

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF 519 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 of corrections is invited to contact the Defence Surveyors’ Association at 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 strategical 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. The notes below may still however provide an “at a glance” summary of the unit’s involvement in world war two.

For 519 Field Survey Company R.E. the index in Brigadier Clough’s “Maps and Survey” gives : -

Theatre	Pages
Home Forces	37, 39, 41, 57.
Overlord	41, 346, 350, 394, 420, 421.

At the beginning of January, 1941 there were nine Field Survey Companies under Home Forces control and they were located in the commands as shown below :-

Southern Command	No. 519 (just formed) No. 516 (with 5 Corps)
Eastern Command	No. 14 (ex B.E.F.) No. 1 Canadian (with Canadian Corps)
Northern Command	No. 13 (ex B.E.F.) No. 521 (just formed)
Western Command	No. 517 No. 520 (just formed)
Southern Command (Clough page 37)	No. 518 (just formed)

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)

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. 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.

War Diary October 1940 - December 1941 - Home Forces

Thin file of both typescript and pencil manuscript war diary pages usually 2 per month.

No Strength Returns. No Technical reports.

Oct 40. Formed on 29 Sep 1940 at Teffont, Salisbury attached to 516 Fd Svy Coy., under Maj. J.F.F. Lathbury R.E. Various postings in.

Nov-Dec. One print lorry arrived 29 Nov. Postings in. One 3-ton lorry also.

6 Dec. Collected G1098 from Swindon.

Apr 41.

4. Maj G.J. Humphries took over command. Coy not now to proceed overseas.

May. Mil training etc.

Jun 41. Lots of "Normal Duties" entries. Some mil trg.

Jul 41. Some tech work now documented briefly.

Aug 41.

Sep 41. Arrangements for accommodation at Eastfield Camp Edinburgh.

7. Accommodated at Peebles, arrived 10 Sep.

Oct 41.

Nov 41.

Dec 41. Normal duties. Mil Trg etc.

WO 166/3784

Seen 30-12-08

War Diaries 1942-1944 ??????

None yet located.

War Diary of 519 Field Survey Company R.E. Jan to Dec 1945.

Each month has one to two pages WD in manuscript. Little technical. No technical annexes.

PRO WO 171/5558

Seen 26-9-08

War Diary of 519 Field Survey Company R.E. January 1946.

Two pages typescript W.D.

At Rehme in Germany? List of postings out and unit disbanded on 26 Jan.

Maj A.G. Weston posted to 16 Map Repro Section.

PRO WO 171/9425

Seen 30-12-08

4. NOTES FROM SOUVENIR BROCHURES.

None are known for 519 Field Survey Company R.E.

5. NOTES FROM PERSONAL ACCOUNTS.

HISTORY OF THE 519 FIELD SURVEY COY

ROYAL ENGINEERS

By

J.H. Richardson ex C.Q.M.S.

M.B.E.

Capt Smith
Lt Russell
Lt Gunn

B.E.M.

Sgt Gayton

MENTION IN DISPATCHES

Cpl Hughes
Col Maskell
L/Cpl Hook

C in C's Certificate of Good Service

Sgt Slaughter
Dvr Groom

Croix de Guerre (French)

Lt Payne
Sgt Belshaw

The following is a short history of the 519 Field Survey Coy RE from its formation on ?? October 1940 until it finally broke up on 6 July 1946.

Its members did not remain intact all that time, but a goodly number did. But whoever joined the Coy, whether it was for a short or a long period, still regards their time in the Coy with a certain amount of affection.

The 519 (Corps Field Survey) Coy RE as it was called then, was formed on ?? October 1940 at a village called Telfont near Salisbury.

The only people who were there at first were the Drivers under the command of the very able Sgt Slaughter. The officers consisted of the OC Major Lathbury, the 2IC, Capt Barron and also CSM Devonshire and CQMS Sainsbury.

The first technical people to arrive were Sgt Bland and Cpls Richardson and Rogers, both of whom were promoted Sgts on arrival. We arrived on 27 Oct and after that the technical people began to trickle along and the Coy gradually began to take shape with the arrival of the four Subalterns, 2/Lts Rostron, Robbins, Towner and Dearman.

There followed a period of "getting used" to each other, and of course plenty of "fatigues"! It was a very strenuous time for people in administrative positions, and I am sure they were glad when the Coy finally took shape. During this period there was also plenty of time given over to military Training.

During the first stages of its formation the Coy was with the 516 Coy, but they left after a short time and left us in possession of the Manor where some of us were billeted, the rest were in the School Cox's bungalow and a couple of cottages.

