

AWM52
2nd Australian Imperial Force and
Commonwealth Military Forces unit war
diaries, 1939-45 War

Item number: 8/2/26

26 Infantry Brigade

January 1943, Report on
Operations "Lightfoot", part 1 of 2

S E C R E T

Copy No. 5

4 Jan 43

26 AUST INF BDE
REPORT ON OPERATIONS
"LIGHTFOOT"
23 Oct - 5 Nov
1942

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4 Jan 43

26 AUST INF BDEREPORT ON OPERATIONS OCT - NOV 42SECTION IEvents leading up to "LIGHTFOOT"The Preliminary and General Background

In Jun the enemy advanced into EGYPT. MERSA MATRUH fell and with this a real threat to the Delta developed. A limited counter offensive finally halted his forces at EL ALAMEIN. By the end of Jul a definite line was established from the coastal area South to RUWEISAT RIDGE. Further South the situation was still more or less fluid. During Aug our defensive positions in the north were strengthened and data slowly accumulated regarding those of the enemy.

In addition bdes not actually in the fwd areas created a series of Defended Localities to the East of the EL ALAMEIN system. The policy at that time was to hold these localities as pivots of manoeuvre in an attempt to breakup and defeat the expected enemy's attack. In the middle of Aug the general policy was altered. The new Army Comd stated that the enemy would be held in our present positions and that no ground would be surrendered. Steadily increasing signs pointed to the enemy resuming the attack about the end of Aug. This was launched in the South with minor attacks along the remainder of the front. By the first week in Sep it was evident that the enemy's plan for an early development of the offensive had failed. From this successful defence came thoughts of the resumption of our Jul offensive on a much larger scale. Before definite plans had been formulated a series of minor operations were successfully undertaken aimed at increasing probable gun areas and making available more ground between the coast and our FDL's. The value of this was clearly demonstrated later. With this change of policy and the defeat of the German offensive a new feeling seemed to permeate the whole of the Bde. All exercises and discussions turned to the attack and the finding of ways to overcome our mistakes of the past. So without knowledge of any particular operation a sound offensive spirit was quickly built up in the Bde. This proved its value throughout the operations.

Secrecy and Initial Planning

The Army Comds policy made it evident that trg for offensive action was now of first importance. The lessons learnt in earlier fighting had been thoroughly digested and applied in a series of general trg exercises both with and without tks.

The first intimation of any definite plan for the offensive was given personally to bde comds on 17 Sep with definite instructions that it was to go no further. Just prior to this intimation an instruction was received suggesting possible and probable roles for the bde in any future op. The role suggested for 26 Aust Inf Bde was that of the flanking unit in a break through attack. This would call for the protection of an open flank after the break in. The problem of flank protection had already arisen in the ordinary course of trg. It was therefore possible to direct trg on these lines without creating any suspicion as to what was really afoot.

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The programme for passing the information to sub comds and staffs was as follows :-

BM	On D minus twentyone
Bn comds	" D minus thirteen
BM(L)	" D minus thirteen
SC	" D minus twentyone
Coy comds and remainder	
bde staff	On D minus six
Remaining offrs	" D minus four
Men	(" D minus three
	(" D minus two

No personnel left the bde area for leave after D minus six. All personnel on leave that day returned at the normal expiration of such leave and were then incl in the LOB personnel. It will be seen from the above table that quite a lot of work had to be done by comds without any knowledge of the Army or divisional plans.

26 Aust Inf Bde held the coastal sector of the div front until relieved by 24 Aust Inf Bde on D minus nine. This allowed a short period in the rear areas where bn and coy comds could carry out trg with the full knowledge of what was before them. The steps taken to ensure secrecy appeared to be effective, and until sub unit comds were informed officially, they had no actual idea of what was contemplated. However the general increase in back area work such as dumping programmes, burying cable and rd improvements, indicated to the normal thoughtful person that something was afoot. When the bde was relieved there was a general feeling that preparations were being made for an attack though there was no knowledge of the actual operation. One noticeable pt on this occasion in contrast to previous operations was the lack of information being brought fwd by personnel returning from rear areas.

Holding the Line

26 Aust Inf Bde relieved 20 Aust Inf Bde in the coastal sector on night 22/23 and 23/24 Sep. The bns were generally familiar with the line having occupied the same area for the greater part of Jul. It was essential to use this period in the line to obtain detailed information as to enemy dispositions both that part to be attacked by the bde, and by the remainder of the div. An examination of available information revealed many gaps and much to be confirmed. 2/48 Aust Inf Bn was holding that part of the line which this bde was mainly interested. 2/23 Aust Inf Bn was on the coastal sector. It had already been decided that this bn in view of their previous trg in mob ops with units of 23 Armd Bde would be in div res for the contemplated operation. 2/24 Aust Inf Bn was in the res area, but for patrolling and collecting information was given a portion of 2/48 Aust Inf Bn front. It was necessary to concentrate the main effort of bns from 300 grid southwards to 297 grid without arousing any suspicion. Bns were accordingly informed that information obtained north of 300 grid to the ry, appeared to be satisfactory, while that to the south was vague and contradictory. A series of questions showed where this information was lacking.

The CRE, independent of the bde, and through 2/7 Aust Fd Coy (in sp), instituted a series of parallel sweeps to locate minefields in no man's land and immediately in front of the enemy FDL's, with particulars of any anti-personnel mines. Protective patrols were provided by bns to cover these operations. It soon became evident that the engrs were not obtaining the information which bde considered vital. Consequently offr patrols were sent out to obtain certain definite information. These patrols were given instructions to penetrate beyond the enemy minefield. Engrs were asked to provide sappers to give technical advice on any mines encountered. This system proved satisfactory and sound information was obtained.

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In addition, OPs manned by bn IOs, and for one day by bn comds, were established in the area of west 24. In this way certain essential pts were accurately pin pointed. Bn comds were informed of the scope of the forthcoming operations four days prior to handing over and so had sufficient time to obtain any details which they now, with a fuller knowledge, considered essential.

When the bde was relieved by 24 Aust Inf Bde very little remained to be obtained or confirmed as far as the frontage of attack was concerned. 24 Aust Inf Bde were asked to, and furnished the small amount of data necessary to complete this very thorough, methodical and careful appraisal of the enemy's defences.

SECTION 2

The Development of the Plan

At 1000 hrs 6 Oct comd 9 Aust Div gave bde comds an outline of the army plan and the role of the div in those plans. Tasks were allotted to bdes. That of 26 Aust Inf Bde was the right flank of the break through and the formation of the Corps Northern flank. Approximate brdys and objectives were given. The Bde frontage was 800 yds and the depth of the attack about 4000 yds. The army plan laid down first and final objectives. The attack was to be on a one bn front with a second bn passing through to the final objective. It was agreed that each bn should have two coys fwd. An intermediate bn objective would be fixed for these and the remaining coys would pass through. The withdrawal of 2/23 Aust Inf Bn into div res was decided upon. It was intimated that the bn in div res must be prepared to work with an army tk bn on any part of the Corps front.

Protection of the right flank

The plan legislated for the formation of a right flank from the enemy FDL's westwards. This left a gap of some 3500 yds between the right of the flanking bn and our present FDL's. To provide the necessary protection in this gap and to join up with 24 Aust Inf Bde forming the firm base, a composite force was to be organised. This force was to establish a series of posts each of one section of A Tk guns protected by one section of MGs and a small party of infantry. Posts were to be self contained, mutually supporting, wired and the whole covered by a minefield. The first part of this field was to be laid from Pt EAST 24 to WEST 24 by a coy of 2/3 Aust Pnr Bn on night D minus two/D minus one.

Enemy Anti-personnel mines

The extent the enemy used anti-personnel mines to protect his A Tk minefields was discussed and plans to deal with these were suggested. It was evident at this stage that insufficient knowledge was available as to the extent of these anti-personnel mines on the proposed frontages of attack. It was suggested for consideration that a separate operation some two hrs before the original attack might be necessary to effectively clear these anti-personnel mines. Immediate steps were taken to obtain detailed information covering the types and methods of laying.

Start lines

Discussions took place as to the minimum distance a start line should be from the enemy FDL's. In full moonlight it was decided inadvisable for start lines to be laid closer than 1400 yds. As the arty plan had to be coordinated throughout the whole corps front it became evident that certain compromises as regards timings would be necessary. To coordinate the whole of the arty lifts it was necessary to lay down a general axis of advance and the bearing of the start line in relation to this. On the 20 Aust Inf Bde front this did not present a serious problem as the start line was approximately parallel to the enemy FDL's. The same start line extended northwards for this Bde meant that the southern flank of the enemy position was 400 yds closer than on the north.

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Two problems had to be solved. Firstly the method of forming up the 2/24 Aust Inf Bn, and secondly the timing of arty concentrations. There were the following alternatives :-

(a) To make subsidiary start lines for each of the leading coys which would enable them to arrive at the FDL's simultaneously and in line. The res coys using a prolongation of 20 Aust Inf Bde start line would adv directly to the bde first objective.

There were several objections to this method :-

(i) It would bring leading coys too close to the enemy posns to the north.

(ii) It would involve a change of direction once the FDL's had been captured.

(iii) Coordination with units on the left flank would be difficult.

(iv) Certain complications would arise in the arty plan.

(b) To use the same start line as 20 Aust Inf Bde lifting the arty concentrations as each platoon of the leading coys arrived at the enemy FDL's. This had the advantage of starting off with and maintaining the direction of adv. It had a number of disadvantages both in regard to the arty fire plan and flanking fire protecting pls which had further to go.

(c) To use the original start line and axis of adv but to echelon coys and pls from this start line so that they arrived at the FDL's simultaneously. There were no complications as far as the arty fire plan was concerned. The maintenance of direction was reduced to its simplest form and it only required suitable pacing on the part of each coy to ensure their arrival on the intermediate objective.

A Ech Tpt

The next point for serious consideration was that of bringing up A ech vehs. The bde front was some 800 yds with the axis of adv only 400 yds from the enemy posns on the flank. The 2/24 Aust Inf Bn vehs would have to move across this exposed flank for some 2000 yds after crossing the enemy FDL's. In the case of 2/48 Aust Inf Bn the distance was 4000 to 5000 yds. It was therefore evident that any movement after first light into the area to be captured by this bde, would have to be made from an axis further to the south if the enemy maintained his posns close to the flank. In view of this it was agreed that a suitable axis on 20 Aust Inf Bde front would be used in daylight. The CRE was given the task of reconce this route.

Even during the night there would be considerable danger in getting A ech vehs through the central axis. It was therefore decided to run a second axis on the inter bde bndy. This was later moved 200 yds further north as a safeguard against the possible failure of clearing all pockets of resistance on the inter bde bndy

Gaps in minefields and routes

The question of gaps in minefields required careful consideration and many discussions with the CRE. From previous experience, both in operations and exercises, it was considered that a minimum of three gaps per bn was necessary to effectively handle "A" ech vehs and engr stores. The CRE said this task was too much for one fd coy. Div was unable to allot further engr to this bde. Finally the following compromise was the best that could be done. One gap initially opened to eight yds on the central bde axis, and one on an axis 200 yds to the south were to be made.

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The third emergency gap was to be opened between these two. If, owing to enemy action, it became necessary to open a gap further to the south, this could only be done by delay in clearing minefields further into the enemy posns. It was agreed that two routes would be marked and taped by 2/7 Aust Fd Coy. The lighting of the northern axis was to be done by 2/24 Aust Inf Bn. These tracks were later given distinguishing signs, a diamond on the northern axis and a boomerang on the southern. It was decided to swing the boomerang route to the north to join the diamond track after the enemy's second line had been passed. The latter could then be continued fwd as required.

Reorganisation considerations

Even with the above arrangements it was considered that the risk to A ech vehs was still very great. Consequently bns were instructed that every possible means of ensuring that tpt and stores reached them would be employed. Man loads were to be carefully considered and decided upon to suit the particular tasks allotted to each coy. Pl "packs" were arranged to be transported by carriers so that essential stores arrived first. Maximum control was to be exercised over all tpt moving into bn areas; sp arms to be arranged in bn gps and their fwd movement placed under direct control of bns; bde res consisting of one A Tk bty less three tps, and one MG Coy less two pls, to be held back and moved under bde control. The quick laying of Hawkins A Tk mines appeared to be one of the essential factors in reorganisation, and it was decided that first priority would be given to 2/48 Aust Inf Bn. Mine laying was to commence from the north western corner of the captured area and laying both south and east was to be simultaneous. From the dispositions of the enemy minefields then known or suspected, it was considered that a minimum of 3000 of these mines would be required. Arrangements were made for bns to receive special instructions in the drill of laying these mines.

On night 18/19 Oct a full scale rehearsal was carried out in which a reproduction of the enemy minefields and defs was laid down on the ground. From this exercise the main pt brought out and incorporated in the plan was that the bn moving to the first objective must remain on that line until the second bn had passed through. Then, and not before then, would any move be made towards forming a def flank to the north.

Timings

The bde having the shorter distance to go would have to conform with the corps timings. These timings finally allowed a pause of 60 mins for tps allotted to the final objective to pass through. This was considered satisfactory.

In addition to this main pause two pauses of 15 mins each were arranged for passing coys in the Bns through the intermediate objectives. In actual tests these times appeared satisfactory.

Study of enemy dispositions

The next pt requiring detailed and careful study was to obtain the clearest possible picture of the enemy's dispositions. An offr of the bde staff was given the task of examining every available source of information and, from these, to build up a complete picture of the enemy's defs as far as they affected the front and flanks of the bde task. It was considered that the over print map gave only a very general guide. The object of this detailed research was to give bn comds the number and types of weapons, and numbers and nationality of personnel likely to be encountered in the different enemy localities. This effort was well worth while

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and finally a comprehensive picture was obtained, not only of the def's being attacked but also of the tps likely to be available to the enemy for immediate counter attack. The research was also of great value in checking up on proposed arty concentrations.

Type and method of dealing with Anti-personnel mines

Investigations by patrols finally determined that the anti-personnel mines used by the enemy consisted mainly of Italian B 4 type. These were attached to short pickets. It was considered that in the moonlight they would not be difficult to find and that a small party of engr's would be adequate to clear them quickly and ensure that the adv was not seriously held up.

Enemy wire

Reports indicated that the enemy wire on the frontage to be attacked was not strong. However it was considered that a minimum of four bangalore torpedoes per coy should be carried. These were to be carried by inf and three engr's per inf coy would be allotted by 2/7 Aust Fd Coy to do the actual firing.

The siting of A Tk guns

An examination of the enemy def's and the location of his suspected minefields made it evident that counter attacks supported by tks were unlikely on the northern flank of 2/24 Aust Inf Bn, as, apart from the difficulty of moving through his own minefields, the area of manoeuvre was too restricted. The reverse however applied to the front and flank to be held by 2/48 Aust Inf Bn. It was decided therefore that the main strength of A Tk guns would directly support 2/48 Aust Inf Bn, that guns allotted to 2/24 Aust Inf Bn should be sited to give further depth; and that similar considerations should govern the location of the res tp.

The siting of MGs

The dispositions of the enemy inf on the northern flank suggested the greater possibility of an immediate inf counter attack against 2/24 Aust Inf Bn. It was therefore decided that in addition to a pl of MGs directly supporting this bn, the res pl under the MG coy comd, should be sited with a primary task of covering penetration into this bn area, with a secondary task only in 2/48 Aust Inf Bn area.

Exploitation of trig 29

Outside the area to be captured the dominating feature was trig 29, some 2000 yds on the northern flank of the posn to be taken by 2/48 Aust Inf Bn. This trig dominated the whole of the area to be captured and in addition to being a good OP, with a number of btys in the area, it also provided a covered approach for a deliberate counter attack by the enemy. It became evident therefore that Ft 29 would have to be considered for immediate exploitation or for a further operation once a secure base had been obtained in the original area attacked. This had to be considered in conjunction with the possibility of our armour moving north. The 2/48 Aust Inf Bn was asked to consider exploiting to this trig with carriers at first light. It was also laid down as a possible role for 2/23 Aust Inf Bn in Div res.

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The employment of tks

40 R Tanks from 23 Armd Bde was under comd 3 Aust Div for these operations and this bde was asked to consider whether tks could be usefully employed for the capture of the final objective. Due largely to presence of only partly neutralised enemy posns on the northern flank it was considered inadvisable to employ tks for this purpose. The whole regt was thus allotted to 20 Aust Inf Bde for the capture of its final objective. It was arranged that these tks were to rally in a posn from which they could support 26 Aust Inf Bde, should it be counter attacked. It was agreed that the regt would be under comd div, but that, in the event of the failure of comms 26 Aust Inf Bde comd could commit it either on the front of 26 or 20 Aust Inf Bde as required.

The time of zero

The question of zero required very careful consideration as the plan in its larger aspects was merely a preliminary to launching the armour into mine free country. The Armd Corps was to be responsible for clearing mines on its own routes. It was expected to launch the armour from our newly won posns by first light. The more time the armour had for mine clearing and moving up the greater was the certainty of its successful launching. On the timings agreed, with pauses, the final objective could not be taken before zero plus five hrs. Last light and moonrise were estimated to be approx 1900 hrs. Calculating the moves necessary to reach the start line, 2200 hrs was suggested as the earliest time for zero. The Armd Corps pressed for an earlier zero, but after a very careful re-check of all timings, this bde submitted that the time first suggested was the earliest that the operations could begin with the certainty of all troops arriving on time.

Medical arrangements

The exposed right flank was a dominating factor in the medical plan for this bde. Initially bns considered that the most satisfactory results would be obtained from RAPs well fwd. These RAPs were to be close to our own FDLs in the vicinity of the fwd veh assembly areas or near the start line making evacuations along the respective bn axis of adv. The movement of ambulances in daylight would be a problem and it was considered likely that they would move through 20 Aust Inf Bde area. One ADS was to be initially established on the main rd SE of trig 26 working back to an MDS near the main rd NW of ALAMEIN station. In addition 2/11 Aust Fd Amb were to arrange for stretcher bearers to sweep the whole area fwd from the start line to ensure that all wounded were collected. Depending on the situation bns were to move their RAPs fwd into their own areas.

Conclusion

These considerations and discussions formed the basis of bn and bde trg exercises. From these a firm plan was developed. Discussions took place over a large scale model provided by Div HQ. Sp arms were present at these. Coordination on the southern flank and the fire plan was finalised. By 10 Oct plans had developed sufficiently to enable the div comd to put a clear and complete picture of the proposed operations and adm plans before the whole of the commanding offrs and bde staffs of the div. The Div Comd stressed the part to be played by the div and what was to be expected of everybody.

From the points enumerated above the Bde plan was developed. This was issued to Bns and supporting arms as 26 Aust Inf Bde Operation Order No 21 dated 21 Oct 42.

SECTION 2

The Deception Plan

The broad army deception plan was based on the supposition that it was practically impossible to conceal from enemy aerial observation, the huge concentration of tpt etc necessary for an army operation in the desert. The deduction was to use these concentrations as a means of deceiving the enemy as to our intentions both as to time and place. Large numbers of dummies of all types were prepared by camouflage coys of EIGHTH Army and played an effective part in the scheme. As far as this bde was concerned the plan was to place in the bde area not later than 1 Oct, vehs and dummies equal in number to the total vehs required in the forward area on D day. Certain areas were allotted to the bde and the required number of vehs and dummies were dug in. The real vehs were provided from unit A echs together with a percentage of B ech vehs brought forward for this purpose. The balance was made up of dummy vehs. Bde appointed a deception offr to control this area and every care was taken to ensure that dummy vehs were not detected by the enemy. The dummies were placed in veh pits interspersed among real vehs. The drs were made to live in the vicinity of the dummies and not with their own vehs. Vehs were free to move in and out of the area but this was done in conjunction with a drill for the movement of dummy vehs. When it was the turn of a dummy veh to move, it was collapsed and a real veh was run into and out of the pit to maintain the correct amount of movement and a track plan as if all vehs in the area were real. At the end of the day the places of certain real and dummy vehs were exchanged. The highest standard of maintenance of dummies was insisted on throughout the period. They were truedup at first light.

The construction of slit trenches for the laying up of tps and the digging of bde tactical HQ was left as late as possible. Care was taken to comouflage this work as it was done. All amn dumps made in the fwd area were buried and where possible disused trenches were employed.

SECTION 3

Preliminary arrangements and initial moves in preparation for the Operation

The preliminary arrangements covered :-

- (a) The collection of information in the area likely to be the scene of operations for this bde.
- (b) Recce.
- (c) Specific trg for the operation.
- (d) Adm arrangements including the dumping programme.
- (e) The marking of routes, concentrations and assembly areas both for personnel and vehs.
- (f) Preparations for comms.
- (g) Allocation of vehs and loads for the first phase.

