

111 Field Regiment RA
Operations in the Central-Adriatic Islands.
Sept 1944
SECRET

(Ref Maps Yugoslavia - Scale 1:100,000 Sheets 108, 109, 110, 124, 125
Scale 1:500,000 showing central Adriatic Islands in Appendix A)

By early September 1944, Marshall TITO was in urgent need of some successful operation by his XXVI YNAL Division, which with himself, was stationed on the island of VIS. Apart from any strategic advantage gained, the political effect was most desirable. The Partisans on the mainland, whom the Marshall had left at the beginning of June 1944, only just escaping the German clutches, had been fighting on, continuously with many privations, hardships and losses. They were apt to be critical of the large Yugoslav forces which appeared to them to be sitting inactive in the safe island fortress of VIS.

It was therefore planning to execute Operation FLOUNCED II, to be carried out by the XXVI YNAL Division and 43 Commando, supported by British Artillery from VIS. This operation aimed at the capture of the island of BRAC. BRAC together with the smaller and adjacent island of SOLTA, commands the mainland coastline from MAKARSKA (4416) to SPLIT. The SPLITSKI and BRACKI channels, which at their narrowest points are respectively 6 and 3 1/2 miles wide, separate these two islands from the mainland.

On 10 Sept, Brigadier DAVY of LFA, Air Commodore Sinclair of Balkan Air Force, and Captain BLACK RN, NLO, LFA, flew to VIS. Accompanying them was Lieutenant-Colonel T. de F. JAGO, RA, in command of 111 Fd Regt RA, replacing Lieutenant Colonel J. S. Elliot who was off to 46 Division as CRA. Two conferences were held; one at HQ VIS Brigade, attended by commanders and staffs of the British troops in the Island, and one with the Partisan Chief of Staff and Division commander. The plan for Operation FLOUNCED II was approved, and D day fixed for 20 Sept.

The enemy however moved faster. As part of his general scheme of evacuation of the Balkans, he started to thin out the Adriatic Islands. On 11 Sept, the day following the coordinating conference, reports showed that the Germans were quitting SUPETAR on the N.E. end of BRAC,

and Tac/R reported landing craft at the Eastern end. Partisan brigades from VIS sailed for BRAC that night. 43 RM Commando were landed on the S.W. end of the island, in LUCICE cove (9816) with the object of harrying the enemy and interrupting his withdrawal from SUPETAR. The commando was to return to VIS after two of three days, when either their harrying was completed, or if the enemy was holding in strength.

During the next day the situation on BRAC was obscure. No information came back from 43 RM Commando. According to Partisan reports, SUPETAR was still strongly held. That evening, the CO 111 Fd Regt RA together with Commander VIS Brigade (Colonel MEYNELL), decided to send a battery or at least a troop, of 25 pdrs to land at LUCICE cove to support 43 RM Commando, and if possible to engage the enemy in SUPETAR.

Mention must be made here to the difficulty in finding landing beaches on BRAC where 25 pdrs could be got ashore from landing craft, and where, once ashore, the guns could come into action. Gun platforms and crest clearance was one problem; tracks and beach exits was another and even greater one. Unless guns were landed at one of the small ports on the island, from which roads of a sore run inland, they were practically tied to the beaches, and could only strike up to their maximum range from there.

On 13 Sept, Major J. B. H. Daniel, RA, commanding 212 Field Battery was given orders to take a troop of 25 pdrs to LUCICE bay, land there if possible, contact the CO of 43 RM Commando believed to be in the vicinity of MILNA (9818) and then act as the situation demanded. Information as to what was happening on BRAC was almost non-existent. Arrangements were hurriedly made with the Navy for landing and escort craft, embarkation ports decided upon and loading commenced. The Battery Commanded sailed in an LCI from VIS Harbour at 15:00hrs together with Lieutenant G. R. Mason, RA, the C.P.O, one O.P.A and five signallers. The latter were to man the rear link set back to VIS and also the Battery Commanders No. 22 set. On the same LCI were a company of Highland Light Infantry (HLI) as covering force to the guns and some reinforcements for 43 RM Commandos. At 16:00hrs, 5 R.C.Ls sailed from RUKAVAC, carrying 'D' Troop 212 Bty.

The Battery Commander landed at LUCICE Cove 986167 at 16:45hrs, to be told by phone from HQ 43 RM Commando not to disembark the guns and company of HLI. With this bald prohibition, and on other information, Major Daniel had to be content, until summoned forward to a conference at HQ 43 Commando half an hour later.

Lieutenant-Colonel McAlpine, commanding 43 RM Commando told this conference that the only enemy left in BRAC were in the SUMARTIN area (3115) in the S.E. corner of the island. This was some 20 miles away by sea, and a little more by sea and road via BOL Harbour (1511) and G. HUMAC (2015). 43 Commando were to remain in the MILNA area, to guard the west coast against possible enemy landings. 11 Troop R.S.R. (4 x 75mm guns under Captain ROSS) were deployed in the area of BOBOVISCE 9921.

