



## TfL Corporate Archives Research Guides: World War II 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition

### London Transport Staff Overseas

In 1939, London's public transport authority, the London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB), had over 86,000 members of staff on its payroll. By October, 7,121 had enlisted into the armed forces, and by the end of the war, 22,580 employees had been called up for service.

LPTB staff were sent to fight the Axis all over the world and were involved in many pivotal battles which would support the allied victory.

#### LPTB's Anti-Aircraft Regiment

The 84th (London Transport) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, part of the Royal Artillery, was formed in October 1938 following Hitler's violation of the Munich Agreement made between Germany, France and Britain.



*Officers and men of the 84th (London Transport) Anti-Aircraft Regiment on parade at Stonebridge Park depot after call-up. 5 August 1939. Image courtesy of London Transport Museum 1998/35730*

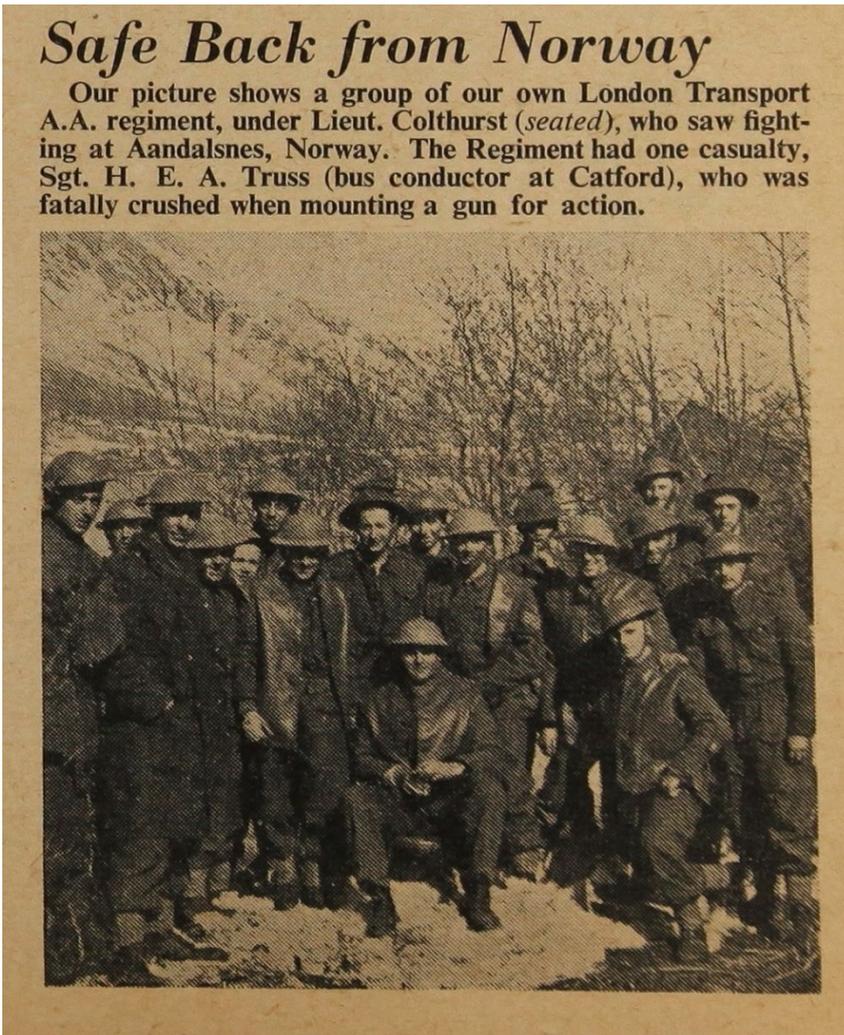
The new regiment was composed of four batteries recruited from LTPB staff and for this reason 'London Transport' was included in its title. Its motto was 'Strong for Service', a phrase coined during the advertising of the creation of the LPTB in 1933.



