

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

**THE FIFTH BATTALION  
JULY TO DECEMBER, 1940**

**Contributed by Lieutenant-Colonel W. A. R. Ames, O.B.E.**

The 5th Battalion formed part of the 184th Infantry Brigade (Brigadier C. St. Q. O. Fullbrook-Leggatt, D.S.O., M.C.), 61st Infantry Division (Major-General A. Carton de Wiart, V.C., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.).

On the 14th July, 1940, Lieutenant-Colonel W. A. R. Ames took over command of the 5th Battalion from Lieutenant-Colonel Edmunds. The Battalion at that time was stationed at Antrim Castle in a sea of mud. The second-in-command was Major C. A. L. Courts and the adjutant Captain J. A. E. Mulgan.

Intermittent training had been carried out as far as it was possible, but little more than spasmodic training had been accomplished. Officers and other ranks alike were splendid and were itching to get on and train.

On the 24th July we started to move to Coleraine, Castlerock and Magilligan by route march, going into bivouac on two nights, and arriving at our final destination on the 26th July.

On the second day's march the Battalion was visited by the Secretary of State for War, Mr. Anthony Eden. Our mobile column, consisting of one carrier and ten requisitioned petrol trucks, passed Mr. Eden, who agreed that it was the most pathetic sight he had ever seen. In two months' time we had our complete war establishment of vehicles.

The distance to Coleraine from Antrim was thirty-six miles and to Magilligan fifty-two. This was completed in three days and few men fell out. The story of the return march is a very different one.

In Coleraine the men were accommodated in an old factory (Gribbons Factory) and the officers in a large, empty house (Laurel Hill). Castlerock's accommodation consisted of small seaside lodging houses. At Magilligan the troops occupied the old musketry camp.

During this period training was started in earnest and the first Battalion exercise was carried out one night about "invasion week-end" period up in the mountains at Sconce Hill. The Battalion was actually led into battle by the medical officer and his ambulance, the cooks took four hours to make a stew, trucks were ditched, etc., but it was a beginning.

In addition to training, time was spent in filling old bottles with petrol for use as bombs and Coleraine was opened as an ammunition port to build up base depots. The docks needed guarding and wiring, which all fell to the lot of the Battalion.

Two embarkation staff officers came to open up Coleraine as an ammunition port. Co-operation with these two officers made the work of wiring and guarding the docks a very pleasant task. At about this time a flotilla of motor torpedo boats arrived in the River Bann to base themselves on Coleraine. Owing to the difficulties of passing the bar at the mouth of the river they did not remain long, but one afternoon all company commanders were taken on fee duty boat to look at the defences of Magilligan beaches from the sea. As the boats swung into Lough Foyle at about 30 knots the gunners were seen manning and loading the two 6-inch guns on the point, but luckily they did not open fire. The most important people of all had not been warned.

RECORD OF THE 5TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY  
JULY 1940-JUNE 1942

Zero day for invasion (the 15th September) found the Battalion equipped as follows:

- (a) One carrier.
- (b) Eighteen Bren guns.
- (c) Three anti-tank rifles.
- (d) Twenty-three requisitioned petrol lorries.
- (e) Troops practically untrained.

They would, however, have given a very good account of themselves.

During a visit by Lieutenant-General H. C. Loyd, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., who was then inspector of infantry, the Battalion carried out a field firing exercise on Magilligan ranges. The sappers blew up twenty four charges to represent shell fire, and the beach defence machine guns provided overhead fire.

Owing to more troops arriving in Northern Ireland the 61st Division began to concentrate northwards and the Battalion moved westwards. Headquarters and one company moved to Castlerock, two companies remained at Magilligan and one company went on to Bellarena.

This move was completed by the 6th October, 1940, and our comfortable quarters in Coleraine were handed over to the 6th Bn. The Royal Berkshire Regiment.

The dispositions of the Battalion from now on were: headquarters and one rifle company at Castlerock, two rifle companies at Magilligan, and one rifle company at Bellarena.

The operational role included the defence of Magilligan beaches and counter-attack on Limavady aerodrome.

