

## Traces of War – War Diary

17 Field Company October 1944

### ZOMEREN

1<sup>st</sup>

Coy moved off 0900 hrs. Slow convoy but no enemy interference. Arrived new location near HEUMEN approx 1500 hrs. Coy area in wood. All vehicles hidden among trees. All ranks dug in. R.O.11 carried out recce of bridge in vicinity. Some enemy mortaring during night but nothing in coy area. Weather - showery, colder.

[Ref: 185 Bde Adm Order 15 App H/1 RE 3 Div Adm Order 3 App H/2]

### HEUMEN

2<sup>nd</sup>

Coy position improved during day. Cookhouses, mess and other adm depts dug in. O i/c 2 PI made a recce for a diversion round a C1 2 br at 721542. Work was started on building a crib pier in centre of span to increase classification O i/c 1 PI out to discover interpreters but was unsuccessful. Brief visit by CRE at 1200 hrs. O.C. went out on recce at 1245 hrs. C1.11 bulldozer on trailer which had become detached from convoy on previous day, arrived. In evening O i/c 1 PI went out to collect two interpreters who had been obtained from the Dutch Brigade. Both men were interviewed by O.C. Could speak Dutch, French, German and English fluently. Will be very useful. Weather fine but cold.

3<sup>rd</sup>

RO 11 out on recce of roads in area. All platoons engaged on building cribs to strengthen br at 721542. A great deal of bumping of sleepers and stores involved and progress consequently slow. Work completed 1430 hrs and br classification increased from 2 to 12. O i/c 1 PI with small party experimented on setting woods on fire. Comd post completed 1600 hrs. Office set up in there. Some enemy shelling and bombing during night but nothing in coy area. Weather wet.

4<sup>th</sup>

Message received from 185 Bde in early hours of morning asking for party to go out to 2 Warwicks area to clear mines. RO1 despatched to Bde HQ to obtain further details. Party of 3 PI left at 0730 hrs to deal with it. 1 and 2 PIs carried out experiments on winter bivouacs. 3 PI mine clearance party was increased by a further two sections at 1300 hrs. A few Teller mines discovered. 2 i/c attended Q conference at Div HQ. Some enemy air activity during afternoon and considerable enemy arty fire in area where 3 PI were working but no casualties. 2 PI improved approaches to C1 12 br over railway. Approx 14 enemy shells landed in vicinity of coy lines during night. Splinters through canopy of 3 PI truck and one or two near escapes for men but no casualties. Weather - showery, cold.

[ref: 3 Div Op Order No. 13 App E/1]

5<sup>th</sup>

2 PI made further improvements to their br. Further experiments with winter bivouacs carried out. All Officers and NCOs down to Cpl attended demonstration by 253 Fd Coy of pulling mines. Very interesting. Boche aircraft shot down in flames during demonstration. OC and 2 i/c reced possible new coy location. In the evening one man from 3 PI went out with each of two patrols sent out by 1 Norfolks. Patrols did not get quite as far as intended, but brought back useful information. Little enemy activity during night. Weather fine but cold.

6<sup>th</sup>

1 PI experimented with methods of initiating ring main for gapping minefields. 2 PI training in mine pulling. Bulldozer attd the coy did an hours work digging in 185 Bde workshops. Church parade for C of E in morning. In afternoon majority of..... soft skinned vehicles were sent back to 15 Fd Pk under comd CQMS. Movement order received from HQRE - move 8 Oct. Men from 3 PI accompanied four patrols sent out by 1 R. Norfolks during night. Two patrols were due to enter REICHSWALD and lie up for 24 hrs, but could not get as far as intended and returned. All patrols came under heavy fire, but brought back infm on tracks and enemy dispositions. Spr. Wright missing from one patrol. Weather: fine - cold.

