



*The Fighting "Four-Two"*

*1868 - 2020*



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## Acknowledgements

The Late General Sir George Kirkpatrick, K.C.B., K.C.S.I.

Major A.H.M. Morris M.C., G.M., R.E., Officer Commanding 1944

### Obituary

Brigadier A. H. M. Morris C.B.E., D.S.O., G.M., M.C., (1904-1972)

Council of the Institution of Highway Engineers learned with very much regret of the death on November 20th, 1972, as the result of a road accident, of Brigadier A. H. M. Morris, a member since 1957. Brigadier Morris served in the Royal Engineers from 1926 and saw service in France, Italy, Palestine and Korea. Since 1969 he had been Director General of the British Quarrying and Slag Federation.

Audrey Swindells on behalf of J. Harold Swindells, 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company, World War 2

22806352 Spr Derek Male 8 Troop, 1952-1955

23353764 Spr Derek Williams 8 Troop, 1956-58

WOII (SSM) Roy Willmott, 1967-1968

A/Cpl Davy Moorman, 8 Troop, Late 1960s – Early 1970s

Bob Mortimer, 8 Troop, Late 1960s – Early 1970s

Ad Dixon, ??

2/Lt David Bolling Paterson 436207

Arnd Wobbeking – British Army in Hameln

Major S G Higgens RE MBE Officer Commanding 2001 - 2003

## Foreword

*Fellow members of The Fighting 42<sup>nd</sup>, I have given myself the pleasure of trying to bring together from various sources our history to share. As you will see from the document the history of the squadron is wide and varied and will have reached 150 years in April 2018. This achievement of about 150 years is almost half of the time that there have been Royal Engineers; this alone warrants recording our history. I would like to think that between us all we can make the Fighting 42<sup>nd</sup> history the most comprehensive of any in the Corps.*

*To put the 42<sup>nd</sup> history into context I have in places included other information about the Corps as a whole, this allows a fair comparison of the unit to the rest of the Corps and gives a greater insight into our wider history.*

*As with previous researchers I have not had much luck in finding information about India, the BOER War and World War 1. I am however very grateful to those people that have contributed so far, in particular I would mention that about half of this document is due to previous research carried out by Major A.H.M. Morris M.C., G.M., R.E. Officer Commanding 1944.*

*With the exceptions of the areas already mentioned the history is quite good up to 1960. I have left much of this blank on purpose because there are nearly 500 members registered on two sites on Facebook. With modern technology and more recent memories, I am sure that today's members can provide stories, photos or sporting achievements etc. for inclusion.*

*I am not precious about what I have written so far and if I have made a mistake or missed something please let me know.*

*Just to keep things on the lighter side I have also included a couple of old Corps drinking songs at the back for you to reminisce with.*

*Many thanks for taking the time to read this.*

### **Tom Byrne**

8 Troop (1966-1970)  
42 Field Squadron R.E.  
35 Engineer Regiment  
B.F.P.O. 31



1986

## The Royal Engineers Quick March

### Wings

In 1870 the Commandant of the School of Military Engineering directed that a popular air of the day be adopted as the Corps Regimental March, unaware that The British Grenadiers had already been authorised.

The tune adopted was Wings which was officially recognised in 1902. The British Grenadiers is the second Regimental Quick March. The Corps has no official Slow March.

"Wings" was adopted as the RE Quick March in 1870.

1902 "Wings" was officially recognised.

It consists of two Tunes scored by Bandmaster Newstead of the Royal Engineers Band  
The path across the hills (German) and Dolores (Miss Dickinson)

Wings to bear me over mountain and vale away;

Wings to bathe my spirit in morning's sunny ray.

Wings that I may hover at morn above the sea;

Wings through life to bear me, and death triumphantly.

Wings like youth's fleet moments which swiftly o'er me passed;

Wings like my early visions, too bright, too fair to last.

Wings that I might recall them, the loved, the lost, the dead;

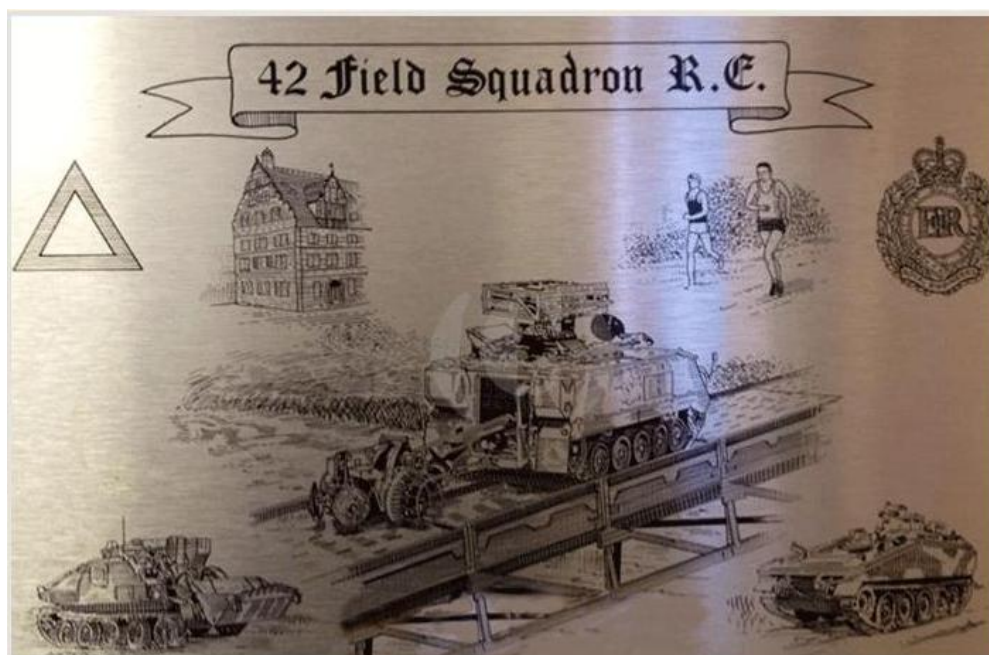
Wings that I might fly the past, long vanished.

Wings to lift me upward, soaring with Eagle flight;

Wings to waft me 'heav'ward to bask in realms of light.

Wings to be no more wearied, lulled in eternal rest;

Wings to be sweetly folded where Faith and Love are blessed.



## Corps of Royal Engineers, a condensed history

The Royal Engineers trace their origins back to the military engineers brought to England by William the Conqueror in **1066**, specifically Bishop Gundulf of Rochester Cathedral, a talented military engineer, and claim nearly 1,000 years of unbroken service to the crown. Engineers have always served in the armies of the Crown; however, the origins of the modern corps, along with those of the Royal Artillery, lie in the Board of Ordnance established in the **15th century**.

In **1716**, the Board formed the Royal Regiment of Artillery and established a Corps of Engineers, consisting entirely of commissioned officers. The manual work was done by the Artificer Companies, made up of contracted civilian artisans and labourers.



*Royal Military Artificers Working Dress*



*Uniform of the Royal Military Artificers, which the Soldier Artificer Company adopted in 1788*

In **1782**, a Soldier Artificer Company was established for service in Gibraltar, and this was the first instance of non-commissioned military engineers. In **1787**, the Corps of Engineers was granted the *Royal* prefix and adopted its current name and in the same year a Corps of Royal Military Artificers was formed, consisting of non-commissioned officers and privates, to be officered by the RE. Ten years later the Gibraltar Company, which had remained separate, was absorbed and in **1812** the name was changed to the Corps of Royal Sappers and Miners.

In **1855** the Board of Ordnance was abolished and authority over the Royal Engineers, Royal Sappers and Miners and Royal Artillery was transferred to the Commander-in-Chief of the Forces, thus uniting them with the rest of the Army.

In **1856** the Royal Engineers and Royal Sappers and Miners became a unified corps as the Corps of Royal Engineers.

In **1911** the Corps formed its Air Battalion, the first flying unit of the British Armed Forces. The Air Battalion was the forerunner of the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Air Force.

In **1915**, in response to German mining of British trenches under the then static siege conditions of the First World War, the corps formed its own tunnelling companies. Manned by experienced coal miners from across the country, they operated with great success until **1917**, when after the fixed positions broke, they built deep dugouts such as the Vampire dugout to protect troops from heavy shelling.

The Corps has no battle honours. Its mottoes, ***Ubique*** (Everywhere) and ***Quo Fas et Gloria Ducunt*** (Where Duty and Glory lead), were granted by King William IV in **1832**, signifying that the Corps had seen action in all the major conflicts of the British Army and almost all of the minor ones as well.

Before the Second World War, Royal Engineers recruits were required to be at least 5 feet 4 inches tall and 5 feet 2 inches for the Mounted Branch.

They initially enlisted for six years with the colours and a further six years with the reserve or four years and eight years. Unlike most corps and regiments, in which the upper age limit was 25, men could enlist in the Royal Engineers up to 30 years of age. They trained at the Royal Engineers Depot in Chatham or the RE Mounted Depot at Aldershot.

The Royal Engineers Museum is in Gillingham in Kent.

## Corps Badges and Squadron Insignia

### *Monogram Or Cypher*



*Ubique*

*Everywhere*

*Quo Fas et Gloria Ducunt*

*Where Duty and Glory lead*

The Monogram or Cypher, as it is sometimes called, may be used on notepaper and on Christmas Cards and other similar documents. It is not worn on uniform but is emblazoned on the Fanfare Trumpet Banners of the RE Band.

### *Corp Badge*



*Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense*

*"Shame be to him who thinks evil of it"*

*Or*

*"Evil be to him that evil thinks"*

### *Royal Arms Corps Badge*



*Dieu et Mon Droit*

*God and my right*

**Royal Arms**, On 10 July 1832 King William IV granted the Royal Regiment of Artillery and the Corps of Royal Engineers permission to wear on their appointments the Royal Arms and Supporters, together with a cannon and the mottoes Ubique above the cannon and Quo Fas et Gloria Ducunt below it. In 1868 the cannon was omitted from the Corps Badge. Since then the actual design of the Royal Arms has changed slightly with each reigning monarch.

The Corps Badge used to be worn on an Officer's sabretache and cartouche, and on parts of his charger's saddlery. It was worn by all ranks of the Corps of the Regular Army on their full-dress blue spiked helmet up until 1914. The RE Militia, Volunteers and Territorials, however, had a slightly different Badge in that the motto Ubique was omitted from the scroll under the Royal Arms and its place taken by a laurel branch.

Nowadays the Corps Badge is only generally worn on the full dress busby by the RE Band.

## Cap Badge



Worn by officers and soldiers in No's 1 and 2 Dress and by soldiers on berets.

Replicas of the Cap Badge in colour are often placed on unit notice boards and in stained glass windows in churches.

## Grenade Badges

An embroidered grenade was first worn on the tail of an RE Officer's full dress scarlet coat in 1824, and the following year a brass grenade was introduced for Other Ranks of the Royal Sappers and Miners.

The grenade was later worn on the epaulet and then on the collar. The number of flames to the grenade has varied, but in **1922 a nine-flamed grenade**, with the motto *Ubique* below it, was authorised. The Royal **Artillery** grenade is similar, but has **only seven flames**.



Soldiers'  
Collar Badge  
No 2 Dress



Officers'  
Collar Badge  
No 2 Dress



The embroidered Arm  
Badge is worn above the  
chevrons by Sergeants &  
Staff Sergeants



The officer's  
beret badge  
is an  
embroidered  
grenade



42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company  
adopted the  
6th South African  
Armoured Division's  
insignia when the  
Squadron was under  
their command in Italy  
in World War 2



42 Field Squadron  
added the  
South African  
Springbok  
to the insignia in 2003

Green and yellow are two of the South African traditional colours.

## Patron Saint of the Royal Engineers

The patron saint of the Royal Engineers is Saint Barbara. Accounts place Saint Barbara in the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century to early 4<sup>th</sup> century in Nicomedia, present-day Turkey or in Heliopolis of Phoenicia, present-day Baalbek, Lebanon. She is the patron saint because of old legends associating her with lightning and mathematics.

Her story consists of her being carefully protected by her father who kept her locked in a tower in order to preserve her from the outside world, Barbara then became a Christian in secret. When her father found this information out he took upon his sword to kill her but her prayers created an opening in which she was transported to a mountain gorge where two shepherds watched their flocks. Her father pursued her rebuffed by the first shepherd but then betrayed by the second who turned to stone and his flock turned to locusts. Her father tortured her however because she kept true to her faith each night her wounds healed and the flames set to burn her would extinguish when they came near her. Her father then sentenced her to death to be carried out by him, however after the beheading as punishment he was struck by lightning and his body consumed by flames.

Saint Barbara's tomb then became a site for more miracles.

Saint Barbara became the patron saint of artillerymen. She is also traditionally the patron of armourers, military engineers, gunsmiths, miners and anyone else who worked with cannon and explosives. She is the patron Saint of the Italian Navy also.

### Saint Barbara



Saint Barbara's day is 4<sup>th</sup> December and is also celebrated by many other army military corps including the Royal Artillery and RAF armourers and also many sections of the Australian, Canadian, New Zealand, Irish and Norwegian armies that deal with explosives. She is also the patron Saint of the US Navy and Marine Corps Aviation Ordnance men.



## Quotes & poems about the Royal Engineers

### Written by well-known historical figures

"The Sappers really need no tribute from me; their reward lies in the glory of their achievement. The more science intervenes in warfare, the more will be the need for engineers in field armies; in the late war there were never enough Sappers at any time. Their special tasks involved the upkeep and repair of communications; roads, bridges, railways, canals, mine sweeping. The Sappers rose to great heights in World War II and their contribution to victory was beyond all calculations."

*Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, 1st Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, 1945*

Extract from the poem "Sappers"

I have stated it plain, an' my argument's thus  
 ("It's all one," says the Sapper)  
 There's only one Corps which is perfect - that's us;  
 An' they call us Her Majesty's Engineers,  
 With the rank and pay of a Sapper!

*Rudyard Kipling*

"The ideal engineer is a composite. He is not a scientist, nor a mathematician, nor a sociologist, nor a writer, but he may use the knowledge of any or all of these disciplines in solving engineering problems."

*N. W. Dougherty (American Engineer, University Lecturer and Athlete), 1955*

"We have had such an expenditure of Engineers that I can hardly wish for anybody, lest the same fate befall him as has befallen so many"

*Wellington*

"What is a Sapper? This versatile genius... condensing the whole system of military engineering and all that is useful and practical under one red jacket. He is a man of all work of the Army and the public - astronomer, geologist, surveyor, draughtsman, artist, architect, traveller, explorer, antiquary, mechanic, diver, soldier and sailor; ready to do anything or go anywhere; in short, he is a Sapper."

*Captain T.W.J Connolly, the historian of the Royal Sappers and Miners, 1855*

"In the event that the situation had deteriorated and a break-in operation to Sarajevo....had become necessary then armoured engineers would have been the lead element. Once again we are reminded that there comes a time in war when Sappers have to go in front to open up the way.

'Follow the Sapper' is a timeless cry."

*Brigadier I.T.D. McGill's Report to the Corps, 1995*

### Royal Engineers Historical Facts

The Royal School of Military Engineering was named the School of Military Engineering in 1868 the same year that 42 Depot Company was formed in Madras.

The Royal School of Military Engineering is the British Army's Centre of Excellence for Military Engineering, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), and counter terrorist search training. Located on several sites in Chatham, Kent, Camberley in Surrey and Bicester in Oxfordshire the Royal School of Military Engineering offers superb training facilities for the full range of Royal Engineer skills. The RSME was founded by Major (later General Sir) Charles Pasley, as the Royal Engineer Establishment in 1812. **It was renamed the School of Military Engineering in 1868** and granted the "Royal" prefix in 1962.

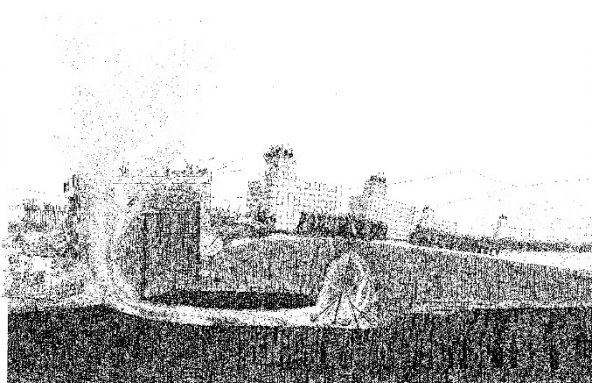
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### Royal Engineers Historical Facts

Sappers are named after the trenches or 'Saps' they constructed during siege warfare against fortresses.

The sap in the picture shows a Persian sap in 498 BC.



The Royal Engineers Corps football team won the FA Cup in 1875, the only military team to win it. They beat Old Etonians 2-0 in a replay after the first game ended 1-1.



The Engineers were also losing finalists in 1872 (The Wanderers 1-0), 1874 (Oxford University 2-0) and 1878 (The Wanderers 3-1). All matches were played at the Kennington Oval.

The Engineers' Depot Battalion won the FA Amateur Cup in 1908, the only military team to win it. They beat Stockton 2-1 at Bishop Auckland.



The FA Amateur Cup was an English football competition for amateur clubs. It commenced in 1893 and ended in 1974 when The Football Association abolished official amateur status.

Royal Engineer teams have won the Army Football Cup 23 of the 106 times it has been played from 1889 to 2015 (almost 22%).

There were no competitions in 1901, 1915-1919 and 1940-1946.

**Service Battalion Won** 1903; Runners-up 1904, 1905

**Depot and District Battalions Won** 1906

**Depot Battalion Won** 1907

**Training Battalion Won** 1937

**Barton Stacey Won** 1947

**4th Training Battalion Won** 1950, 1957, 1958

**4th Divisional Engineers Won** 1969

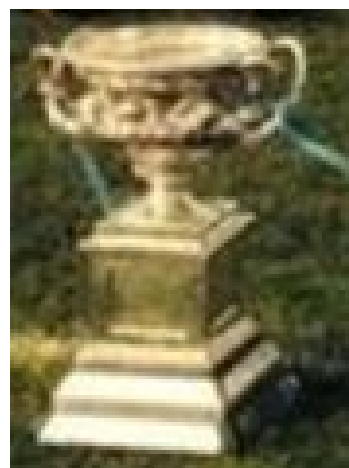
**32 Engineer Regiment Won** 1970; Runner-up 1971

**3 RSME Regt Won** 1997 Runners-up 1995, 1997, 1997, 2001

**Training Regiments Won** 1980; Runner-up 1991, 1993

**40 Army Engineer Support Group** Runner-up 1985

**28 [Amphibious] Engineer Regiment Won** 1981, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002; Runner-up 1983, 1988.



Captain Francis Fowke and Major General Scott of the Royal Engineers designed and oversaw the construction of the Royal Albert Hall.



Sappers invented military diving in 1838 and taught the first Royal Navy divers.



The picture is of Tony Liddicoat one of 42 Field Squadron's (9 Troop, mid to late 60's) and the Corps' most experienced divers and is on the front cover of his book "Five Bells – Job Done".

The Colonel-in-Chief of the Corps of Royal Engineers is HM Queen Elizabeth II



Colonel By of the Royal Engineers built the Rideau Canal in Canada from Quebec to Lake Ontario.

Starting in 1826 to spend five summers heading the construction of the Rideau Canal, the 200 km long waterway, which now connects Ottawa and Kingston. This formidable task included the building of about 50 dams and 47 locks, without the aid of modern equipment.



Lieutenant John Chard of the Royal Engineers commanded the defence of Rorke's Drift in the 1879 Zulu War. He was immortalised by actor Stanley Baker in the film Zulu.



In 1911, the Air Battalion of the Royal Engineers became the first unit responsible for manned balloons, airships and kites. The Air Battalion became the Royal Flying Corps in 1912 and then the Royal Air Force in 1918.

Commandant of the Air Battalion

Major Sir Alexander Bannerman



**Civil engineering, as it is known today, was once the preserve of the military.** Civil engineering is a professional engineering discipline that deals with the design, construction, and maintenance of the physical and naturally built environment, including works like roads, bridges, canals, dams, and buildings. Civil engineering is the second-oldest engineering discipline after military engineering, and it is defined to distinguish non-military engineering from military engineering.

## Formation of 42

### Formation of 42<sup>nd</sup> (Madras) Depot Company, Royal Engineers, April 1868

In April, 1857, the newly formed 23<sup>rd</sup> Company was sent to China, but on reaching Singapore orders were found awaiting its arrival changing its destination to India, where its services were urgently required on account of the mutiny which had broken out in the Sepoy Army, and which was threatening the loss of our Indian Empire. The Company landed at Calcutta in September, and served throughout the war until peace was restored. In December, 1859, it proceeded to China to join the army then about to carry on the war in that country, which had been suspended during the crisis of the Indian Mutiny.

Meanwhile the 4<sup>th</sup> Company under Major Nicholson, the 11<sup>th</sup> under Captain Cumberland, and the 21<sup>st</sup> under Captain Neville, had embarked for Indian service and landed, the two former at Calcutta and the latter at Bombay in the month of November, 1857. These were the first Royal Sappers and Miners who ever served in India. During their stay in the country they were taken on the Indian Establishment, and ceased to figure on the home returns, which, in consequence, showed a perceptible decline in numbers. The 10<sup>th</sup> Company had embarked at the same time as the three last mentioned with the object of serving in India, but on touching at Ceylon they found their destination changed to China, to take the place of the 23<sup>rd</sup> diverted from China to India. This Company was followed almost immediately after by the 8<sup>th</sup> under Captain Lambert, and the two landed almost simultaneously in Hong-Kong in detachments, spreading over the months of February and March, 1858. There were at this time four Companies serving in the Indian Mutiny, viz., the 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, and 23<sup>rd</sup>, and two in China, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, afterwards joined by the 23<sup>rd</sup> from India. The other three Indian Companies at the close of the war were thus disposed of: The 4<sup>th</sup> returned to England and the 11<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> were sent to the Mauritius.

These four having been removed from the Indian establishment, brought up the home numbers to 3,967.

For some years past a number of men had been stationed at Chatham, undergoing instruction, but not attached to any of the thirty-two Companies. This detachment had gradually increased in strength until, by the middle of 1858, it had reached the number of 648. In July of this year it was broken up into four new Companies, the 33<sup>rd</sup>, 34<sup>th</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup>, and 36<sup>th</sup>, the detachment as such disappearing from the returns.

The formation of Depot Companies dates from April 1st, 1861. On that day the 35<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> were converted from Service into Depot Companies, and two additional Depot Companies, the 37<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup>, were formed, the latter absorbing the permanent Staff, supernumerary Sergeants, Band and boys. Two additional Depot Companies, the 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup>, were formed in August, 1862, to supply men for duty in India as Non-commissioned Officers of the Companies of Native Sappers and Miners.

**In April, 1868, the 41<sup>st</sup> Company for Bengal, the 42<sup>nd</sup> for Madras, and the 43<sup>rd</sup> for Bombay, were formed, to be paid on the Indian Establishment.**

In April, 1885, the Depot Companies surrendered their numbers and were lettered. The 12<sup>th</sup> was converted into a Depot Company and lettered A. The 35<sup>th</sup> to 40<sup>th</sup>, inclusive, were lettered from B to G & **the three Indian Companies 41, 42, and 43 were lettered H, K, L**; and the 23<sup>rd</sup>, or depot of the Submarine Miners, M. A new or N Depot Company was also formed. The numbers 12, 35, 36, and 37 were filled up by service companies.

The main duty of a Depot Company was to hold reinforcements in a state of readiness ready for allocation to other in theatre units.



## THE LATE GENERAL SIR GEORGE KIRKPATRICK, K.C.B., K.C.S.I.

In February, 1897, I took over the Command of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company, Royal Engineers, from Major Graham Thompson R.E., who had raised the unit (as a Field Company) at Chatham in 1891, taking it out to Malta later in the year. The following two years and a half were spent quietly at Malta, where the Company was employed on the usual R.E. duties.

Throughout this time the behaviour of the unit was excellent. Drunkenness was practically negligible, and the Company possessed a thoroughly good reputation. On one annual exercise I was appointed C.R.E. for one side with the Company under my command. We embarked on the Submarine Miners' launch and made our way to St. Paul's Bay at the west point of the island. Here we rigged up bivouacs for the infantry, and on the day of the final manoeuvre the Company advanced by a hill path to outflank what were known as the North-West Front Defences, completely surprising the defending force. The exercise being successfully concluded, we returned to St. Paul's Bay, where we constructed a pier from Maltese carts to enable the attacking force to embark dry-shod on their return.

During September, 1899, I received orders to embark the Company for the South African War. The unit mobilized as far as was possible, for it had to be made up to strength from the other companies in Malta, drawing its engineer equipment from the local R.E. Stores.

When ready, we were embarked on a Moss liner from Alexandria, with orders to re-embark at Gibraltar on to a transport bound for South Africa. This re-embarkation did not take place; however, as Alexandria was in the grip of plague, and any disembarkation at Gibraltar was disallowed by the authorities. We proceeded to Liverpool and I remember crossing the Bay; there was an alarm of fire during dinner. The Company was immediately drawn up on deck while the troop deck from which smoke was issuing was torn away. Luckily for the Master, we had with us some bluejackets who ably assisted the very small crew in the job of tracing the cause of the smoke. It was eventually found to be due to smouldering bales of cotton at the bottom of the hold.

We docked at Liverpool on a Saturday morning, and I was met by a corporal of the Army Service Corps who had orders for me from Chester, the nearest military headquarters. These orders were that my Company was to embark on the Monday morning at Birkenhead en route for South Africa.

No arrangements had been made for our accommodation and as we were not to be allowed to remain on the ship I had to ask the Chief Constable of Liverpool if he could supply billets. These he at once provided, being mostly in public houses surrounding the docks. Even so, the Company behaved extremely well, and on the Monday morning we paraded on the wharveside where our stores had been stacked. As soon as the stores had been loaded on to a wagon, we marched through Liverpool to the Ferry. Thence across to Birkenhead where we embarked on the transport Pindari. With us were two batteries of Horse Artillery from London with about three hundred horses, many of the horses having been mobilized from the London Bus Company! We sailed that night, heading into a strong gale which prevented our dropping the pilot until reaching the Canary Islands. The Pindari's fittings, stalls, troop decks and so on had been so badly put up that they began to come to pieces during the gale. The task of putting them up again was undertaken by us with tools supplied from the ship's engine room. Following this setback, it was learned that many of the horses were dying for want of ventilation, and it became necessary to cut a hole into one of the air shafts.

After a long voyage we reached Cape Town, where I was informed that we were to double up with another company for railway work, and my work as Captain would be superfluous. I protested, saying that I had trained the unit and wished to command it on active service. I was overruled, and, as I had qualified at Staff College, I was appointed to the Intelligence Branch of the Staff. Subsequently during the war I used to find members of the unit at railway work and so managed to keep in touch with them. Always their work was of the high standard expected of them.



General Sir George Kirkpatrick, K.C.B., K.C.S.I.

*George Kirkpatrick*  
- General

## **Information about GENERAL SIR GEORGE KIRKPATRICK, K.C.B.\*, K.C.S.I.\*\***

He was born on 23 August 1866 in Kingston, Ontario and died in 1950 (83 or 84 years old).

He enrolled at the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston, Ontario from 1882–85, student # 138. As a surveyor in 1892, he authored topographic maps of the 'Town and environs of the Fez Region of Morocco.

Kirkpatrick was commissioned into the Royal Corps of Engineers in 1885. He was appointed Aide-de-camp to the General Officer Commanding, Thames District in 1892.

He was Officer Commanding 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company from 1897 until 1899.

He was deployed as Deputy Assistant Adjutant General (Intelligence) during the Second Boer War 1899-1902.

He served in Halifax, Nova Scotia as Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General from 1902 and then became Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General at Headquarters of the Army in 1904.

He went on to be Assistant Quartermaster General at Headquarters, India in 1906 and Inspector General of the Military Forces of Australia in 1910.

He served in World War I as Director of Military Operations in India from 1914 to 1916 when he became Chief of the General Staff in India.

He subsequently served as Commander of British Forces in China from 1921 to 1922 and General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Command, India from 1923 to 1927. He retired in 1930.

*\* K.C.B. Knight Commander of the Bath*

*\*\*K.C.S.I. Knight Commander Star of India*

### **Note by AHM Morris Officer Commanding 1944**

Much of the information in this document is gratefully acknowledged to be due to the diligent research carried out by Lieutenant Colonel Morris who made the following note about his research.

I have had great difficulty in getting together anything like a connected narrative, showing the History of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company.

The late Sir George Kirkpatrick was good enough to write a note on Malta and South Africa, and Captain Jenkins (an old comrade) let me have some particulars of the unit in the Boer War, but I can get nothing at all on India nor the First World War and very little information apart from locations up till 1939.

I have not attempted to reproduce maps, as they would cover quite a lot of the world. Anyone interested can borrow an atlas and chase them out for himself.

Suffice to say that the Company, in its first life, lived exactly 79 years and in its travels "touched" at Madras, Malta, South Africa, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, North Africa, Italy, Austria and Greece. From 1939 onwards it is plain sailing, and I hope that, sketchy as it is, the story will at least serve to remind those of us who were privileged to be members of the Company of the times we had with it. I was lucky enough to command the Company in Italy from the Garigliano up till just before the Gothic Line, during most of which time we were with the 6th South African Armoured Division as part of 24 Guards Brigade Group. Guardsmen are a peculiar race and, I suppose, Sappers are too, but once we got to know each other everything went like clockwork, and I think that the esteem in which the Company was held by the rest of the Brigade can well be summed up by the fact that on more than one occasion the Brigade "intentions" for the following day, in so far as we were concerned, stated, "Sappers will rest"; indeed, on one occasion I well remember waking up twenty miles behind the advance and when, later on, I taxed my Second-in-Command (Captain Goad) with this he said that he had received a personal order from the Brigadier that I was not to be disturbed. I am sure that all old comrades and primarily this book is written for the old comrades cherish similar memories, and I know that I still receive many letters from those who were with me at that time. The cheering fact for all of us ex-members is that the Company has been raised again as the 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Squadron and forms part of the 35th Regiment out in the Middle East.

B.A.O.R. 1950

A. H. M. M.

## Timeline

Dates	Location	Deployment	Under Command	Sub-units – Remarks
April 1868-1889	Madras	Raised as 42 <sup>nd</sup> (Madras) Depot Company		Holding unit for reinforcements for other units.
April 1885	Madras	Renamed "K" Company		
1889-1899	Malta	Formed as a Fortress Company		
1891	Chatham	Reformed as 42nd Field Company RE		
1899-1902	South Africa	Deployed as a Railway Company		2 <sup>nd</sup> Boer War
1902-1911	Portsmouth	Field Company		
1911-1914	Gosport	Field Company		Forts Monckton and Gilkicker
1914-1918	France and Belgium	Deployed to France and Belgium	Army Troops	World War 1
1918-1920	France and Belgium	Remained in France & Belgium for civil infrareconstruction	Army Troops	
1920-1922	Haifa and Mesopotamia	Deployed as Railway Company		
1922-1935	Egypt (Moascar)	Deployed as part of the Canal Infantry Brigade	Canal Infantry Brigade	
1936-1939	Egypt (Moascar)	Deployed as a Field Company	HQ British Troops Egypt (BTE)	
1936-37	Sarafand, Palestine	Deployed as a Field Company but with the addition of a Railway Role		1936–39 Arab revolt in Palestine Largest British base in Middle East 1930's and 1940's. Now in Israel and is their largest Army base.
1939-1940	Mersah Matruh Garrison and Western Desert (Egypt)	Water supply and a railway section	Mersah Matruh Garrison HQ British Troops Egypt (BTE) until 17 June 1940 and then HQ Western Desert Force	
September 1940-1941	Suda Bay, Crete Less 1 Section at Heraklion	Deployed as a Field Company	14th Infantry Brigade and then HQ Creforce*	*Commonwealth & Allied Forces, Crete
1941-1942	Gabal Maryam, Egypt	Conducting experimental bridging, destruction of minefields and other specialist work.	Group Headquarters Reserve Ninth Army	
1942	Syria		20 <sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Brigade (9 <sup>th</sup> Australian Division)	
1942	Palestine		Ninth Army	
1942	Egypt (Helwan and Wasta)	Construction of two brigade fortresses, road and field defences.	X Corps	
1943	Egypt (Western Desert)	Deployed as a Field Company carrying out normal R.E. works.	XXX Corps	
1943	Cyrenaica		Eighth Army	
1943	Tripolitania		C.R.E.50 <sup>th</sup> Division	
1943	Tunisia		201 Guards Brigade	

Dates	Location	Deployment	Under Command	Sub-units – Remarks
1943-1945	Italy			A detailed timeline for these dates is given in the table in the Section: Locations in Europe 1943-1947
1945-1946	Austria			
1946-1947	Greece			
April 1947	Barton Stacey	Suspended Animation		
Jan 1950	Egypt	Reformed as 42 Field Squadron	35 Army Engineer Regiment	
1952 – 1954	Fayid Egypt	Canal Zone		
Jan 1954 – 1955	Cyprus	Op Tuna laying water pipelines Kissousa/Troodos Mountains	35 Army Engineer Regiment	
Dec 1955	Ripon		35 Army Engineer Regiment	
1956	Egypt, Cyprus	Egypt (Port Said) then Nov 56 – Jan 57 Cyprus for Suez Crisis (OP MUSKETEER)	35 Army Engineer Regiment	Aug - Nov 56: Marchwood
31 Oct to 22 Dec 1956				
1956	Ripon			
Nov 1957	Osnabruck	Roberts Bks	35 Engineer Regiment	
Sept 1964	Hameln	Gordon Bks	35 Engineer Regiment	
Mar - June 1968	N. Ireland	OP JOLE	35 Engineer Regiment	
30 Apr – 5 Aug 1971	N. Ireland	Long Kesh OPCON	21 Engineer Regiment:	Infantry Role
22 Nov 1972 – 28 Mar 1973	N. Ireland	Short Strand, East Belfast OPCON	35 Engineer Regiment:	Infantry Role,
30 Oct 1974 – 28 Feb 1975	Ballykelly, N. Ireland	OP DESCANT (Engineer role)	35 Engineer Regiment:	7 Troop in Antrim
22 Oct 1976 – 24 Feb 1977	Ballykelly, N. Ireland	OP DESCANT (Engineer role)	35 Engineer Regiment:	
Jan 1978	Hameln	Gordon Bks	4 Armoured Division Engineer Regiment	35 Engineer Regiment re-formed as 4 Armoured Division Engineer Regiment
23 Jan – 27 Apr 1978	N. Ireland	Armagh		
20 Mar – 21 July 1981	N. Ireland	Ballykelly		
Jan 1981	Hameln	Gordon Bks	35 Engineer Regiment	4 Armoured Division Engineer Regiment re-titled 35 Engineer Regiment
Oct 1983 – Mar 1984	Falklands	Single Construction Squadron	35 Engineer Regiment	
Feb – June 1986	N. Ireland	Single Construction Squadron	35 Engineer Regiment	A Troop in Antrim
1987	N. Ireland	Antrim Op JOLE		
Oct 1991 – Mar 1992	N. Ireland	OP DESCANT - construction		SSM WO2 John Peers, OC Maj Jamie Sage
29 Oct 1992 – May 1993	Bosnia-Herzegovina	Vitez, OP GRAPPLE 1	35 Engineer Regiment	SSM WO2 Tommy Henderson OC Maj Jamie Sage
June – November 1995	Bosnia	Ploce OP GRAPPLE SURGE	35 Engineer Regiment	To build a camp for 24 Air Mobile Brigade
1996	Falklands			
1998	Bosnia	OP PALATINE		9 Troop only



<b>Dates</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Deployment</b>	<b>Under Command</b>	<b>Sub-units – Remarks</b>
1998	Falklands			7 & 8 Troops only
1999	Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania	OP AGRICOLA OPCON	28 Engineer Regiment	
1 Dec 1999	Hameln	Gordon Bks	28 Engineer Regiment	Came under command 28 Engineer Regiment
Oct 2000 – Mar 2001	N. Ireland	Northern Ireland: OP DESCANT	28 Engineer Regiment	
2001	Oman	Ex Saif Sarea II		
2002 – 2003	N. Ireland	OP Descant / Roulement Engineer Squadron OP FRESCO Firefighters Strike	25 Engineer Regiment	
June – July 2003	Congo	OP CORAL	28 Engineer Regiment	
June – November 2003	Iraq	OP TELIC	33 EOD Regt	
May – Jul 2004	Afghanistan	OP TARROCK	28 Engineer Regiment	
Mar – Sep 2005	N. Ireland	OP DESCANT	28 Engineer Regiment	
Oct 2006 – Apr 2007	Afghanistan	OP Herrick 5	28 Engineer Regiment	
c2008	Hameln	Gordon Bks	28 Engineer Regiment	
Oct 2009 – Apr 2010	Afghanistan	Op Herrick 11	28 Engineer Regiment	
June 2013	Hameln	Disbanded		

## **Field Company in THE BOER WAR, By CAPTAIN R. JENKINS M.C. (LATE R.E.)**

During September 1899, Captain G. M. Kirkpatrick, who was commanding the Company in Malta, received orders to embark the unit for the South African War. It was mobilized as far as possible at Malta, but it had to be made up to strength from other units on the island. The Company embarked on a liner from Alexandria with orders to re-embark at Gibraltar. Unfortunately, the authorities would not allow this change of ship, which saw the Company steaming into Liverpool on a grey autumn day, dressed in their khaki drill, with helmets, wooden water-bottles and long sword bayonets. During the day they were followed by excited people, and shopkeepers refused to take their money. Bands turned out, the men received a great welcome, and at the music halls the sappers were asked on to the stage, where they received a tremendous ovation. The ship which took us to South Africa was the Pindari, manned by Lascars. On arrival on board it was thought that it would be a first-class voyage, for below was prepared a fine lunch for the men. Two batteries of Royal Horse Artillery accompanied the Company, together with some three hundred horses.

On leaving the Mersey, the reasonably fine weather changed and a heavy gale came up. The gunners and their horses took it very badly and some forty horses were lost overboard. The gunners were so ill that we were asked to help feed their horses. Because of the weather our pilot was unable to get off until our arrival at the Canary Islands. In our seven weeks' voyage, four quarters of fresh meat was the ration for the entire troopship. Four men daily received one pound of biscuits, salt beef and pork. The salt beef and pork cases were dated from the Crimean War, and had been stored at Woolwich at that time. Apart from this unappetizing ration, dried vegetables and a tot of lime juice were issued each day. Incidentally, when the meat casks were opened they had to be washed with sea water to remove some of the salt from the contents.

On Christmas Day each mess of fourteen men were issued with flour, currants and so on for making their own Christmas pudding. No pudding-cloths were available, so the sappers used the legs of their long pants into which they put a piece of tin to denote the Mess from whence it came!

There was a canteen on board, but it sold only brick dust, Soldier's Friend, powder, boot-laces, no food but plenty of mineral waters. On arrival, then, at Cape Town, no wonder the men made a rush for the nearest restaurants for a good meal. They certainly had hearty appetites and had to be rounded up for entraining en route for the front. Forty-five men were put in open cattle trucks, and it took three days to get to Neuport, Cape Colony, where the Boers were well over the border.

On arrival the Company went straight into trenches constructed by civilians.

From Cape Town to Pretoria the unit was employed as a Railway Company. The Boers in their retreat had destroyed every bridge, and Lord Roberts could not advance until the railways and bridges had been repaired and rebuilt. At one place 7,000 sleepers were used by the Company in repairing one bridge. Over the Modder River the Company constructed a very large bridge, and special baulks 90 feet long by 2 feet square were brought over for the purpose from Canada. These baulks were floated downstream and erected on the site of old footings.

Boer Commandos were raiding the railway very frequently at that time and one night at Leinsproot a Boer Commando surprised the Company and surrounded the train in which it was travelling. The unit lost twenty killed that night and many more were wounded. It was indeed a great blow and the raid had come as a complete surprise.

The Boers took about thirty prisoners, who were kept walking all the time. Because their captors lived from the land, rations given to the prisoners were very meagre, consisting mainly of hard maize and millet seeds. A great many prisoners died of starvation.

Later during the campaign, two sections of the Company were sent to Crete to join the International Force sent there to prevent the Turks from murdering their Armenian neighbours. The Turks were wont to cut open the stomachs of their victims, filling the gash with grapes. The unfortunate Armenians would then be tied upon a horse and sent home to teach others a lesson. Seven of these Turkish thugs were caught, and it was decided to hang them publicly. We were given the job of erecting the scaffold. Seven doors were placed on a staging about 30 feet high, under which a 3-inch naval rope was stretched to hold the doors. When the nooses had been placed and all was ready the rope was cut, and the bodies hung there for three days.

On the conclusion of the war in 1902 we embarked in South Africa for Portsmouth.

## 1868 – 1939

Along with two other units, the Company was raised in April 1868 in Madras as a Depot Company holding reinforcements for other units in India.

In 1885 it was renamed "K" Company and continued its Depot role.

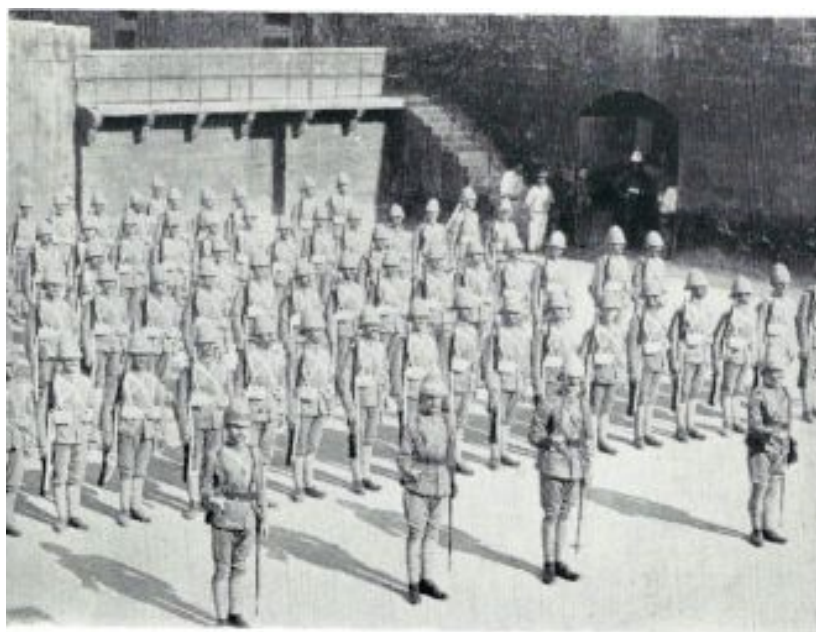
In 1889 it became a Fortress Company and was stationed at Malta, whence it sailed in 1899 to South Africa returning to England in 1902.

From 1902 until the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 the Company was stationed in Portsmouth district carrying out the normal duties of a Field Company. During the Great War it served in France and Belgium as an Army Troops Company.

The Company remained in France and Belgium until 1920 to assist with their civil infrastructure reconstruction.

In 1920 the Company was sent to Haifa where it was employed in the Sinai Desert on railway and pipeline construction.

In 1922 the Company moved down to Moascar, where it formed part of the Canal Brigade (Infantry Brigade). It had however an additional role; that of temporarily operating railways in Egypt in the event of a civil breakdown. For this reason it contained one section of railway tradesmen. Engine-drivers, stokers and other artisans trained for railway work. It was in fact employed to some extent in this railway role during the Palestinian troubles in 1936-7 when the Company was at Sarafand.



**The Company on Parade—Malta**

## Royal Engineers in the Second Anglo-Boer War, short version

11 October 1899 - 31 May 1902

It would be difficult to conceive of a campaign in which the work of the Engineers would be more arduous than it was in South Africa, or in which the difference between middling and excellent service on their part would be more acutely felt by those in command or by the body of the fighting troops. The corps is fortunate in that in no quarter, official or unofficial, has there been the slightest attempt to bestow on them anything but the heartiest commendations. The difficulties they had to contend with and overcame were appreciated by all the generals. It has often been remarked that the natural courage required to prevent men running away from a shower of shrapnel or a hail of rifle-bullets, where the men have the power of returning the storm even in diminished force, is a totally different quality from the trained, inculcated heroism which enables men to go out in the face of certain extreme danger to repair a telegraph line, examine a bit of railway, or build a bridge without the excitement afforded by the opportunity of returning fire. The Engineers had to do all these things and a hundred others. The splendid conduct of Major Irvine's pontoon company in "constructing well and rapidly, under fire", the bridges required on the Tugela, was said by General Buller "to deserve much praise"; and unofficial writers were wonder-struck at the cool, methodical work, flurry, haste, or anything slipshod being unseen. Every plank set in its place, every knot tied as if at a drill.

Apart from the tendering of lavish praise, the only remark civilian writers have ventured is that the army at first trusted too much to the Engineers. It may be so, but the fault vanished when the common-sense which flourishes on active service smothered the regulations, which rather get the upper hand in peace-time.

Any detailed account of the work of the Royal Engineers it is impossible to give, but it must not be forgotten that they were constantly in the thick of the fighting, as when half of the 37th company were on the shell-riven and bullet-swept summit of Spion Kop on 24th January, or as when the 7th company, with the Canadian Regiment, made the last grand advance at Paardeberg on the night of the 26th February.

It would perhaps be wrong not to recall Major Hunter Weston's achievement in piercing the enemy's line on the night before the occupation of Bloemfontein, and his successful cutting of the

railway several miles to the north of the town, whereby he secured many locomotives and trucks. This was by no means the only splendid feat of Major Hunter Weston.

In his despatch of 2nd April 1901 Lord Roberts notes that the period during which the advance from Bloemfontein to Pretoria, a distance of about three hundred miles, was made, was 3rd May to 11th June, and during that time there were repaired twenty-seven bridges and forty-one culverts, and ten miles of line were laid. This work was done either by the Engineers or by soldiers or native labour acting under Engineer officers or non-commissioned officers.

During the whole war the work on telegraph lines was very great and, owing to the guerrilla nature of the campaign, extremely hazardous. Many commendations earned by the Corps were got for members of it volunteering to go through districts thickly infested by bands of the enemy to repair a broken wire. Going out on trolleys to examine the railways and remove mines and obstructions under fire was a task which often fell to the Engineers, and sometimes met with a deserved mention.

The Army List of December 1900 shows the following units as in South Africa: The 5th to the 12th, the 17th, 20th, 23rd, 26th, 29th, 31st, 37th, 38th, **42<sup>nd</sup> deployed as a Railway Company**, 45th, and 47th companies; the 1st Division Telegraph Battalion; A and C Troops Bridging Battalion; Field Troop, 1st Field Park, and 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Balloon sections.

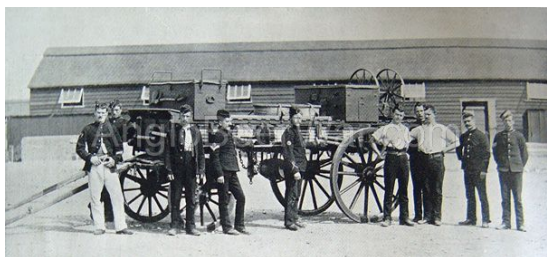
Two VC's were gained by the Corps. Corporal Kirkby was awarded the Cross for on 2nd June 1900, during a retirement after an attempt to cut the Delagoa line, the party being hotly pressed by very superior numbers, riding back for a dismounted man and bringing him behind a rise, it being the third occasion of his being mentioned for gallantry. By a memorandum in the Gazette of 19th April 1901 it was announced that Lieutenant R J T Digby-Jones, RE, along with Trooper Albrecht of the Imperial Light Horse, would have been recommended for the VC on account of their having during the attack on Waggon Hill, Ladysmith, on 6th January 1900, displayed conspicuous bravery and gallant conduct, but both these heroes had been killed.

Apart from honours bestowed on Major General Elliott-Wood, Colonel Rochefort-Boyd, Colonel Gorrington, Colonel Sandbach, Major Girouard, Major Hawkins, and other of the principal officers of the Corps, the mentions gained in the chief

	Officers	NCOs and men
General Buller - 30 March 1900		3 DCMs for pontoon at Munger's Drift  2 mentions for sandbags on bridge at Langerwachte
	14	9
General Buller - Final Despatch	16	8
Lord Roberts - 31 March 1900	10	5
Lord Roberts - 2 April 1901	7	
Lord Roberts - 4 September 1901	63	55
Lord Roberts - 1 March 1902	6	63

In Lord Roberts' despatch of 28th February 1900 as to Paardeberg the work of Colonel Kincaid and the 7th company Royal Engineers in the last rush forward was brought to notice. In Lord Kitchener's despatches, written during the war, there were mentioned approximately 11 officers and 30 non-commissioned officers and men, and in his final despatch 46 officers and 64 non-commissioned officers and men.

The Telegraph Battalion of the Royal Engineers has two divisions, of which the first was in South Africa. Ordinarily it was stationed at Aldershot, employed in purely military work, and constantly being exercised, while the other division was attached to the Postal Telegraph Service, and had charge of a large district in the South of England.

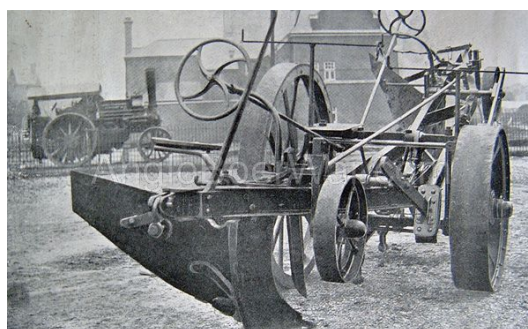


The first section comprised 16 staff sergeants and sergeants, 3 trumpeters, 18 corporals and second corporals, 4 artificers, 77 sappers, and 54 drivers, with 65 horses, but the staff had been expanded for work in the field. Each section of a telegraph division was supplied with twenty miles of line,

despatches are approximately as follows: By Sir George White, despatch of 2nd December 1899, 1 officer, 3 non-commissioned officers and men; despatch of 23rd March 1900, 8 officers and 32 non-commissioned officers and men for the siege.

part of it being air-line and part insulated cable. A two-horse cart carries the latter, and there were three six-horse waggons for the air-line, besides other vehicles for supplies, technical equipment, and baggage.

The military steam plough was quite a new engine of warfare, intended to dispense in part with manual labour. There are, of course, positions—many of them in the countries of South Africa—where such an implement could not be used; but abundant opportunities must occur for the employment of the strange apparatus.



The steam entrenching plough, drawn by a traction engine, will throw up a 4-ft. entrenchment for the protection of infantry, where the ground is level, at a great rate. The plough-share, or cutter,

by means of a thread movement, is inclined downwards at an angle into the soil, and the machine had worked at Aldershot without any difficulty.



The 45th (Fortress) Company of Royal Engineers was charged with the work of steam road transport in South Africa, and a part of the equipment is illustrated. The photograph was taken as the traction engine, with its train of waggons and trolleys, was passing through the Oxfordshire village of Littlemore. The village inn is the "Marlborough Head," and if the famous Duke, who fought so strenuously with the difficulties of transport in the great wars of his time, could have surveyed this steam apparatus, he would have been greatly astonished indeed. Steam transport had been tried practically in Natal with the greatest success, and should help to solve one of the principal difficulties of the commanders. The engine depicted was supplied by Messrs. Fowler, of Leeds, and is a 10 horse-power nominal—50 horse-power indicated—three-speed locomotive, which will draw a load of 50 tons over an ordinary road, and will carry a sufficiency of water for a run of from 20 to 25 miles. The three traction waggon's are calculated for 10 tons each, and the trolleys will carry twice as much. Altogether, the equipment seems very promising, further, performances will afford valuable information for future progress. Upon the heavy roads of the country, cut up by much traffic, and muddy after long rains, steam-traction was very helpful.

The art and science of military ballooning had made wonderful progress within the last dozen years [to 1900], and although the balloon depicted had been of the utmost service to Sir George White, it is quite possible that it represents a type destined to disappear. New forms of balloons, mostly cylindrical and seemingly fantastic in shape, had already been introduced and tested.



The balloon section at Ladysmith enabled the defenders to observe very closely what the assailants were doing, to discover their laagers, and sometimes to divine their purposes, and it is very credibly asserted that the Boers were greatly vexed by the balloon ascents. It is a notable fact that a balloon is a very difficult object indeed to destroy by gun or rifle fire, owing to elevated position and uncertainty of range. The ballooning section which accompanied Sir Redvers Buller also proved extremely valuable, and it played a particularly useful part during Sir Charles Warren's flanking movement, when the positions of the enemy were discovered and signalled to him. The headquarters of the Balloon Section of Royal Engineers was at Aldershot.

The destruction by the Boers of the iron girder bridge at Frere seriously impeded the advance of Sir Redvers Buller, and the construction of the substitute was a triumph of skill on the part of the Royal Engineers.



The wooden bridge they erected alongside that which was wrecked was connected at each end with the railway, and carried the line across the river. The old bridge had been broken in the middle, and the girder framework, precipitated into the hollow, now formed a broken V. While the building of the new bridge was going forward, immense quantities of stores were collected, and

a great camp grew up in the neighbourhood; and across this bridge the troops composing Sir Redvers Buller's force passed in their advance to the Tugela, with a vast train of military stores. Unfortunately, owing to the inadequacy of road transport, we had been somewhat too closely bound to the railway, and the flank movement of Sir Redvers Buller upon the Upper Tugela was really the first occasion on which any large body of troops had left the line.

The "A" and "C" Troops of the bridging battalion were taking part in the campaign in South Africa, and the former advanced with Sir Redvers Buller to Frere.



Pontoons had been sent forward early in the course of the relieving operations. They are seen in this picture upon the waggons ready for Sir Charles Warren's flanking movement upon the Upper Tugela, where he threw his force across the river at Trichardt's or Wagon Drift on January 17 and 18. With the utmost celerity the Royal Engineers had set to work, and a pontoon bridge, 85 yds. long, had been laid across the river. The stream was in flood at the time, and some of the pontoons were used for ferrying men across. The headquarters of the bridging battalion were at Aldershot, where work is continually going on, and the experience gained has proved of the very greatest service during the present war. Probably in few parts of the world could greater demands be made upon the Royal Engineers than in preparing for the crossing of the rapid and fluctuating rivers which intersect many parts of the present seat of war.

Officers of the 38th Field Company. The 38th Company has been well employed upon the line of communications, where the presence of the Engineers has been very necessary.



It is under command of Major A. W. Roper, who is represented in the middle of the group, with Captain Haggitt and Lieutenant Betty, while behind stand Second Lieutenants Winterbotham, Sankey, and Osborne, with Captain Hodgens, R.A.M.C. A field company upon active service is provided with a large equipment of tools, explosives, and other technical materials to enable it to undertake all necessary engineering operations, including the construction of field defences, entrenchments, such as were used for sapping the enemy's position at Paardeberg, making or destroying railways, roads, etc. A field company also carries with it a certain amount of bridging material to enable small streams and rivers to be crossed without the help of the pontooning troops. In an ordinary way, a field company is able to build a bridge 45-ft. long for the passage of all arms, and light bridging to the extent of 75-ft. for infantry. When field fortification had to be undertaken upon a large scale, the field companies of the sappers superintend the work, which was mainly executed by working parties supplied by the infantry. The Engineers, however, provided labour as well as necessary tools from their great equipment.

38th Field Company NCOs.



These men are typical of the non-commissioned officers among the sappers, who, without an exception, were highly capable men. The drivers were the only men enlisted for the Royal Engineers who did not know some trade. Many men entered as telegraphists, photographers, printers, lithographers, and cartographers and these went through a short pioneering course. The drivers were trained at the depot at Aldershot and the sappers at Chatham, where they learnt both infantry and pioneer duties, and during the summer every depot company passes through a course in camp duties, pontooning, entrenching, etc., at the camp at Wouldham, near Chatham. Other men who were selected for submarine mining were passed, after going through their infantry drill, to the mining school. The sappers, who were trained at the depot at Chatham, after being examined, were transferred to the different Engineer formations, where they received higher pay.

### 47th (Fortress) Company Inspection

At the beginning of 1900 the Corps of Royal Engineers, which had been much in the public mind during the operations in South Africa, consisted of forty-five companies, independently of the depot companies, the telegraph and bridging battalions, and certain additional detachments.



The 47th Company had been newly formed, and in this illustration Major-General Fraser, commanding the Thames District, is seen inspecting it, and the company had since left for the Cape. An enormous amount of work had fallen to the Engineers, who had been continuously employed in making entrenchments for guns, and field redoubts and shelter trenches, in addition to much work connected with arrangements for camping and supplying the troops. They had laid pontoons and built bridges, repaired railways and made roads, and it was their duty to place and fire the charges which destroyed "Long Tom" and other Boer guns in the neighbourhood of Ladysmith. Indeed the sappers had been ubiquitous, and without their good work the operations could not have gone on.

### 42nd (Fortress) Company

This company had been well employed with the column of General Clements. There was a great deal of work for the Engineers to do at Colesberg and Norval's Pont, and the skill with which the bridging operations were conducted very greatly facilitated the advance of the column into the Orange State. Although, as their name indicates, the work of the Fortress companies of the "scientific corps" lies mainly in the construction, defence, and attack of fortified positions, officers and men are thoroughly trained in the construction of floating bridges, in demolitions, and in a great deal of the practical work required of Engineers in the field. The training of the Fortress companies embraces in fact the building of suspension and trestle bridges, and they are well able to take their part in field operations in addition to their work in relation to fortifications. In a certain sense the name given to them may be regarded as misleading, for they are not wholly devoted to fortress war, and had shown their value in many directions in the course of the war.

