WEST NOVA SCOTIA REGIMENT

WWII WAR DIARY

Place

Date

Time

Entry

WORTHING

1 Apr 42

0800

Training as per syllabus. Bn officers and Coy Commanders went to Hayling Island to be spectators at a demonstration put on by one coy of RCR supported by carriers. Demonstration of “Assault Landing”. Lt-Col Ernst proceeded to NETD today. Maj J.A Hebb has been appointed OC.

2100

Lieut C.E. Bent gave a lecture to C Coy on identification of units of the German army.

WORTHING

2 Apr 42

0800

On this day a Bn exercise, “Attack and Counter-Attack” was carried out in the area North and East of Cissbury. The carrier platoon under command of Lieut MacIntosh acted as enemy. The tps thoroughly enjoyed this exercise and much profitable experience was gained therefrom. The Brig and Bde-Maj were, for a time, spectators at this exercise.

WORTHING

3 Apr 42

0800

Training as per syllabus.

1330

Maj J.A. Hebb went to a conference at Div HQ.

1830

Coy comdrs meeting at Sky Ring to discuss training, forthcoming exercise, etc. Fd. Return.

WORTHING

4 Apr 42

0800

Training as per syllabus.

1330

Officers discussion at Sky Ring on “Action to be taken against airborne tps.”

1900

“A” Coy entertained by film “Blondie on a Budget” provided by Auxiliary Services.

WORTHING

5 Apr 42

1000

Church parades as usual.

1400

Lieut C.E. Bent, IO of this unit discussed with the 2 i/c of 5th Bn HG the various ways in which they can assist in the event of an enemy raid.

2000

Conference of OCs of the units comprising the Br force in forthcoming exercise ROBIN 1.

WORTHING

6 Apr 42

0900 - 2300

“Robin 1”. Action Stations. Bn crossed SL at 0905 hrs and due to a brainchild of Lieut C.E. Bent were all over in twelve minutes which established a new “high” for this performance by mixed transport and marching tps. Bn reached battle posns at 1120 hrs and the balance of the day passed without event until approx 2300 hrs when 8 gp was called to a conference at Bde HQ. The Brigadier had learned that the enemy HQ was located at ANGERING PK. He requested that one coy be dispatched forthwith to endeavour to capture this HQ. He also outlined his appreciation and plan for the main attack by the Bde. He assumed that the enemy intended tracking from the road Worthing - Arundel in a southerly direction with the intention of wiping out the “Van Doos” and any local detachments of Home Guards in this area to form a bridgehead for an invasion by sea-borne tps. To circumvent this he intended moving the C & Y Regt South across the downs via Blackpatch and Harrow Hill to attack the rear of the enemy concentrations while the West NSR moved via the road Findon-Angmering to take a posn at the latter place from which an attack on the left fwd portion of the enemy could be launched. The 48th were to cooperate to the extent of forming a protective flank on the enemy’s right flank.

WORTHING

7 Apr 42

0100

Bn moved off to carry out these movements as noted above, and did just that. The approach of the C & Y Regt was made much easier by the attack of “B” Coy, West NSR who were carrying out a “Commando” raid on the enemy HQ. While this coy never succeeded in reaching its objective, they caused great confusion in the enemy camp and wiped out more than two coys of enemy in addition to several A/tk guns and MGs. This attack coming from the East drew the attention of the enemy from the approach of the C & Y R from the North. Hardly had this gallant coy, led by our dashing Maj Courtney laid down their lives, at great cost to the enemy, than the balance of the West NSR, who by now were well on their way to the road Worthing - Arundel, began to contact further detachments of enemy who were beginning to stir in preparation for their attack on the R22eR. Their line of advance led them through the very centre of one of the enemy Bns. In true Canadian fashion they fought their way through inflicting very heavy casualties as they went. Arriving at the road Worthing - Arundel they met, at Patching Pond, two Bns of enemy moving on to their start line. Fighting grimly and valiantly, the hardy Bluenoses led by their intrepid A/CO Maj Hebb, attempted to smash through to their objective. Force of numbers however eventually proved too much for them and after having scuppered the large part of an enemy Bde, the last attack was put on by the remnants of this fine fighting unit, approximately 25 strong. And so, on the blood-soaked ground at Patching Pond, the last of our brave sons of Nova Scotia breathed their last. Their fate was not in vain as the “Van Doos” had not fired a shot to date and the C & Y Regt arrived fresh upon the field of battle. With these two full units to pick up the torch dropped from the failing hands of the “Novies”, the enemy force, badly mauled as it had been by our unit, was unable to carry on the fight for very oolong and soon gave up the ghost to retire to the nether regions to which all good Nazies (viz: dead ones) go.

