

***BASED ON EXTRACTS FROM THE REGIMENTAL WAR CHRONICLE OF THE
OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY VOL2 1940/1942***

FROM JUNE TO 31st DECEMBER, 1940

Hereford became the rendezvous of the Battalion and here joined those who had escaped from Europe, and those who for a variety of reasons had become detached. On the 10th June the details moved from Hereford to Bryngwyn House, a few miles outside the town, their strength on that date being three officers and eighty-two soldiers. This was a large country house which, in peace time, had been a country club. It became the headquarters of the 145th Infantry Brigade details consisting of the 2nd Glosters, 1st Bucks and the Battalion, all under the command of a major in the Worcestershire Regiment.

As the Battalion had suffered so severely the 1st Bucks very generously helped in every way possible, even to feeding the officers and soldiers. This very generosity was unfortunate, as it meant that the Battalion details were not forced to look after themselves, nor were any real plans made to do so. Thus, when the day drew near on which a move had to be made, they were neither self-supporting nor were they in a position to receive the 650 reinforcements which eventually arrived.

On the 21st June Major Jarvis arrived from the I.T.C., Cowley Barracks, to command. By that time orders to move to Ross-on-Wye had been received. Similarly, the 2nd Glosters were to go to the same town, while the 1st Bucks remained at Bryngwyn House. These moves were essential to allow the battalions to receive their reinforcements. The 2nd Glosters were fortunate in being allotted barracks and tented accommodation, while the Battalion was ordered to occupy empty houses.

The position on the 21st June was pretty grim. The details were to move on the 22nd June and to receive over 360 reinforcements on the 24th and over 300 on the 25th. The assets were: one field officer, four officers, one orderly-room Q.M.S., 4 one R.Q.M.S., a few Serjeants of technical ability, and about 100 rank and file, amongst whom was one cook.

The deficiencies were serious, and the most important were: second-in-command, adjutant, quartermaster, Regimental Serjeant-Major, five Company Serjeant-Majors, five Colour-Serjeants, rifle company Serjeants, and cooks.

During the afternoon of the 21st June an interview took place with the A.Q.M.G. of the 48th Division and the D.A.A.G. to ask for help in obtaining cooks, at least. The unsatisfactory reply given was that the reinforcements would have to cook for themselves after they had arrived. This was not to be thought of, as they were travelling from Bodmin and Leeds. Agreement, however, was reached that any that the 43rd could spare might be accepted. Fortunately, the 43rd were encamped at the race-course at Hereford, and Lieutenant-Colonel Richards was not only sympathetic but practical. He promised to post R.S.M. Tremlett as quartermaster, Serjeant Roby as Regimental Serjeant-Major, Corporal Bryant as a Colour-Serjeant, Corporal Reed as Cook Serjeant, and to provide two cooks. He kept his word and this valuable team of Regular soldiers joined on the 24th. The 1st Bucks maintained the assistance they had already rendered by posting two cooks.

During the evening a reconnaissance was made of our future accommodation in Ross-on-Wye: this consisted of some widely scattered empty houses and the yard of an inn, which contained a detached dining-room. In this yard some cooking ranges were promised, and underneath the dining-hall it was planned to store the rations. There was nothing for it but for the officers to feed at various licensed premises, as no mess equipment existed.

This second move of the Battalion took place on the 22nd June and headquarters were established in Vaga House, which stood on a very steep hill leading down to the river. On the 24th June a draft of five officers and 360 soldiers of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry arrived from Bodmin.

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Everyone was delighted to see reinforcements of light infantrymen, but depressed to observe that the only soldiers above the rank of private were two Serjeants. An official complaint only brought the reply that N.C.Os. did not exist. Our sketchy cooking arrangements stood the strain, and this draft was fed in relays in the inn yard. Simultaneously, six other officers joined from the 50th Battalion at Fleet.

The next afternoon six officers and 300 soldiers arrived from the Infantry Base Details at Leeds. These had been to France, but, through no fault of their own, had seen no fighting. These too were duly fed, but had to be lodged a mile from our only cookhouse. Their area soon became known as "Siberia."

On the 25th June reorganization took place and efforts were made to find the specialists that would soon be so badly wanted. At this time nearly every soldier had a rifle, but the Battalion had no mortars, anti-tank rifles or vehicles of any kind. The most serious deficiency was any form of light automatic.

The advanced party went to Winchcombe Camp on the 28th June, and two days later we had our first visit from our brigadier. As orders were received on the 29th June that the Battalion was to move to Bradford-on-Avon and not to Winchcombe Camp, Captain Montgomery was ordered to go there across country and plan the reception of the Battalion. The day before we moved the following were received and issued:

Sixteen Bren guns (light automatic).

Eight Boys anti-tank rifles, .5-inch.

One Thompson sub-machine-carbine, .45-inch.

The Battalion was to move by train to Bradford-on-Avon on the 1st July, the first train leaving Ross at 0735 hrs. and the second at 1035 hrs. In spite of several difficulties, the troops entrained in a manner that would not have disgraced a battalion of six months' standing, let alone one of six days'. As the commanding officer fortunately had his own private car with him he was able to see the first train away and, while it trundled along, go round the accommodation at Bradford. When the first train arrived at this station all was ready to guide the companies to their areas, and indeed they were just about to march out of the station yard, when the camp commandant of the 48th Division rushed up with orders to stand fast for thirty minutes, as there was a change of plan. The stationmaster was prevailed upon, much against his will, to park the train first on the up and then on the down line, to let the normal trains pass.

After half an hour a staff officer duly arrived with orders for the Battalion to occupy a large house three miles west of Frome. As fortunately the train was pointing in the right direction, the companies were able to entrain again for Frome. Captain Montgomery was ordered to collect his advanced party again and move to Frome in the little transport the Battalion now possessed, while the second train was successfully diverted en route. The commanding officer managed to reach Marston House before the first train load, order the advanced parties of two other battalions off the premises, and make a rough accommodation plan. It had been a lovely house in its prime, which was not 1940, and stood in a fine park containing some exceptionally large trees. As it was not, of course, possible to accommodate the Battalion in the house, two companies lived in tents near by and each company fed in the open under a separate tree.

By this time the officers had obtained possession of the pre-war camp kit of the Battalion, and a very comfortable little mess was set up in the empty rectory in the park. This was the first time that the officers had been able to sit down together, indeed even to know what each other looked like.

On the 4th July a system was introduced by which one company was detailed as duty company each day, its role being to remain within the Battalion area and to deal with enemy landings by parachutists. One platoon of the duty company was at instant notice and slept and ate fully equipped. A vehicle or vehicles were nominated for its conveyance, and parked outside the buildings occupied by this platoon. This precautionary measure was maintained throughout the war.

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On the 4th July orders were received to move by train to camp at Dartmoor, above Okehampton, on the 6th July. This move passed off without any difficulty and in the evening the Battalion found itself under canvas some 1,100 feet above sea-level.

The evening of our arrival in camp was windy but fine. During the night it began to rain and it continued night and day. Tents became waterlogged and a stream ran through the officers' dining tent. The marquees sagged on their poles and the work of the orderly room became a nightmare. Signals were pulp before they could be delivered. Valiant attempts were made at training, but not much value was obtained in manoeuvring about the edge of Dartmoor in the teeth of a south-westerly gale, which blew for seven consecutive days and nights. As at that time the danger of enemy parachutists was uppermost in the higher commanders' minds, the Battalion was ordered to maintain a standing patrol by day and an officer's patrol by night round the perimeter of the camp. Morale declined and two officers made a practice of eating a second meal in their tents after dining in mess.