[Ref: RE 3 Div movement Order 4 - Appx E/2]

7<sup>th</sup>

Parties from each PI sent to new coy location to do digging of weapon pits, vehicle pits, etc. in preparation for move of coy on following day. New area about 1 mile away from present location and thickly wooded. At approx 2215hrs FR 2 arrived from HQRE to say coy was to move to south side of R. MEUSE to arrive in new location not later than 1100 hrs. Move was laid on straight away. Bulldozer sent back to 16 Fd Pk Coy. Weather: cold.

8<sup>th</sup> Coy packed up and moved by pls. Arrived new location NIEUW GASSEL approx 0900 hrs. Pls in farms. Defence of platoon localities organised. Spr Wright who had been missing from patrol rejoined via 1 Norfolks.

9<sup>th</sup>

Lt. W.A. Greenshields posted in from 246 Fd Coy. RE. In afternoon soccer against 246 Coy - won 2-0. RO.1 on route recce in area OPLOO. OC on recce with CRE. Orders received to move on following day to area OPLOO.

10<sup>th</sup>

Os i/c 1 and 2 Pls RV at 0615 hrs with officer from armoured bde to recce crossings for forward routes over ditches in area between ST ANTHONIS and OVERLOON. Coy moved 0700 hrs to PLANTLUST. Owing to shortage of tpt due to other commitments move was a prolonged one and equipment had to be ferried up from previous location. On arrival pls immediately set to prepare crossings over ditches for forthcoming operation and signposting routes forward. Another party under RO.1 started mats for AVRE. Each mat consisted of 150 spare 18' long 4" diam, tied at 1' centres with balloon cable. Coy, HQ established in small house on edge of wood - sticky position as it was under the muzzle of a 5.5 gun. Gunners warned us repeatedly that it was unhealthy. Spasmodic stonking by enemy with mortars. A near miss on coy HQ which broke all windows, loosened tiles and mortally wounded a piglet to say nothing of setting some of the gunners charges alight. Rain! Pouring rain the whole day. Everyone soaked and the HQ house leaking like a sieve. CRE arrived approx 2030 hrs and suggested pls moved back into soon at ST ANTHONIS. This was done and men had a fairly comfortable night. Postponement of operation by 24 hrs and order to "splice mainbrace" raised morale considerably. 5 reinforcements arrived.

PLANTLUST

11<sup>th</sup>

Work continued on preparation and signposting of forward routes. Work not quite so unpleasant as weather fine, but roads in a terrible state and transport not in a very good way. Only 1 Jeep and 1 Scout car in working order. Party under RO.1 completed construction of three AVRE mats. Sgt. Laurence returned from BRUSSELS with 5 reinforcements - all old members of coy. Brief visit by CRE at mid-day. Pls and majority of HQ moved back to ST ANTHONIS during afternoon. Op orders for operation AINTREE arrived.

[Ref3 Div Op Order 14 - App E/3 RE 3 Div Op Order 11 - App R/4 3 Div Adm Order 22- App H/3]

12<sup>th</sup>

Final check of advance routes carried out at first light. Tank track constructed. Barrage opened up 1100 hrs and attack went in 1200 hrs. Pls engaged on mcs of forward routes. Fairly heavy mortaring and shelling - one vehicle damaged, but no casualties. All went well with attack and 8 Bde captured OVERLOON. 12 reinforcements arrived during day. Weather fine.

13<sup>th</sup>

Second phase of attack 185 Bde attacked 0000 hrs on 2 Bn front 2 Warwicks on right, 2 KSLI on left. Mine clearing party from 2 PI with KSLI and from 3 PI with Warwicks. Considerable time spent clearing wood to the south of OVERLOON and task not complete by nightfall. 3 PI had two O.Rs wounded and one killed when spandau opened up after the leading coys of Infantry had gone through. Very few mines found - 2 PI 5 R mines 3 PI nil. Report centre cstd at 185 Bde. Pls returned to billets at dusk having cleared routes of mines to foremost possible limit. Weather: fine. Whilst putting out marking lights on route cleared through wood south of OVERLOON, L/Sgt Sharp 3 PI captured 2 prisoners.

