





PIAT team - 9th Royal Fusiliers  
Imperial War Museum NA 6683

The 9th Regiment Royal Fusiliers (9RF) spent World War II as part of the 56<sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division's 167<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. Stationed in the United Kingdom until August 1942, the Division set sail to the Middle East to help provide protection for the Iraqi oilfields as well as British interests in the region. Iraq had been the scene of an Axis-supported uprising under Prime Minister Rashid Ali, who had refused to allow the British to move troops through the country as guaranteed by the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. Indian troops and a British relief force from Transjordan moved in, quickly defeating Iraq's five conscript divisions and destroying their airforce

of 56 mostly obsolete aircraft. By October 1941, an armistice was signed and a pro-British government established, but concerns regarding the region's stability still remained.

As Axis forces in North Africa began to falter, the 56<sup>th</sup> Division traveled 4,000 miles of road from Iraq, through Palestine, Egypt, and Libya, to Enfidaville, Tunisia, playing a supporting role in the victory. It was not for this battle that they had traveled so far, however. With North Africa secured, training for the inevitable invasion of Italy began. Early September found 9RF, along with the rest of 56<sup>th</sup> Division, boarding ships to rendezvous with elements of the U.S. 5<sup>th</sup> Army (Gen. Mark Clark commanding) off the Italian coast. The invasion force would include two U.S. and two British infantry divisions. Operation Avalanche commenced as the fleet entered the Bay of Salerno.

*The "Black Cats" stank of coffee. These men, who had all been in the Middle East for some while, wore khaki drill (KD), a lighter-weight tropical uniform, which had been bleached almost white by the relentless desert sunlight. The final collapse of the Axis in North Africa had yielded a vast amount of war booty, which included tons of poor-quality Italian coffee. The staff, fearing that the soldiers would stand out against the green European terrain had all their KDs stained brown. Great cauldrons of boiling coffee were prepared, some in North Africa and others on the ships en route to Salerno, and their KDs "dunked" in the evil brew. The result was an unevenly brown-stained uniform smelling of coffee.*

- Eric Morris, "Salerno: A Military Fiasco", p. 83

Landing one mile south of the Tusciano River mouth at 0330 hours on September 9, 1943, the 9RF was immediately confronted by enemy fire. Advancing to their objectives against spotty resistance, the regiment entered Battipaglia shortly before midnight and began preparing defensive positions.

*The advance from 'Roger' Beach was relatively straightforward business for the 9<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers, who advanced 6 miles that day, all the way to their objective at Battipaglia.*

- Angus Konstam, "Salerno 1943: The Allied Invasion of Italy", p. 31

*Among the assault troops was a troop of four guns from our regiment, C Troop and these were the only artillery on shore until the remainder of the regiment arrived later that morning. C Troop was supposed to have made up a battery together with a troop of self propelled guns, but the latter were sunk on the way in! One thing was already quite obvious, that the Germans had no intention of letting us remain onshore if they could possibly help it.*

- V. C. Fairfield, 64<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, BBC's "WW2 People's War" website

At dawn, the two companies of the 9RF were assaulted from two directions by a large force of panzer grenadiers and armor. Lt. Col. Ted Hillersden, the Regiment's commanding officer, was wounded, passing command to Major Delforce. The situation became increasingly dire and the men were finally ordered to fight their way out as individuals.

At 1830 hours, B Squadron, Royal Scots Greys drove the panzers back, allowing the 9RF to regroup at a crossroads outside of Santa Lucia. The battered soldiers now numbered 200 strong. Some 300 had been killed or captured in the day's fighting.

*Late in the afternoon [Lance Corporal Harold] Lampard and his chum Fusilier Brown heard the sound of running feet and unmistakably Teutonic voices shouting commands. Loud shouts came through the flimsy walls of the neighboring house; then a German broke through a door with a leveled submachine gun. Lampard shouted into his microphone: "We're about to be captured; I'm closing down now to kick in the set. Out."*

*- Hugh Pond, "Salerno", p. 109*

*[Baron von Falkenhausen] discovered that although Lieutenant Colonel Hillersden's 9th Fusiliers occupied the town, their outposts to the north were only lightly held, as the bulk of the British defenders were concentrated to the east. His assault guns and tanks had little difficulty in brushing aside the first line of Fusiliers, then engaging and destroying an anti-tank gun screen deployed across their path. The Panzer grenadiers then entered Battipaglia, followed by the German armour. A near simultaneous assault was launched against the southern end of the Fusiliers' defence line to the east of town.*

