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ARMY FORM C.2118

WAR DIARY

or

Unit 279 Field Company, R.E

~~INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY~~

(Delete heading not required)

Month and Year Dec 44

Commanding Officer Major P.T. WOOD, DSO, MC,
RE

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	References to Appendices
HELENAVEEN 739111	1		Preparations for operation GUILDFORD to clear enemy from pocket WEST of MAAS in front of VENLO (.) Assembly area for 6 K.O.S.B. checked for mines (.) Preliminary task:- Build three small bridges at 864096 (.) Not possible by day (.) Unnecessary stores offloaded at Field Park (.) Necessary stores offloaded at site by night (.) Ground soft and some trucks bogged (.) All pulled out eventually (.)	
	2		Tying up for operation to-morrow, see Appendix 1 and 2 for orders (.) At night three 30-ft Baileys built at 864096.	App. 1 and 2.
	3		Operation GUILDFORD (.) Jobs:- 2 Platoon to advance in Kangaroos behind flails and mark right edges of gaps by means of long poles with gap marking signs on top (.) 6 gaps each numbered from right (.) 2 Platoon to remain at A/Tk Ditch and maintain bridges laid by Churchills A.V.R.E. (.) 1 Platoon to go up when 2 Platoon Kangaroos returned and mark left edge of gap (.) 3 Platoon to do any jobs required in BLERICK (.) Recce Officer with each of four Battalions (.) Operation was most successful (.) Some misgivings had been felt as to whether the Bridge Layers and Kangaroos would bog on the soft fields but the operation went almost exactly according to plan (.) 5 of the 6 bridges were eventually laid and there were never less than three routes open at any time (.) 2 Platoon, who had the job of maintaining bridge approaches, had eight casualties from shelling, one serious (.) Of the three little bridges laid the previous night only one was in use at the end of the day, the approaches to the other two having become impassable (.) When this happens there is no method known to us of quickly making them passable again. Corduroy has proved the only method.	PT Wood Capt. Maj. R.E. For O.C. 279th Field Company R.E.

	4		Plan now to open up two permanent routes into BLERICK, yesterday's objective. 3 Platoon worked on OBAN, which is exposed and was shelled at intervals through the day.	
	5		Maintenance of TAY-OBAN routes. See Trace A. A Party of P.O.W. were taken into the minefields, where they cheerfully lifted tellers with alacrity. They had laid them during the two nights preceding our attack. All T.Mi. 35 (uncommon these days) and none booby trapped. 140 from area 883096 and 80 from 882097. Lt. Haines and Sjt. Cooke began eight day course on mines and explosives for new pioneer platoons of 44 (L) Bde at HELMOND.	Trace A.
	6		O.C. to 2nd Army Mines Conference. Ordered to make Cl. 40 crossing at 889123. O.C. had done preliminary recce previous day. Enemy-observed by day. Probably 70' Double single. Plan: Lt. BOARDMAN bridge Commander. His Platoon (2) to lay out on night 6/7 and build, assisted by 2 sections 3 Platoon night 7/8. 1 Platoon to unload night 6/7. Div Bailey Platoon to be Used	
		1630	Capt. BLOCKLEY and Lt. BOARDMAN on site. No preliminary clearing necessary, old R.C. bridge had been blown clean away and both abutments demolished.	
		1700	Setting out began.	
		1830	1 Platoon arrived and began unloading. An hour late owing to a breakdown.	
		2245	Unloading finished. Near baseplates and rollers in position. Far bankseat 70% dug out.	PT Wood Capt. Maj. R.E. For O.C. 279th Field Company R.E.
KIRKEN KUILEN 765130	7		Lt. SCANLON with 2 sections 3 Platoon began dismantling our laboriously constructed Red Lion Club at TILBURG, the town having now been taken over by 1 Canadian Army. On reaching the Bridge Site in the evening, it was found that one baseplate had collapsed through the day's heavy rainfall having run down the hill and through a crack in the tarmac and so washed out the bankseat. Building was therefore held up while a transverse drain was dug to prevent this re-occurring and a grillage was put down. Bridge was opened at 0230 hrs. During the day company moved to former Dutch Reformatory at 765132. A hutted camp in good order. Water supply the only problem, no electricity for the pump.	
	9		See Appendix 3 for Div Plan. North road to BLERICK now clear, 12 R-mines lifted 892093. 1 Platoon working to link Corduroy with road as on trace A. Road 889123-893101 cleared of mines and small trees but not possible to open it owing	Appendix 3. Trace A.

