

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

**THE SEVENTH BATTALION
FROM JUNE TO 31st DECEMBER 1940
Contributed by Lieutenant-Colonel K. Horan**

The story of a new battalion, for the first year of its existence, must be dull and colourless. Nevertheless, the harvest depends upon the sowing.

Many times in those early days did I and the senior officers try to impress upon all ranks that they must live up to, and not on, a regiment's tradition; many times in the years to follow did they prove that those words had been understood.

On the 3rd June, 1940, I was appointed to the command of the 50th Battalion of the Regiment which was forming in the Aldershot district.

Brigadier Clarke briefly gave me the situation: that we were to form in Fleet; that we should have to live in billets, which were scattered and insufficient; that a few men had already arrived and another four hundred were expected daily; that cookhouses and stores were non-existent, but that I could take over the headquarters of an anti-aircraft battery recently returned from Norway.

I took a taxi to Fleet and discovered that a few men had already arrived. I knew that Johnny Granville was to be my adjutant. As far as I can remember, there were about four private soldiers and C.Q.M.S. Richards, who proved himself a tower of strength in these early days.

After inspecting the accommodation available I made a vow that I would get the Battalion out of billets and into a camp at the very earliest opportunity.

The events of the next few weeks do not require any detailed description. Men were pouring in straight from civilian life, and had to be fed, clothed and trained as soon as possible, and life was very hectic.

The chief difficulty was accommodation for stores, cookhouses and dining-halls, but gradually, with much improvisation, we settled down and began to find our feet.

I was lucky in two ways. First, the type of men coming in was the absolute cream of the country's man power. Keen, intelligent and willing, they had only one vice and that was an inability to realize that they couldn't just go away for a few hours whenever they felt inclined. Other than this, crime was non-existent in the Battalion.

Secondly, for a short time at least, I had the assistance of several experienced officers and warrant and non-commissioned officers.

So there we were in Fleet, living in scattered billets, feeding in garages, drilling in the streets in all kinds of kit, and attending lectures on the lawns of desirable residences, while the RQMS and his satellites were buried under mountains of blankets, battledress and other baubles.

I had realized from the first moment that we should never really get going as a battalion until the Battalion was moved into a camp or barracks. It was therefore a great relief when, on the 1st July, I managed to persuade command to let us move into Haig Lines, Crookham, which were then vacant.

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The Battalion thus carried out its first move on the 2nd July, 1940, at 1730 hrs. Everything went well and by 2100 hrs. we were settled in our new quarters, with the officers and Serjeants in well-appointed messes. From then on we were able to organize training properly and, above all, to begin to put our administration right. We began to exist as a team.

The war diary of this period contains the words "Work continued on Defence Line," repeated many times. This defence line, which must not be confused with our own defence localities for which there was every justification, was my bete noir. It consisted of a huge anti-tank (so-called) ditch, which stretched across England. We had to take our turn working on this ditch and its accessories, and many hundreds of vital training hours were confiscated. The point was that we were not trained, and every day, hour and minute was vital.

At this time we were still the 50th Battalion with the sole role of draft-finding. It certainly meant that we were kept short of auxiliary weapons and transport.

Training went steadily ahead during July and August, 1940, and the Battalion began to take shape. The companies and their commanders at this time were as follows:

H.Q. or Major R. M. Barnes's Company.

Letter A or Captain H. J. Woods's Company.

Letter B or Captain J. R. P. Montgomery's Company.

Letter D or Captain K. G. Livingstone's Company.

Letter D Company acted as a nursery, or depot company, and all recruits went through a period there before being drafted to one of the other companies for more advanced training.

There were not enough men to form a Letter C Company.

Training was varied by several local defence schemes and exercises and also by conferences for officers. Frequently, too, visits by enemy aircraft enlivened the proceedings. These raids served as excellent practice for the P.A.D.(Passive Air Defence) services and enabled us to check up and improve the existing orders.

The 19th August, 1940, was a red-letter day in the history of the Battalion, for information was received that we might shortly be ordered to adopt an operational role on the coast. Application was made at once to command for equipment to war scale.

On the 21st August the Battalion paraded for the first time in mass and carried out a route march. The whole column, marching at wide intervals between platoons and companies, covered nearly two miles.