From now on individual training was organized for two companies at a time at Magilligan. The programme was carried through fairly successfully with one or two major interruptions, such as the digging of the Bann Line and Magilligan defences.

As regards equipment, issues were improving, but the Battalion was still almost entirely armed with Lewis guns. Two extracts from a training instruction go to show the difficulties and shortages of equipment:

"(a) As the Regiment is being made up to full war establishment it is expected that Bren guns will shortly be issued. All ranks will therefore be instructed in the use of this gun.

"(b) The use of the hand grenade will be explained to everyone, and if grenades are available all ranks will throw one live grenade."

In addition to training, work was going on steadily in building up the beach defences of Magilligan. Magilligan played a large part in our lives from July, 1940, to January, 1942.

The Magilligan peninsula lies at the entrance to Lough Foyle, overlooked from Eire by the Donegal Hills rising steeply from the sea across the narrow entrance to the lough. On the Ulster side it is overlooked by Benevenagh, a grand mountain about three miles inland with a steep face inaccessible in many parts.

The shape of the peninsula is triangular, based on the line of the Benevenagh cliffs, with the two sides running up to the point which guards the entrance to the lough. It consists almost entirely of sand-dunes, with a few farms of poor soil, a number of holiday bungalows and two hotels at the actual point which, without doubt, ran a remunerative smuggling concern in the days of peace. Both hotels were requisitioned and housed troops for the defence of the peninsula. There is also an old Martello tower, which was reincarnated for further service during the war.

RECORD OF THE 5TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY  
JULY 1940-JUNE 1942

Before the war Magilligan was a summer musketry camp for the Army in Ireland and had accommodation in huts for about two companies, close to a first-class rifle range.

Operationally, Magilligan peninsula is of great importance, as it guards the entrance to Lough Foyle, which took the place of Lough Swilly for the Navy owing to the neutrality of Eire and under the terms of the Eire Bill. The shores on the west side are vulnerable to attack in the event of an invasion of Eire and on the north side from the open sea. The total length of vulnerable beaches is from seven to eight miles. It is also ideal landing ground for parachutists, but it would be a moderately simple operation to cut off any troops who gained a footing, as there are only three narrow exits from the peninsula.

Limavady aerodrome lay three to four miles away towards Londonderry. It was, at the time, operational, finding patrols for escorting convoys safely to port while the Battle of the Atlantic was at its height.

In this atmosphere of guarding the entrance to the naval port of Londonderry and always prepared to counter-attack any attempt to capture Limavady aerodrome, the Battalion spent eighteen happy and hard-working months.

Although very isolated, bleak, cold and lit with lamps of doubtful efficiency, Magilligan was attractive, and the troops in many ways enjoyed their life there. We changed companies fairly frequently and there was no loss of morale during the time we were there.

November and December were fairly quiet months and for recreation officers and soldiers took up golf. The mess was only a hundred yards away from the first tee of Castlerock golf course and many enjoyable times were spent there.

**THE FIFTH BATTALION FROM  
1st JANUARY TO 30th JUNE, 1941  
Contributed by Lieutenant-Colonel W. A. R. Ames, O.B.E.**

After Christmas duties were imposed which interfered with training. The one big tank obstacle in Northern Ireland was the River Bann, which ran practically due north and south through Ulster, entering the sea at Castlerock, and the 61st Division was ordered to prepare and dig a defensive line on this river.

The Battalion sector was on the right of the line with a frontage of about 8,000 yards. Reconnaissances were made by all company commanders of their sectors and work was started on the 6th January, 1941. Owing to the shortage of stores it was only possible at first to dig three-foot trenches, while working parties went twenty miles away to cut brushwood for revetments. Every platoon area had to be wired; and it was not an easy task satisfying farmers, the Ministry of Agriculture, and higher military authority.

It was a trying time for the commanding officer and company and platoon commanders alike, as "The Bann Line" was very much in the public eye and was frequently visited by higher authority of all ranks and formations.

Everyone had his own views and was not inclined to leave the detailed siting of section posts to the man on the spot who had given it much more thought than those who criticized. Posts sited and dug on a Monday would not find favour with brigade on Tuesday, but were approved by division on Wednesday, and so on ad nauseam. The men worked with a will and knew none of these things. The weather became atrocious and work was practically suspended for the time being towards the end of January, but training continued.