*An officer and soldiers from the 84th (London Transport) Anti-Aircraft Regiment take part in firing practice. 18 August 1939. Image courtesy of London Transport Museum 1998/51204*

One battery landed in Norway in 1940, and after a stint at home the regiment saw action in Italy and North Africa.

The regiment took part in the Siege of Tobruk, battle for Sidi Rezegh, Battle of Medenine, the allied invasion of Sicily, and were the first battery of heavy anti-aircraft gunners to land in Tripoli in 1943.



### "Safe Back from Norway"

Photograph showing bus drivers who worked for the 84th Anti-Aircraft Regiment in France who saw action in Andalsnes, Norway. The regiment suffered one casualty, Sergeant H. E. A. Truss, a bus conductor from Catford, who was fatally crushed when mounting a gun during battle.

*Photograph of LPTB bus drivers drafted into the London Transport Anti-Aircraft Regiment. July 1940. Archive ref num: LT000030/078*

## Our Ack-Ack Men Hit Them Hard in Libya

SEVERAL enemy planes over Libya have been shot down by an A.A. battery composed, in part, of London Transport men. They have endured all the rigours of a desert campaign and, throughout, they have shown "cheerful willingness, the mark of London Transport the world over" (to quote one of their officers).

The battery in Libya was one of the batteries that together formed, in 1938, the A.A. Regiment, at that time a new unit that was recruited from London Transport staff and, for this reason, included the name London Transport in its title.

"Grand work has been done," says an officer. "But," he also says, "an unfortunate incident with some Jerry tanks resulted in three Officers and 63 Other Ranks being unaccounted for. Only ten of the Other Ranks were London Transport men. I have every reason to believe the majority were captured."

The battery was in the desert six months and fought hard; and in February, 1942, it returned to rest at its base, a lovely bay on the Mediterranean. Here 2nd Lieut. Joseph Fitzpatrick, who in civil life is a ticket clerk at Hammersmith (and joined as a gunner in September, 1939), wrote:

We landed in Egypt last summer and trained for the battle that is waging at present. Everyone was keen to get to grips with Jerry again, especially those who, like myself, had Norway and London blitz scores to pay off. When at last the Army moved forward and crossed the barbed-wire frontier into Libya, guns were manned but no enemy was seen.

Tobruk and Sidi Rezegh are two of the places we have seen in this campaign. Throughout it all we have had the honour of being the most advanced A.A. unit in the desert. We have several planes to our credit: these days the old Hun does not fly so low—he has learned to respect our A.A.

The country would make a London busman weep. Rock and boulders for miles, patches of scrub, deep escarpments and wadis [rocky watercourses], and (on top of it all) very heavy sandstorms. Navigation is by compass and we spent many a cold, foodless night through losing the way. Now and then one meets a gazelle or a rabbit in this wilderness, but its only regular inhabitants seem snakes and scorpions.

A good picture of Tobruk was given by two corporals who went round our Charlton and Chiswick works recently and addressed the staff at dinner time. The wreckage of 27 enemy dive bombers helped to fill the harbour, they mentioned, and was one sign of good work by A.A. gunners.

"The country would make a London busman weep"

The London Transport Anti-Aircraft batteries fought in Libya and were the most advanced unit in the desert campaign. Joseph Fitzpatrick, ticket clerk at Hammersmith, writes a letter to staff magazine *Pennyfare* discussing his wartime experiences and hardships navigating the rocky Libyan terrain.

*Anti-Aircraft Regiment takes down enemy planes over Libya. Article reporting on fighting taking place in the desert campaign. Includes account by Second Lieutenant Joseph Fitzpatrick, an Underground ticket clerk, on the exploits of an anti-aircraft battery in Egypt and Libya. May 1942. Archive ref num: LT000030/078*

The men were considered “seasoned desert rats” with a strong, fighting reputation. It was reported that some of the regiment’s batteries were employed in every port and landing used to bring goods ashore.

