

training over, 119 L.A.A. Regiment defended the coast of East Anglia about Felixstowe and Lowestoft and then the Yorkshire coast about Spurn Head. In January 1943 Colonel Craven was appointed to command 13th I.T.C. at Maidstone and handed over command to Lieutenant-Colonel J. F. Young, a Gunner, who was destined to lead the Regiment to Normandy in June 1944, with 15th Scottish Infantry Division.

4. *The 70th (Young Soldiers) Battalion*

Young Soldier Battalions, all numbered 70th and consisting of volunteers between the ages of 16 and 18, were formed in most Regiments. Their immediate purpose was to take over guards at vulnerable points and so release men for the Field Army; the long term policy was to train boys for service in the Field Army later on. The 70th (Young Soldiers) Battalion of the Regiment was raised by Lieutenant-Colonel O. M. Fry from two young soldier companies, which had been formed in the 8th Battalion. On September 19, 1940, Colonel Fry marched his two companies out of Brasted to billets in Tonbridge, headquarters being in the Drill Hall in Avebury Avenue. Recruits poured in, and by October 31 the battalion was nearly 1,500 strong and organised into six companies.

Gradually, as the boys became trained, guards at vulnerable points were taken over. Guards were also provided for crashed aircraft in the Tunbridge Wells-Sevenoaks area. By the end of February 1941, the battalion was very scattered, with the latest recruits in huts at Maidstone Barracks, one company at each of West Malling, Detling and Gravesend airfields, and two at Biggin Hill aerodrome. The sixth company was at Shirley Hall, Tunbridge Wells. Headquarters remained at Tonbridge.

On April 12, Lieutenant-Colonel Chitty came from the 1st Battalion to assume command.

In May, headquarters moved to Penshurst, and the company at Gravesend aerodrome was withdrawn to Redleaf nearby. Penshurst then became the hub of the battalion. In September, General Sir Charles Bonham-Carter made a two-day visit there, a sports meeting being held on the second day. The first batch of men to come of age for the Field Army was posted to 13th I.T.C. in November.

After six weeks of relaxation and mobile training at Old Park Barracks, Dover, the battalion returned to Penshurst and the aerodrome guards until the end of April 1942. All its commitments were then handed over to the R.A.F., and the whole unit was concentrated

at Mereworth Park, near Watlington. Colonel Chitty was promoted to command the Gravesend Sub-area as a full Colonel, and, on May 18, Lieutenant-Colonel E. S. Heygate assumed command. Reorganisation into a 'Home Defence and Young Soldiers Battalion' then took place, with a Headquarter Company and four companies each of one cycle and three rifle platoons. Wireless sets and a full complement of carriers and other vehicles were issued, and training for a mobile role began.

The first large-scale training exercise was held during the last week in May. This exercise ended at Aldershot, where the battalion remained for three weeks, headquarters being at Rushmoor Arena and companies in billets in neighbouring villages. At the end of this period the battalion marched back to Kent, covering seventy-three miles in three days, and went into Boxley Camp, near Aylesford, for four weeks' further training.

Reorganisation and training for its new role were now complete, and late in July the battalion took over the operational role of counter-attack troops for Detling aerodrome. In September a similar task was taken over at Gravesend aerodrome. At the end of that month the whole unit moved to Milton Barracks, Gravesend, where it relieved the 30th Battalion of the Regiment.

This was to be the last move. On October 7 the battalion came under War Office control for disbandment, and a few days later the posting away of drafts to other units began, some going to the 7th and 30th Battalions. The final parade was taken on October 24 by the Commander North Kent Area and Colonel Chitty, as Commander Gravesend Sub-area. On November 11, 1942, the 70th Battalion was converted into 28th Primary Training Centre. This P.T.C. was itself disbanded on February 20, 1943, after an existence of only three months.

b. *Note on the Home Guard*

Much distress was felt at the time over the conversion and disbandment of these four new battalions, but the reasons for the changes are now clear and show that the step was made necessary by the trend of events, Germany invading Russia on June 22, 1941, and from that moment an invasion of this country became improbable. This meant that large numbers of infantry battalions would no longer be required to guard our coasts, and as Germany became more and more involved in her struggle with Russia many of these battalions became redundant. For this reason the 10th Battalion was converted