

THE BUILD UP – 1939 – 1944 The 1st BATTALION

INTRODUCTION

The Bn had just returned from annual camp when they were mobilised and concentrated in Hereford before moving to Tenby in November. Then followed almost 5 years of training before being launched into the Normandy invasion. Life on the Home front was not easy with an invasion threat, the blitz, rationing and all of the other privations and restrictions.

The Battalion went through a period of reorganisation internal and external, it received new equipment, was transferred to a newly formed Division (operating under new tactics), it was brought up to strength with new recruits and there was a constant churn on manpower. On top of all of this they moved constantly around the country.

ORGANISATION

There was an immediate internal reorganisation taking place with older and medically unfit men being transferred or discharged and new men being posted in, this was to continue throughout the period with in addition: experienced men being posted out to form new units; men volunteering for 'special' tasks – eg: paras and commandos; skilled men being posted to units where their skills were better employed and recent basically trained conscripts being received.



CSM Richard Harman, who had served with the Battalion at Suvla Bay during the First World War was transferred to the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and then 9th Bn Gloucestershire Regiment as being either too old and/or unfit for overseas service. He was eventually discharged in 1943.

CSM Harman at Camp in the 1930s

It is not entirely clear how many or why men were posted out but at least 2 men (4105644 Pte Bath and 4104659 Pte Capes) from the Regiment joined No 2 Independent Commando and were killed in action with them in Norway in May 1940.

Peter Andrews was a wartime volunteer officer of the KSLI who was posted to The Herefords in Northern Ireland.

He joined the Herefords as 12 Platoon Commander in B Company – his gave his initial impression in a letter home: *It's a beautiful spot right at the foot of the Mourne Mountains, but the town is very second rate. We are*

under canvas but it is perfectly comfortable. They are a grand set and everyone is very friendly ... the meals here are wonderful.

Clearly a capable officer he was selected as the Adjutant for the move from NI back to UK and later transferred to HQ 159 Bde with whom he served for the rest of the war.



2Lt Peter Andrews – wearing the shoulder flash of 11 Armd Div and The Herefordshire Regiment.



Peter Andrews with the staff at the Urban Training school in West Ham London, where the Battalion completed training in 1944.

Tony Wardman was also posted to the Battalion in NI and assumed the role of MT (Motor Transport) Officer – he was to serve with the Battalion throughout the war in the carrier Platoon. This photograph shows him wearing the collar badges of the KSLI and (partially visible) a shoulder flash of the Herefords.



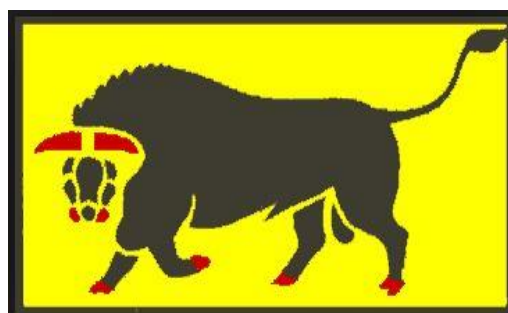
Things took an interesting and revitalising turn in May 1942. 159 Infantry Brigade was taken out of 53 (Welsh) Division to combine with 29 Armoured Brigade and form 11 Armoured Division under Maj Gen Sir Percy Hobart. It was a new War Office establishment and nobody seemed to know in those days what should be the correct proportion of infantry to armour in one formation. Many different ideas had been tried out but this one was constituted for 11 Armd Div; Broadley it was:

1 Armd Bde (3 Armd Regts and 1 motor Bn)
1 Inf Bde (3 (lorried) Inf Bns)
1 Recce Regt (Armd)
2 Arty Regts
Anti Tank (ATk), Light Anti Aircraft (LAA), Royal Engineers (RE), and services to scale.

The Battalion converted to Lorryborne Infantry and this new role was adopted with great enthusiasm and the idea of training as part of an armoured division captured the imagination and gave a fillip to all. On leaving 53 Div the divisional sign of the Red W was replaced by the black bull on a yellow rectangle, which was to become famous as the sign of 11 Armd Div. There was no saying how long there would be to train before the Division might be called into action.



