

17 Vehicle Company Royal Army Ordnance Corps

The history of 17 Vehicle Coy RAOC (last known as 'C' Coy 16 Vehicle Bn) commenced during the latter part of 1943 when the Normandy invasion was planned and the unit was brought into life as the vehicle company of 17 Adv. Ord. Depot.

PREPARING FOR 'D' DAY

In January 1944, the DOS decided that of the four Adv. Ord. Depots within 21 Army Group 17 AOD would be the first to be phased in for operations and that it should operate mainly with regard to beach maintenance. Consequently, the training of the Depot was immediately switched to beach maintenance only, assisted in this task by the Stores Coys of 16 AOD.

On 13 May 1944 (D-23) 16 and 17 AODs moved to their concentration areas, where training continued until the move to the marshalling area was made on D-8.

'D' DAY OPERATIONS

Operations in Normandy commenced on 'D' Day and from this day, Ordnance units were moving ashore forming main dumps in the three main sectors.

From D+2 onwards recce parties were arriving daily to prepare the way for other Ordnance units. One of these, the recce party of 17 AOD which was supposed to be the first major stores Depot to supply the whole Force, never reached shore. The craft on which this party travelled was torpedoed in mid-Channel and all senior Officers, with the exception of the COO himself, lost their lives. This included the OC 17 Vehicle Coy, Lt. Col. Holman, his 2 i/c Major Brockhill, Capt. Bryan and Lieut. Goodwyn. After this tragic incident, Lt. Col. H.E. Sumpster assumed command of the Unit which he retained until released from the Forces in January 1946.

17 Vehicle Company, with reserve vehicles, started to arrive in the Theatre on D+7. On this day, the Unit started its way which began at Bayeux and Vaux-sur-Aure and led to Brussels and Antwerp and, later on, to the Hamburg-Lübeck Autobahn, first under the protecting wings of 17 AOD, but soon as a self-contained unit of Battalion strength (35 officers and 960 other ranks).

Originally, it had been the intention to keep the Vehicle Coys under command of their respective AODs but when the break-through took place, it became evident that this plan was no longer practicable. Vehicle Parks had to increase their holdings and became widely dispersed all over the L of G. So it was decided to bring the Vehicle Coys of all four AODs together under their own COO who would be responsible for the supply of vehicles to the whole Theatre. This arrangement remained in force until 1947 when HQ COO Vehicle Coys was disbanded at Ludersen (Hannover) and the Vehicle Coys came under the direct control of DDOS (MT), HQ BAOR, at that time Col. W.E.B. Dansie OBE.

FROM NORMANDY TO HAMBURG

As the operations in Normandy continued, the immense organisation for the receipt and issue of vehicles gradually began to take shape.

Parks were sited and moved again, sometimes within a few days, initially in the fields, side by side, or along the Normandy roads and later, in echelon, all the way to Hamburg. Some seven hundred different types of vehicles had to be handled - ranging from light weight motor cycles to tank transporters 70 feet long - including heavy AFVs, Armoured Cars, Bridgelayers, Flame-throwers,

Mobile Telephone Exchanges, Bakeries, Surgeries, Bulldozers, etc. As time went on, the stock grew up to some 45,000 vehicles fit and unfit, segregated in the six stock-holding Parks of the Coy i.e.

171 Vehicle Park	Hy "A" Vehs
172 Vehicle Park	"B" Vehs
173 Vehicle Park	"B" Vehs
174 Vehicle Park	Lt "A" Vehs
176 Vehicle Park	Unfit "Alt and "Blt
177 Vehicle Park	"B" Vehs

In addition, 175 Transit Vehicle Park under Major S.G. Lee was operating first at Boulogne and later at Antwerp, to receive the reserve vehicles which were phased into the Theatre from UK. In the course of this Park moving into Belgium, an incident occurred which throws an amusing light on the atmosphere in which all these moves took place.

The Park had been instructed by Coy HQ to notify the names of all towns and villages occupied on their way. So they came to a place where no name could be discovered, but eventually a sign-board was found showing the word "TRAM" in block letters and an arrow pointing in the direction of the town centre. A signal was then despatched to Coy HQ "TRAM occupied by 175 TVP today" but when the available maps were studied to find this place, it was discovered that it did not exist and it soon transpired that the sign board in question merely pointed to the tram depot of the town concerned. The "occupation of Tram" was the joke of the Unit and remained connected to Major Lee's name until he left the Coy in 1946.

