

# His Majesty The King Captain General

#### THE REGIMENTAL COUNCIL OF THE ROYAL ARTILLERY

Comprising the Master Gunner, members of the Master Gunner's Committee, members of the Royal Artillery Board of Management and serving Royal Artillery General Officers on rotation

#### **Master Gunner's Committee**

#### **Royal Artillery Board of Management**

#### Chairman

The Master Gunner St James's Park
Lt Gen Sir Andrew Gregory KBE CB DL

#### **Members**

Lt Gen SR Skeates CB CBE
Brig IG Harrison CBE
Col RST Murphy QVRM TD
Baroness JA Scott of Bybrook OBE
Mr D Rowe OBE

#### **Ex Officio Members**

Regimental Colonel Commandant - Lt Gen MR Elviss CB
MBE
Regimental Controller - Maj Gen DM Cullen CB OBE
Regimental Colonel - Col PJ Farrell OBE ADC

Regimental Secretary - Col PR Bates
Royal Artillery Sergeant Major - WO1 (RASM) J Lightfoot

#### In Attendance

Assistant Regimental Secretary - Lt Col RJ Carter

#### The Regimental Council of the HAC

Colonel Commandant - Gen Sir Roly Walker KCB DSO

#### **Members**

Lt Gen MR Elviss CB MBE

Maj Gen SFN Lalor CB TD

Col JM Ferguson TD

Maj ICS Morpeth TD

Royal Honorary Colonel - HRH Prince Michael of Kent
GCVO

Regimental Colonel - Col HJP Wilkinson
Commanding Officer - Lt Col GR Cobb VR
Secretary - Maj CV Marment VR

#### Chairman

Chairman RAI & RACF
Maj Gen DM Cullen CB OBE

#### RAI/RACF Trustees

Comd 7 AD Gp - Col SI Hay
Comdt RSA - Col DA Butt

Dep Comd 1 DRS BCT - Col RA Forster

Regt Col - Col PJ Farrell OBE ADC

Col BMD Ingham MBE

RASM - WO1 (RASM) J Lightfoot

#### **RAI Trustees**

Brig RN Alston MBE

Dep Regt Col - Col P Haigh TD

Lt Col JRM Gower MBE VR

Lt Col SJ Halliday TD

Maj MG Williams

#### **RACF Trustees**

Brig MN Pountain CBE (RAA)
Col CE Comport OBE TD DL (RAA)
Col MD Relph MBE
Lt Col SJ Howe RA (RAA)
Mr WBdeC Cussans

#### In Attendance

Regimental Secretary - Col PR Bates
Assistant Regimental Secretary - Lt Col RJ Carter
Finance Secretary - Mrs B Hoblyn

#### **National Artillery Association**

President - Lt Gen Sir Andrew Gregory KBE CB DL
Vice Presidents - Col MJE Taylor CBE TD DL
Col JAB Kinloch TD DL
Chairman - Col CE Comport OBE TD DL
Trustees - Col D Middleton OBE TD
Maj AJ Dines TD
Maj D Harris TD
Maj M Taylor TD



# The Journal of the Royal Artillery

Editor: Lt Col N D Cooke

Controlling Managers: Regimental Council of the Royal Artillery

Editorial Office: RA Journal, RHQ RA, RA Barracks, Larkhill, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP4 8QT

Telephone: 01980 845241. Email: RARHQ-Publications@mod.gov.uk

Cover Picture: His Majesty King Charles III Visits the Royal Regiment of Artillery

Back Cover Picture:
Gunner- The Original
(This is currently stocked by the YOs at Larkhill and a percentage of the profits go to the RAI)

The views expressed in this publication reflect the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect official opinion in any way. Editorial matter and illustrations © Royal Artillery Institution 2020.

Editorial and Forecast of Events

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

Contents

#### **EDITORIAL**

elcome to this edition of the Journal of the Royal Artillery, now in its 167th year. There has been a great deal happening and the Royal Regiment has been in the thick of it as usual.

For the Gunners and Larkhill the most prestigious event was the visit of His Majesty King Charles III, our Captain General, on 25 June 2025. The Regimental Colonel and Royal Artillery Sergeant Major (RASM) planned the visit meticulously and the latter ensured everyone did exactly what they were suposed to do.

It was a joyful occasion and much appreciated by those who attended. All our regiments were represented, as were civilian staff, families and friends. It was relatively brief but very poignant, and as we know there are endless calls on our Monarch's time. He clearly enjoyed himself and the interaction with his subjects, as portrayed by the picture on the cover, which also acts as an accurate summary of a memorable day. The RASM gives a fuller report with illustrations in this publication.

Victory in Europe (VE) Day and Victory over Japan (VJ) Day were marked, though the latter was more low key. VE Day was wildly celebrated 80 years ago but, of course, the fighting in the Far East continued for over another three months afterwards. Brigadier Jon Cresswell, Chairman of the Royal Artillery Historical Society, writes on both inside these covers. We are reminded of the sacrifices that are made by our soldiers and how critical it is to be well prepared.

The World remains extremely unstable in parts and one wonders where it may end. The ceasefire in the Middle East is holding as I type but could change in an instant. The destruction in Gaza is tragic to behold but the terrorists are hiding within the civilian population, and it is, as ever, the women and children who suffer most. Israel is surrounded by neighbours who wish it harm but is the one democracy in the region and has every right to defend itself. It is the degree to which it does so that is up for debate. One sincerely hopes that some lasting resolution can be determined by World leaders but will that be possible without an independent state of Palestine; and the cost of rebuilding Gaza will be enormous?

Artillery is very destructive, as witnessed in Gaza and Ukraine, and is often a game changer. It is a linked theme through this Journal and is our business. It is often said that artillery wins wars and Brigadier Cresswell has given a robust take on this. There is also a view from an Italian student on how British artillery turned the tide in Italy in WWII. This is personal for him because his great uncle, who was only 6 years of age, was killed during the battle of Salerno.

The war in Ukraine continues with no clear end in sight. Artillery has been a key factor on both sides and the destruction immense. The tenacity of the Ukrainians is remarkable and their ingenuity, especially with drones, inspiring. It is hoped they could be given the wherewithal to draw the war to a close but World politics are at play and it is very sensitive. The stalemate helps no one but opposing sides are determined to win and as has been stated before the Ukrainians are fighting for survival.

On 28 April 2025 the UK Secretary of State for Defence announced the establishment of The King's Gurkha Artillery (KGA). This is an exciting addition to the family of the Royal Regiment, but it is not, as many may not know, the first time that Gurkhas have been Gunners. A fascinating article from the Autumn Journal of 2011 has been published again in this edition by way of context.

It has been excellent to have Gurkhas in the Regimental Headquarters enabling the establishment of the KGA. It has taken me back to Hong Kong in the early 1970s as a newly commissioned subaltern when I was posted to 47 Light Regiment in Sek Kong. My Battery, 4 Sphinx Light Battery, supported 1/2nd and 2/2nd Gurkha Rifles, and I also attended the Jungle Warfare Instructors Course in Kota Tinggi, Johor, in Malaya. The Gurkha NCOs on the course were very professional in the jungle and came in to their own, armed with their khukuris.

Both Duncan essays cover the development of artillery in the future and are thought provoking. It is imperative that we continue to develop the best equipment, and we must remain watchful and ready.

#### **REGIMENTAL EVENTS 2025/26**

25 October	Alamein Dinner	Larkhill
6 November	Field of Remembrance	Westminster Abbey
9 November	RA Ceremony of Remembrance	Hyde Park Corner
27 November	Sports Awards Dinner	Larkhill
5 December	YOs Dining In	Larkhill
7 December	St Barbara's Day	Larkhill Garrison Church
12 February	RA Gold Cup	Sandown
23-25 February	WO1s Convention	TBC
19 March	RA Boxing Finals	Larkhill
20 March	Gunner 26	Larkhill
20 March	Spring Dinner	Larkhill
? March (tbc)	Sports Awards Dinner	Larkhill
12 April	Gunner Sunday	Royal Hospital Chelsea
17 April	YOs Dining In	Larkhill
15-17 May	RA Assembly	Blackpool
4 June	King's Ghurka Artillery Formation Parade	Larkhill
18 June	Hail & Farewell Dinner	Larkhill

#### **CONTENTS**

	The Regimental Council	
	Editorial and Forecast of Events	. 4
(	Contents	. !
	The King's Visit	
ı	By WO1 (RASM) Lightfoot	(
	Book Reviews	. (
ı	Letters and Submissions	

4 Autumn 2025

# A Royal Visit

# His Majesty King Charles III visits his Royal Regiment of Artillery 6 June 2025

By WO1 (RASM) Lightfoot



WO1 James 'Alfie' Lightfoot Joined the Army in 2002 and attended ATR Pirbright followed by Larkhill for ITT. He was then posted to 19 Regt RA and employed as a signaller within 13 (Martinique 1809) HQ Battery. He deployed to Iraq in 2005 on OP TELIC 6 as part of the Brigade Commander's security group in Basra. On return, he completed AAPTI and LBdr leadership courses which resulted in promotion to LBdr. Another operational deployment this time to Afghanistan in 2007 saw WO1 Lightfoot act as the CO's signaller for OP HERRICK 6. Post tour, he completed a Bdr leadership course and was promoted to Bdr where he was assigned to 52 (Niagara) Battery as an OP Ack. In 2009 he deployed to Afghanistan on Op HERRICK 10 as an FST Comd within the Musa Qala district and on return following POTL, he was posted to ATR Pirbright as a Section Commander within 59 (Asten) Battery.

In 2012 he returned to 19 Regt RA and deployed to Afghanistan for a third time on Op HERRICK 16 as part of the Targeting Support Group in Lash Kar Gah. He promoted to Sgt on return from Afghanistan and was employed as the BC's Ack/JTAC (Joint Tactical Air Controller) within 28/143 Battery (Tombs's Troop) which included numerous OTX in Kenya and Canada. He was selected for promotion in 2015 to SSgt and attended GCC 32. WO1 Lightfoot was promoted to WO2 in 2016 and employed as SMIG Precision Targeting Cell and subsequently SMIG Targeting which involved instructing international partner forces including Chile, Norway, Lithuania, Denmark, Ukraine, Germany, and the US. In 2020 he was appointed as the Battery Sergeant Major 127 (Dragon) Battery within 19 Regt RA. He was selected for promotion to

WO1 in 2022 and posted to 5 Regt RA as RSM. In 2023 he attended SSEA (Senior Soldier Entry Assessment) 2023, was selected for commission and appointed as RASM from Jun 24. WO1 Lightfoot has always been a keen sportsman and has represented the Army and Gunners at every rank in football for 22 years. Having entered the 'twilight' years, golf is now his chosen sport.

#### A Visit Fit for the King

The Gunners had not had a visit from the Captain General since Queen Elizabeth II conducted the tercentenary review on 26th May 2016, as part of the wider celebrations to commemorate 300 years since the formation of the Royal Artillery. So, when it was announced His Majesty King Charles III would be visiting on 6 June 2025 a feeling of excitement across the Gunners built.

#### Larkhill, 6 June 2025

In a historic and deeply meaningful moment for the Royal Artillery, His Majesty King Charles III visited Larkhill as Captain General, marking his first formal engagement with the Regiment in this capacity. Soldiers and officers from all 21 Royal Artillery regiments gathered in an extraordinary display of unity, professionalism, and pride to welcome the sovereign and showcase the full breadth of their capabilities.



The King's arrival was marked with all the ceremony and tradition befitting the occasion. A resounding 21-gun salute, fired by The King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery, echoed across the garrison, formally announcing His Majesty's presence. As the royal convoy made its way to the RA Officers' Mess, the route was lined with cheering children from Larkhill Primary School, alongside soldiers, officers, and staff from across Larkhill Garrison, creating an unforgettable and heartfelt welcome.



#### Extensive Preparations and a Turn in the Weather

The event was meticulously prepared over several weeks, involving the Garrison Management Team (GMT), Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), key contractors, Sodexo, and a tireless work party of service personnel and staff. Despite relentless rain and challenging conditions in the lead-up, including heavy downpours during the final rehearsal, the team's determination paid off. In a stroke of poetic fortune, the clouds

parted on the day itself, revealing glorious sunshine and near perfect conditions for the ceremony.

#### A Stunning Display of Tradition and Capability

The Officers' Mess was a spectacle of outstanding military music, colour, history, and regimental pride as all Royal Artillery colours were presented. From seasoned veterans to new recruits, everyone stood proudly as the King interacted with the Royal Regiment. The sense of occasion was visible.

His Majesty was warmly welcomed by the Master Gunner St James's Park Lieutenant General Sir Andrew Gregory KBE CB DL and the RASM WO1 J Lightfoot before proceeding to take a Royal Salute from the honour guard, comprising of soldiers and officers from 1st Regiment Royal Horse Artillery. Taking time beyond the



formalities, the King engaged personally with soldiers, officers, families, and supporting staff. His informal, genuine approach

6 Autumn 2025 Autumn 2025

A Royal Visit

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

A Royal Visit



left a strong impression, reinforcing his deep connection to the Armed Forces.

One of the day's most memorable moments came as the King took his place behind the L118 Light Gun. Led by Sergeant Mitchell and under the guidance of expert gunners, His Majesty fired a round with precision and composure, an act that resonated deeply with those present, symbolising his enduring commitment to the Regiment he now leads. For His Majesty's fine gun drill, he was presented with a 105mm cartridge case by Gunner Durrant.

#### **Showcasing Our Present and Future**

Throughout the visit, a series of capability stands demonstrated the Royal Artillery's current technologies, operational roles, and training initiatives. These included cutting-edge targeting systems, uncrewed platforms, surveillance equipment, and demonstrations





from deployed personnel through equipment stands and detailed briefings. The King received a comprehensive overview of how the Royal Artillery continues to evolve to meet the demands of modern warfare, while maintaining the core values and traditions that have defined the Regiment for over three centuries.

A heritage display provided a rich historical context, tracing the journey of the Royal Artillery from its origins to its current global operations. The exhibits paid tribute to generations past and highlighted the resilience and adaptability of the Regiment through times of war, peace, and transformation.



#### An Inspirational Day

His Majesty's visit was not only ceremonial; it was also deeply inspirational. His genuine interest in the Regiment's work, its people, and its families left an unforgettable mark on all who were present. For many, the King's warmth and approachability were just as impactful as the grandeur of the day.

As Captain General, King Charles III assumes a role held by many of the Royal Family previously, this visit reaffirmed that the Royal Artillery continues to enjoy a strong and meaningful relationship with the Crown, a bond forged in loyalty, shared service, and mutual respect.

The 6th of June 2025 will be remembered not just as a ceremonial milestone, but as a day when the Royal Artillery stood proud in the presence of its Captain General, showcasing the very best of what it is, what it does, and what it represents for the future.

#### Dinner to Mark the Occasion

In order to mark the occasion and to maximise the opportunity in having all Commanding Officers and Regimental Sergeant

Majors in one place at the same time (a real rarity) the Master Gunner St James's Park held a dinner at the RA Officers' Mess.



HM King Charles III personally sent his loyal greetings for all those present at the dinner and a splendid evening was had by all. The finest pieces of silver were on display and excellent background music provided by the Lancashire Artillery Volunteer band created the perfect ambience. A truly special way to end a visit from our Captain General.



8 Autumn 2025
Autumn 2025

# **Artillery Wins Wars**

#### By Brigadier Jon Cresswell



Brigadier Jon Cresswell holds the chair of the Royal Artillery Historical Society and is a regular contributor to these pages. Over the past few years, he has published articles on Counter Battery Fire, Weight of Fire calculations and French Recce Strike alongside historical subjects such as Military Education, Britain's Cavalry in the Great War and the Turkish Invasion of Cyprus.

He now leaves the tactical world to become a Defence Diplomat and so in this last stroke of the pen, he offers us a paper which in line with the Gunner Heritage Startegy combines both history with contemporary operational effectiveness and looks at the strapline 'Artillery wins wars'. Cresswell served most of his operational career in Navy Command and in Capability and Acquisiton at staff. His military education has been completed in France and he now returns to France as the UK Defence

## **Renown awaits the commander who first restores** zenith of operational skill.<sup>2</sup> This is the most economical way of warfare and the central premise of the manoeuvrist approach

#### Winston Churchill

he strapline 'Artillery Wins Wars' was in vogue on email signatures for a short period recently.¹ Its message was simple and direct. It was clearly informed by the war in Ukraine but not exclusively; the conflict for Nagorno Karabagh between Armenia and Azerbaijan will also have been a factor, not to mention 3 (UK) Division's experiences on the US Warfighter exercise programme. And yet, British military history reveals a constant desire to privilege Manoeuvre over Fires, where outmanoeuvring the adversary represents the

zenith of operational skill.<sup>2</sup> This is the most economical way of warfare and the central premise of the manoeuvrist approach and is certainly not wrong.<sup>3</sup> However, unless you throw a double six this is rarely how wars seem to play out and you quickly find yourself in an expensive and protracted attritional confrontation to restore the conditions required for combined arms manoeuvre rather than the eventual exhaustion of the adversary. The former though is likely to be restricted by the requirement to protect limited resources and so decisive Fires once again becomes the default setting.<sup>4</sup> This was the British way of warfare in the second half of the Great War and very much Montgomery's approach from El Alamein to the crossing of the Rhine.<sup>5</sup> Under General Sir Rupert Smith, 1st Armoured Division was artillery heavy in 1991 and used Fires as a manoeuvre arm – doubtless the model for today's DRS BCT (Deep Recce Strike Brigade Combat Team).

- 1. Originally driven by the then Comd 1 Arty Bde, Brig Charlie Hewitt.
- 2. In the French army, manoeuvre is revered even more.
- 3. Purists will say that the manoeuvrist approach is not necessarily about actual ground manoeuvre and is more about taking an indirect approach, but the author proposes that the natural understanding tends to favour physical movement on the ground.
- 4. This is not to suggest that firepower is absent from manoeuvre. As Sir Rupert Smith makes very clear in his reflections on Op Granby 1991 in the BAR Special Report The Gulf War, 'it is firepower that does the business'. Indirect Fire in support of close combat is Fire Support as opposed to Fires as a lever of Joint Effects/Integrated Action.
- 5. Throughout the Normandy campaign, 21st Army Group failed to breakthrough the German defences and fought a firepower heavy, attritional battle to fix the German armoured divisions while Bradley's 12th Army Group broke through and out to envelope the Germans in the Falaise pocket.

Nevertheless, the designation of the gunners (along with the sappers and signals) as a combat support arm is symbolic of the subordination of Fires to Manoeuvre in the culture of our army. Inevitably this is correct in terms of the relationship of the artillery to a manoeuvre arm commander at the lower tactical echelons (Coy, BG, Bde) and COIN operations naturally accentuated this. At the higher tactical echelon however, this relationship changes. The Corps Commander and Divisional GOCs are not manoeuvre arm commanders who receive Fire Support, they are full spectrum commanders who command the Fires capabilities within their formations. This changes the dynamic entirely as the Corps and Divisional Fires and Force Protection battles are central to delivering the conditions to transition to CAM brigade close combat.

It is at these higher levels of command that Fires are planned to deliver the desired effects and inform the commander's decision making through the Decision Support Matrix (DSM). Put simply, Fires (Artillery, Air and Aviation) as a lever of Joint Effects (the other two being Info Ops and CEMA (Cyber & Electromagnetic Activities)) are the means of offensive engagement at the higher tactical level, enabled by whole force ISTAR and special / deep manoeuvre forces. The anti-air warfare and counter battery fights are also commanded at this level and yet when you do the maths, you realise that very few gunners will have experience of operating in level 1 (Corps) and 2 (Division) battlestaffs. Consequently, it is no surprise that we view our role as one of combat support to close combat because this is where the majority of our experience lies and as a result, our narrative becomes biased towards this. History suggests this to be a cultural constant dating from the transfer of the Gunners and the Sappers from the Board of Ordnance to the Horse Guards in 1855. Through his scholarship on artillery in the Great War, Sanders Marple suggests that the Royal Artillery readily accepted and even sought comfort in its perceived subordinate role to the infantry.<sup>6</sup>



This diagram from SDSR 15 highlights the place of Fires/Artillery in the army's narrative – relegated to an enabling capability and represented by a digger in the accompanying icon.

#### How we Fight

Articulating how we fight presents a challenge as this depends on the tactical echelon and the phase of the conflict in terms of the enabling conditions achieved by the other components. I would suggest that our CAM (Combined Arms Manoeuvre) training exercises focus on the opening phase of a confrontation (which ideally would achieve a decision) or the post attrition phase where the conditions for CAM have been restored. This is where the C2 challenge is found and where we rightly seek to train, test and validate our capabilities. A two-week FTX where the manoeuvre elements simply 'hold the line' and protect / sustain while the Divisional Deep Battle Team conducts a 24/7 Steel Dragon would not deliver a worthy level of complexity or activity across the training audience although it would be good fun for the Joint Fires community.

This also applies to the exploitation of non-organic capabilities as this results in our own sensors and effectors being inactive and therefore untrained. That said, seeking to replicate the challenge that we observe in the attritional and seemingly static operations in Ukraine is difficult as if the transitional conditions are not achieved

for close combat then the ability to change this will almost certainly be beyond the capabilities of our brigades and battlegroups – all they can do is survive to fight and try to maintain their combat power through protective fieldworks, concealment, deception and dispersion.<sup>7</sup> This creates a tyranny in training of needing to maintain artificially the combat effectiveness of formations to make the exercise work; we cannot afford to culminate on day two of a five-day sequence.

If the aim is to test or validate staff processes, then the tactical events are merely the platform for command and staff activity and the MEL (Main Events List) is adjusted and force levels mitigated accordingly. Similarly, if the primary exercise aim is to validate a subordinate unit (or several as in the case of Ex CERBERUS) then those units will need to be given challenging mission sets which, if they are to succeed, requires the Corps and Divisional level enabling conditions to be achieved (unless it is the intention that the primary training audience might not succeed) otherwise EXCON will end up fighting its own battle against the simulation to make the exercise work. Rupert Smith notes from experience that a UK division can probably only support one brigade at a time and so this will drive

6. "The Infantry cannot do with a gun less": The Place of the Artillery in the BEF, 1914-1918 pp 6, 30 and 86.

10 Autumn 2025 Autumn 2025

<sup>7.</sup> It is also evident that static/attritional phases create a technological arms race that will not necessarily be in place and resourced in the opening phase of a conflict. Indeed, in the event of a break-out, the power requirements and technological support might struggle to keep up.

some deft transitions of effort by the division to enable each brigade in turn or the exercise objectives are achieved by creating force ratios where each brigade can succeed organically.

The result is often a series of false positives and as these Computer Assisted Exercises are often the only personal experience that we have, they risk becoming the tactical benchmark for the art of the possible. This is further accentuated when the exercise is limited to the day shift due to resource/ contractual reasons and done in a CPX environment where fixed installation and protected command centres are used and there is no obvious requirement for the commander to circulate on the battlefield (the moral component of fighting power) or for the C2 node to be dispersed or operate in discreet or reversionary modes. There is also the paradox that to optimise training, we naturally wish to exercise the full spectrum of combat down to the section commander and bomber going forward to post a grenade. In reality of course, we seek the very opposite; if we can achieve the effect though a stand-off engagement and preserve our combat power then this will always the preferred option. When viewed through this lens, even at the lowest tactical echelon, Fires become the kinetic combat lever of choice.8

#### The Corps and Divisional Battles

Fires are central to operations at the higher tactical formations. This is why we 'command at the highest level and control at the lowest'. This means that the Corps can issue direct orders to all Fires capabilities under its command, ie. the Corps Artillery Brigade and the subordinate Divisional Artillery Groups. Notwithstanding the inevitable complexities of national caveats in a multinational environment, this is essential to deliver mass when required and ensure the necessary agility to mitigate risk (ie. the inevitable enemy counterattack in force). If the Corps fires all its GMLRS (based on 24 x SPLL (Self Propelled Launcher Loader) per unit) at one target set, then this equates to 1152 x M31 rockets in a matter of minutes (an unlikely scenario but it makes the point). If the division on the Main Effort is supported by the Corps gun group (as was frequently the case in the major actions of both world wars) then 3 rounds FFE from the Corps might equate to 720 x 155mm on target in around 20 seconds. Desert Fire by Andrew Gillespie describes this exact scenario in 1991 and Op TOTALISE in 1944 is another excellent example where the 2nd Canadian Division was supported by six divisional artillery groups or AGRAs: which came to well over 400 guns. This might be the mitigation in the absence of DPICM (Dual Purpose Improved Conventional Munitions), the withdrawal of which from the British inventory must now be challenged under our drive to increase lethality.

Gunnery training rightly requires economy and so the sheaf of a gunfire mission is routinely delivered by three trajectories in response to a Battery level fire mission. This risks creating

the assumption that the standard intervention is 'Fire Mission Battery' whereas we must be comfortable with Mike, Uncle and Victor missions. This is the Parham system where engaging a regimental 'Mike' fire mission was the standard concentration (STONK) in the Second World War with divisional (Uncle) and corps (Victor) concentrations also being very quick to orchestrate. As Stig Moberg highlights, this was the secret to the British army's success on the continent in 1944/45 which was so highly prized (and praised) by Montgomery. The 'so what' in terms of control is that the executive order for engaging a Corps or Divisional target might be a JNCO observer looking into a TAI (Target Area of Interest) (either directly or through stand-off ISTAR).

The Fires enterprise is vertical which ensures that trajectories can be manoeuvred across the battlefield and above all is formation agnostic in order to achieve mass. We often view long range Fires through the depth that they achieve but reach also enables mass through enfilade fire. The Fires system of system can concentrate and disperse its effects in a matter of minutes and switch from deep to close to rear seamlessly; in fact, the operators crewing the artillery weapons platforms will probably be unaware of which battle they are supporting, reacting simply to fire mission data received and executive orders to fire. The key driver for corps and divisional operational ambition will be ammunition stocks and the volume that can be protected and transported. Greater reach in terms of FIND and STRIKE offers a wider target array. Notwithstanding the number of possible targets, destruction and neutralisation shoots will use a relatively limited number of shells whereas suppression missions or covering fire, being time based, will require significant quantities of ammunition, noting also that 155mm is not the most efficient nature for this task. Fire support through suppression or covering fire also requires the guns to be stationary for long periods of time and so requires the counter battery battle to have been mastered as a pre-condition or risk accepted and mitigated through digging in which is a major undertaking for a 155mm battery and will require dedicated engineer support.

