

by Roger J C Thomas, Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

PENALLY

Penally Training Camp is located a couple of miles to the south west of the popular holiday resort of Tenby. The name does not come to mind quite as readily as Salisbury Plain, or Otterburn, but this camp has been occupied at one time or another by most of the infantry and artillery units of the British Army.

Unlike the majority of military camps in this country, Penally does not owe its existence to either the First or the Second World War; it has a much longer pedigree. Its origins date back to the French invasion scare of 1858-59.

In March 1856, the Crimean War came to an unsatisfactory conclusion, leading to distrust between Great Britain and its former ally, France. Thereafter, an aggressive French foreign policy contributed to bringing about a French invasion scare. This scare produced an expansion of the Royal Navy, a massive fortress building programme to protect the naval dockyards, and an improvement in the training of both regular and militia regiments of the British Army.

A Commission was appointed in 1858 to enquire into 'the establishment and organisation of the Militia with a view to rendering it more efficient for military purposes'. Amongst the numerous recommendations made by the Commission, it was suggested that a recognised Musketry Course should be included as part of the annual training syllabus for Militia units. Consequently, a number of 'Musketry Camps' were established to cater for this need.

Work commenced on the construction of Penally Musketry Camp during 1860, taking about a year to complete. It occupied an area of 14 acres, 1 rood, and 25 perches, on the gentle southern slopes of the Ridgeway, to the west of Penally village. It consisted of a Guardhouse, an Officers Mess and Quarters, a Stable and Kitchen Block, a Regimental Store, a Magazine, a Soldiers Quarters and Ablutions, a Urinal, a Cookhouse, a Canteen, a Sergeants Mess, and two underground water tanks. The buildings were nearly all constructed of stuccoed brick, and roofed with slate. The all important musketry range was established about half a mile away, in the dunes to the north of Giltar Point. The numbers of soldiers using the camp often far exceeded its capacity. For example, in the summer of 1903, the 3rd Militia



Infantry Brigade was undertaking its Annual Training. The Brigade consisted of five Battalions, a total of 19 Officers and 954 other ranks. As a consequence, accommodation had to be provided under canvas. On such occasions, temporary water pipes and tap stands had to be provided to ensure adequate supplies of water for the troops.

Militia units often pitched their bell tents and marquees in fields on the eastern side of Penally village, some half a mile from the main camp. One of these fields is still known to this day, as the 'Volunteers Field'.

The long established practice of sleeping under canvas was all well and good during the summer months. However, with the outbreak of the First World War, it quickly became evident that quartering large numbers of troops under canvas, during winter months, did not contribute to efficient training. This was particularly true at Penally Camp, which is lashed by winter storms rushing in off the Atlantic.

The authorities attempted to deal with the problem in 1915, building new barrack huts within the main camp. The huts were raised off the ground on brick pads and were rectangular in plan, timber framed with gable roofs, and were clad with painted corrugated galvanized steel sheeting. This action however, still did not provide sufficient room for a Brigade, and tents were still provided on occasions, to make up the shortfall.

The new hutments provided sufficient accommodation for six single Officers, six Sergeants, and 346 men. Additional facilities were also provided, which included a Telephone Room, a Regimental Institute, a Non-Regimental Stores, a Sergeants Mess

equipped with a Games and Reading Room, a Kitchen, Bar, and Cellar. Training facilities included a Bombing Room, an Anti Gas room, three Musketry Rooms, and a Lecture Hall. Electricity was not provided, and the camp was lit by acetylene.

The increased use of the musketry ranges also resulted in a new gallery range being built in the dunes immediately to the north of Giltar Point. The range consisted of a concrete covered-way with shelters, revetted to the rear with earth, and sand butts.

Practice trenches were also dug at a number of locations, both within and outside of the training area. The largest trench complex remains extant, on the ridge to the south of the railway bridge at Valley Bottom. The complex is located just below the crest of the ridge, and consists of a cremallere (indented plan) fire trench, linked by a number of zig-zag communication trenches, running back to a parallel support trench.

The trenches, which survive to a depth of up to 1.5m in places, are revetted in stone and are traversed to prevent enfilade fire. Evidence of command posts, shelters, and latrines remain as earthwork spurs off the communication trenches.

The infantry were not the only units to use the Penally Camp ranges. As far back as the 1870's the Royal Garrison Artillery fired large calibre Rifled Muzzle Loading shells across the bay from St Catherine's Fort, Tenby, to impact on targets at Giltar Point. Smaller calibre artillery was also catered for.

About a mile to the west of the camp, a narrow military road cuts south across the fields from Lower Bubbleton to Proud Giltar, where a field artillery firing stand was set up. This feature appears on maps

TRAINING CAMP



that pre-date the First World War. The inter-war period witnessed a considerable slackening in the pace of life. Territorial Army summer camps were re-introduced, and shooting competitions were the order of the day. However, all of this was to change during the late 1930's, and the tempo of training increased as the situation deteriorated.

In addition to the infantry units using the rifle ranges, artillery men using the newly established anti-aircraft range at Manorbier took advantage of the camp's facilities. A practice which continues to this day.

During the Second World War, ever greater demands were placed on the camp's accommodation. Many allied troops passed through its gates, and special training courses were provided for the Home Guard. The Royal Marines established their Sniper School at the camp in October 1942.

The Royal Marines Brigade Artillery Group were also present during the latter months of 1942. However, heavy rain, and no proper hardstandings, made the movement of guns and vehicles in and out of practice shoots extremely difficult.

Yet again, all this activity placed undue demands on the camp's facilities. As a result, a new 600 yard-Gallery Range was built to the west of the one at Giltar Point.

works on the eastern perimeter. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that these trenches would have been pressed into service, had the need arisen.

Superficially, since the Second World War, neither the function, nor the appearance of Penally Camp has changed dramatically. Apart from the demolition of 17 huts built during the Second World War, the majority of structures from all periods of construction remain in use to this day, including those built in 1860.

Appearances can however be deceptive, new buildings have been added and the camp has been thoroughly modernised. At present, it can provide accommodation for up to 50 Officers, 90 NCOs and 400 Junior Ranks, together with all their vehicles and equipment. The training facilities include a 16 lane 500 yard Gallery Range, an Indoor Small-bore Mini Range, a Training Theatre, and two Air Defence and Skill-at-Arms Classrooms.

In addition to the on-site facilities, the Camp Commandant and his staff are also responsible for the Templeton Training Area.



This site is a former wartime airfield, with a wide variety of environments, ranging from open grassland, through to dense woodland. As a result, a wide range of training activities and wildlife co-exist in this area.

Today, Penally Training Camp and the Templeton Training Area provide modern facilities throughout the year for a wide range of military activities. Nevertheless, reminders of the past are all around to see. The trenches provide a particularly fitting memorial to those who passed through the gates, and lost their lives during the two World Wars. ■

- 1 Digging practice trenches during the First World War
- 2 Penally trenches Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales
- 3 Volunteer's Field, Penally 1976
- 4 First World War timber barrack hut
- 5 The Guardroom built 1860
- 6 Second World War 'curved asbestos' huts

Photos: 1, 3-6 Roger J C Thomas