

Thomas H. Raddall



Lieutenant-Colonel G. W. Bullock, O.B.E., E.D.



The King visits The Regiment in Southern England with Brigadier C. B. Price.
Colonel Bullock leads "Three Cheers for His Majesty."

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WEST NOVAS

a history of the

West Nova Scotia Regiment

by

THOMAS H. RADDALL

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FOREWORD

This is the story of a Regiment. In particular it is the story of four or five thousand officers and men who passed through its ranks during the great war 1939-45. It is not the whole story, for every soldier sees his battle from an individual viewpoint — in modern battle a very restricted viewpoint — and to gather them all would take a lifetime and fill many volumes. What I have tried to do here was to set forth the essential story. Primarily it is a book for the men who paid me the honour of asking me to write it — the associated veterans of the Regiment; but I had in mind that others would want to read it, especially those who lost a loved one in the battles here described, and for these I have tried to avoid military technicalities as much as possible and to sketch the backdrop of great events against which the Regiment moved and played its part.

So far as one human being can gather and sift good evidence this book contains if not the whole truth at least the truth and nothing but the truth. Soldiers are direct people and much of the description of battle in these pages may seem laconic. But as the recorder I had space to consider; and when you have said "the company came under severe artillery and small-arms fire and was forced to withdraw with its wounded" you have given any intelligent reader the bitter picture of that company in hours of struggle and agony. There are many such pictures in this book. Nevertheless I have stretched my space here and there to add a phrase, a paragraph, sometimes a page or more of detail gathered from eye-witnesses, to make the picture clear.

It will be noticed that the book contains no list of decorations and awards. This was because my best efforts could

not secure a list positive and complete. The Director of Records at Ottawa furnished a list of officers and men with the decorations they received, but added, "As awards were gazetted by Corps and not Units it is possible that the list is not complete." It was not. Officers and men of the Regiment furnished me with the names and details of many more, but there remained no assurance that all were at hand and in justice I had to put the list aside. Many of those who received awards are mentioned in the narrative and that was the best I could do. In any case, what list would be truly complete? In the army decorations were rationed like everything else. At each battle's end the platoon, company and battalion commanders wrote recommendations for certain of their men whose valour or service had distinguished them in the fight. These were passed to Corps. On the other hand at each battle's end the Corps commander was furnished with a number of awards to be allotted to the various units under his command. The number was inflexible and so the awards were restricted and not one in five of the recommendations could be filled. The recipients were chosen more or less by lot as the only way out of the dilemma, and the rest of those recommended were passed unnoticed along with the many whose valour had been performed in lonely sectors of the battlefield where no eye could see and no hand could recommend.

The bones of this narrative are laid upon the official diary of the Regiment, kept with care from day to day, giving all the important map references, and with the Part Two Orders sheets attached — a typewritten volume for every month from Sept. 1, 1939 to Aug. 31, 1945, each signed by the commanding officer. In many cases these volumes included Intelligence Reports and sometimes air photographs of the enemy positions. For the period covering the fighting in the Sangro mountains, the battle for Ortona and the winter war along the Arielli River I was able (through the courtesy of Brigadier T. G. Gibson) to secure the Brigade diary as well.

These bones I have clothed with the flesh of personal accounts, written and oral, together with information gleaned from field maps, orders, photographs, field notebooks, personal diaries, letters and other documents furnished by officers and men of the Regiment. The happiest part of these labours came

through the various quiet but keen young men who visited my house and took me through this or that action literally yard by yard, with the maps spread out on the floor of my study and the Regiment's war diary at our elbows. To them and to the many others who contributed their knowledge I offer here my thanks. Whenever a personal account disagreed sharply with the regimental diary and other evidence I rejected it. In the main the various accounts fitted together perfectly, and in this respect the compilation of the narrative had all the charm of a jigsaw puzzle which, an apparently hopeless heap of material at first, produces at length a complete and authentic picture.

I had at hand also the official casualty list of the Regiment, corrected to July 24th, 1945 — three months after the close of hostilities in Europe. This shows as prisoners of war only those who actually turned up in German P. O. W. camps at the war's end. The rest of the missing are presumed dead, and I have included them with those killed in the actions in which they disappeared. There were a few errors in the list which I have corrected. (Lieut. Ian McIntosh, for example, was attached to Brigade at the time of his death and his name does not appear in the regimental casualty list; yet he remained a West Nova officer and was in fact killed while on a mission to the battalion C/O.)

Omitted for lack of space is the record of the Reserve battalion of the West Nova Scotia Regiment, raised at home in 1940 for local defence and composed of men past active service age, boys of 17 and 18, men in physical categories too low for service overseas, and veterans of the old war. This unit (in which, bald and grey, I found myself commanding a platoon!) watched and patrolled the western coasts of Nova Scotia from '40 to '45, armed with American rifles, automatic carbines and pistols and a few ancient Lewis guns. Its greatest utility came in the year 1942 when German submarines infested the coast and (on the American side of the line) landed parties of saboteurs. The Reserve battalion had its adventures — mostly comic — but that is another story.

THOMAS H. RADDALL

Liverpool, N. S. August 31st, 1947.

CHAPTER I

The Fighting Past

In origin the West Nova Scotia Regiment is one of the oldest on the Canadian militia list, and it has the longest fighting record of them all. Its roots were the independent militia companies formed for local defence in western Nova Scotia prior to 1697 under the old French regime, and augmented from 1713 to 1784 under British rule. Under the French regime the Acadian companies fought repeatedly against English attack. Under British rule the companies of pioneer Germans, Huguenots and New Englanders fought first against the Indians, and then combined with the Acadians to fight off American attacks during the Revolutionary War 1775-1783. By 1784 there were well established companies at Chester, Mahone, Lunenburg, L'Anse-au-Loup, Liverpool, Shelburne, Barrington, Yarmouth, Clare, Digby, Annapolis and Cornwallis, nearly all of which had fought in defence of their towns and settlements during the late war.

During the Napoleonic Wars 1793-1815 the west Nova Scotia militia companies stood to arms many times under the threat of French and then American attack, and sent strong drafts to assist in the defence of Halifax. More than this, many of them fought at sea, both as sailors and marines. Indeed the Liverpool company between 1796 and 1805 often furnished whole crews for privateers operating against the French and Spanish as far away as the West Indies and the Spanish Main. This amphibious role was intensified in the war against the

Americans from 1812 to 1814, when the coasts of western Nova Scotia were infested with American privateers and the local militia took to the sea, not only to defend their ports but to carry the war to the enemy. One west Nova Scotia privateer, the "Liverpool Packet", manned almost entirely by men of the Liverpool militia company, captured nearly 100 American ships in the course of the war, and frequently landed armed parties on the American coast itself.

After 1815 there was a long period of peace, but the west Nova Scotia militia companies were carefully maintained, and during the Fenian Raids, 1866-1871, they frequently stood to arms. However they were not called upon to fight again until the war with Germany, 1914-1918, in which they took a valiant part, as we shall see. Down through the years the companies underwent various regimental groupings and re-groupings until finally in 1936 they were brought under a single unit command as the West Nova Scotia Regiment.

The western half of the Nova Scotia peninsula is a Canada in miniature, with regions of rich farmlands but more of forest, with salt water on both sides, and a population of widely different racial origins and religious faiths. Let those who despair of Canadian unity take a long look at this, the oldest settled part of Canada, once the scene of bloody warfare and racial and religious persecution, where for many generations there has been goodwill and a willingness to work and fight together for the common cause.

The original inhabitants were Indians of the Micmac tribe, a race of scouts and hunters who remain to this day in scattered communities about the coast, with their tribal headquarters at Bear River. The French arrived in 1604 and settled chiefly along the Fundy shore. They called the country Acadie and hence are known in history as the Acadians. Next came the Germans and Huguenots, chiefly from the Rhineland, and Montbeliard in Lorraine, who settled on the south shore in what is now called Lunenburg County. This was in 1753. The New Englanders settled in Queens, Yarmouth, Annapolis

and Kings counties in the period 1759-1765. The end of the American Revolution brought a flood of exiled Loyalists to Shelburne County, Digby County and Annapolis County in 1783. These people included veterans of Tarleton's Legion, the Prince of Wales' American Volunteers and other famous Loyalist corps, and with them settled English, Irish, Scots and Welsh veterans of no less than 24 British regular regiments disbanded in Nova Scotia after the war. At this time also came a number of men from disbanded Hessian regiments, who settled chiefly amongst the old "Deutsche" stock in Lunenburg County. After 1815 there was another military influx, veterans of British regiments disbanded after Waterloo, many of whom settled in Lunenburg and Annapolis counties. From this far-gathered fighting stock came the men who formed the West Nova Scotia Regiment.

The French set up a local militia soon after their arrival in 1604. By 1697 in the region of Annapolis they had six companies, commanded by a French regular officer, M. de Falaise. After the British conquest the Acadian militia ceased to exist as such, but those who were willing to cooperate with the British regime were admitted to the local forces, regular and militia. An Acadian officer, Major John Doucett, eventually commanded a company of the 40th Regiment, a British regular unit raised at Annapolis in 1717, and rose to be Administrator of the province of Nova Scotia.

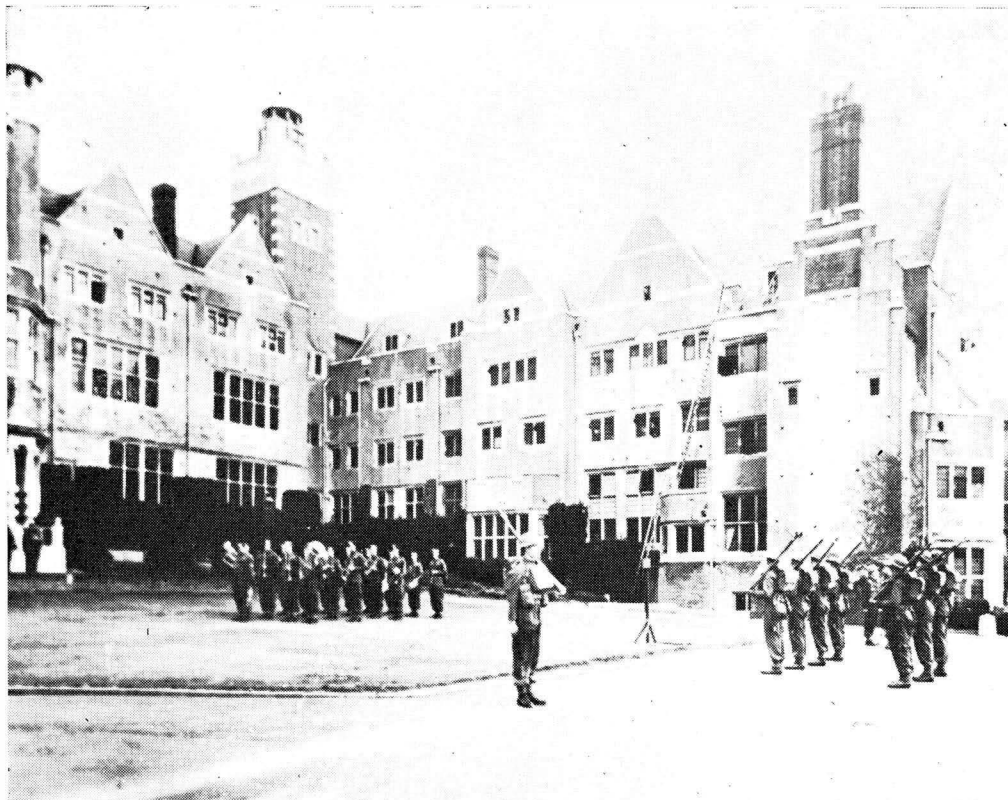
The story of the 40th Foot is closely connected with that of the West Nova Scotia Regiment and it requires a mention here. The 40th was raised at Annapolis by Governor Philipps, who became its first colonel. Closely associated with the west Nova Scotia militia, with whom it shared the local defence, the regiment was stationed at Annapolis and other posts for forty years, like the Children of Moses in the wilderness, at times almost forgotten by the authorities in England, although its first commander was buried in Westminster Abbey. The uniform coat (often very ragged) was scarlet, with facings of buff. The 40th helped to defend Halifax when that city was founded in 1749, fought at Louisburg in 1758 and Quebec in 1759. Subsequently it was transferred to service abroad and

thenceforth served in the Empire's wars in various parts of the world. In 1793, by special warrant of the heir to the throne (later King George IV) the 40th was given the title of "The Prince of Wales' Volunteers", thereby confirming the old link with western Nova Scotia, where the original Prince of Wales' Volunteers, a Loyalist regiment, had settled on disbandment in 1783. The 40th Foot survives on the British Army List as The South Lancashire Regiment (The Prince of Wales' Volunteers) and its ancient comradeship with the militia of Western Nova Scotia was renewed on May 26th, 1929 when the Annapolis Regiment was allied officially to the South Lancs. And when the Annapolis Regiment was combined with the Lunenburg Regiment under the title of The West Nova Scotia Regiment in 1936 the affiliation was transferred to the combined unit.

During the long sojourn of the old 40th Foot at Annapolis many officers and men married Acadian women, and thus the seeds of Anglo-French amity were sown in Nova Scotia. (One dour British officer, arriving at Annapolis in 1757, averred that Fort Anne was really governed by Madame Marie Magdalen Maisonat, whose daughters had all married officers of the 40th!) When the tragic story of the Acadians reached its climax in the great expulsion order of 1755, Major Handfield of the 40th had been given the embarrassing task of carrying out the deportation from Annapolis. He fumbled the job deliberately, with the result that most of the Acadians in the region of Annapolis slipped away to the woods and later re-established themselves in Digby County.

By 1775, when the old animosities had been buried, the Acadians served loyally in local militia companies guarding the coast against American raids, and thenceforth maintained their own units under their own officers until the Fundy Shore companies, English and French, were brought together as the 69th Regiment (1st Annapolis Battalion) in 1869, and the 72nd Regiment (2nd Annapolis Battalion) in 1870. And in 1898 the two regiments were amalgamated as the 69th Annapolis Regiment.

The population of western Nova Scotia is distributed chiefly about the peninsular coast in an irregular U, so that it falls naturally into two social and geographical divisions. the



Changing the West Nova guard at Roedean College, Sussex.



Colonel M. F. Gregg, V.C.; C.B.E.; M.C.

“Fundy Shore” and the “South Shore”. Just as Annapolis early became the military centre of the Fundy Shore, so Lunenburg became the military centre of the South Shore. Consequently in 1870 the South Shore companies were combined as the 75th Regiment, with headquarters at Bridgewater in Lunenburg County.

Until the outbreak of war in 1914 the 69th and 75th regiments carried out their annual training side by side at Aldershot Camp, near Kentville in the Annapolis Valley. In World War One, for reasons still mysterious, no Nova Scotia unit was included in the 1st Canadian Division (although regiments in that division took very eagerly draft after draft from the Nova Scotia militia) — indeed none of the Nova Scotia militia units was permitted to go overseas as such, even in the subsequent contingents which made up the Canadian Corps in France. On the contrary, various new Nova Scotia units were raised (including the 25th, 40th, 64th, 85th, 112th, 185th, 193rd, 219th and 264th battalions) and the established militia had to be content with sending drafts to those which reached the front. This system worked out well enough in the field but it lost all the *esprit de corps* established by home units in the peacetime years — a mistake which was not repeated in World War Two.

However, in recognition of its officers and men who fought in overseas units in World War One, the old 69th was named the Annapolis Regiment in 1922 and awarded the battle honours : —

ARRAS 1917-1918
HILL 70
AMIENS
HINDENBURG LINE
PURSUIT TO MONS

Similarly in 1922 the old 75th was named the Lunenburg Regiment and awarded the following battle honours of World War One : —

ARRAS 1917-1918
YPRES 1917
AMIENS
HINDENBURG LINE
PURSUIT TO MONS

For the next 14 years the two western Nova Scotia regiments carried out their annual training in the same brigade. In the year 1932 the Honorary Colonel of the Annapolis Regiment (Hon. Robert E. Harris, late Chief Justice of Nova Scotia, and himself a native of Annapolis) presented that unit with colours bearing its battle honours. The presentation ceremony was held on the parade ground at old Fort Anne, and the colours now repose in the fort museum.

In the year 1933 Col. C. H. L. Jones, OBE, VD, became Honorary Colonel of the Lunenburg Regiment, and he presented the unit with colours bearing its battle honours. The ceremony took place on a blazing hot day in July, 1935, and for the occasion the Lunenburg Regiment encamped near the town of Lunenburg itself, where it performed the elaborate ceremonial in the presence of a great crowd of people. At this time the C/O was Lt. Col. W. E. Ryder, rector of the Anglican parish of Lunenburg, who had won the Military Medal as an infantryman in World War One. His second-in-command was Major G. W. Bullock, ED, rector of the Anglican parish of Bridgewater, who had served as a chaplain with the Canadian forces overseas in World War One. A regiment commanded by two clergymen is surely unique in Canadian military annals; but there is nothing strange about it to those who know the history of Lunenburg County, where a devout faith and a keen martial spirit have gone hand in hand from early times.

About this time a new badge for the Lunenburg Regiment was designed by the adjutant, Capt. W. P. Potter. It consisted of a shield superimposed upon a maple leaf and containing in relief a replica of an 18th century blockhouse and a modern fishing schooner — in fact a replica of the famous schooner "Bluenose". Beneath these was the regimental motto "*Semper Fidelis*".

When the Annapolis Regiment and the Lunenburg Regiment were amalgamated in 1936, the militia infantry companies of western Nova Scotia for the first time in their long and eventful history were brought under a single command, and the chosen title was what, in effect, they had always been — the West Nova Scotia Regiment. Major Bullock was given the command with the rank of lieutenant-colonel, and charged

with the job of marrying the two — perhaps, as he remarked, “because that sort of thing was in my line.”

It was not an easy task, for the “wedding”, like Noah’s Ark, involved two of every kind, including two complete sets of officers and two very good bands. However the job was done, and Francis W. McCarthy, then a private in the Regiment, prepared a design for the unit badge which was adopted and remains the badge of the “West Novas”. It consists of a crown and shield superimposed upon an eight-pointed sunburst representing the dawn—Nova Scotia, most easterly of the Canadian provinces, being the one on which the sun first rises. Across the face of the shield, and dividing it into four triangular segments, is the Saint Andrew’s cross, taken from the ancient Nova Scotia flag. The left and right segments each contain a mayflower, the floral emblem of the province. The top segment holds a replica of the Acadian chapel at Grand Pre, representing the Annapolis Valley in general and the ancient Acadian militia companies in particular. The lower segment holds a replica of the schooner “Bluenose”, symbolizing the seafaring communities of the South Shore and their old-established militia companies. Around the shield is a circular riband bearing the name, “West Nova Scotia Regiment” and the motto “*Semper Fidelis*”. Beneath is the single word “Canada”.

The regimental march, “Wenosco” was adapted by Lieut. Beck, the bandmaster, from an old marching tune. The regimental colours are those of the affiliated British regiment, the Prince of Wales’ Volunteers (South Lancs) — crimson, gold and blue. When a dress cap was authorized in 1940 the chosen design therefore was dark blue with gold piping, and the top fold faced with buff — the uniform facing of the old 40th Foot.

The West Nova Scotia Regiment was distributed roughly in halves, with two rifle companies on the Bay of Fundy side, and two on the South Shore side. Headquarters Company was located at Bridgewater, on the chief cross-country road from the Atlantic to the Fundy side. Each company had a wooden drill shed (dignified by the title “Armoury”) in its home town, where it carried on business and stored its arms and equipment; and every summer the whole battalion gathered at Aldershot Camp in the Annapolis Valley for a fortnight’s training with

the brigade. This schedule of company and battalion training, together with occasional local social affairs and an annual Regimental Ball, constituted the peacetime life of the Regiment.

It should be remembered that after 1918 a succession of Canadian governments clamped a rigid hand on militia expenditures, and this became a policy which lasted 20 years. During most of this time the Canadian militia was held together chiefly by the devotion of its regimental officers and NCO's. Arms, equipment, clothing were all of the 1918 model when obtainable at all. It was difficult to arouse the enthusiasm of the young men and quite impossible to adapt regimental training to modern conditions with this ancient apparatus. And the situation was aggravated after 1934 by the knowledge (plain to every thinking soldier in those times) that another great war was looming across the sea — a war which would be fought with vastly improved weapons and equipment and with wholly new tactics in the field. The new leader of the old enemy, whose aims and objects were openly confessed in a book called "Mein Kampf" to be had in any library, was boasting of his terrific new equipment and trailing pictures of it across the pages of every newspaper and magazine in the world.

It is astonishing to reflect that even when "new" equipment began to reach the Canadian militia units in 1939, on the very brink of the catastrophe, it was equipment conceived in the British military eye of 1918. For example, the official mind was obsessed with the perils of poison gas; the British infantryman of 1939 was to be fettered and encumbered with gas cape, gas mask, gas goggles and other gas paraphernalia; his mind was to be stuffed with a weird assortment of anti-gas precautions; and worse than all this, the whole conception of movement in war was to be tied to the pace of a decontamination squad. That the enemy might use gas again was a reasonable assumption. But the over-emphasis of this assumption was dangerous, for it affected the entire viewpoint on mobility, the key-note of the newest kind of war. There was decrepit thinking in other directions, all of which was reflected in the equipment. Of course it is easy to look back and see these

things. Perhaps in charity it is best to say that any nation which bases its fortunes on the supposition of peace is not apt to give much study to the tools of war.

In mid-August 1939 when war with Germany was practically certain, the West Nova Scotia Regiment was distributed as follows : HQ Company at Bridgewater under command of Capt. John A. Hebb; "A" Company at Lunenburg under command of Major O. B. Berringer; "B" Company at Annapolis under command of Major K. P. Harris; "C" Company at Middleton under command of Major Ray Longley; "D" Company at Mahone under command of Major H. V. Corkum. The regimental band was at Lunenburg in charge of Lieut. R. H. Beck. Each of the company armouries contained uniforms and equipment (vintage 1918) for about 100 men. There was a shortage of rifles and a great deficiency of boots. The automatic weapons consisted of one Lewis gun per company, each gun a relic of 1918. There was no regimental transport at all.

Late on the evening of August 26th 1939 Lt. Col. Bullock received an order from District HQ at Halifax to mount a corporal's guard on each of the various company drill-sheds and armouries under his command. This message was relayed to the company commanders by telephone, and the various guards were clothed, equipped and mounted by midnight that night. With this modest step the West Nova Scotia Regiment began its career in World War Two.

At 10 P. M. on Friday, September 1st, Lt. Col. Bullock received the order to mobilize the Regiment and communicated the news at once to the company commanders. A general mobilization scheme had been drawn up in case of war and it was put into practice forthwith.



CHAPTER 2

Mobilization

Headquarters Company at once established itself in the little grey wooden armoury on the slope of Hospital Hill in Bridgewater, and mobilization there and elsewhere went on apace, with one complication after another overcome by improvisations, some of them brilliant. At 4 A. M. on Sunday, Sep. 3rd — the day Britain was officially at war with Germany — "A" Company reported 55 men under arms, practically its entire peacetime roll. The other companies did almost as well. And as the Sabbath daylight grew the first recruits began to arrive, the beginning of a stream which swelled with each succeeding day: farmers, fishermen, mill hands, students, garage hands, clerks, loggers and river-drivers (many of these in mack-inaw shirts and staggod trousers, just as they came from the woods), schoolboys, hopeful veterans of the old war — there was even a lighthouse keeper!

The recruits were a cross-section of the West Nova Scotia population: men of Acadian descent, of German and Huguenot descent, men whose 18th century ancestors were New England Yankees, men descended from the Loyalists of '83 or the British veterans of Bunker Hill, Yorktown, the Peninsula or Waterloo; and there was a group of slim brown Micmac Indians, whose ancestors had fought and often scalped the others singly or collectively.

The quiet air of Bridgewater, Annapolis, Lunenburg, Middleton and Mahone suddenly was loud with the shouts of

drill-sergeants, the peculiar shuffle of civilian footwear trying to move in unison, the slap of hands on rifles and the thunder of grounded butts.

The band moved up from Lunenburg to Bridgewater and on Sunday, Sep. 10th, led HQ Company on its first wartime church parade. For lack of barracks the Regiment took over the buildings and grounds of the Lunenburg County Exhibition on Hospital Hill in Bridgewater, and HQ Company moved in at once. At 6 P. M. on Sep. 11th, "B" and "C" companies arrived by train from their Annapolis Valley depots and marched up to the Exhibition Grounds headed by the band. "A" and "D" Companies arrived a few days later. The long main building of the Exhibition became sleeping quarters, and here also the various company offices were established. The cattle and poultry sheds (with their peculiar smells) were taken over for cook-houses and mess halls. Squads of men in uniform, in parts of uniform, or simply in civilian clothes marched up and down the beaten earth of the fair grounds where in happier times the wheels of fortune, hoop-la booths, merry-go-rounds, the Wild Man of Borneo and the hootchy-kootchy girls had performed in a glare of electric lights.

The officers, crowded out of the Exhibition buildings, found quarters in the Fairview Hotel and Lahave Hotel, and there enlivened their off-duty hours in the merry fashion of healthy young men everywhere. They needed some release for their spirits, for their duties in these days were long and arduous. Recruiting parties had been sent through the regimental area and the stream of recruits had become a flood. The adjutant, Capt. H. G. Mason, afterwards estimated that at least 1600 men turned up in the mobilization period, all clamouring to enlist. An odd feature of the work at this time was that every prospective recruit had to be attested before he was given a medical board; and "Hack" Mason, labouring far into each night in the orderly room, was overheard muttering incredulously, "There just can't be this many men in western Nova Scotia!"

One of many complications in these days was a rush of reports from patriotic citizens denouncing spies and saboteurs — with whom the Regiment was expected to deal. This led to some amusing encounters. Two "spies" solemnly tracked

down at the pretty village of Petite Riviere by an Intelligence sergeant turned out to be a woman teacher from Columbia University, and her husband, on a summer holiday from the United States. A pair of elderly women ("acting in a suspicious manner on the streets of Mahone") proved to be writers for the Canadian National Railways Magazine! But it was all part of what then seemed very much the game of war, and it would be hard to say which enjoyed it most, the "suspects" or the troops.

The most amusing feature of these early days however was the appearance of the Regiment. The supply of uniforms and equipment soon ran low in the tide of recruits, and the QM (Major C. H. R. Zwicker) was at his wits' end trying to get more from the flabbergasted army stores at Halifax. Trucks were sent up to the capital city with demands, and they came back with a medley of uniforms, equipment, medical stores and rifles, not nearly enough but simply a "payment on account". With these the Regiment had to be content.

The CQMS of "A" Company (C. F. Whynacht) worked out an ingenious if unorthodox method of satisfying the eager rookies. The first man enlisted in the morning got a cap (the flat-topped 1918 sort), the next man a tunic, the next a pair of trousers, and so on. When the day's issue of clothing ran out he began to issue a web belt per man. (A belt was a prized possession, for which there was a good deal of cheerful theft after Lights Out.) Thus it went.

Long afterwards one officer wrote, "As our C/O was himself a clergyman, needless to say every man and his dog attended church parade. And the Regiment presented a weird and at the same time awe-inspiring sight as it marched down the hill to town and church. No two men were dressed alike." It was common to see a burly lumberjack wearing a flat-topped army cap, a mackinaw shirt, a khaki web belt, a pair of bull's-wool trousers (cut off at the calf, woods-fashion, and showing a length of gray woolen stocking), and shod in anything from a pair of battered shoe-packs to a pair of patent-leather shoes lately purchased in a local shop.

The market town of Bridgewater was a pleasant place in these early autumn days. The troops off-duty strolled up and down the main street with their girls, bought out the shops,

filled the local theatre, or sat on benches beside the LaHave River, where the trees were slowly turning colour with the early frosts. The Bridgewater folk were hospitable and threw open their homes to the boys. There were band concerts, suppers in church halls, and sing-songs everywhere. There were picnics and excursions by boat and canoe down the river. Donations of sweets and home cookery poured into the barracks, and Mr. W. H. Smith of Lunenburg sent up ten barrels of fresh apples.

But the Exhibition was a bleak place in the increasingly cold nights of a Canadian fall. A few stoves were secured and installed, though they made little difference. An appeal was sent out through the countryside for mattresses or bedding of any sort, and much was received; but most of the men, sleeping on the bare floor of the main building with a blanket or two at most, found the boards not only hard but as draughty as the Pole. Most of them were still marching in the autumn rains and mud in the wrecks of their civilian shoes, and an epidemic of colds made an ominous rise in the sick rate. Army boots were impossible to secure. In desperation Lt. Col. Bullock enquired of Ordnance at Halifax, "What does the government pay for a pair of army boots?" The answer was "\$4.70". Bullock then appealed to the patriotism of the boot-shop keepers, and sent a truck to scour the counties of Queens and Lunenburg, buying up all the workmen's-boots in sight at a blanket price of \$4.70. In this way the C/O kept the Regiment on its feet and out of hospital. Unfortunately he could not appeal to the patriotism of the purveyors of red tape, and the authorities refused to pay the bill.

So it was with such matters as the telephone bill. The mobilization order obliged the C/O to hold many long-distance phone talks with his company commanders and other officers scattered all over western Nova Scotia. This bill, too, the purveyors of red tape refused to pay. It was "unauthorized"! If nothing else these matters illustrate the difficulties of building an army on a moment's notice, a warning to governments of the future; and especially they illustrate the maddening straits which befall the man who undertakes to make military bricks, not only without straw, but without the "authority" to clutch at a single handy stalk.

Winter came, and still the Regiment lay at Bridgewater. There were route marches about the countryside, now brown and bare, and rifle shoots on the range at Lunenburg. Each Sunday saw its church parade. The drill squads and platoons continued to tramp the frozen mud of the Exhibition ground or shivered at lectures in the barren cavern of the main building, where the few small stoves only emphasized the cold. There were inoculations and more inoculations.

And all this time there were rumours and counter-rumours about the destination or simply the destiny of the Regiment. Veterans of the old war recalled the ignominious fate of established Nova Scotia militia units — held for home guard duty at the ports, or simply acting as recruiting stations for other regiments in the field. Others remembered hopeful new regiments raised and sent overseas, only to be broken up in England and drafted to France as reinforcements.

In mid-September Lt. Col. Bullock had called his officers together and informed them that the Regiment had been chosen for war duty. He did not know what duty but he hoped for overseas service: On that the Regiment had to feed its mind until Oct. 25/39, when a sudden visitation came from the gods. No less than the G.O.C. 1st Canadian Division, Major-General McNaughton, accompanied by Brigadier Boak of the Halifax military district, and Colonels Landon, Vince and Price, carried out a general inspection and seemed pleased with what they saw. The rumours now struck a decidedly hopeful note, which rose higher on Nov. 14th when Lieut. C. R. Day left for England to take a signals course, accompanied by Lieut. S. D. Smith and four NCO's bound for a small-arms course in the famous British army school at Hythe, Kent.

On the following day HQ Company left Bridgewater for Aldershot Camp in the Annapolis Valley. It was intended that the rifle companies should follow in a day or two, but scarlet fever broke out at Aldershot and that big camp went under quarantine. Companies "A", "B", "C" and "D" remained perforce at Bridgewater until the end of November. Nov. 21st was a red letter day. All hopes for active service abroad were confirmed when Major C. H. R. Zwicker, Capt. W. Steadman and 11 other ranks left for England as the advance party of the Regiment.

On Nov. 23rd there was a visit from Brigade. Colonels Price and King, Brigade-major Foulkes and Capt. Magee inspected the Regiment and its quarters and observed a tactical exercise by the four rifle companies in the spruce copses and rolling farmland behind the town. In the evening the Brigade-major gave the officers and WO's a lecture on the German army, and Col. Price followed with a chat on cooperation and the pleasant relationship he wished to see maintained between brigade and battalion officers.

In the days immediately following, gas respirators were issued to all ranks, and on Nov. 27th the Regiment made a route march in full uniform and kit, wearing the respirators at intervals to accustom the men to their use. The peaceful farms along the lovely Lahave valley were afforded a vision of several hundred inhuman figures, armed, burdened, hideously masked, all marching as to war like a legion of ghosts from 1918.

It was the time of year when, all over western Nova Scotia, farmers and woodsmen may be seen cutting and bundling Christmas trees for export to the United States. Bridgewater had long been an assembly point for this business and in that memorable November of 1939 a daily procession of trucks and carts could be seen dumping their green freight in a field immediately opposite the Exhibition barracks.

This was the scene which confronted the Regiment as it formed up for its last parade in the Bridgewater Exhibition grounds. The contrast was strange; on one side of the highway thousands of slim young fir trees, each about the height of a tall man, tied in neat bundles and standing upright on their butts like an army symbolic of peace and goodwill; on the other side the long ranks of bronzed men in newly-issued battle dress, with the thin sunlight of early winter glinting on their rifles, a regiment of free men setting out to fight for all the things that Christmas means. A striking scene, and no one who saw it will ever forget it.

The time had come to leave the pleasant town of Bridgewater, and the Regiment left with some regret and a host of happy memories. The townsfolk had been most kind, with the hospitality for which Lunenburg County is famous. Quite

apart from this, true comradeships had been formed within the ranks that were to last through many hard months and years abroad. There were group as well as individual friendships. Thus "A" and "B" companies found an affinity which lasted through the war, as did "C" and "D". During the Bridgewater period also certain cheery characters and personalities developed, such as "Chummy" Hiltz, "Ollie" (O. G.) Why-not, "Snippy" Peach, and the never-to-be-forgotten "Charlie" Outhouse, who as a sentry one dark night in the early English period challenged General McNaughton's car, roaring "Stop, or by God I'll let go both bar'ls!"

In these three months observers had seen a widely gathered multitude of ploughboys, lumberjacks, clerks and fishermen, transformed into a unit. The Regiment still had a vast amount to learn about modern war but it had taken a good first pace along the road, and it was with high hearts and a stout faith in themselves that the four rifle companies, on Nov. 30th and Dec. 1st, set out by bus and truck for Aldershot.

CHAPTER 3

Aldershot to Aldershot

Aldershot Camp is a sandy place in the pine woods a few miles out of Kentville, N. S., familiar to pre-war members of the Regiment by reason of the summer training there. None ever had seen it in winter. The term "winter quarters" had aroused some optimistic thoughts amongst those who hitherto had reclined on the chilly floor of the Exhibition barracks. These illusions were promptly dashed. In December 1939 Aldershot Camp consisted of a few permanent buildings, a number of hastily constructed board-and-tarpaper huts, and a wide expanse of sodden tents pitched over the slopes of Strawberry Hill and Blueberry Hill. A snowstorm soon completed this rosy picture.

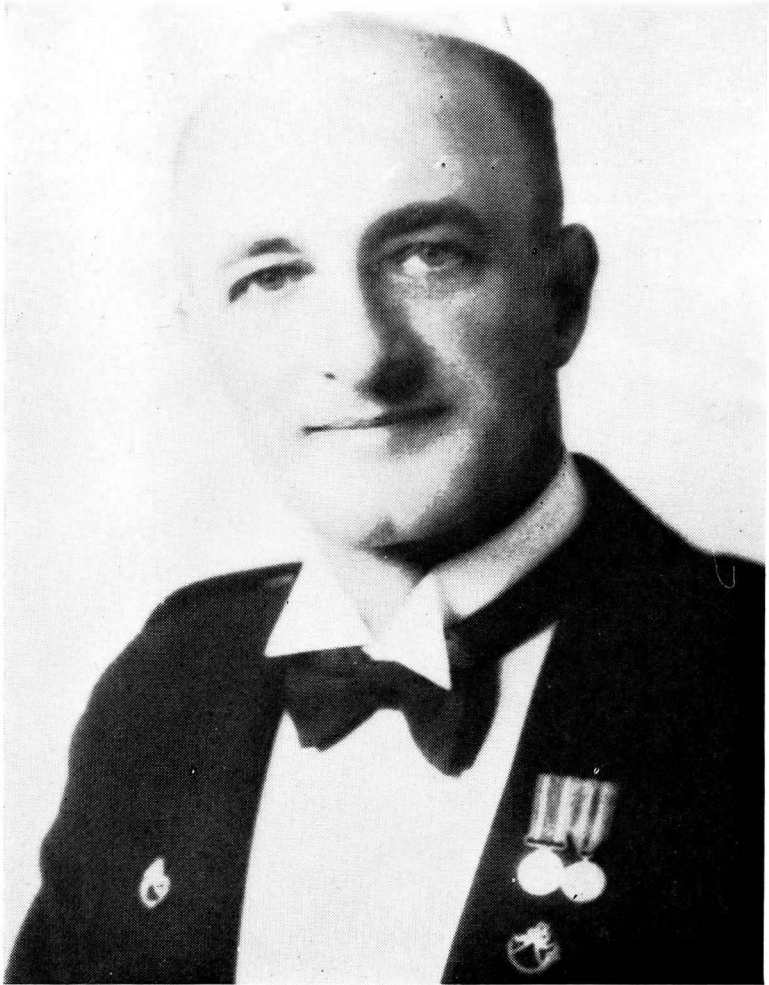
As one Lunenburger put it, running a dour glance over the *mise en scene*, "Boys, we've traded a devil for a witch!" It was true, and in the windy huts and frosty tents (all the officers were in tents) many a man sighed for the Exhibition floor. Fortunately "winter quarters" was an illusory term in any case. For the West Novas this actually was an embarkation camp, and their stay was to end in three weeks' time. The three weeks passed in unremitting toil. The Regiment now had a strength of 880 all ranks, each of whom had to be issued new clothing and equipment of the standard required for overseas service. In the meantime company training, kit inspections, parades of all kinds filled the days. The crack shots "zero'd" the Regiment's rifles on the Aldershot range. The "paper war"

reached a new pitch and the Orderly Room was snowed under with documents in duplicate, triplicate, quadruplicate, to be filled out, issued, filed or despatched. The absence of officers and senior NCO's with the advance party in England, or on courses here and there, threw a heavy burden on the rest, and the staff laboured far into the nights.

One memorable event of these Aldershot days was a sudden raising of the dental standard for overseas service, which meant re-examination of all ranks and a good deal of dental work. The clinic was housed on Cornwallis Street in Kentville and staffed with a group of civilian dentists and technicians headed by Doctor (later Captain, CDC) L. Fluck. A half-ton truck left camp every half-hour laden with men for the clinic, returning with "survivors". Many tales are told of this heroic mass dentistry. According to one cheery soul, "The men were pushed into the dental chair; the dentist would roll up his sleeves, tell the patient to open his mouth, take a look, and yell 'Brace your feet!' The gutters of Cornwallis Street were running blood." But this is not mentioned in the Regiment's war diary and must be considered apochryphal.

An example of the clinic's good work was the case of an "A" Company batman, Sheldon Fancy. All of Fancy's teeth were condemned and he was struck off the regimental strength as unfit for overseas service. He came to his officer filled with grief and together they returned to the clinic. A very human dentist agreed to extract the teeth and to have plates made the same day. Fancy was put back on the strength. But there was an awkward moment when the Regiment embarked. At the very gangplank a vigilant M.O. noted Fancy's still swollen mouth and demanded suspiciously, "Show me your teeth!" Fancy dived a hand into his pocket, pulled forth his false teeth triumphantly, muttered "Here they are — two sets complete!" and dashed up the gangway.

During these busy Aldershot days the Regiment received a new adjutant, Capt. W. C. Gemmell, and an R. C. padre. Hon. Capt. T. F. Cashen. There were general inspections by Brigadier Constantine and Cols. King and Adamson, who instructed the C/O and company commanders on the details of embarkation. The departure date was set first for Dec. 9th, then the 20th, finally the 21st.



Lieutenant-Colonel A. A. Ernst.



Top : Major Hebb and some of the boys on the Downs.
Below : A platoon of West Novas at Guillemont Barracks.

Soon after three o'clock in the morning of the 21st a very unmilitary alarm clock awakened the battalion officers, who had crept out of their frozen tents to sleep in their bedrolls on the floor of the mess. Reveille was at 4 A.M. but most of the troops were awake and stirring before that. Everyone knew this was The Day. There was no ceremony about departure.

At 5.45 A.M. in the winter dark and a downpour of rain. Battalion HQ and the HQ Company marched down to Aldershot Siding followed closely by the rest of the first "flight", and their train pulled out with 324 all ranks aboard. The second "flight" followed in another train at 7.30, just at sunrise. The journey to Halifax was soon over. At 11 A.M. the whole unit was detrained and assembled at Halifax docks for embarkation, and in half an hour the last man passed from Pier 21 to the Polish liner "Chrobry".

While the train movement and embarkation of the troops had been carried out in this smooth fashion, the distribution of the troops aboard the ship itself left much to be desired. Battalion HQ for example discovered that its 37 other ranks had been allotted space in 13 different cabins in all parts of the ship. This was no fault of the West Nova officers, who had to spend the next three days hunting up their men amongst other units similarly scattered. This work began as soon as the Regiment went aboard on Dec. 22nd and continued far into the night.

At 11.15 on the following morning (Dec. 22nd) the leading ships of the convoy began to move out of Halifax harbour. The others followed in order, and at 1 P.M. the "Chrobry" (pronounced Krobree) left Pier 21 and took her place in the outgoing column, while the West Nova band played "O Canada" and the regimental march "Wenosco". Just before sailing, Lt. Col. Bullock had gone up to the headquarters of M.D. No. 6 to say Goodbye, taking with him those now famous bills for the boots and telephones. He laid the bills on a desk, remarked, "Here's a bill or two you can do what you like with", and departed.

The weather was a queer mixture of mist and snow and by 1.45 P.M. the shore of Nova Scotia vanished in the white

murk astern. The Regiment was not to see it again until five years and nine months had passed and a long roll of its officers and men had found graves in foreign soil.

Of the voyage across the Atlantic there is not much to say. As the sun went down on Christmas Eve the Canadian destroyers which had formed part of the escort turned back towards home. Aboard the "Chrobry", fir trees and decorations, and a great variety of confectionery and other refreshments had been shipped for the celebration of Christmas at sea. There were feasts on Christmas Eve, including one for the Polish officers and crew, to which Lt. Col. Bullock and other West Novas were invited. At 11.30 P.M. Lt. Col. Bullock conducted a Church of England communion service in person. A midnight mass was celebrated by the R. C. padre, Capt. T. F. Cashen — his choir including one Baptist, one Presbyterian, two Lutherans and last but not least a United Church clergyman.

On Christmas morning special religious services were held for the troops of all denominations. At noon the Christmas broadcast from London was heard throughout the ship, and at the conclusion of the King's message the officers drank a toast to His Majesty. By evening the weather took a turn for the worse, and from then on a rising gale with sheets of cold rain gave many of the troops their first real taste of the North Atlantic winter passage. For three days the sea was boisterous to say the least, and there was a good deal of *mal-de-mer*, but with the stout proportion of sailors and fishermen in their ranks the West Novas bore up nobly.

For those with sea legs there was plenty to occupy the mind — boat drills, wrestling and boxing matches on "B" deck, moving pictures, band concerts, variety concerts and sing-songs. On Dec. 29th the convoy entered a zone of intense submarine activity and all troops aboard "Chrobry" were ordered to remain on deck wearing lifebelts except for meals. Late that night a pair of fixed lights came in sight to starboard, the first glimpse of northern Ireland, and just at daylight on Dec. 30th the ship dropped anchor in the Firth of Clyde. Major-General McNaughton and some of his staff came aboard

the "Chrobry" at noon and it was announced that disembarkation would take place on the following day.

Shortly after breakfast on Dec. 31st the troops began to move by lighter from the "Chrobry" to a pier at Gourrock, and the Regiment from "New Scotland" suddenly found itself in the Old — and felt at home. This feeling never departed, indeed it grew stronger later on, when the Regiment included many lads of Highland descent from Cape Breton and elsewhere in Nova Scotia. In spite of the hospitality of southern England, where the Canadians were to stay so long, Scotland remained a favourite place for a furlough.

However the first acquaintance was a brief one. Within two hours the 800 officers and men of the Regiment pulled out of Gourrock in two trains, with the baggage following in a third. The troops were jammed in the little railway carriages, an uncomfortable novelty after the roomy Canadian sort, although everyone admired the speed and precision of the trains. And so, like mobile tins of sardines, the West Novas sped through the day across the Lowlands, over the border, and through the night down the length of England to another Aldershot — the famous English one.

The Regiment arrived at North Farnborough station on the morning of New Year's Day, 1940, and marched to Guillemont Barracks, a well built camp of wooden huts with corrugated iron roofs, their home for the next few months. Here Major C. H. R. Zwicker and others of the advance party rejoined the unit, also Lieut. S. D. Smith, who had completed his small-arms course at Hythe. By 4 P.M. the battalion was settled in its quarters and as night fell the men became acquainted with a prominent feature of their life to come — the black-out.

CHAPTER 4

The Battle of Britain

The period in England presents the historian with a problem, for his space has certain limits and he must reserve a major portion of it for the actual fighting record. Yet it is impossible to pass lightly over a period of three years and six months, during which the Canadian learned by constant and arduous training the art of war in its latest phase, became a citizen of Britain not merely by adoption but by long and intimate residence (forty or fifty thousand of him married British girls) and acquired the outlook of the professional soldier to whom the Regiment is home, the beginning and end of everything.

There had been little like it in World War One, when the Canadians passed into battle on the continent after a few months on Salisbury Plain and thereafter maintained their greatest strength in France and Belgium. There had been nothing like it in Britain since the days of Roman occupation, when the legions tramped their long straight roads, built camps which grew into towns as their soldiers married British women, and came to look upon this pleasant countryside as their natural habitat — a very far cry from Rome. There is a British regiment so old that it is facetiously called Pontius Pilate's Body-guard. During their long stay in England the Canadians came to look upon themselves in something of that light.

There was no air of settled ease, however. On the contrary the training was incessant, the troops became toughened to a degree beyond a peacetime imagination, and as time went by they performed feats of endurance that would have astonished the athletic Romans. There are Canadians today, veterans of fighting in Sicily, Italy, France, Germany and Holland, who look back upon "Exercise Tiger", performed in the countryside of Kent and Surrey, as a supreme experience.

The Canadian 1st Division arrived in Britain at a time when the war news was ominously quiet. Poland had fallen in the autumn and except for the private war between Russia and Finland a silence of death had fallen upon the short-lived eastern front. In the west it was much the same. The so-called "phony war" was in being along the Rhine, where the French had pushed out cautiously from the Maginot Line but contented themselves with outpost skirmishes. A British army lay in France near the Belgian border. It was supposed that the inevitable German thrust would come through Belgium, as it had in 1914, and the B.E.F. would then swing across the Belgian border to engage it.

With this in mind the training of the Canadian and other troops in Britain was conducted during the spring of 1940. Early in January the West Novas were given the customary five days' landing-leave, one-third of all ranks proceeding to London and elsewhere at a time. The unit then settled down to its training schedule. On Jan. 11th the machine-gunners received their first Bren gun. By the middle of the month they had seventeen. Things were looking up!

"Training per syllabus" became routine as the weeks and months went by, filled with parades, instruction squads, route marches over the roads of Hants and Surrey, lectures, drills, tank demonstrations, rifle shoots on the range at Ash, gas demonstrations, and so on. There was a constant traffic of officers and men leaving or returning from courses. The weather in the early months was damp and chill, with occasional snow and frost. The C. of E. personnel paraded frequently to St. Christopher's Church at Cove, and on one occasion were returning blithely to the tune of the regimental band when the wind

instruments suddenly froze and the music perished in a medley of weird gasps. For the R. C. personnel, Padre Cashen celebrated mass each Sunday in the NAAFI (Navy, Army and Air Forces' Institute) hut at Guillemont Barracks, where no such musical chances were involved.

For entertainment there were shows in the gymnasium or the NAAFI hut by volunteer concert parties and ENSA troupes, and later on conducted tours to Windsor Castle, Winchester, Southampton and Oxford University. There were dances in the sergeants' mess with girls from nearby towns and villages. The dances usually were under the joint auspices of the West Nova and Royal 22nd (Quebec) Regiment NCO's, since the two regiments were quartered together in Guillemont Barracks.

Sports were not neglected, despite a chronic shortage of proper equipment. Volleyball and baseball were popular. The West Novas developed a very good boxing team including J. M. LeBlanc, R. Steele, C. Olmstead, F. A. Embree, S. B. O'Handley and a powerful negro lad, T. Falls, whose ancestors had come to Nova Scotia as slaves with the Loyalists. "Tommy" Falls later went on to the heavyweight championship of the Canadian 1st Division and of the British Isles (Army), while the others again and again distinguished themselves and the Regiment in Brigade sports.

Certain events stand out in the bleak early months of 1940. On Jan. 24th there was an inspection of the 3rd Brigade by King George. As the King walked along the rigid West Nova lines, Lt. Col. Bullock presented each of his officers, and when the royal visitor reached the last file the Regiment broke into three roaring cheers.

To the C/O this inspection by His Majesty was a particular satisfaction and a climax. Lt. Col. Bullock had infused the Regiment with his own ardent and loyal spirit in the years of peace, had raised it to war strength and taken it overseas. Few of those who saw his burly figure and athletic step on the parade ground realised that he was 56, although many guessed that a younger man would command the unit in the rigorous training period which lay before it, and eventually in the field.

Now the time had come when Lt. Col. Bullock could leave and feel that his part of the work had been done and done well.

Characteristically, he made no formal farewell. He shook a few hands (including the hand of his son, Platoon-sergeant-major R. W. Bullock) and left for a post as chaplain with the forces elsewhere. On Feb. 5th, 1940, Brigadier Price assembled the West Nova officers in the mess at Guillemont Barracks and introduced the new C/O, Major (later Lt. Col.) Milton F. Gregg, VC, MC.

On the two succeeding days Major Gregg gathered the officers and NCO's in the band room of the NAAFI hut for a personal talk. Slim, dark, dynamic, with a record of courage and decision in World War One, Milton Gregg (a Maritime province man himself, and a graduate of Acadia University) made himself the heart and soul of the Regiment during many months of hard monotonous training in England. He was an ideal commander and it was one of the ironies of war that a severe breakdown in his own health robbed him of the chance to lead the unit into battle.

On March 7, 1940, a novelty appeared in the training routine when the West Novas were ordered to send a crew of Lewis-gunners to be embarked on a small ship at London as part of the anti-aircraft protection of shipping in the Thames. Towards the end of the month a second team was despatched.

With the coming of April battalion exercises on a wider scale were carried out by day and night, sometimes on foot, sometimes in motor transport. There were rifle and Bren-gun shoots on Hangmoor Range and the Long Siberia Range at Bisley. New equipment was constantly arriving, and now there were special new rifles for Lieut. H. F. Parker's snipers. Yet a good deal of this time the Regiment (with other Canadian and British units) practiced old-fashioned trench warfare in the elaborate earthworks at Aldershot. Here things proceeded as in 1916, with regular spells in the line, day attacks, night attacks, supplies brought up and reliefs carried out in the dark with furtive care — there were even occasional casualties from flying blank-cartridge wads.

On the social side in April Lieut. E. M. Crouse was married in Farnborough Parish Church — the first West Nova officer to marry overseas. His bride was a charming British girl and the ceremony was performed by Lt. Col. Bullock, who came down for the occasion. At this time also there were visits

from distinguished people like Lord Bennett, the Canadian peer, and there was an inspection by the British Secretary of State for War, Lord Stanley, accompanied by Major-General McNaughton, Brigadier Price and a number of other 1st Division officers.

On April 23rd came Mr. Norman Rogers, the Canadian Minister of National Defence. Of his visit Col. Gregg later remarked by radio to Canada, "The Hon. Norman Rogers has inspected the West Nova Scotia Regiment and was greatly pleased with their appearance. On my own part I wish to say to the fathers and mothers in Nova Scotia that your boys put on a great show today. They will give an excellent account of themselves, whatever they may be called upon to do. All ranks in my Regiment send to all of you in Nova Scotia our best wishes."

In the evening the West Nova officers gave a dinner in honour of Mr. Rogers and Lt. Col. Gregg proposed a toast to the distinguished guest. Mr. Rogers, himself a Nova Scotian, referred to the harmonious blending of races in the old province, each a people of military prowess, and congratulated the Regiment on its worthy representation of them all. "This," he added, "is the proudest day of my life." The Regiment recalled that remark soon after, when Mr. Rogers was killed in a flying accident following his return to Canada.

During the month of May the Aldershot training continued with its emphasis on trench warfare; but across the Channel things were happening which were to change the whole face of the war, including all theories of training and equipment. The "phony war" along the Rhine came to an abrupt end in a terrific German armoured stroke, which swept over Holland, decoyed the British army into Belgium, and then broke clean through France to the Channel ports. At the end of the month the British forces were making their desperate but successful escape from Dunkirk, leaving all their guns and equipment in enemy hands — and the Canadian 1st Division remained the only troops in all England fully equipped to meet an invader.

The first hint of this new and startling development came at the close of an exercise move to Warminster Camp and back to Guillemont Barracks, when the West Novas were ordered to pack up at once for an undisclosed destination. All sorts of rumours were afloat. The officer responsible for the Regiment's war diary wrote on May 29th a cryptic, "Preparing for another MT move — this time on active service." And on May 31st, "At 2240 hours the 2 i/c signalled the convoy to start, and the West Nova Scotia Regiment began its trek to intervene in the Second Great War."

This was pure optimism as events proved, but at least the long monotony of Guillemont Camp was at an end. The "trek" was to Northampton in the heart of England, where the Canadians could strike with equal facility at an enemy landing from the Channel or the North Sea. Northampton was a pleasant place, not least because in the words of one enthusiast, "a brief reconnaissance of the city revealed to our admiring eyes the largest aggregation of female beauty ever seen in one place, including Canada."

After four days of these delights the West Novas moved to Ashby Castle and then — to the great disgust of all — back to Guillemont Barracks. But now it was revealed that the Canadians had moved south en route to France. The King and Queen inspected the 3rd Brigade and other units and wished them God-speed. On June 13th the West Novas' kit bags and surplus baggage were stored at Camberley, together with the band instruments. The Intelligence section drew maps of France from the army stores, Aldershot. On June 14th an advance party under Lieut. Parker proceeded with the Regiment's vehicles to Plymouth docks, with orders to embark. Everyone said, "This is It."

These hopes were doomed. After several hours Parker and the vehicles were recalled to Aldershot — just as they were about to embark — and on June 16th after church parade Brigadier Price informed the officers that all remaining British forces were being withdrawn from France because organized French resistance was at an end; and the Germans were preparing to invade England. He also passed on for what they were worth one or two items of British information which had a doubtful echo in Canadian ears — (a) that properly applied

small-arms fire was effective against dive bombers, and (b) that the Germans could not possibly land heavy tanks on British soil.

There followed a week of tactical exercises in the familiar surroundings of Aldershot, with the Regiment digging slit trenches, hiding bivouacs from the air, carrying out attacks and retreats, and practising with the pitifully inadequate anti-tank rifle, in such places as Stony Castle, Crowthorne, Pyestock Wood and Wishmoor Cross.

On June 24th the West Novas received a new role in the defence of England and moved through Henley-on-Thames to encamp in the grounds of Blenheim Palace as the core of a composite force known as "Z-Group". Their stay here was notable for a number of air-raid alarms, all of which proved false but gave an unusual zest to the digging of slit trenches by the troops. There was also an amusing business at Hardwick Farm, where Lieut. Johnston and 50 other ranks, fully armed and equipped, were hastily summoned by a 1st Division security officer on the evening of Dominion Day. German parachutists were said to be concealed on the farm, and search by the eager troops revealed several youths and a woman, refugees from Europe. These were genuine victims of Nazi oppression, employed by the British gentleman-farmer, who took his indignation later to high quarters. It turned out that the security officer's informant was an imaginative deserter from the British Army!

In truth, the whole countryside was spy-mad about this time, and Germans dressed in British uniforms were seen all over the place. Near Wadhurst Station, where the West Novas bivouacked on July 6th, they were delighted to learn that the Brigadier and Brigade-Major had been reported to the police by the matron of the local hospital "because their actions and appearance were so suspicious!"

The Regiment, still in its role as "Z-Group", remained encamped near East Horsley in Surrey for the rest of the summer, in a position of readiness for the defence of the Channel Coast. The time was passed in strenuous training manoeuvres with the other units of 3rd Brigade, sometimes acting as invading "Germans", sometimes beating the "Germans" off with stiff counter-attacks, descending swiftly into Kent or Sussex as

occasion demanded, fighting notable battles at Felbridge, Uckfield, Cold Harbour, South Park Farm, and living a gypsy life in the woods and copses.

During this time the Luftwaffe began its now famous attack on Britain, and often the high sky over Surrey and Kent was alive with planes, British and German. For this thrilling show the West Novas had a seat in the stalls, very distracting as far as training went, for the boys found it hard to put the proper zest into a sham fight with a real one going on overhead. Once a German pilot bailed out of his plane and was astonished to find himself in the midst of several hundred armed and embattled Nova Scotians — the Regiment's first prisoner, and for that matter the first German prisoner taken by the Canadian Army overseas.

Brigade had now acquired a mobile bath unit capable of handling 125 men per hour; but West Nova bath parades were held in additional ways and places, ranging all the way from Saint Teresa's Convent to the Lido Bath Club at Guilford, Kent. The YMCA provided recreation in the field, and the boys had many opportunities to enjoy the hospitality of the villages along the summer's route.

In August the West Nova band got its instruments from Camberley and gave concerts whenever the opportunity was afforded. An old quarry provided the Regiment with its first chance to throw live bombs — after due warning to the local populace, lest they think the Germans had landed. Major K. Harris was detached on special duty in Kent, where for several weeks along the Medway Valley he supervised the clearing of lines of fire for about 35 miles of the hastily-built "pillboxes" and gun emplacements in the main battle zone of the southeast coast defensive system.

Portable field radio telephones came into use. The Intelligence section under Lieut. J. O. Millard was increased by 15 other ranks. A new section of snipers trained under L/Cpl. (later Lieut.) F. A. Embree, a crack shot himself. The scout section was placed in charge of L/Cpl. J. J. P. Francis, a Micmac Indian.

At this time also the Regiment began to fly its own flag. Nova Scotians are rightly proud of the fact that their province has had its own flag for more than three centuries, granted by

King Charles the First, and consisting of the blue St. Andrew's cross of Scotland on its white field, with the red lion of the Scottish kings superimposed. The St. Andrew's cross appears on the West Nova badge of course but the Regiment wished to fly the flag as well. This was made possible in August 1940 when the Premier of Nova Scotia, Mr. Angus L. MacDonald, presented them with one.

On August 9th at the West Nova camp near East Horsley the flag was hoisted with ceremony by Lt. Col. Gregg himself, while the band played "O Canada", "The Maple Leaf Forever" and the regimental march "Wenosco". That evening in celebration a regimental dinner was held in the HQ Company mess, the first since leaving Guillemont Barracks. From this time on the blue-cross ensign marked West Nova headquarters wherever the Regiment went in Britain, and along the fighting road through Sicily, Italy and Holland.

CHAPTER 5

Autumn and Winter 1940

September 1940 was a tense month. The German air attack had reached a terrific pitch by day and by night. RAF observers noted strings of self-propelled barges moving down the French coast from the Belgian and Dutch canals under cover of shore batteries, and large concentrations of German troops and equipment assembling near the French Channel ports. Heavy cannon, removed from the ill-fated Maginot Line and installed at Cap Gris Nez, began to throw shells at Dover across the Channel. On Sep. 11th Winston Churchill in a broadcast to the empire declared that all signs pointed to an attempt to invade England within two weeks.

During the summer a few Thompson sub-machine-guns (the popular "Tommy-guns") had been issued to the West Novas. Now came enough to provide one to each platoon. At about the same time came orders to move nearer London. On Sep. 18th the West Novas struck their tents, filled the slit trenches and latrines, and bade farewell to their hospitable English friends in Horsley, Guildford and Dorking. One gentleman wrote the C/O expressing his appreciation of the good conduct and consideration of the West Nova boys camped near his farm. This, incidentally, was the farmer who provided "C" Company with a ferret and made them the envy of the Regiment. The ferret, a slim and highly-skilled beast named Peggy, pulled many a succulent rabbit out of the nearby warrens for the stew-pots of the lucky "C's".

By evening the West Novas found themselves in very different surroundings, a residential suburb of London called Woldingham, where there were many fine homes. The Regiment was billeted over the whole Woldingham area, and found life under roofs an agreeable change after the nomad existence of the summer. There was one drawback for the thirstier souls — the nearest “pub” was three miles away in Warlingham.

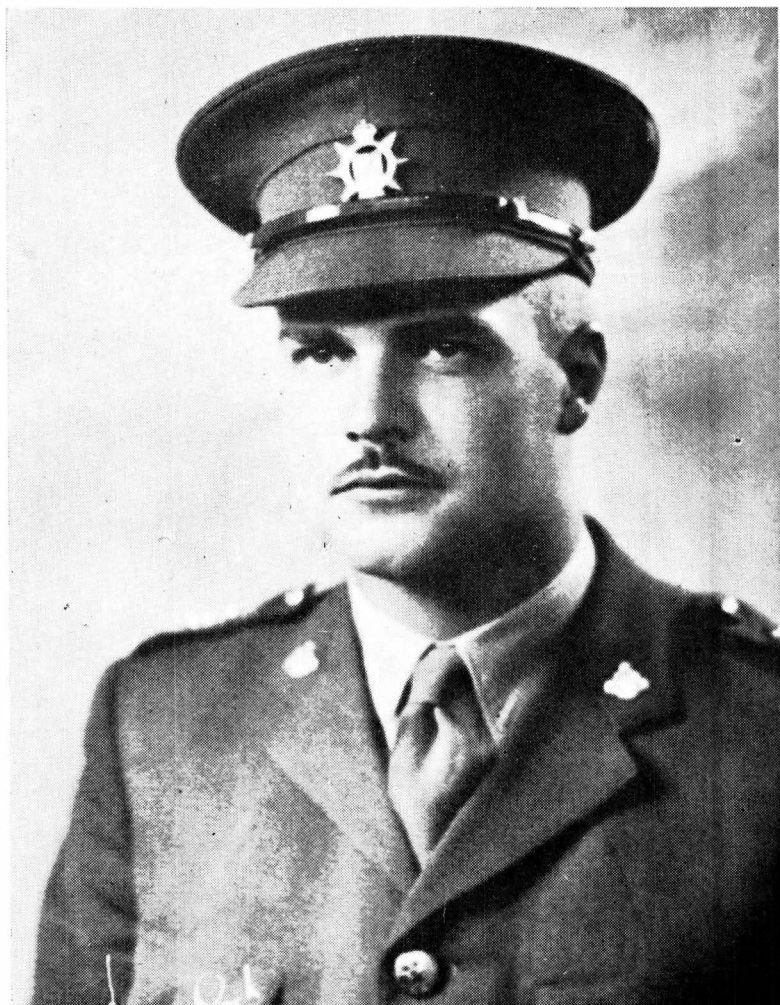
The whole village turned out for the first formal mounting of the West Nova guard. It took place on the village green, with a very smart guard, and the band in attendance. The people of Woldingham took the Regiment to their hearts from the first. An energetic civilian committee was set up to arrange entertainment for the men, and a number of ladies fitted a large room in the battalion HQ house, “Southdean”, with comfortable furniture for the officers’ mess. The West Novas long remembered Mr. Harry Letts, Mrs. Ball and others of the Woldingham Committee for their kindness in a time when their own homes and lives were in imminent danger and their days and nights were filled with strain.

The air raids on nearby London were in full blast, with frequent air battles over Woldingham itself, and every billet was kept ajar with bomb explosions and the rattle of the local anti-aircraft batteries. The Regiment’s martial spirit remained unshaken, however, and towards the end of September a suspicious number of applications for leave to Caterham revealed to the C/O a plot to renew the West Novas’ little personal war with His Majesty’s Brigade of Guards, there stationed. (This was a merry affair of fists and boots, dating back to the Guillemont Barracks period, when the Guards rather naturally took umbrage at the West Novas’ success with local girls.) In the interests of Empire solidarity, all leave to Caterham was cancelled for a time.

October brought the dark wet English autumn, and the increasing length of the nights gave the Luftwaffe every opportunity to bomb London under cover of darkness. (The RAF had trounced them smartly in the big daylight raids through August and September). Towards the middle of the month Woldingham itself began to receive a nightly shower of bombs, besides those which fell in daylight, and there was much



Lieutenant-Colonel L. T. Lowther, E.D.



Major J. A. Hebb, E.D.

damage to houses and to the civilian population. "C" Company's billets received a bad shaking-up one night, but without injury to the personnel.

On one occasion, a stick of eleven bombs fell across the Woldingham water tower — a pet mark of the German airmen, — without damage. Indeed, in the course of several days no less than 60 bombs fell within a radius of 300 yards of this tower without hitting it or even damaging it. An incendiary bomb landed on the lawn in front of West Nova HQ., breaking a window and spattering oil over the white front of the building. Several houses were completely wrecked by heavy bombs which left craters 50 feet in diameter and 30 feet deep. These broke gas and water mains and made havoc in the village for a time. The people bore up nobly, although as one said ruefully, "It looks as though Jerry knows you chaps are here."

On Oct. 25th the West Novas moved down to Brighton, Sussex, to take over part of the Channel coast defence. On the way there was a quaint interlude at Godstone, where an innocent-looking lorry swung into the Regimental convoy and travelled in its midst for several miles before someone discovered what it was — a disposal squad in charge of a huge German air bomb that had dropped (but not exploded) on London. On arrival the West Novas were quartered in the famous Roedean school for girls, about a mile outside Brighton. Here were some of the white chalk cliffs famous in song and story.

The school itself, a group of handsome grey stone buildings looking past a stretch of green lawns to the Channel, was large enough to house the whole Regiment. There was an impressive ceremony in front of it as the West Novas formally took over the guard from the 15th Queens Own, with the Nova Scotians' band providing the music. At its climax, the sharp command of a Queens Own corporal, "Sentries, pass!", the West Novas took over not only the guard but the defence of sixty square miles of coastal Sussex. Lt. Col. Gregg himself raised the Nova Scotia flag on the staff before the school, and more than one man noted its significance here — the Regiment and the flag had returned to the sea. (Curiously enough, many of the Roedean girls had been removed to safety in Canada when the Blitz began and their school was taken over by the

army, and at this moment were continuing their studies at "Edgehill", the well-known Anglican school for girls at Windsor, N. S.)

It had been supposed that the Regiment would occupy trenches and "pillboxes" in the approved coastal defence pattern: but the West Novas found only a long stretch of rolling green downland, to be patrolled day and night in all weathers. These downs, apparently bare, were not so innocent as they looked. The folds and hollows concealed batteries of artillery, whose occasional practice on targets in the Channel gave the West Novas their first experience of shells whistling overhead.

Air raids were less frequent here than in the London region, but from time to time there was a noisy day or night when a storm beat on the shore, tore loose the floating mines in the Channel, and exploded them against the foot of the cliffs. Sometimes the whole school shook. But the rear party, left to clean up behind the Regiment at Woldingham, had plenty of air excitement. During one very heavy raid on that hard-hit village the West Nova party distinguished themselves in rescue work amongst the ruins. They were warmly praised by the Woldingham ARP, and L/Cpl. F. E. Blakeney was cited in army orders and later decorated with the British Empire Medal for his part in the affair.

On Nov. 14th the West Novas returned inland to their former billets in Woldingham for the winter and spring. Training continued vigorously on a company and platoon basis. On November 20th the Regiment sent a convoy of 30 lorries to haul coal from Isleworth on the Thames, the railways being too congested for prompt delivery. On the 27th a working party was sent to get the Purley Ice Rink ready for winter sport, and plans were laid for a ice hockey schedule with other units of 3rd Brigade. On the social side there were picture shows at Caterham and elsewhere, and variety concerts put on by the Canadian Legion and YMCA. The West Novas had developed an excellent dance orchestra during the spring of 1940, and towards the end of November these lads provided the music for a very successful dance at the Woldingham Golf Club, where 75 girls of the WAAF were invited guests.

About this time official approval was given to the new dress cap of the Regiment, a dark blue "wedge" with gold

piping, and the top fold lined with salmon buff in memory of the ancient connection with the 40th Foot. And it should be mentioned that the Prince of Wales' Volunteers, South Lancashire Regiment, whose army ancestor was the 40th Foot, re-established the old friendship here in England, extending to the West Novas the hospitality of their mess, etc.

A feature of these Woldingham days was Sergeant Cunningham's bagpipes, with which he frequently led "C" Company on the march. Sports were in charge of Capt. LeTourneau, who kept a keen eye on the Purley Rink and the West Nova hockey team. Education for post-war rehabilitation had now been in progress for some time; the officer in charge of these facilities was the Brigade R. C. Chaplain, the popular and witty H/Capt. A. D. Butts, known to everyone as Father Butts, whose tall lean figure was to become so familiar to the West Novas in the tough months and years ahead.

Early in December the GOC, 1st Division, General Pearkes, inspected the Regiment and had warm words of praise for all ranks. For this inspection Lt. Col. Gregg, whose health had been failing for some time, kept himself on his feet by sheer will power, but immediately afterwards the M. O. ordered him to hospital, where he remained ill for several months. In his absence the command was taken over by Major A. A. Ernst.