53 Div Shoulder Flash



11 Armoured Div Shoulder Flash

LOCATIONS and TRAINING

The Bn established itself at Tenby and settled in to a cycle of training for war. The German invasion of Norway and Denmark in April 1940 made raids against Northern Ireland, if not a full-scale invasion, possible, and it became essential that the troops in Northern Ireland should be reinforced. The threat of invasion became more real after the Dunkirk evacuation. There was also the possibility of Irish Republican action which in some areas was sympathetic to Germany. Elements of 53 Div had been sent to Northern Ireland in Autumn 1939 and were reinforced with the remainder of the Division. In March 1940 Lt Col AD Bryant took command of the Battalion, which on 10 April 1940 left Tenby for Northern Ireland. The Bn remained in Portrush until 7 June, when it moved to Larne, remaining there until 19 June. It was stationed at Castlewella from 19 June 1940 until 9 May 1941, where it spent a most uncomfortable time under canvas, and then moved to Newcastle, where it remained until 16 November 1941, when it returned to England, arriving at Crewe on 18th, this was a most welcomed move.

In addition to security duties training became more intense – new equipment and new organisations were introduced and the constant churn of manpower continued. The threat was not overly apparent to the soldiers and there was still an air of being ‘at camp’.

The War Diaries for the years 1939 to May 1944 are published here and give an account of the Battalion’s activities – also included are some OP ORDERS for training exercises which give a flavour of the topics and organisation of training and how it became more intensive during the period.

A member (unknown) of the QM department kept a running account of the Bn's movement during this time and also made comments about the various locations – it is reproduced in full below:

Subject: Raspberries/buttercups/Tulips 'W/S' & Bulls – Moves of the 1st Bn The Herefordshire Regiment

Date	Detail	Remarks
1939		
Nov	8	Left Hereford
	8	Arrived Tenby
1940		
Apr	10	1000hrs Left Tenby
	11	1230hrs Arrived Portrush Northern Ireland
Jun	7	1100hrs Left Portrush
	7	1400hrs Arrived Larne
	19	1500hrs Left Larne
	19	1800hrs Arrived Castlewellan
Jul	2	Tuesday 1630hrs
Oct	28	Monday 100hrs
1941		
Mar	14	1230hrs
May	9	1500hrs Left Castlewellan
	9	1515hrs Arrived Newcastle
Nov	16	1315hrs Left Newcastle
	18	0230 Arrived Crewe
1942		
Apr	7	1430hrs Left Crewe
	9	1630hrs Arrived Linton, Kent
May	11	1730hrs Left Linton
	11	1945hrs Arrived Maresfield Camp, Sussex
Aug	15	1000hrs Left Maresfield
	15	1600hrs Arrived Weeting Hall Camp, Brandon, Suffolk
	16	Sunday
Sep	3	Thursday
Nov	1	Sunday
Dec	25	Friday
1943		
Jan	20	0830hrs Left Weeting Hall Camp