The plight of the Battalion was forcibly represented to the brigadier, but although he was sympathetic he could not help much. It was then that the famous duckboard controversy arose. The arguments for and against allowing the Battalion duck-boards were propounded by various degrees of staff officers, and the plea that the Battalion should be issued with them on the plain grounds that it wanted them was denounced as a particularly vicious form of military heresy.

Staff officers arrived and said in effect: "Let there be duckboards." Storekeepers of R.E. dumps where this particular article is bred said: "No. It has not the backing of such-and-such." And so the battle raged backwards and forwards. In the end they were promised for Monday, the 15th July, but as the Battalion moved on the 14th we never saw them.

It was during our stay at this Devonshire "Venice" that the commanding officer received a letter from the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Winston Churchill, pointing out the seriousness of the position and the commanding officer's personal responsibility as a battalion commander. All commanding officers received this letter and only the fact of its degree of security prevents its reproduction here. The commanding officer met Lieutenant-General Brooke, G.O.C.-in-C, Southern Command, for the first time, who also spoke of the country's profound difficulties. On the 12th July orders were received to move by motor-bus to Tiverton on the 14th.

An aeroplane having been put at the commanding officer's disposal on the 13th July, he made a reconnaissance of the Tiverton area as best he could, considering the fact that he was being flown backwards. As the machine provided was a pre-war army co-operation plane with only one seat besides the pilot's, the commanding officer had to masquerade as an air gunner and see what he could at the same time. The spirits of the Battalion took a turn for the better as they packed in the pouring rain against the move in the morning.

The Battalion moved out thirty-two officers and 827 soldiers strong, excluding two officers and four soldiers attached. The Battalion occupied Tiverton as follows:

Headquarters.—Colliepriest Cottage.

A Company.—Wesleyan Chapel.

B Company.—Drill Hall and two other halls.

C Company.—St. George's School.

D Company.—Old Brewery.

H.Q. Company.—Colliepriest House.

The Battalion quickly settled down and received many kindnesses from the inhabitants. The family firm of Sir John Heathcote-Amory, Bt, was most helpful and lent its dyeing vats for use as baths. They supplied unlimited hot water and about a dozen men bathed at a time in water about three feet deep. The sum of 6d. per soldier per bath was allowed as a charge against company imprest accounts.

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The Battalion had by this time supplied brigade headquarters with two liaison officers. Their role was to receive orders from the brigade commander and to repeat them at Battalion headquarters. Soldiers had also been provided to help in the formation of the brigade and divisional defence platoons. Their role was the close defence of headquarters. During our stay at Tiverton warlike stores began to arrive in earnest and by the 19th July two carriers and one 3-inch and four 2-inch mortars had been received.

As the fear of invasion of England was still very real, training began on all levels at once. In other words, one day companies would be doing platoon training and the next exercising as a battalion. What was, of course, really required was intensive individual and specialist training, but that had to come later during the winter months. The sum total of all this mixed work was that incredible mistakes were made on bigger exercises and several wrong lessons had to be relearnt later. This was unsettling but in the main passed unnoticed except by Battalion headquarters. It was here that the weekly route marches were introduced, which were continued, except when on beach defence, for some two years.

The operational role of the Battalion at this time was the same as most troops in England: to pounce upon the enemy at the very earliest moment should he dare to set foot in the country. In order that this plan might be more efficiently carried out, all battalions in the 48th Division were mobile and had a platoon of troop-carrying lorries stationed with them. In our case at this time the vehicles consisted of civilian single-deck buses, which in more peaceful times had carried the sightseers round the beauty spots of England.

The embussing and debussing of the Battalion from these unsuitable vehicles could not be done at the speed that one would have wished. Their design was unsuitable for the narrow, high-banked lanes and roads of Devonshire, but by careful planning and reconnaissance not one of these grey juggernauts was ever allowed to get itself into such a position that it could neither turn round nor reverse.

In these days each battalion was responsible for its own path-finding.*(*On the threat of invasion all signposts and place-names of towns, village* and railway stations were either removed or obliterated in order to hinder parachute troops in plotting their position on landing.) This was accomplished by having in the advanced guard a truck load of soldiers who were especially chosen for the work and were set down by the officers guiding the Battalion at fork and cross-roads. It was the duty of the last vehicle in the column to take up these guides. There was no dearth of applicants for this work, as no soldier of the battalion in my experience ever stood within fifty yards of any building in Cornwall without being supplied with a tray of tea and food. In order to provide early warning of possible contact with the enemy and to prevent the Battalion being attacked while embussed, a motor cycle platoon was formed. The machines were all of different makes and included one twin engine bicycle which was so temperamental that no one knew when it was going to work on its more ambitious cylinder.

One day the ire of the divisional commander was roused by observing this platoon led by its officer, who carried a map in his mouth. The platoon covered only a short distance of road and was obviously riding in sight of one another. The reason for this unmilitary behaviour was quite simple. The Battalion was in fresh country and possessed only two copies of the relevant map, one being between Lieutenant Evelyn's teeth and the other in the possession of the commanding officer. This platoon did excellent work during its existence, and when maps and map-cases were easier became a highly skilled body of men.

Another specialist platoon was that formed for tank hunting. Its role was to stalk and destroy tanks in their laagers at night. As "sticky" grenades had not yet been invented, this destruction was to be carried out by Molotov cocktails. These consisted of beer bottles with screw tops containing an inflammable liquid of a high coefficient of viscosity. If the tank was stationary with its engine stopped, the breaking of the bottle was not deemed sufficient to set it alight, and other means had to be found for so doing. If the tank had its engine running, it was soon on fire by the inflammable liquid coming in contact with some hot part of the machinery, or finding an electric short.

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The carriage of these bottles was solved by using the wire containers that milkmen use in their business. In order to convince the Battalion of the effectiveness of this new weapon Lieutenant Ely was instructed to give a demonstration. For this purpose he chose the town recreation ground and broke the bottles against the brick wall of the conveniences. The liquid was ignited and the result so effective that the portion of the building labelled "Ladies" was nearly destroyed.

The first Battalion exercise took place on the 27th August on Dunkery Beacon, Exmoor. It was part demonstration and part exercise in the advance on a broad front across difficult country. Its object was to teach co-operation of the various components of the Battalion and to gain experience in manoeuvring as a battalion. Time was always a serious consideration, as the Battalion was not allowed away from its area of Tiverton during the hours of darkness, and suitable areas did not exist nearer than Exmoor. While the companies were moving into position, two packs of hounds passed by, which were sights for sore eyes.

The advance was made across some of the deepest and toughest heather grown in the British Isles, but it is a long advance that has no objective and in the end all went well. But not before Captain Tufnell-Barrett, acting on the principle that a good soldier never looks behind him, had taken his company considerably farther than was required.

On the 12th August the divisional commander conducted an exercise which ended in the Bickington area, on the main Chudleigh—Ashburton road. It was not very instructive for the soldiers, as they were not allowed to debus for fear that they should damage the crops. It also turned out to be the swan-song of our brigade commander. His successor was Brigadier The Viscount Bridgeman, whose stay was all too short.

An unexpected draft at this time was received from the Royal Warwickshire Regiment consisting of four lance-corporals and seventy-one privates. They had to receive further training and formed the bulk of the reinforcement Company. Concurrently with all this, the I.T.C. at Oxford were helping all battalions considerably by running courses, and all and sundry were being dispatched on any course offered by the brigade staff. So much so that the Battalion was likened to a greedy trout that would suck at any fly that came its way.

