

The Biscuit Boys

Section 080

The Territorial Association

Origins

The Territorial movement as we know it today had its origins in the Napoleonic Wars. By then a large numbers of different persons and organisations had been instrumental in forming Britain's regular army composed of infantry battalions and cavalry squadrons whose services were made available to the Crown to serve the country's interests at home and abroad. The threat of an imminent invasion however brought home to the government the fact that these forces would be quite inadequate to deal with a major invasion. As a result in 1794 Parliament passed an Act which empowered the Lords Lieutenants of the counties to raise both infantry and cavalry units from their citizens. By and large the qualification for the cavalry was the ability to supply one's own horse, officers being the gentlemen of the county. As a result the cavalry were formed mainly from yeoman farmers and tradesmen, while the infantry were generally labourers and unskilled workers.

The Cavalry

The first troop organised in Berkshire was The Abingdon Independent Cavalry commanded by Captain Thomas Prince in March 1798. Their formation was reported in the Reading Mercury of 21st April 1794. Activities typically consisted of one day and one evening a week drilling. The second troop was the Woodley Cavalry commanded by Capt Henry Addington formed in 1798. By June 1798 four other troops had been formed at Newbury, Thatcham, Hungerford and Maidenhead. By 1803 this had expanded to include troops from Windsor, Wargrave, Donnington, Aldermaston and Vale of White Horse.

They were reorganised in 1804 with the Abingdon, Hungerford, Donnington and Vale troops being amalgamated into the 1st Regiment of the Berkshire Yeomanry Cavalry under the command of Lt Col Charles Dundas MP. It had 16 officers and 199 men. A similar move to form a second regiment in the east of the county was thwarted by a lack of cooperation between the several troops. Eventually the Wargrave and Woodley troops joined the 1st Regiment and an Eastern Regiment was formed in 1821.

In 1831 the Hungerford Corps of Yeoman Cavalry was formed. It was part of the 1st Yeoman Cavalry Brigade which also included the Middlesex Yeomanry.

Throughout the rest of the 19th Century the two units waxed and waned, individual troops being reformed and disbanded. In 1895 they consisted of two squadrons, the

First comprising A Troop (Wokingham) and B Troop (Reading) and the Second Squadron : C Troop (Newbury) and D Troop (Wantage) They were brigaded with the Middlesex Yeomanry to form the 1st Yeomanry Cavalry Brigade.

Headquarters were moved to Yeomanry House in Reading in 1895 from Hungerford.

The Infantry

The Boer War

After initial disasters the government formed The Imperial Yeomanry for service in South Africa and county Yeomanry units were invited to form companies and participate. The Berkshire Yeomanry supplied three Companies, the 39th Company, 10th Battalion and the 58th Company of the 15th Battalion. The third company was of infantry from the 1st Volunteer Battalion. 137 men volunteered and served in the Allen Brigade of 3rd Division.

The 10th sailed for South Africa on the SS Norman on the 10th Feb 1900. Their first encounter was at Boshof on 5th April 1900. They joined the main advance on Pretoria under Lord Roberts and then moved to patrolling duties in the Orange Free State. They returned home in July 1901.

The 58th left Cape Town on 1st May 1900 for Kimberley and then joined the 15th Bn at Boshof and moved around to Lindley, Bethlehem, Heilbron, Harrismith and Kroonstadt.

The 1908 Reforms

When the Boer War ended the government were acutely aware that mounting a large overseas campaign without adequate reserve forces was no longer feasible.

At this time the establishment of the 1st Volunteer Battalion was 1396 although the muster was only 1078. There were companies At Reading (A and B), at Wantage, Windsor, Newbury, Abingdon, Maidenhead and Wokingham (H)

The 2nd South Midland establishment was 116.

As a result of the Haldane reforms a new Territorial Association was formed with units of both cavalry and infantry, plus an artillery unit affiliated to the RHA and a support unit affiliated to the ASC. The infantry unit was designated the 4th Bn Royal Berkshire Regiment although at first there was very little contact with the rest of the Regiment.

The TA at the Start of WW1

When war broke out the Berkshire Territorial Association administered four reserve units:-

- Infantry 4th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment
- Cavalry 1st Squadron Berkshire Yeomanry
- Artillery 1st Squadron Berkshire Royal Horse Artillery
- Logistics 2nd Battalion South Midlands Army Service Corps.

The Committee consisted of:-

- J H Benyon Esq Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire (President)
- The Rt Hon Lord Haversham PC (Chairman)
- Colonel J C Carter VD (Vice-Chairman)
- Col Hon O W Craven
- Col G S Willes TD
- Col V W Van de Weyer
- Col G C Ricardo TD
- Col L H Hanbury VD
- Col O P Seracold
- Lt Col Sir E Barry
- Lt Col J B Kerslake TD
- Lt Col L Wilson DSO
- Major C Turner
- Major C G Myall
- Major R J Clarke
- Major A G Troup
- Charles E Keyser Esq JP
- J W Martin Esq JP
- W Howard Palmer Esq JP
- Leonard Sutton Esq JP
- Capt M L Porter (secretary)

They had two Administrative Centres, at Yeomanry House and St Mary Butts in Reading.

