

## NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF 515 FIELD SURVEY COMPANY R.E.

### 1. INTRODUCTION.

It is believed that there are no detailed "official" unit histories for the Field Survey Companies raised in the second world war. It is now perhaps doubtful if any will be compiled. For some of the companies, brief anecdotal souvenir histories were produced towards the end of the war using the cartographic and photographic skills and mobile printing resources of the units.

Hopefully, the following notes on various sources of historical material will serve in lieu of a unit history until the compilation of one is addressed, if ever.

There are four obvious sources of historical material : -

- a. Brigadier A.B. Clough's monograph "Maps and Survey", H.M.S.O., 1952.
- b. References, mainly war diaries, held in the National Archives at Kew.
- c. Anecdotal souvenir histories produced by the units.
- d. Personal accounts or reminiscences and correspondence regarding the same.

Notes on a-d above are at paragraphs 2-5 below. Anyone wishing to add to these notes or to suggest improvements or corrections is invited to contact the Defence Surveyors' Association at

[www.defencesurveyors.org.uk](http://www.defencesurveyors.org.uk) or : -

Defence Surveyors' Association, c/o Royal School of Military Survey, Denison Barracks, Hermitage, Berks, RG18 9TP.

### 2. NOTES FROM "MAPS AND SURVEY" BY BRIGADIER A.B. CLOUGH, H.M.S.O., 1952.

For each theatre of war Brigadier Clough describes the historical background and the strategic and military considerations followed by the survey planning and an account of the phases of the campaign including the survey involvement. These are followed by sections on the maps and map production, triangulation and field surveys, aerial photography and survey and map supply and distribution. For anyone interest in military survey in general or survey unit histories in world war two "Maps and Survey" should be consulted. Notes towards unit histories have been extracted from "Maps and Survey" and these are shown below, sometimes in full, sometimes in brief.

Since these notes were made, "Maps and Survey" has been scanned by DSA and is now available on the DSA website. Where they exist, the notes below may still however provide an "at a glance" summary of the unit's involvement in world war two. They are arranged in approximately chronological order of events rather than in Clough's page order.

For 515 Field Survey Company R.E. the index in Brigadier Clough's "Maps and Survey" gives : -

<b>Theatre</b>	<b>Pages</b>
Home Forces	39, 40, 41.
Overlord	41, 346, 351, 365, 394, 430, 462.

#### **Home Defence and preparations for offensive operations.**

.....  
 Survey Directorates were assembled for the Allied Planning Headquarters for Operation "Torch" and for the British First Army which was to take part. 518 Field Survey Company R.E. was mobilized for this operation and ceased to be under Home Forces control. By October, 1942, the Survey organization in Home Forces was as under : -

Director of Survey, with Survey Directorate at G.H.Q. (now Colonel A.B. Clough who replaced Colonel Fryer on his appointment to Middle East in January, 1942).

A small Directorate with each of the Home Commands and certain Corps.

Field Survey Companies Nos. 14, 516, 519, 520, 521, 523 (**515 in Northern Ireland**), 1 Canadian.

General Survey Sections Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

Field Survey Depots Nos. 3, 4, 5, 7, 10 (No. 6 in Northern Ireland).

Air (Survey) Liaison Section No. 1.

.....  
 (Clough page 39)

#### **Home Defence and preparations for offensive operations.**

.....  
 During May (1943?) two further General Survey Sections (Nos. 8 and 9) completed their formation and training and were added to the Air Survey Group. In the following month **515** Field Survey Company with No. 6 Field Survey Depot, crossed over from Northern Ireland where they had been doing duty for several months.

.....  
 (Clough page 40)

**Home Defence and preparations for offensive operations.**

.....  
**515** shown in survey orbat for HQ 21 Army Group.  
.....

(Clough page 41)

**Survey Organization and Narrative.**

.....  
**515** shown in survey orbat for HQ 21 Army Group, under Army Group Units.  
.....