At the beginning of September the parachute scare became very real, and some inexperienced and ignorant staff officer ordered the permanent occupation of certain points of high ground which he had unintelligently taken off a small-scale map. Fortunately this piece of crass stupidity was discovered and cancelled, but not before the Battalion had, with great difficulty, occupied its allotted points, one over seventeen miles from Battalion headquarters. Having survived this last irritation, orders were again received to move.

Perhaps this is a suitable time to explain our erratic wanderings. Although the 48th Division had reformed in the Hereford area, its allotted position was in Devonshire. All these moves were therefore to manoeuvre the brigades into their places, and finally to occupy the best winter quarters under the circumstances, when the threat of invasion in the autumn of 1940 was lessened.

Our next station was by no means as compact as Tiverton, and the final accommodation occupied was:

Battalion Headquarters and H.Q. Company. — Devon House of Mercy, Bovey Tracey.

B Company.—Bovey Tracey.

A and C Companies.—Pitt House.

D and R Companies.—Chudleigh.

This move was temporarily postponed, as the entire army was put on the alert and everyone slept fully equipped. This, like other alarms, subsided and the Battalion occupied its new quarters on the 9th September.

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Two days later the platoon at immediate notice turned out to deal with a reported landing by parachutists near Hennock, and after a prolonged search discovered that an escaped barrage balloon was the cause of the excitement.

Owing to the built-up nature of the Tiverton area and other geographical difficulties, the Battalion had as its rendezvous the small park where our troop-carrying buses were kept. Here in the Bovey Tracey area a more ambitious scheme was possible and adopted, with Battalion headquarters in a circular sandbagged post built by the Home Guard and called by us "Kaffir Kraal." Here the Battalion was mobilized, not too concentrated, and able to move in its buses in any direction. Wherever the Battalion went it had a concentration area well away from its accommodation, which, it was suspected, the Germans had reconnoitred from the air, and would be the first target for their bombers. The location of the anti-parachute observation post was changed from the racecourse grandstand at Haldon to a folly called Laurence Tower at Haldon Belvedere, where it should have been originally.

At the beginning of October a draft of 120 soldiers was received from the I.T.C., which brought our strength up to thirty-seven officers and 983 soldiers, excluding the usual attached men. The last draft was posted to R Company.

Our thirty-two-seater buses were now replaced by three-ton lorries of 19 Troop Carrying Company, R.A.S.C. The former, despite individual mechanical idiosyncrasies, had served us well and a certain nostalgia was evident when they went.

On the 20th October the Battalion moved to Rawlinson Barracks, Denbury Camp, near Newton Abbot, where it stayed for the winter. This camp had been erected in the summer of 1939 for the accommodation of the militia, whose first batch was called up on the 16th July. It was a splendid camp and the best quarters the Battalion saw during the whole war. It had central heating in the soldiers' barrack rooms and a comfortable cinema. The only objection from the Battalion's point of view was that it was larger than was required, with the inevitable result that we were "at home" to others in order to fill the huts. We had one company of the 1st/9th Manchesters, who were the divisional machine-gun (Vickers) battalion, brigade anti-tank company, an emergency cookery school, and off and on, but always at the most inconvenient times, a physical training course, as we had a gymnasium.

The statement that "the Battalion moved" might lead the reader to believe that this was a straightforward change of lodging. Far from it, as one rifle company and several skeleton portions of the Battalion were engaged in a "battle" with the Home Guard in and around the old stannary town of Chagford. When the commanding officer found that he was on the directing staff of the exercises he approached the brigade commander for permission to be replaced in order that he might superintend the move. He was politely informed by the brigade commander that all moves went much better if the commanding officer was absent and the quartermaster left in charge. And so it proved. For the sake of any who read this story later, it must be stated that as the Home Guard was composed of civilian volunteers all exercises in which they took part occurred on Sundays, usually before luncheon. It was reckoned a black day by them if their military activities were not concluded in time for them to slake their thirst.

With the arrival of the Battalion at Denbury Camp a prominent milestone in people's minds had been reached. Here for a time was a small amount of permanency, here could regimental customs and methods of procedure be inculcated, and here as far as the soldier was concerned was a comfortable bed and invariably an excellent meal on the return from the longest and most gruelling exercise.

Naturally, our first thought was the reconnaissance of our allotted concentration area, to which we so often returned. The site at first glance on the map looked far from satisfactory, but with a certain amount of ingenuity quite a good plan was evolved. Battalion headquarters was established at licensed premises in the shape of "The Jolly Sailor" at Bickington on the main road between Chudleigh and Ashburton, with companies in the valley of the River Lemon.

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Our first practice concentration was not a great success, for a number of reasons. However, the night concentration on the 26th October at 0400 hrs. went off very well. The Battalion was allowed to return to camp directly the brigade commander had visited Battalion headquarters and assured himself that our protection had been sent out and was in occupation of its allotted positions. This entailed scrambling up some quite steep and slippery hills.

A great test of stamina and endurance was devised by the brigade commander, consisting of a cross-country run in fighting order across some of the hardest going on Dartmoor. The first spasm was a very steep climb through felled trees and a wood, then came a long, uphill run across the moor past Coldeast Cross to the finish at Haytor Rock Basin. The height above sea-level at the start was 500 feet and in half a mile the course had climbed another 500 feet; in another one and a half miles at Coldeast Cross the height was 1,200 feet. Rippon Tor, which rises to 1,564 feet, lay right across the straightest line and to skirt it might save a climb, but it increased the total distance run. A little respite was gained during the descent of Rippon Tor and before the final climb to 1,491 feet was begun. The course was four miles as the crow flies, but this statement has no meaning compared with the severity of the going.

One company from each battalion ran each day and on the 7th November all the A companies competed against each other in a mass start. The Battalion on this occasion won all the prizes, i.e., the first sixty past the post, the first section and the individual winner. His time was 67 min. 15 sec.

As the Battalion was now doing weekly route marches of over twenty miles everyone was fit (or else was medically boarded) and this cross-country run was not all the strain it might have been.

On the 26th November our brigade commander came to say good-bye on assuming the appointment of director-general of the Home Guard. He was followed by Brigadier G. C. Thorne, who had been commanding his battalion in an independent foot-guards brigade outside London. Although we now received another draft from the I.T.C., this time of twenty-five, the Battalion was weaker by fifty than it had been at Bovey Tracey.

As there were no ranges nearby the Battalion had to use those at Willsworthy, on the west side of Dartmoor. These ranges were very well laid out for field firing, but of course very distant. A classification range in the neighbourhood of Coldeast Cross was in process of construction, but was not ready for use until the autumn of 1941.

Christmas Eve saw the Battalion reel off a nineteen-mile route march in order to earn the right to sit down to Christmas luncheon. As far as food and accommodation were concerned it was the best Christmas the Battalion was ever to enjoy.

We wound up the old year with a twenty-six-mile route march through Totnes, Ashburton, Bickington and Chereombe Bridge. Throughout all these marches our anti-aircraft platoon protected the column by picketing the route with its four sections of one Bren gun each. As the tail of the column passed the last antiaircraft section, the latter bounded forward and took up a suitable position ahead.

