

At the end of November 1944 25 Army Tank Brigade was ordered to be broken up in view of the difficulty with reinforcements and the change of strategy needed for the final push over the River Po and then into Austria. Consequently 51 Royal Tank Regiment and the 142 RAC ( Suffolk Yeomanry) would be sent to form the basis with certain Royal Engineer units for a combined RAC/RE Brigade. North Irish Horse were sent to join 21 Army Tank Brigade in place of 145 RAC which was to provide reinforcements. They were then looked after by No 2 Troop of the 3rd Cheshire Field Squadron under Capt McCarthy who had been with me at OCTU. The 21st Army Tank Brigade was then refurbished with the new tank elements ready for the April push. So NIH would have been in the line as defence but training was carried out to effect the initial crossing of the river fortifications. The New Zealand Division made very good progress and was well supported by the 8th Indian Division for crossing the Santerno River. The New Zealanders pushed on towards Massa Lombarda but the 8th Indian Division had to fight desperately for its advance, and now without assistance from the flame-throwing tanks which failed to come forward. The tanks of the NIH however made a remarkably successful attack, unsupported by the infantry and crossing many ditches and craters with the aid of fascine bridge-layers, advanced on the Divisional right for about six thousand yards. The infantry, wading through the river waist deep, were subjected to muerous enfilade fire from both sides, but their resolution was unailing, and by the evening had joined up with the NIH and later the New Zealand Division in front of Massa Lombarda The bridgehead across the Santerno was firmly held and traffic was crossing the new-built bridges behind them. The enemy's opposition was now crumbling and they were retreating from all the formidable defensive positions.

The new Assault Regiments RAC/RE were making a vital contribution to the advance especially with the new equipment, consisting of ARKs, old Churchill tanks less turret, AVREs with 50ft Bridge and old Churchills with 30ft bridges for ditches and craters, and large demolition charges + spigot mortar (251b charge) with 80yard range against concrete pillboxes etc. flail tanks, fascine carrying tanks and tank dozers. All this equipment had been demonstrated to General Clark and his subordinates and then to the units they would be assisting. This had followed on from the improvisation of the 1st Scorpion Regiment RAC and the 10th Armd Division during the winter of 1943/44 in the Middle East where the tank workshops were working non-stop to provide the equipment for the final push.

Before the 4th Division left Italy for Greece and the 25th Army Tank Bde was broken up each Commanding officer in the Brigade received a personal letter from the Brigadier. My Dear Alan,

I have received the following letter from Major Gen A. D. Ward DSO, commanding 4 Div. " Now that your Brigade has ceased to be under my command, I should like very much to thank you and the whole of your Brigade for the magnificent co-operation that you have given to all units of my Division whenever I have had your Brigade under command. In the short battle from Tivoli to Palombarda, the final stages of the advance to Florence and in the recent battle, you have always done everything that we have asked of you and we only wish that you were a permanent formation of the 4th Division.

Will you plases express my gratitude to everyone under your command and wish them from me individually and collectively the very best of good luck."

Will you please ensure that this letter is published in your unit so that all ranks may realise that their efforts have been fully appreciated. I have written to General Ward to thank him for his letter and to wish him and his division the best of luck in the future.

Yours ever

J.N. Tetley.

In respect of the NIH history, all the relevant details were included in my personal history which I have included for you and unfortunately I could not find either the names of the publisher or author of the book. However you may find that "The Tank Museum" at Bovington Camp, Wareham, Dorset have a copy as I was able to obtain from them useful information and photos when writing up my history in Italy.

STAFF LIST -----25 ARM Y TANK BRIGA DE----- 6Novr. 1944.