Certain aspects of these arrangements have already been mentioned but are dealt with here in more detail.

The collection of information

As already mentioned this bde was for a period facing the enemy defences that were to be attacked in the first phase. The collection of information was done over a period of time and was as thorough as possible in keeping with secrecy. The study of rear areas not under direct observation was made from aerial photos in close consultation with the A.A.P.I.U. From this and a careful study of previous I summaries many of the doubtful points were cleared up. 24 Aust Inf Bde on taking over were asked and obtained such of this information as had not been completed at the time of relief.

Recce

Before leaving the coastal sector bn comds had four days in which to carry out any specific work with the full knowledge of the impending operation. They were able then to direct the observations of coy comds and I staffs to any of the topography they considered essential. Coy comds were put into the picture 17 Oct and were thus afforded an opportunity of making further detailed recces. The 2/24 Aust Inf Bn laying up area, the route to it, and the start line were all recced. The information regarding the laying up area for 2/24 Aust Inf Bn was passed to 2/32 Aust Inf Bn who undertook the actual digging. 2/23 Aust Inf Bn recced, planned and dug their own res area in the vicinity of BARREL HILL.

Specific Training

During night 12/13 and night 14/15 Oct this bde was relieved by 2/24 Aust Inf Bde. On night 12/13 Oct, 2/23 Aust Inf Bn which was relieved first, moved to an area south of SHAMMAMA HALT and came under comd 23 Armd Bde for mob trg with tks. The remainder of the Bde moved to between areas "A" and "B".

Great difficulty was experienced in obtaining suitable trg areas. The previous div training area which was close to the bde bivouac area was now occupied by tps. For the first two days bns carried out coy and bn exercises based on plans already discussed. Tpt was overhauled and pl "packs" prepared.

A training area was finally obtained south of EL HAMMAM station. In conjunction with the div trg staff and 2/7 Aust Fd Coy a reproduction of the enemy's defences and our own FDL's was put on the ground. The two bns and sp tps were assembled in areas at the same distance from the FDL's as would be the case in the actual operation. They moved into these areas at approximately 1500 hrs and laid up as it was considered they would do in the operation. The adm arrangements for meals were the same as those for the actual day. The whole operation was then rehearsed on timings worked out and every attempt was made to simulate actual conditions especially in regard to smoke, dust and haze. Anti-personnel mines were put down and anti tk mines laid with light charges sufficient to indicate to vehs the presence of mines. Bangalore torpedoes were also used. The new rocket type of signals were tried and the method of firing them perfected. This was to stand them in the barrel of a 2" mortar set at approximately 80 degrees.

Only limited time was available and great credit must be given to the div trg staff, bde staff and engr's for the completeness in which conditions were reproduced. The main points brought out were :-

- (i) The vital necessity of adequate teams and means for maintaining direction.
- (ii) The necessity for tps to remain on their objective, until the tps following had passed through, and so avoid any confusion.
- (iii) The tps acting as enemy remained in their posns to test mopping up operations. These appeared to be satisfactory.
- (iv) As a result of doubts regarding the maintenance of direction an arrangement which had been used during a raid at TOBRUK namely tracer fired from a Bofors, was considered. This had been tried by the Highland Div in their exercises to indicate the axis of adv and opinions of those who has seen it varied as to the efficiency of this method. Accordingly trials were carried out the following night and some doubts were expressed as to whether it was wise to use this method without actual practice with tps during exercises. In the case of this bde a further factor was that the bofors would have to fire from a position only some 400 yds south of enemy posns and might draw considerable fire on to the axis. After some discussion it was finally decided to use Bofors to mark the axis of each bde.

Administrative arrangements

The thoroughness in the adm arrangements made by army, corps and Div simplified the work of bde and bns. The details so far as they affect this bde are shown in Appx A of this report.

One point required special consideration by this bde. Owing to the fact that the enemy would be close to the northern flank throughout the operation it was anticipated that difficulties would be experienced in replenishing amm during the hrs of daylight. The whole of the adm arrangements aimed at ensuring that the total requirements for the following day's fighting were in the battle area before first light. "A" ech tpt had been reduced to the lowest possible margin and the possibility of heavy casualties among vehs had to be legislated for. It was probable therefore that this would involve a series of lifts by bn tpt. In addition to forming a bde mob res by withdrawing certain vehs and amm from bns, bde dumps were established some 500 yds forward of our FDL's and close to the axis of adv. These dumps were successfully completed night 20/21 Oct. They consisted mainly of mortar and SAA. Details are shown in Appx A. Special arrangements were made by 24 Aust Inf Bde to cover this area with patrolling for the remaining nights before "D" day.

/Route

Route marking and sign posting

The route plan was drawn up by 9 Aust Div and provided two routes for the bde up to the FDL's. Existing tracks and rds leading to these routes were allotted as shown in appB of this report. The northern route was named and marked the "Diamond" track and the southern the "Boomerang". Debussing points and veh assembly areas both rear and fwd were decided upon and marked. The fwd veh assembly areas were some 1000 yds east of the start line, that of 2/24 Aust Inf Bn being north of the "Diamond" track with 2/48 Bn between the "Diamond" and "Boomerang" tracks. Prior to D day the CRE arranged for the sweeping of these two routes fwd to the enemy's minefield. Certain points on the div start line was surveyed and marked by CRE with white lights.

Preparations for communications

As soon as the location of Bde Tactical HQ was fixed buried cable was put down from Div Tactical HQ. This and the intercom between the various shelters and dugouts was completed on night 22/23 Oct. Lines were laid to 2/24 Aust Inf Bn laying up area and fwd some 500 yds west of our FDL's ready to be continued close behind the advance.

Vehs and tpt arrangements

The enemy being close to the flank, it was considered that carriers would play an important part in getting up reorganisation stores, mortar and MG amm. The possibility of them having to tow A Tk guns was also visualised. 9 Aust Div was asked to provide towing hooks on all carriers and a number of trailers about the height of a carrier. Actually four carriers per bn had hooks fitted and three trailers were allotted to both 2/24, 2/48 Aust Inf Bns. Based on the individual requirements of each Bn the order of the vehs in bn gps were worked out. It was laid down as the tpt offrs responsibility to ensure that tpt moved in this order and on the time table laid down.

SECTION 4

PHASE I of "LIGHTFOOT"

The Breakthrough and formation of the northern flank 23/24 Oct 42

General

This phase was part of the army plan to make a gap through the enemy mined areas and so give the armour a clear rd to the open country beyond. Penetration was to be to an average depth of 5000 yds. The attack was on a four Div front. 9 Aust Div was on the right with 24 Aust Inf Bde holding a firm base on the coastal sector, attacking with 2 Bdes fwd. (26 Bde on the right and 20 Bde on the left).

Troops available

The 2/23 Aust Inf Bn were withdrawn into Div Reserve to work in cooperation with 23 Armd Bde. In addition to the 2/24 and 2/48 Aust Inf Bns the following tps came under comd 26 Aust Inf Bde for this phase :-

12 Aust A Tk Bty
A Coy 2/2 Aust MG Bn
One Sec 9 Aust Div Pro
A Composite Force as under :
C Sqn 9 Aust Div Cav
Two tps 11 Aust A Tk Bty
D Coy 2/2 Aust MG Bn
A Coy 2/3 Aust Pnr Bn
One A Tk Pl 2/3 Aust Pnr Bn

In support :

2/7 Aust Fd Coy
and for the initial move 1 "scorpion"
portions of 9 Aust Div and
30 Corps Arty - under control of CRA

Plan

This is covered by 26 Aust Inf Bde OO No 21 dated 21 Oct 42. The attack was to be on a bn front. 2/24 Aust Inf Bn to capture 1st objective and 2/48 Aust Inf Bn to pass through to the final objective. The Composite Force were given the task of joining the right flank of 2/24 Aust Inf Bn after reorganisation, with the present FDL's. On reaching their objectives each Bn formed a flank to the North. The adv was to be preceded by 20 mins CB from the whole of the Corps arty and covered by concentrations on known enemy defences lifting to conform with a rate of adv of 100 yds in 1 1/2 mins to enemy FDL's. then 100 in 3 mins with 15 mins pause to pass coys through on Bn intermediate objectives.

In arriving at the Bde plan the following points were considered and dealt with as shown :

- (a) The enemy had a large concentration of arty in the coastal sector not included in the area of attack. Once the limits of our attack were known this arty could be concentrated on our newly formed flank. To minimise and delay the use of this arty on our flank 24 Aust Inf Bde were asked to stage a series of raids, diversions and "chinese" (dummy) attacks.
- (b) Posts in the enemy's FDL's close to our flank would perhaps be troublesome during reorganisation.

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The flanking arty fire was arranged to be lifted enabling exploitation to take place to the north.

- (c) The flank and front to be held by the 2/48 Aust Inf Bn was liable to counter attack by tks while the flank position of 2/24 Aust Inf Bn owing to presence of enemy minefields was not considered to be in such danger. Two tps of 12 Aust A Tk Bty were placed in sp of 2/48 Aust Inf Bn and one in sp 2/24 Aust Inf Bn mainly against penetration, all of the available Hawkins mines were allotted to 2/48 Aust Inf Bn.

The allotment of tps to objectives was :-

1st Objective (RED LINE)

2/24 Aust Inf Bn

with in sp :

One tp 12 Aust A Tk Bty

One pl A Coy 2/2 Aust MG Bn

5 Sec 2/7 Aust Fd Coy for mine clearing and
(route marking

Dét 4 Sec (6 ORs for firing Bangalore Torpedoes
(12 ORs for clearing anti-personnel mines

2nd Objective (BLUE LINE)

2/48 Aust Inf Bn

with in sp :

Two tps 12 Aust A Tk Bty

One pl A Coy 2/2 Aust MG Bn

6 Sec 2/7 Aust Fd Coy for mine clearing and
(route marking

(6 ORs for firing Bangalore Torpedoes

(12 ORs for clearing anti-personnel mines

(4 ORs for laying Hawkins mines

In sp of Bde : 2/7 Aust Fd Coy (less 5 and 6 secs and dets)

In res : 12 Aust A Tk Bty (less three tps)
A Coy 2/2 Aust MG Bn (less two pls)

Initial moves

These were in accordance with 26 Aust Inf Bde movement Table No 1 dated 20 Oct 42. Fwd concentration was carried out on the night of 21/22 Oct. The Bde and att units (less 2/24 Bn) moved into the EL ALAMEIN defences and bivouaced north of the MAID ROAD. Tp carrying tpt was employed. The move was under Divisional control, A Ech Tpt moved with units. B Ech moved to an area some five miles east of ALAMEIN station on the coast track. 2/24 Aust Inf Bn carried out the first stage of its fwd move by cross country route march. This was from Locality B to Locality A and was completed on night 20/21 Oct. On the night 22/23 Oct this bn moved by tp carrying tpt to a lying up area in the vicinity of TELL EL EISA station. Slit trenches and shelters had been previously dug and camflgd by 2/32 Aust Inf Bn. During the lying up period strict control was exercised over all movement. At the same time arrangements were made for several men at a time to gather under shelters. Various means were provided to keep the men occupied. As the Bn did not complete the move to this area until 0300 hrs on 23 Oct it was necessary to ensure that they were rested as much as possible during the day. The A ech vehs of 2/24 Aust Inf Bn moved into and replaced an equal number of real or dummy vehs in the area immediately south of trig 26. With this move the fwd concentration of the Bde was complete. Thanks mainly to good traffic control and strict adherence to time tables the moves were completed close to scheduled times and without incident.

/Approach.

Approach march

The details for this move are given in Appx E of 26 Aust Inf Bde OO No 21 dated 21 Oct 42. 2/24 Aust Inf Bn issued a hot meal as soon as it was dark. By 2000 hrs all coys were assembled, equipment was checked and the move to the start line began. The bn moving on the "Diamond" track arrived on the start line at 2100 hrs. "A" Ech vehs and vehs of sp arms moved into an assembly area north of the track. B and D coys formed up in echelon and the bn reported it was in posn at 2130 hrs. This report was made by telephone. During the approach march the line had been extended to Bn HQ on the start line.

Bde HQ with the bde res of A Tk guns and MGS left the bivouac area in the ALAMEIN defences at 1900 hrs and proceeded to Bde Tac HQ. Vehs were dispersed and the report "Bde Tac established" was sent to div at 2000 hrs. 2/48 Aust Inf Bn in tp carrying tpt from 101 Gen Tpt Coy left the bivouac area at 1730 hrs. The bn debussed just south of TELL EL BISA station and an initial veh assembly posn was formed some 800 yds to the south.

The engr dets were fwd of our FDL's and had already commenced sweeping ops to the west along the line of the "Diamond" and "Boomerang" tracks. There was delay in getting fwd the pilot vehs which were to test the cleared gaps. As a result the engr sec comd reported that he would be late in clearing the first enemy minefield. The one "Scorpion" allotted to 2/7 Aust Fd Coy for gap clearing was reported held up by engine trouble some miles to the east. By 2130 hrs bde was able to report all units in posn with everything so/going "according to plan".

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Arty Programme

The arty programme for the attack was in two phases. In the first phase, from zero minus twenty to zero minus five the whole of 30 Corps arty (408 guns) was employed on counter battery work. The second phase commencing at zero was a long programme of concentrations covering the adv to the first and final objectives. During this period a further counter battery programme was carried out. The whole of the div arty with the addition of six fd tps and medium arty were used to support the attack. Concentrations were worked out to cover in turn the whole of the enemy's defences, as they were then known. The number of guns allotted to each task varied with the importance of the area and the proximity of the advancing tps. The 4.5 med guns were used at varying periods throughout the night to fire ahead of the 25 pr concentrations. The first phase of the arty programme provoked very little in the way of flares from the enemy FDL's. As far as 26 Aust Inf Bde was concerned enemy counter measures were not noticed until 2155 hrs when the first phase was almost complete. The return fire was scattered and appeared to be directed on and in front of our FDL's. A few rds fell among 2/24 Aust Inf Bn tpt damaging one 6 pr A Tk gun and one veh. Prior to commencement of the operation an arty plan for defensive fire based on regt concentrations was drawn up over the whole front. These concentrations extended from near WEST 24 - WEST and then south thus covering the whole of the bde front. Each concentration was given a code name and traces were issued to bns. These concentrations, on the occasions they were fired, came down very quickly and dealt successfully with enemy counter attacks. The defensive fire tasks were issued as Appx G; with the lifts and concentrations for the attack in Appx's C and D of 26 Aust Inf Bde OO No 21 dated 21 Oct 42.

The advance to the first objective

Under cover of the concentrations directed initially on the listening post area in front of the wire, then lifting to the FDL's, 2/24 Aust Inf Bn moved into the attack. Contact was made

/with

with 2/17 Aust Inf Bn of 20 Aust Inf Bde on the start line prior to moving off. There were no surprises in the move through the enemy minefield and wire. The wire, anti-personnel mines and general layout was as reported by our patrols in this area. The wire consisted of a series of single bands of concertina backed by a row of triple concertina. Bangalore torpedoes were used on this last line of wire. In no place did it seriously hamper the adv of our tps. At this stage the main opposition came from a post on the left flank. After stiff fighting this was successfully cleared. Several machine gun posts were dealt with and the adv continued. It appears that "B" coy on the right had to wait some mins for the barrage to lift. This was due mainly to the little resistance encountered in this area. By 2305 hrs the bn reported it had reached the intermediate objective.

The system of reporting success was to give the coy comds name followed by the time at which that coy reached its objective. Similarly the bn comds name was used as a code to indicate that the whole of the intermediate objective was in our hands.

As an aid to direction during the adv a Bofors AA gun was positioned immediately behind the start line and fired three single shot tracer every five mins. At the pause on the intermediate objective the gun was moved fwd to within 200 yds of the enemy FDL's. Thereafter it followed the adv using the pauses to move fwd.

The engr det detailed for gap clearing and marking commenced their sweep as soon as the bn left the start line. The floating fd discovered approximately 300 yds west of the start line consisted of German Teller mines. A gap was cleared but further delayed the arrival of the det at the enemy's first minefield. Work on the gap proceeded quickly in spite of spandau fire attracted by the firing of the Bofor. A gap in this field was reported cleared and marked at 2320 hrs.

At 2320 hrs the two rear coys (A and C) of 2/24 Aust Inf Bn passed through the leading coys and were able to proceed to the bn objective without delay. Opposition was quickly dealt with and was much less than that encountered by the leading coys, as the enemy had few organised defences in the area. Enemy tps driven from the FDL's went back to the second line. Two additional minefields were encountered that were not shown on any map. In these a large number of Italian B 4 type mines were positioned on short pickets. Thanks to the brilliant moonlight these were easily avoided. The engr parties from No 5 section reported these two minefields gapped, marked and lighted at 0010 hrs 24 Oct. Although the section had suffered some 12 casualties during these operations they continued to develop the gaps made, and opened an emergency gap 100 yds to the south.

A and C coys of 2/24 Aust Inf Bn took up temporary positions on their final objective using all available enemy cover. Contact was successfully made with the bn on the left. A temporary HQ was established on the axis until 2/48 Aust Inf Bn had passed through.

The Advance to the second objective

2/48 Aust Inf Bn debussed, moved on foot to 2/24 Aust Inf Bn start line and used this as a forming up position. The bn formed up with two coys fwd and two in res. The bn start line was put down by the I sec about 200 yds in rear of 2/24 Aust Inf Bn's final objective. The start line was crossed at 0038 hrs. 2/48 Aust Inf Bn was faced with the enemy's second line defences some 1500 yds after crossing the start line. This position was much more heavily wired than the FDL's. It was also protected by a minefield in which were many anti-personnel mines. During the pause of 60 mins allowed for the bn to pass through, the whole of the enemy's second line and positions to the flank were kept under fire.

/At

At a coordinating conference this bde agreed to take over the southern post of this particular sector although it was in the 2/13 Aust Inf Bn area.

At first some stiff resistance was encountered. This was quickly cleared up and the fwd coys were able to pass through to the intermediate objective which was reported in our hands at 0210 hrs. A pause of 15 mins was allowed for the res coys to pass through. These coys moving in battle formation immediately to the rear had mopped up the area as they moved through. They then moved to the final objective which was reached slightly ahead of time at 0245 hrs. Considerable difficulty was experienced in making contact with 2/13 Aust Inf Bn on the left although patrols were sent some distance into their area. Contact was finally made at approximately 0400 hrs on the line of the intermediate objective. Contact was again made at 0800 hrs. It was then learnt that 2/13 Aust Inf Bn had not progressed beyond the Bn's first objective.

Reorganisation

As soon as 2/48 Aust Inf Bn was on its way to its first objective, 2/24 Aust Inf Bn began the necessary moves to reorganise covering the northern flank. The two coys on the right took up dispositions covering the general area they had reached on the intermediate and final bn objective. The left fwd coy swung to the NW and took up a position on the left of the original right fwd coy. The remaining coy became the bn res and took up a defensive position facing to the north and west. This position was approx behind the centre coy. Dispositions are shown on the trace att in Appx A. With the gaps in the minefield successfully opened no difficulty was experienced in getting forward "A" ech and supporting arm vehs. Loads were dumped in pl areas and sp weapons were placed in posn. Following the adv of 2/48 Aust Inf Bn No 6 sec 2/7 Aust Fd Coy proceeded to sweep along the continuation of the "Boomerang" track across no mans land and through the enemy's defences. During these operations no less than seven minefields were encountered. Despite the heavy call on the sappers the fields were cleared and marked. The final gap was opened and marked only some 30 mins after the bn was due on the final objective. On reaching the final objective the bn immediately reorganised with the left fwd coy facing west and the right fwd coy facing north. The right res coy swung to the right facing north and made contact with the coy on its left. Contact was not made with the left coy of 2/24 Aust Inf Bn and for a time there was a gap between the two bns. The left res coy moved fwd a short distance from the intermediate objective and took up a posn facing to the west and north west. The fwd move of the "A" ech and sp arms vehs commenced as soon as the gap was reported clear. To assist vehs to move quickly to coy areas lucas lamps with distinguishing colours were flashed at intervals from Coy Hq. Everything worked smoothly and there was no difficulty in getting to the correct areas. It was approx 0400 hrs when tpt arrived in the coy areas. 2400 Hawkins mines were included in the first trip. Vehs immediately off loaded and returned to the fwd bde dumps for further stores. By dawn all coys were well supplied with amn, RE stores, food and water, and the vehs had returned to the bn veh assembly pt without loss.