As V.E. Day approached, the parks of 17 Vehicle Coy were spread over three European countries - 173 and 176 Parks at Brussels, 175 TVP at Antwerp, which was then the main port, 177 Veh Park at Horst near Venlo in Holland and Coy HQ, 171, 172 and 174 Veh Parks on their way to Hamburg. In the further course of operations, 172 Veh Park advance parties were spread as far as the Mecklenburg area, collecting vehicles left behind by the battle-front. From VE Day onwards, the Parks were then brought to their ultimate sites in Germany, on the Autobahn between Bremen - Hamburg - Lübeck.

BRINGING 17 VEHICLE COY INTO BAOR

The first Park to arrive in the Hamburg area was 171 Vehicle Park under Major R.G. West, with their stock of heavy AFVs which were parked on the Autobahn, commencing at the Hamburg entrance, some 8 miles in the direction of Lübeck. Then followed 175 Transit Veh Park, still under Major Lee, who were first moved to a provisional site near Hollenstedt (South of Hamburg) on 10 Jun 1945, and transferred to Sievekingsallee, Hamburg-Horn, at the end of June 1945. The next Park to arrive was 172 Veh Park under Major W.L. Porter (later taken over by Major F.T. Wellfare), the main 'B' Veh Park of the

Coy and future main issuing Depot in BAOR. This Park took up a further stretch of the Lübeck Autobahn, from the 171 Veh Park exit as far as Bad Oldesloe. 174 Veh Park under Major C.H.A. Platten MBE was the last Park to arrive in Hamburg during this first phase in July 1945.

Litzmann Bks in Hamburg-Horn (later designated HILSEA Bks) were occupied in June 1945 to provide accommodation for the personnel of 171, 174 and 175 Veh Parks, and the attached AFV Servicing Units RAC, whereas 172 Veh Park personnel were accommodated at "Hamburger Wald", a small hotel in the vicinity of their Autobahn site. HQ 17 Veh Coy had arrived in Hamburg in June 1945 and put up their offices at 60 Wilhelmstrasse, Hamburg-Rahlstedt.

In October 1945, the first change in the structure of the unit was made. 171 and 174 Veh Parks were amalgamated to 171/174 Veh Pk under the joint command of Major West, responsible for both heavy and light "A" vehicle holdings of the Unit.

During this period, 173 Veh Park, 176 RVP and 177 Veh Park remained in the L of C to complete their task in that area. The first Park of this group to move into Germany was 176 RVP who took over the Autobahn between Hamburg and Hollenstedt on 16 Oct 1945. Next to follow was 173 Veh Park on 18 Dec 1945, then operating on the Sottrum - Sittensen stretch of the Bremen Autobahn. The last Park to move was 177 Veh Park who left their site at Venlo in May 1946 and arrived at Sottrum on 10 May 1946 under the command of Major D.W. Allen who later on became Camp Comdt of HILSEA Bks. On that date they took over the original site of 173 Veh Park who moved further North to close the gap between 177 and 176 Parks. 177 Veh Park then assumed the role of a RVP.

KEEPING BAOR ON WHEELS

With the arrival of 177 RVP in the Hamburg area in May 1946, the move of 17 Veh Coy into Germany was completed. The Unit was then in occupation of 75 miles of Autobahn between Sottrum (nr Bremen) and Bad Oldesloe.

From June 1945 until the end of 1946 thousands of all types of British and American vehicles were received from all units that had taken part in the Campaign and, driving along the Autobahn in those days one could discover many well known Formation signs, such as 8 Corps, 30 Corps, 51 Div etc. In December 1946, total holdings were as follows :-

Hy "A" Vehs	1,567
Lt "A" Vehs	4,685
"B" Vehs	44,545
TOTAL	50,797

To give a picture of the issues activities of the Unit, it may be said that from May 1946 until the end of 1947, 17 Vehicle Coy and, in particular, 172 Veh Park were the main issuing Depot for the British Occupational Forces in Germany. Hundreds of vehicles were issued weekly and, in addition to these routine issues, the following special commitments had to be dealt with :-

To Danish Government Copenhagen	2,312 Vehs (road convoys)
To Netherlands Govt The Hague	3,200 Vehs - by rail
To Belgian Post War Army, Brussels	2,800 Vehs - by rail
To Dutch East Indies	2,655 Vehs - by sea via 175 TVP

At this time only few Class I reserve vehicles arrived in the Theatre and the amount of work that had to be done to prepare available holdings for issue can only be appreciated if one realises that most of these vehicles had to be brought up to the required standard in local wksps or under unit arrangements. Most of them had been parked on the Autobahn for

some months, exposed to the well known Hamburg weather conditions. Covered accommodation for vehicles was just non-existent during this period. Motor-cycles and cars were covered with tarpaulins and in 171 Veh Park every single fit tank had to be "pentoused" in order to prevent damage to turrets and main armaments.

