

Wembury Fire Command

Transcription of the Diary of Lt. Col. Stanley Osborne

Transcriber's note: The original spelling, capitalization, punctuation and military abbreviations have been retained as closely as possible.

This document is a scanned copy of a handwritten diary kept by Lt. Colonel Stanley Osborne during the time when he was Commander of the Wembury Fire Command (late 1939 to the end of 1941). The diary was preserved among the photos and documents of Stanley's widow Clarie Osborne. It is now in the possession of Stanley's grandson, Dr Michael Clemens. All the photos, plus the original watercolour painting, included here were pasted into the original diary. The diary ends abruptly at the end of 1941, when Stanley was redeployed to St Helena.

Biographical note: Stanley Osborne (1894 – 1971)

Stanley Osborne was born in Newlyn West, Cornwall, and was the son of a schoolmaster. Although Stanley chose to follow his father's footsteps into the teaching profession, he also had a strong interest in military matters and in 1908, when he was only 14, he became a volunteer with the Cornwall Royal Garrison Artillery. During the First World War he became attached to the 4th Devonshire Regiment and served with them in India and Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq). On his return to the UK after the end of the war Stanley resumed his teaching career. He married Mary Elizabeth Clarissa George ("Clarie") and they had four children. During the inter-war period Stanley was the headmaster of Perran-Ar-Worthal CP School near Falmouth, and subsequently became the head of Foxhole School near St Austell. Throughout this time Stanley remained in the Territorial Force (the precursor to the Territorial Army) and in 1926 he became commander of the 157 Heavy Artillery battery near Plymouth.

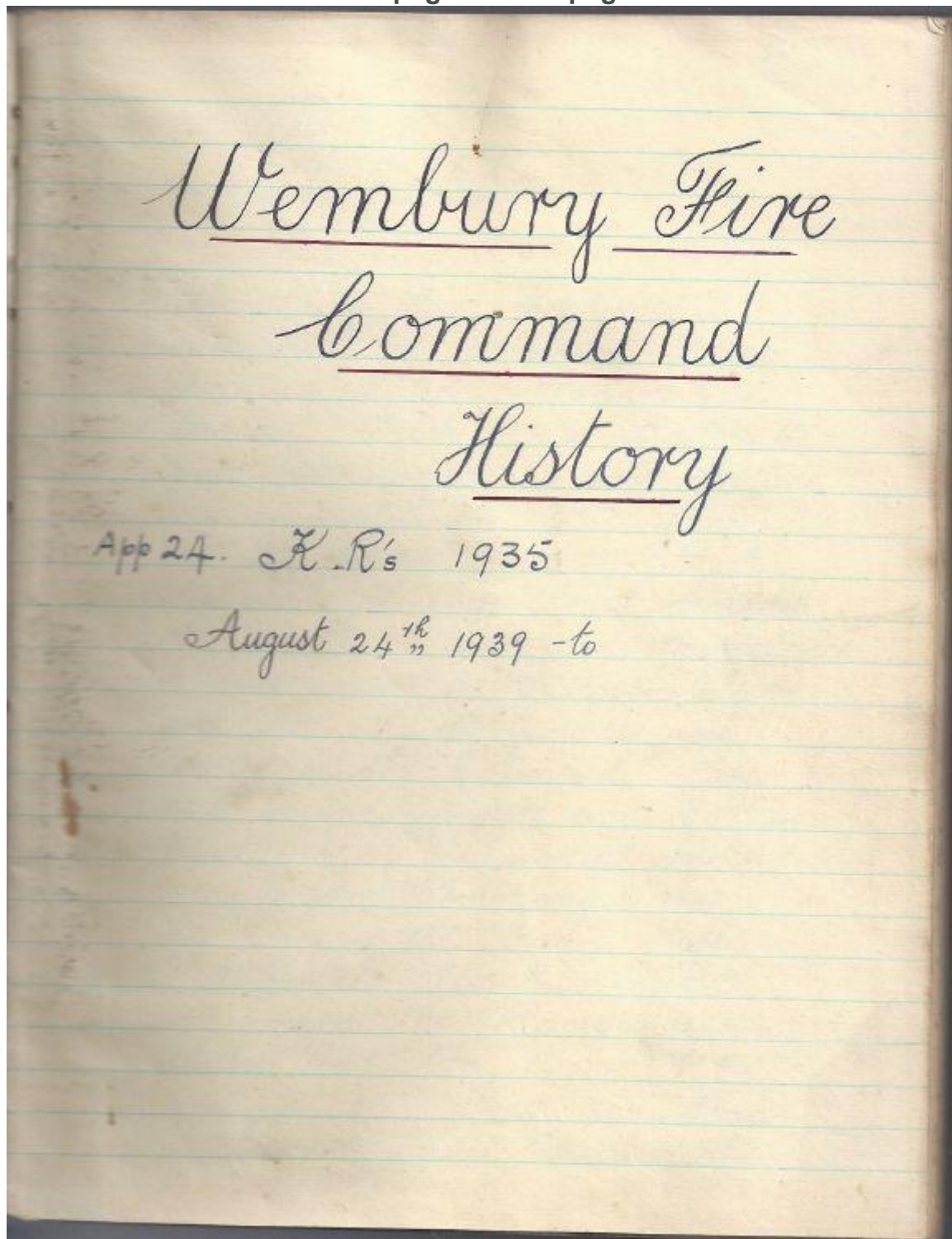
When war was declared in 1939 Stanley was well placed to take charge of the Wembury Fire Command, which had been formed in 1932 to protect Plymouth Sound, the Breakwater and the city beyond. He assumed the role of Fire Commander at Wembury on 23rd September 1939.

Stanley's time at Wembury was clearly a very successful period in his military career. As well as being a highly organised officer he had great empathy for those under his command, and his diary has many references to his concerns for the health and comfort of his troops. During this period, he was promoted from Major to Lieutenant Colonel. He left Wembury in early 1942, having been assigned the role of Officer in Command of troops on the South Atlantic island of St Helena. He returned to the UK in 1944 and remained in the Territorial Army until 1950.

Shortly after his return to Britain Stanley became the headmaster of Trewirgie Junior Boys School, Redruth – his third such headship and the one for which he is probably best remembered in Cornwall. He remained there until his retirement in 1958. In recognition of his unbroken military service and achievements, Stanley Osborne was twice awarded the Territorial Decoration, and he was also honoured with the King Haakon VII of Norway Liberty Medal. In 1949 he received an OBE. In 1961 he became Chairman of the Camborne-Redruth Urban District Council. Stanley Osborne died in 1971.

A more detailed account of Stanley Osborne's life and career has been published in the magazine of the Cornwall Family History Society (Issue No. 199, p. 24, March 2026). For any further information please contact Michael Clemens (M.Clemens0@gmail.com).

PDF page 3 - Title page



*Wembury Fire Command
History*

App 24. L.R's 1935
August 24th 1939 - to

PDF page 4 - Watercolour caption



*H. Pains
Shagstone & Rame Head
30 October 1940*

PDF page 5 - Photograph caption



*Some of our P.A.D.
- Trenches -*

Diary page 1 (PDF page 6) - Preface

Wembury Fire Command consisting of Wembury Range Finding Station, Renney 9.2" Battery, Watch-House Battery 6", and Bovisand 12 pdr. Battery was originated in 1932 from the 24 Cadre Battery R.A. stationed at the Royal Citadel Plymouth. Care and Maintenance Parties under a District Officer and two Master Gunners were located in the Command. They had District Gunners and Civilian Caretakers in their various works.

The Fire Commander was a Major of the Cadre Staff.

When the Fire Command was formed the Range Finding Station had two 14,000 yds P.F.s and a 100' Barr and Stroud Instrument under the care of

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A. Willingham, M.C. D.C.M. M.M. C.de G., an ex-Officer of the Regiment.