The agility of the Fires system is underpinned by its CIS architecture and the ability of the Divisional Fires Cell (currently termed the Joint Air Ground Integration Centre (JAGIC)) to allocate Fires to Task and Target under a flexible General Support Reinforcing command state based on the carousel method. Set against the HPTL for Targeting and counter battery fight (JAGIC Fires Tasks) and the Priority of Fires (POF) list for Fire Support (Corps and subordinate unit Fires tasks), the JAGIC exercises command of all Fires capabilities in the division and either retains control for Div Targets or delegates assets to the Brigade FSCC (Fire Support Coord Centre) for brigade missions. FSCMs (Fire Support Coord Measures) are imposed to ensure both Blue force safety and freedom of action (on the far side or within a Kill box). In the opinion of this author, there should only ever be a single

Coordinated Fire Line (CFL), and this is owned by the Divisional JAGIC.<sup>11</sup> It is not automatically the boundary between the Close and Deep battles; the Div Recce Force might be in the Deep and the CFL must be ahead of this force. Clearly if there is no Div GMR (Ground Mobile Recce) in front of the brigades then the CFL will then become the start of the Deep Battle. Airspace Management has become a cottage industry over the COIN years but is no longer directly applicable for large scale warfighting operations. Fires have right of way and crewed aircraft must be cleared into the Land battlespace. The default setting is gunline hot.

#### Game Theory – One on Three

The recently expressed ambition for the British army to be able to defeat a force three times its size (in an offensive scenario as we should normally be able to deny freedom of action to an enemy force three times our size in defensive operations) is an excellent platform against which to set a divisional fires game theory. The theory below was developed by 1st (French) Division on Ex AURIGE 2024 which was the CREVAL (Combat Readiness Evaluation) validation event of the 7th Armoured Brigade and saw the brigade routinely reinforced with divisional and corps Fires. Key to this is the tactical term DEFEAT as a mission and the interpretation of DESTROY as an effect together with the neutralising effects of the latter. 12 A 6:1 Force/Advantage ratio is sought through the following prisms: 3:1 Combat Power, +1 for Fires/Force Protection, +1 for CEMA, +1 for information superiority including morale. The concept requires the enemy force to be engaged in echelon and defeated by the warfighting division which is able to preserve sufficient combat power to engage a second echelon with the same advantage ratio and then transition to the defence to block or deny a third. It is based on the Deep Recce Strike concept inspired by Rupert Smith 1991 concept of using Fires as a manoeuvre element as well as a STRIKE and Fire Support capability. The assumptions used are:

- COMAO (Composite Air Ops) destroys a unit based on 4 x sorties armed with DMS (Dual Mode Seeker) Brimstone. 13
- Corps Aviation Raid destroys a unit.
- Fire Mission Corps Artillery Brigade (Uncle Target) (800 rounds) destroys a unit.
- Fire Mission Corps (c300 guns) (Victor Target) destroys a brigade. (c5000 rounds in three minutes).

Against this level of ambition, the Corps is able to FIX the remainder of the Combined Arms Army First Tactical Echelon while the warfighting division engages the volume of one enemy (first echelon) division. The second echelons are engaged by the MCLCC (Army). Of

the three enemy CAM Brigades and Div Troops, one brigade and Div Troops are neutralised and fixed by the division through Multi-Domain Fires with the other two being sequential brigade objectives for which they are reinforced with Fires to reduce their target set. The Divisional Fires assumptions are:

- Aviation BG Raid (up to 16 x a/c) destroys a unit.
- CAS sortie (2 x aircraft) destroys a sub-unit.
- Aviation Fighting Patrol (up to 4 x a/c) destroys a subunit.
- Fire Mission Battery (c50 rounds) destroys an entity (platoon/troop).
- Fire Mission Regiment (c200 rounds) destroys a subunit.
- Fire Mission Division (c800 rounds) destroys a unit.

In terms of Field Artillery, the above assumptions only use tubed artillery rather than rockets which deliver precision strike than area effects and therefore are more suited to Targeting/Deep Battle disruption than force ratio targets. Attacking the adversary's ability to fight is the role of Corps Targeting whereas the focus of the division is to deliver freedom of action and deliver the transition force ratios for close combat.

#### Mot de Fin

In his Army HQ sponsored paper, The Future of Fires, RUSI's Jack Watling set out four roles for the artillery and wider Fires: Targeting/Deep Strike against the HPTL (High Payoff Target List), shaping attacks out of contact to create the transitional conditions for close and decisive engagement, counter battery and protective Fires (including anti-air warfare) and finally fire support to ground manoeuvre. While the latter is clearly decisive, its primacy can only be arrived at if the other three roles have been successful and these are commanded and controlled at the operational and higher tactical echelons. It is therefore essential that Fires staff officers are trained and educated in these areas (including educating themselves). The potential addition of further DRS brigades or groups to the army's order of battle means that we should no longer rely on the 1 DRS BCT SOPs which work for now as it is a singleton capability at command level 2. Finally, a more complete understanding of 'How we Fight – Fires' at the higher tactical level will underpin a wider Fires / Artillery narrative that students on command and staff courses will be able to present to their fellow students. History reveals that the British army has often achieved success through the primacy of (overwhelming) Fires to create the conditions for ground manoeuvre based on the effective integration of Fire and Movement.

<sup>8.</sup> We are also faced with the dilemma of training with the capabilities that we are assess that we are currently able to field versus what we should be able to field doctrinally both now and in the future. Further to this is the level of support that it is reasonable to expect from allied formations and higher echelons. At the time of writing, our current Fires order of battle would probably see us working with several batteries of M270 GMLRS, 1x Bty of 155mm/52 calibre howitzers in the General Support role and up to three light gun units in the field artillery role with 1x Medium AD Bty capability and 12 Regt RA Regt Group with VSHORAD/CS AAA. Add to this an attack aviation regiment. The ability to sustain this level of ambition logistically is beyond the knowledge of the author.

<sup>9.</sup> Based on 72 x 155mm guns per division multiplied by three divisions plus 24 x 155 guns in the MNFAB = 240 guns x 3 RFFE = 720. 10. Stig Moberg, Gunfire: British Artillery in World War II.

<sup>11.</sup> There is a school of thought that sees the use is several CFL at various echelons as a means of dividing up the battlespace. The author's experience to date is that sadly this imposes artificial restrictions an inevitably these CFL are considered as RFL and as formation boundaries. The result is that Fires are then constrained rather than liberated and thew additional process for decoration takes time. (The author freely admits however that he is the prisoner of his own limited experience on a series of Corps / Divisional exercises and a more worked up and integrated enterprise might benefit from this approach.

<sup>12.</sup> Defeat: to diminish the effectiveness of an adversary to the extent that it is unable or unwilling to resist or achieve its intent. Destroy: to damage a target to such an extent that it is unable to fulfil its intended function without being reconstituted or entirely rebuilt. (SOHB 2018, p. 2-1-4.)

<sup>13.</sup> https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brimstone\_(missile)

<sup>14.</sup> The Future of Fires: Maximising the UK's Tactical and Operational Firepower | Royal United Services Institute

<sup>15.</sup> That history, however, is actually very limited. 1944/5 and 1991/2003 and Dermot Rooney's work on Operation Veritable in Feb/Mar 1945 calls into question the level of effectiveness of 21st Army Group's Fires and their integration to enable ground manageuvre. Andrew Gillespie's Desert Fire offers a compelling narrative of Joint Fires Integration.

The Journal of the Royal Artillery The Journal of the Royal Artillery **Duncan Essay Duncan Essay** 

## **DUNCAN ESSAY 2025**

Explore how autonomous technology and artificial intelligence could transform artillery capabilities. Discuss the potential benefits and challenges of integrating autonomous systems into the Royal Artillery.

By Lieutenant Ben Markey Royal Artillery



Lieutenant Ben Markey was commissioned into the RA in Summer of 2024. Since joining 32nd Regiment Royal Artillery he has served as a Troop Commander within 42 (Alem Hamza) Battery. His deployments have included Estonia, France, Texas and most recently has just returned from Kosovo where he led a small team supporting NATO operations which included the first operational deployment of the EAGLE capability. Lt Markey holds an MLitt in Strategic Studies from the University of St Andrews which he attended when not busy perfecting his golf game on the links. This essay came first in the Duncan Essay 2025 competition.

he successful integration of autonomous technology and artificial intelligence (AI) into the Royal Artillery (RA) would provide a drastic increase in lethality, efficiency, and survivability of capabilities. Yet, there are fundamental challenges that must be addressed which are likely to hinder successful integration. Ethical concerns, electronic warfare threats, the requirement for doctrinal adaptation, and financial restrictions are realities which must be accounted for during the necessary transformation of the RA to include AI technologies. Rapid technological advancements are fundamentally

reshaping modern battlefields; the British Army must look to the lessons of the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas/Hezbollah conflicts, which demonstrate the battle-winning effect that comes with an increase in sensor- shooter loop efficiency. This paper will first introduce the current state of AI and autonomous technology before exploring the potential applications within the RA. Ultimately, there must be a strategic hedging of future investment between new technologies, and more conventional capabilities due to the volatile changes in the character of

Al and autonomous technologies have experienced an immense acceleration in computational power and capability during recent years. 1 Technological theories underpin this development, three of which, when taken together, can help to explain the pace of development. Wright identified in 1936 that as production of a technology increases, cost decreases due to efficiency improvements and manufacturing experience,<sup>2</sup> modern information technologies follow the same 'experience curve' pattern.3 This trend is evident in the increasing affordability of Uncrewed Aircraft Systems (UAS). Once restricted to technologically advanced militaries with strong industrial production bases, they now present an affordable and highly effective asymmetric weapon, commercially producible for low cost at a vast scale. Ukraine aimed to manufacture one million drones in 2024, revised in March to two million, then in October announced it could produce four million.4 Not only does this demonstrate Wright's experience curve in action, but also highlights the adaptability and rapid innovation of the Ukrainian defence sector.5

Complementing this theory, Moore predicted that the number of transistors on a microchip would double approximately every two years, 6 therefore generating an exponential increase in computing power. Indeed, in recent years, Moore's prediction has underperformed the actual increase; for example, Nvidia's GPU performance has risen 1,053 times over the last eight years,<sup>7</sup> a 5.7x increase every two years. AI technologies will likely continue to deliver increased performance at lower cost, the British Army must seriously engage with this opportunity. Importantly, investment in such technology must come with a tempering of expectations regarding immediate battlefield implications. Amara recognised the tendency to 'overestimate the effect of a technology in the short run and underestimate the effect in the long run'.8 Past military technologies, such as precision-guided munitions, were initially thought to revolutionise warfare but suffered from guidance failures. Yet, with continued investment and a long-term outlook, these munitions have become the cornerstone of modern airpower as seen in Israel's strikes on Hamas and Hezbollah. Cyber-warfare and particularly Al-driven disinformation campaigns are likely to have a greater longterm effect than initially predicted. 10 Likewise, the long-term integration of AI elements into military systems will likely improve operational effectiveness. In the short and medium-term, military planners should seek to set the conditions to allow this future vision to occur through early investment and trials.

In the above paragraphs, a broad overview of the state of Al technology has been established. This paper will now explore how AI and autonomy could apply more specifically to artillery capabilities. The definitional question of what constitutes a lethal autonomous weapon system, or indeed what 'counts' as Al, will not be addressed as it is a debate which has already been adequately discussed within the literature. 11 The RA is in a unique place to benefit from AI integration; the Regiment is already structured as a 'system of systems' with broad capabilities into which AI could be integrated. These potentially force multiplying effects will be discussed in the context of the Russia-Ukraine, and Israel-Hamas/Hezbollah conflicts, two case studies which provide very differing conflict scenarios. One follows the conventional warfighting type which has been the renewed focus of the British Army since 'Future Soldier' and 'The Land Operating Concept', 14 whilst the other represents the possibility of expeditionary intervention by British forces within the context of renewed middle eastern instability.

The RA system of systems relies upon the ability to communicate effectively between the target detectors or 'sensors', such as TAIPAN, and weapon engagement systems or 'shooters', such as Archer. 15 This sensor-shooter loop is a crucial element of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict. Both nations are seeking to increase the speed of this loop in order to gain tactical and operational level advantages over their adversaries. Al-enhanced fire control systems may be able to reduce this time dramatically; this would be particularly useful in counter-battery fires, where the speed of response is critical in preventing the enemy from being able to manoeuvre to safety.16 Effective counter-battery fire has been key to preventing the Russian advance through Ukrainian defences. 17 Al implementation may increase speed of fire through the decrease of human computation and reliance on radio communications, with systems directly connected for cross-queued responses. An example of where this style of implementation is already being utilised can be seen through the Android Team Awareness Kit system, which allows for calls for fire and situational awareness at the lowest tactical level.<sup>18</sup>

For the purposes of this example, suspending the clear need for ethical and human oversight (which will be addressed later in this paper), an autonomous fire control system could function as follows. A passive audio detector close to the Forward Line of Enemy Troops (FLET) detects the firing of an enemy gun, thereby cross-queueing a TAIPAN radar system to radiate onto a target area detecting the trajectory of the fired round, from which an accurate launch grid reference can be determined. 19 This data could be communicated directly to a centralised Al-driven data centre located to the rear, calculating within seconds the optimal firing solution for friendly gun positions in the area, including the

- 1. Peter Slattery et al., 2025.
- 2. T. P. Wright, 1936.
- 3. Béla Nagy et al., 2013.
- 4 Ulrike Franke 2025 5. Oleksandra Molloy, 2024.
- 6. Gordon E. Moore, 1965.
- 7. Timothy Prickett Morgan, 2024.
- 8. Roy Amara, (n.d), quoted in Searls, Doc, 2012.
- 9 Seth Frantzman 2024
- 10. Roman V. Yampolskiv, 2016.
- 11. Michael C. Horowitz, 2021.
- Mariarosaria Taddeo and Alexander Blanchard, 2022. Ingvild Bode and Hendrik Huelss, 2018.
- 12 Ministry of Defence, 2024.
- 13 Ministry of Defence, 2021,
- 14 Ministry of Defence, 2023.

- 16 Jack Watling, 2019, 6. 17 Jack Watling and Nick Revnolds, 2023.
- 18 Olivia Savage 2023
- Giles Ebbutt, 2024.

14 Autumn 2025 Autumn 2025 15 number and type of rounds needed. This data is sent to a waiting Archer 155mm, firing onto the coordinates through its own internal autonomous calculations. In this hypothetical scenario, there would be no need for human relaying of information at any point, and it would represent an incredibly efficient sensorshooter loop. Ukraine is already attempting to implement basic elements of the above example, through the integration of AI into its Caesar 155mm self-propelled howitzers. Semi-automation of these artillery systems has already provided benefit to Ukraine, in their ability to be moving, halt, lay and fire multiple rounds before moving again in under two-minutes. This has increased precision and survivability whilst reducing ammunition usage by thirty percent.<sup>20</sup> In the context of a global ammunition shortage and the importance of survivability and lethality, the UK has correctly identified a need for a capability upgrade through the procurement of RCH-155.<sup>21</sup> Opportunities for optimisations through further automation should be sought whenever possible with this newly developing system.

A key part of the sensor-shooter loop is accurate and rapid target recognition. Automated target recognition built into visual sensors and munitions could dramatically increase the speed of threat identification and therefore engagement on the battlefield. Training AI in the detection of common enemy 'tells' such as the 'Z' on Russian vehicles would force a reimagining of friendly forces recognition and camouflage usage throughout the battlefield. Deep learning AI models trained on enemy vehicle image databases would increase the likelihood of identification,<sup>22</sup> subsequently confirmed by human-led firecells monitoring multiple video feeds. The possibility to feed in audio, video and textual data from a multitude of ground, air and space-based sensors, human and non-human in nature. would create better situational awareness and speed of decision making within command nodes.<sup>23</sup> Spatial and temporal realities may negate some efficiency advantages within spheres such as munition flight times and logistics moves, but overall, they will be beneficial. Challenges in such comprehensive data fusion are widely recognised,<sup>24</sup> and indeed the accuracy and authenticity of information being received by any sensor must be scrutinised. With the current state of AI technology, and the potential for analytical errors and false positives/negatives, automated target recognition should be utilised as a decision supporter rather than decision maker. However, it is likely that image recognition and object detection by AI within a military context will surpass human ability in the near future.<sup>25</sup> Whilst useful in a general warfighting capability utilising larger sensors such as TAIPAN, the urban applications of this technology could be even greater. Modern urban areas are full of sensors; facial recognition could rapidly identify known combatants and assist those on the ground in responding to developing situations.<sup>26</sup>

The RA has the opportunity drive forward British military Al integration through its specialised expertise within the UAS

sphere. 32nd Regiment RA, operating S2 and S1 category UAS, are particularly well placed to implement new technologies and push the boundaries of their capabilities. S2 category UAS are critical in providing intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) to commanders on the ground. Flying beyond the FLET, high quality imagery could be transferred to a centralised data node where Al-automated imagery analysis could be conducted. This is already occurring in Ukraine, with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) 'Avengers team' implementing 'VEZHA' within the Delta system project.<sup>27</sup> VEZHA enables AI to analyse real-time drone footage, prioritising what is shown on commander's screens, enabling more efficient human analysis.<sup>28</sup> An empty field will not be shown, whereas one with multiple 'hits' of enemy systems will be flagged for human analysis. 'Delta', maintained by the Ukrainian MOD, has data centres dispersed amongst eight cities close to the front, from which data is synthesised and passed vertically and horizontally.<sup>29</sup> Within this ecosystem, smaller specialised AI models are being trained and implemented, tailoring target recognition to specific input data types. Ukraine is demonstrating the implementation of a layered UAS approach, now enhanced thorough AI technology. For example, the Quantum Systems Vector UAS acts as a realtime onboard image processing collection asset, and crossqueues armed S1 UAS to launch and eliminate targets.<sup>30</sup> When fully developed, this layered approach would involve an Alcontrolled loitering munition swarm executing the strike action.<sup>31</sup> The RA should seek to develop a similar layered ISTAR approach from FIND to STRIKE, and begin to develop with industry the same computing infrastructure and algorithms that are allowing Ukraine to adapt rapidly to real-world changes on the battlefield. The RA possesses the British Army's acoustic sensor

capability, enhancing survivability by enabling passive audio detection, thereby minimising radar emissions in the kill chain. Al is revolutionising this decades old technology, allowing for precise and rapid recognition of sounds in real time. Through utilising neural networks enhanced by deep learning, tools like the Ukrainian 'Zvook' are able to detect and identify air-threats at low altitudes,32 with various sensors covering 20,000km2 of the front line.33 The product produced has a false positive rate of 1.5-2.5%, but the advantages far outweigh this error rate, <sup>34</sup> being able to link into the Delta system to provide commanders and urban populations real-time situational awareness of incoming air threats. The current state of RA equipment in this area is not fit for purpose; whilst the capability lends itself to widespread and fixed infrastructure, investing in the ability to deploy mobile detectors such as the Zvook system would allow the RA to provide far better situational awareness for commanders. Indeed, with its commitment to the Forward Land Forces in Estonia and Poland, the RA should be able to provide this capability on a long-term basis through established positions located near the frontlines allowing for early detection of potential threats. A system similar

to Delta in Ukraine could be used to synthesise this data into a cross-nation user-friendly product.

As we can see, the range of capabilities lend the RA to be at the forefront of AI implementation into the military; the Regiment must exploit this opportunity and engage early with newly established organisations within wider British defence such as the Defence AI Centre (DAIC). The RA will be among the primary users of any new British system for battlefield awareness and target acquisition; it should therefore offer assistance and advice to the DAIC and proactively deliver its requirements. The British Army has been working on developing their own Dismounted Situation Awareness (DSA) tool; however, progress has been slow,<sup>35</sup> a key challenge being how to continually update and take into account new technology, something at which Ukraine's Delta system seems to excel. The utilisation of LTE enabled smartphones would allow the user to 'hide' amongst existing commercial communications networks, reducing the likelihood of detection;<sup>36</sup> this is becoming standard practice for DSA technologies. Israel has seen success in deploying Elbit Systems E-LynX SR personal radio, with a goal to 'integrate every soldier into a synchronized digital network' that combines radio, smart devices, satellite systems and mobile networks.<sup>37</sup> This empowers junior soldiers to participate in operational decision-making, furthering the idea of the 'strategic corporal',38 and engaging all service personnel as potential ISTAR contributors. Whilst an all-system communications network could vastly increase the lethality of the RA, it also has the possibility to develop into further tools that could enhance urban ground operations, as demonstrated by Israel.<sup>39</sup> The information gathered by tools such as 'The Gospel' and 'Lavender' have already played a crucial part in the identification of targets for strikes. 40 Unit 8200 of the IDF Military Intelligence is developing a ChatGPT-like Large Language Model, training it on Arabic from all the signals data previously collected by the unit.<sup>41</sup> This has the potential to help enhance and filter newly incoming signals, and form connections that may not be apparent to a human operator. Whilst this could provide an increase in the efficacy of intelligence gathered, it could also lead to false positives being drawn by these probabilistic models, raising serious ethical concerns.

So far, this paper has focused largely on the potential benefits of integration of AI and Autonomous technologies into the RA, it will now address the significant risks and issues. The risks can broadly be separated into two categories: internal (development, implementation, and ethics) and external (cyber/electronic warfare and proliferation). Internally, the British Army has already recognised that our adversaries may not be as concerned regarding the ethics and legality of AI adoption. We must therefore rapidly 'develop, field, and scale our own capabilities' in order to become

a 'responsible and capable' user of AI technologies. A Noticeably, there have been widespread challenges amongst those large companies or organisations that have attempted to scale up from pilot AI systems, A a barrier to successful implementation in these cases often being the disparate opinions on ethics and risk ownership. Most high-level leaders see themselves as 'unprepared to tackle AI ethics issues', A and likely do not have the time to delve into the detail of these systems. In a military context, commanders are highly time constrained; therefore, it is critical that experts in AI development provide regular briefs on the development of new models and methods of implementation into the system of systems.

This will not only produce institutional buy-in for funding further ventures but also assist in the rapid experimentation and adoption opportunities for different units. Without this two-way communication, it is likely that implementation will take so long as to be effectively obsolete by the time any project is delivered. Doctrine must shift rapidly to adapt to the changing landscape of the battlefield, a key component of which will be the use of Al systems within the next five years. The government has already identified a 'gap between the [MOD] rhetoric and the reality' of Al usage, with it still being treated as a 'novelty' rather than a critical future component of the British Army that requires appropriate investment to reflect this.<sup>45</sup>

Whilst experimentation and testing should occur with as little red tape as possible, there must be a strong debate amongst key risk holders with regards to usage of AI systems for live-fire scenarios. A re-assessment of the Laws of Armed Conflict and International Humanitarian Law to better integrate and clarify the legalities of these new technologies is also required.<sup>46</sup> The present state of AI modelling necessitates a human 'in-the-loop', able to override or confirm decision-making by the Al-enhanced system. This will assure compliance with existing legal frameworks and allow the operator to ensure any action is in line with British Army's values and standards. In-the-loop systems will also serve to improve the decision making in turn or their operators, acting as a feedback tool on strategic and tactical situations. These types of systems should be seen as a decision-making asset for any commander rather than simply a military panacea. The conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine are currently testing beds for newer Al models, demonstrating that small, specialised systems trained on specific data sets can not only rapidly increase the effectiveness of lethal effects but also reduce the cost in development, a key barrier to successful implementation.47

The reduction in cost of entry into Al-powered weapons has led to an increase in smaller actors participating in sub-threshold conflicts without needing significant resources or risking human lives.<sup>48</sup> As Al proliferation increases, with open-source base

```
20. Stephen W. Miller, 2024.
```

<sup>21.</sup> British Army, 2024.

<sup>22.</sup> Jerzy Surma, 2024.

<sup>23.</sup> Forrest E. Morgan et al., 2020.

<sup>24.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27.</sup> Kateryna Bondar, 2025.

<sup>28.</sup> Kateryna Chernokorenko, 2024.

<sup>29.</sup> Kateryna Bondar, 2025.

<sup>30.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31.</sup> Tim Martin, 2025.

<sup>32.</sup> Zvook, n.d.

<sup>33.</sup> The Economist, 2024.

<sup>34.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35.</sup> Lt Colonel Gareth Davies (2024), quoted in Ebbutt, Giles, 2024.

<sup>36.</sup> Sydney J. Freedberg Jr, 2018.

<sup>37.</sup> Elbit Systems, 2025.

<sup>38.</sup> Scott R. Mitchell, 2012, 58.

<sup>39.</sup> Noah Sylvia, 2024.

<sup>40.</sup> Harry Davies, Bethan McKernan, and Dan Sabbagh, 2023.

Bethan McKernan and Harry Davies, 2024.

<sup>41.</sup> Harry Davies and Yuval Abraham, 2025

<sup>42.</sup> British Army, 2023.

<sup>43.</sup> IBM, April 2020.

<sup>43.</sup> Ibivi,

<sup>45.</sup> Defence Committee, 2025.

<sup>46.</sup> Ministry of Defence, 2004.

<sup>47.</sup> Sydney J. Freedberg Jr, 2025.

<sup>48.</sup> Defence and Security Accelerator, 2023. Sarah Kreps and Richard Li, 2022

material widely accessible, specific and targeted AI models used by hostile actors could see more established nation-states and militaries targeted in highly effective and increasingly complex ways. This danger highlights the importance of data and IT infrastructure protection within militaries. Should the source data used to train a military AI model be compromised and 'poisoned', the effects could be catastrophic. This type of attack could involve injecting false information into a dataset, or modifying data already present.<sup>49</sup> On the battlefield this could look like an Al-enhanced 'final attack' First Person View drone launched from behind the Forward Line of Own Troops. striking a friendly force after its database of enemy vehicles had been 'poisoned' by the enemy to include friendly elements.<sup>50</sup> This is a broader problem for defence, as protecting data is a critical component of creating an effective and secure AI model. Therefore, the RA should ensure collaboration with the broader defence community to continually enhance the resistance against potential cyberattacks on the Al-enhanced capabilities it employs.

