



THE BLACK CATS



Newsletter of WARGroup,
comprising re-enactors of
1st Batt., London Irish Rifles
1st Polish Para Brigade
RAMC &
Royal Corps of Signals
www.WARGroup.info



WINTER 2010/11
Issue 4

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WINTER 2010/2011 ISSUE

INTRODUCTION

Hi everyone, Happy New Year to WARGroup and all our friends! We've had a fantastic year again, but not without its ups and downs. As we remember the year, and the memories of the men and women we try to portray, we can be thankful for all we have; friends, family, and for a great year re-enacting! Here's a few articles and pics to remind ye of 2010, and get you thinking about what we do and about the year ahead- another great year hopefully- some indicative dates on the back page....

as our Yank friends would shout, CURRAHEE!!!
Best wishes, Editorial team (well, me n Rob)



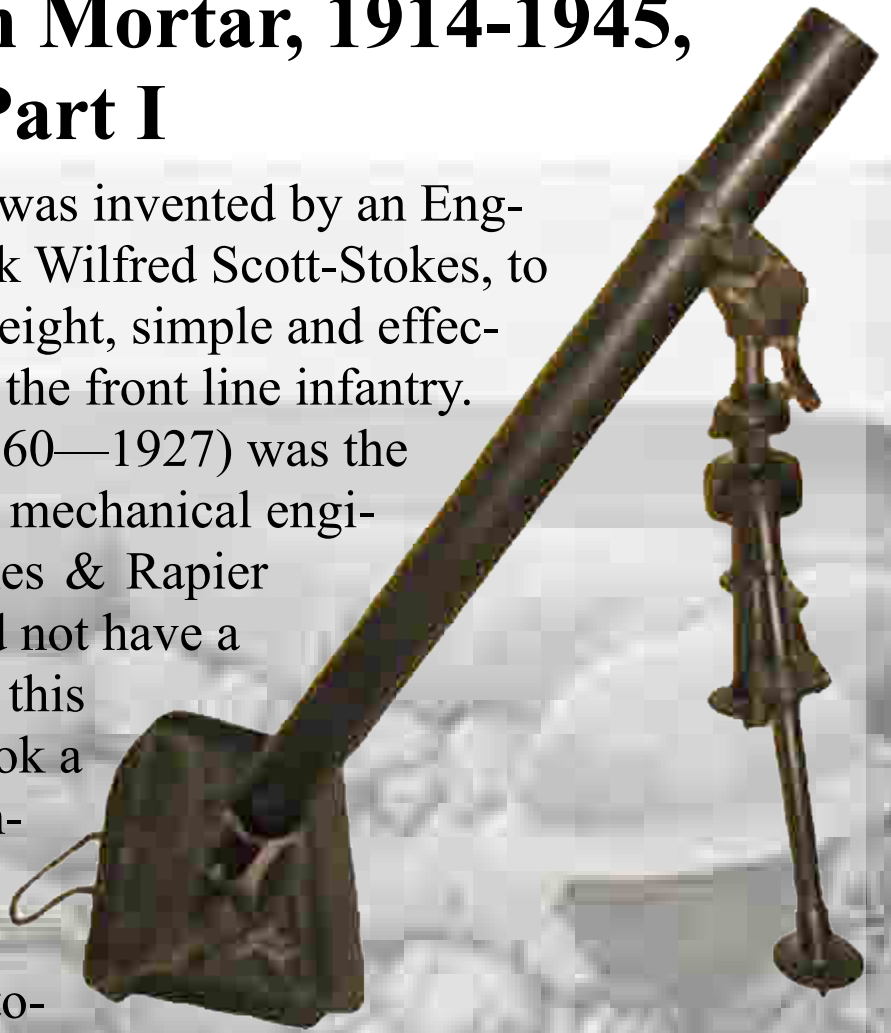
The Stokes 3in Mortar, 1914-1945, Part I

The Stokes mortar was invented by an Englishman, Frederick Wilfred Scott-Stokes, to provide a lightweight, simple and effective, support weapon for the front line infantry.

Wilfred Scott-Stokes (1860—1927) was the managing director of the mechanical engineering firm of Ransomes & Rapier from Ipswich. Stokes did not have a military background and this probably helped as he took a novel approach in designing an easily transported and lightweight trench mortar. His working prototype was ready for initial testing by

late January 1915.

Ransomes & Rapier manufactured gas cylinders, as well as cranes, pumps and traction engines. The barrel was the main component of the gun and this was produced on the same machinery used to make gas cylinders. Indeed the barrel looked very like a gas cylinder, being made from seamless steel tube. The tube had one open end and the other had rounded shoulders terminating in a neck. The neck, which is uppermost in a gas cylinder, acts as the base end of the barrel. This neck extension is drilled and threaded to take the striker, which, when screwed home, projects into the bore. A smaller cap cylinder, with internal threading at the upper end, screws over the neck extension and the lower end, terminating in a rounded base, rests in a hemispherical depression in the base-plate.



