

Transcript from original war diary of Douglas Edward Watts.

Version (in red) taken from a re written copy by DE Watts sometime after 2000?

(Blue type = questionable/unsure?)

Tunisia Campaign

Jan 4 1943. We sang in the rain and snow on the station platform last night.
Saw Pennine Chain today.

5 Jan 1943. Arrived at Liverpool. Embarked immediately. Food on the ship pretty good.

6 Jan 1943. Away. Dock work interesting. Stand in queue at the ships bar for a lengthy period with no luck.

7 Jan 1943. Awake in Clyde. Ship gets oil and water. Other ships also.

8 Jan 1943. Still in Clyde. Saw submarine. Had lecture on malaria.

9 Jan 1943. Away again. Ships gunners practice. Many sea sick, me also, very unpleasant experience. Ships clock put back one hour. Saw one aeroplane.

10 Jan 1943. Sunny morning had church service. Ships concert. "Rumour" ATS in next ship.

11 Jan 1943. Gales last night, heavy seas today.

12 Jan 1943. Very heavy seas, monstrous waves, ship tossed about. Kit falls from racks, plates broken, one fellows head bandaged up after being hit by falling boots.

13 Jan 1943. Surprise false alarm. Mild weather.

14 Jan 1943. Ships guns fire again (practice). A warm mild day. Ships concert.

15 Jan 1943. Land in sight. Seen gulls and fishing boats.

15 Jan 1943 (evening). Saw coast towns, all brightly illuminated. Presumably Spanish/Moroccan. We passed through Straits of Gibraltar.

Ships Stewart dies. Clocks put forward. Illuminated as we pass through straights. On guard duty.

16 Jan 1943. More land in sight. A very warm day. Marvellous blue sky. We prepare kit for disembarking.

17 Jan 1943. We pull into Algiers. Seemingly weird place. Disembarked and prepared for a 15 mile march with full kit. Exchanged cigarettes and razor blades with the natives for oranges. Men knocked up. Ride a little way, finished journey march and sleep in wine factory on floor with one blanket. Had no meal since 11am this morning.

18 Jan 1943. Rest day. All my bones ache. Bully beef and biscuits for meals.

19 Jan 1943. Went for walk and mixed with the natives. Received 1125 francs.

20 Jan 1943. Better food. Visited small town. Kit bags arrive.

- 21 Jan 1943. On guard. Talk with native Arab sentry (after a fashion).
- 22 Jan 1943. Visited a small town had champagne and equipment arrive.
- 23 Jan 1943. More equipment arrives. My wireless set is damaged.
- 24 Jan 1943. Getting back to routine. And it's a rainy day.
- 25 Jan 1943. More rain. Straightening things out.
- 27 Jan 1943. Packing up ready for move. Have cold.
- 28 Jan 1943. Some of the boys have gone. Boiled eggs to eat on the journey.
- 29 Jan 1943. A long journey through mountain country. Arabs have eggs to sell everywhere. A very cold night and slept rough. Done a guard.
- 30 Jan 1943. Still travelling. Wild boar country. Hyenas cry out at night
- 31 Jan 1943. Still Travelling. Hot day on guard.
- 01 Feb 1943. Pull in a valley. Had a puncture on the way.
- 02 Feb 1943. Get bread for first time and do washing.
- 03 Feb 1943. Travel during the night. Accidents. Mans skull lifted. 1 driver broken leg, and another a broken arm. MP (military police) face cut about. The truck overturned.
- 04 Feb 1943. More night travelling. Lorry overturned. 3 of the boys hurt. (Paul Russell). Had a good meal today. Hun planes about.
- 05 Feb 1943. Went to gun position. 12 Stukas over. Not much sleep last night. 11 am we smack at the Hun (fire on enemy positions). Saw several ambulances come back. Some of us news reeled. 5pm shells drop near us. With the infantries' CRA (Commander Royal Artillery) congratulating us on good shooting.
- 05 Feb. 1943. Went to gun position 12 Stukas flew over and dive bombed infantry in front of us. Not much sleep last night. 11 am. We fire on enemy positions. A small attack must have been made this morning; several of our ambulances are coming back with wounded. Some of us news reeled by a paramount photographer. 5 pm. Some enemy shells came over.
- 06 Feb 1943. We smack at the Hun during the night. I had first good nights' sleep for 3 nights. 11am. Smash Huns tanks and Lorries. Ordered to move again.
- 06 Feb 11am. We fired at enemy tanks and lorry damage observed. Just received orders to move.
- 07 Feb 1943. 3 Am. Our truck gets ditched. Up to our ankles in mud. After much swearing, we got it out. Had bully and biscuits, smoked and had some (some of the officers) whiskey. 6pm. Arrived at fresh position and we smeared the truck with mud for camouflage.
- 08 Feb 1943. A few more shells at the Hun. Food good OK.

