

Following on from the article covering RM Transport by a former member of the RM Provost, Chris Davies, in the last issue (pages 22 - 29) here are two personal accounts of that section of the Corps by two veterans of WW2.

ROYAL MARINES PROVOST by Pat Goulding and Derrick Gibson-Ford

Coming from the RM commandeered 'Sunshine Holiday Camp' on Hayling Island Pat Goulding commenced his Provost service at RMTG (Devon) Headquarters, The Grange, Lymptone in August 1943, officially designated as RMTG Dalditch. When at the end of that year RMTG, RM Division, and MNBDO Provost Companies merged, HQ was set up in Exmouth at the Imperial Hotel, and another hotel as well as Lady Byron's House up on the Beacon, provided accommodation.

"The Provost Marshall during my stay at the Grange was a Major Corps RM, and the next senior member was Sergeant Jacks (a Scot), then two

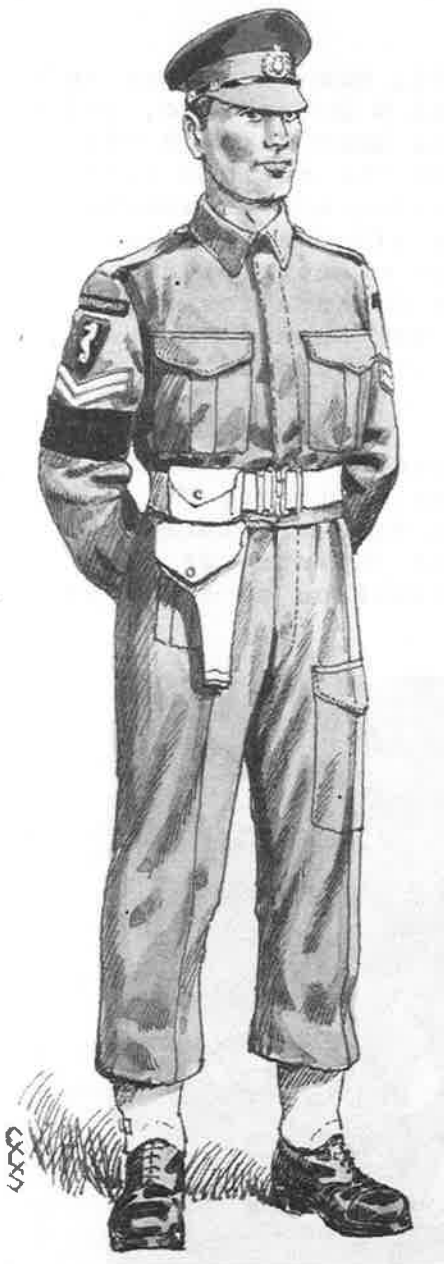
corporals (Brett and Bradley), and the remainder of us were L/corporals. Our motor-cycles were BSA 500cc side-valve models plus one or two Royal Enfields of similar capacity; a 15 cwt truck was used on our patrols which mainly took place at night in Exmouth and Budleigh Salterton (occasionally Exeter and Sidmouth) whilst daytime duties consisted of motor-cycle patrols or security duties in the Grange entrance hall. We were quartered in nissen huts in the grounds where there was an orchard. I don't suppose more than a hundred personnel were employed here, made up of officers, clerks, storemen, drivers, sentries (medically downgraded men) and about 30 Provost.

I left the Grange early in 1944 to join a section in Merioneth, a few miles north of Towyn in Wales, where we were quartered in a requisitioned farm house on the side of a mountain overlooking a huge Royal Artillery training camp at Tonfanau. A sub section (relieved at intervals) was set up further north at Barmouth, and the SNCO of the unit was CSM Mogford who had been a recalled time-served Royal Marine and former Metropolitan Policeman.

Strange to relate I received no formal police training, with the exception of a motor-cycle riding course provided by the M/T section of Dalditch camp, where we attended daily for about three hours; although I vaguely recall that some of my colleagues did receive some form of training elsewhere.

We were army orientated, issued with Corps of Military Police patrol mackintoshes, and a heavy motor-cycle mackintosh plus army greatcoat; then when I served with the Portsmouth Provost section I was issued with No 2 Blue

uniform. Later, when serving with the London section, those of us who had army issue greatcoats were taken by train to Chatham and exchanged these for RM greatcoats!"



Derrick Gibson-Ford (POX3946) started his service at Eastney as a boy bugler aged 15 years on 15 May 1939, going on active duty onboard HMS IRON DUKE the following February as Captain's Bugler, returning to Eastney in November 1941 as a recruit, having turned over to the General Duties ranks, because of the number of buglers. In Squad HO 138, of which he was the only 'regular' (CS), he was awarded the Naval Gunnery Medal and completed QR3 Course on passing out. Drafted to HMS BELFAST November 1942 until October 1944, he saw action with Russian Convoys, SCHARNHORST conflict, and 'D' Day operation covering Juno Beach as Flagship of the 10th Cruiser Squadron.

