

**FROM KNOOK TO MEHLE**

R. A. BROMLEY  
"BRACKENWOOD"

# FROM KNOOK TO MEHLE

being the History of  
"D" TROOP, 9th SURVEY REGT., R.A.

by  
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(With full acknowledgement to the Diary of W. E. Hargreaves)

## Knook

The history of the 9th Survey Regiment, R.A. commences in March 1941 when the Regiment was formed at Knook Camp, Heytesbury, near Warminster, under the command of Lt. Col. Smith, R.A.

Heytesbury is a typical Wiltshire village situated on the south-west edge of Salisbury Plain, and this, together with its nearness to the School of Survey at Larkhill, made it an ideal spot for the formation of a survey regiment.

At first the Regiment consisted of a motley collection of artillerymen from all sorts of units and wearing all manner of dress. After several weeks, however, it sorted itself out into Survey, Flash Spotting and Sound Ranging Batteries, and, of course, R.H.Q.

The S.R. battery was commanded by Major Farrow, and, at first, seemed to consist of one troop only; this was "C" Troop commanded by Captain O'Brien. There was a hazy notion of a "D" Troop with a personnel of little more than one sergeant and a couple of gunners.

The summer of 1941 was very fine and one remembers the S.R. and survey training under Capt. O'Brien and Lieut. "Tich" Wright, the odd route marches and gas training under one Lieut. Heywood, the cross-country runs in which the fittest of Q.'s and B.S.M.'s had to take part, and the week-end passes which seemed to come by magic from the hand of a certain lance-bombardier who appointed himself to the battery office. One remembers, also, of those fine summer months, the regimental cricket matches and athletic sports, the dances in the N.A.F.F.I. (with its three bars), the crowded village pubs, and day passes to such places as Warminster, Salisbury and Frome. These were also the great days of hitch-hiking, and many were the tales told of the long distance lifts received.

As the summer wore on "D" Troop began to grow under Captain Cleaver who came from R.H.Q., and soon the battery had two troops working.

Colonel Smith was replaced by Lt. Col. Eastwood, R.A., and rumours began to spread concerning the movement of the Regiment. The 8th Regiment, which shared Knook Camp with us, moved on into Wales and we felt that our turn was soon to come. Speculation was settled when it was announced, much to the delight of all "Geordies", that we were to move to County Durham.

## Coxhoe

Late summer saw the Regiment leave Knook and begin its long march to the north. This took three days. The first night we halted at the Lutterworth staging camp and the second at the staging camp on Doncaster race course. Both of these camps were to be re-visited by the battery many times, and the Doncaster camp in particular became very well known. At dusk on the third day S.R. Battery arrived at Coxhoe, a small mining town a few miles south of the city of Durham.

Few who were present on that occasion will forget that first evening. The camp consisted of a large house, Coxhoe Hall, surrounded by nissen and similar huts; these huts were in no particular order and were all very cunningly concealed among trees and ditches. These were also the days of rigid blackout, and as we arrived in the middle of an air-raid, one can imagine the stumbling, falling, tripping and cursing which accompanied that first night.

In County Durham we experienced a new state of affairs, as the Regiment was split up. S.R. Battery and R.H.Q. were in Coxhoe, Survey Battery at Ferryhill, and F.S. Battery at Middleton-in-Teedsale.

Coxhoe is a typical Durham mining town and we found ourselves among a very hospitable people and enjoyed to the full the freedom of clubs and pubs. Little out-door training was done but there seemed to be countless duties. In those days the two troops and B.H.Q. were about equal in numbers, for B.H.Q. then contained survey and wire-laying sections, and we used a duty system whereby each troop had one week on and two off. Strangely enough this seemed to work very well, although the one week on was a very hectic period; coming off one duty and straight on to another was by no means uncommon.

This life was rather rudely upset by two very ambitious schemes in which we took part. The first of these took place at the end of September and went under the name of "Bumper". For this we journeyed back along the Great North Road, stayed again at Doncaster, and carried out our part of the "battle" in the Eastern Counties. Large numbers of troops were employed and for many of us it was a first experience of living rough. When sound rangers eventually deployed, most of the officers had been "killed or taken prisoner" and the base was set up and operated by a pair of very green bombardiers. October saw the end of the exercise and another march back to Coxhoe.

There was little rest after this before taking part in an infantry exercise around Wylam on the river Tyne a few miles above Newcastle. This was another tiring affair and is remembered for lack of food, less sleep and general discomfort. It was during this scheme that Sergeant Ken Holmes first came to sound rangers, being first of all posted to "C" Troop.

The coming of winter ended such schemes and the Christmas season was spent in the grandest of styles. One thinks of Coxhoe's pit-head baths, of a well-known gunner reading the football results on sentry duty, and of a certain sergeant and bombardier detailed to arrest a drunken and defaulting gunner at one of the open-all-day clubs.

A much sadder memory is that of a road accident in which Gunner McKenzie was fatally injured.

1942

### Middleton-in-Teesdale

The beginning of January saw the end of our stay in Coxhoe, but not of our time in County Durham. We merely changed billets with F.S. Battery and moved to Middleton-in-Teesdale. This move was very unpopular at first, but objections were very silent after a short time at Middleton. It is doubtful whether any unit of the British Army made itself so much at home anywhere as sound-rangers did at this small town. We were to spend the next sixteen months there and during that time S.R. Battery became almost part of the town itself.

Middleton is situated on the northern bank of the River Tees, near the junction of the three counties of Durham, Yorkshire and Westmorland. It is high up in the Pennines, surrounded by bleak moorland and only a few miles from the well-known High Force Falls. In summer it is visited by many tourists, but we arrived on the very same day as the winter snow.

Both troops were billeted in the town, "C" Troop were mostly around the village hall in nissen huts, one lucky party being in a large room behind the Cleveland Hotel, while "D" Troop had two large halls known as Bourne and Wesley.

Major Farrow was still in command of the battery with Captain Cleaver in charge of "D" Troop. Captain O'Brien had left the battery while still at Coxhoe and "C" Troop had been without a T.C. After a few weeks at Middleton, however, Captain Bromley's name is mentioned for the first time as being in charge of "C" Troop.

S.R. and survey training began with the end of the snow and schemes around the district were frequent but for the most part quite leisurely. They were, of course, well mixed with duties, both necessary and unnecessary. Several longer schemes took place on the Otterburn ranges in Northumberland but these are chiefly remembered for the excellence of a house known as the Percy Arms.

During the summer Major Farrow left and was replaced by the Adjutant—Captain Humphrey—promoted to major for the post. Now it was obvious to all that Major "Sam" Humphrey had come to Middleton with the express intention of "smartening-up" the S.R. Battery. Unfortunately, sound rangers have an inherent and deep-rooted objection to being "smartened-up" and they in turn set themselves the task of showing the new B.C. the error of his ways. Who shall we say won the battle? sometimes open, but more often subtle and insidious. Looking back on it after some years one can only suggest that the honours were about even. No fair-minded person would deny that if sound rangers were not "smartened-up" in the months that followed, they were very much toughened and made more workmanlike. This was a very worthwhile achievement. For their part, sound rangers, nobly led by the two T.C.s, took "Sam" in hand and considerably extended his education. They taught him to take a far more human view of human frailty and that a blind eye can sometimes be of great value. At any rate, when, some three years later, Sam's turn came to leave the battery, it can safely be said that he and sound rangers parted on the best of terms.

The new command made "C" Troop into a Training Troop under Captain Bromley, with Sergeant Holmes as No. 1, and "D" Troop a Fighting Troop under Captain Cleaver, with Sergeant Lenihan as No. 1. The idea was that "C" Troop should polish up new-comers at a sort of class-room level and then pass them on to "D" Troop for training in the field. From "D" Troop dozens of sound rangers were posted to other survey regiments. In fact, we became a training and holding regiment for supplying men for home and abroad, and, as the summer wore on, more and more of the original members of the battery were posted away. While old hands were leaving, "C" Troop was being supplied with new-comers from the School of Survey, from "G" Troop (attached to R.H.Q.), and from a batch from the Suffolk Regiment. Many of these "G" Troopers and Suffolks remained with the battery until the end and became very good sound rangers.

During this time training was pretty stiff, reveille at 0300 or even 0130 hrs. being the accepted thing for schemes. Names such as Copley, Crook, Langden Beck, Coniscliffe and Brough, come to mind as being the centres of these activities. Lectures, pep-talks and demonstrations with models all added to the accumulation of skill and knowledge. This S.R. training was reinforced by such vigorous exercise as running up and down the local mountain, route marches in F.S.M.O. (often at the double) to such places as High Force, and P.T. (bare feet) early in the morning. In addition, Saturday morning inspections were things to be wondered at if not commonly admired.

So, under these conditions, the summer of 1942 wore on. One variation was a long march and a series of schemes to Larkhill, which lasted from the middle of August until the beginning of September. For this the battery camped at Fargo, a short distance from the School of Survey.

The summer passed away and the work became somewhat easier. We used a permanent base quite a lot and this proved very useful, in spite of the odd stories told about it by early morning maintenance parties.

The end of the year saw the battery still at Middleton, although many of the familiar faces of Christmas 1941 had been replaced by the time Christmas 1942 came along. Needless to say, this festival was celebrated as only a Sound-ranging Battery stationed at a Middleton could celebrate it.