By first light all the sp weapons, both those of the bn and att arms were in posn. The coys were dug in and every man provided with a half sheet of galvanised iron. Covered with sandbags this made excellent head cover. A perimeter wire of single concertina was laid. Hawkins mines were put down in two rows on the basis of one mine per yd. One Bn set out its section posts by a system of pacing. This ensured that the platoon covered approximately the frontage allotted to it. To a large extent it eliminated the natural tendency of "huddling" at night.

/Re-adjustments

Re-adjustments at daylight and subsequent events

No enemy counter attack materialised at first light although shortly afterwards he began a general shelling of the newly captured area. This concentrated on to certain areas as the light improved and his OPs were better able to select targets. Most of his observation was obtained from Pt 29, a distinct feature some 1600 yds to the north, that completely dominated the area occupied by the two bns. Most of the shelling in the earlier part of the day was directed against 2/24 Aust Inf Bn and to the rear of our FDL's facing north. This seemed to indicate that the enemy was not yet able to pin point our posns.

When it was realised that a gap existed between the two bns, the carrier pl 2/24 Aust Inf Bn was dismounted and moved in to make contact. At this time it was difficult to obtain the exact location and dispositions of coys. To enable bns to fix their posns accurately two pts were selected in each area and at a pre-arranged time that night three flares at one min interval were sent up. The flash spotting section was asked to take bearings. Successful readings were obtained in two cases and our disposns were then accurately plotted.

No enemy counter attacks developed until the afternoon of the following day 25 Oct. During the afternoon 24 Oct and the morning 25 Oct, however, a number of tanks manoeuvred to the west and NW of our positions. These tks attempted to obtain information as to our dispositions and at the same time enticed our A Tk guns to open fire prematurely. Although our guns refused to be drawn one 6 pr was knocked out. Another gun replied and Mk IV tk was set on fire. The remainder then withdrew some distance to the west. The 2/48 Aust Inf Bn was kept very much on the alert by enemy concentrations to the south on the 2/13 Aust Inf Bn front.

At approximately 1430 hrs enemy were seen to be forming up on our northern flank just to the west of Pt 29. Arty defensive fire was called for and this counter attack was dispersed without any serious fire being required from bn SA weapons.

The Composite Force

The plan laid down for this force was put into effect without interference by enemy troops. The HQs and two of the posts were located within the area of the enemy's defensive fire. This caused a number of casualties while digging in and laying the mine-field. Contact was made with the newly formed flank of 2/24 Aust Inf Bn before first light.

Communications

Prior to zero the bde sig sec (L) ran a line fwd to a report centre on 2/24 Aust Inf Bn axis of adv. As the gaps were cleared cable followed the bns to their objective and line comms was established. Difficulty was experienced in maintaining these lines. The normal fwd control by wireless was established. The 101 sets remained with A ech vehs and from here operated the bn fwd gp. No 18 sets operated with each coy. Los moved with bn HQ close to the bn rear link and kept bde informed as to the progress of the operations. They moved from the set and contacted bn comds at intervals. Only one success signal was seen at bde HQ the remainder were reported by wireless.

Medical arrangements

The evacuation of casualties worked very well. Bn RAPs were able to operate in the vicinity of the HQ and wounded were quickly evacuated by ambulance. Stretcher bearers collected and brought all wounded back to the RAPs. There was no difficulty in handling the number of casualties. The enemy appeared to treat the RED CROSS with respect. Stretcher bearers and ambulances moving in the fwd area by day were not fired upon.

/Supplies

Supplies and meals

Arrangements were based on the assumption that no veh movement would be possible in the area in daylight. All necessary stores and rations were taken fwd into bn areas during the night of the attack. Hot meals were provided before the attack and were subsequently taken fwd in containers at night. Haversack rations were used during the day. Additional stores required were brought fwd on the second night, these included additional Hawkins mines for 2/48 Aust Inf Bn.

The conduct of the tps

The conduct of the tps in the first phase of this operation proved the value of a carefully rehearsed battle drill. They were confident of their ability and fought with determination, in every case getting to their objectives. After the capture of the objective the work of reorganisation was carried out with the same zeal. Every man knew his job as a drill and did it quickly and thoroughly. Because of this there was absolute confidence in their ability to hold the ground they had won.

Summary of Phase I

As a result of this operation the bde had successfully penetrated the enemy's forward defences and overrun his main posns on a one bn front. On the north a firm flank had been established. The posn was prepared to receive counter attacks with or without tanks. The number of prisoners taken (shown in Appx A) was rather lower than anticipated. This was due mainly to the enemy's defensive plan whereby his FDL's between the two "braces" or switches were lightly held. In the case of the second line defences, held by Italians, the defenders for the greater part did not remain to contest their posns once the barrage lifted. Several A Tk guns were captured in this area, (numbers shown in Appx A) most of them in good condition. No effort was made by the enemy to destroy these guns. Details of our own losses are given in diagrammatic traces att in Appx A.

The enemy's FDL's were as our observations and patrolling had led us to believe. Minefields were more numerous than was expected from an examination of aerial photographs. In all cases these fields were thickly strewn with B 4 type anti-personnel mines. The enemy's second line was even stronger than the overprints suggested and had these been manned by determined tps our casualties would have been undoubtedly much heavier. The dug in tks which were reported to be just west of the final objective had either been moved during or just prior to the attack, as on this part of the front only mobile tks were encountered. The whole of this operation worked closely to the original plan. The main lesson was undoubtedly the value of careful planning and a thorough and complete battle drill. The speed at which a well planned reorganisation can be carried out was also clearly demonstrated.

SECTION 5

PHASE II

The extension of the attack to the north including the
the capture of Pt 29 and the enemy's switch line night
25/26 Oct 42

Warning Order

Early consideration of the role of this bde pointed to Trig 29 being an early objective in any extension of the attack to the north. If the major plan had worked to time table this bde would then have had the assistance of a portion of the armd forces under 10 Corps. These could have operated on the western flank in a coordinated attack. Alternatively if the armour had succeeded in breaking through, their presence well to the west of the first days objectives, would have assisted and modified any plan of attack to the north. By 1200 hrs 24 Oct it was evident that, whatever the reason, 10 Armcd Corps had not succeeded in reaching open country. 26 Aust Inf Bde was informed of the possibility of the attack on Trig 29 being carried out on the following day. This would have to be done without the assistance of or the threat of our own armd forces. Both 2/24 and 2/48 Aust Inf Bn comds were informed. They proceeded to carry out early reces and to collect all possible information.

Topography

Trig 29 although only some 12 to 20 feet higher than the ground occupied by the greater part of both bns was a distinct feature, rising sharply from the surrounding plain. It definitely commanded the whole of the area as far east as the enemy FDL's, and some distance south into our positions. It was used by the enemy as an OP throughout 24 and 25 Oct. The speed with which he shelled any veh moving in the area left no doubts as to its command. From the area of our new FDL's fwd of contour 25, there appeared to be other distinct features to the east of Trig 29. However, there was nothing on the 1/25,000 map to indicate their presence. It was very difficult to obtain any observation that could accurately indicate the nature of this ground.

Recce and information

Running approximately north and south through Trig 29 was a distinct track. During the afternoon 24 Oct and during 25 Oct, tanks were seen moving west and south of Trig 29 in the area of the track. This suggested that the area was free of mines. Throughout the day the enemy maintained SA fire from the north against both bn fronts. It was evident that the switch (or "brace" line) running from a pt some 1000 yds south east of Trig 29 and in the general direction of THOMPSONS POST was occupied by the enemy. It appeared also that the enemy had taken up positions south and southwest of Trig 29. No precise information could be obtained as to what extent that portion of the enemy's second line immediately to the north of the area captured by us, was now occupied. Except in the area of the enemy's original FDL's daylight patrolling to the north was limited and restricted by enemy fire. Patrols were able to move north along his FDL's, and confirmed that for some 500 yds at least these posts were unoccupied. No definite information was available as to the FDL's further to the north. From this it was considered unlikely that enemy tps were in the area between our fwd line and the switch line already mentioned.

During night 24/25 Oct recce was carried out by both bns. 2/48 Aust Inf Bn recce along the track running directly to Trig 29, and 2/24 Aust Inf Bn the area between the enemy FDL's and second line. At dusk 25 Oct an enemy party about 20 strong approached the area of C Coy 2/48 Aust Inf Bn. This party was allowed to approach close to our FDL's and was then fired on by a sec of 2/2 Aust MG Bn in C

/Coy

Coy area. They suffered heavy casualties. Two offrs and two NCOs were taken prisoner. The former proved to be the acting Regt comd and the acting comd of II Bn of 125 Panzer Grenadier Regt. The regt comd was seriously wounded. Both offrs carried sketches showing existing dispositions, minefields and the proposed reinforcements of this area by coys from the other two bns. The acting bn comd, who was not wounded, was quickly taken to 2/48 Aust Inf Bn HQ, where with the aid of one of the Bn I staff who spoke German, the CO questioned him. He appeared to have considerable fear as to his fate in our hands and answered all questions freely. From this the bn comd satisfied himself that the track to Trig 29 was free of mines. The prisoners were immediately sent back to bde where a div interpreter further questioned them. This latter interrogation took place close to the zero hr already fixed. It served mainly to confirm assumptions already made, and in no way affected the plan.

Considerations and Plan

The plan in general terms was to seize Trig 29, continue our FDL's on the western flank northwards to this pt, and hold a line east to the enemy's original FDL's. At the same time certain posts of the "Composite Force" were to continue this new line to our original FDL's.

The enemy defences in this area, based on prior information and the overprint map were the remains of his second line and the "switch" running in a north easterly direction to THOMPSONS POST. The switch line was definitely held and from all reports appeared to be held in strength. Certain posts in his second line were also manned. It was doubtful whether any of his original FDL's south of the switch line occupied, though in the northern section it seemed quite likely that certain elements moved in during night 24/25 Oct.

Throughout the afternoon 24 Oct and during daylight 25 Oct, considerable enemy movement was observed in the area of Trig 29. It was exceedingly difficult to determine just what was taking place. Although this movement was clearly observed it was impossible to say that the enemy was reinforcing his positions because as many tps appeared to leave the area as came into it. This may have been a relief or a re-grouping of his dispositions. Judged from the volume of fire, the enemy had a number of tps to the south and southwest of Trig 29. No dug in posns were shown in this area on the 1/25,000 overprint map. Aerial photographs of a sufficiently late date, were not available. Enemy dispositions therefore could not be accurately placed.

From all this evidence it was safe to draw the conclusion that the enemy was attempting to strengthen his defences in the general area of Trig 29. His intention in this regard was confirmed by the captured sketches already referred to. The two bns holding the line would be required for a successful attack, and these would have to be relieved before moving to their assembly areas.

The soundest way to capture Trig 29 itself appeared to be an attack directly to the north. In view of the enemy's reported strength in the switch line it was considered that an attack in flank working in a north easterly direction would be best. When this line was cleared reorganisation to the north could then be carried out on a general west-east line from Trig 29. The div plan therefore arranged for 2/17 Aust Inf Bn to relieve 2/48 Aust Inf Bn in their present area, and for a re-adjustment of the 2/15 Aust Inf Bn to include the area held by 2/24 Aust Inf Bn. The attack was to be made by two bns. The left bn (2/48 Aust Inf Bn) was to attack and capture the area around Trig 29. The right bn (2/24 Aust Inf Bn) was to clear the enemy defences in the switch line and then reorganise to the east of Trig 29. The whole of 9 Aust Div arty with the addition of 146 Fd Regt from 8 Armd Div, two fd regts from 51 Div, 7 and 64 Med

/Regts

Regts was to sp the attack. The equivalent of one fd regt and two med btys were allotted to CB tasks.

The main problem confronting the bde was to establish suitable start lines for the two bns. This depended largely on the information available as to the enemy dispositions immediately to the north of 2/48 Aust Inf Bn. There seemed to be two alternatives. Firstly to establish a line for 2/24 Aust Inf Bn sufficiently far back to enable the tps to assemble under cover of 2/48 Aust Inf Bn FDLs. After they had moved some 1000 yds fwd, to then launch 2/48 Bn to the north. Alternatively, 2/24 Bn to attack from a start line north of the existing FDLs of 2/48 Bn. The bn comd who had reced the area was doubtful if a start line could be put down in this posn without first clearing the area. It was finally decided to attack directly north from 2/48 Bn FDLs towards Trig 29. This had the advantage that the ground thus cleared would enable the 2/24 Bn start line to be laid close to the enemy's switch line.

Based on the opinion that the track to Trig 29 was free of mines the CO 2/48 Bn suggested that the attack on this pt be carried out by infantry mounted on carriers. The speed of such an advance would ensure a high degree of surprise. In this way the posn could be quickly taken, before the enemy was fully aware that an attack was contemplated in that particular area. This suggestion was accepted provided that a res was retained to undertake the operation on foot should the carriers fail in their original assault. Plans were made whereby the arty programme could be repeated should this become necessary.

The plan finally decided upon was laid down in 26 Aust Inf Bde OO No 22 dated 25 Oct. Briefly from a start line within their own FDLs 2/48 Bn was to advance with "A" and "D" Coys fwd astride the track running north to Trig 29. These two coys were to move to an intermediate bn objective some 1000-1100 yds from the start line. "C" coy mounted in ten carriers with a res pl mounted on four 6 pr portees following was to pass through and capture Trig 29. Each carrier was to take six or seven infantry, the coy moving in three rows of four, four and two carriers. This formation was to be followed by four more carriers each towing a 37 m.m A Tk gun. Finally one 6 pr tp - 3 Aust A Tk Regt carrying the res pl was to follow with guns towed. "B" coy was held in res. When the success signal was given from Trig 29, A coy was to move fwd from the intermediate objective, mop up on their western flank, and take up a final posn just SW of Trig 29 and D coy was to move fwd in line with A coy East of the Trig and later link up with the 2/24 Bn. B coy was then to move up to the general area of the intermediate objective. The capture of 2/48 Bn's intermediate objective would enable 2/24 Bn to lay their start line in this newly won area.

The attack by 2/24 Bn was to be on a two coy front on a bearing of 52° grid. The axis of advance was to run through the northern side of the enemy's minefd. This gave the right hand coy the initial task of clearing up that portion of the enemy's second line north of 2/48 Bn area. For the first objective A and B coys were to be fwd with C and D coys in reserve. The move to the second objective in the vicinity of 301 Grid and the "FIG GARDEN" was to be made by one coy, the remaining coys to be used if required to mop up that part of the enemy's FDLs immediately to the South of the final objective. On further consideration it was decided to attack the second objective with both C and D coys. A composite pl from HQ coy was to be given the task of clearing the area to the south of the bn's final objective. The decision was made following information gained by daylight patrols in the late afternoon. Reorganisation was then to take place to the north on an East West line making contact with the 2/48 Bn.

The axis of advance of the 2/48 Bn was not ideal for bringing up supporting arms, A ech vehs, and reorganisation stores. The track itself was quite good and to the best of our knowledge was free of mines. It was, however, open to direct fire from field, A Tk and MGS to the west. Vehs using this track would most probably be heard

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these enemy positions. The situation was similar to that in the first attack. It was decided that initially the risk would have to be taken.

In the case of 2/24 bn if the veh route followed the bns axis of adv the engr's would probably have to clear a gap through the whole length of a minefield over 2500 yds. In addition with reorganisation being made to the north there would have been no less than four changes of direction. The route therefore chosen was from approx the centre of 2/24 Bns old FDL's on a bearing of 335 degrees grid. This would necessitate one short gap through the enemy's minefield and would bring "A" ech vehs by the shortest route to the centre of 2/24 bn reorganisation area. This would also be useful to 2/48 bn in the later stages of the attack. Although it was expected that the engr's could do some preliminary sweeping on this route, forward work was not to commence until the success signal was seen, or information was passed to the OC party, that 2/24 bn final objective had been taken.

Survey

The flatness of the country and the lack of observation over the enemy's switch line made it essential to have a datum point surveyed in the area. From this point the start lines could be laid or traverses run. One of the map spots obtained on the night 24/25 Oct by the use of very lights and flash spotters was ideal for this purpose. Using this datum point both start lines were laid and the actual operation proved the undoubted value of this method.

Arty programme

The arty programme consisted of a series of concentrations on known enemy defences together with barrages to cover those enemy posns of which no detailed information was available. A counter battery programme was also fired. The rate of advance on which the arty timings were based was, a 100 yds in 2 mins for the first 500 yds for 2/48 Bn and 600 yds for 2/24 Bn, thereafter 100 yds in 3 mins to the final objective. A pause of 5 mins was allowed to pass the carriers through and 7 minutes to reach Trig 29. A 10 mins pause on the first objective was allowed for in the case of 2/24 Bn. In all some 144 25 prs and 32 med guns supported this attack.

Relief

Before the 2/15 and 2/17 Bns of 20 Aust Inf Bde could begin the relief of this Bde they in turn had to be relieved by units of 51 Highland Div. Although timed to be completed by 2200 hrs it was evident that this could not be done. The greater part of 2/48 Bn was relieved by midnight. The remainder had to leave their positions without handing over. The 2/24 Bn was forced to move from their area before the relief arrived.

Assembly and start lines

In the 2/48 Bn, the two coys allotted to the intermediate objective were those holding the northern flank of the posn. Assembly was made in their own coy areas and carried out with very little trouble. "C" Coy in res was given the task of capturing Trig 29 in cooperation with the carriers. The carriers were brought up from the Bn veh assembly point behind our old FDL's. The "marrying up" with C Coy was carried out immediately to the south of the two coys doing the initial phase.

The relief for 2/24 Bn had not arrived at the time set down for the bn to move. All was quiet in this sector. The question was referred to Bde who ordered the bn to move to its assembly area east of "C" coy 2/48 Bn. This decision was given as the 2/15 Bn already

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held posns in depth to 2/24 Bn facing both north and west. These formed a firm base and 20 Aust Inf Bde stated that reliefs were actually moving up. These had reced the area in daylight and were fully conversant with the posns they had to take over.

The start line for 2/48 Bn was taped by the IO working from the datum point. Guides were provided to take the I section 2/24 Bn to the same pt as their start line originated from it. One hundred yds of this start line was laid before the 2/48 Bn's attack began. As the start line was to a flank there was no interference.

All coys remained in their defensive posns until after last light "A" and "B" coys allotted to the first objective, prepared their coy "packs". These were loaded on carriers which joined the coys just after dark. When the loading was completed both coys moved to the vicinity of the "PIMPLE", used as 2/48 BN RAP. At 2330 hrs they moved off from this point and were led to the start line. In the same way "C" and "D" coys, when ready, moved to the vicinity of the "PIMPLE" and followed in rear of "A" and "B" coys. They went to ground after forming up some 200 yds in rear. There was no opposition during this move, and only limited and unsaimed enemy fire was sweeping the area.

The attack on trig 29

The leading coys of 2/48 Bn (A and D) crossed the start line at zero (2400 hrs), and advanced towards the first bn objective. No opposition was met until some 400 yds from this line and then mainly on "D" coy front. They had to fight to clear up two posts in the areas of 2/24 Bn's start line. The two coys halted with D Coy on the right taking up a position facing NE to cover 2/24 Bn start line. The assaulting force for the capture of Trig 29, in the formation already mentioned, crossed the start line at 0022 hrs which was estimated to bring them to the intermediate objective some 5 mins after it had been secured by the leading coys. The timing was correct and this force moved forward to Trig 29. The arty concentrations lifted 3 mins later, and the carriers arrived at the foot of the hil one min after our fire had lifted. This fire was reported to be heavy and caused many enemy casualties. It also assisted surprise by drowning the noise of the approaching carriers. "C" Coy dismounted and were quickly engaged in fierce hand to hand fighting with large numbers of the enemy. The attack undoubtedly came as a surprise and the plan was entirely successful. In a very short time, despite the number of enemy in this area, Trig 29 was in our hands. The success signal went up and "C" coy exploited towards the gun posns north of the trig.

"A" Coy on the left of the intermediate objective then moved north on a line which took them to the west of Trig 29. Several enemy posts had to be mopped up in this area, and after some stiff fighting the coy was able to reorganise, facing west, in touch with "C" coy on Trig 29.

The div order covering this operation arranged for 20 Aust Inf Bde to take over the extension of our western FDL's north to the 300 grid. This was carried out by moving one coy 2/17 Bn to the north of the area already taken over on the initial relief. "B" Coy 2/48 Bn which had been held in res now moved and took up a position to the east and south of "A" coy, and so filled the gap to the right of 2/17 Bn.

