WEST NOVA SCOTIA REGIMENT

WWII WAR DIARY

Place

Date

Time

Entry

42-N-2

DEC - 43

AGNONE

1

0830

Bn embussed in area of station and brick factory, moved off at 0900 hrs arrived at AGNONE (H35) at 1130 hrs. Good billets with lights and running water for the most part were found in the town. Troops allowed on street until 2000 hrs.

1600

Brig Gibson and Capt Prince visited BnHQ.

2

1000

Lt col M P Bogert and Capt H M Eisenhauer recce road to Castiglione (H36) with a view to providing flank protection on the move to the coast. QM and LOBs arrived at the Bn today.

1800

Show, “Gambling on the High Seas” (vintage 1930) put on by Auxiliary Services K of C.

3

West N S R prepare to move to Casalbordino (H49) on 4 Dec 43. D Coy is to provide flank protection for the Bde Gp on this move as far as Castiglione. During the morning Lt col M P Bogert and Capt Rogers arranged the posts for this task.

4.

1100

Bn passed SP as per movement order. Movement was slow due to diversions and slippery roads, reached Vasto (H59) on the Coast at 2200 hrs and Pollutri at 2400 hrs where billets were arranged by the recce party under Major R S E Waterman.

5.

0600

Bn on 2 hrs notice from this time Shows put on by K of C in the afternoon and evening.

6.

0845

Warning Order for move to ROCCA. Recce party under Major R S E Waterman to that Area. Bn crossed Sangro at 1555 hrs and arrived at Rocca at approx 1700 hrs. Raining very hard. Take over position of RIF (78 Div) who will move out in the morning. Slight shelling of A Coy area during night 6-7 Dec.

7.

0830

Lt Col M P Bogert and Capt H M Eisenhauer proceed to Bde HQ. 1030 hrs RIF move out. 1115 hrs slight enemy aerial activity over our area, but our own planes are very active and soon dispersed them.

Some indication that Lt Blanchard who lead the Pl of B Coy on the Castle [sic.Castil] di Sangro feature is dead, and buried in that area, but as yet this has not been positively confirmed.

ROCCA

8

Increased air activity is a notable feature on this front. All morning our bombers were over the enemy lines and a few enemy planes made their appearance but hastily disappeared on each occasion.

1400

Bn “O” Gp which Lt Col M P Bogert outlined the attack 1 and 2 Bdes are making this afternoon, also dealt with special points on our move tomorrow.

Our Pioneer Officer, Lt Lynch, discovered a new type of German Mine detector, from an enemy dump

9

0900

Lt col M P Bogert and Capt H M Eisenhauer to conference at Bde HQ regarding scale of transport. 3 officer reinforcements arrived at the unit today. Bn on two hrs notice to move.

10

1500

Lt col M P Bogert and Capt H M Eisenhauer to Bde HQ. Bn to move forward at midnight. Recce party detailed to leave at 1950 hrs. Lt col. M P Bogert and Capt Burns, OC B Coy, attend an “O” Gp at Tac Div HQ. Bn move by tpt to area 336099 arriving at 0300 hrs 11 Dec 43. Bivouac in the field in that area, incessant rain causing this to be very wet, muddy and disagreeable.

11

Intermittent, harassing, shell and mortar fire on this area throughout the day. Some slight casualties.

On the night 10/11 B Coy moved forward with the Regt but broke off at the dispersal point and continued forward to S. Leonardo 326118 where they were joined by 1 Sqn of tanks. This was to form a battle group and a firm base from which they could patrol vigorously to try to secure a tank route across the ORSOGNA-ORTONA road. They were shelled and mortared heavily in this area throughout 11 Dec 43. In the afternoon of the 12th two patrols under Lts Jones and Romley sent out recce a tank route up to and across the ROSOGNA-ORTONA road. Lt Romkey encountered enemy areas 315125, two enemy killed, own tps no casualties. Found this route impassable for tanks. The story of Lt Jones’s patrol is best told by the extract from a recommendation for award for this officer which follows: “On 12 Dec 43 Lt Jones took a strong recce patrol into enemy territory in order to find a route for tanks to reach the ORSOGNA/ORTONA road. A way was discovered and enemy were heard. It was too dark to observe but he obtained definite information that there were enemy in this locality by listening. He returned to the company and in conjunction with Lt Clarke of the 11 C.T.R., organized an attack for the morning of 13 Dec 43. The attack was put in at 0700 hrs 13 Dec 43 with 10 platoon, with Lt Jones in command, riding on three tanks of 11 C.T.R. They drove into the middle of the enemy position and our tanks knocked out 3 German mark 4 specials and one anti-tank gun. Only one shot was fired by the German tanks, the surprise being so complete. Shrapnel from this shot hit Lt Jones in the shoulder. Despite this he showed great aggressiveness and courage in that he continued to lead his platoon in destroying and driving off the enemy on the ground in this area. After was finished he carried on with ortanizing [sic] defence in this area until the balance of his company arrived at approximately 1030 hrs, when he expressed the wish to carry on a result of this action the only entry to the ORSOGNA-ORTONA road was made available enabling our tanks and following forces to exploit across this road”.

