



## 56th Infantry Recce

The 56th Recce was formed in January 1941 starting originally with the Anti-Tank Companies from the 167/168/ 169 Brigades of the 56th (London) Div. together with personnel from a wide variety of Infantry units, all from the same Division. It was originally called the 56th Battn. Reconnaissance Corps under command of Lt. Col. "Nick" Hamilton who in the words of his successor (Lt. Col. K. Chavasse) "Had done such a good job in getting so many sub-units from different Regiments together and knocking them into shape to make a sound foundation for the 56th".



Lt. Col. K. Chavasse, our new C.O. joined us at Colchester, he was a regular soldier, and the Colonel's comments on joining were "I can never forget the feeling of instant loyalty of so many of the officers, who had never seen me before and must have wondered what this new broom would be like, I felt an almost instant acceptance".

Whilst at Colchester the Regiment was invited, and refused, to become involved with the Artist's Rifles (Reference to the Lineage Book of the British Army showed for some reason that we were part of that Regiment from 1942 to 1945 and even goes to the stage of specifying places like Tebourba, Oued Zarga, Medjez, Tunis, Sicily Sangro, Cassino, The Liri Valley, Lake Trasimeno, River Senio and Argentina).

It was at this time that Officers each bought something which was to become distinctive of the "56th" Officers - The Green Beret - but these were not worn until embarkation time.

A period was spent with the 38th (Welsh) and 47th (London) Divisions until we finally returned to the 56th (London) Div. In May 1942 we together with the 56th Div. were warned for overseas service but this, for us, was not to be the case and in August 1942 we moved to Barry Camp in Scotland to join the newly formed 78th Div. In 1987 whilst chatting about our Regt. to Ken Baker of the 49th Recce it came out that at the time the 49th was an independent Squadron with the 78th Div. but due to the fact that a complete Regiment was required we took their place in the Division.

The new 78th Div. then consisted of the 1st Guards Brigade, 11th Brigade (Ex.4th Div) and the former 36th Independent Brigade, additionally we had the Gunners (17/ 132/138 Field) 64th Anti-Tank, plus the RE's, RASC, RMIC etc... all of these units were welded into a fine fighting Division by a Commander of high ability namely Vivian Evelegh, who chose the now famous "Battleaxe" as the Division sign.

## North Africa

Originally it had been intended that the Division was to go abroad in September 1942 but due to a leakage of information the departure was put off until late October. So in the month of October we found ourselves as part of a convoy, sailing down the Clyde, but it was not until we were well at sea that we knew we were going to North Africa but even then no one seemed to be in the least bit bothered. Col. Chavasse had known our destination prior to sailing as he had been called to the War Office some time before to work out the scale of essential vehicles for the landing for the Regiment less "A" Sqdn, who were to follow a month or so later. The first and only stop which-we had was at Gibraltar but this was only for the night, then we moved across the Mediterranean to Algiers arriving on the 12th November, "C" Sqdn. having already landed via the beach on the 8th November. On the 13th November we moved down the gang-ways onto Algiers Docks and proceeded to take a gentle "Stroll" with full pack and anything else portable to the Botanical Gardens. This was to be our "home" for the next couple of days whilst our transport was unloaded and once this arrived we dutifully packed our kit and started off on our "African Adventure" but when we left the Gardens the ponds therein were somewhat soapy due to our use of them for our ablutions.

"C" Sqdn. took the Northern Route leading the 36th Brigade on the coast road through Tabarka in the direction of Djebel Abiod and hopefully Tunis. Meanwhile "B" Sqdn. leading the 11th Bgde. was heading in the direction of Beja and then for a town which was to become very well known to all members of the 1st Army - its name Medjez el Bab, with each of these columns were representatives of the 17/21st Lancers



and later we were to meet up with the Commandos and the Para Boys.

"C" Sqdn. had the honour of being the first British troops in Tunisia as they arrived at Djebel Abiod on the 17th November after their 4 day 1150 mile run from Algiers with very little sleep. Their first contact with the enemy was made by their No.15 Troop Commanded by Lt. Graham Wheatley when he and his crew Recc'd beyond Djebel Abiod and saw the enemy. In their efforts to turn the LRC round on a narrow road it overturned in a ditch, but the contact was reported back to the Brigadier who sent forward some 6 pounder and 25 pounder guns together with the Royal West Kent's. This force took on the enemy Mark IV tanks which were advancing, eleven of which were knocked out at the expense of 5 -2 pounders and some of the 25 pounders. Meanwhile Lt. Wheatley and his crew had to abandon their LRC and hide in a culvert, intending to make their way back under cover of darkness. However, this plan was ruined by an Arab shepherd boy who betrayed them to the Germans and they finished up as prisoners.

Later on Sgt. Crutch ("C" Sqdn.) was on a Carrier patrol North of Djebel Abiod on the coast road ahead was a known enemy position and he had been told to find out their strength etc. When within 800 yards of the enemy a German heavy Machine Gun opened up covering a disabled tank used as a road block but, despite the fire he "butted the tank and got within 400 yards of their position and was able to note information which was of great value and as a result of this action he was awarded the MM.

November 22nd saw the Assault Troop ("B" Sqdn.) with the 36th Bgde, together with some Anti-Tank guns moving out from their overnight harbour into the village of El Arousa where one of their Sections occupied a farm on the outskirts. Later in the day some French Troops rushed into the farm saying the enemy was nearby and this turned out to be a Motor Cycle combination some 1000 yards away. It retired but the farm came under machine gun fire. Two Armoured cars went out to Recce and both came under fire and were knocked out with the result that 5 of the 6 crew were killed and the Officer Lt. Robinson badly wounded. Sgt. Mayne, a Canadian attached for experience, was awarded the MM for his efforts in extricating the wounded in this action.

Later that night the farm came under fire and a trooper was wounded and subsequently died as a result of being hit in the stomach. In the daylight Cpl. MacDonald together with two other men noticed the enemy manning a gun, they fired at the crew with a Bren Gun and "removed" four men, these were immediately replaced and again silenced for the second time. Unbeknown to them their position was being surrounded and the enemy was creeping up on them but only when a grenade landed near did they realise what was happening. A Lance Corporal had noticed the grenade land and had picked it up to "Return it" but unfortunately it exploded blowing his hand off and at the same time injuring Cpl. MacDonald in the back. The attacking enemy arrived and covered them with machine pistols whilst the Corporal, who had First Aid experience, rendered aid to the L/cpl's wrist and then the remaining trooper dressed the Corporal's back which had been injured by grenade fragments. The Germans took the three of them into the village where they saw them smashing up captured rifles. They were then transported to a First Aid Station where the enemy dressed their wounds and later moved to Tunis where they were operated on by German and Italian Doctors, subsequently they were taken in a Junkers 52 plane to Naples and as soon as they were fit they were passed on to a POW camp.

After the El Arousa episode the Regiment had orders to move into and through Medjez el Bab but "B" Sqdn. who had been harboured near Sloughia was to be involved in a "spot of bother." When daylight dawned the Carriers were spread out over the Sloughia Iron Bridge which at the time was being guarded by French troops. In view of the possible danger from Air attack, the Luftwaffe at this time having control of the skies, it was decided to move vehicles from the vicinity of the Bridge. The one at the far end turned and came safely off the bridge but the one at the near end turned and slid into the ditch with dire results. It was unfortunate that the French Troops had been in the habit of removing their Box mines during the hours of daylight and placing them in the ditch and the carrier had unfortunately slid onto this pile with the result that the commander was killed and the driver badly wounded. In addition the Troop Sgt. (Terry Vine 12 Troop) who was close by was also injured. Just as things were being sorted out an enemy plane decided to attack, luckily it was only a single plane otherwise things would have turned out rather differently. Even so he turned and machine gunned the column setting fire to some "soft" vehicles and creating more casualties.. Then for some unknown reason he had had enough and they were left to lick their wounds. Whilst this attack was in progress the wounded had to endure it but very soon the MO plus



"Fergy" made their presence felt and did everything possible to succour the injured.

The carrier commander that had been killed was buried at the roadside and later that day we had to re-bury him as the Arabs had dug up his body, removed his clothes, and left him on top of the soil. I hate to think what would have happened to any of these people if they had been found taking part in this barbaric act.

Whilst all this was going on the Northants had entered Medjez and found that the enemy had vacated it although some Algerian troops had been holding out in the town. The enemy had "removed" the centre span of the Roman Bridge but this was quickly replaced by the RE's who promptly put up the first Bailey Bridge of the campaign, many more of which were to follow.

As soon as the bridge was completed Recce moved across and by dusk were opposite Tebourba, having encountered no enemy other than a Messerschmitt fighter.

It should be recorded that although called the First Army at this time (End November 1942) it consisted only of 2 Brigades, Blade Force and some Divisional Troops - a total of 12,300 when the Axis had some 20,000.

By late November early December daily patrols were in force and the Regt. had penetrated to within 15 miles of Tunis and it was at this stage that we were coming up against German 6 Wheeled Armoured Cars and Half Tracks together with the lethal 88 mm. It says much that in face of such opposition that the "Tally Ho" spirit never faltered as it became even more necessary for "Hot " news to be passed on quickly for inclusion in the Div. General's battle map. There was only one way to learn our "craft" and that was the hard way - by experience. Crews whether were in Carriers or Cars, Officers, NCO's and the mere trooper were all part of a team of 3 or 4 and each man's life depended on the rest of the team. Radio operators had to be ever on the alert for receiving and transmitting plus looking after the inevitable Bren Gun and as soon as they arrived back in harbour it was essential to check batteries etc. and to replace where necessary.

At this time the Colonel had to report personally each night to the Divisional Commander and give a detailed report of the day's activities, this involved a long night drive in his favourite "Faugh a Ballagh" ARC and then the return journey "back to RHQ just in time to issue orders for that day's activities. The General was reported to have been "happy with Recce's work". Just prior to Xmas 1942 the Regiment had been withdrawn to Aine Salem to rest and the Colonel called a conference of Officers to go over recent events and decide what recommendations should be made for the future, some of these were:- **the need for a Heavier ARC complete with a larger armament and that the 2 pounder Anti-Tank gun** needed to be of a larger calibre. Later in the campaign we were to see the Heavy ARC and the 6 pounder gun. At this conference it was decided that the Assault Troop (those tough boys) should be used for nightly jobs such as holding bridges, observation work, ambushes etc.

