

22 BATTALION

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Some keywords in the header are a local Electronic Text Centre scheme to aid in establishing analytical groupings.

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Jamie Norrish

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Added full TEI header.

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22 Battalion

by

JIM HENDERSON

WAR HISTORY BRANCH
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND
1978

22 BATTALION

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[FRONTISPIECE]



German Tiger tank captured at La Romola, 31 July 1944

German Tiger tank captured at La Romola, 31 July 1944

22 BATTALION

[TITLE PAGE]

Official History of New Zealand
in the Second World War 1939–45
22 Battalion

Jim HENDERSON

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[EXTRACT]

Out of all this comes I think a humbleness towards those chaps attended in their first moments, an awareness of knowing that they always put on a very brave front and conveyed so much in a look or simple gesture when given that first attention and a cigarette, and invariably never to acknowledge the possibility of a 'homer': the hardest part seemed to be having to leave mates behind-that thought of return.

—Mick ('Doc') Bradford, 22 Battalion stretcher-bearer

Men will even give their lives if only the ordeal does not last long but is soon over, with all looking on and applauding as though on the stage. But active love is labour and fortitude, and for some people too, perhaps, a complete science.

—Dostoevsky (The Brothers Karamazov)

The faith in the heart of a mustard seed is the faith of a mustard tree, the force in the heart of a drop of water is the force of a waterfall. And when one hopes, all mankind hopes with him. For I am all mankind and I am in every man.

—V. Anant (Birth of the Lord)

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22 BATTALION

FOREWORD

Foreword



windsor castle

by lieutenant-general the lord freyberg, vc, gcmg, kcb, kbe, dso

It is a great pleasure to be able to write a foreword to the history of the 22nd Infantry Battalion.

The 22nd Battalion came overseas with the [Second Echelon](#) at the time of the overthrow of [France](#). It was shipped to England and took an active part in the Battle of Britain. Towards the end of 1940, when the threat of invasion was past, the 5th New Zealand Brigade came back by sea and arrived in the [Middle East](#) early in March 1941, just in time to join up with the rest of the New Zealand Division and take part in the campaign in [Greece](#). This campaign ended quickly, and after evacuation from the beaches near [Athens](#) the Battalion was taken to [Crete](#), where it fought right through the short campaign. The Battalion was given the most difficult task of all, to try to hold the [Maleme](#) airfield.

After Crete had fallen, the Battalion took part in a series of successful actions in the Libyan campaign (1941) in the operations about [Bardia](#) and in the advance to [Gazala](#).

After that campaign the Division moved to [Syria](#) and stayed there until the middle of June 1942, when it moved back to the [Western Desert](#) and took an active part in the defence of Egypt. The 22nd suffered heavy casualties when it was overrun by the 15th Panzer Division at [Ruweisat Ridge](#). It fought again with distinction at Alam Haifa and [Alamein](#). It was then decided to turn the 4th Brigade

into an Armoured Brigade, and the 22nd Battalion was converted into a Motor Battalion. It came across to [Italy](#) with the rest of the Division and had a long record of fighting in the Italian campaign.

At the end of 1944, with the end of the war in sight, the Division was short of infantry, and the 22nd Battalion was reconverted into an infantry battalion and formed part of the 9th New Zealand Infantry Brigade. It fought with distinction near [Rimini](#), at [Faenza](#), and in the very successful battles that ended the war in [Italy](#), where it attacked and fought from the [Senio](#) right through to [Trieste](#). The Battalion then went with J Force to [Japan](#), where it was disbanded.

The Battalion had a series of very capable Commanding Officers, who led it with great dash and skill. Colonel Andrew, VC, brought the Battalion from New Zealand and stayed with it all through 1941. He was succeeded by Colonel John Russell, who was killed at Alam Haifa, Colonels Campbell, Donald and O'Reilly, who commanded the Battalion with distinction.

This excellent history tells a story which should be widely read. I hope it will have the success that it deserves.

Bernard Fryberg

Deputy Constable and Lieutenant-Governor

Windsor Castle

7 November 1956

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PREFACE

Preface

The author, on ending his two and a half years' task and all too conscious of so many brave men and acts unrecorded, wishes particularly to thank Brigadier Andrew, VC, Colonel A. W. O'Reilly, Majors Stan Johnson, R. E. Johnston, Bob Knox, Keith Hutcheson, Len Turner, and Captain E. B. Paterson, Padres Thorpe, Champion, Martin Sullivan and Sergel; R. R. Foreman, Mick Bradford, Bart Cox, Stewart Nairn, Lloyd Grieve, George Orsler, Bob Grant, Ian Ferguson, John Collins, Doug George, C. H. Stone, and many others for ungrudging and generous help; Tom De Lisle (unit historian, who blazed a brave preliminary trail through a jungle of war diaries); branches and officials of the 22 Battalion Association (especially Taranaki); the anonymous war diarist who covered the [Alamein](#) attack; the understanding and patient Editor-in-Chief and staff of the [War History Branch](#); and 'my wife Jill who stoically endured every campaign of the Battalion.'

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GREECE

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CHAPTER 1 – THESE WERE THE MEN

CHAPTER 1

These Were the Men

This, after all their travelling, was the most important voyage of the lot—the voyage to Greece. Twenty-second Battalion was sick of ships, tired of delays and rumours and endless route marches and moving on again, impatient of other men (sailors, airmen) protecting them, fighting the war for them. Now they had crossed the Mediterranean to Greece, a crowded train had taken them far into the north, and as the Germans struck from the vassal state of Bulgaria, they moved quickly into the mountains, into the woods and shadows of Olympus Pass. They prepared defences as best they could (barbed wire, weapon pits, a few mines) and shortly before midnight on 14 April 1941 they heard a faint echo and throb which grew and surged into a roar of engines as the enemy came up the road to Olympus.

They were about to become infantrymen. This time, nobody would be in front.

I would like to tell of the days in Trentham Camp, when Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew, VC, ¹ addressing the first parade of his battalion, said: 'My name is Andrew: A-N-D-R-E-W. There is no "s". And I'm the boss.' How men would watch their officers, rather pale in the face and obviously shaken, leaving the Colonel's midday conferences. Colonel Andrew was a strict (too strict, some say) disciplinarian; he saw to it that his battalion drilled and route-marched like no other battalion in 2 NZEF. Right from the start this tall, lean man with a stiff black moustache was determined that his battalion would be welded into a unit ('22nd. Vrai et Forte! Second to None'), armed with what scanty weapons we had in those early days, and doubly armed with the armour of self-discipline.

And soon they were calling him 'February' because of his automatic sentence when rules were broken: '28 days' detention'.

Trentham: the first big step: the foundation for what was to follow: 'that air of adventure and great things to come period of life'. Then gradually, very gradually, getting further away from home and nearer the enemy through weeks of sailing, marching, or being mucked about, then maybe a distant air raid or war damage, then the sound of artillery in the distance, gradually getting closer, then seeing the first enemy shell land....

The men found [Trentham](#) `so suddenly different from what I had been used to: the place which created the atmosphere in which we were to live for so long. The general expression of chaps going into camp ("We're in the army now, so—'em all")—those laughs we had at PT—the first roll calls and one-stop-two—mess parades and growling about the food— learning to salute and say "sir"—quiet talks by our brand new N.C.O.'s: "You do the right thing by us chaps and Corporal X— and I will see you right"—the early risers roundly cursed, the man with "that terrible laugh of his", the sleeper who ground his teeth horribly—all that folding blankets, polishing brass and rushing to get on parade in the morning —the tremendous indecision whether greatcoats would be carried and groundsheets worn or vice versa—the RSM's voice —the bullring ("Never walk across there, it's sacred ground and it would be more than your life is worth")—picking up paper and cigarette butts on cold mornings—... arms inspections—the first day on the rifle range (some hit the target and some didn't)—fatigues—final leave—vaccinations—exploring the ship—looking at Mount Egmont fading in the distance (it was the last we saw of New Zealand) and wondering how long before we would see it again, that's if....'

I would like to tell of the voyage to [Britain](#), defiant and alone (but all voyages are the same) ²; of the English hospitality and the church of Hollingbourne in [Kent](#), where the vicar, [Rev. E. A. Norman](#), hung the battalion flag, and it hangs there still today; of the German armada winging in over [Kent](#) as the Battle of [Britain](#) opened, and the battalion waiting on the coast by [Maidstone](#) for the invasion which never came; of the night when the battalion suffered its first casualties in a bombing raid when Ian [Holms](#) ³ was killed and three others ³ wounded; and of the long voyage, past the Cape of Good Hope again, to three brief weeks in Egypt before embarking for [Greece](#).

But all this was preparing for war—an elusive war which seemed to sidestep the battalion. This would take up many pages, which instead will go to longer descriptions of the battalion in battle, and what men remember there. For a battalion's task is to fight, a battalion is a battle-axe in the very forefront of the fray, and the infantryman's lot is privation, great bleak stretches of boredom and wasted time, danger, fatigue, teamwork. And great pain cannot be described: the mind will not remember.

Colonel Andrew had learned all this the hard way, first as a lance-corporal in the First World War when he won the Victoria Cross at Warneton Road, near Messines. Leading two sections, he seized a machine gun and charged on to take a second machine gun. Then, taking a private with him, he went on another 300 yards to take a third machine-gun post and a nearby strongpoint in the cellar of an inn called 'In Der Rooster Cabaret'. After the war he served with a British regiment in India and became a Regular soldier in the New Zealand Army. With his route marches, his curt '28 days', his insistence on discipline—discipline—discipline (although his successor, Lieutenant-Colonel Russell,⁴ would win devotion from a totally different outlook), Colonel Andrew worked for (or demanded) 'that pride in unit' which would create a particular spirit of its own, a collective strength and unity which can be spoken about by many but which can be known only by the rifleman.⁵ It would lead to an officer speaking with a jealous possessiveness of 'my boys', so that certain officers, lying freshly wounded in hospital, would be as merry as crickets until the news came: 'The Battalion's going in.' Then they would fall silent, wondering if the men who had taken their places would be sufficiently shrewd, would not underestimate the cunning German, would take full care of 'my boys'. And at times, all through the restless night, these men would cry out or mutter encouragement, warnings and advice as once more they led their men forward in their sleep.

It would lead to a man jumping on to a grenade to lose his life in attempting to save his companions; it would carry a man forward when mentally and physically he was utterly incapable of further exertion. When Captain Young⁶ made an 'impossible' escape in the desert, his main thought was 'to get back to my battalion at any cost'. The first New Zealand officer to escape from Germany (Colin Armstrong,⁷ an original member of the battalion) would write in his book, *Life Without Ladies*, that escapers 'have justified themselves in their own eyes and in the eyes of their people and their regiments.' Another officer, shockingly wounded, refused to die 'because—well, I was determined to live: call it by the old military term "Maintenance of the Aim" if you like.' It would make a man, wounded in action and receiving rough yet tender care from his comrades, write: 'At that moment I was proud to belong to 22 Battalion.' And it would lead to Colonel Andrew himself admitting: 'In the presence of these men, one felt humble.'

The battalion also would produce a man who gave trouble before going into

action, and who on the night of one attack fell sobbing and completely demoralised near the start line while shells exploded about the poised platoon. Two other men 'were about to go too'; if they went, most of the platoon would crumble. After some straight talk, insisting that the man was going in whatever happened, the platoon officer seized him by the neck, held him erect off the ground, 'and tried to shake some guts into him, but in vain.' So, towing him by an arm, they dragged him along the ground, along with them into battle. This man, later sent back to a cold reception from the same platoon, on his own initiative took complete control of the platoon and led it to success in a night of chaos when all its leaders were lost or wounded. This man has every right to consider himself among the great men of the battalion.

But the backbone of any battalion is no heroic figure but the ordinary man ('He's the one who counts,' as Colonel O'Reilly ⁸ says), who quietly leaves his civilian life, quietly and steadily performs his army duties, and then, just as unostentatiously, disappears into civilian life again. Such a man is a private who has contributed a great deal to this book. He expresses the feelings of most New Zealand soldiers when he writes: 'Anyone would think by the way I write that I really enjoyed the war. But nothing could be further from the point as I don't think anybody could hate war any more than I do. And as for army life—I could never picture myself taking it up as a career. Still on the other hand there were those good times, and I have always liked travel. And there was that comradeship which I haven't experienced to the same extent in civvy street. In fact when I first got home I never wanted to have anything more to do with the previous four years—it wasn't until a few years later that I started to take an interest in what had happened. But now I have even read quite a few books on World War 2 and look forward to going to reunions.'

He later writes: 'To my mind, two things which showed up the wrongness and hell of war: when we were together, the Platoon or Company, some of us may have stopped to wonder how many of us would come through. Then one day a shell or something would come over and we would hear that so- and-so had been killed. Then you would realise how often it was that one of the best had gone (not that you wanted to pick out anyone else to take his place). But until then you hadn't given it a thought that he would die. Sometimes he was a well-known character, but more often—it seems—he wasn't well-known. But as soon as he had gone the atmosphere

in which we lived our lives changed, and you realised that the part of that atmosphere that was missing now had, before that, been filled by so-and-so, and his passing had left something missing.

'Another instance was the shelled or bombed village or town. I remember especially once in [Italy](#) we were going along in the trucks to take up a new position and just before we entered a town we stopped, and immediately we heard a hell of a racket just ahead—Jerry was shelling hell out of the place— just a continuous crashing cracking and crumping. When it stopped we moved on through the town. The dust was everywhere—just like mist forming in the evening (it was evening), and the smell of dust, explosives and rubble (any who have experienced that smell will remember it) lying on the still warm air. A dead cow. And about half a dozen Italians—some men and women and one or two children—standing or walking by some rubble—their heads down taking no notice of us and looking pretty dazed. They looked as though they may have been looking for something. The old saying came to mind: "We call ourselves civilised". It wasn't only that it was happening in [Italy](#) but in so many other places—and could happen in N.Z.—and yet no one wanted it to happen.'

It is difficult to describe or define this collective strength and the feelings of men for their battalion. 'Scotch' [Paterson](#),⁹ who during his two years with the battalion rose from corporal to company commander and won the MC, writes:

I think a man's consciousness of the battalion varied with both the rank he held and his length of time in it. I know as a corporal, for my first two months the idea of the battalion was more or less as we would now look upon the world—its limits extended beyond your immediate horizon. You did not actually seem aware of anything outside the battalion—the rest of the army, or the Division, were too far away from your ken altogether. Other companies in the battalion touched your consciousness only vaguely. Your immediate world was bound up, not even so much in the company as in the platoon.¹⁰

The platoon was the fighting unit, the unit you actually lived in, and even that was brought down to a small world in the section. You ate with, slept with, fought with those in the section. You knew those in the other two sections and you relied on them in a fight to support you and help you as two distinct units in the same way

that your own section working as a unit tried to help the other two. You didn't know, however, the chaps in the other sections with anything like the same degree of intimacy. Generally in a battle you felt the strength of the platoon rather than the battalion.

On the other hand, by the time the battalion started in [Italy](#) as I knew it, the battalion had established certain traditions. The old hands in the platoon, maybe a corporal, a sergeant, maybe one of the privates in a section or the driver of the platoon truck had stories of men who had gone before. I well remember the scathing comment of our platoon sergeant to one of us who had offended in some way or another: 'You'd never get away with that if Les Andrew was here.' It was a real rebuke.

On the other hand too, while we seemed to be intensely proud of our platoon, we were equally so of the company and, in a larger way, of the battalion. You didn't want to let the company down— although 'Company' didn't mean so much a group of men in my mind at the time, as a stern looking soldierly stocky man, who for all his apparent ruthlessness would duck and dive his way through every night without fail, under at times really terrific shell and small arms fire, to our positions in [Cassino](#) with a sandbag full of hot pies baked for the boys by Terry the cook somewhere in B Echelon [the non-fighting part of the unit]. Haddon [Donald](#) ¹¹ used to arrive that way about midnight as a rule, and would go round in the dark, stand beside one of the boys as he peered through a hole in the wall out into the dark, and call him quietly by his first name or his nickname, thrusting a very squashed but very, very acceptable pie into his hand. 'How's it going, Noel?'

I should think there would be quite a number of men who never knew much more than the men in their section before they headed home on a hospital ship. On the other hand a great many more, staying long enough to see the battalion out of the line a few times, would come to know at least the company or to get a broader view of the battalion and identify themselves with it as a unit. As you climbed in rank, of course, you automatically came into the picture. However, though you knew you depended on the artillery, on the tanks and all the supporting weapons behind you, I think, going into an attack, the strength you felt you really relied upon was the strength of the platoon, since you knew that as a last resort that may be all that was left to you. An instance of this was the attack on [La Romola](#) when in the confusion

such as I had never known before or since— smoke, dust and noise—the attacking force of 3 Company was really for a great part of the night a number of small bands of men, each group carrying on up the hill not sure whether there was any of the rest of the company left or not. We all met up eventually near the top, but for a time I doubt whether anyone realised there were any others still on the go.

Later in [Italy](#) after a few spells out of the line there were opportunities to gain a battalion outlook—helped no doubt by such things as the brigade sports meetings—the training period at [Fabriano](#) when the NCO's of the battalion were able to get together for a fortnight on their own—company farewells to chaps going home, and so on.

I have always thought that 'the old hands' were really the men who won the war. They knew the fighting when things were tough, when it was the men rather than the materials which carried the day—when the end of the war was just nowhere in sight at all and yet men carried on doing sometimes almost incredible things. These were the men (privates and nco's in the early days) who carried that fighting spirit on into their units as nco's and officers in the times that I knew. They were the 'old digs'—you could tell them by their eyes.

These were the men, still untried in battle, who awaited the German now at [Olympus](#).

* * * * *

Twenty-second Battalion's path to the battle-front had been long and devious.

First battalion parade at 7 p.m. on 18 January 1940 at [Trentham](#). Men from these districts form the companies: A, [Wellington](#); B, north of [Wellington](#) along the west coast; C, Hawke's Bay and Wairarapa; D, Taranaki. First route march on 7 February from [Trentham](#) to Wallaceville bridge; 'casualties were not numerous,' notes the war diary. The battalion pipe band, six drummers and six pipers under Lance-Corporal [Cameron](#),¹² leads the march. (The pipes had been presented by New Zealand Scots through the president of the Highland Society of New Zealand, Mr [E. D. Cameron](#), who later worked to replace pipes chopped up in [Greece](#).) The battalion marches through [Wellington](#) on 27 April, and sails¹³ from Pipitea Wharf on 2 May in

the 43,000-ton liner *Empress of Britain*, with 'Borax', a fox-terrier mascot, smuggled aboard.

The convoy increases off the east coast of *Australia*: the *Queen Mary* joins the escorted ships now carrying some 8000 New Zealanders and 8000 Australians. Shore leave at *Perth*. The convoy is diverted south in the *Indian Ocean* on 15 May to reach *Capetown* on the 26th. The battalion's first decoration and first death: John Ormond¹⁴ dives overboard into swift and shark-infested waters in an attempt to rescue a sergeant (from *1 NZ General Hospital*), and is awarded the BEM; Norm Traynor¹⁵ dies of head injuries received ashore. A short call at *Freetown* to refuel (*France* falls, *Italy* enters the war). On 16 June the great convoy sails up the Clyde to anchor off *Gourock*. To Mytchett (near *Aldershot*): route marching, training, finding the rations slender, and a visit by King George VI. In July battle dress replaces brass-buttoned uniforms ('giggle suits'). The battalion's first 'mechanised move' in double-decker buses on 11 July to 'Hog's Back'. In August the Second Echelon's '100-mile route march'. In mid-August the Battle for *Britain* begins, and early in September Mr Churchill pays a visit. To Warren Wood and Hollingbourne (six miles from *Maidstone, Kent*), to coastal positions awaiting the invasion which does not come. Men make their first acquaintance of English farming methods 'and some of them never got over it.' As *Lieutenant Freddie Oldham*¹⁶ wrote:

And why the man in front of horse?
His father taught him to, of course.

Bombing delays leave trains. Colonel Andrew to late comers: 'You know that trains are likely to be delayed. You should have left a day earlier. 28 days' detention.' Manoeuvres, the troops rather bewildered and critically short of equipment, with London Division (men with flags represent tanks). On the night of 27-28 October a bomber jettisons its bombs: one man killed, Private Ian Holms, the battalion's first death from enemy action, and three wounded in A Company. To winter quarters at *Camberley*, near *Mytchett Camp*, 'responsible for countering any action by enemy parachutists or other airborne troops'. Camps left by other units in an 'appalling state'; Brigadier *Hargest*¹⁷ in a letter congratulates 22 Battalion on the most creditable 'striking contrast' with its late quarters—and asks for fifty men from the battalion to clear up other units' litter. At the foot of the letter Colonel Andrew notes: 'I wonder whether it will continue thus throughout war service with the *5 Bde*

in this war.' More route marches to the skirl of 'The Pibroch of Donald Dhu', the battalion regimental march. Advance party of sixty-nine (including Lieutenants [Clapham](#)¹⁸ and [Anderson](#)¹⁹) leaves for the Settler and Elizabethville at Liverpool in mid-December. Early in a freezing New Year the battalion sails from Newport, Wales, in the 'Drunken Duchess' (or Duchess of Bedford), and reaches Egypt on 3 March after a hot, cramped voyage with poor food. Three weeks in Egypt, then the battalion, packed into the small steamer, [Hellas](#), sails for [Piraeus](#) harbour, near [Athens, Greece](#).

* * * * *

The battalion had moved back to [Olympus](#) from [Katerini](#) on 8 April 1941 (two days after [Germany](#) declared war on [Greece](#)), to join Major Hart's²⁰ large advance party preparing weapon pits in the gorge. The battalion plugged the gap between 23 Battalion, on the steep right flank, and 28 (Maori) Battalion on the equally rough left. They straddled the main road leading south to [Athens](#). Along this road through the gorge the main attack would come. Close by were a turbulent river and the [Petras](#) tuberculosis sanatorium, partly German staffed and, curiously enough, not evacuated.

Everyone worked hard, putting finishing touches to existing weapon pits, preparing new ones, improving bush tracks, and entrenching. Reserve ammunition, rations, and quantities of barbed wire came up along steep, winding mule tracks. Anything approaching a road would be destroyed when the enemy drew near. The pioneers, under Lieutenant [Wadey](#),²¹ bridged the small Elikon River for emergency access to C and A Companies; signallers with Lieutenant [Beaven](#)²² put down telephone wires linking companies and Battalion Headquarters. The battalion held a complicated position almost two and a half miles long over very rough, wooded country. A deep ravine to the right of the pass road severed the front, which was cut up further by steep faces, rock, and loose shingle. As one man said: 'It was hellava country to wire A very tough, wiry, stumpy bush smothered in thorns grew along the faces, and we tied all these bushes together with barbed wire. This made pretty tough obstacles almost impossible to get through.'

Every platoon had taken up front-line positions and the only reserve was the pioneer platoon. Battalion Headquarters was back about a mile by the main road. A

Company (Captain [Hanton](#) ²³) linked up with B Company 23 Battalion on a ridge just south of and overlooking the white-walled sanatorium. A Company men 'felt rather peculiar' digging weapon pits in full view of potential enemies, the German members of the unmolested medical staff. C Company (Major Hart) followed the ridge north of the sanatorium to the Elikon River. Across the deep, wooded ravine B Company (Captain [Laws](#) ²⁴) barred the main road. Eleven Platoon overlooked the main bridge spanning a side stream and had a forward post perched in the cliff



olympus pass positions, 5 brigade, april 1941

face. This platoon was covered by 10 Platoon, alongside on higher ground. Twelve Platoon, on still higher ground, was a little further back. Finally D Company (Captain [Campbell](#) ²⁵), linking with the [Maori Battalion](#), was astride a most inferior, no-exit road leading to a settlement called [Skotina](#). Lieutenant [McAra](#) ²⁶ set up his mortars on an outcrop nicknamed 'Gibraltar'. He had trained his mortar men to perfection, and the steep-fronted outcrop covering the front was an outstanding mortar position. The battalion Bren carriers camped alongside the road by Gibraltar. Twelve Platoon of 27 (Machine Gun) Battalion, taking up high ground behind C Company and covering most of the land between the road and the sanatorium, supported the battalion. Two-pounder guns of 32 Battery 7 Anti-Tank Regiment supported B Company and elsewhere. Incidentally, none of these anti-tank guns covered the approaches to the front. They would come into action (cold comfort for 22 Battalion's riflemen) only when the companies were overrun. This siting of the guns was the fashion after the French and Belgian débâcle, and one anti-tank gunner

dryly remarked that a tank 'would have to be dropped by parachute before he could have a crack at it.' About three miles back the 25-pounders of [5 Field Regiment](#), experiencing trouble with crest clearance, completed the supporting arms.

The crisp air and the solid work gave yet more zest to men already fighting fit. 'Never,' noted one officer, 'have these fellows been more cheerful or willing.' It was spring, and a strange clicking noise, like slithering pebbles, alarmed many a lonely sentry in the night until New Zealanders discovered the tortoises were mating. Here and there little patches of primroses, hyacinths and violets grew wild among fir and cypress woods, and looking up, a man could glimpse the snowy peaks of [Mount Olympus](#). Stories, not of ancient gods but of deer on [Mount Olympus](#), sent a hunting party from 14 Platoon out one evening, and after an arduous climb, when only tracks of deer were seen, the hunters returned with a plump calf: 'mistaken for a fawn' was the excuse. It was expertly quartered and boiled in a benzine tin, and the veal handsomely supplemented the platoon's rations, for food was not plentiful at [Olympus](#). Even a sackful of sodden dog biscuits found in an old ammunition dump were boiled into a mash and eaten by B Company.

Delicacies came the way of 9 Platoon when, on the cold, raw night of 10 April, the German medical staff of the sanatorium stole away undetected, leaving the patients helpless. This was discovered in the morning by Lieutenant 'Snowy' [Leeks](#),²⁷ who had been suspicious of the place for some time. Some 5 Brigade trucks evacuated the patients, and 9 Platoon enjoyed hospital-baked bread, rabbits, fowls, pork, and even a peacock. Some titbits went back to Battalion Headquarters 'to appease the old man'. A case of brandy and cherry brandy quickly disappeared into water bottles, none reaching 'the old man'. Later on, strange sounds (quite unconnected with the brandy) from the sanatorium vexed patrols: doors banged suddenly in the night, and prowling dogs knocked over objects inside the empty rooms.

Good Friday (11 April) dawned wet, cold and misty, and next day, when the enemy was still out of sight, the CO called off all except routine duties to let men light most welcome fires and dry out sodden clothes and blankets. Padre [Hurst](#)²⁸ held a small, simple and impressive eve-of-battle communion service in his tent at the top of a ravine. That night more rain and snow made conditions worse, turning roads and tracks into quagmires and adding to the wretched plight of the refugees,

who a few days earlier had been allowed to pass, but now, with the enemy expected any time, were given short shrift and sent back the way they had come. Mixed among the refugees were swarthy little Greek soldiers (some carrying their shoddy boots and trudging along barefooted) in khaki uniforms recalling 1914-18 fashions. The Greek troops were let through the road block, together with a weird piece of Greek artillery, a lumbering cannon on six-foot wheels drawn by an exhausted old engine.

The last peaceful day passed—Easter Sunday (13 April ²⁹). Down by the riverbed Padre Hurst celebrated Holy Communion, using a large square stone for his altar in a natural sanctuary, with the men sitting round on boulders in a natural church. Many a man carried the memory of this [Olympus](#) service with him until the end of his war days.

At 2 p.m. on Monday an enemy reconnaissance plane droned slowly over the pines and cypresses concealing 22 Battalion, and from that time onwards similar aircraft flew over 5 Brigade's positions, scorning the quite ineffectual fire from light automatic weapons and impudently swooping so low that the Iron Cross markings and sometimes the pilot himself were seen. Three hours after the first German scouting plane appeared, B Company watched the last [Divisional Cavalry](#) vehicle clatter back; then the three 22 Battalion Bren carriers in front of the road block were withdrawn, and an hour later the plunging echoes from the last demolitions faded and died in the darkening mountains. The road bridges ahead were smashed, the fifteen long months of training and preparation were ended, and 22 Battalion, alert beside its weapons, faced the enemy.

The motor-cycles, headlights glaring, swung into sight. Before they braked to a stop in front of the demolition, 11 Platoon (Lieutenant Armstrong) opened fire with its Bren guns, and the startled vanguard shrank back leaving, as was discovered next morning, five wrecked motor-cycles, some with sidecars and all with weapons, lying about the road. Simultaneously advanced troops made a show of force across the front by firing indiscriminately from machine guns, pistols and spandaus. Tracer streamed and ricocheted through the night. Then the firing died down and stopped, although enemy transport (still using headlights freely) could be heard and seen collecting strength further back. Two Germans blundering into wire received a

'pincapple' from Cam Weir.³⁰ Sentries in the forward posts kept very much on the alert.

The next day (15 April) was rather an anti-climax. After breakfast (in name only) news spread officially that [Olympus](#) would be abandoned in the night. Although few men in the battalion knew this at the time, another German force, after invading a helpless [Yugoslavia](#), had advanced through the weakly defended [Monastir Gap](#), in the north-west. Any further advance would leave the whole [Olympus](#) range defences outflanked and cut off from behind. The Allies were to pull back urgently, first to the [Olympus- Aliakmon River](#) line and then to [Greece's](#) narrow waist at [Thermopylae](#), where (they hoped) a solid stand could be made on a short front. Two-thirds of [Greece](#) would be lost in this sweeping withdrawal south.

News that 5 Brigade was to retreat to the southern end of the pass in the night was rather a surprise, for the day was fairly quiet, apart from short exchanges of fire in the early morning and some shelling in the afternoon. It seemed that the enemy, checked for the time on the road, was trying to find a way round the flanks. Shortly after breakfast 22 Battalion heard the Maori Battalion's mortars to the left open up for half an hour to engage and drive back 'five enemy tanks', actually tracked troop-carriers. Later from the right came the sound of 23 Battalion's mortars engaging an enemy patrol, and 25-pounder shells passed overhead to scramble transport and debussing troops.

Twenty-second Battalion's main labour of the day went into preparing for the withdrawal, which was expected after nightfall. The companies started packing out some gear by mules³¹ down slippery bush tracks to the road behind the front, where trucks would take over. Unnecessary stores were destroyed, and Barney Clapham, the transport officer, 'very worried about repercussions', chopped up the battalion bagpipes.

An example of resourcefulness about this time was given by the driver, Jack [Hargreaves](#),³² who loaded C Company's 15- cwt truck with ammunition and the most important parts of the company's stores, and attempted to get the truck out along the partly built track (all access roads now were held by the enemy). Starting off alone, Hargreaves got the truck not only along the primitive track but also through scrub and rough country before he was forced to abandon and destroy it.

Tramping out alone, through miles of strange, rough country and forest, he rejoined his unit.

Back in the battalion lines in the late afternoon the scream of shells over forward areas showed that the enemy, making full use of his reconnaissance planes still cruising over the pass, was groping for the well-concealed 25-pounders. Soon the battalion would develop an accurate ear for shells, instantly distinguishing between the sound of an 'inne' (a shell heading for your area) and the report of our own guns. Many a soldier was almost indignantly surprised when the enemy suddenly varied his range, and loud reports in the battalion area showed that the 22nd was under enemy shelling for the first time. The few '14-' 18 men in the battalion (no doubt wondering whether they could stand up to it for a second time) found they recognised instantly the different sound between close and 'safe' shells – and also between rifle fire and machine-gunning: bullets going pss–pss–pss were safe; bullets pinging, cracking or buzzing like bees were close and dangerous. Colonel Andrew, inspecting positions, heard one Kiwi advise another: 'You watch the old man. When he ducks, you duck.' These random shells caused two casualties, Sergeant Dillon ³³ (Battalion Headquarters) and Private Wright ³⁴ (a signaller attached to the mortars), neither of them severely wounded.

An hour after the shelling started a verbal message from Brigade said: 'Hold everything 24 hours'; the retreat was postponed. In the evening mortar fire over the battalion area caused no casualties. 'Practically all the boys were awake all that night,' writes one man, 'very few got more than an hour's sleep, practically all our nerves being strung up so that we heard many noises that we would not have noticed normally. Excitement was pretty general and every Jerry patrol that approached us was warmly welcomed.'

Late in the night, between midnight and 2 a.m., D Company's turn came. The company (left of the road and linking with the [Maori Battalion](#)), with the rain, scrub and broken ground, had a tough job covering the wire and minefield along the whole of its front. Parties could be heard stumbling against bushes in the darkness. Sergeant Jerry Fowler ³⁵ fired his 2-inch mortar towards one party and was annoyed at derisive cries in English of 'You'll have to do better than that!' D Company, thinking this a ruse to discover their positions, lay low, and in the morning found their wire cut and all their carefully laid mines by the little bridge removed—a game

piece of work.

Soon after daybreak on 16 April the main enemy attack began in an attempt to shoulder a way up the main road through 22 Battalion in the centre. Tom [Logie](#)³⁶ was the first in the battalion to die in battle. Suddenly shelling began, short of Headquarters Company's cookhouse in a dry riverbed. The Colonel's batman, 'Shorty' [Lawless](#),³⁷ went to ground in a muddy patch and lost the Colonel's pot of tea. Company Sergeant-Major [Fraser](#),³⁸ an old soldier, realised the shells were falling short and began to laugh. 'Twice again "Shorty" and the tea parted company amidst uproarious laughter. [A minute later a] shell landed right in the cookhouse. Tom was killed almost instantly and another lad [Jack [Tregea](#)³⁹] was hit in the elbow.' As the shells increased, Doctor [Longmore](#)⁴⁰ hurried to the cookhouse while Padre Hurst and Sergeant [Drake](#)⁴¹ collected his instruments. 'We hurried back to find Tom just passing on, and the Doc performed an immediate operation to remove Tregea's forearm. It was a brave and skilful job, well done and well taken,' noted Padre Hurst. 'I gave the soldier the cigarette he asked for about two minutes after he had been sewn up. How quickly great fun, our first fear and I suppose reaction to it in laughter, became real tragedy.'

Meanwhile B Company, spotting tanks (and no mistake this time) and other vehicles approaching, called for immediate concentrated artillery fire in front of 11 Platoon, and as the shells cracked down Lieutenant McAra's men, until now 'not wasting ammunition on scattered targets', swung their mortars into action for the first time, pumped 137 rounds into the knot of men and vehicles taking cover under a cliff just between C and B Companies on the [Petras](#) road, and claimed about a company of men and two armoured vehicles. (They were very innocent in those days; a company of men takes a lot of killing.) After his 3-inch mortar detachment had been driven out by heavy shelling, Sergeant George [Katene](#)⁴² of the Maori Battalion, whose conduct won the Military Medal, immediately opened up in another position. Others saw the artillery 'making hits galore, really grand shooting' along the road, and again B Company's approaches were clear, until five German tanks at 7 a. m. crawled to within 400 yards and pashed away at 11 Platoon with machine gun and two-pounder cannon.

A fine description of the battalion first meeting enemy tanks is given by Corporal

Andrews⁴³ of the hard-pressed 11 Platoon: 'I yelled out to the boys that three tanks as big as houses had come up, they laughed, but when the little tank pulled aside and the big fellows weighing somewhere about 35 to 45 tons came into sight they changed their minds, but they were not in the least downhearted—in fact Herb [Burgess⁴⁴] gave the old crown and anchor cry of "Shower' em down, shower' em down!" [The tanks eventually came to within 100 yards of 11 Platoon, opened fierce fire, then withdrew.] Each of these retirements heartened the boys and I now think that at the time we fully believed we had them licked. We most certainly hindered them, but the more we fired at them the more we gave our positions away and the Jerry was not slow in getting our positions to a foot.'

Swept with fire, the platoon had to sit tight and take it. Alan Murray⁴⁵ lost a thumb; Jack Tustin⁴⁶ was mortally wounded across the thighs; Herb Burgess and George Peacock⁴⁷ died at their post, manning their Bren gun to the last. The only real threat to the tanks was the indirect artillery fire (which now moved these tanks only 200 yards or so up and down the road) and the chance of a fluke hit from a mortar. The two-pounders were too far back to fire. The battalion's only immediate defence against armoured vehicles was the 'elephant gun'—one Boys anti-tank rifle to each platoon—Brens and rifles. Men now were even more sceptical about the value of rifle and Bren fire against tanks. At this time, on B Company's immediate front and within 800 yards, were about forty vehicles including one medium tank, other lighter tanks, and many tracked vehicles used for troop-carrying. Out of sight a great mass of enemy transport, tanks, and troops had piled up, stretching from the pass along the road back to Katerini, the first three miles mainly made up with tanks, tracked troop-carriers and motor-cycles.

Soon the infantry knew only too well that more mortars had crept up to join the fray. The troubles of the riflemen increased again when too many 25-pounder shells seemed to be landing too close to the forward weapon pits (the guns, firing over 3000 rounds this day, were having much trouble in clearing a ridge further back), and B Company with some relief received Lieutenant-Colonel Fraser,⁴⁸ CO 5 Field Regiment, who set up a special observation post, contacted the guns by radio, directed fire himself, and soon quietened the mortars.

At 8.40 a.m. a strong enemy tank attack was launched again up the road. These

tanks had been hidden in trees and scrub not more than 600 yards from the front. Colonel Fraser, seated in the open on a folding chair, ordered ten rounds' gunfire. The gunfire and tanks arrived at the same spot simultaneously in a cloud of dust and smoke. Infantrymen saw the attack splinter and smash. At least ten vehicles, including an ammunition truck and at least one tank, were knocked out—the tanks were supported by infantry. Then another tank and an ammunition truck went up, the truck being credited to hard-working Private [Whibley](#)⁴⁹ and his Boys anti-tank rifle. 'In actual fact,' writes Whibley, 'we were under the impression that a shot from the Boys had entered the visor of the tank, for when I fired it ran off the road and started to smoke.' (B Company, reporting on the Boys rifle in action, said it 'embarrassed tanks'.)

The hard-pressed 11 Platoon⁵⁰ was rushed by three tanks at 9.18 a.m. One tank charged straight down into the hole left by the demolition. The platoon disposed of the crew. The two remaining tanks tried to cross the demolition, apparently attempting to use the first tank as some sort of bridge. Failing to do this, they sprayed B's front. The battle continued throughout the morning, mainly in the central sector. At one stage 11 Platoon's forward post in the cliff face had to be withdrawn to another position further back. The men stuck to their position until their post was virtually shot away from underneath them: tanks had fired at the weapon pit until the soil below the parapet collapsed.

Under such pressure B Company, curtailed by fire, between 9.30 and 10.30 a.m. suffered further casualties: Johnny O'Brien⁵¹ (a Maori) and Doug [Wilson](#)⁵² killed; Sergeant Joe Mahar⁵³ and Privates [Harnish](#)⁵⁴ and [Lovett](#)⁵⁵ wounded. Corporal Jack [Hagen](#)⁵⁶ later led a party back in a brave attempt to bring out the dead and bury them. As this party moved forward Paul [Donoghue](#),⁵⁷ a volunteer from Headquarters Company, opened up with a Bren to give covering fire, but drew such a response that the party finally was forced to give up.

On the battalion's right flank a company of infantry attacked C Company to test defences between the sanatorium and the river. Fourteen Platoon drove them back, and at dusk the enemy was heard digging in. Activity in front of A Company, further right, was small, and it didn't seem that the neighbouring 23 Battalion positions were being pressed heavily. Across on the other flank [28 Battalion](#), holding one big attack in the forest, also gave some help to D Company 22 Battalion. From 3 p. m.

onwards activity on this company's front increased. All through the afternoon a D Company sniper, Barney Wicksteed,⁵⁸ had prevented enemy pioneers from working on the smashed bridge in front of B Company. In the dusk a force estimated to be a battalion strong gathered in the scrub on a 1000-yard front. Twenty minutes later a tank got across the demolition and turned towards D Company, halting where the mines and the wire had been interfered with in the night. The tank made no efforts to close in on the weapon pits but hampered D Company's movements with persistent fire. Small groups of infantry attempted to reach the steep valley between B and D Companies. Later, at 6.30 p.m., an armoured troop-carrier crossed the demolition and took cover under a bluff in front of B Company. The troops aboard went to ground in the valley between B and D Companies. No further attempts were made to get through 22 Battalion, which during the afternoon and early evening had more wounded: Privates Christiansen⁵⁹ and Meek⁶⁰ (D Company) and Sergeant Ford⁶¹ and Private Weir (B Company). Two men missing believed killed, Privates Norris⁶² and Peterson,⁶³ were captured.

The wounded, particularly Jack Tregear with one arm, showed great fortitude during the move back over rough tracks. The stretcher-bearers had a rough time handling stretchers through scrub and wire and up and down hills. At one exposed spot below B Company headquarters the stretcher-bearers had to leave cover, cross the road swept occasionally by enemy fire, and crawl through wire with stretcher and casualty.

Fortunately the enemy did not press forward after dusk. The strenuous six-mile withdrawal to the mouth of Olympus Pass succeeded. The night was impenetrably black, the ground precipitous and bush-covered, every mule track a morass, and at any time the enemy might press on and cut things up. Companies gradually thinned out as more and more heavily burdened riflemen trudged back, until last of all the Bren-gunners left for the rendezvous behind the RAP on the road. From 8.30 p.m. tired men began passing the check post carrying practically all their arms, ammunition and equipment, and slogged on through the mud and up the pass road. Flares going up on each flank showed where the enemy was following the withdrawal, but after a while darkness, the rough going, and demolitions brought them to a halt.

Forward posts of C Company (the nearest in a straight line to the check post) took over three hours to reach the road. Platoons had to come out in single file carrying rifle, pick and shovel, and as much ammunition as possible, and sweat up a steep hill covered with scrub and stunted bush to reach Company Headquarters. From here they scrambled down a narrow track greasy with mud (a jibbing donkey, acquired by a signaller, was flung over a cliff here), crossed a valley and creek, and then, in many cases actually on hands and knees, climbed up the other side on to the main road. The rearguard could hear the Germans talking when the last of C Company left Company Headquarters.

Half of D Company might have been captured if it had not been for Captain Campbell. The company destroyed everything which couldn't be carried, and left a few booby traps behind (a grenade under pack straps was a favourite trick). Then the first party moved off at dusk in a heavy mist and rain while the German mortared the track out. However, contact guides posted through the bush to lead out the second half moved off by mistake with the first party. The rest of D Company spent an exhausting ⁶⁴ night in total darkness trying to find the way out through dense bush and over precipitous country. Finally, the last men hit the pass road at 3 a.m.

B Company, the last company to move, started off under heavy fire. The shelling may have been partly due to the din made in extricating Wally Harrison's ⁶⁵ truck, stuck down a bank. Despite the shelling B Company withdrew with little confusion, Sergeant Charlie [Flashoff](#) ⁶⁶ showing great coolness as he stood by the sunken road repeating reassuringly: 'Take it easy, chaps. Help your cobbles up. Take your time. Just round the corner you'll be safe.'

A section of pioneers under Lieutenant Wadey and Second-Lieutenant [MacDuff](#), ⁶⁷ with a carrier, remained by the prepared demolition by a check point just behind the old positions. The detonation was delayed because the three officers and forty men from D Company had not checked through. Finally, at 1 a.m. on 17 April, Colonel Andrew, satisfied the D Company party would not be coming out that way, ordered the engineers to blow. They also blew the pass road in seven places.

On foot and (if lucky) by motor transport, ⁶⁸ the battalion moved back from [Olympus](#) while shells from 25-pounders whistled overhead to the enemy positions. Vivid muzzle flashes cut open the darkness. At 4 a.m. most of the battalion had

reached [Ay Dhimitrios](#), wet, cold, hungry and exhausted—and very much wiser men. When reporting to [General Freyberg](#), Brigadier Hargest wrote of 22 Battalion's 'steady withdrawal, absolutely to time, without any excitement. They had borne the heat and burden of the day.'

Four explosions, ripping the road ineffectively apart, delayed the invader and signed off the stand at [Olympus](#), which had cost the battalion fewer than two dozen casualties.

The retreating infantry, trudging along in the downpour, heard the first demolition explode after midnight. The second went off at 2 a.m., when most of the battalion was well on the way to [Ay Dhimitrios](#), at the south-western end of the pass. The next, fired within two hours, disturbed none of the exhausted soldiers' sleep,⁶⁹ and by the time of the final explosion, at 7 a.m. on 17 April, B Company, moving along like sleepwalkers through the little village of [Ay Dhimitrios](#), rubbed their eyes in astonishment. It looked like a dream, something quite out of this world: the few women moving about the cobbled streets all wore nineteenth-century crinolines. B Company, with next to no sleep, was back on duty again, moving up the hillside through the village and standing to against the expected German follow-up. In the thin rain and sleet Jack Hagen, like many more of his comrades, huddled miserably under a sodden blanket for shelter, while one man dozed and another kept watch.

Not long after dawn the battalion, united again, moved back about three miles, partly on foot and partly by truck, and formed alongside the Maoris a new line at the head of the pass. Here weary, muddy soldiers revelled in hot food again, sent up from B Echelon together with mail from home, some of the letters no more than four weeks old.

At 3 p.m. the battalion (less A Company, staying for an hour's rearguard) was moving south fast, bunched under the canopies of 4 RMT Company's three-tonners and enjoying tinned fruit taken from abandoned dumps—the first time tinned fruit had been on the battalion menu for months. Many of these lorries showed signs of strafing and bombing, a pointer to what might lie ahead on the way down to the [Thermopylae](#) line. Luckily the rain and the mist round [Olympus](#) had held off the [Luftwaffe](#), for the battalion had been swallowed in a great river of army traffic

scurrying south, soon swollen (at the crossroads by the hamlet of [Elevtherokhorion](#)) with heavily laden trucks, carriers, and guns getting out from the northern end of the collapsed [Olympus](#) line. But so far the road surfaces were good, and about dusk the battalion passed through [Larisa](#), the first town the men had seen thoroughly devastated from the air. First an earthquake (promptly taken advantage of and exploited by Mussolini's airmen) had struck the town; then came the [Luftwaffe](#). Torn buildings sagged into streets heaped with rubble and gashed with craters and here and there flames danced on splintered beam and blackened ruin. Private [Hilder](#)⁷⁰ remembers the storks among this desolation. 'You could see them on their nests, up on top of the remaining chimneys.'

Tom De [Lisle](#)⁷¹ wrote: 'Despite the fact that they knew the troops were withdrawing, the Greek people were kindness itself, producing boiled eggs, wine and bread for which they staunchly refused to accept any drachmae in payment—not by any means the last example of Greek loyalty and kindness.' But other men remember Australian hospitality by this wrecked town, and Lance-Corporal [Cleghorn](#)⁷² notes: 'We carried out an exchange for tinned beer. The exchange was effected in transit, with a man sitting on the bonnet of the truck tossing tins to the Aussies in the back of their transport, and catching tinned beer in exchange.'

The headlong retreat from [Olympus](#) ('We fled like the Ities in the desert') was now about to tax the patience of 5 Brigade. From the [Olympus](#) line the brigade was ordered to go by the coastal road to [Volos](#), where it would form a rearguard. But only a few hours after the brigade had left [Olympus](#) orders were changed suddenly, as the coast road was impassable. The brigade was to use the main road and turn east to [Volos](#) beyond [Lamia](#). Some groups learned of the switch in plans at [Larisa](#), and some did not, for communications were poor and under great strain. Trouble for 22 Battalion began in the night at [Pharsala](#), about 20 miles south of [Larisa](#). The night was pitch dark. The road, in grade and width like a metalled country road in New Zealand, was suddenly knotted with traffic tangles.⁷³

Near [Pharsala](#) ('the father of all traffic jams'), some military police tried to switch New Zealand units off the choked road, and here Colonel [Row](#)⁷⁴ (a New Zealand officer attached to [Anzac Corps](#) Headquarters) quite innocently added to the confusion, thereby starting a rumour of a 'Fifth Columnist New Zealand officer'. The Colonel, acting on instructions from [Anzac Corps](#), used a petrol company's road map

(the kind given to unsuspecting tourists), which showed a comfortable road leading east to [Volos](#), to divert some of 22 Battalion, who found to their dismay and disgust that the road after a while petered out into an ox-track. It seems that about 200 men from the battalion, including Major Hart, went this way; the trucks dumped the riflemen in the dark and made off to gather more soldiers in the north. Lieutenant Donald (14 Platoon C Company) refused to be diverted anywhere and safely reached the [Molos](#) area nearly a day ahead of the battalion. Furthermore, Donald's group gathered enough canned beer from an abandoned canteen 'to give every man in the Battalion two cans, and every man in C Company, six cans.'

Another part of the battalion, A Company, was hopelessly lost, and vanished (on paper) for twenty-four hours. The rest of the battalion, strung out and scattered among the scurrying transport (it was now 1 a.m. on 18 April), carried on down the main road south to [Lamia](#), in the last hours of darkness striking a packet of trouble on the hilly pass before [Lamia](#): another traffic jam, trucks piled up on the narrow road, some over the side, transport banking up, several trucks on fire. Flames could have drawn night bombers; certainly the daylight would draw attacks on the helplessly stalled transport. The sheltering dark would not last much longer. A path was cleared by tipping trucks ahead over the bank (Battalion Headquarters truck went over too). So the greater part of the battalion got through to [Lamia](#).

Some groups were near [Lamia](#) township (but do not seem to have suffered any casualties) when the [Luftwaffe](#) struck. 'Our attention was drawn to the raid by the local peasants. We were driving along and couldn't of course hear the planes for the truck engine. Suddenly we noticed the people in the fields rushing frantically away from the road and taking cover. We got out of the truck just in time to see the Stukas circling over the town and then peeling off one by one in their dive. Most impressive.'

At [Lamia](#) air raids were by no means the only headache. Here Major Laws and B Company (ignoring orders to change direction at troubled [Pharsala](#)) were now switched east to [Volos](#), the original destination; so was Major [Leggat](#)⁷⁵ with most of the B Echelon transport; so also were Colonel Andrew, Second-Lieutenants MacDuff and [Hawthorn](#),⁷⁶ and others, and 'at [Volos](#) we were loudly cheered by the inhabitants, who seemingly thought we had come as their saviours—and just as

noisily condemned when we retired.'

At [Volos](#) the hunt for many missing platoons began. The rearguard at [Volos](#) was now unnecessary, and the battalion was ordered to [Molos](#). MacDuff, Hawthorn and others, on motor-cycle and in truck, roamed far afield, collecting isolated parties which were stranded, lost, or marching south, and killing sheep on the way for provisions. Suffice it to say that somehow, by good luck and much hunting, the battalion, here and there running the gauntlet of daytime air raids, gathered together safely again at [Molos](#), the final destination, by 19 April, and was resting thankfully after digging deep slit trenches.

The New Zealand Division, now in its last week in [Greece](#), was guarding an area including the famous [Thermopylae](#) pass where heroic fighting took place between the Spartans and the Persians more than 2000 years ago. Fifth Brigade units, making the best possible use of trees for cover and camouflage, prepared positions for holding the coast road and the foothills south of [Lamia](#) and the Sperkhios River, which ran along the whole length of the front, cutting through a marshy plain.

Enemy planes arrived over the area about breakfast time on Sunday, 20 April, hunting and blasting away, coolly bombing and strafing the road and scouring the battalion area from as low as 200-300 feet. Formations of the [RAF](#) were said to be on their way, but none arrived. The brief appearance of four Hurricanes over the bay during the morning was most heartening, and later when one suddenly reappeared and shot down a Junkers into the sea, as one man the troops along the front, regardless of exposing themselves, rose from their trenches to cheer. It was hateful—humiliating—sticking to a hole in the ground, unable to hit back.⁷⁷ Around noon bombing caused the first battalion casualties since [Olympus](#). A few men had bunched together to draw their rations. One bomb collected a group of D Company, killing five and wounding six—more than half the casualties at [Olympus](#) in one blow.⁷⁸

'This was the first really low-level bombing I personally can recall,' writes one man. 'The fact I can best recall is being able actually to see the bombs drop away from the fuselage of the plane and come down in a long curve. One seemed to have plenty of time to watch and then duck below ground level in the slit trench.' But another man felt this way: 'Bombing is pretty uncomfortable. You can see the black dot (usually three of them) detach itself from the plane, turn slowly over and then

come apparently straight down to you. Its screech gets louder and louder. You bitterly regret that you grew so large and then there's a bang 50 or 60 yards away.'

[Thermopylae](#), for most of the battalion, meant taking up defensive positions near the Springs of [Thermopylae](#)—a spa with a hot sulphur stream—digging and wiring, working away until air sentries gave the alarm of enemy planes heading in, taking cover, changing position a little, watching artillery open up at the enemy feeling out across the plain, and diving to earth when shells came back. Lights blazing, German transport streamed down the hill behind [Lamia](#) all night (21-22 April). The battalion watched, started counting, and soon gave up, but no attack gathered after dawn. In mid-afternoon on 22 April Colonel Andrew, returning from a brigade conference, passed on the news that [Greece](#), with the Germans now bursting down below [Albania](#) on the opposite coast, had capitulated. All British forces were to be evacuated. Sixth Brigade would remain with the artillery at [Thermopylae](#), but 5 Brigade was to go at once. Immediately word went round to stop work on positions and rest as much as possible. All gear except the material a man could carry was to be buried or destroyed without tell-tale signs—fires, for instance, were prohibited. As if in farewell twelve Messerschmitts appeared, one by one breaking formation and diving at selected targets, spraying explosive, incendiary and tracer, then continuing the dive to almost tree-top level as they left. Ignoring air activity and orders to stay put, a [Royal Horse Artillery](#) officer, who had camped near C Company, slipped off in his truck and returned with it laden with tobacco and cigarettes from an abandoned [Naafi](#). The supplies from this well-remembered Englishman lasted some men well through Crete.

Under cover of darkness 5 Brigade moved back 17 miles to [Ay Konstandinos](#), on the coast. Major Hart commanded a rearguard of sorts for 5 Brigade. With Second-Lieutenants Leeks and [Carter](#)⁷⁹ and fifty-eight men, together with a party from 23 Battalion, Hart and his force stayed, the group from 22 Battalion spreading out and pretending it was a brigade, and the 23 Battalion party holding a bridge ahead on the main road from [Lamia](#). The carrier patrol group (nineteen altogether now, and under Captain Denis Anderson) patrolled dank river flats in front of the [Thermopylae-Molos](#) line, hearing in the night thousands of frogs, the weird cries from some night birds, and watching the twinkling lights of the German transport coming down to [Lamia](#). Except for a minor flurry round the bridge the night was peaceful. From dawn

until noon on 23 April enemy planes cruised above [Thermopylae](#). In mid-afternoon the party by the bridge dealt with about eighteen Germans on motor-cycles, and later fired on an attempt to cross the river towards dusk. Then the whole of Hart's force was pulled out, 'fortunately for us 12 hours before the battle commenced,' wrote Hart. 'I think [Brigadier Barrowclough ⁸⁰] felt he should do so as we were not part of his brigade, and he didn't want to see us scuppered protecting him after our own brigade was safely away.' Hart's infantry were taken by the carriers into [Molos](#).
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The carriers at [Molos](#) gave protection to a demolition party under Lt-Col G. H. Clifton, joined [Divisional Cavalry](#) near [Athens](#), filled up with petrol from the [Divisional Cavalry](#) dump, and then made south towards [Corinth](#) until one by one the motors failed. Picked up by truck, the carrier men missed the action the [Divisional Cavalry](#) fought against parachutists at [Corinth](#), and Anderson and his men, carried off with [6 Bde](#), were soon back in Egypt.

Meanwhile, all through this day (23 April), the bulk of the battalion rested under cover in the olive groves at Ay Konstandinos, secure from the searching [Luftwaffe](#). One party, boots off, slept soundly on a pine-covered slope until Tom [Barton](#) ⁸² bellowed, 'Get out! Get out!', starting a mad, cursing scramble over thorn and thistle. Nothing happened. The party limped back to find that a falling pine cone and not a grenade had struck Tom in his sleep. He had warned his comrades with what, happily, was not his last breath.

The battalion drew reserve rations and enough petrol for 150 miles from a neighbouring supply depot. Up with the rations came a dozen brown demijohns of rum. In the cold and wet of [Olympus](#) men had been told there was no rum in [Greece](#). Considering rum would increase the dangers of the night drive ahead, the CO ordered Tom Hawthorn into action. Swinging a mean pick, the Intelligence Officer despatched the lot.

The battalion pulled out at 8.30 p.m. on a nine-hour run over 140 miles to another olive grove near [Athens](#). Headlights were used most of the way. The troops passed through [Athens](#) in the early dawn and felt a useless pity for the abandoned Greeks. Their last day in [Greece](#) (24 April) went by under the olives. German pilots prowled overhead, but found nothing. Men, bitter and apprehensive, reduced their

packs to the bare minimum, ate heartily from reserve rations, stored away bully and biscuits in overcoat pockets, and passed the time sleeping or playing cards. Drachmae notes, now thought worthless, were gambled away recklessly or were used to light cigarettes and pipes. Trucks not needed in the shift to the beach in the night were ruined by draining away all oil and water, flinging grit into the petrol, and then running the engine hard until it seized, when picks added the finishing touches. Some of these trucks had not covered 2000 miles.

At 9 p.m. that night 22 Battalion set off on its last drive in [Greece](#). Twenty-one members would remain behind as prisoners, but exactly how and where these men were captured is not clear. ⁸³

The running rearguard of [Greece](#) – more running than rearguard – was over. Inside the trucks nobody talked much. The 20-mile run ended a few miles short of [Porto Rafti](#) ('D' Beach), head over heels into the final flurry of a bewildered campaign, 'a hellava schemozzle: liaison officers bustling, yelling, rushing round in circles, kicking out the headlights, demanding men sling away arms and equipment—orders and counter-orders from every Tom, Dick and Harry.' The battalion had taken great pains to keep all its rifles, essential equipment, mortars and precious radio sets, yet in this confusion of orders all the radios and some rifles were dumped. ⁸⁴ 'These b—s going over our trucks and equipment forced us out of our trucks too early and left us, tired enough as we were, to footslog several miles to the beach. But everything went perfectly down by the shore where the landing craft lay.'

Out in the darkness waited HMS [Glengyle](#) and [HMS Calcutta](#). 'One followed the queue down to a mess deck where the Navy was dishing out big mugs of Navy cocoa and fresh bread on a slab of bully beef, while a matelot flourishes a jar with a "Mustard, laddie?"

'Safe again in the hands of the Navy.'

¹ [Brig L. W. Andrew](#), VC, DSO, m.i.d.; [Wellington](#); born Ashhurst, 23 Mar 1897; Regular soldier; Wellington Regt 1915-19; CO 22 Bn Jan 1940-Feb 1942; comd [5 Bde](#) 27 Nov-6 Dec 1941; Area Commander, [Wellington](#), Nov 1943-Dec 1946; Commander, Central Military District, Apr 1948-Mar 1952.

² Yet this 5th Reinforcement troopship memory shows the link across the years: 'The OC Troops was Col. Turnbull, an old Dig whose pet aversion was long hair. After one particularly sarcastic lecture he rocked the whole show by referring to many as "Enaus"—talk about a flap—never heard that one before—much speculation until eventually a definition came up: "A woolly looking animal with long matted hair, probably lousy." The reaction was terrific and in a matter of hours every conceivable sort of hairdo appeared—bald types, top-knots, cowlicks and some furrowed like a ploughed field. Col. Turnbull was OK though, and I well remember on disembarkation at [Tewfik](#), as he was standing watching us pull away in the barges a wag sang out: "Hooray, Enau." The old boy lifted a hand and his emotion was evident to all and had a sobering effect—his own memories probably of similar circumstances 27 years before.'

³ [Pte I. S. G. Holms](#); born [Featherston](#), 27 Aug 1913; nurseryman; killed in action 27 Oct 1940.

⁴ [Lt-Col J. T. Russell](#), DSO, m.i.d.; born [Hastings](#), 11 Nov 1904; farmer; 2 i/c Div Cav 1941; CO 22 Bn 7 Feb-6 Sep 1942; wounded May 1941; killed in action 6 Sep 1942.

⁵ Out of a battalion numbering about 32 officers and 740 men, only about 350, or less than half, actually went forward with rifle and bayonet, automatic weapons, radio set, and first-aid equipment.

⁶ [Lt-Col R. R. T. Young](#), DSO; [Richmond](#), England; born [Wellington](#), 25 Jun 1902; oil company executive; CO [School of Instruction](#) Feb-Apr 1943; CO [28 \(Maori\) Bn](#) Dec 1943-Jul 1944, Aug-Nov 1944; wounded 26 Dec 1943.

⁷ [Maj C. N. Armstrong](#), MC and bar, ED; [Wanganui](#); born [Wanganui](#), 12 Sep 1910; barrister and solicitor; p.w. 27 Nov 1941; escaped (from [Poland](#)) Oct 1943; 2 i/c 22 Bn Nov 1944-Jun 1945.

⁸ [Lt-Col A. W. F. O'Reilly](#), MC, m.i.d.; [Wellington](#); born [Dunedin](#), 24 Apr 1906; schoolteacher; CO 22 Bn 22 Nov 1944-24 Mar 1945; twice wounded.

⁹ [Capt E. B. Paterson](#), MC; [Howick](#), [Auckland](#); born [Edinburgh](#), 3 Jun 1911;

company managing director; wounded 8 Aug 1944.

¹⁰ 'And not without reason,' writes Colonel O'Reilly, 'for when the battle's joined in an infantry attack, things are really over to the platoon. Time and again Company Headquarters lost touch, but in the morning following the attack, the platoons were on their objective.'

¹¹ Lt-Col H. V. Donald, DSO, MC, m.i.d., Legion of Merit (US); Masterton; born Masterton, 20 Mar 1917; company director; CO 22 Bn May-Nov 1944, Mar-Aug 1945; four times wounded.

¹² L-Cpl E. S. Cameron; Wanganui; born Scotland, 28 Dec 1908; clerk.

¹³ The officers when the battalion embarked were: CO: Lt-Col L. W. Andrew; 2 i/c: Maj G. J. McNaught; Adjut: Capt P. G. Monk; IO: Lt W. W. Mason; MO: Lt W. M. Manchester; QM: Lt T. Thornton; Padre: Rev. W. E. W. Hurst; RSM: WO I S. A. R. Purnell; HQ Coy: Capt E. F. Laws, Lts G. G. Beaven, E. J. McAra, D. F. Anderson, M. G. Wadey, H. R. Harris, 2 Lt L. Leeks. A Coy: Capts J. W. Bain, J. Moore, Lts W. G. Slade, R. B. Fell, G. C. D. Laurence. B Coy: Capts S. Hanton, T. C. Campbell, Lt S. H. Johnson, 2 Lts C. N. Armstrong, T. G. N. Carter. C. Coy: Maj J. Leggat, Capt W. Bourke, Lt K. R. S. Crarer, 2 Lts H. V. Donald, E. E. Tyrell. D Coy: Maj J. G. C. Leach, Capt I. A. Hart, Lts W. G. Lovie, L. B. Clapham, 2 Lt P. R. Hockley. Reinfs: Lts E. T. Pleasants, E. H. Simpson, 2 Lts B. V. Davison, F. G. Oldham, C. I. C. Scollay, J. L. MacDuff, T. R. Hawthorn.

¹⁴ Capt J. D. W. Ormond, BEM, m.i.d.; Waipukurau; born NZ 8 Sep 1905; farmer; wounded 20 Apr 1941.

¹⁵ Pte N. S. Traynor; born NZ 13 Apr 1913; electrician; accidentally killed 28 May 1940.

¹⁶ Maj F. G. Oldham; born NZ 6 Nov 1912; bank clerk; wounded 24 Oct 1942; killed in action 30 Nov 1943.

¹⁷ Brig J. Hargest, CBE, DSO and bar, MC, m.i.d.; born Gore, 4 Sep 1891; farmer; Member of Parliament 1931-44; Otago Mtd Rifles 1914-20 (CO 2 Bn

Otago Regt); comd 5 Bde May 1940-Nov 1941; p.w. 27 Nov 1941; escaped Italy, Mar 1943; killed in action, France, 12 Aug 1944.

¹⁸ Maj L. B. Clapham; Opunake; born Tokomaru, 10 Jul 1917; motor mechanic; wounded 20 May 1941.

¹⁹ Maj D. F. Anderson; Wairoa; born Ashburton, 19 Mar 1911; stock agent; wounded 24 Oct 1942.

²⁰ Maj I. A. Hart, m.i.d.; born NZ 24 Oct 1904; barrister and solicitor; died of wounds 2 Nov 1942.

²¹ Capt M. G. Wadey; Wanganui; born Wanganui, 3 Apr 1913; foreman plumber; wounded and p.w. 23 May 1941.

²² Maj G. G. Beaven; Auckland; born Palmerston North, 12 Apr 1910; clerk, NZR; wounded 22 May 1941.

²³ Maj S. Hanton, ED; Wanganui; born Forfar, Scotland, 6 Aug 1908; printer; p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

²⁴ Maj E. F. Laws, ED; Wanganui; born Napier, 9 May 1904; accountant.

²⁵ Col T. C. Campbell, CBE, DSO, MC, m.i.d.; Waiouru; born Colombo, 20 Dec 1911; farm appraiser; CO 22 Bn 6 Sep 1942-18 Apr 1944; comd 4 Armd Bde Jan-Dec 1945; Commander of Army Schools, 1951-53; Commander, Fiji Military Forces, 1953-56; Commandant, Waiouru Military Camp, Dec 1956-.

²⁶ Lt E. J. McAra; born Dunedin, 5 Apr 1906; commercial artist; killed in action 20 May 1941.

²⁷ Maj L. Leeks; Melbourne; born Wanganui, 22 Nov 1914; insurance clerk; twice wounded.

²⁸ Very Rev. W. E. W. Hurst, m.i.d.; Dean of Dunedin; born Moira, Northern

Ireland, 17 May 1912; p.w. 24 May 1941.

²⁹ This day Capt Monk became 2 i/c B Coy, 2 Lt MacDuff replacing him as Adjutant; Capt Campbell (2 i/c B Coy) took over D Coy; Maj J. Bain (D Coy) had been evacuated sick.

³⁰ Pte T. C. Weir; Otorohanga; born Taumarunui, 16 Sep 1908; labourer; wounded and p.w. 16 Apr 1941.

³¹ When this had been done, according to army regulations an acquittance roll had to be made out for the muleteers. 'There's nothing funny about trying to make an alphabetical roll of scared mule-drivers when you don't know their language,' recalls K. R. S. Crarer. 'The roll never got more than half done.'

³² Pte J. R. C. Hargreaves; Te Whaiti; born Gisborne, 12 Oct 1912; millhand; wounded Nov 1941.

³³ WO I D. G. Dillon; Patangata, Hawke's Bay; born NZ 12 Nov 1911; labourer; wounded 15 Apr 1941.

³⁴ Pte S. A. Wright; Hamilton; born Auckland, 16 Mar 1918; linesman; three times wounded.

³⁵ 2 Lt T. G. Fowler, MM, m.i.d.; Cambridge; born Kapuni, Taranaki, 16 Oct 1909; storeman.

³⁶ Sgt T. Logie; born Scotland, 24 Jun 1905; butcher; killed in action 16 Apr 1941.

³⁷ Pte E. Lawless; Wellington; born England, 7 Aug 1914; seaman; p.w. 1 Jun 1941.

³⁸ WO II H. T. Fraser; Lower Hutt; born Wellington, 19 Feb 1902; motor driver and salesman.

³⁹ Pte J. Tregea; Christchurch; born NZ 29 Nov 1914; moulder; wounded 16 Apr 1941.

⁴⁰ Maj L. H. V. Longmore; Christchurch; born Wellington, 19 Nov 1909; medical practitioner; RMO 22 Bn Dec 1940-May 1941; p.w. 21 May 1941; repatriated Nov 1943.

⁴¹ Sgt J. Drake; Wellington; born Wellington, 26 Nov 1915; dairy inspector; p.w. 21 May 1941.

⁴² Lt G. Katene, MM; born Porirua, 27 Sep 1915; labourer; killed in action 7 Dec 1943.

⁴³ Sgt A. W. Andrews; Napier; born Hokitika, 4 Dec 1910; contractor.

⁴⁴ Pte H. H. Burgess; born NZ 21 Sep 1909; farm manager; killed in action 16 Apr 1941.

⁴⁵ Pte A. C. Murray; Feilding; born NZ 21 Feb 1913; plasterer's labourer; wounded 16 Apr 1941.

⁴⁶ Pte J. R. Tustin; born Raetihi, 17 Nov 1912; shepherd; killed in action 16 Apr 1941.

⁴⁷ Pte G. H. Peacock; born Taihape, 24 Jan 1902; labourer; died of wounds 16 Apr 1941.

⁴⁸ Lt-Col K. W. Fraser, OBE, ED, m.i.d.; Eastbourne; born Scotland, 1 Nov 1905; asst advertising manager; CO 5 Fd Regt 1940-41; p.w. 27 Nov 1941.

⁴⁹ Cpl S. W. Whibley; Upper Aramoho, Wanganui; born Wanganui, 3 Nov 1914; labourer.

⁵⁰ Second-Lieutenant Armstrong received the MC, his citation reading: 'His

platoon was placed in the path of the enemy's advance and successfully resisted [on 15-16 April] the combined efforts of motor cyclists, AFV's and infantry to penetrate his position. It was largely due to the example of 2 Lt. Armstrong that the action was successfully fought.' B Company had suffered 13 of the battalion's 19 casualties at [Olympus](#).

⁵¹ Pte J. O'Brien; born [Maketu](#), 27 Jul 1913; labourer; killed in action 16 Apr 1941.

⁵² Pte [D. Wilson](#); born [Petone](#), 4 Jun 1904; assembler; killed in action 16 Apr 1941.

⁵³ Capt J. Mahar, m.i.d.; born NZ 31 Oct 1913; contractor; wounded 16 Apr 1941.

⁵⁴ Pte [C. J. Harnish](#); [New Plymouth](#); born NZ 1 Oct 1916; lorry driver; wounded 16 Apr 1941.

⁵⁵ Pte [C. S. Lovett](#); born NZ 8 Dec 1899; stoker; wounded 16 Apr 1941; p.w. 28 Jun 1942; died of sickness while p.w. 12 Feb 1945.

⁵⁶ Sgt [J. M. Hagen](#); born NZ 14 Nov 1910; labourer.

⁵⁷ Pte [P. P. Donoghue](#); born [Petone](#), 7 Apr 1916; clerk; wounded 15 Jul 1942.

⁵⁸ L-Cpl [B. M. Wicksteed](#); [New Plymouth](#); born [Wanganui](#), 22 Mar 1918; clerk; wounded 29 Aug 1942.

⁵⁹ Pte [R. A. Christiansen](#); born NZ 18 Apr 1918; railway fireman; wounded 16 Apr 1941.

⁶⁰ Pte [D. J. Meek](#); [Stratford](#); born [Scotland](#), 20 Aug 1918; foundry labourer; wounded 16 Apr 1941.

⁶¹ Sgt A. G. Ford; Gisborne; born Auckland, 4 May 1917; carpenter; twice wounded; p.w. 27 Apr 1941; repatriated May 1944.

⁶² Pte R. Norris; born NZ 6 Mar 1909; tinsmith; p.w. 16 Apr 1941.

⁶³ Pte A. H. Peterson; born NZ 16 Oct 1918; painter; p.w. 16 Apr 1941; killed while p.w. 3 Dec 1942.

⁶⁴ A. G. Lambert recalls: 'Old Bill Norm had the old anti-tank rifle, damn heavy to carry. To dismantle it he threw the bolt away and carried the darn rifle for miles before he threw it away. His language was rather choice when one of the boys mentioned the fact he could have swapped loads with the same effect.' A wounded Bren-gunner, D. J. Meek, leg smashed, was accidentally left behind: 'the worst half hour I've spent in my life as I thought the Jerries wouldn't worry about one wounded prisoner, and I thought they would torture me or something like that. I sure was glad to see four chaps return for me.'

⁶⁵ Pte G. W. A. Harrison; born NZ 18 Apr 1911; motor assembler; wounded 16 Apr 1941.

⁶⁶ Sgt C. Flashoff; born London, 3 Jul 1902; depot storekeeper; wounded and p.w. May 1941.

⁶⁷ Col J. L. MacDuff, MC, m.i.d.; Nairobi; born NZ 11 Dec 1905; barrister and solicitor; CO 27 (MG) Bn Sep 1943-Feb 1944; 25 Bn Feb-Jun 1944; Adv Base 2 NZEF Jun-Jul 1944; Supreme Court judge, Kenya.

⁶⁸ One party, told to get into the first empty truck reached, struggled on in the downpour until an empty truck loomed up on the side of the road—a civilian truck, obviously commandeered. Thankfully the party clambered in and waited for the convoy to move off. Some slept, others waited anxiously. Eventually Lieutenant Clapham (transport officer) and Sergeant Bob Smith appeared on motor-cycles and told them all transport had gone. The red-faced soldiers found they had parked in a useless old civilian truck jacked up on blocks of wood and without wheels.

⁶⁹ 'We were sited in defensive positions before dawn and told to dig in on the barren rocky hillside,' writes a lieutenant. 'This we were too exhausted to do, and all except the sentries lay down and slept on the sodden ground with no covering except their greatcoats. I can remember thinking that the weakest of us might easily die of exposure that night, but I was gratified when each one responded to a shake and made short work of a very welcome mess-tin of bully stew.'

⁷⁰ Pte C. J. Hilder; Wellington; born Wellington, 10 Sep 1910; machinist; wounded and p.w. 29 Apr 1941.

⁷¹ WO I A. H. M. De Lisle; Te Whaiti; born Wellington, 14 Aug 1904; company director.

⁷² Capt A. A. Cleghorn; Wellington; born Morrinsville, 11 Mar 1915; insurance clerk.

⁷³ This road, Larisa- Lamia, had been reserved exclusively for Australian traffic. New Zealanders were switched on to it as an emergency measure, and here and there were roundly abused for trespassing.

⁷⁴ Brig R. A. Row, DSO and bar, m.i.d., Legion of Merit (US); Upper Hutt; born Christchurch, 30 Jul 1888; Regular soldier; 1 NZEF 1914-19 (CO 3 (Res) Bn); comd 8 Bde, 3 NZ Div, Mar 1942-Dec 1943.

⁷⁵ Lt-Col J. Leggat, ED; Christchurch; born Glasgow, 19 Dec 1900; school-teacher; NZLO GHQ MEF 1941-42; GSO I Army HQ (NZ) 1942-43; headmaster, Christchurch Boys' High School.

⁷⁶ Capt T. R. Hawthorn; Auckland; born NZ 24 Mar 1914; school-teacher; wounded 20 May 1941; p.w 22 Jul 1942.

⁷⁷ Soldiers, calling the RAF 'Rare as Fairies' and much worse, spoke bitterly about the total lack of air cover in the move to the Thermopylae line: the Air Force tartly replied that soldiers should have 'levelled their ignorant criticism' at their own commanders who choked the roads with endless columns of MT and should have withdrawn 'exclusively by night'.

⁷⁸ Casualties in the midday bombing were: Killed: 2 Lt G. D. McGlashan, Sgt J. S. H. Dring, Cpls A. E. O'Neill and G. M. Sandiford, and Pte L. B. Bosworth. Wounded: 2 Lt J. D. W. Ormond, L-Cpl A. T. Blakeley, and Ptes D. L. George, A. G. L. Lambert, all of D Coy. Pte J. Cockroft (of Bn HQ and attached to the company) was fatally wounded. 2 Lt D. H. Nancarrow (C Coy) was wounded by a bomb splinter.

⁷⁹ Capt T. G. N. Carter; Lower Hutt; born Warkworth, 25 Jun 1916; law clerk; p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

⁸⁰ Maj-Gen Rt. Hon. Sir Harold Barrowclough, KCMG, CB, DSO and bar, MC, ED, m.i.d., MC (Gk), Legion of Merit (US), Croix de Guerre; Wellington; born Masterton, 23 Jun 1894; barrister and solicitor; NZ Rifle Bde 1915-19 (CO 4 Bn); comd 7 NZ Inf Bde in UK, 1940; 6 Bde May 1940-Feb 1942; GOC 2 NZEF in Pacific and GOC 3 NZ Div, Aug 1942-Oct 1944; Chief Justice of New Zealand.

⁸¹ At Molos the carriers and the infantry in Hart's party split up. The infantry from now on stayed with or near 6 Bde's headquarters until evacuation south of Corinth Canal. Although once taking up an anti-parachute role very briefly, they did not go into action; they reached Port Said on 2 May in the Comliebank and Thurland Castle.

⁸² L-Cpl J. L. T. Barton; Masterton; born NZ 25 Jun 1911; shepherd; p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

⁸³ 22 Bn's casualties in Greece were:

Killed in action or died of wounds	12
Wounded	19
Wounded and prisoners of war	4
Prisoners of war	17
	52

⁸⁴ Some embarkation officers had taken far too literally an order from General Wavell that in quitting Greece men were to take precedence over arms. Those radio sets, wantonly dumped on Greece's shores, might have changed the story of Crete.

22 BATTALION

CHAPTER 2 – MALEME, CRETE

CHAPTER 2

Maleme, Crete

Of all the days of the war one stands alone in the minds of the battalion. The day is 20 May at [Maleme](#), Crete.

Twenty-second Battalion's area had the same kind of features as the rest of the coastal strip round [Canea](#), which is near the north-west corner of Crete. Foothills of the main mountain range came down towards the sea, and the battalion position included two spurs running north and south. ' [Crete](#) was a wonderful place, almost every inch cultivated with grapes, olive groves, orange groves, and grain,' wrote Sergeant-Major [Pender](#) ¹ 'To get on the high ground and see the various squares of different-coloured cultivation was a wonderful sight.' In Captain Thornton's ² view: 'The lack of a thousand-and-one Army forms was a Godsend.'

On the north the battalion's boundary was the sea with a sand and pebble beach unaffected by tides. Between this and the foothills was the airfield. [Crete](#) had no good airfields. To the east of [Maleme](#) airfield lay the hamlet of [Pirgos](#) (often called, mistakenly, [Maleme](#)). [Pirgos](#), marking the battalion's eastern boundary, was typically Greek. The dome of the Orthodox Church rose above the houses, which were flat-roofed and crowded. The streets were narrow, dirty, smelly. The western boundary, the Tavronitis River, had a gravel and boulder bed 600 to 800 yards wide. The 'river' itself was only a shallow creek, like some of the smaller snow-fed rivers of [Canterbury](#). The area west of the river was not defended ³ Had the Maori Battalion been there instead of in a relatively quiet area five miles to the east, [Crete](#) might not have fallen.

Much of the flat land in the battalion's area was covered



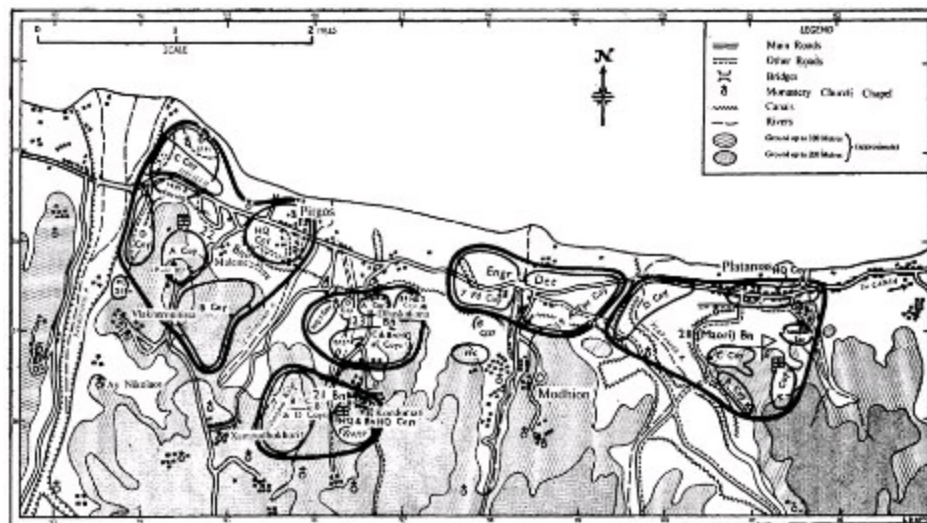
CRETE

with groves of olive trees sixteen to eighteen feet high. The groves gave almost complete (though rather obvious) cover from the air. The hillsides were terraced with stone banks and planted with grape-vines, the chunky, black trunks two to three feet high and in full leaf. These vines were terrors for tripping up a man in a hurry. The broken land, the olive groves and the vineyards made it impossible to find a spot which gave a good view of the whole battalion area. This prevented development of supporting fire. To make matters worse small ravines, ten to forty feet deep, fanned out from the bottom of the eastern spur to the coast.

Mention should be made of the [Fleet Air Arm](#) men at [Maleme](#), for criticism still comes from several quarters of 'leaderless and demoralised mobs' of airmen milling most disconcertingly about the battalion's area when battle was joined, for indeed they were a hindrance from the infantryman's viewpoint.

In February 1941 aircraft from the [Illustrious](#) (heavily divebombed west of [Malta](#) the month before) were transferred to [Maleme](#), reinforced by fighters from [Egypt](#), moved to southern [Greece](#), and in five weeks sank five Italian ships, damaged five more, and attacked [Brindisi](#). The squadron returned to [Maleme](#), now under [RAF](#) command (it should be noted), the [Swordfish](#) and [Blenheims](#) returned to [Egypt](#), and the [Fleet Air Arm](#) and [RAF](#) pilots took turns in flying the handful of [Hurricanes](#), [Fulmars](#) and [Gladiators](#). On 17 May only one plane, a [Hurricane](#), was airworthy;⁴ it was piloted by Lieutenant A. R. Ramsay, [RNVR](#), who had shot down two enemy aircraft the day before. This steadfast officer's testimony will be given later.

The battalion, a little over 600 strong after the campaign in Greece, marched into the Maleme area at the end of April, and 'from about 8 May until 20 May he [German aircraft] gave us a shake-up about every couple of hours,' noted Major Jim Leggat. 'You feel terribly naked swimming in the sea if a plane



FIFTH BRIGADE, MALEME, 20 MAY 1941
fifth brigade, maleme, 20 may 1941

is machine-gunning.' At dawn and dusk everyone stood-to: from 5.30 a.m. to 7 a.m. and from 8.15 p.m. to 9 p.m.

A strong attack on Crete was expected from sea and air. On 17 May troops heard from Intelligence 'that Jerry would attack on that day, the 17th, or the 19th and would bring 15,000 troops by parachute and 20,000 by sea.' Fifth Brigade, holding a position running west from Platanias to the Tavronitis River and extending up to two miles inland, was charged with 'a spirited defence...to counter attack and destroy immediately.' Altogether, representatives of fourteen formations and units⁵ were concerned in defending Maleme airfield. Commanders of the New Zealand units and detachments met in conference in the Maleme Court House on 11 May so that, in Brigadier Hargest's words, the defence would 'be properly co-ordinated and confusion avoided when an actual attack takes place.' The COs of 22 and 23 Battalions had already met three days before to arrange SOS signals 'should other means of communication fail.'

Twenty-second Battalion's task was to hold the airfield and its approaches. Fifth Brigade had laid down: 'In the event of a major landing being made on the drome,

support and reserve coys will be utilised for immediate counter-attack under cover of mortars and M.G. fire....If necessary support will be called for from [23 Bn](#) and should ... [communications fail] the call will be by "verey" signal (WHITE-GREEN-WHITE).'
Twenty-first and 23rd Battalions, in addition to holding their areas, were to be prepared for counter-attack on the airfield. These two units were within about one and a half miles, south-east and east, of Headquarters 22 Battalion. Twenty-eight (Maori) Battalion, as well as holding its area round [Platanias](#), was 'to be available for counter attack'. The order was that 22 Battalion's position would be defended at all costs: obviously no plan of withdrawal was considered.

The battalion's positions looked on the map roughly like the mark of a deformed left foot four and a half miles round, a considerable distance, and enclosing an area hopelessly large for all-round defence by twenty officers and 592 other ranks. About thirty all ranks had been evacuated sick just before the invasion. Headquarters Company, ⁶ turned into a rifle company, was in and around [Pirgos](#) village; a platoon was away guarding the Air Ministry Experimental Station (a radar station). C Company was firmly planted about the airfield. D Company covered a bridge by the airfield and extended half a mile southwards along the east bank of the Tavronitis River (the western bank was not defended). A Company held high ground overlooking the riverbed and airfield; this high ground included a 300-foot hill called Point 107, and by this point was Battalion Headquarters. B Company was holding a ridge south-east of Point 107. The battalion, therefore, held and encircled the airfield and the vitally important Point 107. Telephones connected each company headquarters to Battalion Headquarters, but all lines were cut and useless when the blitz ended. An untrustworthy radio linked Battalion Headquarters with 5 Brigade Headquarters, four miles away to the east.

A brief glimpse at the enemy is necessary. Credit for the idea of invading [Crete](#) by air is claimed by General Kurt Student. ⁷ The operation (code-named MERCURY) was commanded by Colonel-General Alexander Löhr. Despite close air reconnaissance and some espionage, the Germans did not locate the infantry positions accurately (our camouflage precautions had not been in vain), although their estimate of ten days for clearing [Crete](#) ⁸ was only four days short. On the other hand, although they had planned to take all four main centres on the first day, none except [Maleme](#) was captured within a week or ten days. Organisational difficulties

postponed invasion from 15 May to the 20th. Some 22,000 men were chosen for the whole operation, including mountain troops who could not be landed unless an airfield were captured or the sea route secured. On invasion day the four spearheads (about 10,000 men) would land from the air in distinct groups spaced along the northern coast of Crete. Nearly one-third of them would descend in the [Maleme](#) sector defended by 5 Brigade, where 22 Battalion, holding an area three times larger than that of 21 or 23 Battalion, would meet the brunt of the attack later in the day. (More paratroops would actually land in 23 Battalion's area; 22 Battalion would receive not only paratroops but almost all the glider troops, and would later have to withstand the pressure of two whole paratroop battalions which had landed and assembled out of reach on the undefended ground to the west.) Winning an airfield immediately was vital: only then could reinforcements arrive. The Germans clearly realised that, with no suitable ships and without control of the seas, the capture of an airfield was absolutely essential to success in Crete.

On invasion day the [Assault Regiment](#),⁹ the élite of the invasion force, descended on [Maleme](#). First came the gliders, probably forty of them, carrying about 400 men altogether (excluding the pilots). The glider troops, about to suffer 75 per cent casualties, were superbly equipped—whereas 15 Platoon, awaiting assault on the most westerly tip of the highly prized airfield, had grenades of jam tins filled with concrete and plugs of gelignite with fuses.

The [Assault Regiment](#), Student's pride and joy, was to take the airfield and Point 107. A detachment from III Battalion plus some of its Regimental Headquarters, which grated down in belly landings just south of the Tavronitis bridge, was raked and cut with heavy fire (from D Company), but took the bridge. The detachment's commander, Major Braun, was among those killed. A second company of the [Assault Regiment](#) landed its gliders at the mouth of the Tavronitis River and made towards the airfield, but was halted and held (by C Company), and its commander, Lieutenant Plessen, also met his death. The third party of gliders (a battalion headquarters and a company) came slanting down along the south-east and south-west slopes of Point 107, to be dealt with effectively by Headquarters Company and B and D Companies, and again the commander, Major Koch, was killed.

Soon after the gliders descended, in came the regiment's paratroops, about a dozen men spewing out of each fat Junkers 52 at heights of 300 to 600 feet, some

firing as they descended, 'indiscriminately certainly, but keeping our heads down.' Glider crews could rally quickly and fight as a team, but paratroops, scattered as they were, took longer to group together. Three battalions of paratroops came in over [Maleme](#). Two of these battalions landed in comparative safety in undefended land west of the Tavronitis River along the coast road leading west from the bridge and out of 22 Battalion's reach.¹⁰ Here was the generous reserve of strength for continuing the assault on the airfield. The third battalion of paratroops, descending all unaware of its grisly doom west of [Pirgos](#) village and fairly close to the coast, was cut to mincemeat by 21, 22, and 23 Battalions and an engineer detachment—two-thirds slaughtered with all their officers.

The commander of the [Assault Regiment](#), General Meindl, soon to be severely wounded by 22 Battalion this day, pressed all available men into two assaults, one by the bridge and the other a right hook which crossed the river south of 22 Battalion and aimed north to Point 107. This two-pronged attack led to the crucial fighting of the day.

Twenty-second Battalion war diary: '[Maleme](#). 20th May. Usual Mediterranean summer day. Cloudless sky, no wind, extreme visibility: e.g., details on mountains 20 miles to the south-east easily discernible.'

The daily hate followed the dawn. For days the bombing had been increasing steadily. Flying low, fighters and bombers raked vineyards and olive groves. No 22 Battalion men were injured. The planes turned to the sea and the men prepared for breakfast, but again the air-raid siren sounded from the mysterious Air Ministry Experimental Station tucked away up in the hills. The time was now nearly eight o'clock. Cursing men, still hungry, had just taken cover in trench and under trees when twenty-four heavy bombers appeared, the first of an endless fleet, wave upon wave, bombing, strafing, diving. The approach of the fleet was first felt through the ground rather than noticed from the sky, one man remembers. The whole of 5 Brigade's area received an unprecedented rain of bombs, particularly 22 Battalion's area, with an estimated 3000 bombs falling round the airfield. Dust and smoke billowed up; the earth shook with explosions; trees splintered; slit trenches caved in (in one substantial five-man trench only Joe Chittenden¹¹ survived); men, dazed and numb with the fury of the assault, bled from ears and mouths. 'The silence after the

[blitz],’ writes Sergeant [Sargeson](#),¹² ‘was eerie, acrid and ominous.’ Says Sergeant [Twigg](#)¹³ of the intelligence section: ‘The immediate countryside before densely covered by grape vines and olive trees was bare of any foliage when the bombing attack ceased and the ground was practically regularly covered by large and small bomb craters.’

A thick blanket of dust and smoke rising hundreds of feet blurred or blotted out many a man's view. Under cover of this the gliders and then the paratroops came in, and most of them were down by nine o'clock.

The majesty of the arrival of this armada and the descent certainly awed but definitely did not demoralise the New Zealanders. Action came as a relief—almost a grim joy—after cowering under cover for a fortnight of air raids, and the remark, ‘Just like the duckshooting season!’, was widespread at the time. Indeed the First World War was worlds away from this unique invasion, in which the enemy, the artillery, and the machine guns came from the sky, and a solid front no longer existed; each man was a front in himself, and the enemy could strike from in front, from both flanks, from behind, separately or simultaneously. In this new war the very moments were precious; in those first deadly, vulnerable ten minutes hundreds of paratroops were slain as they swayed and stumbled and groped and grouped over 5 Brigade's ground.

Captain Campbell (D Company): ‘My first thought was “This is an airborne landing”. I still have vivid recollections of the gliders coming down with their quiet swish, swish, dipping down and swishing in.’

Private [Fellows](#),¹⁴ (HQ Company): ‘The first thing that met my startled gaze when I looked out was the descending paratroopers. My throat seemed to get very dry all of a sudden and I longed for company.’

A lance-corporal parachutist from [Hamburg](#): ‘My parachute had scarcely opened when bullets began spitting past me from all directions. It had felt so splendid just before to jump in sunlight over such wonderful countryside, but my feelings suddenly changed. All I could do was to pull my head in and cover my face with my arms.’

Some gliders landed on the terraces stretching from 22 Battalion's headquarters

down to the beach north of [Pirgos](#); some landed in the valley east of Battalion Headquarters; most landed in the gravel bed of the Tavronitis River, above and below the bridge. No aircraft landed on the airfield on 20 May, but a few troop-carriers landed on the beach late in the day.

The Luftwaffe crossed the coast a mile or more west of the airfield—out of effective Bofors range—and flew inland at about 500 feet. The two 3-inch anti-aircraft guns on Point 107 could not tackle effectively such low-flying aircraft. The planes turned towards [Maleme](#) in a broad swing, skimming low over A and B Companies. The slow troop-carriers do not seem to have been fired at by all of the ten Bofors round the airfield, an angry point with the infantry at the time and later.

15

Glider and parachute troops numbering probably 500 (perhaps 600) landed in 22 Battalion's area, and at once the day's battle splintered into a confused series of individual actions by the companies, which are best followed by attempting to trace each company's experiences in turn. One enemy group landed by [Pirgos](#) village itself in Headquarters Company's area.

Headquarters Company (Lieutenant Beaven, three officers and about sixty men, mostly administrative staff not previously riflemen) was completely isolated all day from Battalion Headquarters. It was at once cut off when several gliders silently swam down between it and Battalion Headquarters, followed by perhaps ten, perhaps twenty, plane-loads of parachutists plus a small field gun. A second wave of parachutists fell about mid-morning. The invaders suffered severe losses, but the well-equipped survivors rallied to form awkward strongpoints in grape-vines and trees. These strongpoints made movement very difficult indeed. Within an hour the company suffered its most severe loss of the day. [Sergeant-Major Matheson's](#) ¹⁶ platoon, out on a limb to the south, was cut off and overrun. Details are slender, but a survivor, Regimental Quartermaster-Sergeant [Woods](#), ¹⁷ describes the scene: 'Over comes the Hun with Stukas, Junkers and gliders, not mentioning the 109s. By the time the Stukas and 109s had left us the air round about seemed to be alive with Junkers, and believe me the birds that flew out of them were pretty thick. They looked impossible as the odds must have been easily 15 to 1.' Shooting was good until grenades got the front trenches, [Matheson](#) received his mortal wound, and the platoon position fell.

Private Cowling ¹⁸ tells of Matheson's stand. Just before the invasion broke, Matheson ordered Corporal Hall ¹⁹ and Cowling over to the company cookhouse on fatigue. They had covered about half the distance when 'we came across two signallers who said "The game is on you two, use that spare slit trench.'" From the slit trench, facing towards Matheson's men, Cowling saw 'quite a few paratroops in this area, they were all easy meat, those that came around.... the Transport Platoon were using machine guns. Boy, and weren't they using them too! We later found out they were enemy stuff they had conquered.' Matheson's men held their own with ease until the Germans got a good footing in an adjacent brick barn. Then the story changed abruptly. Fire and grenades from this commanding position brought the end. In their slit trench Hall and Cowling bagged several paratroops (one, caught in an olive tree, dangled helplessly but fatally only six inches from the earth), and at one stage Hall said: 'Hey, you're having all the fun, let's change ends for a while.' But after the capture of the barn snipers shot Hall through the right eye, and then Cowling was hit and fainted. He was picked up by Germans next day and, together with about a dozen other wounded, was taken to the battalion RAP, which had been captured by that time.

Even after taking Matheson's position, the enemy got no further towards Pirgos village; he was content to retain small patches among the olives and try to edge westwards along the coast to the focal point—the all-important airfield. Headquarters Company continued to hold Pirgos. Company Sergeant-Major Fraser was annoyed that anti-personnel mines covering approaches to the company area had not been primed so as to allow any relieving counter-attack complete freedom of movement. He and Lieutenant Clapham had hastened to the company's western defences to encourage men to leave trenches and fire at paratroops in the air. This encouragement was not needed by a section commanded by the First World War veteran, Jack Pender, an armourer sergeant attached to 22 Battalion. Pender, with his corporal, Hosking, ²⁰ had recently been mounting Browning machine guns out of aircraft in various other battalion positions. His section covered paratroops falling twenty-five yards along the front. Very few of them landed alive. But two automatic weapons, set up in a blind spot, gave trouble all day.

Satisfied that the company's western front was holding well, Lieutenant Clapham, this time accompanied by Sergeant Charlie Flashoff, next set off to the

east, to Corporal Moore's ²¹ section, on the right flank near the sea and forward of Company Headquarters. Clapham and Flashoff were wounded and incapacitated by grenades. Moore's post held out, and so did another strongpoint by the beach commanded by Corporal [Hosie](#). ²² Hosie's men had an anxious time when, about 4 p.m., a large party of Germans marched down by the beach towards them, 'but a three-inch mortar [actually a 75 millimetre French field gun of C Troop [27 Battery](#)] landed about six bombs right smack on top of them, and what was left took cover in a house on the beach.' The seaward posts kept survivors pinned down until dark.

Padre Hurst and a group of 'cooks and bottlewashers', manning a small defensive position and soon using up the few rounds of ammunition they possessed, were joined by Jack Pender, who ducked back to his armoury and returned with a bucket of bullets. 'They kept us going till we moved out. Also with his help we got a German field piece going and he cleaned up a machine gun nest in a cottage—that was our greatest triumph.' The field gun fired again at dusk.

The afternoon seems to have been relatively quiet for Headquarters Company. Twice during the day Private Fellows prowled around [Pirgos](#) quite freely, once filling his tin hat with eggs 'and dropped the lot when a Jerry fired, missing my ear by about 1 ½ inches', and once 'finding two of our privates in sole possession of the church, Arthur ("Wog") [Alexander](#) ²³ and Frank [Mence](#), ²⁴ who drank the holy water and complained about tadpoles.' After an anxious morning the company commander, Lieutenant Beaven, seems to have remained confident. Beaven, his telephone wires cut, his signallers prevented by fire at 10.30 a.m. from further attempts to contact Battalion Headquarters by visual methods, had been in touch but once with the outside world. A cool and resourceful runner, Frank [Wan](#) ²⁵ (his companion signaller, [Bloomfield](#), ²⁶ dead), ²⁷ had come from one and a half miles away to report that Wadey's platoon at the AMES was not in contact with enemy troops. That was all. Beaven sent runners to Battalion Headquarters and to B Company. None returned. The day dragged through in complete isolation. Three hours before sunset Beaven wrote this concise report and gave it to the indefatigable Wan, who was captured but hid and preserved the report in his boot until the war ended:

Paratroops landed East, South, and West of Coy area at approx 0745 hrs today. Strength estimated 250. On our NE front 2 enemy snipers left. Unfinished square red

roof house south of sig terminal housing enemy MG plus 2 snipers. We have a small field gun plus 12 rounds manned by Aussies. Mr. Clapham's two fwd and two back secs OK. No word of Matheson's pl except Cpl Hall and Cowling.

Troops in HQ area OK.

Mr Wadey reports all quiet. No observation of enemy paratroops who landed approx 5 mls south of his position.

Casualties: killed Bloomfield
wounded Lt Clapham, Sgt Flashoff, Cpl Hall, Pte Cowling, Brown. ²⁸

Attached plans taken off Jerry.

G. B eaven, Lt OC HQ Coy

1650 hrs

At dusk the enemy began collecting and calling the roll where Matheson's forward post had been. Forming a gun crew and manning the small field gun, Pender, Fraser and Hosking fired at point-blank range against the assembly point. 'That quietened them down quite a bit,' said Pender. They were as cheeky as hell, shouting out to each other and giving orders, but the field gun quietened them down except that orders turned to squeals and yells, which was very good.'

After dark a party of five went out to find that B Company had gone. Beaven checked for himself, found this true, but being reluctant to leave, held on until towards 2 a.m., when a party from 28 (Maori) Battalion passed through towards the airfield and returned in about half an hour. This sent Headquarters Company on the move too. In the night as the withdrawal began the captured German field gun got its own back with the last shot it would ever fire for 22 Battalion. Somebody stumbled against and fired the gun. The recoiling piece smashed into a man who cried: 'My bloody leg is gone!' Taking their four wounded with them (there were also three dead, apart from Matheson's platoon), Headquarters Company left Pirgos.

Kennedy ²⁹ and Wallace ³⁰ had some trouble in getting volunteers to help the wounded: 'however several Aussies, probably ack-ack gunners, did a grand job.' Charlie Flashoff, sorely wounded, lay on the stretcher; Barney Clapham, supported

with a comrade on either side, struggled along. Another wounded man was taken in pick-a-back relays. Unhappily, somewhere about dawn, they ran into German light automatic fire. Ordered by someone to leave stretcher cases, Kennedy and Wallace joined others in the party and headed towards 23 Battalion area. [Pirgos](#) was handed over to the enemy, 'why,' writes Private Fellows, 'I have never been able to find out. At no time during the night or day had [Pirgos](#) been occupied by the Jerries. A few had come through and a few stayed, but only the dead ones.'

C Company (Captain [Johnson](#) ³¹) had a strength of just over 100, including signallers and stretcher-bearers, seven Brens, six Browning machine guns 'borrowed' from unserviceable [RAF](#) planes, nine tommy guns, and no mortars. Thirteen Platoon (Sergeant [Crawford](#) ³²), verging on to the beach, covered the northern end of the airfield; 15 Platoon (Lieutenant [Sinclair](#) ³³), facing the riverbed and the bridge, held the western end and was to halt any attack coming across the almost dry riverbed; 14 Platoon (Lieutenant Donald) and Company Headquarters, by the southern end of the airfield, would hold any attack coming from inland. A counter-attack by 23 Battalion was expected. In C Company's area there was one serious weakness: a large number (about 370) of [Air Force](#), [Fleet Air Arm](#) and Naval men (MNBD0 ³⁴ gunners), despite (it should be remembered) repeated requests by Johnson and Andrew, did not come under 22 Battalion's command. They retained their independence almost to the point of absurdity; even the current password differed among the three groups. Furthermore, not one serviceable Allied aircraft now remained in Crete. Many a soldier still wonders why this unwieldy group was not briskly cleared out of the way and the airfield destroyed. ³⁵

All sections, amply stocked with ammunition, were well dug in in partly covered slit trenches, two or three men to each trench. Mines were laid, but on strict orders from Force Headquarters were never primed because they might have blown up friendly Greeks. There was another weakness: at the south-west corner of C Company's position, where this company ended and D Company began near the concrete and wood bridge crossing the Tavronitis River, the [RAF](#) had its tented camp. The camp and the large number of airmen about it made it impossible for 15 Platoon to tie up thoroughly with the northern platoon of D Company: 'one good defence line would have run straight through the officers' mess—unthinkable!' Straight through this weak spot the Germans came.

The breakfast-time bombing, raising a sudden, blinding dust-cloud round C Company's positions, killed five men and wounded one in 14 Platoon and Company Headquarters close by. The dust hid the arrival of the first gliders: Company Headquarters saw no gliders at all. When the air cleared, men looking east saw the blue-grey uniformed, swaying paratroops landing round [Pirgos](#) (Lieutenant Beaven's area), and plenty more were coming down to the west, over the riverbed, from about 800 yards south of 15 Platoon up to the river mouth and even, fatally, into the sea itself.

Almost simultaneously an attack began from the riverbed against the twenty-three men of 15 Platoon. Shingle banks running north and south gave good cover. These glider troops directly in front of the platoon developed increasingly heavy fire. But the platoon, stoutly resisting, held on, halting an attack after the Germans are said to have taken the anti-aircraft guns in front of the platoon. 'These guns lacked certain parts and did not fire a shot,' says Lieutenant Sinclair. ³⁶ 'The parts were to have arrived days before the battle. Crews didn't accept our suggestion to prepare positions near ours, and only two survived the blitz. These two joined Lance-Sergeant [Vallis](#) ³⁷ in his pit.' The sergeant accepted a helping hand with a Browning automatic salvaged from a plane and mounted on bits and pieces of aircraft. The sights were a conglomeration of soap, chewing gum and screws. With unlimited ammunition Vallis fired this gun until it was white hot—and then still kept on firing.

Next the Germans, having been checked on the front, swung slightly to attack on the northern end of 15 Platoon (Corporal Haycock's ³⁸ section), aiming towards the western section of 13 Platoon near the beach.

The one phone link between C Company and Battalion Headquarters was out—bombing had cut the telephone wires. Signals for assistance in an emergency had been discussed (15 Platoon once had considered hanging a white or coloured cloth on a tree, and other men in the battalion remember vague suggestions of waving copies of the Weekly News), but none of these rather futile arrangements was made final, and perhaps just as well.

So from now on messages had to be sent by runner. At 10 a.m. Captain Johnson, believing the enemy was boring through the north flank of 15 Platoon to 13 Platoon, unsuccessfully sought permission to counter-attack with the two I tanks,

which were dug in and camouflaged between 14 Platoon and Battalion Headquarters. These carefully hidden tanks, Colonel Andrew's trump card, were to be used only as a last resort. Unaided, therefore, the two northern platoons held this attack.

While the northern enemy party opened its at first unavailing attack against Corporal Haycock's area to the south, a far more formidable party, leaping and firing from behind one protecting pylon to the next, had crossed the riverbed and seized intact the concrete and wood bridge over the Tavronitis. The first crack in Maleme's defences was now being made. About 11 a.m. the enemy began his first attempt to drive a wedge between C and D Companies in a thrust on Battalion Headquarters. He was now in the vulnerable RAF camp, a cat among pigeons, and 15 Platoon, pinned to its positions, was now under fire from south, west and north. 'Yet,' says Sinclair, 'with plenty of good targets and an interesting attack, we were not unduly worried. We seemed to be holding our own, so we just hung on and hoped. New uninitiated troops do not know much fear.'

The German spearhead, planting parties by the camp to fire across the airfield towards 13 Platoon by the sea (a long way, but movement on the opposite side of the airfield was clearly visible), moved on towards Battalion Headquarters, on Point 107. In front of the enemy, making matters worse, went unarmed airmen, either demoralised and fleeing or being driven deliberately as a screen. As the Germans, with the airmen in front of them, neared Battalion Headquarters, Captain Johnson sent Lance-Sergeant Keith Ford³⁹ (14 Platoon) and his section across to help. Colonel Andrew sent them back with the words: 'You look after your own backyard—I'll look after mine.'

After returning to Captain Johnson, Sergeant Ford and two men were sent out once more, across the angry airfield to 13 Platoon. They used what cover they could find in approaching the eastern edge of the landing strip where it was narrowest, then 'ran like hell'. One man, Private Porter,⁴⁰ was lost on the way. Thirteen Platoon was to take a more active role by joining and supporting the hard-pressed 15 Platoon, still holding out in the middle section and at Platoon Headquarters. But the enemy (near the river mouth on the northern-most positions of 15 Platoon), firing heavily across the airfield towards the sea, made any such move impossible. Johnson could not check why no advance was succeeding. He could see fire from the

RAF camp area, but not that from the river mouth. By this time, noon, Lieutenant Sinclair (15 Platoon) had fainted through lack of blood, and his batman, Jim Farrington,⁴¹ had been shot through the head. Although hit through the neck, Sinclair had kept going for an hour, trying unsuccessfully with tracer and incendiary bullets to ignite a petrol dump alongside a stack of RAF bombs.

Near Sinclair a soldier had given his life in one of the most gallant acts in the history of the battalion. When a grenade landed in his trench, Lance-Corporal Mehaffey⁴² unhesitatingly flung his helmet over it and then jumped on it in an attempt to save the lives of his two comrades. Both of his feet were blown off and he died soon after. Mehaffey was recommended for a posthumous Victoria Cross. 'His behaviour and gallantry throughout the entire scrap until his final act of sacrifice was indeed of a high order,' wrote Captain Johnson.

Before continuing the company story, here is a fragment from 13 Platoon. Forbes-Faulkner⁴³ had the north-west section of 13 Platoon (that is, closest to 15 Platoon), with his headquarters in the small chapel. The field of fire was to cover a landing by sea. He writes: 'In checking with the Aussie Bofors crews, their password and ours was not the same, nor did either coincide with the Fleet Air Arm.... On the morning of the invasion the Aussie Bofors gun did not fire a shot, I don't know the reason why. We were a fair distance from most of the activity, and the first intimation that we had that they were close to us was when we saw a Hun hop into the Bofors pit and cover the gun with a Swastika flag. Joe Hamlin⁴⁴ shot him as he came out.' The westerly half of the section held their own at first; later in the day they were taken prisoner and marched off. The rest of the section held out in their pits, getting 'a few more as they moved towards the chapel, probably thinking it was defended, but from our position we nicely enfiladed them at about 25 to 50 yards.'

About 2 p.m. a spirited lieutenant from an English light anti-aircraft battery led eight men (two 'bomb happy'), survivors from his troop of Bofors guns by the south-east edge of the airfield, into Company Headquarters. They volunteered to join C Company as riflemen and were armed. Captain Johnson carries on the story:

'At 3 p.m. [Johnson is two hours out: the attack began just after 5 p.m.] the long and eagerly awaited order to counter attack with support of the two tanks arrived from Battalion Headquarters. I had discussed with the tank troop commander

the day before just how we would work together. The troop commander, believing the Germans would have no anti-tank weapons capable of hurting a Matilda, feared nothing except enemy soldiers on top of his tanks. He asked that his tanks should be kept sprayed with small-arms fire. I asked how we on foot would communicate with the tank. He told me to press a bell at the back of the tank, and the tank commander would open the turret and talk. When the counter attack started, contact was attempted with the tank crews. Nobody answered the bell. [Throughout the entire war, no tank man ever seemed to answer the bell, and the exposed infantryman had to hammer vigorously on the tank with rifle, tommy gun, or metal helmet before the turret would open suspiciously.] Lieutenant Donald commanded the attackers on foot: 14 Platoon (about 12 below strength) was organised as two sections with a third section of gunner volunteers. The tanks left their concealed positions at 3.15 p.m. [5.15 p.m.] and moved west past Company Headquarters along the road towards the river in single file about 30 yards apart. The first tank proceeded up to the river, firing as it went, until it stopped in the riverbed.'

Sinclair, regaining consciousness for most of the afternoon, saw the tank 'go down under the big bridge and out a little further west where it came to a halt. The place was seething with enemy plainly visible in the long grass. They seemed uncertain what to do.'

Johnson continues: 'The tank went no further. Apparently the turret had jammed. The crew surrendered.' [This comment is based on a report given Johnson by Corporal 'Bob' [Smith](#),⁴⁵ who was subsequently a prisoner of war employed on the airfield before escaping to Egypt. Sinclair has another version: some sort of anti-tank rifle burst through to the engine, the crew at pistol point were forced to service the damaged part but instead ruined it permanently. 'From where I was,' Sinclair goes on, 'I thought this business with the tank and the men was futile. Of course I could see more perhaps of the opposition lying in wait.'

'The second tank turned about before reaching the bridge and came back past Company Headquarters on the [Maleme](#) road,' says Johnson. 'It had not fired a shot. Bellringing was unavailing. When the second tank turned 14 Platoon was under withering fire from the front and southern flank. Their position was hopeless. Those who were able to withdrew, using the lee side of the tank for shelter. Donald,

himself wounded, led only eight or nine men back, most of them wounded, from this brave but disastrous counter attack. The English officer (unfortunately I never learned his name) was killed in this attack after pleading with me to let him take part and lead a section.'

It was obvious now that the Germans were well consolidated—they did not waste time digging in, nor had they need to. Johnson sent a runner to Colonel Andrew with the disturbing news that the counter-attack had failed. Fifteen Platoon⁴⁶ and the western section of 13 Platoon seemed to have been overcome; 14 Platoon was practically finished, and the cooks, stretcher-bearers, and Company Headquarters staff alone could not hold the inland perimeter of the airfield for long. The company would probably hold out until dark, but reinforcements would be needed then. The CO replied in his last message to get through to Johnson on 20 May: Hold on at all costs.'

Speaking of his men, Johnson pays a tribute to Company Quartermaster-Sergeant [Vaughan](#),⁴⁷ who worked untiringly to supply food and water, and says: 'The surviving men were in excellent heart in spite of their losses. They had Not had enough. They were first rate in every particular way and were as aggressive as when action was first joined.' He also speaks movingly of the performance this day of all the men in his company, mainly from Hawke's Bay and [Gisborne](#): 'I'll never know men like them again.'

Late in the afternoon two Ju52s attempted to land on the airfield, but the mauled company was by no means carrion yet. All weapons opened up and the planes, spitting back small-arms fire, swung out to sea.

From after dark until midnight German patrols were active in the neighbourhood. In the night no C Company patrols could contact Battalion Headquarters. Its old area was now found to be occupied by Germans, a severe shock indeed. Simultaneously (and here is another instance where the fate of the airfield hung delicately in the balance), a company 114 strong from 28 (Maori) Battalion came confidently right to the eastern edge of the airfield and failed by a furlong or so to contact C Company. This would be bitter news to C Company men when they heard some days (or, in some cases, several years) later of the Maoris' thrust. The company now believes the Maoris came to within but 200 yards of

Company Headquarters and 14 Platoon, but halted by the knocked-out Bofors guns, and hearing only the shouts and trappings of noisy German patrols, concluded that the airfield had fallen and pulled back. The position of Company Headquarters and 14 Platoon was marked clearly on maps in the hands of other battalions and even as far back as Creforce Headquarters. Had the Maoris made contact, C Company is confident that with Maori reinforcements it would have held out all next day (21 May), still denying the airfield to the enemy, despite the certainty of heavy casualties. In that event, the story of [Maleme](#) would have changed with a vengeance.

For three hours after midnight patrols failed to find A, B and D Companies. A man conspicuous for his one-man patrol activities was Peter [Butler](#),⁴⁸ over from Headquarters Company; his explorations were of paramount importance and greatly helped the evacuation from the airfield. Reluctantly convinced that no support was coming, now that the battalion apparently was gone, and believing that his few remaining men on the inland side of the airfield could not withstand the inevitable dawn attack, Johnson, after conferring with Donald, decided to withdraw at 4.30 a.m. on 21 May. The lateness of the time is worth remembering: dawn was approaching. Johnson and his company had stuck to their posts nobly: their withdrawal from the fateful airfield was a bitter reward for their day of steadfast defiance. A runner went to tell 13 Platoon and returned saying the place was bare.⁴⁹ Every man removed his boots and hung them round his neck. Critically wounded men were made as comfortable as possible and left with food and water. The southern wire round 14 Platoon's defences was cut and, in single file, the wounded interspersed here and there, they set off. One man was practically carried, stooped over the back of a friend; another crawled all the way to 21 Battalion on his hands and knees. No stretchers were available; the party could not have carried them in any case, for they had to be prepared to fight their way out. They⁵⁰ went past the snoring Germans to the right, through the vineyards separating C Company from A Company, up to A Company's deserted headquarters, on to the road, up the hill past a grounded and ghostly glider until, after dawn, they reached a wood near 21 Battalion's positions. As they fell dead-tired under the trees, German planes began the morning hate.

D Company (Captain Campbell) had about 70 men, supported by two machine

guns of 27 Battalion on makeshift mountings, an uncertain number of Bren and tommy guns, and no mortars. The right boundary included the bridge over the Tavronitis River. Near here 18 Platoon (Sergeant Sargeson) was placed; 17 Platoon (Lieutenant Jim Craig⁵¹) was next, with 16 Platoon (Lance-Sergeant Freeman⁵²) further inland on higher ground on the company's left flank. The last two platoons looked down on to the riverbed and across to flat ground on the other side. About a quarter of a mile south was an outpost, a platoon from 21 Battalion.

As the platoons were out of touch with each other during the day, their experiences will be treated in turn.

The most northerly platoon in D Company, 18 Platoon, 30-odd strong in Greece and wasted to only twenty-two by 20 May, was extraordinarily thin on its vital ground. Throughout 20 May Sergeant Sargeson had no contact whatsoever with C Company (on the airfield, on the platoon's right flank) or even with his company's remaining two platoons.

On the point of breakfast-time 'it suddenly became expedient to keep your head down while our slit trenches concertina-ed in and out under the grandfather of all blitzes.' Hard on this, Sargeson recollects, 'the planes were literally wing-tip to wing-tip and all disgorging a skyful of multi-coloured parachutes. ... I remember being fascinated by the spectacle and remarking to Corporal Bob Boyd⁵³ who was beside me: "Look at that Bob, you'll never see another sight like that as long as you live"—and Bob's reply, eminently practical and much more useful to the cause as he picked up his rifle, "Yes, and if we don't shoot a few of the b—s we won't live too bloody long."'

Any scattered paratroops who had overshot their intended mark west of the river to land near 18 Platoon's positions were dealt with; but detachments from the great bulk of the invaders, landing well out of range, formed up as the day grew older and attacked in orthodox fashion as well-equipped infantry. Eighteen Platoon's two-man picket on the bridge (Smale⁵⁴ and Barrett⁵⁵), according to plan fell back towards a position near the RAF cookhouse to cover the bridge from there with a Boys anti-tank rifle which Arthur Holley⁵⁶ had devotedly lugged out of Greece. Barrett was killed and Smale soon wounded and later captured, and this tenuous grip on the highly important bridge was almost immediately lost. Corporal Neil

Wakelin's ⁵⁷ group obviously could do nothing about the bridge, under which, protected by pylons, an enemy machine gun and mortar (subsequently identified by a dud round) promptly took post and offensive action, pinning down and pounding the handful of defenders in the two nearest pits (Gillice's ⁵⁸ and Minton's ⁵⁹). Accordingly, by mid-morning, with the noise of battle unabated, Platoon Headquarters saw the first minute fall in the avalanche which, starting at [Maleme](#), would sweep the British from [Crete](#): through the dust some 250 yards away a few of these men were being shepherded through the wire and dazedly gesticulating back not to fire. One of these captives, Arthur Holley, writes of their severe bombing, himself being blown up with a grenade, and of casualties widespread among his companions.

Sargeson, checking up, found Wakelin 'all right, and agreed that his position and mine were now the front line. We knew nothing of C Company. Warfare continued spasmodically with a fair bit of activity directed at us from the M.G. and mortar behind the bridge. However, no direct frontal assault was made and we sat tight. If the enemy had realised how thin we were I don't doubt he would have dug us out but we parried shot for shot and I suppose he was guessing—or else was busy with C Company so that he could later outflank us.'

In the late afternoon, expecting an evening assault on what now was clearly the left flank of the whole airfield position, the sergeant went back ('encountering no one except carnage') to Company Headquarters, to be told by Captain Campbell that reinforcements were nil. The platoon had in fact received reinforcements at the beginning of the bombing: fourteen [RAF](#) ground crew, as arranged. These fourteen men, willing enough to be sure, were of no use, quite untrained as they were for any infantry task and hopelessly ill equipped, with no rifles and perhaps a few. 38 pistols. All clad in deceptive blue, they were hastily camouflaged by New Zealand greatcoats in the boiling sun. Nearly all were wearing light shoes which were soon in ribbons.

Returning to his platoon and learning that Wakelin's post had been in close action, Sargeson investigated with Corporal Boyd. Two survivors overlooked in their hole ([Nickson](#) ⁶⁰ and [Velvin](#) ⁶¹) told how, surprised from behind, Wakelin and [Doole](#) ⁶² had been led down to the canal and apparently tommy-gunned. When the four got back to Platoon Headquarters, darkness was approaching. Sargeson 'decided that I

could not prevent infiltration in the dark and that rightly or wrongly, I would not sit out on a spur but would withdraw my few men and consolidate with the rest of the company. And believe me we literally tiptoed away into the night and heard quite clearly the enemy moving in behind us (the Germans' habit of calling to one another in the dark advertised their presence).'

They 'were a little disturbed' to find the rest of the company had also withdrawn a short distance, and Captain Campbell and Company Sergeant-Major Fowler, with no information on the situation generally, were about to send a two-man patrol to Battalion Headquarters.

While watching the gliders come in 17 Platoon saw seventeen land along the dry riverbed of the Tavronitis. The first one grounded on the hillside between positions occupied by Captain Campbell and Lieutenant Craig. At least five of the occupants were killed or wounded, and Craig with his batman, Bert [Slade](#),⁶³ were returning to their position with two unwanted prisoners when 'a Jerry machine gun opened up and settled the problem for me, missing both Slade and myself but copping the two prisoners dead centre.' Craig and Slade felt sure they had cleaned up the occupants of the glider, but the balance (four) were glimpsed making for the ridge just above them and disappeared in the direction of the coast gun. The full crew of a glider, hidden by a slight promontory, advanced together towards Allan Dunn's⁶⁴ section, but the section posts of Tom [Walsh](#)⁶⁵ and [Kettle](#)⁶⁶ (the latter receiving 'marvellous assistance from a couple of [Air Force](#) chaps [who] were great shots and knew no fear') got the lot. 'Our firearms were most inadequate,' comments Kettle. 'My section was issued with a Bren gun a few days before the blitz, with instructions not to fire indiscriminately with it as it was necessary to conserve ammo. We obeyed this instruction most explicitly unfortunately, for it was discovered upon attempting our first burst at the enemy that the gun was without a firing pin.' They gathered enemy equipment, including a spandau, which gave good service until ammunition ran out at 12.30 p.m. Barney Wicksteed did good work as a sniper.

Tom Walsh's section, with one trench blown in by a bomb, was fully occupied in firing at its front, the riverbed, 'but,' says Danny [Gower](#),⁶⁷ 'Tom Walsh suddenly turned round with his tommygun and dropped three Germans suddenly behind us, the three enemy coming right out of the olive groves. We took turns then facing front and rear, but after a while there was not much doing.' Sergeant [Forbes-](#)

Faulkner⁶⁸ saw across the riverbed Greek civilians being used methodically 'during the day as cover while the Jerries organised themselves.'

As far as 17 Platoon is concerned, there seems to have been only one casualty; scattered paratroops (about twenty fell in the platoon area) had been quickly knocked out; the positions apparently held firmly all day, but movement in the afternoon brought fierce and most accurate fire from across the riverbed. 'No. 17 Pln had a fairly easy time of it most of the day,' writes Jim Craig. 'As my position gave me a clear view of all my positions and I was expecting at any time to receive orders to counterattack, I did not deem it advisable to stray very far from my Platoon H.Q. where I could be contacted by Coy. Cmdr. or Bn. The sections seemed to be O.K. and had quite capable section commanders and I kept in contact with them by runner, however I now feel that on looking back I should have perhaps taken matters into my own hands, as we had cleaned out what enemy had come our way, in the nature of Paratroops and Gliders, and made a counter attack to retrieve No. 18's lost position, but it would have left our own position and the right flank of 16 Pln wide open.' About 6 p.m. (according to Pat Thomas⁶⁹) a runner began visiting sections with an instruction to move back to Company Headquarters in groups of two or three, for the enemy had the area covered with machine guns.

On the left flank of D Company, 16 Platoon held positions on the hillside overlooking the dry riverbed, with a good field of fire but out of sight of the rest of the company. The platoon commander was Sergeant Vince Freeman. The pounding from the air was severe; there were bomb holes everywhere, but not one casualty. 'There was not a tree standing in my area and our trenches were half filled in,' writes Corporal Pemberton.⁷⁰ "'Windy" Mills⁷¹ had a Boys anti-tank rifle tied up in an olive tree,' recalls Harry Wigley.⁷² 'He had ideas of shooting at troop-carrying planes. I don't think that gun was ever found, nor the tree it was tied to.'

Stray paratroops (their chief object apparently was keeping the riverbed defenders occupied while the main force beyond landed and organised) soon were cleaned up by 16 Platoon, which dealt as well with two stray gliders, and also, the platoon fears, with several blue-dressed RAF men ('our big worry') escaping into the hills. A furiously swearing Private Gilbert,⁷³ his Bren full of dirt from the bombing, had to take it down, clean it, and assemble it before opening up with marked effect

on gliders and their occupants in the riverbed. But every time the gun fired it sent up a cloud of dust which drew heavy machinegun fire and mortaring from the enemy quickly grouping across the river. Two guns from 27 (MG) Battalion gave a spirited performance until ammunition ran low in the afternoon. A wounded machine-gun officer (Second-Lieutenant [Brant](#) ⁷⁴) was given first aid in Sergeant Freeman's pit: 'he was offended because I pulled his identity discs out to check up just who was behind me. Wanted to know if I thought he was a Jerry.'

Apart from bursts of counter-fire from across the river, the rest of the morning for 16 Platoon passed 'rather quietly.... In the afternoon there were no targets offering ... nothing of interest'; it was 'a reasonably quiet day and [the platoon] handled what there was around.' Germans had worked up to under the riverbank in front of the platoon but came no further, content to call out in English, 'Come down here, Comrade'. 'They desisted in this when someone invited them to stick their—square heads above the bank and he'd give them Comrades.'

'That night,' writes Pemberton, who was in charge of half of the platoon, '16 Platoon was sitting very snug and in control of the position, and in the early morning I was surprised when Tom Campbell contacted me and said we were moving out as we could not contact the rest of the Battalion.' The platoon suffered but one casualty all day: Private [Simpson](#), ⁷⁵ shot in the foot. 'We had hoped that the 21 Battalion would have been allowed to have come down towards [16 PI] as we were undoubtedly undermanned, and in a real manpowered charge early in day could have swung the tide,' summed up Sergeant Freeman.

At Company Headquarters some men were redistributed into section posts in the immediate area. Here Captain Campbell's exasperating day from sunrise to dusk (at 8 a.m. his signals post had a direct hit from a bomb) was by no means over: the hardest decision would soon face him. Now, after dark, Sergeant-Major Fowler ⁷⁶ and another soldier picked their way to Battalion Headquarters. 'It was evacuated, all right. But where had they gone?' Campbell continues: 'From a conference held before the action there was the plan that we would congregate south if we lost the drome. ⁷⁷ Then I thought that my company position might be wanted as a sort of pivot round which a counter attack could swing, especially if the battalion had pulled back to the south. I took stock of wounded nearby. They knew nothing of a counter attack. I decided to pull out. It was then 3 a.m.'

The situation among perplexed, weary, hungry and thirsty men was not improved by someone suddenly shouting, 'Every man for himself!', for morale had fallen flat with the news that the battalion had gone. Remnants of 18 Platoon with Sergeant Sargeson went far south on a hazardous expedition. Some of 17 Platoon with Lieutenant Craig began making south along the riverbank, were blocked, moved towards Point 107, and at sunrise were surrounded and captured. Company Headquarters, 16 Platoon and various strays followed Captain Campbell along a track running due east, skirted a party of sleeping Germans, met Captain Hanton and other mystified groups from the battalion, and at daybreak were nearing the protection of 5 Brigade's lines higher in the hills.

'Farewell to [Maleme](#) aerodrome and some fine cobbles,' wrote Sargeson.

A Company (Captain Hanton and Lieutenants [Fell](#) ⁷⁸ and [McAra](#) ⁷⁹; exact strength and weapons unknown), with the task of all-round defence, held its fire until parachutists were about 100 feet from the ground. Twenty-two Germans who landed alive in A Company's area were accounted for. Hanton, moving about, 'saw dozens of corpses on the ground or in the trees.... During the lulls the men grabbed any German stores that landed near them. There were canisters of gear, food, motor cycles and even warm coffee from Hun flasks. The detailed organisation of the force amazed us at the time; we had not realised that so much care could be taken to win a battle.'

