

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

**THE SIXTH BATTALION
FROM JULY TO 31st DECEMBER, 1940**

Sixty new infantry battalions were raised in June and July, 1940, and by happy coincidence number 43 was the 6th Bn. Oxf. and Bucks Lt. Infy.

On the 4th July a battalion cadre of eighteen officers, five warrant officers, fifty-three N.C.Os. and sixty-five men was formed at Cowley Barracks.

On the 6th July the Regiment was informed that, together with the 19th, 20th and 21st Battalions Royal Fusiliers, it was to form the 14th Infantry Group. The group later became known as the 214th Infantry Brigade. Also on the 6th July the advanced party, consisting of Lieutenant A. G. Hill, D.C.M., Second Lieutenant D. M. Bodkin and sixteen other ranks, left for Wincham Hall, Northwich, Cheshire, which was to be the first home of the Regiment. On the 8th July the Regimental cadre moved to Northwich and began to prepare for the reception of the army class intakes. On the 17th July the first batch, practically all from the counties of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, arrived to form A Company. On the 24th July another 190 men arrived, mostly from the Southampton area, to form B Company, and on the 26th July 360 more joined and formed C and D Companies, about 60 per cent, coming from Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire and the remainder from London, Devonshire and Cornwall. By the end of July all had been attested, inoculated and fitted out, and the Regiment could really call itself formed. None of the army class men had ever worn uniform before.

The surrounding country proved very suitable for the men's initial training, in which speed was the essential factor. In this respect the late summer was particularly kind and in spite of the lack of equipment good progress was made, due both to the efficiency of the N.C.Os. and the keenness of the men themselves. The programme for training recruits at the I.T.C. at Cowley was used, and the routine of training in musketry, Bren gun, anti-tank rifle, wiring and route marches was pushed steadily ahead. The imagination of the men was exercised to good effect as a substitute for the deficiency in weapons. The efficiency of the training, however, was well proved on the eventual arrival of the equipment, when the men found the work made comparatively straightforward for them by the sound theoretical instruction they had received.

The particular difficulty in the training was the shortage of rifles which considerably delayed instruction in musketry, bayonet fighting and arms drill. For instance, at one time C Company had 199 recruits and only forty rifles. The quartermaster produced broomsticks and the training went on. When, in September, the companies were sent for range firing practice the majority of men had still not been issued with rifles and had to use some which they had not previously handled.

At about the middle of October the various men suitable for the six H.Q. Company platoons were chosen, but the lack of signals equipment, 3-inch mortars, Bren carriers and transport vehicles hindered the training.

As rifles by this time had been issued to all the men the Regiment began to look more like a fighting battalion. No leave was granted during the Regiment's time at Northwich, as the threat of invasion and the need for training precluded it.

From the 27th October to the 4th November the Regiment stayed at Banbury en route for its more permanent winter quarters at Kingsclere. The men were billeted in various parts of the town and as many of them were near their homes short leave was allowed for the first time. During the week Lieutenant-General B. L. Montgomery, D.S.O., the commander of V Corps to which the Regiment was attached while at Banbury, paid an informal visit.

RECORD OF THE 6TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
JULY 1940-JUNE 1942

On the 1st November the first Regimental route march took place and on Sunday, the 3rd, the Regiment paraded for church for the first time with the band of the 43rd Light Infantry. The salute was taken outside the Town Hall by the brigade commander, Brigadier J. M. Prower, D.S.O., and the Mayor of Banbury, who after the parade promised the Regiment a silver bugle. The smartness of the Regiment on parade created an excellent impression in the town.

On the 4th November the Regiment moved by motor-coach to Kingsclere, near Newbury, the companies being billeted some three miles apart. By this time a large part of the equipment and mechanized vehicles had been received and training was intensified.

During its stay at Kingsclere the Regiment was inspected by Major-General J. G. Swayne, C.B.E., commanding the 4th Division, and later by the commander-in-chief, Home Forces, General Sir Alan Brooke, K.C.B., D.S.O., accompanied by the G.O.C.-in-G, Southern Command, Lieutenant-General C. J. E. Auchinleck, C.B., C.S.I., D.S.O., O.B.E. The inspecting officers expressed themselves satisfied with the standard of efficiency which the Regiment had attained. The 43rd Light Infantry band paid another very welcome visit when it accompanied church parade, gave a concert of light music and also played at a Saturday night dance at the village hall.

