

WHISTLER

Major RJR Whistler MBE started his military service with the Territorial Army in London with the Artists Rifles. He was subsequently commissioned into the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and then deployed to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). Serving with 4th Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry alongside 2nd Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, he was involved in the defence of Cassel in northern France, holding back the German for three days as part of the defensive screen around Dunkirk during the evacuation. The British forces had prepared a defence on the hilltop, emplacing anti-tank guns and barricading the narrow streets of the town. After scoring initial successes against the tanks of Panzer Regiment 11, which had made the mistake of advancing without infantry support, the British garrison was heavily attacked from the ground and air and much of the town was reduced to ruins. With most of his fellow officers killed in this action and with Roger wounded in the knee, he was captured, but the defence played an important part in holding up the Germans while the Dunkirk evacuation was taking place. Spending the rest of war as a Prisoner-of-War, Roger escaped several times, but was recaptured. After 5 years he finally escaped while being marched to Austria and spent the last few weeks of the war manning a Machine Gun on a US tank (his family still has the case of the last round of 0.5 ammunition fired, which Roger brought with him when he returned to England at the end of war). After the war he was promoted Captain on secondment to the Provost Service for many years: serving in East Anglia; and as a Staff Captain at the War Office in Officer Personnel Administration. A posting to Malaya followed where he again saw further Active Service, initially in Kuala Lumpur, and then in the jungle. Promoted Major in 1951, he served in Singapore at General Headquarters Far East Land Forces (GHQ FARELF) as APM, returning to the UK in 1953, to become Chief Instructor at the RMP Depot and Training Establishment at Woking. His last posting was to Germany with Headquarters Rhine Army. He retired in 1962. A very private man and many thought him stand offish, but once he got to know and trust a person he became very affable. Towards the end of his service he was employed in Regimental Headquarters with responsibilities for the RMPA and Museum. The RMPA had been formed in 1946, replacing the defunct CMP Old Comrades (War) Association. On retirement he remained in post, as Assistant Regimental Secretary, which had become a Retired Officers' appointment. The Museum then consisted of a collection of memorabilia akin to a private collection and together with the Museum Assistant, the late George Pitter, Roger set about reorganisation. His plans were advanced accidentally in 1962, when severe frost ruptured the water tank in the Clock Tower above, sending thousands of gallons of freezing water down into the Museum below and ruining many of the exhibits. This gave Roger the opportunity he needed to dispose of much of the rubbish (there was no other word for it) that comprised

much of the collection, thus the makings of a modern museum was born. His energy was also directed at the Depot Branch RMPA, which soon became a thriving organisation with well attended events. The annual RMPA Reunion also received the 'Whistler treatment' and the first held in Chichester in 1964, saw everyone of the 222 seats, the maximum the Barrack's dining room could then take, occupied and many applications had to be refused. Roger had, of course become a RMP Officer when the Corps of Officers was formed in 1954, and it is not generally realised that not all seconded officers had been offered a transfer. Another of his memorable actions was to transform a neglected lawn outside the old barracks Chapel into a beautiful memorial garden, honouring those who gave their lives in the Corps. He provided the means and the late Mr Gates, the Depot gardener; and volunteers the labour. When The Corps moved to Chichester, Roger transferred turf from the garden to Roussillon Barracks, where a Street (Whistler Avenue) was named after his cousin General Sir Lashmer (Bolo) Whistler GCB, KBE, DSO (and 2 Bars) DL, who had commanded the then Royal Sussex Regimental Depot at Roussillon Barracks before the war. One patch was laid at the entrance and another outside the CO's office. The former disappeared when the Gatehouse was built and when the move to Southwick Park took place, a turf from outside the CO's Office was re-laid at the new Chapel's Garden of Remembrance. Roger's unstinting work for the RMPA and other matters resulted in him being appointed MBE (Civil Division). The French Government also awarded him the Dunkirk Medal.