

6/7 QUEENS IN GIB

SOME SAY IT'S LIKE AN OPEN PRISON

report from Maj J. R. Putnam

Marble Tor, the One Army concept, is alive and well and living in Gibraltar which is *not* the British Army's favourite posting. Once a bastion of Britain's far-flung Empire, now that the frontier to Spain has been closed, the Rock is left with all the social amenities and, more importantly, all the training facilities of a small open prison. The Gibraltarians themselves thrive in the confined space, but for the British serviceman, despite sun and sea, the sense of claustrophobia is overwhelming. Once the novelty of the first six months has worn off the problem is one of survival and anything that gets the resident battalion off the Rock, even temporarily, is A Good Thing.

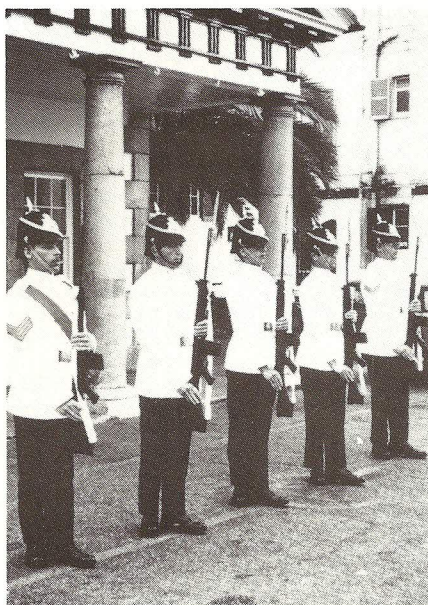
Each year, between April and July, general reserve battalions of the TA take it in turns to send a rifle company to Gibraltar for their two week annual camp, thus giving the Terriers the chance of an overseas posting and enabling a corresponding company of the regular unit to escape briefly 'on parole' to the fleshpots and larger training areas of the UK.

6/7 Queens got a double crack at Marble Tor, possibly because the resident battalion was 2 Queens, enabling over 250 to sample the Gib posting. The big problem was deciding who should go and who should stay. The promise of all that sun and sea and cheap booze all at the taxpayers expense, proved a substantial lure and the attendance at drill-halls in the months prior to annual camp improved dramatically.

The 250 officers, NCOs and men selected were organised into two rifle companies. The first commanded by Major Ashley Wilkin, a 28 year old solicitor from Alton, and the second which relieved them after a fortnight was commanded by Major Richard Hopper, a bank manager from Woking.

No. 1 company's first impression of the Rock was a pretty jaundiced one. Four and a half hours in a Crab-Air Herc on top of six spent in drill hall, coach and airport reception lounge had reduced them all to gummy-eyed automata. They were heartily sick of the silly hammock seats, the plastic food, the wax flavoured orange juice, to say nothing of the deafening noise. By the time the plane lumbered over Ceuta their mouths had an aseptic sweetness and the term Old Sweat was rapidly taking on its true meaning. On top of it all they were treated to one of those Gibraltar-style landings that so enliven the workaday routine of the RAF ground staff at North Front and which draw whistles of admiration from passing seagulls. 'You tax payers *paid* for the whole runway,' said the pilot disarmingly, 'We might as well *use* the whole runway.'

The warm welcome from the 2nd Battalion set the tone for the whole four weeks. With characteristic efficiency and courtesy they were soon settled into their quarters in Lathbury Barracks, where as one soldier remarked, the view alone,



across the barrack's Beau Geste-like courtyard to the great mountains of Africa beyond was "worth a guinea a minute". The routine of both companies was to be that of the absent regular company, a four day cycle that put one platoon daily on Frontier Guard, two on military training and the fourth with a day off giving everyone ample time to enjoy the sights of Gibraltar.

2 Queens as resident battalion had developed a highly efficient organisation for exploiting the recreational opportunities. Thanks to them everyone was able to enjoy water ski-ing, sailing and rock climbing as well as the more conventional sights.

The Royal Navy also co-operate. Through them the Company could enjoy tours around the Rock and across to Morocco and put a party aboard the frigate Diomedea for day trips into the Med. For eight fortunate soldiers, there was a four day visit to Villefranche in the carrier Hermes. The nuclear submarine Superb docked for a brief visit and very kindly accepted a party aboard. Not to be outdone in such hospitality the nearby Dutch submarine Tonijn immediately volunteered to take a party to sea.

On the military training side both Company Commanders were hard pressed to devise stimulating and realistic training given the limited facilities available. By dint of good planning and much hard work on the part of platoon officers and NCO's a worthwhile programme was put together, testing basic fieldcraft, weapon handling and shooting.

The most popular training facility by far was the ingenious urban CQB devised and built by 2 Queens in a deserted tunnel complex deep in the Rock. The deceptive half light and strange echoes of Beefsteak magazine brilliantly complemented the

imaginative array of snap targets and "incidents" that awaited the unwary patrol. With this range it proved possible to teach and test snaphooting and minor tactics under extremely realistic conditions.

However their real purpose was to guard the Frontier. Ever since the closure of the Spanish side of the border a daily guard has been mounted over the narrow sandy isthmus that joins Gibraltar to the Spanish mainland. For 365 days a year a platoon from the resident battalion is deployed in the Four Corners guard-room and its three outlying sangars, partly to prevent any Spanish infringement of our territory but mainly to dissuade Gibraltarians rashly trying to cross to relatives on the mainland. A three-day stint in Algecira's jail is not to be wished lightly on anyone.

This is *not* a glamorous duty as any regular soldier will admit. There appears to be little chance of a major incursion by Spanish troops and after the first two days of unfamiliar routine the hours at Four Corners and in the sangars dragged even for the youngest and most enthusiastic. 'Constancy', said Napoleon 'is the *first* quality required of a soldier, bravery only the second.' After three days in those sangars they knew what he meant.

The high spot of their four weeks on the Rock was the opportunity to mount Convent Guard. After a week of intense preparation under the vigilant eye of the CSM and the PSI S.Sgt Laine the two Guards were ready to take over from the regulars and acquitted themselves admirably. The best comment on their performance and an apposite summing up of the whole four weeks of Marble Tor came from the Governor himself. As he watched the ceremony from the balcony of the Convent and the Band and Drums marched away down Main Street leaving Sgt Pigeon's No. 1 Guard firmly in command, he said to Lt. Col. Barrow, CO, 2 Queens, 'I though you said these lads were Territorials, I can't tell them from your chaps.' 'That, Governor', said Colonel Peter, thinking of the One Army Concept, 'is the whole point.'

TA MAN TAKES OVER 5 ROYAL ANGLIANS



A TA officer is now commanding 5th (V) Bn The Royal Anglian Regiment. Previously the battalion was under a regular officer.

The new CO is Lt Col Roland Wreford (38) from Camberley. He is seen here (left) with his predecessor Lt Col Swallow who has been posted to the Ministry of Defence.