

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

MARCH 1943.

- 1st Mar. Work on Bn. posn. continues with slight shelling of area. Patrols at night as before to area West of REMTSIA feature.
- 2nd Mar. O.O. no. 2 issued. Unceasing work on posn. goes on. 1800 hrs. code word "PYGMALION" comes into force. Battle posn. occupied at night and high state of vigilance maintained. Slight shelling during day.
- 3rd Mar. Div. Comd. addressed all officers down to Coy Comdrs. at 0900 hrs. on present situation. Posn. can now be called fightable and all essential work completed. Patrols as before.
- 4th Mar. Enemy attack was expected at first light but did not materialise and on whole quiet day with very little enemy arty activity.  
High state of vigilance maintain. Our patrols at night report considerable movement of M.T. in area of foothills.
- 5th Mar. Some shelling of Bn. area during day and slight enemy movement in area REMTSIA. Bn. still standing too.
- Six Mar. For Ops. on this day see appendix "B" attached.
- 7th Mar. Enemy had withdrawn from posn. he had occupied on previous day.  
Some shelling of Bn. area during day but otherwise quiet.  
Congratulatory message from Army Comdr. received. Bn. still "Standing To".
- Appendix "C" attached
- 8th Mar. Code word "VAPEX" came through and Bn. "STOOD DOWN". Slight shelling of area. Recce and standing patrols at night Bn. very tired.
- 9th Mar. Quiet day except for slight shelling of Bn. area. Spent in cleaning and maintenance.
- 10th Mar. Another quiet day.
- 11th Mar. Nothing to report other than shelling during day. Recce patrol at night and encountered A.P. minefield and suffered following casualties 1 officer and 12 O.R's. wounded and missing, 1 Officer and 1 O.R. wounded.
- 12 Mar. Slight shelling of Bn. area during day.
- 13th Mar. Bde. "O" Group 1030 hrs. giving orders for preliminary moves.  
New area reced in morning by "O" Group and "O" Group orders at 1430 hrs.
- 14th Mar. "O" Group reced new area at first light otherwise quiet day.
- 15th Mar. Divl. Comdr. visited Bn. during afternoon, saw "A" Coy and congratulated them on their work during battle of MEDENINE. Relief of Bn. by 1 R. Sussex commenced at 2100 hrs. and was complete by midnight. Bn. then moved by Mar route to area 617904 and took up defensive posn. "C" Coy right "A" Coy centre ""B"" Coy left with 1/6th Queen's on right and 1/5th Queen's left.

- 16th Mar. Some shelling of Bn. area during day causing 30 are casualties. Bn. moved again at 2000 hrs. occupying posn. as follows "A" Coy right 603908 "B" Coy left 607904 "C" Coy in reserve 605910 Guards Bde putting in attack on ZEMOULA feature.
- 17th Mar. Some enemy arty. Activity during day during which 201 Guards Bde. withdrew to area E. of rd. and 1/6th Queen's conferred during night moving back to area 6191.
- 18th Mar. Quiet day. Two successive recce patrols at night which located enemy posns.
- 19th Mar. Another quiet day followed by fighting patrol at night. Owing to clear visibility and enemy alertness this was unable to penetrate to its objective a M.G. post in area 565932.
- 20th Mar. little to report during the day except slight shelling during morning.
- 21st Mar. Relief of Bn. by Rifle Bde. at last light and Bn. moved by Mar route to area E. 6096 and there relieved 1/B.W. Def. posns. Taken up with "C" Coy Right, 6059066, "A" Coy Left 607956, "B" Coy in Reserve 614963. Slight enemy M.G. and Mortar fire on fwd. Coys whilst relief taking place.
- 22nd Mar. Little movement possible in Bn. area as posn. under close enemy observation. Recce Patrol out at night and confirmed information re enemy posns. E. of rd.
- 23rd Mar. A quiet day. Strong Standing Patrol at night to catch enemy who had been reported patrolling. Fwd. Coys shelled and Mortared during early morning.
- 24th Mar. Little to report during day. Div. staged on to ZEMOULA feature at 2230 hrs. drew heavy enemy reaction.
- 25 Mar. Lt. Col. R.H. SENIOR DSO, TD apptd. To Comd. 151 Bde. and Comd. of Bn. taken over by Lt. Col. D.S. GARDEN Green Howards. Bn. relieved by 6 Green Howards, relief being complete at 0300 hrs. and Bn. moved in tpt. And took up old posn. in area E. 6085.
- 26 Mar. Morning spent in cleaning and maintenance. Bde. "O" Group 1500 hrs. giving orders for night and next days Ops.  
2130 hrs. Bn. moved to concentration area at 6280 arriving there at 0130 hrs. with 1/6th Queen's on Right and 1/5th Queen's further fwd. in area 5477. Bn. leaguered in this posn. for night.
- 27th Mar. Bn. moved into open formation at first light but did not move until 1050 hrs. when move to further concentration area at 5678 took place. Carrier Pln. were working under our Comd. on left flank of 1/5th Queen's and maintained contact with 5 Ind. Bde. on their Left. Bn. went into close leaguer for night.
- 28<sup>th</sup> Mar. Bn. moved at 0830 hrs. to concentration area at E. 5179 and later took over from 2/K.R.R.C. with two Coys less 1 Coy fwd. on high ground 4982 and 5083, 1 pln. on pt. 221, 5281 and 1 Coy in reserve area 5179. Great difficulty was experienced in occupying this posn. owing to the large number of mines laid in the area. A small number of casualties were suffered including Maj. W.D. GRIFFITH O.C. "C" Coy.
- 29th Mar. Forward Coys were withdrawn during morning and Bn. went into Coy leaguer in area 5180. Day was spent in cleaning and maintenance.
- 30th Mar. Bn. was due to move today but move was cancelled and gave further opportunity for washing and games of football were organised. Those two days of comparative rest did the whole Bn. a great deal of good and were welcomed by all.