When 10 platoon went in to the attack, balance of the coy stood to, and as soon as reports were received, Capt F H Burns took the balance of the coy forward arriving at 1030 hrs. The full coy took up a defensive position in this area.

1100 orders received by B Coy to clear ridge 313116 to 316124. One pl was left in this position under comd Sjt Vingar, Capt Burns proceeded with remaining pls and tanks towards towards Berardi. Was fired on twice from top of ridge enroute, this was cleaned out by 12 Pl. Under heavy shell fire all across feature, contacted remainder of the Bn at 318126. In the meantime 10 Pl succeeded in capturing 52 FWs in the area of yesterday’s scrap.

We now take up the story again at 1800 hrs 11 Dec 43. A, C & D Coys move off on foot, intention, to attack along axis of feature 3112 northwest to TOLLO (2615). Route by road to 500 yrads [sic] north west of S. Leonardo. Bn came under shell fire from start point, which continued until they had crossed the diversion at the MORO river. 3 ORs casualties and 22 set knocked out. Moved off from FUP (324127) at 2200 hrs, A Coy right, C Coy left, followed by BnHQ and D Coy. AT 2220 hrs came under heavy SAA fire from line of the top of ridge 315123 to 317127. Several attempts were made to carry this position but the enemy were found to be well dug in along the lip of wadi this area. Enemy had numerous MMGs and the Bn was pinned down and dug in area 318126.

[12 & 13th Dec 43 not in file until final words, as follows]

S. LEONARDO

…with the two pls of B Coy and tanks contacted and joined the remainder of the Bn.

14

Bn still holding the same posn in the face of heavy arty, mortar and SAA fire. A, C and D Coys now have a combined strength of 76 all ranks and are acting as a single coy under comd of Capt Rogers. The two pls of B Coy and a Pl of LOBs, just brought up, form another coy under Capt Burns. BnHQ, att Fd Amb, etc, give the Bn a total strength of 217 all ranks.

15

B still holding this posn in the face of heavy arty, mortar and SAA Fire. Enemy snipers very active on the flanks. 13 PsW taken today.

16

Still sitting tight same posn. The R22eR on our left and front are getting some of the enemy’s attention, so shelling and mortaring are comparatively light although still continuing. The Bn is being re-organised, a small draft of reinforcements has come up.

2300

Two men patrol from B Coy report enemy activity (digging) in the area 319132.

17

0100

Fighting patrol is sent out to investigate this and shot up the general area.

0230

Further fighting patrols proceeded to this area and had a brisk encounter with the enemy, suffered three casualties, and were forced to withdraw. Bn Still under arty mortar and SAA fire throughout the day.

18

Intermittent, arty, mortar and SAS fire.

1400

Lt col R S E Waterman outlined plan of attack to be carried out at 1600 hrs.

1600

A, B & C Coys totalling 160 all ranks with 3 tanks in support attacked the enemy strong point area 317128 and north. This was a sharp brisk encounter which has as its objective, flushing the enemy from area of bridge to enable the R22eR who had a clear field of fire on this to’mow then down’ so to speak. Some enemy were flushed and accounted for the R22eR, but this was found to be a strongly defended posn (approx 1 Bn) and the B after suffering approx 20% casualties withdrew to its former posn. Four officers wounded, one officer missing, presumed killed. Brig Gibson watched this action from the BnHQ area. When Lt col R S E Waterman returned from this action, he gave Brig Gibson a complete account of the action along with

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…what was later found to be a very accurate estimate of the enemy strength in that area.

19

This Sabbath was spent collecting and burying our dead. Re-organization of the Bn is still being carried out. The Hun still wont let us forget his proximity.

