

with Field Army units. A scheme whereby a very great input will be absorbed by Training, Holding and Home Defence units and sixty more battalions created has been evolved. During June 1940, instead of the normal 70,000 Intake, the figure will be 165,000. In July it will rise to 180,000. The new units will be rather in the form of Kitchener Army units, officers being selected and Regimental Associations, the Corps of Commissionaires, etc., being asked to help.

Such was the letter which was issued by the War Office to announce the steps that were being taken to meet the threat of invasion after Dunkirk, and which launched the 9th Battalion on its career. The formation of the battalion began on July 1, 1940, in the Drill Hall at the Depot at Maidstone, where a cadre of 17 officers and 150 warrant officers, N.C.O.s and men from 224 I.T.C., 50th Holding Battalion and the battalions of the Regiment recently returned from France began to assemble. Lieutenant Benbow, the Quartermaster, with transport loaned by the I.T.C., began to draw up the necessary arms, equipment and clothing. Lieutenant-Colonel G. Ingham, who had been Assistant Provost-Marshal with I Corps in France and had been evacuated at Dunkirk, was appointed to command. The R.S.M. was H. Hayward.

On July 8 the cadre went by rail to Malvern, where it prepared to receive the remainder of the personnel. These were 800 militiamen straight from civil life, most of them from the 26-27 age groups. Many of these men came from the Regimental recruiting area of Kent and the south-east of London, and their regional pride was strong. Before the end of July the whole intake had arrived and had been clothed, equipped and accommodated in billets or under canvas. The number of weapons available was small owing to the losses at Dunkirk, but no time was lost in getting down to training. The men were excellent material, and when General Sir Charles Bonham-Carter visited the unit on August 13 he was very impressed by the progress that had been made. One of the company commanders was Captain Michael Joseph, author of a history of this battalion entitled *The Sword in the Scabbard*.

On October 11 the battalion moved south by train to take over the operational role of beach-defence. Its sector, from West Lulworth to Swanage, extended over twenty miles, each company being responsible for some five miles of the coast. It consisted largely of vertical cliffs, however, where a large-scale landing from the sea would have been difficult. The sector was wired and there were a few concrete beach posts, but most of the positions were trenches or weapon pits. Battalion Headquarters and its officers' mess were

in Bucknole House, near Corfe Castle, and the four company headquarters were at Swanage, Kingston, Tyneham and West Lulworth. The Brigade Commander was Brigadier G. W. (later General Sir Gerald) Templer.

During the winter that followed many difficulties had to be overcome. Some of the concrete posts became flooded and new ones had to be built elsewhere; more billets in the shape of bathing huts and bungalows had to be taken over; and the improvement of the trenches and weapon pits usually meant complete reconstruction. There was little to entertain the men in the villages in the evenings, and travelling film shows and dances were organised in the village halls. In addition wireless sets, gramophones and various indoor games were supplied to remote detachments.

Soon after Christmas all N.C.O.s not in the highest physical category were transferred to other units, the first carriers arrived in the battalion, and some of the deficiencies in weapons were made up. These events started rumours that a move was imminent, and sure enough on February 3, 1941, troop-carrying lorries conveyed the battalion through deep snow to Lambourne and Newbury in Berkshire, where most of the men were accommodated in racing stables. The 1st Battalion of the Regiment was in billets at Highclere nearby. The new role was that of Infantry Battalion in the Support Group of the 6th Armoured Division (Major-General J. T. Crocker), and for this the battalion became mechanised.

At the end of February there was another move, this time to Sharnbrook, near Kettering, where headquarters were at Cobb Hall. Companies were quartered in neighbouring villages, all several miles from Battalion Headquarters. The troops were mainly in billets, though some of them were accommodated in the kennels of the local hunt. With several towns in the vicinity they could see some life in the evenings, but there was little time for relaxation. The battalion at last had its full complement of weapons and transport, and training began the day after the move.

On April 26, 1941, the battalion moved to Shepreth camp, near Cambridge, where it was concentrated under canvas. On May 28 Colonel Ingham was obliged to retire to hospital in Cambridge, and Major Fawcett, the second-in-command, answered for him until Lieutenant-Colonel P. H. Macklin arrived on June 12, in time to command the battalion during two important exercises. One of these was the joint Eastern and Southern Command exercise called 'Bumper', in which the 1st Battalion also took part. At the end of August the battalion was visited by General Sir John Dill, the C.I.G.S., and on September 12 His Majesty The King reviewed