Lieutenant-Colonel McAlpine suggested that the best thing for the 25 pdrs and company of HLI was for them to go by sea to BOL and try to link up with the Partisans at the East end of BRAC. He lent 5 R.E. personnel to Major Daniel, as a small measure of combat the enemy mines with which the island was proficiently sown. The Battery Commander left his No.22 set as a rear link with 43 Commando, manned by HLI signallers.

As the Battery Commander re-embarked in the LCI at 20:00hrs, 'D' Troop on RCLs was arriving in LUCICE cove. Darkness was falling and gale force wind was getting up. Orders were passed over the loud hailer to the RCLs to follow on to BOL. An hour and a half later the Navy efficiently berthed the LCI at BOL in complete darkness. All personnel and stores offloaded on to the main jetty. Major Daniel reconnoitered possible landing places for the RCLs, still an hours sailing time behind. The water line was too low to disembark the guns directly onto the jetty, and eventually a beach was found with access to the main road, just wide enough to take one RCL. By means of gun tractor winching gun up the beach, 'D' Troop had finished offloading by 01:00hrs, 14 Sept.

The road leading from BOL to the centre of the island rose from sea level to some one thousand five hundred feet in a distance of under seven miles, which included ten hairpin bends. It was known to have been blown in at least two places, from previous recces carried out by Officers of 111 Fd Regt when the island was wholly in enemy hands. As intelligence from Partisan sources was still very meagre, Major Daniel decided to spend the five hours remaining before daylight at the foot of the mountain in BOL.

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Meanwhile, back at RHQ on VIS, intelligence reports indicated enemy withdrawing from the island of KORKULA, across the PELJESACKI straights, to OREBIC, on PELJESAC peninsula. Thence the evacuation route led across country by mile track to TRAPANJ harbour on the North

coast. From there, the enemy embarked for PLOCA, on the mainland.

At about the same time as 'D' troop 212 Bty was again at sea, on passage from LUCICE cove to BOL, the CO 111 Fd Regt was in conference with Commander VIS Brigade, planing how best to interrupt this latest German escape route on PELJESAC, at DUBA (5886). This beach had previously been reconnoitered by Lieutenant FILLEUL of 212 Bty, in connection with another operation. It could just accommodate 4 guns, landed from LCTs using winch rope and Field Artillery Tractor (FAT).

From DUBA beach, the guns could reach TRAPANJ harbour and VELA LUKA just beyond; they could also shoot southwards into OREBIC area, where enemy guns were known to be in action. This latter shoot entailed clearing a difficult crest, for which a special "Charge 1 1/2" had to be made. The mule track from OREBIC to TRAPANJ could also be engages. These three artillery tasks formed the main object of the intended operation.

At 10:00hrs the next day, CO 111 Fd Reg, RA held a conference at his HQ, attended by Lieutenant-Colonel Makeig Jones (HLI), Squadron Leader Heath (RAF Regt) and Major Turner commanding 212 Bty. Details for the operation on PELJESAC were fixed. HLI (less 1 company who were with 212 Bty on BRAC) were to land at DIMNA beach, and move inland to cut the mule track from OREBIC to TRAPANJ and ten on to advance TRAPANJ. 211 Bty (less 1 troop) were to land at DUBA beach, support HLO and as soon as possible bring observed fire onto any enemy in TRAPANJ harbour. One flight of RAF Regt (the only infantry left on VIS) were to act as covering force to the guns on DUBA beach.

Having tied up all details, and got all ready to start embarkation, a "political" hitch occurred. When the project was put to the Yugoslav Chief of Staff, he demurred, saying that there would be danger to the Partisans in KORKULA and OREBIC, and that the Marshall's approval must be first obtained. All this was at about eleven o'clock in the morning. The CO of 111 Fd Regt, who conducted these negotiations (Colonel MEYNELL the Garrison commander being away on a visit to BRAC), pressed the Yugoslav Chief of Staff to phone the Marshall's HQ forthwith to obtain an early reply. This he did but no reply was forthcoming. "The Marshall is very busy, I will let you know as soon as I get an answer" - this, through the interpreter, was the Chief of Staff's constant rejoinder on the many subsequent occasions that day that an answer was requested. Actually, the view held by CO 111 Fd Regt was that the Partisans were being "dogs in the manger". Their own troops were still

clearing KORKULA and at that time had no units on PELJESAC, and it appeared that they did not want British troops there first.

Eventually, after appealing through MacLean's mission for an early reply, approval was given at 16:45hrs, with the proviso that a written undertaking be signed to the effect that British troops would not remain permanently on PELJESAC! CO 111 Fd Regt did not sign and left the baby to Commander VIS Brigade on his return.

At this late hour, a hasty embarkation, escort and ports of disembarkation plan was made with the Navy. HLI (less one Company) were to load in an LCI at VIS Harbour; 211 Bty (less 1 troop) to load in an LCT; RAF Regt flight to load at KOMIZA and join up in VIS harbour. The indefatigable efforts of Lieutenant Commander Giles RN and his co-operative enthusiasm enabled all landing and convoy plans to go through.

