

Covering recent operations in Libya from 13th. Nov. to 5th. Dec.

MAPS. I;250,000 EGYPT and CYRENAICA sheets 3&5.

No. 3 Company, 27th. N.Z. (M.G.) Battalion came under command of the 6th. N.Z. Infantry Brigade at 1600 hrs. 12th. November. A conference was held at Bde. H.Q. at 1600 hrs. on the 12/11/41 when orders were issued for the move from the Box to a Divisional Assembly Area in the vicinity of BIR IDWAN 675323

The Company passed the S.P., the Western exit of the BAGGUSH BOX, at about 1315hrs. on 13/11/41 and arrived at the Assembly Area with the Brigade Group about 2000hrs., Coy. H.Q. at 680313. The Group largeted in this area until the morning of the 15/11/41. While in this area we received 15 cwt. trucks for our three tonners and were brought up to establishment in vehicles.

On the 15/11/41 the Coy. moved with the Group to the vicinity of Point 218, ref. 586337. Coy. H.Q. at 589335. We arrived at approximately 1930 hrs. and remained largeted in that area until the evening of the 16/11/41. During the night 16/17 Bde. Group moved to area in square 5532. Arriving about 0100hrs. on 17th. Coy. H.Q. about 560321. The Group largeted in this area during the day of the 17th. During the night 17/18 the Bde. Group Moved to area centre of which ref. 519329. Coy. H.Q. about 519328. The Group largeted in this area during the 18th.

During the night the Bde. Group moved across the Frontier in to LIBYA (18/19) to an area in square 4833. Coy. H.Q. situated at approx. 491331. The Group remained in this area until late afternoon of the 19th. when orders were received to move to an area in vicinity of Point 199, 479350. This move was partly by day and partly by night the area being reached about 2131hrs. on the 19th. The Group largeted in the area until about 1530hrs. on the 20th. when orders were received to move to TRACK JUNCTION in square 4839.

20/21 NOV. On the night 20/21 the Coy. moved with Bde. Group from Trig 190 ref. map CYRENAICA I:250,000 471356 to the road junction in square 4839. On this trip the going was very bad as the trucks had to go through two very swampy patches and several groups got bogged and remmarshalling of the groups took quite a while. We did not move till about 0500hrs. The Group remained in this position till about 1500hrs. when the march to BIR CHLETA was commenced. Ref. map I:250,000.

21/22 NOV. On the night 21/22 the Coy. moved with 6 Bde. Group from Trig 213, 485, 392 along the TRIGH CAPUZZO to a position about 6 miles S.E. of BIR CHLETA map ref. 454403. During the move no. 8 Pln. was detailed to act as right rear flank guard.

22/23 NOV. On the night 22/23 the Coy. moved on with Bde. Group with the intention of occupying a defensive position around Trig 175, 439405. During this move the Bde. Group halted at BIR CHLETA, which it had intended to side-step at daylight. The Group was attacked by Germans who were beaten off and no. 8 Pln. which was carrying out the role of right flank guard came into action (see report attached). No casualties were sustained by the Platoon. After this brush with the enemy the Group pushed on rapidly to a position S.E. of point 175, no. 8 Pln. rejoined the Company.

The Brigadier decided to attack Point 175 with the 25th. Bn. and to attack towards the AERODROME at SIDI RESEGH with the 26th. Bn.; Machine guns were NOT used in the initial phase of the attack.

Early in the afternoon the Right Forward Btn., the 25th. was having a very sticky time. No. 9 Ptn. M.M.G. was ordered forward to assist. This Platoon had a tough time and 11 of its personnel, including the Ptn. Comdr., Mr. Daley are missing, three of these are known to be killed. Late in the afternoon the 24th. Bn. C.O. went forward with two of his Companies and took over from the C.O. of the 25th., who was wounded.

During the early evening the remnants of no. 9 Ptn. who had become disorganised, filtered back to C.H.Q. That evening the Brigadier decided to reorganise his position. Two Platoons, No. 7 and No. 8 were ordered to move forward at 0400hrs. to come under command of 24th. Bn., on point 175. No. 9 Platoon who still had all their guns were put under command of 25th. Bn.

The two platoons under command of the 24th. moved forward at 0400hrs. No. 7 Platoon took up a position on the rear of the 24th. and No. 8 on the left flank of the same Battalion, Coy. H.Q. at 439404.

This day was quiet and the guns had practically nothing to do.

24th NOV. On the evening of the 24th. the C.S.Ms. which had left earlier in the day to collect ammo. and petrol returned to the larger area and made off towards two derlict trucks, after having appeared to lose their direction presumably thinking them to belong to the Bde. Group. The lorry hit a land mine and went up in smoke. Three personnel were on the lorry. The C.S.M. who sustained injuries (the extent of these is not known) was evacuated. One O.B., Gibbons, was burnt and was also evacuated. But the driver; Pte. Horn,

escaped without injury. This made us two trucks down as No. 9 Ptn. Pick-up (Mr. Dalys) had shrapnel in the radiator on the afternoon of the 23rd. We had it in tow in the hope of being able to repair it.