## 1943

### Middleton-in-Teesdale (continued)

1943 was to be an important year for the Regiment, and it started off with great energy for "D" Troop. The B.C. had decided that the troop should carry out a series of endurance tests, the main object of which was to determine how long a man could operate a S.R. Radio Link set before he became inefficient owing to exhaustion. Several of these tests were carried out, but one in particular stands out. This one started the year well—on January 1st. Four stalwart operators were chosen for the occasion and these were set up with their sets within a few yards of a headquarters in the village hall. One, slightly more fortunate than the others, was placed in a small and very draughty shed, the second in an ordinary bell tent, while the remaining two were in the open. Each man was fed on ordinary rations from the cookhouse and was allowed only that kit packed in F.S.M.O. for his protection against wet, cold, etc. The H.Q. was also used as an A.P. and its job was to shout over the air, averaging four times per hour, the signal "Shot! Shot! Shot!" The four unfortunates outside then pressed their switches to "Send" as quickly as possible. The S.R. Recorder was so arranged that the film showed the "Shot! Shot! Shot!" signal and also the switch over of the four sets to "Send". From this film the time lag between the two could be determined. It was expected that this time lag would increase until, one by one, the operators failed to react at all. During this time the weather was bitterly cold and the whole affair was very uncomfortable for the H.Q. Staff working inside, so it can be imagined how the "guinea pigs" outside fared. The test started at 0900 hrs. and carried on wearily through the day of the 1st. The first man to drop out was, strangely enough, the occupant of the shed; this was not due to exhaustion, but to misadventure. This enterprising gunner thought to make life more bearable by making a small fire in his shed; his only fuel, however, consisted of damp twigs and these made such a thick smoke in the confined space that he came near to suffocating himself, missed a signal, and was counted out. The others carried on through the bitterly cold night and on into the next day. The second night came and by 6 o'clock the next morning only one man was left operating his set. This was Gunner "Codger" Martin, and he was duly proclaimed the winner. It is doubtful whether anything useful of a scientific nature was learned from this experiment, but it does serve to demonstrate the toughening process that we were being subjected to at that time.

January 15th saw another aspect of this same process, namely, the epic march to Wolsingham, where Survey Battery was now stationed. For this march of something like 15 miles the whole battery turned out complete with F.S.M.O. and such things as bren guns and stretchers. The route was over open moorland, the weather bitterly cold, and the roads covered with ice; in fact, the whole outlook was one at which even a hardened infantryman might well have looked askance. To the credit of the battery it must be written that every man, save one who fell out with a leg injury, marched into Wolsingham with the trace of a swing in his step and a little pleasantly surprised at his own hardihood.

On February 8th "D" Troop moved off on a visit to the artillery ranges at Sennybridge, Breconshire, South Wales. This march took three days, staging camps being at Doncaster and Wellington. The weather at Sennybridge was as wet and windy as only a bad February in Wales can be. Whichever side of the ranges we went, the wind always seemed to be in the wrong direction and was totally unsuitable for sound-ranging. Practically all work was washed out and we returned to Middleton after an absence of ten days with little or nothing accomplished.

Two days after our return we began to see the shape of things to come. Postings-out suddenly ceased and the whole battery was reorganised and a start made towards bringing it up to full strength. A big switch over in personnel was made between troops: Capt. Bromley as T.C., together with Sergt. Holmes as No. 1 and a number of others from "C" Troop came over to "D" Troop, while Capt Cleaver went to "C" Troop. In fact, the new "D" Troop was largely made up of the old "C" Troop, and the history of "D" Troop, as many know it, starts from this moment.

The first try-out of this new organisation came in the form of an extensive exercise known as "Spartan". This scheme took place in the country north of London, and thousands of troops were engaged in a mock battle. As the name implies, it was to be a tough affair with short rations, much movement, shops out of bounds and other inconveniences. The beginning of March was doubtless chosen as being the best time to make things as uncomfortable as possible. Fortunately for those taking part, General March did not play his part very well and we had quite good springlike weather, although rather chilly; this, no doubt, greatly annoyed the powers-that-be. We left Middleton on 27th February and proceeded by way of Doncaster (yet again) to the area around Beaconsfield and Chalfont St. Giles. We stayed several days at Chalfont waiting for the exercise to begin. When the "battle" started "D" Troop made two deployments, one near Berkhamstead, and a second in the Leighton Buzzard district. The "war" ended on 12th March, and three days later we were safely back in Middleton.

One more big scheme took place at Middleton, this took the form of a Divisional March around the Scarborough and Yorkshire coast area. It was a very tedious affair and ended at Otterburn in Northumberland. Some will remember the break-neck race, nobly led by "Tich" Wright, back to Middleton when once the troop was released from the apron strings of the Division.

Since the return from "Spartan" much feverish activity had been going on in Battery and Troop Offices and "Q" Stores in order to put the battery on a mobilised basis. New equipment, battle dress, stores and kit of all sorts was

the order of the day. Greasy gunners saw themselves blossoming forth with two brand new uniforms and everything appeared very smart. The regiment had previously been in 30 Corps and had worn the "Black Cat" of that formation, but we now heard that we were the survey regiment of 1 Corps and the old flash was replaced by the "Spearhead". Many began to see that all this activity was but a preparation for a D-Day to come, but over a year was to pass before that came about.

Amidst all this activity it was with great regret that we heard that our time at Middleton was drawing to a close. After a stay of nearly sixteen months, the battery fell in on the cold wet morning of 30th April, ready to move on into Scotland.

Floods of memories of Middleton will return to sound rangers who spent all or most of the time at this town. Apart from the training there, we remember the homely pubs—Cleveland, Talbot, Bell, Kings Head, Bridge, Working Men's Club; the Saturday-night dances at the village hall; and Ben Spraggon with his fish shop and his attempt to emulate John Gilpin at the village gymkhana. We remember the snows of the winter of 41-2 and the remarkable absence of snow during 42-3; the wild moorland around the town; the River Tees with High Force; and the chattering beck that tumbled through the town to join the Tees.

## Alyth

Generally speaking, it was with little enthusiasm that the troop arrived at Alyth, a small Scottish town in Perthshire, about twenty miles north-west of Dundee. The whole regiment was again brought together and accommodated in and around a large house known as Barony Hall. Alyth is on the edge of the Scottish Highlands and it was in these surroundings that our work was to continue.

For training we now worked as a "Group" and not as a battery. Our particular group was made up of S.R. B.H.Q., "D" Troop S.R., "A" Troop F.S., and "E" Troop Survey, and although in time we became accustomed to this arrangement, there was never the old family feeling which we had when working with "C" Troop. Schemes came thick and fast, and names of many famous highland beauty spots were the scenes of these; names like Dunkeld, Pitlochery and Aberfeldy figure many times in H.Q. diaries.

During this time mobilisation measures continued and embarkation colours and numbers were painted on stores and kit-bags.

On 27th May "D" Troop forgot its sound-ranging for a time and returned to pure survey. We were sent to Moffat in Dumfriesshire, from which headquarters we had the job of carrying out an extensive survey of some proposed artillery ranges south of Moffat. For nearly two weeks the surveyors and drivers worked very hard, from first thing in the morning until dusk they were kept busy running up and down hills and mountains, and, in the end, had established dozens of bearing picquets and other survey points. During this period of hard labour by surveyors and drivers it is said that certain signallers enjoyed themselves to the full.

3rd July saw a large batch off on a combined operations course at Rothesay on the Isle of Bute in the Firth of Clyde. We stayed one Saturday night in Glasgow on the way and proved that the song of the Scottish comedian was perfectly correct. In Rothesay we were billeted in a large house and used the pavilion on the sea-front as a dining room. The meals produced in this



place, however, were so bad that most of the troop seemed to feed in the local cafés and restaurants. The combined operations training was very extensive and consisted of such activities as getting vehicles on and off landing craft, water-proofing vehicles, rowing large boats, scrambling up and down nets, and generally getting very wet. Fortunately, the weather was very kind and so we were not worried overmuch by this. The whole affair ended up with a night scheme which took the form of a night assault landing. Until that particular night the landing craft had been manned by naval personnel, but for this occasion the R.A.S.C. took them over. As this was the first occasion they had performed this duty unaided, the beauty of the night on the Scottish waters was rather spoiled by somewhat erratic seamanship. However, by July 11th the whole party was safely back in Alyth.

A remarkable affair, starting on 15th August, was the so-called "rest" camp at the small town of Kenmore on the banks of Loch Tay. For this we camped on the edge of the loch under trucks and tarpaulins, and lived largely on "Compo" rations.

Several interesting events took place here. One that comes to mind was a series of tests in swimming, running, motor-cycling and general athletics. The toughest of these tests was a race in which one man, dressed in F.S.M.O., carried over a course of about 200 yards another man, also in F.S.M.O.. The ultimate winner of this herculean task was Gunner "Rupe" Ash, thereafter looked upon as the strong man of the troop.

The most important event of this camp was the introduction of the words "Assault Party"; roughly speaking, the idea behind these words was this. It was realised that in the event of the troop taking part in an invasion it would be impossible for the whole troop to be landed at once. It was thought, therefore, that the troop would have to be thinned out to about 40% of its full strength, this percentage consisting of men necessary to get the troop into action and to keep it going until such time as the others arrived in various waves. The first practice of this idea took place at Kenmore, after the B.C. had explained the procedure at a meeting of officers and sergeants. After a certain amount of trial and error the S.R. Assault Party was finally made up of 44 men with six vehicles. These were:—

D.	Jeep	T.C.s recce.	2 men
HQ.	3 ton	HQ, Survey and Line Stores	18 men
AP1.	15 cwt.	Stores for AP1 and AP2.	8 men
M1.	15 cwt.	Stores for M1 and M2.	6 men
M3.	15 cwt.	Stores for M3 and Met. Section	4 men
M5.	15 cwt.	Stores for M4 and M5.	6 men

The camp ended on 20th August and the troop returned to Alyth.