Loading started at 19:30hrs, the LCTs having only that movement arrived from the mainland, and continued after dark. After one anxious moment, when the ramp slipped down leaving a quad clinging grimly on suspended above the water, all troops and guns were stowed, and "PELFORCE" sailed at 22:30hrs, 14 Sept.

111 Fd Regt were now operating on two fronts, namely BRAC and PELJESAC. The former was 33 miles distant, and the latter was 52. Constant R/T communication was established with each force by Regimental Signals Section, using one Relay station on HVAR, for 'DANO FORCE' (as Major Daniel's Bty became known), and one on SCEDRO for PELFORCE. Situation reports from both fronts were received without interruption throughout both operations, until RHQ itself finally moved from VIS. These proved invaluable, as the RA network was the sole means of keeping VIS Brigade Commander informed.

The relay stations were put ashore in dinghies, detached from the convoys carrying the main bodies to their respective destinations. Having got ashore in the dark, the R. Signals operators set up their stations, having with them a supply of rations, spare batteries and charging set. Local protection was assured by Partisans.

At one time all stations on the rear link net on a circumference of some 140 miles, were all in touch with each other. As operators had sailed independently at different times there was a natural curiosity as to where each station coming up on the net was located, an only strict

wireless discipline prevented them from trying to find out.

Returning to DANO FORCE on BRAC. At 06:00hrs 14 Sept, the Battery Commander and his party, Troop Commander's OP party and GPO's party set off in three jeeps and trailers up the main G. HUMAC - SUMARTIN road to contact the Partisans. Sitting on the bonnet of the leading jeep were two sappers, looking for any signs of mines. Their mine detector had temporarily gone out of action. The Troop leader followed in an FA tractor with the leading gun and its detachment, to rendezvous at G. HUMAC. The CPO remained at BOL to maintain communication with RHQ on the rear link to VIS. With him was a small party under the Battery Sergeant Major, who organised the ferrying forward of guns, stores and ammunition. It should be explained here that the whole Regt has only 8 Field Artillery Tractors for its role in VIS.

The role of 212 Bty (less 1 troop) as first envisaged, was to land at LUCICE cove, come into action there, and stay put. Subsequently, only 1 tractor had accompanied them. Of the remaining seven tractors, one was sent with PELFORCE (and subsequently got hit by shell fire), three came over to BRAC at a later stage when "C" Troop joined the battery, and three were left in VIS, to clear PELFORCE guns on their return, and to provide against a possible future operation involving a further troop of 25 pdrs. The troop of 212 Bty on BRAC therefore had to move up from BOL, and ferry ammunition over some dozen miles, with only one tractor and three jeeps and trailers.

The recce party of 212 Bty found the three demolitions on the road BOL - HUMAC repaired. At G. HUMAC the Battery Commander contacted a mule-borne Partisan pack bty, which could only give the vaguest information. The enemy were thought to be still in SUMARTIN, and Partisan infantry were on ahead, somewhere. The recce party went about three miles along the SUMARTIN road to an area at 243162, which had been picked off the map as a likely troop position. It was found to be suitable, and Major Daniel ordered the GPO to deploy the troop just off the road. It was here that a French-speaking Partisan confirmed that the enemy was still in SUMARTIN, but believed that the Partisan infantry were not in contact. The Battery Commander and Troop Commander went on a further two miles, where an English-speaking Partisan sapper and a Partisan Battalion Commander were contacted at 265163. The enemy were said to be holding the high ground 291166 and possibly 292160 with some 300-500 men. Partisan troops were holding Sv. TOMA 271159. The location of the Brigade Commander I Dalmatian Brigade, and the Divisional Commander were not known. (Throughout the

whole operation the greatest difficulty was experienced in finding the Brigade or Divisional Commander as neither had any staffs nor signal comms., they roamed the countryside at will, despatching runners and aides-de-camp in a Napoleonic fashion to the Battalions in battle).

About this time, at 08:00hrs there were no sounds of battle, and it was not known whether the Partisans were in contact with the enemy. An OP was established forthwith on Sv. TOMA (268160) and the O.P. jeep was sent back to assist in bringing up the guns. The Battery Commander then returned to the troop position to find that owing to the screening effect of the mountains the GPO's No. 22 set was out of touch with BOL. Taking his own 22 set and signallers, he established an intermediate station some miles back, in the area G, HUMAC, which solved this problem, but meant that all five No. 22 sets were deployed. One was at the OP., one with the GPO., one as intermediate station and one at BOL, all being on the Bty net. The fifth set was at BOL, providing the rear link to VIS.

The Battery Commander now went back down the mountain road to BOL harbour, taking the jeep and trailer. At BOL the Company Commander of the HLI was contacted and given such meagre information as was available. This company thereupon set off on a 11 1/2 mile march, up the mountain road, to take up their position covering the guns. Owing to the priority requirements of gun ammunition, no transport could be spared for them and they marched up carrying all their equipment, including Machine Guns.