31st Mar. Bn. moved at 0700 hrs. and went by give access in single file and reached area 4595 by 0930 hrs. Here breakfast meal was taken and at 1300 hrs. Bn. moved again and went into leaguer at area Z. 3814.

Lt. Col. D.S. Gordon  
Commanding  
1st 7th Bn. the Queens royal regiment.

31/12/43.

#### **Appendix "A".**

At about 0715 hours on six of March 43 a strong force of German tanks (Mk's 3, 4 and 4 specials) appeared in the main track from the S.W. they were seen by the gun crew of no. 5 gun (Sgt. ANDREWS) who knowing the A/Tk. layout to be mutually supporting allowed the first 4 tanks to proceed along the track. Sgt. ANDREWS engaged the 5th tank (Mk. 3) and scored a direct hit with his first shot which stop the tank, he then put 4 more shots into the tank to ensure a "kill" and the crew then "bailed out".

He then switched to the tank following a Mk. 4 and with about six shots put it out of action the crew also bailed out. The other tanks then turned South and made for a Wadi at approximate 618840. One of the leading tanks had meanwhile been engaged by no. 8 gun (Sgt. Vincent G.) and this tank and another then moved into a hull down posn. immediately opposite Sgt. ANDREWS gun and proceeded to fire on no. 5 gun and "A" Coy Sgt. ANDREWS took up the challenge and fired several shots at them causing one to move away. one presented only a small target. The parapet of Sgt. ANDREWS pit was smashed at this stage and he ordered the crew to take cover and continued to load and fire the gun himself.

Hits were scored on and around the turret and this eventually had the effect of moving the tank from its hull down position. The other tank appeared to be making for the main Wadi by "A" Coy and a hit was scored on this tank which afterwards retired behind cover and probably disabled. Sgt. ANDREWS had other small targets during the day and prevented the enemy from entering the main body into "A" Coy area. He fired several shots at the second tank he disabled during the morning in the hope of setting it on fire but was unsuccessful. In all he fired 65 rds. 6 pdr 7 cwt A.F. shot during the day.

The remaining tanks having been driven South by the effective fire of Sgt ANDREWS gun then entered the wadi (at approximate 620845 in which no. 7 gun (Sgt. CRANGLE) was sighted.

He engaged the first tank (Mk. 3) at about 500x and disabled it. Subsequently a force of 6 Tks. entered the wadi in a group from various directions and he engaged them at very short range putting at least three of them out of action. One tank at this stage knocked out a 6 pdr gun of 1/6th Queen's which was covering the South end of the Wadi.

Sgt. CRANGLE continued to engage the other tanks who fired on the gun with tank A.P. and S.A. fire which riddled the gun shield in over 20 places until a direct hit on the reciprocator put the gun out of action. Meanwhile the Bren gunner had been keeping the tank Comdrs. from obtaining observation from their turrets. After the gun had been knocked out Sgt. CRANGLE and his crew fixed bayonets and three tanks approached the protecting Infantry (a Pln. of "B" Coy 1/6th Queen's) who taken prisoners. The tanks then "winkled out" Sgt. CRANGLE and he's crew and took them prisoner at about 1500 hrs. At about 1900 hrs the enemy were endeavouring to recover their tanks in this Wadi about 500x from Sgt. CRANGLE'S gun site. Some were "brewed up" by the enemy and some had tracks blown off on the minefield.

