

On the duplication of the Territorial Army in March 1939, it was decided to base the duplicate battalion of 5th WELCH on Swansea. The locations were therefore: Battalion Headquarters and Headquarter Company at Swansea; A and B Companies at Maesteg; C Company at Aberdare and D Company at Merthyr.

The first five months of the war found 2/5th Battalion The Welch Regiment engaged in a defence role on the coast between Llantwit Major and Porthcawl in South Wales. It was part of 113th Infantry Brigade with 15th Battalion The Welch Regiment and 4th Battalion The Monmouthshire Regiment. Early in 1940 tropical kit was issued and soldiers sent on embarkation leave, but plans were changed quickly because of the fall of France.

May 1940 saw the Battalion moving for hard training to Rugeley in Staffordshire, the place connected with Palmer the Poisoner of the eighteenth seventies. Battalion Headquarters and Officers' Mess were established at Blithfield Hall, the ancestral home of the Bagot family. Companies, under canvas, were well dispersed throughout the picturesque 100-acre park. At Blithfield the whole Battalion trained rigorously under the energetic direction of the Second-in-Command, Major HT Pepper, from individual training right up to Battalion schemes. Chartrey Park, North of Abbots Bromley was very much used for company schemes. It was when at Blithfield, too, that 38th (Welsh) Division undertook its first manoeuvres through Cheshire and Lancashire.

The Germans at the time were carrying out heavy night raids on Liverpool and gallant work was done by Private Murphy, batman to Captain JR Jones of D Company, in rescuing two children from a blazing farmstead on the outskirts of the Battalion bivouac area-Oulton Park. The Brigadier supplemented manoeuvres with Battalion endurance tests, from all of which the soldiers gained much credit.

In September 1940 when it was thought that the Germans were about to invade England and the alarm was given throughout the country, the 2/5th WELCH assumed the responsibility for the defence of Meir Aerodrome near Stoke-on-Trent with companies taking their turn in guarding it.

On 11th October 1940 the Battalion moved into winter quarters at Crewe Hall, the magnificent seat of the Marquis of Crewe. Companies were under canvas or in Nissen huts. The daily hard training throughout the summer and autumn greatly increased the Battalion's efficiency, and its fitness and ability to endure long marches.

The report on the recent divisional exercises however was unfavourable, and after a couple of weeks at Crewe Hall the Battalion heard that 38th (Welsh) Division was to be concentrated in Southern England for 'smartening up.' By October the Battalion was in its new winter home - Blenheim Barracks, Aldershot.

At Aldershot the command of the Division was taken over by Major-General NMS Irwin, of Dakar fame. He spoke to each Battalion in turn, and soon everyone knew what was expected.

The first week brought tidying and smartening up with a vengeance. Kit and barrack room inspections followed in quick succession; almost everything in the Battalion was pressed, painted or polished. For the soldiers, Aldershot meant months of individual training in squads on the wind-swept Laffan's Plain and Long Valley. Officers and NCOs had, in addition, nightly lectures and sand model exercises. The proximity of London, which was being raided almost nightly, also brought them 'black-out patrols' at hourly intervals until 'lights out.' Inter-brigade moves on 28th February 1941 saw the Battalion march out from Aldershot to Ascot.

Battalion Headquarters and Sergeants' Mess were established in the Race Course Stands and Tote Buildings, while Ascot Hill House became the Officers' Mess. Battalion schemes and Brigade and Divisional exercises took place at frequent intervals and were a welcome change from the monotonous, but very necessary, individual training of Aldershot. These higher formation exercises involved long moves by transport to Salisbury Plain, the Marlborough Hills and the South Downs. By this time the Battalion had 'lost' its impressed hotchpotch of vehicles and been made up to scale with Fordson 30 cwts and Canadian Chev 15 cwts. Battalion drivers therefore had much practice in night convoy driving with lights restricted to masked headlamps and rear axle lights. These exercises, too, trained officers, warrant officers and senior NCOs in map reading and compass work, signals and intercommunications generally.