*- Angus Konstam, "Salerno 1943: The Allied Invasion of Italy", p. 43*

*Two of our officers and several other ranks at the OP's were reported missing and for most of the day and all through the night we were called upon for gunfire in support of our infantry the 9th Royal Fusiliers who were having to fight off fierce counter attacks in and around the small but strategically important town of Battipaglia, from four battalions of German infantry with supporting armour. In fact, the area around this town had been earmarked by the enemy for their attempted breakthrough to the sea and the hoped for destruction of the beachhead.*

*- V. C. Fairfield, 64<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, BBC's "WW2 People's War" website*

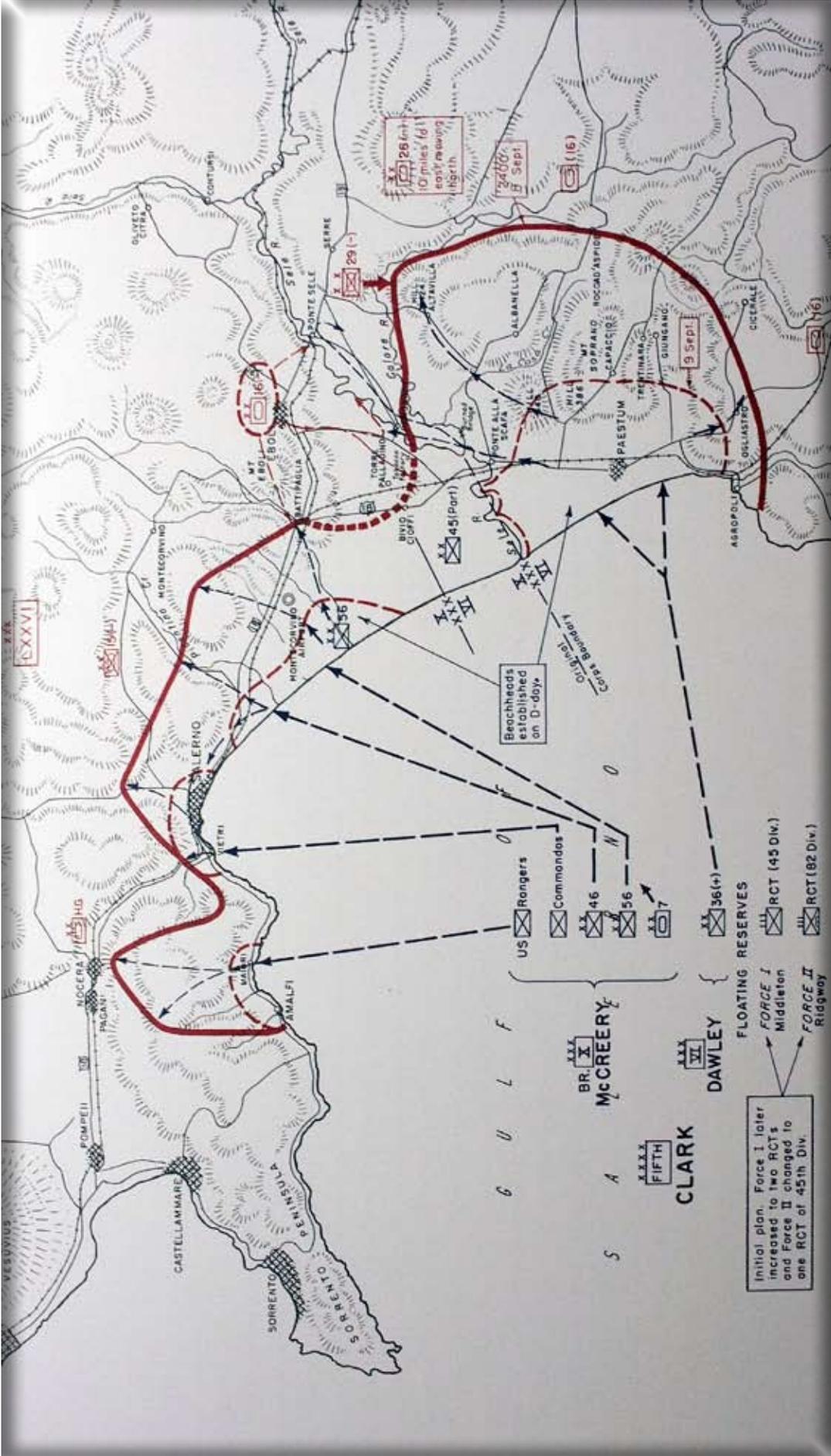
Saturday, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1400 hours: II/64 Panzer Grenadier Regiment and Panzer IVs of the II/2.Panzer Regiment of 16.Panzer Division attack the positions held by the 167<sup>th</sup> Brigade. Despite heavy fighting, the 9RF, assisted by the Shermans of the Royal Scots Greys, managed to advance about a half-mile up the road towards Battipaglia. Overall, the fighting went badly for the brigade and 9RF was forced to fall back to new positions some two miles away from their objective.



