

THE BUILD UP – 1939 – 1944 – THE 2nd BATALION

The **2nd Bn** was part of 114 Infantry Brigade (Inf Bde) part of 38 (Welsh) Division. The Division which had been formed in 1939 as a duplicate of 53 Div. The Bde consisting of 5KSLI, 1Brecknocks and 2Herefords. The Bn remained at camp until 10 Sept, they then returned to Hereford before deploying to their war station at Glen Usk Park, Crickhowell on 13 Sept. However country life carried on in the county and men were deployed in support of the hop harvest. Recruits were received to bring the Battalion up to strength and men left for other units – this was constant all of the time of the Bn's existence. The Battalion also found men for Key Point defences including the Severn (Rail) Tunnel. In early 1940 they moved to Rugeley Camp on Cannock Chase, then to Oulton Park Cheshire. While there the Bn assisted troops who were evacuated from Dunkirk.



The shoulder flash of 38 (Welsh) Division – the yellow cross of St David.

They were then warned for overseas service, embarkation leave was granted but the move cancelled and the Bn earmarked for Home Defence and moved to Aintree as part of the Liverpool defences.

In 1941 the Bn was at Camberley and again warned for overseas service under a new CO – Lt Col WA Grey. In February they moved to Aldershot and occupied a 'regulars' barracks – Oudenarde Barracks. They then moved to Bognor Regis and were allocated for Coastal Defence – the hope of Active Service faded. In late 1942 the Bn concentrated in Dorset and was again warned for overseas service.

Training continued and local duties for Home Defence and support – these included support to local authorities in response to enemy bombing raids.



Lt Col Gray CO, Hon Col Patteshall, 2ic Maj Shaw Ball

In 1942 the Bn lost drafts and individuals to other units and special platoons for combined operations training. Individuals were lost to form training cadres of new Bns and colonial units.

In May 1943 the Bn moved to Hythe in Kent, a particularly active area with air-raids, shelling and the constant threat of coastal incursions. Constant coastal patrols were carried out and the cliffs of Nazi occupied France were clearly visible.

In October the Bn moved to Alnwick in Northumberland and again underwent a period of intensive training and the hope of active service were high again, only to be dashed when in January 1944 they were again allocated to Coastal Defence.



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2nd. Battalion . Carrier Platoon.

Left to right.
Back Row.

— — — — Ptes Taylor, G Walker, — Markham

Standing.

Ptes. R Evans, I Bevan, ~~S~~ Shuttleworth, — — — D Bascombe, G Close,

Seated.

Ptes, E Hayward, P Pinches, L/Cpl. Jackson, Cpl. Atherton, Cpl. H Chalk,
Sjt. C.W.Griffiths, Capt. J Reddaway, Sjt. E.E.Suddrick, Cpl. J Loftus,
Cpl.J Harrington, Cpl.J Brougham L/Cpl.E Hayes Pte T Davies.

Seated on floor.

Ptes, C Langley, D Bright — F Cole, T Gambby, Williams, Price, — — —.

In Spring 1944 in advance of DDay the Bn moved to the Isle of Wight with the rest of 114 Bde, for coastal and vulnerable point defence – one vulnerable point was the PLUTO infrastructure. Pipeline Under The Ocean was the fuel pipeline put in place to provide fuel to the invading forces in Normandy.

In March 1944 Lt Col CD Barlow took over as CO.

Amongst those posted to other units were Lt (later Maj) Wally Jukes and LCpl (later CSM) Ernie Bevan from Ledbury.



The Ledbury men that formed the street lining party in London for the 1937 Coronation. The Ledbury company became Y Coy of the 2nd Bn. The officer – Lieutenant Wally Jukes was transferred out and saw active service in NW Europe. LCpl Ernie Bevan (rear left) transferred out and served in East Africa with The King's African Rifles.

Also Lt (later Col) Singleton was transferred out – his obituary from the Daily Telegraph is shown below.

Infantryman, spin-bowler and pipe-smoker who ran a prep school with disregard for normal procedure

COLONEL MICHAEL SINGLETON, who has died aged 89, was a pipe-smoking classicist whose family ran one of England's oldest prep schools for much of the 20th century.

"As a soldier he raised an infantry company which was called to the colours at the outbreak of war in 1939. He was also a chairman of the Bench, High Sheriff and fine left-arm spinner.

From 1948 to 1973 Singleton was headmaster of The Elms school near Malvern. Believing that boys should be neither cosseted nor cowed, he ran the school to robust, rural routines. Before breakfast every morning, Singleton would march everyone outside for several minutes of physical exercise. "Breathers" was held in all weathers, all seasons.

Long walks, cold dormitories and regular hymn-singing were also an integral part of the education, along with cricket nets and Latin prose.

Despite a brisk code of discipline, Singleton took a laissez-faire approach out of the classroom. Every November 5 the smallest boy in the school was sent down a tunnel to light the very core of the bonfire. None, so far as anyone can recall, was ever lost.