In December the 214th Infantry Brigade moved to the Isle of Wight (relieving the 12th Brigade), where it came under command of the Hampshire Division commanded by Major-General G. J. P. St. Clair, D.S.O. This division found all the troops to man the beaches and other more static defences in the Hampshire area of V Corps. Besides the 214th Brigade, the garrison of the Isle of Wight included:

- (a) 11th (Royal Militia of the Island of Jersey) Battalion Hampshire Regiment.
- (b) I.T.C., Hampshire Regiment, at Parkhurst.
- (c) 156th Field Regiment (Lanarkshire Yeomanry), R.A.; batteries of the 527th Hampshire Coast Regiment, R. A., at the Needles and Culver Point.
- (d) East and West Wight Battalions, Home Guard.
- (e) Part of the anti-aircraft defences covering Portsmouth harbour.
- (f) 8th Battalion East Lancashire Regiment.

To begin with, the Regiment was to have the role of island mobile reserve based on Ryde, with the three other battalions of the brigade on the beaches on the south coast of the island.

On the 10th December the Regiment left Kingsclere for the Isle of Wight for a stay which, apart from one short period on the mainland, eventually lasted until it was mobilized to go overseas in June, 1942.

By late afternoon we were in billets in Ryde. We were fortunate in that we were to spend Christmas at least in a town and not on the beaches themselves. With the 19th, 20th and 21st Royal Fusiliers the Regiment formed the mobile reserve, the mobility consisting of a number of green island buses together with their excellent civilian drivers, who knew the neighbourhood intimately.

We experienced, for the first time, the results of enemy activity and the very real necessity for wearing steel helmets as soon as the sirens sounded. The anti-aircraft barrages of Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight brought the war in the air home to us in a way that we, as a regiment, had not experienced before.

**THE SIXTH BATTALION
FROM 1st JANUARY TO 30th JUNE, 1941**

In January, 1941, a programme of training for officers and N.C.Os. was carried out, chiefly tactical exercises without troops, cloth model exercises and lectures. On the 21st January C and D Companies left Ryde to take over part of the sector manned by the 21st Royal Fusiliers at Brading and Bembridge. Thus for the first time the Regiment took an active part in the defence of our shores.

On the 1st February the Regiment took part in its first large-scale exercise, the first of many. During the month A and B Companies relieved C and D on the beaches, and, although it was not up to establishment in infantry weapons, the Regiment had the doubtful consolation of a 6-pounder Hotchkiss gun at Bembridge. Crews were trained in the manning of the gun and at the end of the month it was fired with marked success at a towed target.

March saw the Regiment still at Ryde, training when the opportunity allowed and still awaiting essentials in armaments and transport. There was no lack of enemy activity in the air during the spring, and every night, as well as occasionally during the day, gunfire was heard and fireworks seen over the Solent. On the night of the 9th/ 10th March there was a near-miss when a number of bombs dropped on Ryde and one unexploded sample fell outside H.Q. Company's office. The first classification of the signal platoon resulted in a 100 per cent, success and the transport platoon also received a strawberry. Thanks to good maintenance and driving, during the period the 29th October, 1940, to the 25th March, 1941, the Regimental vehicles covered a total distance of 140,000 miles without one single accident.

Early in April the 3-inch mortar and anti-tank rifle were fired for the first time. Gradually the Regiment was being issued with more weapons and ammunition, and the days of imaginary armaments were passing. On the 3rd April the Regiment was inspected by the corps commander, Lieutenant-General B. L. Montgomery, D.S.O., and in a congratulatory message he expressed his appreciation of the soldierly bearing of all ranks and considered that the men looked fit and hard.

On the 7th April Lieutenant-Colonel C. R. Spear, M.V.O., M.C., relinquished command of the Regiment. Lieutenant-Colonel R. H. Doyne came from the 52nd Light Infantry to command the Regiment on the 7th April.