In 1931 a "P" P.F. (30,000 yds) was set up prior to Long Range Trials when the "Centurion" Target Ship was used. A Mark I Table Fire Director was installed for these Trials, together with a Fortress Plotter, using Observation of Fire Instruments for F.O. Ps. at Middle Barton, and Wembury; the guns used were Renney Battery 3 - 9.2 and Penlee Battery 3 - 9.2. 500 Rounds full charge were fired from each Battery.

As a result of these Trials a modern Range Finding Equipment was installed at Wembury.

In 1935 a concrete B.O.P. and B.P.R. were built to house a T.F.D. Mk II and a Co-ordinate Converter Mk II. The "P" P.F. was then moved from No 3

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cell and placed in the B.O.P. and a No. 10 Director was put in No 3 Cell, which became Wembury F.O.P.

The Fortress Plotter was set up in the B and S. Plotting Room and a Range Finding Exchange installed. The 100' B and S. was moved to Singapore.

At the outbreak of hostilities on August 24th 1939 the Command lay-out was one of the best in the Country and was equipped as follows:-

R.F. Station - Wembury

B.O.P. with "P" P.F.

Decoder

Stereoscopic Telescope

B.C.'s Charts

Wireless Room

Full Telephonic lay-out

Complete B.O.P. Furniture

all of latest pattern

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B.P.R. with T.F.D. Mk 2.

C.C. Mk 2.

Disc Predicting

Rate Corrector

Modern Stools

F.P.R. with Table Cross Observation
with Arcs for Wembury F.O.P.
Rame F.O.P.
Watch-house F.O.P.
Encoder
R.F. Exchange.

F.O.P. with No 10 Director.

Renney Battery
3 - 9.2" Mk VI.

Watch-house Battery
2 - 6" Mk VII.

Bovisand Battery
4 - 12 pdr. QF.

The Mobilisation Scheme laid down that 157 Battery

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of the Devonshire Heavy Regt. should man the fortifications of the Wembury Fire Command, and that the Regular Personnel of the Royal Citadel Plymouth allotted to the Fire Command should be absorbed in the 157 Battery of the Devonshire Heavy Regiment T.A.

This was the position on the eve of hostilities Aug 24th 1939.

Diary page 6 (PDF page 11) - Embodiment and Mobilisation of Wembury Fire Command

On August 21st 1939 at 2300 hours the Key Party of 157 Heavy Battery of the Devonshire Heavy Regiment was called out under the following Officers and Warrant Officer:-

Capt: H. S. Stebbing R.A. (T.A.)
Lt: T. K. Hitchens R.A. (T.A.)
2 Lt: D. J. Annear R.A. (T.A.)
B.S.M. N. L. Pullen M.B.E. R.A. (T.A.)

By 0415 hours on August 22nd 1939 the above staff and twenty other ranks had assembled at Battery H.Q. Lambhay Hill Plymouth and had begun to embody the Battery.

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Full embodiment was ordered at 1700 hours on August 24th 1939 and was completed by 2300 hours the same night when all Officers and 220 other ranks had reported and were ready to move off.

At 0430 hours on August 25th 1939 the Battery moved by Western National Bus to war stations, where they were joined by the Regular Personnel. A small party under 2 Lt D. J. Annear remained at H.Q. to receive Reservists and Recruits and to detail them to War Stations.

The following Officers took up Stations as shown.

Wembury R.F. Station, Command and Battery H.Q.

Lt. Col. J. C. M. B. Cooke M.C. R.A. - F.C.
Major S. Osborne T.D. R.A. - B.C.
2 Lt. Hinchliffe R.A. (Reg) - P.O.
2 Lt. Shearme R.A. (Reg) - I.O.

Unnumbered manuscript page (PDF page 13)

No 3 C.F. R.E. for D.E.L.

Capt. F. Tyler R.E. T.A. - O.C. Renney

Lt. R. Carr R.E. T.A. - Renney

Lt. Edmundsen R.E. T.A. - Renney

2 Lt. Pannell R.E. T.A. - Bovisand

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Watch-House Battery

Capt. H. S. Stebbing R.A. T.A. - B.C.

Lt. M. D. Kharegat R.A. T.A.

2 Lt. K. W. Knight R.A. T.A.

2 Lt. G. C. F. Beaumont R.A. T.A.

Renney Battery

Capt. W. E. M. Jones R.A. T.A. - G.P.O.

Capt. F. R. Hall R.A. (Reg) - D.O.

2 Lt. M. R. Shute R.A. T.A.

Bovisand Battery

Lt. T. K. Hitchens R.A. T.A. - B.C.

Lt. J. W. Best R.A. T.A.

2 Lt. Endicott R.A. T.A.

Major R. Anderton R.A.M.C.

Wembury.

Major T. Hunter R.A.M.C.

Bovisand.

PDF page 15 - Photograph captions

A Converted Holiday Hut to a Barrack Room

3 in a Room.



'G' Dept. Butcher's Dept.



Diary page 9 (PDF page 16) - Accommodation of Troops

Renney, Watchhouse and Bovisand Batteries accommodated personnel of the R.A. and R.E. in Barrack Rooms and huts previously erected.

At Wembury the troops were billeted in the Wembury Camp, (Holiday Camp) and the Officers in the Heybrooke Lido Holiday Camp. At this time there were 200 Campers here but by the end of September the Camp was taken over by the Military Authorities.

A general survey of Accommodation was made and a building programme for each work prepared. As work was completed a progress report was submitted to the Commander Fixed Defences - Plymouth.

Building process was slow owing to

- a. Amount to be done
- b. Shortage of workmen
- c. Difficulty in getting material
- d. Sanction to begin work.

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By the end of September 1940 the following progress in Accommodation had been made.

Wembury - 5 new huts and a Guard Room and M.I. Room were erected but not ready to be taken over owing to difficulty in getting the drainage question settled with the Land Owners.

Renney - Ample hut room finished and occupied.

Watchhouse - new huts occupied and additional huts being erected.

Bovisand - Alterations to existing buildings completed.

General Remarks:-

The Accommodation is good and every assistance has been given by the Garrison Engineer and his Staff to meet the requirements of the Fire Command.

PDF page 18 – Photograph

Uncaptioned photograph of two uniformed officers.

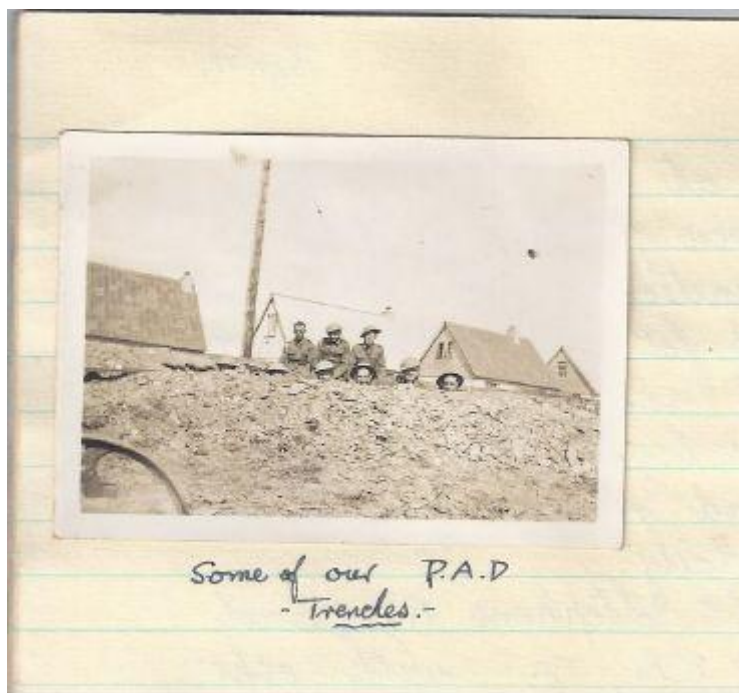
Diary page 11 (PDF page 19)

On arrival at the various works all guns were prepared for action and Ammunition fuze and held in readiness for action. Watches were detailed and normal work at War Stations begun; Training of Recruits and re-drilling was carried out daily.