With the end of the summer, schemes became more local, and soon the inevitable rumours of another move began to float about. On 9th November "D" Troop said its farewell to Alyth.

At this stage we may consider some of the memories which remain of this small Scottish town, apart from those associated with military duty. First, perhaps, the wonderful scenery of the surrounding countryside, and then, the visits to neighbouring towns such as Perth, Dundee, Blairgowrie (with its raspberry-picking gypsies—very popular with certain types), and Kirriemuir (of ballad fame).

Of these, Dundee was generally considered first favourite with those with a pass in their pocket, and many hours were spent in that town which seemed to consist largely of bars and fish saloons. In Alyth itself there was a very efficient Y.M.C.A., a well patronised Italian Café, a rather more noisy shop-cum-restaurant-cum-dance-hall, and a local hall which could be used for films or dances. Furthermore, we must not forget the Land Army girls, usually referred to as "Woodpeckers".

## **Gretna and Glasgow**

On leaving Alyth we expected to take part in a scheme near Gretna, in Dumfriesshire, and at the conclusion of the scheme to proceed to a new camp at Johnstone, a few miles west of Glasgow. The first part of this expectation came true but the second did not. The scheme around Gretna was rather a miserable affair, during which we lived in lofts around a farm yard which was little more than a sea of mud. We left this district on 13th November, expecting to go to the new camp at Johnstone, to which, in fact, an advance party had gone. On the journey, however, it became apparent that something had gone wrong with the arrangements, and we learned that Johnstone was not for us. Instead, we went to Glasgow itself, and for two days lived in Bellahouston Park and saw something of the sights of the city. Everyone seemed uncertain of our ultimate destination until it was announced that we were off to Salisbury Plain.

## **Urchfont**

So began another long march, with a first night halt at a small village north of Newcastle, which had just sufficient pub accommodation for the troop to spend the evening. The second evening saw us stop for the last time at Doncaster; this was the eighth time we had used this camp and most members of the troop had its good and bad points carefully weighed up. The third night we put up in the outhouses of a large house near Burford, and on the fourth we arrived at our temporary home of Urchfont, near Devizes.

At Urchfont we had billets in huts and odd houses and carried out some few schemes, including the use of the new and smaller Radio Link sets which had recently arrived. Everybody managed to get a 36-hours pass and generally enjoyed a fairly easy time.

It was here, with a certain amount of regret, that we heard of the regrouping of the batteries for all purposes. Hitherto, although we had carried out all serious training with "A" and "E" Troops, we had for all other purposes made up S.R. Battery with "C" Troop. But now the separation was to be complete and we became members of the new "B" Battery, still under Major Humphrey, while "C" Troop was made part of "A" Battery. For all administrative purposes this was a good move, but few sound rangers relished it, as, for that matter, did few flash spotters or surveyors.

After a fortnight or so at Urchfont we moved on to our last permanent camp on this side of the channel, and on 6th December the troop arrived at Cobham, in Surrey, about 20 miles south-west of London.

## Cobham

Our camp at Cobham was situated in the middle of Fairmile Wood, about one mile from the town along the main London road. The camp consisted of nissen and similar huts which had previously been used by Canadians. The whole Regiment was together again, with the exception of R.H.Q. which was some few miles away. H.Q. 1 Corps was only a mile or so away. The huts were sprinkled about the wood in such a manner that it took some people a few weeks to find the way about. Coming back to camp on a dark night was something of an adventure, and one felt almost sorry for the orderly sergeant stumbling about at night attempting to call a roll.

Generally speaking, Cobham was a very popular camp, owing to its nearness to London and general ease of access to places round about. Many of the troop were Londoners, and they, of course, were particularly pleased. Many others were able to take advantage of a reasonably generous allowance of 36-hours passes to get home, and many were able to spend the odd Saturday in London—according to individual choice—and catch the early morning Sunday train back to Cobham. In addition, Cobham itself possessed some excellent pubs, a good cinema, a good dance hall, and one or two canteens and cafés.

At Cobham things began to sort themselves out in earnest ready for the day which was to come; such things as typhus inoculations took place, and on February 4th, the troop took its last 10-day leave together.

A few days after the return from this leave the troop spent what was undoubtedly the most miserable week of its existence in this country. This took the form of a scheme on Salisbury Plain for which purpose we were attached to a Canadian artillery unit. The Plain is never a very congenial spot, but for this week it gave of its very worst weather; the temperature was around and below freezing all the time and terrific winds with sleet and snow blew for much of the time. We camped near the Bustard in small tents and these were no great help in keeping out the weather. Training was carried out over the roads and fields which were frozen and icy, and this gave rise to a very unfortunate accident. Returning to camp one evening in the failing light, Gunner Callick had the misfortune to crash his truck into a tree and was fatally injured, while his companion Bdr. Staines was badly hurt. It was a very unhappy troop which returned to Cobham on 23rd February.

A far more pleasant time was spent by a party from the troop which went to Southampton on 26th March to demonstrate some of the finer points of sound-ranging at an Artillery Exhibition. For two days we had many senior officers sitting at our feet while we demonstrated how to take a photograph of the noise made when a firework goes "Bang!!" In slack periods some of our fellows could be seen rubbing shoulders with brigadiers as they watched other units putting on their shows.

Other schemes took place in and around Cobham, but these largely concerned themselves with the Assault Party, imaginary landings and deployments being the order of the day. Great activity was all this time going on with the checking of stores and kit, practising the art of jumping off moving vehicles, and racing the newly acquired jeeps over the nearby stretches of sand. Trucks were laden according to stores lists and driven away to Guildford gas works to be checked on the weighbridge. Instruments were packed and made waterproof and floated on nearby pools to see whether they would float in case of need. There were more

innoculations, rifle and sten-gun practice, and lighter amusements such as football matches and cross-country runs. And one must not forget the tremendous amount of work put in by the drivers and driver-mechanics in order to get all the vehicles water-proofed.

At last the time came to leave our last permanent home camp. On May 18th the Assault Party loaded up their six vehicles, and, leaving the rest of the troop in Cobham for a little longer, they left with a civilian police motor-cycle escort for an unknown destination.

The composition of the Assault Party was as follows:—

D.	H.Q.
Lieut. Simpson (O.C. Party)**	Sergt. Watkins (Party No. 1)
*Gnr. Holgate	Sergt. Pullen
A.P.1.	Bdr. O'Hara
Sergt. Garner	L/Bdr. Furley
Bdr. Ramsdale ✓	L/Bdr. Holttum
*Gnr. Downie ✓	L/Bdr. Smith
Gnr. Pollard ✓	Gnr. Kemm
Gnr. Philipson ✓	Gnr. Robson
Gnr. Smith, S. H. ✓	Gnr. Butcher
Gnr. Matheson ✓	Gnr. Jeal
Gnr. George ✓	Gnr. Melville
M.1. (2)	Gnr. Hanks
*Bdr. Orling	Gnr. McGeown
L/Bdr. Staines	*Gnr. Tritton
Gnr. Martin	Cfm. Hartley (R.E.M.E.)
Gnr. Harris	Cfm. Cherry (R.E.M.E.)
Gnr. Baker	F/Sgt. Smith (R.A.F. Met.)
Gnr. Bone	L.A.C. Pentecost (R.A.F. Met.)
M.3.	M.5. (4)
L/Bdr. Evans	*Bdr. Davage.
*Gnr. Matthews	L/Bdr. Filewood
Gnr. Macklin	Gnr. Fletcher, J.
Gnr. Denny.	Gnr. Frost
	Gnr. Simpson
	Gnr. Hird

\*\* Capt. Bromley travelled with B.C.'s Party.

\* Driver.

The remaining 60% of the troop was under the command of Lieut. Wright, it was to follow in three waves, the first called 60%, then 75%, and finally 100%.

## Purfleet

The journey took the Assault Party east and north of London and eventually ended at Purfleet in Essex on the north bank of the Thames. Purfleet was in the middle of a troop concentration area, the area being divided into large camps. Our camp was efficiently run by a permanent staff and we were allotted bell tents at the bottom of an old chalk quarry. In order to reach the dining tents,

ablutions etc., we had to climb a large number of steps cut into the face of the quarry; a very tiring business, especially as the weather was boiling hot. We spent the time in camp doing last minute checks to stores, using the very large and well-equipped N.A.F.F.I. tents, and taking very welcome showers in the portable baths which had been set up. A lot of time was also spent in digging slit trenches around the tents as a protection against possible air-raids. We were among the first units to arrive at this camp and at first had plenty of room to move about, but, as the days passed, the camp became more crowded and less comfortable. For nearly a week we enjoyed quite a measure of freedom, we could leave camp and each man managed a 36-hours pass to London. But, on May 26th., the camp "sealed", this meant that nobody was allowed to leave it and all mail was stopped. This was a signal for extra activity; we had a pay parade with French francs as currency, there was an issue of new battle dress, sweet rations, cigarette rations, "Mae West" life belts, aids if taken prisoner, emergency iron rations, and 24-hour ration packs.

