



Van Arty Association and RUSI Van Members News Dec 26, 2017

Newsletters normally are emailed on Monday evenings. If you don't get a newsletter on time, check the websites below to see if there is a notice about the current newsletter or to see if the current edition is posted there. If the newsletter is posted, please contact me at bob.mugford@gmail.com to let me know you didn't get a copy.

Newsletter on line. This newsletter, and previous editions, are available on the Vancouver Artillery Association website at: www.vancouvergunners.ca and the RUSI Vancouver website at: <http://www.rusivancouver.ca/newsletter.html> . Both groups are also on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=vancouver%20artillery%20association> and <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=rusi%20vancouver>

Upcoming events – Mark your calendars See attached posters for details.

Jan 01 New Years Levee – starts at 1100hrs in the Officers Mess
Jan 10 First Lunch of 2018

Dues

A reminder that dues are payable as of January 1, for members of the Vancouver Artillery Association, RUSI Vancouver and Associate members of the 15 Fd Officers Mess.

See details at the end of this newsletter.

World War 2 – 1942/43

John Thompson Strategic analyst - quotes from his book "Spirit Over Steel"

Dec 25th: Longstop Hill in Tunisia is back in German hands but Axis forces in Sirte withdraw and the worsening weather mitigates against further heavy fighting. Rabaul is hit by a heavy American air raid staged from Guadalcanal.

Dec 26th: Darlan's assassin is executed (rather hastily, only 40 hours after the murder) and General Giraud is chosen as his replacement. Manstein's forces withdraw to the Don.

Dec 27th: Von Kleist starts to run for Rostov as six Soviet armies start a counter-offensive in the Caucasus. General Vlasov is allowed by the Germans to form the Smolensk Committee for Russian Liberation. US attacks on Mount Austen on Guadalcanal resume – with heavy loss to

the 132nd US Infantry Regiment.

Dec 28th: The Arakan offensive in Burma runs into heavy Japanese opposition at Rathedaung. Roosevelt confirms a policy of non-cooperation with Britain in the development of nuclear weapons.

Dec 30th: Start of the Battle of the Barents Sea: The Germans send the pocket battleship Lutzow and the heavy cruiser Hipper and six destroyers to intercept Convoy JW-51B. The Convoy is escorted by two light cruisers, nine destroyers and six corvettes. (Another escort group based on the battleship HMS Anson is nearby but will not arrive in time to get involved). The British Royal Navy will fight as its ancient traditions dictate that they should always do under such circumstances – tenaciously.

Dec 31st: 5th Shock Army has captured Tormosin. General Leclerc's men leave Chad on the way to link up with the 8th Army. The Japanese decide to evacuate Guadalcanal -- the balance of power in the Pacific is rapidly sliding the Allied way. The end of the Battle of the Barents Sea; both sides have lost a destroyer, but Teutonic tentativeness and Anglo-audacity has saved the convoy from harm. Captain Robert St Vincent Sherbrooke in HMS Onslow commands the convoy escort and beats off four attacks by Lutzow and Hipper, remaining on the bridge despite his own wounds and temporary blindness. He upholds the finest traditions of the Royal Navy and is subsequently awarded the Victoria Cross.

1943: The Allied Grind Forward

The balance of power has now shifted to the Allied side, but victory is not going to come easily. The Axis powers have conquered widely and have much strategic space and the many economies that come with fighting defensively. The Germans and Italians still hold Tunisia and their submarines and aircraft still levy a toll on all shipping in the Mediterranean. Indeed, the U-Boats are at the zenith of their strength and this endangers all Allied projects. The Allied victories at El Alamein and in Algeria have pushed the Axis wolf far back, but it can still bite ferociously if approached carelessly. The campaigns at Guadalcanal and New Guinea are far from over. The balance of strength in the Pacific is still too close to the fulcrum for confidence. Yet, month by month, it does tilt the Allied way. Still Japan has vast holdings too and it remains on Guadalcanal and New Guinea; and the Japanese are keeping their acquisitions in South East Asia and China comfortably enough. The Japanese also have a chain of defended islands whose airstrips deny much of the Pacific to the American Fleet.