FROM 1st JANUARY TO 30th JUNE 1941

On the 13th January occurred an incident which caused the divisional commander to direct that an appropriate entry should be made on the conduct sheet of C.S.M. Roby in accordance with paragraph 1718 (B) of the King's Regulations, 1940. The following extract from the war diary describes the occasion:

"No. 5378576 C.S.M. C. Roby, D.C.M., was instructing in the throwing of live grenades on Willsworthy ranges on Monday, the 13th January, 1941, when a soldier, who had withdrawn the safety pin from a grenade, failed to hold the lever down with his fingers, with the result that it flew away, thus actuating the firing mechanism. The soldier was in the throwing position when this occurred and, apparently losing his nerve, he dropped the grenade on the floor of the throwing pit, in which he and C.S.M. Roby were standing. About four seconds had then elapsed from the time the lever had sprung clear, but C.S.M. Roby, with great presence of mind, kicked the grenade round the corner of the wall between the bays, at the same time pulling the soldier with him on the ground. The grenade immediately exploded and C.S.M. Roby's presence of mind undoubtedly prevented a serious, if not fatal, accident."

Our divisional artillery now staged a demonstration on the range above Okehampton, in which they were assisted by the 43rd and a platoon of the 1st/9th Manchester Regiment, which was the divisional machine-gun battalion. One party was placed in "the forefront of the battle" and actually experienced the barrage going over its head, the 43rd passing through to give the field firing demonstration and advancing behind the barrage. The demonstration started with a smoke screen, followed by an artillery barrage, thickened by machine-gun fire from the right flank, and then came the advancing infantry. This was the first time that the majority of the spectators from the Battalion had heard a field gun fired and seen the shell burst, and was most valuable in giving experience. As the war progressed it was made increasingly obvious that the fear of "the unknown" could rise to the most enormous proportions. When "the unknown" became "the known" fear vanished.

Fortunately, respect remained and the Battalion never had a grenade or mortar accident during these years, nor did anyone take short cuts across minefields.

Our strength was 36 officers and 888 soldiers, including eight officers and soldiers attached.

FROM APRIL TO MAY, 1941 (first tour on the beaches)

The beaches of Devonshire and Cornwall were guarded by beach battalions in the usual brigade and divisional organization except that the divisions were classified as "county" ones. In this particular instance the county division was the "Devon and Cornwall."

As these battalions had been tied to their duty of patrolling the beaches and watching likely enemy landing places, any field training had been found practically impossible. Now, some of these battalions consisted of the best material conscription had provided, and it was not the intention that such man power should spend their whole service in a defensive role. It was therefore decided that battalions of this county division should exchange duties with battalions of the 48th Division, and for this purpose the brigades of these two divisions were affiliated.

Our affiliated beach brigade was composed of the Buffs, and the period of exchange was one month. Not only did battalions exchange duties but they also temporarily exchanged brigade commanders, with unfortunate results during our second tour of duty on the beaches. The exchanges were staggered in order that battalions of the 48th Division should be left to help battalions of the Devon and Cornwall Division with their field training. As beach battalions were not equipped to the same scale as field force battalions, we had to leave behind certain specialist platoons and equipment for their use. We left all our transport at Denbury, except the commanding officer's car, and used the 10th Buffs' transport on the beaches.

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The sector of the beach which the Battalion took over extended from Stoke Fleming to Start Point, and we were disposed as follows, reading from north to south:

B Company: Manor House, Strete Gate.

C Company: Slapton village and the Sands.

D Company: Torcross and Stokeley Manor.

A Company: Sunnydale, Beesands and Hallsands.

Battalion headquarters and H.Q. Company were at Fallapit House, near East Allington.

The country inland from the beaches is typical of a large section of the county and consists of deep combs wandering as geology had dictated. The roads were narrow, bounded by high, broad banks, and meandered rather aimlessly through this area. It was some time before one could learn the geography without constant reference to the map.

The move of the Battalion to its sector of the coast went off without a hitch and long before dark on the 18th April the Battalion was installed in its new role, with the rather disquieting knowledge that if there was a real alarm the battalions were to change back to their own tasks.

Our beach sector was equipped with both Vickers machine guns and two 6-inch mortars. The former were very old and there were some Maxims among the Vickers. Against our move to the coast some of our soldiers had been shown how to fire these weapons, but they were so antique that none of them could be relied on to fire more than a few rounds without jamming for one cause or another. The two mortars were a legacy from the First German War and looked as if they were on loan from the Rotunda at Woolwich. Each mortar had about twenty-five bombs and no more were available, as manufacture had ceased in 1918. There was another difficulty in their service: they exploded if dropped, as the "arming" device of the modern bomb had not been invented when these were made.

Permission was obtained to fire two rounds from each, and it was with some relief that the mortars were observed to be quite sound after firing. The bombs were very much alive and the noise of their burst was heard at Battalion headquarters, six miles distant.*(These mortars had an evil reputation in the 52nd in 1918 for their inaccuracy.)

The beaches themselves were also protected with belts of wire and minefields. It is to the credit of all ranks that the lesson of respect for minefields inculcated then never left them. There were never any casualties from minefields then or later in the Battalion's story. One summer afternoon, when about eighty mines in a field at Strete Gate blew up simultaneously, the sentry was knocked over, but no harm was done. The reason for this occurrence was never discovered.

Our nights were far from peaceful, as the German bombers passed regularly over Fallapit House on their way to Plymouth, which was enduring heavy attacks. On one of these occasions one of the German machines was successfully attacked by one of our pursuit aeroplanes. In order to facilitate its escape it dumped its bombs and two fell about three-quarters of a mile from Battalion headquarters and a land-mine came down in a field three miles away. We suffered no damage except that a sentry was pushed over by the blast and the guard commander fell off his chair. They say the devil looks after his own. Anyway, several members of the Battalion had a fortunate escape when a 3-inch mortar bomb struck the branch of a tree in a high wind on its way up. It went off with a prodigious noise, but claimed no victims.

As a considerable amount of thought and work was being put into the rebuilding of our defences it seemed a natural corollary that the best method of gauging our success in this direction was to see what the defences looked like from the sea. This was the commanding officer's idea, and he managed to persuade the Royal Navy to supply the necessary craft. The voyage of inspection was made in a motor-launch and very interesting it was too. Certain open field defences were very well concealed, but some of the positions in buildings looked suspicious.

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As the Battalion was to erect miles of steel scaffolding on the beaches of Devonshire and Lincolnshire, a description of this anti-invasion obstacle will not be amiss to those who never saw it. It consisted of steel tubes bolted together in the same way as scaffolding in big cities and was erected along the high-tide mark, with the intention of causing delay to landing parties. It was planned as an obstacle to vehicles, whether armoured or not, but the writer is not prepared to say whether they would in fact have stopped a heavy tracked vehicle. As it was not easy to calculate exactly where high tide reached, this scaffolding often was built a little too near the sea and affected the set of the beach. Consequently, it would sometimes be found completely buried, at other times only resting on the beach. It collected seaweed, but did not roll itself into a mat like barbed wire. On the 18th May we left the beaches and returned to Denbury camp.

As there were no classification ranges in the neighbourhood we moved to Amesbury Abbey for four days on the 27th by road. Battalion headquarters lived in the Abbey and the remainder in huts under the trees in the grounds. We shot on the Bulford ranges, but owing to the bad weather and small scale of ammunition allowed the visit was not a great success and the results of the shooting disappointing. We returned to Denbury on the 1st June.

The 12th and 13th June saw the Battalion taking part in another brigade exercise, which was yet another counter-attack on the Slapton beaches.