By 11:00hrs, 'D' troop was in action. The Partisan battery which had been met earlier at G. HUMAC was in the same area as 'D' troop. The 4 x 75mm guns of the RSR troop were arriving by road from BOBOVISCE after a 20 mile move over some appallingly bad going. This troop came into action, some 2000x ahead of the 25 pdrs.

Shortly after midday, Major Daniels contacted the elusive Partisan divisional commander, the Commander of I Dalmatian Brigade (Major BOGDAN) and Troop Commander of the RSR. A conference was held at the RSR troop position. The Partisans stated that the enemy was not now on ring contour 291166, and was thought to be only at SUMARTIN and Sv. NIKOLA 219161. This latter was a commanding feature some 2000 yards short of SUMARTIN. Its surface was covered in stone bunkers and honeycombed with strong dugouts and MG emplacements. As it proved later, it formed a naturally and artificially strong barrier before SUMARTIN.

The Partisan intention, as stated by the Division and Brigade commanders, was to assault both Sv NIKOLA and SUMARTIN at 16:00hrs. They required "maximum effort" from the artillery from 15:30hrs to 16:00hrs on the Sv NIKOLA feature, and on the SUMARTIN peninsula. The Divisional Commander undertook to lay a line from his HQ to the Arty OP. 'D' troop and the RSR troop were linked by phone.

Major Daniel and Captain Ross, commander of the RSR troop, established a joint OP on Sv TOMA 268160 at 13:30hrs. The former then registered the Sv NIKOLA position, and the latter the SUMARTIN positions.

At 15:30hrs, the arty concentration began. The ammunition situation was poor. In view of the role of the Bty as first planned, only 100 rpg was carried. The Battery Commander had signalled back to VIS early in the morning for a further 400 HE and 800 cartridges but this would take about 24hrs to come by sea and road. However, a replenishment of 200 rpg were expected that night. At 16:30hrs, half an hour after the zero hour fixed by the Division Commander, no sounds or signs of battle were apparent. The line from the Divisional Commander to the OP had not materialised, and a search for the Battery Commander for the Partisan Commander proved fruitless. By 19:45hrs, there were still no signs of the Partisan attack, and the Battery Commander went down to the RSR troop position, there to meet Major CRICHTON (British Mission Liaison Officer to the Partisan Forces) and two other British Mission officers. With these three, joined by two officers of the PWB (Psychological Warfare Branch) with jeep-mounted broadcast apparatus, the Battery Commander went forward to the near side of the village of SELCA 3016, 2000 yards short of the enemy position at Sv NIKOLA. Still no sign nor information of the whereabouts of the Division or Brigade commander. By means of a French speaking Partisan runner, the RSR troop had gathered that SELCA was in Partisan hands.

At 21:00hrs the Battery Commander returned to the troop position. A further 800 HE were signalled for back to VIS. RHQ meanwhile came up with the offer of a further troop of 25 pdrs ('C' Troop) to be shipped to the battle area. These were accepted with the proviso that more Field Artillery Tractors were essential.

That night, 14/15 September, the Partisans expected German ships and small craft to enter SUMARTIN harbour, with the object of evacuating the garrison. Between 21:30hrs and 05:30hrs, five concentrations were fired on the harbour, and in RASOTICA bay 3417.

At first light on 15 Sept, the enemy were reported still to be in the areas of Sv NIKOLA and SUMARTIN. The Partisans were in SELCA. The Divisional Commander's intentions were indefinite, but he requested heaviest support by both artillery and air on the enemy localities. The request for air support was transmitted by 212 Bty back to VIS, using their own rear link, and also through Major CRICHTON's (British Mission) set. A further 1600 HE were demanded. During the rest of the day the artillery carried out shoots on Sv. NIKOLA and SUMARTIN. 'D' Troops fire on the reverse slopes of both areas resulting in enemy ammunition dumps being hit, followed by explosions and smoke. The RSR Tp of 75mm's concentrated on the SUMARTIN peninsula where a battery of four Russian 90mm was in action, and produced a similarly gratifying result.

Two RAF officers with VHF set and signallers now arrived in the forward area. The Battery Commander established them on the rear slopes of Sv TOMA, not far from his OP. The line from 'D' troop to the RSR troop was extended to link up the RAF controller's party. In addition an RAF officer was established at 'D' troop OP, with remote control to the VHF set.

At 15:30hrs, a Partisan runner told the RSR that the Dalmatian Brigade would attack Sv NIKOLA and SUMARTIN again at 20:00hrs that night, and requested arty support from 18:30 to 20:00hrs, with concentrations on both positions.

Major Daniel now found himself not only artillery commander, coordinating the fire of his own Bty, the troop RSR and the Partisan 75mm troop, but also the channel for demands of air support. The peripatetic Divisional Commander could hardly ever be found. Messages were delivered by runner in pidgin English, bastard Italian and scraps of French. The coordination of fire plans and their making in accordance with Partisan indefinite intentions proved no easy task.