09 Feb 1943. Stukas (flew over) about, otherwise a quiet day. 7pm. Enemy attack with MG fire. We put shells over by the score. Busy time on the wireless. They get hill.

10 Feb 1943. Quiet day. 7pm. We fire over hundred shells.

11 Feb 1943. A very cold night. It rained and snowed, up to ankles in mud.

12 Feb 1943. Fire A few more shells over. I feel knocked up.

13 Feb 1943. Quiet wet and windy day. Cleaned wireless gear.

14 Feb 1943. Quiet some ME's flew over. 7pm. We fire a few shells. 9pm. a few more.

15 Feb. 1943. Hot day. Had first good wash for 3 weeks. Quiet.

16 Feb 1943. A few shells over last night. It was said today, that the enemy dead were too numerous to count after our shelling on the 9th. (A French report).

17 Feb 1943. We shell road.

18 Feb 1943 we fire at enemy guns. The usual ME's over.

19 Feb 1943. Rainy day, mud everywhere. Nearly everyone's blankets wet. The French reports our sister troupe killed 43 enemy today.

20 Feb 1943. Quite. 7pm. A few shells over. We fire a few shells at 7pm.

21 Feb 1943. Quiet, 7pm, something brewing. 11pm prepare barrage to support infantry in dawn attack. Everyone tense.

22 Feb 1943. 6am. many guns fire. 9pm. We did not gain objective. Not many casualties reported. Believed by ME?

23 Feb 1943. A fire few shells over. 9pm distant gunfire heard.

24 Feb 1943. 12 am. We fire at hostile guns. 4pm. Also. 6pm. Rained heavily, one gun team very wet and fed up; my conscience pricked me for always working and sleeping under cover. I received first letter from home.

25 Feb 1943. Fire at enemy guns, tank and bridge. We suspect attack.

26 Feb 1943. We fired during the night; infantry pleased with our efforts, enemy ambulances were seen this morning clearing the battle field. 4pm five enemy fighters flew over and around us. 3 were shot down, one pilot bailed out, gunners argue who hit them.

27 Feb 1943. Four ME's flew low around our position. Usual firing.

01 Mar 1943. Our sister troupe move further up, we get some bread. Two Italians give themselves up to O.P.

(02 Mar 43) One of the above Italians volunteers to go back to enemy lines and (fetch) after his mates. He returned saying his mates had gone moved.

- 03 Mar 43 we fire on enemy headquarters, in farm, men were seen running from burning buildings. A fairly hot day.
- 04 Mar 43 we shell heavily, enemy gun positions, several rifle and M/G bullets whine over our position, thought we were being attacked by patrol. Found to be practice firing. 6 ME's over.
- 05 Mar 43 we shelled enemy heavily. Raining. Men seem irritable.
- 07 Mar 43 we fire on Italian anti tank guns, men seen running into nearby gully, their cloths in tatters.
- 09 Mar 43 2 Italians give themselves up to O.P. (observation Post) one of them is a corporal. The weather is cold and windy.
- 10 Mar 43 Quiet. 7pm one gun and team go within close range of enemy.
- 11 Mar 43 above gun had busy time, now trying to get back to old position, much trouble after heavy rain. Rum ration. Two letters from home.
- 12 Mar 43 a large force of our planes went over. Our big gun fired at 2 ME'
- 13 Mar 43 the last two Italians were taken back to the O.P. They pointed out German positions. They were in good spirits; our lads gave them cigs etc. **Said they didn't like our big guns.**
- 16 Mar 43 Making all preparation for move. A few Hun shells dropped near. **½ mile away**
- 17 Mar 43 arrived at new position last night. Digging until 3am.
- 18 Mar 43 it's quiet. Making the place habitable in spite of much rain.
- 21 Mar 43 Very quiet. Much mud about. Rations rather small.
- 22 Mar 43 it's a sunny day. The major took a shot.
- 23 Mar 43 it's very warm, nearly hundred shells fired last night. All the mud dried up.
- 24 Mar 43 continuing warm. Some firing.
- 25 Mar 43 a large force of our bombers went over, some ME's about.
- 26 Mar 43 Fired on div target for demonstration.
- 27 Mar 43 Usual firing. 9pm. Flames seen and artillery plus MG (Machine gun) fire heard.
- 28 Mar 43 our people attacked and took 2 hills, heavy artillery barrages put over. We fired over two hundred shells **from our four guns.** 7pm a very heavy thunder storm, much rain during this storm, plenty of mud again. Extra ordinary large hailstones.
- 29 Mar 43 some firing. We get news of 8th Army taking M **Mareth** line.
- 31 Mar 43 I **two of us** had a good night's sleep in fantastic dug out last night. 9pm. A.A. guns fire at enemy fighter. Our troupe commander amuses himself firing at two Huns in a trench.
- 01 Apr 43 4pm. Making preparations for a move, shelled enemy observation Post.