(Clough p346)

**Moves of units overseas - 21 Army Group.**

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Some of the Army Group headquarters survey units reached Normandy during June, and were temporarily under command of Second Army. The units concerned were : -  
4 Field Survey Depot R.E. (Maps). Completely overseas during June.  
4 General Field Survey Section R.E. Over on light scales.  
**515** Field Survey Company R.E. Reconnaissance party only over during June.  
5 Field Survey Depot R.E. (Stores). Two other ranks only over in June.  
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By the end of July the following Army Group H.Q. were over in France, less their residues which were en route:-

- 4 and 5 Field Survey Depots R.E.
- 4 and 5 General Field Survey Sections R.E.
- 515** Field Survey Company R.E.
- 14 and 15 Map Reproduction Sections R.E.

.....  
(Clough page 351)

**The pursuit from Normandy through north-eastern France.**

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During the latter part of August, (1944) Nos. 14 and 15 Map Reproduction Sections R.E., equipped with double-demy printing machines, were installed close to H.Q. 21 Army Group in Normandy and they, together with **515 Field Survey Company R.E.** and its mobile demy printing plant, were able to supplement the bulk stocks received from the United Kingdom. ....

(Clough page 462)

**Radar surveys.**

.....  
During the autumn of 1944 the topographical sections of **515 Field Survey Company** and 4 and 5 General Field Survey Sections were mainly occupied on this work.  
.....

(Clough page 430)

**The final stages**

21 Army Group Survey Directorate moved into Germany during April, accompanied by **515 Field Survey Company**, 19 Map Reproduction Section and a detachment of 4 Field Survey Depot. The remaining survey units under direct Army Group control stayed back in Antwerp and Brussels, except for No. 1 (Air) Survey Liaison Section which was with 34 Wing R.A.F. at Eindhoven.  
.....

(Clough page 365)

**515**, with other units, shown in survey orbat for HQ 21 Army Group.

(Clough page 394)

**3. NOTES FROM REFERENCES, MAINLY WAR DIARIES, IN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES, KEW.**

As far as possible, the brief notes from unit war diaries listed below are in chronological order. War diaries from world war two are generally foolscap in format. In addition to the war diary proforma which may be in manuscript in pencil or ink, or typescript, the files usually contain the periodic returns of soldier and officer strengths. Some also contain technical diary annexes but many are confined to mundane notes on arrivals and departures and movements and their content as a source for a historical and technical account can be

disappointing. Where they exist, the following “shorthand” notes are generally based on initial hasty examinations of the diaries simply to assess their scope and possible worth as sources for a unit history.

Only one war diary for the unit has been confirmed so far, but see also the reference to 515 Company in the short-lived AD Survey 4 Corps war diary : -

#### **AD Survey 4 Corps War Doary - June 1940.**

Single page manuscript war diary.

East Kilbride. **Det of 515 Coy** leaves to rejoin main body of unit.

11 Jun. Warning Order for move of Dte received.

12 Jun. Dte leaves for London by train.

13 Jun. Office established in Nobel House.

18 Jun. Maps of Scandinavia area returned to W.O. Map depot. HQ Renamed 5 Corps, order issued to move to Tidworth.

19 Jun. AD Svy etc to Southern Command to drawn supplies of maps.

20 Jun. Remainder of Dte arrives.

29 Jun. Capt McSmith leaves to join No 4 Trg Centre RE.

30 Jun. Lt Col Papworth leaves to join HQ 6 Corps.

2 July. Directorate closes.

War Diary signed by Lt Col Papworth.

PRO WO 168/14

Seen 15-11-08

#### **515 Field Survey Company R.E. War Diary Jan 1940 - Dec 1941.**

Mostly 1-2 pages typescript War Diary pages for each month. Only brief notes made.

Good quality WD copies mean that a potted history could easily be compiled for this period for a little photocopying. This diary is unusual in that no Strength Returns are included, but this makes examination easier.

##### **Jan 1940.**

22. Formation commenced at Gibraltar Bks Aldershot. Under Maj Papworth R.E.

##### **Feb 1940.**

Details of arrivals, incl Prain, Irwin, Dowson etc.

