



The Canadian Army Battle Drill School at Rowlands Castle – 1942

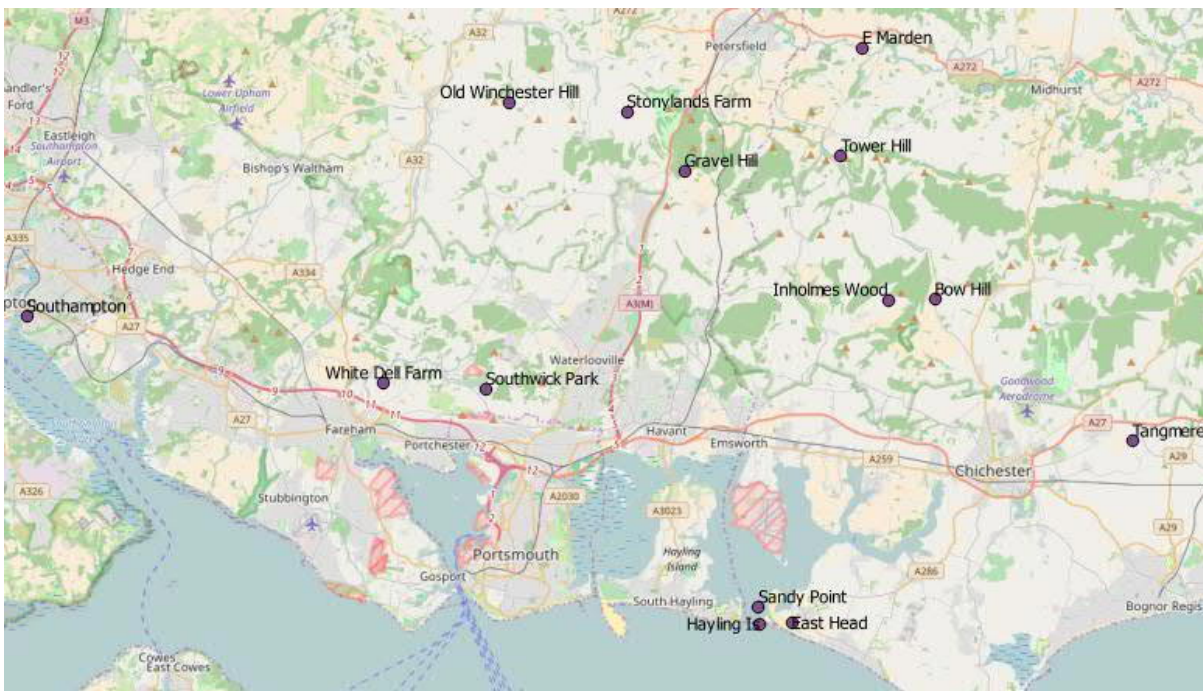
Part 2 – Locating the School’s Activities



Regional scale Activities

In the School’s Unit War Diary some of the training locations were defined using grid references whereas some were defined simply by a place-name. The grid references quoted referred to the Military Edition of the Ordnance Survey maps which were in use at the time. These were based on a different projection and reference system than today’s maps. Some of the references given were six figure ones which, as with modern OS maps, defined a 100m square on the ground whereas some were four figure and therefore only defined a 1km square. The locations have been translated to the current GBNG system where appropriate and then plotted on the regional map below. This demonstrates the wide-ranging scope, both geographically and in content, of the School’s activities.

Some examples of the activities carried out across the region follow.



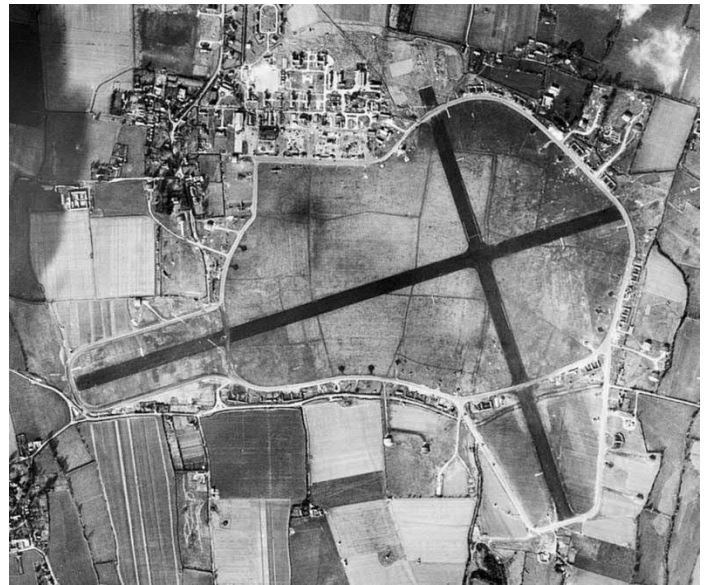
Regional map showing the location of the school’s activities.

ref 19

The markers on the map show the numerous other sites across the region where the school carried out their training exercises and as can be seen, their “patch” covered a very extensive area amounting to 550 sq.km.

