Smith took over B Coy, the Adjutant, Capt. Keogh, was ordered back to A Echelon to recover from a slight wound, and 2/Lieut Whiley took over his duties, while Lieut Watt became RIO. The CO was himself ordered by the Brigadier to remain at A Echelon as he was not yet fully fit.

The next three days passed reasonably quietly except for A Coy who were considerably isolated on an important feature on our right. But with the extra platoon they had been given they showed themselves full of fight and Boche attempts to turn them off their hill met a very warm reception.

On the 11th, however, the Boche tried again and A Coy, now complete masters of the situation, retaliated so successfully with everything they could lay their hands on that the Boche was reduced to pounding D Coy and Battalion HQ with shell and mortar fire for an hour. We were well dug in by now though and casualties were extremely light, except for our telephone lines as usual. Finally, on the night of the 13th/14th we were relieved by the Royal Fusiliers, and after a lengthy change-over due to the isolated position of A Coy, the Battalion got back to Monte San Savino, where they were billeted and entertained for the next three days. During this period Major Gordon returned from the Brigade Tactical School and took over B Coy, while Major Macrae was appointed Commandant of the School.

Four Companies strong once again, the Battalion took over from the West Kents on the night of the 15th/16th, but that night the Boche went back and was pursued next morning by the Royal Fusiliers, with ourselves moving in bounds behind them. Having been holding a defensive position for ten days, the RWK had accumulated a considerable stock of ammunition and supplies, and the A/Tk platoon under Major C W Smith was sent forward to clear it all up. It was no small task. For instance, our two forward Companies had got proper cook houses — a rather rare event of cooks carrying on their trade in front of Battalion HQ. But the A/Tk platoon worked so well that everything was back on to the main line of supply by midday, by which time the Battalion had been put into an area just north of San Pancrazio. We were there that night and the

next day, by which time the Brigade had been 'pinched out' by the rest of the Division and brought into reserve for a week.

During this period, Major C W Smith was evacuated with pneumonia, and Major G McP Smith (just back from a course at Benevento) took over 'S' Coy, leaving Capt McDonald still with A Coy. Even this arrangement didn't last, as, only a few days later, Major Smith found himself commanding the Battalion.

It was a pleasant enough week, with visits from the Grenadier Guards' Band, bathing in a river, and a Royal Guard to be found when the King made an inspection and held an investiture in Monte San Savino. We also had a party with our Canadian Tanks, and got the following letter from them:

"Dear Brian,

During the past few days, I have had an opportunity of discussing the past operations with the Officers and men of the various squadrons.

Major Bob Taylor and all his Officers had only the very highest praise for the Black Watch, and the men of the squadron all hoped that they would not be separated from their Scottish friends.

It is grand to hear of this mutual confidence and it will go a long way towards winning many a hard-fought battle. I am sure the confidence that 'A' Squadron has in your Battalion is based on the great fighting qualities of your Officers and men.

During our fighting in Sicily and Italy, we worked with many formations, but I may state that I have never before heard so many flattering remarks of the quality of the infantry we were supporting as I have in the past few days.

I do trust that we will continue to support 12th Brigade, and I can assure you that 'A' Squadron will continue to support the Black Watch.

I hope that a little later we will be able to do a little playing together instead of fighting, and thanks for the grand co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

Storey."

(Two days after this letter had been written, the Canadians were taken from us, to the regret of both sides, to go and support one of the Indian Divisions.)

But all good things come to an end, and on the 25th it being obviously our turn to lead the Brigade again, we moved off to take over a position from the 24th Guards Brigade, who were operating on our Divisional left with the 6th South African Armoured Division.

After a very mountainous trip, contact was established with the Guards, and we were given our tasks for 25th July—incidentally the day the Royal Guard of Honour was actually parading, which didn't help the organisation particularly.

Chapter 6, Italy: June 29th – July 25th

The map clearly shows what we had to do, which was to secure the high ground running from road junction 893485 in a north-easterly direction, thus acting as flank guard to the Guards, and to open up the road which runs up a valley through Dudda, to the left of Pt 470 and on to 869512.

On our securing this high ground, the sappers would then be able to repair the demolitions on both the main road and the road running east to Ponte. The Battalion arrived in the area one mile south of Dudda, and, save S Coy, took up positions there for the evening. After dark, C Coy occupied Pt 522 (Danahar) with the object of securing a firm base for the start of operations in the morning, and sent out a "recce" patrol during the night 25th/26th to report on the number and size of the demolitions on the road to Ponte. S Coy machine guns were put on Pt 522 to support the advance next morning, with the mortars just behind that feature.