Shortly before firing the fire-plan, the Battery Commander received a signal from RHQ in VIS, informing him that 'C' Troop 212 Bty, and a troop of 3.7" HAA in a ground role, would arrive that evening. Guides and leaguer area were arranged. The troop arrived about 02:00hrs that night.

The fire plan supporting the Partisan attack was fired between 18:30 and 20:00hrs. Late on during the night tracer and 20mm fire were seen at various points on the coast from POVLJA 2921 to SUMARTIN, and the

Partisans reported three ships in RASOTICA bay. In anticipation of a possible enemy landing, the covering force of HLI was warned to keep a sharp lookout. It transpired later that the Navy had attacked and sunk three of these German craft.

By 06:45hrs 16 Sept, 'C' troop was in action alongside 'D' troop. The enemy still held Sv NIKOLA and SUMARTIN. The events of the previous night were confused, and it was only at 10:00hrs that the Divisional Commander was found, and an accurate account of what had happened obtained, with the help of a Psychological Warfare Branch Officer as interpreter.

The Partisans had planned to attack Sv. NIKOLA and SUMARTIN with three Battalions, one Battalion along the axis main road SELCA - SUMARTIN, one Battalion to attack Sv NIKOLA in rear and one Battalion in reserve area 330180. The plan envisaged the cutting off of the Sv NIKOLA position from SUMARTIN. Before the assault on Sv NIKOLA could develop, enemy ships arrived at 21:30hrs off the NE coast between VOSCICA 3219 and RASOTICA 3417, and fired inland.

The Battalion attacking Sv NIKOLA from the rear thought the enemy were attacking from the north, and sent up fighting patrols. The Battalion to the north of SUMARTIN sent patrols south. No enemy had landed but a pitched battle between the two Battalions raged for about 20 minutes causing casualties. The Battalion directed on Sumartin entered the town, but withdrew. The two Battalions in the north also withdrew in some confusion.

The Divisional Commander's intention now, was to rest his men all day, and to attack Sv NIKOLA and SUMARTIN again at 04:30hrs next morning, 17 Sept. Major Daniel suggested to the Divisional Commander that if the assault on SUMARTIN were phased to be 30 minutes later than the attack on Sv. Nikola, the artillery support could be arranged to concentrate on first one position, and then on the other. The Divisional Commander agreed to the following plan:

<u>Infantry</u>	04:30hrs	Attack on Sv NIKOLA
	05:00hrs	Attack on SUMARTIN
<u>Arty</u>	03:30 - 04:30hrs	Concs on Sv NIKOLA and SUMARTIN
	04:00 - 04:30hrs	Continuous fire at a slow rate on both positions.
	04:30 - 05:00hrs	All arty lift to SUMARTIN positions

Precise information of the enemy's defence positions on the SUMARTIN peninsula was obtained.

Arrangements were made for the Med Bombers to bomb SUMARTIN at 14:00hrs, and for Psychological Warfare Branch to broadcast to the Germans that unless they surrender the bombardments would become increasingly heavy.

Before leaving the elusive Divisional Commander, Major Daniel arranged to live at the "Divisional HQ" (about 4 men under a bush) with effect from 18:00hrs and for a good interpreter to be there.

During the day, a conference at 212 Bty Command Post was held, details of the fire plan communicated to the RSR, and registration points fixed. A new OP was established at 266163, and a line run from 212 Bty exchange to the Partisan 75mm Bty (4 guns), and thence to the RSR troop. A three way switch was out in at the Partisan Bty, connecting the two lines to the Partisan OP line. The Acting CPO 212 Bty (Lieutenant Barnes) from then on lived at Partisan Bty HQ as a liaison officer.

The Battery Commander explained the fire plan to the Partisan artillery. No interpreter was available, but the Partisan GPO and the Battery Commander both spoke a little French. The Partisans only had a total of 50 rounds left at this time, so 212 Bty transport collected and delivered more for them.

The HAA Troop (Major GLENTON) had arrived and was deploying in area 2615, with the object of engaging hostile batteries on the mainland north of MAKARSKA. The Troop would not be ready to fire before first light 17 Sept.

The air support arrived at 14:00hrs in the form of 3 mediums bombing SUMARTIN. German newspapers were dropped on own troops: this was repeated at 18:30hrs.

By nightfall, the Battery Commander was established at Divisional HQ; a first class interpreter ready to hand; line comms to all arty through the 3-way switch at Partisan HQ: wireless through on the 212 Bty net. Clocks were to have been put back to 'A' time that night. The Partisans, apart from the fact that few had watches, had no orders to change, so British troops remained on 'B' time. The Commander then altered H Hour from 04:30hrs to 04:00hrs; the subsequent change of arty timings passed to all concerned.