At last there came a time when we were to get our printing and Photo-mechanical lorries. Both Printing Sgts went at short intervals to Crabtrees of Leeds and brought a Printing lorry each. The Coy now began to look more like a Survey Coy.

I remember the first job which was done by the Printers and that was a Christmas card for Major Lathbury and one for the Coy. During this time the other sections were getting their stores in and beginning to put in a bit of practice and getting used to working with each other. We soon settled down and became a solid Coy.

Christmas 1940 came and went, and the winter blossomed into Spring. It was then that we saw the true glory of Telfont. I think it was one of the prettiest villages I have ever seen. Who remembers the trout stream that flowed along one side of the road? And Cpl Taylor wading in it on the nights he had had a few drinks? Also the bleach powder that was put into the stream to catch the trout?

At the end of March 1941 something happened to disturb the equanimity of the Coy. We all had 7 days embarkation leave! And at the same time Maj Lathbury fell ill and lost command of the Coy. When we all came back from leave we found we had a new OC namely Major Humphries.

Our tropical kit then appeared and was issued to us. What a sight we all looked! Tops too big, shorts too long and slacks too short etc. After a short time we had a parade of everybody in their kit, and I should think that the OC was the only person who knew how to wear it!

The stores were all packed by this time and we were more or less all ready for the word go, when one morning on parade the OC announced that we were not going overseas and that we were to hand in our kit that same day!

Just after this we were joined by a new officer 2/Lt Smith, who, in 1943 was destined to become 2IC at a most critical time in our Coy's history.

In September 1941, the Coy moved to Victoria Park, Peebles in Scotland, and I think everyone will agree that it was the pleasantest station the Coy had been in. We did some intensive military training whilst at Peebles, mostly with the Home Guard! Route marches, gas training by day or night, that assault course and PT.

Those of us at Peebles will remember the route march to St. Mary's Loch for many a long day. The Coy was at Peebles for about a year and in Sep 1942 moved to Dalmeny Park, South Queensferry at which it stayed until Jan 1943.

Our next station was at Tadcaster, between Leeds and York. Our stay there was marked by Exercise "Sparton" which took place in March 1943. The Coy was away on this exercise for a fortnight and when it returned to Tadcaster, resumed its even way.

In Oct 1943 another milestone appeared in the history of the Coy and this was Exercise "Blackcock". This was also notable by the fact that on this exercise we first put up our Second Army signs signifying that the Coy now formed part of the British Second Army.

About this time we were printing a series of maps called "Benson". Little did we know that we were looking at maps that covered ground over which the second front was going to take place. We were also, about this time, doing a lot of "practice loads", the significance of which we were to find out later.

About the end of Oct 1943 Major Humphries was promoted to Lt Col and Major Pring arrived to take command of the Coy.

In Sep 1943 the Coy had another move, this time to Luton in Bedfordshire at "Airport Camp". Our stay at "Airport Camp" was marked more than anything else by the fact that at last "Benson" was finished, the job having taken about 18 months. Also whilst at Luton our time was taken up very considerably by "practice loads" and so on. The MT also constructed a ramp and practiced landing off barges, and the waterproofing of vehicles also took up a large part of the MT's time.

At last there came a day when we moved into our "concentration area" which was at Clapham Park, Bedford. The move was made on 5 May 1944 and marked our really first effort at living "rough" although some of the Coy were living in billets.

Just before "D" Day, 6 June 1944, our assault Scale party went off to their Marshalling area, the "Light Scale" party went next, followed by the residue of the Coy. Eventually we all joined up together and once more became a Coy instead of three separate parts, on the 6 July, at Esquay-sur-Suelles, in Normandy.

By the time the residue arrived on the 6 July, the Topo Sections and No 5 Printing Section were old hands at campaigning. The whole Coy soon got to work and there wasn't a man whose little bit wasn't useful somewhere. The Topo Sections went out and did some mighty sterling work, always not far away from the front line, whilst back at HQ Repro, Drawing and HQ Sections were working hard as ever they could go.

We left Esquay-sur-Suelles on the 11 August for a small village called Locqueville, which was near Villers Bocage. The Coy stayed at a deserted farm, parking and working alongside the inevitable apple trees!

