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162 Regt RCT/RLC – A Short history

162 Regiment RLC has a distinguished history originating from the Supplementary Reserve Movement Control Groups, Royal Engineers which were reformed after the war in 1951 and expanded in 1952 to 18 MC Gps. The Movement Control regiments were formed in 1960 from the Groups based on the UK Commands.

On 15 July 1965, the Royal Corps of Transport was formed from the RASC and RE Tn and Mov. The Movement Control regiments became part of the RCT AER. The Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve was introduced on 1 April 1967, and the Movement Control regiments were reduced to two.

162 Movement Control Regiment RCT was formed from 74 and 75 Regiments and members of 73 Regiment living outside Eastern and Southern Commands and assigned to duties in BAOR providing movements support to the Transport and Movements regiments and staff in HQ 1(BR) Corps throughout BAOR from the Channel Ports to the Divisional areas.

In 1982 the concept of the Corps Movement Control regiment was trialled with the RHQs of 24 and 162 Regts combining to form the Corps MC regt. Under command were four Traffic Regulating Centres, 281 Sqn (Corps Railheads) and 282 Sqn, (Div Railheads).

On 1 April 1983 the Regiment was reorganised with 283 Squadron joining the re-rolled 163 Movement Control Regiment, in its place came the new 280 TRC Squadron formed from 491, 492, 493 and 494 Traffic Regulating Centres.

1985 saw the link with 24 Regiment broken as the Regiment forged a new association with 25 Transport and Movements Regiment in Bielefeld already familiar to 162 Regt by its work with 281 and earlier 283 Squadrons.

The Regiment's final role prior to the reorganisation arising from the Options for Change and Logistic Support review was to run the Joint Corps reporting Centre with responsibility for the control and monitoring of the whole of the resupply chain for 1st BR Corps.

On the formation of the Royal Logistic Corps on 5 April 1993, 162 Movement Control Regiment RLC took under command the Six District Movement Squadrons: 279 Scotland, 284 Southern (East), 285 Eastern, 286 London, 287 Southern (West) and 288 North West/Wales with an all ranks establishment of 346. 280 Squadron disbanded and 281 and 282 Squadrons reformed with the new 163 Movement Control Regiment. The small RHQ was tasked to provide support to the Tpt and Mov function at UKLF.

Under SDR in 1998, 280 Squadron re-joined the Regiment having been raised in 1995 to provide support to 29 Regiment RLC. However, in 2001, 280, 285, 286 and 288 Squadrons were disbanded and the Regiment was re-rolled as a War Establishment Reserve with 279, 284 and 287 Squadrons.

Under the Future Army Structures rebalancing, 162 and 163 Movement Control Regiments RLC were amalgamated. The new 162 Movement Control Regiment RLC had five task squadrons; 281, 282, 283 and 284 Squadrons nationally recruited and the Swindon based regionally recruited 280 Squadron. 279 was the HQ Squadron. The new regiment was twinned with both 24 and 29 Postal Courier and Movement Regiments RLC.

Under the Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010, a new, regional 162 Regiment was formed by the amalgamation of the national specialist regiments: 88 Postal and Courier Regiment RLC and 162 Movement Control Regiment RLC. With its RHQ in Nottingham, and task squadrons spread from Plymouth in the south to Coulby Newham in the north, the new regional 162 Regiment RLC will continue to carry out the movement control and postal and courier operations roles formerly undertaken by the two national specialist regiments.