## ‘We are Desert Rats’ says an ‘Ack-Ack’ Major

**A**N H.A.A. battery formed in part of London Transport men (they were in the regiment formerly named after London Transport) was in the retreat from Libya to Egypt. An officer, whose civil life is in our Welfare Department, writes: “We are doing quite well at the moment (19 July is the date of his letter) and all have great confidence in the G.O.C., who is personally conducting the battle.

“Morale of the troops at the beginning of the last big battle was wonderful. My own regiment is considered seasoned desert rats. No thought but victory and on to Benghazi and Tripoli entered our minds.

“However, now we are hitting back strongly and confidently.”

The same officer curses the enemies of both sides—flies; and thanks Warco for socks after his old ones had perished from wear, washing and sand.

*Account from officer reporting on the progress of the fighting and good morale amongst the men. September 1942. Archive ref num: LT000030/078*

## Not just friends, but comrades

### Is the Army of To-day All Right?

I decided to try out this Army theory: so I joined the Board's own unit, the 84th (London Transport) Anti-Aircraft Regiment R.A. It's been eight months of good, clean, healthy living in a crowd of jolly good fellows. I am prepared to do lots of eight months with these friends, or I should say, comrades.

The Battery itself shows that the Army is a democratic organisation. We have had work to do, but to me it was a surprise, and gratifying, to see our officers remove their coats and grab pick or shovel and get "stuck into it" with the men.

Our evenings are made as comfortable as possible. A concert was arranged by the men and our Major did his stuff (even if he did break down!). Food is good, and this speaks well for the "Welfare Department." Any complaints are dealt with without delay.

Not a man in the Battery wishes himself out. The Army of To-day is all right.

R.F.B., Gunner, — Battery



*Bill Store*

Within the regiment morale of the troops was high, with a real sense of camaraderie. One gunner wrote to LTPB's staff magazine *Pennyfare* stating, "Not a man in the Battery wishes himself out".

The London Anti-Aircraft regiment was in high spirits and the officers were happy to be involved in routine tasks such as digging. Concerts were held in the evenings to boost morale and the men were fed well.

*Letter from a Gunner describing joining the 84th (London Transport) Anti-Aircraft Regiment. 1939. Archive ref num: LT000030/018*

Staff were stationed across the globe building railroads in North Africa, fighting in tanks and planes, and driving supply lorries across the rocky desert terrain - their civil skills coming into good use to support the war effort.

No matter where staff were stationed, teamwork was of the utmost importance and it wasn't uncommon that staff would be posted to the same units.

## 'It was Three Bells Over Arnhem' says Busman

**B**USMEN of London Transport were in despatch crews that, flying transport planes, dropped supplies to airborne comrades stubbornly holding on against the Germans near Arnhem.



'The first week was memorable for all of us', says one of these busmen. 'It was three bells over Arnhem all right. Flying in planes loaded with food, ammunition and petrol was far from a busman's holiday.'

'We entered enemy territory at Eindhoven—to be greeted by fierce flak. It caused our pilot sticky moments. Jerry was trying to turn us from our mission. But even a large hole in a wing and several holes in the fuselage didn't stop our carrying on to our dropping field, that at Arnhem.'

'We awaited, and so anxiously, the pilot's bell to signal us to push out our load. Only a matter of seconds—but hours (it seems) when tracer and A.A. fire flies up from all directions. And then our gay parachutes drop—drop *so* gently, and right into the middle of the dropping zone.'

'Another cargo delivered to our comrades! And back at the 'drome, the usual remark is, *Blimey! That was a sticky rounder.* But after all main thing, on all these trips, is TEAM-WORK.'

In one 'team' were three London Transport drivers: L. Cpl. J. E. Wells, Sidcup Garage; L. Cpl. G. F. Warman, Mortlake; and Dvr. A. E. Thomas, Catford.

*Flying planes over Arnhem "far from Busman's holiday". Working as a team, three LTPB bus drivers drop food, ammunition and petrol to comrades whilst being bombarded with bullets. November 1944. Archive ref num: LT000030/078*

Some roles were carried out in more solitary conditions. In a letter written to *Pennyfare* in 1944, Conductor at Sutton Garage J. M. Nevin uses his own resources and initiative to navigate torn, twisted shipwrecks as a diver in the navy.