News also came through at this time that the Colonel had been awarded the DSO and the citation stated that "As a result of his personal example, dash and daring, his unit of two weak Squadrons, in spite of being out-gunned, out armoured and, frequently dive bombed they dominated the area and throughout the period obtained valuable information of enemy movements".

By this time "C" Sqdn. had returned to the Regiment from its activities in the North and "A" Sqdn. had arrived from the UK and for the first time in many months the "Family" was together. The Colonel recollects sending back a young officer to Algiers to collect NAAFI with instructions to bring him back a bottle of Irish Whiskey. The Officer duly returned and called at the Colonel's Bivvy, saluted smartly and said "Your Whiskey Sir" and promptly dropped the bottle which disintegrated. (Anyone know who the Young Officer was as the Colonel cannot remember).

One thing that could be said about the First Army was that we were well fed living as we did on "Compo Rations", and to those people not acquainted with the term it was simply a wooden case in which was sufficient food for 14 men for 1 day or the reverse ie. one man for 14 days and it comprised of the breakfast, mid-day and evening meals, plus a bar of chocolate each, hard biscuits, tea and milk mixture cigarettes plus the essential toilet paper; bread only became available later when things became more



established. Water supplies were collected daily by the Water Wagon from selected Water Points where the water had been approved but even then it was still subjected to the addition of special tablets to ensure that it was sufficiently pure enough for our stomachs to accept. At one time someone in Authority had the bright idea of us having to use salted water for all purposes even for making tea - you can well imagine that this idea was not very popular and we very soon reverted to ordinary plain water.

One Regimental task at this time had been to contact and assist in the extrication of members of the Paras that had been dropped at Depiene, well inside enemy territory. The Regiment had been in touch but communication had been lost. Sgt. Whatley together with Tpr. Jones of the Intelligence Section set off to make contact. After a few miles Sgt. Whatley's machine developed a puncture, they moved off the road and the Sgt. took the trooper's motor cycle leaving him to mend the puncture and follow on. Not long after leaving him the Sgt saw some enemy tanks which he avoided and made his way to Depiene. Near the village he found a number of wounded Paras in hiding and handed over his instructions to the one in charge. On his return journey he again had to dodge enemy tanks and made for the place where he had left his companion but all he found was a tangled heap of metal made from the cycle but no sign of the trooper. It was later established that he had been captured by an Italian patrol and made prisoner. Sgt. Whatley returned to the Regiment to report on his mission and as a result of his efforts the Para Boys were rescued by the Regiment and he was awarded the MM.

At this stage it would be an idea to mention Tunisian MUD in which the First Army had to live. Those people who have visited Tunisia on holiday will only be thinking in Terms of "Sunny Tunisia". The weather at this time was to put it politely, B..... awful, being cold and wet and as a result the mud sucked at the boots, bogged vehicles down when they ventured off the roads, tracks became impassable for vehicles and generally the weather had in fact proved the prime factor in the whole campaign, preventing the use of tanks and so delaying over the winter months, any attack in force towards Tunis.

Whilst at Aine Sellam we had received replacements in personnel and vehicles. The No 11 Wireless set was replaced by the No.19 set which incidentally we knew nothing about. All the operators got "Stuck-in" and stripped out the old ones and fitted the new, all done in complete darkness due the urgency of having to move within 24 hours, subsequent experience proved their worth.

Having spent Xmas at this place and whilst there we obtained a pig which was roasted and we enjoyed the meal after a month or so of Compo Rations.

We had been lucky as whilst we were out of the line the Guards had been involved in the attack and capture of a very well known feature called "Longstop Hill". After the capture they handed over to an American Combat team but as a result of a German counter attack they lost it and the Guards were recalled to stabilize the situation.

Patrols continued in the Goubellat Plain area and as far South as Bou Arada where Recce assisted the French in regaining the place after a German attack. The Regiment had been "showing the flag" in the Djebels Djaffa and Rihane, El Arousa and Bou Arada areas leaving mementoes of their first contact at "Tally Ho Corner" then down to St. Cyprien, only 14 miles from Tunis.

Due to being out-gunned by the enemy it became necessary to hand over some patrols to the heavier cars of the Derbyshire Yeomanry. Their activities at a road junction 10 miles outside Medjez made it necessary to give the place a name and it was done aptly by calling it "Peters Corner" after the Derby Yeo's Peter Payne-Galway and it remained so until the end of the Tunisian hostilities.

By the middle of February 1943 problems had arisen in the American held area in the South at the Kasserine Pass and "A" Sqdn. was dispatched "Hot foot" together with several other units to bolster up the situation. When they arrived the situation was very confused and they were met with a message from Gen. Alexander saying "The positions were to be held at all costs" this was due to the fact that if the enemy had broken through and pushed on to Le Kef the whole of the First Army would have been in great danger. The American troops had taken a heavy pounding and were disorganised and streaming back and to ascertain what was happening two troops of Recce were sent forward, subsequently a third one was pushed forward, some of these Armoured cars had been fitted with light cannon which had been taken



from crashed aircraft in the Medjez area.

The enemy commenced to shell the area and the 25 pounders replied and hit a petrol dump and the subsequent flames silhouetted enemy tanks thus giving the Gunners the chance to hit the leading three tanks. It was only after the loss of 18 tanks that the enemy withdrew. The situation was still desperate as prior to the enemy withdrawal, 16 of the 25 pounders, and a new Battalion of Leicesters had been over-run and the Lothian and Border Horse and the 17/21st. Lancers had only a total of 10 tanks between them. When dawn arrived the 10 tanks moved forward to attack and very soon firing was heard. Finally only 3 returned but the bluff worked as the enemy had wrongly assumed that they were the spearhead of an attack and withdrew. Also at this time some 105mm. guns arrived and went into immediate action and the situation improved, probably their timely arrival helped.

In view of the lull Recce were told to move back to rest but no sooner had they arrived and harboured than a message arrived for them to move forward and maintain contact with the enemy, the Order simply said "Go forward and report when you make contact", and as they passed through the 6th Armoured Divs. Guards unit they were greeted with "Good luck Recce".

Out in the dark No Man's Land they passed "Brewed-up" vehicles and endeavoured to avoid shell and mortar craters, at the 5 mile stage they reported "No contact" and back came the Order "Keep moving", the two lead cars moved on to draw any fire but nothing came - lucky for them. The advance continued for some 20 miles when the lead car hit a mine, the Assault Troop took over and lifted some 100 mines. The second car moved off the advance axis to find a way round and then got back on to the road but half a mile further on more mines were found and as a result of this report to Brigade the RE's were sent up to take over the mine clearing whilst the Sqdn. was told to move off across country. One of the Scout troops took on the job and very soon found the enemy Soon all three troops were committed but as soon as the road behind had been cleared the Guards unit was motored forward to take over the weight of the attack.

No sooner had the Sqdn. been relieved than a DR arrived from RHQ with instructions for them to return immediately to Medjez area as the Regt. was heavily engaged together with the 46th Recce that had recently arrived from the UK. We had been under the impression that the arrival of a sister Regt. meant that we were to be rested but no such luck.

Evidently the enemy had sent tanks down the road plus infantry who were swarming up the hills on either side and were involved with the 46th Recce on the Right flank and the 56th was involved in similar fighting hence the call for the Sqdn. to return promptly.

The thrust for Beja was a serious one and threatened Allied plans, an attack in the Testour area at "Steam Roller Farm" was being fought off by No.6 Commando who had 4 troops there, the enemy in the shape of the Herman Göring Jaeger Regt. were attacking yelling "Jaeger" whilst the Commandos retaliated by shouting "Commando". Due to the constant pressure the Commandos had to fall back through a road block manned by 56 Recce astride the Testour road. At this stage further enemy progress was stopped by the Derby Yeo reinforced by "Churchills" of the 142 RTR and the enemy was forced to retreat to Steam Roller Farm, subsequent attacks on this farm made by the Guards with tanks of the 51st RTR found a shambles of bodies plus Swiss Chocolate, Danish Butter. Brandy and Cigars which had been dropped by their planes and understandably the Regiment took its share of the booty.

Some time later "A" Sqdn. were patrolling the Doc du Bed valley and Lt. Michell's troop made first contact and were pinned down by both Machine Gun and Mortar fire "A" Sqdn. Commander, Major Darsie Murray then went forward on foot, but just prior to moving he ordered another troop to assist but they in turn were pinned down The Major gradually made his way forward to ascertain from one of the troops where the fire was coming from and during this period 2 troopers were killed. Having sized up the situation Major Murray left the troop to return to his vehicle and had barely left the protection of a hollow when he was killed by a burst of M.G. fire also at the same time there were other casualties including Lts. Jack May and the very young Peter Schofield who were both wounded in the face. In view of the serious situation an Infantry unit was ordered forward to assist and they passed through Recce positions with fixed bayonets and in extended order but they were very soon in much the same situation. Col. Chavasse who had been in



contact came forward to personally find out the form and eventually the Sqdn. was ordered back leaving the battle to the infantry who were managing to get the situation under control. The bodies of the Major and the 2 Troopers were taken back to a farm owned then by a Monsieur Dejamais who undertook to ensure that the Arabs would not desecrate their graves, the bodies were later removed by the War Graves Commission and they now lie in the Cemetery at BEJA.

Thereafter the Regt. was involved in a variety of roles and although the Regt. did not take part in the final push to Tunis as our Division had been given the task of taking back the hills which they knew so well - Longstop, Djebels Ang and Mahdi together with the villages of Toukabeur, Chaouch, Heidous, Tangoucha and Kefs which they did but at no little cost. One Sqdn. was involved with the infantry in preventing enemy from escaping. One LRC from "C" Sqdn. (Bill Croucher's Troop) was loaned later to Randolph Churchill, the Prime Minister's son so that he could get into Tunis as soon as it was liberated. So by the 7th May the First and Eight Armies entered Tunis but pride of place was given to the tired infantry of our Div (The 78th) when they entered on the 8th exactly 6 months after the initial landings in Algeria.

For a considerable amount of the 6 months the Division short of men and equipment, they the, 78th Div. had been virtually the whole of the First Army and for most of the time they had been short of air cover, short of rest and unappreciated at home.

As soon as the job was completed we congregated at La Marsa, a small seaside resort just outside Tunis where we lived either on or not far from the beach and whilst there we listened to the Africa Corps Band going through their repertoire. Whilst there all Officers were called to a Monty conference in a cinema in Tunis this being the first time they had all actually seen the "great" man.

