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ARMY FORM C.2118

**WAR DIARY**

or

Unit 278 Field Coy RE

**~~INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY~~**

(Delete heading not required).

Month and Year OCTOBER 1944

Commanding Officer Major C.R. NICHOLLS RE

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	References to Appendices
4225	1 Oct		<p>No 1 Pl- Two secs maintaining cl 9 &amp; cl 40 brs (Bailey) at 3824. Enemy shellfire. One sec in harbour and then proceeded to 551279 as adv party for new coy harbour but were forestalled by 12 Corps &amp; returned to coy location.</p> <p>No 2 Pl- Pl harbour at 425318. One sec maintaining br at 427319. One sec on rd repair. One NCO &amp; 8 men dug eight gullies in the approach to the br &amp; also repaired a section of the roadway in the same place. Light shelling round br - no damage.</p> <p>No 3 Pl- In harbour - 3923.</p>	<p>Map Series:- BRUSSELS-LIEGE Scale: 1: 250,000 Str : 6 &amp; 234</p>
"	2 Oct	0800 1000 1400	<p>No 1 Pl- One sec left as adv party for new coy harbour. Two secs returned from maint of cl 9 &amp; 40 Bailey brs at 3824 after handing over to 51 Div. Pl left harbour to location of cl 9 &amp; 40 Bailey brs to take up def posns previously held by 279 Fd Coy. Changeover completed by 1500 hrs.</p> <p>No 2 Pl- One sec digging gullies on right hand side of approach to br at 427319. One sec building up under timber approaches to br. One sec maintaining br and far bank approaches. Brs handed over to 51 Div at 1030 hrs. Arrived at coy location at 1330 hrs. Pl left harbour at 1430 hrs to take up def posns at 380240 on the Wilhelmina Canal.</p> <p>No 3 Pl- In harbour at 398226. At 1600 hrs took over def posns on Wilhelmina Canal from 279 Fd Coy at 380244. Light shelling.</p>	-do-
4225	3 Oct	1545	<p>9 Men left harbour area from HQ pl to make 2 Pl up to strength and thereby relieve a sec on the def posn at 380240. Returned to harbour at 1430 hrs as coy was due to move.</p> <p>Coy moved to 5422 arriving at 1815 hrs.</p> <p>Above-mentioned def responsibility handed over to 5 Seaforths (51 Div) at 1400 hrs and all pls returned to coy HQ.</p>	<p>Map ref series - as for 1st Oct</p>

5422	4 Oct		Recces for close support raft trg area. Suitable site found at 5526. Preparation for Pioneer trg carried out. Nos 1,2 & 3 Pls in harbour area.	-do-
"	5 Oct		Trg for rfts in Bailey. Trg in close support raft. Pioneer offrs and men on mine trg. No 1 Pl erected a close support raft for instruction of pl	-do-
"	6 Oct		Pioneer offrs and men on instruction in elementary demolitions. Trg for rfts in Bailey br. No 2 Pl - One sec collected Class 5 raft from MILL MR 6444 and unloaded them at coy site at HELMOND 551266 No 3 Pl - Trg on Close Support Raft. Work by night and day.	Map ref series- BRUSSELS-LIEGE & WALCHEREN-AMSTERDAM. Scale 1:250,000.
5422	7 Oct		Pioneer offrs and men completed their course by having instrn on Cl 5 Assault Boat Anti-Tank Raft. Trg for rfts on Bailey Br. No 1 Pl - 3 men from each sec on instrn in the operation of the Storm Boat. No 2 Pl - All secs building Close Support Raft at HELMOND from 0800 hrs to 1630 hrs. Night work on Close Support Raft from 2230 hrs to 0100 hrs. No 3 Pl - Instrn on building and operating Cl 5 F.B.E. Raft, Watermanship and Storm Boats.	-do-
"	8 Oct		Address by Div Commander.	
"	9 Oct		Coy given the task of constructing a class 15 br at 545624 Task given to 1 Pl. Recce carried out. Site was on site of existing demolished drawbridge. Two spans blown, two piers damaged, one span particularly damaged and drawbridge tower particularly damaged & blocking approach to br. Project worked out, submitted to and approved by CRE. Outline plan. (a) Demolish drawbridge tower. (b) Construct two R.S.J. spans each 6 girders 30'x15"x12" (c) Pack up damaged span & re-lay pave. Lt Niven joins Coy and takes comd 2 pl.	
"	10 Oct		1 Pl successfully demolished obstruction on br site at 545624 (Sheet 5 S'HERTOGENBOSCH Scale 1:100,000). Details of work involved :- Amount of Explosives used 40 slabs of Guncotton 16 Guncotton Primers 15 Detonators, Electric 100 yds Plastic Cordtex 1 Reel wire, electric	