After breakfast, which had been delayed in the blitz, Lance- Corporal Chittenden and Bill [Croft](#) ⁸⁰ had just returned to their pit near the coast gun when, unknown to them, the four German survivors from the glider came over the ridge. As Chittenden and Croft reached their trench Croft's 'first reaction was to ask for a smoke,' says Chittenden. 'Producing tobacco I was passing some to [Croft] when I noticed his hands slowly rising and a look of alarm on his face. Looking upwards I was soon aware of the cause. Four Germans, tommyguns in hand, were standing at the end of the trench beckoning to us to get out.' Croft, rising, received a full and fatal burst; Chittenden next knew that he was grappling with the German leader, rolling over and over, then was stunned by a heavy blow (a shot, or shots). Soon recovering, he walked off for first aid, and but for his wounds would have convinced nobody that four Germans were in the immediate vicinity. What happened to these four Germans

is not known. Company Sergeant-Major Harry [Strickland](#)⁸¹ 'was in our Company Headquarters area, not a German in sight, there was a bang, I was on the deck [a stretcher case] wondering what the hell had happened.' Then along the ridge Lance-Sergeant [McWhinnie](#),⁸² with two or three others, was bailed up, disarmed, and driven ahead until rescued, probably by one of the parties sent out from Battalion Headquarters.

The next excitement came when Germans from the captured [RAF](#) camp began moving towards Point 107: there seem to have been two such sallies within two hours, each time with [RAF](#) men in front of them. These men, some with their hands up and crying 'Don't shoot! Don't shoot!' probably were being used deliberately as a screen. Both parties did not get far, for each time they were dealt with by men from A Company and Battalion Headquarters. The first skirmish was over quickly, and here [Regimental Sergeant-Major Purnell](#)⁸³ was killed. The second advance, beginning about 11 a.m. with a larger screen of [RAF](#) men, also ended when the Germans behind the screen came under fire.

'From then on, there was the odd firing and movements from below [from the airfield and environs] but nothing of vital importance as far as we were concerned as a company,' says Hanton. 'Later on I tried to see how Fell and McAra were getting on in their platoon positions to the south. Neither a runner, nor myself later, succeeded in getting through. About lunchtime the CSM, Strickland, was shot through the stomach. ... For the rest of the day, a comparatively quiet time. I don't recall being worried at all over the company's position and casualties.'

At 5 p.m. orders reached Company Headquarters that reserve companies of 23 and 28 Battalions would arrive by 9 p.m., and at that time the company was to pull back to the RAP ridge, and further back at midnight. Orders would come about the second move. 'Was amazed to hear of it,' wrote Hanton. 'Things were not bad with me and T. Campbell whom I met next morning did not go out of his way to suggest that he was in hot water exactly.'

After dark A Company moved a little eastward to the RAP ridge. A runner took news of this move to Fell and McAra, and possibly during this move Fell, silhouetted against the skyline, was killed. The company stayed at this RAP ridge until the early hours of the morning. From there runners had been sent out on both flanks, north

and south, to contact C and B Companies. Both returned to say they had gone quite a distance without meeting anybody. 'All the time I had the gnawing feeling that I was all on my own,' says Hanton. 'I got the troops that were left, there might have been 50, and began marching down the RAP road, south-west, away from the coast,' to meet, greatly to their relief, Campbell and a party of D Company men. After hiding in a gully for most of the next day, the united party went on and reached a new line being formed by 21 and 23 Battalions.

At Battalion Headquarters Colonel Andrew considered the blitz worse than the 1914-18 artillery barrages: 'I do not wish to experience another one like it.' He was wounded slightly: 'a wee piece of bomb that stuck in above the temple, and when I pulled it out it was bloody hot and I bled a bit.' A man nearby heard the angry Colonel exclaim: 'We'll go out and get these b—s when the bombing stops.' In the smoking and dusty aftermath no paratroops landed between Point 107 and the two ends of the airfield, but several gliders did, between Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Company, coming down among dust curtains still hanging from the bombing. No glider troops fired on Battalion Headquarters, and the paratroops were too far away. For fifteen minutes pot-shots were taken at an enemy group about 700 yards away, near a dry watercourse towards [Pirgos](#) village. Two gliders were within 200 yards of Battalion Headquarters; their crews lay hidden and doggo among the plentiful cover of vines until the late afternoon.

An hour after the landing the erratic No. 18 wireless set was working again, and at 10 a.m. reported to Brigade the landing of hundreds of paratroops in the riverbed and further west. 'It was now so quiet that we [Battalion Headquarters] were walking round freely,' records Major Leggat, who goes further, saying he 'was a bit bored from the lack of movement. Things were a bit quiet round Bn Hq and I went up to the top of the hill where I could hear a few shots.'

These shots came from a gunner enterprise. On the hill just above the two 4-inch coast guns, Lieutenant [Williams](#)⁸⁴ of 27 Battery had an observation post which soon became useless for observing and directing fire when communications failed. By 10 a.m. the Germans were into the [RAF](#) camp, and soon a few had moved on into a clump of olive trees containing the [RAF's](#) RAP. From this grove the first advance (a tentative affair) began probing up the lower slopes of Point 107 in an area apparently not covered by A Company. Williams and another artillery officer,

Lieutenant [Cade](#),⁸⁵ quickly grouped together straggling British gunners⁸⁶ and airmen (one defensive position was along a stone wall), sent a runner to Colonel Andrew for aid, and then prepared a bayonet attack. Some men stuck knives on their rifles. 'Very soon a large party (30 to 40) appeared variously uniformed, and partly uniformed men with hands above their heads, many terror-stricken, all yelling and pleading with us not to shoot (meaning at the enemy) but to let them come on or they would be shot in the back,' writes Twigg, who was ordered on to the hill when the attack began. 'Among these men were some of our Bn,' including the battalion provost sergeant (few men would wish a provost sergeant such a fate), Gordon Dillon, and Sergeant McWhinnie. 'When any defences were seen the Jerries just took one or two of us and pushed us ahead onto the defence. The Jerry doing it put a Luger in your back and just pointed. It was easy to understand,' writes Dillon. 'They would keep close behind in case of shooting. It was well planned and with the intention of pushing into our positions.' He adds: 'Some damn good shots picked the three Jerries off.'

Descriptions from various viewpoints now understandably enough clash, but clearly, with 'astonishing ease' the gunners, three or four men with Major Leggat, and Twigg with a few signallers dealt with the very few Germans behind this distressed screen and restored the situation. But the sally had cost [Sergeant-Major Purnell](#) his life. 'During all this time [from 10 a.m. to at least 11 a.m.] parties of men were moving about on the aerodrome and the hill, and it was quite impossible to know who was who; there was a great deal of shouting back and forth and the ubiquitous adjective was the best countersign,' noted Lieutenant A. R. Ramsay, of the [Fleet Air Arm](#).

A similar assault occurring perhaps three hours later was only partially checked, but this time military etiquette was deliberately flouted. [Petty Officer Wheaton](#) (an electrician working on the airfield) and a [RAF](#) man, on capture, were given a red swastika flag by a German officer, ordered to march in front of a group of German tommy-gunners, and to shout to parties to surrender. Flag in hand, the hapless petty officer was driven forward until, with a sudden dash for liberty, he landed in a trench where New Zealanders, firing an automatic weapon, drove back the enemy and rescued the airman, now badly wounded. As this drive began, a Marine officer came down from the hill, spoke of 'a screen of captured [RAF](#) men', and urged [Palmer](#)⁸⁷ to

take his Bren carrier up to the gun position. 'We had been told not to move the carriers without orders from Colonel Andrew,' Palmer relates. 'I suggested to the officer that he got permission from Battalion Headquarters. Private "Sandy" Booth,⁸⁸ who was present, offered to gather a party of men and take them up to cover the gun position. He gathered a party of about 20 RAF and Anti-aircraft men telling them it would be better to fight on the hilltop (Point 107) than be killed like rats in the olive grove.' A few followed Booth to the top of the hill.

Meanwhile, back at Battalion Headquarters, with all telephone wires cut and useless, messages and information came and went laboriously by runners or patrols who performed many acts of devotion to duty. The four Bren carriers seem to have been overlooked for patrol work. The Colonel himself (and by now some impression should be emerging of the atmosphere and handicaps under which he was working) tried to get through to Headquarters Company, and later went towards B Company to see the situation there for himself. Brigade reported over the air that the enemy was landing in New Zealand uniforms—false—but this was at exactly the time when leaderless groups⁸⁹ of displaced airmen were milling about Point 107, another vexation to the commander upon whom the pressure of events increased mercilessly throughout the day. No news at all came from Headquarters Company at Pirgos perhaps at any time a German thrust would come from the east. At 10.55 a.m. the Colonel asked Brigade by radio if 23 Battalion could contact Headquarters Company. Accordingly,



Original officers of 22 Battalion

Back row, from left: 2 Lt T. G. N. Carter, 2 Lt L. Leeks, Lt R. B. Fell, 2 Lt B. V. Davison, 2 Lt F. G. Oldham, Lt E. J. McAra, Lt L. B. Clapham, Lt G. G. Beaven. *Third row:* Lt G. C. D. Laurence, Lt D. F. Anderson, 2 Lt C. N. Armstrong, 2 Lt J. L. MacDuff, 2 Lt P. R. Hockley, Lt S. H. Johnson, 2 Lt C. I. C. Scollay, Lt W. G. Lovie, Lt H. R. Harris. *Second row:* Lt W. G. Slade, 2 Lt H. V. Donald, Lt W. M. Manchester, Capt J. Moore, Lt E. H. Simpson, Lt M. G. Wadey, Lt W. W. Mason, Lt T. Thornton, Capt T. C. Campbell, Capt W. Bourke, Capt I. A. Hart, 2 Lt T. R. Hawthorn, Lt K. R. S. Crarer. *Front row:* Lt E. T. Pleasants, Maj J. G. C. Leach, Maj J. Leggat, Maj G. J. McNaught, Lt-Col L. W. Andrew, Capt P. G. Monk, Capt E. F. Laws, Capt J. W. Bain, Capt S. Hanton (Absent, Rev. W. E. W. Hurst, 2 Lt E. E. Tyrell)

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Second Echelon men parade for showers, Trentham



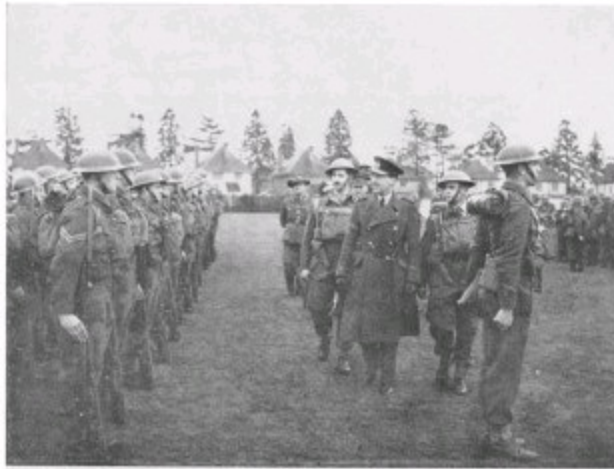
Second Echelon men parade for showers, Trentham



Borax, the unit's mascot, on parade in England

Borax, the unit's mascot, on parade in England

Sir Cyril Newall, the new Governor-General of New Zealand, inspects 22 Battalion in England, December 1940. With Sir Cyril are Capt S. Hanton (right) and Lt-Col L. W. Andrew (left). Brigadier J. Hargest is behind the Colonel



Sir Cyril Newall, the new Governor-General of New Zealand, inspects 22 Battalion in England, December 1940. With Sir Cyril are Capt S. Hanton (right) and Lt-Col L. W. Andrew (left). Brigadier J. Hargest is behind the Colonel



View from the main road in 22 Battalion's sector—looking east from the exit of the gorge on the eastern side of Olympus Pass

View from the main road in 22 Battalion's sector—looking east from the exit of the gorge on the eastern side of Olympus Pass

Greece: a troop train moves through the mountains towards the front



Greece: a troop train moves through the mountains towards the front



Looking towards Mount Olympus from Dholikhi

Looking towards **Mount Olympus** from **Dholikhi**



The evacuation from Greece
—5 Brigade troops on *HMS
Glengyle*

The evacuation from **Greece** —5 Brigade troops on **HMS Glengyle**



German planes burning on Maleme airfield

German planes burning on **Maleme** airfield

Aerial photograph of Maleme airfield



Aerial photograph of Maleme airfield



German troops waiting to embark for Crete

German troops waiting to embark for Crete

Helwan, July 1941: Lieutenant-Colonel L. W. Andrew and his battalion on return from Crete



Helwan, July 1941: Lieutenant-Colonel L. W. Andrew and his battalion on return from Crete



Bringing in German wounded, November 1941

Bringing in German wounded, November 1941



Captured members of B Company at Bardia

Captured members of B Company at Bardia



Bren carrier with German machine gun, Gazala, December 1941

Bren carrier with German machine gun, Gazala, December 1941

17 Platoon of 23 Battalion made towards [Pirgos](#), but did not reach Headquarters Company, for the latter was firing on all movement. (Yet it should be remembered that Wan got through on his first mission.) Unfortunately, Colonel Andrew was never given any indication that his [Pirgos](#) men were still holding out zealously. In the same message seeking information about his Headquarters Company he reported that otherwise 'line was still intact and [the Battalion] were holding everywhere.'

Pressure mounted steadily as the afternoon began and the drama of the airfield and Point 107 moved towards its climax. A few minutes after noon Battalion Headquarters wirelessly reported to Brigade that enemy guns and heavy machine guns were firing at them from west of the river. In the early afternoon mortaring and strafing (presumably from the ground) was heavy, some of A Company were seen beginning to move back beyond Battalion Headquarters, saying that a strong enemy force was moving up between A and C Companies. (The southern posts of A Company did not move.) At 2.55 p.m. Battalion Headquarters reported to Brigade that 'position was fairly serious as enemy had penetrated into Bn H.Q. area', and at 3.50 p.m. 'left flank had given way but position was believed to be in hand'. Headquarters appealed for news of its HQ Company as reinforcements were 'badly needed'. Perhaps it was then that Andrew asked Hargest for a counter-attack and was told that 23 Battalion was engaged with paratroops (23 Battalion area was clear by 11.40 a.m., when companies were out hunting paratroops). So denied support and with no reserves due to the large area the 22nd covered, Andrew made his last throw, the two tanks, and to his bitter disappointment watched the attack fail. At 6.45 p.m. Point 107 was bombed by five planes. Major Leggat now saw the [Luftwaffe](#) resuming close support, for by now the enemy knew his spearheads had reached the top of the hill, and planes machine-gunned areas forward of that. Brigade's last recorded message from 22 Battalion (7.25 p.m.) '... asked for immediate assistance and reported their casualties as heavy....'

The counter-attack by 23 Battalion, freely discussed before the invasion, was widely expected, and when it did not come, the feeling of bewilderment and isolation increased. Apart from A and B Companies, nothing was known about the fate of the rest of the battalion or the brigade. The enemy, growing in organisation and confidence, challenged movement. Hidden enemy parties took heart. Practically all news was unreliable, just rumours. A hitherto most reliable man, suffering great

strain, reported that D Company was wiped out.

'The morale of Bn. H.Q. officers and men [in the morning] was good, and I consider up to the standard and far better than in the latter years of the war,' writes Twigg. 'The O.C. and 2 i.c. showed signs of strain during the day, and I put this down to lack of news and information concerning their own troops and the position in general. I am sure that the bombing or their personal safety did not concern these officers, but the responsibility was great.'

The brigade plan did not seem to be functioning; the CO had little information; neither wireless appeal nor the distress flares had brought the counter-attack; the enemy had exploited to the full the weakness of the defences by the [RAF](#) camp, over which the CO had little control; only A and B Companies seemed to be left, and these appeared likely to be overwhelmed with the dawn. Colonel Andrew therefore told Brigadier Hargest that he might have to withdraw, and he understood the Brigadier to reply: 'Well, if you must, you must.' By this—which may have been about 6 p.m.—Andrew meant a short withdrawal from the top of Point 107; he still intended to deny the enemy any use of the airfield.

Leggat takes up the tale: 'Just before dusk [sunset was 7.50 p.m.] McDuff (I think) and I followed the CO to B Coy's HQ. We went up the road past the glider, which gives some idea of the quietness of the situation. Here we used Armstrong's slit trench and blanket and went into a huddle. [Crarer](#)⁹⁰ tells me the Signaller had still his set with him but was having no luck in getting through. A company of [23 Bn](#) under Carl [Watson](#)⁹¹ came through about 9. I took them across the road. McAra said he would put them in position (he was killed 5 minutes later).'

The Colonel had decided to withdraw the rest of his battalion to B Company's ridge to anchor a flank and to reorganise. But on reaching the ridge he 'found the enemy had pushed round my flanks further than I had expected, and I had to make the decision to withdraw to the 21/ [23 Bn](#) line and this I did before dawn.' 'This decision must have been made about 10.30 p.m.,' notes Major Leggat. Runners went out with news of the withdrawal, but only B Company knew of the move.

Leggat went on to Brigade Headquarters by carrier to report 'that we were officially off [Maleme](#)', and Hargest, asleep and in pyjamas, 'was absolutely surprised

and unprepared.' Similarly, when Captain Crarer (B Company) passed at the end of his company through 21 Battalion, 'Colonel Allen⁹² was surprised and totally ignorant that any withdrawal was to take place.'

The day had opened, and ended, with complete surprises. Yet the most bitterly surprised would be the four companies, mauled but still in position below in the darkness, still holding on and unaware 'that we were officially off Maleme'.

B Company (Captain Ken Crarer, with Lieutenant Armstrong acting as second-in-command; exact strength and weapons unknown): 10 Platoon (Sergeant Bruce Skeen⁹³) was to the south, 11 Platoon (Corporal Andrews) to the north, and 12 Platoon (Lieutenant Slade⁹⁴) to the west. This company's task was an all-round defence of the area; to tie in with A Company and to protect two machine guns placed slightly to the north; to prevent any attack coming over the hill to the west and down to the airfield. In the last two days the company area had received its share of bombing and strafing. Pilots paid particular attention to machine-gunning the road.

The parachutists came in in a line running from the north-east of B Company across to the southern area of D Company: 'As each flight of troop-carriers (3) emptied its load of about a dozen troops per plane, a fresh flight carried on extending the line until they were dropping directly over and beyond us. By this time the Browning was smoking hot and I was frantically reloading and spraying the Jerries as they continued the line to circle the drome.' They fell thickly around the area where Slade's platoon was in position, and this platoon seems to have remained isolated all day.⁹⁵ When Slade was wounded, Corporal Jurgens⁹⁶ took command. Andrews's platoon got all but three of the paratroops who were dropped within 200 yards, 'and one of my NCOs, L/Cpl. Elliott⁹⁷ took a couple of men despite the standing order that no man was to leave his trench and went down into the valley where several Jerries had landed among the trees and cleaned them out. Keith Elliott got wounded in the arm and a tommy gun man, Tommy Thompson⁹⁸ got one through his right leg. [Elliott's excursion probably took him to within 400 yards of Matheson's platoon at Pirgos.] As Elliott's venture proved to be the way to handle paratroops I sent out half the platoon at a time to scour our area and bring in all the machine guns, pistols, tommy guns and grenades that the Jerries dropped in containers. There was a container after every fourth or fifth man.'

A glider 'sneaked in on us' and dropped below the road between B and A Companies. Two men with a captured German machine gun 'poured belt after belt into the glider'; a sniper wounded Johnny Adcock ⁹⁹ before he was himself killed.

Crarer says: 'Apart from a bit of sniping and several prisoners surrendering, and an occasional drop during the day, the area remained comparatively quiet—a lot of shooting to the west where enemy parties were gathering. Communications with A Company were visual and by liaison. We had a carrier which had made two trips to Battalion Headquarters by early afternoon. I tried to make contact with Slade's area by sending two patrols forward, but they were shot up and did not get through. [Slade, alone at Platoon Headquarters, was wounded but dealt valiantly with three Germans with an anti-tank gun. Allan Holley ¹⁰⁰ says that from 10 a.m. onwards the hill was clear, and from early afternoon everything was quiet.] We had good liaison with Lieutenant McAra (commanding a platoon in A Company) who early in the day came over saying he'd been kicked out of his area, but he later on collected stragglers and before lunch re-established himself in his area.

'There was no platoon attack, or no organised attack, on B Company. Casualties, not heavy in the company, would not have reached ten. [11 Platoon had three lightly wounded men.] We had all sorts of weapons; all fairly well capable of looking after ourselves. Any runners coming to our area before midnight would have found us at home.'

Australian and English stragglers from the airfield were 'sorted into some sort of shape, organised into sections, given what enemy equipment they could raise, and that night organised a complete defence of the perimeter of Armstrong's and Sergeant Skeen's areas.'

By dusk all four Bren carriers had landed up by B Company's area. During the morning Privates Jack Weir ¹⁰¹ and Maurie Cowlrick ¹⁰² volunteered to drive up the road to form a road block on the right of B Company, and 'the only firing was at odd paratroopers.' Then two more carriers came up. Earlier in the day the Browning from one had been used for firing on paratroops in Headquarters Company area; later it was used to scatter a party of enemy attempting to retrieve a supply container on the ridge behind Headquarters Company. Although they were right on the road, the

carriers were not strafed because the crews covered them with parachutes. About 8.30 p.m. the fourth carrier (Palmer's) made its second and final trip up to B Company's area. Weir and Cowrick were told that if 23 Battalion support did not come, 'Maurie and I were to wait until the last man would tell us he was the last man, only he didn't.' The two stayed until nearly daylight. All the carriers were put out of action before being abandoned; apparently more or less forgotten, they had served little purpose this day.

Just after dark Captain Watson, with A Company 23 Battalion, came into B Company's area and was ordered by Colonel Andrew to take up a covering position in Captain Hanton's area. He wanted a guide and McAra said: 'That's my area. I'll take you in.'

Corporal Andrews writes of his first inkling of the retreat: 'At ten minutes to eleven that night I received word that I had to have the platoon ready to move out and clear a village nearby [half a mile directly south of B Company] and to guard the Battalion through the village. Up to that time we had no indication that the position was so serious.'

Crarer goes on: 'Battalion HQ came into our area after dark and decided to withdraw at midnight. The withdrawal was OK. We got a message round to Slade's platoon by the shouting of orders round the chain of posts.' Colin Armstrong led 11 Platoon (Corporal Andrews) out first, then Jurgens brought out some of Slade's men. Slade couldn't be moved and was left with food and water. 'These chaps came out down the track and south of 21 Battalion's area. Then out came the last platoon, Skeen's (No. 10).' The rearguard in the village saw the remnants of the battalion pass through safely and then followed along behind: 'Indeed, every few yards we passed dead paratroops and even then they had begun to stink.'

Thus the battalion withdrew and the invaders of [Crete](#) gained the airfield they had to have to continue the assault. The chapter of misfortunes and misunderstandings which led to Colonel Andrew's fateful decision has been related.

¹⁰³ All next day 5 Brigade sat like a man bemused when the fate of the invasion of [Crete](#), in the words of German commanders concerned, 'balanced on a knife edge'.

¹⁰⁴ A counter-attack was in fact mounted on the night of 21-22 May, but it was too weak and too late. German officers are told in the course of their basic training that

in battle 'It is better to do the wrong thing than to do nothing.'

Remnants of 22 Battalion joined the defence line of 21 and 23 Battalions next day. In the late afternoon the last original 22 Battalion post was evacuated: the AMES guarded by Captain Wadey and his well-armed platoon of pioneers. The radar station, a mile inland from Point 107 and on high ground, two knolls with a saddle between, covered about half an acre and contained two [RAF](#) officers and about fifty airmen. Two painfully conspicuous 40-foot wireless masts were encircled by barbed wire. The equipment was very 'hush-hush', and not even Wadey saw inside some of the vehicles.

Two signallers, complete with flags, were attached for communication with Battalion Headquarters. 'When the show broke, despite many wearying hours of flag waving they never made contact with the Battalion,' says Wadey. The pioneers, untroubled by paratroops, shot up a glider which landed within range. In the afternoon Ju52s were seen crash-landing up the coast. Wadey 'couldn't understand why something was not done about this', so accordingly the two runners, Privates Wan and Bloomfield, were sent to Headquarters Company to link up, get information, and report the troops massing from the crash-landed 52s further up the beach.

The night passed uneventfully except for a large body of troops marching past the station. This was a sizeable part of 22 Battalion on the withdrawal, but no word was passed to Wadey. About 10 a.m. on 21 May stragglers and wounded gave the first reports of the battle and the withdrawal. Later, shots were exchanged with isolated groups of Germans. A private had gone back to 21 Battalion for information and failed to get any, so Wadey went out himself, later walked into Colonels Andrew and Allen, with Major Leggat and Captain MacDuff, and was told to hold his position at all costs, for the airfield was to be counter-attacked that night. He returned to find one of the [RAF](#) officers wounded.

Private Parker, ¹⁰⁵ with a section in an outpost outside the wire, reported enemy flag-waving (ground to air communication), fired, and checked this activity, but soon (perhaps 3.30 p.m.) the bombers turned to pound the mound, a concentrated target with the vehicles, the masts and the circle of bright new barbed wire. 'We received what the battalion had had all the week ... the whole hill was heaving in smoke and

dust ... one of the Stukas seemed to be going to drop right on us ... this one carried a bomb, orange in colour, under the belly. I saw it leave the plane and dive for us and knew it was going to be close.' This was the end. The pioneer platoon and the [RAF](#) detachment withdrew from the AMES. With a compound fracture of the leg, Wadey fainted and regained consciousness. He and other casualties from the mound were carried to the 21 Battalion RAP, where they were welcomed by Padre Hurst.

When Headquarters Company had pulled out of [Pirgos](#) towards dawn on 21 May, Padre Hurst, with twenty walking wounded, eventually reached 21 Battalion's RAP, where Captain [Hetherington](#) ¹⁰⁶ was in charge. The doctor had arrived by caique from [Greece](#) before battle commenced, and had been equipped by enemy supplies dropped in his battalion area. In a cottage turned into an RAP they worked for three days before capture. During that time a young German officer, Tony Schultz, ¹⁰⁷ wounded in the forearm, gave valuable help. He doubted if his comrades would recognise the [Red Cross](#). To save the lives of the wounded, sixty British and ten Germans, a swastika flag was made by cutting up a red flannel petticoat (found in the loft) and fixing it to a white sheet. Lashing the flag to two poles, Hetherington and Hurst hoisted it above the hedge until firing ceased and slates stopped flying from the roof. Then a party of Germans, which Padre Hurst thought— perhaps mistakenly—was a firing party, lined up against a wall all who could stand. 'An officer made a fiery speech in German and we thought we had had it,' says Hurst, 'until a wounded officer we had tended called out from his stretcher in the corner of the yard. He told how well we had looked after him and his men and we were reprieved. A nasty moment.'

About the time the AMES was attacked, more wounded were falling into enemy hands down in the valley. The battalion's medical officer, Captain Longmore, had remained at the advance RAP, close to the airfield, and had put through fifty-five to sixty casualties by 3 p.m. An hour and a half before dusk he was ordered by Colonel Andrew to evacuate the post: Battalion Headquarters was going back. Led by a battalion officer and carrying the wounded, they moved 'up hill and down dale' towards 23 Battalion's lines. There was an acute shortage of stretchers. A severely wounded man carried on a blanket recalls 'a man on each corner struggling along in the dark, bumping and stumbling over things they couldn't see. I survived the bumping although I don't think I was supposed to.' Morning found them camped in a

clearing with 160 stretcher cases and walking wounded, among them Lieutenant-Commander Beale of the Illustrious, and later some wounded paratroops. Their officer guide left to collect stretcher-bearers but did not return. 'The injured made a white circle from RAP gear,' writes the doctor, 'and all the crowd sat inside it. Planes flew all round but we were never hit, although bombs dropped all round.' Twice they tried to get out messages and failed. At 5 p.m. they were taken prisoner.

Through these next two critical days, 21 and 22 May, the enemy kept up contact all along 5 Brigade's front. When not bombing and strafing, fighters circled positions, a bomb poised menacingly under each wing. Troop-carrying planes, heedless of fire, began landing methodically on the airfield about 4 p.m. on 21 May. Perhaps sixty planes landed on 21 May with about a battalion and a half. More paratroops came down west of the riverbed. Those men from 22 Battalion who had reached 21 Battalion's lines waited all night with flares ready to guide [RAF](#) bombers on to the airfield. None came.

The RAPs used up the last dressings; food and water ran low or ran out altogether; the smell from the dead became sickening. Enemy parties probed south and behind the brigade. When flares suddenly went up in the dark from a ridge, accompanied by yells from gathering Germans, an exhausted 22 Battalion man 'felt like when the police gave me a summons once.' Yet at midnight on the 21st a great wave of gratitude went out to the [Royal Navy](#) from the weary men huddled in the hills above [Maleme](#), for the watchers saw a furious display of searchlights and blazing guns: our warships were smashing and routing completely an attempt to land seaborne forces and equipment.

Before dawn on 22 May the counter-attack on [Maleme](#) airfield was launched by 28 (Maori) and 20 Battalions, the latter coming up from behind [Galatas](#) after an unfortunate delay. Consequently the attack, timed for 1 a.m., did not start until about 3.30 a.m. From the start line, two miles east of [Pirgos](#) village, the two units carved their way along the coastal area with plenty of grenade and bayonet work. One company (D of 20 Battalion) succeeded in reaching in triumph the eastern edge of [Maleme](#) airfield soon after daybreak, but mortars, machine guns and air attack gradually forced it back. The remaining troops battled into [Pirgos](#) village, but this was the limit of their advance. Some men from C Company 22 Battalion, ¹⁰⁸ with a company from the 23rd, joined the Maoris in the mêlée round [Pirgos](#).

Over to the south-west, at 7 a.m., 21 Battalion's turn came to play its part in the counter-attack. Not under cover of darkness but in broad daylight the battalion achieved a spectacular advance, which showed how thin the Germans still were on the ground: in three hours it had partly cleared a corridor a little over a mile long towards Point 107. D Company 22 Battalion, which was operating with Colonel Allen's force, continued to push on until the leaders had nearly reached their old riverbank positions. Confirming this, Pemberton and Clem Gilbert (with Fred Palmer¹⁰⁹ wounded in their section) say: 'It was a hard struggle back after getting so far.' However, planes had continued to land with more troops, who were rushed into the line, and about noon—when reliable news came of the failure of the counter-attack along the coast—advanced parties had to be pulled back. 'They had used incendiary bullets on us and a whole patch of grain was set alight.' In the late afternoon increasing enemy attacks from ground and air forced the 21 Battalion attackers back to their original positions.

As night came enemy infiltration increased; to the south strong enemy forces were working round 5 Brigade, whose last hours in the Maleme area were at hand. Men of the battalion were scattered among front-line units, and one of them records: '... gave up hope, didn't feel bad though, except thought tough on Mum, Margaret and everyone. Talked to B., he felt the same.... Waited and wondered what feels like to be killed. Heard firing and yells from Maoris about 100 yards away. Had chased Jerries off; could not believe true. Spent night on watch, half hour each, too tired for more, put tin hat where would fall on rifle and wake me up if dozed and nodded head. Told everyone in front were enemy.' But temporary relief of a kind was coming. In the early hours of 23 May withdrawal was ordered and began, to the angry surprise of many, though to have remained would have meant disaster.

The next day (23 May) the brigade, hounded and chased from the air, split into small parties, and now in serious danger of being cut off altogether, drew back into the east, sheltering behind 4 Brigade, which was defending Galatas. Villagers on the way bravely 'smiled and waved but there were tears in their eyes.' Fifth Brigade Headquarters looked grotesque with abandoned band instruments lying about. 'We weren't keen on music by that time, only a little hungry,' wryly comments a D Company man. The condition of the men is indicated by this note: 'Crossing stream

... found several Jerries in water, smelt awful, had drink anyway.' Just after this, by the little coastal settlement of [Ay Marina](#), a small and most welcome party returned unexpectedly to the unit. Private [Follas](#)¹¹⁰ and one or two others from the battalion had been serving a few days' detention in the [Field Punishment Centre](#) in the [Maleme](#) sector when the invasion began. Collecting automatics and ammunition from canisters falling providentially near, the inmates and guards (sixty altogether) zealously dealt out punishment to paratroops, took prisoners, hunted snipers, and gave valuable protection to a nearby troop of New Zealand guns, whose officer, Captain [Snadden](#),¹¹¹ would say: 'When we put a shot in there, you get everyone who runs out.' In the general withdrawal a few in Follas's group collected a donkey, loaded it with four spandaus, carried the ammunition themselves and, after taking part in a brisk skirmish yielding twenty prisoners, met 22 Battalion survivors in the afternoon. 'What have you been pinching this time?' asked Colonel Andrew, viewing approvingly the donkey, the spandaus, and the ammunition. (On the subsequent retreat to [Sfakia](#) the donkey, already a well-known personality in the battalion and called 'Sweet Nell', was hit during an air raid and had to be shot.)

Behind the defenders of [Galatas](#) the battalion was just over 200 strong—enough for two companies under Hanton and Campbell. Their task was to defend [Divisional Headquarters](#) against parachutists, to defend a ridge which was part of the reserve line, and to counter-attack if needed. For two days the remains of the battalion stayed in these reserve positions, dug by other troops earlier and giving protection from spasmodic strafing. Movement was cut to a minimum, and troops were prohibited from opening fire on aircraft so that positions would remain concealed, an order hard to obey, particularly when one aircraft, nicknamed 'George', regularly swooped so low that the pilot's features could be seen. This passive attitude, for those unable to hit back, was most depressing.

The air attacks increased on 26 May, and the pressure continued on the sorely tried front-line units, by now forced back a mile behind [Galatas](#) after defiantly but briefly reoccupying the town at dusk in a last desperate bayonet charge. Twenty-second Battalion group's turn came in the afternoon of the 26th, following rumours (false) of an enemy break-through towards the coast. The battalion moved from its reserve positions along the ridge and across a road to help plug the rumoured breach. This emergency move, doubly dangerous in daylight, was cancelled half-way

through, but not before men in Hanton's group were strafed in a ditch and had suffered ten casualties.

In the night the battalion joined 5 Brigade's retreat south-westwards of [Suda Bay](#), Colonel Andrew and Major Leggat taking turns at the front and rear, but unfortunately the battalion split into two separate parties in the darkness. A brief stand was made in rearguard actions on 27 May on a line known as 42nd Street (this was a mile west of [Suda](#) village) and again at [Stilos](#), seven to eight miles back on the road leading inland into the mountains and on towards the south coast.

One day was very like another. 'All day you lay hidden in trees nibbling anything you could get. We struck a few trucks that had been hit and had some broken biscuits. No tea of course for we couldn't risk fires.... On other times we marched at night and into the dawn till the first plane was heard and that was the sign to take to the trees. You never saw such hills. The road had a good surface but went ... [zigzagging endlessly] and you seemed hours in going half a mile. Two nights I think to get to the top—just with your head down and your tongue hanging out because there was no water.' At [Stilos](#) on 28 May men, worn out and gaunt through long marches, little sleep, poor food, and the day-long blitzes, learned that their destination was [Sfakia](#), on the south coast, about 40 miles by the twisting road. They rallied in the morning for the last and the roughest trek of all, heading into the dry and dusty hills.

Survivors still say there seemed to be no end to the road up 'Phantom Hill'. Men, exhausted and ill, were held together by dogged endurance and the encouragement of their comrades. Mate helped mate. 'The discipline on the march was a credit to the Brigade,' says 5 Brigade's diary. One man felt he was going to crack. Colonel Andrew casually sat down beside him, and on learning where he was educated, yarned away quietly about school-days at Wanganui Collegiate. 'I was OK after that.'

They hid up on a rocky, pine-dotted hillside near the beach. From here and there more parties and members of the battalion turned up. ¹¹² Major Leggat thinks that here came one of the most dramatic moments of his life: '... we were told they couldn't take us. No one spoke for quite a while and then we just rolled our pipe tobacco in our newspaper cigarette-paper'; and the major concluded his letter home: 'You can see that it was not the glorious affair that the papers write about. All you

needed was good feet and the ability to go without water.'

Instead of embarking, the weary battalion suddenly had been ordered to take part in the final rearguard, remaining ashore to cover the last evacuation that night, 30 May. Captain Stan Johnson writes:

After the exhaustion of the fighting of the preceding ten days, the incessant bombing and strafing, the frequent withdrawals and rearguards, the casualties, the lack of food and of sleep, and with that hollow feeling in one's stomach resulting not only from the knowledge of failure, but also from the feeling of having been let down some ten days earlier, when the counter-attack at [Maleme](#) did not eventuate as promised, this was almost a knockout blow!

How to tell our troops, those gallant fellows who had given of their all so uncomplainingly, that Egypt was not for us, that we were to fight on till 10 a.m. the next day? It speaks volumes for the morale of the Battalion and of the integrity and loyalty of the soldiers that not one man anticipated the order by leaving his post during the night.

The next day, spirits soared with the news that more ships were returning to [Crete](#) and that the battalion, after doing a final beach-perimeter and control-point duty, would be evacuated.

Half an hour before midnight on 31 May the battalion began embarking, every man shaved, every man fully equipped (for those without gear equipped themselves from cast-aside material). Whalers, assault landing craft and motor landing craft took troops to the waiting ships: the minelayer [Abdiel](#), the light cruiser [Phoebe](#), and the destroyers [Jackal](#), [Kimberley](#), and [Hotspur](#). Colonel Andrew and two other officers were the last aboard. In Egypt he wrote the last two pages which closed the battalion war diary for May 1941:

This record for May 1941 is of a young battalion which had been 'blooded' just a month before in [Greece](#) and was called upon to withstand a 'blitz' of the utmost fury and intenseness, fight against terrific odds, suffer severe casualties, and undergo tests of endurance and morale that many a veteran unit does not come up against throughout its service. Nothing which was encountered by units of the 1st N.Z.E.F. can compare with the period 20/31 May 1941, and yet I am glad to be able to report

that this young battalion proved they could 'take it', give plenty in return and remain as a useful unit to the last day.

The casualties ¹¹³ for the period 20/25 May were 53% and for the month of May 62.35% of strength....

Many lessons have been learned and we should benefit from these in future actions. We know now that we can deal with the enemy even with his tanks and/or aeroplanes, that he does not like night work or the bayonet, and that on the ground he is no match for our men. Even though we had to withdraw for eleven days we had our 'tails up' in defeat.

¹ WO II J. S. Pender; Kawau Island, Auckland; born Sydney, 8 Apr 1894; fitter-engineer; NZ MG Corps 1914-18.

² Lt-Col T. Thornton; Wellington; born Waihi, 24 Aug 1910; clerk.

³ 'I am quite certain that Col. Andrew remarked after the visit [of Brigadier Hargest] that he pointed out the need for troops across the Tavronitis from 22, but for some reason, probably lack of troops available, this was not put into effect.'—Sergeant F. N. Twigg, 22 Battalion Intelligence Sergeant.

⁴ 'The garrison was expecting eight more Hurricanes with fresh pilots on 20 May (Lt-Comdr Black had been sent back to Alexandria to fetch them), but before they could reach the island the airborne invasion began.'— Fleet Air Arm (prepared for the Admiralty by the Ministry of Information, 1943), a booklet which shows that the Fleet Air Arm men generally acquitted themselves well 'against hopeless odds and impossible conditions' in the tragic twilight of Maleme.

⁵ Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Fleet Air Arm, Royal Tank Regiment, Royal Artillery, Royal Australian Artillery, New Zealand Artillery, New Zealand Engineers, 21, 22, 23 and 28 Battalions, 27 (MG) Battalion, Royal Air Force. Colonel Andrew had made several unsuccessful attempts to gain some sort of co-operation from the RM, FAA, RAF and Bofors gunners in his area. The RAF camp near the bridge seriously impaired 22 Battalion's defensive perimeter.

⁶ Three Bren carriers with drivers in charge of a corporal were on loan to 22 Battalion from 1 Battalion, The Welch Regt. As the battalion's carrier platoon had gone to Egypt from Greece, the crews for these carriers were supplied by 2 (Anti-Aircraft) Platoon under Lt J. Forster. No. 3 (Carrier) Platoon men who had been left behind in Greece later escaped to Crete. They were Cpl Jim Hurne (soon evacuated sick) and Ptes Jack Weir and Maurie Cowlrick. They manned a fourth carrier (which had been salvaged from a sunken ship at Suda Bay) and fixed up a Bren gun 'with a bit of olive branch and a piece of tin.' The second carrier had a Bren, and the remaining two had Brownings without sights, so tracer was used to give direction.

The three escapers mentioned above had pushed off from Argos in a Greek boat. They made down the bay (no rudder, rowing) and pulled into the shore for cover when planes came over. Landing on an island, they broke down the chapel door which yielded a rudder—of sorts. On another island they stole another boat with a useless engine and a sail and made their way to the tip of Greece, struck two islands (Kithira and Antikithira), and in eight days made the western end of Crete. Rations and water were slender (a glass of wine and a small boiled egg apiece were all they could manage for their first meal in Crete); 'Jack Weir had a hunch (correct) over navigation. He was a born bush-mechanic.'

⁷ Student had the tables turned on him at Arnhem (4600 aircraft in this airborne operation). Watching 'an immense stream', he exclaimed: 'Oh, how I wish that I had ever had such powerful means at my disposal!' See *The Struggle for Europe*, by Chester Wilmot.

⁸ The Allied strength in Crete on 20 May was:

	Officers	Other Ranks	Total
Royal Navy	25	400	425
British Army	666	14397	15063
Mobile Naval Base Defence Organisation (Royal Marines)	92	1849	1941
Royal Air Force	61	557	618
Australian Imperial Forces	327	6213	6540
Greek Army and gendarmerie	268	9990	10258
New Zealand Division	381	7321	7702
	1820	40727	42547

This total includes [Layforce](#) (commandos), 800-strong, which landed on 24-27 May.

⁹ A German regiment approximates to a British brigade. Four battalions of the regiment (less two glider-borne companies committed in the [Canea](#) area) landed at [Maleme](#).

¹⁰ Less one company, which landed almost two miles inland, up the river well beyond the New Zealand area.

¹¹ Sgt A.J. Chittenden; Waitara; born [Wanganui](#), 17 Apr 1914; baker; wounded 20 May 1941.

¹² Lt A. M. Sargeson; [Hawera](#); born [Hawera](#), 9 Jun 1915; clerk.

¹³ Lt F. N. Twigg; Hastings; born Feilding, 2 Sep 1914; shepherd; wounded 3 Oct 1944.

¹⁴ S-Sgt N. N. Fellows, m.i.d.; [Wellington](#); born [Wellington](#), 6 Jun 1918; salesman.

¹⁵ This was probably due in part to casualties among gun crews during the blitz. By no means alone in his opinion, Lieutenant Robin Sinclair (15 Platoon) is emphatic that some Bofors were out of action through faulty or missing parts. Captain Johnson speaks of a late order (19 May) telling certain guns to move positions slightly before opening fire again. Nevertheless some of these guns were still firing at 3 p.m., according to 5 Brigade war diary. One 22 Battalion man, [Bill Hulton](#), says: 'I have great admiration for [Bofors crews] and also for the Jerry pilots who attacked them. On many occasions I saw Stuka pilots diving down the fire of these guns, and had no misgivings as to whether I would have had the guts to withstand such a gaff.'

¹⁶ WO II J. Matheson; born [Scotland](#), 16 Jun 1905; tinsmith; died of wounds 20 May 1941.

- ¹⁷ Sgt J. Woods; born Melbourne, 25 May 1897; motor-body builder; wounded and p.w. 24 May 1941.
- ¹⁸ Pte N. M. Cowling; New Plymouth; born New Plymouth, 1 Nov 1913; market gardener; wounded and p.w. 21 May 1941; repatriated 1943.
- ¹⁹ Cpl W. S. Hall; born Carterton, 21 Feb 1907; salesman; died of wounds 21 May 1941.
- ²⁰ S-Sgt H. P. Hosking; Feilding; born Feilding, 24 Apr 1917; watchmaker.
- ²¹ Sgt A. W. G. Moore; Wellington; born NZ 25 Oct 1903; driver; wounded 26 Jun 1942.
- ²² Cpl A. J. Hosie; Mauriceville; born Petone, 19 Sep 1915; soap worker.
- ²³ Pte A. W. Alexander; born Masterton, 19 Jan 1912; mechanic.
- ²⁴ Sgt F. V. Mence; New Plymouth; born NZ 24 Dec 1913; tile maker.
- ²⁵ Pte F. M. Wan; Wanganui; born Hawera, 8 Mar 1918; railway porter; wounded 21 May 1941; p.w. 1 Jun 1941; released 20 Jan 1945.
- ²⁶ Pte G. Bloomfield; born Scotland, 14 Aug 1908; carpenter; killed in action 20 May 1941.
- ²⁷ Attending the dying man were stretcher-bearers Trevor Wallace and Ray Kennedy. The two found 'that the stretcher needed so urgently was being used as a bed by a driver, yes, we had to get [him] to part with it. Bloomfield, past our help, died shortly after we got him on the stretcher. We placed him in a deep dry watercourse handy to Coy HQ, an area we'd selected to place wounded.'
- ²⁸ Not traced.

²⁹ Pte R. G. Kennedy; Taumarunui; born NZ 30 Dec 1914; plumber.

³⁰ Sgt T. G. Wallace; born NZ 21 May 1911; farmhand.

³¹ Lt-Col S. H. Johnson, ED; Wellington; born Whangarei, 5 Oct 1910; school-teacher; p.w. 27 Nov 1941; joined Regular Force; Director AEWS, 1953-.

³² Sgt J. McM. Crawford; Gisborne; born Scotland, 10 Apr 1910; carpenter.

³³ Capt R. B. Sinclair, ED, m.i.d.; Waipawa; born Gisborne, 3 Jan 1918; clerk; wounded and p.w. 20 May 1941; escaped Jul 1941; invalided to NZ Nov 1941; served 22 (Mot) Bn, Italy, 1944.

³⁴ MNBDO: Mobile Naval Base Defence Organisation.

³⁵ The reasons are discussed in the Crete volume of the official history of New Zealand in the Second World War.

³⁶ Captain Johnson cannot understand this statement. He recalls all 10 guns firing regularly on days preceding the invasion. He had hoped that some of the guns could have been silenced, resited, and then could have taken the German by surprise if an airborne invasion began.

The views of men who still stoutly maintain that the anti-aircraft guns did not fire on invasion day can be summed up in the words of CSM H. Strickland. Gliders, troop-carriers and parachutists, 'an ack-ack gunner's dream, they were sitting shots but there were no shots. All due respect to ... [D. M. Davin's Crete] the guns didn't roar into action, not at Maleme. There was an order that they were not to open fire, and they didn't.' Perhaps one day this controversy will be investigated and settled.

³⁷ Sgt T. H. Vallis; born England, 17 Jan 1915; farmer; p.w. 20 May 1941.

³⁸ WO I F. B. Haycock, m.i.d.; born Auckland, 10 Dec 1915; Regular soldier; p.w. 1 Jun 1941; escaped Jul 1941.

³⁹ WO II F. K. Ford; Gisborne; born Auckland, 26 Jun 1913; clerk; p.w. Jul 1942.

⁴⁰ Pte R. E. Porter; born Australia, 11 Jun 1918; labourer; killed in action 20 May 1941.

⁴¹ Pte J. Farrington; born NZ 6 July 1905; miner; killed in action 20 May 1941.

⁴² L-Cpl J. T. Mehaffey; born Wellington, 20 Jun 1916; civil servant; killed in action 20 May 1941.

⁴³ Sgt K. J. Forbes-Faulkner; New Plymouth; born Auckland, 16 Nov 1914; timber worker.

⁴⁴ Cpl J. Hamlin; born Wellington, 6 May 1915; shepherd; accidentally killed Nov 1955.

⁴⁵ Sgt A. G. Smith; born Pahiatua, 3 Mar 1918; driver; wounded and p.w. May 1941; escaped Aug 1941; died Taumarunui, 29 Dec 1948.

⁴⁶ Doc' Fowke was apparently the only man to escape from 15 Platoon. He crossed the centre of the airfield after dark and rejoined Company Headquarters. Most of 15 Platoon were wounded or killed. He brought news of Mehaffey, whom he had nursed with two others in their weapon pit until they died.

⁴⁷ WO II W. T. Vaughan, m.i.d.; New Plymouth; born England, 21 Jan 1903; shop assistant.

⁴⁸ Sgt P. F. Butler, m.i.d.; Whangarei; born Auckland, 22 May 1917; driver.

⁴⁹ 13 Platoon, cut off, made its own way back after dark, greatly assisted by Bob Bayliss, then a private—a clear example of a natural leader coming to the fore and assuming control successfully when everything looked

hopeless. Deducing (with German voices everywhere) that Company Headquarters had been captured, the platoon made its way east of B Company area and rejoined the company early next morning.

⁵⁰ The total number to leave 14 Pl and Coy HQ area at 0430 hrs was approx 40 made up of about 14 unwounded, and the 14 wounded C Coy men and about 12 RAF and LAA troops. En route we picked up perhaps a further 12 mixed troops, some 22 Bn and some FAA; but we dropped 6 including the CSM Bob Adams, Cpl Smith 14 Pl, and Cpl Earnshaw Coy HQ. On the ridge we picked up 13 Pl approx 15 strong. The above figures are not accurate, but they are as near as I can remember. My check in 21 Bn area about 1100 hrs, after I had got all our wounded including Donald off to the 21 Bn RAP gave me 27 unwounded ... C Coy men.... half of us had dysentery in a rather severe form. Donald did an excellent job—as always—clearing local area on ridge and covering the withdrawal of the wounded. He did not receive a decoration here, but I certainly recommended him for one for his magnificent behaviour and gallant leadership during the continuous period of 30 hours.—Captain Johnson.

⁵¹ Maj J. W. C. Craig, MC and bar, ED; Tauranga; born Gisborne, 22 Aug 1911; accountant; p.w. 21 May 1941; escaped Jul 1941; served with MI9 (A Force) in Greece; recaptured Jan 1942; escaped (Italy) Sep 1943; served with partisans in Ligurian Mountains Sep 1943-Dec 1944.

⁵² Sgt V. Freeman; Halcombe; born Perth, Aust., 4 May 1913; shearer and farm worker; p.w. 21 May 1941.

⁵³ Sgt R. McL. Boyd; Ohura, King Country; born NZ 5 Oct 1910; van driver; wounded 29 Jun 1942.

⁵⁴ Pte H. Smale; Whenuakura, Patea; born Napier, 6 Aug 1912; labourer; wounded and p.w. May 1941; repatriated.

⁵⁵ Pte E. Barrett; born NZ 30 Oct 1918; casual employee; killed in action 20 May 1941.

⁵⁶ Pte A. E. Holley; Waingarō; born Hawera, 26 Dec 1918; farm labourer; wounded and p.w. 20 May 1941.

⁵⁷ Cpl N. L. Wakelin; born NZ 30 Nov 1912; lorry driver; killed in action 20 May 1941.

⁵⁸ Pte A. Gillice; born NZ 14 Mar 1905; labourer; p.w. 15 Jul 1942; died of sickness while p.w. 11 Feb 1945.

⁵⁹ L-Cpl F. J. Minton; born Carterton, 10 Apr 1915; labourer; died of wounds 23 Nov 1941.

⁶⁰ Pte W. Nickson; Halcombe; born NZ 28 Feb 1916; labourer.

⁶¹ Pte E. G. Velvin; Eltham; born Eltham, 28 Aug 1919; butcher.

⁶² Pte W. Doole; born NZ 12 Jun 1913; farmhand; killed in action 20 May 1941.

⁶³ Pte H. J. Slade; Dannevirke; born Dannevirke, 6 Nov 1912; labourer; p.w. 1 Jun 1941.

⁶⁴ L-Cpl A. D. Dunn; Stratford; born NZ 3 Jan 1914; storeman; p.w. 21 May 1941. Dunn writes that he later escaped 'and spent three months searching around Crete for Transport back to Egypt.... [Because of] the heavy strain on the villages where these staunch people were trying to feed so many and mostly due to the severe punishment the Germans were handing out to those people caught assisting British Soldiers I decided with my companion, Pte D. Grylls, that on information which we had received we would try and find our way back to Greece and on to Turkey. After exchanging our uniforms for Civilian clothing we contacted a chap with a sixteen foot boat and rowed our way back to Greece landing at a Coastal Village.... After resting there for three days we decided to press on to Turkey, quite easy really, but we had picked up an English Soldier at the Village who wanted to tag along with us and did, but his lack of fitness started to hamper our progress and in allowing a rest on the outskirts of a Town we were invited to the Police Station where we were Jailed and sold to the Italians....'

⁶⁵ Cpl T. Walsh; Wanganui; born Wellington, 14 May 1914; labourer; p.w.

15 Jul 1942.

⁶⁶ Cpl H. A. Kettle; Waitara; born Waitara, 17 Mar 1918; baker; p.w. 21 May 1941.

⁶⁷ Lt D. Gower; Stratford; born Patea, 14 Nov 1917; labourer; wounded 16 Dec 1941.

⁶⁸ L-Sgt C. F. Forbes-Faulkner; born South Africa, 2 Mar 1909; baker; p.w. 1 Jun 1941.

⁶⁹ Pte P. A. Thomas; born Stratford, 28 Jan 1904; timber worker.

⁷⁰ Sgt W. G. Pemberton; New Plymouth; born NZ 6 Dec 1911; driver.

⁷¹ Cpl A. A. Mills; born NZ 15 May 1905; waterside worker; died of wounds 22 Jul 1942.

⁷² Pte H. Wigley; born New Plymouth, 4 May 1917; labourer; p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

⁷³ L-Sgt C. R. Gilbert; New Plymouth; born NZ 14 Nov 1911; painter and paperhanger; wounded 3 Oct 1944.

⁷⁴ Maj P. A. M. Brant, m.i.d.; Fiji; born Durban, South Africa, 3 Jul 1907; Regular soldier; wounded 20 May 1941.

⁷⁵ Pte J. B. Simpson; New Plymouth; born NZ 30 Aug 1916; butcher; wounded 20 May 1941; p.w. 1 Jun 1941.

⁷⁶ Jerry Fowler, after paying a warm tribute to the way a nearby 27 (MG) Battalion section under Corporal Gould covered the bridge, sums up: 'the whole of Don Coy held out the whole day and did not move from our original positions until night, and only then when we had found out that Bn HQ had fallen back, they evidently thinking that our Coy had been overrun.

We were not overrun, and had more than held our own with all enemy landed or advanced into our area. In my opinion our Coy Com. Capt. Campbell put up a very good show and proved himself a very fearless and brave soldier. The soldier on that day whom I will always remember is our Coy runner [Mick Bourke](#) of Stratford. He did some very grand work that fateful morning, and his personal bravery I will always remember.'

⁷⁷ The airfield was to be held at all costs; no alternative scheme is mentioned in available official records. This was purely a D Company plan. As far as the whole battalion was concerned, the airfield was to be held at all costs; but, remembering the lessons of [Greece](#), Campbell had thought it wise to have an alternative plan and had instructed his platoon commanders to re-form to the south 'if the worst happened'. The precaution availed D Company nothing.

⁷⁸ [Lt R. B. Fell](#); born NZ 8 Nov 1910; motor mechanic; killed in action 20 May 1941.

⁷⁹ Because the battalion had no mortars, McAra had gone to A Company as a platoon commander.

⁸⁰ [Pte W. H. Croft](#); born NZ 6 Apr 1916; freezing works labourer; killed in action 20 May 1941.

⁸¹ [WO II H. J. C. Strickland](#); born England, 31 Jul 1904; foreman; wounded and p.w. May 1941.

⁸² [L-Sgt I. B. McWhinnie](#); born NZ 7 Nov 1916; clerk; killed in action 20 May 1941.

⁸³ [WO I S. A. R. Purnell](#); born [Auckland](#), 21 Feb 1914; Regular soldier; killed in action 20 May 1941.

⁸⁴ [Capt L. G. Williams](#), m.i.d.; Silverstream; born [Christchurch](#), 2 Jun 1909; draughtsman; wounded and p.w. 22 May 1941; repatriated Nov 1943.

⁸⁵ Col G. P. Cade, DSO, m.i.d.; Wellington; born Hawera, 10 May 1909; Regular soldier; 6 Fd Regt 1940-41; CO 6 Fd Regt 1945; Director RNZA 1948-54; CRA and GSO I NZ Div, 1954-57; comd Malaya Force, 1957-.

⁸⁶ Watching the blitz, Williams saw British gunners (4-inch, 3-inch and Bofors) plastered and blown from their posts by bombs: one second-lieutenant remained alive among the officers on the 4-inch guns. This answers criticism by the infantry, who could not understand why the Marines on their two 4-inch guns did not fire a shot. In any case, the guns were sited for firing out to sea and could not sweep the critical western bank of the river where the Germans were massing.

⁸⁷ Sgt G. H. Palmer, DCM; Dannevirke; born Christchurch, 27 Aug 1916; shepherd.

⁸⁸ Cpl B. A. Booth; Waipukurau; born Waipukurau, 11 Feb 1911; grocer; wounded 26 Oct 1942.

⁸⁹ In fairness to these men it should be said that by the afternoon a large part of the ill-armed congregation of displaced airmen, sailors, and gunners had sorted themselves out into some shape on the south side of Point 107. Lieutenant Ramsay (RNVR) says: 'The F.A.A. had taken up positions directed by a combination of their own inclinations and any officer who appeared to know anything about the situation—Col. Andrew was occasionally seen for instance—but no one loved us or took any interest in us....' The group in the afternoon 'had a pretty bad time, but when dark came the situation seemed safe but highly uncomfortable except for the West side of the Hill which was now completely occupied by Germans.' With no information and no guides reaching them in the dark, they nevertheless remained on the southern slopes of Point 107 until 4 a.m. (21 May), an indication that the group, although bewildered, was not demoralised. At 4 a.m. they struck out for the hills further inland. Ramsay's report continues:

- '1. We didn't know where our own people were.
- '2. We didn't know where the enemy were.
- '3. Many people had no rifles.
- '4. Many people had. 30 rifles and no ammo.
- '5. Everyone was desperately tired, thirsty and hungry. We had no food and no water.

'5. We had no objective to make for.'

Matters did not improve when the party did manage to contact the New Zealanders in 21 and 23 Battalions' areas. From then on, unwanted, 'without any understanding of who was who', they were shuffled disconcertingly from one unit or group to the other until carried away in the general retreat east to [Canea](#).

⁹⁰ [Lt-Col K. R. S. Crarer](#), m.i.d.; [Gisborne](#); born [Wellington](#), 24 Nov 1909; accountant; seconded to British Army, 1942.

⁹¹ [Lt-Col C. N. Watson](#), MC, m.i.d.; [Wellington](#); born [Tinwald](#), 8 Jan 1911; school-teacher; [CO 26 Bn](#) Jun 1942; [23 Bn](#) Jun-Jul 1942; p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

⁹² [Lt-Col J. M. Allen](#), m.i.d.; born [Cheadle](#), England, 3 Aug 1901; farmer; MP ([Hauraki](#)) 1938-41; [CO 21 Bn](#) May-Nov 1941; killed in action 28 Nov 1941.

⁹³ [Sgt B. Skeen](#); born [Wanganui](#), 12 Nov 1907; linesman; killed in action 22 May 1941.

⁹⁴ [Lt W. G. Slade](#); born NZ 12 Jun 1907; clerk; died of wounds while p.w. 23 May 1941.

⁹⁵ Yet within half an hour of the drop Slade's cook came over to Company Headquarters badly wounded in the face, 'painting a grim picture of Slade's area being wiped out'. Slade is believed to have been killed in a German plane which was shot down while evacuating severely wounded prisoners to [Greece](#).

⁹⁶ [Sgt B. D. N. Jurgens](#); [Naike](#), [Huntly](#); born [Taihape](#), 22 Sep 1918; farmer; wounded 29 Oct 1942.

⁹⁷ 2 Lt [K. Elliott](#), VC; [Pongaroa](#); born [Apiti](#), 25 Apr 1916; farmer; twice wounded.

⁹⁸ [Pte T. J. Thompson](#); [Foxton](#); born [Waihi](#), 25 Jan 1909; labourer; wounded 20 May 1941; p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

⁹⁹ Pte J. C. N. Adcock; [New Plymouth](#); born NZ 4 May 1914; labourer; wounded 20 May 1941; p.w. 28 Nov 1941.

¹⁰⁰ Pte A. D. Holley; [Wanganui](#); born NZ 31 Aug 1917; railway porter; p.w. 1 Jun 1941.

¹⁰¹ Pte J. Weir; [National Park](#); born Aust., 10 Feb 1912; driver.

¹⁰² Sgt M. C. Cowlrick; [Napier](#); born [Napier](#), 19 Dec 1918; clerk.

¹⁰³ 'Let me say at once, I do not for one moment hold Col. Andrew responsible for the failure to hold [Maleme](#); he was given an impossible task, and he has my sympathy,' writes [General Freyberg](#) in a letter to the author in January 1956. 'I take full responsibility as regards the policy of holding the aerodrome. I did not like the defences of any of my four garrisons. I would have put in another Infantry Battalion to help Andrew, but it was impossible in the time to dig them in. The ground was solid rock, neither did we have the tools. Puttick, Hargest and I must bear our share of responsibility for the defensive positions that were taken up at [Maleme](#), which were as good as we could hope for under the difficult circumstances.'

¹⁰⁴ General Ringel, who commanded 5 German Mountain Division, and General Sturm, who (as a colonel) commanded the air landing at [Retimo](#), made the following comments on an official German study of the [Balkan](#) campaign: 'The passive attitude of the British Command in the neighbourhood of the important air-landing base of the Germans, [Maleme](#), was decisive for the loss of Crete. The British were satisfied with firing against this landing place instead of recapturing the airfield in a counter attack immediately after the first landing. This would have made the landing of the 5th Mountain Division with transport machines impossible and would have doomed the parachutists so far landed in [Crete](#) ... no sufficient naval material was available for a German invasion by sea in the entire Aegean.'

¹⁰⁵ Not traced.

¹⁰⁶ Capt O. S. Hetherington, MBE; [Rotorua](#); born [Thames](#), 3 Apr 1903;

medical practitioner; p.w. 23 May 1941; repatriated Sep 1944.

¹⁰⁷ The Padre gave Schultz his wife's address in case a letter could be sent saying the New Zealander was captured and alive. Schultz, later captured in the Desert, spent the war in [America](#), returned to [Germany](#) and, wishing to become a teacher, entered a university in the British Zone through a reference from the Padre. He is now a teacher and happily married. Padre Hurst has a photo of the wedding group.

¹⁰⁸ The term 'C Coy 22 Bn' covers remnants of C Company and others from 22 Battalion; the same is meant by 'D Coy' in the following paragraph.

¹⁰⁹ Pte [F. Palmer](#); born [New Plymouth](#), 3 Feb 1910; labourer; wounded and p.w. 22 May 1941.

¹¹⁰ Pte [L. G. J. Follas](#); born [Levin](#), 17 Oct 1910; painter; wounded and p.w. 26 Jun 1942.

¹¹¹ Maj [J. P. Snadden](#), MC; [Wellington](#); born [Te Kuiti](#), 24 May 1913; salesman; twice wounded.

¹¹² Sargeson's party, after hiding all day on 21 May above [Maleme](#) in a long, overgrown ditch, had tiptoed out undetected when night fell, and their luck holding, succeeded in making through the rocky ranges 'rather like a bit of typical NZ mountain bush country I suppose, not so much bush.' They shared one tin of M & V, spoonful by spoonful, between 14 hungry, weary and ill-shod men. One man sucked a raw egg. After reaching a village four miles from Souriya Bay, on the south coast, other escapers attempted and failed to reach [Sfakia](#) (already rumoured as the point of evacuation) by boat. Sargeson's party then made for [Sfakia](#), following roughly along the rugged, arid coastline and suffering from hunger and thirst. Shooting a small goat and boiling it in salt water in a petrol tin found on the beach, they also drank the briny soup. 'We learned that the pangs of hunger (which we had somewhat abated) were a trifle, compared to the punishing agony of thirst.' That night, on a ridge, investigating the sound of croaking frogs ('Hallucination perhaps'), they found neither swamp nor water. A day later, almost beyond care, they stumbled on a stream. Four scattered Greek settlements provided enough slender food and water to see them to [Sfakia](#) at 7 p.m. on 31 May, and only when on the minelayer [Abdiel](#) did Sargeson

eat his army emergency ration: 'I had argued that while I could still walk I could keep that concentrated can till I reached more desperate straits.'

¹¹³ The battalions casualties on Crete were:

Killed in action and died of wounds	62
Wounded	65
Wounded and PW	81 *
Prisoners of war	94
	302

* Two of whom died of wounds while prisoners.

22 BATTALION

CHAPTER 3 – LIBYA, 1941

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Libya, 1941

If I ever get a chance to grab a soft job I'll do so. —Private 6971, immediately after Greece.

I hope I get back to the old Battalion. I'd hate to go into a strange unit. It's one's old cobbles who make the existence of an infantryman reasonably happy. —Private 6971, after some weeks at Base.

'Cairo,' writes Bob Foreman,¹ 'the city which seemed to stand apart—the boom town. If you wanted to go on the bash what better place than Cairo—arguing with and cursing and swearing at George Wog—bright lights—a great variety of food and drink—the Pam Pam—a few chairs flying — and bottles—then came the Red Caps to spoil it all—jokers running down troops from other countries fighting in the desert (were the troops furthest from the line the loudest in their criticism?)—shoe shine boys (remember those ones who would pester you when you didn't want your shoes cleaned, and then rub a patch of blacking on them?)—hawkers (wallets, photos, obscene and otherwise—crude little books containing very crude stories written in unconsciously humorous English—fountain pens, watch straps, etc., etc.). Wogs saying such things as "You come with me Kiwi—I show you...." Walking down to Bab El Louk station and passing Wogs smoking hubbly-bubbly pipes—a whiff of burning incense when passing some doorway —Arabic cafés blaring forth native vocal and string music from a radio and fat Wogs sitting at tables drinking (say) coffee (black in small cups). Cane crates full of fowls, piles of veges. —hunks of raw meat covered with flies—those native pancake sort of things—donkeys (four legs two ears and a nose sticking out from under some enormous load, or a Wog sitting on the donkey's rump and the donkey always looking the picture of dejection). The Wog driving his cart and sitting at the front with his wives in a group at the back and dressed in black with veils. Walking round the streets, shops and places where you could get nearly anything at a price—Wog kids meeting you and then running after you yelling "Baksheesh-ana-muskeen-marfesh faloose" (then, finding themselves out of luck and the object of abuse, as a parting shot: "New Zealand bastard!"). Then in the bazaar—they said it was safer if there were three or four of you together—masses of tall Wogs in flowing dirty white robes—some of them carrying sticks—out of the hot

dusty sun into a cool dark little shop (maybe you wanted to buy some stockings or tapestries)—then out into the blinding sunshine again—Wogs with something wrong with one eye—a Wog with no legs, just wheeling himself along the street on a trolley: a trunk, two arms and a head. Sometimes he would stop and get off his cart and move himself along with a loping motion on his arms and the bottom of his trunk, the way a monkey sometimes hops along on its front legs. And small Wog eggs with a taste of their own. And always Wogs shouting and arguing. Gully-gully men—Wogs with flies clustered round eyes and mouth and not bothering to brush them off. And traffic roaring and honking their way along the streets, especially those taxis, they drove with one hand on and off the horn. And the trams, packed full and other Wogs clinging onto the sides. (It was the same on the trains—full inside—and more Wogs sitting on the roofs of the carriages—robes flowing and fluttering in the wind.) And all those tales of mystery about the Dead City. (And tales of trams bought and sold.)

‘But often you would get dressed up in your “Groppi- Mocker”, with maybe a camera slung over your shoulder, and make for the N.Z. Club (via [YMCA](#), Wog bars, and [Maadi](#) train). Then a hot shower, more refreshing than a cold one even in hot weather. Then a feed (that very good ice cream at the Club), and then off for the afternoon to—say—the zoo or Mohamed Ali Mosque (something worth seeing I thought) or the races at [Gezira](#) or [Heliopolis](#)—you only usually went to the Pyramids once (got your photo taken sitting on a camel), and if you felt energetic, climbed to the top; also stood for a minute and looked at the Sphinx. (Also wondered just how they got those great blocks of stone all the way from the quarry.)

‘Then maybe back (by train or sometimes taxi) to [Maadi](#). If it was still daylight and hot, well what better than a nice cool meal at the [Maadi Tent](#)—those ladies of [Maadi](#) who ran it won't be forgotten by one Kiwi. (Then back to the pictures at Shafto's or Pall Mall: reels put on in the wrong order and frequent breakdowns: waves of insults, whistles, etc. each time it broke down. Also Andrews Sisters singing “Rumboogie” while you waited for the pictures to start at the Pall Mall.) And as you left the [Maadi Tent](#) there were all those Jackaranda and Flame trees putting on a great display of blue and red, and maybe a Kiwi having a round of golf. And if you came back by bus, taxi or lorry, remember that bump at the railway crossing? And the Berka (no comment)?’

Men new to [Cairo](#), walking out of the [New Zealand Club](#) and wandering aimlessly down streets and around corners, would suddenly stop, realising they were completely 'bushed'. The best plan was to call a gharry, say ' [New Zealand Club](#), George' with the utmost casualness, and hope no circling of blocks would add a few more 'ackers' to the fare. Newcomers soon found the heat and sweat played up with leather watch straps; they bought metal ones (and arguments would start: 'Now if you're smacked on the wrist...'). And the sudden discarding of money belts, so zealously worn and guarded in camp and in troopship. Some had their hair shaved off—a regular fashion early in the war—or were tattooed, waking in the morning with heavy head and groping for sweet, cold water in the tall-necked earthenware zeer, and discovering that other dull ache was some clumsy or blatant tattoo. The once-over at hairdressing establishments: haircut, shave, shampoo, vibrator-massage, nail manicure, and so on.

Pestered by a hawker to buy something at, say, 50 piastres, and offering perhaps five or ten just to be rid of the trader. But 'George', game to the end, haggling, until finally: 'Right New Zealand. You my very good friend—I give it you at your price.' And the Kiwi saying in disgust: 'Christ, George, I don't want the bloody thing.' Many bought sunglasses, and how quickly these were discarded. Others bought bottles, all sealed and wrapped in cellophane and ribbons and labelled with a well-known brand of Scotch whisky, but when opened it tasted like methylated spirits; and search as much as a man could, no trace would be found where the glass had been tampered with and repaired. Gradually other men grew more civilised in their drinking habits, and ordered and drank such things as 'gazoos: very nice, very sweet, very clean'; ate water melons; got used to the paper boy (Mail or Gazette) shouting remarks about diseases (not entirely unknown within the [2 NZEF](#) itself) affecting Mussolini and [Hitler](#) and, sometimes, for a ten-acker bribe, even a distinguished New Zealand commander or two.

The Naafi canteen ran 'housie' and sold eggs and chips fried in oil, and Stella or Pyramide beer, invariably drunk from cut-down beer bottles. The company canteen (when company canteens were established) had its radio blaring happily ('the beer ran out on one occasion and we got in Zibbib, with disastrous results to one Kiwi from [Gisborne](#)'). Bits of spare time were also passed dozing in the tents, or running each other down, or playing cards.

'Sometimes somebody would get heartily sick of it all and really go on the bash. Then in the dead of night we would hear approaching noises—songs—laughter—curses. Then one voice would break away from the others and make roughly in our direction ('You are my sunshine, my only sunshine....'). Then the next second the whole tent would jolt as a thud was heard outside. Then would follow a stream of curses at the offending tentpeg—then the voice would become more distant and finally die away in the distance, probably to enter at last its own tent—telling the victims in there just what it thought of them, amid much shuffling and fumbling....'

'Yes: Egypt and the desert: I hated it,' writes a veteran. 'The other countries I saw all had their redeeming features, but Egypt had so very little and I liked it least of all. A climate and landscape as uninteresting as any I could imagine. You hear of beauty of desolation: ² well it had the desolation.... I didn't even see those great sand dunes you see in pictures (except maybe a patch in the [Sinai](#)), but mainly flat desert or sombre wadis (valleys) and escarpments. And so little sand and so much dirt, dust and broken bits of rock lying about, plus camelthorn. Some said the sunsets were beautiful, but I'd say I have seen plenty better at home. Then again some said that the evenings had "something". But there again I'd say that it was only relative: how many times in the desert have we waited longingly for the evening to come?'

June began with the weary survivors landing at [Alexandria](#) and going on to the desolate outskirts of [Garawi Camp](#) (near [Helwan](#), a few miles south of [Maadi](#)), a very bad camp, 'arid and bare as a sow's paunch', with no facilities, rice three times a day, no fresh vegetables, and a sugar shortage. The Intelligence Officer, Sam [McLernon](#), ³ suggested grinding the rice to make it more palatable; but this made meals more leather-some than ever. The rearguard from [Greece](#) welcomed comrades back. The stories, reunions, arguments, laughs, and sudden silences began. So did weapon training and the endless route marches (full water bottles carried, but nobody allowed to drink). One platoon, slogging through dirt and sand, met a peanut vendor—and hawkers used to appear in the most surprising places, even during 'highly secret' moves. The soudani-seller cried: ' [Hitler](#) no bloody good, Mussolini no bloody good, but peanuts very bloody good.' They ignored him, and as they headed for home, heard the farewell cry: ' [Hitler](#) no bloody good, Mussolini no bloody good, and peanuts no bloody good.'

The reinforcements, 365 of them, marched in, bringing the battalion's strength up to 30 officers and 752 men. 'And what a splendid lot of men they were too,' says Colonel Andrew. 'They'd had home affairs to wind up and leave in order, and once this was done they turned to soldiering. When they came to us they were keen to learn. The veterans took them in hand, taught them and wised them up. They settled down excellently.'

Here is the first impression of a reinforcement, Private [Price](#):⁴ 'The first parade after the reinforcements had been posted to their various Companies, he gives us all a heart to heart talk: "You are in the 22nd Battalion, yes, 2nd to none, and I'm tough, bloody tough. Old February, that's me—Twenty-eight Days—ask any of the old hands, they'll tell you. Don't think you can go sick and get out of it...." The old hands had told us beforehand practically word for word what he would say.... Our Company Commander is a hell of a good sort, Major Hart....'

The Colonel was not satisfied with the appearance of his battalion. He cancelled all leave until camp lines were left clean and tidy, bedding and equipment laid out properly for inspection, guards and pickets knew their duties and performed them smartly, and men dressed properly on parade. Furthermore, to the delight of other ranks, officers were given brisk rifle drill for several mornings.

One Saturday morning the men were straggling back to camp after an unusually hot march. The Colonel appeared and shouted: 'March like soldiers!' A muffled voice retorted: 'Oh shut up you silly old b—.' That afternoon, instead of [Cairo](#) leave, away they went on a second march, Colonel Andrew first saying, 'I may be a silly old b—but I'm the boss' and then setting the pace. No veteran will ever forget that afternoon's march, and stories of that day used to frighten off reinforcements from 22 Battalion. 'But by God,' a veteran writes, 'we prided ourselves on being able to walk any other outfit into the ground—and we could. An officer, Tommy Hawthorn, used to bounce along, leading his boys, with his eyes half closed, the son-of-a-gun could walk indefinitely.'

After a few weeks at [Garawi](#) the battalion moved to another camp, [Kabrit](#), by the [Bitter Lakes](#), three-quarters of the way down the [Suez Canal](#) and about 16 miles from the tarnished port of [Suez](#). This was no holiday resort: enemy bombers knew [Kabrit](#), and all tents (eight men to a tent) were dug down three feet. They stayed

here for a month. Fifth Brigade was grouping together for advanced training. On the lake and on the Canal they practised invasion exercises in shallow landing craft. 'These ALCs are something like a steel barge, one end opens and the platoon goes aboard, Nos. 1 and 3 Sections first and No. 2 last. All sit down in rows, the door is pulled up, and away we go. The ALCs are.... for landing purposes only. There are ships fitted with special davits and the ALCs are carried aboard these. Then about three miles off the shore the Mother ship anchors, and each crowd man their ALC and are lowered over the side, and away you go, either get lost or land on the wrong beach. We put in two days on one of these ships and did a few practice landings and then the whole business was called off.' Perhaps it was just as well that the plan to make a surprise landing behind enemy lines in [Libya](#) was abandoned.

Meanwhile, men who had lost all their personal gear in [Crete](#) were wondering whether they would be compensated. They learned now that they would: 50 ackers (10s.) apiece. Officers seem to have received full compensation, and one is known to have received £46.

From [Kabrit](#) they went on to [Ismailia](#), marching a third (14 miles) of the way in a day, one of the worst marches put up by the battalion, with feet giving out all the way. Platoon commanders had to go on a punishment march next day. Nobody fell out from 3 (Mortar) Platoon, 7 Platoon (A Company), and 14 Platoon (C Company). Paul Donoghue and a comrade marched the full distance with recently stitched heads.

The unit, now on guard duties with the rest of 5 Brigade, had the bad luck to camp in [Spinney Wood](#), a filthy spot, a good example of some of the wretched places a battalion can be landed in. [RASC](#) traffic, using extensively a road through the camp, sent dust flying in all directions. One row of tents huddled between a highway and a railway. A train 'with square wheels' jolted past every night. The Camel Corps only too obviously occupied an area to the south. Near that was a row of native hen-houses. Any attempt at migration was balked by a wireless station to the west, the [Royal Marines](#) to the north, and the main railway line to [Port Said](#) to the east. Within this blighted area sprawled a contractors' canteen (no [Naafi](#)), a dhobi with clothes-lines and living quarters, native latrines and washing places, traders' hovels, and a native barber shop—all this in a dusty patch smaller than 20 acres, where 774 men lived in tents jammed together, their guy ropes interlacing. Precautions against the

swarming flies were negligible; cooks found their quarters dirty and primitive, and with no mess tent, men had to draw their food and carry it to their tents. The camp was set in a malarial area. Every night jittery natives streamed through the lines to avoid air raids on [Ismailia](#). And an outbreak of plague in [Port Said](#) stopped all leave.

Colonel Andrew, who could storm as fiercely for his men as against them, sent a vibrant report to Brigade, but fortunately the battalion stayed here only a fortnight.

There were two compensations: a train containing crates of beer became derailed, an extraordinary coincidence, beside the camp (while the canteen contractor joined pillagers about the train, other enterprising soldiers rifled his canteen); and working parties sent to unload boats on the Canal often returned laden with tinned delicacies. With visions of luxuries, C Company landed the hay and wood line: no job was dirtier or thirstier. Officers of 23 Battalion were entertained at a hilarious party, at which Colonel Andrew sat back smilingly and said: 'If I were 10 years younger I would be in there.' Suddenly, with a whoop and a yell, he dived into the struggling mass 'and took as much subduing as anybody.'

The next move, 280 miles away into the desert, into 'the blue', was to [Kaponga Box](#). While approaching their destination, near [Alamein](#), a few men noticed a slight rise in the sand and rock. It didn't look much. This modest ridge was known as Ruweisat—a dark and tragic place for the battalion one year later. [Kaponga Box](#), where 5 Brigade settled, was a patch of desert encircled by low sandhills, intended to be turned into a horseshoe-shaped fortress—not a Beau Geste one with walls and loopholes, but a camouflaged, almost invisible fortress with strongpoints and trenches on the surface and underground tunnels and rooms. Fifth Brigade sweated away preparing these amenities. Little showed above ground. The idea was that should the enemy sweep down from the frontier and approach [Alexandria](#), the fortress garrison, amply supplied with food and ammunition, could sally out and harry him from the flanks. This 'Box' outlook, together with schemes of flying 'Jock columns', was a fashionable but unsuccessful idea, abandoned in mid-1942.

The battalion set to work to build a series of 'keeps'. First the section built its keep, modelled along the lines of those which had proved their worth round [Tobruk](#). Once the section keeps were finished, they were wired round to form a platoon keep, and then, finally, a company keep—that was the theory, anyway. There was

no continuous line—rather a chain of company keeps, about 400 or 600 yards apart. The men worked away in the rock and sand, hacking out holes of all shapes and sizes with many curses and blisters, four hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon. Charlie Brock⁵ and his pioneers were well to the fore. Indian sappers and men from 7 Field Company, New Zealand Engineers, gave brief assistance, blasting into layers of hard limestone which had very few fissures. Sometimes they struck enormous, tough boulders. 'A Company found some good fossils; one day a rabbit bobbed up, God knows what it lived on, but it was knocked on the head with a spade.'

The battalion picks and shovels, although plentiful, were made from poor stuff: 'on the hard rock the pick just bounced off and turned back and looked at you.' The battalion's forge was kept busy. Help arrived in the shape of twenty crowbars and Spaulding hammers.

By mid-September good progress had been made. Parties took spells and briefly bathed and basked on the coast. Ploughing back to the Kaponga Box through fine, sandy dust left the troops dirtier than ever. Water was not plentiful—'1 ½ gallons a man a day for all purposes', read the official ration, but all of this except half a water bottle for each man went to the cookhouse. The soldier washed, cleaned his teeth, and shaved with this ration of half a bottle, and 'if any was over he was able to have a good drink.' Canteen stores had to be brought 40 miles away from El Daba. Canteens opened with slender and quickly exhausted stocks of English, Australian and Egyptian chocolate, tinned fruits, boot polish, shaving tackle, biscuits, English lollies, cigarettes, tobacco, and Chinese beer ('Ewo', with the yellow label, from Shanghai); on the average a man received half a bottle each week, 'and all other luxuries in the same proportion.'

'Flies were the greatest army of all,' wrote Tom De Lisle. 'At their worst they accompanied the moving soldier, and made his arms ache with waving to ward them off. At their mildest they were still there in ones or twos to torment and annoy. No matter what remote spot the battalion moved to, nor how quickly, no sooner were the preliminaries of bivouacking engaged in when the vanguard of the fly army arrived. Flies and sand! Sand and flies in never ending quantities.'

To keep the men in touch with civilisation a Cairo daily newspaper brought out a

special [Western Desert](#) edition which arrived by air a few hours after publication. Half-hearted attempts to prosecute Egyptian war profiteers made wry reading. The NZEF Times brought the home news every week; a picture propaganda magazine, Parade, turned up too; and the [YMCA](#) cinema unit toured here and there, screening tirelessly 'Topper Takes a Trip'.

For all its bleak environment the life was better than at base camps. 'I think that at [Kaponga](#) the troops were fitter and healthier than they ever were before or since,' says Colonel Andrew, 'and we should have gone direct from there into action.' Other men, remembering 'the terrific desert sores', disagree firmly. 'Gerry Fowler could tell you of some battles with desert sores and septic fingers,' notes a stretcher-bearer, 'and how nearly every "cocky" in Taranaki provided ointment and liniment and the Lord knows what through parcels for D Company.'

At Kaponga, first thing every morning before starting his daily jobs, Padre [Thorpe](#) ⁶ would go across the desert plateau away from the unit's position to read the Psalms and Bible readings for the day, 'and to pray for the men and for our people at home, and that I might be of some use. At the time about which I speak things were pretty bad with the Allies; I tried to see the world situation from a moral and spiritual point of view. How else could we pray? And of course there were great moral issues at stake, and it was important that we should keep that perspective in view. Otherwise we would not have right motives, when coming back after the war, to rebuild our nation on more secure moral foundations. It seemed, as it really was and is, a critical crisis in the story of mankind—with the rise of Nazi-ism, as an evil, destroying force and with plenty enough soul-less materialism corrupting our own people. With this background of thought, I prayed for the springs of spiritual renewal within our people, and of course within our own men of the 22nd Bn. Stretching away for hundreds of miles was the desert, barren and lifeless, and symbolising to me in a very real way the desolation in the heart of man that gave rise to such a ghastly war. Moreover, Egypt itself depressed us by the corruption and slums (tho' in the worst slums I had found inspiration when I saw Christian love in missionary centres). Tho' I knew God's promises, could I ask for "a sign"?

'My prayers seemed pretty hopeless. But then I remember I took a hold on myself, and stood up and prayed, accepting God's promise that those who pray believing are already answered. Then there came over me an assurance that

whatever the barren appearance to the contrary, God had not forgotten man and his need, and His mighty purposes were working out. I turned to the Psalms of the day and the words were to me a direct message to confirm what I felt: "I am well pleased that the Lord hath heard the voice of my prayer, that He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore shall I call upon Him as long as I live!" Verse after verse applied to our situation and to me.

'As I arose to go back from my meditation, something attracted my attention. Nearby on one of the dead-looking camel-bushes was an exquisite, wax-like flower, the only sign of life that I had seen in that vast dead desert. Then, nearby I saw a similar tiny, pink flower; and close by me I saw a little track in the sand behind a white snail-shell. All through the hot summer these snails had sealed themselves off with a waxy substance and had gummed themselves to camel-bushes. Intrigued by tiny signs of life I walked around for some hundreds of yards, and found not a sign of anything more; nor did I when moving around our position that day. Here was the "sign" I asked for. To me it was a way in which the good Lord said to me, that in the moral desolation of man He was still sovereign over His universe, and He would bring forth springs of life in the midst of man's failure. It was as real to me as if He had spoken by voice; and I knew I could help bring a new moral strength of purpose to those who were in the midst of the conflict.'

October ⁷ brought an end to fortress work. The Division was to train for mobile desert operations. The rest of the Division was now by the coast at [Baggush](#) Box, and 5 Brigade would join it there. In any future attack, as Brigadier Hargest pointed out during a visit, the infantry would be carried in motor transport up to the assembly point. Sometimes men might be carried into the fringe of the attack itself and debus under fire.

After a church parade on 5 October the battalion moved off in convoy, bound for [Baggush](#), and travelled 25 miles westwards over the desert before bivouacking for the night. One man's impressions read: 'Movement of a big formation in the desert is like a convoy at sea. As far as the eye ranges are motor vehicles big and small. They roll and dip with the undulations in the sand. The carriers forge along as escorts—like destroyers—and suddenly one will dart away, speeding to the head of the moving mass of vehicles, or to some point which needs watching.' Before tea-time

next day the battalion covered 50 to 60 more miles to a gaunt escarpment scattered with mines at ` [Baggush](#) by the Sea', as the parodies of ` [Sussex](#) by the Sea' described the dusty, flea- and bug-infested oasis. From here, after a month, big formations of New Zealand vehicles would move out, the Division would assemble and move towards [Libya](#), one force moving in one body, nearly 3000 vehicles and over 19,000 men, in all its power and majesty, for the only time in its life. But first, something had to be learned of exercises, traffic discipline and manoeuvre. And time was running short.

News came through of a gallant escape from [Greece](#). Early in July Second-Lieutenant Craig had broken out—the first officer to escape from his camp—from a prisoner-of-war cage near [Athens](#). Two months later he and three companions reached [Crete](#) via Antiparos. Engine trouble set in, and for twenty-four hours they drifted near Port Spinalonga. From there they set sail to [Alexandria](#). The boat was small, and they suffered great hardship. They reached [Alexandria](#) on 8 October, and Craig, who had shown great fortitude all the time, went back to underground work in [Greece](#).

The troops practised, with map and compass, navigation and movement and speed over the desert by companies, by battalion, and then, for three days, by brigade. They moved at night without lights. They learned to scramble from 3-ton lorries, and to attack swiftly and in orderly fashion. B Echelon (administration, supplies, sanitation) rehearsed its own movements and checked over rationing arrangements. A sergeant recalled the panic which set in back home when his family of four drove off for a Sunday picnic. 'Now we've got 800 men to feed and care for on the move, dammit,' he wrote. They went through the motions of practising protection against aircraft and sudden raiders, both on the move and when halted for the night. Engineers gave talks and demonstrations on various types of mines and booby traps. A practice took place on the range with live grenades (Lieutenant [Davison](#) ⁸ was injured here).

Then General Auchinleck (who had succeeded General Wavell after the first desert victories) took the salute at a parade at [Sidi Haneish](#) station, 'the best gallop we had for a long time, luckily we moved along in our own dust storm.' Admonishing 7 Platoon's commander, Peter [Hockley](#), ⁹ for untidy lines, Colonel Andrew pointed to a lumpy old sandbag, aimed a vigorous kick at it, and found it was full of solidly set

cement. Some members of the battalion were allowed to see New Zealand play the Springboks, provided they marched with full equipment and ammunition. Other units went by truck. They saw the All Black, Jack [Sullivan](#), ¹⁰ of D Company, score the only try of the match. Another All Black, Captain Arthur [Wesney](#), ¹¹ of 26 Battalion, converted Jack's try and kicked a penalty goal. He had two more weeks to live.

Padre Thorpe records in his diary the last two days at [Baggush](#) oasis:

Sunday, 9-11-'41. Expectancy in the air as I go from place to place among barbed wire and mines taking little services, before moving up into action...at the services in each place little messages for the occasion. After each service around a rough altar at the back of a V8, they come to kneel in brown dust for Holy Communion.

8 am: A Coy; 8.30: B and C and Holy Communion; 9.15: HQ and D and Holy Communion. Then as fast as rough desert will allow, along the flat to [21st Battalion](#) HQ escarpment with Major [Harding](#) ¹² to a great parade of 21 Battalion HQ at 10.15 am. All ready. Again through the service is a sense of things to come, of committing those we love to God, of asking guidance and strength to go out into the fortunes of battle, 'O, God, our Help in ages past'; Lieut.-Col. Allen gives the last message and we arrange for Holy Communion early tomorrow.

I called at HQ and saw Padre [Sheely](#) ¹³ (R.C.) and went on to [23rd Battalion](#) HQ for lunch with old friends....On to YM for as many primuses as they could sell me for the platoon trucks. To 22 Battalion Headquarters and franked a pile of letters. To 28th [Battalion] for more primuses. Back in a cloud of dust to the deep concreted dugouts of C.C.S. for final visit to sick men including Padre [Read](#), ¹⁴ Doc. [MacGregor](#) ¹⁵—all anxious lest they get missed out of the coming offensive: visit to Transport 22 Battalion, up rocky escarpment to C Coy to give latest news from [BBC](#), treacherous journey, along escarpment again to A Coy among whom I was living at the moment, and then quiet in the dusty, concrete gun-emplacement which is my home and my spiritual fortress, to sleep.

Monday, 10-11-'41. A cold shave in darkness and away to 21 Battalion as light comes. Lieut.-Col. Allen meets me in battledress— which from now on replaces for all of us the scanty drill shorts— and we choose a rocky waadi against the

escarpment. I open the back of the car and set out the silver vessels on the simple altar. One by one a few faithful come and stand in the cold wind for the simple service. As in all these last services there is the special thought for those in authority, for decisions on which shall hang the issue of the day, and the life or death of many. (I did not realise then [Padre Thorpe subsequently wrote] that the [21st Battalion](#) was to be so badly mauled at [Sidi Rezegh](#), that among the killed would be the C.O. now kneeling for his last Holy Communion, and that Padre Sheely with many prisoners would be in German hands.) But here we commit all to God, rise to our feet and on with the day's work. Breakfast at [21st Battalion's](#) officers' mess, back to A Coy by 8 am, away with the Ration Corporal, some 12 miles up the road to [Naafi](#) for emergency supplies, cigarettes for the wounded, wine for Holy Communion. Back for lunch, last letter to R—, and till 3 pm franking a great pile of innocent letters which may be the last. Called at the R.Q.M. for an extra water tin and a petrol tin, go to the Transport for petrol, to D Coy for extra blankets and emergency ration. Mess in A Coy's officers dugout, [BBC](#) news, silence and prayer, get anti-gas ointment, finish!

They were off on Armistice Day. 'Some idiot from Div H. or Base had the happy thought of sending us a lot of red poppies to buy. We didn't subscribe very much. Seemed a very "We who are about to die" stunt.' Away they went, a motorised fleet, streaming up the coastal road, leaving behind the rehearsals in vain by the Canal, the hen-houses and humiliations of [Spinney Wood](#), the navy work at [Kaponga](#). They were off, 77 vehicles among 5 Brigade Group's 1006 lorries, trucks, cars, carriers and guns. They were off, 700-odd men, a twenty-sixth of the New Zealand Division, a hundred-and-sixty-fifth part of the newly formed [Eighth Army's](#) 118,000 men and 17,600 vehicles going towards battle.

The idea behind this campaign, the Second Libyan or CRUSADER campaign, was to drive the enemy out of North [Africa](#). [Libya's](#) two northern provinces, first [Cyrenaica](#) then [Tripolitania](#), were to be captured in turn. The first step, which was to be taken in November, was not the relief of [Tobruk](#) (this was incidental to the plan) but the destruction of the enemy's Armoured forces. Once the armour was shattered, General Auchinleck, holding [Cyrenaica](#) easily, hoped to advance into [Tripolitania](#).

Out in the desert from [Mersa Matruh](#), 22 Battalion rested quietly while the other units of the Division moved into position. [General Freyberg](#) arrived from [Baggush](#)

after jotting down in his diary: 'Thirteen to dinner last night; part of [13 Corps](#), and left on adventure 13th November.' When they were all in place the New Zealand vehicles formed an oblong 12 miles long and 8 miles wide: 2800-odd vehicles, 200 yards apart, each with a camouflage net to break revealing outlines and shadows. They rested, silent and still, waiting the word to go.

The word came. The oblong crawled forward, the Division moving as one entity for the first time in its history, early on Saturday, 15 November. Vehicles, still spaced 200 yards apart in case of enemy bombing, stretched from horizon to horizon, an unforgettable sight.

Speed was set at seven miles in the hour, for the ground with no roads whatsoever was humpy and patched in low, wiry camel-thorn, the sand piled and packed in small hard cones about its roots. It was no joy-ride for the riflemen, jolted, bumped and bashed together, stiff at times from the cold, travelling under conditions which would have brought serious trouble to any transport firm carting farm animals. Yet 'the morale of the Division was at its peak, a level never surpassed,' writes a New Zealand historian.

They covered 60 miles this day, dug in, and settled down for the night, all lights banned except in the carefully blacked-out office trucks. Daylight movement was cut to a minimum, and all through Sunday they lay low, undetected. Evening brought intense activity. Vehicles drew in and closed up for the 25-mile night move. Green-shaded lamps, planted a mile or so apart, marked the route ahead.¹⁶ The guiding lamps were placed and tended by provost who had gone on ahead, had done their work, and then had taken cover. The centre of each brigade moved along this route. The trucks ran into soft sand in the darkness, concertina movements began in the column —now fast and lurching, now crawling or halted.

Vehicles, halted in their tracks in the night, fanned out to 200-yard intervals at daybreak. To allow for this sudden expansion, gaps of several miles had been left between the brigades. Men heard of an eve-of-battle message from [Britain's Prime Minister](#) saying: 'Now is the time to strike the hardest blow yet for final Victory, Home and Freedom.'

They moved again in the night. This was no orderly move, but a hectic

scramble. Last night's bruises doubled. The route, not well chosen, lay across soft sand, small depressions, rocky rises and other obstacles. Trucks fell back and then, their drivers hoping against hope not to ram the vehicle ahead, raced forward to hold position in the darkness. The night, pitch dark, was slashed wide open with great sheets of light from a thunderstorm in the north. The brief flashes, momentarily lighting up the desert and dazzling drivers, revealed trucks, roaring angrily, disappearing into dust clouds. And the dust-caked riflemen, cooped together under the lurching canopies of the three-tonners, felt like dice in a shaker.

A party from D Company went out in the afternoon to guard engineers cutting a 300-yard gap in the wire barrier along the Libyan frontier. (This barrier, no defensive measure, was to keep Mussolini's [Senussi](#) from straying.)

The next night, tangling with the trucks from another battalion, the 22nd moved into [Libya](#).

Inside the frontier, south of the chain of enemy forts, the New Zealanders, unmolested, waited in full battle order. With airfields soggy from recent rains, the bulk of the enemy air force remained grounded. The Division's move, both to the frontier and 12 miles farther north in the afternoon of 19 November, seemed to have been undetected by the enemy. English armoured vehicles and tanks arrived, most inoffensive looking at a short distance under their camouflage of false canopies. The complete and cocky confidence of these Englishmen, 'some knee-high to a grasshopper', made a deep and permanent impression on the New Zealanders—this and the fact that the English soldier was always short of sugar.

Before the New Zealand Division began its major operations, deadly fighting raged over a huge area of desert. Tanks hid hull-down behind any protecting rise, or charged from out of the sunset. One by one the engagements ended in flames, with oily smoke billowing above the horizon. Anti-tank guns claimed most tank victims. By the afternoon of 22 November the Germans began to get the upper hand. Our battle plan allowed dispersion of our armoured brigades, which were defeated one by one. The German properly co-ordinated all arms in his panzer divisions, but many of the British tank officers thought they could 'go it alone'.

The New Zealanders were not to be sent to hem in the frontier forts from the

west until the enemy armour had been at least neutralised by 30 Corps. Tobruk garrison also was not to start its break-out (to join hands with 30 Corps) until the battle of the armour had reached a favourable stage. Both events seemed to have arrived on 21 November, when Tobruk garrison started its push towards Ed Duda and the New Zealand Division resumed its northward advance. The auguries, however, had been false. The battle of the armoured brigades and panzer divisions began to turn in favour of the panzers by the



Lieutenant W. C. Hart, Les Murphy and Jack Weir rest on the way back from Gazala

Lieutenant W. C. Hart, Les Murphy and Jack Weir rest on the way back from [Gazala](#)

Playing cards under the olive trees at Haifa



Playing cards under the olive trees at [Haifa](#)



17 Platoon's camp on the Syria-Turkey border

17 Platoon's camp on the Syria- Turkey border

Captain Fred Oldham shaving in the Syrian desert



Captain Fred Oldham shaving in the Syrian desert

22 Battalion digs in at Minqar Qaim. Lieutenant Sam McLernon (left, elbows on knees) was later captured at Ruweisat



22 Battalion digs in at [Minqar Qaim](#). Lieutenant Sam McLernon (left, elbows on knees) was later captured at Ruweisat

A meal at Kaponga



A meal at [Kaponga](#)



Sgt Keith Elliott, VC

Sgt Keith Elliott, VC

Troops debus the day before the attack on Ruweisat Ridge



Troops debus the day before the attack on Ruweisat Ridge



General Freyberg joins Captain MacDuff and members of B Company in a mug of tea, 26 October 1942

General Freyberg joins Captain MacDuff and members of B Company in a mug of tea, 26 October 1942

Tanks burning on Miteiriya Ridge



Tanks burning on Miteiriya Ridge



Unloading supplies at Sollum, November 1942

Unloading supplies at Sollum, November 1942

Moving through the minefield at Siwa Road, November 1942



Moving through the minefield at Siwa Road, November 1942

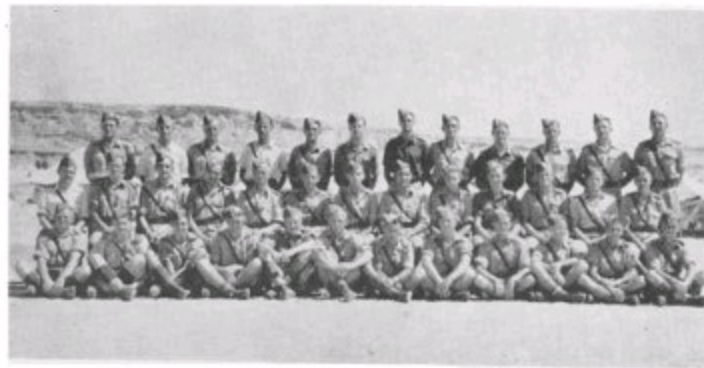


22 Battalion Pipe Band, Maadi, 1943

22 Battalion Pipe Band, Maadi, 1943



22 Battalion prisoners of war at Stalag VIIIIB



Officers of 22 (Motor) Battalion, Maadi, June 1943

Back row, from left: Lt W. H. Cowper, Lt A. W. F. O'Reilly, Lt J. H. W. Dymock, Lt P. R. Willock, Lt C. R. Carson, Lt P. B. Were, Lt R. E. Johnston, Lt F. R. Wheeler, Lt E. F. T. Mullinder, Lt T. F. Heggulun, Lt D. M. Whillans, Lt F. N. Twigg. *Centre row:* Rev. T. E. Champion, Capt W. A. Cawkwell, Capt D. Horn, Capt R. R. Knox, Major F. G. Oldham, Major H. V. Donald, Lt-Col T. C. Campbell, Major J. L. MacDuff, Major P. R. Hockley, Capt L. G. S. Cross, Capt J. Forster, Capt J. Milne, Capt G. S. Sainsbury. *Front row:* 2 Lt T. G. Fowler, 2 Lt W. A. Tubert, (Not identified), 2 Lt D. C. Cox, Lt R. L. Thompson, Lt A. T. House, Lt. L. R. Thomas, Lt A. W. Hart, Lt C. McKirdy, 2 Lt J. H. McNeil, Lt W. C. Hart, Lt T. N. Bright

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afternoon of 22 November. Early news of the fighting was optimistic and the enemy's losses greatly exaggerated.

The order for action, soon to affect the battalion, came early on 21 November. The forces to the north—the strongholds of [Bardia](#), [Sollum](#) and [Halfaya](#)—were to be blocked from the west, completing their isolation, for already the Indians had hemmed them in from east and south. Fifth Brigade, screened by the [Divisional Cavalry](#), was to cut [Bardia](#) from [Sollum](#). Fourth Brigade would move north too, while 6 Brigade remained for the moment in reserve.

The battalion ¹⁷ formed up at noon and moved off towards the north. The brigade's three rifle battalions were carried on lorries of 309 General Transport Company, a British unit borrowed for the campaign. They travelled steadily for about four hours, meeting nothing more formidable than a heavy rainstorm, and halted about four miles from [Sidi Azeiz](#), not a settlement but merely a landing strip and a junction on the worn caravan trail known as Trigh (track) [Capuzzo](#). The trail, faint and in some parts quite obliterated by drifting sand, runs from the border to south of [Tobruk](#), and far into the west. Twenty-second Battalion was to capture and hold the track junction near [Sidi Azeiz](#), and prevent any enemy movement east or west.

The cavalcade of 1000 vehicles had scarcely halted after covering 20 miles when the battalion was ordered to push on and take [Sidi Azeiz](#) immediately. [Sidi Azeiz](#) was deserted—but only just: from what men saw of dugouts and hastily abandoned articles lying about it appeared that the enemy had left in a hurry only a little time ago. Potatoes were still cooking on untended fires; a lonely wind scattered letters from home, curious-looking magazines and writing material. A [Divisional Cavalry](#) squadron, striking the first blow of the campaign, had raided the place, taking about fifty prisoners, lorried infantry and gunners, including a startled Italian officer in his bath. The enemy had not attempted to return. The battalion at once organised to meet any counter-attack, and all companies went quickly into position. Captured material included four [Breda](#) guns and large quantities of ammunition, seven trucks, two motor-cycles and a great wad of paper money. The carriers found a treasure trove inside an aircraft fully loaded and ready for flight. The night was peaceful.

While the battalion continued digging in next morning during heavy rain at [Sidi Azeiz](#), D Company left to probe the outskirts of [Bardia](#) itself, 11 miles north-east.

With the riflemen went seven carriers, a troop of anti-tank guns, and a detachment of two mortars. The small force had been told that 23 Battalion was 'rolling up the opposition' on the road running north from [Capuzzo](#) to [Bardia](#). D Company's urgent task was to head them off and round them up by [Bardia](#)'s crossroads just before the Italians reached the protecting defences. The battalion war diary says that Major Campbell was to 'push forward as far as cross-roads outside [Bardia](#) and withdraw without getting into serious fight', but Campbell got no such impression. If he had, he would have pulled back much sooner; for the crossroads were actually inside the [Bardia](#) defences.

Lieutenant Bob [Knox](#),¹⁸ with his seven carriers, went well ahead in arrowhead formation, his task to contact the enemy, find his strength, flanks and position on the ground, engage him, and radio back all information to D Company. The carriers, keen to reach their objective before 23 Battalion appeared, pressed on, flushed a party of Italians, simultaneously came under fire, suspected an ambush, directed the Italians where to make for, and swung off on a wide right-flanking circuit to the outer defences of [Bardia](#), 'a sea of barbed wire in which there was a kind of gateway,' Knox writes. 'I of course moved through this opening and noticed hundreds of men in uniform about 100 yards ahead and to my left. Some were standing, others just lounging around. I remarked to my driver [C. G. Watson](#)¹⁹ that these men must be the 23 Battalion who had beaten us to the job.

"Like hell!" says [Slim Watson](#). "These Bs are Ites!"

'Being doubtful and wanting to make sure, I told him to drive closer. The Ites just stood and looked at us, apparently under the impression that anything mechanical was German.

'When we get up about 60 yards from them I realise what has happened. I remember adjusting the sights on my Bren gun and putting it on to single shot. I aimed at one poor fellow who was standing smoking a cigarette. I pressed the trigger and strangely enough two rounds went from the gun and the fellow dropped, having collected both. Of course everyone else in the vicinity dropped out of sight into slit trenches which I hadn't noticed.

'I next stood up to yell charge (like a bloody fool), and then for the first time

discovered that I only had three carriers under Sergeant [Hart](#)²⁰ with me, the other three having captured the prisoners and taken them back to D Company's headquarters.

'I sat down behind my gun and opened up on a German staff car which was moving off as fast as possible. No sooner had I opened fire than all hell broke loose, so informing my driver to get out through the gateway I told my wireless operator to contact D Company and tell them the news.'

The carrier party, passing through 'their smallfire stuff which was buzzing around us like a swarm of angry bees', took cover in a handy wadi, untouched by heavy shelling but reached by mortars 'which really didn't seem to be very heavy.' This wadi indicated a fairly safe way back towards D Company.

Meanwhile D Company, now about seven miles on from Sidi Azeiz, rounded up the party of Italian prisoners, and continued the advance in vehicles in desert formation according to the drill book. Almost immediately down came heavy artillery fire from the left. The trucks drove on until the fire grew too accurate, with mortars joining the fray, and were then sent back while the company deployed and continued on foot over bare open ground in a determined attempt to reach the crossroads. The men were plodding on through an area marked with various large heaps of stones and large drums. The enemy was now ranging on to these identification marks, mortar fire was extremely accurate, 'landing among us like raindrops', and here several casualties, including [Charlie Smith](#),²¹ were incurred. Many were actually knocked over by the blast but were otherwise unhurt. 'Mac let out a wild yell, and there bouncing along the ground with terrific leaps was the nosecap of a shell—we stood fascinated and watched its progress past us—then carried on and walked the rest of the way—funny how the tension had gone.' Soon they ran into machine-gun fire. More were wounded. Fortunately at this moment badly needed cover seems to have been detected by [Lieutenant Bill Lovie](#)²² and 16 Platoon on the right.

Major Campbell (known as 'pooch' because of his frequent orders to 'booten up your pooches') writes: 'I seized the opportunity as a rain shower moved across us to quickly change direction right with the whole company and seek the cover of a very low ridge. I am quite satisfied that this completely foxed the enemy defences which, being unable to find us, thereafter left us severely alone.' An attempt to bring up the

transport and resume the advance as another shower approached, however, brought a further hail of fire. The platoons deployed and Campbell settled down to observe what he could of the enemy defences, intending at nightfall to withdraw the company to [Sidi Azeiz](#). Foot patrols failed to contact 23 Battalion: the radio at this stage failed to get through to Battalion Headquarters.

Knox had now returned to the company area, placed his Bren-gunners on the ground to a flank where enemy positions could be picked out quite easily without binoculars, then went back to report to Battalion Headquarters, and returned under heavy fire. He met Corporal [Caldwell](#) ²³ who, although exhausted with little sleep in the last forty-eight hours, cheerfully volunteered to guide him to Company Headquarters. There Knox passed on the Colonel's orders: 'Tell Campbell to withdraw his company immediately.' It was now between four and five o'clock. Knowing a move now (instead of waiting for dusk) would bring casualties, Campbell questioned this order. But it was confirmed and so he carried it out, himself bringing up the rear. He adds: 'No sooner had the first section of the leading platoon poked its nose round the corner from our hideout than the symphony commenced. However, everybody moved steadily and we had very few casualties in this withdrawal. I think we had only one man killed.... There were one or two wounded though not seriously, and we were lucky to have got away so lightly.'

The waiting trucks, just out of shell range, were a welcome sight to D Company, and soon, travelling by truck and Bren carrier, most of the men were back with the battalion again at [Sidi Azeiz](#), where important information was passed on promptly about the gun positions, the estimated calibre of the guns, fields of fire and range. In the battalion's first action in [Libya](#) four were killed ([Crompton](#), ²⁴ [Redpath](#), ²⁵ 'Shorty' [Sangster](#), ²⁶ and 'Sandy' [McClintock](#) ²⁷) and fifteen wounded, a high cost for eleven Italian prisoners. The men 'had behaved magnificently' under fire; Private Laurie [Corbett](#), ²⁸ who had coolly driven an ammunition-laden 8-cwt truck under fire to pick up wounded, recalls these two incidents:

'I remember seeing a fellow (I think his nickname was "Irish") coming out with his full equipment, pack, rifle, etc. and marching with his head high in the air. He had the lower portion of one side of his jaw cut wide open with a shell splinter, but apparently he wasn't worried very much about that because he just went past me and smiled.' And: 'Tom [Campbell] was lying on the ground with bullets hitting the

ground in front of him. He was obviously the main target because of his dress which was a white trench-coat. He also had a great big map board with him. I told him to throw the coat away, but he said it was "too cold". Hell! The sweat was pouring off my nose which was pretty close to the ground.'

As the company cleared the line of shells the Medical Officer, Captain [Volckman](#),²⁹ was waiting with the greeting: 'Have you anything for me?' 'He was in a trench coat, his fore-and-aft cap sideways on his head, and a more striking resemblance to Claude Raines with his hands in his pockets would be hard to find. "By jove," said someone, "you look just like Napoleon." The name stuck, and he was always referred to after that as "Nap".

In two three-tonners just after dark, Donald and his platoon (14) from C Company went back for wounded who could not be found or were isolated by particularly heavy fire during the withdrawal. Near the spot the platoon left the trucks and walked forward cautiously. 'It was pitch black,' writes Donald. 'We had to comb the ground close to the defences. We left one section at the trucks: too many men would have been difficult to control. We spread out in a long line about five yards between men, almost the limit of visibility, and started to comb the ground systematically. It was very eerie with the searchers calling out in hushed voices the names of the missing men, with flares meantime going up intermittently from the Italian lines. Everyone froze when the flares went up, and we felt as if we had been stripped to the skin, but not a man moved, although every moment we were expecting the dread chatter of a machine-gun.'

Then Donald received a shock. A grinning face under a shock of curly hair poked over his shoulder, and a Scotch voice said: 'Hullo.' It was Jock ('Haggis') [Lowe](#),³⁰ flatly disobeying orders to stay with the trucks. Donald reprimanded him. 'But you're bloody pleased to see me, aren't you?' said Jock. 'Yes,' said Donald emphatically. With Jerry Fowler and Jock playing a notable part, they collected every man. For their work in this action and previous campaigns, Campbell was awarded the MC and Fowler the MM.

In the west a dramatic change had begun. The armoured corps had suffered heavy losses, while the sortie from [Tobruk](#) had halted. This affected 5 Brigade and, in its turn, 22 Battalion. At 2 p.m. on 22 November (while D Company was still

pinned down before [Bardia](#)) this signal reached Divisional Headquarters from [13 Corps](#):

Leave minimum troops to observe enemy [Bardia](#) and send remainder your troops to clear up north [Bardia- Tobruk](#) road, and advance on [Gambut](#) which enemy aircraft still using. Advance west will best assist plan.

For [30 Corps](#) was beaten, and [13 Corps](#) had to do its best to link up with [Tobruk](#) as well as isolate the frontier forts—a makeshift arrangement and no part of the original plan. For the rest of this ill-fated and confused campaign the New Zealand Division was split into two parts: 5 Brigade, by the frontier and under fire from the forts, was soon to be buffeted by raiding panzers while 4 and 6 Brigades battled about the gaunt slopes of [Belhamed](#) and [Sidi Rezegh](#) in the Division's bloodiest fighting of the entire war.

In 5 Brigade's tasks along the frontier forts ³¹ 22 Battalion was concerned with [Bardia](#), a somewhat meagre port but important as an anchor of the frontier defences. It now held a reinforced brigade of Italians stiffened by Germans and appropriate artillery.

The battalion (briefly without B Company, which did not move on and join up until after dark) set off towards [Bardia](#) on 23 November, which dawned to the rumble of heavy gunfire and flashes far to the south. Moving seven miles north-eastwards from [Sidi Azeiz](#), the battalion came to the 150-foot-high escarpment stretching past [Bardia](#), and took over from 20 Battalion, which the day before had dug in on the escarpment and fanned out below to sever the [Tobruk- Bardia](#) road. The new position, a few miles west of [Bardia](#) garrison, was reached about noon. Occupation was delayed by a scuffle between 20 Battalion and a hotch-potch of enemy with half a dozen lightly armoured, half-tracked guns (mistaken for tanks). Then 20 Battalion streamed away to the battle in the west, and the 22nd, piling up stones in front of slit trenches to improve the defences, was in position by 2 p.m. Some men, while digging in, noticed thermos-flask bombs scattered about. Late in the afternoon transport was seen towards [Bardia](#); shells from the garrison burst harmlessly on the escarpment a mile away. Here, firmly planted among rock and sand in the area named Menastir after a nearby well, the battalion stayed for five days, masking the [Bardia](#) fortress from the west and cutting the coastal road from

Tobruk.

At [Menastir](#) A Company took up position forward by the crossroads below the escarpment, C Company was placed to the east, and D to the west, on the escarpment, both with a platoon of medium machine guns. Headquarters took up the central position with the field artillery to the south. Twentieth Battalion's prisoners were sent back to 5 Brigade, which was now setting up its headquarters at [Sidi Azeiz](#). B Company stayed at [Sidi Azeiz](#) as a guard for Brigade Headquarters, but was called back briefly to the battalion during the night. Colonel Andrew was expecting 'a bit of fun' in the morning. B Company arrived in the B Echelon area and settled down as a reserve company.

The 'bit of fun' arrived at breakfast time on 24 November: 'Oh, they're only our blokes,' said somebody, and breakfast continued until interrupted by sudden mortar, machine-gun and rifle fire.

What looked like two companies of Germans attacked from the east. They were difficult to spot. They advanced directly in front of the sun, and did not open fire until within 1000 yards. The battalion immediately manned all defences and turned the attackers back with heavy counter-fire from all weapons, the artillery, Bofors and anti-tank guns opening fire at a range of 1500 yards over open sights. B Company, from reserve, set out after the enemy until he reached his transport beyond the ridge. The counter-attack halted, but [Bob Bayliss](#)³² had not had enough. With [Jack Adeane](#)³³ and another he chased five Germans for a mile, finally forcing them to ground. Bob, with a man on each flank, went in with his tommy gun. He shot two in the last 30 yards, and then the German officer emptied his Luger at him at point-blank range and missed. Bob, who brought the officer ('a truculent b—') and two other captives back with him, won the MM.

The action, in which five soldiers were wounded, lasted about half an hour. Nine prisoners were taken, several enemy dead were buried, and spasmodic shelling of the ridge continued without any further enemy attack. A private 'spent the hot moments in a hole feeling homesick and a bundle of nerves.'

Fifth Brigade's policy now was to harass with strong patrols the enemy in his isolated forts, and to keep him guessing. Accordingly, after finishing the rudely

interrupted breakfast, a fighting patrol from 14 Platoon (C Company) moved out, reconnoitred the enemy defensive positions outside [Bardia](#), and although under heavy artillery fire, edged to within a thousand yards of the main defences and to within a few hundred yards of an outpost. The patrol returned unscathed with useful information (including the heartening news that 20 to 30 per cent of the enemy shells were duds) and a little brandy, spare water, and socks, all picked up in a small deserted Italian camp. A Company seized an incautious Italian truck at the crossroads. B Company (less one platoon), supported by carriers, went out on a long sweep north of the coastal road, covered 32 miles, 'an uncomfortable trip, no place for lorries', rounded up six Italians, and on return received a rude welcome from a two-pounder gun in A Company's area. Many a man spent a restless night hearing imaginary shells. A few night bombers passed overhead.

Defences were well strengthened (more digging, more rocks piled up). Next day (the 25th) was quiet, with reports of enemy armoured fighting vehicles on the prowl. The precautions were just as well. The tanks with 5 Brigade had left the day before for [Sidi Rezegh](#) because General Godwin-Austen believed 'the battle will be won in the forward zone'. At dusk Brigadier Hargest radioed from [Sidi Azeiz](#) and said an awkward situation had arisen in the south. (An enormous German cavalcade of 2000 vehicles had suddenly been reported coming up from the south, from [Sheferzen](#), near where the Division had crossed through the frontier wire.) Hargest was sending his non-fighting B Echelon, supply columns and [Divisional Cavalry](#) B Echelon to 22 Battalion for protection. Probably he would follow. B Company, not without misgivings, was sent back to Sidi Azeiz to give Brigade Headquarters protection. Rumours buzzed all through the night.

At dawn on the 26th the battalion made ready for action. All vehicles moved to the foot of the escarpment, joining transport which had arrived from Brigade Headquarters. ³⁴ The artillery moved in closer, taking up a position in the centre of the perimeter, and the guns swung their dark muzzles out towards the bare desert. Carrier patrols scouted south-west for six miles but saw no enemy movement.

Meanwhile Peter Butler, Tom [Hood](#) ³⁵ and Bill [Greig](#) ³⁶, who were driving south for supplies, were about 18 miles south of Brigade and [Sidi Azeiz](#). Suddenly like a rocket over the ridge soared a truck. The English driver slowed up momentarily to stutter: 'T-t-t-tanks!', then shot on again. They ignored the nervous fellow. Then one

of the party, strolling up to the ridge, looked down on to a swarm of hostile fighting vehicles. Despite the Tommy's flying start, the three 22 Battalion men passed him and beat him to Brigade. Well before this, in the early hours of the morning, a 22 Battalion patrol stationed at Sidi Azeiz had reported to Brigade Headquarters. This patrol, led by Lieutenant [Barton](#),³⁷ reported what seemed to be a powerful enemy force camped across Trigh [Capuzzo](#) and about five miles west of [Sidi Azeiz](#). This made at least two strong forces approaching [Sidi Azeiz](#).

The balloon went up at 10 a.m., preceded spectacularly by an Me110 sweeping over the battalion at a height of less than 50 feet—some men fired their first shot of the war against this plane. A big enemy convoy ([15 Panzer Division](#)) appeared from the dusty south-west and moved, apparently without end, along Trigh [Capuzzo](#) towards [Bardia](#), between the battalion and Brigade Headquarters' area. Fired on by the forces at Sidi Azeiz (a few carriers, some 25-pounders with little ammunition, and machine guns briefly engaged the column with little success), the host swung towards [Bardia](#) and came under fire from guns in 22 Battalion's area. Vehicles were too well spaced to suffer much harm, and the convoy, estimated by the battalion at between 700 and 800 vehicles, was intent on reaching [Bardia](#). Two enemy armoured cars on the ridge 2000 yards east of the battalion made off when shells landed near them. Major Tom Campbell, watching through binoculars, suddenly exclaimed: 'Good Heavens! Our water cart has joined the procession!' This was only too true. Abruptly, to a sprinkling of fire, the water truck left the convoy and came wildly into New Zealand territory. Ted [Jaggard](#)³⁸ jumped out and, half smiling, stuttered: '—! Made a mistake, thought they were South Africans by the sun-helmets. Cows started shooting'—a long speech for him.

Then, quite apart from the main convoy, another force appeared: enemy armoured fighting vehicles coming in from the west at the foot of the escarpment. This second force was coming from [Gambut](#) with repaired tanks and supplies for [15 Panzer Division](#), but it did not get through; it was driven back by F Troop 32 Anti-Tank Battery, which scored direct hits.³⁹

Vehicles in the main convoy were still passing at dusk and in fact not long before midnight one group came close to 14 Platoon C Company (all standing-to), an English voice called 'Hullo', someone opened up, and away they went. The entire

German Army seemed to be on the move. Dumbfounded over events, every man knew one thing: he was in for a hot time tomorrow. In short, 5 Brigade, intent on isolating the frontier forts, was now thoroughly isolated itself. Rommel, confident of victory near [Tobruk](#), had boldly but foolishly sent all his armour circling south-eastwards, then north, in a massive raid to wipe out forces menacing the frontier forts. (Incidentally this period, 24-26 November, was not a bright spot in Rommel's career. Not a single well-prepared or well-directed operation was laid on during this time, and at [Sidi Omar](#) [7 Indian Brigade](#) defeated and crippled the tank regiment of [21 Panzer Division](#).) The tables were turned. The raid did not succeed, but up and down the frontier, confused and despairing lightly-armed and non-fighting units (including [13 Corps](#) Headquarters) milled, fled, or were gathered up by the raiders.

'Hargest in hopeless position but Corps HQ won't let him move,' noted Ray [Salter](#),⁴⁰ of Battalion Headquarters, in his diary. The Brigadier certainly was not prohibited from moving his vulnerable headquarters from [Sidi Azeiz](#); he intended to move to [Menastir](#) on the afternoon of 27 November, but this was too late. Captain [Simpson](#)⁴¹ of B Company, at [Sidi Azeiz](#), recalls that Hargest's orders 'were to hold the landing strip at all cost and there we were. Who was actually responsible for the defensive plan I cannot say but I am sure it was aimed at a threat from the West and South and must have assumed the continual stream of vehicles making for [Bardia](#) were broken remnants rather than a coherent force merely going in to refuel.

'I have always considered that the "vehicle discipline" at Brigade Headquarters was shocking during the few days we were there. Anyone wanting anything seemed to drive into the middle of the area and the congestion at times round the actual Headquarters vehicle was a shock to anyone trained by L. W. Andrew,' says Simpson. In fact, the conglomeration of Brigade Headquarters vehicles attracted attention, invited attack, and made defence most difficult. A small, uncluttered force might have had a chance of holding the airstrip, which was of no interest to the Germans.

B Company (Captain Stan Johnson, with Captain Simpson as second-in-command), with a troop of four guns, had left [Menastir](#) in the darkness of the evening of 25 November to give protection to Brigade Headquarters. The company came into [Sidi Azeiz](#) from the north, and at once 11 Platoon (Colin Armstrong) was detached and sent to the south-eastern perimeter. With his two other platoons (12

Platoon, Lieutenant Barton; 10 Platoon, Sergeant Andrews) and the 25-pounder troop, Johnson took up a position—it was too rocky to dig in—just south of the airstrip. Very lights rose to the south and west: 'we could hear vehicles moving very close, swarming around.' Barton, with his platoon, went west along the [Capuzzo](#) track to get an indication of what was coming that way: Captain Hamish Simpson, with a foot patrol of half a platoon, moved south among vehicles in the dark trying to identify sizes and types, and so did Armstrong's men. All returned safely before dawn.

'The sight of that desert at dawn was amazing,' says Johnson, 'thousands of vehicles seemed to be going in all directions, milling north south east and west: you could get lyrical about it: they seemed just like a poor mass of lost Ities. A few came towards us (the three guns and 10 and 12 Platoons), we let them come right up, these strays, and we grabbed them when they got out of the cab. Three came in like that, one after the other—Germans. Open fire? God NO! Guns quiet.'

In the afternoon of 26 November the host got under way, ignoring [Sidi Azeiz](#), and streamed north and east towards [Bardia](#). In trucks, 10 and 12 Platoons, with the three guns, went raiding to the west along the fringe of this mob, 'just like a fox-terrier running up and down beside a herd of cattle. Down trails, out riflemen, a few quick shots at a few vehicles, then up and off fast. As we would let rip with a few rounds, now and then out of the mass would come a tank or two—there would be a dirty spit of a shell beside us (funny, they shelled us and didn't use their machine guns), then we'd run like hell.' The handful of raiders, suffering no casualties, dug in in the late afternoon on the western perimeter. B Company patrols in the night (26-27 November, a night without flares) definitely found and reported tanks, 'many tanks', barely one and a half miles east of Brigade Headquarters. Their engines were running. Johnson was rather surprised that he was not accordingly moved over to the east.

The storm broke after dawn on the 27th: 'a beautiful day but things look black for us.' The enemy had spent the night mostly outside [Bardia](#). An urgent request to [13 Corps](#) (shortly before it went off the air) for bombers had resulted in a lone [RAF](#) plane flying over at sundown. At 7 a.m. forty tanks, infantry and guns of [15 Panzer Division](#) bore down from the direction of [Bardia](#) on to 5 Brigade Headquarters at [Sidi](#)

While standing down after dawn and preparing for breakfast, the troops heard the klaxon alarm sound, and simultaneously the attack started. The line of armour halted at a handy distance, from which their guns and machine guns smashed into the vehicles. Johnson, by the brigade command truck, quickly got 10 Platoon from the western perimeter. 'The fire was really belting in but not one casualty as they came across, some 400 yards tightly congested with vehicles. The cool sergeant [Andrews], a very able platoon commander, lay down with his men next to me, calmly placed a grenade to his right, another to his left, handy, offered cigarettes and lit them, while spurts of sand were all about. Terrific concentrated fire.'

Sergeant Andrews gives his impressions: 'By this time the air was thick with smoke from ... burning trucks (ours) and as the smoke lifted at intervals I could make out the outlines on the horizon some 300 yards away of the turrets of about two dozen tanks. At the sight of these the old tail went down properly [yet he prepared to use his grenades and wished he had anti-tank sticky bombs].... Then the force of the attack increased and the first wave of tanks came tearing through about 20 yards apart. Fortunately this wave stopped firing as they came near and passed without inflicting any further casualties ... while this was happening the second wave of tanks had moved up closer and were spraying our area with machine gun bullets.... the guns stopped when I looked up to see a lot of chaps between us and the tanks with their hands up and Brigadier Hargest surrendering to the tank commander. Well I was stumped....'

Over to the east in 12 Platoon Private George [Orsler](#)⁴² glimpsed tanks in a brief pause after initial severe shelling: 'Hurrah we thought our tanks have arrived and chased him off—but no they are Jerries, they are firing at our anti-tank guns—hell this looks grim, what shall we do now.... [His section-leader, 'Snow' [Bateman](#),⁴³ was hit by a burst of machinegun fire] while a mortar lands close in a cloud of dust and the section huddles behind the truck wheels in an attempt to get cover. Then someone spotted an abandoned MG pit, and we all dived in. It was an anti-tank rifle (Boyes) and one of the boys had a go at a tank commander who is half out of his turret—he misses and a double Spandau drops towards us—did we flatten—I'll say. Luckily he did not fire and turned off just before reaching us. Another Jerry tank coming from the other side gave us another turn but he too was not interested in us.