A word or so concerning these 24-hour packs will not be out of place at this point. As the name implies, these packs, of which we had two each, were calculated to feed one man for twenty-four hours, and they were so packed and concentrated that one pack would fit into a mess tin. The contents consisted of concentrated meat extract, concentrated porridge, hard biscuits, compo tea and boiled sweets. With the pack went a small solid fuel cooker which was used for making the tea and heating the meat or porridge when mixed with water. In order to ensure clean water we carried tablets with which to purify doubtful supplies. These packs really did the job for which they were intended and most men found that they had bits and pieces of the two packs left over at the end of 48 hours.

On 1st June the party left its camp for another not far distant and remained there for one night, then, on the morning of 2nd June we started a slow march to the docks at Tilbury.

## At Sea

After many checks by R.E.M.E. and several other delays we were expertly backed on to the deck of a tank carrier by Sergt. Garner just before dusk. Here luck was with us for we found that we were on board an American ship, and during our stay there, the Yanks fed us on their own rations, of which they seemed to have plenty. What happened to the rations we should have used is uncertain and nobody seemed to care anyhow. During the day we had fed on sandwiches only, so that it can be imagined that we were pretty hungry by the time we settled down. Most of us then had our first experience of real American hot-dogs and coffee which were taken with great relish.

We shared the ship with other 1 Corps troops, mostly signallers and Canadian Tanks, and were to remain on board for five days. During this time the crew acted as grand hosts and the food we had was excellent.

That night we moved down the river and in the morning found ourselves at the mouth just off Southend. The next three days we spent lounging about in fine weather and indulging in the game of trying to guess what was going to happen next. On the evening of the 5th, up came the anchor and our line of ships moved towards the sea, and as darkness came down we passed close to the white cliffs of Dover.

Early next morning we were informed over the loudspeakers (which always started off with "Now hear this") that this was D-Day, that the invasion of Europe had started, and that we should land sometime during the evening of that day. As we sailed across the channel we could see long lines of ships, each with its own bobbing balloon barrage, and hundreds of aircraft passing overhead.

For our own part of the affair maps were given out and orders for landing received. The idea was that on landing we should proceed to a rendezvous known as "Elbow Eddie", there to meet Capt. Bromley who was due to arrive some hours before us and to have last minute orders ready. While still on board a provisional deployment was planned with positions for A.P.'s and Mics. Most of the day was spent preparing for this job. As evening came the French coastline came into view, vehicles were unchained, kit made ready, and everything prepared for the big event. But it soon became obvious that something had gone wrong with the timing. We stopped a mile or so from the shore and were given to understand that we should probably spend the night there. Many on board would perhaps have preferred to get on land rather than stay off shore, but the night passed with plenty of noise but no misfortune. Odd enemy planes came over and dropped some bombs, the crew manned the A.A. guns and had a go at anything that came near, but morning came and found us in the same spot, without mishap, but with no signs of going in to land.

The day passed and in spite of several warnings to get ready we still stayed in the same place. Close by a large British warship created extra noise by firing large stuff on to the land.

A second night was spent in much the same way as the first, but the early dawn of the 8th saw us approaching the land. We beached very early that morning and as we were awaiting our turn to go off, we had the misfortune to be rammed in the stern by an in-coming British ship; no harm was done to those on board but our ship was certainly put out of action. What happened to her and her jolly crew after our departure is unknown.

## Reviere

We came down on to a smooth beach at fairly low tide and all except the heavily laden 3-tonner made the road without mishap. This truck became stuck in the wet sand and gave us an opportunity of watching the efficient way in which the beach parties worked. On receiving our distress signal a tracked vehicle was sent to our aid and had the H.Q. truck out of the sand in a few minutes.

Our landing had taken place on a beach slightly west of Graye-sur-Mer, and, following the signs to "Elbow Eddie", we found that they led us about 2 miles inland to the village of Banville. Here we met Capt. Bromley as arranged and waited for orders. As none seemed forthcoming at first, we proceeded to dig ourselves in and prepare the first meal from the 24-hour packs. Everything seemed fairly quiet around here, but we saw parties of German prisoners being marched to the beaches and even had a glimpse of "Monty" passing in his jeep.

Later in the morning we learned that there was no prospect of any sound-ranging for a time, but that the party was to go some four miles further inland to a village called Fontaine-Henri, there to dig in and await further orders. This we did and halted at a farm where "E" Troop had already set up a Survey H.Q. and were doing some survey work. They had been on this job since the previous day and had suffered several casualties. We set about the task of digging in, in which we were interrupted by odd rifle shots which made some of the party break

off in order to search some nearby rocks and caves for chance snipers. This work was stopped when we were advised by the French Canadians deployed nearby that a retreat from the spot was recommended. It was decided to follow this advice, so we reloaded and returned about two miles to the small town of Reviere, where we again dug in.

We remained at Reviere for four days, doing no sound-ranging, but not idle. "E" Troop were working hard and had suffered casualties, so members of our troop were detailed to assist them, some by doing survey, others by providing escorts for survey pairs working in dangerous country. Lieut "Charlie" Simpson did some very useful work at this time for "E" Troop, as one of their officers had been badly wounded.

After two days on 24-hour packs the compositions started to come along, and our A.P. party took on the job of cooking and proved themselves very capable.

The days and nights were reasonably quiet, sometimes an enemy plane would come along, but we suffered no harm.

### **Le Fresne-Camilly**

On 12th June we again moved forward about 4 miles to the village of Le Fresne-Camilly, where we at last prepared for a S.R. deployment. By the evening the deployment was completed on Radio Link, and we then heard that the 60% Party would be joining us.

During this time the 60% Party had had a rather different history. They had remained at Cobham until 3rd June when they left for Canning Town; they embarked on the Empire Deed on 8th June at Milwall Dock and disembarked at Graye-sur-Mer on 11th. Finally they joined the Assault Party just after the first deployment on 12th.

Le Fresne-Camilly base was important from our point of view as it was the first base the troop had put out under active service conditions; so perhaps a few details of its timing will not be out of place. The orders for deployment were given at 18.00 hours and H.Q. was set up with a temporary plotting board 19.50 hrs; the full radio net of 5 Mics and 2 A.P.'s was complete by 20.15 hours. Our survey was carried out by "E" Troop. Compared with certain scheme timings this may have seemed rather slow, but when one considers that it was the first time that any of the fellows had been in action, it must be regarded as a very good effort.

Most of the out-stations had a very nasty time on the night of June 12-13, particularly M.I. and A.P.I.; in fact, M.I. were advised by the local Recce Corps to return to H.Q. This they did, but were back at their station early next morning.

Meanwhile the 60% Party had established Waggon Lines a short distance from H.Q. and were busy digging themselves in. H.Q. worked in the camouflaged truck until the 17th, when they moved into a very well constructed dug-out.

For the first few days the base was very quiet and the people doing most of the work were the parties laying and maintaining cable under most trying conditions; lines seemed to be torn and broken as soon as they were in operation, and the line parties under Sergt. Pullen gave yeoman service. By the 18th, however, things became more lively and it is recorded that on that day shots had become numerous, and on the 28th we received a message of congratulation from the Battery Commander on the number of locations made during the previous 24 hours.

Altogether this base was out for 30 days, during which time we made 193 locations, of which 6 were rated as "A" and 18 as "B". The A.P.'s remained on radio all the time while Mics alternated with line or radio according to conditions. Of the 30 days, wind conditions were favourable for sound-ranging on 15 and unfavourable on the other 15.

As already mentioned the Assault Party had neither sent nor received mail since 26th May, and this state of affairs was not broken until the day after landing when the specially prepared field post cards were allowed out. But on 11th June, the first ordinary mail reached the troop and from then on letters and parcels were reasonably regular.

The waggon lines settled down to a fairly regular routine and even the fact that we had just landed in a foreign country did not prevent Harry the cook from taking the odd Derby bet on 17th June.

Although the fortune of war had been with "D" Troop during this time and we had suffered nothing serious, it was not so with our old comrades of "C" Troop. Bad luck had been with them since their landing and they had already suffered casualties including some killed. Among these was an old friend of many in "D" Troop—Sergt. Claud Cotton.

Le Fresne-Camilly is a small Norman village rather dominated by its towering church, and in normal times is in the middle of rich agricultural land. For many of us it will be remembered for its innumerable apples and huge barrels of cider. There was little to do except sleep in off-duty hours, although some of us would go along after an area had been taken and check up on some of the locations made.

The base closed down on 12th July, exactly one month after its opening, and on the next day the troop moved on to a regimental waggon lines at Douvres la Deliverande.

## **Douvres la Deliverande and Beuville**

On the 14th, leaving waggon lines at Douvres, we set out another base with H.Q. at Beuville in order to cover the River Orne. This H.Q. was next to the H.Q. of a "C" Troop base which was covering the same river at a different angle. The Beuville base only lasted 4 days and was mainly a line base except that A.P.'s used radio. We made 24 locations of which 4 were "B".

On packing up on 18th July, the troop remained at the Douvres waggon lines and spent 4 days on well-needed maintenance of stores, kit and vehicles. Some even managed to get as far as the nearby seaside town of Luc-sur-Mer and enjoy a refreshing swim in the sea.

## **Giberville**

On 23rd July we moved on to what was the worst base we were called upon to put out. This was the Giberville Base and was used after the fall of Caen and the crossing of the Orne. Giberville is a village on the eastern outskirts of Caen and at the time we moved in was by no means a healthy place. Apart from shelling and mortaring we had to contend with numerous dead and decaying animals which, in turn, brought swarms of flies and mosquitoes. We suffered some minor casualties on this base, but, in addition, hardly a man escaped some form of stomach trouble due to these pests. No sooner was the tin of "Meat & Veg" opened than it was covered with flies, and sleep in off-duty hours was extremely difficult with hordes of mosquitoes buzzing around ones ears.