Major P. E. Stephens R.A. T.A. and 2 Lt Horner R.A. (T.A.) with other Ranks from 193 Battery (Falmouth) were attached, as Falmouth had no guns and were not ready for the Battery to take up War Stations.

On 30th August 1939, Capt. P. Hardman and 19 O.R.s of the 4th Devon Regiment reported for Vulnerable Point duties and took up stations at Wembury and Renney.

Two Naval P.O.s arrived in the Command and were attached to the Fire Commander's Staff for Recognition of Ships.



PDF page 20 - Photograph caption

Some of our P.A.D.
- Trenches -

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Having settled in the various works personnel set to, to prepare trenches for local defence and to organise P.A.D. Schemes.

By the end of August the Command strength was as follows:

R.A. Officers 17 O.R.s 267

R.E. Officers 4 O.R.s 85

M.O.s 2

Devons Officers 1 O.R.s 18

R.N. P.O.s 2

P.O. A. S. Rutchons; P.O. J. Kennedy.

During the month of September 1939 all troops were inoculated against Tetanus and Typhoid and vaccination was begun.

The 4th Devon V.P. Guards were relieved by 40 O.R.s of the 5th Devons stationed at Millbay.

Eight recruits joined the Command.

Local afternoon leave to the extent of 12% of the Command was granted.

On September 17th the Inspector General Fixed Defences visited the Command.

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Weather conditions from August to the end of September were excellent and the health of the Troops was good.

On October 8th all Officers were medically regraded.

On the 11th 33 O.R.s joined from Sandown Reception Camp, and on the 13th 24 O.R.s were posted from the 70th Training Regiment.

On the night of the 17th October Fire occurred in the Engine Room at Renney owing to overflow of Petrol Tanks. The Engine Room and Machinery were damaged and 5 R.E. personnel were gassed in trying to cope with the Fire.

It was found that when "Pyrene" Extinguishers were used where Engine Fumes were prevalent that Phosgene Gas was generated. Three of the R.E. Personnel, including Capt. R. Carr R.E., were admitted to Hospital. "Foam Fighters" were

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placed in Engine Rooms to replace "Pyrene" Extinguishers.

A Court of Inquiry held under the Presidency of Major S. Osborne R.A. revealed damage to the extent of £400. This was subsequently written off by Higher Authority.

On September 23rd 1939 Major S. Osborne T.D. R.A. took over the duties of Fire Commander; Capt. H. S. Stebbing came to Wembury as B.C. Renney, and Lt. M. D. Kharegat became B.C. Watch House Battery.

During the next three days there was considerable enemy submarine activity and the Batteries were kept at Immediate Readiness.

Capt. E. G. Newnham R.A., who had recently joined as Assistant F.C., went to Shoeburyness on an Air Co-operation Course, and on October 30th 1939 2 Lts. Hinchliffe and Shearme left to join the 4th A.A. Regiment to proceed to France.

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Heybrooke Camp was visited by Capt. Rush R.N. and Staff from Devonport with a view to accommodating 400 Naval Ratings.

Early in November 16 Recruits were posted from the Suffolk Hussars and Worcester Anti-Tank Regiments.

On Nov. 20th special precautions were taken against possible raids, instructions having been received from the C.F.D. Extra vigilance was kept by look-outs and Guards and local defence "Alert" Schemes were put into force.

An examination of Layers and Specialists was carried out in the Command by the Command Instructor in Gunnery, Major Bolt R.A., on Nov. 17th and on the 18th a Reconnaissance for the Fortress Defence was made by the C.F.D., F.C. and O.C. D.C.L.I. Two days after one Officer and 12 O.R.s (N.C.O.s)

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of the D.C.L.I. arrived to take over V.P. work from the 5th Devons.

At the same time A.A. Batteries were located at Wembury, Renney and Bovisand.

Constant watch was kept for Enemy sub-marines and Air-craft as frequent warnings of their approach were given. During this period the weather conditions were bad, and for long periods the Batteries were kept at Night Routine.

The Cadets from the 70th Training O.C.T.U. visited the Range Finding Stations and demonstrations in modern lay-out and methods were given by the Wembury Range Finding personnel using T.F.D. and Fortress Systems.

On December 6, 16 other ranks were drafted to the 3rd Super Heavy Battery under Major P. Strudwick. This was the beginning of the break

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up of the original 157 Battery.

On the 7th December the C.F.D., F.C. and I.G. visited Watch-House and reconnoitred sites for Guns.

The following changes took place on December 8th:

2 Lt Annear to Bovisand

Capt. Jones to Rame as A.F.C.

Lt. Kharegat to Drakes

Capt. Dennis from Drakes to Renney as B.C.

Considerable sub-marine activity was reported during this period and extra look-outs were posted in Batteries.

1940

Sergt. J. Wilson R.A. (Reg.) died.

January opened with severe frosts but the health of the R.A. was good; several of the D.C.L.I. now numbering 180 were suffering from colds and sore throats.

On January 4th Capt. Hitchens was posted to Drakes Fire Command

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The Command was inspected on January 9th by the G.O.C. S.W. Area when local protection schemes were exercised and Battery Gun Drill carried out.

From January 15 to January 21st very severe frosts and strong northerly gales prevailed. All water supply was cut off; most of the mains burst and great difficulty was experienced with Transport. The heating of the Troops' huts was very poor at Wembury and Watchhouse, and on several mornings it was difficult to work the gun dials, especially with the T.F.D. This was due to oil in the Table becoming too thick. As a result the F.C. urged for a hot water installation for the Range Finding Station. This was completed in October 1940.

On January 24th 2 Lt Paris R.A. was posted from Shoebury (Cadet) to Renney Battery.

On January 25th Lt. Kirke R.A.M.C.

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relieved Major Anderson R.A.M.C., who was posted to a Field Ambulance (129), and Lt. Damley R.A.M.C. was posted to Bovisand in place of Major Hunter, who took up duty at Stoke Military Hospital.

2 Lt Sinnott posted to Bovisand from Rame Fire Command.

Early in February from 1st to 5th all Respirators were tested in the Gas chamber and disinfection carried out. On the 6th young layers practice with 1" Aiming Rifle was carried out by Bovisand 12 pdr Battery and the D.E.L. were exercised.

Warning was received that 2 Officers and 50 O.R.s were to be posted to the Orkneys and on February 7th 53 O.R.s from Depot Exeter arrived to be trained to replace the draft, and Capt. Bown R.A. was posted to Bovisand as the new B.C.

On the 16th February a Fire occurred at Watchhouse; Capt. Brightman the B.C. who relieved Lt. Kharegat reported

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that the A.A.L.M.G. Post had been destroyed. This Post consisted of a wooden building which had been loaned to Capt. Stebbing by a Dr. France. Unfortunately the whole place was burnt down; the Court of Inquiry was held at Watchhouse, but no definite cause of Fire could be established. The estimated damage was £99 Government

Property, which included a Lewis Gun, Rifles and Equipment, and £55 being the value of the Hut. Higher Authority ruled that the £99 be written off and that the Garrison Engineer be instructed to build a new hut for Dr. France; £5 had to be paid from Battery Funds. This decision was made in September 1940.

On Feb. 24th 5 O.R.s left for drafting to the Middle East.

Musketry Empire Test and .303 Training was begun in the Command on February 28th.

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Early in March "Immediate Readiness" was ordered by the C.F.D. owing to suspected enemy submarines in the approaches to Plymouth.

On March 5th 74 Rounds of 1" were fired from Bovisand to test the new layers, and the same day 2 Lt Knight was detailed for service in Hong-Kong.

On March 11th Capt. C. G. Newnham and 5 O.R.s were detailed for special service and proceeded to Portsmouth, and on the 16th the first Air Raid warning was given.

