

1/7 Bn. The Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey) War Diary January 1943

JANUARY 1943.

Area In the field.

- 1st Jan. "A" Coy detached from Bn. for duties at 109 FMC. "C" Coy similarly sent to "B" Echelon. L.O.B's returned to the Bn. consisting of 4 officers Lts. SARAH, HUDSON, GODFREY and CLARKE and 42 O.R's.
- 2nd Jan. "B" Coy detached for duties of establishing petrol point in SIRTE area. 0930 hrs. Bn. "O" Group. Orders for action on code word "ELIJAH" i.e. In the event of enemy attack. Route for Bn. to move South between WADIS TAMET and CHEBIR reced, this route is not satisfactory for movement of Bn. column.
- 3rd Jan. Strong gale blew up during morning and continued throughout the day making conditions very unpleasant.
- 4th Jan. Gale slightly abated but still blowing hard. Demonstration by 1/6th Queen's of "Forming" and A/Tk screen.
- 5th Jan. Gale blown out. Field Firing exercise set by this Bn. for 5 Plns of 1/6th Queen's. Lt. BEVERIDGE returned from HQ 44 Div.
- 6th Jan. enemy aircraft over area. 1 Portee destroyed by M.G. fire from aircraft. 2 O.r's being wounded.
- 7th Jan. Weather fine. "C" Coy returned to Bn. after completion of duties. Field Firing exercise continued for 5 Plns of 1/5 Queen's. 2000 hrs. Enemy aircraft dropped thermos bombs on Eastern edge of Bn. area. No damage or casualties.
- 8th Jan. 3 Plns of "C" Coy and Battle Patrol took part in Field Firing exercise.
- 9th Jan. Bn. Skeleton exercise to practise forming up and drill for night advance. 1700 hrs. "O" Group at which C.O. gave outline orders for future ops.
- 10th Jan. C.O. attended talk by Army Comd. in the morning. Maj. N.J.P. HAWKEN MC detached from Bn. – in Comd. of Bde. B Echelons.
- 11th Jan. Capt. J. FRACIS and Lt. C.R. CLARKE with 17 O.R's detached from Bn. for Provost duties for 131 Inf. Bde.
- 12th Jan. C.O., 2/IC Maj. GRIFFITHS, Maj. HAWKEN, Adj., Capt. KEELY & Capt. ISAAC attended Div. Comdr. talk on forthcoming operations at 131 Inf. Bde. HQ. Maj. GRIFFITHS gave out orders to all personnel under his comd. taking part in forthcoming operation i.e., "C" Coy 3,4,5, Plns detachments of Signals and Stretcher Bearers. Personal message from Army Comd. received.
- 13th Jan. 1/7th Queen's Gp under comd. Maj. J.W.D. GRIFFITHS moved off at 0945 hrs. C.O. and 2/IC visited 7th Armd. Div. rear HQ. Lt. A.B. BEVERIDGE attached to HQ 7th Armd. Div. for duties as L.O. for duration of forthcoming ops.
- 14th Jan. 2 Officers and 37 O.R's sent to assist "A" and "B" Coys working parties.

- 15th Jan. party consisting of Bn. HQ less Sig. Sec., HQ Coy., B Ech. Left area of TAMET Landing Ground at 0930 hrs. and joined up with Rear HQ 7 Armd. Div. at 1700 hrs. difficulty in crossing WADI CHEBIR but all vehs arrived safely. Milage covered 69.
- 16th Jan. Started off at 0845 hrs. crossing WADI ZEM ZEM in the afternoon and arriving WADI EL BREG at 1700 hrs. "B" Coy on way up to make Landing Ground at SEDADA. 42 miles covered.
- 17th Jan. Moved 0915 hrs. many delays owing to defiles into SEDADA WADI which had been blown. One Coln. Ran into minefield, 19 set veh. Damaged, no casualties. Leaguered for night in WADI SOFFEGIN having covered 27 miles.
- 18th Jan. Started off at 0730 hrs. – good going to start with but deteriorating later. Leaguered about 12 miles N.E. of BENI ULID.
- 19th Jan. Set out at 0730 hrs. bad going and delays owing to defiles. Enemy resistance in TARHUNA area slowing advance.