Then a direct hit by an enemy mortar on a nearby 25 pounder startled us, and we forgot momentarily about tanks. When we peered through the dust and smoke once more we saw Jerry infantry and motor cyclists rounding up our chaps everywhere—we exchanged thoughts hurriedly—will he shoot us or not—will we put our hands up like the others or lie doggo. We had little time to think, so reached for the skies. One chap near a truck filled his tunic with a few rations and dished them out to us to hide round our persons—we were now prisoners

“Von line” shouts a Jerry with a tommygun, and we obey quickly. In searching us a young Nazi pulls out a 36, his face whitens and carefully he places it on the ground a few yards away—we nearly laughed.

‘Then we were ordered to a large group some 200 yards away from the scene of the battle. A grim sight it all was with burning vehicles and equipment everywhere. We were ordered to sit down and told that if anyone stood up he would be fired on. In the meantime the Jerries got busy to salvage as many vehicles as possible.

‘By midday we were well searched and our long march to [Bardia](#) began....’

Fifth Brigade Headquarters, suffering about ninety casualties, was now out of the war with some 47 officers and 650 men prisoners, counting four officers and the surviving men from B Company, which had suffered two killed and about six wounded. Among the officers, Captains Johnson and Simpson, Lieutenants Armstrong and Barton, were taken to [Italy](#) by submarine; the men (‘We were the cause of amusement to hundreds of Ites and Jerries’, after trudging under guard to the fortress) were herded together, and after being meagrely fed in [Bardia](#)’s bleak compound, were liberated when the fortress fell early in the New Year.

Meanwhile, at [Menastir](#), 22 Battalion listened to heavy firing from [Sidi Azeiz](#), saw in the distance the fires and smoke, wondered about the fate of companions in B Company, and thought gloomily, ‘our turn next unless a miracle happens.’ A message came through: Brigade Headquarters was being attacked. Then silence. In vain they attempted to make contact again by radio and despatch rider. [Sidi Azeiz](#) must have fallen, and a second despatch rider, Gunner Dobson ⁴⁴(14 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment) set off to check up. He approached [Sidi Azeiz](#), found the smouldering camp occupied, and was captured when his motor-cycle was shot from

under him; he soon escaped and was awarded the MM for his bravery on this excursion.

[Menastir](#) was not troubled in the morning, but a second attempt by the Germans to get supplies and repaired tanks through from [Gambut](#) was foiled by the guns. The German- Italian armour was recalled urgently to the [Tobruk](#) front. One division (15 Panzer) was to return south by way of [Sidi Azeiz](#) and Trigh [Capuzzo](#), and [21 Panzer Division](#), which was severely mauled and without its tank regiment, was to travel by the coastal road. The battalion group succeeded in delaying 21 Panzer's return for a day by forcing it to deviate south by Sidi Azeiz.

The first of 21 Panzer appeared an hour after noon when a large enemy convoy made westwards along the flat below the escarpment. The convoy halted, opened fire, was dispersed with vigorous artillery and machine-gun fire, and took refuge in rough country north of the road. This group probably detoured later by way of [Sidi Azeiz](#).

Half an hour later a much stronger force appeared and attempted to sweep away [Menastir's](#) opposition. These enemy troops and vehicles, on the ridge about a mile north-east of Battalion Headquarters, launched a heavy attack with artillery, mortars, machine guns and rifle fire. The brunt of this attack was borne by artillery, medium machine guns, and the left forward company (C Company), some of whose men consider this shelling and mortaring the heaviest they ever experienced. [Dick Goodall](#) ⁴⁵ and [Percy Hunt](#) ⁴⁶ were killed. Major Hart, wounded in the back of the head, refused to leave his post. Sergeant Viv Hill ⁴⁷ was knocked unconscious when a shell landed eighteen inches from his head and passed within a foot of his nose as he lay on his back in a slittie. Although the side of his face swelled up, turning from black and blue to a greenish-yellow, he carried on with conspicuous bravery. Another man, twice knocked unconscious by shells landing two feet from his trench, escaped with burst ear-drums. One 25-pounder received a direct hit, killing four of the crew; two other guns were hit shortly afterwards.

Enemy infantry, attempting to close in under cover of this shelling, were checked by unabated fire from the defenders. The Vickers and the artillery (two-pounders, four 25-pounders, and three Bofors), exposed though they were, played a most active part. The fight continued for two and a half hours, by which time the

enemy had had enough and halted the attack. To the surprise and relief of 22 Battalion he withdrew (to take the [Sidi Azeiz](#) route) and the night was fairly quiet.

Meanwhile large enemy columns were streaming out of [Bardia](#) and westwards through [Sidi Azeiz](#). That afternoon and into the night the signallers worked hard trying to get in touch by wireless with outside units. No replies came back. The battalion, still periodically under shellfire, was isolated.

Earlier in the day—whether in the afternoon or morning is not quite clear—tracked vehicles could be heard creaking and moving about (though few men cared to raise their heads to see for themselves). Lieutenant Donald called out: 'Here's your chance, 14 Platoon, get out your sticky bombs, here come the tanks.' No tanks came in—they were engaged by the two-pounders and one of them was disabled and its crew captured, the other escaping—which was just as well; for the sticky bombs had neither fuses nor detonators.

The inevitable threat during breakfast came again next day (28 November), within two miles of Battalion Headquarters. One hundred vehicles halted and diverted the battalion's attention by going through the motions of an attack to cover an enemy column moving south-westwards from [Bardia](#), and then withdrew. 'Well,' notes one soldier's diary, 'the miracle has happened, Jerry has suddenly left us unmolested, he must have been in a terrible hurry for he left us without firing a shot. We are not out of danger yet as we are cut off from the outside world so anything may happen yet.'⁴⁸

The battalion's situation was critical. Ammunition, water, and supplies were very low, not enough to see them through a sizeable attack, although roving carriers collected a little food from an old enemy camp. Everyone had been on half rations for two days, cigarettes and tobacco were vanishing, and Lance-Corporal Butler noted that the evening meal on the 28th was a cup of tea only. Wounded and prisoners had to be moved. Men were dazed or sore from concussion.

The battalion's chances of carrying out its task of preventing enemy movement to and from [Bardia](#) now had practically vanished. Colonel Andrew, lacking ammunition, unable to fight effectively, and seeing his food vanishing, had little choice but to move south to contact 4 Indian Division. The decision to move through

'pirate country' was not easily reached. Deviations had to be made to dodge enemy columns; at any stage the battalion, without tanks and with few carriers, was liable to run into enemy convoys; and above all, the final leg of the course was between two enemy camps. This allowed the navigator only a small margin of error. If he failed, the battalion and the attached units had every chance of joining B Company in Bardia's prison pen.

The arrangements for the move were made by the second-in-command, Major Greville.⁴⁹ He had four hours to marshal more than 220 vehicles, most of them stragglers and strangers sent to the battalion for protection.⁵⁰ Each vehicle, under cover of darkness, had to be brought up a single and very steep track which climbed a hundred feet up the escarpment. The last truck groaned up the narrow track, and all of the vehicles were marshalled into position in less than three and a half hours. Transport began forming up just west of D Company from 6 p.m. onwards. An enemy truck appeared and was seized by a section of carriers; it contained seven Germans, some of them wounded, and two wounded British soldiers, one of whom died almost immediately.

At 10 p.m. all lay in the hands of fortune—and in the hands of the navigator, Second-Lieutenant Sam McLernon, who performed his exacting task brilliantly. The convoy was under way half an hour later. Cloudy conditions made navigation difficult; parts of the route were quite unknown and rough. Yet a good speed was kept up. Drivers picked their way to the west of Sidi Azeiz, and at one stage an enemy truck attached itself to the column before becoming lost again. Twice the completely blacked-out column halted during the night while German columns moved across its track. The convoy arrived safe and sound close to Sidi Omar four hours later. Dawn brought gunfire close by, but whether from friend or foe nobody could tell. The battalion made contact at last at 7 a.m. with the Divisional Cavalry, which handed instructions to Colonel Andrew, who learned that he had been appointed to command 5 Infantry Brigade.

The raiding panzers, their visit to the frontier over, were now delivering the coup de grâce in the Tobruk sector. The bloody fighting at Sidi Rezegh and Belhamed ended with the remnants of 4 and 6 Brigades being driven from the approaches to Tobruk. The Division had suffered over 4000 casualties in killed, wounded and prisoners. Some units sought refuge in Tobruk; the remainder broke

through a gap in the encirclement and withdrew to the south-east. All but 5 Brigade (which remained under command of 4 Indian Division) were ordered back to [Baggush](#).

During 29 and 30 November 22 Battalion occupied positions east and west of [Fort Musaid](#) and reinforced 23 and 28 Battalions in the [Capuzzo- Musaid- Sollum](#) sector, which was not attacked. 'Been digging all day, ground very hard and rocky and blisters galore but the thought of Jerry's accuracy with his mortars etc. makes me dig deeper.' With Colonel Andrew now commanding 5 Brigade, and Captain John MacDuff acting as Brigade Major, Major Greville took over 22 Battalion.

At the end of November 5 Indian Brigade took over the [Capuzzo- Musaid- Sollum](#) position, freeing 5 Brigade to move on to [Menastir](#) on 1 December, when once again [Bardia](#) was blockaded from the west. This time, much to the 22nd's satisfaction, a whole brigade would be waiting at [Menastir](#) to give a warm reception to any enemy movement to or from [Bardia](#). The battalion, patrolling towards [Bardia](#), stayed on the familiar escarpment and sited supporting weapons with great care. A little to the north the [Maori Battalion](#) dug into the flat below, facing towards [Tobruk](#) and not far from 23 Battalion, which was also astride the road but facing [Bardia](#).

Stubborn [Bardia](#), still holding out, continued to range its guns over the [Menastir](#) area. A party under Captain Young reconnoitred the outer defences of the fortress. Major Campbell led a scavenging party to an abandoned camp—spare parts and equipment had been lost when [Sidi Azeiz](#) fell—and collected much-needed petrol, spare parts and tools for the LAD, and a few blankets and tents for a small ambulance unit. In fact, the unit now rather resembled a mob of hawkers. Clothes were stiff with dirt and sweat; most of them had not been changed for a fortnight. The afternoon of 2 December turned cold and wet, and little wretched groups with no shelter huddled together over inconspicuous fires, usually in benzine tins.

But things certainly warmed up next morning (3 December), when companies were warned to stand-to in a cold, driving wind. Two large columns of enemy were reported on the way to the relief of [Bardia](#). One column met its doom to the south towards [Sidi Azeiz](#) at the hands of an Indian column—100 dead and 100 prisoners.

The other column, 100 to 200 vehicles according to one estimate, came

carelessly down the coastal road from the direction of [Tobruk](#). The unsuspecting enemy actually drove into the first Maori positions on the flat before fire was opened on the whole of the column by all weapons within reach. Colonel Andrew had insisted that his brigade hold fire until the last possible moment, and none could play that game better than the Maoris. Wrecked vehicles blocked and tangled transport in many sections of the road, and the enemy fell into confusion with crippling losses, his documents telling of 'withering fire from well-concealed positions on the escarpment.... the hail of fire.' In cramped and fireswept positions, enemy 75-millimetre guns and mortars had great difficulty in swinging into action to return the fire and support advancing infantry, which in any case got nowhere. Under the cover of smoke some took to the rough country on the northern side of the road, but were rounded up by a few infantry and carriers. Fire from 28 Battalion (luxuriating in a field day), plus machine guns and heavier supporting weapons of the brigade lined along the escarpment, inflicted severe punishment. Twenty-second Battalion, enthusiastically giving maximum fire support, had a grandstand view of the rout. Care had to be taken when [Bardia's](#) guns reached out over the escarpment. Some of the battalion's vehicles on the move panicked and were hit in the ensuing scramble, which was brought under control by an engineer, Sergeant [McQueen](#),⁵¹ who later received the DCM. Late in the afternoon the enemy managed to escape under the cover of smoke. He left behind some killed and prisoners, estimated to be as many as 260 and 120 respectively. Fifth Brigade had ended its last days along the frontier with a dramatic coup, which incredibly enough cost only one man killed and nine wounded. Many fires burned far into the night.

Orders for a move back to the [Capuzzo- Musaid- Sollum](#) area gave no time to bury the dead or to salvage battlefield debris. These tasks were taken over by the [Divisional Cavalry](#) and South African units providing the relief. The move back to [Musaid](#) early on 4 December proved more deadly to 22 Battalion than the previous day's fighting. The column, after travelling for about half an hour, came under shellfire from the guns of an Indian force between [Sidi Azeiz](#) and [Bardia](#). A carrier raced towards the guns to call off the shelling. The Indians, expecting an attack, could have been misled by the number of captured German and Italian vehicles in the column, but the general situation in any case was complicated and confusing. A sergeant records the 'terrible lack of recognition signal', and two days later he noted: 'Just heard that 12 of our tanks put out of action by [RAF](#). Not surprised—no co-

operation.' Wherever official news is meagre, unconvincing, or lacking, a host of grey rumours scurries in, attempting to fill the fighting man's need for information.

Fifth Brigade's guns struck back at the unrecognised Indians ('We got one of their guns and a gunner. Regrettable'), and to make matters worse enemy artillery from Bardia joined in the bombardment. Avoiding cannonades from friend and foe, the hapless battalion, zigzagging its course, finally reached Musaid to occupy, when further shelling died down, positions left by 5 Indian Brigade. On the way an Indian shell, striking a 22 Battalion truck, fatally wounded the driver, Jack Towers,⁵² and another man, Lance-Corporal Wellington.⁵³ A badly wounded German prisoner endured the 'wild dash, enough to finish off the toughest [but when taken off the truck] he still clung to life and not a whimper out of him.'

The battalion stayed five cold days at Musaid, writing home rather shaky letters, puzzling over all the recent moves 'just like a game of draughts', and learning the fate of 4 and 6 Brigades. 'I think,' wrote one man in words which were only too painfully true, 'they are split up too much and taking Jerry too cheaply.' The first rum ration in the campaign arrived, a quarter of a cup each. Cold, cutting winds interrupted sleep, rain soaked blankets and equipment, and touches of 'Wog guts' were common. Men got to know well a big gun, possibly a naval gun, which fired regularly from the direction of Halfaya. The Musaid- Capuzzo area is remembered for this gun ('Hellfire Herman') and for an old Italian plane set in the parade ground.

Apart from occasional shelling the only brush with the enemy was at a well, Bir el Silqiya. Here a party under Lieutenant Donald lay in wait to capture a staff car and five prisoners, and souvenirs—binoculars, compass, cameras. On the way out Bill MacKenzie,⁵⁴ a prominent and hard-working Bren-carrier sergeant, was killed by mortar fire. A German prisoner, an officer speaking perfect English, asked Jack Ford⁵⁵ why the New Zealand troops were two different colours: 'he said they were frightened of the Maoris as he heard they were cannibals and ate their prisoners.' At Musaid a rather battered gramophone came into its own. All through the campaign Gordon Couchman⁵⁶ had kept it and a few records wrapped carefully in a blanket and stowed in the back of a carrier. On occasional peaceful nights the gramophone would start, and heavily muffled men would drift in from the darkness. 'She was a bit scratchy and a bit sandy, but she worked. Those songs were "Ave Maria", "La Paloma", "The Desert Song", and Richard Tauber ... singing "You are my Heart's

Delight”.’

Major Greville left to command 24 Battalion. Colonel Andrew and Captain MacDuff returned to the battalion when Brigadier [Wilder](#)⁵⁷ took over the brigade on 9 December. Colonel Andrew had faced and overcome many difficulties. Working with little rest, he had gathered about him and welded together an efficient brigade headquarters which received 'perfect loyalty and assistance'. His greatest difficulty was forming and maintaining a supply column, and he gave special mention to the hardworking 17 LAD. For 'outstanding courage, skill and leadership ... through a very difficult 14 days', Colonel Andrew was awarded the DSO.

After marching (the Colonel was back again!) ten miles to [Sidi Azeiz](#), the infantry boarded troop-carrying lorries of 4 RMT Company, which had come down unescorted from [Tobruk](#) without meeting any enemy bands, a good omen for the move into the west on 9 December.

After being relieved by two South African battalions 5 Brigade, 3213 strong (22 Battalion totalling 536), in [13 Corps](#) reserve, was to continue the westward advance from [Tobruk](#). By 8 December the enemy, short of supplies and greatly weakened by losses, had raised the seige of [Tobruk](#) and was withdrawing to partly prepared positions at [Gazala](#). Thirteenth Corps was to break this line and prevent the enemy from escaping. By this time British forces were getting the upper hand. The enemy continued to withdraw westwards from [Acroma](#).

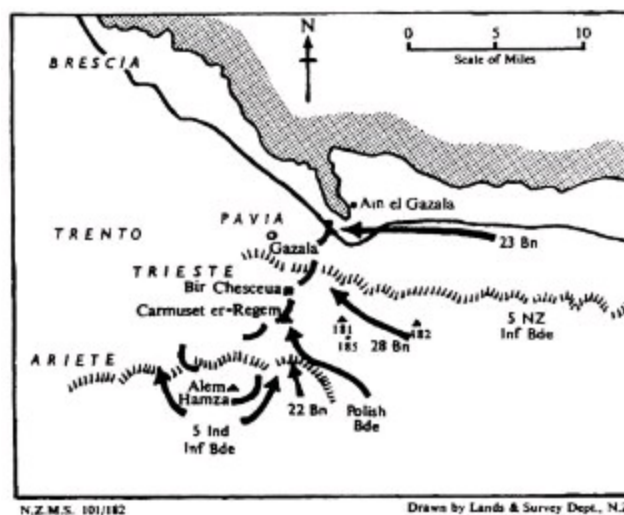
Fifth Brigade's first clash with the enemy since leaving the frontier came on 11 December, during the move to [Acroma](#), 17 miles west of [Tobruk](#), a slow, cautious move because mines abounded. Twenty-second Battalion stayed in reserve this day—when Lloyd [Bailey](#),⁵⁸ a most promising 'I' sergeant, was killed in a motor-cycle accident. Twenty-third Battalion moved ahead, clearing a path along the [Derna-Tobruk](#) road, and at noon the Maoris got under way with a dashing attack west of [Acroma](#), charging with the bayonet and capturing over 1000 Italians at a cost of sixteen casualties.

The enemy stood in the [Gazala](#) area on 12 December, covering the withdrawal of vital supplies. His line, a series of strongpoints which ran from south-west to north-east for several miles at right angles to the [Tobruk-Derna](#) road, proved hard

to penetrate. Furthermore the [Luftwaffe](#), close now to its airfield bases, was back in strength again. Fifth Brigade faced elements from four Italian divisions. Twenty-third Battalion remained near the coast; next to it was 28 (Maori) Battalion, then 22 Battalion, and on the left flank 5 Indian Brigade, with all the remaining armour gathered further south.

Moving up from reserve on 12 December the battalion made a tedious, trying, and dusty trip and crossed one area liberally sprinkled with thermos-flask bombs, which wounded Lieutenant Bob Knox and his driver, 'Slim' Watson. 'The carrier slewed, everyone ran out to them, running through thermos bombs,' said Gordon Couchman. 'I tell you we walked back mighty

gingerly.' A surprise attack from the rear by four Heinkels damaged a truck. As the battalion dug in for the night, the gunfire ahead increased. To the south-west a British force was engaging a strong enemy position. The Intelligence Officer, while circling on reconnaissance with two carriers, accepted the surrender of a pocket of 150 despondent Italians and handed them over to the British.



THE ATTACK ON GAZALA, 12-16 DECEMBER 1941

the attack on gazala, 12-16 december 1941

Battle was joined on the morning of the 13th,⁵⁹ and in the course of a three-mile advance the battalion twice ran into enemy fire. The infantry immediately debussed, A and D Companies fixed bayonets and moved forward to the attack, while C acted as their reserve. Heavy fire from front and flanks pinned the infantry down, but D captured a post and took twenty-four prisoners, equipment and

weapons. The remainder of the column, hurried by heavy shelling, moved into a depression, and headquarters was set up at Bir el Geff. Here, with much satisfaction, the Bofors guns shot down three enemy planes.

As the attack by A and D Companies developed, an enemy strongpoint was detected on the right flank. This was causing a great deal of trouble, so C Company, under Major Hart, attacked at 2 p.m., theoretically supported by artillery and twelve I tanks, though the tanks were late and the guns seemed to be mainly in enemy hands. The company advanced in open order with two platoons forward and one back. No shots were fired, and 100 Italians were taken out of trenches. Then the tanks came up, the enemy artillery opened fire, 'and from then on until the Company reached the escarpment perhaps 600 yards further on it was one rain of shellfire, remarkable in that one man only was wounded. Plenty of the chaps lost skin, but that was as close as it came.' The enemy equipment destroyed included four guns.

Indignation was widespread over two deliberate misuses of the white flag by the Italians. Shortly before the attack some carriers had gone forward. A white flag was raised, and one carrier approached. Suddenly the flag was lowered, and fire from 20-millimetre guns and machine guns raked the carriers. An anti-tank bullet in the forehead killed Alan Merrick,⁶⁰ and a shell smashed a carrier's engine. On the same day Lloyd Cross,⁶¹ setting his platoon off in the advance, hurriedly detailed Private Kirschberg⁶² and two others to bear left and pick up some Italians who were waving a white flag. 'But Private Kirschberg never arrived there, the miserable hounds wounded him,' writes Mick Kenny.⁶³

Enemy fire continued briskly from surrounding ridges, halting any further movement. The three companies consolidated as best they could, but digging in was hopeless, just a matter of getting down a few inches.

In this attack 'we stretcher bearers were caught on a piece of high open ground and as always—due we believe to the stretcher being taken for an anti-tank rifle—came in for some particular attention, and there is vivid memory of undoing webbing to get closer to the ground, and ages spent in moving the stretcher forward so that one could rest the edge of one's tin hat on it "hidden from view", and painfully slow work edging stones onto their ends while the least movement brought long bursts of machine gun fire—but Oh! what security when a stone the size of a dinner plate was

in position! The old "stern-sheets" never before or since have assumed to one's mind such major proportions, but the greatest injustice of all really seemed, at the time, that nature had to be so cruel as to assert herself and nothing could be done about it—if one wanted to live a little longer.'

The battalion did not advance next day, 14 December. The [Maori Battalion](#), nearby, had taken Point 181 in the night with almost 400 prisoners. Along the [Gazala](#) front a tank attack was driven back, bringing the total of enemy tanks knocked out in the last two days to twenty-two. In the morning Colonel Andrew, while on reconnaissance and checking positions, found his left flank dangerously open—the Buffs had been overrun by a German counter-attack. This called for greater vigilance and brought a heavy strain on to the battalion's patrols. Although assured protection by the armoured brigade, at no time could the battalion make proper contact with it. After his tour the CO issued a special order calling for aggressive fire at every opportunity: 'just sitting passively in trenches [sic] will be of no assistance whatsoever to other units on our flanks.'

Here, on a totally black night, Padre Thorpe set out, counting the 2000 paces and hoping to strike the forward positions without walking into the opposition. His faint 'Hullo' was heard and answered, and in the pitch darkness men gathered round an historic chalice he carried for the communion service. ⁶⁴

Although under a different command, 5 Brigade was now working in co-operation with a Polish brigade. Polish officers who, it was pointed out, 'have a lot of debts to pay', reported to 22 Battalion before taking up positions about two miles east of Battalion Headquarters. The Brigade Commander and the CO reconnoitred the Polish positions, and early next day the Poles prepared to attack in the north. Twenty-second Battalion's task was to give them the utmost support with artillery fire and other weapons, and then to advance and take over ground won by the Poles.

Accordingly, the battalion's attached artillery opened heavy fire at 3 p.m. In the meantime, however, the Poles, without letting the battalion know, had changed their zero hour to 3.30 p.m. Half an hour's artillery work was wasted, and on top of this the Polish artillery shelled the battalion's anti-tank positions. When the attack did begin the enemy, thoroughly roused, replied hotly. Off to a bad start, the Poles

advanced slowly, but at dusk, when the shelling eased up, no call had been made on 22 Battalion to support them. The battalion was not too pleased at events anyhow.

At dusk D Company, under Captain Young, was sent over to join the [Maori Battalion](#), which had made further advances (yielding 180 prisoners) this day in the Point 181 area. The CO, seeing his battalion being whittled away and concerned about his open left flank, recorded his disapproval of this move. However, a piece of good work had been carried out by a platoon from C Company. Enemy guns, firing on the flat, had ranged on the Poles during their attack. British artillery had accounted for most of the gun crews, and the platoon finished them off and destroyed the four enemy guns.

“Tiny” [Revell](#),⁶⁵ our Quartermaster,’ recalls a D Company comrade, ‘had the unenviable job of bringing up our rations and had to walk in carrying two containers: he came in for a lot of unwelcome attention and repeatedly disappeared in shell bursts till we wondered if he would ever make it. Many times we thought “Tiny” had “had it” but he duly arrived, out of breath and strange to say fair hopping mad. He wasted no time—dished it out—then picking up the dixies proclaimed loudly in most forcible language that the So-&-Sos couldn't hit the biggest man in the NZ Army (“Tiny” weighed at that time between 19 and 20 stone and was built in proportion)—and “I’m going to walk back this time and to Hell.” He did, and apart from an initial burst of machine gun fire they left him alone!’

At daylight on 16 December A Company attempted to silence an enemy strongpoint on the left flank. The position held, and artillery fire was concentrated on the area. The Poles, now really under way, made steady progress during the day, aided by C Company with long-range Bren and spandau fire. When a report was received of a strong enemy force, about 800, forming up by the open left flank, an extra section of machine guns moved over, but no attack came. The concentration was broken up by intense gunfire. The Poles rounded off a good day's work by attacking Bir Naghia after dark with supporting fire from C Company. The post, deeply dug in and concreted, was cleared at bayonet point. Twenty-second Battalion's carrier patrols reported much transport movement: the enemy seemed to be withdrawing.

Private [Duffy](#)⁶⁶ recalls an incident this evening in A Company. A barrel of cognac

had been discovered, together with 'a German motorbike which would only just go, and Corporal Lloyd Williams⁶⁷ and Alan Mutton⁶⁸ were doubling on this bike, Alan driving, Lloyd on the back. Well Lloyd had a pocketful of Italian grenades and would drop one behind him every now and again. Of course Alan didn't know this, he thought he was being shelled or something. It was quite a while before he woke up to it. We had a great view of it from a nearby rise.'

The 17th brought warm, bright sunshine—and a great peace. D Company came back from the [Maori Battalion](#), which had moved forward the day before to cover any advance from the gathering enemy force, 800-strong. The Maoris and D Company, after long and weary plodding, ran into fire and were shelled again as the force withdrew following our bombardment. The Maoris suffered fifty-eight casualties. D Company had two men killed and ten wounded, including one man wounded in the lobe of an ear: 'We tried to keep the chap with the hole in the ear as a showpiece but the darn thing healed up quickly, so no free beer for that back in Taranaki!'

The second Libyan campaign was over for 5 Brigade which, in the words of the commander of [13 Corps](#), 'has enhanced the remarkable reputation enjoyed by the New Zealand forces.' The enemy had withdrawn in the night, and the New Zealanders took no further part in the pursuit into the west. The battalion had suffered seventy-seven casualties, including twenty-three dead, forty-four wounded, and ten prisoners of war (of whom one was wounded). In the Division (4594 casualties) one officer in every three and almost one man in every four had become a casualty during those bloody three weeks. Of the many prisoners taken by 5 Brigade, the Italians outnumbered the Germans by 100 to one.

So back to [Baggush](#) where the Division waited, back over the dusty old trails the ancients and the caravans had used, to a cold Christmas Eve at [El Adem](#) and a short service to mark Christmas Day—'a bleak, windy morning, it seems sarcastic to say "Happy Xmas". There is a smell and taste of petrol in my cup of tea and it needs a lot of sweetened tinned milk to kill it.' 'Someone attempted to improve (?) the bully beef by boiling it with sauerkraut and nearly poisoned the lot of us.' Then back to [Sidi Azeiz](#), where men wondered about B Company comrades, and into Egypt again, to a smothering dust-storm: 'Our faces were unrecognisable, powdered all over [with dust] ... the awful wind....' Down to the railhead, and so by train to [Baggush](#).

But they took the lid off the place on New Year's Eve. The Division, decimated but together again, showered the night sky with German flares, exploded Italian grenades, even fired several 25-pounders out to sea, alarming nearby English units which stood-to to repel a seaborne invasion. As midnight came in over the little oasis 'the boys pulled down the colonel's tent and demanded a speech, but Colonel Andrew, taking this in good part, would not address the gathering until he was properly dressed,' writes Doug [George](#).⁶⁹ 'He then fired several Verey flares in spontaneous reaction (and so did Captain John MacDuff, setting fire to a bivvy), and regarding his collapsed tent said: "I will crawl into the b— thing as it is." But they held him in such estimation that they decided to re-erect the tent for him.'

¹ [Pte R. R. Foreman](#); [Carterton](#); born [Carterton](#), 7 Jan 1918; farmhand; twice wounded.

² He remembers only one spot where he saw both beauty and desolation together: '... coming up the [Red Sea](#) (inky and oily looking in a stifling hazy heat). The coastline of Egypt was on our left: rocky, mountainous and barren looking. It had a reddish glow about it; you could almost imagine it glowing hot. It had beauty of desolation.'

³ [Capt S. M. McLernon](#); [Gisborne](#); born [Gisborne](#), 14 Jul 1913; civil servant; p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

⁴ [Sgt R. D. Price](#); born [Tolaga Bay](#), 26 Jun 1914; farmhand; wounded 27 Jun 1942; died of wounds 9 Aug 1944.

⁵ [Sgt K. R. Brock](#); [Invercargill](#); born [NZ](#) 9 Jun 1908; labourer.

⁶ [Rev. D. D. Thorpe](#); [Christchurch](#); born [Little Akaloa](#), 16 Nov 1908; Anglican minister.

⁷ The battalion's senior officers at the end of September 1941 were: CO, Lt-Col L. W. Andrew; 2 i/c, [Maj T. C. Campbell](#) (Maj J. Leggat had gone to GHQ MEF). HQ Coy: OC, Lt F. G. Oldham. A Coy: OC, Capt J. Moore; 2 i/c, [Capt E. T. Pleasants](#). B Coy: OC, Capt E. F. Laws; 2 i/c, [Capt E. H. Simpson](#). C Coy:

OC, Maj I. A. Hart; 2 i/c, Capt R. R. T. Young. D Coy: OC, Maj G. L. Mather; 2 i/c, Capt K. R. S. Crarer.

⁸ Capt B. V. Davison; Lower Hutt; born Wellington, 25 Oct 1914; traveller.

⁹ Maj P. R. Hockley, ED; Lower Hutt; born Napier, 2 Dec 1917; clerk; now Regular soldier.

¹⁰ L-Cpl J. L. Sullivan; New Plymouth; born NZ 30 Mar 1915; truck driver; wounded 27 Jun 1942.

¹¹ Capt A. W. Wesney; born Invercargill, 1 Feb 1915; clerk; killed in action 23 Nov 1941.

¹² Brig R. W. Harding, DSO, MM, ED; Kirikopuni, North Auckland; born Dargaville, 29 Feb 1896; farmer; Auck Regt 1916-19; CO 21 Bn 1942-43; comd 5 Bde 30 Apr-14 May 1943, 4 Jun-23 Aug 1943; twice wounded.

¹³ Rev. Fr. W. Sheely, m.i.d.; Te Aroha; born Hunterville, 5 Oct 1907; Roman Catholic priest; p.w. 28 Nov 1941.

¹⁴ Rev. S. C. Read; New Plymouth; born Invercargill, 24 Aug 1905; Presbyterian minister; National Patriotic Fund commissioner, UK, 1944-46.

¹⁵ Capt K. P. L. MacGregor; Frankton; born Hamilton, 8 Oct 1911; medical practitioner.

¹⁶ Flags marked the route in the daytime. The celebrated New Zealand black-diamond signposts, which would stretch across North Africa and then up Italy to Trieste, had not yet appeared.

¹⁷ These sub-units came under the command of 22 Bn: 28 Bty 5 Fd Regt (for a day), one troop 32 A-Tk Bty, 2 MG PI, one section 7 Fd Coy, 1 detail (eight men) 5 Fd Amb.

¹⁸ Maj R. R. Knox, MC, m.i.d.; born Scotland, 10 Jun 1910; carpenter; twice wounded.

¹⁹ Pte C. G. Watson; Lower Hutt; born NZ 25 Apr 1905; tractor driver; wounded 12 Dec 1941.

²⁰ Lt W. C. Hart; born NZ 10 Jul 1910; roofer; killed in action 21 Sep 1944.

²¹ Pte C. B. Smith; born NZ 12 Jan 1919; clerk; died of wounds 5 Jan 1942.

²² Capt W. G. Lovie; born NZ 17 Feb 1899; journalist.

²³ Lt W. A. D. Caldwell; Gisborne; born Gisborne; 27 Nov 1919; clerk; wounded 15 Jul 1942.

²⁴ Lt W. J. Crompton; born NZ 3 Oct 1917; salesman; killed in action 22 Nov 1941.

²⁵ Pte T. A. Redpath; born Auckland, 19 Jul 1911; miner; killed in action 22 Nov 1941.

²⁶ Pte C. Sangster; born NZ 4 Nov 1909; farmer; killed in action 22 Nov 1941.

²⁷ Pte A. J. McClintock; born NZ 5 Dec 1915; labourer; died of wounds 22 Nov 1941.

²⁸ Pte L. G. W. Corbett; born NZ 5 Jan 1919; transport driver; deceased.

²⁹ Maj W. G. Volckman, m.i.d.; Leeston; born Oxford, 26 Jul 1902; medical practitioner.

³⁰ L-Sgt J. T. Lowe; Waipukurau; born Scotland, 10 Jun 1906; labourer.

³¹ 21 Bn moved westwards with Divisional Headquarters and 20 Bn, and 5 Bde was down to three battalions: 23 Bn at Capuzzo, 22 Bn on the way to Menastir, and 28 (Maori) Bn at upper Sollum. Together with 4 Indian Division, 5 Bde was to keep the frontier forts isolated. For the time being it was out of the question to capture Bardia, lower Sollum or Halfaya.

³² WO II R. J. Bayliss, MM; born Hastings, 8 Feb 1909; shepherd; killed in action 26 Oct 1942.

³³ Sgt J. J. Adeane, Gisborne; born NZ 17 Oct 1919; clerk; wounded 26 Oct 1942.

³⁴ Among those reaching 22 Battalion from 5 Brigade were 27 RASC men who had been recaptured; they confirmed that 40 enemy tanks and some MT were west of Sidi Omar and were believed to be making for Bardia.

³⁵ Pte T. M. Hood; Auckland; born NZ 27 Feb 1914; carpenter.

³⁶ Pte W. J. Greig; born NZ 28 Sep 1918; lorry driver.

³⁷ Capt D. G. Barton; New Plymouth; born Marton, 14 Jun 1912; bank clerk; p.w. 27 Nov 1941.

³⁸ L-Cpl E. H. Jaggard; Palmerston North; born Wanganui, 17 Mar 1906; farmhand.

³⁹ The 22 Battalion group now included four 25-pdr guns (one troop of 28 Battery had gone with B Company to Sidi Azeiz), four 2-pdr anti-tank guns, three Bofors, and 12 Vickers guns (4 Coy 27 (MG) Bn). All contributed handsomely towards staving off the enemy.

⁴⁰ Pte R. Salter; Russell; born NZ 7 Jun 1918; greenkeeper.

⁴¹ Capt E. H. Simpson; Marton; born Marton, 11 Feb 1908; farmer; p.w. 27 Nov 1941.

⁴² Sgt G. W. Orsler; Gisborne; born Marton, 7 Mar 1911; motor-body builder and painter.

⁴³ L-Sgt J. A. Bateman; Levin; born Eketahuna, 19 Dec 1912; P and T Dept linesman; wounded 27 Nov 1941; p.w. 15 Jul 1942; escaped [Italy](#), Sep 1943.

⁴⁴ Gnr G. R Dobson, MM; [Lower Hutt](#); born NZ 6 Jan 1912; truck driver; wounded 26 Oct 1942.

⁴⁵ Pte B. C. Goodall; born NZ 19 Nov 1918; shepherd; killed in action 27 Nov 1941.

⁴⁶ Pte P. W. Hunt; born NZ 24 Nov 1917; storekeeper; killed in action 27 Nov 1941.

⁴⁷ 2 Lt V. D. Hill; Fernhill, Hastings; born Hastings, 10 Jan 1911; farmer.

⁴⁸ They were out of touch with the rest of [Eighth Army](#), although the gunners (remnants of [28 Battery](#)) at [Menastir](#) had been in touch by wireless with [27 Battery](#) at [Capuzzo](#), which had called up the CRA 4 Indian Division.

⁴⁹ Lt-Col A. W. Greville, m.i.d.; born NZ 5 Aug 1897; Regular soldier; comd Advanced Party [2 NZEF](#), 1939; DAQMG 1940-41; CO [24 Bn](#) Dec 1941-Jul 1942; killed in action 22 Jul 1942.

⁵⁰ Brigade and [Divisional Cavalry](#) echelons, Brigade LAD, a British general transport company, [RAF](#), postal unit, [YMCA](#), and AIF.

⁵¹ Sgt E. J. E. McQueen, DCM, m.i.d.; born [India](#), 20 Dec 1904; seaman; wounded Nov 1941.

⁵² Pte J. R. Towers; born [Palmerston North](#), 19 Dec 1918; fabric roofer; died of wounds 4 Dec 1941.

⁵³ L-Cpl W. R. Wellington; born NZ 31 Aug 1918; car painter; died of wounds 29 Dec 1941.

⁵⁴ Sgt W. H. MacKenzie; born Havelock North, 7 Jan 1906; farmer; killed in action 8 Dec 1941.

⁵⁵ Sgt E. M. J. Ford; Masterton; born New South Wales, 29 Oct 1906; freezing worker.

⁵⁶ Sgt G. Couchman; Waverley; born Wanganui, 27 Feb 1918; truck driver.

⁵⁷ Maj-Gen A. S. Wilder, DSO, MC, m.i.d., Order of the White Eagle (Serb.); Te Hau, Waipukurau; born NZ 24 May 1890; sheep-farmer; Wgtn Mtd Rifles, 1914-19; CO 25 Bn May 1940-Sep 1941; comd NZ Trg Gp, Maadi Camp, Sep-Dec 1941, Jan-Feb 1942; 5 Bde 6 Dec 1941-17 Jan 1942; 5 Div (in NZ) Apr 1942-Jan 1943; 1 Div Jan-Nov 1943.

⁵⁸ Sgt L. G. Bailey; born Balcairn, 19 May 1918; baker; died on active service 11 Dec 1941.

⁵⁹ A small yet important point: before action a YMCA truck found the battalion, which had been critically short of tobacco and had 'smoked anything that looked like a cigarette...mighty welcome, it certainly helped the chaps.'

⁶⁰ Cpl A. Merrick; born Christchurch, 2 Mar 1917; salesman; killed in action 13 Dec 1941.

⁶¹ Maj L. G. S. Cross; born Dunedin, 20 Nov 1918; Regular soldier.

⁶² Cpl H. M. Kirschberg; Hastings; born Taihape, 31 Mar 1917; clerk; three times wounded.

⁶³ Sgt H. W. Kenny, m.i.d.; Tawa Flat; born Johnsonville, 29 Dec 1917; machine operator; wounded 15 Dec 1944.

⁶⁴ The little portable communion chalice, which Padre Thorpe carried in its case in his battledress pocket, belonged to his grandfather, Archdeacon R. J. Thorpe, who came to New Zealand in the 'sixties from [Ireland](#), and was a member of the Volunteers in New Zealand. He carried it on horseback in backblock districts. It was handed on to Padre Thorpe's father, the [Rev. F. H. Thorpe](#), who carried it in his saddlebags when he used to ride the 230-mile-long South Westland parish when there were scarcely any bridges; the clergyman could and did shoe his own horses.

⁶⁵ [WO II B. J. Revell](#); Hastings; born [Wellington](#), 24 Jun 1915; civil servant.

⁶⁶ [Pte S. Duffy](#); [Lower Hutt](#); born [Durham](#), England, 6 Mar 1919; salesman; wounded 23 Apr 1944.

⁶⁷ [L-Sgt L. Williams](#); [Lower Hutt](#); born [Greymouth](#), 22 Nov 1917; clerk; wounded 24 Oct 1942.

⁶⁸ [L-Sgt A. B. Mutton](#); [Wellington](#); born [Australia](#), 8 Nov 1913; duco-sprayer; wounded Jun 1942.

⁶⁹ [L-Cpl D. L. George](#); [New Plymouth](#); born NZ 5 May 1917; cycle mechanic; wounded 20 Apr 1941; p.w. 15 Jul 1942; escaped [Italy](#), Sep 1943.

22 BATTALION

CHAPTER 4 – INTO 1942 AND SYRIA

CHAPTER 4

Into 1942 and Syria

` Christmas made everyone forget for a while the prior miseries of two cigarettes per day, stony ground to sleep on, a few bits of salvaged canvas, with iron or old doors to keep out the weather. The latrines were crude, so was the cookhouse. Men were seen following their mates to pick up cast away cigarette butts. Hunger drove many to behave like pigs at mealtimes— pushing one another about to scrape out empty dixies, etc. Everyone lost weight with dysentery, and medical treatment was poor....

`... by 4 o'clock on 4 January, everything of importance was set on fire or blown up by the enemy, and by daybreak we were told that Jerry had surrendered, and our column would be in, in an hour or so—cheers by all. About 9 o'clock the first armoured vehicles arrived—our own Div. Cav. What a welcome, what food they gave us, and once more we were free.'— George Orsler, of B Company, liberated when [Bardia](#) fell to the South Africans.

From the [Western Desert](#) the battalion went back to the [Suez Canal](#) area again, to tents at [Kabrit](#), where 200 reinforcements arrived. At a railway station on the way down Mick Kenny had a small tin left over from the rations. He told Arab beggars to hold out their hands, and leaning out of the carriage window, gave them all an equal share—of golden syrup. `The way the [angry] Wogs moved their hands reminded us of accordion players.' Elsewhere, in another part of the battalion, a man produced a precious tin of coffee and milk `and about 17 of us brewed up and drank it out of rusty tins. The thing that impressed me was that the owner had not the slightest thought of drinking it himself, he shared it automatically, we were soldiers now.'

At [Kabrit](#) they practised for seaborne invasion again, and once again the plan (or `boy scout exercises', as a good many New Zealanders considered them) was abandoned, much to the relief of 5 Brigade's new commander, [Brigadier Kippenberger](#), ¹ who gives this opinion of the battalion at the time: `22 Battalion had a good record, though it was unhappy at having lost its [Maleme](#) position in [Crete](#)—after very heavy casualties— and it had a grouch that it had not been fairly treated in decorations. Les Andrew, unfortunately, was going; but I had my choice of John Russell or another good officer to succeed him, chose John, and had no worries

thenceforward.'²

For some time now the battalion had known it would be losing 'February'. Before the Libyan campaign some men had called at his tent to see him about a rumour. It was true all right, said the Colonel, and he was leading the battalion through just one more show. His last show was over now. The battalion's war diary reads for 3 February: 'This was a sorry day for the 22 Bn for it paraded to say farewell to its original and much respected CO., Lt. Col. L. W. Andrew, who is shortly leaving on his return to N.Z. Lt. Col. Andrew inspected the whole Bn from 0845-1000 after which he said a few words of farewell and asked the troops to live up to the traditions of the Bn whether on leave, in base or in action. After wishing his men the best of luck, Lt. Col. Andrew took the salute whilst the Bn marched past. At lunch-time, he dined with the sergeants and spoke some encouraging words to them.'

'Not one man on the parade felt anything but regret now that the time had come to say goodbye to a man whom they had always admired, loved and respected, despite the "February" and the 28 days,' wrote Tom De Lisle.

The Colonel left, but his influence went on to [Trieste](#), where his outlook and memories of his veterans were recalled in a poem attempting to humble some irresponsible horseplay by newcomers to the battalion. When speaking about this man in years to come, some would say he, with his discipline, was an anachronism—a 1914-18 hangover. Others, probably the majority of men who had served under him in the lean, hard years, would say with affection: 'There was never another like Old February, or Old Wirewhiskers', and at reunions even notoriously meek men would be found hopefully claiming as a mark of distinction to have served '28 days under Old February'.³

The battalion's new commander, from [Divisional Cavalry](#), was the son of Sir Andrew Russell, who had commanded the New Zealand Division in [France](#). John Russell took over the battalion in time for combined operations: a move down the [Suez Canal](#) and, after a night off Port Tewfik, a brief mock assault off [Ras el Sudr](#), a small promontory in the [Red Sea](#). A Company stayed at home; B and C boarded the familiar HMS [Glengyle](#), and D packed into HMS Princess Marguerite. The men came back from their invasion practice to learn to their disgust that they were booked for [Libya](#) again—Rommel was moving out from [El Agheila](#) towards [Gazala](#)—so back to

Libya and to El Adem, near Tobruk, went 5 Brigade, which this time crossed the frontier in farcical fashion. The convoy had halted for tea within a couple of miles of the wire. The column began moving over the remaining two miles into Libya as night came in, but something slipped up, a bemused driver brought his truck round to the rear of the convoy, and other trucks following other tail-lights deftly turned the convoy into a great circle. The circular convoy, a little dizzy, did not make Libya until midnight.

The brigade resignedly dug in on the escarpment south of El Adem to protect the aerodrome and Trigh Capuzzo if the enemy broke the Gazala line. The front ahead remained quiet; no raiders appeared. Untroubled, the brigade built its second 'box'. Blasting, digging, wiring, minelaying (13,000 mines taken with full authority from Tobruk's defences), salvaging and camouflaging, interrupted by an air raid or two, continued until March, when after a heavy flood and a sandstorm the brigade thankfully made its way back to Maadi.

A pleasant surprise awaited in Cairo, at the New Zealand Club, where 'the staff was now NZ girls running the Club. What a difference they made, it was like a touch of home again,' wrote Dick Bunny.⁴ 'They were all so pleasant and everything was clean and a strong contrast to my previous visits when the Wogs held sway.'

At a brigade parade General Freyberg, presenting awards won in Greece, Crete and Libya, decorated these four 22 Battalion men: Colonel Russell, DSO (won while with the Divisional Cavalry), Major Campbell, MC, Captain Donald, MC, and Sergeant Bob Bayliss, MM. Soon afterwards, early in April, the battalion set off for Syria to join the rest of the Division.

The night before the battalion left Maadi a party returning from the pictures saw to their joy near the Pall Mall theatre the door of another battalion's cookhouse swinging wide open—too good to be true—a trap, perhaps? So one member, pretending to be drunk, reeled towards the open door calling blearily for 'Jack'. Nobody lurked inside. Doubling up, the rest of the party carried away cases of tinned peaches (a desert luxury), several sacks of sugar, flour, and quantities of tea. The loot was distributed far and wide. Next day, as the party pulled out for the green pastures of Syria, men looked back innocently on the turmoil in this unit's area: redcaps darting here and there, copious interrogations and note-taking, startled and

angry groups denying and protesting.

Most of the men (600 of them with four tons of baggage) left by train. They took with them a new padre, Rev. T. E. [Champion](#),⁵ after saying goodbye to Padre Thorpe (troubled with failing health), whose 'fearless and untiring efforts for the comfort and assistance of the troops' were noted appreciatively in the war diary.

While a few drove north in lorries, most of the battalion travelled in carriages from [Maadi](#), not too comfortably either, some getting down under the seats and sleeping on the floor while others stretched out in the luggage racks. They crossed the Canal at [Kantara](#) by ferry, entrained, stretched out in box wagons, passed through more uninteresting desert, which at last gave way to poor grazing land, tufts of grass here and there,



and a wandering Arab herdsman with a few sheep and goats. Slowly the land improved: little houses of sun-dried bricks were set in fields divided by prickly-pear hedges. Then the train clattered into the fertile coastal plain of southern Palestine,



eastern mediterranean

past field after field of ripening oats, and citrus orchards bordered by tall cypresses. 'What a relief all this was after the desert: the greener the country became, the higher the boys' spirits rose, we were just like a mob of school kids. We could easily imagine the feelings of the Israelites when after wandering 40

years in the desert they discovered this valley.' In fact, this trip north to [Syria](#) was stored away fondly into hundreds of memories, to nourish many a soldier in the accursed summer at [Alamein](#), and also in the dead days of prisoner-of-war camps so soon to envelop many a man now free.

Gaza railway station, the first stop in Palestine, swarmed with young Arabs carrying every imaginable container (buckets, baskets, kerosene tins, big jam tins and even chamber pots) piled with oranges to be exchanged for bully or cheese. Here New Zealanders probably ate the largest amount of fruit in the shortest time in their lives. Soon the floor of every truck was covered with oranges and grapefruit, 'absolutely delicious, so juicy and so full of flavour. As soon as they had sold all they carried, they rushed off to the side of the station and got another load and as soon as they got to the train they were empty again. This must have gone on for over half an hour, and we were eating them all the time and throwing the skins outside till when we moved off the ground around the station was red with skins. My only regret was that I couldn't have sent some home to you.'

A day and a night passed at a transit camp near [Haifa](#), a small port with oil refineries on the flat and suburbs of stone buildings sprinkled on surrounding hills.

Some 22 Battalion men, without money, lazed and read or slept under the olive trees. Others went to town and found it rather 'stereotyped, not much evidence of individuality'; the native quarter was much cleaner and healthier, with not so much bleating for baksheesh; on the sides of the streets lay huge piles of oranges, and 'the girls especially the Jewesses were very attractive and would at least look at us and that is more than the white female pop. of [Cairo](#) did.'

As the battalion travelled on up the coast the [Lebanon](#) hills gradually grew nearer. Fields were being cultivated or were covered with fruit trees and bordered with cypresses and gum-trees. 'I'll never forget the sound of wind in those bluegums.' In one field an Arab toiled with wooden plough and an ox or donkey; in the next a Jew on a tractor hauled a double-furrow plough, perhaps helped by Jewish girls dressed in shirts tucked into baggy bloomers. Everywhere spring flowers appeared, 'purple and white daisies, red poppies and yellow buttercups all mixed together. In the garden of some peasant I saw the most wonderful roses I have ever seen. The biggest blooms possible and every colour of the rainbow. Just past this are the remains of an old aquaduct built by the Romans and nearly obscured by vegetation.'

John [Collins](#)⁶ saw and was amused at 'an Arab dressed up to kill riding a pushbike and he passed another Arab on a camel and gave him a look as much as to say "Why don't you travel in a civilised way?"' Yet occasionally an old village would be passed, unchanged over the centuries, where the women carried water jars on their heads and did all the work while the men sat in the sun and gossiped. 'That appeals to me, I think it should be introduced into NZ after the war.'

Later, while on leave in Palestine, Collins, like many New Zealanders, was deeply impressed with the farming, financial and social aspects of community life in the new Jewish settlements, the remarkable achievements of voluntary labour, the efforts to improve cultural backgrounds, and especially the community care and upbringing of children, which freed mothers from much drudgery and developed self-reliance and initiative in the children. In the midst of world warfare many New Zealanders thought deeply about this simultaneous welding together of Jews from many races—Americans, Poles, Russians, Germans, French and [Palestinians](#). There is on record at least one 22 Battalion man, a Gentile, who thoroughly enjoyed himself,

'away from anything to do with the Army', by working in a Jewish community settlement while on leave.

Where Palestine ended, the hills, covered in scrub and spring flowers, came right down to the coast. Buses took the battalion across the frontier into [Syria](#), which was less highly cultivated and rockier; the hillsides were terraced or patched with olive groves, with here and there old ruins and Crusaders' castles. Then the orchards and vineyards increased again, with wayside cafés selling fruit, wines, and liqueurs at ridiculously low prices. 'The trousers the Lebanese wear are something like riding pants, but the seat is all baggy and reaches nearly down to the knees. They certainly would be comfortable but a bit draughty in the winter.'

The travellers paused briefly in a transit camp by [Beirut](#), where pay, changed into Syrian pounds (about eight to £ 1 sterling) gave sadly brief sensations of wealth. The last leg of the five-day journey began with the switch to the mountain railway and the unforgettable climb of 5000 feet in three stages over the Lebanon Mountains, almost to the snowline. Villages and towns with grey walls and red-tiled roofs, well known to wealthy tourists, were passed. The curious little train toddled along at about 20 miles an hour, sometimes pausing gratefully while wood was cut for the boiler. Many sat on the roofs of their 'dog boxes' or cooked meals on primuses inside. The train reached the top about noon and slowly began spiralling down to the green and beautiful [Bekaa](#) valley.

'That rail trip was the highlight of the trip to [Syria](#),' wrote Lieutenant O'Reilly, 'the wild flowers growing in profusion beside the track, the mountainside on its lower slopes liberally covered with trees, the steep little valleys, terraces built in almost impossible places to conserve a few square yards of soil, the mulberry trees and vines and orchards, those attractive looking villages with their square houses of clean stone, the holiday resorts of [Syria](#), the snake-like twistings of the railway up the mountainside, the magnificent view as one looked back down towards [Beirut](#) in the blue setting of the [Mediterranean](#).'

In a siding at [Rayak](#) box wagons waited, a good sight until soldiers saw only too plainly that the previous passengers had been cattle. The trucks, not washed properly, were a disgusting sight and smell. The medical officer (Captain Volckman) insisted on clean trucks; some arrived, and the trip went on, through country that

changed to poorer, stonier soil, with far fewer crops and stunted fruit trees, but mostly herds of sheep and goats. The fact that sheep in [Syria](#) followed the shepherd, and were not driven as they are in New Zealand, intrigued everyone. The people, mostly Kurds, lived in curious mud huts shaped like beehives. Workers along the railway lines gladly accepted army biscuits tossed out by the travellers. Lorries waiting at a small station soon took the battalion to its destination, [Afrine](#) camp, north-west of [Aleppo](#), early in the afternoon of 14 April. A and D Companies and some Headquarters Company men promptly went off to the forward posts to relieve 24 Battalion.

The Division, resting, building defences, and acting as occupying troops, was to guard and improve the defences of this north-west corner of [Syria](#), through which ran the main road and railway, northwards from [Aleppo](#) into [Turkey](#). If the Germans invaded [Turkey](#), 22 Battalion, perched up on the frontier (and now briskly exchanging rice for eggs), would have a grandstand seat.

[Syria](#) had endured more than her share of invasions. After the First World War the country, wrested from the Turks, had been handed over to the French as a mandate. Now British, Australians, and New Zealanders had joined the French in [Syria](#), and the Syrian himself was experiencing rather a lean time. Groups of natives, patient, silent and dignified, clustered at unit cookhouses, waiting for scraps. The Army took over distributing flour in [Syria](#), and the New Zealanders were responsible for doing so in their areas. The shortages and semi-famine in some places were due, not to the French administrators, but to Syrian merchants cornering the market. Occasionally bands and parades marched to and fro to impress the Syrians, and certain establishments were 'closed on religious days as a gesture of respect and goodwill.' 'The Syrians,' wrote one 22 Battalion man, 'conduct themselves with a dignity, reserve and courtesy which are in marked contrast to the servility of the Arabs in Egypt. Not once since arrival have I been asked for baksheesh or its Kurdish equivalent.' The New Zealanders soon learned that the French were not liked 'because they treat us Syrians as though we are Algerians.'

Battalion Headquarters was just outside [Afrine](#), and the camp looked down into the pleasing valley of the Afrine River. The mountains, the river, the creeks (actual waterfalls 'that we could stand under stripped off'), the grass and the growing crops all around seemed miraculous after the desert—'too good to be true, the Army is

cooking something up for us I'll bet.' Wildflowers were abundant, especially red dwarf anemones, and as John Russell summed up, 'the longer they leave us here the happier we shall be.'

Nevertheless a curious little incident had happened on the way up. The carriers, which travelled under their own power part of the way, had stopped at dusk by one of the most beautiful little settlements their crews had ever seen. The local café was in keeping with the surroundings: a stream ran past tables where drinks were served, and here the men sat at peace and marvelled, 'until we got too much in, someone was sick into the creek, then another fell in. When we came out of that place everything had changed, we were just drunken soldiers again, yelling our heads off.' The settlement so unexpectedly—like certain other places met during the war—had revealed only too clearly the loneliness of a soldier's life. Despite all the violence and the movement of troops the settled life of the world went on just the same, 'and we were only soldiers drifting by', not the main act, but just a sideshow.

[Afrine](#) camp was well spaced, with fairly comfortable iron huts containing stoves, which meant the luxury of morning and afternoon tea regularly. One night a sudden storm swept down the valley, and men half asleep in their beds lay listening to an unfamiliar, yet typically New Zealand noise: rain on a corrugated iron roof. [Afrine](#) village, 34 miles from [Aleppo](#), was the administrative centre for about 350 settlements spread over mountainous country along the Turkish border. Troops worked in with the French gendarmerie and the Garde Mobile—and sometimes borrowed their horses for brief and exhilarating gallops.

Roads and tracks led out from [Afrine](#) to frontier posts along the rough hillsides and down in the valleys. Here the battalion held strategic positions.⁷ Sentries and patrols watched bridges, railway lines, roads and tracks. 'Guard duty on the Turkish border: 2-hours duty at night and an hour by day and free for the rest of the day.... a great job,' wrote Private Price, of C Company. 'To hold up all lorries, cars and so on, examine visas, and write down all particulars in a little black book.' Hidden demolitions and road blocks were planned to smash communications should invasion threaten from the north. Yet further back engineers, supervising great labour gangs of Syrian men and women ('babies on their backs and carrying stones on their heads'), hustled about building, improving and making roads and bridges—which

would make it all the easier for an invader once he was safely past the frontier.

Probably the pick of all jobs in [Syria](#)—excepting, of course, the running of a company canteen—was guard duty at the station of Meidane Ekbes, the last stop of the famous Taurus Express before it passed into [Turkey](#), a ‘cushy’ job indeed ‘until Jack Sullivan arrived with a fund of PT exercises to shake us along a bit. The train used to burst forth (about a mile away) from the tunnel in a cloud of smoke, then come whistling down the grade for all the world like a Hornby model in a stagelike background.’ Many a section here ‘acquired’ foreign currency and goods which were either prohibited in [Turkey](#)—or which the troops stoutly maintained should be prohibited in [Turkey](#). One over-zealous searcher was still on board when the express crossed the frontier; he was ‘lost’ for some time. But the New Zealanders were not the only collectors, for Doug George reports how ‘two of us were talking to our officer on the station platform one sunny day. Suddenly, past us swaggered a local villager. He was clad in an Army shirt plus two pips on each shoulder, issue “Bombays” rolled up, and a pair of “Star” football socks—a leading New Plymouth Rugby club—capped off with a pair of sandshoes. We pretended not to notice him of course for reasons which should be obvious to anybody!

Here a platoon would line the rails to prevent passengers leaping away while a British intelligence sergeant went through the train. The search never seemed to last more than half an hour. This imperturbable sergeant, who had lived most of his life in [Turkey](#) and other Eastern countries, spoke about four or five languages and confidently went about his job of screening the travelling public. His name may have been Baker; he had escorted American tourists on trips before the war. Geoffrey [Mather](#)⁸ ‘marvelled at the speed with which he sized up the motley group of passengers, the rapid interrogation, and the hauling out of the train for further questioning those who had given themselves away or looked suspicious. Bearing in mind his high linguistic qualifications, his valuable local knowledge, and his soldierly bearing, I thought how well [Britain](#) has been served overseas by her soldiers and others—many of them junior rank like this sergeant whose work must have had a high security value.’

Up at the Fort they used a small donkey for bringing up the stores from the road below, and for carrying the Padre's kit from place to place. The Padre remembers ‘not uncommon’ cries, as he lead the donkey along, of ‘Dad is the one with the hat

on'.

Apart from that in the odd shop and café, there was very little fraternisation between members of the battalion and the local inhabitants in [Afrine](#). A detachment of the [Transjordan](#) Frontier Force based between [Aleppo](#) and [Afrine](#) sent patrols up to the Turkish border and also kept an eye on the Kurds who, having been exploited by landlords for generations, had taken to brigandry. This detachment invited the battalion's sergeants to its mess on hospitable and lively occasions (a prominent warrant officer had to spend a few days in hospital). Some men, invited to nearby villages, were embarrassed, first by the strange-tasting and highly seasoned food (the eye of an animal was considered a delicacy), next when no knives or forks appeared, and last at the pained looks when every scrap of food was not eaten. Captain Young recalls 'a most sumptuous repast with the headman "Mukta" of the village in the loft— above the goat house'. Officers had been asked to spread friendships, and at Radjou Mather diplomatically notes how he 'entertained local chiefs or whatever they were called at my HQ, and was in turn the recipient of excellent hospitality, dispensed with Eastern charm and generosity.'

Closer understanding was not confined to Syrian relationships. 'Russell Young was, I think, a territorial officer, and took some time to find the level of the boys, so much so that at The Tunnel he called the chaps together and asked them if anyone would oblige by letting him know some of his faults—he would be available in his digs. The beer ration was right, and some went in and had a fair dinkum pow-wow with him. It was not long after this that he not only knew every man in the company but his Christian name as well—it is safe to assume that later on the boys would have followed him clean to Hell if he wanted them to, and he earned the name of "Brigham Young".'

Easily the busiest men in [Syria](#) were the medical men. The regimental aid posts gladly offered a rough and ready medical service, complicated by language difficulties. Suffering Syrians would point to their stomachs and make agonised faces. 'The local government doctor in [Afrine](#) (paid by the Syrian Government) was rather a casual sort of chap—most of his medical instruments were rusty and he had no stethoscope [he placed an ear against the patient's chest], ' writes Padre Champion. 'His son was studying to become a doctor at [Beirut](#). I hope he was more efficient

than his father. One does not wonder that many of the local people had no confidence in the local medico and preferred to come to our RAP.' Keen and ready for anything, one RAP sergeant prepared to deliver a child, ordered hot water galore, and looked very excited at the prospect of a new case. Unfortunately the doctor walked in and diagnosed the case—not a baby but a large watery cyst.

'At Medaine [Meidane] Ekbes,' writes Mick [Bradford](#),⁹ who was working with Malcolm [McKenzie](#),¹⁰ 'one day when apparently we had gained the confidence of the people a woman was brought to us with a very inflamed foot accompanied by another woman and three men.

'The feet of course were stained to a deep russet brown and I hit upon the idea of painting the swollen part underneath with iodine, when a pus sore could be seen. She couldn't put the foot to the ground, so taking the bull by the horns, [I] decided to lance—no lance only a cut-throat razor—advanced on that when with delighted cries from the men and a wild yell from the patient the latter was borne to the floor, the foot held up invitingly by strong hands, and there was nothing for it but to proceed. With plenty of yells from the helpers to drown the anguish of the woman the job was accomplished successfully —much to my own astonishment! We bound it up and away they went all smiles—no conversation, everything by sign language as we had nothing in common.

'Some days after the sentry on the building sent word up that a deuce of a crowd was down below and thought he recognised the woman by the bandaged foot. She came up loaded with all sorts of veges., eggs etc., and walked about us to show how she was cured— debbil-debbil gone from the foot, we learned. From that day on we had no peace and the things we were asked to tackle would make your hair curl.

One party came in with all the upper teeth infected including the roof of the mouth—a respirator was required on that one! A sort of scalpel was obtained from a French woman's manicure set and in we went, but that one never came back— God only knows how the deuce it panned out—you'd have to see it to believe it.'

The variety of cases was in keeping with the primitive life: a nine-year-old boy with half his forehead almost lifted off by a kick from a donkey; an unfaithful wife of a hillman, who had attacked her with axe and dagger, fractured her skull and

stabbed her by the collarbone; a Kurd, involved in a feud, who had been shot by a Mauser rifle in the leg, 'an awful mess, he did not cry out, he was a brave man.' Medical men visited nearby villages and went further afield, climbing up and down hills to reach caves where the sick (and weakling infants) needed attention. 'To my surprise and joy the little baby lived,' notes Sergeant [Cassidy](#).¹¹

Busy though he was Captain Volckman spent much time grinding coffee beans and frying them in a pan with a dash of mustard, 'making a liquor which he bottled, and served us well later in the desert—a great brew really.'

Leave parties went down to [Aleppo](#): Select Club (for officers only); Select Café (warrant officers and sergeants), and Palace Café (other ranks). Some managed to travel further afield, to [Damascus](#) and [Beirut](#). The Kiwi Concert Party and [YMCA](#) movies came along, and 5 Brigade Band gave several good concerts. Extraordinary band music brought heads out of huts and round corners when Boy Scouts, who were strong in [Syria](#), paraded outside the battalion orderly room for inspection by Colonel Russell in gratitude for motoring them to some festival. After much discussion it was agreed that the scout band was playing our National Anthem.

A good deal of time passed in cards, letter writing, swimming (keeping an eye out for water snakes and freshwater crabs) and reading. A man who secretly enjoyed comics and received bundles of them from home now wrote: 'Lay off the comics though as I'm beginning to lose prestige round here.' Some went off dynamiting a few tasteless trout out of the creeks— Corporal Pat [Hughes](#)¹² was among the pioneer fishermen-grenadiers. The trout, a bit like our New Zealand perch, or a cross between a mullet and a trout, weren't much good.

Sixteen much-envied men were chosen for the Ninth Army Ski School course in the Lebanons. The skiers might have been used as alpine troops in the [Balkans](#), for a thrust towards Germany through [Greece](#) was being advocated by Mr Churchill at this time. Anyhow, of the sixteen skiers, three qualified: Sergeant [Cross](#)¹³ and Privates [Tilbury](#)¹⁴ and Bunny. [Tilbury](#) says: 'That month at the ski school was the toughest I have ever put in, counting a lot of skiing, tramping and deerstalking before the war. Most of the time we were running round with a rifle and pack.' Bunny recalls the dumping of an unpopular canteen sergeant, an Australian, in the concrete pool outside the Cedars Hotel. He adds: 'It was not so very long after leaving the ski

school that I had a big fall (without skis) and landed up 800 or 900 feet below ground in a Polish coalmine [as prisoner of war].'

Health was good in [Syria](#)'s bracing climate. Strict precautions, including the ridiculously cumbersome ' [Bombay](#) bloomers', were taken against malaria. On some hot nights mosquitoes hummed like a swarm of bees. The local drink, arak, was prohibited. Inflamed with arak ('a destroyer of intellect and constitution'), a drunk gave one company its liveliest moments on the frontier by sending boulders crashing onto the orderly-room roof at [Radjou](#). The incident was closely followed by a debate at the [YMCA](#): 'Is the early closing of hotels in New Zealand in the best interests of all concerned?' 'John Russell walked in and asked if he could have a go, and turned on quite a speech about how we in NZ and NZers in particular needed education in our drinking habits—he was for longer hours and supply from refreshment rooms, grocers, etc., and finished up by saying that he did not like the idea of being told when to drink. Sort of get it where, when and how he wanted it. Most of us supported that realistic view. He was a favourite, and it was nothing unusual to find him either in front or behind in the mess queue.'

Incidentally, as the result of too much liquor, one night a small party from the battalion put on a wretched guard in [Aleppo](#): 'This was an unfortunate night,' writes D. L. George, 'anyhow ... at least two were matted. One fired a burst of Tommygun up the street, and another fell asleep at Bn. HQ. Duly we appeared before John Russell. After hearing evidence, his large benign face looked stern enough, but he, with a twinkle in his eyes, gave the culprits a very light punishment. I remember this incident particularly, because it sheds light on John Russell's big-hearted character.' A day or two after this the Colonel was writing home '... I like the look of my team more every day and guarantee that when our turn comes they will give a good account.'

Indeed, the days in [Syria](#) were drawing to a close. The first week of 'intensive training' round [Afrine](#) camp began with Corporal Ray [Mollier](#) ¹⁵ doing the sprint of his life when a rifle grenade, instead of soaring, just trickled from his rifle. The week ended with a mobile-column exercise with carriers, a few anti-tank guns and a 3-inch mortar detachment. A Syrian scorpion 'made Haddon Donald jump quicker than any enemy action ever did. He had sat on a stone to which a scorpion considered he had priority. The last we (of C Company) saw of our commanding officer was making

post-haste to the RAP.'

On the brief manoeuvres in the desert beyond [Aleppo](#) convoy movement, flag signals, and embussing and debussing were practised but these seemed to consist mainly 'of being packed like sardines in the back of a truck with your mate's rifle sticking into your ribs and then rushed at full speed to a supposed enemy position, at which point the truck driver would spin the truck around on full lock and then pull up dead. We were now supposed to scramble out as fast as possible in full kit and deploy. Here again we began to feel that shortage of drinking water, especially after having had our fill of the precious liquid for the previous six weeks.'

The war diary for May ended with these words: 'Whatever the immediate future may hold, the Battalion is in good heart, ready to play its next part in the struggle to end aggression.'

Unhappily the next move meant misfortune for most. On the night of Sunday, 14 June, after the first day of the brigade manoeuvres in the Syrian desert, Gough [Smith](#),¹⁶ hip in a hole in the sand, wrapped in a blanket, was looking at the stars when 'Og' [Wood](#)¹⁷ (15 Platoon) loomed up in the darkness: 'Can you chaps all hear me? Word has just come through from the brigadier that the manoeuvres are off. We are moving on to join the Division at Baalbeck tomorrow. The Brig. stressed the fact that there is absolutely no panic, but we have to be over the canal within a week.' Smith goes on to record: 'The silence was broken by a dozen questions, curses and groans. "Are we going into a stink?" "Has Jerry broken through?" "Trust the Pommies to muck it up." "Well wouldn't that rock you?"—the —desert—"Shut up and hear the rest." 'Og' resumed his confidential lipping: "That's all we've been told but I suppose we are going up 'the Blue'; if we do it'll be into a defensive position behind the lines. The Brig. said there is no panic. This is purely a precautionary measure...."

At the end of the next thirty days the battalion would have slept in about twenty-five different places. From the hills of northern [Syria](#) the battalion, dismayed at the black news of disaster following disaster, moved a thousand miles, south then west, into the [Western Desert](#), and the last of a thousand rumours about returning home died abruptly. There, in the last week in June, the New Zealanders would take their stand against the enemy driving deep into Egypt. The words of John Collins, writing home when he reached [Syria](#), were only too true: 'The grapevines are just

beginning to sprout, and I suppose by the time the grapes are ripe we shall be a long way from here.'

¹ [Maj-Gen Sir Howard Kippenberger](#), KBE, CB, DSO and bar, ED, m.i.d., Legion of Merit (US); born [Ladbroke](#), 28 Jan 1897; barrister and solicitor; i NZEF 1916-17; CO [20 Bn](#) Sep 1939-Apr 1941, Jun-Dec 1941; comd [10 Bde \(Crete\)](#) May 1941; [5 Bde](#) Jan 1942-Jun 1943, Nov 1943-Feb 1944; GOC [2 NZ Div](#) 30 Apr-14 May 1943 and 9 Feb-2 Mar 1944; [2 NZEF Prisoner-of-War Reception Group](#) in [UK](#) 1944-45; twice wounded; Editor-in-Chief, [NZ War Histories](#), 1946-57; died [Wellington](#), 5 May 1957.

² [Infantry Brigadier \(Oxford University Press\)](#), p. 113.

³ The total number of men who served 28 days' detention in [22 Battalion's](#) first year, although clearly a [2 NZEF](#) record, cannot be given because the Part II Orders are missing from the unit records for most of 1940.

⁴ [Pte R. A. Bunny](#); [Masterton](#); born [Masterton](#), 20 Sep 1907; labourer; p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

⁵ [Rev. T. E. Champion](#); [Petersham, New South Wales](#); born [Auburn, New South Wales](#), 23 Mar 1908; Anglican minister.

⁶ [L-Cpl H. J. Collins](#); [Winchester, South Canterbury](#); born [Wellington](#), 4 Nov 1919; school-teacher; wounded 19 Apr 1945.

⁷ Two companies and a few detachments occupied each sector and changed round once a fortnight. They were in two sectors: Northern Sector: [Meidane Ekbes](#) (where the railway crosses into [Turkey](#)), [North Tunnel](#), the [Fort](#) (guarding the railway viaduct and the south tunnel), the [Saddle](#) (a height over the [Kara Sou](#) valley, neatly divided by the frontier) and [Radjou](#) (forward area HQ) on the southern side of the Saddle. Southern sector: To the south-west, [El Hammam](#) (viewing the border and [Lake Antioch](#)), [Katma](#) (8 miles north-east along the road to [Aleppo](#), by a railway tunnel). Towards the end of April more detachments occupied posts at two main railway bridges in the [Afrine- Radjou](#) area.

⁸ Maj G. L. Mather; born England, 4 Feb 1906; school-teacher.

⁹ Sgt C. K. Bradford; Tolaga Bay; born Gisborne, 15 Sep 1908; taxi proprietor; wounded 4 Dec 1943.

¹⁰ L-Cpl M. M. McKenzie; Hastings; born Dannevirke, 28 May 1918; bushman.

¹¹ Sgt W. N. Cassidy; Whakatane; born NZ 3 Nov 1914; truck driver; twice wounded.

¹² Cpl P. G. Hughes; Hastings; born Wellington, 26 Jul 1914; clerk.

¹³ Lt E. K. Cross; Wellington; born NZ 31 Aug 1915; commercial traveller; twice wounded.

¹⁴ Pte H. Tilbury; Otaki; born Lower Hutt, 25 Jul 1911; market gardener.

¹⁵ 2 Lt R. Mollier, MC; born Wellington, 7 Jun 1917; draper; wounded 24 Oct 1942.

¹⁶ Pte G. W. Smith; Masterton; born Masterton, 4 Apr 1914; farm manager; p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

¹⁷ Lt O. G. Wood; born NZ 20 Feb 1912; warehouseman; killed in action 24 Oct 1942.

22 BATTALION

CHAPTER 5 – MINQAR QAIM

CHAPTER 5

Minqar Qaim

Two days after [Tobruk](#) (with 30,000 men, great dumps of equipment, stores, weapons, ammunition, and all its old legendary bravery and defiance) had crumpled between dawn and dusk, 22 Battalion, with 5 Brigade, camped down by [Mersa Matruh](#) at the end of the five-day dash over almost 1000 miles from [Syria](#).¹ The Colonel, the company commanders and the battalion Intelligence Officer, travelling independently in a two-day race from [Syria](#), had gone on ahead for an urgent conference in [Maadi](#), and then were given very brief leave until the battalion approached [Alexandria](#). Two officers, Bob Knox (of the carriers, recovering from his wound in [Libya](#)) and the Intelligence Officer, Sam McLernon, were in Alexandria when they heard that [Tobruk](#) had fallen: 'The news was a shocker and we really could not believe it,' writes Sam, clearly indicating the feeling of humiliation and impotent rage which now swept the [Middle East](#). 'Bob and I were having a few in the Hotel Cecil with a Danish Captain off a small ship that had been plying back and forth between [Tobruk](#) and [Alexandria](#) for many many months, and they both cried with rage and shame when they learnt of the rapid fall and the loss of so much equipment that [had taken] so much time, labour and danger ... to build up.

'The trip from Alex. to [Mersa Matruh](#) will always remain in my memory, as we saw a sight that most of us hope never to see again—the British Army in rout. There are no other words to describe it. An endless stream of traffic for scores of miles, with drivers with their feet on the accelerators with obviously only one stopping place, [Cape Town](#). Twenty-five pounders and quads, trucks, ambulances, anti-aircraft guns, A.S.C. trucks, all jumbled up together and heading eastwards.' Others, travelling by rail, recall armoured vehicles in the jumbled mass too, undamaged tanks were pulling out, 'and we going in with our tin-can carriers—depressing, to say the least.' 'Our chaps kept asking what the story was, and all we could answer was "they are just regrouping, we will be O.K." What a miracle that the Huns could not get up their fighter force, because if they could have, the casualties would have been stupendous.'

For its first two days at [Matruh](#) the battalion, placed between 21 and 23 Battalions, dug in and spread out thinly over old 1940 'defences'—old trenches,

rotting sandbags, useless mine fields, old gunpits, old strongpoints half buried in the sand, supported by a dozen naval guns set well back in pillboxes. Soldiers reported that the breech-blocks from many or all of these guns were missing. Something else was missing too: a plentiful water ration. Men found the daily allowance inadequate after the abundance of water in [Syria](#). A few scattered units of [Eighth Army](#) lay between the New Zealanders and the enemy, now in high triumph and on the point of crossing the frontier. Meanwhile the battalion watched a beaten [Eighth Army](#) pouring back in full retreat—a rabble. As [General Freyberg](#) wrote: 'The Army had, for the moment, disintegrated.'

On 24 June the enemy entered Egypt, and the idea of a serious stand at [Matruh](#)—if it ever had been contemplated and planned seriously—was given up. General Auchinleck, relieving General Ritchie and taking over direct command of Eighth Army, ordered a delaying action only, to cover the Army's retreat to [Alamein](#). Part of this action would be fought south of [Mersa Matruh](#), and south into the desert went the two New Zealand brigades in the light of a half moon, a long column of lorry-borne infantry, guns and Bren carriers—but no tanks.

Enemy bombers struck shortly before a halt in the night: the nearest bomb landed about 20 yards from a 22 Battalion truck, wounding Sergeant 'Tangi' Moore, and Privates Alf [Adams](#)² and Jack [Scandlyn](#).³ Elsewhere in the Division two or three men were wounded.

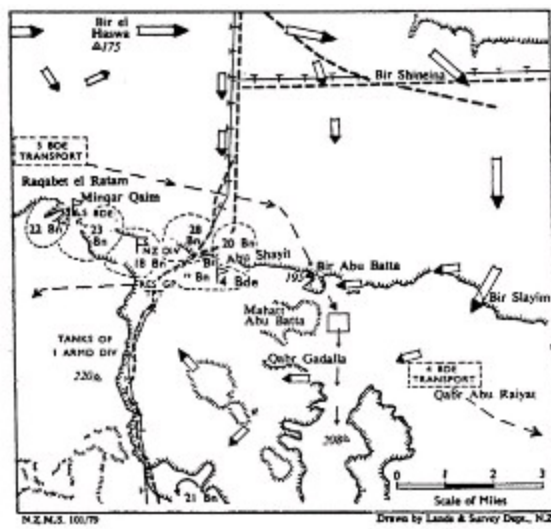
Digging in began at daylight on 26 June in some of the hardest rock it had ever been the battalion's misfortune to strike. Then orders came for another move (a veteran in his diary 'cursing the army, the desert, and the day'), and again the brigade headed south, ten miles to the bare escarpment of [Minqar Qaim](#). Here, about 25 miles south of [Matruh](#), the battalion took up a position facing north and west on the top edge of the escarpment, about 100 feet high and running east and west—an outcrop known later, and with very good reason, as 'Iggri Ridge'.⁴ Positions were dug⁵ yet again, and rocks were piled up protectively at once, a minefield was laid round the western and southern boundary, and the carriers, circling some six miles south, confirmed that troops of [5 Indian Division](#) were holding ground on the battalion's flank.

The battalion then, on the extreme western flank of the Division, awaited the

enemy. Before dusk the troops saw away towards the sea a huge black mushroom of smoke grow up from the desert—demolitions.

The first New Zealanders to strike the enemy at Minqar Qaim seem to have been carriers from 22 Battalion—Fred Oldham was now in charge of the carriers with Knox acting as patrol leader in charge of three carriers. About eight o'clock next morning (27 June) Knox's patrol, some eight miles north-west of the Division's position, sighted first one, then two more 3-ton trucks acting suspiciously a mile away. All had canopies on them. Another patrol of three carriers was to take over at 9 a.m. 'I told my boys to retire slowly towards our gunline so that if I did strike something heavy I would have a shade of odds in my favour. We led them slowly towards home and every time I stopped my carriers these trucks turned around tail on to me. This confirmed my suspicion that they had some heavy armament under the canopies. When I got within three miles of home the trucks went off in the direction from whence they came. Seeing my relieving patrol coming I made off for home

and on contacting my opposite number, Sergeant Murphy, ⁶. I told him of all that I suspected and also that after reporting in I intended to suggest to Fred Oldham that we take all carriers out and go to work on these three trucks. While I was telling Fred Oldham, in came Sergeant Murphy and told us that he had been ambushed by these same three trucks and had two carriers shot up. Dick [Geenty](#) ⁷ ... was left on the field as dead. I think he turned up in a POW camp only to die there. He was a great little fellow. [Roger Barton](#) ⁸ was the means of saving the



21 PANZER DIVISION ENCIRCLES MINQAR QAIM, 27 JUNE 1942

21 panzer division encircles minqar qaim, 27 june 1942

lives of all concerned. He very bravely stood up in the remaining carrier and using a Browning gun taken from a crashed aeroplane, he kept the three trucks under fire while the crews from the two disabled ones climbed aboard and so were brought safely back.' The two damaged carriers, which were abandoned, probably were responsible for an excited Italian radio message intercepted a few minutes later. An Italian patrol was reporting back over the air that New Zealand vehicles had just been discovered in their area.

This was the battalion's (and 5 Brigade's) only brush at close quarters with the enemy throughout the entire day. Soon after the attack on the carriers shells began falling on the brigade area, and this continued off and on all day. German medium guns gave our outranged artillery a heavy pounding, but the New Zealand gunners did most creditable work against motor transport and other thin-skinned vehicles when, at 10.30 a.m., an enormous convoy, a mile wide, appeared far away in the northern haze, and an attack seemed to develop. 'Their transport covered the desert, roaring eastward, each truck trailing a long streamer of dust which finally mingled with the others in a huge cloud.' The most serious aspect of this attack was that most of 5 Brigade's transport, which had laagered about a mile from the battalions, moved hastily eastwards and sped off again when tanks completed the encirclement of the Division. The battalion's padre, in the fleeing transport, noted: '13 tanks, 2 Bren carriers and an armoured car came up the waadi in the direction of our transport. "They're ours." Several tanks began firing. "They're Jerries!" Was there a scatter? I have never seen so many trucks start off on such a mad rush.'

In the 10.30 a.m. attack tanks pushed forward but were held and driven back by the artillery. The guns, hard at work, held off the enemy all day. The enemy probably was content with encirclement—plenty of time next day to deal with this trapped force. A tank battle flared up in the afternoon south of the battalion's defences, but what the result was nobody knew. About this time, judging from the sound of the enemy guns and the direction from which the shells were coming, it appeared that the whole of the New Zealand Division was surrounded. At least one New Zealander was heard to remark to his comrade: 'Well, and how do you think the b—s will get us out of this little lot?' A man said to his section leader, Corporal Hill,⁹ 'Things are getting a little rough round here.' Hill replied, 'Yes. Have a nip,' and to the other's surprise produced half a bottle of Scotch. 'I had a nip all right. Poor Rowe went missing in the breakout, I only hope he was able to finish the Scotch before the desert claimed him.'

In the afternoon shelling brought casualties to the battalion, among them Rhys Price with broken jaw and teeth, stumps of teeth buried in his tongue, and several body wounds.¹⁰ Wounded men, who were gathered up by the hard-working medical units, would have to endure a second ordeal in crazily bouncing ambulances a few hours later.

Towards evening news came that after dark troops would gather at a certain place, a path would be cleared, and then (although this last order does not seem to have been known by many other ranks) the Division would keep going until Kaponga Box was reached, nearly 100 miles away at Alamein. Because the battalion's B Echelon and troop-carrying transport had been chased off and scattered, all gear except personal arms was to be dumped. Someone recalls 'John Russell saying quietly: "Drop this: drop that: you may have to fight your way out".' Officers threw away bedrolls and kit—and other ranks 'quickly snaffled their grog.' The men of the 22nd, following close behind other battalions clearing the way, were to take their chance and swarm on to anything with wheels—anything from cooks' trucks to water carts, even ammunition wagons and field guns.

While these preparations were going on, an interesting little incident, a good omen for the coming charge, showed how boldness could secure success. Colonel Russell had sent Sam McLernon and a section about 400 yards north of the

escarpment to act as a watching party. The night was fairly dark, and soon the party saw one of our own three-tonner lorries move up and stop about 100 yards away. A few minutes later Knox, with his carriers, appeared casually and said all was quiet. Next, men climbed out of the three-tonner ahead, lit cigarettes and leaned against the lorry, yawning. McLernon, armed with a revolver, and his batman, Morris Nicol,¹¹ with a rifle, strolled towards them. 'We were just about up to them when all of a sudden the truck started up. The men hopped onto it, opened fire, and ... disappeared in the darkness. The episode showed clearly how by pure cheek one could approach the enemy's lines without difficulty.'

By about nine o'clock that night, most of the surplus gear had been abandoned. All the carriers were loaded to the top with 3-inch mortar ammunition. Then someone, thinking 'What about the mortars?', found that they had been made useless by running a truck over the barrels. No time remained to unload the carriers, so away they went fully loaded with bombs when the shadowy figures of the battalion began moving down from the escarpment on to the plain below. A man was 'beginning to whimper as though given prescience of his fate in the next few minutes.'

The closely packed column of hurrying men raised a white cloud of dust in the misty moonlight. They spoke in whispers, feeling that the enemy must be able to see and hear them. 'We were marching in threes,' writes Gough Smith, who stubbornly retained his pack and blankets, 'continually changing our positions as some halted to drop packs or hurried up from behind to fill gaps, and in those changes of position deciding our immediate fate. I was talking to Dick Bentley¹² and those about me, cursing and making jokes, but secretly oppressed by forebodings and the eerie light. A long line of Brens and trucks loaded with ammo passed us only a yard or so away, keeping in the shadow of the escarpment. Suddenly I was enveloped in a rosy cloud full of flying stars. I began to stagger towards the ground; we were being shelled; I wasn't hurt. A terrific blast caught me sideways and knocked me flat. I came struggling up from terrific depths of blackness, my lungs striving for air.'

Anti-tank mines which had been placed about 5 Brigade's defences were supposed to be lifted for the retreat (Brigadier Kippenberger writes: 'I gave special, and I thought clear, orders for lifting our minefield';¹³ this was not 22 Battalion's

responsibility), but this had not been done previously. The close columns of infantry were marching under the escarpment when a carrier tried to pass on the left of the infantry and exploded two mines. The blinding flashes and two great explosions were only a few yards from the marching troops, 'and many of us thinking "Christ the sods are on us and throwing bombs"—the scatter, most moving up the escarpment like goats and some throwing themselves towards the direction of the enemy.' Havoc and a fortunately brief panic broke out, while the wounded cried out pitifully. At least twenty-five men were lost here; how many belonged to 22 Battalion the records do not show. John Riddiford's ¹⁴ platoon (No. 14) certainly suffered: so did 15 Platoon, in which Frank [Algie](#), ¹⁵ Dick Bentley, Jim [Bryson](#) ¹⁶ and Harold [True](#) ¹⁷ were killed and twelve others wounded, among them the All Black, Jack Sullivan. The battalion's carriers picked up a number of severely wounded men and placed them on top of the mortar ammunition which had been packed in the carriers.

The men rallied and eventually reached 5 Brigade's forming-up area, where every vehicle had been pressed into service, nose-to-tail in long columns. Men scrambled on and into the nearest vehicle.

'There was no panic, but all sort of formation was lost and at this stage the 22nd Battalion was definitely not a fighting unit. Some scrambled on quads, some on anti-tank guns, some on Bofors as well as the artillery and three tonners and Pick Ups,' writes Sam McLernon.

After midnight 4 Brigade, which included the Maori Battalion, began the valorous attack to clear a path to the east, along which 5 Brigade was intended to follow. While 4 Brigade was still in action, the 5th and the rest of the Division got under way. 'We soon moved off quietly and if ever we in the convoy cursed a vehicle it was a Grant tank that was chuffing along on one cylinder, shooting out flames from the back and making a terrible noise. We felt sure that every German from [Benghazi](#) to [Mersa Matruh](#) must have heard it.'

Brigadier [Inglis](#) ¹⁸ (since late afternoon replacing [General Freyberg](#), who had been wounded in the neck) wheeled his formations to the south, away from the fighting. After they had safely covered about a mile and a half, they struck a laager of about a dozen closely packed German tanks. Flares went up, and then a hail of cannon and automatic fire came down on the New Zealanders. 'We were moving

along nicely when all of a sudden the fun started,' says McLernon. 'The convoy stopped and troops debussed and waited; all the while the tracers and mortars hailed down, but strangely enough the casualties were comparatively light, thus proving once again that at night at least 99% of troops must fire too high.'

'Chaps illuminated by the intensity of fire, and tracer, red hot shell, hanging on in all manner of places, Bofors gun barrels, etc.—the terrible screams of those in the ambulance which caught fire—the terrific clatter of the Grant tank beside which Malcolm McKenzie sheltered when once we halted only to have a shell hit the turret and knock it from its bed,' writes Mick Bradford. 'The German stretcher-bearer walking down towards our truck with Nicky Nicholls¹⁹ from Inglewood and myself looking at him in stupefaction and asking each other what the Hell he thought he was doing—and the column moving off again with a mad dash to get on board again forgetting the Hun—helping hands from "Tiny" Revell—feet in a dixie of stew—and shell shot passing through our truck canopy from front to rear and hitting the one behind killing some and then the realisation that our wagon was being towed by an artillery quad! Holy Sailor.' Inside the truck 'with all that holocaust around us ... Tarrant²⁰ said very quietly: "You know Mick it doesn't do to have your own brother in the same outfit as yourself".' Incredible as it may seem, a man saw a small shaving mirror and picked it up, remembering that a comrade needed one.

Keith Hutcheson²¹ remembers a man running after a vehicle crying 'For Christ's sake stop!' until he dropped, still pleading in vain; tracer 'hitting tanks and shooting straight up like sparks from a grindstone'; and how Colonel 'Gussie' Glasgow²² appeared, 'standing up in his stationwagon, gesturing his hand round to the right, in a most exposed position, the wagon crawling round at about 5 m.p.h. A very gallant act.'

'The troops had of course debussed, and when the transport moved on, they just grabbed any vehicle that happened to be close,' McLernon continues. 'Some were run over and others were killed by enemy fire, but the casualties were much less than appeared possible. My Corporal, Rowan Hill, was killed that night. The milling mass of trucks reminded me of a cattle stampede in a corral, as all of a sudden, they all followed the leader, Colonel Glasgow, and dashed straight through the enemy. Without Colonel Glasgow's inspiring leadership our casualties would have

been terrific, as no-one except him seemed to react quickly enough to the tornado of enemy fire.'

Describing the night as 'unreal and eerie as a nightmare', one survivor from 15 Platoon writes: 'Strings of incendiary bullets and shells tore across our front. Trucks burst into flame. Fireballs lit up the scene. The convoy halted. The firing became heavier and men began to leap from damaged vehicles. A staff car raced up the line, an officer hanging out of the window. "Turn to the right, swing to the right!" he yelled. There was a gigantic roar of motors and the whole line as one swung to the right and raced forward ... an incendiary shell splashes off a Grant tank like a drop of water ... strings of tracer ripped about our heads or bounced about the desert. There were many ghastly sights. Men jumping from stationary trucks were knocked down and killed by the stampeding convoy. A string of explosive bullets passed down the length of Ike Benn's ²³ truck, blowing off his neighbour's head in passing.'

Knox says: 'All hell broke loose and one of our Bofors guns which had been captured by the Hun opened up but apparently couldn't be lowered enough to strike any of the carriers as we were too close. The tracers just kept buzzing over our heads but they hit plenty of the larger vehicles. Suddenly every vehicle moved as one and I can still see Quads and limbers on my left moving quite fast with soldiers running to get a hold on any part of them even to the gun barrels. Trucks and ambulances were going up in flames everywhere, and all were crowded as we had lost our B Echelon that morning. All I did was follow the vehicle in front and kept going. Hell what a stampede. We travelled all night and at dawn I was able to take note of what was happening. We were being led by a staff car in which was Colonel Glasgow. He organised the column and did a wonderful job. Every time he saw a strange column he prepared for action and then sent me ahead to contact the various strangers who were really much like ourselves—lost. No doubt if we had contacted the enemy Colonel Glasgow would have given him a hot reception even with the weapons we had he is one of the many good leaders I have met in the Army.'

Knox's description is typical of the experiences of other fit men in the battalion that night and next day. The plight of the wounded lying on the mortar ammunition in the bucking carriers can be left to the imagination. Men who had passed through the advanced dressing station had been loaded into a few ambulances and lorries,

some of which were hit or caught fire. Private Price, a stretcher case in an unlucky lorry with about twenty walking wounded, got to his feet and, despite his smashed face and multiple wounds, ran and caught an ambulance.

After striking the German laager the columns had split up. One group, led by Brigadier Inglis, had turned to the east towards [Alamein](#); the group which turned west and was rallied by Colonel Glasgow headed to the south and then eastwards to [Alamein](#).

Many of the men of 22 Battalion, scattered and mixed with other units, moved with Colonel Glasgow's column. Other stragglers, in groups and patches, 'split up, b—ed up, and far from home' as one man put it, followed on, advised here and there by Colonel Russell, who was driven by Jack Hargreaves. In the break-through inferno, with his men spread about the convoy, the Colonel of course had no command. 'I pulled out onto a flank to get my bearings and see what the trouble was, while the convoy swung about and disappeared in the night again. Owing to the noise of so many vehicles it was not hard to tell where it was and eventually I found myself with a bren carrier and five burning trucks alone on the spot.' He set a course between two enemy positions 'and crept off as quietly as we could they opened up on us....I told the driver to step on it. ... suddenly we shot out into space but fortunately we landed on all four wheels and kept going. About half an hour later we ran into friendly patrols [and] pushed on in the direction of the noise of the main convoy. When the light came we found that we had been following a different outfit altogether and in spite of searching high and low could not find our people at all, everyone but.' In the afternoon he picked up B Echelon, directed it to the east, continued the search for his men, and pulled up at the divisional rendezvous at dusk. 'What a day.'

Borrowing petrol and water wherever possible, climbing into less precarious transport if lucky, the freed brigade began drifting into the divisional rendezvous near [Kaponga Box](#); 'and [Kaponga](#) meant food and water and rest—we thought.' Here the battalion, assembling and watching with surprise the arrival of yet more comrades who had been 'definitely' captured or killed, formed into shape again. 'Next morning,' says one officer, 'it was amazing: there was the battalion back and intact and organised and ready again, a good lesson of the wonderful recuperative

powers the Army had—and [Freyberg's](#) circus in particular.' Yet, with blankets and all personal gear lost, the effect of the break-through, the privations and shock would nag increasingly at men over the next trying fortnight. Another officer writes: 'The morale of my boys was very low at this stage. After all most of them had been chased out of [Greece](#) then [Crete](#), and by now had thought Egypt was next on that list. However they soon got over that and came good.'

An indication of the trial ahead comes from Padre Champion's diary:

We are now in our third and last line of defence. God help us. We cannot tell how our men fared in the battle last night and things are still very confused. Organisation on our part seems very poor. Monday, 29 June: We were bombed last night.... Tuesday: We were heavily bombed last night. ... at 3 pm a bad dust storm.... Wednesday, 1 July: A lot of gunfire all around this morning. Some say the Yanks were 15 miles away last night with mechanised stuff. [This proved to be wrong. ²⁴.] Many bombers came over during the night. Friday [in 21 Battalion's RAP, under heavy mortar fire.] At midnight I buried two men.... Saturday.... numerous shock cases—some cried like babies. They went through hell.... Jerry bombed along the skyline today and got a few of our trucks but we bombed him and got a few of his. Sunday 5 July:buried.... [two men, not from 22 Battalion].... Monday: ... a lot of shelling going on today. I am the only padre available for 21, 22 and 23 Battalions at present.... Tuesday: Plenty of artillery fire in the morning.... Wednesday: Things seem very much quieter.... Thursday: The units seem very scattered. Gunfire all day. Friday: The morning opened with awful amount of gunfire— very deafening. The news seems better. They say the Aussies took 700 prisoners last night.... buried Cpl. [Baker](#) ²⁵ (22 Bn) and Pte [Benny](#) ²⁶ at night. I slept near Brigade HQ, at night. About midnight there were many flares being dropped from planes—which we thought were ours. The Transport officer for 22 Bn came and told us to be on the move in 1/4 of hour (the Jerries were a few hundred yards away we were told later). The flares were German ones— they were looking for us! We travelled all night. 13 July... many shells... two cooks were killed... buried [Berry](#) ²⁷ and [Sawyers](#) ²⁸ Wednesday 15 July: [at 23 Battalion RAP] The morning dawned with much fighting—wounded men poured in, numerous Italian and German prisoners, 2,000 for the day.... bombed twice.... 23rd [Battalion] doctor went up to the front to help with wounded—he is a game man.... buried three men, one was corporal [Creagh](#) ²⁹ of 22nd.... lost an

ambulance in the minefield last night.... 16 July: Padre [McKenzie](#)³⁰ (Senior Presbyterian) and I buried 8 men who were killed at their post (anti-aircraft gun).... at night shells passing both ways over our heads and all about us. 17 July: ... conducted services over 9 men [from 23 Battalion] who had been buried hurriedly [the service was at the request of Lieutenant-Colonel [Romans](#)³¹].

The Padre now hears that 22 Battalion, almost wiped out, is withdrawing to reorganise; he stays with the remaining two battalions in the brigade; morale is improving. But by 23 July (when 6 Brigade had been crippled) 'things have all gone wrong again because the tanks did not go in and support the infantry at "first light".' The front quietens, but the flies are 'extremely bad ... awful ... too numerous to have a service beastly flies ... one of the Ten Plagues that never left Egypt!'

¹ 4 and 5 Brigades went to [Mersa Matruh](#); 6 Brigade stayed in reserve at [Amiriya](#), near [Alexandria](#). 22 Battalion's LOB party (under Major T. C. Campbell) was A Company and the 2 i/cs of the other companies, who went back to [Maadi](#), where they stayed for a month.

² Cpl [A. S. Adams](#); [Gisborne](#); born [Gisborne](#), 18 Aug 1910; station hand; wounded 26 Jun 1942.

³ Cpl [J. T. Scandlyn](#); Te Karaka, [Gisborne](#); born [Napier](#), 25 Jan 1913; transport driver; wounded 26 Jun 1942.

⁴ Iggri: an army term taken from the Egyptian for 'hurry off'

⁵ Mortar men, with obvious reluctance, set up 'a Heath Robinson device for knocking out tanks': the new Spigot mortar, freshly issued in [Matruh](#) and with the usual remarkable reputation. 'It not only kills the soldier, but the next of kin as well,' glumly remarked one sceptical mortar man. This ungainly weapon (four long legs had to be pegged to the ground) was used for only a few practice shots at [Minqar Qaim](#)—the mortar men with some relish spiked theirs before leaving the place.

⁶ Sgt [H. J. Murphy](#); born NZ 2 Nov 1924; clerk

⁷ Pte G. R. Geenty; born Waipukurau, 20 Dec 1917; farmhand; died while p.w. 25 Aug 1942.

⁸ Sgt R. B. Barton; born England, 4 May 1919; farm labourer; wounded 2 Apr 1944.

⁹ Cpl K. R. Hill; born NZ 15 Apr 1909; farmer; died while p.w. 29 Jun 1942.

¹⁰ Rhys Price after his discharge from hospital needed plastic surgery: 'He should never have gone back to the front,' says a stretcher-bearer, 'but such was the shortage of good battle-experienced NCOs (and of course the spirit of the man himself) that he went to Italy and was killed there.'

¹¹ Pte M. H. Nicol; Palmerston North; born Pauatahanui, 15 Jan 1905; barman; p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

¹² Pte R. C. Bentley; born Fiji, 20 Dec 1916; storeman; died of wounds 28 Jun 1942.

¹³ Infantry Brigadier, p. 133: ' Brig. Kippenberger used to go around all the men during the action at Minqar Q aim and inform them of all that was happening,' notes one 22 Battalion man. 'That of course was a great boost for morale and was really appreciated by the men.'

¹⁴ Capt J. S. Riddiford; Martinborough; born Takapau, 17 Feb 1913; farmer; wounded and p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

¹⁵ Pte F. H. Algie; born NZ 4 Aug 1918; herd-testing officer; killed in action 27 Jun 1942.

¹⁶ Pte J. O. F. Bryson; born Woodville, 16 Oct 1918; porter; killed in action 27 Jun 1942.

¹⁷ Pte A. H. True; born NZ 16 Sep 1916; labourer; died of wounds 28 Jun 1942.

¹⁸ Maj-Gen L. M. Inglis, CB, CBE, DSO and bar, MC, m.i.d., MC (Gk); Hamilton; born Mosgiel, 16 May 1894; barrister and solicitor; NZ Rifle Bde and MG Bn 1915-19; CO 27 (MG) Bn Jan-Aug 1940; comd 4 Bde 1941-42 and 4 Armd Bde 1942-44; GOC 2 NZ Div 27 Jun-16 Aug 1942 and 6 Jun-31 Jul 1943; Chief Judge of the Control Commission Supreme Court in British Zone of Occupation, Germany, 1947-50; Stipendiary Magistrate.

¹⁹ Pte G. W. R. Nicholls; Inglewood; born Inglewood, 14 Jun 1915; farmhand; wounded 15 Jul 1942.

²⁰ L-Sgt P. M. Tarrant; Feilding; born Eltham, 17 May 1916; dairy farmer; p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

²¹ Maj K. R. Hutcheson; born Wellington, 25 Jan 1914; school-teacher; wounded 24 Sep 1944; died 1956.

²² Col K. W. R. Glasgow, DSO, ED, m.i.d.; Wellington; born Wellington, 15 Nov 1902; headmaster; CO 14 Lt AA Regt May-Dec 1941; 5 Fd Regt Dec 1941-May 1943; OC Tps 6 NZ Div May-Aug 1943; GSO I NZ Maadi Camp, 1944; Rector, Scots College, Wellington.

²³ Pte I. Benn; Masterton; born England, 20 Nov 1907; labourer; twice wounded.

²⁴ A rumour based on the arrival of some United States specialist troops to study tanks and armoured tactics. They later manned some British tanks in action.

²⁵ Cpl W. G. Baker; born Auckland, 30 Oct 1918; shunter; killed in action 10 Jul 1942.

²⁶ Pte A. H. Benny; born England, II Jul 1908; fertiliser worker; killed in action 10 Jul 1942.

²⁷ Sgt E. G. Berry; born NZ 6 Nov 1915; hairdresser; killed in action 13 Jul

1942.

²⁸ Pte J. H. R. Sawyers; born England, 16 Feb 1909; cook; killed in action 13 Jul 1942.

²⁹ Cpl L. E. Creagh; born NZ 6 Apr 1913; bootmaker; killed in action 15 Jul 1942.

³⁰ Rev. J. W. McKenzie, CBE, MM (First World War), ED, m.i.d.; Auckland; born Woodend, Southland, 1 Jan 1888; SCF 2 NZEF 1941-44; Chaplain Commandant of the Royal New Zealand Chaplains Department.

³¹ Lt-Col R. E. Romans, DSO, m.i.d.; born Arrowtown, 10 Sep 1909; business manager; CO 23 Bn Jul 1942-Apr 1943, Aug-Dec 1943; twice wounded; died of wounds 19 Dec 1943.

22 BATTALION

CHAPTER 6 – DISASTER ON RUWEISAT

CHAPTER 6

Disaster on Ruweisat

For the first two weeks of JULY 22 NZ BN played an active part in the battle of EGYPT on the [EL ALAMEIN](#) front. Then on the morning of JULY 15 after a successful attack the BN was involved in a disaster On RUWEISAT RIDGE

22 Battalion war diary

' They won't come in hundreds, boy, but in bloody thousands. The air will be full of 'em. We're too small and we can't retreat. All we can do is kill off as many as we can before we're killed off ourselves.' This, in confident, cheerful undertones, was the prediction of a veteran of [Greece](#) and [Crete](#) to a new reinforcement, Private [Hewitt](#) ¹ The two were on guard in case parachutists descended to attack large dumps in Tura Caves, near [Maadi Camp](#), well behind the [Alamein](#) line. As the two looked up into the darkness, far to the west 22 Battalion was breaking through at [Minqar Qaim](#).

No parachutists, no gliders, fell on [Tura](#) or [Maadi](#). The two men, exploring round the cliffs and hoping to knock over a fox, disturbed large owls living in the rocks: 'big bad-looking brutes three or four times as big as our moreporks that glared at us with horrible yellow eyes.' Newspapers, heavily censored, arrived with 'a big photograph of [Freyberg](#), who had been wounded, with a caption saying something about "Old Soldiers never die." But I don't think it cut much ice. We knew plenty of young soldiers who had died, and knew plenty more were going to die before this damned war was over.'

They went back to [Maadi Camp](#) booked for the Western Desert and the [Alamein](#) line—Hewitt was to take his place in 22 Battalion—and 'I can tell you the old [Naafi](#) got a hammering that night. You would think the boys were all off to NZ instead of the battle. It was a different thing in the morning when we were wakened up in the dark and the effects of the beer had worn off. One poor devil put a bullet through his foot.' A good breakfast (the last good breakfast 'for the duration' for so many of these reinforcements), a long line of ASC transport, 800 piling in, and away with the dawn, a few ... firing off shots and an angry red-faced officer darting about in a truck attempting to nab the culprits.

'It was a lovely day for a drive down the Nile and into Cairo where everyone was starting the day's work. The streets were pretty crowded, while those who had not left home looked out of the windows or came out on the balconies to give us a wave and a "thumbs-up" or "V for Victory" sign. The people of Cairo haven't much love for soldiers as a rule and I don't blame them, but that day they gave us a good hearing. We were really reaping the kudos due to the Div. So the cry went up "The Kiwi— Good Luck, Kiwi," and we, a handful of dumb infantry, felt we were going forth to save the greatest city in Africa. As the convoy strung through the crowded streets the boys were in good form, some still firing shots and others leaning out with bayonets trying to tent-peg watermelons that were stacked up on the Wog carts.'

In the Nile Delta the cotton was in flower and the old fellahin were working away thrashing their corn. About 4 p.m. (pretty hungry, for the rations had gone astray) the reinforcements drove into Alexandria: 'much nicer than Cairo, cleaner and fresher with beautiful gardens and palms. The people here again gave us a great hearing and all the most beautiful women in the world seemed to be waving and smiling on us. But they are a pretty mixed crowd, and the yarn goes that they all had swastika and Italian flags ready to give the other boys as good a welcome.' Past the harbour fortifications and on to a succession of enormous dumps: wrecked planes, wrecked guns, and so on. 'What a hell of a waste it all seems.' In the Naafi at the Amiriya transit camp the reinforcements met 6 Brigade men fresh from the desert: 'I have never seen so many bottles of beer with the tops off at one time.'

On the road again by daylight, 'our belts tightened up a notch or two for breakfast. The road was now crowded with stuff going up. Convoys of artillery, tank transporters (huge trailers with many wheels) and trucks of all sorts. I'm afraid most of the convoys we saw were going up empty and coming back full!'

Aussies, a good sight 'with their hard dials and cheery grins'. A big notice read, 'Are you prepared to act if ambushed on this road?' (Some optimists, or pessimists, loaded their rifles here.) Through an Arab village to the old cry of 'Eggs-a-cook; eggs-a-bread!', then into the Western Desert proper, flat and stony and bare, passing 'more and more trucks and tanks until they seemed to be everywhere. I saw more trucks that day than I have ever seen in my life. All over the desert in all directions there seemed to be trucks and transport parked.' Flights of up to twenty

Kittyhawk and Hurricane fighters swooped reassuringly overhead; sometimes a lone fighter skimmed a few feet above the desert, flashing past between 300 and 400 miles an hour. On over the flat, truck-dotted desert. A lone New Zealander working a huge bulldozer drew wisecracks about Public Works Department. 'On we went slow but sure, and by evening, when we camped down among tanks and trucks in what someone called the third line of defence, we could hear the artillery hammering away and could see the flashes over the Western horizon.'

Guides, taking them next morning past a nose-down, tail-up Stuka, led the way to the New Zealand positions. 'The noise of battle was getting louder all the time and we passed a big main dressing station or clearing station with its big red crosses all over the tents. The drone of planes brought a beautiful sight of 16 bombers—Bostons—wonderful as they roared overhead all silver in the sunlight and in perfect formation and so close it looked as if you couldn't put a pin between their wings. Behind, above and round them raced and dived the vicious little fighters, their escorts.' Under a bit of a ridge was B Echelon, a sort of headquarters for battalion transport, quartermaster stores, and cooks' trucks. The New Zealand mobile canteen (the [YMCA](#) was really on the job at [Alamein](#)) turned up, and Hewitt bought 'a large tin of pineapple to take up to the boys.' Battalion transport took the reinforcements to Battalion Headquarters under another ridge a few feet high. Hewitt walked off past an anti-tank gun to his new home: No. 2 Section, 13 Platoon, C Company, 22 Battalion. 'In the line the section is everything as you can eat, live and die together so to speak.' He dug in smartly, 'but I must say I got a hell of a shock when I first saw them; if ever men were done to a frazzle they were. They were thin, their eyes sunken, and what with no shave or wash for days (the water question was an appalling disgrace) they looked awful. No doubt the Div. had had a hard time....'

Yes, a hard time in the last fortnight. A restless fortnight of movement by day and by night, of digging in only to move and dig in yet again, short of water, shelled and bombed as the heat and the flies and the gritty dust increased while the two armies, in a land they loathed, circled like boxers in the first round of [Alamein](#).

With the rest of the New Zealand Division 22 Battalion had retreated non-stop after [Minqar Qaim](#) to the [Alamein](#) line, to join 6 Brigade near [Kaponga Box](#), the strongpoint the battalion had helped to make in the autumn of 1941. Stragglers, each party 'absolutely the last survivors', came in. After reorganising quickly, the

battalion totalled up its [Minqar Qaim](#) losses: 10 killed, 33 wounded, 14 missing (prisoners of war). Some got heat prostration: 'I vomited. Everything was spinning round and round. The remedy for this was salt water and bicarbonate of soda, and in 20 minutes I was as right as a bank.' After all the alarms and excursions Frankie [Flynn](#)² a cook with the bad habit of filling the burners while one might still be going, burned down D Company's cookhouse: 'With a terrific Woomph! the whole outfit was enveloped in flames—blew up—terrific screams from inside the flames then a wild figure on fire leaped towards us...we rolled him in the sand and jacked him up.'

Panzerarmee, slowed but not stopped by actions at [Minqar Qaim](#) and [Mersa Matruh](#), rolled on until it met the South African Division entrenched in the [Alamein Box](#). Knocked by the South Africans, the attackers veered south, overran an Indian brigade, and pressed eastward along [Ruweisat Ridge](#) to the north of the New Zealanders. When Panzerarmee was halted by British troops on [Ruweisat Ridge](#), New Zealand gunners fired from the southern flank. [Ariete Armoured Division](#), swinging out on the panzers' right, got nipped off by the gunners and 4 Brigade. New Zealand Division was told to get up north of [Kaponga Box](#) to catch the rest of the Italians as they pulled back, and to annoy them in the flank. Fifth Brigade, toiling through soft sand, got there first, laid on an attack into the [El Mreir Depression](#) (unoccupied by the enemy), was bombed and Stuka-ed heavily, and advanced no further. Patrols went out in the night (6-7 July).

Fourth Brigade came up on the west, but before the two brigades could really come to grips with the enemy the Division was told to pull back (a truck blazing fiercely lit up most disconcertingly 22 Battalion's transport moving out), and both brigades went back several miles, abandoning [Kaponga](#), which had never been fought for.

The Division, now deployed around Deir el Munassib, was told that [5 Indian Division](#) (on the right) and the New Zealanders were to capture [Ruweisat Ridge](#), about nine or ten miles to the north. So first of all, under shellfire, they made a short advance to [Alam Nayil](#), the springboard for the attack on Ruweisat, six miles away. 'This was a proper rag time one and only the Almighty knows how we managed it,' wrote Colonel John Russell, 'but when the light came we were only about half a mile out and within the hour we were all in our right places. Long enough to dig in and

then move again— this time towards Jerry which was definitely good.... It was a most impressive sight to see the fellows advancing under shell fire with never a falter. A Tommy officer who was with me at the time said, "Well, I've seen that sort of thing on the pictures but I never expected to see it in real life...." `

Ground at [Alam Nayil](#) was held and occupied without close fighting. Three days of indecision on high passed. Twenty-second Battalion shifted positions several times. Each time weary, thirsty, dusty riflemen had to dig fresh slit trenches and positions. They were still digging away when the reinforcements from [Maadi](#) found them. 'Did we,' asks one 22 Battalion man, 'move 17 times in a fortnight, or 14 times in 17 days?'

This indeed was the opening of The Hard Summer, with the [Eighth Army](#) sprawling like some battered and dazed giant boxer up against the ropes, almost all but the spirit itself beaten. But despite disasters and indecision and errors which will be discussed and debated in higher level histories, the spirit of the sorely tried British and Commonwealth troops was not extinguished among disillusionment, unnerving rumours and occasional near-despair. Here, simply by holding on, the [Eighth Army](#) won the first victory of [Alamein](#). Those who burst through in October in triumph to sweep the Axis from North Africa should remember the veterans of July, including those who, through no fault of their own, received the immediate and bitter reward of the prisoner-of-war camp.

The picture may have seemed clear enough to higher authorities, but to the weary and wondering men in the ranks the two weeks of movement after [Minqar Qaim](#) were as incomprehensible as the doublings and trackings of a hunted animal. 'It was all very baffling to us, but we took Tommy's [Captain Hawthorn's] word for it that each move was related and part of the game of chess we were playing with Jerry. So things went on and whenever it seemed that we must crack up altogether under the strain, a quiet day or a cool night would give us enough reserve of energy to carry on for a few more days.'

An excellent summary of this period is given in his prisoner-of-war diary by Gough Smith, who had served in the second Libyan campaign: 'The food was plentiful enough: bully stew, M & V, tinned sausages, rice—but the water ration was not: we usually were too dry to eat all our rations. I cannot stress too strongly the

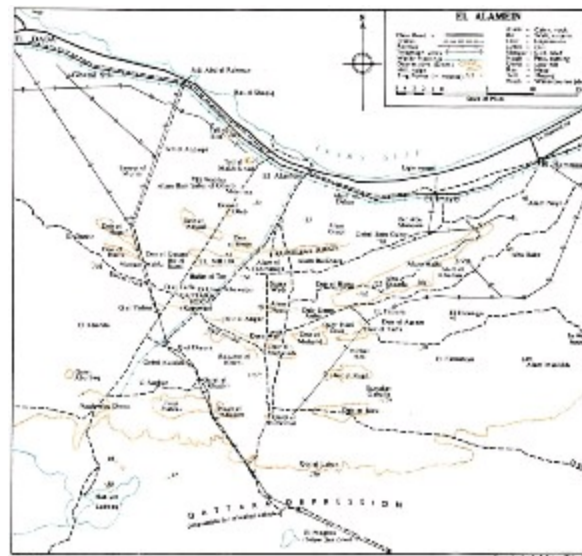
terrific nervous and physical strain to which we were now subjected. It sounds dull and unimpressive on paper.' The ration of three mugs of tea a day and a full water bottle, and the rest going to the cooks, was cut to three mugs of tea not full and about three-quarters of a water bottle, and the food was thick and heavy. The summer heat of the desert was trying, to say the least.

They had no bivouacs or shelter (lost at [Minqar Qaim](#)). 'As our movements from now on were almost continuous and every stop meant digging in, more often than not we dug in three times a day.' The desert was far more rocky than sandy, digging was invariably hard, most of the movements were under shelling and occasional bombing, and turns had to be taken on guard duty at night. 'One's limbs were heavy and languid. Each cup of tea eagerly awaited was tossed straight down, not seeming to reach one's stomach but to be sucked up by the body on the way down. We seemed to make light enough of it all and to be able to joke and laugh over our woes, and it was not until our reinforcements arrived some 10 or 12 days later that we realised into what a pitiful physical plight we had come.... I do wish to make it clear what strain we were under and also what a fine spirit prevailed through it all.... The New Zealanders could always rise to an occasion and that kept us cheerful and firm throughout our troubles and the stupid, conflicting, lying pep stories with which we were pestered.'

One of the troubles of this period was that the men were not given sufficient authentic news, and rumours and weird stories abounded. Even the long-suffering Orsler was writing home: 'Browned off, browned off, that's what everyone's talking.' Another original member of the unit was writing: 'We're like the tikis with their tongues hanging out—so b—y dry.' In fact, the pipeline from [Alexandria](#) to the front now supplied the equivalent of the population of [Wellington](#). The limited amount of water coming forward was enough, provided it was distributed correctly, but at this time there are indications that the water was not well distributed throughout the battalion. There were delays in distribution (often the enemy bombed water points when trucks had congregated together), and the preciousness of water was not always realised and sometimes abused by more comfortable troops just out of the danger zone. Little consolation can be taken from the fact that the enemy, with more than twice as far to bring water, suffered much worse troubles.

Two hours after dawn the sun was blazing down on the attackers preparing for

the assault on Ruweisat. The night had been cold and the food and the greatcoats had not arrived. This, and the changing of positions, earned the place the name of Gafu Ridge. For breakfast Private Hewitt produced the pineapple ('You ought to have seen their eyes pop out'). Some men's slit trenches were found to be too close together, so several trenches had to be dug again further apart: hard, exasperating work among the heat, the hard rock and the stones. Enemy crews out of sight returned to their guns, shells began tearing through the haze, men dived to their little, six-foot-long slit trenches and took cover face down, fists clenched under chins or palms pressed against foreheads, gritting their teeth



EL ALAMEIN

and sometimes dragging at a cigarette. Small stones fell on sensitive backs, ears rang with concussion. The new men soon learned the different sound of shells, whether they would pass on or land alongside. The artillery and the **Air Force** hit back vigorously, the fighters wagging their wings first to one side and then to the other, to view all the earth below and to display their circular identification marks on each wing-tip. The racket died down, and at 3 p.m. the battalion moved back about three-quarters of a mile. It was going, after twenty-one long days in forward positions, into reserve, and would follow on the heels of 21 and 23 Battalions as they advanced in the attack. The move meant digging yet another lot of trenches. Everyone suffered from thirst, and the reinforcements bitterly remembered seeing on their way up B Echelon men washing their dixies out with water. Hewitt records hearing 'one soldier of considerable experience say he doubted if men had ever been

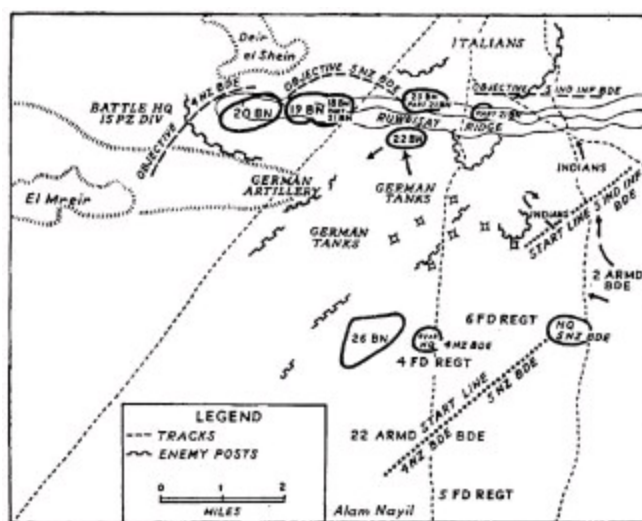
in worse condition for battle.'

When the new slit trenches had been dug, the news came of a three-mile move back in the night. That night a party, including sappers, under Lieutenant Riddiford, went out to decide if an enemy minefield a mile away was alive or a dummy. The engineers, who were lightly armed, were assured they would not be left behind in an emergency. They found the minefield (somewhat hampered by the RAF dropping flares which silenced 'the Italian chatter, movement and arias'). The mine-detectors failed to work. On the way back to Battalion Headquarters the patrol passed, as one man wrote, 'a pleasantly formidable array of British tanks ... the first I had seen since Matruh. Checking of minefields and the presence of tanks seemed to add up. We were all sick of running away and knew that with a little armour we needn't do it. Front-line soldiers in their innocence are notoriously optimistic.'

Next day, 14 July, was 'a terrible "day of rest": heat, thirst, smell of dead. Everyone sprawled about longing for sunset.' The battalion dug in again before sunrise and hoped for a quiet day; everyone was thirsty, and a soldier wrote: 'I didn't think I would ever have come down to licking secondhand blankets but I got a little dew off them and thought it worthwhile.' The burnt-out remains of enemy trucks and guns were scattered near the battalion, and scrounging parties went out for water, sticking bayonets into radiators and any tins and drums lying about, or shaking water bottles 'alongside stinking shallow graves, just a heap of stones or a sandbag or two over the body. We found tins of biscuits, grenades and rifles, Spandaus, Bredas and ammo of all sorts, tins of oil and God knows what else, but never a drop of water.' The shelling began again, not so close this time, but the heat was as bad as ever and inescapable—blankets propped up for shade would have drawn Stukas. One or two men made patches of shade with bits of cane baskets (for carrying ammunition) picked up round the broken guns. In any case the skies opened about lunch-time: 'the ominous roar and rumble of bombs fairly falling out of the sky and then a hell of a row as we all opened up at a flight of Stukas: the loud bang-bang of the Bofors guns, the rattle of the LMG and the crackle of rifle fire. They soon passed out of sight and all was quiet again.' Men lay about, listless, thirsty, sweating in what shade they could find, until in mid-afternoon they heard that the attack would be on—no doubt about it this time—in the approaching night.³ 'Late in the afternoon Tommy told us that we were going into a grand attack that night. Everything down to the last detail

had been thought out, it was going to be a roaring success. The Division would sweep in, in a silent midnight march, dislodging the enemy from Ruweisat Ridge and link up with the Indians and Aussies to wipe Jerry completely.'

Extra water arrived with the evening rations, and 'I felt ready for anything. The extra water cheered everyone, a whole extra German watercan (about 4 1/2 gallons) to each section, though as Joe Bunny said they were fools not to have given it out sooner instead of letting us all get into such a mess.' In the fresh night air the men set about preparing for their attack confidently.



RUWEISAT RIDGE, DAWN 15 JULY 1942

ruweisat ridge, dawn 15 july 1942

Dusk came down over the desert. Twenty-second Battalion, without its promised rum ration and now under Major Hanton, moved up towards the start line and the six-mile plod through enemy country to near Point 62, in the blackness on Ruweisat Ridge. A long attack indeed, a task which would have taxed the strength of even fresh troops. This trying distance would have been impossible for Colonel Russell, whose feet had been troubling him lately ('Bad news. The boys reckoned he would be hard to replace,' wrote one of his men), and already Jack Hargreaves was driving the Colonel back to hospital, where on 16 July he wrote home: '... the absolute devil... Col. Christie⁴ who is looking after me is confident that he will turn me into a marching soldier in a week or two so things aren't too bad. But it almost broke my heart as it looked as if things were really going to start in the right direction for a change.'

The battalion would go in 300 riflemen strong. They would not lead the attack but follow on, mopping up, about 1500 yards behind 21 and 23 Battalions. C Company would be forward on a wide front and the two other companies hard behind, B Company on its right rear and D Company on the left rear.

Anti-tank guns, thirty-six in all (six-pounders and the two-pounder infantry anti-tank guns), were intended to follow close behind 22 Battalion, but in the darkness during the forming up the guns, which were distributed across the front in various places, did not join up. Only the four six-pounder guns under Mick Ollivier⁵ were with 22 Battalion when the fateful dawn broke.

Fifth Brigade had a lane 4000 yards wide between 4 Brigade on the left and the Indian brigade on the right. Fifth Brigade, with 850 riflemen, was about to attack on a 1000-yard front, leaving a 3000-yard gap between it and the Indians, a gap which would be scoured out (in theory) by British tanks (2 Armoured Brigade) at dawn. The British tanks also were to assist the anti-tank guns in protecting 5 Brigade's right flank, where 22 Battalion would be digging in. That was the plan.

A low-flying plane, flashing navigation lights on and off, flew over the start line dramatically as the attackers moved off, and roared straight towards Ruweisat Ridge, drawing tracer and flares and roughly indicating enemy strongpoints in the distance. Many infantrymen believed that this plane signalled the advance to begin. Silently the 550 riflemen of 21 and 23 Battalions pushed ahead into the darkness. It was 11 p.m. Then 22 Battalion ('hearteningly orderly and resolute looking,' their Brigadier wrote) went forward in light fighting order of rifle and bayonet, Mills grenades and sticky bombs. Private Hewitt entered his first attack:

'It was all quiet and orderly, we just trudged along over the sand. I can't say I was very excited or even very scared. One felt that one had been at that sort of thing all one's life. As we moved in closer the Jerries and Ites started up the odd bursts of machine gun fire as if they were a bit uneasy about things. Then the fire became more prolonged and after a few flares had been put up they started giving us all they had. Big mortars came whistling over to land with nasty bumps and shattering explosions beside us in the dark, while at times the night was lit up with flares and tracers from different types of shells and bullets, also a burning truck or two.'

Fighting began at midnight and continued here and there until past 4 a.m. With the first crash of fire, coloured flares and tracer slashed the darkness. Soon the uproar in front increased with hoarse New Zealand shouting and frightened cries, and as the companies came on to the fringe of the first fallen outposts, they clearly heard the old familiar 'Mamma Mia!' from stricken Italians. 'I don't blame them either, it must be bloody awful to have to face a night attack.' Enemy guns and mortars reached out blindly into the night, 'overs' cracked down to send dust and fragments of rock flying, and Hewitt, jarred by a near miss, found 'it was nice to hear Joe's quiet voice call to me out of the darkness and ask if I was all right. Next instant there was a terrible crack as a shrapnel shell exploded in the air over the front of our section and it was then my turn to enquire after their health.'

As the battalion progressed behind the attackers, past the moaning and crying wounded (mainly Italian) whom the stretcher-bearers would find, the ominous noise of tanks could be heard, first from the right flank and then passing across the line of attack. These were thought to be British tanks. They were not.

'We were moving forward in slow easy stages spending waiting time on our stomachs while mortar landed about us ... The Battalion commander insisted on halting the Battalion each time with the word "Stanna"...."

Suddenly 'machine gun bullets came zipping past our ears. That put the wind up me all right. I hated the sound of those bullets, but can laugh now when I think of myself and old Jack Scully ⁶ who was in front of me; how we walked along with our heads instinctively bent down as if we were trying to keep off the rain!'

Plodding on mile after mile, one man, Gough Smith, notes how he grew uneasy, feeling 'that the enemy retreating before us were leading us further and further into a trap. We passed abandoned guns and tanks. Nothing was destroyed, we merely plodded on....' He felt the tank crews might be lying in hiding, waiting to follow up and attack at daylight. But most men who glimpsed the outline of tanks would have taken it for granted that they were British.