Early in February General Sir Henry Pownall, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C., army commander, Northern Ireland, visited the Battalion to decide how much of the Magilligan beaches should be defended.

Owing to the abnormal high tides and gales during the winter the sea had encroached in some cases as much as twenty-five yards and washed away much of the wire and trenches. In one case a concrete pill-box that was carefully tucked away in a sand-dune was now isolated on the beach and surrounded by water at high tide. All our work of the past autumn was practically nullified by the elements.

General Pownall decided that the defences should be repaired and redug before the spring and gave us a target date, the 15th March, 1941. It was then the 11th February, 1941.

As usual, the Battalion got down to it and for the next month all day and every day was spent on the beaches digging, wiring and revetting. It was no easy task. Owing to the gales, men had to work in eyeshields to keep sand from their eyes. Sand also penetrated battledress. The men were amazingly cheerful under these very difficult and uncomfortable conditions. The Battalion was becoming fit, hardy and gutful.

We fulfilled our contract, and Headquarters, B.T.N.I., (\*British Troops, Northern Ireland.) who had taken a great interest in the work, arranged an exercise to test the defences and the communications from battle headquarters to the bomber squadron near Belfast, which was to come to our assistance in case of attack. Two companies of the 6th Royal Berks acted as enemy parachutists and failed to get through.

During the month we put up twenty-five to thirty miles of wire and the signallers laid about twenty miles of cable for communications from battle headquarters to each platoon headquarters. It was a great work and nobody except he who took part realized what it entailed.

RECORD OF THE 5TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY  
JULY 1940-JUNE 1942

On the 8th March, 1941, we left Castlerock for Bellarena, where the Battalion was concentrated, less two companies still at Magilligan, four to five miles away.

Bellarena is a large country house standing in its own grounds on the shores of Lough Foyle and overlooked by that magnificent mountain Benevenagh.

In October, 1940, a large barn was taken over for the troops, the cart shed turned into a dining-hall, the dog kennels into a cookhouse, and the officers were billeted in the house.

A camp was built at Bellarena for a battalion less two companies, during the winter and the Battalion moved in on the 6th March.

Although isolated, it was an ideal camp: the barn became the recreation room for the men, and the officers had great fun with the wildfowl on the shores of Lough Foyle besides some fishing in the river that ran past the camp. Our operational role was still the defence of Magilligan beaches and counter-attack on Limavady aerodrome, but geographically we were in a much better position to carry it out, all being concentrated on the west side of Downhill Gorge.

As work on the Bann Line kept dragging on, the colonel decided to finish it off in one spasm in the form of a digging exercise. We marched to the line and dug in reliefs continuously for four days (four hours on and four hours off). Battalion headquarters was established at the Coleraine Institute. We finished the whole task and left the Bann Line behind us.

At about this time General Carton de Wiart, on being ordered to another theatre of war, handed over command of the 61st Division to our own Brigadier Fullbrook Leggatt. Fullbrook's place was taken by Brigadier F. H. Hawkins, M.C., of the Highland Light Infantry.

Training in March and April consisted of Battalion and brigade exercises and long marches to harden up the troops. The colonel decided, therefore, to try to beat the 52nd march to Talavera, which was fifty-two miles in twenty-six hours carrying 56 lb. of kit.\* The colonel decided to march from Bellarena and Magilligan to Antrim (fifty-two miles) in twenty-four hours carrying approximately 45 lb. of kit. (\*This march was accomplished by the Light Brigade (1st/43rd, 1st/52nd and 2nd/95th) from Malpartido or Oropesa to Talavera over mountain tracks in the heat of a Spanish July.—ed.)