##### **Mar 1940.**

3. Unit moves to Puckridge Hill Camp, Fleet Rd Aldershot.

##### **May 1940.**

8. Print lorries arrive from Leeds.

9. Unit ready for move to Norway. Strength 3 Off, 1 WO, 110 Ors.

22. At Glasgow, Gourock, East Kilbride

##### **Jun 1940.**

12. Movement order to Southampton.

13. Detachment for N.W.E.F. (Norway) to rejoin unit.

15. Vehicles on ships offloaded. Movement orders cancelled.

16. Topo secs on exercises in Cotswolds.

##### **Jul 1940.**

2. Orders rec'd for mov to N. Ireland.

8. Unit move via Stranraer to Belfast.

16. 2 Topo on A.A. gun site surveys.

17. 1 Topo to Larne ditto.

##### **Aug 1940.**

1. Unit move from Sunningdale Camp Belfast to Groomsport House near Bangor.

In Aug Topo secs on exercises.

24. 1 Topo to Orlock to do range survey.

In Aug, Repro on 1-inch of N.I. work done at civilian printers, McCaw Stephenson and Orr; Little and McLean and John Cleland.

##### **Sep 1940.**

Various topo tasks. Repro details not noted. Maj L.F. de Vic Carey now O.C. (and since Jun!)

##### **Oct 1940.**

WD 2 pages, various small topo tasks. Print tasks itemised. Company now 6 Off & 1 WO & 134 OR's.

##### **Nov 1940.**

Similar.

##### **Dec 1940.**

Similar.

##### **Jan 1941.**

1 page topo and repro tasks itemised.

##### **Feb 1941.**

Ditto.

**Mar 1941.**

Ditto.

**Apr 1941.**

GSGS 4142 ¼-inch repro. Also 1/25,000 sheets.

**May 1941.**

**Jun 1941.**

1-inch and ¼-inch repro tasks. Various topo tasks.

**Jul 1941.**

Similar.

**Aug 1941.**

Ditto.

**Sep 1941.**

Ditto. Plus GSGS 4136 1-inch repro. GSGS 4142 ¼ -inch.

**Oct 1941.**

Ditto.

**Nov 1941.**

Ditto.

**Dec 1941.**

Ditto.

WO 166/3780

Seen 30-12-08

**515 Corps Field Survey Company R.E. War Diary 1942.**

No strength returns, just typescript AF C2118 war diary forms.

Location "Field" O.C. Maj J.F.F. Lathbury RE.

**Jan 1942.**

Complete Section left for air survey training at STC. Maj L.F. de Vic Carey assumed AD Svy Scottish Command 26-1-42. Capt Lathbury became O.C. 28-1-42. Much trg at STC and postings in from same. Strength 8 Off, 1 WO, 8 Sgts, 165 OR's.

**Feb 1942.**

Topo Secs - Whole month on individual training. Repro - GSGS 4136 layered one-inch etc.

**Mar 1942.**

Mil Trg, no tech diary.

**April 1942.**

Survey Exercise Carnclough - Omagh 10-19 Apr. Plane table survey 1:25,000. 2 Tops in 3 days covered 12 km sq. Repro on GSGS 4136. and GSGS 3906 25,000. Dwg Sections on 4-point, Crone, and Merton methods of mapping from obliques.

**May 1942.**

Topo on field trg again. Production - GSGS 4136, GSGS 3906.

**Jun 1942.**

Topo Sects on exercise. Production - GSGS 4142, 253,440.

**Jul 1942.**

Topo Sects on exercise. Production - GSGS 4136.

**Aug 1942.**

Coast Def Bty surveys. And various other tasks. Drawing Lough Erne 1:25,000. Repro GSGS 4136.

**Sep 1942.**

Coast Def Bty surveys. And various other tasks. Drawing GSGS 4136. Repro GSGS 4142, 3906, etc.

**Oct 1942.**

Topo various. Drawing one-inch layer proofs. Repro various. Rotaprint shown.

**Nov 1942.**

Similar minimal notes.

**Dec 1942.**

Topo on two Benson 25,000 sheets. Drawing - Benson. Repro - various.

PRO WO 166/8209

Seen 9-4-09

**515 Corps Field Survey Company R.E. War Diary 1943.**

O.C. Maj J.F.F. Lathbury. Typescript war diary with no strength returns. Location "Field". Each month has sections on Topo Sections, Drawing Section, Reproduction Sections, Misc., Mil Trg., Courses, Postings, Strength summary (In Jan 43, 6 Off, 1 WO2, 6 Sgts, 125 R & F. Diaries signed by Capt D.C. Hunt.

