

YIPPEE!

6/7 QUEENS GO WEST

Report: Martin Wilson

150 Queensmen from the London, Surrey and Sussex companies of the 6/7th (V) Battalion joined forces in a composite 'Thunderbird' company for their exchange trip in June with the Oklahoma National Guard at Fort Chaffee.

After welcoming the incoming Americans at Mildenhall USAF base in a violent downpour, they flew out and finally touched down at Fort Smith, Arkansas to be met by the Oklahoma Commanding General, Brig Lawrence Roy and the National Guard Band playing a selection from 'Oklahoma'. They also found out what 'baking hot' really meant.

The first week was spent in acclimatising themselves to the high temperature and humidity, to American weapons and equipment and to the mid western drawl.

Driving jeeps and other American vehicles on the right hand side of the road in an area swarming with MPs, coping with insect pests like the tick and chigger, and dealing with an occasional rattlesnake also took some getting used to.

Nevertheless, the Thunderbird company learnt how to use the M16 rifle, the M60 machine gun, very like our own GPMG, the .45 pistol and the XM203 grenade launcher.

This handy chap is slung below the M16, can fire anti personnel grenade 400 metres and was rated by the Terriers as a good piece of kit.

Other weapons trained on were TOW and Dragon. On the Dragon simulator kit Cpl Dave Saunders of Hornsey, to the amazement of his American instructors, hit every moving target they put up.

Visits to the camp were frequent. Americans of all ranks from buck private to two star general wanted to see them in action, listen to their strange accent and learn about life in Britain and TV and Pressmen swarmed about the place.

A welcome visitor from home was Maj Gen Sandy Boswell, DTA&C who flew out from the UK for a couple of days.

The mid weekend break gave the Terriers a chance to spread their wings. Some spent a couple of days as guests of National Guardsmen and their families. Others hired cars and one enterprising group hitched a lift with the Texas Air National Guard who were flying their giant Chinook helicopters back to Dallas for the weekend. For the rest there were visits to local people, to basketball matches and to that essentially western spectacular, the Rodeo.

Training in the second week was concentrated on company exercises and manoeuvres. The unrelenting heat, over



Maj Mike Mercer, Thunderbird Coy's OC presents Maj Gen Boswell, DTA&C, with a regimental plaque and a Thunderbird Coy T-shirt during his visit to them in camp in America.



Cpl Tom Raper of D Coy at Camberwell leads his section into the assault after a heli-borne landing in a Chinook.



Pte Howard King of Bracknell tries out the American M60 machine gun on the Fort Chaffee ranges.

100°F with high humidity created problems and a number were taken out by helicopter to rest. Recovery, however, was quick and all those affected were soon back on duty.

Chinook and Huey helicopters, flown by Air National Guardsmen anxious to reach their quota of flying hours, were available in apparently limitless numbers and gave the company the opportunity to participate in different types of air-mobile ops by day and by night. The Air National Guard was fully satisfied that Thunderbird Company was 'Air-mobile Qualified' and presented them with a giant pair of carved wings to hang on the wall to prove it.

At the end of camp the Queensmen were able to repay some of the hospitality they had received by entertaining their hosts, the 1/180th National Guard, and the other units they had met at a company party. The fortnight's training was not only the best they had had in terms of military experience, but gave them the opportunity to meet other people on their own land and in their own homes and to forge another link in the chain of friendship with our allies.