Lt J. W. Best relieved Capt. Brightman on the 16th as B.C. Watchhouse.

Another draft of 6 O.R.s left for Falmouth and 35 O.R.s arrived from Exeter on the 18th, and on the same day 4 N.C.O.s were posted to 158 Battery on promotion.

On the 24th of March 2 Lt Endicott and 2 Lt Sinnott with 50 O.R.s, all of the original Battery, left for the Orkneys, leaving Bovisand

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with an entirely new Battery mostly composed of Army class intakes.

On the 26th Master Gunner Culling from Renney was drafted to Aden.

During this month Training was carried out and examinations of layers, range finders and Table specialists held. The weather was wet and stormy and heavy mists and fog prevailed for days on end, necessitating constant "Night Routine".

On April 2nd 2 Lt P. Hicks and 2 Lt Douglas reported for duty and were posted to Renney and Watchhouse respectively.

The C. in C. Home Defences visited the Command on April 4th.

Major Dyer arrived for a tour of duty on the 7th, and on the 9th Lieut Carter and 2 Lt Johnson were posted to Bovisand.

On the 8th April an enemy plane was fired on by our A.A.L.M.G.s at Wembury. This was the beginning of a long series of A.A.L.M.G. fire at

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planes attempting to lay mines in the harbour.

It was decided that the R.A. should take over the R.E. work of running the D.E.L.s and our men having been trained by the R.E.s both in the Command and at the School of Electric Light, Gosport, the change took place on the 15th, when the handing over of stores was done.

Netton F.O.P. was now built and the R.A. with the R.E. work parties began to lay the cables across the River Yealm. This was a long and arduous task and the men worked extremely well. The work was completed in a month.

On 18th April the first of our Candidates left for O.C.T.U. Training - Br. Bradshaw, L/Sgt. Willon and L/Br. Crabb.

On 30 April 2 Lt Beaumont left for Gibraltar.

On May 1st Capt. Walling was posted as A/F.C. but on 20th he was drafted to Falmouth as Staff Officer.

PDF page 33 - Photograph caption



*After the C.O.'s Address
May 10th 1940.*

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During May month many changes took place in the Command.

On the 5th 23 O.R.s left for Norway.

On the 6th Lt Col. Cooke left to take up duties as C.F.D. Orkneys and Lt Col. W. P. A. Robinson M.C. took over the Command of the Devon Heavy Regiment.

On 10th May all leave was cancelled and orders re official "stand to" ½ hour before and ½ hour after official night and day were carried out as "Invasion contemplated" was in force.

The O.C. addressed all troops in the Command and impressed on all the seriousness of the situation.

From the 13th of May onwards drafts were posted to Bovisand and Watchhouse for training purposes. These men when trained were posted to newly formed Coastal Batteries. The first lot of 30 arrived on the 14th, and on 15th 47 O.R.s, 37 of whom were immatures, were posted from Harrogate. All of these men had to be fully

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equipped and trained as they were intakes of only one month's depot training.

A 6 pdr. Sub-Calibre shoot Case III C.B. (Fortress System) and one series Auto-sights was carried at Renney on the 16th; and on the 23rd May a 3 pdr Sub-Calibre Shoot took place from Watch-house.

May 25th: Lt Ferris took charge of Bovisand Battery, with 2 Lt Ward as S.C. These officers came from Rame F.C.

Lt Best now B.C. Watchhouse handed over to Capt Kharegat and proceeded on R.D.F. course at Southampton University.

Capt. Burr was posted to 217 S/L Regiment - Hereford and 2 Lt Shute left for 220 S/L Regiment at Yeovil. 22 O.R.s also left for these Regiments in exchange for 22 O.R.s.

On the 28th Capt Jordan R.A. arrived as a/F.C. but left for

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the 12th Field Training Regt. R.A. on the 8th when he was relieved by Capt H. Allen who now became A/F.C.

Picklecombe and Drakes carried out 3 pdr. Practices from Watch-house on the 4th and 6th of June.

Owing to so many changes taking place local courses of Instruction were held at Watch-house for all junior and new Officers and N.C.O.s. The 1st Course took place on the 10th.

On June 11th all Officers were medically re-graded.

Another 3 pdr Shoot was carried out at Watch-house on 13th June and on 15th Lt Sessions arrived as 6" Instructor to incoming Trainees.

From 18th to 26th gun practice was carried out as follows:

18th: 42 Rounds 12 pdr from Bovisand 157

19th: 28 Rounds 12 pdr from Bovisand 158

20th: 28 Rounds ½ ch. 6" Watchhouse 157

14 Rounds ½ ch. 6" Watchhouse 158

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22nd: 12 Rounds 12 pdr Bovisand 158

24th: 12 Rounds 12 pdr Bovisand 158

25th: 10 Rounds 9.2 Fortress System Renney 157

25th: 10 Rounds 9.2 Case II Renney 157

26th: 14 Rounds 12 pdr Bovisand 158

On June 27th 500 Rounds of 12 pdr Ammunition was transferred to other Batteries. (Wiltshire)

On June 29th Air Raid 'Red' was received at 0055 hours. This was the first of a long series of warnings. During July there were 26 'Red' warnings. Planes came over and concentrated on Mine laying. Our Lewis Guns went into action on the 21st and 28th.

On the 21st the Lewis Gunners took up position on the cliff below Wembury. Enemy planes came in over the Mewstone and made a direct line for the Breakwater. On two occasions they were between 300 & 400 feet

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The weather was a clear bright Moonlight night and the planes when the AA/LMG's opened fire were easily seen. They altered course and gained height and returned gun fire on our position. Later heavy fire from A.A. guns in the neighbourhood opened, and the planes made off in a Southerly direction.

On July 1st a written examination for all senior N.C.O.s was held.

On July 10th 25 O.R.s were drafted from the 52nd R.A. who were disbanded from France and on the 15th 38 O.R.s were posted from Bulford whilst 1 B.S.M., 1 Br. and 16 O.R.s left for Rame. Lt Pennant and 22 R.A. joined ex Dunkirk.

On July 31st the new F.O.P. at Netton was set up and a 'P' P.F. installed.

During July the weather conditions were perfect and the health of the troops excellent.

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During August many raids were made in the vicinity; Bombs both H.E. and Incendiary were dropped near Bovisand and Staddon and some in Wembury.

On the 11th a Magnetic Mine destroyed a large house in Bovisand Valley. The Sentries on guard at Bovisand were badly shaken. A rescue party rescued the Occupants from the house. An elderly gentleman and his housekeeper. Neither was hurt.

About this period it was observed from the Night F.C. Post that a Magnetic Mine had fallen in Rame, and on another occasion the whole of Penlee Point was set alight with Incendiary Bombs. There were no casualties.

On Aug. 15th Capt Dennis and 35 O.R.s left to form 336 Coast Battery and Lt Pennant and 30 O.R.s proceeded to the Orkneys as a 12 pdr Battery.

On the 19-22nd the C.O. carried out a full inspection of the Command.

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On August 23rd the new Commander of the S.W. Area, Major General C. W. Allfrey D.S.O. M.C. visited the various works, and on the 28th there was a visit from the Official War Correspondents.

The following day the 8th Corps Commander Sir Colin Jardine inspected the Command.

7 O.R.s were posted to Woolwich for drafting overseas.

One Year of War and the Strength of the Command was as follows:

Officers 18 R.A. M.O. 2

W.O.'s 7

S/Sgts 1

Sgts 10

L/Sgts 14

Bdrs 15

L/Bdrs 32

Gunners 345

Total 20 Officers

424 O.R.s

Diary page 31 (PDF page 41) - Retrospection, August 1939-August 1940

The foregoing diary will give a fair idea of the changes which have taken place in the Command and Battery during the first year of War. There are only a few of the original men left. Only 2 Officers and 40 O.R.s. When we mobilised it was hoped that we should come to our War Stations for a short time and proceed as a Battery overseas as soon as men were available to relieve us.