**Jan 1943.**

Drawing & Topo on Benson. Repro on one-inch and bog maps Ireland.

**Feb 1943.**

Surveys for A.A. at Larne and C.D. Bty Orlock and range surveys. Benson ongoing. Repro one-inch Bog Maps. 18 sheets of one-inch N.I.

**March 1943.**

Similar to Feb. Progress on about 15 Benson sheet numbers stated. A 24-inch process camera installed and in use.

**April 1943.**

Battery surveys ongoing. Progress on about 30 Benson sheets listed in detail. One-inch 3<sup>rd</sup> Revision sheets 311 to 327 printed. Process camera used to enlarge Benson Block 2 to 1:25,000 scale.

**May 1943.**

Topo and Dwg both on Benson. A large copyboard frame made for camera. Double Demy equipment being dismantled. Benson progress notes.

**June 1943.**

Similar to May. All Double Demy equipment returned to 1 Fd Svy (Stores) Depot RE. Detailed Benson progress notes. The Company moved from Bangor to Dunsfold Surrey from 25 to 29 June.

**July 1943.**

Unit together with 9 Map Photo Section ordered to mobilise by 24 July. All War Estbt vacancies filled except 2 motor mechs. G.1098 almost complete. Stens, PIAT's and Brens received. One Tavistock and 8 bins outstanding. Benson progress notes. Lt E.A. Miskin to S.T.C. Lt A.G. Weston to 16 M.R.S. Lt M.E. Butt posted in .

**August 1943.**

Benson progress notes. Lt J.L. Fleure posted in.

**September 1943.**

Solely on Benson production and printing, typical runs 3,020. Practice in "Browne" adjustment Tech training in hand. Two 10 ton Fodens print lorries received. Mil trg commenced.

**October 1943.**

Lt H.J.W. Smith attached from STC.

Benson work resumed on 20 Oct. Block 8 completed. Block 2 continues. Repro on 1:25,000 of England.

Completed months mil trg on 20 Oct.

**November 1943.**

Benson continues. Coy still deficient two tavistocks.

**December 1943.**

Benson progress detailed. Repro on 82 sheets of Ireland 1:25,000.

PRO WO 166/12152

Seen 28-4-09

**515 Field Survey Company R.E. War Diary 1944.**

O.C. Maj J.F.F. Lathbury. Typescript war diary with no strength returns. Location not stated. Each month has sections on Benson Block II Topo & Drawing Sections, Photo Section, Reproduction Sections, Misc., Mil Trg., Courses, Postings. Strength Returns now included. Diaries signed by Capt D.C. Hunt.

**January 1944.**

Repro GSGS 4090 1:100,000 x 6,000 copies.

**February 1944.**

Benson Block II work completed. 4000 copies tri-colour for each of 25 sheets in block 2 and 4000 copies of reprints of 22 sheets in Block 8. Topo spent 18 days on milk trg. 3 Topo trucks waterproofed and waded. Repro and Photo on Benson whole month, 5 lorries waterproofed and waded. Drawing on Benson and tech and mil trg. One new pattern Photo Processing lorry received.

**March 1944.**

16,000 copies printed of sheets 28/22NE, NW, SE, SW; 28/20 NE, SE, and 28/18 NE, SE making total of 128,000 copies in all. Two new 10 Ton Foden Photo Mechanical lorries received. Various tech and mil trg.

**April 1944.**

Ten Benson sheets printed total 83,000 copies. Topo practised Canadian Traverse, Aneroid Heighting and one trig scheme. Drawing on Block adjustment and air photo compilation work. A British aircraft crashed in the camp, OC and 3 OR's injured. One theodolite and minor eqpt destroyed, one vehicle burned out. Requisitioned property damaged considerably.

**May 1944.**

One Repro Section detached to "T" Map Depot for operational printing from 22 May.

Topo Sections on battlecraft training.

515 Fd Svy Coy and 9 Map Photo Section demobilized and re-mobilized as 515 Fd Svy Coy on 31 May.

5 Bedford 3-ton 4 x 2 replaced by 4 x 4s. One 2-wheeled water trailer replaced by two 15 cwt 4 x 2 trucks.

Unit not moved for "Concentration" Concentration completed and "Light Scales" at 6 hrs notice to move to Marshaling Area from 31 May.