In the meantime "D" Coy held their position until the 2/24 Bn attack passed through. They then moved north and took up a position to the right and rear of "C" coy and reorganised in this area as the reserve coy of the bn.

The capture of the switch line (by 2/24 Aust Inf Bn)

As soon as the two leading coys 2/48 Bn had moved forward towards their first objective, the I section 2/24 bn completed laying the bn start line on a bearing of 52 degrees from the datum point. The bn

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was able to form up on this start line without incident and few casualties.

Capture of first objective

The two forward coys, A and B, crossed the start line on time, (0040 hrs) A Coy, on the right, advanced with three platoons forward two within the enemy's wire, and the third pl sweeping outside and to the right of the wire. For 300 yds they advanced without meeting any opposition. This indicated that the enemy's second line was not longer held, and had probably been cleaned by the 2/48 Bn in their advance. At this point, which coincided with their entry into the switch line, they came under heavy arty and mortar fire, This was possibly the enemy's defensive fire covering this line, and had probably been called for some time previously during 2/48 Bn's adv. Shortly after A coy had come under mortar fire, the centre pl of that coy engaged an enemy post. The coy comd ordered the left pl to assist, and the post was cleared up. These two pls encountered and dealt with a second enemy position some 300 yds further on. The right pl moving astride the wire, met no direct opposition, but suffered casualties from the enemy defensive fire in front of his line. On reaching the first objective, the 2 i/c, who had taken over when the Coy Comd was wounded, reorganised the coy with the left and right pls forward, withdrawing the centre pl, which had had the greater part of the fighting, into res. B coy, on the left, advanced with two pls forward and one in sp. Some 300 yds after leaving the start line, this coy was subjected to anti-tank and mortar fire, coming from the left. The coy found only two small posts which caused them any trouble, and these were quickly cleared up. Just prior to reaching the first objective, the right hand pl moved in onto A coys front and silenced an A Tk gun which had been causing trouble. Throughout this advance they were able to maintain touch with A Coy, until the objective was reached and reorganisation commenced. Here for a short time touch was lost, but was re-established later in the night. These positions were by far the strongest encountered by this bde consisting of localities dug on dominating rises, included in which were a number of deep shelters. One 88 mm gun was captured with the cover still on although the crew fought from nearby positions. Both coys reached their objective at approximately 0150 hrs. The time of arrival on this objective should have been zero plus 93 mins (0133) hrs and a pause of 10 mins was allowed for the remaining coys to pass through. These coys should have passed through at 0143 hrs, but as the leading coys were late, they went through immediately and endeavoured to catch up the seven mins lost.

Move to second objective

C Coy, on the right, and D Coy, on the left, moved off from the start line some 10 mins behind A and B Coys. No directed fire was encountered during the move up to the first objective. C Coy also moved through with three pls fwd, the two pls on the left working inside the enemy's defences and the one on the right skirting his wire. Three of four enemy posts were encountered some 400 yds after passing through the first objective. Owing to the enemy resistance they do not appear to have caught up to the barrage at any stage of the subsequent fighting. After heavy fighting, the two left pls cleared these posts, and finally arrived at the "FIG GARDENS", or as named by the Germans "Teufelgarten" (Devils Gardens). Here, originally an enemy Coy HQ, they found a great deal of hastily organised opposition, including mortars. The position was rushed, however, and after some heavy fighting in which the pls suffered a number of casualties, the "Garden" came into our possession.

The pl on the right had had a clear run up to this stage. Immediately the "Garden" was captured, heavy fire was brought to bear on C Coy from what appeared to be a strong enemy post some 200 to 300 yds to the northeast. Fire coming from this area included anti-tank, 2" and 3" mortars. The right hand pl had worked round to the south of this position, but were also held up by the heavy fire.

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In the meantime D Coy, moving on the left, had only two pls. It encountered three posts about 300 yds from the first objective succeeded in clearing these up, and continued the adv. During the whole of this adv heavy fire came from the left. The left pl was detached and cleared up one of these centres of opposition. This pl later rejoined the coy, and both were forced to ground in line with C Coy in the vicinity of the "Devils Garden".

The enemy post causing all the trouble appeared to be far more heavily wired than any so far encountered. No bangalores were available with the coy. The OC "D" coy contacted "C" coy. A plan was formulated for an attack on this post by D Coy, supported by fire from "C" coy on the right. The OC "C" coy reported the posn to the Bn comd, giving an outline of his proposed plan. He received orders not to push on with the attack but to withdraw to posns from which they could carry out the required reorganisation to the north. The only remaining offr in D coy was wounded at this time. The OC "C" coy took comd of both, and controlled their withdrawal. On instrs from the Bn IO they reorganised on the right of A coy, which had moved into a fresh posn behind 2/48 Bn.

To ensure that any enemy opposition in the original FDL was cleaned up, a composite pl from Nos 2 and 4 of HQ coy moved out on the right of "C" coy. They found one enemy post active. This was quickly cleared up, and the pl moved to the north, made contact with C coy, and later moved off to reorganise with that coy.

Composite Force

The Composite Force was ordered to conform with the new disposns. To enable them to do this 24 Aust Inf Bde took over two posts in the vicinity of Pt West 24. The remaining posts moved fwd to posns as shown on the trace att with Appx B. Two posts were successfully established dug in, wired and mine laying commenced by first light. Owing to short shooting from our arty and later to enemy fire from the direction of THOMPSONS POST, they were unable to establish the remainder of the posts originally planned. During the reorganisation period they were able to make contact with 2/24 Bn and establish posts further to the south which gave the required link up.

Reorganisation

Reorganisation in the case of 2/48 Bn was quickly carried out. A ech vehs and "pack" loads moved up, unloaded and vehs were moved back. While waiting at the junction of the new north track and the "Diamond" track an enemy shell struck an amm truck which immediately burst into flames. By the aid of this light the enemy concentrated field and A Tk guns within direct range on to the other vehs and in a short time eight vehs were put out action. Despite this loss by first light all coys of this bn were wired, mined, well dug in with head cover and had ample res of food and water. Supporting arms had followed closely behind, and these were in posn. In short the bn was fully prepared for whatever the enemy might attempt to do.

The task of 2/24 Bn was much more difficult; having captured and mopped up enemy defences in the switch line, reorganisation had to be carried out an average distance of 800 yds to the north. It was only when moving to take up these posns that the full import of the topograpy of this area became evident. As they moved fwd the coys were confronted with a series of ridges and high points running west to east. These vantage points were all held by enemy posts plentifully supplied with light automatics. The left coy (B) succeeded in moving fwd and making contact with 2/48 Bn. They had to fight the whole way and captured considerably more prisoners than in the adv along the switch line. Most of the fighting fell to the right pl and the res pl had to come to their assistance. Both pls were now short of amm, but commenced to dig in with the right flank somewhat refused. The second coy which was to make contact with the left coy and the two on the final objective suffered extremely by casualties and lost contact on their left.

One coy was now in touch with 2/48 Bn and two coys were in the vicinity of the "FIG GARDEN", thus leaving a wide gap between. The bn comd saw the coy comds and obtained, as near as was possible

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under the existing conditions, the actual location of the coys. After sifting the information received and balancing up various factors he decided to withdraw the right flank coys so that a continuous front could be presented to the enemy. Reorganisation on these lines was completed by 0500 hrs. Contact was made a little later with the Composite Force who had modified their positions as already mentioned.

Enemy action 26 Oct

From first light for some three hrs the enemy subjected the whole of the captured area to intense arty fire. The main concentrations were put down in the vicinity of Trig 29. On 2/24 bn front tps were pinned down to their positions mainly by MG fire, and sniping at close range from the ridges to the north of their positions. Energetic counter action was taken with mortars and arty on all known and suspected localities. By evening that day due to this energetic action it was possible to move about in 2/24 Bn area with much greater freedom. A series of defensive fire concentrations similar to those employed on 24 and 25 Oct were arranged to cover the whole front. No enemy counter attacks developed 26 Oct although during the day groups of enemy were seen to move into position 1200 to 1500 yds north of Trig 29. Observation and visibility was good and in a number of cases these groups were quickly dispersed by observed arty fire. Whether these tps were taking up defensive positions or attempting to concentrate for a counter attack is not known.

Counter attacks

At first light the following day 27 Oct, some 30 tanks were located to the west of Trig 29. These tanks were out of range of our A Tk guns and made no attempt to engage with our defensive positions. Their role seemed to be that of preventing any northward move of our armour. At 1400 hrs four tanks were seen approaching Trig 29 from the northwest. They moved in sufficiently close to draw A Tk fire. This was withheld however and the tanks were forced to withdraw by our arty fire. None of the A Tk positions were disclosed. At 1600 hrs enemy lorried infantry were seen to move into dead ground some 1500 yds north of trig 29 where he had attempted to concentrate the previous day. This move was immediately followed by a heavy shelling of our FDL's. Trig 29 was heavily shelled with a large proportion of smoke in an attempt to blind our OPs. At 1630 hrs what appeared to be a bn of inf were seen to the south of the area in which the tp carriers were last observed. They commenced to advance towards Trig 29.

Advice of this move was received at Ede HQ., just before comm temporarily broke down. While comms were being reestablished the CRA was asked to fire the two concentrations to the west and northwest. The arty defensive fire was immediately put down and further regts were brought in.

When comm was again through the CO 2/48 Bn was asked whether the arty fire had been effective. He replied that the dust was so heavy that nothing could be seen. He asked that the concentrations be stopped to allow the dust to settle and so enable the OPs to report on the enemy movements. Defensive fire was again called for some fifteen minutes later. Despite this heavy arty fire the attack was pressed forward and was then engaged by mortars, MG and SA fire. Heavy casualties were inflicted but the attack was maintained until just before last light. Some enemy came as close as 400 yds to our FDL's and the remainder withdrew into partly dug positions some 600 yds away. In the failing light the enemy were seen to evacuate a large number of wounded.

Between 2200 hrs and 2230 hrs the enemy launched further counter attacks on both the 2/24 and 2/48 bn fronts. Under cover of darkness he was able to press this attack right up to our wire before being

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driven back, mainly by SA fire. This attack took place just as the arrangements already made for this bde to be relieved by 20 Aust Inf Bde, were due to start. These counter attacks were carried out with great determination and it is certain that the enemy suffered heavy casualties. One PW stated later that 80 were killed and 200 wounded in his unit during one of these attacks. In addition to the attacks described several attempts were made to form up to the west of Trig 29. These were successfully dealt with in turn by arty fire and did not materialise further.

Reliefs

No further enemy counter attacks developed and at 0430 hrs 28 Oct both bns were relieved. 2/24 Bn was relieved by 2/13 bn, 2/48 bn by 2/17 bn both of 20 Aust Inf Bde. The bns then moved into the area SE of TELL EL EISA station to prepare for further operations.

Comments

The action of 2/48 Bn was notable for the successful use of carriers in giving speed to the attack. With speed came surprise and success quickly followed. For the only time during the Battle of Egypt a Bn of this Bde worked with a Reb coy. It was held back in case of failure with the carrier attack. Although not used it was able to give depth to the reorganisation and assist the heavily engaged "B" coy of the 2/24 Bn with necessary reorganisation stores and amm.

Surprise in the case of the flank attack on the switch line is questionable as the enemy on the long axis of advance were on the alert and prepared once the direction of the attack became apparent.

The start line strength of 2/24 Bn was as follows :

A Coy	-	3	offrs	76	ORs
B Coy	-	2	"	53	"
C Coy	-	4	"	64	"
D Coy	-	2	"	57	"

from which it will be seen that the coys were considerably under strength, and in one case organised in two pls only. With the establishment of a datum point, the start line, direction and distances worked out satisfactorily.

The preceding attack of 2/48 Bn cleared not only the start line but the whole of the area up to the enemy's switch line. The fighting to the 2/24 Bn first objective was normal, although the enemy for a period put down effective defensive fire on the right of the leading coy. The enemy fought in all cases, but were successfully dealt with practically to the final objective. The "Devils Garden" being only some 300 yds from the line laid down.

There seems to have been some confusion as to the distance covered by the coys moving to the final objective, and a report was received at Bde HQ that they had overstepped the mark as far as THOMPSONS POST. This was not accepted at the time, and there seems some doubt as to how this report arose. Both the coy comds appeared to know at all times just how far they had gone.

It has been rather difficult to obtain details of what was in the COs mind in his reorganisation plan, but the following should be somewhere near the mark. The CO following the attack closely, ordered the two coys on the first objective to begin the reorganisation to the north, anticipating that A coy would be in res. Following this move he received reports of very heavy fighting by B coy, when gaining their position alongside 2/48 Bn. All this fighting took place in an area believed to be clear of enemy tps. There were indications on the map, captured from the Regimental Commander the previous evening, showing that he proposed moving coys from the bns north of the railway line, to strengthen the southern flank.

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Had reorganisation taken place according to the original plan, the coys on the second objective would have reformed to the north, with "C" coy somewhere in the area of the final objective, and "D" coy taking up a position between this and B coy. It was a big gap to fill, and with the reduced numbers, the Bn comd probably considered that his reorganisation would be scunder if made with the coys in closer contact. Undoubtedly, following the experience of B coy, both C and D coys would have had to undertake attacks of some magnitude and without artillery support, to gain their reorganisation line

SECTION 6

PHASE III

The extension of the northern flank towards the ry and
main rd night 28/29 Oct 42

General

After the successful attack on Trig 29 and the holding of that position against all counter attacks, it was decided to extend the operations to the north. For the proposed task 2/23 Bn was to be released from Div Res and revert to command. 23 Armd Bde (less three regts and 259 Fd Coy RE) was to be in sp of the Bde.

Relief and move

To release the 2/24 and 2/48 Bns who were then holding the area of Trig 29 the following reliefs took place: 2/13 Bn relieved 2/24 Bn in the area East of Trig 29. 2/17 Bn who joined the southern flank of 2/48 Bn extended their line northward to take over that bn's posn in the area of Trig 29. Both bns then moved back to the lying up area East of TELL HL EISA station. As these moves were dependent on certain reliefs by the Highland Div on the southern flank of the 20 Aust Inf Bde they were not completed until the early hrs 27 Oct 42.

Plan

The divisional plan was an operation employing both the 20 and 26 Aust Inf Bdes. 20 Bde was to attack from Trig 29, occupy the enemy defences some 2800 yds to the north, and when captured to form a flank both to the north and to the west. 2/13 Bn was to adv due east from Trig 29 clearing up the enemy defences on the ridges running from it. They were to gain the objective of the enemy's original FDL's and exploit to the defended area SW of THOMPSONS POST.

20 Aust Inf Bde having cleared the ring, 2/23 Bn in conjunction with the 46 R Tanks were to adv on a bearing of 23 degrees grid to the ry line, exploit to the main rd and secure an area from which the 2/48 Bn could attack. This second move was to be to the SE clearing up the enemy defences astride the main rd. On the successful completion of this phase of the operations 2/24 Bn were to move north of the ry line and attack THOMPSONS POST from the north.

Information

From recent overprint maps aerial photographs and reces made from Trig 29, the enemy appeared to have no organised defences between the Trig and the ry. An isolated portion of a third line had been commenced facing East some 2500 yds to the north of Trig 29. Indications seem to be that this area was not held in any great strength. Certain diggings and bty posns were just south of the ry and immediately east of the point on which 2/23 Bn was to be directed. It was suspected that a large portion of the area to the north West of THOMPSONS POST was mined, although no definite indication was obtained even from a captured map.

Captured sketches and infm obtained from the acting Reg comd of the 125 FGR made it clear that the enemy was altering his disposns to meet this new threat to his coastal sector. It was necessary therefore to treat this area as occupied with defensive posns of which we were unlikely to obtain any great detail. The operation involved a number of points requiring great care and detailed preparation. The 2/23 Bn had previously trained with the 46 R Tanks. Although this regt was in support, the CO of the 2/23 Bn was instructed that he would be responsible for the forming up and the

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maintenance of direction of the supporting tks. The detailed arrangements for their move, were to be made in close consultation with 23 Armd Bde.

That part of the operation allotted to this bde called for long advances by all bns. In the case of 2/24 Bn this was over 10,000 yds with no less than four changes of direction. The first essential therefore was to determine the exact spot on the ry where the 2/23 Bn would cross. To enable this to be done 24 Aust Inf Bde were asked, and agreed, to have their searchlights on for five mins each hr and half hr, starting at a time to be fixed. A light was also arranged to be shown on Trig 29. It was hoped by this means to have accurate info available to the other two bns following on.

Arty Plan

Because of the uncertainty of the enemy locations between Trig 29 and the ry, concentrations were to be put on to all known enemy diggings. In addition the adv was to be covered by a barrage. This was to be timed to suit the rate of advance of the tks at 5 miles in the hr. The attacks of both the 2/48 and 2/24 bns were to be covered by timed concentrations. Lifts were to be timed at 100 yds in three minutes.

Assembly

46 R Tanks were in a fwd rally approx 3.5 kilos west of WEST 23. They were instructed to sweep and prepare a lane of adv from this area to the "Diamond" track. The 2/7 Aust Fd coy were instructed to sweep and mark three lines of adv along what was known as the "New Diamond" track to Trig 29, and to make a gap through the Hawkins minefield sufficiently wide to allow the tks to move out on to their line of adv. The centre line was marked by "diamond" signs. The two side lines 70 yds from this axis were marked by a "double bar" sign. The track was to be left clear for movement of 20 Bde until 2200 hrs. 2/23 Bn and 46 R Tanks were to be in posn by 2230 hrs and to pass through our FDL's at 2330 hrs. The 2/48 Bn were to use the "Diamond" track and the 2/24 Bn the "Boomerang" track. Their movement from the lying up area was to take place as laid down in 26 Aust Inf Bde CO No 23 dated 28 Oct 42.

Bde HQ

Bde Tac HQ moved up to a posn on the right of the "New Diamond" track some 1000 yds SE of Trig 29. A fwd report centre with line comm to Bde Tac was established close to our FDL's. This HQ was in hastily dug shallow shelters which were not completed when Bde staff moved in. This posn was too close to the track and was under intermittent shell fire throughout the night.

Operations of the 20 Aust Inf Bde

The attack by the 20 Aust Inf Bde commenced at 2200 hrs, both the 2/13 and 2/15 Bns moving off at the same time. Light opposition only seemed to have been encountered by the 2/15 Bn who had no difficulty in securing their objective. Much stronger resistance was encountered by the 2/13 Bn and heavy fighting took place before they succeeded in reaching the "FIG GARDEN". The success of this bn was not reported by the 20 Aust Inf Bde until 2340 hrs.

Action of the 2/23 Aust Inf Bn

The CO 2/23 Aust Inf Bn remained at Bde HQ until advice was received that 20 Aust Inf Bde had gained their objectives. The movement of this bn timed for 2330 hrs did not take place until 2340 hrs. Because of this late start the CRA was contacted and the timing and arty plan modified in accordance with a pre-arranged code.

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The plan adopted by the 2/23 Bn was to mount as many of the bn as possible on their own carriers and additional carriers loaned by 2/24 Bn. The balance of the tps were distributed on the tks of the sp sqns. By this means it was hoped to make a more rapid adv than would have been possible had the inf moved on foot and maintain closer touch with the tks in an endeavour to obtain greater surprise.

Trouble however developed before this force cleared our own FDL's. Despite the lighting and marking of the gap through the Hawkins minefield a number of tks went astray and were blown up by these mines. Instead of remaining until the posn had been examined, a number of tks attempted to move out to the flank and further casualties were incurred. Some considerable time was lost in rectifying this posn and widening the gaps still further. At 2400 hrs the adv proceeded and shortly afterwards a report was received that the tks were again held up by mines. The engrs carried out the necessary sweeping and marking although no mines were discovered in this area. Later investigation failed to discover the presence of any minefield.

Comm with the CO 46 R Tanks was completely lost at this time and the CO 2/23 Bn had great difficulty in locating him during this period. HQ 23 Arm'd Bde which was established close to 26 Bde HQ also failed to make contact. Later it was learnt that the tk cmd had left his tk to investigate the mine situation.

At approx 0055 hrs the tks were again on the move but did not adv far before they came under exceedingly heavy fire from what later turned out to be six 50 mm A Tk guns. Complete confusion resulted with tks moving off in all directions. As the inf coys had been allotted to work with individual sqns these too were rapidly dispersed in the confusion.