Normal training continued and on the 26th August we were inspected by General Johnson, V.C., the G.O.C.-in-C.

On the 28th August the anti-tank platoon gave a very effective demonstration to the whole Battalion of bomb throwing against a mock tank, using various types of "Molotov cocktails" and other horrors. After the demonstration volunteers were called for from each company to do some throwing and, to the huge joy of the spectators, they "wiped the eye" of the anti-tank platoon by scoring a higher percentage of hits.

On the 30th August eighty-two specialists (transport, signallers and intelligence section) were transferred from rifle companies to H.Q. Company, and specialist training began on 2nd September.

On the 6th September information was received from command about the formation of new four-battalion brigades. One brigade, consisting of the 50th Wiltshires, 50th Royal Berkshire, 50th Oxf. and Bucks Lt. Infy. and 50th Lancashire Fusiliers, was to be formed and come under Southern Command.

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On the 7th September preliminary arrangements were made for the formation of Letter C Company. This company came into being officially on the 16th September.

At 2130 hrs on the 7th September we received the code-word "Cromwell," the warning of possible invasion. We "stood to" that night, all leave was cancelled and the men were confined to barracks. At 1300 hrs the following day "Cromwell" was cancelled, but the leave restriction still stood.

On the 9th the first Regimental cadre was started. The same day the War Office gave authority for the Battalion to be reorganized on a war establishment.

On the 14th September North Aldershot Area ordered extra alertness, as all information seemed to point to the "balloon going up" during the week-end, and on the 16th we were ordered to "stand to" daily from 0600 hrs until half an hour after sunrise. On the 19th the cadre course and the intelligence section fired the 2-inch mortar and the anti-tank rifle for the first time on Greyscott and Hangmoor Hill ranges.

On the 7th October information was received that we were to move on the 12th to Westward Ho! A small advanced party left on the 10th, and the Battalion entrained at midnight on the 11th, moving in two special trains.

One evening late in September I was sent for to go at once to command headquarters to see the G.O.C.-in-C. Wondering what was afoot, I arrived to find Lieutenant-Colonel Sawyer, commanding the 50th Royal Berkshire Regiment, which was also moving to Devonshire, and several senior staff officers already in conference. There I was told that on the next day but one, very early in the morning, we were to march past a Very Distinguished Person. I was told who it was, but was not allowed to tell anyone until the men were on parade for the ceremony. We did a reconnaissance the next morning of the saluting point which was about five miles from our camp, and I decided to move the men out by transport, carry out one or two rehearsals and then have breakfast after the "party."

Everything went well on the day except that one company's transport broke down and they had to move to the rendezvous in true light infantry style in order to have time to cool off, get in one rehearsal and have a final polish up.

At the appointed time the men were paraded and told that they were going to be inspected by His Majesty The King. His Majesty arrived punctually and as soon as he had taken up his position beside the road we started off. The Battalion went past in column of route, ten paces between platoons and twenty paces between companies. They went past extremely well at 140. The King was most warm in his praise of the men's turn-out and obvious keenness and asked if it took longer to train them to march at 140 than at the heavy pace.

The Royal Berkshire Regiment also went past in excellent style. An escort of fighter aircraft was circling overhead throughout the proceedings.

Afterwards all the officers were introduced to His Majesty, who said a few words wishing us well in our new task on the beaches.

We took over from the 10th East Surrey Regiment at Westward Ho! and at once were split up again. A, D and H.Q. Companies were in the holiday camp, which is delightfully situated on the cliffs overlooking Northam Burrows and the estuary.

B Company was in poor billets in Bideford, and C Company was in Torrridge House in Westward Ho! itself.

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The holiday camp was the usual Butlin affair of chalets with a big central dining-hall and a theatre, the latter being very useful for lectures, E.N.S.A. shows, etc. It was all very nice in fine weather, but apt to be cold, damp and dangerous in the winter gales, when chalet roofs used to blow off and deposit themselves, yards away, on parked transport or some other billet.

The next few weeks were spent in the preparation of our beach defence localities and co-ordination of the plan with the senior naval officer and the Home Guard, who were a very live force in this district.