The A.P.'s and Mics suffered from constant shelling, and H.Q., fortunately well dug in, had several direct hits, but escaped with a couple of minor wounds and the loss of two vehicles.

During this stage a regimental rest camp had been established at regimental waggon lines in the village of Gazelle on the other side of the Orne. Here, almost everybody was able to go for a three day recuperation under much more healthy conditions. Attractions from here were visits to Bayeux and a cinema which was now working in Luc-sur-Mer; so that the break was greatly appreciated.

From a sound-ranging point of view the base was quite successful, although we suffered adverse winds for 16 days out of the 19. A.P.'s remained on radio all the time while Mics used line or radio as was most expedient. The results were 138 locations of which 5 were "A" and 18 "B".

No one was sorry when this base closed down on 11th August, but we had not yet finished with Giberville. Troop waggon lines remained there for the next base which was put in immediately. For this H.Q. moved some five miles in the direction of Falaise and set up at the small village of Garcelles-Sequeville. Little of interest happened here except that on the first night the roof of the H.Q. dug-out fell-in, much to the consternation of the party on duty. The base lasted five days with mixed line and radio, and four out of the five with unfavourable winds. We obtained only 15 locations with no "A" or "B". On 16th August we closed down and the whole troop returned to waggon lines at Giberville.

### **Conteville and Mirebel**

We stayed two more days at Giberville doing maintenance to stores and vehicles; and then, on the 18th, left this unfortunate and deserted village behind us and moved on into more open and cleaner country, eventually coming to rest some eight miles south east at the village of Conteville. Here we camped in a large field and it was a very welcome change to be away from the dirt and dust of Giberville. The village itself was badly damaged and one remembers the hospitality provided by the troop to "monsieur le maire" who returned to find his village in such condition.

Still keeping waggon lines at Conteville, H.Q. and outstations went forward to Ouezy, where they received orders to cross the river Dives at Mezidon and establish a base with H.Q. at Mirebel. This base was to be used for ranging only. It was not very successful and lasted for two days, packing up on the 21st.

### **Crevecoeur-en-Auge and Bazin**

On the 22nd the troop moved forward to Crevecoeur-en-Auge where it camped in and around a large house or chateau. Using this as a new waggon lines, H.Q. went further forward, about 12 miles to the north east, and established another ranging base with H.Q. at Bazin. This also lasted only two days and was not very successful, so, on the 24th, it was closed down and waggon lines were brought forward to Bazin.

It was at this time and place that a certain gunner who had not long joined the troop drank too deeply from his bottle of Calvados, and found himself saying things that it would perhaps have been wiser to have left unsaid.

### **Le Pin and Les Simons and Lilletot**

It was now 24th August and the troop had been in action continuously since 12th June but was now to enjoy a period of eleven days out of action. These eleven days were spent in general maintenance and short moves.

On the 25th we left Bazin, crossed the River Vie and arrived at the village of Le Pin. One night only was spent there and then came another move forward to Les Simons, passing through Cormeilles. The 27th was spent there and then we went on through the cheering crowds of Pont Audemer to the small village of Lilletot where we camped in the orchard of a farm. It was thought that a new base might be set up with this as H.Q. and an underground H.Q. was set up and plotting board made, but the base was never occupied. Instead we remained in the spot for six days leading a quiet easy life amid congenial surroundings. In the nearby towns of Cormeilles and Pont Audemer mobile baths and cinemas had been set up; we were able to visit these and so make life more interesting.

Rations were now getting better as the compo ration was being supplemented by fresh bread and fresh meat and vegetables. At the same time certain members from all vehicles were becoming expert at acquiring quantities of fresh eggs and other items of farm produce which go to make life more enjoyable.

But while all this was going on "D" Troop was getting left behind the battle and our next bit of action was something of a side-line. The Germans were now retreating very rapidly into Belgium and Holland but were leaving behind pockets of resistance in the channel ports. One of these was Le Havre, and it was in order to play our humble part in the siege of this place that we left Lilletot on September 3rd.

## Maneglise

It was first of all necessary to cross the River Seine and to do this we had to go down the river as far as Elbeuf, just above Rouen. We crossed the river over a well-constructed pontoon bridge and then followed the other bank and so to Rouen itself. Few will forget the cheering throngs of French people which greeted the seemingly never ending stream of transport that passed through Rouen on that Sunday. The good wishes, the handshakes, and the fruit pressed upon us was truly the sign of a great welcome. Through the city and its war scars we passed and on into the open country beyond, and that night we camped in a farm of the small village of Etoutteville surrounded by thousands of freshly-picked apples. One night only was spent here, and then, next morning we continued on through the town of Bolbec to a small town a few miles from Le Havre itself. This was Maneglise, and here we set up H.Q. and waggon lines and a base overlooking the harbour.

This waggon lines is worthy of note as it was in a farm which we shared with a number of refugees from the port now under siege. These people, who incidentally had been very careful to bring their fire engine with them, lived with us while we occupied the base and many interesting tales could be told of the extension of the "entente cordiale" which took place there.

A glance at the map will show that we were no great distance from Fecamp, which, it will be remembered, is the home of the famous Benedictine liqueur. This well-known drink is made by the monks of the Benedictine Monastery by a carefully guarded process. The town of Fecamp had just been cleared of Germans and the liqueur was on sale at 116 francs the bottle. The number of "D" Troop motor-cyclists who found trouble with their machines and had to try them out by a run to Fecamp and back was something of a record. It was also noticed that the pannier bags had taken on conspicuous bulges during the trip.

The base was set up and in operation on 4th September and stayed in action until the Germans capitulated on 12th September. As far as sound-ranging goes it was the perfect example of a base; it covered the tip of the peninsula and the

target area was nicely defined by the coast line, and the wind was favourable for most of the first five days, blowing straight from the sea at right-angles to the base. But about mid-day on the 9th, it veered round behind us and was accordingly not so helpful. Under the perfect conditions of the first five days we were kept exceedingly busy, and by the time the base closed down we had produced 83 locations and carried out 8 ranging shoots. Of the locations 13 were "A" and 22 were "B", a very good proportion. We all thought that we had done a good job at Le Havre and were very pleased when it was announced that "D" Troop had produced 98% of the enemy guns reported to the Counter Battery Officer.

During the last few weeks <sup>4</sup> "D" Troop's Counter-Mortar Section had been in action, using the new 6-pen recorder. We had supplied men to help in the use of this and it was with great regret that we learned that one of them—Gunner L. G. McAlpine—had become a fatal casualty. Later on in the campaign the Mortar Section branched out on its own, taking some of our best men with it.

By 12th September we were well and truly behind the main battles of the campaign, which had now got well into Belgium, and 14 days were to pass before "D" Troop carried out another deployment.

### St. Pierre Lavis and Mesnil Follenprise

We remained at Maneglise for the 13th, saying "adieu" to our friends with the fire engine, and generally getting ready for another move. On the 15th we turned north, passed through Goderville and Fouville, and came to rest in the small hamlet of St. Pierre Lavis just north of Fouville. We remained here for three days during which we managed some passion trucks into Fecamp, and to beat "E" Troop at football by five goals to one. For it must be remembered that throughout these happenings "A" and "E" Troops were never far away and often shared camp sites. Among other things "D" Troop was always very proud of its football team which was nobly led throughout by Bdr. "Ted" Davage.

In addition much work was done at St. Pierre Lavis on maintenance to stores and vehicles and there was even a best dress inspection and an issue of blanco. This latter event was received with very mixed feelings and with a view to an inspection at Fouville which did not materialise.

But we were now about to leave Normandy which had been our home since D-Day, and a few general words concerning the way it touched us may not be out of place. It was apparent that the province must at any time be very rich with its agricultural products of butter, cheese, eggs, milk, apples and cider; and, as far as could be gathered, the Germans had been content to leave it fairly well alone, knowing it to be such a storehouse. Of course, the invasion had rudely shattered its peace, but even amidst the desolation of war it was possible to see the farmers trying to get on with their labours. The product most remembered by "D" Troop will probably be the local spirit known as Calvados, after the name of the department or county. This fierce drink, made from apples, was calculated to satisfy even the most hardened of the troop's drinkers. The other products were well sought after in off-duty moments and many tasty meals were produced around every vehicle in order to supplement the monotonous rations. The recollections of Normandy orchards must remain with us for some time; apples had a habit of finding a way into all manner of places, like sand in the desert. Even the bonnets of vehicles could be found to contain partly cooked apples many weeks after leaving the country behind. One of the most humorous sights was that of a certain H.Q. member opening a large parcel from home and finding, nicely placed on top—one large rosy apple.

On 17th September we moved on through the lovely wooded countryside of Ouville-en-Caux, Cany, Offramville (with its leaning steeple), and Arques to Mesnil Follenprise, some few miles inland from Dieppe. Here we camped in the delightfully clean surroundings of an orchard. We put in another four days of quiet work, doing stores checks, armourers' inspections, M.T. inspections by L.A.D., and inoculations. There was the first kit change since landing, a troop hockey match, and even time for another football match against "E" Troop which this time ended with the sharing of four goals. Altogether a very pleasant change.

However, our wanderings in France were nearly at an end, and on 21st September the Regiment fell in for a column run towards the Belgium frontier.