The South Downs were soon to become even better known to the Battalion for, after less than two months at Ascot, 38 (Welsh) Division again undertook a beach defence role, this time on the Sussex Coast line. 113th Infantry Brigade was at first in reserve and the Battalion moved to



Uckfield near Haywards Heath. Buckham Hill House became Battalion Headquarters and companies were encamped in the surrounding well wooded grounds. Training continued on similar lines as at Ascot, except that tanks arrived in the area and there were opportunities for co-operating with armour.

In June 1941 the Battalion took its turn on Beach Defence and moved forward to the coast. Battalion Headquarters was at the Brewery, Portslade, with Companies dispersed along the sea front from Patcham, North of Brighton, to Shoreham. Training gave way to defence works, guards, picquets and patrols. Weeks were spent in erecting the 'Brighton Ring,' miles of wire, triple dannert and concertina, behind which were constructed strong and mutually supporting positions designed to resist invasion and to deal with German paratroops who might be expected to land on the Downs. Brighton area brought new problems. The Mortar Platoon found itself responsible for operating 6-inch mortars, naval relics of the First World War. Sunk into emplacements near the foreshore they were to be ranged primarily on to raiding German ships. The Battalion's stock of 60 pound bombs, many of which were deficient of fuse caps, was evidently the last in the country, and so actual firing of the bombs was restricted, much to the relief of neighbouring householders whose windows became fewer with each practice! The Battalion's front extended for about six miles and so the Signal Platoon had a vital and heavy task to perform. It was a common sight to see the Signal Officer, Lieutenant EW Jones, cycling through Brighton carrying behind him his reinforcements - a cage of pigeons. He never claimed to be a fancier and there was little surprise when on a Brigade signalling exercise, 'Seagull,' after telephone and wireless had failed and resort was made to the birds, they only hovered around and settled on neighbouring rooftops, despite the efforts of Headquarters Officers to dislodge them with sticks and stones! An integral part of the defence of Brighton against an invasion was the blowing up of Shoreham Harbour which was to be done by 'pressing a button' in King Alfred, the naval establishment. The responsibility for blowing the harbour rested with the Commanding Officer. It was stated that on one occasion the button was accidentally pressed and two props fell out of the pier!

Before leaving Brighton the Battalion met with one of those disasters inseparable from training for war. B Company, after attacking the shore defences from the sea as part of a Corps exercise, took a short cut home to their billets through a minefield that was ill-defined and guarded and about which many were not informed. Eight men were lost. In November 1941 the Battalion moved West along the coast to Weymouth and the next eighteen months were spent in lovely Dorsetshire.

From the outbreak of war 2/5th WELCH had plenty of time and facilities for training. It was now nearly up to full strength, officers knew their men, and it was the wish of all that the Battalion should go into action sooner or later as a unit. But now there was a change which was to affect the future greatly. 38th (Welsh) Division was placed on a lower war establishment which meant for the Battalion the providing of drafts of men for overseas. This draft finding was to continue for the next two years, and although fresh intakes of called-up men were received at intervals the Battalion was at times thereafter much under strength.

Though the Battalion was deployed along the coast from Verne Barracks, Portland to Osmington, East of Weymouth, there were more opportunities for training than at Brighton, and this covered individual instruction to formation exercises on Salisbury Plain and throughout the Southern Counties. Bombed areas of Weymouth were set apart for street fighting practice. The Battalion's concentration area was in Came Wood, South of Dorchester, from which many exercises were started. Christmas 1941 was spent in Weymouth.

Inter-Brigade moves early in 1942 saw 2/5th WELCH for periods of three months each at Poole and Swanage. Heaths and ranges South of Wimbourne Minster became available for training. In Swanage Bay everyone had to pass swimming tests in battle order while assault landings were made on cliffs at Chapman's Pool. Companies too, took their turn in erecting the 'Tank Island' of Wareham. The Battalion left Swanage in August 1942 and marched 35 miles to inland camps. After spending a couple of weeks in the fog on the hills North of Evershot it went into another camp on the bogs of Bradford Down, two miles West of Dorchester. Here the Battalion had a counter-attack role against possible landings on the Dorset Coast.

For winter and Christmas of 1942 the Battalion moved into Poundbury Barracks, Dorchester. In the Spring of 1943 another move forward to the coast was made. Battalion Headquarters went to Portisham. Companies were deployed over a wide area from Chickerall and