	20	2050hrs arrived West Tofts Camp	Much nicer office, good gad? Miles and miles from nowhere. Only pleasure we look forward to is leave and pit.
	7	Thursday. Battalion inspected by HRH The Duke of Gloucester. Poured with rain during the inspection.	I'm sure no affection was felt by the men.
	26	Tuesday. Battalion inspected by HM King George VI.	My, my we must belong to the elite to receive such favoured attention.
	30	Sunday. Announced that Mr Churchill had paid a flying visit to Casablanca.	Our transport returned to base, once more saving our bacon – Leave at last. That lucky special.
Feb	28	Thursday.	Had a physical check of store 45 (junk). Endeavouring to get rid of Tenby rubbish. Quite a big day for Q branch.
Mar	16	0900hrs left West Tofts Camp	Another triumph for the railway system. Hope we don't see Lt QM Stacy again. Look out civilianisation here we come.
	16	1020hrs arrived Newmarket	Roll out the barrel. Happy once more -even the QM. Sleeping in stables; went to sleep the other night and woke a little ho(a)rse.
	20	Saturday	Out on the beer. Quite a good drink at the Waggon & Horses. Weeds reviving.
Apr	20/21	Tuesday & Wednesday. Newmarket Races	Battalion granted 2 half holidays – broke – many brave heart asleep in the deep.
Jun	10	Midnight left Newmarket	We leave the land of stables with mixed feelings – very mixed for a few.
	10	1700hrs arrived Hornsea York	Oh for the life on the ocean wave. Lovely gravy and what girls! The cream.
	17	Thursday 0900hrs left Hornsea	Same entry as 16 Aug 1942. Very sad day. We go but we come back.
Sep	3	0915hrs arrive Leven	Back to the bucket and wooden seats days. Roll on Dec 1 st .
	8	Italy capitulates	Big news, look out Jerry you are next.
	23	1330 left Leven	Very joyful day. We come back lots of smiles.
	23	1355 arrive Hornsea	We leave the land of buckets and wooden seats. Again there are lots of Mossy (s)miles.
Dec	25		Fifth Christmas in the Mother country. Who's grumbling? We are told 1944 is the year for attack. Let's hope for an early armistice.
1944			
Jan	1		Great day – battalion football team won the East Riding Services Cup. Hull besieged by 'swede bashers'.
Feb	13	Ex Eagle	Twelve days in the blue. Very wet, very cold but very interesting – in a way.
	25	Ex Rum terminated	Sober at last – peace perfect peace in this dark world of schemes.
Mar	16	Thursday Caps GS received	Great excitement in the camp
Apr	2	Sunday left Hornsea	Oh how beautiful is my country – morale drops 2 points. We leave Yorkshire belles and good old Rose & Crown bitter with sad hearts.
	4	Tuesday arrived Aldershot	The birthplace and home of the British Army. Troops 'fousands of 'em'.
May	27	Saturday Still in Aldershot	Leave still cancelled. Great events in the offing. Look out jerry we are on our way any time now.

	30	Tuesday	Some battalion commences 'no leave no 2 nd front' campaign. Result - more route marches and like it and still no leave.
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Weeting Hall – demolished 1954



The most intensive Divisional training took place from May to July 1942, ending in extensive field manoeuvres that lasted 14 days and were supervised by Montgomery himself. The tempo continued to increase with changed equipment – especially new Crusader tanks.

Another milestone in the Bn's story was 16 August 1942. Mobilisation orders were received and the Division was put on priority for equipment. Feverish anxiety and all the attendant details of mobilisation followed. The Division was scheduled to join 1st Army in North Africa. Everyone highly elated and went to work with a new will. Months rolled by and still the finishing touches to preparation went on. Special leave in 7 and 3 day stretches kept coming round but still no sign of movement. At last towards the end of January 1943 the 'go' was sounded and vehicles were despatched in batches varying from 10 to 50 to ports around UK. However on 30 January the transport returned to base as the embarkation order had been cancelled.

This was a severe test on morale. To be keyed up for months and then to be turned about like that was dispiriting to say the least of it. To think of more training was the last straw. However leave was started and the situation was soon restored. A still higher degree of efficiency was attained during the final preparations and the inevitable changes in personnel continued. During this period the Division received a new Commander – Maj Gen GPB (Pip) Roberts under whose skilled leadership it was to serve the whole of its fighting career.

The training of the Battalion was a long and varied business. During years of waiting the MT (Motor Transport) and (Bren Gun) carriers gradually became standard types of military vehicles and began to bear some vague relation to vehicle establishment. It was a long struggle spread out over 5 years.

It was a period of changing officers, changing men, changing locations and changing blanco. Schemes, TEWTS (Tactical Exercise Without TroopS), exercises, individual training and all the vicissitudes of training days followed each other with monotonous regularity and there seemed to be little constructive continuity about anything. All the time however a grand thing was happening which was to be reflected when at last the efforts made in the early days were put to the test. An esprit de corps second to none was growing in every member of the unit.

There was nothing fresh to learn about individual training, except *not to sit on the hot pipe on the top of the tank*. So began a new period of training and an endless series of exercise - Inf/tank cooperation and everyone got down to it with enthusiasm. Soon the infantry and tank crews knew each other intimately, not only on the training grounds but in the mess, on the sports field and in the cafes. Anyone wearing the bull was openly accepted as a kindred soldier. Combined camps at Butterwick and Burrow House were great occasions when this close relationship became unshatterably cemented.