### Preparing to leave for the Cape



The departure of Royal Engineers entails a great labour upon the members of the corps. Here we see forage and ammunition trucks, brought down by the railway to the docks, being lightened by the removal of some of their contents to enable them to be hoisted aboard the transport. It will give some idea of the immense quantity of stores and appliances required for the work of the Royal Engineers if we say that a field company is provided with four two-horse carts for entrenching tools, one cart with a single horse for medical equipment, a field smithy, and two pontoon waggons with four horses each, besides two carts for stores and baggage, and one cart for provisions, each of these having two horses. There are also five pack-horses for carrying entrenching tools. The total supply usually consists of in shovels, 71 pickaxes, 9 spades, 65 various axes, 43 bill-hooks, 20 saws, 420-lb. of gun-cotton, 1,000 sandbags, and 10 crowbars, besides trestles and pontooning materials.

### Royal Engineers supplying water to the camp at Spearman's Hill.



The supply of good water to the troops is a matter of the highest importance, and the practical work rests with the Royal Engineers. When Sir Redvers Buller's camp was pitched at Spearman's Hill, the supply was very bad, but the sappers, as is their custom, were equal to the occasion, and they are seen in the picture drawing water from an artesian well.



### Royal Engineers' Balloon at Zwarts Kop.



It will be remembered that the sappers' balloons were of the utmost service to Sir Redvers Buller's column, and that it was by the balloon that the trap was discovered which the Boers had prepared when the attack was made upon Vaal Krantz. The balloon here represented was photographed when ready for an ascent near Potgieter's Drift. A ballooning section of Engineers carries its balloons upon one cart, but has four other carts for gas-tubes and various gear, each drawn by four horses, in addition to two baggage and store carts. The gas is stored in a compressed state, the equipment is complete, and the winding apparatus is very strong and efficient. The training of Royal Engineers in ballooning work takes place at Aldershot, where the section had its headquarters, with a school of aerial navigation provided with an efficient and well-trained staff. Within recent years ballooning had made great progress in the British Army, and the experience gained in the present war would prove extremely valuable.

### 11th Field Company, RE.



These excellent men, who are represented with three or their officers, were now engaged in the operations of Lord Roberts's force, and had done excellent service during the advance to Bloemfontein. From what has been said in relation to the previous pictures it will be seen that the sappers have a highly important duty before them. In the present war they had not, it is true,

had to repair wharves or landing-stages wrecked by an enemy driven from his coasts, but they had a great deal to do in restoring damaged railways and rolling-stock and in working the railway material. They had repaired and constructed many telegraph lines, and made good many bridges and roads. They enabled the Modder and the Tugela to be crossed, and rendered valuable assistance in preparing field fortifications. They made adequate provision for many camps, and had taken efficient measures in regard to water supply and sanitation. Upon them, indeed, had devolved a great deal of work upon which the success of the military operations had largely depended, and the excellent manner in which their operations had been conducted is ample testimony to the admirable training which officers and men received. In addition to their practical duties, the Engineers had charge of a vast quantity of stores, and it is the work of a great organiser to see that they were distributed and used well.

### A Pontoon Bridge across the Tugela.

The Engineers had constantly been employed about Ladysmith and on the Tugela, and it was they who provided the practical means for the relief of the place. They threw a long pontoon bridge across the river at Trichardt's Drift when Sir Charles Warren crossed and the attack on Spion Kop was made. They made another pontoon for the attack on Vaal Krantz, and still another was laid down when Sir Redvers Buller had driven the Boers out of Colenso, and, when the course was obstructed and the Inniskilling Fusiliers lost so terribly, they built a fresh pontoon with the utmost celerity.



As has been explained, every field company can undertake a certain amount of bridging work, but the bridging battalion, to which nothing in the bridging way is impossible, forms a distinct section of the force, and had its headquarters at Aldershot, where the work of practical training goes on regularly, and where every facility for the exercise of bridge-building and pontooning exists.

Pontoons of the RE ready for embarkation.



The character of the pontoons is well seen in this picture, as they were brought up on waggons ready to be put on board a transport. The material is very heavy and extremely bulky, and large numbers of draught animals are required to bring it to the point where it has to be used. A single pontoon company had, in fact, not less than twenty waggons, each with six horses. Sixteen of these waggons carry one pontoon each, while the other four transport the trestles and other pontooning material. This supply will enable a bridge to be built 100 yards long, and capable of being used by all arms of the service. There are additional vehicles also for various purposes — two carts for medical equipment and forage, a field smithy, two waggons for equipment, and three for baggage stores and supplies. Most of these were drawn by four horses. A great quantity of pontooning material was sent to the front in Natal early in the course of the war, and had been used with the utmost skill.

17th Field Company at Durban. We have here a picture of a company of Royal Engineers, which has done excellent service with Sir Redvers Buller, just landed from the transport at Durban.



It was engaged on the Tugela, and suffered in conducting its operations under fire. Nowhere in South Africa had the Engineers done better service than in the operations in and about Ladysmith. They had been continually employed in assisting the gunners by preparing the positions to be taken up, and in the digging of shelter trenches, besides all the work which had fallen to them at the camps. At Frere they built a bridge alongside that which the Boers had so thoroughly wrecked, and they found a great deal

of work in repairing the railway line. In the picture the men are seen drawn up and wearing the khaki which is universal in South Africa. At home their uniform consists of red tunics, or serge frocks in undress and marching order, with collar and facings of blue, braided with yellow, dark blue trousers with red stripes, and infantry helmets.

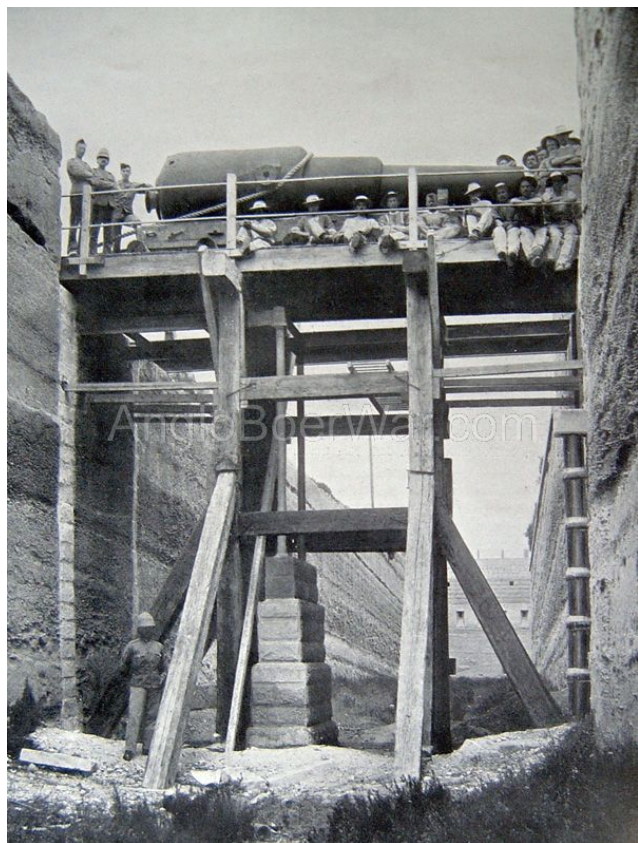
Royal Engineers of the Ordnance Survey.



These men belong to a party which went out in charge of Captain Close, RE. They were picked for the work of reconnaissance, and having come from the Ordnance Survey Office they were thoroughly acquainted with surveying and cartography; The Ordnance Survey of the United Kingdom, commenced in 1746, had been a most important duty undertaken by the corps of Royal Engineers, and one of great value to the country at large. The work had developed marvellously in quality and excellence, and had been the means of training a large body of most efficient men in independent duties, thus developing in them self-reliance and highly important professional qualifications.

The men depicted were chosen expressly because of their competence, and were thoroughly equipped and capable. Examination of positions, and a grasp of the essentials constituting their military value, are most important for Royal Engineers in the field.

## Royal Engineers Bridging a Chasm



This striking picture, illustrating the kind of work which is required in South Africa when heavy weights have to be carried across deep river courses, was constructed by a Fortress Company in Malta, (42 were a Fortress Company in Malta at the time and it is possible that this is a photo of them), and shows a bridge which was constructed over a gap 35-ft. deep to admit the passage of a 12.5 in RML gun weighing 38 tons upon a sleigh weighing 2 tons.

It is only one example of the kind of bridging work which is executed by the Royal Engineers, and it is especially interesting to know that this particular bridge was constructed by a Fortress company, thus showing that the Fortress Engineers are not by any means confined merely to sapping work.

It is the characteristic of many South African sluits and spruits that they lie in deeply-worn beds analogous to the chasm depicted, and calling for work of the same character as the sturdy bridge in the illustration. Bridge-builders in South' Africa have to take account of the fact that slender streams may soon become roaring torrents.

### FIRING PRACTICE FOR ENGINEER RECRUITS DURING THE VICTORIAN ERA UNTIL THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Victoria was Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland from 20 June 1837 until her death on the 22 January 1901. From 1 May 1876, she had the additional title of Empress of India.

The engineer recruits, were allowed 100 rounds of ammunition each for their course of target practice and fire practices 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 17, 19, 21, 23, and 26 of the infantry recruits' course, the remainder of the ammunition (9 rounds) being disposed of as may be found best by the instructor.

Number of Practice	Mode of Firing	Target	Distance in Yards	Number of Rounds	Position of Firing
1	Individual Firing	2	200	7	Lying
2	Individual Firing	2	200	7	Kneeling
3	Individual Firing	2	200	7	Standing
7	Individual Firing	2	300	7	Lying
8	Individual Firing	2	300	7	Kneeling
10	Individual Firing	2	400	7	Lying
12	Individual Firing	1	500	7	Lying
14	Individual Firing	1	600	7	Lying
17	Rapid Individual	2	200	7	Kneeling
19	Rapid Individual	1	500	7	Lying
21	Deliberate Volleys	Sectional	300	7	Front Rank Kneeling
23	Rapid	Sectional	300	7	Single Rank Kneeling
26	Rapid Volleys	Sectional	300	7	Front Rank Kneeling

### DESCRIPTION OF TARGETS

Target No.	Target Height	Target Width	Bull's Eye	Circle
1	6 ft.	8 ft.	3 ft.	5 ft.
2	6 ft.	6 ft.	2 ft.	4 ft.

## BOER WAR impact on the Royal Engineers

During early 1900, practically the whole of the Royal Engineer Field Troops had been shipped out to South Africa for the second Boer War, leaving none available for other wars, if necessary. Authority was therefore given by The Marquess of Lansdowne, Secretary of State for War, to raise a large number of additional units. The chart below shows that the size of the Army (430,000) during the second Boer War was with the exception of the two World Wars at its largest in history.

This would indicate that both the military and politicians had learnt their lessons from the first Boer War (16 December 1880 until 23 March 1881) which was lost. The total strength of the Army during that war was only 124,000.

Twenty Three (23) Royal Engineer Units were raised:

2 Pontoon Troops	C & D
8 Field Companies	46 <sup>th</sup> , 54 <sup>th</sup> , 55 <sup>th</sup> , 56 <sup>th</sup> , 57 <sup>th</sup> , 58 <sup>th</sup> , 59 <sup>th</sup> and 60 <sup>th</sup> Fd Companies
2 Field Park Companies	3 <sup>rd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup>
4 Balloon Sections	
5 Fortress Companies	By the outbreak of WW1 there were 26 coastal defence Fortress Companies (of which 15 were overseas)
1 Railway Company	53 <sup>rd</sup>
1 Telegraph Division	3 <sup>rd</sup>

### British Army Regulars in numbers



\*including volunteers \*\*including the women of the ATS

Source: National Army Museum and MoD

## World War 1

As with previous researchers I have not been able to find anything on this part of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company history, other than; it was deployed as a Field Company in 1914 from the Portsmouth area to France and Belgium.

The Company came under command Army Troops and after the war was retained in France and Belgium until 1920 to help with the civil infrastructure reconstruction. Army Troops were mainly used for building bridges and maintaining roads to the rear to maintain logistical routes. These Army Troops could be called on to do any Field Company work or if necessary the work of any of the other Royal Engineers units.

From the next page a description is given of the Royal Engineers units serving during the First World War which identifies the sort of work that the 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company could have been called on to do or assist with.

In 1920 the Company then moved to Haifa and Mesopotamia where it deployed as a Railway Company.

**Haifa** is a northern Israeli port city built in tiers extending from the Mediterranean up the north slope of Mount Carmel. The city's most iconic sites are the immaculately landscaped terraces of the Bahá'í Gardens and, at their heart, the gold-domed Shrine of the Báb. At the foot of the gardens lies the German Colony, with shops, galleries and restaurants in 19th-century buildings.



**Mesopotamia** is a name for the area of the Tigris–Euphrates river system, roughly corresponding to modern-day Iraq, Syria and Kuwait, including regions along the Turkish–Syrian and Iran–Iraq borders.



## Royal Engineers strength World War 1

On 1 August 1914, the RE consisted of 1,056 officers and 10,394 men of the regular army and Special Reserve, plus another 513 and 13,127 respectively serving with the RE of the Territorial Force.

1,569 Officers and 23,521 men with a total manpower of 25,090.

By the same date in 1917, it had grown to a total manpower of 295,668. In other words, it was more than twelve times bigger than the peacetime establishment.

## Other units of the Corps of Royal Engineers in the First World War

### Royal Engineers Depots and Training locations

RE Unit or Depot	Depot location	Remarks
(1st) Reserve Battalion and Depot Battalion	Chatham	Organised on mobilisation in August 1914 but essentially similar to what had already existed at Chatham. Reserve Battalion (A to F Companies) trained new recruits. Depot Battalion (G, L and M Companies) received men returned from Expeditionary Force and also men enlisted for Tunnelling Companies, Special Companies and other specialist units
Billeting Battalion, later called 2nd Reserve Battalion	Chatham, later moved to Chattenden	Formed when original Reserve Battalion could no longer cope with numbers of recruits
Provisional Companies	Chatham	Formed when original Depot Battalion could no longer cope with numbers of recruits. Two Groups of Provisional Companies were formed: No 1 included G, L and M Companies and a new Provisional Bn; No 2 was made up of four new Provisional Bns. Additional J and Q Companies were added to No 1 in early 1918
Dismounted Training Centre. Formed 3rd Reserve Battalion in Jan 1918	Newark	Formed to help cope with flow of recruits into New Army units
Dismounted Training Centre. Formed 4th Reserve Battalion in Jan 1918	Deganwy	Formed to help cope with flow of recruits into New Army units
5th Reserve Battalion	Christchurch (Bournemouth)	Formed in Jan 1918 from what had been the reserve Field Companies grouped in Southern Command. Abolished in October 1918 to make room for a new Bridging Training Centre
6th Reserve Battalion	Irvine	Formed in Jan 1918 from what had been the reserve Field Companies grouped in Scottish Command
Royal Monmouth Reserve Battalion	Monmouth	
Royal Anglesey Reserve Battalion	Beaumaris	
Mounted Training Depot	Aldershot	
Special Brigade Depot	Withnoe (Devonport)	Originally called Special Brigade Reserve Company
Signal Service Training Centre	Woburn	Also established a number of other sites in the vicinity. HQ moved to Bedford in October 1917
Signal Service	Bedford "A"	Recruit Depot
Signal Service	Bedford "B"	Signalmen and Linesmen Depot
Signal Service	Bedford "C"	Operators Depot
Signal Service	Biggleswade	Air and Permanent Line Depot
Signal Service	Haynes Park	Riding, Driving, Saddlers etc Depot
Signal Service	Haynes Park	Switchboard Operators Depot
Signal Service	Haynes Park	Cadet Battalion
Signal Service	Hitchin	Draft depot
Signal Service Wireless Training Centre	Worcester	Moved to Fenny Stratford in August 1917
Signal Service Depot	Dunstable	Moved to Wellingborough in March 1918
Army Signal School	Dunstable	Army-wide centre for training signals instructors, under command of Signal Service Training Centre HQ, formed March 1918

Source: Work of the RE in the European War 1914-19. "The organization and expansion of the Corps"

### **The Fortress Companies of the Royal Engineers**

On 1 August 1914 there were 11 Fortress Companies at home and 15 overseas, all on coastal defence duties. Some were entirely for Electric Light (that is, searchlight) duty; others also had Works responsibilities. On mobilisation, men of the Territorial RE took over the home stations, releasing men for duty with the BEF – although not all regulars were withdrawn right away but were released gradually, their places being filled by men who were unfit for overseas service. Territorial troops also moved out to take over some of the overseas stations.

In August 1918, a new establishment was implemented, reorganising into Fortress Companies and Fortress Works Companies. At the same time the Tyne and London Electrical Engineers Companies became the parent units for all coast defence and anti-aircraft Electric Light units and the depots that trained men for them.

### **The Special Companies of the Royal Engineers (poison gas)**

No Special Companies existed in 1914. They were a war time invention. The Great War was the first in which chemical weapons were deployed. There was great moral shock and outrage at the first use of Chlorine, released by the Germans against defenceless French troops in the Ypres Salient. The Special Companies of the Royal Engineers were formed to develop the British response. By 1918, gas was used both offensively and defensively, delivered by a range of sophisticated techniques.

### **The first use of poison gas, 22 April 1915**

A bulletin issued by the French Tenth Army on 30 March 1915 noted that the German XV Corps in the neighbourhood of Zillebeke (near Ypres) had installed iron cylinders containing an asphyxiating gas into their front-line trenches. A German prisoner taken near Langemarck on 14 April told of a forthcoming gas attack on the French units in that sector, arranged for noon on 13 April but delayed while waiting for a favourable wind. The man carried a small sack filled with cotton waste, which would be dipped in some chemical solution to counteract the effect of the gas. A Belgian agent reported much the same thing. A reconnaissance flight by No 6 Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps reported nothing unusual in the German positions. Further information from Belgian sources on 16 April 1915 reported the manufacture in Ghent of 20,000 face masks.

Despite these warning signs, no specific defensive steps were taken: the concept of large concentrations of a poison gas was unfamiliar, and barely believable from a practical or moral viewpoint. It was specifically banned by the Hague Convention of 1907.

The Germans attacked using a cloud of Chlorine gas, a bluish-white mist rolling forward on the wind, on 22 April 1915 near Langemarck. The subsequent fighting, with both sides rushing reinforcement into the area, developed as the Second Battle of Ypres.

Chlorine has a powerful irritant action on the lungs and mucous membranes; prolonged exposure is fatal. Men who stayed in position, especially on the firestep of the trenches, suffered least as the cloud rolled past them. Terrified men who ran with it, and the wounded lying on the ground or in trench bottoms, got the worst exposure. The Germans released 180 tonnes of gas, in a flow which lasted for 5 minutes.

### **French and British reaction**

Allied reaction was one of outrage and much propaganda capital was made of the German use of gas, but by mid-May 1915, after gas had been used again in the Ypres Salient on several more occasions, both French and British defences were already in place. The first batch of gas helmets (flannel bags with talc eye-pieces), enough to issue 16 to each infantry battalion, were provided for machine-gunners. Men already knew by then that a piece of gauze or cotton wadding, soaked in urine, provided a crude protection. Vermoral sprayers were issued, to neutralise any gas that hung in the trenches. With modification, these measures carried on throughout the war; 'gas gongs' (usually an empty shell-case) were located in most front-line trenches as an immediate signal of any presence of gas to unwary troops.

### **The first Special Companies are formed**

As early as 3 May 1915 the British Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, authorised the preparation of measures to retaliate against the German use of poison gas. Experimental research work was carried out at Porton, and a laboratory established at Helfaut, near St Omer in France. The Kestner-Kellner Alkali Company, being the only firm in Britain capable of manufacturing Chlorine gases in quantity, supervised trials with the final large-scale one taking place at Runcorn on 4 June. The method – as used by the Germans – was to form a continuous cloud by discharging compressed gas from cylinders to the atmosphere, and allowing the wind to move it over the enemy positions.

Special Companies of technically skilled men, under Major C.H. Foulkes of the Royal Engineers, were formed with a Depot at Helfaut, to deal with the new weapon. Nos 186 and 187 Special Companies were formed first, in July 1915, followed by 188 and 189 Companies in August. All of the men were given the rank of Chemist Corporal. On 4 September 1915 the first two Companies, totalling 34 Sections of 28 men, were assigned to First Army for forthcoming operations.

### **The British decide to use gas in the attack at Loos, 25 September 1915**

The British army employed poison gas for the first time in the opening barrage for the Battle of Loos, principally to overcome a shortage of artillery. All ranks were issued with the original pattern gas helmets, but the battle and weather conditions at Loos proved them to be a severe hindrance (the eye-pieces prohibited vision and movement; rain caused chemicals in the fabric to run out and irritate the eyes, and breathing was difficult). Many men chose to discard the helmet.

### **Both sides develop gas as an offensive weapon**

Significant advances in the production of gas were made after Loos by the Chemical Department of the Ministry of Munitions. Carbonyl Chloride – or Phosgene – had already been identified as a suitable cloud gas. It was similar to Chlorine yet could be inhaled for a considerable time without being noticed, only to produce serious or fatal inflammation of the lungs. (The Germans were the first to release Phosgene, in an attack at Ypres on 19 December 1915). The Allies decided to employ a Phosgene-Chlorine mixture, codenaming it 'White Star'.

In June 1915, British Commander-in-Chief Sir John French requested that 10% of all 4.5-inch, 60-pounder and 12-inch shell production should contain gas, in response to increased German use of lacrymatory (tear) gas shells. The first trial SK (South Kensington, codename for Ethyl Iodoacetate) shells arrived in September 1915, but it was not until April 1916 that 10,000 rounds had arrived, giving a small battlefield supply. By the end of 1916, only 160,000 rounds had been delivered and it was not until large quantities of Phosgene shell became available in 1917 that the Army was adequately equipped.

In the 1916 Battles of the Somme, the British army released 1,120 tons of gas, mostly White Star, in 98 separate attacks. Very little gas shell was used, all of which was fired by French artillery.

### **Defensive measures are also developed**

The P (Phenate) gas helmet with glass eyepieces was introduced in November 1915. It did not protect adequately against Phosgene, and was replaced by the PH (Phenate-Hexamine) helmet from January 1916. From August 1916, the PH was replaced by the small box respirator, which although an unwieldy design gave protection against the different gases in use.

The Special Brigade is formed

Despite the limited results achieved by the cloud gas discharge at Loos, it was believed sufficiently successful to warrant further development. One of the first acts of Sir Douglas Haig on his appointment as Commander-in-Chief was to request that the War Office expand the four Special Companies of the RE into a more substantial force, viz.

- Four Special Battalions, each of four Companies, to handle gas discharge from cylinders and smoke from candles;



- Four Special Companies to handle gas shells fired from 4-inch Stokes mortars. Each Company to have 48 such weapons;
  - Four Special Sections to handle flame projectors (throwers);
  - Plus, a Headquarters and Depot, making in all an establishment of 208 officers and 5306 men.
- This request was approved and the Brigade built up by adding volunteers from units already in France to the four original Companies. Later, drafts from England would join. The force was designated the Special Brigade. It was placed under the command of Col. C. Foulkes, RE, who was appointed Assistant Director of Gas Services; he reported to Brigadier-General H. Thuillier, RE, Director of Gas Services. Lt-Col. S. Cummins, RAMC acted as Director of Anti-Gas Measures.

By the end of May 1916, No 1 Special Battalion and No 2 (less a Company) were allocated to Fourth Army; No 3 (less a Company) to Second Army; No 4 (also less a Company) to Third Army. No 4A Battalion was provisionally formed from the three detached Companies, and was attached to First Army. No 5 Battalion was the Stokes mortar unit, and had 3 Companies attached to Fourth Army and 1 to Third Army. The Flame Projector Sections arrived in France 26 June 1916. The principal base in France was established at Helfaut.

### **Tunnelling Companies of the Royal Engineers (underground warfare)**

The war on the Western Front bogged down into siege conditions by November 1914. Both sides faced the need to break through the enemy's defensive entrenched positions. It was not long before an ancient art was remembered and used most effectively: mining under the enemy lines, placing explosives and blowing them up. In some areas, both sides mined and counter-mined intensively. For the infantry above ground, the wait for underground explosions was nerve-wracking indeed; for the men underground, hard toil often came accompanied by sudden death.

### **The first use of underground mine warfare**

The pre-war British army had no specific organisation for carrying out sapping, mining and tunnelling operations, although most men of the Royal Engineers received some training in the subject. Digging beneath an enemy position with the object of destroying it is essentially an act of siege warfare, and military planning did not believe that this was a serious possibility. However, by the end of 1914 it was clear that the entrenched positions of the Western Front were akin to siege conditions.

On 20 December 1914 ten small mines – each subsequently discovered to have been 50kg of explosive, driven under the British positions from saps in the German front-line system – were blown at Givenchy. An infantry attack followed, and over 800 men of the Indian Corps were lost. By January 1915, it was evident that the Germans were beginning to mine on a definite system.

### **British response**

On 3 December 1914 the commanding officer of IV Corps, Sir Henry Rawlinson, requested the establishment of a special battalion to assist with mining duties. On 28 December, in the tense time following the first German mine attacks, Major John Norton Griffiths – a larger than life character, formerly an MP and an officer of the 2nd King Edward's Horse – suggested the hiring of 'clay kickers', men with a particular skill who had been employed in mining for the London Underground. Meanwhile the army was ordered to proceed with offensive mining operations using any suitable personnel they could find from within the ranks. These men were formed into Brigade Mining Sections. On 17 February 1915 the first British mine was blown at Hill 60 by RE troops of 28th Division.

### **The first Tunnelling Companies are formed**

A decision was taken in February 1915 to form eight Tunnelling Companies, made up of men drawn from the ranks, mixed with drafts of men specially recruited for this kind of work. This has been described as the quickest intentional act in the war: men who were working underground as civilians in the UK on 17 February were underground at Givenchy only four days later, such was the urgency of needing countermeasures against the aggressive German actions. Another twelve Companies were eventually formed in 1915, and one further one in 1916. A Canadian Tunnelling Company was formed in France and

two more arrived from home, by March 1916. Three Australian and one New Zealand Tunnelling Companies arrived on the Western Front by May 1916. All of these units were engaged on underground work including the digging of subways, cable trenches, saps, chambers (for such things as signals and medical services), as well as offensive or defensive mining. A Mine Rescue School was formed in Armentieres in 1915.

### **Underground warfare develops**

Once both sides had embarked on mining operations, there was a determined struggle for tactical superiority in those areas where conditions were favourable. At Hill 60, The Bluff, St Eloi, Aubers Ridge, Hooge, Givenchy and Cuinchy, where the front lines were relatively close together and the geology suitable for tunnelling, the mining companies sought ways to not only drive mines for destroying enemy positions, but developed measures of detection of the enemy mine systems. When detected, an enemy mine would be immediately destroyed by the explosion of a camouflet, often at the cost of severe damage to one's own system. There were many underground encounters, as a tunnelling team, breaking into an enemy position, met the enemy underground. Sometimes these encounters included fighting in the tunnels and chambers.

The blowing of mines below enemy front-line positions became a regular feature of local actions. Infantry tactics developed that would enable the rushing and capture of the crater formed by the explosions. The craters were often themselves a dominant ground feature, as the lip of earth thrown up was usually higher than the ground in the area, giving possible observation over the enemy. Crater fighting became a highly dangerous and unpleasant feature of many actions in 1915 and early 1916.

Mining in support of larger infantry offensives was also adopted, with increasing numbers of mines of increasing size being used in the first minutes of the major British attacks at Aubers Ridge (May 1915), Loos (September 1915) and the Somme (July 1916). Gradually, the British tunnellers gained ascendancy.

### **Craters – legacy of mine warfare**



*Some impression of the scale of the Lochnagar Crater, blown on 1 July 1916 at La Boisselle on the Somme, can be made by comparing the crater slope and depth to the tiny figures of people on the lip.*

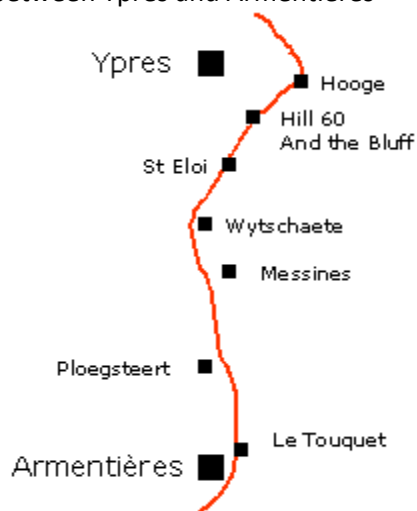


*The aim was to destroy large areas of enemy trenches and to disorientate the defenders. Mining warfare reached its zenith in June 1917, when 19 huge British mines blew under the Messines Ridge. The Messines craters still exist and are now deep pools. This is Kruisstraat numbers 1 and 4 mines. Tunnellers of the Royal Engineers had dug from 1500 feet from behind the British line to reach this strong point under the enemy trenches. 49500 pounds of explosive, mostly ammonal, buried 57 feet below the surface, blew at 3.20am on 7 June 1917.*

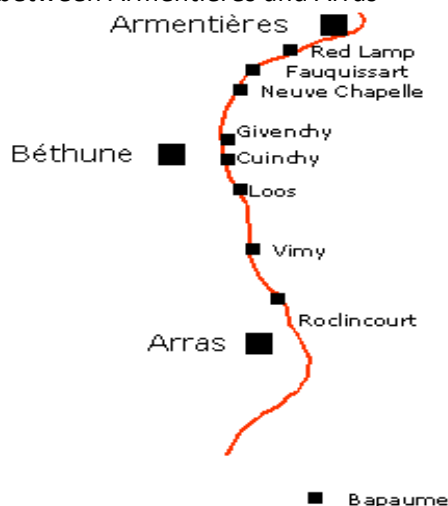
After the immense and successful demonstration at Messines of the superiority that the Tunnelling Companies had achieved, there was relatively little mining activity. This was largely due to the return to a more fluid war of movement in which siege methods became irrelevant. The tunnelling troops were more often engaged in construction work, and in creating underground subways for infantry to shelter in and to reach the front lines without molestation. In the crises of Spring 1918, they were often called upon to act as emergency infantry. When the tables turned and the Allies began to advance in late July 1918, they worked on making safe the many towns, villages and facilities they captured, including the very dangerous work of rendering harmless the many explosive devices that had been left behind.

### Principal areas of mining activity in France and Flanders

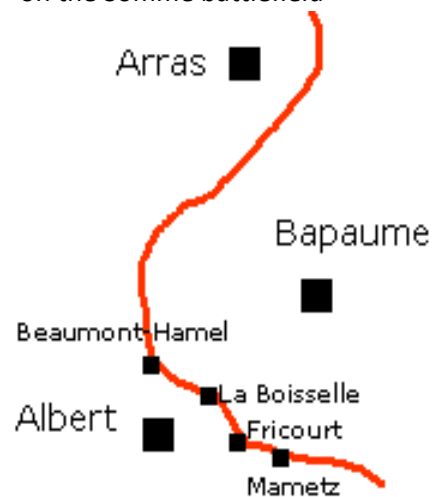
Northern sectors:  
between Ypres and Armentieres



Central sectors:  
between Armentieres and Arras



Southern sectors:  
on the Somme battlefield



## The Field Survey Companies



**A group photo of the men of the 6th Field Survey Company RE**

### The Field Survey at the start of the war

On 1 August 1914 there were three Field Survey Companies, the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> all at home, their troops being employed on work for the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries. On mobilisation, two were split up and the men sent to coastal units.

### The developing role of the Field Survey

Especially once the war in France had ceased to be one of movement and the deadlock of entrenched positions had begun, the artillery lost most of its ability to fire at targets that could be directly observed. Enemy artillery and other positions were out of sight, requiring indirect firing. The ability to know very accurately where your own position was, where the enemy was and the general lie of the ground became of increasing importance. Surveying the ground, creating maps and identifying the position of the enemy even when he could not be seen became the job of a new type of Field Survey Company.

Four companies were formed in France in March 1916 and were organised as RE units by July, although a fixed establishment was not defined until February 1917. They each comprised a Headquarters, Topographical section, Map section, Observation section and Sound-ranging section. Some of the various sections already existed and were absorbed into the new companies. The Army Printing Sections were also added into the Field Survey Companies later on, principally to organise production of the tens of thousands of maps that needed to be issued. Three more Companies were also formed and moved to other theatres.

Company	Location in 1918
1st Field Survey Company	Based in France.
3rd Field Survey Company	Based in France.
4th Field Survey Company	Based in France.
5th Field Survey Company	Based in France.
Field Survey Depot	Based in France. It was located at Montreuil but moved to Campignelles-les-Grandes in the winter of 1917/18.
6th Field Survey Company	Based in Italy.
7th Field Survey Company	Based in Egypt.
8th Field Survey Company	Based in Salonika.

### Reorganisation as the Field Survey grows and matures

In May 1918, the Companies in France were reorganised into Field Survey Battalions, comprising a Headquarters (this including the surveying and printing sections), two Artillery Sections (incorporating the sound-ranging and observation sections) and a Corps Topographical Section. There was one each for the five British Armies. For tactical purposes they were placed under the General Officer Commanding Royal Artillery in each Army. Three additional Sound-ranging Sections were also created for other theatres.

Field Survey Battalions	Structure in 1918
1st Field Survey Battalion	In First Army. Comprised "H" – "L" – "P" – "T" – "Y" & "Z" Sound Ranging Sections and Nos 4, 10, 11, 18 and 21 Observation Groups.
2nd Field Survey Battalion	In Fifth Army. Comprised "DD" – "J" & "U" Sound Ranging Sections and Nos 5, 8, 9 and 27 Observation Groups
3rd Field Survey Battalion	In Third Army. Comprised "C" – "CC" – "D" & "F" Sound Ranging Sections and Nos 15, 16, 17, 19 and 20 Observation Groups
4th Field Survey Battalion	In Second Army. Comprised "BB" – "GG" – "I" – "M" – "S" & "W" Sound Ranging Sections and Nos 1, 3, 6, 7, 12 and 23 Observation Groups
5th Field Survey Battalion	In Fourth Army. Comprised "A" – "B" – "G" – "K" – "O" & "R" Sound Ranging Sections and Nos 2, 13, 14 and 24 Observation Groups
Depot Field Survey Battalion	Based in France.

### Artisan Works Companies of the Royal Engineers

The Royal Engineers' Artisan Works Companies were made up of skilled men from a variety of trades and were used for a wide range of work, initially hut construction and road making, in the lines of rear communication.

The information below comes from the history of the Directorate of Works (National Archives WO161/2) unless stated. Locations given in each case are those of Company Headquarters.



**Watercolour "view of a row of Nissen huts set in a sunlit landscape of grassy lawns, fruit trees, and plants in large barrel pots.**

**By Beatrice Lithiby OBE.**

**In the foreground, three young women in khaki uniforms relax on the grass"**

**The huts would be typical of work of an Artisan Works Company and are apparently at Dieppe.**

### Four original companies formed

- 51st Artisan Works Company: August 1916 and 1917: Le Havre, then to Marseilles
- 52nd Artisan Works Company: December 1916 and thereafter Boulogne
- 58th Artisan Works Company: January 1917 and thereafter Calais

- 60th Artisan Works Company: April 1917 Rouen; and thereafter Abancourt. A detachment was at Etaples, later Boulogne and Dieppe.

### **Expansion June 1917**

- *1501st Artisan Works Company* June and thereafter: Boulogne. Later renamed as 922nd Area Employment Company and later 243rd Artisan Works Company (below)
- *1502nd Artisan Works Company* June 1917 and thereafter: Calais
- *1503rd Artisan Works Company* June 1917 and thereafter: Ardres
- *1504th Artisan Works Company* June 1917 and thereafter: HQ and half company at Le Havre, except for period in first half of 1918 when at Etaples. Other half company at Marseilles
- *1505th Artisan Works Company* June 1917 Rouen, moved to Etaples January 1918 and later to "Southern aerodromes" (possibly a similar story to 1506th, below)
- *1506th Artisan Works Company* As far as I can tell, the only one of these companies to have left a war diary (National Archives WO95/4057). Formed at Dieppe on 11 June 1917 and was still there when diary ends on 1 January 1918. It then moved to Etaples but around May 1918 went to Courban, attached to the Independent Air Force (the long-range bomber squadrons). Documents are not clear but it is possible that half of the Company went to Nancy at this time.

### **Area Employment (Artisan) Companies of the Labour Corps transfer to RE**

Army Council Instruction 1303 of 1917 specified that no skilled man who possessed a skill that was required by a technical corps should be allowed to remain in a unit where that skill was not being used. Further orders established a number of Area Employment (Artisan) Companies which were to be under the control of the Labour Directorate. By late 1917 a total of 24 of these units had been formed and were part of the Labour Corps. I have yet to find the orders that eventually transferred some of them to the Royal Engineers but it is evident that five of them were:

- 240th Artisan Works Company. Converted from 919th Area Employment (Artisan) Company. At Boulogne from October 1917.
- 241st Artisan Works Company. Converted from 920th Area Employment (Artisan) Company. At Ardres from May 1918.
- 242nd Artisan Works Company. Converted from 921st Area Employment (Artisan) Company. At Abbeville (where it appears to have been from March 1916).
- 243rd Artisan Works Company. Converted from 922nd Area Employment (Artisan) Company (former 1501st Artisan Works Company, above) and possibly at Rouen and Dieppe.
- 244th Artisan Works Company. Converted from 923rd Area Employment (Artisan) Company which had been at Trouville, moved to Cherbourg.

## Railway Construction Companies of the Royal Engineers



The contribution to the war effort, especially on the Western Front, of the designated Railway Construction Companies of the Royal Engineers is largely overlooked and/or not researched in most accounts of the conflict. Given the fact that the earliest troop movements gave rise to the phrase “war by timetable” and that the railway was the primary means of movement of men, munitions and supplies, the important if unglamorous role of this military function cannot be underestimated.

### The RE railway construction and maintenance troops in 1914

In August 1914 there were only two Regular and three Special Reserve RE Railway Companies. Their establishments were:

Companies	Officers	Other ranks
8th Railway Company	3	106
10th Railway Company	3	106
Depot Company	2	4
Royal Anglesey (1 Company)	5	145
Royal Monmouth (2 Company)	10	290
Total	23	651

The army set in motion plans to expand upon the remaining rail network still in Allied hands in France and Flanders. The 8th Railway Company landed in France in August 1914 and the 10th and two Special Reserve Companies in November of that year. The third Special Reserve Company landed in February 1915. It was soon seen that these units would not suffice for probable requirements and the Director of Railway Transport was instructed to organise additional Railway Construction units. In October 1914, the Railway Executive Committee in England formed a Sub-Committee for Recruiting. Very large numbers of the employees of British railway companies were then volunteering for military service and the men for RE Railway units were selected from them. *By the end of 1917, out of 180,000 enlistments from English railway companies, about 40,000 were serving in RE Railway units.*

### Training the RE troops

The HQ of the regular railway troops before the war was at Longmoor in Hampshire and the Special Reserve Companies came there annually for training using the specialised Woolmer Instructional Military Railway. During the war, Longmoor, and subsequently part of Bordon, became the centre for all RE railway

and road personnel and at one time also for Inland Water Transport personnel. From the outbreak of the war until the armistice, nearly 1,700 officers and 66,000 other ranks were sent overseas from this centre.

### **The source of railway troops**

Approximately half the officers for the new units were provided by the British railway companies on the recommendation of the Railway Executive Committee and the other half were mainly men from overseas who had been employed on colonial and foreign railways. Some of the Companies formed in 1915 drew upon a large contingent of local men, forming the kind of unit seen in the infantry as "Pal's Battalions". However, as time wore on and with the major transport logistical re-structuring of 1917, the local flavour would become diluted as men were swapped around and experienced men from other army units were combed out to swell the ranks of the Railway Companies.

### **Railway construction**

Once in France, the sappers would be assigned to a Construction Train, of which there were eight in operation in mid-1915. Each Construction Train would have a complement of up to two complete Railway Companies, with a Captain as officer commanding the train. This enabled the sappers to carry both themselves and all their necessary tools and equipment to and from wherever the next work was required. The Companies would pitch tents for accommodation, as required. Large-scale work would include the construction of the major stores and ammunition dump at Audruicq, ten miles from Calais. Here, and at numerous other locations such as the nearby major ammunition dump at Zeneghem Yard, there was great use of Chinese Labour and R.E. Labour Companies to prepare the ground, ready for the platelaying sappers.

### **Immense undertaking**

As the various campaigns and battles unfolded, RE Railway Companies were engaged all over the British sector, joined by Dominion RE Railway Companies. Close examination of the period maps bear testimony to miles of what was to be temporary track that criss-crossed the area. Howitzer Spurs, Ambulance Train Sidings, Tank Enablements and bridges were all constructed, in addition to the constant maintenance and line doubling. Work in progress was always a potential target for enemy artillery and also there were the attentions of the German Air Force to contend with. Zeneghem Yard, for instance, was a natural target and sappers from RE Railway Companies are recorded as having to help extinguish serious fires resulting from air raids.

A primary objective was always to take standard gauge railways as close to the front as possible, to lessen the demands on light railway systems, horsed transport and manpower. For the sappers, work could mean toiling around the clock, especially where lines had been cut by shellfire. Inevitably there were casualties; analysis of the records shows that 173 men from Railway Companies lost their lives. From just the two Regular Companies in 1914, there would be a total of forty-five Companies engaged in Standard Gauge Railway Construction, including other theatres such as Egypt and Salonica, by the end of hostilities. Most of the men in the RE Railway Companies had enlisted for the duration of the war and were naturally keen to return home as soon as possible. However, there was still much line repair work to be done in order to restore the lines of communication now extending deeper into the areas formerly held by the Germans. The Railway Companies gradually began to be demobilised and by August 1919 the last Company had laid its last sleeper.

The RE also raised Railway Operating Companies and Railway Workshop Companies.

### **The Royal Engineers Labour Battalions**

The RE raised 11 Labour Battalions consisting of navvies, tradesmen and semi-skilled men who could be released from munitions production work, for use in construction of rear lines of defence and other works. The first of these units began to arrive in France in August 1915. 30th Labour Battalion RE was allotted permanently to transport work; it was eventually converted into three of the railway construction companies and one wagon erecting company.



## Light Railway Operating Companies of the Royal Engineers



### **The mangled ruins of part of the light railway after a direct hit on a trainload of ammunition.**

Amidst the debris are damaged shell cases. The light railway was used to transport casualties and supplies within the Ypres area. From Birr Cross Roads casualties were transferred to motor ambulances to be transported to the advanced dressing stations on the Menin Road. Note in the background a line of motor lorries

Although the British Army on the Western Front used the French standard gauge railways to move men, equipment and supplies along the lines of communication from the Channel Ports to the Divisional railheads from the earliest days of the Great War, it relied largely on horsed transport and manual effort to move it from the railhead to the front lines. The formation of the RE Light Railway Companies in early 1917 was innovation that was one of the factors that transformed the operational abilities of the army. Goods and men could now make the last leg of the journey to the front by light rail. Until that time, ammunition supply in particular had been subject to delays and required vast numbers of men and horses, and the light railways helped overcome both problems. Traffic and wear on the roads and tracks leading up to the front was eased, and fewer men were required to repair them.

### **The first use of light rail in France**

The Light Railway Companies came into existence when it became clear that the maintenance of roads was becoming a severe problem, in terms of the manpower needed and enormous quantities of road stone clogging up the supply routes. In February 1916 the first new light railways were sanctioned.

The first light railway worked by the British was a French one. It had a track gauge of 60cm (2 feet), and this was subsequently applied to all light railways constructed by the army. The British system developed tracks that were prefabricated in lengths that were in themselves of light weight. They could be easily carried and laid quickly, and with minimal preparation of the ground. For lengths of rail that were going to be more permanent, they were laid like full-size tracks, with sleepers and stone ballast. Special units were formed for the construction, maintenance and operation of the new system.

The Company consisted of approximately 200 men, in a number of trades: Drivers, Brakesmen, Guards, Wagon Repairers, Repair Shop Engineers, Traffic controllers and Storesmen. There were few officers among this number (for example, the 31st LROC was commanded by a Captain). The job of the type of

Company was to run the trains, with the tracks being laid by RE Railway Construction Companies – often with the assistance of whatever Labour Corps Company or “resting” infantry were at hand.



**The 11th Durham Light Infantry move up to the front line: quicker and less fatiguing than marching.**

#### **An example: 31st Light Railway Operating Company**

Formed at Boulogne in late February and early March 1917, the Company moved to Maroeuil (on the River Scarpe and a standard railway line) north west of Arras, and built a Company HQ and camp there that remained until March 1918. Used an old cotton mill as base. On first arrival they took over about six of the standard workhorses of the light railways, the 20hp Simplex petrol locomotive.

Took over the operations of all light railways in the Arras area, supplying the front line and artillery units of Third Army. The main lines operated appear to have been the ones running out of Arras to the east, along the Scarpe valley towards the front line positions of Fampoux.

The main pick-up point for goods to be carried was called Q Dump. From there, ammunition, trench supplies, timber, men and a myriad other supplies would be carried forward. Men, wounded and salvage were the main cargoes for return journeys.

The men of the LROC enjoyed a considerable amount of individual freedom – quite necessary as they were charged with moving trains to and fro, getting them re-railed and repaired when accidents or break-downs occurred, etc. The officers and NCOs of the Company appear to have had a sensible attitude, that as long as men were back at camp when they should be, all was well. A simple recreation was going to the YMCA hut in nearby Etrun for a cup of tea.

The 31st worked the lines in front of Arras (including during the Battle of Arras in April 1917, when British artillery finally overcame its former supply difficulties and overwhelmed the enemy) until forced to move back in March and April 1918, when the enemy attacked in great force. The Third Army front was pushed back some way, but held. By May 1918, the 31st HQ was at Fosseux, a few miles further west of Arras, with the locomotives at Bernville. Much track had been lost to the enemy, and much more damaged, so the immediate task was to restore operating efficiency.

In August 1918, an Allied offensive opened that was to win the war. For the 31st, it meant many weeks of gradually extending the lines to keep up with the advancing armies, and all the time moving their centre of operations forward. The distance to be covered kept extending, as the attacking infantry moved much

faster than the supply centres could move up. They moved first to the east of Arras, then further on to Bapaume, then Bourlon near Cambrai.

### **Army Tramways Companies of the Royal Engineers**

The following information is extracted from a document contained with the war diary of the British Third Army Chief Engineer (WO95/383), which drew upon GHQ order RE/G/11101 of 6 March 1917.

The duties of the Army Tramway Company, which was a unit of the Royal Engineers, would be the construction, maintenance and operation of the trench tramways system, in advance [that is, more forward of] the light railways operated by the Director General of Transport.



**Trench railway at “Oxford Circus” on the outskirts of Arras, April 1917.**

**The image shows a typical 2-foot gauge trench tramway.**

Four such companies were allotted to Third Army, and an officer and a small staff was attached to the Chief Engineer for the administration of those companies. Other companies were attached to the other British Armies in France and Flanders.

On 21 February 1918 orders were received that the Trench Tramway Companies would be absorbed into new Foreway Companies RE (new organization for movement forward of railhead using rail/tramway trucks, bridges, tracks, road and tramway systems in Army and Corps areas).

### **Establishment**

Personnel	
Captain, in command	1
Subalterns	2
Company Quartermaster Sgt	1
Sergeants	6
Corporals	7 of which 1 would be for pay duties
2nd Corporals	6
Sappers	23 including six Lance Corporals and one Clerk
Pioneers	60 including four Lance Corporals
Staff-Sergeants RE	2 for Military Foreman of Works, 1 for Engineering Ledger Keeper and Storeman
Attached infantry Privates	3 to be employed as officers batmen

**Transport for use by Trench Tramway Company**

Riding horses	3
Bicycles	10

**Other miscellaneous units of the Royal Engineers**

In 1914, the General Headquarters of the BEF in France and Flanders incorporated a GHQ Signals Company, two Corps Signals Companies (one each for I and II Corps), and specialist units for railways and printing. GHQ always maintained certain engineering units, including the Special Companies RE whose job was gas warfare, Meteorological, Special Works Park (camouflage) and other specialists.

As the army grew in size, the number of Corps increased and were organised into Armies. At Army level, several different types of Engineer units developed, and Corps were left with only one Company-sized unit, in motor and cable sections. Each of the five Armies on the Western Front contained the following, with the establishment varying between Armies and over time.

- Advanced RE Parks (responsible for stores and dumps of goods and equipment)
- Pontoon Parks (looking after bridging equipment)
- Electrical and Mechanical Companies (responsible for machinery, including underground boring)
- Army Workshops (for repairs and maintenance of equipment)
- Anti-Aircraft Sections (searchlight operations)
- Army Troops Companies (established similar to Field Companies, but for behind-the-lines bridging and water work)
- Transportation Works Companies (maintaining vehicles)
- Forestry Companies
- Inland Waterways and Docks Companies

## **British Troops in Egypt (BTE) 1922 - 1940**

British Troops in Egypt (BTE) was a pre-war Command. The first British Troops went to Egypt in 1882 to suppress a nationalist military uprising against the Turkish Sultan. The British Troops remained throughout The Great War. In 1922, Egypt gained independence, but British Forces remained to defend the Suez Canal which was vital to the British strategic interests in the Far East. Between the wars, BTE was a Lieutenant General's command, the only one outside the United Kingdom or India and it was the largest concentration of British Troops outside of those two countries.

**Headquarters BTE (as at 1930)** Order of Battle for 1939 – 1940 are show in the Appendices.

### **The Cairo Brigade**

- 1st Bn. Welsh Guards
- 1st Bn. The South Wales Borderers
- 1st Bn. The Gloucestershire Regiment

### **The Canal Brigade**

- 1st Bn. The King's Regiment (Liverpool)
- 2nd Bn. The Green Howards (Alexandra, Princess of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment)
- 1st Bn. The Durham Light Infantry

### **The Cavalry Brigade (Egypt)**

- 10th Royal Hussars (Prince of Wales's Own)
- 12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's)
- 13th/18th Royal Hussars (Queen Mary's Own)

### **Command Troops**

- II Brigade, Royal Horse Artillery (H.Q., 'C', 'K' & 'L' Batteries, Royal Horse Artillery)
- I Light Brigade, Royal Artillery (H.Q., 6th, 8th & 10th Light Batteries, Royal Artillery)
- 2nd Field Company, Royal Engineers

#### **42nd Field Company, Royal Engineers**

- **The company were deployed as part of the Canal Infantry Brigade in Moascar in 1922.**
- **Records from 1930 to 1940 show the company to be under command of BTE.**
- **From June 1940 the company was at Mersa Matruh Garrison under the command of Headquarters, Western Desert Force. The Headquarters Western Desert Force was formed on the 17th June 1940 by the redesignation of Headquarters 6th Infantry Division. Italy had declared war on the United Kingdom on the 10th June 1940 and skirmishes broke out between British and Italian Forces immediately.**
- **The Mersa Matruh garrison was also designated as Lines of Communication Sub Area West.**

- No. 1 Company, Egypt Signals, Royal Corps of Signals
- No. 2 Wireless Company, Royal Corps of Signals
- No. 3 Company, Egypt Signals, Royal Corps of Signals
- 3rd Armoured Car Company, Royal Tank Corps
- 5th Armoured Car Company, Royal Tank Corps
- 25th Company, Royal Army Service Corps
- 30th Company, Royal Army Service Corps
- 31st Company, Royal Army Service Corps
- 39th Company, Royal Army Service Corps
- 'D' Company, Royal Army Service Corps
- 33rd Company, Royal Army Medical Corps
- 9th Company, Royal Army Ordnance Corps
- No. 4 Section, Royal Army Veterinary Corps
- Station Veterinary Hospital, Royal Army Veterinary Corps
- Egypt Detachment, Royal Army Pay Corps

**Training Battalion  
Royal Engineers**

**Medallion**



1932 – 34

Sapper Dawson won the medallion shown above while assigned to 141 Party, "C" Company, Royal Engineer Training Battalion. The medallion was awarded to him as the 4th Best Man in Bayonet Fighting in his party.

Dawson was promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal on the 29th of March 1932 and received an accelerated promotion to the rank of Corporal on the 1st of September 1934 while serving with the 42nd Field Company, R.E. Dawson was also in possession of a First Class Certificate of Education which he received in January of 1932.

**REFERENCES:**

1. The Sapper, January 1932, p. 166.
2. The Sapper, June 1932, p. 306.
3. The Sapper, December 1934, p. 476.

**B.E.M.**



***CENTRAL CHANCERY OF THE ORDERS OF  
KNIGHTHOOD. St. James's Palace, S.W.I.***

*11<sup>th</sup> May, 1937.*

*The King has been graciously pleased, on the occasion of His Majesty's Coronation, to approve of the Award of the Medal of the Military Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire to the undermentioned: —*

***For Meritorious Service.***

1. 1869233 Lance-Corporal (temporary Corporal) Arthur James Blackmore, 26th Field Company, **Royal Engineers.**
2. 1867621 Sapper Allan James Green, 1<sup>st</sup> Anti-Aircraft Battalion, **Royal Engineers.**
3. **1849237 Lance-Corporal Arthur Kingston Henderson, 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company, Royal Engineers.**
4. 5944419 Sergeant William Henry Johnston, 2nd Battalion, The Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment.
5. 3049785 Lance-Sergeant Archibald Reid Lackie, 2nd Battalion, The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders.
6. 1863529 Corporal Paul David Patrick Seam, 1<sup>st</sup> Anti-Aircraft Battalion, **Royal Engineers.**
7. Squadron Quarter-Master-Sergeant Alfred John Barnett, Remount Depot, Mowbray, Tasmania.
8. Native Corporal Reitz, Bechuanaland Protectorate.
9. Sol Tayin (Quartermaster) Abdel Magid Surur, Western Arab Corps, Sudan Defence Force.

## World War 2

### A Desert Rat – Plus

#### A tale from J. Harold Swindells' 42 Field Company, Royal Engineers

Contributed by: Audrey Swindells

Locations: England, Egypt, Tunisia, Italy, Austria

The commencement of my service in the army was induced by my volunteering to join the Royal Engineers a week before my conscription papers for the Royal Marines arrived. My army life was always fairly close to the sea. I reported to the RE's in Chatham, basic training was in Launceston, Cornwall. Being in the timber trade I was posted to a General Construction Company with a high proportion of tradesmen BUT as Southern England was being bombed daily the proportion of unexploded bombs in 1941 was mounting into thousands and the title GC Company became BD Company i.e. Bomb Disposal and our job to track down, locate and eliminate (explode) these bombs. With the Company HQ variously located at Bedford, East Grinstead, Basingstoke and Southampton, our four platoons could be readily identified as all officers and men had to paint their gaiters a bright orange colour.

Come July 1941 and the need to reinforce our overseas fronts, under 25 year old soldiers in the RE's completing training were formed into drafts awaiting shipping space. Following a seven day leave 550 RE's were entrained for Glasgow and embarked with 1,500 others aboard an eighteen thousand ton troopship which sailed down the Clyde past where the Queen Mary had been launched in 1935, six years before. At that time I had sailed with my aunt on a cruise to the four Northern Capitals in a sister ship of our trooper which was SS. Cameronia, Anchor Line. However, this was a very different experience. The ship was so crowded and it was so hot and uncomfortable that rather than sling a hammock below many of us chose to sleep on deck, despite thorough sea water sluicing at 6.45. Passing the Azores en route to South Africa in a convoy of over forty vessels, we stopped briefly at Sierra Leone for fresh water and during a four day stop at Durban, where we were feted, the RE's draft was split, half the strength being sent to Singapore to be - at best - fairly soon prisoners of the Japanese; or put aboard, as I was, the Queen Mary which speedily arrived at Suez in ten days.

In the Suez Canal Zone the RE depot at Moascar, (Ismailia) soon despatched some 300 soldiers including me, to join units in constant need of reinforcements either on the battle fronts or in Companies in other parts of the Middle East. I was therefore very gratified to be posted to the RE Depot at the Delta Barrage, where the Nile is over half a mile wide with over sixty controllable sluices. However because I was still only twenty-one years old, I was moved on to join the 42nd Field Company which had been reformed after retreating from Greece and Crete and was now on the point of leaving Egypt and going north for service in Syria. Fortunately we did not take part in the Battle of Alamein although we were held in reserve and some six weeks later were doing maintenance on lines of communication in Libya.

The German armies thrust towards Baghdad was anticipated but until we could get new vehicles reissued our movement as a unit was by train in cattle trucks through Haifa in Palestine to Damascus. From Damascus we moved north of Aleppo to take the place of Australian forces who were returning home for the possible defence of their homeland. At this time we were soldiers first and engineers second. Units of the French Foreign Legion were given the option of returning home or being welcomed to join the allied forces. Over 80% of French regulars went home. Those who stayed were multi-racial and were formed into appropriate units.

Due to our tough times in 1942 the whole of the Middle East was in trepidation that the German Army would push us back to the Nile Delta and the one thing that was vital was to provide water that was absolutely pure and we went to the remote hilly parts of the Sinai desert. There were springs and rivulets in winter time where water could be trapped and in peacetime was used to irrigate the land to grow fruit and vegetables. This is where Egypt has its frontier with Palestine and is scrub-like desert. We constructed water points by channelling pipes which took the water down by gravity to tracks where retreating troops might require it. We also constructed with bulldozers 60' high hillocks with canvas lined pond-like containers. There were at least four to six points where water could be obtained which were ten to twelve miles apart and these were constructed by 42nd Field Company.

The work was hard and we were hot and thirsty and whilst we were in construction our water trucks had to go some thirty miles into Palestine for our supply of drinking water. We were living under canvas close by and the lack of fresh food made us very susceptible to injury, and wounds all turned septic. We carried medical supplies but only for serious injury.

On other occasions we were building bridges across chasms and waddis and any road maintenance to improve the desperate state of the main tracks. Sometimes with shrapnel from airbursts flying around us.

We were also called upon to clear anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines. These were all buried in the ground often with trip wires or pull or push action to explode them. Engineers could dismantle these things if they were called upon. On occasions great courage was called for if an engineer realised he had triggered an anti-personnel mine he had to stay where he was risking losing one or both legs rather than his life if he moved off it.

Life in the desert was never comfortable and on occasions water could ooze out of the ground which quickly became lethally impure but if it could be quickly contained it could be of use.

The so very welcome post from home was liable to arrive with the rations, if you were lucky.

