



Mountsorrel Quarrymen and Royal Engineer Quarry Companies



Introduction

Living up to their motto "Ubique" ("Everywhere"), the Corps of Royal Engineers (RE) has a long heritage of service worldwide, tracing their roots back to the military engineers brought over by William the Conqueror in 1066 and led by Humphrey de Tilleaul and Bishop Gundulf of Rochester.

Today's Corps have their origins, as does the Royal Artillery, with the Board of Ordnance established in the 15th century. In 1717 the Board formerly established a Corps of Engineers all of whom were commissioned officers with the manual work being done by contracted civilian artisans and labourers working in Artificer Companies. In 1782 the first unit manned by soldiers was formed for service in Gibraltar. By 1862 all the various elements of military engineers, artificers, sappers and miners had been properly amalgamated into the Corps of Royal Engineers and came under the Commander-in-chief of the Forces.

As can expected from their title, the Corps was and is still today involved in every aspect of military engineering, from survey work, through defensive works construction, water drilling, bridging to road construction and building and operation of railways and inland waterways. Always in the forefront of the use of technology the Corps had before the outbreak of World War 1 established an Air Battalion that was the forerunner of the Royal Flying Corps and subsequently the Royal Air Force. Similarly they were responsible for the first military wireless and telephone communications.

In addition to the specialist engineer units the Corps also deployed Field Companies in support of the Divisions of the regular Field Army and the reservists of the Territorial Force. Their numbers at the outbreak of war in 1914 were:

	Officers	Other Ranks
Regular army and Special Reserve	1,056	10,394
Territorial Force	513	13127

They formed:

- 26 coastal defence Fortress Companies (incl. 15 overseas)
- 7 Signal Companies
- 2 Cable and Airline (signalling) Companies
- 15 Field Companies
- 3 Survey Companies
- 2 Railway Companies

Additionally there were other miscellaneous units and 9 Depot companies carrying out training and administrative duties, as well as specialist engineer training Schools.

By November 1918 the numbers had risen to 229,336 in some 1,328 units.

In France and Flanders at war's end alongside the Field Squadrons and Companies supporting, Army, Corps and Divisional troops there were also:

- Siege Companies,
- Artisan Works Companies,
- Works Companies,
- Electrical & Mechanical Companies,
- Land Drainage Company,
- Field Searchlight Company,
- Tunnelling Companies,
- Special (Gas) Battalions and Companies,
- Survey Battalions,
- Printing Company,
- Forestry Companies,
- Pontoon Field Parks,
- Signal Companies.
- Quarry Companies

The need for Quarrymen and the Formation of Quarry Companies RE

As the war developed into static trench warfare and the numerical scale and complexity of the armies on the Western Front grew so did the need for military road and rail construction and with that a demand for raw materials and the men to obtain them from quarries.

The first two Quarrying Companies (198 & 199) were formed in the summer of 1916, and the men were gathered at the Tunnelling Depot at Clipstone. Moving to France in August and coming under the control of the Director of Works (France).

By August of 1917 this number had been raised to a total of 10 companies. The large increase in the number of Quarrying Companies was part of a much greater demand for manpower and saw men with little military training being rushed to the front. In this skill area the quarries not only of Leicestershire but across the country saw men from Aberdeen to Penmaenmawr to Guernsey needed for quarrying operations for the Western Front. Along with the new recruits professional quarrymen who were already serving in the Army were transferred so that their trade skills could best be used. And we see men of 4th and 5th Battalions Leicestershire Regiment being transferred often through their Divisional Engineer unit to the Royal Engineers. These men are believed to have formed two companies, 328 and 329, which were formed in France.

In late 1916 or early 1917 the Depot was moved to Buxton, which was being used as a Depot for RE Army Troops Company men and was called "School for Instruction in Engineering" (S.I.E.). A total of 7 companies were formed at Buxton, 320 to 326. Any surplus men were then sent to the Road Troops Depot at Aldershot. One further

company, 327, was formed from Irish volunteers at the Curragh. A final company, 348, was formed at the Roads Depot in Aldershot in October 1917.