"Whilst on the Russian convoys, the Royal Marines and Sailors whose action stations or duties were on the upper deck (in below zero temperatures) were issued with fur coats. These were worn skin outwards and fur inwards and were quite expensive, so 'Jack Dusty' used to watch like a hawk that none 'walked' off the ship. I remember mine had long black fur."

When the ship went into dockyard hands in Newcastle that October for repairs and alterations for the Far East he returned again to Eastney, going thence onto the Pre-Commando School, Helmsley Camp (Helmsley House site on the northern outskirts of Havant) and whilst there he saw a call for volunteers in Divisional Orders for the Royal Marine Beach Provost; he applied and was accepted. (minimum height was 5' 10") Living in a hutment camp in the grounds of Helmsley House (which was offices and the Officers Mess) he recalls the assault course just over the railway bridge on the road into Havant in fields and a small wood to the right (the country road and old bridge have since been enlarged and housing estates appeared). "It started with a water jump, a single rope bridge (one for feet and one for hands) plus various other delights that ended with the 'death slide'....climbing up a tall tree and coming down a rope using a toggle held at each end with our hands."

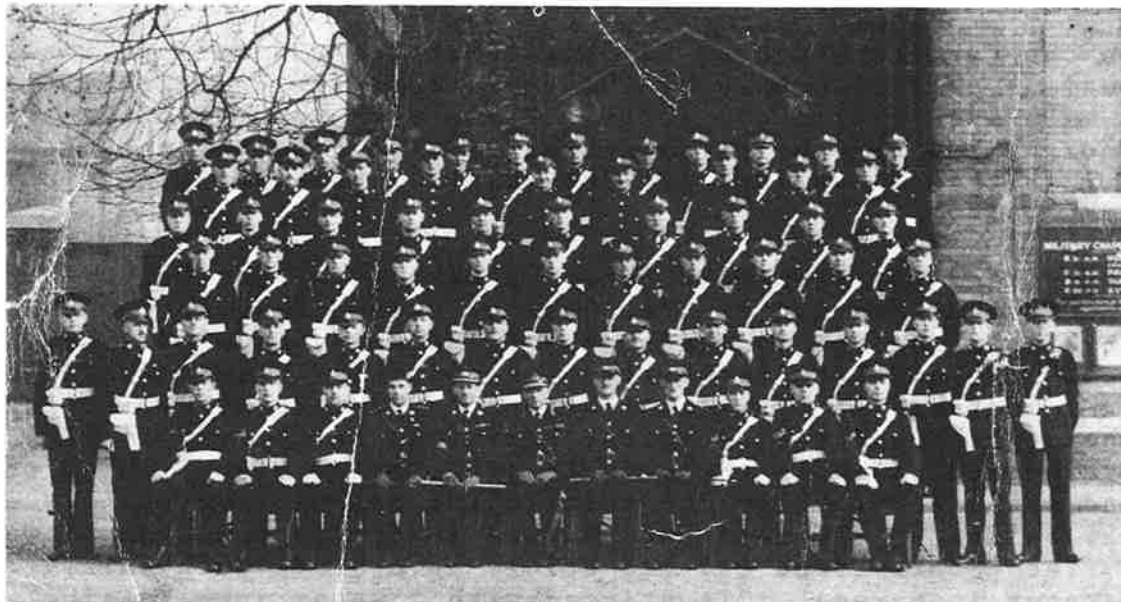
"Field training was done in two places, using live ammunition. At Stoughton on the Downs (north of Emsworth) in such manoeuvres as advancing on your feet (no taking cover), one assault group through the other, with the group in front giving covering fire as the rear group came through....all done at a fast pace intended for use in raids or rapid advances.

The second place was in the chalk pit above Cosham where a mock landing craft (made out of steel sheets) at the cliff top launched you down into the pit bottom where Bren guns were set up on fixed lines using live ammunition, and you crawled under the fixed lines, fired from the Bren guns to the centre of the chalk pit bottom where stood a large wooden hut with doors at each end. In one door and out of the other with just 7 seconds before thunder-flashes went off in the hut. From then on targets kept popping up as one advanced to the far end of the pit (each had to be fired at) then came the climb up the side of the pit to the top. This was done as a fighting unit not individually, and it was meant to be reliastic. After a short rest you made a fighting return (retreat) back to the landing craft.

Of course accidents happened, but in wartime accidents were expected and allowed for, but we were trained soldiers, not recruits, so accidents were few. Not for us the luxury of a 3 ton lorry transport to Stoughton, or the pits, we did it Commando style...half mile run and half mile walk! Our rig was fighting order, with the bayonet scabbard over the left shoulder, not on the belt."

