

**War Diary**  
**57th (East Surrey) Anti-Tank Regiment, Royal Artillery (T.A.)**

<b>May 1940</b>	
<b><i>Outtersteene</i></b>	
1 May	1530. Lt Gen Sir R. Adam [GOC III Corps] visited billets with Brig Duncan and Brig E.P.H Pease Watkin [44 Div C.R.A.]
3 May	0330. Air Raid Warning 1015. Lt Col Travers to RV with G.O.C.
4 May	1012. Capt Foulger visited 227 Bty at Monchcayeux
6 May	0900. Lt Col Travers left for RV with Col Godfrey-Faussett [44 Div C.R.E.]
7 May	0915. Lt Col Travers and Capt Foulger left for Croix
8 May	Night March 131 Bde
9 May	1700. Lt Col Travers and Capt Foulger conference Plan D Div H.Q.
10 May	0404. Air Raid Warning RED 0810. By telephone from Div Arty - All troops at 6 hours notice to Move 1015. 44 Div O.O. No 7, Copy No 7 received embodying code word DAVID (App A) Warning Order (App E) 226 Bty u/c 132 Inf Bde 228 Bty u/c C.R.E. (RE 44 Div O.O. D1) Carrier Pl 5/Queens u/c 57 ATk Regt, Comdr 2/Lt Turner Carrier Pl 6/Queens u/c 57 ATk Regt, Comdr 2/Lt Cox [The Regiment was to provide air cover with its Bren Guns for the marching infantry. The Division was to move on a north-easterly axis, with 131 Inf Bde - with R.H.Q., 225 and 227 Btys - on the roads astride the River Lys, and 132 Inf Bde on two routes about three miles to the north. 228 Battery was detached in a special role as part of a mobile force u/c of the C.R.E. to get to the River Escaut ahead of the Division and guard all the bridges while the engineers prepared them for demolition] 1200. C.O's Conference. Major Chapman, Capt Foulger, Capt Robinson, Lt Elwes RAOC, 2 Lt Donald SO, Lt QM Peace, Lt Whitelaw RAMC, 2/Lt Rathbone, RSM Moore, 2/Lt Turner (Queen's), 2/Lt Cox (Queen's) Verbal Orders ref 44 Div O.O. No 7 given out at conference 1300. B.E.F. Zero Hour 1430. R.H.Q., 225 Bty less B Ech left Outtersteene (B Ech u/c of 57 Field Regt MT Gp 1) 1725. R.H.Q. established Warneton 6250 1750. RA 44 Div O.O. No 1 received
11 May	0550. R.H.Q. established X Rds 709550 Gheluwe 1200. C.O's Conference, Major Chapman, Capt Abbott, Capt Foulger, Capt Robinson, Lt QM Peace, Lt Whitelaw RAMC, Lt Elwes RAOC, 2 Lt Donald SO, 2/Lt Rathbone, RSM Moore, 2/Lt Turner, 2 Lt Cox. Verbal Orders 2100. Enemy Air Activity
12 May	0155. R.H.Q. established Cafe Bacchus, Sweveghem 905552 1025. Suspicious character detained by No 6284990 L/Sgt Munday 2 Buffs and reported to Capt Foulger. This was reported to Lt Col Travers on his return who interviewed the man and handed him over to O/C 2 Buffs