In September 1942 Lt Col JB (Jack) Churcher took over Command of the Battalion. On 7 January 1943, in pouring rain while awaiting embarkation orders, the Bn was inspected by HRH the Duke of Gloucester. On 20 January the Battalion left Weeting Hall camp and moved to West Tofts camp, Brandon, and here on 26 January 1943 the Brigade was inspected by HM King George VI.

On 2 Apr 1944 the Bn left Hornsea and arrived in Aldershot on the following Tuesday, and there the Division concentrated as part of the Allied Expeditionary Force awaiting D-Day.

The Urban Warfare School at West Ham



Serial No. 24 Army Form W3050B
 Naval Form M193
 R.A.F. Form 1653

Date of Issue.....

BRITISH * ROYAL NAVY
 ARMY
 ROYAL AIR FORCE

IDENTITY CERTIFICATE.

No. A104852 Surname Austin
 Christian Names (in full) Cecil James
 has been specially trained as a
 (medical orderly) and will, when necessary, be
 (stretcher bearer) ordered to collect, transport and
 treat the wounded and sick.

* HE is protected under the provisions of the Inter-
 national Convention for the Amelioration of the
 Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the
 Field, Geneva, 1929, if taken prisoner while carrying
 out this function: (Arts. 9 [para. 2] and 21 [para. 2]).

Signature & Rank of Issuing Officer
A. W. Lewis Captain

Signature of Holder C. J. Austin

Notice.—This certificate will be withdrawn
 immediately it ceases to be applicable to
 the holder.
 *Strike out whichever is inapplicable.

(17728D) Wt 27703/1813 100,000 9/42 H J R & L Gp 745/6

Stretcher Bearers were identified and trained in first aid and their duties. Many had been Bandsmen in the Battalion, but this was their war time role.

Pte Austin's Red Cross identification certificate as a Stretcher Bearer.

In Aldershot the Battalion had a series of photographs taken covering each company.





SERGEANTS' MESS, 1st BATTALION THE HEREFORDSHIRE REGIMENT, 1944

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1st Lt—Sgt. J. Lobb. Sgt. J. Mullington. Sgt. T. Widge. Sgt. L. Hartshill. Sgt. A. Clements. Sgt. H. Dutcher. Sgt. L. Pys. Sgt. F. Warrington. Sgt. B. Brown. P.Sgt. H. Lewis. Sgt. H. Goole. Sgt. W. Watts. Sgt. R. Coymon.
2nd Lt—Sgt. E. Zolman. Sgt. J. Fletcher. Sgt. E. Hyman. Sgt. F. Felton. Sgt. B. Perkins. Sgt. L. Cotterill. Sgt. W. Dutton. Sgt. T. E. Jones. Sgt. E. Holloway. Sgt. H. Payne. Sgt. L. Bell. Sgt. J. Sinner. Sgt. R. Pugh. Sgt. D. Reynolds.
3rd Lt—Sgt. E. Selskirk. Sgt. O. Whitwell. Sgt. T. Jones. Sgt. F. Wright. Sgt. F. Cook. Sgt. D. Thomas. Sgt. V. Bunsell. Sgt. E. Midward. Sgt. F. Tusk. Sgt. L. Bedson. Sgt. J. Staley. Sgt. J. Parker. Sgt. T. Proddy. Sgt. E. Gimes.
Squad—C.Q.M.S. J. Whalley. C.Q.M.S. J. Mansfield. C.Q.M.S. E. Bunsfield. C.S.M. J. Williams. C.S.M. H. Edgeworth. C.S.M. C. Mason. R.S.M. P. Wells. Lt.-Col. J. B. Charter. R.Q.M.S. H. Bellings. Capt. O. A. Knyvett-Hoff.
C.S.M. A. Mairhead. C.S.M. M. Toner. C.S.M. J. Greenhouse. C.Q.M.S. B. Grice. C.Q.M.S. J. French. C.Q.M.S. D. Coghil.