Later we moved to the Guelma area where we bought Arab hand made "odds and ends" in leather in the small town and after a short while we moved via Cape Bon to the Hammamet area, and again a short spell to the concentration area, where we experienced the hot winds, on the outskirts of Sousse, where "Monty" visited us and told us that he wanted our Division in "his Army" (Often wonder what response he would have made if we had all said "No thanks we do not want to join").

At a later stage officers of both the 1st and 8th Armies were somewhat dismayed to see notices displayed on 1st Army vehicles which proclaimed "No connection with any other Army".

Local leave was laid on with visits to Sousse and there was plenty of "poaching" of water melons as the Arabs never had much chance of safe-guarding their crops of this product. However our stay in this area did not last very long and by the 14th July we were moving into the docks at Sousse joining the queues to enter the LST's to start our second campaign, this time in Sicily.

SICILY

Now as newcomers to the 8th Army we were on our way to the island just off the toe of Italy. To many members of the 8th Army we were the ones that had not even "browned our knees" but we had something which they would have to learn the very hard way. As a first class fighting Division we knew quite a lot about fighting in close country and they were soon to learn what the 78th Div. could do especially when it came to the capture of Centuripe.

The trip over from Africa was uneventful except for the two Bren Carriers which came unshackled on the top deck of one LST and when the ship commenced rolling they threatened to push two 15 cwt. "soft" vehicles on the outside into the drink but luckily the rolling ceased and the remainder of the voyage was quiet except for night time when a considerable amount of Anti-craft fire was put up without any casualties. The beach landing next day was quiet as the original landings had been made some days before. After a couple of days ashore during which time we sorted ourselves out and moved off through squalid villages with the inevitable clouds of dust which despite some protection from scarves and handkerchiefs still permeated up the nose and down the throat and everything was covered by a film of dust. In addition we started to get used to the usual calls from children for "Cioccolati, caramelles and biscotti"

Our Division had been assigned to be part of 30 Corps along with the 51st Highland Div. (Soon to return to



the UK), together with the Canadians and the Div was given the task of advancing in the direction of Mt. Etna with Cattenuova as its first objective. The intention being that once this was gained it was to be followed by Centuripe, which was immediately nick-named "Cherry Ripe". In view of the position of this town it became essential that Mules be obtained as due to the lack of shipping space the Army had not been allowed to bring them from N. Africa.

During the fighting for Cattenuova the E. Surreys captured a German Officer and in his possession they found the whole German plan of future operations in Sicily and it specified that Centuripe was the hinge pin and had to be held at all costs and ended with the words that "No German Soldier was to be embarked finally from Sicily unless he was in possession of his personal fire arms".

Until this place was taken it was not possible for Recce to operate, so once again the PBI had the job of taking this old fortress town perched on the top of a razor backed ridge and, in addition it was defended by the Herman Göring Div. and the 3rd Para. Regt. who were no mean adversaries and also the road up was the usual zig-zag commanded by the town above.

The Divisional Commander decided that the attack should go in quickly and some of the Infantry would be using a Mule track using the requisitioned animals whilst other units were assigned to the road route.

From on the spot reports the following information has been gained - "The Barrage opened up at 1800 hrs and by 1930 hrs the heavily laden infantry were seen moving into position and this attack finally went in at 0100 hrs the following morning and by 0230 hrs. "A" Sqdn. were given orders by RHQ to move up the road behind the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders. Slowly the lead car of No.6 troop picked its way along the road, the attack had gone well and the Sqdn. Commander was heard to say "Thank God" and the heavy ARCs took on the remainder of the German rearguard. The enemy immediately reacted by shelling the town and the Troop had to take cover, some cars moving into firing positions. By early morning the lead troop was through the town and on the road to Adrano but soon the first two cars were hit by enemy 88 mm. guns thus blocking the road, all of which was under observation from an escarpment. The Assault Troop was ordered forward to observe and later reported the enemy gun position which was immediately dealt with by the Gunners. The Troop again moved forward for a mile or so when three Bren Carriers were hit and so the crews went to ground in a bend in the road and did a foot Recce to spot the guns and these were subsequently dealt with.

By evening the Sqdn. had advanced some 8 miles to the River Simento and the bridge was found to be a pile of rubble and the RE's were called forward to deal with this matter. The enemy reacted quickly to the arrival of a Bull-dozer and poured withering fire on to them and in addition for first time they experienced fire from the Multi-Barrelled Mortar which was immediately nick-named the "Moaning Minnie" due to the noise which both the firing and the Bombs created, luckily this new weapon was not so accurate as the single barrelled variety but it did make one nervous until you became more used to the noise.

However, the RE's succeeded in getting a Bailey Bridge into position and subsequently Recce moved in the direction of Adrano but when only a few hundred yards short of the town, the lead car was knocked out as a result hitting a double bank of Teller Mines. Heavy ARC's carried on through the town to the cross roads where they stopped before handing over to another Sqdn. as we only had one road on which to advance".

Thereafter the same sort of happenings with other Sqdns. ie the enemy stubbornly resisting any forward movement, plus mines, mortars, MG fire plus the usual 88 mm."C" Sqdn. had a period when approaching a town and the patrol was fired on and two Regimental Officers, Lts. Weeks and Mitchell distinguished themselves by rescuing wounded personnel under fire, the cars were subsequently withdrawn to allow a heavy attack to go in to deal with the situation.

The lower slopes of Mt. Etna consist of miles of hard rough and rocky surface; plenty of hard black lava and through this inhospitable landscape ran a one track tarmac road hedged in by two solid stone walls without any gates or entrances. Because of this the artillery had to break down walls to get their guns into position and it was remarkable that despite these problems all requests for support were answered. Also due to the type of ground it was not possible for the Gunners to dig slit trenches for their own protection,



when the enemy started to retaliate. Casualties were caused to them both by shrapnel and flying pieces of lava which themselves created wounds as bad as the flying metal.

August 9th saw "B" Sqdn. clearing the high ground of the rugged lava slopes, later a well sited enemy SP gun knocked out 3 Recce cars just short of Macherone and later the Sqdn. was held up by mines on the road. As some of the carriers were going forward to clear the mines one of them blew up on a mine at the roadside where the ARC's were standing. Not long after this episode contact the 9th U.S. Division who came in from the coastal road. The junction of the two Divisions resulted in the sealing off of the enemy in the Messina peninsula.

Due to the heavy damage caused by bombing etc Recce were unable to move forward and no longer had an active role to play although the PBI, as usual still had to carry on but luckily by the 13th August the Division passed into reserve and 3 days later the US troops entered Messina and it was all over.

However, the Div. Artillery still had work to do and they moved up into concealed positions beside the Straits of Messina ready to put up a barrage for the landings later on the toe of Italy by the 5th Div. and the Canadians. Meanwhile the 78th Div. had been transferred back to the 5th Corps under which it served in N. Africa. The Division had been severely tested, not only operationally but also administratively and had earned tributes from the Commanders of higher formations that were more than mere phrases. Gen. Montgomery wrote to say that "He thought the Division had added to its N. African reputation" and the Commander of 30 Corps (Gen. Leese) sent his congratulations on the Div's "Magnificent fighting".

The Regiment took the opportunity of a couple of weeks rest in and near the small seaside resort of Gioioso Marea with daily dips in the briny but little did we know what was in store for us on the mainland and more especially how many good friends we would lose on the long journey up Italy.

"Your request for stories leads me to recall an even that I have often told friends and is always regarded as bit of a laugh, but could have had tragic results for me, I wonder if any of the lads recall when I blew the latrine to pieces when we were based at Gioiosa Marea on the north coast of Sicily in August 1943."

"We were camped in a pomegranate grove close to the beach and when I went to use the latrine some kind person had propped the lid open; consequently there was just a mass of flies. So, without thinking, I went and got an empty cigarette tin, filled it with petrol and tipped some into the latrine. By the time I had found a match, the petrol had well and truly vaporised. The resultant explosion after throwing in the lighted match was terrific, the wooden seat disintegrated into matchwood, the hessian screen was flattened, and your's truly was hurled through the air some yards away, minus eyebrows, eyelashes and the stubble on my head, which I called my hair. My eyes, nose hair and ears were filled with all sorts of indescribable matter. I was stretchered off to the nearest hospital, where I had my stomach pumped out and the burns attended to. I was in hospital for 48 hours and the doctor told me that if the ground where the latrine had been dug had been firmer instead of sandy soil, the result might have been more concentrated and lethal "

"I have often wondered that had I been in the American Army, what the citation for the Purple Heart would have read."

## Italy

After the seaside rest we moved into Messina and once more made our acquaintance with the LST's for the short trip across the Straits of Messina and we landed on the 9th September a few days after the original landings.

"B" Sqdn. had the job of leading along the road from Reggio Calabria in a N.E. direction towards Crotona and then on to Taranto followed by Bari and Barletta, by this time the force then called "A" force, was expanded by the addition of the Royals, 3rd County of London Yeomanry, Kensingtons, 17th Field Regt, 64th Anti-Tank, 237 Field Coy. Two Para Sqdn. RE's together with the Airborne Recce Sqdn. (later to be involved in the Arnhem episode) and the whole force was able to push ahead against some resistance in the general direction of Foggia with its airfields.



Within hours of arriving at Foggia a lorry containing a party of Germans arrived during the hours of darkness and were all promptly taken prisoner.

The next morning two troops of "C" Sqdn. continued to advance and a troop under command of Lt. Croucher plus 2 Para Engineers took the inland route whilst another troop kept to the coastal route. Lt. Croucher's troop travelled in a semi-circle and whilst in a small town square being mobbed by the locals a shout went up "Tedeschi". It turned out to be a Motor-cycle combination manned by three Germans and after a burst of fire from the Troop one was captured and the remaining two managed to evade capture by running into the trees. The RE's said of this episode, their first patrol, "Sod this lark out here all on our own". These RE's had done some excellent mine clearing work that day and Bill Croucher said that "this being our first long patrol without any support or radio contact did not impress anyone on that patrol!"