#### **Appendix "B"**

##### 1/7th Bn. the Queen's Royal Regiment Account of Ops. 6th March 43

Ref. Maps Tunisia 91 N.E. and 91 S.E.

Def. posn. a. Infantry. The posn held by the Bn. was as follows:-

"B" Coy on right holding the pass area 612858.

"C" Coy. Coy centre on high ground 614854 and a Coy left astride Wadi area 620850 with 1/5th Queen's on right and 1/6th Queen's on the left.

In many cases posns had to be taken up on fwd. slopes and in order to conceal our dispositions these were only manned at night and positions on backward slopes were occupied by day whilst observation was maintained by O.P's and carrier patrols.

Each Coys front were covered by small minefields of Hawkins grenades, "B" Coys was laid astride tracked leading up through the pass, "C" Coys just fwd. of their F.D.L's and "A" Coy astride the Wadi. There was no tactical wiring carried out.

(B). Support arms

(i) Mortar detachments were dispersed as follows,

"B" Coy 2

"C" Coy two and one in reserve area Bn. HQ with the task of covering any dead ground on their respective front.

(ii) A/Tk. It was considered that the most likely tank "run in" to the Bn. positions were "B" Coys posn. and "A" Coys Wadi and A/Tk guns were disposed accordingly. In addition to Bn. A/Tk guns pln. one troop each of 216 and 260 A/Tk Bty's we're in support and positioned in the Bn. area making a total of 12 x 6 pdrs and four x 2 pdrs.

(iii) Carriers. maintained an observation line by day in area 596844 and by night withdrew into mobile reserve in area Bn. HQ.

(iv) Brigade Arty. In direct support of the Bn. was 510/146 Fd. Bty's. with gun areas at 625872. D.F. tasks were arranged on each Coy Front to cover likely enemy forming up places for an attack on the posns. One O.P. remained with "B" Coy another with the Carriers, the latter during the attack being used whenever required.

State of readiness. Code word "Pygmalion" came into operation at 1800 hrs 2nd March and from then onwards the Bn. was at an immediate state of readiness. It was not anticipated that more than 15 mins warning of any attack could be given therefore as already stated Carrier patrols by day were carried out and also a standing patrol was posted at x rds. 580843. From this recce patrols were sent out each night to the area of the REMTSIA feature to discover enemy dispositions these met with much success, locating the enemy on many occasions and giving information about his moves of transport.

The Battle. On night 5th 6th March our patrols had heard much movement of transport and at 0600 hrs. enemy shelling commenced. This appeared to be directed at gun areas, but many shells fell in the Bn. area.

The first report of any enemy movement was of 15 Inf. moving at 593866 at 0645 hrs. and this was quickly followed by tanks advancing up the track to area 6184.

These were immediately engaged by our A/Tk guns in "A" Coys area and the first two which were at 617845 were hit several times and the crews of both filed out. The other tanks about 12 in number swung east and went into hull down posns in Wadi 621846 on the immediate flank of "A" Coy whilst 2 got into position at 615885 and all these were able to bring both A/Tk and M.G. fire across the Bn. area, whilst themselves partly defiladed from our A/Tk gun fire. At the same time inf. were advancing on all Coy Fronts and when engaged went to ground about 1500x from our positions where they were heavily engaged by both Arty. and Mortar fire and made no further advance except in the case of those in area 5985, who when engaged appeared to swing N. onto 1/5th Queen's front.

The position remained almost static up to about 1200 hrs. when further tanks joined those in the Wadi bringing the total there to about 20 and their fire together with Arty shelling made

movement by the Bn. area extremely hazardous partly ? in the case of "A" Coy whose left hand Pln was within 80m of these tanks and quite unable to move.

At this. Period O.C. "A" Coy made urgent requests that attempts should be made to remove these tanks and as they could be seen from Bn. HQ O.C. 510 Bty. directed fire from his Bty. onto them.

Many shells landed in the target area actual results were difficult to observe owing to the dust and smoke of battle. This target was registered as 1190.

By 1415 hrs. the only line of concern still existent was that to "B" Coy and the Bn. O.P. comms to all other being maintained by wireless which worked most satisfactorily.

Information had been received that the enemy was preparing a large-scale attack at 1430 hrs. and in readiness for this tanks were soon to form up in close order in the Wadi and as this appeared to be a direct threat to our left flank heavy and concentrated fire from both 69 Med. and 146 Field Regts was brought down on M. 90 and at the same time enemy Inf. were engaged by all available weapons.

At 1430 hrs. 7 of the tanks moved forward one immediately brewed up and the rest were met with such intense fire that after covering about 200x they were forced to withdraw and made no further advance for the rest of the day but as they still constituted a serious threat 5 Shermans from 22 Armd. Brig. moved up to area 6285 and engaged them though it is considered without inflicting casualties.