The battalion now began running into more prisoners and small isolated groups from the forward battalions. Even on a night like this came a wry tinge of humour. 'Shorty' Jury ⁷— 'one of those blokes who, when doing rifle exercises, gives one the

impression that either they or the rifle are trying to climb one another'—stopped by a group of men 'with what then must have been the smallest prisoner ever, and after an inquiry as to what he had, and the usual "Ruddy so-an'-so", he shoved off—literally—just moved forward expecting the bloke to read his mind. There was an agonised grunt as the bayonet prodded, and Shorty took after his charge like a man in for the polevault.'

'Challenges and password (Speights) were much flung about,' notes Roy Johnston. ⁸ 'We could hear no sound of attack on our left flank. The right seemed quiet too. The impression was that whether by design or otherwise the attack was converging. There were flares going up on our left flank. In due course we were advised back that they were success flares. Our forward march was continuing but slowing. We saw enemy dead and some of our own. The men were tired and many were sleeping every time they went down. It continued that way all night—challenges, password, prisoners going back—occasional flares on our left—"success signals".'

Hewitt's section had passed 'odd trucks, guns and even a tank or two and we heard someone calling in the darkness "Are you there Kiwi? Are you there Kiwi?" It could have been a cunning Jerry, anyhow no one answered him. Suddenly I stumbled on a huddled form in the darkness and Jack Scully said "See if he has any field glasses or a Beretta," so I rolled him over thinking he was dead and a horrible groan came from the poor brute and he felt all soft and warm.'

So it went on until the battalion had covered about six miles (some believe more ⁹), and 'there seemed to be doubt developing as to our position,' says Johnston. '[We] were a little bit uneasy about things, also there was a machine gun firing a stream of multi-coloured tracers across the way we had come.' 'Then a dog barked at us out of the darkness,' adds Hewitt. 'There was something foreboding about the damned dog plus the machine gun that kept firing unmolested on our flank.'

Here Major Hanton was ordered to extend his battalion over a 1200-yard front facing north, and to contact 23 Battalion, 700 yards ahead. The Brigadier, on a carrier driven by Couchman, came hurrying past: 'Hurry up and dig in before light, boys.' Behind the battalion, in the direction it had come from, several posts now

began firing. A rumble of tanks from the left flank was reported.

'Dawn found us on a slight feature looking down to a shallow basin ... in daylight we moved into the basin. We were halted. We were told to dig in,' Johnston continues. The time now would be about 5.15 a.m. 'No one could inform us as to our front, or direction of anticipated counter-attack. We were told to dig in anywhere. The men were being very philosophical about it all but there was confusion. Soldiers trained ... to do ... what they were told "dug in anywhere" ... there were but limited fields of observation and fire. Short distance to the front of our advance lay a small escarpment'—the almost imperceptible rise that was Ruweisat.

'Those with shovels and picks,' writes Hewitt, 'started digging while the "diggers" who had nothing to dig with built up rough little shelters of stone. I had a few rocks in front of me and even one or two on each side which was better than nothing. Suddenly there was an ear-splitting crack and a fiery projectile flashed past a few feet above ground and got a direct hit on a truck in front of us which promptly went up in flames. [A brief duel with a six-pounder anti-tank gun begins] while all we could do was to lie low, as the shells just seemed to be skimming our heads. The noise was appalling, it seemed to strike through one's ears into the very brain.' George Tosh¹⁰ was shot dead. Gough Smith, like everyone else, 'never thought of our being captured. Our tanks would appear in a moment, or our guns would open up, more anti-tank guns would appear. Something must happen.' It did.

The tanks, thought to be eight altogether, advanced on to the doomed 22nd, one group coming from the south towards the battalion's western flank, the other swinging to the east. They made shrewd use of natural cover, the early, misty light, and a dust haze. Ollivier's six-pounders opened up, but the four guns were overwhelmed in a matter of minutes, while the startled riflemen (many of whom at first mistook the indistinct tanks for the expected British armour) lay low, or tried to open a brief, hopeless small-arms fire from open ground or from scarcely begun slit trenches.

A furious, impotent Hewitt 'had never had one single lesson in recognition of tanks of any sort. I had once seen a German tank in Maadi and had wanted to go over and have a good look at it, but was told to pay attention to the lesson in hand which happened to be a new method of changing step on the march by an ex-

Christchurch dancing master.'

He describes the end of his battalion: 'It was all very bewildering to have tanks coming in from the rear and they now had their machine guns going all the time to keep us down. As I said before I had a few stones in front of me but none behind me, and I can tell you I felt pretty bare and exposed in that quarter! One platoon on our right that was near a bit of a ridge got up and made a run for it, they had of course to run a hell of a gauntlet of machine-gun bullets, and it was pretty grim to see these men running with dust being kicked up all round them as they fell or dived to the ground and then up and on again.' These were Keith Elliott and his men, and as they began running men shouted: 'What the hell are you running for—they are our tanks.'

'The tanks having knocked out our guns came rumbling and clanking towards us with nothing to stop them.... We could do nothing but keep hoping some of our own tanks would turn up to the rescue.... A big Mark IV was only about 70 yards off me by this time and I was feeling like a fly in a web or Bob Semple's wheelbarrow, and wondering what the hell to do next.... Some of our chaps were right under the damned monster, and I can still see clearly the silly little bits of white paper they waved for a white flag. Then all seemed to rise up out of the desert with their hands up.'

The men, numbed and dazed ('It was a possibility we had not thought of': 'I think we all felt rather silly and self-conscious': 'the horrible shock of that moment when the first of our chaps leapt out of their holes with hands up'), were rounded up quickly, for the Germans 'were in a great hurry to get us out of it.' One tank commander said 'with the best Conrad Veidt English: "For you my friends, the war is over."' Another, sitting up on the turret, looked 'cool and efficient with his ear-phones still on his helmet and an eagle and swastika on his right breast.' Some riflemen had been escorting back about thirty Italian prisoners, but 'the boot was on the other foot, the Ites now helped line us up and they didn't fail to see the joke.' Fourteen officers and 261 other ranks were now 'in the bag', including four wounded who were considerately treated. Apart from these prisoners, the whole of the Ruweisat action had cost the battalion one killed and eighteen wounded (two of whom died later). Several men, including Major Hanton, were roughly handled when they refused to give up personal possessions, yet such treatment was exceptional,

and 'a friendly Italian sergeant showed great approval of a photo of June and the kids.'

Now the sudden bewilderment was ending, many a man realised and continued to realise bitterly that 'It was a humiliating and disgusting sight. Someone somewhere had let us down badly.' Shepherded by the half-dozen tanks, the prisoners were on the point of moving off when a German called sneeringly: 'It's a long way to [Tipperary!](#)' Back came the defiant reply, half sob, half snarl: 'It's a longer way to [Cairo](#), you bastard!' As the captives trudged off through the dust, the sun came over the horizon.

On a slight rise on the far right flank of the battalion 11 Platoon, commanded by Sergeant Keith Elliott, saw four tanks swinging round to the east. Infantry were running behind them, and about the time when the startled onlookers began identifying white crosses on the tanks, the firing started. Elliott, although wounded across the chest, cried out to his platoon to move 400 yards ahead to the semi-cover of a slight ridge. ¹¹ Swiftly the three sections (led respectively by Corporals Garmonsway, ¹² [West](#) ¹³ and [Staines](#) ¹⁴), eighteen men in all, reached cover in time to see the four tanks close in from the east on 12 and 10 Platoons and march them off at a smart clip to the west.

Moving another 400 yards north to a second small ridge, the platoon saw New Zealand troops and, after Elliott's chest wound had been dressed, took up a position on their far right (eastern) flank. Here the platoon came under the command of Lieutenant [Shaw](#) ¹⁵ of 21 Battalion. A distressed lance-corporal appeared and said that his officer and batman were lying out in front, the officer with an eye shot out and bleeding badly. Elliott, leaving Corporal West in position, went out with Garmonsway's and Staines's sections. They were soon under fire from a post about 500 yards ahead, and Garmonsway on the right flank was held up by more firing from the east. Elliott ordered Garmonsway to press home an attack in that direction.

Elliott now began his own attack ahead, the first of a series of charges which won the Victoria Cross, five enemy strongpoints and some eighty prisoners. With the sergeant were only three men (everyone else was more than fully occupied as it was): [Lancaster](#), ¹⁶ [Jones](#), ¹⁷ and [Smith](#). ¹⁸ As they closed in to within 50 yards of the first post ahead, the eleven Italian defenders signalled surrender. While they were

dismantling an anti-tank gun and some machine guns, they were fired on by another post 100 yards directly ahead and from yet another a little to the right and further on. Smith was now sent back for reinforcements. Elliott, Lancaster, and Jones captured the next two posts 'fairly easily'. The three men now had about fifty prisoners. They set about dismantling and wrecking more enemy weapons.

However, from the north-west, from a gently rising slope, fresh fire was directed at them. Shepherding their prisoners again with them, the three New Zealanders advanced against this fourth post over 100 yards away. The attack was well under way when another stream of fire burst from yet another direction, from behind and from the west about 200 yards away.

Leaving Lancaster and Jones to attend to matters in front, Elliott on his own dashed towards the new threat from the west, but was forced into cover alongside an abandoned water truck. From there he sniped at the defenders until all were on the point of surrender, except the machine-gunner who, sticking to his gun and keeping the deserted truck under fire, succeeded in wounding Elliott in the thigh. Elliott recovered from the shock of this wound in time to see a sniper on the escarpment hampering Jones and Lancaster. He fired at and winged this sniper, and then, turning to his own pressing problems, dashed to a small hummock, threw a grenade and charged, eliminating the machine gun and its faithful operator and taking about fifteen prisoners.

Weak from his wounds (another bullet had creased his knee— his third wound— and furthermore he was fresh from hospital after a bout of malaria), Elliott rejoined Jones (now wounded) and Lancaster in time to help wipe out the fifth and final post. With their captives (including two German medical officers and several German other ranks) they made their way back slowly to Corporal West's position, where Garmonsway and his party, in a spirited second front of their own which won Garmonsway the DCM, had silenced three machine-gun nests and taken a German officer and a sergeant, two Italian officers and sixty Italian other ranks. By noon 11 Platoon's tally was 140 prisoners and perhaps thirty killed and wounded.

Indian troops were now spreading out over ground ahead. Elliott was taken away to an Indian dressing station.

The infantry had carried out their task of taking Ruweisat Ridge, but without the support of tanks ¹⁹ or anti-tank guns could not be expected to hold their positions against the swift and aggressive action of the German tanks. The eight tanks which overran 22 Battalion were those of [15 Panzer Division](#), which had not been located before the battle; the assault had passed through the area in which they had been laagered. Moving to get out of the way when they realised that the Italian positions had been carried and that they were isolated, they ran into 22 Battalion before it could deploy or dig in. Perhaps even that would not have mattered if the anti-tank guns, which had been ordered to move with and behind the battalion, had been in their correct position.

Twenty-second Battalion accordingly suffered the consequences. The unit did not suffer humiliation and captivity gladly, and the bitterness of the Ruweisat men against their senior officers and the Army in general lives on still today. As it was, the captives who trudged off into long, bleak years of hardship and captivity would be denied even the cold comfort that their fate had served as a warning to other New Zealanders. Later that very day 19 and 20 Battalions (and a week later 24 and 25 Battalions) shared the same grim fate in the Division's darkest hour.

The prisoners, after being lined up and searched hurriedly, were marched through the heavy sand for one and a half hours before the first brief halt was called, and suffered 'thirst and fatigue such as I had never known'. Some when captured had a few drops of water left in their bottles; others had none. 'If only they would give us a mouthful of water—our mouths were dry and tongues were beginning to swell. I for one drank water out of the radiator of an old [derelict] truck. The water was rusty but what did that matter it was at least liquid.' An old groundsheet was rigged up over one man who was 'in a very bad way' through thirst; at least he would have a little shade. Another man hastily buried his wife's letters in the sand: 'Better left in the sand of the desert I thought than in the hands of the enemy.' Searching the captives again, a German intelligence officer found, but did not confiscate, a song book.

'Has it the "Siegfried Line" in it?'

'Yes.'

'I am sorry, but you won't be hanging any washing out on the Siegfried Line, but we will be hanging ours out on the [Alexandria](#) Line.'

The march resumed for another one and a half hours. 'Many of the boys half crazed were behaving badly, rushing up to every Jerry and beseeching him for water.' One man tried to stop trucks on the road. Another fainted. Men don't know how they made the last two miles. 'I began to have visions and imagined that someone was holding a cup of water to my lips. I would come-to with a start to find my lips pursed as though in the act of drinking.' Trucks arrived (the men got about half a pint each of petrol-tainted water) and took them to the [Daba](#) prisoner-of-war cage (British built), and their first food for twenty-four hours: three ounces of biscuit and half a mug of water.

Next morning they were herded forty to fifty into each lorry and guarded by grinning and vindictive [Senussi](#) and Italians. 'I now had begun to feel a hatred for my enemy.' The Germans had been reasonable. The prisoners were taken past [Mersa Matruh](#), [Sidi Barrani](#), and [Tobruk](#) to the insanitary, overcrowded [Benghazi](#) cage, 'The Palms': hunger, lice, dysentery. Dick Bunny, who had once belonged to 13 Platoon C Company, wrote: 'There was no room for any exercise and we just lay under the palm trees and gazed at the blue sky above and the stars twinkling at night, thinking of the space and the freedom that was in the heavens above.' In November they were shipped to [Italy](#), and later were taken to [Germany](#).

At [El Daba](#), when almost every man was too exhausted even to think of escaping, Captain 'Brigham' Young escaped; 'a wonderful performance,' writes a captive comrade, 'as he had had no more water than the rest of us for the last 12 hours, that was nil.' The whole of the battalion, captives and remnants alike, rejoiced in Young's escape, for somehow it seemed a symbol of defiance when all hope had gone. Another prisoner's tribute reads: 'It was possible to escape that night. We were only 40 miles from our own lines but only one man had the guts to venture out, exhausted, thirsty and starving as he was; that was Captain Young. Good luck to him!' 'Brigham' Young, when asked to describe his escape in detail, says he was 'on the lookout for a chance to escape because

(I had told my own men on previous occasions that it was a duty to escape if
a) possible.

- (I could think of nothing worse than years in a prison camp.
- b)
- (I cannot take indignities lying down and would have despised myself had I not
- c) made the attempt.
- (The thought of my wife wondering and worrying.
- d)
- (I just had to do something.'
- e)

On the march stragglers who looked as if they were contemplating escape had been warned that if anyone began wandering away he would be shot. At [El Daba](#), outside the cage, the officers were separated from the other ranks, but Young had removed his pips on the march. He says:

I waited until about half the other-ranks had been interrogated and put behind the netting. We were only about 20 yards from the guards' hut which appeared to be unoccupied. I wandered (casually, I thought and hoped) over to the hut and entered unobserved. Hanging on the wall was a water bottle full of coffee—I poured it into my own empty bottle and pocketed a small packet of biscuits lying on the table. I was relieved to get out and rejoin the others unobserved. Heartened by this success I wandered over a few minutes later to a small heap of kerosene tins (two high, I think) close to the guards' hut, and still appearing to be unobserved I lost no time in getting down behind them and hard up against them. I suppose my tensest moment up till then was waiting for a burst of machinegun or rifle fire had I been noticed. After a minute or two I felt safe and more relieved than I can tell. I felt that my best and safest course was to go to sleep, which I promptly did. Some time later, it was almost dark, a staff car drew up on the other side of the tins and someone got out—not six feet away. This woke me up. I remained there an hour or two longer. All was quiet save for two sentries, whose beat finished some yards away. I was facing south; the cage entrance and the sentries were to the left (east) of me.

I crawled away from the tins, perhaps 300 yards to the right. Now I could see neither the cage nor the sentries. That night I headed due south by the stars. Once I thought I had run into their lines—I think they were vehicles—soon after I started. I gave them a wide margin. I walked till daylight—an estimated 15 miles, maybe more. I wrapped myself round a small desert shrub for the day. The flies were annoying. A few planes overhead.

The next night I continued south for another 15 miles and it was the following evening, soon after I had started out, that I came across a number of damaged and abandoned Italian vehicles, and from the wreckage salvaged the welcome tin of meat extract which I opened with a pocket knife I still had. Soon after I encountered the Bedouins but before that I had my biggest fright: I saw two soldiers resting on their rifles and apparently looking at me—perhaps 100 yards away. I didn't move for some time and then started to move on. They kept looking and even, I could have sworn, turned their heads to continue watching me. But nothing happened and I moved on as quickly as possible. Obviously I must have been seeing things due to my tiredness, and I certainly didn't go closer to find out why they took no action. I was pleased to get away.

Then I saw objects in the haze in the distance but decided I was again fooling myself. But gradually they took shape, camels in charge of two Bedouins. One was menacing and covered me with his rifle from about 100 yards away. I sat down and didn't move. He continued to aim at me, all the time shouting. His companion was far more reasonable and friendly, and seeing I was unarmed, approached. He gave me three sweets and ran off and filled my empty water bottle; what a blessing! He waved his arm across an arc to the north and indicated to me that the enemy—my enemy—were there. He accepted my knife as a present, smilingly but a little reluctantly. I wonder if he still has it.

That night I walked south-east for ten miles to make sure I had gone round the enemy, and then due east for another ten miles, and was at dawn dismayed to find myself among a 'B' Echelon. This I think was on the edge of the Quattara depression. I was watching one vehicle down in the wadi when I saw two men facing me, perhaps 200 yards away, near another vehicle. I moved away and as soon as possible got down into the wadi and under a large bush. I had been there only a moment when I heard voices above, stopping and moving away. I assumed they were suspicious but not sufficiently so to make a detailed search.

That was my worst day. The flies were at their worst under that tree [sic] and with enemy vehicles around I had to keep quiet and out of sight. That night after dark I set out again with some trepidation. I heard voices in a number of directions but was soon clear away. I was very tired now and had to sit down and rest every

half hour. I travelled north-east that night which I hoped would skirt the enemy and take me to our lines. But all the time I had the fear that we may have withdrawn a long way and that if so I wouldn't make it. The ground here was very uneven and I was stumbling forward. It was an effort to continue. About 3 am I supposed it was I missed falling into a trench by a foot or two. Immediately there was a hubbub and excited Italian shouting. I thought the best thing I could do was to pretend to be a German; knowing a little German and hoping they didn't I said a few words which together were meaningless, and stumbled on a little more quickly than before. I expected bullets to come whistling round but nothing happened. I was heartened now because I had hopes that I had come through their front lines and our own may not be far away. But I couldn't be sure. Soon I was startled by a challenge close by. I could see two figures but didn't hear what they said, or was too startled to take it in. They stood silently there. It was now or never and I advanced towards them. 25 Battalion sentries!

During his capture and escape Young had lost over one and a half stone; he was down to just under nine stone. He had no head covering against the summer sun except a handkerchief used as a hat occasionally in the daytime. He longed incessantly for a drink of milk (a curious desire, for he seldom touched milk) and thought longingly of an iced gin at the Maadi Club. 'My inspiration was the satisfaction I would get of having achieved something worthwhile—and of making my wife happy. But it was certainly worth it and under similar circumstances I would risk it again.

'My main thought was to get back to my battalion at any cost. Yes, I was determined. I prayed once or twice for the necessary strength to see it through.'²⁰

¹ Sgt R. W. Hewitt; Carterton; born Palmerston North, 23 Feb 1909; farm manager; p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

² Pte F. J. Flynn; born Dannevirke, 15 Jul 1916; hotel porter.

³ One soldier writes: 'It was a famous advice, difficult to remember exactly but impossible to forget. It ran: "The Australians on the right flank are putting in an attack. If the attack is successful, we shall attack. On the

other hand if the Australian attack is not fully successful, we shall attack. If another British-Indian group does something else we shall attack. And if all these things don't happen we shall withdraw to a line 14 miles in rear." The soldiers said "Why the ... don't they just say we're going to attack and be done with it?" The statement became a pattern for army humour. [At this time men felt] the show was going badly. Men, without seeking to know all that had been at [Tobruk](#), cursed South Africans because they could see the captured transport Jerry was using, and we were being shelled with our own [captured] twenty-fives. The infantrymen accepted it; that is all infantrymen can do; but the feeling was current that we were enacting a glorious Gafu.' Another rifleman writes: 'We were told the Jerries were in a hell of a mess from lack of water and were too weak even to bury their dead and that the [RAF](#) were going to bomb hell out of them until 11 pm when we would go in and clean him up easily. It all sounded very nice on paper.'

⁴ [Col H. K. Christie](#), CBE, ED; [Wanganui](#); born NZ 13 Jul 1894; surgeon; OC Surgical Team, [Greece](#) and [Crete](#), 1941; OC Surgical Division [1 Gen Hosp](#) 1941-43; [CO 2 Gen Hosp](#) 1943-44.

⁵ [Capt C. M. Ollivier](#); [Kaikoura](#); born [Christchurch](#), 27 Aug 1918; p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

⁶ [Pte J. P. Scully](#); [Carterton](#); born NZ 12 Jun 1905; labourer; p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

⁷ [Pte H. W. Jury](#); [New Plymouth](#); born NZ 12 May 1916; labourer; p.w. 15 Jul 1942.

⁸ 2 Lt [R. H. Johnston](#); [Pukerua Bay](#); born [Taihape](#), 7 May 1915; civil servant; p.w. 15 Jul 1942; escaped [Italy](#), Sep 1943.

⁹ In any night attack, understandably enough, some always feel they have advanced too far. After capture, the prisoners were hurried due west, below 4 Brigade on Point 63, and were seen by members of the brigade ('They're only Eyeties anyhow,' said the man behind a distant machine gun in 4 Brigade); therefore the unit could not have advanced further than it was supposed to, and this is confirmed by movements of Sergeant Elliott's platoon, records of 8 Panzer Regiment, and 23 Battalion's positions.

¹⁰ Pte G. M. Tosh; born Scotland, 3 Jan 1910; labourer; killed in action 15 Jul 1942.

¹¹ This account of Elliott's exploit is based on an interview he gave Mr R. Walker, of [War History Branch](#).

¹² 2 Lt R. F. Garmonsway, DCM; Rangiwaea, [Taihape](#); born [Taihape](#), 29 Jun 1911; shearer.

¹³ Capt A. B. West, m.i.d.; born Hastings, 29 Nov 1916.

¹⁴ Cpl L. C. Staines; [Palmerston North](#); born [New Plymouth](#), 4 Jul 1916; Regular soldier.

¹⁵ Capt R. A. Shaw; [Taumarunui](#); born NZ 8 Jun 1912; commercial traveller; twice wounded.

¹⁶ Pte J. R. Lancaster, m.i.d.; born [Gisborne](#), 16 Sep 1918; wounded 24 Oct 1942.

¹⁷ Sgt R. G. Jones, m.i.d.; [Auckland](#); born [Manunui](#), 2 Dec 1913; policeman; wounded 15 Jul 1942.

¹⁸ Pte L. H. Smith; born [Canada](#), 16 Jul 1914; stableman; wounded 4 Sep 1942.

¹⁹ This is no consolation to 22 Battalion, but critics may care to consider that a week later the British [23 Armoured Brigade](#) burst right into the German lines in the vicinity with eighty tanks; only eight tanks came out.

²⁰ Another man captured at [Ruweisat Ridge](#), Sergeant R. J. G. Smith, who twice tried to escape on the way, was taken to [Mersa Matruh](#) to repair the truck of an Italian padre ('a man of sterling character'). German mechanics would say: 'I wonder if the padre's truck is still running?', to which the stock reply was: 'Even if it isn't running, I bet the padre is.' Finding Smith had

been in [Crete](#), two veteran German soldiers entertained him with 'Stuka juice' (any strong liquor). Choosing his time, and storing away provisions and water, Smith escaped. After many hardships, when water ran low, he placed a small stone under the tip of his tongue, sucked it constantly, but was tortured with thoughts of water: 'I would think of a thousand rivers running to waste in the sea, all the freshwater lakes with perhaps people nearby not even noticing them or attempting to drink them dry. I couldn't understand why they didn't want to put their heads in all this water with their mouths wide open just drinking all the time. I thought of my old sergeants' mess with bottles of cool beer stacked up in dozens, standing there doing nothing, with nobody drinking them. Unbelievable that such things could be....' After 17 days and 18 nights Smith, in a state of collapse, walked into an Italian bivouac on the extreme southern flank of the [Alamein](#) line. Maintaining that escape in the desert is worse than being adrift at sea in an open boat, he says an escaper's only friend is his two feet, and he wholeheartedly agrees with these words of the aviator, Charles Lindbergh: 'You never see the sky until you've looked upwards to the stars for safety.'

22 BATTALION

CHAPTER 7 – ALAMEIN

CHAPTER 7

Alamein

In a letter he wrote home on 22 July 1942 Lieutenant-Colonel Russell said:

Well, I've got the story of what happened now and it's a sad one to say the least of it as I'm pretty well short of three companies and my headquarters; fortunately all the specialists were a bit behind and so escaped the mopping up. I gather two Jerry columns of tanks one on each flank caught them as they were moving up at first light and as they were unsupported at the moment simply rounded them up and put them in the bag—the whole show taking ten to fifteen minutes—tragic but very few casualties thank goodness so we will get them back in time. Please God we will be back on Jerry's tail and have him cleaned up before he can get them shipped away....I feel very sad about it. Had I been there I gather there was nothing I could have done and most likely I should have been in the bag too.... I've got a very good foundation to build on...but I have lost so many good young officers and NCOs to say nothing of men....'

'After the Battalion was captured I applied for transfer from stretcher bearers as the whole "guts" seemed to have gone out of the outfit and no 16 Platoon and all: just couldn't bring myself to settle with the new chaps—Mac felt the same—think most of us did.'—Mick Bradford.

'That's the finish. I'm not training any more bootmakers for the b—Jerries. Just as they were starting to be handy, too'.— Battalion bootmaker, Corporal Jack [Lines](#),¹ whose five recently trained bootmakers had been captured.

Twenty-second Battalion had gone into the field on 22 June 720 strong. Then 125 (A Company), left out of battle, were sent back from [Mersa Matruh](#) to [Maadi](#), where they stayed during the [Minqar Qaim](#) and Ruweisat actions. Before the attack on [Ruweisat Ridge](#) the battalion's casualties in killed, wounded, and missing (120) were nearly balanced by reinforcements numbering 106. Casualties in the next few days were 278, most of them prisoners. After Ruweisat the battalion had only about thirty riflemen left in the field, but men from A and B Echelons, the anti-tank, mortar and carrier platoons totalled 273. They went back to [Maadi](#), where A Company was waiting; 157 reinforcements arrived, and at the end of July the battalion's strength

was 28 officers and 577 other ranks.

During the first fortnight in August the battalion was still taking shape and reorganising in a [Maadi](#) undergoing the purge of its lifetime: many a New Zealander was jerked from 'a sweet possie' and dropped in the front line before he had gathered together his hitherto most serviceable wits. By 18 August the unit had been built up to the strength of three rifle companies and Headquarters Company.² The next day the move back to the Division began, 'up the Desert Road in the middle of a scorching day, and as we stood in the front of the tray looking ahead over the cab the wind came up in our faces in hot gusts off the scorching asphalt—it caused my lips to crack and bleed in the week following this at [Alamein Box](#).'

In the last month, both armies having fought to a standstill, positions had changed very little along the 35-mile [Alamein](#) line, which stretched from the coast almost due south to the treacherous sands of the [Qattara Depression](#), impassable for a modern army's heavy vehicles and armour. The Alamein line (groups of minefields, holes, gun emplacements, strongpoints) still barred the way to [Alexandria](#), 60 miles away.

The New Zealand Division, in a square about five miles across and just south of [Ruweisat Ridge](#), remained on the inland or southern flank of the line. The troops dug laboriously deeper into the stubborn rock, strengthened positions, gunpits and minefields, and endured with growing exasperation the flies, the blazing mid-summer heat, and the regular attacks of dive-bombing Stukas. Sickness, particularly yellow jaundice and dysentery ('Wog guts') spread, but despite the great heat sun-stroke was unknown at [Alamein](#). With some men the slightest scratch meant another desert sore, which took a long time to heal and attracted the flies. Some men seemed to get desert sores (or septic fingernails) for no reason at all; others apparently were immune. This summer was the worst period in the Division's history; veterans who went on into [Italy](#) look back and say: 'It was easily the worst, without question.'

However, a clean wind was beginning to blow in the desert. 'The scientific soldiers were now to come from England,' wrote [Brigadier Kippenberger](#). General Alexander took over command of the Middle East Forces, and General Montgomery ('the man who really put the ordinary soldier in the picture', as many men describe

him) took over the [Eighth Army](#). The new—the startling new—head of [Eighth Army](#) declared, 'there will be no withdrawal and no surrender', and underlined his words by sending the transport many miles back behind the [Alamein](#) line.

Montgomery visited 22 Battalion on Sunday, 23 August, two or three days after the reorganised battalion had taken its place in the New Zealand fold again and settled down at the front. He impressed everyone by his quick and confident manner. One officer in the battalion says: 'Within a few days a new spirit was abroad. His greatest success was the raising of morale of the troops, and with the raising of that morale came his success.' Another man considered him 'rather like a jockey', which certainly can be taken as a tribute from a racehorse-crazy country. Tom De Lisle recalls how the commander, 'deceived by Private Harry Sansum's³ (Signallers) frail appearance, asked Harry if he felt all right.' The signaller replied he had never felt better in his life. The General smiled and passed on, and 'later the boys chided Harry on a golden opportunity lost. As one of them said: "Why, when a big shot like that thinks a man's crook, he's as good as back in Taranaki!" 'Men of C/D Company 'were in slitties, under cover, lookouts posted, when we were called together in a hollow square. The general wanted to see, and be seen, by all his men. All of the officers were presented to him.'

When the battalion returned in late August to the New Zealand Box, near Ruweisat, where a most trying fortnight would be spent, it was given the eastern flank (a reserve position) to defend, and came under the command of 132 (British) Brigade, which was under New Zealand command at this time. Fourth Brigade, smashed and broken, would take no further part in the desert war. The battalion, scarcely shaken down into shape and now changed almost beyond recognition, fell to on the old familiar task: digging in on hard, rocky ground—sometimes helped briefly by pneumatic compressors—wiring, filling sandbags, piling up rocks, siting 3-inch mortars and two-pounder anti-tank guns along the front, carving weapon pits and slit trenches.

A veteran still rather shamefacedly remembers a particularly deep slit trench he dug there: 'that slit trench, of all the hundreds one must have made, is called to mind notably for the fact that it was very evident of "fear", and is marked too by receiving there a telegram of all things of the death of a member of the family—how anybody could be bothered to deliver it at such a time and place speaks a language

of its own.'

Flies, heat, thirst and dust, in that order: that was the curse of the [New Zealand Box](#), which brings to mind a weary picture of the constant waving of hands in front of faces all day. 'Putting our hands over our mugs of tea to keep the flies out, and waving our bread and jam in the air between bites, which stopped them getting stuck on the jam but didn't stop them from settling up near your shoulder and crawling down your arm to get at it.' Some, holding tea and food in front of them, walked briskly into the breeze, which the flies disliked (but breezes were very few). Best of all was to clear the little two-men bivvy (some had dug-in bivvies here), leaving the flaps up at each end and covering them with mosquito netting 'so what breeze there was could come through. Then lay down on your back for a bit of peace, and let the sweat from your chest run down your ribs in cool dribbles. But the flies got in again sooner or later.' Early-rising flies, a little dopey and hard to shift, were up before sunrise; by sunset most of them mercifully would be gone. The flies (strongly attracted by moisture, went for eyes, mouth, sweat and desert sores) were dark in colour, gave the impression of having cast-iron heads, and were about the size of a New Zealand housefly (not, mercifully, as large as a bluebottle). Men hid from the tormentors in slit trenches covered with groundsheets, but the stuffy heat soon drove them out again, more exasperated than ever.

Dusk came like some great sigh of relief over the entire battle-front. Newcomers to the battalion, placed in turn on night picket and pacing their unit's area in the Box, learned how easily a man could lose his bearings (a landmark would be a stunted bush or a small pile of stones) and get lost in the bare sand with only an odd patch of camel-thorn and an occasional vehicle looming out of the darkness. A feature of the [Alamein](#) line, of course, was that little if anything showed above ground. When lost, a man had to make a mental note of where he stood, and then strike out hopefully in various directions until he came to something familiar. Another night task, until the end of August, was lighting special beacon-flares (tactically placed tins filled with kerosene-soaked sand). This was for the benefit of certain night flyers in the [RAF](#). Off to kindle his beacons at most uncomfortable hours every night went Sergeant Cyril [Whitty](#),⁴ of the intelligence section, leading his grumbling and swearing helpers, and insisting that nobody went to sleep or neglected his flare.

'I think the most exciting thing in those days were the dogfights which took place above us. The chaps standing and looking up and cheering and shouting encouragement. The dive to earth (usually trailing smoke), the eruption, and a second or so later the sound of the crash. It was also good to watch our ack-ack following an enemy plane: sometimes you wouldn't see or hear the plane until he was quite near, but you knew where he was by listening to and watching the ack-ack. Then it was very satisfying to watch those bombers that day when our Bofors caught them dawdling over our lines and shot down most of them. I clearly remember one of these bombers. You could see a flash on his right-hand motor as a shell hit it, and then for a fraction of a second nothing, and then the whole motor burst into a ball of orange flame.'

Allowing for dogfights, Stukas, shelling and so on, the battalion soon found the line much quieter. The Axis forces, still most confident of victory, were massing for their final thrust towards [Alexandria](#). Few enemy prisoners had been taken along the entire front for two weeks, so in the night of 25-26 August the Maoris swept back from a characteristic raid with thirty-five Italians, the first New Zealand offensive operation under General Montgomery. By this time Rommel's next attempt to master Egypt was expected: his last throw, probably coming on the inland flank and brushing past the New Zealanders' positions. All preparations had been made to meet this attack; the thrust deliberately would be allowed to penetrate east until yet more positions would be met. Then, blocked in front, hampered by intricate minefields, and pounded from the flanks and from the air, the raiders, out on a limb, would have no choice but to withdraw from the trap. And furthermore, this plan to turn at last the Axis tide in [Africa](#) would work.

On the night of 31 August-1 September 5 Brigade and 132 (British) Brigade changed positions, and with this change 22 Battalion (not moving) came again under 5 Brigade's command. Before the brigade had fully settled into positions, the codeword TWELVEBORE arrived, and this celebrated Eighth Army order was read out: 'The enemy is now attempting to break through our positions in order to reach [Cairo](#), [Suez](#), and [Alexandria](#), and to drive us from Egypt. The Eighth Army bars the way. It carries a great responsibility, and the whole future of the war will depend on how we carry out our task. We will fight the enemy where we now stand; there will be NO WITHDRAWAL and NO SURRENDER. Every officer and man must continue to

do his duty as long as he has breath in his body.... Into battle then, with stout hearts and with the determination to do our duty. And may God give us the victory.'

Within twenty-four hours 22 Battalion, at the Box's 'back door', was liable at any moment to be in the front line. In fact, although the by-passed New Zealanders were not attacked in the eastward 'victory drive', some Germans must have penetrated close to the south-eastern corner of the Box, for German mines were found laid there afterwards.

The Luftwaffe staged a particularly lively night: 'I suppose some of the planes could have been ours but I should think nearly all of it came from Jerry,' writes a private in 13 Platoon. 'He started soon after dark and the last plane went back with the coming of first light. I don't remember any time during the night that there wasn't at least one plane flying around. There were flares, bombs, butterfly bombs [their first appearance, vicious things leaping like jumping-jacks from the opening canister] and strafing. Early in the night he dropped three flares quite near us and they seemed to hang in the sky for a long time....I was surprised by their brightness—I remember I could quite easily read the words in an old [Auckland Weekly](#) in the slittie beside me. A rear-gunner busily fired bursts trying to provoke a target, but not a sound came from the Bofors or anyone else that night. A plane ... [dropped butterfly bombs]: there was a gobbling and crackling noise and all these sparkling lights appeared on a patch of desert: depending on how many you could see they looked like the lights of a big town or a prison camp at night.'

Fortunately for 22 Battalion the British armour to the east held firm, and Rommel began to withdraw. Now came the turn of the New Zealand Division to strike, in the night of 3-4 September, and to 'harass' (a favourite non-committal sort of word in the first half of the war) the withdrawing forces. The New Zealanders were to attack to the south and hurry along Rommel's withdrawal. The [132nd Brigade](#) went in on the right, 5 Brigade on the left; 22 and 23 Battalions were warned to be prepared to follow up the Maoris and 21 Battalion, which led the attack. One company from 22 Battalion (B Company) had the role of guarding a party of engineers who were to follow up the Maoris and lay a minefield. The attack wasn't the full success pictured: after adventures and alarms in the night B Company and the sappers didn't get far enough forward to lay the minefield. Before dawn the Brigadier ordered B Company to dig in behind the Maoris and called the rest of 22

Battalion up to join it. A mine blew a wheel from the intelligence truck and Lieutenant [Webster](#)⁵ was wounded. After daylight C/D Company had joined B, and the two companies formed a line on a ridge through which the Maoris withdrew. A Company remained in reserve with Battalion Headquarters, about a mile to the rear. Supporting 22 Battalion were said to be the few remaining Crusader tanks of a squadron of 50 Royal Tank Regiment, which had been severely mauled in the night. The battalion had the Maoris' anti-tank platoon as well as some six-pounders in the neighbourhood.

The battalion was not into position before daylight. Several platoons were shelled as they moved up ('I remember the tiny bits from one airburst "ticking" on my tin hat'), but they moved on and dug in as quickly as the rocky ground would allow. The anti-tank guns were up with them, reassuringly, but during the morning several platoons were moved forward, moving, digging and moving on, and thereby getting further away from anti-tank protection.

Before this an artillery smoke screen had been ordered to cover the Maoris' withdrawal. Parties of Maoris began drifting back through the smoke: 'I'll always remember them. They were coming back in anything from singles to small groups, swaggering and strolling along with happy carefree faces, and not seeming to have a care in the world... seemingly back from a cross-country stroll rather than a slaughtering match down in the depression.' The Brigade Commander noticed the whole of 22 Battalion's area 'under heavy fire from tank guns and 88's. I was pleased to see how little notice anyone appeared to be taking. After all, they were only small shells.' One man, [Hec Jensen](#),⁶ nicked in the buttocks, would have disputed this statement.

No sooner had the Maoris pulled back to the 22nd's lines than there were obvious signs that the enemy was going to attack. Shelling, mortaring, and machine-gun fire increased. About noon enemy infantry and a few tanks advanced towards the slight gap between B Company's and C/D Company's positions. Seventeen Platoon, well advanced and badly placed, had not dug in properly and had no anti-tank protection, 'when we saw what appeared to be a section of Jerries with their hands up marching towards us before tanks coming on towards us in a pincers movement. We were very exposed.' Private [Orr](#),⁷ a Bren-gunner, had an arm

severed and later died.

Artillery support was called for, but the enemy was very close before the shells fell. The positions were in 'horribly flat and exposed country' on the forward side of the ridge and could be seen from two or three miles away. Exact movements are not clear, but with the spectre of Ruweisat upon them again, two platoons from the makeshift C/D Company got up and ran (it happens even in the best armies) over the crest of the ridge to shelter. When the enemy thrust was held up by the anti-tank guns, the men were ordered back to their positions, but when the next wave came they withdrew again.

This hasty retreat is seen through the eyes of a new reinforcement, whose impressions of first going into action could be typical of many new men experiencing their first action on this day.

After arriving at [Maadi](#) from New Zealand he had listened to men from the battalions 'talking about their narrow escapes and laughing about it—laughing about things they must have thought far from funny at the time of the happening. It didn't sound so bad. So from then on till my first action I felt more confident. (They didn't say that after a time you could feel sick of hearing that "crump" followed by those wicked bits of shrapnel whining away—and think of all the misery they were causing all over the world.)' When bombers flew over the base areas at night, he heard the sound of bombs dropped and saw 'those wonderful fireworks displays'—it was really exciting.

'Then joining the battalion and moving up to [Alamein](#) (I noticed that whenever we stopped as we neared our destination jokers always seemed to be inclined to get a shovel and start digging, also at different times on the way you would see somebody now and again just glance up around the sky). But to me—well—it was an adventure. And it was in the [Alamein](#) Box that I saw my first enemy shell land, just over in the minefield a hundred or so yards away, and our sergeant said we had better get near the slittie—but I was in no hurry.

'And from then on with dogfights above us and bombing in different places all around—and all that shelling while moving south to take up our positions on top of the escarpment overlooking Munassib—it was all adventure.'

Now comes the retreat.

'Then we saw those Jerries forming up and then start advancing across the flat towards us—and I was enjoying every minute of it—I had no nerves at all. (After all what show had fifty or a hundred Jerries and a few tanks advancing across a bare flat got against a battalion of us, sitting in slitties and looking right down on top of them? If I'd looked around I would have noticed that we didn't have any tanks at all.) Then I noticed jokers around me keeping their heads well down—but I wanted to get a good look at these Jerries I had heard so much about. The bullets started to clip the rocks in front of me and fly past my head, so I thought: well they ARE a bit close—I'd better keep my head down a bit.

'And—well—from then on things started to deteriorate. The tanks came up the ridge round the side of us (one stopped and a figure appeared standing up in the turret having a good look around and taking all the time in the world to do it). But I was still quite happy.

'But then someone says that we're getting out—and that's where the rot set in—running back there—with swarms of bullets tearing past me—going the same way as I was (like the hare—they were—I was like the tortoise—and running flat out), and looking and sounding a bit like swarms of angry bees—saying to myself: "Well it's here—they can't miss me— I wonder what it'll feel like"—and waiting for it—and shrugging my haversack up on my back in the vain hope of some protection. And—well—to finish the story—I never looked forward to going into action with the same glee after that!'

When one of the platoons reached the shelter of the anti-tank guns (Sergeant Danny Gower gamely lugging the stricken Orr out with a fireman's hoist), Colonel John Russell, collecting Orr in his jeep, ordered the men back, but to return now seemed impossible, so they halted in front of the guns. There the shelling intensified and the platoon suffered seven casualties within half an hour. One man, dazed with blast, realised he was walking round and round a gun in circles, but 'we were set once we got back to the anti-tank line for three tanks were knocked out by the Maori anti-tank gunners in double-quick time.' The attack was beaten off by concentrated fire from the Divisional Artillery: 'shells rained down like pepper out of a pepper-pot, the desert seemed to brew up, terrific.'

The enemy pressed his counter-attack spasmodically for nearly three hours, but against the heavy artillery fire from the large number of New Zealand guns in the Box he finally gave up about 3 p.m.

Corporal Len McClurg,⁸ in the noon attack, had controlled his mortars admirably when the enemy closed in towards the battalion positions. The accurate and intense fire of McClurg's men ('They played their mortars to an unforgettable rhythm, like a piano') halted them until the artillery SOS fire broke up the attack. McClurg, with great coolness, had moved repeatedly to and fro over 100 yards under heavy fire directing and observing the ranging and fire of his own mortars. In the afternoon attack the corporal, although wounded in three places, carried on with his duties until this attack was beaten off. He won the DCM. Another cool man was Corporal Lacy Craig,⁹ with a most advanced section screening an anti-tank gun. When the tanks were 200 yards away, Craig held his section firm, and the anti-tank gun, working at top efficiency, held off several tanks. Among other men who distinguished themselves this day was Captain John MacDuff, actively and reassuringly keeping groups in contact and moving about freely in most unpleasant conditions.

In the night the RAF, dropping flares, revealed German transport huddled together in a gap in the minefield 'and let them have a lot of bombs. We could see trucks being blown up and ammunition exploding in the dark.'

The New Zealanders moved back that night, and within a few days British and Greek troops had taken over the New Zealand Box. When the confused battle of Alam Halfa was over, nobody was quite sure who had been 'harassed' the most.

The news of the withdrawal that evening was like a reprieve, and the weary trudge back through the sand began. All next day (6 September) the men rested, heartened by the news that the Division was going on leave, and with 'Colonel Russell wandering round, sitting down and yarning with chaps for their point of view.' Overhead a large air battle raged, and eight unidentified aircraft were shot out of the sky. A Hurricane fighter crash-landed half a mile east of A Company, and the South African pilot (who received attention at the battalion RAP), thinking he was in enemy territory, was found smashing the last of anything at all useful, much to the disgust of souvenir hunters. In the afternoon three Stukas were shot down in another air battle.

That evening came the incredible news, a call for all officers to attend the funeral of Colonel Russell. After sadly telling Brigadier Kippenberger he would have to give up command of 22 Battalion because his feet were seriously troubling him again, John Russell went to visit an English friend in 132 Brigade. Returning in his jeep, he saw a Bren carrier in difficulties. It had run over and exploded a mine. The Colonel walked forward to help the crew and trod on another mine. 'The manner in which he met his death portrays his true character,' reads 22 Battalion's war diary this day, 'he was always willing to help those in difficulties.' After the long weeks of disaster in the desert and the misfortunes of 1941, the tragic death of this most human commander seemed an almost unbearable blow. It was hard to fight down the feeling that the battalion was unlucky, perhaps even a doomed battalion. But, with this last sad blow, the fortunes of 22 Battalion were to change. The days of defeat were over.

'Sad beyond words', that evening, in a New Zealand war cemetery, the General, the Brigadier and all the battalion officers attended the burial conducted by Padre Champion, who thought it seemed so sad (in the dark) to be laying to rest so great a soldier with such a simple service. I thought of those words written about the burial of Sir John Moore: "Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note".

In his last detailed letter home, written at the front a fortnight before his death, the Colonel had said: '... [heat and flies] but it's the same on the other side of the wire. It's grand to get back to the Division again and be in the picture. One never knows what is happening when one is away from it.... It was a great sight coming up, to see the stuff stacked up behind us gives a great feeling of confidence in the future.... We had the new Army Commander around my area yesterday and he was most impressive—looked as if he knew his own mind and meant to see things were carried out on the dot. Small, quiet spoken and tight-lipped with an eye that saw more than the obvious so I shall be surprised if he does not produce the bacon. This W.D. [[Western Desert](#)] has certainly produced a number of bowler hats for British Generals and by the process of elimination we must get the goods soon.... '... my word what a lot of problems there are going to be, to be squared up after this show. It's very interesting yarning to the boys under these circumstances for you get so much closer to them in the field when you share their grub and jokes along with the hardships, and the one thing that they are all emphatic about is that no political

differences or class warfare must be allowed to interfere with the comradeship built up under these conditions. That the RSA must never be used for political ends—but the carrying into all shades of life the camaraderie learnt in the field. How many of us will remember this five and ten years after? DV we will learn our lesson once and for all this time—but the human animal is very wayward and delights to go his own way regardless of his fellow man.... I shall have to stop as the light has almost gone and it's definitely no lights by request at night in these parts.'

Colonel Campbell again took over the battalion. Then came the long gruelling trek out, manhandling stuck vehicles to the 'rest area', 37 miles west of [Alexandria](#). For a treasured fortnight the troops rested by [Burg el Arab](#), an unforgettable contrast with its clean white sand, the [Mediterranean](#), and the old picture-book desert fort said to have been used in filming 'Beau Gest'. There was no desert, no flies, no thirst, no war at Burg el Arab, but plenty of time to laze around, to forget some things and remember others, to enjoy hot showers, clean blankets, free cordials and biscuits and cups of tea from the [YMCA](#)—and, of course, swimming, resting, visiting [Alexandria](#) and [Cairo](#) with and without leave. 'When I had my first bath the sight of so much precious water made me feel like drinking it!' Men just back from four-day leave to [Cairo](#) could be picked out at the beach by the appearance of their faces, eyes and hair. They watched movies, and saw with genuine pleasure and pride first-class shows by the [Kiwi Concert Party](#), 'which showed what New Zealanders really could do musically etc. if they got cracking.' Then back to work, about 20 miles south into the desert for special training in a 'hush-hush' locality known as 'Swordfish area', where a pet dog gave birth to a litter of pups; and Private Alf Adams remembers how soldiers came from all over the desert, like the wise men following the star, just to look at those little live pups. Here D Company was formed again, and the following officers now commanded companies: A, Captain Hockley; B, Captain MacDuff; C, Captain Donald; D, Captain Anderson; Headquarters Company, Captain [Farrell](#); ¹⁰ and [Support Group](#), Captain Knox. Major [Steele](#) ¹¹ became second-in-command. The 23rd September brought the great news which the battalion, and B Company especially, had been waiting for impatiently: Keith Elliott had been awarded the Victoria Cross for valour on [Ruweisat Ridge](#).

The Division rehearsed for its attack in the [Alamein](#) line which would follow a month later. The New Zealanders would approach the front under cover of darkness,

send back all tell-tale vehicles, rest all next day dug in and out of sight, go forward again when night returned, and attack in the moonlight. The real assault would go forward on [Miteiriya Ridge](#), to the north of the fateful Ruweisat, and for the rehearsal a patch of desert closely resembling this ridge was chosen. Conditions were made as authentic as possible: minefields (which the sappers swiftly cleared and marked), live ammunition, smoke, tracer, wire, and movements of units duplicated as exactly as possible the assault which was to be made a month later.

At 7 p.m. on 24 September the battalion climbed into its vehicles and moved 11 miles westward along a prudently lighted track to 5 Brigade's assembly area, a rough, dusty ride with the going bad, many vehicles sticking and churning in soft sand. Dug in and keeping as still as possible, the companies rested all next day. In the afternoon the Colonel and the Intelligence Officer joined the Brigadier's reconnaissance of the area chosen for the divisional attack exercise, and placed guides in the battalion forming-up area. That night the battalion marched six miles to where the guides took companies to selected areas, where they dispersed and dug in before midnight. They stood-to for an hour at dawn, and company and platoon commanders made reconnaissances for the night-attack exercise. At 8 p.m. the battalion moved to the start line at a gap in the minefield, where the companies deployed on a 600-yard front in this order:

D Company B Company
A Company C Company

At 11 p.m. the battalion advanced 2660 yards to the second start line, which had been secured by 23 Battalion 'attacking' ahead. Here the battalion front was extended to 1200 yards, and now, with nobody in front, 22 Battalion, advancing close behind the artillery barrage, 'attacked' 2400 yards to the final objective, where positions were organised. The success signal was given at 2 a.m., and the supporting weapons brought up into position. At dawn the battalion was ready to deal with any theoretical counter-attack. Then [General Freyberg](#) held a conference of all officers and NCOs down to sergeant to discuss and criticise the exercise.

While the battalion went on a route march, [Support Group](#) practised weapon training. Lance-Corporal 'Pluto' Hulme's ¹² two-pounder anti-tank crew practised loading live rounds. 'It was quite safe, the firing mechanism had been removed. During smoke someone replaced the firing mechanism—there was nothing

surreptitious about it, the crew were standing around fiddling with the gun as guncrews do, trying the sights, the traverse, firing mechanism. After smokeoh, back into the training. "Action left!" A live round was rammed home, the gun swung round on to the RAP truck with a bigger queue than usual because of the current route march. "Action Right!" The gun swung round on to the 2 i/c's tent: still no fire order. "Action Front!" The gun came round on to the colonel's tent. "Range 700." "Zero." "Fire!" And Private Fred Putt's ¹³ foot pressed the firing pedal.

'The well trained gun crew observed the shot. Right on the mark, but high, it cleared the tent, ricocheted from the ground, and away into the blue. Then it flashed home to everybody that the damned gun was not supposed to go off, at least not then. Apparently the battalion, still on route march, was marching in single file because everyone seemed to think the shot went directly over his head. From that time on, Private Putt, alone among our eight, and later sixteen, guncrews enjoyed the rank and title: "Gunner".'

When the Division's rehearsal for [Alamein](#) was over (further rehearsals on a smaller scale would, of course, follow), the battalion moved back a few miles in a dust-storm and prepared for the brigade ceremonial parade due on the last day of the month. Sixteen Platoon of D Company was two minutes late for the rehearsal parade: beer, in short supply and very precious, was stopped for the whole company. A deeply disturbed meeting delegated Jack Sullivan (canteen representative) to tell the OC that 16 Platoon was prepared to take any punishment (except the beer cut), and it was considered unfair to penalise the whole company. The decision remained, but D Company helped themselves to their beer ration just the same. An alarmist felt that the company 'would be up for mutiny'. After next morning's parade Colonel Campbell arrived, inspected the company, and asked the men to try to bring back the spirit of the old 'Don' Company he once commanded. Then, sending all officers away, he said: 'Sit down men, and you may smoke.' When everyone was comfortable he went on, 'Now tell me all your troubles—what's all this business about the beer?' The Colonel listened patiently, asked why they had not gone to him, and finally said he wanted no more such nonsense. He then appealed to the old hands to give newcomers all possible help, saying that any reinforcement wanting advice should never hesitate to approach an old soldier. 'The company fully appreciated this tactful and understanding manner of dealing with the situation,'

sums up Tom De Lisle, 'and felt that their old OC had endeared himself more than ever to the boys of his old company.' Touches like these were not uncommon between senior officers and their men in the New Zealand Division.

The big parade for General Montgomery passed off happily, a spectacular and heartening sight. The General took the salute, and pinned the VC ribbon on Sergeant Keith Elliott's chest, the DCM on Corporal Ron Garmonsway, and the OBE on Major Steele (which he won while commanding the New Zealand squadron of the [Long Range Desert Group](#)). Addressing the parade through a microphone the General said: 'A magnificent spectacle. I've seen you in action and on parade you're equally good. You've killed Germans before and you'll kill them again.'

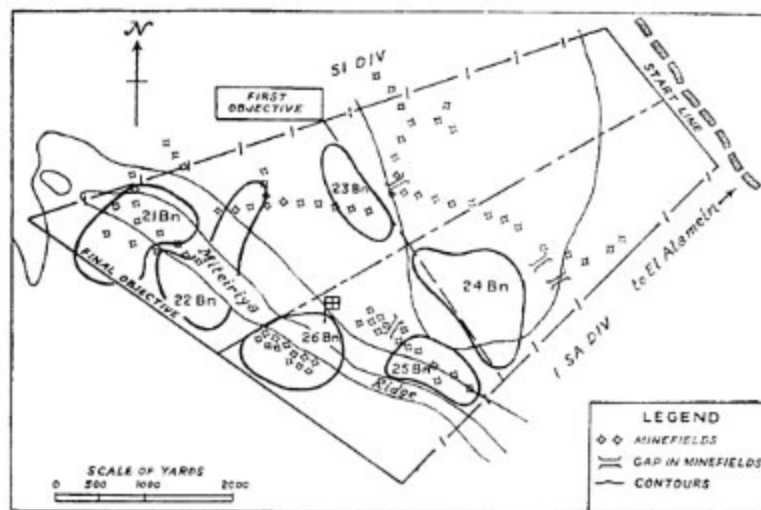
On 19 October, when the battle was drawing close, Padre Champion took a service, preaching on Luke, XII, 2: 'For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.'

'This is the big day and tonight the big show begins. I am writing this in a large slit trench which was conveniently dug by Australians previously,' wrote Lieutenant [Wardell](#).¹⁴ It is a beautiful day, sunny and not too hot so far (10.30). Haddon Donald and other company commanders have been out on a reconnaissance and has just been over to tell me what he has seen. So far I don't know what time zero hour is, it is always a last minute secret. We have buried all our gear except what we stand up in, and it will be collected later.

'A lot of shelling is going on and our planes and German ones are having a scrap right overhead about 20 thousand feet up. I have just been round my men, they are joking and confident about tonight and so am I. I cannot take my diary with me so this will be the last day I record until we get our gear back after this scrap. If it is not continued....'

All along the front the [Eighth Army](#) was about to attack.¹⁵ The New Zealand Division was to attack south-westwards to secure the north-western portion of [Miteiriya Ridge](#) and clear a wedge-shaped patch roughly two miles wide and three and a half miles deep. In 5 Brigade 23 Battalion, setting out at 9.35 p.m. (five minutes before the opening bombardment), would lead the attack, advancing about two miles to capture the first objective, the enemy's foremost defences, just through

the first enemy minefields. Then, at five minutes before midnight, 22 Battalion (on the left) and 21 Battalion (on the right), after moving up 23 Battalion's cleared lane, were to take over from where the 23rd had left off and attack for about another one and a half miles. In 22 Battalion D Company was on the left, C in the centre, B on the right, and A Company in close reserve.



5 AND 6 BRIGADE POSITIONS, DAWN 24 OCTOBER 1942
5 and 6 brigade positions, dawn 24 october 1942

Battalion Headquarters' forward group would follow the rifle companies: Rear Battalion Headquarters would be further back with the head of the Support Column.

Although the strength of 22 Battalion was 35 officers and 628 other ranks, actually less than half of these (310 all ranks) would take part in the attack, and the great burden of casualties would fall, not on the battalion as a whole, but almost exclusively on the riflemen; 129 all ranks from [Support Group](#) were to follow into position immediately the attack succeeded.

One man (who found the [Alamein](#) attack not as terrifying as some actions he had been in), remembers the reassurance of 'all the signs of the attack about to take place before official word reached us—that word was confident, and I think we felt confident too—although there were some mutterings about our tanks. We heard about the great mass of our equipment— guns, tanks, 25 pounders and everything to the last detail seemed to have been taken care of. The picture was confidence—with sometimes just a slight doubt.'

The evening meal—the coolness as the sun set—the full moon rising in the east—the YMCA Mobile Canteen arriving and a man buying a tin of tomato juice, ‘What a wonderful drink it was to quench my thirst and I felt remarkably good although rather nervous—and expectant. We wondered among ourselves just who would and who wouldn't make the objective. But there was none of that dread fear that I have experienced on one or two other occasions. When you feel sick and watery in your stomach or when you can't eat anything, things are getting bad then.’

Padre Champion remembers the moon ‘peeping out from behind a bank of clouds at 5 minutes to 7 p.m. like wishing us “good luck”.’

That evening, 23 October, ‘we had a good meal of stew after dark and then back to our platoon areas,’ continues Wardell, writing up his diary after the battle, ‘where we saw to the rifles and Bren magazines, primed grenades and a last general once over of all our weapons. Then at 8.40 my platoon joined 14 and 15 and we were soon going through ... [a British minefield] through which sappers had cleared a track.’ They were soon just behind 23 Battalion, poised for its advance to the first objective beyond the first enemy minefields. ‘...dug in and waited for the barrage from some of our 800 25-pounders to begin. Approx 200 opened up behind us [at 9.40 p.m.] and the row was terrific; they fired about four shells a minute and kept this up for four hours.’

‘And what a sight!’ adds Mick Kenny. ‘Red flashes all over the place, the air became thick with dust, smoke and burnt cordite. The sound of the Highland Bagpipes and the Maori Battalion doing their war cries. What a scene! Something we can't ever forget.’

‘The shells bursting blew up a large enemy ammo dump and at one time an ammunition truck went sky high and disintegrated on the way down,’ Wardell wrote. ‘This was clearly visible against the continuous glow of shells bursting. The 23 Battalion went off the ... [start line at 9.35 p.m.] and the attack started....’¹⁶

‘All this time we had waited flat on the ground with shells whistling over our heads in incredible numbers; the blast from the bursting shells was so great it was hard to breathe as the wind was knocked out of your lungs. Never had [Alamein](#) known a night like it. Warships were shelling the enemy from the sea, and our

bombers roared overhead dropping enormous loads of flares and bombs.

'For a moment during the lull we heard the pipers from the [Black Watch](#) [the Highland Division was on the right of 5 Brigade], it was a grand sound and an inspiration to us all. Our zero hour [10.30 p.m.] had come and we had our ration of rum which Og Wood and I gave out to the platoons; then we formed up and away to the [first] start line. Still the bombardment went on—it seemed incredible that anyone could live through it; we were soon to find out that they could. They were very well dug in.

'After about 600 yards of perfectly flat desert we came to the [British] minefields and wire entanglements [through which gaps had been cleared], it was brilliant moonlight and we could see the mines and anti-personnel mines on iron standards about a foot above the sand with trip wires to set them off; because of the moonlight we were able to see the mines and trip wires.'

The battalion advanced for forty minutes on a compass bearing of 245 degrees, or practically west-south-west. The men were moving over the ground cleared by 23 Battalion and the Maoris, the latter in a mopping-up role; they had met no hostile fire so far, but closer and closer grew the flashes and noises ahead of machine guns, mortars and shellfire. After forty minutes they saw purple lamps. This was the forming-up area, on 23 Battalion's objective, carefully lit up and marked in advance by the Intelligence Officer, Lieutenant [Butchart](#),¹⁷ and his party, who had followed close behind 23 Battalion. Here a signal was received from Brigade that 23 Battalion had been held up (actually it had gone on beyond its objective), and Colonel Campbell told all companies to be prepared for opposition earlier than they had expected. Shell and mortar fire was being met, and some casualties were caused by shorts in the New Zealand artillery barrage.

The companies fanned out into extended line. The main attack for 22 Battalion began from the second start line (23 Battalion's objective) at fifty-five minutes past midnight.

The attacking companies were well into position in relation to the artillery barrage, now bursting in a violent wave close in front of them. The advance continued at the rate of 100 yards in three minutes, with contact being kept between

Headquarters and the companies. Elements of 23 Battalion met falling back on the left flank said that they had struck heavy opposition further forward. D Company, which had lost contact with 26 Battalion on the left flank, reported that it was held up by strongpoints previously reported by 23 Battalion. C Company went in, wiping out all opposition, and the advance continued.

'The enemy now opened up on us with everything they had,' Wardell continues, 'and their fire was withering. They were obviously expecting us in spite of the utmost secrecy of our previous movements. It seemed impossible that anyone could advance into this fire, but we did. By now we were going through thick dust like fog caused by bursting shells and smoke from bursting shells; it was pinkish to look at as tracer bullets winging through all the time made it so. The enemy used tracer a lot and it was actually possible to avoid machine gun tracer and you could see where it was going and walk beside it as they were firing mostly on fixed lines.'

'We returned their fire with Bren and rifle fired from the hip, also Tommygun. Then a mortar shell landed almost at my feet, blew me up into the air and when I came to I was quite alright, but Hori [Toms](#)¹⁸ my batman had blood pouring from a wound gaping in his hip, and his leg all twisted and broken. Then [Adams](#)¹⁹ got hit badly and his trousers on fire. Sergeant [Reidy](#)²⁰ and I ripped them off. Then [Lofty Veale](#)²¹ then [Simmonds](#)²² and a few more got wounded, and our stretcher bearers following up did great work. We pushed on all the time. The creeping barrage was crashing shells overhead and bursting about 200 yards in front of us. On we went and now right in front of us was a large German machine gun pit with about 7 or 8 Germans firing with all they had; we charged them with Brens, Tommys and grenade and finished them off. Then on again. We had come a long way by this time and still the fire was terrific. Then we were going through a very heavy cloud of dust and smoke, and I got a most terrific whack on my shoulder and a burning pain and I was on the sand again with blood running down my arm onto my chest.'

Contact with the companies was now becoming increasingly difficult because the dust and smoke hanging over the battlefield made visibility bad despite the full moon. Another complication now set in. Some of the attackers advanced too fast (the rate was 100 yards in three minutes), and when the 25- pounders opened up after the next lift, 'the shells tore down and crashed around us.'

Wardell was now out of the battle, so another man takes up the tale: 'There was much ducking and diving around us as we got back behind them. The dust and stuff from the barrage was dimming the moon, and it wasn't always easy to see or keep contact. At least two of us got out of position, saw an n.c.o. from the company behind us, asked him which company he was, and he jumped in the air and jabbered and roared and we were treated to the finest exhibition of "scone-doing" we ever saw in the army. He was waving his arms around in the air and by what we could make of it he reckoned we should be further ahead.' The two men regained their places and carried on, a little peeved at perhaps being mistaken for deserters.

'I don't think we noticed half the stuff coming our way because of the noise of our own guns. But now and again you would notice a man stagger or fall or do something that told you he had been hit—then a chap near spun round, dropped his rifle and grabbed his ankle and said: "The bastards have got me". Then one of our jokers a few yards to my left and slightly in front of me, he must have spotted something for as I glanced his way he was standing with his legs well apart, and just as I looked there was a flash right between his legs and just in front of him: he seemed to pull back a bit but then carried on again. Now and again we passed the dead body of one of the enemy—each lying in its own special position.'

Despite the dust clouds the advance halted according to plan at the pause of the artillery barrage at 1.40 a.m. Colonel Campbell visited all the company commanders and, finding that C Company had suffered heavy casualties, ordered A Company to take over a forward role in the centre, with C Company moving back into the reserve position. D Company was still on the left. Lieutenant Wood had been killed and two other officers wounded in C Company, in which only thirty other ranks remained to take part in the final phase of the attack. Corporal Lacy Craig had become the commander of his platoon, and was discharging his duties with considerable skill and judgment.

B Company (on the right), extraordinarily enough at this stage, had met no opposition, but one of its men had been killed and another wounded.

The advance was resumed at 1.55 a.m. into heavy shell and mortar fire and some machine-gun fire. Mick Kenny in A Company saw it like this: 'To be advancing and seeing tracers coming towards you, hissing past, shells bursting around, being

met by whizzing dirt, seeing comrades blown over, challenging dugouts, getting Ities out at Bayonet point, over-running dugouts and to be fired at from behind—what a night! However, Lieutenant O'Reilly who carried on, although wounded, got us to our objective—a great effort for a wounded officer.'

About this stage a particular enemy machine gun, firing on fixed lines, kept putting short strings of tracer at an angle through the battalion's line of advance. A man in C Company (which was following behind A Company) could 'see several points of light appear far ahead and sail gracefully and quite slowly towards you, then as they got near you they would seem to speed up and dart past then go serenely on until they disappeared somewhere behind. It came to the time when I had to pass through its line of fire so I kept a sharp lookout ahead then got onto the other side as quickly as possible without getting out of line too much.'

Soon victory was within grasp, for at last the battalion was moving up the northern slopes of [Miteiriya Ridge](#) itself. Rear Battalion Headquarters group joined the forward headquarters, and the mopping-up party from [28 Battalion](#) was in close and thorough attendance at the rear. This detachment from the [Maori Battalion](#) also gave brief and invaluable attention to the wounded, thrusting dropped rifles in the sand bayonet first as a guide for stretcher-bearers. A wounded man remembered the dead 'surrounded by great dark patches in the sand, their faces looking ghastly in the moonlight.'

B Company still kept touch with 21 Battalion on the right flank, but contact with the centre company had been lost just short of the ridge. B Company had suffered further casualties by this time, losing two killed and twenty wounded. As the leading infantry, thinning fast but undaunted, crested the ridge they struck intense fire from enemy machine-gun posts which were not at that time hampered by the artillery barrage. Quickly sizing up the situation, Captain MacDuff placed some of his Bren guns in position to return the fire, and rushed the remainder of his men virtually on to the edge of the barrage with great skill, stamping out the enemy practically before the artillery had lifted. This swift action undoubtedly minimised casualties in the rest of the battalion and enabled it to reach its objectives according to plan. For this action MacDuff won the Military Cross.

By now all companies had met strong opposition, and heavy duelling with

automatic weapons was taking place on the battalion front. A Company, in the confusion of the attack, had eased over to the left, and just before reaching the final objective met Battalion Headquarters. This company also had suffered during the assault: one killed, twenty wounded and seven missing so far, and every man with his own particular narrow-escape story. 'On one occasion while we were lying on our stomachs waiting for the barrage to lift I felt what seemed like a worm give a wriggle in the back of my shirt—only it felt hot.' Later this man found that the bullet, after entering the top of his haversack, had gone through a packet of army biscuits ('incredible') and then a tin of bully, and had broken in two; one part had passed out through the bottom of the haversack, and the other fragment had smashed the haversack's buckle.

D Company had lost touch with 26 Battalion after moving through the wire, and the relative positions of A and D Companies in the line of advance had been reversed. C Company (despite its losses and its return to reserve position) had again gone forward with D Company, and all four companies took part in the advance to the final objective. D Company struck its first enemy posts at 2.20 a.m., but these and further enemy strongpoints were routed until the final objective was gained. Even then the company did not halt—the same company which had been appealed to over the 'beer strike' four weeks ago. D Company (and, in fact, most of the battalion) attacked a further 600 yards, taking sixty prisoners, while C Company also moved forward and accounted for a number of prisoners, as well as killing many of the enemy remaining in their pits.

During the advance over the ridge Battalion Headquarters had been seriously depleted and divided. The wireless set had gone astray and communication with Brigade lost, while A and C Companies' sets were out of action. A company from 23 Battalion (which had overshot its objective) was met, but luckily these troops made themselves known very quickly.

In the final stages of the attack the battalion endured intense bombardment from mortar and airburst shells, but by 2.35 a.m. all the companies had reported reaching their objectives. Unfortunately the men carrying the rocket flares were either wounded or missing, and not until 3.15 a.m. was Colonel Campbell able to fire the success signal. The attack had gone entirely to plan and the objectives detailed in operational orders had been taken. A further 600 yards of enemy territory also

had been exploited successfully, many of the enemy killed, and some 150 prisoners taken. Throughout the attack the battalion had not strayed from the correct axis of advance and had been under full control and in contact with Headquarters. The Intelligence Officer and his party, doing exceptionally good work in the marking of the forming-up areas and in laying the start line, had contributed to the success.

The casualties, 110 altogether, undoubtedly were heavy, but considering the opposition and the final success, these losses were not thought unduly high. Nevertheless, one man in every three in the actual attack had become a casualty—such is the lot of the infantryman. Further grim work was ahead, for the companies still had to consolidate. Although they had advanced an extra 600 yards, they now drew back, and while consolidating, still under heavy shell and mortar fire, suffered more casualties. Captain Donald (C Company), who had been wounded earlier, returned to the field after his wound was dressed, and was wounded again. Lieutenant Butchart, who had stayed with the forward companies after laying out the start line, was killed while trying to raise Headquarters over a No. 18 wireless set; the shell also killed the signaller alongside him.

The battalion had consolidated by 4.30 a.m., with its foremost positions about 1000 yards beyond the crest of Miteiriya Ridge, and Battalion Headquarters was established on the reverse slope by 5 a.m. Prisoners taken during the attack were handed over to the most helpful and capable A Company [Maori Battalion](#), under Major [Bennett](#).²³ The battalion stretcher-bearers had worked nobly, their work being exemplified by cool and fearless Corporal Frank [Blackett](#),²⁴ who won the Military Medal. In charge of the stretcher-bearers attached to B Company, Blackett collected, attended, and sent out all of the twenty men wounded in the company during the attack, and also attended the wounded from other companies who could not be moved. He and his fellow stretcher-bearers were under extremely heavy shell and mortar fire. When tied down by enemy fire towards the end of the attack, Blackett dug in his remaining wounded until he could shift them. Next day, returning to his company, he did not spare himself and moved round under machine-gun fire to bring in further casualties.

Just before dawn on 24 October the most welcome sound of the 'Scorpion' group and battalion support party could be heard approaching from the rear, and then, true

enough, the sound of tanks. The Colonel sent a party to comb a strip of ground to the left of a marked minefield at the foot of the ridge. The party found this patch clear of mines. The first twelve to fifteen tanks got to the strip safely, but the next tank, foolishly taking a short cut to the right, ran on to the minefield. Others followed, and four were crippled. Vehicles streamed up and milled about this place; some suffered the same fate. The whole of the battalion area was still under heavy shelling. The support weapons, delayed by the minefield further back, were late in arriving, and only two two-pounders were able to get into position. The remaining anti-tank guns and medium machine guns were forced to go into position behind the ridge, for the forward positions were being heavily and continually shelled.

The Support Group had met its own difficulties getting up and into position, as Bart Cox ²⁵ explains:

The barrage still shattered the night. The assault troops had moved forward long since. **Support Group** were given the order to move. The long slow crawl forward—nose to tail—losing the vehicle ahead in the dust—the gap in the minefield [cleared by New Zealand sappers]—the wrecked Scorpion blocking the cleared track. The long hours—barrage still thundered—D.A.K. [Deutsch Afrika Korps] and Italians spat back fitfully. The sky lightening as dawn broke, and just as it became light the sudden activity as **Support Group** were diverted to the right and through the gap cleared for 51st Highland Division. [This diversion prevented trouble ahead where the four tanks were shortly to be crippled.]

Trucks and carriers trailed through the dust of the gap, swung left again, and raced across the front in daylight. Jerry threw everything at them, they should have been a perfect target—a gunner's dream. Then into the comparative shelter of the ridge. 'No. 1 gun here.' 'No. 2 there' and so on. Our long training stood us in good stead as ramps were flung into position—guns eased onto the ramps— wheels locked into position—ramps stowed away—ammunition off— and away went the portees.

'Dig in.' 'Just a minute, we'll have to change your position.' 'Pack up again.' 'Can't they ever make up their ... minds?' A jeep draws up—the gun is hooked on—a few boxes of ammo. flung aboard—shovels and picks—and away goes the gun and two men. Two more walk across carrying rifles and bren—the fifth man stacks up the

gear left behind and makes his own way. The shells still scream over, odd ones coming close.

The new position is about 20-30 yards back from the ridge facing a break—just a shallow depression breaking the line of the ridge. By no means a good anti tank site, but our tanks haven't come up (they never do) and that gap must be covered. It's a one shot position—either you get him in the belly as he breasts the rise or — you've had it. Hope he doesn't sit hull down and stick his gun through, but he couldn't do that—on a slope the other side— couldn't depress his gun sufficiently—we hope. Dig, Dig, Dig.

No.4 plods back and forth. A box of ammo. and a pick—another box of ammo. and the cleaning rod—and so it goes on.

'Here come our tanks.'

Looking back they can see clouds of dust and occasional glimpses of tanks through the dust. One or two draw up close and sit hull down behind the ridge. Someone yells 'Hell, look at that.' A long line of tanks breaks through the gloom. One, two, three—no use trying to count them as they appear and vanish in the gathering dust.

'They can't be ours. Too many of them.' To old desert digs who have waited so often in vain for our tanks to arrive it seemed too good to be true. But it is true, and they are ours—an endless stream pulling in to form a wall of steel along the ridge where a short time before a lone 2 pounder crew weighed up their chances of a lucky belly shot as the first Jerry tank came over the rise and then— curtains.

It was The Dawn for the New Zealanders, for the Eighth Army, in many more senses than one.

'Scorpions' flailed and cleared a path through the minefields on the top of the ridge. A number of tanks from the attached armour moved through. A small tank battle developed. Battalion Headquarters, now within twenty yards of the gap in the minefield which had become the enemy's target, had a hot time until 10 a.m., when it moved a little and set itself up on the reverse slope of the ridge.

A glimpse of the 'small tank battle' mentioned above was seen by Bart Cox:

[Some Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry and [Staffordshire Yeomanry](#)] tanks lined up on the ridge—others in the narrow area between ridge and minefield. Odd ones burning. A Crusader manoeuvring near the R.A.P. hit a mine—crew baled out, but tank did not brew up.

Spasmodic firing. Officers sitting on ground with maps behind a tank. A runner dashes up, comes to attention, salutes, hands over a signal, stands at attention while officer reads message. 'What, salute in the middle of a bl... battle' a New Zealander gasps in horror. 'B... must be mad.' The runner took a smart pace forward, accepted a reply from the officer, saluted, wheeled and doubled away. Discipline took on a new meaning to sundry old desert digs.

A tank is hit and brews up over the ridge. The crew bale out and stumble back to safety, their hands and faces burnt horribly. Their faces are black—seared—except for those queer white patches around the eyes where the men had screwed up their faces as the blast hit them. Their hands are burnt and useless, they hold them up in front of their chests. They do not say much—just stand mute—shocked—in agony.

Willing hands lead them away to a jeep, and their officer speaks. 'These good people are going to take us to the R.A.P. Very good of them. Is the seat of my pants still on fire? Would someone mind putting it out for me? Can't use my hands. Well, don't waste time lads, and hurry back, THERE'S MORE KILLING TO BE DONE.'

This morning 'Tiny' Revell, D Company's quartermaster, in his most conspicuous lorry driven by Jack Ford, made a trip up to the battalion with Captain Crarer, who told Ford 'to pull up in an area littered with weapons of various kinds, greatcoats, and one or two bodies. There were two or three tanks quite close with their crews sheltering beneath them and one valiant Pongo was boiling his billy, for shai, on yet another that was still burning. Crarer said we were to pick up everything in sight and await his return.' 'Tiny' Revell continues: 'The Pongos proceeded to remonstrate with us in their language, begging us to take our something 3 tonner elsewhere before the 88s got the range. Unfortunately the 88s were quick off the mark and loading that truck lives with me yet. We did it between shell bursts and in the process discovered two terrified little Eyeties hiding under some discarded greatcoats: two

unwilling workers added to the party. Just then a light tank or A/c. came on the scene with [Freyberg](#) standing up through the hatch complete with binoculars. "Who is old—with the red hat?" said the nearest Pongo. "That's 'Tiny' [Freyberg](#) the G.O.C.," I said and Jack and I started work again. We were stooping at the tail of the truck to raise it when a shell burst painfully close, blowing both of us over and throwing shattered rock etc. into the truck. When the terror left me I found that I had snuggled under a blanket covering the body of Arnold [Widdowson](#) ²⁶.... I promptly stood up and Jack Ford called out to me "Are you all right [Tiny](#)?" At the time [Freyberg](#)'s tank was stationary a few yards away and the G.O.C. turned, waved, said "I'm fine", and the Pongos said: "Ee what a Fred Karno's Army." ²⁷

The battalion expected a counter-attack at noon. Twenty to twenty-five enemy tanks, with infantry in support, had moved in to within 400 yards of its front. The situation looked critical. When two tense hours had passed, it became obvious that this move was only for the purpose of establishing forward infantry.

The tanks in support of the battalion, as well as the artillery, fired continuously during the rest of the afternoon. Hostile shells, machine-gun and snipers' fire brought further casualties among the forward companies: 'terrific mortar shells bursting in the air spitting death as the shrapnel fell down.' A nearby couple were not as lucky as the observer just quoted. 'Bob and I in the same slittie: the next thing I remember was waking to find my tin hat jammed down over my ears (the sandbag-covering stuff on it was ripped to threads). I think we were only stunned for a few seconds. When I looked at Bob he was looking at me as though he was just coming to his senses too. We looked at each other, collecting our senses, and then I saw blood all over his face and hands, then he gave one look at his hand and said: "Aw, hell."'

[Support Group](#), about 500 yards to the rear and slightly to the right of Battalion Headquarters, also came under heavy shelling. At 6 p.m. D and C Companies were ordered to withdraw over the ridge to behind Battalion Headquarters. Captain Oldham, who had taken over command of C Company, while moving back over the ridge trod on and exploded a mine. One man was killed and six wounded, including the captain.

The signallers laid lines to company areas during the night. The battalion anti-

tank guns and attached machine guns and six-pounders moved into forward positions. Two two-pounder and two six-pounder anti-tank guns were held in reserve. The 'Q' staff, established with A Echelon, arrived at 8 p.m. with an unforgettable hot meal. The padre, under constant shelling, got up safely too, and the RAP was set up within a mile behind Battalion Headquarters. Lieutenant [McKirdy](#),²⁸ with an A Company patrol, passed beyond the foremost positions and returned to report enemy minelaying parties 1000 yards in front of the battalion.

Except for the sentries, the troops settled down to snatch as much sleep as possible, marred by intermittent shellfire and bombing attacks by single enemy planes on the tank unit's headquarters over to the left. Pickets on duty all through the night reported no particular alarms. Soon, however, A Company was to suffer unnecessarily. It was mistakenly relieved by a unit from Sussex Regiment and then was ordered back again. 'What a royal welcome Jerry gave us when he saw us going back still in broad daylight: mortar fire, machine-gun fire—the air was blue, not only with smoke but with oaths—someone had blundered.'²⁹ One man at a time dashed across the open ground. 'Bluey' [Sapsford](#)³⁰ was killed and two wounded. Slit trenches, when reached, of course were full of the English troops until they pulled out. A lull—a sergeant called out to keep heads down, then suddenly a resounding bang—the dust clearing... poor "Tich" [Tichborne](#)³¹ had copped it. That night we wended our way to see Captain Hockley and reported to him our misfortune, and Captain Hockley that night read the last rites for "Tich" while his comrades gathered around.'

Another sad loss that day was [Sergeant-Major Bob Bayliss](#), one of the battalion's outstanding soldiers. He was killed while trying to silence an anti-tank gun.'... and it wasn't hard to picture his effort, or the reason for it,' wrote somebody who afterwards visited the scene, 'because hard by the position was a British tank with the crew still inside looking very calm in their death.'

No counter-attack broke on the battalion's front. The stolid British tanks (now winning their spurs back again with the New Zealanders) fired most hearteningly at any enemy objectives from hull-down positions on the ridge. Signallers worked untiringly to keep their lines open. C Company, cut up, was disbanded, its men sent to the three remaining rifle companies. Lieutenant Cross took over command of D Company, which moved briefly out to protect a minelaying party of engineers. A

Company (which suffered two casualties through bombing in the early hours of 27 October) extended its area to cover a gap where a platoon from 26 Battalion had been captured.

The shellfire 'wasn't so bad at first—just one shell at a time, I should think about a minute between each, but as time went on and each one landed in the area somewhere near a slit trench, it began to get on the nerves. One would come over and crash down somewhere around. If it was close you would see (from where you were lying in your shallow slittie) a ragged thin dirty coloured cloud drifting through the air; sometimes it cast a light shadow as it went across the sun. Then you waited for the faint first whispering sound of the next one, then the sound would increase in volume and down she would crash again. Then there would be momentarily a feeling of relief that that one didn't have your name on it, but then you started to wonder where the next one was going to land. This type of shelling (I thought) was the worst on the nerves of all the enemy's ways of making war which I experienced.'

[General Freyberg](#) visited the battalion again on 27 October and inspected with Colonel Campbell the land ahead of [Miteiriya Ridge](#). Arriving alone at B Company headquarters, he joined Captain MacDuff and members of B Company in a mug of shai, waved towards a distant tank battle, and remarked: 'Out there history is being made.' Vicious shelling spread later in the afternoon, but an advance party from the Transvaal Scottish reconnoitred the area, and news that the battalion was to be relieved was confirmed at 11 p.m., when the battalion changed over with the South Africans, embussed in RMT lorries, and drove back via Star track to the rest area before dawn. 'And has anyone ever noticed how peaceful it is just to lie back on the good old desert sand and let the good old sun shine on you?'

[Miteiriya Ridge](#) had given the battalion another hard knock with 25 killed, 114 wounded, 12 missing: altogether 151 casualties. This was the battalion's last, and most creditable, battle in the desert.

Breaking the [Alamein](#) line took eleven bloody days. The Axis defences sprawled back four or five miles. Four nights after seizing [Miteiriya Ridge](#), the New Zealanders were withdrawn. [Eighth Army](#) kept up the pressure, but no signs of a break-through came until after 2 November when Operation Supercharge, controlled by New Zealand Divisional Headquarters, smashed through to [Tell el Aqqaqir](#) (north of

Miteiriya Ridge) under an even heavier artillery barrage. A decisive tank battle ended the days of Rommel's victories in Africa. British tanks, heedless of casualties and opposition, swept forward most gallantly, charging, fighting, and overrunning enemy positions and guns; and on 3 November the headlong stampede back to Libya began. Next day the New Zealanders moved out through the breach in pursuit.

Eight days later, on 11 November, one year exactly after the move from Baggush towards the frontier forts, 22 Battalion crossed over into Libya, then turned to unloading work at the port of Sollum. There three small raids by three unescorted bombers on 15 November brought three casualties, one of whom, Lance-Corporal Stone,³² died of wounds next day. General Freyberg arrived with the news that the battalion would be turned into a highly mobile unit attached to the New Zealand armoured brigade being formed in Maadi. Before 9 a.m. on 17 November 22 Battalion was heading east, > Maadi-bound, its days of desert campaigning over.

The convoy pulled into Maadi Camp, passed Shafto's theatre, turned left, passed 4 Brigade's area, the Church Army hut, and continued out into the 'tiger country' of 'U' Area, right alongside the camp prison, known as 'Rock College'. It was a desolate area—a few tents were up, piles of others waiting to be erected, a few cookhouses, but it was to be 'home' for the battalion for almost a year.

'Next day a parade was called,' writes Sergeant Bart Cox. 'We were to be inspected by Brig. Inglis. Gear was to be cleaned—rifles and bayonets were to be removed from their cocoons of oil, rust, and sand—boots to be polished. It was hopeless to try to improve the desert-stained battlestained clothing, but an effort must be made.

'The day of the parade arrived. Subalterns gazed horror-struck at the array of dusty, creased and stained uniforms, battered glengarrys covered with soot and oil, and the rifles and bayonets!!! (No comment.) Senior officers were tight lipped. Most of the officers and men had at some time or another served under the Brig., especially when he was in command of the Training Depot. They recalled with horror those battalion parades when every Company had been inspected in detail, and after each Company was inspected its O.C. had been instructed to march away the shattered remnants of his command, while the Brig., the light of battle in his eyes, swept on to the next victims. Officers and men recalled these events—the men not

so vividly, for they had little to lose—but to the officers the outlook was grim.

“Bunty” [Cowper](#)³³ summed up the position when he looked at one of his men—recoiled—came back for another look—and said, “No matter what the Brigadier says to you, don't say a word unless he asks you a direct question. Then agree with him, agree with anything he says. Only thing you can do in a case like this is to hit him over the head with your rifle. Better not do that.”

‘But they did not know the Brig. Those old days in 32nd Battalion, they had been raw recruits—new officers. He had been hammering them into shape. Now they were his boys— part of his command—they were trained men—this was different.

‘On battalion parade things went as usual, only more so. It seemed as though officers and senior N.C.O.'s conscious of the obvious deficiencies in their men's appearance would make up for it by immaculate dressing and drill. Came the Brig—General Salute—etc. etc.—and here it comes!—but no, instead of inspecting his men, he stood in front of them, beckoned with his hands and said, “Close in, I want to speak to you.” And he spoke to them, welcomed them to the [4th Brigade](#), told them of future plans, and apologised to them. Yes, Apologised! He explained that although he knew 22nd were to come under his command, he did not know until the advance party arrived a few hours before the Battalion, that we were on the way. So he apologised because our tents had not been erected, because the area was not prepared for us. He thanked us for the parade and departed amid a flurry of salutes. And the pent up breath of every officer, held since the car with the blue pennant first rolled up, was released in one long Phew!! And 22nd Battalion was received into the bosom of [4th Brigade](#).’

¹ [Cpl J. T. Lines](#); born [West Coast](#), 27 May 1905; boot repairer.

² The company commanders and seconds-in-command were:HQ Coy, Capt K. R. S. Crarer, 2 Lt J. P. Farrell; A Coy, Maj D. G. Steele, Capt P. R. Hockley; B Coy, Capt J. L. MacDuff, [Capt A. J. Young](#); C/D Coy, Capt D. F. Anderson, Capt F. G. Oldham.

³ L-Cpl H. M Sansum; [Wellington](#); born Barry, Wales, 13 Jan 1905; clerk.

⁴ WO II C. Whitty; Christchurch; born Christchurch, 23 Oct 1913; salesman.

⁵ Maj J. L. Webster, m.i.d.; born NZ 24 Dec 1912; agent; wounded 4 Sep 1942; died of wounds 20 Dec 1944.

⁶ Sgt H. R. Jensen; Dannevirke; born Dannevirke, 12 May 1919; grocer.

⁷ Pte H. S. Orr; born Wanganui, 3 Sep 1918; labourer; died of wounds 13 Sep 1942.

⁸ Sgt L. T. McClurg, DCM; born Chatham Islands, 19 Mar 1918; labourer; wounded 4 Sep 1942.

⁹ WO I R. L. Craig, MM; Otorohanga; born Mangaweka, 28 Apr 1905; farmer.

¹⁰ Capt J. P. Farrell; Hastings; born Australia, 9 Apr 1912; land agent and valuer.

¹¹ Lt-Col D. G. Steele, OBE, m.i.d.; Rotorua; born Wellington, 22 Mar 1912; farmer; OC A (NZ) Sqn LRDG 1941-42; CO 22 (Mot) Bn 18 Apr-11 May 1944; 27 (MG) Bn May-Nov 1944.

¹² 2 Lt I. G. Hulme; born NZ 1 Aug 1914; clerk; wounded 3 Aug 1944.

¹³ Pte F. E. Putt; New Plymouth; born NZ 9 Apr 1919; farmhand.

¹⁴ Capt R. Wardell; Masterton; born Masterton, 21 Dec 1910; farmer; wounded 24 Oct 1942.

¹⁵ This was the plan: 30 Corps between the coast and Miteiriya Ridge, was to attack with (from right to left) 9 Australian, 51 (Highland), 2 New Zealand and 1 South African Divisions. South of 30 Corps, 13 Corps was to make diversionary attacks. Two lanes were to be cleared through 30 Corps' sector for the passage of the armour of 10 Corps; the southern lane,

through 2 NZ Division, was to cross [Miteiriya Ridge](#). 2 NZ Division was to secure the north-western portion of this ridge with 5 Brigade on the right and 6 Brigade on the left. 23 Battalion (right) and 24 Battalion (left) were to capture the first objective, the foremost enemy defences, and in the second phase of the attack 21 and 22 Battalions (5 Brigade) were to pass through 23 Battalion, and 26 and 25 Battalions (6 Brigade) through 24 Battalion, to take the final objective (the ridge). In both phases the Maoris were to mop up behind the assaulting battalions. The engineers were to clear gaps through the minefields and mark lanes for [9 Armoured Brigade](#) (under the command of 2 NZ Division) and the supporting weapons.

¹⁶ The 900 medium and field guns certainly opened the heaviest bombardment so far in [Africa](#)—but only 104 guns covered the New Zealand front, each gun firing on a lane 24 yards wide and increasing later (as the New Zealand front widened) to 46 yards—in fact, despite the shellbursts and the dust clouds, a very thin barrage for the infantrymen.

¹⁷ [Lt D. J. W. Butchart](#); born NZ 3 Jan 1916; journalist; killed in action 24 Oct 1942.

¹⁸ [Pte H. Toms](#); [Rotorua](#); born [Taihape](#), 14 Sep 1917; farm labourer; twice wounded.

¹⁹ [Pte C. C. Adams](#); born [Palmerston North](#), 19 Jun 1908; labourer; died of wounds 24 Oct 1942.

²⁰ [Capt D. M. Reidy](#); [Palmerston North](#); born [Waipukurau](#), 28 Apr 1912; canvasser.

²¹ [Pte W. L. Veale](#); born [Auckland](#), 3 Sep 1910; waterside worker; twice wounded.

²² [Pte A. G. Simmonds](#); born [Wellington](#), 28 May 1906; iron moulder; wounded 24 Oct 1942; killed in action 2 Dec 1943.

²³ [Lt-Col C. M. Bennett](#), DSO; [Wellington](#); born [Rotorua](#), 27 Jul 1913; radio announcer; [CO 28 \(Maori\) Bn](#), Nov 1942-Apr 1943; wounded 20 Apr 1943.

²⁴ Sgt F. J. Blackett, MM; Lower Hutt; born NZ 16 Sep 1913; engineer.

²⁵ Sgt B. A. Cox; Christchurch; born Christchurch, 10 Sep 1909; accountant.

²⁶ Lt A. F. Widdowson; born Timaru, 29 Apr 1913; farm labourer; killed in action 24 Oct 1942

²⁷ A First World War song, sung to the tune of the hymn 'The Church's One Foundation', went like this:

We are Fred Karno's Army,
The ragtime infantry,
We cannot fight, we cannot shoot,
What earthly use are we! etc.

Fred Karno was an English Edwardian music-hall comedian, an artist in the portrayal of comic inefficiency, whose acts rose to a climax of misunderstanding, hopeless confusion, disintegration and despair.

²⁸ Capt C. McKirdy; born NZ 25 Apr 1917; clerk.

²⁹ 5 Brigade received a warning order in the evening of 24 October that it was to be relieved by 133 Lorried Infantry Brigade next day. No such relief took place, but the expectation that it would caused some confusion in 22 Battalion. B, C and D Companies were withdrawn to the transport area near Brigade Headquarters on the morning of 25 October, and only A Company (MacDuff) remained on the forward slope of Miteiriya Ridge. The following morning (the 26th) A Company, believing that it was to be relieved, also withdrew, but was ordered to return while on the way out. C Company was disbanded and its men were absorbed into the other three rifle companies. On the night of 26-27 October B Company went back into position on the ridge. D Company protected a party of engineers laying mines in the evening of 26 October and went into position behind Battalion Headquarters next morning.

³⁰ Pte E. S. Sapsford; born Wellington, 31 Mar 1912; postman; killed in action 26 Oct 1942.

³¹ Pte F. T. Tichborne; born Australia, 15 Aug 1914; slaughterman; killed in action 26 Oct 1942.

³² L-Cpl J. N. Stone; born Wellington, 16 Apr 1908; market gardener; died of wounds 16 Nov 1942.

³³ Capt W. H. Cowper; born Dannevirke, 27 May 1912; farm manager; killed in action 1 Jun 1944.

22 BATTALION

CHAPTER 8 – TO ITALY

CHAPTER 8

To Italy

And we went on doing more training and more route marching with now and again the usual fatigues, guards, etc.: groups dotted round the area on lectures, weapon training, and so on, and on such occasions rifles weren't always within reach.¹ At this particular time a 'blitz' was on over rifles left lying around by their owners. So one day groups looked up, grateful for the diversion of Colonel Campbell marching towards Battalion Headquarters, a rifle in his hand, and a soldier, without rifle, hurrying along behind and rapidly closing the gap. Another real funny sight in the army I reckon was when one-stop-two was in progress and a group of men were marching along with rifles at the slope and an order was given (say one that wasn't heard properly, or say an unexpected order for change of direction), and you saw about half the men turning one way and half the other way. If ever men looked ridiculous it was then—all marching in opposite directions—so intent—with rifles sloping back.

Small groups, given compasses, would be sent out at night with a bearing and the distance in yards to some rock. All going well, they looked under the right rock and found a slip of paper with further directions. So it went on (usually about four rocks), and then home. One night a party from 2 Company, on the last lap looking under various rocks, found a bundle of notes, about £6. Discreet inquiries brought nothing, the finder took his friends to the canteen, and this, for at least twenty New Zealanders ('it looked suspicious'), was the greatest unsolved mystery of the Second World War.

When the battalion received its own trucks, tinned foods were collected for section boxes. Soon each ammunition box was well stocked with stores, ranging from lowly bully beef, margarine, cheese, evaporated milk ('Pet' brand), milk powder, condensed milk, coffee-and-milk preparation and ground coffee to such delicacies as tinned fruit, toheroas, and oysters. Evening snacks grew in variety, quality and quantity.

The officers' mess had a cook beyond description and praise. In the evening he would come to the officers, wait respectfully until he caught the eye of the Adjutant,

and murmur: 'Dinner is ready when you wish, gentlemen.' The Adjutant, waiting an opportunity, would tell the second-in-command, who at his leisure would inform the Colonel. 'Of course this priceless cook had to leave us on furlough, to be replaced by an unpolished Kiwi. The first night he took over, in collarless grey shirt, he burst in among the officers, pointed a hairy arm accusingly at Colonel Campbell, and shouted gruffly: "She's cooked!"'

And some days we went bumping on the trucks across the desert to those wadis at the back of [Maadi](#) and 'attacked' various positions, firing our small arms as we ran. When we did those 'attacks' certain ones of us had to lie down as we were 'shot.' Old 'Cactus' said: 'X—was a good officer. When we did those "attacks" he used to yell out at me "Lay down! You're shot!" early in the "attacks"— he could see I couldn't keep up to those young jokers.' And sometimes, while mucking about out there, we would stop and pick up a bit of fossilized wood (pieces lay thick on the ground in patches) and wonder how long it was since trees grew in this God-forsaken patch of desert. And we used to go for swims at [Maadi](#) baths (sometimes we'd route-march down) and to concerts (often by famous stars) at EI Djem.

Larry Adler, the famous American harmonica player, gave a show, and when he finished [General Freyberg](#) got up (this was after the end of the African campaign) and made a very appreciative speech. He ended up by saying: 'And thank you again, Mister—er—er—' (somebody next to him whispered in his ear)'—er—yes, Mister Larry Adler.' And Larry Adler then got up and made a very appreciative speech, and ended up by turning to the General and saying: 'And thank you again, General—er—er—' (and the boys, overjoyed, roared ' [Freyberg](#) ') '—er—yes, [General Freyberg](#)'

And we received reinforcements. Received them with no outward show of enthusiasm. It wasn't till they showed that they fitted in to the team that they became one of us. Then we stopped calling them 'those new jokers'.

A young officer arrived from the [Pacific](#) (where he had taken the war very seriously; he was making the Army his career) and joined the battalion. What he saw and heard shocked him professionally: discipline wasn't tight; sometimes there seemed to be no discipline at all; everyone was living on past achievements; judging by their behaviour certain officers obviously could not hold the command (and respect) of their men when it came to the crucial test of battle. It hurt him, and

finally in March 1943 he wrote home to his wife: 'Perhaps I am mistaken but sometimes I feel that some of the officers here don't quite accept me because I haven't been in action yet. Sometimes the attitude of certain members of the mess makes me mad.... Some of these birds who have been here for a while have a horrible complex, they know everything and just can't be taught. If a few of them would get a little less shickered and do a little more work it would do the world of good. I'm no wowser, but they drink far too much round here and if you can tell me men who do that can do a decent job of work, well, I'll eat my hat....'

His opinions 'certainly were shaken a bit' by the performance of officers and men on the 100-mile route march before the Division embarked for [Italy](#), and shortly after his first battle in [Italy](#) he was writing home critically to his wife: 'I must say some of these new reinforcements turning up....' So it has been since the first reinforcements joined in the first tribal wars.

One of the things that first struck me [another man, not the officer] when I joined the battalion was the rough and ready ways of the jokers—especially in their dress. Later on I had more time to think about it. And it appeared that among the many styles in the mess queue the one that was most popular was something like this. On the head a cap-comforter or a balaclava pulled down and then turned back up until it came to about the ears. (These were worn when the weather was cold.) In the hotter weather if you wore a shirt it was worn loosely, hanging from the shoulders down over the top of your shorts (not tucked in) and unbuttoned down the front (to clearly show your identity discs). Then on the feet you wore either tennis shoes or boots and socks (no hose tops or puttees). Glengarrys weren't popular, but sometimes you would see a lemon-squeezer [felt hat]—but not worn in the orthodox boy scout or Base style—but usually with the crown dented in all round and minus badge and usually minus puggaree. (And sometimes, as a salute to our sister Dominion across the Tasman, one side of the brim was turned up.)

Then there was all that moaning that went on regarding the front-line troops, B Echelon, and Base—the first throwing the dirt at the second—and the second throwing the dirt at the third. And, just quietly, how many jokers joining the battalion saw one action and then got into B Ech smartly, there to enjoy all the changes, sights and freedom of battalion life without running any great risk, especially after [Alamein](#) and our air superiority, and then thoroughly abused all at

Base, with its tediousness, red tape, etc.? I often wonder, if Base wallahs had been given the choice of staying where they were or going to B Ech, how many would have stayed at Base? Also, if B Ech had been given the choice of going either to Base or the front line, how many would have gone to the latter? Of course I don't mean that they were all like the above by any means.

But at [Maadi](#) (before going to [Italy](#)) we togged up, and the dhobi did improved business as we went to [Cairo](#) on leave in our neatly pressed KD shirts, shorts and slacks—with a handkerchief tied neatly round your neck. And a lot took to wearing shoes and those long turned-down socks—and some went so far as to buy a pair of desert boots.

And how many injections was it you were supposed to have if you fell in the [Nile](#)? Was it 20-odd?

In the line, very often, the section and platoon were your whole world, while when out of the line you got to know more of the company. This was especially so now at [Maadi](#). We visited the company cookhouse three or more times a day, had our canteen, and over the first part of our stay there received no reinforcements—and everyone was well and truly established in and part of the company—you knew everyone in your company to a lesser or greater extent. And you knew more than just their faces. You knew the way so-and-so walked or talked, how so-and-so held his pipe, or how so-and-so always wore his glengarry on the top of his head—all their little mannerisms. But of those in other companies, well, some faces you knew, but most of them were strangers; no especial personality behind that face, only what you imagined.

Those Headquarters guard duties at [Maadi](#) were no picnic. Carefully groomed, boots highly polished, clothes clean and well-pressed, lemon-squeezer hat just right, I was scrutinised critically by the officer of the guard, then carefully appraised of whom to salute, and how to salute whom, and warned to execute all movements with snap. By the time the guard change was made I was wet with sweat, and felt like a limp rag in the terrific heat of this brilliant, shimmering, midsummer's day. Left to it, however, I determined to try to uphold the tradition that the Kiwi can rise to the occasion when necessary.

After a few brisk movements—nobody in sight—I realised it was siesta time. Good show! Me for the awning most of the time. Now, everyone will recall that this awning, situated midway along the sentry's beat, was a high wooden framework, covered at the top and part-way down the sides and back. The shade it offered was very acceptable even if there was no breeze. Retiring to the shade I was thankfully standing 'at ease' under the awning, idly conscious of Shafto's ugly bulk on my right, EI Djem on my left, and the water tanks standing stark on the hilltop ahead and above me. It was a grand chance too for a scratch: amazing how many embarrassing parts begin to itch with perspiration when there is little chance to attend to them.

Out of the corner of my eye I caught sight of an officer approaching, and noted that he was entitled only to a 'slap of the butt'. He was rather close, and I'd have to get weaving to be at 'the slope' by the time he reached me. As I swung the rifle (with fixed bayonet of course) to number two position, that damnable bayonet stuck deeply into the awning framework! Hell's teeth! Was I in a fix? I duly slapped the butt (of the skewered and suspended rifle) which was down around waist high now, and the officer solemnly returned my compliment, but his shoulders were shaking visibly after he passed.

Only one man in the battalion could not read or write. Only two other men knew this, the first 'guide' who read and wrote for him (in strict secrecy), and another who took over in [Italy](#). This man hid his illiteracy most cunningly; he pretended to read newspapers and letters. On one occasion, when an officer brought him a cable, all eyes turned expectantly towards him. 'He's had it now,' thought the 'guide'. However, he opened the envelope, 'read' the cable, and said: 'Boss, I've had it, I've just got to go home. Old man died. I've got to run the farm.' Rot,'said the officer. The man replied: 'If you think I'm a liar, you read it then', and handed over the cable. The officer read aloud: 'Many happy returns, happy birthday.' Everyone roared with laughter; the ruse was not detected.

'Snow', a well-known character in the battalion, for weeks on end 'was quite the gentleman'. But sooner or later he would decide to go to [Cairo](#) for the afternoon, and off he would go, quietly and orderly. And most times, it seems, that would be the last we would see of him until he came out of clink; he was several times in Rock College [the New Zealand detention centre] and once in [Abbassia](#) [the British

punishment centre, where New Zealanders were sometimes sent]. It appears that when he arrived in [Cairo](#) he would meet up with some other chaps and they would start on a round of the bright spots. Soon Snow would be getting under the weather and starting to assert himself. Then it would be only a matter of time before either they got mixed up in trouble, or their money ran out—usually both these seemed to happen. When he was broke, Snow would look for other means of support, and no soldier in the Allied armies was safe from him. Anyone from a general down might be good for a few ackers. Finally one of his escapades would bring him into contact with the Redcaps, and that would be that. One day he came back with his hands bandaged up. It appears that he and his cobbers decided to brighten the town up by setting off a few flares or Very lights or something. They were putting on a good display and Snow was just lighting one when somebody yells out: 'Stick to your guns, boys!' and Snow hung on to his. Official explanation: burnt with a primus.

Bert [Leuchars](#)² arriving home from leave with a tropical palm in a small wooden barrel he'd acquired from outside some Gippo café. It certainly did give our tent a very homely appearance. And Lieutenant Dave Whillans's³ troublesome monkey, and the armourers' dog, Snifter, which was run over by a tank just before [Italy](#).

Some of the boys had been celebrating the night before and at next morning's parade one at least was still feeling the effects of his heavy night. Jimmy [Jack](#),⁴ the Canadian Kiwi, might have passed inspection if the officer, as a good soldier should, had kept his head erect and eyes straight ahead. But then inspecting officers are either not good soldiers or else they don't stick to the rules. Even the most junior of junior subalterns would not have passed Jimmy as correctly dressed. His web gear was correct. Rifle and bayonet? Yes. Hat and badge? Yes. Shirt, KD? Correct. Boots, puttees, sox? Yes. Need we continue?

One junior NCO had a particularly good rifle. It was always clean and never rusted, never tarnished—a quick pull through and a dust over with an old shaving brush, and it was ready for any inspection. Needless to say its proud owner guarded it as his most prized possession, although he had been known sometimes to lend it to his best friends for guard duty. One morning on company parade, Major Dennis Anderson announced that he would inspect A Troop. Naturally he spotted the good rifle, examined it, admired it, and complimented the NCO. Next day, as he rushed out to parade, the same NCO tried to pull his rifle through. 'Tried' was right. The

same pull-through that slid so easily through the rifle could not be coaxed or forced through the piece of rusted iron he held in his hands. He stopped, horror-struck, amazed—it was not his rifle—worse, it obviously belonged to one or other of those notorious rifle neglecters. In his haste he had grabbed a rifle belonging to either a cook or a driver. No time to go back, but anyway lightning never struck twice in the same place. Yesterday 'Maudie' had inspected A Troop, today it would be B, C, or D. Brush up the outside—she'll be right!

Company parade, and 'Maudie' announced—horror!—A Troop would be inspected. Other troops would move off independently to their respective parade grounds. Came the usual, 'For inspection —Open order—March!' For inspection—Port arms.' And then, instead of inspecting the troops in that position—after all, the outside of the rifle might possibly have passed—he gave the order, 'Examine arms.' That was the last straw. Now nothing would save the day—everything was ruined—that expected second stripe would be just a myth.

Down the ranks came the officer, peering, taking a rifle here and there—holding it to the light—even Egypt's most brilliant sun on the clearest day would never—could never—send the faintest glimmer through the dust and rust of ages collected in that bore—this particular Sword of Damocles took the form of a lump of wood and old iron fashioned in the shape of an S. M. L. E.—and closer came fate—three men away, two, one—here it is.

Mr. Anderson, fine officer that he was, looked at the NCO, smiled, said: 'You're the man with the good rifle', and passed on with never a glance down. And that's how I became a corporal and finally a sergeant—just luck!

A German recce plane often came over [Maadi](#). You would first see him away to the north as a vapour trail—sometimes, when he got nearer, you would see him as a black speck. Then, when he got near [Cairo](#), some heavy ack-ack would open up and you would see the tiny puffs many thousands of feet up—but not nearly high enough to worry Jerry. Then he would gradually turn left in a great half-circle and move north in the direction of the Canal, and finally disappear away to the north—it would take him some time to do this circuit. No planes could reach him until a specially equipped Spitfire was rigged up, waited, and then, after a long chase, shot him down towards [Crete](#), so the story went, just under 50,000 feet. For a little while this lone

flyer was sort of missed, in a way.

I had spent two years in the infantry and had only recently transferred to the Anti-Tank. At long last a change from the eternal rifle—Bren drill—2-inch mortar—bayonet. I could name all Bren stoppages; I knew why that small hole had been drilled in the gas chamber, how many turns in the rifling of the Short, Magazine, Lee Enfield, Mark—what does it matter.

The battalion was in [Maadi](#), changing from an infantry to a motor role. For weeks we had been going through the same old grind: maintenance—gun drill—PT—route marches—rifle drill, etc., until at last even the new role began to pall. And then it happened. I was summoned to the orderly room. 'Salute the orderly room as you enter, soldier!' Sorry, Sergeant-Major.' (The longest way up and the shortest way down—wouldn't it?) I was told I was to be sent on a course. What, me go on a course? What a relief, anything for a change. 'By the way, what course is it, six-pounder?' 'No, as a matter of fact it's a platoon weapons course.'

Perhaps that helped brown me off slightly, but a short time later I was doing a drop of Maori PT—flogging the sack, no less. The other members of the team were sleeping, nattering, and what have you, and one man, curse him, was doing a spot of dhobi-drill. He had set up a primus and was boiling up some KD. I've admitted I had cause to feel browned off, but not homesick, so there was I day-dreaming, when through the door drifted just a smell—an odour if you like. It brought it all back. Home, the family getting ready for work or school, Mum in the laundry boiling the copper. I reckoned I was just the average soldier, tough if needed, but I was now ready to burst out in tears, and all because I could smell boiling soapsuds.

Sometimes on manoeuvres water would be drawn in two-gallon tins. As was to be expected, some men drew more than their share, leaving the others to go short. Captain Knox instructed 'Hicko' [Broughton](#)⁵ to supervise the issue—make sure every truck collected a fair share. Next evening Captain Knox, as he passed, saw the men drawing water tins and asked Broughton if everything was under control. 'Hicko's' answer broke up the nearby mess queue. 'She's right, sir. Some's got it, some ain't, she's right!'

Part of the battalion, together with some tanks, went on manoeuvres into the

desert. Anti-Tank Company, less one troop, was in an infantry role. That one troop, except for the NCOs, was composed of reinforcements whose anti-tank training was far from complete. What little experience they had was with six-pounders, but the powers that be decreed that 'for the purpose of the exercise' two-pounders would be used.

Naturally the exercise required that the guns be loaded and unloaded from the portées, and any gunner knows that is not a job to be undertaken lightly by an inexperienced crew— certainly not to be attempted as a fast movement. Grave misgivings were felt by the NCOs concerned, but the alternative was to be in an infantry role, and everyone knows that there is only one thing worse than being an infantryman in action, and that is being an infantryman on manoeuvres.

The portées raced into the field. 'Action!' Ramps—hand-spike—wheels—winch—and by the grace of God, the guns were on the ground and dug in. The No. 4s put the [Benghazi](#) burners on for tea. Whistles blew, flags waved, and the manoeuvre ended. The signal to form convoy was given—easy enough for the infantry, but not quite so simple for a gun commander with a 'green' crew and a two-pounder on the ground. A first attempt resulted in a jammed hand. Just then the water boiled and the gun commander naturally called a halt for a mug of tea.

This lack of activity seemed to displease some of the higher-ups, and a jeep was despatched to inquire into the matter. The inquiring sergeant, satisfied that all would be well in a few minutes, rejoined the convoy. The tea was disposed of and the crew went back to the loading just as a second jeep, this time with an officer, called to inquire after the well-being of the troops. The loading went on apace and eventually the last portée joined the convoy, amid glowering glances from certain officers. Whistles blew, flags waved again, and in column of route the convoy cleared the battle ground.

Next day on company parade Captain Donald'discussed' the events of the previous day, touched briefly upon the efforts of certain acting infantrymen, discoursed for a few minutes on the sight of these stalwarts advancing in battle order, carrying primuses, [Benghazi](#) burners, billies and sundry impedimenta usually seen only among motorised units, and thus he worked up to bigger things.

'One gun crew took a long time to rejoin the convoy. Is the gun commander here?'

'Yes, sir.'

'What was the cause of the delay?'

Now, I could have told him about the jammed hand and the 'green' crew, but I knew that officers liked observing events through binoculars. I knew that binoculars—several pairs of them—would have picked out the tea making and tea drinking, and I pictured myself making excuses, floundering through explanations—on company parade, too, so I took a deep breath and said, 'We were just ready to load the gun when the billy boiled, so we had a cup of tea.'

Never before or since have I seen Haddon Donald at a loss for words. I strongly suspect I had stolen his thunder. 'My God! My God! The Brigadier, the Colonel, tanks, trucks, guns, all waiting, and you—you made a cup of tea. Don't ever do it again—don't ever do it again.'

The quiet chuckle that stirred the ranks didn't help the good captain either, and if he ever sees this story I hope he forgives me, but secretly I think he enjoyed these little events which indicated what I believe to be the way Haddon would have his NCOs act. I don't think he liked commanding 'yes men' and when I reflect on the NCOs who served under him, I feel that was how he had 'brought them up'—independent thinkers, yes, but great NCOs—on the surface 'Maaleesh' experts, but always on the job....

A few minutes' reflection must engender a great respect for the man who selected many of them and who trained many of them—and above all, the man who controlled them.

So 22 New Zealand (Motor) Battalion, the only motorised battalion in the Division, took shape over almost a year, a tedious year at [Maadi Camp](#). It was an independent, self-supporting group with its own vehicles; it would become a highly mobile force with particularly strong fire power, both offensive and defensive; it would train and hold itself ready to exploit at the shortest notice any breach in the enemy line, by following up fast before the enemy had time to reorganise, aiming to

win and to hold fresh ground until other units arrived. Its duties would include, as Brigadier Inglis had pointed out, protection for the tanks by day and also in the night when they were laagered together; mopping up after a tank attack, and winking out the enemy from positions inaccessible to armour. It would be strongly armed with its own anti-tank guns and machine guns.

The new battalion, 35 officers and 730 other ranks, contained fewer riflemen and a great many more drivers and technicians than the infantry battalion: 237 other ranks carrying rifles and light automatic weapons as against the customary 350 riflemen in other battalions. The companies changed from four infantry companies to three motor companies (1, 2 and 3 replacing A, B and C), and an anti-tank company replaced the former D Company. Each motor company, in the original establishment, was made up of a company headquarters, scout platoon (with eleven Bren carriers), a medium machine-gun platoon armed with four Vickers, and two motor platoons, making a company strength of 6 officers and 158 other ranks. One 3-inch mortar was attached to each company. The Anti-Tank Company (7 officers and 146 other ranks) included four troops, each troop with four two-pounder anti-tank guns, which were exchanged for six-pounders before the battalion left for [Italy](#).

In point of fact the Italian countryside would not permit the battalion to use its mobility to any great extent. The extra carriers and medium machine guns would be withdrawn after the stalemate at [Cassino](#), but the battalion would keep its mobility and independence where fire power was concerned to enable it to play a fluid role up the Adriatic coast in close co-operation with the tanks. The New Zealand Division eventually was really a motorised division, but whereas other battalions had to borrow vehicles from the ASC to shift troops, 22 (Motor) Battalion, until shortly before the final thrust in [Italy](#), always had its own transport under command and was designed to play a mobile role.

With the arrival of vehicles of their own the infantrymen's lot improved a great deal. For example, riflemen now had a chance to store away and take with them a little food. As one man put it: 'Any officer with a batman, or any small group such as artillery or anti-tank which carry their own rations, must inevitably, although they may not realise it, live much better than a large body. There are all sorts of little odd drinks and things that all add up. And if a full belly holds hunger in contempt, so does an extra mug of tea or so make one a little careless of what the next man is

going through.'

Men went off to a wide variety of courses (usually about 9 officers and 120 other ranks were away on courses at any given time) at the New Zealand School of Instruction and the New Zealand Armoured Corps Training Depot, to learn all about the tasks of driver-mechanic, driving and maintenance, motor-cycles and maintenance, platoon weapons, enemy weapons, mortars, range-takers, Intelligence, Vickers machine guns, signals, radio, anti-tank gunnery, and minelaying. A long-overdue service was introduced to the companies in December, when members of the intelligence section read summaries (some of them quite accurate) on the progress of the war, the exploits of the [Eighth Army](#), and current events. Manoeuvres grew longer, from hourly to all-day affairs, and then to exercises spreading over several days. Carrier, medium machine-gun and motor platoons trained to work together. More use was made of radio-telephony during these schemes. The Anti-Tank Company practised with live ammunition, and 'Gunner' Fred Putt pushed away happily at his pedal. Sherman tanks of 4 Armoured Brigade gave a demonstration 'indirect fire' shoot. Brigadier Gentry ⁶ lectured in the Pall Mall on lessons learned from the last of the fighting in North Africa. Companies held shoots and tactical exercises.

In an exercise with [18 Armoured Regiment](#), 4 Company, its guns concealed and camouflaged and using shells with paper wads, 'destroyed' ten tanks for the loss of two guns. Reinforcements were given most realistic training (no limit to the amount of ammunition used), and were toughened up over battle courses. More than 200 members of the battalion who had not taken part in the battle of [Alamein](#) were conducted by Captain Hockley round areas where the battalion had fought. They passed through the desolation the veterans knew, and the story was pieced together and told to them.

It sounds a busy time, but the time dragged painfully: 'I don't know what we would have done with our spare time if it wasn't for the pictures. We soaked away time at the movies, they were wonderful time-killers, but towards the end we were getting sick of them too.' And a diary notes: 'Saw some films shown in the mess tonight. One, [produced by the] New Zealand Film Unit, made me think of the times I'd sat in the old Majestic with Eth. and watched the same things. Got quite

homesick. Oh for a large chunk of NZ butter and a bit of green grass!

Sports played a big part in the battalion's life. Enthusiasm reached new heights as the unit gained victories against all-comers with monotonous regularity. The rugby team won the 4 Brigade competition and overran Composite Training Depot (winners of the [Maadi Camp](#) competition) by 17 points to 4. Five leading members played for 4 Brigade and were also in a [2 NZEF](#) side: H. W. Kenny, L. R. Thomas,⁷ P. P. Donoghue, R. [Newland](#)⁸ and T. Fowler (a football injury laid up Jack Sullivan for some time). When cricket came round, Sergeant L. R. Thomas and Lance-Corporal [McCall](#)⁹ established a Middle East Services record for opening batsmen: 207 runs in 105 minutes in an unbroken stand. Some of the best performances of all (even including the efforts of the battalion men yachting on the [Nile](#) and the Herculean tug-of-war team) came from Captain [Johnston](#),¹⁰ who won the 880-yard events at widely competitive [Cairo](#) and army athletic meetings.

At Maadi the best news for many was the announcement that all the married men and some of the bachelors in the First, Second, and Third Echelons would be going home on furlough (the Ruapehu and Wakatipu schemes). On 6 June the first draft, including 5 officers and 133 other ranks from the unit, sailed away in the [Nieuw Amsterdam](#). Before their departure they made a presentation to Mrs Chapman at the [Lowry Hut](#). Their spokesman, Bob [Turner](#),¹¹ remembered that soon after the battalion had reached England Mrs Chapman had equipped her van (a gift from her father, Mr [T. H. Lowry](#), of Hawke's Bay), and from her house in Wokingham had daily visited the various units with cups of tea, little snacks, cigarettes and chocolate. Her service had been continued in [Kent](#) (and at [Camberley](#)), and when supplies had become limited she had 'adopted' mainly 22 Battalion and the [Divisional Cavalry](#). She had sailed to Egypt in the [Empress of Britain](#) and had carried on with the mobile canteen until the [Lowry Hut](#) was built. 'And when we came off [Crete](#), exhausted and bewildered, she was there on the wharf at [Alexandria](#) to greet us with her smile, her understanding, and her comforts.' (Apart from a few months on furlough in New Zealand in 1944, Mrs Chapman was with the [2 NZEF](#) from 1940 until after the end of the war.)

An officer wrote in June 1943: 'Excitement over here is intense at the moment and morale could not be higher. God help the next mob that strikes the Kiwi. [Brig. Kippenberger](#) drew a striking comparison and paid the Div a great compliment when

he said that it was fast becoming known and compared with such great units of history as Napoleon's Old Guard, Caesar's 10th Legion and Crawford's [sic] Light Div on the Peninsula. The Div has a wonderful name over here but the General impressed on us that it must not go to our heads, and I don't think the boys will let it do that. They are as proud as punch in their own funny way but become reserved and quiet, like all New Zealanders, when they get in a crowd.'

The training period had its quota of accidents and misfortunes: one man was killed and eleven wounded by the explosion of a 68 grenade; Sergeant Tom [Steele](#),¹² a veteran of 3 Company, lost a hand when a prepared charge went off; and Lieutenant [Talbot](#)¹³ (battalion transport officer) died in hospital after a sudden and brief illness. A party homeward bound in a truck after a football match and smoke-oh at 2 General Hospital, [Kantara](#), was swept by a burst of fire from the opposite side of the [Sweetwater Canal](#). No trace was found of the mysterious assailants who had wounded four men in the truck.

When the battalion was fully motorised the Division struck out on a 100-mile route march on 7 October along the desert road to [Burg el Arab](#): 'Last time we had been that way a year ago the wind came up in our faces in hot gusts off the scorching asphalt....' The marching was done at night because of the heat, but it was still stifling and deadly monotonous, as night marches generally are. The battalion was the only unit to complete the march fully, and furthermore had far fewer casualties than any other unit, as Brigadier Inglis noted appreciatively. Four Company (nicknamed 'Corps d' élite') put up the best performance. Time and again on the weary march the company's signature tune was heard: 'The Blue-ridged Mountains of Virginia', invariably led by Don [Agnew](#).¹⁴

The marathon march took seven nights, about 15 miles being covered each night. After the hourly ten-minute halt'so many of us on restarting would appear to be walking on hot bricks for a while. The pads of our feet became very tender.... And we used to spend a long time watching that cookhouse light while on the march. But as the road ahead was level and straight we could never tell just how far away it was. We knew it was our stopping place.'

'As time wore on we found the only decent diversions were grizzling and singing,' recalls Tom [Grace](#).¹⁵ Grizzling made our tired feet worse but singing eased

the pain—so sing we did, every song in the book, and when we ran out we made them up. Each night we halted for hot cocoa. Somebody hit up Bill Butler¹⁶ (the “Q,” bloke) for a hunk of bread apiece to go with the cocoa. “She’s right, I’ll jack’er up,” said Bill, but for two nights no bread. The third night, after putting our heads together, we insisted Bill Butler walk with our troop for a bit.

To the tune of “The Quartermaster’s Store” we burst into:

There’ll be bread, bread, so Bill Butler said
On the march, on the march.
There’ll be bread, bread, so Bill Butler said
But we got—all instead.

‘That fixed it—we never did get the bread.’

One man is still amazed at receiving an issue of strawberry jam on the march. He had quite forgotten such a delicacy remained in the world.

Much credit for the success of the march goes to the pipers of the band, whose pipes had been replaced by Scots’ gifts from New Zealand. ‘They marched and played and carried along many weary bodies which might otherwise have faltered,’ said Colonel Campbell. One stalwart in the band was Johnny Meikle,¹⁷ who carried on with enthusiasm when three of the original pipers, Sergeant Jock Lowe, Private Jock Mackay,¹⁸ and Lance-Corporal Dick Moody¹⁹ returned home on the Ruapehu scheme.

At Burg el Arab the battalion did a little more training (including Technique, the Division’s last exercise in the desert, and the last familiar flap with vehicles stuck in the sand), received injections against various diseases and a course of pill-taking against malaria, went on route marches and another night march (Con McManus,²⁰ of I Company, covered ten miles with a hangover and entered into the legendary figures of the battalion when Neil McNeil²¹ discovered him at dawn clumping valiantly along with his boots on the wrong feet), and voted in the General Election in New Zealand. A severe sandstorm howled in farewell from dawn to dusk on 10 October, and a week later the battalion embarked at Alexandria. Laden like a mule, any man who sat down was cast by his burden, and a comrade gingerly lending a

¹ These pages are based upon the recollections of a number of men who served in the battalion.

² Sgt A. J. Leuchars; Wellington; born Wellington, 11 Jul 1914; accounts clerk.

³ Lt D. M. Whillans; Ruapuna, Ashburton; born Dumbarton, 19 Dec 1910; policeman; wounded 14 Jul 1942.

⁴ Sgt J. G. Jack; born England, 13 Jan 1915; fur dresser.

⁵ Pte H. C. P. Broughton; born NZ 12 May 1912; labourer; twice wounded.

⁶ Maj-Gen W. G. Gentry, CB, CBE, DSO and bar, m.i.d., MC (Gk), Bronze Star (US); Lower Hutt; born London, 20 Feb 1899; Regular soldier; comd 6 Bde Sep 1942-Apr 1943; DCGS (in NZ) 1943-44; comd NZ Troops in Egypt, 6 NZ Div and NZ Maadi Camp, Aug 1944-Feb 1945; comd 9 Bde (in Italy) 1945; DCGS 1946-47; AG 1949-52; CGS 1952-55.

⁷ 2 Lt L. R. Thomas; Johnsonville; born NZ 29 Jun 1916; canister maker.

⁸ Sgt R. A. Newland; Wellington; born Masterton, 16 Jan 1916; farm labourer; wounded 24 Oct 1942.

⁹ Cpl A. T. McCall; born Ashburton, 5 Apr 1919; clerk.

¹⁰ Maj R. E. Johnston; Burnham; born Wanganui, 1 Jan 1918; Regular soldier; wounded 15 Dec 1944.

¹¹ Pte R. Turner; Napier; born Scotland, 23 Feb 1910; timber worker.

¹² Sgt T. Steele; Waitara; born Stirling, Scotland, 19 Mar 1911; Regular soldier; accidentally injured 16 Apr 1943.

¹³ Lt W. A. Talbot; born South Africa, 27 Dec 1906; salesman; died on active service 22 Apr 1943.

¹⁴ Pte D. Agnew; Waitara; born NZ 29 Mar 1906; barman.

¹⁵ Cpl T. P. Grace; born Christchurch, 17 Mar 1905; bank clerk; wounded 27 Mar 1944.

¹⁶ S-Sgt W. J. Butler; born Masterton, 10 Dec 1918; farm labourer; killed in action 29 Mar 1944.

¹⁷ Cpl W. J. Meikle; Wanganui; born Scotland, 27 Sep 1911; carpenter; honorary pipe-major, 22 Bn, Jan 1943-Aug 1945.

¹⁸ Pte W. R. Mackay; born Eltham, 17 Jan 1918; labourer.

¹⁹ Cpl R. Moody; Napier; born Ohingaiti, 15 Sep 1910; motor mechanic.

²⁰ L-Cpl C. P. McManus; Hamilton; born Lower Hutt, 22 Sep 1905; clerk; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

²¹ Pte N. McNeil; born Woodville, 7 Aug 1921; truck driver.

²² Shipped in three groups: A (Colonel Campbell) in Llangibby Castle, II, 951 tons; B (Major Donald) in Nieuw Holland, II, 696 tons; C (Captain Oldham) in Letitia, 13,000 tons. Lieutenant C. R. Carson followed later with the vehicles. Each man carried aboard his blanket roll, winter and summer clothing, personal gear, weapons and ammunition, respirator, bivvy tent (shared between two), anti-malaria ointment and tablets, emergency ration, and an empty two-gallon water can.

22 BATTALION

CHAPTER 9 – ACROSS THE SANGRO

CHAPTER 9

Across the Sangro

In [Italy](#) the battalion was under fire for twice as long and suffered more losses in killed and wounded than in all the other campaigns put together. An officer (who served in the line from [Sangro](#) to [Trieste](#) and was decorated for gallantry) writes: 'So far as 12th Reinforcements onwards were concerned I know there was a tendency for people to say: "No fighting spirit", "Things aren't what they used to be", etc., etc., in the same way as we of an older generation deplore the younger generation coming on. Looking back I wouldn't think it justified. The young territorial going into his first action went into it with gusto, and in most cases he went in intelligently, using his training which he had had for three years before in New Zealand. As the end of the war became more apparently within reach there may have been a certain amount of "If we don't make a noise, he won't," but that depended more on the attitude of the men in charge of them, than the men themselves, in my humble opinion anyway.'