Tangmere Airfield

Tangmere airfield, well known for the part it played in the Battle of Britain, lies at the extreme eastern edge of the training area. It was the scene of a night attack carried out by the School against the regular defences manned by a battalion of the RAF Regiment. The umpires judged that although there were heavy casualties on both sides the defences were broken and the airfield was taken by the attackers. The Diarist goes on to state with a hint of glee "Large quantities of explosive were used to blow the wire fences and the scheme was as close to reality as it is possible to get." It seems that many valuable lessons were learned on both sides.



Aerial Photo of Tangmere airfield 10/2/1944

English Heritage

Bow Hill

Also in the eastern part of their area is Kingley Vale/Bow Hill. This was a designated weapons training area/Range and as such was used extensively by the school. This was particularly the case while the last two intakes were there. These were mixed intakes consisting of Rifle, Mortar and Carrier units and Bow Hill was particularly useful for combined, integrated training with all three "disciplines" working together under live rifle, machine gun and mortar fire.



A typical Universal Carrier

IWM



A two-inch mortar crew of The Regina Rifle Regiment taking part in a training exercise, Sussex, England, 18 April 1944.

MIKAN 3225494

Southwick Estate

This is another location used heavily by the school for "Boating Drill", "Bridging" and "Improved river crossing". These activities took place on the lake within the grounds of Southwick House and involved the use of collapsible boats both as pontoons and as boats proper. They were also trained to use Kapok bridging equipment which used Kapok filled floats as pontoons.

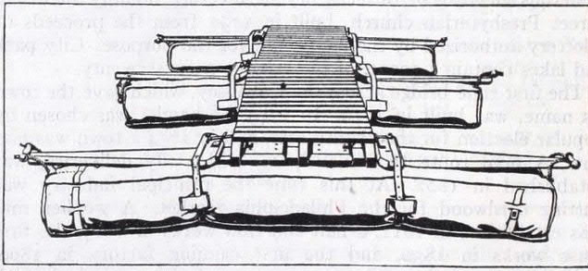


FIG. 1.—KAPOK ASSAULT BRIDGE, SHOWING THE BUOYANT CUSHIONS FILLED WITH KAPOK, A LIGHT COTTON-LIKE SUBSTANCE OBTAINED FROM TREES NATIVE TO JAVA AND THE INDIAN ARCHIPELAGO. THESE CUSHIONS REMAIN AFLOAT EVEN WHEN REPEATEDLY PUNCTURED BY RIFLE FIRE

Kapok Infantry Bridge

thinkdefence.co.uk



Men of the 8th Sherwood Foresters cross a river using a small kapok pontoon bridge, Dunadry in Northern Ireland, 28 August 1941.