At 0800 hrs. on the 24th April, 1941, the Battalion started from Bellarena, picking up the two companies from Magilligan at the Smithy road-block. We passed through Coleraine at about 1230 hrs. (sixteen miles) and halted for half an hour on the south side of the town for tea and haversack rations. By this time the sun was up and the road very straight. It was obvious that the afternoon would be trying. However, we marched on through Ballymoney, reaching a bivouac area at Clogh Mills at about 1845 hrs. (thirty-three miles). Everyone was made to have a paddle in a stream near by for ten minutes, and then dinners at 1930 hrs. After that a compulsory rest until 2230 hrs. At 2300 hrs. we started off again, much refreshed by the rest and in great heart. We halted outside Ballymena for fifteen minutes for a cup of cocoa and a biscuit and then marched on.

The troops were singing lustily all through Ballymena and woke everyone up and we became very unpopular. The buglers met us a mile out of Antrim and played "One More Mile to Go." We passed under the archway into our old camp (now occupied by the Berkshire Yeomanry) in Antrim Castle at 0640 hrs. The Battalion marched in at 128 to the minute and the colonel took the salute. Fifty-two miles in twenty-two hours forty minutes.

The worst part of the whole march was starting off again after ten-minute halts over the last twelve miles.

RECORD OF THE 5TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY  
JULY 1940-JUNE 1942

The psychological effect of the march was amazing. The men were fit to fight and everyone who took part in the march felt a tremendous sense of achievement. The Battalion never looked back from that date.

At this time Major C. W. P. Branson was placed in a low medical category and in his place came Major R. D. R. Sale, from the Bucks.

A general feeling that the Battalion was not doing enough to help win the war led to the issue of the following training instruction in May, 1941, which gives a fair description of the responsibilities of the Battalion at this time. The instruction read as follows:

"Training Instruction No. 19

"1. The training of the Regiment has now reached a stage from which it is essential to progress rapidly in order to be prepared to take our place in any eventuality. As a whole, the Regiment is slow in tactical movement, both in mechanical transport and on its feet.

"It is imperative for all ranks to realize that our present location is 'IN THE FRONT LINE' and we may be attacked tonight not only from the sea but by bombing, airborne troops and Irish Republican Army, plus the fifth column.\*(\*This expression was much in vogue in the early days of the war. In Elizabethan days a fifth column would have been known as traitors within our gates.)

"All ranks will be made to understand this and the lethargic atmosphere of 'It won't come here' will be eradicated.

"The commanding officer fully realizes the difficulties of being at war and peace at the same time. By living in billets or even peace-time huts with all its peace-time details of meticulous uniformity, it is hard to realize that in a few hours of kits being inspected or the ceremonial mounting of guards, the Regiment may have suffered many casualties.

"This meticulous discipline is the basis of a good fighting regiment and goes on continuously in a major or minor degree throughout any campaign, both in the front line and back areas. This has been proved not only in the last war but in this war. Any slackness in self-pride tends to lower morale and when morale is low it is hard to recover.

"The hallmark of a good regiment is when all ranks can produce 'that little bit extra' cheerfully and this is only obtained by discipline of the highest order. What leaders of all ranks in the Regiment must instil into themselves and the men whom they command is:

"(a) Speed.

"(b) Alertness,

"(c) Initiative.

"(d) Independence.

"2. As regards para. 1, the training of the Regiment has progressed very rapidly and will continue to do so with the fine spirit shown by all ranks both during the long, dark winter months at Magilligan and in the isolated and draughty billets at Castlerock and also during the dull, monotonous task of rebuilding the Magilligan defences which had been washed away by the winter storms.

"3. The hallmark of a good regiment is when all ranks can produce 'that little bit extra' cheerfully; this is only obtained by discipline of the highest order.

"All there is to say about this statement is obvious to all. The Regiment has proved its capabilities in this respect as second to none during:

"(a) The march to Antrim.

"(b) The digging of the Bann Line.

RECORD OF THE 5TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY  
JULY 1940-JUNE 1942

"4. There is, I am afraid, a feeling amongst all ranks that the Regiment is not taking its fair share in the effort to win the war and in this respect some may feel that the situation is much the same as it was when training instruction No. 1 was issued. BUT IT IS NOT. Bombing has been brought to this country and the invasion of the shores of England and Scotland, although ever present, is not so imminent as it was in August, 1940. The Battle of the Atlantic, however, is raging and our supply life-line from all parts of the world is through the North Channel only, to the western ports of England and Scotland.