It was evident to the CO 2/23 Bn that it would be exceedingly difficult if not impossible to continue the attack in cooperation with the tks. He immediately set to work to organise as many of his own troops as could be collected. By approx 0315 hrs some 60 to 70 men were collected, organised and launched to the attack. They succeeded in capturing the enemy's posn including six 50 mm A Tk guns, a number of smaller calibre and some 160 prisoners almost entirely German. At this time it was most difficult to obtain infm as to what was taking place. LOs were sent fwd, and 23 Arm'd Bde were asked to obtain any infm they could. By 0345 hrs on the morning of 29 Oct it became apparent that 46 R Tanks had lost all cohesion. At 0400 hrs the CO 2/23 Bn reported personally by wireless that he had been unable to collect more than the original attacking force of 60 to 70 men and that he was digging in on ridges some 1000 yds fwd from our FDL's. He had not sufficient tps to continue the attack. He was not in touch with any responsible offr of 46 R Tanks.

About this time a number of tanks, estimated at 15, moved to the east of the 2/23 Bn position and headed for the railway. This force was not in touch with the Bn. The move was made without any reference to the CO although a number of men, but no offr of the Bn, still remained with the tanks. They advanced 800 yds before they came under heavy A Tk fire from several 50 mm's and one 88 mm. Nine tanks were knocked out and the accompanying troops suffered heavily.

Re-arrangement of the plan

The situation as it became known was immediately reported to Divisional HQ who were also in touch with 23 Arm'd Bde. Both COs of 2/24 and 2/48 Bns were standing by at Bde HQ. 20 Aust Inf Bde were contacted and asked for infm as to the routes taken by the 2/15 Bn. An LO was sent over by the Bde and in company with the IO 2/48 Bn made a recce of the route. The plan proposed by Bde was to continue the operation from the area of the 2/15 Bn. The 2/24 Bn was to adv to the ry line and secure the necessary area to the north so that the 2/48 Bn could proceed with its original attack. In anticipation of this plan being put into effect both bns were ordered to move fwd from where they had remained on the "Diamond" and "Boomerang" tracks

/while

while the situation was obscure. Division made the 40 R Tanks available to operate with the 2/24 Bn and they were instructed to adv over the same route as 2/23 Bn.

The time element was the most serious consideration. It was difficult to obtain from the 23 Armd Bde an accurate time of arrival for the 40 R Tanks. The distances to be covered were considerable, and it appeared certain that if the attack could be completed before first light it would not be possible to move up the necessary sp arms and stores in sufficient time for reorganisation. The situation together with the foregoing facts were placed before Divisional HQ at 0345 hrs. Orders were received not to proceed further but to ensure that 2/23 Bn were reorganised securely in the posn they had gained, making contact with the 2/13 Bn on their right and 2/15 Bn on their left.

The 2/24 and 2/48 Bn's were ordered to return to their lying up areas in the vicinity of TELL HL EISA station. The remnants of 46 R Tanks returned to their rallying area to the south.

Exploitation

Reorganisation by the 2/23 Bn on the ground captured was complete by first light. They were unable however to gain contact with the left flanking bns until about 0800 hrs. By this time enemy fire on their front had decreased considerably. Patrols were pushed out during the morning. As these patrols made good, the ground was occupied by the bn. As a result the bn advanced some 1000 yds and made contact with the 2/13 Bn on their right. To maintain closer touch with the 2/15 Bn on the left the carrier pl was organised to take up a posn and fill this gap.

Handing over

Instns were received from 9 Aust Div that the 2/23 Bn was to come under comd 20 Aust Inf Bde, who would become responsible for the whole of the northern flank. At 1300 hrs on 29 Oct Bde HQ withdrew to the junction of the Main Rd and the "Diamond" track. Preparations were immediately put in hand for further operations.

Comments

The fact that confusion could exist in an operation with tanks and infantry means that something was wrong. It is difficult to assess the cause accurately. The following points would bear careful examination :-

- (a) Difficulties of navigation can be minimised by tanks moving with covers up, and the use of adequate lighting on routes even at the risk of possible detection by the enemy.
- (b) The German A Tk gunner with his better sights and freedom from turret restrictions has all the advantages in a night engagement. If the enemy A Tk strength is high heavy losses must be expected.
- (c) The need for extensive combined training so that commanders really know one another.
- (d) The operation must be under command of one officer. Tanks in support is not the answer. No move or change of plan must be made unless it covers both tanks and inf.

The inf being able to reorganise, and with considerably reduced numbers to attack, successfully suggests that the presence of the tanks may have seriously reduced enemy morale.

SECTION 7

PHASE IV

The attack to the Railway and the
main road

Conferences

On the afternoon of 29 Oct 42, a conference was held at 9 Aust Div Tac HQ at 1700 hrs. The situation on the army front was explained together with the regrouping of the German forces following our thrust to the north. The necessity for maintaining pressure on the coastal sector was emphasised. An outline of a proposed plan whereby this pressure could be continued was given. This was subject to certain definite info being received from 30 Corps and a further conference was arranged for 0700 hrs the following morning. At this second conference the Div plan was explained and tasks were allotted.

The Plan

20 Aust Inf Bde with 2/23 Bn still under comd were to remain in their present positions and hold these as a firm base. From this base 26 Aust Inf Bde was to carry out an attack which was an elaboration of that attempted on the night 28/29 Oct. This attack was to be made without tks although a regt was placed in sp. One bn was to adv from our present FDL on an approx bearing of 30 degrees, secure an area astride the main rd in the vicinity of Barrel Hill B11, and later link up with 2/15 Bn. From the area so secured two bns were to attack to the EAST astride the main rd, their objective being the enemy's FDL's. The right hand bn was then to attack THOMPSONS POST while the left hand bn exploited northwards to the coast. When the enemy's FDL's in the vicinity of Ring Contour 25 had been secured, a fourth bn was to adv from the Barrel Hill B 11 northwards to the coast, and reorganise facing west and east.

Troops Allotted

In addition to the bde less 2/23 Bn the following tps were placed under comd for these operations :-

One Bty 102 A Tk Regt RA
9 Aust A Tk Bty
B Coy 2/2 Aust MG Bn
2/32 Aust Inf Bn
2/3 Aust Pnr Bn
One sec 9 Aust Pro Coy

and in sp :

40 R Tanks
2/3 and 2/7 Aust Fd Coys

Staff Arrangements

Because of increased tps under comd and the complexity of the operations, 9 Aust Div made available two Staff offrs, one to assist on the "G" side and the other with the initial moves, 24 Aust Inf Bde made available their Staff Capt to assist where required. To enable the best use to be made of this additional staff the 26 Aust Inf Bde staff concentrated on the operations of the two bns of this bde while the divisional staff dealt with those of the 2/32 and 2/3 Pnr Bn. The two staff cpts assisted by offrs from Div HQ dealt with the initial moves of the whole group. The amount of work involved was large and the time available limited. The above arrangement worked excellently in practice and for the most part orders were available

/to

to bn comds in sufficient time to work out their own plans. Certain final details regarding movements were late. This caused trouble during the move fwd, however, it was straightened out and did not affect the operation.

Considerations

Once again careful consideration had to be given to timing. Each operation was dependent on the success and timing of the preceding one. The alternatives were :-

- (a) To give a firm zero for the first phase and fix the zero of each succeeding stage according to the action that took place.
- (b) To fix firm timings wherever possible but as a safeguard arrange for a code whereby the zeros could be altered. As two bns were concerned in the second stage it had to be clear that any alteration of the time must be agreed to by both commanders and a code was arranged accordingly. It was not considered that the final stage could be launched at a set time. A code was therefore incorporated in the Operation Order whereby a time could be given both to the Bn and to the CPA controlling the arty programme.

The next consideration was that of the supporting arms and reorganisation stores. Only one axis of adv would be available from our FDL, and this would necessitate crossing the ry line. From a recce this appeared to be a distinct embankment. Congestion was likely to occur and it would have been extremely difficult to supply four bns in sufficient time through the one bottleneck. "A" Echls were therefore to be divided into two flights. The first flight reduced to a minimum was to follow the bns. The second was to remain in such a posn that it could move around to the Main rd and old Matruh rd once these had been opened by the second stage of the attack. The posn chosen must also allow them to follow the first flight should these rds not be opened. The third important consideration was that of survey.

Survey

As described in PHASE III, searchlights were again arranged through the 24 Aust Inf Bde. On the night 29/30 Oct flares were sent up from the area of the 2/15 and 2/23 Bns. Successful readings were obtained by flash spotting on one pt only in the 2/15 Bn area. This was used as the datum point for fixing the start line in the first stage of these operations. It proved entirely successful.

Recce had confirmed that an Egyptian Barrack block marked on the map as being alongside the railway actually existed on the ground. This block later to become known as the "Blockhouse", was some 400 to 500 yds east along the ry line from the pt where the 2/32 Bn axis would cross. This bn was given the responsibility of determining exactly how far their crossing was from the "Blockhouse". This infm was to be passed by them to the 2/24 and 2/48 Bns. In actual practice the whole of these arrangements worked perfectly and no trouble was experienced in correctly laying start lines, or in obtaining correct direction in any stage of the operation. On the other hand the same recce made it clear that the telephone line from the coast to the railway through "Ring Contour 25" no longer existed on the ground. This was shown on all maps. It could not be used as was originally intended as a check on the distances to Bn objectives.

Stages and Tasks

Details of the operations are set out in 26 Aust Inf Bde OO No 24 dated 30 Oct 42. The attack was divided into four stages.

/Stage

Stage one was to be carried out by the 2/32 Bn with 289 Bty, 102 A Tk Regt RA and two pls of MGs under comd. Their task was to capture the enemy's posns astride the main rd in the vicinity of Barrel Hill "B 11", and form defensive flanks to the north, northwest and west. Behind this screen the two bns in the second phase would form up. At a later stage 2/32 bn was to link up with the 2/15 Bn south of the railway.

Stage two was to be carried out by the 2/24 and 2/48 Bns, and it involved the capture of the whole of the defences eastward to the enemy's FDL's from the ry 1200 yds to the North.

Stage three was to be carried by the same two bns as in stage two. 2/24 Bn was to attack THOMPSONS POST from the old Matruh rd on a bearing of 223 degrees grid, while at the same time 2/48 bn was to attack on a bearing of 55 degrees grid passing through the enemy's defences known as the "Clover Leaf" to the "Egg feature" on the coast.

Stage four was to be carried out by the 2/3 Pnr bn who were to adv north from the vicinity of "B11" to the coast on a bearing of 6 degrees grid, mopping up enemy defences and reorganising facing east and west

Arty

The arty sp under the control of the CRA 9 Aust Div consisted of the div arty, three fd regts 51 Highland Div, three fd regts 2 NZ Div, three RHA regts, 1 Armd Div, 146 Fd Regt RA, 7, 64 and 66 Med Regts RA. This made a total of 360 guns. The sp consisted of timed concentrations on known enemy localities with a barrage to cover the advance of 2/32 Bn in the first stage of the operation where details of enemy posns was not so well known.

Movements Fwd

From the areas occupied by the attacking bns two tracks led fwd from our FDL's namely the "Diamond" and "Boomerang" tracks. These united and formed one track directly south of Trig 29. The "New Diamond" track led off in a north westerly direction to Trig 29. As all tps had to move to a debussing area situated north of the trig 29 and in 2/15 Bn area, it was necessary to provide a return circuit so that assembly in the fwd area could be completed on time. To do this, the "Boomerang" track was continued and swung north to the west of Trig 29. This track was known as the "TENT" track. The "Diamond" track was extended to the east of Trig 29 and was marked and known as the "Guillotine" track. All bns used the "Diamond and Guillotine" tracks for fwd movement except the 2/48 Bn which moved up on the "Boomerang-Tent" tracks. All empty tp carrying tpt was returned via the latter track. This necessitated the supply and maintenance tpt of the 2/32 Bn being held back until the 2/48 Bn had debussed and the vehs were turned round.

Owing to the lateness of the order and to the inexperience of the provost personnel these arrangements did not work as smoothly as intended. Bns experienced a certain amount of difficulty straightening themselves out. These difficulties, however, were overcome with a sufficient time margin.

OPERATIONS - STAGE ONE

Objectives

The first stage was allotted to 2/32 Bn with 289 A Tk Bty and two pls "B" coy 2/2 Aust MG Bn under comd. The advance was divided into two objectives. The first a distance of approximately 2700 yds would carry the Bn over the railway line and enable them to secure enemy posts immediately to the north. The second a further 400 yds would secure the feature "B11", clear up posts to the north of the road, and enable the Bn to reorganise so that stage two could begin.

/ Certain

Certain enemy posts north of the road and to the west, although not to be occupied, were to be mopped up by this Bn.

Start Line

The start line was located in our own FDL's between the 2/15 Bn and 2/23 Bn. It was located by a traverse from the datum point already fixed by the flash spotters. Excellent work was done by the I sec and IO of this Bn in accurately determining the correct line. Because of its importance to the whole operations, this was further checked by a staff officer of Bde HQ.

Forming up

The Bn formed up with "A" coy on the right, "B" coy on the left, and "C" and "D" coys in rear. The Bn comd allotted a frontage of 300 yds to each coy. This seems to have been strictly maintained throughout the advance to the railway. Owing to delays at the debussing point the Bn did not cross the start line until 2210 hrs, ten minutes late.

Arty plan

The arty fire plan for this stage consisted of concentrations on the few known enemy posns with a barrage superimposed for the first objective. The timings throughout were on 100 yds in 3 mins. This was reported as holding troops up on several occasions but it seems more likely that the time available was not always used to the best advantage. A pause of 15 mins was allowed for on the first objective, with a further pause of the same duration before exploitation to certain enemy localities.

Advance to 1st objective

Although ten minutes late in starting the Bn had no difficulty in regaining touch with the barrage. In the later stages halts were frequent to allow the arty to lift. Throughout the advance opposition was considerable and continuous though not really determined or serious at any time. Over 175 prisoners from I Bn 361 Regt were taken up to the railway line.

Little if any attempt appears to have been made to clear up posts outside the Bn frontage. These posts were reported later to be harrasing traffic of this Bn. Other Bns passing later were forced to take action against a number of these posts. Up to this stage the casualties had not been heavy.

Advance to 2nd objectives

As soon as the railway line was reached the IO made a check for position. It was found that "B" coy was about 300 yds to the right. The necessary adjustment was made during the pause "B" coy continued the advance to the second objective on the left "C" coy on the right passed through "A" coy who remained just north of the railway with "D" coy to the south.

Fighting was much harder during the advance to the second objective. "B" coy suffered the bulk of its casualties at this time. "B" coy reached "B 11" and reorganised in that area. "C" coy were to push out westwards, north of the railway but failed to gain sufficient ground to properly clear the stage for the two bns following. "A" coy cleared along the line to the "Blockhouse".

Reorganisation

About this time the CO was severely wounded and evacuated. The battle 2 i/c took over and moved "A" and "D" coys to their posns

/south

south of the line. Here, too, the coys did not push out sufficiently far and although casualties were light, and both coys "huddled" far too close to the ry and so did not fill the gap between there and 2/15 Bn.

The railway embankment was found to be 12 ft high. The engr's blew the rails and dug out a crossing. This took time and it was not until 0130 hrs 31 Oct that "A" ech vehs moved over. In the meantime the enemy moved down the railway line from the west. He established posts and heavy fire was brought to bear on the gap. This caused casualties to men and vehs but the gap was kept open. For reasons not fully explained, the vehs of "B" coy failed to cross and the coy did not receive valuable reorganisation stores, the lack of which effected later operations. The A Tk Bty moved over and took up positions directly to the north. It is interesting to note that "B" and "C" coys mopped up no less than 100 PW from their area after first light. This had some bearing on stage two of the operations.

OPERATIONS - STAGE II

General

This stage covered the capture of the enemy defences astride the MAIN RD. The attack was to be made on a two-bn front, 2/24 Bn on the right, 2/48 Bn on the left, with a start line running north from the railway line to barrel "B 11". Debussing was carried out in the same area as 2/32 Bn, and the initial advance was over the same ground. After a number of delays in the MT movement forward, due to an internal relief of the Highland Div using the same track, 2/24 debussed shortly after 2/48 Bn. 2/48 Bn moved off first, astride the axis, with 2/24 Bn following. Minor mopping up had to be done during this move.

The COs of both bns moved together. This enabled them to confer immediately on any problems that arose. During the advance 2/24 Bn veered off and arrived at the railway line some distance to the left. This necessitated them moving through 2/48 Bn to reach their correct area.

Start line

As arranged in orders, a guide from 2/32 Bn met the 2/48 Bn on the railway, and took the IO of that Bn to a marker placed 250 yds west of the "Blockhouse". The tape laying party of 2/24 Bn had not yet arrived. The 2/48 Bn party immediately set to work and laid the tape line as far north as their tape allowed. The 2/24 Bn party later extended this to the MAIN RD.

There was a great deal of fire in the area north of the railway line. This appeared to be coming from the west of "B 11" and just north of the railway. The CO 2/48 Bn considered the advisability of sending a pl to deal with the posts concerned. He finally came to the conclusion that it would be better to send a coy to the north and a pl to the west. It was hoped in this way to completely clean up the posts as quickly as possible. C coy on the left and a pl of B coy on the right were ordered to advance in the direction of the MAIN RD and to clear up any opposition met. They were to return to the start line once this had been completed. "C" coy found and dealt with a pocket of resistance only 50 yds north of the railway line. As soon as they returned, the Bn comd ordered them to move 100 to 200 yds forward of the start line. This brought the coys into a depression that gave a certain amount of protection from enemy fire still coming from the west. The res coys, "A" and "D", were also pushed forward a short distance from the start line. As soon as this move was completed, the 2/24 Bn arrived on the start line. They did not see the 2/48 Bn and the CO thought they had already started.

/Under

Under this assumption 2/24 Bn was ordered to advance. No contact was made with the CO 2/48 Bn. The left fwd coy of 2/24 Bn realising the troops on their left were halted, went to ground some 100 yds east of the "Blockhouse". The CO 2/48 Bn, waiting on the start line and had to deal with the problem of a delayed start. He realised that owing to the clearing up operations they were some 15 mins behind the start time. Provision had been made in the Bde Order for re-firing or delaying the artillery programme. This, however, required 45 mins from the time the request was put through. He considered that, as the Bn had already advanced a certain distance towards the first objective, they could probably catch up with the artillery fire plan. It would therefore be better to move off immediately, than to wait in an exposed position, under enemy fire, for 45 mins.

This decision was communicated to the CO, 2/24 Bn, by means of a Bde LO in the area. Contact was re-established some 500 yds from the start line, and the advance to the first objective got under way. For the purposes of clarity, the advance of each Bn will be treated separately.

The advance of 2/24 Bn

"C" Coy was on the right and "B" Coy on the left with the old MATRUH RD forming the Bn axis of advance. "C" Coy moved forward with one section south of the railway line to give warning of any enemy positions in that area. Some 300 yds from the start line they were close up to the arty concentrations and had to halt for a few mins for them to lift. No trouble was experienced by this Coy, and they gained their objective with very few casualties and little fighting.

"B" Coy, on the other hand, encountered difficulties some 500 yds from the start line, and had to clean up a number of posts. They were finally held up some 200 yds short of their objective. "A" Coy, who were following immediately sent a pl to assist. Help was also forthcoming from "B" Coy 2/48 Bn. After heavy and sustained fighting in this area, "B" Coy, with one pl of "A" Coy, succeeded in gaining their positions on the first objective. Owing to the delay there was no pause and almost immediately "D" Coy, on the right, and "A" Coy, on the left, passed through. "A" Coy picked up their pl on the way.

Once again little opposition was encountered by the right hand coy, although they were under heavy fire from the higher ground to the left. "A" Coy were forced to fight the whole of the way after passing through the first objective. When some 700 yds from the final objective they struck very heavy opposition. At the same time "D" Coy came under heavy fire from the same area. "D" coy at once turned to assist "A" Coy, attacking the position from the southwest. Fighting was extremely heavy, and "D" coy, with only 6 unwounded survivors and no offrs withdrew west to the protection of the railway embankment. "A" Coy were able to hold on and reorganise in this area. The remnants of "D" Coy contacted Bn HQ, and when the situation was made known to the CO he ordered "A" Coy to withdraw south of the railway line also. They took up a position directly to the north of THOMPSONS POST.

At this stage the Bn comd had not yet received information passed through Division that THOMPSONS POST had been reported unoccupied by 20 Aust Inf Bde. As the Bn comd was wounded in this engagement, there has been no opportunity of obtaining at first hand his reactions and decisions during this period. It would appear, however, that he was gathering together sufficient forces to enable him to carry out stage three of the attack, namely, the capture of THOMPSONS POST.