02 Apr 43 Had a rough journey and arrived at position about midnight, so far a very windy place.

03 Apr 43. 11 Am. Enemy shells landed on our position, one landed seventy yards from where I was washing. Some earth fell from the crater on me. 4pm the enemy shell us again, one shell burst ten yards from some of my mates, no one was hurt.

04 Apr 43 10am the enemy shell us again, two of us were getting in telephone wires on an open field, we soon spread flat on the ground. Two fellows had a shell burst on the edge of a trench they were in, they survived it but were pretty deaf for a while, if the blast had gone forward they would have been killed, this same shell flattened the roof of a tent in which two men (Moles & Stannard) were slightly dug in. A real miracle there was no casualties. 12am prepare to join an armoured division for an advance.

05 Apr 43 had a fairly long, cold and rough ride last night. The Majors truck went over a cliff, the driver sent to hospital. 7am arrive at hide.

06 Apr 43 Regiment left hide last night the journey rough. One lorry with gun went off road into deep gully. Damage not yet known, three men were said to be unconscious. Have since heard some seven in hospital.

Most of regiment in position in no man's land. Dawn broke before our troupe could get in. Had **very** little sleep lately.

5pm. Enemy shell area.

07 Apr 43 Arrive in position. Nothing in front of us. **At present no infantry field guns between us and the enemy. We dig trenches as quietly as possible throughout the night.** 3pm enemy shells **over** drop near.

08 Apr 43 4.30am I am on duty in CP (**Top Command Post**). **I sit at the wireless, I** can hear our Churchill and American tanks roaring **past** by ready to take up battle positions **I suppose**, anti tank guns and 25 lbs are in front of us now, also AA's. There'll be a hell of a showdown in about an hour or two's time and onwards. 11.30am the battle has now been going on for about six hours. Our troupes reach first objective very quick. (PICHON) so far there advance has been about 1 mile an hour our guns are now left well behind, so far as I know the enemy shelling was not heavy. I was on duty and did not see much of the **tank battle that was raging on the plain a mile or two away** but the din was significant of what was happening. There has been several Hun **German** prisoners **go passed** today our position. **I have just heard that** we have **had** some casualties, (our troupe). It must be expected, although we have had good luck in the past, **who and how many I have not heard.** Things around here are now quiet.

1pm. Many tanks go past. I have just heard that our troupe commander was the casualty, He was killed by a shell splinter which hit him in the neck, the others who were with him are safe. I have just heard the wireless operator Cpt. Moffatt was a good and very intelligent commander. He was in pre war days, the Ipswich Town clerk. He was equally good a soldier he delighted in getting at the "Bosh" as he would sometimes put it. He is, unless there have been more this morning, the first casualty. This is war, we must expect, but sincerely hope not to lose our mates and probably ourselves, as I lay writing now men on both sides are most likely dying.

09 Apr 43. I have just heard that Capt. Moffats' driver was wounded in the chest, not seriously. All yesterday our tanks roared past, they must have amounted to hundreds. The Major came back last night fagged right out, after being shelled. And seeing tanks blown up very near him, he was with Capt Moffat When he was killed.

6 pm. Things have been going fairly well although the news is vague. We could see the guards advancing this morning amid heavy mortar and gunfire. During the day I have heard some of the tanks radios, their messages indicate they are in battle.

Prisoners are being brought back frequently, ambulances often pass.

11 Apr 43. We advanced along the main 'axis of advance' yesterday we went from position to position without getting the chance to fire a shot. The things I saw yesterday when we halted, I shall never forget, in places there were tanks from both sides knocked out, in some of them were the dead crews. I had a good look at two German tanks, in the first one the driver was burnt to a cinder. The skeleton of his legs and feet could still be seen on the control pedals, his head was burnt right off, in a corner of the tank I could see the remains of his cigarette tins etc. The other tank or rather 88 mm gun towers, the most terrible sight was seen,

A freshly killed German lay with his legs dangling from a girder, he was partly burned, half his head was blown off and blood was dripping from his once fair hair. A silver ring shone from his scorched fingers, one of our lads had nerve enough to take it as a souvenir. Sights like that were also seen of our boys. We have now advanced about 40 miles and our infantry are still on the go, they have just taken KAIROUAN, we shall soon be moving again, I reckon, there is very little rest for anyone now. There are several enemy fighters and bombers about bombing and MGs. Two Lorries are now burning not far from this position.