From close liaison with the senior naval officer in Appledore we gained much useful information with regard to local naval defences, communications, tides, etc., from the point of view of possible landings, while from the Home Guard we learnt about their positions in our rear, their tank traps, flame-throwers and general security arrangements.

All the time training continued steadily and we began to toughen up with long marches against the clock and continuous forty-eight-hour exercises.

On the 21st October the defence scheme was altered and the Battalion was still further split up by A Company having to move to Upton, Bude, in Cornwall, to take over the defences of Widemouth Sands.

The main beaches of Westward Ho! were heavily mined and mines were continually exploding owing, usually, to wandering sheep searching out pastures new, and, once, by a spaniel chasing a rabbit.

One day I received a communication from a local farmer. It was a bill and stated simply:

"Dr. to Farmer Giles.—To one sheep blown up by your mine, £5." My mine, no less!

Peter Hayter and I pondered long and anxiously over our reply, and then we had a brain-wave and replied as follows:

"Dr. to O.C. 7th Oxf. and Bucks Lt. Infy.—To one mine blown up by your sheep, £50."

We never heard another word!

Very bad weather at the end of October and early November had the effect of hardening the men. Route marching was carried out every week whatever the conditions, and the marching improved considerably. As an example, on the 15th November the Battalion marched fifteen miles in four and three-quarter hours without any distress, covering the last five hundred yards at 134 and carrying out arms drill and other activities immediately on their return to camp.

On the 6th November General Auchinleck, the army commander, inspected the training and expressed himself satisfied with all he had seen.

On Christmas Day the chaplain held half-hour services for all the companies, and then the commanding officer, second-in-command, adjutant and Regimental Serjeant-Major visited the men at dinner. Everyone was in great form, though it was a trial of strength for the Regimental headquarter staff!

Whenever possible I sent the companies out on their own for two or three days' continuous schemes, and we had weekly tactical exercises and Regimental days.

The corps commander, General Franklyn, often visited us and showed the greatest interest and keenness in our progress.

On the 30th December the band arrived, staying a week with each battalion of the Regiment.

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FROM 1st JANUARY TO 30th JUNE, 1941
Contributed by Lieutenant-Colonel K. Horan

On the 3rd January a route march was carried out with the Battalion moving closed up, with an anti-aircraft carrier in front and behind. The band was in the centre and the men marched extremely well. It was like old times to see the Regiment swinging through Bideford to the old familiar marches.

On the 13th January we were visited by the army commander, General Alexander, who had taken over from General Auchinleck. He made a long and very thorough inspection of the defences, beginning at Bude and at the end said he was pleased with all he had seen and that he found the state of the Battalion "most refreshing."

On the 1st February we were due to play the Royal Berkshire Regiment in the final of the area football cup competition and I decided to combine business with pleasure and march the troops to Barnstaple and back (about twenty-six miles) to see the match. B Company who were away on training, were to come in on their own to watch. We left at 0900 hrs and reached the ground at 1250 hrs, (Twenty-six miles in three hours fifty minutes—over 61/2 miles per hour.) where we had an excellent meal prepared for us by our friends, the enemy.

The match could scarcely have been more exciting. There was never more than a goal in it, and three minutes from the end the Berkshires were leading 4—3. We managed to equalize just on time and then played fifteen minutes' extra time each way. During this period we put on three goals without reply and so the 7th won the cup 7—4. The cup was presented by the Mayor of Barnstaple.

That night the Battalion marched into camp at 136, tired and happy, to the reiterated shouts of "One—two—three—four— five—six—SEVEN!"

Just as we started I overheard one of the men remark: "There's the Old Man marching. Bet he doesn't walk far!" That put the "Old Man" on his mettle and he walked all the way there and back with, admittedly, an occasional longing glance at his car, which was following the column.

On about the 8th February I was having my hair cut in Bideford when the barber said to me: "I'm sorry to hear that your Battalion is moving, sir; they've been so popular here!" As I knew nothing of any move, I was naturally curious and pressed him for details. "Oh, yes," he said, "you're going to Kent on the 13th February. Didn't you know?"

On the 13th February the Regiment left Bideford for Lyminge in Kent! So much for security. It is a fact that every shopkeeper in Bideford knew of our departure two days, at least, before I did. We were changing places with the 15th Royal Fusiliers.