In the meantime, "B" Coy had been considerably reduced by fire from the ridge. They pulled back to a position some 200 yds westward along the MATRUH track. They were ordered by the Bn to re-form once more **and continue along the line northward from "C" Coys position.** While moving up to carry out these instructions, they received further orders to join "A" and "D" coys south of the railway line. "C" coy, who were securely dug in by this time, were also ordered to conform.

/Shortly

Shortly after this movement was complete, the Bn comd received advice regarding THOMPSONS POST being empty. He decided to lead a patrol and satisfy himself that such was the case. This patrol, some 16 strong, penetrated through the wire and minefield, but when some 400 yds inside the post were fired on and suffered a number of casualties. The patrol then withdrew.

The Advance of 2/48 Aust Inf Bn

After a delayed start "B" coy on the right and "C" coy on the left advanced towards the first objective. Little enemy opposition was encountered until the main rd was crossed. "B" coy had to fight its way forward from the time it reached the bend in the rd. In addition to the opposition on its own front fire was coming from enemy positions in front of 2/24 Bn. One pl was sent to deal with this fire. This pl was successful and so assisted "B" coy 2/24 Bn to gain their objective. After crossing the main rd "C" coy had to fight forward over a series of ridges and encountered strong opposition in quarries to the north of the "PALM TREES". This opposition was so determined that the bn first objective was not gained until 0300 hrs

The bn was now well behind the timed programme and there was no possibility of them carrying out the attack to the coast, which formed their part of stage three, in conjunction with the prepared arty fire plan.

The two res coys followed closely behind. "B" and "C" coys were both drawn off to a flank and a gap developed between them. "A" coy moving immediately behind this gap encountered heavy opposition and were forced to fight their way forward for some distance to the approximate line of the bn first objective. In the fighting in this area all offrs of "A" coy became casualties.

In view of the fore going the bn comd came to the conclusion that due both to the time factor, and the heavy casualties sustained, he could hope to do no more than reach the enemy FDL's crossing the main road. "A" Coy was combined with "C" to form a composite coy. The attack now continued with three coys. "B" coy moved on the right close to the rd with the combined "A" and "C" on the left. "D" coy moved along the foot of the ridge and the low ground to the north.

The two coys on the right were able to fight a further 500 yds forward against increasingly stubborn resistance. When they had succeeded in clearing the enemy from the last ridge to the west of ring contour 25, the attack lost its momentum. This was entirely due to the losses sustained. Trouble developed on the right flank of "B" Coy. The Bn HQ gp went into action against an enemy post just south of the rd and remained in the area after successfully dealing with it.

"D" Coy had lost touch with the remainder of the bn and subsequently it was found that they had fought their way right into the enemy FDL's. Their casualties were extremely heavy, some 12 men being later found killed in this area. The coy, now consisting of 6 unwounded men, was withdrawn south of the rd. They missed the bns forward posn but later rejoined when the bn finally reorganised to the north of the "BLOCKHOUSE".

At approx 0430 hrs the bn comd decided to dig in close to the area reached by "B" coy and BHQ. While digging was in progress, efforts were made to contact 2/24 Bn. As they had by this time withdrawn south of the railway line, these efforts failed.

The Bn comd was now faced with a difficult situation. He held a posn approx midway between his first and second objectives with a total mustered strength of some 48 men, including some wounded. Touch with "D" Coy on the left had been completely lost. No contact had been made with 2/24 Bn and they were certainly not in the area on the right flank. The Bn comd then decided he must abandon his part of stage three. He concluded that he could best maintain the object of the attack by reorganising in closer touch with 2/32 Bn, forming a firm base which, if the 2/3 Pnr Bn was successful, would still

/ensure

ensure that the enemy was cut off in the coastal sector. At 0530 hrs this plan was put into effect and he was able to inform 2/24 Bn by wireless of the action he was taking.

The remnants of the bn withdrew towards "B 11" moving on the southern side of the main rd. By first light posns had been taken up to the east of "B 11".

OPERATIONS - STAGE III

For the reasons given in stage two, no action as contemplated in stage III, took place, with the exception of a patrol from 2/24 Bn which moved into "THOMPSONS POST" under the leadership of the CO.

OPERATIONS - STAGE IV

The attack to the north by 2/3 Aust Pioneer Bn

Movement to the Assembly Area

The 2/3 Pnr Bn moved along the "Diamond" track from their area north of the Main Road, taking with them only five vehs in the first flight of "A" ech. They arrived at the debussing area north of Trig 29 at approximately 2300 hrs, debussed, and formed up with two coys forward - C on the right, D on the left. The remaining Coy, "B" was in rear of C Coy. The Bn was led onto the 2/32 Bn's axis of advance and crossed that units start line at approximately 2310 hrs. After advancing some 300 yds, they were fired on by enemy machine guns from the right flank. The fire appeared to be general, and not specially directed at them, although casualties were suffered.

The CO ordered "B" Coy to deal with these, and a pl was detached for this purpose. This pl moved round the southern flank and succeeded in cleaning up the post, capturing some 40 prisoners and 6 spandaus. The remainder of the battalion continued to advance, arriving south of the railway a little after midnight. The Bn was halted and until 0330 hrs they laid up in the formation in which they had advanced. During this time certain trouble was experienced by fire from the railway line to the west. A patrol was detached from "B" Coy to deal with this opposition which, however, was cleared up by 2/32 Bn before the Pnr Bn party arrived. Some difficulty was experienced by the Engrs in making the necessary gap in the railway line, and a pl was detailed to assist.

Move to Start line

The start line had been laid from "B 11", on a bearing of 92 degrees grid. The Bn moved up to this line at approximately 0330 hrs with C Coy on the start line and D Coy some 200 yds in rear. "B" Coy took up a position just north of the railway line. Considerable difficulty was experienced by Bde in contacting the Pnr Bn. Finally contact was made through the wireless set of 2/32 Bn, and the code word "Broome 0425" was passed.

Further difficulty arose in ascertaining whether the Bn had actually crossed the start line on time. It was finally elucidated that they had crossed at 0335 hrs, some 10 mins late. The CRA was contacted, and arrangements were made for concentration No 53 to be re-fired.

Advance to First Objective

"C" Coy met with little opposition and collected a number of prisoners without any extensive fighting. They arrived on the first objective ahead of time. "D" Coy following close on their heels passed through without waiting for the pause of 15 mins. After advancing some 200 yds to the north, they were held up by our own arty

/fire

fire in the vicinity of Contour 5. The coy halted and waited for our fire to lift. When the concentration finally lifted, the Coy comd considered there was not sufficient time to enable him to reach his objective and reorganise before first light. He therefore dug in on the ground he held only some 200 yds forward of the first objective.

At first light all enemy fire had ceased. A number of the enemy could be seen moving about on a hill to the north, and the sand dunes on the coast. The coy comd of D coy at once sent out a fighting patrol of 16 men under an officer with orders to clean up the position to his immediate front. The Germans went to ground, and the patrol came under heavy fire. Only some four unwounded men were able to make their way back.

From approx 0730 hrs onwards enemy fire increased steadily. Under cover of this fire, mortars (both light and medium) were brought up by the enemy. Both "C" and "D" Coys were subjected to heavy mortar fire. This fire was maintained throughout the morning, and the enemy re-manned two 50 mm A Tk guns on the right flank, which had been dealt with previously, but not destroyed.

As the coy reorganisation stores had been dropped at bn HQ, "D" coy comd moved back to "C" coy to try and obtain more ammunition. Whilst away on this task, the enemy laid a smoke screen in front of "D" coy positions. The remaining offr, under the assumption that the Coy comd had been killed, took charge. It was reported that two coys of the enemy were seen through the smoke to be assembling for an attack. As the coys amm was low, this offr ordered the coy to withdraw. The coy comd, moving fwd, attempted to stop this move but was unsuccessful. As they withdrew they were joined by the greater part of C coy, although no orders had been given, and the offr of this coy remained in their positions.

The OC of D coy made his way fwd to his coy HQ, where the stretcher bearers, wounded personnel, and his batman had remained. He was unable to leave this position until that night. From there he was able to see the subsequent movements of the enemy tanks against "B 11".

"C" Coy now consisted of one whole pl and a portion of another. They were pinned to the ground by enemy fire, which increased as the enemy took up more advantageous positions both to their front and flank. Following the withdrawal of the forward coy, the Bn comd ordered B coy to withdraw to the vicinity of "B 11". The remaining two coys, largely without offr, withdrew south of the railway line, and were disorganised for some time.

REORGANISATION

With the exception of 2/32 bn, no bn attack had gone as originally planned. At first light 2/32 bn was holding a general line laid down for their reorganisation from "B 11" across the railway line towards 2/15 bn posn. The second coy just north of the railway line was further east than was intended while the two coys to the south of the line had not moved sufficiently far to fill the ground to the northern flank of 2/15 bn. The Pnr Bn had two coys within 500 yds of the coast with the third coy just north of the main rd. The 2/48 Bn had taken up a posn some 300 yds east of "B 11" facing north and to the east. One further post was established just north of the railway line. The bn comd considered that he could prevent any enemy breakout from his defences to the east. The 2/24 Bn were established south of the railway line in two areas about 200 yds apart. They were in a posn to extend the line of 2/48 Bn to the south; however in actual fact the posn became one of res to the left coys of 2/32 bn.

Following the withdrawal of the forward coys of 2/3 Pnr Bn, their "B" coy moved back at approx 1200 hrs to a posn between "B" coy 2/32 Bn and the left of 2/48 Bn.

/Enemy

Enemy Counter Attacks

Several counter attacks developed from the west, both north and south of the railway. The earlier attacks were made by inf of seldom more than a coy strength. They were not pushed home and the defensive arty fire halted them. Some of these counter attacks were engaged by MMGs but in one case only, south of the railway, did they obtain any effective shooting.

The first serious counter attack developed at approx 1130 hrs when the enemy used tks. "D" coy comd Pnr Bn, who remained in the original coy area, had a clear view of the initial moves of the enemy armour. Fifteen Mk IV and Mk III's advanced along the coast track until they were directly north of "B 11". They then formed into line, advanced south avoiding high ground, swung to the west and came in on the south of the road. At the same time inf advanced from the west north of the ry line.

40 R Tanks accompanied by 2/7 Fd coy, moved to the west of "THOMPSONS POST" after gaps had been cleared in the extensive minefields into the area of "B 11" in sp. They finally took up hull down posns just to the east of 2/48 Bn, and were able, in conjunction with 298 A Tk Bty, to engage the enemy tks effectively and stop their advance. The enemy tks withdrew to the north and rallied in the area previously held by "D" Coy 2/3 Pnr Bn.

At approx 1400 hrs a further attack was delivered from this area which succeeded in breaking into the posns held by "B" Coy 2/32 Bn and capturing a number of prisoners. Due to the fire of our tks and A Tk guns, this attack was again forced to withdraw to the same area. One Mk III was set on fire and several others were immobilised the latter later being recovered by the enemy. One 88 mm, attempting to come into action to sp this attack, was knocked out and the towing veh set on fire by a 6 pr.

Soon after 1600 hrs the final attack for that day commenced. The tks again approached along the same route and worked around to the north of the 40 R Tanks. They suffered several casualties throughout the day and lost at least 8 tks during their final withdrawal. They failed to penetrate our positions and at last light were seen to withdraw to the same area close to the coast.

Throughout the whole of these attacks the restricted area about "B 11" occupied by our tps was under almost continuous heavy shell fire. It was decided to re-group the available tps during the night so that the posn would be more securely held against expected attacks the following morning. The re-grouping was on the following basis. The 2/48 Bn was to remain in its present position. 2/24 Bn was to fill the area between their right flank and the railway line. The remnants of "B" coy 2/32 Bn, which had been severely handled during the days fighting, were to be withdrawn south of the railway line. "C" coy was to extend the bn posn to the left and effect a junction with 2/15 Bn. The Pnr Bn, now reorganised on a two coy basis, was to be responsible for the western line between "B 11" and the railway. Steps were being taken to implement this plan when advice was received from 9 Aust Div that 2/24 and 2/48 Bns would be relieved by the remaining bns of 24 Aust Inf Bde (2/28 and 2/43).

Relief

As both the 2/28 and 2/43 Bns were almost up to strength it was obvious that they could not take over the posns now occupied by the two bns of this bde. The 2/43 Bn moved into the 2/48 Bn's posn and extended it considerably. For reasons not yet made clear, 2/3 Pnr Bn did not continue with the scheme agreed to. The necessary alterations were made by the 2/32 Bn. This led to some confusion and finally 2/28 Bn moved into the general area of "B 11" facing west and north. The Pnrs were used to fill the gap between the 2/32 and 2/15 Bns.

/Comments

Comments

The whole of these operations was carried out with a view to destroying the enemy's grip on the coastal sector. Although not according to plan, they finally succeeded in forcing the enemy to withdraw. This, in conjunction with the armoured breakthrough further to the south, started the enemy on his long withdrawal to the west. The concentrations and moves involved in this operation were complicated and difficult. However, due to untiring and excellent staff work, all units were on their start lines very close to the actual times set out. The main brunt of the attack fell on the two weakest bns the 2/24 and 2/48. They carried out an attack with the arty firing concentrations in reverse thus preventing them moving as close up as in previous attacks. Despite this disadvantage it was only lack of numbers and casualties suffered that prevented them from reaching their objectives. In spite of the hammering they had received these bns were still able to maintain a front and hold it against enemy counter attacks.

The lateness of the attack, together with the lack of battle experience, were the two main factors responsible for the failure of 2/3 Pnr Bn, firstly, to gain their objective even with light casualties, and secondly, to maintain the posns gained. Their inability to get reorganisation stores fwd would have seriously affected their ability to hold on had they remained till the tk attacks developed. No A Tk guns reached the two fwd coys.

Once again, quite apart from reduced numbers, there was the tendency for units to huddle in a confined area. This huddling allows very little flexibility in a posn and makes the preparation of a really effective defensive scheme difficult. It is one of the pts which must be watched for and guarded against in future operations.

The movement of enemy tks through the marsh area near the coast came partly as a surprise. Based on previous experiences in similar country it was considered unlikely that this area would be used by tks. Subsequently a track, following a low sandy strip running through the marsh area, was found. This could not be seen from our posns.

SECTION VIII

PHASE V

The holding of the coastal sector and the movement to occupy the evacuated enemy posns 2 Nov

On relief 26 Aust Inf Bde was to take over the firm base held by 24 Aust Inf Bde in the TELL EL EISA - TRIG 33 - COASTAL AREA. To effect the relief it would be necessary to leave this area temporarily unmanned 9 Aust Div Cav were accordingly given the roll of holding this area with standing patrols until such time as 26 Aust Inf Bde was in posn.

On 1 Nov the Cav pushed patrols fwd towards the enemy defs along the coastal sector and south of the railway towards "THOMPSONS POST". Very little fire came from the enemy posns although reports indicated that the area was still held. During the night 1/2 Nov inf patrols pushed out towards the enemy FDL's and reported them still manned. During 2 Nov it became evident that the enemy was not holding the posn in any great strength. One sqn of Cav working on foot was ordered fwd to test if he still retained A Tk weapons in the defences. This patrol moved wouth of the main rd towards ring contour 25 and reported the feature clear of enemy. It was occupied that night by 2/24 Bn. 2/48 Bn moved into the TELL EL EISA area.

The following day patrols moved fwd and made contact with 20 Aust Inf Bde in the vicinity of "B 11". The enemy continued to shell his own defs, and any movement seen in them, for the next two days, until he was forced to withdraw from the SIDI AHD EL RAHMAN area.

General conclusions and lessons

Numerous lessons are brought out in the extensive operations carried out by this bde. Many of the lessons are old ones but a number of new and interesting points also emerge. These have been mentioned throughout this report and in a number of papers in answer to questions to higher authority.

Briefly the outstanding lessons are :-

1. A sound and practiced battle drill capable of carrying tps through heavy continuous fighting.
2. Careful planning and study of detail.
3. A prepared and planned reorganisation scheme for every operation.
4. Coy, pl and man loads or packs depending on the requirements of each operation.
5. Thorough training with, where possible, complete rehearsals.

Throughout this report there has been little mention of the determination and outstanding gallantry of the tps - the operations speak for themselves.

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SECRET

APPENDIX "A" to 26 Aust Inf Bde
Report on Ops

THE ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR "LIGHTFOOT"

PRELIMINARY ARRANGEMENTS

Deception Plan

In September 42 when the plan was first evolved for the LIGHTFOOT ops a deception plan was put into being. The substance of the plan was unknown to any but a few. Around Pt 26, 90 B ech vehs were dispersed each Bn supplying 30 vehs and the "park" was thickened by the addition of an equal number of dummy vehs. These vehs were made of hessian on a wood frame so that when photographed from the air they resembled Army MT (3-ton, 30 cwt and 1-ton types). Before being erected, tracks were made leading to each dummy posn and these were freshened and the dummies moved overnight from time to time. After a particularly squally period when rain fell the crews of the MT who camped alongside the dummy vehs had to do some smart work to restore the dummies before enemy A/C were over to do a Photo R. This area was to be used by arty during the actual ops.

About 14-18 Oct 42, Hard Rations were issued to all tps in EIGHTH ARMY as a means of misleading the civilians who handled rations farther back into thinking that the attack would be made earlier than it was; and then with the continuation of normal rations this view would be frustrated or at least would confuse their minds as to the actual date of ops commencing on a large scale.

B Ech

On 20 Oct the Bde moved from the TEL EL SHAMMAMA area to a posn NW of ALAMEIN Sta between the rd and the sea, with the exception of B ech which were placed in the area south of the rd at ALAM EL MILH. Each B ech was self contained and included Bn LOB personnel who were on the scale of approx 3 offrs and 35 ORs per Bn. Bde LAD was in the same area with Bde HQ B ech. All units were maintained from their B echs with vehs going fwd before dusk to the Unit Fwd Assembly Area and then fwd to units under cover of darkness.

Div Adm Area

This was established near HAMMAM to provide an area in which all MT not absolutely necessary could be parked to give the maximum dispersion in the fwd area. These gps of vehs were self contained (approx 25 vehs from the Bde) and from the time of arrival there were used by higher formation for deception purposes elsewhere in the Corps area.

Amn

Units held complete first-line scale of all types at 1700 hrs 20 Oct after which replenishment instead of from the AASC Coy att to the Bde was from an AP in the SHAMMAMA area. From 1700 hrs 23 Oct a Res AP was opened at Kilo 101 on the main rd.

During the July ops it was found that fwd units ran short of amn and to avoid a repetition of this, a Bde Res Dump was specially authorised by Div and was placed on the ground off the Diamond track west of the "PIMPLE". This dump was actually created by the SC just fwd of our FDLs under cover of darkness on 22 Oct. It was split into three equal dumps and a covering party from 2/43 Bn prevented interference from enemy patrols prior to ZERO. This dump was under control SC for use by bns as required and consisted of:

/s. 303 Amn.

.303 Amn 200,000 rds
3 MOR HE 4,500 bombs
2 MOR HE 3,000 "

In addition each Bn supplied one 3-ton veh loaded with 1/3 of normal first-line holdings of all types which also came under control SC at Fwd Bde HQ. This system was found to be extremely useful and this res was used more than that on the ground. Amn was demanded by bns by phone to SC.

Sups

Prior to 21 Oct Rations were drawn from Bde Gp Sup Pt on a "fresh scale"; but from 22 Oct dry rations were issued and this system continued throughout the ops although bread was sometimes available instead of biscuits.

Cooking was done at Bn B ech and the evening meal carried fwd in "hot boxes" to coys under cover of darkness. Breakfast and the midday meal were "hard" and carried on the man to be consumed as opportunity offered.

Emergency Rations

Although Emergency (chocolate) rations were issued when the Bde came into the Western Desert in July a check carried out on 18 Oct indicated a deficiency of approx 50% in the Bde Gp. This quantity (approx 2,400 rations) was very difficult to obtain in the limited time available before D day; the deficiency showed poor interior economy in the units concerned. The shortage was ultimately delivered to Bde HQ at 1700 hrs 23 Oct but despite the fact that one bn was already in the lying up area all tps went into action with the emergency ration.

POL

Until 20 Oct pet was supplied from tankers in bulk to unit 44 gall drums. After this date when all veh tks were filled each veh carried 100 miles res in 4 gall non-returnable containers (flimsy) and all unit pet trucks carried full loads. Replenishment was from 4-gall tins from a Div PP at Kilo 102. From the above date supplies did not permit res being replaced and veh tks only could be filled.