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Back on VIS, RHQ was in continuous touch with the Battery Commander 212 Bty on the rear link wireless. This artillery R/T channel proved to be invaluable as the only form of communication from BRAC to VIS Brigade HQ, to the RAF and to everyone else. It was used for all traffic, 'G', 'A' and 'Q'.

The second in command (Major CHEESMAN) had gone to BRAC by LCT on 15th Sept, to get a first hand picture of the situation, to inform the Battery Commander of the arrival of HAA Troop and 'C' Troop, and to give him the CO's intentions. The CO at RHQ was meanwhile following the course of both DANOFORCE on BRAC and PELFORCE on PELJESAC peninsula, ready to reinforce either with more guns. A potential third operation on SOLTA was also being planned. A war on three fronts, with three batteries and only 8 gun tractors.

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PELFORCE had sailed from VIS harbour at 22:30hrs 14 Sept. The force started disembarking at 04:30hrs 14 Sept at DUB at 984865. Some delay was caused in bringing the LCT in to the beach. Naval recce reported DIMNA (6086) unsuitable, so LCI landed infantry and OP parties at DUB with the guns. When visited DIMNA proved a perfect beach, and it transpired the naval recce had gone to the wrong place.

Guns were in action at first light.

At 05:30hrs the advance inland started in the following order of march:

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'C' Coy 2 HLI	)	Advance Guard
'Z' OP (Lt Owen)	)	
Mortar Platoon	)	
M.M.G Platoon	)	
C.O. 2 HLI	)	Main body
'X' OP (Major Turner)	)	
'A' OP (Major McTiffin)	)	
'A' Coy 2 HLI	)	

No opposition was met until the CO's party reached 609855, at about 07:15hrs, when machine gun fire was opened on leading Company. At first

it was thought that the fire came from Partisan troops and the advance continued.

Meanwhile at 07:00hrs guns on extreme eastern tip of HVAR opened on DUBA beach. The fire was directed at shipping and was accurate but not quite accurate enough. After one rating had been wounded all ships cut their cables and stood out to sea, taking a certain amount of 25 pdr ammunition and smoke with them.

The enemy guns then shelled the gun positions. Their calibre is unknown. Suspected German 10cm F.K.18 or Italian 105/28 guns. Number of guns was four, with high M.V. Time of flight 31 seconds. They fired percussion and air-burst H.E. The fire lasted for about 15 minutes.

Local inhabitants had stated these guns had shelled DUBA beach at 07:00 for some time past. One POW was taken in DUBA village. Meanwhile the head of the main body had reached 613853. The track was under machine gun fire and mortar fire at long range. Troops could plainly be seen on the crest east and west from 610839, and strings of mules descending the track at 613838.

After some delay in deciding the identity of these fire was opened, using charge 1 1/2. The enemy on the crest went to ground, machine gun fire became sporadic and considerable confusion was caused on the track.

Attempts to use the track continued for about an hour and a half after which time the enemy realised that further attempts would cause needless losses under shell and medium machine gun fire.

At 07:40hrs guns from OREBIC opened very accurate fire on 'A' troop position, wounding Battery Sgt Major Jennings and Driver Hansford, hitting the quad and dropping shells within a few yards of the guns.

These guns were identified as 75mm howitzers from fragments. A concentration was fired off the map on their suspected gun area searching and sweeping. Their fire then ceased. Things then quietened down. The enemy-held crest was shelling with fuze 222, searching and sweeping. Movement on Pt 660 (639828) was also engaged.

At 12:00hrs 'A' Company 2 HLI were in position on GRADAC (6185) with 'Z' OP. 'C' Company were in a defensive position south of the track with 'X' and 'A' OPs deployed. A local OP was put out at DUBA to engage HVAR guns, but owing to rain visibility on HVAR became too bad.

At approximately 16:00hrs, OREBIC guns opened up again wounding Gnr Elston and setting fire to charges on No. 3 gun. The fire was very quickly put out and no interruption caused to the fire of our guns on the main enemy positions.

Shortly after this very heavy explosions were heard in OREBIC; and smoke rose high over the 900m hills. Explosions continued throughout the afternoon. An attempt was made to move 'Z' OP eastwards along the crest to obtain a view of TRPANJ, but this was defeated by the ground which was almost sheer in many places. As observation could not be obtained, a map shoot on TRPANJ was carried out, searching and sweeping. 120 rounds were fired, apparently with some effect. This fire killed a German Naval Officer and a Marine Corporal whose bodies were still on the quay two day later, and decided the Germans to abandon TRPANJ as an evacuation port.

The night 14/15 Sept passed quietly, the German guns at OREBIC shelling the track until 22:00hrs and then stopping. Our guns remained laid on the mule track, but very little movement was heard and we did not fire.

At 03:00hrs on 15 Sept 'A' OP embarked at RIMNA in a rowing boat and went by sea to 644857 to get observation on TRPANJ. At 05:00hrs one platoon HLI went forward to the enemy ridge, (reaching it at 06:30hrs), covered by the troop. No enemy was seen, and platoon reported numerous dead mules, scattered equipment etc in this area.