Out of [Alex.](#), like [Fremantle](#) and [Colombo](#), the buildings seem to gradually sink beneath the sea—no hills around to let you know there was land there [writes a 22 Battalion soldier]. They said we kept close to the North African coast and the other coast of [Sicily](#) and [Italy](#) because there may be subs around. We got several glimpses of the old desert coastline—the last near [Derna](#)—they said it was anyway. Nearing [Taranto](#) we were quite close in and it looked good to see the green hills and the large white houses on the lower country near the coast—we were rather disappointed with the houses when we landed however—they didn't look nearly so good close up.

[Taranto](#) too looked allright from the boat, but was disappointing when you got into it. Dirty—nothing much to see—nothing much to buy—vino—pictures of [Taranto](#) and a few useless articles—many shops had their shutters up. (Generally speaking the further north you went in [Italy](#) the better the living standards became.) Not many people in the streets. Later on they were to come out again—then the signorinas walked the streets in their best frocks. And very attractive some of them were.



ITALY MAP No.1

Off the boat and we set off on the march to our area. ¹ It wasn't very far but we had a fair load up and it was quite a warm day. (Somewhere along the way someone said that they had been talking to a chap who had arrived a week or so earlier and he said it was good—never got any hotter than this.) When we got out into the country it was good to see all the green of hills and fields and the winding country roads. Like something you remembered long ago.

Then to our area. Grass around your bivvy—and inside it— sunlight sifting through the cool pines—how strong they smelt— kicking an unseen stone in the grass as you walked along. You felt like throwing your chest out—no stinking desert here.

Up next morning—birds whistling in the trees—dew on the grass—a fresh tang in the air. The atmosphere. Yes it was different from the desert. Then some marches and fieldcraft. (You thought back to [Trentham](#) and playing hide and seek among those trees over by the racecourse.) Then somebody found the vino factory and soon there was a steady string of jokers—a water tin (or hastily rinsed petrol Jerry can) in each hand going to get them filled. Later the grass died in circles where they had been sick.

Then those roaring open-air fires at night and the smell of pine smoke. We sat around these in the evenings and sipped 'purple death' and yarned. It reminded you of pictures of pioneers of North American backwoods—firelight on your face—tall dark pines at your back.

One night someone mentioned that it was 23 October and many of us thought back to the happenings of this time one year ago—and wondered just how much further on we would be this time next year. It was something new to look back on one whole year of progress.

Then on the trucks [4 November] and speeding north—cool wind in your face—across the undulating rocky country which stretches nearly to [Foggia](#) (this area covering the heel of [Italy](#) you could call rather poor and rocky—but it was covered in vegetation—and we had just come from the desert). Slabs of rock gathered from around and about and built into low stone walls. (If you walked along there in the summer you would glimpse the flickering of tails and then the moving of heads as snakes watched you pass.)

Around Monopole area we passed through that district where all those picturesque houses are—like beehives—something picturesque and really outstanding I thought. Church, house or barn— they all had the same white walls and the round pointed roofs. 'Trulli' houses I think they called them. (Remember those very large flocks of birds swooping over the countryside just north of [Taranto](#)?) We were still pretty new to the Italians and they seemed to have changed to their new role pretty quickly. They gathered along the roads and in the villages and towns and we got some enthusiastic welcomes from them as we went along. The signorinas greeted us with that come-hither wave—with the palm of the hand facing upwards. They had forgotten they had just been our enemy. At [Foggia](#) we saw our first bombed European town—rubble everywhere and many walls of buildings—if you looked through the windows from the street you could see blue sky. There were many of Musso's farm settlements around here on the flats—each house the same—big square looking things with words on the walls—they looked like some official buildings or something.

Onward they went to a beautiful wide valley near [San Severo](#). Here the battalion spent ten days, getting into shape and training in fieldcraft, the men using their bayonets to cut down thistles. Signaller Jim [Selwyn](#)² discovered that hundreds of yards of cable had been taken to mark out football fields, which were then marked with an old Italian plough dragged behind a jeep. In this area rations were supplemented with lamb, fowls, turkeys. Soon the men felt that they were being

overcharged for black-market turkeys. They promptly put the Padre to work on price control. The Padre now was Martin Sullivan³ ('Joe Ghost' to the officers). 'Jimmy,' began the Padre. 'We are not happy about the price your friend is charging for the turkeys.'

'Oh, Signor, everything is honest and fair. Tony he buy them and sell at very small profit.'

'Now, Jimmy, I do not think you're telling me the truth.'

'Si, si, Signor. That is the truth. I swear. I no deceive you!'

'Look here. You know who I am, don't you?'

'Yes, Signor: you the Priest.'

'Well now, Jimmy, you know what happens to people who tell lies to the priest.'

Jimmy (scared): 'Si, si, Signor, I know.'

'All right. Now Jimmy, I'm asking you as a priest: did your friend steal those turkeys, or did he not?'

Jimmy (after a significant pause): 'Honest to God, Mr. Priest, I think he pinch them.'

Then on the trucks again [16 November] and moving north. Through Termoli—plenty of battle scars on the buildings there—they said the British landed there some weeks ago. It was good to be sailing along in the trucks in the refreshing air. It could have been an autumn afternoon in NZ—sunshine and cloud and no wind—when somebody pointed ahead—and away to the north we could see a range of high mountains covered in a mantle of fresh snow. We were passing through rolling green country—more attractive than further south. [The battalion turned inland soon after the Trigno River, where there were new Bailey bridges and an immense traffic jam—the convoy travelled a mile and a half in three hours.]

The road that we were on was a bit on the narrow side for two-way traffic—it hadn't been made to carry the hordes of army vehicles now on it, and bad ruts had

been worn in it. Also it was built up quite a few feet above the surrounding fields. So if you moved over too far on to your own side when passing another vehicle your truck was liable to pop up onto the ridge that had been formed between the rut and the greasy sloping side—then there was nothing to stop it sliding down right off the road. And this is precisely what we did—turning over on our side as we did so. One moment we were all sitting on the gear—the next moment I remember being flung across the truck and lying helplessly with a Bren box on top of me: the gear was now on top of us. Jack ... was the only one of us free to move—the rest of us had to just lie there. He extracted himself from some gear and then proceeded to free us one by one, and as we got up we set to work too—flinging such things as webbing, rifles and water tins out the back as we went. We finally got to the front—two pairs of legs sticking out from under some gear—gave them a yank—and we were all out—just a few bruises.

In hilly country the roads wandered along the tops of ridges (they did this in so many parts of [Italy](#)), not along the valley bottoms as usually in NZ. These hills were dotted with farmhouses, from here north through [Italy](#), but in the far south, from [Taranto](#) to near [Foggia](#), most of the people lived in villages or towns and came out to the fields each day to work—a relic, they said, of the old days of brigands and robbers, not so long ago either. [Strung out, the troops struggled into [Furci](#), where they stayed for two cold nights, with their bedrolls unrolled on the ground.]

We were sitting around talking before turning in—we heard faintly something away to the north. We listened—and sure enough it was that old familiar sound bump-bump-bump. It was about a year since we had heard the arty in action.

Waking in the morning to feel a cold damp drizzle falling on the side of your face (this was something new)—pulling the blankets up over your head to keep it off—it was cold on your cheek—just a few more winks.

Being woke up at night to do your two hours on—sitting out there in the silent blackness—just occasionally the bark of a dog from some farmhouse: down in the valley or across on the other hill. (They had said the other night that a patrol had been given away by dogs barking—one dog had barked, then a little later a bit further along another barking, and so on, tracing the path of the patrol as it moved along.) So you listened to see if there was any pattern in this lonely fitful barking

from different directions. But not this time—say just one very faintly up some distant valley, then one just down the hill below you and loud, then one away over to the right. It was a bit cold. And sometimes, sitting there in your greatcoat and webb, hunched up, your rifle between your knees, or your Bren sitting up in front of you on its bipod—you felt miserable. And you thought and thought—the things that had happened to you since you went to the Drill Hall (to join the rest of the chaps—[Trentham](#) bound) that day years ago—what was going to happen in the future—those plans when you got home (?)—what were they doing at home now—right this minute. Then you worked out what time it was now in NZ (the hour, that is, as far as what day it was, well you had probably forgotten what day it was in [Italy](#)).

Then you wondered, say, if the mailman had been yet—if so-and-so still had the mail run—what that joker was doing now who used to drive the mail car—he'd got turned down ('footballer's knee') but he still played football (there had been some gossip at the time). Old what's-his-name had flat feet but had talked his way in: was flat-feet the mug? I suppose in ten years time old 'flat-feet' though would feel a bit better than the other chap. It'll soon be shearing time—back in the old shed, eh—losing some sweat. What's happening to all those young people who used to go to the dances—I suppose you'd see a lot of them again when you got home. (You didn't know then, but when you got back so many of them had vanished —before the war you knew so many—after the war, so few.)

Usually there were two of you together and if the sky was clear you could have a look round—find the north star—or argue which one was it. Or if conditions were satisfactory, get down in the corner and have a few puffs. In the first few minutes you still felt sleepy and thought: 'Hell nearly two hours to go—what a —'. Still often the time went quite fast. But at other times... Sometimes when you were short of sleep you would find that you would have to do something to stop from dropping off. On the few occasions when I was like that I found it a good idea to kneel or sit with my legs doubled up under me—any awkward position—so that you would have to keep moving each time your legs started to ache—the more often you moved the less chance you had to doze off. But still—now and again the old head would drop forward—then up smartly—then you would say to yourself: 'I'll just watch that bush there in front—that one with the piece sticking out the side—I'll just keep watching that and thinking about it.'

'It goes up there and around there and down the other side.' 'It goes up there and around there and down the other side.' You would keep saying this to yourself over and over again, and think you were doing all right. But then up would come your head again, and you would realise that you had been saying it and going off to sleep at the same time. There was nothing for it: get into a more awkward position.

On the next move, from [Furci](#) to the Montagnola area (six miles in a straight line but much more by the tortuous road), 22 (Motor) Battalion was given the task of protecting the Division's left flank on its advance to the [Sangro River](#). The task was not difficult, for the enemy was intent on pulling back to his winter line beyond the river, which the [Eighth Army](#) was about to attack. The road toiled up through the hills—rather like the Manawatu Gorge. Just before reaching Montagnola it led over the brow of a hill and dipped steeply down into the valley, winding down a forward face to a bridge at the bottom and up the other side. Apparently an enemy rearguard had observation posts on high ground at the far end of the gorge. In this tricky spot, when running the gauntlet, the battalion came under fire for the first time in [Italy](#). Conversations between sergeants and drivers went something like this:

Sergeant: 'Jerry is continually shelling the road—as soon as we cross the crest we come under his fire, we go like the hammers of hell—non-stop—till we reach the bridge. The bridge is in against the opposite side and he cannot reach it, understand?'

Driver: 'What happens if I get hit?'

Sergeant: 'You just keep on going, boy, till you get to the bottom.'

One driver, a Cook Islander, 'Tip' [Kea](#),⁴ 'had a high pitched voice and a giggle even higher than the voice. He rolled his eyes and giggled. One by one the trucks pulled away and on to that forward slope. Tip giggled, a note higher. A shell landed ahead, Tip giggled, his eyes opened wider and his foot already hard down on the gas went down harder—the floor boards bulged. Another shell, a higher giggle, more eyes, more foot.

'One landed on the road ahead. Again the formula, giggle, eyes, foot. Around another bend—Hell!—How did we miss that Bren Carrier—the Carrier crew diving into the ditch. By now the gun on tow was airborne and the accelerator must have been dragging on the road. The next one landed on the road practically under the muzzle of the gun—stones and debris flew past the cab windows. Tip's eyes really

opened this time, his giggle reached a note that would have shamed Galli-Curci — and he really took off.

‘Later shells seemed only incidental—they were dropping behind anyway—all that mattered was to hang on—and then the bridge and safety—a smoke. Any smokes alight when we crossed the brow had long since been chewed and swallowed.’

Nobody was hit; everyone was at least startled. One shell landed in front of the bonnet of Len Turner's ⁵ jeep; another passed under the RAP truck. Carl Ring, ⁶ the medical officer, coolly slowed down his jeep to pick up a tin hat. ‘Well, I thought someone might need it,’ he explained afterwards. Ahead a group of officers selecting company positions had their own worries— mortars. Crouched behind a rather meagre haystack, Ken Joblin ⁷ drawled in his deep voice: ‘How thick do these damn things have to be to stop one of those things?’

This was certainly no place for a motor battalion—better for mountain goats. The battalion was on one ridge, and across the valley a village, Tornareccio, was occupied by the enemy, who was also along the opposite ridge. The valley was very deep, and the ridges were a mile or more apart.

The supply side was difficult: everything had to be man-handled, and when atrocious weather settled in the place became a quagmire. ‘We nearly proved that a jeep with four chains could climb the side of a house. (From now on we were to get used to hearing a new sound—day and night—army lorries with chains on: clank-clank or clatter-clatter—right through till the following spring.)

‘By now we had been surprised several times in hearing English spoken by Italians in unexpected places: “Hullo boys” (they usually said that), then a few pleasantries, and someone would get the vino. They usually had worked in America and returned to spend the last years at the scenes of their childhood.’

The battalion stayed on its front opposite Tornareccio for three days, and was engaged in patrolling and general defence work while the enemy withdrew. Explosions echoed through

the mountains as the Germans carried out demolitions. One of the first

reconnaissance patrols was under Sergeant [Williams](#),⁸ who was soon to be wounded near [San Eusanio](#). The patrol picked up an Italian for a guide and struck off boldly in the rain along a road, the Italian leading—with his umbrella up!



SANGRO RIVER-ORSOGNA AREA, NOVEMBER 1943-JANUARY 1944

sangro river-orsogna area, november 1943-january 1944

They found that the enemy had just left [Tornareccio](#), but the little village was badly booby-trapped. A party led by Lieutenant [Were](#)⁹ cleared away these obstructions.

The time was ripe for the New Zealand assault over the [Sangro](#). Twenty-second Battalion carried on northward with no undue alarms to a ridge ('Grandstand Hill') overlooking the river and with a view right down to the river mouth. This halt lasted a week—the [Sangro](#), rising in flood, was holding up the crossing.

The battalion, now in reserve, waited while the Division poised below near the bank where a tributary, the Aventino, and the [Sangro](#) met about 15 miles from the coast. All bridges had gone. The shingle riverbed was scoured with channels, some trickles, some 50 yards wide, the water from a few inches deep to up past a man's waist. Ahead stretched a small flat which ended at an escarpment 150-feet high, and beyond this cultivated ridges climbed towards [Castelfrentano](#). The battalion's area was thickly populated. From now on the troops were to become very 'casa-conscious'. In theory the casas (houses) were good in the hot weather. Most of them had thick walls of stone which took the greater part of the day for the sun's heat to penetrate, and after dark they radiated this heat well into the night. The theory

might have worked if there had been good doors and windows. In winter the houses, with their high ceilings, were cold, draughty and bare; the cold was intensified of course when a chunk of the roof or a wall was missing.

As casas were plentiful, almost everyone managed to get under cover. So did the opposition: 'Looking across to the enemy lines you couldn't see a thing; you would have sworn there wasn't a Hun in [Italy](#).' In fact the almost uncanny emptiness of a battlefield is one of the many surprises a recruit receives on reaching any front. Nevertheless enemy gunners had the southern side of the [Sangro](#) well in range. On 24 November Privates [Benge](#)¹⁰ and [Pearse](#)¹¹ (2 Company), just after finishing a cup of tea, were looking down on the river they would never cross. Shellbursts grew closer. Benge 'didn't go flat to the ground but crouched down with my knees bent, and my body bent as far as was possible forward. The next thing I remember I was flat on my back, and on trying to get up found to my surprise that I couldn't.' A piece of shrapnel had entered his back and had come out near the hip. Pearse died in the night.

'The road rose steeply from the [Sangro River](#) and wound up the side of the hill to [Casoli](#),' recalls a corporal. '4th [Brigade](#) occupied the side of the hill and the flat to the river. Parked in the olive groves flanking the road were hundreds of vehicles—jeeps, pick-ups, two-tonners, three-tonners, portees, carriers and so on.

'Up the road toiled a small group of civilians. A small group that paused frequently, then plodded wearily upwards—a pitiful little group—three old men and two women—carrying a coffin.

'And no one thought to run out a vehicle and give them a lift. No one thought to? More than likely most of the troops who saw them were too moved to do other than fade away as discreetly as possible.'

Near Grandstand Hill the seed was sown for true co-operation between tanks and infantry. An early task was manhandling quantities of shells up a steep hill for the tanks. Major Donald moved his company down into [20 Armoured Regiment's](#) area, and platoons and sections ate and slept and talked with tank crews. Mutual understanding spread; the tanks and the infantry began to appreciate each other's capabilities and limitations, and by working together became confident in one

another. Co-operation between all arms (at last) would become one of the main strengths of the Division in the advance through [Italy](#).

Squadron after squadron of bombers 'softened up' the defences across the river. The Luftwaffe was a dead duck— except for one or two brief sallies. The battle of the [Sangro](#) opened on the night of 27–28 November. The terrific barrage awakened every 22 Battalion man—they knew their turn was only a day or two away. Nothing could be seen in the pitch-black night except gun flashes. Below the battalion New Zealand infantrymen began wading through the icy water. Climbing, digging in, and climbing on again, the muddy troops pressed forward up the defended slopes towards [Castelfrentano](#). The battle and the bombing continued all next day. Late in the afternoon some German prisoners passed by, many of them youths of eighteen, several of them badly shaken and weeping.

In the night [Hewitt](#) ¹² of the carrier platoon was sleeping in an Italian house with some Bailey-bridge engineers when a shell with an armour-piercing and high-explosive head (nicknamed 'spud-digger') 'landed so close to an engineer and myself that the heat of the explosion singed all our hair and took eyebrows and eyelashes right off.' The previous day the Italian householder had asked Hewitt if the German would return over the [Sangro](#), and he had replied: 'Not bloody likely'. The Italian, beaming, had moved a haystack, dug deeply and unearthed nearly all his worldly belongings: dishes, cutlery, wine, and a lot more. 'He grinned at me saying "Tedesky he no get", and the whole family came out and carried it all inside. Next night the house was blown to pieces, his two bullocks stabled under the house killed, and all his labour wasted.'

The next day (29 November) [19 Armoured Regiment](#)'s tanks and 24 Battalion seized the Barone feature. The Italian campaign proper was about to open for 22 (Motor) Battalion, whose men watched this assault with even more interest; for this was where they were going. [Colle Barone](#) (on the Division's extreme left flank) was a steep, partly wooded, partly cultivated hill which guarded Route 84, the main road from the riverbed to the ridge where the town of [Castelfrentano](#) perched. Sixth Brigade's advance, swinging slightly to the right, away from Route 84, was leaving the road clear for an advance by [18 Armoured Regiment](#) and 22 Battalion. This move, along Route 84 then westward to [Guardiagrele](#), was intended to bluff the enemy into thinking a main attack was coming up the highway. This (it was hoped)

would draw off enemy troops while the main attack made straight towards [Castelfrentano](#).

Twenty-second Battalion crossed TIKI Bridge (built by 8 Field Company under heavy fire and bombing) over the [Sangro](#) late in the morning of the 30th and made towards the Barone feature.

‘During one halt tea was made and a hurried lunch taken. Troops sprawled on the grass at the sides of the road eating, drinking, and smoking. Had they enjoyed a higher status in the scale military a photo would, in course of time, have appeared in the N.Z. papers and inevitably the caption would have contained some reference to an “al fresco meal”. Apparently no one more lowly than the top brass rated this “A.F.M.” caption.

‘Up the road towards them slowly worked a group of engineers sweeping for mines. As they approached each vehicle the crew obligingly gathered up their benghazi burners, munga boxes, mugs of tea, and what-have-you, and stood aside while the sappers made sure they had not been sitting on a nest of Teller or “S” mines. Reassured the men returned to their previous positions and resumed their interrupted meal.

‘Good to know the “ginger beers” are on the job.’

Behind the battalion, in column after column, came the artillery, followed safely by [18 Armoured Regiment](#)'s 28-ton tanks—just four tons more, in theory, than the bridge would hold. Vehicles bogged down in the mud on the flats across the river where strips of ‘corduroy’ road (bundles of faggots) had been laid in the worst patches. One by one they were extricated and joined in their slow ‘start—stop—start’ progress following the advancing infantry. A man in [Support Group](#) remembers: ‘Groups of Italian peasants lined the road, the elders trying to coach the bambinos in a monotonous “Viva Engleesi!” “Viva Americano!”—at that stage they could not make up their minds who we were. Individual efforts by the youngsters favoured the “Chocolatta” “Cigaretto” “Bisquite” approach. One old Tony—a veritable, if venerable, cheerleader—waved a flag, hopped about the roadside, and quavered his vivas until the necessity to sidestep a racing jeep, wave, hop and quaver simultaneously proved too much for him and he toppled over backwards into a ditch.

When last seen his flag was still fluttering bravely, his two boots supported by skinny legs waved in the air and a stream of feeble "vivas" rose from the depths of the ditch.'

The battalion moved up into the Barone feature. While company areas were being chosen, Captain Knox and Lieutenant [Gardiner](#)¹³ (the latter evacuated) were wounded in identical places, cheek and arm, by the same shell. Meanwhile Major Fred Oldham (3 Company's commander), 'one of the most popular and best loved officers', went out with a sergeant and found and marked a minefield. On his way back he stood on a mine, could not get clear and, leaning against a bank, shouted to the sergeant to take cover. He did, but there was no cover for Oldham.

'Five of us, including the C.O., went out to bring him in,' writes an officer. 'We went down a slope in single file, twenty paces apart, one behind the other. The place was full of mines and we had not the faintest idea how to avoid them. I was following the C.O., when he turned over his shoulder and said in his quiet voice:

"Keep absolutely still. I think I am standing on one."

'We retraced our steps and the engineers finally brought Oldham back, so that we could give him a decent burial.

'The sequel of the story is an interesting one. The place was full of mines and the one the C.O. was standing on was the only dud in the whole nest of them.

'That very day, incidentally, the boys brought down a Nazi plane. They were bitter and angry over Oldham's death. I shall never forget the sight of the young, arrogant German pilot who parachuted out. He struggled over the rough country until he came to the road and then he sprung instantly to attention and looked at us with utter defiance. He was a fine figure of a man; black hair and wearing a blue, polo-neck jersey. We lost Oldham and rescued this fellow. We all felt we knew who had the better bargain; death is frequently discriminating in its choice.'

As the battalion settled in Haddon Donald set off with Mick Bradford (soon to be cut down by a shell splinter, 'embedded in the fifth cervicle as a constant reminder of the "good old days" (?), and a pension—small!'). The pair, armed with a couple of revolvers, followed a road which [Divisional Cavalry](#) had under observation. A track

led to a group of silent buildings. The two topped the track, a door flew open, Bradford leapt like a startled stag, and among kisses and cries of 'Americano! Americano!' Donald went down in a flurry of arms, male and female. That night a patrol from the battalion found Route 84 clear ahead to the first junction, two miles on, which was mined. Turning west at the junction the patrol crept towards [San Eusanio](#), but stopped at the sound of German voices.

The battalion pushed up the highway early on 1 December. One Company met tanks from [18 Armoured Regiment](#) and advanced up Route 84 (the infantry at first riding on the tanks) until after two miles the mined area brought a halt by the turnoff to [San Eusanio](#) hamlet, 2 Company's objective. Houses handy to the road were booby-trapped. The body of an engineer sergeant lay in a doorway. Severe shelling stopped any further advance for the day, and 3 Company, with the battalion's 3-inch mortars and anti-tank guns, came up to protect the tanks overnight. This was not a pleasant place to camp; the narrow road prevented dispersion. One man had been killed and four wounded in the battalion and eight tanks damaged, one of them being a complete write-off.

Colonel Campbell, dashing across some open ground, suddenly hunched his shoulders and ducked his head. A shell swept across his back and burst a few yards away. Had he run upright, it would have taken his head off. (The Colonel went through the war without losing more than his little finger in a jeep accident.) Exploring the road ahead in the night, a party of infantrymen and engineers under Second-Lieutenant [McNeil](#) ¹⁴ found that the Germans had blown up a house to block the road a mile ahead. Cutting some trip-wires across the road brought immediate fire and flares. A platoon under Second-Lieutenant Monaghan, ¹⁵ with tanks, turned west to find [San Eusanio](#) clear, and stayed in possession of the settlement. In the dark the carriers were also making towards San Eusanio by a narrow lane, with [Shaw](#) ¹⁶ in the leading carrier: 'On reaching the track Lt. [Hart](#) ¹⁷ our platoon commander directed me down it, 'he writes. 'As I was moving off quite happily he casually said: "Be careful Jack, it's bound to be mined." I found it not a pleasant feeling to be in a carrier moving along a narrow mined track in pitch darkness.'

Within a few hours the battalion would be in the thick of it: 'Most unpleasant, 'as Brigadier Stewart ¹⁸ said later.

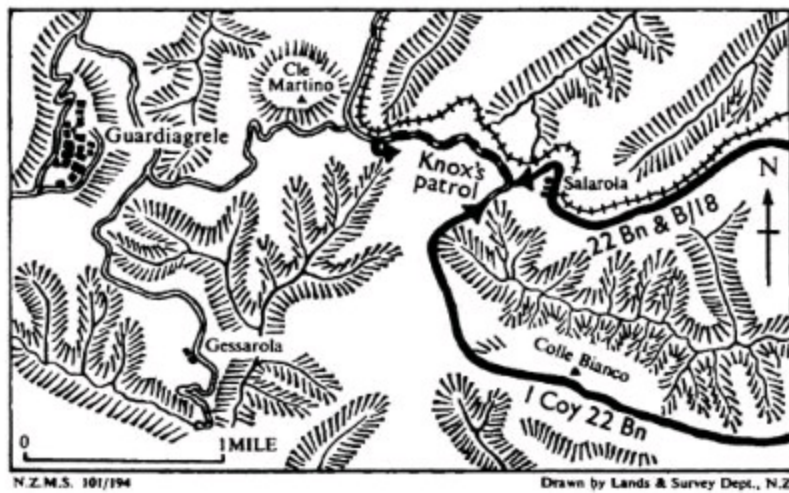
Early next morning ¹⁹ the tanks left their laager and, supported by 2 Company, advanced unopposed except for shellfire until an anti-tank ditch barred the way just before the junction of Route 84 and the road to [Guardiagrele](#). A bridging tank (a Valentine with a detachable bridge clipped to it) arrived and filled the gap, 2 Company occupied the junction at 10 a.m., and 3 Company came up in strength to the position. 'There were Huns running in all directions but the tanks didn't miss much.' The road, now turning left and running along a ridge leading westward, was most exposed and at the mercy of guns on higher ground towards [Orsogna](#). The infantry, digging in on the slope facing towards [Orsogna](#), soon came under what seemed to be almost direct fire from 88-millimetre guns. 'Things were just fair to muddling for some time. We withdrew to the reverse slope.' A little group, on the point of sitting down to enjoy a plump chicken left simmering in a pot, was sent packing—and still hungry. A [Divisional Cavalry](#) car came skidding down the road. An officer stuck his head out. 'Want to know anything?'

'Yes. What's it like?'

'Not so bloody good.'

About 4 p.m. the Brigadier arrived in a flurry of dust in his little scout car, strode into Battalion Headquarters, placed his map on the table, pointed to a place about ten miles away, and said: '[San Martino](#), go there!'

The trouble was that the road ran on the wrong side of the ridge in full view of [Orsogna](#); some of the eighty-eights must have been firing over open sights. The nine tanks of B Squadron [18 Armoured Regiment](#) clattered along the exposed road, the infantry walked steadily, and the A Echelon vehicles followed in bounds—prompt bounds. Mountains of earth soon began flying in all directions, and the tanks hit back in grand style, their cannon wreathed in great red flashes, 'moving in line ahead like battleships firing broadsides.' The tanks and the infantry, attacking with spirit, thrust west on an advance which continued well after dark and certainly took the enemy rearguards by surprise.



SALAROLA JUNCTION, 2 DECEMBER 1943

salarola junction, 2 december 1943

Two Company continued in the lead until the tanks were halted by a demolition two miles on. The company pushed on, while bulldozers went to work to mend the road. With a steep bank on the left and an abrupt fall to the right, these demolitions were most effective; drivers showed much skill in passing them. Night fell. A group of Italians, who had come out from hiding, were in a circle holding hands and dancing for joy. Their faces beaming in welcome, they shook the hands of passing soldiers.

A massive haystack, blazing in the dark, lit up the road uncomfortably. Bob Simmonds, a veteran of Greece and Crete and now the Padre's batman, had paused to pick up a greatcoat when a salvo of five shells arrived. Simmonds died instantly, and a truck and motor-cycle ahead were blown to smithereens, leaving intact, oddly enough, just one jerrican of exceptionally good vino.

Another demolition blew up before 2 Company, where the road ran past a small village, Salarola. The men came under fire from the west of the village, and here Captain Nancarrow²⁰ died from a full burst of bullets in his hip. Captain Knox, at the rear, his arm in a sling (the shrapnel had been removed without anaesthetic), heard of 'Nan's' death, pressed forward, borrowed a tommy gun, and led the company with conspicuous gallantry which won him the MC. The heavily taxed men, on the move since early morning and under constant shellfire, were now almost asleep on their feet, but the end was not yet in sight. An enemy tank covering the second demolition blew up, and 2 Company went on, surprising and seizing a German battalion commander and two men on the way. The German officer was described as

the battalion commander of 26 Panzer Division, and his loss was a bad blow to the enemy division. When captured he was directing the withdrawal of his last rearguards.

The company worked its way round a sharp bend past the village, and at the junction of a minor road leading south a third demolition went up. 'All of a sudden this big red flash leapt up in front of us with a roar. (One of the chaps said "You could feel it in your guts".) Then we heard a roaring noise from the direction of the "blow" and as we listened it moved out towards us like a ripple on a pond when a stone is thrown in. It took us a moment to realise just what it was—the stuff coming down again—then we ducked our heads under cover—two or three of us got under the eaves of the nearest building—a moment later great junks of sticky clay and mud were plopping and thudding down around us.'

This decisively halted the main advance and virtually ended 22 Battalion's progress in the [Sangro](#) campaign. The indefatigable Knox led a party to find a way round this last crater. A dozen or more men still kept going, now in bright moonlight, until near the [Guardiagrele- Orsogna](#) crossroads. At first they moved 'along between the big square Italian houses: on our right their fronts were in shadow, but on the left they faced right into the moonlight with black squares for windows. We looked up at them inquiringly but they remained silent: the only noise we could hear was the crunch of our boots on the road.' Near the crossroads they could hear metallic clinking like a sledge-hammer striking metal stakes, voices, and the noise of a vehicle. (One report says this crossroad was found to be heavily mined.) They withdrew. Back near the demolition they were challenged by grenade and tommy gun from a house ('I was sitting hunched forward with my head down and some tiny fragments made a tinkling noise on my tin hat'), returned the fire, withdrew, and grouped together by the demolition to dig in fast. Two hapless members of 11 Platoon, leaping for cover from sudden firing nearby, landed in a latrine pit.

Men who took part in this advance believe that the battalion, with the enemy caught off-balance by the speed of the advance, could have reached [Guardiagrele](#) if bulldozers had quickly filled in the craters for the tanks. By dawn of course the enemy was prepared, his many guns and mortars waiting.

When the tanks appeared, the third demolition—about 40 feet wide—was too

much for them. They laagered in [Salarola](#), protected by 3 Company. Headquarters 22 Battalion reached [Salarola](#) at 2 a.m. on 3 December, and the battalion formed a line by the village, where it would stay, two miles short of the [Guardiagrele](#) which it would never reach. The transport, while coming up on the road, had suffered from shelling. Casualties for the day were two killed and six wounded.

No direct part in this day's tenacious advance along the road to [Salarola](#) had been taken by 1 Company, which had a different role—a left hook from the south, starting not far from the Barone feature. The company, with tanks and a Divisional Cavalry detachment, probed westward past [San Eusanio](#), where it had spent the night of 1–2 December. The road, poor and steep (the countryside descended steeply on each side), climbed the [Colle Bianco](#) ridge. At the top of the ridge the track turned east, to run behind a prominent feature which the rest of the battalion and the tanks would attack next day (3 December). This feature was just beyond [Salarola](#) village. The wretched going hampered the tanks, and at [Colle Bianco](#) the force was shelled severely by seven guns. The tanks, aided by fighter-bombers, silenced the guns. 'Lieutenant O'Reilly was standing up and having a "shufti" through his glasses when a fair bit of stuff landed close by. Calmly keeping on looking, the lieutenant remarked... "Don't worry. It doesn't hurt till it hits you." 'This became a proverbial saying in 6 Platoon.

The guns having been silenced, a patrol went forward with sappers who were seeking mines in the path as far as the junction with the main road near [Salarola](#). This junction was where the third (and final) demolition had ended the battalion's advance. The patrol reported the path as far as the junction clear of mines by 11 p.m. One Company spent the rest of the night ²¹ just below the crest of [Colle Bianco](#), and stayed in position there most of next morning before joining the battalion. After dawn the company, watching the feature beyond [Salarola](#) village, saw the troop of New Zealand tanks just below the crest. 'Every now and again,' writes Lieutenant O'Reilly, 'they would crawl to the crest, let fire, and move back. They were taking a lot of mortaring—Major [Green](#), ²² acting C.O. 18 Armoured Regiment, died of wounds received here—and we thought that Jerry had that position well taped. Just how well we were to find out later that day, and in the days that followed, when we were in position there....'

Now that 1 Company had joined the battalion again, it was hoped that a swift

advance would carry on to the next, and important junction, a mile further on, which led to [Orsogna](#). This soon proved to be impossible.

A small village stood at the fork, and a steep bluff (Colle Martino) rose behind it. Tanks went on to the crater to cover this objective, and at 8 a.m. on 3 December 3 Company, supported by a heavy artillery concentration, went forward to assault. But the tanks on the road drew heavy shellfire; 3 Company was soon held up, and 2 Company, close to the tanks, was forced to keep under cover. The enemy at the fork was too strong, and within an hour the attack was abandoned. Tanks covered the withdrawal and helped bring back casualties; tired infantrymen trickling back 'had that ruffled dirty weather-beaten look that you see at times.'

In the afternoon the tanks shelled [Guardiagrele](#) and the road fork; the artillery shelled but did not silence enemy guns, and the mortars and guns vigorously engaged positions along the road. A night patrol led by Second-Lieutenant McNeil found the fork more heavily manned by night than by day, and the attack towards [Guardiagrele](#) was cancelled.

The battalion's casualties in this sector during 2 and 3 December were ten killed and twenty-five wounded. The signallers, exposing themselves as they faithfully carried out their tasks, kept open the battalion's troublesome telephone line (five miles long and often cut by shells) to 4 Brigade Headquarters. ²³

The battalion's anti-tank guns, after a great deal of strenuous manhandling, had worked hard engaging targets, preparing for tank attack, and withstanding shelling and mortaring.

'Les [Whiting](#) ²⁴ had a favourite expression during heavy shelling. He would turn to us with a quizzical expression and say: "D'you know Jerry's a bloody rotten shot, isn't he. He hasn't even hit us yet."

'Norman ("Cordite") [Kriete](#), ²⁵ a crossword-puzzle fiend, used to work away in his slittie or casa during shelling, and often when there was a momentary lull his voice would hollar out: "Hey! What's a word starting with H that means—?"

'The veteran "Pop" [McLucas](#), ²⁶ badly shot through the chest, given a shot of morphia, and lying on a tabletop during shelling, was heard to remark slowly: "Do

you know, I was through the first World War and three years in this one and never been hit. My old woman told me I was a bloody fool to come away this time—I think she was right.”`

Young Teddy [Smith](#),²⁷ mortally wounded in the back and in intense pain, `managed to pass the odd wise-crack before he was taken away. As we put him in the ambulance he opened his eyes and looked up at [Stan Dempsey](#),²⁸ who was our guncrew cook (an excellent one at that), and said with a slow smile, “Cheerio, Stan, you were a bloody rotten cook anyway”, and closed his eyes for the last time. He died an hour later.’

‘I didn't know so much of life could be crowded into seven days,’ writes Captain Johnston, describing the battalion's week at [Salarola](#). ‘We were constantly shelled and mortared with Hun efficiency. Looking back on the sallies we did, they seem like a motion picture. I can still see the tanks trying to push on and we were going in on our feet. The fire was terrific and you could hardly see tanks for earth and flame and smoke—but luck was against us, and a good many of my old platoon made the big sacrifice here. [[Hercock](#)²⁹ and Joe [Hawkes](#)³⁰ killed, and several others wounded, including ‘Shorty’ [Bremner](#).³¹] The first day (3 December) when the tanks appeared over the ridge we could hardly see the things, mountains of earth (he was firing some terrific stuff, big guns) and flame and the tank boys working their guns as fast as they would go. They gave the impression that they would be blowed if they would chuck it in. I saw one tank get four direct hits (high explosive), it didn't hurt a bloke inside, and with the tracks burst they just ran her backwards down the hill on her bogies. They are great tanks these of ours and our boys have confidence in them. The forward platoons couldn't move for the fire, they couldn't even stick their heads up. It's funny how in all this you manage to think, I suppose you have so much to think about you haven't got time to worry.’

The battalion held its ground for four more days, ‘and I reckon we gave as good as we got.’ One day the enemy ‘did Battalion Headquarters over for an hour flat out.’ The house, on a reverse slope, was just too hard to hit, but the chimney came down in a smother of plaster, soot, dust and debris. This day Harry Sansum, cool as a cucumber, did a conspicuously good job in aiding the wounded.

‘One night we were sitting in our slitties, no sound of action anywhere, when

faintly from behind [Orsogna](#) bump-bump bump-bump-bump—on and on it went (you hardly ever heard his guns fire.) We said: “Christ, some b—'s in for it.” I didn't think to ask myself “Is it us?” Then the moans got closer and closer and then came right in on us (“Hell! It's us!”). Then down in your slittie and lie there, blinking or eyes shut, and just hope for the best. Then for a minute or so he really plastered us. Then it just died out and we got up and looked around— you could smell the smell of explosives all right—the air was thick with it. “If I ever get out of this I'll never growl again,” said one chap....’

Over the northern bank of the [Sangro](#) was a stretch of road known to all as the Mad Mile. ‘We used to watch the new chums drive sedately up to the brickworks, and on receipt of an air burst from Jerry we saw these drivers transformed instantly into demons of speed whose times over the remaining distance would have put them in top class at Silverstone. Incidentally the cooks (who had a clear view of the Mad Mile) used to lay bets with one another as to whether I would make it when I went up with the rations.’

After being relieved by a British parachute battalion on the night of 6–7 December, the battalion drew back to a ‘rest’ area ³² still handy to the [Castelfrentano- Salarola](#) road. Some men camped near the gunlines, ‘and every time one of the blasted things fired the crash came in the door and out of the window and the darn place shook as though it was an earthquake.’ The gun crews were Scots: ‘good jokers: “Come and have a cuppa tea Kiwi”—made you feel like one of themselves —no fuss. The radio always going, and jiving round the room. Those guns would fire at night and we would sleep right through it. Yet in the daytime if they fired without you knowing that they were going to, they'd give you a hell of a start. We slept pretty soundly after [Salarola](#).’

Except for 8 Platoon, 1 Company (which had taken over the exposed left flank along a jeep-wide track roughly between [San Eusanio](#) and enemy-held [Guardiagrele](#)) went back into crowded billets in [San Eusanio](#), whose inhabitants had given the company and tanks a great send-off when they passed through a few days before.

During daylight between 11 and 22 December 8 Platoon had a section stationed in a house about half a mile forward. Three or four houses grouped around were occupied by Italians. ‘On the afternoon 21 December a very excited Italian came

bursting in with the news that a Jerry patrol was in a house about 200 yards away and heading our way,' writes N. W. Lash. ³³ A corporal 'posted a Bren and rifle facing the approach and himself used the attic window with a tommygun. His tommygun firing was to be the signal to let go everything. Strangely enough the patrol walked quite confidently down the track with their weapons at ease. Three privates, we could see them plainly, and a lieutenant with Iron Cross on the tunic [who later proved to be an English-speaking cadet officer and who gave information which was thought to have washed out a scheme to attack [Guardiagrele](#)]. Approaching the corner they brought their weapons to the ready and we let them have it at 30 yards. Two were killed and we took the other two, wounded, prisoners. Our officer Jack Monaghan arrived to see what it was all about and took the two prisoners away.'

Captain Johnston later wrote home how he met one of these wounded at the RAP, on the stretcher. 'I looked over the Doc's shoulder and there was a beautiful fair haired blue eyed kid; I blurted out "Christ it's only a child." The Doc was doing something but the kid was looking at me all the time with wide open eyes. He kept on looking at me and then raised his arm. I did a funny thing. I caught him by the wrist. Then he said: "Where am I shutze, where am I shutze?" He thought he had been shot in the abdomen. I ran my hands over his body but assured him he hadn't been shot there. He just looked at me and said "Praise be to the Lors." He had been shot through the chest, the bullet going under the right breast and out his back. It was a shocking wound and must have got one of his lungs. The Doctor sewed him up there and then and the little blighter never said a word. I hope he lived. I've seen fellows talk a lot then treat a wounded German like a nurse would. I must have done the same.'

Both wounded prisoners died on Christmas Eve.

A much different story about this area is told by another officer in the battalion: 'They called him Harry the Yank. The reason for that was, of course, that he spoke American. We were never sure whether he was not a Fifth Columnist and our doubts always remained. He was a Station Master in charge of a tiny village and we used to go up to his house at night, about twelve of us, and play trains. Harry would wear his Station Master's hat and wave his green flag, and, grown men though we were, we used to go round hanging on to each other's waists, making appropriate noises. Perhaps in a way this was a link with home and children.

'Some of us had an interesting experience one night at Harry's place. Just before 9 p.m. we noticed that several of the women folk slipped from the room: Harry said they had gone to Church. So one or two of us followed them and we found a large assembly, mostly women, gathered round in a stable with the lowing oxen nearby. They were saying the Rosary and they had done that night after night for a couple of years, because there was no resident priest in the area. One of the women led them in the devotions. It was a humble setting and somehow doubly sincere and impressive.'

The rest behind the immediate front line continued. ³⁴ Carriers helped [20 Armoured Regiment](#) to move ammunition; a platoon went off to protect artillery observation posts and sound-ranging specialists; machine-gunners did turns of duty in [Salarola](#); many stood-to in slushy outposts on the alert for German night patrols sneaking down from the ridges.

The gleaming eyes of a cat gave Sergeant Cassidy one of his greatest shocks in the war, and the same goes for Bill [Walsh](#), ³⁵ who trod on a dog. Another sentry recalls: 'Tiny and I sitting in a slitty in the middle of the night and arguing as to which lines a fire was burning in.... Then the talk got round to other aspects of war. Tiny (the [Sangro](#) was his first action) said he was afraid of pain. He didn't think he could stand it if he got hit badly. Poor old Tiny, he needn't have worried, he got a direct hit from a 170 m.m. or something just north of [Rimini](#).'

The battalion kept ready to move on, once the enemy weakened, to attack up to the junction of the [Orsogna- Guardiagrele](#) road—but the enemy grew stronger, if anything, and no break-through took place. [Eighth Army](#) was bogged down for the winter. A stalemate spread over the Adriatic front.

Christmas came. In A Echelon's cookhouse Lieutenant Dave Whillans held a Christmas party and generously offered liqueurs all round. Bottles emptied rapidly, fresh ones arrived to be drained even more quickly, but nobody seemed much happier until the medical officer joined the party. He took a small sip: 'How long have you been drinking this stuff?' The 'liqueurs' turned out to be a cough mixture laxative heavily laced with cascara. Translating instructions on the labels, the doctor ³⁶ read out to abashed soldiers just how many spoonfuls should be given to expectant

mothers.

Roman Catholics from 22 Battalion and other nearby units went to midnight Mass in the church at [San Eusanio](#). The organist rather startled the congregation by playing 'Now is the Hour' on three occasions. 'We found out later that he had learnt it from the Kiwis who were billeted with him. He was under the impression the song was New Zealand's national anthem.'

On Christmas Eve Mick Kenny went over to visit his brother, a lieutenant in the [Maori Battalion](#). 'We had a grand evening and had been singing our own Christmas carols all in harmony —during a lull in our singing we could hear in the distance the voices of Germans singing "Silent Night"—then the Maori boys started singing with them. The next day we were into things again. I have thought more of this incident perhaps than any other, especially at Christmas when I hear the singing of carols.'

Padre Sullivan has his own Christmas story: 'We took over... [an Italian's] house and established an R.A.P. in it. That meant that he and his wife and his little boy had to live in the stable below. He was a small farmer, with a tiny piece of land, two or three scruffy sheep and a few poultry. We were there at Christmas time and this old boy (at least he seemed old) spoke English fairly well. He came to me one day and said, "Would you read me some story from the New Testament?"

'I said I would and he gave me a copy in the Italian language, so that when I read from it his wife and boy would be able to follow it. Each morning for about a week I was in the habit of coming down to that stable and reading him some passages.

'Christmas came upon us while we were there and the boys in the Company thought they would like to do something for this small family and so they held a tarpaulin muster. One way and another a number of gifts were collected; many items of food and something each for the mother and the father and the boy. At night they stole down and, while these three people were asleep, they filled Christmas stockings for them. When I went down on Christmas morning, the small family was quite overcome with joy and the old man invited me on this occasion to read the story of Christmas. I did, and I was never more moved by it. The tears in their eyes as they listened to this immortal tale was a sight which somehow seemed

to bring it alive. There was a father, a mother, a small boy, a stable filled with straw and a couple of lowing oxen in the corner. The wheel of history seemed to have made a full turn. In the midst of war, we were at peace.'

New Year's Eve: a blizzard. It was bitterly cold. Men in outposts had a wretched time. 'Hardly any good days now, mostly cold and miserable with snow on the ground a great deal of the time.' But New Year's Eve was happy enough for some members of 2 Company, cosy and warm with a plentiful supply of vino before a roaring fire inside a casa. 'There was a feeling among us of mellowness and goodwill to all men.'

Back to the line they went, delayed by snow blocking the road, on the night of 3-4 January. The snow, thick on the ground, was a lovely sight, but it soon palled and the increasing mud was cursed steadily.

'During this winter the old Army boots took a thrashing. Jokers coming from outside in the mud and snow took off their boots as soon as they got inside and put them by the open fire to dry. But many were put too close and so suffered damage. We also started building our own diesel stoves. Fuel drip-drip- drip from a tin into a metal container—a steady sizzle and a roar—and the smoke and fumes going up the chimney which protruded out a window (many round food tins wedged one inside the other with the ends cut out). She didn't always work too well though—the place that thick with fumes and smoke that you could hardly see or breathe. But when you got one really revved up she just glowed red hot and threw out a terrific heat: you wondered how all that heat came from that tiny trickle of diesel. Of course—there was a chance she may blow up on you.'

On the second visit to [Salarola](#) 3 Company occupied the village, thoroughly prepared the buildings for defence and carried out some ingenious schemes, which included bricking up lines of communication between houses, making holes in walls between rooms and holes in floors upstairs with ropes for quick descent. Efficient booby traps and signal systems were arranged, and all sentry posts were co-ordinated. The men, skilful now in not exposing themselves when need be, became highly efficient sentries; few people could move far without being challenged, as a senior officer (pig on back) and 'Joe Ghost' (fowls in hand) found out.

'On watch during the day (there were two of us together) we would stand back from the window of the upstairs room of our casa and search with our eyes for any sign of movement in the enemy area. We had a good view of [Orsogna](#) (its tower bombed, shelled and blasted but always intact) and the ridge stretching down to [Guardiagrele](#), and we would go methodically from one building to another in both towns, and the odd buildings scattered around (remember that casa sitting on its own just on top of the ridge where the road from the crossroads reached the top of the hill just before entering [Orsogna](#)?). But never could we two see the slightest sign of movement. He must have seen plenty of movement in our area at times ("This mess queue's going to get a shock one day").'

Civilians were cleared out of the no-man's-land ahead ('What a nuisance the poor wretched devils are in wartime'), and Major Donald became in effect the mayor of [Salarola](#). According to custom he appeared on the balcony of Company Headquarters at 10 a.m., a time when enemy guns could be relied upon to remain silent. Then local inhabitants sauntering past would doff their hats and bow. All village disputes were brought before the 'mayor' to be settled. Gifts flowed into Company Headquarters, and at one stage the larder held four pigs, two lambs, six fowls, dozens of eggs, bottles of good wines, and fat cheeses. Officers began collecting walking sticks, and vied with one another to produce the nobbiest or the most crooked.

The booby traps laid around farmhouses in no-man's-land collected in the first night half a dozen sheep and two horses. A few snow capes arrived for patrolling. Before this a man might have improvised camouflage by using long white petticoats taken from empty houses. One patrol set out as an experiment in ordinary battle dress, made a wide sweep, and was almost into Lieutenant O'Reilly's platoon area before being detected. A group of officers, watching with binoculars in brilliant moonlight and icy clear air, had failed entirely to see the figures in battle dress.

Six Platoon (thought to be the first medium machine-gun platoon of 22 Battalion to fire at the enemy) held a remote outpost on [Bianco](#) ridge. Rations and ammunition came up by mule train from [San Eusanio](#) to [Bianco](#) village. A carrying party from the platoon covered the last three-quarters of a mile in deep snow and atrocious going. The platoon kept busy on sentry duty and patrolling. Shooting was

done from positions well forward. A suitable place would be reconnoitred by night, the gun section would move into position well before dawn and return after dark. Fresh positions evaded spandau fire and mortaring.

The most exacting work at another advanced post is described by Corporal Paterson. A greater contrast with desert warfare is difficult to imagine. This post, at the top of a minor ridge, was about a mile from the cliffs on which Orsogna stood. Into these cliffs the Germans had dug innumerable holes. An observation post was manned by a British medium battery officer and his wireless assistant in the one room that remained upstairs in a small two-storied house. Downstairs were two rooms, one more or less intact and the other badly holed. These two rooms were occupied by a section of infantry as a guard, which was changed under cover of darkness every forty-eight hours.

Once inside the house the guard spoke in whispers only and showed no lights until relieved. The intact room was just large enough for seven men to lie down, each with one blanket; the holed room was used as kitchen, guard posts, lavatory and entrance to the house. The Germans, who had dugouts only 200 yards to the left of the outpost, were under the impression that the place was derelict and quite unoccupied. Nonchalantly they would climb out of their holes as daylight came and stamp around in the snow, swinging their arms to warm themselves and generally stretching themselves after a cramped night in a slit trench. To preserve the illusion that the house was unoccupied, the infantry had strict instructions not to shoot except as a last resort and to let inquiring Germans enter the house and deal with them silently inside.

Paterson's section (from 15 Platoon) lined up in the snow, which was a foot to 18 inches deep, and with a guide set off to relieve the British paratroopers about a mile away. 'We were accompanied by our platoon commander 2 Lt. Ian Thomas³⁷ and the company sergeant-major, Scott.³⁸ We crept up to the house on its blind side and relieved the paratroopers who wasted no time in getting out and dismayed us a little by their obvious anxiety to leave the place behind them as soon as possible. (We found out afterwards that whereas we had 48 hours there, they apparently had much longer.) Ian Thomas and "Scotty" saw us comfortably in and departed, promising to call again in a couple of days' time. We had a couple of primuses and tins of potatoes, carrots, etc. which we cooked up during the day, together with odd

cups of tea, and generally felt fairly comfortable. However about 9 p.m., towards the end of our first 24 hours there, a blizzard started to blow. The temperature dropped to much too cold and soon as we did our turn of picquet duty in the kitchen we found ourselves standing in something like a wind tunnel with the snow driving straight through from the big hole in the wall (facing the Huns opposite) and out the hole in the wall behind. There were two of us out in this at about 5 a.m. (daylight usually came up about 6 then)—when we saw staggering towards us on the blind side a solitary figure. In the driving snow it seemed to appear then disappear again. Remembering our instructions not to shoot we waited while the hair at the back of my neck anyway sort of rose, and we both wondered how far in we should let them come, and how many we should deal with. One of us woke the others and we all stood to. The figure eventually more or less fell into the room. It was Ian Thomas in a state of almost collapse. He was shaking violently with the cold. We rubbed him hard for a time, then with my greatcoat on we persuaded him to lie down and warm up with practically all the other blankets on him. It was some time before the shivering stopped. We asked him what on earth had brought him out walking on a night like this. He said that he wanted to see how his boys were getting on, and make sure we were all OK. He had started off about 9 p.m. and had only got a few hundred yards when the blizzard came up. However the thought of turning back had apparently just not been considered. In the finish he was falling face forwards on the snow to make a track for himself through the drifts which had piled up so high that he was almost out of his depth in it. By this means he managed to make the 1500 yards or so in good time—about 8 hours' solid going. Within three or four hours he had recovered his usual vitality and was joking, laughing and generally enjoying himself thoroughly—in whispers of course for the blizzard had gone and all was quiet again and Jerry very close.'

Intermittent shelling and mortaring still plagued the battalion area, but with no very serious results. A wiser battalion suffered only very few casualties compared with those during its first stay in [Salarola](#). With the deep freeze the front had quietened down a lot. The most serious casualty took place on 17 January when a direct hit on a jeep killed all four passengers: Lance-Corporal Jock [Downing](#),³⁹ Privates Laurie [Parnell](#),⁴⁰ Garry [Romley](#),⁴¹ and A. W. [Morris](#),⁴² who were returning about 11 p.m. from playing poker at Transport Platoon headquarters. All except Romley, who died soon afterwards, were killed instantly.

'A vivid memory of the next afternoon,' writes Jenkins,⁴³ 'when we buried them just off the road, was the number of Italians present. Although quite a bit of shelling was going on, no one stirred even a little while the two padres, R.C. and C. of E. were reading the services.'

Shelling increased in the next few days. 'Lying in the bunk at night listening to all the different noises the Jerry shells landing in the vicinity made. Some made a tinny crisp sort of crash, something like breaking glass. Some a deep-voiced crump. Some sounded more like a crack. There seemed to be many varieties—with some you would hear the whine—with others just the burst.'

As the shelling increased so did rumours of an imminent move—and on the night of 18-19 January the much-discussed relief took place. The men were warned repeatedly to make no noise whatsoever. An English regiment from 4 Indian Division came in, and with headlights flashing on and off, trucks roaring, and men shouting, 'did everything but tell the Hun a relief was on. They set to work to park their vehicles—revving engines and gear changes as they drove up alleys—much shouting and advice to drivers: "Right hand down." "Eeee, chum, you nearly took—corner off building," "Easy mate," etc., etc., and backed blaspheming into possies. Jerry didn't take any notice of it all—just the few usual ones in the vicinity. And we 'oved quietly onto the road and away.'

¹ Appointments in 22 (Mot) Bn on arrival in Italy were: CO, Lt-Col T. C. Campbell; 2 i/c, Maj H. V. Donald; OC 1 Coy, Maj P. R. Hockley; OC 2 Coy, Maj R. R. Knox; OC 3 Coy, Maj F. G. Oldham; OC 4 Coy, Maj L. G. S. Cross.

² L-Cpl J. R. Selwyn; Lower Hutt; born Auckland, 28 May 1918; printer.

³ Very Rev. M. G. Sullivan; Dean of Christchurch; born Auckland, 30 Mar 1910.

⁴ Pte T. A. Kea; Rarotonga; born Rarotonga, 18 Jul 1919; clerk.

⁵ Capt L. O. Turner; Feilding; born Feilding, 23 Apr 1921; saddler.

⁶ Maj C. C. Ring, m.i.d.; Auckland; born Auckland, 19 Apr 1914; medical practitioner.

⁷ Capt H. K. Joblin, m.i.d.; Marton; born Hunterville, 6 Nov 1909; bank officer; wounded 18 Apr 1945.

⁸ Sgt H. C. Williams; born NZ 8 Jul 1908; herd tester; twice wounded.

⁹ Capt P. B. Were; England; born Te Aroha, 13 Apr 1919; student; wounded 24 Oct 1942.

¹⁰ Pte J. W. Benge; born NZ 16 Mar 1922; garage assistant; wounded 24 Nov 1943.

¹¹ Pte A. A. Pearse; born NZ 9 Mar 1921; farm labourer; died of wounds 25 Nov 1943.

¹² Pte J. Hewitt; Dannevirke; born Dannevirke, 10 Nov 1918; farmhand; twice wounded.

¹³ Lt N. C. Gardiner; Wellington; born Wanganui, 15 Sep 1914; clerk; wounded 30 Nov 1943.

¹⁴ Lt J. H. McNeil; born NZ 2 Jan 1920; labourer; killed in action 31 Jul 1944.

¹⁵ Lt H.J. Monaghan, MM; Eketahuna; born Eketahuna, 24 Jul 1918; labourer; three times wounded.

¹⁶ Capt J. T. Shaw; New Plymouth; born New Plymouth, 31 Dec 1921; painter; twice wounded.

¹⁷ Lt A. W. Hart; Masterton; born NZ 17 Jan 1918; garage proprietor.

¹⁸ Maj-Gen K. L. Stewart, CB, CBE, DSO, m.i.d., MC (Gk), Legion of Merit

(US); Kerikeri; born Timaru, 30 Dec 1896; Regular soldier; 1 NZEF 1917–19; GSO 1 2 NZ Div, 1940–41; DCGS 1941–43; comd 5 Bde Aug–Nov 1943, 4 Armd Bde Nov 1943–Mar 1944, 5 Bde Mar–Aug 1944; p.w. 1 Aug 1944; comd 9 Bde (2 NZEF, Japan) 1945–46; Adjutant-General, NZ Military Forces, 1946–49; CGS 1949–52.

¹⁹ Early on 2 December 24 Battalion entered [Castelfrentano](#). The Division next aimed to make for [Orsogna](#), on the next ridge, but the New Zealanders were unable to capture this town.

²⁰ [Capt D. H. Nancarrow](#); born [Hawera](#), 4 Jan 1910; school-teacher; killed in action 2 Dec 1943. Nancarrow's batman, Private G. R. Elgar, 'whom, characteristically, Nan looked after as if he were doing the batting himself', was wounded with him. 'Come on! We've got them on the run!' were the captain's last words. Unseen by 12 Platoon, a German motor-cycle combination on the other side of the demolition coasted silently downhill to the crater's brink, opened fire at point-blank range and fatally wounded the officer.

²¹ A light moving in the darkness perplexed this party until they found a distraught Italian farmer, who said that his cow was about to calve and he had to attend to her. Keeping a stealthy eye on the farmer, the infantry found that he was hiding money and personal treasures.

²² [Maj H. M. Green](#), m.i.d.; born England, 3 Sep 1905; sales manager; died of wounds 3 Dec 1943.

²³ 'The manner in which our sigs kept our lines of communication open was something to be remembered. Wading through snow waist deep, searching for lines and repairing lines under murderous shell and mortar fire, did not deter these men.'

²⁴ [Pte F. L. Whiting](#); born NZ 17 May 1920; assistant seedsman; died New Plymouth, 12 Aug 1947.

²⁵ [Pte N. H. T. Kriete](#); [Wellington](#); born [Wellington](#), 26 Oct 1916; packer.

²⁶ Pte H. S. McLucas; born Auckland, 8 Feb 1900; commercial traveller; wounded 3 Dec 1943.

²⁷ Pte E. P. B. Smith; born Taihape, 4 Sep 1922; clerk; died of wounds 3 Dec 1943.

²⁸ Pte S. J. Dempsey; born NZ 11 Jul 1920; civil servant; killed in action 14 Dec 1944.

²⁹ Cpl M. Hercock; born Pahiatua, 20 Feb 1919; farmhand; killed in action 3 Dec 1943.

³⁰ Pte O. J. Hawkes; born Waipukurau, 16 Jun 1905; contractor; killed in action 3 Dec 1943.

³¹ Pte N. C. Bremner; Lower Hutt; born Feilding, 10 Jan 1919; labourer; twice wounded.

³² Major D. G. Steele returned from furlough in New Zealand to resume his appointment as 2 i/c; Major Donald assumed command of 3 Company.

³³ 2 Lt N. W. Lash; Dannevirke; born NZ 4 Nov 1921; farmhand.

³⁴ The 'San Severo Club' was formed after the first Salarola action. One evening in an Italian casa, over a few drinks, new lyrics were composed to the tune of 'Ball of Yarn'—a song introduced by 2 Lt Earl Cross. Each verse was about one of those present on that evening, plus a few of the other officers of the company. Captain 'Bunty' Cowper was the head, and others in this club were Lts J. H. Dymock, C. R. Carson, F. R. Wheeler and E. K. Cross, Sgts Butler and Kerrigan, and Ptes Ancrum, Hudson, Agnew, O'Brien and Hanley. The song was sung on many a convivial evening after that occasion. The 'San Severo Club' was the forerunner of other such clubs in the battalion: another memorable club was the 'Goums Club'. Veterans have many nostalgic memories of these gatherings.

³⁵ Pte W. M. Walsh; Napier; born NZ 25 Dec 1918; labourer; wounded 25 Mar 1944.

³⁶ 'The Medical Officer at this time (like the padre) was a more popular man than a lot. When you visited him he heard your story before he decided whether or not you were malingering. So many gave you the impression that they reckoned you were lead swinging before they knew anything about your ailment. It didn't go over too well when you had been crook for, say, a day or two and knew you were damned crook.'

³⁷ Lt I. L. Thomas, MC; Ruatoria; born Christchurch, 30 Apr 1917; fat-stock buyer; twice wounded.

³⁸ 2 Lt E. M. Scott, m.i.d.; Masterton; born Dannevirke, 21 Nov 1916; shepherd and drover; wounded 17 Jan 1945. Every other night Scott took relief parties off to the ruined house. 'Somehow, by the way he walked, or it may have been in the set of his chin, as he strode out wielding a heavy walking stick, bareheaded as a rule or with just a beret on, he gave a powerful feeling of confidence and well-being. He seemed to be quite fearless and matter of fact, perfectly confident and capable of dealing with any situation which might arise.' Paterson, meeting Scott in hospital in January 1945, told him of the great confidence he had given 'us lesser lights. Scott, much amused, said that far from feeling as confident and fearless he was always internally between a—and a shiver until he got back into the lines.'

³⁹ L-Cpl T. J. Downing; born Napier, 5 Dec 1919; shepherd; killed in action 17 Jan 1944.

⁴⁰ Pte L. A. Parnell; born Wellington, 20 Aug 1914; clerk; killed in action 17 Jan 1944.

⁴¹ Pte G. G. Romley; born NZ 10 Mar 1918; shepherd; died of wounds 18 Jan 1944.

⁴² Pte A. W. Morris; born NZ 9 Nov 1911; farm labourer; killed in action 17 Jan 1944.

⁴³ Pte W. Jenkins; Palmerston North; born Dunedin, 9 Oct 1917; jockey.

22 BATTALION

CHAPTER 10 – CASSINO

CHAPTER 10

Cassino

From a stalemate in the east, at [Orsogna](#), the battalion went to a stalemate in the west, at [Cassino](#).¹ As the [Sangro](#) area differed from the desert, so [Cassino](#) differed from the [Sangro](#). The memory of that chaotic heap of dusty, stinking rubble burned itself into the nerves and minds of New Zealanders as no other place did in the war. Here some men glimpsed what they felt could be the setting for future wars. As [Doug Froggatt](#)² writes: 'Just gaunt walls pitted with shell fire and surrounded everywhere by heaps of masonry and stone and over all a pall of fine choking dust and the smells of stagnation and death. Great gaping bomb craters each part-filled with water. Everyone in [Cassino](#) got as far below ground as possible and most platoons were well below shell-penetrating depth. Stand to at dawn and dusk was the regular thing and then men crawled up top and stood to arms. Of course there were always some poor blighters on watch throughout the day but even these contrived to be well hidden away.'

For several days they had travelled, over from the [Sangro](#) to bare olive and oak groves round a little town a few miles south of [Cassino](#), [Piedimonte d' Alife](#), where they arrived one morning. One man continues the story:

Some of the usual stops and starts on the way. Cold ... but fine. (Getting out of the lorries at some of the stops after daylight and stamping and jumping round to try and get warm—especially the feet—looking up and down the road and up at the bold looking hills—winter over the countryside—everything calm and rigid looking—the hills and the leafless trees beside the road and in the fields standing out black and clearly defined against the clear watery sky—a faint layer of smoke haze girdling a hill—hands in your pockets—cold on your cheeks, an icy feeling at the tip of your nose.) At Alife, mornings raw but fine: leave to [Pompeii](#)³ and see bodies of men and a dog in the positions they were in when overwhelmed by the eruption. On the way back someone says 'There's the Isle of [Capri](#)', so we move to the back of the truck and look round the edge of the canopy for a shoofiti. Some training among the olive trees—heard the sound of gunfire away to the north.

Then to [Mignano](#)—a night trip and cold as hell, greatcoats on and blankets

round us—boots on the steel tray—feet numb and sore with cold—out of the trucks first thing in the morning at destination—onto ground hard as iron—no white frost—but ground frozen hard—no mud until ground thawed.

At [Mignano](#): a group of jokers gathered in a circle and looking at a man in the centre—then up would go his arm and all faces would follow it skyward—looking towards heaven—then all down together and stares at the ground: two-up: a common sight. And those [Mignano](#) echoes—some of them had a ringing metallic sound —rising or falling in tone as they reached across the valley. It also had a noise something like wind blowing through a wooden barrel.

How the echo from the U.S. guns used to crash around the various mountain sides. A gun would fire and one echo would bang against the nearest face and then move up the different crags and gullies— almost dying away and then coming on more loudly again as it reached another steep face. And while this was going on, other echoes would be doing the same thing—all at different times—on other mountain sides—getting further away as you listened—just like waves breaking on rocks. Sometimes you wouldn't hear the gun at all—but an echo would come surging up the various mountain sides. I thought that this echo effect had a tendency to make a shellburst sound louder in the hills of [Italy](#) than in the flat desert.

Clear days—windy days—and nearly always cold days when rain, driven by a bitter wind, pelted down, and turned the area into mud and water (we got to work one day and metalled a track into our area for vehicles using, I think, rubble from the village). It nearly always seemed to be cold and windy—and we were in bivvies. And at night the wind rushed and flapped round the sides of your bivvy—cold and draughty....

It was a calm and sunny morning however when we were returning from a route march and saw the bombers making for [Cassino](#) and then saw the masses of brown and black smoke billowing up from the Monastery—then heard the trembling rumble of the bombs. (From a distance bombing sounds very like that rumble which comes at the beginning of an earthquake, and we had an earthquake while at [Mignano](#).)

Our area at [Mignano](#) ⁴ lay in a valley between the rugged hills to the NE and 'Million Dollar Hill'. (It was called that, they said, because it had cost a million dollars

to capture. Some of the jokers climbed to the top of it and when they came back said that it had plenty of signs of a slogging match having passed over it, it was very rocky.) After one storm it was mantled in snow down to the foot. As a landmark it completely dominated our area and every time you looked around—there it was. It seemed to have something threatening about it—there were more around like it—and Jerry held some of them.

But it wasn't all bad. Sometimes on a clear evening (it would be nearly dusk in our valley) the sun shining from behind Million Dollar Hill would strike the barren rocky hillsides on the other side of our valley—heather or some such thing growing from between the rocks. And the hills (or mountains) would take on the most vivid hues I have ever seen—pinks, blues, mauves and reds. (Like you read about in books—but I had never noticed that hills did that until then—nor have I really noticed it since. But these colours were vivid.)

And we used to go for route marches along the road through the area occupied by the tanks (and we used to go to Mobile Cinema shows in that area too).

Yes—and on a route march too—or you may be going on trucks somewhere—you would often pass through another unit's area. And maybe you would see some one from that unit whom you knew—maybe you had seen him often—but maybe you had heard in letters from home that he had come over in one of the latest reinforcements but you didn't know to what unit he had gone. Then suddenly you would spot him. And you would yell out something—say— 'How's things at Bush Valley?'—or— 'Have you been to any dances at Waikikamukau Hall lately?' (some question like that). Then up would go his head and he would search frantically with a surprised questioning-eager look. But it was hard for him to spot you—in the mass of other jokers or looking out from under the canopy of the back of a truck. And the last you saw of him he would still be looking seriously in the direction of the road. And you could imagine him a few seconds later turning away and scratching his head and wondering who the hell that was— 'Must be somebody local'—and thinking the same thoughts again—say that night or next day.

And then the day some of us did a lot of tearing around over there near the foot of Million Dollar Hill for the movie cameras ⁵ — maybe we would get our pictures on the newsreel showing us attacking [Cassino](#)—this 'attack' we did quite a few times

before the real one. And in that area one day some of us tried out the relative merits of the Piat and Bazooka on the walls of a ruined casa. And wasn't it here that one day some Messerschmitts or Focke Wulfs went tearing past and disturbed a 'shoofti plane' going about his leisurely business, and he darted down into a gully—smartly.

And then once again out would go officers (jeep, overcoat and map case) to another conference. Then a fresh story of how the attack was going to be carried out. Then rain again—and that was that.

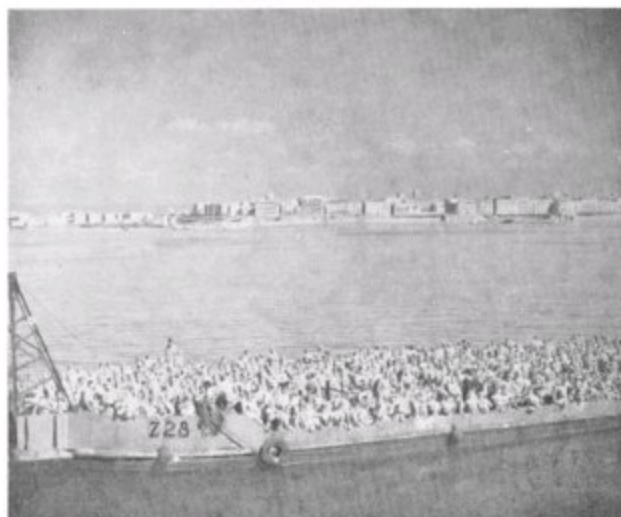
Twenty-second (Motor) Battalion was to speed forward and



'Bivvies' at Burg el Arab

'Bivvies' at Burg el Arab

Going ashore at Taranto



Going ashore at Taranto



Aerial view of the crossroads to Castelfrentano and Guardiagrele in the Sangro River area, January 1944

Aerial view of the crossroads to [Castelfrentano](#) and [Guardiagrele](#) in the [Sangro River](#) area, January 1944

Brigadier Inglis chats with members of 2 Company at Salarola



Brigadier Inglis chats with members of 2 Company at [Salarola](#)



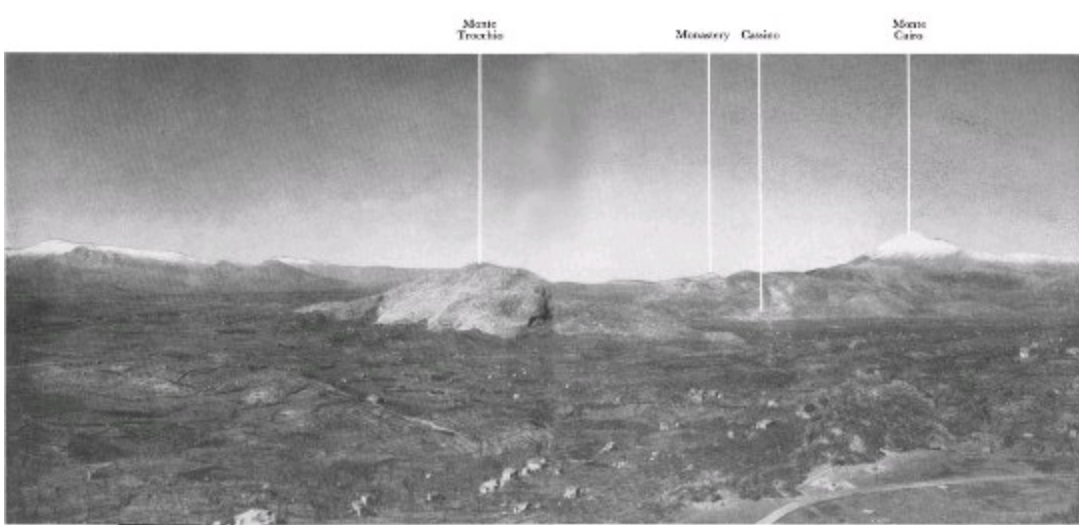
8 Platoon, 1 Company, just out of Cassino

8 Platoon, 1 Company, just out of Cassino

12 Platoon



12 Platoon



Snow-capped Monte Cairo and the Monastery guard the junction of the Liri and Rapido valleys. Cassino lies at the foot of the hill at the head of Route 6, with Monte Trocchio in the centre of the picture

Snow-capped Monte Cairo and the Monastery guard the junction of the [Liri](#) and Rapido valleys. [Cassino](#) lies at the foot of the hill at the head of Route 6, with [Monte Trocchio](#) in the centre of the picture



The courtyard of the castle at Vicalvi, June 1944

The courtyard of the castle at [Vicalvi](#), June 1944



La Romola

La Romola

Point 361—the battalion's final objective in the advance to Florence



Point 361—the battalion's final objective in the advance to Florence



12 Platoon before the move to the Adriatic

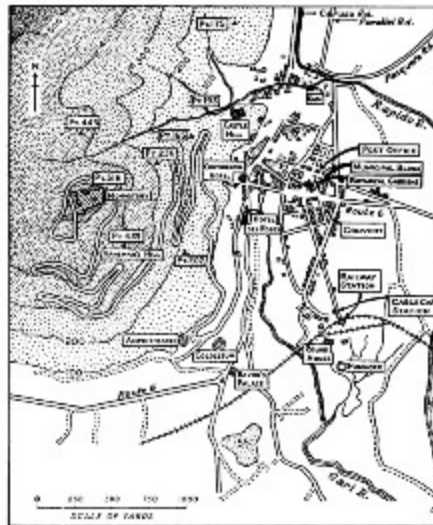
12 Platoon before the move to the Adriatic

I. F. Thompson receives a wireless message, Rimini, September 1944



I. F. Thompson receives a wireless message, Rimini, September 1944

exploit in the breach once the break-through came. But no break-through came. Days of waiting grew into weeks, and the battalion was nicknamed (for a little while) 'AMGOT' (Allied Military Government of Occupied Territory). Officers and men studied superb aerial photographs taken from all heights down to as low as 200 feet. They studied these photographs, built models, demolished them, then built them from memory.



**CLASSINO
cassino**

Men were lectured on the positions of all standing landmarks and tasks allotted to each platoon. They hoped men would get to know the general layout of a heap of rubble which once housed 24,000 Italians. The fresh rubble converted 'mousetraps

into bastions of defence,' the Germans said, so very truly.

Other New Zealand battalions had fought bitterly and bloodily in the ruins: their stories, and stories of the defence, came back to the waiting battalion. By now three-quarters of the town was captured, a foothold won on [Monastery Hill](#), and a bridgehead gained across the Rapido River. New Zealand infantry, battling around where Route 6 led through the town, won the Botanical Gardens and reached the threshold of what was left of the Hotel des Roses and the Continental Hotel, two of the last remaining keypoints of the town's defences. These two hotels were near the end of the town where Route 6—that broken road a man would never forget—making a sharp turn, led to the entrance of the prized [Liri](#) valley. Soon, before this brilliant German defence, flesh and blood reached the limit of endurance. Two days before 22 Battalion came into [Cassino](#) the attack was given up for the time being; positions so far won would be held in the ruins. The road to [Rome](#) stayed closed. The battalion would go in, not a victorious force on the hunt, but merely in a holding role.

And all this time—the battalion had been waiting its turn for more than a month—orders and moves had been changed and changed again. 'The battalion's going in.' 'Ready in an hour.' 'Ready in half an hour.' 'Cancelled.' 'Going in tomorrow.' 'Keep ready to move.' 'Prepare to move.' 'Cancelled....' Day after day. Nerves wore down. The suspense preyed on men's minds.

We sat down in the mortar truck—canopy down against the cold—and lit the old primus to make the usual billy of steaming coffee. ('When she's boiled and you've put the coffee grains in, put her back on until she bubbles up again—that's what makes it.') Everything was cold and bleak looking—the weather and the outlook. We seemed to have come to a dead end. Everything had looked so bright when we arrived in [Italy](#). (Strike through [Pescara](#), then across to [Rome](#), then a powerful drive up the peninsula to the southern borders of the Reich—a German sergeant taken prisoner at about the time we crossed the [Sangro](#) had the cheek to say that we would fight many more battles before we would get past [Italy](#)—it was in the paper.) Now all that had gone. Bleak cold—mud and rain—wind and snow—nothing but slogging. And old Tedeschi [Italian for 'Germans', often abbreviated to 'Ted'] never gave an inch—if he was forced off some place and thought there was a chance to get it back—back he would come—as though it was the last ditch. Shelling, mortaring

and spandaus going brrrrp brrrrp. (How many times during our days in the battalion did we hear that latter sound?) ('Aw well, I suppose she'll come right in the spring'— 'The bloody tanks can't get off the roads, that's the— trouble')

'Highway Six: that last strip into [Cassino](#),' says a 22 Battalion company commander. ⁶ 'Transport, moving only at night, would turn into a sideroad. There you would debus with your weapons, some ammo and a couple of blankets, and make your way into [Cassino](#) on foot as the transport turned, ready to go back. That was the Mad Mile, a most unhappy stretch, a dead road in the daylight, no movement except at night, for the enemy had that road exactly taped, down to the last yard. Every now and then there'd be a burst of mortars, especially on places where bridges had been over small creeks or depressions. We moved very swiftly along the Mad Mile, I can tell you, always in single file, always well spaced, and the outstanding impression was the smell of death—sweet, sickly—a terrific stench there. The trees were blasted and broken on the sides of the road, and big craters were everywhere, most of them filled with rainwater. A ditch, handy to the side of the road, gave urgent cover. The Mad Mile was not only covered directly down the road but also to the left: spandaus somewhere over towards the Continental Hotel.'

A member of the battalion, who takes his religion seriously, writes: 'This was a moment lived ... [on the fringe of the town before 3 and 4 Companies went into position]. It was a Communion Service held in the barren room of an Italian house. Outside the mortars were falling with heavy thuds. Inside about twenty men were kneeling in their battle-dress uniforms. The Chaplain had no robes save his own stained and dirty uniform. For a Chalice he used a dirty, chipped tumbler and for a Paten to hold the bread, he had a shallow, cracked enamel dish.

'Many of those men were attending their last Communion on earth. The service was stripped bare of every possible external, but all those who attended it felt they were near to the heart of reality. It takes a war sometimes to reveal the truth to us.'

Battalion Headquarters and 3 and 4 Companies moved up Route 6 to take over from New Zealand infantry on Saturday night, 25 March. The night was dark; fine rain falling made observation difficult. As the men approached the town, the fire became more intense. Flares threw a bright light for a few minutes then died away—smoke drifted across the road—shells crashed around or screamed overhead—tracers

whipped by, seeming to drift in the air when seen at a distance ('Jerry was firing straight down the road, tapping out tunes with his damned machine gun')—occasionally a close one sent every man flat on the ground.

Near its destination the head of the column halted for some reason; in the darkness this was not noticed until actual contact was made with the man in front. This action, telescoping down the line, left the men anything but dispersed. At that moment an enemy mortar bomb landed and exploded in the centre of the group, killing two and wounding fifteen. Immediately the battalion moved forward again, while the stretcher-bearers began evacuating the wounded to the RAP. Sergeant Cassidy, of the carrier platoon, who attended to his mates and helped them along to the RAP, notes: 'Among those the bomb collected were our platoon officer Des Orton ⁷ (throat), my driver C. G. Nikolaison, ⁸ Max Rogers ⁹ (hindquarters), Dave Patton (hand), and myself (leg and chin). Poor old Nick, as we called Nikolaison, was killed, together with G. S. Bygrave.' ¹⁰ 'Harry McIvor ¹¹ was very good and helped us all a great deal despite continuous shellfire,' writes another casualty, Private Jarmey. ¹² Corporal Kirschberg ¹³ 'was quite silly for a while from blast. Private H. McIvor helped me back to the underground RAP, and hence I was sent back as far as Wellington last stop.' Des Orton (his platoon had gone to ground and remained there) recovered his senses and struggled to his feet with a typical remark: 'Come on you b—s—let's get cracking. There's no future in lying around here!'

After this unsettling experience Battalion Headquarters and 4 Company Headquarters were set up in the crypt of a ruined church; 3 Company Headquarters was about 200 yards further west in a roofless church—just large pillars surrounded by four bare walls, 'a great place for sunbathing!' A knocked-out German tank lay nearby, its dead crew, later buried, scattered outside it.

'A number of priestly garments all beautifully embroidered lay amongst the ruins and some of these were salvaged, shaken out and used to wrap tommy and bren guns to keep the all-penetrating dust out of the mechanism. There was also a statue of a child with outstretched arm in one corner of the Church and just before first light on our first morning in the town I sneaked round the corner and walked into the outstretched arm—God what a fright....'

Each headquarters smelt abominably—German bodies were found later under

the rubble. Walkie-talkie sets and field telephones buzzed incessantly as they kept contact with Battalion Headquarters and each platoon. Living mostly in low cellars, men developed what they called the 'Cassino Crouch'.

Men coming in were guided to their positions by their opposite numbers in 21 and 24 Battalions ('like sending a blind man into a boxing ring to fight'). The battalion, in a holding role, was to defend a slice of desolation about 350 yards by 300 yards; the most advanced positions were within 200 yards of enemy strongpoints. In the night the enemy briskly shelled the battalion's new positions, but nobody was injured.

Dawn found everyone burrowed under cover in the rubble and ruins. 'The Monastery looked most formidable as one looked up with your head thrown right back enough to put a crick in one's neck.'

Four Company (its anti-tank men acting now as infantry) settled down in about the centre of [Cassino](#) in what they nicknamed the 'Timber Yard'. 'We had quite a bit of fun getting to our final destination under "Bunty" Cowper, our 2 i.c., who was delighted at the chance of leading us in.' As they crept along in single file towards the Timber Yard, Jerry fired multi-green flares: 'our training all went by the wayside, for instead of standing dead still trying to look like a tree stump we imitated startled rabbits.' Men dived for cover in all directions. Cliff [Hatchard](#),¹⁴ making a rapid reconnaissance in heavily hobnailed boots, trod on several hands. One victim took two days to coax a glove off his badly-skinned hand. The darting men drew heavy mortar fire for about an hour, but 4 Company's only casualty was Fred [McRae](#),¹⁵ with a splinter in his big toe, 'but a homer.'

The Timber Yard consisted (like most of [Cassino](#)) of a fair depth of rubble and scattered chunks of 12 by 12 inch timber, varying in length from five to fifteen feet. These pieces of timber made most useful shelters. Men with the utmost caution reinforced their burrows and hide-outs by lifting broken beams and making shallow slit trenches a foot to two feet deep. Some went further. Sergeant Valintine¹⁶ and Stewart [Nairn](#),¹⁷ for example, gouged out a small dugout at the bottom of a large bomb crater. They dug with hands and odd utensils, for they had lost their shovels on the way in, thanks to those notoriously alarming airbursts. At night they salvaged heavy timber and placed it across the dugout, which was 6 ft. long, 3 ft. wide and 3

ft. deep. They packed three feet of wet clay on top and covered the wet floor with a gas cape.

Most of the platoons, well down in the cellars, debris and rubble, passed most of the time in the darkness or semi-darkness, or in artificial light from lanterns or battery lights. 'This state of affairs was much preferable to being in amongst the stuff that was flying about up top.' Battalion Headquarters was always lit up in the Crypt. Some men didn't see a German all the time they were there. But snipers definitely were about; it was never safe for a man to show himself at a window frame. Often the air was murky with smoke as well as dust. 'Smoke bombs came over with a soft woosh, and something detached itself and plopped down.' Holes in the broken walls provided lookouts, sometimes masked by muddy blankets. 'One automatically listened to the discharge of the missiles from the nebelwerfers, paused and heard their arrival. Every day, with a charmed life, it seemed, our friend the shufti plane came lazily overhead. By day the scene was one of rocks and ruins. There was noise but the only movement came from the stretcher-bearers of the Indian forces. At night the interchange of shells above our heads seemed more perceptible and bright flashes of light came from those which struck the hillside around the monastery. Broken tiles slithered and clattered incessantly and now and then, with a great thud, a shell would burrow into the ground as if seeking entrance to our shelter in the ruins. Towards dawn the enemy could be heard talking and laughing and apparently chopping wood. In the rubble I found a tourist guide to [Italy](#), so I read the chapter on [Cassino](#).'

Shelling and mortaring continued without casualties during the battalion's first day (26 March) in [Cassino](#). Our heavy guns shelled the Hotel des Roses. From the severely damaged building enemy stretcher-bearers carried out wounded. Probably the building was still occupied after the shelling because the stretcher-bearers returned and did not come out again. This happened frequently. In the night Captain [Baird](#) ¹⁸ and his RAP party arrived to take charge of the RAP at Battalion Headquarters.

One hardship, the men in forward positions soon found, was that the enemy was too close to allow lights, or small fires to warm up food and keep out the chill. The usual method of making a cup of coffee and milk was to tip a little of the precious water from water bottles into the mess tin and, with the aid of broken-up

methylated spirits tablets called 'META', heat the water and add the coffee and milk. Someone improved on this 'with a really brilliant idea, painstakingly collecting perfectly dry sticks, lighting a fire that did not smoke in the least, pouring tins of stew, potatoes and carrots into a half-kerosene-tin, and heating it up. While bringing our share to us, one came over, and, although the concoction was full of grit ... it was "à la Savoy!" 'This experiment seems almost unique: very few fires, no matter how small, were lit deliberately in [Cassino](#).

Early on 27 March enemy tanks were heard moving on Route 6 by the Baron's Palace, voices drifted across from near the Hotel des Roses, and at dusk two effective 'stonks' were brought down to stop a tank moving by the Continental Hotel. This day twelve casualties, none of them fatal and all of them among the luckless 4 Company, came from the explosion of one shell. Most of these men, dead tired, had had a trying night, and except for those on picket were trying to snatch some sleep. Until dawn they had been on carrying tasks, and the same job was to be repeated that night.

A Troop had carried out casualties. At that time the German artillery had made the Bailey bridge spanning the river just out of [Cassino](#) quite impassable for all traffic, even jeeps. The wounded had to be carried out about a mile and a half to a corner where the ambulances took over. The troop was lined up and paired off, two men to a stretcher. Just before the trek out began at midnight, stretcher-bearers were told that some stretchers held wounded, some dead. Bob [McCarthy](#)¹⁹ and [McKinnon](#)²⁰ 'bent over to lift up our stretcher case, took a good look at our burden who was completely covered by a blanket, and saw him lying deathly still—a corpse. Neither of us said anything. On our journey our "case" didn't move or murmur, so firmly convinced he was a "dead 'un" we gave him a ride that was anything but gentle. Approaching the demolished bridge we ran into a really good mortar stonk. We just dumped our stretcher and flattened out, not giving much thought for our case: he was dead anyhow. Imagine our surprise and horror as we lay there to see the head of our "corpse" pop from under the blanket and say quite calmly: "Don't worry about me boys, run and find yourselves some cover." Needless to say we sheepishly got up to assure our friend it was quite O. K. and we'd give him a much better ride for the rest of the trip.' The wounded and dead delivered, A Troop loaded up with water and rations for the return journey, which again was anything but

quiet.

These were the men who now were trying to sleep in the cellar of a shell of a building. Outside was a Sherman tank, engaged in observation-post work for the artillery, and the Germans had been trying to get it with 'Terelle Bill', a big gun sited up [Terelle](#) way. A minor annoyance had been bugs, but most of these had now been killed with some German chlorine tablets found in the cellar. About two feet of the top of the cellar wall facing the enemy was above the ground, and this is where the heavy shell struck. Part of the building fell, the cellar filled with dust, 'and poor old Jerry was abused in no small way while we were dragging ourselves outside,' wrote [Brian Leach](#).²¹ 'Sick of living like a rat in the cellar,' [Small](#)²² 'had gone up into the sun, come what may. Boy, it sure came!' He was helped into cover, where someone said 'Give him water.' Up went [Small's](#) water bottle and he almost choked to death: it was full of rum, a legacy from a jar procured in [Taranto](#). The two most severely wounded were [Wally Nicholls](#)²³ (feet) and [Sid Tsukigawa](#)²⁴ (elbow). The latter, 'our outstanding soldier, returned to the Battalion,' notes a comrade, 'but could never bend his elbow more than halfway. Fortunately he was T. T., so it was an inconvenience only when firing a tommygun.'

Among the others wounded were the troop commander, [Earl Cross](#), and Corporal [Faull](#)²⁵ and [Paul Potiki](#).²⁶ In the confusion [Cross](#) and [Forbes McHardy](#)²⁷ got their boots mixed, each putting on a pair for the same feet. 'Had anyone been standing at the time,' says [McKinnon](#), 'he would have been cut to ribbons. Those unhurt in the troop did a great job in helping those of us who had copped it. They were all great chaps and I'm one that can truly say that I'm proud to have belonged to the 22nd Battalion.'

Another casualty, Corporal [Grace](#), was helped by [Frank Kerrigan](#)²⁸ ('calm and unruffled as usual') to the RAP, where [Kerrigan](#) noticed 'Colonel Tom Campbell doing the rounds and looking 20 years older than his years—worry and lack of sleep were telling their tale—my sympathy went out to him.' The wounded were carried out that night, the road was shelled as usual, and [Leach](#), a stretcher case, reports: 'The two carrying me said if the shells came any closer they would put me down as I would be quite safe being so close to the ground while they ran for cover. I told them I would be quite OK, but felt far from happy. However the shelling ended as quickly as it started.'

Next day (28 March) anti-personnel mines were laid in front of 15 Platoon, and a patrol (one of the very few patrols in [Cassino](#) at this time) from B Troop 4 Company contacted the Buffs on the left flank. 'Lofty' Veale, to his horror, saw a mortar shell come through the window of his broken room, hit the wall—and fail to explode. But a fragment of flying stone gave him a painful black eye.

A tank moving by the Continental Hotel brought down two prompt 'stonks': the artillery, now expert in 'stonks', could blanket any chosen area within a matter of four minutes. At breakfast time 3 Company saw to its surprise a fairly large party of civilians making their way towards the Hotel des Roses on Route 6 leading out of the town; on the brigade front another party, about thirty men and women, were seen later on. A warning shot brought a most unusual 'white flag' when a woman bent down, removed an undergarment, and waved it vigorously. At dusk a party of twenty enemy moving from the Hotel des Roses to the Continental was shot up by D Troop 4 Company and the artillery.

At odd times outposts glimpsed enemy stretcher-bearers who seemed to be replacing tired and hungry front-line soldiers with fresh ones. Some thought bulky greatcoats concealed belts of ammunition. Although a sharp watch was kept on these stretcher-bearers, and some soldiers urged action ('I was dying to pull the trigger'), it is doubtful if they were fired on. It is also doubtful whether they were abusing the [Red Cross](#).

Heavy concentrations of enemy artillery and mortar fire on 29 March drew counter-shoots. D Troop fired on and brought casualties to an enemy party by the Hotel des Roses. That night, when Battalion Headquarters marched out (1 and 2 Companies of the battalion relieved the others in [Cassino](#) the next night), misfortune visited the carrying parties going back down Route 6.

By now carrying parties ²⁹ were growing wise to the ways of Route 6. After dark they brought up food, water, ammunition and sometimes letters from home—a weird destination for letters from quiet suburban homes and country farms on the other side of the world. ³⁰ 'The last straight, only about 400 to 500 yards, seemed like a mile or so when one walked it for the first time, and every little noise seemed almost to wake the dead.' The carrying parties dumped their loads at Battalion

Headquarters and took back any wounded, empty water tins, bags, and so on. Their destination, Battalion Headquarters, was underground and had a small, sandbagged entrance which unfortunately faced towards the enemy. One carrying party reached this narrow entrance, found it awkward to get through because of the bulky packs, and was hovering on the threshold 'when Jerry let fly with a few mortars and we were literally blown through the hole by a near miss.

"Gee! That one was close!"

"Everyone OK?"

'We were OK, but it was close.'

Carrying parties began recognising the systematic way the German went about shelling Route 6 and the town: first the station, then the bridge, the church, and so on. Listening for a circuit of his shelling, men picked times to get going on to the next 'safe' area, and waited there until it was time to move again. Their inspiration was camp—and bed. And perhaps something more: one man, for instance, volunteered for a carrying-party trip one night just to take a particular friend a bottle of whisky. Every night a ballot was taken among B Echelon men for eight to fourteen carriers.

This night (29–30 March) some men had drawn a third turn before others had drawn a second at carrying supplies into [Cassino](#), and some of those picked for the third round objected to going in. Sergeant Butler, who had made two or three trips, said he would go in place of one of the others.

'While awaiting to embuss I looked around at the various carrying parties who were preparing to go up in three-tonners to a rendezvous [approximately a mile] from [Cassino](#),' writes Orsler. 'They were being sent on their way by their mates who had perhaps been in the carrying party of the previous night and who really knew that it was the worst part of the [Cassino](#) undertaking. There were many grim faces, but still the occasional wit who just had to bleat like a lamb as he climbed aboard the three-tonners which did resemble a NZ sheeptruck.

'The road was very busy this night; we passed some 15–20 trucks loaded with metal waiting to run in and dump their loads into the holes and rivers where shelling

had ruined the bridges. The moon was getting brighter each night. This night a few clouds gave us cover but sometimes a clear moon would catch us in the open with no cover. Snipers were also busy. We arrived safely at the church after a jittery trip.' The moon was still bright for the trip back. The carriers left in lots of three. Orsler was among the last three. 'Picking our chance we made the dash over the open 100 yards or so in full view of Jerry to a heap of rubble, once a building, which gave us cover to get our wind. Then off to the bridge which we had to bypass because the engineers were pulling down its remains. In the hurry I ran onto the bridge and saw a chap (one of our 4 Company mechanics) dead across the steel frame. Hurrying back off the bridge and around the side, I soon caught up with the other two, and we were told to get going fast as Sergeant Bill Butler had been wounded and Jerry was giving the place hell, and it looked like IT.'

By this first Bailey bridge [Jensen](#)³¹ was killed and Sergeant Butler wounded in the arm. Engineers working on the bridge sent their RAP man to fix up Butler and provided a stretcher. [Barney Beckett](#)³² took the front of the stretcher, two engineers took the rear. 'We got a fair way along the road,' writes Beckett, 'and were just about to put the stretcher in a jeep when a shell appeared to land right beside the stretcher. The jeep beat a hasty retreat. Butler and the two engineers appeared to be dead, and I was pretty well knocked about. Then Sergeant [Franklin](#)³³ turned up, fixed a field dressing on me, carried me over to a derelict tank, hunted back the jeep, and took me to the A.D.S. Those engineers were very good chaps and had no need to help us as there should have been our own chaps about. I am also very grateful to Sergeant Franklin.'

Just after he had heard that Butler was wounded, Orsler and his two companions were 'literally blasted off the raised road ... and after finding all of us, still able to say "OK get going", we [moved] off again to make a dive for cover a second time about 100–150 yards further along. After this we lost no time in getting out of range but Jerry seemed to follow us for a long way up that road that night.'

The three men reached the RAP outside [Cassino](#) to find, to their astonishment, that nobody else had arrived, 'so we had grim feelings for the others. About 20 minutes later we drank cocoa and biscuits. During this time the first stretcher cases arrived.... Things were grim. To think that Bill Butler had to get a double wound and then afterwards [be] killed was a bit too much and it kind of knocked all of us. We

had cursed our luck on the way out, but now were counting our lucky stars that we were there at all. Well that was how things turned out.'

Back in [Cassino](#) strong shelling began early in the afternoon of 30 March, and later increased in intensity, 'so much so that we felt something brewing.'

That night the enemy attacked the railway station but was driven off by 26 Battalion. Shells bursting within five to ten yards of 22 Battalion's positions started sudden storms of dust from the rubble. Men's heads now were becoming quite sore through long wearing of steel helmets. Suddenly Stewart Nairn found himself 'lying flat on my back on the floor of the dugout half covered in clay and splintered wood. Through a gaping hole in what had been the roof of our dugout I could see the sky in a haze of dust. Looking towards the end of the dugout I could see "Fudge" Valintine gazing at me with a look of amazement and pain. He was clasping his right heel in one hand and he uttered after a pause: "Jesus Ker-ist. I'm hit. How are you?" He said the words very slowly and it really sounded rather funny.' They waited five hours, until dark, before reporting to the doctor. 'In that period we smoked three and a half packets of cigarettes: Lucky Strikes: 20s.' The wounded safely made the trip out that night, by-passing 'the first Bailey Bridge, on which many soldiers had been killed, without any difficulty, although our hearts were in our mouths expecting one to land on the decking, which was well taped, at any moment.'

For the carrying party coming forward up Route 6 earlier that evening, the story was different. 'Towards evening I saw our clerk "Kai" [Thomson](#)³⁴ coming down the road with the good news that I would have to be in the carrying party again that night.' Douglas ('Slim') [Calman](#)³⁵ accepted with mixed feelings. 'Something told me that I may not be back so unconsciously I packed up my gear and left it in the truck.... Before moving off Bob Knox produced a bottle of rum, and I certainly needed Dutch courage right then. We got cracking.' After debussing, each man was loaded up. 'Hell! What a load: a large carry-all on each back and a two-gallon tin of water in each hand.' All was very quiet as the party set off along Route 6 heading towards [Cassino](#). After a while, moving along a built-up road lined on each side with the remains of trees, they gradually approached what looked like a heavy mist. Later they discovered this was smoke from canisters and shells which were being fired by our artillery. Each man just followed the man in front and hoped he knew where he

was going. It was very still. An occasional burst of machine-gun fire could be heard. Many a man 'was a bit dry in the mouth.'

Just as they reached the bridge into the town, the hush was broken by a terrific bombardment which landed on the left-hand side of the road. Luckily the carrying party was on the right, but most of the men were knocked off their feet. 'I found myself flat on my back, cast like a sheep, as I had a valise full of rations on my back,' Calman continues. "'Snow" Absolom ³⁶ came to the rescue and in the darkness we heard a voice. It was Major Milne ³⁷ who was fairly badly wounded. "Snow" assisted both of us to the RAP ... no praise is too great for those medical blokes when a man is in need.'

One and 2 Companies took over. 'As we climbed into the trucks, the rum issues came to light, thereby disproving the story that the cooks had swiped it during our days of waiting. Everyone was tense with the knowledge of the dangers ahead on Route 6. The trucks drove a little too far and we were very smartly debussed to confront a lone donkey, half-obscured by mist. Then began the journey as it has been described: past an occasional form on a stretcher, sometimes ours, sometimes one of the enemy; past the burnt-out tank, off the road into the sticky clay where the Bailey bridge lay whole but tilted to one side. A brief halt by the church. And all the time the sound of artillery, the whistle of bullets overhead, the chatter of spandaus and the sickly-sweet smell of the dead around us. To the left, up the main "street", skirting the top half of a dead priest, into the ruins of a once smart villa.'

'I passed one of our company laid out on a stretcher,' wrote Geoff Knuckey. ³⁸ 'They had left him as he had passed on and God bless him and all the others who died on that stretch of road.' While being evacuated in a three-tonner Milne 'looked back just as a star shell burst over and lit up Cassino, and there it was, framed in the truck's canopy, like a mouthfull of broken teeth, my last and unforgettable glimpse of the war.'

The two companies spent, with only two casualties, the first week of April in a quieter Cassino. The tension still remained of running the gauntlet on Route 6 'living like a louse in the stinking rubble', and in watching out for enemy parties prowling in the ruins after dark. As Brian Leach summed up: 'I don't know which I would have sooner done: carried rations in or sentry duty: both were rather nerve wracking.' 'I

had a hard-shot private in my company,' writes Knox, 'who had broken every law in the army. One night he arrived in the carrying party with a note stating that he had volunteered for the job. In my eyes he rehabilitated himself although he was afterwards just as bad a soldier. Hell! He still visits me.'

'The interminable rustling of those damn gas-capes at night as the picquet just relieved, tried to settle down,' writes Bob Grant.³⁹ 'Everything outside "moved", there were all sorts of "noises" outside too, but still that ghastly rustling went on until one felt like screaming.' He goes on to describe a night on picket:

Wakened from fitful sleep to full consciousness, stiff and cold from lying on unyielding ground, to face that weird half-light called night-time in [Cassino](#), the uncanny silence seemed like a cloak. The noise, to me, was preferable. It had substance, was solid and somehow comforting. The silence was wholly sinister.

Vague recumbent figures behind one, stirring in restless sleep, seemed to make a terrific din, and, straining to see or hear any outside movement, one felt like yelling 'Quiet! damn you! Stop breathing! Someone's sneaking up on us! That bloody tree stump is moving That pile of rubble is a Jerry patrol! Quiet!'

Whew! It's OK. That is a tree stump, and that pile of rubble is a pile of rubble. But I could have sworn.... I should be relieved soon. What's the time? Hell! my watch must have stopped. I've been here more than 20 minutes. No! it's going. Twenty minutes....

That's a Jerry peering over what's left of that wall on the skyline! If it is, he can see me! I could pick him off easily, only mustn't give our positions away. No. It's only a piece of broken masonry.

A staccato, snarling burst of Spandau imprints every cold, single round on one's spine. Ugh! Then in the distance comes that comforting sound of a Vickers 'pop-pop-popping' away, on a fixed line. Good old M.G. One relaxes, and the mind wanders to more pleasant things. Hope Sam's making out alright with 25. Not a bad mob that. Of course 22 is just.... That damned stump is at it again! Relax feller. It's still a stump. I wish my vision wasn't so restricted. A bit monotonous. Where was I? Oh, yes, 22 is just the best. About time that lupin was sown for green crop at home. Wonder how the garden is.... There are some figures out there. I can see and hear

them, coming this way! Better call Scotty—he's awake anyway, and after a good look says: 'She's right, Bob. It's the Old Man coming over. I'll wake the boys for Stand To!' Cheers! The night's over. Nothing to worry over now. But I was afraid earlier. Afraid of an awful silence.

Yet, despite the intense strain of sudden shells, or silence, or mortars and snipers ('I'll never forget the face of one of our platoon commanders bringing his men out of [Cassino](#): a dead, expressionless face, and crouching behind them cradling a tommy gun and weaving backwards and forwards like an animal, the strain had been so great'), despite short rations and water, despite smoke, dust, and next to no sleep for a week ('too noisy in the daytime, too scared—semi-isolated as we were—in the night'), the men still produced a grim [Cassino](#) brand of humour.

One of our tanks was stranded and abandoned in the main entrance to the convent next door to the ruined church. From the ruins men walked through a doorway and there, suddenly poking a man in the face, was the muzzle of the gun. When a few men of the [Coldstream Guards](#) (their boots muffled in sacking) arrived to get the run of the ropes two days before their unit relieved the battalion, the New Zealanders politely stood aside to allow a Guardsman through the doorway. Just at that moment a 22 Battalion man, fooling around inside the tank, traversed the gun right on to the Guardsman, 'who froze before our eyes.'

But at least one laugh could have been enjoyed by the Guardsmen. When four relieving Guards officers came in, 'the leader towering about the 6' 7? mark, the other three in the vicinity of 6' 5?', Lt. Monaghan started to show them the layout and advised me [Private [Lee](#) ⁴⁰] to be alert as they were so big they must hit something. A few seconds later there was a huge crash and I went to investigate and found the lieutenant picking himself up from a heap of tins. The Guards' changeover was perfect.'

While guiding in a relief party, one 22 Battalion private 'couldn't resist putting on the "old dig" act. The young officer in charge had an outsize bedroll on his back. I told him and his party to follow me closely—where the challenge points were—to run when I ran—and that I had to judge exactly the period between Jerry's precision stonks! I admit that I ran most of the way, but was a little ashamed when on arrival the officer dropped his burden and collapsed on it, perspiration literally running off

him.'

Sid Meads ⁴¹ (1 Company) relates how on the last day 'everyone was feeling happy huddled in a low cellar just in front of the two hotels when Lee Bridgeman ⁴² picks up our officer's (Gordon Stuckey ⁴³) Verrey pistol. Pulls the trigger and swish—out pops a flare and it ricochets round the cellar and burns out. Smoke everywhere. Coughing cursing men. One, Arthur Aldridge, ⁴⁴ thought it was a 36 grenade and held up a gas-cape to protect himself with. Smoke billows out and then the Jerry hate starts and carries on for an hour or more. Bridgeman a very subdued man and needless to say all we others too.'

Haddon Donald wanted to know why a group of his men hadn't shaved for four days. A safety razor with one rusty blade was unearthed, and eight men used it. 'A quick dash out with a Jerry helmet for water from a nearby shellhole, some Lifebuoy soap, and agony upon agony. O.C. very gratified.'

Knox found a silver chalice in Cassino about the time the battalion pulled out, and offered it to the 2 Company man who came out of Cassino and down Route 6 in the fastest time. They left in single file, about ten yards apart. Knox, leaving last, was the only man to catch up with the man in front of him; he won the Cassino Handicap, plus cup.

The battalion had seen the last of Cassino town itself, but was to stay near Cassino for the rest of April. The men came out to a countryside in spring: wild flowers were out in the fields, and buds bursting on the vines; the fields never looked so green. The battalion moved four miles to the south of its old position in Cassino town. On the way back the lorries were very exposed in places where the road was raised by embankments, and there were patches of fog too. Then the battalion entered lightly wooded country.

Its new front, 3000 yards long and fairly quiet, lay on the eastern bank of the Gari River, into which the Rapido flows. Here patrols were active, some of them soon moving across the river and cautiously feeling into enemy territory. This work (the battalion's casualties for April were 4 dead and 11 wounded) drew a compliment from the Brigade Commander, Brigadier Inglis, when 22 Battalion finally left its river line.

The new position was a beautiful place: 'that beautiful green of the new barley, and a fair amount of clumps of bushes so you could move carefully by day. There was just the odd shelling and mortaring, otherwise pleasant enough. We were still in full view of the monastery, its ruins still watched us, wherever you went you always had the impression that the monastery was watching you.' By night it was an uncanny place: 'mist swirling around and bullfrogs croaking—just the setting for a Hollywood mystery picture. Dry area. Niente vino.' Here, no matter how damp or dismal or dangerous the night, Forbes McHardy always arrived after midnight 'with a big billy of tea for his men: it was terribly appreciated.'

The battalion was not far from the hamlet of Zuparelli, which was little more than a group of houses in one block. Civilians still lived round Zuparelli, but when the French Moroccan Goums took over on the left flank the Italians immediately sent their women away.

'Number One Company, in reserve in Zuparelli, grew very fond of an old patriarch there: alert and erect when you saw him from behind, but when you faced him he was about 80,' recalls a battalion officer. 'He had a son, about 50, just the boy about the place. The old man was very intrigued by the boys' false teeth and was keen to get a set. In vain we tried to get him to be more careful about occasional shells—throughout the Italian campaign, Italians seemed to think shelling was meant exclusively for soldiers, not civilians. So one night old grandad collected it. Now this family's wheat, tomatoes and so on were all locked away jealously in the attic. Old grandad had not allowed his wife or son the keys. When grandpa died, much to the amazement of the boys, decrepit old grandma (who we thought had really had it), then came to light and, rejuvenated, took over office—and the keys. The son, aged 50, was still the boy about the place.'

Men of 2 and 3 Companies stood-to by night in prepared positions and lived in buildings by day. In the fortnight they were there the battalion's mortars fired over 2000 rounds. The first casualties came on the fifth day (14 April), when a platoon commander, Lieutenant [Revell](#),⁴⁵ and three other ranks exploded a booby trap. Revell was hit by several pieces of shrapnel, and Sergeant [Bradbury](#),⁴⁶ hit in the neck by a piece as big as a pea, was amused later to find himself listed as wounded. The place contained many sorts of booby traps, which the companies neutralised

and replaced with ones of our own. These were mostly "Silent Sentries": flares fixed to a steel rod and spring-loaded, so that when a tripwire attached was fouled, up went the flare, lighting up the surrounding countryside. These were used as a warning of approaching enemy patrols. Another type used was a primed hand-grenade placed in a milk tin, or round tobacco-tin, and a long fine wire attached. When this wire was tripped, the grenade was pulled from the tin and exploded.'

Two Company's position had been attacked three times before by strong enemy patrols, which apparently had crossed the river by some subtle method. The patrols kept dry and left no tracks. Knox decided to move forward all positions right to the water's edge, and a capable soldier, Sergeant [McClymont](#),⁴⁷ took up a position in a heap of rubble by the water. He kept in touch with Company Headquarters by phone.⁴⁸ The next night (15 April) McClymont asked to be allowed to take a patrol along the riverbank towards where he had heard Germans. The sergeant organised his patrol and set off bravely to his death. His patrol and a German party met head on. The leaders opened fire at point-blank range: both McClymont and the German died instantly. A badly shaken patrol reported back to Company Headquarters, where Knox organised a new patrol and one of these young lads who had been in McClymont's patrol offered, despite his shaken condition, to lead me to the spot where McClymont had fallen. This he did very well. We found both bodies and brought the sergeant's body home. I recommended this guide for a decoration but I don't think anything came of it.'

Only a few weeks before his death Jim McClymont had written this poem:

Rain falling dismally

Every tree drips mournfully

Like the sad ghosts of happier bygone years.

Why can't man live peacefully?

Why must he war eternally?

Lord, grant that the years to come may be

Unmarred by strife and pain

That she at last may share with me

Sunshine as well as rain.

Doug Froggatt, the signaller, writes: '3 Company in this position had a listening post down near the river. This consisted of a hole dug in the side of the road and suitably camouflaged. A telephone wire was run to the post and as soon as possible after dusk each evening two men would go there, connect a telephone and sit out the night in silence and in sweat. I can well remember giving vent to considerable profanity when, after the patrol had gone to the listening post and no contact had been made by phone, one of us signallers was detailed to go and see if the line had not been cut by shellfire. Wrapping boots in sacking (something everyone who went down to that post did) one would creep down the road tommy gun under arm. Frogs were abundant in roadside swamps, the night being filled with their love songs (it was early spring). Suddenly all frogs would cease to croak and dead silence would descend. It was at such times that the tommy gun was held a little tighter and the sweat ran down the forehead in spite of the coolness of the weather. Although it was necessary for 3 Company Sigs to make that trip a number of times no break in the 'phone line was ever found and always at the end sat two B— soldats who had put the earth wire on the wrong terminal or plugged the earphones in the microphone jack (we were at this stage using wireless remote control units as telephones).

'One night whilst sitting on the 10 line Telephone Exchange switch-board (to which we had 19 lines connected) a light above the listening post line came up and on answering it a whispered voice asked for Company Commander, Haddon Donald. "The trump" was soon put on and the following conversation ensued:

OC: "Yes".

Whispered "We can hear some Germans moving down here in the swamp, Sir!"

Voice:

OC: "In the swamp! In the swamp! What's the good of them in the swamp, I want them in the bag—get cracking!"

'Sometime later the light again came up above the listening post line and a whispered voice said, "Tell the Major they got away, will you?"

'Hell—who'd be an infantry Private again?'

An engineer officer briefly with the battalion failed to cross the Gari. He found that the current ran about ten miles an hour and thought there was some danger of being swept away. Nevertheless on 20 April Lieutenant-Colonel Steele (CO of the battalion now that Colonel Campbell had left on furlough for New Zealand) told 2 and 3 Companies' commanders that patrols would cross the river. Shortly after this the enemy heavily shelled 3 Company and 15 Platoon headquarters. Private [Tama](#)⁴⁹ was killed outright, and Private [Mollier](#),⁵⁰ gravely wounded, died next day. After dark the patrols set off to the river. The patrols from 2 Company didn't get across; they found the water too deep and the current too strong, but 3 Company's patrols were successful at two places.

After the first attempt patrols ('faces blackened, proper commando outfits like') from both companies successfully crossed over each night until 24 April, when the battalion was relieved by the Indians. Strangely enough the first 2 Company officer to cross was a very poor swimmer. Once across, patrols left ropes in position on each bank to help future reconnaissances. One patrol successfully used rubber boats. A boat was swamped, but the officer and corporal, undaunted, swam the river. Only once did these parties run into resistance. A patrol which was to cover Lieutenant [Jock Wells](#)⁵¹ crossing the Rapido on a rubber pontoon drew mortar and machine-gun fire. Although the party sheltered in a safe-looking sunken road, four men were evacuated: Privates [Duffy](#), [Dumble](#),⁵² [Heald](#),⁵³ and [Rule](#).⁵⁴ Robert Rule, badly wounded in the mouth and with ten teeth knocked out, remembers 'after they gave me the needle and had me on the stretcher ready for the ambulance, I braced my arms against the stays and refused to let go, fearing they were putting me in my Box for St. Peter before I was ready. There is one thing I would like to mention as a Maori in a Pakeha Battalion. I fully appreciate having served alongside mates such

as they were—our platoon officer Jock Wells was tops.'

The battalion took some pride in mastering the river. Men patrolling the enemy side discovered a severe tank obstacle: a deep ditch quite overlooked in the plans for the coming attack. (Photographs from the air did not show up this ditch as a serious obstacle. Information from the 22nd's patrols led later to the ditch being bridged by tank bridgers.)

A company cook, Terry Miles,⁵⁵ was plagued by rats. He slept in the cookhouse, a downstairs room which once housed grain. Rat traps were not an army issue. A sympathetic signaller collected a number of old wireless batteries and fixed up a small tin of food and a sheet of tin. 'The idea was that the rats had to stand on the sheet of tin and reach up into the food. As soon as the rat standing on the plate of tin touched the food tin, contact was made and whacko she bumped. The first night the idea was used proved a real nightmare for Terry. Rats and blue sparks shot all over the room and next morning the tin plate bore many scratch marks where rats had taken off with great acceleration. Admittedly no dead rats were found but thereafter, however, no more rats were seen or heard.'

For another month [Cassino](#) held out. Meanwhile 22 Battalion left the river and reorganised, changing from a motor battalion proper to a motorised infantry battalion. During this time a sergeant, an ammunition-truck driver, and George Orsler went back for a trip to [Piedimonte](#). Orsler writes: 'Here Sergeant X [name withheld] had become friendly with an Italian girl of 25–30 years—quite a nice piece too she was, and he being in charge of rations could easily do a big line and Sergeants were better than Privates, etc., in the eyes of the Fair Sex, but somehow this girl must have fallen for X in a big way. For when the three of us arrived back there the girl was at church but her friends were still at home. They were pleased to see us again and asked after X, telling us that this girl had felt and dreamt that he had been killed, so we told them it was true, and they cried and told us not to tell the girl when she came back from church. So we were on our guard and held back our news. The girl arrived in due course and was pleased to see us and asked for X. We said he was too busy to come today. But no, she said, that was not right, she was sure he was killed. We said "No", then: "he was hurt." She was sure. We said yes he was wounded and in hospital and would be out soon. No, she said, that was lies. X was dead. We could not convince her otherwise, so asked her how she knew.

She told us that on the night of ... she had seen X killed in her dreams at the exact minute he was killed and that first he was wounded and later killed by a German mortar bomb. It seemed so real that we could not see how she could know so much had she not been there but it was all true to the exact detail and she, in a straight line, was more than 15–20 miles away. We had to admit that what she told us was true, every detail. I have heard of similar experiences but this is the only one I personally have come in contact with at its happening. This is true and may be fantastic but the other two of the party will verify my words.'

Once the battalion was out of the line by the Rapido River, parties went on leave, some making south to [Bari](#), others (the lucky ones) heading off for a first-class holiday on the beautiful Isle of [Ischia](#) off the Gulf of [Naples](#)—another [Capri](#) without [San Michele](#). The island had offered similar hospitality to German soldiers. The scheme: the battalion supplied the food, the little hotels cooked it, and the cost of board, two shillings a day, was paid from regimental funds.

The island was now a [Royal Navy](#) rest camp. The naval officer in charge was Lieutenant-Commander McLennan, who had visited New Zealand. Fourth Brigade started the ball rolling by sending over small parties. Then Division grew interested. Brigadier [Crump](#),⁵⁶ Commander of the NZASC, made a good job of arranging the organisation, accommodation, and control of New Zealand troops in [Ischia](#).

From Naples a little steamer took leave parties to the island's lovely little port, almost a complete circle, the remains of a drowned (and, happily, long extinct) volcano. Men went on a couple of miles to Casamicciola. On the way they passed over a few hills and looked back to a glorious view: the harbour, the blue [Mediterranean](#), [Naples](#), and [Vesuvius](#) away in the distance. 'It was not a camp as a soldier knows it,' writes a staff-sergeant. 'There was no reveille, parades, or queuing up for meals. No sleeping between blankets on hard beds. Just the reverse. The men were all accommodated in quaint old-world hotels or more modern villas. Built of stone they were large and cool. All had their gardens and open courtyards or balconies almost entirely shaded by the dense foliage of grape vines [where sometimes] meals would be served during the heat of the day.'

Good wines were sold most of the time in the villages, but the pensions sold wines and liqueurs to their guests at any hour (a service by no means overlooked by

the visitors). Yet not once were the authorities troubled with drunkenness, and of the 950 New Zealanders who passed through this rest camp, only one was banished 'for unruliness'.

The soldiers swam, sunbathed, and loafed about on a good sandy beach; they hired sailing boats, canoes or row-boats, bought grass hats and souvenir baskets and model boats woven from seagrass, lazily watched the swallows in the daytime and the fireflies at night, and clip-clopped in old gharries along sleepy little streets and out into the orchards, vineyards and olive groves, all circled by an unruffled sea. Invigorating mineral baths could be taken in several imposing buildings, where for ten lire (sixpence) a small room could be hired with a large marble bath and a full-sized mirror.

They ate plenty of good fresh vegetables and fish, and fruit too—big grapes and cherries. A few gathered up enough energy to climb 800 feet through woods and tall firs to the top of a sleeping volcano, Mount Epome, where the view (or exquisite liqueurs at a tiny monastery with its rooms tunnelled out of solid rock) made the effort well worth while. A bootblack (rewarded with a meal) guided one party: 'the track ended with the pine woods and we had to trust in our leader as he skirted plantations of corn and beans. Shy peasant girls were caught looking up at us after we had passed them at their work; the men did not even give us a "Giorno" in greeting. At the edge of the crops sticks some three feet high carried a small trap, baited with a green twig. Each time our guide came up to a trap which had caught a bird he gravely transferred the bird to his overcoat pocket and gently reset the trap.'

Some managed to arrange a small dance or two, but hawkeyed chaperones watched every move. A school-teacher (from an outlying village), who had been in the [United States](#), brought a party of girls and their families along to one 22 Battalion dance. It wasn't much of a success. The visitors' main interest was the supper. It was very difficult to prise any of the girls away from the supper table for a dance. 'They played sad havoc with our rations,' reported Major O'Reilly glumly.

Three days and four nights the holiday lasted. Then it was goodbye to the little villas and hotels with the big vases and bowls overflowing with flowers: the Internazionale (Mario and his wife), Miramonte ('Madame'—was she pro-Axis?), Valla Igea ('John'), Yacarina, Canetti, La Camera.

'On the last night before our leave finished I went to bed early: the vino had taken another victim,' writes 'Shorty' Kirk.⁵⁷ 'My cobber, Bert Clifford, hardened and seasoned, could not be beaten, he would not give in to vino. Finally he came in and woke me up. "Hey Shorty, would you like a feed?" I said faintly "Rightoh Bert." Bert returned with a couple of fried eggs in his hands. I looked at Bert and said nothing about "Where's the plate?" or such like. But I could see something was troubling Bert pretty bad. This island by the way had a terrible lot of lizards on it, they were really thick. But anyway Bert was pretty far gone, and the next thing I could hear was Bert's hands fumbling all over the top of the dressing table. "What's wrong Bert?" Bert replied: "Aw blast these lizards. I'll catch them in the morning." Poor Bert, he did have it bad.'

At a parade of 4 Armoured Brigade General Freyberg presented Bob Knox with the MC he had won at the Sangro—a popular award, for Bob (shortly to be invalided home because of ill health) knew his men not only by name but by nature too. It was Bob's custom to read out routine orders to his assembled company, and his interpretation of orders was characteristic. 'No rubbish,' he would read, 'may be deposited in the lines.' Then he would look up and say: 'That means you, Smith, Brown and Robinson.' Reading orders about discipline, Bob would pause, then add those which would be enforced rigidly. If anyone thought he was incapable of doing so, he would be pleased to meet him at the back of his tent after the parade, to decide who was the better man.

The General pinned on the decoration, paused, spoke a few words, then moved on. Everyone wanted to know what Freyberg had said. 'Well,' explained Knox, 'he told me that it was a very nice decoration, which I thought was damned decent of him seeing it was the only one he didn't have himself.'

Battalion officers held a dance in the main post office at Caserta and invited the sisters and VADs of 2 General Hospital to help things along. Entertaining themselves further afield, some went on picnics to the coast near the mouth of the Volturno River. Swimming in the water in the nude was marvellous. One picnic party looked up to see a maimed United States Liberator, returning from a raid, falter then smash into the sea. Still vivid in many minds is the obvious desperation with which the crew were jettisoning everything movable as they passed overhead, fighting in vain to win

a little height on two engines. Strong swimmers, led by Sergeant ('Strip') Teaz,⁵⁸ went to the rescue and brought ashore two drowned airmen.

While the leave parties enjoyed freedom, the rest of the men settled down into the new arrangement of three motorised infantry companies and a support company. This reshuffle virtually wiped out the Anti-Tank Company. Still more infantry were needed in Italy and mechanised troops were of little use when war stagnated in the hills. Then the battalion trained in tank and infantry co-operation (SCONEDOER, this exercise was called) with the armoured regiments, suffering three casualties —three men of 2 Company caught in our own fire. On one such manoeuvre 1 and 3 Companies skirted Alife. The tanks laid a smoke screen at one stage of the attack to enable the infantry to get forward, the smoke shells passing waist high through 3 Company, which took off to a man and sheltered in a ditch full of blackberry until the manoeuvre was safely over.

Training with the tank men continued. Simultaneously, volunteers were coached in special work on reconnaissance patrols, while selected officers went about lecturing on and demonstrating mines, explosives, signals (the No. 38 set), patrols, and river crossings by rubber assault boats. Here Arthur Fong⁵⁹ heard the most gracious remark ever made about the atrocious 'V' cigarettes: an Italian purchaser explained to a friend that the 'V' meant Virginia tobacco.

But (as more than one veteran prophesied) this training was of little use in the last week of the month. The battalion was sent into a dead-end, the mountains about four miles north-east of Cassino, to hold very steep country. Here, for the first time since Olympus, the battalion depended on mules for supplies. Here, too, came the curious sensation, while staying in the same place, of being in the front line one day, and miles behind it the next. The battalion was out of the picture. A heavy offensive began on 11 May, and within a fortnight the Gustav line yielded and broke at last, thanks mainly to the Goums finding their way through the mountains into the Liri valley. This spectacular drive, surprising friend and foe alike, took the enemy from behind. He was in trouble enough, too, in front. Simultaneously the Poles, backed by New Zealand artillery, attacked the Monastery, and British troops, with New Zealand armour, cut bloody Route 6 behind the ruined town. By 25 May the Liri valley lay wide open, and the hunt up the peninsula to Rome swept forward.

Two days before this 22 Battalion, which all the time had been expecting a dashing part in the break-through, was being tucked away quietly among the trees and woods and brave red poppies in the hills, a mile north of Sant' Elia Fiumerapido,⁶⁰ well towards the source of the Rapido River. Units of the Division were stationed here after their [Cassino](#) ordeal. One and 3 Companies had to march a good way into position in the dark to relieve the [Cape Town Highlanders](#). It was raining too and the country was rough. Supplying these hillside positions was tricky. From Hove Dump jeeps took over, grinding along a steep, rocky exposed road. Some 22 Battalion drivers joined this jeep train briefly. When jeeps could get no further, mules took over. The [Cassino](#) line petered out here in the mountains. From rocky peaks and sangars, outposts watched one another while the main fighting went on below round [Cassino](#).

For six days (23–28 May) 1 and 3 Companies stayed above Sant' Elia Fiumerapido, a rough area of stunted trees and hard rock. Men fitted themselves into crude depressions high in the hillside, around which the South Africans had built low walls of loose rock. To tired eyes the trees and bushes moved in the night like enemy soldiers on patrol: 'and the countless fireflies—all their lights going on and off at regular intervals.'

For the first four days the companies met shelling and mortaring, which one night killed a man, the only 22 Battalion death by direct enemy action in this place, Private [Strang](#),⁶¹ in 3 Company's headquarters area. On 27 May, after careful patrolling, they found the enemy had gone.

A mile in front of the battalion's positions lay the village of [Valleluce](#), hidden in woods. Shelling and mortaring was still going on at this time, but on the night of 25–26 May Lieutenant [Mullinder](#),⁶² with thirteen men, reached the village to find, after creeping stealthily from house to house, that both enemy and civilians had flown. A little later the lieutenant, with Lance-Corporal [Lange](#)⁶³ and Private [Leighton](#),⁶⁴ walked into a booby trap. All three were wounded. A party began carrying the lieutenant, the most seriously hurt, back on a heavy door to battalion positions. Lange rested one hand on the side of the door to help himself along. Dave [Hannah](#),⁶⁵ bent over on the back of the door, changed places with his comrade, 'Mac' [Shotter](#),⁶⁶ and 15 yards further on another mine 'went up right under us', killing Shotter and

Lange and wounding Hannah and Hodges.⁶⁷ Stunned and wounded in the head, Hodges was helped to the RAP by 'Nuts' Medway,⁶⁸ 'and from there I don't remember much except a lot of needles and getting carried in and out of the ambulances.'

Blown from the door, the unfortunate lieutenant died two days later. After this the rest of the party gave up the idea of remaining overnight in the village, which, a member of the patrol notes, was 'the most poverty stricken I have ever seen. It was alive with fleas. Trip-wires and traps were everywhere, even in the church. We saw a violin case lying only too prominently in one cottage and dared not touch it. In another a locked cabin trunk begged to be opened. We passed it by, only to learn later that a braver or more foolhardy soldato had inquired within and found—a dead cat.'