thinkdefence.co.uk



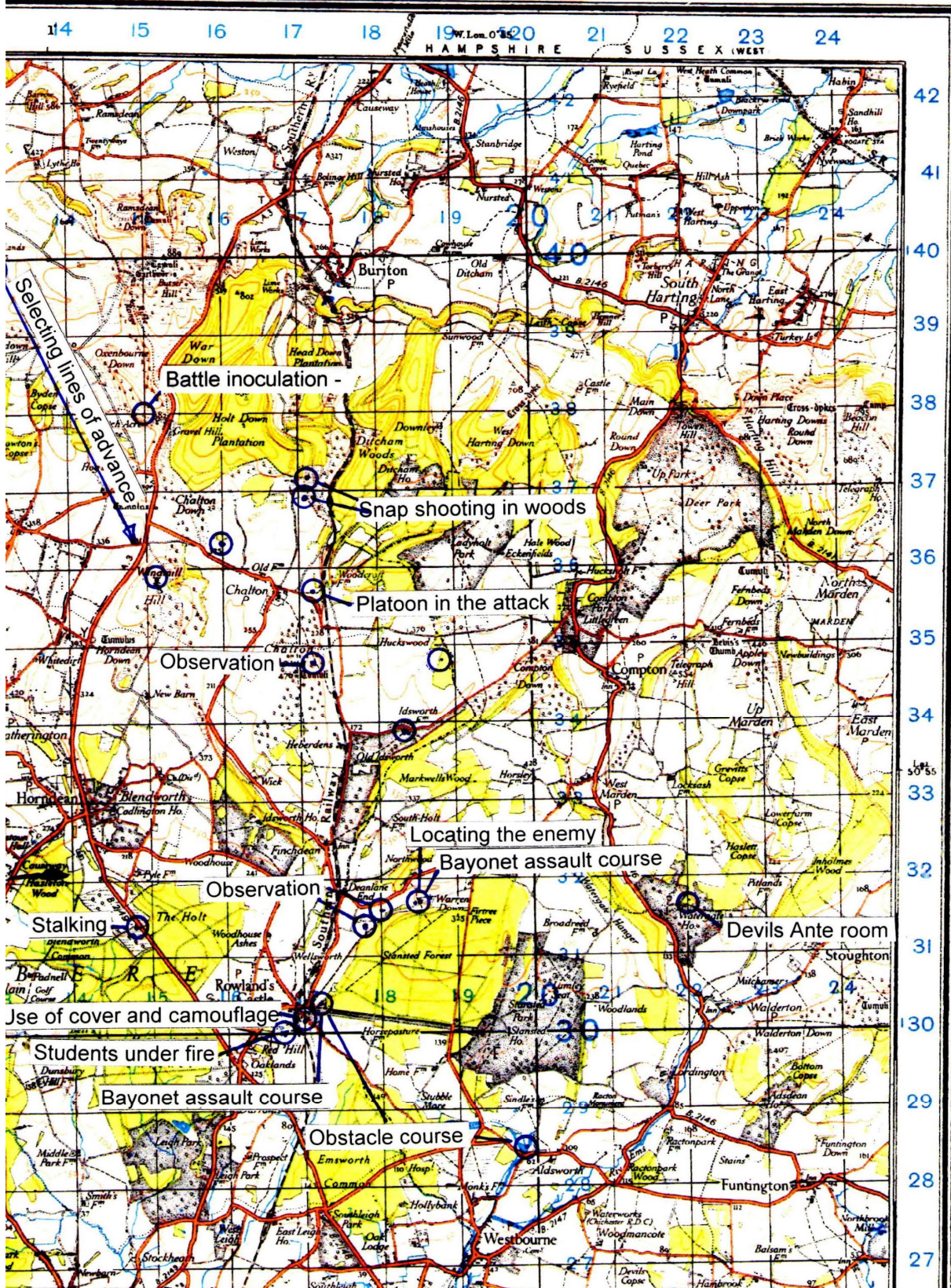
Folding Boat Equipment – FBE mk III

thinkdefence.co.uk

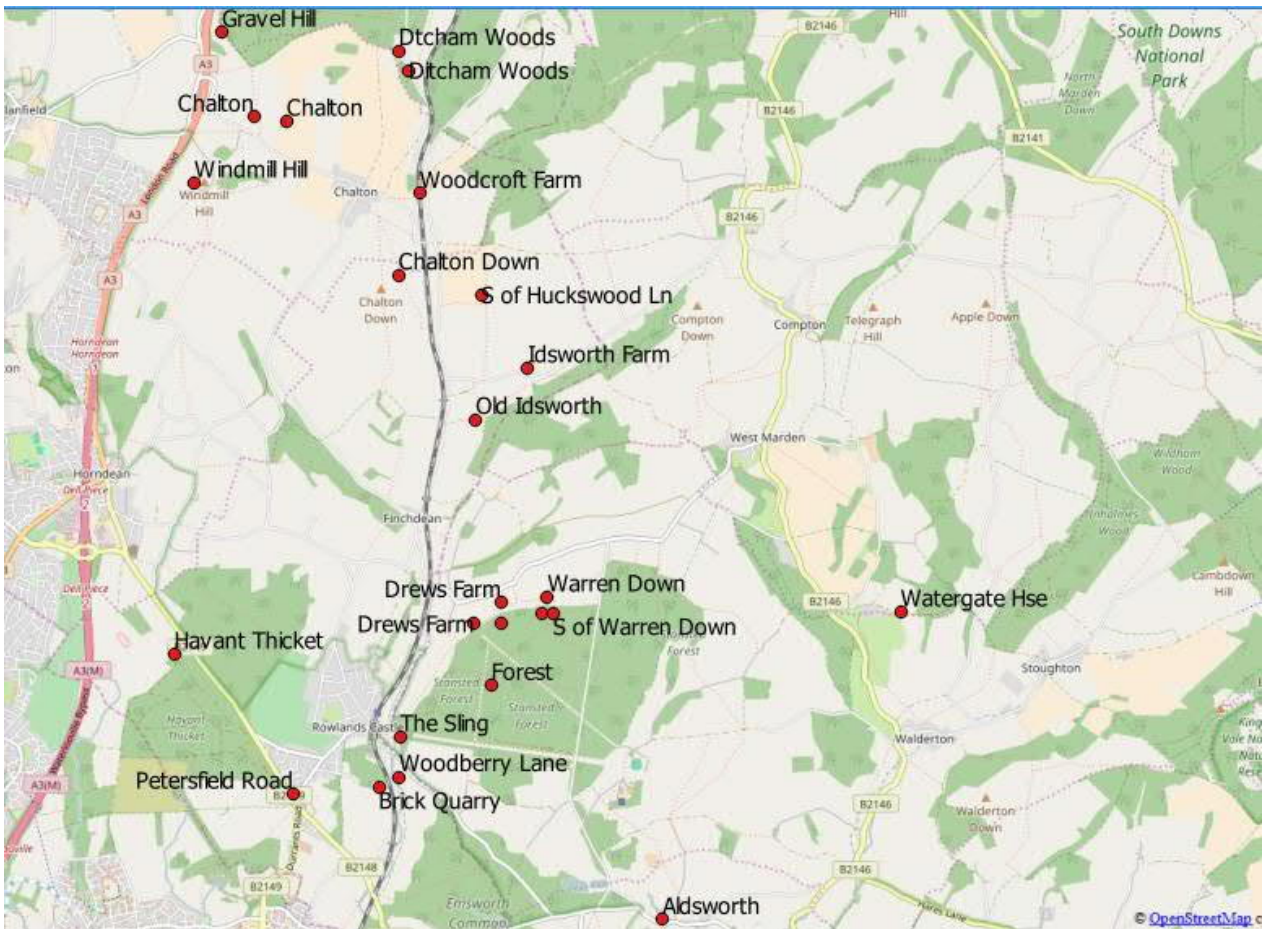
Local Activities

The following is a wartime map that has been annotated with the location of some of the activities indicated. Once again, these locations have been identified using map reference or place name information:

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24
 W. Lon. 0° 55' HAMPSHIRE SUSSEX (WEST)
 SHEET 132



ref 20



All the main lectures and many of the demonstrations and practice sessions took place in the camp area which was located in Sling. Many of the places used by the school for training locally will be very familiar to local residents who may be surprised by what went on so close to home.

An example of this is the use of a pillbox in the Chalton area. The school used this for teaching the students how to attack fortified positions such as blockhouses using smoke mortars to cover the attack, Bangalore torpedos to cut barbed wire entanglements and demolition charges to complete the assault. The pillbox itself no longer exists because it was used by I.C.I to test some experimental explosives and was destroyed in October 1942 just after the school moved on.

The Ditcham woods area was another favourite location, being used by all the intakes for "Snap Shooting in the Woods". In this, the students were suddenly presented with pop-up targets as they walked along. The purpose of this was to give them practice in firing their weapons from the hip without sighting in the normal way.