Owing to difficulties of terrain a long period elapsed before the HLI could collect companies together to continue advance.

'A' OP registered TRPANJ and reported no shipping or movement. At 07:00hrs HVAR guns opened fire again and were effectively engaged by 'Z' OP from top of GRADAC. A call for RAF assistance resulted in appearance of planes over the target at 08:05hrs. We fired on target at this time as a guide. All bombs fell wide of the target, so the troop continued to engage on their own. This was the last heard or seen of the HVAR guns.

At 10:00hrs firing was heard from TRPANJ direction and one platoon of HLO with 'X' OP went forward to 640850, reaching it at 14:00hrs after a very still climb. During this time further concentrations were fired on the HVAR guns and into TRPANJ.

The enemy were holding a rearguard position from ISTRI VRH (6584) to Point 270 (6684). These positions were both engaged, and VOLA LUKA bay registered (6784). Very little movement was seen. Patrols reported Partisan forces in OREBIC and moving north east. At 16:30hrs further concentrations were fired on HVAR gun positions and into SUCARAJ harbour and town. Visibility was good, the range 13,200 and the shelling all in the area.

At 17:00hrs enemy mortars opened up on OP area and continued at intervals until 20:00hrs. Cover was good and only one casualty (slight) was suffered by HLI. At 18:30 4 x 75mm guns of the enemy joined in from south-east (bearing of flash 138° from OP). Likely areas were searched but with unknown effect. Point 270 was also shelled and the valleys east of it searched. At 20:00hrs all enemy firing ceased and nothing more was heard until 22:30hrs when very lights were fired on all positions.

At 05:00hrs 16 Sept no movement was seen on enemy positions. At 06:00hrs Partisan troops were seen due south of OP moving East. 'A' OP which had been pulling in during the night accompanied these to Point 270 but saw nothing of enemy. At 08:00hrs 'X' OP came down and rejoined HQ 2 HLI at 634847.

Patrols entered TRPANK and KRACINICI (6684) without opposition. The inhabitants reported that the enemy had evacuated during the night from VOLA LUKA and towards the east of the peninsula.

Large quantities of stores abandoned in TRPANJ included ammunition of all sorts, engineer material, clothing, tools, harness, several machine guns, one gun (destroyed), 140 mules (40 dead) and 100 Italian labourers.

A few stragglers including one gunner were picked up. Nothing further of interest took place and the force came away without loss at 23:00hrs.

'A' troops casualties were three wounded, one seriously. 1300 rounds of HE and smoke were fired during the operation.

At about 11:00hrs RHQ signalled PELFORCE orders from re-embarkation that night from DUBA beach. HLI reformed and returned to this base, and together with 211 Bty and RAF Regt embarked at 23:00hrs.

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As soon as the PELFORCE operation had finished, RHQ and 476 Bty

embarked at RUKAVAC and sailed at 08:00hrs 18 Sept for BRAC. The ships bringing back PELFORCE arrived as the LCTs carrying RHQ and 476 Bty put to sea.

Meanwhile, on BRAC, the battle for SUMARTIN was continuing.

The artillery programme started at 03:00hrs on 17 Sept. By 04:00hrs, ammunition dumps were blazing in the SUMARTIN area. At 08:00hrs the Partisan Btn assaulting Sv. NIKOLA was in the minefield on its slopes; another Btn had practically cut off the SUMARTIN peninsula. The exact location of the troops was obscure and no fire could be put down without reference to the Battery Commander at Divisional HQ. By 09:30hrs SUMARTIN was in Partisan hands. The enemy had withdrawn to the NE corner of the peninsula and some were attempting to swim for it. The Partisans were held up by two anti-tank guns firing from the cemetery at 334149, at the neck of the peninsula. The RSR troop took on this target as a close shoot with success.

Enemy guns on the mainland had by now opened up, and casualties had been caused to personnel and equipment of 'E' Troop 64 HAA Regt. A Partisan with local knowledge pointed out the gun area from which two guns were firing, and Major Daniel engaged them, shooting the HAA 3.7 inch guns. Heavy shelling of SUMARTIN area and to the north soon followed from other enemy guns on the mainland behind the mountain gap at 340280. A request for air attack on these guns was sent back to VIS. By 11:45hrs only Sv. NIKOLA remained in enemy hands. A German officer captured in SUMARTIN was sent by the Partisans to tell the garrison to surrender, but as he had not returned nearly three hours later, its refusal was assumed.

The Divisional Commander decided to put in a silent attack on Sv. NIKOLA from the east at 17:00hrs, but at 18:00hrs the Partisan Brigade Commander requested artillery support. An extremely difficult problem was presented; in that the assaulting Partisans were 300 yards plus of the target on the reverse slope. Major Daniel did a close shoot registration of the crest of the Sv. NIKOLA ridge, using 'C' and 'D' troops of 212 Bty.