## **Novelles-sur-Selle, Duffel and Baal**

Our route took us through Neufchatel, Aumale, Amiens, Albert, Bapume and Cambrai to Novelles-sur-Selle near Douchev. Here we camped in a large field and spent the last night on French soil visiting the local "auberges."

The column started again early next morning, passing through the French towns of Quereenaing, Aulnoy and Onnaing until at 11.30 hours it passed from France to Belgium at the town of Quievram. We went on through Mons, Soignes and Nivelles and then by-passed Brussels by going along the wooded roads to the east of the city. And so we came to Malines, or as the Flemings call it, Mechelin. Here we noticed that the language of the countryside was changing, French giving place to Flemish which is the tongue of Northern Belgium. Through Mechelin we went to Duffel where we camped in a field about one mile out of the town.

On the afternoon of the 23rd we left Duffel and proceeded through the ancient town of Lierre to the small town of Baal on the road to Louvain. We were the first British troops to visit this town and were very popular with the inhabitants who made much of us. The first night we camped on a piece of waste ground, and next morning changed our money from French to Belgian francs at the rate of 200 French to 175 Belgian francs. The T.C. seemed to have worked himself into the good graces of the proprietor of an adjacent café and used a comfortable corner seat as pay table. During the day we moved a short distance to a large ex-German barracks just outside Baal and hoped to stay there for a while. The inhabitants had made the occasion an excuse for a fair in the village, and, in spite of the pouring rain, we managed thoroughly to enjoy ourselves.

But our stay was not to be long, and the next morning the call came for a further advance. Our fortnight out of action was nearly at an end, and on the 25th we left the little town of Baal, took the road back through Lierre, and came to rest at the village of Heiblok a few miles further north.

## **Heiblok, Oostmalle, Westmalle**

Here we had almost caught up with the fighting, and leaving waggon lines at Heiblok, H.Q. moved forward to establish itself at Oostmalle. H.Q. was in a large garage and the base ran along the Antwerp-Turnhout road. The A.P.s had some difficulty getting to their positions and Gunner Jeffery was unfortunately wounded and had to be evacuated to hospital. This base used wire with A.P.s still on radio and it lasted four days. The wind was mostly unfavourable but we did get some results. At the end of the four days the base was moved

slightly to the west with the new H.Q. being set up at the Abbaye de la Trappe in Westmalle. We manned this second base for three days before handing it over to "C" Troop; during that three days the wind was very favourable and we obtained many locations. Taking the two bases together we secured 77 locations, of which 6 were "A" and 24 were "B".

During this time waggon lines remained at Heiblok and when back off duty we were able to indulge in a few passion trucks to Lierre and Antwerp. Lierre is a place of great interest, its most famous building being the Astronomical Building. Antwerp became a very popular resort, and we were able to get a number of trips into it while working in this part of the country. After a time it became even more popular as N.A.F.F.I. set up some very fine canteens and clubs.

We handed over the Westmalle base to "C" Troop on 2nd October and spent the next three days at Heiblok on general maintenance and amusement.

### **Vosselaer and Hegge**

For the next move the troop left the pleasant pine woods of Heiblok, proceeded north to Oostmalle, and then east along the Turnhout road, stopping a few miles short of Turnhout at the village of Vosselaer. The weather was now getting colder and at Vosselaer we were fortunate enough to establish waggon lines in a school.

On 6th October H.Q. moved forward through Turnhout, then north along the Tilburg road, to establish a base with H.Q. at Hegge. This H.Q. was about the smallest we had yet experienced, the whole party squeezing itself in a small stone wash house attached to a farm. The Mics were wired, with A.P.'s on radio, and lasted for 16 days; during much of this time the A.P.'s had a rather rough time. The wind was adverse on 12 of the days, but we managed some fair results, getting 108 locations—9 "A" and 18 "B".

During this time waggon lines remained at Vosselaer and during off duty periods visits to Antwerp were possible; but these were often rudely spoiled by falling masonry and tinkling glass, as the city was now receiving large numbers of flying bombs and rockets.

### **Camphout and Puts Molenje**

The day after closing down the Hegge base we moved across to the west and established a new waggon lines at a house in Camphout, some miles north of Antwerp and just short of the Dutch frontier. From here H.Q. moved forward over the frontier and a new base was set up with H.Q. in the small village of Puts Molenje. This was in a farmhouse and we had the odd experience of seeing a hard-working Dutchman putting panes of glass in his house on one side, while shells were shaking them out on the other.

This was a mixed radio and line base and lasted for five days with a mostly favourable wind; but there was not much to be picked up and we finished with 36 locations, only 4 were "B".

### **Zegge and Zevenbergen**

The Puts Molenje base closed down on 27th October and we remained at Camphout until 2nd November, when we moved to the Dutch village of Zegge; here waggon lines again settled down and even found an old Dutchman who stayed with the cookhouse until we left Holland. On the same day another base

was laid out with the H.Q. in the same village. This was another radio and line job which lasted five days, four of them with an adverse wind. We gathered 48 locations, but only 3 of them "B".

Zegge remained as W.L. for the next base, which lasted 6 days and had its H.Q. at Zevenbergen; this used nearly all radio and had three days with a favourable wind. We found 55 locations—2 "A" and 10 "B". For this base we were in a bad area, the villages were mined and badly damaged and dead cattle numerous, and we were all pleased when it closed down on 11th November.

For some of these Dutch bases we had been left to do our own survey work; and the survey section, which had little survey to do in France, worked hard and capably under Lieut. Charlie Simpson and Sergt. Derrick Drinkall.

Since the break out from the Normandy beach the troop had seen a great deal of change and movement, but now, on moving from Zegge, we were due for a long period of static work.

### **Tilburg, Kaatsheuvel and Vlijmen**

On 12th November we moved eastwards and came to the large Dutch town of Tilburg, and this was to be the home of waggon lines for over five months, with one short break. The reasons for this were simple. We had now reached the wide River Maas and the enemy were in position on the other side; sound-rangers' job was to have a series of bases along the river and these were to be manned by "C" and "D" Troops. Sometimes we would be on one base, sometimes on another, and again, when things were quiet, we would be entirely off duty and back at waggon lines. Tilburg was well situated for this purpose, being a little over ten miles south of the river. "C" Troop, doing a similar job to ourselves, had waggon lines at Breda, some fifteen miles west of Tilburg and about the same distance from the river. At Tilburg we shared a large school, named Kasteel Dreef, with "A" Troop; while "E" Troop and B.H.Q. were a short distance out of the town along the Breda road.

When we first entered the town it was in an unsettled condition, and moving about at night was done in parties and armed; but this lasted a short time only, and soon we were as much at home as in Middleton or Cobham. Tilburg is a fairly large manufacturing town with really very little natural beauty or architecture to recommend it, but, for all that, "D" Troop took to it very well and became very friendly with the inhabitants. Some even went further and found themselves very charming wives during their stay.

For the first three weeks at Tilburg we took part in no deployment, but contented ourselves with a great deal of maintenance. For the first time in many months we had a large permanent stores to work in and a thorough job was made of cleaning up and repairing instruments.

In addition to this general cleaning up there were football and hockey matches, battery dances, and trucks to Turnhout, Breda, and occasionally as far as Antwerp. At first Tilburg was very crowded with British troops and the few facilities made available by N.A.A.F.I. and E.N.S.A. were badly overloaded; but, as time went on the troops became fewer and the facilities better, so that one could get into a cinema or canteen without too much ado.

We have already mentioned the Counter Mortar Section attached to our troop. Not long after reaching Tilburg this section was fully made up with stores, and, on 18th November, it branched out on its own and became independent of us. Its personnel was made up from all the troops in the battery, and we lost many old friends including Sergts. Brunswick and O'Hara.

On 3rd December came orders for our first deployment, this was to what was called the Middle or Kaatsheuvel base, as H.Q. was situated in that village. The Mics ran east to west just south of the river, with the A.P.s well up to the river. For the running of these bases as far as possible we used line only, although A.P.s were equipped with radio as a second means of communication. The duty procedure was for the A.P. parties to remain at their stations all the time, taking it in turns to return to Tilburg for rest; while H.Q. parties went up every twelve hours. Each H.Q. party took with it two line parties and these often spent a very busy time. All manner of mishaps came to these lines, and on more than one occasion microphones were carefully taken away by other units who mistook them for some new form of mine. The H.Q. was set up in the local school and was reasonably comfortable; in idle moments it was not unusual for the village schoolmaster to come along and attempt to teach the mysteries of the Dutch language.

We had some very mixed weather on this base including very thick fog, and, towards the end of the month, temperatures below freezing. This time we held the base for 29 days, of which 19 had adverse winds, but, by the time we packed up on New Year's day, we had made 51 locations 2 being "A" and 15 "B".

About this time other things were attracting attention in Tilburg. First of all there was Christmas, for which we had the usual dinner, produced after much hard work by cooks Harry and Joe.

Unfortunately the peace of Christmas was rudely broken by rumours of parachutists. The story went that the other side of the Maas was full of these people who were preparing to make an attack on our side. There were several "alerts" on account of this, but nothing happened.

A menace more serious at this time was the increasing number of flying bombs being used. It is not certain whether our area was intended to receive any of these, but quite a number did fall on Tilburg; while the railway station was at one time the target of some long range enemy guns. A.P.s, Mics and H.Q. were also worried by these flying bombs as the "dud" bombs sent over had a nasty habit of falling near our positions.