It was in November 1944 that he transferred to the Royal Marines Beach Provost; this was a special service unit of volunteers living in houses

or hotels, drawing kit and pay from the nearest source (Home Base Ledger) by producing pay-books. They were formed for active service with the commandos and other landings, but later sections were set up at Portsmouth, Chatham and London, with Plymouth being served from the Exmouth base where all training was carried out. The London section were the only ones living in army barracks (Chelsea) with other allied military police, and messed with the Guards Regiment. They, and those in naval towns were the only ones who wore blue uniforms for foot patrols.



"RM Provost at Chelsea Barracks - 1943"

Details of Dress and equipment:-

PORTSMOUTH - Mobile work/patrols - khaki battle dress blouse, khaki riding breeches, despatch rider riding boots with woollen stockings (khaki or white) pulled over the top and folded neatly. MP armband on the right arm, white webbing belt, holster, supporting sling and Smith and Wesson .38 revolver (personal weapon). Steel crash-helmet with MP on the front and rank markings (cheverons) painted above.

In wet weather the revolver would be worn under the khaki army motorcycle (belted) mackintosh, and in dry cold weather the holster belt and strap was worn over the leather jerkin issued at Exmouth. Peculiar to Portsmouth was an alternate non-standard sheepskin jerkin (a gift from the people of South Africa). This being sleeveless, the battledress blouse showed rank markings and MP Band when the jerkin was worn. The section frequently provided outriders for the C-in-C, one at each corner of the car.

Dress for foot patrols was No 2 Blues, blue Dockyard Police peaked cap with red cloth cover, MP arm band (red on blue); dockyard police leather belt, holster and strap (for .45 revolver) with our own .38 Smith and Wesson; sea service boots, and a greatcoat when cold. Coats were avoided if possible because they got in the way should some trouble have to be sorted out, and revolvers were seldom resorted to as the issue 12 inch torch proved a suitable baton! (Being smaller than the .45 revolver, the .38 Smith and Wesson gun was a loose fit in the holster)

LONDON SECTION - Dress for foot patrols was the same as Portsmouth, except that they used their white webbing belt, holster and strap.

EXMOUTH HQ - Here the khaki battledress was worn with the red cap cover

over the khaki peaked cap, white webbing gear and shore service boots, and obligatory MP arm band. Top coats were the Greatcoat and Army (unbelted) khaki Military Police mackintosh. This 'khaki turn-out' was of course standard issue, and we had it at all times; the 'Blues' being additional for the capital and naval towns.

"I arrived at Exmouth in November 1944 at the Imperial Hotel and was interviewed by Major Little (Provost Marshal) and put on a course; it was a case of passing this and becoming a Lance Corporal RM Provost or fail and be posted to Dalditch for the RM Battalion which was forming for service in France. The course at Exmouth incorporated military and civil law, traffic control



unarmed combat, foot patrols, and brothel controls. (This caused great amusement, and we said that we now had a job we could do after our release!) On completion we moved to Poole learning to load and unload tanks etc from landing craft, find and mark vehicle parks and then get tanks and guns into them. (This did not happen previously on 'D' Day; as tanks went straight into action). We were taught to ride motor-cycles, not only on roads but rough riding

under fire at high speed, in all conditions. Then back to Exmouth for the examination on completion of which (pass or fail) one was immediately posted. I went to Portsmouth until that unit (housed at 7 Brading Avenue, Southsea, near Eastney Barracks) closed down, and so moved up to the London detachment where after only about a year in the Provost I requested (for personal reasons) to return to General Duties and at the end of 1945 took a posting to HMS ST VINCENT at Gosport."



Although the UK units were now disbanding, the Royal Marine Provost however went on to form No 35 Company Provost under Major Little for service in the far east, where they had the honour to accept the surrender of a large Japanese naval ship, and the relief of Singapore Changi Jail.

A normal Provost unit comprised of a Captain RM (Provost Marshal), 1 Sergeant, 2 Corporals, 12 L/Corporals (6 pairs), and 1 L/Cpl truck driver. Of course London and No 35 were much larger.

RMP Patrol - Singapore 1945
(photo by William Boliver)

FOOTNOTE:- RM Provost Sections were attached to all main units during WW2, and were much in evidence at the Dieppe and Normandy landings, working in conjunction with their army counterparts, controlling traffic, and patrolling against looting and other disorders, right through to the occupation of Germany.

The last of these RM Police were disbanded in June 1946; but then in the Autumn of 1962 the branch was resurrected at Eastney when C/Sgt J McDermott, from JSAC, took charge of 15 other Royal Marines for a seven weeks



course at the Royal Military Police Depot at Inkerman Barracks, Woking, and the first successful candidates were posted out to Singapore as RM Police Troop of 3 Commando Brigade, and RMP units have been in existence ever since.

EDITOR

Reproduction of painting by Ernest Ibbetson (p. Gale & Polden Ltd) depicting the 'Corps of Military Police on Active Service - 1945'.