At 1700 hrs. it was learned that the left hand Coy of first 1/5th Queen's had been heavily attacked and to a certain extent overrun and Carrier pln. together with one Pln. from "B" Coy was sent to that flank to render all assistance possible and it is worthy of note that the position in this area was re-established by the next morning.

Darkness fell without any infantry attack being made on this position it is felt that the manner in which they were continuously engaged contributed largely to this, but the tanks still remained in the position they had occupied throughout this day.

Our last fight report claims one tank destroyed and two hit and stopped. An attempt was made to blow these two latter Tks. up but they could not be located. There was much noise coming from the area of the other tanks and as an attack was expected in that quarter it was not considered advisable to detach any force to attack them.

Throughout the night the Bn. remained in battle positions and though there was some shelling no attack materialise in spite of very heavy transport movement to our front which could be clearly heard.

At first light the next morning the enemy had withdrawn, his attack having failed ? ? on our front.

As an example of the way in which the Bn. fought an account of the action of two A/Tk guns is attached at appendix "C".

Enemy losses. At 0930 hrs. 7th March in area 625848, 624845, 597844, & 620849 they following tanks were found and later in the day destroyed:-

12 Mk iv Specials

12 Mk iii Specials.

3. Mk iii.

It is not possible to say how all these tanks were put out of action but at least six were by A/Tk guns of this Bn. and a considerable number by RT fire which was initiated by battery in direct support.

An estimate of enemy infantry casualties is not possible but it is considered that they would not be light owing to the weight of fire poured into them. Our Mortar Pln. fired 400 rds and 510 Bty 3600 rds.

Own losses.

Men	1 O.R. Killed
	9 O.R's Wounded
	10 missing believed POW's.

Vehs. 2 Carriers destroyed, one 3 Tonner burnt out, Two 1500 cwts. burnt out, One Jeep damaged. 1 M/C damage.

#### Lessons.

1. ? Inf. In well dug in and well sited posns supported by it's own A/Tk guns can repel a tank attack.
2. The value of concealment and not occupying positions in view of the enemy in daylight. It is considered that the enemy launched this offensive with little idea of the exact location of our defended localities.
3. The effectiveness of heavy Arty fire against tanks when in close order.
4. The necessity of engaging infantry when in forming up areas in order to disorganise their arrangements.
5. Leading from 3 and 4 above the closest possible liaison with Inf. and Arty Comdrs.
6. The quick and accurate passing of information so that the max. weight of fire can be brought down on threatened units.
7. Leading from 6 above the vital importance of comms. being kept open at all costs.

#### Officers Serving 31<sup>st</sup> March 1943.

Lt.-Col. R. H. Senior, D.S.O.	Queen's R.R.		
Major J. Sykes-Wright	Queen's R.R.	Maj. W. D. Griffiths, M.C.	Queen's R.R.
Major N. J. P. Hawken, M.C.	Queen's R.R.	Capt. R. Carver	Hants.
Capt. A. S. S. Playfoot	Queen's R.R.	Capt. E. V. Isaac	Queen's R.R.
Capt. P. C. Freeman	Queen's R.R.	Capt. K. A. Jessup	Queen's R.R.
Capt. D. L. Fennell	Queen's R.R.	Capt. E. G. Sandys	Queen's R.R.
Capt. T. A. Kemp	Queen's R.R.	Capt. E. M. French	R.W.F.
Capt. J. Fracis	R. Fus.	Capt. P. Z. Henderson	Queen's R.R.
Lieut. F. G. Sarah	S. Staffs	Lieut. A. C. Worrall	Devon's
Lieut. D. T. Hodson	Som. L.I.	Lieut. G. H. Courchee	Essex R.
Lieut. R. A. Burton	Queen's R.R.	Lieut. S. E. Brown	Hants.
Lieut. E. S. Corbett	Hants.	Lieut. A. R. Lugg	Hants.
Lieut. G. W. Bevan	Queen's R.R.	Lieut. C. R. Clarke	Queen's R.R.
Lieut. T. C. Godfrey	R. War.	Lieut. H. C. Relhan	Queen's R.R.
Lieut. J. M. Skillington	R.W.F.	Lieut. E. G. Dever	Kings R.
Lieut. B. G. Meara	S.W.B.	Lieut. L. H. Cockroft	Queen's R.R.
Lieut. G. S. D. King	Lincolns.	Lieut. C. H. Stammer, Q.M.)	Queen's R.R.
Capt. W. G. Edwards, R.A.M.C.			

Rev. W. Metson, R.A.C.C.