

The Story of The 69th Light Anti-Aircraft Battery Royal Canadian Artillery

Toronto

Foreword by Major Brookes Ferrar Gossage, MBE, MC, MiD

Signed *"All the best to Windacres" from Brookes and George, May 1948.*

"The remarks about Bucks Green apply only to the little slot of ground occupied by us & are 'civilian address' terms of endearment! The kindnesses and patience of those wonderful people called English will never be forgotten by the Canadians & we sincerely hope your memories are half as flattering as ours." George was his brother. Brookes had previously served in the Great War. Their grandfather had emigrated to Canada before 1860 when he married in Toronto.

Anne Gossage recalls: "It was an outrider from the Canadians stationed at Buck Green who came down the drive [to Windacres]; it is as vivid to me as if it was today. He wanted vegetable marrows, Mum told him, try Summerfold, but asked him who his commanding officer was. Gossage he said. Mum gave him her card; the rest is history. Brookes Gossage was a close relative and he and his brother Charlie then made the officers mess in our dining room. I can't believe that there were too many officers? When they left Rudgwick, the night before they gave me the most wonderful dolls house complete with everything, lights, car with gears - if only we still had it." Brookes Gossage died in 1975. Charles was another brother.

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The narrative below is taken from the above book.

The Battery along with 32nd and 100th were part of 4th LAA Regiment attached to 3rd Canadian Division which made the assault on Normandy in June 1944. The regiment holds the record for the most enemy planes shot down in Europe. it was only out of action for 17 days in its year fighting on the continent.

Recruitment was from personnel in Brantford (between London and Hamilton, Ont), Toronto and districts around in 1941, and disbanded only in late 1945.

Arriving in England September 1941, the first locations were Colchester and in Kent, with numerous other locations for training. Arrival at Bucks Green was on 18th October. 1942. A location that became known as The Bog, or Bucks Bog. "We decided we did not like it at all." Expeditions into the Sussex countryside were known as Plow Gallops (after the CO's surname, not necessarily the mud of a Sussex winter), a totally chaotic experience. To stay in Bucks Green for a month was about all human nerves could experience of the place. There was nothing to do in The Bog, but The Cricketers, The Queen's Head and The King's Head were well patronised. To spend seven nights a week in the same pub was hard to take. The battery left for the coast on 22 November, returning on 13 December to a sea of mud until Christmas when it became colder and frostier. That Christmas a children's party was organised, food and a movie, and a gun to clamber over, and of course presents. The three pubs did a wonderful trade on New Year's Eve to see in 1943. In a few days they left for Cark

in Cumbria, a place they had been in before, and almost as bad as Bucks Green. Interestingly, the guns could only be entrained at Horsham, Rudgwick not deemed suitable. "to load a Regiment (all three batteries) in blackout takes great skill". Then back to Sussex at the end of January. An appointment in Five Oaks Camp to cover a parade of Cameron Highlanders on the 29 January, polished guns etc., only for it to be cancelled and the battery sent to Worthing at 2 hours' notice, followed by The Isle of Wight, and back again, to be followed by a "battle" raging chaotically across the whole of southern England in February.

Back to The Bog after two weeks, 13 March, then off to Cark again. Return to The Bog was on 28 March. E Troop livened things up with a battle at Hyes Farm. In early May the battery was sent to Harlech. From bivouacs at Gaskyns on the night of 4 May, the battery set off for Bexhill in convoy, eventually ending up at Crawley on 7 May, thence by incremental bivouacs to Sennybridge in Wales, returning to Worthing on 13 May (700 miles, not a shot fired in appalling weather, 4,270 gallons of petrol used). They returned to The Bog on 24 May. Apparently, one of the sins of the Canadians was pinching onions from allotments and gardens in the village [surely not in May?]. Staying in Bucks Green was known as Bog sickness. On 19 June peace was shattered when the NAAFI canteen was blown up in a gas explosion, blamed on Gunner Sammy Carter. On 21 June Bucks Green Camp was given a spring clean, drains were dug, paths paved, some landscaping done, but a Nissen hut was still a Nissen hut even when dressed up. this was followed by a dance on 26 June, a band found from the 3 Division Concert Party. Some went to Cornwall whilst others stayed in Rudgwick. Rudgwick was by now being seen as a good place for three square meals and a good jumping off point for leave [Worthing, London?]. Some men were detailed to put up power lines for the "authorities". Time that summer was spent digging trenches in the camp, and creating gardens around the NAAFI. No sooner than the potatoes were ready, they had to leave camp again for the Sussex coast.

Back in September to Bucks Green, the account suggested that other Canadian batteries may have been there in the interim, requiring a clean-up. That was followed by wholesale removal, under great secrecy to Barton-on-Sea in Hampshire on 15 September, never to return to Bucks Green. Never mind that mail arrived there before they did, and that all of Rudgwick seemed to know where they were going. Barton was said to be the best posting yet both for the battery and for the locals who had never had foreign troops before. This was followed by Bournemouth on 30th September where they stayed longer than anywhere else in England, until 12 April 1944. Next was to Bisley in Surrey using its famous firing ranges.

As D Day got nearer, they moved to Wickham north of Portsmouth, then Botley a little further west. Embarkation of guns etc. began on D+1, 7 June, but arrival in France was not until 11 June.

So, the last Rudgwick saw of the Canadians was in September 1943.

The book's locations diary gives the dates in Bucks Green as:

18 October – 22 November 1942

13 December – 12 January 1943

26 January - 30 January

13 March – 17 March

28 March - 26 April

24 May – 9 June

17 June – 29 June

13 July – 27 July

1 September – 15 September.

The camp from USAAF imagery 1944.