BDE HQ	Brigade Commander-----	Brigadier J.N.Tetley DSO TD	
	2nd i/c-----	Colonel H. M. Liardet QBE	
"G" Staff	Brigade Major-----	Major J.G.Stratton	NIH
	GSO III-----	Capt. M. J. F. Shaw	RAC
	Bde LO.-----	Capt. P. Francis	NIH
"AQ" Staff	DAA7&QMG-----	Major W.H. Payn	RAC
	Staff Captain-----	Capt. F. T. Roberts	RTR
	BRASCO-----	Capt. G. H. Albutt	RASC
	BEME-----	Major R. A. Everett	REME
	BDE Ordnance Officer-----	Capt A. D. Tagg	RAOC
BDE	BDE L. O.-----	Capt. J. E. Byrne	NIH
	O.C. Bde Signals-----	Major G. A. Low	RCSig
	O. C. Bde Hq Sqn-----	Major T. Barren	RTR
North Irish Horse	Commanding Officer-----	Lt CoL A.W.A. Llewellyn-Palmer DSO MC	
	2nd i/c-----	Major P. Welch MC	
	Adjnt-----	Capt. M. B. Pope MC	
	L. o.-----	Capt. J. B. Behr	
	OC "A" Sqn-----	Major R. J. Griffiths MC	
	OC "B" Sqn-----	Major A. K. E. Finch Noyes	
	OC "C" Sqn-----	Major R. D. Morton	
	OC Bn HQ Sqn-----	Major W. W. G. Lavery	
	LAD-----	Capt R. T. Whateley MC	REME
51 Royal Tanks	Commanding Officer-----	Lt Col. R. B. Holden DSO TD	
	2nd i/c-----	Major J. D. Ellerbeck	
~	Adjnt-----	Capt R. J- Corner	
	L. o.-----	Capt. F. Medley	
	OC "A" Sqn-----	Major A. C. R. Powditch	
	OC "B" Sqn-----	Major H. Thompson	
	OC "C" Sqn-----	Major R. Hair MC	
	OC Bn HQ Sqn-----	Major G. P. Bradley	
	LAD-----	Capt S. A. McAuliffe	REME
142 RAC (Suffolk)	Commanding Officer-----	LtCoL G. A. E. Peyton OBE	
	2nd i/c-----	Major J. G. Fox	
	Adjnt-----	Capt A. H. Dodson MC	
	L.O.-----	Capt. C. Austin	
	OC "A" Sqn-----	Major J. Austin	
	OC "B" Sqn-----	Major R. O. Prentice	
	OC "C" Sqn-----	Major A. T. V. Borrett MC	
	OC Bn HQ Sqn-----	Major E. C. V. Williams	
	LAD-----	Capt J. B. Sewell	REME
27 Coy RASC	Officer Commanding-----	Major A. L. Bannister	
	2nd i/c-----	Capt. R. Elliott	
5 Lt Field Amb.	Commanding Officer-----	LtCol. W. Lyle Brown DSO	
	2nd i/c-----	Major R. L. Orchardson	
25 TkBdeREME	Officer Commanding-----	Major B. H. Smith	
	2nd i/c-----	Capt. S. F. Webb	
104 OFP	Officer Commanding-----	Capt J. Bibby	
25TkBdeTpRE	Officer commanding-----	Capt A. S. Whitaker	
253 Fwd Dely Sqn	Officer Commanding-----	Major J. H. Sloane	

I then had to go to Helwan on a special course for bridging equipment and its transport. The lack of purposeful training was getting harder for the troops to react, so when Major RG Copleston became OC he was told by the CRE to stir up the training etc. I was next sent with drivers to Tel-el-Kebir for new transport and I drove the OC's new Humber back. The training now became more strenuous with several 8-10 mile route marches with full equipment and ending with range firing, the officers using the heavy Thompson machine gun. I had to go again on another mine course and then pass on the training to each troop. At last we learnt of the move to Italy. I took 2 sections with 12 laden vehicles by road to Amariya whilst the remaining 13 vehs and the scout cars went by train on the 13/4 March. On the 18th we embarked at Alexandria on a merchant ship. I was made OC Troops, being i/c the largest unit although there were several Majors but unattached. I had become a full Lieut in Febry. so my pay increased. At meals I sat next to the ship's Captain and they did feed well on board and were very helpful with the administration.

Unfortunately a Gunner was caught taking down the blackout with lights on, so I had to give him summary punishment. On the 21st we landed at Brindisi and I took the Ship's officers to a farewell dinner at the Port Club. After unloading our stores and vehicles we were ready to push on, so on the 25th March I proceeded by road to Naples with the soft transport, driving in the OC's Humber. The scout cars and other transport went by train on flats with no cover and the drivers bellyached as it was so cold and filthy going through the numerous tunnels. In the meantime the Sqn had been addressed by General Birks OC 10 Armd Div and CRE LtCol Walker and left on the 23rd for Port Said by sea to Port Augusta, then by bus and train to Messina, ferry over to Reggio then via Pollara, Sapri and Salerno to finally end up at 198 Transit camp in Afragola. Meanwhile I had carefully motored up through the hills and came down to Salerno and then through the debris of the Versuvius eruption, some 9ins of black rock larva powder along the roads, and the still glowing red top of the mountain.