25 NOV. Before daybreak on the morning of the 25th., the 24th. and 26th. Battalions moved forward. Three platoons were withdrawn to Company again.

About 1300hrs; on the 25th. the Company moved forward with Bde. H.Q., a distance of about three miles, the direction of the move being due WEST towards SIDI REZEGH. During that move H.Q. Group was badly shelled and we had one casualty who had shrapnel through the foot, but was evacuated. It was necessary also to abandon one motor-cycle. The Company remained with Bde. Group (Coy. H.Q. about 435403) until about 1900hrs. when it was decided that the Bde. would take up defensive positions at SIDI REZEGH and ED DUDA. Two platoons, Nos. 7 and 9 were placed under command of the 24th. Bn. who were attacking SIDI REZEGH and No. 8 Platoon under command of the 26th. Bn. who were to move to attack ED DUDA. Coy. H.Q. remained with Bde. H.Q. The intention was to use the platoons in a consolidation role after the capture of the two objectives.

25/26 NOV. During the night 25/26 it became apparent that the original SIDI REZEGH - ED DUDA plan would not succeed and during the 26th. Nos. 7 and 9 Platoons were involved in very heavy fighting with the 24th. Bn. Casualties were heavy and the Platoons lost 7 out of their 8 guns. No. 8 Platoon with the 26th. Bn. were not so heavily involved and had only one slight casualty.

26/27 NOV. During the night 26/27 the positions of the forward Battalion was improved and by the morning of the 27th. the WESTERN end of SIDI REZEGH ridge was consolidated. The remnants of Nos. 7 and 9 platoons were withdrawn to Coy. H.Q. on the night 26/27. On the same night Bde. H.Q. ^{MOVED} further WEST ward and Coy. H.Q. was at 433404. No. 7 Platoon Commander missing.

On the 27th. the 7 guns of Nos. 7 and 9 Platoons were recovered but owing to the heavy casualties they ^{PLATOONS} had sustained they were re-organised as two three gun Platoons. No. 7 Platoon was placed under command 24th. Bn. with a consolidation role on the SIDI REZEGH ridge. This Platoon reported to the 24th. Bn. H.Q. at about 1630hrs. on the 27th..

28 NOV. The position on the morning of the 28th. was as follows; No. 8 Platoon was under command 26th. Bn.; No. 7 Platoon was under command 24th. Bn. both on the WESTERN end of SIDI REZEGH ridge and No. 9 was in reserve. No. 7 and 8 Platoons had a quiet morning but shelling and mortar fire commenced at about 1400 hrs. and No. 8 sustained its first serious casualties, three killed and three wounded. During the afternoon the Bde. H.Q. were heavily shelled and Coy. H.Q. had three casualties from splinters.

Early in the evening the Brigadier decided to move the Bde. H.Q. Group north to a position at approximately 432406. The Engineers under Major CURRIE and No. 9 Platoon under myself were ordered to take up a defensive position on SIDI REZEGH ridge at about 433404 to protect the SOUTHERN flank of the Group. Coy. H.Q. under the 2I/C remained with the Brigade H.Q. Group, which was approximately 1500 Yds. NORTH of our position.

29 NOV. By daylight on the 29th. the engineers and ourselves were in position.

The day of the 29th. passed quietly for us on the ridge. Facing SOUTH the dispositions were as follows; On our RIGHT flank were the 24th. and 26th. Battalions with nos. 7 and 8 Platoons still under command. On our LEFT flank at the BLOCKHOUSE 435404 was the 25th. Bn. and on their LEFT was the 21st. Bn. on Point I75, 439404. All the battalions were very much depleted.

A considerable amount of movement went on all around us during the day. Tank battles were heard N.W. and S.E. of us and convoys were observed on the escarpment SOUTH of us. One of these convoys advanced towards our position and we found recognition to be very difficult. We were expecting a SOUTH AFRICAN convoy from the same direction and Brigade had warned us to be very careful not to shoot them up. Fire was held until the convoy was about 600yds. away when one of the flank sections opened fire. The convoy immediately turned and made off in a S.W. direction; some of the rear ones were seen to halt at extreme range SOUTH of us and recognition was still not definitely established. A wounded man was observed out in front and a party went out to collect him. He was a German so orders were given for all M.M.Gs to open fire on the trucks in sight. This caused one truck to make off EASTwards although two remained but the personnel were observed to get out of them. During the afternoon an Italian tank drove up under a white flag. Inside was one dead, one severely wounded and two unarmoured Italians.