The main body left Bideford station on the 13th, moving in three trains at 2100 hrs. It appeared as if the whole of Bideford and Westward Ho! had turned out in force to see us off, and I had the greatest difficulty in keeping the road clear for the companies to move on to the platform. The men had made themselves extremely popular by their discipline and good behaviour generally, and the townspeople were not slow to show their appreciation.

The main body arrived at Lyminge station at 0730 hrs on the 14th February. Hot tea was served outside the station and then the companies marched to their billets: A Company to Elham, B Company to Beachborough, C Company to Acrise Place, and D and H.Q. Companies to Lyminge.

The condition of the billets left much to be desired, but the men got down to cleaning very well.

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We had our first taste of the Battle of Britain on this date. Several dog-fights took place overhead during the morning, cannon shells exploded in Beachborough, and a Spitfire made a forced landing between Lyminge and Elham.

On the 17th Brigadier Britten, commanding the 167th Brigade, 56th (London) Division, inspected the Battalion, companies remaining in their billet areas.

On the 18th the Brigadier talked to all officers, warrant officers and N.C.Os. He reviewed the history of the 56th Division and the 167th Brigade, explained the dispositions of the troops in Kent and detailed our tasks, the most important of which was to act as counter-attack battalion for Hawkinge and Lympne airfields. In consequence, training for the next few weeks was concentrated on working out plans for immediate action for either of these two airfields. T.E.W.Ts. and exercises were held and careful reconnaissances made of all the routes to, and the defensive positions on, the airfields themselves.

On the 21st February B Company moved to Postling.

On the 25th I gave a lecture to all officers, explaining the new organization of the defences which came into force that day. XII Corps was responsible for the defence of Kent only. The right forward division was the 56th Division, left forward division the 43rd Division, and the 44th Division was in reserve.

The 56th Division (Major-General Stopford) was organized as follows:

Right sub-area: 168th Brigade.

Centre sub-area: 169th Brigade.

Left sub-area: 206th Brigade.

Rear sub-area: 167th Brigade.

The rear sub-area was divided into five sectors, A to E, E being that occupied by the Regiment.

I then allotted a further sub-sector to each rifle company, further denned the duties of the immediate action platoon that was always "standing to," and stressed the importance of fire-watching, bicycle patrols, observation posts, and liaison with the Home Guard, police and air-raid precaution authorities.

The end of February, 1941, found the Battalion settling down well in its new station after a rather trying fortnight.

As the battalions forming the brigade were originally the 8th, 9th and 15th Royal Fusiliers, we, by changing places with the 15th Royal Fusiliers, rather upset the composition of the brigade.

Intensive training went on day and night and on the 4th March General Stopford, commanding the 56th Division, visited us and discussed various points of training and counter-invasion plans. He inspected H.Q. Company's billets and watched the mortar platoon training.

On the 10th March a conference at brigade headquarters amended, somewhat, our previous tasks. In future, the 167th Brigade's primary job was to deal with airborne landings and its secondary task was to counter-attack into the Romney Marsh area. The Regiment, in particular, had to be ready to send one company and a section of carriers to Hawkinge and to be prepared to counter-attack:

(a) High ground north of Folkestone.

(b) High ground north of Hythe.

(c) To block Hythe exits.

In consequence, training was devoted to an intensive preparation for these operational roles. Fire control was emphasized particularly, since, for the first forty-eight hours after invasion, there would be no administrative movement for ammunition or supplies. At the same time, one company was found daily to erect tubular scaffolding along the Lympne—Stowting line.

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On the 24th the Regiment carried out an exercise in road movement and harbouring, and the following day another one was set by the brigade commander.

We heard on the 27th March that the 167th Brigade would move on the 2nd May to take over the right forward area from the 168th Brigade.

I held another transport exercise on the 7th, this time by night, and all concerned soon realized the vital importance of a well-conceived drill combined with the fullest possible reconnaissance.

On the 8th April we were told that we were to take over the sector held by the 10th Royal Berkshire Regiment on the 1st May, and on the 9th April I took the company commanders and specialist officers on a tactical reconnaissance of the Isle of Oxney and also of the area we were to occupy.

