WEST NOVA SCOTIA REGIMENT

WWII WAR DIARY

Place

Date

Time

Entry

NORTHAMPTON

1 Jun 40

0630

The MT move to NORTHAMPTON was completed without any serious difficulty. At one point the Carlt. & York R broke in on our convoy and caused some confusion. And on the Oxford By-Pass, the leading car of our convoy, containing the 2 i/c and the IC, and two carriers turned left instead of right because of a confusion of signals from the guide on point duty. The guide then signaled the rest of the convoy on to the right and the leading car and carriers had to drive very fast to regain the head of the column, as the trucks and buses were hurrying to catch us, thinking we were out of sight ahead.

When the convoy reached NORTHAMPTON, we were guided into The Country Cricket Grounds, where our cooks, who had come up on Friday, had their cookers set up and breakfast all ready—this being the place selected by the Staff Captain on Friday. No sooner had a few of the cars and trucks entered the park then we were ordered out and the convoy was led to EAST PARK PARADE, where the convoy was parked under the trees. As the cooks had to move over here, breakfast was very late, not being completed till 0930 hrs. No breakfast for officers.

A temporary Bn HQ was set up on the west side of EAST PARK PARADE. The 2 i/c scrounged two tents for us. The rest of the BN were shown to their billets. The day was spent in finding billets and resting.

EAST PARK PARADE (NORTHAMPTON)

2 June 40

0940

Sunday morning found the Bn still sleepy, but very happy in their new situation because their brief recce of the city on Saturday had revealed to their admiring eyes the largest aggregation of feminine beauty that any of us had ever seen in one place before, even in Canada. AS one member of our Bn expressed it, “I had my eye on one good looking girl coming down the street. As she passed me, I saw a better looking one coming. I finally discovered that I could just make a grab in the dark, as they were all good looking.”

However, we had a Church Parade this morning. Then we resumed our recce of the city.

Still no officers’ mess, the officers having to buy their food in the city.

1430

The 2 i/c IO, Scout Officer, and one Int private and three drivers went out to make a road recce towards CLACTON-ON-SEA. We got as far as ROYSTON, making route reports on all difficult portions of the route. Then we returned and made out an interim report for Bde.

EAST PARK PARADE (NORTHAMPTON)

3 Jun 40

0830

The same party, plus a Sjt from the attached tps of the RCF, spent the day making a road recce and route reports from ROYSTON to CLACTON-ON-SEA. We reached CLACTON at 1530 hrs and spent an hour resting and seeing the sights of that city. During this visit the IO challenged the Sniper Officer to a shooting match in an indoor rifle range, and the IO won by one point. We finally reached home at 2130 hrs.

During the day an officers’ mess was organized in a house on EAST PARK PARADE across from our two tents. One room in this house is the Bn Orderly Room, but no blackouts are installed as yet.

1330

The Bn fell in on the Cricket Ground and then practiced embussing and debussing.

1530

Sports.

1900

The Bn fell in again and marched to Northampton Cricket Arena where they attended a very enjoyable evening of music and songs supplied by people of this city. At the end of the program, the Brig awarded the prizes won by the WNSR in Bde sports. Also he presented our Bn with the Bde shield, which was for the winning Bn.

EAST PARK PARADE (NORTHAMPTON)

4 Jun 40

1600

An adv party proceeded to ASHBY CASTLE to lay out a campsite for Z Gp.

The Padre went to London to purchase stores for the Officers’ Mess.

ASHBY CASTLE

5 Jun 40

0750

The Bn was embussed and started to move to ASHBY CASTLE, which we reached without incident. The rest of the day was spent setting up tents and making plans for a life under canvas. The men explored the adjacent villages during the evening and returned mourning the delights of Northampton.

The MO was overlooked in informing our people of our move out of Northampton. After some trouble in securing information and transportation, he finally reached us in the new camp at noon, breathing fire and brimstone and bitterly complaining about how we had wronged him.

ASHBY CASTLE

6 Jun 40

1200

By noon today we were comfortably settled down under canvas. An inlying and an outlying picquet were established, and the I Sec mapped the camp area and the surrounding country.

Today the I Sec had its first casualty. Pte Charles Barkhouse suffered a fractured thigh when the water cart he was guiding overturned. He was taken to Northampton General Hospital.

2000

The Staff Captain came out and ordered us to strike canvas in preparation for a move tomorrow.

2330

Not a tent is standing. Everyone except the QM department and the Transport are preparing for a night under the stars. Many of the men are a bit excited, as they think they are on the eve of going to the war. Singing and loud jokes were heard till midnight.

During the day, while riding his motorcycle on duty, Sjt. Whynot, R., was seriously injured and taken to Northampton General Hospital.

