

AN OUTLINE HISTORY OF THE 26th COMP. A.A. REGIMENT.

Shortly after Japan entered the war it was decided to give the main ports of the Dominion anti-aircraft protection. Although they lie so far to the south, the ports of Dunedin and Port Chalmers were given their allotment. Lieut.-Colonel, then Major, Sleigh and Capt. Kilner were initially posted to the regiment that was to be formed for the purpose, and the first routine orders were issued on June 5, 1942, marching them in, together with 2nd Lieuts. Arnold and Banks.. At that time the Regimental Headquarters consisted of a room at the Kensington Drill Hall. On June 10 a small draft of men was marched in, followed on June 22 by the main draft. By this time temporary Headquarters and residence had been taken up at Littlebourne House.

The selection of the main site at Wharf Street had already been made by the C.R.A. and the Brigade Major A.A. Reconnaissance and the selection of further sites was left to the Regimental Commander and Capt. Kilner. Several sites were selected at Dunedin and Port Chalmers, but have not been occupied. Light gun sites were reconnoitered in the wharf and oil tank area of Dunedin and were occupied on July 13.

A tremendous amount of work was necessary before the Wharf Street site was fit for occupation, and during the actual construction the Regiment supplied a 24-hour picquet. The move from Littlebourne was made on October 6. During the early days at the new camp, gun and predictor detachments had to leap over drainage ditches ten feet deep in the course of their drill, the agility they then acquired doubtless contributing to their smartness later on. A small draft of officers was marched out to an overseas mobilisation camp on September 16.

The first draft of W.A.A.C.'s was marched in on October 9, and underwent training on the instruments. Their numbers have steadily increased during the further history of the Regiment. The radio-location equipment arrived on October 28, the wharfies remaining under the impression that it was a set of mobile field kitchens.

The first shots from the heavy guns—they were the first to be fired by heavy A.A. guns in the South Island—were fired as a salute on Armistice Day. On November 23 the light battery fired its first live shell practice from St. Clair beach.

On November 21 the Os.F.C. arrived, firm in the belief that they were God's gift to A.A. After some time at Wharf Street they gradually became convinced that A.A. could function without them. On December 20 began the first visit from an R.A. Gunnery Instructor in the person of B. S. M. Vickerman. The Regimental Christmas Dinner—served in the traditional manner by officers and senior N.C.O.'s—was held on December 29.

On January 7, 1943, considerable consternation was caused in the Sergeant's Mess by the promotion of four W.A.A.C.'s to sergeant rank. Others have joined them since.

The first full-dress live shell practice was held by the heavies on January 20. The standard was good, the drogue being well torn. The shoot by the light battery on the following day was particularly successful, three drogues being brought down.

At the beginning of February the camp Y.M.C.A. acquired two 35m.m. cinematograph projectors, giving the unit Hollywood feature films on nights when there was no leave. In the middle of the month Capt. Kilner and a large draft of men were marched out to an overseas mobilisation camp. On February 8 Miss McClure arrived as the first W.A.A.C. officer in the Regiment, to be followed on March 29 by Miss Begg.

On March 6 the unit was well represented at the Combined Services Sports Meeting where it gained several successes.

The first resident M.O., 2nd Lt. Hutchison, was marched in on March 4, and the second R.A. Instructor, B. S. M. Cobhill, began a visit on March 31.

From April 2 to April 9 a mobile R.D.F. scheme was held on the Taieri Plains, and on May 17 and 18 both batteries had a further shoot. The Wharf Street site was the first to