

The Bands of The Royal Lincolnshire Regiment. **by Major Ron Berry MBE ARCM**

This is a factual account of the last thirty years service of bands in one of the old county regiments of the British Army. Little different I am sure to the experiences and service of many other infantry bands of the time. The Lincolns however were proud of their bands and realised the importance of the music provided by them in peace and war.

In 1930 the two regular battalions of the Regiment met for the first time in their long history at Gibraltar. The 1st Battalion, Bandmaster, Mr C S Trowt, en route to Shanghai and the 2nd Battalion, Bandmaster, Mr A Stringer, after service in India and Khartoum, was returning to the home establishment.

After completion of their service in Shanghai the 1st Battalion moved to India, where members of the band saw service on the North West Frontier as stretcher-bearers and were awarded the Indian General Service Medal 1936-39 with the appropriate clasps. In 1935 Bandmaster, Mr R W Griffett had succeeded Mr Trowt and when World War Two broke out the Battalion was stationed in Nasirabad. Further tours of duty on the North-West Frontier followed until in 1942 the Battalion moved East and into Burma in 1943. The regimental band had been losing men to other duties from the outbreak of war however it was at this time that the remains of the once fine band were finally disbanded. Mr Griffett and the Drum Major, Peter Tancred were promoted Quartermasters, with the remaining members of the band finding other employment with the rapidly expanding armies in India.

The 2nd Battalion on their return in 1930, was initially stationed at Dover where in 1934 Mr Stringer handed over the baton to Mr R Williams. The band was busy at the annual Leeds, Aldershot and Tidworth tattoos and very popular in the many resorts that employed military bands, in those days from April through to October, In 1935 the band accompanied the battalion on an emergency move to Malta, where they stayed for nine months before moving to Palestine in July 1936 because of Arab unrest. For their service in Palestine members of the band were awarded the General Service Medal with the clasp 'Palestine'.

The band continued with their busy round of duties after their return to the United Kingdom in December 1936 until the outbreak of WW2. The 2nd Battalion, being part of the 3rd Division commanded by Major General, (later Field Marshal), B L Montgomery moved with the British Expeditionary Force to France.

All the trained stretcher-bearers from the band accompanied the battalion and Mr Williams, together with half a dozen young bandsmen and the boys moved to the Regimental Depot at Lincoln.

The Lincolnshire Regimental Band, Lincoln early 1941

The Depot eventually found itself to be the home of the 7th Infantry Training Centre where thousands of civilians were trained to become soldiers in 26 weeks. Mr Williams found the ITC to be an excellent and fertile recruiting ground and in a very short time had found sufficient musicians to reorganise the band. A few of the original band returned to take up their musical duties, and a further number who had been captured as stretcher-bearers in France in 1940 and had been prisoners-of-war, were repatriated in 1943. As the war progressed Mr Williams was able to form an excellent string orchestra, a number of dance bands, as well as a large marching band. Not content with this a number of professional theatrical people, a producer, ballet mistress and dancers joined the army of band members. Full stage shows were produced as well as pantomimes with performances throughout the East Midlands and South Yorkshire at the many factories engaged upon war work. In early 1945 the band joined the BLA, (British Liberation Army), in Northern Europe for a six week tour that was to last for three months. The band in the final stages of the war was attached to the 4th Battalion, The Lincolnshire Regiment in the 49th Division, and headed their triumphal march into the newly liberated city of Utrecht. The band later joined the 2nd Battalion, The Lincolnshire Regiment, entertaining units throughout the 3rd Division. For this service the band were awarded the France and Germany Star.

Mr W T Brown, who had been appointed Bandmaster of the 1st Battalion in 1943, returned from the Canadian Army where he had been conducting one of their bands since leaving Churchill House, Aldershot. The 2nd Battalion Band under Mr Williams undertook a two-month tour of Berlin in March and April of 1946, being present at Gatow Airfield for the departure of Field Marshal Montgomery from his post of Commander-in-Chief of the British occupation forces.