The criticality of quarries and the specialist men to operate them to the war effort was highlighted by the French Commander-in Chief, General Petain who, in late March 1918 during the German Kaiserslacht offensives said to Winston Churchill “*A battle like this runs through regular phases. The first, in which we now are, is forming a front of any kind. It is the phase of Men. The second phase is that of guns. We are entering upon that. In forty-eight hours we shall have strong artillery organizations. The next is Ammunition supplies. That will be fully provided in four days. **The next phase is Roads. All the roads will be breaking up under the traffic in a week's time. But we are opening up our quarries this evening. We ought to be in time with the roads if the front holds where it is***”.

Training and Organisation

Training was limited to testing the man's quarrying skills and knowledge they did not receive any true military training and as can be seen from the Establishment weapons issues were minimal. A Guernsey quarryman who served in 321 Company recollected in the 1980s that he thought he had joined up to a civilian outfit and was therefore rather surprised when on arrival at Buxton to be issued with an Army uniform.

Royal Engineer Quarry Units and Depots			
Unit	Location	Date	Comments
Tunnelling Depot RE	Clipstone	1916	Initial formation point for Quarry units
Army Troops Depot RE and School for Instruction in Engineering	Buxton	1917	Quarry training and unit formation location
Roads Depot RE	Salamanca Barracks, Aldershot	1916	Depot administrative facility
198 Company	Marquise/Rinxent	1916	Formed at Clipstone moved to France
199 Company	Marquise/Rinxent	1916	Formed at Clipstone moved to France
320 Company	Marquise/Rinxent	1917	Formed at Buxton moved to France
321 Company	Marquise/Rinxent	1917	Formed at Buxton moved to France
322 Company	Marquise/Rinxent	1917	Formed at Buxton moved to France
323 Company	Marquise/Rinxent	1917	Formed at Buxton moved to France
324 Company	Marquise/Rinxent	1917	Formed at Buxton

			moved to France
325 Company		1917	Formed at Buxton moved to France
326 Company		1917	Formed at Buxton moved to France
327 Company	Marquise/Rinxent	1917	Formed at The Curragh moved to France
328 Company	Marquise/Rinxent		Formed in France
329 Company	Marquise/Rinxent		Formed in France
348 Company		1917	Formed at Aldershot moved to France October 1917
NB: RE archives note the existence of 190 to 195 and 197 Quarry Companies but no details is extant. It is possible that these were initial designations of training establishments or of early unit formations.			

On arrival in France the majority of the units went immediately to the area of the Marquise quarry complex and started work.

Organisation of a Quarry Company Royal Engineers RE

War Establishment July 1916

Quarry Company Royal Engineers – Establishment July 1916					
Rank	Number	Corps	Role	Pay Scale	Comments
Captain	1	RE	Command		To report with complete personal equipment
Subaltern (Lieutenant or 2 nd Lt.)	3	RE	Sub Unit command		To report with complete personal equipment
CSM (Company Sergeant Major – Warrant Officer)	1	RE	Command		To report with complete personal equipment
CQMS (Company Quarter Master Sergeant – Staff Sergeant/Warrant Officer)	1	RE	Administrator		To report with complete personal equipment
Sergeant (Sgt)	4	RE	Command/Administrator		To report with complete personal equipment
Corporal (Cpl)	8	RE	foreman	2s 6d per day Plus 1s to 2s RE Pay per day according to grade	issued with personal equipment with sidearms but without

					rifles.
Lance Corporal (L/Cpl)	16	RE			issued with personal equipment with sidearms but without rifles.
Sappers	228	RE	Skilled Quarrymen but to include trades as listed below	1s 2d per day according to grade	issued with personal equipment with sidearms but without rifles.
Cook	1	Infantry			
Batmen	4	Infantry	Officer's orderlies		
Drivers	1	Army Service Corps	Horse Transport Driver		
Specialist trades –included within Sapper establishment of 228					
Steam Engine Drivers	16	RE		1s 2d per day Plus 1s to 2s RE Pay per day according to grade	Subject to a trade test before acceptance
Internal Combustion Engine Drivers	4	RE		1s 2d per day Plus 1s to 2s RE Pay per day according to grade	Subject to a trade test before acceptance
Bootmakers	2				
Carpenters & Joiners	2	RE			
Gas fitters and Plumbers	2	RE			
Masons	2	RE			
Platelayer	2	RE			
Quarrymen	197	RE			
Smiths	4	RE			
Tailor	1	RE			
Tinsmith	1	RE			
Transport					
Bicycles	4				
GS Wagons	1				
Draught Horse or Mules	2				

Operational Quarries supporting the Western Front

The mission of a Quarry Company RE was the operation of quarries for the purpose of producing road metal (crushed stone or aggregate) primarily for the construction of roads and for ballast for railway tracks.