On Dec. 21st the Records Office at Canadian Army HQ, London, provided the Regiment with the best joke of the season, a solemn notification that the West Nova Scotia Regiment had never gone through Orders as transferred to England, and therefore officially were still in Canada. It was pleasant to think that on paper at least the boys would spend Christmas at home. In fact, the Regiment spent a cheerful Christmas at Woldingham. There were voluntary services in the morning at St. Paul's Church, followed by prodigious Christmas dinners, Nova Scotia style, for officers and men. The C/O and officers visited each company in turn with the compliments of the season, and went on to visit Lt. Col. Gregg in Bramshot Hospital. In the evening 100 officers and men attended a dance at Upper Warlingham. All in all the first Christmas in England was a truly happy one. Even the German Air Force stayed at home.

On Dec. 27th Col. J. L. Ralston (successor to Norman Rogers as Canadian Minister of Defence) visited the West

Novas. He was guest of honour at a regimental dinner at Selsdon Park, where his fellow guests were Generals McNaughton, Crerar, Pearkes and Price. The bill of fare was typically Nova Scotian, and Col. Ralston, who like his predecessor was a native of the Bluenose province, reminded the guests of the fact in a little speech at the dinner's end. Afterwards the West Nova officers withdrew and fell in with the Regiment, which had marched over in charge of the RSM and formed up in front of the Selsby Park Hotel. And there Col. Ralston, a fighting veteran of World War One, inspected the unit with a practiced eye and pronounced it one of the best — a judgement later confirmed by that critical man the Brigadier.

CHAPTER 6

1941

New Year's Day '41 found the West Novas at Woldingham, still confidently expecting the long-delayed German invasion and certainly facing another year in England. During January the round of company training was varied by battalion route marches, beginning with 12 miles and increasing in length to a three-day affair at the month's end which averaged 25 miles a day. The Brigade ice-hockey schedule got under way at Purley Rink, and the West Nova team defeated the Carleton and Yorks but lost a close game to the "Vingt-Deux".

February was marked chiefly by a divisional field scheme, "Exercise Fox", and the month of March by "Exercise Beagle", which took the Regiment many miles over the wet countryside on motor transport and afoot. Early in March, Major Ernst left to take a seven-weeks' tactical course and Lt. Col. L. T. Lowther took over the command. Two days later the Regiment paraded to receive the farewell of Brigadier C. B. Price, who was returning to Canada to take command of the 3rd Division. In his place Brigadier H. N. Ganong took over the 3rd Infantry Brigade.

For variation in the training through the spring there were (much hated) working parties to handle coal, and to unload trains of rubble at Epsom for road building; and whole companies were sent to the Dover-Deal area on wiring duty. On April 6th the old feud with the Guards was settled in the proper place — the boxing ring at Caterham — where the

Canadian 1st Division team defeated a team from the Guards' depot by 7 bouts to 5. The West Novas had four men on the 1st Division team — Cpl. F. A. Embree, L/Cpl. T. A. Falls, and Ptes. W. G. Fowler and A. F. Garnier — each of whom won his bout. Later in the month a number of West Novas went to take a special NCO course at the Guards' Depot; they returned full of knowledge and friendship, reporting the Guards to be the finest fellows in the world, and thus the feud was buried. It had been a pleasant little interlude in the dull round of the "phony war".

On April 25th Lt. Col. M. F. Gregg returned from convalescent leave and resumed command of the West Novas, who were glad to see him back; but he was not to be with them long. On May 9th the very popular and capable C/O was promoted to the command of a large officer-cadet training unit. At a regimental dinner the West Nova officers presented him with a silver cigarette box engraved with the WNSR crest, and the Colonel visited each of the companies to bid them farewell.

The middle of May saw the Regiment engaged in a Brigade scheme, "Exercise Rhine" — an ambitious name for what actually was a crossing of the Medway River by assault boats at night, forming a bridgehead on the other side, and returning after daylight. It was a lively affair in which all ranks got thoroughly soaked and plastered with mud but emerged singing like larks. At one point the C/O, Major Ernst, missed the Intelligence Officer suddenly, and found him sunk to the waist in a mudhole. These holes were numerous and added a lot of gaiety to a dark occasion. The gaiety was not lessened when a party of amateur Charons, weary with a night of paddling their comrades across the "Styx", lay down on a secluded part of the muddy bank to steal a nap. They awoke drenched and half drowned, and thus discovered that the Medway is a tidal stream for a surprising distance from its mouth.

Early in June the West Novas had the honour of providing a guard for Prime Minister Churchill's home at Westerham, Kent. The great man sometimes strolled about the grounds conversing with officers and men, and "A" Company always recalled this occasion with great pride. Westerham had another

interest for Canadians. It was the birthplace of General James Wolfe, whose old home, now called "Quebec House", is still preserved.

June saw "Exercise Waterloo", a divisional affair which carried the West Novas through many miles of Sussex, fighting severe "battles" at Horsham and Chanctonbury Ring, and arriving back at their Woldingham billets on the night of the 16th. This was followed by a test move to the area of the Biggin Hill airdrome, to defend that important London feature against "German" paratroops. On June 21st the 3rd Brigade track and field sports were held on the hill at Upper Caterham, and the West Novas ran away with the show, taking 74 points, while the Royal 22nd won 47 and the Carleton and Yorks 14. The West Nova officers provided refreshments for the regimental sports team afterwards at the well-known Horse Shoe Inn, Warlingham.

These sports, and the baseball and softball games to be seen so frequently in the Canadian area, attracted much interest from the English residents. But they were a little puzzled. At one game between West Novas HQ and a team from the Royal Canadian Engineers a lady was heard enquiring, "But why do the catcher and umpire wear gas-masks?"

June 27th was notable for a special regimental radio broadcast to the folk at home in Nova Scotia, through the facilities of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Several officers and men were given an opportunity to say "Hello, Mum and Dad", or "Don't forget to send more cigarettes!" and one man from Lunenburg requested a package of sauer kraut, that ancient and highly esteemed vegetable product of the South Shore.

In June also the troops were issued with the rectangular crimson shoulder-patch of the Canadian 1st Division, the famous "old red patch" of World War One, with its gallant memories of Ypres, Amiens and the Hindenburg Line.

In July the Regiment moved from Woldingham to Biggin Hill, just across the county line in Kent, where it remained under canvas through the summer and autumn engaged in defensive schemes. The West Novas here, and indeed everywhere they went in England, established close working relations with the local Home Guard units. At Biggin Hill one or two West

Nova companies played the part of "German paratroops" with great cheer and enthusiasm against the rest of the Regiment and the Home Guard, notably in an exercise called (with an unusual flash of official wit) "Operation Fanny Adams".

August brought, amongst other things, "Exercise Roft", in which the West Novas made an all-night march of 26 miles in pouring rain, rested three hours at the roadside on the sodden ground, and then pushed on to fight a desperate "battle" with the Royal Montreal Regiment on Lambsdown Hill (still in a flood of rain) through the following day and half the following night. Soon after the succeeding dawn, as the West Novas were resting triumphantly on the hill, they were visited by the Divisional C/O, Major-General Pearkes, accompanied by the Hon. Angus L. MacDonald, former premier of Nova Scotia and now Minister of the Naval Service in the Canadian war cabinet, who thus had a good chance to see how his fellow Bluenoses were bearing up under the long test of a waiting but far from idle war.

On Aug. 26th the Regiment paraded for inspection by another distinguished visitor, the Right-Honourable W. L. Mackenzie King, prime minister of Canada, who was accompanied by Generals McNaughton and Pearkes. The prime minister addressed the Regiment for about fifteen minutes with a general message from the folk at home.

In September came "Exercise Bumper", the most ambitious manoeuvre yet performed by the Canadians in England. Certain divisions of British troops, acting as a "German" invasion moving swiftly inland from the Norfolk coast, penetrated into Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire in an effort to cut off London from the rest of England. Traffic through London was ruled impossible due to enemy action, so the Canadians moved in a wide sweep around the city to meet the "invaders". The 3rd Brigade in motor transport travelled via Guildford, crossed the Thames at Marlow in the night, and sent the West Novas forward to the city of Luton in Bedfordshire, where (in an exposed position in the Chiltern foot-hills) they were ordered to "hold out to the last man."

It should be explained that all these operations were carried out with every possible appearance of reality. Umpires travelled with every unit, noting when it came under "enemy" fire,

estimating "casualties", often pronouncing whole companies and battalions "wiped out" with the sang-froid of gods on Olympus. Every stratagem of modern war was open to the troops — there were "fifth-columnists" in all sorts of disguise, "prisoners" were searched and sharply questioned about strength and position of their units, bridges were declared "blown", roads "shelled", whole villages "destroyed".

In the course of "Exercise Bumper", which lasted eight days from start to finish, the 3rd Brigade distinguished itself for a stout battle against overwhelming odds, and the West Novas eventually were "wiped out" in a gallant attack near the village of Great Offley, with the comforting assurance of the umpires that they had inflicted "severe losses" upon the "enemy" — including the 4th Dorsets, the London Scottish, two batteries of Royal Artillery, and a Reconnaissance unit. The lightning sweep of the Canadian division had covered no less than seven English counties, and their work was praised by General Sir Harold Alexander, just back from Burma, and in charge of the "Bumper" manoeuvres.

Again the Regiment settled into the routine of "training per syllabus" on Biggin Hill. October came, and the wet autumn weather. An unfortunate accident marked the training during this month, when Capt. C. E. Miller was demonstrating a new type of grenade. One grenade had a defective fuse, and Miller was attempting to dispose of it when the thing exploded, destroying three of his toes and giving him a bad shake-up. Major John Hebb and Sergeant Ramey received lesser but painful injuries at the same time.

The snipers of 1st Division held a special match shoot at the Henley Park range in November, and the West Nova team not only led its own brigade group by a healthy margin but came within a single point of leading the entire division. Top man on the West Nova team was Pte. Harry Gates, with a score of 87.

On Nov. 22nd the Regiment moved down to the Sussex coast for another spell in the front line of England, this time in the neighbourhood of Worthing. From the Royal Welsh Fusiliers the West Novas took over various responsibilities, including the defence of Shoreham Airdrome. Prompt contact was made with the local Home Guard and plans laid for the

event of German attack. The battle positions chosen were at Chanctonbury Ring and Steyning Round Hill. None of this business on the Channel coast, it may be added, was mere training. Across a few miles of water lay a powerful German army, and any invasion attempt would be, in the words of the troops, "playing for keeps". Every Canadian who moved through Kent, Sussex and Surrey in '40 and '41 did so with a keen eye for ground and an uncanny feeling that perhaps he was walking on his own grave.

(Colonel-General Franz Halder, the German Chief-of-Staff at this time, has since told of the invasion plan. "It was planned to use three armies for the invasion of England and they were stationed along the Channel coast from Le Havre to Holland. These three armies were to form the army group led by Von Rundstedt. The intention of Von Rundstedt's group was . . . to land on the English south coast between Dover and Portsmouth, to destroy the opposing British forces, and to advance step by step northwards in order to occupy the area between the south coast and a line drawn through Midhurst-Guildford-North Downs, which area was required as a base for further operations.")

Christmas came again, the third away from home, the second on English soil. Nova Scotia and especially the Bridgewater barracks seemed as far away as the moon. Two years of promotions, transfers and the natural medical wastage under a long and severe training program had removed many of the "originals" who crossed the Atlantic in the "Chrobry" in 1939. Reinforcements had come from every part of Nova Scotia, and "C" Company had become almost a Cape Breton unit.

The talk, the bearing, the outlook of the men now were those of the veteran soldier long stationed in a land that while not foreign was at any rate two years and three thousand miles from home. They regarded themselves as old inhabitants. Marriages had been numerous and many West Novas now had children born of English wives on English soil. And Cupid was still at work, for in the long dull round of soldiering there were precious three-monthly leaves to London and other haunts of Mars and Venus; and there were the weekly dances at the YMCA, at Warlingham hospital, at the Bell Hotel in Bromley, at Keston Hall in South Lancing, and at the Connaught Hotel

on the Sussex coast. And more than one of the officers would remember the dances at "Broadlands", "Nightens" and "Tinnivelli" for many a day to come.

But more important than any of these was the every day association with English people in their homes, not only about the camps and billeting areas but on the many marches through the land. The first impression of many of the troops was that of an old country fallen far behind the pace of the world. They compared the size of the trains and motor-cars with those across the Atlantic; they wondered at the absence of central heating in a climate which if not as frigid in winter was certainly as wet and bleak as any Nova Scotia spring; indeed there were a hundred comparisons, all invidious. This was quite natural in young men, proud of their country, and coming suddenly from the New World to the Old. But time and experience had broadened their viewpoint very much. Above all they found that the spirit of a people was the thing that counted, and if they could not admire English plumbing they could appreciate English hospitality and English courage. The troops had a word for it — "guts". The people of the British Isles had guts, and in the show-down that was what mattered.

CHAPTER 7

1942 – The first six months

New Year's Day '42 — the third New Year in England for the Regiment — was more or less a day of rest for all ranks, apart from the necessary guards and details. There was an interchange of visits from officers of the regiments comprising 3rd Brigade (West Novas, Carleton and Yorks, and "Vingt-Deux") to wish each other the compliments of the season.

On the following day Lt. Col. Ernst and 16 other West Nova officers attended a momentous lecture at Brighton — momentous, not because of the subject ("Invasion Battle as it affects South-Eastern Command") but because the lecturer was none other than the brilliant, odd and ruthless General Montgomery. For most of the officers it was the first close glimpse of "Monty", and the first chance to "size him up", Canadian fashion. Montgomery was known throughout SECO at this time chiefly as an erratic tyrant of incredible rudeness to officers and men alike, emphasized somehow by his occasional lapses into warm humanity. His reputation in battle was still to be made, and the Canadians who met him in '41 and '42 came away with mixed impressions, mostly bad. Some thought him crazy; but one or two who remembered their history recalled that Wolfe of Quebec had been termed mad after Louisburg — and old King George the Second had expressed a pious hope that Wolfe would bite some of his other generals. "Monty" in these days was busy biting other generals, with results not always fortunate.

On Jan. 6th the West Novas suffered a tragic mishap during a training exercise on the River Adur, when an assault boat capsized in mid-stream and six men of "B" Company were drowned. Some of them were good swimmers but in the cold water and weighted down with weapons and equipment they had no chance to save themselves. Ptes. Frank Smith and O. S. Foster of "B" Company, who made heroic efforts to save the lives of their comrades, were later presented with certificates of the Royal Humane Society, and awarded the British Empire Medal.

The funeral was conducted at Brookwood Cemetery on the 10th, with padres Addie and Butts in charge of the rites. "B" Company supplied the burial and firing parties and Lt. Col. Ernst and all the officers of "B" Company were in attendance. Since coming to England the Regiment had buried several of its men, most of them victims of traffic accidents in the black-out, but the loss of six in a simple training exercise came as a shock.

February was noteworthy chiefly for the short but tough "Exercise Beaver", an invasion exercise carried out on the downs about Frieslands and Chanctonbury Ring, complete with "gas", "dive-bomber" and "paratroop" attacks. For their real role in the defence of the Sussex coast (as distinct from mere training exercises) the West Novas were grouped chiefly about Highden House and Highden Wood, with such diversions as lectures and sand-table demonstrations at Sky Ring, semaphore practice on the Worthing golf course (dodging the mashie shots of local sportsmen), and practice shoots on the ranges at Cissbury and Bow Hill. The defence preparations still involved a good deal of wiring and trench-digging, not to mention putting up anti-tank scaffolding on the beaches, all of which kept the Regiment very busy.

On March 2nd Lt.-General Montgomery called and interviewed the C/O and company commanders. A special guard was selected from "C" Company for the occasion. The training of new divisions in Canada had now become a matter of great moment, and all units overseas were called upon to send back parties of experienced NCO's for instructional duty. On March 10th the West Novas sent off their quota — 18 capable men, a

distinct loss which resulted in a school for new NCO's, opened at Weppon's Farm under the direction of the second-in-command, Major John Hebb.

Soon after this the Regiment took part in "Exercise Mouse" another invasion exercise chiefly notable as a comedy of errors due to vehicle accidents on the congested roads. On March 20th the 1st Division boxing team met that of Canadian Corps in formation semi-finals. The West Novas had four men on the Division team, two of whom (Pete. A. F. Garnier, light-weight, and Cpl. F. A. Embree, welterweight) won their bouts. Pte. A. Savrnock of the West Novas lost his bout to the middle-weight champion of the Canadian Army by the narrow margin of half a point.

On the 25th the officers held a dinner at Findon Manor in farewell to Lt. Col. A. A. Ernst, who was leaving the Regiment to take an appointment in Canada, and Major John Hebb became acting C/O in his stead. The month's end saw another invasion exercise, "Exercise Mickey", carried out in heavy rain and fog.

April brought "Exercise Robin", a lively affair in which the West Novas found themselves once more in the role of a sacrifice attack; they fought their way into the midst of an "enemy" brigade and laid down their lives at a place called (aptly enough) Patching Pond. The English spring was now well advanced and the patrols and bivouacs on the downs were very pleasant after the winter's mud. In the course of these manoeuvres they were forcibly reminded of the real enemy from time to time, as on April 9th, when a German aircraft came out of the morning mist in the West Nova area and dropped three bombs, two of which struck the local gas works.

April also brought a welcome if rugged change in the training, for on the 16th the GOC 1st Division informed a conference of officers that from now on the training emphasis would be switched from defence to attack — i.e. a landing on the enemy coast. He added that the Canadian Corps probably would form the spearhead of an invasion of the continent "possibly this year". This was enormous news, and the cheerful prospect was not marred by the fact that henceforth transport would be cut to the minimum for an opposed landing on

enemy beaches, and each soldier must carry two days' hard rations and a single blanket when afield.

This led to "Exercise Beaver 3rd" in which the 1st Division "invaded" Sussex and stormed into the town of Horscham in defiance of all opposition and to the horror of the umpires, who ruled (after some discussion) that according to the textbooks the 1st Division's position was hopeless. They awarded a victory to the (defending) 2nd Division, a matter which veterans of the 1st Division continued to argue for the rest of the war. Following this affair the West Novas moved from their winter quarters to tents about Highden House for the summer.

On May 8th the Regiment moved to the Hastings area and there prepared for "Exercise Tiger", destined to be famous in the memories of the Canadian Army. On the 17th Major-General Pearkes gave a picture of the operation to a conference of officers at Division HQ. Kent and Sussex, the two counties garrisoned by the South-Eastern army under General Montgomery, were to be considered as two countries mobilizing for war. The Kentish army had a vast superiority in armour, while the Sussex army was superior in artillery and aircraft. The strategy of the Sussex Army (of which the West Novas were part) was to entice the Kentish forces into battle on unfavourable ground, defeat them, and push on into Kent.

May 20th saw the West Novas on the road, moving under cover of darkness with the rest of 1st Division towards the Kentish border. Rain began to fall at once, and continued at intervals throughout the operation, spaced with hours of muggy and oppressive heat. One West Nova officer wrote, "Picture two files of marching men, one on each side of the road, with a line of tracked carriers, wheeled vehicles and motor-cycles moving along the middle. The fumes from the vehicles hang heavy in the night air. The danger of being knocked down is ever present in the darkness. The sound of the motors, especially that of the cycles, is persistent and aggravating..."

Midnight of the 21st found the West Novas neatly tucked away in the woods near Barcombe, the 1st Division's concentration area. The rain now had become a torrent. In this and other bivouacs along the "Tiger" route the troops rigged shelters, some of them very ingenious, and as the oper-



Lieutenant-Colonel R. D. King, D.S.O.; E.D.



Training in the Highlands, 1943.

ation (and the rain) unfolded, all ranks sought and made full use of the resources of the countryside within their reach. This led to some quaint encounters in the dark. Lieut. G. W. Theakston, for instance, stretched himself to rest in a small farm outbuilding and awakened later to find himself practically the foster-mother of a litter of new-born pigs. In another outhouse Lieut. J. W. K. Smeltzer was more surprised than pleased to find a breakfast egg laid within two inches of his nose. But the greatest surprise was reserved for L/Cpl. Jeremy, the Micmac Indian sniper, who crawled to cover in what turned out to be the abode of a small but very prickly hedgehog — his first acquaintance with the English cousin of the porcupine.

At midnight on the 24th "Sussex" officially declared war on "Kent", and 18 minutes later the West Novas trudged off on a six-hour march through the wet dark to their first objective, near Horam, where they lay doggo through the 25th and 26th, pushing out patrols to seek contact with the "enemy". It now became apparent that the "Kentish" army, refusing to be drawn into the "Sussex" trap, would have to be attacked on their own ground. Accordingly the "Sussex" forces began to roll. At 5 A.M. on the 27th the West Novas moved forward to Robertsbridge and took up a position astride the Rother river within striking distance of the Kentish border. Here again their patrols covered miles of countryside without finding a sign of the "enemy".

Accordingly at 4.30 A.M. on the 28th the Regiment pushed into Kent, arriving at Tenderden at 6 P.M. Here after a brief halt they were ordered to advance again, this time to Smeeth Station, which was reached late in the night. At 4.15 A.M. on the 29th there was a sudden "Stand-to!" but no enemy attack developed and at 9 A.M. the West Novas were on the march again, skirting the Kentish railway centre of Ashford. Within an hour their forward elements came under heavy "machine-gun" fire in the open downland east of Ashford, and the Regiment was ordered to withdraw to Smeeth. Here the cooks prepared dinner, which turned out to be the last meal for many rugged hours.

Brigade had determined to put in a full-scale attack on the "enemy", who were holding a ridge called North Range

in force, and by mid-afternoon the West Novas were heavily engaged with "enemy" tanks and infantry. The struggle centered in a small Kentish village, where the West Novas "knocked out" ten enemy tanks and then became locked in a desperate "struggle" with the opposing troops.

As usual with manoeuvres of this kind, in which reality stops short of actual combat and live ammunition, the ultimate fate of the troops, guns and armour engaged is a matter for the umpires, who seldom can agree with one another or with the troops, thus providing the toughest operation with a saving comic relief. Nobody ever knew who won the battle of Ashford, for at 8 P.M. on the 29th the combatants were solemnly informed from on high that a third "country", the powerful nation of Surrey, had taken umbrage at the Sussex invasion of Kent and demanded that Sussex withdraw its army at once.

The withdrawal began at 11 P.M. on May 29th and the West Novas marched 22 miles through the night, halted for four hours on the morning of the 30th, and trudged on through the long hot afternoon a distance of 17 miles to Fisher's Farm, where they bivouacked for the first full night's rest since May 20th. The following day was spent in preparation for the long march home. On June 1st the Regiment set off again. Brigadier Ganong marched with them for several miles, and General Montgomery sent an aide to pass along the line of march and congratulate the troops on their splendid showing.

After a night's bivouac the march was resumed, and at the evening halt the West Nova officers managed to procure several barrels of beer, which were "rolled out" for the refreshment of the other ranks. The auxiliary unit of the Knights of Columbus (now attached to the Regiment for the duration of the war) also provided each man with a pie, a chocolate bar and a packet of cigarettes, which were most welcome. On June 3rd the Regiment completed the march back to Worthing, arriving at Highden House at 9 P.M. and again accompanied by Brigadier Ganong for several miles.

Thus ended "Exercise Tiger" and twelve days and nights of hard marching, short rations and little sleep. The total distance covered afoot by the West Novas was well over

200 miles, much of it in rain and mud, with the added fatigue of uncertain footing along the roadsides to allow room for the vehicles, and all the jostle and the thousand petty annoyances of movement in the dark. The shortest march was 9 miles; the longest was that of the final day, a full 29 miles along the South Downs to Worthing. A number of men were treated for foot blisters during "Tiger" but after treatment by the M. O. each of them went back into the line of march and stayed there. In a report to Brigade later on, regarding the fitness of the West Novas, the C/O was proud to state, "Number evacuated as casualties attributable to marching — NIL." The stragglers were few, and these were gathered up and marched to rejoin the battalion. Thus the West Novas finished "Exercise Tiger" on their feet to the last man and the last step, a record of endurance and march discipline unequalled in the whole Division.

The rest of June passed in routine training in the Worthing-Brighton area. The Regiment's anti-tank rifles, always worthless against modern armour, were now replaced by six 2-pounder cannon, and a special anti-tank platoon was formed to handle them. On June 26th the Brigade sports took place at the Rotary Recreation Grounds, Worthing, and once again the West Novas carried off the honours by a good margin. Amongst the various items on the program, Pte. MacInnes won the 100-yard dash; Pte. Letourneau the 440-yards and 880-yards; L/Cpl. K. V. Butler won the standing broad jump; L/Cpl. T. Falls won the shot-putting. The West Nova team won the 440-yard relay race, and their tug-of-war team won in both classes with eight straight pulls. As a result the Nova Scotia flag flew at the mast-head on the sports grounds throughout a triumphant day, and the Regiment received the Brigade silver cup.

CHAPTER 3

1942 – Summer and Autumn

Early in July the Regiment moved a few miles westward and encamped for a number of days in the area of Arundel and Littlehampton. The boys were hopeful of sea bathing but as usual the famous beaches were found to be mined and forbidden. While here a new C. of E. chaplain, H/Capt. R. Phillips, joined the Regiment.

Back at Highden again on the 11th, the Regiment's softball team won a game from the "Van Doos" by a score of 17 to 4. The WNSR team looked very smart in new baseball uniforms bearing the Regiment's crest, provided by Supervisor James R. Losie of the Knights of Columbus. On July 15th the Regiment experienced its first "battle inoculation" — an exercise under actual rifle, machine-gun and grenade fire, carefully laid down by snipers and other experts with the object of compelling the troops to use every bit of cover and dead ground. A few minor casualties resulted but the troops did very well and rather enjoyed the novelty.

On July 22nd Lt. Col. M. "Pat" Bogert took over the command of the West Novas and spent the day in an inspection of the Regiment and in personal talks with the officers and NCO's. A Canadian veteran of the fighting in Libya, he quickly won the esteem and confidence of every officer and man, and was destined to lead them into battle on fields very far from any they had contemplated.

There were rumours of battle in this July of '42; not the usual "flaps" and "latrine whispers" but something mysteriously real. For one thing the Canadian 2nd Division had vanished. It was not even included in "Exercise Tiger". Something was "up" — and it had to do with the Germans across the Channel. The men of 1st Division naturally felt confident that they would form the spearhead of any attack in that direction, but the whispers and the mystery went on into August, when the West Novas moved to the other side of Brighton and encamped in the vicinity of Lewes. From Lewes the Regiment took over coast watching in the Saltdean-Newhaven area, and moved into billets in Newhaven and Peacehaven.

On the night of Aug. 18th there was a large and unexplained movement of troops through the West Nova area — unexplained until the next day, when all the world heard of the gallant and bloody attempt of the 2nd Division at Dieppe. The West Novas' medical officer, Capt. N. L. Walker, was called away to assist in clearing the wounded, and Telescombe Cliffs House was prepared as a transit depot for men returning from the raid. The natural comment of 1st Division was a general "Tough luck!" A more significant if silent comment was the emptiness of two large "bull pens" constructed near Newhaven for the reception of German prisoners. It was clear that the technique and tools of sea-landing assault were still far short of ideal.

After the long training and waiting the Dieppe affair had come with surprising suddenness. A new feeling of imminent action spread rapidly through the rest of the Canadian troops. "It won't be long now" was on everybody's lips. But it would be long enough; the 1st Division was fated to remain in Britain another year before seeing action; the 5th Division and 1st Armoured Brigade would follow them six months or so later; the main body of the Canadian Army overseas was to remain in England almost two years before the great attack on the continent.

However the signs were encouraging in September '42, for the West Novas were visited by Col. Lord Lovat and Major Young of the Commandos, who gave the Canadian officers the benefit of their experience at Dieppe. This was followed

promptly by "Exercise Viking", a combined-operations affair. "Viking" had its comic side, for the assault craft failed to turn up and the exercise was carried on without them, beginning with a hard hot march to an "embarkation" area near Hailsham. The West Novas complained with some justice that boat rides of this sort were very hard on the feet. However on the following day eight LCP's (landing-craft, personnel) arrived, and 160 officers and men of the West Novas under Major F. B. Courtney began to train with them at once. By the 17th they were able to perform a night landing which satisfied the naval officers commanding the craft, and the LCP's were withdrawn for use elsewhere.

On Sep. 19th the Regiment paraded at Firle Park for inspection by the new GOC, 1st Division, Major-General H. N. L. Salmon, M.C. The end of the month saw the brief "Exercise Invader", a brigade affair in which the West Novas put in a night attack from a "bridge-head" near Saltdean, then reversed their role and as "S. S. Regiment der Fuehrer" defended the same positions against the Royal 22nd Regiment on the following night — all in a storm of wind and rain.

Late October brought important news from the Libyan desert. General Montgomery — "Tiger" Montgomery — had taken over command of the Army of the Nile soon after that famous exercise in Kent, and now he had defeated the Germans at an obscure place called El Alamein near the Egyptian frontier. As the wily German general Rommel withdrew towards the west there was another stunning piece of news — strong American and British forces had landed in Algeria with the intention of taking Rommel from the rear. And RAF bombers had begun to drop their famous "block-buster" bombs on the munitions-making cities of Italy. Something big was stirring at last, but in an unexpected place.

October brought another inspection of the Regiment by Col. Ralston, Minister of Defence, accompanied by Lt. General McNaughton and Generals Stuart, Crerar, Salmon and Walford of the corps and division staffs. The parade took place on Lewes race-course. This was followed in a few days by an inspection of the Regiment, its billets, offices and stores, by Brigadier Foulkes and staff. And later in the month Foulkes, an old friend of the Regiment, informed the officers and NCO's

at a gathering in "A" Company mess that the coming winter would provide a last chance to perfect their training before going into action. He added significantly that since the West Novas were recruited largely from a seafaring population they should suffer less from seasickness than other troops, and he would expect them to form the spearhead in any landing attempt by 3rd Brigade.

During November there were further exercises in the use of assault craft, otherwise the training routine was broken only by the despatch of working parties to harvest sugar beets for local farmers. On the lighter side, K. of C. supervisor Losie arranged weekly boxing matches at Drove Hall, where the West Nova boxers met teams from neighbouring units and a team from the Royal Navy. A busy football league got under way. The regimental band gave a concert in Navy Hall, Newhaven, and the program included several tunes and songs by four lads of the Signal Platoon, known as the "Hill Billies".

December passed in routine, with trips by train to the ranges at Tunbridge Wells and infantry-tank cooperation exercises at Snaphill. The weather was alternately wet and then clear and cold, the health of the troops was good and they moved briskly in the open air.

Christmas came again — the third in England. There was a large and merry dance at Drove Hall on Christmas Eve. At midnight there was a service of mass for R. C. officers and men in "C" Company's mess. On Christmas morning there was Holy Communion at Christ Church, Newhaven, for Anglican personnel, and services for other denominations in "C", "D" and Support Company lines. At noon the men in each company mess sat down to a dinner of roast turkey and roast pork with the appropriate vegetables, sauce and pudding. "B" Company and Battalion HQ had their dinner together in Drove Hall, seated at three long tables decorated in green and scarlet, with candles down the middle and a gift from the K. of C. at each man's plate. Here the NCO's served the food while the officers served the beer. Brigadier Foulkes and Lt. Col. Bogert visited each mess to wish all ranks a merry Christmas.

Later in the day all who had access to a radio heard the King's broadcast to the Empire and the Canadian Forces' pro-

gram, with a message from Lt. General McNaughton to his troops. At 7 P.M. the officers sat down to their Christmas dinner in the mess at Peacehaven. The festive board reminded at least one of them of Nova Scotia's ancient "Order of Good Cheer", and the toasts to the King and to Absent Friends were observed with all the ringing sincerity of the historic French group at Port Royal in 1605.

The year '42 ended on the most satisfying note yet heard in the war. A huge German army was surrounded by the Russians at Stalingrad. Another was trapped in Tunisia and Libya by converging American and British forces and would suffer the same fate. And the Allies now had established an almost undisputed command of the air over Europe. To the West Novas as to all Canadians overseas it seemed clear that 1943 would be The Year.

CHAPTER 9

1943 – The last months in Britain

January was a month of incessant training, with certain novelties like the use of "scramble nets" in climbing up and down a ship's side (these practices took place in Newhaven Harbour), cliff climbing exercises performed by day and by night along the shore, and demonstrations of mine-laying and wire-clearing.

On Jan. 22nd Lt. Col. Bogert was transferred for a period of duty at 2nd Corps HQ, and Lt. Col. R. D. King took over the command of the Regiment. A Brigade football league was in full swing, the West Nova team wearing new trunks and jerseys in the regimental colours. The patrols along the coast found new and interesting targets as the winter storms tore mines adrift in the Channel and washed them in towards the land. Some of these mines were destroyed or sunk by small-arms fire from the shore, but one drifted in to the beach below the officers' mess at Peacehaven and exploded, damaging several houses in the vicinity.

In February the new Mark 4 rifles were "zero'd" on the ranges by the West Nova snipers before being issued to the Regiment. A special course for subalterns was conducted by Lt. Col. King, and their duties were taken over for a week by the company NCO's. The German air force continued to put in a fleeting appearance from time to time, and on Feb. 10th a DO-217 was shot down in the West Nova area by ack-ack batteries. In the latter part of the month came "Exercise

Present", a four-day battle exercise through the heart of Sussex and reaching its climax on the edge of Ashdown Forest, during which time the troops bivouacked in the open with their single blankets and lived on campaign fare.

March brought a welcome change from the long routine on the Sussex coast — a move to Scotland for large scale sea-and-land operations. The regimental transport was sent off by road and the unit went by train from Newhaven, transferred from train to ship at Ardrossan, Scotland, and steamed through Bute Sound and up Loch Fyne to Inveraray, where they marched the last mile to Shira Camp. The weather was fine and the scenery so much like Cape Breton that for many of the lads it was like coming home.

Here for three weeks the Regiment lived an amphibious existence, moving about Loch Fyne in the steamer "Duke of Argyle", scrambling down the nets into LCT's (landing-craft, tanks), leaping ashore on the narrow beaches and "fighting" their way up into the steep hills. The weather rang all the changes from fine to stormy in the course of these weeks, with a lot of rain and sleet driven by high winds and whipping the face of the loch. All in all it was a rugged business.

For entertainment at its close there was a cutter race between crews drawn from the three regiments of 3rd Brigade. It was held in Loch Fyne, the course running from Salmon Beach to the stern of H.M.S. "Saint Helier", lying off Inveraray Pier. The West Nova crew won the first heat easily but were nosed out by the Carleton and Yorks in the final. Both teams received prizes donated by the officers of 3rd Brigade.

March 21st saw the Regiment back in the familiar surroundings of Newhaven and Possingworth Park at the other end of Britain, where April passed in the old routine, varied by "Exercise Past" and "Exercise Welsh", in which the emphasis was on infantry-artillery cooperation, with actual artillery fire laid down under the direction of infantry officers. The feeling of imminent action remained, emphasized somehow by that sniff of Highland air. The men began to see a significance in everything that happened. . . the demonstration of German infantry tactics and words of command (a realistic show by a special platoon in German uniform, witnessed by the whole Regiment in Lewes Park) . . . repeated demonstra-

tions of booby-traps and mines by the Pioneer Platoon . . . the re-organization of the battalion on its original four rifle-company basis after months of unsatisfactory experiment with three . . . the repeated assault-boat practices on the Ouse and Adur rivers . . . the inspection by Brigadier Penhale, the new C/O 3rd Brigade . . . the incessant TEWT's (Tactical Exercise Without Troops, a dull but useful form of training for officers and sometimes NCO's, roughly equivalent to Waltzing Without Girl) . . . the showings of the official film "Desert Victory" to all troops . . . that epic of "Tiger" Montgomery's now famous Eighth Army . . . yes, something was in the wind. What?

The chaplains had planned special open-air services on Easter Sunday, April 25th, but the weather obliged them to hold these observances in the shelter of the recreation hut in the camp. On the following day the C/O announced that the West Novas shortly would go "elsewhere" for a period of special training, and that the Regiment must be ready to move any time after daylight on April 27th.

As the band instruments and other surplus kit were gathered and taken to storage, and the men's equipment and marching kit were brought up to scale, (and despite repeated warnings from the C/O that the movement was "for training purposes only") the Regiment felt the approach of *action* at last, after all the monotony of months and years. Morale soared to the heights as the column moved off and the West Novas swung their lean rumps down the road from Possingworth Park to the railway station.

As the trains pulled out it became known that the destination was Scotland again, and the sceptics pooh-poohed at once — it was to be just another boat-and-goat affair in the Highland lochs and hills! — but the optimists were in the majority, unquenchable after three years and six months of blighted hopes. And this time they were right. It was really Goodbye to England and the long "waiting war". No more "Beavers", "Tigers", "Bumpers" . . . no more digging and filling slits in the long-suffering English landscape . . . no more patrolling and staring over the grey waters of the Channel . . . no more TEWT's, thank God! (they were wrong there) . . . no more

popping at targets on the rifle ranges . . . none of that any more.

The Regiment was saying Goodbye to other things as well; wives, children, sweethearts, hospitable friends . . . leaves in London, Aberdeen and a hundred towns and villages between . . . Brighton, Newhaven, dances at "The Dome", at Drove Hall and the Cliff Sports Club . . . parties at "Maxim's", "The Star and Garter", "The Fountain" . . . jolly evenings at village pubs through Surrey, Kent and Sussex . . . the pleasant side of life in England . . . no more of that for a long time . . . a long hard time.

But in the mingled joy and regret of departure one thing stood forth as clear as fire — here was the road to home. From the first they had known that the only way back to Canada for the fighting man lay somehow through Hitler's Europe, and now at last their feet were on that road. In the months and years on English soil they had become tough and practised soldiers, and they had that cockiness which marks the fighter — the spirit which fully believes that the Regiment is the best battalion of the best brigade of the best division of the finest army in the world. In this spirit the West Novas set out for unknown battlefields at the end of April 1943.

CHAPTER 10

Scotland to Sicily

The Regiment detrained in the early morning of May Day at Crieff, a quiet town on the Earn river, 18 miles west of Perth in the east Highlands of Scotland. There the West Novas remained six weeks engaged in strenuous practice for mountain warfare. Again it was a rugged business, for at 1500 feet the warm mist and rain of the valleys changed to flying specks of snow, and one route march which covered two days and nights in the hills ran into a regular Canadian blizzard at 4,000 feet on the top of Ben Mor.

The signal and mortar platoons were introduced to the "Everest carrier", an ingenious pack which enabled a single man to shoulder the load of a mule. On all of these excursions the weapons including Brens were carried, together with great-coat and blanket, and the food consisted of tinned "Compo" rations prepared by each man in his mess tin at the wayside. Much of the movement was by compass and map, for like Kipling's screw-gunners the West Novas could say of these Crieff days, "They sends us along where the roads are, but mostly we goes where they ain't; we'd climb up the side of a signboard an' trust to the stick o' the paint."

The marches were separated by lectures on mountain warfare at the Hydropathic, a health resort in Crieff; and there were shoots by the anti-tank platoon with their new 6-pounders, more practice in mine-laying and mine-lifting, and a side trip by train to Shira Camp at Inveraray for field firing

and assault-boat exercises. There were visits from Brigadier Penhale and Lt. General McNaughton. A former C/O of the Regiment, Brigadier M. F. Gregg VC, MC, came up for a last chat with the officers and men before embarkation. Finally Lt. Col. M. "Pat" Bogert returned from five months' duty at Corps HQ and resumed command of the Regiment, with Major R. S. E. Waterman as his second-in-command.

The regimental transport vehicles were waterproofed and spirited away, and on the morning of June 15th the companies paraded and received security instructions for the coming move, together with an issue of 150 cigarettes per man. Shoulder flashes and division patches were removed. At noon the West Novas entrained at Crieff station in full marching order, and in three hours arrived at the port of Gourock on the Clyde. A group of the Women's Volunteer Service were on the dock, passing out hot tea and scones as the men came along. Embarkation was by means of lighters, which conveyed the four rifle companies and battalion HQ to the Polish liner "Batory", lying with many other transports on the north side of the river in the mouth of Loch Long. The LOB's (left-out-of-battle personnel) and rear party were to follow later in another ship with the regimental vehicles.

Aboard the "Batory" (officially known as H. M. Transport A-8) the West Novas found the Carleton and Yorks, together with Brigade HQ and detachments of other 3rd Brigade and English troops. The weather was clear but the air aboard was thick with rumour. The official name of the movement, "Operation Husky" meant nothing at all. There were whispers of tropical kit aboard. That could mean the Mediterranean, where allied airmen were heavily bombing Sicily and Sardinia. Or it could mean Burma or some other area "out East". But what about that mountain training in the mist and snow of the Highlands? "Norway, my boy! — where else?" And the tropical kit? Just a security gag!

This went on for days, as the transports remained in the Clyde steadily embarking troops. There were boat drills, with every man wearing his lifebelt and carrying a full waterbottle. There were lectures on security, and the officers discussed ways and means of keeping the men fit and happy at sea.



Colonel M. P. Bogert, D.S.O.; O.B.E.; Croix de Guerre.



Ortona Battle Map showing Arielli positions.

On June 18th the 1st Division carried out a full dress rehearsal for a landing against enemy opposition, with the 1st and 2nd brigades going in to the assault and 3rd Brigade in reserve. The troops emerged from the transports' sally ports and headed for the shore in LCP's, with the assistance of new American amphibious vehicles — the soon-to-be-famous DUKW's. This exercise bore the code name of "Stymie", an unfortunate choice and a rather bad omen, for a strong wind kicked up the sea, damaged several of the landing craft, and finally forced the abandonment of the attempt.

More days went by in the anchored ships, marked chiefly by the first doses of mepacrine, the evil-tasting anti-malaria tablets with which the 1st Division was to become so familiar. On June 23rd came "Stymie 2nd", this one successful. The assault convoy had moved down the Firth of Clyde to a spot described as "an area similar to that where the actual operation will take place." It turned out to be Troon, a little port on the Ayrshire coast, where there were wide sandy beaches running up to low fields and gently rolling hills. The West Novas in their role of support troops went ashore in LCP's and dug in above the beach. After a night in these positions they returned to the "Batory" and with the rest of the convoy moved back into the Clyde. The mystery was as deep as ever.

On the evening of June 28th, at last, the transports headed for the open sea, with "Batory" steaming second in her column, and West Nova machine-gunners manning anti-aircraft posts about the ship. The feeling was happy but tense. All doubts and questions were swept away on the following morning when, far at sea, all ranks stood by the ship's loudspeakers to hear the voice of Brigadier Penhale stating calmly, "We are going to the Mediterranean to take part in the biggest combined operation ever conceived." When he added on July 1st — Dominion Day — that the objective was Sicily, that the Canadian 1st Division was to form part of the famous 8th Army, and that it would land on the flank of its old comrade of World War One, the 51st Highland Division, the whole ship broke into cheers.

That night the Brigadier addressed his officers and gave them an outline of the operation. Montgomery intended to land his entire force on the south-east tip of Sicily and attack

the remainder of the island with this point as a base. The assault on the right was to be carried out near Syracuse and Augusta by the 13th Corps — and "Monty" coolly expected Syracuse to "be in our hands by breakfast time on the day of the landing". The 231st Independent Brigade was to land immediately north of Pachino. The 51st Highland Division would land on the toe of the Pachino peninsula, with the Canadian 1st Division immediately west at La Gratticellie. Farther west a corps of four American divisions under Patton would land at Gela to clean up the west end of the island. The whole operation would be heavily supported by Allied aircraft and warships.

The officers followed Brigadier Penhale's exposition on maps, air photos and a plaster landscape model arranged in the ship's lounge, and the battalion C/O's were issued with copies of the operation order, maps, photographs and descriptive pamphlets from sealed bags taken in the ship.

The big convoy described a wide course west into the Atlantic and then south and east towards Gibraltar. The voyage was undisturbed. On board "Batory" the West Novas turned in their battledress and were issued the much-rumoured tropical kit. It consisted of khaki drill bush shirts, slacks and shorts — the shorts to be worn through the day's heat, and the slacks to be put on at evening as an anti-mosquito precaution. "Security", that hush-hush maiden aunt of Mars, had prevented any attempt to fit the men in England, or even to obtain proper sizes, and the result was ludicrous. "Batory" swarmed with scarecrows in khaki-drill. A process of swapping improved the appearance of the Regiment somewhat, and later on when weeks of sweating and fighting through the Sicilian hills had moulded the K. D. to the shape of each lean body there was a certain uniformity; but up to the hour of disembarkation no sergeant-major could look upon his men without danger of apoplexy.

The "Batory" passed Gibraltar shortly after midnight of July 5th-6th, and on the 7th another huge convoy appeared — the American force. July 9th was a busy day of preparation for the landing. The officers had studied the operation orders with care. The troops were confident. This was not to be another Dieppe. But if things did go wrong? The C/O

made that point very clear. In the event of being cut off ashore, resistance must be "to the last man and the last round." However as 3rd Brigade constituted the Division reserve for the landing it was not likely to be committed until the beach-heads had been well established.

At this point for the benefit of the lay reader it may be well to describe the composition of a Canadian infantry battalion on active service in 1943. The West Nova Scotia Regiment consisted of Battalion Headquarters (including the commanding officer, and a small operational and intelligence staff); Headquarters Company (including the Signals platoon and an Administrative platoon consisting of quartermaster's, transport and pay sections); Support Company (including a Mortar platoon armed with 3-inch mortars, a Carrier platoon equipped with light fully-tracked vehicles, an Anti-Tank platoon armed with 6-pounder guns, and a Pioneer platoon); and four rifle companies, "A", "B", "C", and "D".

Each rifle company was divided into three platoons, and each platoon was sub-divided into three sections of 10 men each. Thus the ultimate fighting group consisted of 9 men in charge of an NCO, armed with rifles, one Bren gun and one Piat (anti-tank) weapon. Each section NCO carried a Thompson ("Tommy") gun rather than a rifle. The lieutenant commanding a platoon usually carried a tommy-gun, as did his batman. The company officer carried a rifle or tommy-gun in addition to his revolver when in action. All told the battalion numbered between 700 and 800 officers and men. Not all of these were committed to action. As an ultimate reserve in case of severe losses a certain proportion of officers and men, together with the transport and other non-fighting personnel, were held at the battalion rear. These were the left-out-of-battle personnel, known simply as LOB's. (In the case of the Sicilian landing the West Nova LOB's were travelling in another transport.)

The West Novas had breakfast aboard "Batory" at 3 A.M. on July 10th — landing day. As the sun rose it revealed a strange and tremendous scene. The wind and sea had risen in the night (shades of "Stymie One"!) and as far as the eye could reach the Mediterranean was covered with ships, ships, tossing up and down and making their troops incon-

tinently sick. On the other hand Sicily looked sunny and peaceful in the morning light. Far to the north the dim shape of Mount Etna stood over the land like a distant colossus. Somewhere above those beaches and those quiet hills lay the Italian Sixth Army, consisting of four regular divisions and five coastal defence divisions, with their line-of-communication troops and base units, totalling something like 225,000 men. In addition there were at least two German divisions of first-rate quality, with others on the way.

The Allied forces consisted of Montgomery's four divisions and two independent brigades, plus Patton's four American divisions, all with powerful "corps" and "army" formations behind them. In point of numbers the odds probably were even; but the fighting quality of the Italians was known to be low after their severe drubbings in Libya, and although well equipped the Germans could not match the Allies' gun power nor their armour. As for air support the RAF and AAF had swept the enemy out of the Sicilian sky, except for a few hit-and-run bombers.

There was another, more subtle point in the Allies' favour. The enemy command had considered the shoals and bars along the south-east coast of Sicily and its exposure to the *sirocco* (the capricious but strong wind from Libya, prevalent in the first half of the year and given to sudden gusts in summer — exactly what was happening now) and decided that any Allied landing would be made farther west or perhaps on the north side of the island. In view of all this the enemy forces were concentrated inland, with one eye towards the north and the other towards the west, and the south-eastern peninsula of Pachino was lightly held by Italian coastal troops.

Thus when the British and Canadians dashed ashore behind a heavy barrage on the morning of July 10th they met little opposition. The West Novas, as part of the reserve brigade, did not leave the "Batory" until afternoon, when the beaches were wrapped in sunshine and silence and some of the beach maintenance crew were actually enjoying a swim! The landing conditions for heavily burdened troops were far from ideal, however. The landing-craft grounded in breakers some distance from the shore and the troops had to scramble out, holding their weapons high, and wade in water that ran from

three feet to five feet deep as the swells rose and fell. (Capt. C. B. Higgins, a man of rather slight stature, with his arms full of Orderly Room supplies, is said to have walked ashore completely submerged!)

Thus the Regiment arrived in Sicily drenched to the skin but in high spirits, and by 5 P.M. the rifle companies were digging in amongst the vineyards about a mile inland. The men sat or slept amongst the short grape-vines with the *sirocco* drying the clothes on their bodies. Darkness fell, with the Regiment still in reserve. At midnight came the order to move forward and mop up any opposition by-passed by the leading elements.

The West Novas moved off at once, taking advantage of occasional farm tracks but chiefly moving across country by compass, a difficult business in the dark maze of vines and cactus hedges. There was no transport available, and the signallers had to carry the HQ radio set on a stretcher all the way. No enemy troops were encountered until after daylight on the 11th, when "C" Company (Capt. Gordon MacNeil) came under machine-gun fire from the San Fornata ridge, the Regiment's objective. "A" Company (Capt. Stan Smith), "B" Company (Capt. John Cameron) and "D" Company (Capt. J. K. Rhodes) all were eager to get into the attack, but the matter was settled quickly by the forward elements of "C", when Lieut. R. W. ("Red") McCarthy, armed with nothing but a jammed rifle, and accompanied by CSM Reginald Foley and Sergeant Stone, worked their way boldly forward to the top of the hill. Here in a strong-point commanding the whole approach were an Italian officer and 25 men, who came out and surrendered without firing another shot, although they had four heavy machine-guns and plenty of small-arms ammunition and grenades. The rest of their equipment was rather amusing; it consisted of 5 single motorcycles and 5 motorcycles with trailers. It was very useful to the conquerors, but Brigade, which also was short of transport, ordered the machines to the rear.

The rest of the day passed without incident and by nightfall there was no further contact with the enemy, although McCarthy's platoon had some interesting moments in the dark when a group of American paratroopers landed in their vicinity

and were nearly shot up as "Jerries". So far the Regiment had suffered only three casualties, two of which were accidental and the third shot by an Italian sniper — who was promptly eliminated. At 6 A.M. on July 12th the West Novas moved forward again. In mid-morning there was a hit-and-run attack by 8 Macchi aircraft but no casualties were suffered and the day passed without incident.

The pattern of this part of the campaign was now set: the infantry moving up along the roads in a cloud of white dust kept astir by vehicles and marching feet, a burning sun through the day, a sudden chill and a swarm of mosquitoes at night. The food consisted of tinned "Compo" rations, each box containing enough tins to last fourteen men a day. At night officers and men alike slept wrapped in their gas capes and mosquito nets in the fields and at the roadside. There was little drinking water to be had in this parched countryside, where even the rivers ran dry in summer — in many places the local peasantry used the arid river-beds for roads. Through the swirling white dust of the highways, which covered the vehicles and caked on the sweating troops, could be seen an endless succession of dry hills and folds studded with sumach bushes and prickly pear, with clumps of gnarled olive trees, sun-smitten vineyards and an occasional wheat field lower down, each with its solitary soiled-white farmhouse. The soil was a crumbling grey, with patches of brown about the pit-heads of the small sulphur mines, and an occasional outcrop of red rock.

By this time the Regiment's light-scale transport (i. e. the minimum allowed for operations immediately following the landing) had reached the shore safely and come up. Unfortunately many of the other vehicles of the West Novas and other units of 3rd Brigade had been lost in a sunken transport, and all through the Sicilian campaign the 3rd had to depend on its light-scale vehicles plus any serviceable Italian and German transport it could capture along the route. There was another resource, however. Sicily was a land of donkeys and mules. The C/O ordered Capt. A. W. Rogers to take four men and round up sufficient animals to carry the 3" mortars. Rogers and his merry men scoured the dusty countryside "rustling" mules and donkeys right and left, and satisfied the owners with

IOU's "signed" by General Montgomery, Winston Churchill, Roosevelt, Mackenzie King and other worthies who came to mind, displaying a fine impartiality except in the case of one belligerent Fascist with a beard, who was paid with a well-placed boot and no receipt at all.

CHAPTER 11

Giaratana to Catenanuova

By July 14th the West Novas had reached a point 2½ miles south of Giaratana, the only village of size in this area, and hot tea and soup were served to the troops, a welcome change from the hasty fare of the preceding days. Here the Regiment received a visit and a short talk from General Montgomery himself. "Monty" was full of fight and vim, had good words to say of the Canadians, and was cheered as he drove off.

On the evening of the 15th the Regiment passed through the hill-top village of Vizzini, silent in the moonlight and apparently deserted, the empty street echoing the stolid tramp of the soldiers' boots. With brief halts for meals and rest the march continued in the burning summer weather. On the 16th the West Novas passed through Caltagirone, still in a reserve role, and reached the vicinity of San Michele that night. Here the 3rd Brigade was ordered into the advance, and at midnight the West Novas moved off in troop-carrying vehicles.

In the early afternoon of July 17th the Carleton and Yorks gained contact with the enemy. The West Novas, leaving their transport at a destroyed bridge some distance past Piazza Armerina, moved off across country to make a flank attack. "B" Company (Capt. J. R. Cameron) soon came under rifle and machine-gun fire from a massive and steep hill called Monte Del Forma, and later met mortar fire along the road itself.

The Germans had chosen a good spot to make a stand. Here the road through the hills divided, one branch going towards German HQ at Enna, clearly visible on its tall cliff 12 miles to the west, the other branch wandering eastward to Valguarnera. Just west of the crossroads stood Monte Del Forma, commanding the whole approach. Brigade orders now switched the West Novas farther to the flank, with the object of taking Monte Del Forma by a "left hook" while the Carleton and Yorks and Royal 22nd Regiment, with artillery support, engaged it from the front. This involved a hard forced march for the West Novas over difficult country through the heat of the following day. The carriers and the supporting tanks were soon halted by a deep ravine, and Lieut. R. W. Bullock quickly arranged to take his mortars forward on foot. The West Novas plunged down through the tall reeds and jungle-like shrubbery of the ravine and began the long climb over steep bare slopes in the blazing Sicilian sun.

The afternoon was thunderous with the drum-fire of 120 Canadian guns pounding the face of Monte del Forma, followed by the sharp bark of Canadian tanks and British self-propelled guns shooting across the valley, and the rippling gusts of machine-gun and rifle fire as the Carleton and Yorks began their frontal attack. At 4 P.M. the West Novas, breathless but triumphant, reached their steep objective, the shoulder of Monte Del Forma overlooking the Enna highway — only to find that the Germans had just withdrawn, having taken a terrific hammering from the Canadian artillery and the day-long attack of the Carleton and Yorks.

However the German rearguard sprayed machine-gun bullets at the West Novas for a time, and a "B" Company platoon under Lieut. W. H. P. David captured a German motor-kitchen with its crew of six as they attempted to escape towards Enna, while on the face of Monte del Forma the rest of 3rd Brigade were counting the 30-odd machine guns, a self-propelled 88 mm. cannon and other booty left in their hands.

That evening, holding the high ground overlooking the important Enna highway, the West Novas came under tank gunfire, and L/Cpl. J. H. Warren of "D" Company was killed — the first West Nova to die in action.

The affair at Monte Del Forma was typical of the delaying tactics used with great skill by the Germans in Sicily and through the early part of the Italian campaign. The rugged face of the country was admirably suited to their purpose and so was the course of the river beds, most of which ran across the line of advance. By blowing out the bridges, mining the approaches, and covering these with fire from commanding hills and ridges it was possible to stall the advance again and again, forcing it to deploy and make an encircling movement — only to find the bird flown as the grasp closed. On July 19th the West Novas made contact with Patton's American forces operating on the Canadian left flank. The Canadian 1st Division was now re-grouping and developing attacks left and right towards Enna and Valgarnuera. During the 19th and 20th a number of Italian soldiers, stragglers and deserters, gave themselves up to the West Novas and passed back happily to the prisoner-of-war cages at Piazza Armerina. They were a bedraggled and shameless lot, telling all they knew with great volubility; and what they knew made very clear that the Italian troops in Sicily were worthless. The size and success of the Allied landings had convinced them of a thing they had long suspected — that Mussolini's half of the Axis was doomed — and they hated and feared their German allies more than the Duce could induce them to hate and fear the British and Americans.

On July 21st the West Novas rode forward in motor transport through Valguarnera to a point near the little village of Libertina, which they were ordered to take by an encircling march in the night. The Regiment set off about 10 P.M., marching by compass over hill and dale, some of it covered with wheat stubble and straw. There were patches of burnt straw where shells had set the fields afire during the previous day, (when British patrols had been repulsed with loss by the German garrison of Libertina), and the charred smell hung in the night air. The HQ radio set was carried on mule back, so that the signallers were in constant communication with Brigade; and by one of those freaks of army routine which make the gods laugh, one of the messages received (and carefully decoded by the Intelligence Officer over a shrouded flashlight)

read as follows : "Brown paint is now available at Brigade HQ"!

After some hours of travel over the rugged landscape in the dark, the Regiment arrived on a low ridge east of Libertina and "C" Company pushed down into the village and found the enemy fled. The Germans had left some discarded uniforms and what was more valuable, a pair of artillery-spotter's binoculars, mounted on a tall tripod, of the kind known to the troops as "donkey's-ears" by reason of the long Y-shaped periscopes. This powerful instrument served West Novas' HQ faithfully for many months afterward.

The Regiment now dug in on the high ground east of the village. The transport, delayed by mines on the road, did not come up until mid-morning of the 22nd. During the morning the German artillery fired a few ranging shots on the West Nova positions and at 4 P.M. opened a bombardment, uncomfortably accurate in spots, which continued at intervals throughout the next five days. It was the West Novas' first experience of prolonged bombardment with no opportunity to hit back, the supreme test of the soldier, and they came through it with their tails up. The orders were to hold their present position as a firm base. It happened to be the pivot on which the rest of 1st Division was swinging up from the left, while the 51st Highland Division moved up on the right.

The Regiment was well dug in and the casualties were light, although things looked bad for a time on evening of the 22nd, when the German gunners found the small wood where the regimental transport was parked, blew up an ammunition lorry, damaged several other vehicles, and forced a hasty removal of the rest to the shelter of some dry ravines west of the village. The signallers remained in their radio truck throughout the bombardment, passing messages back and forth to Brigade, and one of them later was awarded the Military Medal. A stretcher-bearer, Pte. John King, exposed himself repeatedly to attend the wounded in exposed positions, and he also received the M. M.

Battalion HQ also was shelled out of the wood, and removed to a dry ravine farther back. Some of the shells were from a powerful long-range gun, and their blast dug holes three feet deep in the hard-baked earth. The West Novas

found a quaint humour in their nightly application of mosquito cream, per order, when the air at times seemed full of whizzing steel. But their best laugh came at 4 P.M. on July 23rd, when two German corporals of the Herman Goering Division came in with a white flag and informed the West Nova HQ that the Regiment's position was hopeless, and that unless it surrendered within the next hour it would be attacked in overwhelming force. This interesting offer, made in very good English, was met with one from the adjutant, Capt. C. B. Higgins, who suggested that the German army could go to Hell and that the optimistic corporals could depart forthwith to the P. W. cage, flag and all.

While this was going on the main Canadian advance was held up at Agira, eight miles to the West Novas' left. On the immediate left the Carleton and Yorks and the Royal 22nd Regiment moved up on July 24th, and at noon on July 27th Lt. Col. Bogert received orders to advance upon Catenanuova, an important town where the roads from Regalbuto and Centuripe joined to cross the Dittaino River. Accordingly the West Novas left the Libertina Ridge and pushed ahead with their water, tools, and "22" radio set carried on the backs of mules. The movement continued through the night and at 4 A.M. on the 28th the Regiment took up concealed positions in which it lay doggo through the day. Apparently their advance was not observed by the German artillery, who continued to shell the old positions at Libertina. Major R. S. E. Waterman was slightly wounded by this shell-fire while bringing up the rear elements during the day.

For the attack on Catenanuova the 3rd Brigade was placed under command of the British 78th Division, veterans of the fighting in Tunisia, who had just come up from the south and occupied the steep rocky hill of Monte Scalpello. On July 29th Lt. Col. Bogert received orders for the attack, to take place that night. The West Novas were to cross the river, seize Catenanuova itself, and establish a bridge-head for the 78th Division, while a company of the Carleton and Yorks cleared the large grove east of the town and patrols of the Lancashire Fusiliers explored the road to Centuripe. The attack would be supported by two field and two medium artillery regiments.

Throughout the daylight hours of the 29th the West Nova scouts kept a careful watch on the night's objective. A good deal of enemy activity was observed on the heights above Catenanuova and in the town itself, and the keen eyes of Pte. Jeremy the Indian sniper detected enemy troops in position east of the town. As darkness fell "C" Company pushed out patrols to cover the assembly of the battalion. The mules had been brought up, loaded with the "22" set, medical equipment and 3-inch mortars. Another mule train was to bring up the rations; this was in charge of a very cool and efficient British NCO, a veteran of Tunisia.

Shortly after 11.30 P.M. the artillery barrage tore the night apart and the West Novas moved forward at a pre-arranged rate of 100 yards every three minutes. At midnight the barrage shifted ahead and the leading companies ("A" and "B") quickened their pace somewhat, keeping about 200 yards (it was impossible to determine exactly in the darkness) behind the red flash of the shell-bursts in order to gain the utmost advantage of an enemy driven to cover. Necessarily this close follow-up had its risks and just before the advanced troops reached the dry bed of the Dittaino River some shells fell short, wounding Capt. S. D. Smith of "A" Company and 7 men of "B" Company.

Under the plan of attack "A" and "B" were to push through the right and left skirts of Catenanuova and establish themselves on the slopes to the north of it, while "C" and "D" mopped up the town itself. Battalion HQ was to move behind the leading companies to a position at the north-east edge of the town. The ground was very rough and the steep nature of the Dittaino's banks forced the leading troops to converge somewhat as they approached the town. The river bed was extremely wide and covered with a rank growth of dry grass. Beyond lay the railway embankment, also a long concrete wall eight feet high. As "A" Company (now under command of Lieut. Ross Guy) approached this wall the enemy sent up several flares and tossed a number of "potato-masher" grenades, apparently at random, for there was no small-arms fire. There was some delay as the men tried to boost each other over the wall, but a large shell-hole was discovered farther along and the troops passed through into the Catenanuova railway yard,

where a long train of freight cars lay smashed and burning. High-tension electricity wires were dangling in the light of these fires and the troops had to be careful not to touch them with their feet or their weapons.

"A" Company now pushed through the town, dodging occasional bursts of rifle and machine-gun fire from small enemy groups apparently withdrawing before them. After scaling a number of garden walls the company emerged into the open, where a machine-gun fired upon them at close range. This was silenced by the grenades of L/Cpl. Robertson and his section and "A" Company passed on to its allotted objective on the slope.

"B" Company (Capt. J. R. Cameron) after a brief brush with an enemy machine-gun in the fringe of the town pushed on and reached its objective without further incident about 2.30 A.M. It was apparent that the enemy had pulled his main force out of Catenanuova when the barrage began, but he had left some troops in the town and was unaware that these had been by-passed, for "B" Company had barely established itself astride the Catenanuova-Regalbuto road when a German motor vehicle came bowling along confidently from Regalbuto. The West Novas opened fire, wounded the occupants and captured the car. Within the next hour two more vehicles came along and fell into "B" Company's toils in the same way.

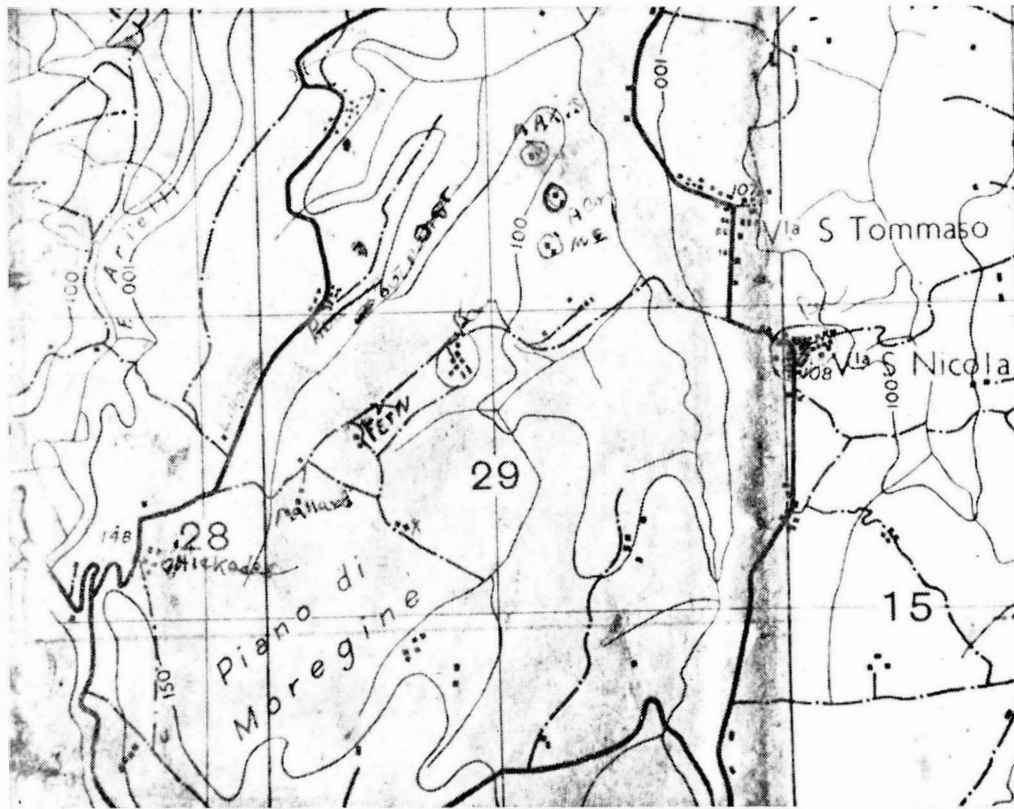
"C" Company (Capt. G. L. F. McNeil) passed through the town without encountering enemy troops and took up a defensive position on the forward slope of the ridge south-east of it. "D" Company (Capt. A. W. Rogers) had a little more trouble on the way, "bumping" an enemy machine-gun post near the railway line and another amongst the battered houses. At one point a German despatch-rider suddenly emerged from a side street and was shot by L/Cpl. W. H. Morrison, firing a Bren gun from the hip. "D" Company was fired upon again by enemy troops in a prominent red building at the north end of the town, but a swift grenade attack by Lieut. Cunningham and his leading section silenced this post and the company passed on to the high ground beyond. What had happened was an unusual case of German cowardice. The 923rd Fortress Battalion had bolted before the West Nova attack, and only a few bold groups remained to offer resistance.

Thus Catenanuova was taken with unexpected ease; but at first light on July 30th the Germans launched a series of counter-attacks supported by the fire of tanks and self-propelled guns. The nature of the landscape, all hills and folds, slashed by gullies and studded with cactus and olive groves, made it possible for their assault groups to approach and appear without warning, but it also confused their direction and the result was a queer disjointed battle which raged for several hours.

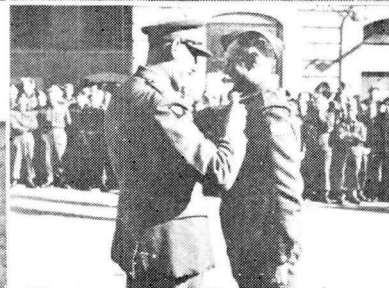
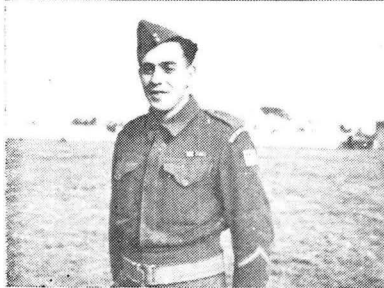
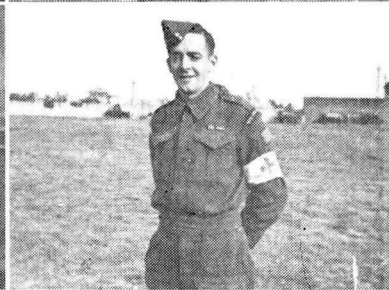
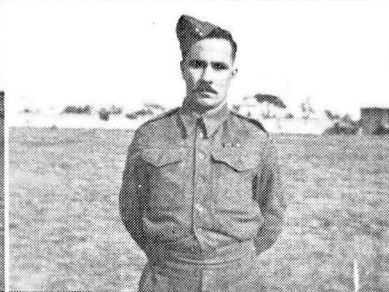
The first notice "D" Company had of the enemy attack came when a German tank appeared on the Centuripe road and sent a storm of machine-gun bullets clipping the cactus leaves just above their heads as they crouched in their shallow rifle-pits. The tank was far beyond the range of the company's Piats and nothing could be done about it, but finally the tank turned its attention to "A" Company.