Two days later the Regiment moved from Ryde into the line. The Regiment was responsible for the defence of fourteen miles of coastline and the Regimental area was forty-two miles in circumference.

May saw further Luftwaffe attacks on the island. On the 3rd four high-explosive bombs were dropped in the neighbourhood of Regimental headquarters, one damaging a cottage in which the pioneer platoon was billeted. The ceiling fell in in one room, which was fortunately empty that night, its occupants being on leave. Five days later, on the night of the 8th/9th May, about 400 incendiary bombs were dropped on and around Regimental headquarters. The men extinguished the bombs within half an hour, but nothing could save the thatched cottages in the village.

In June, in spite of having to provide working parties for all manner of tasks better suited to other soldiers than those of a light infantry regiment, we were able to do a little training while in reserve, which was, of course, the reason for being in reserve. Tank-hunting training, gas spray, assault courses, platoon three-day marches and inter-company schemes were organized.

On the 24th June a composite company of the Regiment took part in a field firing exercise with the 156th (Lanarkshire Yeomanry) Field Regiment, R. A. Many of the men taking part had to advance under a barrage put down from the flank. It was the first time they had witnessed artillery fire. Everything went off very well, but it was a moot point who was the most nervous: the gunners who had never fired their brand-new guns before, the infantry who knew that the gunners had never fired their brand-new guns before, or the rabbits who most unnaturally resented being blown up hill and down dale by 4.5's and 25-pounders, not to mention mortars (2-inch and 3-inch), Brens and rifles.

**THE SIXTH BATTALION
FROM 1st JULY TO 31st DECEMBER, 1941**

The first week of July brought the first anniversary of the Battalion, and a year of Army life to most of the men. On the 4th July a special order of the day was published:

"On this the first anniversary of the formation of the Battalion I wish to express my appreciation of the efforts made by all officers, warrant officers, non-commissioned officers and men to uphold the high standards and traditions of the Regiment to which we all have the honour to belong.

"History has been made, and we have seen both triumph and disaster since July, 1940, when with fourteen officers and a small cadre the Battalion was formed in Cheshire.

"Sixty battalions of the British Army are a year old this week. Of those sixty we are No. 43, a strange coincidence and a happy augury.

"Lieutenant-Colonel C. R. Spear, M.V.O., M.C., on relinquishing command of the Battalion, said that no commanding officer could have had a more loyal and enthusiastic body of men serving under him. I should like to endorse that well-merited tribute and at the same time stress the fact that much has yet to be done to reach that state of training necessary to defeat a highly organized and ruthless enemy.

"But I am convinced that so long as we are imbued with the spirit which today exists in the Battalion we need have no fear of the ultimate results when we are called upon to take an active part in the fight against the Hun.

"(Signed) R. H. Doyne, Lieut.-Colonel"

The 52nd Band came over to help celebrate the birthday, and dances and concerts were arranged in Newport and Ryde. The only change amongst the officers was the posting of Second Lieutenant T. P. Roberts to B Company in place of Second Lieutenant P. G. Redfern, posted to Headquarters, Hants Division.

During August the Regiment became fast friends with the latest arrivals, the 10th Bn. The Somerset Light Infantry. In a brigade exercise the two regiments became German paratroops. From the light infantry point of view the exercise was an unqualified success, since the speed of the two regiments across country compelled umpires and directors to alter the situation so often that in the end the light bobs had to be halted to enable the British forces to catch up.

Although "Lunar" was more akin to moonshine, it was a most useful exercise and we learnt a lot. There were some amusing incidents which can readily be recalled. For instance, the sight of an umpire and the director fleeing over the downs in search of their respirators what time a very visible cloud of tear gas— being, of course, no respecter of persons or even of the peerage —pursued them with a persistence not all reputed to it hi any textbook.

The weather was good and the men were encouraged to learn to swim as part of their essential training.

In the first week in September the Regiment returned to Ryde as island mobile reserve. For the first time it was reasonably well concentrated, apart from one platoon manning an observation post on Merseley Down. The officers were able to have one Regimental mess instead of being split up in penny packets. This helped as only a regimental mess can.

