

## Exercise Gobi Dust

0530, Thursday 18 May saw 119 people outside C Squadron block 4 RTR. They were there for the start of Exercise Gobi Dust, an exercise in which C Squadron 4 RTR went to Fort Bliss, El Paso, Texas to take the place of M Troop, 3rd Squadron, 3rd Armoured Cavalry Regiment who were coming over to Tidworth. It was to be a reciprocal exchange between the two units which was to last about four weeks. Because of the difference in numbers between the two units, C Squadron also had some personnel from B, D and G Squadrons. In addition to this there was a Recce Troop from 16/5 Lancers.



*Capt Eccles, LCpl Baston, Tpr Feeney and Tpr Shaw.*

subversive groups active in Fort Bliss, the hazards of working in the desert (heat strokes, heat exhaustion, snake bites, spiders, etc). But most importantly we were warned of the diseases to be caught from the ladies of downtown Juarez, just across the Rio Grande from El Paso.

Over the weekend we took over the American tanks, which were in this case M60A1, and had some time to sample the sun and find our way around Fort Bliss, which compared to Tidworth Garrison is enormous.

On the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the next week we had training and familiarisation of the M60 tank. Commanders, Gunners, Loaders and Drivers were split into their trades and each group worked independently of the other. For the Commanders training involved capabilities of the M60A1, how to set the range finder and its operations, familiarisation with the M85 0.05 machine gun, operation of the radios and acquaintance with the commanders sights.

On the Thursday all the tanks moved out to the mini-range at Fort Bliss and the crews practised drills and technique, boresighting and also performed a dry mini

battle-run. This was just to get familiar with moving in the bumpy terrain we should encounter and to practise ranging targets.

At this stage any faults with the tanks came to the surface and would have to be rectified before firing on the ranges. On the following two days, we prepared for the move to the ranges and tried to get any repairs needed done during this time. This proved quite frustrating as it was during the period of the Americans Annual Ranges and the spares, oils and mechanics were out in the field, so supplies were scarce back in camp.

However, when Sunday morning arrived all the tanks except one were able to move to the ranges. So 16 moved to the Dona Ana Ranges at 1000 hrs, with the one tank left behind moving later on in the day. The march out took about 3 1/2 hours and it became obvious just how bad the dust would be in the desert during movement.

Only one person didn't make it out to the ranges and that was Cpl Boag who was hospitalised with an abscess on his ear ... um.

On Monday the majority of tanks did their boresighting and zeroing. Those that didn't

complete it on that day finished on the Tuesday. After every tank had boresighted we then did a sub-calibre shoot. With all this done the tanks were ready to fire on the Wednesday. Six tanks fired that day and did a Table VIII run. Of these six Cpl Law's tank had the best run with a 100% first round hit success rate and also hitting the small arms targets first time. This tank, along with Sgt Marsh's, was the only one to hit the target on the stab run. On this range the Americans video every run, so the Commanders have the benefit of seeing how the crew and themselves performed. This was a useful and very beneficial idea. The six tanks that fired that day also did their night firing on the Wednesday. The remainder had a long wait until the next day when they did a Table VII run and their night firing.

There was a difference in priorities between ourselves and the Americans. Whereas they went for speed and, consequently had very fast acquisition times, we tended to take it more slowly and concentrate on getting more first round hits. On the whole the Americans were impressed with our performance on the Ranges.

With the firing completed, the tanks were fitted with the American equivalent of SIMFIRE, which is called MILES (Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System). This was done on Friday in preparation for our FTX which was to start early the next day.

On Saturday morning we moved out of a leaguer to our positions, where we were to fight a defensive battle against the Americans. This was quite a strange experience, because during their advance we could see their dust clouds along distances which were well outside the range of the MILES, so we just had to sit and watch them come closer and closer. However, when we were finally able to engage them, the battle went very well and the MILES showed itself to be a good piece of equipment.



*Tpr Cadden loads a 105mm DST round.*

In the afternoon of the same day we had an advance to contact against the Americans. It proved to be quite difficult moving across the ground as there were sand dunes which couldn't be driven over, but had to be skirted. Also troop control was difficult due to the poor communications between tanks. During the advance to contact we were given good assistance by 16/5 Lancers and it proved to be successful, despite the fact we only had seven of the 17 tanks left after the final assault.

That evening we moved to where a barbecue was being laid on for us by the Americans. After seven days of brilliant sunshine and extremely hot weather, the heavens opened with a torrent of rain; the barbecue was quickly washed out, although we did eventually get something to eat, albeit cooked on gas burners rather than charcoal.

Sunday morning we moved back to El Paso where the process of cleaning and handing over the MILES and machine guns began. This done, we started to clean and prepare the tanks for handover to the Americans on the Monday.