As we had been warned that we were going to be given a Regimental exercise in this area on the 17th/18th April, I held a T.E.W.T. of the exercise on the 14th which enabled all officers to make a careful study of the ground.

On the morning of the 17th April the corps commander, Lieutenant-General Thorne, visited the Regiment unexpectedly and inspected the billets of H.Q. and D Companies, the quartermaster's stores, and watched D Company on training. He was extremely pleased with all he saw and said so, most warmly.

On the 17th/18th April we carried out Exercise "Oxex" which involved a night move by mechanical transport, a silent attack across a water obstacle (the Royal Military Canal), a dawn attack on enemy positions on the Isle of Oxney, consolidation and the meeting of a counter-attack.

The move and harbouring were unsatisfactory, although the troops reached their assembly positions in time. This was due to lack of experience in working on an extremely dark night with minimum lighting, and the sodden condition of the harbouring area, which caused unnecessary delay, noise and the piling up of vehicles on the road leading into the harbour. All very good lessons. The attack on the bridges, however, was very well done, and, once the bridgeheads had been established, the attack was pushed through to the line of consolidation with great speed and drive. The defensive fire plan was quickly determined and coordinated, and signals and intelligence worked well.

Later on, the "enemy" (8th Royal Fusiliers) counter-attacked and broke into our left-flank positions, but the exercise was ended before issue was joined on our whole front.

This exercise, the first the Regiment had ever taken part in as a complete battalion, was of the greatest value. The chief lessons were:

The need for a very flexible drill for movement by mechanical transport, with the necessary adjustments on the actual night.

Provision of an ample supply of traffic control and harbouring signs.

The value of well-trained despatch riders. The advantage of close co-operation between signallers and intelligence posts.

Unfortunately, the umpiring, in some cases, and the conference at the end of the exercise were extremely sketchy and, to a large extent, grossly inaccurate; the final summing up differing entirely from the opinions and rulings of the chief umpires, who were not present at the conference. This was so marked that I nearly had to quell a riot among the officers on the way home.

But I had learnt what I wanted to know: that the men had plenty of drive and were fit, hard and keen, and also that the officers and junior leaders were not afraid to use -their initiative. The rest was merely a matter of time and experience.

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One interesting incident occurred on this exercise. I had to give out my orders for the attack at 0200 hrs in a barn by the light of a candle. O group (Order group, i.e., those officers and Regimental staff detailed to receive verbal operation orders.) had assembled and also the divisional and brigade staffs, who had come to watch proceedings. As we were Germans in this exercise, I emphasized to the O group that they were not to be hampered by ethics or rules or red tape, as in the British Army, but had to concentrate on two things—my intention and speed. The brigade staff looked slightly horrified at this heresy and were by no means mollified when, a few minutes later, Johnny Granville's company, with black faces and wearing gym shoes, passed silently on their way. This was before the days of camouflage cream and "prepare for battle," and I don't think they thought it was "cricket."

On the 21st April another exercise again proved that we wanted further practice in movement by mechanical transport, and it showed up the results of faulty wireless.

The Regiment came under command of the 168th Brigade and as we had not been informed of their frequency or call sign, and as no despatch riders could get through owing to the tactical situation, communication with this brigade was impossible.

On the 30th "Armadillo" began and was an excellent exercise graced with the presence of several V.I.Ps. (Very Important Personages). The 167th Brigade acted as enemy to the 1st Armoured Division and covered itself with glory. We had an overwhelming force against us, but by great initiative on the part of junior commanders, combined with good tank-hunting, we managed to stave off defeat until only a few hours before the conclusion of the exercise.

At the end, with the 8th and 9th Royal Fusiliers, our Regimental headquarters and B, C and D Companies out of action, David Higgins, with A Company, was left to command the brigade, which he did valiantly to a finish.

There was a stimulating amount of action and excitement in this exercise which is so often lacking when big forces are in operation.

On the 2nd May Lieutenant-General A. F. A. N. Thorne left to take over Scottish Command and Lieutenant-General B. L. Montgomery took his place.

On the 3rd May a conference was held in Dorking on Exercise "Armadillo." Only the army commander, General Paget, and the commander of the armoured corps spoke. The Regiment was especially noted for its dash and offensive spirit.