The Stalingrad campaign has not yet been crowned with victory and there are bastions and forces enough beyond it. The Soviets have kept their core heartlands safe – just – but Leningrad remains under siege and the Germans are still uncomfortably close to Moscow and in firm possession of the Ukraine. The Soviets and the Americans are also aware they need experience and that there is only one way to earn it. For victory, the Allies also need manpower, better weaponry and superior logistics. But the Russians and British have lost much manpower already while America is still swarming with men in training. The Allies' war-winning weapons

are only starting to arrive in numbers, and considerable logistic difficulties have yet to be overcome. Set against them are highly experienced and well-trained troops of the Axis powers who still believe the war can go their way once more with some luck and a clever offensive or two. To paraphrase Churchill; El Alamein, Stalingrad and Guadalcanal marked the end of the beginning and now have yielded the beginning of the end... but a long and painful road lies ahead

January 1943: The Soviets Push Back Beyond Stalingrad

"Most of the men are stricken with dysentery...Starvation is taking many lives and it is weakening our already extended lines. We are doomed." - Maj Gen Kensaku Oda (Referring to the state of Japanese troops on Guadalcanal) - 12th January 1943

General: U-Boat strength amounts to 212 U-boats and 181 being readied for operations, but bad weather this month will restrict Allied shipping losses to 50 vessels and 261,000 tons. The RAF will concentrate on Cologne, Dusseldorf, Essen and Lorient with a growing inventory of Lancasters and increasing accuracy in technique. The tiny US bomber fleet will go after Brest, St. Nazaire and Wilhelmshaven.

Jan 1st: The ferocious German defence of Velikiye Luki is failing and the bulk of the town falls into the hands of the Kalinin Front. German troops in the Caucasus fall back from the Terek River. The Americans and Australians start to force a Japanese withdrawal from Buna.

Jan 2nd: The renewed US assault on Mt Austen on Guadalcanal achieves better results than the last one, while US troops also mount a highly successful assault around Buna on New Guinea. US submariners in the Pacific have a new commander, Rear-Admiral Charles Lockwood, who has been listening to complaints about unreliable torpedoes and the under-employment of his boats. Specific deeds of courage, usually on specific days, attend most awards for valour in battle. The courage of those who won the title "Righteous Among the Nations" had to last day in and day out for months and years. Typical among them is the Belgian aid worker Yvonne Nevejean, who has been hiding Jewish children from the Nazis. The Gestapo is aware she is up to something, but cannot crack her organization – which receives clandestine funding from many prominent Belgians and hides many with the aid of the Catholic Church. She saves over 4,000 children and is later named Righteous Among the Nations.

The War Diary of C31 L/Sgt Charles D Phelan, A Battery, RCHA 1939 - 1945

Edited by BGen (ret'd) Robert P (Bob) Beaudry CD

Chapter 40. Rest Area, Uso River, Gambbetta, and Cesena

23 Sep 1944. The Regt travelled a few miles back to Riccione. We were allotted houses about a block from the sea. Our troop had three houses. Officers and Sgts had their own Messes in nearby houses. Bob Shaw, Alex Rentoul and I bunked in a nice room complete with a washbasin. A trouble light and battery solved the lighting problem and we were all set. What a

relief to lay down in a nice clean room and to know the night would not be disturbed by continuous calls for fire! We slept like babies. *

24 Sep. Parade at 0900 hrs followed by maintenance and making deficiency lists of clothing and equipment. Had another good night's sleep.

25 Sep. All NCOs were called to the Bty office to meet the new Bty Comd (BC), Maj McPherson. He told us of a few changes coming up. Capt McQuestion is to be the new B Tp Commander. He hinted I may be going to the Bty CP.

26 – 28 Sep. Maintenance and sports on beach. Finally got a haircut.

29 Sep. Guard of Honor sent to Div for the visit of the MND, Col Ralston. Got word that we were going back into action. Recce is to move at first light tomorrow. So that looks like the end of our "two weeks to a month's rest" that the CRA, Brig Ziegler had told us – seven days! We packed up in the afternoon.

30 Sep. I left in GB at 0800 hrs, travelling through Rimini. The town had been badly blasted. We passed many burnt-out tanks. Too many of them were ours, but there were also a good number of German Tigers. We reached our area near the Uso River, about two miles from the sea, and picked a position along the road. We persuaded the New Zealanders who occupied a nearby house to let us use the hallway as a CP. We found the entrance to a German dugout, which was 6 ½ feet deep and 10 by 10 feet square, with a huge mound of earth over the roof. A large 12-volt battery with wires leading into the mud under it had convinced the Kiwis that the place was booby trapped. Bob Dunning and I looked it over, prodded the floor a bit, took a chance, and moved the battery. It wasn't a booby trap! We set up the CP in the dugout. Jerry dropped shells into the area all day. In the evening extra ammo began to arrive just as an airstrike began. We unloaded 2000 rounds of HE in record time, dumping it all into a ditch. Jerry dropped a concentration which covered the area. We dropped into the ditch with the ammo and hoped for the best. We were lucky, and Jerry did no damage.