Construction: The Stokes Mortar is a remarkably simple weapon consisting of an unrifled metal tube fixed to a base plate (to absorb the recoil) with a lightweight bipod mount that could be adjusted for range. The weapon could be broken down into three sections for easy transport and has a total weight of 49kg.



Firing: The Stokes was fired by dropping an 11lb (4.5 kg) shell down the tube onto a firing pin at the base of the tube. This set off a shotgun-like blank cartridge and this

in turn ignited propellant rings attached to the mortar shell. The propellant gases then launched the mortar bomb up the barrel and towards the target.

Range was determined by varying the amount of propellant charge attached to each shell (known as a 'bomb') and by the angle of the barrel. The yoke of the bipod could be elevated or dropped to increase or decrease the angle of the barrel and range was a product of the angle of elevation of the barrel and the amount of propellant attached to the particular bomb. A bomb (un-stabilised WW1 type projectile) could be fired to a maximum range of 800 yards (732 metres). The safe minimum range, due to exploding fragments, was about 100 yards (91.5 metres).

The basic primary cartridge
propellant for short ranges and was used to initiate the additional
'Rings' of propellant to
Up to 4 additional 'Rings' of
to incrementally achieve greater
tables below). The 4 rings were
primary cartridge and gunners
rings which were not needed.

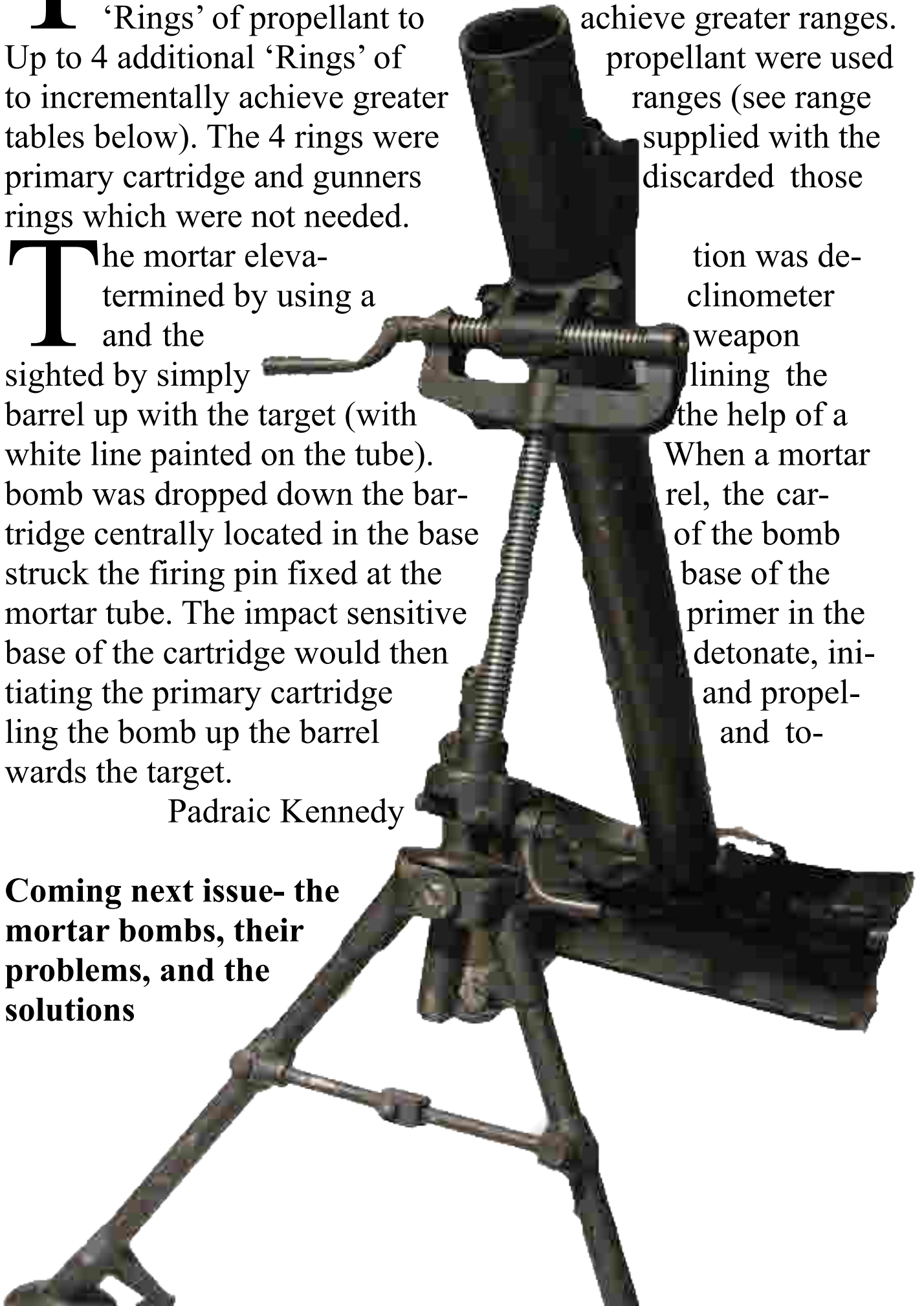
The mortar eleva-
tion was de-
termined by using a
and the
sighted by simply
barrel up with the target (with
white line painted on the tube).
bomb was dropped down the bar-
tridge centrally located in the base
struck the firing pin fixed at the
mortar tube. The impact sensitive
base of the cartridge would then
tiating the primary cartridge
ling the bomb up the barrel
wards the target.