**June 1944.**

Op Overlord. Adv party 1 Off & 2 Ors to proceed o'seas on D + 5. Conc done in present location.

Appx A is list of Benson? Sheets produced incl print runs.

**July 1944.**

Embarkation orders recd 1 Jul.

2 Jul Embarked. LST 317. Landed dry-shod.

3 Jul Contact with adv party at Le Manoir 862798 and moved there.

5 Jul Visited by Col Heap DD Svy 2 Army.

19 Jul Visited by Col Shewell DD Svy 21 Army Gp.

Residues left Dunsfold 18 Jul.

Re-surveys of 37/18 SW and 37/16 SW by ground and air svy. 1/3 of Sheet 37/16 SW still in enemy hands. 5m V.I. contours being surveyed. Repro on reprints of 9 sheets, 53,000 copies.

**August 1944.**

20 Aug. Tech direction passed to D Svy 21 Army Group

3 Aug. 5 Gen Fd Svy Sec arrived in theatre and came under command 515 Coy.

22 Aug. 4 & 5 Gen Fd Svy Secs moved to Caen area for duty with 4 Cdn Fd Svy Coy RCE.

Assistance given to 3 & 4 Fd Svy Depots handling large consignments of maps.

List of repro work attached.

**September 1944.**

18 Unit moved from Le Manoir in Calvados to Brussels arriving 20 Sep. Located at Rue De L'Aqueduc, Ixelles, Brussels in a garage. One topo sec to Rouen to recover and list 100,000 sheets in German store. Stocks also recovered from German map stores in Brussels area. Topo Sects fixed radar masts at 4 locations.

Training in Canadian Traverse and Thomas Least Squares method. Repro statistics.

**October 1944.**

An Air Svy Group formed at 515 under Capt W.R. Taylor from 1, 2 and 5 Gen Fd Svy Sects. On 12 Oct they moved to new accom in Ave. Des Nations, Brussels. German map depot at Tourcoing salvaged.

A civilian firm commissioned to cancel and cut German stocks ready for printing on reverse.

Radar mast fixed at Louvain.

1-7 Oct The air svy group revised 45 sheets of GSGS 4414 Germany 1:25,000. 25 were reprinted.

25 Oct A new block of 104 sheets of GSGS 4414 commenced.

**November 1944.**

6 Nov. Increment of 4 Off and 95 OR arrived to form Repro increment for 21 A. Gp.

10,000 Reams of Demy cancelled German stock produced. 1030 reams of Double demy also.

One radar mast at Eindhoven fixed.

52 sheets GSGS 4414 recd from Air Svy Gp with corrections.

Repro statistics appended.

**December 1944.**

Maj D.C. Hunt shown as O.C.

GSGS 4414 work continued 22 sheets recd from Air Svy Gp.

Officers were Maj D.C. Hunt, Capt R.T. Russell, J.L. Fleure, K.W. Bland, M.E. Butt, K.E. Baseley, R.E.

Morrison. O.R. estbt was 150, strength 166.

PRO WO 171/1634

Seen 28-4-09

**515 Field Survey Company R.E. War Diary January to December 1945.****January 1945.**

515 Coy - 7 Off, 174 OR. Rfts Pool - 3 Off 31 OR. Combined - 10 Off, 205 OR.

Topo sect fixed a radar site for RAF at Arlon, Luxembourg, in 12 US Army Gp area.

Work continued on GSGS 4414 Germany 1:25,000.

A printing demonstration was given to Gen Staff and Press at HQ Air Svy Gp Avenue Des Nations, Brussels on 30-31 Jan. Cuts to electricity supply disrupted production, 21 civilians discharged for this reason.

Production statistics listed.

**February 1945.**

Cuts to electricity supply disrupted production.

Work continued on GSGS 4414 Germany 1:25,000, Block 3. 15 sheets completed, 6 in work.

**March 1945.**

On 11 Mar unit placed under comd GHQ Tps 21 Army Gp, incl 19 MRS and 4 Fd Svy Depot.

Recce party to Suchteln Germany to find new loc for unit.