I came into Naples transit camp for instructions and was told to smarten up the section to take over guard duty for 24hrs from the Americans in front of the Town Hall! We performed so well that the Town Major asked us to do it again! Then I collected the transport, overhauled them and on April 4th rejoined the Squadron and was congratulated by the OC. On the 6th Lt Fladr and I visited Isernia to arrange taking over from 2 Polish Corp Fid Coy. The OC and SSM then reced Isernia and Forli del Sannio whilst the Troop continued training on Bailey bridges. Finally on April 11th we moved into Forli del Sannio in support of 3 Coldstream Guards, and built a new road for them as well as Nissen huts. Vasek and I were billeted with an Italian couple but we had to keep clear of his wife Blanche when he was away. The Sqn were now responsible for maintenance of roads in the area of 24 Guards Bde, whilst Lt Fladr and I became responsible for all the Bailey bridges up to River Sangro and then prepared a detailed report for all roads and culverts etc. This entailed many night recces to the river Sangro with patrols of 3 Coldstream and 5 Grenadier. You could hear the clip clop of the German horse carts on the far bank as they took rations, ammo etc. but we never stirred anything up as we didn't want to draw Spandau fire. Just before the end of the month Sgt Kelly and I gave mine demonstrations to 5 Grenadier and 3 Coldstream. On May 11th I and L/Sgt Whitaker went down to Capua for a weeks course on Bailey Bridges. One afternoon I was able to go down to a camp north of Naples where 551 AT Coy were and was welcomed by Wilf James, the Sgt's Mess and then the Officer's Mess. In Forli del Sannio Vasek Fladr and I often went to see a well spoken lady with two teen age daughters, taking rations so that they could make supper for us all. They were very careful whom they came in contact with, as the father had been a well known Fascist and was hiding away up in the hills. One evening after the meal and no doubt a few glasses of local red wine, I went to the toilet, so I thought, but lost track of the floors, went through an open window and fell 15ft! Vasek quickly took me into hospital for X rays on my bruised ribs but they kept me in for 3 days.

Meanwhile the battle Diadem had started and we were ordered to follow behind the advancing Polish Corps who had captured Cassino and take over maintenance of roads and bridges Carovilli-Roccsecca, Highway 6 and made a detailed report on repairs required as well as checking culverts for mines etc. Then on June 2nd moved to beyond Cassino from Carovilli to repair Bailey bridges and culverts. Part of the Squadron now had leave and the remainder was restructured as we had to make ready to move north of Rome after it fell. On July 1st moved to Perugia/Narni Route 75 to build a Bailey over the River Tiber at Perugia. This was followed by vehicle mtce and training on mines found north of Rome. On the 10th moved to Castel di Brolio under 6 South African Armd Div. The Sqn continued up to Foligno after resting at Radda and then moved back to Lido di Roma for training before returning to Foligno under 7 Armd Bde. and later 1 Armd Div.

Meanwhile on July 11th I was sent for by 3rd Cheshire Squadron at Passignano to join Capt Thorburn's troop and met the CO, Major Derek (Nick) Nicholson, fellow Lancastrian from Morecambe. I was told that my troop would be supporting 25 Army Tank Bde consisting of North Irish Horse, 51 RTR and 142 RAC.(Suffolk Yeomanry). The other two troops supported 9 Armd Bde (Capt AP.Cowell who had been on my first OCTU.) and 21 Army Tank Bde (Capt D.S.McCarthy). The two Army Tank Bde. were equipped with Churchill tanks intended for close support to the Infantry as well as other tanks, round about 150. The units were then supported by Royal Devon Yeomanry, normal artillery plus self propelled Priests.