"Mr. Winston Churchill, in the House of Commons, when speaking on the Eire Bill on 5th May, 1938, and deploring the handing over of the British ports to Eire, made the following statement:

" 'When the Irish Treaty was being shaped in 1922 I was instructed by the Cabinet to prepare that part of the Agreement which dealt with strategic reservations. I negotiated with Mr. Michael Collins, and I was advised by Admiral Beatty, who had behind him the whole staff of the Admiralty, which had just come out on the successful conduct of the Great War. Therefore, we had high authority in prescribing the indispensable minimum of reservations of strategic security.

" 'The Admiralty of those days assured me that without the use of these ports it would be very difficult, perhaps almost impossible, to feed this island in time of war. Queenstown and Berehaven shelter the flotillas which keep clear the approaches to the Bristol and English Channels, and Lough Swilly is the base from which the access to the Mersey and the Clyde is covered. In a war against an enemy possessing a numerous and powerful fleet of submarines these are the essential bases from which the whole operation of hunting submarines and protecting incoming convoys is conducted.'

"Owing to the neutrality of Eire and the Eire Bill, Queenstown and Berehaven are denied to us; the French ports, being in occupied territory, cause us to mine the South Channel to safeguard our life-line through the North Channel.

"Lough Swilly is also denied to us as a naval base, but Londonderry, on the shores of Lough Foyle, is the substitute.

"This Battalion has the honour to be responsible for the land defences at the entrance to Lough Foyle, with Eire a mile across the water, and also for counter-attacking any enemy attempts to seize Limavady aerodrome, one of the very few from which go daily many machines to patrol the Atlantic and escort convoys safely to port through the North Channel.

"We are therefore playing a very important role in the Battle of the Atlantic and it is up to us all to see that this Battalion is not responsible for that life-line being severed.

"The enemy may try to cut that life-line at any time, he may not; he may try to invade the east coast of Scotland, he may not; he may try to invade Eire, he may not; BUT our duty is to be prepared at all times to repel any attack, no matter what form it may take, in order to allow the R.A.F. at Limavady and the Navy at Londonderry to continue their work uninterruptedly so that the Battle of the Atlantic shall be won which will take us a long way towards the final overthrow of Nazism.

"5. The contents of this instruction will be explained to all ranks, who will be warned about discussing openly the importance of Limavady and Londonderry."

Then came the seven-day exercise, which was one of the most successful ones we had had. As it was the first time we had spent more than two nights out, it was also a test for all services and administrative staffs.

We concentrated on the afternoon of the 25th May and carried out a night march southwards in order to force the crossings of the Moyola River.

RECORD OF THE 5TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY  
JULY 1940-JUNE 1942

We were forced to take up a defensive position very hurriedly on the next night, which was an absolute soaker. The next day the Battalion advanced but was held up again on the line of the river in a position round the village of Knockloughrin. There it fought a tremendous battle for thirty-six hours or more before finally carrying out a withdrawal to a defensive position which had to be occupied in the dark.

The exercise was over at about 1100 hrs. on the 31st May, and to make a real job of it we decided to march the twenty-four miles home. As the men were becoming very fit and hard there was no reason to pamper them and ask for buses.

The march proved this. We started at 1600 hrs. on a very hot afternoon to march twelve miles, after which we were to have an hour's halt for supper. After passing through Garvagh the atmosphere became most oppressive and between 1900 and 2000 hrs. approximately fifteen men collapsed from the heat. However, they all got in at about 2030 hrs. under Major Sale.

By this time the sun was going down and the air was much cooler; everyone had had a cup of tea and a sandwich and felt very much refreshed. Lieutenant Ruck Keene came up to the commanding officer just before the Battalion marched off at 2200 hrs. and said: "I don't know what there is in Army tea, but it seems to have the most remarkable recuperative powers!"

The next twelve miles were unforgettable. The Battalion pushed along at a tremendous pace, singing the whole way, with never a sign of anyone falling out, including those who had collapsed. At 0145 hrs. on the 1st June the Battalion marched into Bellarena gates singing "Show me the way to go home, I'm tired and I want to go to bed."