1015

“Cease Fire”. End of ROBIN 1.

WORTHING

7 Apr 42

1200

Tps marched back to billets and the balance of the day was spent in organized rest.

WORTHING

8 Apr 42

0800

Training as per syllabus.

1800

Meeting of officers of 3rd Bde was held at Highden Ho to discuss the lessons learned on Robin 1, also reduction of transport for an operational move such as an invasion of the Continent. “A” Coy entertained this evening by show provided by Auxiliary Services.

WORTHING

9 Apr 42

0715

A tip and run raider came out of low cloud and mist and dropped three bombs in our area, two hit the gas works and one in Homefield Pk. Two fatal casualties.

0800

Maj Hebb went to 2nd Ech and Holding Unit for purposes of liaison.

2030

Maj J.A. Hebb, OC this unit discussed CC 5th Bn HG the role of the Home Guard as anti-raid tps.

WORTHING

10 Apr 42

0800

Training as per syllabus. Brigadier Ganong visited this unit this morning. The commanders of A, C and D Coys went to recce the areas of the various units of the 1st Bde whose anti-raid duties they are taking over during the exercise Robin 2.

1930

C Coy entertained by show, short dance and refreshments put on by auxiliary Services

WORTHING

11 Apr 42

1030

Coy comdrs carried out mutual inspection of billets.

1200

Maj J.A. Hebb visited HQ 1 Cdn Inf Bde to establish liaison with the Bde-Maj with ref to our anti-raid duties in that Bde area during exercise Robin 2.

1800

B Coy WNSR took over anti-raid duties of the Edmonton Regt during Robin 2.

WORTHING

12 Apr 42

No Protestant church parades today. Two of the new reinforcement officers visited Sky Ring this A.M.

1200

A Coy moved off to area of 48th to assume their anti-raid role during Robin 2.

1300

D Coy moved off to area of R22eR as above.

1220 OC Coy moved off to area of H&PER as above.

WORTHING

13 Apr 42

Very quiet today. Coys are still out covering anti-raid duties of units mentioned above.

WORTHING

14 Apr 42

Coys arrived back in our own area today.

2100

Coy commanders conference held at Sky Ring to discuss arrangements for exercise “Prepare to Advance” to be held tomorrow.

WORTHING

15 Apr 42

0900

Maj Hebb went to downs near battle posns to discuss the siting of anti-tank mine fields.

1250

Tps move off on “Prepare to Advance”. The GOC and Brigadier were spectators at this exercise and discussed with Maj Hebb spacing, time taken to pass a given point etc.

1900

All Bde officers attended a conference at Highden Ho The Brigadier opened a discussion on “Opposed Landings”. In his opening remarks he pointed out the many operational and administrative obstacles to be overcome in this type of operation. Following his remarks the BM put five questions to the officers for their solution For this purpose the officers were divided into fifteen syndicates. The discussion was long and arduous. Inasmuch as no one of the officers had had any experience with this type of operation, it is not thought that any great value was gained form the discussion other than to cause the officers to consider the problems and to impress them upon the necessity for careful study of the subject.