Gun crew of 267 Battery, 67 Anti-Tank Regiment, Royal Artillery prepare a 17 pounder Pheasant anti-tank gun for action

Imperial War Museum NA 6685

Battered and tired, the 9RF held their position. The tenuous situation became worse on September 14<sup>th</sup>. A German armored assault threw the 167<sup>th</sup> Brigade back towards the Tusciano River. The arrival of B and C squadrons of the Royal Scots Greys convinced the enemy tanks to withdraw. By nightfall, the situation was under control and, leaving the remnants of the 9RF behind, 167<sup>th</sup> Brigade moved to bolster units to the north.



# SALERNO CAMPAIGN

Plan for Landing at Salerno, 9 September 1943, and situation at Nightfall, 11 September

detail from *The West Point Atlas of War World War II: European Theatre, map 66*

Note the gap between the British and American beachheads. Between five and ten miles separated the British 56th ID and the American 36th ID, a fact the Germans sought to exploit. Part of the US 45th ID was brought in to help fill the gap.



Finally, at 2200 hours on September 17<sup>th</sup>, the Germans retired from the field of battle. The following day, the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division relieved the weary 56<sup>th</sup> Division. As history records, however, the Salerno landing was not to be the end of their Italian adventures.

## EPILOGUE

Following their actions in September 1943, the 9RF continued fighting along the west coast of the Italian peninsula as part of the British 10<sup>th</sup> Corps. Naples, the Volturno, and Monte Camino were notable battle honors achieved by the 167<sup>th</sup> Brigade as they headed north towards Anzio. In March 1944, 9RF was granted a respite as they were shipped to Egypt. There they remained until July when they were shipped back to Italy, this time to the Adriatic coast of the peninsula, to continue the fighting through to the end of the war.

A small collection of names and events undoubtedly understate the fighting that occurred in an Italian town on the slopes of Mount Eboli. By all accounts, it was a chaotic scene for the men who fought there, with British and German soldiers alike stumbling upon each other as they turned a corner, both vying to hold the important communication center that was Battipaglia. There were many failures on both sides of the conflict and there seems to be no shortage of blame to go around. Salerno would be but a single chapter in what would become known by some as the Backwater War.



## FORCE LIST NOTES

The fielded army, based on the 9RF, is designed to represent that regiment and the units which provided direct support. The combat platoons, made up of 3 full rifle platoons from A Company, are joined by one rifle platoon from B Company. From the Support Company of the 9RF, a carrier patrol and a heavy mortar platoon have been selected. The guns of the Royal Artillery are well represented in this list with an anti-tank battery, anti-aircraft battery, and a full field artillery battery.

While the list is historically based, this specific build is not only meant to represent what assets were available to 9RF, either organic to the regiment or as divisional support. The field batteries, while historical, may also be taken to represent the naval firepower present in Salerno Bay, often cited as a key factor in helping keep the Allies on the beachhead by dispersing German units gathering for assault. The anti-aircraft battery not only represents ship-based Bofors, but also mimic the air cover provided by allied airpower throughout the operation.

One historical support unit has been left out. There are no Sherman tanks to represent the ever-present Royal Scots Greys. This was a conscious decision to create an infantry list without armored support, even where that support is verifiable in the historical context.



## 56<sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division

Major General Douglas Graham

September 9-18, 1943



### 201<sup>st</sup> Guards Motor Brigade

*Brigadier General Gascoigne*

3rd Battalion, Coldstream Guards

6th Battalion, Grenadier Guards

2nd Battalion, Scots Guards

*(B Squadron, Royal Scots Greys, in support)*

### 167<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade

*Brigadier General Firth*

8th Royal Fusiliers Regiment

9th Royal Fusiliers Regiment

7th Ox & Bucks Light Infantry Regiment

*(A Squadron, Royal Scots Greys, in support)*

### 169<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade

*Brigadier General Lyne*

2/5<sup>th</sup> Queen's Regiment

2/6<sup>th</sup> Queen's Regiment

2/7<sup>th</sup> Queen's Regiment

*(C Squadron, Royal Scots Greys, in support)*

### Divisional Troops

44<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Regiment

6<sup>th</sup> Cheshire Regiment (Machine Gun Battalion)

56<sup>th</sup> Div Detachment, Royal Signals Regiment

Royal Scots Greys Regiment\*

### Royal Artillery

64<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment

65<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment

113<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment

69<sup>th</sup> Medium Regiment

67<sup>th</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment

57<sup>th</sup> Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment

100<sup>th</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

### Royal Engineers

42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company

220<sup>th</sup> Field Company

221<sup>st</sup> Field Company

563<sup>rd</sup> Field Park Company

\*temporarily attached to Division from 23<sup>rd</sup> Armoured Brigade, 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division - equipped with Sherman tanks.