On the 27 August we left there for a place called St Nicholas-des-Latiers. Whilst there we stayed in the grounds of a big modern-looking chateau. The Coy was not there long before leaving on the 4 Sep for a place near Amiens. At this place which was reported to be Kesselring's "Western Wall" HQ, the three Survey Coys joined up (519, 514 and 521). It was here that the Transport of all three Coys was together without a trace of camouflage, and I believe it was Colonel Francis who said "Thank God for air supremacy". We stayed at this HQ for three days and on the 7 Sep our unforgettable journey as far as Brussels began. I say unforgettable because, I for one, will always remember it. Who will ever forget the enthusiasm of the Belgians as we crossed the frontier? The gifts of fruit that were literally thrown at us as we drove through the towns. Belgians laughing, crying and cheering in turn. We eventually reached our destination which was a place called Schepdaal, about 8 miles from Brussels. Once again the three Coys were together. Our stay here lasted until the 21 Sep when we moved to Zonhoven, which is near Hasselt. These were the only two places in Belgium that we stayed at, and our next port of call was Holland.

On the 2 Oct we made our way to Geldrop in Holland. This was our first experience of winter quarters, and we were billeted in two schools. Towards the end of October our billet was wanted by a higher authority and we had to move, so on the 31 Oct we moved to Eindhoven, which was only 6 kilometres

from Geldrop. At Eindhoven the whole Coy were in one school in a street called Julianastrasse, and the quarters proved to be quite comfortable indeed. Two or three hardy souls still preferred to sleep in tents, although we passed through a very cold winter. During our stay at Eindhoven we received an increment of two more printing wagons plus the necessary men. There was plenty of amusement in the town and quite a few members of the Coy soon made some very good friends of the Dutch. Our Christmas dinner was a big success, the hall reflected great credit on the men who put in such hard work doing the decorating, and during the dinner a visit was paid by Col. Heap. A photograph of the whole Coy whilst at dinner was taken by Sgt Denis.

On the 13th April came a big moment in our lives. We made our first move into Germany! And from now on is a history of half a dozen quick moves which brought us to the end of our campaign.

Our first stop in Germany was at a place called Winnekendonk, which is across the River Maas and not far from the Rhine. Saturday 25th April brought the day when our troops crossed the Rhine. We were in a position to see the whole of the air attacking force crossing and by nightfall we knew that our troops had succeeded in this task; and had secured a firm hold on the opposite bank. From Winnekendonk we ourselves crossed the Rhine to Hamminkeln on the 1 April. On the 7th April we went to a place called Hs Surrenberg and stayed in the grounds of a castle belonging to a Baroness. On the 15th April we moved to what was formerly a Hitler Youth Hostel at Eickhof near Liebenau. Leaving Eickhof on the 25th April we went to Fallingbostel and our HQ in an abandoned radar camp. It had been pretty thoroughly ransacked by the DP's by the time we reached there. On the 4th March we left Fallingbostel for Melbeck near Luneburg. It was while we were at Melbeck that at last the war came to an end on the 8th May 1945.

On the ??May the Coy went to a place called Rhaden and at Rhaden we saw with mixed feelings the end of the old 519 Field Survey Coy. For on the 6th July the Coy was disbanded and a completely new 519 was formed. Members of the old 519 were posted to various other Coys, Sections and Depots.

At the beginning of this history will be found a list of Honours and Awards gained by members of the Coy and at the end, a list of dates and places at which the Coy stayed during its career.

? Oct 1940	? Sep 1941	Telfont near Salisbury
? Sep 1941	? Sep 1942	Peebles, Scotland
? Sep 1942	? Jan 1943	Dalmeny Park, Scotland
? Jan 1943	? Nov 1943	Tadcaster, Yorkshire
? Nov 1943	5 May 1944	Luton, Bedfordshire
5 May 1944	? Jun 1944	Clapham Park, Bedfordshire
? Jun 1944	11 Aug 1944	Esquay-sue-Seulles, France
11 Aug 1944	27 Aug 1944	Locqueville, France
27 Aug 1944	4 Sep 1944	St Nicolas-des-Latiers, France
4 Sep 1944	7 Sep 1944	Near Amiens, France
7 Sep 1944	21 Sep 1944	Schepdaal, Belgium
21 Sep 1944	2 Oct 1944	Zonhoven, Belgium
2 Oct 1944	31 Oct 1944	Geldrop, Holland
31 Oct 1944	13 Mar 1945	Eindhoven, Holland
13 Mar 1945	1 Apr 1945	Winnekendonk, Germany
1 Apr 1945	7 Apr 1945	Hamminkeln, Germany
7 Apr 1945	15 Apr 1945	Hs Surrenberg, Germany
15 Apr 1945	25 Apr 1945	Eickhof, Germany
25 Apr 1945	4 May 1945	Fallingbostel, Germany
4 May 1945	? May 1945	Melbeck, Germany
? May 1945	6 Jul 1945	Rhaden, Germany

PRO WO 402/376

This was the copy originally given to me by Richardson some time after the 19 Squadron 150th Anniversary in 1977 and later passed by me to MCE.(MRLG) some years ago.