That evening the enemy, getting rid of stocks of ammunition, shelled Sant' Elia and the jeep-head for the last time. After dark Lieutenant Monaghan led a patrol a mile north of Valleluce, wove safely through a minefield, and hid in thick undergrowth as a shadowy party of forty enemy soldiers filed past within 25 yards. At dawn (27 May) further patrolling detected empty positions. After this another patrol under Lieutenant Bright⁶⁹ pushed on to the summit of Cifalco, on the battalion's left flank, and found more abandoned sangars and dugouts. Next day other patrols came back with the same story: clearly the enemy now had abandoned the top of the Rapido River valley. The only casualty in these patrols was Second- Lieutenant Stuckey, who was wounded by a booby trap.

That was the last day in this place. The two companies marched back to Sant' Elia Fiumerapido, where the Rt. Hon. Peter Fraser, meeting the battalion on an informal visit, spoke about the 2 NZEF and rehabilitation plans. A few nights before this a battalion man had been yarning about prospects in a new job that was waiting him back home. Three or four comrades were sitting about in the calm dusk of an Italian evening. The conversation had drifted to news of home. This man pulled out his wallet and handed round photographs of his young wife and small baby, of his parents, and the new home which was waiting his return. 'Somehow,' writes Padre Sullivan, 'we came to know the people he spoke about, and began to share something of their lives, and his.'

'The next morning at 7.0 a.m. we buried him. There were only three people at the grave, which was dug out on the top of a mound and overlooked a valley below, with whole fields of red poppies blowing gently in the breeze.

'Just as the simple service began, up staggered one of his friends, who was en route to the front line. He stood there, a big, hulking fellow, heavily accoutred as for war, tin hat on his head, rifle in one hand, and in the other he clutched half a dozen wild red poppies. He was dumb and inarticulate, but this tribute he felt he must pay. There could not have been a simpler cortege. It is doubtful if there could have been a more splendid one.'

All over the western Italian front the German was now in headlong retreat, pulling back fast over 200 miles to his next fortified line south of [Florence](#). Other victorious units near the coast pressed on up the [Liri](#) valley; the New Zealanders, working northward further inland close to the [Apennines](#), would not reach [Rome](#) (which fell on 4 June), but were to halt at [Avezzano](#), about 50 miles north-west of [Cassino](#). They cleared rearguards, removed cunningly concealed mines and booby traps, and patched up smashed roads and bridges. This took about a fortnight; by 9 June the first troops were in [Avezzano](#).

In this New Zealand advance 22 Battalion, again disappointed at not being used as a motorised battalion, moved almost 20 miles due north, through the little town of [Atina](#), and went into position just below [Alvito](#). Shortly before the move began (Sergeant Bart Cox recalls), 'the boys with an eye to loot no doubt, were venturing further and further afield.

'Sergeant-Major Frank Kerrigan to one of the troop sergeants: "Is your jeep here?"

'T.S. "Yes."

'S.M. "Can I borrow it?"

'T.S. "What do you want it for?"

'S.M. "There's a little portable organ in a church just up the road. Just the thing for the Padre. He'd like it."

'T.S. "But Frank, the Padre wouldn't use an organ you had pinched from a church."

'S.M. "Wouldn't he? That's all you know. Look, I'm a bloody Doolan but I know your Padre better than you do. If I get the organ he'll use it."

'Fortunately the road proved impassable, even for a jeep, so the good Padre was never put to the test.'

Near [Alvito](#) the battalion stayed from 1 to 12 June, for the first three days protecting the right flank of the advancing Division (5 and 6 Brigades were thrusting towards [Avezzano](#)). The first three days brought shelling, and then the enemy and his mountain guns had gone. On the first day his shelling 'killed a very fine fellow, a character, Captain W. H. ("Bunty") Cowper, acting OC Support Company. He spoke in quick staccato style, he was very good on the foraging side of army life, and he ran a most unorthodox company headquarters.



D. Charlwood prepares a meal near Rimini

D. Charlwood prepares a meal near [Rimini](#)

Panther turret captured by
22 Battalion near Rimini
September 1944



Panther turret captured by 22 Battalion near Rimini, September 1944



The 22 Battalion rugby team which won the Freyberg Cup, December 1944.
This photograph was taken before one of the earlier games

The 22 Battalion rugby team which won the Freyberg Cup, December 1944. This photograph was taken before one of the earlier games

A village priest brings in refugees from German-occupied areas near Faenza, December 1944



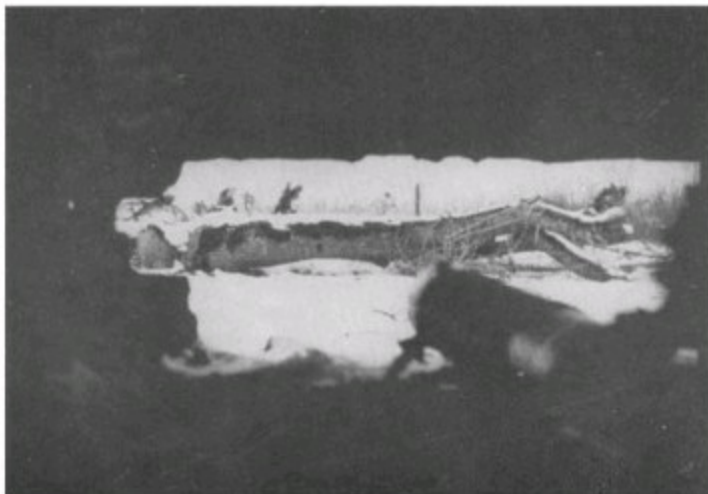
A village priest brings in refugees from German-occupied areas near [Faenza](#), December 1944



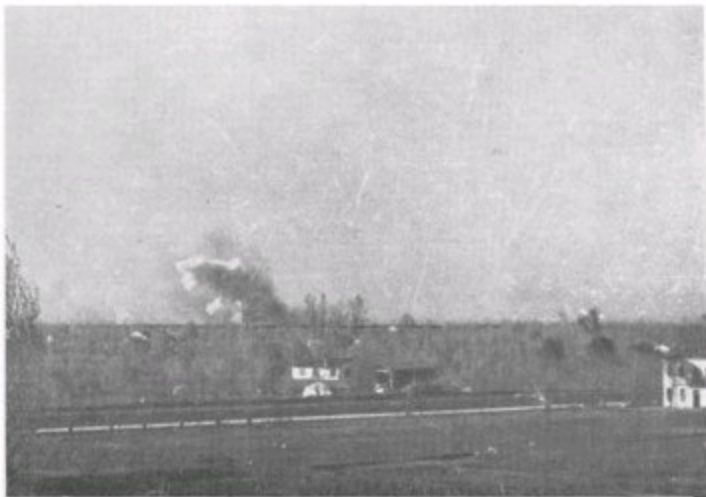
D Company headquarters, January 1945

D Company headquarters, January 1945

A machine gun in the rear of Palazzo Quarantino covers the Senio stopbank, January 1945



A machine gun in the rear of Palazzo Quarantino covers the [Senio](#) stopbank, January 1945



The attack across the Senio River begins, 9 April 1945.
The line of the stopbank is clearly seen

The attack across the Senio River begins, 9 April 1945. The line of the stopbank is clearly seen

QM trucks at Massa Lombarda, April 1945



QM trucks at Massa Lombarda, April 1945



Don Horn, Sid Benson and Major Reg Spicer with a mortar
captured at the Reno River, April 1945

Don Horn, Sid Benson and Major Reg Spicer with a mortar captured at the Reno River, April 1945

Ferrying trucks across the Piave, April 1945



Ferrying trucks across the **Piave**, April 1945



German prisoners pushing their vehicles near Trieste, May 1945

German prisoners pushing their vehicles near **Trieste**, May 1945

C Company parades in Trieste, May 1945



C Company parades in **Trieste**, May 1945



22 Battalion controlling the Japanese repatriation centre at Senzaki

22 Battalion controlling the Japanese repatriation centre at Senzaki



Resting during manoeuvres,
November 1946

Resting during manoeuvres, November 1946



Lt-Col J. T. Russell

Lt-Col J. T. Russell



Lt-Col T. C. Campbell

Lt- Col T. C. Campbell



Lt-Col D. G. Steele

Lt-Col D. G. Steele



Lt-Col H. V. Donald

Lt-Col H. V. Donald



Lt-Col A. F. W. O'Reilly

Lt-Col A. F. W. O'Reilly



Lt-Col W. B. Thomas

Lt-Col W. B. Thomas



ITALY MAP No. 2

Bunty's death was bitter to them.' When shells began plastering a crossroad Cowper, Sergeant 'Strip' Teaz, and [Walker](#)⁷⁰ ran into a cave for shelter. Fragments flying from a shell bursting about eight yards away killed Cowper and wounded his companions. "'Strip" Teaz was a damn fine man and a grand soldier, and our whole platoon were sorry when he passed out in hospital in [Caserta](#) a few days later.'

Among the last enemy shells to fall in the battalion's area was one which ended Private White's⁷¹ war days. He was washing his feet at the time and had his right leg pulverized while still holding it. White remembers 'how I yelled like hell for my cobbles as I was afraid another shell would land and finish me off.' Spun around by the concussion, he recalls how the shattered leg 'felt as though it was "corkscrewed" in the cobbled road.' Bed-boards (six-foot planks) were placed across a jeep to take the stricken soldier to the RAP. A dud shell landed five yards in front of the jeep on the way down to the doctor.

During this time no visible sign of the enemy was found by three patrols, one sent out by the carrier section, the others under Second-Lieutenants McHardy and Henderson.⁷² Then, on 3 June, five Honey tanks, a troop of Shermans, and 11 Platoon 2 Company, with Captain [House](#)⁷³ in command, pushed six miles north, shot up an enemy observation post and saw abundant signs of recent occupation but actually saw no enemy troops, although the armour, skirting ahead of the infantry, came under shelling late in the afternoon.

This ended 22 Battalion's brief role in the advance. Support Company moved up to billets in the orphanage at [Alvito](#) (the cold showers here were most welcome). The village, the late headquarters of the German 5 Mountain Division, was the wealthiest and least damaged settlement the battalion had met so far.

Looking back to this day, a veteran writes: 'After the desert environment (which seemed a fitting place for a battle) war seemed to clash with the atmosphere of [Italy](#)—the countryside and weather from spring to autumn seemed too beautiful and peaceful for that. I remember the morning we moved up to [Alvito](#). There was a stop just before we got to the place and everyone was standing round the trucks waiting in the sun and taking in the Italian spring at its best. There wasn't a murmur of war anywhere. Then all of a sudden—like a train coming— a big shell came over the hill and crashed down on the Orphanage. It completely broke the spell and someone

said: "What a b—of a thing to do on a morning like this." And I was in perfect agreement.'

'Small Italian towns can be funny places,' writes another member of the battalion. 'Under the late Benito Mussolini's regime they were all over-organised. [Alvito](#) was no exception. It had a Director of Art, a Director of Music, even a Director of Education, I believe. They gave us a concert in the small theatre, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. The Director of Drama took over the programme—pathetic—but the Battalion compere thought that we had to give local morale a boost, so he came on to the stage and said in English: "This won't be much of a show, but give it all the support you can. We shall start with a frightful tenor, but give him a good hand."

'The tenor came out and, before he could sing a note, he was given an ovation. Schubert's Serenade followed: the trouble was that he was so overcome with his welcome, he would not stop singing. The compere went on the stage again and said: "Break it down you fellows: there are other items and you have overdone it with this bird."

'We eventually got through with a one-act play in Italian, interpreted by one of our people who spoke the language, and "Penny Serenade" was sung by a young Italian girl with a "penny" voice. At the end of the afternoon's show, the Director of Drama came forward to the compere.

"They were a good audience," he said, "but you forget that I speak English."'

After the first show the actors and actresses were told: 'You must be here at 7.30 p.m. If you arrive five minutes late, the show's off. And we will give you supper.' They were there at 7 p.m. with all their families, obviously because food was in the offing. 'To our embarrassment and chagrin, our lighting system broke down and we were unable to start until 8.15 p.m. The show went off with a bang, thanks to the co-operation of the troops. Then came supper. The girls were beautifully dressed, even to lacquered finger-nails, but they were very hungry. It was a sad sight to watch them stick their bare arms into the Army cookers and pull out handfuls of baked beans. It was a pity that Mussolini could not have seen that.'

[Alvito](#) town rose up from the foot of a knoll and looked down on a checker-board

of fields spreading away down the valley towards [Atina](#), a pleasant place marred by the tragic death of Private [Wood](#),⁷⁴ of Battalion Headquarters, who accidentally shot himself in the head when removing his tommy gun from its case in preparation for a route march. He was buried next to 'Bunty' Cowper.

Here came the news, first of the fall of [Rome](#), then 'the thing for which we had been waiting for years: The Second Front as we called it. The authorities said we shouldn't call it that, that we were really The Second Front, but we still stuck to it instead of invasion. So when we heard we all went down and gathered round the radio, and it sounded very like what you expected it to sound.'

'What made me the most bitter?' asks Lloyd [Grieve](#).⁷⁵ 'Hard to say. Neither discomforts nor delays, cold or mud, booby-traps or soya-links. I think, perhaps, the wounding of a non-combatant, the small boy in the [Liri Valley](#) whom I found playing with some German detonators and who, before I could intervene, blew the flesh from the fingers of one hand, exposing the bones like small twigs on a branch. War was not an army on the march; it was all the wounded and suffering; it was shooting a German in the arm and then using one's own field dressing to stop the flow of blood; a crazy adventure to the man in battle, a dread horror to the civilian.'

From here the battalion went on to rest. One soldier wrote: 'This "rest" business you hear about is really only a lot of hard work for us, training, etc. They never leave you alone for long.'

For several weeks the Division rested and trained at Fontana [Liri](#), near [Arce](#) on Route 6, 55 miles short of [Rome](#). The dour struggle for [Cassino](#) was over. The battalion had not been heavily engaged—its casualties were 13 dead and 57 wounded—but the approaching battle for [Florence](#) would be a different story.

Padre Sullivan has the last word on [Cassino](#):

I suppose the war floated over the heads of some men like a warm wave. They seemed to go through the business without any idea of what was involved. My little batman was such a one. He enlisted under age in order to be with his brother, but he never at any stage understood the significance of the conflict. He seemed to live in another world. The incident I am about to record seems incredible, but it is true.

We had been in [Alvito](#) for some time and he was driving me back to [Caserta](#) to No. 2 Hospital. We were obliged to pass through [Cassino](#) and, as we came down the hill to go through that shattered and forlorn looking place, I said to him,

'Walter, what is the name of that town below us?'

He looked out of the cab of the truck and pondered for some time.

'You've got me beat,' he replied.

'Stop the truck,' I ordered him. He did so and we got out.

'Now,' I said, 'it could be one of the four following places. [Alvito](#), [Montecorvo](#), [Mignano](#) or [Cassino](#).' It obviously could not be any of the former three, but Walter did not seem to think so. He reflected for some time.

'It's [Alvito](#), of course,' he replied, and mark you, we had just left that town, having spent a fortnight there. I got him by the ear and led him to the side of the road and said:

'That is [Cassino](#), my boy. Take a long, long look. It is now burnt into our national history. If you remember nothing else about the war, remember that.'

Knowing him as I do, I am willing to bet that is all he has remembered.

¹ Devastated [Cassino](#) lay at the foot of [Montecassino](#) (about 1700 ft high), topped by the famous monastery, soon to be bombed. [Cassino](#) blocked the way into the [Liri](#) valley. Here, on the western side of the [Apennines](#), British, American and French troops of [Fifth Army](#) had hoped for a quick breakthrough from [Cassino](#) to the great prize of [Rome](#), less than 70 miles away. These soldiers had fought their way into the [Volturno](#) valley, which led into the [Liri](#) valley near [Cassino](#). But the mountains drew in, the evil winter weather descended, and the enemy, firmly entrenched in his rugged Gustav line, fought back with defiant courage and skill. Here, into the [Volturno](#) valley came the New Zealand Division in the first week in February. Three weeks later 22 Battalion learned that its old desert brigade commander, [Major-General Kippenberger](#), now commanding 2 NZ Division, miraculously escaping death but losing both feet, had trodden on a mine on [Monte Trocchio](#). He was succeeded by Brigadier G. B. Parkinson.

² Pte D. R. Froggatt; New Plymouth; born New Plymouth, 30 Mar 1922; postman; twice wounded.

³ A wall of Pompeii had an ancient Latin notice: 'It is a wonder, oh Wall, that thou hast not collapsed under the weight of so much nonsense'. Throughout Italy, as the months dragged by and the front seared its way north, the old tradition of slogan-scribbled walls lived on: DUCE or DUX, now defaced and out of fashion, together with VEDERE, VIVERE, VINCERE or COMBATTERE. VIVAS were abbreviated to a w-sign (which the dissenter inverted into an M sign), VIVA STALIN (always correct and plentifully supplied with hammers and sickles, or stencil of Lenin), CHURCHILL (CHURCHIL or CIORCIL) and ROOSEVELT (RUSVELT). Nobody attempted to viva Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek (or, oddly enough, Hitler, it seems). WELCOME TO THE LIBERATORS varied once or twice with LONG LIVE DEAR OLD ENGLAND; LONG LIFE TO THE USA; HURRAH! BOYS! HURRAH! and YOU ARE WELL COMMING. Peaceful signs ran to GOOD CLEAN BARBERS, and VERY BEST LAUNDRIES and FAST WASHWOMAN. Among Allied signs (varied and many) were two which nobody ever understood: WASKI POST and PUNKT RAT. The Allied Military Government of Occupied Territory, joining the fray as a mere amateur, posted well-meaning signs reading AMGOT, but these were again abbreviated (and hastily, too) to AMG because, so the story runs, amgot is Persian for something unspeakable connected with a dog.

⁴ Here New Zealanders came into closer contact with American troops and bartered successfully for large-collared American jackets. An officer relates: 'The Yanks, after their custom, had provided almost every known amenity. In the centre of an area which they occupied, stretching for what looked like almost an acre, there was a vast series of marquees strung together. This was the American mobile bath unit. The procedure was most exact.

'We New Zealanders, after first having taken advantage of it without permission, were finally granted authority to use it. That was allowed because the Yanks appeared to have no option. The men lined up and entered the first marquee. As they did so, they took off all their clothing and each man put it in a huge canvas bag, which was received by a courteous G.I., who gave him a duplicate disk by way of receipt. Then slowly the group of male nudes made its way along duckboards, up the steps and into a series of shower cubicles, which ranged from very hot to cold. Each one was visited in turn and, as the individual soldier came out of the last one, he was met by another courteous G.I., who handed him a huge towel. Still

clutching his disk he dried himself, passed it on to a third waiting American and received his bag of clothing back, de-loused, fumigated, one almost thought dry-cleaned. He dressed and went out the far end of the last marquee. The pièce de résistance needs to be described. This whole business went on to the accompaniment of music. In the far corner a lanky G.I. worked the gramophone and changed the records. What will be his answer to his growing son, who now keeps on asking him: "What did you do in the War, Daddy?"`

⁵ `In the fullness of time,' writes a sergeant, `newspapers and periodicals from NZ reached the Div. What photos! What comment. "My God! What these boys must be going through!" "Look at that brave man charging through the smoke with a rifle and bayonet!" "Great men on the bayonet, these NZers!" "These men have seen hell".'

⁶ Battalion appointments at [Cassino](#): CO, Lt- Col [T. C. Campbell](#); 2 i/c, Maj [D. G. Steele](#); OC 1 Coy, Maj [A. W. F. O'Reilly](#); OC 2 Coy, Maj [R. R. Knox](#); OC 3 Coy, Maj [H. V. Donald](#); OC 4 Coy, Capt [W. H. Cowper](#).

⁷ Lt [H. D. Orton](#); Onewhero, [Tuakau](#); born NZ 20 Feb 1916; farmer; wounded 25 Mar 1944.

⁸ Pte [C. G. Nikolaison](#); born [Whetukura](#), [Ormondville](#), 25 Aug 1911; deer stalker and lorry driver; killed in action 25 Mar 1944.

⁹ Sgt [M. A. Rogers](#); born NZ 2 Aug 1916; twice wounded.

¹⁰ Pte [G. S. Bygrave](#); born NZ 10 Aug 1920; farmer; killed in action 25 Mar 1944.

¹¹ Cpl [H. McIvor](#), MM; [Hastings](#); born [Scotland](#), 16 Feb 1919; labourer.

¹² Pte [A. B. Jarmey](#); born [Wellington](#), 23 Feb 1922; clerk; wounded 25 Mar 1944.

¹³ Cpl [B. K. Kirschberg](#); [Hastings](#); born [Wellington](#), 23 May 1918; shop

assistant; twice wounded.

¹⁴ Cpl C. E. Hatchard; Hawera; born Normanby, 21 Jun 1921; electrician's apprentice.

¹⁵ Pte F. E. McRae; Napier; born Auckland, 6 Aug 1917; labourer; wounded 25 Mar 1944.

¹⁶ 2 Lt D. A. Valintine; born Cambridge, 17 Apr 1922; clerk; killed in action 30 Jul 1944.

¹⁷ L-Sgt S. McL. Nairn, m.i.d.; Hawera; born Hawera, 24 Sep 1920; shop assistant; wounded 30 Mar 1944.

¹⁸ Capt C. H. Baird, m.i.d.; born NZ 2 May 1918; medical student.

¹⁹ Pte J. R. McCarthy; Wellington; born Christchurch, 18 Dec 1920; clerical cadet; wounded 23 Dec 1944.

²⁰ L-Sgt H. F. McKinnon; Palmerston North; born Rongotea, 9 Feb 1919; truck driver; wounded 27 Mar 1944.

²¹ Pte B. T. Leach; born Marton, 11 Feb 1919; P and T Dept linesman; wounded 27 Mar 1944. 'I would like to add the fine work the VADs did, some of them were real angels and really spoilt us,' writes Leach. 'I will never forget the days I spent in hospital in Bari, some of my cobbers would go down town and smuggle up wine to me. Believe me, I used to get quite merry in bed. I was well looked after as the nurses would smuggle the empties out for me in the mornings before the Sister came on duty.'

²² Pte L. J. Small; Gisborne; born NZ 28 Feb 1917; printer; wounded 27 Mar 1944.

²³ L-Sgt W. H. Nicholls; Palmerston North; born Auckland, 31 Aug 1913; carpenter; wounded 27 Mar 1944.

²⁴ L-Sgt S. N. Tsukigawa, MM, m.i.d.; Balclutha; born Balclutha, 21 Jul 1918; printer; twice wounded.

²⁵ L-Sgt L. H. Faull; Stratford; born New Plymouth, 27 Jul 1913; dairy farmer; twice wounded.

²⁶ Cpl P. F. K. Potiki; Wellington; born NZ 11 Sep 1918; clerk; wounded 27 Mar 1944.

²⁷ 2 Lt G. F. McHardy; born Palmerston North, 22 Dec 1905; sheep-farmer; killed in action 28 Nov 1944.

²⁸ S-Sgt F. N. Kerrigan, m.i.d.; Hastings; born Portobello, Otago, 21 Apr 1910; carpenter; wounded 27 Jun 1942.

²⁹ The carrying parties going out from [Cassino](#) used to wait at the crypt, which served as Battalion Headquarters, until about 1 a.m., to carry out any casualties to the ADS.

³⁰ Letters home, of course, were written from within [Cassino](#) itself. Private 492769's letter, which eventually found its way to his wife in Hastings, contains this classic sentence: 'That oil question on the car seems to bother you but when you can't see any oil at all on the dip-stick that's the time to worry.'

³¹ Pte J. E. Jensen; born NZ 14 Jan 1917; shepherd; killed in action 29 Mar 1944.

³² Cpl J. O'B. Beckett; Tauranga; born Christchurch, 23 Jun 1904; mercantile and insurance manager; wounded 29 Mar 1944.

³³ Sgt A. A. Franklin, m.i.d.; Te Kuiti; born Hong Kong, 11 Oct 1905; farmhand.

³⁴ Cpl W. S. Thomson; New Plymouth; born New Plymouth, 2 Feb 1911;

public accountant; wounded 28 Jun 1942.

³⁵ Pte D. T. N. Calman; born NZ 19 Feb 1919; carpenter; twice wounded.

³⁶ WO II R. H. Absolom; Linton; born NZ 2 May 1914; shepherd; now Regular soldier.

³⁷ Maj J. Milne; Otautau, Southland; born NZ 24 Oct 1913; farmer; twice wounded.

³⁸ L-Cpl G. F. Knuckey; Hastings; born NZ 24 Mar 1910; builder; wounded 22 Sep 1944.

³⁹ L-Cpl R. W. Grant; born Dunedin, 11 Feb 1907; hairdresser.

⁴⁰ Pte E. N. Lee; Waitoa; born Durham, England, 1 Nov 1920; printer; wounded 17 Oct 1944.

⁴¹ Sgt S. Meads; Rangiwahia; born Rangiwahia, 18 Apr 1911; farmer; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁴² Pte L. H. Bridgeman; Tariki, Taranaki; born NZ 8 Feb 1920; farmhand; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁴³ 2 Lt R. G. Stuckey; born Manukau, 29 Jun 1921; clerk; wounded 28 May 1944.

⁴⁴ Lt A. F. Aldridge; born Napier, 3 Apr 1914; stock agent; wounded 14 Apr 1945.

⁴⁵ Maj A. H. Revell, m.i.d.; born NZ 3 Oct 1908; farmer; twice wounded.

⁴⁶ Sgt G. R. Bradbury; Clive, Napier; born NZ 23 May 1911; carpenter; wounded 14 Apr 1944.

⁴⁷ 2 Lt J. D. McClymont; born England, 18 Sep 1915; sheep-farmer; killed in action 15 Apr 1944. (McClymont, who had been recommended for a commission, was gazetted posthumously.)

⁴⁸ Putting down phone wires in pitch dark (wrote T. Hegglun), some men 'had a lot of fun, falling into all the shellholes, tripping over everything, raining like hell, and what with wading about in the river and falling in the mud I'm in a hell of a mess. Spent rest of night just in overcoat.... burnt blasted boots and socks drying by fire.'

⁴⁹ Pte R. Tama; born NZ 27 Sep 1920; general labourer; killed in action 20 Apr 1944.

⁵⁰ Pte F. H. Mollier; born NZ 10 Feb 1904; auctioneer; died of wounds 21 Apr 1944.

⁵¹ Maj J. Wells, m.i.d.; Wellington; born Dargaville, 4 Jan 1911; bank officer.

⁵² L-Cpl W. Dumble; Napier; born Meeanee, 17 May 1912; farm manager; wounded 23 Apr 1944.

⁵³ Pte L. J. Heald; Lower Hutt; born NZ 18 Sep 1918; moulder; wounded 23 Apr 1944.

⁵⁴ Pte R. G. Rule; Wairoa; born NZ 10 Jun 1918; shepherd; wounded 23 Apr 1944.

⁵⁵ Sgt T. U. Miles; Halcombe; born Feilding, 26 Mar 1914; farm contractor; wounded Dec 1943.

⁵⁶ Brig S. H. Crump, CBE, DSO, m.i.d., Bronze Star (US); Lower Hutt; born Wellington, 25 Jan 1889; Regular soldier; NZASC 1915–19; Commander NZ ASC, 2 NZ Div, 1940–45; comd 2 NZEF (Japan) Jun-Sep 1947; on staff of HQ BCOF and NZ representative on Disposals Board in Japan, 1948–49.

⁵⁷ Pte R. H. Kirk; Napier; born NZ 1 Jun 1922; apprentice mechanic; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁵⁸ Sgt A. S. Teaz; born NZ 21 Oct 1915; aircraftsman; died of wounds 11 Jun 1944.

⁵⁹ L-Sgt A. S. Fong; Greymouth; born Greymouth, 12 Jun 1908; linotypist.

⁶⁰ A town which had been knocked about somewhat (one man writes). In one of the churches the statues of the saints were undamaged and somebody had placed them in the pews, facing the altar; the local cemetery was of interest to the observant. A book of records showed when several bodies had been interred in the special plot until they were ready for exhumation [they were taken out and placed] in a linen bag in the small compartments in the cemetery wall. A building at one end of the central walk contained hundreds of bones—the heads in one stack and the rest in another. One marble plaque in memory of an Italian youth bore a bas-relief of the departed riding his motor-cycle. No famous last words were quoted. The rough soldiery took delight in ringing the cemetery bell at odd times. 'Many of the tombs had been broken into before our arrival....'

⁶¹ Pte J. S. Strang; born NZ 27 Aug 1914; farm contractor; killed in action 26 May 1944.

⁶² Lt E. F. T. Mullinder; born Taihape, 30 Dec 1917; school-teacher; died of wounds 28 May 1944.

⁶³ L-Cpl D. W. C. Lange; born Gisborne, 14 Jun 1920; proof reader; killed in action 26 May 1944.

⁶⁴ Pte E. G. Leighton; Helensville; born Auckland, 15 Jun 1919; sheep-station hand; wounded 26 May 1944.

⁶⁵ Cpl D. Hannah; Hawera; born Scotland, 2 Jul 1911; slaughterman; wounded 26 May 1944.

⁶⁶ Pte M. J. Shotter; born NZ 11 Sep 1922; exchange clerk; killed in action 26 May 1944.

⁶⁷ Pte V. L. Hodges; Manaia, Taranaki; born New Plymouth, 24 Feb 1915; farmhand; wounded 26 May 1944.

⁶⁸ Pte L. J. C. Medway; born NZ 23 Jan 1922; shop assistant; killed in action 30 Jul 1944.

⁶⁹ Capt T. N. Bright, m.i.d.; Wellington; born Gisborne, 10 Jun 1917; bank clerk; wounded 4 Dec 1943.

⁷⁰ Pte U. B. Walker; Levin; born NZ 24 Mar 1911; butcher; twice wounded.

⁷¹ Pte C. J. White; Palmerston North; born Wellington, 31 May 1919; warehouseman; wounded 3 Jun 1944.

⁷² Capt V. G. Henderson; Tawa Flat; born Featherston, 30 Mar 1919; clerk.

⁷³ Capt A. House; born Lower Hutt, 15 Nov 1913; warehouseman.

⁷⁴ Pte B. J. Wood; born NZ 28 Dec 1921; farmhand; accidentally killed 11 Jun 1944.

⁷⁵ Pte L. G. Grieve; Auckland; born Auckland, 28 May 1906; grocer; wounded 27 Sep 1944.

22 BATTALION

CHAPTER 11 – LA ROMOLA

CHAPTER 11

La Romola

'My Dear—, You say that Fred— tells his wife what he does every day. Well, when we are not in the line camp life is much the same every day but front line work is different.' —Private 492769, writing home on 30 July 1944.

And jokers coming back from [Rome](#) and talking about—woman —St. Peters ¹—vino bianco—woman—Appian Way—muscatella —Victor Emanuel Memorial—woman—Vatican City—cognac—Olympic Stadium—woman—Borghese—Anisetta—Cistine Chapel—woman—catacombs—hair-cut, shave, shampoo, nail manicure—1400 Lire—Romulus and Remus—vermouth—souvenirs— woman, etc., etc., [writes Bob Foreman].

In all my memories of various cities [Rome](#) stands out as something different. Although it was Italian it seemed to have dignity. There was a difference between [Rome](#) and [Cairo](#)—they both had their own personalities. [Cairo](#) was a place for fun and games—among other things. [Rome](#)—among other things—was a place where you could take it easy and enjoy the luxuries of life—something further removed from the army than was the case with [Cairo](#). And in [Rome](#) you saw all these things which you had heard about since childhood. And the women—so many had just taken on the oldest profession in the world. And so many of them still had the charm and looks of their upbringing—their new job didn't show—as yet—in their appearance (as it did in places like Egypt). We asked one young girl in a bar one night (she went about her job still as a new chum) why she had started on this career. And her reply was the same— I suppose—as hundreds of others would have been: 'I've got to eat.' You had to have something more than a bit of money to live in [Rome](#)—after the upheaval of war. And after seeing all the other places in [Italy](#) which we have seen— [Rome](#) seemed clean and— well it seemed to have dignity. Everyone seemed to have something to say about [Rome](#)—anyway you couldn't go home and say you hadn't seen [Rome](#). [At the Apollo Cabaret English military police would beg New Zealand officers forming scrums with Springboks: 'Don't scrum sir! Sing!'—to no avail.]

The traffic didn't rush and bustle as much as in [Cairo](#)—but remember those

rowdy diesel engines and their clattering exhausts —everything from great Fiat lorries and buses down to those little Fiat three wheelers. The streets reeked of diesel fumes. All day the din would go on—and keep going on till after midnight—then it would begin to slacken so that by about 2 am there would be short intervals of silence between the comings and goings. Then up till about 5 am there would be as much silence as there was clatter of exhausts (as gear changes were made), coming through your bedroom window at the NZ Club. But after 5 am the noise started to increase again so that by about 7 am they were in full cry once more. (And the motor scooters added their quota of noise.) Then there was the Italian orchestra at the Club—they played well but had a rather limited repertoire (the signorina singing 'Trotta, Trotta Cavelina' etc.—the boys liked it.)

Back at our area we mostly sang (with a bit of vino) the songs we had sung since we had gone into [Trentham](#). The army songs such as 'Who'll do it this time', 'Star of the Evening', 'Sweet Violets', etc. were always to the fore—together with one or two of the latest song hits and one or two Italian songs some of the boys had just learnt. As the session got going a lone voice would be raised in such melodies as 'Mountains of Morne', 'Shake hands with a Millionaire', 'Granny's Highland Hame', 'Will my Soul pass Thru' [Ireland](#)' etc., etc. Then towards the end of course there would be 'Now is the Hour'. But there were two song hits which came out at the beginning of the war and which seemed to always stay at the top— 'Roll out the Barrel' and 'Bless 'em All'. (How you cursed that song if you were stone cold sober and trying to get some sleep at about midnight when there was a party going on next door.) But now there was a new song which had been rising in popularity and which now stayed at the top for the rest of the war. At first you had it sung in English ('For you Lili Marlene') but soon you could also have it in Italian ('Conte Lili Marlene') or German ('Mit einst Lili Marlene'). I heard that some of the Italians were quite surprised when we came to [Italy](#) and went round singing a German army song half the time. ²

And the drunks.... You would hear them coming back over the ridge from a 'session' somewhere in the early hours of the morning and shouting at each other. Then there would be a long pow-wow at X's bivvy and finally all would be quiet. Next morning X would be full of remorse. He would utter such remarks as: 'I'm no good—I've let you boys down again, I'm not fit to be with you boys'—and he would sit in

the sun looking utterly dejected. And he would have a job to find his clothes. Often something was missing completely—maybe his boots, or maybe his shirt, or then again his false teeth. But a few nights later he would be off again.

Then off on another route march ... with locusts or cicadas or what ever you call them kicking up a hang of a din in the trees and a continuous scuttle of lizards in front of you as you walked through the grass—two sounds so very typical of an Italian summer. (One joker swore he had a pet lizard which came to see him every morning.)

Then out to hospital with boils and carbuncles—rejoining on the [Arno](#).

An American sergeant, James P. O'Neill, armed with notebook, pencil and Leica camera, came to visit the battalion at the end of July. The battalion had moved from resting near [Rome](#) and had travelled 270 miles north, over the dusty countryside other soldiers had captured, and on beyond Lake Trasimene. Here a ring of mountains stood between the Allies and [Florence](#). In this mountain stronghold the German was fighting a savage rearguard action before falling back to his formidable Gothic line, which was taking shape behind [Florence](#) and stretching across the Italian peninsula from coast to coast.

The Division's task was to drive the enemy from the hilltops commanding Route 2, which led into [Florence](#). Twenty-second Battalion was in the act of taking a hillside village, [La Romola](#).

Sergeant O'Neill arrived to write an article, 'Kiwis in [Italy](#)', for his magazine Yank, 'The Army Weekly. 10c. By the men ... for the men in the service.' Already he had photographed one mess queue and had prepared the caption: 'Fighting Kiwis in [Italy](#) line up for their chow. It's corned willie and, inevitably, a chipped mug of tea.'

At the command post O'Neill met the Adjutant, Captain [Carson](#),³ 'a dark, good-looking Kiwi, with grey rings under tired eyes and a sad, cynical grin.' He moved on to find Colonel Donald, who was trying to fix up a bath for freshly wounded Major O'Reilly. 'We didn't give Bert O'Reilly a bath after all,' Donald complained. 'Some of those crazy Maori jokers stole the bathtub.'



the advance to florence

The night's objective for the battalion was the town of 'El Romula' [[La Romola](#)], and a farmhouse directly across from it and in front of a hill. The artillery was to lay down a heavy barrage and then the infantry was to move in. The attack would begin at 10 p.m. on the 29th.

The American was sent off to 11 Platoon, which was in reserve. He was introduced to the cook, Alec [Gillon](#), ⁴ a Taranaki 'shepherd' preparing 'a baffling mess of everything [30 tomatoes, 16 fresh eggs and 2 rabbits] it is miraculous what you sometimes get out of a combination like this.' The visitor contributed a tin of peas and a packet of lemon-juice powder. His impression of New Zealanders took shape: 'They wore no helmets, preferring their berets or stray Itie hats: they were all a deep, healthy tan and most of them wore no shirts. They looked like especially healthy members of a 4-H club [American equivalent of young farmers' club], except for the hollows under their eyes and the dark tense lines that marked their tan complexions.'

After dinner Gillon and 'another ex-sheep-herder from Palmerston', turned on a haka; a keg of chianti was tapped; the talk drifted to 'the shielas (girls) back home and when they would see them again'; and the American was promised toheroa soup next day.

But in the morning 11 Platoon, needed in the final assault on 'Romula', had left for the line. Captain Carson explained the attack and said the men were moving on to a farmhouse at the foot of the hill.

'A small Kiwi [Padre Sullivan] ... straw-coloured hair and freckles, and he wore a freshly laundered shirt' was collecting names for a burial party. The American went forward to watch the farmhouse, under fire from a Sherman, fall. Mortars started a barrage and a platoon moved forward.

'When they were about 300 yards away, the mortar barrage stopped and the platoon opened up with small arms. Then the men started to run toward the house. They were about 50 feet away when a grenade blew up in front of them and one of the Kiwis went down. The rest were almost up to the house when two civilians crawled out of a cellar hole and began running away. The Kiwis didn't pay any attention to them. Both of the civilians started down the rise: they got about 20 yards and then one stepped on a mine and went up in a cloud of dust. The other kept running.

'Now I could see dark forms come out of the cellar. They were Germans, about 15 of them, and they all had their hands up. Four Kiwis started to hustle them back to the rear. The rest of the platoon disappeared into the house.'

O'Neill then returned to the command post. 'When the hill at last fell, a man said: "At least we're one bloody hill closer to New Zealand."'`

The staff correspondent, his story finished, packed up and moved on to other places, other stories.

Before its attack on [La Romola](#) the battalion, laden with superb peaches from an orchard in the assembly area, and glimpsing a tired King George VI driving past from a visit to the front, had searched, checked over, and occupied the hilltop hamlet of [San Casciano](#) (some sniping and shelling) on 27 July.

The battalion was preceded ⁵ by a force clearing the way called [ARMCAV](#), which included 2 Company under Major Keith Hutcheson, the first troops into [San Casciano](#). 'We saw our divebombers deal a terrific blow on [San Casciano](#),' wrote Hutcheson. 'One moment the town looked smiling in the sunlight. Then came our bombers and a sickly yellow pall of dust and smoke arose. As the dust cleared away we could see the town leering in ruins.' The company next moved on to occupy [Spedaletto](#), a hamlet further north, where it was relieved by 23 Battalion. The company, heavily

mortared and shelled during its spearhead advance, had met with casualties, the first being Lieutenant Tom [Wauchop](#),⁶ found face down in long grass, killed instantly by a mortar fragment.

The occupation of [San Casciano](#) on 27 July cost two men killed and five wounded. They were caught on a long, sweeping bend of the road curving uphill to the town. Most of the men crowded together on the leading tank jumped down into the water-table between the tank and the bank when the first shell arrived, but Philip [Mason](#),⁷ a wireless operator, who had his earphones on and was facing in another direction, was slow to move. He was wounded by the fast-following second shell. Private [Watt](#),⁸ 'being a new chum didn't know what to do, but the others all said: "Get off the—tank into the ditch." Just as I was bending down to jump off I felt a stinging pain in the throat, but thought it was a flying stone till, landing in the ditch, I found blood was pouring out.' Fraser [McGirr](#)⁹ promptly bound up Watt's dangerous wound, 'and after that I always took a dim view of riding on the outside of a tank. Even now the smell of a diesel engine brings the scene back.' Doug [Shaw](#)¹⁰ and [Davidson](#)¹¹ were wounded simultaneously.

[San Casciano](#) stood on a ridge just over 1000 feet above sea level. North of the town the land, dotted with olive trees, dipped down over two miles to a narrow valley with a creek and a road, an attractive enough sight in peacetime. About half a mile up the steep slope on the other side stood the cluster of houses called [La Romola](#), and a couple of miles on from that a ridge called [La Poggiona](#). Within the next few days the battalion would storm both [La Romola](#) and [La Poggiona](#), key positions in the final defence of [Florence](#)—a bloody assault over a week which would cost 26 dead and 80 wounded.

Beyond [San Casciano](#) heavy firing came from the hills. These new defences, called the Paula line and particularly strong in guns and mortars, were held by experienced troops including [4 Parachute Division](#) and [29 Panzer Grenadier Division](#). But already [Florence](#) (declared an open city) was in sight; its twinkling, tantalising lights could be seen in the distance from certain hilltops at night.

Now working with squadrons of [4 Armoured Brigade](#), [Divisional Cavalry](#) and other units, the battalion was about to meet particularly bitter fighting.¹² But the men would shoulder their trials with distinction, many an unblooded reinforcement

fighting with almost a veteran's skill. Also, for the first time in Eighth Army's history, a German Tiger tank, a massive 60-tonner in full running order and complete with crew, would be captured.

By dawn on 28 July 3 Company was past [San Casciano](#) and holding the ridge overlooking the valley which lay between the battalion and [La Romola](#). Vehicles moving along the road in the valley were mistaken for ours, and a tank major remarked happily: 'We'll be in [Florence](#) tonight—the 19th are through!' A section and three tanks prepared for a descent into the valley to investigate a blown chunk of the road. They were to find a detour; if nothing happened, the rest of the platoon would come down and up the other side to occupy [La Romola](#). Divisional Headquarters was under the impression that the Germans were pulling back steadily.

'It was a rather chilly grey morning with the sun just breaking through to give promise of a fine day when the tanks went off with the section under Corporal Max Rogers,' writes Second-Lieutenant Paterson. 'Across the valley there was no sign of life at all—everything was absolutely quiet and still, almost eerily so. We watched the tanks wind down a narrow rutted track into the valley below, then trundle along the road at the bottom for a hundred yards or more to the edge of the huge hole in the road where the turnoff to the village joined the main valley road. The tanks stopped, Max Rogers spread his men out around them and they lay down. The three tank commanders climbed out of their turrets and were walking over to look closely at the hole in the road. Suddenly like a broadside from a huge battleship, the whole hillside opened fire simultaneously—88mms, mortars, spandaus, small-arms fire—everything seemed to come out at once from the whole area of the hill opposite. The tanks burst into flames in the same time as you would count 1—2—3... The shelling continued very heavily for some time and from then on right through that day and night and next day and part of the night until the [La Romola](#) attack it was intermittently heavy to light almost without let-up.'¹³

Rogers's section vanished; the ridge was drenched with fire, and in fact during this day (28 July) all of 3 Company's vehicles would be shelled out of commission. Everyone on the ridge scrambled for cover in a church, where later a solitary tank man appeared, after worming his way up a shallow gully, with the news that, although one or two were wounded, most of the men were safe in a house partly

sheltered by a small spur.

Tom Kriete, in his [Red Cross](#) carrier, most pluckily drove down and gathered up the wounded near the tanks, firmly refusing to take an armed officer with him and saying reproachfully: 'It's against the Geneva Regulations.'

Among the rescued wounded was Ian [Riddle](#),¹⁴ 'a fine chap, quiet, reserved and solid. He died later from his wounds, although by the cheerful way he greeted me [from the stretcher] I never guessed that he was wounded so seriously.'

After a scratch breakfast (sour red wine, stale bread, and lengths of that smoked sausage often seen hanging from the ceilings of Italian farmhouses) Rogers's section, one by one at erratic intervals, dashed outside, over open and horribly exposed ground, into the shallow gully, and so safely up to the church—all except hapless 'Lofty'.¹⁵

Major [Sainsbury](#)¹⁶ remembers the sectioning drily report 'that in their opinion Jerry had not gone.' At that moment Colonel Donald arrived in his jeep and entered the church. A 'stonk' came down and collected his jeep, 'so', adds the Major, 'I think even he was convinced.'

Three Company spent the rest of that day and the next in and around the church while the heavy shelling continued, and suffered some casualties. 'No breakfast, Sweet Fanny Adams for the rest of the day, rather miserable actually.' To the right 1 Company, less exposed, advanced some of the way towards the valley, at the cost of three men wounded by the same mortar bomb. Several units, including 1 Company, made their headquarters in a sturdy three-storied building hidden in trees and believed to be invisible from the other side of the valley. In fact, a New Zealander was light-heartedly strumming a piano when a shell bit into the top story. This was the start of half an hour's shelling which didn't seem to much affect this solid building. This fire could have come from a Tiger tank near [La Romola](#).

During the morning of 30 July a reconnaissance patrol under Sergeant Allan [Clinton](#)¹⁷ went out 'to establish the position of the enemy—in other words, to draw fire. It soon did. While creeping out of the ditch the four men were fired on. They decided to run back to a house about 400 yards away, and were running together

when [Ingpen](#) ¹⁸ broke away and ran up through some maize, 'and the next thing I knew my leg started to go at all angles and ... I was at the house with the other boys, to whom I owe a terrible lot, and to Graham [Bassett](#) ¹⁹ and the boys of No. 7 Platoon for their great friendship.'

Lieutenant Monaghan had gone to an observation-post position in houses just over the top of a ridge in 3 Company's area. While looking over the ground of the next night's attack, he was caught in mortaring and severely wounded in the stomach. He returned to Company Headquarters full of apologies for getting wounded and reluctant to lie down. 'Jack was a first-class fighting soldier and 1 Company greatly missed him,' notes a comrade. Jim [Maclean](#) ²⁰ took over the platoon. That night a tank officer reconnoitred to the stream in the valley and found the banks too steep for the tanks to cross.

By 9.30 pm [an officer writes] we had our orders for the attack [that night at 1 a.m.] I was held back by George ('Gharry George') Sainsbury after the conference for further orders. I was told to send an N.C.O. and two men, equipped with a 38 set [a portable radio] to the village of [La Romola](#). They were to go to the village, find out if it was occupied, count how many Germans were there and radio the information back, then return and rejoin the platoon in time to move off [to the start line] by midnight. I was to send good men since apparently the information must be reliable. I protested to Major Sainsbury stating that as the answer was obvious since we were even then being heavily shelled, and there was a great deal of machinegun fire coming over from the village and its surrounding area, it was a futile waste of men. I told George that although I had never before refused to obey an order I would do so now.

He reasoned with me, explaining that it was an order from [Divisional Headquarters](#) so far as he could make out, and that he liked it no more than I—that nevertheless it would have to be done. Apparently Div HQ had the word of two Italians that the Germans were pulling out and the authorities did not wish to waste the ammunition involved in a barrage. If the Hun was pulling out, the barrage could be called off, I then told George that if it had to be done, it was no job for an NCO and though I didn't want to do the job there was no alternative other than for me to do so. He reminded me that I'd have more work to do before the night was out, so

once more I tried, suggesting that a spare officer he had ... should be sent rather than an NCO, but orders were orders and so I returned, raging and disconsolate to my platoon, hurrying to give them as much time to do the job as possible and rejoin us— although I doubted whether they would have a ghost of a chance. It was then about 10.30 p.m.

I selected Corporal [Edwards](#)²¹—we called him Eddie Edwards— a keen, conscientious, thoroughly reliable and fearless soldier. To go with him I picked what I thought to be two of the most enterprising and reliable men—'Fudge' Valintine and 'Nuts' or Jack Medway. These two were friends and were as keen and fine a couple of chaps as I knew. I called them out as soon as I arrived at the platoon, telling the others to get ready for a move at midnight.

I gave them (i.e., Medway, Edwards and Valintine) their orders, reducing it to my own terms, namely:

- (1) they had to go towards the village and establish the fact that it was occupied. First contact with the enemy would establish this and observation from where we were would establish the width of area of occupation.
- (2) They were not to take the radio set as it would only hinder movement and I could see no reasonable opportunity of their using it anyway.
- (3) They were to travel light with only personal weapons.
- (4) They were to return to the platoon as soon as possible, making their way back to us as soon as they had established contact with the enemy.

I emphasised this last point as being important, pointing out that a recce patrol was useless unless it came back with the News. Having compromised with the authorities and my conscience as best as I could I saw them go, feeling profoundly disturbed. I then went in to give the rest of the platoon the orders for the attack. Just before we moved off at midnight word came to me that Eddie Edwards had crawled in on hands and knees, with his feet badly smashed and his scalp badly wounded, and the information that Fudge and Nuts were dead. A shell had got them not 200 yards down the hill. Three days before that, Nuts, in a moment of conversation, had told me how lucky he had always been in having such a wonderful mother and family at home, and how he thought that if a man had to finish up his life this way he reckoned it would be worth it for a family like his. He may have known something—I don't know.

I didn't tell the boys as we moved off what had happened.

Intense shelling covered the start line while the platoons crept, dodged, and ducked into position near it as 1 a.m. approached. Three Company would cross first, with 1 Company following directly behind. Three Company's start line was between two roads on the left; 1 Company would spread out to the right and make directly for [La Romola](#). Two Company would cover the left flank round the road leading southward from [La Romola](#) to [Cerbaia](#). The attackers were to advance under the barrage, which was to lift forward 100 yards every five minutes. From a crest in the rear Vickers guns of 27 (Machine Gun) Battalion began their supporting fire.

A company commander says the 'German defensive fire was very intense in that V-shaped valley—very—it filled the blasted valley—it was horrible.' Says a platoon commander: 'The noise, dust and smoke was terrific and hardly seemed to increase when our own barrage opened up since it had already about reached the ultimate limit.'

Into this went the battalion as the hands of illuminated watches circled round to one o'clock. Subalterns and sergeants yelled to their platoons to get cracking.

Three Company was 'hashed about' by shells or mortars on the start line. Its left-hand platoon (No. 14), with an enraged Triss [Hegglun](#),²² had been dealt a heavy blow on the way to the start line, so only a small number from this platoon got away into battle, Peter Mitchell²³ and Phil [Powell](#),²⁴ on their own initiative, carrying on with a handful of men. Sixteen Platoon scrambled in to fill this gap, but its leader, the cool and adventurous Johnny McNeil, was soon killed, and Sergeant Mick Eades²⁵ took control. Confusing matters further, Second-Lieutenant Keith Cave's²⁶ platoon (which was supposed to be with the rest of 2 Company), somehow caught without shelter, dived into a fairly deep ditch, mixed with 13 Platoon, and bemused that platoon when it rose and moved off into the attack. The remaining platoon in 3 Company (No. 15) on the right broke contact in the middle (Ian Thomas with one half, Sergeant Bill [Windsor](#)²⁷ with the other), but by running in the darkness somehow managed to link up again. Doug Froggatt, the attached signaller with a radio set, was severely wounded just past the start line and lost his radio. (Elsewhere an overwrought man, believing units were being massacred, seized a radio and attempted to call off the attack until he was forcibly restrained.)

One Company, with very similar problems, and with 6 Platoon lost all night, was also 'b—bewildered', as its OC, Len Turner, tersely and graphically describes it. Turner was given command in battle when it was learned that Major O'Reilly had been hit in the head near the start line. The Major, bleeding profusely and surprised at the violence of the shelling, saw and heard no more that night of his three platoons attacking up the hill. Refusing to be evacuated, he stayed with 5 Platoon, the only platoon in 1 and 3 Companies which remained intact entirely throughout the night.²⁸ Two Company, while forming up, was not only mortared, separated and to some extent tangled, but an impudent German almost offhandedly tossed a bakelite grenade into Company Headquarters for good measure.

The wonder is how the attack succeeded at all, and how [La Romola](#) fell: 'it was a time of incomprehensibility to most of us.' To describe the attack as a co-ordinated drive would be false. The assault became a matter of small groups all moving up on their own, none quite sure whether they weren't the only ones left on the task. Determination (which is the very basis of courage) won [La Romola](#). Everywhere radio links failed. Men were isolated, sometimes for hours on end. In this dark and violent night visibility was poor enough (only a few feet) without the constant fog of sour-smelling dust and smoke thrown up by the shells. But the enemy was misled too: several parties of Germans, absolutely convinced that the attack had failed, walked innocently into captivity or death.

The first man to win his way into [La Romola](#) was Lieutenant Ian Thomas with 15 Platoon (3 Company). This won him the MC. His citation mentions how 'His courage, his cheerfulness and his complete disregard for his personal safety were factors of great inspiration to his men. On two occasions the platoon was pinned down by heavy fire from machine-gun posts. Lt. Thomas himself charged both [posts] and with his tommygun killed or wounded the defenders and the advance continued.'

In the afternoon before the attack, Sergeant Johnny [Hughes](#)²⁹ and another man from 16 Platoon had gone out on reconnaissance, but had been held up in the creek. Fifteen Platoon was not supposed to go forward until it heard from this patrol, but at night no news had come so the platoon advanced. 'Getting off the startline was the worst part,' says Bill Windsor. 'We met shelling and counter shelling in the creek, keeping touch in the platoon was tough, but we got 'em up there.' Pushing on up the

hill they lost contact, reached the first house half-way up, were shelled and fired on by a machine gun (near the house), which was cleaned up. Here Phil [Wevell](#)³⁰ was wounded, and was killed by a second machine gun while making his way back to the house. The second nest was cleaned out (Private [Wilson](#)³¹ was wounded), and on the threshold of La [Romola](#) 15 Platoon was held up for a good two hours in the second house, which was not occupied, and was trying to make contact with the other platoons.

About 3 a.m., when Thomas's platoon was occupying its two-storied building on the fringe of [La Romola](#), a burst of Bren-gun fire directed questioningly above the roof brought shouts from Thomas's men of 'Stop that Bren, you silly b—s' and 13 Platoon's survivors emerged from the gloom.

Thirteen Platoon, when the attack opened, had gone up a ditch in single file, its men two or three feet apart in the dark. This ditch led up the hill, and Paterson, tellingly indicating what others too were enduring, goes on: 'After a couple of 100 yards the shelling got so intense that I thought for a time we had overrun our own barrage. I accordingly halted the platoon for two lifts [of the barrage] while I tried to judge which way the shells were coming and whether there was any difference after the next five-minute lift. There wasn't, and several shells seemed to come from the front so I passed back the order to move again.'

Probably at this moment several shells landed at the back of the platoon. Private Gordon [Nilsson](#),³² 'a fine comrade', Private 'Buck' [Cruickshank](#),³³ Corporal Terry Molloy³⁴ and others were killed. Sergeant 'Massey' [Wood](#)³⁵ and Private [Fitness](#)³⁶ were among the wounded. Private [Maidens](#),³⁷ wounded in leg and arm, survived being buried by another shell a moment later. 'Massey' Wood, who had been told before the attack to do what he could for any casualties, now had his hands full: Corporal Max Rogers and Private Doug [Baty](#)³⁸ helped him. Wood carried Fitness, slung over his shoulders, until he reached the stretcher-bearers, 'although at the time.... thought it of little use except that Fitness was still breathing.' Sergeant Rhys Price, calm and steady, gave efficient aid to the wounded that night.

When the ditch ended, 13 Platoon, now only eleven strong, spread out in open order and advanced in a long line. Paterson goes on: 'Meanwhile we advanced our 100 yards each 5 minutes, having long before given up any idea of dodging shells

but watching for fixed line Spandau fire which seemed to be sited at intervals along our front from somewhere over on our left. When observed we'd wait for a burst, then run across its path before the next burst came. So we went on in leaps and bounds. With five men on either side I'd get up, shout "Come on you b—s" or some such edifying words of encouragement while "Richy" [Private [Richardson](#)³⁹] who carried a useless 38 set automatically, of his own accord, took on the job of platoon sergeant, running like a sheepdog from one end to the other of the line, making sure that all the blokes heard in the din, and all moved off together. As we went on the shelling seemed to subside then virtually petered out, with only spasmodic Spandau fire', as the little group drew near Ian Thomas's building. They joined forces, tried vainly for an hour to make contact with Company Headquarters or the tanks by radio, 'during which time odd Huns appeared from time to time and disappeared with an odd grenade or so.' A small group from 14 Platoon appeared, took over Thomas's prisoners and then, as the first streaks of dawn were starting to show, Thomas and Paterson, to the left and to the right, moved off again, each with the remnants of his platoon and without tank support. 'In this fashion we arrived at the village of [La Romola](#)⁴⁰ just as daylight came up and brought us back to a world of comparative reality.'

Soon after the attack opened, and with 14 Platoon smashed, 16 Platoon crossed the road in the valley 'and advanced up a fairly steep incline under streams of German tracer.... We were in extended line led by Lt. Johnny McNeil and in trying to keep well up under our own barrage found ourselves too far to the left of our line of advance, so veered over to the right and suddenly found ourselves amongst the hail of shells which were dropping short. We went to ground, me [[Sicely](#)⁴¹] with wireless set on the ground in front of me. No sooner were we down when a shell hit an olive tree almost above us, and in the darkness I heard a voice I recognised as [Ces Murfitt's](#)⁴² saying: "Oh God, Oh my God let me die", and immediately he died. A minute or two later another shell landed very close and I collected a piece of it in the right thigh. I called to Johnny McNeil who came over with [Wally Wicken](#)⁴³ to help me take the wireless gear off. While they were leaning over me another shell landed almost on top of us and both Johnny McNeil and [Wally Wicken](#) were killed, all I got was a blast of earth on my head.' From this moment Sergeant Mick Eades took over the platoon and succeeded in leading it by daybreak into its [La Romola](#) objective. He won the DCM and (a high and well-deserved honour very rarely made in the infantry)

an immediate commission in the field in recognition of his further brave work in the following five or six days.

'Altogether it was a sticky affair and I feel we suffered more casualties than we deserved,' sums up Major Sainsbury. 'I remember that ... along came an English Arty Major and Sgt. [commandos] who had been detailed to trail along with us to see what an Infantry attack was like. I saw them on the starting line and then the fun started and to this day I don't know what happened to them but I hope it was good experience for them.'

Len Turner tersely describes the attack by 1 Company, which had crossed over the valley and formed up to the right of 3 Company, with 6 Platoon on the left, 8 in the centre and 7 on the right (5 Platoon, under Second-Lieutenant Arthur Woolcott, ⁴⁴ went up the valley on a right hook with the tanks):

'Time passed swiftly, H Hour arrived, Major O'Reilly did not return as planned (knew something must be wrong), we kicked off on time. Hadn't gone 25 yards ... [before] Alan Viles ⁴⁵ was killed outright by shell.... A bastard barrage was on, infantry nightmare, you know, advance say 1500 yds and then pause, and move off at right angles.... Everyone was a bit jumpy about this, you didn't dare ease over to the right too much! Time moved on.... I have never seen grapevines more thickly planted, they seemed about 15 feet apart, strung on tight wires, you had to wriggle thru, no show of bursting thru: wires too tight. Barrage leapt ahead. Rec'd wireless message from Arthur Woolcott to take over 1 Coy as Major [O'Reilly] wounded, very sweet, no link to Bn Hq, no runners, no "I" bloke, no nothing, just very intensive enemy harassing fire. Called Lt. "Junior" McLean ⁴⁶ and Sgt Mick Kenny 8 pl; Graham Bassett and Sgt Alan [Clinton] 7 pl; Sgt Seddon ⁴⁷ 6 pl; together. We had a natter. Decided "up the grapes", "push on regardless". After a while, the grapes won; meantime 6 Pl, Sgt Dick Seddon now O.C., had veered a little to the left along a slight ridge, and lost contact; another "O" group [conference].

Outcome: I would lead, Graham Bassett second, the remains of the Coy in single file in an effort to get to the objective.

'We pressed on, ratted a few Jerry positions, and as dawn broke (first light) were in the right-hand outskirts of the village, approx 200 yds from the objective,

and b— bewildered. Dispersed men in house, as heard fire and someone coming, it was Cpl Jack Shaw and 5 PI, luckily, more or less as planned. Major O'Reilly wasn't far away, he looked like a pirate, bloodied head bandaged and shirt, and greyer than ever, and looking fierce (he had reason too!). I told him the situation, and when I mentioned casually I had lost 6 PI, holus-bolus, I thought he was going to dance the can-can.'⁴⁸

Probably 3 Company occupied the left end of the village and 1 Company the right end at the same time. Twenty-one prisoners were taken and probably fifty to sixty of the enemy had been killed. The battalion had lost 1 officer and 7 men killed, 1 officer and 21 others wounded. [La Romola](#), undefended in the daylight, turned out to have just one fairly long winding main street and plenty of short streets. It was set on a ridge, with a church tower at the left end, and the many gullies leading off the main ridge reminded some of a miniature [Orsogna](#).

When 2 Company was mortared in the creek-bed, Company Headquarters had no choice but to advance alone and ahead of the starting time (to prevent congestion further back) and for an hour lay in no-man's-land behind a most inadequate haystack. The fire intensified. Two guns firing short in the barrage brought casualties. Finally, after the lost and scattered men had been gathered together, all the platoons came within radio touch. The leading platoons were led by Second-Lieutenants Vic Henderson and Keith Cave. Their first objective was a white house, then 'a sort of palace' 400 yards to the left, and finally some houses on the crest of a hill, 600 yards beyond. Landmarks, tracks, and a road were difficult to find and identify.

As the men crossed the road towards the first objective, severe mortaring brought several ugly casualties—somebody panicked and raced along the road almost screaming for stretcher-bearers, but Hutcheson, grabbing him by the wrists and squeezing them hard, told him to get on towards the white house, which he did. The white house, eventually located, was found clear of enemy, 'thank God.' The 'sort of palace' turned out to be full of terrified civilians, for 'the air was noisy with the covering fire of our MMG's and the bursts of infantry weapons.' Company Headquarters was established here as four stranded Germans surrendered. The platoons on the top of the hill met sharp resistance but occupied their objective and took several prisoners. They spent the rest of an anxious and bewildered night

standing to, but although there were bursts of fire all round, the company's front was not attacked. ⁴⁹

Shortly after dawn a 5 Platoon party began a routine search which yielded one of the most spectacular prizes of the Italian campaign, a trophy certainly on its own amongst the New Zealand Division's battle prizes. Lieutenant Arthur Woolcott, with a small party including Lance-Sergeant Ken [Stevens](#), ⁵⁰ Lance-Corporal Kevin [Dillon](#), ⁵¹ and Private 'Snow' [Dodunski](#), ⁵² crossed over to the right of the road on the fringe of [La Romola](#) and began searching an inverted 'V' of houses. Approaching the top house, the lieutenant and Dodunski burst in the door and raced inside, while the rest sped round the sides of the house and, said Stevens, 'nearly had kittens on the spot. We ran clean into a Tiger tank. An odd olive branch (camouflage) was on the top and the long gun was sort of pointing to the ground. We stood like geese.' Presently Dillon circled the monster ('its tracks were so big it seemed unfair'), and as it now appeared to be abandoned, began climbing onto it 'when up comes the lid. Before I could surrender, the German did, with three or four others. We were very tough once they put their hands up.'

The elated patrol (describing the crew as 'good chaps, surprised by that night's attack, and also they'd probably had the war') escorted their captives into [La Romola](#), each with a neatly packed blue bag similar to air travel ones. Woolcott, going through the tank, found it in perfect order, and tank men later took it away (the company's number chalked on it) towards B Echelon.

Noel [Bird](#) ⁵³ writes: 'We'd been stonked rather heavily in the night and from a distance it would sound like a large counter attack. Of course messages had flown, and at first light the [Tank Recovery Unit](#) were on their way out with their valuable prize, the Tiger. But in our B Echelon it was seen through a grey misty dawn on its way down the road towards them. Someone announced that Jerry had broken through: after that, chaos. Our so-called heroes became sprinters of almost world class, but hardly dressed for the occasion. The return to duty was not quite so heroic.'

A new padre for the battalion, Padre [Sergel](#), ⁵⁴ witnessed the panic as he drove towards [Rear Divisional Headquarters](#), saw the tank, then learned of its capture, and thought, 'This 22 Battalion have got something.' He reached the battalion area. A

little cemetery was made outside a chapel, and 'unfortunately before we moved from there the grassy spot was quite filled with graves. I was impressed by the flowers which the local Ites laid on each grave, and when I called back weeks later I found that fresh flowers were still on each grave. Despite the fact that their homes were smashed and half or all their worldly goods were destroyed, they realised in some inarticulate way that these Kiwis from a far-off land had given their lives for them.'

Padre Sullivan left the battalion for England. 'He was a most understanding personality, and many of the chaps stopped a punch in the ribs for using bad language in his presence,' writes Bob Grant in a typical tribute. 'We didn't have to call Church Parade—you couldn't keep the chaps away. His packing case draped with a Union Jack, topped with a wooden cross, dressed in his holy raiment, Padre would just talk, not preach, to us. He told us the Bible stories in a way that made their meaning clear, and where it was possible to have singing, chose hymns every denomination would know. He always became so absorbed in his narration that, before long, a corner of the flag would be lifted, and Padre's foot would be resting on the box as he pressed home the various points he decided to make.'

At 11 p.m. on the night of 1 August ('the old story, momentum lost,' comments Captain Len Turner,) the battalion began a two-pronged attack from [La Romola](#), 1 Company (with 2 Company in close support) aiming for [Tavernaccia](#), a hill to the north-east, and 3 Company attacking [La Poggiona](#) ridge, within a mile and roughly north of [Tavernaccia](#).

On the start line 1 Company again met with disaster. Eight Platoon became badly cut up by shellfire: Frank [Deehan](#)⁵⁵ was mortally wounded, Private [Borthwick](#)⁵⁶ killed, and several others badly wounded. In vain Harry [Mohr](#)⁵⁷ and Sid Meads, hobbling about, put a rough tourniquet on the stump of Deehan's arm. Seven Platoon was on the start line and another platoon, probably 6 Platoon, was passing to get into position 'when a shell (we still think it was one of our shorts) landed right by us.' Casualties altogether were about a dozen.

Ridges and steep-sided gullies disorganised the company, which was caught in our own barrage for about twenty minutes, thanks to the nature of the ground. Though scattered and dazed and also hampered by wire—grape-vines strung across the line of attack—the survivors pushed on to [Tavernaccia](#). A large two-storied

house, with a tower on top of it, appeared on the hill; it was surrounded by a cyclone fence six feet high which enclosed some three acres. Enemy shell and mortar fire increased, small-arms fire 'was pretty fierce', and the building was occupied, with 5 Platoon in a house further on the right flank. This platoon, losing contact half-way during heavy mortaring, had pushed on independently to its objective. A German had picked up the platoon's call-sign on the radio and, claiming to be the commander of 6 Platoon (Len Turner), insisted that Arthur Woolcott halt his attack. When the voice could not give his own nickname ('Tich'), Woolcott went on with his men. Two Company, very tired, reached its objective but was heavily mortared as it consolidated at dawn. The tanks, up by daylight, drew some heavy shells.

Three Company, lining up to take [La Poggiona](#) ridge, had been depleted by the [La Romola](#) attack to three platoons: 13 Platoon (Lieutenant Paterson), 15 Platoon (Lieutenant Ian Thomas) and 16 Platoon (Sergeant Mick Eades). Lieutenant Triss Hegglin (of the late 14 Platoon) acted as company second-in-command in the field.

The start line was 100 yards or so on from the village on the Poggiona side. The time was 11 p.m. A barrage was laid on—100 yards every five minutes. The advance was to be along the road which led to a group of buildings set about a square courtyard, beyond which lay about 400 yards of open, flat, slightly scrubby ground leading over to the hill feature, La Poggiona, which was to be 3 Company's final objective. The company was to be on top of the hill before daylight.

The barrage opened up; 13 and 16 Platoons led, then came 15 Platoon. Away they went, lying down at the 100-yard mark while the barrage worked out its five minutes' pounding, then up and on another 120 paces. Most of the trouble came from houses bordering the road, which gradually curved and rose. After about 800 yards the attackers were on a small ridge with trees. Here our own shells certainly seemed to be hitting the tops of the trees and bursting, 'so that there was a constant tinkle-tinkle, spatter-spatter of shrapnel and splinters on the roadway around us.' About now 15 Platoon was sent to 'do over' a house on one side of the road; a shell struck the top of a three-foot wall close by and wounded about five, including Lieutenant Thomas, Corporal Dick [Sheppard](#)⁵⁸ and Private [Ridding](#),⁵⁹ who mentions 'the inspiration and confidence that radiated from Lt. Thomas both then and during all previous events.' Sergeant Bill Windsor took over the platoon.

Up the long line passed a message from Company Headquarters to halt and allow the barrage to go for three lifts, when it might clear the trees. Men crouched and lay in a shallow ditch on the side of the road. The fifteen-minute halt grew into half an hour, which was again extended on orders from Company Headquarters in the rear. The barrage was slipping away from the attackers. Much ground remained to be covered. 'The boys lying inactive on their stomachs were not getting any great kick out of the situation. I wandered down at intervals to see how they were getting on and was annoyed to find one man out of his place in the line. As I bent closer to see who this chap was (sitting up talking to another who was lying flat with his tin hat stretched out to its extremes to give maximum coverage) I found ... Foll. Carrington⁶⁰ ... sitting as large as life, wearing instead of his tin hat an Ite sort of greyish Panama hat at a rakish angle. He was talking nonsense, joking and laughing. I started to explain why every man had to keep in his place, so that when we got up to move the man behind would see in the dark just the man in front, and so get up and move also. If the man in front wasn't there it was too dark to see the next man again. Foll pulled me aside a little and explained that the particular chap he was talking to had been getting a bit on edge and he was simply keeping his pecker up for him, and that at the first signs of movement he'd slip back smartly to his place in the line. Knowing Foll I had no worries on that score and left him still sitting there amongst the very flat bodies, with my own pecker considerably uplifted.'

Eventually 3 Company was ordered on again, and by a group of houses the barrage stopped. Fire (including a well-placed spandau) from both the top and bottom stories of this group of houses held the attackers. A stalemate was prevented by a 20 Regiment tank-troop commander, Second-Lieutenant Bill de Lautour,⁶¹ who brought his tank forward and briskly rammed a house or two, while the infantry fired at top windows to stop grenades being dropped down into the tank's open turret.

In this way the houses fell with a few prisoners. Dawn was coming up fast, the barrage had long since stopped, and the hill ahead was still in enemy hands.

Major Sainsbury decided to establish his Company Headquarters in the group of buildings and tackle the hill in the evening. It was now almost full daylight, and Sainsbury knew the approach to the hill lay across about 400 yards of cruelly open

ground; the men, who had had only irregular food scavenged from here and there and little rest during the last three nights, were dead weary. A platoon sent 100 yards forward to protect the buildings drew fire `from almost a half circle, from about half right to full left—mainly Spandaus. From one knob on the left alone I counted four streams of Spandau tracer coming from a machinegun nest ... in a few minutes bullets appeared to bounce off the hard dry dusty surface rather like a hailstorm. Before the holes were dug there'd be no platoon to man them.' The platoon ran back to the buildings.

Bill de Lautour offered `to shoot `em up the hill' to within 30 yards of the top with his 75-millimetre guns and .5 machine guns. With this help 3 Company got moving again, 13 Platoon on the left and 16 Platoon on the right. The two platoons advanced across the ground in a long extended line, the tanks level with them and spaced at intervals along the line. The tanks kept up a continual fire as they rolled along, `while Bill, with his round, sunburned face (on which seemed a perpetual grin) poked up above his turret, directed the fire of his troop. His face was a great tonic to us, and so was his shooting.' One of many targets was the machine-gun nest of four spandaus on a knob: three tank shells dead on this target silenced them.

Half-way across the flat, as arranged, the tanks stopped and laid down a barrage for 3 Company to advance under to the top of the hill. At the bottom of the hill some of the men ran fast through a house with one wall damaged. One German `had half-turned you know to sling his grenade and I got him in the back, I saw three neat holes, and as he fell and I jumped over him and shoved on, I thought to myself: "Christ, you're good", just like that. And a bit further on I seemed to be outside myself, looking at myself, and thinking: "Hell, is that me?" And then I forgot it all and just shoved on up the hill.'

`The ground rose steeply before us, with corrugations not unlike the old Maori defences as they are today on our own hills,' writes Paterson (13 Platoon). `We started to run up, firing as we went. There were quite a number of Huns on the hillside and a good many more on the top. As the boys ran up there was shooting for all, like the opening of a good duck shooting season I should think. Everyone was greatly excited, and the enemy began to drop their weapons and run as we came to the top. We ran over the top and some distance down the other side, with by this time the enemy in full flight.'

Now came the moment of exaltation, which one man describes in these words: 'I stood there stock still, gripping the tommygun like this. You seemed to feel the strength of every muscle in your body. In front in their grey uniforms the Germans crashed away into the bushes, scuttering like great rats—or like pigs—running away—unclean, evil they seemed just at that moment in the early morning, you see. And it seemed as if a great finger was pointing straight down at you, or—no, this is closer to it—you were the tip of a great triangle of light shoving on into the darkness of a [Europe](#) the Hun had overrun and fouled for all these years. And you were doing this, you yourself were driving this darkness back, you were out in front, you were part of this crusade or history or whatever it was—and then some bloody fool fires his tommygun and we—off back up to the top of the hill.' ⁶²

Remembering an old instruction, 'Never overrun your objective', Paterson reluctantly called a halt to the victorious pursuit and told his men not to shoot, for in front a good many Germans seemed ready for surrender. A young German lad was seized and told to shout to his comrades: 'Schiessen nicht', 'Herein kommen', 'Wir schiessen nicht', and so on, in the belief that the German's accent would be more intelligible than a New Zealander's. 'However he was terrified and his voice came out in a pitiful kind of quavery wail. I roared at him: "Louder, you b—!" He seemed to catch on, and a louder, more quavery wail came forth, but to my repeated roars he could improve no more, so I took up the burden of the song myself.'

Paterson describes the scene: 'After a minute or two the faces of the enemy began to appear, peering through the little bushes and scrub amongst the light trees, and all over the ground for some distance down we could see them beginning to rise and put their hands up. Then one near us, perhaps 20 or 30 yards away, stood right up and started to walk towards us with his hands up. Just then unfortunately a youngster who had not long before joined the company lost his head and fired a burst of tommygun through the German's stomach at short range. The rest turned and ran down the hill while we in turn ran back to the top of the hill and started digging.'

The two platoons (13 and 16) had little time to dig in back on top of the hill. ('I suddenly realised that the mosquito-like whines whipping about knee-high were actually bullets—brain working a bit slowly,' as one man put it.) The Germans, with

every justification enraged at their comrade's death as he was surrendering, rallied swiftly and assaulted the hill fiercely three times. Twice they were driven back by 3 Company, which was shooting as hard and as fast as it could. As the third counter-attack broke the section on the left flank reported hearing the enemy crashing through the undergrowth on the left; apparently he was starting to surround the company. After continuous firing ammunition was low: tommy-gunners and the Bren-gunners reported 'Nearly out.' Unwilling to be surrounded without ammunition, 13 and 16 Platoons retreated, ⁶³ section by section, 'down the hill up which we had run so enthusiastically an hour or so before'—16 Platoon to Company Headquarters, 13 Platoon to cover the slope from inside the partly smashed house at the foot of the hill.

Colonel Donald decided to take the hill in the late afternoon with 2 Company, supported by a barrage from the 25-pounders. About six o'clock the barrage opened up, catching 13 Platoon still in its outpost. A smoke shell filled the wretched ruin with fumes; the cap from the shell struck Tracey ⁶⁴ on the big toe, and he cursed the artillery violently.

So the two platoons from 2 Company assembled in 3 Company's headquarters, where the RAP was also established.

'Just as the platoons under Lieutenant Cox ⁶⁵ and Henderson were assembling at the startline,' wrote Major Hutcheson, 'we were subject to one of the bitterest shellings I have ever experienced. Someone said they were our own shells and indeed it seemed to be true. I could not get the CO on our own radio, so climbed into a tank and spoke to the CO of the tank regiment asking him to lift the barrage. Then my two platoons came staggering back, shocked and disorganised, and with heavy casualties. Lieutenant Cox had a badly shattered elbow, and mutilated arms and legs seemed to be everywhere. I pointed out that the barrage was over and that the attack must go on but everyone eyed me grimly.'

Before his arm was smashed, Cox had got as many of his platoon (10 Platoon) back as he could contact. Private Wicksteed ⁶⁶ 'caught it in the knee joint. I gave a yell as it was very hot as well as a jar as it stopped against the bone.' Just before Owen Bullot ⁶⁷ was hit in both thighs, 'the section were getting out of the way fast, in between hitting the deck every time anything came in. Two of the chaps in front

of me went down, heads well down and stern ends way up in the air. In a lull I could not help but laugh out loud; these two chaps looked back at the sound of laughter, and the look on their faces very clearly showed that they thought I had cracked under the strain.'

Over on the right flank some of 12 Platoon pulled back and dodged some of the barrage, but among the platoon casualties were Kane,⁶⁸ Robert Nossiter,⁶⁹ Dick Perrott⁷⁰ and Clark,⁷¹ of whom the last pressed down in vain into a shallow depression. A carrier took Norman Faulkner⁷² back to the hard-working RAP, 'and what a nightmare ride this was as we were shelled all the way out.' One explanation for this disaster is that the only maps available were old Italian ones. Men advanced up to the first track shown on the map, but the track was now non-existent, and the men came on to the barrage line as the guns opened up 'and collected the lot.' Men who were there think that in a very few minutes about twenty were left on their feet out of about 117, but very few if any were killed. Apparently the majority were suffering from blast and shock, and the disorganisation was considerable.

Yet it will be seen that the act of a few men, probably no more than a dozen, had a wide influence over the stricken 2 Company. On the right flank some of Corporal Tsukigawa's men (12 Platoon) sat out the storm (no new orders recalled them) and then moved forward towards the objective: the ridge, which was across a gully full of pine-trees. Not being able to see the rest of the platoon and not knowing everyone had retired, this little force, led by the resolute corporal, advanced alone. Castell-Spence⁷³ writes: 'We went down into the gully and were going carefully up the face leading up to the main ridge. We must have been about halfway up when Jerry spotted us and opened up with a few bursts from a Spandau. [Mel Jacob,⁷⁴ on the Bren gun, was hit.] We lay down and tried to pick up where the fire was coming from.' Mortar bombs fell a little short. The men pulled back into cover in the gully when the Air Force came over and raked the ridge with cannon and bomb.

While this was going on, Second-Lieutenant Jock Wells's platoon was down at 2 Company's headquarters and another platoon too far back to use. Neither, of course, had been on the fatal start line. 'Suddenly word came in that Corporal Tsukigawa's section had not come in but advanced up the hill,' Hutcheson continues. 'This encouraged the men, and I said, "Come on, we can't leave him up there by himself."' Wells's platoon came quite cheerfully.

'We spread out into open formation and advanced slowly towards [La Poggiona](#). One or two wounded were still sheltering in hollows and I sent them back.' Here men passed Private George [Ireland](#),⁷⁵ who became almost a legendary figure. He was grinning cheerfully and greeting passers-by with the words: 'Gosh, I'm sure glad to see you. I'm on my last cigarette.' One leg was hacked through at the shin, but was hanging by an inch or so of flesh at the calf. With his blunt bayonet [Ireland](#) was trying to complete the act of amputation. (This incident is fully authenticated by a number of astounded witnesses.)

'As we reached the foot of the hill,' Hutcheson resumes, 'Corporal Tsukigawa and a couple of men appeared. He announced [La Poggiona](#) clear of the enemy. Our barrage had done some good after all. He joined our extended line [for his work the corporal won the MM], and once more an advance was made on [La Poggiona](#). But by now the Germans had returned again. They opened up with several spandaus. We couldn't locate them through the trees, but as we plodded steadily upwards we could see twigs being cut off and bark nicked by their bullets a foot or so above our heads.'

They returned the enemy's fire, and soon most thankfully realised from the elevation of his fire that he was withdrawing. Slowly in line abreast, a few yards apart, they edged up the hill to the top, probed a hundred yards forward in silence, then suddenly met a rain of mortar bombs plus spandau fire again. They pulled back just behind the crest of the protecting ridge, just twenty-four men, and dug in frantically, using steel helmets, knives and bayonets, two men to a trench. One man shared a trench with Sergeant Mick [Bougen](#)⁷⁶: 'I wonder if Mick knew I wanted to lean on him heavily for moral support because he was calm and placid?'

All night they sat and watched the skyline, and waited for the counter-attack that never came. Parties from 2 Company joined them on the ridge, then from 3 Company Sergeant Bill Windsor and Second-Lieutenant Keith Cave arrived with their platoons. In a peaceful dawn they looked down on [Florence](#).

'One thing I remember,' writes Wicksteed. 'When we went into battle the olive trees were looking very nice, but when we came out they were all stripped and ripped to ribbons with the shelling that had gone on.'

With the capture of Poggiona the enemy's effective resistance south of [Florence](#) ended. The battalion was given the chance of carrying on the chase, but the CO decided that the men needed rest more than the honour of being the first into [Florence](#).

Now that the New Zealand Division had pierced the Paula line, the enemy had to abandon his positions south of the River Arno, and the South Africans entered [Florence](#) early on 4 August, followed by a New Zealand column.

Later, while the battalion rested in [Siena](#) after a week in the [Arno River](#) line, Colonel Donald sent this message to his men:

You have just passed through a period during which every one of you has been put to the test in a way that some had never experienced before. You have stood the test in a manner which has upheld the best traditions of the 22 Bn, and I am proud of you. We have had our casualties, 116 in all since [2 Coy](#) started its successful advance along Route 2, and some of the best and bravest are no longer with us. This is one of the regrettable hazards of war, but we shall not forget them.

There have been many instances of personal bravery that have come to my notice, and many I am afraid which must inevitably pass unnoticed because of the darkness and the fog of war. Some of these men will receive the honour due to them, and we thank them for bringing distinction to the Bn.

During the battle for Casciano, [La Romola](#) and Poggiona, you did, singularly well, the same job as the other two NZ Brigades did with three battalions. The strain was severe but you succeeded.

The 22 Battalion has fought many engagements through [Greece](#) and [Crete](#) to the [Western Desert](#) and [Cassino](#). Its face has changed from time to time, but always there has endured the spirit of its first commander, Colonel Andrew VC. He asked for and obtained the highest qualities of courage and fighting spirit. I should like to tell you that the successes you have achieved in the past three weeks have been as great as any in the Bn's history and that our old motto 'Twenty second to none' is still as deserved as ever. You have done this. I am grateful to you.

On 6 August the battalion moved into a holding area south of the [Arno River](#) and

some six miles west of [Florence](#), its last battle area on the western side of the [Apennines](#). Casualties were light here. In the battalion's lines was 'a beautiful palace, built by Caruso and belonging to the Count of Michelo. I have never seen a more luxurious dwelling. It was sad to see such a lovely home gradually reduced to rubble by the German's regular shelling.'

Johnny [Begg](#)⁷⁷ ('the only Kiwi screwdrivered in action') was hard at work in the darkness on 13 August when his 3-inch mortar misfired. The usual misfire drill did not release the bomb, nor did Ray Potier's⁷⁸ pounding on the barrel with a pick handle. So Potier removed the firing mechanism and, using a large screwdriver, attempted to push the bomb out. He struck the cartridge, which exploded, but the bomb didn't.

'The blast blew us all off our feet,' relates Begg, who had both hands at the muzzle impatiently waiting for the bomb to slide out. 'Old Paddy—my number three, was blown out of the pit. I can still remember him cursing in real broad Irish! Ray lost the barrel. It took off. I was told they found it 50 yards or so downhill, and that a patrol coming in thought it was a new secret weapon of old Ted's, as they heard it whistle away.'

The next night the battalion, due for a rest in [Siena](#), was relieved by Americans. The guide for one party says: 'Down the hill in Indian file we came to the main road and had to turn right. In the middle of this track where it met the road was a bundle of straw. Word came back: "Look out for the straw, there might be a mine under it." And the Yank in front of me turned around to pass the word: "Look out for the mine, there may be straw under it."'`

¹ 'Only a war could bring this about,' writes Lloyd Grieve, 'four Japanese in American uniform standing quietly in contemplation of the High Altar of St Peters.'

² The first verse of one version begins: 'Outside the barracks, by the lantern light / That's where I'd stand and wait for you at night. / We would create a world for two. / I'd dream of you the whole night through. / Of you Lili Marlene, of you Lili Marlene.'

'There was a German grave near the road in the Battalion area and it

was said that an Italian girl used to come regularly and put flowers on it. Some said she should be hooted out of it or given a bullet while others took a completely different view of it.'

³ Maj C. R. Carson, m.i.d.; Palmerston North; born Palmerston North, 19 Nov 1916; merchandise traveller; BM 4 Armd Bde Nov 1944-Mar 1945.

⁴ Pte A. A. Gillon; born NZ 14 Aug 1909; grocer's assistant; killed in action 22 Sep 1944.

⁵ They left from the rest area round Siena. Battalion Headquarters was at Vagliagli, in a twelfth-century palace built by a pope, now the seat of a junior nobleman, Terrosi-Vagnoli, who occasionally invited officers to dine and once remarked in French: 'You will notice that I insist on the servants wearing white gloves when waiting at table. I cannot bear their touching the food with bare hands. Don't you think it a good thing?'

Within a few days King George VI visited the front. 'What uplifted me most during the war?' writes a member of the battalion. 'The King of England with a dirty face. He came to see us one day—the next we were in the line. I saw no ceremonial parade; I wasn't at an organized "cheering-point" on the route. But to look out of the window of an Italian farm-house (where I was on guard over the family) and see our dust-covered monarch drive slowly by convinced me that "old George was a good bloke" and brought to light an unexpected patriotism which must have been lying dormant within me all the time.'

⁶ Lt T. S. Wauchop; born NZ 2 Nov 1909; solicitor; killed in action 25 Jul 1944.

⁷ Pte P. A. Mason; Feilding; born Feilding, 24 Nov 1920; farmhand; wounded 27 Jul 1944.

⁸ Pte J. S. Watt; Kimbolton; born Kimbolton, 21 Aug 1909; farmer; wounded 27 Jul 1944.

⁹ L-Cpl I. F. McGirr; born Wellington, 11 Aug 1921; tennis racket finisher; killed in action 19 Oct 1944.

¹⁰ Cpl A. D. Shaw; Southland; born NZ 12 Apr 1922; farmhand; twice wounded.

¹¹ Pte G. Davidson; born NZ 26 Jun 1912; farmhand; wounded 27 Jul 1944; killed in action 21 Dec 1944.

¹² Battalion appointments were: CO, Lt-Col H. V. Donald; 2 i/c, Maj D. Anderson; OC 1 Coy, Maj A. W. F. O'Reilly; OC 2 Coy, Maj K. R. Hutcheson; OC 3 Coy, Maj G. S. Sainsbury; OC 4 Coy, Maj L. G. S. Cross.

¹³ 'Don't put it there: Jerry can land them on a threepenny bit round here,' Johnny McNeil warned a heedless guncrew digging in near his platoon in the night. At dawn 'Jerry hurled a packet that destroyed gun, ammo and Munga box.' A white-faced guncrew emerged and listened respectfully to Gordon Benton's quiet and thoughtful statement: 'Well chaps, I've just made a firm resolution. If there is another war I'm not going to it.'

¹⁴ Pte I. G. Riddle; born Hawera, 28 Apr 1915; farmer; died of wounds 28 Jul 1944.

¹⁵ Lofty unfortunately had jumped down into the nearest shelter, the deep ditch on the German side of the road, instead of running with the others to the ridge-protected casa. Lofty stayed in his ditch, some 20 feet below a German position, all that day and late into the night, getting away about midnight after listening to a steady rumble of German conversation for some fifteen or sixteen hours. Efforts to persuade Tom Kriete to pretend that Lofty was wounded and to rescue him failed dismally. 'Against the Geneva Conventions', said Tom firmly and repeatedly.

¹⁶ Maj G. S. Sainsbury, m.i.d.; Frankton Junction; born 30 May 1909; solicitor.

¹⁷ Sgt A. O. Clinton; born Taihape, 21 Jan 1911; farm labourer; died 11 Jun 1956.

¹⁸ Pte N. L. Ingpen; Dannevirke; born Feilding, 4 Dec 1922; bank officer;

wounded 30 Jul 1944.

¹⁹ 2 Lt G. M. Bassett, MC; Palmerston North; born Wellington, 23 Jul 1914; farmer; wounded 18 Oct 1944.

²⁰ Lt J. N. Maclean; born NZ 2 Mar 1919; bank clerk.

²¹ L-Sgt A. Edwards; born Woolwich, England, 10 Mar 1922; sheep-farmer; wounded 30 Jul 1944.

²² Lt T. F. Hegglin; Blenheim; born Marton, 29 Jul 1915; builder and bridge contractor; wounded 3 Dec 1943.

²³ Not traced.

²⁴ Lt P. S. Powell, m.i.d.; New Plymouth; born Hunterville, 3 Nov 1913; salesman.

²⁵ 2 Lt A. E. Eades, DCM; Woodville; born Pahiatua, 10 Jun 1917; labourer.

²⁶ Lt K. H. Cave; born Carterton, 2 Feb 1912; grocery manager; killed in action 14 Apr 1945.

²⁷ Sgt W. C. Windsor, m.i.d.; Wellington; born Wellington, 2 Oct 1917; butcher and driver; twice wounded.

²⁸ 5 Platoon (Arthur Woolcott) had the task of getting the tanks up the valley road and into the village while the rest of 1 Company attacked up the hillside. Demolitions almost instantly halted the tanks, which decided to follow at dawn if possible. By the demolitions O'Reilly joined Woolcott for the night. Progress along the valley road was slow for 5 Platoon, which had to search numerous houses under heavy mortar fire but met little resistance from ground troops. Before reaching the village at 5 a.m. the platoon took a spandau nest and two prisoners. Lance-Corporal A. D. McIntyre, the only casualty, was wounded in the knee.

²⁹ L-Sgt J. A. Hughes; born Wellington, 23 Jun 1916; butcher; killed in action 15 Dec 1944.

³⁰ Pte P. S. Wevell; born England, 1 Jan 1911; farm labourer; killed in action 31 Jul 1944.

³¹ Pte T. R. Wilson; Hastings; born NZ 17 Mar 1920; freezing worker; wounded 31 Jul 1944.

³² Pte G. L. Nilsson; born NZ 31 May 1915; farmer; killed in action 31 Jul 1944.

³³ Pte R. J. Cruickshank; born Ohura, 10 Oct 1922; truck driver; killed in action 31 Jul 1944.

³⁴ Cpl T.W. Molloy; born NZ 15 Nov 1916; watersider; killed in action 31 Jul 1944.

³⁵ S-Sgt E. E. B. Wood; Auckland; born Christchurch, 13 Jul 1914; insurance agent; twice wounded.

³⁶ Pte G. R. Fitness; Wanganui East; born Auckland, 8 Mar 1921; farmhand; wounded 31 Jul 1944. (Fitness made an amazing recovery in an English brain specialist's ward in Rome.)

³⁷ Capt A. K. Maidens; Pahiatua; born Taradale, 10 Mar 1912; bank officer; wounded 31 Jul 1944.

³⁸ Sgt D. Baty, m.i.d.; born NZ 27 Apr 1920; shepherd; three times wounded.

³⁹ Sgt A. H. Richardson; Wellington; born Auckland, 5 Feb 1922; clerk.

⁴⁰ They contacted Company Headquarters and were given their positions to

hold in the village; they called the platoon rolls and tried to find out what had happened to the missing men (about a dozen from each platoon), and felt it was a grim morning; they boiled up the emergency ration in a big pot of water and added a bottle of old cognac; they posted pickets and fell asleep.

⁴¹ Sgt J. F. Sicely, m.i.d.; [Wanganui](#); born Marton, 25 Sep 1921; farmhand; wounded 31 Jul 1944.

⁴² Pte C. S. Murfitt; born Kapuni, 29 Dec 1919; farmhand; killed in action 31 Jul 1944.

⁴³ Pte W. A. Wicken; born England, 4 Dec 1912; labourer; killed in action 31 Jul 1944.

⁴⁴ 2 Lt A. H. Woolcott; [Wellington](#); born Havelock South, 26 Oct 1911; mechanic.

⁴⁵ L-Cpl A. R. Viles; born Feilding, 19 Aug 1920; farmer; killed in action 31 Jul 1944. ('A grand lad who was always a great source of strength in action—cool and resourceful,' writes one of his officers.)

⁴⁶ Capt R. W. McLean; [Wellington](#); born NZ 15 Jan 1909; line erector.

⁴⁷ Sgt R. Seddon; Dunedin; born Dunedin, 5 Jan 1912; school-teacher; wounded 14 Sep 1944.

⁴⁸ With the wounded major they moved on to the objective; 6 Platoon drifted in by sections. By 10 a.m. 1 Company was together again, a few missing. Reaching [La Romola](#), one small group under Sergeant Dick Seddon 'came upon quite a solid type of casa, we had to get in and the door was locked or jammed so we bashed it down with our picks and shovels, and what do you know, the front of the place had been blown in by bomb blast. A fool is born every minute: we must have been born all together.'

⁴⁹ Next morning 11 Platoon 3 Company (Sgt Jock Wells) recovered the

bodies of six men from 7 NZ Anti-Tank Regiment, who had been buried when a nearby house blew up. [La Romola](#) was still being shelled fairly heavily: 'it was a case of picking up a brick or two at a time, and each shell brought down odd rubble from the upper structure. The men of my platoon worked splendidly.'

⁵⁰ [Sgt K. M. Stevens](#); [Wellington](#); born [Masterton](#), 10 Jul 1921; warehouseman; wounded 21 Sep 1944.

⁵¹ [L-Cpl E. T. K. Dillon](#); [Wellington](#); born [Greymouth](#), 4 Apr 1908; clerk; wounded 21 Sep 1944.

⁵² [Pte G. P. Dodunski](#); born [Inglewood](#), 19 Jun 1920; farmhand; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁵³ [Sgt T. G. N. Bird](#); [Waipukurau](#); born [Hastings](#), 25 Dec 1917; farmer; wounded 23 Dec 1944.

⁵⁴ [Rev. P. C. S. Sergel](#), Silver Star (US); [Hamilton](#); born [Eltham](#), 11 May 1907; Anglican minister.

⁵⁵ [Pte F. H. Deehan](#); born NZ 13 Feb 1904; labourer; died of wounds 2 Aug 1944.

⁵⁶ [Pte T. J. Borthwick](#); born [Taumarunui](#), 14 Oct 1918; labourer; killed in action 1 Aug 1944.

⁵⁷ [S-Sgt H. W. Mohr](#); born NZ 16 Sep 1914; shepherd; wounded Oct 1944.

⁵⁸ [Cpl R. J. Sheppard](#); [Stratford](#); born NZ 6 Aug 1921; shop assistant; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁵⁹ [Pte A. E. Ridding](#); [Wellington](#); born [Wellington](#), 7 Aug 1922; bank officer; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁶⁰ Pte F. A. Carrington; born Inglewood, 19 Feb 1921; draper's assistant; killed in action 3 Oct 1944.

⁶¹ Capt H. M. B. de Lautour, m.i.d.; Wairoa; born NZ 27 Feb 1911; sheep-farmer.

⁶² This description was given at the end of a four-hour conversation. He felt like this again for a moment once or twice before the war ended, but never with the same fierce intensity.

⁶³ Paterson still (1955) reproaches himself for ordering this retreat. He did not know that 15 Platoon under Sgt Bill Windsor was even at that moment starting to climb the hill, and also that the tanks near the bottom of the hill held boxes of .303 and tommy-gun ammunition.

⁶⁴ L-Cpl B. L. Tracey; born Auckland, 24 Oct 1920; ice-room attendant; twice wounded.

⁶⁵ Lt D. C. Cox; Hawera; born Hawera, 14 Jan 1921; clerk; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁶⁶ Pte D. Wicksteed; Stratford; born Stratford, 23 Apr 1922; dairy farmer; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁶⁷ Pte O. Bullo; New Plymouth; born New Plymouth, 3 Nov 1920; P and T exchange clerk; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁶⁸ Pte N. L. Kane; Gisborne; born Scotland, 25 May 1922; student; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁶⁹ Pte R. Nossiter; born NZ 22 Jun 1922; plumbing apprentice; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁷⁰ Pte R. W. Perrott; Hastings; born Gisborne, 23 May 1922; orchard worker; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁷¹ L-Cpl L. A. R. Clark; Inglewood; born NZ 22 May 1920; farmhand; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁷² Pte N. A. Faulkner; Masterton; born NZ 18 Aug 1920; salesman; twice wounded.

⁷³ Lt K. D. Castell-Spence, m.i.d.; Whatatutu, Gisborne; born South Africa, 10 May 1906; station manager; twice wounded.

⁷⁴ Pte M. H. F. Jacob; Wellington; born Ruahine, 21 May 1921; labourer; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁷⁵ Pte G. F. Ireland; Wellington; born Masterton, 3 Jan 1918; factory hand; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁷⁶ WO II E. D. Bougen, MM, m.i.d.; Raetihi; born Taihape, 18 Mar 1918; farmhand.

⁷⁷ Pte J. N. S. Begg; Hamilton; born Scotland, 25 Apr 1916; labourer; wounded 13 Aug 1944.

⁷⁸ Pte C. R. Potier; Tuakau; born NZ 13 Dec 1921; farmhand; wounded 13 Aug 1944.

22 BATTALION

CHAPTER 12 – ADRIATIC

CHAPTER 12

Adriatic

Back from the [Arno River](#) by [Florence](#) to the area near [Siena](#), and standing in the cool shade of its old buildings on a hot afternoon (something mellow about this place) it gave the impression of being full of memories and seemed to hint at a smell of mosaics and varnish, with old fashioned lace glimpsed through windows. A charming place [writes our 22 Battalion soldier].

And in our area we still did a bit of the usual growling, but looking back surely there must have been many worse places to be in at that time. Wind seemed to be a forgotten thing at that time of the year in [Italy](#). Every morning was the same—the sun burst forth on a cloudless sky and the countryside took on that golden dusty look of harvest time (it had started to look like that at Fontana [Liri](#))—but crowded everywhere by the greenery of such plants as oaks, pines, fruit trees and grape vines—and they threw their black mottled cool shadows over the roads and into the fields. And standing looking across miles of sloping ridges to more ridges blue in the distance on those long glorious afternoons it wasn't hard to believe travellers when they said that [Italy](#) had some of the most beautiful countryside in the world....

Then off in the trucks for a few days at the beach.... The air seemed hushed under a hot breathless sun and the water in the bay didn't even sparkle—its surface was too smooth for that—it just had a smooth polished glassy look. We spent most of our time either lying in the shade of the pines just off the beach or baking on the beach or lolling in the more than lukewarm water. And someone said 'See those islands out there—well that big one in the middle, that's Elba—and that one out to the left, that's Montecristo.'

Back at our area and then pack up, gear on the trucks and over the hills and valleys of [Italy](#) on the dusty trail to [Foligno](#)—past that patch of barren looking country, then later round historic old [Perugia](#). Next morning away again on the road from [Foligno](#), and soon we started to climb the [Apennines](#)—up up up the road wound. But finally we reached the top. Here you naturally expected the road to start winding down the other side, but instead it flattened out and roved over undulating countryside for a number of miles— a land of green fields dotted with casas which

seemed to be completely cut off from the rest of [Italy](#) and at a height of over three thousand feet—another land. (You remembered seeing the film 'Lost Horizon' before you left NZ.) Then we went down the other side, right down to [Iesi](#), and our area for the night. And by that time, sitting looking at each other with our backs against the sides of the tray—you could easily have imagined we were back in the old desert once more—in our coating of fine powdery dust we looked grey—just like the vegetation at the side of that and so many other roads in [Italy](#) at that time of the year. Just like that [Amiriya](#) dust.

And now [on the Adriatic, below [Rimini](#)] it was the grape season (if all the lines of grape vines in [Italy](#) were placed end to end I wonder just how many times round the earth they would reach). And it wasn't hard—in many areas we went to—if you like grapes, to find a place for your bivvy beside a row—and then what better to do first thing in the morning than reach out from your bunk, pick a bunch, lie back again and enjoy them—they sweetened your mouth at that time of the morning. Near the roads they were often covered with dust, but you wiped that off as you went along. And there was plenty of other fruit to be had too. It was harvest time for many things, among them a field of tomatoes, an acre or so of them right beside our bivvies at [Fano](#)—big red smooth eggshaped ones weighing down the plants. Many a Kiwi boot must have trodden the ground around those plants, but when we left there after some days, you couldn't see where we had been.

Then there were all those days when we used to route march down to the beach—swim and sit on the beach—have our midday meal and return in the trucks in the afternoon—pleasant memories.

And as we moved up the coast in short hops the arty always booming away in front of us got louder as we got nearer the front line. And always we were hearing of success and hope—how well the Poles and Canadians were going—at first [Pesaro](#) had fallen and one after the other coastal towns fell—not far to [Rimini](#)—and once that fell we would be through his line. And then—there wide open before us—there was no mistake this time—would be the [Po Valley](#) or Lombardy Plains—something we had been waiting for ever since we arrived in [Italy](#). Of course we had heard tales like that for so long, but this time there was no doubting it—you only had to look at a map of [Italy](#). Our tanks would soon have the country they had waited for. The Brenner Pass was mentioned. (But no one mentioned that it was September and—

well—we knew what winter was like in [Italy](#)—and what would it be like in a month or so?)

And these tales weren't very old when, if you took notice, you could feel a change in the air. Those white afternoon clouds were just a little less white and a little more grey and were inclined to spread across the sky. And the thunder storms were a little less thunder and a more steady rain fell from them. And the breezes were just a little cooler—and the air was warm and soft but not hot. Soon those clouds would become very grey and spread right across the sky on many days. And as the thunder died out so the rain would fall more steadily and more often. And the cool breezes would gradually become cold winds. And then often they would lash the rain against canopies and bivvies with a sharp pattering noise— then swish under tailboards, and carry on to the hard stone casas, driving in doorways and windows and brushing round corners. Little more than a month ago the scene had been a calm one of blue green yellow and gold, but now the colours were becoming drab.

'Ah well—think I'll hit the sack—best place on a night like this.'

'Pretty good on the backs down racket aren't you, soldier.'

'I dunno about that—if there's anything worth going to see I'm a starter—not like you on [Rome](#) leave—too tired to get off your bed and go to see the things of historic importance.'

'Christ a joker needed a rest after climbin' that bloody great staircase—anyway it's the first time I knew you had things of historic importance tucked away in your valise.'

'Now listen here dig I've said time and again that just because I don't smoke and you jokers do, it doesn't mean I have to go without the benefits of a cigarette issue—anyway you're too bloody lousy to eat your chocolate.'

With the fall of [Florence](#) about two-thirds of [Italy](#) now was cleared. But here the [Apennines](#) angled directly across [Italy](#), almost from one coast to the other, and in the ranges and rough heights and canal-cut plains the German manned yet another formidable line—the Gothic line, a belt many miles thick of minefields, concrete emplacements sheltering guns, and the steel-cased turrets of Panther tanks

mounting their deadly 75-millimetre anti-tank guns.

This line, slanting across the face of [Italy](#), ran from [Pesaro](#) (on the Adriatic) to just north of [Florence](#). It had only two weaknesses: one was the rough Futa Pass (between [Florence](#) and [Bologna](#)), in the [Fifth Army](#)'s area. The other weakness—and this was where the [Eighth Army](#) and the New Zealanders would battle again—was the narrow strip of coastal plain on the Adriatic end of the line. This small plain was thoroughly prepared to meet assault. From [Pesaro](#) a band of seaward fortifications ran back for 30 miles to [Rimini](#). The enemy defences took advantage of the foothills running down towards the Adriatic and of an ever-increasing mesh of rivers, ditches and canals. Once past [Rimini](#) the Gothic line would be turned from the east, and the Po valley entered.

September found the New Zealand Division around [Iesi](#), back on the eastern side of [Italy](#) again. The new positions on the Adriatic coast were about 110 miles north of the previous year's [Sangro River](#) positions. The New Zealanders reached [Iesi](#) as the Canadians made their first dent, a ten-mile dent, in this end of the Gothic line. Swinging left behind [Pesaro](#), the Canadians fought their way into [Cattolica](#). The Poles took [Pesaro](#) on 2 September. Slowly—death, destruction, and desolation mounting as [Eighth Army](#)'s losses averaged 155 killed and 600 wounded every day for a week—they ground like some great bleeding glacier towards [Rimini](#), with Canadian Corps on the coast, 5 British Corps in the middle, and 10 British Corps in the higher foothills and mountains.

One Company 22 Battalion and the supporting tanks were the first New Zealanders (apart from the artillery) to go into action against the Gothic line. The company joined battle on 14 September, two days after a renewed offensive all along the Adriatic front, when the Germans reported 'an absolute wall of shellfire ... ploughing up the whole countryside and carpeting us with bombs he is tearing into it.... Our casualties are even higher than at [Cassino](#).'

Some recent arrivals took a look at the front from [Gradara](#) Castle. 'Standing on the top we could get a great view of our front line a few miles to the north. We could see (in the dusk) the tiny sudden flickers as various guns of our arty fired on different parts of the front—they were flickering almost continuously somewhere. (Was it that evening that we also saw the Navy firing from out at sea—we saw that

happen several times and sometimes saw Jerry retaliating as spouts of water went up near the ships.)’

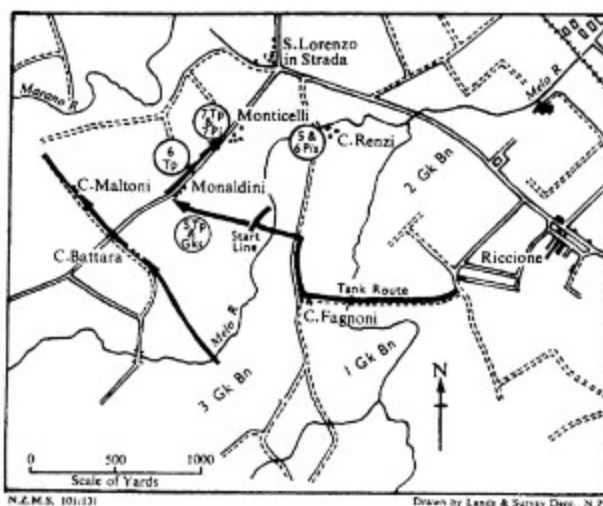
The grey, semi-swamp land stretching ahead, cut up by roads, canals, ditches and hedges, was the hunting ground of a most sinister German weapon, the *nebelwerfer*, or ‘cloud thrower’, now described by Bob Foreman, who soon was to be out of the war when a bomb from his own mortar exploded against an overhead branch of a tree swaying in the wind: ‘A little while after we had turned in (in a casa) there was this sudden screech-crash all in a fraction of a second (an 88 I suppose)—it sounded as though it just went past one wall and burst about a chain away. (It’s funny how these little things stick in your mind, but I’m sure the room was silent before the shell came—and was silent again for a few seconds after it burst. But the latter silence seemed different to the former. Was it that unconsciously you had heard breathing in the first silence, whereas everyone held their breath for a second or two in the second silence—I wouldn’t like to say. It was a silence of hesitancy.) We had just settled down again from this disturbance—and then we heard them start winding up “Minnie”. (We used to say “winding up”—what caused that noise anyway?) It would be hard to describe that winding noise—something remotely like a nearly flat battery turning over the engine of an old Ford car—but it must have been a hang of a noise when you were standing beside it. Then the moan as the rockets set out on their journey—something like those multiple air raid sirens—but with a steady pitch. We heard them gradually getting closer as they lost height—then the distant “Bash” as the first one landed—it sounded more than a quarter of a mile away. Then—like some enormous giant striding across the countryside in hobnailed boots and taking strides chains long—they marched towards us. Bash-bash- bash-bash-bash—each one getting louder and finally (at this stage between the last bangs there was a fumbling noise within the room—I think others doing the same as I was—starting to reach for my tin hat) one last big bash as the last one landed about, say, five yards from the wall of our house.’

Twenty-second Battalion joined the Adriatic campaign in mid-September. The unit, for a while the most advanced of all New Zealand battalions, drove up a traffic-crowded highway, Route 16, to the town of [Riccione](#) on the afternoon of 13 September. ¹

Ahead 3 Greek Mountain Brigade, fresh from training in [Syria](#) and in the line for

the first time, had run into difficulties in attempting to take a group of farm buildings and the settlement of [Monticelli](#). Veterans of 1 Parachute Regiment and

Turcomen (some captured Russians and White Russians who had gone over to the German side) had taken their toll of the inexperienced troops, who so far had suffered 172 casualties. Twenty-second Battalion, settling down behind the Greeks, had first of all a simple task: to plug the gap if the enemy broke through. The enemy didn't break through, but part of the battalion went into action just the same. The Greeks, and 22 Battalion behind them, were under 1 Canadian Infantry Division. Next day a big attack to the north began, aiming to take [Rimini](#) from the west and to win a crossing over the river above the town. The Greeks, though dogged enough, got nowhere,



ATTACK ON MONTICELLI, 14 SEPTEMBER 1944
B Squadron 20 Armoured Regiment and 1 Company in support

attack on monticelli, 14 september 1944 B Squadron 20 Armoured Regiment and 1 Company in support

so the Canadian general promptly called for a 22 Battalion task force to give the Greeks 'moral and physical support'. This set 1 Company (Major O'Reilly) on the move.

'As we were moving up, my first time in ...,' Private [Price](#),² a remarkably honest man, relates, 'in the distance I heard the bang of artillery and as we had been told that you could hear the shells coming towards you I heard the whistle and made a dive for the ground where I lay shaking like a leaf until the other jokers started to laugh. They then asked "What's the matter, Shorty? They are our own shells going

over." But that didn't worry me because I still hadn't got over the shock of hearing them.'

When the men were under way, tanks from B Squadron 20 Armoured Regiment came in too. The company's task simply was to protect the tanks. Had the infantry been expected to bolster the attack, the whole battalion would have gone in. Eight Platoon (Second-Lieutenant Avery ³) followed Greek infantry and some of the tanks over vineyards into the smoke and dust-covered remains of farm buildings, [Monaldini](#), which fell easily enough as they were defended by only two spandaus and a handful of troops. Before the tanks arrived, a New Zealand tank officer on reconnaissance 'admired the spirit of the Greeks who were firing [on the farm buildings]. From time to time some of these men rushed out of a house, fired a few rounds, and then dashed back into the house before the answering mortar stonk could catch them in the open.' After the farm buildings had become ours, 7 Platoon (Lieutenant Bassett), with tanks, moved up the road to attack [Monticelli](#) settlement, but the enemy pulled out as the platoon drew near, leaving behind a badly wounded German in a building. 'The place was a wine-making centre,' recalls Bassett. 'I remember the immense wine casks which completely filled one of the buildings. We were all rather perturbed next morning to see large notices outside the building proclaiming in German the place to be infested with typhus—this after we had occupied the place overnight.'

When they had settled into their new position, Bassett's men were able to see the enemy's defences, which had been dug behind the surrounding fences. The platoon commander thought they were perhaps the best constructed positions he had seen. They were well camouflaged, and stretched for about half a mile up the road as well. As Private [Jamieson](#) ⁴ walked across a stone courtyard, 'There was a hell of an explosion and I was hit in the forearm. I stuck my hand into my trouser pocket to get my tin of cigarettes and cut my hand on a piece of shrapnel and needless to say, no smoke.'

The two attacking platoons had had a fairly easy time that afternoon, but not so the rest of the company, which was getting into position about 500 yards east of [Monticelli](#) and preparing for a descent on the place if need be.

'We were walking along a track (in a sort of canal) in single file like a lot of

ducks when the mortar dropped through the trees, bursting in the water and sending water and mud in all directions,' writes [McNeil](#).⁵ Lance-Corporal [Astwood](#)⁶ met his death here, and eleven others were wounded, all from this one bomb. McNeil goes on: 'The wounded were quickly attended to and shifted to an Italian house nearby where the badly wounded were despatched as quickly as possible. Our main difficulty in getting out was getting through the Greek guards who were inclined to be trigger-happy and very jittery.' Hit on the back of the right hand, [Sampson](#)⁷ 'could have sworn it was blown off, but was not game enough to find out for myself, so I asked my friend Bernie [Spranger](#)⁸ right next to me to tell me if my hand was missing. The cheering words came back: "She's right Snow, it's bloody well there alright.'"

The badly wounded had just been hustled under cover when five mortar bombs came over like a pack of hounds. Sampson, exposed, 'curled up in my tin hat ... scared stiff, and I think my hair must have pushed my hat up 2 inches.'

On the way back to a Canadian casualty clearing station the wounded had to take cover again, this time in a dugout where Germans had been living for weeks. 'It was filthy,' one wounded man remembers, 'and stank worse than rotten eggs. In this dugout, among the wounded, our company commander Bert O'Reilly was busy among us, doing his best with the Greek interpreter, calling for stretcher bearers, and passing on the odd encouraging word.'

By 9.30 p.m. the New Zealanders were firmly settled in little [Monticelli](#) for the night. At dawn a patrol from 7 Platoon found [San Lorenzo](#) (a short distance up the road) unoccupied.

The Greeks now aimed for the [Rimini](#) airfield, about a mile away. The first advance of the new day was made in the centre by 1 Greek Battalion (followed by 6 Platoon), which crossed the Marano River before 10 a.m. and reached a house before machine-gun fire from the airfield's fringe sent them to earth. Early in the afternoon all of the [Greek Brigade](#) went forward after the armour had been relieved by tanks of C Squadron 18 Armoured Regiment. Fighter-bombers appeared to pound the western side of the airfield. First Greek Battalion again had to halt just short of the airfield. Directly at this party came strong bazooka and machine-gun fire; from the left, at the bottom of the airfield, a self-propelled gun fired back, joined by shells

from the right from a well-protected Panther turret. One by one the New Zealand tanks edged along a line of hedges, trying to avoid this fire. A New Zealand tank was hit and two gallant tank men, (Lieutenant [Collins](#)⁹ and Sergeant [White](#)¹⁰), ignoring ammunition on the point of exploding, dragged out the trapped driver from among the shambles. Thirty-six enemy were killed, a dozen prisoners taken, and the force camped for the night near the southern end of the airfield. In the dark a sudden flash and explosion to the right announced the end of the Panther turret: its crew had destroyed it before withdrawing.

Third Greek Battalion (attended by 7 Platoon) captured the hamlet of [Casalecchio](#). Only the church continued to hold out until the artillery got on to it, and then a Greek platoon, plus tanks and the escorting 7 Platoon, took the church—or what now passed for a church. Fire from the airfield stopped any further advance for the day. The Greek Brigade's right-hand battalion, [2 Battalion](#) (and 8 Platoon) made a short advance up the main road to the Marano River. The day had cost the Greeks thirty-three casualties: losses in 22 Battalion's company were slight.

This day, forsaken amongst shot and shell, a cow stood by a well bellowing for water. Private [Devereux](#)¹¹ grabbed her by the neck, pulled her into the door of a casa, and started to milk her. The Greeks were delighted; a sergeant swore that he never saw a cow milked before (and never expected to see one milked again) with mortars dropping around.

Any attack up and beyond [Rimini](#) airfield would be useless until 2 Greek Battalion drew level with the airfield, so next morning (16 September), sweeping the area before them with machine-gun fire, the infantry came up to link with [1 Battalion](#) on the left. The remaining Greek battalion advanced 700 yards on the left flank. [Rimini](#) airfield now lay within the brigade's grasp, but in hangars, buildings, and houses round about defiant snipers and mortar and machine-gun crews had survived the bombing. The field itself, about a mile square, was covered by fire and thick with mines, and further back another shrewdly dug-in Panther turret made deadly use of a perfect field of fire. To the left of the Greek Brigade Canadians were battling against fanatical resistance from [Coriano Ridge](#).

This Panther turret fell next day as 2 and 3 Greek Battalions slowly began working their way up either side of the airfield. Skip-bombing by six aircraft left the

turret unscathed, but Lieutenant Collins (6 Platoon was with his tanks) was determined to get it. While the guns smothered the turret in smoke shells, Collins took his tank west, turned to face the turret and, when the smoke thinned, pounded home seven deadly direct hits. The crew fled from the ruins and the lieutenant received the MC.

In a parallel drive during the next three days, 2 and 3 Greek Battalions (accompanied by 8 and 7 Platoons)—and fresh tanks from C Squadron [19 Armoured Regiment](#)—reached out to enter in triumph and drizzling rain the city of [Rimini](#) early on 21 September. Although they had had their share of fighting, the success of this advance was due to the furious fighting inland, where the Canadians were shouldering the burden of the assault.

Who was first into the ancient and undefended city of [Rimini](#)? The New Zealanders say 'New Zealanders', and the Greeks say 'Greeks'. Twenty-second Battalion's war diary says: 'At first light a tk tp comd of the 19th, accompanied by 2 Lt. Avery, reced fwd along Route 16 into [Rimini](#), and returned to lead their men fwd before 0800 hrs.... [On the fringes of [Rimini](#) both Greek battalions] paused to raise and salute with reverence their national flag in a tribute to comrades who had fallen.... Meantime, the New Zealanders pushed on and if, therefore, the [BBC](#) announcement of the capture of [Rimini](#) by Gks alone was a trifle in error, the error was, perhaps, in tribute to the gallant Greek dead, trifling.'

It is clear that a handful of New Zealanders (8 Platoon 22 Battalion and 11 Troop [19 Armoured Regiment](#)) were first into the old city and reached the main square (the Piazza Cavour, where the Town Hall stood) before the Greeks. It is certain the Greeks (2 Greek Battalion) were the first to enter the new part of [Rimini](#), called [Rimini Marina](#), a summer resort on the coast and about a mile from the old city square. Nobody disputes that the city fell to 3 Greek Mountain Brigade at a cost of 314 casualties over thirteen days. 'I was glad,' wrote General Alexander in his despatches, 'that this success had so early brightened the fortunes of that heroic country which had been the only ally to fight by our side in our darkest days and that a new victory in [Italy](#) should be added to the fame won in the mountains of [Albania](#).'

In [Rimini](#)'s town square Avery and his platoon were joined about half an hour later by the 11 Troop tanks (delayed by a river), which parked by the Town Hall.

Then came the first of the 3 Battalion Greeks and, says a Greek operations summary, 'at 7.30 a.m. the Mayor of Rimini informed Captain Apostolakis that he was ready to hand over the town. The handing over protocol was therefore drawn up, in Greek, English and Italian.'

The city had taken a battering from bombers, artillery and naval guns, especially on the coast; some most pleasing homes and villas had been badly knocked about. Buildings south of the canal yielded a few prisoners and 'the silence of desolation'. Then one by one citizens began emerging: from buildings, from basements, from sewers.

Beyond Rimini the battalion would find the countryside more open, with more land in pasture. Vineyards had not entirely disappeared, but generally the picture was similar to farmland on a plain in New Zealand. Many of the fields were hedge-lined, and as this was marshy land, most roads were bordered by deep ditches—ready-made trenches if they ran in the right direction. Here and there stood odd clumps of trees, perhaps near a big house, but compared with the country the battalion had passed through earlier in the campaign, the landscape was relatively bare of trees. Some of the casas 'were still inspiringly solid', but the newer type of farm villa, with the stable attached to the house, was often built of hollow tile-like bricks, which as Major O'Reilly remarked, 'come hell or high water, gave protection only in the case of high water.' In the days ahead some of the battalion in a reserve position would have to occupy one of these hollow-brick houses for a week when the shelling and mortaring were heavy. 'The only habitable part was the stable which ran along the back of this house,' one man recalls. 'We shared the stable with four cows that were a picture of placid contentment even during the heaviest shelling.'

References to rivers in this region should not bring to mind a picture of pleasant meandering streams with tree-lined banks. Rivers past Rimini were nothing but ditches on a grand scale with ugly steep banks from 12 to 20 feet high. The New Zealanders had not left the hills far away—they rose on the left about two or three miles away. (In the hills British soldiers fought with distinction, several times outflanking the enemy and forcing a withdrawal on the narrow plain below.)

The weather at this time was abominable. Dark clouds hung like a pall over the most depressing front. The nebelwerfer wailed over sodden landscapes where

corpses of men and farm animals lay in the mud. Adding to the melancholy atmosphere, artificial moonlight appeared—massed searchlights focussed on the low clouds—the reflected light bathing the land ahead in a weird, purplish half-light. Clouds of dust and debris from shelling rose up like wraiths in the artificial moonlight. Soldiers remember a couple of rum issues—a rare event indeed—and probably the miserable conditions called for the rum.

Twenty-second Battalion scarcely paused in [Rimini](#). That night (still 21 September), in the cold and the pitch dark, the battalion, now gathered in force, went over the [Marecchia](#) River, just above [Rimini](#). At last the time had come to show how swiftly an attack could be mounted by a motorised battalion. Colonel Donald's orders group did not disperse until 6.30 p.m.: at 7 p.m. troops were beginning to cross the river. Two bridges crossed the [Marecchia](#). One was a destroyed railway bridge by the coast, and a little further inland an old Roman bridge (built in 27 AD, and left intact by the enemy) went part-way over the river—a modern bridge which used to carry the road the rest of the way across had been blown up well and truly. Round this part-Roman, part-modern and part-ruin bridge, the battalion would wade across, 1 Company (O'Reilly) on the left and 2 Company (Hutcheson) on the right. Spandaus had stopped any of Hutcheson's daylight patrols from testing the river, and because of this 2 Company would have a miserable crossing, but in 1 Company's case all went very well indeed, thanks to Sergeant [Hughan](#).¹² He and a few men had found and reconnoitred a safe crossing place west of the demolished bridge. This sent 1 Company off on a detour which circled about 200 yards to the left, crossed the river and then, under cover of the northern stopbank, took it back into position alongside Hutcheson's sopping men, who somehow managed to flounder through their unexplored part of the river. Then, side by side, the two companies would advance, attacking over a mile to a watercourse called the [Fossa Turchetta](#). Canadian troops—who a little earlier had made a crossing of their own further up the river and were now finding that the crossing was becoming well gummed up by mud churning and spreading from a tangle of transport and tracked vehicles—would link up with 1 Company near the watercourse. New Zealand tanks would come up to the 22 Battalion attackers once the engineers had fixed a ford across the river.

Houses thickly dotted the land ahead and gave good cover to the enemy machine-gunners and riflemen waiting to meet the advance. Dug-in Panther turrets

with 75-millimetre guns and machine-gun posts lay around the little settlement named [Celle](#), at the crossroads south of the watercourse. There 1 Parachute Division lay in wait for O'Reilly's men. To the right, nearer the coast, Hutcheson's force would clash with well-equipped troops from 303 Grenadier Regiment and 162 Turcoman Infantry Division, who would make the best use of fortified villas, minefields, and fortifications which had been intended to smash any invasion from the sea.

New Zealand tanks, belching flame, for twenty minutes pounded enemy hideouts over the river. As the tanks fell silent the infantry waded into the river at 7 p.m. Thirty-five minutes later one German general told another over the phone: 'The enemy is building up for a new main thrust along the Via Adriatica towards [Ravenna](#). We must have fresh troops there, because the Turcomen can't be used again except as second-line troops....'

Most of 1 Company crossed easily, although one or two men had to swim in some parts. Hutcheson, on the seaward side of the smashed bridge, was in difficulties. The spot he chose to cross had been recommended by a Canadian officer: 'No more than two feet deep,' he had said with assurance. On the other side a bomb had smashed the steep, smooth, ten-foot-high retaining wall protecting the riverbank. The attackers could scale this broken part, but unfortunately another bomb had blasted a crater in the riverbed too. 'As the company (hungry, for the hot meal had not got up in time) forded the river in the pitch dark of a cloudy evening every man must have had the experience of plunging into a hole four feet deep,' Hutcheson recalls. 'With great difficulty I raised both arms and managed to keep dry my map board and walky-talky wireless. The Sigs. men were unable to do this with the heavy 22 set they were packing in on their backs, and the soaking put it out of action.'

Ahead of Hutcheson had gone an advanced guard which was to silence the spandaus immediately ahead. Two spandau crews were seized without mishap, and 2 Company (except for the hole) crossed safely.

Both companies now were across. The heavy mud was thick on their boots. One Company was getting into position for attack when someone from Intelligence told Lance-Corporal Kevin Dillon (incorrectly) that the attack was to go in from the top of the stopbank. Dillon's section in a few moments reached the top of the mound and

walked almost on top of a machinegun nest. From a range of ten yards a startled machine-gunner opened up, wounding Dillon, Dick [Goodall](#),¹³ and Jack [Wallace](#)¹⁴ all in the legs, while Sergeant Stevens, further back, was hit in the chest. Wallace, unlike the others, didn't lie flat on the ground, but partly rose, attempting to crawl away, and died instantly, shot through the head. Promptly shouting 'Follow me!' (to rally some new members of the company who were bemused by the sudden flare-up), Corporal 'Jock' Cockburn¹⁵ charged the machine gun from the flank, silenced it, killed two and dragged out a third German badly wounded. He then looked round—nobody had followed him! (A few nights later Cockburn, after some good work searching houses on his own, was hit in the eye and the elbow: his soldiering days were over. Alongside him Lloyd Grieve, bleeding from the head, gathered up his badly holed No. 38 radio set and carried on until daylight. 'The set's aerial and my rifle and the shovel caused no end of bother in the wired rows of vines.')

The attack began. They charged over the stopbank. One Company advanced in extended order on the right of Route 16. The cumbersome No. 22 radio set, carried by two men and cursed steadily throughout the night, not once raised Battalion Headquarters. They could have left the thing in the river. When 1 Company charged over the stopbank, the enemy opened up, but his forward positions were quickly wiped out and three prisoners taken. The company's only casualties in this first charge were the one killed and three wounded in Dillon's misadvised group.

The company moved forward steadily in the dark, showery, muddy night. Boots soon became ponderous and heavy with further accumulations of mud. A section led up the road by Bob [Ferris](#)¹⁶ silently clashed with one or two enemy. One man seized a German in a headlock and captured him after a brief tussle. Another man fell into an Italian cesspit full of straw, water and manure, and continued to advance, only the whites of his eyes showing. An uproar flared near [Celle](#) crossroads, where a wounded prisoner was taken by Corporal [Joe Coppell](#).¹⁷ He was one of a party of Germans moving down Route 16 in the direction of [Rimini](#); the rest escaped in the gloom while Max [Tarr](#),¹⁸ tears of rage running down his face, swore at his Bren gun, which had every stoppage possible. (About an hour later the same Bren got away seven magazines in about as many seconds.) Near [Celle](#) a man watched 'the spectacular arrival of the enemy shells which glowed salmon pink—probably armour-piercing.'

