

## ABERFAN

At lunchtime on Sunday, October 30th 1966, The Battalion was warned for duty at the scene of the Aberfan disaster which occurred on the Friday. Originally, we were ordered to send as many men as could be mustered that evening, but this was changed during the afternoon to an early morning move on Monday.

Well before first light on Monday the advance party left Honiton for Sennybridge to take over accommodation there for the Battalion. At first light the Recce party left for Aberfan by helicopter. The Battalion left barracks shortly after and were concentrated at Sennybridge by the early afternoon.

The first two companies moved into the disaster area and a very sad sight met their eyes, The Press and TV pictures could not really give the impression of the overall sadness of the scene

The impact of actually being on the spot was a most moving experience for us all. Two companies were at the scene for twelve hours at a time so that everyone worked in two shifts, twelve hours on and twelve hours off. During the off-duty period the companies returned to Sennybridge for a meal, a sleep and then another meal before coming out again.

Initially our tasks were to maintain an inner and outer cordon to keep out everyone except those working at the site, and to provide a reserve of men for emergency. However the cordon duties were soon relaxed and our task became the provision of labour to help clear the area. This involved us in numerous jobs, but we were glad to undertake them all, unpleasant as some of them were, since we felt we were providing a direct contribution to help.

We assisted in traffic control, digging for bodies, clearing out houses, work on the tip itself to make it secure, sandbagging, laying pipes, carrying stores and many other minor tasks such as cleaning out the mortuaries, water supply and so on. A major task we had was to dig the mass graves and fill them in again after the burial. This was perhaps the saddest job of all; it had to be carried out at night, and involved moving and repositioning the thousand or so floral tributes which had been received from all over the World.

Throughout our work we were supplied with tea, soup and sandwiches, of which there seemed to be a never ending supply, by the Salvation Army, W.R.V.S., Red Cross and various church organisations—and we are most grateful to them all. We remained for nearly a week, our final job being to provide a cordon for the visit of H.M. the Queen on the following Saturday, although in the event the sightseers kept away and we were not needed for this.

Throughout everyone was most kind and helpful to us and seemed pleased to see us on the scene. We believe our presence did a lot to assist in giving the army a good name and we were of course glad to have been called upon to help on this occasion.

A collection was subsequently made to buy a memorial seat for the cemetery at Aberfan. This was handed over at a small ceremony to the Major of Merthyr Tydfil by the Second-in-Command, Major D.E. Dunand, accompanied by Ptes Harmer, Rourke, Sankey, Dunlop and Bdsman Raynor.