During the month tubular scaffolding had reared its ugly head again and more than three hundred men were employed daily on working parties either loading, unloading, erecting or demolishing.

RECORD OF THE 6TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
JULY 1940-JUNE 1942

At Ryde there was little need for organized entertainment, but a most successful variety show was staged by the Regiment at the Commodore Cinema entitled "Light Infancy."

At the beginning of November the usual inter-battalion relief was postponed and then cancelled. This started the wildest stories, especially since preparation had been made for relieving the 19th Royal Fusiliers at Sandown. On the 4th November, however, the divisional commander came over and addressed all officers. The commanding officer had already informed officers of what was in the wind: that we were leaving the Isle of Wight and that we were shortly to move overseas—to India! That was all he himself knew at the moment.

The effect on the men was difficult to gauge. The Regiment was fortunate in having a number of officers and men who knew India and had soldiered there with the 52nd. Most of the Regiment, having been in the Army only since July, 1940, thought of India in terms of curry and shipping advertisements. Generally speaking, however, the prospect of seeing something more of the world than tubular scaffolding was welcomed. The divisional commander warned us that India might mean anywhere from Persia to Singapore.

While the Battalion was serving in the Isle of Wight a Regimental band was formed under Corporal Ransted, of A Company, who discovered a number of men in the Regiment with some experience. Instruments presented the biggest problem, but the Ryde Town Band had been disbanded and had a number of instruments which, through the generosity of the Mayor of Ryde, we were able to buy at quite a small figure.

It was some time before the band, numbering six, made its first appearance at an open-air church parade. Week by week it developed in size until, thanks to the addition of five men from the Depot, a dance band was formed. Then came the news that the 52nd band was being disbanded and we were fortunate in securing eight bandsmen with a considerable amount of experience. This enabled us to change to a proper military band. Today the Regimental band numbers twenty-four, and, although only two periods per week are allotted to them* training, they make numerous public appearances, such as "Retreat" sounded with the buglers each week, church parades and adjutant's drills.

During November the Hampshire Division was disbanded and the 214th Infantry Brigade came under the command of the 47th (London) Division, commanded by Major-General J. E. Utterson-Kelso, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., with headquarters at Winchester.

On the 19th November another version of the successful "Light Infancy" was given in Ryde, this time in aid of the Regimental Comforts and Prisoners of War Fund. During the performance, called "More Light Infancy," which was attended by Major-General Utterson-Kelso, the commanding officer made a presentation of a silver cigar box to the Mayor and Corporation of Ryde on behalf of the Regiment for the kindness and hospitality shown while it was in Ryde.

As the day of leaving the island drew near, beach defence work by the Regiment ceased.

A farewell visit to a representative gathering of the Regiment by the brigade commander was paid on the eve of our departure from the Isle of Wight. In thanking us and wishing us the best of luck in the future, he referred to the Regiment's general bearing and discipline as "perfection itself."

So we left the Isle of Wight on the 26th November. After less than twenty-four hours at Wimborne, orders were received that we were to go to Porthcawl, South Wales. The advance party left on the 27th November and reached Gloucester before being recalled. This time the orders were that Ringwood, only eight miles from Wimborne, was to be the new home of the Regiment.

RECORD OF THE 6TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
JULY 1940-JUNE 1942

On the 2nd December the Regiment moved to Ringwood, taking the place of the 2nd London Irish in the 140th (London) Infantry Brigade in the 47th Division. The other battalions in the brigade were the 11th and 12th Royal Fusiliers, and the brigade commander was Brigadier J. W. Pendlebury, D.S.O., M.C. The 47th Division's operational responsibilities covered a wide area, extending over all the ground in a triangle formed by Portsmouth, Winchester and Bournemouth as well as the Isle of Wight.

The 140th Infantry Brigade were responsible for the New Forest area and the Regiment's operational role was, briefly, to man an area to the north-west of Ibsley aerodrome just outside Ringwood, to frustrate possible paratroop landings and, in the event of a successful landing and occupation of the aerodrome by the enemy, to deliver a counter-attack.