As we can see, implementation of AI and autonomous the Ukrainian systems into RA capabilities would provide a significant benefit and, put simply, represents an illusion of choice in that it must military affairs.

be undertaken. The question is rather how rapidly the RA is willing to adapt to the inevitable utilisation of these systems. Of course, more conventional capabilities should continue to be maintained, and a balance should be struck. However, the lethality benefits gained from successful integration will soon outweigh those of more conventional non-AI enhanced systems. There is a fantastic opportunity for the RA to be at the forefront of AI trials and integration, holding the largest variety of capabilities that span the effects outputs of the Army, from ISTAR to STRIKE. While challenges exist, the declining costs and increasing proliferation of AI and autonomous systems by our adversaries necessitates decisive action. The RA and wider Army must establish a clear pathway that extends beyond rhetoric, implementing continual development and robust experimentation endorsed by command at all levels. Ethical considerations must be accounted for, but through using in- the-loop systems, development and innovation can continue at pace. The foundations must be set for broadscale collaboration between defence (one of the largest data collectors) and industry (the drivers of innovation), as seen with the Ukrainian Delta system. This will ensure the British Army is not left behind during this latest technological revolution in

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Amara, Roy. (n.d), quoted in Searls, Doc, "The intention economy: when customers take charge", Harvard Business Review Press (2012). https://archive.org/details/intentioneconomy0000sear/page/n7/mode/2up. (accessed February 28, 2025)

Bode, Ingvild, and Hendrik Huelss. "Autonomous weapons systems and changing norms in international relations." Review of International Studies 44 (February 19, 2018). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210517000614. (accessed March 9, 2025)

Bondar, Kateryna. "Ukraine's Future Vision and Current Capabilities for Waging Al-Enabled Autonomous Warfare". CSIS, March 6, 2025. https://www.csis.org/analysis/ukraines-future- vision-and-current-capabilities-waging-ai-enabled-autonomous-warfare. (accessed March 8, 2025)

British Army, "British Army's Approach to Artificial Intelligence". Press release, October 2023. https://www.army.mod.uk/media/24745/20231001-british\_army\_approach\_to\_artificial\_intelligence.pdf. (accessed February 28, 2025)

British Army. "British Army moves a step closer to the next generation mobile fires platform". Press release, April 24, 2024. https://www.army.mod.uk/news/british-army-moves-a-step-closer-to-the-next-generation-mobile-fires-platform/. (accessed March 2, 2025)

British Army. "Exercise Dynamic Front | Archer and Taipan | British Army," January 21, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8YQ7WP91-Y. (accessed March 5, 2025)

Chernokorenko, Kateryna. "Vezha is now accessible within the DELTA combat system." Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, October 14, 2024. https://mod.gov.ua/en/news/kateryna- chernohorenko-the-battlefield-video-analysis-platform-known-as-vezha-is-now-accessible- within-the-delta-combat-system. (accessed March 19, 2025)

Davies, Harry, and Yuval Abraham. "Revealed: Israeli military creating ChatGPT-like tool using vast collection of Palestinian surveillance data". The Guardian, March 6, 2025. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/mar/06/israel-military-ai-surveillance. (accessed March 8, 2025)

Davies, Harry, Bethan McKernan, and Dan Sabbagh. "The Gospel: how Israel uses AI to select bombing targets in Gaza". The Guardian, December 1, 2023. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/01/the-gospel-how-israel-uses-ai-to-select-bombing-targets. (accessed March 10, 2025)

Defence and Security Accelerator. "Scoping out the Grey Zone". Press release, May 4, 2023. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/competition-scoping-out-the-grey-zone-sub-threshold-ai-competition-document. (accessed March 10, 2025)

Defence Committee. "Developing AI capacity and expertise in UK defence". UK Parliament, January 2025. https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmdfence/590/report.html. (accessed March 6, 2025)

Ebbutt, Giles. "Up close and personal: new technologies for dismounted soldiers". European Security & Defence, June 21, 2024. https://eurosd.com/2024/06/articles/38911/up-close- and-personal-new-technologies-for-dismounted-soldiers/. (accessed March 18, 2025)

Elbit Systems. "The Soldier's Digital Lifeline." Press release, January 8, 2025. https://www.elbitsystems.com/blog/the-soldiers-digital-lifeline. (accessed March 16, 2025)

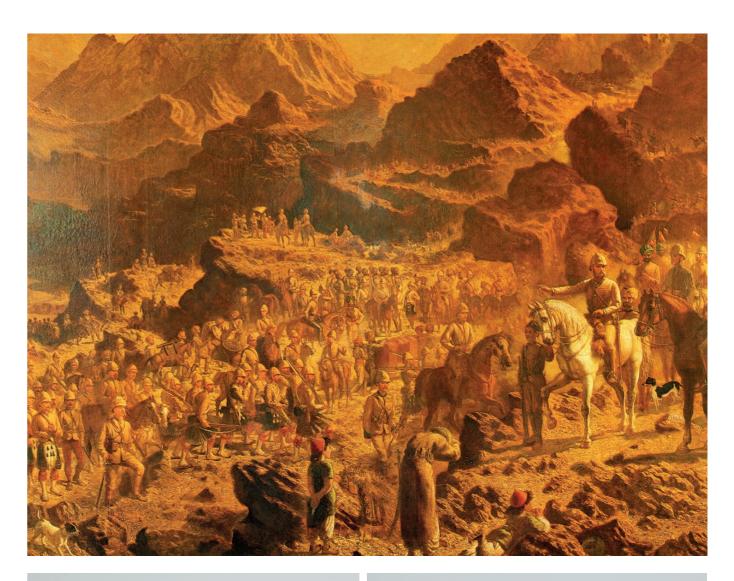
Franke, Ulrike. "Drones in Ukraine: Four lessons for the West". ecfr.eu, January 10, 2025. https://ecfr.eu/article/drones-in-ukraine-four-lessons-for-the-west/. (accessed March 13, 2025)

Frantzman, Seth. "IDF carries out precision strikes on Hamas on two fronts." FDD's Long War Journal (blog), July 18, 2024. https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2024/07/idf-carries-out-precision-strikes-on-hamas-on-two-fronts.php. (accessed March 10, 2025)

Freedberg Jr, Sydney J. "Can't Stop The Signal: Army Strips Down Network To Survive Major War". Breaking Defense, March 26, 2018. https://breakingdefense.com/2018/03/cant- stop-the-signal-army-strips-down-network-to-survive-major-war/. (accessed March 6, 2025)

49. Bart Lenaerts-Bergmans, 2024.

50. Freedberg Jr, "Trained on Classified Battlefield Data, AI Multiplies Effectiveness of Ukraine's Drones."







The Journal of the Royal Artillery The Journal of the Royal Artillery When Gurkhas Were Gunners When Gurkhas Were Gunners

# When Gurkhas Were Gunners

## This article was originally published in the Journal of the Royal Artillery in Autumn 2011

#### By Robin Garran

Robin Garran was a national service subaltern officer who served with 1/7 Gurkha Rifles in 1958 and 1959, writes the editor (Major Mike Shaw). He has since had a lifetime's association with the Gurkhas whom he greatly admires. I first met Robin when, as captain of my golf club, he organised an exemplary beating retreat by a Gurkha band as part of his captain's day celebrations in 2006. Though I have yet to beat him on the golf course we have been friends ever since, and of course there has always been an undercurrent of Gurkha/Gunner rivalry between us. He told me once that Gurkhas made excellent Gunners; I didn't believe him – but here is the proof that he was absolutely right ........

In September 1950, in Malaya, a detachment of the 7th Gurkha Rifles (7GR), commanded by Gurkha Major Chatraman Rai, laid their 25-pounder and shelled communist terrorist camps in the jungle. By then, the two battalions of 7GR (1/7GR and 2/7GR) were no longer 'Gunners', but they had been 101 and 102 Field Regiments RA (7th Gurkha Rifles) respectively from June 1948 to July 1949 (for 13 months). The guns were still with them and they had been trained in their use. This was the first and as it turned out, last time that Gurkhas fired 25-pounders 'in action' even if, as some say, this was more of a

Gurkhas had been 'Gunners' before, 6GR (then the Cuttack Legion) had 3- and 6-pounders during the 1800s, and 8GR (then the Sylhet Light Infantry) had 6- and 7-pounders up to 1911. 'Bubble' and 'Squeak' being universally adopted as nicknames for their favoured guns. There is reference to a unit of 7GR firing anti-tank guns in North the other Gurkha regiments with greater initial strength. Africa and in 1945, in India, two companies of 3/4GR were trained on 25-pounders by 60 Field Regiment RA against a possible Japanese invasion of Malaya – that was until the atom bombs were dropped. Apparently the RSM of 60 Regiment, who was a large man, felt that the smaller Gurkhas would not be able to manhandle the guns, but when he witnessed for himself the strength of the wiry Nepalese soldiers, he relented very quickly!

On the partition of India in 1947, four of the ten Gurkha Rifle regiments, with two battalions each, were transferred from the Indian to the British Army (the only Indian Army units to pass over). These were 2GR, 6GR, 7GR and 10GR. The selection of 2GR was straightforward, given their close ties with the 60th Rifles (Kings Royal Rifle Corps) arising out of the Defence of Delhi during the Indian Mutiny. The other regiments were chosen because their first battalions were based in Burma at the time. The 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles were disappointed, despite their title.

The 'plan' was to form 17th Gurkha Infantry Division, based in Malaya and Hong Kong, consisting of two brigades drawn from six battalions of infantry, two field regiments RA (initially), and supporting arms from the Sappers, Signals, Provost, Transport etc). These latter corps' arms would be raised from scratch, while 7GR was selected

for conversion to the aforementioned 102 and 102 Field Regiments RA. It was hoped that anti-tank and light anti-aircraft regiments (and, perhaps, another field regiment) would then be added to the order of battle and to that end the regimental numbers 101 to 105 were

The reasons for choosing 7GR are not clear, but are again probably due to practical considerations. 7GR was the most depleted of the four GR regiments on arrival in Malaya in early 1948. Gurkha rifleman had been given the 'opt' – whether to join the British Army, remain in the Indian Army, or demobilise. 2/7GR was 'got at' (another story) and only some 45 men, with their British officers, arrived in Malaya. Bearing in mind that the other Corps' arms were being raised from scratch it was, presumably thought that new Gurkha recruits could be trained as Gunners from scratch also, rather than re-training any of

Two cadres, of some 35 each from both battalions, were sent for training in gun drill by 16 Field Regiment RA in Tampin during April/ June 1948. There was later one other course on Blakang Mati, an island just off Singapore. Further training would be undertaken by the regimental training wings.

The Gun drills appear to have been well learned, from the first tentative handling of heavy shells to some very creditable laying and firing. As an aside, 26 Field Regiment RA (a battle-hardened group) apparently found the Gurkhas' habit of singing late into the night rather tiresome in their lines.

By early 1948 several 1GR officers had transferred to 7GR. Among these were Heelis, Rooney, Cross, Jenkins, Rattray and Whitehead. They were given the option of staying or leaving on conversion to artillery field regiments. Those who stayed were gazetted to the RA. Heelis transferred to 2GR while Drayton joined the Malayan Police and soon became ADC to the Governor.

One has to consider how difficult all this was at the time. The war had not long ended; people were being demobbed; the partition of India had occurred; information was scarce and career prospects were difficult to judge. The natural mind-set of the time was that Gurkhas were infantrymen and morale was low in 2/7 GR the 'opt' experience.



Gurkha Gunners engaged in live firing on 25 Pounders in Malaya in the late 1940s. The conversion of Gurkha Gunners lasted only 13 months.

In late-June 1948 the two battalions welcomed, as commanding officers, Lieutenant Colonel JM Hepper RA and Lieutenant Colonel GP Cunningham RA, both of whom had been mountain gunners in the Indian Army. The formal conversion into field regiments then took place with the infantry companies being transposed into gunner batteries. A. B and C Companies became P. Q and R Batteries. The formal designations also became 101 and 102 Field Regiment RA (7th Gurkha Rifles).

Together with the new commanding officers came 16 officers seconded from the Royal Artillery. Of these, some were regular Gunners. among them Eden DSO. Davies. Cook. Cutfield. Spurgeon. Fulling. and 'Gentleman Joe' Young RHA, but some were emergency commissioned officers from Indian infantry regiments, who, unable to obtain an infantry commission in the British Army (in short supply in 1947), had accepted commissions with the Royal Artillery. These latter had taken the opportunity to transfer back to the Gurkhas, as it were, when this opportunity arose. Among these were Rose and Thornton (3GR), O'Leary and Forestier-Walker (Rajputana Rifles) and Tregenza and Moore (5GR).

By then the writing was on the wall. From March 1948 communist terrorist activity had increased to such an extent that in June the Governor declared a state of emergency. The Gunner officers suddenly found themselves, all hands to the pump, leading their batteries, in the infantry role, into the jungle with no experience of this kind of warfare and only rudimentary Gurkhali. Meanwhile, the 'Gurkha' British officers were back in their element, as it were.

By early 1949 it had become clear enough, if not before, that the 'plan' to turn Gurkhas into Gunners had been undermined by force majeure. In July, 101 and 102 Field Regiments became 1/7 and 2/7 GR once again. All the regular RA officers were posted out, except for Lieutenant Colonel Hepper, who stayed on as the CO of 1/7GR and later was awarded the DSO. Ex-Indian Army officers were permitted to stay and those, like Jenkins and Rose, who had been gazetted to the RA, eventually returned to permanent cadre.

During the 'Gunner' period, the Director Royal Artillery, Major General S B Rawlins visited both field regiments and presented regimental banners, which are still preserved at Shorncliffe, The Gurkha based in the UK. These flew over the gun parks while the 7GR regimental flags still flew over the quarter guards. Colonel Murray recalls that all ranks had insisted that the Gurkha title and the cap badge be preserved, hence '(7th Gurkha Rifles)' in the RA title. According to another source, RA insignia were to be carried on the shoulder tabs but the crossed kukris of 7GR were maintained on head dress. No other cap badge was ever designed.

The gun parks contained four 25-pounders for each field regiment, which were mainly used for gun drill. No Quad gun tractors were ever delivered, so our 7GR drivers were not let loose

Another visit, in October 1848, by the Deputy CIGS, Lieutenant General Sir Kenneth Crawford, may have had some significance. Around that time, Prime Minister Atlee had rejected Field Marshal Montgomery's nomination for his successor and recalled General Sir William Slim from retirement with promotion to Field Marshal. Many believe that Slim, who had formerly been CO of 2/7GR, countermanded the RA 'experiment', but the ground may well have been laid by Crawford, knowing what was in the wind back home. Slim was later to visit both battalions in late 1949, but by then 7GR were no longer Gunners.

Lastly, one might perhaps ask the question whether the Gurkhas would have made it as Gunners. Given modern training methods and the versatility that Gurkhas display as signallers, sappers and logisticians, one feels sure that they would have been successful. Yet, it would not have seemed necessarily so in 1948 when the Gurkhas had proved themselves only as infantrymen in the Burmese jungle and other theatres during the Second World War. Conversion to gunnery would have seemed a waste of a valuable resource.

20 Autumn 2025 Autumn 2025 21 The King's Gurkha Artillery

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

# The King's Gurkha Artillery

# Forging a New Chapter of Excellence in the British Army

By Captain Arunhang Nembang KGA



Captain Arunhang Nembang was among the first Gurkha Late Entry (LE) Commission officers to transfer to the King's Gurkha Artillery (KGA) on 2nd June 2025. He had completed 26 years of service with his parent unit, 2nd Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles (2 RGR). Throughout his career he undertook numerous operational tours and overseas exercises. He has gained extensive experience and demonstrated professionalism and dedication throughout.

Following his commission as a Late Entry Captain in 2020, he served as a Platoon Commander in C (Tamandu) Coy 2 RGR and Operations Officer; Training Support Unit (TSU) at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS), and Staff Officer (SO3) G3/7 at Headquarters University Officers' Training Corps (HQ UOTC). He continues to live up to the high standards of the Gurkha ethos and British Army, and looks forward to pursuing further excellence in his new chapter with the King's Gurkha Artillery. He is keen to embrace the challenges and opportunities that now lie ahead.

#### Official Announcement of Regimental Growth

n 28 April 2025 the UK Secretary of State for Defence announced the establishment of The King's Gurkha Artillery (KGA). This will be a new unit in the Brigade of Gurkhas and will be integrated into the Royal Regiment of Artillery. A new Gurkha capbadge has also been created, the first in 14 years, to represent the new unit and specialisms.

This is not the first time a Gurkha artillery unit has been created, neither will this be the first time Gurkha soldiers have been trained on artillery guns. This announcement has been a defining moment in the proud legacy of the Brigade of Gurkhas and the Royal Regiment of Artillery. In a statement released by Army Command earlier this year, it was confirmed that KGA will expand to regimental strength, with five Batteries expected to form up and reach full operational capacity by 2028.

This expansion is not only a testament to the exceptional service, professionalism, and adaptability of Gurkha soldiers, but also a reflection of the Army's long-term strategic commitment to enhance its deep fires capability and integrated strike formations. As global threats continue to evolve, the British Army's focus has shifted toward agility, precision, and readiness; qualities that have always been embodied by Gurkha soldiers.

The formation of 5 Batteries under KGA represents more than just numerical growth; it signifies the creation of a sustainable, multi-skilled regiment capable of delivering artillery firepower and battlefield intelligence across future operational environments. With a reputation for discipline, loyalty, and excellence, the Gurkhas' contribution to the Royal Regiment of Artillery has become an indispensable part of the British Army's next generation capability.

For the soldiers and officers of the KGA this announcement

is more than a milestone. It is a proud reaffirmation of their heritage and a promise of an enduring future within the Royal Artillery family.

#### KGA Cap Badging Ceremony - 2 June 2025

A landmark occasion in the regiment's history took place on 2 June 2025, when the first batch of the King's Gurkha Artillery Cap Badging Ceremony was held at the Royal Artillery Barracks, Larkhill Garrison. The ceremony officially marked the moment when the soldiers and officers of KGA donned their new cap badges, bearing the distinctive crossed cannons and kukris; a symbol of unity between the Royal Artillery and the Gurkha ethos.





The event was attended by senior officers, families, and distinguished guests, including representatives from the Brigade of Gurkhas and the Royal Regiment of Artillery. The atmosphere was charged with pride, anticipation, and emotion as each soldier received the emblem that would forever bind them to the proud artillery heritage of "Ubique" ("Everywhere").

During his address, Brigadier Charlie Harmer, Colonel of the Regiment for The King's Gurkha Artillery, paid tribute to the soldiers' professionalism and determination: "Today marks the beginning of a new chapter. The King's Gurkha Artillery stands as a bridge between tradition and transformation; proud of its roots yet fully focused on the future of modern warfare. This cap badge is not merely an emblem; it is a statement of purpose, of unity, and of enduring service."

## Initial Trade Training (ITT): Building the Foundations of Gunnery

Following the cap badging, newly assigned KGA soldiers commenced their Initial Trade Training (ITT) courses at the Royal School of Artillery, Larkhill. The purpose of ITT was to upskill and transition Gurkha soldiers; many from various military backgrounds such as infantry, engineers, signallers and logistics, into the demanding and highly technical gunnery role.







This training phase proved transformative. The Gurkha soldiers undertook intensive instruction in artillery theory, fire discipline, gun drills, communications, and target acquisition. Each stage of training not only enhanced their technical understanding but also reinforced the teamwork, precision, and discipline that define the Royal Artillery ethos.

The adaptability of Gurkha soldiers was evident from the outset. Instructors and senior training staff consistently remarked on their professionalism, resilience, and hunger to learn. Whether in the classroom or on the gun line, KGA trainees displayed the same quiet determination and unwavering spirit that have made the Gurkhas a symbol of excellence for over two centuries.

#### **Excellence from Gunners to Warrant Officers**

At every level, from Gunners to Warrant Officers, the soldiers of the KGA have excelled beyond expectations. Throughout their courses, they consistently achieved top marks in both theoretical and practical assessments, setting a benchmark of excellence that has earned admiration across the Royal School of Artillery.







success

was most evident during the live firing exercises of the 118 Light Guns, where their teamwork, precision, and control reflected the professionalism and motivation of a fully formed artillery unit. Instructors praised their zeal, energy, and commitment to excellence, noting how seamlessly they adapted to their new role.

The instructors involved in the course and training commented: "The performance of KGA soldiers has been exemplary. They

have brought the Gurkha spirit into the gun line — a spirit of quiet strength, mutual respect, and relentless drive to achieve perfection. Their work ethic is second to none."

This outstanding performance not only enhanced their reputation but also strengthened their confidence as they prepared to transition into subsequent phases of professional development.

#### Subsequent Trade Training (STT): Preparing for Operational Readiness

Having successfully completed ITT, KGA soldiers have now progressed to the Subsequent Trade Training (STT) phase; an advanced programme designed to develop multi-skilled

Duncan Essay

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

Artillery Decided the Fate of the Battle

artillery operators capable of supporting modern, high intensity operations. STT focuses on the full spectrum of find, fix, and strike capabilities, enabling soldiers to integrate cutting edge technology with traditional artillery skills.







The aim is clear: to ensure KGA personnel are fully prepared for operational deployment and can deliver effects across the deep battle space. The training also reinforces readiness for joint operations alongside NATO partners, ensuring that KGA remains a deployable and capable asset of the British Army.

## Historical Dine-In: Honouring Leadership and Legacy

In another milestone, the King's Gurkha Artillery hosted an historic Dine-In Night on 12 September 2025, held at the Royal Artillery Officers' Mess, Larkhill. The event honoured both the regiment's formation and its first leadership team — Lieutenant Colonel Michael Fletcher, the first Commander of The King's Gurkha Artillery, and Major Lalitbahadur Gurung, the first Gurkha Major of the regiment.

The evening was steeped in regimental tradition, blending





the distinguished customs of the Royal Artillery with the unique cultural elegance of the Gurkhas. Toasts were raised to the King & Nepal to reflect enduring bond between Britain and Nepal, and to the distinguish guests and their true ladies.

#### Dashain Celebration: Culture, Tradition, and Unity

To conclude a year of remarkable achievements, the KGA celebrated its first-ever Dashain Festival — one of the most important cultural events in the Gurkha calendar. The



celebration was held at Larkhill Garrison and inaugurated by Lieutenant General Sir Andrew Richard Gregory KCB CB DL, the Master Gunner of St James's Park, alongside Major Lalit Bahadur Gurung, the Gurkha Major of KGA. The ceremony began with the lighting

of the traditional "Diyo" lamp, symbolising prosperity, unity, and divine blessing for the regiment.

Dashain is more than a festival; it is a reminder of home, heritage, and togetherness. For the soldiers of the King's Gurkha Artillery, celebrating this occasion in their new regimental family reflected how deeply culture and service intertwine. Families, officers, and soldiers came together to share food, music, and blessings, reinforcing the regimental ethos of mutual respect, cultural pride, and brotherhood.





#### A Regiment for the Future

As 2025 draws to a close, the King's Gurkha Artillery stands firmly as one of the most promising and dynamic regiments within the British Army. In less than a year since its official establishment, it has demonstrated excellence in training, leadership, and cultural integration. From the moment of cap badging to live firing on the gun line, and from dining nights to Dashain celebrations, KGA soldiers have shown what it truly means to be Gurkha Gunners.

Looking ahead to 2028 and beyond, as the regiment will reach strength of five Batteries, with those Batteries being embedded across different artillery regiments-including dedicated Battery forming up within 7 RHA. This distributed attachment model will accelerate integration with established strike units, broaden the Royal Artillery's tactical depth, and drive rapid cross-pollination of skills and doctrine. By placing Gurkha Gunners alongside frontline artillery formations, the Army will gain increased agility, sustainment of high standards, and a significant uplift in deep-fires and responsive strike capability across the force. The King's Gurkha Artillery will not only represent the next generation of firepower but also the enduring values of service, unity, and respect. The guns of the Gurkhas now stand ready Ubique, and forever proud.

"Jai KGA"



# Artillery Decided the Fate of the Battle

By Matteo D'Angella



Matteo D'Angella is an Italian university student with a passion for modern history in his spare time. He has collaborated with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, dividing 128 of those missing on the Cassino Memorial by death area, trying to identify the unknown or find their burials. He is doing the same with the German Red Cross, the Freiburg State Archives and the German Volksbund, signalling the graves of tens of Germans who died in Italy and permitting the recovery of three of them in 2017. In this case he collected 2000 German soldiers names who died in Southern Italy, because Germany has no official estimates nor a memorial for their unrecovered fallen. He had contacts with several research groups, locals and foreigners, sharing his researches with them, such as the Royal Hampshire Regiment Museum, The Royal Tigers' Association, the Queen's Royal Regiment Association, the French Mémorial Maginot de Haute Alsace and the Rüdersdorf cultural society, while he briefly had contact with the German Parachutists League and the Belgian MIA Project in 2018. On 17th April 2019 he attended the event at the Teatro delle Arti of Salerno with Graziella Di Gasparro as quest, daughter of a Nazi massacre victim. He had an important role in identifying the authors of the killing of Andrea Mansi, a sailor killed in Naples in 1943. Furthermore, he studied the American PIR 509 through British and German sources and identified to the Defense POW/ MIA Accounting Agency an American aircraft crash site at Grottaminarda near Avellino. He

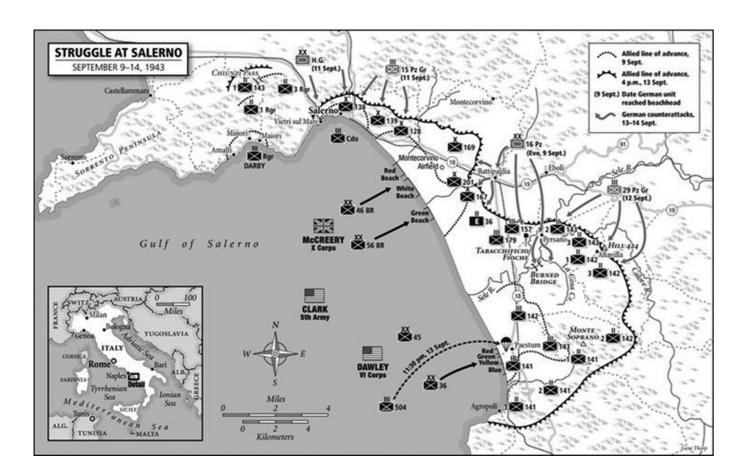
studied the Italian Resistance in Campania, finding out that in autumn 1943 some Yugoslavians were in Salerno area and Russian citizens were in Naples and Benevento and that even a Spanish anti fascist on British service was killed in action fighting the Germans.

he Operation "Avalanche" had as its objective to take Naples, the largest city in Southern Italy that was strategic for its harbour and airfield. For that, the 5th Army landed on 9th September 1943 at 3.30 hour am with her 6th American Army Corps at Paestum and the 10th British Army Corps at Pontecagnano. Additionally, a British Commando Brigade landed at Vietri sul mare and four American Ranger Battalions stormed the village of Maiori trying to reach Nocera that evening. Naval artillery silenced coastal batteries at Pontecagnano-Faiano, Montecorvino area, Vietri and Salerno itself, where on the Bellara Hill there was the 25th and 31st Italian coastal battery and in Pastena there were several

German 88 mm guns of 452th Anti Aircraft. In the end, at a cost of about 300 British and 100 American soldiers killed in action, the D Day was successful. Also because of the surprise effect against the lone 16th Panzer Division, which suffered heavy casualties in killed and prisoners. It lost almost all its tanks because with the Italian armistice on 8th September, the 222nd Italian Coastal Division was disbanded and all defence units from Castellammare di Stabia to the Gulf of Castrocucco were dissolved.