	Churchill Mkl	Churchill Mk 3 & 4	ARV	Sherman Mkl/2
North Irish Horse	6/61b.	35	4	18
51 Royal Tank Reg.	4 "	26	4	12
142RAC(Suffolk)	5 "	22	3	11

Later the units received Churchill Bridge tanks (30ft), Sherman dozers, ARVs and heavy fascine tanks and later in 1945 Crocodile flame throwing tanks. My first task was to take 1 Section to Montevarchi with 51 RTR recce forward routes, whilst NIH fought up Camporeggi Ridge with Sgt Ridley helping them to Martino flanking 6 Armd Div. On July 26 I moved across to Greve lifting mines for 142 RACs advance. For several days continuously providing diversions for the tanks so had to send 2 Section back and brought in 3 Section who had been resting. On the night 30th took 2 Sappers front of the line to check our and German tanks for booby traps and defused several mines so that the recovery teams could recover ours. On August 1st I moved across to join Sgt Ridley filling in craters and lifted 6 Tellermines at Greve for NIH but the next day we were heavily shelled. On August 3rd my Humber Scout car reversed over a Schumine but the driver though shaken was OK, had to quickly get another from Bde. The Bde was now in support of 4 Division, NIH with 28 Bde, and 142 with 12 Bde. They had been with this Division before fighting up from Tivoli to Palombara. The sections in general liked to camp in the vineyards up the Chianti valley as they were fairly well camouflaged and the terrain was hard. They used the water bowser to have showers much to the amazement of the Italian females working among the vines who though bent with the work managed to peep! It was so noticeable that the Italian men made the women work while they sat about drinking and talking, the lads could not get over the sight of the women working bent over for hour after hour without a break. When I had a rest period I was often asked by Brigadier Tetley to join his HQ bridge party and enjoyed the company. I had spruced up my bridge with Vasek Fladr and we had been tutored by an international bridge player (from Argentina) for an hour at 6th SA Armd Div Officers mess, costing us a several pounds for the illumination!

As a very small unit like the Medics, we were well looked after for rations and comforts and I was always brought in to Bde discussions for advice on the unit's foibles. On August 4th I worked for 24 hrs preparing a track for RW Kent as well as tank tracks. After some sleep I took 1 Sect on a recce with tanks up towards the River Arno. I had to arrange a night recce with NIH and Bde for further crossings through the enemy lines, carefully edging past their sentries to get as near to the River Arno and in sight of Florence. We then came under heavy mortar fire returning to the camp. On the 7th drove a tank crossing through a 12ft thick fortification and reced road diversion for the tanks. The Troop was next told to prepare to move back to Foligno area, but my sections continued sweeping and lifted 4 Tellermines for NTH whilst I did a small night recce for NIH to get their tanks to the river. Finally the troop built a 40ft Bailey over wash land for CRE 4 Div before sending my 2 Honey tanks south.

4 Div and 25 AT Bde were now enroute for the attack on the Gothic Line and had moved to Foligno area My troop made camp at San Mariano, 6mls SW of Perugia and then swept the areas for Bde and repaired a culvert on one approach road. I did manage time to look round Perugia and Assissi with Sgt Ridley and we took a quick run over to see Sienna. The main party moved to Foligno whilst I went with the advance parties of the tanks to sweep their areas and that of Bde HQ. On the 14th I visited Sqn HQ troop to meet Major France acting CRE. Now was the time to replenish stores and transport, Bde handed over 15 cwt Armd Scout cars (made by White in America) for the sections from their reserves. In due course these vehicles had nesting boxes along the back end for 10 hens, we never lacked for eggs for breakfast, though I believe the hens were purchased with a chit signed by King George VI! The troop was represented at 8th Army Command Parade. During 18/19 August the troop moved up behind the start line and at a Bde conference I learnt that 25 AT. Bde would be

I was told to visit HQ Troop who had moved up to Jesi for final instructions. As part of V Corps we would be going straight for the German prepared defence positions in the Gothic Line. So from the 20th to the 25th we prepared tank tracks towards the start line, the river Metauro, filling wadiis and strengthening minor roads for the supply columns. At night I did several recces to the river for crossing places and to test for the Churchill tanks and locate any mine fields and check information received from the Italian partisans. The Household Cavalry were providing the front screen for 46 Div so I did some recces with Capt Astor in our scout cars to draw fire and mark tank routes. He was one of the aristocrats" Up and at'em Bde" so I was not surprised to learn some days later he had gone too far with his next recce and was made a prisoner! Our flank was well covered by the Canadian Corps in the east and by 56 Div in the west. So on 26th August we went in and at Montegeliane came under very heavy mortar fire and Corporal Arthur was killed. The attack went well and by the 27th had crossed the Metauro and recced road to Montefalcino. Next day we continued after liaising with 271 Field Coy of 46 Div to map out where mines wanted clearing. From then it was a chase during the good weather for which we were constantly reccing tank routes and lifting mines. By the end of August we were over the River Foglia hi spite of difficult crossings under intense artillery fire, in support of both NIH and 51 RTR. I then took 2 sections in support of 142 RAC to Monte Gridolfo away on our west flank, lifting 40 Box and 5 Teller mines. The following day Sept 2nd the troop rested to do maintenance but I went on to clear a road and crossing of the River Ventena for NIH. No sooner over one river than bang on to the next, River Conca with the NIH in support of 138 Bde and then on to San Clemente. So far we had not had many casualties, mainly shrapnel wounds from shelling, being fortunate with mine lifting.