'When we were just on the [Celle](#) junction, a tracked vehicle was heard moving slowly and quietly down the highway towards the junction from the left,' says O'Reilly. 'Fire was coming from the west just beyond [Celle](#), so we assumed it was an enemy vehicle and opened fire on it when it was a few yards short of the junction. It stopped immediately and there was a grand silence. Investigating, we found it was a Canadian carrier. The crew had made a fast getaway, so 1 Company did not establish friendly contact with the Canadians!'

Eight Platoon, weaving up to the right of the cemetery, met with no enemy opposition and settled down on its objective about 1 a.m. without contacting the enemy. Five Platoon, taking prisoners and killing stragglers in the dark, also reached its objective. Six Platoon, however, was held up by the railway line; it was weak in numbers and had lost its officer, Wally Hart, an original member of the battalion and not long back from furlough. He had been mortally wounded while charging a spandau over the railway line. Norm [Callesen](#),¹⁹ Reeve [Collins](#)²⁰ and Ray [Gurney](#)²¹ picked him up and placed him on a stretcher. Hart was 'a truly fine chap, all man, and a great soldier, we were all more than sorry to hear the news.' Ken [Hansen](#)²² and Bob Ferris were wounded close by, the latter in and about an eye, which was promptly and effectively dressed by Brian [Douglas](#)²³ and retained its sight.

A dead-tired 7 Platoon (just back with the company after a mopping-up job in [Rimini](#)) now came through and ran into severe fire from a Panther-type turret manned and heavily defended by Germans. While his section blazed at the strongpoint, Corporal Reeve²⁴ charged across open ground, met a shower of hand grenades, and in turn lobbed back grenades until the enemy bolted. With no spare men to occupy the strongpoint, Reeve and his section had to press on to the watercourse. The enemy quickly returned and opened fire again. This fire perplexed the company commander, who knew 7 Platoon already was well past this area. He sent over a party from 6 Platoon, but it was spotted, and two particularly good men fell wounded, Lance-Sergeant [Roberts](#)²⁵ (Hart's right-hand man) and Private [Revell](#),²⁶ while [Joe Coppell](#), in a furious one-man charge, almost succeeded in capturing the strongpoint alone. As soon as possible Reeve and his men were brought back and attacked yet again so resolutely that the enemy (estimated at twenty) fled once more, leaving several stricken men and six prisoners. Reeve received an immediate MM.

One Company consolidated about its objective. One officer and one other rank had been killed and eight other ranks wounded for a bag of thirty paratroopers and thirty abandoned spandaus. The velvet blackness made it impossible for the company to scour all the area from the river to the watercourse, and later five Turcomen (162 Infantry Division) were rounded up by the Medical Officer, Captain Baird—a characteristic touch. The doctor's ambition was to have his RAP the most forward one in the Division. The battalion's [Red Cross](#) carrier did heroic work this night.

Over on the right 2 Company moved up parallel with the railway line as fast as it could, leaving mopping up until daybreak. Minor tussles took place with Turcomen holding fortified houses. The beach area was heavily fortified against assault from the sea: three or four heavy naval guns in camouflaged concrete emplacements disguised as ice-cream stalls faced out to sea, and land round about was mined thickly. In one of these minefields 10 Platoon foundered. Mines abruptly exploded in quick succession at chest height, a horrible sensation. [Lewis](#)²⁷ was killed; Roy [Lorrigan](#),²⁸ Jim [Hill](#),²⁹ Knuckey³⁰ and Braybrook³¹ were among those wounded. Knuckey, wounded in the elbow, blown face down into a creek and fearing he might drown, heard the stricken Jim Hill say distinctly: 'That's a fine thing to do to a man.' Second-Lieutenant Keith [Cope](#)³² and Clem Lawson³³ were wounded simultaneously in the leg, probably from the same mine.

Lawson goes on: 'We then saw the enemy wires marking a corridor in the minefield which led to some Italian casas. Finding one of these casas free of enemy troops, all wounded were evacuated to the ground floor and others were placed on the second floor and on guard around the building. Lieutenant Cope and I limped along this corridor, each having an arm across each other's shoulder, and reached a point about 50 to 60 feet from the entrance door of the casa. We leaned on a fencepost. Our sergeant, Ian [Ford](#),³⁴ reported to Lieutenant Keith Cope that all wounded were in, except the two of us.

'Keith then instructed me to go in with the sergeant. I being a friend of Keith's suggested that I would wait and go in when he did. However it was not to be—fortunately for me. I will never forget Keith saying "Orders are Orders, and you must go in." I immediately obeyed, and as I entered the door of the casa there was a

heavy explosion. Keith had not moved his position. We had been standing on a mine which was set off by some of our gang who touched a concealed tripwire. Keith died after a few minutes.'

Harassed by this tragedy, Hutcheson ordered 12 Platoon to consolidate in a house near hapless 10 Platoon. His two remaining platoons consolidated by the railway line, 300 yards short of the objective, but from here to the watercourse the ground was open and within the company's killing range. After midnight, thanks to [6 Field Company](#) engineers, the tanks crossed the Marecchia River.

The smashed bridge had taxed the ingenuity of the stretcher-bearers to the full and had severely tried the patience of the wounded. The bridge was doubled up to a peak in mid-river by the force of the enemy demolition. Up this a party of stretcher-bearers shouldered each other, those at the foot of the steep and slippery slope lying flat while the others clambered over them. Those below were hauled up, hanging on each other's feet, by the man suspended head first. The descent of the peak was made something along the lines of a human rope ladder. All this, with the stretchers as an additional burden, went on in the dark while enemy fire sometimes fell round them. On one steep slope of the broken bridge the medical men lost their grip on Kevin Dillon, and down he slid, into the river. They fished him out and carried on. Padre Sergel, characteristically and ingeniously, was busy in the river. Hearing that a sergeant was badly hit and his leg broken, the Padre, his batman ([Home-Douglas](#) ³⁵.) and two others with plenty of rope, had clambered across the river into 1 Company's fireswept area. The stretcher party was well equipped. As a result of his experience with cumbersome stretcher-work in [Cassino](#), the Padre had invented a shoulder-strap harness, which he later learned had been standard equipment in the First World War and apparently had been forgotten. 'Our padre, a most practical man, had found a few good New Zealand oaths were the best passwords on approaching some unknown place at night.' Freely using this method, they eventually reached the stricken sergeant, tied him into the stretcher, and 'what a wonderful difference it makes to one's nerves if there is somebody else to think about besides oneself. And every yard further back gives one an increasing sense of security.' The broken bridge looked quite impossible, so they struggled across underneath, among boulders and mud, to the steeply sloping wall on the other side, some twenty feet high. Here one man lay flat against the slope, another crawled up

him, and then Home-Douglas scaled up these two human ladders to the top. Padre Sergel threw a rope up to Home-Douglas, the stretcher was gradually hauled up the smooth wall, and the sergeant was delivered to the RAP in time.

Lieutenant Jock Wells, leading an early morning 11 Platoon patrol along the seafront, ran into Turcomen, who were just stirring, pottering about half-asleep and hanging out blankets. One Turcoman, opening fire with an automatic, felled [Small](#) ³⁶. with a bullet just below the knee. Hutcheson saw six enemy running along the beach, set after them with a couple of comrades, landed up by a big gun emplacement and bagged fifteen Turcomen cowering in a nearby trench. The Russians obligingly pointed to a camouflaged dugout, where a solitary German under-officer was added to the bag.

The party of wounded men, stricken in the minefield and taking refuge in the casa, was not left in peace. At dawn the men on the top floor repulsed an attack from the beach, and even succeeded in collecting some prisoners. In the house Hill and another were in a bad way, but the hot drinks made from the issue of cocoa, milk powder, and sugar which each man carried seemed to save Hill's life. Later in the morning the wounded were taken away.

One of the wounded died unexpectedly in hospital some days afterwards. His wound was not severe, but he developed pneumonia through lying wounded most of the night in soaked clothing. The battalion was still in summer clothing and battle dress would not arrive for a fortnight yet. The body of the dead man, Lewis, had remained in the minefield. After dawn two of his pals, Gillon and Athol [Jimmieson](#), ³⁷. gallantly determined to bring back their comrade's body, returned to the minefield. They met with disaster. Another mine exploded, killing Gillon, and Jimmieson later died of wounds.

About 10 a.m. battle was joined once again, 2 and 3 Companies, with tanks, starting off up the coast towards the small seaside resort called [Viserba](#) and the canal almost a mile away. Just nine hours later, the Chiefs of Staff of [Tenth Army](#) (Major- General Fritz Wentzell) and of Army Group C (Lieutenant- General Roettiger) held this telephone conversation:

Army Group: 'I don't understand what is going on on your left.'

10 Army: 'That's right... 303 Turcoman Regiment was there.'

Army Group: 'But isn't the line at [Viserba](#)?'

10 Army: 'It was. A strong enemy patrol with tanks broke through at [Viserba](#)....'

Twenty-second Battalion, with [19 Armoured Regiment's](#) tanks, was responsible for this part of the chat and for scattering 303 Turcoman Regiment, in the words of the Germans, 'to the four winds.'

Two Company made good speed up the coast road to reach in half an hour the outskirts of [Viserba](#), where the company slowed up with a jerk. All the buildings and fortifications had to be searched. By noon the company was about a quarter of the way into [Viserba](#). Heavy anti-tank fire swept the coastal road, and north of the canal mortars and machine guns kept the infantry on their toes. The tanks had to approach in the open, so for a start the infantry went on alone. The infantry would move on about 800 yards, while the enemy slowly fell back in front of them. The tanks followed in bounds as soon as the infantry reported that part of the road clear of anti-tank fire, because 'it would have been suicidal for the tanks to have moved up before us or with us.'

On the way up there was a touch of comedy. One group, spotting three or four enemy soldiers standing in the open a couple of hundred yards away, covered them with a concealed Bren, and waited. 'They beckoned to us. We beckoned back. We beckoned to each other for three or four minutes—neither side opening fire. Then a section went out to stalk them while we tried to keep them occupied, but suddenly they disappeared.'

In [Viserba](#), just before tea-time, mortar fragments splattered a courtyard, striking Corporal [Burcher](#)³⁸ in his back, face and arm. Privates Ken [MacKenzie](#),³⁹ [Cliff Smith](#), and Tony [Howie](#)⁴⁰ dressed the Corporal's wounds. Late in the afternoon 3 Company settled down for the night by the canal. Starting off in the morning, this company promptly ran into solid mortar fire, which killed a tank troop commander. Then two tanks bogged down in the soft ground. Until noon they hadn't got much further on, but in the afternoon the advance improved and by 4 p.m. 3 Company had reached a factory. Private [Herbert](#)⁴¹ had been wounded in a skirmish. A mortar had collected [Mick Eades](#), who says, 'Sergeant Bill Windsor did all in his power to help me and make me comfortable, in particular going to a lot of trouble to hunt up an enamel basin while the mortars were still landing.' Despite his great need, Eades

could not use the basin, and his main thought then was 'the boys must be disgusted with me, asking for it and then not using it.' He records 'My sincerest thanks and admiration to our doctors, sisters, nurses and padres for their careful, efficient and cheerful manner in which they cared for us. Being in their care after having been through a scrap or two and had one's nerves strained to blazes is the nearest thing I knew to heaven.'

Near the canal both companies found the firing better. The enemy hadn't attempted to hold [Viserba](#) and instead was fighting a rearguard action and falling back slowly in the face of the advance. Writing about the move through the centre of [Viserba](#), an officer notes: 'Civilians were mostly barricaded in houses. Though scared, they were cooperative. They presented a difficulty though, as they were inclined to celebrate the liberation, and wanted my troops to join in. The troops behaved well, but found [Viserba](#) interesting.'

From the crossing of the [Marecchia](#) the night before up to the canal, 22 Battalion had suffered thirty casualties, including two officers and four other ranks killed. During the advance through [Viserba](#) about thirty enemy had been killed and 123 prisoners taken, many of them Turcomen.

This day wounded from all kinds of units passed through the battalion RAP, where Padre Sergel 'saw many struggles with almost lifeless figures, but although one came to distinguish between those with some chance and those with that dreadful grey look of death in their eyes, I find that nobody died in that R.A.P. that day. Some of the Germans were among the wounded, the Doc always took the most serious cases as they arrived no matter what they belonged to. The walking wounded had to wait.'

The Colonel wanted to carry on, but Brigadier [Burrows](#)⁴² said the 22nd was outstripping 5 Brigade too much. The force crossed the shallow river (the tanks silencing small-arms fire directed at 2 Company) and halted about 400 yards up the road just after 3 a.m. Two hours later Major-General [Weir](#)⁴³ (replacing for a few weeks [General Freyberg](#), who had been injured in a plane crash) ordered the 22nd on again. Its destination was the Fontanaccia—and no further. Within half an hour the most advanced men were only 700 yards from the stream. But here a tank went up, and a really virile bombardment of mortars, plus angry spandau fire, forced 2 Company back into sheltering houses—just as one man ‘was thinking of a stop and a cup of shai (lovely thought!)’

Further back, trouble loomed for 3 Company. Fifteen Platoon, nearing a house, saw a top window suddenly ablaze, and Sergeant Windsor fell, hit in the shoulder. A Tiger tank crawled away from the back of the house and withdrew while a bazooka set one New Zealand tank blazing and knocked out the other. The enemy in the house (content enough with two tanks to his credit) didn't linger to meet the platoon attack, but heavy mortar ‘stonks’ landed all round the place, ‘and things were pretty lively for a few minutes, one of our men, V. [Bransgrove](#),⁴⁴ being killed,’ writes Watt.

In this fire Corporal [Kain](#)⁴⁵ and Lance-Corporal de Joux⁴⁶ volunteered to go forward with [Kriete](#)⁴⁷ to aid two seriously injured tank men: an officer with a large piece of shell casing through his thigh, the other man with a gash on the back of his neck. Kriete thought to himself: ‘If I'm not careful here, his spinal cord might get nipped in between the joints, and that will be the end of him.’ They put this man face down on a door to keep his neck quite straight, placed the officer on a stretcher, and sheltered in the nearest casa, where Sergeant Bill Windsor and a few others were taking cover. While attending to the wounded, Kriete heard Schmeisser bullets coming through the door, ‘and then some unfamiliar people came through the door. A thought seemed to strike me that we might be a bit restricted in our movements from then on! How right I was.’ The German party, commanded by a good-looking, English-speaking officer, took over. This officer's main anxiety seemed to be for ‘rememberances’ (souvenirs), ‘which made him seem one of us. There was a disposition map from one of the tanks on the ground, and we unobtrusively edged this under some furniture with our feet.’

Heavy shelling continued. General pandemonium reigned in the headquarters. Kriete, worried about the wounded officer, 'could not do much about his loss of blood owing to the terrific piece of shell casing through his thigh. His life was just steadily dripping away. The Germans had only first aid equipment and could not do anything owing to our heavy fire. The other one was looking much better, his colour had come back, it looked as if he would be all right. The officer seemed to be dead, could not detect any breath or heart beat, so covered his face. I was glad to see him die, in a way; to see him gasping for breath and know you could not do anything for him was hard to take.'

Leaving the dead officer behind, the party moved back along the long, dreary trail of the prisoner of war. Maurice Kain writes: 'Our interrogation at what would be the equivalent of Div. H/Q was conducted by a very polished officer who had been a farmer in Nova Scotia before the War and spoke and behaved perfectly. On being given the usual P.O.W. answers he sighed, turned to a well-bound volume and recited off who we were, the Tanks we were working with, names of our C/O and battalion officers, the route we had recently travelled (in supposed security), and our supports on both flanks. He was most insistent for information about the [9th Brigade](#) and its composition but as news of its intended formation had not trickled down to our level it was no trouble to look completely blank.... but he had all the gen. The next day's interrogation at [Forli](#) where after marching through the streets and being spat on by the local populace (could these be the same Eytes as behind our lines?) we had a going over by the Bully type....'

'... food was a bit scarce,' says Kriete. 'At one stop we partook of boiled donkey. I cannot recommend it. Eventually we crossed the Po, and so to Moosburg Camp. Our cattle-truck was supposed to carry 40, but there were 63 when we got there, and I looked in a mirror, I fully expected my hair to be grey, but it wasn't.'

Twenty-second Battalion, stalled by stiff opposition, was now out on a limb: the CO sent Support Company up the coast road to a handy position in case of emergency, but no crisis came. Vigorous spandaus over to the left were silenced by tank and machine-gun fire, and the makings of an enemy counter-attack by the railway line was broken up. Over the whole front artillery fire raged. The battalion mortars, hard at work on this attack up the coast, were now feeling particularly

'pleased at the way we got each bomb away; each bomb seemed to go down the spout and then away from each mortar at the same time—one-two-three, and so on.'

Lieutenant Doug Caldwell, the mortar officer, returned in his jeep with a German prisoner. When he approached an array of 25-pounders, Caldwell stopped the jeep. The German asked: 'How do you expect us to stand up against that? How can you lose with the mass of weapons that you have?' A soldier hearing the remark writes: 'I don't know if he ever thought about [Greece](#) and [Crete](#) or tanks in the desert with 2-pounder guns etc.—when the boot was on the other foot.'

Despite the enemy's frequent fire on 2 and 3 Companies, the infantry and the supporting tanks (A Squadron 19 Armoured Regiment) held on, and only five infantrymen were wounded. Two Company had set up a rather precarious lookout in a flimsy house, and here an observation post was manned to help pick targets for the artillery and tanks. A man in this uneasy building writes: 'During that day, the 23rd., I felt exhilarated by watching our tanks and artillery inflict so much damage on the enemy. The platoon didn't occupy any of the rooms on the north side, but upstairs they had opened or removed all windows facing the enemy, and opposite them had knocked peepholes in the wall from the next room, so that they could stand with cover from view and a certain amount of cover from fire, and observe the enemy. We had an excellent view of a three-storeyed building evidently being used as an OP. Here the tank troop sergeant did some excellent work. With some fine shooting he put a couple of rounds of HE through the roof and upper storey to make the enemy run downstairs, and then pumped a dozen or so rounds rapid (armour piercing and high explosive) into the lower storeys. The building was evacuated fairly rapidly. From the number of people we had seen moving about there it must have been a headquarters of some sort.'

At this stage it might appear that the enemy more or less comfortably and calculatingly pulled back in the night (instead of being driven back) and plastered the battalion in the daylight 'according to plan'. But the German, as always, would not go back except under pressure, and the pressure was certainly felt, according to German documents. 'The speed of our advance was largely due to the speed of his withdrawal,' comments a company commander, 'and the speed of this was due to

the fact that we kept in close contact with him and didn't give him a chance to consolidate. Events inland too might have made him want to keep his line straight.'

Next day a dawn patrol found that the enemy had gone back over the river, but he was moving purposefully about on the far bank. Within half an hour New Zealand shells were bursting on the north bank. The battalion's mortars, which had been particularly active the day before, later pumped 300 rounds across the river, and followed this up, working non-stop for an hour, by plastering sixty rounds each on two targets. The battalion, now due for relief, was kept for one more attack—the bitterest and most frustrating of them all—on a one-company front across the Fontanaccia (little more than a wide ditch) after eight o'clock that night.

The platoon leaders were away at a meeting, and there was a certain air of unrest and tenseness in our digs. We older hands knew in ourselves, tho' not in detail, the results of such a meeting; even so we hoped we were wrong and would be going out of the line to a rest area for a time [writes a man who would be a casualty himself that night, [Private E. O. Jones](#),⁴⁸ of 3 Company.] However we settled down to laboriously cleaning our mechanism such as rifles, tommyguns, Brens, and checking grenades and rifles. At the same time we were anticipating our next move forward which to us would inevitably result from the leaders meeting this day. The new chums who had come up to swell our numbers were a mixed lot, and I was allotted a young chap who was very green, and we set about to put them at ease regarding their position and completed their knowledge, the bits that can't be learnt from the old text book, and certain little things of advice.

Everyone is quiet and solemn as we find ourselves on a start line,⁴⁹ a latitudinal road from the coast, and the eerie blanket of light of the artificial moonlight along with the dark clouds and the sudden stillness as we wait almost spellbound, gets you deep inside, and then it's on; the Arty have commenced a bombardment of the enemy positions, 'poor Jerry', which carries on for a good five minutes. Then we're off. How we got over a very high hedge directly in our front I don't remember, nevertheless we're on our way—some thinking: to what or where?

My new mate on the Bren gun sticking close by me reveals a strange look as the moon comes out for a second and I know then that he has mixed feelings, and wondering if in his first show he'll be brave, and not show cowardice, and then I give

him some sweets for we all get that taste in the mouth which seems to come from a silage pit, it's so vile. The sweets help for a while and then the chewing gum gets stale too.

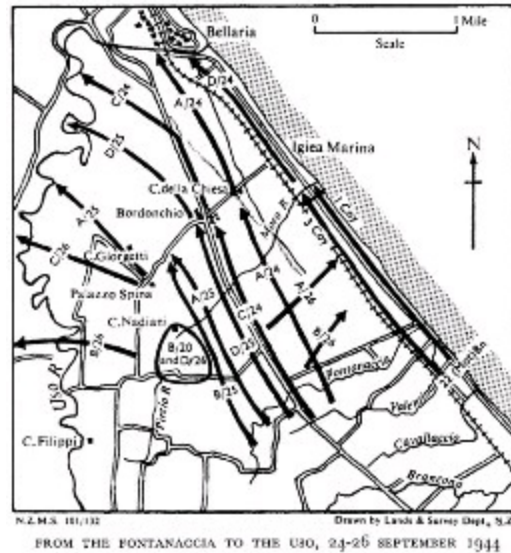
We knew that Jerry or Tedeski wouldn't take long before he comes out of hiding, for we older hands had experienced similar approaches to him before this, and sure enough the quiet lull after the shelling ceased, and we're settling down to a steady gait, was broken by the scream overhead of the Moaning Minnie (Nebelwerfer mortar), and fortunately a certain amount of warning was given and next we find ourselves—Peter and I—in a ditch full of nice comfortable water [Rio Fontanaccia]. However we were better off than some of the other lads. Confusion reigned for a while and then we are on the move again, and we pass a couple of bodies freshly broken and are thankful for the blanket of night, tho' some poor guy... hasn't many moments left, all we will remember will be his haunting scream. Our medical orderly is a good lad and a busy one too from now on until he himself later is stopped by a grenade.

Occasionally a reassuring voice can be heard giving encouragement to all in the deathly age we're going through and especially does Jim [Hanham](#)⁵⁰ put new spirit into us as we find it at times difficult to control ourselves from going berserk. We seem to have been through all this barbarity before for countless years it seems, and we think surely this isn't the age of Christianity or Christians.

And suddenly our thoughts are brought back to reality by a Burrrr. Burrrr.... as a Spandau opens up and we realize it even before we hear the clatter, for the dust alongside is whipped up into a frenzy. And we know we have arrived at our enemies' positions, and 'fun and games' are about to commence.

There is a series of scrambling as the front section, having been taken by surprise completely, are slipping back to better cover, and we shoot off to the right across a paddock to the lateral road and pile into the cover of the ditch and Peter and I are really in it. From what we can make out the Teds are well cached in a hole just ahead of us not more than 25 yards. While we were engaged Jim Hanham manages to get even nearer and we hear a happy bark of his Thompson, and almost instantly the Jerries fire their last burst at us which causes Peter beside me to scream horribly and then it is I realise he has uttered his last sound on earth. He

suffered little and was never for one moment anything but brave. I never knew his surname only that he was young in age, about 20 years....



from the fontanaccia to the uso, 24-26 september 1944

Sixth Brigade attacked on the left, moving up fast through the carnage wreaked by the crushing barrage, but over on the coast 22 Battalion ran into serious trouble in its last night of this action. Expecting the main attack would come up the coast, the enemy laid the weight of his artillery on this area, which was fair enough for 6 Brigade's battalions, but a dismal business for the 22nd. Shells cracked and whined over the start line, where the two companies were forming up to support the attack, and from only half a mile away two self-propelled guns hammered the road with solid shot. Great showers of sparks flew up from the road wherever a solid shell landed. One Company (on the right by the sea) and 3 Company (on the left), backed by tanks, got painfully under way into a storm of mortars and spandaus firing from shrewdly sited positions on the low sandy ground beyond the Fontanaccia. No Turcomen these, but paratroopers and panzer grenadiers on the job with a vengeance. 'Suddenly a terrible enemy stonk came right down on our HQ [2 Company, just relieved on the coast by 1 Company],' Keith Hutcheson says. 'We all dropped below the window level and I was a bit slower than the rest....' Doctor Baird went up and returned with the stricken major through heavy shellfire. At times Baird lay on top of him to protect him. Armstrong now took over command. At the RAP Hutcheson, almost unconscious, lips numb, vision only a pinpoint, was given a transfusion of plasma. 'I felt the vitality returning to my lips, and I could talk again.

Soon I was feeling fine.' But for days he lay near death.

Tanks couldn't spot enemy positions just ahead. Striving to detect them, the infantry was flayed with spandaus. A hapless platoon of 3 Company managed to make the Fontanaccia, and the tanks floundered across too. Soon 3 Company was brought to a final halt. Sainsbury feared his company was suffering rather severely, and communications were almost hopeless—the old story. On the right 1 Company painfully crossed the stream and went a few hundred yards over sandy ground to a large three-storied house by the beach. Here, about midnight, Colonel Donald reported to 4 Brigade that 3 Company was stalled and 1 Company's tanks were balked by mines along the coast road. General Weir weighed the chances of sending 26 Battalion to the 22nd's aid, while Donald, personally visiting 3 Company, decided it might be better for his men to detour into the protection of 6 Brigade's area, then turn to strike back at the enemy flank, rather than bulldoze a way on this frontal attack. Three Company, however, made a little more progress, and the idea of attacking from the left flank was dropped. A tank with 1 Company was blown up, and the engineers tried (with not much success, for the fire was cruel) to clear mines ahead of the troubled tanks.

The German had a perfect crossfire of spandaus using tracer. The ruined tank had struck a double Teller mine, and the explosion and bits of tank hit nearby men and most of 5 Platoon headquarters. 'The Jerries were covering the minefield with schmeissers, and while I was patching up Lionel Lapworth's ⁵¹ stomach wound an enemy threw a hand grenade,' writes Corporal [Tansley](#). ⁵² 'I was hit but we managed to fire-fight the Jerries away: the RAP collected our wounded.'

Brigadier [Pleasants](#) ⁵³ came up to see for himself, but throughout a night of uproar the 22nd advanced not much more than 500 yards beyond the river. At daybreak casualties proved much fewer than expected: eight in all.

Next day (25 September) the enemy decided to quit the coastal strip, which was too exposed after 6 Brigade's advances a little further inland. Demolitions sounded a mile away towards the settlement of [Igiea Marina](#), and civilian refugees straggled through with stories that the enemy, plus artillery and Tiger tanks, was withdrawing back beyond [Igiea Marina](#). Acting quickly on this heartening news 1 and 3 Companies, supervised by the CO, got under way again. Fighter-bombers and

artillery scoured ahead of them. The advance went well to the river south of [Igiea Marina](#), but near the water the enemy mortars awoke again, especially round the partly damaged bridge. Early in the afternoon the battalion reached the fringe of [Igiea Marina](#), where (at last) 26 Battalion relieved it. Major-General Weir expressed the highest praise for the work the unit had done in the advance up to and then beyond the Marecchia River. The battalion's casualties from Fontanaccia to [Igiea Marina](#) were sixteen: one officer killed and one officer and fourteen other ranks wounded.

'The battalion had performed remarkably well, and by the speed of its advance broke through heavily defended positions thick with gun emplacements, mobile pill boxes, mines, etc,' summed up Colonel Donald, looking back over the operation. 'With very few casualties it accomplished with speed what might have taken perhaps weeks of heavy fighting.'

Padre Sergel was taking note of the refugees: 'One morning literally hundreds came flocking past, I intended to take some snapshots of some of the more fantastic groups but their pathetic and frantic expressions somehow deterred me. One could visualise the scene as they had hurriedly snatched together their most treasured possessions as they left their homes in flight. Some had donkey carts laden to the skies, others pulled carts themselves, piles of bedding, odd pieces of furniture, ornate family pictures, bird cages, poultry in crates, often the youngest and oldest members of the household sat in state amidst all this conglomeration. Other families had escaped with only a few possessions clutched under their arms, and some came empty handed. They had all passed through shell fire and although during this particular morning most of the shells were passing over from our twenty-five pounders, yet the shriek of each missile added to their terror. We tried to tell them they were safe, that the shells were British, but they were too dazed to understand. One felt that these poor simple people in exposing their worldly treasures to alien gaze were exposing their naked souls whose simple existence had been broken and shattered by war. But it was not all sad, I remember one stately old man, whose upright walk showed him to be a veteran of some former war, who boldly marched ahead of one group with no possessions but on his head instead of a steel helmet was a well known enamel article of bedroom equipment.'

After resting for a few days at [Viserba](#) 22 Battalion relieved 23 Battalion, under

a clear sky and a full moon. Two Company took over before midnight on 30 September, but 3 Company was delayed a couple of hours. A fighting patrol twenty strong, armed with grenades and bazookas, gave trouble ahead and held up the relief, which cost the battalion two wounded. The front was alive this night, and taking advantage of the clear sky two rare German bombers flew over, sprinkling butterfly bombs and high explosive to a violent barrage of anti-aircraft shells (the New Zealanders alone fired over 2000 shells in a few minutes). All over the front fire increased: 'I stood and listened and thought. Years ago we had been told that the RAF—and later the Americans—were knocking his factories out right and left—surely by now his arms production must be well behind schedule, to put it mildly. And yet as you listened all along the front it was crump-crash-crump-crump. And it went on for long periods at a time. It made you think: just how long can he keep going? I had never heard so much Arty activity from him—at times he seemed to be doing all the shelling.'

On the night of 1-2 October the battalion came under considerable enemy artillery and mortar fire. Before dawn a raiding party of fifteen enemy attacked a forward platoon with bazookas, killing one man and wounding three. 'We are in a house, a typical Iti outfit, with the barn for the animals underneath and the living quarters on top,' concludes 'Shorty' Price, a somewhat different man now from the one who began the advance with the Greeks. 'Some of the boys are up the stairs watching out for the Jerries. A patrol comes back without seeing any Jerries. We have our pickets posted and think we are in for a quiet night when all of a sudden we hear a Spandau open up and our section leader [Clarke](#)⁵⁴ who is standing in front of a double wooden door stops the lot. I hop up to a window with my Bren gun to see what I could see and there isn't a sign of anybody. I'm there a few minutes looking out and the next thing I know is a terrific bang alongside me and I fell to the ground. I looked down at my stomach and saw blood spurting out like a fountain and I thought I was a goner.'

Two patrols went out to reconnoitre the river front and came back with details about the size and the condition of the stopbanks, the depth and width of the stream, and impressions of enemy defences. There was not much to be seen of the defences because the enemy was well hidden by the high stopbank on the far side. In one place the river was seven to eight feet deep; in another only eighteen inches

to a couple of feet. The stopbanks were fifteen feet high, and between them was a stretch of forty feet. Plank bridges crossed the [Fiumicino](#) in one place. Guns, mortars, and machine guns kept going through the day; one of their objects was to drown the noise of the engineers' bulldozer busy on repair and demolition work.

A bright moon on the night of 3-4 October made patrolling difficult and brought prompt machine-gun fire from an enemy keeping a keen eye on the southern bank of the river. With rumours of Germans on the prowl, a sentry's hair rose as rusling round a haystack grew nearer. Then came a shaky voice: 'Don't shoot—it's only me.' Taking no chances, his relief had crawled all the way. The right-hand company (2 Company) sent a strong patrol (10 Platoon) out and reconnoitred the river front and confirmed that the forward slopes on the bank opposite were occupied. Here came the best example of cool courage that Lin Faull can remember. 'Sid Tsukigawa (one of the finest soldiers and gentlemen I was privileged to meet) crossed this river in bright moonlight and avoiding a trip wire on the river bottom climbed the far stop-bank and stood on top and had a good look at the Jerries dug in on the reverse side.' But the patrol, hampered by the moonlight, later ran into strong enemy fire by the river and suffered casualties. A heavy artillery and mortar 'stunk' was called down on the suspected enemy positions.

Donald had ordered Lieutenant Twigg to take his platoon (from 3 Company) out at dusk, advance to the bank of the [Fiumicino](#), and attempt to ambush an enemy patrol, take prisoners, and generally observe. Some time before the platoon set out, however, a heavy 'stunk' came down on the platoon's immediate front from our artillery. No change or cancellation of orders was issued. As they expected, Twigg's party reached the river to find the enemy standing to, and was engaged immediately. Simultaneously the enemy laid down heavy counter-fire. Fully expecting the enemy to follow up behind his fire, Twigg sent his sergeant and the platoon back, but stayed himself with two of his best men to observe the enemy lines. Before reaching the platoon area the two men were killed and Twigg, wounded, recalls 'trying to decide (a bit dazed, no doubt) which I should carry back with my one free hand, my Thomson or a bottle of rum, which was to have been consumed once our patrol had succeeded. My mouth was pretty well shattered, and the platoon sentry was rather inclined to shoot me because I couldn't reply to his challenge.' Pitying Twigg, with his mangled mouth, in the ambulance was Sergeant

Gilbert, who had recently returned to the battalion from New Zealand and was now out of the war, partly paralysed and in agony, the back of his neck gashed by a mortar-bomb splinter. He was on the stretcher above Twigg in the ambulance.

Gilbert had been working out some accounts for comforts which the platoon (Lieutenant Cave's) had just received from Company Headquarters. A heavy mortar 'stonk' had burst all round the house and one bomb had landed on top of a haystack just outside Gilbert's room. The only fragment to penetrate the house came through the transom over the door and passed through the sergeant's neck. Private [Pemberton](#)⁵⁵ (who afterwards lost a foot on a Schu mine) was one of the stretcher-bearers who carried the sergeant out. 'We got a pasting on the way. Several times we were forced to drop Gilbert and take to earth.'

On the night of 4-5 October 10 Platoon ⁵⁶ (well informed, thanks to Tsukigawa's daring 'look-see' over the [Fiumicino](#) the night before), crossed the river by La Chiusa, captured a German from 4 Parachute Regiment in one dugout, and probably killed two other Germans with grenades and tommy guns in another. The other company, moving back to the scene of last night's clash, spotted an enemy party carrying boxes—probably mines—to the stopbank. They held their fire until these men had gathered together and then killed three and wounded or killed two others. The patrol next threw grenades at another enemy party further downstream and shot up a house across the river. One man was wounded in this patrol.

A high-velocity gun scored seven direct hits on one of the battalion's positions and heavily bombarded Battalion Headquarters, but only one man was wounded. Eleven Platoon met fire from an enemy patrol which was thought to have crossed the river, but mortar and artillery fire checked any further threats. The last day in this place was overcast and showery. The changeover went quietly enough, except for traffic difficulties along slippery roads.

While the battalion rested in [Viserba](#) again, the New Zealand drive to the Savio River began—a seventeen-day task. Once the [Savio](#) was reached, all the New Zealanders would take a well earned rest and leave the mud and the canals and the wretched outdoor living conditions for clean and peaceful stone houses tucked away in quiet little Apennine towns.

The attack, in the last autumn of the war, began with the Canadians on the left lined up by Route 9, the New Zealanders in the centre, and some miscellaneous units known as Cumberland Force over by the now unimportant coast. Fifth Brigade crossed the Fiumicino River and by 16 October was nearing the Pisciatello River. There 22 Battalion reappeared on the scene and took over from 21 Battalion.

By this time the dust was back again, and great, rolling yellowish-white clouds marked the paths of advancing columns of all types of transport—trucks, guns and tanks. But close under the surface the mud waited.

On the New Zealanders' right flank 22 Battalion, in a smart advance in which two were killed and three wounded, came to within half a mile of the [Pisciatello](#). During the day (16 October) 1 Company marched across country and two small rivers without opposition other than mortaring and took up platoon positions about 400 yards south of Via Ventrata. That night a patrol from 7 Platoon to Via Ventrata did not contact the enemy—so far so good—and early on the 17th the company moved forward and took up positions along the road. Orders came to attack the enemy paratroopers, who were in a position round casas about 400 yards ahead. Six and 7 Platoons got their objective, but 8 Platoon was pinned down by spandau fire. The tanks, which were called up, drew awkward fire from heavy guns and blasted unsuccessfully at the spandaus. Under cover of the tanks firing, a withdrawal was made to a deep ditch, wide at the top but narrow at the bottom. Here they were pinned down by mortar fire, then hit by a mortar bomb which wounded Laurie [Duffy](#),⁵⁷ Ernie [Burch](#)⁵⁸ (in fifteen places), and three others. They then retreated again, still under heavy mortar fire, attacked again and took the casa objective from the flank. Privates [Grant](#)⁵⁹ and John [Harold](#)⁶⁰ were killed.

In this charge 6 Platoon in particular staged a model attack to seize firmly-held [Casalini](#). A troop of tanks supported the platoon, and with these tanks one section made as if to attack from the front. Meanwhile Sergeant George Palmer led the remaining two sections to the right flank, where one section, owing to hedges and obstacles, did not see Palmer and his section (a mere eight men) move off into the final attack. Making the best possible use of cover, these eight men crept undetected to within striking distance, and then charged into the middle of thirty unsuspecting paratroopers. The eight men seized the Germans' house while the enemy dived into

their trenches round it. The section then was able to shoot them down from the second-story windows. Fierce fighting ended with the enemy utterly routed, leaving four machine guns behind as well as dead and wounded.

Further parties from 6 Platoon came up to hold complete superiority over the ground. This smart piece of work was described as 'a copybook demonstration of the values of speed and surprise', but Palmer says: 'The credit for this should go to the chaps with me. I was lucky enough to give the right orders at the right time and the section did the job.'

But trouble was looming for 7 Platoon, which was holding a forward position on an open flank. After midnight a heavy enemy 'stonk' and smoke barrage came down, particularly round this platoon. Then, with bazookas, rifles and grenades an enemy party, thought to number fifty, closed in and surrounded the house, which was defended by two sections under Lieutenant Graham Bassett. In the following fight 7 Platoon, tried to the utmost, fought back viciously. Bazooka fire smashed into the casa's walls. Four men were wounded, including Bassett himself, and with the No. 38 radio set soon wrecked, the defenders lost all contact with Company Headquarters. Ignoring great pain from his wounds, Bassett kept control of his besieged platoon and, as further casualties were suffered, overcame the loss in manpower by cleverly altering the positions of his men.

For more than six hours and until well after dawn the enemy continued to press. The platoon's grand defence beat off every attack. With the coming of the longed-for dawn fire slackened, but then another strong party returned, again enveloped 7 Platoon's house, and in the ensuing heavy fire-fight made skilful use of haystacks and natural cover. Again 7 Platoon defied the attackers until tanks and 6 Platoon moved up in support. Then 200 yards away a white flag went up, and the exhausted platoon collected a number of prisoners. At least eight enemy dead lay about, and other casualties had been carried back in the night. For his 'quiet, cool leadership, and his complete disregard for his personal safety', Bassett received an immediate MC. Seven of his men were casualties.

Bassett writes: 'It was a platoon show: every member of Number 7 played his part to the best of his ability and as I would have wished him to.' He pays tribute to 'the excellent work of Sergeant Ian [Park](#)⁶¹ who was killed in a later action. Park

maintained the morale and discipline of the platoon after my wounds made me hand over.'

That night Major O'Reilly, returning from a trip round his platoons, was picking his way down a track leading to a casa. From a top-story window Russell,⁶² a tommy-gunner, spotted the figure in the gloom. Now Russell favoured the big drum magazine on his tommy gun, but the Major was dead against it because of stoppages. He was always trying to persuade Russell to use the short clip magazine. Spotting the unidentified figure approaching at 20 yards, Russell let rip with a shower of twenty rounds. The officer survived, came uninjured through the doorway, and told a shaking and apologetic Russell: 'If you shoot again at such short range, boy, and miss you'll be taken off that tommy gun.' An hour later Russell was overheard telling a comrade: 'Anyhow, the old b— won't be talking about stoppages again.'

George Barnes⁶³ and four comrades slept in a barn until 'a terrible uproar: four Ites (two men and two women) on the business end of a rope trying to assist nature in the birth of a calf. The cow gave a convulsive heave, the Ites threw a couple of buckets of water over her, and all screamed enough to wake the dead, but George Barnes never woke or stirred.'

The battalion had arrived just in time for a spectacular change in tactics: a heavily armoured right hook over more than five miles of countryside to the Savio River, which flowed more or less north from Route 9. This hook would smash the front between the inland town of Cesena (on Route 9) and Cervia by the coast, cut all roads below the river leading to the coast, bring about the fall of Cesena, and free yet another stretch of the highly important Route 9. More important than all this, as far as 22 Battalion was concerned, was that for the first time 4 Armoured Brigade would work all together as one brigade. Previously its tanks had been split up under infantry brigades in support of infantry advances. Now the tanks had come into their own, in a drive of their own (in mud of their own, too), and a company from 22 Battalion would support each regiment. While the tanks shot up other tanks and strongpoints, the 22nd's men would protect them from attacks by enemy infantry and light anti-tank guns. 'We were going to rush through like the Panzer outfits of the early days.'

In the darkness of the last hours of 18 October the artillery flayed the banks of the [Pisciatiello](#). Two battalions crossed. By mid-morning on the 19th two regiments of New Zealand tanks were over. Some of the 28-ton Shermans crossed by ark bridges; others, striking trouble on the mucky banks, crossed by other bridges.

At 9.50 a.m., and to the very day exactly one year after the brigade left Egypt after its months of training for just such an assault, Brigadier Pleasants gave the orders for the tanks and the 22nd to advance. Forward they went, 18 Armoured Regiment on the right with 2 Company 22 Battalion carried on the tanks themselves. ('OK for the tank commander inside the tank with just his head showing,' comments Ken MacKenzie, 'but what about the P.B.I. on the outer like lollies on a wedding cake?') On the left was [20 Armoured Regiment](#), with 3 Company.

Flat farmland stretched before them on their 2000-yard front, dotted with houses and trees and criss-crossed with narrow lanes. Further rain arrived in the night, but the ground was not yet 'untankable'. The chief obstacles were mud and deep ditches, and here good work was done by Sherman bulldozers hauling out stalled tanks. During the day the armoured brigade won almost three miles, at the cost of seven tanks knocked out and twice as many bogged down. The enemy, startled at first when tanks attacked instead of infantry, soon settled down to a steady resistance. Frequently a tank would plug two or three 75-millimetre shells through a house, the infantry would rush the place in extended order—three yards between men—and a flanking section, leaving the others to deal with the front of the building, would swing round, gallop to reach the rear and catch any enemy escaping from the back door.

In this attack Private Watt wishes 'to pay a tribute to some of the platoon officers: the one and two-pippers who actually led the platoons into battle: a platoon (often composed largely of men like me, a bit jittery and not too sure of themselves) prepared to follow anyone who would lead.'



4 ARMoured BRIGADE'S ATTACK TO THE SAVIO, 19-20 OCTOBER 1944
A company from 22 Battalion supported each regiment

4 armoured brigade's attack to the savio, 19-20 october 1944 **A company from 22 Battalion supported each regiment**

Going up to the start line, Watt saw 'Snow' Pearce⁶⁴ hand his wallet and a few little things to a comrade who was left out of battle, saying: 'Here, you know what to do with these.' The advance at first was very quiet: men were resting by a three-foot-deep drain when Cash⁶⁵ 'got a very uneasy feeling of being too high in the air', so got into the drain. His neighbour, Pearce, said: 'What the hell are you getting down there for? There's nothing—'. From out of the silence two shells landed. 'Not even finishing what he was saying he fell on top of me dead.'

The first objective, a road called 'Cassy', was reached, with the German retreating under the cover of lively shelling. Charlie Pollard⁶⁶ had a large hole knocked through the brim of his helmet, and 'what a relief to bolt into those big stone casas with the cattle standing quietly in their stalls in the one room and the Ites in the next having their dinner or, more often, down a hole under the floor.' Watt continues: 'As we stood in that casa looking out the window at the shells and mortars falling all round, I, and probably some of the others, felt "this is too hot, we'll just have to shelter here for a while." But after a few minutes [the platoon commander, Maclean] looked out the window at the shells falling and said to the chap with the 88 set: "Send a message. On 'Cassy', pushing on to 'Gertie'" [the second road and the second objective]. Then turning to us all he said quietly: "Well chaps, we've got to go on." I don't honestly think I'd have the courage to go out that door. But if a man like that was willing to lead, we were all willing to follow. I take off my hat to men like that.'⁶⁷

'Gertie' was reached, and cover taken inside casas, but a short withdrawal was made after dark; the tanks did not like the chances of Germans sneaking through with bazookas. The three tanks with Maclean's platoon got bogged in a field; the platoon went into a house, and the sections drew lots for who would go first to dig a slit trench by each tank and guard those tanks under the heaviest fire I have ever experienced. [McGirr and Lindsay⁶⁸ were killed by a shell as they were crossing a ditch towards the bogged tanks.] I will never forget the hush that came over the platoon and the look on the face of our officer as he came into the room and said "They're both killed."

Although the plan to occupy Calabrina and Osteriaccia that day failed, the German was about to leave. Under cover of heavy shells and mortaring, and to the sound of demolitions, he began his move back behind the sheltering banks of the Savio.

At dawn on 20 October patrols from the two companies probed ground ahead of 18 and 20 Regiment's tank laagers. The enemy was nowhere in sight. Calabrina and Osteriaccia were deserted.

The armour now swung west towards the Savio River. With the Canadians battling up Route 9 and forcing the enemy out of Cesena, the enemy's main aim was to get behind the river with all speed. Delayed by the swampy ground and the skilful demolitions on the roads and particularly on the crossroads (some craters could have held a cart and horse comfortably), the armour took most of the morning to reach the Rio Granarolo stream, where bridge-laying tanks went to work. From here 18 Armoured Regiment (on the right, accompanied by 2 Company) pressed on uneventfully almost to the bank of the Savio itself by dusk. Twentieth Regiment (with 3 Coy),⁶⁹ finding the going more difficult, nevertheless drew level with them by sunset. Keith Whisker⁷⁰ (3 Company) ran into a deep cesspit.

The platoon, mostly new reinforcements, had a tendency to bunch when advancing. There was no more bunching against Whisker, at least, that afternoon. The house where he fell was full of Italians, among whom a woman gave birth to a baby when the tanks shelled the buildings.

The battalion ran into little opposition, and at night the two companies grouped

about their tanks to protect them from sudden attack. The hook was accomplished, but commanders were worried about the right flank, which lay open to attack from the coastal sector. During the day not one tank had been lost, and twenty Germans were in the bag.

After midnight a patrol from 14 Platoon reconnoitred the river area opposite 18 Regiment's front. Led by a sapper, Lieutenant [Skipage](#),⁷¹ the patrol found the [Savio](#) a tough proposition. The banks, high and steep, seemed impassable to tanks; the water itself was about 65 feet wide and three feet deep, and a Bailey bridge 130 feet long would be needed to make a crossing. The patrol, although suffering no casualties, did not gather this information undisturbed. By a partly wrecked steel pontoon bridge a spandau post spotted the infantrymen. Brens replied, and the work went on.

Next day (21 October) advanced patrols from the battalion safely checked tracks running west to the river and consolidated with the tanks, 2 Company with [18 Armoured Regiment](#) moving across to link with the [Divisional Cavalry](#) near Pisignano. That night every New Zealand gun handy to the river opened up to fox the enemy while the Canadians further south unsuccessfully attempted to cross.

Meanwhile 7 Platoon (led admirably by Sergeant Ian Park after Bassett had been knocked out), again distinguished itself in another Bassett-like stand. Sergeant Park, Sergeant Reeve and his sadly depleted section had been sent up to aid a knocked-out tank near La Rossa. The two sergeants, from a drain, exchanged grenades 'with our unpleasant neighbours' until a call came from the back of the section that Germans were cutting in behind the party. The two raced back to a casa, where in the meantime others from the party had barricaded themselves in. A tommy-gunner killed two of the advancing Germans as Private Devereux turned to thrust a large table on end against the door. Devereux goes on: 'We climbed the stairs and Tedesky was out in canals and ditches in front of us a few chain—maybe two chain. He let fly with Spandaus and I got right onto him with the Bren. I got a burst through the shoulder and I remember nothing till Tom Dolan and Private Heffernan were treating me down the stairs. Tedesky hit the door with a grenade, and Dolan shot him through a small window. They said if it hadn't been for that propped up door he would have got us all.'

Park, Reeve, and a few others entered the besieged casa. Then, despite urgings to stay put, Park, Reeve and two privates swept out and attacked round the casa; Park met his death and a grenade wounded Reeve and Burlace.⁷² The casa held out until dusk, when the wounded were taken away. After dark Major O'Reilly ordered 6 Platoon (Sergeant Palmer) up the machine-gunned road to support 7 Platoon, which had retired successively to one house, then to another. The loss of the two NCOs, Park and Reeve, had led understandably enough to a certain amount of confusion. Six Platoon found the area lit up by blazing haystacks. One tank was bogged down helplessly. Palmer (who received an immediate DCM for his leadership this night and for his achievements on 17 October) swiftly organised 7 Platoon to give immediate cover to the tanks and the ground ahead, and was preparing to attack north when Maclean arrived with 5 Platoon to take charge. This platoon and 6 Platoon occupied two neighbouring houses without fighting; Palmer and Lance-Sergeant Coppell (who also was prominent this night) found no sign of movement around bamboo clumps to the right.

Then twenty to thirty German paratroopers came down the road to occupy the two houses. The two platoons waited, then poured out a hail of fire. The battle was on, a confused mêlée with violent firing on both sides. At times it was difficult to discriminate between enemy movement and moving shadows caused by flickering flames from the burning haystacks. Finally the Germans crawled away up a deep drain, leaving behind dead, wounded, bazookas and a machine gun. Private Lealand⁷³ later died from wounds, and the day had cost the company no fewer than ten casualties.

Some 88-millimetre shells fell very close to the houses during the night, and at one unfortunate stage the tanks were machine-gunning through the back door of 5 Platoon's house, much to everyone's annoyance. A great deal of small-arms ammunition was used during the night for defensive fire, particularly by the tanks.

During the fracas round the house Private Hawley⁷⁴ won the MM. Roving out into no-man's-land, if not into enemy territory itself, in his ambulance carrier, Hawley had evacuated the wounded in the first action and returned before the engagement with the parachutists began. This time he went out with a stretcher party to bring in a wounded NCO lying 50 yards from an enemy post. Burning haystacks lit up the

place, and there was next to no cover. While returning they saw an enemy patrol following only 30 yards behind. During the attacks which followed, Hawley volunteered to carry a message back to 1 Company headquarters, and he got through, despite the light from the flaming haystacks and the enemy close at hand. 'At times,' Adriatic campaigners say, 'that blessed RAP of ours was just about catching casualties as they fell.'

All through this drive up the waterlogged Adriatic coast the Medical Officer, Baird, was well to the fore. A company commander says: 'Only with great difficulty did one CO restrain Baird from getting in front of the troops. On the occasion Palmer was surrounded in the house, Baird brought his RAP right up in front of a certain Company and throughout did an excellent job.'

An officer who saw a good deal of the RAP staff writes: 'One could relate at some length the story of our RAP and its members under the leadership of the Doc. How we were besieged one night when some German patrols infiltrated round behind our lines. How we had a direct hit on the upstairs room where the doctor and padre were sleeping and how they were half buried in rubble. How the RAP liberated several villages ahead of the [Eighth Army](#). How we made new routes for our ambulances only to see them churned into impassable quagmires by the [4th Brigade](#) tanks. But of this I am sure that never did a battalion have such a medical unit. From Doctor down to the humblest drive they could handle the most severely wounded with the care and tenderness of a nurse, and deal with the shirker and malingerer with the harshness of any sergeant major.'

Another man remembered for his work, both spiritual and with the wounded in the forward areas, was Padre Sergel. 'He usually was around when chaps ran into trouble. One can recall some touching and memorable church services held in all kinds of places and under all conditions. There were times at Communion when men couldn't kneel down for the mud, and the padre himself was in gumboots.' One man's impressions can be condensed into these few words: 'The dying and the frightened remembered him.'

A Canadian armoured division began to take over from the New Zealand Division. Twenty-second Battalion, which with the tanks had opened the New Zealand attack on the Adriatic a month ago, featured in the last New Zealand action

here, entering and occupying by itself [Pisignano](#), Borgo Pipa and La Rosetta. Then away down the grey coast they went, turning near [Ancona](#), then inland through [Iesi](#) to the peace and quiet of the rest area high in the [Apennines](#). In its second period by the Adriatic the Division had 1125 casualties, of which 188 came from 22 Battalion, just 100 fewer than those during the [Arezzo](#) and [Florence](#) campaigns in July and August.

And so the New Zealanders ended their association with 1 Canadian Corps, which had broken the Gothic line, and, in four weeks, had covered 14 miles of 'ideal tank country', which unhappily had turned out to be little more than a reclaimed swamp ideal for defence.

On the way back the convoys twisted past notices erected by the generous Canadians. Twenty-second Battalion read, and remembered fondly, one such notice which said: 'Cheerio Kiwis all—nice having worked with you.'

¹ Here Captain C. N. Armstrong returned (via [Italy](#), [Germany](#), [Poland](#), [Sweden](#), England and New Zealand) to his old unit, temporarily going to Support Company. Captured in [Libya](#) in 1941, he received a bar to his MC for many escapes from PW camps which led finally to freedom in [Sweden](#). After furlough in New Zealand, he volunteered to return to the war. Among reinforcements were several old members of the battalion, including [Dick Kendrick](#) and [Ted Bassett](#) who, after being taken prisoner at Ruweisat, escaped in [Italy](#) and went home before rejoining the battalion.

Battalion appointments were: CO, [Lt-Col H. V. Donald](#); 2 i/c, Maj D. Anderson; OC 1 Coy, Maj A. W. F. O'Reilly; OC 2 Coy, Maj K. R. Hutcheson; OC 3 Coy, Maj G. S. Sainsbury; OC 4 Coy, Maj L. G. S. Cross.

² [Pte H. D. Price](#); Hastings; born NZ 7 May 1924; grocer; wounded 2 Oct 1944.

³ 2 Lt F. H. Avery; [Te Awamutu](#); born [Auckland](#), 4 Apr 1924; storeman.

⁴ [Pte W. G. A. Jamieson](#); [Lower Hutt](#); born Mangatainoka, 30 Nov 1904; branch manager, clothing outfitters; twice wounded.

⁵ Pte K. A. McNeil; Coromandel; born Coromandel, 8 Mar 1912; farmer; wounded 14 Sep 1944.

⁶ L-Cpl L. H. Astwood; born Wellington, 12 Nov 1920; clerk; killed in action 14 Sep 1944.

⁷ Pte M. K. Sampson; Whangarei; born Waitara, 11 Nov 1906; clerk; wounded 14 Sep 1944.

⁸ L-Cpl B. G. Spranger; Omata, New Plymouth; born Stratford, 16 Nov 1922; farmer.

⁹ Capt P. L. Collins, MC, m.i.d.; Hastings; born Wellington, 1 Jan 1917; warehouseman; three times wounded.

¹⁰ Sgt L. C. White, m.i.d.; Onehunga; born NZ 11 Oct 1914; motor driver; wounded 15 Sep 1944.

¹¹ Pte E. Devereux; Rapahoe, Runanga; born Southland, 27 Mar 1904; gold miner; wounded 21 Oct 1944.

¹² Sgt F. J. Hughan, m.i.d.; Carterton; born NZ 13 May 1911; twice wounded.

¹³ Pte R. J. Goodall; born NZ 10 Jul 1923; shepherd; wounded 21 Sep 1944.

¹⁴ Pte J. J. Wallace; born NZ 26 Jul 1919; cabinet maker; killed in action 21 Sep 1944.

¹⁵ Cpl O. S. Cockburn; Oamaru; born Lovell's Flat, Otago, 24 Jan 1922; labourer; wounded 25 Sep 1944.

¹⁶ WO II R. Ferris, m.i.d.; Blenheim; born Picton, 11 Apr 1921; grocer; wounded 22 Sep 1944.

¹⁷ 2 Lt J. W. Coppell; Herne Bay, Auckland; born Auckland, 17 Jan 1922; interior decorator.

¹⁸ Cpl M. J. Tarr; Tuai, Wairoa; born Dannevirke, 11 May 1922; farmhand.

¹⁹ Sgt N. F. Callesen, MM; Shannon; born Hamilton, 26 Oct 1921; dairy farmer.

²⁰ Pte S. R. Collins; born Wanganui, 9 Feb 1922; clerk; killed in action 15 Dec 1944.

²¹ L-Cpl R. Gurney; Wanganui; born Wanganui, 7 Sep 1915; slaughterman; wounded 2 May 1945.

²² Pte K. Hansen; Petone; born Wellington, 23 Aug 1923; farmer; wounded 22 Sep 1944.

²³ Pte B. F. W. Douglas; Hastings; born Wellington, 8 Feb 1922; clerk; twice wounded.

²⁴ 2 Lt M. N. Reeve, MM; Te Puke; born NZ 20 Sep 1920; farmhand; wounded 21 Oct 1944.

²⁵ Sgt A. W. Roberts; Te Araroa, Gisborne; born Timaru, 13 Apr 1911; freezing-works foreman; wounded 22 Sep 1944.

²⁶ Pte W. R. Revell; born NZ 11 Sep 1922; tannery employee; twice wounded.

²⁷ Pte J. Lewis; born Northern Ireland, 8 Mar 1903; labourer; killed in action 22 Sep 1944

²⁸ L-Cpl R. B. Lorrigan; Cambridge; born Palmerston North, 17 Jan 1922; clerk; wounded 22 Sep 1944.

²⁹ Pte J. Hill; born Kaitangata, 20 Jun 1911; woollen mills employee; wounded 22 Sep 1944.

³⁰ Knuckey was taken to 3 NZ General Hospital and within a day or two 'in came General Freyberg to see the wounded and displayed the wound [caused by an aeroplane accident] in his side. Very proud of it he was, just like a big schoolboy watching all the time to see there were no sisters about as he was not supposed to be out of bed. He's a tough old stick though.' A favourite time-killer in hospital (among the wounded) was to recall people and places—and pubs. Two stricken comrades one night traced and discussed all the pubs in Napier. Next morning one comrade, greeting the other with the customary 'How are you?', was told: 'Lousy—I've got a hangover—those last two at the Albion topped me off.'

³¹ Pte R. G. Braybrook; Gisborne; born Gisborne, 10 Mar 1917; farmer; twice wounded.

³² 2 Lt N. K. Cope; born NZ 29 Jun 1919; Regular soldier; killed in action 21 Sep 1944.

³³ 2 Lt C. S. Lawson, m.i.d.; New Plymouth; born Palmerston North, 20 May 1904; sales manager; wounded 21 Sep 1944.

³⁴ Sgt I. L. Ford, m.i.d.; Rapanui, Wanganui; born Apiti, 10 Apr 1914; farmer; twice wounded.

³⁵ Dvr D. C. P. Home-Douglas; Levin; born England, 6 Jun 1905; farmer

³⁶ Pte P. D. Small; Palmerston North; born Palmerston North, 26 May 1919; hardware assistant; wounded 22 Sep 1944

³⁷ Cpl A. C. Jimmieson; born Masterton, 25 Jan 1916; farmhand; died of wounds 27 Sep 1944

³⁸ Cpl F. A. Burcher, m.i.d.; Dannevirke; born Masterton, 29 Jun 1922;

exchange clerk; wounded 22 Sep 1944.

³⁹ Pte K. J. MacKenzie; Christchurch; born Waimate, 28 Jan 1922; shop assistant; wounded 15 Apr 1945.

⁴⁰ Pte A. G. Howie; Wellington; born Wanganui, May 1922; civil servant.

⁴¹ Cpl R. R. Herbert; Palmerston North; born England, 27 Jul 1907; shepherd; wounded 22 Sep 1944.

⁴² Brig J. T. Burrows, DSO and bar, ED, m.i.d., Order of Valour (Gk); Christchurch; born Christchurch, 14 Jul 1904; schoolmaster; CO 20 Bn 1941-42, 20 Bn and Armd Regt 1942-43; comd 4 Bde 27-29 Jun 1942, 5 Jul-15 Aug 1942; 5 Bde Mar 1944, Aug-Nov 1944; 6 Bde Jul-Aug 1944; Commander, Southern Military District, Nov 1951-Oct 1953; Commander K Force, Nov 1953-Nov 1954; Commander SMD, Jan 1955-.

⁴³ Maj-Gen C. E. Weir, CB, CBE, DSO and bar, m.i.d.; Wellington; born NZ 5 Oct 1905; Regular soldier; CO 6 Fd Regt Sep 1939-Dec 1941; CRA 2 NZ Div Dec 1941-Jun 1944; GOC 2 NZ Div 4 Sep-17 Oct 1944; 46 (Brit) Div Nov 1944-Sep 1946; Commander, Southern Military District, 1948-49; QMG Nov 1951-Aug 1955; CGS Aug 1955-.

⁴⁴ Pte C. W. V. Bransgrove; born NZ 6 May 1910; tramwayman; killed in action 23 Sep 1944.

⁴⁵ Cpl M. G. Kain; Auckland; born Petone, 8 Oct 1905; warehouse manager; p.w. 23 Sep 1944.

⁴⁶ L-Cpl E. H. de Joux; born Timaru, 5 Apr 1922; public servant; p.w. 23 Sep 1944.

⁴⁷ Pte E. T. Kriete; Wellington; born Wellington, 26 Oct 1916; watersider; p.w. 23 Sep 1944.

⁴⁸ Pte E. O. Jones; born Wanganui, 28 Sep 1923; grocer's assistant;

wounded 25 Sep 1944.

⁴⁹ Other accounts say the start line was anything but quiet.

⁵⁰ Sgt J. A. C. Hanham; Whangarei; born NZ 23 Jul 1922; farm labourer; twice wounded.

⁵¹ Pte L. H. Lapworth; born Wellington, 25 Mar 1906; airways clerk; died of wounds 11 Oct 1944.

⁵² Sgt S. L. I. Tansley; Wellington; born Wellington, 18 Jan 1908; company manager; twice wounded

⁵³ Brig C. L. Pleasants, CBE, DSO, MC, ED, m.i.d.; Wellington; born Halcombe, 26 Jul 1910; schoolmaster; CO 18 Bn and Armd Regt Jul 1942-Mar 1944; comd 4 Armd Bde Sep-Nov 1944; 5 Bde Nov 1944-Jan 1945, May 1945-Jan 1946; twice wounded; Commander, Fiji Military Forces, 1949-53; Commander, Northern Military District, 1953-57; Central Military District, 1957-.

⁵⁴ L-Cpl P. C. Clarke; born England, 28 Dec 1917; bootmaker; killed in action 2 Oct 1944.

⁵⁵ Pte E. A. Pemberton; Wairoa; born Wairoa, 10 May 1908; clerk; wounded 15 Dec 1944.

⁵⁶ Among those on this raid were Lieutenant Revell, Tsukigawa, Ron Winstanley, Lin Faull, Alex Sinclair, and several others.

⁵⁷ Pte L. Duffy; born Durham City, England, 23 Nov 1920; printer's apprentice; died of wounds 17 Oct 1944.

⁵⁸ Pte E. F. Burch; born NZ 28 May 1910; station manager; wounded 17 Oct 1944; died on active service 13 Nov 1945.

⁵⁹ Pte A. A. J. Grant; born NZ 3 Jul 1921; meter repairer; killed in action 17 Oct 1944.

⁶⁰ Pte J. G. Harold; born Pongaroa, 12 Dec 1921; fencer; killed in action 17 Oct 1944.

⁶¹ Sgt I. B. Park; born NZ 29 May 1922; stock clerk; killed in action 21 Oct 1944.

⁶² L-Cpl J. N. Russell, m.i.d.; born NZ 4 Sep 1920; truck driver; wounded 15 Dec 1944; killed in action 3 May 1945.

⁶³ Pte G. C. Barnes; Hastings; born NZ 20 Feb 1910; barman.

⁶⁴ Pte W. S. Pearce; born Auckland, 22 Jan 1913; carpenter; killed in action 19 Oct 1944.

⁶⁵ Pte R. G. Cash; Ngamutu, New Plymouth; born NZ 10 Dec 1919; dairy farmhand; wounded 30 Nov 1944.

⁶⁶ Sgt C. Pollard; Te Puke; born Wanganui, 4 Sep 1915; hardware assistant; wounded 2 Aug 1944.

⁶⁷ 'In this tribute I would also include platoon sergeants like "Rocky" Long, our sgt at that time. When we were sheltering in a ditch with bullets flying he would always be the first to stand up and walk up the line saying: "Just stay where you are a minute or two and she'll soon blow over."'

⁶⁸ Pte J. D. Lindsay; born Wellington, 21 Aug 1909; bank officer; killed in action 19 Oct 1944.

⁶⁹ A massive hedge, with perhaps a tank-trap ditch behind it, barred the way at one stage. Spandaus, too, were expected on the other side. Halting his tanks, the troop commander asked an officer to look through the hedge. Hearing the request, Fred Fisher, with his No. 38 set, and knowing of the

possible dangers, ran to the hedge and had to be hauled out by his heels and ordered to sit down while the officer wormed his way through and viewed the other side. The officer writes: 'He, in that instant was prepared to give me everything, literally, and not to me personally—I don't recall having seen him before this, for I had just come back from two months in hospital. He was prepared to do that for any of us. But there were so many things done like that amongst the companies....'

⁷⁰ Pte K. C. Whisker; Palmerston North; born Feilding, 5 Oct 1911; farm labourer.

⁷¹ Lt L. T. Skipage; Durban, South Africa; born Featherston, 25 Sep 1912; structural engineer.

⁷² L-Cpl E. J. Burlace; Dannevirke; born Woodville, 23 Aug 1913; farmer; wounded 21 Oct 1944.

⁷³ Pte N. P. Lealand; born NZ 23 Jul 1908; clerk; died of wounds 22 Oct 1944.

⁷⁴ Dvr R. J. H. Hawley, MM; born Dannevirke, 4 Jan 1922; porter.

22 BATTALION

CHAPTER 13 – CASA ELTA

CHAPTER 13

Casa Elta

Astern note ended the routine orders for October. Vino, poultry, pigs, cars and clothing had disappeared in [Fabriano](#), where the removal of furniture, fittings, and electric light bulbs 'will seriously prejudice the smooth running of the theatres.... civilian women have suffered from the unwanted attentions of drunken soldiers', the local Carabinieri (police) complained that their pistols and rifles had been taken away from them, and 'in the event of further incidents occurring it will be necessary to move the Brigade from the built-up area into the fields.' Two men stealing a goose were chased by a fierce old woman with a sickle, and a man taking cabbages in the night comforted himself with the thought: 'Anyway he fought against us at [Alamein](#).'

November was just into its stride with intensive training 'and much sporting activity' when the battalion was changed from a motorised battalion to a normal infantry battalion and returned to the 5 Brigade fold again, still retaining the distinctive beret. The difficult country in [Italy](#), either mountainous or low-lying and cut up with rivers and canals, had hampered a motorised battalion in swift advances. Now, with winter setting in (already a light snow had fallen), conditions grew steadily worse. The only mobile operation the battalion took part in up to this time in [Italy](#) was the advance to the [Savio](#). Everyone in the battalion regretted the change, 'the degeneration' as some put it, but there was just no choice. Anyhow, at the end of an overcast and rainy November, roads and tracks would be in such poor shape that at one stage anti-tank guns would have to be towed into position from Route 9 by oxen!

So the men were posted back into 'provincial' companies once again, ¹ returning to the original plan: A Company was manned with [Wellington](#) men, B with [Wellington- West Coast](#), C with Hawke's Bay and Wairarapa, D with Taranaki. The loss of their liberal transport ended many comforts.

Fourth Reserve Motor Transport Company's three-tonners, for the first time in [Italy](#), took 22 Battalion away from [Fabriano](#) on 24 November, away into the north, to the painfully advancing front, to relieve a British unit on the Lamone River, north-

east of another newly captured town, [Forli](#). Over the wide Lamone River, its massive stopbanks cunningly terraced, tunnelled and fortified, lay the next prize, [Faenza](#), destined to fall before Christmas (with 22 Battalion thrusting out over most trying country below the town) and to serve the New Zealanders as a winter base.

The battalion's new position, facing the Lamone River, was a difficult spot. The enemy had converted [Ronco](#) settlement just over the river into a stronghold, and held firmly in [Scaldino](#), east of the river and immediately north of the battalion's positions. The first task for the rested New Zealanders would be to clear the Germans back over the river. On the battalion's left was 23 Battalion; on the right, the [Gurkhas](#). Until this attack began, the battalion sent out vigorous patrols to investigate the river and its banks, to locate enemy positions, and to spot minefields. [Air Force](#) support round [Ronco](#) 'was excellent and very heartening to the boys.' A party under Lieutenant Ken Joblin (12 Platoon) penetrated a stopbank and was promptly driven back by strong fire and grenades. One man was killed, Private O'Connor. ²

The next night (27 November) a small 11 Platoon patrol, under Lieutenant Forbes McHardy, left to find the exact number and position of spandau nests still remaining in a curve on the eastern bank of the river. McHardy left his four men to cover him, crossed the stopbank, and came right round behind this clump of enemy. Returning to pick up his men, he paused for a final look, stepped right in front of a spandau, and died instantly.

But thanks to this patrol, a surprise attack next night succeeded in driving the three spandau posts over the river.

McHardy's body was recovered, his tommy gun beside him. Near here Private [Beaven](#) ³ was wounded.

Along this riverbank opposition was heavy and vigorous, and both sides brought down direct fire at the slightest provocation. In retaliation for 12 Platoon's use of a Piat mortar from the top story of its casa, 'a Panther tank sneaked up onto a stopbank and blazed away until things got too hot for it. Its gun hacked away at the top of our casa, 12 direct hits, like a mad dentist attacking a tooth, and we [12 Platoon] were the shrinking nerves, cowering in the basement. Two men were

bruised and shaken by falling masonry.' Soon after this the platoon was plagued by some of our own shells falling short. Nor was the artillery too popular with the Gurkhas over to the right.

Lieutenant Lin Thomas's fighting patrol round Rombola in the night was fired on, and before identity could be fixed, dawn approached and the patrol withdrew. Lin Thomas and Bob Ferris carried out the one casualty, Private Kennard.⁴ Private McMillan⁵ and another man on the right flank lost contact, and with the coming of daylight took to the nearest cover, a tiny hen-house, where they huddled all day with a good view of the Germans moving about. When an Italian came to feed his fowls in the afternoon, the two men asked him not to give them away, but other Italians moving about the farm 'cast such fearful and curious glances at the hen-house that by dusk the German sentries were beginning to give it some close observation.' While the sentries looked elsewhere, the two wriggled down a shallow ditch by the hen-house and escaped back to their platoon. Within two days the farmer's wife was killed by our tank fire.

Information gleaned by patrols (the hen-house couple stressed that the area was strongly held and heavily mined) was put to good use at 8.30 a.m. on 30 November, when D Company went into an attack to clear the pocket of enemy ahead over the river. Working well with C Squadron 18 Armoured Regiment's tanks, the company pushed north-eastwards over 1200 lively (and muddy) yards, cleaning out a corner along the Lamone and seizing the first two groups of buildings (Scaldino di Sotto and Rombola), and continuing until by noon three further groups of buildings were in its hands. The enemy, answering with spandaus and mortars, held good positions in houses and under haystacks, which the tanks methodically and most hearteningly shot up with incendiary and high explosive. Joining in the attack, the battalion mortars fired 1130 rounds; supporting machine guns, 37,000 rounds.

The platoons, fairly widely spaced, worked independently: Sergeant Massey Wood's platoon on the left, Second-Lieutenant Jim Sherratt's⁶ in the centre, Second-Lieutenant Paterson's on the right. The line of attack was roughly parallel with the riverbank.

By the river Wood's platoon advanced briskly, but slowed up once when civilians stampeded past ('I couldn't help but think of Barbara Freitchie as the old lady ran

past with her grey hair streaming behind her') and when a plucky German, found later to be wearing the Iron Cross ribbon, attacked a tank on his own, firing his revolver and circling the tank defiantly until wounded in the legs by grenades. The platoon rushed its final objective, a large three-storied house near the stopbank (apparently a German headquarters). '... the boys were wildly excited and yelling loudly.... excitement ran high' as surrendering parties rose from 'slitties' and from under a haystack, or fled through olive trees and smoke. The platoon took the house and hastily sorted out positions to hold against a possible sally over the top of the stopbank as rifle and mortar fire spattered through the position.

In the centre the advance of Sherratt's platoon was handicapped through misfortune in a minefield. Near a disabled tank two prisoners approached. One trod on an S-mine (escaping injury himself) and five men of one section fell either wounded or severely shaken. Don [Stoneham](#)⁷ died. Comrades comforted Private [White](#)⁸ 'by telling him we had a date in his favourite pub in [Wanganui](#)', but his stomach wounds proved fatal.

While to the left the two platoons cleared and occupied ground to as far as Casa di Sopra, on the right Paterson's platoon converged on Casa di Mezzo, a couple or so buildings behind a crossfire from spandaus placed at intervals right across the front, and where bazookas fired at the tanks. In this hot spot Private Freddy [Fisher](#)⁹ (with the No. 38 radio set) met his death. The only choice for Paterson's platoon was a frontal attack.

The tanks softened up the defences, the 25-pounders delivered a small and uncomfortably close 'stonk', and then the platoon went in, firing from the hip and taking the last 30 yards at the run. One section sprinted round the back of a building to cut off escape. A hitherto unnoticed and silent spandau, now slightly behind them, opened up most disconcertingly, but the nearest man, Private Trevor [Selby](#),¹⁰ turned immediately on the spandau, coolly walked towards it, and put all thirty rounds from his Bren magazine into the chest of the man operating it. 'The other Hun who had been assisting with the spandau put his hands up and was still green and shaking violently when he marched away fifteen minutes later with the other prisoners.' Di Mezzo fell, and without much further trouble the platoon went on to Casa di Sotto and halted for the rest of the day in a large white building.

D Company in its advance had collected twenty-two prisoners (one of whom, a company commander, Lieutenant Menkel, provided a rich haul of documents and a trace of a minefield 'pleasingly accurate'), had killed about as many, and had lost two killed and seven wounded, one of whom, John Oldfield ¹¹ (felled by a mortar and distressingly wounded on top of the head and in shoulder and elbow), made one of the pluckiest recoveries in the history of the battalion. In action this day for the first time were a high proportion of young reinforcements who won this tribute from a platoon commander: '[They] had obviously been well trained in their territorial regiments before leaving NZ [and] worked beautifully together. They walked at their objective firing steadily from the hip, their line straight and the distance of three yards between men maintained evenly throughout. Actually it was a great thrill to me to be there to watch them.'

Paterson's platoon went on in the dark night after Corporal Cliff Hatchard and two others had scouted some 600 yards ahead without striking trouble. They broke into and occupied a large house (Gabadina) close to the riverbank. Before dawn someone with a bottle of concentrated Horlicks tablets announced 'Breakfast ready.' 'Now our Company 2 i.c. Capt. Bob Wood ¹² had only been appointed recently, but we had seen enough of him to give the boys such faith in his ability to find and feed us no matter what, that many of the boys arrived with two dixies and a mug extended in the dark.'

At sunrise unsuspecting Germans directly across the road stretched and settled comfortably around three spandau pits and strolled round a small house. The platoon trained its Brens on the spandaus, waited, then as two Gurkha scouts came up the road, opened deadly fire while Paterson and Morrie Reeve's section charged out to seize the house and most of the dumbfounded occupants. Not quite half-way between the house and the stopbank stood a haystack. Here two Germans, lugging a machine gun, ducked down when they found they hadn't time to make the 30 yards to the stopbank. Paterson shouted, 'Herein kommen!' 'Wir schießen nicht!' and then (inspired): 'Wir haben panzer!' Simultaneously a German officer half-reared from behind the stopbank and started roaring at the two men too. 'It was very funny. The Hun officer, exceedingly annoyed, flung his hands in the air, shaking his fists, when the two ran over to us.'

Inside the house the captives huddled on a heap of hay while the platoon, munching ersatz chocolate and sweet biscuits, kept the stopbank under fire, and jeered (in a friendly way through wall ventilators) at Morrie Reeve, temporarily but harmlessly shut out of the house.

'I remember Morrie calling in mock desperation from the cowshed wall alongside the house. We were all in a somewhat hilarious mood.' Sergeant Johnny Law¹³ got the 2-inch and Piat mortars going and ranged with smoke bombs, which the men inside the house thought was a German ruse to mask an immediate attack. Instantly they fired furiously, as did the enemy, equally misled. Several minutes passed before both sides calmed down. Finally the stopbank became quiet. The arrival of an anti-tank gun had convinced the Germans that this was a powerful force. But then heavy mortaring and shelling took over. The Gurkhas relieved the platoon that afternoon, and for his inspiring leadership Paterson (who before the war, as a 'student missionary', had a small Presbyterian church for a time) was awarded the MC.

The fresh ground was held for the remaining week in the line, a week of patrolling and observing (sometimes with a periscope) round the river. Rocket-firing Thunderbolts and Spitfires strafed generously. Reacting promptly to rumours of a vino factory nearby, Captain 'Junior' McLean, with jeep, driver, and storeman 'Hicko' Broughton, found the factory floor a foot deep in flowing vermouth. McLean and driver left 'Hicko' to guard the factory and sped back for tins to fill. Returning, they ran into an anxious English officer dragging a half-drowned 'Hicko' out of the doorway.

Slit trenches for standing patrols were dug along the ledge of the stopbank, sometimes under fire: 'The bullets kept whistling through the grass along the flat top of the stopbank a few feet above our heads, and Sergeant Mick Bougen had a neat bullet hole drilled through his beret.' These slit trenches were manned at dark, about 5.30 p.m., with Germans the other side of the 25-foot-wide river. 'It was a darned cold night and we [10 Platoon] found in the intervening few hours since we had dug the slitties about 2? of water had seeped in and our feet were soon like blocks of ice. Each trench was occupied by two blokes, one of whom stood on a firing step just above, so that he could see across the top of the bank. Each pair did four and a half hours before being relieved. We just stood and listened and froze, and repeated the

performance the following night.'

Fog came down to hide the river, which was rising after more rain, and brief glimpses of logs and rubbish drifting past sent out anxious alarms: 'Enemy boats approaching!' D Company repulsed a genuine attack over the river one night. Sergeant Tsukigawa ('the man who brooded when left out of a patrol'), taking a quick peep over the stopbank, was shot neatly through the ear. Spandau fire badly wounded Sergeant [Long](#).¹⁴ Before dawn four Germans, including a company sergeant-major, came over under a white flag and spoke freely about positions. Men sleeping on the floor of a casa had a rude awakening when a shell burst in the top of a nearby tree. A window's shutters were inconveniently open and three men collected wounds.

Pandemonium burst in a 'Chinese attack' in the night of 3-4 December, a hoax to draw attention from 46 British Division successfully crossing the Lamone River further inland to the New Zealanders' left. Bogus messages flashed between brigade and battalion headquarters, and between battalions and companies. Tanks crawled round in circles; signallers filled the air with menacing tales and threats, parties pretended to strike out over the water with bridging material. Every available weapon blazed away—one officer emptied his revolver across the river. Guns and mortars lavishly fired smoke shells; the enemy became thoroughly alarmed—and so did 10 Platoon, bitterly complaining of being smoked out by 34 Battery. Smoke made some men sick, and sometimes respirators were worn. The enemy, of course, congratulated himself on foiling a desperate attack.

Eighteen Platoon, in luck, found quantities of eggs, and a record batch of about thirty were frying invitingly in an outsize pan when suddenly an alarm came from an outpost: numerous grey figures scurrying through no-man's-land to disappear among trees. The eggs were abandoned, signals were sent out, and a general alarm was given. The rumble of tanks was soon heard, and then came the orders. The tanks and infantry in extended line were to comb through the battalion front. The net result of the operation: a flock of about forty grey guinea-fowl!

The battalion, tramping down the muddy road in single file, went out of the line on 8 December to billets in [Forli](#). As soon as it reached the rest area it had a most important engagement. James Casson, a New Zealand war correspondent, writes:

An achievement of which the Battalion was exceedingly proud was the winning of the final in the New Zealand Divisional Rugby Championship, for which the trophy was the Freyberg Cup, on 8 December 1944. The competition was very closely contested and the final roused as much interest in the Division as a Ranfurly Shield match does in New Zealand. In the five rounds which ended with 22 Bn and 2 Ammunition Coy level in points the Battalion drew with 21 Bn, beat 5 Field Regiment, beat 25 Battalion, drew with 2 Ammunition Company and beat Divisional Signals.

The playoff was in the ruins of a fine stadium Mussolini had built in Forli.

On a bitterly cold, grey afternoon the teams lined out before a crowd of 5,000 Kiwis for one of the most closely contested games ever played by Divisional sides. Conditions were shockingly bad. Except for two narrow strips of firm going on the goal lines the ground was a morass.

The teams ¹⁵ were:—

22 Bn: Kenny; Sherratt, Dickson, Sullivan; Bowers, Thomas (capt); Bevan; Beisel, Armstrong, Rogers, Cooper, Simpson, Anderson, Reynolds, Dallimore.

2 Ammunition Coy: Scott; Argus, Neeley, Poultney; Kotlowski, Flynn; King; Remnant, Brown, McLean, Ramsey (capt), Jackson, Pannett, Budd, Stewart. Referee: Sid Nicoll.

For the spectators, festooned over the ruins of the grandstand, perched on vantage points on trucks, or lining the field, it was a game to remember. Both sides played to attack all the time and strove desperately to open play up. In such conditions there was much scrambling, but everyone was giving it a go and play veered rapidly from end to end of the field, with several very near tries and never a dull moment. Despite their faster-moving backs and a weight advantage in the pack of a stone a man the Battalion team, for all but the last 10 minutes of the first half, looked as if they might be beaten by lighter forwards who played magnificently together as a pack.

Right on half-time a scrum was formed 10 yards from the Ammunition Company's goal-line. Battalion hooked the ball and Bevan passed it back to Thomas, who drop-kicked a goal. It was perfectly executed pre-arranged play and it gave

its bridgehead over the [Lamone](#). Carefully 22 Battalion had gone forward into a tricky position: along the main road past [Forli](#), then to the south-west, to a remarkably second-grade road running into a valley with a broken railway line. This narrow approach, under enemy observation, was 'stonked' regularly. Men went part of the way in trucks then foot-slogged into position in the daylight. Two men were ignominiously wounded when a dog exploded a picket mine. This was 'a hell of a place to attack in: quite impassable for tanks. Rough going, few tracks, the sudden drop and rise, and the creek would prohibit a regular advance and a creeping barrage, so the Battalion decided to call for concentrated artillery fire, to be brought down when needed on special points. This worked OK.' Most of the battalion could look across a steep, bush-covered descent to a sharp rise ahead. Near the top of this rise stood the pocket-fortress of [Casa Elta](#).

' [Casa Elta](#) was the usual stone farmhouse, fairly large, two storeyed, with a lean-to cow byre on the back. The privvy, pig-pen, shed and manure-pit were on the left, slightly in front, a well on the right corner of the house. About five small straw stacks stood in the front yard, a few medium-tall pine (?) trees well out in front where the steep slope down started. The whole setup sitting on a nice little knob, a grand view to the right almost to the [Celle](#) Crossroads it seemed (all along that fatal minefield). To the front and left extra steep sides down into gullies and then up onto ridges. The Jerry slitties were well sited around the yard perimeter. I consider that one could move from position to position almost without being observed,' says Len Turner.

A gruesome incident happened in C Company's headquarters area. A civilian hospital had been set up in a house, identified with the [Red Cross](#). All soldiers were kept strictly away from the hospital packed with sick and distressed refugees under the care of a most competent Italian doctor. But a heavy shell landed and exploded in the basement, killing and mutilating many of the unfortunate civilians. A 5 Brigade Headquarters sergeant (probably a security sergeant) worked gallantly, evacuating the pathetic patients, but some civilians still lay helpless in the hospital when the big attack started.

In the last hour of 14 December, 5 Brigade was about to go forward past enemy-held [Faenza](#) to the little village of [Celle](#), almost in the foothills. Panzer grenadiers with tanks were waiting. The Maori Battalion formed up on the right, the

23rd in the centre, and the 22nd on the left in the roughest country, with at least two creeks and ridges to cross. Under artificial moonlight the barrage of 420 guns began—and the enemy immediately flung a vicious counter-barrage through ours, about 150 yards behind it.

C and A Companies (left and right) moved off, supported later by B and D Companies respectively. The battalion's objective that night was left open. If possible, it was to get to the [Senio River](#), 4000 yards away; if not, to the road running west of [Celle](#), about half-way to the river. As soon as the leading companies slowed up, the others were to pass through. Nobody had any idea that the 22nd's ground would be so strongly defended.

Already the enemy was blazing back with shell, mortar, spandau and tracer. Here and there a man staggered or spun round and fell after moving only a few yards. On the others went, in sudden starts and dashes, pushing from house to house over low but steep-sided ground until resistance reached a climax on the side of a steep hill 800 yards away. This was [Casa Elta](#), farmhouse and barns converted into a stout fortress, guarded with many well-placed machine-gun posts and surrounded by mines of every description—a place the battalion would never forget. 'The engineers said later that it was the most thickly sown and had the greatest variety of mines that they had encountered up to that time,' writes a battalion officer, 'and that never had they seen so many footprints so close to so many mines before'.

Piat mortar bombs began blasting the walls of [Casa Elta](#), but the enemy held on, hour after hour. Not until 4 a.m., when it had been by-passed and attacked from the rear by hastily assembled yet stubbornly persistent little parties from C Company, did this strongpoint fall.

The advance on the left to [Casa Elta](#) had been costly for C Company, especially for 15 Platoon (left), which soon had all its leaders wounded or killed. Lieutenant Brian [Edinger](#)¹⁸ was knocked out on the start line as he said 'Come on!'; Sergeant 'Doc' [Fowke](#)¹⁹ took over command; Johnny Hughes was platoon sergeant, and before long both these good men met their deaths in [Casa Elta](#)'s minefields. The isolated and virtually leaderless platoon, still doggedly aiming for [Casa Elta](#), now split into three groups under Private Hugh [Poland](#)²⁰ (soon wounded), Lance-Corporal

Brian Galvin ²¹ ('Boom, up I brewed'), and Private Ron Dixon, ²² a natural leader who won an immediate MM. Dixon capably grouped some of the shreds of his platoon together, pushed on to the right of Casa Elta, captured two defended positions and eight prisoners, severed telephone wires, which isolated Casa Elta, and later joined the last assault on the house.

Thirteen and 14 Platoons, which suffered lighter casualties, also lost touch in the dark and mine-flecked night, but towards 3 a.m. small parties from both of these scattered platoons were converging independently on Casa Elta from behind the farmhouse. '... on getting to the rear we spread out in extended formation and attacked with our weapons firing and yelling to make our numbers sound more than we really were,' writes Lance-Sergeant Len Seaman, ²³ leading about ten men from 13 Platoon. 'We captured several prisoners from an outbuilding to the left of the casa. My attention was then attracted by movement behind the casa itself, and on moving round the building I came in contact with one who was just too cunning for me.' Seaman was hit in the chest.

Groups from 13 and 14 Platoons had now met up and, working zealously together, carried out the last of the skirmishing at close quarters round the casa's walls. One group from 13 Platoon had been delayed by heavy and accurate fire from three spandau posts until Private Henry McIvor, an acting section-leader, voluntarily stalked the first post and wiped it out with his tommy gun, and went on to silence the second post with a grenade when his weapon jammed. McIvor, 'without [whose] acts of gallantry, no progress could have been made' by the platoon, received an immediate MM.

About the last act round the stubborn farmhouse came at 4 a.m., when five Germans approached it with a spandau. Ces Carroll ²⁴ (14 Platoon) raced into the courtyard roaring 'Mani sopra!' (Hands up!)—and with that his tommy-gun magazine fell out with a clatter on to the courtyard. In a mutually horrified silence, friend and foe looked at each other. Then the Germans surrendered: some twenty Germans were taken altogether at Casa Elta.

About an hour before Lance-Sergeant Seaman was hit, B Company had passed through C Company's area, escaping the minefield, but finding the going rough and muddy and the enemy harassing fire heavy and accurate. Scrambling through the

creek, B Company slogged on up towards its first objective, a steep tongue-shaped ridge slightly behind and to the west of [Casa Elta](#). Ten Platoon (Lieutenant Len Turner) was on the left and 11 Platoon (Lieutenant Phil Powell) on the right. A line of small trees ran down the ridge, and the men, silhouetted by artificial moonlight, moved over the skyline fast as enemy spandaus opened up at very close range, bringing half a dozen casualties. Showing up clearly on that barren, steep face, B Company drew brisk spandau fire from [Casa Elta](#) in its rear, where seven spandau posts were found next day.

'We tried a bit of fieldcraft but Jerry had the book with all the answers in it. Here,' says Len Turner, 'Major [Spicer](#)²⁵ (OC B Coy) caught up and suggested we keep the enemy amused with fire while 12 Platoon (Lieutenant Joblin, in reserve) endeavoured to infiltrate between this setup and Casa Elta. This they managed to do, and moved on to Casa Mercante. As this manoeuvre was going on all hell let loose at [Casa Elta](#), and we knew a short time later, as we received a message to move on to [Casa Mercante](#), that [Casa Elta](#) had been captured by Sergeant Len Seaman and Co.'

After a sharp engagement [Casa Mercante](#) fell soon after dawn to B Company, yielding altogether forty prisoners, including ten wounded. A good impression of the scene is given by Ian [Ferguson](#):²⁶ 'Some of 10 Platoon were firing from the hip in the middle of the road, and others were shooting from behind the slight cover of the 2 ft hedge. From the house flashes were ... [coming] from all the windows and it was obviously strongly held. It was a miracle none of our chaps were bowled over, but it was certainly spectacular while it lasted with grenades, Brens, Tommyguns and rifles all cracking and the Jerries returning our fire.'

Turning now to the battalion's right-hand sector, A Company's attack was opened by 6 Platoon (Lin Thomas) and the doomed 7 Platoon (Captain Johnston). Thanks to the rough ground, 6 Platoon arrived at the first objective, Casa Ianna, a little behind the barrage. The house had forward defences under haystacks. One section, under Corporal Tony [Clark](#),²⁷ attacked from a flank while the other two sections fired on the house, which was taken with no casualties. Corporal Clark won an immediate MM through his leadership in this flanking attack. Under fire from two machine-gun pits, he personally went in with hand grenades and tommy gun and silenced both. Six Platoon fired the haystacks and burnt two cars hidden in them,

and smoked out prisoners who were still in their pits underneath. Altogether some twenty prisoners were taken from this casa. The platoon was most fortunate in getting safely through an undetected minefield in front of this house, but 7 Platoon, in another minefield further to the right, was not so fortunate.

Two further houses in 6 Platoon's line of attack were taken with no resistance, 'Jerry having flitted before we arrived,' writes Lin Thomas. 'The last but one in our area nearly turned out to be a battle of friends. A platoon (I think) of C Company on our left had got off course slightly and had taken this particular casa of ours. It was just breaking dawn, and still a bit dusky, and they had a prisoner outside trying to entice some stray friends into the casa when we attacked. The password was yelled from all windows smartly, and what could have been a serious situation turned into relieved wisecracks and laughter.'

Eight Platoon, in reserve and lying on the ground, 'heard a grunt or moan from Sergeant Mick Kenny', who was wounded. Sergeant Arthur Fong took over the platoon. Soon they learned that 7 Platoon 'was "out the monk" with casualties, so we had to take our right flank, after picking up one section of Number 7.' By now the enemy was falling back, abandoning a high bank criss-crossed with trenches and then a couple of houses. Without any close fighting and with only a couple of casualties, Fong and his 8 Platoon safely reached the Casa Ianna area and stayed there.

Captain Johnston headed 7 Platoon. With him were Sergeant Jack Shaw and Corporal Callesen. The platoon was to attack on the right flank of the battalion. It moved on to a small flat, just behind our barrage of bursting shells, and lay there until the barrage lifted. Here Doug Ellis,²⁸ the signaller, was wounded in the hand but refused to go back.

The barrage lifted. The platoon moved into a gully. Four 'shorts' landed in quick succession just in front of Johnston and Shaw, blowing both off their feet.

Up the slope, across a track, through a hedge, on to a forward slope, and there, just ahead, was the start line. 'Across on the next ridge we could see, by the light of the gun flashes and shell bursts, our first objective.'

Half-way down the slope shells landed right on the platoon, killing Reeve Collins and wounding others. 'The noise was terrific.' Doug Ellis, again wounded (in the side this time), still carried on. Regrouping, the platoon followed the horizontal line of anti-aircraft tracer directed straight on to its first objective. Then the platoon stopped. A check revealed that there were only eight left (including the wounded Ellis). Shaw went back, but could not penetrate the shells blanketing the ridge.²⁹ He returned and asked: 'What do we do now?'

'We're going on with the show,' Johnston answered.

As they moved off again, Ellis went down with his third wound, in the thigh, which would cost him a leg. Shaw and Russell dressed the wound, noticed the radio set was a complete write-off, and placed Ellis in a small hollow where he lay alone for seven hours.

They carried on to a hedge breasting a narrow road. Russell and Quinn³⁰ forced their way through, Wood³¹ followed, with Shaw a yard behind. Wood set off a mine the other two had missed. Collecting his senses and struggling to his feet, the sergeant saw McIntyre³² and another man stretched out on the ground. The other man was unhurt, but McIntyre lost an eye. They crawled together into a drain beside the road.

'All this time Jerry was slinging shells into our area.'

Shaw, still dazed, his eyesight affected by the mine blast, began wondering where Captain Johnston was. Then he saw the captain. It took him a while to realise that Johnston was crawling towards them.

With his signaller hit in the thigh and his radio set ruined, Johnston in the meantime had run ahead to find the road and make contact with some tanks faintly visible in the artificial moonlight. He hoped that the tanks, in radio contact with Battalion, would be able to raise and bring up the reserve platoon of A Company, commanded by Mick Kenny. Johnston found the tanks out of action, their tracks blown off, and their crews sheltering from fire. He set off to find the reserve platoon himself. Several times the hedge barred the way. Finally, he stood back and charged the hedge, struck a mine hanging there, was blown high in the air, and landed on all

fours in a minefield. He began crawling through this minefield, dragging a smashed leg behind him, and carefully feeling in front with his hands—in his dazed condition he was under the delusion that he could clear aside mines and make a safe path for his wounded men to follow. He had crawled about 100 yards when Sergeant Shaw saw him. Disregarding faint warnings from Johnston, Quinn and Russell came out from the ditch to join their captain.

'How bad is it?' asked Johnston, as they began aiding him. 'Can you take it?' asked Russell, and, reassured, replied: 'Well, she's gone—your right leg.'

Johnston, a prominent athlete, accepted the news calmly and gave directions for shelter: 'Up the road turn right, past the tanks to the house on the left.' Eighty-eight-millimetre shells landed near the house, Johnston was pushed under a tank for shelter, and Russell and Quinn found an 18 Armoured Regiment RAP carrier. They and the driver picked up the captain and were about to move when another crash came, distinct from the general uproar of battle. Quinn had set off a mine and lost a foot. Russell and the carrier's driver were wounded too, and the hapless Johnston for the third time within an hour was hurled into the air and freshly wounded in the back and legs and suffered a burst ear-drum.

The mangled men left in the carrier, the driver, wounded in the thigh, insisting on driving. Johnston, his battalion uppermost in his mind, directed the carrier to 23 Battalion's headquarters (under mortar fire), where Lieutenant-Colonel [Thomas](#)³³ said he would radio 22 Battalion. Then, after passing through a mortar 'stonk' and crossing a bridge under bombardment from enemy guns, the carrier shed both tracks in deep craters. Tank men came to the aid of the wounded who 'had no more excitement after that,' writes Sergeant Shaw. Before he was carried away, Johnston, mastering his drifting thoughts, firmly ordered Russell not to return to the wounded signaller Ellis, but to find Colonel O'Reilly and tell him of the platoon's plight. This Russell did, although bleeding, exhausted, and exposed to more fire. Following Johnston's directions, Russell stumbled into Colonel O'Reilly's headquarters before the radio message got through from 23 Battalion.

Back on the other side of the mined hedge Corporal Callesen gathered the lost men together and led them into an attack on 7 Platoon's first objective.

Within an hour of A Company opening its attack, D Company was ordered to send a platoon forward to find A Company (all radio contact had been lost), to radio back reports, and to try to keep radio touch with C Company on the left.

Sixteen Platoon, under Second-Lieutenant Charlie Deem,³⁴ went forward. 'A dirty black night, the ground wet and greasy, the going hard,' writes Lance-Corporal [Barnden](#).³⁵ 'All the way we had to run the gauntlet of very constant and accurate defensive fire.' Frequently the platoon had to stop and radio its bearings back to headquarters. Each time it did this the platoon was plastered with uncannily accurate mortars, which 'brought out a lot of indignation from the boys who reckoned that the enemy were on our wavelength and were merely following our route from our radio reports.' But no casualties came yet. 'We first saw [Casa Ianna] through the blackness of the night brilliantly lit by its surrounding haystacks and barns which were well ablaze. At this stage the barrage had ceased but the night was filled with small arms fire. On our left the Brens were having a go at [Casa Elta](#). There was a hell of a noise coming from the direction of [Celle](#). Everything was quiet at Casa Ianna: A Company were in full possession.' In extended order, ready for battle, the platoon crossed the creek and climbed a rise safely³⁶ into Casa Ianna, where A Company was getting its breath back, and holding prisoners.

About one and a half hours after Deem's platoon left, the call came for the rest of D Company. A guide led them in single file in the dark over rough, wooded, and mined country to A Company. 'The grey dawn was just showing.' The two companies investigated and occupied buildings in the Casa Ianna-Roba delle Suore area, taking more prisoners without serious engagements.

Passing over the freshly-won ground, the New Zealand war correspondent who had described the Freyberg Cup match now wrote: 'Fields and roads are pitted and torn with shell holes; trees are broken and splintered and not a house in the area undamaged. Many are reduced to rubble. In many the Germans had torn holes in the ground floors and dug shelters under the houses, stacking earth inside the rooms for extra protection. Slit trenches around the houses emphasised their determination to hold the positions. It was only the speed and fury of our infantry attack, following a terrific barrage, which smashed the German resistance.... The tiny village, [Celle](#), a miniature [Cassino](#), with a church, a few buildings and earth all round, was an

indescribable confusion of wreckage....'

The companies stayed in position all that day, 15 December, here and there taking part in minor mopping-up operations. A few weary men in D Company, occupying a house full of Italians, tried to persuade some of them 'to do a spot of liberating themselves. I said we had come 15,000 kms to liberate them, we still had a hell of a lot of liberating to do and many of the men who had come with us were now dead or wounded. I didn't think it fair to leave all the liberating to us since it wasn't our country anyway. I then asked for some brave volunteers. After a lot of talking—"too old," "too weak," "too young," "no weapons" etc. etc., two 15 year olds came forward, their mothers trying to drag them back and everyone crying by now.' Finally four, armed with German weapons, set off 'and for the first and last time we had the pleasing spectacle of Italians marching forth to liberate their own country.' The New Zealanders were excitedly accused of sending four Italians off to certain death, but soon a great shout of joy arose: 'our four Italian heroes appeared, buttons bursting off chests with pride, rifles prodding one tall German. As they came closer the German was seen to be the colour of his uniform on one side of his face, a portion of the other side was missing, he seemed to have several other holes in shoulder, arms and chest, also one in the thigh. How he was able to walk was a miracle. He carried himself like a soldier. He could still speak in a kind of whisper.' To the amazement of the Italians the soldiers placed him on a door, gave him water and cognac, conscripted four Italians and threatened them with death if the German did not reach the unit RAP.

In the mopping-up operations in the morning of 15 December Crowe ³⁷ saw a spandau sticking out of a dugout, 'so I reached down and grabbed the barrel to yank it out and found a Jerry hanging onto the handle, but before I could bring the tommy-gun up he ducked around the side, so we chucked in a couple of smoke bombs and brought them out.' But the smoke drew shelling and 'the old saying is quite right that you don't hear the one that's got your number on it. I heard quite a few, then Whamm! I was flat on my back. Old Tex Jones helped me up to the boys.' The mopping up continued.

More stretcher-bearers got to work after dawn, when a call for volunteers among men left out of battle met with a grand response. Because of the difficult country, mud, occasional shelling, and the menace of mines, some men did not

reach hospital in [Forli](#) until twenty-two hours after being wounded. Ned Pemberton and three others (including an adventurous artillery forward observation officer, Captain [Horrocks](#),³⁸ who was later decorated for his services) turned to rescue Galvin from the minefield. They placed him on a stretcher, 'both stood up, took one step, and Boom, up we go again. Poor old Ned had his foot blown clean off and the other knocked about.' Pemberton, calmly smoking a cigarette, was carried into the advanced dressing station and greeted the doctor with: 'Well, she's a one boot job, Doc.'

Crowe, who had been wounded in hand and leg, couldn't help laughing. His stretcher-bearers, anti-tank men, 'were all armed with revolvers and red-cross armbands and the chap out in front had a tommygun in one hand and a [Red Cross](#) flag in the other, a real peaceful outfit.' Among the last men whom [Anderson](#)³⁹ and his comrades picked up was Len Seaman, who had been shot neatly through the centre of his chest and was bleeding profusely: 'we thought he'd had it.' By now some of the stretcher-bearers were worn out. There were about eight men to each stretcher, one at each handle and the others taking over at short intervals.

Colonel O'Reilly visited [Casa Elta](#) and on his way back captured eight Germans coming out of a dugout near Casa Ianna. The battalion was still rather confused about its own casualties: the correct number for the attack was forty, including five dead—a hard blow in a bloody night. Many were seriously injured in the limbs from mines. The battalion's prisoners were eighty-four (including two officers), seventeen of them severely wounded, and more men coming in as mopping up went on. All were from 36 Regiment 90 Panzer Grenadier Division—tough, well seasoned, stubborn defenders, liberally supplied with automatic weapons.

[Faenza](#), having been outflanked, was abandoned by the enemy in the night of 16-17 December. The battalion, solidly supported by [Air Force](#) fighter-bombers working a few hundred yards ahead, reached the [Senio River](#), two miles below Castel Bolognese, before dusk on the 16th. Captain Bob Wood, having run the gauntlet through [Celle](#), was waiting impatiently with a jeep and trailer full of hot stew. The shelling and the 'Moaning Minnies' had been fairly heavy at times during the afternoon. Everyone was dog-tired. Most of the platoons had leapfrogged forward, occupying houses in turn. They were under observation from [Castel](#)

[Bolognese](#), in front of the sector and on the other side of the river. Plainly visible were the village's church spires, and many a man thought to himself: 'Feel a bit naked with that damn church spire: great observation post for Jerry.'

The RAP was radioed not to come up until dark, which was not far off. 'However not 10 minutes later there was a commotion and a clatter ... a Bren carrier was weaving around the shell holes on the road, a chap standing up in it with a beret on and smoking a pipe, directing the driver and hanging on to a small [Red Cross](#) flag. The carrier was being chased along the road by 88's which bounced either in front or behind it on the roadway but somehow missed each time. It was Paul Sergel. The Padre in leisurely fashion unstrapped the stretcher from the carrier and loaded on the wounded chap while shelling and mortaring continued heavily. He said it was better not to wait till after dark as sometimes time was important with these casualties. The driver climbed in, then Paul idly swung himself aboard, waved with his pipe in his hand and, still standing, directed the driver back to the RAP while once more 88s chased them all along that piece of road.'

Clearly the worst of the opposition was over. The battalion had collected more captives, bringing its total prisoners since the attack began to 124, nearly half of 5 Brigade's total of 284.

However, the river and winter would hold [Eighth Army](#) at bay for many weeks. D Company found the river in front of it 30 feet wide, in some places wider still. Sheer stopbanks rose 12 feet high and had been blown here and there to flood nearby land. Deep mud and marshy ground skirted the stopbanks, craftily mined as usual and threatening to crumble if anyone tried bridge-building. Civilians said the [Senio](#) ran eight feet deep at least, and other reports showed that tanks hadn't a chance of crossing anywhere round about.

Low clouds and patches of damp fog drifted over the front for the next few days. This mist was a double blessing to Ford and his comrades. 'Apparently the house we were in must have been raided a lot for poultry (or gelenas), as there were only about six chooks left round the place and as wild as March hares. We'd no hope of catching them. The birds used to roost in a tree in front of our house in full view of the enemy. One misty afternoon the boys decided to rig a 36 grenade, with a long string, in the tree where they roosted. In time the gelenas came to roost, and all the

boys' mouths were watering expecting a feed of poultry next day. When the birds were all settled round the grenade someone pulled the string; four seconds, then an almighty explosion, it didn't get a single bird, only blowing them out of the tree. They all ran away and that was the last we saw of them.'

When the weather improved a little the enemy promptly got on to houses in the front of 22 Battalion's area, shelling, mortaring and bringing up tanks and self-propelled guns to blaze away from across the river. 'Blink your eyelashes and the bastards would be on to us.' Every house near the riverbank stopped direct hits, and in turn both the RAP and the mortar platoon, just a little further back, were hit. The infantry lifted mines, observed enemy artillery, kept busy on flash-spotting, and sent back bearings to the artillery supporting the battalion. The mortars and machine guns kept busy. Over the ruined roads, through the mounting slush, ice and mud, across soaked fields, the battalion carriers played a big part in bringing up rations.

A piece of mortar passed through a window in a platoon headquarters casa on 19 December and smashed Private Mabbett's ⁴⁰ arm. He made his way out, cheered by a shot of liquor on the way from Second-Lieutenant Bill [Treseder](#). ⁴¹ The hospital sister apologised for the bed having only one sheet. 'Don't worry, as long as there's plenty of hay to sleep on, replied the dazed private. He adds: 'It was typical that when I came to next day, there was Sergeant Tsukigawa to ask me if I wanted anything, or could he send a cable home to my people.'

A little incident now took place which impressed the officer concerned 'as typical of the men of the 22nd. War seemed to bring these things out in a way that doesn't happen in peace time.' As with several other platoons, strength now was low— his platoon, numbering eighteen, held two farmhouses along the front, with nine men in each. Each house had three picket posts to man, apart from any odd jobs which cropped up. Everyone took a turn at picket duty, and everyone grew a little 'dopey' from lack of sleep. The officer writes: 'Our house had a fireplace in the back where at night we kept a small fire going to warm us—smoky chimneys in the daytime not being desirable features of any place round there I relieved Pat O'Carroll, ⁴² a Maori corporal in my platoon, at midnight. At 2 a.m. I came down from watching out into a cold drizzle of rain to warm up at the fire before turning in on the floor. I found Pat sitting gazing into the remains of the fire in a semi- stupor. I sat down beside him and together we watched our thoughts flickering in the embers. We had been in the

line some time so that our tobacco supplies were running out. I had calculated that if I rationed myself to three rolls a day I'd just about make out until we were relieved. We were all about the same way. As I sat there I thought it wouldn't hurt to have a cigarette before lying down for a sleep. I took my tin from my pocket, rolled myself a cigarette, then passed the tin to Pat telling him to have one. He took the tin, rolled himself a cigarette, and then passed it back to me. I slipped it into my pocket again. We sat there a little longer, hardly speaking, then I turned in. Next day, when I couldn't hold out any longer, I took my tin out of my pocket again to roll a cigarette. To my amazement it was half full of tobacco. I couldn't make it out at all. I thought back ... then I remembered passing it to Pat. I tackled him: "Hey you—, what did you do to my tobacco tin last night?" Eventually he admitted putting all of his own into my tin, saying he'd given up smoking for a while —claimed he often did—and thought I might like to have the tobacco for which he had no further use, anyway.'

Consistent shelling spread over 21 December, a day which began badly when one man was killed and three severely wounded by mines just north of D Company. A riverbank patrol (Les Raill, ⁴³ 'Snow' Barratt, ⁴⁴ and Gordon O'Donnell ⁴⁵) was skirting the apparent edge of a minefield in almost total darkness when Barratt exploded a mine, which blew off his left leg near the groin. 'We did our best to tourniquet this terrible wound and then Gordon O'Donnell left posthaste to fetch assistance.' Time passed. Fearing O'Donnell had been wounded on the way back and that Barratt might die from lack of medical assistance, Raill gamely lifted his wounded comrade on his back 'but going up slight slope, shuffled onto a mine, and that was that.' Showing almost superhuman fortitude, Raill improvised tourniquets for his two smashed legs: a tommy-gun sling and barrel on one leg, a tommy-gun magazine and braces on the other. Barratt had been thrown well clear and did not speak or move again.

Help arrived. Raill was placed on a door and carried safely from the minefield. Unhappily the party who recovered Barratt's body, while returning along the track they had safely used on the way up, exploded another mine which cost the battalion two experienced and resolute soldiers: Lance-Sergeant Lin Faull, who lost a leg, and Private 'Blue' Bowering, ⁴⁶ who lost an eye.

Raill writes of 'the splendid work of the company stretcher-bearers who shared

all dangers during attacks without the reassurance of lethal weapons in their hands. I was struck by the demeanour of these chaps on several occasions and, when I was hurt, the first person at my side was the RAP bloke who strode rapidly down the easiest and therefore the most dangerous path as though there never was such a thing as a tripwire or Schu-mine.'

During the four days before Christmas several houses occupied by the battalion were blown to bits. The whittling-down process continued (the steady trickle of wounded men being carried away was more unnerving than one quick blow), and C Company had to quit a position when a casa was utterly destroyed. The moment the men moved into their new place, down crashed another exasperating 'stonk'.

Three members of 15 Platoon fell wounded when their house stopped a direct hit, and the platoon was then left without NCOs.

The mortar men suffered too. Mick [Condon](#)⁴⁷ 'was buried under brick and rubble. I have to thank Hec McKinnon and Fred [Bowers](#)⁴⁸ for clearing away the debris and getting us out, and half dragging, half carrying me under Spandau fire to medical aid.' Among the ruins an old stove had split in half, singeing the head of Allan [Ainge](#)⁴⁹ before he could be rescued. Bill [McSweeney](#)⁵⁰ was killed outright, together with 'Tony', the owner of the little farm, who had letters of gratitude from escaping New Zealand prisoners of war whom he had assisted. Another mortar man, Noel Bird, was wounded when the fog, lifting over the front, increased enemy shelling. Bird had chosen 'a nice cosy corner of the cellar for my bed, being the safest part of the house as I thought. But as fate would have it, after I was wounded Jim [Cooper](#)⁵¹ took my cosy corner bed and that night was killed in it from a direct hit.'

One night just before Christmas, when a signaller in 15 Platoon's casa left his radio set and went outside, Private [Morgan](#)⁵² took over the set and died instantly when a mortar burst through the kitchen window and ripped away the ceiling. At daybreak the house was pounded to bits. Stew [Shanks](#),⁵³ Keith [Martin](#),⁵⁴ and one or two others were buried in rubble: 'a terrible feeling lying there and wondering what was going to happen next.' Scooping away rubble, George [Cade](#)⁵⁵ suddenly raised two appallingly gory hands and said 'Poor Stew.' But the 'gore' came from a tomato sauce bottle. Filled with anger and concern, Cade flung aside a massive rafter (it

took three men to move it later), and the three buried men, none seriously injured, were freed 'just when breathing was beginning to get a little difficult.'

Among the last casualties in this position was Private [King](#),⁵⁶ wounded in the face by a stray spandau bullet when drawing water at night.

Christmas Day was pretty quiet except for 'stonks' about Battalion Headquarters and close attention to any movement. The battalion machine guns fired 16,000 rounds, and the suffering mortars called it a day with a dozen bombs. But an early morning Mass was conducted by Padre [Callaghan](#)⁵⁷ at Battalion Headquarters for twenty-six members of the headquarters, a party from 27 (Machine Gun) Battalion, and a handful of Italian civilians.

Every company planned to hold a carol service in the largest room in the biggest house in its area. Padre Sergel started out alone across country with his bundle of books and Communion set, but even before he reached the first house the mortars were on to him, driving him into a ditch, so the first service was late. The next move was mostly behind cover. The third trip, again in the open, meant a lot of ducking, diving and taking cover. This service had to be held after dinner when the vino had circulated generously, and although the carol singing was superb, the faithful had to adjourn to an upper room for Communion. 'The fourth company turned on a real Christmas atmosphere,' the Padre recalls. 'It was held in the large ground-floor stable with cattle and donkeys in our midst, and most of the boys were sitting on straw with a few peasants crouched round a small fire in one corner. It needed little imagination to feel we were back in Bethlehem centuries before. We realised, perhaps for the first time, the background to that old, old story. In the evening we built a big fire, and round this we sat as at home, and we sang as best we could the old carols and old songs of happier days. Our thoughts turned back to the Christmas before in Southern Italy on the [Sangro](#). How far we had advanced since then! How many friends we had lost since then! Then came memories of the Christmas before in Egypt, and the one before that in the desert, and some could tell of others even before then. And then we thought of those at home.'

¹ A Coy, Maj A. W. F. O'Reilly (and then [Capt P. R. Willock](#)); B Coy, Capt R. H. Spicer; C Coy, [Maj L. G. S. Cross](#); D Coy, [Maj G. S. Sainsbury](#). Lieutenant-Colonel O'Reilly became CO when Lieutenant-Colonel Donald left for

England on furlough. On 17 November 1944 the battalion marched past in honour of Lieutenant-Colonel Donald and another former CO, Colonel Campbell, who became commander of 4 Armoured Brigade.

² Pte E. P. O'Connor; born NZ 8 Apr 1911; civil servant; killed in action 26 Nov 1944.

³ Pte R. A. Beaven; New Plymouth; born New Plymouth, 21 May 1922; farming student; wounded 29 Nov 1944.

⁴ Pte D. C. Kennard; born NZ 15 Apr 1921; labourer; killed in action 28 Nov 1944.

⁵ Pte J. G. McMillan; Dunedin; born Masterton, 16 Oct 1922; clerk; wounded 12 Sep 1944.

⁶ Lt J. R. Sherratt; Pukeatua, Te Awamutu; born Gisborne, 11 May 1919; accountant.

⁷ Pte D. F. Stoneham; born NZ 3 Feb 1920; warehouseman; killed in action 30 Nov 1944.

⁸ Pte G. L. H. White; born Waikanae, 22 Feb 1917; stock driver; died of wounds 2 Dec 1944.

⁹ Pte F. S. Fisher; born Feilding, 21 Jul 1914; clerk; died of wounds 30 Nov 1944. 'He was quite tall, slightly built, rather shy and a sensitive type—nothing of the tough, hardbitten fighting man about Fred, though the reason he was killed was really because he couldn't work his 38 set properly lying down—in fact they never would work properly when you wanted them to, whether you stood up or stood on your head,' writes a comrade. 'However, Fred had the 38 set and was determined to do the job properly, so he sat up in a very shallow ditch in the middle of an open paddock while we had mortars, 88s, bazookas and Spandaus giving us the works. Every time I looked round at him he'd be sitting up calmly fiddling with the dials, or trying to fix the aerial in a different fashion. To my constant: "Lie down, you silly b—Freddy," he had the same reply each time: "She's right, I'll

make the b— work yet.” Then the mortar landed and exploded almost in his face.’

¹⁰ Pte T. D. Selby; Tirau; born NZ 3 Mar 1923; farmhand; wounded 8 Dec 1944.

¹¹ Pte J. P. Oldfield; Whenuakura, Patea; born NZ 29 Aug 1914; freezing worker; wounded 30 Nov 1944. ‘I went blind but realised I was hit and could hear myself breathing heavy and sort of shaking. Then I heard Ken Grey of [New Plymouth](#) yelling “Bring the stretcher quickly, old Jack has been hit...” [They cut his web equipment away, lifted him on the stretcher] and my sight came back in a flash ... I could see the thick blood in the trench and also the tin hat with a slit on the top as if it had been hit with an axe.’ Carried under shellfire into a wrecked house, its roof still smouldering, Oldfield had a shell dressing tied on his head and a shot of morphia. Claude Waterland (of Patea) (‘He offered me a cigarette, I didn't care for one and haven't smoked since’) and another carried Oldfield through the paddocks to a Bren carrier fitted for stretcher cases. From the RAP (where Jack Quinn and his assistant cleaned him up) an ambulance took him first to the CCS, then to the British General Hospital at [Rimini](#), where a special neurosurgical team instantly operated. ‘There were 17 different nationalities in the ward (mostly broken skulls) and Italian was the only language the patients could talk to each other. After several weeks there getting hell with penicillin injections and sulfa drugs, I flew back from [Rimini](#) to [Bari](#) by Douglas Air Transport with the Yanks. By ambulance to Barletta, and next night by ambulance train across [Italy](#) to [Naples](#). I think the train had square wheels. I was sicker on arrival there than any other time.’ Seriously ill until March, he gradually regained the use of his limbs. To 2 NZ General Hospital at [Caserta](#), convalescing ‘on good and plenty of NZ kai.’ To Bari Hospital, then home.

¹² Maj R. MacG. Wood; born NZ 12 Aug 1914; clerk; p.w. 15 Jul 1942; escaped; safe with Allied forces 21 Dec 1943.

¹³ Sgt J. L. Law; [Palmerston North](#); born England, 7 Apr 1914; carpenter.

¹⁴ Sgt R. T. Long, m.i.d.; [Wellington](#); born NZ 23 Apr 1921; labourer; twice wounded.

¹⁵ Some of these players were or later became big names in Rugby. From 22 Battalion: Mick Kenny (Maori All Black), Vince Bevan (All Black), M. McG. Cooper ([Oxford](#) and [Scotland](#)), Jim Sherratt ('Kiwi' Army Team). From Ammunition Company: Bob Scott and Wallie Argus (both 'Kiwis' and All Blacks).

¹⁶ Arthur Fong says: 'There was only one reasonably dry patch on the ground, that being near the 25 yard line directly in front of Div Ammo's goalposts, and it was from this spot that Lin Thomas potted his goal.'

¹⁷ Lt S. I. McKenzie; [Palmerston North](#); born [Palmerston North](#), 9 Jun 1906; public accountant.

¹⁸ Maj B. S. Edinger; [Wanganui](#); born [Wanganui](#), 14 Dec 1920; printer; wounded 14 Dec 1944.

¹⁹ Sgt B. H. Fowke, m.i.d.; born NZ 19 Jan 1915; painter; killed in action 15 Dec 1944.

²⁰ Sgt H. F. Poland, m.i.d.; Hastings; born [Hamilton](#), 30 Jan 1922; clerk; twice wounded.

²¹ L-Cpl B. J. Galvin; [Auckland](#); born [Wellington](#), 29 Oct 1922; manager; wounded 15 Dec 1944.

²² Cpl R. H. Dixon, MM; born [Wellington](#), 22 Jun 1922; machinist.

²³ L-Sgt L. F. Seaman, DCM; Raetihi; born [Ohakune](#), 17 Jun 1921; butcher; wounded 15 Dec 1944.

²⁴ Sgt C. Carroll, m.i.d.; Te Ore Ore, [Masterton](#); born NZ 6 Dec 1918; jockey; wounded 4 Sep 1942.

²⁵ Maj R. H. Spicer, MC; [Palmerston North](#); born [Christchurch](#), 20 Apr 1910; salesman; CO 22 Bn 7 Aug-19 Oct 1945.

²⁶ Pte I. H. D. Ferguson; Christchurch; born Gore, 14 Jul 1920; civil servant; wounded 17 Apr 1945.

²⁷ Lt A. G. Clark, MM; Christchurch; born Christchurch, 20 Dec 1920; optical mechanic.

²⁸ Pte D. H. Ellis; Gisborne; born NZ 7 May 1922; freezing-works employee; wounded 15 Dec 1944.

²⁹ In the lost party an exhausted man had fallen down in the mud and those behind him, thinking he was taking cover, had followed his example. When they got up again they were cut off by this shellfire, which also halted Shaw on the other side.

³⁰ Pte P. J. Quinn; Wellington; born Wellington, 28 Aug 1922; hairdresser; wounded 15 Dec 1944.

³¹ Pte E. J. Wood; Wellington; born NZ 29 Oct 1921; dredge hand; wounded 15 Dec 1944.

³² L-Cpl A. D. McIntyre; Whatatutu, Gisborne; born Feilding, 4 Jun 1921; farm employee; twice wounded.

³³ Lt-Col W. B. Thomas, DSO, MC and bar, m.i.d., Silver Star (US); London; born Nelson, 29 Jun 1919; bank officer; CO 23 Bn 1944-45; 22 Bn (Japan) 1945-46; twice wounded; wounded and p.w. May 1941; escaped Nov 1941; returned to unit May 1942; Royal Hampshire Regt.

³⁴ 2 Lt W. C. Deem; Inglewood; born Hawera, 6 Jan 1901; barrister and solicitor; died 3 Feb 1956.

³⁵ L-Cpl C. S. Barnden; New Plymouth; born Onehunga, 16 Nov 1914; shop assistant; wounded 16 Dec 1944.

³⁶ Men were startled to see next day that the whole area from the creek to

Casa Ianna was smothered with mines and extensively trip-wired. Although many mines had been destroyed by the barrage, the area was still very deadly indeed.

³⁷ Pte A. W. Crowe; Lepperton, Taranaki; born New Plymouth, 3 Dec 1921; farmhand; wounded 15 Dec 1944.

³⁸ Capt J. B. Horrocks, MC, ED; Auckland; born Auckland, 7 Jun 1920; law clerk; CO (Lt-Col) 9 Coast Regt RNZA, 1952-55.

³⁹ Cpl A. F. Anderson; Masterton; born Carterton, 19 Mar 1923; carpenter; wounded 16 Apr 1945.

⁴⁰ Pte F. C. Mabbett; Rotorua; born Wellington, 22 Apr 1913; clerk; wounded 19 Dec 1944.

⁴¹ Lt B. A. Treseder, m.i.d.; born Pahiatua, 12 Nov 1920; clerk.

⁴² L-Cpl P. O'Carroll; Tikorangi, Waitara; born NZ 8 Feb 1915; freezing worker.

⁴³ Pte L. F. Raill; New Plymouth; born Waitara, 25 Feb 1923; clerical cadet; wounded 21 Dec 1944.

⁴⁴ Pte E. F. Barratt; born NZ 18 Dec 1919; engineering assistant; killed in action 21 Dec 1944.

⁴⁵ Pte W. G. O'Donnell; Te Tawa, Inglewood; born New Plymouth, 26 Jun 1921; farmer.

⁴⁶ Sgt L. A. Bowering; Frankton; born NZ 15 Apr 1921; electrician; wounded 21 Dec 1944.

⁴⁷ Cpl M. P. Condon; Waverley; born Eltham, 20 Dec 1920; farmhand; twice wounded.

⁴⁸ Pte F. J. Bowers; Motueka; born NZ 20 Jul 1921; clerk.

⁴⁹ Sgt A. O. Ainge; born Dunedin, 8 Dec 1916; shepherd; died of wounds 23 Dec 1944.

⁵⁰ Pte W. F. McSweeney; born Palmerston North, 6 Sep 1920; printer; killed in action 22 Dec 1944.

⁵¹ Pte J. K. Cooper; born Killinchy, 13 Apr 1908; shepherd; killed in action 23 Dec 1944.

⁵² Pte I. G. Morgan; born Levin, 31 Jan 1923; student; killed in action 23 Dec 1944.

⁵³ L-Cpl S. W. Shanks; Manutuke, Gisborne; born Gisborne, 14 Oct 1909; farmer; three times wounded.

⁵⁴ L-Cpl K. Martin; Gisborne; born NZ 21 Feb 1922; machinist.

⁵⁵ Cpl G. W. Cade; Upper Hutt; born Wellington, 30 Oct 1914; foreman paint manufacturer.

⁵⁶ Cpl G. S. King; Wellington; born Blenheim, 1 Oct 1918; school-teacher; wounded 26 Dec 1944.

⁵⁷ Rev. Fr. V. D. Callaghan; Lower Hutt; born Wellington, 9 Dec 1909; Roman Catholic priest.

22 BATTALION

CHAPTER 14 – ‘HELL OF A CRACK’

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'Hell of a Crack'

Without question the battalion agreed that No. 6, owned by Charlie Merrylees's ¹ syndicate, was the greatest horse since Phar Lap. No. 6 had just won four out of six races at [Forli](#), and £206 3s. 7d. was on the way to the battalion funds in New Zealand, bringing the total from race meetings to £405 10s. 3d. Tommies ('well down the drain but, game enough to chase their losses, landed the mustard in the last race'), Kiwis, 5 Brigade Band, a sprinkling of Italians, and a cluster of bookies rolled up to enjoy the [Forli](#) Turf Club's Winter Meeting. The battalion had left the line on 27 December to rest in [Forli](#). One man struck exactly the right note by arriving in a classical Derby hat. Running the meeting was a hard-working team of sportsmen headed by 'Kai' Thomson, not a whit disturbed by a broken collar-bone, Jack Sullivan, Mick [Tatham](#), ² 'Snow' Absolom, George Sainsbury and Arthur Aldridge.

The horses stood six inches high and, complete with jockeys, were fixed on stands. The ground was marked out with white tape in draughtboard fashion, and the six horses lined up at the starting post, on the fringe of the course, facing the first row of squares. 'They're off!' And away they went, square by square in turn, as the dice were thrown. In a hurdle race chocks of wood lay here and there along the course. No horse could jump until his number was thrown twice on the one roll of the dice.

The routine orders opening the new year ³ were unremarkable. Warning was given that a heavy blue X surrounded by a thick blue circle was about to appear on many rather interesting shops, bars, buildings, clubs, restaurants and other places; this new sign, soon so familiar to the battalion, would mean OUT OF BOUNDS. One hundred and four thousand Christmas parcels, posted late in New Zealand, would not arrive for another month. The House of Representatives, [Wellington](#), sent hopes for a speedy victory in 1945 'and their determination to support you to the very end—Schramm.' As for jerkins, leather: 'The practice of using leather jerkins to provide sleeves and collars and other additions to other jerkins will cease forthwith.'