12 Apr 43. We moved again last night (went through KAIROUAN) and are now with the infantry again, our job here is to help blast out an enemy pocket of resistance. Not far from here are several burned out German Lorries half scorched dead men were still in them. Last night, our Recon corps boys shot them up. 2 pm. We are all set up ready to move again, it seems the Hun did not put up a very good fight. There dive bomber just bombed a large concentration of vehicles of which we are in. They dropped four bombs not far from here. I don't think there was much damage; our AA is too much for them it seems. We are to go forward with the guards.

13 Apr 43. Apparently they have changed their minds. Last night we went back to a hide just outside KAIROUAN. I hear all the Div which we are with are coming back to refit. Scores of their tanks have been coming back.

14 Apr 43. We rejoin the regiment and prepare to go north. No one has had much sleep lately. I sat up and slept a bit between reporting progress of convoy over the wireless, it will probably be the same tonight.

16 Apr 43. We are still in the same hide, cleaning equipment and ourselves up and generally resting. The night before last some Arabs came round and stole some of the boy's boots. A few German marks were left to pay for them.

20 Apr 43. The past few days we have had quiet in the same hide. I am now up north with a reconnaissance party; the positions are to be recon' in the dark in a very forward area.

21 Apr 43. Midday yesterday we went to forward W.L. (weapons loading) area
2.30 This morning I was awakened by shells bursting and MG fire. The Hun had got wise to our plan and had put in an attack. They over run our staked out gun position. Captured some guns of other regiments' and set fire to ammo dumps, one of our line trucks which went well forward had not yet joined us.
8.30. We are now in a hide further back; scores of Churchill (tanks) are passing on the way to the front. A counter attack will probably turn into a main offensive.
5 pm. I am writing this at HQ. Things seem rather confused today, we have been to several different places, on our way here we came across some of the fellows who were in the line truck, and they had lost this truck. We have had plenty of air support.

22 Apr 43. We came to the original forward position last night the guns are now with us. There are several scars of yesterday's battle around here. Not far from here is a German A.T. gun and one of our 25 lbs, the latter's tyres were still burning last night its tower were blown to pieces. Five of the men from the line truck are still missing, the ones that returned had had a rough time of it, the truck was fired at by a Hun tank and burned up, they crept through the corn field to get back.

23 Apr 43. Last night the infantry put in an attack, we put up a barrage for them, it has been reported that they are making progress. Shells are falling pretty close to our position last night. We have had plenty of air support. There have been air battles going on all day, the enemy dived bombed some vehicles, two were hit. Our sister troops commander is reported to be suffering from shell shock.

24 Apr 43. 7.30 pm. A good many of our tanks came past here last night. The enemy bombed them for about an hour.

9 pm. There have been some very fierce battles today, attacks and counter attacks by both sides. Casualties are said to be high, we have been firing nearly all day, the enemy has not sent many shells back. The advance has left us to fire at maximum range most of the time. Air battles have been going on all day. We have just heard the BBC news, first time for over a week.

25 Apr 43. News is vague today. I have seen several of our tanks coming back. The enemy have been shelling the road near our position, some of the shells burst uncomfortably close. Several pieces of shrapnel penetrated into one of our gun towers.

26 Apr 43. Our infantry took 'Long stop Hill'. We have moved our guns about six miles forward; their infantry are in the fields around us. Just before we came here R E's (Royal Engineers) swept the area for mines. The other men of the line truck that got shot up have been reported as missing.

27 Apr 43. The gunners have been busy today, over 400 shells have been fired, many of them supporting the infantry. The Hun has been shelling pretty close this afternoon. 3 or 4 graves of our grenadier guards are near this position. Enemy AA shells fired at our bombers have burst over head.

28 Apr 43. We have done much firing today, 140 shells or more were fired in a quarter of an hour at enemy tanks which broke through. Scores of shells have burst around us, the troupe is alright but our sister troupe had one killed and six injured and sent to hospital, our troupes held their own.

29 Apr 43. Enemy dive bombers dropped bombs very close to our position, thought they were aimed at us, fierce battles have been going on, we know of 17 enemy tanks knocked out, seen by our O.Ps. (Observation post). The party came in tonight pretty exhausted after being surrounded by tanks and shells, once by some error of our divisional artillery. A fair amount of our infantry was caught in the barrage. I was pleased to get three letters from home today.

30 Apr 43. Comparatively uneventful. Usual tank battles, a few enemy shells have dropped pretty close making a familiar feeling shudder down my spine and finish in my feet. The everyday groups of 12 planes have been bombing enemy lines not far away. Bomb explosions shook the earth under us.