"A" Company received the brunt of the German assault, which came upon them just as they were digging in. The men had made little progress in the hard-baked soil when a German self-propelled gun suddenly appeared out of the sunrise and opened fire point-blank. The men scattered to cover in a long cactus grove or hedge. Sergeant "Richie" Ellis and a group of No. 7 Platoon made a gallant attempt to knock out the enemy gun with a Piat, but it was out of their range and was quickly supported by a strong force of German infantry and the fire of more distant 88 mm. gun or guns.

As the daylight grew Lieut. Guy and his signal corporal found themselves apparently alone, crouching in a shell hole with the "18" radio set, a pistol and four grenades. The whole area was under constant shell and small-arms fire, however Guy went forth and discovered a few men sheltering behind a stone wall. He gathered others until he had nineteen in position along the wall as the nucleus of the company defence. There was still no clear knowledge of what had happened to the forward platoons, but fifty yards in front of the wall lay a small cactus grove and towards noon the enemy suddenly concentrated his efforts on that point. As the German infantry doubled into the open with Guy and his men shooting hard at them, there was a crackle of rifle and Bren fire from the grove itself, where in fact Lieuts. E. N. Doane and C. C. Reeves had rallied the survivors of their platoons.



Arielli front, showing points "Chickadee", "Mallard" and "Lone House".



West Novas decorated at San Vito by Sir Oliver Leese.
Top right : Lieut. Cameron MacNeil, M.C.

With the situation thus clarified Guy dashed to the radio set and gave Battalion HQ the picture, asking for reinforcements, ammunition, and artillery support. Reinforcements and ammunition would be long in coming, for the whole battlefield back to and beyond the Dittaino was under intense enemy fire. A troop of self-propelled Royal Artillery was in position to shoot, but the enemy were too close to Guy's men to risk a shoot from the map, there was no artillery observer with "A" Company at the time, and Guy himself like most junior officers in these early stages of the campaign knew little or nothing about the observer's art.

Lt. Col. Bogert, at the HQ radio, gave Guy a few quick instructions. Fortunately the British artillery representative and his radio set were only a few yards from Bogert himself and the C/O explained what was afoot. With this liaison the shoot was swiftly arranged. Guy, rather dubiously, gave a map reference well away from his positions and observed the fall of the shells. With one or two subsequent salvos and corrections the young lieutenant had the principle of the thing and in a short time was able to report a direct hit. The British gunners then went into fire for full effect and after one further correction of twenty-five yards the C/O was relieved to hear Guy shouting cheerfully that the enemy were breaking from cover and that his men were shooting them down.

Altogether the hectic fire-fight raged about the stone wall and the cactus grove for nearly three hours, but the intervention of the British artillery tipped the scales and by 3 P.M. the Germans had given up the assault, leaving the ground littered with their dead and wounded. For his courage and determination in this action Lieut. Guy was awarded the Military Cross.

In the meantime "B" Company, at 6.30 A.M., was confronted by a number of dim shapes doubling over the slopes from the west, where the Royal 22nd Regiment was attacking the ridge of San Maria. One of the outposts challenged, "Van Doos?" and a voice replied in English, "Yes!" Capt. Cameron ordered his company to stand-to and went forward to investigate, having in mind that prisoners taken during the night had said their whole company was ready to desert. What he perceived however was neither "Van Doos" nor German deserters but about a half-company of German infantry, armed and

equipped, deployed in extended line, and advancing towards a gully in front of "B" Company's positions. Cameron called on his men to hold their fire until the enemy reached the gully, where they could be entrapped; but a too-eager Bren gunner fired a burst and the Germans veered sharply south and disappeared in a fold.

These enemy troops now fell upon the positions of "C" Company, entrenched on the slope just to the left of West Nova HQ. "C" promptly opened fire, as did several of HQ personnel, and adjutant Capt. C. B. Higgins, a crack shot, bowled over several of the Germans with a rifle. This storm of Bren and rifle fire played havoc with the enemy force, the remnant of which made a dash for a bushy gully at the foot of "C" Company's slope. Capt. G. L. F. McNeil determined to clear them out with the bayonet before they could dig themselves in, and ordered Lieut. Harry Maclean and his platoon forward, part of it to sweep straight up the gully while the rest cleared the bushes on the lip of it. Led by McNeil in person the attack went in with great dash and complete success: the West Novas killed two German officers and several of their men, and withdrew to their own positions with 21 badly shaken prisoners, who were turned over to Battalion HQ. For this exploit McNeil was awarded the Military Cross.

The adventures of "C" Company continued. Suspecting that the enemy might have penetrated into the streets of Catenanuova, McNeil sent a patrol into the town, where they encountered a German half-track vehicle in one of the streets and engaged it with Bren and rifle fire. The vehicle withdrew, but as the patrol followed up they were fired upon by machine-guns in fixed positions. Undaunted, the patrol (No. 14 platoon) now armed itself with a Piat and returned to the scene. They found the enemy armoured vehicle quickly but were unable to get within Piat range. A German tank now appeared and with direct gunfire compelled the patrol to withdraw.

In the meantime under heavy covering fire German assault groups continued to feel their way towards "B" Company, who drove them off and took several prisoners. Another German group, fifty strong, attempted to take "D" Company from the rear, but in doing so they were ambushed by the Carleton and York company concealed in the olive grove east of the

town, and thoroughly routed. At this point the Germans abandoned the whole attack and contented themselves with a heavy bombardment of the town and its perimeter by shell and mortar fire throughout the day. One or two enterprising German snipers worked their way up and began to bother battalion HQ and "C" Company, but "C" Company's deadly Indian sniper, Pte. "Charlie" Jeremy, crawled out and put an end to that.

During the strenuous morning hours the West Novas' mortar platoon (Lieut. R. W. Bullock) and signals officer (Lieut. Harvey Jones) had worked their way across the open river valley under sharp and continuous enemy fire to assist in the defence. Lieut. Ian MacIntosh, a very gallant and determined young officer, while coming up from Brigade HQ with a message for Lt. Col. Bogert was killed by machine-gun fire in the valley — the first West Nova officer to die in battle.

Throughout the action the enemy laid a curtain of machine-gun and cannon fire across the broad grassy flat of the Dittaino River bed, which prevented the regimental transport from entering Catenanuova, so that the rifle companies were cut off from all supply. At 2 A.M. on July 31st the rations finally got through, a welcome sight to the men who had not eaten since 5 P.M. on the 29th. Late that afternoon the West Novas' padre, H/Capt. Brundage, held a burial service over the newly-dug graves outside the town, and the Regiment's dead were committed to the earth. The casualties had been light considering the nature of the fighting, due to "Pat" Bogert's skilful handling of the Battalion, the faithful and accurate artillery support, and the good use of ground by officers and men of the forward companies. In the three actions at Monte Del Forma, Libertina and Catenanuova the West Novas had lost 19 killed and 51 wounded, chiefly at the latter place. In casualties suffered, prisoners taken, and loss inflicted on the enemy, Catenanuova was as sharp and successful an action as any fought by a Canadian battalion in Sicily, although the West Novas received little credit in the published accounts of the campaign.

General Evely of the British 78th Division told the West Novas' C/O later, "Colonel, your boys did a hell of a good job at Catenanuova." But perhaps the best praise came from a veteran British machine-gunner on the slope of Monte Scalpello, watching the German attack. "Blimey!" he announced, "Whatever unit is in there — they can't 'arf take it!"

CHAPTER 12

Catenanuova to Francofonte

After their brief stand at Catenanuova the Germans resumed their retreat, and on the night of July 31st the West Novas once more were on the march, following a difficult track over the dark hills towards Monte Peloso. They halted just before dawn for a meal and by 10 A.M. on Aug. 1st were in position and consolidated on Peloso. By 2 P.M. "B" Company had crossed the Catenanuova-Regalbuto highway to occupy a position (later known as "Whistling Hill") looking towards the next day's objective, a massive and ominous hill called Monte Criscana.

Here "B" Company came under continuous and well-aimed mortar fire, while 88 mm. shells whistled over their heads to burst on the higher ground behind or fell short and burst on the forward slope. The company "18" radio set was put out of action. Ptes. Alcorn and Perry were killed, and amongst the wounded were L/Cpl. Turner, Pte. T. Middleton and Capt. Cameron's batman, Pte. Stan Smith.

Cameron sent a pair of scouts to locate the German observation post, for the enemy mortar fire was uncomfortably accurate. The scouts, Ptes. Langille and O. S. Foster, captured a corporal of the 3rd Parachute Rifle Regiment, who was promptly interrogated at HQ and proved a most valuable prisoner. Indeed he was too good, for he not only described the German mortar positions very accurately but went on to declare the German strength to be no more than one or two

companies astride the hill to the north-east. Perhaps he was lying on the latter point, probably he was guessing, but the cold fact was that Monte Criscana was held in strength by crack paratroops equipped (as paratroops always were) with an extraordinary number of machine-guns and automatic rifles, and with strong mortar and artillery support.

"C" Company was ordered to reinforce "B" on Whistling Hill, and as they emerged from their positions on Monte Peloso to do so they were spotted by enemy observers and shelled by 88 mm. guns, suffering fourteen casualties including Lieut. G. E. Romkey, who was wounded. About the same time the battalion transport, sheltering in a wood behind Monte Peloso, came under shell fire. A few vehicles were hit but there were only minor casualties. Towards 7 P.M. Battalion HQ, which had moved forward to a grove east of the main road, also came under artillery fire. The C/O's signaller, L/Cpl. Butler, was killed and Bogert himself, a few paces away, had a narrow escape. Thus the situation stood as night fell.

The Sicilian campaign had now reached a stage where the strategy of both sides was very plain. Montgomery's plan was to push straight through the eastern half of the island and seize Messina, commanding the all-important strait between Sicily and Italy. To this end he had taken the east coast ports of Syracuse and Augusta with his right, and swung his left through the hills past Enna, headquarters of the German and Italian troops in Sicily. The German command (the Italian command had ceased to matter) on the other hand was holding tenaciously to the east coast about Catania while swinging back its troops from the west end of the island, where Patton's rapid armoured thrust threatened to cut them off. The Canadians and the 78th Division were thus at the centre of the Allied operations, pressing hard against an enemy whose object was always retreat, but retreat at a pace slow enough to enable his troops farther west to escape. When the pressure in the centre became dangerous the Germans reacted sharply, as at Catenuova, but in general they confined themselves to the delaying tactics described before, making a stand at certain favourable points and withdrawing when their purpose was accomplished.

Such a point was the town of Regalbuto, which the West Novas were approaching on the night of Aug. 1st with the rest

of 3rd Brigade. The Brigade now had a dual role (a) to cover the left flank of 78th Division, which was about to launch a full-scale attack on the craggy town of Centuripe, 8 miles south-east of Regalbuto, and (b) to extend towards Regalbuto where ultimately it would pass once more to the command of the Canadian 1st Division.

At this time the German forces about Regalbuto were under pressure from the west by the RCR and other units of 1st Division and by the 231st (Malta) Brigade, and as usual when the pressure reached a tender spot the German command had thrown in several stiff counter-attacks well supported by artillery. Nevertheless it was expected that the enemy would pull out of Regalbuto as the 3rd Brigade closed in from the south. This he did, but not without a fight for Monte Criscana and the safety of his retreat.

On the morning of Aug. 2nd the West Novas pushed forward to occupy Monte Criscana with "D" Company (Capt. A. W. Rogers) in the lead. As Rogers and his men got well across the intervening low ground they suddenly came under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire from enemy troops dug in and concealed on the lower slopes of the big hill. "A" Company (Lieut. Ross Guy) moved up to the right to support the attack but shortly after noon it too was pinned to the foot of the slope by the German bullet storm. The saga of these two companies during the ding-dong fight which followed contains many a tale of individual heroism, for both made gallant and repeated efforts to close with the enemy.

Sgt. R. H. Ellis, who had behaved so gallantly at Catenuova, was killed while leading his platoon in a determined effort to wipe out two German machine-gun posts on the face of the hill. Pte. F. W. Keyes was killed while carrying a message across the deadly open to Lieut. Charles Reeves. Reeves himself was fatally wounded as he led his platoon in another attack soon afterwards. Stretcher-bearer Gordon Spinney (who later received the Military Medal) worked courageously to aid the wounded lying on the slope. Lieut. E. N. Doane, in charge of "A" Company's mortars, exposed himself repeatedly in his efforts to get his weapons to bear on the German defences.

In one of the abortive attacks the Bren gunners of one forward section were killed or wounded, leaving the rest in a dangerous position without covering fire. Pte. Thomas Martell dashed to the gun and carried it forward, together with the ammunition clips, in full view of the enemy. (Martell later received the Distinguished Conduct Medal.) In the same situation Pte. G. J. Doucette picked up his Bren and dashed straight up the hill, firing from the hip at the German riflemen. His daring and determined rush carried him far up the slope but he was shot down as he paused to reload.

The British artillery observer with "A" Company had vanished, leaving nothing but his plotting board. What was worse, the company's "18" radio set (a portable set carried on a signalman's back, having a range of 300 yards to 5 miles, depending on local conditions) had been damaged, so that no communication with Battalion HQ was possible for several hours. "D" Company was in somewhat similar case. Thus there was no forward observation for the supporting troop of British self-propelled guns. However "B" Company from its positions on Whistling Hill could see the plight of the forward companies and could observe a certain amount of enemy movement on the Criscana slopes, and with Capt. Cameron and Lieut. D. I. Rice acting as spotters the artillery was brought to bear. By this time a section of Vickers (heavy machine-guns) had arrived on Whistling Hill, and the resulting combined shoot, although on a minor scale, was a little gem of its kind. At various points German infantry were flushed out of cover on the Criscana slopes and mowed down by the busy machine-guns.

Under cover of this fire "D" and "A" companies were able to disengage and withdraw to reorganize for further action, while "C" Company moved up on the right flank of "B" to help cover the retreat. The wounded were brought back safely but of necessity the dead were left where they fell. The sun was now going down and it was intended to put in another attack after dark; but at 7 P.M. Brigadier Penhale, accompanied by the chief artillery officer of 78th Division, came to West Nova HQ for a conference with Lt. Col. Bogert and decided against it. Farther north the Germans had withdrawn from Regalbuto during the morning, while to the south-east 78th

Division had taken Centuripe. Monte Criscana therefore had lost its immediate significance. Soon after these officers left, ten German shells fell about Battalion HQ, killing two men and wrecking the "22" radio set.

Patrols from "B" Company, moving over the battle-ground towards dusk, found the Germans withdrawn and in their place a number of furtive Sicilians, busy robbing the dead of both sides. At first light in the morning of Aug. 3rd the West Novas collected their dead and buried them on the lower slope.

The Regiment's casualties in this fierce little skirmish were 20 killed and 35 wounded. Amongst the killed was Cpl. K. V. Butler, a fine athlete who had distinguished himself on the regimental sports team in England. One of the wounded was Pte. F. H. O'Rourke, who was wounded previously in the Libertina action but had his injury dressed and marched on to Monte Criscana with the Regiment. In the past four days "A" Company had lost its C/O and all of its sergeants, two of whom (J. E. W. and R. H. Ellis) were brothers. It was a severe loss for one company.

The 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade had now come up on the West Novas' left and the 3rd Brigade passed once more to the 1st Division command. On August 4th the Regiment moved off again, marching through Regalbuto to a position just east of the town. Regalbuto was a complete ruin, shattered mostly by air-bombing, and the Maltese Brigade had moved into the town, triumphantly daubing large Maltese crosses in red paint over the front of the late Fascist headquarters and on the great door of the town hall. They had fought well and deserved their fun, but their exuberance overlooked the efforts of other units (notably the RCR) which had fought stiff and bloody battles for the heights overlooking the town.

It was one of the ironies of war, repeated again and again in the Sicilian and Italian campaigns, that regiments which fought through the surrounding hills should receive little or no mention in the capture of towns which lay at their feet. The news correspondents usually described the fortunate unit which passed into the town (often to find it unoccupied) as its captor. This irony dogged the footsteps of the West Novas all the way through Italy later on. It did not matter to the fighting man,

who knew *who* accomplished *what* and felt pride in his own achievements; but it mattered to the folk at home, who again and again found no mention of the Regiment in action except in the long and growing casualty list.

From their positions east of Regalbuto the West Novas could look down the Salso River valley and across the valley of the Simeto with which it joined, and see the bulk of Mount Etna like an immense fortress blocking the road to Messina. On the steep scarp of the mountain gleamed the white town of Aderno, the next target of the 1st Canadian and 78th British divisions. To the north of Aderno lay Bronte, once the seat of Lord Nelson, from which he took his Sicilian title. According to Sicilian legend the ancestor of the dukes of Bronte was one of the Cyclops, who forged the trident of Neptune and the thunderbolts of Jove. It seemed a poor place for the last Sicilian stand of the Germans, who in the past four weeks had suffered so sharply from those instruments.

The 3rd Brigade was now in reserve and at last the West Novas had a chance to clean up uniforms and equipment. The transport brought up the large packs, the first time the Regiment had seen them since the start of the campaign, and with them the first issue of EFI (Expeditionary Forces Institute) chocolate and cigarettes. This happy state of affairs did not last long. Under the Brigade scheme the Royal 22nd Regiment had seized a bridgehead over the Simeto River on the night of the 5th, through which the West Novas were to move. The axis of the advance was towards Mount Etna, and the object was to attack the high ground north of Aderno in conjunction with the 78th Division. In the early morning of Aug. 6th Lt. Col. Bogert with the intelligence officer and company commanders motored to the heights of Centuripe for a view of the objective, and two hours later the Regiment moved off to the attack. The 78th opened a terrific bombardment of the Aderno plateau and the sound of their gunfire rolled up the valleys in continuous gusts.

Indeed the bombardment was so terrific that Aderno fell without a fight, and the movement of 3rd Brigade was shifted to a point north-west of Aderno, where it would cover the left flank of the 78th Division for the advance on Bronte. It was

plain that the climax of the Sicilian campaign had arrived. The Germans, who had held on stubbornly in the Catania plain while their centre and right swung back from the west, were now in full retreat to Messina and thence out of Sicily.

At 2 P.M. the West Novas moved off in troop-carrying vehicles along the track north of the River Selso, and thence across the River Troina, where the companies pushed on afoot. After the long marches and struggles in the arid hills of central Sicily these lush valleys were like a glimpse of the Promised Land; and it was here in the shady orange and lemon groves, in the pleasant sight and sound of flowing water, that the Regiment made its first acquaintance with the German "Nebelwerfer". This was a six-barreled rocket mortar whose projectiles uttered a weird howl and swish as they passed through the air. The rockets exploded with a sharp crash and left the discharged canister, a large black bottle-shaped affair with strips of metal peeled back like the skin of a banana.

It was a new and most unhappy sound in the cacaphony of war, in which the West Novas had learned to distinguish the clip-clop of the "88" German field gun echoing amongst the hills; the low swift burr of the Spandau — a machine-gun said to fire so fast that "the bullets come out like a rod of lead"; the shrill screech of the Schmeisser automatic pistol and the flutter and *woomp* of German mortar bombs; not to mention the terrier bark of the British 25-pounder field gun, the solemn thud-thud of the heavier 4.5 and 5.5, the deadly ripple and chuckle of the Bren, the chatter of the tommy-gun, and always and everywhere the characteristic crack of the infantryman's right arm, the Enfield Mark 4 rifle.

All these, with the boom and shudder of aerial bombs and bridge and road demolitions, the sudden splitting detonation of Teller and other land mines which the Germans sowed about the roads and bridges, made up the battle music which for four terrific weeks had filled the valleys and echoed from the crags of Sicily. It was fitting that at its close the Germans should introduce this last fearsome instrument. There was something Wagnerian and thoroughly Teutonic about its appearance at the close of the first act, with a mighty volcano in the background and the pot-helmeted hero withdrawing to the wings through a bower of green orange leaves.

At 6 P.M. on this long August 6th the West Novas were pushing up the main road to the north along the Simeto River under a spasmodic shell-fire from long range German guns. By 7.30 they had reached their objective and settled in position. The Germans had blown the main bridge across the Simeto at this point and although the stream was readily forded by men and mules the regimental HQ had to be established on the west side. The steep banks would not permit passage of the truck containing the "22" radio set.

Here the Regiment remained through Aug. 7th, under an occasional flurry of shells from distant German guns. Rations for the rifle companies were taken across the river by the now familiar mule train. About 9 P.M. on the 7th the German long range artillery fired 48 shells into the West Nova area but there were no casualties and as the sounds of war died away towards the north it became evident that this was "Jerry's" parting salute as far as the Canadians were concerned. The movement of the combined British and American armies into the narrow north-east tip of Sicily had brought about a congestion of men, guns and vehicles on the roads — and the Germans had destroyed bridges and often whole sections of highway with a thoroughness hitherto unseen in the campaign. Hence the Canadians and various other divisions received orders to stand fast on the positions last reached, while the forward troops finished the job.

Thus the 8th of August found the West Novas resting in an idyllic scene, surrounded by orchards and market gardens, with juicy tomatoes, peaches, oranges and grapes to be had for the plucking, and the cool Simeto flowing past. Soon the inviting waters of the river were alive with naked Bluenoses, sun-burned from head to waist and from thigh to foot, but strangely white about the mid-section, swimming, larking or busily scrubbing away the crusted dirt and sweat of a month's marching and fighting in the dusty Sicilian hills, and the stream flowing milky-white with soapsuds.

The news of this paradise spread quickly and on the following afternoon the bathers included Brigadier Penhale and his staff, looking just like other men (as Joe Private observed) "once they took off the brass". It was indeed a happy place and a happy time, with all men brothers, like boys in a swim-

ming hole at home. There were other amenities, and amongst them Lt. Col. Bogert and his officers held a party at the Casa Sciarrone to celebrate the success of the first campaign.

On Aug. 11th came orders to move back, and the Regiment packed up and departed by motor transport through the memorable scenes of Catenanuova and thence to Francofonte in the Catania plain, where the Canadian 1st Division was officially at rest. It was a poor exchange in many ways, for here in the unhealthy lowland the men went down by dozens with malaria (in spite of mepacrine, the enforced wearing of slacks after sundown, and the use of mosquito nets), and there was a good deal of jaundice, sand-fly fever and dysentery — the latter symptoms possibly brought on by the gorging of fresh fruit after weeks of Compo rations and thirst.

After Holy Communion on Sunday Aug. 15th the Regiment paraded for a special religious service in remembrance of the dead and in thanks for the victorious conclusion of the Sicilian campaign, followed by a march-past with Lt. Col. "Pat" Bogert taking the salute. The Regiment now settled down to the business of an army "rest". Lieut. R. G. Cunningham opened a training course for NCO's, to replace NCO casualties in the battalion. The sports officer arranged an inter-company softball schedule. In a series of discussions under the direction of the C/O the officers and sergeant-majors reviewed the events of the past month with an eye to improving equipment, administration and fighting tactics in the light of battle experience. And there was a brisk smartening of clothing and equipment after the easygoing latitude of the long march across the hills.

There were many visitors in these days: Major-General Simonds, the brilliant young GOC 1st Division; Brigadier Penhale and his staff; Lt. General McNaughton, GOC Canadian Army Overseas; and "Monty" himself in his jaunty black beret — all with words of high praise for the troops. Another and more familiar visitor was the former C/O, Lt. Col. G. W. Bullock. This indomitable man, now nearly 60, had reverted to the rank of captain and taken command of the 1st Canadian Graves Registration Unit, in order to follow his beloved Regiment and see that its dead were located and properly buried and marked. His duties were general of course, but in Sicily

and along the fighting trail through Italy later on he devoted a particular care to the dead of his own West Novas, tramping with pack on back and stick in hand over the barren hills and lonely valleys in search of them, and refusing to give up while a single grave remained unfound.

The part of Sicily in which the Regiment now found itself was one of the pre-war winter playgrounds of Europe, and the surrounding hills were dotted with luxurious white-walled and red-tiled villas of wealthy Italians and other visitors, all abandoned now. In one of these the West Novas established their battalion HQ, a palatial residence with three modern bathrooms, a piano, a fine kitchen with a water-heater for the baths, and a good deal of comfortable furniture. The officers gave it a new name with an authentic Latin sound, "Casa Nova". Here for two happy weeks the blue-cross flag presented by Mr. Angus MacDonald fluttered in the warm Mediterranean breeze, exciting the interest of the inhabitants and the pleased surprise of Scottish officers with the British forces in the vicinity: and here with choice Italian wines and food the officers' mess entertained an endless succession of visitors.

However the happiest feature of this well-earned rest at Francofonte was the daily excursion to the beach, where all ranks frolicked in the surf for hours on end, a multitude of nude bronze figures worthy of a Greek frieze. In the blue waters of Mussolini's Mare Nostrum the West Novas washed away the last traces of central Sicily, forgot the feeble springs and dry rivers of the hinterland, and marvelled that a people surrounded by warm clean water could be so incredibly filthy.

Sicily had been a sorry disillusionment for many of the lads. Those with some memory of their school geography had expected a green land inhabited by clean industrious wine-merchants, with a troupe of beautiful damsels dancing the Tarantella and a sprinkling of picturesque brigands in the background. Instead they had seen (through a cloud of dust) a jumble of dry hills where little grew but tussocks of coarse grass and clumps of sumac and prickly pear, with an occasional wheat field or an orchard of lean and twisted olive trees in the folds.

The red-tiled Sicilian villages, each charming in the distance, had proved to be squalid slums inhabited by ragged and

unlovely beggars, male and female (but with handsome children) all of whom stank to heaven and for good measure flung their slops and sewage in the gutters of the streets. It was a sanitation officer's nightmare against a backdrop of pure Hollywood, in which the only brigands were the young ragamuffins demanding cigarettes and sweets, and where the swarming fleas explained the Tarantella.

Apart from all this the swift campaign had been a military education. The Italian troops had been concentrated chiefly in the west end of the island, where Patton's Americans gathered them up in droves; but the British and Canadian troops had faced crack German units all the way. The Germans, vastly outnumbered and out-gunned, with little or no air cover, had fought a skilful and courageous battle, taking every advantage of a landscape admirably suited to their game — which was to inflict as much loss as possible and get out. When they did get out via Messina on Aug. 16th, fending off the Allied aircraft with an umbrella of *flak*, the Eighth Army gave them full marks for a losing hand played very well indeed.

But if the Germans had escaped another Tunisia by the skin of their teeth they could not escape the political consequences of the fall of Sicily. The Italians had deposed Mussolini on July 25th and placed their leadership in the hands of Marshal Badoglio and the King. The Allied troops, busy with sharp battles in the hills, had greeted this news with a shrug, for Badoglio had announced his intention of continuing the Fascist war. Unknown to the Allied troops (but suspected by the Germans) Badoglio was conspiring to surrender his country's fleet and armies at that very moment, and Messina had barely fallen when an Italian plane arrived on a nearby airfield with his emissary to General Montgomery.

The truth about that dramatic visit came long afterwards. Montgomery had a soldier's eye on the German troops pouring into Italy through every Alpine pass, and with good reason doubted Badoglio's ability to "deliver the goods". And "Monty's" prompt decision was the right one — to cross over and establish his army in southern Italy before the Germans got there in force.



Top left : A West Nova pioneer with his prisoner, Arielli front.
Top right : Tending a wounded West Nova, Arielli front.
Below : West Novas with a captured medico, Arielli front.



Lieutenant-Colonel R. S. E. Waterman, D.S.O.

CHAPTER 13

The First Foot in Italy

On August 23 Lt. Col. Bogert called his company commanders together in the "Casa Nova" and gave them portentous news. The Eighth Army was about to descend upon Italy itself, and the Canadian 1st Division was to make the first landing at the port of Reggio while the 5th (Yorkshire) Division went ashore further north opposite Messina. More than this, 3rd Brigade was to be in the van of the assault, with the West Novas and Carleton and Yorks leading and the Royal 22nd Regiment in immediate reserve. Thus the soldiers from Maritime Canada were to be the first Allied troops to set a firm foot (as distinct from raids) on the continent of Europe — Hitler's Festung Europa — since the last British soldier left the beach at Dunkirk. It was a great honour and a keen responsibility.

Training for "Operation Baytown" commenced at once: the familiar business of getting in and out of assault craft was practised again and again; the officers studied a plaster model of the Italian side of Messina Strait, and air photographs of the Regiment's objective. The photographs were revealing, and what they showed was breath-taking to say the least. For centuries the Italians had guarded carefully the Straits of Messina, and in August 1943 the steep heights above Reggio (whence the train-ferry crossed to Messina) were defended by two large U-shaped concrete forts armed with modern cannon, each approached from the coastal highway by a narrow road laid out

in long hairpin curves up the face of the ridge. Every foot of the approach was commanded by the forts, and probably by machine-gun posts and trenches concealed in the orchards on the lower slope. The West Novas were to land on a beach immediately before these forts, scale the heights and capture them — like Wolfe at Quebec. The Carleton and Yorks were to land on the West Novas' right and capture the town and airfield of Reggio.

It was a stiff undertaking. A strong Commando raid on Reggio at the end of August had been nipped by vigilant German troops, who broke up the attack and (according to the German Army communique, usually reliable) captured 400 prisoners. The rest of the Commandos, having no retreat to the boats, had scattered into the hills. The Reggio forts were believed to be garrisoned by Italian soldiers and marines, which might mean anything. Some of the Italians, notably the Alpini and other divisions from the north, and the parachute units, were good fighting men. But even the poorest sort of soldier, sheltered in positions of such strength and with cannon and automatic small-arms at his hand, could wreak havoc amongst invading troops before the sight of their bayonets shook his courage. The beach was believed to be mined, which entailed some careful probing in the dark before the companies moved off the assault craft. All in all it was no wonder that a well-known Canadian newspaper correspondent, informing his friends that he intended to land with the assault brigade, received a cryptic, "Well, Munro, it was nice to have known you!"

On Aug. 29th the West Novas motored to the port of Augusta, where practice landings were carried out two miles south of the town under the eye of Major-General Simonds. The reality of these exercises was increased by showers of rain and by German aircraft attacking Augusta harbour. In the meantime the long awaited W.E. transport vehicles of the Regiment (replacing those lost at sea) had turned up at the port of Syracuse, and the rear party under Capt. W. R. Moore had arrived from England.

On the morning of Sep. 1st the Regiment sent off the last of its transport to the assault assembly area opposite Reggio, and in late afternoon the West Novas embarked at the port of

Catania in LCI's for a night voyage up the coast to Mili Marina. It was a smooth trip of about 50 miles, passing Mount Etna en route, the sort of thing that well-to-do tourists enjoy in peacetime: and the troops enjoyed it no less, though they had to make it in the dark. It was the anniversary of the Regiment's mobilization order, received at Bridgewater just four years before.

This nocturnal Cook's Tour ended at 1 A.M. on Sep. 2nd, when the Regiment disembarked 5 miles south of Messina in the region of Mili Marina, there to lie hidden for the rest of the day amongst the olive, almond and lemon groves just above the beach. The strait was slightly more than seven miles wide at this point, but each side had excellent observation of the other and even by starlight the white town of Reggio looked very close and clear at the foot of the massive "Fort Hill".

All through the afternoon the West Nova officers studied the forts and the approach through their field glasses. A strong but irregular current ran through Messina Strait, made turbulent in spots by "bastard" currents flowing the other way, hence the old Greek myth of tremendous whirlpools and the sea monsters of Scylla and Charybdis. No doubt the myth arose from the strange circular patches of roiled water created by these opposing currents, each patch ruffled like the petals of an enormous flower. The Sicilians called them "garafano" — carnations — and the word was apt.

For some days now the Eighth Army artillery had been firing ranging shots across the strait, and 655 guns were hidden in the orchards and villa gardens along the shore from Messina to Mili Marina, ready to lay down the assault barrage. But it was impossible to hide the swarm of assault craft gathered in nearby Sicilian coves and harbours, and the fleet of warships and assorted rocket-ships and floating batteries now moving in towards the strait. The enemy must be well aware of their intentions: the great and only question was how much force he had been able to assemble at the toe of Italy in the short time since Messina fell.

Only the Allied high command knew at this time that the Reggio landings were intended to be a diversion, carried out by a single corps: the main blow was to be struck by General Mark Clark's 5th (British-American) Army a week later at Salerno,

near Naples. With this timing it was hoped that the landing of the 1st Canadian and 5th British divisions would tempt the main German force into a counter-thrust in the Calabrian hills, there to be cut off by a swift advance of the Fifth Army across the "ankle" of Italy. These plans went awry, as will be seen; the Germans had suspected some such manoeuvre and the Fifth Army was promptly pinned to its beaches at Salerno, holding on for its life, while the lone British-Canadian corps in Calabria fought its way across the "instep" to the relief, if not the rescue.

None of this was known to the troops who lay above the Sicilian beaches in the gathering darkness, awaiting the word to embark for Reggio. They were cheerful and confident, sitting or lying in groups, talking of home, of England, of the march through Sicily, or singing (not too loudly) such light-hearted ditties as "Roll Out The Barrel", "Bless 'em All" or "Oh, We're All D. T.'s" to the accompaniment of the humming mosquitoes. The strait was calm in the starlight with a slight haze over the water. Far up on the opposite height, somewhere near the south fort, a large fire blazed, subsided, and blazed up again from time to time.

The occasion was historic in many ways. Down through the centuries armies of many races had lain here looking forth to the conquest of Italy or the defence of Sicily — Greeks, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Saracens, Normans, even British. And the old British chapter had a new significance, for it was just 137 years since Sir John Stuart with his 5,000 young soldiers crossed from Sicily into Calabria, pushed up into the mountains in the burning summer heat, and defeated Napoleon's bronzed and moustached veterans in the battle of Maida. After Austerlitz the French had boasted that the continent was theirs, for no soldiers in Europe could withstand them — just what Hitler had said of Europe and his Wehrmacht after Dunkirk. But Napoleon's soldiers had learned a sharp lesson from Stuart's hard-hitting redcoats in the summer of 1806, and now history was about to repeat itself.

Shortly before 1 A.M. on Sept 3rd — exactly four years after Britain declared war on the Italo-German Axis — the

West Novas began to embark, moving down to the beach in their pre-arranged groups. The assault craft lay with bows to the sand and their ramps down. The megaphoned voice of an embarkation officer directed each group to its boat. There was no confusion. With the skill of long practice and eyes accustomed to movement in the dark the officers and men tramped steadily aboard and crammed themselves, their weapons and equipment into every available space, sitting, squatting or standing as the chance afforded. The landing craft had an unfortunate resemblance to steel coffins and there was the usual joking about it. The voices of the crews had a familiar ring; they were officers and men of the Royal Canadian Navy.

By 2.30 A.M. the whole force was embarked and the assault fleet backed away from the beaches, swung, and headed for Reggio. The sound of all these motors throbbing in the still night seemed tremendous in the ears of the crouching passengers. It seemed all Italy must be awake and aware of what was going on. By standing on a pack or some other convenient object the men next the sides could look over the steel bulwark and see the whole strait crawling with dark shapes headed for the darker shadow of the steep Calabrian shore.

All the sounds of all these craft were drowned and smothered at 3.45 A.M. when the great barrage began. A ripple of gun-flashes passed down the Sicilian shore from Messina to Mili Marina and then settled into a rapid and continuous bombardment. The warships joined in. A rocket-ship in the van of the West Nova flotilla spattered the beach with hundreds of 6-lb bombs. The shoreline vanished in a haze of dust and smoke, and the night breeze wafted the fumes of burnt explosives out to the approaching boats.

The naval crews had difficulty in finding the exact landing points in the murk. Half a dozen searchlights sprang out from the Sicilian shore to point the objectives, like so many long white fingers, while a heavy anti-aircraft gun fired a stream of red tracer straight at the beach north of Reggio. As the boats drew inshore the barrage lifted to the forts and other targets in the hills, where occasional gun-flashes showed that some of the enemy were alert and ready to fight.

There was a breathless minute or two as the leading craft drew in to the shore and the pioneers leaped out to deal with

the expected mines and wire. But there seemed to be no mines or wire. Indeed there seemed to be no enemy. Not a shot came out of the darkness. About 5.30 A.M. "A" Company, West Novas, reported themselves ashore — a few minutes after Brigade HQ received its first report from the leading elements of the Carleton and Yorks. However two platoons of "B" Company had been landed at 5.13 A.M. a considerable distance to the north of their objective, and had not reported owing to communication difficulties. These men of Cameron's had moved in to the main road and were making their way south to their objective when they encountered "A", a number of dim forms moving in the murk. The moment was tense. The challenge for the night (evidently devised by the sporting English) was "Jack Hobbs?" And the reply was "Surrey and England." Lieut. Don Rice of "B" Company called out the challenge and received no answer. Weapons were cocked as Rice challenged again. This time a puzzled "A" Company voice was heard saying, "There's no Jack Hobbs here!" In the excitement the password had been mislaid.

At the foot of the slope a few houses lay in ruins, shattered by the gunfire and still shrouded in dust. Farther south there was a glow of fires in battered Reggio. Having searched the mysteriously silent beach-head the West Novas assembled quickly and commenced scrambling up the hill to the forts in the chosen order for assault — "D" and "C" companies leading, then battalion HQ, with "A" and "B" in close support. Behind the climbing soldiers the beach personnel and engineers already were at work making way for the passage of tanks and transport.

Dawn broke, and the early morning air was cool, but the Regiment had a hot and breathless scramble to the crest, cumbered as it was with picks and shovels in addition to weapons, ammunition and equipment. About 7 A.M. the leading sections dashed into the forts — and found them silent and apparently deserted. It was a comic anti-climax to the night's anticipations and the grim climb in the dawn. In the north fort "D" Company discovered a pair of trembling Italian sergeants, who informed them that the garrison had fled into the hills when the barrage began. The same was true of the south fort. These poltroons had abandoned four 280 mm. mortars, four

75 mm. cannon and two 20 mm. quick-firers undamaged in their haste to get away, together with a great supply of ammunition. Some of them fled on over the hills but during the morning 55 Italian soldiers and marines crept back and surrendered to the West Nova patrols.

Where were the "Tedesci"? The Italians shrugged and gestured towards the north. From all that could be learned the Germans had pulled out their forces on the previous day and vanished. They were watching these events however, for at 8.30 A.M. a single gun opened fire from the hills, shooting over the forts into Reggio harbour. A barrage of 64 Canadian guns promptly silenced it. Half an hour later several German dive-bombers made a belated attack on the harbour and were driven off by Bofors fire. In the meantime the Carleton and Yorks had occupied Reggio and sent a patrol south along the coast road to Melito. At 3 P.M. Brigade ordered the West Novas to leave "A" Company in charge of the forts and move to the Reggio airfield. Here the Regiment remained through the night. Patrols were sent out but no enemy was encountered.

On the morning of Sep. 4th "A" Company rejoined the battalion at the airfield. A "B" Company patrol under Lieut. D. Kirk was despatched along the hill track through Cardeto to explore the possibilities of moving motor transport that way to the main Melito-Gambaria highway. The patrol returned at evening reporting the track unsuitable. They had received a great welcome in the village of Cardeto, where the mayor (in his official sash) and 300 people turned out to give Kirk effusive thanks for their "deliverance".

The axis of the 1st Division advance was the single road from Reggio to Delianuova, which soon was choked with traffic. The West Novas were ordered to remain at the air-drome until the 6th, when they set off in motor transport through the mountains. The night was spent in a fir forest near Gambaria, where due to the altitude (4000 feet) the air was cold and the men shivered in their thin khaki-drill with no protection but their gas-capes. A heavy rain completed their discomfort.

In the morning there was an issue of rum to take the chill out of their bones. The weather cleared and the sun shone as

the vehicles rolled on towards Locri. At dark they reached the village of Delianuova, where they left the transport and caught a hasty meal before striking off across the hills on foot. The road petered out on the height of land and from there on their only guide was a mule-track, difficult to follow in the dark, and about 2 A.M. on the 8th the track was lost altogether. The men were very tired after the hard up-hill march and Lt. Col. Bogert decided to halt until first light, when the patrols could pick up the track.

There was still no sign of the enemy but there was plenty of cover for them in the mountain copses and, as it chanced, a body of Italian paratroops lay concealed in a bushy ravine close to the bare knoll on which the West Novas had laid down to rest. The Italians had been trained in Germany and were well equipped with 9 mm. automatic rifles and pistols. They wore a blue-grey uniform of fine texture with a winged badge on the collar and had long peaked caps. The Germans had rushed them up into the hills to delay the Canadian advance and their boots were worn out by hard marching.

Just what their immediate intentions were, no one ever knew. Apparently, like the West Novas, they had bivouacked after a long march into the hills and by pure chance the Canadians had come alongside them in the dark. About 5 A.M. one of their night patrols stumbled on a group of sleeping West Novas. At the same time their silent approach startled one of the transport mules, which stampeded through the West Nova lines, a very effective "stand-to". Firing broke out at once, and quickly rose to battle pitch as both sides snatched up their weapons. The edge of the knoll soon was lined with West Novas shooting hard at the Italian rifle flashes and hurling grenades into the ravine.

Dawn was just breaking, and Lt. Col. Bogert, making a quick and accurate appraisal of the situation, sent "A" Company (Capt. J. W. K. Smeltzer) to out-flank the Italians from the right. The Italians fought unusually well for a time, but by full daylight their commander and 56 of his officers and men were prisoners, a number of others were dead, and the rest fled away towards the flank, where a platoon of the Edmonton Regiment took up the chase and pursued them out of the area.

The Italian major, a chauvinistic character, was captured with two of his officers before the fight ended. When Lt. Col Bogert told him to call on his men to surrender and save further bloodshed the major struck a Mussolini attitude and declared his unit would fight to the death. At this the two junior officers, one of whom was a very tall man with a beard, snatched off their long rows of medal ribbons and handed them over to him with a torrent of indignant Italian phrases apparently calling him a butcher. At this the major burst into tears. He restored the ribbons to their outraged breasts (which held convenient press-studs for such taking-off and putting-on) at which the junior officers burst into tears. The outcome of this magnificent grief was the surrender of the Italians remaining in the ravine.

Thus, in a small and obscure struggle in the Calabrian hills, expired the last flicker of Italian fighting spirit in this war. The sharp little action was rather costly to the West Novas, although the casualties fortunately were not many. One of the originals of the Regiment and a very fine soldier, CSM Reginald Foley was killed: Capt. R. G. Thexton was severely wounded: Sergeant H. S. Cunningham of "C" Company was badly wounded and never returned to the Regiment: the medical officer, Capt. A. W. Hardy, was shot while binding the wounds of Sergeant H. J. Shanks. (Shanks died of his wounds later.)

At 8 A.M. (Sep. 8th) the West Novas resumed their march. Rations had come up over the rough trail by jeep and in mid-morning a halt was made for a meal. By mid-afternoon the Regiment reached the main highway and swung south towards Locri. The country was rugged and the enemy had blown the bridges at each ravine, so that the transport was held up. At one of these blown bridges the West Novas halted for the night. They were exhausted after their 40-mile march across the hills, made with little food and less sleep, and when the signallers received word that Italy had formally given up the war the news was received with little more than a sleepy "Is that so?" The Italian troops who had been withdrawing before the Canadian advance were much more jubilant, and entertained the West Nova patrols with a display of flares and the joyous discharge of rifles and machine-guns on the heights overlooking Gerace.

The official German news agency, D. N. B., had the last word : "This act of treachery has been foreseen since the removal of Signor Mussolini, and the German government has taken all military precautions."

CHAPTER 14

Locri to Potenza

On Sept. 11th after long delay on the mountain road, where every bridge had been blown and the approaches mined, the West Novas marched into the little port of Locri, where the troops enjoyed a swim in the sea. The coastal road was still choked with military traffic, moving slowly as the engineers repaired bridges, filled craters and removed the various obstacles thrown down by the departing enemy. The German forces in Calabria apparently consisted of demolition parties with a thin screen of fighting troops, all on wheels, with the advantage of uncongested and undamaged roads at their rear as they moved back, leaving havoc in their wake.

They could not damage the sea however, and on Sep. 11th, while a compact Canadian armoured force pushed along the coastal road, the West Novas made a frog-leap into the Gulf of Squillace, embarking in LCI's on the beach at Locri in the early morning and landing at evening just south of the important inland town of Catanzaro. Here the 3rd Brigade was assembling when the armoured force pushed into Catanzaro and found it undefended. A "rest" of four days was decreed for the troops on the coast — four days of practice marches without water-bottles and with strict march discipline — while new plans were formulated in the light of events at Salerno.

General Clark's 5th Army had landed on Sep. 9th at Salerno in an attempt to seize the great port of Naples and to cut across the "ankle" of Italy at the very moment of the Italian

surrender. The Germans had suspected the manoeuvre (their suspicions no doubt confirmed by some of Badoglio's staff) and General Kesselring had several crack divisions in position to strike at the invaders the moment they landed. A ding-dong battle was raging about the Salerno beach-heads. Clark's position had been precarious from the start, and the fierce German armoured thrusts (one of which had penetrated into Salerno itself) now made it downright dangerous.

There was a ray of sunshine on the far side of this thundercloud. The Germans had been obliged to keep their greatest force about Naples, where the greatest danger lay, and the thin screen of German troops in the "toe" and "heel" of the peninsula could not hold a determined attack at any point. Thus Montgomery's two divisions (1st Canadian and 5th Yorkshire) in Calabria already had swallowed the "toe", and other light forces had seized the important naval base of Taranto and were cutting rapidly across the "heel".

Kesselring's reasoning was obvious: (a) the British-Canadian forces in the "toe" and "heel" were not more than two or perhaps three divisions, (b) Montgomery could not reinforce them much while the bulk of Allied shipping was absorbed in the Salerno affair, and (c) a rigorous policy of road and bridge demolition in the mountains of the "foot" would contain the British-Canadian forces there for weeks. The German was playing for tempting stakes. Once the 5th Army had been driven off the Salerno beaches he could turn and crush the venturesome divisions in the south.

With the stakes thus set it remained for Montgomery to gamble in his turn, and his decision was to ferry the 5th Division up the west coast in the available assault craft while the Canadians struck straight through the mountains at the German rear. The Canadian objective was the vital railway and road junction of Potenza, in the middle of the "ankle", 120 miles north of Catanzaro as the crow flies and twice as far by the winding coastal and mountain route. Traffic problems on the inferior and badly damaged roads leading inland prevented a quick movement of the Canadian division, and General Simonds resolved to send a special mobile force ahead.

The Canadian general's choice for this adventure was the West Nova Scotia Regiment, supported by one squadron of the

14th Canadian Tank Regiment and auxiliary groups of sappers, signallers and artillery. The whole was placed in command of Lt. Col. M. P. Bogert of the West Novas and hence was named "Boforce". At this time the following appointments were held in the Regiment : Major R. S. E. Waterman, second-in-command; Capt. C. B. Higgins, adjutant; Lieut. H. M. Eisenhauer, intelligence officer; Lieut. J. H. Jones, signals officer; Capt. C. L. Putnam, commanding HQ Company; Capt. D. M. Archibald, commanding Support Company; Capt. J. W. K. Smeltzer, commanding "A" Company; Capt. J. R. Cameron, commanding "B" Company; A/Major G. L. F. McNeil, commanding "C" Company; Capt. A. W. Rogers, commanding "D" Company; Regimental sergeant-major, G. S. Dean.

The great dash began on the morning of Sep. 16th, when the West Novas embarked in assault craft at Catanzaro Marina and made another frog-leap along the coast to the village of Trebisacce. The beach here was believed to be mined, but the mine-detectors (one to each company) were rendered useless when the landing craft grounded and the troops were obliged to leap out in deep water. The situation was quickly solved by the irrepressible Pte. R. H. "Snippy" Peach, who exclaimed "Aw hell, boys, follow me!" and marched straight up the strand, planting his wooden sticks (to indicate a safe path) as he went.

From Trebisacce the West Novas motored along the coast road to Villafranca, which was reached about 10 P.M. The supporting arms moved up the coastal road to join them and shortly after noon on Sep. 17th "Boforce" struck off for the objective. The only available maps were small-scale things made from old Italian surveys, with little detail of the heights and contours. The force passed along the coastal road for some miles without interruption (except for the routine 20-minute halt every two hours by the leading tanks) and at Rotondella swung inland. Good progress continued and the column halted for the night about 10 miles east of San Arcangelo. About 10 P.M. a patrol under Lieut. D. I. Rice, accompanied by Lieut. H. M. Sisenhauer and Captain Thrupp (an Italian-speaking intelligence officer from Division HQ)

pushed forward to the bridge 5 kilometers beyond San Arcangelo and found it intact.

The advance was resumed before daylight on Sept 18th. with "C" Company in the lead, riding on tanks. The country was mountainous with dense forests of conifers and deep gorges like the hills of Cape Breton, with an admirable site for a German ambush at every turn of the dizzy road. The column passed through San Arcangelo and on to a point near Armento, where it halted for a meal. Soon afterwards the enemy demolition parties were found to be just ahead, and there was a halt shortly after noon while the engineers made a diversion around a blown bridge south of Corleto. Corleto had been severely bombed by the RAF, and "D" Company had to clear tons of rubble from the main street before the column could pass through. Meanwhile "B" Company pressed on afoot, accompanied by Lt. Col. Bogert and a party of engineers.

About 4.30 P.M. an engineer officer, dashing ahead of the column on a motor-cycle, suddenly came upon a German staff car headed the other way. The surprise was mutual and the venturesome engineer escaped, but the Germans captured his cycle: and Lieuts. J. H. Jones and W. H. P. David with the advance patrol came to the bridge at Laurenzana just in time to see it blown up with a terrific explosion, and the Germans withdrawing just beyond. There had been little sleep for the troops since the 16th, except for the brief halt on the previous night, and so the column regarded the blown bridge as a blessed opportunity. However Capt. Pritchard and his engineers laboured all through the night to make a diversion-crossing of the ravine.

An hour before daylight on the 19th "A" Company moved up to cover the bridge diversion, and three hours later it was passable for jeeps and motorcycles. Meanwhile "A" Company pushed on afoot, close on the heels of the Germans, who blew a big crater in the road a mile ahead. "D" Company helped the hustling engineers to fill this hole and the track soon was passable for jeeps, but as "A" Company rounded a steep curve ahead the enemy blew a bridge across the river there and fired on the leading troops, slightly wounding Capt. "Buck" Buchanan, the daring and skilful artillery observer. The West Novas replied with rifles and Brens, and Lieut. R. W. Bullock quickly

got his mortars into play, with the result that as the leading elements of "A" Company attacked across the stream, the Germans fled, leaving one of their vehicles burning near the blown bridge.

By mid-morning the main force came up, having by-passed all previous obstacles, and the tanks once more led the column. The blown bridge was by-passed, so was another near Anzi. The road now was studded with Teller mines but the advance continued rapidly and at Anzi the West Novas came in sight of the rear German lorries, which were shelled by one of the Canadian tanks. Thus hustled, the enemy had no time for elaborate demolitions or properly to conceal the mines with which he was hastily sowing the road. The miles rolled past. From the wooded mountains, studded with lonely hamlets and the summer villas of wealthy Neapolitans, each commanding a magnificent scene, "Boforce" emerged into an open country of rolling hills and about an hour after dark the head of the column arrived on the heights overlooking Potenza.

The spectacular Canadian dash into the heart of Basilicata Province in less than sixty hours had been noted by German HQ, which was still primarily concerned with the battle at Salerno. However at the last moment a force of German paratroops was taken out of the Salerno fighting and rushed in motor transport towards Potenza. Their leading elements had arrived in the town but they had little time to establish themselves when "Boforce" was upon them.

Potenza was a city of 14,000 inhabitants about 2700 feet above sea level and built on the side of a steep hill overlooking the dry bed of the Basento River. It contained a fine cathedral and there were many blocks of modern apartments, admirable for defence in street fighting. The Allied air forces had been bombing the railway yards for days, with considerable damage to the town, and for their part the Germans had blown the main bridge over the Basento and sown the approaches with Teller mines.

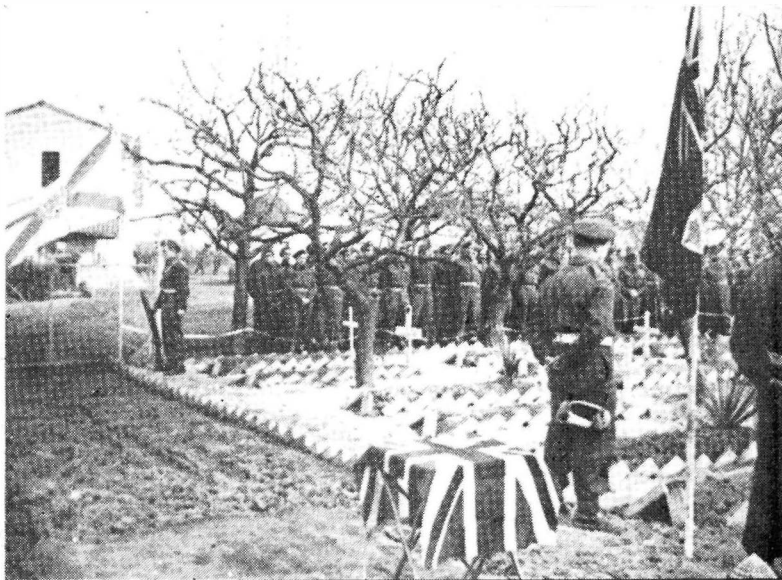
To lessen the confusion of a night fight in strange streets Lt. Col. Bogert waited for moonrise before sending his force in to the attack. Potenza was blacked-out and silent but as the moon came up the buildings gleamed white on the north slope of the valley. There was a faint mist farther down, where the

bed of the Basento made a deep gash in the valley floor. Potenza on its height had the reputation of being one of the coldest towns in Italy, and the West Novas, with the sweat of the day's exertions turning chill in the thin stuff of their shirts and slacks, found the waiting very long.

About 1 A.M. (Sep. 20th) when the moon was well up, "D", "C" and "A" companies moved down into the valley in their motor transport. It was a noisy approach but stealth was impossible in any case, for as the leading troops were jumping from their lorries near the blown bridge one of "A" Company's vehicles backed over a mine, which exploded and wounded Lieut. Ross Guy and six others. Lieut. D. Kirk's platoon of "B" Company had been placed under command of "A", and three of Kirk's men were seriously injured (one was thrown right over the cab) when their lorry's front wheels dropped into the crater of a blown mine. A sudden gust of small-arms fire added to the din as Lieut. Carroll and a patrol of "A" Company discovered a party of Germans about to blow a small bridge farther up the ravine and drove them off.

"C" and "D" companies went down into the dry Basento gully and got across without difficulty. There was no sign of the enemy. The tall white buildings of Potenza stood silent and uncanny in the moonlight as the West Novas crept up through the fields and gardens on the lower slope and began to work their way into the town. They had passed through the main streets and were approaching the railway yards when they "bumped" the leading patrols of the German paratroops. Dawn was just breaking. At once the silence was shattered by a storm of rifle and machine-gun fire as the two forces "slugged it out". Reports by radio and runner from the forward companies brought supporting fire from the Canadian tanks and Vickers machine-guns on the height overlooking the Basento valley from the south, but this fire had to be applied with caution due to the uncertainty of the West Nova forward positions.

As the daylight grew it was apparent that the enemy were posted chiefly on the heights commanding the town from the north, which at once became the target of the Canadian artillery. Brigadier Penhale and the GOC 1st Division, General Simonds, came up to watch the battle from West Nova HQ



**Top : Dedicating the cemetery outside Russi after the Senio fighting.
The last West Nova graves in Italy.
Below : Col. Waterman and his officers at Ortona.**



Sir Oliver Leese confers with officers of 3rd Brigade behind the Arielli positions. Lt.-Col. Waterman in beret.

on a bend of the road above the valley, where the whole scene was spread out before them, as Simonds said, "like a sand-table model".

The Royal 22nd Regiment moved up west of the town to cover the flank from the Salerno side and shortly after noon a troop of Canadian tanks roared into the town itself. Two hours later Lt. Col. Bogert went in with his jeep, accompanied by "B" Company (less Kirk's platoon) and the Carrier Platoon (Lieut. E. D. Hersey) all riding on tanks. This was too much for the paratroops, apparently about company strength, who fled through a railway tunnel to their transport, awaiting them on the reverse slope of the ridge. They made off quickly towards the east, leaving one of their self-propelled guns demolished in the outskirts of the town. "C" and "D" companies took up the pursuit on foot, following the leading troop of tanks, and Lieut. T. J. Keefe was wounded when one of the tanks struck a mine on the farther slope. "B" Company with the rest of the tanks moved through the town and consolidated a position a mile beyond, where about 5 P.M. they were relieved by the Carleton and Yorks. The inhabitants of Potenza had emerged from their cellars and other hiding places and were surging about the rubble-strewn streets, cheering wildly as the "Canadesi" passed through, and giving them fruit and wine.

From their position on the Potenza heights the West Novas despatched a mobile patrol under Lieut. R. W. Bullock, with orders to push along the main highway towards the Gulf of Salerno until contact was established with the Fifth Army. The patrol accomplished this at Satriano, where it met elements of the 5th British Division. On the way Bullock and his men received an effusive greeting from the village of Tito, where they found and freed ten political prisoners of the Fascist regime. These worthies presented the West Novas with a document which is worth recording here :

TO THE LIBERATORS OF ITALY !

The Italian people offers today at the liberators the expression of the very great pleasure and unlimited reverence. Today for all the Italian folks, after 21 years of slavery and political terror, is come the desired day of the liberty and justice.

After 21 years of torment, griefs and plunders you will see for the first time the smile returned on the terrified lips of the Italian people. Your people fighting this war for the liberty of all the folks of the world, you are the surest fact of our future.

OUR LIBERATORS, CHEER ! *

Today under your govern we begin to returned to be a free people, free from the chains of Mussolini and his clique, commanded by the greatest criminal of this world, Hitler. These chains you have broken with the power of your Armys. As your parents, as your spouses, as your children expect your returned, also our people exexpected your arrival. In the stoic conscience of every father exiled from his wife and children, the heart transfixed of every mother, orphans deprived of their parents, and sweethearts in all the folks, a voice raises at the sky! We want justice — inexorable justice for all the terror borne in 21 years of autocracy inuman till the excess. These tyrants, rats and criminals have killed our liberty every day till today. We request your inexorable justice pitilessly. Your arrival is the most guarantee of the liberty of our tormented Italian people.

Hurrah England!
 Hurrah U. S. of America!
 Hurrah the army of liberty!
 (signed)

Autocey Ceglia — condemned by the dirty fascist justice to five years of political exile for his democratic idealities.”

So far in Italy although malaria had taken a heavy toll in sick, the battle casualties of the Regiment had been astonishingly light in view of the feat they had accomplished. From Reggio to the capture of Potenza the West Novas had suffered 12 killed and 33 wounded. Such progress, at such light cost, was too good to continue long. The real battles lay ahead.

CHAPTER 15

Potenza to Campobasso

The swift move into the heart of the peninsula had carried the 1st Division far ahead of its main supply, and there followed a week's halt at Potenza while lines of communication were established to the coast. The Regiment's indefatigable QM, Capt. C. F. Whynacht, brought up the kitbags and bed-rolls on Sep. 27th. The first reinforcements, 4 officers and 92 other ranks, reached the unit on the 28th. That night a furious thunderstorm, accompanied by high winds and torrential rain, served notice that the autumn season had begun.

These Potenza days were far from idle ones. Amongst other activities the West Novas sent patrols as far as Acerenza and Spinazzola, and a patrol under Lieut. R. W. Bullock, moving east towards the Adriatic, made contact with the 78th British Division, which was pushing up the coast to seize the important airfields at Foggia. There were other labours. Potenza was a chilly place but its heart was warm and its wine was good — a little too good. Soon after the capture a number of West Nova lads slaked the thirst of their long mountain march in the juice of the local grape, with hilarious results. For their sins (including some lighthearted badinage to a brigadier) they later spent long hot hours filling the huge bomb craters in the Potenza airfield.

The Italian campaign now entered a new and stiffer phase. Under the combined menace of the 5th and 8th armies,

Kesselring had swung his Germans back from Salerno Bay and extended a line across the "shin" of Italy, from Naples to the Gulf of Manfredonia. He had not been quick enough to hold the Foggia plain with its large and valuable airfields but he was strongly established in the hills beyond, and at the other end of the line he was holding firmly to the great port of Naples, which the Allies needed very much.

In the broad view, now that the Allies were firmly established on Italian soil, with command of the sea and air, the sound course for the Germans was to abandon the rest of the "leg" and withdraw to the line of the Po River or even to the Alps, where a few second-rate divisions could hold the passes and bottle off the invasion of Europe from that side. The German high command could then concentrate its best force on the English Channel, where a terrific Allied thrust was sure to come next summer.

But Hitler's pride had been stabbed by this comparatively easy establishment of Allied forces on the southern leg of the continent, and no doubt he had taken to heart Mr. Churchill's sly words about "the soft under-belly of the Axis". There was another factor, also psychological. The Italians had deserted him; therefore they and their homes must bleed and burn. To this end he despatched into Italy a stream of veteran divisions with the best equipment he could muster, and ordered Kesselring to fight for every possible inch. Like many a plan strategically bad, the scheme had certain tactical advantages, chief of which was the country itself, a narrow peninsula with a spine of rugged mountains, whose streams in both directions ran across the Allies' line of advance.

Thus the stage was set for the long and bloody struggle up the length of Italy, a struggle which was to swallow thousands of the stoutest soldiers of the Wehrmacht, vast quantities of vital German war material, and finally the German fighting spirit itself. When the war reached its climax in the spring of 1945, Kesselring's former command on the Italian front was the first whole German army to surrender. It included at least 25 divisions, and with its auxiliary units, transport and line-of-communication troops numbered almost one million men. What Rommel could have done with a force like that in northern France in the spring of '44 is a fascinating military

conjecture. But one thing is certain; when all the tale is told and all the balances are cast it will be found that the victory in Normandy was won in no small part by the struggles of the Fifth and Eighth armies in the hills and valleys of Italy.

At Brigade HQ on Sep. 28th Lt. Col. Bogert received advance orders for the next move of the Regiment. The 1st Canadian Division was to proceed via Foggia for an attack on Campobasso, as part of a wide outflanking manoeuvre designed to cut off the Germans defending Naples or force them out of it.

The West Novas moved off in motor transport to Palazzo on Sep. 30th. Two days later the movement continued via Canosa and Cerignola, and thence along the broad tarred highway through the Foggia plain. A terrific thunderstorm broke as the Regiment passed through the wide olive and orange groves in the plain, with a torrent of rain and a sudden howling wind that fairly rocked the lorries on the road. The column rolled on into the hills beyond and finally halted two miles southwest of Lucera, in the Daunia Mountains, where the Regiment pitched its pup-tents and bivouacked several days.

The Italian autumn days were hot but the nights were cold, with frequent thunder and rain at evening, and the soldiers shivered in their thin khaki-drill clothing. The 1st Brigade had opened the drive on Campobasso on Oct. 1st and the heavy beat of gunfire competed with the thunder in the chill wet hills. On Oct. 5th the 3rd Brigade entered the battle, pushing forward the Royal 22nd Regiment, while the Carleton and Yorks made a firm base and the West Novas stood in reserve. On the morning of the 6th the Regiment motored to Volturara, where it received orders to march on to Monte San Angelo and prepare for an attack on the following day.

The Brigade objective was the village of Gambalesa. The West Novas were to seize the high ground commanding the village from the south while the Carleton and Yorks attacked Gambalesa itself. To perform their task the West Novas must move down the open slope of Monte San Angelo, cross the Fortore River, and fight their way to the opposite heights through a series of steep terraced fields. It looked like a tough assignment but there would be strong support from guns of the

1st Field Regiment RCHA and from medium machine-guns of the Saskatoon Light Infantry.

On October 7th at 3 A.M. the Regiment moved down through the chill darkness towards the near bank of the river. The Germans were suspicious and alert, and their artillery was scattering shells at random over the Canadian side of the narrow valley. At 7 A.M. the Canadian artillery opened fire, laying a barrage along the far bank and the slope beyond, and at 7.30 the West Novas rushed for the river. The Regiment was in open order, with "A" and "B" companies leading, "C" Company and battalion HQ following at a 15-minute interval, and "D" Company moving up 15 minutes behind "C".

In the half light of morning the Fortore was an evil spectacle. The bed was fully 300 yards wide and three parts dry, with a stream of unknown depth flowing down the middle channel. In this perfect "killing ground" the tracer streams of German machine-gun bullets were flicking up gravel and water like a rainstorm on a dusty road. In addition the Germans opened fire with a pair of "pompoms" as the Nova Scotians appeared on the bank. These guns fired a smoking stream of 20 mm. anti-aircraft shells which burst in the air over the river and (it seemed to the onlookers) all about the heads of the forward troops.

Once they were down in the broad river bed there was some shelter from the opposite bank and the leading platoons hesitated, crouching under that storm of fire and many of the men lying down in the shallow water. But with shouts of "Come on, boys, let's go!" Lieut. J. C. MacNeil (who later was awarded the Military Cross) and Lieut. D. I. Rice leaped up the far bank and the attack swept forward. To observers on the "home" side of the Fortore the sight of these two hundred men of the forward companies dashing across the river in the criss-cross of tracer fire remained one of the most stirring memories of the war.

Three factors saved casualties in the crossing. One was sheer luck. One was magnificent work by the supporting machine-guns of the Saskatoons, who poured a counter-storm of bullets upon the German positions across the valley, searched out the enemy machine-guns with deadly accuracy and forced one crew after another to "close down". The third was the

Canadian artillery, which in addition to a first-rate barrage on the German infantry positions, drove the enemy pom-pom gunners from post to post and finally forced them to cease fire.

A saving touch of humour lightened the Regiment's passage of the Fortore. In most places the water was not more than knee-deep — in many it was much less — but there were unsuspected holes. Capt. C. L. Putnam of HQ Company, a man with a deep and powerful voice, had come up to assist Capt. J. R. Cameron in getting "B" Company across the stream. He boomed, "Come on, you birds, it's only ankle deep!" — and stepped into the river and vanished, helmet and all. However he scrambled out and led a platoon across. There were other adventures and the men were laughing as they scrambled up the bank and faced the long stiff climb to the heights.

The West Novas pushed on towards the crest in the very worst of footing. The recent rains had converted the ploughland to a brown porridge of mud and bits of straw, which clung to the boots in such masses that afterwards the men always referred to the fight for Gambalesa as "the Battle of Snowshoe Hill". The German forward positions were mainly amongst the farms along the Gambalesa-Tufara road. As the West Novas appeared in the muddy fields above the river the enemy troops abandoned these posts and withdrew on foot and in lorries to more distant positions, whence they continued to lay a harassing fire on the slope.

There were ripe pears in the orchards and the boys of "C" Company snatched handfuls of the juicy fruit as they passed through. Hereabouts the din of battle was pierced by the thin persistent ringing of a telephone bell in one of the farmhouses — an abandoned enemy post. Capt. C. L. Putnam went inside, picked up the instrument and heard an irate German voice bellowing at the other end of the wire. For several minutes Putnam maintained a mutually unintelligible conversation by muttering at intervals in a guttural voice. Finally, knowing that the forward troops were well up the slope, he put an end to it with a triumphant, "The English are here aha!" The only reply was a round Teutonic oath.

As for the West Novas' own communications, the HQ radio set could not be taken across the river because the steep

banks made it impassable to the truck. However the signals officer, Lieut. J. H. Jones, succeeded in laying a telephone wire across the stream from the "home" bank, where Adjutant C. B. Higgins remained in radio communication with Brigade.

The advance continued through the afternoon with "A", "B" and "D" companies forward, and "C" and HQ companies dug in on the intermediate objective. The leading elements of "A" and "B" companies were harassed by sporadic machine-gun and pom-pom fire from a small wood on the crest of the ridge which was the final objective. The 3-inch mortars were brought into play, and at least one multiple-barrelled German gun was forced to withdraw behind the crest. At last light two platoons of "B" Company worked their way into the wood and carried it after a short, sharp fight. There were two casualties in this final rush: Pte. Bud Davison was killed, and Capt. J. R. Cameron received a bullet in the leg. When the position had been consolidated Capt. Cameron was removed to the regimental aid post and Lieut. Rice took over the command until Capt. F. H. Burns could come up.

Meanwhile "D" Company was under steady shell-fire in the scattered woods on the flank, where it was dealing with enemy snipers in one or two farmhouses. Some of these shells came possibly from the Canadian artillery, firing at extreme range; but some came certainly from a German S. P. gun or guns in the direction of Gambalesa. At this time also Battalion HQ was shelled.

When darkness fell all the Regiment's objectives had been secured, together with some prisoners, a four-barrelled 20 mm. gun, a single-barrelled 20 mm. gun, a lorry, a motor-cycle and a good deal of infantry equipment. The 20 mm. guns were of a new type and were taken intact, their crews being killed or captured as the West Novas rushed across the Gambalesa-Tufara road.