One day in Egypt I met a nomadic tribe of Bedouins. Being of a very hospitable nature they offered me some dates, being unable to offend them I took and consumed. The outcome was an attack of dysentery which reduced me from 12 and a half stone to five and a half stone.

On one occasion in Syria, when we were lucky enough to have vehicles but had been late in our movement to the selected destination for our camp, I went to sleep in darkness with limited protection against the cold night and, to my surprise, recovered consciousness in hospital, where I stayed for several days suffering from hypothermia. It was during this time that we camped in metal hutments. I was 'fortunate' enough to drop and break my spectacles. This enabled me to get a pass to Beirut in order to obtain new lenses from an ophthalmic depot.

One day we drove within sight of the Sphinx and the Pyramids but they were nearly half a mile away and we never got back to see them properly.

Much later in Tunisia, just over the Libyan border we were assembled at dusk and marched forward with the infantry ahead of us, for perhaps some three miles. As the dawn broke an enemy barrage began and we were often shelled. Some of these shells were air bursts from artillery fire but groups of up to nine whistling mortar shells could be fired simultaneously and then the air was full of flying shrapnel which created some horrific incidents. About this time we came across unescorted surrendering Italian troops advancing towards us with their arms raised, and at one stage quite close to us they were hit by their own offensive fire and two were terribly wounded. So wounded in fact that one of our officers was forced to shoot one of them, out of mercy.

As engineers we had to sweep a 9' path through a minefield which then had to be widened to 18' and then 27' as quickly as possible so that the road was usable by ambulances going and coming back, without the danger of being blown up by mines. This was obviously harrowing due to the fact that we had to proceed with speed and utterly ignore diversions created by the surrendering Italian troops. After filling in an 8' deep anti-tank ditch and compacting it to take our heavy vehicles the road was marked out by us to prevent misguided vehicles moving into possibly mined areas.

Prior to this we had a night operation which saw us standing by a wadi which was flowing with a fair volume of water, due to recent rains coming from the hills and we engineers were in the valley bottom but 100 yards to the other side of the wadi was enemy territory and enemy outposts. A British tank was stuck in the middle of the wadi with the 2' deep water washing all around it. The crew of the tank were defending themselves from air attack by firing back at diving enemy planes on two or three occasions. Obviously we also had to take cover from the daylight air attacks and I personally hid beneath the wheels of a truck which I afterwards realised was full of explosives. Not quite the best place to take shelter. Our working party retreat in full daylight mid-morning was to be aboard this same explosive carrying vehicle that moved into full enemy vision and gradually proceeded for a third of a mile up the opposite bank protected only by the knowledge that British Infantry were ready to fire at any offensive German action. So we could have been centred in cross fire.

We were about twelve miles outside Alexandria about to go there to board ship. At night time we slept on our ground sheets with a couple of blankets. During the night a freak storm hit us of truly exceptional magnitude. The storm utterly soaked everything we possessed in two inches of rainfall. Gear was literally floating about on the rocky countryside over which the rainwater just flowed collecting in great pools which the dry earth could not absorb. Hundreds of soldiers were faced with problems and discomfort. I boarded a ship in dishevelled condition and the boat headed initially for southern Sicily passing Malta en-route and calling into Syracuse and offloading a small contingent there. Then returning north easterly to Taranto where we landed and were taken via Bari on the heel of Italy. I was aiming to join the 42nd Field Company



from which I had been detached whilst on a radio course. Arriving in a transit camp near Bari I discovered that my Brigade had been transferred from the Eighth Army to the Fifth Army but no-one knew where the 42nd Field Company had moved to. We were sent nearly two hundred miles on to Naples by an extremely slow train. When I called at the Naples transit point they were able to tell me that I was within 40 miles of my destination.

We longed to leave the hot dry atmosphere of the desert but sometimes longed to be back when we had to face the rain and mud of Italy. Naples was 'out of bounds' but some colleagues and I we went off in the vehicle designated to us, and took a risk. It was parked in a square in Naples and the local police must have enquired of the military and been told that the vehicle was there without permission. It was therefore removed and when we returned to the square we had no transport. We had to try and get back some forty miles but we were recognised as being in the wrong place at the wrong time and also soldiers returning to Anzio had made a break for it, so the Military Police were on the lookout. This was unfortunate because our tentative enquiries were met with suspicion and we had to produce our passes which were not acceptable. So I spent a week in a cell sleeping on a very hard floor in a Naples prison. I tried to exercise in the confined space but was allowed to go on the roof of the building to take advantage of a grandstand view of Vesuvius in eruption with one principal flow of red-hot lava more than a mile long from the lip of its crater. Resultant visibility in the streets of Naples was poor. I wrote to a member of my unit soon after being imprisoned and eventually my letter brought results and I thus was absent without leave for a week and was punished by having to report to the Guard Room every hour for more than a further two weeks.

We were in the Apennine mountains, north of Florence during the last winter in Italy. The severe weather saw deep snow in the higher valleys. An Italian man and his wife who had retreated southwards towards the allied armies were able to speak English and we met up with them because the farm house where they had rented space from friendly farmers was near our requisitioned billets. These were only farm 'outbuildings' and although bitterly cold were dry. We met up with this couple and found they had no means of survival and like most of the Italian population, were nearly starving. We managed to save some of our rations and would negotiate the slippery mountain paths and lanes to take these meagre supplies to them.

The weather improved and we moved on ultimately to be greeted by rejoicing crowds as we moved towards Bologna. It was heartening to be given flowers and occasional kisses by thankful Italians and to know that before long this meant we might be returning home.

Eighteen months after arriving in Italy we crossed the border into Austria on the last days of fighting in May 1945. For us it was a case of marking time until we could be sent home, but what a beautiful area in which to wait - in normal times the holiday Lakes of Southern Austria

After returning home I amazed my family by removing my bedclothes on to the floor and it was six months before I could once again relax in a normal bed.

With thanks to the BBC's WW2 People's War and Audrey Swindells for posting J. Harold Swindells' original article.

'WW2 People's War' is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at [www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar)

## Crete 1940

In September 1940 Crete was occupied by an Infantry Brigade which was accompanied by **42 Field Company RE** (Maj EFE Parker) with the role of denying the island to the enemy and of establishing a base there for a division destined to clear the Italians from Rhodes and the adjacent islands. At first the field company was employed on providing accommodation for the brigade and improving the jetty at Suda Bay for the landing of troops and stores.

In November 1940 it was decided to fortify the island against attack and to carry out the necessary work and to press on the preparations for the accommodation of a division, a CRE (Works) (Lt Col PA Clauson) and a small staff were sent from Egypt. The work consisted of accommodation work on billets and hired storage, erection of service depots in standard steel shedding, improvement of jetties and communications in the port of Suda Bay, the reconstruction of stores for the RAF Civil Works and Buildings organisation which was responsible for improving and constructing airfields.

When in April 1941 the situation in Greece deteriorated further work was undertaken to prepare bivouac areas for the troops to be evacuated from that country and to construct defence works at important points in the island, including a large underground headquarters in the side of a hill east of Canea. The whole of these two programmes was well advanced when required in spite of the small numbers of Royal Engineers; the transport available; the difficulty of getting rapid results from local contractors or Government organisations, and the fact that the mobilisation of the Greek forces had denuded the island of useful labour.

A new line was established at '**Forty Second Street**' a dusty 2-km lane running north from the village of Tsikalaria to the main Suda-Canea road. On 27 May 1941, Forty Second Street was the site of a battle between the German 141st Mountain Regiment and two companies of the 2/7 Battalion, joined by New Zealanders of the 28th (Maori) Battalion, stopping the Germans for the rest of the day. **The name 'Forty Second Street', a humorous appellation inspired by the musical of the same name, was given by Sappers from the 42nd Field Company, Royal Engineers who had bivouacked beside the dirt lane after being sent to garrison Crete late in 1940.** The name was recorded on British maps and passed into common use. With German advances into Crete, allied troops joined together, withdrawing towards Canea and by 27th May occupied a line including 42nd Street, from Suda Bay to the Malaxa escarpment. This was the rear-guard of the Commonwealth force retreating southward to Sfakia, site of evacuations. The picture shows a sign erected by the Australians in 1941.

In May 1941, the Commonwealth force in Crete was organised in five widely separated defence areas along the north coast - around the three airfields at Iraklion, Rethymnon and Maleme, and at Suda Bay and the port of Chania. The Germans launched their attack on 20 May with airborne troops. The airfield at Maleme was quickly captured and used for landing German reinforcements. On 23 May, the remainder of the Maleme position had to be given up and its defenders fell back to Chania. On 26 May, the Allied line west of Chania was broken. Suda Bay became indefensible and the troops from these two positions, with the remainder of the Maleme garrison, withdrew across the island to Sfakion, where many of them were evacuated by sea on the nights of the 28 - 31 May. A & D Battalions of 'Layforce' Commandos were landed between 24 and 27 May to protect the disembarkation point of Sphakia/Sfakion on the south western coast of Crete.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

PO3731.001

The airborne attacks on the Iraklion and Rethymnon positions on 20 May were repulsed. Iraklion was successfully defended until the night of 29/29 May when the garrison was evacuated by sea. Orders for the Rethymnon garrison to fight its way southward for evacuation did not arrive, and it was overwhelmed on 31 May. Of the total Commonwealth land force of 32,000 men, 18,000 were evacuated, 12,000 were taken prisoner and 2,000 were killed.

## NORTH AFRICA

In 1939 the unit was at El Daba (180Km west of Alexandria, Egypt) employed on water supply, for at the beginning of the war the railway section became virtually cut off, being employed as an independent Movement Control Group. Subsequently this section was absorbed into Movement Control and Transportation Organizations.

During 1940 the unit was at Mersa Matruh (240Km west of Alexandria) constructing defences, reinforced concrete pillboxes being the chief item. After the Italian entry into the war, regular bombing raids were carried out at Matruh, but the unit suffered very few casualties. All the same, when in October, 1940, the Company was moved to Crete, everyone was glad, for although prospects in Crete did not seem very bright, at least the move provided a change.

After its arrival in Crete, the Company was employed on developing a base at Suda Bay, and among other work erected a very large number of steel huts served by some miles of light railway. Headquarters, 2 and 3 Sections were still at Suda Bay in the Malame area during the attack on Crete, 1 Section being detached at Heraklion. This section was evacuated when Heraklion was threatened and suffered only a few casualties, in spite of the fact that they travelled in the Cruiser Orion, which suffered three direct hits during the crossing to Alexandria.

The remainder of the unit with its own transport arrived comparatively fresh at the embarkation beach on the south coast, where it was ordered to assist in a rear-guard action. It was here that the Company had its first taste of fighting against bitter odds, for apart from a few stragglers, the Officer Commanding, his officers and men were all killed or captured. A few did get away, and Corporal Murfet and Sapper Rae were welcomed back in Egypt some weeks later after a gallant escape in which they sailed a dinghy across the Mediterranean.

With 1 Section as a basis, the unit was re-formed in July, 1941, remaining under training for three months at Gabal Maryam, Ismailia (Egypt): It then passed into Group Headquarters reserve, and remained at Gabal Maryam conducting bridging experiments, destruction of minefields, and other specialist work until the end of the year, when in January, 1942, it passed under the command of Ninth Army. After a week's rest in the snow-covered camps of the Damascus fortresses (Syria) it received orders to proceed to Aleppo (Syria), where it came under the command 20th Australian Infantry Brigade (9<sup>th</sup> Australian Division). The Company remained with the Australians for three months preparing road and railway demolitions apart from a variety of other Sapper jobs, which included the construction of a folding boat equipment ferry over the Euphrates and various road bridges were strengthened to take Class 70 loads.

In April, 1942, the unit was moved to Damascus fortresses, where it was put in charge of the construction of two brigade fortresses in the Jebel Mazar area. Tasks were the construction of road and field defences by direct labour and the supervising of contractors. About 3,000 labourers were under command for these works. At the end of June, X Corps, which commanded the formations in the Damascus area, moved to the Western Desert, the Company remaining as an Army unit. However, this was not for long, for it returned eventually to Aleppo, where it remained for about three weeks.

By now the battle in the Desert was really grave, and the unit, once more coming under command Ninth Army, was moved to Sinai, where it was to construct emergency divisional water points, prepare demolition schemes and take part, in the latter half of 1942, in the construction of probably "the longest unfinished bridge in the world, being 2,688 feet long over the Nile near Helwan" (to quote Lieutenant-Colonel E. N. Bickford, C.R.E., X Corps Troops, at that time).

The first area in which the unit was really static was Misurata (Libya) during February, 1943, where it was billeted in one of the Italian Experimental Agriculture Stations. Its stay of about twenty-four days was the longest it had spent in any one place, for the enemy had retreated fast, leaving huge minefields, many bridges blown, and wells blown in or polluted, providing many tasks on which an R.E. unit could be employed.

### Officer Commanding



Major The Hon. R. G. H. Phillimore,  
M.B.E., R.E.  
1941-1942

To give detailed reports on the many tasks the unit was called upon to undertake would be out of keeping with the rest of this story, but the most important at the time was the crossing of the Oudi Gam (Libya) about seventeen kilometres on the Horns road from Zliten (Libya). It must be remembered that the advance of the Eighth Army depended entirely on its line of communication being constantly kept open, and the Coast Road was a vital artery along which flowed daily thousands of tons of war material. Normally the Oudi Gam is dry, and is the usual type of desert wadi, but the wadi bed was very rugged and rocky, especially at that particular place where the road crossed, so that during the rainy season it became literally a raging torrent. It was in one of these moods that it swept about forty yards of roadway away and threatened to hold up traffic for miles, up and down the line. Obviously it was a priority job, and the 42nd were called upon to build a diversion, and to make a temporary repair to the road.

The diversion was made in a few hours, whilst two platoons were toiling, repairing the road and making new culverts. There were a number of difficulties to cope with, the chief being the swiftly flowing water, admittedly not very deep, but working conditions were made extremely awkward. These, however, were successfully overcome and in four days the road was open to traffic. During this period 1 Platoon was on detachment at Sultan, where it carried out a variety of tasks, clearing minefields, construction of staging areas, maintenance of water points, and various odd jobs for the Town Major.

It was at this period that the unit came under command C.R.E., XXX Corps Troops, for it was not until west of Tripoli that the unit came under command C.R.E., Eighth Army Troops. The Officer Commanding (Major F. J. Field, R.E.) was continually pressing for an operational role, and at the end of February, 1943, the Company moved to Tripoli (capital of Libya) on its way forward. It is worth recording that the M. T. had remained more or less the same as when the unit left Gabal Maryam, and had covered some thousands of miles over most of the worst roads in the Middle East proper, including those in Syria, Palestine and Sinai. Never a serious hitch occurred, and it may be added that the transport, except for a few battle casualties remained "on the road" during the whole Tunisian Campaign, a creditable performance under such conditions.

It was not until the battle of Mareth (Tunisia) that the Company faced the enemy in any operational role since being reformed in June, 1941. As has been told, the unit had been employed as an Army Field Company, where it had worked on the line of communications from El Aghela (Cyrenaica, Libya) to Ben Gardane (S.E. Tunisia) as the Eighth Army advanced. Matters now moved fast and one never remained in one place for more than forty-eight hours. Even the stay at Tripoli was brief, two days before the unit moved forward, eventually arriving at Ben Gardane on 4th March, 1943. Almost on arrival, 1 Platoon moved to Medenine (S.E. Tunisia) for water-point duties, the remainder of the Company moving the following day to a point fifteen kilometres from Medenine on the Medenine-Ben Gardane road.

The next move was to an area a few kilometres behind our positions in front of the Mareth Line, where the unit came under command C.R.E., 50th Division.

On 19th March, 1943, a conference was held at Company Headquarters, and the Officer Commanding informed those present that the unit was taking part in an attack on the Mareth positions along the 50th Division front.

There were three gaps to be made in a minefield, and an anti-tank ditch was to be blown in front of the enemy's positions. The Company moved off at 1830 hrs on 20th March to the forming-up position at Chet Meskine (Tunisia), where it contacted the other R.E. units which were taking part. This position was about 1,000 yards from the enemy's forward defended localities, which called for all vehicles to be dispersed and all ranks to dig in. Even then it was obvious that the enemy's listening posts had picked up the noise of M.T. and voices, for he started to mortar our positions very heavily. Throughout the operation, shelling, mortaring and small-arms fire were intense. An approximate distribution of tasks was as follows. Three gaps were to be made in the minefield; two outside gaps for infantry, the centre gap reserved for tanks. Major F. J. Field, R.E., was Officer Commanding right-hand gap; Major C. A. O. B. Compton, R.E. (One-time 42nd officer) was Officer Commanding centre gap; and Major Osborne, R.E., Officer Commanding left-hand gap. Lieutenant R. J. H. Gaunt, R.E., 1 Platoon Officer, with his platoon under command Major Compton on the centre gap, whilst 2 Platoon were to widen the gap on the right to eight yards. Lieutenant V. Curchod, R.E., with 3 Platoon were to blow the anti-tank ditch at the end of the front minefield, after a Scorpion had opened it up. The operation was successful and this was the first time the 42nd, re-formed at Tahagin 1941, had been in action as a newly formed company. They proved they could do the job and do it well. Unfortunately, the operation had not been without casualties, for the Officer Commanding, Major F. J. Field, R.E., and Lieutenant W. Hind, R.E. (Unit LO.) were killed, Lieutenant Williams, R.E., being wounded,

together with five sappers, one of whom died later. On the brighter side the Company was honoured with three awards for this operation. Lieutenant R. J. H. Gaunt, R.E., received the Military Cross and Lance-Sergeant M. Young and Sapper Jubb each received the Military Medal.

After the Mareth operation the next few days were spent in organization, repairs to M.T. and resting. Major Crookenden, M.C., R.E., became the new Officer Commanding, and with his appointment news was received for a further move.

The next operational role given to the unit was in the area north of Gabes (Tunisia), and here the unit participated in the operation at Wadi Akarit (Tunisia). Casualties during this operation were two officers wounded, one other rank killed, and four other ranks wounded.

After Mareth the unit was continually changing from one formation, to another, one day the 50th Division, the next XXX Corps, and then under command Eighth Army till eventually joining 201 Guards Brigade, to remain with this formation until the end of the campaign. With the Guards we participated in the attack on Enfidaville (Tunisia), moving after a few days to Medjez el Bab (Tunisia), where the Brigade Group came under command First Army, thence being placed in support of the 6th British Armoured Division on 4th May, 1943.

During the operational period the platoons were detached at various times to Battalions of 201 Guards Brigade, and in the final push participated in the night march of the 6th British Armoured Division across Cap Bon peninsula (Tunisia), where the enemy's forces were completely surprised, surrounded, and where eventually all enemy opposition collapsed.

So closed the North African campaign. The Company had been in operation for about two and a half months. Casualties had been light. Great experience had been gained and the standard of training of the Company was well repaid by the performance put up during operations. We lost a few familiar faces. We made a number of new friends, but we looked forward with faith in the knowledge that we had been proved in battle.



*[Photo: Imperial War Museum]*

**Sapper Hampson and "Friend" at Wadi Akarit**

## PAUSE, TWO THREE!

After the final ousting of the Axis forces from Tunisia the unit spent a few days at Hammamet (Tunisia), where time was spent bathing, collecting enemy equipment and resting. Incidentally, nearly every man in the Company had either a motorcycle or motorcar, which could be found, abandoned everywhere. (I think the American Engineers who moved into our encampment would, now that they know and if they could possibly meet some of us, declare a miniature war!).

At that time we were under command of the 6th British Armoured Division, but still brigaded with 201 Guards Brigade. This was only to be for a few days, as the Brigade went to Algiers, and the 42nd was ordered to move to Benghazi for onward routing to the Delta.

Eventually, after a rather monotonous journey, we arrived at Benghazi (Libya) to find a very pleasant camp area near the Blue Lagoon. Following a day or two to get organized after the journey, the unit settled down to a period of training and physical recreation. All non-swimmers were taught to swim and had to "pass out" over a distance of fifty yards. To make training attractive, a number of swimming galas were held, including one or two water-polo matches.

We had been in Benghazi approximately eight days when the news came through that our return to Egypt had been definitely cancelled, our next move being to return to Tripoli to join the 56th (London) Infantry Division. This was on or about 15th July, when we also heard unofficially that 201 Guards Brigade were going to form part of the Division.

On arrival at Tripoli, we settled down about fourteen kilometres east of the town to what we then considered quite a long stay. Most of the time immediately after arrival was taken up by overhauling equipment, maintenance of transport, getting out much-needed reinforcements, and having many inoculations. About the second week, really intensive training started and we all received an idea of what our next role would be. Each platoon went away for four days' mountain training, returning to spend a period on under-water demolitions with Major Gabriel (who, incidentally, was i/c training the unit on invasion from a Sapper point of view, at Kabrit (Egypt, approximately 20 miles north of Suez)). Then came a period of running off L.C.Is., L.S.Ts., and other invasion craft, which eventually wound up in a pleasant two hours at the pictures!

It wasn't all honey for the drivers at this period, for they had to learn to negotiate the intricacies of driving on and off various landing craft. Then there were waterproofing courses, de-waterproofing courses, map reading and numerous other routine items which had to be perfected.

At the beginning of August things started to move. Our transport was gradually taken away and placed ready to be embarked. Scales of clothing and equipment were recast, cutting things down to a minimum without losing efficiency. Incidentally, all the transport as it went away went loaded, the stores not being seen again until we arrived at the other side. Those few days must have been a nightmare to the C.Q.M.S.

Finally the great day came for a dress rehearsal, and we had the pleasure of parading dressed as we would be for the invasion in battle order and carrying guncotton slabs, Bangalore torpedoes, and picks and shovels. A rough idea of the organization of the Company for the operation was as follows. The unit was divided into three groups, the first group containing about 80 per cent of the Company, the second about 15 per cent., and the third the remainder which formed the rear party. Our transport was similarly allocated, but the personnel groups who were on the L.C.Is. had to march, as the transport on L.C.Ts. and L.S.Ts. immediately after landing had to be de-waterproofed.

The platoons were allocated to L.C.Is. with their respective Battalions in the 201 Guards Brigade. Headquarters Platoon, only being seventeen strong, was embarked on an L.S.T. with the allotted Headquarters transport.

We sailed from Tripoli on 1st September, 1943.

### 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company Breaching a minefield at Salerno



Salerno

## ITALY

During the Italy campaign the 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company in the main came under the command of two Infantry Brigades and Divisions:

1. **201<sup>st</sup> (Guards) Infantry Brigade** having previously served with this Brigade in North Africa e.g. Egypt and Libya. The unit remained with this Brigade until April 1944 under command of:
  - a. **56<sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division** 23 July 1943 to approximately April 1944.
  - b. This section (Italy) covers this period, for the Order of Battle see Appendix 4.
2. **24 Guards Infantry Brigade** from 20 May 1944 to 18 February 1945 under command of:
  - a. **6<sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division**.
  - b. This section (Italy) and the section (Extracts from 24 Guards Infantry Brigade History) cover this period, for the Order of Battle see Appendix 5.

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

The division was a pre-war, first line Territorial Army formation. It landed at Salerno in Italy on 9th September 1943, having come from Libya, with the 167th Infantry Brigade, 169th Infantry Brigade and 201st (Guards) Infantry Brigade under command (including 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company).

It was involved in the battles to recapture Naples in September 1943, the Volturno Crossing in October 1943, and Monte Camino in November and December 1943. In January 1944, it was involved in the battles for the Garigliano Crossing. As the position at Anzio deteriorated, the division was transferred from X Corps to the U.S. VI Corps at Anzio. It was withdrawn from Anzio to Egypt on 28th March 1944 to refit.

During the time that 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company RE were with the Division it was commanded by:

Major-General Douglas A. H. Graham: May – October 1943

Major-General Gerald W. R. Templer: October 1943 – July 1944

#### Division Insignia

The 56<sup>th</sup> Division were known as the “Black Cats” because of their insignia which was adopted in 1940. The cat is Dick Whittington’s who is associated with London and the black cat is also associated with luck.

The “Black Cats” Insignia



### 201<sup>st</sup> (Guards) Infantry Brigade

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade was formed by the conversion of the 29th Infantry Brigade on 3 September 1939 and in March 1940 became responsible for all the troops in the Mersa Matruh Garrison area. In February 1941 the unit was reformed and renamed the 22<sup>nd</sup> Guards Brigade on 20 March 1941. It was converted to the 200<sup>th</sup> Guards Brigade (14 January 1942) and then finally the 201<sup>st</sup> Guards Motor Brigade (25 May 1942).

This Guards Brigade saw extensive service in the North African Campaign. It was forced to surrender on 20 June 1942 when Tobruk was captured by German and Italian forces. It was reformed as the 201<sup>st</sup> Guards Motor Brigade in Egypt on 14 August 1942.

In the absence of the 168<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division which had been sent to help in the battle for Sicily, 201<sup>st</sup> (Guards) Infantry Brigade joined the 56<sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1943 as the Third Brigade. It had been an independent Brigade in the campaigns in Egypt and Libya. The Brigade fought with the division during the battle for Salerno.

When the 168<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade returned to the command of the division on the 17<sup>th</sup> October 1943, this Brigade remained under the command of the division, giving it four infantry brigades. The Brigade fought in the battle of the River Garigliano (17-31 January 1944), *but officially left the Division on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1944*, passing to the command of X Corps. It was then attached to the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division on the 6<sup>th</sup>

January 1944 until the 2nd March 1944. In March 1944, due to the heavy casualties sustained by the Brigade, and the lack of reinforcements to sustain three Guards Brigades on active duty in Italy, this formation was reorganised. The 3rd Bn. Coldstream Guards transferred to the 24th Infantry Brigade (Guards), being replaced by the 1st Bn. Irish Guards from that brigade. The 6th Bn. Grenadier Guards, 2nd Bn. Scots Guards and 1st Bn. Irish Guards were all reduced to cadres, sailing for the United Kingdom on the 10th April 1944. This regiment transferred into the division on the 8 April 1944. On its return to the United Kingdom, the formation assumed the role of training brigade for the entire Brigade of Guards.

201<sup>st</sup> (Guards) Infantry Brigade Battles and Honours  
Tobruk 1941  
Battle of Gazala around the port of Tobruk 1942

Under Command 56<sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division  
Under Command 56<sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division  
Under Command 56<sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division  
Under Command 56<sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division  
Under Command 56<sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division

42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company under command

Medenine 1943  
Mareth 1943  
Akarit 1943  
Enfidaville 1943  
Tunis 1943  
Salerno 1943  
Capture of Naples 1943  
Volturno Crossing 1943  
Monte Camino 1943  
Garigliano Crossing 1944

We landed on 9th September, 1943, on a narrow beach a few miles south of Salerno, where 201 Guards Brigade were supposed to be in reserve, but went in much earlier than we expected. Luckily there was very little enemy opposition on this sector and things proceeded very well, Headquarters and transport arriving at the concentration area a few hours after the arrival of the platoons.

The enemy centre of resistance was around Battipaglia, and it was here that 201 Guards Brigade held the line for a long time through the most dangerous part of the whole operation. At one stage we were in the line as infantry with the Guards, and the Brigadier congratulated us on our efforts.

However, the enemy could not hang on indefinitely. The Eighth Army was moving up quickly and the Americans were doing well in front of Eboli on our right.

Battipaglia was taken and the Brigade moved over to the Salerno sector, our platoons in support of their respective battalions being constantly employed on recces, mine lifting, and erecting Bailey bridges. Headquarters of the Company was at this time located at Fiano.

The rear party arrived with the extra transport. Our casualties had been very light. We had sustained no casualties in the initial landing, but during the Battipaglia episode and after we lost men, mostly due to shelling and mortaring.

Salerno eventually fell, and the Brigade pushed up the Cava-Nocera road, branching right through Sarno and Nola down route 7, wheeling off through Acerra, Madaloni, and on towards Caserta, never staying in one place more than four or five days.

From intelligence sources it was gathered that the only organized strength against us were in the form of battle groups, and these elements were fighting rear-guard actions until the River Volturno was reached. The main Sapper tasks along these routes were filling in craters, a Bailey or two, and sweeping verges or gun areas. Actually, the bulldozer became the sappers' constant companion, as many a way had to be bulldozed through the debris of demolished houses. The 'dozer usually made short work of these blocks, but the enemy laid many mines in these village streets, which made bulldozing a hazardous task.

On arrival at Caserta it was evident that the Volturno was definitely going to be held, so movement slowed up and the Brigade held a line a few kilometres south of Capua. The Company took up residence in the Carabinieri Barracks. Headquarters being located there permanently. Platoons were at times with the battalions, but when they were not required, training was carried out on the lake of the Royal Palace, constructing rafts with 44-gallon petrol drums!

The Company took part in the crossing of the Volturno in the Trifulisco area over a floating bridge constructed by the Americans. The enemy put down a heavy concentration in the bridge area, but we suffered no casualties.



On the north side of the river we concentrated for two days. It was here that the Officer Commanding was blown up on a mine whilst on one of his reces. The second-in-command assumed command of the Company. 201 Guards Brigade were to push across the Maggiore massif towards Formicola, thence' over the massif itself towards Rochlietta, Croche and Petrulo, eventually striking route 6. No.1 Platoon actually went on foot across the mountains with the Grenadier Guards. Water supply equipment, mine detectors, rations; all had to be transported across about eight kilometres of rough mountain terrain in addition to scaling the massif. Because of this, on arrival at Formicola we turned out all the local equine power in the form of donkeys, and soon these poor beasts were carrying loads enough to break an animal twice their size. However, by much persuasion, gentle and otherwise, to both donkey and owner, the stores were eventually transported across the mountain and up to Rochlietta. Immediately upon arrival, the platoon set up a water point for the Brigade, which by this time had concentrated in Petrulo, where it awaited the arrival of our other platoons and Headquarters. Route 6 and the secondary roads deviating from it were full of demolitions, and as Teano was the next objective, routes to this place had to be cleared. Because of this, even though we were still brigaded, we actually reverted to under direct command of the C.R.E. Tasks involved were building of two Bailey bridges and the construction and maintenance of diversions. One particular Bailey had to be built over a road/rail demolition. This was a particularly difficult one as it was about 1,500 yards from the enemy and the least noise could be detected very easily. It was pretty obvious that they had heard us, for after three of the bridging trucks had been unloaded at the site, the enemy picked up the sound and decided to alleviate his curiosity by putting down a heavy stonk. Unfortunately, three men were killed, six others sustaining wounds. Eventually the C.R.E. called it off, and after reloading stores the platoons returned to Petrulo. Later, an attack was made on Teano, and the enemy withdrew towards Sessa and the Garigliano. In this last operation the unit was mine-sweeping and clearing roads full of demolished trees, most of which were booby-trapped with the ordinary 1 kilogram prepared charge. This type of booby-trap was very common in the area and effective, and we lost one sapper killed and two wounded whilst endeavouring to neutralize them.

On 3rd November the unit moved to Domenico, near Mount Croce, and for a period came under command of the 23rd Armoured Brigade, reverting after a few days to our old Brigade.

Conditions at this time, especially at the altitude, were very rigorous, and at one time it rained solidly for fifteen days without a break. Most of us managed to find some sort of billet; not always the M.O.'s idea of a hygienic area, but at least a protection against the elements. The platoons were employed chiefly on improving existing rough mountain tracks, the chief form of transport being a jeep, or mules when visiting the Guards' forward position. Our new O.C., Major A. K. Gilmour, arrived on 29th November.

Due to weather conditions, operations became rather static, and after a rather uneventful stay of twenty four days the unit moved to Carano, just south of the Garigliano, on the coastal sector. 201 Guards Brigade, which had been under command of the 46th Division for the period at Domenico, reverted once more to the command of the 56th (London) Division.



The Garigliano

42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company rafting



Major A. H. M. Morris,  
M.C., G.M., R.E.

Officer Commanding 1944  
and the person responsible for the majority of  
information in this document up to 1947

The position on the coastal sector of Garigliano at that time was as follows. The enemy were holding a few positions along the south side of the river, and as usual these positions were extensively mined. The work in this area was enough to make any sapper mine-weary. It was all mines, sometimes sweeping gun areas, then on patrol, then sweeping tracks forward.

An interesting operation was sweeping in the area of the Via Appia. Mines had been laid in the dry season, and after heavy rains the entire area was flooded. It was not a very pleasant task.

The unit supplied the Sapper detail for a Commando raid on the north side of the river, the operation being carried out in conjunction with an attack on 201 Guards Brigade on Pontafiume. The operation, although quite successful, did not permit the Guards to occupy Pontafiume. The enemy did not realize this for a few days, but when he did he came back and occupied it in strength.

Apart from the normal round of work, nothing of particular interest happened until the unit was ordered to move to Mondragone. Here we stayed for approximately twelve hours, when the Officer Commanding received orders to move to Frignano Maggiore, about fifteen kilometres north of Naples, the Guards Brigade having moved to the Aversa area a day or two previously.

Frignano was to be a rest and training area for the unit. We were occupying comfortable billets, and as the weather was reasonable all ranks managed to get some range practice. In addition, a course was arranged for Infantry Pioneers to give them some practical mine training. We were also made responsible for the maintenance of a floating Bailey bridge at Canello. It was in this area that most of the Brigade was doing mountain training around Limotola!

On 17th January we moved to Carano for the assault crossing of the Garigliano. The Guards were taking part in this operation and, being under command 5th Division, had been given the coastal sector. The Company was in support of the Brigade, but came directly under the C.R.E. for all technical operations. After the assault we crossed Garigliano, thence pushing on to an area near Minturno. This was one of the hottest spots the unit had had to live in for any length of time, our length of stay being about twenty days. On the second night, during a mine-laying operation, the Officer Commanding, Major A. K. Gilmour, R.E., was wounded and once more the second-in-command (Captain Peplow) took command of the unit.

Generally speaking, Minturno was not a very comfortable halt, for our normal tasks had to be carried out without apparently paying any attention to the heavy stonk which descended upon us almost incessantly. We established a water point. We swept mines and constructed Battalion Headquarters for the Scots and Grenadier Guards.

The whole position was overlooked from Gaeta on the west, and it was surprising to note the few casualties the Brigade Group sustained at this time. Usually the "coffee-housing" was so great that the enemy did not know whom to have a crack at first and as a result "bagged" very few.

On 13th February our new O.C. (Major A. H. M. Morris, M.C., G.M.) took over, noting with some concern that the Company H.Q. was the leading element of the Company, being in an orange grove in the F.D.Ls. and next door to the "Quarry" which many of us will remember!

A week later we moved south of the river, handing over to a 5th Division brigade and harbouring at Nocelletta. Here we commenced a thorough overhaul of the Company. It was during our stay at Nocelletta that we left 201 Guards Brigade, which moved south for eventual breaking up, and on 22nd February we moved to a Divisional Bridging Camp at S. Angelo, near Capua, for three weeks' training in bridging.

This period was short-lived, for on 2nd March we moved back to Carano area, where we came under command of the 6th British Armoured Division, and whilst here our second-in-command (Captain Peplow) left us for the S.M.E. at Capua, Captain J. S. Goad taking his place.

On the western side of Italy the enemy was firmly entrenched in the Gustav Line, which at this particular sector was a line more or less following the high ground north of the Garigliano. Another line named after Hitler was established a few miles to the north of this, and it can be seen that as far as our own front was concerned, the enemy still dominated the Garigliano and all approaches to it. In addition, he still held Monte Scauri, towering on our left flank rather behind our forward line. Scauri was a high feature right on the coast, very heavily defended, and an excellent observation post.

The 88th United States Division were now operating in this sector, and the unit was working with the Americans chiefly on the maintenance of roads and tracks, and never-ending recesses.

Fine weather now approaching the O.C. decided to continue the overhauling of vehicles and stores, to

ensure the unit being completely mobile for future operations. The amount of scrounging that went on in order to equip troop carrying vehicles with seats and racks, and stores lorries with cupboards, cannot be imagined. All vehicles had to have their desert yellow painted over with proper green camouflage paint. Also a certain amount of barter was carried out to our profit, two instances being the exchange of a much worn jeep which had been severely mortared for a brand new one straight from U.S.A., and the purchase, after a guest night at Capua, of a German Daimler Staff Car which cost the O.C. two whiskies. (How many readers remember the "Cat's Whiskers," eight forward speeds, four speeds in reverse and, according to Sergeant Turner, the M.T. Sergeant, one up, one down and two sideways as well!) We had a close liaison with the American Engineers, and their sappers were down on our ferry site working with us, preparing for the hand-over. It was on the 29th we handed over our works commitments to the Americans, and Major Morris prepared a complete set of instructions and maintenance notes appertaining to the ferry.

Our new location was Piedimonte d'Alife, in the lower Apennines, where the unit came under command 6th British Armoured Division. It was to be a rest period for refitting and reorganization, so in actual fact the threads of that started at Carano were gathered together, and the good work continued. We had many well-organized games of football. Leave was commenced, and medical inspections and interior economy were the order of the day. Major Morris went up as A./C.R.E., 6th Armoured Division, for a week, located in the "Horseshoe" outside Cassino, and Lieutenant Wilson took a party up to sweep mines under water along the famous "Speedy Express," the late railway line, transformed into a road, which led straight into Cassino station.

It was an eerie experience along this road; odd gaps were bridged with Bailey which, through constant shelling, was at all sorts of angles, and wherever one went one was accompanied by the awful Cassino stench, dead bodies, burst sewers and rotting debris. Little wonder, then, that we were pleased to move away from the Garigliano and Cassino to the upper reaches of the Sangro in lovely country near Castel di Sangro on 17th April.

Platoons were detached in the general area Vasto Giradi and Carovilli near Roccasicura, on the River Sangro. Here we were under command C.R.E., 10th Armoured Division, and brigaded with the 24 Guards Brigade. This sector could be visualized as a big V, hinged on Alfadena, the arms of the V representing the Mount Greco range on the left with the Della Maiella range on the right. High points like Mount Domenico (1,629 metres), Malo and Mount Seccine (1,883 metres) stretched out in front of the right arm, in front of which the River Sangro curled down from the Apennines, winding its way through Alfadena.

The unit tasks included clearing and maintenance of the railway tunnel from Vastogiradi to Castel di Sangro (used as a road), roads in the general area, with recce patrols into the mountains sometimes of duration up to seventy-two hours; mine clearance parties; constructing diversions and the making of a jeep track to Petrilli through Ateleta, which necessitated the building of two small box girder bridges, all Bailey having been taken by the C.E. for future operations. One particular bridge had only been constructed a few hours when it received a direct hit by shell fire. During this episode, Lieutenant J. S. Barrett, whose platoon constructed the bridge, was down at the site, and he had to watch his efforts become the target for enemy artillery.

This period of the campaign saw Major Morris as A. / C.R.E., and Captain Goad, second - in - command, assumed command of the Company. Things were rather static on this sector, and the opportunity was taken to send as many officers and N.C.Os. on courses as was possible. These courses were chiefly Bailey bridging at the School of Military Engineering, Capua. However, by 15th May most of the courses had been completed; Major Morris had returned from A. / C.R.E. and the unit was ordered to hand over all its works commitments to 622 Field Squadron, R.E.

Local leave for this year so far had been given to most of the Company, who went down to Sorrento. Will they ever forget it? Sapper Jenkins (O.C.'s batman) must have vivid memories, as Vesuvius was in full blast at the time!

On 20th May we moved to Dugenta, near Caserta, to concentrate with the 6th South African Armoured Division; 24 Guards Brigade were also under command of this Division. The unit was at Dugenta until 27th May, when we moved to Cassino preparatory to joining in what we hoped would be the final phase of operations in Italy. The initial break-through of the Gustav and Adolf Hitler Lines had been achieved, and the 6th South African Armoured Division was going to complete the rout in this sector. The dates of this operation were actually from 27th May until the arrival in Florence. The Commander of the Guards Brigade, Brigadier A. F. L Clive, D.S.O., M.C., wrote a short narrative of the chase from Cassino to Florence as it affected the Brigade Group. Extracts from this narrative are given in the following chapter, and when read it

will be seen that the operation was one of pursuit, with the sappers playing a foremost role.

In the third paragraph of the introduction to the narrative by the Brigadier, there is a great compliment paid to the unit, "That without the incessant work of the 42nd Field Company, R.E., the Brigade would never have advanced at all." It was for us a period of seventy days continually on the move, and the Sappers worked like Trojans. Tasks were always very similar, reconnaissance of roads, mine-sweeping, water points, Baileys, diversions and always sappers with the leading elements.

It was pleasant for the O.C. to hear "bouquets" at every Brigade conference he attended, and the dismay on the part of battalions if "their" platoon was lent for an operation to another battalion was expressed, sometimes in forcible terms i.e., when Lieutenant Gill was wounded for the second time, the Scots Guards assured the O.C. it would never have occurred had his platoon (3) remained with them. This great advance from Cassino to Florence with 24 Guards Brigade was a magnificent military operation and will live long in the minds of those who were in it. There were some hazardous times, even to the extent of the Brigade being temporarily cut off by enemy troops operating across the Brigade axis.

Our casualties in these two months were one officer (Lieutenant F. R. Wilson) and eight other ranks killed, and two officers and forty-nine other ranks wounded, and during the period we constructed 1,040 feet of Bailey bridge and filled in innumerable craters.

## EXTRACTS FROM 24 GUARDS BRIGADE HISTORY

The Brigade completed its concentration under command of the 6th South African Armoured Division on 23rd May, 1944. With it came Army Field Regiment, R.A. (Lieutenant- Colonel T. F. K. Howard) and 42nd Field Company, R.E. (Major A. H. M. Morris, M.C., G.M.), both of which units had been in support of the Brigade Group for several weeks in X Corps area in the mountains. This, then, was the nucleus of 24 Guards Brigade Group which was to form part of the 6th South African Armoured Division throughout the ensuing operations.

It is as well to say that it would be hard to better the intimate liaison and comradeship that grew up between the British and South African units. Everyone, whether senior commander or private soldier, whether gunner, sapper, infantryman, tankman or mortarman, knew his opposite number in the other arm; and not only knew him by his Christian name, but also knew he could trust him. It was this loyalty and appreciation between all ranks that was largely responsible for whatever the Group accomplished.

It is impossible, in a short account, to give proper individual credit to different units, and it must suffice to say that the 23rd Army Field Regiment spared no effort, day or night, to give immediate and effective artillery support and that without the incessant work of 42nd Field Company the Brigade could never have advanced at all.

**Brigade Commander – Brigadier M.D. Erskine D.S.O.**

### 6th South African Armoured Division

42nd Field Company served in this Division as part of 24 Guards Infantry Brigade from 20 May 1944 to 18 February 1945.

This Division – the first true armoured division in South African military history – was formed in South Africa on February 1, 1943 from new recruits and units that had served in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd SA Infantry (and Armoured) Divisions. After completing its training in Egypt, the division landed at Taranto, Italy on April 20, 1944.

Answers.com avers that despite leading the advance on Rome, the division was denied the honour of "taking" the city (entering the city first) by the United States Army. "However, the division was one of the first allied units to enter Florence two months later.

The division's active role in the war ended when the German forces in Italy surrendered on May 2, 1945. Major General WHE (Evered) Poole was the sole divisional commander during its existence.



Division Insignia

Green and Yellow are two of the South African national colours.

### 6th South African Armoured Division Battles and Engagements in 1944 with 24 Guards Brigade and 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company under command

<b>Rome</b>	22 May	04 June
Advance to the Tiber	22 May	04 June
Celleno	09 June	09 June
Bagnoregio	11 June	13 June
Allerona	15 June	15 June
<b>Trasimene Line</b>	20 June	30 June
<b>Arezzo</b>	04 July	17 July
<b>Advance to Florence</b>	17 July	10 August
Monte San Michele	18 July	20 July
Monte Domini	21 July	24 July
Monte Kili	21 July	23 July
Paula Line	30 July	04 August
<b>Gothic Line</b>	25 August	22 September
Monte Porro del Bagno	15 September	18 September
Femmina Morta	17 September	18 September
Catarelto Ridge	28 September	03 October
Monte Vigese	30 September	06 October
Monte Stanco	07 October	13 October
Monte Salvaro	19 October	23 October

**24 Guards Infantry Brigade and 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company leave the Division 19 February 1945**



Brig. M.D. Erskine D.S.O.

Commander 24<sup>th</sup> Guards Inf. Bde. While 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company were under command during the Italy Campaign  
St Georges Day, Rossetti Bks, Trieste. Italy, 1947,

Inspecting 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster)

CSM Cronshaw entertains the Brigadier by telling him he is the oldest soldier, except for the CO.

I wonder if these were his exact words?

On 27th May. The role of the Division was to be the pursuit of the enemy, but the Brigade was first employed in a holding role for the protection of XIII Corps right flank. This task ended on 30th May, and on 2nd June the Brigade Group concentrated near Ceccano after a slow move on narrow and congested roads.

By this time the Americans had captured Valmontone and, with route 6 cut behind him, the enemy was withdrawing at full speed into the mountains north of the Liri Valley. On 3rd June the Brigade Group set off in pursuit with the objectives of Acuto and Fiuggi, where the presence of a celebrated soda-water factory imparted an economic significance to the manoeuvre. The advance was made on a narrow mountain road heavily mined and blown; delay and casualties were caused by accurate enemy shelling of demolitions, but at last light we had captured a junction on the Acuto- Fiuggi road.

The advance then became still-born; the 6th British Armoured Division, appearing unexpectedly from the east, swiftly crossed our axis to take Fiuggi and Acuto, and the Corps Commander arrived in person to give the stand-still order. The operation ended like an exercise with an order to "turn about" and return to a concentration area near Anagni.

The new plan was adventurous. Rome had fallen to the Americans and the enemy was withdrawing beyond it in great confusion. 24 Guards Brigade, as the spearhead of the Army, was to advance with all speed to seize the first bridge over the Tiber, north of Rome.

At first light, 5th June, the Group advanced at a rattling pace down route 6 amongst ever-increasing congestion of French and American traffic to the outskirts of Rome. Here they met an American General who, knowing nothing of our historic mission, declared that the road was reserved for the Fifth Army. After some discussion the Brigade was ordered to harbour in the fields by the roadside.

At 1500 hrs the advance to the bridge site was continued, only to find that the road was also the axis of a French Division and the ubiquitous 6th British Armoured Division, and the bridge site itself was held by French on the one side and the Americans on the other! Traffic on the road was in some places stationary, three deep, and the situation was not improved by an air-raid, during which anti-personnel bombs caused casualties to the 23rd Field Regiment and to some sappers of the 42nd Field Company clearing mines.

At about 1600 hrs on 5th June, Major Morris was ordered to recce the River Tiber about six miles to the north of Rome. He took with him Lieutenants Barrett, Gill and Woolfaardt and three ORs, and the party, cramming into two jeeps, managed to fight its way through the Romans and Americans to the river. It was not until after dark that they got clear of Rome and through the American forward troops. They proceeded along the road, littered with debris and vehicles, including two large buses full of German dead, an

experience never to be forgotten.

Just as they were approaching the river they were challenged, as it turned out, by Goums who were busy bringing prisoners across the river over the remains of the bridge. This was a hazardous undertaking in the dark, as it involved clinging to parts of the bridge 100 feet over the river, crawling across the remains of the bridge in the river itself, and then climbing 100 feet vertically back on to the road. The Goums had all come over, but we could not discover how many prisoners had been lost en route. Time was getting on and, having discovered from the Goums that there were "niente Tedeschi" on the far bank, a statement, incidentally, entirely untrue, Lieutenant Gill tied a line to his waist, swam the river and by this means we managed to measure the gap, returning to Company H.Q. after a "brew."

### **ROME TO THE TRANSIMENE LINE**

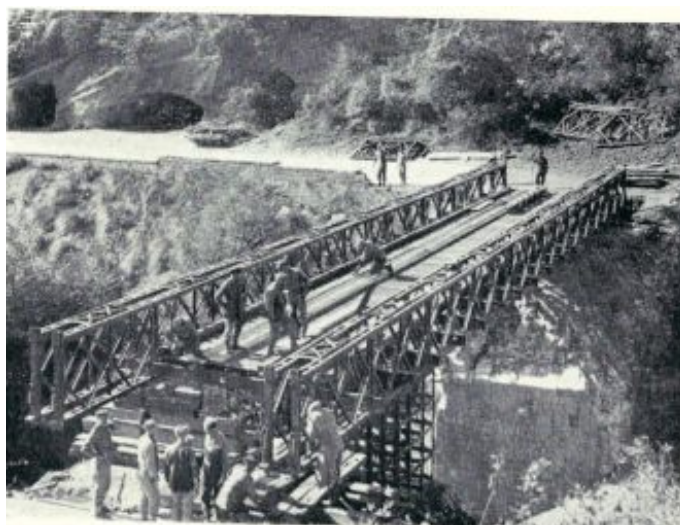
On 6th June the Brigade again retraced its steps and passed through the enthusiastic crowds in Rome to a concentrated area seven miles to the north, coming into Division reserve. For the next four days the 11th South African Armoured Brigade led the advance, which progressed quickly, and to keep up we had to make several tiring moves at short notice, passing by the smouldering caves of Kesselring's late headquarters on Mount Soratte, pushing on through Civita, Castennana and Viterbo. The enemy's withdrawal was still disorganized, and the 3rd Coldstream Guards captured the entire band of 175 Infantry Division! On 10th June we broke through a strong anti-tank screen north of Viterbo, inflicting very heavy casualties on men and equipment, and on 11th June passed through to take the lead.

The first serious resistance was encountered after six kilometres had been covered. At this point the road was mined and covered by small-arms fire from a German company in the vineyards beyond. A company attack with tank support was quickly mounted and effectively dispersed the enemy, who lost thirty prisoners of war and one anti-tank gun. The advance was resumed and reached a demolished bridge 1,000 yards south-west of Bagnoregio.

(The O.C. and his "Tac" were the first on the scene, just beating Lieutenants Gill and Woolfaardt to it. The mining consisted of six teller mines laid in full view across the road. Once the attack started, we sat on the roadside and watched, rather as if we were in the stalls.)

The village of Bagnoregio stood on the top of a precipitous cliff, a little fortress of the ordinary Italian village type. Beyond the demolished bridge which had straddled a deep gully, the road wound up to the village between high banks above the west wall of the cliff. Once bridge building commenced, however, considerable small-arms fire started from the opposite cliff face together with mortaring and shelling of the leading troops. The Brigade took up a firm base position on the high ground south-west of the town, remaining there for the night.

A divisional attack on Bagnoregio was planned for 12<sup>th</sup> June, the French during the afternoon attacking Monterado, thus securing the 6th South African Armoured Division's left flank. The 11th South African Armoured Brigade were then to seize the ridge west of Bagnoregio preparatory to 24 Guards Brigade attack on the village. Monterado was captured by the French, but owing to a misunderstanding their attack started late. The 11th South African Armoured Brigade made slow progress in face of strong anti-tank fire, and at 2030 hrs., in view of the falling light, the operation was cancelled, 24 Guards Brigade standing down from its start line.



42nd Field Company Bailey Bridge near Bagnoregio

The attack was renewed at first light on the following day, and by 0750 hrs. the 11th South African Armoured Brigade were on their objectives, and forty minutes later the 3rd Coldstream Guards, advancing quickly and in fine style, although hampered by mined tracks, had captured their objectives. The 42nd Field Company finished its bridges on both sides of Bagnoregio and, meeting little opposition, cleared the village itself. By 1300 hrs opposition was over and the 12th South African Mounted Brigade passed through to take the lead.



Major Morris and Captain Goad have a chat with the Locals

### **SARTEANO AND THE ADVANCE TO THE AREZZO LINE**

On the afternoon of 21st June, orders were received to relieve the 12th South African Mounted Brigade in the lead. The advance had now reached the outposts of the enemy's Trasimene Line, where determined opposition was being met on the whole front. Cetona had been occupied, but to the north-east the formidable strong-point of Chiusi was strongly held, and to the north there were reports of two battalions in the Sarteano area.

On 22nd June the Brigade moved forward and increasing opposition was encountered as the advance proceeded.

Our own position was made difficult by the openness of both flanks, for on the right the 12th South African Mounted Brigade could make no progress towards Chiusi, whilst on the left the French had only a reconnaissance element, their main thrust being farther to the west. The Brigade Commander therefore planned a Brigade attack for the following day. During the night Cetona was continuously harassed by a single gun which secured a direct hit on the 3rd Coldstream Guards' regimental aid post (and "brewed up" some transport in the main square, including a 15-cwt. truck of 42nd Field Company containing a large number of bottles of wine "released" by Lieutenant Gill).

The attack commenced, and by 1100 hrs it was apparent that we had broken right into the enemy's positions and were causing him considerable alarm. These enemy positions were the strongest that the Brigade had yet encountered. An enemy battalion, fresh, up to strength, and newly arrived from Northern Italy, had had four days to prepare its positions on high ground astride the road, its front being covered by thick and extensive "S" mine belts. They disposed of considerable artillery support and four Tigers or self-propelled guns dug in south of the River Astrone protected by mine belts. These shelled our forward troops at point-blank range and were almost impossible to locate and knock out.

The next day we continued to advance to take the high ground west of Chianciano. Opposition was slight and the objective was reached while demolitions were still going on in Chianciano, The Brigade was by now extremely tired after a week's heavy fighting, in which all had been equally involved, and no major advance was attempted on 29th June. Patrols, however, entered Chianciano and Montepulciano (Lieutenant J. Urquhart and Major Morris, both of the Sappers, were the first into the town by some hours), capturing three prisoners of war from a German rear-guard in the latter and, no doubt, hastening the enemy's evacuation. It was evident that the enemy's co-ordination of his withdrawal had gone wrong, for the 11th South African Armoured Brigade was being held up by a strong anti-tank screen south-east of Monte Fallonico, from which enemy infantry engaged the 1st Scots Guards with mortars. The 1st Scots Guards, therefore, were ordered to pass on down a lateral road, but this was badly blown and mined, and it was discovered that the enemy was holding some high ground immediately north of the Torrita road junction. The light by this time was falling, and as information about the opposition was uncertain, the Brigade Commander decided against a night advance on foot to Torrita.

The next morning the 1st Scots Guards continued towards Torrita, while the 3rd Coldstream Guards took up the advance along the axis. There was a hard battle for Torrita, but strong opposition on the ridge north-west of the village was neutralized by the tanks, allowing the 1st Scots Guards to seize and clear Torrita without casualties to themselves. Meanwhile, the 3rd Coldstream Guards were making steady progress



and were close on the heels of the enemy's demolition parties. One demolition went up 1,000 yards in front of the leading company, and a man with a motor-cycle was clearly seen riding down the road, setting off the prepared charges as he came to them.

During the night the enemy withdrew from his positions, and on 3rd July the advance was resumed to Rapolano. Enemy rear-guards were met on both routes, but driven off by company attacks. The 5th Grenadier Guards, who had a shorter and less demolished axis, occupied the position and were consolidating in Rapolano before last light. However, the first Allied soldier to enter Rapolano was Lieutenant Barrett, R.E., who, learning from civilians that the village was clear, drove past the leading infantrymen, took over three prisoners of war captured by the partisans, and organized a party of forty Italians to fill in a crater on the outskirts of the town. On the following day the Brigade made fast progress along the axis, finding several demolitions which were quickly dealt with by the sappers. Castelnuovo was entered and found clear, and at last light we were established in San Gusme and in the village of Campi on the high ground beyond. That our progress had been faster than the enemy had expected was shown by the arrival in San Gusme of a Hermann Goring Officer who was duly taken prisoner. What he was doing there he refused to say, but it is possible that he had come to reconnoitre the place prior to occupation. Throughout the advance the work of the 42nd Field Company, R.E., had been incessant. Often under observed shell fire, bridges had been put up and craters filled in. Five bulldozers had been knocked out by shells, mortars or mines. The speed and success of the advance hitherto had been largely due to the energy of Major A. H. M. Morris, M.C., G.M., and his Field Company.

#### **THE HALT BEFORE THE AREZZO LINE AND THE ADVANCE ACROSS THE GAIOLE VALLEY**

The 1st Scots Guards' advance up the axis the following day was held up, firstly by two large demolitions which required bridging, and then by very heavy and accurate observed shell fire on the leading companies and sappers working on the demolitions. It was obvious that a further advance in vehicles was out of the question, which persuaded the Brigade Commander to mount an infantry attack on Castel di Brolio, the strong-point barring their advance. From close range the castle looked formidable indeed, for it had been built in the Scottish baronial style, surrounded by a solid wall forty feet in height. There were only two entrances. The enemy had a platoon or weak company inside the building which kept up continuous machine-gun and mortar fire from the battlements, and there seemed to be no way of scaling the wall to close with them. While this attack was in progress the G.O.C. arrived at Brigade Headquarters, bringing news of strong enemy positions along the whole Corps front. We had, in fact, reached the enemy's next main defence position, the Arezzo Line. On our right the 12th South African Mounted Brigade had been held up several miles to the south-east and could make no progress, leaving our right flank open. Civilian reports were already beginning to come in of enemy battalions approaching, and any further advance by 24 Guards Brigade would only have extended our open flank. Our left flank was lightly covered by French reconnaissance elements. Our attack was therefore called off and the Brigade Commander ordered them to withdraw and dig in astride the road about a mile south of Castel di Brolio.

The Brigade had now reached positions which, with only minor adjustments, it was to occupy for the next nine days while the 6th British Armoured Division mounted the main attack on the Arezzo Line. Our orders were to maintain our positions, to keep contact with the enemy and to attempt no further advance.

The enemy particularly resented our occupation of Campi, and the Grenadiers were submitted to frequent and heavy shelling until on 12th July they were heavily counter-attacked. Campi was the ground that was vital for defence, and the 5th Grenadier Guards were disposed of a line north and south along the ridge, with eventually two companies forward of Campi and one in reserve behind. In the centre of the Brigade front the 1st Scots Guards held positions astride our axis on the western slopes of the Campi ridge. Initially they were too heavily shelled, but some readjustments of their positions gave them greater protection from view and fire, enemy shelling decreasing after the first few days. The Guards were interested chiefly in Castel di Brolio, which they were in due course to attack, although collecting and sifting the many contradictory reports from patrols and civilians was also of great interest. No definite report had been received to state whether the town was occupied or not. The 3rd Coldstream Guards on the left were in the quietest sector and had only light contact with the enemy, whose nearest positions were some 4,000 yards away. Battalion Headquarters was comfortably installed in San Giusto, a country house belonging to Countess Cigala-Martini, whose doubtful politics were compensated by her unflinching hospitality, her excellent Chianti and her four nieces.