Italian artillery was silent and except for some gunners killed by the American Rangers on the Maiori-Cetara road, the Italians were captured or just took the route to home, considering the

24 Autumn 2025 Autumn 2025



war ended. Neverthless, some Italians joined the Germans and others the Allies. Some infantrymen of the 239th Infantry Coastal Battalion shot at the Germans in Luciani square in Salerno while Commandos were nearby. Now the Allies had to widen the



German artillery observers of 4th battery, 16th PanzerArtillery Regiment against the British landing forces at Vietri sul mare, morning of 9th September 1943.

bridgehead and field artillery had to pave the way. Comparing the British and the American, the Royal Field Artillery played an important role with her readiness, precision and coordination such as on 10th September, when a patrol of the 5th or 7th company of German 1st Panzergrenadier Regiment "Hermann Göring" attacked the Monte San Liberatore (renamed by the British Commandos "Monument's Hill") in order to control the Vietri defile but a brief barrage dispersed the enemy.

The following day the Germans attacked the northern outskirts of Salerno with remarkable artillery support (including the rocket launchers of 71st Werfer Regiment), capturing hundreds of prisoners and threatening to cut off the Sherwood Foresters and Leicesters from the bulk of the British 46th Infantry Division. But despite the German tactical success, the Royal Artillery concentrated the fire of its guns and the enemy was stopped southwards. For that action the German Major Heinz Dörnemann was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. Meanwhile Major General John Hawkesworth, 46th Division's Commander, took his precautions and on the 12th September, when the Germans attacked again, the British curtain of fire proved so impenetrable that the Germans suspended the attack.

The experience of the British artillerymen, some veterans of the North African campaign, was a gift to the infantry, which would otherwise have been in trouble. In the American sector, on Hill 424 near Altavilla Silentina, the German 29th Artillery Regiment shelled the 36th Texas Division positions and the German troops managed to occupy the hilltop. The next day, the Americans were pushed back again, losing so much ground that the General-in-Chief Lieutenant General Mark Clark even thought of boarding the American troops. In a disorderly but vigorous manner they lined up along the La Cosa creek and with a terrible land and naval artillery fire, drove the enemy back. Conversely, the British 201st Guards Brigade welcomed that night the 64th

Panzergrenadier Regiment at Fosso bridge with a short but intense rain of shells, which inflicted losses on the Germans, who lost a number of armoured vehicles, referred to in their diaries as "travelling coffins." A single shot could be fatal to the dozen or so soldiers on them.

In the 10th Army Corps sector, the Royal Artillery prevented what had happened in the American sector by firing on every vehicle and on every troop movement, as on 12th September at Point 210 near Montecorvino or in San Mango Piemonte area where the Germans in a company strength force, were attacking the Royal Hampshire Regiment. The 13th September was called "the Black Monday" by the Americans but English gunners hammered each sector as soon as it was required. At Cetrangolo, south of Montecorvino, they again repulsed a less important German assault while at Dragonea the situation was very worrying: the commander of 6th company of 1st Panzergrenadier, Austrian Captain Josef-August Fitz led his grenadiers with machine gun in hand as the Germans threw grenades under a smoke barrage. Trusting in a positive German outcome, a Swiss war reporter was in that sector where the British Commandos started close combat with "Hermann Göring" (HG) panzergrenadiers, who had already suffered more than 50 killed in action in four days but despite their young age (the youngest was seventeen!), they were very determined. Mortars and artillery pieces pounded the hills above Vietri sul mare, denying a hoped for victory to the enemy, but British troops had still to rely on the artillery support, as another news shaken Lieutenant General Richard McCreery, the 10th Army Corps commander.



Bring away the wounded under the shell fire prolonged the suffering of the soldiers. British stretcher bearers on Point 270 on 25th September 1943.

D Day + 6 (15th September), began with a German counterattack against the heights of Salerno that succeeded in opening a gap into the British defences, thanks also to the rallied guns belonging to six artillery regiments. They cleared the hills out from the Hampshires but eventually the attack failed due to a lack of additional reinforcements, lacking of flamethrowers (left in a depot near Sarno) and skilful British artillery, which routed

the Mollenhauer battle group at Santa Maria del Campo, east of Salerno.

In this area where the German pincer attack was driven off, lived my grandfather's family. They witnessed the cruelty of the fight and I would like to share a family story. My grandfather during a terrible firefight was taken by the hand by a young German soldier and was hidden in a small cave. Days later, returning in the area, he saw several dead bodies in the fields, including a young British lad with a knife in the throat, probably a Hampshire or Oxs and Bucks soldier. That event shocked him as told to us nephews only in 2018, 74 years after that battle took place. He sometimes wondered if that German, who wore a grey uniform and a visor cap, ever returned home.

The 15th September was a bloody day, because the other German attack took place at Campigliano, where my grandmother heard the support fire for the 167th Infantry Brigade which was defending the castle of Montevetrano. There the Tank Regiment HG made another attempt the next day, but the British stopped it by destroying three Panzer IV tanks and forcing the enemy



Tank number "700" of Second Lieutenant Cadenbach of 2nd panzer regiment. He was reported missing in action when Allied artillery hit his Panzer IV.

infantry to fall back. The 231st anti-tank battery stood out, but everywhere the artillery rendered the German advances futile, as on 16th September it was clear that the Germans had to withdraw to avoid high losses. Failing the above mentioned attack, the 26th Panzer Division's commander, Generalmajor Smilo von Lüttwitz, recalled the 4th German Paratrooper Regiment and the 9th Panzergrenadier fighting at Bellizzi. The pincer attack to capture Salerno was not possible and other exploring raids made by the Germans north of Salerno had no gains in ground, as on 15th September a 16th Durhams counterattack pursued the foe with a bayonet charge after a protective artillery barrage.

Excluding the heights of Salerno, where the Snout, the Pimple and the White Cross Hill were contended altitudes, the single noteworthy event on 17th September happened on Hill 424 at Altavilla where the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment called the artillery support in really close to its positions, in order to repel a German attack for the fourth and last time. It must be said that the desired results were not always achieved. On 18th September in the Salerno sector the artillery preparation at the Pimple failed to dent the 67th Panzergrenadier Regiment's position while a British patrol of 9 Platoon, A Company, 16th Durham Light Infantry Regiment was nearly wiped out by friendly fire. The same unlucky outcome happened to the Queen's Royal Regiment which received an American plane bomb on her positions, claiming several killed and wounded.

That night the German 76th Army Corps left rearguards to protect the retreat to Avellino while the 10th Army Corps

26 Autumn 2025

Artillery Decided the Fate of the Battle

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

The Journal of the Royal Artillery



A Leceisters officer caught a shell exploing near the White Cross Hill on 12th September 1943, when the 129th Panzergrenadier made his first attempt to take Salerno Hills.

executed a well planned offensive against the German 14th Army Corps. At midnight of 23th September the naval and field artillery cleared several strongpoints around Cava de'Tirreni and reached even the German rear lines, allowing the capture of more than 75 prisoners and greatly lowering the opponent's morale. However, the main bulwark in the British sector was the Monte Stella, which was shelled several times in a few days. The enemy had to leave weak outposts on its top, since on 24th September artillery hit the southern and eastern slopes of the mountain. In a night attack the Queen's failed to reach the top and a British officer

was severely wounded when he fell off in to a ravine. The next morning, a Royal Artillery barrage hit Monte Stella, especially on the summit and at 1530 hours on her western slope, probably killing two soldiers of 2nd company of 129th Panzergrenadier Regiment; Hubert Borelli and Erich Schimdt. They had been entrenched northwards so the mountain fell into British hands with no resistance. The Germans couldn't take it because a deluge of fire hit every move; as on 21st September when a German carrying water party on Monte S.Angelo near Cava was hit that morning, or in the night the ammunition trucks at Matierno near Salerno were set on fire and a British witness reported hearing the screams of terrified Germans.

The second phase of the battle of Salerno was undoubtedly a British tactical success. The Wehrmacht set up several defence lines and systematically the British artillery weakened them before the main infantry attack. An important position on the A line was the Castle of Cava de'Tirreni, where the Germans had an assault gun of 10th company, Tank Regiment HG, in order to shoot and scoot at the enemy and make them believe that they had more guns. During the night of 24/25th September that hill was occupied by a lonely squad of 8th company, 1st Panzergrenadier Regiment HGnjj that was wiped out with a single shell, allowing A and B Companies of 2/4 th King's Own Light Infantry to occupy the summit the following morning.

One day later a British officer complained about the stench and the horrible sight of those dead, some of them came from the eastern area of the Reich and they were 18-21 years old, so the local folklore called them the "thirteen brothers", youngsters sent by Hitler to die there for a senseless war. In fact, on 25th September the whole A line had fallen when Coldstreams conquered Point 270 and that evening British artillery repelled a hesitant German counterattack made by a patrol led by sergeant Otto Winckelmann, killed in the course of this desperate sortie

The occupation of A2 and A3 lines was fought for a short time and by 27th September, having left Monte Citola, the Germans



A British BL 7.2-inch howitzer of 56th Heavy Regiment RA harrassing the Germans rearguards, San Mango Piemonte area, 27th September 1943.

retreated on B Line at Nocera, while in the Salerno area, they were evacuating Baronissi. There soldiers of the Steuer combat group were seen by locals marching in two rows along the road, after artillery shells inflicted further losses on them. If on one hand the enemy was unable to hold the Otto line and he was retreating to the Anton line on the Sarno river, on the other, the end of infantry fighting did not mean that there was no artillery activity. The Royal Artillery also had to face deadly German counter battery fire. There were losses among the gunners, as the 93rd German Panzer Artillery Regiment war diary indicates. In the afternoon on 25th September its 8th battery annihilated a British battery south west of Salerno town cemetery, killing the gunners of 64th Royal Artillery Regiment: Percy Lionel Fleetwood, Anthony Francis Murphy and Patrick Josef Reilly. The explosion of an ammunition dump was observed and that night only a single field gun could respond to the Germans. Two days later, at 1530 hours, the 4th battery opened fire on a six gun battery 1 km southeast of Baronissi cemetery and probably this salvo killed the Major Michael Worthington-Jones, Sergeants Charles Lyons and Reginald Lawner, and Gunners James Shanks and Albert Frederick Impey.

On 29th September the Germans had left Mercato San Severino and Scafati, while in Naples an uprising was forcing the

Wehrmacht to hasten the march to the Viktor Line on the Volturno river. But still in this favourable climate, several British soldiers had to die, hit by German shells, such as Ronald Prout or Arthur Vine who are both remembered in the Cassino Memorial. The death toll for September 1943 on Southern Italian soil is about 1650 British dead. I personally counted in the death registers of Salerno 59 inhabitants who died in September 1943 but probably the number is higher. It may be around 105 simply because other people died in October and November 1943 due to unexploded shells. One of them was my great uncle Antonio Crucito, aged 6, who was mortally wounded around 1700 hours on 3rd November 1943, when he stepped near other children who were playing with an unexploded grenade. The blast killed four and wounded the others. He was brought to the Riuniti Hospital with his abdomen ripped out and his bowels exposed but he died at 0400 hours on the 4th November. His grave was lost but some clues lead me to think that he rests in a mass grave with a cross above in the communal cemetery. So I dedicate my article to those who lost their lives in that terrible battle, especially those who came from far away but with an important and not secondary aim to remember the artillerymen, who are often forgotten in combat chronicles despite their sacrifice.



A 1944 colorized photo. 1855 soldiers of the Commonwealth found their final rest in a cemetery in locality Bellizzi, east of Salerno. Still 1400 British soldiers have an unknown grave in 2025 on the Italian mainland

# DUNCAN ESSAY 2025 How should the British Army adapt its structure and equipment to reflect lessons from Ukraine and the centrality of artillery in high intensity warfighting?

By WO2 Hardingham



Warrant Officer Class 2 Daniel Hardingham joined the Territorial Army in 2000, serving with 100 Regiment Royal Artillery before transferring to the Regular Army in 2012. As a Territorial, he deployed to Iraq with 7th Parachute Regiment Royal Horse Artillery and 1st Regiment Royal Horse Artillery (RHA), and to Afghanistan on two occasions with 29 Commando Regiment RA. Following his transfer to 1 RHA, he completed a further Op HERRICK tour before transferring to the Royal Army Medical Corps for four years. In 2018, he returned to the Royal Artillery as a Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) with 3 RHA, deploying on Op CABRIT in 2021. He completed the All Arms Ranger Course in early 2022 and was subsequently posted to 2nd Battalion The Ranger Regiment, completing a 2 year posting as a Team Operations Officer, during which he deployed to Somalia. On promotion to Warrant Officer Class 2, he assumed his current appointment as Formation Senior JTAC with 4th Regiment Royal Artillery. This essay came third in the Duncan Essay 2025 competition.

#### Introduction

The war in Ukraine has redefined contemporary understanding of large-scale conventional warfare. After decades of counter-insurgency operations dominating the western military consciousness, the conflict highlighted the enduring and, arguably, the pivotal role of artillery in high-intensity warfighting. Artillery has once again emerged as the primary lethal force on the battlefield, responsible for the majority of casualties and a decisive factor in shaping the operational tempo and strategic outcomes (Watling and Reynolds 2022). In parallel, supporting technologies such as

unmanned aerial systems (UAS), electronic warfare (EW), and precision munitions have transformed how artillery is targeted, coordinated and protected. These developments raise questions on how the British Army, long structured around manoeuvre and light role forces, must evolve to remain credible in future conflicts against peer or near peer adversaries.

This essay will explore how the British Army should adapt its structure and equipment considering the lessons drawn from the war in the east. The term structure refers to the organisation of forces, including unit composition, command relationships, and integration of supporting capabilities such as UAS, fires coordination, and logistics. Equipment encompasses platforms,

munitions, sensors and supporting systems vital for delivering and enabling artillery effects in high threat environments.

It is argued that the British Army must rebalance its force design, placing artillery and its key enablers at the centre of combat power. This will require structural reform to support sustained, integrated fires across the depth of the battlefield, as well as the procurement of modern, mobile and survivable systems that enhance both mass and precision. Furthermore, cultural and doctrinal change will be essential to overcome institutional inertia and embrace artillery's renewed primacy.

The essay will begin by analysing the key lessons from Ukraine regarding the employment of artillery. It will the examine the structural and equipment adaptations necessary to codify these lessons in a British context. Finally, it will consider the organisational and cultural barriers to change, before concluding with key recommendations.

#### **Lessons from Ukraine**

The war in Ukraine has underlined the dominant role of artillery in contemporary high intensity warfare. Both Russia and Ukraine have leaned heavily upon indirect fires as not only a means of inflicting attrition but as a tool to shape operations, deny manoeuvre, and impose psychological effect on adversaries. The return of large-scale attritional land warfare has re-centred artillery as the principal combat arm, with supporting enablers, particularly UAS, EW and dispersed command and control (C2), playing a critical role in shaping its effectiveness.

#### **Mass and Attrition**

In the early phases of the conflict, Russian forces relied on massed fires to compensate for underperformance in manoeuvre warfare. Shell consumption reportedly reached 60,000 rounds per day during major offensives (Watling and Reynolds 2025), particularly around Severodonetsk and Bakhmut. Despite their limitations in precision and flexibility, traditional 'tube' artillery and multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) inflicted enormous casualties.

Ukrainian forces, in contrast, demonstrated the effectiveness of concentrated but judicious artillery employment, achieving strategic effects with fewer munitions but greater integration with intelligence.

This has profound implications for the British Army, which has prioritised mobility and lightness at the expense of depth, resilience, and volume of fire. Future force design must account for sustained ammunition consumption rates, survivable supply lines, and a re- emphasis on artillery mass.

#### **Precision and Dispersion**

The introduction of the M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) to Ukraine in mid-2022 marked a significant turning point. Its precision effects allowed Ukraine to disrupt Russian ammunition depots, bridges and command nodes with unprecedented accuracy. However, HIMARS alone did not win the artillery fight (Watling and Reynolds 2022). Ukraine's continued use of 155mm howitzers in combination with HIMARS demonstrated that precision complements but does not replace saturation fires.

At the same time, the high lethality of counter battery fire and drone directed targeting has forced both sides to adapt by dispersing artillery assets, limiting fire missions to short durations and rapidly displacing afterwards. This has necessitated high

rates of mobility, secure communications, and decentralised C2; a significant departure from cold war era artillery doctrine. In the British Army, survivability will hinge not only on improved platforms, but on modernised tactics that account for precision enemy surveillance and immediate retaliation.

#### **UAS and Targeting**

Unmanned Aerial Systems have revolutionised the targeting process. From commercial quadcopters providing tactical overwatch to much larger systems like TB2 Bayraktar conducting strategic strikes and ISTAR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance), drones have compressed the sensor to shooter loop to near real time. Ukrainian forces regularly integrate UAS feeds directly into artillery planning at the battery and troop level (Watling 2019), enabling rapid engagements and post-strike battle damage assessments (BDA).

Equally, loitering munitions, such as Switchblade and Lancet, have offered a hybrid between ISR and precision strike. These platforms are cost effective, hard to defeat, and are disruptive to traditional artillery concealment. The British Army must therefore invest in a layered UAS capability, with platforms supporting everything from troop level observation to deep strike targeting. UAS must become a core component of every artillery deployment, and not a niche adjunct.

#### **Counter Battery Fire and Electronic Warfare**

Ukrainian and Russian forces have prioritised counter battery engagements, often using radar, sound ranging, or drone triangulation to detect and strike artillery systems. The resulting 'cat-and-mouse' dynamic has increased the tempo of fire missions and the requirement for rapid displacement. This places new emphasis on automated targeting, and systems that reduce set-up times

Electronic warfare has further complicated the battlespace, Russian jamming has at times degraded GPS guided munitions and interfered with drone feeds (Mozur and Krolik 2023), prompting Ukrainian adaptations including frequency hopping, mesh networking, and hardwired backup systems. For a digitally modernised force like the British Army, over-reliance on vulnerable networks without sufficient EW protection or redundancy could prove catastrophic in a peer on peer contest.

#### **Logistics and Sustainment**

Finally, Ukraine has revealed the brutal logistical demands of sustained artillery led warfare. Ukrainian commanders have frequently been forced to prioritise high value targets due to limited artillery ammunition and inconsistent resupply (Watling and Reynolds 2022). The Russians, conversely, have struggled with over reliance on rail bound logistics and ammunition depots vulnerable to long range fires.

For the British Army, this underscores the requirement for resilient, flexible sustainment chains, robust ammunition stockpiles, and doctrine that recognises the sheer volume of material consumed in high intensity conflict. Artillery dominance is not simply a function of tubes and rounds, but of the system that supports them.

#### Structural Adaptation of the British Army

To apply the lessons of Ukraine to the British Army, it is necessary to revisit and reform the structure of its land

component. The emphasis on mobility and lightness that defined much of the post Iraq and Afghanistan force design has left the Army underprepared for sustained, attritional, fires led combat. If artillery is to be the decisive force multiplier in high intensity warfare, it must be placed at the centre of the British Army's structure; organisationally, conceptually, and functionally.

#### **Rebalancing Brigade and Division**

The current Brigade Combat Team (BCT) model, while adapting to create self sustaining tactical groupings, lacks the artillery depth demonstrated in Ukraine. The model assigns just a single artillery regiment to each BCT (British Army 2021), a level of organic firepower insufficient for shaping operations across a contested and dispersed battle space. There is therefore a strong case for restructuring BCTs with either larger fires groups, or additional support from divisional assets under a resurrected Army Group Royal Artillery (AGRA) style concept. This would enable long range precision and massed fires in depth, freeing up BCT fires for close support.

Divisional formations must take ownership of deep fires, counter battery operations, and long range precision strike, integrating Joint Fires Effects Cells (JFECs) with Air-Land integration elements, cyber, and electronic warfare support (Ministry of Defence 2023). This would reflect both NATO's emerging Multi-Domain Operation doctrine and Ukraine's own tiered command structure, which links tactical fires to operational effects via ISR and digital C2.

#### **Artillery as the Central Combat Enabler**

Historically treated as the supporting arm to manoeuvre units, artillery must instead be reframed as the core around which operations are built. This requires a doctrinal and

structural shift: infantry and armour should be considered enablers of fires rather than the inverse in high intensity contexts. In practical terms, this means elevating artillery commanders within planning hierarchies, ensuring they can shape tempo and resource prioritisation.

This concept echoes the "fix and attrit" use of fires by the Ukrainians against Russian formations, allowing limited manoeuvre elements to exploit effects rather than lead them. For the British Army, this would require revised command relationships and deeper planning integration of artillery planning into divisional and corps level headquarters.

#### **UAS, Counter UAS, and Fires Integration**

The Ukrainian model demonstrates the critical role of UAS in directing fires and defeating enemy artillery. The British Army's structure must adapt by formalising the drone support within artillery units. Rather than rely on ad hoc attachments or distant UAS units, artillery regiments should include organic UAS detachments, at Battery level, equipped with sUAS, one-way effectors, or loitering munitions.

At a regimental level, a centralised UAS cell would provide higher endurance platforms, technical support, and governance over standards, training, and mission coordination. This mirrors how surveillance and target acquisition (STA) elements are traditionally structured in the Royal Artillery and provides a scalable model for force wide implementation.

In parallel, artillery units must be structurally paired with Counter UAS (C-UAS) teams, recognising the demonstrated vulnerability of fire units to hostile drones. These detachments

would provide threat detection and hard/soft kill responses. Without this capability, British artillery units risk rapid degradation by even the most rudimentary UAS platforms.

#### **Reserve Component Integration**

Massed artillery fires demand depth and endurance, both of which require a larger trained force that the regular Army alone can sustain. In Ukraine, reserve and territorial formations have played a critical role in maintaining firepower during prolonged phases of fighting.

The British Army could emulate this by fully absorbing reserve artillery units into their regular counterparts ORBATs, pairing them to ensure alignment in training and readiness. Moreover, reserve soldiers with technical civilian skills such as UAS operation, software integration, or cyber support should be targeted for specific fires enabler roles, thereby augmenting regular force capacity without duplicating costs.

#### **Fire Support Teams and JTAC Development**

Artillery dominance in high intensity conflict depends not only on the guns, but on the effectiveness of those who observe, direct, and synchronise fires. In Ukraine, rapid engagement cycles have been enabled by highly integrated teams combining traditional fire support roles with uncrewed systems and precision-strike coordination. The British Army must evolve its Fire Support Teams (FSTs) and Tactical Air Control Parties (TACPs) into more capable, multi-domain integration teams tailored to the demands of dispersed and contested environments.

At the tactical level, the Army should develop Forward Joint Fires Teams (JFTs) – scalable, modular elements that act as "super FSTs", combining artillery observers, JTACs, UAS controllers, EW liaisons and Cyber into a single team capable of directing effects across multiple domains. These teams would operate at Battlegroup or Brigade level, either embedded with the manoeuvre elements or supporting from protected C2 nodes, depending on the threat environment.

These teams should be digitally linked through various bearers to the Joint Fires Cell (JFC) at Brigade HQ, which would coordinate fires, allocate airspace, and deconflict ISR and loitering assets. In formations such as 1 Deep Recce Strike Brigade Combat Team (1 DRS BCT), this function has already evolved into a Joint Air Ground Integration Centre (JAGIC), enabling real time synchronisation of artillery, air effects and uncrewed systems.

Investment in these deployable Joint Fires Teams should be matched with upgrades to digital fires infrastructure, easier access to UAS feeds and interconnectivity with wider joint assets. Training must also evolve to reflect the increasingly fused nature of effects coordination, collapsing the divide between traditional gunner and air liaison roles where appropriate. Without such adaptation, the Army risks bottlenecking its fires potential at the point of delivery.

#### **Equipment and Capability Adaptation**

While structural reforms are necessary to reflect the centrality of artillery, they must be underpinned by modern, survivable, and scalable equipment. Ukraine has highlighted not only the lethality of indirect firepower, but also the vulnerability of outdated or unsupported systems in the modern battlefield. If the British Army is to remain credible, it must address critical capability gaps in massed fires, precision strike, survivability, uncrewed systems and counter UAS technologies.

#### **Mobile Fires and Mass**

The return of attritional warfare has demonstrated that mass still matters. Ukraine and Russia have expended tens of thousands of rounds per day at various points in the conflict, a scale that has overwhelmed both nations' industrial bases. For the British Army, this reinforces the requirement for an artillery fleet capable of sustained, high tempo fires supported by a resilient logistics system.

The ageing AS90 platform despite its recent life extension is insufficient in both range and survivability. The Mobile Fires Platform (MFP) programme must be accelerated to field modern 155mm platforms such as Caeser and Archer (Boxer 155 now selected), which offer increased range, automation, and rapid displacement. A shift to wheeled systems will also improve strategic and operational mobility while reducing the logistics footprint.

In parallel, the UK must address ammunition stockpiles. NATO warfighting scenarios suggest that most Western armies, including the UK would exhaust their artillery ammunition within days at current rates of expenditure. Investment in domestic production of 155mm rounds, fuses, and charges is essential to support sustained operations.

#### **Deep Fires and Precision Strike**

The ability to strike command posts, logistic hubs and assembly areas at depth has been a key Ukrainian advantage since the introduction of precision munitions like GMLRS and Storm Shadow. The British Army must ensure that GMLRS-ER and PrSM (Precision Strike Missile) are introduced rapidly into the GMLRS fleet, enabling divisional and corps level fires to influence the deep battle space.

Precision strike must be viewed as a complement, not a substitute, for volume. Even with guided systems, effective suppression and shaping still require massed effects to deny manoeuvre, fix enemy formations, and create opportunity. Moreover, reliance on GPS guided weapons creates vulnerabilities to electronic warfare, necessitating alternative targeting solutions and increased emphasis on hardening precision guidance systems.

The UK's adoption of the Naval Strike Missile, with both antiship and land-attack capability, reflects a broader interest in long range land based fires to support joint force integration and littoral denial (Allison 2024).

#### **Unmanned Aerial Systems**

As highlighted previously, UAS have transformed the way artillery is employed. The British Army must now field a tiered UAS capability subsumed into artillery regiments from FST level quadcopters to brigade level tactical UAS (Watchkeeper or its replacement). This should also include reconnaissance and loitering munitions, which bridge the gap between artillery and air-delivered precision strike.

CoTS (Commercial off the Shelf) platforms such a DJI Mavictype drones have proven effective for short range surveillance, fire correction, and BDA (Battle Damage Assessment), especially when employed in mass. These can be fielded rapidly and in large numbers, but require supporting policies on security, electronic hardening and training. For sustained ISR, platforms such as Stalker or Integrator - replacing or supplementing Puma, should be integrated into artillery regiments or STA batteries

Loitering munitions such as the Switchblade, Hero 120 or Warmate offer a critical strike option when time sensitive targets or C-UAS threats emerge (Watling, The Future of Fires: Maximising the UK's Tactical and Operational Firepower 2019). These systems are difficult to counter, relatively inexpensive, and offer precision without reliance on fixed infrastructure. Investment in this area should prioritise affordability, ease of use, and integration with current fires systems.