01 May 43. Battle as a whole quiet, we move up about 3 miles at 5.30 am. There are several guns in view of us, the enemy apparently know of this concentration and several shells have come over, four men were killed here yesterday.

02 May 43. It's rather quiet, enemy put down several rounds of gun fire on open plain about a ¼ mile from here, minor adjustments of a few degrees would cause a lot of damage. A troupe commander of our sister battery has been temporarily blinded by shell blast. The man that was killed on 28 April was in a terrible state, the other were badly injured the shell burst right between the gun trail.

03 May 43. 7PM. We are preparing to go back to our old position preparatory to joining armoured division, our battery gained a good reputation when we were last with them.

05 May 43. We moved to this position early yesterday, there's several old dugouts here made by the French but last occupied by the Germans. I believe we are making use of some of them. Situation is vague

but we have been doing much firing this afternoon, the infantry have been trying to take three hills preliminary, I think, to a big attack. Our bombers have been busy.

06 May 43. 9PM. We are now well forward in a spear head attack; we are now on our third position for this and have had a lot of moving about. The show started the night before last with a terrific artillery barrage, as the morning came so the firing became more intensive, as we moved up, sights were seen similar to when we went on to KAIROUAN. We were shelled pretty heavily, *(the first one that came down landed about 10 yards from where I was mending telephone wires. An olive tree was blown down and the wire was cut badly. I was a bit shaken but soon recovered after finding a trench. Ten or a dozen shells soon followed and the splinters tore through the olive trees, one red hot piece landed in our trench. Our troupe survived this apart from the wireless truck which had a splinter through the tool box but a 25 pounder was set on fire, one man killed and some injured.*

in the last position. No damage was done to our troupe apart from shell splinters through the wireless truck, but a 25 lb gun and tower was set on fire, 1 man killed and some injured.

07 May 43. We started the day about 2.30 this morning, since then we have gone forward from one position to another, the whole affair was very much like when we were down south. Near one of our position was an 88 mm AA gun sight, possibly the crew must of fled in a hurry. All of their equipment and Personnel belongings were left behind. Many of our lads helped themselves to watches etc. We are now resting the night about 10 miles from Tunis.

08 May 43. We have been advancing all day, bypassing Tunis this morning, scores of prisoners have been going back, and many have been sitting about waiting to be taken (German prisoners). When we came to this position we dropped trail about half a mile from tank battle. German dead and wounded lay about. We have been firing on German infantry on a mountain not far away. We could see rds (rounds) falling. As we came through the French village's people cheered and gave us flowers.

6 PM. We have had some very bad luck, one of our guns blew up, the barrel split right open and fell off. Four of our comrades were killed, blown and cut about, pieces of them were picked up yards away, one man's arm was picked up near this truck, about twenty yards from the gun. We have just had the burial service. They were all married men, two from Sudbury.

09 May 43. The enemy were cleared off the hill in front of us this morning and pushed back through the little coast town of HAMMAN-LIF We had been firing on the outskirts of the place until the enemy was driven out. The boys who had been down to this place say the people came out with flowers and wine and some were trying to sing Tipperary. It is now about midnight, we have just had the order to move forward to position the other side of HAMMAN-LIF.

10 May 43. 10 am. We are now in HAMMAN-LIF. Our guns have done a fair bit of firing; their report shakes the whole place. I have just returned from a walk around, one of our boys was playing a piano accordion. In someone's back garden and the French girls came out in their best turn out, and danced, some of the boys have had a fair share of wine, in spite of this bit of gaiety there's a lot of suffering. One woman showed us were a Hun shell had landed in her bedroom as could be expected, it made a mess of the whole house. Dead are still being buried. *(A whole German gun crew lay dead just up the street, shot up by British tanks).* We are now preparing to advance; hundreds of prisoners have been going back. The enemy took most of the food from this place before going.

11 May 43. We have been advancing in jumps of about six miles at a time, once we advanced about thirty. All along the road we saw thousands of prisoners, some actually waved to us as they passed, Italian drivers were driving their own lorries taking prisoners back. We have very nearly surrounded a vast number of the enemy. 8th and 1st artillery zones meet. We fired today from 8th observations. As can be expected there's plenty of booty. Every one who can is out for what he finds handy. I have just had a meal mostly of German food. As far as we are concerned the enemy have caused us little trouble, but a few shells landed uncomfortably close this afternoon. We can now see the sea south of the Tunisian tip.

12 May 43. We have continued advancing, our forward troops have just linked up with 8th army it seems the fighting has finished here, about an hour ago many guns were firing, everything is now quiet. Thousands of enemy have given themselves up from the hills in front of us. (Scores of white objects could be seen waving from the hillside).