George Michael Singleton was born at Hepton on May 12 1913, the son of a schoolmaster who, in 1916, accepted the headmastership of a small prep school in Herefordshire. The Elms, at Colwall, had been founded in 1614 and was set in the lee of the Malvern Hills with a view up to the British Camp.

Michael was the eldest of four brothers. Sandy went on to captain Oxford and Worcestershire at cricket (Michael himself had one game for the county); John farmed in Scotland after a successful Army career; Tim became president of the Law Society. The Singletons were Thirties Herefordshire's It-Boys.

After Uppingham, Michael won an Exhibition to Pembroke College,

Cambridge, where he became a lethal shot with a soda siphon and discovered a secret door from college to the nearby Little Rose pub. After Cambridge he went to teach at West Down school, Winchester, and later joined his father at The Elms.

When war with Hitler was inevitable, Michael Singleton organised a company of the Hereford Light Infantry. He was later seconded to the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and landed in France just after D-Day. Fighting across Belgium and Holland, he was wounded three times and was awarded the MC for his leadership and courage.

Medical attention bored him. More than once he had a batman dress his wounds and discharged himself from hospital to return to his men. Singleton had a low esteem for the higher ranks, and was a stranger to snobbery.

A burst of Luftwaffe fire left his body sprinkled with German shrapnel. When a doctor submitted Singleton to an X-Ray in the 1960s, his sole reaction was to exclaim: "God Almighty!" Singleton murmured: "Oh, it's just a bit of Krupp's metal."

Knocked unconscious during action in Holland, he was saved only when a family emerged from a farmhouse cellar to drag him inside. In peacetime he returned to thank them and was delighted to be reunited with the field glasses which he had mislaid in the blast.

In 1946 Singleton was offered a regular battalion but declined it in favour of a return to The Elms, where he soon became headmaster.

His staff was composed mainly of ex-Army friends - "We have more MCs than MAs," he would say. Maths and wicketkeeping were taught by EA "Betty" Snowball, a noted figure in the England women's cricket team in the 1920s.

On Sunday mornings the entire school walked to church and back, while in the afternoons the pupils were sent up the Malvern Hills.



Singleton: X-rays during the 1960s found him riddled with Krupp's metal

Older boys were allowed to roam unsupervised. Few failed to relish the freedom, and many developed a lifelong taste for hill walking.

What central heating there existed was not always effective, or even switched on. Boys were permitted to capture owls and keep them in the fives court, provided they caught enough sparrows to feed them. One boy recalls being given the task of rearing a lamb to which he developed some emotional attachment. The animal,

called Lottie, disappeared shortly before the school's Christmas feast, and the boy realised what had happened only when he was the first to be summoned for second helpings.

Singleton was known to his face as "Mr Michael", in his absence as "Boss". He habitually dressed in three-piece Prince of Wales checks, in summer with a carnation buttonhole. Outdoors, women would be greeted with a raised hat and a crease of his hooded eyes. His pipe, meanwhile, served as a useful early

warning signal to boys misbehaving after lights-out (a form of curling, played with chamber pots on the polished floor, was a popular pastime). Singleton's tobacco could be scented long before he was heard, and the pipe was seldom far from his lips. He would even smoke it while bowling in the cricket nets.

If he was an authoritarian, sometimes distant figure, his wife ("Mrs Michael") was artistic and warm, giving boys jam toast in reward for minor errands. She organised ball-room dancing matches against local girls' schools.

The school minibus, an ancient Bedford, struggled with the Malvern gradients and did not always win. At the wheel would be the serene figure of Mr Michael, though it was hard to say if more smoke poured from his pipe or through the Bedford's floorboards.

Singleton was appointed CBE at the same investiture as his brother Tim was knighted. On being presented with a second Singleton in such a short space of time, the Queen did a double-take.

Michael Singleton played cricket for the Free Foresters, Frogs and IZ (members were offered discounted school fees), and was a keen country sportsman. As he would sometimes tell animal rights fainthearts, he knew precisely what it was like to be shot at - and hit.

He was the first High Sheriff of Hereford and Worcester, a Deputy Lieutenant and a member of the West Midlands Police Authority.

Unusually for a magistrate, he rolled his own cigars and brewed a potent beer. His funeral eulogy reported long-standing rumours that Singleton was also familiar with the workings, and product, of a "not entirely licensed still".

Michael Singleton died on December 11. He married, in 1939, Diana Philpot, a clergyman's daughter, who survives him. There were five children, one of whom died in childhood.

Pte Ferguson was a conscript posted to the 2nd Bn and Y (Ledbury) Company he remembers:

I was born a Londoner but found myself posted from initial training to the 2nd Bn of the Herefordshire Regt and then directed to Y Company.