The work of the quarry companies was augmented by skilled French labour and local civilian labour as well as RE Army Troops Companies and R.E. Labour Battalions. The quarries were supported by a train depot operated by RE Railway Companies.

Quarry Location or Name	Type of Rock
Beaulieu (Galtier's Quarry) Marquise/Rinxente area Pas de Calais	Limestone
Lonquety	Limestone (fair quality)
Vallée Heureuse Pas de Calais	Limestone (soft)
Audrehem	Flint gravel
Necy (Orne)	Quartzite
St. André (Marquise) Pas de Calais	Limestone
Etavaux (near Caen)	Quartzoid and schist
Incheville (on River Bresle near Le Tréport)	Flint gravel
Milly (sur Therain)	Sand (fine concrete aggregate)
Ste. Pierre Halte (Pas de Calais)	Beach shingle (gravel)
Arques La Bataille (near Dieppe)	Flint gravel
Banc Noir (Rinxent) Pas de Calais	Limestone
Boulogne (Outreau Steel Works)	Slag

Most of the companies were deployed in the quarries around Marquise near Calais, although two and a half companies are known to have been deployed elsewhere.

The work of the men in a Quarry Company typically involved first removing the overburden, or soil, from the rock to be quarried. The rock was then drilled and blasted from the quarry face and the blast rock was transported to the crusher to break it down to a suitable size for use as road metal, railroad ballast or concrete aggregate. Screens may have been used in conjunction with the crusher to obtain a suitable grain size distribution. The processed stone was then stockpiled until it could be hauled away by railroad, truck or wagon to its intended place of use.

The equipment used consisted primarily of pneumatic compressors, pneumatic drills, pneumatic jack-hammers, rock crushers, and side-tipping wagons. The French normally used cheddite as an explosive when working the quarries, but early in 1916 the British supplied the quarries with blastine.

At Marquise the work was 24 hours a day, in a shift system. It is reported that the shift continued until the required amount of stone had been quarried. A Quarryman writing home states that whilst at Marquise/Rinxent "we were split up into 3 parties for separate quarries and where I had to go was called the Happy Valley or Heureuse and was about 1 ¼ miles away but we have to rise at 5 and go to work at 5.45 and work till 5.30 with ½ hour for breakfast and 1 ¼ hours for dinner but you have so much work to do before you can give over for the day and for a company like ours we have to turn out 300 tons for the 24 hours work. So on the Monday morning May 20 we all began working in our quarry day and night shift. The quarry is

called Beaulieu and I am working the first week on day work. They are joined by 325 Q Coy on June 6th



Mountsorrel Quarrymen in France 1917

It was not unusual for Quarry Company men to remain in France long after the Armistice was signed as the Quarrying Companies were needed to assist the French and Belgians with the rebuilding of their roads and secondly because these units were formed late in the war, the men had to wait for demobilization until those who had been called up before him were discharged.

Quarrying Companies Casualties

The Quarrying Companies were rear echelon units and the men who served in them were normally relatively safe because of their distance from the front lines. This does not, however, mean that these units were without losses through sickness but also through enemy action and accidents. It is known the quarries were subject to an air raid on 25th September 1916 when a number of men, including Mountsorrel men, were killed.

Mountsorrel Quarrymen Casualties

196184 Sapper John Henry Pick

198th Quarrying Company RE

Killed 25th Sept 1917 Aged 30

Buried in grave I.B.4. Les Baraques Military Cemetery, Sangatte, France

Son of George and Emma Pick of Mountsorrel and husband of Ada Pick of 1 Church Lane Quorn

262380 Sapper Cecil Porter

324th Quarrying Company RE

Killed 1st April 1917 Aged 30

Buried at Div. 3 L. 12 Ste. Marie Cemetery, Le Havre

Son of Joseph and Martha Ann Porter of Mountsorrel

196206 Sapper Harry Slingsby

198th Quarrying Company RE

Killed 25th September 1917 Aged 43

Buried in grave I.B.5 Les Baraques Military Cemetery, Sangatte, France

Husband of Mrs. Slingsby 7 Hawcliffe Rd. Mountsorrel