13 May 43. Yesterday afternoon the battle here ceased for us and everyone else. I believe 33 bombers came over and that put what seems the finishing touches to it. Some of us got talking to prisoners several could speak English. Their view of the situation was that Germany and England could come to a good understanding. They as soldiers had no desire to fight, they said, like you, we have to obey orders.

14 May 43. The campaign is over now we are resting by the sea. I will bring this diary to a close thankful that I am alive to do so.

This is not an everyday account but I have made it up to the date when time permitted. (Written by DEK Watts)

Italy Campaign?

13 Nov 43. Since the finish of the campaign in North Africa we have spent most of our time in the Constantine area, we have done nothing of importance; some of the boys have had slight attacks of malaria. Although the weather now is usually rain, it has up to a month ago been unbearable hot with flies tormenting most of the day. The guns and vehicles left us a few days ago for [Italy](#); we should be following by now.

14 Nov 43. We are now at a transit camp five miles from [Phillipville](#). We had a long and cramped journey in cattle trucks last night, afterwards we marched about five miles to this camp. The vehicles are now being loaded.

15 Nov 43. Still at transit camp for security reasons, we are confined to barracks.

16 Nov 43. We marched back today and after sitting on the quay side for about two hours we boarded a liner. Most of the crew are French. Our Francs have been changed for BMA currency.

17 Nov 43. We sailed at dusk last night, this morning land could be seen on both sides possible C. BON & PANT. Weather fair, several have been sick, I was no exception. Convoy consists of this ship and escort vessels.

19 Nov 43. In the afternoon of the 17th we passed?????. At dawn yesterday land could be seen on our left. At 1100 yesterday we docked at [Toranto](#) and after standing on the docks for some time we marched through

the town and spent the night in a brick works, we have a roof over us and that is all that can be said in favour of the place. The people are friendly enough with us.

21 Nov 43. Went into the town yesterday, scores of Italian sailors about.

23 Nov 43. Another look around the town, apart from poor quality wine there is very little to buy. A fair number of Italians are out on the street trying to sell their watches.

29 Nov 43. Still in the same billet, our equipment is now being unloaded. Most of our time lately has been spent guarding other unit's equipment.

30 Nov 43. Lorry and equipment is still coming in, weather mild.

03 Dec 43. Still in the same billet, we had an air raid alarm last night. Italians soon take to shelters. Damage unknown.

08 Dec 43. We have not yet moved. A troupe ship is at the docks with the rest of the boys onboard. Damage of air raid some ships sunk, several casualties, said to be three enemy planes shot down. We have taken down our 1st army signs.

11 Dec 43. We have been busy today preparing, possible for moving tomorrow. The floors of most of the vehicles have been sand bagged for prevention of mine blast. The vehicle has had the 8th army sign painted on them.

13 Dec 43. 9 am. I am writing this in the vehicle. All I know at present is a small party of us are going somewhere north. We travelled a fair distance yesterday and camped just off the road last night. Distant gunfire could be heard throughout the night. In spite of the ground being damp I had a good night's sleep.

14 Dec 43. I am writing this in a fairly forward area. We arrived here late this afternoon after a short journey over some very bad roads. In their retreat, the Germans have blown up most of the bridges and mind the verges of the roads in many places. We saw several scars of recent battles. One small town which we passed through was nearly all in ruins. Since we've been here there's been much gun fire. We halted a few miles back and three enemy shells landed in a nearby field and cops. Things are quieter now.

16 Dec 43. 4 am. I have just come on duty. We are all set for action now. The guns arrived yesterday and after much heaving and pulling they finally got them into position. There is mud everywhere. Last night our guns fired a few rounds. Several shells were unloaded last night; some more are on the way, the order of the day is shells and more shells. The earth is wet everywhere and it is difficult to find a good place to sleep. There are plenty of our aircraft about. The main fight here seems to be for some cross roads. There has been fierce fighting for four days for them.

9 pm. The gunners have been busy today both with firing and carrying shells several hundred yards to their gun positions. There were a number of enemy aircraft about this morning; the sky was full of AA air shell bursts. We fired this morning to indicate a target to some heavy bomber. I saw some of our fighter bombers dive bombing enemy positions some distance away. This evening the enemy was shelling somewhere just over the ridge in front of us. In spite of the shelling and persistent gunfire there are many Italian civilians about.

