

WAR DIARY OF THE ANTRIM (FORTRESS COMPANY) ROYAL ENGINEERS (T.A.)

Commanding Officer Major J. Maynard Sinclair, Royal Engineers (T)

HEADQUARTERS 32 Great Victoria Street, Belfast

At 2300 hours on 22nd August, 1939 "BYNG" received. Captain J.R. H. Greeves, Royal Engineers T.A. Proceeded to H.Q. On being informed by telephone, and key party personnel were called in.

At 1600 hours on 24th August 1939 "PLUMBER" received, regiment notices sent out and telegram despatched to Officer Commanding unit – Major J.M. Sinclair Royal Engineers (T.A.) on holiday in the North West of Scotland.

Two manning details for D.E. lights despatched to Grey Point Battery under the command of 2nd Lieutenant W.S. Orr R.E. (T.A.). Followed by Captain J.R. H. Greeves in command of the company in the absence of Major Sinclair. At 2100 hours Grey Point Battery station reported ready for action and engines running, communications and lights tested and found correct. The station was manned during the night hours.

At 0900 hours on the 25th August 1939 the remainder of the Company detailed for Grey Point were despatched from H.Q. At 1000 hours approximately details of the Company detailed for Kilroot were despatched from H.Q, together with the engine and searchlight for H.Q. At 2100 hours approximately, Major J. M. Sinclair returned and took over his command. During the rest of the month of August at Grey Point the normal routine of duty was carried out, the station being manned during the night hours.

At 1800 hours on 1st September 1939 the order to "IMMOBILISE" WAS RECEIVED FOR Grey Point Battery, Kilroot Battery and Belfast Lough Defences. Normal routine was carried out during the rest of the month.

Normal routine, works, training and night manning throughout October, November and December, 1939. Between 11th and 22nd December 1939, a field water course for Officer's and NCO's of infantry units of Northern Ireland was held at Grey Point. Normal routine was carried out in January and February 1940.

On the 11th February 1940 a Lance Sergeant McBride, R.E. was sent to Derry to the 158th Infantry Brigade as instructor for a field works course.

Between 19th and 29th February 1940, a field water course for officers and NCO's of infantry units in Northern Ireland was held at Grey Point Fort. 6 Officers and 20 other ranks attended. The instructors were Lt. A. H. Glendenning, acting Corporal Moore, R.E., and Lance Corporal J. Rice, R.E., the course ended on 2nd March 1940.

Routine and training throughout March and April 1940.

On the 5th April 1940, Lt. A.H. Glendenning left for Banbridge as Instructor in field works to the 160th Infantry Brigade. Capt. J. R. H. Greeves transferred from Grey Point to Kilroot Battery.

Normal routine throughout April and May 1940.

On 12th June 1940, the Company H.Q., and the balance of the company transferred from Grey Point to Kilroot, only engine room staff were left at Grey Point.

On 13th June 1940, training for the conversion to Army Troops Company commenced, this training continued until 29th June 1940 and on the 30th June 1940 instructions were received postponing the conversion of the Company to Army Troops Company, routine training continued.

On 3rd July 1940, the Company was handed over by Major J. M. Sinclair to Captain J.R.H. Greeves, Royal Engineers. Major J. M. Sinclair had been appointed G.S.O. II Ulster Defence Force.

On the 4th July 1940, two new searchlights came into action at Kilroot Battery, 2nd Lieutenant W.S. Orr transferred from Kilroot Battery to Grey Point Battery.

On the 5th July 1940, an old searchlight engine and detachment were sent to Magilligan, Co. Derry, and Captain Greeves went to Magilligan for the installation of the above. This searchlight at Magilligan was in action by the 9th July 1940 and Captain Greeves returned to Grey Point Battery on the 15th July 1940, when Lieutenant A. H. Glendenning went to Magilligan.

Normal routine throughout the rest of July 1940.

On the 29th July 1940, Captain Greeves transferred from Grey Point Battery to Kilroot Battery.

On 31st July 1940 a new No.2 emplacement at Grey Point Battery was completed and occupied.

Normal routine throughout the month of August 1940.

On the 3rd August 1940 a searchlight and engine at Larne, Co. Antrim was brought into action and a detachment sent to Larne to man it. On this same day the engine at Magilligan, Co. Derry was put on a new concrete bed.

On the 8th August 1940. Lieutenant Glendenning was attached the C.E. Northern Ireland District with effect from this date.

On the 16th August 1940 2nd Lieutenant C.D. Clark was posted to the Company .

On 30th September 1940 instructions were received for the Antrim Fortress Company to move to Portaferry, Co. Down, on the formation of a new Field Company – number to be notified later, 32 D.E.L. (Defence Electric Light) engine room staff to remain with Fixed Defences. Date of moving to be 8th October 1940. Accordingly on the 8th October 1940, 3 Officers and 29 other ranks of the Antrim Fortress Company, Royal Engineers transferred from Kilroot, Co. Antrim to Portaferry Co. Down, as Cadre for the Field Company and the diary from this time is to be written from Portaferry, Co. Down.