The billeting problem at Ringwood was acute. When we arrived the brigade commander was on the spot to confirm the commanding officer's decision to refuse to take over certain billets. Eventually A and D Companies, together with part of C Company, moved about five miles away to Burley. Later in the month A Company returned to a hutted camp near Ibsley aerodrome.

With the Regiment once again split up, concentrated training was out of the question. An interesting demonstration, however, was given of "parapatrols," the brigade commander's method for dealing with enemy parachute troops whom we were most likely to encounter in the New Forest area in the event of invasion.

Christmas Day was observed as a holiday throughout the command. The commanding officer, on his tour of all dining-halls, read a message from General B. C. T. Paget, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., commander-in-chief, Home Forces, saying: "I send to you and all ranks under your command my best wishes for the New Year and for opportunities of offensive action against the enemy."

Soon after Christmas a number of officers and Serjeants went on courses at the divisional school of battle drill, intended, among other things, to develop physical fitness by means of realistic battle practices and to attempt by artificial means to prepare the nervous system for some of the shocks of total war.

The 47th Divisional battle school was one of the original schools in the country, and the Regiment was among the first to learn and adopt this new drill. Later, on arrival in India, it was able to demonstrate and disseminate a battle technique that was to change radically the system of training in the Army.>(*The rifle and light infantry drill as evolved by Colonel Coote-Manningham, of the 95th, and Colonel Mackenzie, 52nd, at Shorncliffe and adopted by Sir John Moore was essentially a drill for battle. It survived the test of twelve years of war and was used in what was probably the finest, hardest and most resourceful division of all time in any army. It was natural that a light infantry officer of the Regiment, General Paget, should have been a prime mover in adapting the drill to modern conditions for the whole Army.—ed.)

**THE SIXTH BATTALION
FROM 1ST JANUARY TO 30TH JUNE, 1942
Contributed by Captain M. J. Pultenby**

Captain G. Baker, commanding C Company, writes of the battle course in January, 1942:

"Each course assembled on a Sunday afternoon and there was an introductory address on the Sunday evening by the commandant of the school.

"He told the students that General Alexander, General Paget and the divisional commander, Major-General Utterson-Kelso, had on their return from Dunkirk realized that there must be revolutionary changes in the training of the individual soldier and that training must be based on the doctrine of fire and movement and infiltration, because the Germans had pinned down our men with withering fire and had worked sections, platoons and companies round their backs and had thereby surrounded them; and it was perfectly clear that the British troops had not appreciated what was happening and had not received training themselves in how to counter these tactics or to employ them themselves. We were told that we were going to be taught how to do this by a series of drills and those drills would go farther and would teach us how to cross a river in complete silence and without a word being spoken, of how to clear an individual house or a street or village, of how to clear a wood, and of how to clear a farm or other similar isolated stronghold. The address finished on a cheerful note that live bullets, grenades, mortar shells, etc., were used on the course and they were prepared to accept a percentage of casualties. The reason given for using live stuff was that it was unreasonable to put a soldier into battle for the first time if he had never experienced being under fire before, whereas if he had experienced this, battle would not be such a shock to him or his system. This was battle inoculation.

"There were two platoons up to full strength, one consisting of officers and the other of Serjeants, and a list was made out showing the duties of each particular man on each particular day, e.g., mortarman, anti-tank rifleman, section leader, and so on.