[Read Report on "Prettybirds Patrol" 19th to 21st Jan. at end of January diary.](#)

- 20th Jan. No move before 1315 hrs. only 4 miles covered finishing at head of WADI EL MAADIN.
- 21st Jan. Another day of slow progress, road running South of TARHUNA being reached before nightfall.
- 22nd Jan. Moved through TARHUNA to area 10 miles West.
- 23rd Jan. Advanced up road through CASTEL RENITO and spent night 3 miles East of SOUANI BEN ADEM.
- 24th Jan. Bn. in area 1 mile North of SOUANI BEN ADEM. Troops u/c Maj. GRIFFITHS and party with Capt. FRACIS returned to Bn. Comd.
"O" Group at Bde. HQ at 2000 hrs. Orders of move of Bde. to ZAVIA area on following day. This Bn. no to move until 26th January owing to lack of transport and Coys not yet having returned
- 25th Jan. "R" Group forward to ZAVIA area to recce dispersal areas. Day spent in maintenance and preparations for following days move.
"O" Group at 1630 hrs.
- 26th Jan. "A" & "B" Coys returned to Bn. complete except for 2 Officers and 41 O.R's of "A" Coy still on escort duty. Bn. moved off at 1130 hrs. "O" Group having previously gone forward. Owing to enemy withdrawal Bn. was able to move further West than previously anticipated and after two further short moves took up positions astride rd about 1 mile West of SABRATHA.
- 27th Jan. "R" Group forward at first light. Bn. moved off at 0830 hrs. to area 7464 the enemy having withdrawn once more but leaving very large demolitions in both rd. and railway. Battle Patrol sent forward and entered MELLITA whilst reces made for passage of vehicles to that village. "B" Coy and two Secs of Carriers sent to AGELAT to work round Southern flank with one Sqn. 40 R.T.R.
"O" Group at Bde. HQ at 1800 hrs. where orders received for move of Bn. down railway at 0800 hrs. the following day. The route was to be repaired by R.E's during the night.

28th Jan. Liaison maintenance with R.E's before first light but owing to difficulties in repairing craters Bn. did not move until 1000 hrs.

Subject:- Report:- "Pretty Birds Patrol".

TO 131 (Queen's) Inf. Bde

From. O.C. 7th Queen's Battle Group.

The following report on the activities of the pretty birds patrol may be felt found interesting.

Composition.

7 Carriers armed with L.M.G's and A/Tk rifles.

4 x 3" Mortars on Carriers.

2 Plns M.G's mounted on Jeeps.

Battle Patrol 7th Queen's.

19th Jan. 1845 hrs.

S.P. Area L 9300 was passed at 1845 hrs.

The patrol moved on bearing of 270° for 12.7 miles N.T.R.

After passing TENZVIA L 8896 the going was very difficult but by using the Battle Patrol to recon routes and to dig passages through the torrent beds etc slow progress was made.

After passing EL GADRA at L 7596. route was changed to N.W.

The going in this area was even more difficult and several carriers lost their tracks. Great difficulty was experienced in replacing them.

20th Jan.

By 0330 hrs. the patrol had reached the area R. BU BDIM L 7202 where a halt was made to enable the carriers (which had broken down and had become straddled along the route) to catch up.

Routes were recon for further progress by Battle Patrol.

0700 hrs. I decided that the carriers were more of a handicap than an asset to the patrol and I ordered Capt. FREEMAN to collect them together and proceed back to the Bde. area in one body.

Everyone by this time was very tired.

1100 hrs. The track at L 6604 was reached. I ordered the telephone wires to be cut and a few poles to be knocked down. (Note the wires were live and it is possible that the civilians in TAZZOLI were reporting back the movement of our troops).
N.M.S. of enemy.

The rest of the day was energetically spent trying to get through the hills to the road, each attempt however was unsuccessful owing to the sheer drops of the escarpment sometimes over 500 feet.