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HEADQUARTER COMPANY, 1st BN. HEREFORDSHIRE REGIMENT, 1944



Gale & Polden Ltd., Aldershot

SUPPORT COMPANY, 1st BATTALION THE HEREFORDSHIRE REGIMENT, 1944



CARRIER PLATOON, SUPPORT COMPANY, 1st BN. THE HEREFORDSHIRE REGIMENT, 1944

Back Row—Pte. J. Guy. Pte. B. Brentnall. Pte. G. Phillips. Pte. W. Handley. Pte. H. Burton. Pte. G. Marchant. Pte. H. Whittfield. Pte. C. Gilbert. Pte. S. Cartwright. Pte. R. Lello. Pte. J. Croxall. Pte. G. Farmer. Pte. J. Gilbert. Pte. J. Coupland.
2nd—Pte. F. Price. Pte. G. Parson. Pte. A. Davies. Pte. W. Smart. L/Cpl. J. Moreton. Pte. M. Scammell. Pte. D. Daffurn. Pte. H. Heywood. L/Cpl. L. Pallott. Pte. W. Chamberlain. Pte. W. Meredith. Pte. D. Bevan. Pte. W. Downes. Pte. W. Finnikin.
3rd—Pte. R. Fenner. Pte. H. Hughes. Pte. B. Jones. Pte. R. Morgan. Pte. R. Coleman. Pte. S. Whitcut. Pte. H. Smart. Pte. G. Hastlow. Pte. S. Evans. Pte. H. Burrows. Pte. W. Walker. Pte. J. Rowlands. L./Cpl. W. Page. Pte. W. Foxon.
Front Row—Cpl. T. Walton. Cpl. A. Bowerman. Cpl. J. Harding. Sgt. F. Moppett. Sgt. E. Nettleship. Sgt. G. Rogers. Capt. R. P. Barneby. Lt. A. B. Wardman. Sgt. F. Warrington. Sgt. R. Boven. L./Sgt. H. Lewis. Cpl. J. Brookes.
Innets—Pte. C. Bell. Pte. L. Tallis. Pte. G. Tisdale. Cpl. C. Anson. Cpl. B. Worton. Pte. J. Watson. Pte. H. Watson. Pte. J. Nixon.

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Gair & Potts Ltd., Aberdeen

ANTI-TANK PL. "S" COY., 1st BN. THE HEREFORDSHIRE REGIMENT, 1944



MORTAR PLATOON, 1st BATTALION THE HEREFORDSHIRE REGIMENT, 1944



THE BAND AND DRUMS OF THE HEREFORDSHIRE REGIMENT, 1944

Gale & Polden Ltd., Aldershot

Third Row—Dmr. P. Jones. Bugl. F. Ribley. Bugl. Cpl. V. Penson. Dmr. T. Woodward. Dmr. J. Finney. Bsn. G. Lloyd. Dmr. C. Roblan. Bugl. T. Simms. Bugl. L. Jones. Dmr. R. Robinson.
Second Row—Bsn. Cpl. A. Jenkins. Bsn. C. Austin. Bsn. A. Gwilliam. Bsn. L/Cpl. B. Wilce. Bsn. B. Rittorland. Bsn. R. Dobbs. Bsn. E. Fairbanks. Bsn. R. Windmill. Bsn. R. Richards. Bsn. J. Fletcher. Bsn. T. Homer.
Seated—Bsn. W. Dykes. Bsn. A. Lerigo. Bsn. T. Jones. Bandmaster Sgt. A. Hughes. Band President, Capt. G. M. Lloyd. Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. J. B. Churcher. Adjutant, Capt. Knyvett-Loff. Dmr.-Major, L/Cpl. A. Evans.
 Bsn. W. Windmill. Bsn. B. Steiner. Bsn. G. Snowzell.



"C" COMPANY, 1st BATTALION THE HEREFORDSHIRE REGIMENT, 1944

Gale & Polden Ltd., Aldershot



Gale & Polden Ltd., Aldershot

"D" COMPANY, 1st BN. THE HEREFORDSHIRE REGIMENT, 1944

[Copies of the photos of B & D Coys are not held by the Museum - we would be very keen to acquire them!]

SPORT & SOCIAL

There was also time for relaxation and social gatherings. Sport was seen as an important way to both improve fitness and esprit de corps. Inter company football, rugby, boxing and other competitions were 'de rigueur'. The Battalion was also successful in Brigade, Divisional and Regional competitions and the Regimental football team won the East Riding District Services Cup, having won the Divisional League and Knock out competition.