"The next morning the students assembled and were given their first talk and demonstration on the blackboard of how an infantry section should work in attack. At every lecture every man was dressed in full equipment and did not take it off. On leaving the lecture room we were formed up outside and where-ever we went and whatever we did was at the double throughout the whole of our course. The platoon was doubled to a field where in miniature a section demonstrated what we had been taught on the blackboard. It was quite simple. A platoon advanced in single file and was fired at from a point a short distance away. The platoon at once went to earth and crawled away from the places where they had gone down, on the principle of 'cover from view is not cover from fire if you have been seen getting there.' Every man in the section was taught to observe at all times and so was quick to see where the fire had come from. The section leader then gave an order to his Bren-gun section to fire on the enemy and as soon as that fire started, thus keeping the enemy's head down, the rest of the section moved round to a flank and on arrival gave covering fire on to the enemy's position so that the Bren-gun section could move round, probably to the rear of the enemy and much nearer to him. The Bren-gun section then gave covering fire and the rifle section sent a grenadier forward to throw grenades on the enemy while the remainder of the rifle section fixed bayonets and advanced firing from the hip. Once the enemy's position was overrun the attackers wheeled into the original direction of advance and consolidated some distance from the enemy's position, because we were taught that the enemy, once he lost a position, would bring fire down upon it. We all then practised this and all had our turns at the drill. At first we did it walking on an area the size of half a football field. Next we trotted and each man had his turn at doing the various jobs. It all seemed so plain, so simple and so effective. We could not understand why everyone was not taught this and we asked the reason. We were told that this was far too revolutionary, that the powers-that-be did not accept it as a whole, and that the 47th Divisional commander was so keen on it that he had set up his own school without any particular authority and certainly with no authorized establishment. He had taken the staff from men who had been through a previous course and soon the Battalion had to supply instructors from those who had done well on previous courses.

RECORD OF THE 6TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
JULY 1940-JUNE 1942

"Next we were taught how to crawl with and without weapons and how to stalk each other. All quite simple in theory but difficult and so essential in practice. We ran greater distances with our weapons and we were taken out as a section and told that the enemy was in a certain place some 500 yards or so away and we had to consider the best line of advance to that position. We discussed the problem, each man giving his views and reasons. The line of advance chosen by the majority was accepted, one was chosen as a section leader and the line of advance was tried. After that we had discussions again and faults were pointed out.

"The next day was deemed to provide the supreme ordeal. It was the third day of the course when the awesome assault course had to be negotiated. We had heard a lot about it and we were told that if we surmounted it the rest of the course would seem easy. The assault course took about twenty-five minutes to cover and consisted of crossing a wire fence, over a very muddy field which thoroughly soaked us, through a stream, over a hedge and then a long run down a lane to a small river. All this time we were being urged by bloodthirsty young officers saying: 'Hate, hate, hate. The Hun has ruined your home, has killed your mother, has raped your sister. Blood, blood, hate.' This was supposed to inculcate that wildness which makes men see red, but it was later found by experience that it did not have that effect and it was dropped.

"We reached the river, where a rope was hanging from a bough of a tree by means of which we were supposed to swing ourselves across the river by our equipment. Meanwhile, charges of dynamite were being thrown into the river, grenades were exploding and bullets were being fired just behind us to urge us on. Some fell in the river and others were more lucky. Now, thoroughly soaked, we continued with the run. From time to time we came across booby traps, elephant pits, men hiding in trees with unpleasant wet sacks to drop on us, and so on.

Through some wire we went down into a pit filled with smoke; through the pit into a sewer and on again, urged by bloodthirsty screams; through another sewer; fired six rounds at some targets; on again through a mass of wires, after which we killed Hitler at the end and got into hot baths feeling like the devil's henchmen. Some, but very few, did not survive. Either their limbs or their courage gave out. Every officer and Serjeant in the Battalion passed the course, many with distinction.

"Henceforward, having survived the assault course, we felt we could do anything. The exercises became more exhausting, we seemed to run greater distances, and we became terribly hungry, but it was impossible to get enough to eat or to get a second helping. The only way to do so was to go into dinner at 7 o'clock and leave after the soup and main course. Then at about a quarter to eight start again and go right through at another table, first making sure that there was a different waiter at it who would not detect the subterfuge.

"All the drills were done in close order at first, but by degrees we went out into the country and did them on a larger scale. The section exercise was followed by a platoon and finally by a company scheme. The drill started with a lecture and blackboard or small models, followed by the demonstration section doing it in miniature. Next we did it ourselves in miniature and then on a larger scale. We did it time and time again until we were pretty well perfect. We learned not only how to do a thing ourselves but how to teach it to others and we were all filled with the utmost enthusiasm.

"One particular demonstration of the platoon in attack was staged at Burley. This was very convenient, for those companies stationed there were taken over to see the students of the school doing their stuff and it was a joy for the private soldier to see his company commander slogging along as a Bren gunner.