<b>Caster</b>	1405. HQ less Lt Col Travers and 2 Lt Rathbone left Sweveghem 1600. R.H.Q. established Caster 013543, 225 & 227 Caster, 226 Anseghem 0056, 228 Langestraat 0256 [all in Audenaarde area]
13 May	1850. 44 Div Arty A.O. No 2 (App D) received 1955. 44 Div Arty O.O. No 3 Copies 13-14 received [Airborne Attack and Landings]
14 May	2330. Message from RA 44 Div to stand to for Airborne attack Conference of Bty Cmdrs and Flying Troop (Capt Hellaby)
15 May	1100. 44 Div Arty O.O. No 4 (App F) received 1402. Amendment to above O.O. No 4 received Capt T.H. Robinson appointed Adjutant w.e.f. this date. Capt R.E.A. Foulger now cmdg 225 Bty. 1630. Div ordered 57th A/Tk Regt to Recce a Div area to Right and Left of our own Div Area as 2 Divisions coming to support ground behind R.Escaut. Capt Abbott O/C 227 Bty given Right task and Maj Christopher given left area for general survey of Anti-Tank defence. Large refugee traffic taken under Military Control and guarded against Air attack on roads.
16 May	0408. Bde Major arrived R.H.Q. with Emergency Instructions (Verbal) for immediate guarding of Bridges over R. Escaut. 225 Bty despatched to this task. 0545. 225 BHQ established at 951476 Bossuyt. 0700. 228 Bty relieved 225 Bty. 0800. Maj Chapman 2i/c reported to 44 Div for Conference Received RA 44 Div Admin O. No 3 (Refugees)
17 May	Recce of definite Battle positions to defend N of Escaut in 44 Div Area. Batteries moved to their positions. Much enemy Air activity mostly Recce planes. 2030. R.H.Q. established Farm 996572 [near Anseghem]
18 May	0900. Co-ordination Recce by C.R.A. with C.O., Adj and Field Arty. Anti-Tank plan formulated. 1240. Batteries linked up with plan and scheme by Adjutant. C.O. visited Btys. P.A.D. Schemes and slit trenches prepared. Tracings attached of G.Ps. Enemy Air activity increases.
19 May	Work continued on Anti-Tank Scheme. 4th Division moved into position on our Right relieving our 'Flying Troop' (Anti-parachutist squad) and 228 Bty. 228 Bty Recced positions of Reserve Bty and moved back N.W. 1105. Bridges and Town of Audenaarde attacked strongly from the Air. Considerable damage and casualties amongst our forces. Two 15 cwt Amn Trucks shelled and all lost with Amn. German plane (Bomber) brought down in 228 Wagon line area. Many British infantry and civilian casualties. Royal Artillery plan of Harassing and Counter-defence fire put into operation causing a lull in Enemy advances. Large Enemy attack now expected. Div preparations made. Heavy Arty shelling and Air bombing from the Enemy. Amongst known casualties are: Wounded Gnr Witkiss 876344 (228 Bty)
20 May	Enemy has crossed R. Escaut in places. Our Infantry fell back leaving 2 Pdr Guns exposed to Enemy over-running. Several cut off and believed lost. Hun has penetrated Petegem village but beaten back by mixed

	<p>troops and Bren Carriers. A terrific Arty duel. More heavy bombing by German planes (No RAF or Allied Air response). Enemy gunfire from South of R. Escaut suggest that Bosche is bringing fwd his Arty. Several reports of Enemy advances. Many of our men fighting in trenches (temporary) with Infantry Staff (226 Area) (131 Bde). Among known casualties are: Killed Sgt Reaney (227), Wounded Gunner Cerasoli 1514624 (228)</p>
21 May	<p>Much Enemy Air action continues and still no perceptible response by Allied Air forces. Our A/A fire is steadfast but futile in its small numbers. General position getting 'very hot'. Casualties in 225 Bty through shelling. Capt Foulger &amp; Lt Hutton had narrow escapes when roof of farm (billet) fell in. Numbers of troops 'missing' (overrun). Wounded by shrapnel: Gnr Mead 1451790, L/Bdr Harris 4613779. Bty Cmdrs Conference. Special O.O. issued by 57 A/Tk Regt [the Regiment will fight to the 'LAST man and the LAST round']</p>
22 May	<p>Terrific Barrages from Enemy Guns of all calibres. Heavy bombing from Enemy planes as well as machine gunning. Situation seems very serious.</p> <p>227 Bty withdraws to North of Railway and 226 Bty to Reserve. British Infantry restive (through Fifth Column?) and their fire is jumpy and spasmodic.</p> <p>Enemy Observation Balloon seen South of Escaut directing (obviously) Arty fire.</p> <p>Considerable losses are reported - numbers as yet unknown.</p> <p>One Section of K Troop (228) reported overrun by Enemy Infantry. Capt Hellaby, 2/Lt Douglas and Sgt Bartlett are missing through this encounter. Last seen fighting with rifles and Brens at oncoming foe. 2100. Heavy shelling continues here. Our neighbouring town, Anseghem is now ablaze and bombs are (2300) falling round our present area in depth.</p> <p>2310. All Btys ordered to withdraw. Operation carried out with great difficulty, but in fairly good order. Completed before midnight.</p> <p>German Light Signals seen over ridge in front of our area and L.M.G. fire increasing.</p> <p>100 various Infantry under a Major of E. Surrey Regt concentrated round our R.H.Q.</p>
23 May	<p>0010 C.Os War H.Q. established near Oudenmolen (Map Ref 755586) North of Menin and Courtrai.</p> <p>From Harlebeke to Courtrai the River [Lys] is covered at Bridgeheads by 226 Bty.</p> <p>From Courtrai to Menin by a composite Bty of 225 and 227 Guns</p> <p>0900. 228 Bty is now on wheels in reserve adjacent to Oudenmolen.</p> <p>Losses through Battle of Escaut. 2 Officers Missing, 2 O/Rs Killed, 7 O/Rs Wounded and 13 O/Rs Missing.</p> <p>2/Lt M.A. Edwards awarded the Military Cross. Several O/Rs Mentioned.</p> <p>Considerable loss of guns and equipment. Regt now totals only 28 2 Pdr Guns.</p> <p>1100. Verbal Op Orders received to proceed to Sailly-sur-Lys presumably for re-forming.</p> <p>Major Chapman 2i/c sent fwd with Recce party for billets etc.</p> <p>Much low flying German aircraft and machine gunning. Menin bombed</p>