The night of the 7/8th passed fairly quietly although there was some enemy shelling. The lads of "B" Company, having been practically without food for two days, raided a farmhouse for chickens and baked them Indian-fashion in clay. (This was strictly forbidden by AMGOT regulations, but AMGOT could never understand military necessity, and when

Brigadier Chris Vokes visited "B" Company's position the next day he cocked an eyebrow at the litter of feathers — and grinned.)

All through the night the West Novas could hear enemy motor transport pulling out of Gambalesa, now rendered untenable by their advance, and early on the morning of Oct. 8th the Carleton and Yorks moved into the village. The West Novas' energetic QM, Capt. Whynacht, arrived in the outskirts of Gambalesa before the place was cleared of mines but pushed straight on with the Regiment's rations regardless of the engineers' warnings. So, too, Capt. Donald Archibald and his Support Company drivers brought their vehicles up the main highway in spite of the mines. The more seriously wounded were evacuated across country by stretcher-bearers, in very rough and arduous going. The remaining casualties were not evacuated until about 8 P.M. on Oct. 8th, when the transport got through to the R.A.P.

During Oct. 9th the Royal 22nd Regiment attacked and secured the next ridge to the west. Sergeant Stone of the West Novas had established an excellent observation post on the ridge in "B" Company's position, from which he was able to direct some of the artillery preparation for the "Van Doos'" attack. On the tenth October Brigadier Penhale, accompanied by Brigadier Vokes (the acting commander of 1st Division since General Simonds fell ill at Potenza) inspected the German positions from this post, and ordered the West Novas forward for an attempt to seize the heights west of Jelsi on the following day. The Regiment was put in motion at once and at midnight bivouacked at a road junction near Riccia.

At 8.30 A.M. on Oct. 11th the West Novas went in to the attack. Again it was a case of crossing a valley under fire and advancing up long steep slopes with the soggy earth clinging to every boot. But this time the Germans had plenty of artillery and the West Novas had to advance 1000 yards under their fire before the passage could be attempted. Shells began to fall as soon as the Regiment moved into the open, some of them from 150 mm. guns, although not much damage was done until "C" Company reached the valley. The enemy gunners had this range "taped" and a rain of shells came down

amongst the leading troops. At the same time German machine-guns posted to cover the crossing place opened a deadly fire.

Battalion HQ radio set was soon put out of action, and then the "22" set of the forward artillery observer, cutting off all communication with Brigade and the supporting guns. Lieut. S. F. Williams was killed, indeed before long the slope down to the valley was dotted with killed and wounded, amongst whom the medical officer and his stretcher-bearers moved with a complete disregard for their danger. The M/O, Capt. Fletcher, was wounded in the leg but carried on his work for hours, accompanied by his faithful orderly James Boyd. (For his courage and devotion Capt. Fletcher later was awarded the military Cross.)

Nearly all of the mules carrying the 3-inch mortars and their ammunition were killed, and there were many casualties amongst the Algerian muleteers. One mortar detachment sustained a direct hit by a shell. In spite of this the mortar crews carried on and got their weapons forward. But the attack was held up for a time, with "C" and "D" companies pinned close to a shallow gully, "A" Company held on the slope, and "B" Company feeling its way slowly towards the right. Lieut. D. I. Rice, acting C/O of "B" Company, was wounded in the foot and shoulder whilst crawling forward with Capt. F. H. Burns, who had come up to take command.

"C" and "D" companies maintained their fire-fight with the German machine-gunners hidden in the folds and coves of the steep slope on the enemy side of the valley, and while they were thus engaged "B" Company managed to cross on the right. Burns and his men pressed forward rapidly, followed by "A" and HQ companies, which deployed swiftly to exploit this gap in the enemy defence. The sudden menace on their flank shook the resolution of the Germans opposing "C" and "D", which were now enabled to cross and advance up the slope.

By this time it was late afternoon, with a dense mist rolling down from the heights and hiding all landmarks. Determined to carry the advance as far as possible. Lt. Col. Bogert ordered "A" Company to press on, while battalion HQ followed up. As dusk approached, the forward troops entered a

densely wooded part of the long slope, and at the same time an enemy mortar began to hurl bombs from the right rear. Lieut. R. W. Bullock and the forward observing officer of the supporting artillery (a British paratroop unit) made a reconnaissance towards the right flank, bumped into a party of German infantry, and escaped under a hot fire of small-arms in the gathering darkness.

All this made clear that enemy pockets remained between the Regiment and the valley, with a strong possibility that other groups were infiltrating from the right. In these circumstances Lt. Col. Bogert decided to stand fast for the night. There was some difficulty in locating the various company positions in the foggy dark but when these were firmly established the C/O despatched two scouts with a message to Brigade. These scouts had several adventures with German patrols on the way but they got through.

The mist soon changed to a thin persistent rain and the West Novas spent a wretched night in the open, exhausted by the day's struggle up the muddy slopes and chilled to the bone in their flimsy bush jackets and slacks, with no protection but their worn paper-thin gas-capes. Of all their experiences in the bleak autumn and winter fighting in the Italian hills this cold muddy struggle for the Jelsi heights stands out in the memories of the Regiment.

Unknown to the men of the forward companies, their victory was already achieved, for the sti) thrust across the vale and up the heights had out-flanked the main German force defending Jelsi; and late in the afternoon Lieut. E. D. Hersey and the West Nova Carrier Platoon, closely supported by the daring red-capped light artillerymen of the British paratroop unit, had pushed down into Jelsi itself, "slugged it out" at short range with German infantry and at least one self-propelled gun, and occupied the village itself.

Soon after midnight the Royal 22nd Regiment came forward and passed through the West Nova positions to make a flank attack on Gildone. The morning of Oct. 12th dawned sunny and clear as the West Novas moved off once more, striking across country to a position overlooking the important highway from Jelsi to Campobasso. The day proved fine and warm, and through the efforts of the engineers the West Novas' jeeps and

ration vehicles were able to get over the diversion around the blown bridge at Jelsi before noon. The enemy fired his last shots late in the afternoon, when parties of West Novas went back into the valley to bury their dead. A salvo of German shells fell in the midst of the officers and men engaged in this melancholy task, and Capt. C. B. Higgins and Capt. C. L. Putnam were severely wounded, Putnam dying later in the field hospital.

However, considering what had been accomplished, the Regiment's casualties in the fighting for Gambalesa and Jelsi were comparatively light — a total of 17 killed and 52 wounded. As always it was the quality of the loss that hurt, and the West Novas had reason to remember these actions for their cost in good officers and men. By skillful handling and stout determination the Regiment had made an important contribution to the capture of Campobasso, which was entered on the following day (Oct. 13th) by troops of the 1st Brigade.

The West Novas remained in the Gildone-Jelsi area for several days, cleaning and overhauling their weapons, clothing and equipment. The faded and torn summer uniforms were exchanged (none too soon) for the warmer battledress. The LOB's and "B" Echelon transport had come up on the 13th, bringing with them the invaluable Losie and his K-of-C canteen and moving picture outfit, which were put to use at once. A mobile bath unit enabled the soldiers to wash off the last traces of "Snowshoe Hill". There was a visit from the new O/C 3rd Brigade, Brigadier T. G. Gibson, who discussed amongst other things the adaptation of transport to winter conditions in the mountains.

Finally on Oct. 22nd the Regiment moved down to the farther outskirts of Campobasso with the rest of 3rd Brigade and dug in for the defence of that place against a German counter-attack — which never came. Although the troops still had no shelter against the autumn weather except their small bivouac tents, this was a happy time, for day by day parties from all the Regiment's companies were given leave into Campobasso, which had become and remained for many weeks the recreation centre for the Canadian Corps in Italy. The Savoy Theatre was turned over to the troops. Another building be-

came the "Beaver Club", named after the famous club for Canadian servicemen on leave in London. There were various other movie-shows and recreation rooms for army personnel. For officers there were the "Royal York" and the "Aldershot Officers' Club". Apart from all these there was the novelty of mingling with a friendly urban population for the first time since leaving England. The Italians were tumbling over themselves in the desire to please and to acquire the money of the free-spending "Canadesi".

Campobasso had been for some time the Italian HQ of General Kesselring. It was an arms manufacturing city of 12,000 people, built in a cup of the Apennine Mountains about 2100 feet above sea level, and on the cross-country railway line from Naples to Termoli. The Allied air forces had given it due attention and the railway yards were a chaos of broken and twisted cars, locomotives, rails and sheds. There was little damage to the rest of the city, which contained many fine modern buildings and had a clean look so far missing in the Canadian's experience of Mussolini's realm.

Many of the buildings and walls here, as elsewhere in Sicily and Italy, bore the invariable "DUCE-DUCE-DUCE" and the "Believe-Work-Fight" motto of the Fascist regime splashed in bold paint over their facades. There had been little attempt to remove or even to paint over them. The people regarded them with an apathy of defeat rather than the scorn of a nation truly liberated, and the Canadian soldier retained a strong impression of insincerity that might easily become treachery with a change in the fortune of war. He drank his *vino* and listened to the democratic protestations of the Campobassi with a wry grin, thinking how much more sincere they sounded when they talked of food and wine and love.

CHAPTER 16

Fighting for the Sangro Heights

Throughout the summer and early autumn the troops had been plagued with malaria, and this gave place to an epidemic of jaundice with the coming of the autumn rains. From first to last these twin endemic diseases of Italy bowled over more men than the bullets of the enemy. The only comfort was that the Germans were suffering just as much, as captured documents showed. What with the effects of mepacrine tablets and the various degrees of jaundice the skins of the Canadian soldiers took on a decidedly Mongolian tinge as the weeks went by.

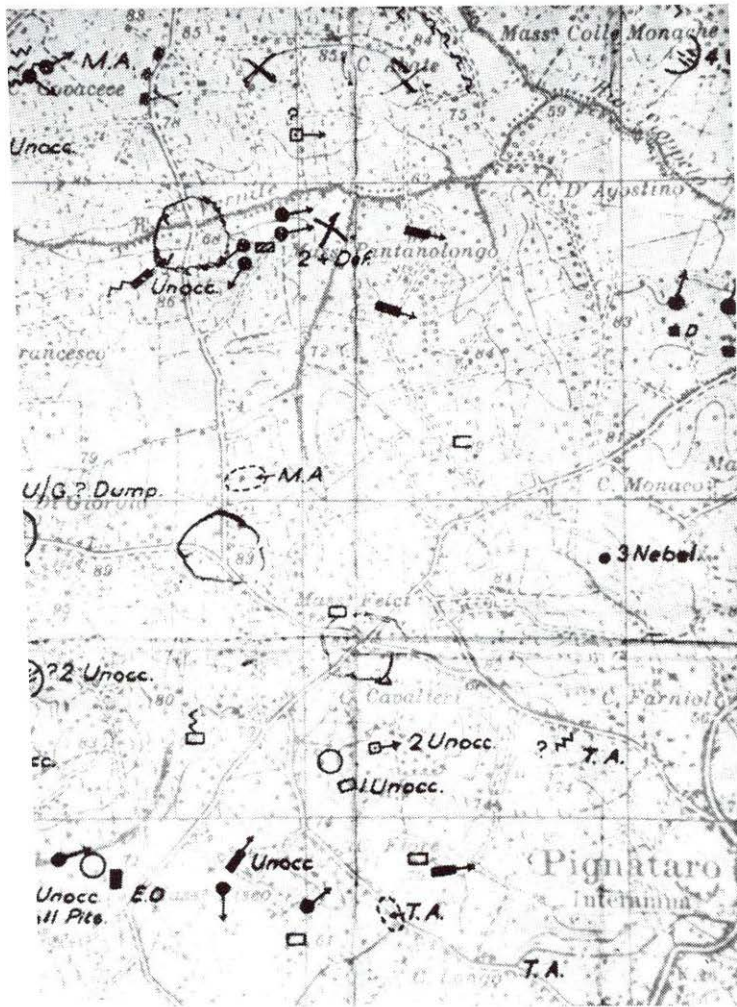
With the clearance of Naples and the seizure of Campobasso and Termoli the Fifth and Eighth armies now had a first-class port and a short rail and road line across Italy, and preparations were made for the next move. For some of the Canadians (now increased to corps strength by the arrival of the 5th Canadian Armoured Division) it meant a preliminary campaign to engage German attention in the rugged hills of the Abruzzi, where the streams were swelling to torrents under incessant rains. To the immediate west and north of this area the tall peaks of the Apennines already were white with snow, and the rest of the landscape rolled in twisted brown-green folds and heaps like the scuffled contents of a child's sandbox. The hills were dotted and in places covered with forests of oak, beech, elm and pine, with frequent clumps of chestnut on the lower slopes. The towns were small, some of them utterly

destroyed by the Germans to deprive the advancing Allied troops of shelter in the winter weather. The roads in most places were little more than mule tracks.

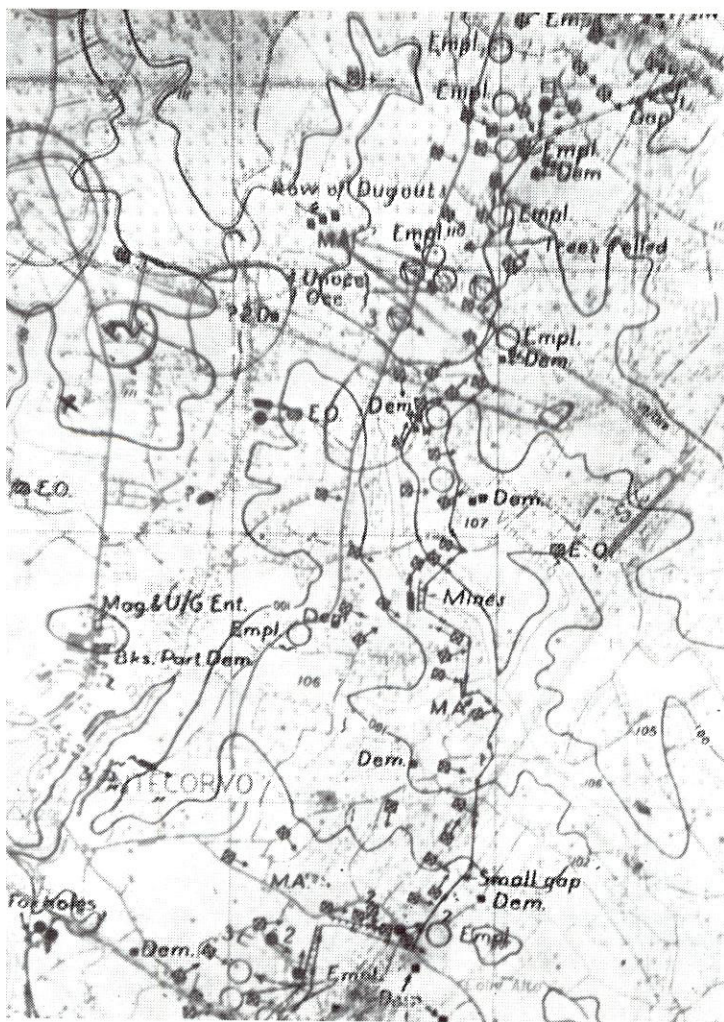
This was the scene into which the West Novas moved from Campobasso on Nov. 16th, 1943. "C" Company, sent ahead on the 8th to cover engineers repairing the road between Carpinone and Sessano, had pushed a patrol as far as Carovilli and found it unoccupied. Some villages had been demolished by explosives and then fired by the Germans as part of their "scorched earth" policy, and they were still burning as the West Novas passed through. Smoke columns rising from more distant valleys showed that every hamlet near the Sangro had suffered the same fate. Every bridge had been blown, the very rubble in the village streets was mined, and the ruins of the houses and even the orchards contained all sorts of ingenious booby-traps. For good measure the whole south bank of the Sangro River in its upper reaches had been sown with anti-tank and anti-personnel mines.

As the West Nova reconnaissance party under Major R. S. E. Waterman crossed the Biferno River near Castro Pignano they noted that the stream was washing out the bridge-diversion made by the sappers, and the torrent was still rising, an omen of the difficulties of winter fighting in these hills. In a steady downpour of rain the Regiment arrived at Carovilli shortly after noon on Nov. 16th and promptly sent patrols towards the Sangro River. There followed a grim game of hide-and-seek with German patrols. On the afternoon of the 17th a "B" Company patrol under Lieut. G. E. Romkey ambushed a German patrol at Vasto Girardi and killed four of them, who were identified as paratroops. On the 18th another "B" Company patrol under Lieut. J. A. Blanchard clashed with a strong German group near San Pietro and hit several of them. One West Nova, Pte. J. W. Colp, was mortally wounded in this skirmish.

Meanwhile the pioneer platoon was busy locating and lifting mines (including many of the new wooden-box type which could not be detected with the usual electrical devices) with which the Germans had sown the mountain tracks. By Nov. 20th the Regiment was established in San Pietro and patrolling vigorously towards the Sangro stream, where the



Field map of the Gustav Line.



Field map of the Hitler Line and the famous inner road.

Germans had fixed their winter line; and a magnificent observation post, with radio communication to battalion HQ, had been set up on a wooded height called Nido del Corvo ("Raven's Nest"), from which the whole area, including the smouldering ruins of Rocca Cinque Miglia, Pietrofarsi, Roccasaro and part of the town of Castel di Sangro could be seen.

On Nov. 21st, shortly after Sergeant Stone and the signallers set up the post on the Raven's Nest, the Germans (suddenly realizing the value of such a post) sent a patrol of paratroops to the height. It was possible to approach the peak under cover of woods along the ridge, and Stone had no notice of the German movement until the patrol appeared on a rocky knoll 300 yards away. For their part the Germans apparently knew nothing of the West Nova O.P., and their attention was drawn by two groups of West Nova infantry moving like dots along the slopes far below. These were a patrol of "D" Company under Capt. D. W. R. Dodge and a "B" Company patrol under Lieut. G. E. Romkey. The Germans opened fire on them with rifles and light machine-guns. The patrols went to cover and worked their way up the height through convenient ravines and copses until they could fire in their turn, and the Germans decamped and left one of their paratroopers dead on the knoll.

The "D" Company patrol was returning from an adventure in Castel Di Sangro, having actually crossed the river to the German side and spent several hours in the village under hot fire from riflemen and machine-gunners in the surrounding hills. In the meantime patrols under Lieuts. Lynch and Cochran had made a valuable reconnaissance of the Sangro itself, measuring the depth of the stream (four feet at Rocca Cinque Miglia) and following the river well to the east before returning "home" through the Royal 22nd Regiment's area.

On Nov. 22nd the O.P. on Raven's Nest was visited by Lt. Col. Bogert, Brigadier Gibson and other officers of the brigade and division staffs. One result of these visits and observations was a decision to occupy "The Castle", a big stone monastery on an isolated hill overlooking the Sangro River and the town of Castel di Sangro beyond. This hill lay about 1,000 yards east of the Regiment's main positions at San

Pietro as the bullet flies, but the approach naturally was much longer, involving the descent of the San Pietro ridge, crossing a small mountain stream, and a stiff ascent on the other side, most of it through muddy hillside fields, with a steep rocky scarp at the top. This natural fortress was shown on the maps simply as "Point 1009."

At 1 A.M. on the 23rd "B" Company (Capt. F. H. Burns) set off in pouring rain and utter darkness for the hill. They crossed the stream without difficulty and Burns sent Lieut. Blanchard's platoon ahead as the climb began. It was a hard scramble. Sleet and then rain had covered the slope with a greasy mud in which the men slipped continually, and which got into the muzzles of rifles and tommy-guns when they fell. The West Novas were drenched and breathless as they drew towards the crest.

The Germans were known to have a post in the monastery, for they had fired on West Nova patrols at various times, but their strength was believed to be small. Actually the enemy not only occupied the monastery itself but had manned machine-gun posts and rifle pits around the perimeter of the rocky plateau on which it stood. These outposts apparently were sheltering from the rain in their weapon-pits and did not notice the approach of "B" Company until Blanchard's platoon were actually on the top. On the other hand Blanchard's men unwittingly passed between the enemy posts in the rainy dark, and now made a rush at the monastery with the usual house-clearing tactics — firing their Brens and rifles and hurling grenades through the windows.

The Germans around the perimeter manned their weapons at once and the venturesome West Novas were caught in a blast of fire from both sides and from the monastery itself. Several were killed or wounded, and gallant "Blackie" Blanchard, himself mortally wounded, ordered the survivors to leave him and withdraw at once. Unfortunately in the terrific racket his voice did not carry far, and only a handful managed to escape. The rest, many of whom were wounded, were overwhelmed and taken prisoner.

In the meantime Capt. Burns had pushed up with the other two platoons in an effort to extricate Blanchard and his

men; but Lieut. Duncan Kirk and his platoon were driven back by a murderous fire, while Lieut. Romkey's platoon, trying to scale the crest from the right, encountered a sheer rock face. Within a few minutes both platoons were pinned to the dubious shelter of a pasture stone wall at the foot of the scarp, with the German fire growing in volume and accuracy as daylight broke over the mountains. Before long the enemy were tossing grenades down the scarp and the position of the survivors of "B" Company became desperate, for there was no escape except down the long open slope.

Fortunately as the sun climbed a cold thick mist arose from the valley, and Burns took advantage of it to withdraw his men from their perilous situation. It was a long grim journey back to the Regiment's positions, and upon Burns' report to battalion HQ in the factory tunnel south of San Pietro Lt. Col. Bogert determined to put in a strong attack on the following day. In the meantime the soaked and exhausted remnant of "B" Company were given a chance to rest and dry themselves in the tunnel.

It may be said that the tunnel under the demolished tile factory at San Pietro was the only real shelter in the West Nova area. The Germans had demolished the factory and the village itself, so that the Regiment was obliged to live in the open, in constant rain and with a bitter wind sweeping down from the snow-covered mountains to the north and west. What the West Novas suffered in this winter fighting in the mountains is well illustrated by the experience of four survivors of the night attack on "The Castle."

Three of the four were wounded. Corporal W. A. Ellis (a veteran of the Regiment who had been wounded previously at Catenanuova) had been hit by two bullets which lacerated an arm and destroyed one eye. Pte. Octave Gallant was badly wounded in the leg, arm and shoulder and was unable to walk. Pte. M. C. Jenkins was wounded in the hand and arm. The fourth, Pte. Williams, was unhurt. When Lieut. Blanchard's platoon was overwhelmed these four managed to get down the scarp and crawl as far as a bend in the stream. After the withdrawal of "B" Company the Germans sent patrols along the stream but the four West Novas escaped notice by slipping

into the water, with their heads protruding under the overhanging grass of the bank. All through the day the German scouts passed and re-passed, and from daylight to dark the courageous four lay immersed in the cold mountain water.

About 4 P.M. one man, unable to endure his sufferings any longer, suggested surrender, but this was vetoed by the others. When darkness came they were so stiff from their wounds and the long hours of immersion that it took two further hours of careful flexing, with several adjustments of their bandages, before they could go on. Then began a long agonized crawl up the rugged slopes towards the Regiment's position. After several hours they reached a small burnt-out house in which fifteen Italian women and three or four men, victims of the German "scorched-earth" policy, were huddled against the November cold. These people gave the West Novas food and wine and the four resolved to stay for a time to gather strength for the rest of the journey.

However a German patrol came along, heard voices, and promptly fired at the house. They were cautious enough to leave it at that, but the four West Novas decided to go on, determined to avoid capture after having come so far and suffered so much. With two Italian men supporting Gallant they set off again in another direction, and at 2 A.M. reached an outpost of the Royal 22nd Regiment, who quickly summoned stretcher-bearers and got them away to the field hospital. It is good to record that the indomitable four survived their experience, and two eventually returned to the Regiment. One of them, Gallant, whose name was so appropriate, was wounded again in the fighting for the Gothic Line in 1944, and again lived to tell the tale.

On the morning of Nov. 24th a concentration of field and medium artillery was brought to bear on "The Castle" and the German weapon pits about the crest. Shortly after noon the West Novas went in to the attack, with "A" and "C" companies and Battalion HQ, accompanied by two 3-inch mortar detachments from Support Company and a platoon of Vickers machine-guns from the Saskatoon Light Infantry. These weapons and the radio set of the forward artillery observer were carried on mules.

The German artillery opened fire as soon as the leading troops approached the small stream in the valley; but the West Novas, advancing in open order and taking good advantage of folds and bushes, got across without much trouble. After crossing the valley "C" and HQ companies and the support groups moved up to a height about 800 yards east of The Castle so that the machine-guns could fire along the ridge while the mortars bombarded the monastery. Meanwhile "A" Company moved around to the right to attack the hill from the flank. At once it received the full attention of the German artillery across the Sangro, but the attack pressed up the slopes through the short winter afternoon, and the German garrison withdrew towards the east, taking with them their wounded and the prisoners who could walk.

When "A" Company rushed into the monastery at the end of their long climb they found the battered stone building empty except for three badly wounded men of "B" Company, left behind by the Germans. Apparently the enemy had buried some of the dead, including Lieut. Blanchard, whose remains were discovered some time later by the British troops who took over the West Nova positions. At the time of the capture of the monastery the West Novas could find only the unburied bodies of one German and three "B" Company men on the edge of the scarp.

Following their loss of "Point 1009" the Germans contented themselves with a desultory shelling through the night, a dreary night for the West Novas on the crest in the howling wind and rain. On the morning of Nov. 25th "A" Company was relieved by "D", and patrols were sent towards the Sangro River. One of these "D" patrols encountered a mine field near Castel di Sangro and lost one man killed and two wounded. The weather, the up-hill-and-down-dale nature of the fighting, and the long muddy slopes rendered all these operations exhausting in the extreme, and despite the efforts of stretcher-bearers working in relays the last of the wounded was not evacuated until well into the morning of Nov. 26th.

Having completed its task of clearing the enemy out of the area south of the Sangro in its upper waters, the 3rd Brigade now stood fast while units of the British 5th Division

moved in to take over. The remaining days of November passed fairly quietly, although the German gunners continued to drop 88 mm. shells in the West Nova area, and there was a brief flurry on the 28th when two unidentified planes dropped out of the clouds and shot up several of the regimental transport vehicles. Supervisor Losie was able to move up his canteen supplies and moving picture outfit by truck and mule to Vastogirardi, and on the 29th the Regiment received a reinforcement of 42 men. The casualties in the mountain fighting had been 44 killed, wounded and missing. However since leaving Potenza the officer casualties had been high, and the unit remained nine officers under strength.

While the 3rd Brigade had been struggling to focus German attention on the upper reaches of the Sangro, the remainder of 1st Division was preparing a secret move to the Adriatic coast at its mouth. Now the time had come for the Brigade to join the rest, and on Dec. 1st the West Novas made a preliminary move, rolling in motor transport along the winding mountain road from San Pietro to Agnone, where they halted for three days.

They were hardened campaigners now, with the infantryman's feel for Mother Earth, which however wet and cold still gave him the only dependable shelter from his enemy. Houses, lights, *vino*, girls — these were admirable luxuries; but when the enemy was present or even within cannon range, the narrow slit trench in a field or a hole burrowed in the safer side of a bank were his natural habitat and the only place he felt at home.

This life had sharpened his senses like an Indian's. He was acutely aware of smells, sounds, the slightest movement in the landscape. He could see an astonishing distance in the dark: indeed he had become an animal to whom night was the natural time to move about in search of prey, while day was the time for concealment and if possible for sleep. He walked warily, using all his senses and ready to drop to earth at the slightest hostile move or sound. He had learned to distinguish even the smell of his enemy. He could step into a farmhouse that reeked of the Italian household and yet know instinctively if the German had been there. There was something about the

"Tedesci", the different stuff of his uniform, his rations and equipment, even his sweat, that twitched the nostrils at once.

There was other knowledge. As part of the Eighth Army the West Nova had picked up many of the ways of the "Desert Rats". At first he had been inclined to scoff at the "tea can" dangling from the tail of every Eighth Army vehicle. But now he had his own, and at every halt on the route he would leap out, throw a little gasoline into the sand-tin, light it, set the water boiling in the can on top, toss in a pinch of tea, and enjoy the "lift" of a hot drink. So, too, he could cook a hearty meal with nothing more than a "jerry can" and a wire grill.

These captured German water tins were of stout metal but light in weight: filled with gasoline, and with two small holes punched (one for air, one for the fuel) in the side, so that a thin stream of gasoline squirted forth and fed the flame beneath the grill, this improvised stove would heat a pot to perfection. And if the pot held from time to time a goose, a chicken or a juicy leg of pork "found" somewhere amongst the farms, who was to say Nay? Even the valiant efforts of the QM and his drivers could not bring up the regimental field-kitchens when bridges were demolished or the road congested with fighting traffic. In these circumstances the soldier learned to forage for himself. And the officers' mess was regaled time to time with a roast of pork or beef that did not come up with the rations.

Many an Italian farmer, seeing in this host of ravenous young men a marvellous source of wealth, now demanded marvellous prices for such provender. A pistol or tommy-gun waved under his nose usually brought the price down to earth, and if he wailed of robbery he was reminded, not gently, that the German had taken and paid nothing at all. If this was a hardship on the Italian population (and AMGOT insisted that it was) it did not impress the fighting man, dodging for his life amongst the hills and acutely aware that these people and their precious Duce had started the whole thing. This is not to suggest that all Italians were inhospitable or that all Canadian foraging was done at the gun-point. The truth is to the contrary. Many a lad retains the pleasant memory of a

meal at an Italian fireside, with the farmer's plain fare fattened by "Compo" and other army rations, and his good-will increased by a generous gift of money, cigarettes and chocolate at the end.

From Eighth Army the West Nova had acquired a certain amount of Egyptian and Anglo-Indian lingo, so that he spoke of a gully as a "wadi", and a stone breastwork as a "sangar" as to the manner born. His officers, entering cheerfully into the spirit of the thing, cultivated the long and bristling moustaches of the British officer (Mark '42), put up a sign in the mess reading, "EIGHTH ARMY DOGS GROWL BEFORE BREAKFAST" and lived up to the sign. A crowning touch was the long fly-whisk which dangled from Major Waterman's wrist throughout the summer months in the Desert Army fashion. Behind such amusing fads lay the genuine pride all felt in their right to wear the crusader sword and shield of the Eighth. Not since Wellington's fighting march through Spain had such a veteran and victorious British army moved on European soil.

On the other hand, the enemy had in Italy an army of picked divisions, hardened in the furnace of the Russian front, well equipped and skilfully led. The nature of the landscape was perfect for the kind of war he chose to fight, and it went far to offset his great weakness — the shortage of oil which forced him to use more horse than motor transport.

Thus the great phenomena of physics, the irresistible force and the immovable object, met in a terrific clash on the Adriatic coast of Italy in December, 1943. The point of impact was a small and picturesque city called Ortona.

CHAPTER 17

The Battle for Ortona

On Dec. 4, 1943, the West Novas left Agnone in motor transport for the coast. Alternate frosts and rains had made the mountain roads slippery and dangerous and the Regiment did not reach its allotted billets in the coastal town of Pollutri until midnight. The descent to the coastal plain brought a sharp change from the wintry cold of the heights. Here the air was milder, the rain more copious, and the deeper soil made a still more tenacious mud.

During the latter part of November, while 3rd Brigade had been hunting Germans in the mountains towards the headwaters of the Sangro, the Eighth Army had been engaged in a bloody struggle to force a passage of the river at its mouth. This had been accomplished and the Germans had fallen back ten miles or so to the next defensible stream, the Moro. Here in the early days of December the 1st Canadian Division moved in to take over the battle from its old friends the 78th British Division.

The battlefield was a perfect set-up for the German defence. Large scale movement in winter was possible only on the narrow coastal shelf, a gently rolling country of fields and vineyards, studded with heavy stone-walled farmhouses and slashed by deep ravines through which the mountain streams poured down to the Adriatic. The movement of troops, guns and vehicles beat the roads to a greasy pulp and churned every

wayside field to a morass of deep black mud. The savage policy of the Germans in retreat, and air bombardment and long-range shelling by both sides, had demolished the towns and villages and driven the inhabitants into the landscape, where they wandered up and down in disconsolate groups, begging food from the troops and giving information to Germans and British alike.

Even the smaller streams had worn deep gullies in this ancient plain, with steep banks that in most places barred the passage of tanks and transport, and here with forced Italian labour the enemy had dug large caves in which they could shelter safe from the heaviest bombardment, rushing up to their weapon-pits at the slightest lull in the shelling. The German defenders were men of crack panzer-grenadier and paratroop divisions, equipped with an unusual number of machine-guns and mortars, and strongly supported by artillery and rocket-bomb batteries. The Luftwaffe had released some of its carefully hoarded planes, a clear measure of the importance given to this battle by the German high command, and for the first time in Italy the Canadians had to make full use of their anti-aircraft guns. Finally, the Germans were using tanks in formidable strength at vital spots in the defence.

The 1st Division opened the attack on the Moro River line on Dec. 6th. On that day in a torrent of rain (Montgomery himself described the weather as "appalling") the West Novas left Pollutri in motor transport towards the front. Again the bad roads and traffic congestion made progress very slow. The Sangro River had risen five feet and washed out most of the military bridges, and the five hundred vehicles of 3rd Brigade had to cross over a single bridge. The West Nova column came under enemy shell-fire soon after crossing the Sangro but there were no casualties. On the morning of the 7th the Regiment took over part of the front from troops of the 78th Division. Here it remained dug in under harassing shell and mortar fire and an almost continuous downpour of rain until Dec. 10th, when the order came to cross the Moro River, pass through the Canadian Seaforth Highlanders and attack the ridge towards Tollo, three miles farther on.

This ridge ran across the front from east to west. At the east end lay Ortona and the Adriatic Sea. On the west towered the white crags of the Maiella Mountains. The ridge, a gently rising feature, commanded the mile or more of low fields and vineyards across which the Canadians must advance. Along its foot, like a natural moat, lay the gully of a small stream running down from the Maiella foot-hills to the sea just south of Ortona. Along the ridge top ran the road from Ortona to the inland town of Orsogna; on the crest lay the small hamlet of Berardi, where the Ortona-Orsogna road was crossed by one running roughly parallel with the coast, leading up from the Moro crossing at San Leonardo to the village of Tollo, behind the Arielli River. This vital crossroads, overlooked by the tall square manor house, Casa Berardi, was the key to the whole position.

The available maps were unsatisfactory in several ways but their worst fault was an omission in detail. There was no indication that the stream along the foot of the ridge lay in a grassy gully deep enough to shelter its defenders from all artillery fire, or that the little stream occupied only part of the hollow, so that German tanks and self-propelled guns could move up and down its length and fire from any point they chose, directed by observation posts on the ridge behind. In the same way German infantry could gather, perfectly screened from view, and launch sudden counter-attacks wherever and whenever the advancing Canadians were halted and forced to ground. This single fact changed the whole face of the battle.

The German dispositions and intentions of course were unknown to the Canadian staff. It was believed that the enemy had concentrated his main strength in front of Ortona itself to ward off a blow along the main coastal highway. Therefore Brigadier Gibson was ordered to seize the Berardi crossroads and push on across the Arielli to Tollo, turning the German right flank. This had been attempted by 2nd Brigade as a "follow-through" after crossing the Moro and storming the village of San Leonardo, but the attempt had been beaten back. How far all these hopes fell short of reality may be measured by the fact that the Germans continued to hold the Arielli line all

through the winter, and Tollo itself was not taken until the following spring.

The West Novas moved off towards midnight of Dec. 10th and reached their assembly point south of San Leonardo at 3 A.M. on the 11th. Liaison with the Scaforth Highlanders and the artillery was established and the Regiment remained in pouring rain well into the afternoon, awaiting the word to attack. In the meantime "B" Company (Capt. F. H. Burns) with a squadron of tanks had been detached and sent forward to probe for a weak spot in the German defences along the lateral road west of Berardi.

At 6 P.M. on Dec. 11th "A", "C" and "D" companies advanced in the early winter dark to attack the ridge in front, moving roughly half a mile west of the road leading up to Berardi from San Leonardo. The Germans were expecting attack and their artillery was busy scattering shells over the fields and vineyards through which the Regiment advanced. The landscape was bare, with an occasional battered stone farmhouse and its usual small orchard of gnarled naked olive trees, worthless for cover, and the usual straggle of vine poles and wires, a curse to men laden with arms and equipment and moving in the dark.

By ill chance one of the shells wounded the signal officer and killed the mule carrying the "22" radio set, which was damaged in the fall. This meant no communication with the artillery, which was to lay a barrage on the ridge. Such communication was vital, and so there was further delay while another artillery observer and another radio set came up. The advance went on in an inky darkness emphasized by a faint glow in the direction of the coast, where the moon was rising. "A" Company was on the right, "C" on the left, followed by battalion HQ and "D" Companies.

Contact was difficult in the dark but the companies plodded on through the muddy vineyards until 10.20 P.M., when a hurricane of machine-gun and rifle fire burst upon them, not only from the ridge but mainly from the lip of the long gully across their front, where the Germans were securely dug in and untouched by the Canadian artillery fire. Several gallant attempts were made to get forward, with little success

and mounting casualties. The enemy now had the rising moon at his back, so that the shadow was all to his advantage, while the cold light shone clearly on the faces and weapons of the advancing West Novas, some of whom actually got within 100 yards of the gully. The true nature of the gully was now apparent, for the Germans had popped up as if by magic out of the earth, and the volume of fire showed that the place was strongly held along its whole length.

It was clear that any further attempt to cross the ravine without strong artillery preparation would place the Regiment in a dangerous position when the Germans launched the inevitable counter-attack, for the ravine was obviously a perfect concentration point for the enemy's forward troops, and on this part of the front the West Novas were "playing a lone hand". Lt. Col. Bogert wisely decided to stand fast until the artillery could be brought to bear on the gully defences for another assault. And so the Regiment dug in hastily in a race with the dawn, a difficult and unsatisfactory business in the moonlight, on strange and poorly mapped ground, and with no clear knowledge of the fields of fire.

As soon as daylight came on Dec. 12th the enemy brought down a heavy cannon and mortar fire on the West Novas' positions amongst the vineyards. It was now revealed that in addition to machine-guns well sited along the lip of the gully the Germans had a tank or tanks moving up and down the length of it, keeping hull-down and firing from various points along the lip. Due to the confusing nature of the ground compared with the maps it was impossible to give the Canadian artillery exact map references of the West Nova company positions, so the gunners were asked by radio to lay down a "reference concentration" — i.e. to fire several salvos on a known line in front of the enemy positions so that the infantry could orient themselves by watching the shell-bursts.

When the night attack broke down, Lt. Col. Bogert had established his HQ in a partly demolished farmhouse. "C" and "A" companies were dug in forward of the house, and "D" Company to its rear, so that the Regiment was well knit for the renewal of the assault. As ill luck would have it, the reference fire came down squarely amongst the forward com-

panies, just as the Germans opened an extremely accurate bombardment of their own — all this in addition to mortar and small-arms fire from the ridge, from the gully in front of it, and from the flank. Communication with Brigade (and the artillery) was severed when the second "22" radio set was knocked out and Lieut. J. S. Farewell, the signals officer, wounded in the early morning hours. Nevertheless preparations were made for another assault and the hour was set at 11 A.M.

Since dawn German fighting patrols had been creeping out of the gully to feel out the West Nova positions, and in driving off one of them Lieut. E. N. Doane was killed. At 10.30 A.M. the Germans suddenly put in a counter-attack, swarming out of their positions in the gully under an intense covering fire of all arms. This was beaten off, but in their eagerness to close with the enemy the forward elements of the West Novas leaped out of their slit trenches and rushed for the gully, only to be caught in the murderous cross-fire of German machine-guns and the cannon of the concealed tanks. So close were they, and so flat was the trajectory, that shells from one tank gun firing over the lip of the gully actually ploughed up the ground for forty or fifty feet before exploding.

Again the casualties were heavy, and by this time the mounting list contained a serious proportion of officers. Towards noon, while restoring the situation in the forward area, Lt. Col. Bogert himself was severely wounded by a bullet in the leg. This in itself was a heavy loss, for "Pat" Bogert (who had been awarded the D.S.O. for his good work at Potenza and Jelsi) was a skilled and courageous commander who held the affection and confidence of every officer and man. The regimental aid post on the lower floor of the battered farmhouse was now choked with wounded, amongst whom the medical officer, Major Woods, and his men laboured devotedly. Here Lt. Col. Bogert lay, still directing the fight, until 5 P.M., when Major R. S. E. Waterman came up from the rear and took command.

By this time the West Novas had beaten off four counter-attacks with bloody loss to the Germans, and the shell-pitted ground between the farmhouse and the gully was littered with

dead in the grey-green uniform of the Panzer Grenadiers as well as the muddy khaki of the Regiment. Thus the night of Dec. 12th found the remnants of "A", "C", "D" and HQ companies clinging grimly to their exposed positions in front of the gully, while "B" Company was still engaged in stealing around the west flank in an effort to find a weak spot, passable for tanks, in the German defences along the road to Orsogna.

It fell to "B" Company to find the only ray of light in this impasse. On the afternoon and evening of Dec. 12th two patrols under Lieuts. J. H. Jones and G. E. Romkey had penetrated close to the Ortona-Orsogna road. Romkey's patrol clashed with a German group, killed two of them, and pushed on, only to find the route impracticable for tanks. Jones' patrol had better luck. They stole right into the German positions at a point where the enemy posts were wide apart and apparently not expecting hostile movement. Moreover the gully at this point was shallow and seemed passable for tanks, with a natural screen of bushes and trees to hide the movement. Why the Germans did not guard the spot more carefully is one of the mysteries of the battle. They evidently intended to use it for an armoured sortie against the West Novas' flank at some favorable point in the battle, because Jones and his men found the tracks of several Mark 4 tanks in the mud under the trees, and heard sounds and voices betraying the presence of a tank "harbour" in a small clearing farther on.

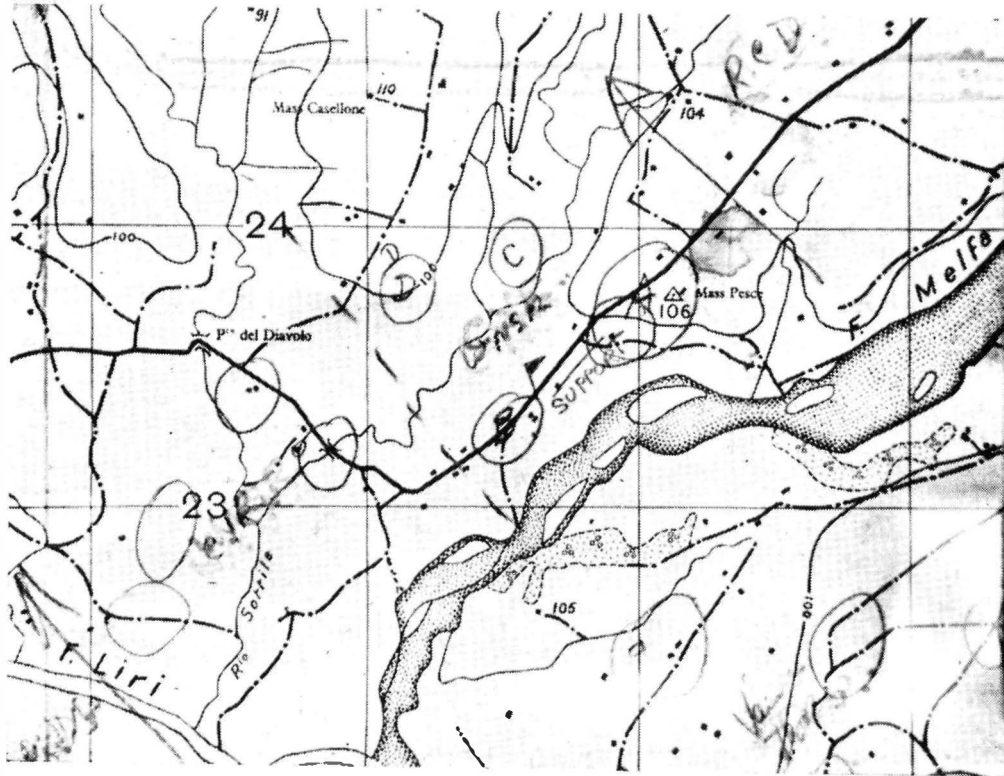
Upon Jones' report, Capt. F. H. Burns conferred with Lieut. Clark, in charge of the supporting tank squadron, and determined to push up at first light, with No. 10 platoon, "B" Company, riding on three tanks in the lead. The attack went in at 7 A.M. on Dec. 13th, a few minutes before daybreak. The night had been moonlit and cold, and rather quiet, for the German guns in the gully were not firing lest the Canadians spot the flash, and the main body of the West Novas under Major Waterman were preparing to withdraw from their forward positions to give the Canadian artillery a clear field for a dawn bombardment. This calm before the storm to the east was awkward for Burns because the noise of his leading

tanks as they approached the gully in the dark was bound to betray the movement of "B" Company. Fortunately at 4.30 A.M. the Germans provided, in an unexpected way, all the covering noise he required.

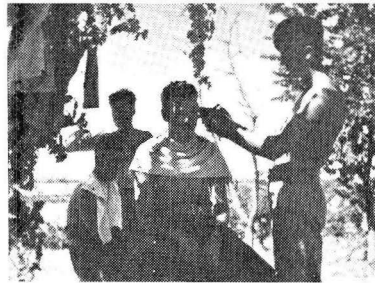
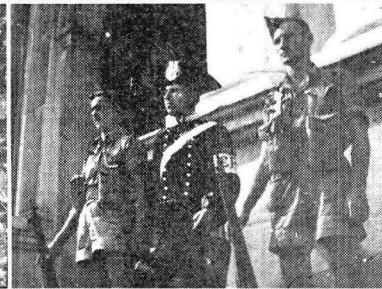
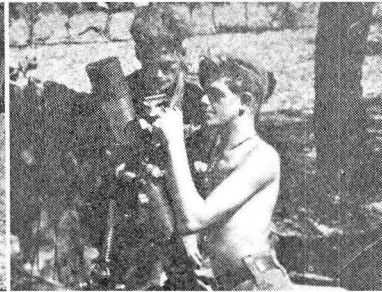
By a quaint coincidence the Germans in this part of the gully had been preparing a similar sortie against the West Nova positions in front of the ridge. There was one difference. Owing to the silence the Germans had kept their tanks in harbour near the gully. However a strong German fighting patrol of about half-company strength had crept out in the early morning hours and made its way towards the south-east (i.e. to "B" Company's right) and at 4.30 A.M. bumped into the main West Nova positions about the farmhouse in the plain.

This stealthy enemy movement, so fortunate for Burns, was very awkward for the Regiment, which was in the very act of withdrawing towards San Leonardo. Lieut. E. D. Hersey of the Carrier Platoon had posted his Bren gunners in the upper storey and on the roof of the farmhouse to cover the withdrawal, and when a line of dim figures in extended order appeared from the west it was at first thought to be part of the general movement. However the West Novas in the slit trenches just forward of the house were on the alert and called out the challenge for the night — "Johnny?" The password was "Walker"; instead a voice called out in English, "Yes!" Again came the challenge, sharply. This time the voice said "Hasty P's" — the well known nickname of the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment of 1st Brigade, who were not in this area.

Hersey promptly ordered his men to fire and the comparative silence of the night was shattered by a storm of Brens and Enfield rifles and tommy-guns. So close had the Germans crept that Sergeant Stone dropped one of them with a burst from his tommy-gun 30 yards from the house itself. The rearguard now was "between devil and deep sea", for it had to stop and beat off this attack when every minute was vital. However the Germans soon had enough and melted away into



Field map of the Melfa crossing.



1. A soldier's baptism in Italy.

3. Wash day

5. A West Nova shoemaker.

7. A barber in the field.

2. Reading "The Maple Leaf".

4. Sgt. Tait MM and comrade with a 3-inch mortar.

6. Guard at City Hall, Campobasso.

8. A hot day for the cook.

the night, and the West Novas managed to get out of the area just before the Canadian artillery began to "plaster" it as a preliminary to a new assault.

All of this racket enabled "B" Company and its supporting Ontario tanks to work up close to the gully from the left without detection. What Jones had found was a rough wagon track which crossed a shallow part of the gully and led up to the important Ortona-Orsogna highway at a point just west of Berardi. Under his keen and aggressive leadership the forward platoon of "B" Company with their three tanks plunged up this track just as dawn was breaking. The Germans had established a machine-gun post to cover it, supported by a group of infantry, and farther back a lone anti-tank gun. But the surprise was complete. The leading tank actually passed the machine-gun before the drowsy German gunners could swing it to fire, and a shell point-blank from the second tank destroyed them and their gun at once.

The German infantry post also came awake too late, and stood in a group beside the track with their hands up and their mouths agape as the tanks and West Novas rushed past. The anti-tank gun farther up the trail was destroyed with a single shot. And now the attackers burst into a clearing in the copses and beheld a remarkable scene. A farmhouse stood in the clearing, and about it, under the screen of the trees, stood three Mark 4 German tanks. The house apparently was a German battalion HQ, for officers, orderlies and similar personnel were diving out of the doors and windows in all directions. A German popped his astonished head out of the turret of the nearest tank and was promptly shot by Lieut. Jones. The tank itself was destroyed by a single shell from the leading Canadian tank. The second German tank suffered a similar extinction. The third managed to get one shell away, which exploded without serious damage to the Canadian tank but wounded Lieut. Jones, who was firing a Bren gun from the ground and mowing down the Germans escaping from the house.

Severely wounded in the shoulder, Lieut. Jones continued to direct his men throughout the morning, as they attacked and overcame one after another of the German groups hastily assembled in the surrounding copses. By noon, when the rest

of the tanks and "B" Company were assembled at this point, Jones and his bonnie fighters had killed about 30 Germans and captured 72 more. At this time Jones was ordered to the field hospital and Sergeant Alexander Vingar, an able and aggressive soldier known as "Slugger" in the Regiment, took command of the platoon. For his splendid courage and leadership in this action Harvey Jones was awarded the Military Cross.

While this was going on to the left, the Regiment itself had experienced another long and bloody day. While it was deployed off the main road near San Leonardo and awaiting the end of the Canadian assault barrage, Capt. Whynacht had managed to bring up and issue rations and a tot of rum. By 7 A.M. the West Novas were back in their former positions about the farmhouse. Lieut. Mark Yeoman took a fighting patrol from "C" Company towards the left, where the Germans had appeared in the pre-dawn darkness and attacked HQ, but he found only a scatter of dead ones in the uniform of the Panzer Grenadiers.

"A", "C", "D" and HQ companies now mustered little more than 100 officers and men, and Brigadier Gibson sent in the Carleton & Yorks to attack along the San Leonardo-Berardi road to their right. Again the Germans in the gully emerged safely from the Canadian bombardment, and the New Brunswickers were repulsed and obliged to dig in like the battered West Novas themselves. Nevertheless both regiments maintained their pressure on the defenders of the gully, pushing forward snipers and patrols and maintaining a brisk fire-fight which cost both sides heavily as the day wore on.

One or two incidents of the previous day's fighting in these same positions will illustrate the nature of the struggle and the heroism of the men who engaged in it. Pte. R. V. Rhodes of the West Novas came to "D" Company as a stretcher-bearer just before the battle. He was known as "Young" Rhodes, for he was only seventeen. One of the men in the forward zone had been hit and half buried in his slit trench by a shell, and lay there calling out for help. Without a moment's hesitation "Young" Rhodes dashed forward in the face of a terrific fire from the gully, dug the man out, hoisted

him across his shoulders, and staggered off towards the rear. Before going far Rhodes was hit in the leg by a bullet but he staggered on, and had almost reached the shelter of a low stone wall when a burst of machine-gun fire struck him in the back. He fell and died, but the man he had given his life to save was dragged to safety behind the wall and eventually reached hospital.

Pte. Roger McCormick of "D" Company was one of the best liked lads in the Regiment, with a ready wit and a cheerful smile no matter how rough the going. A veteran of the Regiment from '39, he was batman to Capt. Rogers of "D" Company when the West Novas entered the battle for Ortona. In the early stage of the battle he acted as a runner between company and battalion HQ when the radio set broke down. Later on, when the company's right forward platoon was badly cut up by shell fire and then attacked by German infantry, McCormick was one of the volunteers who dashed forward from company HQ to help the hard-pressed survivors. He caught up a Bren gun and magazines and with these poured such an accurate fire on the advancing German infantry that the survivors of the platoon were able to beat them off. He was found later, killed by a shell, with the gun still clutched in his hands and pointed towards the gully.

It was plain that the 3rd Brigade had been given a very tough nut to crack. But when Brigadier Gibson learned of "B" Company's successful foray to the south-west of Berardi he saw at once a means of doing it. A company of the Sea-forths was taken under command and sent up with four tanks to exploit the opening towards the Ortona-Orsogna road. Meanwhile Capt. F. H. Burns and his West Nova company and supporting tanks had turned right, seeking a crossing of the gully closer to Berardi and leaving Sergeant Vingar and his hard-fighting platoon to hold the area of the captured German battalion HQ. The Brigade reserve (the Royal 22nd Regiment) was put in motion with orders to pass through the opening Burns had found, get on the Ortona-Orsogna road, and fight its way to the vital crossroads at Berardi.

Unfortunately the communication difficulties which had plagued the West Novas from the start of this battle now had

a sharp effect on the fortunes of the Brigade. When word of "B" Company's success reached Brigade the short winter afternoon was well advanced, and the uncertainties of a movement to cross the gully in the dark (well demonstrated by the West Novas' experience) ruled out the chances of a night attack. This meant that the Royal 22nd Regiment could not open the assault towards Berardi from the south-west until daylight on the following morning. The interval gave the Germans a breathing space, in which they pulled out the shattered Panzer Grenadier formations defending the gully and replaced them with troops of the 1st Parachute Division, a crack unit fresh from a rest area.

Meanwhile the West Novas and the Carleton and Yorks maintained their pressure on the Berardi positions from the front, and at 4.30 P.M. on Dec. 13th the survivors of the West Novas — less than 100 all ranks — made a determined attack on the gully at a point immediately opposite Casa Berardi. Capt. A. W. Rogers commanded the small force, and Capt. H. M. Eisenhower, the Intelligence Officer, went forward to guide them through the olive groves and vineyards to their objective, which lay on the battalion's right flank. By making good use of the available cover in the gathering winter dusk the little band got up close to the gully without attracting German attention beyond a few shots from snipers lying out amongst the fields.

However as they approached a farmhouse near the gully edge they were fired upon by German troops inside, and at once a storm of fire sprang from the gully itself. Capt. Eisenhower fell severely wounded, and the casualties mounted swiftly in the hail of bullets and mortar fragments that followed. Nevertheless Rogers, Lieut. J. G. Kelly and nine others stormed the house and found the rooms littered with German dead and wounded. Other efforts to get forward were of no avail, and as their position was precarious to say the least the West Novas withdrew under cover of darkness, taking their wounded with them. The German artillery and mortars continued to scatter death amongst the vineyards as they passed, and Capt. Eisenhower, walking in spite of a bullet through the thigh, was hit again by a shell fragment in the ankle before he reached the RAP.

By this time the battalion was so reduced that a determined German counter-attack would have wiped it out and made a dangerous hole in the Brigade front. Consequently Capt. Burns and "B" Company were recalled from their adventures on the left flank, except for Sergeant Vingar's platoon, which was left to hold the position taken in the morning attack. "A", "C" and "D" companies now had a combined strength of 76 all ranks, acting as a single company under Capt. A. W. Rogers. The two platoons of "B" Company, plus a platoon of LOB's brought up in the night, formed a second company under Capt. F. H. Burns. These, together with battalion HQ, the attached field ambulance personnel, etc., gave the Regiment a total strength of 217 all ranks.

All through Dec. 14th, 15th, 16th and 17th the Regiment continued to hold its positions before the gully, while the "Van Doos" slowly fought their way along the ridge towards Berardi. Throughout this time the West Nova snipers and fighting patrols (who took 13 prisoners) harassed the enemy day and night. During the night of the 16th a small draft of reinforcements arrived and the Regiment was further reorganized. The 3rd Brigade was now so weary and so reduced by its ten-day struggle that it had not strength enough to turn the key it had found to the flank defence of Ortona.

But now the divisional commander, General Vokes, was shifting his strength from right to left and preparing a terrific stroke. The 1st Brigade was to move in past the remnants of the Royal 22nd Regiment on the 3rd Brigade's left flank, and strike along the ridge at the all-important Berardi crossroads, at the same time pushing out a battalion to cut the road leading from Berardi to Villa Grande in the German rear. The 2nd Brigade would then pass through the 1st and assault Ortona itself. For support Vokes called in all the artillery of the Fifth Corps — British, Canadian and Indian. This meant five field regiments and four medium regiments of artillery, together with a battery of heavy anti-aircraft guns and the massed fire of all the available heavy mortars. For their part the sorely tried regiments of 3rd Brigade must make yet another frontal attack to focus all possible German attention on the defence of the now famous gully.

The great assault was made on Dec. 18th. Under the shock of the massed artillery, swiftly followed by the 1st Brigade infantry and tanks, the stubborn German paratroops yielded foot by foot along the ridge. As night drew near the RCR was fighting a bloody battle for the Berardi crossroads on the ridge. Meanwhile the West Novas had made their last desperate effort — an all-out attack towards Berardi from the south. This of course meant another attempt to force the passage of the gully, and the chosen point was the demolished bridge where the San Leonardo-Berardi road crossed the ravine. The crossing was defended on the south side by a redoubt composed of rifle and machine-gun pits and supported by the fire of mortars in the gully itself. In view of the previous fighting and the recent bombardment its garrison was believed to be small and in no state to offer a vigorous defence. Actually the redoubt was defended by a reduced but still fanatical battalion of young paratroops.

At 4 P.M. on Dec. 17th the West Novas, numbering 160 all ranks, rose out of their water-logged slit trenches and advanced once more through those fatal muddy vineyards before the gully. For support they had exactly three tanks. What followed is a story of individual and collective heroism too long to narrate in these pages, and in this long battle for Ortona it was an old story after all. Led by their devoted band of surviving officers and NCO's the West Novas beat and broke in blood on the stout defences of the crossing. Some of them actually got inside the German positions. But they had lost one-fifth of their effectives in a few minutes and there was no choice but to withdraw or be annihilated. To Brigadier Gibson, watching the fight from West Nova HQ, Major Waterman returned with the grim story. The wounded included Captains R. W. Bullock and D. W. R. Dodge, and Lieutenants E. A. Haines, R. E. Logan and G. E. Romkey, while Lieut. G. F. Archibald, mortally wounded in the enemy positions, died in a German first aid post some time later. Romkey, who had been wounded previously in Sicily, had a particularly narrow escape from death at the very edge of the gully, being struck on the side of the head by a burst of Schmeisser pistol bullets fired at point-blank range. His wounds were grievous enough, however, and he never returned to the Regiment.

Thus ended the climactic effort of the West Novas in the battle for Ortona. It had not been one-sided by any means, for they had killed and wounded many Germans at the crossing; and the machine-gunners of the "Van Doos", who had worked some distance along the ridge beyond the gully, found some perfect targets as the Germans rushed up from their shelters to meet the West Nova attack. It now remained for the 1st and 2nd Brigades to push along the ridge into Ortona itself. The 3rd Brigade had sacrificed itself in frontal attacks to make this possible, and it was the brilliant exploit of "B" Company and the tanks on the left which showed the way to victory.

Sunday, Dec. 19th, and the following day were spent in searching for the wounded over the battle area, and in collecting and burying the dead. This was now possible because the German riflemen and machine-gunners in the gully were dead or gone, but the enemy artillery continued to shell the West Nova zone until the evening of the 20th. The vineyards through which the Regiment had fought were a wilderness of shell-holes, shattered farmhouses and clipped and steel-bitten olive trees. The gully was found littered and in places almost choked with German dead, with their arms and equipment and at least one shell-gutted tank. On the ridge beyond, the cross-roads hamlet of Berardi was a shambles, but the solidly built Casa Berardi survived (with most of its tiles blown off, its window casings shattered and its doors blown in) like a tall square ghost peering hollow-eyed over the battlefield.

The West Novas' chaplain, H/Capt. Brundage, had supervised the burial of the Regiment's dead as they were brought in during lulls in the battle and after the last shots were fired. The chosen plot was in an olive orchard west of the San Leonardo-Berardi road on the slope going down towards the gully, with the long bulk of the Maiella hills rising on the far left. It was carefully tended through the winter, and Pte. Gilbert Rafuse of the pioneer platoon marked out each grave and the whole plot with rectangular terra-cotta tiles set neatly on edge.

On Dec. 21st the West Novas were out of the battle at last, having been under fire almost continuously for sixteen days and engaged in strenuous and bloody fighting since Dec.

11th. (Indeed the Regiment had been in action with little respite since Nov. 16th, having passed into the Moro and Ortona battles straight from its bitter hardships in the mountains.) Of the unit which had left England 800 strong only a shadow remained. Sicily, Potenza, Gambalesa, Jelsi and the mountain fighting all had taken their toll, and in this long and bitter struggle for Ortona the Regiment had suffered 44 killed and 150 wounded, quite apart from the casualties from sickness and physical and mental breakdown brought about by the prolonged strain in the wet and winter cold. Eighteen officers, including the C/O, had been killed or wounded in this battle alone, and the loss of experienced other ranks was proportionately as great.

Amongst the killed were sergeants F. C. Belfie, H. W. McNamara, R. G. Macleod and gallant George Graham, L/Cpl. Albert Savrnock the athlete who had so distinguished himself on the Regiment's boxing team in England, Ptes. A. M. Tooke and F. E. Turpin, both of whom had been wounded previously in Sicily. The wounded included such veterans as CSM G. M. White, Sergeant Alex "Slugger" Vingar M. M., Sergeant F. E. Blakeney M. M., Sergeant A. J. MacBain, Pte. J. W. Marshall M. M., Pte. G. F. Spinney M. M., and the well-known snipers George K. Langille and Val Young.

However reinforcements now were at hand, including a number of old friends recovered from wounds or sickness sustained earlier in the campaign. Ten officers (Major G. L. F. McNeil M.C., Capts. E. M. Crouse, A. M. MacMillan, Lieuts. G. D. DeBlois, W. L. Barnwell, S. B. Beaton, D. A. Campbell, A. J. W. Dyer, J. T. Sweeney, A. D. Taylor) and 181 other ranks arrived. The paymaster made a welcome appearance. There was an issue of EFI refreshments including one bottle of beer per man. The mobile bath unit came up. Life became liveable once more and the Regiment looked something like its former self.

Christmas Day was spent at San Leonardo, the shell-beaten and bullet-pocked village looking over the late battlefield, and the troops enjoyed a dinner of roast pork, turkey and cake, while the accumulated EFI canteen profits were used to give each man a free issue of beer, cigarettes, chocolate and nuts. There was some rain in the afternoon and the Germans' long

range artillery shelled the brigade area heavily at times, but nothing marred the feast. In the evening the West Novas girded up their loins and marched up once more towards the front, where the continuous burst of shells and "moaning Minnies" gave a grim promise of ill will to all men.

Lt. Col. R. S. E. Waterman was in command, a professional soldier of the Canadian permanent force; tough, colourful, jealous for the honour of his Regiment in battle or out of it, not always loved but always acknowledged a first-rate leader of men, he was destined to see the West Novas through some of their toughest battles and greatest glories and to make the Regiment famous throughout the Canadian Army.

At this time the 2nd Brigade was clearing the last German pockets from the ruins of Ortona while the 1st Brigade pushed on. The 3rd Brigade now received orders to move up through 1st Brigade and clear the enemy from the region south of the Arielli, the next river in the interminable succession up the coast. In this role the West Novas as reserve battalion of 3rd Brigade passed the last days of December, moving up, halting, and marching off again. The whole area had been sown with mines by the retreating Germans and Lieut. Deblois of "D" Company was fatally injured by one of these while on duty at night. His men ran to pick him up but the gallant young officer, realising that he had walked into a patch of these murderous things, called out with his dying breath forbidding them to come near until the mines had been cleared.

On the 29th the Regiment passed through the rubble strewn streets of Ortona, where the stench of rotting bodies arose from the ruins like an all-but-visible mist and the ancient castle looked down from its hill, a monument over a tomb. The country beyond was a desolation of shattered farmhouses and villas, burnt haystacks, and shell-pocked fields, sodden with the winter rains and befouled with unburied German dead and a litter of equipment, shattered cannon, burnt-out tanks and vehicles.

The weather had changed to sunshine of a thin wintry sort, with a cold wind blowing down from the snow-covered mountains. On the right flank lay the pale blue Adriatic, and far ahead to the north-west loomed the steep white mass of the Gran Sasso d'Italia where Mussolini, kidnapped by Badoglio's

men and imprisoned in a mountain chalet, had been rescued by German paratroops. From "Point 59", an ancient watchtower on a hill overlooking the Adriatic just north of Ortona, the Canadians held a line running through the villages of San Nicola, San Tommaso and Villa Grande to a shattered hamlet known to the troops as "Tank Village" from the number of burnt-out German AFV's about the place.

The immediate objective of 3rd Brigade was "Point 59" and the Carleton and Yorks were given the job of taking it, supported by "C" Company and the mortar platoon of the West Novas, and by artillery and tanks. The main body of the West Novas remained in close support, receiving much attention from the German artillery and suffering several casualties from mines. Constant patrolling was necessary owing to the loose nature of the fighting front and the many deep gullies which made it possible for enemy snipers and patrols to approach the Canadian positions. The ease with which this could be done was shown on Dec. 26th, when two South Africans (who had escaped from German prison camps) were challenged and received by West Nova patrols, having passed clean through the fighting front of both armies.

The constant shelling made a lot of dangerous work for the signallers, whose lines were cut again and again, and at the year's end the Regiment suffered a sharp loss in popular young Lieut. R. W. Bullock of the mortar platoon, a veteran of the unit from pre-war militia days. He had sustained a flesh wound on Dec. 17th but quickly returned to the Regiment. On New Year's Eve young Bullock went out in the dark with a party to find and repair a telephone wire, just cut by a shell. He and Sergeant W. L. Stailing found the break and were busy with repairs when another shell burst close by. Stailing was killed instantly and Bullock severely wounded in both legs. Bullock fired his revolver to summon help and by chance one of the men who found him was an old chum of his schoolboy days, Signaller L. Clark. What followed is one of the most poignant stories of the Canadian Army in this war.

By another chance young Bullock was recognised in the field hospital by another old acquaintance, Doctor Mackinnon of Bridgewater, N.S., who saw that the wounds were dangerous. By a further chance the boy's father, Lt. Col. G. W.

Bullock, former C/O of the West Novas, was in charge of the 1st Canadian Graves Registration Unit, working in the Ortona battlefield a few miles back. Mackinnon sent a jeep for him. Young "Reg" greeted his father with a smile, saying, "Good show, Dad. I knew you'd come". For a time he seemed to rally, talking about home and the regiment in a cheerful voice at intervals and apparently resting comfortably. But on the night of Jan. 3rd there was a relapse and he was dying when, at 2 A.M., he asked to be sat up in bed for a word with his father. The older man, not knowing how close the end was, begged him to lie down and keep what he had to say until later. The son, who knew, said, "OK, Dad!", gave his father a smile and a wink, and lay back and died.

On the following morning the young officer's body was laid in a grave in the small army cemetery across the road from the field hospital, in the presence of a few friends, and with his own father reciting the simple words of the Church of England committal service. It was a far cry from the peaceful Anglican churchyard in Bridgewater where father and son so often had walked together.

CHAPTER 18

The Winter War Along The Arielli

On Jan. 4th, 1944 the Carleton and Yorks brought their long and bitter struggle for "Point 59" to a successful end, and that night the West Novas moved in to relieve them. The ancient Roman watch-tower was now a very sad ruin indeed, a mere stub of chipped and crumbled masonry surrounded by a tangle of broken sticks that had been shrubbery before the battle, and amongst the modern relics were half a dozen Canadian tanks, two of which were serviceable and the rest used as machine-gun posts. The West Novas' pioneer platoon had a Herculean task to clear the area of mines.

The term "Arielli front" is a misnomer really, for the Germans had settled in winter positions south of that river and the real line followed the course of a small stream called the Riccio, which rose on the north slope of the bitterly contested Berardi ridge and flowed down past Villa Grande and San Tommaso to the sea just north of "Point 59". Both sides were dug in amongst the farms and vineyards, using the bullet-proof stone houses and villas for strong points and working their supplies and reliefs forward by way of bushy gullies in the fields.

So began the so-called "static warfare" which was to continue throughout the winter. The bloody muddy struggle for Ortona had exhausted both sides and taught once more the old lesson of 1917 — that large scale operations in farmland

after the autumn rains merely bog down by their own weight. "Sunny" Italy had proved just as wet and bleak in winter as any part of Flanders in '17, the mud just as deep, the "Jerry" just as cunning and stubborn in defence. To complete the picture both sides now settled down into trench warfare, Mark '17, with the lines so close together in many places that an unwary head drew a sniper's bullet as if by magic, and every sound of movement brought down a flurry of mortar bombs and often a "stonk" of artillery fire. Every building, gully, path and ditch in the forward area was marked and exactly ranged by both sides. Every approach between the lines was watched by scouts and sentries through the day and scoured by fighting patrols at night.