The Winners Of The Inter-Company Boxing Competition



1ST BATTALION HEREFORDSHIRE REGIMENT.
INTER-COMPANY TOURNAMENT SEVEN-A-SIDE RUGBY.
D COMPANY—FINALISTS 1941.



Back Row (Left to Right)—Lt. HOLDEN, W. B. Pte. FOX, W. 2/Lt. LUKES, I. E. J. Major HERFORD, R. J. Lt. Cpl. EVANS, F. A. 2/Lt. WARDMAN, W. R.
Front Row (Left to Right)—Pte. WILLIAMS, F. G. Pte. GREENWOOD, H. Cpl. PENNEDYTON, T.
Absent—Cpl. JONES, F. W.

Tenby - 1939



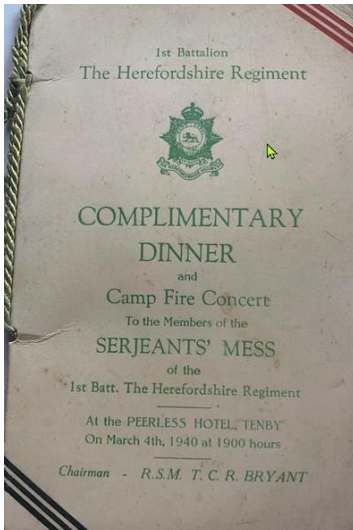
The Sergeants Mess - 1939



K ROW—Sjts. Jones, J. ; Marshall, C. ; Jordan, D. J. ; Sayers, T. ; Harris, F. ; Kite, W. ;
Benbow, H. W. ; Wheeler, G. E. ; Griffiths, B. ; Morris, W. H. ; Chamberlain, T. ;
Beavan, W. J. ; Snowzell, G.

DLE ROW—Sjt. Inst. Deeney, W. T. ; Sjt. Jones, T. ; Sjt. Mason, W. ; C.Q.M.S. Badger, G. ;
Sjt. Robinson, H. ; Sjt. Lewis, J. ; C.Q.M.S. Meredith, R. T. ; C.Q.M.S. Weaver, A. B. ;
C.Q.M.S. Jones, W. ; Sjt. Rogers, G. ; Sjt. Borsberry, L. ; Sjt. Hall, J. ; Sjt. Carbin, W. J.

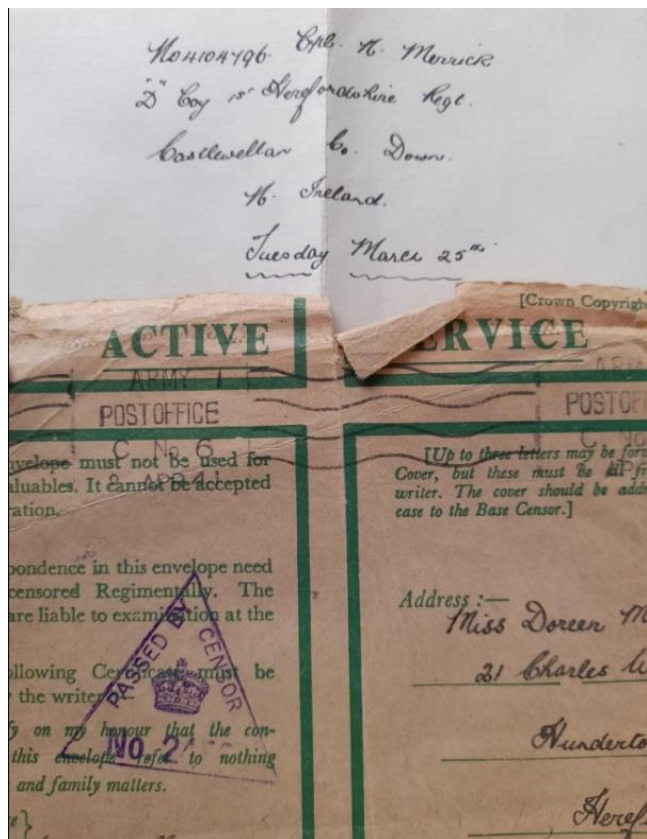
T ROW—P.S.M. Davies, A. A. ; P.S.M. Davies, P. J. ; P.S.M. Roberts, W. ; C.S.M. Rollings,
H. ; R.Q.M.S. Beavan, R. R. ; R.S.M. Bryant, T. R. C. ; O.R.Q.M.S. Smith, A. V. ; B.M. Lawrence,
G. ; C.S.M. Chamberlain, C. ; C.S.M. Morgan, G. ; P.S.M. Pye, W.