As the unit moved forward in a Northerly direction the resistance increased again with the usual mines, Machine Guns and Anti-Tank guns being in evidence and by the time we arrived near to Serricapriola it was not possible for the Regt. to move forward and so we had to await the arrival of the remainder of the Division. So on October 1st the Northants moved into position to attack the town supported by Recce and tanks, once the tanks moved forward loud explosions were heard and a pall of smoke appeared over the town and it appeared that the enemy had been going through the motions and withdrawing whilst destroying anything of value.

So a few hours after the commencement of the attack the inhabitants were mobbing everyone but unfortunately opening a booby-trapped door killed one Recce man and he was buried at the roadside just outside the towns northern exit.

This sort of attack was to be the trend of things to come in Italy, ie cross a river, capture a village or town then a hill or a mountain.

We then moved up in the direction of Campomarino and on across towards a place called Termoli, a name that would subsequently be engraved on many Recce people's memory.

It was only at this time that the 8th Army's intelligence sources confidently stated that the only enemy in front was a Para. Div. but they also admitted that they were not sure of the whereabouts of the 16th Panzer Div.

The Irish Brigade, at this time was still at Bari and they were to be brought forward by the Royal Navy, meanwhile two Commandos of the Special Service Brigade had been landed and 11 Brigade were to join up with them after crossing the Biferno and so the stage was set, but what followed was completely unexpected. 11 Troop ("B" Sqdn.) moved over the Biferno to have a look around and after making contact and passing through the Commandos they moved forward for some time when along came a Motor cyclist and he was immediately "Bagged", then came the surprise - he was from the missing 16th Panzers and he confirmed that this Division had been travelling by night, for a 48 hour period - this news was immediately imparted to the Divisional General.

The capture of the cyclist had improved caution and they moved off again but a few miles further on the lead car stopped to observe German infantry lining up for a meal. This sight delighted the Gunner FOO who had been travelling with the Troop and he immediately "put his guns" on the target with the net result that the enemy had some casualties but as usual they reacted very quickly with shell and mortar fire. In view of the possibility of encirclement they being far forward on their own, the Troop was ordered to return but unluckily not without the loss of one Sergeant.

The move back was one of some 6 miles to the brickworks in front of the town of Termoli and it was here that they joined other units which had crossed the river, these were the Argyles, Royal W. Kents and the Commandos. Gradually under constant pressure from the Panzers small withdrawals had to be made, but due to the fact that the Bailey Bridge had been damaged it was not possible to move any reinforcements forward to assist, and the situation, to say the least was becoming critical as enemy tanks and infantry were constantly probing forward.



At this time an Infantry Colonel decided that one particular position should be abandoned but Tpr. Ives (Assault Troop) refused and single handed he manned a Gun and took on German Tanks until his gun received a direct hit and he was killed. Several other personnel from Recce were killed including the SSM of the Sqdn. and in addition the FOO and several others were wounded. Luckily the Bridge had by now been repaired and reinforcements arrived. It became necessary to get the Recce vehicles back, so to avoid the enemy being aroused by the subsequent noise, was arranged that the Gunners should fire to "cover up" any noise made. Whilst this was in progress the Irish Brigade was being landed and went into immediate action gradually drove the enemy back.

From then onwards, it was a matter of slogging one's way up the length of Italy, with only one really good road on the 8th Army front and it was the case of one river after another to cross many of which had blown bridges and the then second rate railway was shattered.

By now the weather had changed, snow was on the Appenines and it was a colder and harder winter than any one had expected. Greatcoats, mufflers and jerkins were soon in evidence; sometimes we even had a Rum Ration. Gallant fighting at Montecilfone by one Sqdn. was recorded and also another Sqdn. helped in the capture of Montenero.

San Salvo was one of the towns next on this route and it was here that our own planes attacked the Infantry for a time causing several casualties. An attack was put in towards Vasto and the force was made up of the RW Kents, 50 RTR, The Argyles and the N'Hants and it was whilst this action was in progress that the Northants unfortunately lost their Anti-Tank platoon whilst under heavy MG fire, meanwhile Recce entered Vasto with the RW Kents.

It was noted that the enemy prepared defence positions for both Cupello and Vasto but their withdrawal had been made more quickly than he had anticipated due to the weight of our artillery and the steady advance of the infantry and by the 9th November the Lanc. Fusiliers and the E. Surreys were on the Southern bank of the River Sangro looking across to the enemy positions which he now held on the high ground.

Rivers in Italy are quite different in width summer and winter and now the river was some 400 feet across and at this time all patrols going over it were controlled by one officer from the Infantry, the first prisoners taken were found to be from the 65th Infantry and the 16th Panzers. The constant rain made the river a fast running one and during this time it was not possible to get men over on patrol, the enemy took the opportunity to lay more and more mines so that any attack would need a large amount of mine clearance.

The Divisional General ordered an attack to be made, the force to be made up of one Company from each of the 3 Battalions of the 36th Bde. They waded across but lost officers and men on the newly sown mines and also as a result of attacks from three sides. An additional attack was put in by 11 Bde plus the 2/60th from the 4th Div. They had a very hard time having to exist in wet clothes and without any hot food and, in addition it was not possible to get support weapons across to assist.

All this time the magnificent RE's had been busy with their bridge building and they had seen their bridge washed away and had built it again but no words could express the way in which these men worked under shell-fire etc to try and help get across this river. Farther down the river much use was made of the DUKW's to ferry supplies over the river to assist those who had a foothold on the Northern bank.

A further attack was planned to be undertaken this time by the 8th Ind. Div. but they ran into trouble when the leading troops got into the village of Mozzagrogna where they came up against Flamethrowers for the first time and the attack faded out.

78th Div. Commander then decided that the Irish Bde should be put in to attack this place. Luckily as the weather had improved, it was possible to have tanks in support and the enemy was surprised when a creeping barrage was put down with the tanks following and the infantry keeping up close behind.



Just after noon on the 30th November 1943, the Sangro line had been broken but unfortunately the excitement of this win was played down by the news that the Division mourned the loss of "Swifty" Howlett the 36th Bde Commander who had been killed whilst visiting his forward troops.

At this time we had a change of Div. Commander as Gen. Eveleigh was succeeded by Gen. Charles Keightley from the 6th Arm'd Div whom we had known back in N. Africa so we had another friend at the helm.

The Division was tired as a result of almost continuous action from November 1942 during which time the infantry had been having heavy losses, as an example the Argyles had lost 156 Officers and around 1000 in that period and the Buffs had only a few of their "originals" left.

It was decided to move the Division out of the line for a rest at Campobasso but unfortunately "C" Sqdn. were still left behind as they were involved in Recce duties exploiting towards S. Vito and had a hard time. They were however able to join us later in the rest area, after being relieved by the 1st Canadian Div. on December 9th:

The Canadians had been using these rest facilities before relieving our Div. but "C" Sqdn. were only able to have a short time there before the Div. was assigned to take over another sector, this time in the mountains.

This time we were to be responsible for a 15 mile front stretching from Vastogiradi, through S. Pietro and on to Pescopenetaro and this area experienced a very severe winter with snow drifts continually blocking roads, violent blizzards and Dakota Air Transport supplied isolated troops of the Regt. many ski patrols were out, a new experience for all those concerned.

Two Recce personnel were attached to the Polish Commandos in Pescopenetaro for liaison work and luckily for all concerned in this village, some Italians came over and gave information to the effect that the enemy would be making an attack on the positions that night. The Poles, ever ready for action, made immediate arrangements to give them a good reception, the FOO had changed that very day and had been unable to register any targets. About mid-night the "visitors" arrived and were warmly welcomed, they managed to get fairly close! so the Poles promptly requested that the Gunners bring the fire in even closer so that shells were only just skimming the roofs with the result that the enemy decided he had had enough and decided to retreat. Many thanks were due to the F00 and his radio operator who had all our lives in his hands that night.

"B" Sqdn spent Xmas in Capracotta and managed to find plates and cutlery in some of the houses and we even had some table cloths which made our Xmas far more palatable.

Towards the end of February the regiment was relieved by the Podolski Lancers - the Recce Regt. of the 3rd Carpathian Div. who had those nice heavy Staghounds, and we then made our way being the 5th Army front.

Due to the delay in getting away from the mountains some of the Division's Infantry was already in the line under Command of the 5th Army, but meanwhile there was a session of training and we came under the immediate command of the 2nd NZ. Div (Lt. Gen. Freyberg VC).

Early in March the 5th Army sector was moved further south and we reverted to the 8th Army as it was intended that an assault be made on Cassino by the 8th Ind. Div with the 78th Div taking the lead after the breakthrough. Prior to this attack there was to be a heavy air attack on the town and Monastery, which was expected to be the heaviest so far. Unfortunately it had the reverse effect, leaving the roads in such a bad condition that tanks could not assist in any way. It had been expected that the air attack would neutralise the enemy activity and as a result defence was expected to be light however, the enemy had been able to feed reinforcements into their defence positions via tunnels and in addition it was found that some enemy tanks had been walled up in houses making them into strong points.



A Recce signal Section was sent to BDE HQ at Mignano for some reason, but we knew not what, it was only assumed that it was something to do with traffic control once the attack started but as attack failed we were no longer required and returned to the Unit.

Whilst some had been lazing at Bde HQ others of the Recce had not been so lucky as they had been put in the line to relieve the PBI. They really had a hair raising time, having to exist in Sangars (to the uninitiated this type of "shelter" is used where the ground is too hard to dig and so one has to build a wall around oneself to get protection). You can well imagine that when in a position of this nature it is not possible to go to the toilet and so the "heavier" needs of nature have to be performed during the hours of darkness otherwise one got short shrift from the enemy. There is one story of one of our Officers who decided that he wanted to "go" just prior to daylight breaking but he soon had to jump back into the sangar with his trousers still in the down position. Supplies of all types had to be taken forward by jeep to a forward point where they were split into packs for mules to take forward later due to the position of certain units it; was only possible to get supplies there by man handling them into place.

The rocky nature of this area caused a considerable number of head injuries due to flying rock and shell fragments and in consequence a forward hospital was set up to deal promptly with wounds of this type, so once again we to thank the RAMC for their efforts in this respect.

As result of the failure of the attack the net result was the loss of 1316 men of the NZ Div and the Indians 3000 men. Despite this we still had another 6 weeks in the area until the whole of the Division was again relieved by the Poles who were getting into position for a new attack. The whole period of two months in this area up to then had been the dreariest and certainly the most unhappy in the Division's history especially as the losses and hardships had been to no purpose.