Battalion exercise No. 2, which was only partially completed on the 3rd March owing to the weather, was carried out in its entirety on the anniversary of Waterloo. The weather was hot and the Battalion marched forty-two miles in thirty-two hours. Now began a series of company, platoon and section marches. Unfortunately, the conduct of these caused more friction with the brigade commander than was necessary, with the result that junior commanders used all their ingenuity in keeping out of his way, to the prejudice of their proper military training. A great deal of clever organization, able planning and energetic execution took place, but it was offset by the knowledge that it would not receive anything but adverse criticism.

At this time the commanding officer was reconnoitring the land of Lyonesse in the neighbourhood of the aerodromes of St. Merryn and St. Eval so that they might be successfully counter-attacked, if captured by the Germans. It was a far cry from Newton Abbot to Newquay, and it was lucky that the real eventuality never took place.

48th Division exercise No. 7 took place on Woodbury Common on the 26th and 27th June, with the Battalion disposed in the area of the ancient British camp. It was mainly a test of concealment from aircraft, which entailed no movement of any kind during daylight. Some of the younger soldiers of the Battalion found that it was rather a strain to last from breakfast, eaten in the dark, to sunset with only a haversack ration for hours of daylight. When darkness fell, the way the evening meal disappeared would have enheartened the cooks. Truth to tell, many thought that this was starvation.

FROM 1ST JULY TO 31st DECEMBER, 1941

On the 1st and 2nd July the Battalion carried out an exercise in the defence of a river line. The area chosen was not at all simple, as the River Dart ran through a deep valley.

In this exercise the Battalion learnt a lesson that was not forgotten: that a river line must be watched in its entire length by day and closely patrolled by night.

The 18th July saw the Battalion make its second visit to the Devonshire beaches to relieve a battalion for training in the field. Our new area was the coastline excluding the mouth of the River Exe to the mouth of the River Teign inclusive. There were no complaints from the soldiers about their new responsibility. It was close enough to visit women friends in Newton Abbot. For the unattached there were many opportunities in the small watering places dotted along the brown coastline. The Battalion was disposed as follows, reading from north-east to south-west:

B Company: Dawlish Warren.

C Company: Dawlish.

A Company: Teignmouth and Shaldon.

D Company: Watcombe House.

Headquarters and H.Q. Company: Bishopsteignton.

D Company at Watcombe House on the north-east outskirts of Torquay had no true operational role and were used for the large working parties that were chiefly required for the erection of tubular scaffolding.

All too soon our halcyon month by the sea ended, and we marched to accommodation in Newton Abbot on the 18th August. The buildings in which the 2nd Glosters had existed throughout the winter of 1940-41 were not at all what the Battalion considered acceptable. However, after several changes a tolerable standard was achieved.

On the 25th and 26th August the Battalion was involved in a brigade scheme entitled "Semi-Panzer," which took place round the Warren Inn on Dartmoor.

The next spasm was a corps scheme that lasted from the 8th to the 11th September and was laid in the familiar territory of the sunset land of Lyonesse. The bare essentials of the exercise were that the Germans had landed in Cornwall and were advancing north-east. The "enemy" were composed of another division and all the Home Guard. As this meant that the 48th Division was outnumbered by more than two to one, our divisional commander advanced in arrow-head formation of brigade groups. This was not the corps commander's idea of how the battle should have been fought. He said later at his conference at Tavistock that he expected the 48th Division to be launched at once to the attack and the enemy kicked into the sea. But he failed to say what the 48th Division should have attacked at once, especially as there was little or no information to go on. Anyhow, as military readers will already have guessed, it led to a change of divisional commanders, but not until the 48th Division under its old commander had given an excellent account of itself on the biggest exercise ever to be carried out in England, but that is a later story.

FROM OCTOBER TO 31st DECEMBER, 1941

Exercise "Bumper" was the largest exercise with troops that has ever taken place in the United Kingdom at any time. The exercise may be stated as having begun on the 25th September by the receipt of the following message from our brigade headquarters: "Bumper stop Man management should begin today stop Bumper." What this was meant to convey no one ever discovered, but it went down to posterity in the same way as one repeats "Pop goes the weasel." This scheme was the only one in which the Battalion was not denuded of its best and senior officers as umpires, with the result that all went well from the word "Go."

The Battalion left Newton Abbot at 1430 hrs. on the 26th September by transport and began the approach to the scene of operations. That night was spent at Five Head; and on the following evening we moved via Wincanton, Amesbury and Whitchurch towards Newbury, finally halting short of the latter place at 1030 hrs. on the 28th September.

At 1830 hrs. orders were issued to be ready to move from 2200 hrs. north-eastwards across the Kennet and the Thames to take up a position on the River Ousel in all-round anti-tank defence. The Battalion actually set out at 2345 hrs. and arrived at Soulbury, north of Leighton Buzzard, at 1245 hrs. on the 29th September. The commanding officer, who had gone ahead, only arrived there at 1030 hrs. owing to the very indifferent march discipline of the supporting arms, who had halted without authority to breakfast and shave, thus blocking the narrow road.

The Battalion was disposed to hold the line of the canal in an area between Leighton Buzzard and Fenny Stratford and facing west. Companies dug in as far as the interests of the landowners permitted and prepared to meet what might come. This was during the afternoon of the 29th September. The remainder of our activities are best described by quoting verbatim from the commentary produced by the adjutant and the intelligence officer for the information of the soldiers:

BUMPER 30 Sept. 41.

Summary of Information No. 1

Based on information received up to 1130 hrs., 30 sept. 41
All Coy & PLComdrs.

The commanding officer directs that the following summary of information be read, and, if necessary, explained, to all ranks under your command. Accounts of special exploits by pls., secs, or individuals suitable for inclusion in the next summary of information will reach Bn. H.Q. by 1600 hrs. today.

A. General Situation in Brigade Area

(1) The first contact with the enemy was made by the div. recce bn. with an armd. car regt. of 6 Armd. Div. at about 11 o'clock yesterday morning.

(2) At half-past four a regt. of army tanks attacked the line held by the other two bns. about four or five miles in front (i.e., north-east) of our line. They lost 50 casualties, but a number got through, among them those encountered by us, as we shall see below. By 8 o'clock last night the attack had died down.

(3) The following identifications of prisoners have been confirmed: 6 Armd. Div., 20 Armd. Bde., 1 Northamptonshire Yeomanry, 1 Derbyshire Yeomanry (div. armd. car regt.), 10 King's Royal Rifle Corps (motorized infantry); and the following are unconfirmed : Inns of Court Regt. and 72 A/Tk Regt.

(4) In the air have appeared Blenheims, Tomahawks and a Lysander, but no hostile action has been reported.

RECORD OF THE 4TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
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(5) In view of the casualties they have suffered the enemy (20 Armd. Regt.) will probably not be able to attack again with any force, though it is not known what reserves they may have. The most likely place for the next enemy attack seems to be the bde. on our left, and a sharp look-out must therefore be kept for any break-through in this area and an attempt to attack us in the left and rear.

Latest News.—The other bns. now report that they expected an attack by motorized infantry on their front.

B. The Part Played By This Battalion

(1) A Coy. on the right arrived in their area at about 1300 hrs. and saw rather less of the battle than other coys. Patrols were sent out throughout the night beyond the river, but no enemy were encountered.

Latest News.—A fighting patrol, captured an armoured car at about 1120 hrs. today which had been lying hid in the coy. area since last night.