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

7 Jun 40

0130

The Adj woke up the Coy and group Comdrs and summoned us to a conference at the officers’ mess tables. There by the light of a gasoline lantern we drank a cup of cocoa and ate a sandwich, and then the CoO informed us that we were to move out early in the morning.

0445

Reveille. After Reveille the camp ground resembled an ant bed disturbed by the kick of a boot. Packing kits, shaving, loading trucks, carrying baggage and boxes, and all the activities necessary in getting embussed. The men had an early breakfast, and seemed cheerful after their decidedly chilly night under one blanket, many with only their web equipment to keep them warm.

0750

The embussing was carried out smoothly and the convoy was on the move towards the Bde SP by 0835 hrs. There was a great deal of speculation as to our destination. Some claimed we were going to Scotland, some were even optimistic to suggest France. But the weary I Sec, who had done fatigue all night and marked the route on all the maps as soon as daylight permitted, knew that we were in fact headed towards our old stamping ground in the vicinity of the Ely Pub.

0900

We passed the Bde SP exactly on time, and received a cheery “Good Morning” from Brig Price. The trip was carried out successfully on the whole, in spite of running into another convoy en route.

The I Sec had its second casualty within twenty-four hours today. Sjt. Annis, the I Sjt, was hit by a civilian motorcycle and suffered fractures of his right leg and right arm. He was picked up by an ambulance and taken to Cambridge Hospital, Aldershot.

1530

We were met by Major Harris and Lt Parker at the Sandhurst Corner on the London Road and guided to Guillemont Barracks. Our men were a disgruntled lot when they found themselves back here. To top it off, the Scots regt which had been here during our absence had left the barracks in a terribly dirty state.

1614

One of our men aptly described our feelings when he said “I admire the British discipline but don’t think much of their sanitation.” We had to set up our field kitchens in the field and ready everybody. The mess hall was too dirty to use.

Total Strength Officers 21

 ORs 702

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

8 Jun 40

1600

The big event of today was the King’s inspection of the whole 3 Cde Inf Bde. The whole Bde was lined up on three sides of Guillemont parade ground at 1450. The sun was very bright and the ground was still hotter. Finally the King arrived, and we shooed the men with water buckets off the square and stiffened up for the inspection. When, in addition to the King, we saw the Queen, then we thought we were really getting a good send-off.

After the inspection, the CO told us that both the GOC and the Brig expressed satisfaction with our appearance.

Total Strength Officers 21

 ORs 702

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

9 Jun 40

0945

Church Parades. Voluntary.

1200

The CO attended a conference at Div HQ

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

10 Jun 40

0800

PT and rest in the morning.

1300

Route marches by Coys in the afternoon.

Total Strength: 21 Officers

 702 ORs

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

11 Jun 40

0800

PT and rest in the morning. Route marches by Coys in the afternoon. Today Mr. Parker trained his scouts in the use of the Tommy Gun.

1300

Bde sent a warning order for Adv Party for France. Lt Parker, P. SM Bullock and Sjt Curphy were detailed by the C.

Total Strength: Officers 21

 ORs 669

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

12 jUN 40

1145

Details from each Coy proceeded to STONY CASTLE RANGE to fire the ATk rifle.

1900

Bde sent a warning order for the dispatch of carriers to France.

2000

Sixty ORs came from Borden as reinforcements. They were fully equipped.

Total Strength: Officers 21

 ORs 720

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

13 Jun 40

0830

PT

0930

The morning and early afternoon was spent in packing and storing kit bads and surplus baggage. These were stored at REEVE’S DEPOSITORY, FRIMLEY ROAD, CAMBERLEY.

1230

Lt Parker and his party reported to Bde en route to France.

1630

The I Sec drew maps of France from the Map Stores, Aldershot.

Total Strength Officers 21

 ORs 720

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

14 Jun 40

0830

The CO inspected the Coys.

1300

We heard over the radio the news of the German army marching into Paris. It was predicted by many that the French would “fold up” now that Paris was taken.

1400

All transport was loaded and the afternoon devoted to pay parades and further preparations for the expected move to France

1715

Received from Bde the order for our move to France.

1800

Received warning order from Bde tha tour transport would proceed to port of embarkation tonight, and that the troops would go tomorrow. Our CO took no action on this warning, as he didn’t believe these moves would actually occur.

1930

Bde informed us that the planned move to France was canceled until further orders.

Total Strength Officers 21

 ORs 721

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

15 Jun 40

0830

PT

0900

At the COs conference, he informed us that no further orders on the move to France had been received.

1000

Route marches by Coys.

2045

Lt Parker, PSM Bullock and Sjt. Curphy reported back from their abortive adv party. They spent Thursday night at a rest camp at EXETER. They refueled Friday morning and pushed on to PLYMOUTH where they reported to the ESO. Their vehicle was marked by the ESO and driven on the doc for loading. At 180 hrs, while going back to the Rest Camp for supper, they were told by the RCRP that a reverse order had come and hat all of the adv parties of 1 Cdn Inf Div must return to the dock to get their vehicles off the ship and take them back to the Rest Camp to await further orders.