Padraic Kennedy

**Coming next issue- the
mortar bombs, their
problems, and the
solutions**

contained enough propel-
lant for short ranges and was used to initiate the additional
achieve greater ranges.
propellant were used
ranges (see range
supplied with the
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THE LAST BATTLE ON BRITISH SOIL: THE BATTLE OF GRAVENEY MARSH

London Irish Rifles' first WW2 engagement

On the evening of September 27th 1940, Spitfires and Hurricanes from 66 and 92 Squadrons RAF intercepted a German Junkers JU88A-1 bomber over Faversham, Kent. The bomber was on the return leg of a raid over London in which anti-aircraft fire had damaged one of its engines. The chasing pilots were aware that the aircraft was a brand new variant of the Junkers bomber and immediately set about forcing the plane down, preferably in one piece if possible. The JU88A-1 was believed to have a new type of bombsight onboard and its capture was considered a top priority.



After a brief chase the Junkers second engine was hit and she was forced to make an emergency landing on Graveney marsh. Among her four dazed but unhurt crewmen were Unteroffizier Fritz Ruhlandt and wireless operator Erwin Richter.

Not far away in Seasalter, about a dozen armed men from A Company of the 1st Battalion the London Irish Rifles made their way from their billet in the Sportsman Inn to investigate the crash site. They immediately

came under fire from the downed aircrew, now armed with machine guns from their plane and a sub-machine gun. According to the official history of the London Irish Rifles, the men *“organised themselves into a Platoon and carried out a spirited attack, using fire with movement on the flat and open ground.”*





Eventually the brave Luftwaffe crew were overwhelmed and forced to surrender, amazingly only one casualty was suffered in the brief but intense skirmish with a German flyer shot in the foot. After surren-

dering one of the prisoners remarked that the aircraft would “Go up any time now.”

It was clear that Unteroffizier Ruhlandt and his crew were adamant that their plane and its secrets would not end up in enemy hands. Captain J.K. Cantopher quickly entered the plane and discovered not one but two time bombs set to explode. With great courage Captain Cantopher, (who received the George Medal for his actions that night), succeeded in disarming both devices.

Later the prisoners were brought back to the Sportsman Inn and the former enemies enjoyed a drink to mark the occasion. The JU88A-1 was eventually taken to Farnborough airfield where she provided highly valuable information to the experts who would unlock her secrets.

The incident on Graveney Marsh was the first encounter with armed enemy forces on British soil since the French landings at Fishguard in 1797 though historians believe it to be the first actual battle on British soil since the defeat of Bonnie Prince Charlie’s Jacobite Rebels at Culloden in 1746.

In September 2010, the London Irish Rifles Regimental Association marked its 70th anniversary by unveiling a commemorative plaque at the Sportsman Inn in Seasalter.



ROYAL CORPS OF SIGNALS

A Brief History of The Royal Corps Of Signals 1870 -1945

It was in 1870, that 'C' Telegraph Troop Royal Engineers was formed by Captain Montague Lambert to provide the first formal professional unit of trained signallers in the British Army. Its role was to provide the complete range of communication duties, including visual signalling, telegraphic signalling and mounted orderlies. As the need for accurate and fast communications increased, so did the size of the Troop, amalgamating with the 22nd and 34th Companies, Royal Engineers, to form the Telegraph Battalion Royal Engineers. Two Divisions, the 1st Division (Field



Force, based at Aldershot) and the 2nd Division (Postal and Telegraph, based in London) were responsible for all signalling duties until 1908 following the Haldene reforms where they were reorganised to form the Royal Engineers Signal Service.