The Bayonet Assault course which, as mentioned in Part 1, was amongst the toughest in the country, had a number of locations because the components were relatively easily moved. One location that will be familiar to most locals is Warren Down which lies just to the north of Stansted Forest.



“Battle Inoculation”, also known as “Students under Fire” involved familiarisation of the students with being under live fire conditions. This activity was one of the central components of the course and certainly one of the most mentally taxing. Not long after arriving, the school approached the manager of the Brickworks to get permission to locate the assault course in the clay pit there. It is not clear whether the assault course did end up there but the first couple of intakes were in fact subjected to “Students under Fire” on the Brickworks site. For safety it would have made sense to have used the clay pit for this. Subsequently Battle Inoculation took place in the area of Gravel Hill Bottom which is between the southern edge of what is now Queen Elizabeth Country Park and Chalton.

During the Senior Officers’ course, the use of Carriers and Mortars was demonstrated in Bowes Hill, in the northern part of the village. A May 1944 aerial photograph shows erratic vehicle track marks in the fields between Woodhouse Ashes Farm and Old Wellsworth, indicating intensive use of the fields by tracked vehicles. It is likely that this is a result of continued use by the army after the school had left Stansted. The area around Bowes Hill does have a history of military use going back to WW1 or even before



Modern map with possible training area marked.



Aerial Photo showing Bowes Hill area in May 1944

By using the information from the sketch map, information from LIDAR mapping and fieldwork, many of the camp's features and facilities could be located on a modern map:

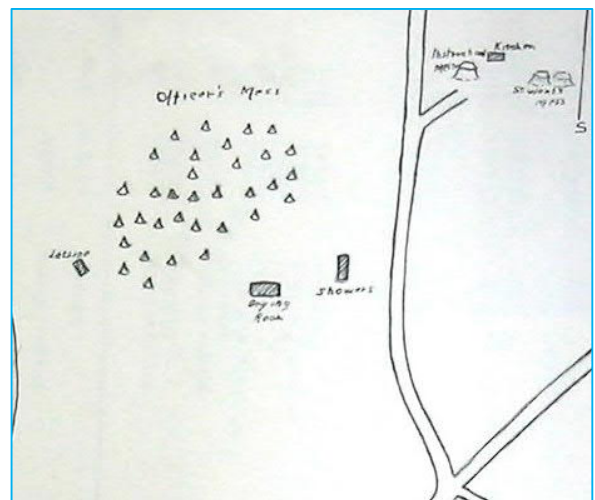


Facilities and Tented areas – Modern Map

Northern Part of Camp Area



Hut Base with steps – Possible officers' shower



This is a well-known feature in the forest consisting of a low 1ft wide rectangular wall measuring 24ft x 36ft with steps leading up. The longer walls have threaded studs and nuts embedded in their upper surfaces at 6ft centres. The enclosed area consists of earth with no obvious concrete slab indicating that the structure probably had a suspended floor. The overall dimensions of the wall and the distance between the bolts suggests that it could be the foundations for a Nissen type hut. There are other small features (discovered from LiDAR data) close by and lower down the natural slope. It is confirmed that they form part of a drainage system leading from the hut. The fact that the showers are shown as a rectangular symbol on the sketch map could suggest that the hut pre-dated the map. There is also comment in the unit War Diary on the condition of the facilities when the school's personnel arrived.

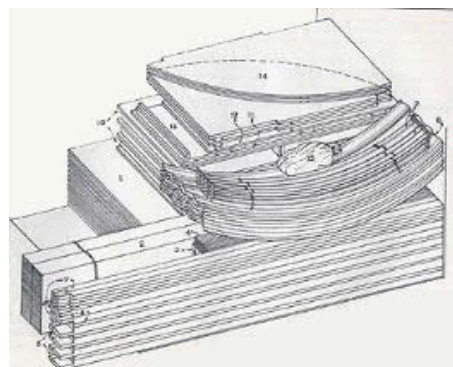
13th April "Only one tap, situated behind the cook house was at first available for use. Bathing facilities were entirely incapacitated because of numerous leaks in the pipes due to previous freezing. The ablution benches were in the same condition, being unusable. Bucket latrines were provided being in good condition for the men, but those for Sgts and Officers were in a poor state of repair and insufficient in number."

The purpose of the hut is unknown at present but could possibly be the officers shower block, being located close to the officers' lines.



Erected Nissen Hut

www.nissens.co.uk

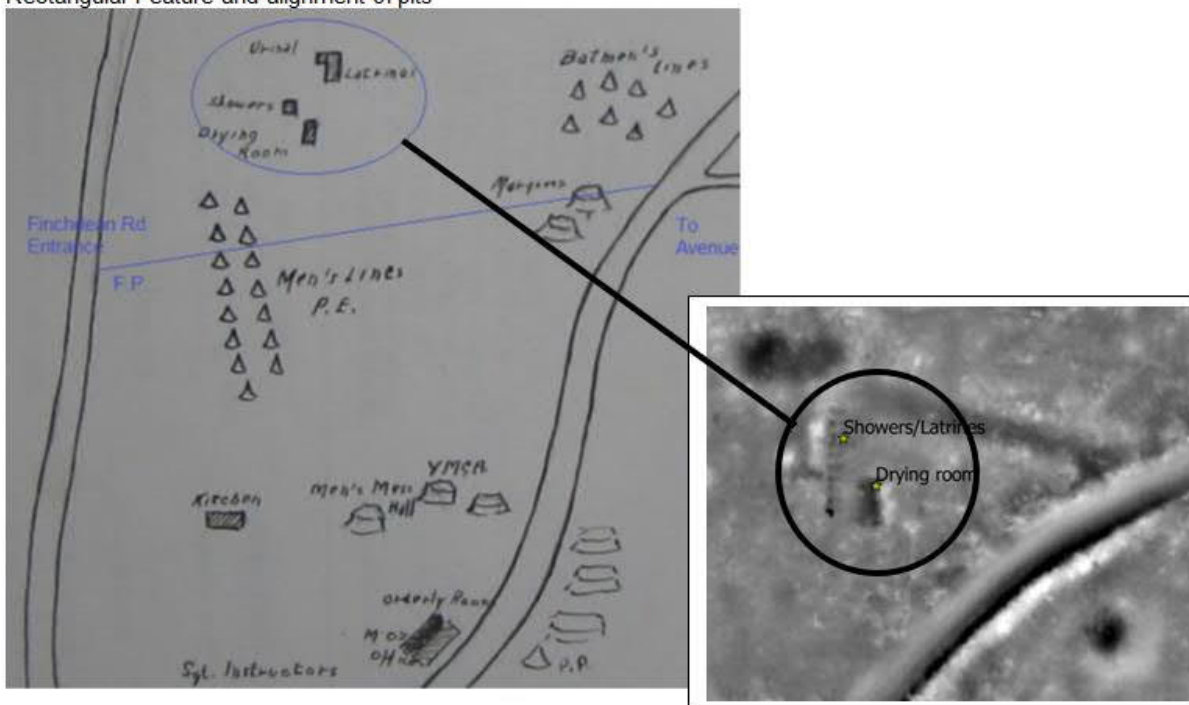


Nissen Hut Kit

www.nissens.co.uk

Central part of Camp Area

Rectangular Feature and alignment of pits



These features were first located as a result of LiDAR mapping and subsequently surveyed.