(2) B Coy. in the centre arrived in their area at about 1300 hrs. Their first sight of the enemy was at about 1745 hrs., when a tank followed by a recce car and another tank tried to cross the bridge at THREE LOCKS. The bridge was blown when the leading tank was on it and both it and the recce car were put out of action. No. 10 PI. armed with Molotovs and crowbars damaged the other tank, but it was able to escape. A prisoner from the first tank, identified as being of the 1st Northamptonshire Yeomanry, was captured, also by No. 10 PI.

At 1835 hrs. another tank crossed the bridge referred to above as having been blown up. It sheered off northwards, and did not attack any of the pl. positions. It was fired at by an anti-tank gun, and is believed to have been put out of action.

Continuous patrolling of the river and canal banks has been going on throughout.

(3) C Coy. are on the left and arrived in their area (STOKE HAMMOND and bridges north and east) at 1315 hrs. This coy. So far has seen most of the battle. Tanks came from the front and left rear. After a confused battle they were adjudged to have destroyed 5
The tanks that came round the left rear must somehow have eluded a fd. bty., R.A., sited in an anti-tank role on that flank—how they did it is not known.
Continuous patrolling in all directions has taken place throughout.

(4) D Coy provided one pl. as protection of B Ech and they have been with them throughout. The rest of the coy. has been lent as local protection to the gunners supporting the other two bns some three miles forward of the Bn. line. They had a good day, destroying 7 tanks.

(5) H.Q. Coy. and Bn. H.Q. have established SOULBURY as an anti-tank island and have little else to tell.

S/E/20. 2 Oct. 41.

Summary Of Information No. 2

Based on information received up to — hrs., 2 oct. 41

To: All Coy. & PI. Cmdrs.

The cmdg. offr. directs that the following, as with Summary of Information No. 1 issued 30 Sept., shall be read, as opportunity offers, and if necessary amplified, to all ranks under your command. Accounts of any individual, section or platoon adventures suitable for inclusion in the next summary will be welcomed.

RECORD OF THE 4TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
JUNE 1940-JUNE 1942

A. General Situation In Brigade Area

The situation since Summary No. 1 was issued has changed so rapidly that it is difficult to give a clear account of what has happened. It must be understood, first, that in the bde. area the other two bns. bore the brunt of the fighting and such tanks and scout cars as were encountered by this Bn. were those which broke through or round the flank of the line held by the forward bns. The latter suffered heavy casualties, 1 Bucks in particular being overrun. The remnants of the two bns. were organized into three bands: one under Lt.-Col. P. P. King, known as KING FORCE, is protecting Bde. H.Q. and the H.Q. of the gunner regt, the second, under Major Lovett, known as LOVE FORCE, and the third under Major Mackenzie, M.C., known as MAC FORCE, are further north and were on our right on the nights of 30 Sept./1 Oct. and 1/2 Oct.

Yesterday morning an enemy armoured force well to our left threatened to break through the other two brigades and was making for Divisional H.Q. The divisional cmdr. called this Bn. under his direct control and moved it to reinforce the 9th Bn. The Somerset Light Infantry, one coy. (B) remaining behind to guard the canal and river bridges. An attack northward, passing through them, was put in on two parallel roads by C Coy. on the right, A and H.Q. Coys, on the left, following in each case a squadron of Valentine tanks.

The tanks advanced out of sight and were never seen again. The coys, advanced and met quite strong opposition at the village of NEWTON LONGVILLE. Some confused fighting followed in which A Coy. lost considerable casualties, leaving them little more than a pl. strong, but the enemy were pushed through the village and out the other side.

The divisional cmdr. evidently considered that we had served our purpose there and ordered us back to the line of the river and canal to hold the bridges again.

From this point onwards a certain amount of confusion arose about our position, as it was not clear whether we had reverted to the command of bde. or were still under the direct orders of div.

Finally, in the evening we were sent by div. to GREAT BRICKHILL, following a squadron of Churchills. They cleared the way and we switched right and occupied, after it was dark, a position in the woods north of WATLING STREET.

This morning we moved to our present position, with the following intention: our bde. and another on our left are to hold a line running east and west and a Canadian div. and an army tank bde. are going to sweep the enemy from west and east, i.e., left to right. It is this operation we are awaiting now.

B. The Part Played By The Battalion has largely been told in Part A above.

The following are isolated incidents:

(1) A Coy. In the afternoon of 30 Sept. a civilian reported troops in the village of HEATH AND REACH, about a mile and a half beyond the coy.'s front, beyond the woods. A patrol, went out to investigate, but found only a friendly field battery, from whom some useful information was gained.

Yesterday evening one pl. was left to guard the MILL BRIDGE. Early this morning it was summoned to join the coy., and then orders were received for it to go back again. This was most unfortunate, but in view of the slight confusion in our role it was unavoidable, and the orders from bde. were changed.

(2) B Coy. remained behind and took over all the bridges on the Bn.'s sector while A, C and H.Q. Coys, were fighting the battle of NEWTON LONGVILLE. During this time some enemy tanks which had overrun BRICKHILL MANOR came to rest on the high ground across the river opposite B Coy.'s H.Q. Tank hunting patrols were sent out, but were unable to get close enough to the tanks themselves to scupper any. 12 men of the crews, however, were killed.

This coy. was right forward coy. in our position in the wood last night and is right forward coy. now.

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(3) C Coy. were the coy. on the right in the battle of NEWTON LONGVILLE and did well. They were left forward coy. last night and again today.

(4) D Coy. still have one pi. with B Ech., and until early this morning the rest of the coy. were still protecting the gunners on WATLING STREET. They came back under cmd. and were advanced guard coy. for the move this morning to our present position.

(5) H.Q. Coy. have had more action this exercise than on any other. In the battle of NEWTON LONGVILLE they played an important part following behind A Coy. and finished off the mopping-up in the village.

There was one thing which does not reflect credit on this coy. A gate was left open at the farm where they spent last night. A prize cow and calf due for showing strayed and have not yet been found. All ranks must take this matter to heart and take extreme care to shut all gates in future.

(Sgd.) J. Bradburn,
Capt., Adjt, 4th Bn. Oxf. & Bucks Lt. Infty.

7th October, 1941.

Summary Of Information No: 3
(Conclusion)

All Coy & PLComdrs.

The commanding officer directs that this summary, which concludes BUMPER, shall, as opportunity offers, be read and, if necessary, amplified, to those under your command who took part. It is regretted that it is issued somewhat late in the day.

A. General Situation In Brigade Area

(1) Summary No. 2 ended leaving the Bn. holding a line running east and west to act as a barrier while a Canadian div. and an army tank bde. swept the enemy from west to east across our front. This operation was completely successful.

(2) Never has the Bn. had so much gunner support. At one time there were two complete field regiments of artillery and a corps medium regiment in support. It was a pity that there were no enemy on our immediate front for them to fire at.

(3) After the sweep by the Canadians and the tanks across our front had finished, the division came into corps reserve and the Bn., in the early morning of Friday, 3rd Oct., was ordered forward to take up an outpost position in the area HOUGHTON CONQUEST—HOUGHTON PARK, some few miles south-west of Bedford. The carriers went forward to occupy the position and the Bn. followed to consolidate it just as daylight came.

Half an hour later the exercise ended.

(4) One last point of general interest. During the last day, BRITISH force dropped parachutists behind the enemy lines. One Serjeant succeeded in returning on a stolen motor-cycle with lists of code names, orders of battle, operation orders and marked maps, showing full details of army, corps and divisional headquarters. Frequencies of wireless sets were also obtained.

B. The Part Played By This Battalion

The following consists of scattered notes of interest, covering the whole of the exercise:

(1) A Coy. have nothing more to report, except that 2/Lieut. Conquest gathered some interesting information about some of his ancestors from the gravestones in the churchyard and from the Rector of HOUGHTON CONQUEST.