The Royal Engineers Signal Service provided the communications throughout the First World War, including the provision of motor cycle dispatch riders and the more recent innovation of wireless communications.

ROYAL CORPS OF SIGNALS (CONT)



In 1920, a Royal Warrant for the formation of a Corps of signals was presented and on the 28th June 1920 the Royal Corps of Signals was formally recognised.

During the Second World War the Royal Corps of Signals served in every theatre of war and by the end of the war the Corps had a strength of 150,990 officers and men supporting all arms of the forces from infantry, airborne, artillery and armoured divisions, as well as specialist intelligence units.

The 56th (1st London) Divisional Signals, Royal Corps of Signals was responsible for all signals relating to the 56 (London) Infantry Division of whom D Company 1st Batt. London Irish Rifles were a part. The divisional signals were involved in the Italy campaign with the 56 (London) Infantry Division from 1943-45.

The Infantry Divisional Signals supported divisional HQ, artillery, Infantry brigades, the reconnaissance battalion, Royal Engineers and the tank brigades.

MP



DISPATCHES



DISPATCHES



WW2 training weekend

The season kicked off with a full training weekend in Kilclooney in March, with the German element holding a well defended



encampment against the Allies. Despite the Brits, Yanks and Poles (and one Russian)

taking part in their very own Burma death march on the Saturday, they still managed a number of spirited assaults against the well dug in enemy, but to no avail as ultimately the weekend ended in a German victory.



The Valley of Knockanure

This locally produced film gave WARGroup's Crown Forces IWOI (Irish War Of Independence) group a chance to hone their "skills",



as they acted out the awful part played by local Black and Tans who arrested four local men on suspicion of being involved with a Flying Column murder of Mr Vicars a local landowner. They gave the men no chance of a fair trial, and after roughing them up, simply lined them up and shot them. Three of the four men were killed, but the fourth managed to escape by running through the bogland and managed to tell his story. The film went on to win



at the Kerry film festival, and was quoted by Daniel Day-Lewis as "Brutal". Well there's no better accolade for a re-enactor than that the portrayal appears realistic!



April saw the group involved in the Dungarvan Food Festival, our first time at this prestigious event. The theme obviously revolved around food and the Great War display, which was set up in King John's Castle, proved to be a **massive** hit with the public.



Not only did they get an insight into the daily rations of the front line soldier but they were also introduced to the weapons, and equipment of not just the British element of the war but also that of the American troops thanks to Kieran's new doughboy uniform. All involved were more than pleased with the event, especially the slap up dinner afterwards courtesy of the Nude Food Restaurant.

Gorey Military fair was another great day out, thanks again to our very own Padre for the invitation. Re-enactors represented a wide array of uniforms from WW1, The war of Independence, WW2 and the Vietnam War. Not forgetting Mark Perry and

his “Orse” acknowledging the role the cavalry played on the western front.



The Curragh Military Show was another busy

event with a multitude of groups on display as well as a host of trade stands. It really was an eye-opener as was the impromptu pole dancing competition the night before(!).





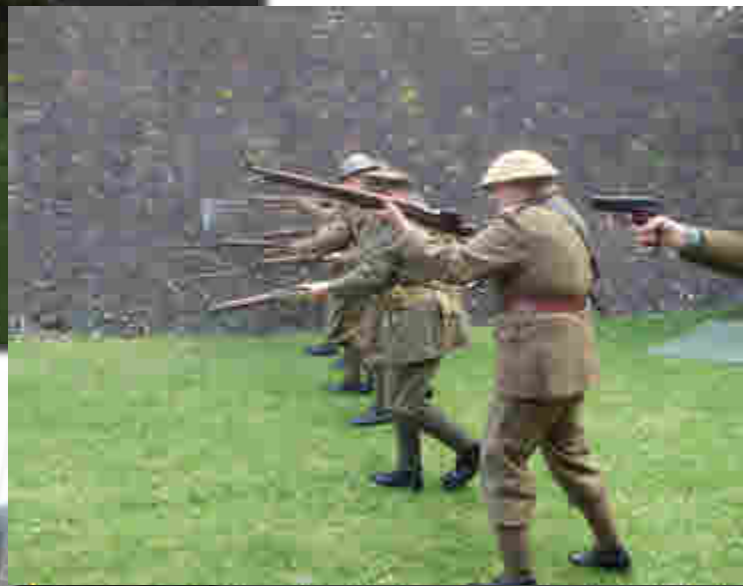
Duncannon was again outstanding. All the displays were of their usual top standard and the weather did its part as well. Re-enactors representing a multitude of periods entertained the crowds and the Black and Tans put in a spirited if undignified appearance at the show,

much to the delight of everyone watching and got exactly what they deserved.