The Countess was a Ricasoli and the sister of the Baron of Castel di Brolio, a reputed Fascist and the entertainer of Mussolini, but may have been guilty of nothing worse than being unpopular with his peasants.

The Ricasoli, besides being the most famous makers of Chianti wines were extensive landowners in the country we had now entered and for a time our progress was from one of their castles to the next.

At 1400 hrs on 12th July the leading company of the 5th Grenadier Guards was heavily attacked. In the dense undergrowth a most determined enemy had succeeded in getting inside our defence, penetrating between the two patrols on the forward slope and company headquarters on the reverse. Two hours of hand-to-hand fighting followed, during which many casualties were inflicted on the enemy, the attack being finally driven off before reinforcements in the shape of a troop of tanks arrived. Seven German bodies were found on the minefield in front of the position, and a total of thirty-five enemy corpses were subsequently counted. The attack had been made by a company of the Hermann Goring Sturm Battalion, which had come from divisional reserve for the purpose. Amongst the captured were two flame-throwers essential members of these specially trained shock-troops. Among the many patrols carried out during this period, which included one by the veteran Countess Cigala herself, there is space to mention only two. During one sultry and eventful afternoon, "C" Squadron, N.M.R., abandoned their "road-blocking" activities to explore Castel di Brolio. The obstacle of the notorious wall was overcome with the aid of a ladder found lying in the laurel bushes, though half an hour's manipulation was necessary before it could be raised into the required position. This was climbed and two Germans were observed within the fortifications, the remainder of the Castle's garrison appearing to be asleep, as not a shot was fired. The patrol then withdrew and reported that "they could not confirm whether the Castle was occupied or not." However, a Scots Guards patrol to Castel di Brolio was accompanied by an Italian, who insisted that the Castle was unoccupied. The patrol entered the back garden and, as two Jerry sentries appeared on the terrace, they were promptly shot by the patrol commander. The enemy replied with considerable fire from the battlements, and the patrol withdrew, suffering no casualties except for the Italian guide, wounded.

As had been anticipated for several days, the Brigade moved forward on its next bound in the early morning of 15th July. This move coincided with the 1<sup>st</sup> Scots Guards Brigade attack on the high ground south of Arezzo. By 0730 hrs all objectives, which had been evacuated by the enemy, had been occupied, and the Baron of Brolio was met on the doorstep of his castle, where he presented an official complaint that his gates had been shot away by the tanks.

The 1st Scots Guards were next ordered to seize a densely wooded spur on the Campi ridge north-east of Castel di Brolio, and by the evening one company had climbed and occupied the summit, capturing a complete German outpost, playing cards.

The country over which the next two days' advance was made was an undulating valley dominated and observed by the southernmost peaks of the Chianti Mountains, some six kilometres away. Accurate shelling applied by observation posts on the hilltops was brought down by the enemy on any movement along our axis and on the sappers repairing the roads. Demolitions and mines, of course, were as frequent as usual.

The following morning shelling again held up work on the axis and the move forward of support weapons. The 3rd Coldstream Guards did not begin their advance to Point 701, the first peak of the Chianti range, till the afternoon. As a Coldstream Guards company climbed the slopes they could distinctly hear fire orders being given by an opposite party in the village to mortars on the reverse slopes. Heavy fires from these mortars pinned the company, which had to dig in after dark, 800 yards from the crest; but before dawn a strong patrol was sent forward to the summit, only to find it evacuated by the enemy. Shelling during the night had been heavy. A Grenadier company sent to occupy a village on the Brigade's left flank was held up short of its objective for some hours by artillery and Nebelwerfer fire, and the shelling of Gaiole was so intense that for three hours no traffic was able to pass through the village.

This was our last encounter in Italy with the Hermann Goring Division, whose relief by 715 Infantry Division was completed the following day. The former body was next identified in action at Warsaw.

### **THE CHIANTI MOUNTAINS**

The Chianti Mountains, which extended over the next twenty kilometres of our route to Florence, were a range of steep and thickly wooded hills through which the narrow road wound its tortuous way. This was the Brigade axis.

Through these hills, the enemy had a series of defence lines which he had been ordered to hold at all costs. The opposition, therefore, was always strong and increased as the Brigade thrust took shape in the eight days' fighting. From Mount Majone to Mount Collegalle, five enemy battalions were identified.

Our opponents were for the most part from the veteran 356 Infantry Division, an experienced formation

whose morale and fighting qualities had steadily improved in the course of its long but successful withdrawal. Progress under these conditions was inevitably slow, and each height on both sides of the road had to be scaled, assaulted, and consolidated as a separate operation. It took eight days to force a way over those twenty kilometres, but when the last height had been captured, the German Army had lost some 250 men, its programme having been dislocated and upset by forty-eight hours.

Some mention should be made at this point of the partisans, who were so conspicuous a feature in their red neckerchiefs in every newly occupied village. While the fighting round Sarteano was in progress, a group of partisans commanded by a retired Italian Lieutenant-Colonel had carried out several patrols through the enemy's lines, bringing back much valuable information to the Brigade. From Castel di Brolio another partisan patrol had been sent out to rouse the partisan bands behind the German lines, to prevent demolitions on our axis of advance. The results had been noticeable in the past few days. Skirmishes between Germans and partisans had taken place at numerous points between the Brigade area and the Arno, and the partisans' most spectacular achievement had been the capture of Figline on the Arno on 20th July. The German code admitted of only one answer to these attacks, and for several days the arrival to our lines of civilians with stories of villages destroyed and families massacred was a common event.

### **THE LAST PHASE**

Hopes of a swift advance on 26th July were soon dispelled. The enemy's resistance, far from weakening, became more stubborn as a result of his reverses. Hard fighting at close quarters went on for more than two hours, and meanwhile the Pretoria Regiment, who were to take the lead, fighting as a regiment for the first time since they had come under command of the Brigade, could not even start their advance. The debouchment into the plain had to be made through the Greve bottleneck, and through this gap there ran only one road. This road was badly blown, and heavy observed shell fire rendered R.E. work again impossible.

The night was quieter. Barriers were put up and in the morning the Pretoria Regiment set off and secured two ridges before being held up by mines and an extremely strong anti-tank screen of Tiger tanks, self-propelled 88-mm. and anti-tank guns. The 3rd Coldstream Guards had been following up the tanks to occupy the ground they had won, and were now ordered to send one company to a feature which the tanks had reached. This feature was part of a flat bare ridge extending across our line of advance. The Coldstream Company was caught in the open by a stonk while moving there, and when they reached the south-western slopes of the feature where they dug in, the company numbered only some forty men. Its summit and reverse slopes were still occupied by an enemy company although our tanks had passed through them, and this uncomfortable situation was not improved by the fact that it was impossible to get food and water to the company for twenty-four hours.

On 29th July although closely engaged by the Pretoria Regiment, the enemy's resistance was fanatical. Germans were seen standing on top of the ridge, firing Spandaus from the hip at the advancing tanks. The Guards suffered many casualties, but by dark they had cleared the opposition and were established below the crest of the ridge.

The enemy had been pushed back, but he had not gone far, still having parties on the crest of the ridge. For three days the Guards were to hold an uncomfortable line of company localities on the southern slope, in such close contact that it was impossible for the sappers to lay mines in front of them. Meanwhile, the 11th South African Armoured Brigade on our left was held up by strong opposition from the high ground south of Impruneta, and on the right the 12th Brigade had had very heavy fighting in the Mount Scalari range, which was still not clear.

The Brigade's next objective was Strada, which lay on low ground overlooked from either side, which was not attacked till the 4th Division was firm on the high ground to the east, and a temporary deadlock ensued which was finally broken solely by the New Zealander's offensive.

On the night of 31st July our slit trenches were shaken by the explosions of numerous demolitions, and for this inconvenience the enemy's withdrawal was followed up to the Strada ridge on 1st August.

The Impruneta feature was not densely wooded nor so steep as the Chianti hills, but it was far from ideal tank country. Much of its southern slope was covered by houses, olive groves and small woods, some of the fields were terraced, and the road that was our axis was narrow and winding, with several blind corners. An intermediate crest of about half-way up the hill was secured by the Pretoria Regiment, which dealt with opposition from infantry and bazookas. Preparations were then made for the attack, the real summit of the hill, the town of Impruneta lying in a hollow beyond. Steep and terraced, it was a most formidable structure

with no obvious approach except the road, which was mined.

At 2000 hrs the attack started, but soon met strong opposition. The tanks were engaged by anti-tank guns before they could deploy. The infantry ran into machine-gun fire and suffered several casualties, and in view of the falling light, the attack was postponed till first light the following morning.

Next morning the attack was again delayed initially by one 88-mm. gun. This proved, however, to be the last demonstration of the German rear-guards, for the gun pulled out and the Grenadiers, advancing quickly and delayed only by mines, passed through Impruneta, pushing on to 1,000 yards beyond. The next phase was less fortunate. An accumulation of villas, separated only by their respective gardens and a number of small hamlets, covered the ground between Impruneta and Florence in ever-increasing density, and on either side of the road, with few interruptions, ran stone walls. Movement off the road was very difficult, and the field of view afforded to our tanks was very limited. In this country, mines, bazookas at close range, and an occasional anti-tank gun inevitably took their toll, and the Pretoria Regiment lost eight tanks. However, by 1400 hrs, Mount Oriolo had been secured, representing a further advance of 2,000 yards.

During the night numerous explosions were heard as the enemy blew the Arno bridges. Florence was quiet when the 1st Scots Guards entered it on the morning of 4th August, for the enemy had withdrawn across the Arno, leaving one machine-gun post behind which unfortunately caused casualties to a Scots Guards platoon on the river bank. Bands of partisans were patrolling the streets, but the greater part of the population were in their houses and appeared to accept our arrival without emotion. The view from the Piazza Michelangelo, an observation point well known to peace-time travellers, gave a strange impression. No movement was visible in the northern half of the city, but a sharp battle was in progress across the Arno opposite the still intact Pontevecchio, where medieval bricks were spattered by repeated bursts of machine-gun fire from either bank. It is interesting to note that very little damage was done to this beautiful old bridge, although some very old and picturesque houses at the north abutment had been demolished.

The Brigade had now reached the objective of its long advance, and a sense of achievement and completion was common to all. It was felt that the Brigade had been given an exacting task which it carried out creditably and successfully, and by its efforts another phase in the defeat of Germany had been ended, for two months had passed since we left Rome and during that period we had covered 200 miles.

The Brigade was exhilarated but very tired, and the rest that had been promised was felt to be both needed and very well deserved. The next two days were uneventful, and on the night 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> August the Brigade was relieved by the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade when, on completion of the relief, we moved to our rest area near Sienna.



Entry into Civita Castellano



Florence—Pontevecchio in the background

## THE APENNINES

Our arrival in Florence on 5th August (2 Platoon being amongst the first British troops in the town) was short-lived, for on the 7th we were withdrawn from operations to move in convoy to Sienna for a rest and refit period. Major A. H. M. Morris, M.C., G.M., R.E., had been posted to the 6th British Armoured Division as C.R.E. on 15th July, and Major C. B. Stewart (seconded from the South African Engineer Corps) became our new O.C.

The period at Sienna was a rest for about a fortnight, when once again the Company, still with 24 Guards Brigade, moved off to Castel Fiorentino in the American sector of the line.

Enemy opposition was fairly stiff, for he had the natural barrier of the River Arno and the surrounding high ground. Actually, the enemy were south of the Arno, and in our particular sector the River Elsa, a tributary of the Arno, formed another minor obstacle.

Our first task at this new location was to erect the ever-needed water point. However, we were not to be let off as lightly as that, for we were soon carrying out the usual recces, endeavouring to find a suitable place for the Scots Guards to cross the Elsa. Luckily one was found with little trouble, and an angle dozer was used to help cut away the flood banks.

This type of work was practically incessant, for the battalions had pushed forward to within easy reach of the Arno, and every night saw our patrols out searching for suitable crossings and fords. Finally the Americans, with the help of some of our sappers, constructed a 165-foot trestle bridge. We were indeed grateful, for owing to the great number of mines and booby traps, we sustained a number of casualties including two bulldozers which "brewed up" whilst cutting some approaches to the river bank.

Eventually the advance continued up through Lazaretto towards Monsumano and Montecatini, to meet the main Auto Strada. One of the platoons went on through Montecatini Alto to Marliana, whilst the other two platoons remained to repair the Auto Strada which had been badly damaged.

As the battalions moved forward, the unit was always very near Brigade Headquarters, and in this last phase before Pistoia the unit was in the area of Serravalle, where Company Headquarters billeted for a period of approximately three weeks, until moving over to another sector on route 6720, the Prato-Bologna route.

Our first location was Castiglione dei Pepoli, the battalions having pushed forward at the time of our arrival to about four kilometres in front of Castiglione, our platoons being still in support. Here we had the misfortune to lose our Officer Commanding, Major C. B. Stewart, R.E., and his driver, Sapper Rayfield. They were both killed by shell fire. The unit buried them in the 6th South African Armoured Division Cemetery in Castiglione.



Major J. S. Goad, M.C., R.E.

Our Second-in-Command, Captain J. S. Goad, R.E., assumed command of the Company. The advance had now penetrated the Gothic Line, but when the Division became static we were positioned on the remaining high ground overlooking Bologna. Our stay in this area with Headquarters at Lagara, 1 and 3 Platoons at Creda, and 2 Platoon at Pian di Lama, was to turn out to be our longest stay in any place for three years! Nevertheless, there was always a fair amount of work on hand, and when the snow came a snow post had to be established. Conditions at times were severe, for with fourteen to eighteen inches of snow, and very cold, the keeping open of roads for transport was a major problem. This was not only from the point of view of the weather, but also from observation, as an extensive part of the road was open to the enemy, and upon these particular stretches the Hun would put down a ten-minute stonk many times during the day and night.



**Our Jeep Bridge**

The unit built two bridges forward of Lagara, including a jeep bridge constructed of Christchurch cribs.

As has been mentioned previously, 1,040 feet of Bailey Bridge had been constructed up to the time of arrival in Florence, but another 600 feet must now be added to this figure. From Montecatini forward, the bridges had been given a prefix letter. The first bridge was "Able," being 80 feet; the second "Baker," 120 feet; third "Charlie," 80 feet; fourth "Dog," 60 feet; fifth "Easy," 160 feet; and lastly "Fox," 80 feet, making a grand total of 1,640 feet, representing the construction over a period of eight months.

### **The D-Day Dodgers**

The D-Day Dodgers is a term for those Allied servicemen who fought in Italy during the Second World War, which also inspired a popular wartime soldier's song.

A rumour spread during the war that the term was publicised by Viscount Astor, a member of the British Parliament, who supposedly used the expression in public after a disillusioned serviceman in Italy signed a letter to her as being from a "D-Day Dodger." However, there is no record that she actually said this, in or out of Parliament, and she herself denied ever saying it.

Reference to a "D-Day Dodger" was bitingly sarcastic, given the steady stream of allied service personnel who were being killed or wounded in combat on the Italian front. A "Dodger" is someone who avoids something; the soldiers in Italy felt that their sacrifices were being ignored after the invasion of Normandy, and a "D-Day Dodger" was thus a reference to someone who was somehow avoiding real combat. The British Eighth Army was a veteran formation from that theatre before landing in Italy.

Several versions of a song called "D-Day Dodgers", set to the tune Lili Marlene, a favourite song of all troops in the desert were sung with gusto in the last months of the war, and at post-war reunions.

There were many variations on verses and even the chorus, but the song generally and sarcastically referred to how easy their life in Italy was. There was no mention of Lady Astor in the original lyrics. A version of the "Ballad of the D-Day Dodgers" is given on the next page.

Actually, many Allied personnel in Italy had reason to be bitter, as the bulk of material support for the Allied armies went to Northwest Europe after the invasion of Normandy. They also noted sardonically that they had participated in several "D-days" of their own before the landings in Normandy became popularly known as "D-Day". The expression was used to refer to any military operation, but the popular press turned it into an expression synonymous with the Normandy landings only.

Italian campaign veterans noted that they had been in action for eleven months before the Normandy D-Day, and some of those had served from 1939 in North Africa even before that.

The numerous Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries across Italy are compelling evidence of the fighting which took place during campaigns such as Operation Avalanche and the subsequent Battle of Monte Cassino.

## Ballad of the "D-Day Dodgers"

### Sung to the melody of Lili Marlene

We are the D-Day Dodgers out in Italy  
Drinking all the vino, always on a spree  
8th Army skivers and the Yanks

We live in Rome to avoid the tanks  
For we're the D-Day Dodgers in Sunny Italy

We landed at Salerno, a holiday with pay  
Jerry bought his bands down to cheer us on our way  
We all sang songs and the beer was free  
We kissed all the girls in Napoli  
For we're the D-Day Dodgers way out in Italy

Anzio and Cassino were taken in our stride  
We didn't go to fight there, we just went for the ride  
And the Sangro was all forlorn  
We didn't do a thing from dusk to dawn  
For we're the D-Day Dodgers way out in Italy

Once we had a blue light, we were going home  
Back to dear old Blighty, never more to roam  
Then someone whispered in France you'll fight  
We said 'Oh No, we'll all sit tight'  
You windy D-Day Dodgers way out in Italy

When we went to Florence we had a lovely time  
They ran a bus to Rimini 'thru the Gothic Line  
Then to Bologna we will go  
When Jerry's gone across the Po  
For we're the D-Day Dodgers way out in Italy

We hear the boys in France are going home on leave,  
After six months service, such a shame they're not relieved,  
And we are told to carry on, for just a few more years,  
Because our wives don't shed their tears,  
We are the D-Day Dodgers, in sunny Italy

Oh Lady Astor, listen please to us  
Don't stand on a platform making a lot of fuss  
You are our sweetheart, the Forces Pride  
Your only fault, your mouth's too wide  
That's from the D-Day Dodgers out in Italy

Walk around the mountains, in the mist and rain  
You'll find those scattered crosses.  
Some of which bear no name  
Heartbreak and toil and suffering gone  
The Boys beneath, they slumber on  
They were the D-Day Dodgers, left out in Italy!

We are the D-Day Dodgers out in Italy  
Drinking all the vino, always on a spree  
8th Army skivers and the Yanks  
We live in Rome to avoid the tanks  
For we're the D-Day Dodgers in Sunny Italy



*"Which D-Day do they mean old Man?"*

## **1ST JANUARY, 1945, UNTIL THE END OF THE WAR IN EUROPE**

The year 1945, opening to the echo of every gun in the area firing off one round, found the Company in comfortable billets, but with this comfort there were many mixed feelings. Some of us were wondering whether the New Year would bring the end of the war in Europe. Others, particularly the Scotsmen, were more concerned for the moment with good cheer, but the majority were wondering when, if ever, the many times postponed attack by the 24 Guards Brigade on Monte Sole would take place. Frozen snow on the ground made the attack not an easy one under the best of conditions which rather led us to think that it would not be launched for some time. In the heart of the Apennines, Company Headquarters was located in Lagaro, 1 and 3 Platoons in Creda, and 2 Platoon in Pian di Lama. The platoons were fully employed on the inevitable track and road maintenance, erection of Nissen huts, and on general repairs to houses. The erection of some of the Nissen huts was a unique operation, for they were built on hillsides for the forward company localities, and had to be transported to the site by mules.

On the second day of the year, the Officer Commanding had orders to prepare a demolition programme to be put into operation in the event of a large-scale enemy counter-attack. This was indeed a very big task, as most of the bridges in the Divisional area were in the Guards Brigade sector. In order to cope with this, the C.R.E. placed two troops of sappers under our command.

This demolition programme was tied up within four days, and explosives dumps were set accordingly. Fortunately, we never had occasion to put the programme into effect. More heavy snow on the 6th brought a further postponement to the attack on Monte Sole. The snowfall continued and the Divisional plan for snow clearance was put into operation. This included a highly successful system of "trains" or convoys moving in one direction at a time over the mountain roads and adhering to a strict time-table.

During the next three weeks road conditions rapidly deteriorated. Alternate periods of freezing and thawing, together with frequent snowfalls, made the task of road maintenance seem futile and thankless; it was only through the untiring efforts of the sappers, slightly assisted by masses of local civilian labour, that the roads were kept open to traffic. Throughout, the sappers remained remarkably cheerful, despite the awful conditions.

Towards the end of our stay in this area the weather improved considerably, and we were able to hand over our roads in a reasonable condition. Included in the hand-over was a quarter-mile stretch of new road which we had constructed across virgin soil, to by-pass a section of the road to Brigola. This section of the road, just north of Rioveggio, was under direct observation from Monte Sole, and had received quite a lot of attention from the enemy.

Mine-laying, booby-trapping and patrolling were the order of the day, and we carried out one or two interesting experiments with "Beehive" charges used as booby-traps. On one occasion a "battery" of three "Beehives," fired electrically and simulating defensive "artillery," successfully broke up an enemy night attack.

One afternoon the low-level Bailey bridge at Rioveggio received a direct hit by an "88" which damaged the top chord, and that night the Company Sergeant-Major and a handful of picked men from Company Headquarters set out to repair the damage.

On 14th January, Captain Bingham, who had been our Second-in-Command in the absence of Captain Wehner, was posted to the Eighth Army Bridging School, Rome, and his place was taken on the 22nd by Lieutenant W. M. Coombe, who arrived from the U.S. 88 Division to which he had been attached.

In spite of all the work at this time, a dance band was formed from the Divisional Engineers, and no less than six out of the nine members were from the Company. After a few rehearsals, the Band launched on a highly successful programme of concerts on 3rd February. Several pleasant evenings were spent by the Company and other units in the Division at these concerts, but unfortunately the series was cut short before the Band could tour 'the whole of the Division.

On the 9th we were informed officially that the Company would be leaving the Guards Brigade to join the rest of Divisional R.E. at the Bridging Camp at Lucca. This information was received with very mixed feelings, but on the 11th the C.R.E. informed us that a new plan had been made in that we were to move with the Guards Brigade to an area south of Perugia. Later in the same day we were informed that this plan had been changed, our future still remaining uncertain. Meanwhile, our work, repairing and constructing roads, continued.

Three days later the Commander of the United States Army Engineer Company due to take over from us arrived, and in the afternoon we were informed finally that we were not only to leave the Guards Brigade, but the South African Armoured Division as well.

During the next four days we handed over our commitments to the Americans and bade farewell to our



many friends in the Guards Brigade and Division with whom we had fought side by side for so long. 2 and 3 Platoons moved off on the 17th, Company Headquarters and 1 Platoon following the next day. The evening of the 19th saw the entire Company in Faenza with 8' A.G.R.E. under command of 16 G.H.Q. Troops.

The next four days were spent in sorting ourselves out. The billets we were now occupying were by no means perfect, for Faenza had been the scene of some heavy fighting. However, by dint of some hard work repairing the damage, we made ourselves reasonably comfortable.

We remained under command of 16 G.H.Q. Troops for the next three weeks, during which time we were employed on road maintenance. The road allotted to us ran from Faenza to Foligno and included several Bailey bridges. We were also responsible for the maintenance of the four Bailey bridges over the River Lamone through Faenza. One of these, known as the Lamone North Bridge, had to be lengthened by 20 feet to allow the construction of a permanent bridge underneath. 3 Platoon received this job, which had to be done at night to ensure that the minimum amount of traffic would be interrupted.

During this period we managed to have a platoon resting, reorganizing and repainting vehicles, which were beginning to look a little shabby after a strenuous winter in the Apennines. For this purpose, Company Headquarters and the platoon not committed moved back to billets in Forli. Some range practices and competitions were organized and conducted on the range at Cesena. The Company Sergeant-Major ran a two-day cadre course on Folding Boat Equipment for N.C.Os. at Magliano with some equipment which had been released to us for training purposes. We were indeed happy to receive this equipment and to know that it meant visiting a Bridging Camp at the Lido di Roma, for we were temporarily under command of our old O.C., now C.R.E., 6th Armoured Division, Lieut.-Colonel A. H. M. Morris, M.C., G.M., R.E.

On 3rd March Captain Wehner returned to us from leave in "Blighty," remaining with us for only a short time, for eight days later he was posted to Chief Engineer of 1 District at Perugia.

When we learned that the Company would not be going to the Bridging Camp, it came as a great disappointment. Instead, it was learned that the Chief Engineer had a "special job" for us, and accordingly we moved on the 12th to an area on the south bank of the River Uniti not far from Ravenna, under command of 2 Commando Brigade. Until the end of March, 1945, we were to undergo serious training for the pending operations of the Commando Brigade. For security reasons, on our arrival in the Ravenna area we were given only the scantiest information on what form this operation would take. However, it was anticipated that the role of the Company would be to produce rafting of various types, the Officer Commanding producing a training programme with this in view, based on a period of two to three weeks, the time limit which had been set us on arrival.

The weather was extremely pleasant, which made training thoroughly enjoyable. We dealt with all types of rafts from class 2 to Class 40, being lucky enough to get "live" loads, including a Churchill tank, with which to practise crossing the Uniti. We even found time in the evenings to indulge in various forms of recreation. Soccer was, as always, very popular, and some thrilling inter-section matches were played. In Ravenna the various clubs, canteens and picture houses were well patronized, for we made full use of all these opportunities, knowing that this happy state of affairs would not last for ever.

For a few days from the 23rd, a series of recces were made and several small jobs of improvement and alteration carried out on roads. A rather more interesting task was the experiments we made on the methods available to haul pontoon sections over the three-tier-floodbanks common to that part of Italy. All this was in preparation for the operation, more details of which had now been revealed.

The general plan was for the Company to support its Commando Brigade in clearing the enemy from the spit of land running between Lake Commachio and the Adriatic north of the River Reno. This was to entail rafting and bridging at the ferry site across the Reno about two miles from the coast, opening the road along the spit to Commachio, and general mine-clearance.

On the 27th our Officer Commanding, Major J. S. Goad, R.E., formed an improvised Engineer Headquarters to co-ordinate sapper work in the forthcoming operation, and 5th and 8th Field Squadrons from 6th Armoured Division were now placed under his command.

The following day the Company moved up to an area close to San Alberto, once again to be under canvas!

On the 29th we were given the final plan, explaining how the Brigade role dovetailed with other operations on the rest of the Italian Front. This operation was to be the first blow of the final push in Italy. The operation "Roast" on the spit was to protect the right flank of the main assault, at the same time endeavouring to persuade the enemy that he was up against the main thrust and so cause him to bring across vital reserve troops from the more important sector.

The Company was to be employed as follows. One platoon was to attach sections to each of No.2 and

No.9 Commando, with the remaining section in support of a Special Boat Section commanded by the late Major Larsen, V.C. These parties were to go out on the lake in Fantails, to land on the west shore of the spit behind the enemy with the object of capturing intact bridges on the road to Porto Garibaldi. 2 Platoon was to give close mine-sweeping support to 43 Royal Marine Commando, clearing the tongue of land between the Reno and the sea. It was also to construct and operate a Class 2 ferry across the mouth of the Reno, at the same time continuing to support the Commando on its way up the east of the spit. 3 Platoon was to assist 5th and 8th Field Squadrons, R.E., bridging and rafting the Reno at the old ferry site, pushing on to open up the road due north to Porto Garibaldi.

The operation was scheduled to commence on 2nd April. By the evening of 1st April everyone was in position waiting for the word to go. Morale in the Company was high, for surely this was to be the beginning of the end, and although we could not foresee it at any time, within one month the enemy in Italy was to surrender unconditionally!

"H" hour arrived at 0445 hrs on the 2nd. The guns opened up, every man swinging into action to put into operation on the ground what so far had been an ambitious plan on paper.

In three days the spit was cleared up to a line running with the Valetta Canal, the Company having moved to a harbour area just north of the Bellocchio Canal. Although the bridge across the Bellocchio had not been captured intact, 3 Platoon had flung a 50-foot Bailey across the gap.

Casualties in the unit had been light considering the complications of the operation, being one sapper killed and one corporal wounded, both in 2 Platoon.

On 14th April, No.2 Commando Brigade was relieved and moved back to rest near Ravenna. Not so 42nd Field Company. We immediately came under command of the relieving Brigade, our old friends the 24 Guards. Plans were made hurriedly for the crossing of the Valetta Canal, but this operation was cancelled the following day.

Three days later the Guards Brigade was relieved, and the Company moved down to our old training area at Ravenna to rest and refit.

The period of rest to which we had been looking forward passed all too quickly. Barely two days after our transport had pulled into the Ravenna harbour, having commenced cleaning up and reorganizing, a further party of one N.C.O. and three sappers had to be sent from 3 Platoon into the wilds to join the Special Boat Section, which was holding the almost deserted islands in the centre of Lake Commachio. Another larger party of two N.C.Os. and ten sappers had to report to 40 Royal Marine Commando to support them in a raid on the west side of the Lake. It was anticipated that this particular operation would prove to be very sticky, involving as it did a long march over very marshy open ground to attack and seize two vital bridges. As it happened, the enemy had prepared for an attack from this direction, and the raiders encountered heavy opposition. Only one bridge was captured intact and at a heavy cost.

A period of intensive bridging and road maintenance began until the 11th, when the Company was ordered to move forward to support the 56th Division, and moved to San Alberto.

Bridging commenced on the afternoon of the following day. 2 Platoon arrived at the site of the proposed 120-foot bridge which was to span a canal just south of the 300-foot gap over the Reno. This gap was the responsibility of the South Africans. Before starting work, 2 Platoon was visited on the site by Brigadier Moberley, the Chief Engineer, who gave them a resume of the latest war news. This was very much appreciated, for at that time we were somewhat out of the picture and, although well tied up in our corner of the war, were eager for news from other fronts.

The platoon finished the bridge in four hours, but they were to have only a few hours' respite after their brilliant effort, for that night, after they had settled down to sleep in their bivouacs just off the bridge site, they were called out to assist the South Africans on the 300-foot bridge. Even then their work did not end there, for they were switched to a site slightly downstream, to complete an F.B.E. bridge which was to be used until the Bailey was finished. Meanwhile, the other platoons were collecting their detachments from Commachio.

Our stay in San Alberto was brief, for our commitments were all north of the harbour, Major Goad deciding to move to the other side of the Reno, where we settled in a couple of fields astride a dusty lane under a flood bank. Moving these days was a tedious business. The weather was very warm and the dust was dry and penetrating. Roads were breaking up rapidly with the continuous stream of heavy traffic; and in the marshy areas it was discouraging, to say the least, the road was gradually being squeezed out by the floods. At any time of the day or night one would see a knot of sappers filling in ruts, only to find that with the passing of one vehicle their work had disappeared, leaving the road as bad as ever.

The unit was kept on this soul-destroying work for days, until two Baileys were called for. One was an 80-foot span over a small canal, and the other a small 60-foot span built by 3 Platoon over a very bad patch in the road, which was nothing more or less than a long peninsula, stretching across flooded fields. The sappers of 1 Platoon had worked like slaves, digging and filling, but even assistance by tipper trucks could not keep that narrow strip of ground above water. It seemed to the harassed Platoon Commander that the whole of the Eighth Army was traversing his road just out of spite.

On the 16th, 2 Platoon was called away to join 2 Commando Brigade at Conselice for mine-sweeping and other works, including the construction of the smallest Bailey the Company had known (a 10 foot span with two ramp sections!).

During the evening of the 18th, information came from Corps that the Company was to come under command 9th Armoured Brigade. Accordingly, the Officer Commanding moved his "Tac" to Brigade the same night, the remainder moving the following morning less 2 Platoon, which remained with the Commandos.

We had moved back to San Alberto, where we learnt that we were to support the Brigade in the crossing of the River Po. That night officers and sergeants attended a night demonstration where they were introduced to the Fantails which carry stores or personnel, and conveniently lay for them-selves a steel and coconut matting carpet as they touch down on the muddy water's edge. The function of the sappers was to form crews to man the Fantails in the crossing, to lay the mats and breach flood banks with explosive and to open up and maintain the circular route from the marshalling area across and back across the river.

Final plans for the crossing places including times had not been given, but once the general outlines were given there was plenty to do. 2 Platoon was still out in the blue with the Commandos in the Argenta Gap operation, so it was decided that 1 and 3 Platoons would provide the crews for the actual crossing, being responsible for the landing points on the enemy side, 2 Platoon was to maintain the marshalling area and home bank. Headquarters and 1 Platoon moved up to a new concentration area, where the crews endeavoured to get as much training as possible, loading the heavy mats on the Fantails by hand and crane.

The route up to the concentration area to which 3 Platoon moved was over the already churned-up dusty roads which 1 Platoon was busy maintaining. As the Fantails moved up to the area which 3 Platoon had cleared of mines, their wide tracks caused heavy damage to the road, keeping 1 Platoon hard at work repairing the damage. Bailey bridges also suffered as the Fantails skid-turned on the approaches, ripping the decking to pieces.

The position, then, on the night of 24th April was as follows: 2 Platoon had finished its task with the Commandos and with Headquarters, and 1 Platoon had settled in a concentration area four or five miles south-west of Ferrara, leaving 3 Platoon at Copparo with 56th Division Fantails, completely out of touch with the Company.

The crossing places had been decided, and large numbers of 5-lb. explosive charges were prepared to deal with the 30-40-foot-high flood bank.

It is as well at this point to quote the Unit War Diary for 25th and 26th April, as it will illustrate far better than ordinary prose the high pressure under which we worked.

#### UNIT WAR DIARY, 25TH-26TH APRIL

- |           |      |   |
|-----------|------|---|
| <b>25</b> | 0630 | Officer Commanding and Officer-in-Charge 1 Platoon receive the crossing places of River Po.   |
|           | 1400 | Officer Commanding returns with information that the actual assault will take place at 1600 hrs. 1 Platoon to be prepared for maintenance of approach routes.   |
|           | 1500 | 2 Sections of 3 Platoon have now gone to the marshalling area under "Foote Force." The timing for the operation is put back to 2130 hrs., so that 1 Platoon have now more time to prepare their Fantails.   |
|           | 1900 | Company Headquarters and 1 Platoon move to new area 045887, whilst 2 Platoon move to 063912. News received that 3 Platoon have started operation "Rustler" (the crossing of the Po). Two sections have crossed to the far bank, whilst the third section remains in the marshalling area to load further mats, if necessary |
|           | 2030 | 2 Platoon have now been called forward to develop the launching site at 095925, using the Sherman Bulldozer.  |
|           | 2300 | The first Fantails start crossing the river.  |
| <b>26</b> | 0100 | Remaining Sections of 1 and 2 Platoons are maintaining the Fantail circuit in the D.M.A. Area 0690.   |
|           | 0400 | 3 Platoon have now moved to 301994.   |
|           | 1030 | 3 Platoon report completion of their task with the Fantails   |
|           | 1130 | Officer Commanding visits the eastern launching site and O.C., 1 Platoon, prepares further mat parties for tonight's crossing of the Po.  |
|           | 1800 | Mat parties depart for loading area. Official notification that Sapper Hennessy, J. J., awarded the M.M.; Driver Adams, D. F., awarded the M.M. The mat parties provided by 1 Platoon will be proceeding downstream to 56th Division to ferry battalions across in that area.   |
|           | 2300 | Brigade notify Officer Commanding that they want the most eastern launching site developed. 2 Platoon detailed for this task. The platoons have now been working continuously for a long period, but are still going strong.  |

There were troubles. Sticky mud, temperamental bulldozers, traffic jams; delays and irritating incidents which could hardly be foreseen, and, of course, the odd shell to liven things up. But nothing could damp our spirits, especially after having seen the magnificent dive-bombing display by the D.A.F. on the enemy bank.

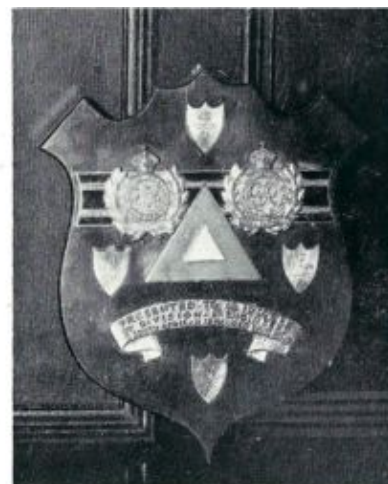
Although the River Po was crossed, the war was not completely won and there was no time for rest. 1 and 3 Platoons prepared their Fantails for ferrying operations over the Adige, in the Rovigo area, whilst 2 Platoon continued to maintain the Po circuit until the Bailey bridge was open. By the evening of the 29th all the platoons had finished their tasks and the whole Company was once more together at Rovigo, having crossed the Bailey bridge at dawn.

A long journey was ahead, for the enemy was in full flight and it was difficult to keep contact.

We left 9th Armoured Brigade and reverted to command V Corps Troops, moving to Pontelongo to complete a 200-foot Bailey bridge which had been started by an Army Field Company. The entire Company was engaged on this work, which took a day and two nights to complete. Two Bailey piers were already in position when we arrived on the site, but considerable trouble was encountered with them, for they had slipped out of vertical on the soft made-up ground. We crossed the bridge soon after its completion, to start on our long trek to Udine via Padua and Treviso, to come under command 6th British Armoured Division, which was moving up route 13 towards Austria.



**The Company Silver**



**Presented to the Company by the Sappers of the  
6th South African Armoured Division**

Our stay in Udine was of only sufficient duration to enable the drivers to clean their vehicles, for we left Udine in the early morning of 6th May and travelled north into the mountains, wending our way towards Plezzo. It was here that we noticed a sudden change and contrast in scenery to the plains of Northern Italy, and found ourselves passing through quaint villages in the shadow of towering peaks. It was very reminiscent of the Hollywood versions of Sweden, Switzerland or Austria. There were gay scenes in some of the flag-bedecked villages. The streets were filled with picturesque costumes. Dances were held. Speeches made. Vermouth flowed and toasts were drunk. But there was an air of tension in this beautiful pass while "High Level" conferences were held to complete the capitulation of the enemy columns in front of us.

In this air of uncertainty, we carried on repairing and improving the road and maintaining the Bailey bridges until the war came to its end. The 8th May found us still working as hard as ever because, unimpeded by enemy resistance, the Division was moving up swiftly on this overworked road to its objective in Klagenfurt,

The last Bailey bridge we constructed in the war, or rather just after it finished, was "Mike," which was a 70-foot, two-way, Class 40 bridge, just outside Klagenfurt, built on the orders of the C.R.E., 6th Armoured Division. This was treated as a rush job and went up during the night. The local authorities were not quick enough moving their trams to the "home" side, and the result was that quite a lot of the trams were on the wrong side of the bridge and had to be hauled over the bridge by hand on steel plates laid on top of the decking.

On 13th May we harboured by the side of the Worther See in lovely country, where we were to stay for nearly a year. Life at that time in Austria consisted mainly of release, leave and heavy maintenance commitments. Quite a number of moves were made, until finally we settled in Klagenfurt to celebrate our first peace-time Christmas for many years.

**Commander  
6<sup>th</sup> South African  
Armoured Division**



**The Commander, Major-General Poole, talking to  
Mr. J. Lawson, M.P., near Legaro**

**Apennine Winter**



## Officers Commanding and Company Officers

### Officers Commanding 1937-1947

Captain R. E. Bagnall-Wild  
 Major I. W. B. Edge  
 Major J. W. Dynes  
 Major E. J. Parker  
**Prisoner of War**, Crete, 31st May 1941  
 Major The Hon. R. G. H. Phillimore, M.B.E.  
 Major F. J. Field  
 Major S. Crookenden, M.C.  
 Major A. K. Gilmour  
 Major A. H. M. Morris, M.C., G.M.  
 Major C. B. Stewart  
**Seconded** from South African Engineer Corps  
 Major J. S. Goad, M.C.  
 Major G. A. Culham, M.B.E.

### Company Officers 1939-1947

1937-1939 Captain E. C. W. Myers  
 1939 Lieutenant H. R. Carr  
 1939-1940 Lieutenant C. A. O. B. Compton  
 1940-1941 Second-Lieutenant T. Temple  
 Second-Lieutenant Aldercotte  
 1941-1942 Lieutenant J. Collins  
 1942-1943 Lieutenant R. E. H. Finch  
 1943 Second-Lieutenant Lowenson  
 1943-1944 **Seconded** from the Rhodesian Army  
 1944 **Prisoner of War**, Crete, 31st May, 1941  
 1944 Captain R. J. Scott  
**Prisoner of War**, Crete, 31st May, 1941  
 1944-1946 Lieutenant Alabaster  
 1946-1947 **Prisoner of War**, Crete, 31st May, 1941

Captain J. C. F. McCarthy Morrrough  
 Lieutenant R. J. H. Gaunt, M.C.  
 Captain S. H. Peplow  
 Captain C. L. Stephenson  
 Lieutenant V. Brown  
 Lieutenant G. C. Morgan  
**Prisoner of War**, Yugoslavia  
 Lieutenant C. F. F. Williams  
 Second-Lieutenant W. J. D. Cole  
 Lieutenant V. J. Curchod  
 Lieutenant I. B. W. George  
 Lieutenant W. Hind  
 Lieutenant S. H. Pickles  
 Lieutenant J. Perry, M.C.  
 Lieutenant J. Collinson  
 Lieutenant D. R. Carroll  
 Lieutenant F. C. Dobson  
 Lieutenant J. S. Barrett, M.C.  
 Lieutenant J. Urquhart  
 Lieutenant F. R. Wilson  
 Lieutenant K. Davies  
 Captain J. S. Goad  
 Lieutenant V. Halpin  
 Lieutenant R. Taylor  
 Lieutenant E. W. Woolfaardt  
**Seconded** from the South African Army  
 Lieutenant I. S. Gill, M.C.  
 Lieutenant R. M. Wilkie  
 Lieutenant D. C. Smail  
 Lieutenant H. A. G. Forbes  
**Prisoner of War**, Italy 1944  
 Captain R. A. P. Wehner  
 Lieutenant L. Vincent  
 Captain T. G. Bingham  
 Lieutenant F. W. Peet  
 Lieutenant W. M. Coombe  
 Lieutenant D. W. Turner  
 Lieutenant A. Lemon  
 Captain P. Walker  
 Captain T. M. Evans  
 Captain J. V. Cowan

## Honours and Awards 1939-1945

**Military Cross**

Major S. Crookenden

Tunisia, 1943

Lieutenant R. J. H. Gaunt

Tunisia, 1943

**Bar to Military Cross**

Major J. S. Goad

Italy, 1945

**Military Medal**

Lieutenant J. S. Barrett, M.C.

Italy, 1944

Sapper W. Jubb

Tunisia, 1943

Lance-Sergeant B. Gough

Tunisia, 1943

Sergeant M.B. Young

Tunisia, 1943

Sapper F. Pardell

Italy, 1944

Lance-Corporal F. Elvin

Italy, 1944

Lance-Sergeant G. Ratcliffe

Italy, 1944

Sapper J. J. Hennessy

Italy, 1945

Driver D. F. Adams

Italy, 1945

**Mention in Despatches**

Captain C. L. Stephenson

Tunisia, 1943

C.S.M. W. G. Heard

Tunisia, 1943

Lance-Sergeant F. Lamyman

Tunisia, 1943

Lieutenant J. Urquhart (twice)

Italy, 1944-1945

Major J. S. Goad, M.C. (twice)

Italy, 1944-1945

C.Q.M.S. D. Stephens

Italy, 1944

Major A. H. M. Morris, M.C., G.M.

Italy, 1944

Lieutenant I. S. Gill, M.C.

Italy, 1944

Driver J. H. Lee

Italy, 1944

Sapper W. G. Adams

Italy, 1945

Lieutenant R. M. Wilkie

Italy, 1945

Sergeant C. R. Greenwood

Italy, 1945

C.Q.M.S. W. A. Smart

Italy, 1945

Lance-Corporal W.A. Richards

London Omnibus List for Gallant &amp;

Distinguished Service in the Field

Escape &amp; Evasion &amp; Special Operations

Escape &amp; Evasion &amp; Special Operations

**Posthumous Mention in Despatches**

Corporal C.E.C. CLEVES

Lieutenant D.E.M. Alabaster

**Roll of Honour 1943-1945****Cyrenaica**

1943

Sapper Warrington

Sultan

**Tunisia**

1943

Major I.W.B. Edge, R.E.

Mareth

Major F.J. Field, R.E.

Mareth

Lieutenant W. Hind, R.E.

Mareth

Sapper E. Spence

Gabes

Sapper E. Phillipson

Gabes

Lance-Corporal L. Morgan

Gabes

**Sicily**

1943

Lieutenant I. B. W. George, M.C., R.E.

**Italy**

1943

Lance-Sergeant T. Pitt

Battipaglia

Sapper E. Redmond

Battipaglia

Lance-Corporal E. Jackson

Battipaglia

Sapper Harrington

Salerno

Sapper Plant

Salerno

Sapper J. Easton

Salerno

Sapper K. Wallington

Capua

**Italy**

1944-1945

Driver J. Peck

Capua

Driver Naylor

Capua

Sapper W. Brimmage

Teano

Sapper P. Sheen

Sessa-Aurunca

Sapper D. Hall

Sessa -Aurunca

Lance-Corporal Haywood

S. Clemente

Sapper Brewin

S. Clemente

Corporal MacGuignan

Roccamonfino

Lance-Sergeant F. Gummer

Sarteano

Driver Stevenson

Radda

Lance-Sergeant Ratcliffe, M.M.

Radda

Lieutenant F. R. Wilson

Radda

Sergeant W. Mason

Radda

Lance-Corporal Ettenfield

Radda

Sapper Clerke

Radda

Sapper S. Tydeman-Rowe

Radda

Sapper W. C. Vaughan

Radda

Lance-Corporal T. Pendlebury

Monsumano

Corporal B. Groome

Monsumano

Major C. B. Stewart

Lagaro

Driver A. Rayfield

Lagaro

Sapper F. C. Jones

Lagaro

## **AUSTRIA 1945-1946 TO GREECE 1946- 1947**

The Christmas holidays came to a close with the Company recovering from a very successful New Year's Eve Dance, held in the school hall. By far the most important task allotted to the Company was Jaegar Barracks, for the work there was considerable. This task included repairs to damaged window sashes, and the replacement of some 400 missing sashes which had to be hung, glazed and painted. A good deal of carpentry, plumbing and decoration was also added to this formidable list.

The Crusader Club was finished on 16th January, and two days later the pipeline from Jaegar Barracks was connected to the main on St. Veitstrasse.

The severe frosts during the month played havoc with our plumbing arrangements, but the installation of slow combustion stoves proved satisfactory.

February opened with the unit still plodding hard to complete its many tasks, and 2nd February saw the finish of the water-main job and the Signals Transmitting Station, which had been started earlier the previous month.

Our weekly dances continued with success and certainly helped to swell the Company's funds which later were to put us on a very comfortable footing.

On 21st February we welcomed C.S.M. T. Needham, R.E., who had been posted to us from 273 Field Company. He played a great part in the future of the Company when it went to Greece. The last day of the month will ever be remembered, for a warning arrived that the Company would be moving to Greece. This news, joyful to some, disappointing to others, was on the whole welcomed, as life had begun to be somewhat jostled, to say the least; however, there was much quick thinking, compassionate requests, surreptitious posting requirements and other dodges well known to us all and it proved beyond doubt that at least a sapper's life in Austria had been most happy.

On 4th March Major G. A. Culham, M.B.E., R.E., was officially posted as the new O.C.

Very little information had been received concerning the move to Greece, but we did know that no man of Age and Service Group 27-29 or within four months of "Python" would accompany the unit. This fact helped us considerably with the reorganization of the Company, for, as the works programme had to continue, we split the Company into two parts even though it remained under a central administration. Major Goad assumed responsibility for all works commitments, whilst Major Culham concentrated on the reorganization for the Company move to Greece.

Transport, another great problem, had to be sorted out. We had a great many vehicles surplus to establishment, and as only technical vehicles were going abroad, some 150 vehicles had to be disposed of before 20th March.

On 16th March Captain T. M. Evans, R.E., arrived to take over duties as Second-in-Command from Captain Walker, who was due for release.

On 19th March the Chief Engineer, B.T.A., Brigadier H. Davey, C.B.E., inspected the Company and wished the unit every success in its new venture and role as one of the Divisional Field Companies of the 4th Infantry Division.

At 0700 hrs on a very cold morning the road party left Klagenfurt. It was a sad parting, as friendships had become very strong within the Company and having been together for so long, Major Goad and Lieutenant Lemon, who saw us off, felt it very strongly.

On the 21st Captain Evans and his rear party left Klagenfurt in R.A.S.C. transport for Villach station. They did not leave until 1900 hrs., and apparently the whole of Klagenfurt turned out to see them go. There is a saying that the British Tommy is a first-class ambassador. The scene as the Company departed certainly proved that statement, for their acquaintances of Klagenfurt were genuinely sorry to see them go.

By 1700 hrs the road party had reached Padua, in Italy, and the O.C. decided to camp the night in a brickyard. Later that evening he went to Padua, where he paid a visit to our former O.C., Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. M. Morris, D.S.O., M.C., G.M., C.R.E., 6th Armoured Division. The Colonel naturally was most interested to hear of the Company and meet its new Commander. Incidentally, the following morning saw us polishing up our 6th South African Armoured Division signs which had been temporarily blotted out on order of C.E.

On the 21st the advanced party reached Rimini, whilst the rear party pushed on to Florence, where it



stayed the night. Everybody was in good fettle, for Florence can be most welcome to the traveller, especially if the visitor has been there before. Our short stay brought back many memories. Many friends were visited, and in the few hours available to us we talked about those days when Florence was a major objective of the summer offensive,

We departed early on the 22nd and pushed on to Rome, via Radiocofani and Viterbo, and thence to Naples. So ended the first stage of our journey to Greece. The move had been most satisfactory and we were only too keen to embark, but it was not until five days later that we received instructions to embark all personnel less vehicles on H.T. King David.

### **GREECE 1946-1947**

On 28th March Major Culham, Captain Evans C S M Needham and 183 other ranks embarked at Naples. Lieutenant D. Turner, 21 other ranks and all the transport remained behind to await a transport ship and the arrival of Lieutenant Wilkie with the rear party from Klagenfurt. Life on the transport King David was very grim, and conditions could not have been worse.

On the 31st we sailed into Pincus, leaving again on the morning of 1st April; whilst back in Naples, Lieutenant Wilkie and the rear party joined forces with Lieutenant Turner and the transport.

On arrival we were taken to our tented camp to be, just outside the town. The Company had to build most of the camp as apparently Movement Control had not notified Salonika of our expected arrival until two hours before we disembarked,

The area allotted to the 4th Infantry Division covered practically the whole of northern Greece down to a line stretching across from Salonika to Verria. In turn, this was split into three Brigade areas. 10 Brigade with its Headquarters in Kavalla was to be our Brigade, and we made arrangements to take over from 225 Field Company, which was then stationed in Kavalla. This Company, incidentally, not being regular, was due to be transferred to the 13th Division, then controlling Southern Greece, with its Headquarters in Athens. On 5th April Captain Evans with 20 other ranks left Salonika en route for Kavalla. On arrival, the advanced party proceeded to take over from 225 Field Company until the 10th, when 225 departed.

The Company less its rear party departed Salonika the following day for Kavalla. We had received news only that morning that our rear party in Italy had embarked on the Empire Eddystone and had left Naples. More good news arrived when we heard that our vehicles with Lieutenant Turner had embarked on the Empire Haldane. Lieutenant Wilkie and his party joined us in Kavalla on 19th April, and on the 21st our vehicles and a few men under Lieutenant Turner arrived in Salonika. By the 26th we were all together in Kavalla, the Company strength then being 4 officers and 215 other ranks.

Major-General Dixon, E.-in-C., Middle East, visited us on 30th April, and General Sir Bernard Paget, C.-in-C., M.E.L.F., accompanied by Lieutenant-General K. N. Crawford, G.O.C.-in-C., Land Forces, Greece, visited us on 18<sup>th</sup> May.

It was during May that we heard that we were to be given the task of building a Bridging Camp on the River Strimon. Accordingly, the Officer Commanding, accompanied by Lieutenants Turner and Wilkie, carried out a recce for the two sites required, one for the actual camp and the other as a bridging site.

On 5th June the first issue of the Triangle, our own newspaper, was published. Little difficulty was experienced in finding a Greek printer to undertake the contract, and the work put into our first effort was well justified by the acclaim with which the issue was received. It was a fortnightly issue, financed entirely by the P.R.I., and relying for material in the way of contributions received from members of the unit, past and present. The Greek printer could not read or speak a word of English, which accounted for the mistakes in the first copy. We had also a very large mailing list which included some very senior officers, and regularly each fortnight some 200 copies were sent away.

On 7th June we were again visited by Lieutenant-General K. N. Crawford. He came to inspect the Company and its accommodation, both of which pleased him. We had had a good month. Naturally we were very proud of ourselves, for we had worked hard to make everything to do with the Company really first-class. We were now reaping the results. Our sports, too, were satisfactory, although Class "A" and "B" releases played havoc with a regular team; nevertheless, we had some good games, and names such as Baron, Logan, Quinn, Lonsdale and many others will always be remembered in the Company team.

Lastly, June saw the departure of Captain T. M. Evans. When he went it was indeed a great loss to 42, but

at least he was not forgotten, and furthermore he did see some of the fruits of his labours.

The Bridging Camp was now going strong, and units of the 13th Division were already in training. Our platoon, however, still remained, for there was a great deal of work to be done.

Throughout July and August normal training took place, with an inspection by the Divisional Commander. Major-General C. B. Callander, C.B., M.C., came to see us and having spent a considerable time with us, ended up in the Officers' Mess with a cup of tea and the current issue of the Triangle. It was a great blow when, some few weeks later, we heard that he was leaving the Division for an appointment at the War Office. The entire Company sent its regards to him in the shape of a small cigarette box made by Corporal Smith.

October and November brought us many inspections and visits, the most Important being that of the new Divisional Commander, Major-General E. E. Down, C.B.E.

Christmas in Greece was a first-class party, for as luck would have it, the Navy in the shape of H.M.S. Chevron came to Kavalla for the festivities. The ship remained for one week, and a great friendship sprung up between the petty officers and our sergeants. In fact, our sergeants won the ship on the result of a darts match, and to this day hold an I.O.U. stating that the destroyer belongs to 42nd Field Company, R.E. As a compromise, the captain, Commander Bush, D.S.C., R.N., presented the Mess with a Chevron plaque. Many parties were held with the Navy as our guests, and after playing us at all sports, including a rugby match on New Year's Eve, they steamed out of Kavalla harbour at seven o'clock on New Year's morning. They were a grand crowd. It was indeed a proud moment for the unit when H.M.S. Chevron drew out of the harbour, for flying from the main mast was the Company's flag.

And so 1946 came to an end. Many exciting things had happened during the year, and we had met many new faces and parted from many old friends.

Little did we know when 1947 dawned that our lease of life was to run out ere many months were passed. During February we felt that something was "in the wind," and the departure of Major G. A. Culham on "Liap"\* set a "depression" going within the Company. An answer came in the shape of our C.R.E., who informed us that the 4th Infantry Division was due to "die" during March, and that the Company would be going into suspended animation with effect from 1st April, 1947.

It was bad news indeed, but in the midst of all the necessary planning and organization for our last move we received a most heartening rumour. An important person was to visit us before our departure. Much speculation went on as to whether it was to be Mr. Churchill, Field-Marshal Smuts, or even the C.I.G.S. We were wrong. On a fairly dull day a destroyer nosed its way into Kavalla harbour and off stepped General Dempsey, accompanied by Lieutenant-General K. N. Crawford. The General had come to Greece to Kavalla to bid farewell to two units only, the Gunners and ourselves. We were naturally proud, and the show we put on was worthy of the occasion.

This was our final inspection, and we left Kavalla with flying colours. We had had many grand times in this little fishing port. We had been happy under command of the 10th Infantry Brigade, even though we had to stick up for ourselves on many occasions.

On the way to Egypt the sappers were slowly but firmly taken away from us until on arrival at Suez the Company strength remained at 3 officers and 12 other ranks. It was heart-breaking to see such a wonderful team reduced to this mere handful of willing souls, volunteers to see the baggage home safely to Barton Stacey. Such was the policy, and nothing can be said.