#### Counter-UAS and Electronic Warfare

The widespread use of drones in Ukraine has driven a corresponding rise in Counter UAS (C-UAS) activity. Artillery units, particularly those in static or semi static positions, are highly vulnerable of hostile drones used for targeting or direct attack. The British Army must field C- UAS capabilities at regimental and battery level, employing a mix of soft-kill (RF jamming, spoofing) and hard-kill (kinetic or directed energy options).

In parallel, a more aggressive approach to Electronic Warfare is needed to disrupt enemy command and ISR. Russian EW assets have shown the ability to degrade Ukrainian UAS control, GPS signals, and digital communications. For UK forces, survivability will depend on electronic resilience, requiring hardened communications, redundancy, and the ability to fight in degraded environments. Artillery units must relearn to operate without GPS, digital maps or reliable feeds and must incorporate them into collective training.

A dedicated EW troop embedded within divisional fires groups could act as both a sensor and effector, locating enemy transmissions for counter battery fires and disrupting hostile ISR. Coordination between artillery, EW and cyber elements must become habitual, not aspirational.

#### **Survivability and Mobility**

Modern battlefield transparency has drastically reduced the survivability of static artillery. Long set-up times, predictable positions, and visible signature make legacy systems easy prey for counter battery and loitering strike. To address this, new platforms must emphasise mobility, automation, and speed of displacement.

Systems such as Archer or Atmos can fire and move within 30 seconds, while older systems like AS90 can take several minutes. Every minute spent static increases risk. Additionally, deception techniques such as decoys, false signatures, and multispectral camouflage should be standardised and integrated into gunnery training and deployment cycles.

Furthermore, signature management must be incorporated into all stages of artillery operations, from deployment to resupply. Commanders must consider electromagnetic, visual, and infrared signatures when selecting firing positions and designing gun lines. Resupply vehicles should similarly be protected with the same vigour.

#### **Organisational and Cultural Change**

Structural and equipment changes alone will not ensure the British Army's readiness for high intensity, artillery led warfare. Institutional culture, doctrinal inertia, and outdated force design risk undermining efforts to modernise. Without a shift in mindset, investment in platforms and structures will yield only marginal gains.

The Army's recent operational focus on counter insurgency, peace support and light role forces has entrenched a manoeuvre

32 Autumn 2025

and infantry centric culture, in which artillery is often viewed as a supporting enabler rather than a decisive capability in its own right. The Royal Artillery has itself acknowledged the need to reposition artillery as a central, rather than supporting component of warfighting in the 21st century (Royal Artillery Institution 2024). This admission aligns with Ukraine, where fires shape operations and dictate manoeuvre rather than react to it. British doctrine must catch up, prioritising fires as a central manoeuvre function and recognising the role of enablers like UAS and EW as integral to the system.

There are also institutional obstacles to integration. Unmanned systems, for instance, sit awkwardly across Corps responsibilities, with no single owner for force design, training, or sustainment. The same applies for C-UAS and loitering munitions. These blurred lines delay capability fielding and create gaps in tactical employment. Local initiatives, such as emerging models for centrally managing drone trained personnel within some artillery regiments, offer a potential path to scalable capability. In these cases, operators are pooled at regimental level and tasked flexibly across sub units, providing consistency and technical depth. However, such approaches remain informal and risk stagnation without formal endorsement, resources, and doctrinal recognition.

Finally, talent management must adapt. Fires, UAS and EW roles are increasingly technical, requiring specialist training, retention initiatives, and long term career planning. Without this, critical enabler roles will become choked. If artillery is to lead in future conflict, then those who deliver and direct it must be treated as a critical asset; not just supporting staff.

#### Conclusion

The war in Ukraine has dispelled any remaining illusions about

the character of high intensity conflict. Artillery, long viewed as a supporting capability, has re-emerged as the central arm in delivering tactical and operational outputs. Fires are no longer just a tool for enabling manoeuvre, they are the manoeuvre. The British Army thus demands urgent adaptation in both structure and equipment, or risk obsolescence in the face of grave peer threats.

To remain credible, the army must rebalance its force design around artillery and its enablers. This means reforming the BCTs and divisional formations to centre on massed and precision fires, supported by survivable C2, integrated UAS, and specialist targeting capabilities, The fires community must be given both the command influence and the digital infrastructure to lead battlespace shaping not merely react to it.

In parallel, equipment programmes must prioritise what Ukraine has proven essential: mobility, range, resilience, and integration. The Mobile Fires Platform must be accelerated, UAS made organic and ubiquitous, and C-UAS and EW brought down to the lowest tactical levels. Every gun group must be capable not only of firing with effect, but of surviving long enough to do so again.

None of this will be achievable without cultural change. The Army must move beyond its historical emphasis on manoeuvre-centric thinking and accept that future conflict may be won by those who can sense, strike and sustain, at scale and at speed. This will require new doctrine, new command models, and investment in the people how can deliver it.

Artillery must be repositioned. Not as a supporting arm, but as the core of the Army's combat power. In wars to come, those who dominate the fires fight will dictate the outcome. The British Army must ensure it is among them.

#### **Bibliography**

Allison, George. 2024. "UK warship gets powerful anti-ship, land attack missiles." UK Defence Journal, December 12. Accessed Apr 29, 2025. https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/uk-warship-gets- powerful-anti-ship-land-attack-missiles/#:~:text=HMS%20Portland%2C%20a%20 Type%20 23,Norwegian%20company%20Ko ngsberg%20Defence%20%26%20Aerospace.

British Army. 2021. Future Soldier: Transforming the British Army. Andover, November 25. Accessed Apr 29, 2025. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61a782a68fa8f50379269dfc/ADR010310- FutureSoldierGuide 30Nov.pdf.

Ministry of Defence. 2023. *Joint Doctrine Note 1/23: Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance.* London, Jan. https://modgovuk.sharepoint.com/sites/IntranetUKStratCom/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FIntranetUKStratCom%2FShared%20Documents%2FJDN%5F1%5F23%5FISR%5Fweb%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FIntranetUKStratCom%2FShared%20Documents.

Mozur, Paul, and Aaron Krolik. 2023. "The Invisible War in Ukraine Being Fought Over Radio Waves." The New York Times, Nov 19. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/19/technology/russia-ukraine-electronic-warfare-drone-signals.htmlhttps://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/19/technology/russia-ukraine-electronic-warfare-drone-signals.html.

Royal Artillery Institution. 2024. The Journal of the Royal Artillery, Spring.

Watling, Jack. 2019. *The Future of Fires: Maximising the UK's Tactical and Operational Firepower.* Occasional Paper, London: Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). Accessed Apr 29, 2025. https://static.rusi.org/op 201911 future of fires watling web 0.pdf.

Watling, Jack, and Nick Reynolds. 2025. *Tactical Developments During the Third Year of the Russo— Ukrainian War.* London: Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). Accessed April 29, 2025. https://static.rusi.org/tactical-developments-third-year-russo-ukrainian-war-february- 2205. ndf

Watling, Jack, and Nick Reynolds. 2022. *Ukraine at War: Paving the Road From Survival to Victory*. Special Report, London: Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). Accessed Apr 29, 2025. https://static.rusi.org/special-report-202207-ukraine-final-web\_0.pdf.

# Victory in Europe A Gunner's War

#### By Brigadier Jon Cresswell



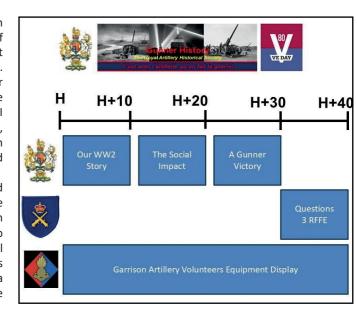
Brigadier Jon Cresswell is the chair of the Royal Artillery Historical Society and as part of the VE80 commemorations and celebrations, he gave the following paper at the Royal School of Artillery on Thursday 8th May 2025. In a short presentation he sets out that we are right to celebrate the end of the Second World War and the central place of Great Britain and the Commonwealth among the victorious allied powers. He observes that while the Great War re-ordered British politics, it was the Second great contest that created the society that we recognise today. He finally contends that on the European mainland this was a victory of Firepower – a Gunner victory.



adies and gentlemen, what a pleasure to join you on the 80th anniversary of VE Day. A day of reflection, of remembrance but above all of celebration. This is not Remembrance Sunday and was never intended to be so. My name is Jon Cresswell and I am the chair of the Gunner History Society and I am delighted to be here to offer you some historical thoughts on this important day. That said, although I will be more Al Murray than Anthony Beevor in terms of style, in keeping with the Royal Artillery Heritage Strategy, there is an element of contemporary operational effectiveness embedded in my paper.

The Gunner History Society numbers some 250 members and we deliver a range of products including webinars, face to face presentations such as today and written articles, normally in the Royal Artillery Journal. We also do bespoke presentations to Regiments or Branches here at RSA. We have our own regimental historian in the form of the excellent Dr Spencer Jones who is a senior academic, renowned international podcaster and a published authority on both Britain and the First World War, the Second Boer War and on gunnery.

So, in the slot that we have today, I am keen to shoot the following fireplan in three phases: let's start by looking back



at our Second World War story – the collective and accepted narrative that we have in the UK. I would then like to take a view

34 Autumn 2025

have left, just have a guick look at the Gunner side of the ledger. As you will see from my sub-title – I propose that in this industrial firepower war, at the tactical level of the British army, this was a Gunner victory.

So, let's begin with our collective memory. Our WW2 story, our WW2 victory that we celebrate today. We have to go back to the first great contest and its conclusion to start our story: the Treaty of Versailles of 1919. There are two schools of thoughts here, the first being that its terms were too harsh, the second being that were too lenient. Of note, they were doubtless lenient compared to the terms that Germany imposed on Russia in 1917. Either way, they failed to prevent the resurgence of German aggression in the 1930s through either deterrence or active enforcement by the allies whose minds were elsewhere after the Wall Street crash and wider imperial interests.

The inter-war period was not one of peace. The Great War did not end on 11th November 1918, that was just the armistice on the Western Front and confrontations continued in various guises until the early 1920s most notably against the new threat which was Bolshevik Russia which became the expansionist USSR in 1922. So, the conflicts that I have depicted here we have the Russian civil war, the Irish War of Independence which will bleed into the Irish Civil war, the Russo-Polish conflict, the rise of Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy, Indian pacification which was tragically controversial. I have not mentioned Afghanistan and the NW Frontier, or the Spanish Civil War but I have concluded with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931. Of note is that Britain emerged financially weakened from the Great War; she had entered in credit, but eventual victory saw her in considerable debt. The final repayment of her WW1 debt to the US was in 2015.... Nevertheless, while the interwar period is the final chapter of the story of Britain's Empire, it is also its zenith – it now covered 30% of the world's land mass and one quarter of the world's population. There is a degree of myth or illusion here but those are the basic facts.



Britain's WW2 story has to be viewed in context. We have started with WW1 and the challenges facing the United Kingdom in the 1920s. The rise of Japan in the Far East might not be recognised as the obvious starting point, but it is important as it is here that Britain's war plans will start to unravel. The concept of Fortress Singapore is key whereby in the event of hostile Japanese action, Britain would be able to deploy a large fleet

of the social impact of WW2 and finally with the time that we to the Far East to be based on the strategically positioned naval base. This is predicated on the Home Fleet holding the North Sea and protecting the Western Approaches with the French holding the Mediterranean in the event of Italian interference. This was in effect the plan in the First World War albeit Japan was an ally and the Far East therefore did not come into question. In fact, the Japanese sent ships to support the British in the Western hemisphere – a stark reminder of how far the tables had turned. So, in essence, Britain could fight two adversaries but not three.

> The fall of France and the German exploitation of France's Atlantic seaboard had naturally not been viewed as a likely outcome. I have gone into this challenge in some detail, but this is the source of Britain's dilemma and the compromise that she will have to make with unavoidable disaster and the inevitable outcome for the strategic independence of Australia and New Zealand alongside nationalist movements across the other British colonies once it was clear that Britain's star had waned. I have mentioned the rise of Fascism in Europe, I link this with appeasement as the predominant threat is communism not fascism, although it clearly comes a close second. This timeline takes us through the phases of the war from the very basic British perspective where France and the UK declare war on Germany on 3 September 1939 following the latter's invasion of Poland. Hitler had already invaded Czechoslovakia. You will note of course that the USSR also invades Poland, but the western allies do not declare war on Russia. Of course the reality was that apart from indirect pressure (ie maritime and economic) and long range bombing, there was not much that France and Britain could actually do to save Poland and so a 'Phoney War' developed along the Franco-German border with some border skirmishes and in the spring of 1940, peripheral operations to secure Norway which the Germans won.

> France fell in six weeks and capitulated and Britain was left to carry on the war alone under its new and resolute Prime Minister, Winston Churchill who took power at the head of a Coalition Government on 10 May and whose deputy was the labour leader Clement Atlee. Britain then endures the German aerial onslaught first to destroy the RAF and gain air supremacy to cover a landing operation and then a campaign of terror to blitz (to coin the phrase) the British people into submission. All the while, Churchill is seeking American support, and this comes in the form of the Lend Lease agreement of 1941 prior to Pearl Harbour and the entry of the USA into the war as a belligerent. Let us be clear through, Hitler's aim was not to fight France and Britain, it was always to create lebensraum and that space to expand lay to the east not the west. The pressure on Brain was significantly reduced when the Germans invaded Russia and this was to exhaust and fix their forces decisively in this enormous land campaign.

> The British contribution was strategic bombing and sea control to keep the sea lanes open to move war material from the USA to Britian and from Britian to the USSR. Britain is also engaged in North Africa against the Italians (who in turn are supported and ultimately commanded by the Germans) and from December 1941 Britain is fighting against the Japanese who at the same time as attacking the US Pacific Fleet and their chain of island bases. they also strike at Hong Kong and begin their march through Malaya to the naval fortress of Singapore. From North Africa, the allies invade Italy which surrenders, and the final chapter is the opening of the second front in the west, the deceive Normandy campaign and the long slow march into the III Reich on both sides by the 'only just' allies which now include France as a full fighting partner once again. Japan capitulates two months after Germany after the dropping of atomic bombs on two of its major cities.

So that was me trying to summarise WW2, no mention of El Alamein, Dieppe, St Nazaire, Enigma, SOE etc. Such is the breadth and depth of the story that extends to China, to the Bengal Famine, to Britain offering Northern Ireland to Dublin if De Valera declare war against Germany on the side of the Allies, of Finland fighting alongside Nazi Germany in order to reclaim the Karelian peninsula that it lost to Russia in the Winter War of 1940, to 'Tube Allovs' and Britain's part in the development of nuclear fission and the atom bomb etc. Inevitably of course we tend to view the war through the land domain which ultimately is decisive but a maritime or air approach to the war would look different too. There was certainly no phoney war at sea and the RAF was in action on day one.

I think one element that we need to be clear about is the continued dominance of British naval power and how this arguably gives Churchill the freedom of action to continue the war and even to commit land forces to operations in the mediterranean to protect the Suez Canal and its lifeline to India and the oil fields of the Middle East. If the Wehrmacht was able to defeat the British and Canadian armies on land and the Luftwaffe would no doubt in time achieve mastery over the RAF, there was little chance that the Kriegsmarine was going to be able to achieve naval ascendency and guarantee sea lines of communication across the Channel for several weeks albeit the cost to the Royal Navy would have been significant.

So the WW2 story that we have been brought up on it one of Monty against Rommel in the Western Desert, the breaking of Enigma, French resistance operations and the SOE, naval engagements to hunt down the surface raiders and U-Boats and Bomber Command being Britain's offensive lever against Nazi Germany's war machine together with a few commando raids for morale and to reassure the Soviets that we were engaged in the fight. All this underpinned by the British Blitz spirit of 'Keep Calm and Carry On'. The highlight of this story of national resilience and resolve is that of the Battle of Britain where combat took place over British territory and the country was clear that the nation's survival was genuinely at stake, and this was the last line of defence for the free world. It is this episode that arguably supports the notion that underpins the message of VE80 of a special generation that fought for the freedom that we enjoy today, and this is not inaccurate.

The fact that the mother country was at threat together with the ultimate victory in 1945 often hides the tragedies and national humiliations that have now been lost from our



national consciousness. The disastrous Norway campaign of 1940, the neutralisation of the French fleet at Mers El Kebir and elsewhere on 3 July 1940, the Dieppe Raid, the loss of Singapore where 80,000 men surrendered, the loss of Tobruk in 1942, the evacuation from Dunkirk although we couch this as a deliverance but we lost a large part of our equipment and the numerous sinkings such as the loss of the RMS Lancastria off St Nazaire where potentially up to 5000 troops lost their lives. These are the forgotten stories, lost in the celebration of the final victory.

Let's move on to the social impact as the two world wars changed Britain fundamentally and led us to where we are today. If the Great War changed our social structures, the Second World War forged our modern identity and shaped our social contract. The Second World War was a Total War and for the people of Britain, the peoples' war. Churchill was the energetic leader of the nation, the Royal Family remained in place, set the example and joined the war effort, the legend of the little ships at the miracle of Dunkirk remains a quite extraordinary story and the Blitz subjected the British people to the violence of war a killing just under 70,000 people, the majority in late 1940 and the first half of 1941. One in four working men were in the armed forces and there was a range of auxiliary services for both men and women including the Home Guard of over a million men and women. Even the scouts and guides had a wartime role. A major propaganda campaign exhorted the British to dig for victory, to support the war effort and to keep secrets. There was also the reminder that Britain was not alone, and this was true. Thousands of troops from Canada and Australia were rushed to the British Isles not to mention all the other national contingents that found themselves in British battledress. 15 million commonwealth subjects served in the armed forces over the course of the war. some five million coming from India, Africa and the Caribbean while the same again came from Canada, South Africa and the antipodean dominions.

The Second World War saw significant numbers of POW taken by both sides. Survival rates for Russians in German hands and vice versa were alarmingly low whereas Axis POW who were transported to North America enjoyed excellent treatment. Of note, many were not able to return home for many years after the war. There was significant deportation within Europe both to obtain workers for the III Reich and of course as part of the final solution and Holocaust. While the genocide of the latter is clearly well known and to some extent serves as justification for the righteousness of the victory from the allied point of the view, the plight of POW and civilian detainees is largely a forgotten story outside of the Great Escape and Colditz.

In terms of people's lives, there were major changes: war poetry symbolised how warfare had become a daily part of people's lives. The poem Timothy Winters talks about the Blitz and how his 'mum has run off with a bombardier', the point being that in WW2 Britain, most people would know what a bombardier was. The language changed as military slang became the norm and Americanisms were introduced. The national effort required payback and in the khaki election of 1945. Clement Atlee's labour government was returned with a landslide and Winston Churchill left office. People looked to a better future which they felt could be better achieved by the Labour party and the welfare state and the NHS came into being during their mandate. The role of the state had changed significantly out of necessity due to the blitz where the responsibility for medical care, shelter and re-housing had to be met collectively as a war cost. The financial impact of the war was catastrophic. Britain had spent £7Bn on fighting the war, that is probably around £260 Billion today. Put in a different way, Britain was spending 2Bn a year and taking in £350m in

36 Autumn 2025 Autumn 2025 37 tax receipts. A quarter of the country's national wealth was consumed. The debt to the US and Canada was finally paid off in 2006. Income tax which was high anyway in the interwar years at 28% rose to 50%. That's the basic rate. Rationing remained in place for many years. This is austerity on steroids. Significant numbers of homes had been destroyed, people displaced, ships sunk which of course impacts on how much food you can import.

On the plus side there was full employment and a sense of victory and new beginning. Society had changed, women had gone into the factories in the Great War and won the vote but the place of women in society was now much more equitable; women had fought on the guns of the anti-aircraft Royal Artillery for example and finally there was Britain's new place in the world. Her global interests could no longer be sustained in the same way and while she attempted to restore and retain the Empire, the sun had set. This was the price of Freedom and arguably the prize as well for the newly independent nations. This is what they had fought for.



When it comes to popular culture, it is worth having a quick look at the films that were produced as these shape society's interpretation of their lived experience and influence others. Wartime films were positive and extolled positive values of resilience, resistance, hope and courage together with doing the right thing. Went the Day Well is an early version of The Eagle has Landed where the Germans invade Britain. Of interest this film was released after the threat of invasion had reduced and serves to remind the population against complacency. *In Which* We Serve is a naval film; Errol Flynn's The Seahawk is about Sir Francis Drake but references to the Phillip of Spain and the Spanish Armada are surrogates for Hitler and the Germans. *The* Way Ahead stars David Niven who was a serving solider at the time as well as a Hollywood Star and some of its script forms the basis for Carry On Sergeant which began the whole genre of Carry On comedies.

After the war, the sentiment changes. Films now remind the audience of the qualities and the sacrifices of the Allies in the cause of victory to reassure the population that the austerity that they are now suffering was worth it. British films serve to remind the Americans of how important the British were to victory and the films of the 1960s also serve as Cold War propaganda against the Soviets. Now of course the primary aim of the film industry is to make money, and the war provides an excellent source of narrative, but these secondary motivations can be detected beneath.



Finally, let's turn to the Gunners. This was a Firepower victory on the land but one which did not come easily or quickly. Over the course of the war, there were 960 gunner regiments numbering some one million gunners. Two fifth of the army were gunners. That said that does not mean that the British army or the Royal Regiment were ready for war either materially or conceptually. Much of the field artillery equipment still dated from the Great War. This table from Frank Baldwin's excellent work on Normandy is telling. There is clearly a huge uplift over the course of the war in terms of both anti-tank and anti-aircraft artillery which shows both how warfare had changed and equally how Royal Artillery thinking at the start of the war had not fully recognised how important these capabilities were going to be.

One area where the Field Artillery had let itself slip was the concentration of firepower. Now as you know, the massing of fires is not always possible or appropriate but when it is required and can be delivered, it is a battle winner and Exercise Bumper in 1941 appeared to demonstrate that the Home Forces (which go on to become 21st Army Group) had not only lost that skill but in some cases they were entirely ignorant of it. Happily, the Commanderin-Chief Home Forces was Sir Alan Brooke, and his chief umpire was Montgomery who had as his senior gunner mentor Brigadier Sidney Kirkham. These two set in place the firepower system of systems that would be used for the remainder of the war in the Western Desert and in Italy and NW Europe. To some extend they remain in place to this day. If you wonder the problem was, formations were dispersing their firepower and delegating command to lower tactical echelons which limited its flexibility. The fighting in the Western Desert created a lot of unfortunate habits and these found their way to Exercise Bumper. El Alamein was essentially a Great War fireplan where no risk was taken and when you look at the Fires laydown in Normandy, you instantly understand why this was a Firepower battle. Mike, Uncle and Victor level fire missions could be delivered in around ten minutes and there was no shortage of ammunition.

The Germans considered the Royal Artillery to be the most professional and the most dangerous element of the British army and feared its devastating firepower. 60% of the Royal Artillery's equipment was lost in France in 1940 and so the British army was expanded and reequipped over the next four years. These were the principal field artillery platforms set out as close support field artillery, medium guns and the heavies. There are few heavies in WW2, deep fires having largely transferred to airpower.

The workhorse was the 25 pounds which is 88mm and could also be found in SP form as the Sexton. A division would have three regiments of these so a DAG of 72 guns. There was also a Canadian 105mm SP gun called the Priest. The superb 5.5 and the less appreciated 4.5 medium guns were found in the artillery brigades at Corps level. A Corps would have up to five regiments of medium guns – around 80 guns as well as a regiment of heavies as well as a couple of field regiments. These Corps Artillery



Brigades (known as AGRA – Army Groups Royal Artillery) would be routinely re-allocated between Corps to reinforce with fire. It is not unusual in Normandy to see a Corps reinforced with two or three AGRA and several DAG from outside the parent formation – so up to 600 guns.



The story of the Field Gunners is one of retreat to the northern coast of France with very little opportunity to fire as anything larger than a regiment. Fires were frequently dispersed in the Western Desert leading some to ask whether artillery should be commanded at brigade level and CsRA and their HQRA disbanded. This changed with the arrival of Montgomery and the artillery in Italy and Northwest Europe was fought as an arm. The role of air observation was key to this. But field artillery is not the

whole story, in fact there were more air defence gunners than field gunners. Air defence was paramount in the protection of the homeland and overseas garrisons in addition to field armies. Coastal artillery saw significant action, notably in the Channel and gunners provided defence detachments on merchant shipping convoys. Not all Gunners were Gunners of course. There is the Royal Marine Artillery 95mm gun brigade in Normandy and Royal Marines also crewed coastal batteries on the Channel coast. Female Gunners from the ATS crewed anti-aircraft capabilities and a number of the yeomanry regiments that were converted to artillery units actually kept their original identity and so while being gunners they were not gunner cap badged. Heavy mortars were operated by specialist infantry units. Finally, of course you have the Royal Australian, Canadian, NZ artillery and the artillery units of the Indian army.

Here are six of the famous gunners of WW2. From the top we have Alanbrooke, Corps Commander in 1940, CinC Home Forces and then CGS and the de facto CDS to Churchill. Top Centre is General Sir Frederick Pile, the GOC of Anti-Aircraft Command throughout WW2, arguably the Royal Artillery's most important battle honour. On the top right we have Monty's Gunner, Sir Sidney Kirkman. Already referenced for Ex Bumper, he is the architect of the Fireplans at El Alamein and the way that Firepower was harnessed by the British army to such great effect in the latter half of the war. Bottom left is Jack Parham, a disciple of Kirkman, architect of the 2nd Army's Fireplan for the D Day landings. Of the Mike, Uniform and Victor system of massing fires and one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the Air OP. Parham was a pilot himself. Next is Pat Porteous who wins the VC with Lord Lovat's No 4 Commando at Dieppe. He is one of three Gunner VCs, the others being Maj Gen Jock Campbell, who wins the award as the CRA of the 7th Armoured Division at the Battle of Sidi Rezegh along with the GPO of J Battery in the same action, Lt George Ward-Gunn MC of 3 RHA. There are also two other non UK Gunner VCs to an Australian and an Indian gunner. Finally, we have Lt Violette Szarbo GC CdG of the FANY/SOE who started as an air defence gunner.



If this brief intervention has been of interest and you wish to further your understanding of this extraordinary chapter in our history then I recommend these two excellent podcasts along with Gunfire by Stig Moberg along with these two online

out there of which I certainly recommend these four along fundamentally and a new world awaited. For now, though it with Mike Watson's Concise History of the Royal Artillery. was a much needed celebration. The cost to the Gunners was And so, eighty years ago Great Britain marked Victory in nearly 30,000 out of around one million who served in the Europe Day. It was a celebration, after six years of war there Royal Regiment over the course of the Second World War.

sources and of course there are a large number of other books was much to celebrate although the war had changed Britain





29,924 Gunners killed in action.