Two South African tanks were kindly lent to us by 24th Guards Brigade until our own tanks (now the 142 RAC, Suffolk Yeomanry) arrived. At 0630 hrs, on 26th July, B Coy, supported by these tanks, crossed the start point and made for their objective, Pt 521 (Kingham). MG fire and shelling opened up on the leading platoon as it crossed the lower slopes of "Kingham," but this platoon was not deterred as it pressed forward. Special mention is due here to Cpl Hoban, the leading section commander, whose personal example and bravery were largely responsible for the silencing of two MG posts which were holding up the advance. Sad to say, this NCO lost his life in carrying out this task. The two tanks then went up on to "Kingham" ahead of the remainder of the Company, and the few remnants of the enemy beat a hasty retreat when Besa fire was directed on to them.

While this had been going on, Battalion HQ was moved to a farmhouse behind Pt 522 with the CO's OP on that feature, from which a magnificent view of the battle area could be obtained. At this farmhouse the Adjutant was given a letter by the owner. The letter, signed by a Black Watch Officer (Capt. Reid), asked British troops to treat the owner well as he had helped him (Reid) after an escape from a POW Camp.

By 1000 hrs B Coy was firmly installed on "Kingham." In the meantime, A Coy had moved forward along the axis of the main road and occupied positions controlling the road junction 8849 and on a feature (Pt 470) to the east. A bulldozer and sappers had arrived and with a small escort had cleared two demolitions on the lateral road, and Sgt Bonella with his assault section of Pioneers had cleared the road up to A Coy. Despite pressure from the Guards Brigade HQ, the CO refused to push A Coy forward of Pt 470 until Pt 617 had been secured — a view that was supported by the 12th Brigade Commander, who arrived shortly afterwards to take over command of this area with the news that 1 RWK and 2 RF were on the way up. Cessation of work on the lateral road was now necessary as 28th Brigade had not yet occupied Ponte as had been believed to have been the case.

In the meantime, D Coy had been directed to Pt 617 (Tunney). A concentration of mortars temporarily halted the Company, but by passing sub-units from feature to feature in a leap-frog manner, steady if slow progress was made. The two tanks were now in support of D Coy and did magnificent work pushing forward with the infantry over pretty dense country.

Opposition was met from MGs and riflemen during the advance, but D Coy overcame this and pushed on to Tunney. Several POWs were taken and our own casualties were light. The Battalion was then ordered to consolidate for the night, and the CO moved two platoons of A Coy into the

area of "Kingham" to strengthen our right flank, while B Coy took over Pt 546. At last light 1 RWK passed through the Battalion and advanced up the road to the north-west, and the third platoon of A Coy was moved to block the road leading into the area from Ponte. The Battalion now reverted to 12th Brigade and the two tanks returned to 24th Guards Brigade.

The night of the 26th/27th was a hectic one for C Coy, as they were fully employed in carrying food, ammunition and water to the other Companies. Porterage in this country was no simple task, especially on a moonless night, but everything was completed by first light on 27th July. It had been a most interesting battle, with a good bird's eye view from Pt 522 and, for once, the wireless working well.

4th Division was now on a two-Brigade axis — 12th Brigade on the left and 28th Brigade on the right. 27th July was a comparatively quiet day for the Battalion, 1 RWK secured the road junction 869512 on the night of the 26th/27th and were directed on to Pt 706 ("Conn"), which they captured by 1200 hrs. next day. In the afternoon C Coy was dispatched to "Conn" to relieve a Company of 1 RWK which was required for that Battalion's advance on to high ground further east. Sporadic shelling of the Battalion area took place during the day, and during the night of the 27th/28th C Coy was heavily mortared in the "Conn" area, but happily casualties from all this were few. Slight adjustments to our lay-out were now made as our reserve (C Coy.) had been put forward to "Conn."

During the 27th July, 2 RF had advanced along the road towards "Sylvia," taking Pt 507 on the way. The intentions for 28th July were, therefore, that the Battalion would pass through 2 RF and become advance guard to the Brigade. This plan, however, had to be cancelled as 2 RF got held up south of "Sylvia," having been driven off Pt 507 by an outbreak of fire in the woods, which spread rapidly and made the hill quite untenable.