The Home Postal Depot (1939-45)

One account of the work of the Home Depot describes it as the core of the Army Postal Service in World War II, but that is perhaps to overstate its consequence vis a vis, the rest of the organisation. However, it is of course a fact, that an inefficient Depot would have impaired the services in all overseas commands, no matter how good the local arrangement in each of them might have been. It was in many ways, similar to the Depot of World War I, and its main function was to sort and distribute all correspondence for Land and Air Forces overseas[1]. It was also the Recruiting and Training Centre for new intakes into the service, it provided reinforcements and postal stores for field units, and it was the Mobilisation Centre for postal units destined for the Expeditionary Forces. It was the Army Postal Service Record Office, and its Postal Accounting Centre. It was responsible too, for most of the general correspondence, casualty, returned letter and compensation work. The Depot did not have anything to do with the operation of field formations. It sounds, and indeed was, a complicated organisation, but although the many ancillary tasks presented some problems, the main ones arose from the rapid growth of work in the Sorting Office,

[1] The Royal Navy's mail was handled separately by the GPO. It was not until 1962 that the responsibility for processing the Navy's mail was given over to the Royal Engineers. At the same time the Home Postal Depot RE moved from Gunsite Camp, Acton to the Middlesex Regiment Depot at Inglis Barracks, Bittacy Hill, Mill Hill, London, NW7. The sorting office was accommodated in a munitions factory off Firth Lane. The road names within the barracks complex reflect the presence of the RE (PS).

Road Name	Referring to:
Charles Sevright Drive	Charles Sevright – Army Postmaster, San Sebastian, Spain (1814)
Curry Rise	RSM GH Curry RE – RSM HPD RE (1939-?)
Drew Avenue	Brig JN Drew, CBE – DAPS (1960-70)
Gawthorne Avenue	Maj EE Gawthorne, DCM, OBE, RE – ADAPS BAOR (1920-29)
Henry Darlot Drive	Henry Darlot - Army Postmaster to Duke of York (1799)
Holmes Avenue	Brig K S Holmes, CB, CBE - DAPS (1950-59)
Kelly Road	Col T Kelly, CMG - DDAPS BEF Southern Army (1915-18)
Kenny Road	Brig VR Kenny, CB, MBE – DAPS (1941-42)
Lidbury Road	Col Sir David J Lidbury, KCMG CB DSO –DAPS (1921-35)
Price Close	Brig-Gen W Price, CB, CMG, CBE, VD – DAPS (1913-19)
Reading Way	Lt Col 'Tubby' Reading – CO HPD RE (1950s)
Roberts Road	Col WR Roberts, CBE - DDAPS 21 Army Group (1943-45)
Ross Avenue	Col D Ross – CO HPC RE (1942-45)
Twinn Road	Brig FCG Twinn, CMG – DAPS (1939-41)
Warren Way	Col P Warren, CMG, CBE – DAPS (1920-21)
Williamson Way	Brig-Gen Sir Fredrick H Williamson, CBE – DAPS (Home) (1915-20)
Maurice Browne Close	Col Maurice Browne MC, Colonel Middlesex Regiment (1942-52)

'A' Block of the barracks was extensively damaged by an IRA bomb on the night of 1 August 1988 killing Lance Corporal Michael Frank Joseph Robbins (aged 23) and seriously injuring 10 others – see ***Financial Times*** (London , England) - Tuesday, August 2, 1988

and the Location Sections, e.g. in 1944 the total traffic handled in the month of October, was more than twice that handled in the same month in 1943, and eight times that at the corresponding time in 1942. In 1944, the 'Peak' receipts were of the order of 13.5 millions a week. In common with the RE Postal Section as a whole, formal authority for an adequate establishment was not forthcoming until 24th August 1939. Recruitment to fill the jobs did not begin until after war had been declared, and for the first few weeks, the work of the Depot was done by the men of the Field units, who were mobilising or waiting movement orders. This arrangement was not very satisfactory, but there was no alternative. The first despatch of mails to France was made on 14th September 1939, the day before the Depot moved out of London.

It had been foreseen that the accommodation provided at Mount Pleasant by the General Post Office would be inadequate. It had also been predicted that road and rail communications in London would be disorganised by enemy bombing, although in the event, this came later than had been expected. In anticipation of these, arrangements had been made to earmark premises in Reading for the work of the Depot, and as quarters for its staff. When the time came, the basement and the garage of the Reading Post Office[2] were made available, and although some of the buildings earmarked for billets had been pre-empted by Civil Departments, those who were left did just about meet the immediate needs.