A dusk attack was now planned for 19:00hrs. From 18:35 to 19:00hrs 212 Bty fired a close shoot fire plan at normal rate. Between 20:00hrs and midnight a bitter struggle raged on Sv. NIKOLA, the Partisans giving no quarter. Enemy guns on the mainland were continuously active, but by 08:00hrs 18 Sept all organised resistance had ceased.

There is no doubt whatever of the great part played by the artillery in the "bloody battle of SUMARTIN", - to quote the words of the Partisan Brigade Commander. Hundreds of German dead were reported by the Partisans on Sv. NIKOLA and in SUMARTIN; the result, they said, of artillery fire. 212 Bty fired over 4,000 rounds in support of the attacks.

Immense stocks of ammunition, arms, equipment, clothing and flour were taken in SUMARTIN, and the total of GERMAN prisoners exceeded 600.

By the time RHQ and 476 Bty arrived on BRAC (midday 18 Sept) rounding up was in progress, and mine clearance going ahead. The whole south eastern area of BRAC was sewn with anti-personnel, Teller and box mines.

The main roads had been swept by Partisans, but this did not prevent a 3 tonner from going up, not 20 yards from where the C.O. and Major Daniel had parked their Jeep. Before further deployment of artillery could take place in this area, a small detachment of Royal Engineers with two detectors re-swept the roads, approached to OPs and gun areas, and many mines were found and neutralised. The subsequent work of the Regimental survey party, too, was delayed and made hazardous by minefield and booby-traps.

The Battle of SUMARTIN being over, the next thing to do was to deploy the maximum of artillery on BRAC for offensive action against the mainland. Before doing so, the CO tried to find out the Partisans future intentions. The Divisional Commander had temporarily left the island. The Brigade Commander, found using third degree methods at the interrogation of the captured German garrison commander under a bush at the top of a hill, frankly admitted he had no ideas other than to rest his troops. No information of possible seaborne landings on the mainland mounted from BRAC could be elicited. It was therefore decided to deploy all available arty in positions from which they could reach as much of the mainland as possible, to engage hostile batteries, coastal defence guns and various camps, installations etc which "I" had located. By now two more 3.7" HAA troops were on their way, and their extra range later proved invaluable.

Great difficulty was experienced in finding any means of access to possible gun areas, and this always proved to be the limiting factor. Concealment had to be good, for the mountains on the mainland coast

towered above BRAC. With only 6 tractors for 16 guns, deployment of the field artillery was necessary in stages. Whole days were spent hunting for gun areas which complied with the two factors, concealment and means of access.

The two 25 pdr Btys (212 and 476) were eventually deployed as near to the north coast as was possible. The 3.7" HAA guns were deployed with troops on a rough line east and west through the island. RHQ, which became HQRA BRAC, was established at PRAZNICA, the most central point of the island. The laying of lines, and survey started. Both proved long and difficult tasks, owing to the great distances involved, and poor road communications. A fair indication of the former is given by the distance covered in the daily DR run to all batteries; this exceeded eighty miles.

Ammunition supply, with the very meagre transport available (3 x 3 tonners per Bty, including cooks, petrol and stores) over these great distances from the base port at BOL, proved very difficult, and was only solved later when RCLs ran loads of ammunition to SUMARTIN harbour in the SE corner of the island, and to POSTIRA on the north coast. This saved a long road carry by shuttling 3 tonners.

All these factors imposed an enormous strain on the Regimental resources, especially signals operators and linesmen.

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RA BRAC then settled down to systematic offensive action against targets on the mainland. Partisan reports, a German map captured at SUMARTIN, and other intelligence gave data for the targets. These consisted mainly of active defended areas, transit camp areas, shipyards, naval and military headquarters and hostile batteries. These targets were engaged mainly by issuing task tables time to bring maximum concentration of fire on to each target in turn. In addition, batteries and HAA troops carried out their own registration and observed shooting. Very little enemy movement was seen on the mainland.

A Counter Battery Office was set up at RHQ, under Captain JEFFREY. When hostile shelling reports came in from units, bombards were put down immediately. Counter Battery programmes were also regularly fired.

The lack of an accurate meteor had proved a handicap. The only form available was that for the HAA, received from BARI. This was converted

to field arty use, using the wind speed and directions from 4000ft, which was suitable for the average range at which targets were being engaged. In addition, the correction of the moment was found by using Datum points.

On the night 22/23 Sept, one remaining Bty of the Regt on VIS (211 Fd Bty) sailed for the adjacent island of SOLTA where they landed in a cover to the northeast of the island and supported 43 RM Commando in its final reduction.

On 24 Sept, HQ Land Forces Adriatic signalled for the immediate despatch of a battery to ITALY, to take part in another operation in the South Adriatic. 212 Bty came out of action forthwith and had sailed for VIS by 16:00hrs.

211 Bty were taken off SOLTA on the night 24/25 Sept in torrential rain and gale force wind. They are now standing by in VIS, at short notice, for another operation in the Southern Adriatic.