Both sides made continuous efforts to dominate No Man's Land at night, so that patrol clashed with patrol, and every clash aroused the whole immediate front and brought down a storm of fire upon friend and foe alike. Removal of the wounded was difficult and often impossible after these encounters, and as the winter weeks went by the torn earth between the lines was dotted with Canadian and German dead. The usual West Nova patrol was the "one-and-ten" — one officer and ten men — but fighting patrols often consisted of a whole platoon armed with machine-guns, rifles, tommy-guns, pistols and bombs, and night after night there were miniature battles in the dark.

The main object of these patrols was to keep the enemy worried and if possible to bring back prisoners for identification. Division and Brigade HQ were always intensely curious about the enemy troops and at one time the reward to a patrol bringing in German prisoners went as high as £5 and 48-hours' leave to the flesh-pots of Ortona. The enemy was extremely alert at this time and soon made a policy of keeping his patrols fairly close to his own front line, so that the Canadians must cross and then re-cross the whole dangerous width of No Man's Land on their excursions, leaving the dead, friend and foe, in front of the German positions. In this way the enemy managed to inflict loss on the aggressive West Novas again and again without disclosing his own identity. Sometimes a patrol "bumped" the Germans and took prisoners, only to be "shot up" and scattered on the perilous journey back. But often enough the venture was successful.

Courage and skill were absolute essentials in this business but luck was always the deciding thing. Luck is fickle and there are many tales of its vagaries on the Arielli front. A few brief examples here must illustrate them all. Thus on Jan. 6, 1944 in the region of "Point 59" Lieut. A. D. Mills and 14 men of "D" Company made a patrol which extended into the daylight hours. The coming of daylight apparently threw the Germans off guard, for Mills and his men surprised a platoon in their weapon pits, killed 10 of them and secured 12 prisoners. At once the Germans on higher ground opened a vicious mortar and machine-gun fire and the patrol was obliged to scatter and get back any way it could. Three of the prisoners were killed and the rest escaped in the confusion simply by dropping out of sight. The West Novas lost one man killed and one wounded.

On the night of Feb. 26th Capt. E. M. Crouse, a veteran of the Regiment from pre-war days, took out a small patrol to investigate a house in the fields near San Nicola. Some distance away Crouse ordered his men to ground while he went ahead, on the old gallant principle of "Never send a man where you wouldn't go yourself". As he reached the house there was a sudden German challenge from within. Crouse hurled a grenade in reply but a moment later was cut down by a burst of bullets from a Schmeisser pistol. The patrol itself now came under sharp machine-gun and mortar fire and was obliged to withdraw, with a parting glimpse of shadowy figures carrying Crouse's body into the house.

On March 15th a fighting patrol under Capt. E. D. Hersey, a keen and courageous officer who had been wounded in the Ortona fighting, went out in the dusk to probe a point known as "Grebe". On reaching it they were fired on by machine-guns directly ahead and from a house on their immediate flank. Capt. Hersey was wounded early in the fray but continued to lead the patrol, attacking the house with 2-inch mortar and small-arms fire. This brought down a concentration of enemy mortar bombs and obliged the patrol to withdraw, but not before four others of the patrol had been wounded.

On Feb. 23rd near San Nicola, Lieut. L. A. Moore of the Pioneer Platoon took a patrol forward and surprised a German

machine-gun post, taking two prisoners. The patrol returned safely with its captures, including the machine-gun itself, a Spandau 42, carried off triumphantly by Corp. R. H. "Snippy" Peach. The prisoners, one of whom was a sergeant-major, proved of the utmost value to Intelligence. On March 16th however Lieut. Moore and his patrol were caught 20 yards in front of a German strong-point in a sudden inferno of bullets and exploding grenades. By a miracle they managed to withdraw, but Moore and Corp. Peach were severely wounded; and Peach, one of the original characters of the Regiment, a humorous and courageous spirit, died of his wounds.

Typical of many gallant but unsuccessful raids was the venture of Lieut. S. B. Beaton and a fighting patrol near Villa Grande on the night of Feb. 11th. At this time "C" Company was established in captured German dug-outs deep in the side of a gully, and Lt. Col. Waterman sent up orders for Beaton to take a strong patrol towards the Arielli River and "beat up" a group of farm buildings known to be occupied each night by parties of German machine-gunners. The approach was through flat muddy fields with no cover except in the numerous water-filled shell holes. The buildings had been the object of several previous attempts and the Germans were very much alert, in fact as Beaton's patrol passed through the West Nova outpost he was warned that the enemy had been heard digging in the darkness not far off. This suggested a German ambush patrol, but the business of a fighting patrol is to fight and Beaton's orders were to attack the farm buildings, so he pushed on, arranging his 30 men in T formation in case of ambush, with ten men extended in line on each side of him and the third section forming the tail of the T. Each section carried a Bren gun besides its rifles and grenades. In addition there were four tommy-guns, one of which was carried by Beaton himself.

A mixture of rain and sleet was falling and the night was very dark. A covering fire of Vickers machine-guns had been arranged, to be laid on the area behind the patrol's objective from 11 P.M. to midnight in order to prevent communication with the main German positions while the raid was in progress. The patrol moved forward quickly to take advantage of this fire, as there was a considerable distance to be covered.



1. A jeep-ambulance in Italy.
3. Winter mud, Italy.
5. A PIAT gunner.
7. Roadside bivouac.

2. Bren gunners near the Hitler Line.
4. Through the Gothic Line.
6. A slit trench in the Liri Valley.
8. Moving up from Rome. The C. O. confers with officers on the road. Capt. R. G. Thexton at right.



1. Lieutenant Irvine and his Tug-O'-War team.
2. West Novas outside a captured German dugout on the Lamone.
3. Capt. Don Rice confers with his platoon commanders during the Lamone fight.

Suddenly a burst of German machine-gun fire came from the left. The patrol dropped into the mud at once. Beaton ordered his left section to deal with this gun while he pushed on with the rest; but as he and the other two sections jumped to their feet no less than five German machine-guns opened tracer fire from positions extending in an arc about the patrol. Beaton was knocked down and severely wounded by a bullet coming from the flank. Half a dozen others were hit at the same time, and the patrol dropped into shell holes, shooting back at the German guns. Simultaneously the West Nova outpost about 100 yards behind opened covering fire. In another minute the whole area was alert and shooting. To this din the enemy added the sharp explosions of rifle-grenades and finally his mortar bombs came fluttering down through the tracer-slashed darkness and burst one after another with huge explosions and eruptions of up-flung mud. He had the range perfectly and the first bomb exploded right amongst the patrol.

For ten minutes the patrol stuck it out, shooting back at the German machine-gunners, who eventually subsided enough for Beaton to give the order to withdraw. The retreat was made by a different route for obvious reasons. Corporal R. W. Bennett carried one of the wounded on his back, plodding carefully along in the mud with bullets whistling all about him. A Bren-gunner, George Nicholson, despite a leg broken by a mortar fragment, dragged himself and his gun to safety. Corp. A. A. "Tony" Brandel, after helping another man to get Lieut. Beaton out, learned that two of the wounded were missing; he went all the way back, searched and found one of them, and brought him to the West Nova lines. The other, mortally wounded, could not be found; apparently he had perished in one of the shell holes.

The patrol, bloody and plastered with mud from head to foot, reached "D" Company's post in a gully, where Beaton, despite his great pain and loss of blood, phoned the C/O with an account of the patrol and the type and location of the German machine-guns. He then permitted the stretcher-bearers to carry him off. The long and difficult journey up and down steep gully banks in the dark towards the regimental aid post required the efforts of eight men per stretcher. Such were the conditions of the "static war".

In the forward area officers and men crouched in slit trenches and caves that were always wet and often filled with rain or slush. The mud was everywhere; boots were caked with it, clothing was plastered with it, even the food was seldom free of it. All supplies had to come forward on the backs of mules as far as the nearest convenient gully: from there to the exposed posts and slit trenches they were carried by relays of men. The rations consisted largely of tinned pork products, bully beef, tinned "M & V" (cooked meat and vegetables) of the British army standard, de-hydrated potatoes and carrots. Cooking was done (when done at all) over improvised stoves of the "jerry-can" type. Old cigarette tins half filled with gasolene, each with a bit of cord for a wick, provided lighting in the caves.

For the sake of comfort the smart appearance of the Regiment went by the board: it was no longer possible however desirable. Leather jerkins, sweaters, mufflers, mittens and gloves of all kinds appeared upon the men. For headgear the knitted wool "Balaklava" helmet became almost universal wear; but in the outposts every man indulged his fancy and one quartet was seen wearing a steel helmet, a Balaklava, a woman's "tam" and an Italian civilian's cloth cap. Men sometimes went days without a shave; and the pioneer platoon was permitted (indeed encouraged) to grow beards in the old pioneer tradition of the British Army. Some of these beards became magnificent as time went by but none was more luxuriant than that of Leslie Moore, the pioneer lieutenant.

In view of the conditions the sick list was moderate, nevertheless Major Woods, the capable and cheerful M. O., had his hands full as the physical and mental strain of the winter fighting took its price. Many familiar faces disappeared, some through sickness, some on leave, some on courses, some in the regular interchange between units, some as casualties. Thus by the end of February, H/Capt. L. F. Wilmot had replaced H/Capt. Brundage as chaplain of the Regiment; Capt. R. G. Thexton had replaced Major D. Archibald in command of "A" Company; Capt. W. C. Allan had replaced Capt. F. H. Burns in command of "B" Company; Major A. M. Russell commanded "C" Company; Capt. J. K. Rhodes had replaced Major A. W. Rogers in command of "D" Company; Capt. B. Cechran commanded HQ Company; Major J. R. Cameron

commanded Support Company; Lieut. R. E. Campbell was Intelligence Officer; F. J. Dalton had replaced Guy Dean as regimental sergeant-major. One of the officers broken in health was gallant young Capt. J. "Cammy" MacNeil, M.C., who died in a field hospital on March 16th. In March, Major G. W. Woods, the medical officer who had seen the West Novas through some of their toughest and bloodiest days, was posted to another unit, and Major H. C. Johnston came to take his place.

The cold, the wet, the all-pervading mud, the exhausting and bloody patrols, the incessant digging, the sniping, the frequent and accurate bombardments by mortars and artillery, the difficulties of ration and supply, the sunless life in the caves, all imposed a severe strain on the troops, and every effort was made to lighten the life as much as possible. A visiting Polish officer was astonished to find a shower bath (invented and built from old mortar cases etc. by Corp. J. W. Williams of "D" Company) operating in the forward area. But such amenities were few at the front.

The Brigade operated with two battalions in line and one in reserve about Villa Grande, each spending ten to twenty days in the front line and then four or five days in reserve. This made it possible for officers and men in reserve positions to taste a little of the comforts of civilization. The K. of C. had established a first-rate rest centre (called "The Nova Scotian Hotel") at San Leonardo, where for forty-eight hours NCO's and men could enjoy good meals, see movie shows or merely loaf in warmth and ease. The Salvation Army had a similar rest centre at San Vito, where also was the famous "Sword & Drum" hostel for officers, established by Major Forbes Thraher the 1st Division catering officer in a big Italian *albergo*, with fine murals, comfortable furniture, hot baths, good wine and meals. There were frequent leaves to Ortona where (in spite of long range German artillery fire) the men could relax amidst a civilian population. Finally 24 other ranks per week were given seven days' leave in distant Bari, the ancient Italian seaport towards the south end of the peninsula.

There was another source of entertainment close — much too close — at hand. Villa Grande in the midst of its vineyards was a village of wine-makers and almost every house in

that somewhat battered hamlet had a red-tiled shed attached or nearby, in which were stored the grain crop and a great vat or tun of *vino rossa*. The place was one vast temptation when the West Novas entered the village, and Lt. Col. Waterman, having in mind that hilarious episode at Potenza, ordered the tuns destroyed. He charged Lieut. C. H. Smith and C. S. M. Whynot with the task, and these two, armed with axes, made the rounds staving one after another of the great casks. The wine welled out over the courtyards and into the street, so that before long the gutters of Villa Grande were running as if with blood. The resultant reek when the sun came out was heady to say the least. In some inexplicable manner one tun of particularly good white wine was overlooked, and the Columbus who discovered it was so discreet that no one ever knew — until the cask was empty. The secret leaked out with the last of the wine, for a number of dead rats were found in the bottom, and the Regiment had its best laugh for days.

Training was more important than ever in these winter days in view of the necessarily lax conditions in the frontal posts and because during the heavy losses around Ortona reinforcements had been flung into the battle without time to assimilate themselves in the Regiment. In view of this a Brigade school was established near Lanciano under Major F. E. Hiltz 2 i/c of the West Novas, and there, week by week, rotating by companies, the three regiments trained their men.

A new feature in the training at this time was the formation of a special platoon of scouts and snipers within the Regiment. The West Novas always had carried a number of scouts and snipers on their establishment, but these had been few, and their number was reduced by battle casualties. The most famous of them probably was a Micmac Indian, Corp. Charles Jeremy, who finally was severely wounded on the Arielli front early in March, 1944. Jeremy never boasted of his sniping "kills", but the admiring troops placed the figure at "something like sixty!" Probably it was much less, but Jeremy had shown what could be done by a man who knew how to melt into the landscape and use his eyes and ears, and the warfare along the Arielli had shown the need of a considerable group of such men, properly trained, armed and equipped.

Hence the formation of the platoon, which was placed in charge of Lieut. D. I. Rice.

About the existing group of scouts and snipers Rice gathered twenty or more keen fellows, all crack shots, with the additional qualities of observation and endurance. These he trained behind the lines in the arts of stalking, camouflage, field sketching, map reading and the use of the compass at night. He emphasized that their chief duty was reconnaissance, for upon their reports the Regiment would base the operation of its fighting patrols. After two weeks of intensive training the platoon went into the line, equipped with rope-soled boots, camouflage head-nets, and rifles with telescopic sights. Some of them manned observation posts in the line itself. Others crawled out into No Man's Land and lay for hours watching the German positions for a chance to kill. Others, in pairs usually, crept towards the enemy positions at night, seeking an opportunity for a raid by a fighting patrol. When such an opportunity was found they reported back to Rice, and when the fighting patrol went out one of the scouts went out with them as a guide.

One of the most successful snipers was H. F. Gates, whose nickname "Snake-Eye" (from the celebrated Fenimore Cooper character) was a tribute to his abilities. Others were D. F. Adams, F. H. Doucett, Val Young, G. K. Langille, C. R. Peck, O. S. Foster and a Micmac Indian, R. M. Francis. Most of these were born woodsmen and some had been professional guides to hunters in Nova Scotia. But one of the outstanding scouts, and undoubtedly the outstanding character, was Charles Fleet, a Newfoundland fisherman. Tall, silent, resourceful, apparently without nerves, seldom armed with anything more than a pistol tucked into his battle-blouse, unembarrassed by finicky scruples in the performance of his missions, Fleet moved about No Man's Land (and as the months went by, across the face of Italy) like a predatory cat.

Lieut. General Sir Oliver Leese had taken over command of the Eighth Army in January (replacing "Monty", who had gone to England to help organize the Channel invasion scheme) and on March 2, 1944, in the town square of San Vito, he held a decoration ceremony for Canadian officers and men recom-

mended for valour in the earlier stages of the campaign. The West Nova awards included the Military Cross to Lieut. J. C. MacNeil (so soon to die), and the Military Medal to Sergeant D. G. Tait, Cpls. J. Amero and J. A. Macleod, L/Cpl. J. W. King, Ptes. H. W. Pelly and R. E. Brown. A large number of officers and men of the Regiment by this time were wearing the ribbon of the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal, which was authorized in January.

March brought warmer weather and the ground began to dry — a sure forerunner of great battles. The slim greenish-brown Italian lizards crept into the sun. They were active and inquisitive creatures but at the first sign of hostility they would vanish into a crevice with the speed of lightning. After the winter's deadly game of hide-and-seek beyond Ortona the West Novas boasted that they could "beat a lizard to the drop", and for them that nimble reptile remained a symbol of the modern infantryman.

In all this mud and blood along the Arielli there was one military compensation — the German suffered just as much and more, for he had no air cover; not only his defences but his lines of supply far to the rear were exposed to plane attack, and the Canadian artillery fire on his forward positions was accurately observed from the air as well as the ground. Both sides respected the Red Cross flag and vehicle markings, and after an infantry raid or an artillery or mortar shoot it often was possible (so close were the lines) to count the stretcher loads being carried away and thus estimate each other's casualties.

Both sides bombarded each other with propaganda leaflets enclosed in special shells. The German soldier, forbidden to read (or to keep) such things, nevertheless tucked at least one British leaflet into his wallet and produced it as a sort of talisman when captured. The West Novas were quite as eager to pick up the German leaflets, but for quite another reason — they had a ready cash value in rear echelons where anxious souls who lived far from the battle were avid for souvenirs to send home. The German propaganda was well printed on good paper. A typical sheet depicted a Canadian soldier's wife, young and attractively built, making a date by telephone with someone who, according to the accompanying text, was a Je-

wish war profiteer. The text was headlined, "YOU have a date with death — YOUR GIRL has a date with Sam Levy!"

April gave the sun a touch of real heat, and the drying of the ground gave a lift to the spirits all round. When a patrol under Lieut. D. A. Campbell shot up a German working party near Lone House on the night of April 4th, the hoarse voice of scout Cpl. C. A. Fleet (standing in plain view on a rubble heap in the moonlight) was heard roaring at the more cautious enemy in front of point "Mallard", urging them to "come out and fight!" Now that the *squish* of mud no longer betrayed movement the battalion snipers were able to get closer to the German positions without detection, and Pte. "Snake-Eye" Gates got in some particularly effective shooting near Lone House.

On Easter Sunday there was an issue of two eggs and two hot-cross buns per man, and Padre Wilmot held religious services in the forward area of each company. Brigadier Bernatchez (formerly O/C the Royal 22nd Regiment) had now taken command of 3rd Brigade, and on April 13th he visited West Nova HQ with General Reid of the 10th Indian Division. On the following evening the O/C Manchester Regiment together with the Subadar and Jemidar-Majors of a Ghurka Regiment were guests of the West Nova officers. Something was in the wind. On succeeding days Lt. Col. Waterman addressed his officers and NCO's, informing them that the Canadians soon were to go elsewhere, to train for the coming summer's battles.

Before leaving the area all the officers and men who could be spared from duty motored back to the little cemetery before Ortona, to which all the recovered bodies of the winter's fighting had been taken for burial, and Padre Wilmot held a simple dedication service. "Already nature was healing over the wounds of war, and the olive trees, scarred and twisted by the shells which had torn up the country, were a mass of leaves and blossom".

From first to last the fighting beyond Ortona along the Arielli had cost the West Novas 39 killed and 124 wounded — almost as much as the battle for Ortona itself. Again the loss included many veterans. Some of these already bore the scars of previous battles. Thus amongst the killed were Pte. Frank Powell, who had been wounded at Potenza; Pte. David McGui-

gan, who had been wounded at Jelsi; and Pte. Thomas Martell, who had behaved so bravely at Monte Criscana and was later wounded in the taking of Potenza. Amongst the wounded were Pte. F. A. Gallant, who had been wounded in Sicily; Pte. John Halley, previously wounded in front of Ortona; Pte. J. R. MacDougall, previously wounded at Jelsi; Pte. Peter A. MacLellan, previously wounded in front of Ortona; Pte. Verdun Nickerson, previously wounded in Sicily; Cpl. Douglas R. Parker, previously wounded twice — on the Delianuova heights and at Gambalesa; Pte. Roy A. Parker, previously wounded at Jelsi; Cpl. Fred M. Patterson, previously wounded at Jelsi; Pte. Howard Pelly M. M., the heroic machine-gunner who was previously wounded at Jelsi; Pte. Gordon Taylor, previously wounded in front of Ortona; Pte. Edward Wedge, previously wounded in front of Ortona. Ptes. James W. Holland and J. S. Croft were actually wounded twice on the Arielli front itself. The Arielli wounded included also Pte. Albert F. Garnier, an outstanding member of the Regiment's boxing team.

On April 21st the West Novas handed over their positions to the dark little men of the Ghurkas and set off for the Campobasso area by way of Lanciano. All was done in great secrecy under orders from Corps, with regimental shoulder flashes and division patches removed, and Canadian markings painted over on all vehicles. It was remarked with some amusement however that the army route signs all along the road still bore the unmistakable maple leaf, and the Regiment followed its own familiar "69" markers all the way to Campobasso. On April 24th the West Novas encamped near Riccia, by coincidence on the exact spot where they had bivouacked on the eve of the Jelsi battle more than six months before.

Here "training per syllabus" became the order of the day. The pioneers laid out a rifle range and a sports field, and softball and soccer teams were organized. Reinforcements arrived. Major A. W. Rogers and Capt. J. H. Jones M. C., were welcomed back to the unit, and Capt. H. I. Mendelson replaced Major Johnston as medical officer.

CHAPTER 19

Breaking the Hitler Line

The month of May opened in summer heat, with the famous blue Italian skies exactly as advertised and the clouds of flies and mosquitoes so seldom mentioned in the tourist literature. Anti-malaria precautions went into effect. Battle-dress was put aside for a new issue of khaki denim, with the usual proportion of out-sizes and under-sizes and the usual comic result until the process of exchange between "the short, the lean and the tall" and the efforts of the tailors had produced something like a fit.

A brand new Nova Scotia flag snapped in the breeze over regimental HQ, a smaller one on the bonnet of the C/O's jeep, while the companies for the first time had their own pennons (all the way from Hobson's, London) to which the company letters were sewn. In honour of Lt. Col. Bogert DSO, now on Divisional staff, the West Nova officers gave a notable mess dinner in the Bank of Naples building, Campobasso, with food and wines of the country and music by an Italian orchestra. The musicians did well with their native tunes but when they switched hopefully to "Tipperary" and other Inglesa songs the effect was lamentable, and finally the West Novas called for "Lili Marlene". The orchestra leader looked astonished — the Italians could never quite understand the Eighth Army's adoption of this German soldiers' song — but his troupe played it with many encores and with such sentiment that it was clear

they had performed for the "Telesci" many times in gatherings such as this.

In the course of various training schemes the Regiment spent a wandering life in the region of Campobasso, moving over the old Jelsi battleground to Lucera (famous as the place where the former second-in-command had demolished a hardware shop in a search for a kerosene lantern, and obtained 140 dozen eggs for the sum of 2000 lira) and thence to Gambalesa, Bucciano and Benevento. On May 12th Major General Chris Vokes addressed the battalion and Lt. Col. Waterman addressed each company in turn, describing the coming battle objectives — the breaking of the Gustav and Hitler lines, and the capture of Rome.

While the Eighth Army had been slugging up the Adriatic coast past Ortona the Fifth Army had found even tougher going on the other side of the Italian peninsula. The direct coastal route from Naples to Rome was menaced inland by strong German forces in the mountains about Cassino, which also commanded the alternative route along the Liri valley. Successive attempts by American, British, New Zealand and Indian troops had failed to break the defences of Cassino, which centered about the famous hilltop monastery. However a foothold had been gained in the mountains about the place, while from the sea an Allied force had landed at Anzio and Nettuno, behind the German right flank, in an effort to turn the whole enemy defences on the road to Rome. The Germans had countered swiftly and pinned the landing force to its beach-head on the edge of the Pontine Marshes. It was the Salerno affair all over again, and once again the only way to break the deadlock was to fight through the mountains on the other flank.

This time it was not to be solved by a surprise dash through the hills. The German position about Cassino was truly formidable and much blood had been spilt in the effort to break it. The real key to the situation was the Liri River, which lay in a beautiful valley about ten to fifteen miles wide between the Lepini Mountains and the main chain of the Apennines on which Cassino stood. The general course of the valley up-stream pointed straight to the Alban Hills and Rome

itself, and the careful Germans had built two strong lines of defence across it, one called the Gustav Line in the region of Pignataro, the other (and main) position a few miles farther back in the region of Pontecorvo, called the Hitler Line.

To secure the flanks of the British drive up the Liri, a Polish corps was closing in about the German bastion of Cassino, while on the western wall of the valley the French general Juin was making good his promise to "flood those hills with my Goums" — his wiry Moroccan riflemen, who were in their element in mountain warfare. British and Indian troops already had assaulted the Gustav Line and taken its main positions with the town of Pignataro. Now the Canadian Corps was to pass through, clean out the remaining positions of the Gustav Line and go on to assault the Hitler Line itself.

On May 15th 1944 the West Novas packed up at Bucciano and rolled in motor transport through the mountains to the Liri Valley, arriving in their assembly area near Pignataro towards midnight. The weather was clear and hot, the scenery magnificent, and the morale of the Regiment at top pitch. The morning sun of May 16th revealed a green paradise, one of the show places of Italy, walled in by high mountains and rolling its length north-westward in farmland thickly dotted with bushes and trees and watered by clear mountain streams. There were orchards and fields of tall grass or young wheat thigh-deep, and the dusty roadsides were speckled with wild flowers, notably the poppy, whose scarlet bloom reminded everyone of "Flanders Fields". There were thickets of scrub oak on the sandy flats between the farm slopes, and the roads and lanes were lined with chestnut and other trees in full leaf, and sometimes hedgerows like those of France.

As usual the streams lay in deep gullies, impassable for tanks in many places, and their banks were thick with shrubs and trees, giving cover for anti-tank guns at every ford. Digging was easy in the gravel flats except where the tough scrub-oak roots were present but on the upland the sub-soil was a hard clay that yielded slowly in greyish-white lumps to the blows of an entrenching tool.

Despite the hot sunshine there was a haze of smoke and dust in the distance, the haze of battle — for 2,000 British and Canadian guns were thundering at the remnants of the Gustav Line — and this was thickened by clouds of artificial smoke released to obscure the British movements from the German watchers on Mount Cassino. Towards evening the Regiment moved up to take over advanced positions from a Mahratta battalion of the Indian Division. There was some difficulty in the dusk owing to the smoke, but the change-over was completed by 11 P.M. At this time the C/O was Lt. Col. R. S. E. Waterman; the second-in-command Major F. E. Hiltz; Major John Millard commanded "A" Company; Major W. C. Allan commanded "B" Company; Major A. W. Russell commanded "C" Company; Capt. J. K. Rhodes commanded "D" Company, and Major J. R. Cameron commanded Support Company. The RSM was F. J. "Togo" Dalton.

In the early morning of May 17th the West Novas had a hot breakfast and at 6.30 formed up along the Pignataro-Pontecorvo road awaiting the word to attack. Despite the terrific British artillery barrage the Germans were much alive and their counter-fire of artillery and mortars fell amongst the West Novas, wounding amongst others Major Allan. Lieut. R. N. Knowles assumed the command of "B" Company until a senior officer could come up from rear HQ, and he conducted its fortunes brilliantly throughout the day.

About mid-morning the West Novas were ordered to pass through the Royal 22nd Regiment and take up the attack. The remains of the Gustav Line consisted of slit trenches, machine-gun, mortar and *nebel-werfer* pits and fortified houses scattered through the fields and orchards, all of which had been thoroughly spotted and "stonked" by the artillery. The Regiment swept forward with "A" and "D" companies in line, closely supported by British tanks, and "B" and "C" companies moving up close behind. At the approach of the West Novas' bayonets one after another of the German positions sprouted dazed and terrified men in field-grey holding up their hands and crying "Kamerad, Tommy!", some of them thrusting out photographs of their wives or parents, weeping and cursing Hitler and the war, and there was a steady trickle of prisoners towards the rear that grew into a stream as the day

progressed. Here and there a group fought it out, usually in one of the less battered farmhouses but these were quickly wiped out. Snipers perched in the thick leafy trees about the wheat-fields and along the roads gave more trouble, but on the whole the enemy resistance gave way quickly and most of the Regiment's casualties were from mortar and artillery fire.

"D" Company got astray in the smoke and the confusing semi-wooded landscape, and a platoon under Lieut. R. A. Langille was ambushed and most of its personnel captured by German troops on the flank. For a time "D" Company's fortunes were obscure and Lt. Col. Waterman sent up Capt. D. I. Rice with the scouts and snipers in search of them. Meanwhile he ordered Lieut. C. H. Smith and the Carrier Platoon forward towards "D" Company's objective, a small knoll called "Objective Wednesday". Moving afoot along a cart-track in the haze the Carrier men came upon the knoll and promptly rushed it. The garrison consisted of machine-gun crews in two or three farm buildings, where they had dug deep fox-holes under the earthen floors and were sheltering. Smith, revolver in hand, burst into one house and caught the crew completely unawares — one of them calmly engaged in shaving himself! Gathering up their prisoners, the Carrier Platoon proceeded to consolidate the position, chiefly using the slit trenches conveniently dug by the Germans outside the buildings. Rice and his men came up at this point, and soon afterwards "D" Company appeared from the flank and took over the positions.

The sheer dash of the forward troops made them impatient with fixed objectives — which in any case were difficult to identify on the ground in the midst of battle — and as some of the supporting shells were falling short there was a tendency to pass through and avoid not only the "friendly" barrage but the German mortar barrage which was sure to be aimed behind it. Such was the fighting spirit of the West Novas that in "A" Company one soldier with a hand badly torn by shrapnel refused a morphine injection and insisted on going forward. Another was blown end over end by a shell which landed six feet away — he sat down a few minutes, shook himself, and went on. Corporal D. K. Carroll, knocked out for a minute by a shell, and with his uniform torn to shreds, went on and fought throughout the day.

The tanks supporting the forward companies had difficulty in crossing a ravine a few hundred yards from the start and were soon out-distanced by the infantry, but they caught up later on and assisted in consolidating the objectives. Lt. Col. Waterman and his famous jeep (which he drove himself) with its sand-bagged floor and "19" radio set were a familiar sight in the advance, although the boys missed the blue-cross Nova Scotia flag snapping from the bonnet — it had been tucked away for battle purposes; and as the Regiment reached its first objectives he was accompanied by Brigadier Bernatchez, always quick to see a situation for himself, no matter the danger. "A" Company long remembered the sight of Waterman and Bernatchez, sitting in the jeep and poring over a map, on a road whipped by German machine-gun fire.

By night the Regiment was dug in amongst the fields about a farm house called Casa di Georgio at a bend in the highway running up the valley from Pignataro. Enemy shelling continued until after dark, when the rifle companies pushed forward two miles and made a firm base for the Carleton and Yorks, who were passing through to take up the pursuit. The Germans were withdrawing to the Hitler Line and contented themselves with a harassing fire of mortars, "moaning Minnies" and artillery laid down on the principal roads and lanes. In spite of this the West Nova rear echelons came up, a hot meal was served to the troops, and there was even a distribution of mail — an unlooked-for luxury in the midst of battle.

The following days saw a repetition of this game of leap-frog between the regiments of 3rd Brigade — each in turn passing through the front battalion, pushing forward, and then digging in while another took the leap. The enemy mortars and artillery were very active in covering the retreat, and the story of the pursuit from the Gustav Line to the Hitler Line is largely a tale of hasty shovelling in the hard clay at the end of each forward leap. One West Nova expressed the feeling of the whole Regiment when he exclaimed to his officer, "Judas Priest, sir, I thought the ground at Cissbury Ring (on the Sussex Downs) was tough — but out here it gets tougher with every shell that falls!"

The maps were inadequate and difficult to follow on the ground. More than once what the map showed as a road turn-

ed out to be merely a grassy cattle track through the fields: the view in any direction was broken by gentle ridges and hillocks crowned with trees in full summer foliage and obscured by the battle smoke, so that platoons and companies moving across country had to use the utmost vigilance to keep contact. The swift and determined pursuit left the enemy little time to damage the roads, and the bigger shell-holes were quickly filled by the Canadian engineers, so that fighting vehicles and transport were able to follow close behind the leading troops. This led to some awkward situations when a long straight stretch of road enabled the Germans to sweep it with machine-gun fire. Traffic was stopped at the first bend, and the jam extended farther and farther back as more vehicles arrived, raising a cloud of dust which inevitably attracted the attention of the enemy artillery and mortars. Many vehicles were hit in such places, but these were quickly pushed off the roads and left to burn, adding their smoke to the general haze of battle.

On May 19th the Regiment swung somewhat more to the westward and passed through the Royal 22nd Regiment under intense artillery, *nebelwerfer*, mortar and long range machine-gun fire. For many of the forward troops this involved a wet passage of the *Forme d'Aquino*, a deep canalized stream about 20 feet wide lined with large trees. Some climbed into the branches and swung across, monkey-fashion, some crossed on the slippery trunks of trees knocked into the stream by shell fire, many had to swim. The West Novas crossed a swampy flat covered with waist-high bushes and towards evening dug in on a low ridge covered with scrub oak and occasional grain fields. A downpour of rain made the night uncomfortable and continued through the morning of the 20th, but the sun came out soon after noon and the rifle companies were cheered by the sight of the QM and his faithful crew and RSM Dalton with his ammunition truck, bringing up hot food and battle supplies through the shimmering heat and shell bursts. About this time Major Russell was wounded, and Capt. H. A. Maclean took over the command of "C", while Major A. W. Rogers had now assumed command of "B".

On May 22nd the Canadians were confronting the Hitler Line and adjusting their brigades for the attack. The PPCLI, Canadian Seaforths and the Carleton and Yorks were to open

the advance, strongly supported by tanks, and the preliminary bombardment filled the long valley with thunder. The weather was thundery as well, a muggy heat lay on the rolling farmlands as stifling as a blanket, and above the battle haze the clouds were gathering with a threat of rain.

As usual the Hitler Line was not visible as a "line" to the approaching infantry, who saw through the haze an apparently deserted landscape in which an occasional farmhouse or haystack was burning. This mysterious scene concealed a German force with infantry disposed in well-sited slit trenches; machine-guns, mortars and *nebelwerfers* hidden in every innocent coppice; strong-points established in every stone farmhouse, well bolstered with sandbags and with dug-outs under the earthen floor; tanks hidden in the shrubby folds, and artillery covering every approach. Hidden, too, were low belts of barbed wire cunningly disposed between the strong-points, with fields of Schu and Teller mines laid before them. The Hitler Line had been long prepared, and many German tanks had been dug in almost to turret depth amongst the young grain, which now had grown hip-deep, concealing every trace of digging but giving the swinging turret a perfect field of fire.

A good deal of this was apparent from the air, as the photographs of the airmen showed, and the Canadian artillery made good use of them. After their bloody experience at Ortona the infantry were rather sceptical, of course. They had seen too many German strong-points and dug-outs untouched by the most furious bombardment, but their tails were up, and on the morning of May 23rd the West Novas were betting cheerfully on the time required to break the line. The Regiment had breakfast in the summer dark at 4.30 A.M. and the companies moved into their forming-up places at first light, each with its supporting group of tanks. All this was accomplished without a hitch, the various units slipping into place with the perfection of a well-oiled machine, inspiring in itself. The staff work was perfect.

In front the Carleton and Yorks opened the 3rd Brigade attack amid a terrific blast of covering artillery. The German defence scheme naturally included a heavy barrage on the Canadian support area, and all through the morning the West



1. Orderly-room staff on the road.
2. Demolished house and concealed tank.
3. German tank taken by West Novas in the Lamone advance.
4. Bren gunner in the Hitler Line.
5. Padre Lawrence Wilmot M.C.
6. Mud and mobility.

Novas endured a constant burst of shells, mortar and *nebelwerfer* bombs. The supporting armour suffered severely, not only from the long range German barrage but by the direct fire of the cleverly dug-in enemy tanks and of self-propelled guns moving about in the copses by-passed by the attacking infantry. By noon there were blazing Churchill tanks in every West Nova company area, with eruptions of black oil smoke rolling low over the landscape and adding to the murk of battle.

This was a tragedy, for the Churchills belonged to the 51st Royal Tank Regiment, with which 3rd Brigade had trained for the battle and attained a perfection of friendship and cooperation. The scene as the West Novas slowly moved up behind the Carleton and Yorks is best described by Major Millard of "A" Company. "We had no sooner moved up than a German SP gun poked its ugly snout out of the bushes about 100 yards ahead and began to lace into the Carleton and Yorks, who were wide open along the road; but I don't think it got more than two shots away when a Piat bomb nailed it and the fire ceased. The ground position from then until we kicked off was unchanged. I tried to find the tank commander, going from one tank to another, pushing little buttons and waiting for them to open the port and pass out a head-phone set so I could talk to them in the racket. One tank commander told me that his squadron C/O, Major Hare, had two tanks shot out from under him already and was now in a third tank called 'Champion'. I found 'Champion', pushed the button and waited. No response. I pushed it again. No response. The turret was open so I climbed up to give Hare a shout — and saw that the tank had received a shell right through the side. Inside was a shambles.

"Just then Hare himself climbed out of another tank nearby. I asked him about the prospects and he answered that he had only five tanks left out of eighteen but he would try to round them up. Off he went through the trees and smoke. In about 20 minutes he returned, shouting for me to crawl under the tank with him, away from the shrapnel while he told me the bad news. There were no tanks left fit for action — his squadron was destroyed all but a few which were damaged beyond quick repair. Hare was a veteran of

the African desert campaign with a Military Cross, and he told me, 'I've seen some rough goes but this is the worst. My whole squadron's had it. I'm going up with a tommy-gun to fight with the Carleton and Yorks!' And away he went.

"I made my way back to 'A' Company's radio set through a scene such as I hope I'll never see again. The field behind the trees was a mass of shell holes, and there about a dozen tanks sat silent, half of them burning. One blew up with a sudden explosion and the turret flipped off like a pot cover. One smoking tank held two living men: the driver opened his small cover and crawled out with his overalls afire; then the turret lid flew open and the tank commander started to crawl out. He was injured and his clothes were blazing, and as he saw me approaching his eyes seemed to plead for help although he did not utter a word. I ran towards the tank, and one of our men jumped out of a slit trench and raced across on the same errand. Just as we reached it the tank blew up and hurled the tank commander through the air. He fell about 25 yards away. We crawled over to him — the air seemed to be full of bursting shells — but when we reached him he'd had it — for good.

"The driver was rolling himself over and over in the grass. We beat the flames from his coveralls, which were now charred crisp, and he was terribly burned. All he could utter was curses — no complaints, no sign of fear. We helped him over to the post where our own wounded were being collected and I went back to my slit trench. On the way I met Capt. A. H. Maclean of "C" Company, with half the flesh of his arm torn away by shrapnel. He had come over to have a talk with me and find out the situation of the tanks. I got the C/O on the radio and gave him the picture. I was told simply to wait. We waited and waited . . ."

There was nothing to do but wait, anywhere in the West Nova area now, until new tanks came up to support the attack, for without them an infantry advance was doomed to crippling losses before it got far enough into the German positions to be effective. Rain began in mid-morning in a tentative fashion that became a downpour in the afternoon.

Once more Capt. Whynacht's cooks and CQMS's rose to the occasion, bringing up a hot meal and the always-cheering mail, which were distributed promptly to the companies by jeeps, carriers and parties of men. The waiting continued, and the casualties continued, as the afternoon wore on, amongst them Capt. A. H. Maclean of "C" Company, who was replaced in the company command by Capt. H. M. Eisenhower. The medical officer, Capt. H. Mendelson, and stretcher-bearers and chaplain worked like Trojans to attend the wounded and get them out. The chaplain, H/Capt. Lawrence Wilmot, always on the spot where there was danger or trouble for his charges, here distinguished himself once more with his quiet energy and courage. By 4 P.M. the casualty list was long. For instance "A" Company, which had set out 107 strong, five days before now counted no more than 55. And still no tanks!

At last the tanks came rumbling up, a squadron of the Three Rivers Regiment, and the West Novas yelled a welcome. Only two or three minutes were allowed for the "marriage" between each group of these Shermans with the respective rifle companies, indeed as one West Nova officer put it, "All our tank liaison training went by the board. As they rolled into our position through the wrecks of the Churchills we just waved them on, got up, and started forward. Our plan was clear enough — to get forward out of that hell hole". It was just 4.30 P.M.

"A" and "B" companies led the advance, with "C" and "D" 200 yards behind. The preliminary bombardment and the efforts of the ill-fated Churchill tanks had made wide gaps in the German wire. The leading companies passed quickly through the sweating and bloody Carleton and Yorks, who called out, "Good luck, West Novas!" as the Bluenose lads went by. The New Brunswickers had fought their way to the Pontecorvo-Aquino road, along which lay the main defences of the Hitler Line. The fields and the roadside were littered with their dead and wounded, but there were many German bodies in the captured rifle pits and gun emplacements, with groups of disarmed and dishevelled prisoners straggling back, hands in air or clasped behind their heads.

The German battle positions extended in front of this highway, which ran across the Liri valley from San Oliva through the town of Pontecorvo to Aquino and gave the enemy a useful lateral road behind his front line. Once the 3rd Brigade got into the positions however this road was cut and the German forces holding Pontecorvo were under a sharp threat from the flank. Elsewhere the Germans were holding stiffly. On the Canadian left the 1st Brigade had got down to the west bank of the Liri but was there held up. On the Canadian right the 2nd Brigade had run into fierce German opposition and sustained heavy loss without much gain in ground. Thus by the fortune of war the 3rd Brigade had a golden opportunity. Only one good road out of Pontecorvo remained to the Germans, and that ran northward at an increasing angle to the Pontecorvo-Aquino road (on which the West Novas now stood) and from 1,000 yards to a mile behind it. With the second road in Canadian hands the strong German force holding Pontecorvo must pull out in a hurry or find itself cut off utterly — and with the fall of Pontecorvo, its main bastion, the Hitler Line was finished.

Brigadier Bernatchez saw the opportunity at once and ordered the West Novas forward to cut the inner road and hang on at all costs. And so to the Regiment came its supreme chance and its greatest glory in this war.

“A” and “B” companies attacked at once, keeping so close to the Canadian artillery barrage that several men were hit by it, but the risk paid off when the troops entered the German defences behind the Pontecorvo-Aquino road and caught the enemy (a battalion of the 90th Division) just scrambling out of their dugouts in the gully of the little Martino River to man their fighting posts. Many surrendered without a fight. A few posts held out but these were bypassed by the forward troops and mopped up by “C” and “D” companies as they came along.

The Martino gully proved to be much deeper than the maps had shown. Its steep banks were impassable for tanks, and the stream ran all the way along the front to Pontecorvo, where it joined the Liri River. Thus the supporting tanks were stopped by an unexpected obstacle, and the only way around was far to the north-east. However the West Novas

scrambled across the stream and pushed on alone in the flood of rain, passed through the German counter-barrage (which continued to fall behind them) and towards sunset reached the inner Pontecorvo road. On the way through the grain fields from the Rio Martino they had met spotty resistance from enemy troops hastily gathered up and flung into the gap. These had been overcome, with a large mixed bag of prisoners, officers and men of several regiments including some paratroopers, a queer assortment evidently scraped up in groups at the German rear and sent along the road without a clear idea of where they were going or what to do when they got there.

The road was littered with limbs from the shell-blasted trees along the way, and as "A" Company stepped out upon it a German despatch-rider came tearing along, hurtling recklessly over these obstacles, heading for Pontecorvo. Sergeant Rafuse of No. 8 platoon promptly shot him off his motorcycle with a burst of tommy-gun bullets fired from the hip. Except for scattered rifle shots the German resistance had ceased by this time, and prisoners continued to stream in from all sides. The road itself was a puzzle, a narrow gravel highway running northward along a low wooded ridge between the Rio Martino and the hollow of the Liri River a mile or more to the south-west. Could this be the "main road" described as the Regiment's objective? The smoky haze and the nature of the ground, thickly dotted with trees and copses, made it impossible to see far in any direction. One thing was certain: since the Regiment's object was to cut the main communication of the Germans in Pontecorvo a further advance was all to the good. Consequently the West Novas pushed on across the road and took up positions beyond, along the ridge.

From right to left the company positions, now that the Regiment had deployed, were as follows. "B" Company was digging in amongst the trees and thickets just west of the road. "A" Company was on a bushy spur west of the road. "C" Company was well beyond the road on the south-west end of the ridge, grouped about a small farmhouse masked with trees. "D" Company had descended into the fields well west of the road and occupied a group of farm buildings about 1,000 yards from Pontecorvo itself. Thus by sundown each

company was able to radio the C/O giving the code word for "objective reached". (The word was "Caporetto", a name with significant memories of World War One.)

And now things began to happen. It was true that the West Novas in their determined rush had cut the main road out of Pontecorvo and now stood determined to hold it despite the perils of their lonely situation. But the Germans still had two third-rate roads in their possession. One of these ran along the east bank of the Liri, under fire from the 1st Brigade and the French troops in the hills across the river, and therefore useless to the enemy. The other ran up the valley under the flank of the wooded ridge on which the West Novas lay, and screened from their view by the intervening thickets and folds. Along this road the Germans quickly gathered troops and tanks for a counter-attack. At the same time the German commander in Pontecorvo, now aware of the menace at his rear, sent a strong force of troops and tanks to cut their way out along the main road. Thus the Regiment soon found itself attacked along its whole front, as well as its left flank, and finally from its rear.

It had been presumed, indeed reported, that the 48th Highlanders were on the West Novas' left flank, and the first notice that they were not came when "D" Company perceived large numbers of German infantry moving through the grain fields from that direction. Capt. J. K. "Dusty" Rhodes of "D" Company promptly called for artillery fire on that area, and when it was not forthcoming he asked that the C/O come to the phone. The resulting radio conversation — all in clear — is given here verbatim.

Lt. Col. Waterman : "I can't give you artillery fire on that position — the Highlanders are there."

Capt. Rhodes : "Then, sir, they're wearing damned funny helmets!"

Lt. Col. Waterman : "Very well, 'Dusty' — but .on your head be it!"

Capt. Rhodes : "For God's sake not on my head, sir — on theirs!"

Lt. Col. Waterman : "Roger!"

The resulting artillery shoot, laid on with great accuracy, created havoc with the German troops and for a time forced

their tanks to cover, but not before one of them had wiped out a "D" Company section near a large house on the left flank.

Similarly "C" Company (Capt. H. M. Eisenhower) soon found itself menaced by a German tank supporting the infantry attack. The company had captured a German anti-tank gun in taking the farm, and found a lorry full of ammunition for it in one of the sheds — but the gun was damaged and none of the West Novas knew how to make it work. Fortunately the German tank commander seemed puzzled about his exact objective, for he opened his turret and scanned the ridge slope with his field glasses. A burst of Bren fire caused him to drop inside quickly, and the tank rolled away and disappeared into a fold.

While this was going on Major John Millard of "A" Company, on the spur where the road mounted the ridge, crept forward with some of his men for a look into the valley. They were greeted by a blast of machine-gun fire and were startled to see below a force of German infantry and tanks, evidently preparing to mount a counter-attack. With nothing but a few short-ranged Piats for defence against tanks this was serious, and Millard decided to pull back his company and dig in astride the road, where the Regiment's 6-pdr. anti-tank guns could be expected before long. In the meantime the artillery observer with "A" Company, Capt. Robinson, directed by radio a battery shoot on the gully. "A" Company in its new position could not see the results. "D" Company, down in the valley far to the left, were able to look up the gully, a broad rift in the slope, and saw the Canadian shells play havoc with the German troops assembling in it. But this was not known until much later. At the time "A" Company was digging in close to the road along the spur, expecting a violent attack from the west at any moment. Major Millard conferred with Major Rogers of "B" Company, which was now dug in west of the road and to "A's" right, and told him of "A's" changed position. At the same time Millard despatched a runner to warn "C" and "D" companies that he had pulled back to the road. Unfortunately the runner was shot down by German soldiers crouching in a nearby grain field and the message did not get through.

And now occurred the most astounding episode of the battle. While the West Nova companies were digging in and engaged in beating off persistent German attacks from the west

and south-west, a well-led and determined German force from Pontecorvo had crept through the waist-high grain along the south-easterly side of the road, well past the rear of "D" and "C" companies. And now, in the twilight, it fell upon "A" from the flank and rear. The first notice of this attack came when a German soldier jumped up in the tall green wheat close to "A" Company HQ, well to the east of the road, and fired a Schmeisser automatic pistol point-blank at Major Millard and three others who were standing together in conference. The bullets missed Millard but hit the three others, including Capt. Robinson the artillery observer, and in a moment the survivors of "A" Company HQ found themselves in their slit trenches fighting for their lives.

The platoons digging in across the road were not visible owing to intervening thickets, but a sudden hullabaloo of shots and voices there gave witness that the company itself had been similarly surprised. "There were sporadic rifle shots, one burst of tommy-gun, several bursts of Schmeisser, some shouting, a series of single shots towards the road, some indistinguishable voices, and then silence." Millard and his companions did not know what to make of this, but fifteen minutes later Lieut. C. A. Irving and Cpl. Mackinnon crawled in with shocking news. The forward platoons, busy digging in, with weapons laid aside, depending on the sentries watching towards the west and south-west, had been taken completely unawares by German infantry that sprang "from nowhere". The sentries had been shot as they turned to see the cause of the commotion, together with the men who managed to snatch up their weapons, and the survivors had been taken prisoner and marched off in a northerly direction along the road.

The spotlight now shifts to "B" Company (Major A. W. Rogers) dug in amongst the ridge copses west of the road and to "A's" right, and busy fending off German infantry and tank attacks from the woods on the flank of the ridge (La Fornella) to their front. After the troops from Pontecorvo had overwhelmed "A" Company the German commander apparently assumed that he had taken out the only Canadian force in his way, for he formed up his men, ordered the "A" Company prisoners to march ahead with their hands up, and set off along the road towards the north.

"B" Company had heard the commotion to their left rear and were astonished to behold twenty or thirty West Novas marching up the road, weaponless and with their hands in air, and followed by a column of German troops. Dusk was closing down and in the deceptive gloaming under the trees for a moment they could not believe their eyes. The situation was solved by a quick-witted pair of "B" Company machine-gunners, Ptes. Walter Peach and R. L. Hall, who fired a burst of Bren bullets over the heads of the prisoners as a signal to "duck", and then swung their gun on the German column itself. Peach and Hall paid for their quick decision with their lives, for the first burst of German fire killed both of them. But by that time the prisoners had dived to earth at the roadside, and "B" Company, swiftly turning its rifles and Brens, was mowing down the German troops, a perfect target on the road behind. It was all over in a minute. Not a German escaped.

Thus the prisoners were freed a few dramatic minutes after their capture, but all were unarmed and all convinced that "A" Company's old position was thoroughly in German hands. This was not quite correct. Although German troops were still swarming up the road from Pontecorvo, or rather through the grain beside it (all unseen by "D" Company and merely suspected by "C", who had seen at a long distance the "A" Company men marched off) Major Millard and Lieut. Irving had gathered eight survivors of "A" Company and were holding a few slit trenches about "A" Company HQ on the south-east side of the road. Of the lonely ten, the artillery observer and another man were *hors de combat*. Another (whose name remains unknown) had an arm broken by a machine-gun bullet but insisted on fighting. Lieut. Irving and Cpl. Mackinnon volunteered to collect a Bren gun, a Piat and suitable ammunition, and work forward to the road in an effort to stop the Germans using it, while Millard, his batman Gillis, CSM Nauss and the others held off the Germans coming through the grain.

All this left "D" Company, posted in farmhouses down in the valley 700 or 800 yards to the left (and well to the west of the road) in a most dangerous position, of which the Germans took advantage. At last light the enemy attacked from the front with a Mark 4 tank and infantry, and from the left

flank with two Mark 4 tanks and infantry. After a sharp fight the German infantry were driven to ground by Bren and rifle fire, leaving many dead and wounded about "D" Company's positions. The tanks, discouraged by Piat bombs in the dusk, finally withdrew. This was just as well, for by that time "D" had one Piat left in working order.

"C" Company (Capt. H. M. Eisenhower) on the ridge spur between "D" and the Germans who had over-run "A", also was left in air. Eisenhower, from his post in the farmhouse, had seen at a long distance in the failing light a group of men marching in a northerly direction along the road at his right rear. Some had their hands in air and he thought they were all German prisoners, but the keen eyes of Sergeant B. W. Gehue, a sniper, detected the Canadian uniforms. It was a puzzle to know how this had come about in the heart of the Regiment's positions. Apparently "C" Company now was practically surrounded by German troops. This seemed confirmed when a tank opened fire on Eisenhower's farmhouse (the bullets came right through the walls) from the direction of "B" Company. This may have been a Canadian tank supporting "B" Company against attacks from the gully on the southwest, but in any case the situation was doubtful and to meet it Eisenhower moved half of "C" Company down close to "D" and the other half to a house lying between "D" Company and the Pontecorvo road.

Thus the situation when darkness came was bad, indeed desperate. "C" and "D" companies were cut off towards Pontecorvo, well in the German rear, while "B" Company was equally isolated on the ridge to the north-east. Between the two groups was a handful of "A" Company survivors on the spur beside the Pontecorvo road. Major Millard's radio batteries were now very weak, but he had managed to inform the C/O of his disaster and his present strength. Lt. Col. Waterman acted promptly. A troop of tanks of the Three Rivers Regiment was sent up to support "B" Company, together with the West Nova scouts and snipers and various other personnel scraped up at Battalion HQ. Major J. R. Cameron (the Battle 2 i/c) also went up to examine the chances of getting forward the support weapons. Finally the C/O sent forward on foot

the Carrier Platoon (Lieut. C. H. Smith), charging Smith to use his own judgement about the situation on the spur.

All this was accomplished, despite the difficulties of movement across country in the approaching darkness. The whole area about "B" Company was alive with German troops, who could be heard moving and talking, especially in the bushy ravine towards the north-west. But an occasional rifle shot from the direction of "A" Company's old position suggested that some sort of defence was still in being there. There was still a trace of light in the western sky, and Lieut. Smith determined to push over to "A" Company's old position with the men of his platoon and see what was going on. He secured the support of three of the tanks, who were to cover his movement and then return to "B" Company. This they did.

When Smith and his eighteen men arrived on the knoll in the gathering darkness they found Major Millard, CSM Enos Nauss and a handful of men defending a farmhouse and two or three slit trenches on the south-east side of the Pontecorvo road, near its junction with the small farm lane. At the edge of the Pontecorvo road were Lieut. Irving and three men, crouching in the ditch. This heroic four had shot down several German groups moving up the road and for good measure had knocked out a German lorry with a Piat bomb. By chance the lorry contained supplies for a German field canteen, on which the four West Novas had managed to ease their hunger. Smith, astonished to find so few in this dangerous position, suggested that they unite with the group about "A" Company HQ. Charles Irving's reply was worthy of the motto of the Regiment. He answered simply, "No, my men and I have stuck it out here and we're going to stay — and die, if necessary".

The dusk was weird with the cries of German wounded lying along the road and stumbling about the open on the farther side, and while Smith was considering how to dispose his men there was a sudden outburst of small-arms fire and grenade explosions at the left rear. He hastened back and found his platoon shooting hard into the fields towards the south. The Germans were coming through the wheat again, as they had done when their advanced force "jumped" A Company. It was now pitch dark, and Smith ordered his

machine-gunners with their four Brens to shift their positions from time to time along the farm lane to give the Germans a false impression of their number. The Carrier Platoon, although reduced by casualties, were in stout heart and comparatively fresh, having come late into this particular battle, and far into the night they bluffed the Germans with these tactics. Nor was their defence purely passive. From time to time in parties led by Sergeant L. J. Newcombe (who later received the Military Medal for this night's work) and Cpls. H. L. Woodworth and B. Bertrand they made forays into the grain on the lower slope, taking several wounded and unwounded prisoners. Also Smith hunted up one of "A" Company's mortars in the dark and proceeded to make things hot for the Germans in the old forward positions to the westward of the Pontecorvo road.

As the little mob of prisoners grew they were grouped about a large tree and told that they would be shot down if they attempted to escape. Towards midnight Lieut. Smith made his way to "B" Company for a fresh supply of grenades and to inform Major A. W. Rogers of the situation on the spur. He then returned to his platoon with Cpl. Burnet.

Thus by 1 A.M. the situation of the West Novas was in a sense restored but still perilous. All ranks were exhausted by the past week's continuous marching and fighting, and the rifle companies had lost from 20% to 60% of their effectives killed and wounded since going into action on the 17th. The link between the two halves of the Regiment, just where the Pontecorvo road mounted the ridge, still consisted of Millard's exhausted group, Irving's gallant handful, and Smith and Sergeant Alonzo Campbell and their seventeen Carrier-men.

It was now early morning of May 24th. In each company area the wounded had been gathered and attended but there were no blankets to cover them and the rain was still falling. Sounds of German movement continued in the rainy dark all along the Regiment's front but there was no further attack until dawn. For a large part of the night "D" Company, still busily engaged to its front and flank, heard sounds of transport moving along the highway past its rear. Rhodes had established an all-round defence and his men were still very much on their guard, but they assumed the sounds to mean

friendly forces moving up from Pontecorvo, where the 1st Brigade had been thundering away all the previous day.

Actually the First Brigade did not enter Pontecorvo until after daylight of the 24th, and these nocturnal sounds were made by part of the main German force pulling out with a number of tanks and half-track vehicles. The efforts of Smith, Irving and their men on the spur discouraged further German efforts to fight their way out along the highway, and the enemy apparently drew off the road just short of the spur and made their way by a cart-track through the fields towards the north-west. The Germans' failure to crush "C" and "D" in their isolated position with superior infantry and armour must be ascribed to the stout defence put up by these companies during the previous evening, to the accurate Canadian artillery support, and to the uncertainty of the situation on the ridge.

As dawn broke the weary West Novas beheld a cheering sight — groups of Sherman tanks of the 5th Canadian (Armoured) Division coming up through the shattered Hitler Line. They were just in time to help the tired men on the ridge beat off the final German attack. During the night the enemy had worked up a tank close to Lieut. Irving's position on the spur, and hidden it behind a house a short distance west of the road. The long barrel of its 88mm. gun was the first thing the West Novas saw in the grey light of morning. Before it could get into action however one of the oncoming Shermans spotted it and threw in two quick shots, one of which exploded inside and set it afire. A thick column of black oil smoke rolled up to the morning sky, an omen for the German infantry, who left a few snipers and withdrew.

The most serious threat of the morning developed towards dawn on the Regiment's right, where Rogers and "B" Company were still holding like a rock. The Germans had gathered a considerable force of infantry and tanks in the shelter of a shallow ravine about 500 yards from "B" Company's front, and now pushed up under the screen of the copses on the west slope of the ridge. The Shermans went into action at once and the attack was broken up so thoroughly that the men of "B" were able to gather a number of prisoners with ease.

On the far left flank the Germans had withdrawn in the darkness, and the only danger came at dawn when a troop of

Shermans in their zeal opened fire on the houses held by "D" and "C". A runner from "D" warned them in the nick of time. Probably the last shot in the battle was fired by a German sniper on the bloodstained spur, where Cpl. H. L. Woodworth of the Carrier Platoon, engaged in burying one of "A" Company's dead, was killed by the single bullet. It was a typical German act, and the West Novas long remembered it.

So ended a hectic day and night, in which the Regiment had slashed its way past the Hitler Line into the enemy's rear, held on against every effort to dislodge it, and forced all but the German rearguard out of Pontecorvo. The action had been well planned and well fought, and for his leadership Lt. Col. Waterman was awarded the Distinguished Service Order.

During the morning of May 24th the Regiment withdrew behind the Pontecorvo road while the Irish Regiment of Canada and the tanks of the 5th Armoured Division took up the pursuit of the enemy. Parties were sent to salvage the weapons and equipment scattered over the battlefield and to bury the dead, and with this always melancholy task the West Novas ended their immediate labours and got a blessed night's rest.

Again many familiar faces were missing from the bivouac. Amongst the veterans killed were Pte. Raymond J. Goyetche, who had been wounded previously on the Arielli; Pte. Ernest Norton, previously wounded at Jelsi, and Pte. Levi Roy, previously wounded on the Arielli. The wounded included such veterans as Ptes. James Bennet, Barton Gaetz and L/Cpl. Horace Covey, all of whom had been wounded at Catenanuova; Pte. James L. Gallant, previously wounded on the Sangro Heights; Pte. Charles Lowe, previously wounded at Potenza; Ptes. Thomas Murphy, Henry Regan, Donald Smith and Cpl. George Davis, all previously wounded at Ortona; Ptes. Byron Delaney, John Gaddes and George Mill, all previously wounded on the Arielli.

Sergeant William S. Joudrey was amongst the killed, and the wounded included sergeants Donald Cleghorn and Karl Cook, and CSM Feldon Hamm. The officers wounded were Majors W. C. Allan and A. M. Russell, Capt. A. H. Maclean, and Lieuts. R. P. Neil, G. F. Prat and R. N. Knowles. "Bud" Knowles, who had commanded "B" Company for a time dur-

ing the early part of the fighting and shown fearless leadership throughout, later died of his wounds in hospital.

Most of the dead were buried where they fell, but Padre Wilmot managed to collect the bodies of fourteen where the Regiment passed over the Pontecorvo-Aquino road, close to a dug-in German tank which had done great damage before it was destroyed. Here they were buried in a small plot on the east side of the road immediately opposite a small Italian wayside shrine.

In this as in most of their battles the West Novas never knew how many Germans they killed or how many they sent scrambling back to the POW cages. The Regiment was too busy to count them, living or dead. The prisoners they took in this one battle certainly numbered several hundred. As for the German dead, the path of the West Novas through the Hitler Line, across the little gully of the Rio Martino and on to the second ridge and road was strewn with grey-green corpses of the Wehrmacht. The stretch of the main Pontecorvo road along the ridge, and the woods and trampled grain fields about it, were a sight for the morbidly curious for days. It was a charnel-house.

The last of the Regiment's wounded was evacuated from the battlefield at 4 P.M. on May 24th. Meanwhile the 5th Armoured Division, hard on the heels of the beaten enemy, had reached an obstacle in the Melfa River, a tributary of the Liri five miles or so from the Hitler Line. The Canadian armour was eager to plunge on as soon as a bridgehead could be established, indeed its reconnaissance tanks had succeeded in crossing the stream at one point but the German command had sent in its last tank reserves and fought a desperate battle to drive them back. The establishment of a bridgehead farther down the river was urgent and it called for infantry. Up went the 1st Division.

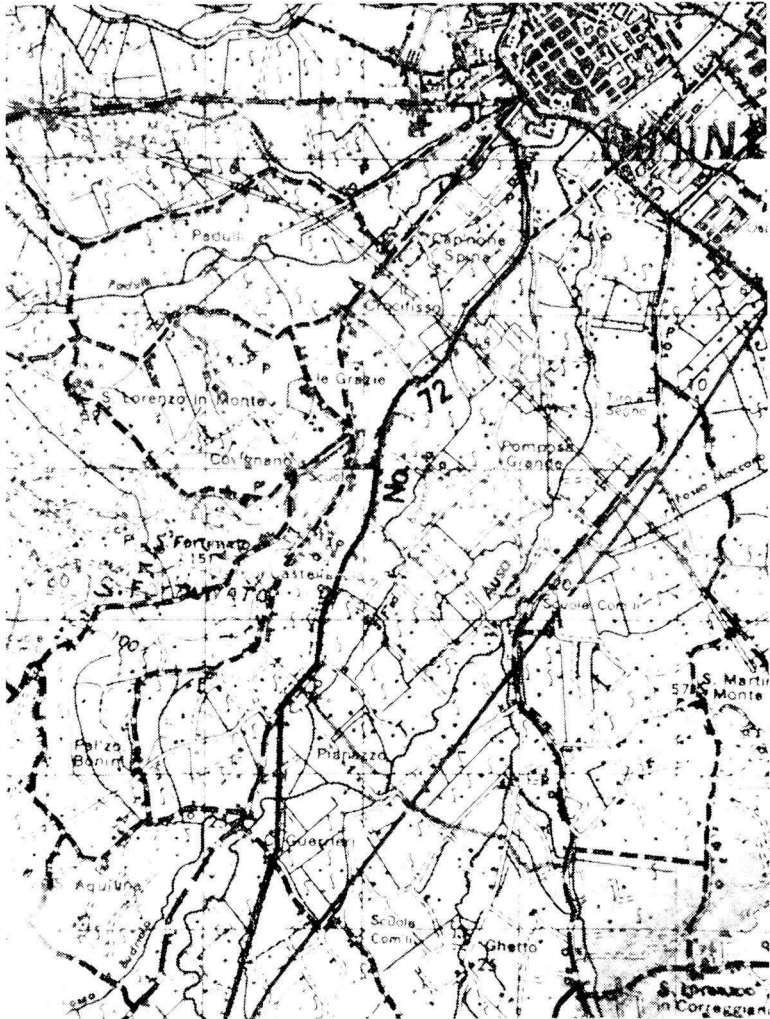
The West Novas marched off with 3rd Brigade on the morning of May 25th and soon reached the scene. The 3rd Brigade objective was a wide but shallow ford of the Melfa just above the point where it joined the Liri. It was a wicked-looking spot as the West Novas approached, with low and

open ground extending down to the south bank, then a gravel flat 200 yards wide, a shallow but rapid stream running down from the nearby hills, and on the farther side a fairly steep bank. It was a perfect situation for the German defence. Fortunately the enemy was too disorganized after his mauling in the Hitler Line to establish his infantry along the Melfa, and the Canadian tanks had given him no time in any case.

Instead the Germans fought a delaying action with a screen of infantry and machine-guns covering the north bank from the slopes behind, and concentrations of artillery, *nebelwerfer* and mortar fire in the region of the blown bridges and the fords. This was bad enough. With the Carleton and Yorks on their flank the West Nova rifle companies made a dash for it. By keeping five yards apart, crouching low and moving in well spaced waves the men reached the north bank with only one fatal casualty, although there were many narrow escapes. The Support Company also got across safely, but the pioneer platoon was not so lucky. As the West Novas appeared on the north bank the Germans redoubled their fire, and progress was slow as the forward companies worked their way towards the higher ground, diving into small stream beds and gullies whenever the "88's" and "moaning Minnies" sought a particular target.

The Regiment crossed the Melfa about 5.30 in the afternoon and all through the long summer twilight it marched more or less on its stomach, like the army of Napoleon. The approach of dusk enabled the rifle companies to push on to their objectives boldly. "C" and "D" companies had got well forward by way of the gully of the little Rio Sorrire, and at dusk Lieut. G. L. Drew led his platoon of "D" Company over a small ridge to reconnoitre the bridge over another brook beyond. As he reached the top of the rise in the failing light Drew met a German soldier heading straight towards him with a light machine-gun. Drew pressed the trigger of his tommy-gun but it failed to fire, so he threw it aside and attacked the German with his fists and quickly beat him into submission.

There were one or two other adventures in the dark, but the German soldiers remaining were probably stragglers, for when Lieut. T. J. Keefe led a "C" Company patrol up to the company's objective a party of Italians in a house along the



Field map showing San Lorenzo (bottom right), the Ausa river, and the ridge of San Fortunato (centre left). The last positions of the Gothic Line.



1. Anti-tank gun and crew.
3. Col. Ralston visits the Regiment after Gothic Line fighting.
5. Helping a casualty into a jeep.
7. Lieut. Taylor, Capt. Harvey Jones M.C., Capt. McCallum.

2. West Nova officers and a casualty.
4. German railway demolition, Italy.
6. Col. Waterman and Major John Cameron.
8. Lieut. Kirk and Colonel Ralston.

way informed him "Tutti Tedesci via!" and provided two guides for the rest of the journey. "C" Company was on the left of the Regiment, and during the night Capt. Eisenhower sent a patrol under Lieut. J. Reid down to the Liri bank, where a bridge crossed the river at a small Italian town. The bridge was found to be passable, and as General Juin's French troops were known to be moving up the bank a careful watch was kept for them. Soon after daylight on May 26th French troops were seen moving on the West Nova left, and "C" Company moved up to cover the bridge. During the day the German artillery fired "air-burst" shells over the bridge from time to time but the West Novas were dug in to the north of it and suffered no casualties.

By this time the 5th Division's tanks, guns and troops were pouring through the various Melfa bridgeheads and hitting straight up the valley. As the Cape Breton Highlanders passed through the West Nova positions the two Bluenose units exchanged grins and greetings. The 1st Division's part in the great drive up the Liri was finished at last, and Lt. Col. Waterman visited his companies to congratulate them on the fight the Regiment had made. The West Novas now had been marching and fighting and digging with little rest for ten terrific days and nights, and since they entered the battle on May 17th they had lost 51 killed, 170 wounded and 20 missing. The strain on the company commanders had been especially severe, and Major R. G. Thexton took over "A" Company from Major Millard, Capt. J. H. Jones M. C. took over "B" Company from Major A. W. Rogers, and Capt. Allan Nicholson took over "D" Company from Capt. J. K. Rhodes.

Padre Wilmot gathered the dead at the Melfa crossing. Fortunately they were few, and their graves were made in the garden of a house near the river which had been used as the regimental aid post.

CHAPTER 20

The summer's rest and the battle of Foglia River

The West Novas spent the last days of May encamped north of the Hitler Line battlefield. Reinforcements arrived to replace the heavy casualties. Church parades were resumed. A vigorous sports program produced amongst other things a crack softball team, and there were some memorable games. One sunny afternoon a troupe composed of Canadian soldiers and CWAC's put on a fine vaudeville show while the Regiment sat and watched from a natural grassy amphitheatre.