Amongst
the
many
re-enactments



and skirmishes during the weekend, the public witnessed a WW1 skirmish with the London Irish Rifles WW1 line walking into a gas attack by the Germans,

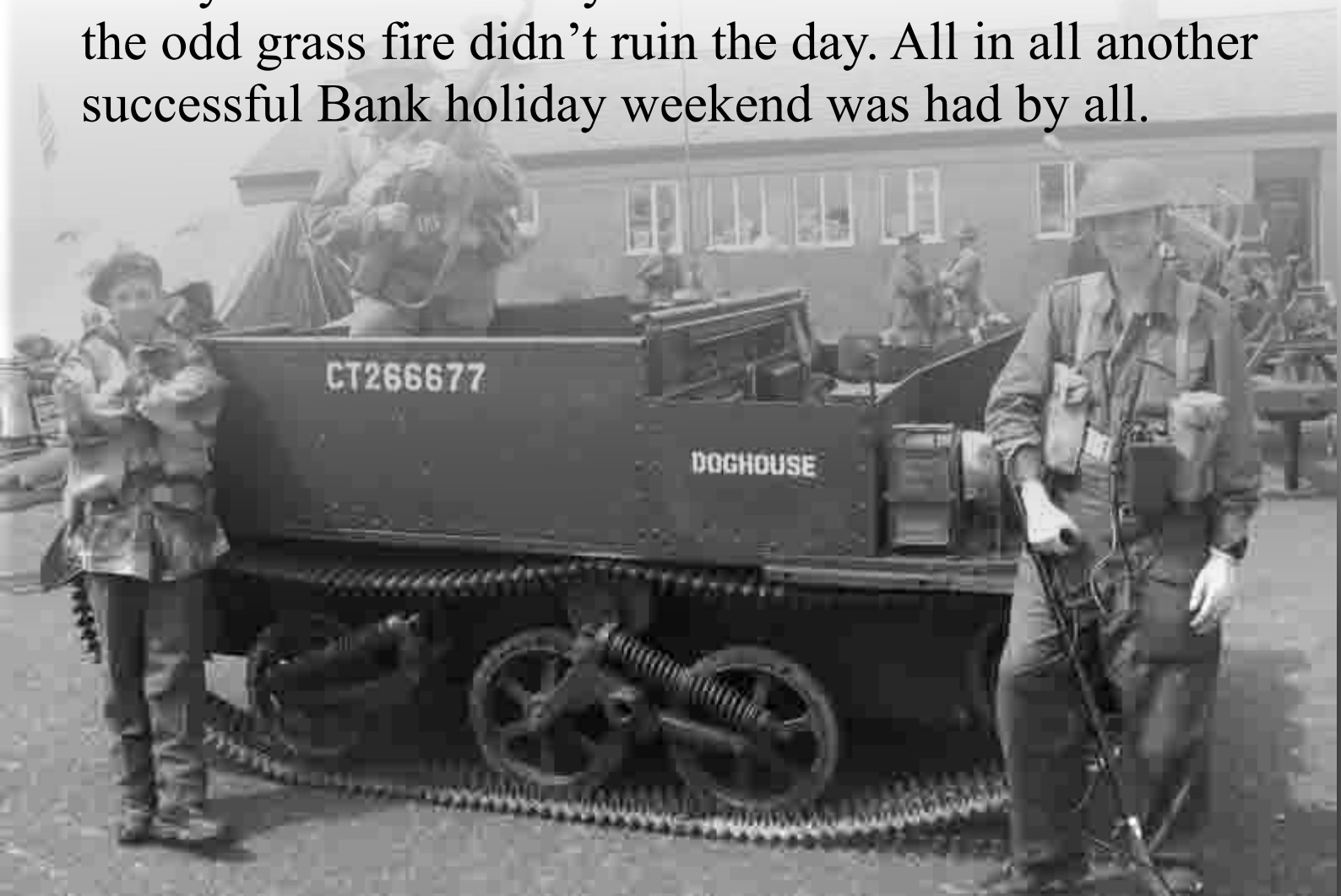
with the expected consequences...



We were also introduced to the Doc's new baby, his WW2 Bren Gun Carrier "Doghouse".

The main battle saw the Allies putting up a brave but suicidal defence of the Dunes, but

enemy forces eventually overwhelmed them and even the odd grass fire didn't ruin the day. All in all another successful Bank holiday weekend was had by all.



In Carrigtoohill we were again invited along to the excellent Medieval Festival in the shadow of Barrys Court Castle, county Cork.