WORTHING

16 Apr 42

1000

Divisional officers conference at Odeon Cinema, Worthing. At this conference the GOC outlined the program of training for the season. It now appears that we are to turn from “Anti-Invasion Exercises” to the more encouraging “Invasion” Exercises. He outlined the new establishment of Canadian Army HQ and stated that the formation of this HQ was now nearly completed and that the work of forming and organizing the new 2nd Cdn Corps would be carried out next. It is hoped, he stated, that the full Cdn Army, with its ery impressive armored formations, would be in the field this year. He further stated that the Cdn Army was almost certain to be the spearhead of the Allied Invasion of the continent. With this in view more intensive and more rigorous exercises would be carried out this season.

Due to the difficulties incumbent on a fighting force which is carrying out an opposed invasion of the continent transport for these exercises will be cut to a minimum. It is suggested that this will consist of 21 M/Cs, 12 15 cwt lorries per inf Bn, with the possible addition of one Stn wagon and 21 carriers. Tentative priority lists for otherBn vehicles have been made up. These to be brought up as the shipping conditions warrant.

Under these conditions it will be necessary for the soldier to be self-sustaining for a matter of two, possibly three days Therefore he will carry two days hard rations - and we DO mean HARD - plus one blanket.

This will be carried out on “Beaver 3” which is to commence on 20 Apr 42 and carried out until 27 Apr 42. The effect on the men of this added load and these hard living conditions will be carefully studied for future reference.

WORTHING

17 Apr 42

0900

Coy commanders went to Highden Ho to look over various coy locations.

1300

Maj J.A. Hebb called at HQ 1 Bde under whose command we come during “Beaver 3”.

1930

Lieut C.E. Bent gave a lecture at Muir Ho to the Civil Defense Services on message writing and Identifications of the German forces.

WORTHING

18 Apr 42

0800

Work parties went to site of the summer camp to prepare the ground for pitching tents.

1400

“O Gp” summoned to Bde for conference on “Beaver 3”.

2215

Brigadier Ganong called requesting that anti-raid precautions be more rigid tonight.

WORTHING

19 Apr 42

1100

OC’s “O” Group assembled at “Skyring” Mess. Orders given at this conference were only general in nature regarding administrative arrangements in preparation for the exercise “Beaver III”. Transport, rations, blankets etc as per the GOCs conference at Odeon on 16 Apr 42.

1400

Accomodation [sic.] recce party for the Bn under the A/2 i/c, Maj P.H. Stehelin (vice Maj J.A. Hebb, who, as previously noted, is A/OC vice Lt-Col A.A. Ernst). During this recce the concentration area to be used on “Beaver III” and routes to it, were visited.

WORTHING

20 Apr 42

1100

Brigadier Ganong visited the unit to discuss last minute details before the unit passed out of the 3 CIB, for the purposes of the exercise, into the 1 CIB. In order to confuse our enemy Intelligence, it has been decided to mix the rigades. The West NSR go to the first Brigade with the Hastings and Prince Edward Regt and the PPCLI. The remainder of the order of battle will be found under the appendices.

1400

Maj P.H. Stehelin met the Staff Captain, 1 CIB, to discuss final arrangements fo the concentration area and other admin details.

2115

“Beaver III” gets under way as the unit moes over the start line at Offington Roundabout.

2345

Bn in position at concentration area and bedding down for the night.

FIELD

21 Apr 42

1200

The entire day has been, and will continue to be, spent in resting for the arduous hours which lie ahead. Once more we gird our loins for the titanic struggle. Grim-faced “veterans” of many a bloodless battle prepare with single-minded purpose to sell their lives dearly.

1430

“The Brain Trust” busy indeed as “O” Groups follow one another in quick succession with the CO attending one at Div HQ, followed by another at Bde HQ. To round off the succession of conference the Bn “O” Group then went into a huddle. It is hoped that, as the battle progresses, the true worth of these many conflabs will show itself in the utter discomforture [sic.] of a crest-fallen enemy.