*\*"During the war the Army had operated a scheme whereby any man who had served overseas for four years was repatriated. This was known as PYTHON, a reference to the Army eating its own tail. Towards the end of 1945, a new scheme was introduced named LIAP, which letters denoted Leave In Addition to Python. Under LIAP, any person who would have served overseas three years, before being demobilised, was to be given a short home leave."*

## Locations in Europe September 1943 to April 1947

1943	9 September	Sugar Beach	201 Guards Brigade -	56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	October	Battipaglia		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	October	Salerno		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	October	Fiano		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	October	Sarno		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	October	Nola		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	October	Nocera		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	October	Maddaloni		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	October	Caserta		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	October	Capua		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	November	Petrulo		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	November	Roccamonfina		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	December	Carano		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
1944	1 January	Mondragone		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	5 January	Frignano		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	17 January	Carano		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	23 January	Minturno		56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division
	17 February	Nocellata	5 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division	
	22 February	Capua	5 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division	
	6 March	Carano	6 <sup>th</sup> Armoured Division	
	2 April	Piedimonte d' Alife	6 <sup>th</sup> Armoured Division	
	17 April	Roccasicura	10 <sup>th</sup> Armoured Division	
	1 May	Vastogirardi	10 <sup>th</sup> Armoured Division	
	24 May	Dugenta	24 Guards Brigade -	6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	27 May	Cassino		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	31 May	Pontecorvo		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	1 June	Pofi		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	3 June	Frosinone-Anagni		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	7 June	Castelnuova		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	9 June	Bagnoregio		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	19 June	Citta Del Pieve		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	20 June	Le Piazze		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	24 June	Cetona		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	30 June	Montepulciano		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	1 July	Anagni		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	9 July	Le Felice		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	18 July	Gaiole		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	21 July	Montemuro		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	24 July	Monte Michele		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	25 July	Barbiano		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	31 July	Greve		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	3 August	Impruneta		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	5 August	Florence		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	7 August	Siena		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	22 August	Nr. Castel Florentino		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	26 August	Monteboro		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	8 September	Pazerre		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	13 September	Barile		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	28 September	Castiglione		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	6 October	Creda		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	8 October	Serra		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
	17 October	Lagaro		6 <sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division
1945	19 January	Faenza	8th A.G.R.E.	
	12 February	R. Uniti and Ravenna	2nd Commando Brigade	
	28 March	San Alberto	2nd Commando Brigade	
	6 April	Beloccio Canal	2nd Commando Brigade	
	8 April	Ravenna	2nd Commando Brigade	
	11 April	San Alberto	56 <sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division	
	18 April	Ferrara	9th Armoured Brigade	
	30 April	Pontelongo	V Corps Troops	
	2 May	Padua	6th Armoured Division	
	4 May	Treviso	6th Armoured Division	
	6 May	Udine	6th Armoured Division	
	8 May	Plezzo	6th Armoured Division	
	13 May	Werther See Austria	6th Armoured Division	
	16 June	St. Veit, Austria	6th Armoured Division	
	29 July	Leoben, Austria	46th Infantry Division	
	16 November	Klagenfurt, Austria	H.Q., British Troops in Austria	
1946	2 April	Salonika, Greece	4th Infantry Division	
	12 May	Kavalla, Greece	4th Infantry Division	
1947	April	Suez		
	April	Barton Stacey	Suspended Animation	

### 42 Field Squadron, 1950-1954, Canal Zone, Fayid, Egypt

The 42<sup>nd</sup> Field Company was brought out of suspended animation in 1950 in the Middle East. It was renamed 42 Field Squadron and was placed under command 35 Army Engineer Regiment.



Fayid Village



Fayid Village Egypt, 1952

Fayid Village



24 Hour Guard, Minden Camp, Fayid, Egypt, 1952



7 TROOP AT WORK



Regimental Police Duty, Minden Camp, Fayid, Egypt, 1952, 42 Field Squadron, Royal Engineers

22806352 Spr Derek male on Guard, Christmas Fire Piquet? And Regimental Police.



### 8 Troop hard at work sunbathing?

#### Sapper Derek Male

Note from 22806352 Spr Derek Male who will be 82 in May 2016 and now lives in Melbourne, Australia.

I have found that it is very hard to find any of the old lads now, some may have emigrated like myself, some may have passed on, and some may be thinking that all this new technology is way over their heads, and would sooner just sit in the armchair. I have been lucky enough to find 4 people from that time, 3 Sappers and an M.P.

In 1952 I became 22806352 Sapper Male D. R. and was told to report to Malvern at 1 TRRE, I did my induction there for 2 weeks, then I Was Sent to Crickhowell, near Abergavenny, South Wales, and Joined 39 Corps Engineer Regiment, and was put in # 8 Party, for the 6 weeks basic training. When that was completed I was sent up to Elgin in the North of Scotland and Joined 8 TRRE, for the 10 Weeks Field Engineer Training. When that was finished, I was sent out to the Suez Canal Zone, MELF 15 and Joined 35 Corps Engineer Regiment, and was put in 8 Troop, 42 Field Squadron, the camp was named Minden Camp and was based at Fayid. After about 18 months there, in 1954 when everyone had to come out of the Suez Canal Zone for political reasons, I moved with the Regiment to Cyprus, and we were based at Polimedia Camp Limasol.

From there all the Squadrons, 16 Sqn, 30 Sqn, 42 Sqn, and 18 Fd Park were all Deployed on building works, to provide the new GHQ Middle East a new home after moving from Egypt.

During my tour of duty in the Canal Zone, Egypt, based at Minden Camp Fayid MELF 15, 42 Fd Sqn Took part in a full Scale Exercise, out in the Sinai Dessert, named Operation Longbow 2. I think that it lasted about 4 weeks; it was basically a re-enactment of the desert warfare of WW2 in which we learnt of all the hardships that the 8th Army had to endure for a lot longer than we did. At the end of the Exercise we were a very sorrowful looking bunch of Sappers that returned to Minden Camp, for de-lousing. That is one lesson that I will never forget.

In Cyprus in 42 Fd Sqn, I was involved in Building a 22 mile long water pipeline from up in the Troodos Mountains down to the site of the New GHQ. This was built on time in spite of the constant harassment from the \*EOKA Terrorists. In 1955 I left for the UK and was Demobbed from Barton Stacey.

*\*EOKA is the acronym of the organisation's full name in Greek, Εθνική Οργάνωσις Κυπρίων Αγωνιστών, Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston ("National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters"), sometimes expanded as Εθνική*

*Οργάνωσις Κυπριακού Αγώνος, Ethniki Orgánosis Kipriakou Agónos ("National Organisation of Cypriot Struggle").*

After finishing the 10 weeks field engineer training at Elgin, Morayshire, Scotland, I was kitted out in dark green gear with no brasses but instead the badge and all other webbing tabs were all in a black material. I was then put on a draft to go to Korea and sent home on two weeks embarkation leave. Towards the end of the last week I received a telegram informing me to take one more week's leave and then to report back to Scotland, not to Elgin but to another camp, whose name now escapes me. So following the last word of command I arrived at the new camp whereupon I had to report to the R.Q.M.S. stores. I then had to empty out my kitbag onto a table where all of my new dark green kit was checked for size and the quantities of each item recorded and put into a ledger, after this was completed I was handed a new set of kit. This time everything was a sand coloured uniform (2 for the use of) and was called K.D. Khaki Drill. After ten days of not doing much, only having medical check-ups and a load more jobs, I was told that I was being posted to the Middle East and that I was a lucky so and so, little did I know that those last words would come back to haunt me, for the next two years.

I left Scotland by train down to London and had to find the infamous 'Hole in the Ground' as it was known, it was in Goodge Street, Camden, North London. It was, as I found out a transit facility which was in one of the disused underground stations. Down there it was like going down to hell, next to no ventilation, stuffy, sweaty, air coming from hundreds of military personnel of all three services laying on the old platforms on mattresses waiting to be sent to God knows where. That is where all the other ranks were, about 90 feet underground, while the officers and senior NCO's were all at the top opening area. It was while stuck down there as a virgin soldier I came to find out about what true military 'mateship' is all about. I was down there for about 48 hours and although we were all stuck down there, and not allowed to surface for some fresh air and a look around, (not so for the ones up above). I made a lot of friends down there from all walks of life, and we made the best of things with what we had to hand, the soldiers best friends (fags and cards).

When my name was finally called with a few more, we finally got to go up those stairs for the fresh air, the services were separated and I found myself in the company of about 20 sappers from all the other training camps. We were then bundled into a Bedford Q L truck, and transported to Stansted Aerodrome. I think in the 1950's it was an RAF Station anyway we eventually boarded a Viking 4 Propeller Aeroplane of the Queen's Flight, and set off into the unknown. We were only 18 Year olds who had never been on a plane before so it was to be a white knuckle flight for sure; our flight path took us over the Alps, what a fantastic sight it was to a load of young lads. As darkness fell and while most of us were deep in sleep we were suddenly awakened by some load shouting from the back of the plane, " the plane's on fire" we were all awake by then and panic set in, but when the lovely stewardess appeared from the back of the plane with a tray full of beer, and told us everything is OK and what was seen was only the engine's exhaust's glowing red hot. We said thanks for the info and to come back again in fifteen minutes to reassure us with another tray of beer!!

Flying on we landed at Naples, Italy for a few hours rest, then it was off again across the Mediterranean Sea, and finally landing at R.A.F. Fayid Aerodrome, and then into Fayid Transit Camp. In there were lads from all Regiments, the RAF and a small amount from the Navy, we were all waiting for travelling documents to go to our different camps. I forgot to mention that when the plane landed at the aerodrome and the doors opened up, we were all making our way up the aisle to the open doors and down the steps, the overwhelming heat came rushing into the plane, and the stench of Egypt hit us, it was revolting needless to say we all got down the steps quick smart, where the whole plane load of us were bent over throwing up on the tarmac. So that was our first encounter to us Joskins) (the old time squaddies name for white rookie soldiers,) to life in Egypt. After a couple of days of kit checks and booster jabs, trucks started to roll into the camp from all different regiments etc. The Royal Engineers Trucks, the ones that I can remember were from 22 Engineer Regiment, and the one that had my name on was 35 Corps Engineer Regiment, at Camp Minden, the Regiment was made up of, 16, 30 and 42 Field Squadrons, 18 Field Park Squadron, and H Q Squadron. I was sent to 42 Field Squadron, and placed in 8 Troop where I remained until end of Service in 1955.

After about a 30 minute drive in the back of a sand coloured Bedford QL truck we turned into Minden Camp, Fayid. Home to 35 Corps Engineer Regiment, Royal Engineers. After passing through the check at the guard post we were met by 5 sergeants from the 5 squadrons on the base, and marched off to the allocated squadrons in groups. In my group there was 8 of us green sappers heading for 42 Squadron's

SQMS building, when there we were further split up into troops, 7, 8, 9 and HQ Troops. We drew our bedding, mattresses, blankets etc., and then humped them down the various troop tent lines, until we found an empty bed space in a 4 man tent, and introduced ourselves to the sun browned occupants therein. One of the photos above shows me on Christmas day outside 8 Troop Lines bonding with my new mates. Once Christmas was over us newcomers soon found out that life in Egypt was never going to be a bed of roses, the daylight hours were usually made up around the camp with all manner of duties thought up by the HQ Squadron to quell the onset of boredom and to keep up the moral of the troops. So after works parade 42 Sqn would be dismissed to carry on with the jobs allocated to each of the troops. This could be the white washing of thousands of jerrycans that were placed into the sand at a 45° angle around all the 4 man tents in the squadron and along the walkways between the tents. While that was in progress another gang would be armed with bass brooms and their job detail would be to sweep all the sand around the tent area's level and then to make patterns in the sand by drawing the broom across to form various patterns, being very careful to make sure that each troop lines had different patterns, this obsession with sand effected everyone. The worst instance of this that comes to mind is when your name comes up on Part 2 Orders for a 24 hour guard mount, you have to get all your kit ready in your tent, get dressed up smartly, freshly blanched webbing etc. then to get to the parade ground next to the guard room where the 24 hour guard works from; this was a distance of about 200 yards so to get on parade in a clean manner the only way to do this was to get one of your tent mates to picky back you across the sand until you reached the tarmac, and of course you return the favour when it's their turn, one of the photos above is me on 24 hour guard mount.

I did a bit better than most when it came to the jobs selections I suppose for when the staff sergeant got to me on the works parade he asked me what was I doing before enlisting. I told him that I was working for my father in the building trade and learning painting and bricklaying, righto he said first up you'll be reporting to the QM Stores where you will pick up all the painting materials you will need and then you will re-paint all the Buildings in HQ Squadron. That took quite a while but when that was finished, he said now let's put your bricklaying skills to work, so for the next couple of months I was put on a truck and taken to where there was an old German POW Camp. There with others we had to knock down the old brick buildings and clean up all the bricks, I thought I was serving hard labour! I then went on to do a 6 month duty with the Regimental Police, as seen in photo.

### **You Tube Suez and Canal Zone links providing an insight to the difficulties faced during the crisis.**

You Tube Title	Link	Length	
		Mins	Secs
<b>1951</b> To and from the Middle East	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnjXJaNktGI&amp;nohtml5=False">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnjXJaNktGI&amp;nohtml5=False</a>		
<b>1952</b> Paratroops in Suez Round-up	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gh_84H8hl">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gh_84H8hl</a>	1	28
Christmas in the Canal Zone	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmKINn9Urkd">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmKINn9Urkd</a>	2	47
Nun killed in Canal Zone	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXJwrBbxZew">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXJwrBbxZew</a>	1	53
Britain keeps canal working	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7voMJniGDE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7voMJniGDE</a>	1	8

## Suez Canal Zone Roll of Honour

This Roll of Honour is dedicated to all Royal Engineer personnel who lost their lives whilst serving in any capacity in the Suez Canal Zone of Egypt during the 1951 - 1954 'Emergency' of; and in 1955.

Name	Rank	Number	Additional Data	Date	Cemetery
Campbell A M C	Lance Corporal	22324596	9 ESBO Suez	2 Oct 1951	Fayid
Dickinson J R	Sapper	22309718		3 Dec 1951	Fayid
Rose S	Major	203159		4 Dec 1951	Fayid
Bradbury F	Corporal	22211998		11 Dec 1951	Fayid
Fairley H G P	Sapper	22506819		15 Jan 1952	Fayid
Havelock A S	Sapper	22662385	HQ Movements	19 Jan 1952	Fayid
Taylor J R	Sapper	22257736	10 Railway Squadron	13 Mar 1952	Fayid
Walsh J C	Lance Corporal	22522629	35 Corps Eng. Regt.	14 Nov 1952	Fayid
Harrison J	Sapper	22474502		3 Mar 1953	Fayid
Crangle W	Sapper	22624079	35 Corps. Eng. Regt	7 Apr 1953	Fayid
Taylor G W	Sapper	22574301	42 Survey Eng. Regt.	21 May 1953	Fayid
Bonner E	Sapper	22798024		21 Jun 1953	Fayid
Johnson C F	Sapper	227951143		23 Jun 1953	Fayid
Southwell S J	Corporal	22264620	17 Field Squadron	2 Jul 1953	Fayid
Thompson G	Sapper	22795083	22 Field Regt.	7 Feb 1954	Fayid
Quibell J V	Sapper	22840537		7 Mar 1954	Fayid
Smith G M	Warrant Officer II	1868839	22 Field Eng. Regt.	17 Aug 1954	Fayid
Jones R J	Sapper	23039587	47 Survey Squadron	19 Nov 1954	Fayid
Carlton V P	Sapper	22403963	8 ESBD	26 May 1955	Fayid
Cripps C A	Sapper	22819325	8 ESBD	26 May 1955	Fayid
Pottinger G W	Sapper	22998870		19 Jul 1955	Fayid
Thomson D J	Sapper	2275106		18 Jan 1951	Moascar
Radcliffe D R	Captain	362719	35 Field Eng. Regt.	24 Oct 1951	Moascar
Fearn R	Lance Corporal	22236264	Workshops A ADM	18 Nov 1951	Moascar
Bradbury H H	Captain	371502	Q MOV. BTE	3 Dec 1951	Moascar



<b>Name</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Additional Data</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Cemetery</b>
Haycock H A	Sapper	19044222	10 Rly. Squadron	28 Apr 1952	Moascar
Watkins R	Sapper	22774544	25 Field Regt.	14 Oct 1952	Moascar
Hodt D	Sapper	22624512	1207 IWT OP Squadron	20 Dec 1952	Moascar
Jewell W	Staff Sergeant	2547478		6 Jan 1953	Moascar
Jupe J	Lance Corporal	22547714		10 Jan 1953	Moascar
Daw T	Sapper	22798544	1207 IWT	25 Apr 1953	Moascar
Taylor E G	Sapper	22812240	50 Field Squadron	11 Jun 1953	Moascar
Hoyle H	Captain	188141		30 Jun 1953	Moascar
Davies-Patrick H	Sapper	22807298		12 Jul 1953	Moascar
Walsh D	Sapper	22787939	39 Field Squadron	29 Jul 1953	Moascar
Parker I S R	Lance Corporal	22201411	HQ CRE Works (N)	29 Oct 1953	Moascar
Tillman J W	Sapper	22665207		1 Jan 1954	Moascar
Axelberg E E	Sapper	22827922		18 Jan 1954	Moascar
Cox D B	Sapper	22765450		21 Jan 1954	Moascar
Hammett J	Lance Corporal	23540320		21 Jan 1954	Moascar
Cann D A	Corporal	2548555		15 Mar 1954	Moascar
Stringer W G	Major (MBE)	657986		13 Apr 1954	Moascar
McGowan L C	Sapper	22783979	25 Field Eng. Regt.	30 Jun 1954	Moascar
Graves A G	Corporal	22717296		11 Sep 1954	Moascar

**Rolls of Honour for all British and Commonwealth Services Personnel can be found at:**

[http://www.suezcanalzone.com/roh\\_list.html#Royal Engineers](http://www.suezcanalzone.com/roh_list.html#Royal_Engineers)

## General Service Medal (GSM), Canal Zone 1918-62

On 11th June 2003 the Prime Minister announced in the House of Commons that the Naval GSM 1915-62 and the GSM 1918-62 with 'Canal Zone' clasp was to be awarded to those who had served in the Suez Canal Zone of Egypt during the period 16th October 1951 to 19th October 1954.



The qualification criteria for the Suez Canal Zone GSM, (or Clasp), is to have served for a minimum of 30 consecutive days within the Canal Zone during the period 16 October 1951 to 19 October 1954 and the following personnel are eligible:

- Members of the Armed Forces based in the Suez Canal Zone at that time;
- Accompanying civilians who wore the appropriate uniform of their organisation;
- Commonwealth and Colonial Forces, subject to approval by their government;
- Foreign Nationals enlisted with any of the above categories.

Veterans of the Canal Zone, or the next-of-kin of those who have died, should apply in writing to the MoD Medal Office, giving Full Name, Date of Birth and Service Number. Next of kin will be required to supply supporting documentation. As with the initial issue of all other British campaign awards there will be no charge for the medal.

The address for all applications is:	E-mail: JPAC@spva.mod.uk
Service Personnel and Veterans Agency	Fax: 0141 224 3586
Ministry of Defence Medal Office	Free Phone: 0800 085 3600
Innsworth House	Overseas Civ:
Imjin Barracks	+44 (0) 141 224 3600
Gloucester	
GL3 1HW	

The following information, (or as much as possible) will be required:

Service Number - Regiment/Corps (Army and RM), Branch/Trade (RAF and RN) - Full Name - Date of Birth Rank and Date of Discharge, plus, of course, your current name and address.

Although the reigning monarch changed during the Suez campaign, Queen Elizabeth II appears on all the GSMs issued for the Canal Zone because it was Queen Elizabeth that approved award of the Clasp to the GSM 'Canal Zone'.

### Wearing of Medals

There is often a lot of discussion on how, when, where and which medals to wear. Quite some time ago our late colleague, 'Sapper' Dave Hickman, wrote to Col. Ashley Tinson (Rtd), the Medals Consultant for the Royal British Legion. Here is a copy of the Colonel's reply.

Dear Mr Hickman

Whether in uniform or civilians it is normal to wear medals at Remembrance and other parades linked to Military Service.

In uniform they are worn normally above the left pocket. If any type of top coat is worn they are not displayed.

In civilian clothes they are worn in a similar place to that for uniform and in this case if an overcoat or mac is worn, they may be worn on it.

Unofficial medals may not be worn in uniform and should not be worn in civilian clothes. However, if they are worn they must not be put on the official bar and are usually worn well down the left side under Official Medals.

I assume you know the order of wear; it is basically Campaign Medals in order of date of participation, Golden Jubilee Medal, Accumulated Campaign Service Medal, then Long Service and Good Conduct Medal.

Ashley R Tinson.

Honorary Medals Consultant to the Royal British Legion

## Veterans Lapel Badge

All those who have served in HM Armed Forces, including the Volunteers and Regular Reserves are eligible to apply. Click on one of these links below to access and download the application form.



Microsoft Word Version

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/armed-forces-veterans-badge-application-form>

You may post or fax your completed form to the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency. Or you may call the Freephone number to apply.

If you use the Freephone method, please ensure you have to hand all the details asked for on the application form.

Postal address:  
The MoD Medal Office  
Innsworth House  
Imjin Barracks  
Gloucester  
GL3 1HW

Freephone Helpline  
Free: 0800 169 2277 (UK only)  
Free: 0800 169 3458 (Minicom UK only)  
+44 1253 866043 (Overseas)  
Fax: 01452 510871 (UK only)  
+44 1452 510871 (Overseas)  
Email: [spva-vetsbadge@mod.uk](mailto:spva-vetsbadge@mod.uk)

## Addresses for Service Records

Army Personnel Centre Secretariate  
Disclosures 2, Mailpoint 515  
Kentigern House  
65 Brown Street  
Glasgow G2 8EX

When applying for your own records you will need a 'Subject Access Request Form'. (DPA SAR Form 1694 (Jan 08).

This can be downloaded from the website:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/requests-for-personal-data-and-service-records>

If next of kin of a deceased person is applying they will need a 'Certificate of Kinship Form'.

For a copy of this, follow the link on the website:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/210233/request\\_service\\_details\\_NOK\\_pt1\\_v6.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/210233/request_service_details_NOK_pt1_v6.pdf)

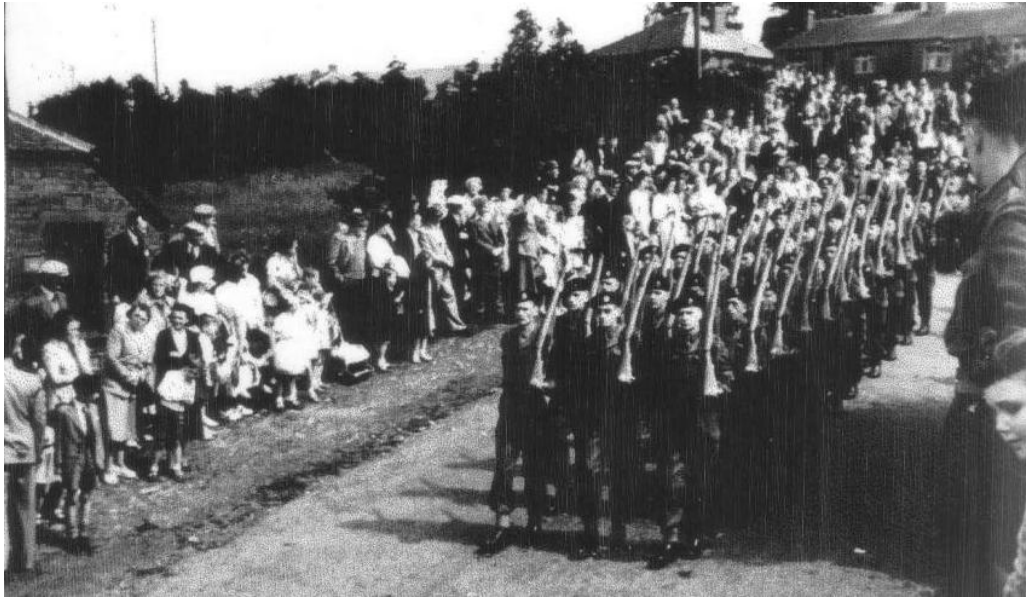
## Clasp to GSM for Cyprus 1955 – 59

This clasp or medal was approved in July 2014

## Clasp to GSM for Suez Crisis – Op Musketeer 31 October to 22 December 1956

The clasp or medal is also available for this Operation.

### 1952 Basic Training at Crickhowell, Abergavenny



Spr Derek Male

# 8 Training Party

39 Corps Engr  
Regiment

6 Weeks Basic Training  
Crickhowell, near  
Abergavenny, South  
Wales.



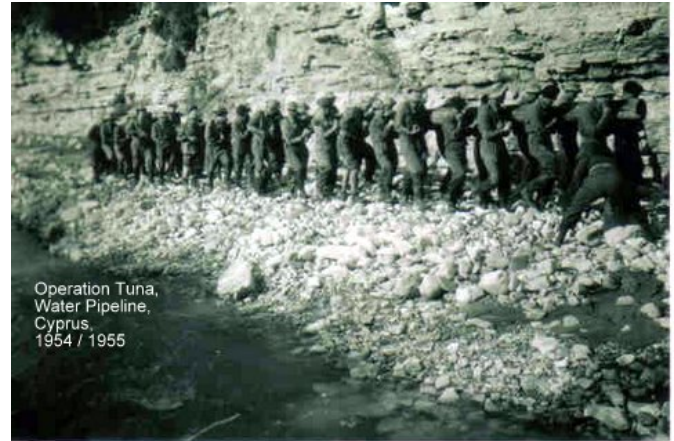
Crickhowell,  
Abergavenny

I am not sure if this is  
practising getting  
married or grave  
digging?

## 1954, 42 Field Squadron, Kissousa, Cyprus



Work Camp, Kissousa Cyprus 1954  
42 Field Squadron, Royal Engineers



Operation Tuna,  
Water Pipeline,  
Cyprus,  
1954 / 1955

### Work Camp

Everything had to be manhandled as it was an area where cranes etc. could not go.



Breakdown at Kissousa  
Cyprus, 1954



Connecting Water Pipes  
Troodos Mountains,  
Cyprus, 1954

### Plant Repair

### Connecting the water pipes

## Life as a National Service Royal Engineers Subaltern

I have received a diary and photographs from David Paterson who served as an officer during national service. I have compiled these into a thirteen-page document which I have attached as a stand-alone document and can be viewed at Annex F, it covers much of the time the Squadron served in Cyprus carrying out water supply tasks while having to deal with EOKA. Terrorists. This account of David's time with the Squadron provides an interesting comparison to that of the Sapper.

EOKA was an underground nationalist movement of Greek Cypriots dedicated to ending British colonial rule in Cyprus (achieved in 1960) and to achieving the eventual union (Greek enosis) of Cyprus with Greece.

**1956, Suez Crisis – Op Musketeer 31 October to 22 December 1956**



**1956 42 Field Squadron, Ripon**



**7 Troop MT at Proteus  
Camp/Training Area,  
Ollerton, Notts providing  
training for WRAC TA.**

**42 Field Squadron at Deverell Barracks Ripon  
1957 prior to moving to Osnabrück.**



**1957, 42 Field Squadron, Osnabrück**



**Spr Derek Williams**

**Keeping the OC's Champ spic-n-span, or else!**



**Derek celebrating Taff's promotion to Cpl and wondering why he was so clean and was he on the same exercise as him?**



**The centre Snow Bunny is Derek Williams**



**Derek sweeping the snow out of his wagon so his passengers wouldn't get cold feet!**



The morning after a week-long scheme in & around the Teutoburgerwald (see next page).

Next stop the showers.

**Note from 23353764 Spr Derek Williams, who was 81 years young on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2016 and living in Melbourne Australia. He sent all his messages and photos from his iPad.**

I was one of the don't want to be there's.

I was conscripted in November 1956 and let out a much different man in November 1958.

I first went to Malvern (1 Trg Regt) we were there for about 4 weeks mainly for jabs, kit issue and the all-important haircuts, oh dear all those tony Curtis d a's lying in heaps around the barber's chair. I'd got myself a crew cut before I went, didn't matter still got a haircut. I was in 8 troop driving a 3 tonnes initially, last weeks were as the O.C.'s driver.

My one major claim to fame was standing on the jetty at the Hook of Holland with a big pink teddy bear under my arm, a present for my Mrs; you should have heard the comments from my fellow squaddies, not to mention what the Sergeant said as I thoughtfully sucked my thumb!

Anyway, the army won as it always does and I became a useful member of a very smart team.

My last C.O. Was one of the best and went to the trouble of having all his drivers proficient with all the M.T. Including the dozers and the graders.

It seems unbelievable that it is 60 years since those memories were made.

Continued...



Continued...

**The Teutoburg Forest is a range of low, forested hills in the German states of Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia**

**Approximately 88 Kms S. East of Osnabrück.**

**Part of the Teuterbergerwald 1957/8 we made camp just behind the first peak on the left middle top of the picture.**

**Artist's 3D impression of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest**



**What is the history of the Teutoburg Forest that the Fighting 42<sup>nd</sup> would choose to Exercise there, I think it must be traditional; the hardship and the fighting?**

The Battle of the Teutoburg Forest (German: Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald, Hermannsschlacht or Varusschlacht), described as clades Variana (the Varian disaster) by Roman historians, took place in the Teutoburg Forest in September 9 AD during the Roman-Germanic Wars (113 BC-439 AD), when an alliance of Germanic tribes ambushed and decisively destroyed three Roman legions and their auxiliaries, led by Publius Quinctilius Varus. The anti-Roman alliance was led by Arminius, who had acquired Roman citizenship and received a Roman military education, thus enabling him to personally deceive the Roman commander and foresee the Roman army's tactical responses.

Despite several successful campaigns and raids by the Roman army in the years after the battle, they never again attempted to conquer Germanic territory east of the Rhine River. The Germanic victory against the Roman legions in the Teutoburg forest had far-reaching effects on the subsequent history of both the ancient Germanic peoples and on the Roman Empire. Modern historians have regarded Arminius' victory as "Rome's greatest defeat" and one of the most decisive battles in history.

## 1964, 42 Field Squadron, Hameln

In 1964 the unit moved from Osnabrück to Gordon Barracks in Hameln where it would have a permanent base until it was disbanded in June 2013.



42 Field Squadron

The German name for Gordon Barracks was Linsingen Kaserne.  
It was named after:  
Lieutenant General Karl Christoph von Linsing  
13 June 1703 to 6 May 1787

Linsing acquired the Dempferhaus, Hameln in 1774



### **A message from 22716247 WOII (SSM) Roy Willmott dated - 18 August 2013**

Hello people, I was SSM 42 Fd Sqn in 1967-68, in Hameln, they were a pretty rough bunch, but excelled at everything when it was needed. The OC was Maj John McLaughlin, good boss, I hope he got a regiment he deserved it, he scrounged a brand new Land Rover for me in place of that incredibly evil White Armoured Scout Car, aptly called the "Pig". He also scrounged all the materials to build a pub in the attic of the barrack block, great success.

In the field I was usually able to get us a barn to stay in, our cook was Cpl Frame, we bought, traded or "borrowed" all kinds of good grub, bacon, eggs, chicken and spuds, they took my Land Rover to "borrow" a few sacks of spuds sitting in a field and bogged down all 4 wheels, some fun, everybody helped with the cooking, they were surprised at my kitchen skills, I did not tell anybody that I spent a lot of time on 'tin bash' during my training, no field grub for this bunch, we had some 'not issue' cooking devices, Frame could do wonders with Spam or Bully Beef, we were told we were to get a helicopter visit, we thought it would be a Scout, but this bloody great Westland thing landed with lots of brass and red tape aboard, they had come for brekkie.

Back in barracks the Politzei were often getting reports about squaddies committing suicide by jumping off the roof, they were just abseiling for the fun of it, thanks guys for giving me a good run, I did not realize what a great honour it could be to be SSM, being a WO11 is a good rank, but being SSM is special. Now in Chilliwack, British Columbia. Best wishes, Roy.

### **New message from WOII (SSM) Roy Willmott dated 24 April 2016**

It is a shame that the name was retired after such a glorious past, I spent most of 1967 and part of 1968 with the Squadron, as I mentioned before they had a reputation as being a wild bunch, but they could pull out all the stops when needed. It did not matter what it was, from bridging to playing hockey, they just blasted every one away; they could cause some chaos in the pubs in Hameln, but fiercely protected the pub they built in the attic of the barrack block.

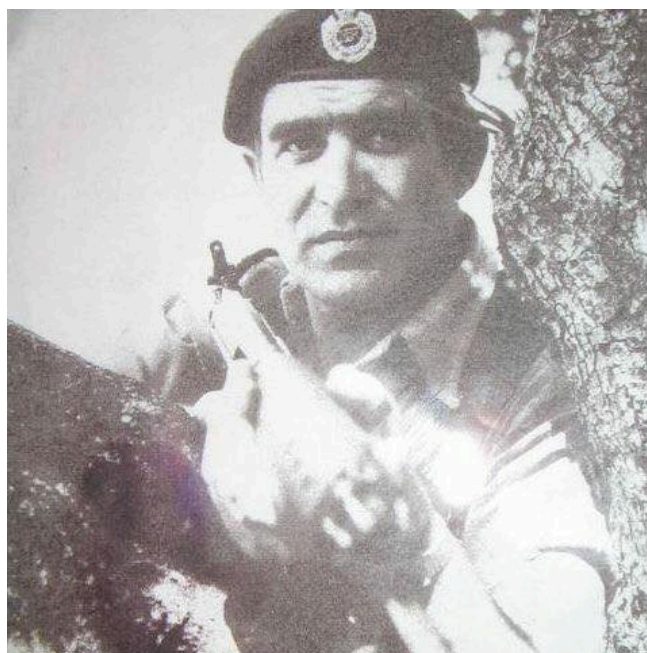
I only remember a few names, radio guy was a Brummie staff sergeant Brian Cazaly, superb radio man, gave me call signs like Penguin, I questioned this and ask for an explanation, he clapped the back of his hands and made a shuffle and said "All flap no fly" he then gave me the call sign Seagull, I thought this was better as it indicates I was soaring above the ground, he said "No it means if you're not squawking you are s-----g," he and I were the only members of the regiment who were ex 9 Para Sqn, so we had a special bond. Dave Folwell was 7 troop staff sergeant, and John Madden the plant sergeant, Cpl Pete Pagetti was our lead boxer. The Squadron again blasted every one away at the annual inspection, the SSMs are not part of this so we stood in the mess and watched, the other SSMs were ticked off because all the 42 Sqn vehicles were driven off the parade ground, some of them were secretly towed off. My driver was a super guy, I always called him Geordie when no one was around, he took good care of me, and insisted that I slept in the back of the Land Rover whilst he was driving, Cpl Frame was our cook and as I mentioned before he was amazing in the field, we collected 5 Deutschmarks from everyone to buy extra grub that made all the difference. He would collect those cans of 'energy' biscuits and take them to a farmer's wife and trade the for eggs or chickens or potatoes, explaining in great detail to the wives that these were special energy biscuits and the old man would be infused with great energy when it came to bed time, worked every time. Frame was also an aspiring magician.

I was very young to be SSM; I had been senior drill pig, SSM of a training sqn, and QMSI in Canada for 2 years, my bosses in Canada, Majors Jim Gear, and John Grosvenor each said if they got a Squadron they would ask me to be their SSM. When I got to Hameln, there was a lot of WOs who wanted a Squadron, and were ticked off when Ray Pie (29 Field Squadron) and I got the SSMs jobs. I was orderly officer on Christmas, an older WO told me to close the Mess as he was the senior member, I asked him to look at the senior roster which the RSM Dick Levitt had placed in the foyer. After working as SSM of a Field Sqn I realised why these guys coveted the position, in the whole regiment there are only 3 Field Squadron sergeant majors, it was a great experience for me, I had tremendous support from everyone and I am still immensely proud to have served with you all, thanks, Roy Willmott.

## 1968 Czechoslovakian Uprising – Danny Thompson

Written by Tom Byrne

Sadly Danny died in February 2016 and was to the end a campaigner for justice for military personnel being charged or convicted for so called war crimes.



I have to go back to February 1966 because that is when I first met Danny.

At the tender age of 17 I had just been posted from 1 Training Regiment Royal Engineers to 8 Troop, 42 Field Squadron, 35 Engineer Regiment in Hameln (BFPO 31).

When I first got there I was a driver and new drivers had to pass a tick test based on the Manual for Drivers in Germany and then go out with an experienced driver for 20 hours driving before being allowed out on their own. That was when I first met Danny who was in 9 Troop and was allocated to be my experienced driver.

Danny took this role seriously and acted as though he were a Sergeant Major, Driving Instructor and Examiner (I think it was his first time out as an experienced driver). In short, he took the job seriously. This had its advantages; we were duty Squadron and one of the duties was to do the daily ration run. We spent the week going to and from Hanover to collect bread, vegetables and meat etc. from the Royal Army Ordnance Corps supply depot. All the way there and back I got a running commentary on where every vehicle on the road was from according to their registration numbers and, where those locations were in Germany and if the Squadron had trained or exercised there. Danny had also just completed his basic German language training course and I was therefore a prime target for him to practice on, this was definitely beneficial as I constantly received lessons in basic German and was challenged on them not only the next day but every time we met.

After the first day I said to Danny that I would see him in the Squadron Bar later and buy him a drink as a thank you. Danny was not going to have any of that! He had found out that the Squadron Sergeant Major, a Scot called Alexander Montgomery had banned me from drinking in the bar because I was only 17 and Danny with his vast superiority in age appeared to be in agreement with him. Danny was of course only a bit older but as I said he was taking his role in my development seriously. Of course, I took no notice of him in this last respect but it didn't matter because we became friends and stayed that way.

Couldn't take any notice anyway, at that time a beer cost 50 pfennigs and there were 11 Deutsch Marks and 20 pfennigs to the £1. That meant that you could buy 22 beers for £1. Tell any 17-year-old to abstain under those circumstances. I never ever noticed Danny to be either abstemious or temperate, only in his advice to me for moderation.

Because Danny was in a different troop we never really did much together but were always good friends and enjoyed many a laugh (usually with a pint). However, one thing that always impressed me was his commitment to learning German, he eventually qualified as an interpreter and hence came his moment of fame.

It was 1968 and British Troops along with a lot of others had to make a show of force on the German and Czechoslovakian border as part of NATO.

In the early part of 1968, the Czech's got a new leader Alexander Dubček who was intent on giving socialism a human face. Initially the Soviet leader, Brezhnev endorsed this as he thought it was a good idea and wanted to avoid coming down heavily in order to avoid the bloodshed of the Czech uprising in 1956. As ever giving a human face to anything meant that people had greater freedoms such as 'speech' and, eventually that speech was deemed to be revolutionary, particularly when supported by actions.

In August 1968 the Soviets moved 250,000 troops into Czechoslovakia from the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland with further troops from East Germany in readiness to support if needed. The East Germans were originally due to have gone in but stopped at the last minute, probably because Czechoslovakia had the only direct border into the West from the Soviet/Warsaw Pact countries but, that border was with West Germany and the Soviets no doubt did not want a conflict of interest or loyalties between the two German sides.

Although it was never intended for the Soviets to enter the West, accidents can and do happen. That was the main reason for NATO troops making a show of force on the border. Live ammunition, explosives, shells, missiles, minefields, the whole lot.

What did Danny have to with this? No, he didn't start it.

With so many troops of different nationalities on the ground it was necessary that everyone knew what was being said in different languages. So, with perfect military precision we had interpreters attached from a variety of countries with all sorts of skills e.g. German officers who spoke perfect Russian and or Polish etc. but not a word of English, you can imagine, Bedlam would have seemed like the perfect debating society.

This is where Danny was able to step forward and take his place to represent our Squadron and other Units as he carried out the interpretation of the English and German, this of course meant that he was privy to what was happening on both sides of the border and what plans were being put in place to combat any attempted border crossing. The Soviets were quite happy to move into a country as they did after World War 2, plant their flag and declare the country a satellite of the USSR and say move us if you can.

This is where the accidents started to happen. The USSR alone was made up of 69 different countries with that many languages. Their T54 Tank was so economically designed that they could only fit people in who were 5' 4" tall or less. This meant that there could be up to 5 crew members trawled in from different places and speaking 5 languages.

Danny and the other interpreters spent a lot of time on the border or just over it turning back these Tanks and giving the officers with them instructions on where to go and what they were allowed to do.

Why?

The Czech's had been out turning all the road signs upside down. Danny told us that most of the Soviet officers had their maps upside down; not because they were trying to do something clever like read the upside down road signs but because they could not read! They hadn't even known that they had reached West Germany; they thought they were in Central Czechoslovakia. Not to be wondered at when you think maybe 5 languages and an officer who can't read and maybe speaks another language. Danny said that when questioned the officers couldn't even say what their orders were, not because it wouldn't be allowed

under the Geneva Conventions but that they couldn't remember them because they couldn't read them and could not write their own. But somebody let them have a Troop of fully battle-ready Tanks?

Danny was kept very busy during this time doing what as you can imagine was actually a very serious job. He was also in his element, being in charge of a major part of the operation, giving orders to people and having to suffer fools but not gladly, he had a great time. Of course, the rest of us were winding him up about it then and for a long time to come, but it didn't matter, he had reached his personal zenith, had taken it seriously and enjoyed it. He had also gained great respect within the Squadron, we were all very proud of Danny and his exploits in 1968 but we never told him to his face of course, then again, we didn't have to, he knew, because the banter was good natured, which it wouldn't have been if the Squadron were not proud of him.

108 Czechoslovakian civilians were killed and around 500 wounded in the invasion.



Czech youths holding Czechoslovakian flags stand atop of an overturned truck as other Prague residents surround Soviet tanks in downtown Prague on Aug. 21, 1968.

## 42 Field Squadron link to Fame

### The Bailey Bridge Design Team

During the late 1960s 8 Troop were fortunate to have second Lieutenant Jarrett-Kerr as Troop Commander. From the outset he was not only a good Troop Commander but had a real gift for combat engineering and bridging in particular. It was a while before we found out that most of his family had been Sappers but one of his relatives was Major H.A.T. Jarrett-Kerr who was a member of the original Bailey Bridge design team. Our new Troop Commander had been well trained and prepared for his new role.

Major Jarrett-Kerr also took part in the design of other bridges e.g. the class 16 air-portable bridge. He eventually became a Brigadier and the Director of MEXE (Military Engineering Experimental Establishment).

MEXE and its predecessors carried out a wide range of research and development tasks connected with military engineering equipment, particularly the crossing of wet and dry gaps and aids to amphibians; earth moving; road and airfield construction equipment; mechanical handling plant and equipment and mine laying techniques and equipment. In particular, the famous "Bailey Bridge" was developed under the chief designer (and later director), Mr. D C Bailey. In addition, the work of MEXE involved problems relating to fuel storage and distribution, water supply, electricity supply and transmission, power driven watercraft, water purification and the testing of different types of materials.



*The Bailey Bridge Team. 1941.*

*Back Row*

*R.S. Lane, Col P.K. Benner, Brig. F.E. Fowle MC, Col. S.G. Galpin, B.M. Furneaux, A.T. Bines*

*L to R*

*Front Row*

*H.J. Taylor, S. Mountney, Lt.Col. S.A. Stewart RE, D.C. Bailey, **Major H.A.T. Jarrett-Kerr RE**, Maj H.W. Kenyon*

*L to R*

### **Sir Donald Bailey**



## 1972 - 1973, 22 Nov - 28 Short Strand, East Belfast

### Example of a Northern Ireland Tour in an Infantry role

Davy Moorman was tasked with taking his section (21F) to an upstairs club in Clyde Street to lift a guy called Hugh Nugent. Unusually there was no back up section and Davy led his section spaced out up the stairs and left Fred Harvey at the front door.

When they went in Davy knew there was something not quite right as there was an all-male crowd with the exception of one woman. Davy recognised the woman as the girlfriend of Joe Moran who was on the 'Most Wanted' list.

Davy knew that he should have backed off but saw a guy alone at the bar with his back to him and he just knew it was Joe Moran and so he grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and then all hell let loose!

Davy had Joe by his long blonde hair and was pulling him toward the top of the stairs when; the crowd started throwing bottles tables and chairs over the balcony and his section had no alternative but to retreat slowly down the stairs. Davy turned to let Moran go cocking his SLR and putting one up he spout. When Davy cocked his SLR the crowd all dived to the floor but Joe Moran was now behind him and trying to choke him. Just before Davy passed out he felt a blow to the back and side of his head. Luckily this woke him within seconds only to find his SLR in his ear and to hear the mob screaming "kill the bastard." Davy felt whoever had control of the weapon cock it again. Obviously the first round ejected and Davy could feel the trigger being pulled but again whoever it was did not release the safety. Whether this was deliberate or not no-one will ever have any way of knowing. At the same time his section regained the stairs and as he saw Geordie Lyddell and Bill Mumford he got to his feet and literally dived over the balcony, minus his weapon!

With blood pouring from his head Davy grabbed Fred Harvey's SLR and screamed for the 'bastards' to pass down his SLR or he was coming in shooting! It worked; an elderly guy slithered down the stairs with the SLR and handed it to Davy butt first.

Davy grabbed it and at the same time as he did the whole republican crowd came en masse running down the stairs out and away. Andy Smith's section appeared from nowhere and tried to grab a few but they all got away. The following is a message from Bob Warburton (see photo on next page) who was a member of Andy Smith's section:

SSM Jimmy Dee thought it was a good idea to send our section (21A) led by Andy Smith round to back up 21F. Andy deployed me next to the door and another on the corner of the next junction in the street. Andy went with two others across the street. As events took place Les was the first out of the door saw Andy and told him what was happening. Andy then asked for backup and a Humber pig to block the doorway. Dave Davidson was the next out followed by Davy bleeding from his head. The door was slammed shut and after around five seconds the door opened slightly and I was handed Davy's SLR. I was stood there then when the door flung open and everyone from the club piled out throwing glasses, bottles and anything else they had brought out with them. I got a couple of bottles to the chest but managed to hit one guy low with the butt of my SLR but they all got away running up the street.

By this time an ambulance appeared but Davy ended up going to Musgrave Park Hospital in a Land Rover.

The next day a mural appeared on the side of Ma Cupple's Fish and Chip shop, it depicted 'Just one Bullet' and a message "Davy this one's for you"

Davy has thanked his section many times, then and since. He had what was probably the youngest section in Belfast in those days. In Davy's words:

"I gave them some shit by guldering\* them, they saved my life, no if's or buts. They were the youngest and bravest section in Belfast that day or any day! The mistakes were all mine I should have backed off and I didn't! No one knows why we never had a backup section that day or why the intelligence was so bad! Captain Morgan was our intelligence Officer and was also My Troop Commander, we were never in love. Geordie Liddell, Fred Harvey, Dave Davidson, Bill Mumford, Dave Woods and Dave Turner would all know. After the stitches and debrief etc. I was back on duty within 4 hours. I was later exonerated by the Officer Commanding and the Special Investigation Branch who were interested as to why I had lost a 7.62 round!"

\*Gulder or Guldering is an Ulster/Scots term for Shout or Yelling.





**Bob Warburton**

### **Woodstock Street incident**

Dave Turner's and Davy Moorman's sections came under fire from the Woodstock Road (Loyalists) into Woodstock Street (Strand). Nothing too much but there was a young child in the middle of Woodstock Street who couldn't move for fear. Les Smethurst ran out and grabbed the young girl and ran with her to safety on the other side of the road while the sections gave covering fire.

### **R.I.P. Les Smethurst**

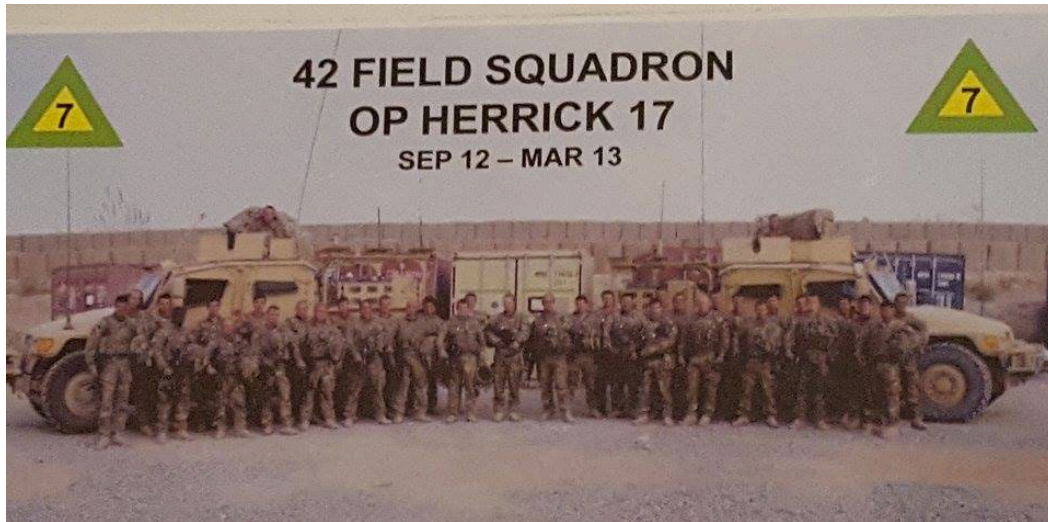
Although this is only a very minor incident I have included it to show the character of Les Smethurst who was unfortunately killed in a road traffic accident on exercise in the second half of 1973. Les was commanding a Ferret Scout Car (believed to have been driven by Ted Pickering) that overturned and trapped him underneath the turret.

### **R.I.P. Charlie Brown**

This would appear to have been an unlucky time for road traffic accidents because at around this time Charlie Brown was also killed. Charlie was travelling on the autobahn in a minivan being driven by Henry Hallick when four Dutch soldiers returning home from a weekend in Hamburg crossed the autobahn and hit the minivan head on. Charlie unfortunately took the full force of this collision and was killed. Charlie's father came from the West Indies to the funeral at the Hanover Military Cemetery and sung a lament that had many of the mourners crying. The pall bearers included Davy Moorman, Bluey Jean, Errol and Jodi.

**Assorted photos submitted by Ad Dixon**

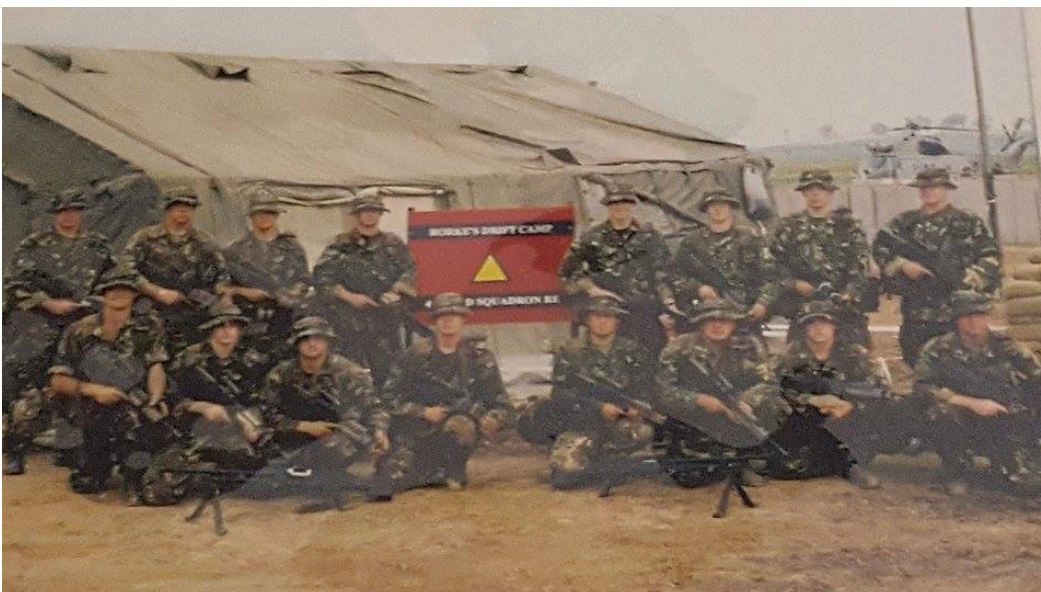
Awaiting update and stories



7 Troop  
Op Herrick  
17



7 Troop  
Op Herrick  
11



Rorke's  
Drift  
Camp





Triangle Club, Gordon Barracks, Hameln

## Three into One Does Go!

### An Account of 42 Field Squadron's Deployment to the Democratic Republic of Congo June - August 2003

Major S G Higgens MBE

As published in the Royal Engineers Journal August 2004.



*Major Simon Higgens joined the Corps as an Apprentice Tradesman in 1983. Between 1985 and 1991 he served with 34 Fd Sqn and 51 Fd Sqn (Airmobile), deploying with the latter to Northern Iraq on Operation Safehaven in May 1991. He applied for officer training in 1991 and was commissioned into the Corps in Dec 1992. His first appointment, as Tp Comd, was with 20 Fd Sqn where he subsequently served as Ops Officer. In this role he deployed with the Squadron to Angola on Operation Chantress in May 1995. Taking up the post of Adjutant, 35 Engr Regt in Apr 1996 he was promoted and posted as Group Leader to the RCB at Westbury in Oct 1997. In 1999 he attended the Combat Arms Fighting Systems Course at RMCS and in Jan 2000 was posted to the DPA as both Requirements and Trials Manager of the then fledgling Engineer Tank Systems IPT. He assumed command of 42 Fd Sqn in Aug 2001 and deployed the Squadron on Exercise Saif Sareea II, Operation Descant and Operation Coral. He assumed his current appointment as ERLO in Sep 2003.*

(Elements of this article appeared in Edition 19 of the *Sapper Telegraph*).

#### INTRODUCTION

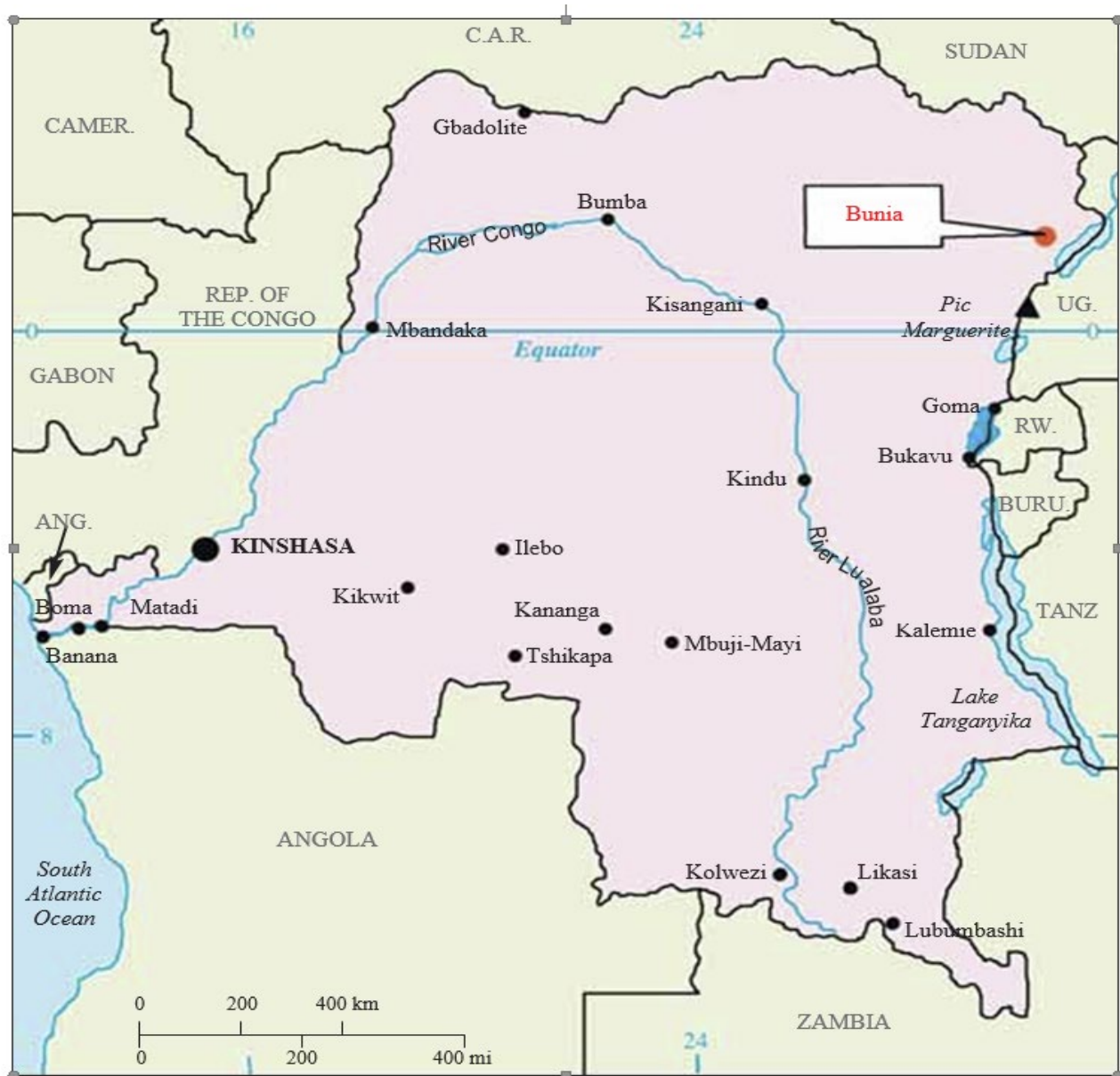
In June 2003, in the immediate aftermath of Operation *Telic*, a small UK military contingent predominantly based on 42 Fd Sqn, deployed at short notice and with expeditionary scalings to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Limited in manpower, resources and equipment, the Squadron Group was the United Kingdom's contribution to Operation *Artemis*; the first ever European Union Defence Force deployment outside of continental Europe. Operation *Coral* was the United Kingdom's title for the operation.

In total, the Squadron was deployed for just 62 days and yet in such a short period of time made a valuable contribution towards restoring peace and stability to one of the World's most impoverished and troubled regions. Contending with not only the inhospitable conditions and its isolated location, Squadron personnel had to operate in a dangerous environment against a back-drop of frequent incursions by local militia and scenes of inhumanity and brutality comparable to those witnessed in Rwanda in 1994.

With the World's attention focused elsewhere, details of Operation *Coral* are not widely known. This article seeks to record the efforts of the men and women in the Squadron, offer some personal thoughts and demonstrate how much can be achieved with a relatively small group of Sappers.



Grim realities of life in Ituri



Map of Democratic Republic of Congo.

## BACKGROUND

The 2,200 strong French led Interim European Military Force (IEMF) mission, was in response to a United Nations request to the European Union for military support in the Ituri Region of North East Congo. Based on a French Marine Brigade supplemented with Special Forces (SF), the Force also included Swedish SF and Belgian medical and air assets. The Ituri Region was witness to an increase in hostilities between the rival Hema and Lendu militia after the withdrawal in May 03 of the Ugandan Army. An inter-ethnic war had been raging in and around Bunia for the previous four years and had claimed an estimated 50,000 lives. The Bangladeshi led UN Task Force was not due to deploy until Sep 03 and the lack of a permanent, credible military presence in the region, especially around the provincial capital Bunia, required an interim military force to support the UN's efforts in

returning peace to the volatile area. The leading elements of the IEMF (French SF and Foreign Legion) arrived in theatre during the second week of June 2003. In an effort to make the IEMF a truly multi-national force, British participation was requested by the French Government.