Early in the afternoon the Brigadier rang up and informed me he was taking No. 7 Platoon away from 24th. Bn. and placing it under command of 21st. Bn. on Point I75. Late in the evening of the 29th. Brigade informed me that Point I75 had been over run by the enemy and all our troops captured.

All I had left of No. 7 Platoon after that were the six drivers and one sergeant who had managed to get away from Point I75.

29/30 D.V.

Thennight 29/30 passed quietly on the ridge.

The day of the 30th. was also fairly quiet although considerable convoy and tank movement was observed on the SOUTHERN escarpment. During the afternoon two tanks appeared on our EASTERN flank and moved over the escarpment NORTH of us towards Brigade H.Q.. A few minutes later one came back and was promptly bagged by the A/T guns with us.

Late in the afternoon Brigade informed us that the 24th. and 26th. Battalions had been over-run and captured. About half a section of No. 8 Platoon evaded capture and made their way back to Brigade H.Q.. Things were now pretty sticky and we were expecting a busy night. By now the Company had suffered severe casualties.

Shortly after dark some vehicles were heard moving just over the edge of the escarpment between us and Brigade H.Q.. Two A/T guns on portees went over to investigate and fired at a big lorry. This went up in flames and it turned out that they were three 3-ton lorries of ammunition towing two or three enemy guns. We had a great fireworks display out of it.

About midnight I was moving about and through my glasses I observed a line of men approaching from where the 24th. and 26th. Battalions had been.

I hurried over to the flank and warned the guns to keep a good lookout and not to fire too soon as there was a possibility of them being some of the 24th. and 26th. filtering back. They were allowed to come quite close and were then challenged. A great gabber of foreign language answered the challenge and so fire was opened and they could be heard running away. Later in the night a badly wounded German came in and gave himself up; still later his cobbler who was unhurt came in and gave himself up so that he could be with him.

The prospects were gloomy for the morrow if the SOUTH AFRICCA who had been expected for the last two days, did not arrive by morning.

Ist. DEC.

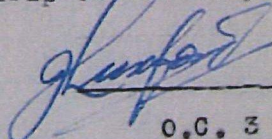
They did not arrive.

Came the morning of the 1st. Dec.. Things were quiet at first but heavy shelling of Brigade H.Q. soon commenced. At about 0800hrs. Brigade H.Q. was attacked by tanks and infantry. Lorry after lorry went up in flames and we on the ridge could do nothing to help. Things looked very black. The battle had been raging about three quarters of an hour when swarms of tanks were observed coming over the escarpment SOUTH of us. Friend or foe?, it was hard to tell. I went out to contact them, they turned out to be our own; part I think, of the 4th. armoured Brigade, and I directed them on to the battle. The enemy tanks drew off and the Brigadier decided to find a healthier spot for the Group. He came up on the ridge in his car and we were ordered to evacuate immediately and follow. We had no transport with us so our tanks whipped through the position and the chaps clattered up on to them. The Brigade Group moved off in an EASTERLY direction but had not gone very far when it ran into an ambush. The whole group turned NORTHwards and there was a wild stampede of trucks across the desert. Control was gone. The Group eventually ran through the 4th. Brigade area and stopped. The time would then be about 1200hrs.

As a fighting unit the Brigade was useless and so later in the afternoon orders were received to move back towards the frontier.

The strength of the Company was then two Officers and about sixty O/Rs.. We had 19 trucks left out of 23, which was 'nt so bad. The move back commenced at dark and on the 5th. Dec. the Company arrived back in BGGUSH after a very uneventful trip of four days.

Report on action 23/II/41 (8 Pln.)

 Major,
O.C. 3 Coy.

My M.M.G. Platoon was employed as part of the right flank guard of the G.I.B. column on night of 22/23 Nov.. At about 0715 of 23rd. during a halt a German motorised patrol appeared very unexpectedly and drove between the Bde. Group and the 25th. Bn. where they halted as the gap had been closed by our tank (A German soldier later stated, when taken prisoner, that they were unaware of the presence of British troops in that area). One of my sections immediately went into action, closely followed by the other and effectively disabled the last few vehicles in the column, killing and wounding 5 and 10 of the enemy and practically closing the way out. After a brisk, but one sided, exchange of fire during which time the infantry surrounded the enemy who surrendered. The range was point blank and we found later that our Mk. VIIIz ammunition had pierced even the engine blocks of odd vehicles. We passed in for inspection papers which included what appeared to be a signallers code. The Germans were armed with automatic pistols, sub-machine guns, rifles and two automatic quick firing anti-tank/anti-aircraft guns. I am convinced that their arms, vehicles and equipment is very inferior to our s.

 J. W. Stewart, Lt.
3 Coy.