In May 1939, notification had been received, that a company of the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS)[3] would be attached to the Depot. No one had found out

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[2] ***The Times*** reported that the local corn exchange was also used to accommodate the Depot. The same report stated that the Depot was *"sending 4,500 bags of letters and 13,000 bags of parcels to the BEF every week. The average time from posting to delivery is six days. In the letter office mails come in from 100 post offices with direct dispatches to the Army Post Office. Bundles of letters are distributed to sorting tables for what is termed primary sorting into 48 separate divisions. In another part of the room is the more specialized secondary sorting, where the letters are put into pigeonholes for units and so on. These rows of pigeonholes are called 'roads'. There are for example, the Artillery road, the RAF road, and the Ordnance road. It was explained that the term 'road' survived from the time when there were seven main roads – such as the Dover road – for mail coaches in England and letters used to be sorted for different roads"* - ***The Times***, Thursday, Nov 16, 1939; pg. 5

[3] The Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) was formed on 9 September 1938, initially as a women's voluntary service, and existed until 1 February 1949. Its roots were in the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), later Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC), formed in 1917 and disbanded in 1920. Postal trained members of the WAAC served with RE (PS) units in France from May 1917 to the end of the war. During

how many women would join, and what tasks they would undertake, but on arriving in Reading, it was discovered that the 10th Berkshire Company ATS was already mobilised and ready to provide cooks, orderlies, typists and clerks. The company was commanded, and had been raised by Junior Commander Rhona H Parkinson[4] and comprised a group of about sixty young women from the Abingdon, Oxford and Newbury areas. Because the Depot organisation had still to settle down, it took a little time to merge the new unit into the Army Postal Service, but very soon the typists and clerks were busy in the administrative and clerical sections. Rather later the cooks and orderlies were in the kitchens doing their best to feed the men, and if their early efforts were not exactly 'Cordon Bleu', they were not to be blamed for that. They were severely handicapped by bad working conditions, and poor equipment. Primitive is a fair description of both. The 10th Berkshires [ATS] eventually lost their identity in a reorganisation which took place, when the number of ATS employed at the Depot had greatly increased. At its peak, the women's establishment (Postal Section[5] and Administrative) reached over 2,000, but the first sixty will always be remembered for the cheerful contribution they made when help was most needed.

A letter and packet sorting office was set up in the garage of the Reading Post Office, and the parcels office and clerical and administrative offices were established in its basement. London and provincial civil post offices, despatched mails to the Expeditionary Force Base at Cherbourg. The latter were carried on personnel ships sailing from Southampton. History repeated itself, and 'security', and a lack of an effective liaison with the War Office, led to early difficulties. It was not possible to design a proper sorting plan because the Army Post Office was not supplied with an up-to-date battle order, and what was worse, no proper form of address for troops overseas had been agreed and published. The inevitable result was that the Depot was saddled from the outset with a heavy accumulation of undeliverable correspondence.

WW2 ATS personnel served primarily at the Home Postal Centre RE, but in 1944 some women were posted abroad to the Base Army Post Offices in Cairo and Naples.

[4] Before the war Junior Commander Rhona H Parkinson ATS taught music at the boy's public school, Radley College, Abingdon.

[5] ATS selected for postal work attended 6 weeks postal training during which they learnt how to process and sort mail, process registered letters, receive, prepare and make despatches. After completing their trade training they were paid 2s 8d a day and entitled to wear the RE Bomb on the left breast of their tunic.