It was another superb weekend, with War of Independence and WW2 battles to entertain the crowds, a decent looking trench sec-

tion supplied by the organisers and manned resolutely by Mark P.,





And a superb display of WW2 equipment, much to the delight of the public!



Yet again those fiendish Black and Tans turned up along-



side their Crown forces comrades from the regular British Army and the RIC.

The local Flying Column started things off by assassinating an RIC officer...



A

nd lay in
wait for
the Crown



Forces. Despite an initial
roundup of suspects by
the Tans, again in the end



they got what
was coming
to them.



October saw the group coming together for our second WW2 training weekend of the year. This time the focus was on a skirmish between the German war machine and a British reconnaissance unit of London Irish Riflemen and their Bren Gun Carrier, (along with a little help from a 30.cal machine gun). Our German cousins got their tickets well and truly stamped that

weekend and the resulting film footage is a testament to what dedicated Re-enactors can achieve together.

Our next event was at the Prince August Toy Soldier Factory in Macroom, county cork. Joe and his lads put on a couple of explosive shows in which a beleaguered unit of London Irishmen tried in vain to stop the German assaults upon their fuel depot. It was a cracking day out for those members of the public brave enough to come out in the rain.

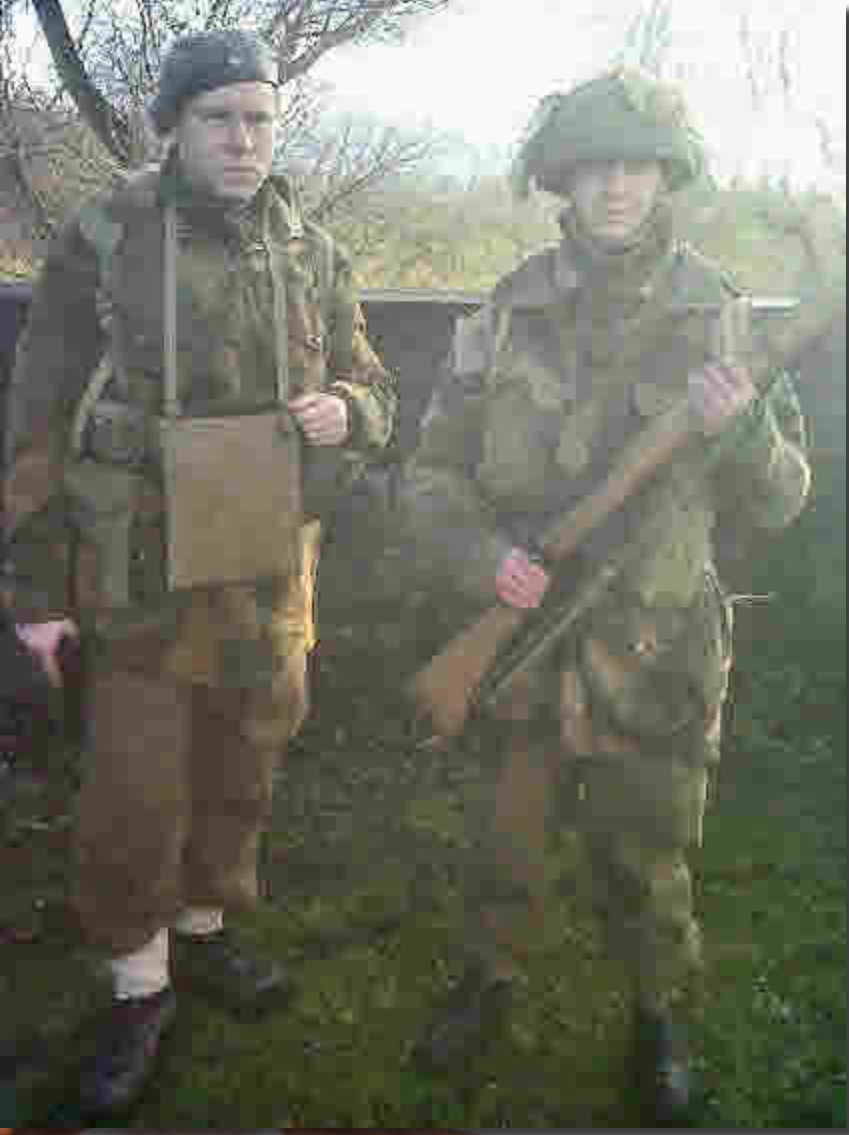


We had a private battle weekend when we had a chance to test out one of Joes and one of Emmet's beautiful old British Army motorbikes. Marcyn was the bravest and managed to tame one of the bikes- for a while at least! :u)

