

Ronald Elliott
Salerno Mutiny

The Jocks had this sort of tribal feeling about us in terms of their argument that they were Scottish soldiers should be in Scottish divisions so it was a nationalistic thing from their point of view as well as everything else. The Durhams didn't have that sort of aspect to it. So to most of it it was more like trade union solidarity than it was anything else. "Oh, we'll all stick together lads and they can't do anything to us", sort of thing. So it had little to do with war or whatever. And I remember there was this tall, red-headed Geordie sergeant, and I was in two minds I thought "perhaps I ought to help them", but on the other hand I really had only been in the 9th DLI about three weeks so I really hadn't very much of a case to be anyway if truth be told. So I went to him and I said "What should I do?" He said "Ah, lad", he said "you should support the Jocks and the Durhams", he said "they've been treated badly and if we all stick together we'll be all right". He says "you stick with me". It really didn't crystallise until they actually brought up all our kit. You see until we had everything, which included kitbags and so forth which always tend to go in the sort of rear positions. They're kept in the ship's hold and that sort of thing, and you thought "We'll pick them up later on and you're just left with your fighting kit. When you get your kitbag and your big pack and all that sort of thing that means you're complete, you've got all of your kit, then you can move, then you're more mobile. And that came up in one morning I remember and then after that point in time we really didn't have any excuse for not going anywhere. Before that we couldn't have gone anywhere because we weren't fully kitted, as it were, but once we'd got our kit up, and in that point in time we were in a mutiny situation. We all were paraded and this chap, toe out, I think he was a major, he might have been the brigadier or whatever but he said, in effect, that there had been mistakes made, they were sorry that it had happened the way that it did and that every effort would be made after the immediate problem to try and get people back into their proper formations or whatever. But for the moment that we really didn't have any option but to obey orders and report for duty and we would be posted to appropriate battalions within the 5th Army. And then the Riot Act was read out as far as I remember. Having that read out to you then you sort of appreciate the enormity of what you're into, that quite clearly you were disobeying lawful orders and could be shot or whatever. When the Riot Act is read out in those situations it brings a chill to anybody's mind. And the order was then given that all of those that wished now to obey their lawful orders were to centralise with all of their kit in the centre of this field. So I thought to myself after all this "I'm a bloody fool really. What have I got that I can say is any sort of an excuse for doing what I'm doing"? So I wandered off in the centre with my kit and lo and behold there was my friend the red headed sergeant organising the collecting together of the kit. And I said to him "I thought you said we all ought to stick together and we'd be all right". He said "Oh lad", he said "you have to obey orders at the end of the bloody day", he says "you can't beat the Army". So I reckoned that if he went then the least I could do was to go as well.