		to 18 interlaced trees forming block at 893109 which cannot be moved without mechanical equipment which will provoke shelling. There is also crater at 894107 and 894105 where A/Tk ditch crosses road (.) Route not needed however (.)	
	10	ARMCO crossing at 839081 begun for R.A. 50% completed (.) More work on corduroy road 865094 (.) Many mines previously lifted were blown up.	
	11	ARMCO crossing at 839081 80% (.) Corduroy 20% (.) Lt. Wilkinson joined company.	PT Wood Capt. Maj. R.E. For O.C. 279th Field Company R.E.
	12	Crossing finished (.) Corduroy 30% (.) Horse went up on mine on track 843088 - 838087 from which 6 T.Mi. 35 steel were subsequently lifted (.) It is only through some such occurrence as this that minefields off the beaten track can be located (.) It is difficult sometimes to make commanders realise that it is impossible for the R.E. to guarantee an area clear without days or weeks of methodical searching which is not, of course, possible. Track beside railway 838146 - BLERICK made passable.	
	13	C. in C. visited Division and decorated Major Wood, M.C., D.S.O., Capt. Blockley (M.C.), L/Sjt. O'Shea (M.M.). Estimated time of completion for corduroy 18 Dec (.) Draining and hard standings in camp improved (.) It was all mud and with the recent rain was becoming bog (.)	
	14	Walk continued on Corduroy and hard standings (.)	
	15	" " " " " " " (.)	
	16	Further work on corduroy and hard standings (.) All pipes in camp lagged (.) Lt. HERBERT joined company (.) Div R.E. home leave ballot (.) Company did well apart from Serjeants, who were unlucky (.)	
	17	By driving the small pump off the back wheel of a motor-bike, enough water was pumped to operate the camp showers for an hour. Corduroy will be opened to-morrow evening (.)	
	18	Corduroy - all logs laid but needs sanding on top (.) Recce done by O.C. and Lt. WATKINSON for A/Tks minefield to be laid by night, area 893082 (.)	
	19	Sanding of corduroy continued (.) Lt. WATKINSON and party from 3 Platoon laid 83 Schu mines and wired them at night 19/20 (.)	PT Wood Capt. Maj. R.E. For O.C. 279th Field Company R.E.
	20	Sanding of Corduroy completed. Hard frost at night.	
	21	R-mines and T-mines collected from MEIJEL area for laying in a practice minefield for 44 (L) Bde. Recce by O.C. and Lt. HERBERT for	

		minefield to be laid area 896129 where enemy are suspected to be crossing MAAS. Night 21/22. 2 short belts of S-mines laid, at end of wood. Another night of frost.	
	22	Maintenance of NORTH route. Sjt. Cooke killed in accident while blowing up damaged R-mines, exact cause unknown. R-mine had been run over by truck with safety nail in place and igniter pin was nearly out.	
	23	Road maintenance. Lt. du Vivier and Haines with 1 Platoon laid perimeter fence in area 8902, night 23/24. No A/Pers mines available except British Shrapnel mines. These mines are NOT considered suitable for laying by night just in front of Jerry's nose.	
	24	No work apart from mines (No. 5 British A/Pers) laid within last night's perimeter wire after dark. Platoon Commander was misled by stupid infantryman and set off 2 trip flares.	
	25	No work. A good Christmas dinner was appreciated by all ranks. Frosty day with bright sun.	
	26	No work. Carol service in morning. Company assembled in afternoon while O.C. read out Christmas message and C.S.M. explained Home Leave Scheme. Another frosty, sunny day. General feeling about Christmas - "We didn't do too badly."	
	27	Day spent cleaning up Christmas mess.	
	28	At 859135 45 T.Mi.35s and T.Mi.35 blown up. Stores check begun. Roads very slippery from 10 days frost.	PT Wood Capt. Maj. R.E. For O.C. 279th Field Company R.E.
	29	Track swept 885114 - 888114. Platoons marched to SEVENUM to inspect our defensive positions there in the event of an attack. G.O.C. inspected camp and had tea in Officers' Mess.	
	30	House at 895121 booby-trapped. Superiority of German over British equipment for this job most apparent.	
	31	Showers at SEVENUM improved with screens. Black-outs for Bde. Recreation Room completed. New Year seen in with skirl of bagpipes.	PT Wood Capt. Maj. R.E. For O.C. 279th Field Company R.E.