The Capua area was a paradise compared with Cassino and we had to get used to ordinary things like the song of a bird and we had the additional pleasure of hearing English women ' s voices in the nearby town of Caserta, which at the time was an Army HQ.

May 1st found the Division undergoing various exercises for the future attack in which we were to play a role. The attack went in on May 11th with the 4th and 8th Indian divisions leading and our job was to exploit once things had settled and we were to have the Arm'd Brigade alongside and the Canadian, then in Corps reserve, were to be with us. On May 14th the Regt. was told to move forward to the main base at Mignano, all the area forward of this place was covered with smoke to screen the activities from the enemy in the Monastery.

The Division's first attack went in the next day and there were several acts of bravery by infantry personnel including one by Fus. Jefferson who single handed took on a German tank with a PIAT, and as result of this action he was awarded the VC which was the third gained by the Division.

Frosinone was the first major objective to be entered by the Regiment in this advance after it had passed through Castrocielo, Roccasecca, Arce, Ceprano and Madonna. The push continued N and NW of Frosinone but on the 3rd May the Regiment was relieved and then prepared to move NW to the Sector N. of Rome which had by then been taken by the 5th Army.

The Americans had made a surprisingly rapid advance on the coastal sector, having taken full advantage of the 8th Army's attack to join up with the Anzio forces. By the 8th June the Regiment was in a concentration area N. of Rome and on the 10th in a fresh Recce role it advanced via Civita Castellana, Fabrica di Roma, Vallerano, Soriano, Graffignana and Orvieto one of Italy's famous wine areas

It was at this time that Recce had a spectacular run as they then had under command a small force consisting of a Squadron of the Warwickshire Yeomanry, "A" Company of the RIF, two troops of the 315 Anti-tanks, a Battery of the 17th Field Regt. and a detachment of the 237, Field Sqdn RE's. The main body was responsible for the protection of the S. Africans advancing along the W. Bank of the River Tiber whilst "A" Sqdn was on the other side where the advance was slower.



In the advance from Orvieto to the shores of Lake Trasimeno the Regiment killed 1115 enemy, took 121 prisoners captured or destroyed 26 guns of over 26 mm. capacity, 55 machine guns, plus assorted vehicles including one lorry load of French Brandy and sweets. (Where did it all go to?).

The movement forward continued and it was at this time that the Div. Commander had a lucky escape whilst visiting the Buffs when a sniper's bullet shattered his field glasses with a single shot. Lake Trasimeno was in sight but we still had some way to go and resistance was increasing, the PBI had as usual taken heavy losses and in some cases the companies were down to one third strength.

Recce had by now been returned to under command of the Division and reported that the enemy were showing signs of withdrawing from Castilione de Lago. A patrol under the command of Capt. Lampard was ordered forward to capture a house short of this town and on the way they commenced to remove mines and were fired on but a Troop supporting them moved forward to the house and found that it had just been evacuated. The following morning a Sqdn. moved forward towards the town, lifted more mines on the way and on entering the town found that the enemy had evacuated the place. "A" Sqdn. went on through the town and continued North and by the afternoon of the 7th June with 8 Troop on the Right and 7 Troop on the left when Lt. Ridley (8 Troop) took an enemy patrol by surprise killing 8 and wounding 6 whilst the remainder disappeared into the corn. On arrival at the next village they were told that the enemy had only left some half an hour before, after the inevitable glass of Vino, 8 Troop continued for another 4 miles before they found themselves in the middle of a German Company area. Here a small battle developed and a Sgt. was badly wounded by a Schmeisser which had rendered his ARC powerless. The fire had been coming from an upper window so another ARC moved forward and silenced the person firing and rescued the Sgt. Whilst this action was in progress the sound of their support tanks of the Warwickshire Yeo moving in to their assistance was music to their ears.

Around this time the news came through that the hard pressed Division was to be relieved and go to Egypt for a long rest, refit and retraining period.

But in the meantime the Regiment was still advancing along the railway, hammered by SP Guns day and night and having to make diversions due to enemy "removals" of various bridges. Finally Recce was the last unit of the Division to be relieved and by the 4th July the whole of the Div. was out of the line having handed over to our old friends the 6th Armd Division.

What a pleasure it was to be away from all that Shot and shell atmosphere up North. We gradually got accustomed to a more peaceful type of existence and in addition were able to get a good nights sleep as we were now back near Rome staying at Tivoli. A few days after arriving we had the usual G. 1098 Kit check so a lot of excess equipment was disposed of very quickly, wonder if it was all dug we left the site

Whilst there we had the chance to visit Rome and visit St. Peters and other places of interest, some of the Irish Brigade took the opportunity to see the Pope and pay their respects. We were all ready on the 14th. July and commenced to march down the road to Rome Station passing the 44th Recce who were on their way up to take over our vehicles.

## Egypt

By the 17th July we had departed from Taranto on our second trip across the Med, this time to Alexandria where we took the train for our journey to Quassassin Camp. The place subsequently turned out to be way out in the desert and mass of white tents alongside Polish personnel who were arriving from all corners. Although being "out of the way" it was well served with a NAAFI, cinema and most welcome showers and washing facilities and we could even get our KD washed and ironed if we so desired ,

We had of course to get used to the heat which was usually in the region of 100 degree's F. All one wanted to do at this stage was to lay on one's bed and sweat. Very soon leave available for a few days in Cairo or Ismalia. It was quite an experience to visit Cairo and take the opportunity to visit the Pyramids and the Sphinx. Bananas and cream became a very popular item at Groppi's in the centre of Cairo (Remember that Bananas at this time were few and far between in the UK) also if one wished it was possible to use the facilities of the swimming pool at Heliopolis near the RAF place, but never, never take a



dip in the "Sweet Water Canal" (That was an order otherwise one would be in serious medical trouble due to a particular type of wire worm).

One thing we learned in Cairo was the term to be "Gipped" and later the Cairo shopkeepers etc were to learn that we would not take that laying down. Due to the large amount of "light fingered merchants" in this town it became an order that our pay books be retained on our person by the addition of string around our necks attached to the book.

The original intention had been that we were to rest and then go to Palestine for a further two months training but this was not to be as a request was received for the Division to return to Italy, this being due to the fact that the tough resistance in the Gothic Line plus the transfer of units to the Second Front had created a shortage of manpower and so we were soon to be on our way back.

Recce had been allocated 28 new American Greyhound Arm'd cars (M8's) to replace 16 of our heavies previously held, modifications were put into effect at once including the usual addition of sandbags to reinforce the thin floors against mine damage. Prior to the move back to Italy the Div. Boys decided to give the Cairo shopkeepers a lesson over the prices charged and they went to town" causing some £3000 worth of damage but even then they probably overcharged for the damage. New Bren Carriers were also collected from the massive ordnance dump at Tel e Kebir and it was noticed that this dump was surrounded by a double barbed wire fence which was mined to prevent intrusion by the Arabs.

#### Italy Again

By mid September we were back again on Italian soil at Taranto and then for the first time since we had left the UK in October 1942 we were equipped to the full G.1098 standard and the effects of this were to be very welcome later on in the year when the weather really turned cold and wet .

Just prior to our leaving Egypt the news was passed on that we were to lose our current Div. Commander as he been promoted to Command the 5th Corps but our paths were to cross later on. Meanwhile Brig. Arbuthnott was put in temporary command, and was confirmed in his appointment later on and promoted to Major Gen. During his tour he never spared himself in his efforts to look after the needs of his division. The subsequent arrival back in Italy meant a distinct change in the temperature and we now had to get used to Battledress again and after a few days of getting ourselves sorted out we started our move north with Recce leading the Division.

The journey North took three days and it brought back many memories when we passed through places like Termoli and the Rivers Sangro and Trigno with our final destination being Fano some 40 miles South of Rimini.

It had been the intention for the Division to move forward on the 4th October but only two hours before this move time we were told that this had been cancelled and we were now to come under Command of 13 Corps on the Right of the 5th Army. Due to the swiftness of the move it was all carried out entirely under verbal orders and our ever efficient Divisional Military Police made an excellent job of moving well ahead and signposting the route so that all we had to do was to follow the Battleaxe sign. This move was carried out in the pouring rain and it meant some 36 hours of continuous driving over mountain roads with all available crews taking turns with the normal driver to give him a rest.

After daylight dawned we stopped for a few hours on the road on the edge of the old walled city of Assisi and some of the crews managed to pay a fleeting visit to the town. After this short stop we moved NW to the Divisional concentration area at Scarperia where the Regiment remained the 19th October when the vehicles were left behind and most of the crews moved into the line area in 3 Tonners to relieve the sorely pressed infantry. General Alexander reported to have said that he was giving his last fresh Division to reinforce the 13th Corps in the 5th Army. The Irish Brigade had already been in the line since the 5th October and the Division had relieved the 88th U.S. Division astride the Imola road just North of Castel del Rio. South of this village the enemy had destroyed a long viaduct and in consequence the Divisional Engineers were given the job of building a bridge, which turned out to be the highest Bailey Bridge then in existence and it really was a marvellous piece of engineering when completed. (Again a first for the



Division). This was to replace a diversion which the Americans had been using, however when finished due to its height it was not possible to move more than one Battalion over per day as the vibrations set up by wheel chains threatened to have the bridge down and in consequence all the vehicles had to remove their chains before passing over it

The area itself had never had the amount of traffic the past and the roads and tracks soon became a mass of liquid mud and were only passable with four wheel drive vehicles. At one stage it became necessary to obtain this type of vehicle and they were loaned from the Americans in exchange for Bottles of Rum and Whiskey - something which they never seemed to be able to obtain from their own sources - Lucky for us.

Gun positions had to be chosen very carefully with the idea that at a later time the guns would be able to be removed, at this time Air photos of enemy areas were issued to the Gunners to enable them to be able to give support fire when called upon.

Special mention must be made at this stage of the work put in by the Air O.P Commander Capt. Bernstein DFC whose aircraft took off in all weathers never knowing if they would be able to land when returning.

As mentioned earlier we moved into the line on our flat feet and little did we know what was ahead of us. We were to make the personal acquaintance of places with names like Gesso, Pieve, Spadura, Acqua.Salata, Spinello, Salara etc and also to get used to Rain, Snow, Mud, Ice and to sleep in "Divis". Throughout all these conditions and despite being later issued with sleeping bags we were not allowed to remove our Boots.