At 0800 hrs, 15 Jun, our adv party got orders from the Commandant of the Rest Camp to return to their Bn. They were to check in at the Rest Camp at EXETER on the way back to learn whether any new orders had come. They started immediately for EXETER, where no orders had arrived. Lt Parker then phoned 3 Cdn Inf Bde for instructions. The Staff Captain ordered him to bring our adv party back. Lt Parker was disappointed at not at least setting foot ashore in France and seeing some of the signs of war.

Total Strength Officers 21

 ORs 720

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

16 Jun 40

0930 - 1030

Church parades. At the end of the Protestant church service, Brig Price gave us a short talk, telling us that the BEF were being withdrawn from France because organized resistance by the French army was practically at an end. He also said that the Germans have a force of troops with transport ready for the ination of the British Isles, and that the Royal Navy cannot guarantee that no Germans can land. We are now, he said, to be part of the defense forces of Britain, and must redouble our training to make use of the lessons learned in France by the BEF. The two lessons he mentioned were that the Germans fear the bayonet and that properly controlled and applied small arms fire were really effective against dive bombing aircraft. He also said that the Germans would be unable to land any of their heavy tanks on British soil. (This opinion was received by many of us with considerable reservation.) Finally, he promised us that wherever the most important part of the fighting in this war took place, the Canadians would be sent.

Total Strength Officers 21

 ORs 718

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

17 Jun 40

0800

An identification parade was held to enable a woman to search our ranks for two men whom she accused of attempting to rape her. She didn’t find the guilty parties in our Bn. The boys in Bn HQ were sweating as she came nearer and nearer to them without having found her men in the Coys.

0900

The Bn less “A” Coy marched out to the practice area East of CROWTHORNE to practice tactical exercises, paying particular attention to AA defense while on the march and while halted, digging slit trenches and coy attack schemes.

1800

When we arrived back in the barracks, we heard that France had asked for an armistice with the Germans. Few of us were surprised at this news.

2100

We listened to Winston Churchill’s speech on the news from France. During the following news broadcast we heard that fighting was still going on in France.

Total Strength Officers 21

 ORs 718

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

18 Jun 40

0800

The Coys paraded in battle order and marched to PYESTOCK WOOD for a day of tactical exercises.

Total Strength Officers 21

 ORs 716

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

19 Jun 40

0800

Bayonet and other SATs this morning.

1330

Sports in the afternoon.

Total Strength Officers 21

 ORs 715

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

20 Jun 40

0815

“D” and “HQ” and one pl each of “A”, “B” and “C” coys together with all their transport marched to assembly positions in the vicinity of WISHMOOR CROSS, where they arrived about noon. During the afternoon, they practiced various tactical exercises designed to train them to deal with small groups of parachute troops.

Total Strength Officers 21

 ORs 715

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

21 Jun 40

0900

All troops have returned from WISHMOOR CROSS, after a night in the woods.

1000

The plan for Mobile Recce Units came today from Div. The CO called Lt Parker in and offered him the command of the West NSR detachment, which is to be known as 2 Troop of 3 Can Recce Squadron. After long and careful thought, Parker decided to accept this offer. When volunteers for this new force were called for, about 100 men volunteered. Capt Hebb supervised the task of trying out the motorcycle riding abilities of these applicants. Only 48 could be accepted, this being the authorized strength of the troop.

Total Strength Officers 21

 ORs 715

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

22 Jun 40

0830

Mjr Berringer proceeded to Bde HQ in order to accompany the Staff Captain on an administrative recce of the BLENHEIM PALACE grounds.

1055

An order from Div instructed us to draw twenty-two 30-str buses for the proposed MT move.

Total Strength Officers 21

 ORs 713

GUILLEMONT BARRACKS

23 Jun 40

0945 - 1045

Church parades

0930

Lt Day handed over a copy of the movement table for the pending move. Day got this at Div last night.

1100

Lt Beck went to Rushmoor Arena and got the twenty-two buses.

1115

The CO attended a conference at Bde HQ and received the order for the move.

1300

At a COs conference in our conference room, plans were made for tomorrow’s move. Meanwhile, Mjr Berringer went on another recce of BLENHEIM PALACE area.

1600

Sixty-six ORs arrived from 1st Line Reinforcements, and were billeted in the Gym pending allotment to Coys.

1800

Four additional subalterns arrived today. These are Lieuts. Millard, J.O. Hiltz, F.E., Perry, R.E. and Smeltzer, W.K.

Total Strength Officers 20

 ORs 664

BLENHEIM PALACE GROUNDS

24 Jun 40

0400

Today started with Reveille at 0400 hrs, and breakfast between 0415 and 0500 hrs, at Guillemont Barracks.