With France's recent military history in the Great Lakes Region and Belgium being the one-time colonial master of Congo (formerly Zaire), a non-Francophone country was essential in adding credence to the force and assuaging the concerns of neighbouring countries such as Uganda, Angola and Rwanda.

The request for a British military contribution came whilst efforts were quite rightly focussed on Iraq and it was decided that an Engineer Squadron could best provide a tangible contribution whilst remaining relatively small in size.

## RECONNAISSANCE AND DEPLOYMENT

On 9 Jun 03, I was ordered to report to Joint Force Headquarters at PJHQ. Two days later I received a brief on the situation in theatre and deployed with the Operational Liaison and Reconnaissance Team (OLRT) to Bunia. I had been warned that I would not return to Hameln once the OLRT had conducted its primary task

but would stay in theatre until the Squadron joined me. The OLRT was commanded by Lt Col Andy Mason PARA (COMBRITCON) with Cdr Paul Abraham RN a submariner, his deputy. The OLRT's mission was to establish a foothold at Bunia airfield, liaise with the French led force and identify suitable tasks for the Squadron to undertake. Deploying from RAF Lyneham in a C130 on 13 Jun 03, the OLRT arrived at Bunia airfield during the afternoon of 16 Jun 03.

Once on the ground in Bunia, I had 36 hours to produce a detailed Works Proposal. Upon direction from COMBRITCON, I identified tasks that would assist the UN's efforts in Bunia. Significant constraints applied; firstly, all equipment and materiel had to be flown into Bunia by C130, secondly there was no integral infrastructure or resource supply, thirdly the Squadron's ORBAT had to be capped at around 70 and finally the Squadron had to recover from theatre by 1 Sep 03. Establishing contact with the French military engineers and the UN's Deputy Chief of Aviation in the DRC (Chris 'Brien, a former RAF C130 pilot), it appeared that the airfield and its immediate vicinity was vital ground to both the military and UN operations.

Since independence, the DRC's infrastructure has deteriorated rapidly and movement is now only therefore critical to not only the deployment and sustainment of the IEMF and Bangladeshi Task Force but also the UN and other Non Government Organizations (NGO). The capacity and throughput of the airfield, however, was restricted by the size of the parking apron, which could only safely hold two C130 aircraft (or equivalent) simultaneously. With the IEMF, UN and NGO all vying for space on the apron, it became clear that if it were expanded the amount of aid and humanitarian relief flown into the region would be increased.

With the IEMF Commander agreeing to place his French Air Support Platoon under my command

and the UN agreeing to supply bulk earth moving equipment, the Works Proposal submitted to PJHQ on 17 Jun 03 recommended that the Squadron undertake the apron extension task. Not being a civil engineer and having no prior experience with airfield construction, I was very grateful for the advice and technical assistance

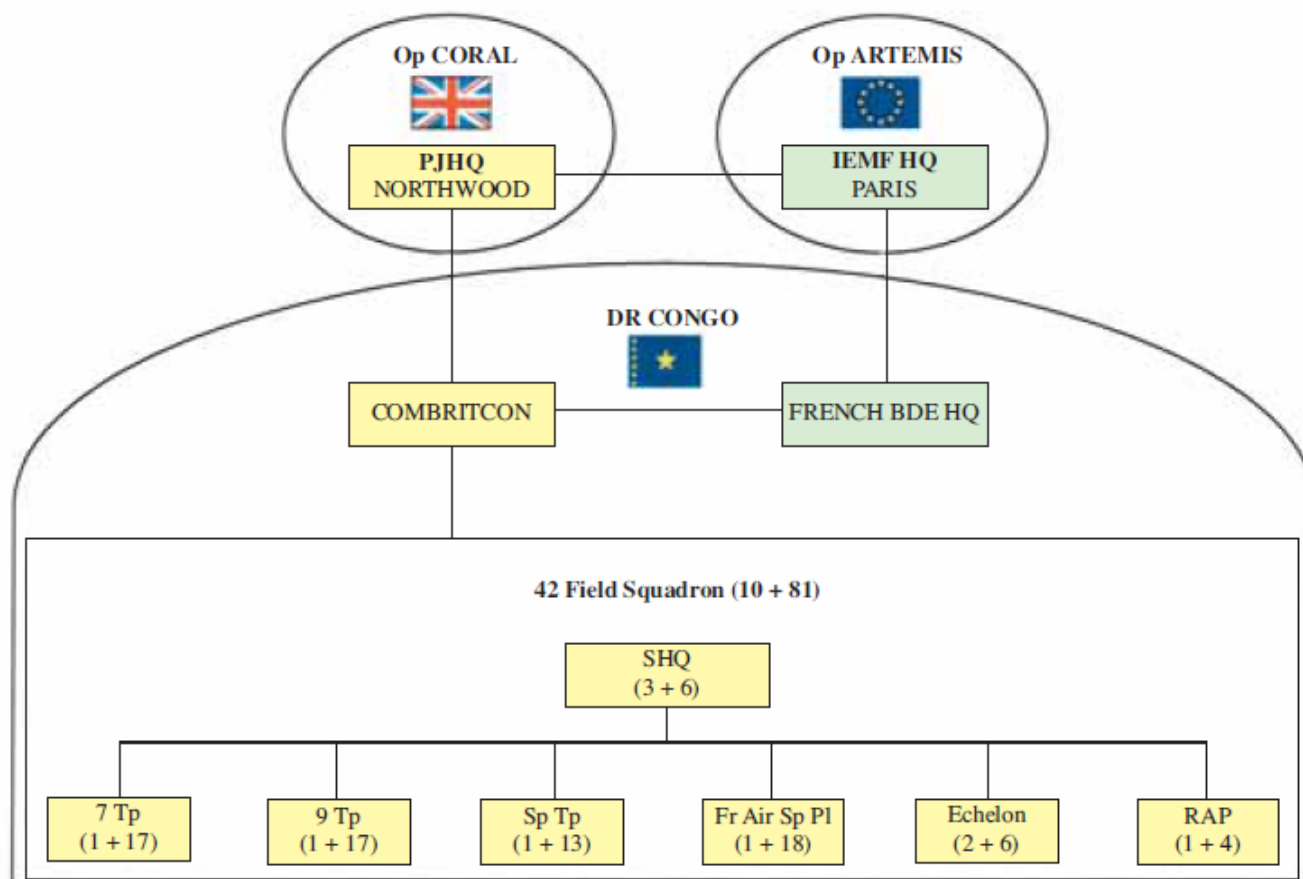


**French Patrol**

that the then OC 529 STRE (Air Sp), Lt Col Buckley, afforded over a very difficult satellite telephone link. The proposal was accepted on 20 Jun 03.

Meanwhile, not knowing when the Squadron would deploy and yet to receive any details of likely tasks in theatre, my 2IC, Capt. Lorne McMonagle prepared the Squadron for deployment. Stripped of most of its vehicles and equipment to Operation *Tellic*, the Squadron was fortunate not to have lost its manpower. Bearing in mind the nature of the deployment, only expeditionary levels of equipment were prepared. Squadron personnel were warned that conditions in theatre would be austere and that they were to take only the bare essentials.

With the Squadron's QM detached to 64 HQ Sqn for Operation *Tellic*, Capt. Neil Bevan, Resources Offr of 45 Fd Sp Sqn, was attached to the Squadron for the duration of the deployment. His knowledge of resources immediately paid dividends in that he negotiated with the Engr Resources Management Cell (ERMC) at Bicester, the reconfiguration of a 250 man Expeditionary Camp Infrastructure (ECI) into one suitable for only 100 men, thereby releasing valuable air cargo space for more essential items such as defence stores and medical equipment. This early liaison with



#### Squadron Organization.

ERMC and the advice and assistance that Maj Andy Reed and his team provided was of significant benefit to the rapid and successful deployment.

In the period preceding my departure, the Squadron had conducted an ITD(A) and basic infantry skills camp at Sennelager and consequently its low-level skills were up to date. The short notice of the deployment precluded a prolonged training package but my Ops Offr, Capt. Chris Ankers, in conjunction with PJHQ planned and organized a two-day OPTAG package in Hameln. A situational briefing by the two Op Coral desk officers from PJHQ proved to be of significant value and supplemented the information that was being received from theatre.

When SHQ received a copy of the Works Proposal on 20 Jun 03, it was able to fine tune the ORBAT, source materiel and arrange for the loan and dispatch of equipment. The ORBAT of 72 included 65 personnel from the Squadron based on an SHQ (-), two Fd Tps (-) and one Sp Tp (-)

and an additional seven medical, environmental health and postal personnel. Vehicle and Plant assets were kept to a minimum with the Squadron deploying with two UltraLight Wheeled Tractors (ULWT), two Troop Carrying Vehicles (TCV), three Land Rovers and one specialist soil rotorvator. In addition to the reconfigured 100 man ECI, other materiel included an Engineer Construction Pack (Light) and 4 tonnes of coldrolled asphalt for runway repair.

Deployment was in three stages; the pre-advance party, comprising Capt. Bevan and a Resources JNCO, flew by civair on 20 Jun 03 to the IEMF Forward Mounting Base (FMB) at Entebbe Military Airport, Uganda. They were prepositioned here to prepare for the receipt and onward despatch of the Squadron's Advance Party and Main Body.

The Advance Party, consisting of one Field Troop, flew by C130 to Bunia via the FMB and arrived on 27 Jun 03. The Main Body, flying on strategic aircraft, arrived at the FMB on 29 Jun 03 and were called forward to



Bunia in piecemeal as the Squadron Camp developed. Several of the C130s bringing the Squadron forward were struck by small arms fire; SSGT Stafford was somewhat shocked when he landed at Bunia to find that a round had passed up between the gap in his legs and out of the fuselage above him. The Squadron was complete at Bunia Airfield on 4 Jul 03.



**Rorke's Drift Camp**

## **CAMP INFRASTRUCTURE AND INITIAL STAGES**

Living conditions in theatre were poor. The area inside the airfield where the Squadron were to be located was littered with human remains, faeces and munitions. Under the direction of my SSM, WO2 Houston, much effort was spent during the early stages of the deployment to improve conditions thereby reducing the risk of disease. Deploying with an Environmental Health Warrant Officer, adhering to guidelines on camp layout, utilizing a centralized cookhouse and strict personal hygiene prevented any outbreaks of gastro enteric or similar diseases. Malaria was prevalent in the area but sound personal discipline with regards to the taking of prophylaxis prevented any cases being recorded in the Squadron. The remainder of the IEMF were not so fortunate; 13 cases were recorded during the time that the Squadron was in theatre.

In addition to the environmental conditions, the Squadron had to contend with the physical threat. Although not capable of mounting a prolonged, direct assault, the Lendu and Hema militia were

capable of mounting concentrated, rapid skirmishes using small arms and mortars. In response, the IEMF relied on a system of strongpoints with SF and infantry patrolling the ground between (the French referred to this as the "Citadel"). With the exception of razor wire there was, however, little protection around the IEMF camp. I decided from the outset to provide indirect fire protection close to the accommodation areas.

This was supplemented with interlocking fire trenches on the periphery of the Squadron position.

On the three occasions when the Squadron was engaged it was reassuring to note that the hours spent planning, preparing and rehearsing for such an event paid off. Under perhaps the most stressful of situations that any member of the Squadron had hitherto found themselves, the professionalism and leadership displayed by all commanders proved pivotal in ensuring that all Squadron personnel who deployed to the DRC returned home safely. Considering the short

notice of the deployment and the lack of opportunity to conduct any significant pre-deployment training, I am convinced that the ITD(A) and basic infantry skills camp that the Squadron undertook just before deploying to the DRC, provided an excellent bedrock on which to develop individual and Section level drills in theatre.

Under the command of Lt Dave Barham, 7 Troop built and maintained the Squadron's camp infrastructure and prepared the defensive positions. With the onset of the rainy season fast approaching, the Troop rapidly established an effective track and drainage system that allowed the Squadron to operate in even the most torrential of downpours. Their skills were very much in demand by the other contributing nations and the Troop ultimately became responsible for the enhancement and maintenance of the entire IEMF Camp infrastructure.

When the Squadron Camp, pertinently named "Rorke's Drift", was ready, 9 Troop, commanded by Lt Lachlan Robertson was flown from Entebbe into Bunia to work along-side the French Air Support Platoon repairing and maintaining the runway. The effective length of the runway was

1,850m and was constructed in a similar fashion to that of a blacktop road. Classified as being able to



**Hema Militiamen (note the child soldier back left)**

support aircraft up to the size of C13 (or equivalent), it was patch repaired using a Limonite (a locally quarried soil) and cement mix. With the exception of emergency repairs, maintenance could only be conducted at night. The runway was located on the western edge of Bunia and as aircraft were often engaged with small arms fire as they flew over the town, the IEMF Commander ordered that all military and UN aircraft should only approach from and depart towards the west. This of course had a detrimental effect on the western half of the runway and most of the repair and maintenance tasks were concentrated here. Repairs, although slow as they relied on the local Pygmy work force to manually mix the cement, were of good quality and yielded a higher strength than that of the existing runway. The maintenance and repair of the runway, although a monotonous and unglamorous task, was vital. The combined efforts of 9 Troop and the French Platoon ensured that the runway was never once closed to aircraft.

### **SQUADRON MAIN EFFORT – EXPANSION OF THE RUNWAY**

A delay in the demining of the apron expansion area prevented work starting on the Squadron's main effort until 8 Jul 03. The existing apron, constructed in an identical manner to that of the runway, was 4,800m<sup>2</sup> and had only one taxi-way from/to the runway. The Squadron's task was to increase the apron to 10,440m<sup>2</sup> and construct an additional taxiway. The expanded apron was to be soil stabilized using the locally quarried Limonite and levelled to link in with the existing drainage. As the task was plant intensive, it was given to Support Troop, under the command of 2Lt Colette

Waters, to control. The French Platoon and UN provided additional plant equipment, with manpower provided by the Field Troops.

On the same day that the project commenced, I was informed by COMBRITCON that the Squadron had to leave theatre by 15 Aug 03 in order to allow the remainder of the IEMF to begin their recovery. This news arrived at the same time that the UN reneged on their promise to supply bulk earth moving equipment. With only two ULWT and one French Caterpillar D3 available, it was vital that the Squadron obtained more heavy plant. A DEUCE from 39 Engr Regt with an operator/instructor was flown out to theatre and the UN's Deputy Chief of Aviation was able to locate and fly in by helicopter (MI 26) a Caterpillar D4. This delayed the works programme by seven days and in order to make up lost time, round the clock shift work was implemented.

The original works plan divided the apron extension into five segments with each being excavated, levelled and soil-stabilized before progressing onto the next. However, the delay in obtaining earthmoving equipment and the impending arrival of the rainy season required the whole area to be excavated, levelled and compacted before any soil-stabilization could occur. In total, over 22,000 tonnes of soil was excavated using the UK DEUCE, French D3, UN D4 and the occasional use of a Uruguayan D5 (a Uruguayan Battalion with integral support formed part of the UN's peace-keeping force in the region). The importation of 3,000 tonnes of Limonite to provide the capping surface was a significant challenge in that delivery was reliant upon three decrepit UN tipper trucks that could each only haul two tonnes plus the Squadron's two TCVs that were converted into flatbeds and unloaded by shovel on site.



**Digging ablution area**

Insufficient stocks of cement and an absence of any sand or aggregate precluded the use of a concrete hard standing to cap the site. Soil stabilization at a ratio of 3 per cent cement by

#### Work on apron begins



weight was the alternative method proposed by the UN. Although the IEMF Engr SO1 and I insisted that the ratio was too low (10 per cent was considered the optimum ratio), the UN engineer, who was the site's technical supervisor, insisted that this was the correct ratio for the local environment and weather conditions. Much heated debate ensued and it was not until the UN agreed to acknowledge my concerns and accept responsibility for the durability of the surface that soil stabilization commenced. Soil stabilization was conducted in the cooler parts of the day and the Caterpillar rotorvator that the Squadron deployed with proved critical to the efficient mixing of limonite and cement. Each stabilized area was compacted, watered and cured for seven days before being subjected to any load.

Finished on 3 Aug 03, the apron extension task took just 27 days and once completed trebled the throughput and capacity of the airfield. Whilst the apron was the Squadron's main effort, enabling tasks included quarry management, route repair, drainage, demolitions, lighting and power supply. On 5 Aug 03 the new apron was formally handed over to the UN in a ceremony that saw local politicians and dignitaries, high ranking UN staff and the French IEMF Commander taking part.

#### RECOVERY

With direction from PJHQ that once the apron extension task was finished the Squadron was to immediately return to Hameln, the recovery began on 5 Aug 03. Planned by Lt Alex Harris, my Liaison Offr, the recovery mirrored the deployment in reverse and staged through the FMB at Entebbe where materiel and equipment was cleaned and



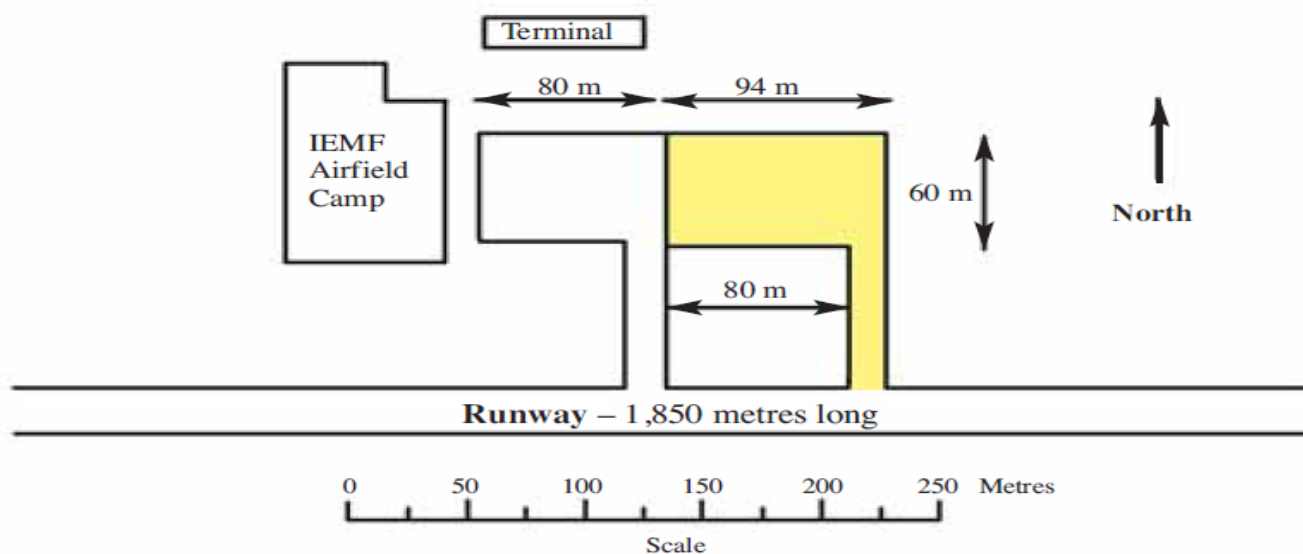
#### Lance Corporal Powell protects Pygmy workforce on runway

reconfigured. Using empty strategic aircraft returning from Exercise *Grand Prix*, the Squadron flew out of Uganda on three flights and was complete in Hameln on 11 Aug 03.

#### LESSONS LEARNT

At the time of writing this article (Mar 04), I have had seven months to reflect upon my experiences in the DRC. However, having handed over command of the Squadron the day after I arrived back in Hameln, I have not been party to all the discussion, correspondence and post deployment reviews that traditionally occur after such an operation. As such, I stress that the thoughts that follow are from a personal perspective and are based on the lessons I learnt whilst in theatre. I offer them to others who may in future find themselves in similar circumstances:

- **Trust (Mission Command).** Having spent 22 months commanding the Squadron before it deployed to the DRC, I was fortunate in that I knew the vast majority of my soldiers and all of my officers and SNCOs very well and was able to capitalize on their strengths. Once tasked, allow subordinates the freedom of manoeuvre.



Schematic of Bunia Airfield Apron (extended area in yellow).

- **Risks.** Be prepared to take qualified risks. Mitigate them as much as possible but accept that circumstances and situations may occasionally require you to make an uncertain decision.
- **Protection.** I was informed upon arrival in theatre that our protection would be provided by other elements of the IEMF. My SSM and I were not happy with this arrangement and made provision for our own protection (especially as the Squadron was accommodated immediately next to the Force's ammunition compound which had no overhead cover or blast walls). It was ultimately my responsibility to ensure the security and protection of those under my command.
- **Rehearsals.** At 0030 hrs on 13 Jul 03 the Squadron stood to in response to an engagement on the north side of the Camp. Having rehearsed the procedure for such on several occasions during day-light and darkness, Squadron personnel were quickly and quietly in place to respond to the incident. Immediately after the incident, my Command Team reviewed the procedure and implemented improvements. This happened every time that the Squadron was engaged. Rehearsals were critical but I had to strike the right balance between lack of preparedness and over-rehearsal.
- **ITD(A).** This operation highlighted that the annual completion of ITD(A) provides sub-units with an adequate template on which to base individual and low level infantry training. It was by chance that the Squadron had completed its ITD(A) training camp two weeks before deployment but it allayed the concern that I had regarding the paucity of pre-deployment training. I shall not regard ITD(A) training as such a necessary evil in future.
- **Operational Record.** My Ops Offr was very diligent in completing the Operational Record - Chronological Overview (Army Form C2118) and entered every occurrence. After the Squadron left theatre, the extended apron's capping surface failed. It would appear that the concerns regarding the ratio of cement to soil by weight was well founded. Fortunately, the Ops Offr had kept a record of all the Squadron's correspondence on this matter and I was able to confirm, when questioned by PJHQ and DMO, that we had foreseen this problem and advised the UN accordingly. Additionally, I was able to confirm that I had attempted to pre-empt the problem by suggesting to the UN that it procure AM2 matting to cap the surface.
- **First principles.** When a critical asset failed, the spares required to repair the equipment could not be obtained locally or quickly received in theatre due to the Squadron's remote location and extended lines of supply. The Squadron's Fitters, Vehicle Mechanics and Electricians displayed significant ingenuity and resourcefulness in overcoming mechanical failure by employing first principles and making good the fault using field repairs. Whilst Health and Safety legislation may normally preclude this option, it is imperative that tradesmen are encouraged to maintain these skills and practice first principles during collective and pre deployment training.



**Aerial view from the North of finished apron**



**Aerial view from the South East of finished apron**

- **Multi-Skilling.** A Sapper is a Soldier, Combat Engineer and Tradesman. This tenet provides the bedrock of the Royal Engineers and is perhaps its key strength. On at least
- engineer and construction tasks. A force of just 65 personnel could not have done such if it were not multi-skilled, thereby proving that three

three occasions during the deployment, the Squadron simultaneously defended itself, whilst undertaking combat into one does go. It is vital that the Corps protects this unique attribute.

## **CONCLUSION**

Operation Coral was a once in a lifetime opportunity. An RLC Maj, who deployed with me on the OLRT, stated that I was the luckiest officer anywhere in the Army; I did not fully appreciate the significance of what he meant at the time – I do now. To command a sub-unit on an expeditionary operation and be independent in its purest sense provided rewards and experiences that far outweighed my disappointment of not deploying on warfighting operations in Iraq. Having had the privilege of commanding and working alongside some of France's most professional soldiers whilst contributing to the efforts of the UN in restoring peace to one of the World's most devastated regions was a wholly worthwhile and memorable experience. The operation confirmed that a Royal Engineer Squadron (or any sized RE grouping for that matter) with minimal levels of equipment is capable of providing tangible, effective support to any force. Its strength, of course, lies with its Sappers who are all Soldiers, Combat Engineers and Tradesmen; three attributes that were needed and tested in the Democratic Republic of Congo.



**Handover Ceremony**

**APPENDIX 1****Royal Engineer Establishments and Structures 1944 - 1945****Headquarters, Divisional Royal Engineers**

The principle functions of the Divisional Royal Engineers were bridging, demolitions, creation and clearance of obstacles or roadblocks, concrete and semi-permanent defences, development and maintenance of water supplies, and disposal of unexploded bombs. A Lieutenant Colonel was appointed as Commander, Royal Engineers (C.R.E.) to command and control all the Royal Engineer assets and units within that division. In addition, he acted as the engineer adviser to the divisional commander. Under his command, usually he had three field companies and one field park company (known as squadrons in armoured formations). Often, a field company would work alongside a specific brigade, thereby increasing understanding and cooperation between the Arms. The field park company provided a workshop, stores and bridging platoon for the division, but in June 1943, the bridging platoons became independent of the field park company, although still within the command structure of the C.R.E.. For the latter part of the Second World War, the personnel, structure and organisation of a Headquarters, Divisional Engineers was set by War Establishment II/118/2, issued in December 1943. The field company was the standard unit of the Royal Engineers within any infantry division during the Second World War, with its equivalent in an armoured division being a field squadron. This unit provided the sappers required for a designated task, with the field park company (and later the bridging platoon) providing additional and specialised equipment.

<b>Personnel</b>	<b>Personnel by Trades</b>
Commander Royal Engineers, Lieutenant Colonel	2 x Clerks
Adjutant, Captain	Draughtsman, Architectural
3 x Subalterns	Draughtsman, Topographical
Regimental Serjeant Major	Driver Mechanic
Serjeant Clerk	Lance Corporal Medical Officer's Orderly
2 x Lance Corporals	3 x Motorcyclists
6 x Sappers	4 x Batmen
1 x Corporal Driver	Batman Driver
13 x Drivers	4 x Drivers of vehicles
Total = 28	Motor Transport Corporal
	Sanitary Dutyman
	Attached
	Medical Officer, RAMC
	2 x Cooks, ACC

In addition, personnel from the Divisional Signals are attached together with the relevant personnel. In an Armoured Division, an Armoured Command Vehicle LP (Low Power) is provided; whereas in an Infantry Division a Lorry Command Vehicle LP is provided. The following personnel from the Royal Corps of Signals served with this unit:

<b>Personnel</b>	<b>Vehicles</b>
Corporal Operator	1 x Bicycle
Operator	4 x Motorcycles
Driver Mechanic	1 x Car 4 seater 4 X 4 (Humber FWD Heavy Utility)
A lance corporal operator and a	1 x Car 5 cwt. 4 X 4 (Jeep)
Wireless set No 22 are provided for the CRE	1 x Light Reconnaissance Car, Humber MkIII
	1 x 15 cwt G.S.
	1 x 3ton 4 x 4 G.S. for unit equipment
	1 x 3ton 4 x 4 G.S. for use as Office
	1 x Trailer 1 ton G.S.



## APPENDIX 1

**Field Company or Squadron Personnel****Personnel**

Major  
 Captain  
 5 x Subalterns  
 Company Serjeant Major  
 Company Quarter-Master Serjeant  
 Transport Serjeant  
 4 x Serjeants  
 6 x Lance Serjeants, sapper class  
 Lance Serjeant, driver class  
 11 x Corporals, sapper class  
 3 x Corporals, driver class  
 15 x Lance Corporals, sapper class  
 5 x Lance Corporals, driver class  
 145 x Sappers  
 47 x Drivers  
**Total = 247**

**Attached Personnel**

Officers' Mess Cook ACC  
 Corporal Cook ACC  
 7 x Cooks ACC  
**Total = 9**

**Vehicles**

16 x Motorcycles  
 3 x Jeeps  
 2 x Light Recce Cars  
 7 x Trucks 15cwt General Service  
 3 x 15cwt Compressor  
 1 x 15cwt Water  
 7 x 15cwt Personnel 4 X 4  
 13 x 3ton 4 x 4 General Service  
 1 x 3ton 4 x 4 Winch  
 1 x 3ton 4 x 4 Office

**COMPANY HEADQUARTERS****Personnel**

Major  
 Captain  
 2 x Subalterns  
 Company Serjeant Major  
 Company Quarter-Master Serjeant  
 Transport Serjeant  
 Serjeant  
 Lance Serjeant Driver class  
 2 x Corporals Sapper class  
 3 x Lance Corporals Sapper class  
 2 x Lance Corporals Driver class  
 13 x Sappers  
 17 x Drivers  
 Total = 46  
 Attached  
 Officers Mess Cook, ACC  
 2 x Cooks, ACC

**Personnel by Trades**

7 x Blacksmiths  
 13 x Bricklayers  
 32 x Carpenters and Joiners  
 5 x Clerks  
 4 x Concreters  
 Draughtsman, Architectural  
 Draughtsman, Mechanical  
 5 x Driver Mechanics, driver class  
 10 x Driver Operators  
 4 x Electricians, maintenance  
 11 x Engine Fitters, IC and pumps  
 6 x Engine Hands, IC  
 6 x Masons  
 3 x Miners  
 7 x Painters and Decorators  
 58 x General Dutymen  
 6 x Motorcyclists  
 4 X plumbers and pipe fitters  
 Surveyor, engineering  
 3 X sheet metal worker  
 2 X vehicle mechanic, driver class  
 3 X water dutyman  
**Total = 194**

**Non Tradesmen**

2 x Batman  
 5 x Batman Drivers  
 26 x Drivers of vehicles  
 Sanitary Dutyman  
 4 x Transport non-commissioned officers  
 Water Dutyman  
**Total = 39**

**Personnel by Trades**

Blacksmith  
 Bricklayer  
 2 x Carpenter and Joiners  
 2 x Clerks  
 Concreter  
 Draughtsman Architectural  
 2 x Driver Mechanics, Driver class  
 4 x Driver Operators  
 Electrician, Maintenance  
 2 x Engine Fitters, IC and pumps  
 Painter and Decorator  
 General Dutyman  
 3 x Motorcyclists  
 Plumber and Pipe Fitter  
 Surveyor, Engineering  
 2 x Vehicle Mechanics, Driver class  
**Total = 26**



## APPENDIX 1

**Vehicles**

7 x Motorcycles  
 2 x Light Recce Cars  
 1 x Truck 15 cwt GS  
 1 x 15 cwt water  
 1 x 15 cwt personnel 4 x 4  
 5 x 3 ton 4 x 4 GS  
 1 x 3 ton 4 x 4 winch

The 15 cwt 4 x 4 will be fitted with a wireless set and one of the 3ton 4 x 4 lorries will be for use as an office The company headquarters were issued with four Bren guns, two PIAT anti-tank weapons and one 20mm anti-aircraft guns

**Each company carried the following:**

2,400 primers  
 672 slabs of TNT  
 1200 lb of plastic explosive 808  
 900lb of ammonal  
 72 X 10lb Beehive charges  
 3 X camouflet sets  
 detonators and fuses  
 6 X mine detectors  
 72 X No 75 grenades (mines)

**Platoon (Company) or TROOP (Squadron, Armoured)****Personnel**

Subaltern  
 Serjeant  
 2 x Lance Serjeants Sapper class  
 3 x Corporals Sapper class  
 4 x Lance Corporals Sapper class  
 Lance Corporal Driver class  
 44 x Sappers  
 10 x Drivers

**Total = 67**

Attached  
 2 x Cooks, A.C.C.

**Organisation****All transport was at platoon headquarters**

Motorcycle 1, Serjeant  
 Motorcycle 2, Transport Corporal  
 Motorcycle 3, Motorcyclist.  
 Car 5 cwt 4 x 4 (jeep), Subaltern, Batman Driver.  
 Truck 15 cwt G.S. 1, Driver I.C.  
 Truck 15 cwt G.S. 2, Driver I.C.  
 15 cwt machinery compressor, Driver I.C.  
     driver operator, Carries Wireless set No19  
 15 cwt personnel 4 x 4 2, Driver I.C.  
 3 ton 4 x 4 G.S. 1, Driver I.C.  
 3 ton 4 x 4 G.S. 2, Driver I.C.  
 3 ton 4 x 4 G.S. 3, Driver I.C.  
 3 ton 4 x 4 winch, Driver mechanic

**The above transport also carried**

1 x Clerk, 2 x Cooks and 4 x other unidentified personnel

**Non-Tradesmen**

2 x Batmen  
 2 x Batmen Drivers  
 5 x Drivers of vehicles  
 Sanitary Dutyman  
 Transport non-commissioned officer  
 Water Dutyman

**Total = 12**

**In reserve**, each field company had one 3 ton lorry in the divisional troops company, Royal Army Service Corps, to carry an identical load

**Personnel by Trades**

2 x Blacksmiths  
 4 x Bricklayers  
 10 x Carpenters and Joiners  
 Clerk  
 Concreter  
 Driver Mechanic, Driver class  
 2 x Driver Operators, Driver class  
 Electrician, Maintenance  
 3 x Engine Fitters, IC and pumps  
 2 x Engine Hands  
 2 x Painter and Decorators  
 19 x General Dutymen  
 Motorcyclist  
 Plumber and Pipe Fitter  
 Sheet Metal Worker  
 Stoker  
 Waterman.

**Total = 26**

**Non-Tradesmen**

Batman Driver  
 Transport non-commissioned officer  
 7 x Drivers of vehicles.

**Total = 9**

**Each platoon is issued with 2 PIAT anti-tank weapons, 800 primers, 224 slabs of TNT in 4.5" slabs or gun cotton in 6" slabs, 400lb of explosive 808 (plastic explosive) in 1.37" x 3.5" rolls, 300lb of ammonal in 25 lb blocks (9" cubes), 24 x 10lb Beehive cutting charges, 1 x camouflet set for making holes for charges, Detonators and fuse and 4 mine detectors.**

## APPENDIX 1

**The Field Park Company or Squadron**

The Field Park Company provided the workshop and stores elements of the engineer provision for an infantry division during the Second World War, with its equivalent in an armoured division being a field park squadron. Each infantry division had one Royal Engineers field park company on its establishment, which provided the heavy equipment, workshop and stores provision for the division as a whole.

War Establishment II/195/2, issued in January 1944, determined the structure and personnel within a field park company during the campaign in North West Europe in 1944 and 1945. It remained consistent throughout the campaign.

A Major commanded each field company, with a Captain as his second-in-command. There was a small company headquarters, including the company serjeant major and company quarter-master-serjeant. Each company or squadron comprised three platoons; each platoon consisting of a headquarters and four sections commanded by a subaltern. Each section had a corporal or lance serjeant as the commander, and eleven other sappers.

The nature of the trades held by the sappers within each section was variable and determined according to the tasks to which they were allocated. Each section was issued with one Bren gun, one Sten gun (usually carried by the section commander), and ten Lee-Enfield rifles.

**Personnel**

Major  
 Captain  
 2 x Subalterns  
 Company Serjeant Major  
 Company Quarter-Master Serjeant  
 Staff Serjeant, Military Machinist  
 Transport Serjeant  
 2 x Serjeants  
 Lance Serjeant, Sapper class  
 4 x Corporals, Sapper class  
 2 x Corporals, Driver class  
 6 x Lance Corporals, Sapper class  
 4 x Lance Corporals, Driver class  
 48 x Sappers  
 36 x Drivers  
**Total = 111**  
 Attached Personnel  
 4 x Cooks ACC  
**Total = 4**

**Vehicles**

Bicycle  
 9 x Motorcycles  
 2 x Cars, 4 seater 4 x 4 Humber F.W.D. Heavy Utility  
 2 x cars 5 cwt 4 x 4 Jeeps  
 2 x Light Recce Cars  
 8 x Trucks 15 cwt General Service  
 2 x 15cwt Compressor  
 1 x Machinery, K.L.  
 10 x 3ton 4 x 4 General Service  
 1 x 3 ton 4 x 4 Winch  
 1 x 3 ton 4 x 4 Machinery, R.E.  
 1 x 3 ton 6 x 4 Crane  
 3 x 4 x 4 Tractors  
 3 x 18 ton Trailer  
 Continued...  
 Continued...

**Personnel by Trades**

2 x Blacksmiths  
 Bricklayer  
 4 x Carpenters and Joiners  
 4 x Clerks  
 Draughtsman, Mechanical  
 4 x Driver Mechanics, driver class  
 3 x Electricians, maintenance  
 3 x Engine Fitters, IC and pumps  
 Engine Fitter, Mechanical Equipment  
 2 x Engine Hands, IC  
 Equipment Repairer  
 2 x Fitters  
 8 x Operator Excavators  
 2 x Painters and Decorators  
 2 x General Dutymen  
 4 x Motorcyclists  
 10 x Storesmen  
 2 x Plumbers and Pipe Fitters  
 Surveyor, Engineering  
 2 x Sawyers  
 2 x Sheet Metal Workers  
 Turner  
 2 x Vehicle Mechanics, Driver class  
 Welder Acetylene  
 Welder Electric  
**Total = 65**  
**Non Tradesmen**  
 4 x Batmen  
 29 x Drivers of vehicles  
 Sanitary Dutyman  
 2 x Transport non-commissioned officers  
 Water Dutyman.  
**Total = 37**

1 x Water Trailer  
 Mechanical Equipment  
 2 x Crawler Tractor Class II, Caterpillar D4 Angledozer  
 1 x Crawler Tractor Class IV, Caterpillar D7  
 Angledozer

### **COMPANY HEADQUARTERS**

#### **Personnel**

Major  
 Captain  
 Subaltern  
 Company Serjeant Major  
 Company Quarter-Master Serjeant  
 Transport Serjeant  
 Lance Serjeant  
 Corporal Sapper class  
 Corporal Driver class  
 Lance Corporal Sapper class  
 Lance Corporal Driver class  
 9 x Sappers  
 13 x Drivers.  
 Total = 33

#### **Attached**

4 x Cooks, ACC

#### **Vehicles**

7 x Motorcycles  
 2 x Light Recce Cars  
 1 x Truck 15 cwt G.S.  
 1 x 15 cwt water  
 1 x 15 cwt personnel 4 x 4  
 5 x 3 ton 4 x 4 G.S.  
 1 x 3 ton 4 x 4 winch.

#### **Personnel by Trades**

4 x Clerks  
 Draughtsman Mechanical  
 Driver Mechanic, Driver class  
 3 x Motorcyclists  
 3 x Storesmen  
 Surveyor, Engineering  
 Vehicle Mechanics, Driver class.

#### **Non-Tradesmen**

3 x Batmen  
 7 x Drivers of vehicles  
 Sanitary Dutyman  
 Transport non-commissioned officer  
 Water Dutyman.

**Total = 13**

The 15 cwt 4 x 4 will be fitted with a wireless set and one of the 3 ton 4 x 4 lorries will be for use as an office. The company headquarters were issued with four Bren guns, two PIAT anti-tank weapons and one 20mm anti-aircraft guns.

## APPENDIX 1

**The Bridging Platoon or Troop**

The Bridging Platoon was part of the divisional field park company until it became a separate unit in July 1943. It was responsible for the loading of the equipment, checking and maintaining it. The platoon would take the equipment to where it was required, but the user unit (a field company) was responsible for unloading and constructing the bridge. Usually, the bridging platoon would not remain during the construction of the bridge, but return to the field park to reload the vehicles in case of further requests for bridging equipment.

War Establishment II/196/1, issued in June 1943, determined the structure and personnel within a bridging platoon during the campaign in North West Europe in 1944 and 1945. It remained consistent throughout the campaign.

A Subaltern commanded each bridging platoon with a serjeant as his second-in-command. There were thirty-two other ranks within the platoon, and a cook from the Army Catering Corps attached. Each platoon was issued with one Bren gun, one PIAT anti-tank weapon, nineteen Sten guns, and twelve Lee-Enfield rifles. The subaltern was issued with a .38 pistol.

**BRIDGING PLATOON OR TROOP – PERSONNEL****Personnel**

Subaltern  
 Serjeant  
 Lance Serjeant, sapper class, general dutyman  
 2 x Transport Corporals  
 1 x Lance Corporal, sapper class, general dutyman  
 2 x Lance Corporals, driver class  
 9 x Sappers, general dutymen  
 2 x Motorcycle Orderlies  
 11 x Drivers  
 2 x Driver Mechanics  
 1 x Batman.

**Total = 33**

## Attached Personnel

1 x Cook ACC

**Total = 1****Organisation**

Motorcycle 1, Motorcycle Orderly

Motorcycle 2, Motorcycle Orderly

Car 5 cwt 4 x 4 (Jeep) Subaltern

15 cwt General Service, Serjeant, Driver I.C., Carries 12 x reconnaissance boats

3 ton 4 x 4 General Service 1 Bailey load panels, Driver I.C., Carries 12 x Bailey panels

3 ton 4 x 4 General Service 2 Bailey load panels, Driver I.C., Carries 12 x Bailey panels

3 ton 4 x 4 General Service 3 Bailey load panels, Driver I.C., Carries 12 x Bailey panels

3 ton 4 x 4 General Service 4 Bailey load panels, Driver I.C., Carries 12 x Bailey panels

3 ton 4 x 4 General Service 5 Bailey load panels, Driver I.C., Carries 12 x Bailey panels

3 ton 4 x 4 General Service 6 Decking load, Driver I.C., Carries 4 x transoms, 10 x stringer, 26 x chess, 4 x riband and 4 x footwalk

3 ton 4 x 4 General Service 7 Decking load, Driver I.C., Carries 4 x transoms, 10 x stringer, 26 x chess, 4 x riband and 4 x footwalk

3 ton 4 x 4 General Service 8 Decking load, Driver I.C., Carries 4 x transoms, 10 x stringer, 26 x chess, 4 x riband and 4 x footwalk

3 ton 4 x 4 General Service 9 Decking load, Driver I.C., Carries 4 x transoms, 10 x stringer, 26 x chess, 4 x riband and 4 x footwalk

3 ton 4 x 4 General Service 10 Ramp load, Driver I.C., Carries 2 x 10 foot ramps, plus ramp transoms

3 ton 4 x 4 General Service 11 Ramp load, Driver I.C., Carries 2 x 10 foot ramps, plus ramp transoms

3 ton 4 x 4 General Service 12 Accessory load, Driver I.C., Carries end posts, bearings, jacks, rollers and tackles

3 ton 4 x 4 General Service 13 Sommerfield track, Driver I.C., Carries 4 x roll

**Weapons**

1 x Pistol .38"  
 12 x Rifles .303"  
 19 x Sten guns 9 mm  
 1 x Bren gun .303"  
 1 x 20 mm anti-aircraft gun  
 1 x PIAT anti-tank weapon

**NOTE:** The anti-aircraft weapon was frequently left behind due to Allied air superiority

**APPENDIX 2****British Troops in the Middle East 1939-1940****Order of Battle 9 September 1939****Troops in Egypt****HQ British Troops in Egypt (BTE)****In the western desert**

The Armoured Division (Egypt) - 7th Armoured Division

Heavy Armoured Brigade

1st Royal Tanks

6th Royal Tanks

Light Armoured Brigade

7th Hussars

8th Hussars

11th Hussars

**Divisional Troops**

"M" Battery, 3rd RHA

"C" Battery, 4th RHA

1st Kings Royal Rifle Corps

7th Infantry Division (at Mersa Matruh)

29th Infantry Brigade

2nd Scots Guards

1st Buffs

Divisional Troops

"P" Battery & 1 troop, 3rd RHA

"D" Battery, 3rd RHA

2nd Field Company, RE

7th Division Signals

1st Northumberland Fusiliers (MG)

1st Hampshire Regiment

**In Cyprus**

17th Heavy Battery (Coastal)

Det. 8th Railway Company

**In Sudan**

1st Worcestershire Regiment

1st Cheshire (MG)

2nd York's and Lancaster Regiment

**In Aden**

5th Heavy Regiment (formed in Aden 9/39)

9th Heavy Battery (coastal)

15th (Singapore) AA Battery Hong Kong Singapore

Light Artillery

**British Somalia**

OC Somaliland Camel Corps

Somaliland Camel Corps

**In the Delta**

18th Infantry Brigade

1st Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment

23rd Infantry Brigade

1st Royal Sussex Regiment

1st Essex Regiment (one coy in Cyprus)

**Alexandria Area**

20th AA Battery, RA

3rd Coldstream Guards

HQ 4th Indian Division

11th Indian Infantry Brigade

4th Field Regiment, RA

2nd Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders

3rd Royal Horse Artillery,

less "M" Battery and 1 troop

4th Royal Horse Artillery, less "C" Battery

7th Medium Regiment, RA

19th Heavy Battery (coastal)

42nd Field Company, RA

45th Fortress Company, RE

54th Field Company, RE

**Divisional Troops**

Royal Armoured Car Regiment

(1 sqn 5th Dragoon Guards under  
command; sailed for UK 11/30/39)

Det/Royal Horse Artillery

(sailed for UK 11/30/39)

12th Field Company, RE

**Jerusalem Area**

2nd King's Own

2nd Black Watch

2nd Highland Light Infantry

**Lydda Area**

Greys (1 Sqn 4/7th Dragoon Guards under  
command, sailed for UK 11/30/39)

**Force Troops**

17th Heavy Battery (Coastal)

Det. 8th Railway Company

Trans-Jordan Frontier Force

## APPENDIX 2

**Order of battle 31 January 1940****In the Western Desert****HQ 6th Infantry Division** ( in Mersa Matruh)

22nd Infantry Brigade

2nd Scots Guards

1st Welch

**Divisional Troops**

"J" Battery &amp; one Troop, 3rd RHA

"D" Battery, 3rd RHA

31st Field Regiment

2nd Field Company, RE

6th Division Signals

1st Northumberland Fusiliers (MG)

**Armoured Division (Egypt)**

(7th Armoured Division on 2/16/40)

Heavy Armoured Brigade

1st Royal Tanks

6th Royal Tanks

Light Armoured Brigade

7th Hussars

8th Hussars

11th Hussars

**Divisional Troops**

"M" Battery, 3rd RHA, anti-tank

"C" Battery, 4th RHA

1st Kings Royal Rifle Corps

2nd Rifle Brigade

**4th Indian Division**

5th Indian Infantry Brigade (includes 1st Royal Fusiliers)

11th Indian Infantry Brigade (includes 2nd Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders)

**Divisional Troops**

(includes 1st &amp; 4th Field Regiments, RA)

2nd New Zealand Division

18th Infantry Brigade

2nd Highland Light Infantry

23rd Infantry Brigade

1st Royal Sussex

1st Durham Light Infantry

**Alexandria Sub Area**

9th Heavy Anti-aircraft Regiment

20th Heavy Anti-aircraft Regiment

5th Light Anti-aircraft Regiment

3rd Coldstream Guards

**Command Troops**

HQ Royal Artillery Group

3rd Royal Horse Artillery, less "J" and "M" Batteries and 1 troop of "J" Battery

4th Royal Horse Artillery, less "C" Battery

7th Medium Regiment

19th Heavy Battery (coastal)

**42nd Field Company, RE, from September 1939**

54th Field Company, RE

45th Fortress Company, RE

Egyptian Command Signals

1st Cheshire (MG)

**Palestine and Trans-Jordan****HQ British Forces in Palestine and Trans-Jordan****1st Cavalry Division**

4th Cavalry Brigade

Household Cavalry Regiment, RAC

Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry, RAC

North Somerset Yeomanry, RAC

5th Cavalry Brigade

Yorkshire Dragoons

Yorkshire Hussars

Nottinghamshire Yeomanry

6th Cavalry Brigade

Cheshire Yeomanry

Staffordshire Yeomanry

Warwick Yeomanry

**Divisional Troops**

104th Royal Horse Artillery (2/20/40)

106th Royal Horse Artillery (2/20/40)

107th Royal Horse Artillery

2nd Field Park Squadron, RE

141st Field Park Troop, RE

1st Cavalry Division Signals

**8th Infantry Division**

14th Infantry Brigade

1st Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire

2nd York and Lancaster

16th Infantry Brigade

2nd Queens

2nd Leicestershire

1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders

Divisional Troops

Royals, RAC

12th Field Company, RE

**Jerusalem Area**

2nd King's Own

1st South Staffordshire

2nd Black Watch

**Lydda Area**

Greys

56th Field Company, RE

1st Hampshire

**Force Troops**

17th Heavy Battery (coastal)

Det. 20th Anti-Aircraft Battery

Det. 8th Railway Company, Re

Palestine Command Signals

1st Buffs

1st Sherwood Foresters -1 Coy in Cyprus

**In Cyprus**

1st Sherwood Foresters (one company)

**In Sudan**

1st Worcestershire Regiment

2nd West Yorkshire

1st Essex Regiment

Sudan Defence Force

**In Aden****Continued...**

## APPENDIX 2

**Aden Continued...**

5th Heavy Regiment (coastal)  
 9th Heavy Battery (coastal)  
 15th (Singapore) AA Battery Hong Kong  
 Singapore Light Artillery  
 20th Fortress Company, RE

**British Somalia**

OC Somaliland Camel Corps  
 Somaliland Camel Corps

**Order of Battle 6 March 1940****HQ British Troops in Egypt (BTE)****In the Western Desert****7th Armoured Division**

4th Armoured Brigade  
 7th Hussars  
 6th Royal Tanks  
 7th Special Group  
 "M" Battery, 3rd RHA, anti-tank  
 "C" Battery, 4th RHA  
 1st Kings Royal Rifle Corps  
 2nd Rifle Brigade

**Divisional Troops**

11th Hussars, Royal Armoured Cars  
 3rd Royal Horse Artillery, Anti-Tank (less "M"  
 Battery)  
 4th Royal Horse Artillery, (less "C" Battery)  
 2nd field Squadron, RE  
 141st Field Park Troop, RE

**Mersa Matruh Garrison**

22nd Infantry Brigade  
 2nd Highland Light Infantry  
 1st Welch

**Attached**

107th Royal Horse Artillery  
 12th Field Company, RE

**42nd Field Company, RE**

1st Cheshire (MG)  
 5th Indian Brigade (less one RF)

**Attached**

Lines of Communications HQ  
 "C" Coy, 1st Hampshire

**Force Troops**

25/26th Battery, 7th Medium Regiment,  
 Royal Artillery  
 Corps Signals

**In the Delta**

7th Armoured Brigade  
 8th Hussars  
 1st Royal Tnaks  
 14th Infantry Brigade  
 2nd King's Own Regiment  
 1st South Staffordshire Regiment  
 2nd York and Lancaster Regiment  
 23rd Infantry Brigade  
 1st Royal Sussex (detached 11/22/40 to 7th  
 Indian Brigade)  
 1st Durham Light Infantry  
 2nd Black Watch  
 1st Hampshire Regiment (less "C" Coy)

**4th Indian Division**

2 Indian Brigades  
 Attached  
 1st Field Regiment, RA  
 4th Field Regiment, RA  
 1st Royal Fusiliers (detached from 5th  
 Indian Brigade)  
 2nd Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders  
 3rd Royal Horse Artillery (detached to  
 Western Desert)  
 4th Royal Horse Artillery (detached to  
 Western Desert)  
 31st Field Regiment, RA  
 7th Medium Regiment, less one battery  
 New Zealand Division (less two infantry  
 brigades)

**Alexandria Sub-Area**

9th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment  
 25th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, less two  
 sections  
 26th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery  
 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery  
 20th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery  
 5th Light Anti-Aircraft Battery  
 3rd Coldstream Guards  
 1st Northumberland Fusiliers (MG)

Continued...

Continued...

**Palestine and Trans-Jordan****HQ British Forces in Palestine & Trans-Jordan**

1st Cavalry Division  
 4th Cavalry Brigade  
 Household Cavalry Regiment, Composite Regt  
 Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry, RAC  
 North Somerset Yeomanry, RAC  
 5th Cavalry Brigade  
 Yorkshire Dragoons  
 Yorkshire Hussars  
 Nottinghamshire Yeomanry  
 6th Cavalry Brigade  
 Cheshire Yeomanry  
 Staffordshire Yeomanry  
 Warwick Yeomanry  
 Divisional Troops  
 104th Royal Horse Artillery (arrived 2/20/40)  
 106th Royal Horse Artillery (arrived 2/20/40)  
 6th Austrian Division  
 16th Infantry Brigade  
 2nd Queens  
 2nd Leicester's  
 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders

**In Sudan**

25th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, less two sections  
 1st Worcestershire Regiment  
 1st Essex Regiment  
 2nd West Yorkshire  
 Sudan Defence Force

**Somaliland**

OC Somaliland Camel Corps  
 Somaliland Camel Corps

**East Africa**

HQ East Africa Force  
 CD Battery  
 Colonial Divisions and Brigades

**Cairo Sub-Area**

2nd Scots Guards  
 Command Troops  
 HQ 19th Heavy Battery  
 X Heavy Battery  
 Y Heavy Battery  
 2nd Field Company, RE  
 45th Fortress Company, RE  
 GHQ Troops  
 HQ 8th Division Signals  
 512th A Field Survey Company, RE

**Jerusalem Area**

Greys  
 1st Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire  
**Command Troops**  
 28th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery  
 17th Heavy Battery (coastal)  
 56th Field Company, RE  
 Palestine Command Signals  
 6th Division Signals  
 1st Buffs Infantry Regiment  
 Trans Jordan Frontier Force

**In Cyprus**

OC Troops  
 1st Sherwood Foresters

**In Aden**

5th Heavy Regiment (coastal)  
 9th Heavy Battery  
 15th (Singapore) AA Battery Hong Kong  
 Singapore Light Artillery  
 23rd (Singapore) AA Battery Hong Kong  
 Singapore Light Artillery  
 23rd Searchlight Regiment  
 20th Fortress Company, RE



## APPENDIX 3

## Creforce Order of Battle 20 May 1941

## 1. Suda Bay Sector

## Mobile Naval Base Defence Organization 1, Royal Marines

## Artillery

## Coast Batteries

'Z' Coast Battery, Royal Marines :

## Coast Regiments

15th Coast Regiment, Royal Artillery : Suda-Canea sector

Attached, 'Y' Battery, 2 X 4inch guns. Later acted as Infantry

## Heavy Antiaircraft Batteries

'C' Heavy Antiaircraft Battery, Royal Marines :

## Heavy Antiaircraft Regiments

'S' Group : Suda-Canea sector

## Artillery

## Heavy Antiaircraft Batteries

'A' Heavy Antiaircraft Battery, Royal Marines : Suda-Canea sector

8 X 3inch guns

'C' Heavy Antiaircraft Battery, Royal Marines : Suda-Canea sector

2 X 3inch guns

234th Heavy Antiaircraft Battery, RA : Suda-Canea sector

6 X 3.7inch guns

## Heavy Antiaircraft Regiments

2nd Heavy Antiaircraft Regiment, Royal Marines : Suda-Canea sector

HQ

## Light Antiaircraft Batteries

23rd Light Antiaircraft Battery, Royal Marines : Suda-Canea sector

1 X 2pounder

## Searchlight Batteries

304th Searchlight Battery, RA : Suda-Canea sector

20 SL projectors

2nd Heavy Antiaircraft Regiment, Royal Marines :

## Light Antiaircraft Batteries

23rd Light Antiaircraft Battery, Royal Marines :

## Light Antiaircraft Regiments

'M' Group : Suda-Canea sector

## Artillery

## Heavy Antiaircraft Batteries

151st Heavy Antiaircraft Battery, RA : Suda-Canea sector

Attached (from 51st HAA Regt), one troop 6 X3.7inch guns

## Light Antiaircraft Batteries

129th Light Antiaircraft Battery, RA : Suda-Canea

From 15th LAA Regt, 11 X 40mm guns

156th Light Antiaircraft Battery, RA : Suda-Canea

Attached (of 52nd LAA Regt), less two troops, ? X 40mm guns

7th Light Antiaircraft Battery, Royal Australian Artillery : Suda-Canea sector

Attached, one section, 2 X 40mm guns

## Light Antiaircraft Regiments

52nd Light Antiaircraft Regiment, RA : Suda-Canea sector

HQ

## Engineers

Crete Composite Company, RE : Suda Bay sector

Attached

## Field Companies

**42nd Field Company, RE : Suda-Canea sector****Attached, less one section at Heraklion**

## Field Park Companies

5th Field Park Company, New Zealand Engineers : Suda Bay sector

Attached

## Infantry

1st Battalion, The Welch Regiment : Suda-Canea sector

Attached from 14 Infantry Bde, assigned to Force Reserve

Continued...

Continued...