Instead Coast Defence has become an important role and Coast Batteries have sprung up all around our shores.

Wembury Fire Command has contributed a large proportion of the personnel for these new "Throw off



Batteries". To do this

PDF page 42 - Photograph caption

Enthusiastic Gardeners.
Wembury 1940.
Some excellent crops were produced.

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it has been necessary to lose some of our best N.C.O.s and men, and to be continually training new gun teams, N.C.O.s and Specialists. In spite of this however the Battery and Fire Command has maintained its high Standard of efficiency.

The men are happy and are looked after very well indeed by their Officers; Sport and Recreation of varied types such as Boxing, Soccer, Hockey, Gardening, Cricket, Tennis, Table Tennis and numerous Concerts have kept the troops in good spirits; whilst the question of leave has been as liberal as could be allowed. The health of the Troops has been exceptionally good. The weather conditions have been all that could be desired and although at times we have been under-manned the men have carried out their duties in a cheerful manner.

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September opened with a temporary break in the weather, a thick mist prevailed for a couple days. During the month we had many A.A. readiness and there were 17 "Reds". Hostile planes seemed to be concentrating on Incendiary Bombs and Mine laying.

On September 4th Capt R. R. J. Dennis was posted to 336 Coast Battery as O.C. at Ramsgate, and Capt G. A. L. Butler (Reg) took command of Renney Battery. 2 Lt Prentice from Shoebury C.A.S. was posted to Renney and 2 Lt J. G. Britton went to Bovisand, both officers ex Cadets.

On 8th September all Ranks were confined to Barracks as "Invasion" contemplated was in force. On the same day Lt Nichone and Lt E. Lumsden were posted to Wembury and Renney respectively. Lt Rose left on 15th for Exmouth.

Diary page 35 (PDF page 46)

During this period several bombs were dropped in the vicinity and quite a few were reported to be delayed action.

On 24th September the Fire Command was visited by the Corps Commander.

About the middle of September 5 of the American Destroyers entered harbour, There was considerable air activity and A.A. fire about this time owing to the amount of shipping in the harbour.

The Revenge lying in harbour and the Newcastle were subjected to bombing, but no damage was done.

October was a month of unusual air activity especially between the hours of dusk and Midnight. There were 137 A.A.Readiness and 47 Raids with heavy A.A. gun fire.

The Raids were mostly engaged on Mine Laying and Incendiary bombs. Our lookouts did good work in locating mines and reporting to the Naval Authorities the Bearing and Range

On 4th October 15 O.R.s were posted from Forth Defences to Bovisand for 6 pdr. Twin work.

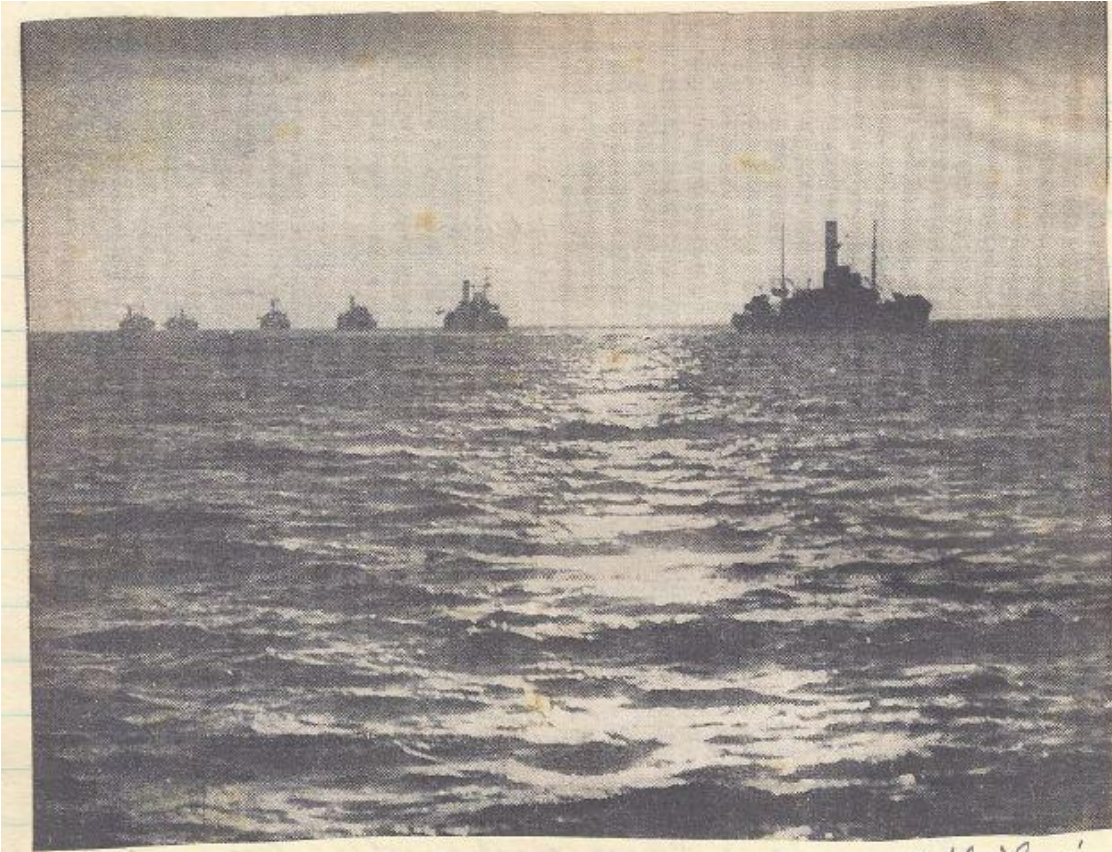
6 pdr Sub-Calibre Case II was carried out from Renney on the 7th, when 19 Rounds were fired.

The same day a mine was washed up in Wembury Bay, and having reported to the R.N. it was removed. The next day another mine fully detonated was located in Bovisand. A guard was mounted over it until the Navy removed it.

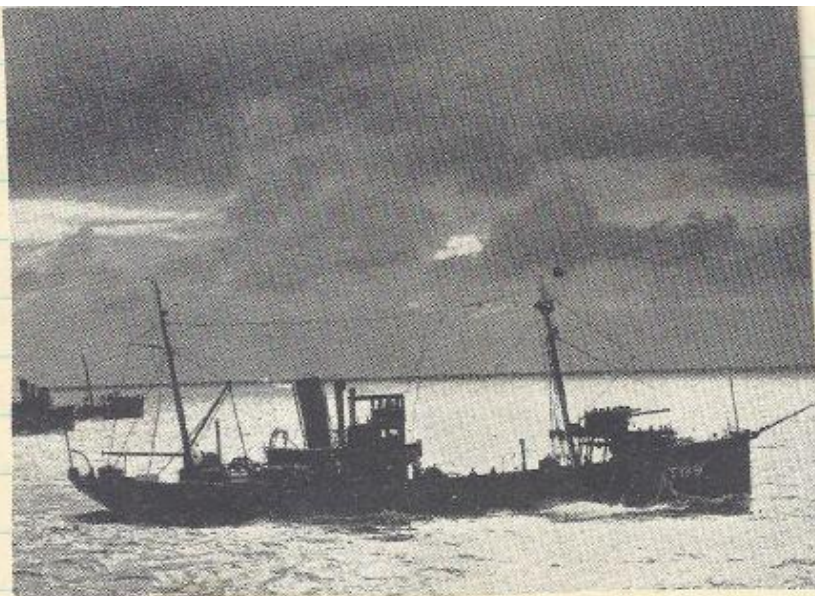
Heavy seas were responsible for their being washed up.

On 15th October Lt Horner was posted to 2nd C.D. Training Regt. and 44 O.R.s from 51st Training Regt. came to Watchhouse for 6" Gun Training.