0530

Mjr Harris and Lt Cochran started off with one NCO and two men per Coy to act as an adv party, their job being to allot coy areas and act as guides to BLENHEIM PALACE grounds. The rest of the Bn embussed on MINLEY ROAD and finally got under way at 0914 as soon as MT of the R22eR got out of our way. We passed the Bde SP twelve minutes late, but made that time up before we reached HENLEY-on-THAMES.

1350

After a trip without any incident of importance, we reached our alloted space in the Castle grounds, and—after considerable confusion not unaccompanied by some heated tempters—we found trees to provide ourselves and our vehicles with the necessary shade and concealment.

1430

The cooks provided a hot meal to everybody, and we then took up the work of digging slit trenches for air raid shelter. In some parts of the ground, rock was encountered a foot below the surface, thus making the digging very difficult. The Adj showed the greatest ingenuity in dealing with this hard digging—he got the attached Engineers to dig his trench with their air drills.

2100 - 2130

Two impromptu sing-songs enlivened the evening. Moreover, although we were all CB, the boys did not lack feminine company, for the village maidens soon discovered the location of the troops in the Palace grounds, and they swarmed over the place all evening.

Total Strength Officers 24

 ORs 729

BLENHEIM PALACE GROUNDS

25 Jun 40

0105

Our first bit of realism in this war came with two air raid warnings. The sirens howled for several minutes, and we could hear planes—probably British—flying overhead. The men were awakened and stood by their new slit tranches [sic.], but no bomb dropped near. The tents, which came last night, were put up under the trees.

0900

The CO attended a conference at Bde HQ where the reorganization of Z-Group was established. We have the same attached units as in the Z-Group of Castle Ashby days.

During the morning, more work was done on the slit trenches. This time, the men worked with an unwonted vigour. Doubtless the air raid scare has improved their willingness to dig shelter for themselves.

1230

Mjr Courtney and the IO went with other parties of this Bde on a recce trip North of Kidderminster.

2335

Another air raid alarm. We all donned battle order and stood in the slit trenches, waiting hopefully for the air raid.

Total Strength Officers 24

 ORs 729

BLENHEIM PALACE GROUNDS

26 Jun 40

0130

After a long cold wait for the raid that did not come, and for the all-clear signal which also did not come, we finally gave up waiting in the trenches, and went back to our beds. We later learned that the all-clear signal came at about 0330 hrs.

0600

Reveille. The rest of the day was devoted to rather leisurely training. The rations today and yesterday were very scanty, and everybody complains of being very hungry. Even the food in the officers’ mess is not up to its usual quality and abundance.

As Z-Group is on four hours’ notice today, the men are allowed to leave camp during the evening.

Total Strength Officers 24

 ORs 727

BLENHEIM PALACE GROUNDS

27 Jun 40

More training by Coys.

Capt Clennett and the IO went on a road recce to ALDERSHOT.

The Group is still on four hours’ notice today.

Total Strength Officers 24

 ORs 723

BLENHEIM PALACE GROUNDS

28 Jun 40

The Group is on one hour’s notice today.

Total Strength Officers 24

 ORs 721

BLENHEIM PALACE GROUNDS

29 Jun 40

No air raid warning today.

As the Group is on four hours’ notice today, passes were issued in the afternoon up till 1800 hrs and after supper till 2200 hrs.

Total Strength Officers 24

 ORs 720

BLENHEIM PALACE GROUND

30 Jun 40

0830

Church parades. The Protestant church parade of Z-Group was held in a field near Bde HQ. Owing to the wind and constant passing of airplanes, and the size of the square of troops, most of the West NSR were unable to hear the sermon.

As the Group was on four hours’ notice, passes to WOODSTOCK were again issued.

1930

The boys of Malvern College gave a concert in the Palace grounds. 100 members of Z-Group were chosen to attend, and greatly enjoyed the concert.

During the last few days, many of our officers indulged in “recce flights” in the airplanes of the neighbouring airport. All these officers reported favourably on the good concealment of our camp.

Today we were warned to look out for parachutists, and all guards and sentries were ordered to bring in all suspects.

Total Strength Officers 24

 ORs 719

NOTE ON 2 TROOP, 3 CAN RECCE SQUADRON

This new Recce Sqn is designed for tactical and protective recce at the front, flanks and rear of mobile columns. “The organization is such that the Recce Squadron may be employed as a whole or self-contained troops may be decentralized to Battalion columns. The latter will be regarded as the normal method of employment.”

Our delegation to this organization, 2 Tp, was officially organized at BLENHEIM PALACE camp on 24 Jun 40. At that date, the 3 Can Recce Sqn was attached to 3 Cdn Inf Bde, and Lt Parker had to sever his official connection with this Bn. However, Parker liked our food so well that he continued to eat in the West NSR officers’ mess.