

## The November 1982 Edinburgh Castle Guard.

### *B Squadron. Edinburgh Edition*

Take 70 or so Tankies and LAD bodies, add shiny boots, with a sprinkling of SMGs, line with greatcoats; stir well and then add one Grenadier Guards drill sergeant and drill for three weeks. Presto! on 1 November the Edinburgh Castle Guard is ready and into action. Out with 1 Para in with B Squadron 4th Royal Tank Regiment.

The memories of the preparation for the Castle Guard have faded fast now that we are on the job but some features will stick in the mind. The Drill Sergeant, Sgt John Swain, from 2 Gren Gds exercised his patience and his voice in October to polish tank park officers, NCOs and soldiers up to Parade Ground brilliance and by the end of the month he was really very complimentary! The QM's department rescued sufficient greatcoats for everybody from their last resting place in Thatcham and the tailors worked overtime to adjust and add badges of rank. Does anyone realise how difficult it now is to find not only greatcoats but the correct shoulder titles?

Most of the adventure training kit that we wanted seemed to be in the Falklands and the canoes that we got looked as though the SBS

had paddled all the way down to the South Atlantic in them; but eventually it all turned up.

On Friday 29 October B Squadron departed for Scotland and our home for the next month, Redford Cavalry Barracks. Built for a thousand and accommodating 80, most of the month the barracks serves as the Training Centre for TA units from all over the Lowlands of Scotland. At weekends the population jumps as the reservists move in, but for most of the time we had the buildings to ourselves. It is rumoured that one territorial unit lost a soldier in the maze of corridors and have not found him yet.

On Monday 1 November the squadron took over the Guard duties at the Castle from the 1st Battalion the Parachute Regiment. Led by the Pipe Band the Guard marched up Johnson Terrace and onto the Esplanade where command was formally handed over in a short ceremony. Finally, led by an Australian OC over the drawbridge and into the Castle - all ours! The temptation to raise the bridge, drop the portcullis and hoist the squadron flag was enormous. Unfortunately the drawbridge is concreted down and the portcullis was removed before it fell on the hordes of foreign tourists.

As for the flag pole - it needed a very brave man to climb the clock tower ladders and out onto a very small platform in the sky with no



*WO2 Deighan instructs his sentries.*

guard rails. When the wind blew it was fairly hairy!

The Squadron Guard was split into four 15-man guard troops and an admin troop. For two weeks two troops did 24 hours on and 24 off whilst the other troops fired APWT and conducted adventure training - more of which later. During daylight hours the Guard troop provided two sentries and an NCO at the drawbridge, a sentry on the main entrance doors in No 2 dress and greatcoat and two men in the guardroom. At night, in combat kit, the guard had two men with a radio at the entrance to the Castle Esplanade, one man on the main doors, a two man prowler guard, and one NCO in the guardroom. Those 24 hours were no easy number as the troops soon

found out, and with manning very close to the bone several found themselves working the second two week period as well.

During those two weeks on guard the Englishmen amongst us came to accept that what they had considered as a 'derelict volcanic blob' somewhere in the middle of Edinburgh was a beautifully built masterpiece built to commemorate the birth of the SSM. Impressive from the outside the Castle is rather like an iceberg - there is more underneath than on top and the rock on which it stands is riddled with tunnels and caverns where once French prisoners of war were incarcerated. Some never saw the light of day for 36 years and only one ever escaped - rather like a Scottish version of Colditz. Today the Castle is the seat of HQ 52 Lowland Brigade and the repository of the Scottish Crown Jewells. Tourists come in thousands during the summer months and even in November coachloads of Japanese and Italians were debussing into the Castle. LCpls McPhee and Ripley were always ready to post for the cameras - an arm around another pretty girl or two or three.

For the two off duty sections life was also busy. For 24 hours a day the squadron ran a very exclusive escort agency for the Scottish Division - collecting soldiers absent from overseas regiments and escorting them to the 1st Gordons' guardroom or to the airport.

Teams went regularly to Luton and Brize Norton to deliver prisoners and collected bodies from as far afield as Guernsey. This absorbed some of the manpower, the rest attempted Otterburn by night and Garelochhead on the West Coast for adventure training by day. Canoeing and swimming tests were done in the icy waters of Loch Long, dodging the torpedoes on the submarine range whilst other abseiled in the surrounding mountains and entertained the local sheep.

So much for the training - but what about the social life and parties? It was very good, but no tales out of court! The big party of the month was of course Cambrai Day and whilst the rest of the Regiment played or watched football, paraded and had a ball that night B Squadron did - exactly the same but with subtle differences. Gunfire was taken to the Castle where the Sergeant Major, carried away by the magnificent sight in the early morning, failed to notice retribution on the ramparts and received an icy awakening. He was lucky it was not boiling oil. A small service was held early in the morning on the battlements of the castle with Tpr Mitchell (the snappy dresser) reading the Special Order of the Day. SSgt Jones gave a short history lesson, and the Squadron toasted Her Majesty and the Regiment in traditional Scottish spirits, all to music provided by a piper - not just any Piper, but an Australian piper for the OC! The weather proving unfavourable, the Squadron adjourned

to the five-a-side court to beat the local police at football. The spectators behaved impeccably! Lunch was served in the cookhouse and the 2IC met the panwash and yesterday's baked beans. A disco completed the day and the CO found a new place to put curry.

On 29 November we handed the Castle back to the Paras and packed our bags for the journey back to England and the Regiment.

At this point we would like to thank all those who made our stay in Edinburgh a success, and particularly Brigadier Anstey and the members of the local RTR associations for their interest, best wishes and especially for the beer on Cambrai Day! We look forward to seeing many of them in Tidworth in 1983.