14<sup>th</sup>

Attack continued. 1 PI with Norfolks on left, 2 PI with 2 KSLI in reserve, 3 PI with 2 Warwicks on right. Norfolks made some progress and 1 PI swept routes forward for their F Xch vehicles and at one time had a recce party with the leading section of inf. They came under heavy shell and mortar fire but had no casualties. 3 PI were pinned down by MG fire and were unable to advance. 2 PI cleared laterals in rear. Very heavy shell and mortar fire all day. Veh casualties - 2 and 3 Pls half tracks hit; 3 PI half track a write off. No mines lifted. Weather showery.

15<sup>th</sup>

No attack today while 185 Bde reorganised after very heavy fighting. 1 and 3 Pls did some mine clearance during afternoon in preparation for next days operations, and 2 PI did route maintenance. 2 PI carrier went up on a mine but two occupants were injured - carrier scrap. Attack due to recommence 0600 hrs next day with Warwicks and Norfolks up. In preparation for this attack which was to be supported by tanks 2 PI constructed crossing over Loobeek with armco and fascines working by artificial moonlight during night. Also during night instruction and assistance was given to infantry in construction of Kapok floats for crossing Molen beek. Weather-fine during day but heavy rain at night. Lt. H.J. Clarke took over comd of 3 PI from Lt. J.A. Oldfield who was posted to CTG Inverary.

16<sup>th</sup>

Advance continued. Heavy rain most of the day and going extremely bad. Pls worked on getting armour and vehicles over crossing over Loobeek, and clearing advance routes. 1 PI had 1 OR killed and three wounded when a shell hit a tree and splinters came down into slit trenches. Many tanks bogged but despite very bad routes and heavy shelling and mortaring advance quite satisfactory. Men returned in the evening weary and wet after very hard days work on route moe and clearance under much enemy fire. Party from 2 PI out during night improving the only vehicle crossing over the Molen beek in order to get tanks, bren carriers and A/Tk guns of Inf Bns across at first light. Very successful job made of it.

17<sup>th</sup>

Attack continued and, although weather during day was better, going still very heavy. Coy moved during morning to location on main road OVERLOON - VENRAIJ south of OVERLOON. Pls still working with their affiliated Inf Bns on route clearance and moe. Several minefields and minedumps reported. By end of day advanced troops were half way into VENRAIJ. Heavy rain set in in the evening. 2 PI had small party maintaining most important of forward routes during night.

OVERLOON

18<sup>th</sup>

Parties out as before on route maint and clearing up odd mines. Maint of Dog route something of a problem as weather very wet. Route mine clearance party from 3 PI under L/Sgt. Lawrence did excellent work under much fire in support of 2 Warwicks advance through VENRAIJ to St. Servatius Monastery enabling armour, rations and support weapons to be got up before dusk. Party from 2 PI out sweeping lane for recovery of two tanks had an accident and 1 Spr was killed and 1 NCO and 1 Spr wounded. Accident probably caused by detector man putting his foot on a Schu Mine and falling on to an R Mine. VENRAIJ now completely occupied and infantry forming up in it.

19<sup>th</sup>

Maint on roads and improving of marking of minefields continued. Party from 1 PI completed clearance of a Schu minefield - 143 in all poked up. Weather slightly better but still shower. O.C. went to Bde HQ to meet Corps Comd who congratulated coy on its efforts. Coy moved to location near ST. ANTHONIS. Accommodated in farms. Small party left at previous location to continue manufacture of notice boards. Weather showery.

[Ref: Trace showing routes cleared by Coy during Op. Aintree. App J/2]

ST. ANTHONIS

20<sup>th</sup>

Work continued on maintenance of Dog route and tidying up of mine dumps and improvement of signing. Maint party also on main road OVERLOON - VENRAIJ. Report centre withdrawn from HQ 185

Bde. In evening mixed party from 1 and 2 Pls constructed 50 ft S.S. Bailey at 754274. Work continued into the night and bridge was open at 0100 hrs. Weather foul during operation - heavy rain and pitch dark.