# Not Forgotten **But Almost Certainly Not Known** Or Understood: a footnote for VJ80 (15 August 2025)

By Brigadier Jon Cresswell

(for bio see Page 10)

riday (at the time of writing) we marked the eightieth anniversary of the Victory over Japan (VJ) on 15th August 1945. The contrast between VE80 and VJ80 was significant; the former, rightly, being viewed as a national celebration with formal moments of reflection but also with joy and happiness (street parties for example). VJ was a very different matter, with the national ceremony taking place in the tranquil reverence of the National Arboretum and the more local manifestations taking the form of Remembrance. Sitting in the middle of the summer holidays inevitably pushes VJ 'out of sight and out of mind' Last and of course, although the traditional narrative of 'fighting for the freedoms that we enjoy today' is cited, the reality of course being this was not really the case.

The campaign in Europe can be equated to the immediate security of the United Kingdom, the Far East much less so. The RBL (Royal British Legion) website offers the following figures, 90,332 British casualties of which there were 29,968 dead which included 12,433 who died as prisoners of war who were held under the most terrible conditions; a fifth were to lose their lives either through brutality or disease. Their suffering is arguably the factor that most captures our collective imagination and is worthy of the dignified remembrance service that took place last week. The comparatively low British figures might surprise<sup>2</sup> but of course this highlights that fact that most of the soldiers engaged were Commonwealth forces and notably from the Indian Army.



Indian Troops in Burma in 1945.

So, what does our collective memory recall about the Far Eastern campaign? At the strategic level, Britain planned on

40 Autumn 2025 Autumn 2025 41

<sup>1.</sup> Victory Over Japan Day (VJ Day) - The End of the WW2 | Royal British Legion.

<sup>2.</sup> The death toll in the European theatre was over four times this.

being able to fight two (naval) adversaries at once, similar to the US Navy's ambition to be able to fight in the Atlantic and Pacific at the same time. Britain's strategy in the Far East was based on her maritime power with the centre piece being the fortress of Singapore which could sustain a modern fleet. The problem was that in 1941, there was no fleet to send as Britain was engaged against two maritime adversaries; Germany in the North Sea/Atlantic and Italy (and Germany) in the Mediterranean. Japan's decision to exploit Western vulnerability in the Far East represented that nightmare scenario of the third naval campaign and this was on the other side of the world.

Japan's attack on the United States Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbour was accompanied by attacks against the Americans in the Philippines and the Mariana Islands and the British at Hong Kong and Malaya. The attack into Malaya culminates with the fall of Singapore and the surrender of 130,000 commonwealth troops: arguably the greatest disaster in British military history. The battle for Sumatra and Borneo (British and Dutch) begins in mid-December. Any yet the humiliation of these events (notably Singapore which fell on 15 February 1942) have largely vanished from our national memory. Indeed, while a terrible shock at the time, the Japanese juggernaut continued to roll, and the immediate pre-occupation was resistance in Burma, Sumatra, Borneo, Papua New Guinea and the eventual defence of India and Australia.

To this end, the war against Japan breaks down into the battle for air-sea control and the (US) pacific island campaign, the recapture of the Philippines from the south which is an American and Australian endeavour and the British defence of India at Imphal and Kohima. This is preceded by deep, and very costly, operations by Orde Wingate's Chindits, 3 followed by



The Chindits in Burma in WW2.

Slim's counter offensive into Burma. There are also other deep operations such as those in Malaya as described by Colonel Freddie Spencer-Chapman in 'The Jungle is Neutral' and the

terrible experiences cited above of Commonwealth POW and notably their employment as forced labour to build the Burma railway.

Notwithstanding the official histories of the theatre,4 General Farndale's coverage of the Far East theatre offers a detailed Gunner perspective of this complicated theatre which must be viewed alongside events in Europe. This is essential in order to understand the political and strategic stakes and the competition for scarce resources (available online and certainly worth reading). The National Army Museum offers an excellent overview which includes a short CWGC (Commonwealth War Graves Commission) sponsored video which offers a simple overview of the geography of the campaign.<sup>6</sup> Other works of note are Slim's Defeat into Victory, George MacDonald-Frazer's Quartered Safe Out Here, and John Tulloch's The Borneo Graveyard 1941-19457 to name but a small handful.8 All offer different perspectives to this not forgotten but poorly understood theatre where, unlike the beaches of Normandy or the hills of Italy, it is not a simple matter to visit and where the march of history has made Britain's imperial past fade into the mists of time. The Gunners' role in the story might be divided into four categories: theatre firepower, the lived experience of



3.7inch Howitzer In Action at Mawlu 3 November 1944.

campaigning in a harsh environment, wider all arms combat whether this is fighting as infantry in last ditch defensive actions or in specialist roles such as commandos or special forces and finally, the terrible experiences of being a POW and the victims of war crimes and atrocities.

Farndale records the Royal Artillery Fallen in the Far East theatre (all causes) as 8,720 ranks. This is nearly 10% of all British deaths and shows the extraordinary price paid by the Gunners in the war against Japan.<sup>9</sup>

- 3. Wingate was a Gunner officer and his second Chindit operation serves as the model for the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.
- 4. United Kingdom Official Histories of World War II.
- 5. The Far East theatre, 1939-1946: Farndale, Martin, Sir, 1929-: Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming: Internet Archive.
- 6. https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/far-east-campaign; https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/mapping-far-east-campaign.
- 7. Reviewed in the Spring 2021 RA Journal.
- 8. This podcast on Meiktila is very interesting and listenable: https://shows.acast.com/the-history-syndicate-podcast/episodes/25-discussing-thunder-run-meiktil
- 9. Farndale, 2000. p325.

# 1944-45: The Zenith of The Air Observation Post

#### By Major Peter Hope



Major (Retired) Peter Hope served in the Royal Artillery from 1964 to 1986 in every branch then available. He was an Army pilot, commando and parachutist. He was educated at Stowe, Sandhurst, Staff College, Camberley and St John's College, Cambridge (Master of Philosophy). On leaving the Regular Army he joined The Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry, serving until 2000. He has had articles published in The British Army Review, Royal Artillery Journal, The Blue Beret (UN Force in Cyprus newspaper) and The Western Morning News. He won the Duncan Medal Essay prize in 1978. He is married to Pamela, who he met at the St Valentine's Day Dance at Headley Court in 1976, has three children and five grandchildren, all girls. A keen Eton Fives, Squash and Hockey player in his younger days, he represented Cambridge at Eton Fives against Oxford in 1985. He has had a pilot's licence since 1962. Since 1990 he has been Principal of Buckmaster and Company.

he Air Observation Post (Air OP) was the very successful wartime solution to the problem of observing artillery fire from the air. It was carried out by Royal Artillery pilots flying various marks of Auster aircraft, which were supplied and serviced by the RAF.

On 5th March 1945 the Air OP reached its greatest operational strength; 15 squadrons and one South African flight, a total of 186 aircraft, although this was supplemented by the use of reserve aircraft that were pressed into action for the use of Army and formation commanders. Eight of the squadrons were formed at Old Sarum, which served as the training and wartime hub for all Air OP activities in the UK. The Air OP served in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Greece, Yugoslavia, Palestine, Burma, Malaya and Java. This expansion to its zenith was a far cry from the first deployment of four aircraft to France in 1940.



Auster under camouflage.

42 Autumn 2025 Autumn 2025

1944-45: The Zenith of the AOP

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

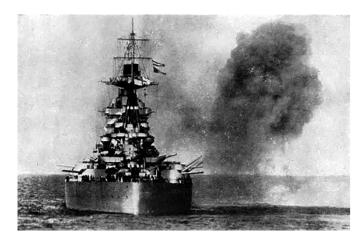
The original aim was to provide air observation for one battery at a time so it may be interesting to see how the Air OP developed artillery observation, other roles and how they carried them out. The key to this development was voice communication by radio.

HF radio had to be used so as to be compatible with ground and naval forces even though VHF is much better for relatively short range work. Using standard Army sets allowed the Air OP to engage targets with a large number of guns as well as carry out other tasks. The radios were difficult to tune, requiring an operator in the ground role. This added considerably to the work load of the pilots. The main problem with HF radio was that its performance dropped off at dusk as static interference increased.

#### **Directing Gunfire**

Directing and controlling gunfire was, of course, the main task of the Air OP. Guns of all Western Allied forces were directed, including Italian artillery after they changed sides in 1943. The smallest calibre used were the 3-inch guns of Grant tanks firing in the indirect role in Burma and the largest were the 16-inch guns of the battleship HMS Rodney off Normandy. Ranges varied between 4,000 yards for the tanks and 42,000 yards for the Dover guns firing deep into Normandy with a time of flight of 80 seconds. These guns fired 62 rounds on 19th September 1944 and some 200 rounds altogether with considerable success. Tanks in the indirect fire role were also used on the Ravena front in Italy when 21 Shermans of the 27th Lancers fired under the direction of 657 Squadron. Assistance to tanks firing in the direct fire role was also provided, particularly in Italy. Captain Leworthy of 657 Squadron several times successfully directed Sgt Miller of 12 RTR onto targets that could, initially, be best seen from the air.

Direction of naval guns was first carried out in Normandy using the guns of battleships Rodney and Warspite, the 15-inch monitor Roberts and the cruisers Belfast and Mauritius. The first



HMS Rodney off Gold Beach

direction of naval guns against an enemy warship was carried out at Castania in Sicily and the first engagement using a US warship was in support of US Rangers at Battipagelia with the guns of USS Philadelphia. At Anzio 90% of all naval gunfire support was directed by the Air OP. The first use of the Air OP in the direction of fighter bombers took place near Lake Trasimento, where Captain Bob Barrass took on 40 tanks with great success.

The number of guns used varied. A single gun was used for destruction shoots, such as the extra ordinary engagement by Arrol Macfarlane on dug in Panther turrets on the Foglia River, where he got one round through the commander's hatch of one of them at a range of several miles. A heavy gun was used to block the tunnel

protecting a railway gun at Gradia on the Gothic Line at a range of 12 miles. On a larger scale the engagement by Major Andrew Lyell on 17th June 1944 of some 40 tanks in Normandy using the 5-600 guns of 12, 30, and 2 Canadian Corps plus the AGRAs (Army Group Royal Artillery) must rank as the greatest concentration controlled by the Air OP, or indeed, any one observer. The greatest ever concentration of guns (over 1,000) was at the crossing of the Rhine. Here the Air OP took on flack batteries, threatening the airborne assault and short notice support of 51st Highland Division. The main fire plan was controlled from the ground but the MGRA (Major General Royal Artillery) 21 Army Group, Major General Mead Dennis, observed the action from aloft flown by Ian Neilson, his GSO2 (Air OP). Throughout the war most targets were engaged by a battery, or regiment but divisional artillery was guite often used, as was the whole of the artillery of a corps. It was not unusual for one pilot to engage up to three targets at the same time but it seems that only Captain Bob Barras successfully, simultaneously engaged four targets.

#### **Photography**

Aerial photography of the battlefield was a specialist RAF responsibility but their severe losses over Normandy gave rise to the development of photographic reconnaissance by the Air OP. From July 1944 each squadron began to be provided with three RAF photographic technicians and equipment so they were able quickly to develop, print and distribute oblique photographs for commanders to use in the preparation of their plans. Major Andrew Lyell carried out fifty two operational photo runs and was awarded the DFC for the photographic work he did along the River Weser in 1944.

#### Liaison

It did not take long for senior commanders to see how useful the Auster aircraft would be for liaison work and for getting around the battlefield. This was particularly the case in Burma, where communications were very difficult. This was, again, officially an RAF responsibility but the pilots used, usually fighter pilots on "rest" tours, were not trained in short field operations leading General Sir Miles Dempsey, commanding Second Army in North West Europe to declare: "Fly Arty and be safe." The most distinguished passenger to be carried was the King, who was flown from an operational strip at Radda on a twenty minute flight to Sienna in Italy in July 1944.

#### Taking and holding of ground

It is normally the job of the infantry to take and hold ground but at least twice the Air OP did this, once by seizing Brussels Airport and persuading the German garrison to surrender and also in capturing Klagerfurt Airport in Austria while it was still held by the enemy.

#### **Ground Attack**

Major General Parham and Captain Belfield called their excellent book on the Air OP "Unarmed Into Battle" but on at least two occasions Air OP aircraft were very much armed. In November 1944 657 Squadron were visited by Vladimir Peniakoff ("Popski", the leader of Popski's Private Army) who was raiding several farms that had been converted into strong points near Ravana. One called Casa del Guardiano he could not reach because of local flooding. He, therefore, asked that the Austers be used as bombers. Loaded with 4.5 inch mortar bombs, PIAT

(Projector, Infantry, Anti Tank) projectiles and hand grenades, Popski and his second in command, Captain Yunnie were taken on several runs at tree top height with great success. The second armed attack was at the crossing of the Rhine. Captain Sharp of 661 Squadron was observing the extreme left flank when he saw approximately 100 men digging in opposite the town of Rees. He called for fire but was told that the target was out of range of any available guns. He immediately returned to his landing ground, had the Perspex panel opposite the rear seat taken out, had the radio removed and with Captain Lindsell set off with a Bren gun and plenty of magazines. They made several passes emptying a magazine each time with excellent results until they were badly hit from the ground and had to break off the action.

#### **Resupply and Casualty Evacuation**

Despite their limited load carrying capability, the Austers of 656 Squadron did very valuable work in resupplying forward elements in Burma and evacuating casualties.



Casevac in Burma in World War 2.

#### Other Tasks

In the advance from Normandy some Austers were fitted with loudspeakers and used for traffic control. The Air OP was

called upon for the reconnaissance of routes on many occasions and provided immediate information to ground commanders after landing near their headquarters and sometimes provided running commentaries on the situation on the ground. In Burma the Austers dropped leaflets on the retreating enemy urging them to surrender and also laid telephone cable over the jungle and rivers to provide land line communications. Six miles of cable could be carried by each aircraft. In Italy a South African sapper trod on a mine in very long grass, He was invisible to his friends who called upon the Air OP for help. The pilot spotted him, Indicated where he was, allowing the unit to clear a direct path and rescue him.

#### **End of the War**

At the end of the war in Europe on 8th May and in the Far East on 15th August 1945 all Air OP aircraft were used for liaison duties, helping with the administration work of the occupying forces. There then followed a rapid run down of what was once a large organisation but one very economical in its command structure. The highest command rank was major RA.

#### Conclusions

The Air OP was very highly regarded by senior commanders but the cost was high. 579 Gunner officers qualified as Air OP pilots during the war including those from Poland, Canada and South Africa and one each from Belgium, The Netherlands, Argentina and India. 67 pilots were killed, mainly from antiaircraft fire and accidents but also from enemy aircraft, small arms fire from the ground and strikes from our own shells. 129 pilots and two ground crew were decorated. Millions of shells were directed but it is difficult to estimate how many shoots were carried out. However, it is known that, for instance, 657 Squadron flew over 5,000 operational sorties between first coming into action in April 1944 and the end of the war with a break when it moved from Italy to the Netherlands. That makes 416 sorties a month. Also, it is known that Captain Coles in one day flew 6 hours and 40 minutes during which he engaged 5 divisional targets, 6 regimental targets and one battery target. Every order was promptly carried out except in the case of very bad weather indeed. Many rules were broken but one never was, whatever the risk; supporting the infantry, who they admired so much. Perhaps that was the only rule that really

#### **SOURCES**

Unarmed into Battle by HJ Parham and EMG Belfield, Picton Publishing 1986.

Memoirs of an Air Observation Post Officer by A Lyell, Picton Publishing 1985.

The Air Observation Post by HC Bazeley, published privately.

Air OP Remembered by IG Neilson, published privately in 2014.

Warlike Sketches by A Macfarlane, published privately.

Artillery on the Modern Battlefield, PEA Hope, Duncan Medal Essay winner 1978.

# Major General Lewis Pugh CB CBE DSO\*\*

# An overdue appreciation of a very gallant Mountain Gunner

By Colonel Nick Quarrelle

(for bio see Page 59)

confess that I had never heard of General Lewis Pugh until I was loaned a book¹ which covered the issues surrounding the end of the British Empire in Asia after World War 2. In the chapter describing the chaotic events in Java (then part of the Netherlands East Indies) was an account of how a disastrous situation had been rescued by the actions of this officer, who in doing so had earned a second Bar to his Distinguished Service Order. I looked further and discovered a story of great gallantry of which I was unaware, as I suspect will be many other readers of this Journal.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Lewis Henry Owain Pugh was born on 18th May 1907 at the family home Cymerau, near the village of Glandyfi, in the Dovey Valley in Cardiganshire to Major Herbert Pugh DSO (1874-1954) and his wife Edith Mary née Smith. Major Pugh had spent many years as a jute broker in Calcutta and had been a member of the Calcutta Light Horse. He had won the DSO in the South African War serving with Lumsden's Horse.<sup>2</sup> In 1914 he had assisted in

the raising of the Welsh Horse and served in Gallipoli, Egypt, and Palestine. Serving as the Second in Command of the Berkshire Yeomanry, he was severely wounded at Gaza on 19th April 1917 and was invalided out in May 1918 on account of his wounds. His grandfather Lewis Pugh Pugh³ (1837-1908) was a lawyer and MP for Cardiganshire who had a distinguished career in India becoming the Attorney General for Bengal. He had built the house at Cymerau in 1905.

#### **EDUCATION AND EARLY SERVICE**

Educated at Wellington College, Pugh entered the Royal Military Academy Woolwich in 1925 from where he was commissioned into the Royal Artillery on 29th January 1927. His first posting was to XIXth Brigade Royal Field Artillery in Germany. By this time the Army of Occupation in Germany had been greatly reduced and become the significantly smaller British Army of the Rhine. By 1927, XIXth Brigade, based at Shrapnel Barracks Biebrich-Am-Rhein, near Wiesbaden was the only Gunner unit still serving in Germany. In September 1929, XIXth Brigade returned to the UK to be based at Fenham Barracks, Newcastle Upon Tyne.

serving for a year as Liaison Officer with 20 Squadron RAF at Rawalpindi before being appointed GSO3 Intelligence at HQ Northern Command, India, which was responsible for the security of the North-West Frontier. In 1934 he was awarded his jacket and posted to G Battery (Mercer's Troop) Royal Horse Artillery serving with them for 2 years in Sialkot.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS

In December 1932 he was posted to India, joining 1st Indian

Division Ammunition Column at Campbellpore and subsequently

From March 1936 until September 1940, Pugh volunteered to serve on secondment with the Indian Police in Bengal serving as a District Superintendent of Special Branch. During this time, he was mostly engaged in anti-terrorism duties and, unusually for a soldier, was awarded the Indian Police Medal in September 1940. The experience, particularly in dealing with riots and insurrection would be invaluable later in his career. He then served briefly with 13th (Dardoni) Mountain Battery, based at Razmak in North Waziristan before attending the Staff College in Quetta. He fulfilled various staff appointments at HQ India and HQ 15th Indian Corps and on 26th May 1941 at Simla was married to Wanda Kendzior.



Wedding Day Simla, 26 May 1941 (Open-Source photo on www.ancestry.co.uk)

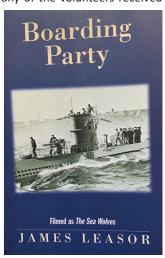
#### OPERATION CREEK

As a Temporary Major he served with the Special Operations Executive (SOE) as the Head of the Country Sections in Force 136.5 It was in this role that he planned and led a covert operation codenamed Operation CREEK. On the outbreak of the Second World War, several German and Italian ships had sought refuge in Mormugão Harbour in Goa, which as a Portuguese colony was neutral territory. In 1942, the SOE mission in Meerut had intercepted coded messages to German U-boats giving detailed information about the movements of Allied shipping leaving Bombay and in March 1943 twelve Allied ships totalling 80,000 tons had been sunk. It was suspected that a secret transmitter on the Ehrenfels, one of the German ships in Goa was responsible. It was also discovered that a Gestapo spy, Robert Koch was living with his wife in Panaji, the capital of Goa. Because Portuguese neutrality could not be compromised by any overt military action by British forces, Pugh planned a covert (deniable) operation, recruiting members of the Calcutta Light Horse and the Calcutta Scottish, using volunteers who, although they were military reservists, were mainly middle-aged bankers, merchants, and

After some rudimentary training by SOE an 18 man assault team embarked on a hopper barge and sailed from Calcutta all the way round the Indian coast to Goa where on 19th March 1943 the Ehrenfels was attacked and captured, and its transmitter destroyed. The captain was killed, and the ship set on fire before being scuttled by her crew. The crews of the other merchant ships in the harbour (two more German and one Italian) also scuttled their ships to prevent them being captured by the British. The crew of the 4 ships jumped overboard and swam ashore where they were taken by the Portuguese and imprisoned for the duration of the war. The local press reported that the crews had mutinied. The captain of the Ehrenfels and 4 members of his crew were reported dead, with 4 more reported missing. There were no British casualties. After the attack, the 13 German U-boats operating in the Indian Ocean sank only one ship throughout the remainder of the month.

However, because of the sensitivity of the situation regarding Portuguese neutrality, the details of the attack remained classified and neither Pugh, nor any of the volunteers received

any acknowledgement or award as a result. The documents relating to the operation were not declassified until 1974 but in 1978 the British author James Leasor wrote a book 'Boarding Party'6 telling the story of Operation CREEK, which in 1980 was made into a film 'The Sea Wolves' starring Gregory Peck, Roger Moore and David Niven. Gregory Peck played the part of Lewis Pugh who acted as a technical adviser in the making of the film. Sensitivity about the operation still remains; in 1976 a number of the surviving



<sup>1.</sup> Forgotten Wars by Christopher BAYLY and Tim HARPER (London, Penguin Books, 2008) ISBN: 978-0-141-01738.

<sup>2.</sup> Lumsden's Horse was a volunteer unit raised in India in 1899 specifically for service in the South African War. The Calcutta Light Horse was active from 1872 until 1947

<sup>3.</sup> Born Lewis Pugh Evans he changed his name to Pugh by royal licence when he inherited the estate of his uncle Lewis Pugh. He married Veronica Harriet Hills, daughter of James Hills of Neechindepore, Bengal in 1864. Veronica's brother, James Hills, won the Victoria Cross in the Indian Mutiny serving with the Bengal Horse Artillery.

<sup>4.</sup> Online Article: The Original British Army of the Rhine by Richard RINALDI, 2006.

<sup>5.</sup> A separate special operations organisation had been established in India in 1941. The India Mission, known subsequently as Force 136, under Colin Mackenzie, a former businessman operated from Meerut under the authority of the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief.
6.Boarding Party by James LEASOR (London, House of Stratus, 1978) ISBN: 0-7551-0135-9.

volunteers sought recognition for those who participated in Operation CREEK - their petition to Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was rejected in 1981.

#### **BURMA – 25th MOUNTAIN REGIMENT**

After a period as the second-in-command of 30th Mountain Regiment in the 26th Indian Division, on 26th January 1944, Lewis Pugh assumed command of 25th Mountain Regiment in 7th Indian Division in Burma replacing Lieutenant Colonel A J Booth MC who had been killed by enemy shellfire on 1st January. The Regiment consisted of three batteries: 5th (Bombay) Mountain Battery (Major Mohinder Singh), 23rd Mountain Battery (Major G A Rowley-Conway) and the Bikaner Bijay Battery (Major Kishen Singh). Each battery was equipped with 4 x 3.7 inch Pack Howitzers which could be broken down into 8 mule loads. Each



Taken from The History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, The Far East Theatre 1941-46 by General Sir Martin Farndale KCB (© Royal Artillery Institution)

Indian Mountain regiment had an establishment of 25 officers, 13 Viceroy Commissioned Officers, 62 Warrant Officers/NCOs, 716 Rank and File and some 300+ mules.<sup>7</sup> The Bikaner Bijay Battery, from the Indian state of Bikaner<sup>8</sup> had been placed at the disposal of HM King George VI by HH (His Highness) The Maharajah of Bikaner, Sir Bijay Singh.

## SECOND ARAKAN CAMPAIGN AND THE BATTLE OF THE 'ADMIN BOX'

In early 1944, the Japanese launched an offensive which they hoped might lead to an invasion of India. Their plan was to tie down formations in the Arakan which would hopefully draw the 14th Army reinforcements to that area before a second phase of the Japanese offensive would drive on to Imphal, hopefully opening a route to the plains of Assam and Bengal. The Japanese plan was to destroy both 7th and 5th Indian Divisions on the Mayu Ridge and capture the Ngakyedauk Pass<sup>9</sup> thereby severing

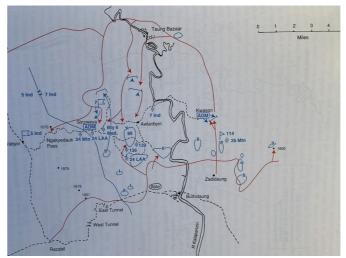
the British Lines of Communication from Chittagong to Bawli. The technique of resistance to encirclement was to form a number of defensive boxes which could be maintained by air supply. The Pass was the creation of the Division's engineers. In 10 days a good mule track had been created, which in 20 days had become a jeep track; and in 2 months the road, which had to be driven through dense jungle and over a precipitous pass with a 1,000 foot rise and fall in 3 miles, was passable by 3 ton trucks.

Within a few more weeks the road was fit for medium tanks and would become the focal point of the battle which broke Japanese capability in Arakan. The Division established its administrative area at the eastern foot of the Pass (hence 'Admin Box') and defensive positions around the box were completed and manned. The same procedure was adopted in positions by the 33rd and 114th Brigades – 25th Mountain Regiment were located with the 114th Indian Infantry Brigade as shown in the map below. In what



The Second Arakan Campaign - Taken from The History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, The Far East Theatre 1941-46 by General Sir Martin Farndale KCB (© Royal Artillery Institution)

became known as "The Battle of the Admin Box" the Japanese attempted to encircle and destroy the two British Divisions (5th and 7th). On the night of the 3rd-4th February 1944 there was considerable Japanese movement which was heard although thick mist hampered observation. At first light the guns of 23rd Mountain Battery engaged the enemy over open sights, with 2 guns firing forward and 2 guns firing to the rear. As Graham recounts: 'As the sun rose, an enemy column appeared marching in formation past Brigade HQ like a crowd streaming away from a football match. Marching six abreast, with flags flying as a means



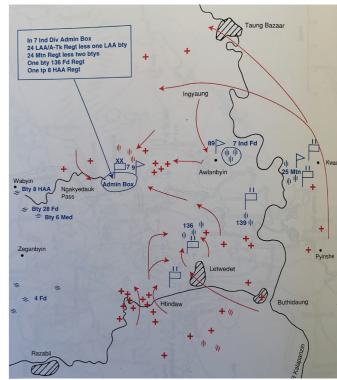
The Battle of the Admin Box 4-6 Feb 44 - Taken from The History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, The Far East Theatre 1941-46 by General Sir Martin Farndale KCB (© Royal Artillery Institution)

of identification to their own aircraft flying low overhead, this column was just in rear of Brigade HQ when it came into view. Lieutenant Colonel Pugh and his Intelligence Officer immediately established an OP on top of the Brigade Commander's OP and traversing two guns of 23rd Battery (the only guns which could be brought to bear which were not otherwise engaged) brought fire to bear on the middle of the column.