Later on in the morning, after a few hours of sleep, there was an atmosphere of complete peace throughout the camp; the men were bathing and lying in the sun, resting and feeling that the past seven days had brought them nearer to the efficiency required to defeat the enemy.

Shortly after this there was another reorganization and change in our operational role. We were to go back to Castlerock, to be concentrated as a battalion after handing over our camp and Magilligan to the 9th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, of the 182nd Brigade.



**THE FIFTH BATTALION**  
**1st JULY TO 31st DECEMBER, 1941**  
**Contributed by Lieutenant-Colonel W. A. R. Ames, O.B.E.**

The brigade's operational role was changed to counter-attack on a group of aerodromes farther south. The two allotted to the Battalion were Aldagrove and Nutts Corner.

After preliminary reconnaissances the brigade commander moved the whole brigade down to the new area near Crumlin, as we were responsible for wiring the new aerodrome. We were becoming so used to living rough that it mattered very little whether we were in billets or barns. Battalion headquarters were established at Glendaragh.

The Battalion put up a fine performance at Nutts Corner, three companies erecting approximately twelve miles of double apron or triple dannert fencing in four days, besides digging many slit trenches for the R.A.F. As usual, the men worked indefatigably and the only unappreciative person was the group captain commanding the aerodrome, who appeared to take for granted everything the Army did for his aerodrome.

There followed strenuous exercises, "Gibraltar" from the 21st to the 25th July, and "Summit" at the end of August. In these, officers and non-commissioned officers alike had worked really hard to master all the details, both tactical and administrative, to bring the Battalion up to as near 100 per cent, efficiency as possible.

We very definitely knew that we were now able and fit to fight in any theatre of war to which we might be called.

During the latter part of the summer there was talk about building a camp for us to occupy in winter, but owing to labour difficulties it was more talk than work.

The colonel therefore put up a proposal that the Battalion should be allowed to build its own camp. It was agreed to allow us to build a third of it, which entailed the erecting of about twenty-four huts. Cement, cement mixer, sand, shuttering, etc., arrived and we turned ourselves for a time into builders. Lieutenant Spicer started with his band of pioneers and about fifty men, who worked like ants and actually completed their job by the target date, the 6th October, on which day we were due to hand over to the 10th Worcesters.

After the very strenuous summer, as many men as possible were attached to our affiliated field company, R.E., 270th Battery, R.A., of the 120th Field Regiment, 63rd Anti-Tank Regiment, R.A., D Company, 2nd/8th Middlesex (Machine Gun Battalion) and the field ambulance.

This experiment was a great success. Company Serjeant-Majors acted as company commanders and Serjeants as platoon officers. These attachments lasted for two or three weeks and the result was good. They gave the men a complete change and the officers also enjoyed the change, as, for a period, they were relieved of the always-present responsibility.

The Battalion returned to Bellarena and Magilligan on the 6th October, and individual training started much on the same lines as the previous year; but we tried a system of grading in the companies to brush up the more intelligent men on elementary subjects and pass them on quickly to more interesting and advanced work, while the more backward were brought up to standard.

General Franklyn, commander-in-chief, Northern Ireland, came and inspected the Battalion and spent a long time going into the system. He went away saying that the training was well organized and the Battalion well administered.

RECORD OF THE 5TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY  
JULY 1940-JUNE 1942

The colonel granted a complete week's holiday at Christmas owing to the strenuous time all had had and as a reward for really good work done by the Battalion. There was no reveille, but all had to be in to breakfast, washed and shaved, by 0800 hrs. and beds made by 0915 hrs.

Christmas Day was celebrated in the usual way and the commanding officer went round all Christmas dinners. The remainder of the week was spent as and how men liked, with two or three platoon parties going on every night.

Just before Christmas the Indian scourge began to descend upon us in full fury and the colonel was obliged to detail excellent officers to go abroad. Let it be said that it wasn't because they didn't want to go abroad, but they had only one desire and that was to fight with the Battalion. Thus we lost many very good officers.