Houses or what was left of them and more especially those with a normal commonplace roof simply did not exist up forward, so we just had to make do with any sort of cover if it could be found and there wasn't much chance of that happening.

Just behind the main line in the valley a few houses had been left standing complete with roofs, so these were put to use as a rest site when we were lucky enough to get a day or so out of the line. Here all were packed into any space like sardines but did not worry about this little matter as lie had the roof Over our heads even if only for a couple of nights.

As soon as this short period of rest was over we made our way back to the slit trenches and, even if they were half full of water they were most welcome if Jerry decided to have a shot at us. The Army Greatcoat soon became a solid mass of mud for some 6 to 9" from the bottom but the Gas Cape came in most useful as a waterproof over the top of the Greatcoat.

Gradually the weather changed to Snow and we were issued with winter kit consisting of Long Johns, String Vests, Thick Pullovers, Vests - heavy type, extra socks to replace those that had been soaked for so long, Windproof trousers and Jackets made from Denim together with White Camouflage trousers and jackets so that we merged with the background.

In view of the fact that we had been in these positions for some time it was decided by the "Higher-ups" that a Mobile bath unit should be set up some 3/4 miles behind us and so we made our way in small parties to partake of their facilities and at the same time get a change of under-clothes and socks if they were available. Thinking about this years later one wonders why we did not catch all sorts of complaints as we had to strip off in one tent and then run "Starkers" across the snow to the other tent for the shower and then make the return journey to get dried and dressed and subsequently return to our "positions" and get dirty all over again.

During all this time those patient animals, the Mules, were employed bringing up all the essentials to us ie food, ammunition, petrol (for cooking) etc. and sometimes taking back the wounded for treatment and even the bodies of those who had been killed in action.

Under these conditions it was obviously essential that we get hot food etc. and so a novel way of producing flame for cooking purposes was developed and it was called a "Polish Burner". It consisted of a



4 Gallon Jerry can into which was poured some 3 inches of petrol, a 60 cigarette can tin was placed below this can and set alight. The larger can had been pierced in the side just above the petrol level. The heat produced by the flame had the effect of producing a vapour which made its exit through the side hole and this, when lit, produced a flame some 9 inches in length with plenty of heat. There were however some dire results due to the large can exploding resulting in injuries to those in the immediate vicinity

As Xmas was approaching it was decided that everyone where possible, should come out of the line to have the usual Xmas fare and so 50% came out and had it on the day and then returned allowing the remainder to also have their meal in peace.

Inevitably the New Year arrived and the usual rumours that we were to be relieved, this time it did not come into effect until some 6/7 weeks later

At this time we had a Troop with the task of holding a house some 3/4 mile in front of the main positions and one night the telephone line was found to be out of order probably as result of enemy mortaring etc. A signaller was therefore detailed, together with one of the Officer's batmen to protect him whilst working, to repair this fault. The only way to find the break was to simply pick up the line in the hand and follow it along; checking in now and then to ensure it was OK thus far until such time as the break was located. The difficulty then was to find the other broken end, bearing in mind that it had been broken in the past and therefore several "ends" would be laying around. The only way was to enter the forward house, but ensuring that you did not get shot as they may have assumed that you were an enemy patrol. Once there you would easily find the end and then it was a question of working back to the break repairing and "praise be" the line was back in working order again. The return journey was made again using the line as a guide thus ensuring that one did not fall foul of any mines, booby traps etc.

Just prior to our relief in February 1945 No. 12 Troop ("B" Sqdn.) was in this forward house and the following is a description of what happened that night, the report is by Tom Blease who was there at the time.

"I was a member of "B" Sqdn. on the night of a German attack on Casa Salara on the 4th February. We were on Spadura Ridge and were ordered to "Stand to" as enemy soldiers had approached our positions to our front. If I remember correctly the orders were given to observe but not to engage. That evening 4th February Lt. Pickard took out a patrol which I was in and our orders were to go as far as possible to the first pimple; this was one of three to our front. Meeting no opposition, we withdrew after waiting for about a quarter of an hour.

On the evening of the 5th February we relieved the troop already in "Casa Salara" where our stay was to be for 3 to 4 days. I was in an outhouse just in front the main Casa from 2300 hrs until 0100 hrs and was then relieved to return to the house, at approximately 0120 hrs the enemy mortared the house, I think about 5 bombs in all hit the house and the ceiling collapsed with every hit. When they had finished their mortaring they fired a long burst of Spandau which seemed to take a long time. I lay in the rubble and watched the tracers hit the softer stones on the inside of the building they seemed to take 3 to 4 seconds to burn out.

Everything went quiet for some 5 seconds and a voice in English shouted "Right Boys, out of the house with your hands up". This to me was a bloody insult so I ran up the rubble and gave him half a magazine - there were two of them. After this he fired a Panzerfaust at our position and I remember seeing a vivid green flash - what a lovely shade of green it was, it blew me up in the air and I landed in the rubble. I spoke to Mr. Pickard who was hit soon after this by a bullet, which he told me about when he returned from hospital. Although he was wounded in the thigh he conducted the defence of the house and the attack came in from the rear door end of the house near the haystacks where there was a large gap in the wall.

I was with Cpl Skinner when three of the enemy appeared from the valley armed with Schmeissers which they had across their chests, they made no attempt to fire and retired. What a scared look they had on their faces, maybe we also had the same. I pressed the trigger of my weapon but had an empty magazine - bad soldiering not counting the number of rounds fired

Eventually the attack died out as we kept up a good rate of fire. There is something I remember about this attack - an enemy soldier was killed in the doorway, an Obergeifrieter (L/Cpl) and he had been armed



with a weapon which I had not seen before, this was like a short rifle with a bayonet folded underneath the barrel and a banana shaped magazine and light coloured woodwork. I gave it to someone who was going back with our casualties to give to Major Goode, I wonder if he got it?

The other people with me in the Casa were Lt. Pickard, Sgt. Glynn, Tpr Haddock the radio operator, Cpl. Skinner, L/Cpl. Preen MM, Tprs. Massen, Rhodes and Balchin and Cpl. Ratcliffe, there may have been others who I cannot recall. I gave this account to Col. Chavasse when I returned to the main "Spadura Ridge".

Bill Croucher, was in "C" Sqdn. at this time, said that he remembers this incident as it was his Troop that subsequently relieved 12 Troop. Bill also recalls the night when two members of "A" Sqdn. were captured from their trench very shortly before the above attack, they vanished without trace complete with their Bren Gun.

Finally late in February 1945 we were relieved by an Indian Division and we were only too pleased to hand over our positions which we had been in and around for some 4 months, although luckily for us we had not been used for attacking purposes as the PBI, as usual, had that lousy job

The weather had gradually been improving so that the time we came out of "them there hills" the ground somewhat harder and we moved to the flat area at Castillione di Ravenna to settle down for a period and get ourselves back into much cleaner state.

However, our enjoyment at being "out" was overshadowed by the news that our Colonel was to be promoted and we duly paraded to say a fond farewell to the man who had been looking after us all those years since we had first met in Colchester. It should be recorded that at one stage in Italy when we were moving forward the Colonel was severely criticised by the "Higher-ups" for not driving forward in our thin skinned vehicles against SP guns and heavy artillery fire, which would have written off the Regiment. The Colonel remembers the farewell dinner which the Officers gave him etc. details at the end - Luckily for us we were not to have a stranger at the helm as Major Hartland Mahon was promoted in his place from "B" Sqdn.

After 3 weeks in this area during which time the Div had been training with new types of equipment the Div relieved the 56th Div and we moved into the line, again as infantry being assigned an area 5 miles N and SW of Cottignola and we were to stay in this area until such times as the plans for the last major offensive were perfected. Forward positions were in the Flood banks which were 25 feet high and 10 feet wide at the top and the had control of all the West Bank of the River Senio, in some cases positions of the enemy and ourselves were only 10 yards apart.

The greatest activity on both sides was at night when large amounts of ammunition was used, daytime being comparatively quiet but care had to be taken during daylight hours due to sniper activity. Recce was unlucky as within an hour of taking over one position they were attacked by the enemy who threw grenades into the position, this lasted only for a short while, but in this short space of time Recce lost 3 killed, 4 wounded and 5 taken prisoner. The small dug-out containing Troop HQ had collapsed, the Troop leader and Sgt. were suffering from Phosphorous burns and subsequently Sgt. Cronin dug out the radio and re-established communication with Sqdn. HQ and as result of this was awarded the DCM. This action was seen by Sqdn. HQ but unfortunately there was nothing that could be done to assist as it would have meant that our own personnel would have been either killed or injured. A further award was made to L/Cpl. Duffy, the Sqdn. Medical orderly, of the MM for going out in daylight with a small party under the Red Cross Flag to give aid to the wounded and bring them back to Sqdn. HQ for treatment and then hospital.

Various positions in the flood banks were occupied for a period of 4 weeks but there were no important changes in the front line except that the enemy was forced, as far as possible, from his posts in the eastern bank of the river

The move back from the Senio was a welcome change even though it meant another bout of training,



the infantry to get used to being carried in Kangaroos (a Sherman Tank chassis equipped to carry troops) and having to work with Flame throwing Crocodile Tanks, Special Tanks for Bridge Building etc. Once the advance started there were to be no halts at nightfall as it had been learnt in the past that this gave the enemy the chance to get himself organised with rear-guard parties. Towns and villages on the main route were to be by-passed and subsequently cut-off, gridded maps were issued to gunners thus enabling them to work out river widths etc. also the RHA had been equipped with some Self Propelled 25 pounders (Priests?).

#### Senio- River Po

The 15th Army Group, consisting of the 5th and 8th Armies, had landed in Italy in September 1943 and some 15 months later in December 1944 after long and bitter warfare up the whole of Italy, struggling across numerous rivers, forcing mountain passes, some 600 miles had been gained and the front line of the 8th Army was formed along the River Senio in the plain of Lombardy. From January to April 1944 the two armies were engaged in a static warfare as close and intense as that in which the two sides remained locked in from 1914-1918, stalemate had been reached but by the beginning of April 1945 weather conditions had improved sufficiently to allow the Allied offensive to be resumed.

So the Scene was set for what we all hoped was to be the final offensive in this land and 5th Corps was to attack over the River Senio.