1945

### **Tilburg, Kaatsheuvel and Vlijmen (continued)**

1945 started off with the troop thinking mostly of home leave; this leave was due to restart with the New Year, and names had already been placed in the hat and drawn for order of departure.

As a first step towards this great event one reported to the Canadian Transit Camp at Oisterwijk, just outside Tilburg; here one obtained good meals and any odd items of kit required for leave. During the afternoon the train was loaded at a station adjacent to the camp, and then began the long journey to Calais, arriving some time the next morning. A few hours were spent changing money etc., then came the boat to Folkestone, the train to London, and one was set for eight days in England. The return journey was much the same, except that the lucky ones would often hear from the B.B.C. that the return of their group had been delayed 24 or sometimes 48 hours.

In addition to these home leaves, short leaves to various centres on the continent were also starting. Chief favourites were Paris and Brussels, while there were others at Lierre and Ghent. Generally speaking it was possible to get one of these short passes between each long leave.

On January 1st we closed down the Kaatsheuvel base and on the same day opened up the Right or Vlijmen base. Vlijmen being another village near the Maas and just west of s'Hertogenbosch. Conditions for this base were much the same as for the middle base and we remained on it until January 18th. We used wire as much as possible, although the A.P.s had to resort to radio on several occasions. For seven of the days we had a favourable wind and made 25 locations, of which only one was "A" and 2 "B". The weather continued to be poor with the temperature around freezing most of the time; this made the roads very bad and the lines parties had a very uncomfortable and dangerous time. One truck had the misfortune to overturn on the ice in the early hours of one morning, but, luckily, no one was seriously hurt. In addition, the flying bombs were causing a certain amount of damage, and on the second day of the base one fell about 100 yards from H.Q. and gave it a nasty shaking. Once again luck was with us and a few glass scratches were the only injuries.

The base closed down on 18th January and once again the whole troop returned to Tilburg for a further period of maintenance, and a certain amount of survey was done on the bases to put in extra microphones.

By this time the leave roster was going at full swing and facilities for entertainment at Tilburg had improved, the weather was still cold and among other things we saw a Canadian team beat Tilburg at ice hockey by 9 goals to 2.

On 3rd February "D" Troop took over the Middle base for a second time and held it until the 20th of that month. The work was mostly routine, and, although new locations were found, the job was largely concerned with giving activity reports of known batteries and passing on general information.

So started another period of rest at Tilburg; little out of the ordinary happened, except that we had a troop photograph taken, and that the regimental football team, which included six "D" Troop players, played the local crack team of Longa. Although the regimental team was reckoned to be good it was no match for Longa and lost 9-0.

## Nijmegen

By this time the British Army was getting ready for the crossing of the Rhine, and, it was with a view to taking some small part in this affair that we left Tilburg for a time and moved on to Nijmegen. In this badly battered town we set up our waggon lines in the school of St. Theresia Kleurt, which was on a hill with a fine view of the River Waal and the famous Nijmegen bridge. On 11th March we set up a base which was partly in Holland and partly in Germany with H.Q. at Beek, an outskirt of Nijmegen. By this time the weather was getting warmer but the A.P.s had a poor time on posts situated on marshy islands of the river. The wind was mostly adverse, which did not give very good results, and on 29th March we handed over the base to the 1st Canadian Survey Regiment, and returned to Tilburg on the next day. We had spent about three weeks in Nijmegen, and from it had taken our first steps on German soil, and had seen a little of the desolation to be found there. Nijmegen itself had been badly treated, but we could see that it must be a much finer town than Tilburg and in peace-time no doubt a very charming spot.



## Return to Tilburg

Our return to Tilburg started another period of 18 days out of action, during which, we not only carried out our usual maintenance, but also moved our waggon lines from Kasteel Dreef School to St. Joseph's School, a little nearer the town centre. During the time it was also found possible to run a regimental football knock-out competition. "D" Troop entered two teams and it came near to being an all-"D" Troop final. However, our H.Q. team lost 3-2 to "F" Troop in the semi-final, but, the Field Section—well led by Bdr. Ted Davage—defeated "A" Troop in the final by 3-1.

On 18th April "D" Troop took over its last base by going back to the Vlijmen base. This work was similar to that of our second occupation at Kaatsheuvel; a few new locations, but largely activity reports and general information. This carried on until the evening of May 4th, when we learned that the "cease-fire" in North West Europe was to take effect from 08.30 hrs. on the 5th. Amid great jubilation this time arrived, but the base remained open until 1700 hrs., when "D" Troop's sound-ranging days were over and it went out of action for the last time.

During the course of this last deployment several changes had take place in Tilburg. On 29th April, Major "Sam" Humphrey paid his last and farewell visit to the troop at St. Joseph's School, as he was leaving for a staff course in India. To take his place Captain Cleaver, who since ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> days had been Battery Captain, became Battery Commander with the rank of major. To fill this gap Captain Bromley was promoted to the office job of Battery Captain, and Lieut. "Charlie" Simpson became Captain and "D" Troop's new commander.

At this stage a few words of appreciation of Captain Bromley will not be out of place. He had been our Troop Commander since Middleton days and in England had made an excellent job of it, but, it was away from England that we saw him at his best. Never sparing himself when there was a job to be done; never taking unnecessary risks, but always the first man there when there was a risk to be taken; always willing to lend a hand with a dirty job and to give a word of encouragement; this is how the real "D" Trooper will always remember him. While still at Tilburg it was with some reflected pride that we heard that Captain Bromley had been awarded the Military Cross.

Other awards gained by the Troop included the Military Medal and "Mention in Dispatches" won by Sergt. "Bob" Ramsdale, who, throughout the campaign had been in charge of an A.P. (no easy task at times), Lieut. "Charlie" Simpson gained another "Mention", and Sergt. Holmes, Sergt. O'Hara and L/Bdr. Lewis Filewood the "Montgomery Certificate." One foreign award came to the troop, this being the Belgian Croix de Guerre awarded to Gunner "Jock" Downie for excellent work with the A.P.s.

The evening of May 4th, when we heard of the capitulation of the German forces in N.W. Europe, was one of great rejoicing in Holland. That evening the streets of Tilburg were filled with cheering crowds of all ages, and the Troop shared in this celebration. However, the official V-E Day for us was 8th May, and that evening large numbers really let themselves go, much to the consternation of certain members of the Dutch general public. The next morning saw a procession of locals, mostly barbers, coming to camp to collect their barber's poles, which had in some mysterious way collected around the bed of the Troop hairdresser—Alec Pollard.

We were to remain in Tilburg just a little longer, and the next days were spent in repairing, polishing up and packing away S.R. instruments, for sound-ranging days were over and the work in front of us was garrison duty. The first taste of this came on May 19th, when most of the troop went via Heusden to Hessbeen on the banks of the Maas. Here we set up posts with the object of preventing unauthorised persons from crossing the river. A number of people were caught near the river, while a number of fish were caught in the river by the simple expedient of throwing hand grenades after them. The troop returned to Tilburg on May 22nd.

But our sojourn in Holland was nearing its close; there were six more days of final packing, making last visits to Breda and Turnhout, and saying good-byes. Then, on 28th, the troop fell in with the rest of the regiment on its long march into Germany.

## Eschede, Lunenberg Heath and Hunnersruck

By this time the weather had become very warm and we made our first day's march back to Nijmegen, over the bridge and on to Arnheim of Airbourne fame, through Zutphen, and so to the town of Eschede just inside the Dutch frontier. We spent the night there and the next morning brought an early fall in; by 0730 hrs. we were passing over the frontier into Germany, proceeding in the general direction of Hanover. A German autobahn runs in this direction, but we were unable to use it, instead we used a number of second and third class roads, and some no better than farm tracks. Our route took us through Osnabruck, with its terrible raid damage, on through Lubbecke, and so to the village of Essel some twenty miles west of Celle. Here we halted and there seemed to be some doubt as to our next stop. After a delay a move was made about ten miles to the north and we arrived at the hamlet of Westenholz on Lunenberg Heath—the Salisbury Plain of Germany. This spot was only about eight miles from the notorious Belson Concentration Camp. We camped here in two-men tents for two days, and then, on 1st June, moved south again. We passed through the centre of Hanover and had a clear view of the terrible damage there, and on further south to the Einbeck-Dassel area, which the Regiment was to occupy. "D" Troop was a few miles to the west of the rest of the battery at a small village called Hunnersruck. Here we billeted, together with L.A.D., in a large house surrounded by fine rolling countryside. Our main job was to send out road patrols to check on the large numbers of Germans roaming about. At this stage non-fraternisation rules were still being well observed, and the only incident concerning the locals of Hunnersruck that comes to mind is the arrival of about twenty housewives, complete with small handcarts, to collect the troop's laundry and small ration of soap handed out by ~~Gunner~~ Lewis, the troop interpreter.

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File-wasel ?

## Sarstedt

The rather quiet life at Hunnersruck lasted until 11th June, when "D" Troop left the rest of the battery and returned north to take over billets in Sarstedt, a small town almost midway between Hanover and Hildesheim. This was to be "D" Troop's final station, except for its "breaking-up" camp.

Sarstedt is a typical small town of the great German Plain, itself containing a number of factories and mines, but, being essentially the centre of a rich agricultural district. Hanover is about ten miles to the north with Hildesheim about seven to the south. A tram-way service ran through the town from Hanover

to Hildesheim and so made communication in peace-time very easy. When we arrived we found that Sarstedt, as opposed to its two big neighbours, had escaped all war damage; and, although the shops were empty, the surrounding countryside was fairly rich in farm produce.

