

The Capture of U. Roatti

AS SEEN FROM A COY PPCLI.

Proven

Ref. Map. Italy 1:50,000
Sheet 197-I LANCIANO

At approx 0015 hrs night 5/6 Dec 43, A Coy PPCLI crossed the river MORO at map ref 325095, turned right and followed the river till coming to a mule track which led up the hill to the town of U ROATTI - The Bn objective. After moving down the river for 300-400 yds, A Coy started up towards the town, following a mule track. Enemy MGs opened fire from the hill above us while we were still in the river valley.

Moving up the river valley we were following B Coy and ahead of C Coy. We soon caught up to the tail end of B Coy and had a long wait till they overcame an MG post that had stopped them. Lieut J. G. Clarke, who was shot in the throat was brought to A Coy HQ, where his wound was dressed and he was then led back across the river.

B Coy moved on up the hill and entered the left (WEST) end of ROATTI. A Coy followed to the top of the hill and then swung off to the right end of town. It was not yet day light and visibility was almost NIL. The leading Pl was commanded by Lieut R. Eary M.C. ~~Pl~~ stopped at a haystack, and together with the Coy Comd was looking around it at a moving

object some 50 yds ahead. The normal challenge was given but there was no reply. A few words of Wop were tried - still no reply. Just then a motorcycle came down the road from the other end of town - the rider shouting "Achtung". About half the Coy fired at him - he jumped off his bike and disappeared in the darkness.

8 Pl, led by Sgt. G.S. Moore, went off to investigate a house that was showing a light. It had been occupied by the enemy and turned out to be HQ 5 Coy, ? Regt, 90th Light Inf Div (German). The occupants fled in the direction of 7 Pl which was rounding up the Germans who had failed to answer our challenge. Some escaped in the darkness but 5 or 6 were captured. One of them, with his hands in the air, suddenly threw a grenade and was promptly shot in the foot. 8 & 9 Pls started searching houses and caves and produced about 7 more prisoners.

Day light was coming so Pl positions were allotted and digging in started. We were not sure of our exact location but knew we were in approx the right posn.

As soon as it started to get light the town came under heavy mortar fire. The mortar fire suddenly lifted and Germans who had apparently crept up the hill under its cover,

reached the 7 Pl posn. Lieut Vary ordered one of his sections to pull out as it had run out of amm, and was then himself taken prisoner with 5 men from his pl. The remainder of his Pl, being out of amm hid in their slit trenches until the action was over and were then able to come out.

At the time 7 Pl was attacked, Coy HQ came under MG fire and had to evacuate its posn. 8 Pl ~~came~~ gave covering fire while Coy HQ moved. 9 Pl in the meantime was getting in some good shooting. Cpl H.J. Clarke did an excellent job with a Bren gun until he ran out of amm ~~until he ran out of amm~~ and was then forced to remain in his slit trench.

8 Pl worked its way into posns from which they could engage the enemy with fire. From then on the enemy was unable to advance or change his posns.

Our supporting tanks arrived about 1 1/2 hrs after the counter attack started. The leading Troop comd. was shown the enemy posns and there were soon no live Germans left in the vicinity of ROAD 11 (except prisoners).

One German, manning an M.G. opened fire at the leading tank and kept firing until he was killed.

The posn was then reorganized and searched. Several Germans were found hiding in panes and two were picked up near Bn H.Q. A great deal of German equipment was collected incl MGs, rifles, wireless sets, telephones, 6-81-mm mortars, one 28/20 mm A. Thq gun, 3 motorcycles, clothing, blankets. It was apparent that the Germans had come back with the intention of staying.

Apart from shelling, nothing much happened until the middle of the afternoon. Our first counter attack had been quite a surprise but all ranks felt quite confident that we could hold our posn against any further counter attack.

The first news of a second German attack came over the 18 set about the middle of the afternoon. A Coy "stood to", wondering from which direction the attack ^{was} come. We soon realized the attack was developing on our left in B Coy area.

Our ths moved into posn and were soon engaging the enemy ths & inf. A Coy H.Q. was forced to move again as a tank AP shell came through our house and practically blinded us with dust. A large smoke screen appeared on our right and although nothing came of it, we were expecting enemy to

come in from that flank.