The main rectangular feature is an earth platform measuring 8m x 3.5m cut into an earth bank. It has a flat floor which has a small rectangular concrete slab possibly used to support a cast iron stove. It is suggested that this feature could be the drying room associated with the men's lines shown on the sketch map. There is no evidence of masonry foundations so the structure may have been made from wood on a more substantial timber base.

To the west of the rectangular area and parallel with the longest side is a line of 10 pits of approximately 1m across and 75cm deep, the southernmost one being larger. These pits could well have been used as latrines. Daily orders refer to latrine buckets being used inappropriately. So it is possible that the smaller pits were used to contain buckets and the larger one to the south may have been used as a urinal. The pits would have been separated by canvas or hessian screening.

Southern Part of Camp Area

Orderly Room and Medical Office:

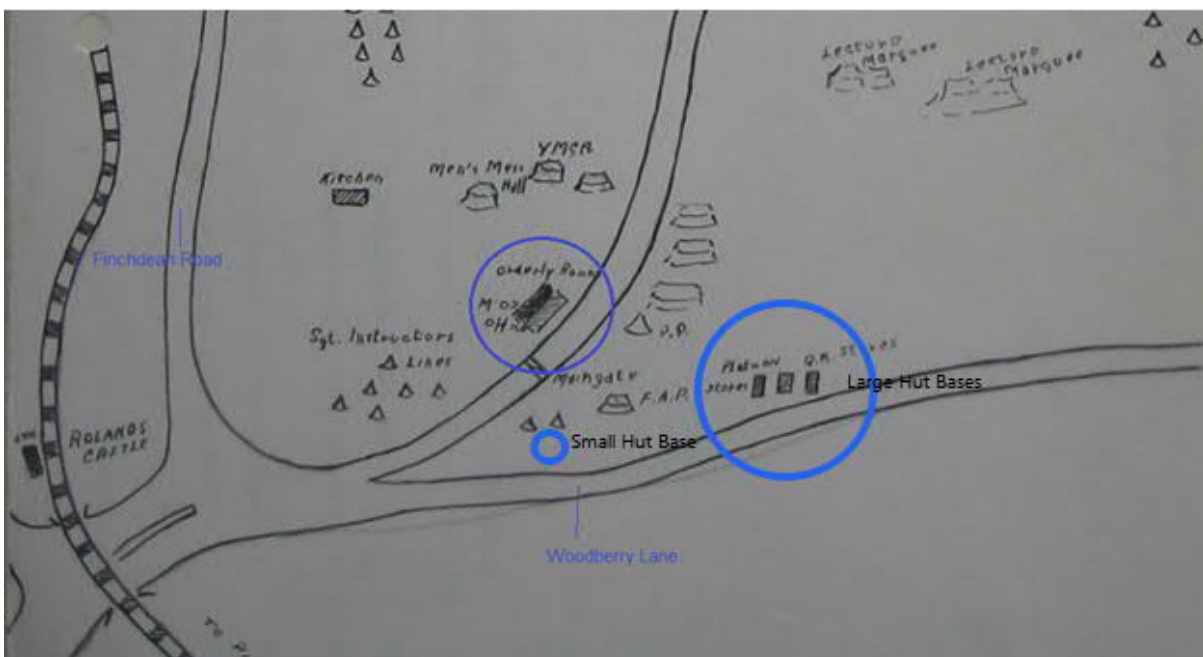
The sketch map shows that half of the Lodge was to be adopted for use by the school for use as the Orderly Room and Medical Office, as the War Diary states this happened following a survey by the Royal Engineers from the Chichester garrison..

Stores:

There are three rectangles adjacent to Woodberry lane marked on the sketch map as "Platoon Stores and QM Stores". Because of their end-use, they would have had to be substantial to keep the contents secure. It is unfortunate that this area is outside the LiDAR survey area but fieldwork has revealed the presence of three concrete hut bases in this location, two of which have been broken up. There are also several slit trenches and a smaller hut base, which could have been the Picket Post. (No access – this is private land)