	<p>again.  1500. Reinforcements reported on way to join us. Officer and transport sent.  2000. Urgent message from Major Chapman (Message attached) We are to join Polforce immediately. Enemy is pushing to Hazebrouck from the West in attempt to widen his salient. We are to proceed with all Speed!  2010. 50 Reinforcements arrive and are allocated to Btys as they pass en Route.  227 and 228 are to support (u/c) 137 Inf Bde at Morbeque 3145 (16 Guns).  225 to 25 Inf Bde at Don 5927 (11 Guns).  226 to Sailly-sur-Lys as reserve with u/c 5th Inniskillings.  RHQ to Sailly.  2115. Column leaves Oudenmolen by Btys via Armentières.</p>
24 May	<p>0400. R.H.Q. arrived Sailly. Much congestion of Guns and French &amp; British transport. Established near H.Q. of Polforce.  Very heavy shelling and Air action by Enemy. Machine gunning and bombing. Plane groups of Germans usually number 40 to 50. Power diving etc. using a heavy type machine gun.  Many casualties including:  Killed 2/Lt Smith-Stafford.  Wounded 2/Lt M.A. Edwards [later died of wounds]  Killed 3 O/Rs.  Wounded 16 O/Rs.  Missing 27 O/Rs.  Considerable damage to Guns and equipment. Bdr Bosman's Gun stopped 3 tanks.  Very heavy pressure in area S.W. of Forest of Nieppe.</p>
25 May	<p>1500. Regt returns to Comd of 44 Div and moved R.H.Q. opening and closing at 1500 hrs. New H.Q. at Les Trois Fermes near L'Ecole de Steentje.  Locations now: 225 &amp; 226 Btys HQ at Outtersteene with 2 Guns of 226 Bty u/c 2nd Div at Merville district under Lt Wealleans.  227 &amp; 228 now form a composite Bty of 11 Guns in Forêt de Nieppe with H.Q. at La Motte .  Very great amount of Air activity by Enemy with dive-bombing.  1900. Reconnaissance. Enemy planes are now at work much later in the evening.  2200. 225 Bty ordered to send 6 Guns to [132] Inf Bde and 5 in reserve at ?</p>
26 May	<p>0600. 226 Bty on ground at Caestre area, rptg to 4th Royal Sussex Ref 385522.  1400. Div Cmdr called with information that German tanks had broken through North of Caestre area and were travelling towards Eecke (Corps H.Q.). Gen Osborne stated that there were some 2 Pdr Guns without Command on the main road in that direction. Maj Chapman (2i/c) was sent to site these Guns which proved to be 2 in number.  A report from O/C 225 Bty that 2/Lt R.G. Orr had shot &amp; stopped an Enemy tank with an A/T rifle borrowed for the purpose from the 1/R.W.Ks at Bois des Huit Rues 2947.  Instruction from Div to send 4 W.Os or Sgts to Dunkerque with qualifications for training purposes in England. These despatched to</p>