Paper mill at Hysinghem producing 500 Double Demy reams a month under unit supervision. Wef 31 Mar 515

Coy relieved of responsibility for handling of captured stocks

**An Auto-Processing lorry received from UK. Not yet in operational use. (Auro Processing ???)**

Topo sects on surveys of 5 radar sites for RAF.

GSGS 4414 Block 3 continues.

Repro Statistics appended.

**April 1945.**

GSGS 4414 block finished before move. 8 further sheets to be taken up.

2 Apr Adv party, 1 repro sect, moved to Suchteln, Germany

5 Apr Main party moved.  
 10 Apr Rear party moved.  
 6 Apr Capt Perks att from 21 Army Gp.  
 6 Apr Return of 1 Topo sect from fixes of radar sites at Breda, Berg-en-Daal.  
 7 Apr 2 Topo Sect to Ostend, svy for GHQ AA Tps.  
 16 Apr Capt M. Perks assumed command from Maj D.C. Hunt who was posted to 21 Army Gp.  
 Numerous other officer posting details not noted.

#### **May 1945.**

War diary now in pencil manuscript. At Suchteln, Germany, F0599.  
 5-6 May 36 Rfts arrive.  
 6 May Capt Russell on recce for new loc of all GHQ Svy units, 515, 19 MRS, Det 4 Fd Svy Depot.  
 8 May VE Day. Capt Russell returned from Bad Salzuflen having found accom site in school. 20 rfts arr.  
 10 May 9 Svy off rfts arr.  
 11 May Capt Russell & 2 Topo Sect adv aparty to Bad S.  
 12 May 3 Photo Vehs sent to 4 Fd Svy Depot, Antwerp. 3 x 3 ton Leyland 6 x 4. Autoprocessing, Rectifying and Enlarging, Processing. Decided to dispose since not being used at present.  
 16 May No 1 Topo at Coesfeld for mobile radar survey.  
 23 May 1 Topo party to take over German returned clothing store at Vinnhorst X328267 for 21 Army Gp map depot.  
 26 May An overhauled print vehicle rec'd from Brussels.  
 31 May Unit, less rear party, moved to Salzuflen from Suchteln.  
 At Appx K is 4-page Monthly Report, typescript in some detail incl repro statistics.

#### **June 1945.**

Monthly Report. Strength is 515 7 + 170. 1 Gen Fd Svy Sec 1 + 25. 4 Gen Fd Svy Sec 1 + 24. 5 Gen Fd Svy Sec 1 + 25. Rfts Pool 1 + 55.

#### **July 1945.**

No war diary. Instead, a Monthly Report to D Survey 21 Army Gp.  
 Major re-organisation of units in 21 A. Gp.  
 Germany Admin Boundaries map 17 sheets.  
 GSGS 4414 revisions.

#### **August 1945.**

Orders to move. New site found in Bad Salzuflen. And unit moved in last week of month.  
 Germany Admin Boundaries map.  
 GSGS 4414 revisions.

#### **September 1945.**

3 Sep Move completed.  
 3 Sep Luneberg trig recce commenced.  
 6 Sep Detailed survey Bayeux area fro Graves Commission.

#### **October 1945.**

Surplus heavy vehicles being conducted to UK via Antwerp.  
 Astro obs for a method of astro resection being developed by Capt Thomas.

#### **November 1945.**

Same tasks continued. Nothing remarkable.

#### **December 1945.**

DGOS visited and addressed all ex-OS employees and briefed on post-war prospects etc.  
 GSGS 4414 revision continuing.  
 Gnomonic Grid Charts in work.  
 1:25,000 German Admin Boundariues Task GSGS 4414A in work.  
 Second Army History maps in work.  
 German Town Plans.  
 Det of 4 Gen Fd Svy Sect under Lt F.G. Bellamy on survey of Munster Lage Sheet 4414, 3026.  
 Use of Zeiss Bosshardt on this task ???  
 PRO WO 171/5557

Seen 28-4-09

#### **515 Field Survey Company R.E. War Diary/Monthly Technical Reports 1946.**

None yet found.

#### **4. NOTES FROM SOUVENIR BROCHURES.**

None are known for 515 Field Survey Company R.E.

#### **5. NOTES FROM PERSONAL ACCOUNTS.**

None are known of.