Rowlands' Castle Lodge



Southern part of sketch map



Small concrete base – possibly a Picket or Guard post

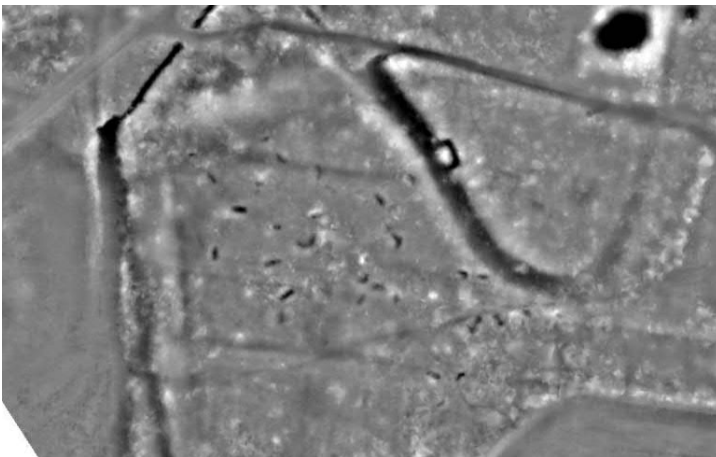


One of the Large Hut Bases – Probably Platoon Store no 2

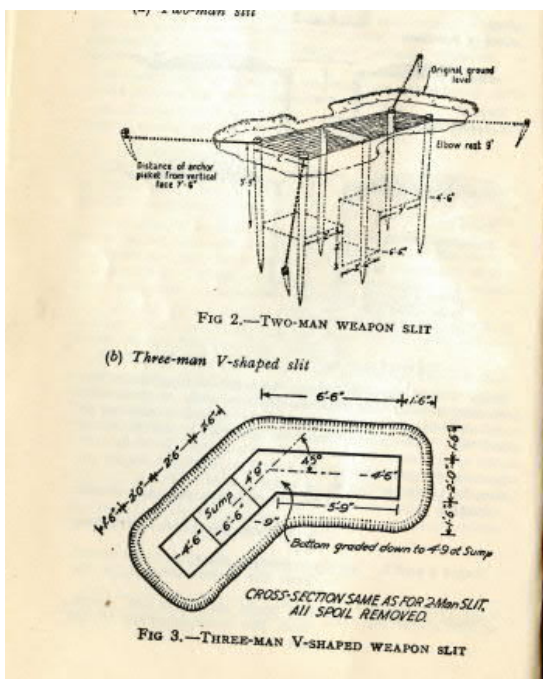
Slit Trenches

This LiDAR image shows a grouping of trenches in the area to the west of the end of the Avenue. These have been surveyed on the ground and correspond in shape and size to military trenches backfilled naturally over time.

There appear to be three types of trench, two of which correspond to types described in the Canadian Army Field Manual ie a Two-man weapon slit approx. 6ft x 2ft. and a three-man V shaped weapon slit. These were



probably used for the normal type of training exercises. The third type of trench, of which there are three examples, are not described in the training manual but are the same width as the two man trench although they are much longer. These are thought to be specific to the school and used as part of the "Tank Trapping" training activity. This is described in both the Training Manual and the War diary.



There is also a section about this particular activity in the Canadian Army Training Manual:

(f) Every man in the platoon, while in a weapon slit, will be overrun by tanks. He will regard this experience with considerable misgiving in the first place, and will feel an almost irresistible inclination to get out of the trench and run away. As soon as he finds out that the tank cannot possibly harm him, and that this form of weapon pit is tankproof, he will gain a great deal of confidence, and on the third or fourth run will be able to bob up again as soon as the tank has gone by and throw a grenade or aim his rifle at the following infantry.

ref 10

The Canadian Army Field Manual gives instructions on how these were to be constructed, accompanied by some diagrams. (Left)

The School's War Diary also mentions this activity.

Following a lecture and demonstration of tank trapping "... Students entered weapon pits and tanks ran over them. All expressed their appreciation and added faith and confidence in slit trench following this experience."