		<p>The above was placed in 6 separate charges. Top and bottom of 2 struts supporting main girders and counterweight.</p> <p>Two charges were placed at the bases of the main Girders on the first pier.</p> <p>The charge was blown successfully dropping structure into canal clear of main waterway and not obstructing building of br.</p> <p>No 2 Pl Training in close sp raft.</p>	
"	11 Oct	<p>No 1 Pl Work proceeding on construction of br at 545264. By 2200 hrs grillage and piers complete and first bay girders in position.</p> <p>No 2 Pl 3 NCOs &amp; 16 men went out at 1300 hrs to assist No 1 Pl on work as given above and returned to coy location at 1700 hrs. 18 rfts arrived.</p>	
"	12 Oct	<p>No 1 Pl Work almost completed on construction of br at 545264.</p> <p>Method of construction :-</p> <p>Existing brick piers were built up with timber to make solid seating. One abutment was re-built with timber crib pier.</p> <p>Girders 15"x12" (12 in all) were used.</p> <p>Centre span launched first from existing section of br then girders were launched from abutment to pier.</p> <p>Structure was decked down with 9"x5" timber held down to girders with 12" bolts through the ribands, decking and a plate fixed to underside of top flange of girders.</p> <p>Working party returned to coy harbour at 1800 hrs.</p> <p>Br open to traffic at 1800 hrs - footwalk still to be completed, and wearing surface to be added.</p> <p>No 3 Pl Moved to rafting site at 1330 hrs. Loaded Close Sp Rafting material and Cl 5 rafting material. Returned to harbour at 1915 hrs.</p>	
	13 Oct	<p>Recce party of 1 Sjt and 1 offr left harbour at 1700 hrs and arrived at ELL (6394) at 1830 hrs approx. Object of recce was to find places on WESSEM CANAL for possible assault crossings.</p> <p>Major Wood of 279 Fd Coy RE contacted at ELL and information obtained from him of certain sectors of the canal.</p> <p>No 1 Pl Cl 24 br completed and open to traffic at 545264. Three secs returned to coy harbour at 1200 hrs. One sec completed the laying of wearing surface and returned to Coy harbour at 1500 hrs. Construction of br :- Br is of composite design, e.g. timber decking, steel girders, over existing br site. Two spans, one of 30 ft and one of 35 ft. Width 11 ft with footwalks at each side.</p>	

			<p><u>No 2 Pl</u> Secs reorganised due to new reinforcements and this pl can now have 4 secs.</p> <p><u>No 3 Pl Veh</u> maintenance.</p>	
	14 Oct		<p>Recce party in harbour at ELL awaiting information re crossings of WESSEM CANAL.</p> <p>1700-1930 hrs. Party recced canal bank and passed their information to Div I.O. and then returned to harbour at ELL for further instructions.</p> <p>OC attended CRE's O gp on Op SYRIUS.</p> <p><u>No 2 Pl</u> with under comd 4 secs from 1 Pl train with 150' Kapok br by day and by night.</p>	
	15 Oct		<p>Recce party still at ELL.</p> <p>OC attends conferences at HQRE and 46 Bde.</p> <p>No 3 Pl moved to Kapok br site at 0900 hrs, and returned to coy harbour at 1300 hrs.</p>	
	16 Oct		<p>Recce party still awaiting further instructions at ELL.</p> <p>OC attends conferences on SIRIUS at HQRE, 46 Bde and 44 Bde.</p> <p><u>No 2 Pl</u> - At 0930 hrs 3 three ton lorries containing Kapok Assault Equipment arrived. Checked by pls. End laths of footwalks painted white to enable positions of Kapok floats to be seen in dark.</p> <p><u>No 3 Pl</u> - No 3 Sec moved off at 0830 hrs for secret rehearsal for OP SIRIUS and returned at 1500 hrs.</p>	
	17 Oct		<p>Major Wood of 279 Fd Coy RE informed recce party at ELL that the operation was cancelled and to return to coy harbour.</p> <p>Recce party arrived at coy harbour at 2015 hrs.</p> <p>All preparation for OP SIRIUS cancelled.</p>	
	18 Oct		Training in mines.	
	19 Oct		)	
	20 Oct		) Coy refitting and reorganising.	
	21 Oct		)	
	22 Oct	1400 1700	<p>OC attends cloth model exercise on operation ERIC.</p> <p>OC attends CRE's O Gp.</p>	
	23 Oct		OC visits HQRE and 46 Bde to tie up final details of OP ERIC.	
	24 Oct	1200 1500	<p>2 Pl carry out training in rd clearance for OP ERIC.</p> <p>1, 3 Pl &amp; HQ cutting brushwood and making fascines for Op ERIC.</p> <p>OP ERIC in its original form is cancelled. Coy warned to be prepared to move in the afternoon.</p> <p>Coy moves to ACHT (3923) arriving 1900 hrs.</p>	