1 Oct. How I dread the coming winter! The guns arrived, and more ammo was delivered, bringing us to 800 HE rpg over normal. We started a HF program at 2300 hrs.

2 Oct. We fired all night, finishing the HFs at 0630 hrs. It is raining, and the ground is pretty slimy. We fired quite a few targets during the day, and so did Jerry. We had a few unpleasantly close, but no damage. Worked in the evening on an all-night HF programme.

** (Editorial Note). In the 29 days starting at the Gothic Line on 25 Aug, 1 Fd Regt RCHA had fired over 77,000 rounds. In the same period the Regiment's casualties were 15 killed and 35 wounded. Maj GD Mitchell, MC, RCHA – Right of the Line, p.141*

3 – 4 Oct. Fired a few targets. Sunny day. Turned in our summer drill uniforms, and we will be issued with a second battledress soon.

5 Oct. At 0030 hrs a very heavy shell hit the CP house and exploded in the stable. Bob Shaw and I grabbed First Aid kits and forced our way into the stable, expecting to find people smeared all over the place. To our amazement the only casualty was a cow. Of the 30-odd persons, Canucks, Kiwis, and Italians, not a person was scratched. What a miracle! Div CB Bty identified the shell as a 210mm after we sent in some shell fragments. Fired HFs at night.

6 -7 Oct. BHQ and A Tp were heavily shelled, but did no damage. Fired a CB programme at night. Raining again. I was told I was to go on a 48-hr pass to Riccione.

8 Oct. I left in the rain, and settled into billets. I spent the evening in the K of C canteen.

9 Oct. Went to see “Kit Bag Review” in the afternoon. This was a quite good all-male Cdn Army show, with Billy Christmas, who used to manage our Regt’l Swing Band, conducting the band. I got back to the position to be told we were on 30 minutes notice to move.

10 Oct. We moved off to a new area about 400 yards west of our present position. Still raining. The guns got in despite very heavy mud and were soon in action. Our CP was in a former stable. No firing all night. 1 Cdn Div reported to be coming back into action.

11 Oct. Fairly decent day. A location report indicated that 5 Div is on the coast with a NZ Div on their left. Left of the NZ Div is 1 Cdn Div. We are across the Rubicon River at many points. The RCRs are around Savignano, the 48th are in Giovanni, and the HPEs are just south of Gambettola and on Hwy 9. They are eight kms from Cesena. Fired quite a few DFs at night. I bought a \$50.00 bond in the 7th Victory Loan Campaign.

12 Oct. Fired a small fire plan at midnight. Left on recce at 0900 hrs. The 2 i/c went forward, but as there were no decent gun positions, we came back about noon. After supper we returned to the area we had recced in the morning. C Bty was ordered to move at once and A and B Btys were ordered to “Prepare to Move”. Jerry shelled the area as we approached, but did no damage. This area was about 2500 yards from Gambettola. According to the RCRs, it was still in enemy hands. A and B Bty recce parties were finally ordered back. We took off at high speed, as Jerry was still shelling the road. A quad in front of us stopped dead in its tracks, and our jeep plowed into it. Lt Farrely got a bad bang on his knees, and I had a few scratches from bouncing onto the hood. The jeep was out of action and was towed back. As our guns were all limbered up and ready to move, we had no action that night. We received a message from HQ 8th Army, from Lt Gen RL McCreary, who was replacing Lt Gen Leese as Army Commander, encouraging us to go all out to finish the job quickly.

13 Oct. Bty still ready to move. Went on recce to a spot better than yesterday's, about 4000 yards from Gambettola. Area is small but the only one available. As soon as the guns went into action we fired in support of the British on our left flank. The HF firing began at 2100 hrs.

14 Oct. At 0715 hrs we started firing on the fire plan in support of the HPE, who advanced 1000 yards. Later we fired another one, and the HPE advanced again. Late in the afternoon we engaged a Nebelwerfer position with the flying OP. Jerry fired near our position, and Gnr Birt was wounded. After supper we were ordered to prepare to engage Nebelwerfer positions 65 degrees right of Zero Line, which was well over the NZ front. Then at 2000 hrs we began firing a 100 rpg Fire Plan in support of the Kiwis.

15 Oct. The NZ attack which we supported last night was successful. They occupied Gambettola and took 15 POWs. In the evening a Sitrep indicated that the RCRs and the 48th are advancing towards Cesena with little opposition. Jerry artillery is being drawn back.