The enemy sought refuge in the bamboo covered hills on either side, but suffered heavy casualties before they were able to dig in.'11 In the early hours of the morning of 6th February, the Headquarters of 7th Indian Division was overrun by the Japanese, with the brunt of the attack being borne by the Divisional Signals. Most communications were cut and the only wireless set still operating was one in the artillery headquarters. Over this means, the CRA Brigadier A F Hely DSO was able to pass control to the RHQ of 24th Anti-Tank Regiment which he succeeded in joining later in the day. The Divisional Commander, Major General Messervy led out a party of his staff by wading down a chaung (a stream bed) and the rest of the headquarters fought their way out and re-established the headquarters in the Admin Box at the foot of the Pass. 12

The Japanese succeeded in cutting the Ngakyedauk Pass on 7th February thereby separating the two divisions and heavy

fighting, with enemy aircraft, artillery and infantry attacks, continued at very close range all around the boxes for the next 14 days, but resupply by air of all stores including ammunition was maintained throughout. Eventually, with reinforcing battalions



7th Indian Division RA units during the Battle of the Admin Box 6-24 February 1944 - Taken from The History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, The Far East Theatre 1941-46 by General Sir Martin Farndale KCB (© Royal Artillery Institution)

able to recapture Taung Bazaar in the north and to reopen Ngakyedauk Pass from the west, the Japanese were forced to fall back having sustained some 5,000 casualties. The Battle of Ngakyedauk Pass, or the 'Admin Box', cost 15th Indian Corps more than 3,500 casualties, of which more than half were in the 7th Indian Division. Lieutenant General Slim, Commander 14th Army in a message to the men of the 15th Corps stated:

'The Battle of Arakan was the first occasion in this war in which a British force had withstood the full weight of a major offensive – held it, broke it, smashed it into little pieces and pursued it. Anybody who was in 7th and 5th Indian Divisions and was there has something of which he can be very proud.'13

Significantly, the British offensive in Arakan was resumed only 5 days after the Ngakyedauk Pass was reopened. Operations continued from March to June although by then it had become clear that the Arakan thrust by the Japanese was not their point of main effort and that their principal axis was targeting the Imphal

<sup>7.</sup> The History of the Indian Mountain Artillery by Brigadier-General C A L GRAHAM (Aldershot, Gale & Polden, 1957), Appendix to Chapter IX, Pp. 271-272.

<sup>8.</sup> In all nine batteries of Indian States Forces artillery were offered to and accepted by the Indian Army. Bikaner was an Indian Princely State in the north-west part of Rajputana Province. It had originally had a camel-borne pack battery which in 1941 was converted to a 3.7-inch Pack Battery and trained at Quetta before joining 7th Indian Division in 1943. The State of Bikaner joined the Indian Union on 7th August 1947.

<sup>9.</sup> Ngakyedauk Pass (pronounced Nukchidowk) was known almost universally to soldiers of all races as Okydoke Pass. See Article: The Okydoke Pass by 'Kaitch' in the Royal Artillery Journal, Vol I XXV. Jan 1948, p.64.

<sup>10.</sup> Golden Arrow, The Story of the 7th Indian Division in the Second World War 1939-45 by Brigadier M R Roberts DSO (Aldershot, Gale & Polden, 1952), p. 30.

<sup>11.</sup> GRAHAM, Op Cit, Pp.342-343.

<sup>12.</sup> ROBERTS, Op Cit, Pp.71-75.

<sup>13.</sup> GRAHAM, Op Cit, p.346

Plain and Kohima and consequently both 5th and 7th Divisions were moved north to Imphal and Dimapur by air.

#### **KOHIMA**

Three Japanese divisions had crossed the Chindwin River on 24th March with the intention of capturing Kohima, the headquarters of a district in Assam and cutting off Imphal, thus opening a possible invasion route into India. However, because of a shortage of transport the Japanese left behind a considerable amount of artillery and the infantry's heavy weapons and only 3 week's supply of food and ammunition were carried. Kohima would be besieged from 6th- 22nd April before being relieved by 2nd (British) Division. Unlike the British, the Japanese had not planned for air resupply and consequently, desperately short of food and ammunition, began to retreat.

#### THE NAGA HILLS AND UKHRUL

In early June, as the monsoon broke, an attempt was made to cut the lines of communication of the Japanese 31st and 33rd Divisions, and the 114th Infantry Brigade of 7th Indian Division supported by 25th Mountain Regiment (less the Bikaner Battery) was to make an encircling movement through the Naga country east of Kohima. It took three weeks to complete this manoeuvre in extremes of weather and in extremely difficult terrain as most of the going was against the line of the valleys. Actions against Japanese rear guards were frequent, often occurring at altitudes of up to 6,000 feet in mist and monsoon rain. On completion of the encircling operation 114th Brigade was pulled out to rest and recover, however there was to be no respite for Pugh and his Regiment. 25th Mountain Regiment was hastily reorganised to support 33rd Indian Infantry Brigade of 7th Division on a flank attack to capture the strategically important junction of Ukhrul approximately 50 miles from Imphal, as shown in the map below.

The entire Brigade was dependent on mule transport and all resupply was to be by air. Graham sets the scene: 'A jeep track from Ukhrul to the Chindwin was one of the main supply arteries of the Japanese; it connected with Kohima and Imphal by other jeep tracks, but all the remaining communications in the area were jungle tracks. About the time the movement began the monsoon broke. There were many rivers to cross, generally running between steep mountain sides and unbridged; the forest shut out light and air; the paths up and down the slopes were slippery with greasy mud, and they collapsed under the pressure of traffic. Many mules fell, some of which were never seen again, and to shorten the column 23rd Mountain Battery was sent back after a few days. The mountain batteries solved the problem by making new tracks for themselves at the cost of considerable labour and fatigue: their officers were unanimous in giving high praise to their drivers for endurance and courage.'14

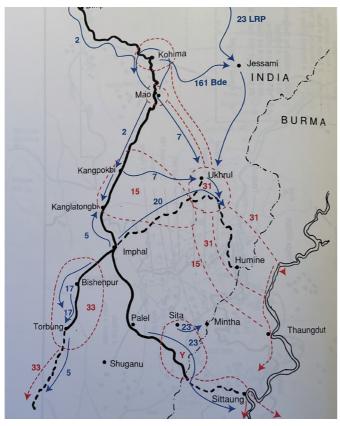
Ukhrul was captured on 3rd July after enveloping attacks from three sides with the Japanese fleeing. <sup>15</sup> Pugh in an article for the Royal Artillery Journal paints a very graphic picture of the conditions endured:

'The Humine track presented a spectacle transcending any so far encountered. In the knee-deep mud and slime of the

track floated the putrefying corpses of many Japanese, swollen and fly- blown, a mass of crawling maggots. Horses lay between the shafts of carts worked to death in a last-minute attempt to escape the inevitable advance of our forces. Wrecked lorries lay in the jungle below the road which in many cases had collapsed beneath them. Their drivers sat dead at the wheel, victims of dysentery, typhus and mere starvation. Equipment lay everywhere, the untidy evidence of a rout. A tank was found embedded in the mud; a gun half buried. From the north of Ukhrul, Naga tribesmen brought information of the deaths of thousands of Japanese, fugitives from Kohima, their only way of escape cut by our unexpected march on Ukhrul'.

For this action Pugh was awarded the Distinguished Service Order. In the citation, <sup>16</sup> the Commander of 114th Indian Infantry Brigade states:

'That fire support from the artillery for the infantry, of the required volume and accuracy, was always available was largely due to his intelligent anticipation of events, and personal reconnaissance with the most forward troops'.



The British Counter Offensive at Ukhrul, June-July 1944

In his manuscript remarks supporting the recommendation, the Commander 7th Indian Division, Major General F W Messervy wrote: 'Lt Col Pugh's Regiment has been more continuously in operation than any other of the artillery of this division in the past year. He has commanded it with skill and fine leadership.'

#### **PUFFCOL AND 33rd INDIAN INFANTRY BRIGADE**

On 26th December 1944, 14th Army regrouped, and 7th Indian Division became part of 4th Corps, with 33rd Indian Infantry Brigade earmarked as the assault brigade for the crossing of the Irrawaddy. On the 28th February 1945, a small mixed force known as PUFFCOL was raised based on the Headquarters of 25th Mountain Regiment and to be commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Pugh. The force consisted of 2 companies of Infantry (2nd SOUTH LANCS), one squadron 16th Light Cavalry (less one troop) (Indian Army), a platoon of Medium Machine Guns and the Bikaner Bijay Battery (mechanised using jeeps rather than mules).

The mission of this force was to locate and destroy the enemy, especially in the POPA area, and to protect the left flank of the Division. For 3 weeks the force manoeuvred over a wide area, destroying, and harassing the enemy, inflicting many casualties, and gaining much useful intelligence. Later Lieutenant Colonel Pugh wrote an article<sup>17</sup> for the Royal Artillery Journal on the issues relating to the command of such a column. On 28th March 1945, Pugh assumed command of 33rd Indian Infantry Brigade. His achievements during his time in command are perhaps best articulated in the citation for the award of a Bar to his Distinguished Service Order:<sup>18</sup>

'In April 1945, Lt Col PUGH was appointed as Officer Commanding 33 Indian Infantry Brigade. Almost immediately he was ordered to capture KYAUKPADAUNG a vital point on the enemy's Lines of Communication some 30 miles south of NYAUNGU. His Brigade Group included tanks and all types of artillery. By two skilful night marches and a brilliantly executed plan he captured the objective with very few casualties while at the same time picking up 120 bodies and capturing much valuable equipment and guns. Two days later again by a clever outflanking movement he captured GWEGYO thereby isolating CHAUK from its land Lines of Communication. With unflagging energy and inspiring his troops to further efforts, he advanced and captured CHAUK by a series of forced marches thereby compelling the enemy to abandon much equipment and guns. No sooner were these operations completed than Lt Col PUGH was ordered to move south and capture YENANYAUNG. With very little transport to lift his troops his organisation and planning were such that he appeared before YENANGYAUNG much sooner than the enemy expected and again, with very skilful handling of his Brigade, he killed over 100 Japanese and captured a quantity of guns, MT and stores.

Always in the forefront of the battle when required yet in complete control of his Brigade spread out over a wide front, Lt Col PUGH conducted these fast-moving operations in a masterly manner. His personal example, tireless energy, skilful and meticulous planning and the confidence he instilled in both officers and men of all arms inspired them to overcome heavy physical difficulties in great heat so that they always went into action with an élan which completely demoralised the enemy.

There can be no doubt that Lt Col PUGH was personally very largely responsible for the outstanding success of his Brigade and his conduct throughout a period of operations requiring stamina and example of the highest order are most worthy of immediate recognition.'

The war in Burma and the defeat of the Japanese were almost complete and Pugh relinquished command of 33rd Indian Infantry Brigade on 19th May 1945 shortly before the Japanese surrendered on 14th August 1945.

7th Indian Divisional History records: 'Never was a division better served by its artillery. They never failed to "deliver the goods" at the right time and in the right place if it were within the bounds of human ability to do so. In the happy band of warriors who wore the Golden Arrow (the Division's emblem) there was no happier combination than that of Brigadier 'Tim' Hely, his four regimental commanders, Lieutenant Colonels Hall, Armstrong, Pugh and Cole, and those that served with them.' 19

#### JAVA - SURABAYA

Pugh was posted to 23rd Indian Infantry Division and assumed the appointment of Deputy Commander of 49th Indian Infantry Brigade, vice Brigadier A W Mallaby CIE OBE. Following the surrender of the Japanese there was a significant task across South East Asia still to be completed to ensure the surrender of all Japanese troops and to release the many Allied Prisoners of War and internees of other allied nations.

The most challenging country in this regard was Indonesia where nationalism and independence from Dutch colonial rule had been encouraged by the Japanese and on 5th September the Japanese Field Marshal Terauchi had declared a Republic of Indonesia under Dr Sukarno. On the surrender of the Japanese many of their weapons had fallen into the hands of the Indonesian nationalists. Political tensions were rising and there was widespread disorder. On 19th September Slim ordered 23rd Indian Division, with two brigades to Java, to deploy one brigade in Batavia and the other (49th Indian Infantry Brigade) to land at the port (and former Dutch naval base) at Surabaya<sup>20</sup> and on 29th September General Sir Philip Christison, formerly Commander XVth Corps, was appointed Allied Commander of forces in Indonesia.

Relations between the Indonesians and the Dutch remained extremely difficult, and the negotiating position of the Dutch Deputy Governor of the Netherlands East Indies was countered by directives from the Dutch government which resulted in a loss of cooperation between the Indonesian nationalists and the incoming British force. 49th Brigade arrived in Surabaya on 25th October and found themselves confronted by nationalists in possession of Japanese artillery, tanks and armoured cars. The Indonesians refused to allow the Brigade to disembark. Brigadier Mallaby sent Pugh ashore to negotiate which, in an article in the Royal Artillery Journal<sup>21</sup> he described thus:

<sup>14.</sup> GRAHAM, Op Cit, p.370.

<sup>15.</sup> Article: Ukhrul by Lt Col L H O Pugh DSO RA, Royal Artillery Journal, Vol LXXIII, 1946, Oct, p.345.

<sup>16.</sup> National Archive. File WO 373/39.

<sup>17.</sup> Article: Jock Columns and the Like by Lt Col L H O Pugh DSO RA, Royal Artillery Journal, Vol LXXV, 1948, Jul, p.148.

<sup>18.</sup> Private Papers of Maj Gen L H O Pugh CB CBE DSO, Imperial War Museum, Documents,14367.

<sup>19.</sup> Golden Arrow, The Story of 7th Indian Division in the Second World War 1939-1945, by Brigadier M R Roberts DSO, (Aldershot, Gale & Polden, 1952), p.264.

<sup>20.</sup> Also spelt with the colonial spelling Sourabaya.

<sup>21.</sup> Article: Sourabaya (NEI) – 1945 by LHOP, Royal Artillery Journal, Vol LXXV, 1949, Jan p.320.

Major General Lewis Pugh CB CBE DSO\*\*

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

Major General Lewis Pugh CB CBE DSO\*\*

'Every quarter of a mile the car was halted at a barricade covered by machine guns. From the shadows emerged excited Indonesians, some in uniform and others in civilian clothes, armed with rifles, swords and spears. These bore down upon the car from all sides demanding the business of the occupants, thrusting rifle muzzles in through open windows, all talking at once, all with fingers on triggers... there appeared to be no end to this nerve-wracking performance.'

The subsequent British entry into Surabaya was peaceful if extremely tense while the British impressed on the Indonesians that their only task was the evacuation of the approximately 16,000 Allied prisoners of war and internees. However, the situation deteriorated further when on 27th October, without any prior warning or discussion with Brigadier Mallaby or his staff, an RAF Dakota dropped leaflets issued by Headquarters 23rd Indian Infantry Division announcing that the British Military Administration was taking over, that all weapons were to be surrendered and anyone who did not do so would be shot effectively imposing martial law. The Indonesians felt that they had been duped but Mallaby told them that he had no option but to comply with the order.

As Farndale recounts: 'Fighting broke out all over the town at 1630 hours on 29th October. All 49th Indian Infantry Brigade posts were attacked. Many officers and men had to run the gauntlet to safety and women and children were murdered. A small escort of Mahrattas guarding a convoy of internees were attacked, and although they resisted gallantly, all were killed, and the internees massacred. Surabaya was soon in flames, everywhere the crackle of small arms fire could be heard along with the crump of mortars. Sukarno arrived with Hawthorn<sup>22</sup> and Mallaby on the 30th and met local leaders who agreed to stop the fighting; but they were not in control and the fighting went on. Mallaby's Brigade Major tried to make contact with local leaders but was captured and killed. Mallaby himself went to meet Indonesian leaders but was intercepted and murdered. The situation was critical. Colonel Lewis Pugh, on hearing of the murder of Mallaby took command of 49th Brigade. This involved him driving five miles across town under fire, but he got through. He found on arrival, that in addition to Mallaby, 18 officers and 374 men were casualties, mostly killed. He reorganised the Brigade and held the airfield while extricating some 6,000 Dutch women and children to Singapore.'23

General Christison issued a proclamation stating: 'I intend to bring the whole weight of my sea, land and air forces and all the weapons of modern warfare against them until they are crushed.'24 He ordered 5th Indian Division (Major General R A Mansergh) to Surabaya to take command and on 10th November gave orders for the full occupation of the town. The 5th Indian Division restored order with artillery and air support and the task was completed by 28th November albeit with many casualties. Indonesian losses were about 4,700 and Allied casualties in Java, nearly all in Surabaya were 11 officers and 87 other ranks killed and 14 officers and 183 other ranks missing.'

For his work in restoring the situation in 49th Brigade, Colonel Pugh was awarded a second Bar to his Distinguished Service Order, one of just 21 army officers to attain such a distinction in World War 2. The Citation states:

'Col PUGH took charge of the whole of 49 Ind Inf Bde which was widely dispersed, hard pressed by overwhelming numbers and short of ammunition. He personally conducted operations by radio telephony and carried on negotiation with the treacherous, dilatory and uncooperative Indonesian leaders with such success that the whole Bde Gp was finally concentrated within the Dock perimeter with no further casualties. Throughout the whole operation Col PUGH showed the highest qualities of leadership; his complete disregard of personal danger and his unruffled and cheerful efficiency at all times were an example and inspiration to all ranks.' <sup>25</sup>

#### MALAYA

From 1946 to 1949 Pugh fulfilled various staff appointments before moving to Hong Kong to take up the appointment of GSO1 in HQ 40th Infantry Division before being promoted in November 1949 and taking command of 26th Gurkha Infantry Brigade and taking them to Malaya to tackle the Communist insurgency in the State of Johore, one of the more active areas of the insurgency.



Major General Pugh Exercise CAMBRIAN PATROL 1960 (Open-Source photo on www. ancestry.co.uk)

In June 1951 he was appointed Deputy Director of Operations to General Briggs who had been recalled to active duty by Slim (now Chief of the Imperial General Staff) to assume the appointment of Director of Operations. For his service he was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire on the completion of his tour in January 1952.

He returned to UK and was appointed Deputy Director of Military Operations in the Ministry of Defence in 1953 before promotion to the rank of Major General and appointment as Chief of Staff at GHQ Far East Land Forces in Singapore in January 1956. Here he was to play a key role in the planning of the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and in the maintenance of the best possible relations with Nepal for which he was subsequently appointed a Commander of the Order of the Bath (CB). In 1956 he succeeded Lieutenant General Sir Francis Tuker as Colonel Commandant of 2nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles, an appointment he held for 13 years, and for 11 years he was Representative Colonel Commandant of the Brigade of Gurkhas, working hard to mitigate the effects of the significant reduction in the Brigade's strength. Returning to the UK in 1958 he took up his final appointment in the Army as General Officer Commanding Mid West District and 53rd (Welsh) Infantry Division (TA) from January 1958 until February 1961 when he retired.

#### LATER LIFE

After his retirement he was appointed Honorary Colonel of The Royal Welsh Fusiliers (TA) in 1961, High Sheriff of Cardiganshire in 1964 and Deputy Lieutenant from 1961-1972 and later Vice-Lieutenant of the county. He also served as the chairman of the County Conservative Association and learnt to speak Welsh. He was, among a number of other appointments, General Secretary of the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales, a member of the Courts of the National Library of Wales and the National Museum of Wales and a Justice of the Peace. In 1978 the family moved from Cardiganshire to Monmouthshire where he died, aged 73, on 10th March 1981.

He is commemorated by 2 monuments:

The first is a slate plinth standing in a field by the side of the lane leading from the village of Eglwysfach to the former family home at Cymerau which is inscribed as follows:

'Erected to the Honour and Memory of Major General Lewis
Owain Pugh
CB CBE DSO\*\* KStJ JP DL

1907 - 1981 formerly of Cymerau and in recognition of his outstanding service to the County Subscribed for by members of the Mid-Wales Branch of the Burma Star Association

to mark the 10th anniversary of the formation of the Branch Built by the HQ Det of the 3rd Batt RWF (TA) Aberystwyth June 1964'

The second is a memorial stained-glass window in St Padam's Church, Llanbadarn Fawr near Aberystwyth which was unveiled on 30th June 1985. The window, given jointly by General Pugh's widow and the Mid-Wales Branch of the Burma Star Association, commemorated both Pugh and those who died in the Burma and Pacific campaigns of 1941-1945.

Despite obituaries being published in both The Times and the Daily Telegraph (both on 17th March 1981), I was surprised that no obituary appeared in the Royal Artillery Journal although a (rather brief) appreciation was published in June 1981 in Gunner magazine. This article seeks to correct that omission and to bring the story of one of the bravest and most highly decorated Gunner officers of World War 2 to a wider audience which should know of his deeds.



26. Webpage: Dictionary of Welsh Biography, Pugh, Lewis Henry Owain (1907-1981), soldier

<sup>22.</sup> Maj Gen D C Hawthorn, Comd 23rd Indian Infantry Division.

<sup>23.</sup> The History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, The Far East Theatre 1941-46 by General Sir Martin Farndale KCB (London, Brassey's, 2000) ISBN: 1 857653 331 3, Pp.315-316.

<sup>24.</sup> BAYLY and HARPER, Op Cit, Pp.175-181.

<sup>25.</sup> National Archive, File WO 373/92 Pt. 1.

 Ukhrul
 The Journal of the Royal Artillery
 The Journal of the Royal Artillery

 Ukhrul

# Ukhrul

#### By Lieutenant Colonel L H O Pugh DSO RA

This article which contains one of the most graphic accounts of the conditions under which the 14th Army fought in Burma was first published in the Royal Artillery Journal, Vol LXXIII, October, 1946. For his role in this operation commanding 25th Mountain Regiment Lt Col Pugh was awarded the Distinguished Service Order

HE road to Imphal was open; the narrow link between our forces forward on the Chindwin and the supplies pouring in from India through the rich plains of northern Assam. Three months previously the Japanese had crossed the Assam-Burma Border, and moving along the grain of the valleys of the wild mountainous country lying west of the Chindwin, had invested Imphal, , occupied Kohima, threatened Dimapur and the single line of railway on which supply depended. After six weeks of the fiercest fighting, and at considerable cost Kohima was reoccupied.

South of Kohima on the precipitous wooded heights of the Aradura spur the Japanese confronted the 2nd Division. To the east, hot on the tails of the Japanese driven out of Naga village after bitter fighting was sent 114th Indian Infantry Brigade of 7th Indian Division, with in support 25th Mountain Regiment, Royal Indian Artillery less one battery. Their object was to cut the Imphal road behind the Japanese confronting 2nd Division by an encircling march through the Naga Hills. After three weeks marching and fighting in mist and monsoon rain at heights of up to 6,000 ft. on jungle covered knife-edged hills, the forty-mile encirclement was completed. The Japanese did not wait for their only avenue of escape to close, but after heavy resistance withdrew east to the Naga Hills and south into the Somra Hill tracts towards Ukhrul and the Chindwin, leaving the Imphal road open.

After two days rest by the roadside 25th Mountain Regiment was placed in support of 33rd Indian Infantry Brigade of 7th Indian Division. It was necessary to make up deficiencies now considerable in men, mules, and equipment for which no replacements were forthcoming. For this, and to replace one section of 5th (Bombay) Mountain Battery placed under command of 23rd (Chindit) L.R.P. (Long Range Penetration) Brigade, the Bijay Bikaner Mountain Battery was used. In addition, to carry the considerable amount of supplies and extra ammunition desirable, and provide 'barebacks' to replace casualties, estimated for this operation at fifty per cent. by divisional H.Q., mules and drivers

were loaned by 24th Mountain Regiment. Failure of the air drop due to weather was a contingency to be catered for. 25th Mountain Regiment was well provided to meet this possibility, with ample ammunition and operational necessities carried on mules.

On the 22nd June the regiment marched 22 miles to Maram where the brigade group concentrated preparatory to the start of the Ukrul operation. East of the Burma Road running from Dimapur to Imphal and on through Palel and Tamu to the Chindwin at Kalewa, lies a tangled, jungle-clad mass of mountains, intersected by deep valleys running north and south. Foot paths, only sometimes passable to mules, join the principal villages and in peace provide a means by which the easy constraint of the administration could be applied. Parallel to and sixty miles east of the Imphal road and joined to it by lateral jeep-tracks, one running from Kohima, and one from Tuphema, runs a jeep-track through Ukhrul to the Chindwin with a branch to Imphal. This had been one of the main Japanese supply arteries, and down it straggled the residue of Japanese forces from east of Kohima, ably attended by 23rd L.R.P. Brigade.

The view from the concentration area which lay at a height of some 4,000 ft. was impressive. In the foreground the green grassy slopes, round and smooth as the Downs, ran down to the Sangu Lok river. A narrow red track wound steeply up a shoulder losing itself in the dense forest covering the slopes of the mountains towering overhead, a formidable cloud-topped barrier. The monsoon had broken and storms of rain and cloud lashed the mountain-tops, floodwater making the rivers in the narrow valleys roar and froth in their rocky beds.

Evidence of the fierce struggle which had taken place along the Imphal road was abundant. Dead Japanese and pack animals, their bodies swollen and absurd lay in stiff and ungainly attitudes at the sides of the road, in sheltered nooks in the hills, and in battered enemy defensive positions. Equipment lay elsewhere, water-bottles, rifles and ammunition, mute testimony to the power of the advancing forces. The Brigade group forded and

swam the swollen torrent of Sangu Lok river, and started the steep climb of 3,000 ft. leading to the Naga Village of Inyamei, beyond which they would harbour for the night.

The crossing presented a problem, and the stream of men and laden mules crept slowly across the narrow two-foot rail less bridge. Mules lost their balance, falling with a splash into the river, and were whisked away downstream until fielded by a line of stops in a shallow below. Evening was drawing on and it was decided to swim and wade the mountain artillery across the river to save time and allow the bridge free for the passage of infantry and the remainder of 1,100 odd Royal Indian Army Service Corps (RIASC) mules comprising the transport of the Brigade. By eight o'clock the crossing was completed, and the rear of the column wended its slow way up the steep narrow track in pitch darkness to the harbour area five miles on.