17 Dec 43. 12 pm. During the day the gunners did some firing and also this evening mostly at enemy guns. General Monty stopped outside the gun position this morning and left a number of cigarettes for our men. For about an hour a single enemy gun has been sending over some very heavy shells which burst in several spots in this area. A big show is expected tomorrow and if successful our troupes should advance several miles beyond Ortonno

18 Dec 43. The day in general, at least where the artillery was concerned started at 6 o'clock with firing at enemy guns and later firing barrages for the infantry. At about 10.30 am. A message came through saying the first objective had been taken, many enemy killed and many prisoners taken. There's still much doubt about progress to the second objective. Our troupe commander and his driver were injured by shell splinters today, both were hit in the face and the troupe commander was also hit in the thigh. A further message has just come through saying combat teams have gone out to attempt to cut the road. The cross roads are still in enemy hands. The first obs (objective) was to the left and beyond the cross roads.

19 Dec 43. A fair bit of firing again today. This afternoon we fired again to support the infantry. It is reported that the second objective has been taken. The Germans are putting up a good fight to prevent us from taking control of the Ortorno road which runs inland. This afternoon a number of tanks went past. The sun has been shining today and the mud is drying a bit. Our troupe commander is in hospital, the driver is alright.

11 pm. The area for about half a mile around us has just been shelled by two heavy enemy guns, the second shell landed pretty close to one of our guns and also the fifth throwing the earth all around us, two or three didn't go off and their dead weight shook the earth when they landed. We took a bearing of the flash and fired soon afterwards possible at them.

25 Dec 43. I am now spending the worse Christmas that I can remember but still it could be much worse. Just along the road there is a sign up wishing us a merry Christmas and they have five turkeys at the cook house for our dinner, we had double NAAFI rations also this week but it had to be paid for. It rained heavy yesterday and there's plenty of mud about. One of our gun towers slid off the road and turned completely over. The past three days I've spent at an Indian infantry HQ. I saw many signs of the hard fighting the infantry had, to get that main road. There are shell holes in most places averaging no more than about five yards apart. I saw one Sherman tank knocked out with the graves of its crew not far from it. I also saw two knocked out German tanks and two of their transport trucks. A dead German laid beside the road apparently hit in the face by a shell splinter, not far from him were the graves of one British soldier, the German had only a little earth thrown over him. We were once under fire of the German six barrel mortar, the bombs made a screaming noise and there is plenty of time to get in a trench. Two nights we spent in an Italian house that had a fair battering by shell splinters. The Indians had been through most of its drawers etc, bent on looting. Small wonder some Italian families are remaining in their homes with the women and children crying when the shells came over.

26 Dec 43. It's been pretty cold today, the gunners have done a bit of firing but not much, the shells are rationed probably because the roads are bad. An enemy shell burst near the house which we were in when in the O.P. area, three soldiers were injured and one killed, two Italians were also hit a woman and a girl of seventeen, the girl has since died.

28 Dec 43. 8 pm. The enemy has just been shelling all around this area, made us a bit jittery; some fell so close that we wondered where the next was coming. Today it was reported that the enemy had evacuated Ortorno. Our Major, his driver (F.L.) and I think, wireless Op were today injured by a mortar bomb which burst on their vehicle, I don't know as yet how badly. Several enemy aircraft swept across the sky this morning at a terrific speed, several bombs were dropped, some civilians injured and I think there were also some casualties in our sister battery. There has been a cold north wind today most of the mud has dried up.

30 Dec 43. The gunners have done their usual amount of firing today; there has been a lot of air activity today. Bombing by both types of our craft, I saw one of our small planes shot down, the pilot drifted down into our lines; his plane came screaming down ending with an explosion.

01 Jan 44. The New Year for us started very wet, it rained continuously for about twenty hours; nearly everyone was flooded out, getting both cloths and blankets wet. It was a sorry sight to see most of the chaps plodding about in the mud trying to keep as dry as they could. The wet blankets were taken somewhere to

be dried, but the little tents and bivvies are still water logged. A few of us have found shelter in an Old Italian house.

05 Jan 44. Things have been comparatively quiet for these past few days except for the night before last when the enemy sent over a considerable number of shells of varying sizes.

09 Jan 44. I am now on duty, the job here tonight is more comfortable than it usually is, in the command post which is joined to the truck, we have an improvised but pretty good fire and in the truck itself I have a tin with some red hot charcoal in. On the whole things pretty quiet, the night before last the enemy gave us a bit of shaking, a number of shells landed and several of the boys' bivvies had pieces of shell splinter through them.

17 Jan 44. For the past week or rather since the fall of Ortorno, we have done comparatively little apart from the usual Hostile Battery tasks. But the lull seems to have finished this morning; we have been firing several hours now, so also has numerous guns in the area. We are supporting Canadian infantry destined to take high ground near the river Ventino ally. Yesterday two of our men were hit by splinters from an enemy shell. One has gone to hospital.

