

*BASED ON EXTRACTS FROM THE REGIMENTAL WAR CHRONICLE OF THE OXFORDSHIRE
& BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY VOL3 1942/1944*

FROM 1st JULY TO 31st DECEMBER, 1942

STILL IN LINCOLNSHIRE!

On the 6th July a small O Group went to Fylingdales to prepare field firing schemes for the Battalion, which followed on the 10th.

The main roads running north from Scarborough and Pickering on the North Riding have between them a fair-sized grouse moor, called Fylingdales Moor, whose highest point is Lilla Cross. There were a few farms on the south-east and south sides of the moor, but little other habitation except in the far north at Little Beck.

It served its purpose well as a field firing range, particularly as the streams which ran off the high ground formed fairly deep valleys in which the use of ball cartridges was comparatively safe. There was practically no cover, and the ground was so boggy in parts that the use of tracked vehicles was artificial in that they were unable to go anywhere they wished.

On this our first visit we bivouacked on Silpho Moor, which lies above the hamlet of Harwood Dale. While the weather was kind it was quite a good site, but during the three days of heavy rain that fell the discomfort was intense, and the black earth soon became a quagmire.

While the 8th Royal Warwicks exercised themselves at Fylingdales we took their place in the Skegness area, guarding the coast from the 8th to the 18th July.

On the 6th September the Battalion moved by road and rail to the Dukeries and occupied Proteus Camp, near Thoresby Hall, for a week's practice in co-operation with the 143rd Regiment, R.A.C., who in happier days had been the 9th Lancashire Fusiliers. We were under canvas and the weather for once was kind. We spent a very interesting time and, apart from manoeuvring with the tanks, managed to fire a few rounds with different types of Piat* (*Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank)bombs.

The 13th saw us setting out to march from Sherwood Forest to Birch Hall Camp, a distance of seventy-eight miles. The camp was pleasantly situated just over a mile from the hamlet of Langdale End, which in turn was seven and a half miles northwest of Scarborough. The camp was not occupied on this occasion until the rain made our bivouac nearly a quagmire on the 19th. All the platoons again completed a field firing exercise, and all ranks fired a Thompson sub-machine carbine course in a convenient stream-bed. There were also grenade throwing, anti-aircraft firing and anti-tank-rifle practices with ball ammunition.

We returned to Woodhall Spa on the 24th by train from Scarborough.

B Company, carried out a very realistic exercise with 754th Field Company on the 2nd November, a bit too realistic as far as Private Macdonald was concerned, as he was wounded in both thighs by a Bangalore torpedo. This accident was followed, on the 9th, by Lieutenant Lewendon sustaining injuries to his hands through the accidental explosion of a 3-inch mortar bomb at our divisional battle school.

The chief event in December was another visit to Fylingdales, during which we helped a new battalion in the brigade to find their feet at field firing. At the divisional commander's special request a very intimate advance under a 3-inch mortar barrage took place. Our Lancastrian guests received this baptism of fire with mixed feelings, as did the commanding officer, who received two fragments of steel in the neck. However, everyone returned to camp on his feet and the divisional commander expressed his pleasure at the reality of the proceedings by saying that he thought we had rather overdone it. This was indeed praise coming from one who the soldiers thought habitually mixed gunpowder with his early morning tea.

RECORD OF THE 4TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
JULY 1942-JUNE 1944

Our role as a draft-finding battalion had become even more obvious than ever, and our obligations became very difficult to meet. On the 24th December our divisional commander called a conference to discuss ways and means of reducing the establishment of battalions to the minimum required to perform their duty of training battalions. Elaborate recommendations were drawn up which were, of course, disregarded by the War Office, and we had to scratch along as best we could.

The divisional and brigade commanders called other time-consuming conferences which resulted in each battalion being allotted a minimum cadre of twenty officers and 237 soldiers.

All in excess of that figure were available for overseas drafts. In addition, the Battalion was to be composed as follows:

Half Oxf. and Bucks Lt. Infy.

Quarter Somerset Lt. Infy.

Quarter D.C.L.I.

These proportions were to be assumed gradually.

The composition of companies was: A Company: intake company. B Company: recruit training. C Company: further training. D Company: drafting. H.Q. Company: specialist training.

C.S.M. Roby, D.C.M., was promoted warrant officer class I and appointed Regimental Serjeant-Major to fill the vacancy caused by R.S.M. Clay being granted an emergency commission as quartermaster.

The rough time-table for soldiers posted to the Battalion from the I.T.C. was:

Four weeks' training on a syllabus issued by the War Office.

One week's field firing and company marches.

Two weeks' pre-embarkation leave.

FROM 1st JANUARY TO 30th JUNE, 1943

On the 2nd January we dispatched a draft of sixty-one soldiers to an assembly centre, and three days later we sent a draft of fifty soldiers to a port of embarkation under seven officers of other regiments—an unsatisfactory arrangement as it turned out.

To offset this we received, on the 6th, twenty-two soldiers from the Somerset Light Infantry and twenty-two from the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry.