On the 4th came under NIH in preparation for 1st Armd Div to move through and 4 Div to follow them. I was very fortunate with my digs in this area, the girls in the house did my washing and ironing to the relief of my batman. They always kept the ash from the fire to put in a large bucket with water and put my shuts etc in it overnight, the weak acid doing the trick. So on Sept 5th the Troop overhauled vehicles but then came some very heavy shelling late in the afternoon followed by rain, which we did not want! On the 6th it was necessary to sweep 25 AT Bde Workshop area for mines as two vehicles had been blown up and they daren't move others. As the rain now delayed the next push, the troop remained on standby for 7/8th and tried to keep dry! The following day the Bde left 46 Div for 4th Div now in Canadian Corps who would follow the Canadian drive. So I took advantage to rest the sections and re-equip the vehicles. The rains ceased and I sent 1 section to NIH who were moving to assault Coriano Ridge, the boggy point of the whole 8th Army attack thereby stopping the advance.

On the 13th I sent two sections to assist 51 RTR by demolishing a brick viaduct for ARK crossing over the River Marano on 14/15th. In the meantime I recced a tank route for NIH to the next river crossing for an attack on Cerosolo which was successful 4 Div was now ordered to press on and cross the River Ausa to take the Frisoni ridge. On the night of 17/18th recced a route for 51 RTR and had my Humber scout car blown up on a box mine but the driver was just thrown out and only suffered shock. Had to have him sent back as we then came under very heavy shelling, Sapper Turvey being wounded. 51 RTR were able to press on until they were bogged down. On Sept 19th I was promoted to Captain and took over from Capt Thorburn who moved to 587 Field Coy. I then received Lieut Chapman who had been sent over from North Africa where he had been on easy construction projects.

On 20/21st there was very heavy rain but I managed to send 2 sections under command NIH and 51 RTR, however all their vehicles and tanks were bogged down. On the 22nd I was ordered to work under 4 Div for the next river crossing, so Lt Chapman had his first task with 1 Section to clear lanes for the tanks and soft vehicles to Santa Giustina for the battle of River Marchia. Again I was fortunate with living in a small manor house and being waited on. When I had to go to HQ Squadron to see Derek Nicholson usually at night, I always found on my return my bed was warm, from a very hot brick in a thick woollen stocking! The delay from the rain, allowed us to clear 14 Box mines round 51 RTR area and thereby provide 2 safe lanes for the push on the 23rd. Next day as 4Div and part of 25 AT Bde went into reserve for refit, I was able to move sections to assist 51 RTR forward. Geared their area and tracks lifting 40 Box mines which this time were clear of anti-lifting devices, used the new Polish mine detectors but found they were somewhat ineffective. Next day I was able to get some of the new American mine detectors for all the sections to use, this type was effective for depths over 1ft. Sweeping forward on the 26th we located a German Holtz mine at a depth of 3ft. Since the troop was becoming weary affr the intense drive forward, especially in the bad weather, I arranged to send 10 OR to the Bde rest centre on

Then on October 1st I was allowed to send 10 OR on leave to Rome! Although 4 Div was in reserve they still provided support to the flanking 46,56 and 10 Indian Divisions in area San Arcangelo, whilst their Field Companys maintained their roads. From this point in the campaign the battle became more and more crossing innumerable rivers, canals and even ditches. So in preparation for these conditions a new formation RAC/RE was brought in with special equipment for the crossings. On the 6/7th a section supported our Troop with NIH for the next attack. I attended Div and Bde briefing for the outline details especially the attack on Monte Faraeto, again the difficulty was in getting tanks up into the hills.