A Coy was able to account for a comparatively small number of enemy but did get in some long range shooting.

The rest of the day was fairly quiet apart from shelling and intermittent MG fire from the ridge in the area of JUBATI.

During the night 6/7 Dec, a great deal of enemy activity was heard across the valley, incl sounds of digging and tracked vehicles moving. Sgt Prior of 9 Pl took a small patrol to the bottom of the valley to investigate. He did not encounter any enemy but was able to tell us just about where they were. Our supporting A Coy did some very good shooting on map ref targets and the enemy could be heard screaming and yelling after some of the concentrations were fired.

17 Pl, 17 Coy came under command A Coy that night and were used to strengthen our defence.

8 Dec was spent cleaning up and trying to discern enemy movements in the JUBATI area. The enemy shelled ROATI, the valley of the MORO, and the Feck area most of the day.

Late in the afternoon the CO of the ? Bn Royal West Kent Regt. came to see our posns. An "O" Sp was held and orders received for a handover to the RWK. The change over took place that night - A Coy being the last

coy relieved. A large mule train arrived with the incoming coy. They didn't seem to mind the noise they made. Despite the fact that the change over resembled a ceremonial changing of the guard, it was successfully completed and A Coy was behind the MORO at midnight.

We were all looking forward to a night's sleep but found ourselves "standing to" most of the night instead.

A. Coy. Statistics

Killed	—	1
Wounded	—	16 (some were N.Y.D. N).
Captured	—	6 (missing behind P.V.I).
		<hr/> 23

Estimated enemy killed — 20

Prisoners taken — 20.

The Adjutant.

May this be forwarded to
Lt. Col Ware as soon as possible.

Wm. Watson

LESSONS FROM ROATTI

1. The German will always return fire, even if he has no idea where it came from.
2. Don't be afraid of German automatic fire at night unless your men are being hit. 90% of the time the German fires even though he has seen no enemy.
3. The German soldier has been taught to shout yell when he makes the final rush of an attack.
4. German mortar fire will come down 100' or even less in front of his own troops.
5. After capturing a position - outposts must protect the men who are digging in.
6. You must have lookouts during heavy mortaring or shelling - it may be the prelude to an attack.
7. Germans do use smoke to take attention away from FUP's.
8. Germans do pull the trick of apparently surrendering but throwing a grenade when you get near them. If a Jerry wants to surrender - make him come to you.
9. DF should be requested before a position is attacked.

W. L. Watsonman

Val Roatti

VAL ROATTI

5-6-7 Dec 44.

On the 5th Dec 43, the Bn was situated on the reverse slope of the high ground across the Moro River valley from the town of Val Roatti.

Numerous recce patrols from the Bn had been down in the river valley all through the day.

At 1700 hrs, Capt R.F.S. Robertson, O.C. "B" Coy, detailed No. 12 Platoon Comdr to take a recce patrol across the river Moro to find a route in to the town up which the Bn could move to attack. The patrol left the Coy area at 1730 hrs. It was a bright moonlit night and visibility was good. On reaching the river a suitable crossing place was found and the patrol moved to the right, finding a mule track. The mule track led up the draw into the right end of town, on the left side of the draw. About half-way up to the town there was a track junction where a track led off to the left into the centre of town. The patrol passed this junction and carried on along the track leading into the right end of the town. When in the out-skirts of town the patrol observed a group of three of the enemy moving against the skyline. They disappeared and a few minutes later were heard approaching along the track toward the patrol. At the same time the sound of hammering or digging was heard and seemed to come from the right and across the draw. The patrol withdrew and returned to the Bn area. The patrol Comdr was called to Bn H.Q. and gave the information.

O.C. "B" Coy called 'O' Group at 2230 hrs and gave information regarding the attack which was to be made by the Bn that night. "B" Coy was to lead and was to take the town. The Coy was to be in position at edge of river by 2330 hrs and was to cross at 2400 hrs. Artillery was to lay down 1780 rds on the town between 2345 hrs and 2400 hrs.