Water

There was never any real shortage of water although from 23 Oct units were restricted to 1 gall per man per day. The supply was from the main pipe line from ALEXANDRIA following the ry with Water Pts at ALAMEIN Sta and TEL EL ALAMEIN. Water was drawn by Unit water trucks and distributed through B echs to tps (with the rations) in 2 gall water cans.

Medical

The Div plan included two Fd Ambs fwd, one on the Coast and one on the main rd both having an ADS fwd. The main line of evacuation was Eastward along the main rd to Kilo 101 where an Amb control pt was established under the ADMS. At this pt amb cars were directed to the evacuation pt considered most suitable (a) for the type of wound and (b) having due consideration to the congestion in the various clearing centres. This system worked admirably. Surgical teams and blood transfusion units were located at the MDS. Stretcher bearers were normally distributed at 4 per coy but suffered by casualties when it was found necessary to detail riflemen

/for

for this task. One amb car was att to each bn for evacuating to ADS. As soon as this amb car passed the control pt another amb car was sent back to the bn. The movement of these vehs fwd to RAPs was frequently hampered by hy shelling.

Burials

In order to concentrate graves as far as possible and to avoid isolated burials a bde cemetary (in conjunction with 20 Aust Inf Bde) was established NE of TEL EL EISA Sta about kilo 104 north of main rd, this being approx 10 kilos fwd of the main cemetary at EL ALAMEIN Sta. Originally units were expected to dig any graves required but actually Div supplied a small working party from various LOB details in the Div to layout and assist to dig graves.

Rec

The Div plan initially incl fwd rec posts at the ALAM EL MILH area with Rec Secs at HAMMAM. Bde LAD was to evacuate from fwd units to Rec Posts. The Bde LAD was also situated in the ALAM EL MILH area, this being some 17 kilos from TEL EL EISA Sta.

Pro

A fully organised Pro system extending from Corps to Div made all rd movement very easy. Sign posting by actual signs being a feature of the rd control. Most routes were marked with a sign e.g. Boomerang track which had galvanised iron cut in the shape of a Boomerang att to stakes and placed every $\frac{1}{4}$ mile or so along the track.

On the Div front the routes Westward were known as Main rd (two way traffic) and the Coast rd which linked up to the South with the Diamond (26 Bde) and Square (20 Bde) routes. Eastward from the FDLs were the Boomerang (26 Bde) and Double Bar (20 Bde) leading to the Main rd and the Sea track. The Main rd was the only two way rd in the Div area. Bde responsibility commenced where the Diamond track left the Main rd and ceased where the Boomerang track met the Main rd. Bde Pro Det provided the small amount of traffic control necessary.

All routes off the main rd were lit from 23 Oct with electric battery lamps showing the sign indicating the rd but these lights were stolen shortly after ops commenced and the tracks were not again lit.

Minefd gaps were marked with the normal red and green lights and axis of adv were also lit at night.

Amenities

Canteens

Fwd canteens which supplied the normal commodities closed on 22 Oct and Mob canteens with limited stocks (excl beer) opened on 28 Oct. Purchases were made by unit canteens which were distributed from B ech with the rations.

Leave

Up to 19 Oct a liberal leave roster was operating for 6 days leave to CAIRO and ALEXANDRIA for both offrs and ORs; no further leave was granted from this date until the Bde left the Western Desert.

Mail

Deliveries were made just prior to and during the battle but

/the

the shipping posn from Australia controlled this more than any of the enemy actions at EL ALAMEIN.

PARTICULAR PROBLEMS

"A"

Strength States

These were rendered irregularly and inaccurately. Priority of comms in battle must be given to ops but it was not sufficiently realised how important the infm on the strength state is to the Div, Corps and Army Comd. Although often contacted by phone, bn adjts frequently could not give the strength of their units together with numbers of casualties even as late as 1600 hrs in the day for the posn as at 0600 hrs that morning. As some state had to be in at Div by 1600 hrs for transmission to Corps the figure was arrived at by taking into consideration reported numbers dead and missing and adding to these the figures for wounded supplied by the medical services plus arbitrary assessment of casualties not reported. This was not satisfactory and it was some days after the Bde withdrew from contact with the enemy that the exact posn was known. In one case the medical services reported a certain number of one bn as having been evacuated through ADS but even after 10 days the unit's aggregate total wounded did not reach this figure which was given on the third day of the battle.

Reports on Killed and Missing

Several instances occurred where soldiers had been reported "killed" and later found to be wounded or missing. In the interests of the Next of Kin at least, no soldier should be reported killed unless the body can actually be found and, normally, a burial return be made out.

Desertion and Fear State

A number of cases occurred of desertion. Few of these were convicted of desertion by Court Martial the majority being found AWL. "Fear state" appeared to be the predominating factor in causing these men to quit. This raises a problem of some magnitude, the soldier who has fear state reports sick at the RAP and is probably evacuated whilst another soldier probably braver "sticks it out" until he "cracks" and then goes AWL and is subsequently dealt with by Court Martial. In many cases both types should be evacuated with "fear state".

Reinfts

No drafts of reinfts arrived during the battle although quite a number of men evacuated with minor wounds returned to their units whilst the ops were still in progress.

Burials

A small number of men were buried in isolated graves, chiefly caused by bns being pinned down in daylight and so preventing vehs being brought fwd to evacuate the dead to Bde cemetery. After the ops, all bns made sweeps over their battle areas and exhumed the bodies buried in isolated graves and re-buried them in the Bde cemetery. It was found that in some cases the enemy had buried four or five bodies of Australian soldiers in one hole and it was fortunate that the Bde was located in the same approximate area after the enemy withdrew thus enabling the maximum number of killed to be located. Approximate total buried in Bde cemetery was 180 not all

/of

of whom were from this Bde.

"Q"

Losses in Controlled Stores

Bns on the whole reported these losses very promptly and in turn Div were advised. There was no Bde or Div res of controlled stores and all demands received by Q(SD) at Div were passed to Corps who quickly made good most losses, the average time taken to supply replacement stores was four days from the receipt of the message stating the loss at Main Bde HQ.

Losses in Vehs

Veh losses were not reported as quickly as they might have been with the resultant delay in replacement; but as with controlled stores Q(SD) at Div replaced all vehs incl carriers (but excl portees) in very quick time.

Amn

The expenditure of amn was not as great as was anticipated so that the res dump established under control of the SC was not all used when the Bde was relieved by 24 Aust Inf Bde to whom it was handed over. The mob res vehs proved invaluable and were frequently used to replace bn deficiencies, which they in turn replenished from Div AP.

Rec

The veh casualties were exceptionally lt but for those vehs which were damaged the LAD was required to send its breakdown veh fwd the necessary 17 or more kilos to evacuate the casualty. It had been laid down by Div that B ech incl LAD would be in the ALAM EL MILH area but this was apparently only intended up to Zero after which the B ech could have been moved fwd as space on the ground permitted. In the event of any adv the LAD was too far back and on future occasions efforts should be made to keep it as well fwd as possible. The LAD required guides to be supplied at some well known RV before they would tackle a rec job from a minefd and for this purpose Pro Det were very useful.

PW

PW were passed back from the leading coys and bns under bn escorts to Bde PW cage established fwd of Bde HQ where Bde escorts (4 Pl 2/1 Aust HQ Gd Bn) took over. From this cage 24 Aust Inf Bde vehs moved PW to Div cage. During the whole ops approx 727 PW passed through the Bde cage, however, many PW were loaded into any available trucks in the fwd area and sent direct to Div cage while quite a number of PW captured by this Bde were escorted to 20 Aust Inf Bde cage. As PW were not in the Bde cage for more than 1 hr no arrangements for feeding them were necessary.

Traffic

The chief problems with traffic control were the removal of signs used for marking routes e.g. Diamond track signs. These were either wilfully removed or knocked down by tks or other MT at night; but whatever the cause the result of their removal may have had disastrous results. Again at night lighting of the tracks ceased after 24 Oct because of the removal of the lamps used.

/Salvage

Salvage

The quantity of material salvaged during the actual ops was not great but included the following:

Tanks Mk 13		1
Hy Vehs (in going order)	British Type	5
	Enemy	12
Carriers	British	3
Fd Guns	German	7
A Tk Guns	Enemy	24
88 m.m DP AA/AT Guns		4
Mortars	Enemy	14
Mortars	British (Spigot)	1
LMGs	British	3
	Enemy	95

After the ops, however, a special drive was made and a large quantity of enemy amn was salvaged as well as pet containers of all types from Jerrycans to 44 gall drums and many other items, the total number of 3-ton lorry loads delivered to Salvage depot from 23 Oct to 30 Nov was 127.

Intercomm

From Zero the SC remained with fwd Bde HQ to handle A and Q matters from the bns in action. The SC(L) was at Main HQ with Bde Sup O, Office truck and clerks. TO was at B ech with LAD. Telephone comm between main Bde and fwd Bde HQ was very poor and although initially a direct line was laid this was disrupted by the passage of tks and never repaired. In addition to line comm, main Bde HQ had for the first few days a W/T set with fwd Bde, and also an Adm link W/T set which remained on a net with AQ at Main Div. After main Bde moved from the original area NW of EL ALAMBIN Sta to the area East of the Bde cemetery on 29 Oct, it was out of all line or wireless comm with fwd Bde or Div, the only comm being one Pro Det M/C. B ech was connected initially with main Bde through a series of exchanges and party lines but comm was never satisfactory and messages had to be relayed or sent by DR. This meant that LAD was out of touch with fwd tps except by DR which would take over an hr to get from fwd Bde HQ to B ech. It is suggested that main Bde forms no real purpose in being a separate entity and that it could well be combined with B ech into a "Rear HQ"; comms at least would be simpler.

SUMMARY

The whole of the Adm plans worked extraordinarily well due to first rate planning on the highest scale, nothing was wanting. The planning removed from the Adm Staff on Bde HQ any real problems and left an easily worked and self adjusting scheme.

Casualties

23 Oct to 1 Nov 42	<u>Killed</u>		<u>Wounded</u>		<u>Missing</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>Offrs</u>	<u>ORs</u>	<u>Offrs</u>	<u>ORs</u>	<u>Offrs</u>	<u>ORs</u>	<u>Offrs</u>	<u>ORs</u>
Bde HQ incl Sig Sec, Gd Pl, LAD	-	1	1	5	-	-	1	6
2/23 Aust Inf Bn	1	24	15	162	-	5	16	191
2/24 Aust Inf Bn	3	64	18	278	-	6	21	348
2/48 Aust Inf Bn	6	84	14	235	1	6	21	325
Total	10	173	48	680	1	17	59	870

Annexures A1,2 and 3 att show the bn strength states diagrammatically.

This appendix includes a summary of I infm with

Annexure B1	Progress trace of PHASE 1
B2	" " " " 2
B3	" " " " 3
B4	" " " " 4
B5	Trace of Key Pts, Geographical names, routes and tracks.

INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY OF INFM

Ref Maps: EL ALAMEIN, GHAZAL, HIQEIF, 1/50,000 Defences Overprint.
SIDI ABD EL RAHMAN, WESHKA, MAKH-KHAD, 1/25,000 Defences Overprint

General

In June, the enemy advanced into Egypt, overran our defences at MERSA MATRUH, and was finally halted in the vicinity of ALAMEIN. This halt was brought about, firstly, by Allied counter attacks, and secondly, because of the enemy's extended lines of comm.

It was soon evident that he intended to dig in on this line, and consolidate, preparatory to a further thrust towards the Delta.

The Axis forces were divided into two gps: (1) GERMAN (2) ITALIAN, each of which was again subdivided into (a) Infantry (b) Armour.

In the search for infm, these gps were kept in mind as it was realised that the fighting qualities of the ITALIAN tps fell far below that of the GERMANS.

Even after some weeks, little was known of the Admin, Supply and Reinft arrangements of the enemy, and thus the period of time required prior to the advance being continued, could not be gauged.

Source

Infm was available from the usual sources, namely, aerial photographs, patrols, observation posts, prisoners of war, captured documents, etc. Patrolling proved of great importance from the Bde's point of view as it gave the tps first hand knowledge of the enemy defences and the ground over which they would have to attack.

Infm available early in October

It was early realised that the GERMAN High Command was worried about the morale and fighting qualities of their ITALIAN allies and reports from patrols and interrogation of PW confirmed our suspicion that ITALIAN units were being "sandwiched" in between GERMAN units. It therefore became of great importance to discover the exact locations of these odd ITALIAN units in the enemy order of battle. Much of the infm was obtained from aerial photographs but very little was known of the minefields between the ry and WEST Pt 23. Prior to being relieved by 24 Bde in the Coastal Sector, a number of patrols were sent out with the express purpose of locating the enemy minefields and obtaining all the infm possible. It was discovered that one suspected field did not exist but very valuable infm was obtained regarding fields in the area in which we were particularly interested.

Observation Posts, placed well fwd of our FDLs, and manned by offr, also gained much valuable infm at this stage.

Air photographs were controlled through 30 Corps. The front was photographed approximately every four days as a matter of routine, mainly in connection with overprint maps. Special strips or photos

were requested by Bde through Div to Corps. These requests were usually complied with, though owing to weather conditions and delays, the photos were not always available when required. It is felt that better value could have been obtained from air photos in the initial stages if they had been more readily available and later if the time lag could have been reduced. During the final period before the attack, all the available infm was collated by an offr of Bde staff.

Enemy Defences

The defences ran from the Coast at MARSAL HAMRA to Kilo 110, with a tongue of fwd posts to Kilo 89, thence to a strong pt, THOMPSON'S POST. From this pt, the line extended southwards to a defended locality in the area of WEST Pt 23, thence SE to RUIN RIDGE.

There were two lines of defence, varying from 2 to 4 Kms apart, and running parallel to each other.

The fwd line was wired and mined and in comparison to the second line was lightly held. The presence of this first line permitted of the uninterrupted development of the main defences in the rear. By night, listening posts were maintained fwd of the FDLs and by day, outpost posns and OPs were manned.

The fwd and rear lines of defence were connected laterally by further defended lines running generally in an EAST-WEST direction at intervals of 4 to 5 Kms. The result, as may be seen on the maps, was a series of hollow squares. Three sides of these squares were mutually supporting, and in the event of a breakthrough in the FDLs, defensive fire could be concentrated inside them. However, an attack along the whole front would prevent the enemy from concentrating his arty on any one area and so make the task of penetration much easier.

O of B

The enemy had at his disposal four GERMAN and nine ITALIAN Divisions as follows :-

<u>GERMAN</u>	<u>ITALIAN</u>
164 Inf Div	27 Brescia
90 Lt Div	Folgore
15 Armd Div	101 Trieste
21 Armd Div	102 Trento
	25 Bologna
	17 Pavia
	16 Pistoia
	133 Ariete - Armd
	133 Littorio - Armd

164 Div was known to be holding the Northern Sector from the Coast to the vicinity of 292 Northing grid with possibly one or two ITALIAN Bns incl. 125 Regt was in the North, 382 Regt in the centre, and 433 Regt in the South. At least one Coy of a Bn of 62 Inf Regt was known to be holding the fwd line immediately North of WEST Pt 23, and it was assumed that the remaining coys of this Bn were disposed in depth on the second line of defence. There was also reason to believe that either the "Cloverleaf" or "Leg of Mutton", was being held by ITALIANS.

Central Northern Sector

The tps in this area were disposed in considerable depth and there were two strongly defended localities in area RING CONTOUR 25 and WEST Pt 23. A strong-post was also located at THOMPSON'S POST. The hollow square was clearly evident in this sector with the centre of the square some 2 Kms NW of WEST Pt 23. ITALIAN forces were in posns flanked by GERMANS.

Bn areas were not clearly defined due to the fact that odd ITALIAN coys were incl and because of the depth of the defences in general.

Because of the open and vulnerable flanks and the fluidity of desert ops, the GERMAN unit was the Coy rather than the Regt or Bn. Each Coy had a balanced armament with ATK guns and HMGs which were

decentralized down to pls. This accounted for several coys being disposed some considerable distance from their parent Bns. All round defensive measures were always adopted. Coy frontages averaged 750 metres with a depth of some 400 - 450 metres.

Posns for hy weapons were dug near protective LMGs situated to both flanks and towards the rear, the LMG posns being connected to the hy weapon pits by crawl trenches. The average frontage of these V shaped posns was 30 metres, the majority being sited in the main defensive line and not in the FDLs.

All fire plans of both arty and automatic weapons were arranged, not only to fire fwd of all posns, but also to actually fire on the posns in the event of their being overrun.

Arty

Gun posns were located in rear of the second line defences and were liable to rapid and frequent change of posn. They were normally guarded by protective tps. Guns were disposed so that defensive fire could be put down at any pt along the front, and, in particular, to enable fire to be concentrated in the area of the hollow squares. Approx 150 guns could be brought to bear on each square, whilst further guns could be switched to any threatened area in the event of localized attack. Any attack in the area of the northern hollow square would encounter intensive arty fire of which a maximum of 4 hy, 17 med, 33 fd and 12 D.P. guns could be employed from NORTH of 300 Northing grid. D.P. 88 mm guns were also employed and normally fired airburst HE shells. It was anticipated that this gun would be made use of at every opportunity in the forthcoming ops.

ATk guns

A variety of ATk weapons was at the disposal of the enemy and he appeared to be well supplied with all types, his main ATk armament consisting of 88 mm, 50 mm, 47/32 (Italian) and 37 mm, as well as smaller calibres. These guns were sited in depth to cover all main approaches and although the bulk of his weapons was in his main line of defence, many, incl 88 mm, had been brought well fwd towards the FDLs to counter any local penetration.

Mobile Reserve

The employment of armour in the fwd area was limited by extensive mining and wiring. With local penetration, any counter attack, therefore, was likely to be delivered by Coys of Inf Bns sited to the rear.

The Armd forces available were 15 Armd Div, with HQ about 6 Km West of Pt 29, and Littorio Div. Each had an estimated strength of 120 tks.

The latest infm pointed to the formation of three battle gps in the Northern Sector. These gps were thought to be a combination of GERMAN and ITALIAN units, despite the difference of performance, fuel, and procedure, which, so far had been regarded as a certain bar to the close co-operation of the GERMAN and ITALIAN armour on similar lines to that of Inf formations.

Each gp was considered to consist of 90 tks, plus supporting arms, the anticipated dispositions being -

SOUTH OF SIDI ABD EL RAHMAN
EL WISHKA 867291
EL AQQAQIR 860297

Further tk concentrations were along 860 grid between 300 and 290 northings and in the area EAST of 866 easting and between 301 and 299 northings.

Smaller gps of up to 10 tks were likely to be employed in the fwd area for immediate counter attack roles at first light. Four tks dug in 3 Kms SW of the PIMPLE could be used in this manner.

There was no indication of any proposed formation of a tk bn to operate with 90 Lt Div which was at GHAZAL.

Minefields

There was no shortage of mines, and British, Egyptian, (captured in Tobruk), Italian and German mines were used in large numbers throughout the defences. (Details of located minefields are shown on the Defences Overprint). Most of the fields incl anti-personnel mines (Italian B4 type) and it was also known that aerial bombs and mines were connected to accumulators so that they could be electrically discharged.

Subsequently, both bombs and mines were found in the enemy defences in the vicinity of THOMPSON'S POST.

During the ops, several unknown fields were discovered, the presence of which had not been disclosed on aerial photographs.

Although the enemy scattered mines indiscriminately in several places fwd of his FDLs, his main fields conformed to the normal layout, namely, 5 or 6 rows, with approx 10 yds between mines and rows. The fields were normally marked by a cattle fence or single dannert and in some cases the mines were only partially buried and thus were easily discernible.

Details of Units

164 Div: 9000 men; 24 Fd, 180 ATK, 18 75 mm Inf guns; 200 MT.
Trento Div: 4600 men; 40-48 Fd, 70 ATK guns, minimum MT.

W.E. Bn of 125 (or 382) Inf Regt

Bn consisted of four Coys, each of three pls, each of four secs. The Coys were in the process of reorganisation on the African model which provided for an establishment per coy of

- 3 5 cm ATK guns
- 3 "Model 41" ATK guns (28/20)
- 3 81 mm mortars
- 18 LMGs
- 2 HMGs

To what extent this reorganisation had been carried out was not known, but it was unlikely that 164 Div would be fully equipped. At the time, a Bn was thought to have about 500 men, 16 5 cm ATK guns, 6 81 mm mortars, 9 5 cm mortars, 12 HMGs and 35 LMGs.

W.E. Bn 62 Inf Regt

Strength - about 500 men.