When the address was chosen – 'C/O The Army Post Office' - the choice was not a particularly happy one, because it did not discriminate between the Expeditionary force in France, and the rest of the army serving abroad. Gradually, sorting plans and location records were built up, but no amount of ingenuity and postal expertise, and there was plenty of it available, could completely overcome the initial handicap, so delays were frequent and complaints numerous. The fact that the Headquarters of the Army Post Office was accommodated in St. Martin's le Grand, and not in Whitehall, is probably the reason why there was ineffective liaison with the General Post Office and an indifferent appreciation of the role of the War Office, and the contribution it could make to the efficiency of the Army Postal System. It was much later in the war, that an excellent exchange of locations information was arranged between the appropriate sections of the War Office, and the Home Depot, to the great benefit of the Forces post.

It was clear that resources in Reading would be unable to meet the accommodation requirement for rapid expansion, so the stay there was a brief one; no more than six or seven weeks. A suggestion that a sorting office and camp should be built on a railway site in Reading, was rejected on a number of counts; not least important, objections to the idea were cost and shortage of labour and materials. Fortunately, the GPO had two new sorting offices nearing completion, one in Bournemouth and the other in Nottingham. The Army Post Office was offered the choice of one or the other. Bournemouth was chosen, because it had the clear advantage of being close to Southampton, the out port for despatches to Cherbourg, although this advantage was diminished at the end of 1939, when it was decided that the Channel ports could be used to despatch mails and personnel.

The move to Bournemouth took place on 1st December 1939, just in time to meet the pressure of the Christmas post. The organisation soon settled down and the much improved working conditions led to a marked change for the better in the standard of service given, and with the help of civilian temporary staff, the Christmas mails were effectively handled. By the late spring, sorting and despatching had become almost a

matter of routine, a routine broken only by the advent of a Canadian contingent who used the Depot as a base, and a small number of men from the French Military Post Office, who were engaged in forwarding mails to their compatriots in Norway and Scotland. The end of the 'phoney war'[6], and the collapse of Allied resistance in France and Belgium changed all that, and postal units evacuated from Dunkirk and elsewhere converged upon the Depot, which became their temporary home. The confusion at the time of the evacuation, caused a hold up in the mail service, and consequently, there was a large accumulation of 'unlocated' correspondence. The men from the Expeditionary Force were available to help unravel the tangle, and quite a sizeable proportion of the letters eventually reached the addressees, although after some delay.

With the Expeditionary Force back in the United Kingdom, there was very little mail work left to do, and only a small quantity of correspondence was sent overseas, chiefly to the Middle East. Despite this, the staff were not inactive, because the local Military Commander found them another job. Indeed, they became an integral part of the coast defence of the Bournemouth area, and spent most of the hot summer of 1940 digging emplacements, wiring the beach and standing guard twenty-four hours a day, against the time when the rumoured invasion would materialise. Incidentally, postal units were well suited to this kind of task, for a fairly high proportion of the men were ex-regular soldiers who, when their time had expired, joined the Post Office as postmen. Fortunately, no one had to fire in anger any of the frugal allocation of five rounds per rifle, and maybe this was just as well, because all units had been forbidden to fire any in practice! There were scares, from time to time and messages were received from the police about reported landings by German parachutists. Searches were made, but no-one was ever in any danger, because no parachutists were found. The real risk was from a nervous sapper with one of these priceless bullets 'up the spout'. However, the truth is, that during these searches friend, foe and interested bystander alike, all came to no harm. The high spot of this military activity came in

[6] The 'Phoney War' was a phase early in World War II—in the months following Britain's declaration of war on Germany (shortly after the German invasion of Poland) in September 1939 and preceding the Battle of France in May 1940 - that was marked by a lack of major military operations in Continental Europe.

September 1940, when someone, somewhere, had reason to believe the invasion was 'on' and breathed the code word 'Cromwell'. The troops spent an apprehensive night gazing out into the darkness and the sea no doubt, wondering what would happen to them after they had fired their precious five rounds. The question remained unanswered because, although the dawn came, the enemy did not.

