

25 March 1981.

Dear Miss Walsh,

As you know, Colonel Washington sent me a copy of your letter inquiring about your father's death in Italy.

I commanded C Squadron from 1942 until the end of the war. I cannot say that I remember everyone that served in it, but your father I remember very clearly indeed. He was a very good soldier, skilled in the techniques required in an armoured car regiment, and of a lively intelligence which made him particularly valuable in our reconnaissance role. I remember how greatly Lieutenant John Maclean, the troop leader of 5 Troop to which your father belonged, relied on him. But he was too that indefinable thing a good man, respected by all that came into contact with him, whatever their rank.

I have no recent large scale map of the area, but the 1966 Shell Map of Centro-Nord Italy (which is, I think, taken from the 1:500,000 of the Italien Touring Club) does show Lunano. If you have difficulty in getting a map let me know and I will see if I can get one in London. Lunano lies some 10 miles west of Urbino. To get there from Urbino one would take the main road running in a south-westerly direction from Urbino and then turn north at S. Angelo in Vado up a twisty road through the hills.

Some three miles along that road on a knoll a few hundred yards to the right lies the farm of Sorbetolo. This was C Squadron's position - it is the highest point for some little way around. Four miles on from Sorbetolo is Pian de Meleto in the valley of the Foglia, and a mile or so to its east is Lunano. You cannot see either from Sorbetolo, but you can see Castello, a village on a conical hill about half a mile north-east of Lunano. Beyond that there is a long ridge at the nearer end of which are (or were when we were there) two large farm buildings. These we identified as Convento, and it was in the fields between Castello and Convento that your father died.

When we arrived in Italy in the middle of 1944 a major offensive was about to begin, the American 5th Army attacking in the West, and the 8th Army attacking on the Adriatic Coast to break the German "Gothic Line". X Corps to which we belonged had the task of holding the mountain area between the two armies with very few men indeed pinning down considerably greater German forces.

Our first area of operation was around Citta Di Castello. The troops of the squadron were continually engaged in patrolling to the

north and east to make contact with the Germans, sometimes operating in armoured cars and scout cars, but more often on foot as the few roads in our area had been cratered by the Germans. 5 Troop played a very full part and when they operated in cars your father normally had the dangerous job of commanding the leading vehicle. Our object was by this activity to make the Germans think that there were stronger forces there than our armoured car regiment spread over several miles.

Then the Germans fell back and we followed them up to and beyond

S. Angelo in Vado, where we caught up with them and had some brushes with them. It then became clear that they intended to stick on the high ground beyond the Foglia. The squadron began patrolling again, making contact with the enemy in the villages beyond the Foglia, calling on

our supporting artillery for help when necessary.

One night there was considerable activity at Convento. Normally all was quiet at night, but most unusually on this occasion we saw the headlights of vehicles. It seemed possible that they were withdrawing.

On the next day I sent 4 and 5 Troops to try to find out what was happening. They went part way in scout cars by country tracks and then on foot leaving the drivers. They reported Castello clear by the prearranged signal of hanging white sheets out of windows - our pack wireesses were not reliable except for short distances. Then there were bursts of machine gun fire, and some mortar fire. I called up on the wireless and asked if they wanted artillery support. Their wireless did work. The reply was that they were closely engaged and would call us back. There was no further messages and no answer to our calls. We expected none the less that they or some of them would find their way back to their cars, but no-one appeared, and we had to accept that the two patrols, some twelve men in all, had been wiped out.

A day or two later we were relieved by the Household Cavalry - we were switched to the main 8th Army Front south of Ravenna. Some little time later we heard that the Germans had retreated shortly after we left and that the Household Cavalry had found the bodies of some 27th Lancers.

I went to see the Household Cavalry and saw the officer who found them. I recall how impressed he was by the fact that the five men they found were in perfect patrol formation, well spread out. They had all been killed by mortar bombs. They had buried them where they fell. I found the graves - five temporary crosses in a line, still well spaced out, in a sloping field somewhere just to the north of Castello. Your father and his great friend Sergeant Rupert Yates were among them. There were no survivors from the men who went forward from 5 Troop. Lieutenant Maclean died of wounds a few days later in a German hospital.

There were survivors from 4 Troop. I saw the officer in command

after the war - he had been wounded and taken prisoner. His troop had ran into a German position, and had been unable to extricate themselves. He could throw no light on what had happened to 5 Troop, but there can be no doubt that they were caught in an unusually accurate salvo of mortar shells.

On the day which your father died away to the east the great battle of Coriano Ridge (where your father now lies buried) was at its height. It is our belief that but for our efforts some of the German forces

fronting us might have been switched there, and made the 8th Army victory more difficult. Many died on what has been described as "that shell torn smoking ridge". Your, father died in an unspoilt pastoral part of Italy with his friends around him.

I enclose a rough sketch map showing the area.
Yours sincerely,

Basil Hall