April 5th dawned fine and clear by the banks of the River with the ground hard underfoot and a cloudless sky, it was ideal weather for the Air Force to begin the process ominously known as "softening up". The morning passed in comparative peace at each HQ, where telephones rang incessantly and on the River bank it was unusually quiet

At 1300 hrs. the first rumblings of the attack began with the medium and heavy bombers passed overhead on their way to drop fragmentation bombs in the form of a carpet in the enemy rear areas.

Some 10 minutes later the first "Cabrank" appeared; Spitfires circling high up in the sky ready to pounce on targets chosen by the ground forces.

At 1520 hrs the overture began in earnest, first guns then mortars, then air, then guns again, then both, there was no mistaking this the prelude of the assault. The bombardment was planned and carried out in 5 phases, each phase opened with an intense gun attack, employing every gun, including Recce 75 mm. SP's and all mortars on the Corps front, this was followed by a 10 minute period in which the guns etc. were silent and the fighter bombers strafed the River banks with cannon. Next the aircraft switched to the areas behind the river and attacked with bombs whilst guns and mortars also lifted from the flood banks and laid down concentrations beyond it.

This cycle of destruction revolved five times between 1520 and 1920 hrs the time planned for the ground assault this time to be known as "F" .

The artillery and mortar bombardment ended at 1920 hrs. precisely, the fighter bombers came down and strafed, but this was a feint and as the aircraft swooped Wasp and Crocodile flamethrowers all along the river bank opened their jets and the enemy posts were subjected to intense saturation of flame on an unprecedented scale, this was the climax of the "preparation".

At "H" hour the fog of war lay thickly over the front and conflicting news confounded efforts to paint a military picture on talc with chinagraph.

By 2115 hrs however, it was clear that substantial bridgeheads had been gained in the initial assault and progress on the whole front seemed to be good. During the night and all next day the New Zealanders on the left and the Indians on the right continued to make steady progress and by dawn of the 11th April they were approaching the second major obstacle in the way of the advance - the River Santerno, but by nightfall the same day this river had been crossed and each of the leading Divisions had a foot-hold on the far bank and the work of our Division was about to begin.



In order that the reader can be more in the picture it is advisable to describe that for this particular offensive that in addition to the normal 3 Brigades (11th, 36th and 38th) we had the Kensington, RE's, RASC RAMC, RAOC and the 2nd Arm'd Bgde. plus a considerable amount of Artillery, Tanks, Flail Tanks, Kangaroos, Crocodiles, and RE Assault Sqdn. and we must not forget "A" Flight 654 Air OP who were our contact with the Air Umbrella.

12th April 1400 hrs we received orders to move and 36 Bgde and one Sqdn moved with tanks to cross and extend the "Indians" Brigehead over the Santerno. 38Bgde were told to move across with its Recce Sqdn to face north and the remainder of Recce was to operate in conformity with any advance of the 38th Bgde but on the East side of the river. Events then moved quickly and the Recce Sqdn. with the 36 Bgde. together with tanks were given the job of capturing a group of houses known as Tre Casa, 1000 yards beyond the most forward infantry of the Indian Div. Once they reached this objective they were to push on towards the village of Conselice, but this village proved to be a tough nut and subsequently had to be taken by infantry

36th Bgde. Commander ordered Recce to pass through the positions of the Argyle and Sutherlanders and exploit up to the River Sillaro on the whole of the Brigade front, further to the left Recce fanned out during the day to close with the enemy all along the front line of the Sillaro. Contact was made in the area of the river where enemy infantry established in well dug-in positions and a great number of mines were encountered

"B and C" Sqdns. were ordered to establish defensive positions to cover this river flank during the afternoon and shortly "A" Sqdn. reverted to command from Bgde.

By the 18th April Recce had passed Cotignola, Lugo, San Agata, Massa Lombarda, San Patrizio, Conselice and had reached Lavezzola and meanwhile away to the left the 5th Army's offensive was just beginning and Bologna was almost in sight.

Now the focal point of interest was the narrow strip of land known as the Argenta Gap. Away to the left stretched the Northern part of Lake Commacchio and to the SW a further stretch of flooded waste land almost to Bologna. The stretch of land remaining between was 2 to 3 miles wide and 4 miles in depth; a narrow funnel between the marshes. Careful thought had been put into fortifying this section - mines were laid thickly and in depth, houses fortified, bridges ready for demolition, extensive network of trenches and wire linked together the dykes, canals and ditches making a corrugated passageway incapable of being rushed by tanks or infantry.

The Corps Commander therefore decided that part of the 78th Div. should be moved via a bridge in the 56th Div. area and the 15/16th saw a lot of activity movement wise and as result the 11th Bgde had a rapid advance only lightly opposed, but extensive minefields had been encountered. On reaching the outskirts of Argenta enemy resistance became firm and a full scale assault was required.

As a result of the heavy fighting by the Lancashire Fusiliers assisted by the East Surreys and the N'Hants together with tanks of the Bays, they managed to get into the outskirts of Argenta and assisted by the Crocodile Flamethrowers of the 51st RT managed to clear the town. Subsequently the enemy put in a counter attack which was beaten off. The enemy retreated northwards.

Both the 11 Bgde and the 38th Bgde were very tired and at this time the Commandos arrived and were put to work. One solid pocket of resistance of the enemy was holding out in San Antonio and although they were surrounded on three sides they fought on. In order to clear this blockage from Route 16, which was to be the main line of communication for the whole corps, later on Recce was placed under command of the 36th Bgde and was ordered to pass through Argenta and clear enemy from San Antonio which was now on the Brigade's left flank.

Unfortunately, the move proved hopeless as the Regt. was unable to make any progress astride the road by reason of the demolitions and impossible going for vehicles, later the task of coordinating the clearance of the enemy pocket south of Bocoleone was given to the Irish Bgde. (38th) and involved much



detailed consideration. Almost everybody in the neighbourhood became involved, N'Hants, RWK, Inniskillings, Recce and 2nd Commando Bgde altogether a thorough hotchpotch.

In the space of 60 hrs, by operations involving every Battalion and Arm'd Regt. of the Div. on ground of the enemy's choosing, with the invaluable support of the Air Force, the 29th Panzer-Gren. Div. together with elements of the 26th Panzer, 98th Infantry and 362 Infantry had been driven from their positions and thrown back into the plain before the River Po. Our Div. was not out in the open and the 6th Arm'd Div. was about to strike out to the West; the Argenta Gap was broken and the enemy lay straggled out along the Southern bank of the Po vulnerable at a hundred points.

The Po di Volano is large river not comparable with the Po itself but still a major obstacle some 5 miles short of the main river

During the night 18/19th April general activity continued over the whole front and on the extreme right the Royal Irish Fusiliers moved forward on the East side of the railway, this move secured for the Div. a firm flank beyond the railway. Further to the West the London Irish patrolled forward of the railway and reached the twin canals just West of Portomaggiore. Between the London Irish and the RIF's "B" Sqdn. with some Shermans of the 4th Hussars had a confused struggle to cross the two canals in the village of Portomaggiore itself. The crux of the situation was an enemy strong point at Croatia, just North of and overlooking the town which was holding out with such obstinacy that no progress was possible beyond the second canal and the Sqdn. was confined to the difficult rubble strewn area of the town's western outskirts.

In the 36th Bgde sector all round advances had been made overnight, Recce, less "B" Sqdn. was still under command and had passed through the Argyles only a short time behind the Buffs. "A" Sqdn. patrolled westwards during the early hours towards Po Morto di Primaro and the Fosso Molino. These patrols met firm enemy resistance on a line approximately two miles east of the canals but as the main line of the Div's advance was on the west side they were not a direct menace to them.

Meanwhile "B" Sqdn. assisted by the LIR made repeated attempts to clear a way through Portomaggiore but these were of no avail, however other movements were afoot in the Div. area. A sticky situation developed despite the assistance of one company of the N'hants, this was all due to the enemy having two SP guns in Croatia with plenty of ammunition and enough men in the general area of the town. Further moves were made in other areas and finally Recce together with the 4th Hussars tanks and the N'hants finally succeeded in clearing Croatia and so removed the constricting pressure from the right flank and at last we had Portomaggiore.

The Americans published a book on the PO valley campaign called "FINITO" and Recce was mentioned as follows "The 2nd Battn. LIR with units of the 56th Regt. drove the Germans from Portomaggiore after street to street fighting"

Later Recce (less "B" Sqdn. operation on the right flank of the Arm'd Bgde. advanced during the afternoon to occupy the general line of Condito Belriguardo from Voghenza northwards to just short of Quartesana. }many mines demolitions and pockets of resistance were eliminated, Voghenza was seized and 19 prisoners taken. 5th N'hants moved up behind Recce and took over the town and Recce passed to under command of II Bgde. who had taken up the lead through the 2nd Arm'd Bgde. bridgehead, later in the day the LF's were directed through the Recce positions to try and deal with some enemy resistance.

About this time "C" Sqdn. were given the task of fanning out inland and Lt. Yates who the previous evening had been warned to be in Naples in 3 days volunteered to go out on patrol with his troop the next morning instead of the Troop of Lt. Croucher who had been in front of the advance for the previous 3 days. It was later that morning that the information was received that Lt. Yates had been seriously wounded whilst sitting on the turret of his armoured car adjacent to a farmhouse. He was brought back and immediately attended by Doc. West and it was most unfortunate that his wounds proved to be serious enough that after some 2 hours information was received that he had died.

Meanwhile the remainder of Lt. Yates Troop was still out of contact and as the afternoon progressed



information was received that the 6th Arm'd were to pass through the positions that evening and strike towards Ferrara. In an effort to contact Lt. Yates' men Lt. Croucher plus a pillion passenger from his own Troop went out on a motor cycle and having progressed along the route taken by the other Troop they themselves came under artillery fire. Having dived down the steep embankment from the raised road, both were slightly wounded but as soon as the firing ceased recovered the motor cycle and returned to the Sqdn. HQ and later Lt. Yates' Troop also returned.

6th Arm'd having commenced their attack providing all with a magnificent display of "fireworks" with many farms and other types of fires lighting the sky for miles around

From the time at which the 2nd Arm'd Bgde and the 36th Bgde had broken out from the Argenta Gap position until the 11th Bgde reached and crossed the Po di Volano was just a period of 3 days. In this time the enemy had been relentlessly hustled along every inch of his many routes of withdrawal. In the minds of the enemy commanders there must have been rising panic as the whole of the force was being compressed against the South Bank of the River Po.