			OC moves independently and visits HQRE. Coy told to prepare to construct cl 40 br at 286275 on night 24/25 and this is subsequently cancelled. OC attends 46 Bde O Gp.	
	25 Oct	0330 0600 0745 0815 0930 1230 1430 1900 2100	Coy O Gp Lt Niven and recce party move off to join Recce Regt. 3 Pl move off to join 2 GH. OC moves to join Bde O Gp Coy moves off 3 Pl arrives at demolished br at 233305. One scissors br put down and br eqpt called for. Br eqpt arrives. Div comd states second scissors br to be put down and bailey to be erected later. Scissors br lifted and Cl 40 Bailey br at 234305 commenced. 40' SS completed at 2200 hrs. OC attends Bde O Gp and orders up pl of Bailey. Lt Niven goes fwd to try to get to br at 231339 - unable to do so. Coy harbour for night area 283274.	Op Instrn No 1
283274	26 Oct	0500  0830  0900  1000  1030  1100	1 Pl with under comd one pl Bailey moves fwd to F.A.A. 225323 ready to construct Cl 40 br at 231339. Order to br to be given by OC 7 S. Recce party able to get down to look at br site. Reinforced concrete br demolished leaving tangled mass of concrete and reinforced beam sticking up some three feet above bank seat level. Both abutments blown. OC visits site. Decides to build 50' D.S. obstruction to be reduced to 20" above bankseat level and br to have 20 ft range at each end and baseplates packed up 1 ft above bankseat height. Two trees felled as rd block to be removed. OC reports situation to Bde comd. OC again visits br site. Site under fairly persistent mortaring and shelling. 4 ORs wounded (L/Cpl Mackie dies subsequently). OC orders work on unloading to stop and all available personnel kept under cover except party working on clearing concrete obstruction who are to work during lulls. OC reports situation to Bde comd and Div comd who is visiting Bde. Div comd states undue casualties NOT to be accepted - br is not urgent. Lt Haig despatched to classify SUISE Br 239343 - reported cl 40 and intact. Offr unable to get down to site. Sgt Caulfield despatched to classify ROODE Br 234343. Answer cl 9.	

	(	1200 Bde state that they must have cl 40 br into OISTERWYCK within an 1000 Coy moves to MOERGESTEL ) hour. CRE present and states impossible to complete Bailey by that time. Suggests Scissors br at ROODE site. Scissors br ordered up and small RE party link up with it. Tks report site unsuitable for br. Bde lose interest in cl 40 br. 1330 Lt Haig gets down to SUISE br - classification - certain cl 24 probable cl 30 - and possible cl 40. 1630 1 Pl complete clearance of concrete obstruction on br site. <del>1700 9 Cams report brs at 188318.</del> Lt Niven despatched to recce br site 178326. Unable to get right down to br and gets involved in enemy counter attack. Reports br demolished - probable span 90'. Rly br over rd at 184328 demolished and forms serious obstacle. 1700 9 Cams report brs at 188318 collapsing. Lt Haig despatched to investigate. Reports br 188318 cl 40 and OK, br at 189320 only capable carrying cl 9. 1800 3 Pl relieve 1 Pl on br site. 1900 No shelling on site and br vehs brought down and unloading commenced. 2140 Br complete.	
MOERGESTEL	27 Oct	1000 OC asks Bde Comd if br ops likely. Bde Comd states NOT today but possibility of cl 40 at TILBURG on 30th. 1045 OC despatches Lt Allan to do recce of demolished br at 178326. 1030 Bde comd asks for one lorry load assault boats to be sent to each 9 Cam & 7 Seaforths. 1100 Bde comd asks for some form of rafting to get jeeps over to 9 Cams & 7 S. OC goes to 9 Cams to see if ATK gun rafts are available with assault boats. None available so two class 5 rafts ordered up and 1 Pl told to stand by to construct and operate them. OC goes fwd to meet Lt Allan and see demolished rly br at 183325. This is a much more serious obstacle than originally reported and is expected to take 2-3 days to clear. CRE is informed at once as it may affect entire br plans. OC 2 Pl warned to stand by with recce party and adv party to br at 177186 and to start work as soon as tactical situation permits. 1300 Coy told to take over rd maint from OIRSCHOTT- MORGESTEL- OISTERWYCK and MORGESTEL-BIEK incl 4 brs on the route. 1315 Coy told no br eqpt on wheels and will have to load own eqpt.	