"The biggest exercise of the course was an all-day affair on which no one was allowed any food at all after his breakfast, which took place at some ungodly hour. We were kept running the whole day and in the course of it repeated everything we had been doing, some of the things several times. Platoon and company commanders were changed so that everyone had a turn in so far as that was possible.

RECORD OF THE 6TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
JULY 1940-JUNE 1942

"The last three days of the course were attended by the commanding officers of battalions, the brigade commander and the divisional commander himself, besides sundry visiting officers. To the commanding officers and the others assembled the officers' platoon gave demonstrations of what they had been taught and of a platoon in attack at Burley. They also took part in an exercise assisted by 25-pounders. On the last day of the course Major-General Utterson-Kelso directed a large cloth model exercise during which commanding officers and their syndicates were put through then: paces.

"We came back from the course feeling very fit indeed and only too anxious to start teaching this revolutionary training which, in its simplicity, was most inspiring to the men under our command.

"At a conference of his company commanders the commanding officer said he was much impressed with what he had seen and ordered us to teach our men what we ourselves had been taught.

"We threw ourselves into the task with great enthusiasm. The remark of one lance-corporal is noteworthy. When he was asked what he thought about battle drill after he had been doing it for some weeks, he said: 'Beforehand I did not really know what I was doing; but now I do.'"

On the 8th January, 1942, an intake of between sixty and seventy Army class men, mostly plumbers and carpenters who had been in reserved occupations, joined the Regiment. They were formed into a recruit training company, known as I Company, and stationed at Lymington, under the command of Major E. A. Braybrooke, who took with him as his staff Second Lieutenants J. T. Starkey, T. P. Bailey and B. C. W. Hart and a cadre of non-commissioned officers to start their training. Not only did many of these men come from the counties of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire and thus started with a certain amount of Regimental pride but also they were a particularly fine body of men who throughout their service with the Regiment did much to uphold its traditions.

On the 11th January the soccer and hockey teams visited the 52nd Light Infantry at Basingstoke and defeated them at both games. This was the first time since the formation of the 6th Battalion that it had met another battalion of the Regiment.

Training during the month included a number of company exercises in which battle drill played an important part. Exercises were also held to ensure the proper working of parapatrols and there was a short scheme to test the defences of Ibsley aerodrome.

In February the training of the men by officers and non-commissioned officers in battle drill went steadily ahead and by the end of the month the whole Regiment had been initiated.

March opened with a surprise. The Regiment had only been lent to the 140th Infantry Brigade before, we thought, being sent overseas. Orders were suddenly received that we were to move to the last place on earth we expected: the Isle of Wight, to defend the southern sector, a job for which we had been responsible on two previous occasions.

On the 10th March the Regiment relieved the 2nd Bn. Essex Regiment in the 214th Infantry Brigade, which now came under direct orders of V Corps and consisted of the 111th (Royal Militia of the Island of Jersey) Bn. Hampshire Regiment, 12th Bn. Hampshire Regiment, 7th Bn. Wiltshire Regiment and 6th Bn. Oxf. and Bucks Lt. Infy. The Regiment took over the defence of the South Coast again, with positions stretching from Brighstone on the right to Ventnor on the left. One company was in reserve at Whitwell, Nos. 3, 4 and 5 Platoons at Billingham and Regimental headquarters at Shorwell.

The commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel R. H. Doyne, writes: "At this period one of the most vital areas in the Regimental sector was the range direction finding station on Boniface Down above Ventnor. B Company, with one section of No. 4 Platoon and two detachments of No. 3 Platoon under command, was billeted at Whitwell and had as its operational role the defence of Boniface Down, or, if already overrun, the task of counter-attacking.

RECORD OF THE 6TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
JULY 1940-JUNE 1942

On the afternoon of the 2nd April the Regiment received orders to send this detachment to Boniface Down. Dispositions for its defence were taken up, but no attack materialized. The company also had a field battery in support which actually registered defensive fire tasks on Luccomb Chine, east of Ventnor, to the consternation of the local inhabitants. Back at Billingham Manor the garrison, commanded by Major J. W. Meade, prepared to stand to, the commander, despite the protests of his staff, announcing his intention of moving his headquarters to the sewage ditch below the tennis court. Luckily this unsavoury operation did not have to be carried out. This state of emergency lasted until the 7th April."