April 23rd saw the 11th Bgde. moving across the Po di Volano and by evening the Recce with the LF's were trying to make progress into the area of the bulge to the West of it and further attacks were made by elements of the Irish Bgde in the direction of the main River Po.

Around this time the Div. Commander made plans for the Div. to move across the Po and chose the 36th Bgde. to lead but these plans were suddenly cancelled.

The landscape was ablaze with burning houses and vehicles and farther North the RAP were dropping flares and bombing the roads and railways beyond the River Po. As dawn approached on the morning of the 25th April it became evident that organised defence was at an end and the Irish Bgde. entered Zocca Ruina to find an incredible scene of devastation.

Packed in the fields, queued up in lanes, cast in ditches, in farmyards, everywhere even in the river itself lay the remains of transport and equipment of the 76th Panzer Corps

Recce Sqdns. were then given the job of overlooking the River and each Sqdn was allocated the area then covered by the various Brigades.

So finally April 25th was the day the Division disengaged after three weeks non-stop mobile battles similar in many respects to that of Sicily as the Div Commander Maj. Gen. Arbuthnott had adopted the continuous pressure system against the enemy by passing one Bgdethrough another and seldom did the leading Bgde. stay in that position for more than 24 hours when a fresh Bgde took its place.

The official casualties figures for the period 9/25th April 1945 were as follows:-

Totals Killed. Wounded and Missing

11 Bgde. - 207

36 Bgde. - 191

38 Bgde. - 399

Kensingtons - 1

Provo. - 1

Div. HQ - 5

RA- 29

RE - 7

Sigs. - 6

Recce- 24 (7 killed and 17 wounded)



No small part was played by the Div's which fought alongside us ( the 78th) and we were proud to have such good friends as the 2nd Arm'd Bgde, 6th Arm'd Div, New Zealanders, 8th Indian Div, and the 56th Div from which we originated. In addition we must never forget the PBI of our own Div. who put up such magnificent display during the last offensive and indeed all those that preceded it since North Africa. Due to the division being "squeezed out" the action for the time being had more or less finished after almost 21/2 years, during which time the Regiment had gained the following decorations

DSO – 2; DCM - 2; MC – 13; MM – 28; MBE – 1; BEM – 1;

American Silver Star- 1; American Bronze Star - 1

Mentioned in Dispatches - 43

Grand Total - 92

In addition to the above decorations the GOC of the Division had made an award named the 78th Div. "Mark of Esteem" and several of these were given to members of the Recce.

Finally to our intense delight surrender of all the enemy forces in Italy took place on 2nd May, and on 3rd May, the Division began to move North for a task that would become all too familiar ie the taking over of surrendered enemy personnel. The route North was via Ferrara, Robigo, Monselice, Padova, Mestre, Conegliano and S. Quirino and Aviano was not reached until the early hours of the 4th May and before this day was out Sqdns. were sending out patrols to the neighborhood to round up scattered enemy troops and equipment.

5th May saw the Regiment moving NE to cover the entrance to the North between Aviano and Medina. On the 6th May due to the fact that an isolated group of approximately 2000 German troops was successfully contesting the northern advance of the 6th Arm'd Div. through the Gemona Gap (NW of Udine) the Regt. was committed to outflank this group by moving North through the mountains via Meduno, Tremonti, Ampezzo, Villa, Ovaro, Conegliana, Tolmezzo, Paluzzo and North over the Austrian frontier Pass of Monte Croce.

Austria

The frontier was crossed on the evening of the 7th May - THE DAY BEFORE ALL EUROPEAN HOSTILITIES CEASED, and the advanced elements of the Regt. had the honour of being the first units of the 8th Army to enter Austria.

"A" Sqdn. later accepted the surrender of a series of SS units; a daunting task in view of the size of those forces but everything went off all right.

Later the Regt had the task of rounding up all the Cossacks who had been on the German side and later had the job of supervising the return of them under the conditions set down at Yalta.

These people presented an amazing sight and was made up of men, women, children, baggage, horses, carts, cows and even camels.

July 6th was designated as the Div Commanders Ceremonial Victory Parade at Spittal in the Drau Valley and the whole of the Division was formed up in line and the Army Commander took the salute and afterwards he rode down the line. Later he took his place on the saluting base and after 2 minutes silence, when the lament was played in memory of the fallen, the whole Division marched past in columns of companies or the equivalent, Staff Officers, C.O'S and Adjutants were all mounted, following the staff came the Recce cars, followed by the Gunners and the Anti-tank Regt with their SP's and the Engineers being represented by their Scout cars and after the mobile units came the remainder of the Division on foot.



It was exciting watching these veterans swing past to their Regimental Marches played by the band of the 4th Hussars with the pipes and drums of the Irish Bgde and the Argyle & Sutherland Highlanders, one could hardly believe that these were the same units that 5 months before had been living in the mud and snow of the Appenines.

Various other duties then befell the Regiment, men still going off on LIAP on the overland route in 3 Tonners, some men were assigned to camps looking after the thousands of displaced persons, some officers having Town Major's jobs

Later a Garrison was established in Vienna being based at Meidling Barracks but we first of all had to congregate at Judenberg, which was then the start of the Russian Zone. It meant that we had to stay in that area for a few days until such time as permission for the whole convoy of Recce Infantry and Artillery was given.

As soon as the OK was given we were on our way through the Russian Zone and we then had to get used to the continual salutes from their side as they assumed that because we were riding we were Officers!

So again we had another first, this time the First Recce unit enter Vienna as well as being amongst the First British Troops there; with us in the town were an Infantry unit and a Battery of Artillery, the Infantry unit being responsible for guard duties at the Schonbrunn Palace. We had other duties amongst which was the guarding of UNRA food supplies arriving at the old Arsenal. Another duty was to try to maintain law and order on the days when the Russians had their Vodka issue but we could only enforce this in the British Zone of the City. The City was divided into several sectors, International, French, Russian and British. Russian troops would wander around and if they took a liking to a wristwatch which a civilian was wearing they would simply insist that it be given to them despite the fact that they may already have several on their wrist

The City had been stripped of everything of value had all been shipped back to Russia as part of their reparations to enable them to get going again, but despite this we enjoyed being able to just ride on a tram and enjoy some of the beauty of that famous old town

Just like all other units we then settled down to the fact that gradually we were to be de-mobbed and it was at this time that Recce was disbanded, some men who still had some time to do were sent to the 4th Hussars and went over to Palestine and those of us left had to change our Cap badge to those of the North Irish Horse, but we still retained our Armoured Cars etc. but we could not forget that despite this change we still thought of ourselves as RECCE.

Some of us stayed in Austria in the area of Wolfsberg until we were de-mobbed whilst others went later on with the NIH to end their service in Germany.

We were justifiably proud of serving in the "56th" and additionally of being part of the 78th (Battleaxe) Division "possibly the finest spirited and most widely tested of Britain's Infantry formations", Comradeship throughout the Division was very strong, so much so that the 78th Div Battleaxe Club started just after the war still exists (1988).

To end the story of the 56th Recce it is only fitting that the last paragraph of the Divisional History Book "Algiers to Austria" be quoted as follows:

The tale is now told, the Battleaxe laid aside and those who survived the years of campaigning are dispersed and scattered. No one who was ever a member of that happy band can fail to look back with a certain nostalgia to the comradeship and friendship of the battlefields and billets on the long road from Algiers to Austria"



## FAUGH & BALLAGH

The Colonel ( Kendal G F Chavasse DSO) I know would to record several things which happened when he was promoted to another job after our move out of the mountains in March 1945.

- 1) He was given a magnificent dinner by the Officers
- 2) He was presented, by the Officers, with a Silver Hunting Horn, inscribed "GONE AWAY".
- 3) As a result of a subscription by all Ranks he purchased a "Superb set of Saddles and Bridles" which he used regularly after his retirement from the Army in 1947.

In addition he has other reminders of Recce times:

- a) A Trumpet "acquired" from Ordnance by Johnny Pack.
- b) The Green and Yellow Pennant flown at RHQ which was also flown on his Recce car "Faugh & Ballagh" when he escorted HM The King (George VI) during his visit to the 78th Div on the 17th June 1943 at the end of the North African Campaign, and afterwards in Sicily and Italy. One brass plate has an inscription: "This frame was presented to Lt. Col. K G F Chavasse from the balance of a subscription from all ranks of 56 Reconnaissance Regt on his handing over command on 7th March 1945".

His comments as follows: "I was deeply touched by this highly illegal and highly irregular subscription from ALL RANKS and have never heard of such a thing happening before in the British Army"

These are some of the places which the Regiment "visited" and left its mark.

### NORTH AFRICA

MEDJEZ EL BAB

TEBOURBA

EL AROUSA

RECCE RIDGE

GOUBELLAT PLAIN

TALLY HO CORNER

DOC DU BED VALLEY

"THE DJEBELS"

KASSERINE PASS

### SICILY

CENTURIFE

MOUNT ETNA

ADRANO

BRONTE

RANDAZZO X ROADS

### ITALY

FOGGIA

SERRICAPRIOLA

TERMOLI

MONTECILFONE

VASTO

RIVER SANGRO

CAPRACOTTA

SAN PIETRO

AGNONE

LAKE TRASIMENO

CASTELIONE DE LAGO

CORTONA



EGYPT  
QUASSASIN  
CAIRO  
RETURN TO ITALY  
CASTEL DEL RIO  
ACQUA SALATA  
SPINELLO  
RIVER SENIO  
RIVER SILLARO  
ARGENTA  
PORTO MAGG I ORRE  
RIVER PO  
AUSTRIA  
ARNBACH  
SILLIAN  
MONTE CROCE PASS  
VIENNA  
WOLFSBERG

This History has been produced with the help of the following: - The 78th Div. History "Algiers to Austria", The Recce Book "This Band of Brothers". The publication detailing "The Final Offensive in Italy of the 78th Div." "FINITO" the American publication of the last offensive in Italy, together with personal memories of Col. Chavasse DSO and others of the Regiment plus the "Short History of the Regiment", produced by the "I" Section.

Investigations of the records of the Regiments casualties shows that we have comrades buried in 24 cemeteries in 5 countries made up as follows:

UK - 2  
North Africa – 6  
Sicily – 2  
Italy- 13  
Austria – 1

Unfortunately due to the time lapse it is not possible to ascertain the exact number of casualties which the Regiment sustained