The Battalion was then ordered to concentrate in the area of "Conn" and prepare to advance across country. The CO and RIO went forward to meet the Brigade Commander at "Conn," and the following plan was evolved. 1 RWK were held up 300 yards short of Pt 770 — they were to attack Pt 770 and then swing right-handed on to Pt 788 ("Corbett"). When this task had been accomplished, and not until, the Battalion was to secure Pt 731 and Pt 762.

Just after this, the CO was forward making a "recce," when a stonk came over and he was wounded in the leg. He had to be evacuated to the RAP of 1 RWK, and command of the Battalion was taken over by Major G McP Smith. [This was Brian Madden, the writer of this history, who had been our much loved, by all ranks, CO since he took over in Tunisia in March 1943. He did not rejoin the battalion until it was in Greece in 1946 but had in the meantime been involved in the crossing of the Rhine in the 5th Battalion.] Necessary orders for the Brigade plan to be effected were given out and all was set for a move as and when RWK secured their objectives. In the early afternoon, 1 RWK attacked Pt 770 and met heavy opposition. With the aid of tanks, however, this objective was taken, but they were not strong enough to attack "Corbett". The original plan had gone wrong, but nevertheless, rightly or wrongly, it was decided that the Battalion must go forward with its attack — Brigade being under the impression that Pt 695 was not occupied by the enemy as the Royal Fusiliers had originally taken Pt 507 without difficulty.

C Coy were then despatched to seize and hold Pt 731. During their approach to their objective they suffered several casualties from a mortar concentration, but succeeded in getting within 500 yards of Pt 731 without undue difficulty.

Then the worst happened— MG fire was opened on them from three sides and they were literally pinned to the ground. After a while Capt. Hutchison managed to withdraw the Company with difficulty on to a reverse slope, and the CO ordered them to dig in there and hold on at all costs. Casualties were heavy and it was impossible to evacuate some of the wounded until after dark. Capt Hutchison was slightly wounded in the foot, and Capt Callander took over command of C Coy. C Coy's strength was now reduced to 3 officers and 46 other ranks.

As the attack on Pt 731 had failed, any attack on Pt 762 was clearly impossible for the present. It was decided by the Brigade Commander that "Corbett" was the next objective that must be taken before any further attempts were made to attack either Pt 731 or Pt 762. "Corbett" appeared, both on the ground and on the map, to dominate the surrounding country. Yet in spite of all this no enemy fire came from this direction, though the most perfect targets in the shape of groups of from ten to twenty officers presented themselves. It was therefore quite naturally assumed that the enemy were not in occupation of "Corbett". Just how false this assumption was will be seen later.

A and B Coys were ordered to go forward and secure "Corbett", and a start was made from "Conn" at about 1900 hrs on the 28th of July. Good progress was made in the initial stages of the advance, but the country became progressively worse and movement became very difficult, while communications had to be cut as wireless aerials had to be dismantled on the move. Just as dusk was falling the two Companies came under Spandau, Schmeisser and rifle grenade fire. Major Lord Douglas Gordon, OC B Coy, who was the force commander, had two possible courses of action open to him — firstly, to withdraw his force and bring down artillery fire; or secondly, to work his force round the feature and into a suitable position to continue the advance at first light. The second course was chosen as it was clearly advantageous to retain the foothold on the feature at present gained.

It was here that difficulty arose over locations. The two Companies were reported as being on the north-west slopes of "Corbett" and this location was accepted as being correct because it was impossible to check it in the dark. This location was in fact wrong but happily no harm came of it. During the night of the 28th/29th July close contact was maintained with the enemy, and by first light the force had been moved round into what was thought to be the south-west slopes of "Corbett". One platoon of B Coy was then sent round to the right (the south) to act as fire party, while another platoon of B Coy was ordered to clear the wood and advance to the top of "Corbett". The fire platoon worked its way round to the right and liquidated a Spandau and five enemy on the way, but the other platoon only made a limited advance until they were pinned down in the wood by fire. The third platoon of B Coy was then despatched to work round the right of the fire platoon and get in at the back of the enemy. But this platoon too was pinned down by fire, though not before they had disposed of a Spandau position. The Platoon Sergeant had the aggravating experience here of all but standing on the Spandau position and then when the enemy cut and ran for it and were at his mercy, his Tommy gun jammed.

To commit any more platoons at this stage would have been fatal, and it was wisely decided that the only policy was to consolidate in the present positions and call for tank support. This request came to Battalion HQ about 0900 hrs on the 29th July. A troop of Shermans was sent off as quickly as possible with the intention of getting on to Pt 752 and shooting the Companies in on to "Corbett", while a troop of Churchills was told to make their way into the present Company areas and then go on to the top of "Corbett" with the infantry alongside. The boxes at the back of the Churchills were loaded with ammunition and water.