On June 1st the West Novas were settled in the region of Pofi, by the Sacco River, where a mobile bath unit was put to good use. A Salvation Army canteen provided free tea and refreshments. There were even a barber and a watch-repairer in this fortunate place. There was an EFI issue of cigarettes, chocolate and beer. The West Nova softball team covered itself with glory, defeating the Carleton and Yorks, the Royal 22nd, and finally a picked team of 3rd Brigade in a series of fast and well-played games.

The breaking of the Hitler Line and the pursuit across the Melfa had enabled the 5th Army on the coast to link up with the beach-head at Anzio and add its own threat to the German defence of Rome. The bloody defeat in the Liri valley had

shattered several of Kesselring's best divisions and cost him valuable equipment and transport. Combined with the Eighth Army's pressure on the Adriatic coast and the incessant air bombing of his long vulnerable communications these affairs forced a decision that he had long postponed — the evacuation of the Italian capital and a retreat to the upper end of the peninsula. It came at a time when his troops had been badly mauled and disorganized, and to prevent the retreat from becoming a rout he was obliged to bring in several fresh divisions — one all the way from Denmark — and this at the very time when the great Allied blow across the English Channel was about to fall, when the German army in northern France needed every man Hitler could muster.

And so on June 4th the British-American forces of Sir Harold Alexander entered Rome, the first Axis capital to fall. On June 6th the Allies struck their great blow across the English Channel into Normandy. The two dates are significant, for in them is the whole story of the Allies' strategy in western Europe.

On June 7th the West Novas were issued with new khaki berets. The beret had been a great change from the old wedge cap, and as 700 men were bound to find as many ways of wearing it the result was as novel as the headgear. Eventually for inspections the beret was given a standard rake, but strict uniformity was impossible even then, and to the end of the war the beret remained the Canadian soldier's one imperishable touch of individuality.

The Canadian Corps now moved back to the Volturno valley to recoup and train for the next great thrust. The 1st Division was grouped about the town of Piedmonte d'Alife, at the foot of the Apennines, whither the West Novas journeyed by motor transport on June 9th. Battalion HQ was set up near the village of Gioia, and here the Regiment remained for many weeks engaged in vigorous training in the hot Italian sun. Sport was not neglected, indeed in some ways it was the foremost feature of the Division program. On June 15th at the Brigade sports the West Nova athletes carried off the honours, winning 51 points against 18 for the Carleton and Yorks and

10 for the Royal 22nd Regiment, with the result that the blue-cross Nova Scotia flag was at the mast-head all through the day. However the liveliest feature of the Brigade meet was a "polo" game on mule back between officers of 3rd Brigade and the 9th Field Ambulance, in which Brigadier Bernatchez distinguished himself and his team by winning three goals.

In the Division sports meet at Teleso on June 24th (won with a narrow margin by the divisional artillery) the West Nova tug-of-war team defeated the Saskatoon Light Infantry in the finals with two straight pulls. Here again the crown of the show was a mule contest, or rather a race between staff jockeys mounted on unwilling mules. The mules, encouraged by their passionate Italian owners and a crowd of yellingurchins, not to mention the riders, galloped gaily off in all directions with a fine Italian disregard for the winning post, with the result that Lt. Col. Hutchins of the Anti-Tank Regiment, riding a mule called "Calamity", arrived first, while Major General Vokes, on "Hairless Joe", came in a bad last with the mule's angry owner pushing beast and Vokes over the finish line.

On June 29th there was a Brigade sniper's contest on the range near Graci, and again the West Nova team, composed of Ptes. Val Young, Rafuse and "Snake-Eye" Gates, carried off the honours. In the light of all these matters the West Novas moved with a cocky air, and with good reason. The Regiment's record, in battle and out of it, was now famous in the Canadian Corps.

These were healthy, happy days, with all ranks sunburned to the tint of a Sam Brown belt. The K. of C. and other auxiliary units put on picture shows which all enjoyed despite the grim relation of their titles. (The first four movies shown to the West Novas after their return from the Liri battles were entitled, "The First of the Few", "Stormy Weather", "You've Got Me Covered" and "They Died With Their Boots On"!)

The men were permitted to visit their friends in hospital at Caserta and elsewhere, following the example of Major F. E. Hiltz and Padre Wilmot. There were frequent leaves to Naples, Pompei and Salerno, and some lucky (or merely enterprising) souls even got to Rome, despite the MP's and the signs ten miles out of the city reading, "Rome Out Of Bounds —

Turn Back Now!" Apart from these diversions Padre Wilmot with his usual insight took over an abandoned chapel in the battalion area and converted it into a reading room for men who wished simple seclusion and quiet — very rare in the hurlyburly of camp life. For Protestant soldiers of the Regiment a church-membership school was held at Lake Metese, where many were baptised; and 80 Anglican soldiers went on with Padre Wilmot to All Saints Church (of England) at Rome, where they were confirmed in a special ceremony conducted by the Bishop of Lichfield. The many Roman Catholic soldiers in the Regiment also had an opportunity to visit the home of their mother faith, and some of them had the privilege of a meeting with the Pope.

All through the month of July the training went on, with emphasis on infantry-tank cooperation. In the course of exercises with "C" Squadron, 48th Royal Tank Regiment, the West Novas developed a strong and lasting friendship with Major Fred Haigg and his men and learned not merely the art of riding on tanks but the more intricate business of getting inside, driving the machines, and firing the cannon and machine-guns.

On July 29th the 1st Division began to move up gradually towards the new front, and the West Novas departed from Piedmonte d'Alife with its pleasant memories and encamped for the night just south of Rome. On the following day the Regiment passed through the Eternal City, rolling along in their motor transport in the fine hot weather, up the famous river Tiber and through the Sabini Mountains to the open country about Foligno and Assisi, on the highway from Rome across to Ancona on the Adriatic Sea.

On August 2nd they were on the move again. The weather continued hot and the motor column rolled up a cloud of dust, so that all ranks were glad of a halt which enabled them to strip and swim for two happy hours in a lake near Castelina. The Regiment rolled on to Castelina and there encamped for almost a week, in the heart of the Chianti Hills, a country of steep sunny vineyards which produce the famous red Chianti wine. Here Lt. Col. Waterman addressed each company in turn, telling the officers and men something of the Canadians' role in the coming battle.

After the breaking of the Hitler Line and the fall of Rome, and while the Canadian Corps was resting and training at Piedmonte d'Alife, the retreating Germans had been pursued up the peninsula by the Fifth and Eighth armies. Stiffened by his new divisions the enemy was able to fight sharp rearguard actions on the way, notably at Arezzo in mid-July, but by July 19th American troops were in the great port of Leghorn on the Ligurian Sea, and Polish troops had taken Ancona on the Adriatic side. The advanced troops now had reached the outer positions of a strong new German line running across Italy roughly from Pisa to Rimini. Kesselring's men called it the Gothic Line.

The western half of the Gothic Line had a natural moat in the wide and deep River Arno, flowing down to the Ligurian Sea through the ancient city of Florence. The eastern half extended over the Apennine mountains to the coastal shelf on the Adriatic where (as usual) the rolling farms and vineyards were deeply scored by a succession of small rivers, the chief of which were the Metauro, Foglia, Marano and Ausa, all running across the Eighth Army's line of advance, and separated by parallel ridges carefully entrenched and fortified by the German engineers and their forced Italian labour. Sir Harold Alexander, commanding the Allied armies in Italy, had resolved to break the Gothic Line on the Adriatic side where the rivers were low and fordable in the summer drought and therefore practicable for tank-and-infantry assault.

To misinform the Germans via the Italian grapevine telegraph, units of the Canadian 1st Division were sent into the western area in the early days of August, there to complete their training for the coming battle on the east. The West Novas moved in succession from Castelina to a point near Florence, then to Sienna, and finally to a week-long bivouac near Perugia, where river-crossing tactics again were thoroughly drilled. Some units of 1st Brigade actually put in an appearance in the front line through the embattled city of Florence, spent some days, and then removed their regimental and division flashes and slipped away. The division finally assembled at Perugia, where representative officers of all Canadian units were addressed by Sir Oliver Leese of the Eighth Army on the coming battle and its objectives. The immediate object was the breaking of

the Gothic Line and the seizure of Rimini, whence the important cross-country railway ran through Bologna to Milan. If a break-through was achieved, the enemy would be pursued into the great Po plain. The Eighth Army's ultimate object was the passage of the Tyrolese Alps and an invasion of southern Germany.

In the latter half of August the West Novas moved towards the Adriatic through Jesi and Moddeno, staying a few days at each place, and on Aug. 27th arrived within sound of the guns a few miles north of Ancona. The job of clearing out the advanced positions of the Gothic Line had been commenced by a Polish division and was finished by the Canadians on the 25th, when the 1st and 2nd Brigades attacked across the historic Metauro River and pushed the Germans back to the Foglia. The Foglia River was believed to be the main German line of defence. Actually the battle zone of the Gothic Line had been laid out in considerable depth, and it included not only the ridge behind the Foglia but the successive ridges behind the Marano and Ausa streams.

On Aug. 28th the West Novas marched into Cartoceto (taken by 1st Brigade), a heap of ruins still under sporadic German shell-fire, and there prepared for action, checking weapons and equipment, scribbling brief letters and receiving communion at services in each company area arranged by Padre Wilmot. The chances of war are uncertain and as action opens the soldier's fortune is mercifully veiled, but in truth the Regiment now was facing its toughest and most bloody battle in this war.

On the night of the 29th the West Novas moved into the front, taking over the positions of the 48th Highlanders on the high ground facing the little valley of the Foglia, and sending patrols down the slope to explore the crossings of the stream. The patrols reported the river 30 yards wide but shallow and readily fordable — in fact they had crossed it without difficulty and without being fired upon. This mysterious silence seemed to confirm two Italian civilians, who reported to the Intelligence Officer (Capt. R. E. Campbell) that the "Tedesci" had with-

drawn to the slopes behind the river, leaving the whole area heavily mined.

Several days after the Foglia line was broken, Capt. H. M. Eisenhauer found in the village of Pozzo Alto the war diary of the German battalion which had defended this part of the river against the West Nova attack. There were maps attached showing the Germans' fire plan, and the diary described in detail the whole action. The Germans had a company of infantry in the village of Borgo San Maria (the West Novas' first objective) and a company on the forward slope of each of the two hills between which the road went up from Borgo San Maria to Pozzo Alto. In addition to their own light machine-guns, these companies were supported by heavy machine-guns on both hills, by 12 cm. mortars, and by anti-tank guns in the valley beyond. In Pozzo Alto there was an 88 mm. cannon, and north of that at least two big tank turrets, complete with revolving machinery and cannon, set deep in concrete emplacements, with a field of fire that extended right across to the West Nova side of the river. To complete these formidable defences the enemy had a broad belt of Schu mines concealed across his front some distance back from the river. Under the German fire plan the Canadians would enter a perfect "killing ground" soon after they crossed the stream. This proved to be the case, and all that prevented a massacre was the fact that the Germans ran short of mortar ammunition as the West Novas withdrew.

All this was in the immediate and bloody future when, at 4 P.M. on Aug. 30th, "B" Company (Capt. J. H. Jones M.C.) pushed across the stream to secure the high ground towards Borgo San Maria, while "A" Company (Major R. G. Thexton), "C" Company (Capt. S. D. Smith) and "D" Company (Major Allan Nicholson) established a bridgehead. The Canadian artillery laid down a heavy barrage; but the Germans (having refused to reveal their fire positions when the West Nova patrols crossed the river) remained almost untouched, and as the Regiment appeared on the north bank the ground sprouted in their faces under a sudden and extremely accurate barrage of shells and mortar bombs.

It was the Ortona affair all over again, with the enemy sitting in deep and well concealed trenches and weapon pits on

the high ground overlooking the whole approach. Every range was "taped", every fold in the lower slope covered by fire from the front or flank. As at Ortona the Regiment's radio communication was destroyed early in the fight and remained blank all afternoon and evening. "B" Company worked forward to the lateral road on the north side of the river valley, but as it reached this narrow highway the Germans uncovered their automatic weapons and added a blast of machine-gun bullets to the flying shell and mortar fragments and the jump-and-scatter of the deadly Schu mines. Men fell right and left, several badly injured by the mines, including Lieut. A. D. Taylor who died at once. There was nothing to do but dig in as quickly as possible, and Capt. Jones gave the order.

In the meantime the other rifle companies had formed a bridgehead and dug in, under a drum fire of artillery and mortars and suffering also from machine-gun fire and mines. Capt. Smith, O/C "C" Company and Major Nicholson, O/C "D" Company were amongst the severely wounded, each losing a leg. For the rest of the long summer evening the West Novas hung on, maintaining an energetic but hopeless fire-fight with the enemy on the slopes. This was the situation as darkness fell. Two miles up-stream the Cape Breton Highlanders had found a more vulnerable spot in the Foglia line and the 5th Armoured Division (to which they belonged) was now preparing to exploit it. On the immediate left of the West Novas, under cover of darkness, the Royal 22nd Regiment now moved across the river to attack Borgo San Maria from the flank. This enterprise required another effort by the West Novas from the front, and soon after darkness fell Lt. Col. Waterman crossed the river to direct it, taking with him the artillery representative, the battle adjutant and one "18" radio set. A phone line was laid across the Foglia to the Intelligence Officer on the "home" bank, where in turn there was phone communication with Brigade.

With communications thus re-established Waterman called the company commanders together (an "O. Group" in the military term) at "A" Company HQ and made arrangements to resume the assault at first light. All through the night the M. O. (Capt. H. I. Mendelson) and stretcher-bearers laboured in the continual crump of shells to gather and attend the

wounded, who were evacuated across the river under the direction of the heroic padre, H/Capt. L. F. Wilmot. (For his courage and devotion here and elsewhere Capt. Wilmot was awarded the Military Cross.)

At dawn on Aug. 31st the West Novas attacked again, with "C" and "D" companies moving up through "B" and working forward by way of a gully running north of the road, while the Canadian artillery searched the face of the hills with shrapnel and high explosive. As soon as they emerged from the gully however the West Novas again met a deadly fire of all arms and again men experienced the shock and agony of mines exploding underfoot or popping up waist-high to explode as the soldiers' feet caught in the trip-wires in the grass. Desperate attempts were made to find a way through the mine-belt without success. The German gunners and riflemen redoubled their efforts and in twenty minutes both the forward West Nova companies were pinned to the ground where they were. To enable them to withdraw, the Canadian artillery at 7 A.M. began to muffle the enemy positions with smoke-shells. By 9 A.M. all three forward companies had got back with their wounded to the positions about the bridge-head, where however they remained exposed to the German artillery and mortar concentrations.

It was plain that in its present position the Regiment would be destroyed piecemeal without a chance to close with the enemy, and as there was no way of getting forward Lt. Col. Waterman at 2 P.M. gave the order to withdraw across the Foglia whilst the artillery again masked the movement with smoke. There was little wind. The smoke rolled thickly in the hot summer haze and the West Novas managed to regain the south bank of the river with little further loss. All that saved a slaughter during the period in the bridgehead was a temporary German shortage of mortar bombs, as the captured documents later revealed. (The German commander also complained of the artillery smoke and attacks by British planes, which prevented him from using his weapons to full effect.)

Under harassing fire from the German artillery the West Novas dug in on the south side of the stream and reorganized for another assault on the following day. As it chanced, a

further venture into the death-trap was unnecessary. On their left under cover of night the Canadian engineers succeeded in clearing a path through the mine-belt, and by this means the Royal 22nd Regiment had managed to work up close to Borgo San Maria from the west. But the great change in the situation came from the break-through further upstream, about two miles west of Borgo San Maria, where the 5th Armoured Division was pouring through the gap in the German defences. Within a short time the "Van Doos" were in Borgo San Maria and the Canadian tanks were heading straight for Pozzo Alto and Tomba di Pesaro, where the 11th Armoured Brigade scored a notable success.

On the afternoon of Sep. 1st — exactly five years after the Regiment began to mobilize at Bridgewater — the West Novas re-crossed the Foglia to find the enemy fled. At this time a Division report informed the C/O of a fact which the Regiment already had discovered at some cost — that the Germans had brought a heavier concentration of artillery into this battle than in any previous action of the campaign. The enemy had been forced to abandon some of it however, and the West Novas found amongst other equipment scattered about the old German positions the three dug-in 88 mm. guns and turrets, two of them in perfect working order. Otherwise the retreating Hun had left the usual destruction in his wake, and for miles around the smoke of burning farms and haystacks rolled up to the hot September sky.

The sharp repulse at the Foglia had cost the Regiment 19 killed and 59 wounded — and this, as it turned out, was only the beginning of the struggle for Rimini! Padre Wilmot had managed to collect twelve bodies of the dead, including Lieut. Arnold Taylor and Sergeant John Cooper, and these were buried in a plot on the south side of the river overlooking the scene where they fell. Again the casualties included many veterans of the Regiment, some of whom had been wounded in previous battles; L/Cpl. James Schofield and Pte. Dan McCormack bore the scars of Ortona; Pte. James Shepherd had been wounded on the Arielli front; Ptes. John P. Bennett, Ross Crosby, Everett Crowe, Lloyd Levy and Stephen Bennett had been wounded in the fighting for the Hitler Line. Pte. Garth Dukeshire had been wounded twice before, on the San-

gro heights and in the Hitler Line. Capt. Stanley Smith had been wounded previously at Catenanuova. Lieut. T. J. Keefe, who was wounded in the Foglia fighting but remained on duty, had sustained a severe wound previously at Potenza.

The forcing of the so-called "Gothic Line" along the Foglia and the quick follow-through by the 5th Armoured Division by no means ended the struggle for Rimini: on the contrary it was just begun. Under the impact of the Canadians and the Poles (who took Pesaro on the coast) the enemy fell back to the region of Riccione while his engineers improved the defences along the Marano River. During the early days of September the West Novas moved up behind the advance, bivouacking near Tomba di Pesaro and San Giovanni and receiving a few reinforcements on the way. On Sep. 5th the 3rd Brigade crossed the Conca River and the West Novas were posted just south of Riccione, the former summer retreat of Count Ciano and his wife Edda, daughter of Mussolini. On this day the 1st Brigade took most of the town quite easily but had a bitter battle for the suburb of San Lorenzo-in-Strada. During the night of Sep. 7/8th the West Novas took over part of the line from the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment at San Lorenzo-in-Strada. They were relieved in turn by troops of a Greek mountain brigade on the following day and went back to their old position south of Riccione. Owing to injuries sustained by Brigadier Bernatchez in a plane accident, Lt. Col. Bogert DSO (formerly C/O of the West Novas) was now in temporary command of 3rd Brigade.

There was steady shelling during this period, (one shell came through the wall of West Nova HQ but failed to explode) and one or two clashes with German patrols but the casualties were few. On the morning of Sep. 10th Lt. Col. Waterman, the intelligence officer and company commanders went forward to inspect the positions held by the Irish Regiment of Canada, whom the West Novas were to relieve. Their guide was the redoubtable scout Charles Fleet, but for once Fleet lost his bearings and led the entire party along a ridge in full view of the enemy for three quarters of a mile. Apparently the Germans were too flabbergasted to take advantage of this juicy target, for the officers and Fleet arrived unscathed in the Irish positions. Back in the battalion area it

was a fine warm Sunday: Anglican and Roman Catholic religious services were held in the open air, and at last light the West Novas marched off to take over the line near the village of Besanigo, whence they were to attack the German positions along the Marano River. Of the officers and men who marched away from Riccione in the warm September dusk one in every three was to be wounded in the coming battle, and one in every eleven was to die.

CHAPTER 21

The bloody fight for Rimini

Rimini was a popular Italian watering place on the Adriatic with many fine modern buildings and a useful airport. It lay on the northern edge of the narrow coastal plain, guarded on the south by steep vine-covered slopes rising to the rough peaks of the Apennine mountains. From one of the foot-hill crags, 14 miles south-west of Rimini by road, the ancient battlements of San Marino, the smallest republic in the world, looked forth across the Canadians' battlefield like a castle in a fairy tale.

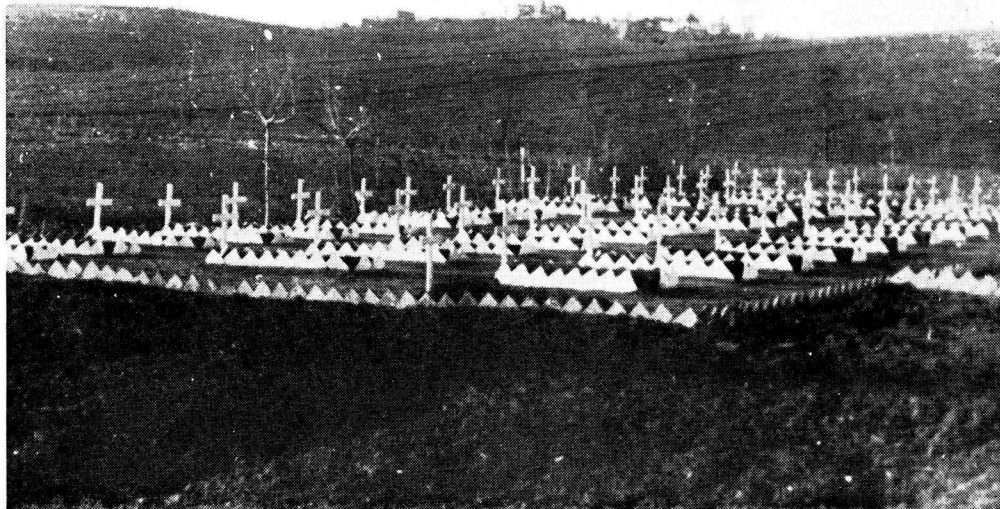
On the east and south-east Rimini was guarded by two parallel rivers, the Marano and Ausa. Like most of the Adriatic coastal streams these were merely shallow creeks in summer, lying in deep gullies gouged by the torrents of autumn, winter and spring. Between the Marano and Ausa valleys, like a lean finger stretched from the foot-hills into the plain, lay a ridge with the village of San Lorenzo-in-Corregiano on its crest. Beyond the Ausa lay another finger, the ridge of San Fortunato, the last German rampart covering the flank of Rimini. These positions were not especially formidable in themselves; the Canadians had taken many like them on the fighting march through Italy. What made them formidable was the strength of the German troops defending Rimini. In the course of the battle the Canadian Corps (1st Division, 5th Armoured Division) encountered and took prisoners from no less than five German divisions — 1st Parachute Division, 90th Light

Division, 26th Panzer Division, 29th Panzer Grenadier Division and a curious formation, the 162nd Turkoman Division, raised amongst the wild tribesmen of the Caspian region during the German invasion of the Caucasus. Apparently willing to fight anybody but their brother Russians, these Mongols had been well trained and well armed by their German drill-masters and were led by German officers.

The immediate objective of the Canadian 3rd Brigade in this battle was the crossing of the Marano River and seizure of the ridge of San Lorenzo-in-Corregiano — referred to henceforth in this narrative simply as "San Lorenzo", but not to be confused with San Lorenzo-in-Strada, the suburb of Riccione. But first the Germans had to be cleared from the village and ridge of Coriano on their left. The 11th Brigade was given the job. Their attack was preceded by a powerful artillery bombardment, and on the night of the 12th the RAF made a spectacular bombing of Coriano and positions on the West Novas' left front, using brilliant flares and dropping their explosives so close to the Regiment's forward posts that one indignant voice demanded whose air force was making the attack, "ours or theirs?"

West Nova patrols had been active each night but could not penetrate to the river, for the Germans were dug in on both sides of it, alert and expecting attack, sending up a fine display of flares through the dark hours, shelling and mortaring the West Nova front and rear, and spurring machine-gun and rifle fire at every sign of movement. To maintain supply to his troops in Ghetto del Molino and elsewhere on the south side of the river the enemy had left intact a bridge across the Marano, and each night the West Nova patrols could hear troops and vehicles moving back and forth. For good reasons the Canadian artillery also left this bridge intact, and so it remained.

The Regiment's attack was to be supported by tanks of the 12th Royal Tank Regiment, two troops of which moved up during the night of Sep. 13th. These and some tanks supporting the 11th Brigade on the left drew a searching fire of German artillery as they manoeuvred into place in the West Nova positions, and "D" Company suffered a number of casualties from it. However the troops and their supporting elements were all in place at the proper time and the 3rd Brigade



West Nova graves on the slope leading up to San Lorenzo. Note the utter lack of cover. The Regiment had bitter fighting here.



Lieutenant-Colonel A. L. Saunders.

opened the attack on a two-battalion front, with the Royal 22nd Regiment on the right and the West Novas on the left. At 3 A.M. on Sep. 14th the leading platoons of the West Novas moved down towards the Marano behind a violent artillery barrage and by 5 A.M. "A" and "B" companies were fighting fiercely in the German positions there, with "C" and "D" companies moving up in support. From the first it was apparent that the enemy held the south bank in strength, with machine-guns, mortars and several self-propelled cannon concealed amongst the wrecked houses there, quite apart from a terrific supporting fire of all arms from his positions across the river.

As the fighting swayed back and forth the whole river valley was hidden in dust and battle smoke and the situation became somewhat confused. At one point "C" Company (Major W. G. Stothart) came under the air-bursts of the Canadian barrage and their "18" radio set was knocked out. Shortly after 8 A.M. Lt. Col. Waterman moved his tactical HQ down into the valley to take closer charge of the battle. The attack went on, and at 10 A.M. "D" Company (Capt. W. H. P. David) and their supporting tanks broke into the hamlet of Ghetto del Molino and cleared the houses with grenades, tommy-guns and bayonets. At 1 P.M. Lt. Col. Bogert arrived at the forward HQ from Brigade to see how things were going. It was difficult to see anything clearly at that point, for the forward area was a bedlam of dim struggling figures, bursting shells and bombs, and smoke, and HQ itself was under a vicious fire from machine-guns and S. P. cannon at close range.

However by this time the Germans had been cleared from the south bank of the Marano, all but two pockets of enemy infantry each with a S. P. gun, and at 2.30 P.M. "B" Company (Capt. J. H. Jones M.C.) made a dash for the river crossing. As the leading platoon reached the bridge it was seen to be relatively undamaged, and Lieut. G. M. Hebb (later killed in action) with magnificent courage and initiative sprinted across and tore out the wires of the German demolition charges before the enemy could touch them off. The West Novas swept on. Facing them now was the long south face of the San Lorenzo ridge, gently rising to the stone church and houses of San Lorenzo village, the German citadel. The crops had been harvested and this intensely cultivated slope was utterly bare except for a scatter of young

olive trees from which the leaves had been blasted by shell-fire. Up this slope went the attack, supported by the surviving tanks. It was a murderous place in the broad afternoon despite the dust and smoke, and the German artillery observers perched in San Lorenzo brought down a deadly fire from their guns behind the ridge. One after another the British tanks were destroyed with their heroic crews, and when "D" Company reached the houses at 3 P.M. it was alone. A gallant attempt to get into this stone-built fortress without support was thrown back.

Meanwhile battalion HQ was having a rough time in a house on the Marano bank, under fire from snipers and the S. P. guns left behind by the attack, and Lt. Col. Waterman determined to move up to the front. Accordingly at 6 P. M. he arrived with his carrier in the forward positions. At 6.30 the intelligence officer (R. E. Campbell) and the artillery representative Major J. Lambert moved up to join the C/O in a half-track vehicle. About 300 yards north of the river they became involved in a knock-down-and-drag-out battle between German tanks on one side of the road and British tanks on the other, but they drove straight on up the road and reached the C/O intact.

At last light the tank reinforcements promised by Brigade had failed to show up and Lt. Col. Waterman determined to attack San Lorenzo again without them. The attack went up the long slope in the early dusk and by 8 P.M. "B" and "D" companies reached the compact stone village on the height. But again it was impossible to effect an entry without the direct fire of tank cannon and the C/O decided to cut the loss and consolidate the Regiment's gains further down towards the river. The companies withdrew and dug in, exhausted by seventeen straight hours of furious battle in the dust and heat. Under cover of darkness Major J. R. Cameron returned bringing forward the support company mortars, carriers and anti-tank guns, the artillery anti-tank 17-pounders, and company cookhouses; and RSM Callaghan drove up with the ammunition truck. By midnight all ranks had received a hot meal and replenished their "ammo", while the Regiment's 3-inch mortars hammered away at San Lorenzo.

There was little rest for the troops and none for the company commanders, who were called together by Lt. Col. Waterman at 2 A.M. for another "O. Group". The C/O announced that the Royal 22nd Regiment had succeeded in getting on to the ridge some distance to the north-east, and that, tanks or no tanks, the West Novas must make another attack at once. And so at 2.30 A.M. on Sep. 15th the Regiment moved up the slope, in a dusty darkness stabbed with enemy small-arms fire and rocked with shell and mortar bursts, for its third attempt on San Lorenzo. "B" and "C" companies were in the lead, with "A" and "D" following in support; but "D" Company got ahead of "C" in the murk and found itself once more with "B" Company on the outskirts of the village.

Here again the lack of supporting armour made success impossible. The fortified houses on the crest, one covering another, spat fire into the dark and pinned the weary but still venturesome West Novas to the approaches. At 3.45 A.M. the Regiment again withdrew to re-organize. Amongst the many casualties the intrepid C/O of "D" Company, Capt. W. H. P. David, had fallen wounded for the second time in this war. Another of "D" Company, Lieut. F. A. Embree (the well-known amateur boxer and marksman) although hit by a bullet early in the battle had the wound dressed and refused to leave the fight. Dawn came — and still no tanks.

At 8 A. M. fresh tanks arrived at last, and half an hour later the West Novas went up the slope for their fourth attack on the defiant German garrison of San Lorenzo. In the lead were "B" Company with two troops of tanks and "C" Company with one troop of tanks, while "A" and "D" companies followed in close support. The morning sun was hot already and promised another sweltering day. The German fire was just as hot and at 9.30 A.M. "C" Company was caught in a cone of bursting mortar bombs and lost all its surviving officers, including Major W. G. Stothart, wounded. "A" Company (Major R. G. Thexton) moved up in its place and the advance went on.

The troops were determined but desperately weary and the pace was slow. At 10.30 A.M. the tanks and infantry were brought to an abrupt halt by sharp machine-gun and S. P. cannon fire despite the concealing smoke and dust of the Cana-

dian barrage. However the Regiment's anti-tank guns were dragged forward and now got in some effective shooting at the houses on the crest. The advance moved slowly on. About this time the German artillery observers spotted the house occupied by Lt. Col. Waterman and his battalion HQ, and a troop of 150 mm. cannon shelled it for an hour, causing many casualties amongst the HQ personnel and destroying the Canadian artillery observer's half-track vehicle with its "22" radio set and the C/O's carrier with the HQ "22" set, in fact leaving no communication except a single "18", with its very short range. This set was rescued and HQ set up again in another house.

It was mid-afternoon before "B" Company got a footing in San Lorenzo, and the fight raged from house to house through the afternoon. In this climactic struggle all ranks behaved with the utmost gallantry, but the courageous leadership of Capt. J. H. Jones M.C. and Lieut. S. K. Nickerson of "B" Company deserves especial mention. (Lieut. Nickerson later was awarded the Military Cross.) "A" Company was in close support, and at 5 P.M. the stubbornly defended village with the survivors of its heroic German garrison were in West Nova hands at last. Major Cameron brought forward the support weapons to help consolidate the capture and at 6.30 P.M. Lt. Col. Waterman received the warm congratulations of Brigade upon his Regiment's success. The German artillery shelled the village vigorously throughout the night but the deep dug-outs and thick stone walls which had defied the Canadian guns so long now gave shelter to the conquerors and the shelling had little effect. Officers and men not required for duty dropped and slept like the dead. Most of them had been fighting continuously for the past forty hours.

Still the battle was only half won, for behind the San Lorenzo ridge lay the little River Ausa and the ridge of San Fortunato — the exact counterparts of the Marano and San Lorenzo. At 2 A.M. on Sep. 16th a patrol of West Nova scouts and snipers went down the north slope of the San Lorenzo ridge to explore the crossings of the Ausa, but were driven off by vigilant German riflemen. Daylight came, and again the day proved sunny, but this time there was a cool breeze along the ridge. Throughout the day the enemy continued to shell San Lorenzo and the slope towards the Ausa, as

well as that towards the Marano, while the West Novas re-organized for further battle. Now that the reverse slope of San Lorenzo was no longer under direct enemy fire it was possible to gather and bury the Regiment's dead. Lieut. H. E. Foster and his pioneer platoon cleared ground for a cemetery on the gently rising flank of the ridge looking back towards the Marano and the heights of Coriano. A party under the direction of Padre Wilmot began to dig the graves, but were driven to the shelter of a large barn in the early afternoon when German shells began to fall nearby. Before long they were driven out of the barn itself, which was hit and set on fire together with two lorries laden with mortars and mortar supplies.

Their pathetic task was resumed after dark, and completed at 3 A.M. on the 17th. (Later on, when the Regiment was out for rest after the Rimini fighting, Wilmot and a party of pioneers came back, obtained tiling from a nearby brickyard, and neatly outlined each grave and the cemetery boundaries.) By the melancholy sequence of events L/Cpl. Stanley Graham, who had helped to dig some of the original graves, was himself killed in the fighting for San Fortunato later, and his body, with others gathered from the San Fortunato battlefield, were brought back and buried here beside the rest.

On the evening of Sep. 16th Lt. Col. M. P. Bogert came up from Brigade to discuss the previous day's fighting and future intentions with the C/O. On the right the 1st Brigade had fought its way to the edge of Rimini airfield, but this was dominated by the Germans on San Fortunato ridge. Therefore Major-General Vokes had determined to cross the Ausa and storm the ridge while the enemy was still shaken by the bloody fight along the Marano.

On the morning of Sep. 17th Lt. Col. Waterman was recalled to Brigade and Major F. E. Hiltz, the second-in-command, took charge of the Regiment for the attack across the Ausa. At noon "B" Company went down the slope to seize a jumping-off place for the assault. This was the cross-roads hamlet of Gaiofana, which was taken within an hour, and a machine-gun section was moved down for support. The

weather continued clear and hot and the German artillery on San Fortunato ridge continued to shell the West Novas vigorously throughout the day and night.

The shelling reached a new pitch on the morning of Sep. 18th, and at 7 A.M. a "friendly" Spitfire lost its bearings and dropped a bomb on the San Lorenzo church, burying some of the engineers and a platoon of "A" Company and causing several casualties. Due to the vigilance of the German gunners and their excellent observation posts on San Fortunato it was impossible for the engineers to descend into the AUSA bed and make a crossing place for tanks until night fell, and so the attack was postponed until dawn of the 19th. Meanwhile on the West Novas' immediate right the Carleton and Yorks cleared the enemy from the river banks and covered the engineers.

For this attack the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment was placed under command of 3rd Brigade, and this unit together with the West Novas were to attack directly towards San Fortunato, with the Royal 22nd Regiment in reserve. All through the night of Sep. 18/19 the sappers laboured furiously in the river bed. At 3.45 A.M. on the 19th they reported the crossings ready, and the attack began at once. The West Novas had begun to form up for the assault at midnight, and now they advanced with "A" and "B" companies in the lead, each with a troop of tanks under command, "C" and "D" following with a third tank troop. Major Hiltz moved up behind the leading companies with an "18" and a "19" radio set mounted on a tank, followed by his carrier with an "18" set. The intelligence officer remained in San Lorenzo in radio touch with the C/O and with telephone and radio communication to Brigade.

The Regiment passed through the Carleton and Yorks at the river bed and at 5 A.M. began to climb the ridge. By this time the slope was fairly jumping with the Canadian artillery barrage and the German counter-barrage, one behind the other. As the West Novas got well up the slope the Canadian barrage lifted for the infantry assault. It was now full daylight, although the air was thick with the dust and smoke of the barrage, and the German infantry swarmed out of the dug-outs to man their weapon pits. In some cases the

leading West Novas were able to see the Germans diving into their slit trenches a few yards ahead. Only a few steps — a matter of seconds — lay between the attacking infantry and success; but the interval was fatal.

The enemy were crack troops of the 1st Parachute Division, the Canadians' old stumbling-block at Ortona. They were well equipped with automatic weapons and in a minute the West Novas were forced to ground by a rush of bullets sweeping the slope at grass-top level. At the same time the supporting tanks were held up by cunningly sited German anti-tank guns, and several were hit. The forward companies called for the Canadian artillery to lay more smoke-shell on the ridge and made several attempts to get forward under cover of it, but to no avail. On their right the "Hasty P's" were held up in the same way. All through the rest of the long day and the evening the two regiments clung to the face of San Fortunato under a searching fire of machine-guns, mortars and artillery, and shooting back as best they could.

At dusk Brigade sent up the Royal 22nd Regiment to work around the slope some distance to the West Novas' left. Towards the immediate left, under cover of darkness, the West Novas' C/O despatched "C" and "D" companies with orders to work up the slope for a flank attack in the morning. The night was very dark, and thick with dust and the artificial murk of smoke-shells. This led to some confusion in the movements of all the attacking troops. Thus "C" Company in the course of the day had encountered a group of the PPCLI in the West Nova area by the river, and in the dark hours of the following morning came upon a group of the Loyal Edmontons with a dead officer close to the top of the ridge.

However by daylight on Sept 20th "C" and "D" companies had completed their left swing and were closing in for the kill, while "A" and "B" companies made a dash at the enemy from the front. At 11 A.M. the tanks and "A" Company broke into the main San Fortunato positions and the enemy defence collapsed. As the West Novas closed in, twos and threes and dozens of badly shaken German infantry scrambled out of the ground, tossing off their helmets and equipment and trotting obediently down towards the AUSA with hands clasped behind their heads. They were a mixed lot,

including paratroopers, men of the 29th Panzer Division, and a good many Mongol-faced strangers of the Turkoman Division. Amongst the West Novas, Capt. Harry Kaiser had been severely wounded in the last phase of the attack, and Lieut. Lou Cotton of "A" Company was recommended for the Military Cross for his determined leadership in the final rush.

At this point the new C/O of the Regiment, Lt. Col. A. L. Saunders, arrived to take command, and the West Novas dug in about the hamlet of Pomposa Grande and tried to get what rest they could in a steady crump of shells and mortar bombs. The Germans neglected nothing in their efforts to blast the Regiment off the ridge. Amongst the various missiles were a number of heavy shells apparently from a long-range railway gun, while at short range a pair of S. P. cannon fired point-blank from a large building farther along the ridge to the right. This building presumably had been used as a hospital, for it bore the large markings of the German Red Cross. The West Novas called for artillery fire on it but the request was refused.

All through the 21st and 22nd the West Novas stood fast in their positions under mingled showers of rain and shells. The end of the long battle was fast approaching, for Rimini now was outflanked all along the line, and on Sep. 22nd a Greek brigade was given the honour of marching into the port, whence the enemy had fled. Thus ended a month of hot and costly fighting. The West Nova casualties in the fighting for San Lorenzo and San Fortunato were 56 killed and 196 wounded. With the casualties of the Foglia crossing, the fight for Rimini had cost the Regiment 75 dead and 255 wounded — half its effective strength.

Only two rifle company officers came through these actions unhurt. "B" Company lost two officers and a sergeant killed in the fighting at San Lorenzo alone. "A" Company, which led in the initial stage of the San Lorenzo fighting, had its complete company HQ knocked out by shell fire half an hour before the assault, with the exception of Major Thexton and his runner who were attending an "O Group" at Battalion HQ at the time. All of "A" Company's platoon commanders were severely wounded in the first day's fighting, and for the attacks on San Lorenzo itself the company consisted of Major

Thexton, Sgt. F. E. Blakeney (who won the Military Medal whilst acting as CSM in this action) and two platoons of about 16 men each, mostly green reinforcements, led by Sgt. Fleury (killed at San Fortunato a few days later) and Cpl. J. W. Marshall M. M., who won a bar to his medal here.

The toll of veterans was high. Amongst the killed were Sgt. Robert Kearnes; Sgt. Fabin Fleury, previously wounded in the Gustav Line; Pte. Percy Corbin, previously wounded in Sicily; Pte. John L. McPhee, previously wounded at Ortona; Pte. Ronald Mailman, previously wounded in the Hitler Line. The dead also included Sgts. Edward Chalmers and John Murray Shaw, and Pte. F. H. Doucette, one of the best snipers in the Regiment. Amongst the wounded were the veteran snipers Boyd Gehue and Harry "Snake-Eye" Gates. Others wounded were CSM George Zwicker, Sgts. Joseph Byrne and Albert Jacobus; Sgt. Ralph Rafuse who had been wounded before at Jelsi; Lance-Sgt. Robert Gilfillan, wounded before at Potenza; Cpl. Joseph L. Peters, wounded before on the Arielli; L/Cpl. Octave Gallant, who will be remembered for his experience on the Sangro heights; L/Cpl. Murray Corbin, wounded before at Ortona; Ptes. Reginald Boomer and John Newman, both wounded before at Jelsi; Ptes. James Galbraith, Alfred Lavigne, Harold Osbourne, William Reekie, George Tibbetts, all wounded before at Ortona; Ptes. W. G. Ingram, James Larisey and Cpl. Freeman Taylor, all wounded before on the Arielli; Pte. Wilfred Doucette, wounded before at Jelsi and again at Ortona; Pte. Gordon Taylor, wounded before at Ortona and again on the Arielli; Ptes. Lloyd Brown, William Burns, Joseph L. Comeau, John Levy, Joseph Luce, James McQuarrie, Russell Mills and Frank White, all wounded before in the Hitler Line. CSM Enos Nauss received a slight wound in this action but remained on duty. So did Lieut. F. A. Embree, but his wound became infected later and he was sent to hospital.

Here again, as in the bloody fighting for the Hitler Line, the gallant and devoted medical officer Capt. H. I. Mendelson worked day and night in the thick of things to attend the constant stream of wounded. At San Lorenzo especially he and his medical detail laboured for hours on end in conditions defying description.

The officers killed in the fighting for Rimini were Lieuts. G. M. Hebb, Gerald Prat (who had been wounded previously in the Gustav Line) and Arnold Taylor. The wounded were Majors Alan Nicholson and W. G. Stothart, Capts. W. H. P. David, H. G. Kaiser and S. D. Smith, Lieuts. John S. Beilby, D. R. Bews, M. A. Craig, G. L. Drew, F. A. Embree, C. H. Foster, W. T. Hollinger, Charles Irving, T. J. Keefe, J. R. Kirk, H. L. McFee, W. F. Sponagle and W. S. Watts. The comparative severity of the struggle in which the Regiment had engaged might be measured by the fact that the other two regiments of 3rd Brigade, both of which had fought hard, suffered 9 officer casualties each.

The German dead lay uncounted in and about the captured positions on both sides of the Marano and Ausa streams, bloating in the hot September sun and swarming with flies until working parties of their captured comrades, under guard, shovelled them into the earth. There was plenty of labour available for these German burial parties. The West Novas alone had captured more than 200.

On September 23rd, out of the battle at last, the sadly thinned Regiment packed up and moved to the coastal town of Cattolica, south-east of Rimini, where they were quartered in the Italian naval barracks outside the town at the mouth of the River Conca.

CHAPTER 22

Cattolica and the crossing of the Savio

For nearly three weeks the Regiment was quartered with the rest of 3rd Brigade in the huge naval barracks, carrying on training of all kinds, especially river crossing, which was practised on the nearby Conca stream using assault boats and the newly devised Olafson boat-bridge. All this betokened a part in the Eighth Army's push towards Ravenna and Bologna, where the line of advance lay across deeper and wider rivers than any yet seen in Italy and a multitude of canals, all of which would be rising soon with the autumn rains.

It was a busy but pleasant time, although the barracks left much to be desired. They were of grey concrete construction with the woodwork painted a light blue, built in rectangular blocks with an outside spiral staircase at each end, and resembling in some fanciful way the design of a modern passenger liner. In departure the Germans had left their invariable mark. All the windows were broken, all the doors had been burned, the supports of all the beds ranged in tiers along the interior walls had been broken beyond repair, so that the troops of democracy had to sleep on the concrete floor; there was no heat in the place at all, and no light beyond the candles and flashlights of the soldiers. In the wet autumn evenings the air was chill, and the survivors of San Lorenzo and San Fortunato, squatting in groups about the candles and playing cards on the floor of each vast gloomy barrack block, were like a gypsy encampment in some mammoth cave.

On the lighter side there were ENSA concert troupes, moving-picture shows in the Embassy Theatre, Cattolica and elsewhere, concerts by RCE and other bands (the West Novas thought of their own brass band, whose instruments were still in England; infantry units were not permitted to take instruments other than bagpipes, bugles and drums into the field.) There were seven-day leaves to Rome and Florence. 48-hour passes to Riccione. Padre Wilmot conducted parties to view the magnificent old castle of Gradara, made famous by Dante, and with more recent infernal connections — prior to the breaking of the Gothic Line it had served for a time as HQ for German General Kesselring.

The Regiment's second-in-command, Major Hiltz, spent a week visiting wounded West Novas in the hospitals farther down the peninsula. Padre Wilmot and others also made the rounds. As usual the British battle awards were few and slow in coming through. The Greeks were more prompt if not more generous, and Lt. Cols. A. L. Saunders and M. P. Bogert DSO (C/O and former C/O of the West Novas) were awarded the Order of Aristian Andreas for their staff work in cooperation with the Greek Mountain Brigade in the early days of September. On Sep. 25th the West Nova officers held a regimental dinner in their mess. It was just after the battle and many familiar faces were missing around the board, but Brigadier Bernatchez was there with Lt. Col. R. S. E. Waterman DSO, who made a touching farewell to the Regiment he had commanded so ably and so long. In subsequent days there were visits from Major-General Vokes of 1st Division, and Lt. Gen. Burns of the Canadian Corps, to congratulate the Regiment on its part in the breaking of the Gothic Line. But the most significant visitor in this period was Col. J. L. Ralston, the Canadian Minister of National Defence, who came and addressed the West Novas on Sep. 29th at the naval barracks, congratulated the Regiment on its battle record, and assured all ranks that they were not forgotten at home.

It was good to have his assurance, for the plain fact was that after the landings in Normandy most of the war correspondents regarded the Italian campaign as a petty side-show, and the hard fighting march towards the Po was forgotten or at best tucked away in a welter of tales about the advance

through France and Belgium. This was a genuine grievance amongst the troops in Italy, who had fought so much longer and suffered so much more than those in France, and who had never enjoyed an abundance of stores, equipment or reinforcements for their battles, nor a battlefield which lent itself to far-sweeping armoured thrusts. Every foot of the way had been bitterly contested and there were many hard miles still to go. This kind of fighting lacked the glamour of the great swoops towards the Rhine and the newspapers tended to ignore it on that account.

There was another grievance and this affected all Canadian troops — the shortage of reinforcements due to a shilly-shally application of conscription at home. Nova Scotia (with a record of voluntary enlistments per thousand of population second only to little Prince Edward Island in all Canada) could have maintained her hard fighting regiments in the field. But about January 1944 the process of funnelling recruits towards their own provincial regiments was discontinued: the thinning trickle of men from Canada was pooled in the reinforcement depots and "rationed" impersonally to all units in the field. As a result of this the West Nova Scotia Regiment (like every other Canadian unit in Italy) was always under strength after Ortona, and the deficiency grew with every battle. The fighting along the Marano and Ausa alone had cost the Regiment 252 casualties. To replace these the West Novas received at Cattolica exactly 119 officers and men, a number of whom were returning from the hospitals after wounds sustained in previous actions. To meet this situation the carrier and anti-tank platoons had to be disbanded and used to bring "C" Company (which had suffered severely) up to something like fighting strength. This was typical of the situation which Colonel Ralston had come to examine, and his subsequent courageous stand in Parliament on the full application of conscription is well known.

On Oct. 12th the West Novas left the Cattolica barracks and encamped on the north bank of the Conca about a mile upstream. Here final training for the coming autumn battles was carried on, and on Oct. 18th the Regiment set off in motor transport for the front. It was a fluid front, for the enemy was

withdrawing slowly towards the Po, fighting stiff rearguard actions at the river crossings. The line of pursuit for the Canadians was along the great highway running northward from Rimini through Cesena and Forli towards Bologna, and the West Novas rolled on in the sunny weather, crossed the historic Rubicon, and on the evening of the 18th took over part of the front from the 48th Highlanders just south of Cesena. At daylight on the 19th the Regiment pushed forward steadily, finding no sign of the enemy except the usual destruction, and by mid-afternoon halted almost in the midst of friends, for the "Van Doos" had moved up on the right, and a British division was striking in from the left to take Cesena.

On the succeeding two days an occasional German shell fell in the West Nova area while the fighting for Cesena was in progress, but there were no casualties. In the bright morning sunlight of Oct. 21st the Regiment marched into Cesena and found the population celebrating their liberation from the "Te-deschi" in the frantic Italian manner despite the German shells still falling into the city. On the following afternoon the mortar platoon moved up to the northern outskirt to support the 12th British Brigade, who were attacking from the left.

Cesena was a city of about 16,000 people, with several fine palaces, a picture gallery and an early Renaissance library. It was overlooked from one side by a medieval fortress called the Rocca, and from the south-east by the beautiful hilltop church of San Maria del Monte. The city lay at the foot of the Apennine hills but separated from them by the Savio River, which wriggled like a snake northwards and then eastwards to the Adriatic Sea. The German rearguards were holding the west bank to gain time for their forces retreating towards the Po. The autumn season was now well advanced and as the weeks went by the increasing rain and mud would bring the Allied armies to a halt. Thus the Germans fell back upon their old tactics, fighting sharp delaying actions at the stream crossings and pulling out when the opposing artillery came up in force.

The prospective battleground was a low rolling country of fertile farms, laid out like a checkerboard with numerous straight roads running east-west and north-south like those of a Canadian prairie township. The Canadian 1st Division had

been given the task of the 2nd and 3rd brigades began to explore the crossings. The 2nd Brigade (of which Lt. Col. Bogert DSO was acting commander) made a successful crossing on the night of Oct. 21st but owing to the nature of the banks it was found impossible to construct bridges in their immediate area. Division ordered that another bridge-head be secured, and as more than two battalions of the 2nd Brigade already were over the river it was necessary to place the West Nova Scotia Regiment temporarily under 2nd Brigade command for the operation.

On the evening of Oct. 22nd Lt. Col. Saunders and the I. O. went to 2nd Brigade HQ, where Lt. Col. Bogert informed them of the West Novas' task. The Regiment was to move up three or four miles along the road running north from Cesena towards Mensa, halting at a crossroads hamlet called Borgo di Ronta. There it would swing west, cross the Savio and establish a bridgehead on the west side. The initial crossing would be made by a company of the PPCLI, who were placed under West Nova command. The West Novas then would pass through as follows: "D" Company (Major J. K. Rhodes) to cross over, swing right, and establish itself in the sloping fields west of the river; "A" Company (Major R. G. Thexton) to cross the river and swing left; "C" Company (Major D. W. McAdam) to follow "A" and then exploit towards the highway running north from Torre del Moro to Ravenna; "B" Company (Capt. J. H. Jones MC) to remain at the river crossing and cover the engineers while they built the bridge.

An assault river-crossing is a complicated operation, even by daylight, and ordinarily it is preceded by careful reconnaissance down to section level; in this case necessity demanded immediate action and the West Nova company commanders had nothing more than a quick glance at an aerial photograph before setting out on their march. The Regiment left Cesena at 10 P.M. on Oct. 22nd, reached Borgo di Ronta after a somewhat difficult march in the darkness, and began to move silently down a country lane towards the crossing site, a bend in the Savio. At midnight the leading platoon of the PPCLI company reached the river, where they "jumped" a German patrol and took three prisoners. Unfortunately the rest of the patrol got away across the river and "the fat was in the fire". Events

showed that the Germans on this stretch of the Savio were watching the river with tanks and mobile infantry, ready to strike at any point, meanwhile relying on their patrols and the mines they had planted on the Canadian bank of the stream. For support they had self-propelled cannon which they could (and did) rush right up to the bank when an attack developed.

All this required time of course, and meanwhile the Canadians had a chance to get a few troops across. The river itself was formidable. The Savio at this point was 50 yards wide and the stream was found to be six or seven feet deep and rising fast as a result of the rains in the mountains. It was 2 A.M. before the PPCLI managed to get a single platoon across by means of assault boats and a rope. Half an hour later this platoon reported itself digging in about a farmhouse, the Casa Porcelli, about 200 yards west of the river. The other platoons of the PPCLI company now moved across, all but the company HQ. which remained on the hither side.

By this time the Germans had come to life, and when the leading platoon of West Novas' "D" Company crossed the stream at 3 A.M. the whole area was under machine-gun fire. What was more ominous, there was a sound of German tanks moving in the fields on the farther side, and before long the Teutonic voices of the tank commanders bellowing orders apparently to their accompanying infantry. By 4 A.M. Rhodes and his company were across and fighting their way towards the right, clearing farmhouses along the way and taking a number of prisoners. At 4.15 "A" Company started across the stream. The leading platoon under Lieut. A. C. Mackenzie got over and at once pushed towards the left, clearing the Germans from a number of slit trenches on the bank and taking 15 prisoners. The next platoon under Lieut. Douglas Knowles was partly across when the German fire suddenly reached a crescendo of mortars, machine-guns and small arms, and personnel of the PPCLI appeared, heading back to the river crossing and reporting an overwhelming attack by German tanks and infantry.

It was now breaking day. Major Thexton, busy restoring order at the crossing, received a report from Lieut. Mackenzie that his platoon was facing three German tanks, supported by infantry, at 200 yards. Thexton at once called the C/O by



Field map, Savio River. The West Novas crossed opposite Casa Porcelli in centre right.



R. S. M. "Bill" Callaghan, M.B.E.

radio asking for artillery fire on his immediate front and suggesting that a light observation aircraft be sent up to direct fire on the tanks. (The only artillery FOO — forward observation officer — with the West Novas had been attached to "D" Company.) An effort was made to get anti-tank guns up to the crossing but the heavy German fire prevented it. At this point an engineer officer arrived at "A" Company HQ and informed Thexton that bridging here was impossible. His sappers after a long struggle in the dark had found the steep soft banks and the rising current too much for them.

By this time the second platoon of "A" Company under Lieut. Knowles had completed its crossing and had begun to deploy, when suddenly it was confronted by German infantry and a tank. The PPCLI had withdrawn all but a single platoon, which was cut off about the Casa Porcelli and overwhelmed. Thus "A" and "D" companies of the West Novas were marooned on the west side of the Savio in broad daylight and facing imminent attack by German infantry and armour with additional self-propelled guns. Both companies had a deep and swiftly rising river at their backs, the banks of which were jumping with German mortar explosions. It was a TEWT student's nightmare come to life.

With no anti-tank weapons, and no time to dig in, Thexton asked permission to withdraw and the C/O granted it at once. Mackenzie's platoon got back to the bank in good order with their wounded and prisoners and regained the home bank in the assault boats. At the same time Lieut. Knowles' platoon withdrew across the stream. Upon enquiry the company C/O learned that Knowles himself had failed to reach the river. Major Thexton re-crossed the stream in an effort to find him, without success. Lieut. Knowles was last seen firing a rifle at an advancing tank, a gallant gesture in the face of certain death. The German fire was now very heavy and "A" Company dug in on the east bank to cover the crossing and await developments.

While "A" Company and the advanced platoon of the PPCLI had thus borne the brunt of the sharp German reaction at the crossing, "D" Company of the West Novas had been pushing swiftly towards its objective on the right. Rhodes and his men cleared various groups of German infantry out of

their way, taking 35 prisoners, and proceeded to dig in about a farmhouse 300 yards west of the nearest part of the Savio and well to the north of the crossing. To this point they had met no German armour; but now they in their turn were assailed by tanks and infantry supported by SP guns. Fortunately the West Novas were well dug in and repeatedly they threw back the German infantry with loss. At first the enemy tanks came in boldly; but this brought them within Piat range and after the West Novas had hit one Mark Five Panther and scored a close shot if not a direct hit upon another the Germans were more cautious.

After 7.20 A.M. "D" Company was alone west of the river and the Germans edged in from three sides — the enemy even worked up a self-propelled gun and some infantry to a group of buildings on the Savio bank at the company's right rear. All the German gunners concentrated their fire upon the farmhouse, the key to the situation in all ways, not least because it held the signallers and the lone "18" set which now comprised "D" Company's sole link with the forces on the home side of the river. This slender link brought powerful support, for as the German tanks and SP guns revealed themselves the F. O. O. was able to call down a prompt and heavy fire from the Canadian artillery behind the Savio. Nobody realised this better than the German gunners and tank crews, hurriedly shifting from one firing point to another, and at every opportunity they poured shells at the house. As the morning went on the building became a ruin with its tiles blown off and its walls shot through and through, but by a miracle the radio set remained intact and so did the signallers, who stuck to their posts with grim resolution. (One of these men, Pte. Alan K. Minard, was later awarded the Military Medal for his devotion to duty.) Finally, when the house was tumbling about their ears, Major Rhodes ordered the radio set to be moved into the shelter of a shell-hole outside.

When word of "D" Company's peril reached the acting Brigade commander (Lt. Col. Bogert DSO) he sent up a troop of M.10 self-propelled guns. Under cover of "B" Company these guns moved up to the Savio bank, where they quickly knocked out a German S. P. gun on the other side and shot up several buildings occupied by German infantry at "D" Com-

pany's right rear. (Later on "B" Company saw two German half-track vehicles marked with the Red Cross come down to these houses and withdraw, each with a load of wounded.) The Canadian artillery farther back now laid down a smoke barrage across the river, and "D" Company was ordered to withdraw under cover of it. The retreat was made with skill, and (now cautious of the weight and accuracy of the Canadian shell-fire) the Germans made no attempt to follow it up.

At 11.30 A.M. Rhodes and his men were back on the east bank intact, all but one or two stragglers who turned up later on. The "D" Company platoon-commanders, Capt. W. E. Garber, Lieut. D. A. Campbell (who was awarded the Military Cross) and Sergeant V. C. Amberman (who was awarded the Military Medal) had shown throughout the utmost courage and resourcefulness. And in the words of the company commander, "CSM Blakeney was everywhere, carrying out his duties with remarkable coolness. Signallers A. K. Minard and F. P. Smith distinguished themselves by their successful efforts to maintain communication under severe artillery and machine-gun fire . . . but it would be impossible to name everyone who performed great deeds that day. The behaviour of 'Dog' Company was splendid . . . the men clung to their position with tenacity and exemplary courage." Major Rhodes himself received the DSO later for his cool and skilful leadership in a situation which might easily have been a tragedy.

The Canadian artillery continued to harass the Germans through the rest of this cool, cloudy afternoon and evening. Two hours after dark an officer and 11 men, all that survived of the PPCLI platoon at the Casa Porcelli, managed to get back across the Savio, having spent the day lying doggo in enemy territory.

At 8.45 P.M. Lt. Col. Saunders sent a West Nova patrol across the river to probe the German defences again. It was a tough assignment in view of the day's experiences and it proved a somewhat weird but successful adventure for Lieut. C. H. Smith and his ten men. Soon after dark the Germans had begun to shell the lane leading down to the river on the West Nova side, using 210 cm. cannon. The explosions had shattered several farm buildings and set five large haystacks afire, which lit up the whole scene towards the river. The patrol got down

to the stream by way of an olive orchard and a vineyard, losing on the way Cpl. W. F. Clark, who trod on a Stock mine and was fatally wounded. As Smith and his men reached the bank they could hear a German tank moving in the darkness to their right, on the farther side of the river. The patrol crossed over in an assault boat which they found lying near the steep fifteen-foot bank.

On the west bank Smith pushed forward with five men, leaving the others to guard the boat and to fire a red Verrey light if the Germans attempted to cut them off. About the white walls of the Casa Porcelli, ghostly in the darkness, the patrol found some of the fallen Canadians. The muddy soil about the house bore the deep tracks of a Tiger tank or tanks. Posting a Bren-gunner to cover their approach the West Novas entered the house and found German equipment littered about the rooms but not a living soul. Smith pushed on resolutely by a series of zigzag farm lanes, searching various houses along the way and finding signs of recent German occupancy. Along these lanes and in the muddy fields, like the trail of gigantic reptiles in a prehistoric swamp, lay the fresh tracks of several Tiger tanks, criss-crossed with tracks of various half-tracked and wheeled vehicles, plain evidence that a mobile German force of considerable strength had assembled here very recently. In some of the houses the very smell of the German soldier still hung in the air. At length the patrol reached the hamlet of Borgo Piepe Sestina, about a mile west of the Savio on the main highway to Forli. Here in one of the houses they found an Italian family, who regarded them first with amazement and then with joy, and informed Lieut. Smith that so far as they knew the last of the "Tedesci" had gone up the road.

This was important news, and the patrol hastened back to report it. The West Nova battalion was ordered to stand fast on the east bank while the 2nd Brigade advanced farther up, where the engineers had found a better bridge site, and very soon troops, tanks and artillery were passing the river in pursuit of the enemy towards Forli. Thus the passage of the Savio, where the enemy had been expected to make a prolonged stand, provided no more than a sharp rearguard action. Major-General Chris Vokes came up to congratulate the West Novas on their gallant effort of the previous day and their vigilance in the

night. It was now mid-day of Oct. 24th, and in the warm sunshine of the early afternoon two men of "D" Company and one of the PPCLI hailed the patrols and came across the river. They had been left behind in the previous day's withdrawal and had spent a day and a night hiding in the midst of the German positions. Thus the West Novas' casualties at the Savio were only 7 killed and 8 wounded, all suffered by "A" Company, miraculously light in view of the chances involved. The killed included Lieut. Douglas Knowles of "A" Company, first reported missing and later presumed dead. His body was never found.

Soon after noon on Oct. 25th the Regiment was ordered to cross the Savio and take up a position about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles west of it between the main highway and the railway from Cesena to Forli. This was done. There was no sign of the enemy beyond an occasional shell from the distance, and after nightfall the West Novas pushed on to a point within two miles of the town of Forlimpopoli. This ended their role in the pursuit. The weather broke at the same time, and the Regiment spent a bleak three days in cold and heavy rain south-east of Forlimpopoli before moving back in motor transport via Torre del Moro to Cattolica, where it settled down (this time in billets) on Oct. 29th.

Here there was a visit from Brigadier Bernatchez, pay parades, and an EFI issue including the usual bottle of beer per man. The K. of C. unit also opened a canteen and recreation room for the men. Protestant church parades were held in the Embassy Theatre and elsewhere, while R. C. personnel attended mass in the parochial church of Cattolica. A trickle of reinforcements arrived, including several familiar faces. There were picture shows in the Embassy and "Acadian" theatres. Now that the winter season approached the Regiment put its khaki drill away and changed into the warm battledress. "D" Company celebrated its Savio adventure with a notable dinner, at which Lt. Col. A. L. Saunders, the adjutant Capt. A. J. W. Dyer, Padre Wilmot, battle adjutant Capt. C. F. Spence and RSM Callaghan were guests.

Last but not least of these, "Bill" Callaghan was a notable personage in any gathering. He was a veteran of World War One, and how he got under the age limit for active service in

War Two was a secret known only to himself. He had served in the Regiment for many months as CSM before taking over from RSM Dalton at Piedmonte d'Alife, and had fought through all the major battles of the campaign. He was one of those old-fashioned sergeant-majors who obtained discipline not merely by barking but by the sheer force of a personality utterly devoted to the Regiment. And that devotion was returned by all ranks, for Callaghan was like the stern yet kindly father of an enormous family of boys, who looked up to him and were as proud of him as he was of them.

On the evening of Nov. 15th the peace of the coast was shattered by salvos of artillery fire from the direction of Rimini — a parting Canadian salute to Major-General Vokes, who was leaving Italy. The salute consisted of six guns for each month of his command. A few days later the West Novas were visited by the new Corps commander, Lt. Gen. C. Foulkes CBE, an old acquaintance who had inspected the Regiment at Bridgewater just prior to going overseas in 1939. Five years ago! What a lot of water had flowed under the Lahave bridges since that cold November day!

Training went on vigorously, with the emphasis still on river crossings and the use of assault boats and bridges. The WO's and sergeants held a "smoker" in their mess. The officers held a dance at which the guests of honour were fifteen Polish nurses, few of whom could speak English; but dancing proved a universal language in itself. Thus in hard training lightened by more pleasant activities passed the cloudy October days, while the Germans beat a slow fighting retreat towards Bologna. Through the loud-speakers in canteens, messes and clubs the London radio (in the same calm tones with which the disasters of 1940 and '41 had been declared) now recorded victories day by day as the great triple squeeze closed on the Wehrmacht — the Russians rolling through Poland and approaching Budapest, the Fifth and Eighth Armies stabbing towards the Tyrol through northern Italy, and massed American, British and Canadian forces pushing into Holland and Alsace. Soon the enemy would be back upon his last great lines of defence — the rivers Oder, Po and Rhine; but the Wehrmacht had a lot of fight left in it still, and winter was just ahead. The climactic battles would come in 1945, that much was clear.

CHAPTER 23

Lamone River and advance to the Senio

On the morning of Nov. 28th the West Novas left Cattolica in motor transport for the front, rolling along the Adriatic coastal road in cold rainy weather through Cesenatico and thence inland to the village of Poggia, a little over two miles north-east of the city of Forli. Here the Regiment arrived at 1 A.M. on the 29th and was billeted for the next two days. Dec. 1st broke chill and wet, and the West Novas had breakfast in the pre-dawn darkness and marched off at 5.30 A.M. towards the front. By night they had taken over from an Indian regiment (the 4/10th Baluchis) their positions near the Lamone River.

This was a flat country (no part more than 200 feet above sea level and most of it much less) in which the rivers and canals were steeply diked to hold the winter floods coming down from the mountains — like a bit of the Netherlands in the heart of Italy. The Lamone had dikes rising thirty to forty feet above the plain, a natural line of defence giving the Germans deep cover and a fine view across the surrounding grain and tomato fields, now nothing but stubble, mud, and straw-stacks.

The Canadian role here was part of a movement to out-flank the city of Ravenna on the one hand, and if possible to turn the flank of the Germans defending Bologna on the other, where the Americans of Fifth Army were held up by a stiff enemy defence. It was an ambitious project in view of the season, the deepening mud, the depth and swiftness of the rivers,

and the fact that Field Marshal Kesselring (due to the now chaotic state of the railway system in Germany itself, which prevented large movements of troops and material from one major front to another) had been weakened little if at all by the German disasters in France and Hungary.

For 3rd Brigade the immediate object was to clear the enemy from the south side of the Lamone River, and the chief obstacle in the way was a canal, the Scolo Via Cupa, lying across the front. This canal had high diked banks where the Germans had dug in their machine-guns and hidden their mortars and tanks, all commanding a wide field of fire across the low-lying farms to the south. Said Division, "Speed is to be the keynote, and if necessary the town of Russi is to be bypassed." British aircraft had been busy attacking the canal positions and the roads behind them, and at 9 A.M. on Dec. 2nd the Canadian artillery opened a violent barrage upon the German front. A few minutes later the West Novas went forward to the attack with "B" Company (Major J. H. Jones M.C.) on the left, "C" Company (Major G. L. F. McNeil M.C.) on the right, followed by "A" Company (Capt. D. I. Rice) and "D" Company (Major J. K. Rhodes DSO) ready to exploit any opening that presented itself.

It was a bright sunny day for a change, and at first the forward companies met little opposition except from the too-enthusiastic RAF, which strafed "C" Company vigorously for a few minutes. By 11 A.M. "B" and "C" had got well forward, overcoming several German machine-gun posts in houses amongst the fields and sending back a little group of prisoners. Lt. Col. Saunders now sent "A" Company forward in close support, as "C" was held up by several machine-guns dug into the canal bank only 50 to 100 yards ahead, and small groups of German troops appeared to be slipping forward between them and "B" as if for a counter-attack.

Due to this German movement on its left and a terrific fire of machine-guns and mortars on its front "C" Company was obliged to withdraw some distance in mid-afternoon. In the meantime "B" Company had made a dash for the canal and got one platoon across by leaping on the rubble of a blown bridge. In view of "C's" withdrawal on their right, "B" now dug in astride the canal. Brigadier Bernatchez came up to

battalion HQ about 4 P.M. to view the situation for himself, and "B" Company was ordered to hang on at all costs until dark, when "A" and "D" would pass through, one behind the other, to exploit the crossing.

The winter sun went down at 4.30. At 5.45 P.M. the Canadian barrage came down on the German positions and rear, and fifteen minutes later "A" Company began to move across the canal through "B". At 7 P.M. "D" Company followed; but these two companies soon ran into strong enemy forces dug in just beyond and supported by the fire of tanks. At 10.20 P.M. they were pulled back to the "home" side whilst the Canadian artillery gave the German positions another hammering and the engineers fitted a Bailey bridge across the canal.

At 2 A.M. on Dec. 3rd "A" Company once more pushed forward into the darkness on the far side, closely followed by "D", and began a left-hook movement to cut off and clear the Germans facing across the canal. At 5.25 A.M. "B" Company drew up its rear platoon across the now completed bridge and struck out straight for the town of Russi. All three companies made fast progress as dawn broke and revealed a landmark here and there amongst the gently rolling farmlands beyond the canal. At 9.20 A.M. "B" Company entered Russi before the enemy had time to organize a street fight and pushed on through to the northern outskirts, where German machine-guns had posted themselves in the stout stone houses and were not to be shaken by infantry without tank support.