*"The chief impression is utter loneliness. You need to tread warily. I talked to myself, considering each movement before acting, and I came through my first attempt very well."*

## Here's a Voice from the Deep: A DIVER'S

*Men of London Transport away in theatres of war have done most jobs: setting light to Berlin, building railroads in North Africa, making submarine raids on France—to name a few. Cdr. J. M. Nevin, Sutton Garage, is a diver: he explores, and salvages, the wreckage of lost ships in the Mediterranean.*

He has had several dips, as he light-heartedly calls descents to the ocean bed. 'My first dip', he wrote home, 'was for half-an-hour: it was one of the worst wrecks, about 40 ft. down—the ship on her side, masts and funnels broken off, the hull torn, twisted and jagged.



*Cdr. NEVIN*

'The chief impression is utter loneliness. You need to tread warily. I talked to myself, considering each movement before acting, and I came through my first attempt very well (in fact, like a professional). I am only sorry that I did not qualify years ago, as I feel that I am naturally capable of working in emergencies on my own resources and initiative.'

### **Blessing for Refloated Ship**

'A Maltese had an interest in one of the lost boats raised,' says Cdr. Nevin: 'his first act was to bring a priest aboard, fasten a crucifix to the mast, and bless the ship! But they are like that—the Maltese: look in a tool-chest or locker and always you see a holy picture or a Latin text. Their religion is a very real thing.'

The funny thing, the diver says, is that the days and nights pass quickly, much more quickly than they did when he was climbing up and down his trolleybus.

*Conductor J. M. Nevin inspects remains of lost ships in the Mediterranean, 1944.*

*Archive ref num: LT000030/078*

## Tummies to Feed

Members of staff drafted into the Army Catering Corps made sure troops were fed, sending hot cakes to hungry soldiers and overseeing civilians prepare food for soldiers at allied leave hotels.

One conductor from New Cross was tasked with feeding up to 7,000 soldiers of various ethnicity where different diets had to be considered.

Sergeant A.G. Ireland, was responsible for overseeing civilians prepare food for all 24 allied leave hotels in Blankenberghe, Belgium.

**5,000 Tummies Contented  
—Headache for Someone**

**A** CONDUCTOR at New Cross, Lt. A. G. Sharpe, Army Catering Corps, has the job of keeping a multitude of men of at least five races happy—by feeding them not merely well but properly.

This conductor, stationed in the Middle East, is Catering Adviser for a unit of 6,000 to 7,000 Kaffirs, Ceylonese, Arabs, Moslems—and our own boys as well.

He tells *Pennyfare*, 'Providing a different diet for each race is a headache at times—but it's very interesting.' No doubt the conductor is assisted by his experience in the hotel and catering industry for 18 years.



A night chargehand in the canteen of Holloway Garage, Sgt. A. G. Ireland, represents Army Catering Corps in the leave centre at Blankenberghe. He has a big duty—supervising cooking, by civilians, of meals prepared in all leave hotels, of which there are 24.

*Sgt. IRELAND*

In addition he supervises a bakery that produces two rolls for the breakfast of every man and woman on leave.

*An article on bus conductor Lieutenant Sharpe, based in the Middle East, was faced with supplying food for soldiers of various races including Kaffirs, Ceylonese and Arabs. Also, Sergeant Ireland, Night Chargehand at Holloway garage, who supervised cooking by civilians in leave hotels. October 1945. Archive ref num:*

*LT000030/78*

By the end of the war, 699 serving members of staff had been killed in action or had died on active service and 582 were reported as having been made prisoner of war.

Of these, 413 were known to have been liberated by the end of 1945, and 126 had resumed duty with the company by 1946.

*Story compiled using information in records at the Transport for London Corporate Archives. The Corporate Archives seeks to preserve and make accessible records, not to interpret them. A wider range of material is available for physical consultation.*

*This story has been enhanced using some material from the London Transport Museum Collection. All enquiries regarding this material should be made directly to that institution.*

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