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(2) B Coy. have sent the following report of their activities on 2nd and 3rd October:

"After orders were received in RIDGMONT B Coy. moved into an anti-panzer locality at BOUGHTON END with two pls. and the transport in the village and one pl. in a farm on the top of the ridge. Signal communication was opened by wireless from an observation post from which no finer view of Bedfordshire could have been obtained; it was a view like a landscape target and a textbook observation post for the gunners was found. The company settled in and washing arrangements were made, but no sooner was everything settled than orders were received for Coy. H.Q. and two pls. to move to LIDLINGTON. 12 Pl. remained in its area on the top of the ridge with the intelligence observation post and 10 Pl. and 11 Pl. moved down to LIDLINGTON. The coy. comd. made a quick reconnaissance of the area and put the two pls. in their areas and Coy. H.Q. in the Rectory. The cooks made tea and began to cook dinners. All transport was hidden away and mortar targets and an observation post located. Further arrangements were made for the long-awaited ablutions, but within half an hour orders were again received to move and beards grew longer. The signallers were by now nearly frantic, having extended the line to LIDLINGTON. Cable reels had just finished turning one way when they had to reverse and turn the other. The company then moved to an open stubble field instead of being comfortable in LIDLINGTON, which was immediately occupied by some Canadian R.A.S.C. This was a sore point.

"During the night 2/3rd Oct. messages disturbed our rest and by 0400 hrs. every man was again on his feet and a night move, this time on foot, to HOUGHTON PARK was completed. This night move was the result of a message which arrived about 0100 hrs. when the previous one had stated 'NO repeat NO move before 1500 hrs., 3rd Oct.' We were not quite sure whether these messages were real or just a bad dream.

"Arrival at HOUGHTON PARK was a misty one and the fog of war was upon us. However, the sun came out and gave of his best, enabling blankets and greatcoats to be dried."

(3) C Coy. have sent in the following notes:

"(a) Tanks.—In the attack on NEWTON LONGVILLE the tanks did not attempt to co-operate with the infantry.

"Resistance had not been located, therefore tanks should be under command of rifle coy. comdrs. concerned and used to crush resistance when it was found. Instead, they rushed ahead, many were casualties, and they failed to assist the infantry forward.

"(b) Patrol Experiment.—In the wooded area west of WOBURN a platoon was sent forward by night on 15-cwt. trucks to establish a fighting base from which recce patrols could operate. By this means a very wide and deep area was effectively patrolled.

"(c) Attack on NEWTON LONGVILLE, 1 Oct., 41.—C Coy. was held up by fire on road into NEWTON LONGVILLE, and 15 Pl. was sent round to the left. Strong resistance was met, which caused the pl. to go further to the left than intended, where they surprised a platoon who were guarding about 8 carriers. These were annihilated from the rear whilst they were engaging a coy. The platoon then entered NEWTON LONGVILLE, where they were sent round to the left to wipe out an anti-tank gun. Very strong opposition was met, and after firing from a fold in the ground for a few minutes a charge was made over the last 50 yards which resulted in the whole platoon being made casualties.

"Note.—In the first part of this story is a lesson in the success to be obtained by infiltration tactics.

"(d) 30.9.41.—In the first tank attack a Valentine trying to turn was surprised by 4 and 5 Sections under Cpl. Oats and Cpl. Chubb, who, under cover of the tank's blindness, surprised the crew's commander, who had his head out of the turret, by getting on the tank and shooting the occupants with a tommy-gun.

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"Note.—This shows that tanks can be stalked and surprised by day. In real war this action would probably have resulted in the award of the Military Medal."

Attack on NEWTON LONGVILLE, 1st Oct. 41.

14 Pl. went to the right and surprised a whole coy. by taking them in the rear. The attackers found a whole platoon with their backs towards them and got within 5-10 yards before going in and finishing them off. Unfortunately the "Stand Fast" order was given and spoilt the rest of the movement.

Lessons: 1, Value of "Going Hide." 2, Necessity for all-round defence.

(4) D Coy., being for the most part detached, have unfortunately had many of their gallant exploits omitted. This is regretted. Here they are:

(a) At one time they were attacked by the 9th Durham Light Infantry and drove them off, losing one section themselves as against one company of the enemy.

(b) The same day, in co-operation with the gunners, they captured reconnaissance cars, carriers, two tanks, several despatch riders and three officers.

(c) Lastly, a patrol, led by C.S.M. Roby, D.C.M., was sent out to harass the enemy and took seven prisoners.

(5) H.Q. Coy. have nothing further to report.

(6) B Echelon, but there is one thing to report against them. The driver of one of our 15-cwt. trucks, entering the area, was very properly challenged and asked to establish his identity by a sentry of the Motor Coach Sec., R.A.S.C. His attitude on being challenged was rude and offensive, and in real war he would probably have been shot, which would have served him right. The wrong attitude to adopt to one who was doing his duty correctly.

(Sgd.) J. Bradburn, Capt., Adjt, 4th Bn. Oxf. & Bucks Lt. Inftry.

The Battalion returned to Newton Abbot by road, staying one night in Wiltshire on the way, and arrived in the late afternoon. At the conclusion of "Bumper" information was verbally received that the division would move to Lincolnshire before Christmas.

The 4th November saw the semi-final of the brigade crosscountry run, in which A, B and H.Q. Companies took part, dressed in field service marching order less gas-capes. The course was a little shorter than the previous one, and started at Cold East Cross and finished at Heyton, a distance of about two and three-quarter miles. The results were:

A Company: first team home.

B Company: third team home.

H.Q. Company: first team home.

This was followed two days later by Battalion headquarters and C and D Companies running over the same course, with the following result:

Battalion headquarters: second team home.

C Company: second team home.

D Company: second team home.

Now came the move to Lincolnshire. The advanced party went to Usselby Hall Camp.

The Battalion moved by road on the 13th November to the Cirencester area, where it arrived in torrents of rain, and stayed the night. The next day the move was continued to Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, and on the 15th November the Battalion came to rest in a large, water-logged field, lined on two sides with wooden huts. This was Usselby Hall Camp. The lighting was allegedly by pressure lamps and the sewerage non-existent. To add to our troubles, our predecessors had kept their vehicles alongside their individual huts, so that a neat morass had formed.

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H.Q. Company was farthest off and lowest down, comparatively speaking. In order to obviate carrying coal to their cookhouse sack by sack a road was begun and pushed on with all speed. The officers lived in huts adjoining the hall, and messed in it. They also enjoyed the temperamental illumination of the pressure lamps, or lamp as it often was. Hardly had the Battalion had time to bemoan its departure from Devonshire and find out that it was a three-mile walk to Market Rasen, when A, B and D Companies were dispatched to help the farmers lift their sugar-beet. The companies were split up amongst six farms in each of the three company areas.

On the 26th November, with no tears shed, the remainder of the Battalion moved to Grimsby by march route to occupy winter quarters in the good old-fashioned style. Battalion headquarters occupied the Augusta Street Drill Hall, where the Battalion fed. The men were accommodated in requisitioned houses up to a mile from headquarters.

Hardly had the Battalion, metaphorically speaking, unlaced its boots when orders were received to provide guards at Humberstone radar station, Grimsby Dock ammunition store, and Immingham Dock, ship, wharf and train guards.