The troop of Shermans moved off first from "Conn" at 1230 hrs and made rapid progress, for though the track was narrow and in places mined, diversions were quickly made by Sgt. Laird and his assault section of Pioneers. The leading two Shermans made their way on to the western slopes of Pt 752 and took up hull-down positions there, but the last Sherman of the troop was less fortunate and hit a mine, thereby losing a track.

The troop of Churchills who were protected by a platoon of D Coy found progress more difficult as their overall width was just a little greater than the width of the track and two of them slipped over the side of the track and became immobile through the loss of a track. The movement of the Churchills was, moreover, observed by the enemy and drew a heavy concentration of shelling and mortaring, which unfortunately caused considerable casualties in the platoon of D Coy supporting them. The Commander of the third Churchill realised the gravity of this situation and, although he was the leading tank, he came back and took on board as much ammunition as possible, though it meant removing water which he had been carrying. This third Churchill, protected by a much depleted platoon of D Coy, and guided by its Commander on foot, then pressed forward and finally forced its way through the very thickest country and got right into the Company areas with the much-needed ammunition. The only water available was a 2-gallon can willingly supplied by the crew, but this did not go far amongst more than a hundred men.

The plan then was that the Churchill and platoon of D Coy would work round to the right and so on to "Corbett", while A and B Coys, went straight on to the feature. The two Shermans had now positioned themselves on top of Pt 752 and were in a position to shoot the attack in from the left. This attack went well and met with little opposition from the enemy, but when the Companies got on to the top of the feature, Major Gordon discovered to his chagrin that it was not "Corbett" but the ring contour Poggio Tughero. Happily this error could easily be rectified and A Coy went forward to clear the wood on the west side of "Corbett" shot in by the two Shermans on the left and the Churchill and B Coy and the D Coy platoon on the right. This advance was successful though quite a lot of sniper opposition was met in the wood, and the remainder of the force then moved over on to the "Corbett" feature and consolidated. This consolidation was complete before dark, when the tanks were withdrawn. The whole of "Corbett" was not occupied—to do this meant wide dispersion, which would assuredly have brought about disaster in this thickly wooded country.

At this time Major Gordon had no FOO at his disposal and defensive fire for the night had to be laid on from Battalion HQ on the Box system. At 2200 hrs the expected counter-attack came in on the two forward platoons of B Coy. This was made frontally, though there was a certain amount of infiltration into the rear of the platoon positions of B Coy. Defensive fire was called for and due to the difficulty of crest clearance it came right down in the forward platoon area. This was most unpleasant for B Coy, but it was doubly so for the enemy, who had not the fortune to be dug in, and it did play some part in beating off the counter-attack. The defensive fire was then lifted three hundred yards forward and when the next counter-attack started at 2230 hrs it was rapidly broken up.

There was a heavy mist and owing to this and the danger of infiltration a hundred per cent. Stand-to was maintained throughout the night. On the evening of the 29th July a hot meal was carried up to the Company positions on "Corbett", but due to the imminent possibility of a counter-attack food was not distributed to platoons until the morning of the 30th. In point of fact the porters were sniped at both entering and leaving the area, and a counter-attack developed just ten minutes after they had left.

A further attack by the enemy was expected at first-light and as the forward platoons of B Coy were running seriously short of ammunition a carrying party was sent back to collect some which had been dumped by the Churchill the previous afternoon on the Poggio Tughero feature. It was no easy task getting it forward in the darkness, but the job was completed just five minutes before the attack began. It was a determined one, but the enemy as on the previous evening persisted in attacking frontally and only sending a few men around to the flanks and the rear, and this form of attack was firmly dealt with by B Coy. It is worth mentioning here that had the enemy attacked from the flank our task of driving him off would have been much more difficult, if not impossible.

The day of 30th July was one of heavy shelling, mortaring and sniping. Unfortunately, platoon positions had to be dug in close country and many casualties, including a splendid officer in Captain Fotheringham, were caused by shells and bombs bursting in the trees overhead. The shelling became intensified in the afternoon and a harassing programme on all known enemy gun positions was carried out. The success of this was evident as the enemy guns were thereafter quiet except for some odd shells which fell wide of the mark. No praise is too high for Capt. Fotheringham, who had stayed up on "Corbett" with his men when, as it later transpired, he had been wounded in the legs on the previous day.