Bn consisted of four Coys organised on the "AS 43" scale which provided for:-

- 3 47 mm ATK guns
- 3 20 mm ATK rifles
- 3 HMGs
- 3 LMGs

It was thought that these figures represented the holdings at the time, whilst the Bn would probably have an allotment of 3 hy mortars from the Regt.

Infm during ops

Prior to the commencement of ops, it was arranged that all PW would be sent back to collecting pts and from there, as quickly as possible, to the Div Cage, where a selection for interrogation by Div interrogator, would be made. As the collecting pts were, in most cases, some distance from Bde HQ, it was found that many prisoners passed through without the knowledge of Bde. Because of this, identifications were not obtained until the prisoners reached the Div cage.

On two occasions, the Div Interrogator went fwd to Bde HQ to interrogate prisoners as the infm which might have been obtained would have been of immediate importance in an impending attack.

In the case of one Bn, PW were asked the normal questions through the help of a Sgt who spoke German. The infm so obtained would have been useless had the PW been sent straight back to the collecting pt.

It would appear that in similar ops in the future, it would be a distinct advantage to have interrogators further fwd than Div. Because of the breakdown in comms and the fact that both W/T and L/T were fully occupied for operational reasons, it was often impossible to get infm back by the Bns to Bde. LOs helped to counteract this disadvantage to some degree, but again there was the time question which is most important in battle.

Similarly, it was often found impossible to pass important infm to Bns immediately it was received.

An attempt was made by Bn IOs to produce a daily I summary, but this was found to be impossible in the heat of battle.

2/23 AUST INF BN.

Annexure 1 to Appx A

		23 Oct	28 Oct	29 Oct	31 Oct
B.H.Q		4/46	4/42	3/32	3/32
H.Q. Coy		7/318	7/321	5/320	5/251
A Coy		4/65	4/69	2/48	1/59
B. Coy		3/78	3/78	2/76	2/68
C. Coy		4/76	4/78	2/40	2/42
D. Coy		4/72	4/82	2/44	2/43

2/24 AUST INF BN.

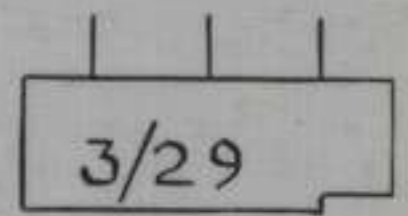
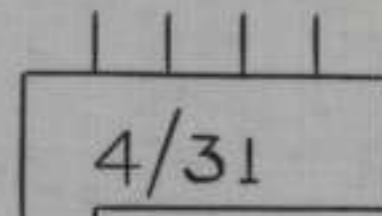
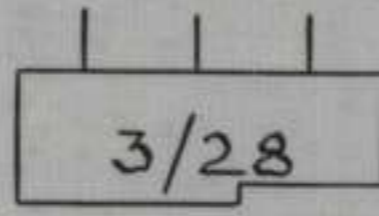
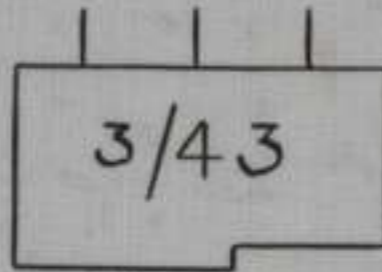
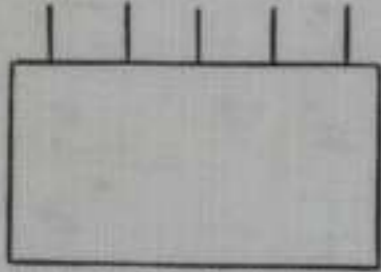
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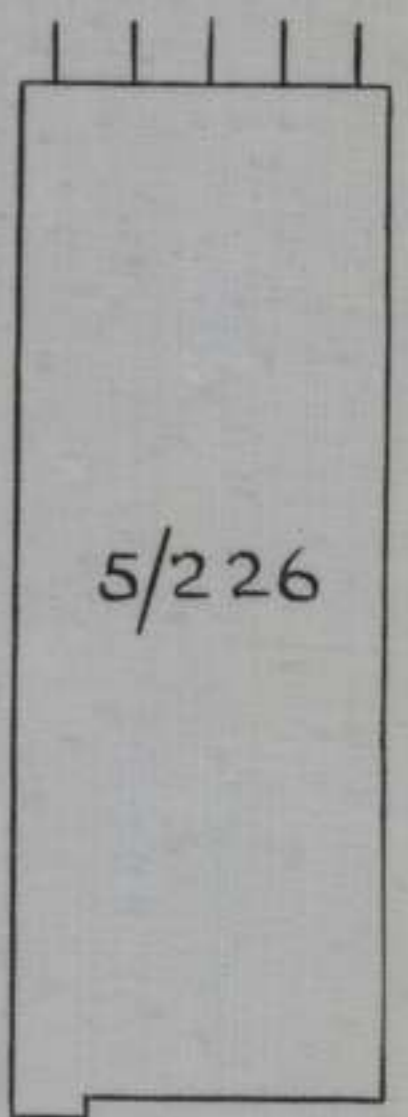
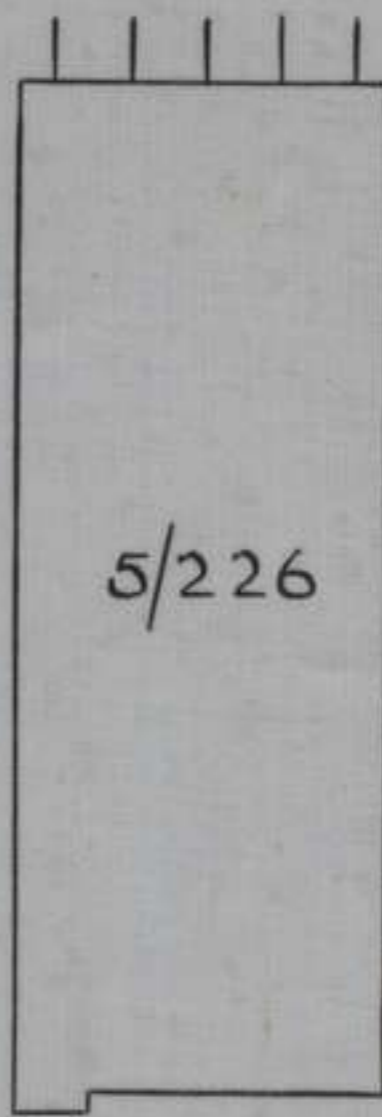
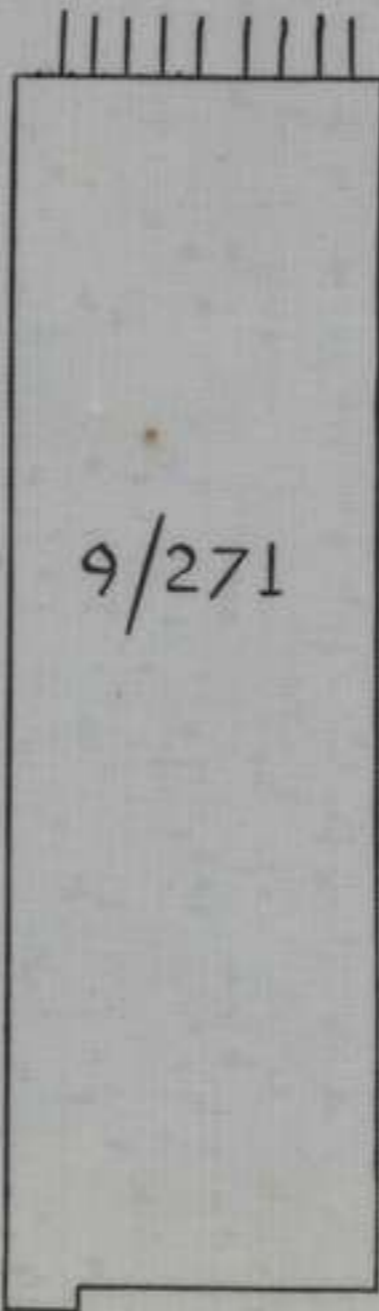
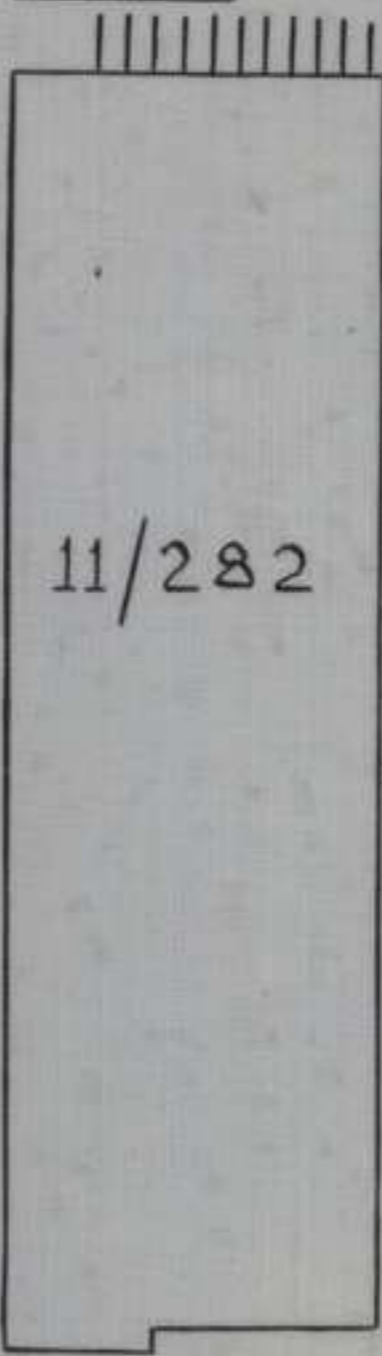
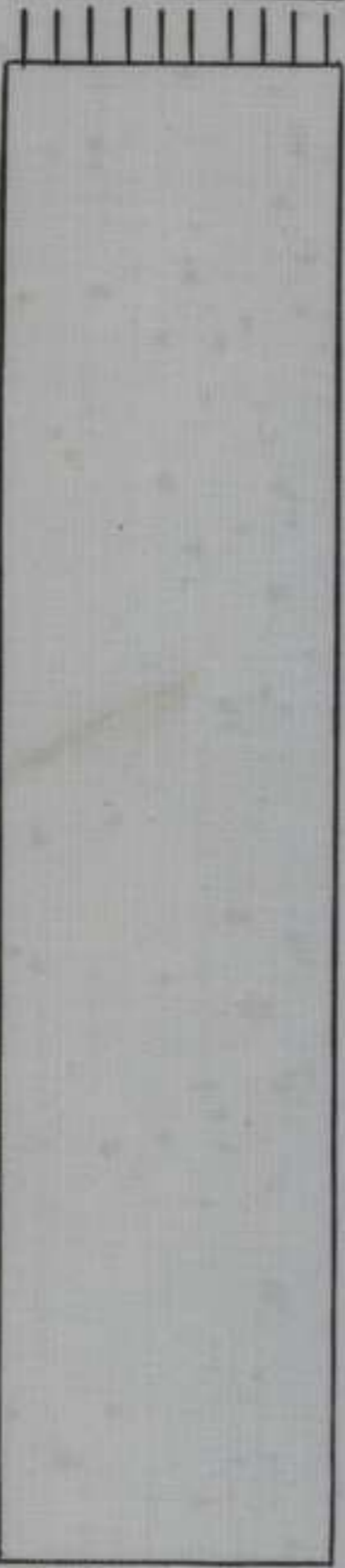
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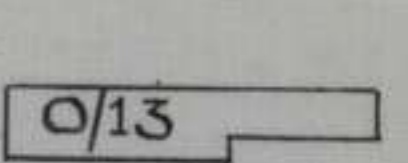
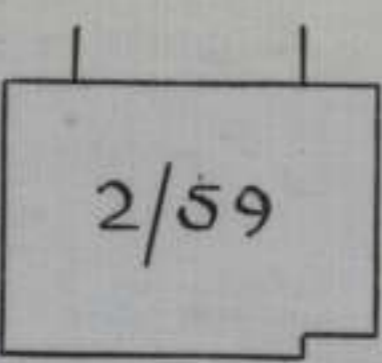
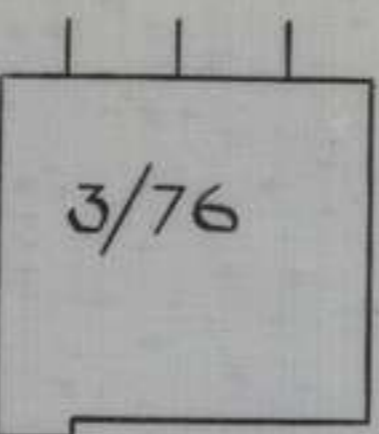
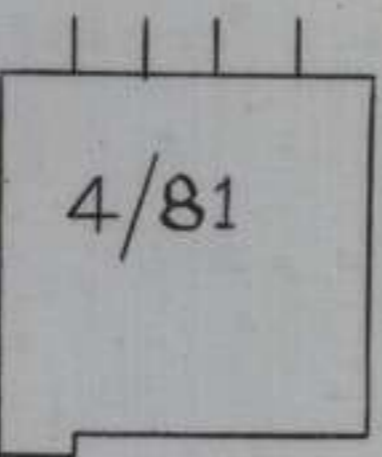
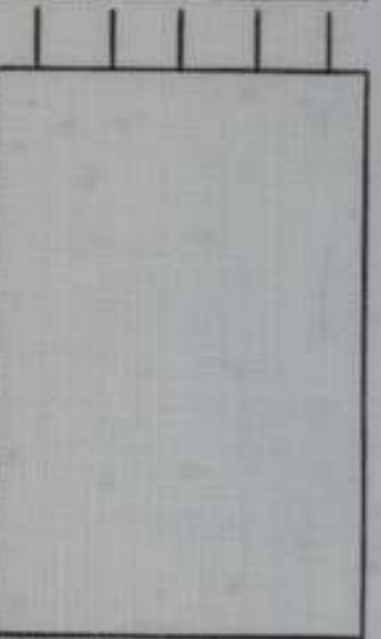
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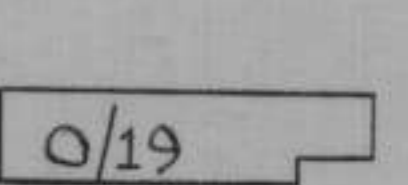
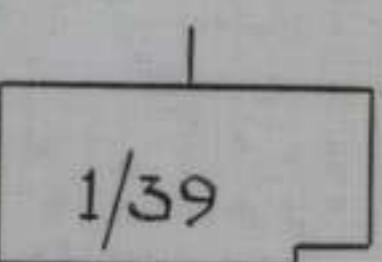
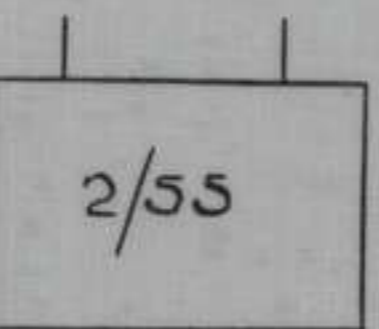
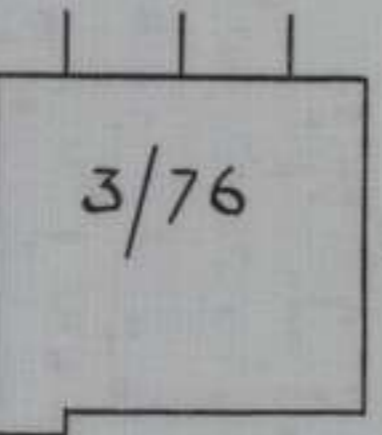
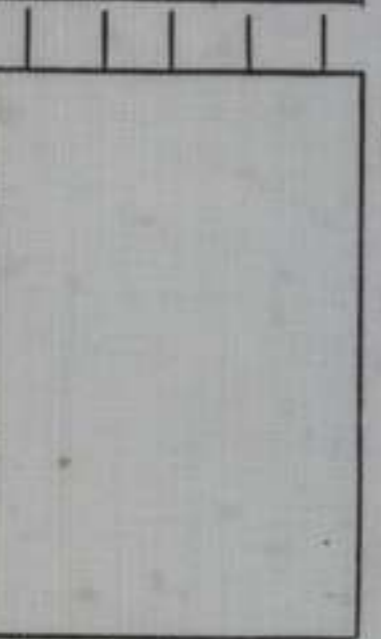
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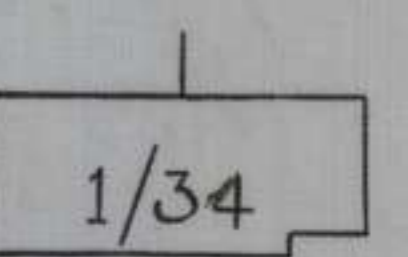
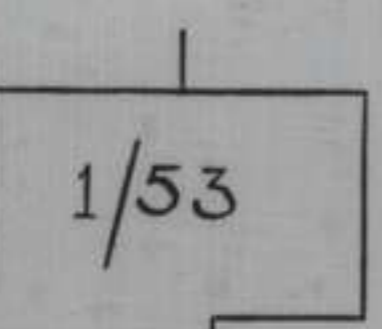
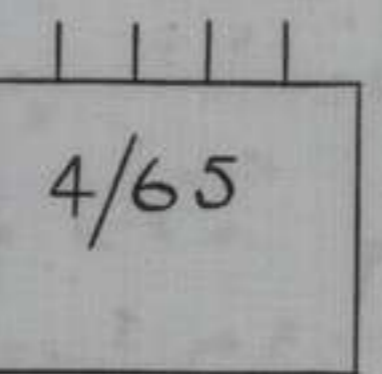
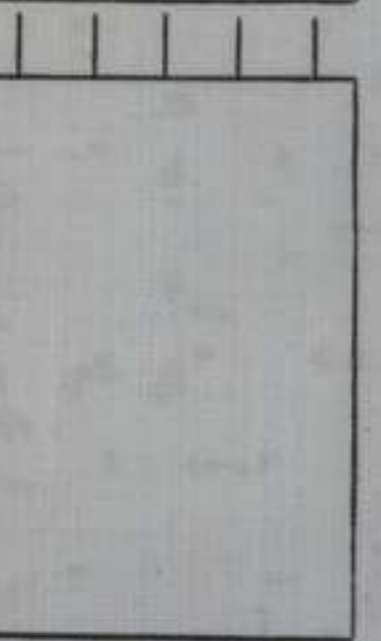
A. Coy



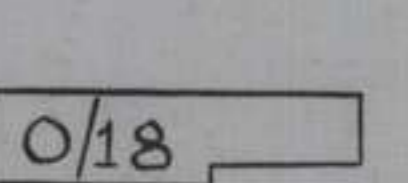
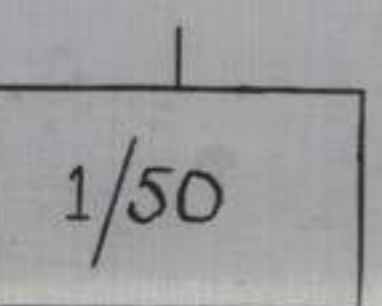
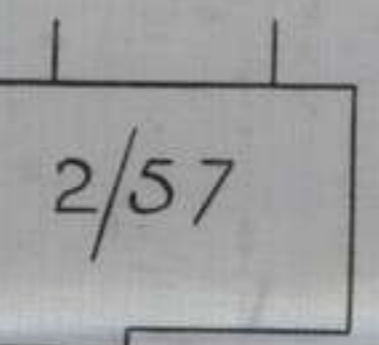
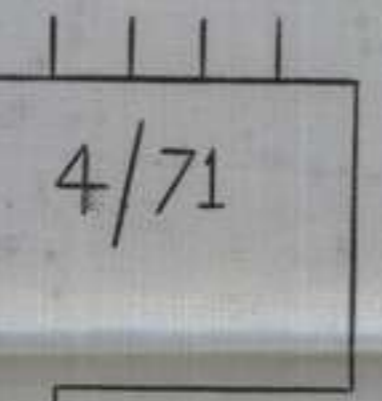
B. Coy



C. Coy



D. Coy



2/48 AUSTRALIAN INF BN

		23 Oct	25 Oct	30 Oct	31 Oct
B.H.Q.		3/45	3/40	3/34	1/23
H.Q. Coy		8/290	8/270	7/235	6/202
A. Coy		4/84	4/71	3/44	1/15
B. Coy		5/81	5/71	4/60	0/12
C. Coy		4/88	3/88	3/64	1/27
D. Coy		4/77	3/63	3/48	0/18