I'd never heard of the Regiment but I soon learned that it had been a Territorial Bn caught up by the outbreak of war while at summer camp. I was told that HQ Company had been formed in Hereford itself and the other 4 companies - W, X, Y, Z - formed in different towns of rural Herefordshire - my company - Y - in Ledbury. So, although I'd never been to Ledbury, nor have I since, I acquired an affection for the place, simply because of the pride and pleasure displayed by that most likeable lot of young men from Ledbury. By that time the Company was already being diluted by people from outside the county - among them I remember 27 Jones, 5620 Jones, 6020 Jones and not forgetting 37 Evans and two Beavan Brothers. These numbers and names are stuck in my mind for ever. [those with common surnames were routine identified by the regimental number]

Because my civilian occupation had been as a designer in advertising, I was soon involved in producing a detailed map of the area covered by the Company at that time between Bognor and Littlehampton. Not knowing any better, I made the map not only large but full of colour, decorated with the Hereford's lion badge and beautiful lettering for wall display, only to hear that although the good work was much appreciated, it was highly secret, because of the minefields etc. and must be kept locked away. I had a lot to learn.

Soon after that I became Company Clerk and having the use of a typewriter, I started a magazine. One copy only for wall display. First issue was quite crude, but it soon developed a character. It was called

'Y Worry', and was well supported, uncovering much unsuspected talent, in writing and drawing as well as verse. I myself managed to contribute a set of verses to every issue.

The Company worked hard at their training, and with good humour most of the time. Several incidents come back to me, one concerning co-operation with the Home Guard.

Up at crack of dawn on a Sunday morning, the company had to find and destroy the local HG fortified strongpoint. Although well camouflaged, 'the place was located and surrounded, but as the Company moved in for the kill, suddenly six heads bobbed up from the undergrowth, and six Home Guard stepped up and out, shouldered their rifles, and started to march off. From the shocked and surprised Y Company, a solitary voice was raised: "Where are you going?". The reply was tossed over a hurrying shoulder: 'Home! It's dinnertime'.

There was a very gloomy day that started early from our quarters in Felpham near Bognor to a bleak stretch at Pagham Beach, there to witness a demonstration of how a 2" mortar could be operated from a hand-held position, without danger to the operator. It all took a very long and very boring time to set up, and was not a success. The operator finished the demonstration with bloodied hands. So we fell in for our march back - it had seemed like a long, long day, dull haversack rations, dreary weather, wasted effort. As we marched, the universal gloom was so pronounced that the Company Sergeant Major (another Jones) finally snapped 'Let's have some music'. Within a minute the whole Company burst into 'Cwm Rhondda' and separated into parts, 'Guide me, O thou great, Jehovah' ... it was so beautifully done and so heartfelt, that over the years whenever I hear it on Sunday's Songs of Praise, Cwm Rhondda still catches me by the throat and that evening comes back to me. But the CSM didn't approve of the choice of music.

We moved out of the county into Dorset. Never staying very long in any one place, Y Company were in Abbotsbury, Dorchester, West Bexington, Blandford Forum, Wimborne etc. and even under canvas at Bradford Down. Dorchester was an interesting billet, with Company HQ personnel housed in the skittle alley behind the Phoenix public house. But in Abbotsbury, first of our Dorset billets, Y Company was the first army contact they'd had, and it seemed like a love affair. Y Coy loved Abbotsbury, and Abbotsbury took Y Coy to its heart. The good ladies immediately got together to set up a club to provide the ever-welcome 'char-and-a-wad' (tea and sandwiches), every evening.

There was at least one day that was fraught with anxiety. It was early in the day when a substantial draft of men took off, fully armed, for an undisclosed destination, leaving a much depleted Company. It was evening, and darkening, when a new draft arrived, fresh from their initial training. Within a short space of time, before any sorting-out had been done, there was an Alarm. Nobody knew how serious it was, but the new men had to be marshalled into some sort of order, and guided by the older hands, shepherded down to the beach - the famous Chesil Beach. Spread out in reasonable lines, all waited in silence. Presently a voice - not a Ledbury voice - piped up nervously 'Sarn-major, what are we supposed to do?'

Sarn-major took a deep breath, and very kindly, very patiently, outlined the procedure in detail, which included loading the rifle, making oneself comfortable in a firing position, breathing easily, staying calm and waiting for the order to fire.

There was a pause while the rookie digested the information and then the rookie said 'We haven't any rounds, and we don't have any rifles, so what ... '. The answer came swiftly, as we shifted our bottoms on that very hard beach, (sitting on what turned out to be the sarn-major's ammunition): 'You throw stones'.

Sadly, I myself was posted away to another unit, but I have never forgotten the warmth of friendship for Y Company ... and Ledbury.

Shortly after DDay, the threat to UK having diminished 38 Div was disbanded and officers and men posted to other units – many as reinforcements to units in Normandy to make good their battle losses.

2 Herefords lapsed into abeyance on 15 July 1944.