Whilst this rather unusual activity was going on, postal units were mobilised and sent to the Middle East, and by the autumn, there was a fair amount of work in the sorting office. By this time too, the postal units which had returned from the BEF had left the Depot to rejoin the formation of the newly constituted 'Home Forces' organisation. However, a new and unlooked-for difficulty arose. Because the British Army overseas was occupied mainly with the Middle East, and the Far East, and the out ports used for mail despatches were usually Liverpool, and Glasgow. In these changed circumstances, it would have been difficult to find a less suitable location for the Home Depot than Bournemouth.

In May 1941, the Depot moved to Nottingham, and took the title 'Home Postal Centre', although it was nearly always referred to in conversation in its old style. Nottingham was chosen as it was clearly, a better collecting point for forces correspondence directed overseas, and there was a much shorter haul for the special mail trains, which took the despatches from the Depot, to the out ports[7]. Set against this, was the fact that the accommodation taken up in Nottingham, was by no means as good as that left behind in Bournemouth. A brand new building had been exchanged for a basement garage and the old sorting office in the Nottingham Head Post Office. Although these buildings met the short-term need, it was obvious that a great deal more space would be necessary, and by the end of the war, seven large

[7] Unlike London; Reading, Bournemouth and Nottingham were deemed as being relatively safe from German air attack, which therefore meant that the chances of disruption to the postal service from enemy action was minimal. On 8 May 1941 as the HPC RE advance party was arranging to move into Nottingham a German bombing mission targeting the Derby based Rolls-Royce factory suffered a navigational error. The result was that their bombs were discharged over Nottingham causing 430 deaths and damage to the Historic Moot Hall, Lace Market, the University College, Trent Bridge cricket ground and Notts County football pitch. The latter two were used by HPC RE for messing and recreational purposes. Ninety per cent of the bombs that fell on Nottingham during the entire war fell that night. – see Gardiner J: *Wartime Britain 1939-1945* (London, Headline, 2004) p. 367-8

buildings, with over 3 acres of floor space, were in use as Army Post Office sorting offices. None were tailor made, and all were short of lifts and conveyors to move the thousands of bags received and despatched every day (see Table N below). It was not an uncommon sight to see a chain gang of perspiring sappers manhandling a day's receipts up several flights of stairs, because the building's solitary lift was out of commission. However, there was nothing to do other than make the best of it, because it was far from easy to find buildings which had the right amount of sorting space, which were suitably located, and also had an acceptable standard of ancillary accommodation and services. This applied equally, to the 130-140 other buildings in use as billets, messes and stores[8]. The fact that the vast organisation was successfully housed, was a tribute to the persistence of the Depot administration, and the willing help given by the local civil, and military authorities.

Destination	Surface	Airmail 1/3 – ½ oz	Thin Postcard 3d	Airgraphs	6d air letter	1st Class surface mail by air
MEF	11 Nov 40	Jan 41 (?)	2 Apr 41	May 41 – Inward Aug 41 – In & Out	7 Dec 42	_
Iceland	Jun 40	Jul 41 (ceased Apr 42)	_	_	_	_
East Africa	-	Feb 41	Apr 41	Aug 41		
West Africa	Apr 41	-	-	-	-	-
Iraq	Nov 41	Nov 41	-	-	-	-
OETA	Nov 41	Nov 41	-	-	-	-
Durban , SA	Feb 42	-	-	-		-
Singapore	Jan 42 (ceased Feb 42)	Jan 42 (ceased Feb 42)	Jan 42 (ceased Feb 42)	_	_	_
India	Mar 42	Mar 42	Mar 42	-	-	-
Madagascar	-	May 42	-	10 Sep 42	-	-
Ceylon	18 Jul 42	18 Jul 42	18 Mar 42			
Aden	-	-	18 Mar 42	-	-	-
BNAF	Oct 42	_	_	5 Mar 43	5 Mar 43	
Faroes Is	Jun 42					
Falkland Is	Jun 42	Oct 42				
Mauritius	-	-				
Azores	Jun 43	-				
Malta	-	Jun 43	-	-	Jun 43	-
CMF	Jul 43				Mar 43	
Iran	-	Apr 42	18 Mar 42			
South East Asia	Sep 44	Sep 44			Aug 44	
BLA	Jun 44					Jul 44