While "A" Company was clearing the Germans from their positions along the canal dike to enable "C" to cross, "D" Company struck off across country at a good pace, first forcing a German prisoner to remove the demolition charges from a culvert near the canal. As these West Novas passed through a small Italian hamlet in the fields their leading platoon under Lieut. D. A. Campbell MC ran into a force of Germans in a reserve position and after a short and savage little battle overcame them. The prisoners came running back with hands up, crying in terror and heading blindly in several directions until they were booted in the direction of the West Nova rear by the following wave of "D" Company — all this to the astonishment and pleasure of the Italian farmers and their families, who

came from their hiding places as the fighting passed and clapped and jeered at this spectacle of Hitler's "supermen" in defeat.

At 9.30 A.M. "D" Company came up against German machine-guns concealed in hollowed-out haystacks with the gunners dug into the ground beneath and very difficult to get at. Stout attempts were made to rush these posts as the morning wore on, without success. L/Cpl. Worthyake made a particularly gallant effort, dashing towards one of the haystacks firing a Bren gun from the hip, but he fell severely wounded only a few yards from the German gun. An attempt was made to set the stacks on fire with a flame-thrower but the operators could not get close enough to reach them. Finally it was accomplished by firing tracer bullets into the straw, and the German machine-gunners were shot down as they scrambled out of the blazing stacks.

By this time the enemy had switched a battery of mortars to deal with the aggressive West Novas, and a sudden flurry of well-placed mortar bombs fell in the midst of them. Amongst others the C/O, Major J. K. Rhodes, and Lieut. Don Campbell were wounded, as well as the forward artillery officer Capt. Fred Drury. (As Lieut. Campbell was carried away on a stretcher he called a cheery goodbye to the company, telling them to address him henceforth "care of the Defence Platoon, Army HQ, London!") It was now about noon, and "C" Company had got across the canal and was pressing towards the road and railway junction under intense machine-gun fire. All the forward companies needed armoured support against the well-sited German machine-guns and their fanatical crews which now stood between the Regiment and a complete break-through, but the few tanks available had been sent forward to "D" Company and the rest had to manage without. Consequently the rate of advance through the afternoon was slow and the fighting difficult.

At sundown a cold thick mist arose from the canal and the many drainage ditches in the fields, and with this advantage the West Novas pressed forward into the night. The going was very bad in the darkness owing to the tenacious mud and the invisible holes and ditches, and the company and platoon commanders had to use their compasses every step of the way. Before long the forward platoons reported sounds of enemy

transport moving some distance ahead. There was some rifle fire and an occasional machine-gun burst, apparently from German troops trying to delay the advance but not anxious to stand and fight it out in the clammy dark. Here and there an enemy group or a lone sniper held post in one of the silent farmhouses but these were cleared and the survivors marched along as prisoners.

At 3 A.M. a German tank spat fire out of the darkness at "A" Company and then disappeared. When the sun broke through the mist on the morning of Dec. 4th all four West Nova rifle companies were able to quicken their pace, and all got on to their objectives without trouble. Just after "A" Company was established, a pair of German horse-drawn wagons came lumbering along the road from the direction of Russi, loaded with uniforms, ammunition and various equipment, apparently part of a battalion HQ store. "A" Company's leading Bren-gunners opened fire, killed the horses and captured the wagons intact, together with their loads and seven astonished German soldiers. Each of the forward companies now sent patrols to explore towards the Lamone River, and by noon it was clear that the enemy had withdrawn his main force behind it.

There remained one or two German pockets on the near side, supported by machine-guns and mortars firing from the Lamone dikes, and while engaged in clearing one of these shortly after noon on Dec. 4th the O/C "B" Company, Major J. H. Jones MC, was killed by a mortar fragment. Thus in the closing phase of an action in which his company had played a vital part passed one of the finest infantry fighters in the Canadian Army. Harvey Jones was one of the originals who landed in Sicily with the Regiment, at that time Signals Officer; but he was never quite happy in that post and when he obtained command of a rifle platoon he was in his element. His dashing exploit near Berardi in the Ortona battle won him the Military Cross, and after recovering from his wound he had further distinguished himself for personal courage and aggressive leadership in every action during 1944.

By nightfall the West Novas had taken 35 prisoners and cleared their front to the Lamone. They now received orders to stand fast while 1st Brigade, which had moved up through

captured Russi, forced a passage of the Lamone just to the south. The 1st Brigade attack went in on the night of Dec. 4/5th but found the enemy holding the river line in force, in deep and well braced dugouts and weapon pits evidently long prepared, and supported not only by artillery but by the direct fire of tanks and self-propelled guns concealed behind the farther dike. The RCR suffered severely and all were driven back across the Lamone. The Germans captured a number of Bren guns and 2-inch mortars, and for the next two or three days they amused themselves by firing these weapons at a West Nova outpost occupying a large monastery called (with memories of the Sangro) "The Castle".

The weather continued fine and cool, with mist at night, during which the West Nova patrols explored the near bank for favourable crossing places. The stream was quite narrow, confined as it was between the 40-foot dikes, but the current ran strongly with the water still rising fast as the result of continued rains in the mountains. Early on the morning of Dec. 10th patrols reported that the Lamone had risen another four or five feet! It was now the turn of 3rd Brigade to attempt the difficult passage, together with the 48th Highlanders, who had not been engaged in the initial attempt by 1st Brigade. The attack was to go in with the 48th on the left, the West Novas in the centre, and the Carleton and Yorks on the right, all preceded by a heavy bombardment by artillery and aircraft. The Germans suspected the attempt and shelled the West Nova positions heavily throughout the night of Dec. 9/10th.

The Regiment's plan was to assault with "A" Company (Capt. D. I. Rice) on the left and "C" Company (Major G. L. F. McNeil MC) on their right. The immediate objectives were two large houses (Casa Zani and Casa Venturi) on the lateral road running behind the German defences on the west bank of the river. When these were taken "D" Company (Capt. W. E. Garber) would pass through and dig in to the south of "C" position, whilst "B" (Major W. H. P. David) would move up to the road and form a firm base for further operations. Two Olafson foot-bridges and a number of canvas assault-boats were available for the stream crossing.

The artillery and aircraft began their preparatory bombardment on the evening of Dec. 10th, and when the barrage

lifted at 9 P.M. the West Novas went in to the attack. Their crossing area extended 500 yards downstream from a demolished railway bridge lying in front of the West Nova outpost in "The Castle". The alert Germans laid down a powerful and accurate mortar barrage on the Regiment's forming-up positions, so that "C" Company suffered 30 killed and wounded before the attack got under way at all. As the forward platoons reached the near dike of the Lamone the enemy added to this inferno with an artillery and mortar barrage on the stream itself while the German infantry and machine-gunners swept the dike with small-arms fire.

"C" Company's foot-bridge was damaged before the pioneers could shove it into place. Their radio set also was hit and for some time HQ had no word of them. On the left, "A" Company got down to the river with few casualties, and the pioneers carried the Olafson bridge down the inner face of the dike and began to push it across under covering fire from the Vickers machine-guns posted in "The Castle". At 10 P.M., just as "A's" bridge was half-way over, the strong current capsized it. Capt. Rice sent men to bring up assault boats.

While the West Novas thus were taking the brunt of the German opposition at its sensitive point between the railway and highway bridges leading to Bagnacavallo, the regiments to their right and left had succeeded in establishing bridgeheads on the farther bank. A gallant attempt by a "D" Company patrol to cross the Lamone on the rubble of the railway bridge itself towards midnight was beaten back by machine-gun fire, and Brigadier Bernatchez, who had come up to West Nova HQ to examine the situation, directed the Regiment to give over its attempts there and to attack the objective from both flanks by passing through the other bridgeheads.

Accordingly at 1.30 A.M. on Dec. 11th "B" Company moved up through the Carleton and Yorks, with "A" following, while "D" passed over through the 48th Highlanders, leaving the badly shattered "C" Company to reorganize on the east side of the river. "D" had a slow and difficult passage in the dark, with only one boat available, however they got over the Lamone at last and pushed north over the railway line, suffering a number of casualties from shell fire and from mines, with which the enemy had sown the railway embankment and its

approaches. At first light they succeeded in storming the Casa Zani and Casa Venturi, taking several prisoners.

In the meantime "B" Company got across at 2.30 A.M. and swung left along the lateral road behind the German dike, while "A" Company stormed its way along the dike itself, killing or capturing the defenders. The strength of the German positions on this part of the Lamone was clearly revealed as "A" Company fought along. Behind the weapon pits and slits there were deep and strongly timbered dugouts in the reverse side of the dike every 20 feet or so, impervious to artillery fire, and equipped with every possible device including electric lights!

While this was going on the Germans attempted to withdraw two self-propelled guns which had been firing through holes in the dike. They blundered into "B" Company, busily clearing houses along the road behind. Cpl. Peter Burnet with his Piat and two men concealed themselves in the road ditch, let these armoured gun-vehicles roll up within a few feet, and knocked out both with well-aimed shots. In the case of one of the S. P. guns, a Piat shot struck the armour just above the lower track-bogies, passed inside at a steep angle and blew the German driver's head clean off, a gruesome subject for the press photographers who later crossed the river.

By 7 A.M. the forward companies were all on their objectives and in contact, having taken the German defences by a perfect "squeeze-play" in the early morning darkness. They remained in great danger from the German tanks, but by 10 A.M. several of the Regiment's anti-tank guns had been ferried across the Lamone on rafts and that peril passed. The Royal 22nd Regiment, reserve battalion of 3rd Brigade, was now passing through on the left, and the West Novas spent the rest of this wet and muddy day in preparation for another night attack.

At 7.40 P.M. (Dec. 11th) "A", "B" and "D" companies began to move forward, with "A" in the lead. There was little opposition. "A" Company met some rifle fire from German infantry defending a bogged-down tank, but the German crew fled as a West Nova group armed with a Piat stalked the tank in the dark by its enormous tracks. The tank, a new type called the "Hornet", was taken intact with its 88 mm. cannon,

machine-gun — even the Luger pistols of the crew were still in the racks. "D" Company now passed through "A" and after some sporadic fighting along the way which yielded a handful of prisoners, reached its objective at 4 A.M.

The West Novas now dug in as ordered, and soon after noon their transport was able to get across the Lamone and come up. The last casualties of the Lamone crossing were Captain G. F. Johnston and L/Sgt. Alton Macdonald of the pioneer platoon, who were killed by a Schu mine while crossing the dike, where they had been superintending the rafting operations. It was another rainy day and the enemy shelled and mortared the new positions viciously from hour to hour. During the afternoon of the 12th "A" Company relieved a company of the Royal 22nd Regiment posted at a crossroads just past their old objective. "D" Company then moved up and dug in south of the crossroads, while "B" moved north along the road and established itself in a group of buildings to the right.

The next obstacle on the way to Bagnacavallo was another canal, the Fossa Vecchio, crossed by the same railway and the same highway, and with the same bridges blown. The pattern was getting familiar — and the German was learning the tricks. At midnight "A" Company thrust forward to the Vecchio, reaching it at the Casa Peli, where the road crossed the canal. "B" Company now moved up to pass through "A" and cross the canal, but on reaching it the water was found to be 20 feet wide and too deep to wade, an unexpected obstacle. Brigade had reported the canal readily passable, calling it the "Vecchio ditch", and no bridging arrangements had been made. The rubble of the highway bridge was covered by German troops posted in fortified houses opposite, with tanks shooting straight down the road.

Farther up, the tumbled masonry of the railway bridge offered a way across. The situation was exactly that of the Lamone crossing, where the railway bridge and the embankment beyond had been sown with mines and covered by the fire of several machine-guns. The men of "B" Company quite naturally hesitated at the prospect. However a single platoon dashed across led by Major W. H. P. David himself, and began to fight its way along the farther side of the Vecchio in a

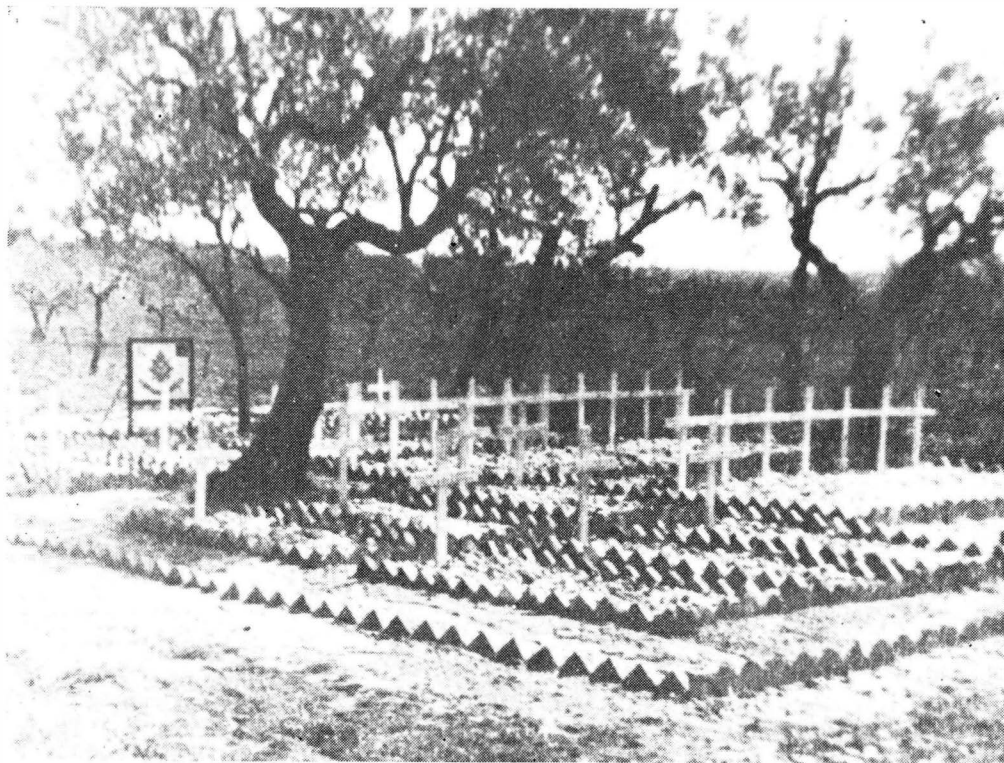
desperate attempt to clear the Germans from the houses covering the blown highway bridge opposite "A", where "B's" attempt to pass through had been checked.

David and his men actually reached these positions but found the Germans strongly posted and supported by tanks concealed in the gardens behind the buildings, and after a short fight in which their Piat ammunition was exhausted they had to withdraw, indeed they barely managed to escape by swimming the canal. As this gallant few in their sodden clothing began to drag themselves up the dike on the West Nova side, the German tanks opened fire again, and Major David fell severely wounded for the third time in this war. At great risk several "A" Company men ran out of their slit trenches and dragged David and other wounded to safety.

Thus the attack came to a halt. Movement in the muddy open approaches to the canal was suicidal in daylight so long as the enemy manned his machine-guns and tanks on the opposite dike or in the stone-walled houses immediately behind. Support from Canadian tanks was impossible because they could not cross the Vecchio or even get up the dike on the near side. At sundown the Brigadier again visited Lt. Col. Saunders to discuss the prospects. It was decided that "C" Company, now reinforced and reorganized, should cross the canal above the railway bridge, then swing to deal with the houses opposite "A's" position at the Casa Peli. "A" Company then could cross the canal and move forward on the right of "C".

This attempt began at 8 P.M. The sky was overcast and the night very dark. By 10 P.M. "C" Company was across the canal with little notice from the enemy, but as the men scrambled over the railway embankment to begin their flank attack the Germans opened a sharp and increasing fire with machine-guns and mortars. However the company pushed along the far bank of the Vecchio, reached the houses opposite "A", and attacked the enemy within. The German infantry in the buildings were shaken up by Piat bombs and several of them killed or wounded in the subsequent fighting, but the two tanks hidden behind the houses again proved a decisive factor and the leading platoon of "C" was driven back.

As his Piat bombs had been consumed in the attack on the buildings McNeil could do nothing with the tanks, so he decid-



West Nova graves under the apple trees, Russi, Italy.



Top : West Novas after the Lamone crossing.
Centre : Fighting towards the famous "gully", Ortona. Note the dead German outside the house.
Below : Cpl. Peter Burnet and Ptes. Comeau and McSorley inspect one of the German S. P. guns they knocked out with a Piat in the Lamone fighting.

ed to dig in where he was, forming a precarious bridgehead with two platoons dug in on the German side of the Vecchio and one on the friendly side where "A" Company was posted. In the meantime "B" Company, now under command of Major D. W. McAdam, had moved along the home side of the canal to occupy "C's" old position. This was the situation when dawn broke on Dec. 14th. The presence of the enemy tanks rendered very perilous the position of the two forward platoons of "C" Company, and they were pulled back across the canal at first light under cover of the mist. Here they dug in, sharing the positions of "A" Company, and while the daylight lasted nothing more could be done.

At this time Division decided to postpone further attacks along the Vecchio for several days. During the night of Dec. 14/15th the 3rd Brigade changed its front slightly. For the West Novas this involved handing over two company positions on their right to the RCR, and taking over two company positions from the Royal 22nd Regiment on their left. By morning light of the 15th the West Novas were established in their new positions. Shortly after noon the 5th Division reported that the enemy on their front had withdrawn behind the Senio River. This made it likely that the Germans would pull back their forces from the Vecchio Canal as well, and to keep contact with them "B" Company attacked a group of houses near the canal at 2.30 P.M. The enemy was still there in force and the attack was beaten off.

Dec. 15th was clear and cold, and during the frosty night strong fighting patrols from "B" and "D" companies were pushed out towards the enemy. They found him still in his positions and very much alert. On the night of the 16th the West Novas were shifted again, this time to take over positions held by the Canadian Seaforths across the Naviglio Canal just north-east of the town of Bagnacavallo. Here they remained several days in the muddy forward positions, sending out scouts and fighting patrols each night to test the enemy's strength. These patrols had exciting adventures, crawling across the fields and attacking the enemy garrisons in various farmhouses along two country lanes called the Via Bigarano and Via Granaroli. On Dec. 20th a platoon of "D" Company, creeping forward in full daylight to attack a group of houses near the crossroads of

the Via Granaroli and Io Stradello, were ambushed by a Mark 6 Tiger tank, which emerged suddenly from a haystack spitting machine-gun bullets and 88 mm. shells at point-blank range. The platoon suffered some casualties but were saved heavy loss by the vigilance and prompt action of Canadian tanks posted with "A" Company on the north bank of the Naviglio, which shelled the tank and fired a smoke barrage which enabled the venturers to withdraw. Artillery fire later was brought down on the area of these houses and a tank or tanks were heard moving off to safer harbour. During this whole day the West Nova area was under shell and mortar fire, but for once the weather was fine and almost warm.

It should be mentioned here that the seemingly innocent hay and straw-stacks dotting this intensely cultivated lowland were favourite lurking places for tanks and for machine-gunners, who sometimes built up stout sandbag "sangars" inside. Indeed the humble farm stack all through the Italian campaign was a common hiding-place for the populace as well as the combatants. In many cases where a wealthy Fascist landlord had fled his *casa* on the approach of battle, his valuables (even to paintings and furniture) were found in haystacks in the surrounding fields. More than one fine motor-car, left behind for lack of petrol, was discovered with a haystack actually built over it, hidden from sight and wind and weather — but not from the probing bayonets of the soldiery.

So too the Canadian learned to examine the houses for rooms lately walled off with brick or stone. Within these home-made vaults (often constructed in the humble stone house of a tenant farmer rather than the big house on the hill) were found all sorts of treasures. One West Nova group discovered a room full of priceless tapestries, neatly walled off but exposed by the explosion of a German shell. Again, in digging slit trenches in or about a village the West Novas frequently came upon radios and other household treasures carefully sealed up and buried in *vinò* casks.

In such ways the troops learned to revise their early opinion of Italian poverty and fecklessness. The further they went north of Rome the more they realized that Mussolini's country contained cheek-by-jowl with filth and destitution a great deal of wealth, not only in such nick-nacks but in rich

farmland, first-rate irrigation and drainage systems, well equipped Fascist schools and barracks, and many fine mansions and modern public buildings.

Thus, crouching through the daylight hours in wet slits and dugouts in the countryside of Bagnacavallo, with its confusion of ditches, rivers and canals, and adventuring towards the enemy at night, the West Novas passed the pre-Christmas season. The night patrols were persistent and often bloody, but they were successful enough to send a steady trickle of prisoners towards the rear for questioning. (By Christmas the Regiment had taken 73 prisoners in these activities between the rivers.)

At last there came a time when the enemy had enough of it. At 4 A.M. on Dec. 21st a "C" Company fighting patrol crept forward to the loopholed houses covering the crossroads of the Via Granaroli and the Via Pieve Masieri, and found the Germans gone. The rest of "C" Company moved up promptly and the scouts went forward. The truth was apparent very soon. The enemy had withdrawn along the whole front towards the Senio.

The West Novas now had been in the line for three hard weeks, continuously under fire and engaged in desperate fighting at each canal and river crossing. Since going into action on Dec. 1st they had lost 34 killed and 101 wounded. A few reinforcements had come up but the Regiment was seriously under strength. On Dec. 23rd it had a brief respite, moving back to billets at San Michele. It was real Christmas weather, cold and cloudy, with snow specks flying. On Christmas Eve Lt. Col. A. L. Saunders left for a brief leave in Rome before transfer to another post, and Major F. E. Hiltz became C/O of the Regiment with the acting-rank of lieutenant-colonel. Christmas morning brought an EFI issue to the troops — chocolate, nuts and spirits. The day was fine and cool. Padre Wilmot held religious services in three company areas during the morning and at noon all ranks sat down to a fine hot Christmas dinner. On the 26th Major J. K. Rhodes DSO, recovered from his wound, returned to the Regiment and took command of "A" Company. Capt. Don Rice, who had led this company so ably

in the Lamone fighting, became battle adjutant. At this time also about 90 other ranks were received as reinforcements and allotted to the various companies.

The West Novas returned to the front on Dec. 27th, taking over positions from the 48th Highlanders near enemy-held Granarolo on the Cantrighella Canal south-west of Bagnacavallo, with the 6th Cheshire Regiment on their left. It was now known that the drive on Lugo and Bologna had been given over for the winter, and both sides settled down to "static" warfare along the general line of the Senio River. This did not mean a static — much less an easy life for the troops. Apart from the miserable conditions of trench life in winter in this low and soggy landscape there began the old grim business of harassing the enemy by patrols, day and night, a form of warfare which made physical and mental demands on all ranks far more severe than those of out-and-out battle. It was last year's Arielli war all over again, with all its mud and cold and bloodshed.

Here the fighting patrol, a little group led usually by an officer but often by a skilful NCO, ventured into the darkness, walking when possible, crawling in the clammy mud most of the time, diving into water-logged shell holes when discovered, lying motionless sometimes for hours wet through and half frozen in the winter dark, and pressing forward again towards some known post of the enemy. And there night after night the German sentries waited, listened, watched for the Canadian patrol that sooner or later was bound to come. All the approaches had been marked and ranged by the German riflemen, machine-gunners and mortar crews. The ground was sown with S-mines and laced with trip-wires which set off other mines or ignited flares. Nothing had been neglected. Into this killing-ground went the fighting patrol with firm instructions to "contact and engage the enemy".

Before leaving their own line the men of the patrol had stripped off their regimental flashes and division patches, removed from their pockets all letters, books or keepsakes which might enable the enemy to gain information from their bodies. It was like a departure from life. "Contact and engage" invariably meant a fight in the open — for not one patrol out of five was able to get into the German positions — against an

enemy securely dug-in or posted behind the stone walls of a house, commanding a perfect field of fire and knowing every inch of it. After contact and engagement the patrol had to withdraw across the whole bullet-swept zone between the lines (where the very mud was soon in eruption as the German mortar bombs came fluttering down and burst, and often the well-meant covering fire of friendly troops was a menace in itself) dragging back their wounded, their weapons and themselves, a slow and painful business, and knowing that the approach of daylight meant almost certain death for everyone.

This went on throughout the winter months along the Senio and its neighbouring canals. In the companies all ranks had to take their turn. Besides the fighting patrols there were contact patrols to keep touch with the regiments on each flank, standing patrols, ambush patrols, reconnaissance patrols — sometimes as many as six West Nova patrols were abroad in a single night. By way of variation in this life the supporting tanks or artillery from time to time shot-up a factory, a church or some other prominent building on the German side of the Cantrighella, or the mortar crews engaged an enemy strong-point there. On the other hand the Germans frequently shelled and mortared the West Nova positions, and occasionally a forward company received the misdirected attention of the RAF.

In these conditions ended the year 1944, exactly as it had begun. On New Year's Eve a "B" Company patrol penetrated to the Naviglio Canal and heard the Germans marking the passage of another year with singing and the music of accordions. It was a fine moonlit night, and on the stroke of midnight a sudden thunder of Canadian artillery rolled along the front. Brigade HQ when questioned on the phone termed it "A New Year's present to the infantry" — meaning the German infantry no doubt.

By this stage of the war, owing to the chronic shortage of reinforcements, the West Novas like every other Canadian infantry battalion were depending heavily on wounded veterans returning from the convalescent hospitals. When a newly wounded man was being carried off by the stretcher-bearers it was common to hear the cry, "Come back soon, boy — we need you!" One result of all this could be seen in the fighting for

the Lamone and its adjacent canals, where out of 135 West Novas killed or wounded no less than 42 bore the scars of previous battles.

Amongst the killed were Alexander "Slugger" Vingar, MM, the fighting sergeant who first distinguished himself (and was wounded) in "B" Company's famous thrust towards Berardi in the Ortona battle, and later won the Military Medal for his part in the rescue of "A" Company in the Hitler Line. Another was Sergeant Alfred Amero MM. Others killed were Cpl. Lloyd McKinnon, previously wounded at Ortona; Pte. Robert Kane, wounded on the Sangro heights; and Ptes. Arthur Robertson and George Shaw, both wounded in the fighting through the Gothic Line.

The wounded included Sergeant Vernon Amberman MM, one of the heroes of the Savio fighting; Sergeant John McMullen, previously wounded at Ortona and again in the Gothic Line; Cpl. Douglas Lewis, previously wounded in the Gothic Line; Cpl. Ross Peeler, wounded in the Gothic Line; L/Cpl. Murray Corbin, wounded at Ortona and again in the Gothic Line; L/Cpl. Thomas Cox, wounded in the Hitler Line; L/Cpl. Leo O'Meara, wounded in the Gothic Line; L/Cpl. James Worthylake, wounded in the Gothic Line; L/Cpl. Lloyd Young, one of the Regiment's crack baseball players and a former member of the famous "Liverpool Larrupers", champions of Nova Scotia in the pre-war days; Pte. Gordon Rogerson, previously wounded in Sicily; Pte. Alfred Chouinard, previously wounded at Ortona and again in the Hitler Line; Pte. Borden Chapman, previously wounded on the Arielli and again in the Gothic Line; Pte. James Larisey, previously wounded on the Arielli and again in the Gothic Line; Pte. Ernest Rennehan, previously wounded on the Arielli and again in the Hitler Line; Pte. John P. Bennett, previously wounded in the Hitler Line and again in the Gothic Line; Pte. William Burns, wounded in the Hitler Line and again in the Gothic Line; Ptes. Edgar Clarke, James R. Johnson, James Keating, John Tickner — all previously wounded on the Arielli; Ptes. Robert Emmett, Kay Macleod, previously wounded in the Hitler Line; Ptes. Russell Corkum, Robert Cox, Joseph E. Gallant, Kenneth Hazelton, Bernard Hughes, William

Levison, C. G. MacDonald, William Rockwell, Everett Stoddard, Wallace Titus, George Blenkhorn, Joseph P. Bourque — all previously wounded in the Gothic Line.

The officers dead were Major J. H. Jones MC and Lieut. Walter F. Sponagle, who died of wounds at this time from wounds sustained earlier in the fighting. The officers wounded were Major W. H. P. David (twice wounded before), Major J. K. Rhodes DSO, Capt. G. F. Johnston, Lieuts. L. J. Belliveau, D. A. Campbell MC, C. M. Forsythe-Smith and H. G. MacGillivray.

CHAPTER 24

Winter war along the Senio

The year 1945 opened with an unlucky omen. Towards midnight of Jan. 1st a "B" Company patrol of six men in charge of Lieut. H. S. Kennedy crept forward to the bank of the Naviglio Canal with an "18" radio set. They had orders to dig in on the canal bank and await the rest of their platoon, who would then establish an outpost. Just as they passed over the canal bank a German machine-gun opened fire and Lieut. Kennedy fell mortally wounded. The patrol returned the German fire but before long were obliged to scatter and withdraw, leaving the radio set and Lieut. Kennedy's body on the bank. Two of the men, severely wounded, managed to drag themselves back unaided to "B" Company's lines, taking two hours to make it. Soon after this affair the Canadian 2nd Brigade was ordered to put in an attack on the village of Granarola, to the left of 3rd Brigade. In connection with this the West Novas were ordered to push up to the Naviglio Canal on the 2nd Brigade's right and attack in conformity with that brigade's flank.

The attack went in on the night of Jan. 3rd. As soon as the Canadian artillery opened their barrage on the German positions, the enemy opened a heavy counter-fire, and the West Novas in their forward positions and in No Man's Land (five patrols were out) endured a searching bombardment from the German artillery, mortars, machine-guns and from S. P. guns or tanks shooting through holes in the dikes. This continued

through the night. At daylight on the 4th the enemy (who had been expected to pull back to the Senio to avoid attack) was still sitting tight along the Naviglio Canal. For proof, three of the five West Nova patrols had been shot-up, and two had suffered casualties.

The 3rd Brigade now joined battle, and at dawn on the 4th "D" Company (Capt. W. E. Garber) of the West Novas struck out towards the Naviglio, preceded by an artillery and mortar barrage. By 9.30 A.M. the company had taken its first objective with few casualties and was digging in, and towards noon reported itself firmly established. "A" Company (Capt. E. D. Hersey) now pushed up to conform to "D's" right. At this time the battle was at its height and the noise was terrific, what with the Canadian and German artillery and mortars, the rippling gusts of small-arms fire, a steady *woomp-woomp* of aerial bombs as the RAF operated its "shuttle-service" over the enemy positions, and the angry *pom-pom* and small black explosions of the German flak.

At 1 P.M. after a short fight "A" Company reached its first objective and "D" made another forward leap. But this time "A's" attempt to close up on "D's" right was stopped by machine-gun fire. For a time the situation was obscure and at 1.45 P.M. Lt. Col. Hiltz went forward to see for himself. He found that "A" Company had been obliged to dig in some distance to "D's" right flank rear. At sundown Brigadier Bernatchez and his artillery representative (Major Brown) arrived at West Nova HQ to discuss operations for the coming night. The day's casualties had been light — 5 killed and 9 wounded — and it was decided that "A" Company should attack again towards the village of Cotignola, closely supported by "C". At 8.30 P.M. the Canadian barrage came down promptly and in less than an hour "A" Company (Lt. A. C. Mackenzie) was on its objective with "C" close behind. The enemy, shelled out, had withdrawn under cover of darkness. All three forward companies now pushed ahead, making contact with the Carleton and Yorks on their right and the Seaforths on the left as they went along.

By 1 A.M. on Jan. 5th "D" Company had reached the Naviglio Canal and found one bridge partly blown and another intact. A patrol went over the canal and reported the bridges

charged for demolition and the roads beyond heavily mined, but no sign of enemy troops. The Regiment passed over the Naviglio and the advance towards the Senio River continued through the day and the following night. The weather was fine and cool and there was very little mortar or artillery fire. The forward troops reported an occasional spatter of bullets from retreating enemy patrols.

By daylight on Jan. 6th the Regiment was drawing up to the Senio through a desolation of muddy fields and the smoking ruins of farmhouses. No doubt the Germans had destroyed the buildings to give a clear field for their guns along the river but it seemed in tune with the "scorched Italian earth" policy they had followed ever since Ortona. On this day the weather broke again with rain, sleet and snow, and the snowflakes continued to fall slowly all through Jan. 7th, when the West Novas finally confronted the Germans along the Senio and promptly came under their mortar and artillery fire. The enemy had a number of S. P. cannon moving behind the tall river dikes and shooting through holes blown by their engineers. One of these guns scored two hits on "D" Company's newly established HQ, but these efforts of the enemy gunners and mortar crews seemed to be ranging experiments and on the whole the day was fairly quiet.

During the night a "B" Company patrol went up to the Senio and came back reporting the stream 30 to 45 feet wide. The Germans were dug in on both banks and were very active with their mortars and S. P. guns. Also they were much more aggressive than the common run of enemy troops, and soon after nightfall on Jan. 8th a German fighting patrol made a perfectly timed and executed raid upon a "C" Company outpost in an isolated position near the river. The post consisted of a house in which a "C" Company sergeant attended a telephone, and some slit trenches in the embankment of the railway close to the blown bridge. In these trenches were six men including a corporal, with two Brens and four tommy-guns.

A relief was about to take place and four men of the relief party had just arrived in the house, one of them carrying a new type of flame-thrower, when the attack took place. The night was very dark, with snow and sleet falling, and the German raiders, 25 to 30 men in white snow-hoods which made

them practically invisible, crept up to the post and suddenly rushed in from all sides firing automatic rifles and pistols and throwing grenades. Evidently they had been picked for the job, for they yelled in quite good English, "Hands up! You're surrounded!" and so on. It was all over in a minute. One of the Bren gunners had time to fire two short bursts and that was all. The sergeant and three of the relief men managed to drop out of the rear windows and get away through a vineyard. The rest were taken without a chance to fight or to escape. (The nimble sergeant's blunt report to "C" Company HQ is worth recording here — "Sir, there are seven men and a flame-thrower on the way to Berlin!")

This was not the end of the night's ill fortune, for when a patrol from "A" Company reached the dike soon afterwards a galaxy of German flares turned the night to day, quickly followed by a storm of rifle-grenades and machine-gun fire from both sides of the river. The patrol had to scatter, lie doggo for a time, and crawl away, leaving two of their number severely wounded on the dike. Encouraged by these events the Germans now sent a hooded patrol towards "C" Company's main positions, but these were spotted and greeted with Bren fire. They melted away into the snowy dark. Following this affair Lieut. MacHattie and his pioneers worked nightly placing mines and wire about the Regiment's outposts near the river. Some of this work had to be done on the near bank of the Senio itself, a difficult and daring job. All of these positions were so close to the enemy that his vehicles could be heard moving about in Cotignola, and on the afternoon of Jan. 10th the RAF carried out a heavy bombing and machine-gunning attack on that busy place.

On the night of the 10th after local artillery and mortar bombardment a fighting patrol from "A" Company penetrated to the river. They found the enemy on the farther dike alert, in fact shooting hard with rifles and machine-guns, to which in a few moments accurate mortar fire was added. The patrol drew off in the starlight carrying their wounded. Thus in a typical patrol encounter ended the West Novas' long first tour of duty in the winter war. With the exception of a brief interlude at Christmas the Regiment had been in the line continuously for 42 days, fighting much of the time and always under fire. After

sundown on Jan. 11th the West Nova positions were taken over by the 48th Highlanders of Canada and (in the same motor vehicles which had brought the Highlanders to the debussing point) the Regiment moved back in a clear starlight night to the town of Russi, which "B" Company had captured on Dec. 3rd.

Here and at nearby Godo the West Novas experienced such luxuries as pay parades, EFI issues, movies and religious services for the first time in many days, and the first real chance to clean weapons, clothing and equipment since they left Cattolica on Nov. 28th. In the meantime there was surprising news from the Western Front. During the latter part of December and the early days of January the German army of the Rhine had made a sudden thrust in great strength, broken through the American 1st Army and almost reached Sedan. On Jan. 10th the "Battle of the Bulge" was still in progress but the great danger was past. However this sharp and determined effort of the Germans in the Ardennes received some careful consideration by Sir Harold Alexander's staff in Italy, where Kesselring's army was equal in numbers to the Allied force and contained sufficient first-line divisions to make it formidable in attack as hitherto it had been in defence. It was thought likely that Kesselring would attempt a similar thrust, and so for the first time since landing in Italy the Allied staff made large scale defensive plans.

As part of 3rd Brigade the West Novas' role in the defensive scheme was that of counter-attack, for which the Brigade would be concentrated at Mezzano in connection with a proposed "North switch line". Lt. Col. Hiltz, the battle adjutant, the company commanders and the C/O's of the Regiment's carrier, mortar and anti-tank platoons all went to Mezzano, where (together with representatives of the supporting tanks, artillery and medium machine-guns) they were shown over the proposed counter-attack positions by the acting Brigadier, Lt. Col. Bell-Irving DSO. The story given them at the time (the truth, but not the whole truth) was that a force of newly-armed and trained Italians, ardently anti-German, were holding part of the Allied line north of Ravenna, and the Canadians were to stop the hole if the Germans selected that part of it for a break-through — as they very likely would.

Meanwhile the Regiment carried out training for its counter-attack role, which sounded so much better than pure "defensive warfare". The Canadian never displayed much interest in defence except when grim necessity forced him into the ground; at all other times it was difficult to get him to dig a slit trench or a dugout. His philosophy always was, "What's the use? The Jerry's got some good ones over there and we'll have 'em by night." He admired the perfection of German defences and would inspect a captured position carefully, pointing out this or that advantage; but it never occurred to him to try this sort of thing for himself unless his officer or NCO demanded it or until the enemy mortar bombs were crashing down and the Spandau bullets whipping the grass-tops. This attitude cost him blood and sweat from time to time; but on the whole it was a good attitude, the attitude of a born fighting man whose motto after five hard years was still the same "Berlin or bust" he had chalked on the sides of railway cars back in '39.

The weather during this energetic week of "rest" at Russi was mostly fine and cold; but true to form it broke on Jan. 19th when, after sunset, the West Novas rolled away towards the front in a bleak darkness slashed with rain and sleet. The Regiment's role, in the counter-attack scheme had not been given up with the passing of the German offensive "flap", but the front line battalions had to be relieved. And so once more the West Novas entered the front line, taking over positions of the Loyal Edmontons just north of Bagnacavallo, quite near their old stamping-ground of the week before Christmas.

CHAPTER 25

The last fighting in Italy

The towns of Lugo and Bagnacavallo lay less than three miles apart. Between them the Senio River flowed north and then turned in a wide curve towards the east. The Germans held Lugo and the left bank of the Senio generally; but they also held the ground on the right bank inside the curve, including the hamlet of San Potito and its outlying farmhouses. The West Novas faced part of the German front within the curve — "B" Company on the right with outposts on the Senio bank itself, "A" Company in the centre about 400 yards from the river, "C" Company on the left about 1,000 yards from the river. "D" Company in reserve along a road called the Via Crocetta, and Battalion HQ in the Casa Carani, a substantial farmhouse on the Pieve Masiera road.

All of these positions lay in an expanse of muddy fields and vineyards laid off in neat squares by a series of parallel farm lanes, some running north-east across the inner curve of the Senio, others crossing them at right-angles towards the south-east. The usual shattered farmhouses, barns and sheds were dotted along these lanes, each a potential strong-point and each a target for the opposing mortars and artillery. The vineyards consisted of many rows of tall poles, each row strung with four wires on which the vines were trained, the first wire 3 feet from the ground and the others spaced about 18 inches apart above it. Between each row of poles was a ploughed strip 15 to 20 feet wide in which the Italians planted vegetables and some-

times grain. In summer when the vines had climbed and covered the wires these green rows made a useful screen for troop movements. But in winter, when the leaves were gone and the vines cut back for next year's growing, the landscape was a monotony of bare poles and wires staggering across the flat wet fields, of naked pollarded trees standing like worn-out shaving brushes along the muddy lanes, and in the distance the long steep dikes of the Senio like a Roman wall barring the way to Lugo.

Within this melancholy scene, crouching in soggy slit trenches and weapon pits, peering from loopholes in the upper stories of tottering farmhouses, both sides lay concealed with their rifles, machine-guns and mortars and their radios or telephone lines to the artillery. Every road and lane, every building, every clump of bushes, every possible vantage point was marked and ranged — even to the factory chimney in San Potito — and by day and by night a harassing fire of all arms was directed on each from time to time. All day snipers lay and watched for the slightest sign of human movement, each night the patrols crept forth on their deadly errands, each night the pioneers of both sides busied themselves in laying mines and wire.

At regular intervals the forward companies of the Regiment were relieved by the one in reserve, and thus one company at a time was able to enjoy the civilized comforts of Bagnacavallo, where Mr. Chivers the auxiliary service officer had established a well-stocked canteen and hostel, and where there were shower baths, good meals and beds, moving pictures and other delights, very strange and wonderful after the days and nights in the trenches.

The weather varied. Sometimes it was clear and cold, the whole scene white with snow like Nova Scotia itself at this time of the year. Then the air turned mild and the copious Italian rain came down, followed by days and nights of clear skies, and then the clouds once more.

Throughout this period the RAF harassed the Germans behind the Senio dikes whenever there was flying weather. The Luftwaffe rarely put in an appearance. However the enemy introduced a specialty of his own, a modified form of the famous V-1 rocket bomb which exploded with terrific blast effects.



Top left and right : Smashed German tanks on the road from the Lamone River.

Lower left : West Novas with a captured tank.

Lower right : West Novas examine a trophy after the muddy fight on the Lamone.



Lieutenant-Colonel F. E. Hiltz.

The rockets had a short range, apparently about 2,000 yards, and at night sometimes the West Novas could see the bright flash of the discharge apparatus on the far side of the Senio. Bearings on these and the subsequent explosions were observed with care, and each day the RAF and the Canadian artillery searched noisily for the rocket-battery sites. (It should be mentioned that the Canadian field artillery at this time was rationed to about 25 shells per gun per day, and these were used carefully in what amounted to sniping at German strong-points etc.)

For their part the German artillery at this time introduced large-calibre, phosphorus shells. Another innovation was the German use of multi-coloured flares, and a West Nova patrol caught in No Man's Land was sure of a brilliant firework display in half the hues of the rainbow — in addition to the usual "stonk" of mortar and machine-gun fire.

On the other hand the West Novas now were equipped with flame throwers of two kinds. There were several of the small "lifebuoy" type which could be carried by a single man, and four of the regimental carriers were fitted with the larger "Wasp" jets and oil-tanks. The Carrier Platoon had been supplied with several Vickers medium machine-guns just before the battle for the Hitler Line. Thus the Regiment now had a various and terrific fire-power with its 6-pounder anti-tank guns, its 2-inch and 3-inch mortars, its flame-throwers, Vickers guns, Piats, Brens, tommy-guns and rifles. It was a far cry from September '39 and the single Lewis gun per company.

The difficulty of getting out the wounded after a mortar or shell bombardment and still worse after the nightly patrol clashes was recognised by both sides, and the Red Cross armband was respected by Canadians and Germans alike. However on Jan. 25th, when a German stretcher-bearer came in to "B" Company with a white flag and a message regarding the clearance of German wounded from their positions about San Potito, the man was regarded rightly with suspicion. He was blindfolded and conducted to Brigade HQ and there questioned carefully. In the late afternoon he was returned to his own lines, still blindfolded, with a blunt message that no German stretcher parties would be permitted on the near side of the river.

Possibly there was no connection with this visit, but that night the Germans attempted another "ghost patrol" raid like their successful venture of Jan. 8th. Again an outpost of "C" Company was chosen, this time near the Senio bank inside the bend at the Casa Catelini. In their white hoods the Germans succeeded in getting up to the post without detection: but an NCO, apparently their leader, was shot dead as he rushed into the doorway of the house. Greatly outnumbered and assailed from three sides by grenades and automatic weapons, the West Novas managed to withdraw intact. When a strong fighting patrol from "C" Company reached the place at first light it found the Germans gone, leaving the body of their NCO in the doorway. Meanwhile a fighting patrol from "A" Company had crept forward, dashed into the German positions just to the right, killed two of the enemy, shot-up another group who attempted to drive them out, and regained their own lines without loss.

On the following night a flood of moonlight illumined the battlefield and most patrol activities had to be cancelled on account of it. The West Nova pioneers under Lieut. H. D. MacHattie continued their perilous work of mining and wiring in front of "A" Company in spite of it, although one of them was wounded by enemy mortar fire quite early in the night. A few hours later Lieut. MacHattie was fatally wounded by an unfortunate mishap in his own lines. He was a courageous and skilful officer who had transferred from the RCE to the West Novas early in the winter fighting, and his death was a great loss to the Regiment.

February found the West Novas still holding the line along the Senio curve. The weather remained cold in general but there were frequent rains and fogs and sometimes a breath of warm humid air drifted over the countryside, a forerunner of the Italian spring. The dirt roads now were churned to a deep cold porridge by the winter's rains and snows and the incessant grind of military traffic, and to prevent a complete bog-down only essential vehicles were permitted to use them. The patrols, the wiring parties, the artillery "stonks", the mortar and machine-gun harassing continued. (One German machine-gunner, dubbed "Little Joe" by the West Novas, kept a careful

eye on the road leading up to the Regiment's position and made things very hot for jeep-drivers and other hardy souls who ventured along that stretch by daylight.)

The Germans persevered with their new rocket-bombs and on Feb. 1st obtained two direct hits on the Casa Montanari, held by the right forward platoon of "D" Company. The upper part of the house was utterly demolished and several of the West Novas buried in the debris, but all were extricated and only one man was hurt. The Regiment's snipers were very active all along the battalion front and not a day or night passed without hits scored on unwary Germans moving about the Senio banks. The enemy learned to keep his head down and large numbers of periscopes appeared along the dikes; but the snipers improved their technique and patience and the daily toll of "kills" and "possibles" continued.

On Feb. 5th the Germans were assailed with something new in the West Nova area, a propaganda broadcast made with phonograph records and loud-speaking apparatus. The broadcast was made at midnight from "C" Company's position, preceded by a few minutes' mortar fire to arouse the enemy and make sure of a proper audience. This broadcast was followed by another on the following midnight, but this time the Germans drowned it out with angry and continuous machine-gun fire.

About this time, each night, some of the mines in front of the West Nova posts were exploded in a mysterious fashion that puzzled the sentries. Eventually it was discovered that numbers of stray dogs were wandering about the battlefield — it was even thought possible that the Germans had rounded up these animals in Lugo and amongst the farms and turned them loose in No Man's Land to explode the Canadian mines. At any rate a keen watch was thenceforth kept for the dogs and several were shot.

On Feb. 7th a German prisoner taken by "C" Company revealed that the troops opposite belonged to the 956th Infantry Regiment, part of the 362nd Division. They seemed to be an active lot and their machine-gunners and mortar crews were experts. Thus on the very day this information was received (and in retaliation for a West Nova mortar bombardment of the German-held Casa Guerra at sundown) they threw a very

accurate mortar concentration on "A" Company's positions, and one of the platoon commanders, Lieut. E. M. McKinnon, was severely wounded.

On the following day "A" Company with pardonable pride reported the invention and manufacture of a new bombing weapon which they called "V. 5". It consisted of two pieces of angle-iron driven into the ground, with a long stout band of truck inner-tube to give propulsion. With this super-slingshot they were able to hurl grenades of the "36" type a distance of 100 yards with accuracy. To lessen the acerbities of war the lads also threw over a few tins of "M & V" (army canned stew) and were more surprised than pleased to find that the enemy had rigged a similar weapon, for back came several tins of a particularly nauseous German stew.

"D" Company, at this time holding the "hot corner" near the Senio, had no need of such a device. Their outposts were on one side of the dike with the Germans on the other, and there were frequent lively exchanges, both sides tossing grenades over the dike itself. Indeed "D" Company received the brunt of German attention in these closing days of the Regiment's second tour in the line, and the enemy had the last word in the argument at their expense. Shortly before daylight on Feb. 9th, the day they were to be relieved, "D" Company's small outpost near the Casa Catelini was boxed in by a heavy mortar barrage and overwhelmed by a strong German fighting patrol. The post was re-established an hour later but three of the original crew were missing.

At sundown on this day the West Novas were relieved by the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and soon were rolling through Bagnacavallo on their way back to Russi. Their last day in the line had been foggy with frequent heavy showers, so that all ranks arrived at their Russi billets wet to the skin, precisely the condition in which they had arrived on the Senio for their second tour of duty three weeks before.

Sickness and casualties in the line had reduced the companies very much, and now came another loss, although the cause was happier. Under the long-service leave system lately brought into effect, one officer and 16 other ranks left the Re-

giment at Russi en route for Canada. They had served faithfully since 1939 and were well entitled to this respite — which incidentally turned out to be a permanent withdrawal from the Regiment and the service. It was the first of many such withdrawals as the names came up (usually drawn by tickets picked out of a cap) and it meant the loss of experienced and valuable men just at the time when the Regiment was facing its final campaign. However no one begrudged these veterans their tickets home, and fortunately the reinforcements now coming up included veterans of service in Italy and France, a number of them just recovering from wounds sustained in battle.

Reinforcements of one officer and 118 other ranks joined the Regiment in Russi. Lt. Col. Hiltz went on leave and Major J. R. Cameron was detailed to the temporary command of the Regiment. In this capacity Cameron was present at the Eighth Army commander's conference at Rimini on Feb. 9th, when the attending officers were pledged to secrecy and informed that the Canadian Corps was about to leave Italy and join the Canadian Army in north-western Europe. That night, just after the Regiment arrived back in Russi from the front, Cameron called a meeting of all officers and informed them that there was to be a thorough "house-cleaning" of all regimental stores and equipment. Surplus items were to be turned back to Ordnance; other items not included in the scale of issue were to be thrown away. (This included many articles for personal comfort, such as spring beds, which had been acquired by some fortunates during the period of static warfare.) Cameron explained that all this was merely to streamline the Regiment and get it back into its mobile condition of the previous summer.

Nobody believed this, of course. In fact everybody sensed a "cover plan" and decided that the Canadians were about to lead a new attempt to drive across the Po valley. The arrival of a number of new vehicles and the replacement of certain other equipment seemed to confirm these suspicions. Of course the original purpose in sending the Canadian 1st Corps to Italy had been to give them battle experience before the Canadians went into action on the continent as an army. Circumstances had kept the 1st and 5th Divisions fighting in Italy throughout the long and bitter struggle from Reggio to the edge of the Po

plain, and in the meantime the rest of the Canadian army overseas had fought their way through France and Belgium. From time to time there had been "latrine rumours" that 1st Corps was going to join the others. All had proved false and now no one believed them any more. - For security purposes this attitude was perfect.

Meanwhile the West Novas enjoyed the pleasures of Russi, which included amongst other things movie shows in the Ritz and Dome theatres. One entertainment was provided by a CWAC troupe called "Live Show", and it was pleasant to see Canadian girls performing and to hear the feminine voices of Canada again. More than this the troops were shown a travel-picture of Canada itself, a thing that warmed the heart, especially after two, three or four years' absence. So many of the men had married in England and Scotland, and the stay in Britain had been so long that they were inclined to regard it almost as home, while Canada had become a legendary country on the far side of the world.

On Feb. 21st the West Novas paraded to their own small cemetery outside Russi, where most of the dead of the winter fighting had been taken for burial, and held a solemn service of dedication and remembrance. The graves lay neatly outlined with tiles under the trees of a little apple orchard. (More than one man present thought how soon the trees would be in blossom, like a bit of Nova Scotia in the heart of Italy). Brigadier Bernatchez came, and Lt. Col. Frank Hiltz read the address and unveiled the signboard bearing the badge of the Regiment, the twin maple leaves, and the words *Requiescat In Pace*. The Nova Scotia flag and the Canadian flag flew at the lower corners of the burial plot and the little table before the padres was covered with the Union Jack. H/Capt. George Hooper offered prayers on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church and the regimental padre H/Capt. Lawrence Wilmot offered prayers on behalf of the Protestant churches. There followed a two minute silence and then all ranks came to attention and the officers saluted as the buglers blew Last Post.

The casualties along the Senio since the first of the year had not been heavy — 15 killed, 45 wounded, 7 missing — but they had been hard enough. Amongst the killed were Sergeant Richard Elliott, who had been wounded previously at

the Sangro heights and again in the Hitler Line; and Pte. Walter E. MacDonald, previously wounded on the Arielli. Amongst the wounded were Sergeants George Aspen, Stewart Bennett and D. W. Strickland; Pte. Francis Delorey, previously wounded at Ortona; Pte. Donald Smith, previously wounded at Ortona and again in the Hitler Line; Pte. Joseph B. Johnston, also wounded for the third time; Pte. W. A. Woodworth, previously wounded on the Arielli; Ptes. Joseph Bourgeois, Theodore Sabean, Pascal Thibodeau, Ernest Titus — all previously wounded in the fighting for the Gothic Line. The officers killed were Lieuts. Herbert S. Kennedy and Harvey D. MacHattie. Those wounded were Lieuts. E. M. Mackinnon, M. H. Marchessault and Andrew C. Mackenzie.

As events proved, the West Novas had seen their last fighting on the soil of Italy, and this was a farewell really to all the dead they had left behind from Pachino to the Senio River. In one way it was a happy thought that at last they would rejoin their Canadian comrades on the Rhine; but there was an elemental sadness in parting from the comrades buried beside the rivers and scattered through the hills of Italy. There was something else. It was sad that the Regiment should be leaving just at the closing phase of the bloody campaign in which they had fought so valiantly and so long, for they would miss the end of all their military dreams since landing at Pachino — the complete surrender of Kesselring's successor and his million soldiers, the first whole German army to acknowledge defeat.

CHAPTER 26

From the Senio to the Siegfried Line

Now that the dreary winter fighting was at an end so far as the West Novas were concerned, their old enemy the weather smiled at last. The closing days at Russi were fine and warm, the sun drew out of the sodden earth a moisture that hung in a thick fog over the landscape each night. Towards midnight on Feb. 27th, after turning over their billets and duties about Russi to a battalion of the 8th Indian Division, the West Novas rolled away in motor transport southward. The dense mist and darkness hid the old battlefields of the Lamone, Ronco and Savio rivers as the Regiment passed over them. By 3 A.M. on Feb 28th the unit was settled in its first staging area, the port of Cesenatico on the Adriatic coast just south of Cervia.

In the early afternoon the movement was resumed in fine clear weather and at 9 P.M. the Regiment arrived in Porto San Georgio, south of Pesaro. Here, in one of the most beautiful Italian watering-places, the West Novas remained for twelve days training vigorously for open warfare and enjoying the spring sunshine. The K. of C. supervisor soon had his hostel set up in the town, and a movie-house was taken over and renamed "Bluenose Theatre". Here the latest British and American picture plays were shown, and a concert party from the 56th British Division put on a show for the Canadians. Moving pictures also were shown on fine evenings in the town square outside West Nova HQ.

On March 12th the Regiment rolled away, passing through the magnificent scenery of the Apennines to the town of Foligno in the heart of Umbria. Division patches and regimental shoulder flashes had been removed in an effort to keep secret the transfer of the Canadians, and when the West Novas attended a cinema in Foligno that afternoon all ranks were strictly chaperoned to prevent a leak to the Italian population.

Shortly after daylight the Regiment moved off once more in its long motor convoy. The cookhouses rolled well ahead and had a hot dinner ready at Arezzo, soon after the convoy passed over the upper waters of the Tiber. This was one of Julius Caesar's old garrison towns. To the troops it was simply a romantic-looking city perched on a hill, and they rolled on through the afternoon admiring the picture-postcard scenery and commenting that Italy wasn't too bad a place when you got a chance to look at it from the tourist's point of view. For many months the troops had moved (and fought) by night rather than by day. It was strange and wonderful to be moving for hours on end in the broad sunshine.

About sundown they arrived in Pontassieve, a few miles from Florence, and here they spent the night. The second-in-command, Major J. R. Cameron, was in charge of the convoy arrangements, ably assisted by the adjutant Capt. A. J. W. Dyer, and the transport officer Lieut. G. N. Budreski, and all went smoothly as the Regiment rolled on through March 14th to Harrod's Camp, a small canvas city in a wood just outside Pisa on the road to Leghorn. Here they remained while final arrangements for the big move were completed. At a battalion conference on the morning of the 15th Lt. Col. Hiltz revealed that the Regiment would next proceed by sea to Marseilles and pass through the length of France to join the Canadian army on the Rhine.

The halt provided a last opportunity to see something of tourist Italy, and many officers and men went to see the Leaning Tower and other curiosities of Pisa. During this five-day halt at Harrod's Camp also a vigorous sports program was carried out, with emphasis on softball and volley-ball, in which there was keen competition between the companies. On March 16th the regimental vehicles and drivers went on to Leghorn and embarked for Marseilles, and on Sunday March 18th Padre

Wilmot held the West Novas' last religious service on Italian soil. It was a sunny day and the men gathered under a clump of trees near Harrod's Camp. For the occasion the choir was drawn from the battalion officers, and H/Capt. Wilmot provided the music with his now familiar Italian accordion.

On March 20th the West Novas motored into Leghorn and there embarked for the voyage to France — battalion HQ and HQ Company in an LST, and the other five companies each in a single LCI. These craft, manned by American crews, looked small for so long a voyage but they had made the trip before with the 5th Division and all turned out well. The port of Leghorn was a scene of destruction created in part by Allied air bombers before the capture and completed by the Germans as they withdrew across the Arno. The docks and wharves were shattered and the harbour bristled with masts, bows or the indecently protruding sterns of sunken ships. However the navy as usual had soon created a passage for Allied traffic, and just before 10 A.M. on March 20th the West Novas began to move along the tortuous channel to the open sea. The weather was warm and clear and the Mediterranean as calm as a summer lake — a very different Mediterranean from the sea which tossed and drenched the Regiment when it landed in Sicily a year and eight months before.

The Germans were still in occupation of their submarine and E-boat base at Genoa to the north, and so the little flotilla stole away southward and towards evening passed the famous island of Elba, with its memories of that other military maniac, Napoleon. It was strange how in his all-but-successful conquest of Europe Hitler had followed the fatal footsteps of his predecessor, even to the march on Moscow, the attempt to seize Egypt, and the grasp on Denmark, Belgium, Holland, Italy and Austria. This time the British had chosen to fight their "Peninsula Campaign" in Italy instead of Spain, that was the only difference.

In the dead of night the Regiment's boats passed between Corsica and Sardinia and chugged on towards France all through March 21st, crossing a serene and green-blue sea. The voyage continued through the second night and the flotilla arrived at Marseilles on the morning of the 22nd. Here again was a picture of havoc, most of it German-made, but the West Novas

had little time to inspect the great port as they disembarked and mounted the waiting motor vehicles. The convoy rolled away to a camp fifteen miles outside the city, where the tents were of the American army type, a novelty. A further novelty was the large number of German prisoners employed about the camp in tasks which usually fell to a regimental fatigue party or to orderlies. At lunch the West Nova officers found themselves being served with peaches and cream by obsequious "Jerries", a fantastic experience for rifle company subalterns who hitherto had seen the German soldier only as an embattled warrior to be killed or disarmed and kicked back towards the P. W. cages — where he vanished.

At this point the soldiers' Italian currency was exchanged for French, and all ranks had to learn the quirks of a new medium of exchange — only to find that Belgian currency succeeded French, and Dutch currency succeeded Belgian, and none of them were worth much worry in wartime Europe where a packet of cigarettes was the simplest and finest currency of all.

On March 23rd the Regiment set off for a destination in Belgium, a motor journey of six days performed entirely in daylight and in sunny weather. The code name for this great trek was Operation Goldflake, and all through France and Belgium the Regiment followed signs bearing the letters GF and "Tac. 69" planted by the advance party under Capt. Don Rice. Each morning at daylight or soon afterwards the West Novas left each staging camp for the next, eating a haversack lunch on the way, pulling up at the next camp in the afternoon and halting for the night. At each evening halt the Regiment found Capt. S. B. Beaton and his party of drivers and cooks and the field-kitchens ready with a hot meal.

The motor convoy passed through some of the finest scenery in France, up the Rhone Valley through Avignon, Orange, Lyons (where they were greeted by cheering crowds in the streets) and Macon, thence across the old green battlefields of World War One to Cambrai and Valenciennes, crossing the Belgian border near the battlefield of Mons, passing within a few miles of the battlefield of Waterloo, thence past Brussels and through Malines and Lierre to the little town of Berlaer, 15 miles south of Antwerp. Major J. R. Cameron, a veteran of Italy from the beginning, conducted this epic journey with

consummate skill. After leaving the Senio River the Regiment travelled 250 miles by the devious route across Italy, 400 miles by sea to Marseilles and thence 600 miles through France and Belgium, a total of 1250 miles at the very least, all without a hitch. As an example of good staff work and road discipline it was hard to beat. The perfection of the arrangements was such that the K. of C. unit travelled right along with the Regiment, had its mobile canteen operating at every halt, and showed a fresh movie to the men each night.

In all the journey through France and Belgium there were few signs of war except towards Lyons on the road from Marseilles, where for a long stretch the wayside ditches were choked with burnt-out German transport, destroyed by Allied airmen as the enemy fled up the Rhone in '44. On the rest of the way an occasional wrecked house or crossroads hamlet only emphasized the fact that little serious fighting had taken place in this broad expanse after the break-through in Normandy. The Germans had fled out of France as fast as they came into it in 1940.

After the filth, the ruin, the poverty and despondency of the Italians the well built and cleanly town of Berlaer and its hospitable people were a tonic to the West Novas. Nothing was too good for them. The Belgian townfolk vied with each other in kindness and good cheer towards the strangers billeted in their midst. Even the taverns were left open until the small hours for their benefit, and although the beer was weak the sentiment was strong.

Now, at long last, it was possible for the men who had served so long in Italy to re-visit their friends in England. Preference in these eight-day leaves was given to officers and men with wives and families in the United Kingdom. At this time, too, another small draft returned to Canada on long-service leave. For the rest there were short leaves to Nijmegen in Holland and to Brussels, the merry capital of Belgium. West Novas in Brussels, still under security bans and without division patches or regimental flashes, found themselves looked upon askance by other troops as if they were new comers getting in at the death of the war. But the more acute observers must have

guessed the truth, if only because the Bluenoses insisted on the cafe orchestras playing "Amapola", "Come back to Sorrento" and "Lili Marlene" wherever they went.

Reinforcements arrived at Berlaer, and the West Novas were up to full strength for the first time in many moons. The change of scene, the hospitality of the Belgians, the leaves to England and elsewhere, the fact that at last they were part of the main Canadian Army after long separation, and the plenitude of recruits, new clothing and up-to-date equipment which apparently went with this fortunate state of affairs — all these gave a lift to the spirits of the officers and men who had served so long on "the forgotten front". When the West Novas left Berlaer for the Rhine on April 4th it was with the delightful feeling of adventure and the cocky sureness of the old Sicilian days.

The hour of departure was 4 A.M., yet it seemed that the whole population of Berlaer had turned out to wish the boys Godspeed and to push little packets of souvenirs and pastries into their hands. By noon the Regiment had (through the oddities of European geography) crossed north-eastern Belgium, cut across a narrow strip of Holland and passed a large army sign reading, "You are now entering Germany. There will be no fraternization with ANY German." Thus by afternoon of April 4th the West Novas were encamped where they had hoped to pitch their tents some time in 1940, on German soil — to be exact amongst the tall trees and thick shrubbery of the Reichswald Forest, where they strolled about inspecting the massive dugouts and concrete bunkers of the famous Siegfried Line. Like its counterpart the Maginot Line it had not meant a thing.

CHAPTER 27

Ijssel River to Nijkerk

A good deal had happened on this front since the West Novas left the Senio trenches en route for the Rhine. In the early days of March a powerful American drive had closed up to the Rhine between Cologne and Coblenz, while the British and Canadians fought their way into the great bend of the river where it swings westward into Holland. The Germans' oft-sung "Watch Upon The Rhine" must have blinked its eyes in the dust and heat of battle, for the Americans had found the great Ludendorff bridge intact and rushed enough troops across to establish a bridgehead before the enemy could assemble force enough to drive them back. Soon afterwards the Americans had effected a good crossing farther up-stream as well. Thus the great western defence of Germany already was breached. But on the Rhine bend about Wesel and on the westerly stretch of the river through Holland the Germans were holding stiffly. In this crisis Herr Hitler had made a broadcast to his people, invoking the shade of Frederick the Great and declaring that they too could fight through defeat and tire out their enemies.

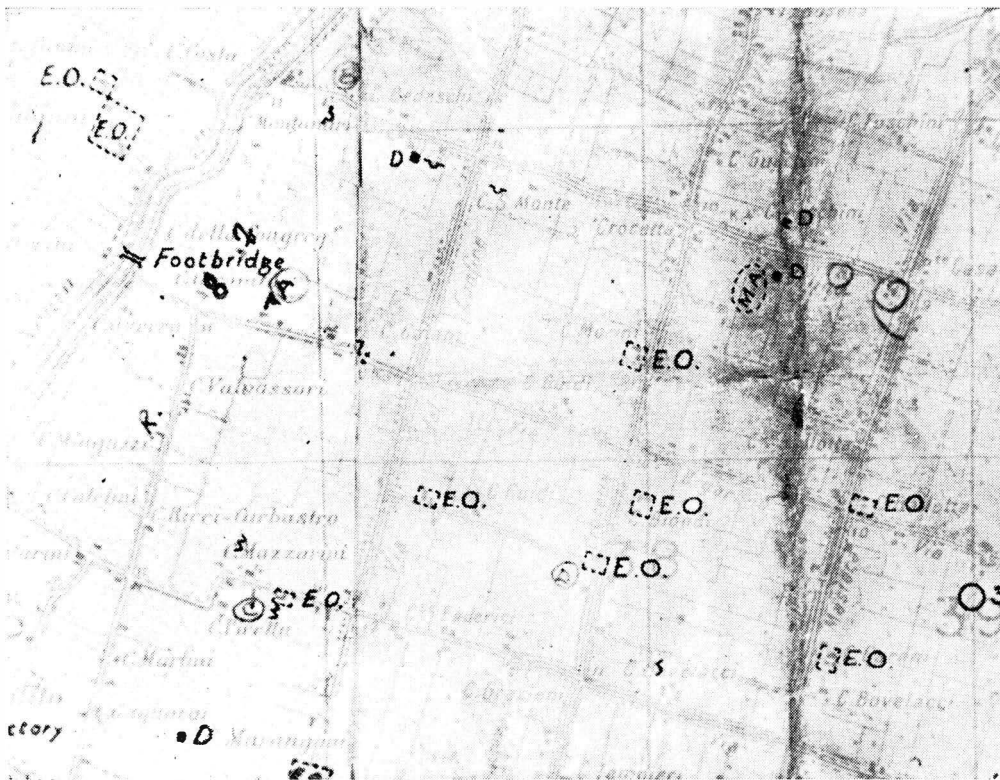
On March 24th the British and Canadian armies had smashed their way across the Rhine bend at Wesel and now were fanning out beyond. The Canadian objective was to cut off the large German forces in Holland by a left hook through Zutphen and Appeldoorn to the waters of the Zuyder Zee, and the 1st Division moved up to take its part in the operation.

The West Novas crossed the Rhine on April 9th, passed through the shattered German town of Emmerich, and then rolled over the Dutch border to Zutphen, which had been taken shortly before. Here on the 10th Lt. Col. Hiltz and the company commanders went forward to look at the area north-east of Zutphen where 3rd Brigade was to cross the Ijssel River.

Hereabouts the West Novas had a chance to see all sorts of river-assault equipment, including many "Buffaloes", the useful amphibious tracked vehicles developed by the Americans for such work. Each Buffalo could take a platoon of infantry at high speed across water, and then pull out and climb a 45 degree slope. But the most unique equipment for the drive into Holland was the maps. Good map paper was scarce, and the latest British field maps were being printed on the backs of captured German ones. Someone in the printing end of the British service had a sardonic sense of humour, for many of the field maps issued to the Canadians swinging through Germany into Holland were printed on the backs of German field maps of England, made in 1940 for the contemplated invasion of Mr. Churchill's island!

Towards midnight on April 12th the 3rd Brigade in its motor transport crossed over the Ijssel through a bridgehead established by 2nd Brigade. The 3rd Brigade plan was to break out of the bridgehead with the West Novas on the left, the Carleton and Yorks on the right and the "Van Doos" in reserve. The West Nova plan laid down by Lt. Col. Hiltz was an initial advance on a single company front, with "A" Company (Capt. O. J. Price) in the lead, closely followed by "C" Company (Major H. M. Eisenhower). The line of attack was practically due west with the object of cutting the main Zutphen-Appeldoorn highway, and since the advance was part of a wide pincers movement the code word for it was a good Nova Scotia noun, "Lobster".

At 11 A.M. on the 13th "A" Company went in to the attack, supported by tanks and by artillery firing ahead at the expected points of resistance. They were held up for a time by an artillery "stonk" called down by the Carleton and Yorks on their right, but by noon they were well on their way towards the highway. In the early afternoon Lt. Col. Hiltz directed "C" Company to move up past "A's" right, by-pass



Field map showing Senio River positions. The West Novas' last battle-field in Italy.