17 Vehicle Coy retained their role as main issuing Depot until late 1947 when the Central Vehicle Depot Oldenburg (16 Vehicle Coy) commenced operating and gradually began taking over part of the issues load.

THE RUNDOWN OF 17 VEHICLE COY

In view of the geographical position of 17 Vehicle Coy and the fact that the Autobahn could not remain closed to all traffic for an indefinite period, it was decided in early 1947 to transfer the commitment of holding and issuing vehicles to a Central Vehicle Depot, to be operated by 16 Vehicle Coy at Alexander Airport Oldenburg, and at the same time to effect a run down of holdings which had accumulated in Hamburg. To effect this rundown, the following action was taken :-

(a) Standardisation of vehicle holdings in BAOR and consequent handover of all so-called non-standard types to Ministry of Supply.

(b) Handover to M of S of all those standard vehicles which were considered surplus to BAOR requirements or were in Class V or VI condition.

(c) Disposal to M of S of all surplus and low class heavy and light "A" vehicles.

When the necessary instructions regarding disposals to M of S had been received, it was found that approx. 10,000 vehicles had to be handed over. During the following months these vehicles were segregated on the far ends of the Autobahn and were then handed over to H of S "en block", i.e. together with the ground on which they were parked (No. 1, 2 and 3 Disposals Parks).

At the same time, the transfer by road and rail of all free fit stock to CVD Oldenburg commenced and unfit vehicles required for repair in BAOR Wksps were railed to 15 Veh Coy (CVD Varrelbusch and 155 RVP). In December 1947, holdings had been reduced by the following quantities :-

171 Veh Park 1,141 Lt "A" Vehs and 653 Hy "A" Vehs

172 Veh Park 7,755 "B" Vehs

173 Veh Park 6,235 "B" Vehs

176 RVP 1150 Lt "A" Vehs and 11048 "B" Vehs

177 RVP Complete stock of 1386 Lt "A" and 6814 "B" vehs transferred to 176 RVP or other Parks in BAOR by 1 Dec 47.

Total holdings in December 1947 were 25,774 only compared with over 50,000 in December 1946. In order to vacate surplus accommodation and to concentrate the administration of the Unit, Coy HQ moved into HILSEA Bks in June 1947 and the Issues Section of 172 Veh Park came to the Bks during the latter part of the same year.

174 Veh Park, at one time amalgamated with 171 Veh Park, was resuscitated at HILSEA Bks in July 1947, and became responsible for all holdings of kits and spares which had so far been the responsibility of 'H' Kitting Section, a detached sub unit of 15 Veh Coy.

On the Bremen Autobahn, 173 Veh Park and 177 RVP closed down in December 1947, after their stock holdings had either been disposed of to M of S or transferred to other Parks, mainly CVD Varrelbusch or 176 RVP. In January 1948, the lay-out of the Unit was as follows :-

DIVIDING THE FORCES IN 1948

From January 1948 onwards, stock holdings on the Autobahn reduced rapidly, partly by disposal to M of S but also by backloading of vehicles to UK, a commitment which commenced at this time and then became the main task of the unit for the following years. From 1948 onwards, all Parks were closed for receipts from units and vehicles which had been repaired in REME Wksps in the Hamburg area were sent direct to CVD Oldenburg, with the exception of Mercedes cars which continued to be issued from 172 Veh Park. Apart from this, all unit activities during this period showed an obvious "folding-up" tendency. After 176 RVP had closed down in early 1948, the Bremen Autobahn was free and open to traffic and 17 Veh Coy was confined to HILSEA Bks and 23 miles of Autobahn between Hamburg and Schmalenbeck.

As far as could be foreseen, the end of the unit's stay in Hamburg had come when the future plans for the Vehicle Organisation in BAOR became known :-

(a) To move the Fit Vehicle Depot to the other side of the Rhine. This vehicle depot was to be built up by 17 Veh Coy at Monchengladbach with the final scope to take over all issues for BAOR.