On the 9th January fifteen soldiers of the D.C.L.I. left to go overseas with one of their own battalions. Three days later we received a draft from the 8th Somerset Light Infantry and dispatched one of twenty-four soldiers to a port of embarkation. On the 13th January 130 pioneers, later increased to 150, joined for training.

On the 16th thirty-six soldiers left for a port of embarkation, and two days later we received eleven soldiers from the 16th I.T.C. On the 21st we received nineteen soldiers from the Somerset Light Infantry.

The 25th saw the dispatch of ten soldiers of the D.C.L.I., while the 26th saw us receiving sixteen from the 16th I.T.C.

This catalogue of receipts and dispatches has been chronicled in detail for January, as it gives a good picture of what went on for the rest of the year.

RECORD OF THE 4TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
JULY 1942-JUNE 1944

The 3rd February saw the Battalion receiving the Crown Prince Felix of Luxembourg, who saw some training and looked round the camp in a pleasant and unostentatious manner.

During March D Company disappeared to make way for S Company; the reorganized command of companies was :

A Company: Major J. Bradburn.

B Company: Major A. A. Ely.

C Company: Captain S. B. R. Green.

S Company: Captain SL F. T. L. Robinson.

H.Q. Company: Captain J. M. Evelyn.

The final week of recruits' training in England was designed to give them some experience of the rigours of active service, coupled with the closest possible proximity to bursting mortar and artillery shells.

Sunday.—Day of arrival.

Monday.—Field firing exercise for a platoon supported by 3-inch mortars in an attack near Harper Moor Beald. It was in this scheme that the only fatal accident took place.

Tuesday.—Two separate field firing exercises, one to demonstrate wood and valley clearing, and the other the capture of an isolated house, Blakey House, near Blakey Topping. The latter included an exercise in house clearing for a section commander armed with a Thompson sub-machine gun. This particular exercise was the responsibility at regular intervals of the commanding officer, who always counted himself fortunate to be alive after one of Ulster's loyal sons had shot his way through the house.

Night firing scheme which lasted until far into the night.

Wednesday.—An attack by an infantry company supported by 3-inch mortars and field artillery. Spectators were particularly unlucky at this exercise. Our divisional commander was hit in the arm, and our brigade commander very seriously injured in the ankle.

Later in the afternoon the company marched to an assembly position near Blakey House, whence at 0400 hrs. they set out on a march of about sixty-six miles.

Thursday.—The march went by way of Newgate Foot, Saltersgate Inn, Lockton High Moor, Eller Beck Bridge, Widow Howe (where breakfast was consumed) and Brachan Howe to Grosmount. So far only skirmishes and annoying incidents had taken place, but Egton had to be fought for and up a steep hill. Just over another three miles brought the company to the ruins of Stonegate Mill, where the night was spent after defences had been constructed and a hot meal eaten.

Friday.—The piece de resistance was the attack on the high ground round Ralph's Cross at an altitude of 1,409 feet. It was on this high ground that the company we have been following in imagination met the company operating the circuit in the reverse direction. The route was by way of Lealholme, Dale End, Castleton, Ralph's Cross, Lion Inn or Little Blakey, and the west side of the Blakey Ridge to Lowna in Lower Farndale, where an evening similar to that on Thursday was spent.

Saturday.—Through minor incidents and ambushes the way led on by Hutton-le-Hole and Lastingham to Cropton, which required a full-scale attack before the company was allowed by the umpires to advance. Cropton, like Egton, lies at the top of a steep hill and its capture entailed a considerable amount of energy on a hot day. But, like real life, the sting was in the tail, and the final withdrawal from Newton, down across the level crossing and up to Levisham, will never be forgotten by any who have taken part in that wild scramble. Even the longest company march must end sometime and this one officially finished at Lockton, where too often a very tired body of soldiers were fated to listen to a lengthy discussion by those whose experience should have taught them that that was not the occasion for verbosity.

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From Lockton to Birch Hall camp was about six miles across the moor by the Bridestones, where the company usually arrived in the late evening just in time to pack their kit for the return to their stations on Sunday.

This well-organized and cleverly planned six days used to occupy an enormous number of training companies; and no one will ever know the amount of ammunition that was expended in the platoon field firing exercises. While the commanders and staff found the local hotels useful for accommodation purposes, the divisional commander himself invariably went into bivouac in the Black Beck valley.

During April twenty-seven soldiers joined the airborne division on voluntary transfer.

The co-operation of infantry and tanks had become such an important aspect of training that arrangements were made for platoons to do one week's attachment each to tank regiments stationed in the Sherwood Forest area. Platoons were constantly moving to and from this area and some very good experience was gained.

We received in May eighty-nine soldiers and dispatched seventy overseas.

FROM 1st JULY TO 31st DECEMBER, 1943

During October the routine training visits to the North Yorkshire moors were discontinued on account of the season of the year, and a tamer circuit in Lincolnshire substituted for the winter months.

On the 3rd November the Battalion moved by march route to a hutted camp in the grounds of Well Hall, near Alford. We had been eighteen months in Kirby Moor camp, Woodhall Spa, and had had enough of it. At about this time the 145th Infantry Brigade was disbanded, and we were transferred to the 144th.

During 1943 the Battalion had sent overseas some 46 officers and 1,524 soldiers.