The 5th May saw us on the move again to our new home, with headquarters at Wittersham on the Isle of Oxney, and A Company some distance away at Ham Street. We had a first-class hand-over from the 10th Royal Berkshire Regiment.

On the 6th May the army commander and Brigadier Whiterton paid us a surprise and informal visit. General Paget said some very nice things about the Battalion. As far as I can remember, these were his words: "I knew from my own inspections that they were happy and well disciplined; I knew from General Thorne that they were well administered; and now, from that recent exercise, I know they can fight."

General Montgomery did not wait long before making his influence felt. On this same day, the 6th May, details of his new defence scheme were issued, which, briefly, was to hold the line of the canal with strong-points at crucial places. There were to be no withdrawals and no alternative positions to which to withdraw. There was to be physical training every morning for all headquarters staff, and all ranks below the age of 45 had to go for a seven-mile run every week. To our unholy glee this applied to higher staffs as well.

On the 12th May all officers went to hear General Montgomery speak in Folkestone. Every officer in XII Corps attended. He spoke without a note for over two hours, dividing his lecture into three parts.

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FROM JULY TO 31st DECEMBER 1941
Contributed by Major P. R. Hayter, M.B.E., M.C.**

Lieutenant-colonel R. C. Cruddas, Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, assumed command on the 19th June and a few days later lectured all officers and non-commissioned officers. He explained the system of training he would adopt and emphasized the fact that each one of them, whatever his employment, must be trained to be a leader of men in battle. Weapon training and section leading courses were begun and continued whenever circumstances allowed, in various parts of the world, for the remainder of the life of the Regiment. The effect of the instruction given on these courses was evident as soon as the Regiment went into action a year later. At intervals over the next two years a series of training directions were issued and woe betide the officer who failed to carry out these instructions with his men or who mislaid his file.

Most of the junior officers spent an energetic and uncomfortable three weeks at the XII Corps Junior Leaders' School at Tonbridge, where all reports were seen by the corps commander. An adverse remark initialled "B. L. M." (B. L. Montgomery.) gathered further sting as it came down through division and brigade to the victim.

In addition to individual training, the Regiment took part in several large-scale exercises. The most outstanding and best-remembered of these was the corps exercise "Morebinge," which lasted from the 4th to the 8th August. In this the Regiment formed part of an enemy force supposed to have landed in the neighbourhood of Rye.

At the end of the exercise the Regiment marched back twenty miles to billets. An extract from the War Diary says: "The Regiment marched back exceedingly well. They had had a hard five days with much marching and very little sleep. There is no doubt that everyone thoroughly enjoyed the scheme and it was proved beyond doubt that the longer schemes are far better training and far more interesting than the shorter ones, which give no one a chance to get a second wind. Probably the outstanding performance, from the Regiment's point of view, was that of the carrier platoon. They were exceptional, but the whole Regiment has cause to congratulate itself."

The commanding officer started a vigorous drive to improve the administration of the Regiment.

The outstanding event was an inspection of the Regiment by Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard Paget, G.O.C.-in-C., South-Eastern Command. This was held at Lydd on the 29th July. The band of the 52nd was present on parade. The War Diary says: "The drill was good and on the whole everything went satisfactorily. The only adverse report we are likely to get is on the general turn-out, which, with the present arrangement for cleaning and repairing, is almost impossible to put right."

After the inspection the army commander lunched with the officers.

The forebodings of the War Diary proved correct and on the 12th August it is stated that an adverse report on part of the turn-out, especially the forage caps, had been received. Eighteen months later, when the Regiment had joined the Eighth Army, General Montgomery reminded the commanding officer of this report.

In spite of their many occupations, the Regiment still found plenty of time for amusements in off-parade hours.

Quite a large number of non-commissioned officers and men even went so far as to marry into their temporary war-time homes. This process was no doubt assisted by the frequent dances held by the companies in the village hall at Wittersham.

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The commanding officer and second-in-command rode to hounds on occasions and in spite of the coastal ban which prevented wives of the Regiment from visiting their husbands, many strange and rather glamorous creatures, who claimed to be land girls, or on work of national importance, were seen in the neighbourhood.

It was with genuine regret that the Regiment received orders to move to Colchester. The move, carried out by transport on the 13th November, went off very smoothly, in spite of bad weather; and the reception received by the Regiment from the East End Londoners was extremely moving.