On 8th April I Company finished its training at Lymington and the men were absorbed into the Regiment and posted to companies.

On the same day the Regiment was relieved in the south sector of the Isle of Wight and moved inland to become mobile reserve. For the first time for many months the Regiment was free from any commitments and could concentrate on training before going overseas.

On the 24th April a warning order was received from V Corps that the Regiment was to return to the mainland, this time to Eastover camp, near Andover. The advanced party left three days later.

On the 4th May the Regiment moved to Eastover Copse camp, on the main Andover—Salisbury road some four miles outside Andover. Thanks to the hard work of the advanced party and the most perfect weather, the camp was passable, although the absence of water and other necessities increased difficulties. Incidentally, this was the first time since the first few months in the life of the Regiment that we had been all together under canvas.

The 8th May was the most important day in the history of the Regiment, for on this day orders were received from the War Office that we were to be mobilized by 0001 hrs. on the 8th June. The wheels were at once set in motion: embarkation leave started, drafts arrived, all transport vehicles were handed over, and the quartermaster's branch was even more busy than usual indenting for all the necessities.

On the 11th June, for the first time in the history of the Regiment, it was inspected by the Colonel of the Regiment, Major-General Sir John Hanbury-Williams, G.C.V.O., K.C.B., C.M.G. Through stage management that can seldom have been equalled (or was it pure coincidence?) part of the 52nd Light Infantry was towed, glider-borne, over the parade ground, at the precise moment when Sir John was referring to their record in the past history of the Regiment. After the parade Sir John sent the following message to the commanding officer:

"Will you please express to all ranks how pleased I was with the fine show they made on parade, which did the greatest credit to you and all serving under your command?"

This inspection, appropriately enough, was the Regiment's last appearance in public before leaving England.

Note by the commanding officer on the state of training of the regiment on going overseas, June, 1942

By June, 1942, the standard of training and administration within the Battalion had reached a very satisfactory standard, considering the difficulties with which we had to contend, both in the Isle of Wight and while with the 47th Division.

The various demands made upon us for assistance in training Home Guard, erection of defence works, as well as operational commitments in a defensive role made it extremely difficult to organize the sort of training required to exercise commanders on the Battalion level.

This particularly applied to co-operation with other arms. Tanks did not exist, and gunners were themselves so committed in defence tasks that they could do little more than help in T.E.W.Ts. and discussions.

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However, in spite of these handicaps, considerable progress was made, while the standard of weapon and basic training had reached a high level, particularly since the enthusiastic acceptance of battle drill.

All ranks were fit, and confident of acquitting themselves well if they were only given the opportunity.

As the burden of erecting defence works, including many miles of tubular scaffolding in the island and wire obstacles at Ibsley aerodrome, had fallen chiefly on the rifle companies, specialist training was interfered with as little as possible.

This policy paid handsome dividends later on in India and Burma, where both the signal and carrier platoons attained a very high state of efficiency, and the mortar platoon came to be regarded as one of the most outstanding in Burma.

As for discipline, both in England and, later, in India, the Battalion earned for itself a reputation for good behaviour and cheerfulness that was in keeping with the highest traditions of the Regiment. The number of men punished by the commanding officer was negligible, and frequently a fortnight or more would go by without a single name appearing on the guard report.

They had already acquired that pride of regiment which is the basis of all good discipline, and were a magnificent team to lead. No driving was ever necessary.

To see men of the Regiment walking out—whether it was in Newport, Ryde or Bangalore—was a pleasure, and their standard of turn-out drew compliments from more than one higher formation commander.

Throughout our time in the Isle of Wight our relations with the civil population were most cordial, and we were greeted as friends wherever we went. This attitude on the part of the civilians towards soldiers billeted in their houses and training on their land cannot be praised too highly, and we shall always be grateful for it. But it was undoubtedly developed and encouraged by the good behaviour and general bearing of all ranks wherever-they might be.

As may be realized, the morale of the Battalion was by now extremely high, and we left England with the sure conviction that we should make a good showing in any undertaking we were asked to attempt.