During one of the Raids Bdr. Bott, a Lewis Gunner, was hit by a bit of shell from A.A. burst and sustained a damaged ear.



Safely Home



*Familiar Scenes
from
our Look out
Posts at
Eventide.*

*Mine Sweeper at Work
off Wembury.*

PDF page 47 - Photograph captions

Familiar Scenes
from
our Look Out
Posts at
Eventide.

Mine Sweeper at Work
off Wembury.

Diary page 36 (PDF page 48)

During the latter part of October all promotion and N.C.O.'s practical examinations were held preparatory to the written Tests in November.

For a considerable time there have been various "rumours" about the re-organisation of the Devon Hy. Regt. It is thought that the Regiment will form Coast Regiments but so far no definite detail is available.

November opened with very heavy rain storms but on the 6th the weather cleared and there was considerable Air Activity. During the evening of the 6th heavy Raids were experienced. 43 Bombs were dropped in Plymouth and several Magnetic Mines burst in the vicinity of the Eastern approaches.

On the night of the 7th and 1810 hours one of the Trawlers off Renney Battery was sunk by a mine and early in the evening there were raids with heavy A.A. Fire.

On the Nov. 4th: low flying

Diary page 37 (PDF page 49)

aircraft were engaged by A.A.L.M.G. Fire at Watchhouse when 100 Rounds were fired.

On the 7th: 1 B.S.M. and 5 O.R.s proceeded to 421 Bty. Woolwich, and on the same day the written examination for N.C.O.s was marked by a Board of Officers (President Major S. Osborne) at Hamoaze House. The results were poor. It is obvious that the number of changes and losses of good N.C.O.s of the Regiment has been seriously felt in all works.

Capt Allen granted 3 days leave pending posting as Administrative Capt. to 70th C.T. Regt.

On the nights 8-9 & 9-10th low cloud prevailed; during the night many raids were made. The planes seem to approach from the North & West. Heavy Gun Fire was experienced and there was plenty of A.A.L.M.G. fire given and the enemy retaliated on Search-light & S/L Batteries. On 10th November at 1715 hours a trawler was mined off Renney in the Main Channel.

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The explosion of the mine threw up a huge column of spray. The Trawler was seen to be emitting volumes of smoke and steam; and within 3 minutes she had disappeared, but not before a small boat was launched. It is believed that 11 were drowned.

November 11 & 12: Very heavy Rain Storms and high S.W. gales prevailing.

November 11-15: The Command Equipment was inspected by the O.M.E. and on 15th the Southern Command I.G. Major Cocks inspected the various works. Everything satisfactory.

On November 23rd Col. W. P. Robinson left the Regiment, and Major S. Osborne assumed Command as Lt. Col. of the Regiment. Capt Hall R.A. became Fire Commander Wembury, with Capt Mercer as his assistant.

On November 27th at 1845 hours a raid on the Western & Eastern approaches was made. It lasted until 0245 hours the following day. Many Incendiary & H.E. Bombs were dropped in the

Diary page 39 (PDF page 51)

Command. There were seventy one planes over the area, in relays of 5 to 10 mins interval. The attack was made from the South East and South. At Netton sticks of Incendiary Bombs lit up the headland, and Flares were dropped just over the Mewstone. These were brought down by our A.A.L.M.G. and Wembury.

Wembury Village, & Down Thomas had several bombs; large craters were made and a Hay Rick caught alight. At Brownhill Fort the road was blown up and two bombs fell inside Watchhouse Battery but did no damage.

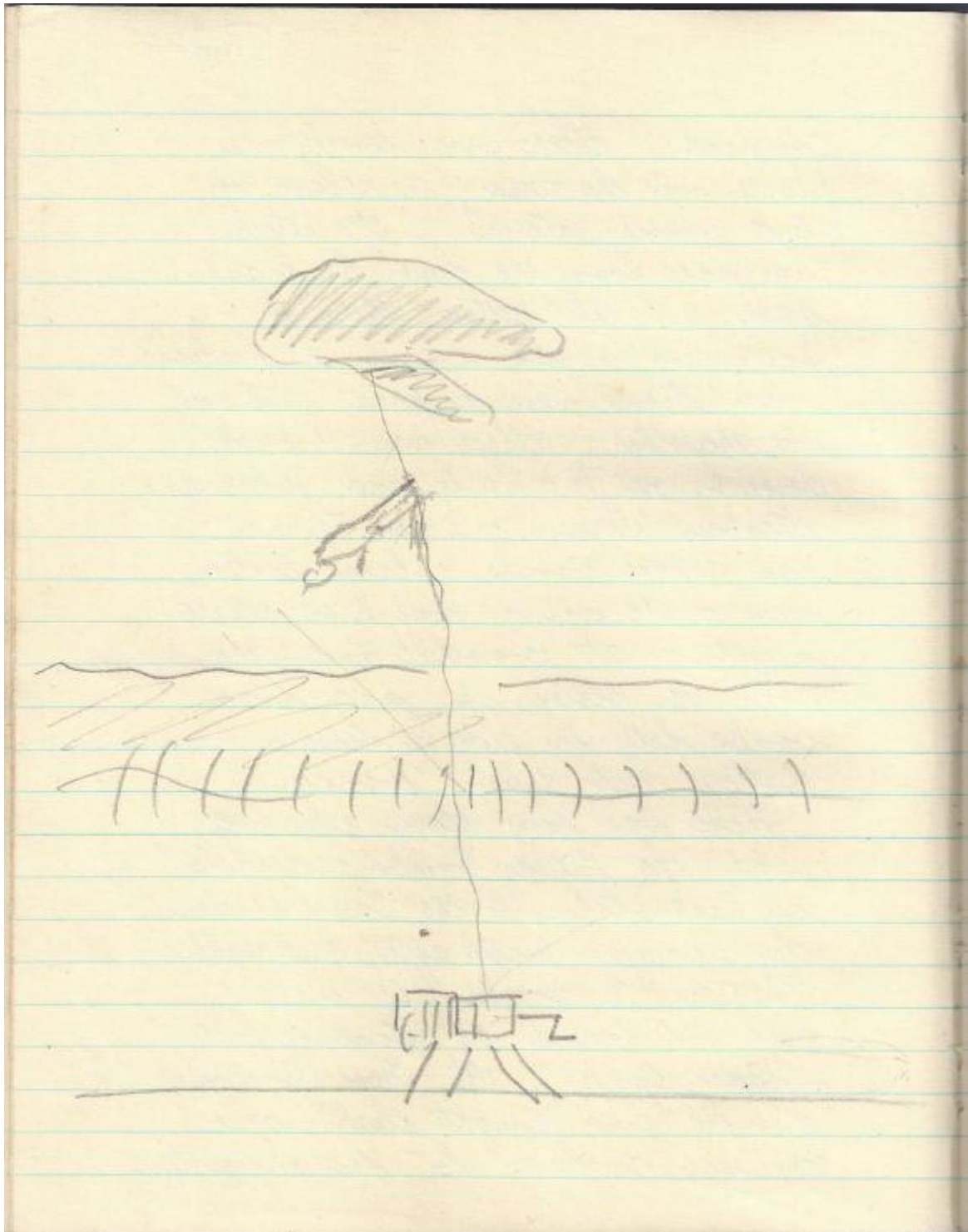
There was very heavy gun fire and the falling bombs necessitated all Ranks taking to the Trenches, where they remained until after midnight.

Fourteen H.E. Bombs fell in a field just behind the Wembury Point Holiday Camp. At Hove (Preston) five Oil Tanks caught alight and continued to burn for four or five days.

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During this Raid on Hove, one of our Gunners on night pass was killed. Gunner R. Farrell, a former Staff Sergt. Artificer at Watchhouse. He & his wife were killed when a direct hit was scored on his house.