In the 'pre-IT age' communication was by letter, (land line) phones were the privilege of the rich and business and the 'weekly' letter was the standard and expected form.



Cpl Merrick in Castlewellean 1940



Lt Col JACK CHURCHER

In September 1942 Lt Col 'Jack' Churcher took over as Commanding Officer. He was a regular soldier of the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry and clearly a most capable officer – to be proved by his early selection as Brigade Commander and eventually the Command of 5 Division. He had seen peacetime service in England and India and was a staff college graduate.

In 1939 he was a staff officer in 11 Brigade of 4 Division and deployed with them to France as part of the BEF. He was on UK leave when Germany launched their Blitzkrieg but immediately returned to France, but due to the chaos could not rejoin his unit. He became a Divisional Staff Officer in an ad hoc lines of communication division, and served with them withdrawing in the face of the German onslaught and eventually being evacuated from Cherbourg after passing through Caen and Normandy which 4 years later would play such a big part in the Bn's history.



On return to UK he was again a Brigade Staff Officer and a Staff Officer in the HQ of the newly formed Canadian Corps, before becoming an instructor at the Staff College – here he would have been exposed to the latest tactics and equipment. He later wrote an autobiography and of his time with The Herefords before DDay he says:

I found myself appointed as Commanding Officer of the 1 Battalion the Herefordshire Regiment. I took over command of the Battalion in November 1942 at Brandon on the borders of Norfolk. The Regiment was part of 159 Infantry Brigade which was the Infantry Brigade of 11 Armoured Division. This was a new Division that had been formed in 1941 and was really only just beginning to get into shape. General Hobart was the Commander of the Division at the time and subsequently the Commander of 79 Armoured Division which included all the "funnies" as we called them, like flame-throwers and flails. 159 Brigade was commanded by Brigadier Sandy and the three battalions were 4 Kings Shropshire Light Infantry, 1 Herefordshire Regiment and 3 Monmouthshire Regiment. Now the Hereford Battalion was a very interesting one in that it was the only regiment affiliated to that county and was really looked upon as the child of the county and they did everything they could from the Territorial Army Association upwards to help, us in every way. By virtue of Herefordshire being next door to Shropshire we were, in fact, included in the Corps of the KSLI and our Colonel in Chief a General Grant was also the Colonel in Chief of the Herefordshire Regiment.

All the camps that the Brigade occupied in Britain were the war-time Nissen hutted camps and they were pretty sparse in what they provided in the way of comfort. Nevertheless we were all in the same boat and the purpose of being up in that area was to train, train for war and become efficient. Nearby in Norfolk was the famous Thetford battle training area which still exists to this day. Shortly after taking over command I decided that I would carry out a full-scale field firing exercise for the whole battalion on the Thetford area so that I could see what standard of training the battalion had reached and what was necessary to be done to bring it up to a higher standard. The exercise went off very well and General Hobart decided to come and have a look at it and his only comment to me was "Why don't you engage the enemy at longer range with your small arms?" So I had to try and tell him as an Infantryman to a Tank man, that it was no good opening fire at seven and 800

yards with rifles and light machine guns as the fire would be ineffective and disclose where your position was. He didn't seem to like that argument much so I quite expected to be told in a few days time that he hadn't liked the exercise. On the other hand, he wrote a short note saying that he was very impressed with what he saw. General Hobart didn't stay with us long and we got a Cavalryman, General Brockers-Burroughs who took over command and he was responsible for preparing the Division for going overseas with the 1st Army into North Africa. Well this didn't in fact materialize although we had two false alarms with the soldiers being sent on 7 days leave and on the second time we lost all our first reinforcements that were going to be sent out ahead of us.