(Source: This incomplete table was found in the PCS Archive held at RE Museum)

Table N – Classes of mails and despatch start dates - Home Postal Deport 1939-45

[8] The buildings occupied by HPC RE in Nottingham from 1941 for operational, messing and billeting purposes included (this list is not exhaustive):

Postal facilities	GPO Queens Street: GPO Huntington Street: Hickings (William Hollins): Viyella, Greyfrairs' Hall, Castle Boulevard: Wilford House (MT):
Messing	Trent Bridge Cricket Ground, Palais De Dance,
Billetting	Wyms (Arkwright St), Forest Street, West Bridgford, 111 Musters Road, Bulwell Drill Hall, Cyprus Road, Wilford House (grounds at the back contained Wooden Hutted accommodation, Landmere Lane,

In the years following the move to Nottingham, the sorting office work became more and more complicated. At the height of the war, it was necessary to segregate, sort and sometimes store surface, 'ordair' and airmail letters along with packets, and parcels for twenty overseas destinations. Seven buildings were used as self-contained sorting offices for particular sections of the work (e.g. one large factory accommodated the sorting for the British Liberation Army, after the Normandy landings), and the civil post offices, subdivided the mail sent to the Home Postal Centre, into the selections required for the separate offices. This arrangement was a tremendous help, and turned what, at first sight, was the disadvantage of not having all the work under one roof, into a positive advantage. To ensure that the various classes of correspondence for the several destinations were kept in a clearly identifiable stream, and that security was strict, a system of colours and codes was used for labelling sorting fittings and mailbags. The small beginnings from which this system evolved, were of course, designed in the early days. The scheme was, from the start successful, but it took sometime to convince the War Office that it was necessary for the Army Post Office to have early information about the movement overseas of formations, individual units and drafts, if correspondence was to be sent forward without delay.

However, the time did come when troops proceeding abroad received mail aboard ship before they sailed, and found airmail waiting for them when they arrived at the port of disembarkation. Once the various authorities got accustomed to the idea of releasing, security information to the Army Post Office, in sufficient detail to meet its quite modest requirements, it even become possible to make effective arrangements to deliver in goodtime, letters for reinforcement drafts. In the early days, their problems had been intractable, because by the time the Home Postal Centre had received news of the whereabouts of the draft, and had sent the correspondence to that location, the draft had in most cases been dispersed, and its members got their mail, only if an efficient organisation redirected it. More often than not, no such organisation existed in the Transit Camps, and much of the correspondence disappeared without trace.

Another very important advantage of the close liaison was that it enabled the Home Postal Centre staff to make arrangements well in advance, for the service to the various Expeditionary Forces as they left home for overseas. The biggest and most complicated operation of all, the invasion of Europe in 1944, was perhaps the best example of what could be done by the Army Post Office when it was fully informed at the outset. In this case, the Home Postal Centre was able to sort, and makeup a number of 'trial' despatches to ensure that the theory could be carried out in practice. There were consequently, few teething problems when the invasion took place, and the arrangements at home successfully complemented those made by the Postal Headquarters of the invading army[9]. It must be confessed though, that the results had not always been as good, and in another and earlier operation, the North African landings[10], the Army Post Office was not brought in until the last moment, and the arrangements in the UK, which were hurriedly made, were not as good as they might have been.

Some idea of the amount of work done in Nottingham, can be gleaned, from the fact that, in 1944, about 3,000 men and women despatched about 340 million letters, 95 million packets and 13 million parcels in 2½ million bags to troops overseas (see Tables O and P below). Receipts and despatches during the 1944 Christmas season broke all records. The biggest problem was not so much the sorting and despatching, but the colossal amount of unnecessary work that had to be done in stacking and storing mailbags until they could be handled in the sorting office, and then having to repeat the process for the bags waiting despatch to the out ports, and airfields by special trains, and road transport, earmarked for the purpose. The great difficulty, was the age-old one of making sure that the mails which came in first, did not get to the bottom of the heap and come out last. It would have been a miracle had complete success been achieved, and to claim a near miracle, would be extravagant, but the operation was indeed highly successful.

