

FROM THE FOURTH.....

'Ich bin ein Auslander' or, for those unused to service in Germany 'I am a foreigner'. Why is it that the writer of this piece which is, after all, the last news of 4 RTR and therefore not only a record of the last few months of 77 years of history but also inevitably in part a valediction of The Fourth, should he an officer steeped in the green of The Third? The answer is simple, for The Fourth's recent history shows that the Officers Mess in particular now contains more members from the Red, the Saffron and the Green than from the 'true Blue'; the lower ranks of 4 RTR also show a sprinkling of men from the other Regiments and it is only the Warrant Officers and Sergeants Mess that is 'pure' Blue. Thus the policy of 'mix 'n' match', as encouraged by Regimental Headquarters RTR, can be seen in action in Osnabruck; while the policy is resisted in some quarters, it has encouraged the amalgamation with The First to be viewed in a positive light by all concerned. Thus it is entirely appropriate for a man from the West Country to pen these words, for the outsider can perhaps see it all as it really is, not just as some people would like to think it is!

The last few months in The Fourth have gone to underline the 'curate's egg' nature of the Regiment; for some things have been done outstandingly well while others, those aspects which perhaps fail to excite, have been done less well. There can be no doubt that The Fourth are a superb tank regiment, the way the old Chieftains perform on exercise is quite staggering for an outsider to behold; simply, The Fourth know about tanks and how to get the best from them. This professionalism was seen to good effect when C Squadron exercised at Soltau in support of 1 Battalion The Prince of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment Battlegroup, before the biter moved to Bosnia (see page 38); certainly the Yorkshiremen's commanding officer was fulsome in his praise for Major Craig Orme and his men of C Squadron. This training was significant in itself because not only was it the last time that The Fourth would train at Soltau but it was also the last time that Chieftain would be seen exercising at sub-unit level in Germany.

The culmination of our training effort was annual firing at Hohne (see page 34), we being the last Chieftain regiment to fire there, as indeed we had been at Suffield. As the drawdown process had already begun, we could only take the 29 remaining tanks plus six Scimitars; however, the manning situation reflected the lack of vehicles so only B and C Squadrons fired. A Squadron looked after Reconnaissance Troop, while G Squadron looked after everyone else and still found time to spend a day on the LAW and SA80 ranges. Once again the soldiers of The Fourth performed quite magnificently and the range period was an unqualified success. Well done the Regimental Gunnery Officer, Captain Tim Allan, and his team for ensuring such an excellent result. It is worthy of record, such is The Fourth's reputation, that a succession of senior officers from the Corps Commander downwards felt the need to visit the Regiment at Hohne; equally welcome was The Moderator of The Church of Scotland. However, regimentally the most important guest was lieutenant Colonel Peter Gilchrist, the future Commanding Officer of the new 1 RTR; he spent three days with the Regiment and very much impressed all those who met him.

Layered on top of all these major training commitments came a host of other minor events like Command Post Exercises, the Annual Test of Physical Fitness (where the Regiment achieved a 100% pass) and various other visits, tests and inspections, all aimed at getting us ready for the move to the United Kingdom. One visit came as a real surprise when a party of Czech weapons inspectors dropped in at very short notice (see page 12) and caused the Second-in-Command to use his cuff in the extended mode! All of these many and varied hurdles have been well cleared, largely due to the expertise of our two Quartermasters, Captain Phil Collins and Captain Barry Quinn. One little foible of the Brigade staff which was not so welcome was an exercise entitled RAT'S REACH (see page 40), which entailed 24 men from each sub-unit in the Brigade marching 50 miles in 24 hours, passing through a number of military skills tests on the way. Needless to say this proved to be a daunting task, as not only did training for it put up to 25% of the Regiment on light duties but also our preparations for firing were severely disrupted. The value of an

exercise such as this to an armoured formation has to be limited; perhaps things which are important to dismounted infantry in Aldershot are less relevant to armoured troops in Germany?

We began by mentioning the curate's egg, then sang the praises of The Fourth and that is fair because the Regiment is generally outstanding when out of barracks but perhaps less able in certain aspects of barrack life. However, if the event is deemed important then all the stops are pulled out and the result, even in camp, can match the excellence achieved in the field. For example, the parade held to say farewell to Rhine Army, when 65 vehicles, followed by Pipe Major Nicholson playing a haunting lament, drove past Major General Denison-Smith MBE (commanding 4th Armoured Division) and selected guests, was yet another success. This was an emotional and important event for The Fourth as not only was it our farewell but it was also the day, 30 April 1993, which marked our withdrawal from the Order of Battle and was the last time that the Standard would be paraded in front of the Regiment. It was entirely fitting that the 1 RTR band should perform at the parade, as they and the Pipes and Drums of The Fourth play so well together; it is a source of great joy and reassurance to our soldiers that the future of the Pipes and Drums is secure in the new 1 RTR. The British Forces Broadcasting Service chose to cover the event in some depth and it was very satisfactory that lieutenant Colonel Martin Speller should have had the last public word on The Fourth. He and his family have worked tirelessly on behalf of the soldiers and Regimental families. He is certainly 'true Blue' himself and has been selfless in striving to safeguard the future for members of the Regiment.

Now, as the Regiment gets ready to leave Germany it is a time of farewells. A recent dining-out in the Officers Mess saw some ten officers formally leaving; most of our fitters will stay in Imphal Barracks to work on the Challengers of the Queen's Royal Lancers; the same is true of our catering, pay and medical teams, most of whom will not be coming with us to Tidworth. To one and all, thanks for your help and support to The Fourth. Also to our clerks who, in common with all Royal Armoured Corps clerks, went to the Adjutant General's Corps on 1 July 1992, a sad time for all concerned. One of the main farewells, however, is to our Chieftains, the barracks seem very still and peaceful without them, though we will undoubtedly be seeing some of our old friends again in Tidworth!

So this is it - the last farewell. Although it is impossible to encapsulate 77 years of traditions and history here, throughout its life The Fourth has had a high reputation. For example, our ancestors in D Company of the Heavy Branch of the Machine-Gun Corps were the first tank troops in action in World War One; The Fourth were the first tank troops across the Rhine in World War Two; and then amalgamated with an equally proud 7 RTR in 1959. More recently 4 RTR were the first armoured regiment to serve (in the latest troubles) in the roulement infantry role in Ulster; the first regiment to train at Suffield. And so to the lasts - the last Chieftain regiment at Suffield and Hohne; the last Chieftains at Soltau. A Regiment with a proud history of success and achievement which compares favourably with all other British armoured regiments. It has been a rare privilege to serve with The Fourth and there is no doubt that the high reputation which our soldiers have justifiably earned will assist the new 1 RTR in quickly becoming established as one of the leaders in the Royal Armoured Corps of the future.