

THE

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Bdr Gary Hyatt hard at work on the Lightweight Counter Mortar Radar computer
Bdr David Jackson, 19 Regt RA



The mortar hu



A crew preparing to deploy by helicopter

A troop of 53 (Louisburg) Bty RA, one of the weapon locating batteries of 5 Regt RA, is currently deployed in Afghanistan on Op Herrick 6 where they are operating with 12 Mech Bde in the mortar locating role.

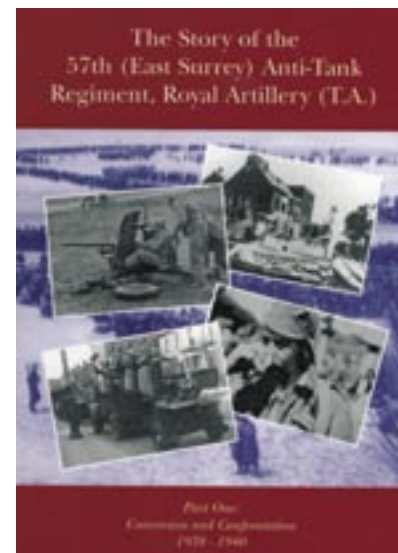
A new piece of equipment, called the Lightweight Counter Mortar Radar (LCMR for short), has recently come into service to help counter the increasing mortar and rocket threat posed to the isolated forward operating bases dotted around Afghanistan. The radars, procured from the USA as an urgent operational requirement raised during Op Herrick 4 when there was a marked increase in the number of mortar and rocket attacks, first arrived in the UK in late March. Amazingly, the first three crews left for Afghanistan just a few weeks later – on Easter Day! This very short deployment time was achieved because the soldiers concerned had already attended all of the general pre-deployment training thereby allowing them to concentrate for the final few weeks on training to use the LCMRs. At the same time, the remainder of the Battery was training to deploy in a similar role with 1 Mech Bde in Iraq, thus giving the Battery the flexibility for cross-theatre deployment.

On arrival in theatre, progress was necessarily rapid; a concept of operations for the new radars was drafted, target hand-off procedures streamlined, communications established and the source of Baskins Robbins ice-cream established! Within a week Bdr Callum Hepworth-Smith and Gnr Dean Holt had sited and deployed the first radar in Forward Operating Base (FOB) Robinson. The other two detachments also deployed quickly into other FOBs.

On 25 April the vigilant radar crew in FOB Robinson was rewarded by the sound of the LCMR alarming to warn of an imminent indirect fire attack. Almost immediately mortar bombs began to land in the compound – but the system had worked, and there was enough warning time for the troops to take cover. Further successes have continued since.

In just a short time the systems have had a marked impact on operations. In addition, a number of systems have been deployed into Iraq. The radars are versatile and effective and are tactically mobile by helicopter or in most types of vehicle. With a crew of just two it has a minimal impact on logistics at isolated bases. Targets located have been successfully handed off to a variety of strike systems, including guns, our own mortars, aircraft and attack helicopters, each of which calls for a different sensor-to-shooter communications link. The kit is fast into and out of action and can be deployed, or re-deployed quickly and with minimum fuss. All of which means that, for the first time, weapon locating radars are employable at the lowest tactical levels. With more experience the system will become effective across the whole spectrum of warfighting operations.

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This small, paperback book (162 pages), sub-titled 'Part One: Conversion and Confrontation', records the activities of 57 Regt RA, a TA anti-tank regiment equipped with what look like alarmingly small, and I would imagine not very effective, two-pounder anti-tank guns. With a preamble on the mechanisation that took place army-wide in the inter-war years, the story takes us from 1938 when training on the anti-tank guns first started, through to 1940, by which time the Regiment had deployed to Belgium and France with the BEF, tasted defeat and made their way back to the UK, minus their precious guns, via the beaches of Dunkirk.

Like most books of its type, it has been meticulously researched and is dotted with footnotes and acknowledgements as if to reassure readers of this fact. As well as matters of historical detail, it records various acts of bravery and derring-do by the officers and soldiers of the Regiment in a sometimes chaotic, but always hard-fought retreat. This is done with a clever mix of narrative text and personal anecdotes recorded by officers and soldiers who took part in the battle. The book is well illustrated with black-and-white photographs, some of them published for the first time. Two caught my eye; one is taken on Epsom Downs and shows a gun crew in action, training for war, but surrounded by thoroughbred horses in training while the other, taken about a year later, shows the Regiment's two-pounder guns abandoned, and littered around the French countryside like so much scrap metal. Very poignant. There are also a number of useful appendices listing, inter-alia, all of the members of the Regiment who originally deployed with the BEF and a list of honours and awards that they later received (one DSO, four MCs and 4 MMs), together with brief citations.

Copies of the book (ISBN: 978-0-9555780-0-7), priced at £10 plus £1.50 post and packing, can be obtained from: Ray Goodacre, 7 Eastgate, Banstead, Surrey SM7 1RN or by telephoning 01737215200.

You could win a copy of this book by having a go at the Gunner Codeword on page 46.

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