(b) To disband CVD Varrelbusch and 155 RVP and to dispose of their stocks to M of S, CVD Oldenburg or backloading to UK.

(c) To convert CVD Oldenburg into a Ret. Veh. Park with the task of feeding vehicles into all BAOR Wksps or to rail them to Hamburg for backloading to UK.

(d) To retain a Port Detachment at Hamburg, under command of 17 Veh Coy, for backloading of vehicles to UK and to receive any new vehicles from UK.

The Advance Party of 17 Veh Coy under Major C. Bell RAOC moved to Ayrshire Bks, M. Gladbach, in June 1948 with the double task to prepare the Bks for the transfer of Coy HQ and to organise the two railheads at Rheydt and Rheindahlen for future receipts and issues.

On 15 Sep 1948, HQ 17 Veh Coy and four Parks (173, 174, 176 and 177) moved to M.Gladbach taking with them a large percentage of personnel so far stationed in Hamburg and a still larger amount of the HILSEA Bks inventory.

In Hamburg remained the so-called "Detachment 17 Veh Coy" with 171, 172 Veh Parks on their Autobahn site and 175 TVP and before leaving Hamburg, the C.O. Lt. Col. V.J. Thornton RAOC made it known to all unit personnel that the expectancy of life for this detachment would be no more

than 3 - 4 months, after which time only a very small "Docks Cushion" would be retained. However, it soon transpired that plans had been changed and that the unit in Hamburg would not only remain in existence but would become independent again, under a new name and a new Commanding Officer :

17 BASE VEHICLE DEPOT AT AYRSHIRE BARRACKS IN HOENCHENGLADBACH

Ayrshire Barracks as it is now known was taken over in 1946 from the Canadian Air Force by 7 Med Regt R.A. It was decided in April 1947 to use the airfield as a Veh Park and to construct a rail spur. The actual date upon which the RAOC advance party arrived to start work in the creation of a Vehicle Park was 19 July 1948, and was known for a time as detachment 17 Veh Coy, under Command of MAJOR BELL. One Coy of GCLO and two posts of CMS were then added, together with the first local German labour.

The barracks on the airfield were cleared of the occupying D.P.'S on 15 July 48, and by 21 July 48 the first train of vehicles were received from CVD OLDENBURG. Train loads of vehicles continued to arrive at the rate of 5 trains per week. The rail-head for the vehicle park was at RHEYDT - some miles from the airfield, with the R.T.O. at Viersen.

The RAOC advance party consisted of 2 OFFRS and 50 OR's, followed by a composite 2nd party of 3 OFFRS and 100 OR's taken from 15, 16 and 17 Veh Coys. The job of the advance party was to mark out an area for the first receipts away from the future RE constructed hard-standings. Working vehs were initially 12 Scammell tractors and the first train load of 3 TONNER was to be put to use.

A total requirement of 2,500 Ammunition shelters was considered necessary, 500 of which would be provided by OC 3 B.A.D. who was located in the vicinity. These were to house the jeeps and motorcycles. Some two hundred local German civilians were recruited by this time, and work proceeded smoothly. RE's were also rehabilitating the Barracks during this period.

As 17 Veh Coy was at this time only a FIT VEH COY, OC NO 1 CVD W/SHOPS and REME INSPECTORATE were kept busy ensuring that only fit vehs were being consigned at 16 Veh Coy, CVD OLDENBURG.

1000 Motorcycles

250 Lorries 3 Ton GS

400 Jeeps

100 Trucks 15 cwt GS

20 half Tracks

20 15 cwt Armd Pers CARRIERS

25 Trucks 15 cwt F/F Wireless

150 Ambulances

6 3 from B/Down 3 Ton

12 6 Ton Winch Lorries

60 Tractors F.A.

120 Trls 1 Ton GS

50 LT Cars

The above vehs were Phase I, and commenced loading on 16 Ju1y 48, moving out on 17 Ju1y 48 and thereafter train loads continued to arrive according to schedule. Perimeter fencing consisted of triple Dannert wire and security was provided by CMWS.

At the end of 1949 it was decided to extend the Veh Park by taking over a further 1,325 acres of land on the other side of the Aachener Straße as there was considerable objection to the requisitioning of agricultural land between the perimeter of the existing Veh Park and Rheindahlen village. A preliminary survey of this land began in Dec 1949.