Our next effort was to take part with our brigade in an Eastern Command exercise near St. Ives, in Cambridgeshire. It was not particularly memorable except for some very cold weather. This was one of the last exercises the Battalion carried out in co-operation with formations, as the 48th Division never took the field as such after "Bumper."

Christmas Day was celebrated by the Battalion less A, B, C and D Companies in Grimsby. The remainder had their celebrations in the agricultural areas, while of course C Company were still at Immingham. The officers entertained the wives to dinner in the mess, which was a large, rambling house called "The Abbey."

FROM 1st JANUARY TO 30th JUNE, 1942

On the 1st January, 1942, our strength was forty-nine officers and 801 soldiers: attached, two officers and thirteen soldiers.

As the number of men conscripted into the Army at this time was greater than the infantry training centres could deal with, it was decided that each battalion of the 48th Division should form a training company until such times as the material so trained could join its battalion. This was an exact parallel with the depot companies that existed before regimental depots were formed in 1876. These companies took over requisitioned houses in Cleethorpes and received the recruits in plain clothes. They gave them three months' training and then each company rejoined its own battalion. Captain Ely commanded our company and a very good job he made of it, despite considerable initial difficulties.

The concentration area allotted to the Battalion was at Well Hall, near Alford, and as insufficient transport was available to lift the Battalion in one echelon a practice move thither was carried out by the "march and ride method." The distance to the area was about thirty-two miles and each company marched fifteen to eighteen miles. Concentration with this method was completed in approximately seven hours.

In the middle of February it was learnt that the Battalion was to relieve the 8th Bn. The Worcestershire Regiment on the Lincolnshire beaches early in March, and reconnaissances for this move were duly carried out.

On the 19th February a party of officers and soldiers went to Welbeck Abbey to visit the 43rd Bn. The Royal Tank Regiment, to see their training with a view to training with them in cooperation. So began a series of visits to the Dukeries for this purpose: most of our visits were made to Rufford Abbey and Clumber Park. The assistance and advice we received were most helpful and many a soldier must have been thankful for this experience when he was called on to co-operate with tanks in battle without a rehearsal.

On the 4th March the Battalion moved, partly by motor transport and partly by march route, to the Louth area, which included some miles of the coast from exclusion of Donna Nook southwards to exclusion of Mablethorpe. The Battalion occupied positions as follows:

Battalion headquarters, H.Q. Company and A Company: Louth.

C Company: Saltfleet.

B Company: Saltfleet-by-St. Clement and Saltfleet-by-St. Peter.

D Company: Theddlethorpe St. Helen.

The country was unrelievedly flat from the sea to Louth and across it blew very cold winds.

Those who occupied Louth lived in the usual requisitioned empty houses and were tolerably comfortable. The division of the available accommodation was complicated by the arrival of our brigade headquarters at a date considerably after the Battalion plan had been made.

The 1st Bucks held the area to our north, C Company held the village of Saltfleet, which was eleven miles north-east of Louth, with two platoons forward on the links overlooking the shore, and company headquarters and the remaining platoon in the hamlet itself. This company patrolled the beach northwards to connect with the 1st Bucks. Apart from the usual minefields and wire, this company's southern flank was protected by an estuary which could not be forded.

B Company had one platoon forward in the bents guarding the beach, with the remainder two miles inland. Its role was the immediate support of C and D Companies, but it was hardly a practical proposition owing to the lie of the roads and the dykes.

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D Company were in a somewhat similar predicament with one platoon forward in the sandhills and the remainder in Theddlethorpe, but in their case the distance of the detached platoon from company headquarters was about a mile. This company maintained contact with the 2nd Glosters' company at Mablethorpe.

From this it will readily be understood that the disposition of the Battalion was far from its commander's liking. However, the vast amount of shallow water opposite the Battalion's area, its exposed position, and the time of the year all militated against any large-scale attempt at landing by the enemy. Even small seaborne raids were unlikely, as any error in the times of withdrawal might well have meant either the craft having to move to deeper water or then being left aground.

However, no untoward incident of this nature occurred and our time was fully occupied in maintaining our defences and improving their camouflage. And in between times individual training proceeded along the lines so well known to all professional soldiers. The commanding officer visited the beaches daily and disposed of any interviews or disciplinary cases on the spot.

Reference has already been made to the drafting overseas of three officers from the Battalion. While at Grimsby orders were received to prepare a draft of forty-five soldiers for overseas and to entrain them on the 7th March. These orders were issued so late by the higher formations that it was left to the commanding officer to address the chosen men and inform them that they would not have the usual amount of embarkation leave. This idleness on the part of the staff was particularly unfortunate, as it had recently been announced in the Press what the entitlement to embarkation leave was.

The only oil that the Battalion could pour on the troubled waters was to accelerate the time usually taken in the preparation of documents, inoculation and other matters. It was also decided by the commanding officer that leave should be granted to the midnight preceding the day of entrainment, in the hope that the hour of departure might be late in the day. However, when the orders were received it was seen that the train was due to leave Louth at 9.30 a.m. on the 7th March. Plans had already been laid for the rifle company in Louth to deal with the draft as they returned, their own companies being about ten miles away. The soldiers, as usual, responded to the confidence that all had placed in them and the draft left according to programme. Some of these men had to walk miles to the station during the night of the 5th/6th March, travel all day on the 6th from Cornwall to Louth, and spend the night of the 6th/7th with administrative preparation. The commanding officer can well remember seeing some very tired-looking men in the train that morning. No doubt they slept heavily on their journey to Berwick-on-Tweed our soldiers were destined for service with the K.O.Y.L.I, overseas.

The 4th May saw the Battalion move to Usselby Hall camp for the second time. Our successors on the beaches were the 1st Bucks. As our predecessors in the camp had changed the uses of some of the quarters, the commanding officer's office smelt of cheese and the second-in-command's of meat; but these odours were soon removed.

Any hopes of being left to ourselves for a little while were soon dashed to the ground, as guards at Immingham and Humberston had to be found. At the latter place there was a long-drawn-out wrangle over chattels, for which we were not to blame.

The 9th May saw us move to Birch Hall camp, about a mile from Woodhall Spa. It was the usual Nissen-hutted affair; pleasantly situated on sandy soil in a birch wood, which fortunately never caught fire. In the winter the huts were dark and gloomy and the camp cold and damp. There were a few fields and a bit of rough ground for training, but all on a miniature scale, as the camp abutted on one side on a large bomber aerodrome, of which more anon.

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On the second Saturday and Sunday morning the soldiers were unable to indulge in the dissipations of Woodhall Spa, as we had to take part in an exercise to test the Home Guard in East Lincolnshire. We played the part of a force that had landed and was pushing its way inland. I think the divisional commander must have gazed on the Bayeux tapestry at some time, as on these occasions troops pretending to land from small boats always had to envelop themselves in latrine screens. We learnt to keep several clean sets for the purpose. This exercise is not worth describing, except to say that we did not reach some of the Home Guard positions before opening time, and so found them untenanted. A chilly night spent on the beach ending in a march of more than twenty miles back to camp is how it impressed most people.

We returned to camp at 1830 hrs. on the night of the 15th May, the advance party left for Beckingham at 2100 hrs. the same night, and the remainder of the Battalion at 0800 hrs. the next day. We bivouacked in a wood alongside the ranges, on which we fired our course till the 21st May.

We returned just in time to take part in Exercise "Opera," which lasted for three days, and chiefly consisted of holding the line of the River Bain, and remaining as concealed as far as possible. One battalion whose concealment did not come up to the divisional commander's standard were somewhat startled to be fired at by him.