	Div 2000 hours.
<b><i>Les Trois Fermes</i></b> 27 May	<p>Heavy bombardment still by Enemy by Air &amp; Arty. All R.H.Q. force standing to with available arms. Ration points now cancelled by Div until further notice. More losses and casualties in all Btys. Lt Wealleans seems definitely cut off at Merville. Low flying attacks vicinity of Les Trois Fermes.</p> <p>C.O. called to late afternoon Conference.</p> <p>1700. Documents and maps packed up as departure must now be imminent. R.Es prepare small local bridges for demolition and R.H.Q. Transport moved South behind bridge over stream.</p> <p>2330. C.O. still at Conference at Division.</p>
28 May	<p>0130 (approx). C.O. returns from Conference with message to send to all Btys: 'JETTISON ALL EQUIPMENT AND STORES. ALL RANKS CARRY LIGHT EQUIP. AND ALL ARMS AND AMMUNITION. R.A. OF DIV ARE TO COVER FLANK OF WITHDRAWAL. BEF ARE WITHDRAWING TO THE COAST'. (This is text of message. Original destroyed)</p> <p>This order was carried out though received regretfully by every man.</p> <p>0215. Capt T.H. Robinson rptd to Div for information as to time of withdrawal of R.H.Q. as all Batteries now u/c of Inf Bdes. Instructions received to commence at dawn (0500 hrs) and establish R.H.Q. near Div H.Q. near Godeswaarde.</p> <p>0500 (approx). Withdrawal in good order.</p> <p>0640 (approx). Established adjacent to Godeswaarde in field under cover of hedges and trees N.W. of Road and Rlwy in Square 4156. Maps and documents destroyed.</p> <p>0905. Terrific Air bombing and machine gunning by German planes. 70 counted in the air at one time. Roads severely damaged. Many whistling bombs by dive bombers.</p> <p>1130 (approx). Infantry report attack by tanks approaching Godeswaarde from N.W. Small arms fire and machine gun fire now very close. We have inadequate defence so C.O. orders further withdrawal to avoid being cut off. All roads N.W. are blocked. We pick up several casualties – wounded.</p> <p>? Eventually arrive at Watou (4063) via L'Abeele which received Arty and Air attack just after.</p> <p>About 1600. Main stream of withdrawal is heading for Poperinghe - French and British. We continue via Rousbrugge - Rexpoede, all towns and villages in flames from bombing.</p> <p>1730. About 3 miles SE of Bergues. Roads hopelessly blocked. We turned north to Warhem then West towards Bergues, crossed the Canal de la Colme and marched towards the coast. We halted at about Cappelle while Lt Col Travers went to Corps H.Q. for instructions. Plenty of Air activity and French guns retaliated (A/A).</p> <p>2230. We moved towards coast again led by C.O. and eventually crossed another Canal having left our H.Q. anti-tank rifle at Corps H.Q. at their request. M.O. and his staff and truck also remained with Corps.</p> <p>2350. We were still marching. Heavy gunfire, Dunkerque in flames and heavy pall of smoke from burning oil lay over in that direction.</p>
<b><i>Dunkerque</i></b> 29 May	<p>0050. We reached the Dunes and halt for a rest. 2i/c, Adj and O.M.E. left to recce possible existence of boats or rafts.</p>

	<p>0300. We marched along the beaches to the Mole and took our place in a long column of all ranks, British, Belgian &amp; French and eventually got on to the wooden pier.</p> <p>0530. We boarded the S.S. Horst a Dutch boat taken over a few days previously by the Royal Navy. The engines failed one hour later, but were patched up by our O.M.E. Lt Elwes RAOC after we had been towed (0740) for about an hour by a British trawler.</p> <p>1500 (approx). We disembarked at Margate and were taken to Rlwy Station in buses.</p> <p>2350. We arrived at 308 I.T.C. barracks Devizes and all ranks were fed and bathed.</p>
<b>Devizes</b> 30 May	0945. Established R.H.Q. in hut adjacent to I.T.C. Offices
	<i>Signed T.H. Robinson Capt RA Adjutant 30 May 40</i>

	<b>Key Appointments May 1940</b>
	<p>Lieutenant-Colonel R.L. Travers, OBE - Commanding Officer</p> <p>Major G.P. Chapman DSO, MC - Second-in-Command</p> <p>Captain R.E.A. Foulger - Adjutant <sup>(1)</sup></p> <p>Captain T.H. Robinson - 225 Battery Commander</p> <p>Major J.R.C. Christopher - 226 Battery Commander</p> <p>Captain G.S. Abbott - 227 Battery Commander</p> <p>Captain P.G. Hampton - 228 Battery Commander</p> <p><sup>(1)</sup> Capt T.H. Robinson appointed Adjutant 15 May. Capt R.E.A. Foulger cmdg 225 Bty</p>