The Regiment crossed London, escorted by civil police on motor-cycles, at what was known as "London distance." This entailed dividing the column into closed-up groups of some twenty vehicles each. In later days the Regiment was to know the same formation as "Baghdad," "Basra," "Cairo" or "Tripoli" distance.

During the period spent in Kent, large working parties laboured at erecting scaffolding along the coast. The purpose of the work was never made clear and the fact that the morning shift had to rise at 3 a.m. did not make the task popular. The corps commander, at one of his lectures at Maidstone, said he hoped the whiter storms would wash it all away, together with the rest of the defences. He had complete faith in his ability to deal with a German invasion of Kent. Nevertheless, the working parties continued. Much help, both voluntary and under official schemes, was given to the local farmers during the harvest. The work was popular and the saving of the hay and corn crops was assured.

The Regiment arrived in Colchester on the 13th November and were quartered in Meeanee Barracks. Barrack life was a new experience for most men of the Battalion and one which was never very popular. The homely atmosphere and greater freedom of billets were generally missed and better institutes and canteens were no compensation for them.

**THE SEVENTH BATTALION
FROM JANUARY TO 30th JUNE 1942
Contributed by Major P. R. Hayter, M.B.E., M.C.**

Early in the New Year the Regiment was ordered to take over guard duties for three weeks at a number of aerodromes in Cambridgeshire and Norfolk. The high standard of living of the R.A.F. in the way of food and quarters was in marked contrast to that considered good enough for the Army and was the matter of much comment.

The return of the companies to Colchester and the decrease in demands for working parties made it possible for the Regiment to settle down to the most concentrated training it had yet carried out. The work done at Colchester and Clacton-on-Sea between January and June had lasting effect on the Battalion and the enthusiasm which was displayed by all men was one more proof of the efficiency of the light infantry system of training. It was at this time that close friendship with the 64th Field Regiment, R.A., began. Artillery regiments had recently changed the establishment from two to three batteries. The new battery in the 64th Field Regiment was numbered 444 and came to be affiliated to the Battalion in the following way. Lieutenant-Colonel A. McCracken, commanding the 64th, asked his battery commanders to choose an infantry regiment of the 167th Brigade to train with. Only one replied. Major Kennedy, of No. 444, asked to be affiliated to the Battalion. There must be few men who served in the 7th Battalion who did not know him and his officers.

The whole Regiment fired their war courses in bitterly cold weather during February—a considerable achievement. The Depot gave us thousands of rounds of all kinds of ammunition, which, on account of transport restrictions, were brought over from Oxford by side-roads, and hundreds of men fired every type of weapon. This would never have been possible with the small official ammunition allotment.

Strenuous platoon marches of three days' duration were carried out to test platoons' adaptability and alertness. Officer training, particularly with officers of other arms, took place in the evenings. All this paid good dividends, and after a strenuous test exercise the brigade commander wrote that he had never seen a battalion where the standard of individual training was so good.

Corps and divisional exercises took place at intervals and were in strange contrast to the efficiency we had been accustomed to in XII Corps under General Montgomery.

A pleasant month was passed at Clacton-on-Sea before moving into Rendlesham Park, Suffolk. There orders were received for the 56th London Division to mobilize for service overseas.

Since the beginning of the year over 400 men had been drafted from the Regiment for foreign service and these had mostly been replaced before mobilization was ordered.

Before leaving England the division had the honour of being visited by H.M. The King. His Majesty watched a demonstration by the 9th Bn. Royal Fusiliers, at which the Regiment were spectators, and then came through our lines, when he spoke to C.S.M. Ayris and other men.

On the 7th July the Regiment was inspected by General Sir Bernard Paget, commander-in-chief, Home Forces. A guard, the only one ever mounted as a ceremonial guard, was first inspected by the commander-in-chief.

The Regiment was inspected in line, marched past in column of threes, and then formed hollow square. The turn-out and discipline of the parade were exceptional and many congratulations were addressed to the Regiment. But those present will remember above all the address General Paget made complimenting the men on their turn-out and bearing, and reminding them, in difficult times especially, to remember the Regiment they served and the great tradition they carried with them.