The Coy left its area at 2300 hrs, getting into position at edge of river by 2330 hrs. The barrage did not materialize and the Coy crossed the river at 2400 hrs led by No. 12 Platoon. It moved up the mule track, passed the track junction and was within some 10 yards of where the Recce patrol had been when fire was opened by an enemy M.G. on the left and above. This fire was not effective as the ground on the left of the track rose steeply and afforded good cover. The night was very black by this time, the moon having gone down at about 2315 hrs. The Coy Comdr ordered 12 Platoon to take ~~in~~ this M.G. post. The Platoon was getting into position to deal with the post when fire was opened by an M.G. on the right, across the draw. This fire forced the Coy down onto the track. Several of our own L.M.G.'s returned fire - firing at the flash. Pte Nixon opened fire with his 2" Mortar, firing low-angle and scoring hits quite close to the post.

VAL ROATTI (cont'd)

Lieut J.G. Clarke, No. 11 Platoon, was wounded through the throat when he fired at the enemy with his Tommy-gun. Pte Morris, C. was killed while using his Bren-gun. The M.G. probably fired at the flash made by ~~this~~ weapons.
their

The Coy Comdr withdrew the Coy to the track junction and moved up the left track. The Coy was now under cover from the M.G. on the right but was exposed to the M.G. which had been on the left. The flash from this gun was seen and the Coy left the track, moving up towards the post. The gun fired continuously but the fire was high over. When within some 20-30 yards of the enemy he threw grenades, they caused no damage. The Coy formed up to assault and after throwing grenades at the post, rushed the position. The M.G. remained silent and the enemy manning the gun were taken prisoner, two men.

Cpl Zroback, 12 Platoon, took his section to the left to look for another post. They came upon another M.G. and heard the machine-gunner trying to cock his gun. The post was knocked out with grenades.

The Section returned and the Coy proceeded up the hill and through a vineyard into the square of the town.

Once "B" Coy was in the town, "A" Coy passed through it proceeding to the right front edge.

"B" Coy had taken up positions and patrols proceeded to look for snipers. Fire came from all directions and mopping up took until about 0800 hrs. The Coy had entered town about 0545 hrs.

A number of prisoners were taken. For the most part, they seemed to be quite surprised to walk into the patrols. Evidently most of them had been asleep in the houses and had not realized that the town had been captured.

The Bn Scouts & Snipers came up and seemed to have good shooting.

The C.O. went out along a road running through the town with Capt Robertson and saw a group of the enemy forming up for a counter-attack. The counter-attack was directed at "A" Coy on the right.

"B" Coy took up positions in defence of the left half of town. Sgt Demmy, commanding 10 Platoon, occupied a house on the road which the C.O. had seen the enemy forming up. From ~~th~~ this position he overlooked "A" Coy and his Platoon got in some good shooting.

VAL ROATTI (cont'd)

No. 12 Platoon occupied houses in the left end of the town and No. 11 Platoon took up positions in a vineyard on the left of town. 11 and 12 Platoons were able to do only a little sniping. The ground in front of the Coy offered good cover to the attackers. The arrival of 5 Sherman tanks finally caused the enemy to withdraw. The tanks arrived at about 0930 hrs.

10 Platoon ran very short of ammunition by the time the enemy withdrew, having started the attack with 50 rds per man and 8 mags per gun.

Ammunition was brought up as soon as possible by mule-train. A road ran left of the square and turned right in front of 12 Platoon before turning left again. The distance between the two bends in the road in front of 12 Platoon was roughly 50-60 yards. A group of buildings stood at the end of the stretch where the road turned left. These buildings were manned by a section led by Cpl Zroback.

The second counter-attack came in from the left along this road about 1415 hrs. The attacking force was composed of 5 Mk IV Special tanks; 2 S.P. guns and roughly a Coy of Infantry, possibly a little stronger.

A recce patrol led by Cpl Martins had gone out along this road at about 1330 hrs to investigate a group of buildings some 800-900 yards. Ptes Gusul and Arne were taken prisoners but Cpl Martins and Pte Bangle made a run for the Coy position and were successful.

Fire was opened by the approaching tanks from the vicinity of the group of buildings. This first fire was directed at a Sherman tank which was in position in front of the houses manned by Cpl Zroback's section. The Sherman was knocked out and the houses behind, manned by the section, were subjected to M.G. fire and H.E. and A.P. fire. The Coy Comdr was in the vicinity of the buildings and ordered the section out and into alternative positions.