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[9] 21st Army Group. The Group's Postal Headquarters was commanded by Colonel WR Roberts a Surveyor in the General Post Office (GPO). During the inter-war years he was an active member of the RE PS (Supplementary Reserve).

[10] Operation Torch (initially called Operation Gymnast) was the British-American invasion of French North Africa in World War II during the North African Campaign that began on 8 November 1942.

Arm	Officers	Other ranks	Total
RE	56 (97%)	1,571 (51%)	1,627 (52%)
ATS	2 (3%)	1,482 (49%)	1,484 (48%)
Total	58	3,053	3,111

(Source: SC Fenwick, '*The Army Postal Services 1939-45 Display in the Royal Engineers Museum*', ***The Royal Engineers Journal***, 116, 3 (2002), 213)

Table O – HPC Staffing levels (1944)

(Note: Civilian employee numbers, which includes conscious objectors (or Non Combatants Corps – NCC), is unknown)

Type of Mail	No of Items (millions)	% of total volume
Ordinary Letters	179	38%
6d Air letters	158	33%
Newspapers & packets	95	20%
Airgraphs	28	6%
Parcels	12.5	3%
½ oz Air Letters	1.3	0.01%
Total	**473.8**	

(Source: SC Fenwick, '*The Army Postal Services 1939-45 Display in the Royal Engineers Museum*', ***The Royal Engineers Journal***, 116, 3 (2002), 212)

Table P – Mails despatched overseas from HPC(1944)

(Note: The strength of the British Army in 1944 was approx 2.75m)

Whilst the sorting and despatching arrangements were vitally important, the real heart of success lay in the Locations Section, where details of the movement, and whereabouts of every unit in the British Army were collated and filed. The information about these matters came from various sources. It came from the War Office, the Air Ministry, and the Postal Section Headquarters of the various Expeditionary Forces, and a fair amount was gleaned from the addresses on the letters themselves. Ultimately, it constituted the most comprehensive, most up-to-date, and most accurate record of its kind existing in any organisation (a sweeping assertion which happens to be true). The working records were, of course, kept in Nottingham, but a duplicate set was stored elsewhere, just in case some mischance fell the originals.

The other branches of the Home Postal Centre, which dealt with general correspondence, returned letters[11], and casualty work[12], were distinguished more by the bulk of the mail they dealt with, than by the intricacy of the work. In 1944, the General Correspondence Branch dealt with 150,000 enquiries, complaints and claims for compensation. Much of the work was routine, but some of it took careful handling. Years of enforced family separation often led to odd situations in which the

[11] The fall of Malaya and Singapore in early 1942 caused the most serious problem regarding returned letters. Thousands of letters were returned; most of them were delayed as they transited through India on their way back to Home Postal Centre RE.

[12] A card index was maintained listing every known casualty, Prisoner of War (POW) or Missing in Action (MIA). In the case of those killed special care was taken to ensure that their returning letters were not sent until the next-of-kin had been officially informed.

Army Post Office was made the scapegoat, for the non-delivery of letters that had never been written, and it needed the wisdom of Solomon to convey this information to the aggrieved party, without bringing the whole world down. The amount of 'casualty' correspondence did not, mercifully, reach the dimensions of the 1914-1918 war, but over 1 million items were dealt with in the year 1944.