		<p>1330 OC speaks to HQRE stating tasks allotted are beyond sources at his disposal and asks for priorities.  Priorities given 1) Rafting  2) Rd maint  3) Cl 40 br and clearing obstruction.  3 Pl told to take over rd maint and hold small party in res.</p> <p>1400 Bde very anxious about class 5 rafts and send down priority flags to take them fwd.</p> <p>1500 Bde states rafts of little importance. Cl 40 br priority I.</p> <p>1530 OC meets CRE to try to sort out priorities. CRE agrees to load br eqpt and to take over rd maint responsibilities.</p> <p>1600 Situation clears.  1 Pl to hand over class 5 raft to pioneers and return to coy to assist 2 Pl with cl 40 br.  2 Pl to construct cl 40 br.  3 Pl to clear demolished rly br.</p> <p>1700 OC visits cl 40 br site and agrees with OC 2 Pl br to be DD 120 ft sunk flush. Obstruction on existing pier to be removed. Excavations start at once.  Demolished rly br presents a serious problem. Two 200 ft Platt truss rly brs cut and dropped across rd and abutments blown in. Extra equipment asked for:  Two D8s with hyster winch  One explosive lorry  Four oxy acetylene cutters  REME rec vehicle.</p> <p>2000 Two Grillage and accessory lorries at cl 40 br site.  All excavation completed by 2359 and work stopped short first light. Bde asked to supply working party of 30 to help unloading br eqpt.</p>	
	28 Oct	<p>1000 Grillage near side complete.  Work delayed by concrete on far side and by twisted girder on central pier obstructing launching plans. Girder cut by acetylene cutter and winched away.</p> <p>1500 Building commences</p> <p>1730 Nose and D.S. completed by 1 Pl. 3 Pl stand by to double up. During this period 3 Pl have made good progress with clearing obstructions. 6 separate demolitions carried out and considerable amount of acetylene cutting completed.  Upper half on NE truss removed and dragged clear and half SE truss removed. Dragging operations delayed by failure of one D7</p>	

		1740	to arrive and cable party on the other one. AVRE rec veh arrived and gave assistance instead.	
		2200	CRE arrives at site and says Div is under orders to move. Coy to be prepared to drop tasks at very short notice. Work on clearance of obstruction to be stopped now. Br to be doubled up and launched as soon as possible.	
			Br doubled up and launched and handed over to 12 Corps Tps for completion.	
			Clearance of obstruction handed over to 12 Corps Tps.	
	29 Oct	1230	Coy moves with Bde to area LEENDE. Plans change en route and Bde moves to take up def posn in area DEURNE which is reached at 1640.	
		1730	OC decides Coy is too far forward and moves it back to area 605210.	
		1900	Air raids in vicinity.	
		2100	Air raids in vicinity.	
			Lt Thomas and Sgt Davidson leave for tour of duty as instructors at Br School.	
605210	30 Oct		1 Pl on rd maint HELMOND - DEURNE. Lt Jones joins coy and takes over comd of 3 Pl.	
"	31 Oct		Sudden call from Bde to clear mines in 9 Cam & 7S area. 2 Pl sent out to deal with 7S and Lt Haig sent to 9 Cam. 2 Pl find that 7S have already lifted the mines in their area. Lt Haig unable to reach 9 Cam. 2 Pl told to send down sec to help 9 Cam. OC visits 9 Cam and finds they have done most of the clearance but marking still required. 2 Pl hand over signs to 9 Cam.	
		1800	OC attends Bde O Gp. Bde Comd wants rd from rd junc 667147 to rd junc 676152 checked by night and rd from rd junc 672143 to 683147 checked as soon as tactical situation permits.	Weekly W3008s & W3009s.
		2130	2 Pl start first of above tasks. Complete by 0100 hrs. No mines found and no casualties.	
			C.R. Nicholls Major RE OC 278 Field Coy RE	