One of the enemy tanks was knocked out by fire from the Bn Anti-Tank guns across the valley.

The attacking force split into two groups immediately after having opened fire. Three tanks, with infantry, swung off the road to the left and through an olive grove making for the positions occupied by 10 Platoon.

The remaining tanks, with infantry, swung off the road to the right making for 11 Platoon commanded by Cpl Whittaker, and for 12 Platoon. Cpl Whittaker ran forward from his position with the P.I.A.T. and two bombs trying to get to a position from which he could fire at the oncoming tanks. He scored hits on the tanks with both bombs but they were faulty and failed to explode.

VAL ROATTI (cont'd)

This tank was knocked out finally by fire from a Sherman tank. The three tanks making for 10 Platoon positions were also knocked out by fire from our Shermans. Before they were knocked out, however, two of them had gotten to within 75 and 100 yards of the position and had subjected the house to x very heavy fire with both H.E. and A.P. Sgt Demmy held on as long as possible but was finally forced to leave the house and take up a position on the ground.

Cpl Davis of 10 Platoon, took up a position in front of the Sherman tanks which was on the road in front of the house. He was responsible for directing fire from the Sherman which knocked out one of the enemy tanks.

The infantry accompanying the tanks deployed when close to the town and tried to infiltrate. They were met by such ~~xx~~ heavy and accurate fire from Bren-gun and rifles that they were forced back a number of times.

Each time they fell back, they re-organized and came in again. One section, roughly, gained entry into the houses in front of 12 Platoon but were trapped there. 10 Platoon covered doors and windows in rear and 12 Platoon the doors and windows in front. Some number of this group were killed as they tried to cross the bend in the road to get to the house. A white flag was eventually waved from the door-way and three of the enemy came out and walked towards 12 Platoon position. They were met by Capt R.F.S. Robertson in the alley-way and ~~xx~~ brought in to one of the houses occupied by the platoon.

11 Platoon held off a group of the enemy trying to out-flank their position. They were in great danger of being over-run but held the position, killing many of the enemy. Cpl Whittaker's leadership and example did much to make the Platoon hold, as the situation was extremely grave.

The enemy did not make the best use of cover, coming into open when good cover was available.

Pte Buck, J.J. had a post on the second floor of the building, overlooking 11 Platoon's position. He saw one of the enemy about 300 yards away, exposing himself, from the waist up, behind a pile of rocks. Buck, J.J. fired six rds at this target. The German ducked after each shot only to expose himself again and again until killed with the sixth shot. He could have had the same observation from a hedge-grove some 5 yards behind the rock pile. At one point, a German tried to run, upright, a distance of some 20 yards to cross the road in front of the Coy. He ran straight into a burst of fire from the Bren-gun and was brought down. The next man attempted the same thing and was also brought down. There was excellent cover from view afforded by a hedgerow running right up to the road.

After about the fifth attempt to get into the town had failed, the enemy withdrew, leaving 5 damaged tanks behind

VAL ROATTI (cont'd)

During the evening, at about 1900 hrs, one of the tanks blew up, probably a German demolition party had returned to do the job.

Our own artillery support was brought down very close to the Coy positions, during 2nd counter-attack. Some of the shells falling within the Coy area.

The night was uneventful except for enemy shelling between 2100-2400 hrs.

Capt R.F.S. Robertson was wounded the next day, around 0900 hrs on the 7 Dec 43, when he was investigating the houses in front of the Coy position. He thought that some men from the Coy had been within one of the houses when it had been hit by a shell, causing the roof to cave in. As it happened, no one had been within.

Capt C.M. MacDougall took command of the Coy, around 1200 hrs. The Bn was relieved by the 7th R.W.K. at 1830 hrs on the 7 Dec 43 and returned ~~by~~ to the position it had formerly occupied across the Moro River.

Note:- First light - 0545 hrs.
Last Light - 1730 hrs.
Moon Full - Set - 2315 hrs.

Times are approx. only. in the above narrative.

J. M. C. Smith
D Coy. P.P.C.L.I.