On the morning of Nov. 28th a remarkable incident occurred at Bovisand. An R.A.F. Balloon came down at the Guard Post and the B.C. with a working party tried to secure it from being damaged. Whilst doing so a Gunner Creswell had his leg entangled in a stay rope. Suddenly the Balloon ascended taking Creswell with it. Suspended head downwards and just by a tangled rope around the left ankle he was carried 1000 feet; first over the sea and then over the land above Watchhouse Battery. Here the Balloon was lowered and Creswell released none the worse for his adventure.



PDF page 53 - Sketch

Uncaptioned pencil sketch showing a barrage balloon tethered by cable to a ground winch or mooring point.

Diary page 41 (PDF page 54)

November 29th: Capt Ferris left to take up duty at Torquay and Lt Pentreath became B.C. Bovisand.

Lt Barker joined at Bovisand.

From November 28 - Dec 2nd there was considerable Air Raiding between the hours of 1500 hours and 2400 hrs nightly. Planes were engaged in Mine laying and met with considerable activity from A.A. Pom-pom &

A.A.L.M.G. Fire. Several Mines were laid however, most of which were spotted by our look-outs and reported to the S.M.O.

During the month of November there were many Air Raids. Bombs & H.E.s were dropped in the locality; 37 times Enemy Planes were over the area.

On December 6th Capt F. Sessions was posted to Devon Heavy Regt. as Adjutant and Lt Hardy took up duties at Watchhouse.

On December 13th 24 Army Intakes began Training at Renney Battery and during their six weeks preliminary work,

Diary page 42 (PDF page 55)

made excellent progress. They were a good type of man.

Dec. 28th: 2 Lt Edwards was posted to Wembury from 592 Coast Regt.

During the latter part of December thick mist and fog prevailed; the weather was mild. Air activity slackened off, there being only 17 Air Raid Reds for the month.

Christmas festivities were well arranged in all works, and Officers, W.O.s & N.C.O.s did well in looking after the men who were made happy and comfortable.

The health of the Command has been good throughout the year and the high standard has been aimed at and in most cases achieved in spite of many changes. A very successful year.

1941.

The new year opened with very severe weather; heavy frost, snow and easterly winds. Great difficulty was experienced in Transport work and

Diary page 43 (PDF page 56)

water supplies as all pipes were frozen for nearly a fortnight.

Air Activity was slight: 14 Air Raid Reds were recorded but little damage was done during January.

On January 15th Watchhouse Battery was handed over to the 71st Training Regt R.A. C.A.T.C. but was under the Operational Command of F.C. Wembury.

The Devon Regt. personnel at Watchhouse were distributed as follows:

Lt Carter to Renney Bty

Lt Hardy to Bovisand

10 O.R.s to Wembury R.F. Station

10 O.R.s to Renney Battery

11 O.R.s to Bovisand Battery

30 O.R.s to Rame Fire Command

23 O.R.s to 71st Training Regt to remain as Watchhouse Cadre.

On January 19th 2 Lt Thornton was posted to H.Q. F.C. for duty and on the 27th Lt McKay was posted to Bovisand Bty.

Lt Moss joined on 31 January and was posted to Renney Bty.

These officers were A.O.E.R. and Capt Thompson R.A.M.C. relieved Lt Darnley R.A.M.C. as M.O. i/c Bovisand.

Diary page 44 (PDF page 57)

February 1941 was very cold and bleak but the Troops "stuck it" and there was little sickness.

2 Lt Maidment from O.C.T.U. was posted to Renney Battery.

On February 19th two H.E.s (unexploded) dropped on Bovisand, near the Cookhouse and living quarters. On investigation by the Bomb Disposal Squad it was found that these bombs had not fused; luckily for Bovisand as they were 250 kilos.

On February 20th Capt G. A. Butler was detailed for Overseas and on 21st Lt P. Hicks also left for Overseas. The Command of Renney Battery was assumed on 22nd by Capt Carter.

Lt Harris and Lt Hodgson A.O.E.R. were posted to Wembury.

Air Activity increased towards the end of the month, there being 16 Raids over the area with spasmodic dropping of Bombs.

Diary page 45 (PDF page 58)

March month saw much Air Activity. Incendiary Bombs were dropped in the vicinity of Wembury and Watchhouse and on March 21st Plymouth had its first blitz. 70 Bombs were dropped in the area of the Command.

On 22 March Major General Lund, M.G.R.A., visited the Command. Most of the raid on Mar 21st was concentrated on the east of Plymouth, and there were signs that the enemy were deceived and mistook the Yealm for the Hamoaze.

During the month of April Night Raids were prevalent; there were 14 Raids, the main being on the nights of April 21, 22, 23. Incendiary Bombs were dropped on Watchhouse, Bovisand and the outskirts of Wembury.

The whole area was lit up and at one time it seemed as if a direct attack was being directed against the Forts. Heavy H.E.s fell in the neighbourhood. One man at Bovisand and one N.C.O. at Watchhouse sustained injuries from Incendiaries. The main attack however was on Plymouth. At 8.40 waves of Bombers came in from all directions. Plymouth was soon ablaze.

Diary page 46 (PDF page 59)

and H.E.s rained on the City. From Wembury Range Finding Station, where we could hear wave after wave of raiders coming in, it looked as if the whole of the area from Mt Batten to the Dockyard was under constant Bombardment. The sky was aglow, and even our helmets were easily silhouetted against the glare.

The gunfire was continuous. At about 2200 hours Capt Kirke R.A.M.C. was sent to the A.A. Camp behind our Station, where a premature had killed two gunners and injured 5 others. The raid on each occasion lasted until the early hours of the morning. Some of our personnel on leave had harassing experiences and one gunner from Wembury was admitted to Hospital as a result of flying debris.

Several of the local gunners of the Forts had lost their homes and in some instances families as well. Every effort was made to aid these men where ever possible.

Altogether during the month there were 16 Raids doing much damage to Plymouth and district.

On April 29th 2 Lt Maudment left for overseas.

Diary page 47 (PDF page 60)

During May month the raids were continued and Devonport came in for its share of bombing.

By this time both Plymouth and Devonport had suffered badly. Streets were shattered, houses bombed and hundreds rendered homeless. Many people left the City at night and sought refuge in the Country.

On 16th May the advance party of 137 Bty from the Orkneys arrived to relieve Bovisand Battery which was to go "en block" to the Orkneys.

During the Evening of the 28th 3 H.E. were dropped at Wembury, damaging some of the Accommodation huts, but no one was injured.

The long delayed re-organisation of the Devonshire Heavy Regt. was now at hand and on 31st May the Regt. ceased to be the Devonshire Heavy Regt. and became the 568 Coast Regt. R.A. (T.A.).

The strength of the new Regiment was at this time 17 Officers and 454 O.R.s.

The C.F.D., Col. Oliver, left to take up the appointment of Inspector of Coast Artillery and was replaced by Col. Gatehouse M.C. R.A.

Diary page 48 (PDF page 61) - Formation of 568 Coast Regiment R.A. T.A.

The new Regiment continued to man the Wembury Fire Command Defences and was organised as follows:-

156 Coast Bty. 9.2 Guns - Renney Fort

1 Major - 1 Captain 2 Subalterns.

157 Coast Bty 6" Guns Watchhouse

Manned by personnel from 71st Training Regt.

137 Coast Bty 12 pdr (later 6 pdr Twins) Bovisand

manned by 2 Subalterns.

H.Q. at Wembury.

1 Lt Col: O/C Regt & Fire Commander

1 D/Fire Commander

1 a/Fire Commander

1 Administrative Captain

1 Lieut C.A.S.L.

1 Lieut P.O.

Total Strength 17 Officers

451 O.R.s.

Diary page 49 (PDF page 62)

Lt Col. S. Osborne became O/C 568 Coast Regt.

Major K. Hamilton - D/F.C.

Captain Johnson - A/F.C.