**APPENDIX 3**

9th Battalion, The King's Royal Rifle Corps (The Rangers) : S of Canea	Attached
106th (Lancashire Hussars) Light Antiaircraft Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery : Suda-Canea sector	Attached, as Infantry
102nd (Northumberland Hussars) Anti-tank Regiment, RA : Suda-Canea sector	Attached, as Infantry
11th Searchlight Regiment, Royal Marines : Suda-Canea sector	HQ and 'S' Battery, as Infantry
211st Medium Battery, RA : Suda-Canea sector	Attached, as Infantry
122nd Light Antiaircraft Battery, RA : Suda-Canea sector	Attached, as Infantry
16th Australian Composite Battalion (2/2nd and 2/3rd Bns) : Suda-Canea sector	
17th Australian Composite Battalion (2/5th and 2/6th Bns) : Suda-Canea sector	
2/3rd Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery : Suda-Canea sector	Attached, part of regiment, as Infantry
2/2nd Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery : Suda-Canea sector	Attached, as Infantry
'The Royal Perivolians' (miscellaneous British units) :	
2nd Greek Regiment (battalion) : S of Canea	Attached
<b>2. Maleme Sector (including Galatas)</b>	
<b>2 New Zealand Infantry Division : Near Canea</b>	
Artillery	
Coast Batteries	
'Z' Coast Battery, Royal Marines : Maleme area	Attached from MNBDO 1, 2 X 4inch guns
Field Regiments	
5th New Zealand Field Regiment : Maleme area	27th (in support 5 NZ Bde) and 28th (in support 10th NZ Bde) batteries, nine Italian or French field guns. Attached from 2 NZ Division
Heavy Antiaircraft Batteries	
'C' Heavy Antiaircraft Battery, Royal Marines : Maleme area	Section Attached from MNBDO 1, 2 X3inch guns
Light Antiaircraft Batteries	
23rd Light Antiaircraft Battery, Royal Marines : Maleme	Attached from MNBDO 1, one troop? X40mm guns
156th Light Antiaircraft Battery, RA : Maleme area	Attached, two troops, 8 X40mm guns
7th Light Antiaircraft Battery, Royal Australian Artillery : Maleme-Galatas sector	Attached, part, 4 X 40mm guns
RAC	
B Squadron, 7th Royal Tank Regiment : Maleme area	Attached, 2 Infantry tanks
3rd The King's Own Hussars : Maleme-Galatas sector	Attached, a detachment of 10 light tanks
Brigades	
<b>4 New Zealand Infantry Brigade :</b>	
area between Galatas and Canea	
18th New Zealand Battalion :	
area between Galatas and Canea	
19th New Zealand Battalion :	
area between Galatas and Canea	
20th New Zealand Battalion :	
area between Galatas and Canea	
Infantry	
27th New Zealand Machine Gun Battalion : area between Galatas and Canea	Platoon Attached
<b>5 New Zealand Infantry Brigade : Maleme area</b>	

Continued...	21st New Zealand Battalion : Maleme area 22nd New Zealand Battalion : Maleme area 23rd New Zealand Battalion : Maleme area 28th New Zealand (Maori) Battalion : Maleme area	
		Continued... <b>APPENDIX 3</b>
	<b>Artillery</b>	
	<b>Coast Regiments</b>	
	15th Coast Regiment, Royal Artillery : Maleme area	Attached, 2 X 4inch guns
	<b>Heavy Antiaircraft Batteries</b>	
	151st Heavy Antiaircraft Battery, RA : Maleme area	Attached, one troop 4 X 3.7inch guns
	<b>Infantry</b>	
	19th Army Troops Company, New Zealand Engineers Maleme sector	Attached as Infantry
	7th Field Company, New Zealand Engineers : Maleme sector	Attached as Infantry
	1st Greek Regiment (battalion) : Maleme area	Attached
	<b>Machine Gun</b>	
	27th New Zealand Machine Gun Battalion : Maleme sector	Two platoons Attached
	<b>10 New Zealand Infantry Brigade</b> : area west and south west of Canea area	
	Composite Battalion, New Zealand Artillery and Army	4th NZ Field Regt and part of 5th NZ Field Regt,
	Service Corps : coast, W of Canea	Service Corps (as Infantry)
	6th Greek Regiment (battalion) : SW of Canea	Attached
	8th Greek Regiment (battalion) : SW of Canea	Attached
	<b>Infantry</b>	
	<b>Machine Gun</b>	
	27th New Zealand Machine Gun Battalion : W-SW of Canea	Platoon Attached
	<b>Recce</b>	
	<b>Cavalry</b>	
	New Zealand Divisional Cavalry Regiment : SW of Canea	Detachment
<b>3. Heraklion Sector</b>		
	<b>14 Infantry Brigade</b>	
	1st Battalion, The Welch Regiment :	
	2nd Battalion, The York & Lancaster Regiment :	
	Heraklion sector	
	2nd Battalion, The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) : Heraklion sector	
	2nd Battalion, The Leicestershire Regiment : Heraklion	
	1st Battalion, Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (Princess Louise's) : Mesara plain	
	<b>Artillery</b>	
	<b>Coast Regiments</b>	
	15th Coast Regiment, Royal Artillery : Heraklion sector	Attached?, 10 X 4inch guns
	<b>Heavy Antiaircraft Batteries</b>	
	'C' Heavy Antiaircraft Battery, Royal Marines : Heraklion	one troop Attached, 4 X 3.7inch guns
	<b>Light Antiaircraft Batteries</b>	
	7th Light Antiaircraft Battery, Royal Australian Artillery : Heraklion sector	Attached, less one troop and one section , 6 X 40mm guns
	156th Light Antiaircraft Battery, RA : Heraklion sector	Attached, one troop, 4 X 40mm guns
	23rd Light Antiaircraft Battery, Royal Marines : Heraklion sector	Attached, one section 2 X 40mm guns
	<b>Medium Batteries</b>	
	234th Medium Battery, RA : Heraklion sector	Attached, 13 X Italian field guns
	<b>Engineers</b>	
	<b>Field Companies</b>	
	<b>42nd Field Company, RE : Heraklion sector</b>	<b>One section Attached</b>
	<b>Infantry</b>	

	Greek Garrison Battalion : Heraklion sector	Attached
	7th Medium Regiment, RA : Heraklion sector	Attached, less one battery, acting as Infantry
	3rd Greek Regiment (battalion) : Heraklion sector	Attached
	7th Greek Regiment (battalion) : Heraklion sector	Attached
Continued...		Continued...
	2/4th Australian Battalion : Heraklion sector	Attached
<i>RAC</i>	B Squadron, 7th Royal Tank Regiment : Heraklion sector	Attached, 5 Infantry tanks
	3rd The King's Own Hussars : Heraklion sector	Attached, a detachment of 5 light tanks

**APPENDIX 3**

#### 4. Central Sector (Retimo-Georgeopolis)

##### 19 Australian Infantry Brigade

	2/8th Australian Battalion : Georgeopolis area	
	2/7th Australian Battalion : Georgeopolis area	
	2/11th Australian Battalion : Retimo area	
	2/1st Australian Battalion : Retimo area	
	<i>Artillery</i>	
	<i>Coast Batteries</i>	
	'X' Coast Battery, Royal Marines : Georgeopolis area	Attached, 2 X 4inch guns
	<i>Field Regiments</i>	
	2/3rd Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery : Georgeopolis area	Attached, one battery, 6 X Italian field
	2/3rd Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery : Retimo	Attached, 8 X Italian field guns
	<i>Light Antiaircraft Regiments</i>	
	106th (Lancashire Hussars) Light Antiaircraft Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery : Georgeopolis area	Attached, 2 X 2pounder atk guns
	<i>Engineers</i>	
	<i>Field Companies</i>	
	2/8th Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers : Georgeopolis sector	Attached
	<i>Infantry</i>	
	4th Greek Regiment (battalion) : Retimo area	Attached
	5th Greek Regiment (battalion) : Retimo area	Attached
	Greek Gendarmerie : Retimo-Georgeopolis area	Attached
	<i>Machine Gun</i>	
	2/1st Australian Machine Gun Battalion : Retimo area	Attached, approx one company in strength
	<i>RAC</i>	
	B Squadron, 7th Royal Tank Regiment : Retimo area	Attached, 2 Infantry tanks

**5. Force Reserve**

	4 New Zealand Infantry Brigade : area between Galatas and Canea	
	1st Battalion, The Welch Regiment : Suda-Canea sector	Attached to MNBDO 1

**6. Reinforcements**

Two battalions of 'Layforce' Commandos were landed between 24 and 27-May-41 to protect the disembarkation point of Sphakia, on the southern coast of Crete.

	'Layforce'
	'A' Battalion, Layforce Commando
	'D' Battalion, Layforce Commando

## APPENDIX 4

**56th (London) Infantry Division Order of Battle****1st London Infantry Brigade****Became 167th (London) Infantry Brigade 18 November 1940**

8th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers

9th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers

1st Battalion, London Irish Rifles (Royal Ulster Rifles)

*Disbanded 23 Sep 1944*

1st London Infantry Brigade Anti-Tank Company

167th (London) Infantry Brigade Anti-Tank Company

15th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers

7th Battalion, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry

1st Battalion, London Scottish (Gordon Highlanders)

*3 Sep 1939- 4 Nov 1940**rejoined 23 Sep 1944**Formed 11 May 194**Disbanded 8 Jan 1941**9 Nov 1940- 13 Feb 1941**14 Feb 1941- 23 Sep 1944**From 23 Sep 1944**1940 detached from division**between 8 Apr 1943 and**17 Oct 1943, left 26 Sep 1944**Left 4 Nov 1940**Left 23 Sept 1944**Left 30 Nov 1940***2nd London Infantry Brigade****Became 168th (London) Infantry Brigade 18 November**

1st Battalion, Queen's Westminster's (King's Royal Rifle Corps)

1st Battalion, London Scottish (Gordon Highlanders)

1st Battalion, London Rifle Brigade

(Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own))

2nd London Infantry Brigade Anti-Tank Company

168th (London) Infantry Brigade Anti-Tank Company

1st Battalion, London Irish Rifles (Royal Ulster Rifles)

18th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers

10th Battalion, Royal Berkshire Regiment

*Formed 7 Feb 1940**Disbanded 7 Apr 1941**4 Nov 1940 - 23 Sep 1944**5 Nov 1940 - 15 Feb 1941**15 Feb 1941,**Disbanded 15 May 1944**17 May - 26 Sep 1944**Left 6 Oct 1939*

1st Battalion, Welch Regiment

**3rd London Infantry Brigade**

1st Battalion, The Rangers

1st Battalion, Tower Hamlets Rifles

2nd Battalion, The Rangers

2nd Battalion, Tower Hamlets Rifles

**35th Infantry Brigade****Became 169th (London) Infantry Brigade 28 November 1940**

2/5th Battalion, Queen's Royal Regiment

2/6th Battalion, Queen's Royal Regiment

2/7th Battalion, Queen's Royal Regiment

35th Infantry Brigade Anti-Tank Regiment

169th (London) Infantry Brigade Anti-Tank Company

*8 Jul 1940**Formed 2 Oct 1940**Disbanded 7 Apr 1941**23 July - 17 Sep 1943***201st Guards Brigade**

6th Battalion, Grenadier Guards

3rd Battalion, Coldstream Guards

**42nd Field Company, Royal Engineers****24th Guards Brigade**

5th Battalion, Grenadier Guards

2nd Battalion, Coldstream Guards

1st Battalion, Scots Guards

1st Battalion, Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment)

*9 Jul 1943 - 3 Jan 1944**From 10 Mar 1945**Disbanded 28 Mar 1945***Divisional Troops**1st Battalion, Queen Victoria's Rifles (*Motorcycle Battalion*)

1st Battalion, Princess Louise's Kensington Regiment

*(Machine Gun Battalion)*6th Battalion, Cheshire Regiment (*Machine Gun Battalion*)

56th Battalion, Reconnaissance Corps

Became 56th Regiment 6 Jun 1942

Became 44th Reconnaissance Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps

64th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery

90th (City of London) Field Regiment, Royal Artillery

113th (Home Counties) Field Regiment, Royal Artillery

*Left 21 May 1940**11 Nov 1941 - 20 May 1942**From 12 Jan 1943**Formed 1 Jan 1941**Detached 15 Aug 1942**1 Jan 1944**Left 18 Mar 1943**From 9 Jul 1940*

Continued...

Continued...

65th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery  
 67th Anti-Tank Regiment, Royal Artillery

*From 23 Apr 1943*  
*From 1 Jul 1940*

Continued...

100th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery

*From 3 Feb 1942,*  
*Disbanded 9 Nov 1944*

220th Field Company, Royal Engineers

501st Field Company, Royal Engineers

*8 Sep 1939 - 18 Mar 43,*  
*Rejoined 13 Octo 1943*

221st Field Company, Royal Engineers

223rd Field Park Company, Royal Engineers

563rd Field Park Company, Royal Engineers

1st London Divisional Signals Regiment, Royal Corps of Signals

*(56th (London) Division Signals Regiment, Royal Corps of Signals)*

*From 3 Jul 1940*  
*Left 30 Sep 1939*  
*From 15 Jan 1940*

**APPENDIX 4**

## APPENDIX 5

**6th South African Armoured Division Order of Battle****Divisional Troops****Artillery***Antitank*

11th Anti-Tank Regiment, SAA 15-Feb-43 05-Oct-43  
 1st/11th Anti-Tank Regiment, SAA 05-Oct-43 08-May-45

*Field Artillery*

166th (Newfoundland) Fd Regiment, RA 18-Aug-44 attached  
 1st/6th Field Regiment, CFA, SAA 05-Oct-43 08-May-45  
 22nd Field Regiment, (SA Irish) SAA 15-Feb-43 05-Oct-43  
 23rd Field Regiment, SAA 15-Feb-43 05-Oct-43  
 4/22 Field Regiment, SA Artillery 05-Oct-43 08-May-45  
 6th Field Regiment, SAA 15-Feb-43 05-Oct-43  
 7th Field Regiment, SAA 01-Oct-43 05-Oct-43

*Light Antiaircraft*

12th Light AA Regiment, SAAF 15-Feb-43 05-Oct-43  
 1st/12th Light AA Regiment, SAAF 05-Oct-43 21-Jun-44

*Medium Artillery*

76th Medium Regiment, RA 13-Jun-44 05-Aug-44 attached  
 7th/23rd Medium Regiment, SAA 05-Oct-43 08-May-45

**Engineers***Field Park Squadrons*

17th Field Park Squadron, SA Engineers 15-Feb-43

*Field Squadrons*

12th Field Squadron, SA Engineers 15-Feb-43  
 622nd Field Squadron, RE 30-Jun-44 attached  
 8th Field Squadron, SA Engineers 15-Feb-43

**Infantry**

4th/13th Frontier Force Rifles 18-Aug-44 13-Jan-45 attached  
 74th Light Antiaircraft Regt, RA (as inf) 25-Aug-44 28-Sep-44 attached  
 Cape Town Highlanders 01-Oct-43 05-Oct-43  
 Imperial Light Horse Sep-43 05-Oct-43

*Support Battalion*

"DSR" Mar-45? 08-May-45

*Support Group*

Royal Durban Light Infantry Dec-43 20-Jan-45

**Medical**

19th Field Ambulance, SAMC 05-Aug-44  
 20th Field Ambulance, SAMC 05-Aug-44

**Recce**

Natal Mounted Rifles 15-Feb-43 20-Jan-44

**Brigades****11 South African Armoured Brigade**

1st Pretoria Regiment 08-Feb-43 08-May-45  
 Prince Alfred's Guard 09-Feb-43 08-May-45  
 Special Service Battalion 09-Feb-43 08-May-45  
 Imperial Light Horse/Kimberley Regiment 09-Feb-43 08-May-45  
 The Kimberley Regiment 05-Oct-43 24-Feb-45  
 4th/13th Frontier Force Rifles 09-Feb-43 05-Oct-43  
 13-Jan-44 08-May-45

**12 South African Motorised Brigade**

1st Witwatersrand Rifles 08-Feb-43 08-May-45  
 09-Feb-43 30-Jun-43  
 First City/Cape Town Highlanders Regiment 05-Oct-43 08-May-45  
 Regiment de la Rey 09-Feb-43 30-Jun-43  
 Royal Natal Carabineers 28-Jul-43 08-May-45  
 The First City Regiment 09-Feb-43 05-Oct-43  
 Witwatersrand/de la Rey Regiment 30-Jun-43 08-May-45

Continued...

Continued...

Regiment Botha/Regiment President Steyn  
**13 South African Motorised Brigade**  
 Imperial Light Horse/ Kimberley Regiment  
 Natal Mounted Rifles  
 Natal Mounted Rifles/SAAF  
 Royal Durban Light Infantry  
 15th Field Regiment, SAA  
 Regiment Botha/Regiment President Steyn  
 5th Field Company, SA Engineers  
 18th Motor Brigade Signals  
 19th Field Ambulance, SAMC

**APPENDIX 5**  
 Mar-45? 08-May-45  
 13-Jan-45 08-May-45  
 24-Feb-45 08-May-45  
 20-Jan-45 22-Jan-45  
 22-Jan-45 08-May-45  
 20-Jan-45 08-May-45  
 20-Jan-45 08-May-45  
 Mar-45 08-May-45  
 20-Jan-45 08-May-45  
 20-Jan-45 08-May-45  
 01-Feb-45 08-May-45



**24 Guards Infantry Brigade**  
**Commander**  
**Brigadier M.D. Erskine**

1st Battalion, The Scots Guards  
 3rd Battalion, The Coldstream Guards  
 5th Battalion, Grenadier Guards  
 23rd (Army) Field Regiment, RA

**42nd Field Company, RE**

201st Guards Brigade Workshop, REME  
 24th Independent Brigade Group (Guards) Workshop, REME  
 550th Company, RASC  
 137th Field Ambulance, RAMC  
 226th Field Ambulance, RAMC



**20-May-44 19-Feb-45**  
**And then assigned to**  
**56<sup>th</sup> (London) Infantry Division**

01-Mar-40 31-Aug-45  
 13-Mar-44 28-Feb-45  
 05-Jun-42 28-Mar-45  
 05-Apr-44 14-Aug-44  
**13-Mar-44 10-Mar-45**  
 13-Mar-44 31-Aug-44  
 01-Sep-44 10-Mar-45  
 05-May-44 10-Mar-45  
 14-Aug-44 10-Mar-45  
 21-Apr-44 14-Aug-44



**APPENDIX 6****V Corps, British Eighth Army 9 Apr 1945, Order of Battle**

The Spring 1945 offensive in Italy, codenamed Operation Grapeshot, was the final Allied attack during the Italian Campaign in the final stages of the Second World War, launched by the United States Fifth Army, the British Eighth Army and the Brazilian Expeditionary Force into the Lombardy Plain which started on 6 April 1945 and ended on 2 May with the surrender of German forces in Italy.

**42nd Field Company** were part of V Corps for this last part of the Italy campaign.

**Order of Battle**

8th Indian Infantry Division (Major-General Dudley Russell)

British 56th Infantry Division (Major-General J.Y. Whitfield)

British 78th Infantry Division (Major-General Keith Arbuthnott)

2nd New Zealand Division (Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard Freyberg) (until 14 April)

Cremona Combat Group (Italian)

**Royal Artillery**

54th Super Heavy Regiment less two batteries

5th Survey Regiment

57th (Wessex) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment less one battery

52nd (East Lancashire) Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

651st Air OP Squadron

654th Air OP Squadron

323rd Searchlight Battery

17th Field Regiment one battery

57th (East Surrey) Anti-Tank Regiment, one battery

55th (Kent) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment one battery

**V Corps Troops, Royal Engineers**

**42nd Field Company**

564th Field Company

565th Field Company

751st Field Company

215th Corps Field Park Company

22nd Mechanical Equipment Platoon

586th Army Field Company

85th Company, South African Engineer Corps (Camouflage detachment)

3 Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps

**Northern Ireland**

**Long Kesh 1971**



**RELO Team Londonderry**



**Unknown ?**

**1982, 9 Troop prior to N Ireland Tour**



***Practising Duty Free Drills?***



## **The Royal Engineers in the Second Anglo-Boer War, Long version**

**The Times History of the War in South Africa: 11 Oct 1899 – 31 May 1902**

**The Engineer Work in the War in South Africa**

*Published by the University of California*

### **Engineering and modern war**

In spite of the obvious and increasing importance of the part played by the engineer in our daily lives, it is very doubtful if the preponderating influence he has on modern war is generally realised. We know from the sayings of Napoleon and of Wellington in what high estimation the Engineer arm was held in war by the great commanders of a century ago. It would be interesting if we could have their opinion on the subject in these days when the engineer, using the term in its broadest sense, practically rules the material life of the world in peace. We are so accustomed in our every-day peace life to have all the resources of engineering at our disposal as a matter of course, that we are apt to become oblivious of our dependence on them.

There is even more danger of our forgetting how entirely dependent armies now are on their engineers in the theatre of war, all these resources do not always exist ready to hand. There it is no longer an ease of buying a railway ticket and taking a seat, of filling in a telegraph form, or of ringing up on the telephone, for the very railway, the telegraphs, and the telephones have often first to be built or organized. Strategy and tactics now have handmaids which are far more indispensable than these existing when life was simpler and war less complicated. The essence of the first large problem of the South African War was to convey our forces out to the front as quickly as possible and then to feed and reinforce them.

The railway carried our armies to our ports, steamships transported them across the ocean, and the rail again conveyed them to the front. All this was engineering work, and, though not all carried out by the Army, was all an essential part of the military operations. The problems of sea transport and of the railway work of the war have been dealt with in the last two chapters. The present chapter will deal with the many other forms of engineering work which fell to the lot of the Royal Engineers and their volunteer helpers. The South African War cannot, indeed, be called a "sapper's war," in the sense that the Crimean and the Russo-Japanese Wars were, for, in spite of the fact that sieges occurred, there were no regular siege operations. With this single exception, however, the long-continued struggle not only called, at some time or another, for the exercise of all the arts of the military engineer, but brought out some developments quite new in warfare.

Some of the duties performed were conspicuous and obvious, but more were comparatively obscure, though none the less important because they lacked excitement or notice. An immense amount was done by the Engineers-Regular, Volunteer, and civil, and no duties during the campaign were better or more conscientiously carried out.

### **General Organisation of the RE's in South Africa**

With the exception of the railway and the telegraphs, all the work carried out by the Engineers in South Africa was under the control and administration of the Chief Engineer, Major-General (now Sir Elliott) Wood, C.B., R.E. At the commencement of the war, after the reinforcements had been sent out, the proportion and allotment of the field units were according to the usual scale for a field army; but they changed considerably with the development of the campaign. So long as the troops were employed in the normal army organization, i.e., before the guerrilla war, the Engineer units may be for convenience classified as consisting of divisional units, of which there was one field company per division, and extra divisional\* units, such as field troops, bridging troops, telegraph divisions, survey, balloon and search-light sections, steam road transport companies, fortress and railway companies.

When, however, the divisional organization of the Army ceased, this classification no longer held good. The fortress companies were lines of communication units, and both fortress and field companies together were the units for general engineer work, as opposed to special duties. The former were employed on stationary work, while the latter, being "field" units, were mobile and worked with the Field Army. For the purpose of this chapter the work of the field and the fortress companies will be treated more or less together, that of the special units being separately considered.

\*These include "Corps" units and others, such as fortress and railway companies, which are not Corps Units

## Fortress Companies and work on Lines of Communication

The work in the different garrisons and on the lines of communication generally is first considered because, however much the demand for other branches of engineer work varied during the campaign, the necessity for this existed from the very first and steadily increased. The peace garrison of Royal Engineers in South Africa included one fortress company, the 29th, stationed at Cape Town. In December, 1899, four more fortress companies arrived upon the scene, the 6th, 20th, 31st, and 42nd, of which all but the first were employed at once on railways. Thus the units for general engineer work on the lines of communication were at first the 29th and 6th companies, though gradually other fortress companies, portions of field companies, and some of the special units were so employed.

Operations commenced early in 1899 with the arrangement of all sorts of accommodation for possible troop concentrations near the base, and continued, when war became imminent, with similar work and with the work of making defences on the frontier. The duties then gradually extended to almost every post\* in the theatre of war which was held for any length of time and their nature can only be very briefly summarised. They included the preparation of camps for the original concentrations, for permanent garrisons, and for prisoners of war; the erection of huts for cantonments, for prisoners of war, for hut hospitals, and for the accessory buildings of general hospitals (under canvas); the erection of storehouses and sheds for every purpose, of stables, remount establishments with all their accessories, such as kraals, sick lines, dipping troughs, etc., etc., and of quarters and offices. In this direction accessory buildings were put up for hospitals for 20,000 and hut wards for 6,000 beds; hut barracks were erected for 7,500 men and for 8,500 prisoners of war; 210,000 square feet of floor space of covered storage was arranged, also sheds and stabling for 10,000 horses, kraals, watering and feeding arrangements for 53,000 horses and mules.

\*In Mafeking there were during the siege no Engineers and the garrison carried out the Engineering work.

All this construction work included water supply, drainage, sanitary services and maintenance. The lighting, largely electric, was carried out by the search-light sections and the Electrical Engineer Volunteers. Boring for water\*\* and the manufacture of ice were also among the various duties performed. When "blockhousing" commenced, factories were started at different centres for the manufacture of blockhouses completely ready for erection by the field parties. A blockhouse included a water tank, wire entanglement, alarm signals, flare lights, fixed rifle batteries, and in some cases land mines, some of which fittings were improvised by the erectors.

\*\*At Enslin and Graspan the water supply essential to permit of Lord Roberts's great concentration was secured by a deep boring with a diamond drill. A great deal of boring was required later to supply the blockhouses on the Victoria West-Lambert's Bay line.

Finally, the work all along included the placing of posts in a state of defence, and for this duty the Engineers were latterly held entirely responsible. The amount of work under the various headings here given was enormous, and of the first importance. But any detailed treatment of it would be impossible within the limits of the present chapter.

## The Sieges and Field Engineering

The defence work at Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking has been dealt with in the chapters describing these sieges. Considerable ingenuity was shown in some instances, but on the whole the defences were not very elaborate from the engineering point of view. The boldest and most original piece of military engineering, indeed, essayed in the war was the Boer attempt to flood out Ladysmith by damming up the Klip River. In many instances, too, notably in the fighting on the Tugela and at Magersfontein, the Boers showed no inconsiderable native talent for field engineering. Their deep, narrow, and winding trenches offered admirable protection against shrapnel or lyddite, and afforded a most useful object-lesson of which the British were not slow to avail themselves.

## Evolution of Defences

The progressive development of the scale and nature of the defences of posts up to the blockhouse era is interesting. At first the garrisons left behind at these places were strong and the defences enclosed a large area. They consisted of earth-works and sangars, as low and inconspicuous as possible in order to escape artillery fire, and well dispersed for the same reason and also for fire effect. The defence depended chiefly on the frontal fire effect of a large number of rifles. As more and more troops were needed for the mobile columns, however, and the garrisons were reduced in strength, the perimeters of the defences originally constructed were found to be far too large, and had to be contracted. Owing to the reduced numbers it was now impossible to rely entirely on frontal fire. It was necessary to place, at commanding points, self-supporting small posts which could fire across the front. A better field of fire could now be obtained from such posts, for, owing to the decrease in the enemy's artillery, the concealment afforded by a low command was no longer essential. The ultimate and logical

result of this tendency to get the best value from the modern rifle was the defence of a post by means of the fire from a few blockhouses round it, and not from a continuous enceinte of trenches.\*

\*This process did not begin generally till the end of 1900, but the principle had been applied before in certain instances.

### **Field Companies**

Besides the 23rd Company, which had been in the country before the war, and was shut up in Ladysmith, the field companies of the Natal army were reinforced in November and December, 1899, by the 17th and 37th Companies, the divisional units of the Second and Fifth Divisions.

Before the outbreak of hostilities there was one company, the 7th, in Cape Colony; in November it was joined by the 11th out from home. \*These two companies with two other units accompanied Methuen's advance up to Magersfontein, being largely employed on railway repairing. In December the 12th Company joined the Third Division before Stormberg, and the 26th joined French at Colesberg subsequently going to the Seventh Division.

For Clements's force the 47th Fortress Company was converted into a field company, while the three divisional companies which took part in the march upon Bloemfontein were the 38th, the 9th, and the 7th. When the divisional organization ceased, the companies remained almost permanently split up. The country was then divided into areas under C.R.E.'s at the different headquarters. The headquarters and portions of the field companies were as a rule stationed at these places whilst various sections trekked across the country doing field duties.

\*8th Railway, 31st Fortress, and part of the 29th Fortress Companies.

### **Work of the Field Units**

The field work remained much the same in nature (except for the blockhouse construction) during the whole war, and consisted of ordinary duties, camp water supply, boring for water, arrangement of field defences, building of road bridges, assisting to repair railway bridges, making roads and drifts, assisting in telegraph and railway work, blocking drifts, laying land mines, etc., etc. As the forces moving about grew smaller and more mobile the sections of the field companies also became more mobile. It was found necessary to mount many of the sappers to enable them to do their very heavy work on the march, for it often happened that they had to remain behind the column, to complete a drift or bridge and see the transport over, and then overtake the column which had marched ahead, in order to arrange the water-supply at the halting place.

One feature of the work was the great amount of drift making, and to assist in this, gangs of Kaffirs were employed as labourers, being in some cases mounted on donkeys collected on the march. There was less actual bridging than might have occurred elsewhere, and, except for the blowing up of farms, there was very little demolition by explosives, though one or two chances of cutting the line behind the enemy were seized with good results. When the blockhouse lines began to be erected all over the country the field sections had the work of selecting sites and erecting the blockhouses in addition to their other duties. The number of blockhouses of all sorts erected when peace was declared amounted to 8,000, most of which were erected by sections of field companies. By the end of the war this work became greatly simplified and very expeditious.

Upon deciding to blockhouse an area the houses were despatched from the reserve at all the blockhouse factories and taken out by the different columns and parties ready for erection. Thus when it was settled to blockhouse the district Vryburg-Mafeking-Lichtenburg, blockhouses were concentrated and despatched from: Middelburg, Standerton, Pretoria, Elands-fontein, Bloemfontein, and Cape Town, and it was possible to erect 400 in six weeks. Generally speaking, the longer the war went on the more fully was the usefulness of the field work of the Engineers realised.

Divisional or column commanders who had never commanded Engineers, or at most only on manoeuvres, at first hardly appreciated them or knew how to make use of them. This very soon changed when they had to deal with the actual difficulties of constructing defences instead of laying tapes on the ground, of crossing rivers, or securing a water supply. At the end of the war there was a continual demand from column commanders for Engineers, especially for junior Engineer officers. The conclusions most obvious from the experiences of the war were the need for a larger proportion of field Engineers to other troops, and for having a larger number of the Engineers mounted.

## The work with the Cavalry and Mounted Troops

In 1899 the authorised proportion of mounted Engineers was one field troop, consisting of headquarters and two sections, to each Cavalry Division, but only one troop, the 1st, was sent out from England. This troop at once joined the force under French at Arundel and remained with the cavalry during the whole of the war. The need for greater elasticity was very soon found necessary, and the troop was reorganised into headquarters and three sections.

During the halt at Bloemfontein, when the number of mounted men in the country had greatly increased, the existing mounted Engineers could no longer cope with the technical duties of all the mounted forces, and a second, Number 2 Field Troop, of headquarters and two sections, was formed of sappers from other field units and of mounted infantry and Colonials. A small mounted detachment of some R.E., Australians and Canadians, was also formed in May. It existed until October, 1900, and was known as the Australian Pioneers. On the Natal side, when Buller's army was preparing to advance from Ladysmith, a third troop, Number 3, was formed from the balloon section which had been in Ladysmith, supplemented by men picked from the artillery and infantry.

The need for more mounted sappers to work with the still increasing number of mounted columns was again felt in August 1900, and in that month yet another, the 4th Field Troop was formed. Some detachments consisting of a few mounted men working under an R.E. captain or subaltern were temporarily improvised for work with columns. One such was formed early in 1900 for work with the Colonial Division; another was formed in January 1900 from the Railway Pioneers in connexion with the project for cutting the Delagoa railway. As to the employment of these units, generally speaking, a field troop was not kept together as a whole, but was split up into its sections, each of which worked with a brigade of cavalry or of mounted infantry, and later with the independent mounted columns.

## Cutting Communications

The normal work was to carry out for the mounted com- forces exactly the same duties as the field companies performed for the dismounted. The only portion of these duties, however, of which we need give any account here, is that of raiding in order to cut communications. The American Civil War still affords the best example of the value of such operations carried out frequently and on a large scale, and South Africa shows little to compare with what was then done. The opportunities offered to the British were limited, and only lasted until they reached the Portuguese border.

In January, 1900, the cavalry essayed to cut the line behind the Boers at Colesberg, and to blow up the Colesberg road bridge over the Orange River, but were frustrated by the enemy. When the cavalry got close to Bloemfontein in March, the railway line was successfully cut by a party of cavalry and Engineers who rode round to the north of Bloemfontein and blew up a culvert, thus capturing several locomotives and a considerable amount of rolling- stock, which proved of the utmost use."

In May the line was successfully broken north of Kroonstad, but the result was unimportant. Later the railway and wires were cut in front of the main advance near Roodepoort on the Rand, and again near Elandsfontein. By this several engines and some rolling-stock were gained. An attempt to isolate Pretoria by breaking the Delegos line immediately to the east was prevented by the enemy." Much more important than any of these minor raids would have been the successful blowing up of one of the main bridges on the Delagoa line. This project was often discussed and once or twice attempted, the most successful attempt being made by Steinaecker's Horse on June 17, 1900.t On the whole, though the opportunities for cutting the Boer railway communications were limited, it cannot be said that the most was made of them. There was plenty of initiative and zeal shown by individuals to attempt this work but there was a reluctance at headquarters to face the probable sacrifice of small detachments as "forlorn hopes" in order to gain some possibly very great advantage.

## Defensive demolition

In this connexion it may be as well to refer to the kindred duty of defensive demolition of railways, bridges, etc., in face of an advancing enemy. On the British side this work was entirely neglected in the opening weeks of the war, when everything depended on it. The destruction of Laing's Nek tunnel, and of the railway to the south of it, and the demolition of the bridges at Norval's Pont, Aliwal North and Bethulie, would have completely altered the whole subsequent course of events. Here again the blame does not rest upon the technical services, but on the general incapacity to realize the seriousness of the war, and on the curious belief, apparently prevalent on the British side, that if they left the expensive bridges and tunnels undamaged the Boers would do so likewise. As a matter of fact, the Boers carried out the work of demolition systematically throughout their successive retreats, the only exception being the line Norval's Pont, Bloemfontein, which the rapidity of Lord Roberts's advance compelled them to leave intact. Of the prevention of demolition by the enemy, the most noteworthy instance

occurred during Gatacre's advance in March 1900, when the Boer charges, ready placed and connected up for blowing up Bethulie road bridge, were drawn under fire by Captain P. G. Grant, R.E., and Lieutenant Popham."

## Bridging

With the exception of the railway bridging there was comparatively little heavy bridging carried out during the campaign. By far the greatest amount of heavy' floating bridge work during the war was carried out on the Tugela by "A" Troop, Bridging Battalion, assisted by the field companies on that side. From January 17 to February 29, 1900, numerous pontoon and trestle bridges were constructed, on two occasions under fire. On the other side, during Methuen's advance, a pontoon bridge was thrown across the Modder River the morning after the fight- November 29 by a field company. The largest floating bridge made during the war was constructed across the Orange River near Norval's Pont on March 15, when Clements's force moved into the Free State.

This bridge, made by "C" Troop, assisted by other R.E. and infantry, was 266 yards long. The crossing of Clements's force and the subsequent repair of the broken Norval's Pont railway bridge, together afford a peculiarly interesting example of the successive stages in the crossing of a river in war. About March 10, while the Boers were still holding the north bank, an Engineer officer swam across to reconnoitre. On March 15 the covering infantry were ferried over in single pontoons and on the same day the pontoon bridge was constructed and the force marched across. On the 19th a flying bridge, consisting of a large "pont" travelling along a wire cable, was rigged up near the broken railway bridge to take stores across from rail to rail, for, thanks to our raid north of Bloemfontein, trains were running from Norval's Pont to that place.

On the 25th an overhead "aerial tram," supported on wire cables and hauled by steam, was conveying supplies from rail to rail at the rate of six tons per hour; and on the 27th this was supplanted by a low-level deviation bridge across which entire trains ran. By May 20 the high-level bridge W8.8 repaired and traffic passed over as before the war. No pontoons were taken by Lord Roberts on the march to Bloemfontein, and their absence was felt at Paardeberg when the Modder River was in flood. Excepting on one minor occasion, however, the pontoons were hardly needed on the subsequent advance to Pretoria, neither the Vet, the Zand, the Valsch, nor the Vaal Rivers necessitating floating bridges. In fact, after the Tugela and Orange Rivers had been crossed, no large floating bridges were necessary, and the bridging units-" A " and" C " Troops, Bridging Battalion, had, after March, 1900, very little of their own special work to do, and were mainly employed on ordinary engineer duties. Smaller bridges were built continually by the field companies for the movements of columns during the whole war; but owing to the nature of the country and the climate, bridging was usually replaced by the construction or repair of drifts.

Though the floating bridge work in South Africa could not have been better done than it was, the existence of special units for its execution hardly seemed justified by the experience of the war, and the bridging companies have since then been abolished. Even in the best watered countries this work should not be beyond the powers of field companies, provided they are sufficient in number and have the material at their disposal.\* At the time of the war every field company only carried enough pontoons and trestles for the immediate construction, without waiting for improvised material, of a floating and trestle bridge for all arms of fifteen yards length.

The non-floating and foot bridges made all over the country were numerous and very different in design, varying from the suspension type carried by wire cables to girders knocked up out of roof rafters and corrugated iron, for of all the work that the military engineer has to do, perhaps bridging gives scopes for the greatest ingenuity in improvisation from the materials available.

\*This is the general view, but it is not shared by all R.E. officers. "The worst economy ever practised, and likely to bring about in any future campaign the difficulties experienced by the Duke of Wellington in the Peninsula, and by the Americans in the Civil War," is the opinion of one distinguished officer on the abolition of the bridging companies. It is worth noting that the advance from Bloemfontein to Pretoria took place in the dry on and that the river crossings were not seriously disputed. In a country with deep rivers and in face of a powerful enemy the pontoons would play a much larger part.

## Ballooning

Balloons were made use of for military purposes by the British Army as early as 1885, both in Bechuanaland and at Suakim. This time three ballooning units were sent out. No.2 section, arriving in Natal in October, 1899, was at once sent up to Ladysmith. No.1 section, arriving in November, was sent up to join Methuen's force on the Modder River, and No.3, arriving in March, 1900, proceeded straight up to 'Warrenton on the western advance. Besides these, a fourth section was improvised for Buller's force outside Ladysmith. This was composed of more or less inexperienced personnel and equipped with surplus stores from the other sections. The actual work accomplished by the units with the different forces can be summarised as follows:-From the end of October till the beginning of December, i.e., as long as gas could be obtained, frequent ascents were made from Ladysmith. The balloons were often fired at, but suffered little damage. As a practical result of their employment, some of the laagers were located and the enemy's movements were observed.



**ANNEX A**

A map was made of the country between Ladysmith and Colenso, and some heliograph messages from the relieving force were read. The unit improvised with Buller's force was boldly used, but the height of the hills was such as to conceal most of the Boer movements, and no attempts at ascents were made after the relief of Ladysmith. On the Kimberley side, No.1 section joined at Madder River just before the battle of Magersfontein, during which ascents were made. During the subsequent halt at Madder River, a balloon was kept in the air continually in order to watch for any movement of the enemy from Magersfontein. The progress of French's march on Kimberley was watched, and on February 16 the reports as to the Boer position having been evacuated during the night were verified. The section then joined Lord Roberts's force at Paardeberg, where a balloon was again kept continually up for some days, the information obtained being very useful. A sketch map of the Boer position, which was at this juncture of extreme value and greatly helped our attack, was also made by Lieutenant A. H. W. Grubb, R.E. At Poplar Grove the enemy's retirement was watched and reported.

On the advance from Bloemfontein a balloon was kept filled and always ready, and ascents were made at the Vet and Zand River fights, and again outside Pretoria itself, but no very valuable results were obtainable. The 3rd section, on its arrival at Warrenton, proved of considerable service in locating the enemy's positions at Fourteen Streams, and in directing the fire of the howitzers and of the 6-inch gun. No more observation being required, the section then took over railway duties and ran the railway from Potchefstroom to Klerksdorp for seventeen days. Subsequently it was amalgamated with the 1st section into one unit, which proceeded a certain distance on the eastern advance, but, owing to lack of transport was sent back to Pretoria without being utilized. In July it ceased its existence as a balloon unit and was employed on various engineer duties.

**Value of Balloons**

Before the results of the employment of balloons in South Africa can be discussed, there are one or two points which will bear consideration. It is obvious that the value of captive balloons for observation is greatly diminished in mountainous regions. Not only are wind squalls, which interfere with ascents, frequent, but natural high points for observation already exist, so that the extra height obtained by a balloon does not confer much advantage. In many cases, too, the range of vision even of a balloon is extremely limited by the configuration of the hills round. It was to be expected, therefore, that not very much value would be obtained from the employment of balloons in Natal. Outside Natal, the balloons were used all along Roberts's advance, and it was only when the mountainous Eastern Transvaal was entered that their employment was abandoned. Afterwards there was practically no scope for the use of captive balloons. It needs a fight between fairly large masses, and one of some duration in one spot, to give time for an ascent to be made, for the observer to grasp the situation sufficiently to send down useful information to the general, and for the general to act upon it. A running fight between comparatively small numbers scattered over a large area is too kaleidoscopic for this form of reconnaissance.

During the earlier period of the war the balloons were of distinct service, and justified their employment. It is true that the collection of intelligence was intermittent and that fire observation for the guns often could not be carried out, but this only shows that balloon observation is no more infallible than other forms of reconnaissance. Apart from the direct advantages gained of observation, etc. There was another important result of their use, and that was their moral effect on the enemy. It is a well-known fact that a balloon in the air produces a curious impression upon those it is watching: As it can be seen by all within the range of vision, there is a natural tendency to suppose that the observer in it can see very much more of those below than is the case. It is thus endowed with entirely exaggerated powers especially disturbing to the ignorant, and there is no doubt that the moral of the Boers was to a considerable extent affected by the mere presence of our captive balloons whenever they were used. Thus, according to subsequent statements of burghers, the Boer retirement at Fourteen Streams was largely due to the moral effect produced by the balloon.

**Electric Lighting etc.**

The search-light and electric lighting work was of an especially technical character, and in few branches of the duties carried out by the Army in South Africa was more assistance given by the Volunteers than in this. The Regular units, the 1st and 2nd Search-light Sections, R.E., the first of which landed in March, 1900-were towards the end of the year amalgamated into one section. The Volunteer detachments were all from the Electrical Engineers, R.E. (Volunteers), the first detachment consisting of two sections which remained in the country from March to November, 1900. A fresh detachment of two companies was sent out in the beginning of the following year; this was gradually increased to five companies and organized as a battalion of Electrical Engineers.

During a great part of 1900 the Regular and Volunteer search-light units were kept on railway work, lighting up the repair operations at the large bridges in order to permit of day and night work, or on the railway telegraphs; but towards the end of the year all were employed in lighting hospitals, depots, etc. When, during 1901, the second detachment of Volunteers arrived, the broad division of work between the Regulars and Volunteers was that the R.E. search-light section carried on the more essentially field duties, such as that of the armoured train

and mobile lights, whilst most of the fixed lights and the more permanent work were handed over to the Volunteers. The electric lighting carried out included that of all the large hospitals and of prisoners' camps, barracks, depots, stores, offices, etc. The Electrical Engineers in addition carried out much permanent telegraph erection and maintenance and telephone work. Their duties also incidentally included signalling, land-mines, a certain amount of steam transport and erection of buildings, and electricians' duties of every kind. At the close of the war they were split up into over sixty separate detachments all employed on technical work.

### **Search Lights**

At the beginning of the war search-lights were made use of when available in the besieged towns. In Kimberley they were installed from these used by De Boers for guarding the diamond floors, and were run by the RE; and by the civil employees of the mines. In Mafeking, where electric light projectors did not exist, acetylene search-lights were improvised and worked by the garrison, which included no sappers. In Ladysmith there were none. Outside Ladysmith two search-lights were employed. They were at first chiefly used for signalling into the besieged town from Estcourt. One plant was borrowed from the Durban Harbour Board and made up from apparatus taken off a tug in Durban harbour. This was run by civilians under the Engineers. The second, made up of plant obtained in the same way fitted with a naval projector, was mounted on a truck and manned by the Navy. Later on both plants were used in the operations round Colenso. The Boers were quite alive to the value of search-lights, and though they had no special units allotted to the work, their Telegraph Corps put up two installations round Ladysmith and prepared an emplacement in their position at Colenso, the projectors being brought down from the Pretoria forts. This search-light plant fell into our hands after the relief.

The next opportunity for the use of search-lights arose from the need of protecting the various occupied towns and posts against night attacks. For this purpose the Transvaal was not ill equipped, electricity being the common system of lighting of the larger towns, while most of the numerous mines had their own generating plant. Thus there were in many cases no difficulties in the way of obtaining power, dynamos, and wiring. Johannesburg and the Rand were especially well off in this respect, and it was for the protection of certain posts on the mines that some of the first defence lights were put up. More projectors were subsequently imported, and lights were gradually established at many of the permanent garrisons. As to their defensive value the evidence is certainly only negative, but they seem to have had a deterrent effect. From the siege of Kimberley onwards, it was noticeable that these places where lights were installed were rarely attacked.

No doubt the value of search-lights, as of balloons and land-mines, is largely moral, especially against an unsophisticated enemy. If a party of burghers wandering across the veld were suddenly caught in a beam, even at such a range that it was quite impossible for those anywhere near the projector to see them, they at once imagined that, because they were plainly visible to each other, they must be equally visible to the enemy, and were consequently afraid to proceed. When towards the end of 1900 an organized armoured train service was created for the patrolling and protection of the railways, the provision of search-lights on the trains was found essential. Small projectors were improvised and all the trains were gradually equipped. These lights increased the value of the trains, for the presence of a light alone was often sufficient to keep the enemy away from the railway line. At a later stage the search-lights on these same armoured trains were used with considerable effect in the drives. Their usefulness suggested the desirability of having a similar line of lights along the cross-country blockhouse lines, and a service of mobile lights drawn by motor transport or animals was improvised, and was becoming regularly organized when peace was declared.

### **Steam Road Transport**

It was decided as early as October, 1899, to send out a certain number of steam traction engines to South Africa, Colonel J. Templer, K.R.R. (Militia), being appointed Director of Steam Road Transport. Though this form of transport had for many years been one of the duties of the Engineers, no special unit for this work existed. In November, 1899, a new unit the 45th Steam Road Transport Company, RE. - was formed, and a certain number of civilian experts were engaged in England. The first lot of engines was unfortunately wrecked on the way out. This involved considerable delay and the engines subsequently secured were hardly as serviceable as those originally secured.

However, work was started at Kimberley in a small way in March, 1900, with an equipment of comparatively few "trains," by the conveyance of supplies to Boshof, Barkly West, and to various camps. From this beginning, in spite of many technical difficulties, and notwithstanding that the uses and limitations of traction engines were not at first properly understood by those for whom they worked, the value of the service became every day more evident, and the work carried out by it more extended. From the original numbers of 5 officers and 119 others, military and civil, the personnel had increased, when peace was declared, to 10 officers, 447 other ranks, military and civil, and 238 natives. The engines had increased in number, by importations and by commandeering, from the 11 first sent out to 46.

## Method of Employment

The transport "stations" were formed at various places on the railways and served as bases or headquarters of a number of traction trains which ran the supplies out from them to posts off the line. At all these "stations" it was necessary to organize some means of carrying out small repairs and refitting, but for the heavier work large repair and building shops gradually grew up at Cape Town and smaller shops at Kimberley.

The chief drawbacks to the work were the lack of water, the existence of sandy belts, the absence of bridges, or continuous rain. For these reasons it was essential that a road should be thoroughly reconnoitred beforehand for use by traction engines, a fact not always appreciated at first. Being tied to suitable routes where water and coal could be obtained or their absence provided against, steam transport really took the place of light railways, and once this principle was generally understood, worked extremely well. A curious feature of its employment was that the enemy very rarely attacked a steam transport convoy.\*

\*The suspicious nature of the Boers was in itself a great protection to the engines. When a traction engine had to be abandoned on the veld it was only necessary, in order to prevent it being damaged, to fasten a couple of wires to the engine and bury them in the sand.

## Advantages of Steam Transport

As some criterion of the saving gained by the use of steam over ox transport, it can be assumed roughly that one engine and train could do the work of 10 to 12 ox wagons, each drawn by a span of 16 oxen. Not only was the number of animals thus greatly reduced by the employment of steam, but the wage bill was also cut down. Apart from this actual saving, the system also gave a possibility of carrying on when animals failed. In 1901, during the outbreak of rinderpest, not only were trek oxen short, but they were not allowed to move from one district to another; there was no quarantine on the traction engines.

The total work done amounted to 1,705,203 ton miles carried at an estimated saving of some £50,000 net over the cost of ox transport for the same amount of haulage, this on the assumption that the oxen required had been available. Not being a very exciting nor, except to those concerned, a very interesting branch of military work, the Steam Road Transport Service did not attract quite the notice it deserved. It is certain that it greatly simplified the supply problem during the whole war, but more especially towards the end, when the whole country was dotted about with small detachments. Since the war a great deal more attention has been given to the organization of this branch of transport duties, not only as regards steam, but also as regards motor traction, the latter a form of transport which in South Africa was only used for the mobile search-lights, but whose importance in future campaigns cannot be overestimated.

## Survey and Mapping Work

The lack of suitable campaigning maps of the theatre of operations at the beginning of the war was freely commented on at the time. Accurate mapping is not a very expensive operation; at any rate, its cost bears a very small proportion to the total cost of preparing for or conducting a war. The whole of Cape Colony and Natal could have been mapped for £150,000, and even a fifth of that sum well spent in these colonies and in the Boer Republics might have proved of inestimable value. The real reason of the failure to provide the first and essential foundation of all military information was not expense, but the fact that the War Office did not, in practice at any rate, show anything approaching an adequate conception of the meaning of the word information.

If it is asked why the colonies did not carry out this mapping for themselves, the answer is obvious; detailed topographical maps are by no means a necessity for a colony in the earlier stages of its development, though they are an essential adjunct for the conduct of war. The colonies did not feel under any obligation to provide for the military necessities of the Empire, nor indeed were they seriously pressed to undertake or to assist in this duty. As a matter of fact, a triangulation of the first order had been carried out in these two colonies in the years 1883-1892.\*

But so far as military necessities were concerned, this geodetic triangulation was practically valueless, though it would have furnished an admirable basis for topographical work. The colonies, having spent so much money on the triangulation, may perhaps, with some reason, have considered that they had done enough for the time, so by a kind of paradox we must put the execution of this triangulation as a possible contributory cause towards the unsatisfactory state of affairs which existed at the outbreak of war.

\*By Major (now Colonel Sir W. G.) Morris R.E.

The execution of this triangulation was due to the initiative of Sir David Gill, H.M. Astronomer at the Cape.

## Maps in existence at outbreak of war

There existed in the Cape Colony at the outbreak of the war, "Divisional Maps" of the Colonial Survey Department. These maps, which were on a scale of 2 miles to 1 inch, were compiled by fitting together farm plans.

They were essentially property diagrams. No hill features were shown; some streams were shown, some were not; the compilation, moreover, was by no means perfect; there were "gaps" and "overlaps." These maps were therefore of little use for military purposes. In Natal a military sketch map on a scale of 1 inch to 1 mile of the triangular portion of the Colony to the north of Ladysmith had been carried out in 1896, by Major S. C. N. Grant, R.E. The area mapped was about 4,000 square miles, but most unfortunately the work did not extend to the south of Ladysmith. In the Transvaal and Orange Free State no topographical survey had been undertaken. Large portions of the Transvaal, indeed, had been mapped in a series of farm surveys. But here again, as in the case of Cape Colony, the work had been done with a view to recording the ownership of land to showing the boundaries of estates and not the topographical features which affect a campaign. Besides, there were a few large scale surveys of special small areas, such as townships, mining land, etc. Not only, therefore, were there no topographical maps existing in South Africa at the beginning of the war, but there was very little useful material for the Army surveyors or cartographers to work upon.

If, in addition, we remember that a large portion of the area of future active operations was in possession of the enemy and not easily accessible, the full nature of the task of equipping the Army with suitable war maps becomes apparent. There were, it is true, a number of reconnaissances made by officers before the declaration of war, but these were of special points and made for specific purposes, and come more naturally under the head of Intelligence reconnaissance than of cartography.

## The work done by the Survey and Mapping Sections

To remedy this state of affairs was the duty of the survey and mapping sections. A survey section consisted of an officer and from six to eight specially-trained non-commissioned officers and men; a mapping section consisted of an officer and from five to ten non-commissioned officers and men, with civilian draughtsmen and surveyors attached in some cases. A survey section normally carries out the actual surveying the field work- while a mapping section, from the work of the survey section or from any other available sources, compiles, edits, prints and issues the finished maps. This division of duties, however, was by no means rigidly adhered to during the war, and it often happened that the survey sections did the work of the mapping sections, and vice versa. During the whole war two survey sections were employed continuously, and three mapping sections were organized. No 1 Survey Section, under Major H. M. Jackson, R.E., after mapping the Orange River station and Strydenburg regions, accompanied Army headquarters on Lord Roberts's advance,\* and was engaged, during the halt at Bloemfontein, in compiling from the Free State farm surveys maps of localities likely to be the scene of operations.

\*During the actual advance there was naturally no opportunity for extended survey, and the work of the survey section was confined to making maps round those places where the halts allowed of this being done, and to making a traverse of the route of the advance.

This section, together with a mapping section, remained to the end of the war at Pretoria. No.2 Survey Section was chiefly employed between Cape Town and Kimberley, having its headquarters at Cape Town, where a mapping section was also stationed. This was the centre of the work for Cape Colony. The third mapping section was stationed at Bloemfontein. From Cape Town, Bloemfontein, and Pretoria, the work of preparing and issuing maps to the Army went on continuously.

The first series of maps issued to the troops was a patchwork of proper topographical surveys joined up by reconnaissances and filled in from existing farm surveys. As districts became pacified more areas were accurately surveyed and fresh editions issued. During 1900, the Imperial map of South Africa for the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony was compiled from the available sources by Messrs. Wood and Ortlepp, of Cape Town, under arrangement with the Field Intelligence Division on a scale of 3.94 miles to 1 inch.

The corresponding map for Cape Colony was completed with the assistance of the Surveyor-General and the Public Works Department in 1901. After the occupation of Pretoria a series of maps of the Transvaal was issued, covering nearly the whole country in sixty sheets, and it was on the correction and continual reissue of this series that the Pretoria sections were occupied till the middle of 1901. This map was on a scale of 2.347 miles to 1 inch. A topographical survey of some 3,000 square miles of the Transvaal was then carried out and incorporated in a fresh edition of the map.

The mapping of the Orange River Colony was carried out in a similar way, and by the beginning of 1902 there were sheets available for the whole colony. In addition to the above main maps, numerous large scale maps of

**ANNEX A**

small areas, reconnaissance maps, and reports were printed and issued by the survey units; also telegraph maps, route maps, military organization maps, skeleton maps, besides various miscellaneous Intelligence publications, such as almanacs, directories, entraining facilities at railway stations, particulars of mountain passes, topographical reports, etc. The methods of reproduction in the field consisted of lithography, photo-lithography, photo-zincography, and the Vandyke process. By these means were printed some 340,000 maps at Bloemfontein and Pretoria; at Cape Town 106,000 copies of the Imperial map of Cape Colony were reproduced.

**Need of Maps for the future**

The chief deduction to be made in the matter is that no Need of maps efforts during a war will compensate for the lack of a proper topographical survey made in peace time. Maps are a necessity to a modern army, and the expense of making them is very small compared with the cost of a campaign. The preparation of a military map of any part of the world in which British troops are even remotely likely to be called upon to fight is a matter of absolute obligation.

**Photographic reconnaissance**

This was an entirely new departure in methods of military reconnaissance and therefore deserves mention, though not very much of it was done during the campaign. Encouraging results had been obtained in England in the taking of panoramic photographs of positions, etc., in order to amplify the usual reconnaissance reports and sketches, the actual views being taken by long-range cameras with tele-photographic lenses. Views were thus obtained which were in some ways more true and usually more quickly made than those drawn by hand. A small detachment consisting of one officer and a N.C.O. was fitted up and sent out with the necessary equipment to do this work from bicycles. The detachment joined French's headquarters at Oolesberg, and was employed with the 1st Cavalry Division in its operations round Naauwpoort, where a large amount of this special panoramic work-combined with the ordinary rapid reconnaissance map work was carried out, including a series of panoramas of the Boer positions and laagers, as seen from Coles Kop.

After completing an extensive reconnaissance north of Bloemfontein, the detachment was no longer employed on its special work. It is hard to say what the value of the photo-reconnaissance work was. The method was quite an innovation in war, and the unit sent to carry out the work in South Africa was small and nobody's child. It seems doubtful whether its existence or possibilities were over really appreciated, or whether it ever got a chance of showing what could be done by its means.\*

\*A large number of panoramic photographs (not tele-photographs) were taken by the editor for the present work, and proved very useful for the purpose of filling in topographical details in the battle-plans, more particularly in the ease of the Natal battle-fields.

**The Army Telegraphs, a separate branch of Engineer work**

The Telegraph work in South Africa was, like the railways, a separate branch, and was under the control and administration of a Director of Army Telegraphs, Lieut. Colonel R. L. Hippisley, R.E., who reached South Africa early in December. Meanwhile, before the arrival of the technical telegraph units of the Army on the Cape side, the Postmaster-General of Cape Colony had collected materials and made arrangements for the repair of the telegraphs damaged by the invading commandos, and had also opened new offices for the use of the Army. Indeed, during this period as well as later, the Army received the greatest assistance from the Telegraph Department of Cape Colony. Upon Colonel Hippisley's arrival, arrangements were made for a proper division of the control and working of the telegraphs between the civil and the military.

On the Natal side, the headquarters and one section of Army Telegraphs arrived in October in time to be shut up in Ladysmith, the officer in command, Major W. F. Hawkins, R.E., becoming Director of Telegraphs on that side. For Buller's army outside Ladysmith, a section under Lieutenant R. J. Jelf was transferred in December from the 1st Telegraph Division\* on the Cape side, and the whole of the telegraphic work, until the relief, was carried out by this section, a remarkable achievement. On the Cape side the 1st Telegraph Division arrived at De Aar in November, and a "permanent line party" of two officers and fifty other ranks landed just before Christmas. Thus at the end of December, 1899, there were in South Africa five sections, one in Ladysmith, one with Buller, three on the Cape side, and also one permanent telegraph party. The amount of material in the country was 315 miles of air-line, 184 miles of cable, and 55 "offices."

\*At that time the proportion of army telegraph troops to an army corps was one telegraph division R.E. This consisted of headquarters and four sections. A section carried fifteen miles of air-line and seven miles of cable. This proportion has been very largely increased since the war.

### Organisation at various periods

From a telegraphic point of view the whole war can be divided into three periods. During the first, which extended, roughly, up to the junction of Roberts's and Buller's forces. The work consisted of establishing field communication between large forces and of repairing, maintaining, and working an increasing length of permanent telegraph line. The feature of this period was the rate at which the permanent work increased as soon as a start had been made from Bloemfontein and Ladysmith. During the second period which extended up to the inauguration of the blockhouse system, the field work had to be carried out for smaller and more numerous mobile forces, whilst the permanent work expanded somewhat less rapidly. During the third period, which lasted till peace was declared, the field work decreased, whilst, owing to the blockhouse lines, telephones, etc., the permanent work grew again.