## WORLD WAR II BATTLE HONOURS OF THE 167<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY BRIGADE

Tunis • Salerno • Naples • Volturno Crossing • Monte Camino • Garigliano • Anzio  
Gothic Line • Coriano • Rimini Line • Lamone Crossing • Argenta Gap

### SOURCES

Dear & Foot. "The Oxford Companion to World War II". 1995

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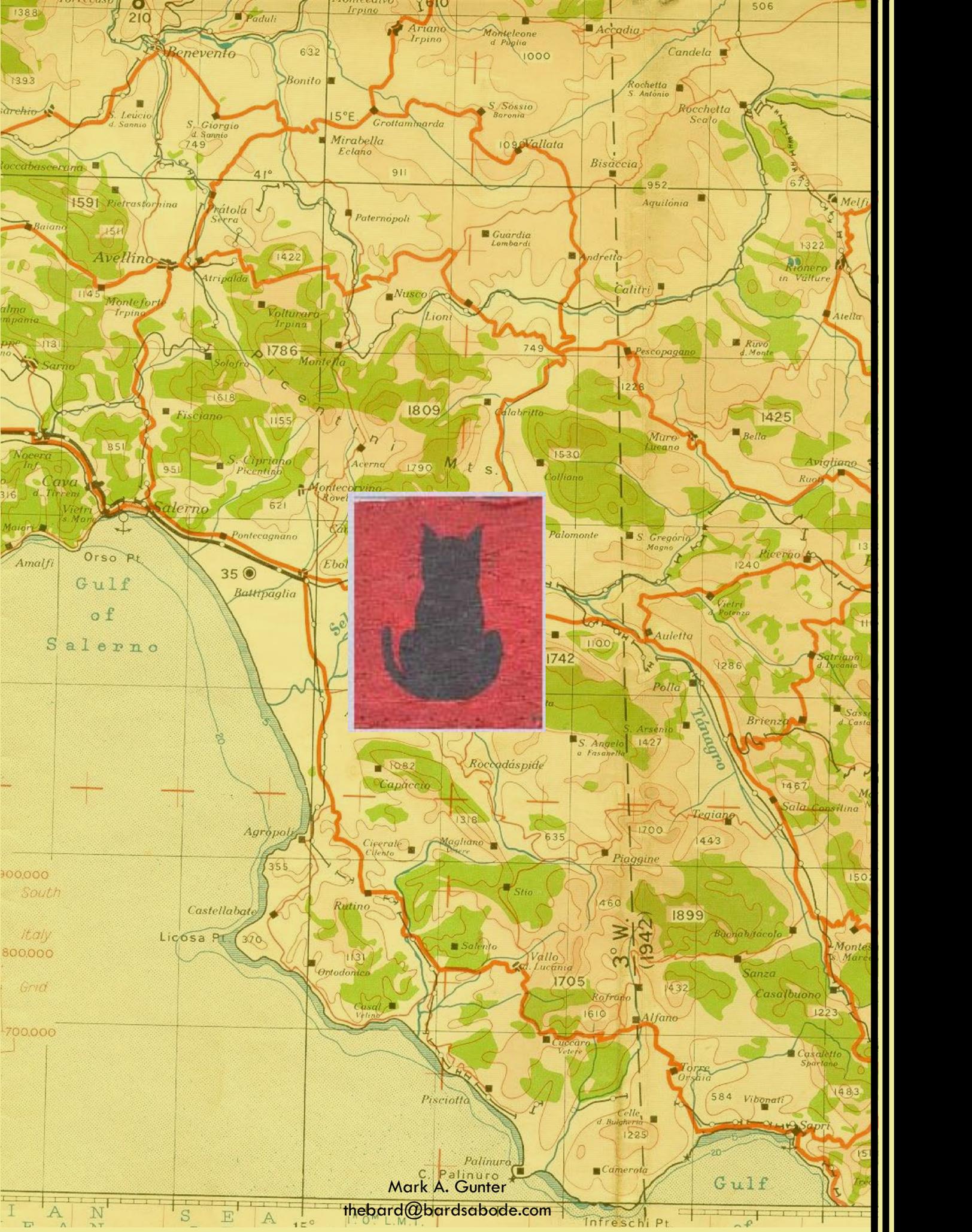
The West Point Atlas of War, World War II: European Theater

Personal accounts of V.C. Fairfield retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/>

Force list background image retrieved from <http://www.mts.net/~royb/rafmapnapoli4014.html>

### CONCEPT

Cover design based on Intelligence Bulletins produced by the Military Intelligence Service during World War II. Examples of these bulletins were retrieved at <http://www.lonesentry.com/intelbulletin/index.html>.



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