**THE FIFTH BATTALION FROM  
1st JANUARY TO 30th JUNE, 1942  
Contributed by Lieutenant-Colonel W. A. R. Ames, O.B.E.**

Early in January it was learned that we were to go down into the III Corps area and relieve the 5th Division, which was going across to England. We moved in convoy at midday on the 16th January for Enniskillen, bidding a final farewell to Magilligan, Bellarena, Benevenagh and many other old haunts that had become such a part of our lives since July, 1940.

The accommodation in Enniskillen consisted of Castle Barracks, the old and condemned home of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, houses and parochial halls scattered down the main street and the old condemned jail which was more politely known as the County Hall. The accommodation was rather squalid. The main feature was the indescribable filth of the billets left by our predecessors. A battalion usually complains that billets are handed over dirty, but these were beyond belief. Out of one billet alone five 15-cwt. truck loads of muck were removed during our first day of occupation.

Our operational role was to counter-attack St. Angelo aerodrome and then, after relief by a battalion from the Belfast area, to rejoin as rear guard to the brigade for the "W" Plan.

It was a change to be in a town, but the men got rather tired of it as time went on. The officers' mess was in a house in the main street. We used to study the population on a summer evening from the ante-room window, and learned the habits of the locals better than they ever realized.

At midnight on the 24th January a special despatch rider arrived with a letter marked "Secret. Only to be opened by the commanding officer at 0800 hrs. on the 25th January." This letter informed us that the American Army was coming to Ireland and a regiment to Bellarena. Also we had to open up the camp, send cooks and prepare everything for their arrival. They arrived on Monday evening and Bellarena was one of the first places to welcome the advanced guard of the large American army that was to follow. They were most appreciative of and complimentary to the organization of the Army as a whole from the moment they arrived in Belfast Lough.

At the end of individual training we began to fire the weapon training course, having saved up ammunition throughout the winter for this purpose.

We achieved considerable success in the cross-country running competitions, thanks to Lieutenants Childe and Morris. We were second to the 2nd Bucks in the brigade run, second again to the Bucks in the divisional run and third in the B.T.N.I.\* run, being beaten to second place by the 7th Glosters by a few points, a team we had beaten by a few points in the divisional run. The Bucks with a very fine team won the B.T.N.I. run. This meant that the 184th Brigade provided two teams in the first three in all Ireland. (\*British Troops, Northern Ireland.)

We did two or three exercises with and without troops to practise the occupation of anti-tank localities and also discovered a most magnificent field firing range, assault course and horror house up in the Belmore Mountains, which was later to become famous in the life of the Battalion. We also built an assault course nearer to our billets which proved invaluable for later training.

In order to shake off winter weariness, a section leading exercise was set. Each section was dropped fifty-five miles from Enniskillen on a line running roughly from Strabane to Armagh. Each section represented a party of British soldiers which had been cut off by the enemy and was attempting to rejoin its own force, reorganizing south of Enniskillen.

The enemy were represented by H.Q. Company and County Tyrone and Fermanagh Home Guard. The only rule was that lifts must not be taken during the day. An officers' section took part under Lieutenant Thompson and got through to Enniskillen on a workman's train. The men had many adventures, including a conversation with the Governor of Northern Ireland by one section.

RECORD OF THE 5TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY  
JULY 1940-JUNE 1942

About 50 per cent, returned without being captured and much ingenuity was shown by many sections, and apart from upsetting the movement control staff at Omagh there were no incidents.

We had a big corps exercise, "Crocus," in which we spent a dull time in reserve, and only came into the battle just as it was finishing, but it gave us an opportunity to brush up our technique in the field after the winter.

Exercise "Mixed" followed on, run by the 61st Division, the 184th Brigade fighting the 183rd Brigade. The object of the exercise was to test our hardness and ability to fight without food. We actually did thirty hours on two sandwiches and a cup of cocoa and marched about the same number of miles. It was satisfying to read in the official report that the "physical fitness of the Battalion was outstanding."

Battle training now took first place and the Belmore Mountain became a second home.

Then the news came that General Sir Alan Brooke, C.I.G.S., was coming to inspect us. It is fair to say that it was a great success. Two days later Lieutenant-Colonel Ames was ordered to report to VIII Corps as assistant adjutant-general.