20

For the first time one can move freely in this area without fear of snipers although a fair amount of shells and mortar bombs are still being lobed in. Further collection and burying of dead being carried out.

Lt col R S E Waterman today proceeded to Rear Div HQ re re-organization.

21

A slight adjustment of the Bn posn was made today, extending our front a few hundred yards on either flank to forma firm base for attacking units Troops were also paid today and EFI supplies brought forward, highlight of this was the fre issue of one bottle of beer per man.

1800

Major G L F McNeil MC, Lt G D DeBlois and 26 ORs reinforcements, arrived, all of which went to C Coy.

Orders were received for the Bn to withdraw on the morrow to area 3311 to rest and re-organize.

22

Bn moved to area 3413, move was completed by 1200 hrs. Mobile bath and disinfecting centre set up.

23

Capt J W K Smeltzer, SOS on exchange of officers to the UK. Capt C E Bent is on loan from 3 Bde HQ and acting OC A Coy until re-organization is complete. R inforcements of 8 officers, Capt E M Crouse, Capt M M McMillan, Lts W L Barnwell, S B Beaton, D A Campbell, A J W Dyer, J T J Sweeney, A D Taylor and 255 ORs arrived. Four rifle coys now have a combined strenght [sic] of 16 officers and 403 ORs.

24

Elements of the Bn attended a PIAT demonstration area 331123.. Of 12 shots fired from various angles and ranges, four penetrations were achieved in a German Mk 4 tank.

1200

All officers of the Bn were addressed by Major-Gen Vokes at Bde HQ in which he stressed the importance of discipline.

25

0830

Accumulated EFI profits were used to give each man an issued of one bottle of beer 70 cigarettes, 3 bars, nuts, etc.

0900

Brig Gibson addressed all WOs of the bn.

1100

An excellent dinner of Pork, turkey, NAAFI cake, etc, was thoroughly enjoyed by the troops.

1400

Bn moved by march route to general area of 331140. The Boche is very active in the area just ahead, dropping “moaning bombs” and heavy shells.

26

Two South Africans, escaped PsW came into our lines and were immediately sent to Bde.

1000

Lt col R S E Waterman proceeds to Bde HQ.

Very little change in the general situation on our front. Activity is confined to patrolling.

27

0400

Lt De Blois, while out on a patrol with three ORs stepped on an S mine. Mr DeBlois was fatally wounded, two ORs stretcher cases, the other one suffering shock.

1620

Slight enemy air activity, no damage within unit area.

The air was considerably improved in this area today by planting some more or less decomposed Boches.

2200

One man of C Coy, shot and killed, when he failed to answer the challenge of the neighboring pl post. The weather has changed to clear and cool. A very cool breeze from the hills sweeps the plains.

28

Bn still in same posn weather clear and cool.

1400

Lt col R S E Waterman and Lt R E Campbell to O Group at Bde HQ.

1700 Bn O Group. Lt Col R S E Waterman issued orders for our part of the Bde advance to be carried out tomorrow.

29

0900

Bn moved off by march route. Bde wil attack along axis 315050 - 305180. Carly & York R on right R22eR on left, West N S R reserve, but will push through and exploit if the first are successful.

1100

Bn halted area 3115 awaiting orders to push through. Remained here all day.

1800

Lt col R S E Waterman to Bde HQ.

ORTONA

29

The ground over which we are now passing is torn and marred by the great struggle. Hardly a building remains standing on this, once rich, coastal plane. Knocked out tank and vehicles dot the landscape, some our own, but enemy Mark 4s and SP guns predominate. The Town of Ortona is literally flattened and the stench of bodies under the debris caused one to hurry through.

30

Carlt & York R and R22eR did not get on their objectives so a change of plan was made. West N S R is to move over on the right flank to relieve PPCLI. This move was completed at 1000 hrs. Bn now in area 3118. Some enemy sniping in the afternoon otherwise quiet. A reinforcement draft of 3 officers and 26 ORs arrived. Usual contact patrols carried out night 30/32 Dec.

31

Quite heavy shelling in our general area today. D Coy having two ORs killed, five ORs wounded.

1200

The Corps Commander 5 Corps Major-General Vokes, Brig Gibson, visited the Bn OP and discussed the general situation with Lt col R S E Waterman.

New Year’s Eve turned out to be a vile night, with high winds, heavy rain and very dark. Patrols had a very difficult task on this night.