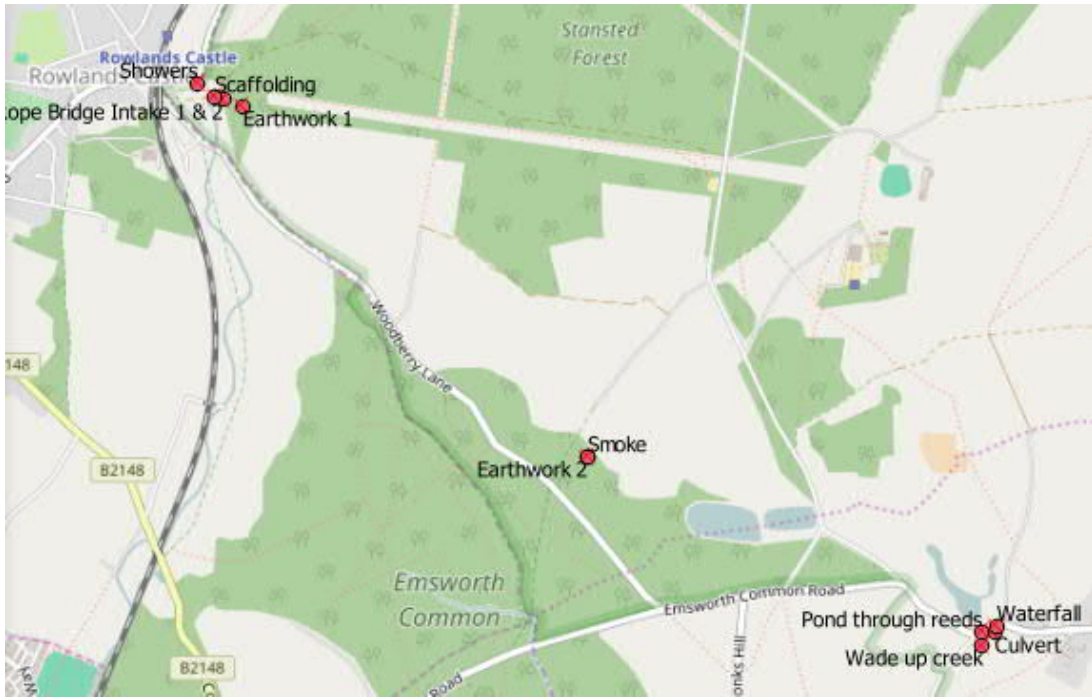
So maybe some of the longer, straight slit trenches could have been used in this exercise.

Assault course locations

For the first two intakes, the assault/obstacle course was located in the camp area, probably centred on "the Sling". This would have involved a number of stages one of which was the "Rope Bridge" as depicted in the photograph below. This shot was taken from a higher vantage point than the rope and is quite likely to have been from a high scaffolding obstacle similar to that shown below. It is also inconceivable that they didn't incorporate the ready-made delight of crawling through the 42m long, mud filled Lavants culvert into the course. This is shown in the photo after the recent removal of more than 1/2m of silt. It is also quite possible that the course involved the use of the nearby deep chalk quarry adjacent to Woodberry Lane to subject the trainees to live fire by the permanent staff's "reliable shots".

As detailed in Part 1, the course subsequently moved to the Aldsworth area and was graphically described in the Unit War Diary as "Deeks' Nightmare".

Assault course locations relative to the camp.



ref 19

Assault Course Stages - The Sling



Rope Bridge Stage

MIKAN 320321



Probable location of the Rope Bridge



Scaffolding stage may have looked like this



Entrance to the 42 metre long culvert



Inside the culvert after clearance

Assault Course stages - Aldsworth

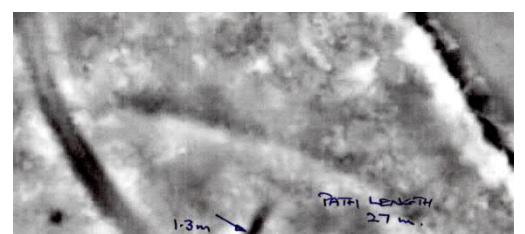
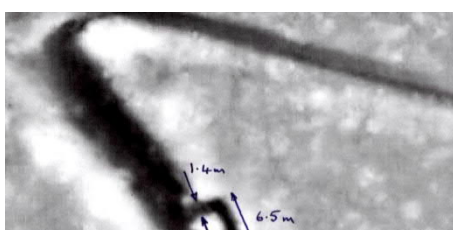


The "Waterfall" at Aldsworth



The Culvert under Emsworth Common Road

"U" Shaped Earthwork Features and their role in the assault courses.



LiDAR images of these features are shown above. Both features consist of a trench making up three sides of a square, cut into a hillslope. The first is located near the end of the Avenue, overlooking the Sling. The second, which has a longer path length, is located in the south of the estate just under a mile from the camp area. Because they are very similar in shape they probably had the same purpose. There is oral history (ref 13) which confirms that the first feature was still roofed over at the end of the war and local boys used to crawl through it when playing in the woods. The position of the first feature, within 50 metres of the Rope Bridge location, suggests that it may have been part of the Assault course, probably the final, smoke exposure stage. It is known from the War Diary that after the second student intake, the assault course was relocated from the camp area to Aldsworth, which is about 1 1/2 miles from the camp. Aldsworth has the dubious advantage of having plenty of water. The water from Aldsworth ponds tumbles over a weir, immediately through a culvert under the Emsworth Common Road and then runs into the river Ems. The area would therefore have provided an ideal, challenging location for the assault course. Because there is only one waterfall feature in the Aldsworth area this pinpoints the precise location of the Waterfall and Culvert stages. It is likely therefore that the students would have had to run or march at the double from the camp to the course at Aldsworth. After completing 18 of the 19 stages of Deeks' Nightmare at Aldsworth, they would probably have had to complete the final, smoke exposure stage in the covered trench on the way back to camp and then afterwards race on to a much appreciated and well deserved cold shower. Please note – earthwork 2 is on private land.