During the day five more Churchill tanks succeeded in getting up on to "Corbett" though a sixth had the misfortune to be knocked out by a Bazooka while on the way up, and the presence of these tanks greatly strengthened the positions. Supplies were now carried up to "Corbett" exclusively by porters. Admittedly, it was not the quickest method, but it was the one way of ensuring that the supplies got there regularly, as indeed they now did.

At 0800 hrs on 31st July, movement was observed on "Fitzsimmons" (Pt 734). Two tanks and a platoon of infantry were sent off to investigate, but it turned out to be the 2nd King's of 28th Brigade, who were working forward on the right flank. Except for spasmodic shelling, the rest of the day was quiet. Supplies were carried up to the Companies without difficulty, and by nightfall it was clear that the enemy had withdrawn.

28th Brigade having passed us on the right, it was decided to bring Companies down off "Corbett" during the night of 31st July/1st August. This was safely accomplished by 0600 hrs on 1st August, and A and B Coys, were concentrated in the area of "Conn". During the afternoon of 31st July a "recce" patrol went out and made a thorough search of Pt 731 and came back with the information that the enemy had gone, so at last light C Coy occupied this hill and the eastern end of the feature Monte Maggio. At first light on the 1st August the RWK advanced and occupied Pt 762 and, accordingly, C Coy was withdrawn to "Conn" as the situation to the north was now secure.

So ended the epic battle of "Corbett". Special mention must be made of Pte Twells, a stretcher bearer in B Coy, who made nine journeys during the battle — each time carrying a stretcher a distance of one and a half miles, often under heavy fire and involving a total of 5,000 ft. of climbing. Mention is also due to the platoon of D Coy which protected the Churchills on the 29th July and then remained with A and B Coys, though in the end their numbers were down to eight men. Such was the price of Monte Scalari.

After the evacuation of "Corbett" the CO and other officers went to inspect the Boche positions. They were amazed to find that their opposition had been at least two German Companies, with a strong Boche platoon position between Pt 752 and "Corbett". Both Major Gordon and Capt.

MacDonald declared that if they had known the numbers against them they would have been even more harassed. The following day two German prisoners who had lain up in the thick scrub surrendered to tank recovery personnel. On cross examination they confirmed the strength of the Boche on “Corbett”. They also stated that we had killed between 40 and 50 and wounded many more, so although the Battalion suffered fairly heavy casualties in seizing and holding this big feature, they certainly gave more than they got. The day of 1st August was one of well-earned rest after the battle of “Corbett”. Owing to casualties, the Battalion was temporarily organised into three Rifle Companies — C Coy being disbanded for the time being, while Major Callander took over command of D Coy. Our goal was now in sight and the spirit current was again “on, on to Florence” with something like 3 or 4 Divisions, our own, the New Zealanders, South Africans and Indians, all converging on the town and hoping to get there first. So we gathered together the remains of our energy, and after a couple of days' rest after “Corbett”, whilst the other two Battalions took up the advance, we were pushed through to the front of the Brigade on 2nd August.

The enemy now had decided to get back behind the Arno, but even so he was not keen on being hurried more than he wanted, and when he felt like it he turned round and hit with his artillery and machine guns. Still, on at least one occasion we captured a hot meal on a stove and a still burning cigarette end!

By 4th August, the Division had reached the outskirts of Florence, and then on the night of the 8th/9th, after nearly two months' continuous fighting, we were relieved and went to be billeted in a lunatic asylum in Foligno, a town in the Appennines, not far from Trasimeno Lago. With this billet, members of the Battalion had now occupied, at various times of the War, an asylum, a brothel, a grave-digger's house, and a maternity home — this last place on the Isle of Wight [after Dunkirk], provoking a query from our Divisional Commander as to whether a recruiting drive was in progress.

At Foligno and a training-cum-recreation camp on the shores of Trasimeno, the Battalion spent the rest of the month. Two important visitors were Sir Oliver Leese, the Army Commander, who gave orders that our “Corbett” battle was to be publicised in the press, and Will Fyffe [the well known Scottish comedian], who was publicised in the Sergeants' Mess. As usual, we won the Divisional Football Competition, and most of the Battalion got few days' leave in Rome or elsewhere.

By the beginning of the month we were refreshed and reinforced but had suffered a loss in Major Pollok-McCall, who had been evacuated to hospital. Major Lord Douglas Gordon now took over 2 i/c.