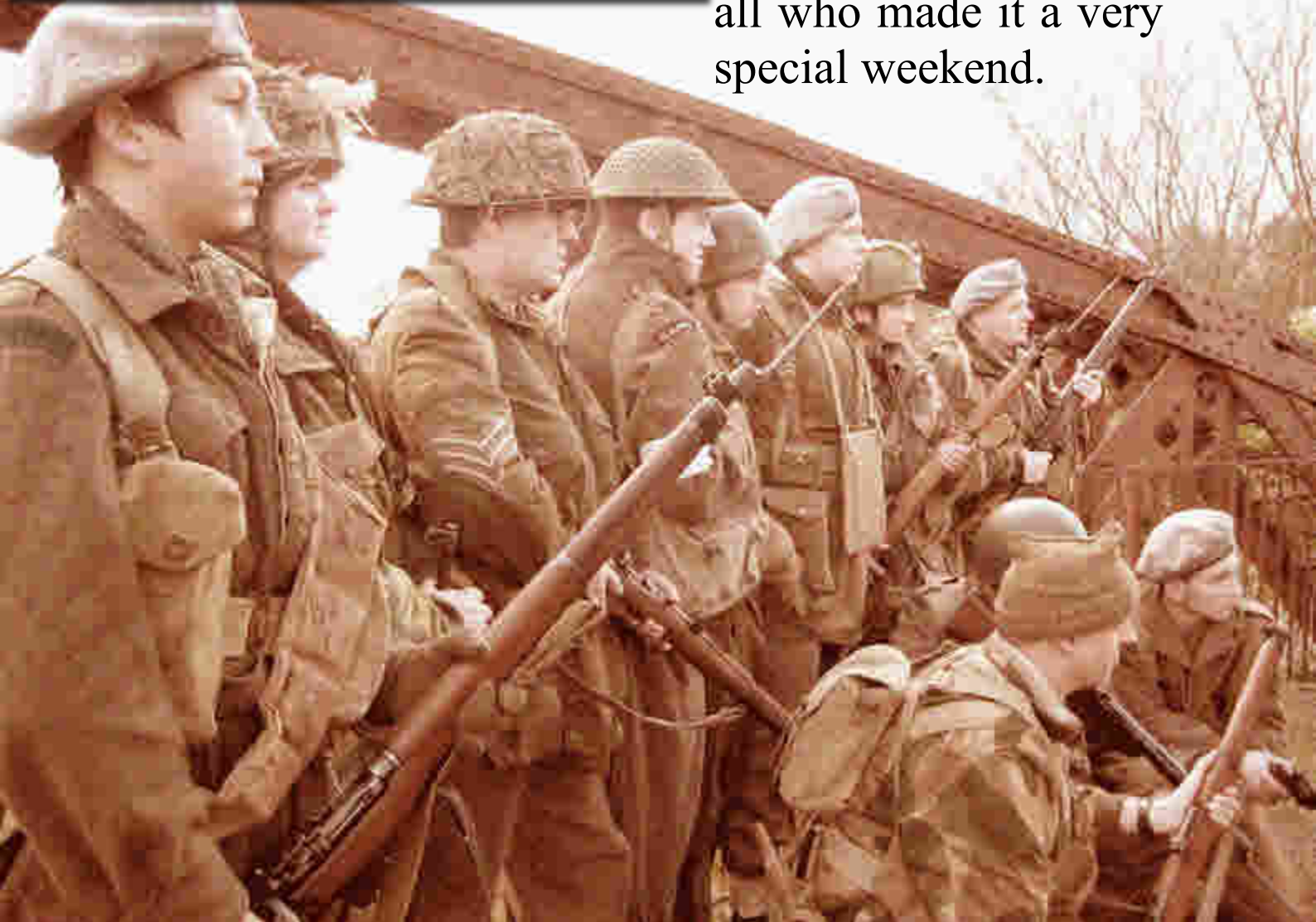


We then took the carrier for a spin to clear its cobwebs, and despite her wish to keep driving into a ditch/ off the road, even Doghouse was tamed (well, at least a little!). A

couple of ambushes (one from each side) and a few casualties later, peace once again descended amongst the Comeragh mountains....for now.