The Royal Lincolnshire Regimental Band, Singapore 1946

With many men being released from wartime service a recruiting drive was now under way to recruit up to 36 boys who would, with the two Bandmasters, the few regulars remaining, and bandsmen returning from many odd corners of the world, form the nucleus of two new bands. In May 1946 Mr Brown took over the 2nd Battalion band from Mr Williams and took the band on a twelve-month tour of the Far East serving in Malaya, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies. During this time they were stationed in Sumatra with the 1st Battalion and moved with them to Taiping, Malaya. For their service in the Far East the band were awarded the General Service medal with the bar 'South East Asia'.

In 1947 it was announced that the 1st Battalion would go into suspended animation and that the band would in future assume the title of the Regimental Band of the Royal Lincolnshire Regiment.

Whilst Mr Brown and the band were in the Far East the training of the boys continued under three band NCOs and although the original 36 boys had reduced in number, recruiting of musicians continued from those passing through the Depot.

Two months earlier than expected the band returned from the Far East and was immediately warned that in September the band would proceed to join the 2nd Battalion, who were then stationed in Palestine. Only seven members of the band that had toured the Far East were eligible for posting and even though the boys and young bandsmen, who had remained in England were making progress, it was felt by Kneller Hall that a further years training was required before embarkation.

A year to the day, 21 September 1948, the band moved to El-Bailah in the Canal Zone, Egypt to join the 2nd Battalion. Some few weeks later the battalion was redesignated the 1st Battalion and within a short space of time moved to Aqaba in Trans-Jordan. From Aqaba the band travelled by road and rail for a series of engagements in Amman culminating in a grand concert in the theatre at RAF Amman. In Aqaba the band played aboard the various Royal Naval destroyers and frigates that entered the port, as well as playing for the various units in the garrison. In late June 1949 the band moved with the battalion to the relative luxury of the long established pre-war cantonment at Moascar, Egypt. The band found that they were very busy indeed not only with the amount of ceremonial performed, but also with the vast amount of engagements throughout the Canal Zone. The dance band was extremely popular playing in all the best hotels and clubs in Port Said and also at the British Embassy in Cairo as well as the famous Cairo Turf Club. After two very busy years in Moascar the band moved once more with the Battalion to Trans-Jordan prior to returning home to the United Kingdom in September 1951.

The Royal Lincolnshire Regimental Band, Berlin 1954

After some three months leave the band based themselves at the depot in Lincoln and proceeded to play at concerts throughout the county as well as in other parts of the country. In October 1952 the band embarked for BAOR to the picturesque town of Goslar in the Harz Mountains where the 1st Battalion had moved in July of that year, During this time the band played throughout BAOR and was broadcasting frequently on the British Forces Radio Network. In 1954 the unit moved to Berlin occupying Brooke Barracks in Spandau with the band performing in a very busy year until April 1955, that included numerous ceremonial events and broadcasting on the American Forces Radio Network. The battalion had been warned for service in Kenya, however at the last moment this was changed to a three-year active service tour of Malaya. Mr W T Brown, who had been with the Regiment for 18 years, had been selected as Bandmaster of the Lancastrian Brigade and therefore handed over the band to Mr D A Bayton. Dennis Bayton later became Professor of Trombone at Kneller Hall.

On 19 July 1955 the band with the battalion embarked upon the troopship 'Empire Clyde' for the voyage to Singapore. After jungle training the battalion moved to Bentong in Pahang State where the band entertained the widely hung companies of the battalion as well as other nearby units. Journeys as duty band to Singapore led to engagements throughout the island and to numerous broadcasts over 'Radio Malaya' both by the military band and the large dance band. The band continued to entertain throughout the many moves the battalion made during its time in Malaya. As their Far East tour neared its close the battalion provided a guard of honour and band for the unveiling of the Rangoon War Memorial.

The band left Malaya for the United Kingdom on 8 May 1958 en route to Minden in West Germany. It was here in Minden that the battalion exchanged their famous Sphinx cap-badge for the 'new' East Anglian Brigade cap-badge and also learned that they were to amalgamate with the Northamptonshire Regiment in 1960. So ended two hundred and seventy five years of service by a fine county regiment, with also the demise of its excellent military band.