16 Oct. A big HF programme during the night. Left early in the morning on recce to an area beyond Gambettola. The infantry was still mopping up as we arrived, and quite a large number of dead Germans were still laying around. We set up about 1000 yards west of the town. I got an Italian to work clearing bushes so I could see the guns from the director. He cleared about an acre for a pack of cigarettes and a can of bully beef. The guns arrived at 1400 hrs and were soon dug in. We fired late into the night.

17 Oct. Fired an hour-long HF programme early in the morning, then engaged Bty and M Tgts, followed by two small Fire Plans. We fired on HFs for 3 1/2 hrs in the evening.

18 Oct. Pretty well a repeat of yesterday. The Regt got a message from the Comd 2 Cdn Bde saying the artillery support was marvellous. Jerry shelled the area in the afternoon but there was no damage. Sitrep at 1830 hrs indicated 3 Bde going into a holding role. 2 Bde is to swing east of Cesena. 4 Br Div is to pass through 46 Br Div and drive to the west of Cesena. We fired a 20 rpg Fire Plan at 2300 hrs, then HFs.

19 Oct. Fired a couple of early bombards, then had a bath in a bucket. Recce moved off at noon to an area about 3000 yards SW of Cesena. The area is very cramped. Jerry fired quite a few shells as we waited for the guns, but no damage. Guns arrived at 1830 hrs. Had trouble passing line to the guns due to the many trees. Finally, Higgins set up the director on the roof of the Bty CP and succeeded.

20 Oct. Engaged many Bty and M Tgts all day, along with a few HFs. At 1400 hrs 1 Cdn Div reported Cesena cleared, but all bridges across the Savio just north of Cesena blown. At 2140 hrs it was reported that the PPCLI had a bridge head across the river. On the coast 5 Cdn Div GGHG are in Cesenatico.

21 Oct. R22R are on north outskirts of Cesena. 2 Cdn Bde took 34 POWs. Savio River is difficult on our side. It is 40 feet wide with high banks, and Jerry has arranged all kinds of obstacles including a mine belt. We were busy all day on various targets. Rain in the evening. At 2000 hrs we began a Fire Plan as 2 Cdn Bde began an assault crossing of the Savio, about 1000 yards north of Cesena. At 2310 it was reported that the Black Watch in 4 Br Div are across river and have taken 39 POWs. In 2 Bde the Seaforths are across river and have made contact with enemy. Edmontons have two companies across, and have one Coy Comd killed. Very grim fighting. We fired nonstop until 0120 hrs.

22 Oct. After a 40-minute break, we fired again for another hour. We had then expended over 1000 rounds in the troop in support of the attack. We fired DFs at 0530 and again at 0615 hrs. Capt McQuestron left as FOO with the R22R, replacing Capt “Sandy” MacKay who was wounded. At 1030 hrs the PPCLI and the Edmontons are firmly established across the river. Plan is that one coy of PPCLI and WNSR, now under command 2 Bde, will enlarge bridgehead tonight with a silent crossing. I worked out a small on call Fire Plan.

23 Oct. Several DFs during the night, and quite a few targets in the morning. Jerry counter-attacked at 1010 hrs, and we were ordered to fire on registered M Tgts “until stopped”. A coy of PPCLI were driven back across river, as well as two platoons of WNSR. D Coy of WNSR, on far side of river, drove off a tank attack. B Tp fired 621 rounds into the counter attack area.

24 Oct. Fired a short barrage at 0530 hrs in support of the Royal West Kents, and fired 281 rounds. At 0945, a PPCLI coy is 3000 yards north of Cesena, and WNSR are 5000 yards north. The infantry is now at extreme range, and Lt Doe left on recce. Sunny today. The Bty moved off at 1400 hrs to a position 1500 yards north of Cesena, but by noon the infantry was again nearly at extreme range. I went on recce to a new position. It began to rain heavily and the guns had trouble getting in. A few DFs late at night, again at max range.

26 Oct. Still raining, and very muddy. We were told 1 Cdn Div will likely be going out of action today or tomorrow. Nothing doing all day except more rain.

From the ‘Punitentary’

What nationality is Santa Claus? North Polish

This is an abbreviated ‘holiday edition’. Regular articles, the Vancouver Gunners Update, Murphy’s other laws and Who is it, will return on Jan 5th.

Dues 2018

Dues for the Vancouver Artillery Association are \$25, payable to the Vancouver Artillery Association. Send to:

Treasurer, Vancouver Artillery Association

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