

Around the Camps



AN EX-RMP'S INTRODUCTION TO 6 (V) QUEEN'S

By Capt. Dominic du Vallon-Lohan

I am not only confused and bewildered, but wet and hungry. Here I am GR 874 383, map series GS 4964, Sennybridge, somewhere on training area '5' (which is termed as a dry training area) standing in a foot of mud and water, straining my eyes through the mist for the inevitable attack by the non-existent Fantasians. As the small drops of dew cling to my Junior Rommel Hats DPM, hesitate, then without prejudice, plummet down my neck, I reflect dubiously whether I have made the right decision in becoming an infantryman.

Having just left the Regular Army with its well oiled resources, efficiency, and technical know-how, I contemplated whether the TAVR would be a satisfying pastime. I had no knowledge of its function or its role, and tended, rather misguidedly, to look upon it as a sort of Dad's Army. With these thoughts in mind, I applied to join 6 (V) Queen's.

My apprehensions were practically confirmed when a letter from MOD welcomed me into the fold of the Royal Artillery! It went on to say that I was to go to 6 (V) Queen's 'D' Bty. RA (V). Dutifully I reported to my new OC, only to find he was a BC, and was told that I was to be the 21/C known as the BK, and that my unit was really D (Surrey Yeomanry Queen Mary's Regiment) Battery 6 (Volunteers) Bn. The Queen's Regiment. It was at this point that they struck home whilst still in a disorientated state of mind, by saying that it was expected that I would go to annual camp in two weeks time!

So with mixed feelings, I joined my Company—sorry Battery, to leave for Wales. My first surprise was that my driver was a Fusilier, Hackle and all. The second surprise was that he and I had shared the same desert in the Trucial States in '67.

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Our convoy stopped at various restaurants en route, where we met other members of the battalion. Loud cries of zigga, zugga, zigga, zugga, zig zig zig reached my ears, and my driver, whilst gently easing me out from under the dashboard, told me that it was only a battalion war cry, and nothing to worry about.

Old friends greeted each other, and stories of last year's escapades ricocheted along the tables. I felt very much out of it, and being an ex-regular held no water, and, no-one's attention. So I gave up and listened. It was really at that point, that I learnt that TAVR soldiers all had one thing in common, boundless enthusiasm (a TAVR attribute which I later realised was motivated by their desire to be as professional as the regular).

Our arrival at Sennybridge Training Camp was uneventful, and during the rest of the day people slowly drifted in, unpacked and made themselves comfortable. The officers and Sergeants' Mess were brought back to life, as were the barrack rooms with the centre pages of *Playboy* adorning the walls. The CO gave the battalion its initial pep talk, followed by the never-ending 'O' groups, that OCs/BCs—seemed to have. Night set in, as did the rain, which set the scene for the worst thunderstorm Sennybridge had had in years.

It was four days, and eighteen 'O' groups later that I was in this trench in an uncomfortable position, contemplating my lot. I had not really seen much of my own troops, precious little of the battalion, and I was not sure who was who. On the social side I had tried to hold my own with the Padre and the Doctor at the bar, only to be unceremoniously carried to bed.

The officer I shared my room with had little or no time for me, and unmercifully scorned me when I asked him what GRIT meant. The soldiers seemed to sense that I was totally lost as an infanteer and played merry hell on my nerves when they camouflaged up and I couldn't find them! Suddenly the clouds parted, the sun came out, we began to get dry.

Back at camp there was an increase of military activity as soldiers moved between stores, classrooms and training areas. Men departed clean, fresh and alert in vehicles to the plateau, returning tired and dirty having accomplished yet another day's useful training. One event after another changed my opinion of the battalion.

First the Officers' Mess Guest Night. A really depressing, and drab Officers Mess had slowly taken on a new shine under the professional influence of the Hon. PMC and Mess Sergeant. On Guest Night, one would hardly recognise the place. Beautifully laid out, magnificent regimental silver gleaming in the candle light, and the food and service was the best I had ever enjoyed. Although I did not see the way the WOs and Sergeants staged their Mess Guest Night, I did hear that the standard was excellent.

Another day saw everybody visiting some part of Wales, and on Sunday the WOs and Sgts. visited the Officers Mess for Curry lunch, having acquired a thirst in the morning in the battalion orienteering competition. The beginning of the next week began with the March and Shoot competition. I was fortunate enough to be running part of the assault course, and took pleasure in not only directing my room-mate through four feet of bog and mire, but watching his platoon use his head as a stepping stone! Still the last laugh was

on me because his section won the competition.

In the afternoon friendly rivalry between all companies/batteries in various sports proved eventful. 'A' Coy. won the football, 'HQ' Coy. won the tug-of-war, and 'D' Bty won the Chain of Command race. The Sergeants versus the Officers football match produced tactics which would not have gone unnoticed by Don Revie. The Sergeants won by three fouls, and one knock-out. By the time we were preparing for the battalion exercise, the various cadres in first aid, cooking, HGV driving, signals etc., terminated with some excellent results. The men had got to grips with helicopter drills, night patrolling, fire orders, and minor tactics, and were obviously well prepared for the forthcoming three days in the field (especially the Sergeants who looked forward to some sleep!) I personally had learnt a lot from watching the men.

On Tuesday—much to my surprise and delight—two Wessex helicopters arrived and the majority of the battalion had at least three flights, which included in some instances the cabaret of the roping down!

The battalion exercise started. The weather had changed again and it rained cats and dogs. It got so bad that even the sheep tried to take shelter in the tents! But for all the rain, that enthusiasm was still there. Attack, defend, withdraw and cordon and search by helicopter. It went well. The QM and his merry band of cooks produced the goods on time which again had all the flavour of professionalism. The men got wetter, and colder, and I thought that if they were going to crack, this was the time. Yet they did not. We eventually went back to camp, soaked to the skin. On reflection I felt that the majority of soldiers could have gone on, if permitted, just to prove to themselves that they were capable of doing what they were trained to do in any sort of condition.

The two weeks were practically over. Tidying up, loading and handing over. The time went by very quickly. We rounded off on batteries/company parties, straining our voices to old nostalgic songs which I thought had been lost forever to the archives of Tin Pan Alley. Next day, in bright sunshine, we started home. Much had been accomplished, and I was already looking forward to next year's two weeks training, come rain or sunshine!

Exercise Standfast - Camp 1974

131 INDEP PARA SQN RE (V)

Despite several excellent DZs and aircraft allocated for the following week, no Hercules were available for the squadron to parachute into camp and we had therefore to take three times as long flying by way of South Coney and Fairford. Nevertheless by noon on the first Saturday the three English troops had arrived at the Hameln Bridge Camp with the 300 (Jocks) Tp. arriving by Hercules later in the day.

At 6 a.m. the following day the squadron were off on the first of their morning runs, 3½ miles to a



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