Although the main task of the Home Postal Centre was handling the soldiers' mail an enormous amount of energy was spent on what the army called 'domestic economy'. To feed, house, and clothe 4,000 people, was in itself, a mammoth job, and only possible when the organisation was made self-sufficient. It was here, that the versatility of the General Post Office establishment came into its own. From the ranks of postmen, sorters and clerks recruited to serve in the Army Post Office, there emerged not only Army sorters and Army clerks, but a Corps of carpenters, plumbers, boot repairers, hairdressers, motor mechanics, and a whole host of other trades needed to keep the Home Postal Centre working night and day, seven days a week. Much of what went on, was 'against the law', and many a sapper mustered as a postal worker, but who proved to have a bent for some other necessary occupation, found himself following his bent rather than his trade.

There was some conflict between the Army Post Office aim of running a round-the-clock service, and the various 'military' demands made by the Area Headquarters, but goodwill on both sides solves most problems, and nothing was allowed to interfere with the main objective - the postal service. A high standard of military turnout and efficiency was maintained, largely due to the efforts of the Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM)[13] who, before he joined the Post Office, had been a regular soldier with the Welsh Guards, although in a rather less exalted capacity. Five companies of ATS postal workers[14], were carried on the Home Postal Centre establishment, and they were controlled by a Group Headquarters headed by a Lieutenant Colonel; here again,

[13] The first RSM of the Home Depot was RSM GH Curry followed by RSM Walton, who towards the end of the war was succeeded by Harold 'Chad' Westbrook. Prior to joining REPS Westbrook had served with the Welsh Guards.

[14] The five ATS Companies were designated 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D' and 'E'. There may have been also a 'J' Company, which is referred to in the Army Post Association newsletters.

the quasi- 'military' demands of the Group tended to conflict with the requirements of the main objective, but the appointment of an ATS Officer to the Postal Section, to act as Liaison Officer did a great deal to reconcile amicably some of the differing views on priorities. Understandably, the ATS administration wanted to organise their work in an uncomplicated way, but what was convenient for them was sometimes very inconvenient for the sorting office management. In the event of course, neither side could have it all its own way, and it was the job of the Liaison Officer to find the right compromise. A great deal of effort was also put into keeping up the morale of the men and women employed in Nottingham. They were, of course, better off than the men in units overseas, but for the most parts, their basic existence was pretty dreary. The Commanding Officer[15] recognised this, and did much to see that an active social life was established from the Centre's own resources. In much the same way as the requirements for 'domestic economy' had been met by the skills of the postal workers, so there emerged a remarkable number of people with musical[16], artistic and sporting[17] ability, whose off duty efforts provided hours of agreeable diversion for the rest. (It is interesting to record the RSM proved to be a talented painter in watercolours). Much of what was done, would have been impossible, but for the great kindness shown by the people of the City of Nottingham, and the men and women who served there in the Home Postal Centre, will always remember with gratitude, the warmth of the welcome they were given as indeed will those who were recipients of similar kindness from the good folk of Bournemouth in the early days. A very great contribution to the unit's well being, was made by Messrs Boots, the Nottingham Forest Football Club and the Nottinghamshire County Cricket Club, who quite spontaneously provided sports ground facilities.

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[15] Colonel Duncan Ross (1888-1945). He was SC & T in Edinburgh before the First World War and was commissioned into RE (PS) after which he served in the Middle East. He succeeded Colonel F Lane as CO of the Depot when Lane was promoted DAPS in 1942. He died from injuries sustained from a fall in April 1945 shortly before the end of the war. He was succeeded by Colonel Freddie J Beacham, who was commissioned into the Corps on 19 June 1937 and had served with the BEF as the OC 1 Air Formation PU RE (1939-40).

[16] An example was the REPS Home Depot Dance Orchestra whose players included: Bill Barnsy, Phil Phillips, Stan Faulker, George Carver, Cliff Russell, Harry Springate, Bert Ranger, Len Swinsen, Rodney Forster, Dave Stewart, Ted Gardener and Sid Roberts. The ATS had their own Drum & Fife Band, under Bandmistress, Rene Strong – See ***Army Post Association Newsletters***.

[17] Home Postal Centre RE fielded both a Football and Cricket team (Vallance was a member of the Cricket team).