Having two such alarms did in fact on the second occasion have quite an effect on the morale of the troops and one had to hold some fairly strenuous exercises to get that somewhat lowering of morale out of their systems and bring them back to the state of efficiency that they were in before the second incident happened. During the time we were at Brandon the Division was visited by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth and we had a parade for them. It was really extremely exhilarating to be visited by the Monarch. In the spring of 1943 we moved to Yorkshire and 159 Brigade was situated in the East Riding at Hornsea and Beverley. The purpose of moving us to Yorkshire was to train the Division on the Yorkshire Wolds which was considered, and rightly so, to be similar type of country to what we could expect when we went to Europe. When we got out of the bocage of Normandy it proved to be the case. It was at this time that Major General Pip Roberts took command of the Division, one of Monty's specially selected tank corps commanders from 8th Army. We trained very hard in Yorkshire and we tried all sorts of interesting experiments as well so that we would be highly efficient on landing on the Continent wherever it might be, as at that time we had no idea where it would be. One of the experiments I worked on was to conceal the whole of my carrier platoon in a field and yet no-one would be able to see they were there and at the right moment they could lift the lids off their holes in which each carrier had been dug and away they went. It was really quite impressive. As you can imagine having been an Instructor at the Machine Gun School and also a very keen Bisley shot I was determined that the troops in the Herefords would be first class shots as well. I held a rifle meeting in which I made a large number of officers and the other ranks all shoot. Just as a matter of interest I came out first in the Battalion in the revolver and second in the Battalion with the Rifle. So after that I was able to put considerable pressure on everybody to improve their musketry and this I know stood us in extremely good stead in the years to come.

Whilst up on the Wolds we started to develop the first armoured infantry cooperation in attack. It took quite a lot of developing because neither the junior leaders in the infantry nor the troop leaders in the armour knew how to set about the problem so it had to be worked out more or less from scratch. In the end we got the drill properly organised as you will see when the story goes on to Operations on the Continent. During this time we had a great number of exercises and I was beginning to note in my mind some of the oddities that came out of our Brigadier. I found him a most illogical commander. At one moment he was all charm and helpful and the next moment he was just the reverse. I could never make the man out and I don't think any of the other COs could either. In early January, the whole Brigade went up to Inverary on the West coast of Scotland to undertake three weeks of combined operations. In other words training for assaulting beaches and moving from ship to landing craft and so on. It was quite an interesting time up there learning the elementary techniques of combined operations - landing off small landing craft, being carried down to the shore in large ships specially adapted for beaching such as the Maracaibo which had been used in Venezuela in the development of off-shore oil. Amongst other things we had to do was to climb off the large ships by scramble nets into small ones and if one was not accustomed to such things it could be quite tricky. On conclusion of our period at Inverary we returned to the East Riding of Yorkshire and the Battalion was once again in our billets in Hornsea where the local inhabitants seemed very pleased to see us. On returning to Hornsea we then carried on with our training as best we could with everybody wondering at that time when and how we were going to invade the Continent of Europe. Plenty of rumours were running around but nothing firm coming out but it is interesting to note that on the Sunday 26 March I once again met General

Dempsey who by that time had been appointed Commander of the 2nd British Army which was the Army scheduled for the invasion of Europe.



The harbour at Inverary January 2024

CONCLUSION

It is fitting to conclude with a remark made by the Lt Col Churcher Commanding Officer, on the occasion he left the Bn to command of 159 Inf Bde in Normandy, who had been responsible for the training in UK - *My object when training in UK, was to save lives. By everyman being proficient at his job and knowing what to do casualties were saved.*

To quote from Maj Hesketh's account of the Regiment's exploits:

- As a Battalion we wore down the Mountains of Mourne; as a Battalion we exercised in the Potteries, on the Downs, on the battle areas of Suffolk and over the Wolds of Yorkshire. Finishing touches to training were applied at Inverary in Scotland and street fighting at West Ham. It was a severe and unrelenting grind but it all made its mark..... After all this drilling, grilling, sorting and shuffling, the Battalion was a first class unit. Trained to the finger tips, where the principles of Infantry/Armour cooperation had been absorbed by everybody down to the all important private soldier. Morale was high and each unit's esprit de corps was merged into an 'Esprit de Bull'

The old maxim 'train hard to fight easy' had been followed and the Bn was keen and 'itching' to do what they had been trained for. It was clear the second front would be opened soon with the invasion 'somewhere' in France – The Bn was 'up for it!'.