

## NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF 520 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 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 520 Field Survey Company R.E. the index in Brigadier Clough’s “Maps and Survey” gives : -

| <b>Theatre</b> | <b>Pages</b>                                |
|----------------|---|
| Home Forces    | 37, 39, 41, 42, 355. See extracts below : - |

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)<br>No. 516 (with 5 Corps)            |
| Eastern Command                      | No. 14 (ex B.E.F.)<br>No. 1 Canadian (with Canadian Corps) |
| Northern Command                     | No. 13 (ex B.E.F.)<br>No. 521 (just formed)                |
| Western Command                      | No. 517<br><b>No. 520 (just formed)</b>                    |
| Southern Command<br>(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)

With the formation of Supreme Headquarters Allief Expeditionary Force (S.H.A.E.F.) in January, 1944, the survey organization in preparation for "Overlord" was as under :-

.....

Remaining with Home Forces :-

Small Survey Directorate at G.H.Q.

One small Survey Directorate at each of the home commands.

Nos. 520 and 523 Field Survey Companies R.E.

Nos. 6 and 8 General Survey Sections R.E.

Nos. 6, 21, 23 and 25 Field Survey Depots R.E.

(Clough 41)

The somewhat unexpectedly heavy demand for 1/25,000 maps during the operations in Normandy and beyond led to an increased requirement in mobile printing equipment for Second Army. It was found necessary, therefore, to despatch overseas the greater part of the reproduction tradesmen of 520 and 523 Field Survey Companies and their printing lorries and by November, 1944, 520 Field Survey Company and 8 General Survey Section had been disbanded.

(Clough 42)

As a result of a somewhat unexpected and abnormal demand for 1/25,000 maps by all arms, especially in the close "bocage" district of Normandy, further mobile printing resources were demanded by Second Army, and agreed to by War Office. This entailed the addition to each field survey company of two printing lorries and one extra graining machine, together with the necessary technical and supervisory personnel. These were obtained mainly from Nos. 520 and 523 Field Survey Companies which were still in the United Kingdom.

(Clough 355)

### 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 landscape 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. The files are not bulky and could be copied at Kew by anyone interested in compiling a more detailed account.

#### War Diary 520 Company RE Jan to Dec 1941.

The Coy formed up in Plas Teg ? Caergwrle ? (illegible) in North Wales under Major C. Belfield R.E.

Capt Wilson and 2 Lt Wade being the initial officer strength.

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| 01-12-40 | Company formed.   |
| 15-01-41 | Collected photo-mechanical vehicle  |
| 20-01-41 | Collected first print vehicle.  |
| ??-02-41 | Surveying AA sites in Birmingham  |
| 15-02-41 | Collected second print vehicle.   |
| ??-03-41 | March war diary has <b>technical diary for Repro Sect attached</b> , not noted. |
| ??-07-41 | Liaison with 3 Svy Bn (R.A.?) mentioned.  |
| ??-08-41 | Capt Blanchflower acts as OC while Belfield sick.                               |
| ??-09-41 | 8 <sup>th</sup> Svy Regt R.A. take over survey of AA sites.                     |
| ??-10-41 | Lt Col Bellamy, OC 8 <sup>th</sup> Svy Regt visited.                            |
| Nov 41   | No notes made.  |
| Dec 41   | No notes made.  |

Some of the months have technical diaries attached.

WO 166/3785 War Diary Dec 1940 – Dec 1941.

Seen 23-9-2001

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

The war diaries are mostly typescript and clear. There are no "strength returns" Jan. O.C. Major Belfield. Officers include Capt Blanchflower, 2 Lts Hesketh, Dicks, etc. Coy at Caergwrle, N. Wales but shown at Mold from 29 June. Diary commences with Dec 41 Progress Report. Also included are Technical summaries including French 1:25,000 printing and one or two exercise reports.

PRO WO 166/8213

Seen 21-3-09

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

Very basic War Diaries are in pencil manuscript. No strength returns. The Coy moves from Mold to Dalmeny by 14 Jan 43 and remains there all year. No technical report annexes.

PRO WO 166/12154

Seen 21-3-09

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

Very basic 2-3 page monthly War Diaries are in pencil manuscript. No strength returns till Sep W.D. The Coy initially remains at Dalmeny. Maj Morris shown as O.C. in March. By Aug Maj Crouch. March W.D. **includes 4 photos of visit of King Haakon of Norway on 8 Oct 43.**

1 Jun 44 Coy reorganised as a Fd Svy Coy to include a Photo Section.

by 14 Jan 43 and remains there all year. No technical report annexes.

In Oct numerous maps of Norway being printed. Vehicle War Establt completed on 10 Oct 44.

In Oct, Officers were Maj D.C. Crouch, Capt B.E. Ridges, Lts H.G. Broderick, J.H. Dunster, F.J. Fowler, N.G. Henry.

3 Nov Orders for disbandment by 28 Nov 1944, and this was effected.

PRO WO 166/15312

Seen 21-3-09

**4. NOTES FROM SOUVENIR BROCHURES.**

None are known for 520 Field Survey Company R.E.

**5. NOTES FROM PERSONAL ACCOUNTS.**

None are known for 520 Field Survey Company R.E.