20 Jan 44. The attack of which I last wrote proved of little success, as far as I can gather. Since then things have been quiet where we are concerned. These past few days some of the gunners have been preparing an alternative position for us, which is said to be rather boggy.

26 Jan 44. It has been raining heavily most of the afternoon and there is plenty of mud about again. The day before yesterday an enemy shelled an area about a mile from us and blew up an ammo lorry and set fire to a petrol dump. Four Indians were injured and one killed. In the past few days there have been several loads of ammo taken to the alternative positions.

01 Feb 44. We are still at same position with no definite signs of moving, the past two days we have been pretty busy firing barrages etc in support of the Canadian infantry who have been trying to take two hills, so far their efforts have been fruitless.

09 Feb 44. I am writing these few notes at a small village in the APPENINES. We have been travelling for two days from the 8th Army sector to the 5th Army. We have been held up today by road blocks due to the heavy downfall of snow. There is no sign of past fighting here but the electric power station has been demolished. An Italian family is living in a building joining the place where we are sleeping tonight, along with their pigs and sheep and a horse, the children have been begging for biscuits most of the afternoon.

13 Feb 44. We have been at this position for several days now, on the outskirts of the village. Some of us sleep in the nearby houses but very few of them are water tight, most have had their tiles moved by the blast of heavy gunfire. This troupe's command post is in a large tunnel which the Italians first dug as an air raid shelter, it looks as if it has been extended probably by the Germans, we have done a fair bit of firing, so far none has been returned. The enemy occupy the ridge in front of us and when firing we can see our own shells falling.

16 Feb 44. Soon after writing the above notes an NCO came running in and said that their gun had blown up, there were no casualties. I went over to have a look soon after and if I had not known I should have thought that most of the crew were killed. A shell exploded in the barrel, the whole lower portion of the barrel had burst open and the remaining end was blown off and landed in front of the gun. Pieces of metal weighing several stone were found several hundred yards away. We fire on enemy guns at various times but on the whole there's not much to do.

04 Mar 44. To some up the past few weeks where we have been concerned there has been very little of importance happened. Most every day we are called upon to fire on enemy guns and at night we have usually fired on enemy infantry and guns in general.

21 Mar 44. We are now back on the 8th army front and have taken over position from another regiment.

There is plenty of mud about when we first arrived; the guns have to be put in their position by bulldozer. At time the enemy shell a road some distance in front of us and also one in our rear. The former is called the mad mile. It's a very sunny day today but the mountains are still covered in snow. For the past few days I have been on duty at the O.P. (observation post), there has been very few infantry in front of us so we have come back at nightfall covering the wireless set with straw to lessen the chance of enemy patrols discovering them, some enemy air burst shells have just burst some distance to our left.

23 Mar 44. Soon after writing above notes the enemy heavily shelled the area for which the air burst were used. Yesterday morning an enemy patrol penetrated through to our infantry positions in front of our O.P. At day break a German type helmet and a mortar were found, there were also blood stains. Enemy mortars fell on an old railway line where one of our phone lines is laid, it was broken in four places, there were seven other lines cut by the splinter. Two of us went out to repair our line it rained and we got wet through, our cloths dried on us.

12 Apr 44. We are still in the same position on the whole; things seem to be at a standstill. There is a certain amount more artillery in this area and also some tanks. Sometimes the enemy shell the small town of CASTLEFRENTANO. There are now more infantry in front of us. I have looked at the town of ORSOGNA through glasses. It has been shelled heavily numerous times by British artillery and is in a pitiful state. This town is still in German hands.

21 Apr 44. Yesterday German bombers bombed the town of LANCIANO near here. Bombs fell in the centre of the town and there were several casualties. Some of our fellows were there soon after the incident and said soldiers lay burning under their vehicles at the vehicle park. A hospital was also hit. Our heavy bombers have been pretty active these last few days.

03 May 44. This morning our infantry took some high ground at one place an advance of about two miles. We have fired on enemy guns several times today. I have just returned from the 8th Army rest camp. It is a well organised place and everything is done to help the soldier forget the war.

10 May 44. Apart from a few shells nothing of great importance has happened in the past week with the exception that a section of our sister troupe went somewhere in the mountain area and somewhat surprised the enemy, the town on which they fired was full of Germans. Three big guns were knocked out and there were considerable casualties. The enemy withdrew from the place and it's still uncertain as to how far back he's gone.

11 May 44. A lecture was given today and enlightened us on the offensives which are close at hand, the Russians have already commenced theirs. This countries attack will commence at eleven tonight with heavy artillery barrage.

15 May 44. So far we've heard very little of the offensive on the other front. Yesterday the Germans attacked on this front and gained some ground after over running.

At this point the dairy ends.

No further diary entries have been found

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