FIELD

22 Apr 42

0415

Quiet and purposeful ,the men of the West NSR rose from their sleep at 0330. In spite of the fact that but one blanket covered them during their intercourse with Morpheus there were few complaints of anything but a jocular nature. The twenty four hours of idleness and rest were over and a scene of “[illegible. ordered?]” activity presented itself as these hoary sons of Nova Scotia prepared for the coming struggle, stumbling about in pitch blackness over stumps and through bushes reminiscent of the alder thickets back in the Land of the Maple. So dark was the night that, when one man on his way to breakfast stepped off the footpath to answer a call of Nature, 200 men queued behind him thinking that it was the end of the line-up Our renowned question mark, Major M.G. Clennett, hearing the gurgling torrent, dashed madly about tearing his hair in rage, thinking that someone had opened the tap of his precious water tank!

0520

The strategy of our wily GOC, Maj-Gen Pearkes is to move swiftly by the by-ways to seize and secure the *strategetically* [sic.] important town of HORSHAM before the enemy can determine our intention and circumvent it. THe only troops used on the main arteries are the two Recce Bns, i.e. the 4th and 7th The latter have been, with the R?M.R. a detachment of A/Tk ARty and Sappers have been placed under command of Div and are known as SCOTT FORCE. THey are operating to the EAST as a protective right flank for our advance while the 4th are operating on the left flank to the WEST in a similar capacity. These forces moved off well in advance of the infantry formations which left their concentration areas at the time noted above.

First Bds are moving via the WEST route, 3 CIB (Under command of Lt-Col Bernatchy, R22eR, in the absence of Brigadier Ganong on duties at Control) are moving by the EAST route. 2 CIB are in support of 1 CIB.

1200

In spite of these difficulties, made more than usually difficult by the new, closed-up, manner of moving, progress was quite rapid.

1635

Bn halted and took up defensive position in order to rest troops and give them supper in preparation for a robable attack on HORSHAM tonight. Here it is well to note that the hard rations, consisting of “bully beef” and a hard biscuit very much like a thin dog-biscuit, have proved to be a rather pleasant surprise. The biscuit, though extremely hard, are quite palatable and very sustaining. “Tinned” bacon, served for breakfast is of doubtful quality to say the least. Hot tea with breakfast and the supper “meal” make life much more pleasant. All in all we found that the hard rations were far easier to “take” than was anticipated. Apprehension about the hard rations was largely caused by the recounting, by the veterans of the unit, of tales of the old type of hard ration issued on Salisbury Plain in 1940. Without a doubt they were an invention of the devil himself. Carbon steel could not be harder. They were boiled for hours in an attempt to soften them, to no avail .Some humanitarian has since devised a more malleable type of “iron” for our consumption. We suggest that this worthy individual should be awarded the “Order of the Dog Biscuit” in recognition of a noble assistance to the war effort, said Order to carry with it a pension of 2 ½ d per diem, this to be paid by the RCASC.

This point was sixteen miles from the concentration area. Our feeble brain computes the rate of travel at 1.52 miles per hour. Not good when one considered that infantry can maintain a rate of 2 ½ miles per hour with ease. However we can loftily disclaim any responsibility for this as we were the reserve Bn of the Bde and could merely follow whence others led.

1900

Bn “O” Group to discuss plans for the assault on HORSHAM. H & PE are to attack on the right “Pats” on the left. West NSR in reserve. Yes, dear readers, reserve again.

2005

Bn crosses start line 556475. Four and one half miles to go.

2040

“D” Coy makes first contact with the enemy. Resistance overcome with these same ease and elan showed [sic.] by our gallant troops. We suffer no casualties. Lovely exercise this, hardly any one gets hurt! Oh! Oh! Who said that? We are attacked by enemy A/C and “A” Coy suffers one casualty, “B” Coy 6.

FIELD

23 Apr 42

0100

Just as the last of the Pats column passed over it, the small bridge gave away, cutting off Bde HQ and West NSR from the balance of the Bde. AFter hasty repairs the bridge is now fit for the passage of troops. Transport must be left behind. HQ Coy tpt was left at the point where we had supper. One Coy, “B”, is to be left behind to protect tpt while the remainder of the unit push on to secure a position on the outskirts of the town. When this is done they will have the remainder, “B” Coy and two lots of tpt, move in to rejoin them

0300

Rear elements move into HORSHAM. Unit is complete again by 0430 hrs.