Each unit divided into three lines. The first line was made up of men who had volunteered for overseas service despite their Territorial obligation to serve only in the United Kingdom. The second line was for the remaining men who had stuck with their territorial commitment and were to serve only in the United Kingdom. The third line was the training and reserve unit.

New recruits were actively sought for the 3rd line units, men had to be at least 5 ft 2 in tall and in good health. They had to be willing to sign on for overseas service for the duration of the war. The age range was 19 to 40 years but ex soldiers could join up the age of 45

Aldermaston

A standing camp for all the third line units was established at Aldermaston Court on the 28th May 1915, the owner Mr C E Keyser being a member of the committee.

Renumbering

When the war began the Royal Berkshire Regiment had three series of numbers in operation. The Regular series, started in 1881 had reached just over 10000, the Reservists series which should have been prefixed by 3/ but rarely was and the Territorial series started in 1908 which had reached about 2000. As men moved from one category to another they were renumbered but often their families knew only the original number. These three series continued in use until 1916 when the confusions became intolerable and ACI 2414 of December 1916 instructed that all Territorials had to be renumbered in a six digit series starting in 200001. Each battalion of the county regiments was allocated a block of 40000 numbers but as the Royal Berks had only one battalion only 200001 to around 204100 were allocated to men who had been on the Territorial books in August 1916 and were still with the regiment. They were renumbered strictly in order of their former numbers with men who had been forgotten or transferred after August tagged on at the end.

The Units at War

The story of the Royal Berks units is told in full in sections xx3 for 1st/4th and xx4 for 2nd/4th battalions. An abbreviated history of the other units is to be found in sections :-

- 081 Berkshire Yeomanry
- 082 Berkshire RHA
- 083 ASC Mounted Brigade

Inter War Years

The first world war had demonstrated that the traditional role of the cavalry was long gone. The regular army reduced to only 14 cavalry regiments and the yeomanry were effectively merged with the Berkshire RHA armed with 18 pounder field guns. They formed the 395th Battery (Windsor and Reading) and the 396th Battery (Newbury and Hungerford) and were part of the 99th (Buckinghamshire and Berkshire) Field Brigade RFA.

In 1938 the 99th Brigade was reorganised as the 99th Field Regiment RFA with two batteries each with three troops. Berkshire providing three troops of four guns each based at Newbury, Wantage and Windsor.

On the eve of war they were split, the Buckingham contingent retaining the 99th Regiment name and the Berkshire units becoming the 145th (Berkshire Yeomanry) Field Regiment Royal Artillery.

The Second World War

Post War (1947-2000)

Under 'Options for Change' The 4th/6th Battalion of the Wessex Regiment became the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment which had been formed by merging the Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment with the Gloucestershire Regiment. Its headquarters were at Brock Barracks in Reading.

The Territorial Association (2000-2006)

In 1998 the Territorial Forces were completely reorganised and more fully integrated into the regular army structures. The Territorial Association structure was retained with Berkshire becoming a Branch of the South East Reserve Forces and Cadets organisation based at Aldershot. The 2nd Battalion of the RGBW was split up, the company based at Reading becoming the Headquarters Company of the Royal Rifle Volunteers and with the Companies based at Bristol and Devizes becoming part of the Rifle Volunteers. The RRV HQ Company however retained the link with the RGBW by wearing their back badge.

The Berkshire TA are now responsible for the RRV HQ Company based at Brock Barracks in Reading, the 94th Signals Squadron based at Mount Barracks Windsor and the several cadet forces, the Combined Cadet Forces, Sea Cadets, Army Cadet Force and Air Training Corps.

RRV were part of 145th Brigade, 4th Division.

The Rifles

In 2007 came further re-organisation with the formation of super-regiments and a much closer integration of regular and reserve forces.

Seven battalions of The Rifles were formed. The 1st Bn RGBW merged with the Devon and Dorsets to form the 1st Rifles. 2nd to 5th Rifles were formed from former Royal Green Jackets and Light Infantry units and two Territorial battalions were formed, the 6th taking over from the Rifle Volunteers and based in Exeter with companies in Truro, Exeter, Taunton, Dorchester and Gloucester and the 7th taking over from the Royal Rifle Volunteers based at Brock Barracks in Reading. with companies in London, Oxford, Milton Keynes and Reading. In addition there are three additional units:- E Company at Shrewsbury, C Company at Bishop Auckland and Y Platoon at Doncaster.