21<sup>st</sup>

More route maintenance. Also improvement to the Bailey Bridge built during the night. RO.1 out on recce in 3 Recce Regt area, checking up on report of mines and finding out what they wanted doing in the way of clearance. Pls reorganising and checking their G.1098. Weather fine.

22<sup>nd</sup>

Pls on maintenance of routes especially Dog route and crossing. Training on methods of dealing with Shu Mines carried out. Three reinforcements arrived. Church parade in afternoon followed by football. Weather fair. Jeep with RO.1 in had wheel blown off by Shu mine - no casualties.

23<sup>rd</sup>

Dog route again and further training in Shu mines. OC attended a demonstration of amphibians at GRAVE. Weather fine.

24<sup>th</sup>

Notification received of the C-in-Cs approval of the award of the M.C. to Lt. Crush and M.Ms to Cpl. Cushing (8 Pl) and Cpl. Melhuish (late of 2 Pl). Weather fine. Coy on same jobs as on previous day. Laying of corduroy road on worst parts of Dog route started. Parties retrieved bodies of officers and men of Norfolks and KSLI which had been lying in minefield. RO.II attended demonstration of amphibians. Weather fine.

25<sup>th</sup>

Work as before - 3 Pl laying corduroy road on Dog and parties from 1 and 2 Pls supplying timber. Party of Pioneers from 1 Norfolks instructed in elementary mine clearance. Weather fine.

26<sup>th</sup>

Work continued on laying corduroy road. Another party from 1 Norfolks received instruction in mine clearance. 185 Inf Bde took over defensive positions in VENRAIJ from 8 Inf Bde. 1 Pl experimenting with blowing path through schu minefield using cordtex projected over field by means of Piat. Weather fine.

27<sup>th</sup>

Corduoy road and experiment with shu mines continued. Compressor leant to 246 Fd Coy for work on their corduroy road. Nothing further to report. Weather fine during the day but rain at night.

28<sup>th</sup>

Corduoy road continued. Demonstration by 1 Pl to all officers of Div. RE in afternoon of blowing path through schu minefield using cordtex projected by Piat. Projection worked satisfactorily.... (65 to 70 yards using 3 strands cordtex) but when detonated cordtex failed to blow mines unless laid directly under strands. We will have to think again. Parties from 3 and 1 Pl sent out to A and B Sqns 3 Recce Regt respectively to place booby traps for them, and others to remove others laid by Boche. Weather: fine, cold.

29<sup>th</sup>

Work continued on Dog. Ramp for loading sand into tippers using bulldozer constructed. Party cleared certain routes in VENRAIJ for 1 Norfolks. A Sapper went with each of two patrols sent out by 1 Norfolks to reconnoitre routes for raiding party on following night. Accident occurred while party of 1 Pl were experimenting with projection cordtex using Piat. Bomb exploded injuring 1 NCO and 5 Sprs. Small party out with Sqns of 3 Recce Regt placing booby traps. Weather cold.

30<sup>th</sup>

Sand loading ramp in operation loading tippers for 246 Fd Coy and the odd one for putting sand on corduroy road Dog. 1 Pl laid dummy minefield in Norfolks area. Party from 1 Pl laid booby traps in house near VORTUM in support 3 Recce Regt. 3 Pl did conservancy in the morning and had the afternoon off. Weather: cold and rain late in the day. 31<sup>st</sup> 31<sup>st</sup>

Sand loading ramp operated by 2 Pl. 3 Pl cutting logs for 246 Fd Coy. 1 Pl on conservancy and resting. Party from 2 Pl erected pile-driver as far as possible, but were unable to train with it as there were

several deficiencies. Five shells landed in coy area during afternoon. No casualties and only a light damage to Officers Mess. Party from 1 PI lifted road block on road GROENINGEN - VIERLINGSBEEK. 1 N.C.O. and 1 O.R. went out with patrol from 3 Recce Regt during night to lay AP mines at point near R. Maas where German patrols were suspected of having landed in the past. Patrol was delayed on its outward journey, but mines were laid successfully. Weather cloudy with some rain.