Because of the extension being regarded as "TOP SECRET" the British Resident was unable to explain to the local authorities the reason for the requisition, with the result that the most fantastic runours spread, including one that a 4 kilometer runway was to be bui1t. Apart of the area surveyed was the RHEYDTER STADTWALD, approx 150 acres which had been bought plot by plot between 1900 and 1910 at a cost of 120,000 GOLDMARKS raised almost entirely by public subscription. A highly indignant RHEYDT CITY unanimously passed a resolution in 1950 protesting against the inclusion of the RHEYDTER STADTWALD in the "air-port", as it was "the only wooded part of RHEYDT", and an area protected by German Law from development.

An agreement was reached on 11 Aug 1950 between Maj Gen Bishop the Land Commissioner in Düsseldorf after consultation with various British Authorities - and Minister President of North Rhine Westfalen that :-

"only 35 trees will be felled leaving 300 trees standing and the road to be built follows the existing lanes for most of its length".

Only about 100 acres of the STADTWALD plus the road were finally included in the South Park. Much discussion with regard to derequisitioning of small sections of the park, moving of boundaries and fences continues to go on and during the latter end of 1959 the boundaries were again reviewed and reduced, the cost of refencing being borne by HQ BAOR AND RHEYDT CITY on a 50 - 50 basis.

A rail spur was added to the South Park in 1953, and several buildings were erected and dispersed throughout the area. The area has been in use since 1953 as a returned Vehicle Park which receives unfit vehs from all over BAOR. Vehs are called forward to REME BASE WORKSHOPS for repair and re-issue into service, whilst other beyond economical repair or "obsolete", are made up into lots for sale. Approx 6,000 vehs may be held in the RVP at any one time. Vehs on receipts are inspected by a Central Inspectorate, placed in a state of preservation for short term storage before being disposed of.

Vehs on North Park are all fit and after Receipt Inspection are placed in long term preservation. Buildings in North Park include 'A' Veh and 'B' Veh REME Workshops, large storage sheds for kits

and vehs, a battery storage and charging plant, maintenance sheds for greasing and preservation. The total holding of fit vehs is around the 7,000 Mark, with a yearly turnover of 12,000.

During 1964 a small section of the derelict German Railway Coach Wksps situated at Recklinghausen was refurbished and taken over by 17 RVD. A small quantity of light vehicles and trailers were held in readiness for special spear head units such as the SAS. The remaining part of the Workshops were in later years to become the home of 17 BVD Vehicle Sub Depot (Fwd).

1967 saw the withdrawal of 6 Bde to the UK and the transfer of 1 (BR) Corps Vehicle Company from Osnabrück to Mönchengladbach to take charge of the maintenance and storage of the AFV 430 series. Also at this time 2 Armoured Delivery Sqn vacated the Hvy 'A' veh storage in the depot and moved to their present site at Hamm. 'A' Sub Depot was quick to reoccupy this very valuable heated accommodation comprising buildings 51, 52, 53 & 54.

The introduction of the Sommerville Plan effected major changes to the vehicle stocks in BAOR and their subsequent deployment. 17 Rear Vehicle Depot was renamed and became 17 Base Vehicle Depot with the responsibility for the tasking of 'A', 'C' and unfit 'B' Vehicles at Mönchengladbach and Recklinghausen retained the B Vehicles PUE and WMR stocks. Ordnance Depot Antwerp took over the responsibility for fit B Vehicles and PUB serials.

In 1967 the 17 RVD Officers' Mess closed down and the officers became members of the Windberg Officers Mess, Mönchengladbach.

This era brought about the consolidation of 17 as a unit mainly into the North Parks perimeter, the vacated accommodation in South Parks being handed over to a number of different units, 23 Regt RCT, 608 MCTG, 15 BOD, Barracks and the Medical stores Depot. In the interest of progress and to make way for the new autobahn, building 115 and 117 were dismantled in South Parks and re-assembled later in North Parks resulting yet another loss of the original perimeter.

1971 brought further major changes to the structure of the unit, A, B, C & RV Sub Depots were amalgamated to form the present 17 BVD Vehicle Sub Depot (Main) currently operating in North Parks and Recklinghausen was designated 17 BVD Vehicle Sub Depot (Fwd) retaining the 'B' Vehicle fit element for PUE & WMR.

Since the arrival of the Vehicle Park in Mönchengladbach the unit has known various titles. On the 1 January 1949 it was designated 17 Veh Bn RAOC. This title changed on the 1 November 1959 to 17 Rear Veh Depot RAOC which in turn changed to the present title 17 Base Veh Depot RAOC on the 1 August 1969.