1300 hrs. I went off and contacted 4th Light of the left who had also found it impossible to get through.

1430 hrs. We shot up some suspicious vehicles who later turned out to be 11th HUSSARS. Many apologies.

1600 hrs. 11th Hussars reported that movement by jeeps was possible up the WADI V ESMAR for a few miles. 5 x 88's were reported to be in the area L 7018 and I decided to go for them.

Good progress was made along the WADI V ESMAR for 7.8 miles.

The Carriers (Mortar) however experienced difficulty in negotiating the hummocks.

We had one or two scares going through but they only turned out to be Arabs watching our progress from the heights. They were frightened off.

1830 hrs. I halted the column to enable Mortar carriers to catch up and then went forward with LLOYD to recce routes for further progress as the Wadi was then impassable. During the move down we heard the 88's firing and I estimated that we had got about 3 miles past them.

1900 hrs. During the recce a two stroke M/C was heard moving W. just over the Ridge of hills about 3000 yds away and I presumed that the enemy had a position in that area. As I wanted definite information of the distance of the road from our position, I sent off a patrol in charge of Battle Patrol Comdr. to get the following information.

- How many yards was the road from our position.
- What activity was there on the road.
- Was it possible to carry forward our weapons on foot and get in position to cover the road.

I also asked them to get this information and return within two hrs. if possible, but time was in no way to curtail their recce.

1930 hrs. Whilst this recce patrol was away arrangements were made to carry forward weapons and ammunition.

2000 hrs. Whilst engaged in giving out orders two figures appeared on our left, and they appeared most interested in our party.
Perhaps they had been sent out to investigate the noise of the carriers in the WADI which was struggling to get forward.
The "O" Group and covering party took up a position to cover their approach and I slipped back and got round to flank behind where they were last seen only to find they had moved off. I then had to shout to our men not to shoot me.
Sentries were posted to guard approaches to our positions.
No further scares occurred, although it was obvious that the enemy had patrols out and the HQ of our patrol was about 600 yards away to West.
The noise of a car engine was heard several times.

2130 hrs. Battle Patrol returned with negative information not having found the road.
It appeared however that the road was more than 2000 yards away and therefore the plan of carrying weapons and sufficient ammunition forward had to be abandoned.
I still required the information and the patrol was sent out again with no time limit.

21st Jan. Patrol returned to say distance was 6000 yds which included crossing of two ridges impassable to transport. A col. of trucks were formed up on the road facing West. I decided on this information to push further W. at first light.

0730 hrs. LLOYD and WARD went on recce in Jeep Westward. I went Northwest. In the meantime, all transport was moved out of WADI.

0830 hrs. LLOYD and WARD reported seeing Italian officer and soldier about 3 miles West. I found nothing that I could get at but it appeared that our troops were only a few miles to the east of my position.

0900 hrs. I decided to make a HQ at L 6916 and then formed the following plan.

- To split the patrol into two.
One party to be commanded by Capt. LLOYD.
Task. To work down the north side of woody asthma and get into a position covering the road at area L 6319.
- The other party including the one remaining 3" Mortar under my Comd. to move to area Pt. 397 at L 6617 and "Paste up" anything we could find, probably driving them out onto the LLOYD patrol.

1100 hrs. By using ground that defiladed us from the view of the enemy we got to a position on the high ground about 1500 yds east of Pt. 397 which was 75 yards from an Italian sentry who was obviously picquetting the heights but was more concerned with shooting at our planes which were quite inquisitive over the area.
Everybody wanted to bump the sentry off but I decided that one shot would give our position away, and I ordered him to be covered and shot if necessary.
It was not possible to stalk any nearer to him.

After a further recce of about 15 minutes the following targets were located.

- (a) 4 x 105's in a sand pit South of the road at 1600 yds range.
- (b) An arty. O.P. on a building on the other side of the road at 2800 yards range.
- (c) About 12 vehicles and personnel in another sandpit on the plain between the two spurs on either side of the road.
- (d) Two guns probably 210's which were firing at our own troops from a position which judging by the sound were right underneath us at the bottom of the escarpment.