Captain D. T. Annear - Admin: Officer

Lieut Hardy - C.A.S.L. Officer

Lieut Shields D.C.M. - D.O.

Major T. R. Hall was posted to the C.A.T.C. at the Royal Citadel on June 16th.

On 19th June 2/Lt Paris was posted to Milford Haven and Major Kennedy arrived to relieve Major Hamilton who left for special employment.

During June enemy Aircraft activity was on a minor scale and although there were several "Reds" little damage was done; the raiders were "single" on reconnaissance.

The new organisation settled down very well but the new Regiment from the Orkneys were in a poor state both in equipment and efficiency. A report on this was sent to the C.F.D. During this period much time was spent on Landward Defence and Infantry Training.

Diary page 50 (PDF page 63)

July month saw the continuation of Defence work, much work was done in wiring, making strong points, camouflage and preparation of Infantry Schemes, although the Gunnery side was by no means neglected. The weather was good and the men worked well in spite of very long hours, as much had to be done to complete the schemes set by Col. Gatehouse.

On July 4th 2/Lt Davey was posted to the Regiment ex O.C.T.U. and Major Lindsay M.B.E. also arrived prior to being posted to Drakes Fire Command (566 Coast Regiment R.A. T.A.).

On July 29th the Regiment was inspected by the Divisional Commander, Corp Commander and C.C.R.A. of the 8th Corps to which the Regiment was now joined.

During August much time was spent in local Defence work - the whole scheme was revised by the C.F.D. Col Gatehouse and many exercises in Infantry Tactics were carried out. Liaison being made with the Infantry who assisted in the exercises. Musketry practice was carried

Diary page 51 (PDF page 64)

out and the Plymouth Test fired - i.e. 5 Rounds at a figure target at 100 yards - 3 hits to qualify.

Air raids and alerts during the month were few - only 9 being recorded.

On 19 August Major Kennedy, the Deputy Fire Commander was posted to the Orkney Regiment and on 29th the B.R.A. inspected the Command.

September month was fairly quiet. Infantry work was continued and the standard of Training improved considerably.

On 14 September Capt Collins 71st C.A.T.C. was posted to the Regt as Deputy Fire Commander. This was the 14th D/F.C. since the War started!

On 18 September Col. Longfield, Capt Mercer and Capt Roberts visited Wembury in connection with proposed changes in Range Finding Instruments. It was proposed to move the T.F.D. to Renney to make room for the C.H.L. Battery Range Finder at Wembury.

2/Lt Davey was posted overseas on Sep 30th.

Diary page 52 (PDF page 65)

In October special attention was paid to all local Defence and Infantry Tactics and a large scale exercise was held lasting for 48 hours. The evacuation of Renney Fort was practised; the attacks made by the Infantry were very thorough and much valuable Training and experience were gained.

On 23 October Col Gatehouse M.C. was posted to the Orkneys and Col. R. C. R. Gill from the C.A.T.C. took over duties of C.F.D.

Gun practices of all armaments was carried out and the 9.2 guns at Renney calibrated.

This month was devoted to Gunnery Training and winter organisation.

There was very little Air Activity.

During the month all Watch Systems were overhauled and special facilities introduced for Training. A Gunnery League was introduced to create the competitive spirit in Sub-Sections.

Towards the beginning of November Air Raid activity increased - spasmodic raids - "nuisance" were frequent.

Diary page 53 (PDF page 66)

2/Lts Birch & Baggett ex O.C.T.U. joined the Regt. on 3 November and were posted to Renney Battery. On November 25 the Command was visited by the C.C.R.A.

A strong feature has been made in the various works of the educational facilities - lectures and talks on Current Affairs and "War" have been given regularly. The Troops have responded well.

The health of the Troops has been exceedingly good in spite of the long nights of typical November fogs.

December month opened with a spell of wet and foggy weather. Successful shoots were held using the Fortress System of Ranging.

On December 2 the Command was visited by the Brigadier and Staff of the Chemical Warfare Dept. All stores and equipment at 156 Bty were inspected.

The Bishop of Plymouth gave the 1st of lectures at Wembury on Dec 4th: Russia - Moscow - & Napoleon.

Major Collins was appointed B.C. 159 Bty.

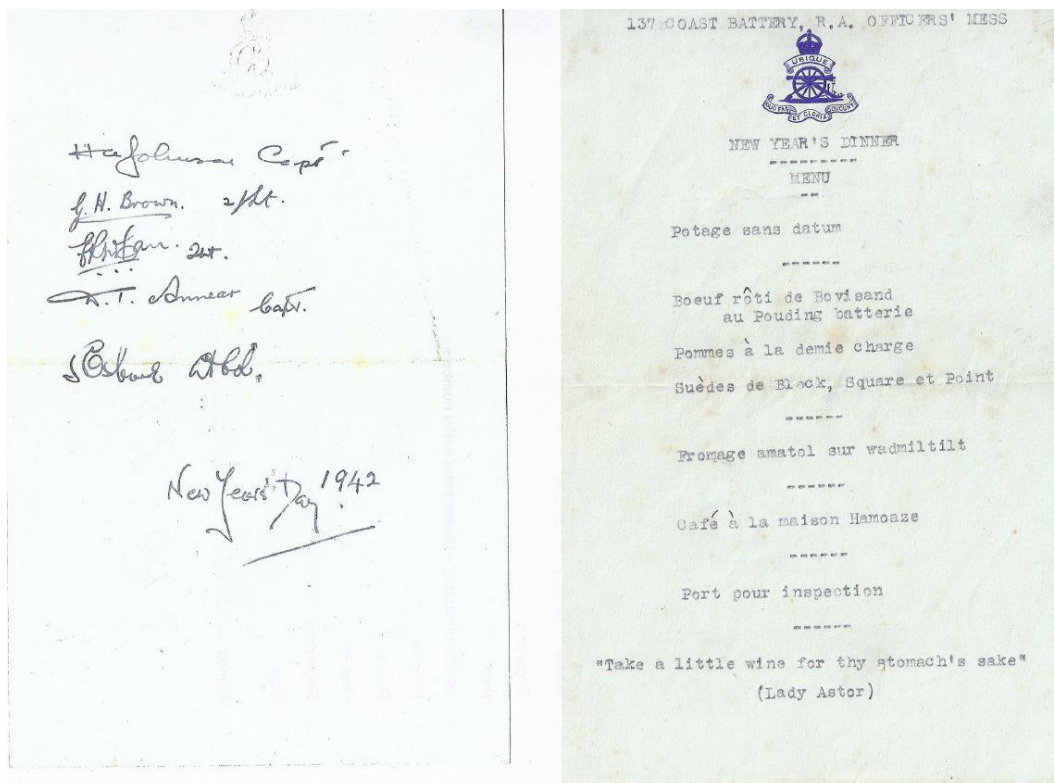
Diary page 54 (PDF page 67)

Drakes Fire Command and Major Gard was appointed D/Fire Commander, to take effect from Dec. 11th 1941.

4 O.C.T.U. Candidates - L/Brs Achilles, Cousins, Rogers & Smith were interviewed by the 2nd W.O. Board and Classified "B" Candidates.

On Dec. 7th the N.F.C. reported War with Japan had been declared.

On Dec. 9th all Ranks at Wembury went through the C.A.P. Gas Chamber.



BATTERY, R.A. OFFICERS' MESS

NEW YEAR'S DINNER

MENU

Potage sans datum

*Bœuf rôti de Bovisand
au Pouding batterie*

Pommes à la demie charge

Suèdes de Block, Square et Point

Fromage amateur sur wadmiltilt

Café à la maison Hamoaze

Port pour inspection

*"Take a little wine for thy stomach's sake"
(Lady Astor)*

At the left, beneath several signatures, it says:

New Year's Day 1942

Transcriber's note; It is a jokey mock-French military menu, with dishes named after Bovisand, battery terminology, block, square, point and Hamoaze.