So we were ordered to move to Roncofredo but I personally queried this in view of the intense rain problems. For the next two days our Honey tanks had to pull out a quarter of Bde transport as well as clearing mines along the route to Sogliano. Moved up to Monteleone clearing roads for the tanks, who due to the mud didn't go off on the tracks and so came under accurate shelling and mortaring. It was now necessary to have some extra support for keeping these local roads, often only rough tracks fit for light vehicles, so some Ack-Ack units and even anti-tank units were brought forward for our assistance. On the 12th with CRE 4 Div I receded route for the tanks but again it rained heavily and only jeeps could supply the forward line. I then did a night recce for 51 RTR to continue the attack but had an argument with Col Holden over the state of the tracks. On October 14/15th the troop moved forward to assist 51 RTR who were in dire straits due to the adverse weather conditions.

It became urgent to move a section to support A Squ NIH who were to attack from Sorrivoli to Diolaguarda on the 16th. The tanks only dared move forward with our assistance as they had some wounded to retire. The other sections then had to work all night clearing roads so the Bde could move from Longiaro to Bardia and then Montelba. No 1 section continued sweeping tracks and roads for NIH to take Aquarelle under heavy mortar fire. 4 Div then pushed on through 46 Div with both 51 RTR and 142 RAC to take Cesena by outflanking movement from the hills. On 19/20th L/Sgt White with 1 & 2 Sections cleared road to Castiglione and then Route 71 and filled in the craters. Again heavy rain which entailed continually using hardcore for wheel guides but we got the tanks up to the River Savioa. After doing another night recce for which I seemed fated, placed an ARK for NIH to cross over Fiume Savoia. The next tank diversion involved lifting 8 different mines, among them Teller, Schu, Box, our retrieved mines and even a glass mine on 1 mile of road.

I continued the tank crossings over craters up to Ronco but supplies could only be lifted by jeep and the infantry by mule! On the 27th spent all day checking houses for booby traps, a slow tedious job requiring constant reliefs. Next day I visited Sgt Ridley at NIH to discuss the tank routes. HQ section had moved into a Nunnery, Madonna del Monte on hill 300ft high SE of Cesena, a very pleasant billet greatly enjoyed by all. However whenever the Nuns came through my area they always said "Prago El Capitano" and bowed. The fat priests were keen to come up from Cesena to see them and cadge whatever food my cooks had given the nuns, as they had many refugees from the fighting line. The Mother Superior was told to come and ask if I could arrange transport for them back to their church, but I said if they walked up they could walk back as it was downhill, even the troops thought they were a lazy lot! As it was getting near to Douglas's 18th birthday I thought I had better give him something special I still had an account with the Yorkshire Penny Bank in Nelson so I wrote to the Manager asking if he would transfer it to Douglas for November 18th and I then sent him a birthday card with the news. It was greatly appreciated although it only had about £20 in it. On October 29th I continued checking the tank route from Borella to Cesena and then arranged for a demonstration of the Churchill Crocodile flame thrower on stream banks that were blown in on the following day for Bde HQ staff and IO'S of the tank regiments. We were asked to clear by the 31st the area Calisse for mines prior to demolition, for NIH's new tank routes. The first two days in November were spent in strengthening some bridges at Montecchio and at Carpena, then filling in craters on the approach roads. There was very heavy shelling on the 3rd so I had to bring 1 Section back to HQ. The next 2 days were spent repairing roads with rubble for a fascine demonstration using two sawn off Churchill tanks.

On the 6th with Lt Chapman and Sgt Ridley I prepared plans for using Crocodile flame throwers in the next attack. There was very heavy shelling on Cesena and scores of refugees made for the Nunnery adding to our problems. The troop continued making up fascines for the Churchill tanks. Then when Bde HQ moved to a new area had to check for mines. Sent 3 Section to recce gap with A Sqd. 142 RAC whilst I went over to NIH to clear mines for 1 Assault RAC/RE. My HQ troop transport Cpl had found a wine store in Cesena so he took a surplus