The battalion's fifth birthday arrived. About twenty 'originals' went off to a get-together in C Company's casa. The battalion's health was just being proposed, and

the speaker with emotion was picturing the great day when, at a similar reunion in New Zealand, 22 Battalion veterans would hear again the voice of Colonel Andrew—when the door burst open, an Italian crone appeared beneath a burden of washing, and in a high state of excitement completely dominated both speaker and reunion for several bewildering moments. The ancient washerwoman, it seemed, had blundered into the wrong house. Some explaining, persuasion, and soothing had to be done before she departed.

The battalion went back to the line just in time to hear the celebrated 'Ghost Train'. The war had frozen all along the [Senio River](#). A heavy fall of snow covered the plains and made patrolling difficult by hiding most traces of enemy minefields. Later the freezing of the snow made silent movement almost impossible. Patrols breaking through the frozen crust on the snow could be heard 700 yards away. The weird glow of artificial moonlight hung over a dead landscape. There were multi-coloured flares, trip flares and parachute flares, or just great empty silences. And tracks of men, tracks of dogs, leading to and from wrecked houses and into dark clumps of saplings. A day could pass with the temperature below zero, and mines (including glass mines) were frozen solid into the ground. Sometimes the sound of voices drifted across the river: echoes of a party, deep-throated snatches of 'Lili Marlene', or squeals from a porker on the way to the cook's pot, or sounds of hammering, sawing and digging from working parties. Over the frozen landscape moved white-hooded figures—patrols in snow capes.

On Monday, 15 January, a curtain of fog hung low over the front, blinding the [Air Force](#) and hiding the soldiers. Then, twice before midnight, 22 Battalion heard and reported the sounds of puffing, the click of wheels passing over rails, the sound of a slow-moving train travelling just across the river in enemy territory. Men heard definite sounds of wheels going over jointed tracks.

There was just one thing wrong. The men knew this only too well when they made their reports. The railway line, the bridges, the stations for miles around were smashed and quite useless.

The night before, at tea-time, 21 Battalion first heard the Ghost Train, doubted the sounds, but heard them again more distinctly just before 9 p.m. Twenty-sixth Battalion also picked up the strange noises. Reports went in to 5 Brigade

Headquarters, and the Divisional Artillery shelled the ruined railway line across the river during the night.

Out of the fog on 16 January, 22 Battalion reported the train four times: 9.33 a.m., 9.40 a.m., 2.24 p.m. and 7.20 p.m., and again just after midnight. The Maoris, taking over from 21 Battalion, were the fourth battalion to hear the train. Then gunners, Indians, and a British heavy anti-aircraft unit heard it too. So it went on, to the end of January. Sounds suggested that the train usually ran from ruined [Castel Bolognese](#) to [Solarolo](#), about 5000 yards.

Radar, which was now in use for pin-pointing mortars, vainly attempted to track down a ghost. Special aircraft, once the fog lifted, cruised hour after hour, searching, hunting, photographing. Photo-reconnaissance men studied minutely old and new aerial photographs reaching miles back into enemy territory. The New Zealand Division's intelligence summaries speculated day after day and drew no conclusion.

The puzzle, still unsolved, could be reduced to three questions. Did—or could—a train actually run somewhere near the enemy front line? 'No,' said air observation. Was it an acoustics trick? Did sounds carry so distinctly from ten miles away that veterans on patrol were deceived into thinking the noise began just a few hundred yards ahead? This seems unlikely. A German trick perhaps: broadcasting records of a train moving? This seems rather pointless, especially as General Polack, who commanded [29 Panzer Grenadier Division](#) on the [Senio](#) from mid-December to 22 January 1945, later told an Allied interrogator that no train ran near [Castel Bolognese](#). No German heard such sounds.

Patrolling, mine-sowing, and booby-trapping filled in 22 Battalion's fortnight on the snowbound [Senio](#). It was a quiet period, for [Eighth Army](#) was critically short of ammunition. Casualties were rare. In snow suits on patrol, Second-Lieutenant Scott ⁴ (commanding 12 Platoon) and Sergeant 'Bunny' [Benson](#) ⁵ passed through an orchard and were worming their way forward on their stomachs in very poor visibility. 'Scottie' wiped a drip from the end of his nose, and brrrrrrt—a spandau opened fire from 25 yards away. Off they went, back to the orchard. Sergeant Ian Ford opened fire with a Bren from the platoon casa to cover them. Both got back, Benson safely, but Scott with bullets through both feet. The machine-gunners supported a brief platoon attack by the [Gurkhas](#). An odd diversion began when a bored Bren-gunner

started the fashion of tat-tatting and beating out the first few bars of a popular song. Indians on the battalion's flank frowned upon this flippancy, but Jerry gave it a go, unfortunately with little success. His main machine gun, the spandau, with its high rate of fire was inclined to purr rather than beat.

One man has good reason to remember this locality. While digging a tunnel system underneath the platoon casa, he swung his pick and out fell a bottle holding one hundred 1000-lire notes. 'Andy' went on [Rome](#) leave almost immediately.

The mortar men were in fine fettle at this time, using the 2-inch mortar as a long-range mortar. Ken MacKenzie began a poem which opened:

I think that I shall never see
A buona Mortar such as thee,
With hungry mouth to sky outstretched,
Steel pressed to earth's sweet flowing breast.
Oh! gaping maw you cry to me
For white hot steel, for mungaree.

The battalion went out to [Faenza](#), to billets in the main square, and then on 2 February into a new New Zealand brigade, [9 Infantry Brigade](#), together with the Divisional Cavalry and 27 (Machine Gun) Battalion, converted to infantry. This new infantry brigade, commanded by Brigadier Gentry, was to meet the need for more infantry in an over-mechanised division. It had to settle down, reorganise, and train as a brigade with very little time to spare before joining the Division. Concentrated and special training began back at [Fabriano](#), where most members of the battalion returned to a warm welcome from the same families they had been billeted with on other visits. The red diamond shoulder patches of 9 Brigade arrived, but the 22nd still kept the red flash under the fernleaf cap badge, part of the dress during its 4 Brigade days.

Before work started in earnest, Major Bob Wood and Captain 'Scotch' Paterson arranged a boisterous farewell for men homeward bound in the Tongariro leave draft. Colonel O'Reilly, Major Sainsbury, Don Agnew and 'Kai' Thomson spoke of old days, old places, old faces. A happy evening ended with the toast 'Absent Friends', musical items, and a couple of fights. A battalion parade farewelled the

'Tongariroites' on 7 February. They numbered 113 altogether, and included men who had returned from New Zealand furlough and 4th and 5th Reinforcements. In a little group apart paraded the old originals, 'who had borne the heat and burden of the days over the long years.' These veterans had been hitting it along for a few days (some literally, as black eyes showed, and one was in trouble for flattening a military policeman in the mud), but they all mustered for the parade. They marched past steadily, taking with them the last shadow of the old days—except for Colonel Donald and Major Armstrong, both still with the battalion. The battalion presented arms. Led by George Sainsbury, away went the draft next day, to a rousing send-off from the pipe band—and many yellow smoke grenades. Later the disabled [General Kippenberger](#) was similarly honoured (without smoke grenades). The battalion had served under his command in the desert. ⁶

March brought brigade manoeuvres, the first a demonstration attack by infantry supported with tanks. A and C Companies attacked, with B and D in close support. They covered over a mile, the tanks firing impressively. Later, instead of tanks, machine guns mounted on carriers gave support. This was preparing the troops for fighting in settlements. Then they moved below [Fabriano](#), to near [Matelica](#) village. More manoeuvres improved tactical and administration details. Remaining well out of the picture, to his profound relief, was Private Murray [Doyle](#). ⁷ When a fieldcraft exercise ended, Murray had just one smoke-bomb left. When nobody was looking, he hurled the thing into a patch of scrub and started an enormous fire, which in turn started widespread inquiries ... but Doyle was never found out.

After this the [Divisional Cavalry](#) Battalion attacked silently through 22 Battalion, and the 22nd carried out a night relief of [27 Battalion](#). Difficulties, exasperations, and problems were ironed out, but everyone capitulated before a violent thunderstorm one afternoon which turned the place into a quagmire. The last exercises included an anti-tank shoot and an artillery demonstration of a 'murder' and a 'stonk'. Captain Spicer had his much coveted, snow-white duffle coat ruined in full sight of B Company's headquarters when a civilian emptied a pot from a top window. At night each battalion in turn made a 500-yard advance under an artillery barrage. The safety distance was 200 yards. This exercise went off well: 9 Brigade was almost ready for action.

And so in April, in springtime, the New Zealand Division went into its last and

most spectacular attack and advance of the war. In a week the Division advanced 20 miles against bitter opposition from some of the élite of the German Army, to capture half of [Eighth Army](#)'s grand total of prisoners. Infantry, determined it seemed to avenge the frustrations and humiliations in the niggling advances hard-won through the mud on the wintry Adriatic coast, fought their way through and mastered the best the [Wehrmacht](#) could throw against them. A fresh division lay broken and smashed within thirty-six hours' fighting. Then, in an advance scarcely pausing, the Division led the [Eighth Army](#) north, from the plains past the [Senio](#) to the Alps. Messages came from equally valorous units: Fifth Army, and the seasoned, hard-hitting Americans in the hills to the left by [Bologna](#); [Eighth Army](#), including the indomitable Poles and [Gurkhas](#), on the Adriatic plains. Such messages mentioned 'a magnificent achievement'. The homeless army of exiles, [2 Polish Corps](#), wrote 'of your incomparable fighting qualities.'

And in the hurricane of fire over the [Gaiana Canal](#), [22 Battalion](#)—together with two staunch defenders during the old days in [Crete](#), [27 Battalion](#) and [Divisional Cavalry Battalion](#) —avenged the bitter day when it was driven from [Maleme](#) airfield. Again meeting paratroops (in the role of infantry, never again airborne), [22 Battalion](#) paid back the old score after three years and eleven months. ⁸

The attack opened after weeks of intense planning and preparation. Across the [Senio River](#) the country stretched ahead dead flat, rather like a great orchard, a green haze of vines on wires, mulberry trees, willows, poplars, and here and there a touch of fruit blossom. A strange new zoology of vehicles had gathered: Kangaroos (Sherman tanks stripped down to carry infantry), Crocodiles (tanks towing oil-filled trailers and hurling flames 100 yards or more), Wasps (flame-throwing Bren carriers with a much shorter range), amphibious DUKWS (called Ducks) for troop-carrying, Weasels (an amphibious type of Bren carrier), and Fantails (amphibious tanks). Bridges waited, ready to go up, some with names chosen after New Zealand towns: Raglan, Woodville.

The 9th April was a beautiful day. The morning passed in peace. One o'clock. Almost two o'clock. The hard, metallic drone from a swarm of Liberators and Fortresses, wave following wave, high in the sky, all making for the [Senio River](#) from airfields as far away as [Foggia](#) and [Sardinia](#). From their bomb bays fell over 200,000

bombs—not the crater-digging bombs of [Cassino](#), but small bombs to blast men and vehicles and cut communications. With a growing roar the countryside erupted into swirling dust clouds. Then came fighter-bombers and rocket-firing Thunderbolts, seeking and searing all signs of movement. Now the artillery, stronger in guns than at [Alamein](#), swung into action, raking the stricken countryside for four hours with a quarter of a million shells. Then, in the red sunset, the flame-throwers, the Wasps and Crocodiles, went forward, their terrible jets of flame billowing out to 100 yards to sear the stopbanks.

‘We are going to hit him a hell of a crack,’ [General Freyberg](#) had said. They did.

Fifth and 6th Brigades went forward, and behind them the tanks. Within three days they had won over four miles of ground and were beyond the next river, the [Santerno](#), even more strongly fortified than the [Senio](#) but not strongly manned. The furious assault had not given the Germans time to fall back to the [Santerno's](#) defences. The new 9 Brigade originally was to win and hold this breach over the [Santerno](#), but this had been done by 6 Brigade. Now came 9 Brigade's turn in the big attack. [Geoffrey Cox](#),⁹ watching men from this brigade move forward, wrote¹⁰:

They marched along the roadside, ten to fifteen yards apart, moving swiftly. Each man carried his pack, with the white enamel mug tied under the strap and a shovel on top. The gear caught your eye more than the man himself. Some carried, some wore their steel helmets. Their rifles or Tommy-guns were slung over their shoulders. Their black boots were grey with dust below the anklets which bound in their battledress trousers, yet they left only rarely a footprint in the soft dust which was constantly powdered and coated anew by the passing lorries and jeeps. Here a man carried a stretcher; there the red cross of a first-aid haversack showed up against the khaki; yet another man held the barrel of a heavy machine-gun over his shoulder like a log. Behind him strode a corporal with mortar ammunition, carrying the holder with its three containers in his hand like a suitcase, grotesquely, for all the world as if he were a week-ender hurrying to the train on Saturday afternoon.

Their faces had the set, silent, apart, almost hypnotised appearance of men about to go into battle. Already these men moved in another world, in the world of absorption in the fight and in personal survival which started just over the river, ahead there in the mist where the flat, crunching bursts of incoming mortar shells

sounded clearly. It was a world from which we in the jeeps and the passing trucks were separated by no great distance on the ground, but by an immensity in life. Across this distance they regarded us without rancour, without bitterness, without even interest. One man called some remark to a friend striding ahead of him, who answered with hardly a turn of his head. For the most part they marched silently, quietly, fatalistically, steadily, accepting but not pretending to like this lot which events had thrust upon them. Above all one felt their individual loneliness, their almost terrible apartness. They were not individuals in the ordinary civilian sense, but soldiers caught up in a something as wide and unchecked as an ocean wave. Yet amidst this each remained, at this moment, alone in himself. No one else now could carry the burden of responsibility which rested on his shoulders like these weapons, this impedimenta, the dual responsibility for doing his task and if possible preserving his own life.

Twenty-second Battalion, 554 strong, had crossed the Santerno River before daylight on Friday, 13 April, and was ready to go into action just beyond the smoking ruins of Massa Lombarda, which had been occupied by 21 Battalion at midnight. On the way up, through the wreckage and carnage where the New Zealand assault over the [Senio](#) had swept, Shanks ¹¹ 'came across an Italian woman sitting on the sunny side of a house near a river and nursing a baby. She told me the baby was three months old, yet that day was the first time it had seen daylight. It had been born in a hole in the ground, and had never been above ground until that day for fear of bombs and shells.' Another small group looked silently 'at a dead German gently cooking as his phosphorous grenades burned about him. A tunic button burst off as we watched. Then bullets flicked past us. We started back, then realised we were under fire from a dead man's bullets exploding (from the heat of the grenades) in his bandolier.'

Now, past [Massa Lombarda](#), 9 Brigade came into position on the left of 6 Brigade, with 22 Battalion on the right, Divisional Cavalry Battalion on the left, and [27 Battalion](#) in reserve guarding the left flank. A and C Companies, moving up in Kangaroos, led 22 Battalion's advance. Nobody could call

Kangaroo transport luxury travel. The gun turret and most of its attachments had been removed from the old Sherman tank. When the riflemen jumped down into the 'pouch' of the Kangaroo, they were confronted by all sorts of odd hooks, brackets

and shelves which stuck out from the walls and prevented all of the six or eight infantrymen (bulging with equipment) from sitting down together. 'At first some of us did try to sit occasionally to avoid being engulfed by the choking clouds of dust thrown up by the tracks on the roads,' writes one Kangaroo



FROM THE SENIO TO THE ADIGE, 9-27 APRIL 1945

from the senio to the adige, 9-27 april 1945

traveller. 'However we soon discarded sitting in favour of standing because we could at least see where we were going, and avoid the discomfort of being shaken up like cough mixture in a bottle every time the driver turned off the road and lurched into a ploughed paddock. Nevertheless I think everyone (despite barked shins, bruises, etc.) was thankful for the cover they afforded us.'

The day was an uproar of aircraft and artillery fire. Progress was good, with the tanks of [19 Armoured Regiment](#) pushing out in front. Pockets of strong resistance soon turned up, and the infantry left their Kangaroos to mop up. C Company soon met stiff opposition, but the house finally fell, yielding prisoners. A Company, mastering spandau fire from houses, ran into a lively engagement at a house further on and took seven prisoners. A platoon featuring in this attack made its first bound to a lateral ditch some 50 yards ahead and halfway to the house. The ground was fairly open. Weaving and doubling in extended line, the platoon reached the ditch and dived in thankfully—all except Private George [Hardy](#)¹² who, in full view of the enemy, calmly walked over a very narrow plank. 'For—'s sake get down!' yelled Sergeant [Forsyth](#).¹³ Back came the reply ('as if from an armchair') 'No—Herman will

ever make me wet MY feet!' ¹⁴

A troublesome anti-tank gun by a canal was sent packing by concentrated artillery fire, and fighter-bombers took good care of Tiger tanks lurking near the battalion area. Fighter-bombers are thought to have knocked out five Tiger tanks here: 'The Air Force did a great job right through.' Our tanks had a difficult time crossing canals, and after dark, under a regimental barrage, the two companies finished their drive with a short advance to Squazzaloco Canal (known as 'Bitch' on the brigade maps), which gave a firm base for the attack coming up on the [Sillaro River](#) after midnight. This day A and C Companies had won 1000 yards: the way to the [Sillaro River](#) was open, but now the riverbank was lined by fresh troops of [278 Division](#).

Before the night attack started, A Company, pushing on from the canal to the river and digging more and more rapidly and with increasing alarm, reported that our own shells were falling in the company area. 'You are quite OK where you are,' came back over the radio, 'it's only "Ted's" stuff coming in.' 'Then, Sir,' tersely answered 2 Platoon's commander, 'we're ... well surrounded.' The shelling thickened, and when the 'stonk' began, most of the company took to a casa 'and personally from that moment my sympathy has gone out to any man of any nation who has had the misfortune to be under a 25-pounder stonk.'

The house received a direct hit. Lieutenant Keith Cave jumped to the hole and stood with his back to it, as if protecting his own men, and a second shell, landing in the same place, killed him. Another death occurred here, and about ten men were wounded. 'Our radio at this stage was talking merrily under a heap of bricks, and we were momentarily in a state of disorder.' When the 'stonk' lifted B Company (in reserve) pushed through.

At 2.30 a.m. on 14 April another assault, which aimed to reach and to cross the [Sillaro River](#), began behind a heavy barrage. Now came the turn of B and D Companies, which had been in reserve. They swung into the attack in the night and met little ground opposition but a great deal of shelling and mortaring. By 3 a.m. they were pushing on to the stopbanks of the river.

The other two companies (A Company grouping together again) followed up. A

platoon from D Company, led by Lieutenant Doug [Hayter](#)¹⁵ (with perhaps a few other men), succeeded in crossing the river, but not for long. A man in this party, Jim [Herbert](#),¹⁶ writes: 'I was wounded by machinegun fire at 10 to 5 on the morning of 14 Apl. on the south stopbank of the [Sillaro River](#) during the advance which began at the [Senio River](#). At the time I was wounded we had crossed the [Sillaro River](#) but found the north bank too hot to hold, so were retiring to the south bank. I stopped the shot while crossing barbed wire entanglements. Another lad wounded at the same time I knew as "Bung" [Young](#); ¹⁷ he died in hospital about three days later.'

On either side of 22 Battalion, however, men from Divisional Cavalry Battalion and two battalions of 6 Brigade held the far bank. The river defied the 22nd all next morning. Heavy shelling and mortaring covered its area, which was also raked with spandau fire. Tanks over the river joined in this hot reception, most of which was directed with painful accuracy from the little village of [Sesto Imolese](#). But men kept busy on reconnaissance in preparation for the crossing that night.

After sunset (still 14 April) in a silent attack, 22 Battalion crossed the supposedly knee-deep [Sillaro River](#) to take the opposite bank and to plug the gap between [Divisional Cavalry](#) and 26 Battalions. Men of B (right) and D (left) Companies, which made the assault, were told that the enemy still held the far bank, or at least kept standing patrols there during darkness. 'Soon as you climb the near bank (12 to 20 feet high),' they were told, 'everyone must dash across the flat top (about 10 feet wide) and the shelf below (about 18 feet wide), drop down into the river, and cross as fast as you can.'

A B Company private describes the crossing: 'A few minutes before 8 p.m. we filed silently down towards the riverbank, inwardly wondering what sort of a reception we would receive on the other side. It was a quiet spring evening and as the entire company spread out in an orderly fashion by platoons in an extended line, I had the fleeting thought that it was "just another exercise" when Lt. Phil Powell who had been standing halfway up on the 20ft. stopbank waved his arm, and we were off!

'As we climbed the bank and ran across the top down on to the sandy shelf below it was impossible not to feel like "sitting ducks," but the familiar tracer hadn't opened up on the far bank and we dropped into the river. Some waded across and

some had to swim. I was carrying a Bren above my head and found it quite an effort in heavy battledress to move forward through the ankle-deep mud underfoot while the water swirled around the top of my Bren pouches. When within reach of the far bank I pushed the Bren up on the ledge, and on the second attempt managed to scramble up after it. I moved forward far enough up the sloping bank to see a house over to the right from which a steady stream of tracer was pouring. I propped up the Bren and had pumped off a magazine in that direction when Phil Powell came along and told us to pair off and dig in.'

With only two casualties in the actual crossing, the two companies held their own in the night against mortars and nebelwerfers, each company driving back a raiding party before dawn. One occupant of a slit trench would stand guard while his friend snatched two hours' sleep. [McArtney](#),¹⁸ who was sitting on the floor of the trench while his companion took over, writes: 'all of a sudden the whole slitty collapsed upon us.' [Garwood](#)¹⁹ and another man dug McArtney out; his collar-bone was broken and his arm broken in two places.

On 15 April B Company found and cleared a gap of a few hundred yards between its position and 26 Battalion, and collected altogether fifteen prisoners. This action began when Private [Charlwood](#)²⁰ and Lance-Corporal [Sinclair](#)²¹ discovered that this part of the riverbank was held by a German standing patrol. Charlwood crept over the top of the bank and fired through the opening of an underground trench, killing one German. The others, surrendering, were shepherded out and lined up for searching. They drew several interested spectators. Exactly at that moment the battalion 3-inch mortars opened up, the first bombs falling perilously short. Men still in their slit trenches watched and grinned at others being beaten to their trenches by some of the half-dozen prisoners. Soon after this a party carrying rations made its way along the river shelf and was about to wade into the river. A nearby spandau snugly set in a bend in the river opened up, and [Spooner](#),²² helping 'to take the good old stew across the river to 12 Platoon', was struck by two bullets. It was his twenty-second birthday. Enfilading fire now swept down the river. Towards noon a Wasp flame-thrower burned out this troublesome spandau post. Aided by prompt 'stonks' on mortars and bazookas, the two companies held their now firmly established positions across the river. A party returning with prisoners was struck by a mortar bomb, which wounded Lieutenant [Rogers](#),²³ and Lance-Sergeant Mick [Glen](#)

²⁴ took over 11 Platoon.

Orders for the evening attack were issued in mid-afternoon. Twenty-seventh Battalion was to pass through [Divisional Cavalry](#) on the left and, together with 22 Battalion, attack and continue the advance over the [Sillaro River](#), each battalion on an 800- yard front. On the right 6 Brigade would attack with the same programme.

At 9 p.m. (still the same day, 15 April) the artillery barrage opened on the very second, and the whole of the New Zealand line went forward. In the 22nd's area above [Sesto Imolese](#) A and C Companies were in front, with B and D in support. Dawn found them three kilometres beyond the river after much resistance from small arms and snipers. Two lieutenants had been killed: [Bedingfield](#) ²⁵ and [McCorkindale](#). ²⁶ Private Sherman ²⁷ had been wounded by splinters in face and forehead when a bullet hit the inside of his Kangaroo. In this attack C Company had pushed on in the dark until it was held up by Germans firmly dug in along a roadway. One hundred yards from here 13 and 15 Platoons occupied a house and kept up a steady fire until dawn. On the way Private Murray Doyle, winded by a piece of spent shrapnel, had lost his rifle and was given a German rifle and ammunition, but could not work the mechanism. During a brief lull the occupants of the house leapt in alarm at a loud explosion in their midst. Murray called reassuringly: 'It's all right—I found how it worked.' At dawn, 'for some reason I have never been able to understand,' Corporal 'Mick' Anderson, armed with a tommy gun, left the house, walked straight to the Germans in their slit trenches, and demanded their surrender. Sergeant Jack Sicely (who had taken over 15 Platoon when Bedingfield was killed) and others moved up to support the corporal. As Anderson grabbed at an enemy rifle about thirty Germans rose, dropped their weapons, moved forward, and were collected. Then Anderson fell, his left arm (later amputated) severely shattered by a concealed tommy-gunner.

It so happened during this night attack that one platoon had taken a prisoner. A man, fierce in outward appearance at least, was left alone in a house to guard this prisoner. Four Germans, intending to surrender, approached. The guard promptly surrendered to them, despite their protests. To settle this awkward situation everyone piled all weapons in the centre of the room and agreed to surrender to the next party to turn up— which happened to be New Zealanders.

As the attackers moved on after dawn, prisoners were sent back in batches; it was impossible to keep count of them at this stage. Fog made visibility poor, and the tanks were slow. Once the Kangaroos had arrived (the Sillaro had been bridged about 1 a.m.), however, the advance speeded up with B and A now the forward companies pushing into a reeling enemy. By midnight they had advanced another good distance, four kilometres this time. The infantry exploited in their Kangaroos in close co-operation with the tanks. In the last ten hours 22 Battalion had taken 116 prisoners and had lost two officers killed and sixteen other ranks wounded in twenty-four hours. Most of the delays were caused by enemy strongpoints and through Kangaroos finding it difficult to cross canals.

At 6 a.m. on 17 April B and D Companies advanced at top speed, limited only by the pace of the tanks and Kangaroos, and halted once while fighter-bombers attacked [Villa Fontana](#) on the battalion's left front. By noon the forward platoons, covering six kilometres, were approaching the line of the Gaiana Canal, strongly held by paratroopers of [4 Parachute Division](#). Bridges were blown here. By 4 p.m. B Company was on the near stopbank of the Gaiana.

The plan for the attack which gained the stopbank was for the battalion's mortars to lay a smoke screen across the immediate front 'which,' Ian Ferguson notes ruefully, 'was a flat treeless plain without even a decent sized tussock for cover.' Eleven and 12 Platoons were to advance right up to the forward stopbank in their Kangaroos, get out and dig in. Ten Platoon was to clear and occupy a couple of houses about 80 yards short of the stopbank and give covering fire to the forward platoons busy with pick and shovel.

'The smokescreen was duly laid,' Ferguson continues, 'and the Kangaroos clanked under way under intense mortar and small-arms fire from the paratroops. The smokescreen disappeared in a few minutes and we bumped and jolted along with funereal speed until our Tommy driver ran us into a large ditch. The Kangaroo pitched nose downwards and became immovable. Everyone scrambled out and started to run forward in the open field to the nearest house about 120 yards away. The whole section made it without mishap.' Racing into a room upstairs with his Bren, Ferguson soon felt 'a jarring sensation in my right shoulder and a momentary burning at the side of my neck, and knew I had collected a burst of spandau from the

stopbank which knocked me over. The first bullet had hit a nerve, and I felt as if I was having all my teeth drilled together.' Phil Powell cut away his battledress jacket and applied field dressings.

Describing the scene on the stopbank, a 12 Platoon man writes: 'The Kangaroos stopped about 30 or 40 yards from the stopbank. The first thing we saw as we jumped out of the Kangaroos was a line of paratroopers' heads and shoulders above the bank, firing at us. Not one man in the platoon was hit in the charge to the stopbank, thanks to the covering fire, small arms, etc., from the Kangaroos and other sources. A hand-grenade battle then followed. Never have I seen anyone dig so fast and furiously in all my life. The ground was like concrete. We cursed another crowd who had borrowed our sharp shovels earlier, and never returned them. The paratroopers seemed to have an endless supply of grenades which they rolled over the bank. So to fool and annoy them (and also to save our own supply of grenades) we would occasionally throw over empty bully beef tins or sods of dirt.... [Privates [Goodwin](#)²⁸ and Colin [Ferguson](#)²⁹ were] wounded with grenade splinters. We were lucky. The Teds fired two bazookas into a Kangaroo on our left flank which burst into flames, causing the ammunition on board to explode. The noise and heat was terrific.'

The firmly-held Gaiana line was stormed next night (18 April) in the last all-out New Zealand assault of the war. In 9 Brigade's sector 22 Battalion took over from [27 Battalion](#) on the left (next to the [Gurkhas](#)), with [Divisional Cavalry](#) on the right. A tremendous barrage broke at 9.30 p.m. and then the flame-throwers went forward to hose and lick the opposite bank with deadly effect. After this the infantry went forward, C Company on the right, A on the left, D mopping up, and B on one hour's notice (and soon sending 12 Platoon to protect the bridge-building engineers from an enemy thrust on the right flank).

'I saw this attack go in,' writes Major Spicer, 'the arty was terrific, then the flame-throwers advanced to the bank in extended line, a Crocodile then a Wasp, at approximately 100 yards apart for the Crocodiles with the Wasps in between, which gave a vehicle every 50 yards. The centre tank started first, then the bank was just one sheet of flame, a sight never to be forgotten.'

At 6 a.m. on 19 April they were three kilometres beyond the Gaiana and midway

between [Villa Fontana](#) and [Budrio](#). Just before dawn, as Headquarters Company began assembling on the outskirts of [Villa Fontana](#), a shell landed in the square where Private Collins and an anti-tank officer were pulling up. Collins, diving for cover, was wounded in the foot almost at the threshold of the RAP.

[Ballantyne](#),³⁰ using a Bren now that his No. 38 set was out of action, was covering 'Buff' North and his Piat mortar. A file of paratroops had been driven off, but a last straggler, using a Luger, shot Ballantyne through the thumb and chest. After lying wounded and alone on the stopbank for about six hours a tommy-gunner, [Phelps](#),³¹ was picked up by efficient stretcher-bearers. 'What a job they must have had considering the smoke and fog that was hanging around.' A small German patrol was driven back by a grenade, which drew 'molti schmieser fire', and Phelps, who had been dropped, 'though I couldn't walk before darn soon caught the stretcher-bearers up, and the only regret was leaving my little bag of loot, and catching them up with a perfectly useless Thompson sub-machine gun clasped firmly in my hand.' While waiting in a little brick shed for an ambulance, the wounded Phelps watched and drew comfort from 'a very corpulent Major flat out digging a slit trench and doing a great sweat. The air was blue when he was sent forward without enjoying his hard-earned labour.'

Casualties had been fairly light; there had been some confused skirmishes with much small-arms fire throughout the advance. The toll of enemy dead was greater than any seen so far by the battalion. A provisional count was made of the dead; the figures are not remembered, 'but it was terrific.' The artillery barrage had accounted for many; others lay by smashed vehicles and carts where the [Air Force](#) had caught them. Every house and canal held its sprawling dead, and here alone the infantry had succeeded: evidence was abundant. The paratroops were taking terrible punishment as the campaign drew to its close. Many prisoners were taken. A Company collected forty in one batch.

In the night C Company headquarters, caught in a heavy 'stonk', made a death-or-glory tommy-gun charge over 200 yards to take cover inside a house, only 'to find themselves in the open air again—with shells still falling—the "house" was merely a shell—a front wall with nothing else,' writes Bryan Edinger. 'The boys involved claim that the anticlimax was such that in spite of the position, they all roared with laughter.'

At 9 a.m. B and D Companies passed through the leading companies, in Kangaroos, and continued to advance until brought to a halt while [Divisional Cavalry](#) cleaned up on the right. Early in the afternoon the battalion moved on again, and although hampered by gun and tank fire and tank obstacles, kept on to establish a line one kilometre short of [Budrio](#), where it was ordered to halt and 9 Brigade was relieved by the 5th. In the past six days the battalion had advanced 15 miles and had taken over 300 prisoners of war, including 100 paratroopers. The battalion's first big battle had been against paratroops at [Maleme](#). Its last battle ended with the paratroops routed and broken everywhere.

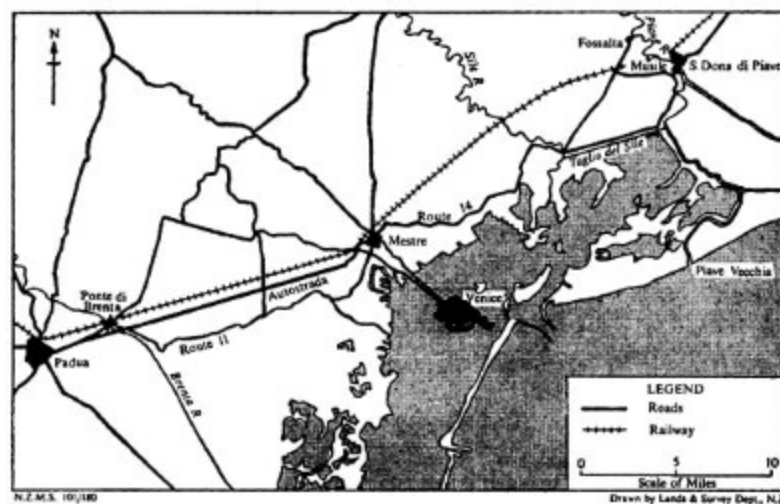
This last attack in which the battalion had taken part broke the back of the German resistance. 'Ted's had it,'³² everyone was saying. The Poles soon afterwards took [Bologna](#), and Allied troops were breaking through in all directions. In force, Eighth Army rushed towards the great [Po River](#). Fifth and 6th Brigades soon crossed the next important river, the [Idice](#), cutting through a reeling, dazed, punch-drunk [Wehrmacht](#). On 22 April the battalion, now in reserve, was on the move again, crossing the [Idice](#) and then, in the afternoon, every company mounted in Kangaroos, pressing forward mile after mile in billowing dust clouds.

That night, with all four company cookhouses set up in different rooms in the same building, the battalion gathered for mess. A solitary plane droned overhead, and then suddenly there was the rat-tat-tat of a machine gun and tracer came streaming down: 'Well! Talk about a stampede, as four or five hundred men tried simultaneously to dive under trucks or into shelter of any kind. A Wild West cattle stampede was nothing to it, and whole containers of food were upset amid shouts of "Put out those lights! You fools!" It was all over within a minute, and a badly shaken battalion queued up again for what was left of the food.'

They approached the Po next day (Colonel Donald soon well away in front of his battalion), and passed by masses of wrecked and burned vehicles recalling the debris strewn the advance west after [Alamein](#). Here one man saw 'the most awful sight of the war.... —a long team of Jerry horses that had been probably pulling a heavy gun. The arty or [Air Force](#) had evidently scored a direct hit, and they had been blown to bits and rolled down a bank by the road, all tangled in their chains and harness. A truly horrible sight that made me feel if we must be so barbarous as to go

to war, it is certainly wrong to drag poor dumb animals into it.'

Crossing the undefended Po on 26 April the battalion, advancing at top speed, within almost two days was into the large road-junction town of **Padua**, where A Company, penetrating a troublesome area, rounded up thirty prisoners. The New Zealand Division, leading the advance of **Eighth Army**, and chosen for this role because of its great mobility, was by-passing many strong enemy formations and groups, some of which surrendered quietly while others fought back briefly. The partisans, taking over great mobs of prisoners and liberating towns and roadways ahead of the New Zealanders, aided our advance a great deal—they liberated **Mestre**, for example, on 28 April at the cost of 110 men.



FROM PADUA TO SAN DONA DI PIAVE

from padua to san dona di piave

Headed by **12 Lancers'** armoured cars, 9 Brigade continued its advance, soon met the autostrada and moved swiftly towards **Mestre**, an industrial suburb on the mainland opposite **Venice**. Tanks of **20 Armoured Regiment** and the Lancers kept their guns busy, and B Company, leading the battalion, deployed briefly to gather forty prisoners. How to get rid of the prisoners and continue the advance was a problem: transport was out of the question, for B Company itself was squashed into four three-tonners. Two civilians, given German automatic weapons, agreed to escort the captives back but couldn't work the automatics. A German stepped obligingly from the ranks with a polite 'Scusate' (excuse me), and explained in his best Italian how to handle the weapon. He then passed the automatic back to the civilian, who said 'Grazie'. Everyone smiled, and away they went.

Clearly the enemy had now disintegrated—at [Mestre](#), like some scene from a Charlie Chaplin film, a German force passed under the autostrada just as the brigade group swept over the intersection on the upper road.

Twenty-second Battalion (except for B Company) now led the brigade in the race for the Piave River, and reached Musile on its banks at 8 p.m. (29 April) in an attempt to seize any bridges still standing. All bridges had gone, however, but a ferry was working. C Company was ferried across and moved into San Dona di [Piave](#), while the other companies deployed for the night in Musile. Meanwhile, an enemy force was reported nearby and C Company sent out a platoon to collect it. Sixty captives were handed over to partisans, who had looked after the innumerable prisoners taken early in the day. If no partisans were handy, prisoners had just been left on the roadside, to be gathered up by somebody else. And so, established on the [Piave](#), 22 Battalion awaited further word for the brigade's next forward move in the race towards [Trieste](#).

B Company, about to win one of the New Zealand Division's most highly prized possessions, featured in a proud achievement while the rest of the Division and the battalion raced on towards [Trieste](#). The company had become the nucleus of Thodey Force, under Colonel Thodey, ³³ 9 Brigade's second-in-command. At [Mestre](#) [Thodey Force](#), which included armour, detached itself from 9 Brigade and headed for [Venice](#), which was thought to have been cleared by partisans. One of the jobs [General Freyberg](#) had given the force was to occupy and hold at all costs the world-famous Albergo Danieli for a New Zealand Forces Club. The General, who had stayed at this hotel before the war, loved [Venice](#). At the back of his mind, as the New Zealanders drove on past the [Senio River](#), was the determination that his men would see [Venice](#), as he had done, from the very best hotel.

[Venice](#) gave [Thodey Force](#) a tumultuous welcome. The Piazza D'Arrive (where roads end and canals take over) was black with civilians who swarmed excitedly over the travel-stained New Zealand vehicles. Major Spicer, commanding B Company, was kissed, garlanded, patted on the back, embraced and treated like a conquering hero, and took ten minutes to cover 100 yards. Apart from the embraces and kisses, the rest of the force was almost overwhelmed with lavish gifts of wines, liqueurs and spirits (including Hennessy's Three Star Brandy). [Venice](#) (from the military

viewpoint anyhow) was practically under control. An English officer, dropped in advance by parachute, had helped to organise [Venice](#)'s most competent partisans.

Ten and 12 Platoons bedded down at the Albergo Santa Chiara, with A Echelon in a nearby garage—a garage de luxe, a three-storied building with a ramp to take vehicles to the two top floors for parking, and downstairs offices resembling an hotel. Meanwhile Company Headquarters and 11 Platoon left the wharf at the Piazza Roma at 5.15 p.m. (29 April) and went by motor launch through the canals, heading for the Albergo Danieli on the Grand Canal. Colonel Thodey had gone on ahead. Chugging along the waterways, the soldiers had gifts showered upon them, while crowds thronged and cheered from balconies where the winged lion of [Venice](#) and the Italian tricolour hung. In the background occasional bursts of firing showed that the partisans were still rounding up and eliminating fascists. Lance-Corporal Sinclair, falling overboard just before the party reached its destination, reached the landing place an easy first. Still more welcomes and demonstrations awaited the party on the wharf in front of the Danieli, and the hotel itself was 'full of gorgeous blondes and brunettes, all freely demonstrating their keen pleasure at the arrival of British troops in the most affectionate manner!' ³⁴ Immediately Major Spicer clapped a guard on the main entrance and claimed the Danieli for a New Zealand Forces Club. Soon members of B Company were busy explaining to all-comers that this was New Zealand territory. One particularly senior officer, checked and astounded, exclaimed: 'Privates staying at the Danieli! Why, I spent my honeymoon heah!' About eight o'clock this night Major Spicer, on his way back to the Piazza Roma to arrange rations and administrative details, saw the first arrivals of 56 London Division. Next day the newcomers formed up and marched impressively to San Marco Square. Several Thodey Force men, on the sideline, ironically hailed the 'liberators'.

For the next few days B Company stood firm in the 'Battle for the Danieli'.

At 8 a.m. on 30 April Major Spicer was visited in his bedroom by a staff officer of 56 Division, escorted watchfully by the B Company picket and very red in the face. He had come to claim the hotel in the name of his division. Major Spicer's good-natured laugh at this news did not improve matters. The visitor explained that the New Zealanders had no right in [Venice](#): it was out of their area; they were trespassers, and he would be glad if they would make arrangements to move at

once. The Major firmly declined. Such interruptions were frequent. Once Spicer was asked: 'Was there a hotel the Kiwis did not have in [Venice](#)?' Colonel Thodey had stressed that New Zealand Divisional Headquarters would be most displeased if any individual claiming the Danieli ever got past Major Spicer. Having first to deal with the picket and then with Lieutenant [Leatham](#),³⁵ no one ever did. Another early difficulty at the hotel was the custom of officers, mainly from the [Eighth Army](#), arriving and demanding food. [Eighth Army](#) had ordered that no civilian food would be eaten by servicemen. So a picket was placed on the restaurant, with strict orders to prevent soldiers from eating there. This resulted in a brigadier, a full colonel, and two majors of the British Army being shooed away by a private from B Company. The enraged brigadier, appealing to Major Spicer, was quoted the [Eighth Army](#) regulations. The well-meaning offer of 'a little bread and butter' routed the brigadier. In the final check-up, just before the hotel was officially taken over as the [Kiwi Club](#), someone discovered that many Kiwis had managed not only to dine and wine well, but had said: 'Charge it up to the New Zealand Forces Club.' The average meal cost 700 lire and the wines averaged around 250 lire a bottle. A fair debt had grown. The manager, told that the soldiers had acted without authority, debited the amount to the 'liberation of [Venice](#)'.

The reason why the Danieli was selected by the New Zealanders goes back to [Rome](#). [General Freyberg](#) was always anxious to have good leave centres for his men, maintaining, 'You can't treat a man like a butler and expect him to fight like a gladiator.' Denying the story that he spent his honeymoon at the Danieli in [Venice](#), but saying that he had visited the hotel in the late 'twenties and 'thirties, the General writes (2 July 1955): 'We were allotted the Excelsior Hotel, as a Club [in [Rome](#)] and when we arrived there we found Americans with a mounted Guard, who told us to buzz off, and they occupied the hotel themselves for a Club. When we were going up on the way to [Trieste](#), we heard that the Americans were coming up the road, and on their lorries had placards with [Danieli Hotel](#). We were not going to have a repetition of what had happened in [Rome](#), and I sent a Company of the 22 Battalion to occupy the [Danieli Hotel](#), and made Colonel Thodey personally responsible to me that he kept the Americans out.'

The most prominent citizens of [Venice](#), including Italian admirals and generals, generously entertained the New Zealanders at their new club. Soldiers quizzically

heard how Venetians always had been patriotic to [Italy](#), not mere supporters of Mussolini. Some maintained they had suffered much; others obviously were war profiteers. (Indeed, it was curious that throughout the length and breadth of [Italy](#), not once did the battalion meet a fervent supporter of Mussolini.)³⁶

Meanwhile Thodey Force helped to restore order. Arrangements were made for Venetian partisans to deliver Germans in lots of 120 to the huge garage in the Piazza Roma, where B Company's other platoons guarded them. Prisoners numbering 2730 were handled like this. The morale of these prisoners was high, but they were pleased that the war had ended with them in British hands. On Monday, 30 April, news reached Major Spicer that several islands in the [Venetian Lagoon](#), including the celebrated island of Lido, still held enemy garrisons. The garrison on the Lido pleasure resort, a long narrow island guarding the entrance to the harbour, refused to yield to Italian partisans. Learning that the German headquarters was in the Albergo Warner on the island, Spicer called the hotel on the phone and located the English-speaking German commander. A conversation, remarkable for its extreme politeness, ended in an invitation to take over the island. The Major, with a party including Sergeant-Major Mick Bougen, visited the island, received an overwhelming welcome, and left with six officers and 350 German other ranks. Two nearby islands, Murano and Burano, were also visited. The enemy had gone, but again handsome receptions awaited these first Allied soldiers.

On the night before the company left [Venice](#) to rejoin the battalion a grand ball—a combined farewell and peace celebration—took place in the Danieli's superb ballroom. As gaiety reached a climax Lieutenant Leatham, astounded, saw a party of six German officers and NCOs march through the door. Rushing forward, Leatham learned that this party, with twenty-eight more in a boat outside, had arrived from an island 48 miles away. Without news or instructions for several days, they had come to [Venice](#) to find out for themselves and walked straight into the hotel. How they passed the sentry was a mystery. The military police took over these gate-crashers, the ball continued with extra zest, and the club added one large diesel scow to its fleet of two pleasure launches.

Apparently the huge garage and car store in the Piazza Roma also had held a German officers' canteen. Great quantities of rare and select wines were found. B Company, when leaving for [Trieste](#), was faced with an awkward choice: to load

cognac or ammunition? The soldiers soon made up their minds, and [Venice](#) and all her old glories faded away behind the tailboards of the New Zealand trucks, to the comforting chink of bottles galore on board. This, indeed, was how a war should end.

With the war on its deathbed, the Division pressed north and east, along its last road, Route 14, skirting the head of the Adriatic Sea and leading to the port of [Trieste](#). The last advance, 76 miles, was one long triumphal procession—flowers, kisses, wine, crowds half-mad with joy and affection. Ninth Brigade led the New Zealanders on this drizzling damp day of 1 May, with a squadron of [12 Lancers](#) scouting ahead. Then in turn came two troops of B Squadron [20 Armoured Regiment](#), A Company, D Company, and Battalion Headquarters, Brigade Headquarters, [General Freyberg](#), C and Headquarters Companies, and then [Divisional Cavalry Battalion](#).

Yugoslav troops first appeared at 3.30 p.m. by the bridge over the Isonzo River, where [General Freyberg](#), Brigadier Gentry and Colonel Donald met Marshal Tito's representatives. They conferred for about twenty-five minutes. Then the Lancers and the armour pushed on, with 22 Battalion close behind, to a tremendous welcome in the large Italian ship-building town of [Monfalcone](#), where partisans and Yugoslavs were holding processions in the main streets. The Italian flag was now giving way to the tricolour and the red star of Tito's [Yugoslavia](#). The first fighting this day broke out near San Giovanni, just beyond [Monfalcone](#). By the crossroads the enemy held strong coastal and anti-aircraft emplacements, while a number of machine-gun posts covered road-blocks. A Company, with tanks, attacked here while the carriers moved towards the garrison on the coastal gun-sites. By 5 p.m. all firing had ended and some 150 prisoners had been taken. The battalion and its supporting arms had no casualties. Heavy rain set in. The battalion remained in tactical positions, and patrols probing forward found groups of enemy here and there, but by dawn they had gone. D Company captured a motor torpedo-boat.

On 2 May, when the broken armies of the Third Reich in [Italy](#) surrendered unconditionally, the last short advance began at 8.30 a.m. with [Divisional Cavalry Battalion](#), due to come in on the 22nd's left flank later, following the battalion. The enemy held out in [Sistiana](#), but a small force of one infantry platoon, carriers, and a troop of tanks pushed ahead, opened fire, inflicted casualties and took eight

prisoners. Despite warnings a British naval captain and an American naval officer in a jeep drove up past the stationary column into heavy machine-gun fire and were wounded, together with two members of A Company, George Findlay³⁷ and Ray Gurney. Air reports indicated that fighting was going on in the southern part of the city of Trieste, now only 12 miles away. The plane, which had met flak, noticed two small fires burning. The tanks opened up on three enemy ships, and set one on fire and sank it. Moving on again, the force halted briefly while the Air Force heavily bombed positions in Miramare seaside resort. Divisional Cavalry now had branched off to the left at Sistiana, and following a parallel top road, joined the advance alongside 22 Battalion.

A few of the Lancers and Colonel Donald next pushed forward into the city of Trieste, but Battalion Headquarters and advanced men in D Company met machine-gun fire at a road block on the Trieste side of Miramare. The tanks smashed this, and by 4 p.m., after a wireless message from the Colonel, the battalion and supporting forces were making a triumphal entry into the city, some of them with extra transport, including a form of German jeep with the engine at the rear, and several dun-coloured trucks whose ultimate disposal shall not be disclosed.

The Division's long trek had ended. Twenty-three days after the crushing barrage on the Senio, the Division had smashed three German divisions to advance 225 miles.

A tumultuous reception met 22 Battalion, mixed with odd bursts of rifle and machine-gun fire which failed to disperse the excited crowds. Snipers were active in many of the enemy-held buildings in the city. Yugoslav troops and an armoured column of old Honey tanks paraded the streets. Amid further cheering from the citizens, Brigadier Gentry, closely followed by General Freyberg, now entered the city. At 4.30 p.m. the battalion, with D Company leading, and the remaining tanks entered the square by the large Tribunale building. A Company for the moment remained at Miramare.

Colonel Donald continued (without much satisfaction) to negotiate the surrender of two garrisons, one in the Tribunale, the other in a 700-year-old fortress called the Castello (or Castle) San Giusto, on a hill in the centre of the city. With armoured cars, Donald led C Company up the steep and winding road to the Castello, handed

over the business of surrender to Major Cross, and returned to the Tribunale. C Company reached the castle, passed through the gates under a massive stone archway, and entered a central courtyard where the enemy garrison waited. A good deal of indiscriminate shooting was going on, and a bazooka had been fired at one of the tanks, but had missed. The Yugoslavs, threatening to shoot down anyone attempting to enter the castle, left C Company alone. An officer, with mixed feelings, watched this milling, encircling, and threatening of different nationalities 'and political odds and sods of at least 5 to 6 distinct flavours. I felt disheartened. I felt the war would never end.'

First the garrison piled weapons and equipment in one large heap, while Sergeant-Major Mangos³⁸ paraded C Company and handed it over to Major Cross. The company, responding to the dramatic atmosphere, drilled and moved superbly. Opposite C Company the enemy garrison paraded, headed by their commander, a naval officer who had served for four years with U-boats in the First World War and for three and a half years in the second. His parade came smartly to attention, and as the commander saluted in the usual fashion, all his officers gave the Nazi salute. C Company in turn snapped to attention, and Major Cross saluted.

An English-speaking German regimental sergeant-major next escorted Mangos on a tour of the castle, pointing out guard positions and revealing formidable dumps of ammunition—the garrison was well prepared for siege. A good deal of time passed before all surrender formalities and arrangements ended. The New Zealanders grew more and more hungry. Major Cross gladly agreed to the commander's suggestion that the company share a meal with the garrison. Around 11.30 p.m. in the old castle New Zealanders and Germans, bitter enemies but a few hours ago, lined up in the same mess queue for the old familiar hot stew.

From time to time members of Tito's partisans had called at the castle gate to demand entrance, but in vain. From houses on higher ground partisan snipers had been shooting at movement within the walls. The captured force now suggested with some enthusiasm uniting with the New Zealanders and fighting side by side if the situation grew worse. Major Cross, suddenly immersed in the intricacies and duplicities of peace, replied non-committally. Next morning the garrison, under escort, marched down the road to the waiting three-tonners. Howls of protest and anger rose from the demonstrating partisans and civilians, who demanded the

prisoners. The New Zealanders saw the Germans off safely.

At the Tribunale building the CO couldn't persuade the enemy commander to surrender. By arrangement with the Yugoslav commander, it was agreed that eighteen tanks from 19 and 20 Armoured Regiments would ring the building and blast it from ranges of 20 to 50 yards. At 7 p.m. the tanks opened up, blowing gaping holes in the walls and firing shells through the windows. They kept up the bombardment for nearly twenty minutes before Yugoslav troops and partisans entered the building and rounded up the garrison.

Next night an Austrian civilian brought a message from the lieutenant-general commanding the [Trieste](#) and north-west coastal area, who wished to surrender his forces to the British. The battalion Intelligence Officer, Second-Lieutenant Clem Currie,³⁹ Sergeant Morrie [Klein](#)⁴⁰ and the Austrian (to act as interpreter) set off on foot, carrying a flag of truce made out of a tablecloth. High up the hillside overlooking [Trieste](#) city and harbour they climbed towards the General's well-guarded villa. The rain fell steadily as the three men tramped over the wet cobblestones. It was necessary to light up the flag in the gloom. The electric torch, playing up, flickered infuriatingly. The Germans were well dug in: the approach to the headquarters was covered by underground shelters and an elaborate system of trenches. As the three moved forward in the darkness they could see the faces of German soldiers standing by, peering at them curiously. They hoped the Germans were sober.

Unhappily, the Austrian was somewhat deaf. He couldn't hear replies to his frequent announcements of the party's mission. Fortunately Sergeant Klein's German got by. At the villa the General eventually agreed to come down under escort and discuss terms of surrender with Colonel Donald. With two of his staff officers, he set off to the battalion's tactical headquarters in the Albergo Regina.

Near the foot of the hill a jeep waited, with the Intelligence Sergeant, Charlie [Simpson](#),⁴¹ alongside the driver. The Germans got into the jeep. The others walked ahead. The only light was the dull glow of the torch, which was still spotlighting the white flag. Soon a Tito patrol challenged the party. Fast thinking and double talk by Currie satisfied the partisans, who did not trouble to investigate the passengers.

The surrender discussions took a long time. Two interpreters were necessary, a German-Italian interpreter and an Italian-English interpreter. The German commander wanted to make certain his men fell into British, not Yugoslav, hands. It was decided to take him out to [Miramare](#), [General Freyberg's](#) headquarters. [Freyberg](#) conferred with Donald, did not see the Germans, and arranged for the commander, his staff, and his men of that particular garrison to be taken to a British prisoner-of-war cage as soon as possible.

The party returned to the garrison and speedy evacuation plans began. D Company arrived as escort and disarmed the enemy. As dawn came into the sky Second-Lieutenant Currie led a long column down the hill. Behind the Intelligence Officer came the German general and his staff in eight cars, a German truck and a motor-cycle, followed by eight of D Company's trucks, and finally about 300 Germans on foot. Currie watched anxiously in case the partisans intervened, but the garrison, conducted by Jim Sherratt and his platoon, safely reached the cages of [Monfalcone](#).

During the first visit to the villa and while awaiting the result of the negotiations, Sergeant Klein remained alone in a room, with the Germans conferring next door. Although he could not detect what was actually being said, he is convinced that everyone joined in taking some form of solemn oath. The commander would say a few words. Everyone repeated his words. Again and again the commander would say something, and each time came the mumbled reply. This ceremony went on for a fairly long time.

One sane note at [Trieste](#) was the faithful [YMCA](#) service from Roy [Salmon](#),⁴² who in the year he had been with the battalion had driven exactly 10,000 miles. Roy and his assistant (Wally [Church](#),⁴³ formerly of D Company), distributing thankfully received hot tea and buns during the last of the firing in [Trieste](#), were probably the last [YMCA](#) unit serving refreshments in the front line when the war ended in the Italian theatre.

On the morning of 3 May, after receiving a message from the commander of yet another German garrison at Villa [Opicina](#) (a large village in the hills north of the city), A Company and tanks of A Squadron [20 Armoured Regiment](#) moved out to the area, only to find that the garrison was under siege by the Yugoslav forces, who were firing when A Company arrived. Captain Jock Wells, A Company's commander,

went forward with a German officer who had come out to arrange the surrender. The partisans opened up with small arms and mortars. A Company came under fire, and to the sorrow and anger of the battalion, one very fine soldier, Lance-Corporal Russell, was mortally wounded and Corporal [Ahern](#)⁴⁴ was wounded.

Orders were given to advance to a large house just ahead. Taking the two wounded, A Company joined the main force of German soldiers. 'And so began the strangest day of the whole Italian Campaign,' writes Lloyd Grieve. 'Casualties had been, and continued to be, inflicted on the Germans by Tito's troops. It was said that their Medical Officers were working flat out. Here we were, among armed Germans who greatly outnumbered us, and subject to the same dangers in a private war which was being prosecuted after the official cessation of hostilities. Midday came and the Tedeschi lined up for a helping of potato soup. When they had filed past I borrowed some mess gear and tried the soup too. Small groups formed round English-speaking German officers who conversed brightly on the course and ultimate end of the war. Most were of the opinion that [Germany](#) and England should have allied themselves to fight against [Russia](#)—and that that day might even come to pass. [Bob Ferris chatted with a German who exported tools to Bob's hometown, [Blenheim](#).] The ORs were mainly middle-aged and war weary troops (some Austrian), too downcast to make conversation per medium of Italian.

'It was not until well on in the afternoon that one of our tanks, bearing a white flag, contacted the Yugoslavs and brought their assault to an end.'

This distressing situation ended after visits by Wells to the Yugoslav headquarters, when a Yugoslav officer and a British liaison officer from these headquarters called at 9 Brigade Headquarters. More parley ended with A Company and the tanks pulling out, while the Germans were advised to surrender to the Yugoslavs.

A Company and the tanks returned to [Trieste](#). Twenty-second Battalion had fired its last shot in the Second World War, and had suffered its last casualty.

'Next day a small party of us set off to bury our dead comrade,' adds Grieve. 'The spot was outside the wall of a newly set-up C.C.S.... a shallow grave was in readiness—shallow because the body would later be removed to a war cemetery.

The circumstances of our comrade's death affected us profoundly. Mere words do not describe the memory of a good companion, young and adventurous, reliable in action, cheerful and unselfish as he lived amongst us. None of us said these things; we all knew that these were our thoughts. Our sorrow conveyed itself to a group of Italian peasants who, bareheaded, quietly joined our service. Roman Catholic and Protestant, countryman and foreigner stood humbly together in the presence and the mystery of death. He died when the war was over, but he died in battle.'

The tension, apparent in [Trieste](#) from the moment the New Zealanders appeared, swiftly increased, a tension which seemed on the verge of erupting into a shooting war at any time. Tank faced tank; Yugoslav and British sentries, remote and frigid, guarded bridges, the harbour, and intersections; armed squads marched through apprehensive streets plastered with photographs, posters and slogans: 'Zivio Tito', 'Zivio Stalin' (and here and there, scrawled in competition, an occasional New Zealand slogan: 'Zivio Gentry', 'Zivio Kiwi'). The Yugoslavs, overrun, humiliated and garrisoned by vindictive German and Italian troops since early 1941, had risen in one of the most remarkable and one of the most savage guerrilla campaigns in modern history, at one time tying down more German troops in their wasted countryside than the Allies were in [Italy](#). For centuries [Trieste](#) had been a disputed city, with a history even more tangled than a battalion history. But to the New Zealanders, phlegmatic Yugoslavs (or 'Jugs'), speaking an incomprehensible language, were pushing around Italians ('and even Ites were humans') in a city predominantly Italian. It was humiliating for an infantryman driving in a truck to be suddenly fired on, and sometimes, enraged, he fired back. This 'peace', with no relaxation, called for extra duties and tasks, and men who were ordered to carry weapons with them even on leave could not enjoy an evening's relaxation. Bored with the whole business of slogans and parrot cries, one 22 Battalion man had seized paste-pot and brush and slammed a poster on to the chest of a Yugoslav—a significant act. For the New Zealand soldier, homesick and sick to death of a diseased and decaying [Europe](#), had suffered and endured enough. This was one hell of a way to end a war.

Yet the tangle of [Trieste](#) can be over-dramatised from the soldier's viewpoint, as the following incident (from a soldier suddenly turned diplomat) shows. D Company occupied the Hotel Continentale, near the centre of the city, and had fenced off each end of the block with rolls of concertina barbed wire, leaving at each end a narrow

entrance to allow trucks in and out. One day lunch was interrupted by the noise of nearby spandaus and schmeissers. 'Suddenly,' writes a D Company officer, 'our street was jammed full of screaming civilians, as [if] a huge river had suddenly been diverted into a little hollow. One Italian male with tears streaming down his face grabbed me by the lapels of my battledress and shouted in broken English: "Save us, save us, Capitano, or we are all murdered!"' Grasping his only weapon, a bright yellow, nobbly walking-stick, the officer thrust his way through the crowd and peered round the corner. 'Spread across the street, coming down at a jogtrot, were about fifteen of Tito's boys and girls—they looked about 16 or 17 years old—dressed in untidy battle-dresses of a lighter hue than ours, caps with red stars, and the girls with their hair hanging down almost to their shoulders.

'As they trotted along, as happy as children at a Sunday-school picnic, they let off bursts from their schmeissers in a general direction of the crowds of fleeing Italians. As I poked my head round they were starting a left wheel into our street. Waving my stick in the air I shouted: "Aspete! Una momento!" They understood about as much Italian as I did, but it was the only language we had in common. They stopped and clustered round. "Che fate qui?" I asked. "Shooting Fascists," they said. "Dove Fascisti?" "There!" they said, and, when asked how could they tell which were Fascists in such a big crowd, replied: "Tutti Italiani Fascisti!" Privately I quite agreed, but stalling for time to think I said wisely: "Forse" (which I think means "possibly").

'I then explained slowly and firmly that questa strada was nostra strada Zelandese—that no-one: nienti altri soldati, niente civili: was permitted on our piece of street. Now they had just filled our piece of street up with civili, which I didn't like any more than they did, and furthermore if they shot any in our street they would make a mess which we would have to clean up. Nienti bono. I said I didn't mind what they did in their streets, but it was not allowed in our street. Therefore would they please, per favore, go a little way back up the street and refrain from shooting until I had emptied all the civili out of our street? They laughingly agreed to do so and retired round the corner, parting on the best of terms.

'I then hopped up onto a truck and pointing vigorously at our street shouted: "A casa, tutti, molto presto! Niente pericoloso— a casa andate via!" With a great surge, the crowd moved out of the street, and about one-third of the solid mass of

humanity were out when the little bastards started shooting again—I suppose the target was irresistible. I ran again to the end of the street and shook my fist at them. They waved in friendly fashion back. Then again I mounted the truck and bellowed: “ Andate a casa—multo presto !” This time they let the crowd go, and within seconds the streets were empty. The manager of the hotel, an unpleasant type, told me that evening that some 18 or more bodies were picked up round in the next block that day. I could not vouch for the accuracy of his figures. The whole incredible business was all over in probably less than 5 minutes. I could not say just how many would be in that crowd, but if you jammed [Queen Street](#) full from Wellesley Street to Victoria Street you would find about an equal number.’

During the month of tension in [Trieste](#) perhaps just one drunken New Zealander could have started a first-class war with the Yugoslavs. For most of that month only a small proportion of men from each company were allowed out of the buildings they occupied. Recreation was difficult, although on a sort of roster system swimming parties, visits to a gymnasium, and so on were arranged. The cooks worked superbly to keep the standard of food higher than troops had ever known before in [Italy](#). Despite this (in one typical company) 135 men, cooped in a second-rate hotel built for eighty-five guests, found the forced inactivity plus the chance of a shooting war starting at any time most irksome and wearying on the nerves. And yet, although the wineshops were open within a quarter of a mile of the place and loot money was abundant, not one incident occurred to the discredit of any man in the company—not one case of drunkenness, not one fight—which speaks volumes for the morale and the self discipline of the men of the battalion.

They left [Trieste](#) at the end of June, after camping in the neighbourhood among hills and pines. (‘When do we go home?’) For the last time the battalion moved along that beautiful coast road past [Miramare](#), up the hill and along the cliff-side through the tunnels. Men, turning for a last look out across the calm of the green Adriatic, thought of a similar, but colder, harbour city far to the south: [Wellington](#), where the battalion had sailed away to war. (‘When do we go home?’)

When the New Zealanders left [Trieste](#), one city newspaper wrote: ‘How could we but love these boys who overthrew the last Nazi and Fascist resistance in our fair city, and who were our guests from May, their youthful pranks with our children,

their loyalty, and their democratic army. Goodbye, New Zealand brothers. We are happy that you are returning to your country before you become corrupted like ourselves by this sick place called [Europe](#), where, if you stay, she would, with her evil, gnaw into you all, as she has eaten into us. So, New Zealand friends, goodbye, and please understand us.'

Southwards they travelled, with their memories and their dust clouds, to the Tiber. They camped near the wrinkled old city of [Perugia](#), where they heard the news that [Japan](#), twice atom-bombed, had capitulated.⁴⁵ How quickly the last five years, with all their hopes and agonies, seemed to shrink into an old-fashioned war. Again they moved, to above [Senigallia](#), to a rest camp on the Adriatic, in August. Further drafts left for home. 'Then they lined the road and gave us a final sendoff. Felt quite "full"—there are a lot of friends left there—real friendships formed under fire—friendships that are not like any other. They are a great crowd, and I was very sorry to leave them.'⁴⁶

As autumn approached, they returned to [Perugia](#), then to a winter camp near [Florence](#), where some men left on official leave to England. On 8 October Major Spicer paraded his battalion. He explained that certain single men of 9 Brigade would be going to [Japan](#) as part of 'Jayforce', New Zealand's troops of occupation. The new force was organised quickly. Lieutenant-Colonel 'Sandy' Thomas, the noted commander of 23 Battalion, took over a reorganised 22 Battalion. They sailed from [Naples](#) in the [Strathmore](#) on 21 February 1946 for [Kure, Japan](#).

One officer, who had been severely wounded and mutilated for life, writes in November 1953: 'I don't think it was in vain for it has been much the same down the ages. The British have fought for their freedom and liberty in various wars and generations—and retained it. Or are we heading for the final great onslaught before the true One World? Can we mix people of different races and creeds? Perhaps it's the return of the Golden Horde. One wonders and waits and I look at my three sons.'

¹ Cpl C. J. Merrylees; [Napier](#); born [Waipukurau](#), 20 Dec 1908; stud groom; wounded 24 Oct 1942.

² Pte W. W. Tatham; [Awakino](#); born [Eketahuna](#), 6 Sep 1910; farmer.

³ While returning late from a social visit to the Divisional Workshops on New Year's Eve, Graham Hesp and A. C. McArtney struck tommy-gun fire near the Naafi theatre and 'learned that the Gurkhas were having a bit of fun, hunted them up, told them we had been their targets, and chummed up well. It shows how friendships can be made.'

⁴ 2 Lt E. M. Scott, m.i.d.; Masterton; born Dannevirke, 21 Nov 1916; shepherd and drover; wounded 17 Jan 1945.

⁵ Sgt F. G. Benson; Marton; born Wanganui, 6 Jan 1917; farmhand.

⁶ Two bands, the battalion's pipe band and 2 Ammunition Company's brass band, played during a battalion parade for General Freyberg, who presented medals to members of the Freyberg Cup team. He paid a tribute to the fighting efficiency and record of the battalion and spoke highly of the leadership and soldierly qualities of Colonel O'Reilly, who next day was leaving for New Zealand on furlough.

⁷ Pte D. M. Doyle; Masterton; born New Plymouth, 15 Jun 1923; shop assistant.

⁸ Appointments were: CO, Lt-Col H. V. Donald; 2 i/c, Maj C. N. Armstrong; OC A Coy, Capt J. Wells; OC B Coy, Capt R. H. Spicer; OC C Coy, Maj L. G. S. Cross; OC D Coy, Maj H. K. Joblin.

⁹ Maj G. S. Cox, MBE, m.i.d.; London; born Palmerston North, 7 Apr 1910; journalist.

¹⁰ The Road to Trieste (Heinemann).

¹¹ Shanks, who was soon wounded in the shoulder, was evacuated in a Bren carrier. He slid out of the carrier when it stood on its tail to climb out of a ditch, but jumped up and, towing his stretcher behind him, caught up again. Twenty-four hours later he had had an operation and was far away in hospital at Bari.

¹² Pte G. W. Hardy; Wellington; born NZ 24 Sep 1923; labourer.

¹³ WO I I. F. Forsyth; Waiouru; born Petone, 16 Jun 1917; transport driver; wounded 13 Apr 1945; RSM, Army Schools, Waiouru.

¹⁴ On another occasion a comrade recalls that Hardy was 'shouting corrections to fire orders to a German machine-gunner who was obviously trying to hit him. The method: "Down 50 you Herman—", or "Slightly right, you Herman—!" It must have been Hardy's lucky war for no one appeared to get him in their sights and he finally made the grade.'

¹⁵ Maj D. G. Hayter, m.i.d.; New Plymouth; born Manaia, 30 May 1912; civil servant.

¹⁶ Pte A. L. J. Herbert; born Waitara, 22 Jan 1922; cheese maker; wounded 14 Apr 1945.

¹⁷ Pte S. R. Young; born Auckland, 6 Mar 1923; factory hand; died of wounds 19 Apr 1945.

¹⁸ Pte A. C. McArtney; Bulls; born Foxton, 1 Dec 1922; exchange clerk; wounded 14 Apr 1945.

¹⁹ Sgt J. H. Garwood, DCM; Lower Hutt; born Wellington, 12 Feb 1921; store-man.

²⁰ Pte D. W. Charlwood; born NZ 30 Apr 1912; truck driver; deceased.

²¹ L-Cpl W. A. Sinclair; born Dunedin, 6 Feb 1922; casein worker.

²² Pte R. A. Spooner; Wanganui; born Hunterville, 15 Apr 1923; apprentice motor mechanic; wounded 15 Apr 1945.

²³ Lt A. S. Rogers; Lower Hutt; born Lower Hutt, 14 Jul 1916; warehouse assistant; twice wounded.

²⁴ Sgt B. G. Glen; Gisborne; born Auckland, 19 Dec 1919; bank clerk; wounded 17 Apr 1945.

²⁵ Lt J. D. Bedingfield; born Wellington, 12 Sep 1920; student teacher; killed in action 15 Apr 1945.

²⁶ Lt K. J. D. McCorkindale; born Auckland, 9 Oct 1920; soldier; killed in action 16 Apr 1945.

²⁷ Pte H. J. Sherman; Te Kowhai, Hamilton; born Dargaville, 20 Nov 1921; farmhand; wounded 15 Apr 1945.

²⁸ Pte B. R. Goodwin; born Stratford, 25 Sep 1922; butcher; wounded 17 Apr 1945.

²⁹ L-Cpl C. K. Ferguson; Heretaunga; born NZ 5 Nov 1921; clerk; wounded 17 Apr 1945.

³⁰ Sgt D. B. Ballantyne; born NZ 6 Jan 1924; filer's assistant; wounded 19 Apr 1945.

³¹ Cpl S. E. Phelps; born Carterton, 29 Nov 1920; slaughterman; wounded 18 Apr 1945.

³² 'After all the slogging through mud it was a wonderful experience to get Jerry really on the run,' writes J. S. Watt, now a learner-cook in the company cook-house. 'It was a hectic rush trying to keep the meals up and no sooner would we start to cook a meal somewhere than the call would come "Pack up and on again.'"

³³ Col J. I. Thodey, DSO, m.i.d.; Perth; born Gisborne, 8 Dec 1910; life assurance officer; CO 21 Bn Jul-Oct 1944, May-Dec 1945.

³⁴ These exotics included the wife or mistress of many a fascist, for the wealthy of northern Italy had avoided the Allied bombing by sheltering in

Venice. 'It was a sight both brilliant and revolting,' wrote a New Zealand Intelligence officer, '... I was glad enough to get away.'

³⁵ Capt T. D. Leatham; Hawera; born Eltham, 5 Jul 1913; meter reader.

³⁶ Nevertheless a corporal writes: 'In Italy, a dead Mussolini seemed to be a more popular figure than a live Churchill, which was a disturbing thought. The Italian peasant, shopkeeper, professional man or student would admit that Mussolini "a prima"—before his thoughts and energies turned to conquest—did a lot for the people. Already they were persuading themselves that the good he had done would live after him while the bad had died there with him on the service station in Milano.... Although the whole land lay blasted by war, looted and disrupted, there was a feeling of confidence in the future. Each day provided a sufficiency of pasta and vino; each day there were willing hands to plant and cultivate, to replace and reconstruct the ruins.'

³⁷ Pte G. Findlay; Lyttelton; born Scotland, 10 Oct 1918; seaman; wounded 2 May 1945.

³⁸ WO II B. E. Mangos; Wellington; born NZ 5 Sep 1911; clerk; wounded 4 Dec 1943.

³⁹ 2 Lt C. S. Currie; Taupo; born Auckland, 6 Feb 1914; shop assistant.

⁴⁰ Sgt M. Klein; Melbourne; born London, 9 Aug 1907; manager; wounded 24 Oct 1942.

⁴¹ S-Sgt C. H. Simpson, m.i.d.; Wairoa; born Gisborne, 21 Oct 1918; farm labourer; wounded 30 Nov 1943.

⁴² Pte R. Salmon; born Auckland, 21 Mar 1910; shop assistant.

⁴³ Sgt W. H. Church; Puha, Gisborne; born NZ 17 Apr 1922; farmhand.

⁴⁴ WO II D. F. Ahern; Wanganui; born Palmerston North, 17 Jul 1923; clerk;

wounded 3 May 1945.

⁴⁵ The total killed in the Second World War (according to Life's Picture History of World War Two): British Commonwealth, 452,570; USA, 295,904; USSR, 7,500,000; France, 200,000; China (since 1937), 2,200,000. Allied total, 10,648,474. Germany, 2,850,000; Italy, 300,000; Japan, 1,506,000. Axis total, 4,656,000.

The war cost New Zealand about £800,000 a day. An American statistician, Colonel W. P. Campbell, has calculated the cost of killing a German soldier in the Second World War at £12,500, which equals the cost of killing 66,000 soldiers in Caesar's time. The cost for one man over the years: in Caesar's time, 3s. 6d.; Napoleonic Wars, £750; American Civil War, £1250; First World War, £5250.

⁴⁶ 'Home on Sunday,' wrote a Wanganui man as his troopship approached Wellington. 'Don't seem to be particularly thrilled—s'pose I will when I see the folks again though, but at present it seems to be just another port of call.'

22 BATTALION

CHAPTER 15 – JAPAN

CHAPTER 15

Japan

'... in dealing with the Japanese... [the British Commonwealth Occupation Force] is dealing with a conquered enemy who, by making war against us, has caused deep suffering and loss in many thousands of homes throughout the British Empire. Your relations with this defeated enemy must be guided by your own individual good judgement and your sense of discipline. You must be formal and correct. You must not enter their homes or take part in their family life. Your unofficial dealings with the Japanese must be kept to a minimum.'—Army directive.

19/3/46: Bits of [Japan](#) all around us.... Islands tree-covered with yellow sandy beaches, and a little cultivation; houses of unpainted wood and grey slate roofs; more villages. They all look grey... [Kure](#) is all grey, hills, towns and harbour.

21/3/46: Rumour: A Jap slapped a British-sailor's face with an axe—he tried to swipe a purse, so they say.... Incident number one....

22/3/46: Stepped onto the sacred soil. It's damn dirty. Marched with band to Railway Station. Japs don't impress. I hope this engine-driver isn't one of those suicide merchants.... [Later, after the 170-mile trip to [Chofu](#)] [Japan](#) appears all the same.... Grey slate roofs. Pine clad hills and rice fields. And dirty little Japs.... —
Extract from a private diary.

After being warned against a variety of diseases (including scattered cases of leprosy), food, vegetables, fruit, water, smuggling and black-market activities, and a Japanese whisky with a heart brand in the centre of the label and mostly methylated spirits inside the bottle (a product of [Hiroshima](#) Province), 22 Battalion stepped ashore in [Japan](#) early on 22 March 1946. The only casualties were some kitbags burned in a railway wagon fire, which had been started by a Japanese labourer accidentally knocking over a candle. Headed by Colonel Thomas and the pipe band (the Japanese remained inscrutable even in the presence of bagpipes), the battalion marched smartly through the desolate naval base of [Kure](#), took the train for six hours, travelled peacefully through [Hiroshima](#) (one bomb, nearly one-third of a million casualties) ¹ to the town of [Chofu](#), and took over the local barracks, which overlooked mud flats and had been occupied recently by Americans. Early next

morning an apologetic advance party, delayed at Hiroshima, turned up at the barracks with rations, cooking equipment, bedrolls and kitbags. Army life was under way again.

The battalion was part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force of 40,000, drawn from Australian, British, New Zealand and Indian troops, who began arriving in February 1946 at [Kure](#), six months after the Americans. [Kure](#) is near the southern end of [Japan's](#) main island of [Honshu](#), which is almost 500 miles longer than New Zealand's North or South Island. The New Zealanders' duties were to the west, where they occupied [Honshu's](#) southerly province of [Yamaguchi](#), a province covering 2000 square miles and holding almost the population of New Zealand at that time, 1,376,000 Japanese.

The New Zealanders took over three Japanese repatriation centres, and supervised the repatriation of almost 300,000 Japanese soldiers and illegal Korean immigrants. Koreans attempting to infiltrate into [Japan](#) seeking employment were checked by strongpoints manned at certain coastal towns. New Zealand patrols combed the whole province, detecting hidden arms or war equipment, reporting war supplies for destruction (one task of the occupying Powers was to see that [Japan](#) was thoroughly disarmed), supervising local elections and civil administration to some extent, and seeing that the orders of the occupation were being carried out in offices and schools. [Japan](#), blasted, bombed and devastated, had indeed surrendered unconditionally. No armed rebellions had to be put down; the use of armed force was not required. Of [Shimonoseki's](#) 150,000 people, 6000 were homeless, living with relations, in public buildings, and in any shelter they could find. The daily food ration was 297 grammes (ten ounces) of rice, beans and/ or barley.

On reaching [Chofu](#), 22 Battalion was prepared for trouble. Within a few weeks several million Japanese soldiers (it was thought at first) would be passing through the nearby smallpox infected port at [Shimonoseki](#) at the rate of about 12,000 a day. 'These soldiers are the cream of the Japanese Imperial Army,' an operation order stated, 'and are reputed to be arrogant and unconvinced that the war is finally lost for them.' The Japanese Government was responsible for seeing these returning soldiers off their ships, on to trains, and safely away into the north. Nevertheless, riots or rebellion might break out (the code-word for a state of emergency was PARADISE,) and the battalion's task if this happened was to hold [Chofu](#) and instantly

clear out all Japanese. Detailed plans for this were outlined and rehearsed, but the precautions were unnecessary. The soldiers did not return by the million, and a greatly relieved Town Major reported in April. 'Japanese say that the Russians captured and sent to Siberia the major portion of the Kwantung Army, and that the only members of this force reaching Japan are a few escapees who entered through Hakata and Senzaki, and who have provided this information. They are of opinion that there will be few repatriates from Manchuria. Since September very few Kwantung Army personnel have reached Japan.'

A week after landing in Japan A Company had taken control of the whole Shimonoseki area, with Lieutenant Bell ² as Town Major (9 Platoon occupied the Jumpsu-Ro Hotel complete with bar 'and no 6 o'clock or Sunday closing'), and other officers took similar posts at other centres. Equally promptly, D Company (Major Wright ³), taking over from an American company, ran the Korean repatriation centre at Senzaki. D Company put through about 2000 repatriation cases each working day, and early in April drafted the highest daily total of 6000. The Japanese worked in close contact with the repatriated people, and the New Zealanders supervised the Japanese. New Zealand guards at first were mounted full-time on the Korean compound (for some Koreans had no love for the Japanese), but later guards were mounted only occasionally. Generally the company's duties (apart from the usual patrols and raids on suspected areas) were to supervise repatriated people through medical and customs officials, and to see to their accommodation and feeding in both compounds —one compound held Japanese and the other Koreans. The company was also responsible for keeping two temporary ferry services running smoothly. Some twenty LSTs regularly brought demobilised Japanese troops and families from Shanghai (1200-odd on each ship); a former Inland Sea pleasure ship (400) and a small ex-Japanese Navy warship (100-odd) were on the Korea to Pusan run.

Most of the Japanese 'had been away from Japan for several years ... they were very bewildered and were unable to understand the defeat of the Nation. The Koreans on the other hand were all civilians. At first they were a mixture of voluntary repats. and deportees. In the main they were complete families. With the passing time illegal re-entrants to Japan soon passed the news that Korea was not the prosperous country they knew and food was extremely short. As a result voluntary

repatriation almost died out.... [One party of 300 Korean men] arrived at [Senzaki](#) dressed in old-style Australian Army uniforms less hat. They had been forced labourers in either Nauru or [Rabaul](#).... [Apart from clothing and feeding them, the Australians also had taught them a thing or two because] they refused to return to [Korea](#) until they had been paid by the [Japanese Government](#). A deputation of them was sent to [Tokyo](#), where they were successful in their claim and returned with a colossal amount of money which was distributed. The period of payment from memory was about three years.'

Major Wright, in charge of the [Senzaki](#) area and in close touch with Japanese authorities, at times 'had the feeling that a certain amount of back-chat was not what it should be and enlisted the aid of an Australian sergeant called Kentwell who was born at [Osaka](#) and spoke the language well. After listening for some time, he addressed the gathering in their own tongue, and thereafter if I was in doubt the presence of a strange soldier had the desired effect.' Strictly insisting that all hygienic regulations were carried out, D Company avoided the very real threat of plagues from carriers of diseases from [Asia](#). A cholera scare was dealt with promptly by quarantining a boatload of suspects.

While A and D Companies settled down in their two areas, the rest of the battalion undertook training ('worse than when I first went to camp'), guard duties, marches showing the flag, pickets, and was prepared to take up action stations if trouble threatened. Patrols began combing settlements house by house and ranged over the countryside. By the end of April such patrolling was well under way within each of the companies' areas. The pitfalls of occupation were brought home to Private [Meggitt](#)⁴ when a restaurant proprietor entertained him at a party in the shop and later gave him a paper to sign. As a joke Meggitt scrawled briefly at the bottom of the paper, pocketed it, and was instantly surrounded by a hostile mob. He handed back the paper, which was later recovered and was found to read:

BCOF HQ KURE

To whom this may concern—this person has permission to use his boat and has full authority from BCOF HQ.

Signed: CAPTAIN JAMES COOK, 1482.

Supplies of war materials discovered, seldom in large quantities, by battalion patrols included gas-masks, steel helmets, belted ammunition, detonators, 3-inch mortars, aircraft engines not properly wrecked, concealed aviation petrol, stores of explosives and hand grenades, material dumped at sea, swords, rifles, mines and shot-guns. But within a few weeks patrols found little to report or confiscate.⁵ The reactions of civilians were recorded by battalion patrols: 'extremely interested in the activities of the patrol, but rather frightened when their premises were searched', 'timid or disinterested', 'startled at first, but soon became accustomed', 'kindly disposed... Perhaps the true Japanese reaction might be determined in these back areas of [Japan](#)', 'Subservient and co-operative. Children obviously coached to say little more than "Goodbye"', 'officials courteous, civilians friendly and generally smiling.' An officer notes that during all his time in [Japan](#) he was never 'able to lose a feeling (with most Japanese males) that I was dealing with something just slightly less than human in mental make-up ... no common ground whatever.'

'I should perhaps emphasise that prestige was a big thing here,' writes Lieutenant Bell. 'We called it prestige (in English). The Japanese called it face (in Japanese). And if there was one dominant aspect, one controlling factor as far as my experience in close contact with the Japanese official classes was concerned, it was this business of "face". By the time I was through I had come to hate the word in whatever language it was used. This may not have been a general experience. But there is no question it was there. And there is no question, either, that while I was Town Major in [Shimonoseki](#) I was involved in a continuous, unrelenting, sometimes amusing, sometimes infuriating, but always difficult battle of "face", which was the more involved, perhaps, because neither side would ever admit that it was in fact going on.'

Searches and patrols continued over the months, for Headquarters British Commonwealth Occupation Force, considering it 'foolish and dangerous' to accept the apparently docile appearance of the Japanese, sent secret reports mentioning the existence of militaristic and nationalistic secret societies and organisations, moves to keep discharged officers and men still in touch, and secret caches containing large quantities of military supplies (more were believed to exist throughout [Japan](#)).

Trouble was expected during the May Day celebrations. However the rallies, hampered by rain, were well conducted and orderly, the main theme of speeches stressing the need for uniting labour and reconstructing Japan by hard work. The Chofu audience, says an official report, 'was almost military in the passiveness of their listening and the precision of their cheers.... Women questioned concerning the main topic of the meeting and as to what May Day was for, were surprised that their opinion was asked for and could give no answer (giggling met most questions).' Later, a general strike throughout Japan was cancelled with no repercussions when General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Allied Commander in Tokyo, simply forbade strike action. 'While God might be in His Heaven,' noted Lieutenant Bell, 'MacArthur was in TOKYO.'

The battalion found Yamaguchi province very different from the Nile Delta or Italy. The hilly countryside was covered with bush, fairly dense in places and about twelve to fifteen feet high, an ideal sanctuary for snakes.

Between these hills lay small, flat, irrigated areas—paddy fields—and these were the life of the country in every sense of the word. Rice was grown in large quantities for food, saki (liquor) and export, barley gave the Japanese their beer, and the straw went into buildings. Only these flats were cultivated; the 1000-foot-high hills were not used at all. Each farmer had merely a couple of acres to look after, the government claimed about two-thirds of his output, and his earnings came to only a few pence a day (the Japanese soldier received 6d. a day, the factory worker 8d., and the New Zealand soldier 25 yen, or 8s. 4d.).

One soldier remembers how 'the women did most of the work, wallowing round knee-deep in mud and water planting and cultivating rice, while the menfolk busied themselves with as little as possible among the small jobs round about, or sat and smoked the quaint pipe, which had to be replenished with a fine, furry tobacco as each minute ticked away.'

In the middle of such an area houses clustered closely, eaves practically touching, so no land would be lost for cultivation. Gardens, if any, usually raised food. The average Japanese house was a frail looking affair, mostly made from straw, negligibly furnished but with ample cupboards and a domestic altar on one wall. If a soldier did not remove his shoes in this altar-room, a Japanese ran up with

a few boards for the New Zealander to stand on. Scattered here and there among the hills on small flats were tightly-packed hamlets or small villages, each with its own Town Major or Mayor (but no policeman), a school, and a surprisingly large population. Each school, no matter how small, had its own dental room, assembly hall, and an asphalt playing area. Small clay roads divided the flats or connected one clump of houses with another, and transport was usually a small four-wheeled wagon pulled by a solitary beast. Closer to the coastline larger towns appeared, varying in size and about equal to New Zealand towns approaching city status.

'Here', writes Stone,⁶ 'industrial works made their appearance and in a big way, as I was once in an aeronautical and naval factory which employed 10,000 workers. These wartime factories were of course stripped of their fittings and plant, and were very spacious. Streets, excepting those connecting the main centres, were not very big, asphalted and in need of repair. Sanitation was unheard of anywhere in the country where I went, the refuse being collected and stored away in wooden buckets with lids to ferment before being distributed on the soil. Hence, living under such conditions, is it any wonder disease is so prevalent? Traffic is fairly scarce, mostly pretty dilapidated buses running beneath overhead powerlines where once ran a tramcar. In these areas were to be found some clever industrialists. [He instances the identical duplication of American motor-car engines, and a small building filled with intricate instruments for ships, all made locally.]

'It was here the Japanese people were encountered most, except perhaps on railway stations. Dress was usually informal and general, the menfolk wearing a light-type cap with a big peak, denim coat and trousers with a type of puttee up to the knees. Sandshoes, black, constituted the footwear mainly. Not very big in stature, the women donned a shirt with baggy trousers so as to be able to squat down for a rest in preference to sitting. A piece of board the length of the foot, with a plaited flax-type piece of cord coming up between two toes and fastened back along the sides of the board, solved the women's footwear problem. Naturally, the dress of the Geisha Girl was of a different standard.

'Generally the Japanese treated us with a watchful eye, interested in all that was done, but did not create any hindrance, hardly. Each patrol was accompanied by two or three policemen who sped around on 3/4s girls' bicycles, and an interpreter, who set about their respective jobs methodically. Time and again, if a civilian was to

be questioned and a policeman was called in to help with proceedings, he usually had personal details before the interpreter had told him what was going on.'

In common with the rest of the New Zealanders, the battalion did not relish the role of occupation troops. 'I don't think many people really wanted to go to [Japan](#). We preferred to go home, or to England, or both, so that our outlook was probably a little jaundiced.' Most of them were men from the 14th and 15th Reinforcements, and few of them had been in action in [Italy](#). Agreements over occupation details and the final approval of the United States Government had taken a long time, and the men were tired of delays and false starts when at last the ship had sailed from [Naples](#) on 21 February 1946. The voyage, in muggy weather, was no pleasure cruise, with a measles epidemic aboard stopping leave at Colombo, [Singapore](#) (where 135 measles and fever cases were sent ashore) and [Hong Kong](#). Extravagant propaganda about [Japan](#) made the final destination even more drab: the poverty stricken and devastated province had no leave centres or pleasant clubs or restaurants, and few if any comforts, despite the efforts of the [YMCA](#). The language was incomprehensible, tuberculosis and venereal diseases were widespread, and the soldier's pay (at first merely 60 yen to £1) went nowhere on the wildest of black markets. The men from [Italy](#) took a sour view of [Japan](#). 'The dogged determination to do as little as possible and to be as troublesome as possible,' one new broom from New Zealand summed up in his report, unfairly as it appears when one considers the detailed reports of many patrols, and the amount of territory covered and examined by so few men. This outlook lasted until they were replaced with volunteers from New Zealand in June, July and August. ⁷ Yet it should be remembered that the echoes of Colonel Andrew's 'Second to None' still remained with the unit: three officers and ninety other ranks representing the battalion at the Anzac Day parade at [Kure](#) were considered 'easily the finest of the [2 NZEF](#) contingent in drill, dress, and general bearing.'

The last spectacular action of the battalion's original J Force men was a sweeping raid on [Shimonoseki](#)'s black market at the end of May. An unsavoury gang had cornered the rice supplies, the life blood of the ordinary citizen. Bit by bit the names of the racketeers were pieced together at secret rendezvous with disgruntled Koreans, special patrols, and 'hush-hush' interviews with anonymous victims. The raid, a complete success, surprised and seized fifty-seven of the sixty suspects,

including protesting policemen who were thrust into their own cells. Another clean-up of a different nature was ordered in the prisons, when a visit to [Chofu](#) prison disclosed '... human animals locked up in cages which were just large and high enough to hold a medium-sized circus lion ... a hideous animal smell.... In semi-darkness and in a stench you could cut through ... [the warder said some of] those creatures crouching in the distant corner of each cage ... never got out of those cages.'

Then, in the next three months, the men from [Italy](#) left for New Zealand, except for a few who chose to stay, including Staff-Sergeant [Murphy](#),⁸ who later died of sickness and was buried at [Kure](#). The old hands were replaced by young volunteers from New Zealand who, with rest camps opening, entertainment organised, and many trips under way to beaches and beauty spots, entered into and accepted the new life with a zeal which would have appalled any wartime campaigner in the battalion.

September: 'Intensive training ... fieldcraft and platoon tactics ... the necessity of saluting within the Battalion....'

October: 'Patrolling ... training ... sport ... pig hunting expeditions have become popular.'

November: '... six days of manoeuvres.... Colonel Thomas handed over command of the Battalion to Colonel McCaskill....'⁹

In December Japanese children were entertained at Christmas parties. The next six months passed in patrols, refresher courses, lectures, sand-table exercises, route marches, range exercises and live shoots. In mid-1947 the strength of the battalion at [Chofu](#) was severely reduced by drafts returning to New Zealand, and others were away on ceremonial appearances and duties with the [Tokyo](#) Guard of the Commonwealth Force. On 15 July an astonishing routine order stated 'that Parasols and Umbrellas would not be carried by troops as they are not part of the regimental dress.' Indeed, the days of the battalion were numbered now. Within a month, on 7 August 1947, 22 Battalion—the last of all the original infantry battalions of the [2 NZEF](#)—ceased to exist, and was renamed 2 Battalion of the New Zealand Regiment. In September 1948 [J Force](#) was withdrawn from [Japan](#).

But the men returned to New Zealand with uneasy memories of a teeming, inscrutable, brilliant nation crammed into a land which was the [Far East](#) no longer, but the Near North, growing closer and closer with every year that passed. They returned with a memory of devastation unparalleled in any of the war zones of [Europe](#) and [Africa](#), and this memory too, refusing to fade, crept steadily closer as time went by. But perhaps, among these memories from out of the bloody years, something more precious than all the other victories was stirring at last: the tiny beginnings of a world conscience were returning with the men of the battalion into all the scattered homes within the remote islands of New Zealand in the South Pacific.

¹ The bomb on [Hiroshima](#) (which with other towns had been warned in leaflet raids to evacuate civilians) brought 306,545 casualties: 78,150 dead, 13,983 missing, 9428 seriously injured, 27,997 with minor injuries, and 176,987 classified as suffering from sickness, privation, and lack of homes, food and clothing. 'It somewhat took my memories back to the wreckage of [Cassino](#) and the twisted iron of [Rimini](#),' writes C. H. Stone, who, describing how the battalion first viewed the bomb's devastation in silent wonderment, adds how men 'could not for a period fathom out how so much could be done by a single blast in such a short space of time.'

² Lt [W. R. Bell](#); [Auckland](#); born [Auckland](#), 24 Sep 1921; law student.

³ Maj [L. W. Wright](#); [Eastbourne](#); born Taumarunui, 10 May 1922; Regular soldier.

⁴ Pte [L. T. Meggitt](#); [Tauranga](#); born NZ 16 Mar 1924; farmhand.

⁵ An extract from such patrol reports (in this instance, Lieutenant Kennedy and 12 men from B Company in a one-day search of Szuki town) reads: 'Factories and Installations: (Wartime and present use.) Electric substation [map reference]; a flour and rice mill working under Jap Govt instructions; small engineering shop making rivets, nuts and bolts, and employing six men; Iron works, made machinery for coal mines during the war, now making iron pots, employs 15 men; two saw mills each employing 10 men; many pottery factories; a large iron foundry [map reference] employs about 60 men, made Jap mors [mortars] during the war, now makes parts for rly

engines, searched by Americans last Sep, very modern machinery incl electric smelting pot, lathes, overhead crane, and its own power plant. Several caves had been dug in the bank surrounding the factory, but these appear to have been all blown in.'

⁶ Pte C. H. Stone; Morrinsville; born Hamilton, 30 Sep 1923; farmhand.

⁷ Noting a different atmosphere 'with the change-over to young and enthusiastic volunteers', Oliver A. Gillespie concludes in his War History volume, *The Pacific*: 'The New Zealander, with few exceptions, made a reliable soldier for occupation duty—a duty which carried with it immense privilege and power among a people to whom obedience was implicit. He rarely departed from an attitude of fairness and decency and controlled with ease a population among which, in the Yama-guchi prefecture, he was outnumbered by 343 to one.'

⁸ S-Sgt J. M. Murphy, MM; born NZ 9 Apr 1906; waterside worker; died of sickness 18 Jul 1946.

⁹ Lt-Col G. M. McCaskill; Raumati; born Temuka; Regular soldier; CO 22 Bn (Japan) 29 Nov 1946-7 Aug 1947; CO 2 Bn Aug 1947-Sep 1948.

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APPENDIX – RUGBY MEMORIES

Appendix

RUGBY MEMORIES

[By Paul Donoghue, who apologises for any names of team-mates omitted; these notes are written from memory going back fourteen years.]

The 11th January 1940 was the last day in civilian life for some 800 members of the original 22nd Battalion, and like many another that day I had to decide just what gear to take to camp with me, and it seemed perfectly natural to include football boots, socks, pants and jersey in the equipment. The next morning saw us off to Trentham and throughout the day we were joined by hundreds from Taranaki, Hawke's Bay, East Coast, [Wanganui](#), Manawatu, Wairarapa and Bush. In those early days Rugby was a common bond and canteens and tents became places of reminiscences of games won and lost, of players who according to the raconteurs had never played a bad game, and it seemed that in the ranks of our battalion we had the nucleus of a football team which could hold its own with any pre-war Provincial team.

We were fortunate in having for our Colonel L. W. Andrew, VC, whose interest in the game was great and whose pride in the whole battalion as a team never diminished. We had a first-class referee in Major Leeks, a first war Army representative in Major McNaught, a real enthusiast in school-master Major Jim Leggat, and a well known exponent of the game in Irvine Hart, later Major, who had been half-back for Wairarapa in their palmy Ranfurly Shield days. With these supporters as senior officers in the battalion there was never any doubt in our minds that Rugby would take up a good share of our relaxation.

I remember well the Colonel announcing one morning on parade that he had received a cup from the people of Hawke's Bay for inter-company football [somebody pawned the cup about a year later], and that after these games had been played a team would be picked to play the other battalions, and that we would beat them too. This last statement made in the Colonel's brittle tones seemed to me

to resemble an order more than an expression of hope.

Our football gear went with us overseas. On the famous Newlands ground in [Capetown](#), Mervyn Ashman, Gerry Fowler and I played for the [Second Echelon](#) against Combined Universities.

So to England. Our first inter-battalion game took place with a memorable scoreless draw with the 21st Battalion, to be followed by equally as exciting games with the Maoris, the 23rds and Artillery, Anti-Tank, ASC, Field Ambulances, etc. Scores and results have faded from memory, but I believe I am correct in saying that we won more than we lost. These games were played in truly unique conditions and illustrate the love of New Zealanders for their national game. The Battle of [Britain](#) was being fought in the skies and many a game was played in [Kent](#) beneath the machine-gun bursts from Spitfires and Messerschmitts, while the spectators had their attentions divided between football and the more grim game being played above. Bren guns were set up on the sidelines as anti-aircraft defence, and many a time during a lull in the game we would see fights to the death above us.

I think our teams in those days usually included Joe Simpson, Taranaki; Bruce Skeen, Hawke's Bay; Ron Ayres, Hawke's Bay; Gordon Couchman, [Wanganui](#); Joe Patten, Taranaki; Morry Stewart, [Wanganui](#); Shorty Sangster, Taranaki; Keith Elliott, Bush; Sammy Sampson and Fred Knott of Taranaki; Ewen Cameron, Doug Bond, Doug Gollan, all of [Dannevirke](#); Jack Stewart of Hastings; Ron Newland of Bush; Merv. Ashman of Hastings; Gerry and Tim Fowler of Taranaki; Eric Newton of Poverty Bay; Earl Hunt, Hawke's Bay, and myself of [Wellington](#). One very enjoyable game was played against the Military College of Sandhurst at [Camberley](#). In this game Ron Ayres received an injury which resulted in his eventual return to New Zealand. Captain of this team in England was Gerry Fowler. We had several representatives in the [Second Echelon](#) team which played on many of the famous grounds of England.

They were just as good as infantrymen in [Greece](#) and [Crete](#) as they were footballers—Joe Simpson, wounded in the leg, left behind on [Maleme](#)—Doug Gollan, a sniper's bullet taking off the tip of his nose, was also left behind, as were Ewen Cameron, M. Stewart and Eric Newton, soldiers of the first order, all becoming POW's. Poor Bruce Skeen died from a stray bullet in the only bayonet charge in which I ever took part—much to our relief the Germans fled. Bruce was truly unlucky.

Major Dyer and Lieutenant Tifa Bennett of the [Maori Battalion](#) led this charge—the gallant Major armed only with a walking stick. Many of our football friends from other units also became casualties. Sickened and saddened from our experiences in [Greece](#) and [Crete](#), we were still able to welcome amongst our reinforcements many whose names were well known in New Zealand Rugby circles and whose presence later on brought the 22nd to the forefront of 2 NZEF Rugby.

Once we were on the football field rank ceased to exist, as I had good cause to remember when playing with Major (later Lieutenant-Colonel) Tom Campbell. The Major, who played for us periodically in England, was once making a determined run down the sideline and looked as though his progress would be stopped by the defenders. I had come up inside of him and had a clear run in. I was calling to him 'With you Major, pass to me Major,' but all in vain as Tom careered on. Finally in desperation I called 'Pass you selfish B—, pass,' and he passed immediately and I duly scored, and upon receiving the Major's congratulations no mention was made of my doubting the legitimacy of his birth.

The Egyptian summer of 1941 and the November campaign in [Libya](#) commenced, and one of our first casualties was beloved Shorty Sangster, a first five-eighths of much guile. Another well-known footballer in Hartley Kirschberg of [Wellington](#), who had recently joined us, received a serious arm wound at [Gazala](#) in this campaign. Some of my friends, Tom Steele, Tim Fowler, Keith Elliott and Dave Barton amongst others, were captured and held in [Bardia](#) for some weeks. All except Dave were released by the South Africans on New Year's Day. Dave, being an officer, was taken along to [Italy](#) with Brigadier Hargest before the town was captured.

The week preceding this Libyan campaign saw a really great match played on the sands of [Baggush](#)— 2 NZEF versus the South African Division, and in this historic match the 22nd was ably represented by Mick Kenny of [Wellington](#), Jack Sullivan, Taranaki All Black, Dave Barton of [Wanganui](#), and if memory serves me right, Gerry Fowler, Taranaki.

The battle over saw us back in Egypt before doing a tour of duty at [El Adem](#), near [Tobruk](#), and finally going to [Syria](#). In this period the 2 NZEF played a series of games in [Cairo](#), [Alexandria](#), and [Maadi](#), and the 22nd secured its usual quota of

players in the team namely Jack Sullivan, Athol Mahoney, Bush All Black who had just joined us, Gerry Fowler and myself. We had at least one inter-battalion game in this period against the 21st, defeating them in the Canal Zone. The sands were our home at this time and company football was the order of the day, and A Company commenced to build up an unbeaten record which held for a long time. Later on, in February 1943, A Company was known as No. 1 Company and it supplied six members of the 2 NZEF team which defeated the Rest of Egypt. The six were Mick Kenny, Lin Thomas, and myself of Wellington, Gerry Fowler of Taranaki, Ron Newland of Bush, and Dave Whillans, a man who represented Canterbury, Auckland and Wanganui. Another well-known player, 'Triss' Heggulun, also joined the company about this time.

July the 15th was a fateful day for the battalion, most of its members being captured at the ill-fated Ruweisat Ridge. One of our football team at least will always remember this day—Keith Elliott gaining the Victoria Cross—and we were more than proud of his achievement. Casualties were a penny a dozen these days and many of us, including Jack Sullivan, were wounded. Athol Mahoney and a well-known Hawkeaposs; Bay Maori All Black, Wattie Wilson, as well as All Black trialist, Chris Anderson, were amongst those captured that day.

The next few months were probably the most trying of our infantry days and nobody was sorry when after the November break-through at Alamein we were finally told at Sollum that we were returning to Maadi to join the newly formed 4th Armoured Brigade as their motorised infantry. Back to Maadi, where we were fully reinforced, and upon joining our new brigade what could bring more joy to a footballer's heart than to find a fully organised Rugby competition in full swing. Before we had played a game Mick Kenny, Jack Sullivan and Ron Newland were selected for the Brigade and 2 NZEF sides, and later Lin Thomas and myself joined them. Tim Fowler made the Brigade side, and never was there a greater travesty of football selection justice than when Tim, playing in the final trial to select the 2 NZEF team to play the Rest of Egypt, not only scored three glorious tries but also outhooked his opponent, and was then omitted from the final selection. We were really amazed as well as indignant. Tim showed what a great little sportsman he was by coming down to Alexandria to see us play and cheer us on.

The battalion at this time was fortunate in obtaining an ex-All Black and 1941 2

NZEF player, Jock Wells, in its ranks. Jock had retired from the game but in his new role of selector-coach his was the hand which guided us in the next few weeks to a record of seventeen wins in eighteen matches, to the winning of the Brigade championship, and to the defeat of the [Maadi](#) competition winners, the Maori Training Unit. This game put the name of the 22nd Battalion on the [Harper-Lock](#) Shield, a trophy now competed for by Wellington Clubs.

At the commencement of this season Jack Sullivan was elected captain and myself vice-captain of the team. After a game or two Jack, nursing his recently wounded leg, injured the other one in a game against the South Africans, and this resulted in the end of his playing career. I, like the others, missed the brilliance of his play and the joy of seeing his defence-splitting runs.

This team is my proudest football memory. Mick Kenny at full back was superb. A machine gun in [Italy](#) prevented New Zealand from seeing the real Kenny, but even on his return and only partial recovery from a serious chest wound, Mick was still able to become a Maori All Black. At this stage he always managed to get selected for the big games in Egypt ahead of the later famed Bob Scott. Two flying wingers in Tommy Walford of Hawke's Bay and a Captain Young from Duntroon were real try getters, and after Jack Sullivan's injury Joe Patten from our original team in England was a cool, resourceful centre. Three others, Digger Down, a Maori from the Rangitikei, Keith Elliott, and Mick Crawford of [Gisborne](#), also had several games on the wing. Their tackling was extra good on the hard grounds, and Keith Elliott in particular had a devastating tackle. His marking of the late George Hart, All Black winger, in one game was classical. Jack Alexander of Buller (selected after the war to play for the [South Island](#)) was second five-eighths. Jack would always oblige with a penetrating straight run and at first- five Lin Thomas was the guiding genius of the back line, and I think the greatest compliment I can pay Lin is to say that I never once saw him bustled, and the thrill of his left-footed drop kicks always at a critical moment warm my heart yet. Noel Parris of Manawatu was an efficient half until he had the misfortune to break a leg, whereupon Ray Mollier and a youngster, Snowy Leighton, deputised for him. So well were these boys playing that All Black Vince Bevan, who had just joined the Battalion, was not called upon to play.

The forwards were on a par with the backs. Diminutive, lion-hearted Tim Fowler

to hook the ball, giant Maori Frank Kerrigan and tough, fast Mervyn Ashman comprised a front row second to none. They certainly lived up to the Colonel's motto 'Second to None'. George Murfitt from Taranaki, on one side, was a typical Taranaki forward—he never tired, while Earl Cross and Dagwood Jones, who played on the other side, were full of energy, and Tom Reynolds, from the spud town, [Pukekohe](#), Sammy Sampson and Freddy Knott of [New Plymouth](#) all took turns in making a real forward pack. Last but not least my co-lock, Ron Newland, who was my partner in platoon, company, battalion, brigade and divisional Rugby—what a forward he was. His genial nature often made his play innocuous. Ron was best when he was aroused, and I must now confess that often I was the cause of his becoming aroused, as I gave him a hefty kick in the shin or a full blooded punch in the ribs. Then he would become a veritable Maurice Brownlie, and he would tell me about how dirty one of the other side was. Such are the depths to which a captain must sink to get the best out of a gifted, easy going player.

The hard grounds were a constant source of injuries to our players. In the few absences of Ron Newland I locked with a Poverty Bay shepherd, Max Rogers, who was a man of great strength, which he demonstrated freely. Shortly afterwards the first furlough party departed for home, the Division for [Italy](#), and we of the second furlough party waited patiently for a boat home, during which time I had the doubtful honour of being captain of the first New Zealand Army team to be defeated in Egypt. The South Africans under the captaincy of Kenyon, 1949-1951 Springbok skipper, beat us twice, but upon my return home I was overjoyed to learn that a team captained by Did Vorrath of Otago had reversed our losses. My biggest thrill was to come later on, however, when one day as a civilian in Hastings I read in the paper that the 22nd Battalion, fresh from the front lines of [Italy](#), had come back to win the coveted Freyberg Cup—trophy for the Divisional champion football team. The only points were scored from the trusty boot of Lin Thomas in one of his inimitable drop kicks taken in a sea of Italian mud.

My impressions of football in four years with the battalion are of the happiest, and I can honestly say that no matter how hard or tough the game not one of us ever made an enemy through football, and now at home many of us are not rich in a material sense but are wealthy in our friends made in NZEF Rugby.

To illustrate the quality of the talent available in Egypt in our unit, we were

embarrassed by the return of three divisional players who had been away at OCTU, Gerry Fowler, Dave Whillans and 'Triss' Hegglin, players any team would be proud to have—yet we had to ask them to keep on playing in the base competitions as it would be unfair to drop players like Murfitt, Ashman and Kerrigan, who were doing so well. A too large crop of good players can almost be as big an embarrassment as a scarcity of them.

Before concluding I would like to give the lie to a statement often made that if you were a footballer in the Army you were protected as far as the fighting went. Although we were ready to have a game at the drop of the proverbial hat, the boys of the 22nd never missed a campaign and many won decorations. There was our own Keith Elliott, and from memory Tom Campbell, Ray Mollier, Gerry Fowler, Frank Kerrigan, Mick Kenny and Tom Reynolds. Others certainly deserved them as well. Infantrymen are simple souls with a zest for life, and our team was always fortunate in having the whole unit on the sideline cheering us on. To all loyal supporters, to all our courageous opponents of all nationalities against whom we played either on the luxuriously appointed grounds of [Cairo](#), [Alexandria](#), [Maadi](#), [Capetown](#) or England, or on the gritty, dusty sands of the desert, we say thanks for the memories. I am sure that every one of our unit who returned to New Zealand joins with me in a heartfelt prayer for all those we left behind.

22 BATTALION

ROLL OF HONOUR

Roll of Honour

killed in action

Lt-Col J. T. Russell	6 September 1942
Maj F. G. Oldham	30 November 1943
Capt W. H. Cowper	1 June 1944
Capt D. H. Nancarrow	2 December 1943
Lt J. D. Bedingfield	15 April 1945
Lt D. J. W. Butchart	24 October 1942
Lt K. H. Cave	14 April 1945
Lt W. J. Crompton	22 November 1941
Lt R. B. Fell	20 May 1941
Lt W. C. Hart	21 September 1944
Lt E. J. McAra	20 May 1941
Lt K. J. D. McCorkindale	16 April 1945
Lt J. H. McNeil	31 July 1944
Lt T. S. Wauchop	25 July 1944
Lt A. F. Widdowson	24 October 1942
Lt O. G. Wood	24 October 1942
2 Lt N. K. Cope	21 September 1944
2 Lt J. D. McClymont	15 April 1944
2 Lt G. D. McGlashan	20 April 1941
2 Lt G. F. McHardy	28 November 1944
WO I S. A. R. Purnell	20 May 1941
WO II R. J. Bayliss	26 October 1942
WO II R. J. Rough	18 April 1945
S-Sgt W. J. Butler	29 March 1944
S-Sgt F. W. C. Thompson	10 July 1942
Sgt E. G. Berry	13 July 1942
Sgt H. J. Butler	20 May 1941
Sgt J. S. H. Dring	20 April 1941
Sgt B. H. Fowke	15 December 1944
Sgt R. P. H. Hocking	28 June 1942

Sgt T. Logie	16 April 1941
Sgt W. H. MacKenzie	8 December 1941
Sgt I. B. Park	21 October 1944
Sgt B. Skeen	22 May 1941
Sgt R. B. Spence	20 May 1941
L-Sgt P. D. A. Brewer	31 July 1944
L-Sgt J. A. Hughes	15 December 1944
L-Sgt I. B. McWhinnie	20 May 1941
L-Sgt J. Walker	5 December 1943
Cpl W. G. Baker	10 July 1942
Cpl J. W. Brown	19 October 1940
Cpl F. D. Condon	3 December 1943
Cpl L. E. Creagh	15 July 1942
Cpl C. J. W. Fanning	24 October 1942
Cpl M. Hercock	3 December 1943
Cpl K. R. Hill	29 June 1942
Cpl G. B. Ironside	15 December 1944
Cpl I. S. McDonald	15 April 1945
Cpl A. Merrick	13 December 1941
Cpl T. W. Molloy	31 July 1944
Cpl D. H. Neilson	20 May 1941
Cpl N. L. Wakelin	1 June 1941
Cpl J. Young	3 December 1943
L-Cpl E. Adams	19 April 1945
L-Cpl L. H. Astwood	14 September 1944
L-Cpl F. R. Brown	15 April 1945
L-Cpl I. W. Brown	19 April 1945
L-Cpl W. J. Charles	20 May 1941
L-Cpl P. C. Clarke	2 October 1944
L-Cpl J. T. Cooper	20 May 1941
L-Cpl T. J. Downing	17 January 1944
L-Cpl T. G. Gomer	15 April 1945
L-Cpl P. E. Herbert	24 October 1942
L-Cpl D. W. C. Lange	26 May 1944
L-Cpl I. F. McGirr	19 October 1944
L-Cpl J. T. Mehaffey	20 May 1941
L-Cpl A. E. O'Neill	20 April 1941

L-Cpl J. N. Russell	3 May 1945
L-Cpl G. M. Sandiford	20 April 1941
L-Cpl A. R. Viles	31 July 1944
L-Cpl F. J. Williams	24 October 1942
Pte F. H. Algie	27 June 1942
Pte W. H. Amner	20 May 1941
Pte F. A. Andrews	18 April 1945
Pte E. F. Barratt	21 December 1944
Pte E. Barrett	20 May 1941
Pte J. Bassett	20 May 1941
Pte R. T. Bedingfield	16 December 1941
Pte A. H. Benny	10 July 1942
Pte R. H. Berry	28 July 1944
Pte G. Bloomfield	20 May 1941
Pte T. J. Borthwick	1 August 1944
Pte L. B. Bosworth	20 April 1941
Pte A. L. Botica	16 December 1941
Pte T. O. Brandford	15 December 1944
Pte C. W. V. Bransgrove	23 September 1944
Pte I. E. Brisco	3 December 1943
Pte D. Brown	2 October 1944
Pte J. O. F. Bryson	27 June 1942
Pte H. H. Burgess	16 April 1941
Pte G. S. Bygrave	25 March 1944
Pte F. A. Carrington	3 October 1944
Pte W. J. Christian	15 December 1944
Pte H. McD. Clark	1 June 1941
Pte M. M. Coleman	20 May 1941
Pte S. R. Collins	15 December 1944
Pte C. L. A. Commins	27 November 1941
Pte C. C. Congdon	20 May 1941
Pte J. K. Cooper	23 December 1944
Pte S. J. Craven	31 July 1944
Pte W. H. Croft	20 May 1941
Pte G. L. Croxford	1 June 1941
Pte R. J. Cruickshank	31 July 1944
Pte G. Davidson	21 December 1944

Pte S. J. Dempsey	14 December 1944
Pte E. D. Dobson	19 October 1944
Pte W. Doole	1 June 1941
Pte J. P. Douglas	26 October 1942
Pte E. J. Dyer	20 May 1941
Pte H. R. Evans	18 April 1945
Pte L. L. Falconer	24 October 1942
Pte J. Farrington	20 May 1941
Pte D. S. Findlayson	26 November 1944
Pte R. C. Fleming	27 July 1944
Pte J. Franks	27 November 1941
D. L. Futter	24 October 1942
Pte A. A. Gillon	22 September 1944
Pte B. C. Goodall	27 November 1941
Pte P. H. Graham	20 May 1941
Pte A. A. J. Grant	17 October 1944
Pte L. L. Grant	1 June 1941
Pte W. J. Grant	5 December 1943
Pte E. A. Handley	25 September 1944
Pte J. G. Harold	17 October 1944
Pte O. J. Hawkes	3 December 1943
Pte A. H. Herrick	24 October 1942
Pte R. I. Hill	20 May 1941
Pte E. H. Hitchcock	27 June 1942
Pte I. G. S. Holms	27 October 1940
Pte C. P. Holman	27 July 1944
Pte W. H. Homer	24 October 1942
Pte P. W. Hunt	27 November 1941
Pte C. N. Jackson	14 April 1945
Pte J. E. Jensen	29 March 1944
Pte R. E. John	28 June 1942
Pte W. R. Johns	20 May 1941
Pte R. N. Johnson	19 May 1941
Pte S. B. Johnson	24 October 1942
Pte J. D. Keehan	24 October 1942
Pte P. W. Keeling	4 September 1942
Pte D. C. Kennard	28 November 1944

Pte T. M. Kilpatrick	3 December 1943
Pte J. Landreth	5 October 1944
Pte R. F. Lankshear	27 November 1941
Pte L. C. Laurenson	20 May 1941
Pte A. R. Lewis	29 June 1942
Pte J. Lewis	22 September 1944
Pte J. D. Lindsay	19 October 1944
Pte M. R. Lord	20 May 1941
Pte J. W. Luddon	14 April 1945
Pte F. McDavitt	20 May 1941
Pte W. McFarlane	21 October 1944
Pte N. M. MacGibbon	20 May 1941
Pte F. J. McGrath	1 June 1941
Pte J. D. M. McIsaac	24 October 1942
Pte D. J. McMinn	19 May 1941
Pte W. F. McSweeney	22 December 1944
Pte A. J. Magee	24 October 1942
Pte J. L. Martin	27 June 1942
Pte G. J. Mason	24 December 1944
Pte L. J. C. Medway	30 July 1944
Pte M. W. Midgley	24 October 1942
Pte F. K. Milham	3 October 1944
Pte I. G. Morgan	23 December 1944
Pte A. W. Morris	17 January 1944
Pte J. V. Mullany	26 November 1944
Pte C. S. Murfitt	31 July 1944
Pte C. G. Nikolaison	25 March 1944
Pte G. L. Nilsson	31 July 1944
Pte J. O'Brien	16 April 1941
Pte E. P. O'Connor	26 November 1944
Pte J. J. O'Neil	1 June 1941
Pte L. A. Parnell	17 January 1944
Pte W. S. Pearce	19 October 1944
Pte A. E. Pedersen	20 May 1941
Pte A. C. Pine	20 May 1941
Pte R. E. Porter	20 May 1941
Pte T. A. Redpath	22 November 1941

Pte W. Reid	20 May 1941
Pte C. Richardson	26 July 1944
Pte L. R. Ridling	1 June 1941
Pte T. Rochfort	21 May 1941
Pte E. B. Sandilands	17 April 1945
Pte C. Sangster	22 November 1941
Pte E. S. Sapsford	26 October 1942
Pte J. H. R. Sawyers	13 July 1942
Pte M. J. Shotter	26 May 1944
Pte A. G. Simmonds	2 December 1943
Pte A. G. Sirett	14 April 1945
Pte G. R. A. N. Smeath	20 May 1941
Pte A. J. P. Smith	20 May 1941
Pte D. I. Stantiall	4 September 1942
Pte A. Stewart	24 October 1942
Pte M. E. Stewart	1 June 1941
Pte D. F. Stoneham	30 November 1944
Pte J. S. Strang	26 May 1944
Pte E. L. Stuart	27 November 1941
Pte G. L. Sutton	25 October 1942
Pte R. Tama	20 April 1944
Pte W. G. Tapp	20 May 1941
Pte C. H. Tardieu	10 July 1942
Pte V. T. Taylor	3 December 1943
Pte F. T. Tichborne	26 October 1942
Pte G. M. Tosh	15 July 1942
Pte B. P. Tracey	1 December 1943
Pte E. Trewby	21 May 1941
Pte G. H. Tuffin	31 July 1944
Pte J. R. Tustin	16 April 1941
Pte D. A. Valintine	30 July 1944
Pte R. Waddington	20 May 1941
Pte J. Wallace	21 May 1941
Pte J. J. Wallace	21 September 1944
Pte W. Webster	1 June 1941
Pte P. S. Wevell	31 July 1944
Pte W. A. Wicken	31 July 1944

Pte S. N. Wigzell	25 October 1942
Pte A. D. Williamson	20 May 1941
Pte A. G. Willis	1 June 1941
Pte D. Wilson	16 April 1941
Pte G. M. Wright	24 October 1942
	died of wounds
Lt E. F. T. Mullinder	28 May 1944
WO II J. Matheson	20 May 1941
Sgt A. O. Ainge	23 December 1944
Sgt R. D. Price	9 August 1944
Sgt A. S. Teaz	11 June 1944
L-Sgt S. S. Keir	25 July 1944
L-Sgt R. H. Ludbrook	12 August 1944
Cpl J. W. Dickson	24 October 1942
Cpl W. S. Hall	21 May 1941
Cpl A. C. Jimmieson	27 September 1944
Cpl A. G. McIvor	20 May 1941
L-Cpl A. Dunbar	12 August 1944
L-Cpl H. A. Gibson	24 October 1942
L-Cpl F. J. Minton	23 November 1941
L-Cpl J. N. Stone	16 November 1942
L-Cpl W. R. Wellington	29 December 1941
Pte C. C. Adams	24 October 1942
Pte J. H. Aldersley	15 April 1945
Pte J. H. R. Anderson	15 April 1945
Pte R. C. Bentley	28 June 1942
Pte G. N. Best	24 May 1941
Pte R. McF. Bithell	24 November 1941
Pte R. C. Brock	21 May 1941
Pte D. F. Charteris	24 September 1944
Pte J. Cockroft	21 April 1941
Pte D. I. Cullen	12 December 1943
Pte F. H. Deehan	2 August 1944
Pte L. Duffy	17 October 1944
Pte F. S. Fisher	30 November 1944
Pte R. H. Flynn	24 October 1942

Pte O. R. Gatman	28 November 1941
Pte P. B. E. Goodman-Burke	21 May 1941
Pte E. E. Heenan	24 October 1942
Pte H. Hooper	25 October 1942
Pte N. R. Hunt	18 July 1942
Pte H. R. Jones	1 June 1941
Pte W. J. King	9 November 1942
Pte L. H. Lapworth	11 October 1944
Pte N. P. Lealand	22 October 1944
Pte A. J. McClintock	22 November 1941
Pte K. Marshall	25 October 1942
Pte F. H. Mollier	21 April 1944
Pte H. S. Orr	13 September 1942
Pte G. H. Peacock	16 April 1941
Pte A. A. Pearse	25 November 1943
Pte I. G. Riddle	28 July 1944
Pte H. R. Robertshawe	17 December 1941
Pte G. G. Romley	18 January 1944
Pte G. R. Rye	3 August 1944
Pte C. B. Smith	5 January 1942
Pte E. P. B. Smith	3 December 1943
Pte A. H. Towers	4 December 1941
Pte A. H. True	28 June 1942
Pte A. H. Vipond	15 July 1942
Pte E. R. Ware	5 December 1941
Pte G. W. Wells	23 May 1941
Pte T. Wells	14 December 1941
Pte G. L. H. White	2 December 1944
Pte J. H. S. Williams	26 October 1942
Pte R. E. Williams	22 May 1941
Pte G. Wilson	25 May 1941
Pte S. R. Young	19 April 1945
	died while prisoner of war
Lt W. G. Slade	23 May 1941
Cpl K. R. Hill	29 June 1942
L-Cpl A. G. Dingwall	30 December 1941
L-Cpl D. Russell	28 February 1945

L-Cpl E. H. Sheath	8 December 1943
Pte C. L. Anderson	17 April 1945
Pte J. Barron	January 1942
Pte T. Broad	28 June 1941
Pte G. R. Geenty	25 August 1942
Pte A. Gillice	11 February 1945
Pte J. Love	14 September 1942
Pte C. S. Lovett	12 February 1945
Pte H. R. Oppatt	23 May 1941
Pte A. H. Peterson	3 December 1942
Pte J. Ross	22 May 1941
Pte B. C. Sampson	17 August 1942
Pte N. O. Wansbough	15 June 1941
Pte A. Williamson	17 February 1945

died on active service

Lt W. A. Talbot	22 April 1943
WO II L. E. Hack	26 April 1944
S-Sgt J. M. Murphy	18 July 1946
Sgt L. G. Bailey	11 December 1941
Sgt G. J. D. Leece	7 January 1944
Sgt J. N. B. Ross	25 August 1944
Cpl C. E. Prestidge	30 July 1945
Pte E. F. Burch	13 November 1945
Pte J. H. P. Calson	16 January 1941
Pte J. S. Crothers	19 September 1944
Pte R. G. Fairbairn	27 January 1942
Pte L. M. Fearon	19 November 1944
Pte I. W. Feast	25 May 1945
Pte A. Haig	12 December 1941
Pte L. E. Harris	13 June 1941
Pte C. R. Hill	29 September 1944
Pte A. S. Jones	20 August 1944
Pte T. F. King	8 August 1943
Pte H. S. McLucas	12 July 1944
Pte R. C. Strachan	11 October 1940
Pte D. P. Thomson	8 February 1942
Pte K. A. Thomson	22 February 1944

Pte N. S. Traynor 28 May 1940
Pte L. J. Williams 27 January 1942
Pte H. T. C. Wilson 27 October 1944
Pte V. J. Wise 18 September 1944
Pte B. J. Wood 11 June 1944

22 BATTALION

SUMMARY OF CASUALTIES

Summary of Casualties

	killed		wounded		prisoners of war		TOTAL	
	Offrs	ORs	Offrs	ORs	Offrs	ORs		
Greece	1	13	2	17	2	19	54	
Crete	2	60	4	61	4	169	300	
Libya, 1941	1	22	3	42	4	6	78	
Egypt, 1942	4	53	9	199	13	291	569	
Italy	13	113	30	432	–	3	591	
	<hr/>		<hr/>		<hr/>		<hr/>	
total	21	261	48	751	23	488	1592	

The killed include men who were killed in action or who died of wounds; the prisoners of war include 3 officers and 86 other ranks who were wounded before capture, and 1 officer and 17 other ranks who were killed or died of wounds or sickness while prisoners of war. One officer and 26 other ranks who died on active service are not included.

22 BATTALION

HONOURS AND AWARDS

Honours and Awards

victoria cross

Sgt K. Elliott

distinguished service order

Lt-Col L. W. Andrew, VC

Lt-Col H. V. Donald, MC

member of the order of the british empire

WO II W. G. Jude

bar to military cross

Capt C. N. Armstrong

military cross

Maj T. C. Campbell

Maj J. L. MacDuff

Maj A. W. F. O'Reilly

Maj R. H. Spicer

Capt R. R. Knox

Lt H. V. Donald

Lt I. L. Thomas

2 Lt C. N. Armstrong

2 Lt G. M. Bassett

2 Lt J. W. C. Craig

2 Lt R. Mollier

2 Lt E. B. Paterson

greek military cross

Maj H. G. Wooller

distinguished conduct medal

Sgt [A. E. Eades](#)

Sgt G. H. Palmer

L-Sgt L. F. Seaman

Gpl R. F. Garmonsway

Cpl L. T. McClurg

Cpl H. J. Welch

L-Cpl J. H. Garwood

military medal

WO I T. G. Fowler

WO II R. L. Craig

Sgt [R. J. Bayliss](#)

Sgt E. D. Bougen

Sgt N. F. Callesen

L-Sgt M. N. Reeve

L-Sgt S. N. Tsukigawa

Cpl F. J. Blackett

Cpl A. G. Clark

Cpl A. G. Gordon

L-Cpl B. C. D. Smaller

Pte R. H. Dixon

Pte R. J. H. Hawley

Pte H. McIvor

22 BATTALION

COMMANDING OFFICERS

Commanding Officers

Lt-Col L. W. Andrew, VC	10 Jan 1940-7 Feb 1942
Lt-Col J. T. Russell	7 Feb 1942-6 Sep 1942
Lt-Col T. C. Campbell	6 Sep 1942-18 Apr 1944
Lt-Col D. G. Steele	18 Apr 1944-11 May 1944
Lt-Col H. V. Donald	11 May 1944-22 Nov 1944
Lt-Col A. W. F. O'Reilly	22 Nov 1944-24 Mar 1945
Lt-Col H. V. Donald	24 Mar 1945-7 Aug 1945
Maj R. H. Spicer	7 Aug 1945-19 Oct 1945
Lt-Col W. B. Thomas	19 Oct 1945-29 Nov 1946
Lt-Col G. M. McCaskill	29 Nov 1946-7 Aug 1947

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