

Lieutenant Colonel George Holme

A huge recruitment drive commenced in Blackpool in April 1939 for men to enlist into the army. By June of 1939, 580 men had signed up meaning sufficient numbers to form 137 (Army) Field Regiment, RA (TA) colloquially known as the Blackpool Regiment. In April 1940 the regiment moved to Oulton Park Camp, near Tarporley in Cheshire.

They moved on 25 April, a section by road and the rest by rail from Blackpool North Station. Packing and movement of equipment and kit goes on through April. The main party had to parade, in full kit, in greatcoats, with respirators and steel helmets to embark by rail at Blackpool North at 08.30 on 1 May. They detrained at Winsford Station and marched by road to the tented Oulton Park Camp, about 6 miles. After the routine inspections and parades the Regiment settled into a pattern of troop and battery training, drills and lectures.

On June 5, 1940 the Regiment was advised to be 'Ready to Move' within 24 hours, to Liverpool, without tents and accommodation stores and on arrival without billets. Searches for billets yielded the Old College and a School in Nile Street, Liverpool. The unit is ordered to 'Stand To', with a Mobile Section moved to assist cover of Speke Aerodrome, with orders to 'Fire' if required. Following a Recce of the City plans are made to move the Regiment to Knowsley Park

On 27 September 1941, the whole Regiment travelled in three trains for a 12-hour journey to Liverpool. On 30 September the unit sailed by convoy on the HMT B19, the 27,000-ton ex-luxury liner 'Dominion Monarch'. She had been requisitioned and converted to accommodate 1500 troops. Although armed for troop carrying, she had only two guns, one salvaged from an 1899 Frigate, HMS Venerable and an anti-aircraft gun whose arc of fire had to be limited, in case she shot at her own funnels.

137 Regiment disembarked at Singapore at 18.30 on Nov 28th, 1941 and immediately travelled to Kajang, south east of Kuala Lumpur, reaching there at 06.30 the following day and marched directly to Kajang Camp to join 11 Indian Division. Japan declared war on Great Britain, on 7 December 1941.

137 had been detailed to defend the RAF Airfield at Alor Star. On 9 December, RHQ and the 2 Batteries, (349 & 350) moved by road to Ipoe, North of Kuala Lumpur, a journey of 145 miles, then on to Sungei Patani, a further 110 miles north on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula and almost due west of the Japanese landing site.

Immediately, 350 Battalion was in action when the Japanese launched a full-frontal attack on Jitra. 501 Battalion joined the fight on the night of 10/11 December. 349 & 350 Battalions were in action in the defence of Jitra, in monsoon conditions, with 501 located at RAF Alor Star close by. On 14 December, 137, withdrew to a position west of Pendang via the Jitra Road, now congested with retreating troops and civilians. Within hours, they were ordered to withdraw south beyond the River Muda, leaving 501 Battalion in position at Lalang, who would re-join the Regiment safely the following day, the 16th.

Over the next 5 days, the 137 Battalion withdrawal continued via Bagan Sarai, Sungai Siput and Chemor. A further move south to Tasek on the 23rd incurred casualties, 4 Dead and 6 wounded and the loss of 2 vehicles, when they were dive-bombed by a Japanese Fighter.

The quiet of 24/25th December was shattered on the 26th when the enemy was spotted and for the next 5 hours concentrated fire on the Japanese positions. The action continued on 27th and the

Regiment moved again to Dipang. 501 Battalion moved to Bidor via Kampar, followed by the rest of 137. Action continued throughout the new year.

The Brigade Commander, Brig Stewart deployed 137 Battalion just north of the Slim River, 350 Battery were detailed to provide a 3rd Line of defence and 'Harassing Fire', a few miles north at Trolak. 349 & 501 Batteries were resting in the middle of the Cluny Rubber plantation, a few miles south, they had been in action for a month, non-stop. Regimental headquarters were located a few miles further south.

The relative peace was shattered by an artillery barrage approximately from the position of the Batteries. First the 2IC, Major Owtram, leapt onto a motorbike to see what was going on. He stopped in time before encountering eighteen Japanese tanks on the road, returning to HQ. The Commanding Officer, Lt Col George Holme, immediately wanted to know the situation and insisted he look for himself. He grabbed the motorbike and set off in the direction of the barrage. He ran into the patrolling tanks and was shot dead. Major Owtram describes him as 'A very brave and able soldier'.

George was killed on 7 January 1942 aged thirty-four. He was married to Phyllis and they had twins Wendy and David, who were only six years old at the time of his death.