0500

Stand-to followed by breakfast. All round defense positions have been taken up and active patrolling is being carried out. Brushes with the enemy are frequent but not serious.

1000

Combines force of two coys West NSR and one coy Pats sally forth to clear the main part of the town of enemy. This operation, after desperate street fighting is carried to a successful conclusion by 1145.

1200

Bde sends word “Beaver Standfast Beaver”. All coys are called in and fed. It is thought that control are not pleased with the way the 1st Div have slid through the defenders and seized the town. In the position that they now occupy there is little hope that the enemy can oust them before the exercise ends. Drive and initiative have completely “foxed” them. We have undoubtedly thrown the plans of Control out of gear.

1800

Having withdrawn under an armistice to a concentration area at almost the exact position where we had supper last night, we now receive a warning order to prepare to move on what is thought to be a withdrawal action. It is as we assumed. Without the enemy having come to blows with us on a scale that all likely to seriously hold up our advance, Control have decided that we have failed to get the necessary supplies and support from the bridgehead and must, perforce, withdraw. Here we beg to note that our communications with bridgehead are so “disrupted” that we easily got TWO lorries, unprotected, through from the unit to B’head and return during the day, These brought up supplies of petrol and ammunition.

2325

Bn moves past start point on withdrawal movement.

FIELD AND WORTHING

24 Apr 42

0700

Bn arrives in position on NEW DOWN from which we started out yesterday morning. Note that, moving under cover of darkness, we made the return trip in 7 hours and 35 minutes. Slightly better than two miles per hour. It is believed that this was largely due to moving the tpt on a detour around a particularly bad piece of road. Positions are taken up here. Tanks att- the Pats at about 0800. REported that they have completely disrupted the Pats and that the position of Bridgehead troops is too precarious to permit them to hold out any longer.

1005

We are still holding our positions and, except for a few tanks in the distance, all is peaceful. We now receive “Beaver Standfast Beaver”.

1238

“Beaver Concluded Beaver”.

N.B. - Ref the hopelessness of our position “a certain high ranking officer” of one of the tank Bns attacking the Downs stated that the 1st Div could have successfully held off any attack by tanks, at great cost to the tanks, due to excellent dispositions of the Arty in A/Tk role. It is certain that any attack by infantry alone would have been successful only with stupendous losses. However, Control rules that 2nd Div have won the battle “Hands Down”. Since it means the early conclusion of the exercise we, frankly, don’t give a damn who won. We are quite satisfied that we did a good job and did it well. What more can one ask? So, without regret, but with a few more helpful lessons under our belt, we turn our backs on the exercise “Beaver III” and go home to rest and search for “new fields to conquer”.

WORTHING

25 Apr 42

0800

Preparations were begun for the move to our summer camping site, but the day was spent chiefly on cleaning of weapons and equipment.

WORTHING

26 Apr 42

On this Sabbath, RC church parades only were held. Tps spend day in organized rest.

WORTHING

27 Apr 42

0800

An advance party of one officer, one NCO and 10 ORs per Coy proceeded to new area.

1000

The GOC gave a talk at the Plaza Cinema attended by all officers and 10 NCOs per unit. He pointed out the lessons learned on “Beaver 3” and offered suggestions for future schemes.

WORTHING

28 Apr 42

0800

Rifle Coys getting paid, also preparing for move to new area in afternoon.

1100

Brigadier Ganong visited new camping site.

1300

A, B, C and D Coys move off to new camping site. (Highden Ho.)

WORTHING

29 Apr 42

0800

Bn completed move to Highden Ho and spent balance of day in getting settled.

1100

Brigadier Ganong again visited our area.

WORTHING

30 Apr 42

1330

Lieut J.W. Turner Lashmar gave a lecture on “Characteristics of Paratps and action to be taken against them”, at Town Hall, Worthing. This was attended by all officers and WOs.

1400

The Bde-Maj visited this unit.

1700

All officers of the Bn met to discuss the lessons learned on “Beaver 3”, also to discuss general training and discipline.