As billets the troop took over two of the best houses in the town and then settled down to duty. At first we had the job of manning four posts in the district, while H.Q. remained in the two houses. These posts were a factory in the town, a mine just outside, a factory a few miles to the north, and, probably the best remembered of them all, Ahrbergen. This last village was also the home of a large camp of Polish Displaced Persons.

Sarstedt was at this time the centre of a number of D.P. communities, and a very serious happening just after our arrival brought us into close contact with one section. A little after nine o'clock on the morning of 16th June, the whole town was rocked by a terrific explosion. Parties were immediately sent out to discover the cause of this, and it was found that part of an ammunition train in the sidings of the railway station had blown up. A lot of damage had been done to buildings and there was a number of dead and injured. Our vehicles were used to evacuate people living nearby to a safe distance, and, while doing this, another explosion caused further damage. This gave many of our fellows a nasty shaking, but otherwise we escaped with a few minor injuries. We continued this rescue work throughout the morning, and, while thus engaged, one of our number greatly distinguished himself. It was seen that there was still a portion of the train that might blow up at any moment, so, Gunner Frank George walked along to the end of this portion and uncoupled the trucks so that they could be driven away. For this action we later learned that he had been awarded the George Medal.

Among other places badly damaged was a block of buildings which housed a large number of Latvians and Lithunians, and we had the job of re-billeting them. For this purpose we took over parts of the nearby village of Giften and by nightfall had them all safely provided for. In appreciation of the work we did for them, the Latvians invited the troop to their Midsummer Eve Celebrations held in the grounds of a large house. For these celebrations fires are lit at sunset, songs are sung, and dancing goes on all through the night and into the next day. The people dress in the highly-coloured national dress, and, as tokens of friendship, place garlands of leaves round their friends. Long blades of rushes are used to tap the girl one wishes to dance with, and the acceptance is a similar tap from her rush. In Latvia these celebrations are of great importance and the people did their best to keep up the tradition in Germany. Many of the troop attended the festival and enjoyed themselves greatly.

We had been just over a week at Sarstedt on our own when we were joined by the rest of the battery and R.H.Q.; to accommodate all these, two roads were taken over and wired off. Meanwhile "A" Battery had also come to the district and were stationed at the nearby village of Algermissen.

With the advent of the battery more posts were set up in the district and the time was spent in manning these, patrolling roads, searching villages at night, searching trains, and generally doing police work in the district. With a view to making the troops more efficient at this sort of thing, several officers and sergeants from K.O.Y.L.I. were attached to us as instructors on infantry tactics and weapons. We found these K.O.Y.L.I.s excellent fellows and remember in particular Lieut. Roy Edgar and the tough sergeant "Jimmy Cagney."

We spent the fine summer in this way, and, until V-J Day arrived, wondering whether our turn for the Far East might come along.

For entertainment a regimental canteen had been opened at the Kipphut Restaurant overlooking the town, and regular dances were being held there and at the Lappenberg Hall in the town. There were cricket, rugger, soccer, and hockey matches, and a regimental athletic sports in which "D" Troop did very well. Leave and short leave continued uninterrupted, and Hanover, although badly damaged, had several theatres, cinemas and clubs open for British troops. To make travel easier special trams were run from Sarstedt to Hanover and back. In Hanover some good shows were to be seen at the Capitol, the Herrenhausen theatre was open for ballet and opera, there was a dirt-track course, first-class football matches, and a circus. At first, non-fraternisation was the order of the day, but gradually, both officially and unofficially, it became relaxed. Many excuses were found to overcome the official ban—such as taking shoes to be repaired.

As the winter came on demobilisation started and, very slowly at first, we began to lose old friends. The first to leave "D" Troop was Harry Gaulthorpe—the ever popular cookhouse chief. A very well remembered occasion was a farewell party thrown by our troop number one sergeant—Ken Holmes—in November. The whole troop turned up for this at the Kipphut and both compliments and liquor flowed freely. Apart from the refreshment provided we remember the fine speech made by Lewis Filewood in appreciation of Ken's work for the troop.

Christmas came along and was spent in the traditional army style with Christmas dinner at the regimental canteen. But, now, the life of Don Troop was rapidly drawing to a close. Many others left the troop, some to Civvy Street and others to different regiments. The T.C.—Capt. "Charlie" Simpson—had been posted away, and as "Tich" Wright was otherwise engaged, the troop was commanded for its dying days by B.S.M. Turrell, with Sergt. Derrick Drinkall as No. 1.

## 1946

### Mehle

To all intents and purposes the history of "D" Troop finishes on 1st January, 1946, when it left Sarstedt and moved to its "breaking-up" camp at Mehle, about ten miles S.W. of Sarstedt. Here the disbandment of the troop and battery continued; more and more left for demob., including the big A.S.G. (23) or were posted away. Finally at 1800 hrs., on 13th January the troop office closed down and Don Troop was nothing more than a memory.

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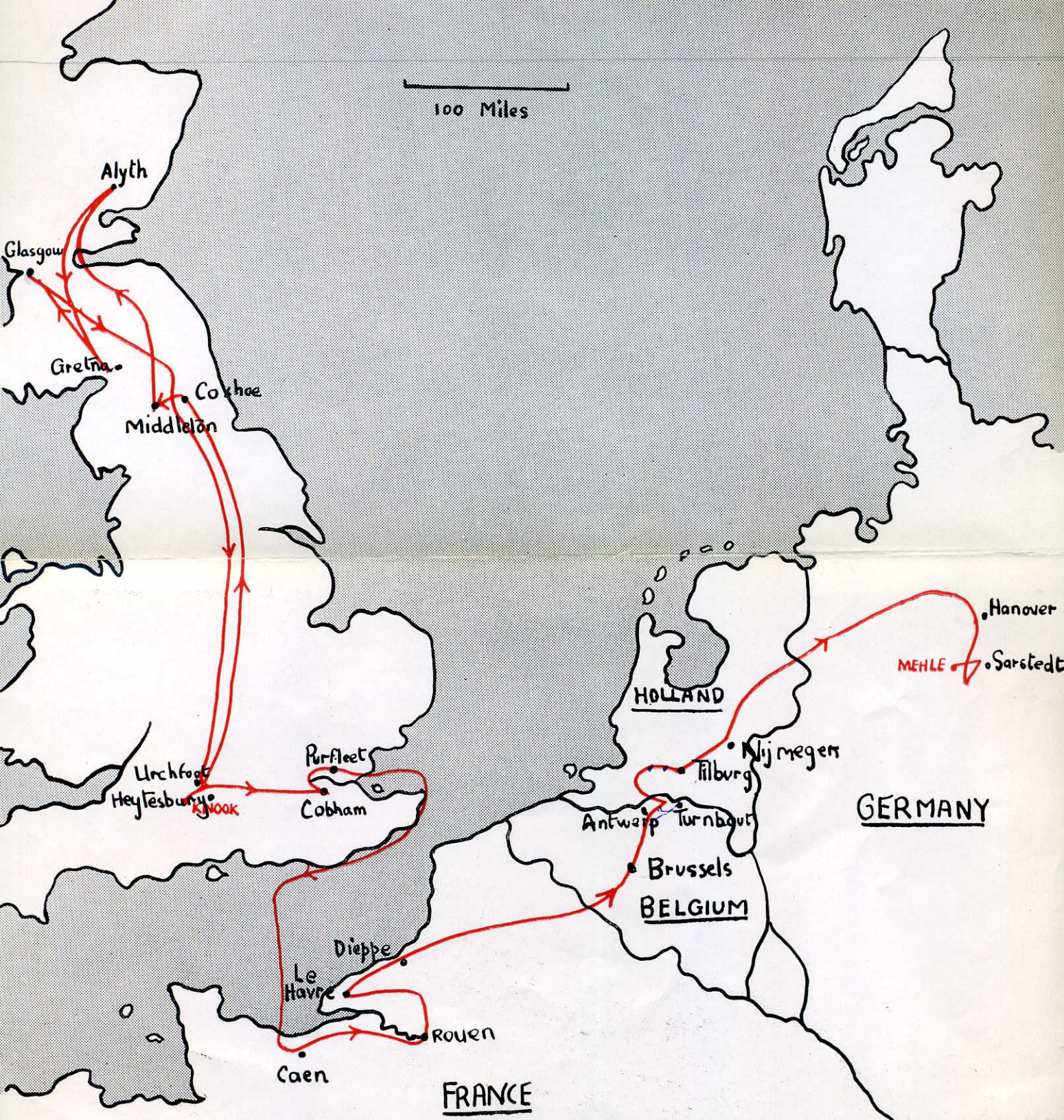
## 1947, 1948, 1949, etc.

### Civvy Street

But something of the spirit of those grand fellows who passed through the ranks of "D" Troop still held good; a little over a year after the events recorded above a Reunion Dinner was held at De Hems Restaurant, London. Since then two other reunions have been held and altogether over 60 members of the troop have attended one or more. Many more, unable to attend, have sent along messages of good wishes.

It is hoped that these annual reunions will carry on long after our records at the War Office have become brittle with age.

100 Miles



Alyth

Glasgow

Gretna

Middlelön  
Colhae

Urchfont  
Heytesbury

Purfleet  
Cobham

KNOCK

HOLLAND

Nijmegen  
Tilburg  
Antwerp  
Turnhout

Brussels  
BELGIUM

GERMANY

Hanover

Sarstedt

MEHLE

Dieppe  
Le Havre  
Rouen  
Caen

FRANCE