Scan record

Title: 421 Artillery Troop RCT

Author: -

Publisher: na

Date of publication: 1977

Source of original: RLC Museum

Accession no. : -

Midlands Historical Data ref: R0363

Date of scan: 17th December 2015

421 ARTILLERY TROOP RCT(V)

The Arty Tps RCT (V), (420/421) were formed in 1966 in response to the 1 Br Corps requirement to facilitate the resupply of the English Electric (BAC) Thunderbird 2 surface-to-air missile to 36 Heavy Air Defence Regiment Royal Artillery. The 'Thunderbird' SAM was the Army equivalent to the 'Bloodhound' system then in use by the RAF for airfield air defence. 36 Hy Ad Regt RA was a 1Br Corps asset, tasked with the high altitude air defence of the Rear Combat Zone (RCZ) in BAOR. BAC (later BAe) delivered 144 Thunderbirds for the Army, which were housed in sterile conditions at the RAOC Ammunition facility at Wulfen. The Thunderbird 2 was a very potent radar-guided system, capable of destroying enemy aircraft up to 80,000 feet; sadly now a museum piece.

36 Hy Ad Regt RA, based at Napier Barracks in Dortmund, was established for 2 Missile Batteries, 10 Bty – ('Assaye' Bty) and 111 Bty ('Dragon' Bty), with 4 launchers per bty. 420 Arty Tp RCT(V) was assigned to support 10 Bty and 421 Arty Tp RCT(V) was assigned to support 111 Bty.

Although based at CVHQ RCT(V) at Bedford, annual camps were normally based at Napier Barracks in BAOR. Capt Eric Mitchell was the first OC of 421 and he handed over to Capt Roger Laing in 1973. Capt Roger Graham took over 420 Arty Tp at about the same time.

Annual Camp in 1973 was a Regimental-level exercise in BAOR, which took place in Nov/Dec as the Regt had recently returned from Northern Ireland. The arctic conditions in the Weser Valley that winter were very challenging and were reminiscent of the Battle of the Bulge (not that I was present then !) CVHQ had issued parkas to the Arty Tp; even then the Tp had to resort to non-tactical camp fires in the woods to survive ! Missile trailers and multi-million pound radar vehs were sliding off the icy roads in the snow, eventually obliging the CO to abandon the ex.

A notable event on that exercise occurred when Capt Laing relieved both the Tp SSgt and Tp Sgt in the field and promoted Cpl Dave Hill, later WO1, directly to SSgt (to the consternation of CVHQ, who eventually endorsed this unconventional move).

Annual Camp in 1974 was a Corps level exercise, but with one Div deployed, including 36 Hy AD Regt RA. It was a very successful exercise at the completion of which the Tp Comd had been tasked to collect 36 boxes of Faber Gold 'champagne' for the Officers Mess Summer Party at Bedford. The plan was for the consignment to be collected from Emblem on the return journey but inevitably the offices of HQ RCT at Emblem were closed; so was the Officers Mess. Capt Laing was then obliged to send the Tp off to Zeebrugge as planned and himself stay the night at Emblem to collect the champagne the following day. Remembering that a lock on the window of the Officers' accommodation was broken, Capt Laing and his driver, LCpl Trevor Sherrington, later RSM of 162 Mov Regt RLC, were able to break in and enjoy a wonderful night's sleep; the only trouble was that they had to break out again to use the ablutions !

If you ever wondered how big a load the ¾ ton Land Rover could take, 36 boxes of champagne (plus kit) must have been the limit; and in spite of which the all-time speed record from Dover to Bedford was broken !

In May 1977 36 Hy Ad Regt RA disbanded and 22 Light Air Defence Regt RA, equipped with Rapier replaced it at Dortmund. Accordingly the Arty Tps RCT were re-roled after 1977 to 4 GS Tps, in support of 22 Lt Ad Regt RA.

ROGER LAING