The 105's had been firing intermittently at our own troops during the whole of the approach.

Tasks were allotted to weapons as follows:-

- Section M.G'S on B
- Section M.G'S on C
- 3" Mortar on A and D

The noise of British planes and A/A fire of enemy created a diversion which greatly facilitated the movement of weapons into position.

1145 hrs. All weapons opened fire simultaneously. The first mortar bomb dropped right amongst the guns at which immediately stopped firing at own troops and a further 60 bombs were splashed amongst them in about 4 minutes. Confirmation of accuracy being made with a smoke bomb halfway through the shoot, it was difficult to observe casualties owing to smoke dust created by bombardment, but it is sufficient that these guns did not fire another shot that day.

A further 12 bombs were splashed in the area thought to be occupied by 210's. Again observation was difficult.

As soon as fire was opened on (C) vehicles & personnel dashed about like madman to get out of the fire. A few casualties were observed and after 4 belts the only thing left was three vehicles.

Two heads which appeared on the escarpment just South of Pt. 397 were engaged and knocked down.

Other suspected O.P's and targets were engaged.

When the Mortar had expended all ammunition, I ordered it out of action covered by the M.G'S.

Our last shots were fired at 1215 hrs and the whole party got away safely being hotted up by a few shells on the way out.

Lloyd's patrol had in the meantime worked round to the left and got into a position near the road West of the escarpment.

At about 1430 hrs his patrol engaged an Italian "O" Group at 950 yards range and casualties were observed. Enemy transport and personnel were engaged at will, the patrol returning to HQ when ammunition had been expended.

Several targets were observed on the way back including an enemy Mortar position which was being shelled by our arty.

But owing to shortage of petrol I could not send the two other Mortar carriers which had just got out of the Wadi onto then.

Having collected the two patrols together the force moved back to TAZZOLI where petrol was obtained and the journey back to Bde. made.

Conclusion. (A). The moral effect of being able to get round to the enemy's rear and shoot them up was probably more valuable than material damage.

(B). It was impossible country for carriers to work in.

(C). The splendid efforts of Capt. LLOYD & Lieut. WARD of the NF and Sgt. CASSELL deserved much praise.

Signed W. W. Griffiths, Major.
Comd. 7 Queen's Battle Group

26 Jan.43.
M.E.F.
Appendix "B"

Account of "B" Coy with Recce Force.

The Coy joined the above Force at Q-AGELAT and after a very hectic day in large sand dunes we reached a leaguer area at about 5565. The next afternoon I was ordered to advance on foot towards SI BU WUAB.

We advanced in open formation until within a mile of the objective and came under heavy M.G. fire. I endeavoured to move to the left flank only to run into further heavy fire from M.G's, replied with mortars. The Sqn. Comdr. tanks agreed that it was advisable to withdraw as we were suffering casualties and therefore we went back about 500 yds and leaguered for the night.

The time then being approximate 1730 hrs.

During the night I ordered active patrolling and one party managed to reach one of the enemy posts but were driven off.

Next morning the Brigadier told me to continue patrols and try and work towards the road running South from ZUARA.

We eventually did reach that road about 4468.

During the time that this patrol was out heavy arty. fire was opened on the tanks and some shells fell in my Coy area, wounding one man fatally and three others slightly. The next night patrols were again active and found SI BU WUAB unoccupied. Therefor the next morning we were transported on tanks to the entrance to ZUARA and rejoined Bn.

I would like to mention Pte. D.J. Walsh 6087667.

During the 3 days and nights he worked unceasingly. He carried fwd. our food. Blankets. & great coats he also acted on three occasions as an ambulance. He was driving my Jeep all the time frequently along tracks being shelled and generally behaved in an exemplary manner. A really good show. Good work was also done by Lt. Laurel who was always eager to lead patrols and worked very well indeed.

S. PLAYFOOT, Capt.

O.C. "B" Coy 1/7th Queen's

ZUARA

3/2/43