West Nova officers at Harrod's Camp, near Pisa, Italy, March 1945

Top left : A COMPANY

Lt. Mackenzie, Capt. Rice, Major Price, Lt. Gervais. In front, Lt. Wylie.

Top right : B COMPANY

Major Mair, Lt. Reid, Capt. R. E. Campbell, Lt. Nickerson.

Below left : BATTALION HQ

Lt.-Col. Hiltz, Padre Wilmot, Major Cameron, Capt. Dyer, Lt. Embree.

Below right : HQ COMPANY

Cpts. Beaton and Whynacht, (a signals officer), Cpts. McNichol, Greensides and Stapleton.

the village of Achterhoek and seize an important crossroads on the highway two miles from Appeldoorn. While passing left of Achterhoek "C" Company came under sharp mortar and artillery fire, and the forward artillery observer was wounded and his radio set put out of action. The company pushed on and reached the crossroads about dusk, closely followed by "B". At this point the highway to Appeldoorn ran straight to the north-east for 1,000 yards, and suddenly German self-propelled guns began to shoot down the road. The shells burst in the wayside trees and on the road itself, severely wounding Lieut. S. K. Nickerson MC, of "B" Company. This fire continued and intensified as darkness fell, and the Regiment dug itself in about the crossroads, which the West Novas dubbed "Hell's Corner".

So far the enemy infantry resistance had been spotty and easily overcome. Snipers had given the most trouble, and the activity of the German S. P. guns prevented the use of flame-throwing carriers to burn these pests out of the houses. The day's casualties had been one killed and 14 wounded, and during the day 51 prisoners had been taken. After the stiff fighting in Italy this was an agreeable surprise. The strength of the Germans opposing the Canadian 1st Division was estimated at something over 10,000, consisting of elements of the 6th Paratroop Division, 361st Infantry Division and 346th Infantry Division, together with a strange assortment of German naval infantry, marines, flak battalions, military police and Dutch Nazi troops. Many of these were poor fighting material but they included numbers of fanatical young Germans eager to fight to the death.

During the night of April 13/14th patrols went forward from "A", "C", "B" (Major W. W. Mair) and "D" (Major W. E. Garber). They gathered in a single prisoner but otherwise found no enemy on the immediate front. The Royal 22nd Regiment now moved up to clear the woods in front, and the West Novas were able to rest and get their first real meal in 24 hours. In the clear warm afternoon of the 14th the West Novas swung left and attempted to get across the Appeldoorn-Zutphen railway line. The approach was across flat fields and as soon as the troops came into the open they met an accurate barrage from German guns behind the railway, while the S. P.

guns along the Appeldoorn road opened fire with deadly effect on their flank. To this the German infantry added mortar and machine-gun fire. Once more the flame-throwing carriers were forced to withdraw by air-burst shrapnel, and by night the Regiment was pinned to slit trenches hastily dug in the fields east of the Appeldoornsch Canal.

The day's casualties had not been heavy but they included a high proportion of veterans. A particularly sharp loss was Lieut. D. W. Kerr, who was shot dead by a sniper in the morning. Most of the wounds were severe, but Capt. O. J. Price, Cpls. Leonard Carrigan and Boris Dimitroff and Pte. Bernard Ward had their wounds bandaged and went back into action.

On the following morning (April 15th) it was determined that the West Novas turn completely to the right and make an attack straight towards the city of Appeldoorn, since troops on the left now were taking the railway embankment positions from the flank. Accordingly at 11.30 A.M., in light showers of warm rain, "C" Company led the new attack, passing through the Royal 22nd Regiment positions in a small forest on the way. The assault was successful, Lieuts. Harry Lash and Leo Belliveau leading their platoons in particularly dashing attacks along the road through the woods and taking a number of prisoners. The first objective, a crossroads near a large hospital in the woods, was quickly reached, and "A" Company now moved up abreast of "C". There was no further enemy resistance in the woods — the main difficulty was to keep contact between the various platoons as they advanced through the thick undergrowth — but as the companies emerged into the open on the farther side they were fired upon by machine-guns and riflemen posted behind their next objective, a road and railway junction, and by machine-guns somewhere on the right flank.

It was now late afternoon, and the West Novas put in a concerted attack, leap-frogging platoons along the road to the junction. This was successful, and Lash's platoon dashed over the embankment to clear the German riflemen from the houses on the farther side. In so doing they were fired upon by snipers on the bank of the Appeldoornsch Canal 200 yards away. A burly negro private, Hayes, spotted one of these snipers, swung up his Bren gun and killed the man with a single burst. At

this point "A" and "C" companies received orders to withdraw, leaving the carrier platoon to dig in on "C's" old position at the junction. The Regiment had been ordered into Brigade reserve once more. By this time the West Novas had taken 88 prisoners, three of whom were officers. Some of these Germans were of naval units, dressed in dark blue trousers, double-breasted blue jackets and blue wedge-caps. They were well equipped and looked well fed but they were out of their element in land warfare and admitted it.

The German command now appeared to be pulling its troops together in and around Appeldoorn, an important Dutch city about the size of Halifax, N. S. It seemed likely that the enemy would offer battle there, for the flanks were guarded by the Appeldoornsch Canal and the rear was well screened from air observation and attack by dense and widespread forest. The 2nd Brigade had secured a crossing of this canal well to the south, and Division now ordered 3rd Brigade to pass through the bridgehead and exploit towards Appeldoorn. The West Novas were selected to lead the 3rd Brigade assault.

Accordingly at 2.30 A.M. on April 17th the Regiment moved off, and by 3.45 Battalion HQ was established on the west side of the canal. "D" Company (Major W. E. Garber) struck off along the canal, supported by tanks and with "B" Company (Major W. W. Mair) immediately behind. The attack began half an hour before dawn and progress was rapid from the start, the Germans pulling out hastily as the Canadians advanced. At 10 A.M. a West Nova carrier patrol reported Appeldoorn evacuated by the enemy and the Royal Canadian Regiment entering the northeast suburbs. The West Novas pushed up into the city, where they found the streets jammed with wildly cheering Dutch, thronging about the troops and vehicles, kissing the soldiers or seizing their hands and shaking them furiously.

Brigade now ordered Lt. Col. Hiltz to form the West Novas into a mobile column and push right through towards the west, leaving Appeldoorn and its woods to be mopped up by other units. While 1st Division had been thrusting towards Appeldoorn from the east, the 5th Armoured Division had broken out of the Arnhem bridgehead from the south and

was racing north towards the Zuyder Zee. The Canadian pinners were to close at the town of Barneveld, ten miles east of Amersfoort.

Accordingly soon after noon the regimental column, led by "D" Company and the tanks, made its way through the happy people of Appeldoorn and rolled on towards the west. There was a slight delay outside the city while some snipers were dealt with and then the column plunged into the forest beyond. There was every evidence of a disorderly enemy flight from Appeldoorn, the road was littered with abandoned equipment and Dutch civilians warned that many German groups were lost or hiding in the woods; but the road was not mined and there was no sign of active resistance until near sundown, when the column halted at a forest village while Lieut. Leo Gervais with a platoon of "A" Company and one of the carrier flame-throwers cleared the woods in the immediate vicinity. Lieut. Gervais was wounded in this skirmish but had his wound bandaged and continued to lead his platoon. Later the vehicles of F Echelon were attacked by a company of German infantry, losing a mortar carrier and suffering three casualties. Tanks came to their support firing tracer bullets, which set the woods on fire and made a lurid setting for the fight.

At 9 P.M. the column moved off again and promptly clashed with a small German force defending the Kootwijk radio station, in the open country just west of the Ughelsche forest. The tanks and flame-throwers moved in and wiped out this pocket, and "D" Company killed and captured a number of the enemy. Again the column pushed on. There was no further resistance. Twice the tanks stopped to re-fuel, and during one of these halts the West Novas surprised and captured a handful of German soldiers posted in a nearby farmhouse.

All through the night the Regiment rolled on past dark and silent farms and through patches of woods, and at 6 A.M. on April 18th joined hands with the Cape Breton Highlanders of the 5th Division at Barneveld. As the crow flies the distance from Appeldoorn to Barneveld is only 17 or 18 miles, but by the uncertain forest roads and through the featureless farmland, all in a darkness infested with wandering German

groups, it was an epic journey. Much of the credit goes to Major Garber and the tank officer for their careful map and compass work throughout the night.

The West Novas now had been on the move continuously for 28 hours, fighting here and there along the way, but there was little rest for them at Barneveld. At 10 A.M. tanks of the 5th Armoured Division reported themselves in the town of Putten with the Zuyder Zee in sight beyond, and the West Novas were ordered to follow, take over the defence of Putten and clear the surrounding woods and farms. But first they had some mopping-up to do around Barneveld, where they gathered in 43 prisoners, most of whom were soldiers of a German railway battalion. Upon questioning it was found that these were the troops who attacked F Echelon the previous evening.

At 3.30 P.M. the West Novas moved off, again in a mobile column, this time heading north-east. They reached Putten without incident after a journey of ten or twelve miles and passed a quiet night in the town. A broad forest stretched east of Putten and it was thought that any German troops cut off by the move would be lying doggo there, hence a fifty-per cent stand-to was kept by all the companies throughout the hours of darkness. However shortly after noon on April 19th the Royal 22nd Regiment reported the forest clear of the enemy, and the West Novas therefore moved three companies west of Putten to fend off attack by the German forces lying along the Eem River. At the same time a mobile mopping-up force composed of the carrier platoon with its medium machine-guns, a rifle company in lorries, and accompanied by the forward artillery officer, began to search the copses and houses in a three-mile circle about Putten itself.

This was completed by dark, and about 8 P.M. the West Novas moved off towards the west. A curious situation existed at this time. The Germans in their hasty retreat had forgotten to cut the telephone wires, or perhaps the parties sent to do this had been snapped up by Canadian patrols or the Dutch "underground" forces. In any case the Dutch "underground" had come to life, and amongst other activities were actually 'phoning reports from towns still in German hands to those reached by the Canadians. Of course much of this information had to be taken with the traditional pinch of salt, but one of

the reports reaching West Nova HQ suggested that the Germans were planning to evacuate armoured vehicles from the town of Nijkerk by means of barges down the ship canal to the Zuyder Zee. At once a task force consisting of the Regiment's anti-tank guns and a platoon of infantry, accompanied by the forward artillery officer, sped by carriers along the dike roads to the mouth of the canal, where it entered the Zuyder Zee. But it was found that the industrious German sappers had blown the stone bridge at that point, effectively blocking the canal against any use by their own transport. The West Novas waited for a time, but there was no sign of the enemy in barges or anything else.

In the meantime the Regiment was moving through the darkness towards Nijkerk itself, with "B" and "D" companies forward. Towards dawn the West Novas halted before a large wood about two miles east of the town. At daylight the wood was cleared — there was no sign of the enemy — and the forward platoons of both companies entered Nijkerk itself, only to be withdrawn on orders from Brigade, to avoid confusion with an attack of the Carleton and Yorks from the south.

It was soon evident that the Germans had withdrawn to what they called the "Grebbe Line" running from the Zuyder Zee along the Eem River to the Rhine and Maas rivers. They had blasted holes in the dikes along the Eem and admitted the waters of the Zuyder Zee into wide areas of the polder land, covering this portion of the line against tank attack. Thus they stood in possession of the great "hook" of Holland from base to point, containing the vital ports of Rotterdam and Amsterdam and the Dutch capital. The Hague, and stopping all traffic at the Rhine mouth. They called this region "Fortress Holland" and had a large if somewhat mixed army to defend it, with plenty of stores and equipment.

The German commander, General Blaskowitz, and the Nazi governor of Holland, the notorious Seyss-Inquart, boasted that if necessary they would blow open all the main dikes, thus flooding (and destroying) a great part of the fertile polders rescued from the sea by patient generations of the Dutch. Meanwhile, cut off in "Fortress Holland" from their countryside, the

great populations of Rotterdam, Amsterdam, The Hague and other cities, already weakened by almost five years of German rationing, now were facing swift starvation.

Shortly after midnight of April 19/20th "B" and "D" companies advanced to Nijkerk with instructions from Brigade to move quietly and cautiously and establish themselves on the eastern skirt of the town. "C" and "A" companies were to follow, and "C" Company with a troop of tanks was to ensure that the woods about the little manor of Salentijn were clear of the enemy. "D" Company reached its objective without trouble at 2.45 A.M. "B" Company was met with small-arms fire, but after a skirmish in the dark in which a handful of Germans were killed or captured the company pushed on and reached its destination at 5.35 A.M. In the meantime the Carleton and Yorks had advanced to the other side of Nijkerk and the West Nova patrols found the town evacuated.

CHAPTER 28

The last shots

During April 20th Lt. Col. Hiltz sent forth three mobile columns to explore the flooded polders north-west of Nijkerk. One tried to reach the Eem River and seize a bridge leading to the town of Baarn, a popular summer resort for Amsterdammers 10 miles west of Nijkerk. But progress was possible only along the main roads, which stood a few feet above the water, and these were badly damaged at well-chosen points by German engineers, with long straight stretches swept by the fire of mobile enemy troops posted to cover them. The column did manage to reach the main Zuyder Zee dike at the point where the small Wiel drainage canal entered the Zee, capturing nine Germans and enjoying some excellent shooting at fleeing groups of enemy cyclist troops.

On the morning of April 21st another West Nova column tried to reach the Eem, this time with the assistance of Dutch volunteers who knew the dikes. The column consisted of the carrier platoon, one platoon of infantry, a section of pioneers, two flame-throwers, two Vickers guns, two 6-pdr. anti-tank guns, two "46" radio sets, two despatch riders and an artillery observer. Again the inundations and road demolitions blocked the way to the Eem; but with the aid of the Dutch, who filled one very deep road crater, the column reached the quaint little village of Bunschoten, standing like an island in the flood, and its canal port of Spakenburg on the edge of the Zuyder Zee, both about 2 ½ miles east of the Eem.

On the morning of April 22nd "A" Company moved up and occupied both these fishing villages. The Germans offered no serious resistance but contented themselves with spasmodic shell-fire from their positions on the Eem River. That evening at a gathering of officers in battalion HQ, Lt. Col. F. E. Hiltz revealed that he was going on leave and would then take another post. He had commanded the Regiment since Christmas, 1944, when the West Novas were fighting their way towards the Senio. The new commander, Lt. Col. J. Aird Nesbitt, a veteran of the Italian campaign, arrived on the morning of April 22nd and went forward to inspect "A" Company's positions at Bunschoten and Spakenburg. On the next day "A" Company was withdrawn. The defence of these villages was taken over by a company of Dutch "underground" troops under West Nova command and in charge of Lieut. W. T. Hollinger, the battalion sniper officer, who had four of his West Nova snipers with him. This group, officially known as Hollinger Force, subsequently had lively encounters with German patrols coming down from the Eem, and gave a very stout account of itself.

On April 26th the West Novas left their flood-bound positions about Nijkerk to take over the Carleton and York positions about the village of Langenoord, south of the inundated area. This was a pleasant country of lush green fields, clean substantial farm buildings and gardens bright with tulip and narcissus. The German lines ran along both banks of the Eem River just ahead, and barring the roads to Amsterdam 20 miles beyond. Contact with Hollinger Force at Bunschoten was maintained by way of the Veen Straat, a high road under enemy observation running straight across the flood. "C" Company (Major H. M. Eisenhauer) was posted about the vital Zeldert crossroads on the edge of the inundations, commanding the approaches to Bunschoten and to German-held Baarn on the far side of the Eem. As the floods continued slowly to rise the West Novas had to construct their defences above ground level with overhead protection against air-burst shrapnel, so that "C" Company eventually resembled a muskrat colony.

Next in line towards the left was "B" Company (Major W. W. Mair) posted on a knoll near De Boomen and looking across the flooded Eem towards the town of Soest. Next came

"D" Company (Capt. D. A. Campbell MC) posted on the Coelhorster road running from the Canadian-held village of Ham towards Soest. Finally, on the extreme left "A" Company (Major O. J. Price MC) was posted about Ham, with a good view of the city of Amersfoort across the river. Battalion HQ was in a dairy in the village of Langenoord in the centre of the regimental arc. These positions formed the extreme right flank of the Canadian army facing "Fortress Holland". The West Nova front from Ham to the Zuyder Zee was about 10,000 yards — the longest ever held by the Regiment — and the wettest. It was also the most quiet. Something strange had happened.

On April 25th Blaskowitz notified General Montgomery that in order to lessen suffering in the civil population during the siege of "Fortress Holland" he would permit Allied food supplies to pass through his lines for distribution to the Dutch people. As a result convoys of Canadian army trucks soon began passing through the Grebbe Line at certain points and discharging thousands of tons of supplies, all under the assurance that the Dutch would get the food. This promise Blaskowitz kept. The fact was that the German troops in what remained of occupied Holland had huge stores of food and ammunition and wanted nothing.

At the same time Queen Wilhelmina and her cabinet in London were urging the British high command to refrain from an immediate assault on "Fortress Holland" in order to spare Dutch life and property. This unexpected situation caused a strange one-sided truce along the whole front. The Canadians were forbidden to fire upon the Germans at any point unless attacked.

This of course was not so altruistic as it seemed. Montgomery suspected that Blaskowitz, seeing the hopelessness of his own position, soon would be in a mood to surrender. Each passing day piled up the tale of German woe elsewhere. The Wehrmacht was falling to pieces on every front at a rate only modified by the transport and supply problems of the victorious Allied troops. In Italy the British had thrust across the Senio and Po and were chasing Kesselring's old command towards the Alps. The Russians had cut off most of Berlin (with Hitler and his staff) and were closing in street by street. British

troops were in Bremen. American patrols were in touch with the Russians along the Elbe. In a few days the whole German military fabric must collapse like a house of cards.

And so on April 26th a "phony war" set in along the Eem, Waal and Maas rivers which formed the moat of "Fortress Holland". It was extremely "phony" as far as the West Novas were concerned because all through the 27th and 28th their forward companies were under spasmodic fire from German machine-guns, mortars and artillery. Fortunately they were well dug in and the casualties were very few, but Pte. F. J. B. Fitzgerald died of his wounds on the way to the regimental aid post — the last West Nova to die in the war. The orders were strict and explicit: "A party of Germans may be expected to cross into our lines and may or may not be in possession of a white flag. In any case there will be no firing. A German party may land in our forward area in a Storch aircraft. Even if the Brigade sector is being fired upon there will be no retaliation."

The mysterious German party did not arrive in the West Nova area. And the queer unreal days went by. The weather was wet and bleak, there was even snow on the evening of the 28th, and the forward positions were as comfortless as Italy at its worst. A battalion rest centre was set up in Nijkerk with movies, games, canteen, shower baths and clean dry clothing available, and daily ten men from each company went back to Nijkerk on a 24-hour pass. The Germans finally ceased fire on the evening of the 28th. In the succeeding days they could be seen moving about the Eem banks engaged on mysterious errands, and night after night there was a glare of fires in the distance towards Amsterdam, and the sound of heavy explosions, as if the enemy had begun to destroy his ammunition dumps.

On May 2nd Lt. Col. Nesbitt was informed that the truce was over — but that no offensive action could be taken. This state of affairs was regarded with soldierly reserve, for there was a general feeling that Blaskowitz might attempt to "go out in a blaze of glory" by launching a sudden attack with all his force. Consequently the C/O and the battle adjutant Capt. J. R. Reid made careful inspections of the forward positions and no precaution was neglected in the battalion area. All

this uncertainty came to an abrupt and dramatic end at 8.30 P.M. on May 4th, when regimental radio sets picked up a flash from the BBC in London — "Allied Supreme HQ announces that the German forces in northwest Germany, Holland and Denmark have surrendered unconditionally to Field-Marshal Montgomery's 21st Army Group, the surrender to become effective 8 A.M. May 5th."

The German armies in Italy had surrendered on April 29th, Hitler himself had perished in Berlin on April 30th, and now the last cohesive German forces had thrown up the sponge. But the West Novas had yet to fire their last shots in this war. Just before dawn on May 5th — three hours before the surrender went into effect — an enemy patrol, apparently of Dutch Nazi troops, attempted to rush a "D" Company post from the direction of the Eem. The West Novas opened fire at once and the raiders fled. The sentry, Pte G. S. Warnell, was thus the last man of the West Novas (and probably the whole Canadian Army) to be shot at by the enemy. It was over!

There was no celebration in the front lines. For one thing the situation was still puzzling. The left forward platoon of "A" Company could hear continuous bursts of machine-gun and Schmeisser pistol fire in the city of Amersfoort across the river. Later in the morning "A" Company, strictly obeying the Cease Fire order, had the mortification of watching ten fully-armed German soldiers enter a Dutch house near their front, drive out the family, and take away a pig. The day was fine with a pleasant breeze after the long rain and cold. Machine-gun fire could be heard at various points along the battalion front, but no bullets came towards the West Novas and it was assumed that the Dutch underground forces were in action on the other side of the Eem.

On the afternoon of May 5th, in the shell-smashed lobby of the Hotel de Wereld in Wageningen, at the south hinge of the Grebbe Line, General Johannes Blaskowitz, looking like a tired and beaten wolf, signed away his troops with their complete stores and equipment to Lieut. General Charles Foulkes, commander of the 1st Canadian Corps. It was a long way from Bridgewater in November 1939, when Foulkes, then a brigade major, had given the West Nova officers and NCO's a talk on the German Army.

On the morning of May 6th the West Novas on the left could see white flags and Dutch ensigns flying over the houses in Amersfoort. On this day the second-in-command Major J. R. Cameron, who had served so long with the Regiment, left to take a post elsewhere, and Major E. W. Cutbill DSO came to replace him. The face of the Regiment had changed very much since the departure from Italy. Several of the veteran West Nova officers had departed on other duties, and the steady operation of the "Canada leave" for long service had removed most of the surviving men who had been with the Regiment from the beginning. However there remained a great many who had fought in Italy and it was largely still a veteran battalion which packed up on the evening of May 7th for the journey into "Fortress Holland".

The West Nova casualties from the Ijssel River to the Eem were 12 killed and 47 wounded, nearly all in the fighting for the Appeldoorn Canal approaches. Most of them were veterans of Italy and eleven bore the scars of other battles. Amongst the killed was Pte. Franklin Crook, who had been wounded in the Hitler Line. The wounded included Capt. O. J. Price MC for the second time in this war; Cpls. Boris Dimitroff and Morris Grant, both wounded previously, in the Gothic Line; Cpl. A. G. Harrington, wounded on the Senio; L/Cpls. Robert S. Christie and Donald A. MacNeil, both wounded in the Gothic Line; L/Cpl. Howard Beaver, wounded on the Arielli and again in the Gothic Line; Pte. Rene Charron, wounded at the Lamone; Ptes. Stanley Powell and Bernard Ward, both wounded in the Gothic Line. Some of the dead were buried in a small plot near the village of Klarenbeek, south-east of Appeldoorn. The others lie in the military section of the Nijkerk cemetery, for here the kindly Dutch insisted that the Canadians who perished in bringing them liberty should be buried, in already consecrated ground. They kept the graves covered with flowers, and pinned to the flowers little sentiments of gratitude such as :

"Many thanks for the big offer of your life"

(signed) ("A Dutch mother".)

CHAPTER 29

The freeing of Holland

At 6 A.M. on May 8th 1945, after its long travels and battles, the West Nova Scotia Regiment left Nijkerk for a journey in peace. Contrary to expectation the unit did not cross the Eem to Amsterdam. Instead it was ordered to The Hague, the capital of Holland. This involved a roundabout route, south through the littered battlefields of Arnhem and Nijmegen and then westward along a fine brick-paved highway towards The Hague. The unit was preceded by Major Cutbill, Capt. C. H. Smith and Lieut. Fisher, armed with nothing more lethal than a wooden mallet, in a jeep towing a trailer laden with the familiar West Nova "TAC 69" route signs. At each crossroads these officers hammered into place a sign for the Regiment to follow — but they had not reckoned with the enthusiastic population. The Dutch folk, aware that this was an historic event, carried off the signs for souvenirs as soon as the trail-blazers were out of sight — and gave the Regiment a head-ache as it made its own way towards the Hague.

It was a strange journey in all ways. The West Novas rolled over bridges and past junctions where armed German sentries stood woodenly watching them pass, and sometimes whole camps of German troops in full possession of arms and equipment, staring sullenly at the conquerors or pointedly ignoring them. In every crossroads hamlet, in every village and town the Dutch people stood waving orange flags, tossing long ribbons of coloured paper, cheering, laughing, crowding

about the vehicles (some rode on the vehicles for miles), kissing and shaking hands with the soldiers from faraway Canada and pelting them with flowers.

It was noticed that most of these excited, weeping, happy folk were women, children and old men. Thousands of young Dutchmen had been carried off during the war to work in Germany. Those who managed to escape this conscription were serving in the Dutch "underground". The countryside was beautiful in the spring sunshine, just like the pictures of Holland in Nova Scotian schoolbooks — broad fields stretching flat to the horizon, roads lined with clean and comfortable homes, and canals with merrily twirling windmills. Despite the German requisitions there were many fat cattle in the pastures and the crops were coming along nicely in the neat rectangular fields. It was truly a smiling land on this day of days.

As the Regiment drew towards Rotterdam and The Hague, with their thickly populated suburbs, the excited crowds literally threw themselves upon the vehicles and all progress was stopped until "underground" troopers managed to clear a way through the streets. These Dutchmen, armed with German weapons as well as with pistols and Sten guns smuggled to them by the RAF, wore a makeshift uniform consisting of blue overalls with an orange armband. Many had steel helmets of the pre-war Dutch army pattern, others had parts of Dutch uniforms, carefully hidden away when the Germans took their country, and now supplemented with boots and other equipment taken from the Germans.

Shortly after noon the West Novas reached Den Hoorn, near the ancient city of Delft, where they halted under orders from Brigade. "A", "B" and "C" companies were billeted in the neighbouring village of Schipluiden under command of Major Harry Eisenhauer, and the rest of the Regiment was billeted in Den Hoorn itself. All the troops were confined to their immediate areas and subject to the general 10 P.M. curfew.

The situation was delicate. Within Fortress Holland were 120,000 German troops, fully armed and equipped. Also within the Fortress was the Dutch "underground", now very much above ground. The original members of this force had their own strict discipline, but their ranks now were swollen by a rabble of youths wearing orange armbands and armed with



West Nova officers at Harrod's Camp, near Pisa, Italy, March 1945.

Top left : D COMPANY
 Lts. MacDonald and Hollinger,
 Major Garber, Capt. Don Campbell
 M.C., Lt. Archibald.

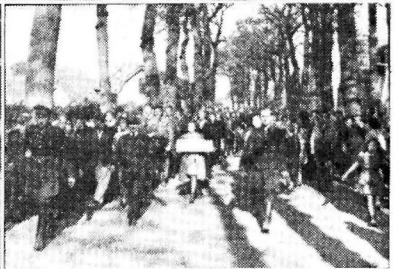
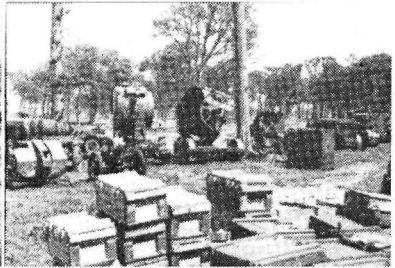
Top right: SUPPORT COMPANY
 Capt. Bews, Lt. Clements, Capt.
 Taylor, Lt. Arnett. In front, Lts.
 Kingston and Long.

Below left : Padre Wilmot holds
 his last religious service in Italy,
 playing the hymn tunes on his
 accordion.

Below right : C COMPANY
 (Back) Lts. Lash, Kerr, Belliveau
 (Front) Major Eisenhauer, Capt.
 C. H. Smith.



Lieutenant-Colonel J. Aird Nesbitt.



Scenes in Holland.

1. A West Nova pioneer tries out a new mine detector.
2. Germans pile arms at The Hague.
3. German coast defences, Scheveningen.
4. Surrendered German equipment.
5. The last battle H. Q. of the West Novas. Near the Eem River, May 5, 1945.
6. The Hun goes home.



Major W. Winston Mair.

stolen German automatic weapons which few understood but all were anxious to use. These young zealots were spoiling for a fight and amongst other activities were stopping and mauling German despatch-riders and staff officers on errands concerned with the surrender. Aware of the hatred they had inspired in this country the Germans were taut, and anything could happen.

On the afternoon of May 9th Lieut. General Diestel, the German commander at Rotterdam, became alarmed at the increasing civilian interference with his troops. He had moved his HQ outside the city to the village of Ridderkerk, where it was practically besieged, and Lt. Col. Nesbitt received orders to despatch a token force to Ridderkerk and restore order there. He sent off a composite platoon of West Novas under Lieuts. Archibald and Fisher to guard Diestel's HQ, with two despatch-riders to accompany Diestel's DR's on business connected with the surrender.

However this was a side-line; the main concern of the Regiment was to disarm and place under guard the German marines and naval battalions posted at Scheveningen, the seaport of The Hague. To this end on the morning of May 10th each rifle company sent a platoon to occupy strategic points in The Hague above the Scheveningen docks, and the rest of the West Novas followed in the afternoon. The rifle companies established themselves in the beautiful park which forms a green belt between Scheveningen and the Dutch capital, and here a huge barbed-wire enclosure was erected to contain the surrendered Germans.

Here, day after day, the people of Holland's capital watched blue-clad German naval personnel and grey-clad German marines in hundreds marching up to the park, stacking their rifles, pistols and machine-guns very neatly near the Belvedere, and then passing into the great wire cage where the West Nova sentries stood guard. No one could help noticing the contrast between the athletic Canadians in their stained and faded battle-dress and the elegant Germans in their spotless blue jackets and trousers, their well-tailored grey tunics, riding breeches and black top-boots. The West Novas looked the fighting men they were. And the Germans looked what they were — a corps of exquisites grown soft in the long ease of the Holland

coast defences, very different from the tough Wehrmacht soldiers encountered by the Regiment in the vineyards and on the rugged mountain slopes of Italy.

Not all the Germans were elegant however. "C" Company, quartered near the waterfront, watched quite another type of German troops moving from the coast defences to concentration camps. These were shabby, pallid soldiers of all ages, a weedy lot evidently of a division left in Holland because it was unfit for service on the Russian or any other front. Their horse-drawn wagons and charcoal-burning lorries were laden with all sorts of unmilitary gear, even household mattresses, sheets, pillows, odds and ends of furniture, and not infrequently their wives or mistresses, a clump of unhappy females sitting on the top. Nothing like it had been seen in Europe since Joseph Buonaparte's troops abandoned Madrid before the victorious advance of Wellington.

Where were the magnificent goose-stepping soldiers who used to provide the Fuehrer with his wonderful military spectacles before Munich? There was one answer. They were dead.

By May 15th the number of Germans disarmed and held in the West Nova cage was 4,439, and still they came. The stacks of rifles and machine-guns, neatly piled four-square like cordwood drying on a Nova Scotia farm, were a queer spectacle to the men who had faced the fire of such weapons up the length of Italy and through the green fields of Holland. There was another spectacle at Leyden, seven miles from The Hague, where the West Novas for a time were responsible for other German dumps. Here were assembled acres of anti-tank guns, *nebelwerfer*, searchlights, mobile dynamo units and field radio sets, with stacks of ammunition boxes, all in perfect condition. The German High Command had long regarded the Holland coast as a probable point for Allied invasion, and nothing had been stinted for its defence.

The West Nova HQ was in the village of Voorburg, a suburb of The Hague, and here on May 17th Lt. Col. Nesbitt, Majors Cutbill and Mair, Capts. Rice, Dyer, Smith, McNicol, Lieut. Archibald and Padre Wilmot represented the Regiment at a civic reception in the town hall. Here were assembled the

burgomaster, the town council and the leaders of the local "underground", while outside a great crowd of people cheered as the West Novas drove up to the hall. Many of the girls were wearing traditional Dutch costume, put on for the occasion, lace caps, voluminous skirts and petticoats, clogs and all, while the guard of honour on the steps was dressed in gorgeous military uniforms of a bygone age. Within, the burgomaster read an address of welcome to the Regiment and thanked them for their part in the deliverance of Holland. Lt. Col. Nesbitt replied for the West Novas in a fitting manner and the ceremony closed.

The gratitude of the people of The Hague did not end in mere words, and their hospitality to all ranks of the West Novas during their stay in the city was something to remember. There was a continuous round of parties, dances and entertainment of every kind. The West Nova officers found themselves provided with a club containing luxurious furniture, amusing murals, bowls of fresh flowers renewed every day, a first-rate orchestra, a bar and lunch-counter, all in charge of deft Dutch attendants. Nor did the other ranks fare worse. "C" Company, quartered for a time in a big modern prison near the coast, soon found themselves equipped with a dozen chesterfield suites, nineteen radios, thick pile carpets, fine linen and silverware, all taken from the National Socialist Bund — the Dutch Nazis, detested by their countrymen.

But more than all this the Dutch people took the men into their hearts and homes. The soldiers found a special attraction in the charm and wholesome beauty of the girls. When the Regiment left for home after its short stay in the Netherlands no less than 65 West Novas had married daughters of the country. Nothing like this could have happened in Italy.

Meanwhile there was a constant going and coming of men on leave passes to Brussels, Paris and London. There was another kind of coming and going, which continued and increased as the weeks went by — the cross-posting of officers and men from one unit to another in order to assemble all personnel in the regiments of their respective provinces. The general policy adopted by Canadian reinforcement units early in 1944 had resulted in many Nova Scotians serving in regiments from other provinces, while Nova Scotian units contain-

ed numerous personnel from central and western Canada. This was now rectified to simplify the problems of homeward transport and demobilization. As one result of this the West Nova Scotia Regiment soon was far over strength, a matter which adjusted itself later on, when drafts of volunteers departed for the forces of occupation in Germany or to train in Canada for the war in the Pacific.

The Canadians in Holland had two prime objectives, (a) to assemble and disarm the German troops and get them out of the country, and (b) to assist the Dutch in building up an army of their own so that the Canadians could get out themselves. These two works went hand in hand, and for their part of it while disarming the German naval forces in Scheveningen the West Novas took under their wing a battalion of 450 Dutch troops under Captain Smitz on May 14th. These Hollanders on arrival at the park perimeter had no weapons, equipment or cooking gear, in fact all they had was their makeshift uniforms and a blanket apiece. They soon were equipped with German weapons and gear. By May 19th the great cage in the park was known as "Campbell's Circus", for here the guard consisted of one platoon of West Nova infantry, one section of the regimental provost personnel, three West Nova subalterns and two companies of Dutch troops, all in command of Capt. R. E. Campbell. This little force had under its thumb something like 7,000 German sailors and marines.

About this time Major Cutbill was posted to another unit and Major W. W. Mair became second-in-command of the Regiment. At this time also Capt. C. F. Whynacht MBE was promoted major and appointed to command HQ Company. The Canadian 1st Corps planned a great parade through the streets of The Hague, and it was decided that each regiment should be represented by a ceremonial company composed of the officers and men with the longest service records. Major W. E. Garber was placed in charge of the West Nova company. The victory parade took place on the morning of May 21st, a great Canadian column of all arms, with several units of Dutch soldiers, marching from the suburb of Loosduinen to The Hague, where Lieut. General Foulkes and Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands took the salute, all in a downpour of rain.

Apart from "Campbell's Circus" with its 7,000 glum animals the West Novas had several other responsibilities, one of which was a dump of German transport vehicles in the Alexander Veld, one of the great city squares. Here "C" Company was obliged to erect fencing and guard with the utmost care a wide assortment of lorries, cars, wagons, hand-carts and bicycles. This dump attracted hundreds of people of the poorer class, in some ways the scum of the capital, all eager for loot. As in all the liberated countries, now that the shooting was over, every male opportunist between the ages of 15 and 75 sported an armband of the "resistance forces", loudly proclaiming his deeds of valour against the Germans and demanding a bicycle, a hand-cart or some other item of loot as a matter of right.

It was most unlikely that one in fifty of these noisy beggars ever had fired a shot for his queen and country, and quite possible that many of them had given collaboration to the Germans in one form or another. Indeed the West Novas early found a difficulty at regimental dances, where loyal Dutch girls refused to associate with a surprising number of others who had consorted with the "Muffs" — i.e. the Germans. This knowledge hardened the hearts of the sentries. Insistent wearers of the orange armbands got short shrift.

If anyone was entitled to a share of the German loot it was surely the man who had fought the "Muffs" all the way from Pachino to the Eem. Apparently the high command recognised this, for in the latter days of May each NCO and private of the West Novas received a quaint assortment taken from the German dumps. Every soldier was issued the following : one bottle of wine, one bottle of tomato juice, 1 comb, 1 mirror, 1 bottle of Eau de Cologne, 1 bottle of scented hair oil, 10 boxes of matches, 1 jar of face cream, 1 tin of shoe polish, 1 box of face powder, 1 box of foot powder and 1 tube of toothpaste. What the Germans were doing with some of these things is best left to the imagination. The West Novas found them useful currency in The Hague.

The various chores of the Regiment at this time included the despatch of a corporal's guard to escort what was ominously titled "A German field butchery unit" to Den Helder. To Den Helder also went a whole platoon, to escort certain German

naval personnel to be handed over to the Royal Navy. A carrier and a despatch-rider were sent to the fields outside Voorburg to round up a party of German soldiers attending army horses there. "B" Company went to a staging camp near Katwijk aan Zee, north of Leyden, where disarmed German troops were to halt overnight on their long trek back to the Fatherland. (The West Novas' instructions said, "Nine to ten thousand German troops will lodge overnight at this camp until the evacuation of this part of Holland is complete"!)

Most of the disarmed German naval troops were to go by sea to Wilhelmshaven, and on May 27th a column of 5,000 of them moved off from "Campbell's Circus" towards the Hook of Holland, where Lieuts. MacDonald and McConnell with a West Nova platoon saw them safe aboard the ships. On May 29th, Capt. Campbell saw the last of his charges off to the Hook, and handed over the deserted park perimeter to the Dutch troops lately under his command. Three days later "B" Company came in from Katwijk, having seen the last of a long German column headed home in that direction.

Chapter 30

Warriors' return

With the departure of the German troops from its custody the last military task of the Regiment was at an end. To be sure there was a brief period of guard duty in the late German coastal defences at Scheveningen, where the lads had a chance to inspect the massive concrete bunkers and gun-pits, the barbed wire and beach obstacles erected to fend off Allied invasion from the sea. It was amusing to reflect that the British-Canadian invasion of Holland had come from Germany after all.

The chief job now was to prepare the Regiment for demobilization in Canada some time towards the summer's end, and in the meantime to fend off boredom and the indiscipline that goes with it. With this in view a program of sports was vigorously carried out; and at the same time an educational program to prepare the men for civil life after the long months and years of war was planned and put into effect. On June 6th Lt. Col. Nesbitt, appointed to the acting command of 3rd Brigade, held a farewell parade and march past of the West Novas in the Alexander Veld at The Hague, and afterwards gathered the men around him and told them something of the future. Shipping problems in the four quarters of the world meant that many troops must remain for a time where they were, peace or no peace. This applied to the Canadians as to others. In the meantime there was a chance to prepare themselves for civil life. Study, patience, a continued concern

for the good name of the Regiment and Canada, would see them home with credit to all. On the following day Major W. W. Mair became acting C/O of the West Novas, with Major H. M. Eisenhauer as second-in-command.

On June 10th the four rifle companies of the West Novas marched in a victory parade of the 1st Division through the streets of Rotterdam. where the sidewalks, doorways, windows and roof parapets were jammed with cheering Dutch. It was the last parade of "the Old Red Patches" as a Division in this war. Ten days later the period at The Hague drew to a close. The Regiment bade *au revoir* to its many friends in the Dutch capital and on the sunny morning of June 21st rolled away to Utrecht, where the 1st Division was concentrating after its scattered duties in "Fortress Holland".

The name of Utrecht rouses familiar echoes in the memory of every Bluenose, for his school teachers emphasize that here in 1713 France signed the treaty which gave up Nova Scotia to the British crown forever. It was strange and somehow thrilling to see the ancient blue-cross flag of Nova Scotia flying over battalion HQ in Utrecht 232 years afterwards. The West Novas occupied a large Dutch garrison barracks on the outskirts of the city and soon set about exploring what until then was only a name in a history book. Modern Utrecht had a population of 150,000, with handsome gardens and tree-shaded promenades encircling the old portion of the city where the ancient ramparts had been. While in these barracks the Regiment received a visit from Lieut. General Sir Miles Dempsey, commander of the British 2nd Army, who talked to several veterans of the Italian fighting including the famous scout Charles Fleet, and Pte. A. K. Minard, who won the M. M. at the Savio River.

Utrecht was a hospitable place, and its comforts were augmented for the West Novas by their faithful K. of C. unit under Mr. A. H. Chivers, who promptly set up a movie theatre, canteen and recreation room, as he had at The Hague. On June 28th about 500 officers and men of the Regiment went to Amsterdam to help line the streets for another Canadian parade, consisting of massed bagpipe bands, five infantry regiments, one reconnaissance regiment, one troop of tanks, three batteries of artillery, several units of the new Dutch troops, and finally the

massed brass bands of the Canadian Army. About 30,000 Canadian troops took part in the show, which was witnessed by 180,000 people, and the salute was taken by Queen Wilhelmina herself, with Generals H. D. G. Crerar and Charles Foulkes standing by her side.

For most of the Canadians it was the last march under arms. All tactical training had come to an end except for volunteers going to the Pacific or to the Canadian Occupation Force in Germany. All emphasis now was upon training for civil life. Change was the order of the day. More and more of the familiar faces vanished from the Regiment. During the months of June and July, 179 officers and men (qualified by long service or by two or more wounds sustained in action) returned to Canada for discharge, 194 others volunteered for service with the Occupation Force in Germany and left to join it; and no less than 166 officers and men volunteered for war service in the Pacific and left for Canada to join the 3rd Battalion, West Nova Scotia Regiment. It was a great compliment to the fighting reputation of the West Novas that the authorities determined to include a battalion of the Regiment in the force destined for the great attack on Japan.

The 2nd Battalion (Reserve) WNSR had been set up in the home counties in 1940 for local defence and coast-watching duties, and consisted entirely of officers and men in physical categories too low for active service overseas or outside the active service age limits. The C/O, a majority of the officers, the RSM and many other ranks were veterans of the First German War.

For the Japanese campaign the 3rd Battalion WNSR (Active Force) was set up at Camp Debert, N. S. on June 11th, 1945 under the temporary command of Major J. H. Gowan. Lt. Col. J. M. Houghton OBE took over the command on July 28th 1945. At this time the battalion was about 150 strong, but within a few days the strength was up to 1200 all ranks, all of whom were volunteers for the campaign in the Far East and many of them veterans of the 1st Battalion in Europe. The latter were especially pleased to find that the Brigade Commander was Brigadier Bernatchez, an old friend of the Italian days.

The Battalion trained vigorously through the hot summer weather, and at an inspection by the Brigadier and staff —

competitive throughout the Brigade — the West Novas stood first. At the Brigade sports the West Novas again took top honours by a goodly margin. These were good omens in view of the Regiment's record in Europe, and had the war in the Orient continued undoubtedly the 3rd Battalion would have given an equally worthy account of itself in the field. However Japan collapsed very suddenly while the unit was still at Debert and Lt. Col. Houghton was ordered to disband it. The last man was struck off the strength on Sep. 27, 1945.

Not the least of those who left the Regiment in Holland to join the Pacific force was the West Novas' courageous and beloved padre, H/Capt. L. F. Wilmot MC. He had joined them in the Arielli trenches in February 1944, a bleak and bloody time, and had served them continuously ever since. Not every padre combines in himself the qualities of a man's man with those of a sincere disciple of Christ. These qualities Lawrence Wilmot possessed in full measure, and by his example no less than his exertions he was a powerful factor in the Regiment's morale during its darkest and happiest days.

On July 18th the West Novas moved to the town of Bussum, near the Zuyder Zee and about half way between Utrecht and Amsterdam. Here the officers were billeted and the other ranks quartered in schools. There was no suitable area for a parade ground, indeed no need for further military training, and so the Regiment turned its weapons in to Army Stores and gave its whole attention to the things of peace.

Capt. C. H. Smith was appointed educational officer and under his enthusiastic effort and direction the West Novas soon had what was probably the finest rehabilitation training in the Division. Battalion HQ was in the Bussum high school. Here two classrooms were set aside for the use of Lieuts. L. Clements and C. Donovan, both university graduates, who taught what amounted to an old-fashioned Nova Scotia country school with all grades from 1 to 12. Textbooks of all kinds were secured through the interest of Brigade. In Bussum itself a Dutch photographer volunteered to conduct a class in photography, developing, printing, enlarging and so on, using his own excellent equipment. In nearby Muiden another class was busily

engaged in learning the arts of electric and oxy-acetylene welding. In a great machine-shop at Amsterdam 40 West Novas practised the mechanic's trade under skilled Dutch instructors. (The Amsterdam and Muiden students were taken to and from their work each day in regimental vehicles.) The Bussum school was extended to include the teaching of book-keeping and other clerical subjects. A short distance from Bussum lay the radio station of Hilversum, one of the largest and finest in Europe, and here many West Novas were able to study the working of a modern broadcasting station. Tours were conducted to Utrecht to study the Dutch cooperative marketing systems, the working of a chocolate factory and so on. Groups of fifty soldiers went to work on farms in the region of Amsterdam, to help the Dutch with their crops and to study their skilled and intensive cultivation of the polder lands. Capt. R. J. McNeil conducted tours of the Delft museum and the world-famous pottery works.

The lighter side of life was not neglected. The Regiment established a recreation centre at "Hague House" in Scheveningen, where parties of soldiers could go on three-day leaves. This centre was in charge of Lieut. H. N. Lash. In Bussum itself the K. of C. operated its usual excellent canteen and recreation hall, in which the latest British and American movies were shown free each night. Dances were arranged in Bussum and Utrecht. Major H. M. Eisenhower took a party of 20 other ranks on a sightseeing trip by air over the Rhineland and north-western Germany. Other organized trips to the Rhine and Ruhr were made in regimental vehicles, the column stopping each night at a staging camp along the way.

All of this was pleasant as well as useful, and it served an important secondary purpose. Shortly before turning over the command of the Regiment to Major Harry Eisenhower, the acting C/O Major Mair was able to report, "In spite of the constant change of personnel the standard of discipline in the West Nova Scotia Regiment was in most respects higher than that of any other unit in the Brigade. Cases of disciplinary action were limited, and at no time did the Unit incur the disfavour of higher formations or the civil authorities".

Of course none of this could supplant the soldier's natural longing for home, and it was with high cheer that the West

Novas packed up on Sep. 6th, said goodbye to their kindly Dutch hosts, and rolled away in motor transport to Nijmegen, the first stage on the journey home. Two days later the Regiment moved by train across the now peaceful countryside of Holland and Belgium to the port of Ostend on the English Channel, famous as the scene of a great British naval raid in World War One. Here the West Novas stayed over-night and then embarked for Dover, where the sight of the white chalk cliffs (which for so long had been the only rampart against a tide of German victory) brought a lump to the throat.

By this time there were not many in the Regiment who had served with it during the long stay in England, but at No. 8 Repatriation Depot at Farnborough near Aldershot a number of familiar faces turned up, amongst them Sergeant L. J. "Pappy" Newcombe of the carrier platoon, wearing the M. M. ribbon he had won in the Hitler Line and still limping from a painful accidental wound sustained near the Melfa River. Here also Capts. Don Rice, Ross Lent and Clarence Spence, all former West Nova officers, rejoined the battalion. This final sojourn in England enabled many officers and men to arrange transportation for their British wives and families before sailing for home themselves, and for all ranks it afforded a last chance to travel over the tight little island which had saved the world, to look up old friends, and to say goodbye.

On Sep. 24th the Regiment, with Major H. M. Eisenhauer in command, took train for Portsmouth and there embarked on board the transport "Ile de France". They sailed on the following day, rounding the Isle of Wight and passing down the Channel. Within a few hours the last of England and of Europe, with its tragic and heroic memories, sank in the wake of the great ship.

The voyage was uneventful. The weather was cool but sunny and the troops spent most of the time on deck. On the morning of October 1st the first outpost of home came into sight — the long low sands of Sable Island. Late in the afternoon the blue line of the Nova Scotia coast appeared, and at 5 P. M. the "Ile de France" entered Halifax Harbour with the laughing, singing troops crowding the rails and every point of vantage in the ship. Hudson aircraft from the RCAF base at Eastern Passage circled overhead, a flotilla of garrison and navy

tugs and launches came out to meet the ship and a big fire-tug like a floating fountain poured streamers of water into the air. Bands were playing on the dock as the ship nosed into Pier 22. High above the city rose an unfamiliar feature — the huge new Victoria General Hospital, begun during the war and still under construction. From its topmost scaffolding flew a big Nova Scotia flag, hoisted there in honour of the Regiment by order of Doctor McIntosh, whose son Ian was the first West Nova officer to die in battle.

All Halifax, indeed it seemed all Nova Scotia was there at the waterfront waiting to welcome the Regiment home. Including the West Novas there were something like 10,000 troops on board the "Ile de France" and there was some delay in getting ashore. Up the gangway came Lt. Col. Bullock, Lt. Col. Waterman and many another West Nova veteran who had reached home before the Regiment. Others were waiting on the dock and along the streets where the West Novas were to march, and many of these waiting veterans were still in hospital blue.

At 7.30 P.M. the Regiment formed up for its last parade. Major Eisenhower marched at the head of the battalion but at his request the column was preceded by Lt. Col. Bullock and 25 other veteran officers of the Regiment. Six abreast the West Novas marched up Morris Street, along Barrington Street, up Spring Garden Road (where the bells of St. Mary's Cathedral pealed forth) and along South Park Street to the Garrison Grounds on the flank of the ancient Citadel. All the way the streets were lined with cheering crowds, and the Citadel slopes were a living mass. It was full dark now, but powerful search-lights on the Citadel ramparts bathed the Garrison Grounds in light. Here on a small platform Premier Macdonald of Nova Scotia made an address of welcome, concluding in a stirring voice, "So long as memory remains in Nova Scotia, your achievements will be remembered". He then presented Major Eisenhower with a new Nova Scotian flag, the last of a succession flown by the Regiment through Britain, Sicily, Italy, France, Belgium and Holland.

The planned program of welcome now went by the board as 20,000 people broke through the police cordon and surged about the West Novas in search of relatives and friends. It was

several hours before the Regiment was able to disentangle itself and proceed in lorries and cars to the demobilization depot at Chebucto Camp in the west end of the city, the end of the long, long trail for "Tac. 69".

During its six years of service in this war the Regiment had travelled more than 8,500 miles by sea and at least 8,000 miles over the roads of England, Scotland, Sicily, Italy, France, Belgium, Germany and Holland. It had fought in twenty-one actions, great and small :

July 17	1943	Monte del Forma	Sicily
July 21-26	"	Libertina	"
July 29-30	"	Catananuova	"
Aug. 2	"	Monte Criscana	"
Sep. 8	"	Delianuova heights	Italy
Sep. 19	"	Potenza	"
Oct. 7	"	Fortore River (Gambalesa)	"
Oct. 11-12	"	Jelsi heights (Campobasso)	"
Nov. 16-25	"	Sangro heights	"
Dec. 11-18	"	Ortona	"
Dec. 31/43 — Apl. 21/44		Arielli River	"
May 17	1944	Gustav Line (Liri Valley)	"
May 23	"	Hitler Line " "	"
May 25	"	Melfa River " "	"
Aug. 30-31	"	Gothic Line (Foglia River)	"
Sep. 14-20	"	" (Marano and Ausa rivers)	"
Oct. 23	"	Savio River	"
Dec. 1-15	"	Lamone River, Vecchio Canal	"
Dec. 27/44 — Feb. 9/45		Senio River	
Apl. 13-15	1945	Ijssel River,	
		Appeldoorn Canal	Holland
Apl. 17-19	"	Appeldoorn Forest to Eem River	"

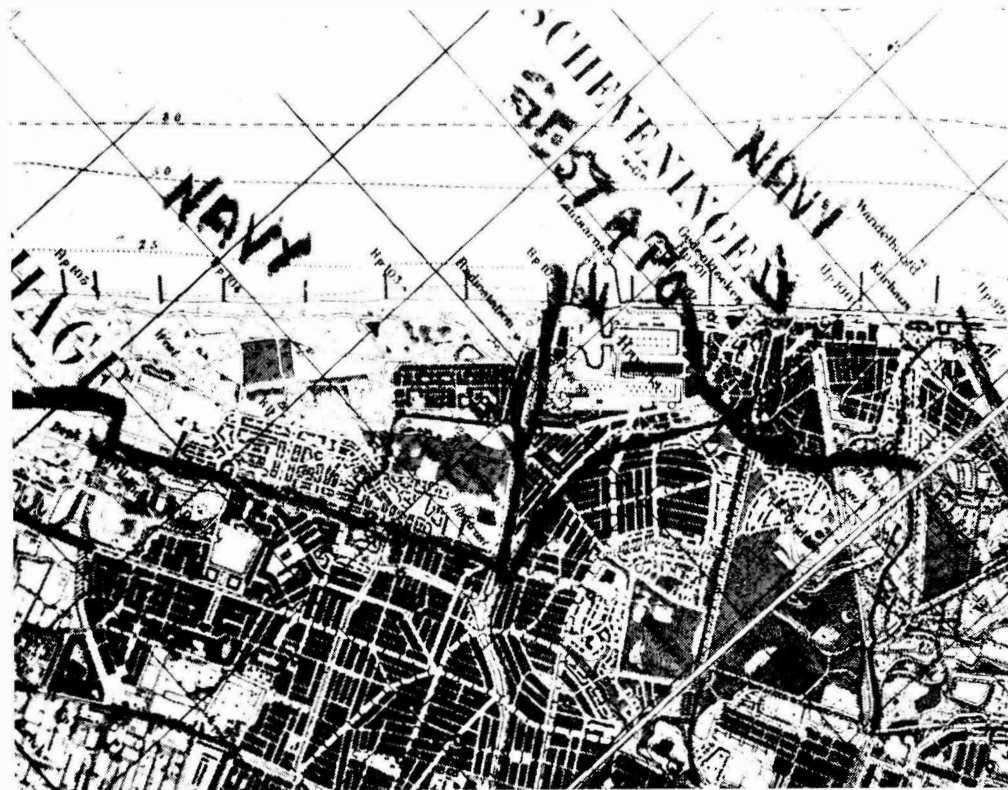
Entirely apart from the long list of officers and men whose health broke down under the prolonged strains of war, disease and weather, the West Novas' battle casualties from Pachino to the Eem were 352 killed, 1,084 wounded and 48

prisoners of war. Of these the officer casualties were 23 killed, 72 wounded, 1 prisoner of war. At least 124 West Novas were wounded on two occasions or wounded in one battle and killed in another; at least 17 others were wounded three times or wounded twice and then killed in action. If the Regiment had no other statement of its fighting record it is bound up in these figures.

The "originals" who went overseas in 1939 and actually returned with the Regiment were terribly few. Of the officers and warrant officers who marched off the "Ile de France" at Halifax only six (Majors H. M. Eisenhower and C. F. Whynacht, Capt. D. I. Rice, RSM Callaghan, CSM E. E. Nauss, CSM R. H. Whynot) had landed with the West Novas in Sicily in July '43. Of these, four had received wounds. This is not to imply that all the rest were dead or incapacitated by wounds or disease, for a number of the "originals" survived the war in other units; but it does mark the vicissitudes that befall an infantry battalion in a modern war.

For despite the development of aircraft, artillery, tanks and other tools of the modern general, the infantryman remains the figure of final importance in the field. It is he, patient, enduring, watchful, indomitable — the wet man landing on the beach, the dusty figure trudging the roads, the moving speck on the mountainside, the lonely man in the muddy slit, the tragic and heroic infantryman who carries the war on his back and stands at last triumphant in the citadel of the enemy. And it is he more than all the rest who pays the cost.

The story of the West Nova Scotia Regiment is an ancient one and long, but its finest chapters were written in blood and sweat between the years 1939 and 1945. The men who wore the sunrise badge through Sicily, Italy and Holland lived up to its motto firmly, and 352 were faithful unto death. May their deeds and the ideals they fought for never perish in the hearts and minds of their countrymen.



Map of the Dutch capital and neighbouring Scheveningen, showing areas where the West Novas disarmed and "caged" 7000 German troops.



Lieutenant-Colonel J. M. Houghton O.B.E., officer commanding
3rd Battalion, West Nova Scotia Regiment (Pacific Force)
until the collapse of Japan.



1. Lts. Smith, Kingston and Spurr, on leave in Cologne.
2. General Sir Miles Dempsey talks to West Nova veterans at Utrecht. (Pte. Alan Mirnard M.M. at right).
3. The result of a premature explosion of a German V. 2 rocket in Holland.
4. The carpenter's "shop" in Reichswald Forest. Note the West Nova "69" route signs.
5. The end of the long trail. West Novas on the quay at Halifax, October 1945.
6. On the voyage home. Capt. C. H. Smith, Capt. McNichol, Lieut. Spurr.



Major Harry M. Eisenhower, who served with the Regiment throughout its campaigns in Sicily, Italy and Holland and returned as Commanding Officer.

The Immortal Dead

- Pte. Alcorn, G. M.
Cpl. Allen, M. E.
Sgt. Amero, Alfred J.
Pte. Anderson, Roy W.
L. Cpl. Andrews, Seward J.
Pte. Andrews, Stephen F.
" Anthony, Cyril H.
Lieut. Archibald, Girvan F.
Pte. Arsenault, Fred.
" Arsenault, R. J.
" Avery, Cecil
" Baigent, Gilbert A.
" Baker, Arthur B.
" Balsor, Harry R.
" Barrett, James R.
" Barter, George W.
Cpl. Behie, F. H.
Sgt. Belfie, F. C.
Pte. Bell, John H.
" Benjamin, W. A.
" Benson, J. J.
" Blacquiére, John W.
Lieut. Blanchard, Joseph A.
Pte. Blanchard, P. J.
L. Cpl. Blinn, J. H.
Pte. Boone, William A.
" Boudreau, A. W.
" Boutler, Lorne E.
" Bower, Gerald C.
L. Cpl. Bower, H. L. C.
Pte. Bradley, John
Cpl. Brandel, Anthony A.
Pte. Brittain, M. H.
" Brown, William L.
Lieut. Bullock, Reginald W.
Pte. Burbridge, W. R.
" Burns, Philip F.
L. Cpl. Butler, K. V.
Pte. Cameron, C. W.
" Cameron, D. J.
" Campbell, J. R.
" Campbell, J. E.
" Campbell, William H.
" Campbell, William H.
" Card, D. A.
" Carr, Samuel J.
L. Cpl. Carrigan, Daniel M.
Pte. Casford, Maurice
Sgt. Chalmers, Edward D.
Pte. Chetwynd, K. V.
" Chiasson, Charles J.
Cpl. Clark, William F.
L. Cpl. Cluney, David W.
Cpl. Cluney R. D.
Pte. Coffey, James H.
L. Cpl. Colbert, Leonard
Pte. Colp, Joseph W.
" Connors, L.
" Cooke, C. W.
" Cooke, Ernest V.
Sgt. Cooper, John G.
Cpl. Corbett, Francis A.
Pte. Corbin, Percy R.
" Corkum, James W.
" Cox, B. P.
" Craighill, S. W.
" Crook, Franklin J.
Capt. Crouse, Everett M.
Pte. Daniels, Joseph E.
" Dauphinee Donald L.
" Davidson, Eldon D.
L. Cpl. Davis, Wilfred M.
Pte. Davison, H. Z.
" Dearmond, Willis E.

- Lieut. DeBlois, Roland G.
 Pte. Delorie, Kevin J.
 " Demone Ferd. H.
 " Dixon, C.
 Lieut. Doane, Elmer N.
 Pte. Doucette, Francis H.
 " Doucette, G. J.
 Cpl. Drake, John D.
 Pte. Drapeau, Emilien
 " Drillio, Edward G.
 L. Cpl. Dugas, Clifford D.
 Pte. Dukes, Joseph
 Cpl. Dunn, Basil C.
 Pte. Dykens, William E.
 " Ellement, David H.
 Sgt. Elliott, Richard R.
 Cpl. Ellis, Charles
 Sgt. Ellis, R. H.
 Pte. Elward, Frederick E.
 L. Cpl. Fader, James V.
 Pte. Fairfax, Charles M.
 " Fancy, Cecil C.
 " Fancy, G. C.
 " Farnsworth, H. T.
 " Farris, H. W.
 " Fiander, Wilfred L.
 " Fitzgerald, F. J. B.
 Sgt. Fleury, Fabin
 C.S.M. Foley, R. C.
 Pte. Fouchere, R. J.
 " Fraser, Douglas J.
 " Fraser, Robert F.
 " Fredericks, T. E.
 " Frizzell, Frank E.
 " Fulton, Ervin B.
 " Gallant, Antoine H.
 " Gallant, Joseph A.
 " Gammon, Alfred V.
 " Gardiner, John H.
 " Gaudet, Edward J.
 " Gaudet, Joseph E.
 " Gay, Austin G.
 " Gehue, R. G.
 " Gillis, Harold T.
 " Gillis, James L.
 " Glode, J. C.
 " Goodchild, F. D.
 " Gorman, L. E.
 " Goyetche, Raymond J.
 Sgt. Graham, George D.
 L. Cpl. Graham, Stanley R.
 Pte. Grant, F. H.
 " Graves, W. H.
 " Gray, K. A.
 " Green, William H.
 " Greencorn C. H.
 " Hache, Theodule
 " Hale, B. K.
 " Hall, Roy L.
 " Hardy, Thomas R.
 Cpl. Hardy, William H.
 Pte. Hart, Richard Jr.
 " Hatt, W. D.
 " Hattie, Bert. M.
 Lieut. Hebb, Gordon Morris
 Pte. Henderson, T. M.
 " Hennigar, Ancel C.
 " Hicks, H. A.
 " Higby, Kenneth
 " Hillier, George E.
 " Hiltz, P. S.
 " Hiltz, Raymond K.
 " Himmelman, Forest R.
 " Hong, George
 " Horton, J. W.
 " Hughes, Dan. W.
 " Humble, Horace G.
 Lieut. Ingraham, Wilbert E.
 Sgt. Irving, Dick
 Pte. Jacques, G. W.
 " James, E. R.
 " Jaquest, Stuart A.
 " Jeffrey, George S.
 " Jodrey, Charles E.
 " Jodrey, Harold
 " Jollimore, H. J.
 Major Jones, James Harvey
 Pte. Jordan, Daniel J.
 Sgt. Joudrey, William S.
 Pte. Kane, Robert
 Sgt. Kearnes, Robert L.
 Pte. Keddy, S. A.
 " Kelly, Harry A.

- Pte. Kennedy, Alex. A.**
Lieut. Kennedy, Herbert S.
Pte. Kennedy, J. A.
Lieut. Kerr, Clifford W.
Pte. Kerr, D. J.
 " Keyes, F. W.
 " Kilcup, E. J.
 " King, Avard E.
Lieut. Knowles, Ralph. N.
Lieut. Knowles, Douglas B.
Pte. Lafleche, Charles E.
 " Landers, Douglas G.
 " Lapiere, Harold L.
 " LeBlanc, Mederic J.
 " Leclair, Henry B.
 " Ledwidge, Emery J.
 " Lefort, Joseph A.
 " Legere, R. E.
 " Lewis, Daniel A.
 " Lewis, George H.
 " Living, A. H. E.
 " Llewellyn, W. L.
 " Lynch, A. W.
 " Lynch, George C.
 " Macaulay, Raymond
Sgt. MacDonald, Alton H.
Pte. MacDonald, D. J.
 " MacDonald, James W.
 " MacDonald, Joseph F.
L. Cpl. MacDonald, Norman A.
Pte. MacDonald, Robert H.
 " MacDonald, Ronald J.
 " MacDonald, Walter E.
Sgt. MacDonnell, C. A.
Pte. MacEachern, Angus L.
L. Cpl. MacEachern, F. A.
Lieut. MacHattie, Harvey D.
Lieut. MacIntosh, Ian. H.
Pte. MacKenzie, G. H.
 " MacKenzie, L. B.
 " MacKillop, Hugh S.
 " MacKinnon, Lloyd C.
 " MacKinnon, Lloyd F.
 " MacLean, B. J.
 " MacLellan, James G.
 " MacLeod, John W.
Sgt. MacLeod, R. G.
- Pte. MacMillan, Fulton B.**
 " MacPhee, George E.
 " MacPherson, Dan. A.
 " MacPherson, L. P.
 " MacQuarrie, A.
 " Mailman, B. R.
 " Mailman, Ronald H.
 " Mansbridge, P.
Cpl. Marshall, Walter M.
Pte. Martell, Thomas K.
Sgt. Masterson, James C.
Pte. Matheson, William A.
 " Mattie, Leonard W.
Cpl. McClusky, George
Pte. McComisky, Joseph S.
 " McCormack, D.
 " McCormick, Claude
 " McCormick, R.
 " McCulloch, R. M.
Sgt. McDonald, Hector C.
Pte. McEachern, H. N.
 " McGilvray, Philip R.
 " McGuigan, David
 " McInnis, Joseph J.
 " McIntyre, Pius
 " McKeeman, W. W.
 " McKinnon, John
Cpl. McKinnon, Lloyd J.
Pte. McKinnon, Michael J.
 " McLaughlin, C. L.
 " McLean, Donald J.
L. Cpl. McLean, William J.
Pte. McLelland, W. J. R.
 " McMullen, M.
 " McMullen, R. A.
Cpl. McNabb, Alexander
Sgt. McNamara, H. W.
Pte. McNeil, John H.
 " McPhee, John L.
 " Melanson, Edward C.
 " Miller, Raymond L.
 " Milliy, W.
 " Monaghan, W.
 " Monk, Roy H. P.
 " Moore, J. W.
 " Morash, Clarence E.
 " Morrison, Ewen M.

- Pte. Morrison, Peter
 " Muise, James R.
 " Muise, Joseph S.
 " Murphy, J. G.
 " Nauss, Ernest F.
 " Newell, Victor D.
 " Nickerson, Claude M.
 " Norton, Ernest M.
 " O'Brien, Ivan A.
 " O'Neil, John P.
 " Pace, W. K.
 Cpl. Palmerston, W. J.
 " Pardy, Frank J.
 Pte. Parker, Charles O.
 " Partridge, Donald R.
 Cpl. Peach, Raymond H.
 Pte. Peach, Walter L.
 " Perry, C. A.
 " Perry, H. J.
 " Pettifer, E. H.
 " Powell, Frank C.
 Lieut. Prat., Gerald F.
 Capt. Putman, Charles L.
 Pte. Ramey, Gordon O.
 Lieut. Reeves, Charles C.
 Pte. Rhindress, R. E.
 " Rhodenizer, H. C.
 " Rhodes, R. V.
 " Rhuland, D. A.
 " Rhyno, Douglas M.
 L. Cpl. Rice, G.
 Pte. Richard, J. B.
 L. Cpl. Richard, L. J.
 Pte. Richard, Paul H.
 " Robertson, Arthur A.
 " Robichaud, Joseph E.
 " Rogers, C. W.
 Cpl. Roper, D. R.
 Pte. Rose, John M.
 " Rose, R.
 " Roy, L. P.
 " Roy, Levi
 " Sanderson, G. A.
 L. Cpl. Savrnock, A.
 Pte. Schnare, Harry J.
 " Sears, A. T.
 Sgt. Shanks, H. J.
 Pte. Shannick, C. A.
 Cpl. Shaule, Lynn A.
 Pte. Shaw, George A.
 Sgt. Shaw, John M.
 Pte. Shebib, Walter J.
 " Sheppard, George W.
 " Sibley, R. E.
 " Smith, Gerald H. A.
 " Smith, John S.
 " Smith, Leslie J.
 " Smith, Ronald E.
 " Smith, W. A.
 " Snow, W.
 " Sparks, Quinton H.
 Lieut. Sponagle, Walter F.
 Sgt. Stailing, William L.
 Pte. Stapley, Ralph D.
 " Stewart, F. B.
 " Stuart, Donald M.
 Sgt. Sullivan, Olaf H.
 Pte. Swan, G.
 " Tarr, Murray E.
 L. Cpl. Taylor, A. A. L.
 Lieut. Taylor, Arnold D.
 Pte. Tooke, A. M.
 " Turpin, F. E.
 " Vanamburg, J. A.
 " Veinotte, L. W.
 " Vickery, Oliver L.
 " Vingar, Alexander
 " Ward, Charles A. V.
 L. Cpl. Warren, J. H.
 Pte. Watson, William A.
 Cpl. Watters, Warren A.
 Pte. White, Harry
 " Williams, A. F.
 " Williams, John W.
 Lieut. Williams, Sherman F.
 Pte. Wilmouth, J.
 " Wojnowicz, Walter
 Cpl. Woodworth, Hugh L.
 Pte. Yorke, Arthur P. S.
 " Yorke, George E.
 " Yorke, William A.
 " Young, R. A.
 " Zwicker, W. B.

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