**During the first period** the two field sections in Natal carried out the work inside and outside Ladysmith, and then marched with the northward advance, performing field duties and carrying out the repair of the permanent lines as they proceeded. The telegraphic junction between the two armies took place at Twyfelaar, north of Ermelo, where a cable line running south from Wonderfontein on the Belfast Railway was met. On the other side the three field sections were at first distributed at Madder River, Orange River, and Oolesberg, and until the halt at Bloemfontein carried out all the field work of the advance. In April three fresh sections from home reached the front, two of which went up the Western line and one to Bloemfontein. There were now available on the western side two sections, while for the main advance there were four.

The procedure from Bloemfontein all the way to Pretoria was that the field sections repaired the permanent line along the railway in the first instance, and also carried out field work for the detached forces and the parallel advances. The permanent party which had already taken over the line between Bloemfontein and the Orange River took over the permanent line to the north, completed repairs, and maintained and worked it as a trunk line. As the Army advanced, this work became more than the party allotted to it could manage in spite of increases to their numbers from various sources, and when, during June, 1900, extra connexions had to be made to the many small garrisons placed along the railway in order to protect it from raids, the strain became extreme. A large proportion of the field sections had to be diverted from their proper work to carry on the permanent line duty. In fact, when Pretoria was reached only two field sections out of four remained available for field duties.

**In the second period** it was essential to reorganize to meet the new conditions, and when the junction of the Natal Army set free two field sections, this was effected. Under this reorganization the Army Telegraphs comprised the following five branches, each under a separate head:-The Telegraph Division (of headquarters and four sections) for field duties; the Western District, Orange River Colony, and Transvaal Permanent Telegraphs; the Stores and Financial Department. This arrangement continued for some time during the guerrilla war and the ensuing column moves; but when blockhouse operations commenced it was gradually changed.

**In the third** period it was found better suited to the conditions of a great length of permanent line, coupled with the incessant moves of small columns and the existence of numerous blockhouse lines, to divide the whole country into areas, each under one officer, who was responsible for the permanent telegraphs and also for the field work of the columns moving within his area. The latter work had greatly changed in character during the blockhouse period, for a close network of permanent wires grew up all over the country. No column could be very far from some wire, and many forces started en l'air (in the air). Four districts were accordingly now created: Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Natal, and Cape Colony, each of which was under its own Assistant Director for all telegraph matters.

### Work done by Field Telegraphs

It may be said that from the time that the telegraph units arrived at the front till the end of the war hardly any move or operation of any importance was made in which the troops were not almost continuously in telegraphic communication with some permanent line, and so with headquarters. As with most of the other Engineer duties, the work was carried out by small bodies of men, varying from a section under a subaltern to a few men and a sergeant, or even a couple of operators attached to a column. Throughout the first part of the war the number of field sections in the field was far too small for the work that had to be performed. In few instances, therefore, was the ideal of tactical telegraphic communication reached.

There is one case, however, that of French's force round Colesberg in January, 1900 in which the proportion of telegraph troops to the whole force was more adequate, and this case furnished a good example of the thorough use of the wire and an illustration of the strength thereby conferred upon a force occupying a largely extended position. French's force extended over a concave arc overlapping the Boer positions and from his headquarters at Coles Kop the General was connected by wire with his whole front, some thirty-three miles in length. It was, in General French's own opinion, mainly due to the field telegraphs that he was enabled to hold such a position, and, curiously enough, this was the only district in South Africa where, at this time, the British forces were doing

**ANNEX A**

more than hold their own. An example of fairly complete tactical telegraphic connexion during an action was that at Poplar Grove, where the Commander-in-Chief was in touch with the base, with the attacking infantry, with the cavalry on the right flank, and with the balloon observing on the left. Spion Kop and Paardeberg, on the other hand, afford striking instances of our deficiencies in tactical intercommunication.

As an example of a cable line quickly laid for a rapid advance, we have the cable line which followed up French's cavalry in their dash to Kimberley.\* This line, about forty five miles long, was unfortunately cut to pieces by Cronje's wagons retreating across it just at the moment when its services were most urgently required. The advance to Bloemfontein is a good example of the use of both systems, cable and air-line. The advanced cavalry was followed by a cable, which was taken up and replaced by all air-line as the main body proceeded. It was impossible either to guard or to take up this field line to Bloemfontein, which was the longest laid during the war, viz., 125 miles, and it was abandoned. Fortunately, however, it was not destroyed by the enemy till sometime after permanent communications had been restored 'Via. Norval's Pont and Bethulie.

The field work remained the same in principle all through the war; but as mobile columns became more numerous, and the network of permanent lines grew closer, the lines became shorter and the detachments decreased in size. The work was especially difficult in the operations in the north-east of the Free State which culminated in Priasloo's surrender. During the guerrilla operations it varied in difficulty according to the activity of the enemy in destroying the wires and the number of the columns operating. At some periods it was impossible to keep lines repaired as quickly as they were destroyed for want of sufficient escorts for the repair parties. Nevertheless, the amount of laying and repair work done without escort was remarkable.

\*Such a connexion with detached Cavalry will no doubt be performed by wireless telegraphy in the future.

**Work of Repair Detachments.** At times, when the troops were only moving about in large columns of all arms small parties of Engineers, under perhaps a subaltern or a sergeant, made long journeys across the veld, following up some telegraph line in order to find and repair a break.

That more of these small detachments were not captured when carrying out these dangerous duties is surprising, while the pluck and zeal of these who carried them out deserve all praise. Among many instances of such dangerous work equally well accomplished one is worth noting. At the moment when Lord Roberts arrived in Bloemfontein there was a break in the field line laid behind his advance. The permanent wires to the south along the railway were cut, and the Army was, for the moment, isolated. There was another permanent line to Bloemfontein from Kimberley via Boshof, which place had just been occupied by the British, but there were Boers in-between it and Bloemfontein and the line was cut. Lieutenant H. L. Mackworth, R.E., and a sergeant rode along this line to Boshof and successfully restored communication, not only managing to avoid observation by a party of Boers whom they came across, but taking advantage of night to "borrow" a remount from them.

**Permanent Line work and its Development.** The growth of the permanent line duties has been touched on. The simplest way of describing what work had to be done is to state that at the end of the war the Army was working 3,378 miles of permanent line with posts, which had been captured from the two Republics. This length of line carried 9,395 miles of wire, a large part of which had to be restored and all to be maintained. From the time that Johannesburg was reached the main line to the south was for some time subject to continuous interruption. During de Wet's raid in June, 1900, Army headquarters were cut off for some days, and only succeeded in getting through communication via Ventersdorp, Lichtenburg, and Mafeking (field line). On another occasion Pretoria and Kimberley could only be connected through Newcastle, Pietermaritzburg, King William's Town, and De Aar. At one period the line was being cut every night (within three months it was interrupted fifty times), and in executing the continual repairs the telegraph staff showed the greatest gallantry.

**Blockhouse lines**

The general bearing upon the field telegraphs of the evolution of the system of blockhouses has already been described. Even while the blockhouses were confined to the railway lines, the additional work entailed in the provision of telephonic communications was considerable. When, however, the system was elaborated, and the intervals between blockhouses decreased and a network of fresh blockhouse lines was made all over the country, the work of constructing and maintaining telephone lines became very heavy, though the actual working of the instruments was carried out by the garrisons of the blockhouses, and thus did not fall on the technical units.

Every line of blockhouses was supplied with telephones, and in most cases with a proportion of telegraph offices. The magnitude of the labour of equipment and maintenance can be realized when it is recalled that the equipment of the blockhouse lines alone involved the erection of 9,361 miles of line and of 1,945 telephones, all but a very small proportion of which was done by the Army. Along the last blockhouse line, 374 miles long, between Victoria Road and Lambert's Bay, under construction when peace was declared, two wires were being run for its whole length.

## Telephone Exchanges

In addition to the normal permanent line duties and the blockhouse telephones, which the Army Telegraphs had to perform; nearly all the principal towns and places in military occupation were provided with a system of telephones with exchanges. These exchanges were necessary for inter-communication between the commandants of defences and their outlying posts. Except those existing in Pretoria and Johannesburg, which were taken over and maintained, they were erected by the Army. Of the total amount of wiring connected with these exchanges (4,105 miles), 1,789 miles were erected by the Army Telegraphs.

## Work in Ladysmith

The headquarters and section within Ladysmith were constantly employed during the siege in the erection and working of a telegraph and telephone system for the defence. There was finally very complete communication between the various posts and headquarters, which enabled Sir George White to direct the defence by telephone, notably during the attack on January 6.

## Personnel and Statistics

The pressure of work in the offices was at all times great\* and extreme difficulty was found in replacing the clerks who: Fell ill from overwork; in the unhealthy districts they had to be relieved every two months. In spite of importations from England and reinforcements, there were at the end of the war only 691 clerks (including civilians) to work 504 instruments. Many of them had to work night and day, and a generous need of praise is due to the telegraph operators, military and civilian; they carried on very trying and responsible work, often under unhealthy circumstances, sometimes in danger, always under strain. It is interesting to compare the numbers employed on the Army Telegraphs at the end of the war with the figures as they stood in December, 1899.

When peace was declared the total establishment was 2,424 men, of whom 21 were officers and 918 natives. The total wire mileage laid (excluding telephones and the 9,395 miles of captured permanent telegraphs restored and worked) was 18,236 miles. The number of telegraph messages sent, transmitted and received during the war amounted to 13k million. The power to cope with this vast amount of traffic was largely due to the Wheatstone automatic fast-speed instruments, which were used for the first time in war. The cost of the telegraphic work to the Army was £324,000, and the cost of the telegrams sent works out to one-third of a penny per word.

A wireless telegraphy detachment, consisting of some Wireless Royal Engineers and some civilian experts provided by the telegraphy Marconi Company, was sent out in November, 1899. At Cape Town it succeeded in acquiring a large additional amount of wireless telegraphy gear consigned to President Kruger. In spite, however, of many trials and great efforts made to ensure success, the results achieved were inadequate, and the system was abandoned.

\*The excessive Indulgence conceded to personal inquiries on behalf of relatives and friends, or to messages of a trivial character, added greatly to this work. After Cronje's surrender at Paardeberg, for instance, the tired operators were kept at work for hours by telegrams of congratulation from public bodies in England. There is no reason why some arrangement should not be made at the base for intercepting messages of secondary importance.

## The Boer Field Telegraphs

Besides their system of permanent telegraphs the Boers possessed a military field telegraph department, It started with a heliograph corps which was formed in the Transvaal by General Joubert in 1890, as a result of the great use the British had made of the heliograph during the 1881 war. This detachment gradually undertook telegraphic duties, and was first used on active service in 1894 in the Malaboeh campaign, when it performed valuable service. After the Jameson raid, when increases were made to the Staats Artillerie, the corps was increased to a strength of 31 and fully equipped as a telegraph and signalling unit, and took part in the Swaziland and Magato expeditions of 1897-1898.

The Orange Free State also possessed a field telegraph corps somewhat smaller than that of the sister republic. Both corps were mobilized in September, 1899, the Transvaal corps under Lieutenant P. C. Paff, and joined the Natal army of invasion, while a detachment of Transvaalers was sent to De la Rey in the west for signalling and also for exploding mines round Mafeking, these duties being carried out by the same unit. Upon the advance into Natal the field telegraph corps was split up and allotted to the different commandos, Great difficulty was at first experienced in arranging communication along the railway line owing to the wholesale damage done to the wires and instruments by the Boers themselves. Telegraph lines were soon established round Ladysmith during the siege, but here, again, the technical troops were hampered by the ignorance of the other Boers, and had to lay underground cables because the burghers could not understand that the air-lines were for the use of their own side.



**ANNEX A**

To what extent the Boers managed to retain their field telegraph units and equipment through the war is not certain. As they lost control of the permanent lines, and were unable to keep up the comparatively cumbersome apparatus of field telegraphs, they fell back more and more upon their heliographs, and with these and with instruments captured from the British, managed to keep up a fairly complete system of communication from their Governments and the Commandant-Generals to the commandos, till up to the very last. Heavy prices were paid to men who captured our heliographs. In fact, during the guerrilla war a heliograph was of far more value to the Boers than a gun. The Boers claim to have successfully tapped the British wires at one stage of the war, though gradually forced to give up doing so through lack of instruments.

To what extent it really was done, will always remain doubtful; but in one respect their facilities for so doing were great, for all their operators knew both languages well, while some of them also had experience in the solution of cyphers. On the whole, for its size and training, and taking into consideration the ignorance of the majority of the burghers, the Boer telegraphic and signalling department was extremely efficient. Its most remarkable performance undoubtedly was the development of a system of signalling over the whole area of war by the use of the heliograph, an instrument peculiarly adapted to the bright sunshine and open spaces of South Africa.\*

\*The heliograph was of course very freely used by the British, but no special corps was assigned to the work, the various units providing their own signallers.

**Regulars and Auxiliaries**

Altogether 357 officers and 8,157 other ranks of the Royal Engineers were sent out during the war. The Regulars were largely assisted in their work during the campaign by the Militia and Volunteer detachments. In all, of the Militia Engineers 11 officers and 350 other ranks, and of the Volunteers 52 officers and 1,151 other ranks went out. In most cases these detachments were attached to various Regular units.

There was also on the western side the Railway Pioneer Regiment, whose services have already been referred to. In Natal, where there were only field units R.E., a corps of civilian pioneers recruited from the Public Works Department was organized under the C.R.E. to do the general engineering work, and also a native labour corps.

Valuable as was the assistance derived from these various auxiliary sources the experience of the war in no way confirmed the idea that our army can in any degree dispense with a large and highly trained corps of Engineers, or with an abundant supply of officers equally skilled in the military and technical sides of their profession.

### The Corps Song

The Corps song, Hurrah for the CRE originated during the South African War is sung in a mixture of English and Zulu to the traditional South African tune of Daer de die ding. The Zulu words are a complaint that as there is too much work for too low wages and little food they are off.

It is believed that Hurrah for the CRE was brought to this country by one of the RE Units which served in the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), possibly the 4th or 54th Field Companies.

#### Hurrah for the CRE

*Good Morning Mr Stevens and windy Notchy Knight,  
Hurrah for the CRE  
We're working very hard down at Upnor Hard,  
Hurrah for the CRE  
You make fast, I make fast, make fast the dinghy,  
Make fast the dinghy, make fast the dinghy,  
You make fast, I make fast, make fast the dinghy,  
Make fast the dingy pontoon.  
For we're marching on to Laffan's Plain  
To Laffan's Plain, to Laffan's Plain,  
Yes we're marching on to Laffan's Plain  
Where they don't know mud from clay.  
Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah  
Ooshta, ooshta, ooshta, ooshta,  
Iknoa malee, picaninny skoff,  
Ma-ninga sabenza, here's another off.  
Oolum-da creid Matabele,  
Oolum-day, away we go.  
Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah,  
Shush.....Whoow!*

Notes from the song:

1. Mr Stevens, A civilian attached to the Royal Engineers at the time was the Chief Clerk in the Chief Instructor's Fieldworks Office.
2. Windy Notchy Knight, ex-Warrant Officer Instructor in the School of Military Engineering Workshops. Nickname for a lanky and knobby-kneed Engineer.
3. Upnor Hard, School of Military Engineering wet bridging site on the River Medway at Chatham
4. Laffan's Plain, training area at Aldershot was very muddy and this area was levelled by the Engineers over a period of years to earn their special rates of pay. The work was planned and carried out under Colonel H.D. Laffan, RE.
5. Ooshta, South African native working cry
6. Ikona malee, No money (Matabele)
7. Picaninny skoff, Little food (Matabele)
8. Ma-ninga sabenza, Lots of work (Matabele)
9. Oolum-da, South African native working cry

“Ooshta, Ikona malee picaninny skoff ma-niga sabenza” is also the Matabele way of saying

“I am fed up and glad to be leaving.”

The Matabele tribe provided many labourers for the Royal Engineers in South Africa.

### THE ROYAL ENGINEERS DRINKING SONG

*The Army and the Navy, they went out to have some fun.  
They went to all the taverns, where the fiery liquids run;  
But the bars they found were empty, for the engineers had come,  
And traded all their instruments for gallon jugs of rum!*

*Chorus*

*We are, we are, we are, we are  
We are the engineers  
We can, we can, we can, we can  
Demolish forty beers  
Drink rum, drink rum, drink rum, drink rum  
And come along with us  
For we don't give a damn for any old man  
Who don't give a damn for us*

*Godiva was a lady who through Coventry did ride  
To show to all the villagers her lovely lily white hide  
The most observant man of all, an Engineer of course  
Was the only one to notice that Godiva rode a horse*

*Chorus*

*She said I've come a long, long way; the man will go as far  
Who'll take me off this bloody horse, and lead me to a bar  
The man who took her from her stead, and stood her to a beer  
Was a bleary eyed old Sapper from the Corps of Engineers*

*Chorus*

*Sir Francis Drake and all his men set sail from Calais Bay  
Waiting for a Rum fleet that was headed out that way  
But the Engineers had beat them by a night and half a day  
And though as drunk as they could get, you still could hear them say*

*Chorus*

*My father was a miner from the upper Malemute  
My mother was a hostess in a house of ill repute  
At the age of ten they kicked me out and never shed a tear  
So I said the hell with them and I joined the Engineers*

*Chorus*

*My mother peddles opium, my father's on the dole  
My sister used to walk the streets, but now she's on parole  
My brother runs a restaurant with bedrooms in the rear  
But they won't speak to me because I'm an Engineer*

*Chorus*

*Continued...*

Continued...

*The Engineers and Infantry once found a gallon can  
The Infantry said to the Engineers, "Out-drink us if you can"  
The Infantry took three drinks and died, their faces a ghastly green  
But the engineers drank on and said "It's only gasoline"*

*Chorus*

*A maiden and an Engineer were sitting in the park  
The engineer was busy doing research after dark  
His scientific method was a marvel to observe  
While his right hand wrote the figures down his left hand traced the curves*

*Chorus*

*She wears her flannel nightie in the summer when it's hot  
She wears her silk pyjamas in the winter when it's hot  
And sometimes in the springtime and sometimes in the fall  
She climbs right in between the sheets with nothing on at all*

*Chorus*

*Now Venus is a statue made entirely of stone  
There's not a fig leaf on her, she's naked as a bone  
On noticing her arms were broke an engineer discovered  
Of course the damn things broken, it should be reinforced!*

*Chorus*

*Now Caesar went to Egypt at the age of 53  
But Cleopatra's blood was warm, her heart was young and free  
And every night when Julius said good-night at three o'clock  
There was a Roman Engineer just waiting round the block*

*Chorus*

*An Engineer once came to school so drunk and very late  
Carrying a load you'd expect to ship by freight  
The only thing that held him up and kept him on his course  
Was the boundary condition and electro-motive force*

*Chorus*

*Now you've heard our story and you know we're engineers  
And like all Jolly fellows we can down our whisky clear  
We drink to every soldier who comes from far and near  
So grab a seat and a glass and have a jug of beer*

*Chorus*

### **The Engineers Drinking Song**

*Ah-hum, titty-bum, titty-bum, titty-bum,  
An engineer told me before he died,  
Ah-hum, ah-hum.*

*An engineer told me before he died,  
I have no reason to believe he lied,  
Ah-hum, titty-bum, titty-bum, titty-bum,  
Ah-hum, titty-bum, titty-bum, titty-bum.*

*An engineer told me before he died,  
And I have no reason to believe that he lied,*

*That no matter whatever he tried,  
His girlfriend was never satisfied!*

*Chorus*

*That girl she had a @#%\$ so wide  
She could never be satisfied,*

*Chorus*

*The engineer was a designer,  
Measured the bore of her vagina,*

*Chorus*

*Then he built her a @#%\$ of steel,  
Powered by a bloody great wheel,*

*Chorus*

*Yes he built a bloody great wheel,  
Two brass balls and a @#%\$ of steel*

*Chorus*

*Two balls of brass were filled with cream,  
And the whole bloody issue was driven by steam.*

*Chorus*

*He tied his girl to the leg of the bed,  
Tied her hands above her head,*

*Chorus*

*There she lay demanding a @#%\$,  
He shook her hand and wished her luck,*

*Chorus*

*Round and round went the bloody great wheel,  
In and out went the @#%\$ of steel,*

*Chorus*

*Up and up went the level of steam,  
Down and down went the level of cream.*

*Chorus*

*Continued...*

Continued...

## ANNEX D

*Till at last the maiden cried,  
"Enough! Enough! I am satisfied!"*

*Chorus*

*Now we come to the tragic bit,  
There was no way of stopping it,*

*Chorus*

*It went like the piston of a train,  
He should have fitted a gearing chain,*

*Chorus*

*Clouds of steam blew out the top,  
There wasn't a way to make it stop,*

*Chorus*

*She was split from ass to tit,  
And the whole @#%\$ thing was covered in \$#@%,*

*Chorus*

*It jumped off her, it jumped on him,  
And then it bugged their next of kin,*

*Chorus*

*It jumped on a departing bus,  
And the mess it made caused quite a fuss,*

*Chorus*

*The last time, Sir, that @#%\$ was seen,  
Was in Buckingham Palace @#%\$ the Queen,*

*Chorus*

*There's a moral to the story I tell,  
If you see it coming better run like hell,*

*Chorus*

*Nine months later a child was born,  
With two brass balls and a bloody great horn,*

*Chorus*

*The warning in the story is,  
Always fit a safety switch,*

*Chorus*

*The crux of the matter is plain to be seen,  
You should never trust a @#%\$ MACHINE!*

## ANNEX E

## You Tube videos relating to 42 Field Squadron, Royal Engineers

Copy and paste link into your Browser	Subject	Duration
<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2q3ZKpSoWBU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2q3ZKpSoWBU</a>	Music - Wings Corps of Royal Engineers	1 ½ minutes
<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZiUnmRta-E">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZiUnmRta-E</a>	Music - Royal Engineers Hurrah for the CRE A description of the song's content and history is given at Annex C to this document.	2 minutes
<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoM6AVykblo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoM6AVykblo</a>	Forces TV, BFBS, British Forces News <b>Engineers create safe area for shuras 30.10.12</b> Soldiers from 42 Field Squadron, 28 Engineer Regiment have been settling in to life at Patrol Base Wahid in the Nad-e Ali district of Helmand province.	3 ½ minutes
<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XVCb1vCI2g">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XVCb1vCI2g</a>	Hero's Welcome for Royal Engineers in Germany 08.04.13 on return from Helmand <b>Includes respects to two fallen Sappers</b>	2 minutes
	 	
<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eqxibw5rv0Y">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eqxibw5rv0Y</a>	42 Field Squadron's Final March 08.07.13	2 minutes



**Capt James Townley**



**Spr Richard Walker**

## Life as a National Service Subaltern Royal Engineers

2/Lt David Bolling Paterson 436207 posted to the Middle East.  
CYPRUS. August 1954 - September 1955 with 42 Field Squadron R.E.

### Farewell Gillingham and Flight to Egypt and Cyprus

After officer infantry training in snow and mud over winter at 3 TRRE, Mons Officer Cadet School, Aldershot from 30 January 1954 -10 March 1954, where I was graded ' B' in a mixed group of R.E. and R.A. cadets, and eventually passing out from Sapper Officer training in No.3 Troop, 403 Class at Gillingham, Kent on 26 June 1954, graded 'C, I received a posting to the Middle East. I had left my initial Army No 22917440 behind and became 2/Lt Paterson No. 436207 R.E.

We had been trained at 115 Cadet Squadron, ME Regt., Gillingham in all the Sapper activities of building Bailey bridges, navigating pontoons, operating pumps, using every kind of explosive, and even building runways. We were also well-drilled on the parade ground as you can see in the photographs of the passing-out parade in 1954. Naturally, I am the one slightly out of line in the front row as we wheel past the saluting base, having too short Glaswegian legs to keep up! It had been a long haul from enlistment at 1 October 1953 as Sapper with Army No 2291740 through initial squad bashing in horrible conditions at Malvern where screening tests were done in the first fortnight, followed by the exacting pre-OCTU training at Cove Barracks and finally passing W.O.S.B. in a series of ingenious leadership tests at Barton Stacey, Aldershot in early December.

Before we left Gillingham, we had to donate to the blood bank and I recall fainting in a heap on the floor from moving too soon afterwards. We had thought that we were super-fit and could get up in 5 minutes. We were glad to leave the place because Scots had a rough ride, not having been to English public schools and being assessed by officers solely from that background. With 4 other Scots, I had repeated the last 4 weeks of the course and two of them failed O.C.T.U. My final test was to command a night Bailey bridge exercise and my classmates were all determined that I should succeed.

The Bailey bridge had to be assembled across a stream and recovered, all in silence with muffled tools. We got back in record time and so they had to commission me.

The deferment had suited me fine as I could meet C.... for another 4 weeks before my posting! We first met at the country dancing at the Scots Kirk in Gillingham. I would accompany her home and then hitch a lift on the Bowaters paper lorries on their way up to London and enter Barracks by the back fence. We had quite a merry dance on Passing-out Day which C.... attended. Someone had a car and ferried us to C....'s home with the S ..... family which was deep in the orchard country beyond Rainham. She was staying alone that weekend and she had to put the ' burglar alarm' geese away in their shed. C.... was attired in long dress and I was in Blues uniform, not the ideal gear for rounding up geese from the



**403 Class No 3 Troop, Pass-off parade march past**  
Brompton Barracks, Gillingham, Kent  
26 June 1954  
2Lt David Paterson 4<sup>th</sup> last, outer end, front row



**Pass-off Day 403 Class RE 26 June 1954**  
Last day as cadets. David Paterson front centre  
note the shoulder flashes designed to put blanco on  
brass buttons and Brasso on flashes.



**Presentation of gift tankard to**  
SDI McIver from Class 403



rough grass enclosure. Meantime they were making enough of a racket to wake the neighbours and it was well after midnight. I think the 'shepherds' were a bit inebriated too which the geese took advantage of.

I was granted a short embarkation leave which I spent at home in Glasgow in July 1954 when I visited my sister and husband at their holiday cottage at Otter Ferry on Loch Fyne and had my photograph (not available) taken by Dad at home in my Blues uniform, I was still obviously uncomfortable in it.

On return to duties, we were given a burst of injections, seated on benches with both arms under attack by medical orderlies with ferocious-looking needles. The idea of sitting in line on benches was that anyone who fainted was supported by the one front or back! I do not know what the cocktail of injections contained.

We flew out to the Middle East in a York 42-seater aircraft, a lumbering old crate which had probably flown well beyond the metal fatigue limits. The engine noise alone was enough to make you airsick but it was the turbulence from thermals over France which set off my stomach. The route was over Dieppe, across Central France and following the Rhone to Marseilles. We flew low enough to see the forests, some with rondels like Tronçais oak forest where we had been as forestry students. The Mediterranean looked great from the air and we slipped on down past Sardinia which looked wild and attractive with hill tracks going up the ridges which softened to green rough vegetation in upper parts.

Our staging post for refuelling was Valetta, Malta and we had a fine view of Valetta Harbour as we banked into the Airport. I promised myself to take a photograph with my Voigtlander folding camera when we took off but I had not counted on the speedy onset of darkness in the Mediterranean. It was pitch dark by early evening when we flew out for the Canal Zone.

I arrived at Middle East HQ in Ismailia with a batch of 12 other newly commissioned Sapper Officers. We were billeted in tents in the exhausting August heat in a sandy dusty Transit Camp at Fayid, consisting of crowded tents surrounded with barbed wire, erected in the vain hope of keeping out the thieving Egyptians. There was little point in having a siesta in the middle of the day under baking canvas with not a fan in sight and plagued by flies.

9 fellow new officers were posted out within 24 hours but it took about 7 or 8 wearisome days for administration to arrange my posting and flight to Cyprus. In my interview with the Adjutant, he found my qualification in Forestry (B.Sc. Hons Edin) rather a puzzle in a largely desert place! My qualifications were at odds with the skills of the civil engineers, quantity surveyors and architects who comprised the normal turn-over of Sappers in National Service staffing. Finally, he kindly sent me to 42 Field Squadron R.E. in Cyprus, saying 'that is the only place with trees'. It was in fact the plum posting in the arid Middle East, with very pleasant coastal recreation.

Awaiting the posting and flight, we used the Middle East HQ swimming station or club at Fayid beside the Bitter Lakes to relieve the boredom. One day I was accompanied by officers returning from Korea - I had escaped that perilous posting. Bathing had little refreshing effect here because of the saline nature of the water and its high temperature. It was strange to float half out of the water and a sure way for a Nordic type like me to get severe sunburn. The only way to get cool was to drink gallons of chilled fruit juice. Even then, we had to be careful of funds when on the low salary of newly commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, still paying off the costs of my newly purchased dress uniform from Moss Bros. My main recollection of this hot boring Transit Camp was of breakfast of greasy fried eggs or scrambled eggs, swotting hundreds of black flies trying to get to it first. Flies never left you wherever you went. A good job I never looked in the kitchen.

Being there for a week, I was caught for Orderly Officer duty, serving with a fierce-looking giant of a Fusiliers Sergeant who looked all of 7ft with the hat plume but kindly introduced me to these duties.



**Regimental Orderly Officer**

## Arrival Cyprus

At last I got my seat allocation to fly to Cyprus on 18 August 1954, and came in on bumpy thermals as soon as we crossed the Island's coastline, landing at Nicosia in the central plain. Thence I travelled in a Land Rover sent to convey me to Regimental Camp at Polemidhia near Limassol, a long very dusty ride. After such a journey in August, you are covered in white dust and emerge as from a bakery when the flour bag had burst and with a drought like crossing the Sahara without a water bottle. I was allocated a room in a wooden chalet terrace with long verandas at the foot of a slope below the Regimental Mess. It had been built under Kitchener in 1880's in a style like the Indian military would have had. There were apricots trained against the veranda and a few trees in rough ground above the low perimeter dyke which consisted of white limestone rocks.

I was informed that a Regimental dinner was being held in an hour or two. Alas, one of my suitcases with my black shoes for Blues dress had not arrived yet and I had to put on brown shoes, black mark on first arrival! However, they all thought it rather amusing. Moving in these circles of the assured snob English middle class who made up the Regular officers and their wives and who make sarcastic fun of nuances of dress and class markers such as your accent was quite terrifying for someone like me from



**Polemidhia Camp**

a simple Scottish background. (The only previous formal dinners I had attended were our annual University Forestry Society dinners and the dinner for the French Forest officers at Tronçais on our French Tour.)

Dinner was held outdoors on the badminton court, lit with fairy lights strung on wires around the court -a very exotic almost Tropical setting. All the regimental silver, a glittering array worth thousands of pounds, was on the long table. The meat course came in with whole roast pig with an apple in its mouth. There was the usual circulation of the port and toast to Queenie. Crickets made a great din and flying chafer insects hit the windows and lights in droves. The cost of the dinner and wines for the guests duly appeared in our mess bills which is tough on National Service Officers on miserable pay rates.

When you walked up to the mess for breakfast soon after 7 a.m., sweat would darken your armpits by the time you arrived there, an indication of how hot it would become by midday in August. Indian families were contracted to do our dhobi (washing and ironing) and sometimes you would change khaki shorts and shirt three times in the day.

## Troop Tasks on the Pipeline. Happy Valley, Kissousa, Anoyira

I was posted to 7 Troop camp at 'Happy Valley' on the south coast near Limassol and below the main road to Akrotiri. Capt. Dick Holland aka 'Dutch' was Troop Officer but was just about to be succeeded by Captain David Herbert. It was on a flat piece of ground in a hollow spouth of the main road providing a site for several dozen tents and a crude football pitch. When I arrived, the lads were out in the evening playing football on this dusty strip in a temperature of 85 to 90F. I could not imagine lasting more than 5 minutes playing in that heat until you became acclimatised to it. A short run away was a beach with cool bathing and if you clambered over the rocky chalk headland there was another small deserted beach to the east. Swimming between the two beaches round the headland was slightly dangerous because of currents. The reason the water was cool was because groundwater flowed from the mainland into the sea at this point and the Camp was actually sited over artesian supplies of water.



7 Troop Camp Happy Valley

Our task was to get base camp facilities installed to accept Middle East HQ in its move from Canal Zone to Cyprus under the threat of rising Arab nationalism under Nasser in Egypt. (One could also interpret the move as maintaining support to Israel and remaining close to the Middle East oilfields in event of an embargo on oil supplies). A large Camp and airfield were to be constructed at Episcopi and the Royal Engineers were to install the concrete bases for tents, offices and Messes, with electrical connection and provide the water supply. Most of my work was connected with the pipeline project Tuna item up to January 1954 and thereafter as National Service dogsbody covering for leave of Regular officers in a variety of tasks including Field Park Squadron, all without ever getting commensurate pay for the rank and function.

The water source was to be well up country to the North, drawing on water coming off the Troodos Mountains. After a time at Happy Valley camp with 7 Troop, I was put to the top station beside the water intake at a place called Kissousa in the hills rising towards the Troodos Mountains in command of 8 Troop, normally led by Capt. Alan Steel. With my team of joiners, plumbers, carpenters, plant drivers and electricians, we quickly set ourselves up with a tented camp, making a small swimming pool by damming the river with gravel, and laying on showers and electricity. It was a most enjoyable little camp, free of all the protocol of Squadron and Regimental Camp. Our sole communication was by radio to Squadron Camp. In thunderstorms it would become nearly impossible to read messages for the static interference with reception. This was ideal as no orders could reach us during these storms but not so good when organising football matches from this remote location: by this time, I was part of the Officers soccer team in the Island.



8 Troop Camp Kissousa

We engaged labour from the local hill villages to do the work of trenching for the water pipeline. There would be gangs of 100 or more labourers whose output was about a quarter of what my Sappers could do. There was a rule that only Greek labour could work on Greek village land and only Turks on Turkish land. (We were hardly aware then of the past tensions which would flare into civil war later between these two races in the subsequent history of the Island.) We used our NCO's as well as the more reliable civilian Gangers to get work from them. The Turks were far more productive than the idle Greeks and we tried to use only Turkish gangers for the same reason.

I had two regular sergeants, Sergeant Smith in 7 Troop, a young man for the rank, keen, able and efficient and nice to get on with; and Sergeant Rodbard in 8 Troop, an older Sergeant who did not like National Servicemen. He came round to a different view when I demonstrated total commitment to the task, spending long hours mastering the drawings, but he made it awkward to begin with. We would make daily visits to the fieldwork and amused ourselves sometimes after passing a trenching gang by going over a ridge, by which time the Greeks would be out of the trench sunning themselves and then doubling back. Gradually, someone would be alert to our return, jump into the trench and start to dig furiously. The rest imagined he had sunstroke and continued relaxed and chatting. Then it would dawn on them that they were observed and there would be a mass plunge into the trench. We always found it strange that they had no loyalty to warn the others. From their viewpoint, of course, there was no hurry as this kind of employment was a rarity and they did not want to kill the golden goose.



**Sgt Smith 7 Troop**



**Vineyard Wadi**

The pipeline passed though dissected white limestone country with many small channels down the hillside, only wet in the winter rainy season, and a few broad large wadi-type watercourses. Any tracks to the vineyards were very narrow with stone dykes, often unsuitable for Thorneycroft or Leyland lorries. To cross the watercourses, we had to weld long sections of 9ins diam. metal pipes and physically move them on to the concrete supports because cranes could not reach many of the crossings. For this task, the

Greeks were useless and we always tried to assemble 20-30 Sappers who used the Bailey bridge weight-lifting techniques of the human caterpillar to stagger off over the loose heavy gravel of the river-bed to the crossing sites with lengths of pipe sometimes as long as 40ft or even 70 ft. in one case.

Some blasting was sometimes necessary to form the pier supports and on one occasion Captain David Herbert was sheltering beside me when we were exploding a shaped beehive charge and a piece of shrapnel went clean through his hat without injuring him. At another point, there was a large maple tree diverting the water channel and undermining one of the piers and we decided to put charges under it. I followed the safety rules of being at a safe distance and in sight but some of the blasé characters went round a knoll out of sight and rather too near the site of explosion. Because of good tamping in the mud of the river, the charge went off with tremendous effect, disintegrating the tree. I had great fun watching sizeable chunks of



**Pipeline Transport**

wood slowly gyrate over the knoll and descend on them, causing panic. The same would occur in rock blasting to take the trench through rocky sections of the terrain. When I first arrived after training, I was amazed how safety rules were not observed compared with how we had been trained.

### Pipeline Task photos



2 Lt Paterson



Manhandling



7 and 8 Troops



7 Troop balancing



8 Troop Brake Press tank



Major Bertie Baxter delivering a telling off

## Social Relations with the Cypriots

There were still many aspects of the Turkish Musselmann Empire around and corruption still abounded in Cyprus from that occupation. I was always regaled by bunches of the best grapes from the vines on the Ganger's veranda in the hope that their employment would be extended. After paying out the labourers weekly in the villages, I and my NCOs would return to Camp with the Land Rover full of water melons, sugar melons and eggs. We would drive up between the tent lines distributing the largesse as it was too much for the Sergeant and me to consume. The Cypriots could never understand that our judgement on engaging labour would not be influenced one jot by these gifts.



Cypriot Workers



Greek Cypriot Workers

On one occasion at Evdymou, a Turkish headman invited me, my Sergeant and two NCOs to his house for a lunch. This took place at a long table in his orchard. We were served by the womenfolk who stood demurely back on the edge of the enclosure and only came forward when food was served. Finally, the Headman and his sons entertained us by singing Turkish songs -the sound was excruciating to our ears and I had great problems keeping a straight face when observing the difficulty my NCOs had in not bursting out laughing. In turn the Turks would try to inebriate us with white wine which was not too difficult considering how fierce the wine was and in a hot sun.

These invitations would never come from the Greek Cypriots and our men did not go for recreation to Greek villages as they were rather too handy with knives. Curiously, I learned very few words of Greek or Turkish in all the 14mths I was there which merely confirms that saturation learning and isolation from your own tongue is the only quick method of learning a language. The villages were still on hill-top situations for defence, historic remnants of former civil war battles between the Greeks and Turks.

## Recreation

Evenings in the Mess might consist of card-playing or, more likely in my case, writing letters to C.... When we were at Regimental Camp at Polemidhia or Squadron Camp at Anoyira, Saturday night recreation might consist of visiting a nightclub in Limassol. These were flowy dumps with dingy lighting, a few palms and crummy decor with lurid murals, pretending to compete with the Nicosia or Alexandria night clubs and failing miserably. The chorus girls would perhaps be drop-outs and alcoholics from Alexandria and long past their sell-by date for belly-dancing, gyrating around in diaphanous dresses, covering their drooping large breasts with balloons which you would be teased to burst. No thanks! The drinks were inordinately expensive and probably watered down so we would return to the Mess for the cheaper bar there. There was a heavy red Cypriot wine called 'Commanderia' which could give you quite a hangover.

As for sports, we played tennis in temperatures around 90F, stopping at each set to drink pints of lemon squash. I played for the Cyprus Officers football team and the RE Regimental team but sometimes I was on too remote a station to reach fixtures. It was amusing to record our first sea swim of the



Pillow Fight

season on 28 February - a contrast with the Moray Firth when at my maternal grandparents.

When we completed the pipeline to Base camp, a big party with wives present was held in the Regimental Mess. We had races down the timber-built Mess in teams, going up over the beams as an obstacle. The problem was we had been over-indulging in cocktails - 'White Ladies' was one, 'gin in a frosted glass', I think - which made you distinctly high in the heat of a summer evening. We drove off from the mess in Dave Herbert's car and descended on Major Bertie Baxter's rented house in Limassol for more partying. The headaches next morning were out of this world - I recall opening my eyes, the ceiling spun, so I closed them quickly. The batman was called to revive us.

Before this event, we had to 'prove' the pipeline, sending water down it for the first time to expel the air. I was up at the top at Kissousa and duly switched on the water. We knew it would take several hours to pass the water through break-pressure tanks, displace the air and operate the valves to expel air but, after a long time, Major Baxter contacted me by radio 'Davie, he says, not a drop to drink here'. After inspection, we found numerous leaks in concreted joints where the maximum angle for joints had been exceeded when passing up and down the sharp re-entrants in the terrain. A civil engineering firm would have known better. It was not long before the vineyard owners twigged how to operate the valves and irrigate the vineyards and a fall in pressure would result. Maybe it is still used that way to this day?

The final joke occurred when we found out that there was an excellent artesian water supply below Base Camp at Akrotiri - all that was required was a pumping station. Thinking back to swimming in the bay below Happy Valley Camp when I first arrived in Cyprus, the explanation for the coolness of the water at depth became evident.

I recall a few hikes on Sundays into the surrounding countryside from Anoyira camp on hot days, over the dissected plateau of bare thorn-scrub grazing land to the north with scattered Karob and olive trees, the steeper valley sides terraced for irrigation and flood control- a dry, brown and dusty landscape in summer. In late summer in the villages, there were heaps of stinking Karob pods in the squares. It was a major crop and Karob trees were a distinctive planted feature of the arid disforested landscape, like a widespread orchard of widely spaced trees. Sometimes for a change it might be olives.

In all the villages, coffee tables were ranked outside the cafes, each table with groups of bearded men with pantaloons, spending the whole day there while their wives and mothers did all the work in the fields and gardens. On the dusty roads, you would meet the women walking the laden donkeys and mules saddled with grain stooks. In other cases, it would be the patriarch riding the animal and again the women, usually in black working clothes with long skirts, always walking behind. The sheep were smelly old things with fat tails -you could not see any visible grazing for them -so perhaps they feed up in the rainy season November-March and live on tail-fat the rest. They were of the Merino type. Sometimes the herdsmen would raise a din when they discovered a snake and it would be hunted through the thorny bushes and killed.

The land use had been immensely destructive over the centuries from grazing by goats and sheep. A dispersed low thorn scrub had replaced the former oakwoods. Loss of cover meant that many areas had to be terraced to reduce erosion in the rainy season, especially in the vineyard country.

## **Mountain Country and the Rainy Season**

The rainy season from November to February resulted in some dramatic lightning displays when we were up near the mountains like Kissousa. Thunderstorms would start in late October in the Troodos Mountains to the North and gradually progress as sheet lightning storms, dancing down the narrow valley to a crescendo like an artillery barrage and then pass on. Locals would shelter under karob trees and from time to time some would be killed by lightning. The moisture brought forth the little pink and white Cyclamen in the gullies. (I am reminded of them when the few which I have in the rockery bloom here in Aug/Sept). By February and March, there would be carpets of wild flowers, especially lilac-coloured Anemones, all kinds of orchids, and flowers like Montbretia in the ditches (Ixias?). I would gather bunches to take back to my tent, leading to curious looks from my batman. Later as the dry weather set in, Helianthemums bloomed and the more aromatic thorny plants. However, there was little time for botanising while we worked to get the bases ready for the transfer of Middle East HQ to the Island and I did not possess a flora. One of my most pleasant trips was at cherry harvest time at Whitsun 1955, going north through Prodomos and Pedhoulas over the mountain pass to the North Coast. The mountain villages had a much more pleasant climate and it was a delight to be up in the cool of the mountains.

## E.O.K.A.

I returned to the Troodos mountains towards the end of my time in Cyprus when, backed by the Greek Orthodox Church, EOKA terrorists were brought over from Athens to support the movements to take Cyprus back into Greece. The terrorists began by trying to undermine the Police force by attacking Police Stations in remote hill villages. We patrolled the hill roads at night to give protection to the mainly Turkish policemen in the village Police Stations. They were best informed to report the terrorists, newcomers being easily identified in such small communities.

We were prohibited from searching the Monasteries where we suspected the terrorists and their arms were being hidden. So, we tried unsuccessfully to intercept EOKA terrorists transferring

arms on the roads at night. One of the dangers of this exercise was that we were liable to be fired on by the policemen as we approached the Station and we heard the safety catches come off on some occasions before we could give the pass-word. These night patrols were additional duties and there was an ever-present danger of falling asleep at the wheel on roads with terrifying drops on the low side, with the frightening thought of going off the carriageway down through scattered pine trees into dry rocky ravines. The stony limestone or granite landscape would be lit by vivid moonlight as we drove through it. The moon looks so large in the Mediterranean. It was the first time I had motored much through the black pine forests (*Pinus brutia*).

Earlier, when we had a few town riots in Limassol in December 1954, officers were issued with pistols. This was the first time that we, the National Servicemen, had ever had such arms. We had fun in the Mess practicing drawing pistols from holsters in Western cowboy fashion 'you lean to the left and draw to the right'. As NS Sappers we had no pistol training and did not have a clue how to fire them! Our training at pre-OCTU and OCTU Cove and Aldershot had only been with rifles and Bren guns.

In the town riots organised by the EOKA in Limassol, buses were over-turned and set fire to. There was some degree of threat to British Forces but I was never on duty when these riots happened. I believe the truck which took my luggage separately to Famagusta was fired on, so I departed at a suitable moment when the situation was worsening.



Limassol Riots 1955



## Water Sports and Desert Training

Being equipped as Sappers meant that we had all the equipment for water operations, so we had rubber boats with powerful Evans-Rude outboard engines. The album records one of these expeditions where the HQ staff of the Squadron were on exercise with all our water equipment but it could be mistaken for simple enjoyment of the Mediterranean beaches long before the post-war tourist boom. In addition, we had dinghies transferred from the Canal Zone. Before Middle East HQ staff arrived, we had sole use of them. These exercises built up camaraderie between men and officers peculiar to the Sappers. I think this was because the lower ranks all had skills which you could respect - they could drive earth-moving equipment, install electrical circuits, lay concrete and build a whole camp. Perhaps National Service officers and particularly Scots could handle them better than Sandhurst products? I thought so.



SHQ Training Endyimou

We held a District gala, regatta and competition at Kyrenia harbour just before I left in August 1955. It included swimming in full kit in the Harbour, a rather frightening experience for the men as uniforms became saturated and the weight of equipment was energy-sapping. Other exercises were in the Sinai Desert when we were flown back to Canal Zone and sent out with Army Division into the rock and sandy wastes where the Biblical migration from Egypt took place. Temperatures were in the high 90's during the day but fell to near freezing at night. The landscape was so bare of shelter that you could appreciate the exposed circumstances of fighting in the North African campaign in 1942-44. Bare wadis traversed between low rocky ridges. I was surprised by how much rock there was in the Desert. Sappers had an easier time because we could transport the small luxuries like folding beds while the infantry just lay on the sand and rock. I became aware of the risks from sunburn when my cheeks were scorched by reflected glare from the rocks. I had thought my peaked cap would protect me. Sand was everywhere, in your hair, your eyes and your food. We operated on rationed water and discovered how to shave on a cupful of water.

There were other training courses and I attended a fire course at Larnaca, living in a Hotel giving on to the beach -very pleasant indeed. I also enjoyed the opportunity to visit the Crusader harbour and St. Nicholas Cathedral ruins at Famagusta. The island is very rich in Crusader remains but also in Roman and Greek and Mycenaean monuments. The Turkish occupation had done them no favours, of course, and the minarets on the St. Sophia Cathedral in Nicosia were a reminder of this.

## On Leave in Greece and the Greek Islands

My leave period came in May 1955 and presented a dilemma as you had access to the Lebanon and the Holy Land or Egypt or Turkey or Greece but it could only be one of these. I chose Greece. One officer personally knew the Norwich Union Insurance agent in Athens and wrote a letter of introduction. I went straight to him after docking at Piraeus and he lined up a cruise round the Greek Islands in a first-class cabin of a small touring boat cum ferry. I made a short trip first to Nauplion, Sounion and Epidaurus and rounded off my mainland tour by going to Delphi with its classic assembly of ruins and madly doing a solo climb up to the SW rim'?' the crater of Mt. Parnassus (8062 ft.). The islands tour included Santorini perched around the drowned volcanic crater, Crete (Palace of Knossos and Heraklion Museum), Rhodes (Crusader Lodges and citadel of Lindos), Melos (ruins of old town), Delos (ruins and floor mosaics) and Mykonos (harbour) -seen in peace and quiet long before the tourist hordes and huge lidos and marinas and Hotels came along to spoil it all. For company on the cruise I had a group of American ladies and Ingeborg from Sweden - well, she was a stunner!

I finished off the tour in and around Athens.

This was one tremendous holiday when I drew on the classic education we received at Eastbank Academy while the Baedacker Guide made up the rest. I still have memories of sitting in the sun beside the Temple

of Apollo and the Tholos at Delphi reading the Guide, wild flowers scattered through the ruins and having the place almost to myself. Vivid memories too of the stunning alpine flower meadows as I crossed the high plateau to reach the foot of the main climb up to the crater rim of Mt. Parnassos. The final leg was a rough climb up through huge trachyte boulders thrown out by the old volcano. I trod on the snow on the crater's SW edge and viewed the whole Pindus range to the North and south to the Corinth Canal. I moved off before reaching the summit when some wispy clouds appeared, recognising that the only navigation aid I had was a small-scale map of the whole of Greece and no compass! On the descent, I found that I had used up all my supplies of apples and chocolate for extra energy, having set out about 0630 hrs. and was failing in energy from dehydration and shortage of calories i.e. food. Here I met real Greek hospitality as I encountered a goatherd family who welcomed me with leaven bread cooked in the rock oven, goat's cheese and cold spring water. I was able to communicate to them that I was from Scotland even although I spoke very little Greek. Mountain peoples are always the best as Bernard Fergusson said of the Campaign in Burma and it was true here.

In the last period in Athens, where I found my French useful as the second language in the city, I climbed up to the massive structure of the Parthenon but admired most the Erechtheion building with its terrace of maidens. Then across to Lycabettus Hill from which you get a different aspect of the city and see the resemblance to Edinburgh with its hills to view other hills from and the monuments crowning them. I went to one Museum with recovered pottery and sculpture but thought it not nearly as good as the Heraklion Museum in Crete.

In Athens, I bought a pale blue pendant necklace for C.... and then, regretfully, sailed back to Cyprus from Piraeus.

### **Squadron Camp Again Anoyira**

Midnight on 31 December 1954 found me duty officer in Squadron Camp at Anoyira near Limassol. I was sitting in my narrow room in the row of temporary corrugated iron buildings somewhat low in spirits when along came three Scots in the Camp to bring in Hogmanay. It was a nice touch which I really appreciated as military discipline ruled out the reverse action. These huts were broiling in summer, one of the reasons we hated being in Squadron camp. The other was Orderly officer duties when you were on duty all weekend, day and night, sleeping on a camp bed in the Mess, and present at changes of the guard. One weekend, one of my guards took his boots off in the rest hours between 2-hour duties. There was a swift shadow across the guard tent as he slept and his boots were gone to a Cypriot thief, resulting in summary punishment for the Sapper. Another regular ploy of the Cypriots was to steal the engine oil from the engine generating the electricity and lighting for the Camp. There would be a phuttering of the lights and then darkness. Their skill at evading the guards was to be marvelled at.

At one time our Adjutant Tom Leask insisted that we wore full officer dress when on duty as Orderly Officer. This meant that we had to loan the sword belt ('Sam Brown ') from one of the Regular officers - see photo. He even wanted us to wear swords but we National Servicemen tripped over them so often that he gave up the idea!



**SHQ Anoyira Camp**



**North View Anoyira Camp**

## Other Assignments

On 3 June 1955, while Major Turner was on leave from Field Park Squadron, Bill Hamilton was put in charge and I became 2i/c, dealing with the Imprest Account, pay for the Squadron and admin. I had enough machinery under me to build an aerodrome, dispersed across the Island. With great cunning my term of this duty finished before the threshold 6 weeks were up or they would have had to pay me what the Regular officer with this charge would have got. Another National Service officer? Tim Shillom did the Stores Captain post, got past the limit and was paid Regular rates for his tour of duty. We were paid slightly more in the last 6 months but for a long time it was £5/week or one quarter of what my regular Sergeant earned and he had family housing allowance of £21 a week as well for his rented accommodation.

The unpleasant duties fell to the National Service officers. One, for the next 3 weeks, entailed being despatched to inventory the accommodation stores at Kykko Camp beside Nicosia in July when it is sweltering hot over 90F in the dusty dry of the central Plain. I have a memory of thousands of folding chairs and items of camp equipment, counting in oppressive heat. There were quite a good bunch of NS subalterns here on CRE or CE staff-civil engineers and architects. One compensation was the better quality of the floor-shows in the night-clubs of Nicosia, a distinct improvement on the sleazy ones in Limassol. The evenings were hot and humid, slightly less sweltering than the furnace of daytime. Sitting at a table in the nightclub waiting for the floor show, a cocktail to hand (which you made to last a long time because of the heavy surcharge of such establishments), we imagined we were Somerset Maugham or Noel Coward or Graham Greene on the Riviera, hearing the crotchety sound of crickets in the trees in the background - a life style out of kilter with our National Service salary!

My last assignment was in Famagusta, surveying for a jetty site for Z craft and staying in 17 Coy RASC Mess, an informal place where you could go around in shorts and bare feet.

One enduring memory of Cyprus was the night sky, the huge full moon showing the detail of the mountains and craters on it and the glittering star-filled sky with frequent shooting stars, awesome and beautiful, a brilliant lesson in astrology.

## Sailing Home

In August 1955, I sailed from Famagusta on board the troopship 'Cheshire', joining it from a lighter. We had quite a stormy passage and I was responsible for clearing the bow section when boat drill was called. This was a severe test of my seasick tendency as the bow dips and rolls violently and I remember once coming very close to being sick. The Mediterranean was far from calm on that voyage. We called at Valetta and caught a glimpse of the Tunisian and Algerian coasts and Cadiz but otherwise saw nothing. To liven things up going up the Bay of Cadiz, we shot with rifles and Bren guns at balloons trailed over the stern.

We did not know in advance the port of arrival and came into Waterloo Dock, Liverpool on 19 September 1955. I had quite a job getting a message through to C.... to meet in London but firstly we had to go via London to the discharge depot at Barton Stacey, Aldershot and collect civvy suit. I do remember on 20 September walking over the pedestrian crossing at the corner of Sloane Square on my way to meet C.... at Wyndham House where she worked as nannie for the S.... family in the extensive luxury top flat. In the next few days, we went to the Tower of London, the National Gallery and to Kew Gardens, St. James' Park, and Hyde Park. I then travelled north and started work with the Forestry Commission as probationer Forest District Officer on 5 October 1955 to start saving for our marriage in September 1957.

In the garden at 'Green Gables', Drummond Road, Inverness in 1959, C.... and I burned most of the scores of letters I wrote from Cyprus to reduce the bulk before our removal from let flat to a cramped converted farm steading at Evanton on posting to the Dingwall Office of the Forestry Commission. They filled a whole small suitcase and so a romantic archive of life as a subaltern in 42 Field Squadron R.E. and descriptions of Cyprus and Greece and the Greek islands was lost forever.! That's one foolish act I would like to retrieve and it would have made this a more interesting account.

D.B. Paterson ex Lt R.E. 436207

October 2004.  
Corstorphine.

## Officers and Senior NCOs

### 42 Field Squadron R.E.

Major Bertie Baxter, OC

7 Tp Capt. Alan Steel

S.S.M. Hammond

Sgt Smith and Sgt Murray 7 Tp

Sgt Williams CC

### ANOYIRA September 1954

Capt. Tom Leask, 2i/c

8 Tp 2nd Lieut. Mike Warren

S.Q.M.S. Harrington

Sgt Rodbard and Sgt Love 8 Tp

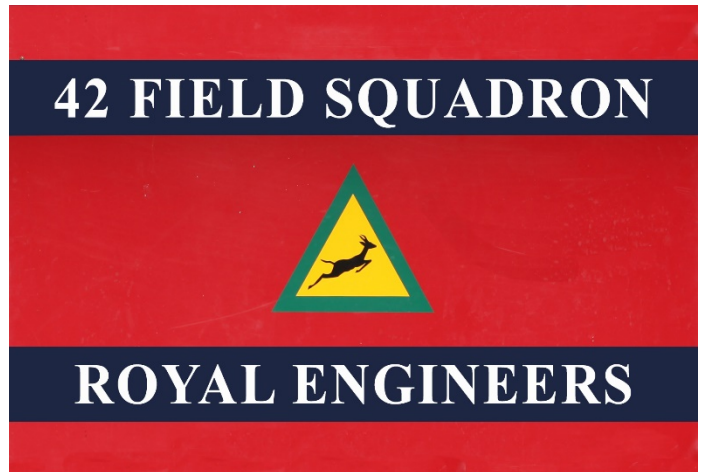
Sgt Miles MT

Capt. David Herbert, Adj.

Sqn HQ 2nd Lieut. D.B. Paterson



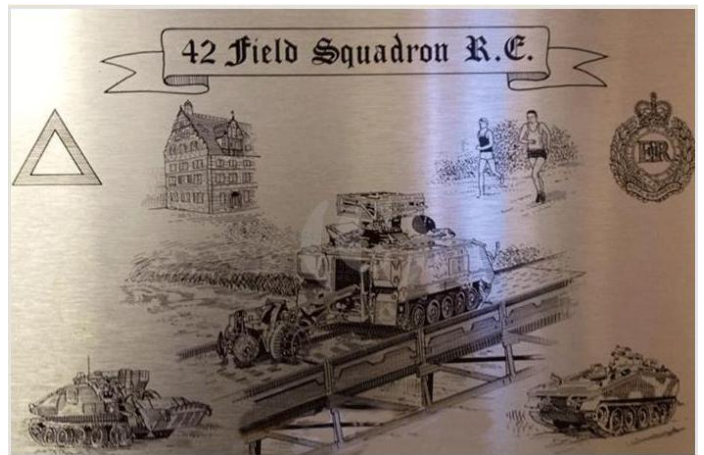
Miscellaneous photos submitted by Arnd Wobbeking



42 Formation



42 Formation 1977 N. Ireland



Leaving Hameln March Past

Leaving Hameln March Past



Leaving Hameln Salute



Lowering the Royal Engineers Flag