On the 9th Novr had to send 2 Section to NIH to clear area for recovery of ARK by AVRE, badly placed by 1 Assault RAC/RE. I took 2 Sections forward to recce route to Forli on the 10th and the river crossings, there being no fords. Consequently we came under heavy Spandau fire and were lucky to come out with only two wounded. Next day I attended a conference at 4 Div to prepare for crossings of the River Montone. Then on the 11th the details were worked out with NIH, 142 RAC and 28 Bde. as it would involve considerable mine lifting. All the tank regiments expressed their great concern since the fighting from Novr 9th in incessant rain, overcoming flood banks to rivers and canals in flat land, all with tank obstacles, had taken severe toll. It had required frontal fighting for every ditch, house and anti-tank obstacle so only a few hundred yards were gained a day. There was no chance of outflanking attacks as every movement by road was resisted with mines, tanks and guns, leaving the infantry to suffer very heavy losses. NIH had supported 8 different bdes, as one exhausted Bn was relieved by another in similar condition, so NIH support had left them with only 4 operational tanks. Likewise my Troop was now over committed and feeling the strain. We continued making fascines and successfully laid some for the NIH at Tome. Then the NIH withdrew to Forli for several days for refitting and mice, which gave us the chance to complete 4 Churchills with fascines.

Lieut Chapman did an excellent recce for 142 RAC over River Montone on the 15th. 51 RTR required more fascines in their area and we got caught in some heavy shelling causing some casualties. On Novr 17/18 reced tank route for their fascine tanks. On the 19th the troop had some more casualties supporting 142 and 51 RTR. Meanwhile NIH returned to support 10 Indian Div at Filetto. After the battle to cross Fiume Cosina on the 20/21 Novr the troop transport and scout cars badly needed overhauling. At last we had the opportunity for 2 Sections to place ARKS for night gapping with 142. This led to heavy shelling and mortaring at the Montone crossing which became abortive. The enemy resistance increased and although we laid an ARK for 142 over River Cosina, the consequent shelling mauled the infantry. The other Sections were busy minesweeping all the advance roads. Troop HQ tried to get 2 Crocodiles to NIH forward units but they could not mount the high river banks. On the 25th I took 2 Sections to help Bde W/Shop recover the ARK's from the river Lamone during another heavy rainstorm. Next day more fascines were made for the tanks but the area had first to be cleared for mines. On the 27th I learnt from Brig Tetley that 4 Div would be preparing to move out to the Middle East and 10 Indian Div would take over. So I had to go that night to the Bde conference. On the 29th successfully laid another ARK for NIH. and on the next day several fascine crossings as the Canadians took over from 10 Indian Div. and then relieved the NIH. During 1/2 Deer continued making fascines for 51 RTR until A Sqn 1st RAC/RE finally took over. NIH supporting the Canadians were relieved by 12 RTR on Deer 3rd and the New Zealand Div moved into the line north of route 9.1 sent Lt Chapman to recce leave camps etc in Rome. The difficult position regarding reinforcements for tanks and troops led to 25 Army Tank Bde being broken up. NIH at Riccione were moved into 21 AT Bde in place of 145 RAC whilst 51 RTR and 142 were taken into the 1st RAG/RE assault unit. So my Troop moved into 8 Army reserve and joined NIH in Riccione, a seaside hotel without any amenities! I had a final interview with Brig Tetley who charged me to express to the troop both his and 4 Div's appreciation of our support in the long haul from Cassino. It was then that I received notification of being Mentioned in Despatches.

The troop then went down to Rome for leave by easy stages and after I had seen them into their rest camp. Chapman and I went to our hotel in the centre of Rome. What a joy to have clean sheets and to have a hot bath at any time of the day. We had breakfast in the hotel but took most of our other meals at the Officers Club. Derek Nicholson had given me the address and name of a lady at the Army information centre. She told me where to shop for value and the best buys to watch for. She also advised me to visit the special Art Gallery for the Forces and Museum and when to visit St Peters. I asked if we could take her out for a meal at some Italian restaurant where the black market was operating! We had a very pleasant time and it was not too pricy so we moved on to a casino to see who were the Roman socialites! She had advised us to carry our revolvers as there was a lot of crime at night. Finally we booked for Tosca at the Argenta Opera House, excellent seats and a stirring performance.

Lastly while looking over Saint Peter's from the stupendous dome and statues down to the basilica, the Pope passed by and when he saw my neighbour was a padre he gave his hand with the huge ring to be kissed and then did the same to me! The Padre then took me along to the non-denominational club for lunch. Afterwards we visited St John Lateran church and the Colliseum before parting. The last day Chapman and I went to see how the troops were enjoying Rome and to listen to their problems!