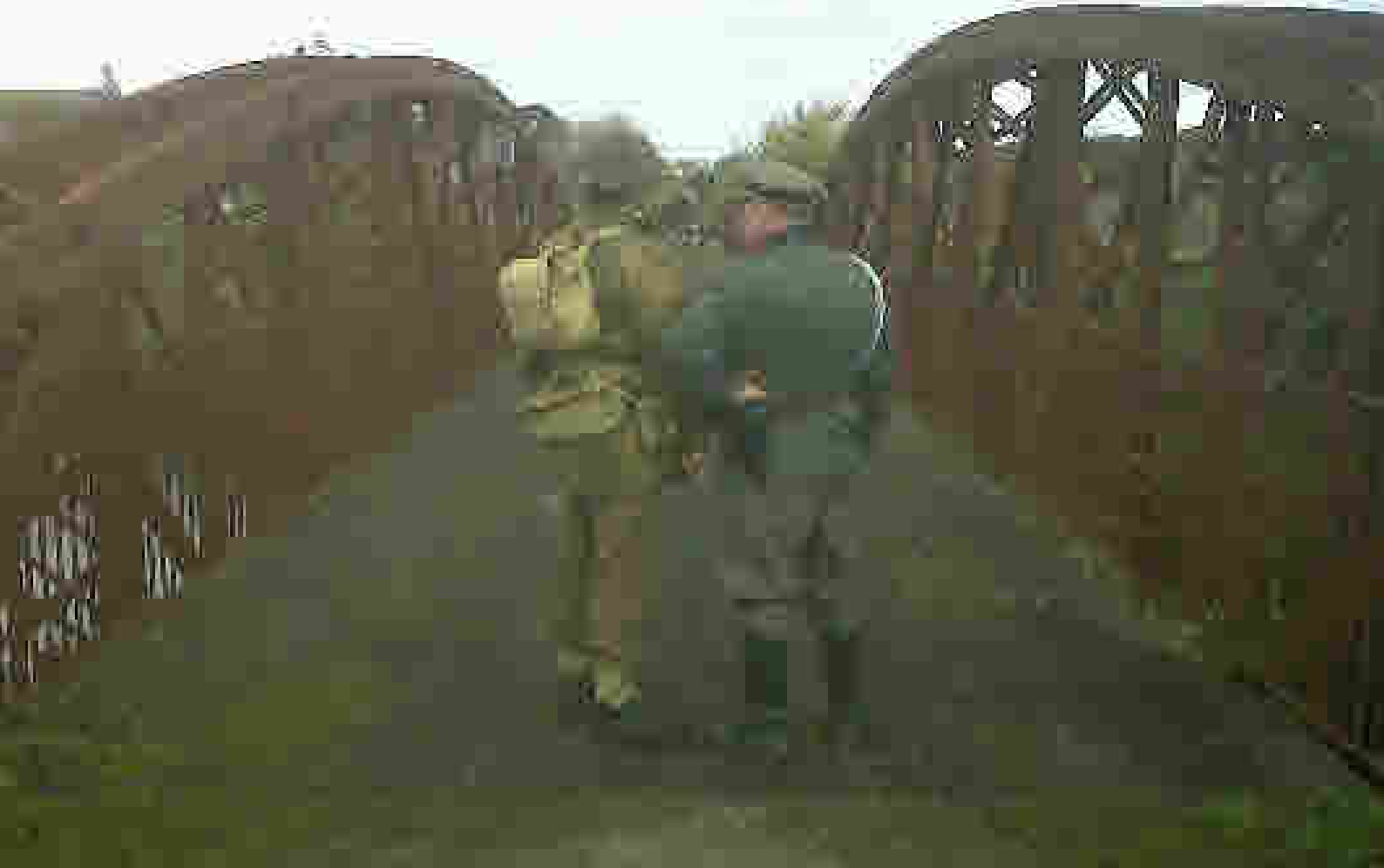


We rounded off the year with the Battle on the Bridge. The old Railway Bridge in Kilorglin, County Kerry was the scene for an engagement between the hard-pressed men of the German Army and the unrelenting men of the Polish independent parachute brigade. The event was a real tonic for everyone involved and a big thank you goes out to all who made it a very special weekend.



The professional way the film shoot was handled and the first peeks at the resulting footage is yet again proof that the Re-enactment scene in Ireland is going from strength to strength.

So well done to all of you and here's to another outstanding year in 2011.





FORTHCOMING SKIRMISHES 2011

AGM & WW1 TRAINING WEEKEND

JAN/FEB

**DUNGARVAN FOOD FESTIVAL DAY WW1 +
IWOI FILMING DAY**

MARCH

CURRAGH SHOW IWOI

EARLY MAY

WW2 TRAINING WEEKEND

APRIL/MAY

DUNCANNON BATTLE WEEKEND

EARLY JUNE

GOREY MILITARIA FARE

END JUNE

CARRIGTOOHILL CASTLE CORK

JULY

DUNGARVAN HERITAGE FESTIVAL IWOI

AUGUST



“THE BLACK CATS” NEED YOU!

PLEASE email Rob or Doc with any pics you have, any articles on kit, tactics, history, slang, etc - we want to hear what YOU have to say! (and NOT to keep seeing photos of ourselves- a scary sight, at the best of times!)

Newsletter Contact Details:

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or speak to Rob or Doc

ROB/DOC 004