On 1st December 1940 the new Company was formed officially and was known as the 591 (Antrim) Army Field Company., Royal Engineers.

Between 3rd and the 9th December 1940, 4 NCO's and three sappers were engaged on the construction of the defence boom on the River Lagan and on the 25th December 1940 100 other ranks joined on posting from No. 5 T.B.R.E. The new Field Company remained at Portaferry until the 5th January 1941 when it left for Halifax, Yorkshire.

An advance party of one officer, one NCO and other ranks had left on the 3rd January 1941. The main party arrived at Halifax on the 6th January 1941. The next day 45 other ranks arrived from No. 22 T.B.R.E., Newark, and on the 12th January 1941 Major A.G. White, Royal Engineers arrived to command the unit.

On the 27th January 1941 591 Company moved to Lightcliffe to carry out field work training and the strength of the unit on the 31st January 1941 was 5 Officers and 175 other ranks.

The Company remained at Halifax until the 16th February 1941, when it moved to Wallingford and remained there in training until the 16th March 1941, when it left for Luton and between 17th and 21st March 1941, the unit was engaged on working at Luton H.Q. of the Advanced Eastern Command.

On the 23rd March 1941 the unit moved to Ely, Cambridgeshire, where it remained engaged in training and works such as the construction of huts at Chippenham, while No. 2 Section of the unit under 2nd Lieutenant C. D. Clark moved to King's Lynn on the 28th April 1941.

During May and June 1941, the unit remained at Ely engaged in general training, likewise in July 1941. Between 15th and the 17th July 1941 H.Q. 591 (Antrim) Army Field Company., together with numbers 1 and 2 Sections of the Company were engaged in exercises.

On the 23rd July 1941 No. 1 Section under Lieutenant W. S. Orr moved to King's Lynn and No. 3 Section under 2nd Lieutenant J. E. Jackson returned to Ely, the unit remained at Ely in August 1941 was at Wolterton Park, Ely in September, engaged in the construction of a hatted camp for 1000 men. Engaged on this same work throughout October, November and until 19th December 1941 and on the 30th December 1941 the unit moved to Woodbridge, Suffolk, arriving on the 31st December 1941.

The unit was engaged at Woodbridge on defence works during January, February, March and until 15th April 1942, between 16th and 30th April 1942 the unit went into training at Layer de la Haye Bridging Camp and returned to Woodbridge on the last day of April 1942. Its strength on this day was 7 Officers and 205 other ranks.

The unit remained at Woodbridge until the 14th May 1942 when it moved to Wallingford Bridging Camp, arriving at Wallingford on the 16th May 1942 and remaining there until the end of the month. The unit returned to Woodbridge between 2nd and 4th June 1942 where it remained until 20th November 1942.

On the 3rd October 1942 Major A. G. White, Royal Engineers relinquished his command of 591 Field Company and Major P. A. Wood; Royal Engineers joined the unit and took over the command. During this time the unit was engaged in various defence works in the area of Woodbridge, such as clearing of mine-fields, the destruction of pillboxes in the Ipswich area, the construction of bridges over anti-tank ditches using Bailey Bridge for the crossing of bridges by Bulldozer D.8.

On the 20th November 1942, when the unit began return move from Halton staging at Walcote near Lotterworth (Leicester). The unit arrived at Woodbridge on 21st December 1942 where it remained in training until the end of the year. The unit remained at Woodbridge during January 1943, engaged on various training exercises under the general direction of the 54th Division, to which it was attached and continued exercises in this area in February 1943.

On 28th February 1943, the 591 Antrim Field Company., Royal Engineers was permanently allotted to the 54th Division. Exercises in the Woodbridge area continued during March 1943. The strength of the unit at 31st March 1943 was 8 Officers and 207 other ranks. Training continued during April and May 1943.

On the 21st May, the unit was converted to the 591 (Antrim) Parachute Squadron, Royal Engineers as a part of the 6th Airborne Division Engineers, and the following day was spent in general reorganisation from a Field Company to a Parachute Squadron War Establishment. The strength of the unit on 30th May 1943 was 10 Officers and 250 other ranks.

The process of conversion continued into June 1943 and on the 2nd June 1943 the Commanding Officer and all parachute volunteers reported to the Airborne Forces School and Depot, Hardwick, for initial parachute training. The second in command remained to close down the Field Company.

On the 8th June 1943 the squadron H.Q. moved from Woodbridge to Beacon Barracks, Bulford and on the 15th June 1943 Captain G.F. Davidson Royal Engineers was posted to this unit from the 3rd Parachute Squadron. Royal Engineers. Vice-Captain J.H. Masterton Royal Engineers as 2nd in command.

Training continues growing more intensive during July 1943.

On 31st July 1943 9 aircraft were allotted to the squadron, training at Bulford throughout August 1943 and training in September 1943 with reinforcements coming in steadily, and on the 30th September 1943 the strength of the unit was 16 Officers and 199 other ranks.

Training throughout December 1943 and on the 19th December 1943 exercise "GUINEA IX" was held and the squadron had its first jump from Halifax Aircraft.

The strength of the squadron on the last day of December 1943 was 18 Officers and 230 other ranks.