The following day the column climbed steadily further into the clouds. A brush with a Japanese patrol yielded ten Japanese casualties at no cost. The path ran ever upwards becoming steeper and steeper, winding along the sides of deep nalas packed with decaying vegetation, rank growths so thick that once off the narrow slippery track, every foot of progress had to be hacked out of trailing vines, creepers, and spongy-leaved bushes. Giant teak trees rising through the dense undergrowth shut out light and sun. The column marched slowly and steadily through the dim twilight under a thick canopy of green. No sound other than the patter of rain drops, the subdued creaking of leather on metal, and the heavy breathing of men too short of breath to speak broke the silence. No birds sang; leeches looped expectantly towards the living, sweating bodies.

From just below the 8,000 ft. summit the view was immense. In front, rising to 7,000 ft. lay the tangled hills covered in forest of one of the wildest portions of the earth. Deep purple and green valleys separated knife-edged hills, trees met across narrow ravines, over all hung the sound of splashing water. Naga villages, clusters of gabled bamboo-roofs with the pointed horns of worship, clinging to the summits like fowls on a perch, appeared through clouds of swirling monsoon mist. Tracks clambered straight up and down hillsides and ran along the six-foot wide summits of ridges where a slip meant a fall to the tree-tops a thousand feet below.

The Naga in his perversity prefers to walk up and down hills and tires easily on the fiat. His tracks are an indication of his desires! Torrential rain fell periodically, mist swathed and swirled in the valleys and around towering peaks. At the bottom of the valleys raged unbridged swollen streams, the noise of whose tumultuous progress reached our ears thousands of feet above. The difficulties of attaining our goal Ukhrul, which lay some hundred miles away across this country were increasingly apparent, as was the possibility of being "pounded" by a combination of mud, rain, rivers, and slippery greasy slopes unclimbable under such conditions to laden mules. The prospect was not reassuring, and the next day's march shewed that our problems were but beginning. 23rd Mountain Battery was here sent back to Maram, as this foretaste of the problems confronting us made it desirable to reduce the numbers where possible.

The 1 Burmas crossed this mountain range during the moonlight, which failed, however, to penetrate the screen of foliage. In the darkness twelve mules fell over the side of the hill. Six of these were never seen again, three were killed, one retrieved from a tree-top in which he had been caught, and one was found grazing, his saddle smashed, and his load scattered, six hundred feet lower down.

The passage of a large number of mules rapidly produces a morass in soft wet ground, and on hillsides causes a collapse

of tracks. The descent of four thousand feet in two miles was accomplished on a narrow footpath by the leading infantry and mules. It then collapsed. No sappers were available as the field company was bridging the Wandi Lok river and improving the track forward for the passage of the leading troops. In default of other assistance, the task of getting forward the large number of supply mules devolved on the mountain regiment and remained theirs throughout the march. Tracks on new alignments were made; steps, in one case 1005, were cut in precipitous slippery hill sides otherwise impassable to mules; bridges were constructed; men and supply mules rescued from khuds over which they had fallen, from muddy morasses in the bottoms of valleys which threatened to drown mules engulfed over their bellies and still sinking, and from torrents carrying them away.

Although the major credit for the successful passage of the mass of mules across the country belongs to the mountain artillery, much is due to the patient uncomplaining RIASC muleteer. To lead three mules tied head to tail under conditions worse than anything previously envisaged, wet, sick, muddy, tired, hungry, and often frightened for weeks on end demands the highest pertinacity and courage by men of the humblest and simplest types. Despite obstacles they made it, arriving at Ukhrul and cheerfully moving on.

On the Bishenpur track, in the hills south of the Manipur plain, and along the jeep-track leading from Imphal to Ukhrul, by the beginning of July the tide was turning. Bitter fighting was in progress in mud and torrential monsoon rain. The capture by the Japanese of Imphal, in which were the supplies promised by their commanders, vital to the existence of their forces, receded from near certainty to improbability, and finally to an impossibility.

Between Ukhrul and Imphal confronted by 20th Indian Division on the edge of the Manipur Plain were a Japanese regiment and a proportion of two divisions. In Ukhrul was also a traitor Indian National Army division. In addition, in this area and its neighbourhood were Japanese columns guarding the approaches to Ukhrul. To the north moving slowly and painfully along the jeep-track were a large, disorganised body of Japanese; sick, starving and dying, the remnants of those Japanese of 31st Division who had been pursued east-wards out of Kohima by brigades from 7th and 5th Indian Divisions.

By the end of June, the form of operations against the Japanese east of Imphal was becoming apparent. 20th Indian Division was fighting its way slowly along the road from Imphal towards Ukhrul. 89th Indian Infantry Brigade of 7th Indian Division with 1st (Royal Kohat) Mountain Battery was moving to the north of 20th Division to by-pass the Japanese and attack Ukhrul from the south-west. 33rd Brigade Group, having crossed the worst of the intervening mountain ranges, moving down on Ukhrul from the north, had placed itself between the Japanese garrisons retreating from positions east of Kohima and their immediate goal Ukhrul, and was moving round the rear of the Japanese opposing the advance of 20th Indian Division.

In addition, the Chindit Brigade with its section of mountain artillery was converging on Ukhrul with a view to placing a line of "stops" on the east and south during the attack on the town. The net was closing. Of the considerable Japanese forces in the Ukhrul area many were sick and weak. The Indian National Army brigades were unreliable. They had been formed mostly from prisoners of war confronted with the alternatives of starving in a prison camp, or enlisting on what purported to be the winning side. The realisation that all was not well could no longer be disguised. The tendency to desert, and British propaganda urging this, made their withdrawal essential, and thus weakened, at least numerically, the garrison of Ukhrul.

Autumn 2025 55

54 Autumn 2025

 Ukhrul
 The Journal of the Royal Artillery
 The Journal of the Royal Artillery

 Ukhrul

The brigade and its artillery marched slowly and painfully on, digging its way up hills step by step and sliding down muddy slopes. Six mountain ranges were crossed entailing an ascent and descent daily of up to four thousand feet in under ten miles. Supply was by air. Even in this, conditions were such that the performance was as dangerous for the airmen as the recipients. Dropping zones did not exist, hill tops were veiled in mist, and flying conditions amongst the hills made supply by air a hazardous undertaking. Perched on hill-tops, no alternative existed other than to receive the drop in our midst. Such clearing of the dropping zone as was possible was done, but no safe area existed into which men and mules could go during the drop. A miss entailed a day's walking to retrieve the load from the valley into which it had fallen several thousand feet below.

Dodging the free-dropped sacks was exciting but not difficult. The danger lay in the tendency of the loads to leave their parachutes on the way down. A "stick" of parachutes required careful watching and nice anticipation. The contents of a case of tinned milk, fruit or meat, the bottom of whose container was insufficiently strong to withstand the check to momentum as the parachute opened had little on grapeshot as a lethal weapon, and a "stick" of coils of dannert wire was a "killer". Despite the necessity of flying directly into mountains, diving through mist, ridiculously small and unsuitable dropping zones, 11 Cargo Combat Transport Force of British and American pilots delivered with unfailing regularity food, ammunition, mail, and even an outsize pair of trousers to fit an exceptionally large behind.

After the brush with Japanese at Oinam only patrols were encountered until the column was some twenty miles from Ukhrul. Reports received from Nagas and Kukis showed that small parties of Japanese were living in the villages on all sides. To the improbability of attempting such a manoeuvre as was in progress the column undoubtedly owed its non-detection. At Tallui, Gurkha patrols encountered and destroyed a foraging party of Japanese, and elsewhere two astonished Japanese walked into the combined escorts of the Brigade and Artillery commanders. In penetration operations prisoners are not taken!

One final climb and below us bathed in sunlight on a green rib of hill lay Fuehring, with beyond partly hidden by trees, Ukhrul. An air drop was in progress on Fuehring, where one of the columns of the Chindit Brigade had arrived. Silvery, shining Dakotas, their size diminished by the height, circled below us, and dropped in succession parachutes of blue, red, white, and yellow. The bright green of the grass in the sun spattered with brilliant colours of the parachutes, the blues, olive-green and mauve of the surrounding hills stretching into the distance made the reality of war and the purpose of our mission seem far away. Fuerhing, a village like any other collection of wooden thatched houses is memorable for the purchase of a small crop of spring onions! These were the first fresh vegetables eaten by many of us since April. That night our patrols encountered heavy enemy opposition along the banks of the Ganjamlok river.

In Fuehring was the column of the Chindit Brigade. Hearing that the Japanese had laid an ambush at a watering point the column commander ordered a patrol of the Indian Officer and ten Punjabi Mussalman mule-drivers of his attached section of 5th Mountain Battery to investigate. With the patrol, though

officially an "enlisted non-combatant" (a category non-existent in 25th Mountain Regiment where all were trained as "fighting men") went Sweeper Ram Sarup of Jind State, Punjab. The patrol encountered the Japanese, and after inflicting casualties, withdrew owing to superior numbers with two wounded leaving one man killed. The withdrawal was covered by Ram Sarup, who shot two Japanese following up, and then rejoined the patrol, himself covered back by them.

The proud tradition of the Royal Indian Mountain Artillery, carried down from generations of fighting on the North-West Frontier of India, is never to leave their dead to the enemy. Having taken up a defensive position the Indian Officer called for volunteers to bring in the body of the dead man, explaining that as it was imperative that information of the Japanese position be reported, he had no choice but to leave the volunteers to accomplish their task alone. Ram Sarup and two men volunteered, one of whom had been awarded the Military Medal a few days previously. The remaining six men silently withdrew leaving this party of three to face an unknown number of Japanese, their only assets their courage, weapons and jungle-craft.

They decided that, covered by fire from the other two, Ram Sarup, armed only with his dah (a Burmese dagger), should creep up to the body and drag it away. The first tug at the body drew a hail of Japanese L.M.G. (Light Machine Gun) and rifle fire, which did not however touch Ram Sarup lying in a shallow fold in the ground twenty yards from the Japanese position. Firing on both sides increased and two more Japanese died. Under cover of this fire Ram Sarup dragged the body into the depression in which he lay, and inch by inch away from the Japanese. After some time, he reached his companions, and the courageous trio started their fighting withdrawal. Whilst covering the other two, Ram Sarup shot another Japanese following up.

The hunt was now up and stealthy rustlings, whispers, whistles and commands could be heard behind them. Moving swiftly and silently they managed to keep ahead of their pursuers for a time. The strain of climbing through thick jungle began to tell and a council of war was held. The two drivers suggested hiding the body; Ram Sarup however said he alone would carry it.

The pace got slower and slower and cries and shouts from the Japanese sounded on all sides. They decided that no more could be accomplished and hid the dead man, removing his arms, equipment, and papers. Ram Sarup carrying these in addition to his own weapons, they passed through the ring of Japanese, regaining their camp at midnight. The body was brought in next day by Nagas as a result of Ram Sarup's directions. Ram Sarup received the Indian Distinguished Service Medal for this act and is thus the first "sweeper" to attain this high award in the Indian Army during this war.<sup>1</sup>

This deed of heroism, calling for the highest courage, devotion, resolution and skill is but one of the many brave deeds performed by the simple, largely illiterate soldiers of Northern India, and in this case by one of the lowest and humblest members of the community. Uncomplaining in adversity, sick, half-starved, such men led by British and Indian officers comprised the majority of forces of the 14th Army engaged with the Japanese. Plagued by insects, vitiated by climate, a prey to dysentery, typhus, plague and unknown ills, shaken by former defeats in the Far East, short

of modern equipment required in Europe, these simple people, the finest fighting material in the world, out-fought the Japanese in the personal and individual contest which took place in the rank, stagnant atmosphere of the swamps, hills and jungles of South East Asia.

Whilst in Fuehring information was received by wireless that 89th Brigade had bypassed the Japanese and had gained a footing in the southern outskirts of Ukhrul. It was decided to press on. Covered by patrols the brigade crossed the Ganjamlok nala (stream or small river bed) on the Kharasom jeep track and moved cautiously along the ridge.

Here the brigade met the first signs of the destruction wrought on the Japanese. A fighter-bomber strike had evidently caught a Japanese column moving up the track. The road, thick with dead Japanese and animals was littered with arms and equipment. In their cautious progress the brigade passed through and round deserted camps of leafy huts, concealed strong points, living accommodation for thousands. Unburied dead lay everywhere, many untouched, some fat and well looking, some emaciated skeletons. Typhus, that scourge of armies had done its work. The miscalculation of administrative requirements, underestimation of the fighting qualities of troops seasoned in the bitter fighting in the Arakan and on the beaches of Dunkirk, North Africa and Madagascar, had led to the Japanese undoing. From this catastrophe they were faced with the necessity of saving what they could. How heavily they were paying did not become apparent until the column had passed through Ukhrul and on down the Humine track

The battle for Ukhrul started with intensive patrolling and harassing fire by 25th Mountain Regiment. Part of the deception plan was the move up in the late afternoon of a Company of 4/1 Gurkhas to a spur to the north-east, along which ran a jeep track leading from Ukhrul south towards the Chindwin. Under cover of artillery concentrations, one company of Gurkhas was to move in the dark through the dense jungle covering the northern slopes and enter Ukhrul silently without artillery support, which was nevertheless prepared in case of emergency, and form a bridgehead.

Nothing went according to plan. As the first company moved obviously into position, news came back that their patrols were in Ukhrul and had met no opposition. This company and another were directed into the town immediately, where they came under heavy fire after penetrating some two hundred yards. No explanation can be found for this Japanese dereliction. Possibly the arrival of a force from a direction considered unlikely, with the surprise engendered by the realisation that it had with it artillery, and the artillery fire on the northern edge of the town had made them withdraw. The 1 Burmas were directed against the western side of the town which they entered that night.

Next morning the infantry started working their way forward, slowly and methodically blowing up bunkers by the simple expedient of placing an explosive charge on the roof under cover of all available fire. Directed by British and Indian artillery F.O.Os. with the forward infantry, the Mountain Regiment fired shell after shell into the buildings often no more than forty yards from the leading infantry. Smoke rose from the burning town; fragments of houses flew into the air. The roar of musketry, the crash of our own shells, and those of the enemy who was shelling indiscriminately the area still held by him in which fighting was taking place, thundered in echo from the neighbouring hills and rolled sonorously up the deep narrow valleys. By mid-day contact was made with the troops attacking from the west, and by evening with the other brigade on the south-west. Pockets of resistance remained but organised defence had ceased. That

night, in the red glow of the burning town, the remaining enemy were liquidated.

The following morning 33rd and 89th brigades met and parted; we to the south taking up the pursuit in an attempt to close the net before the large number of enemy on the Ukhrul-Imphal road could escape south; they to hold Ukhrul, in which we left our wounded, some of whom, after operations performed in the open by the surgical team accompanying us, we had carried for many days across appalling going.

Our situation provoked some thought. We had been fighting continuously for the better part of a year under tropical conditions of the utmost severity. In the Arakan we had fought for a considerable period on half-rations when the Japanese surrounded 7th Indian Division and sustained their first reverses at the hands of 14th Army. We had fought in the filth and wet of Kohima in torrential rains, followed by an encircling move in support of 114th Indian Infantry Brigade through the hard going of the jungle-clad Naga hills. Without a pause 25th Mountain Regiment, by now somewhat depleted in men and mules, had set off into the Somra Hills in this arduous penetration operation towards Ukhrul. The rigours of the march exercised a great strain on men and animals. Health was breaking and it was not possible to carry our sick.

Men and officers with a temperature of under one hundred and three degrees had to march or remain behind and die. Morale was sky-high but the brigade was tired, ragged, weak, and sick with dysentery, fever, and the cumulative effects of unavoidable hunger and malnutrition. From the south came persistent rumours of fresh Japanese troops massing!

Reduced in numbers the brigade group pressed on to Luithar, the promised ten days sojourn in the Ukhrul area a memory of the past. The Japanese had broken. Our arrival in the Ukhrul area across his main supply route had shattered his will to resist. From the north came rumours, later corrected to a certainty of the death of thousands of Japanese from starvation and disease, their last hope of escape cut off by our arrival and the capture of Ukhrul in combination with the Chindits column and 89th Indian Infantry Brigade.

From Luithar the Japanese were seen across the valley digging frantically. Rumours of strong Japanese to our west at Hungpung persisted, but no sound of an encounter with the other brigade was heard. That night our patrols entered Longshong and defeated the few sick Japanese found after slight resistance.

We moved at dawn next day in torrential rain. This four-mile march was one of the worst undertaken. The river at the bottom of a 2,000-foot valley was flanked by paddy-fields. All day mules struggled through the morass until late into the night. Some drowned in the mud, some were so exhausted that they fell unable to move and had to be destroyed. Officers and men laboured waist-deep in mud and water, and by ten o'clock that night the last of the men and animals struggled in.

Next day our patrols contacted a medium machine gun up the road, and throughout the day the road to our south was harassed by Japanese artillery fire. It was obvious that the Japanese intended standing at Moaku to cover the withdrawal of his forces through the narrowing gap between us and 20th Indian Division.

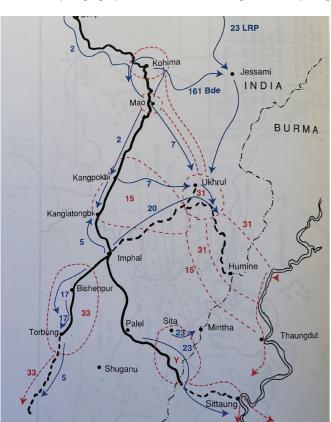
Information of many sick and wounded Japanese with neither arms nor equipment moving down the Humine track to the Chindwin reached us. Rumours of a general, his staff and elephants, the remnants of a divisional headquarters in the hills to our east were rife; three Indian Mountain gunners having been sent to intercept some Japanese walking down a road towards their position, pursued them for two miles, and after a brief interchange of shots, charged firing from the hip with Bren,

AFTERNOTE - For the Victory Parade in London in 1946 a representative detachment of Indian Mountain Artillery was sent including Sweeper Ram Sarup IDSM of 5th (Bombay) Mountain Rattery

Tommy gun and rifle, killing one and taking prisoner another; one Japanese Officer and an N.C.O. after a suicide charge were captured by a patrol; Nagas started bringing in prisoners too sick to move; and fifteen Japanese stragglers were shot within half a mile of the brigade headquarters position.

Our own case had somewhat deteriorated. 1 Queens were almost too sick to fight, the 1 Burmas had a certain amount of typhus and dysentery, 4/1 Gurkhas were fit with a proportion of sick, the Mountain Gunners though thin and emaciated were comparatively fit. Many men and officers were internally too weak to digest or retain their food, and very many suffered from chronic diarrhoea, a legacy of the Arakan increased by exertions of these operations. Rum was fortunately ample and for days on end, many officers and men lived on a diet of rum and hot tinned milk, all they could manage!

Animals were in little better state. Surra (form of pernicious anaemia affecting horses, mules and cattle in the tropics), the scourge of this frontier had broken out among the mules of two battalions, and a number had died. Very many, due to unavoidably long hours under load, wet saddle blankets and continuous plunging up and down hills, were galled. Everything



The British Counter Offensive at Ukhrul, June-July 1944

had been staked on the stay at Ukhrul and little margin remained. It was decided to press forward with 4/1 Gurkhas, a six-gun mountain battery made up to one hundred per cent fitness from the remainder, brigade and artillery regiment headquarters

reduced to the minimum. The weather had deteriorated further if possible. Cloud lay continuously on the hills at the heights at which we were now fighting and made the arrival of our supply drop even more problematical. For this reason, we had to reduce the numbers of the pursuing column.

1 Burmas with the composite battery were to dislodge the Japanese in Maokul; the column would then pass through, pick up the battery and continue down the Humine track, the remainder of the brigade forming a secure base in the Ukhrul and Longshong area.

The Humine track had been used before the rains as a main supply route to the base at Ukhrul This narrow road wound along hillsides, dropped into valleys, and climbed steeply up through forest. Never wider than a single vehicle, the rain transformed it into a glissade of mud. Bridges were washed away, and under the weight of Japanese light lorries the road in places collapsed in a slither of mud and shale down the hill side. Again, the ravages of disease and starvation were rampant. From the large jungle camps lining the road, from nalas and valleys lived in by the Japanese, rose the stench of putrefaction.

At the side of the road or fallen down the khud-side lay lorries and cars, the drivers dead at the wheel or lying beside their vehicles. In the foot-deep mud of the track floated dead Japanese and the carcasses of animals worked to death in the frantic endeavour to escape the inevitable advance of our forces and the onset of disease. Equipment lay everywhere, the unseemly evidence of a rout: a 75 mm. gun was found buried: a tank stuck in the mud: shells, mines and small arms innumerable. Despite all this the Japanese rear guard still held successive positions, each of which required two or three days to clear owing to the difficulties of terrain. Heavy mist and rain prevented air action and along a thousand jungle paths the sick and battered remnants of the would-be conquerors of India struggled painfully southwards.

It was decided by Corps that the object of these operations had now been accomplished. The Japanese threat to Imphal from the east had succumbed to the menace of encirclement, and their forces were withdrawing southwards. Further pursuit would gain little and would impose additional strain on the physique of troops already stretched to breaking point. It might so effect their stamina to involve a period of recuperation so long as to render them useless for further operations. This could not be justified by the possible dividend.

Orders were issued for the brigade group to concentrate in Imphal preparatory to returning to the Kohima area for a period of rest, refitting, training, and leave.

25th Mountain Regiment started on the sixty-mile march into Imphal in the last week of July. This was accomplished without incident other than a small night attack easily repelled, on Regimental Headquarters by a roving band of Japanese. At Litan Bridge the weather was fine, and the regiment halted for a day to wash their clothes and clean up their harness before entering Imphal.

We marched proudly and cheerfully into our final staging camp where we were met by the divisional commander who was roundly cheered by the "Jawans". On the following day began the long journey by lorry of men, mules, guns, and paraphernalia back to Imphal, rest and leave.

# The Action at Étreux 27th August 1914

#### By Colonel Nick Quarrelle



Colonel Nick Quarrrelle was commissioned in 1969 and served in BAOR, UK and Hong Kong with 27 and 20 Regiments before being posted to 16 Regiment where he was Troop Commander, BK and Adjutant. After attending Division III of the Army Staff Course at Camberley in 1982 he spent the next 2 years in the Ministry of Defence in the Directorate of Army Staff Duties before joining 12 Regiment in Germany to command T Battery Royal Artillery (Shah Sujah's Troop) as the first Battery equipped with Tracked Rapier. Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in 1987, he was posted to the British Military and Advisory Team Zimbabwe as the Gunner member of the Directing Staff at the Zimbabwe Staff College. He returned to the UK to command 16 Regiment, then based in Kirton-in-Lindsey, Lincolnshire which included a Northern Ireland tour (his fifth) for which he was Mentioned in Dispatches.

He then spent 2 years as the Army member of the Directing Staff at the Naval Staff College in Greenwich before being promoted to the rank of Colonel and joining Headquarters Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps as Chief Air Defence where he spent 4 years, the final year acting as Chief Air on the deployment as HQ IFOR in Bosnia. His final appointment was Colonel Individual Training Policy at Upavon before leaving the Army in 2000. Subsequently he became Regimental Secretary and Staff Officer to the

Master Gunner St James's Park on the move of the Regimental Headquarters to Larkhill in December 2005, from which he retired in 2015. He is a keen reader of military history and a volunteer in the library and archive at the RA Museum.

The Royal Artillery Museum was recently able to acquire (due to the generous support of the Friends of the Royal Artillery Museum) a very fine picture of one of the early engagements of World War 1 which occurred during the retreat from Mons. The action involved the 2nd Battalion the Royal Munster Fusiliers, the Centre Section (C and D sub-sections) of 118th Battery Royal Field Artillery and a troop of the 15th Hussars. The painting by the artist Christopher Clark (1875-1942) had been in the possession of the Stewart-Cox family for many years and was recently offered for auction at Wooley and Wallis saleroom in Salisbury.

A coloured reproduction of the picture and a brief account of the action are contained in the Royal Artillery War Commemoration Book<sup>1</sup> but surprisingly there are very few details in the XXVIth Brigade War Diary<sup>2</sup> which simply states: 'The Section 118th Bty with the Munsters did not rejoin.' However, there is a full account in the first chapter of the regimental history of the 2nd Battalion Royal Munster Fusiliers<sup>3</sup> on which I have drawn extensively.

118th Battery formed part of XXVIth Brigade Royal Field Artillery based at Lille Barracks, Marlborough Lines in Aldershot as part of 1st Division and had been mobilised in early August, travelling to Boulogne on 17th August. The Battery was commanded by Major Abingdon Robert Bayly<sup>4</sup> aged 42 and the Centre Section Commander was Lieutenant Arthur Stewart-Cox<sup>5</sup> aged 26. During the retreat from Mons, the 1st Infantry Brigade<sup>6</sup> under the command of Brigadier-General Ivor Maxse was covering the withdrawal of 1st Army Corps. On the British right was the 5th French Army. The Battle of Le Cateau had been fought on 26th August and the badly shattered 2nd Army Corps, under General Smith-Dorrien was withdrawing to the south. General Maxse's intent was for his rearguard to maintain a distance of some eight miles between the main body and the advancing enemy.

After a tiring march on 26th August, 1st Infantry Brigade was quartered around the village of Fesmy, approximately 7 miles south east of Le Cateau. The following day the withdrawal was to be continued under the command of the Commanding Officer

<sup>1.</sup> The Royal Artillery War Commemoration Book published on behalf of the RA War Commemoration Fund (London, G Bell and Sons Ltd, 1920).

<sup>2.</sup> XXVI Brigade Royal Field Artillery War Diary, The National Archives, File Reference WO 95/1250/1.

<sup>3.</sup> The 2nd Munsters in France by Lt Col H S JERVIS MC (Aldershot, Gale & Polden, 1922).

<sup>4.</sup> Maj A R Bayly RFA (Kane's List 4839), Date of Birth: 7 Mar 1871, Commissioned: 14 Feb 1890, Promoted Major: 14 Oct 1907. Served in India Sep 1890-Nov 1902. Died 13 Feb 1952.

<sup>5.</sup> Lt A Stewart-Cox RFA (Kane's List 7232), Date of Birth: 6 Dec 1888, Commissioned: 23 Jul 1909, Promoted Lieutenant: 23 Jul 1912. Died 4 May 1973.

<sup>6. 1</sup>st Infantry Brigade consisted of 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, 1st Battalion Scots Guards, 1st Battalion Black Watch and 2nd Battalion Royal Munster Fusiliers

of the 2nd Munster Rifles, Major Paul Charrier<sup>7</sup>, who determined that his plan should concentrate on the roads down which any



2nd Battalion the Royal Munster Fusiliers, shortly afterwards. At around from webpage: www.britishbattles.com/ first-world-war/battle-of-etreux

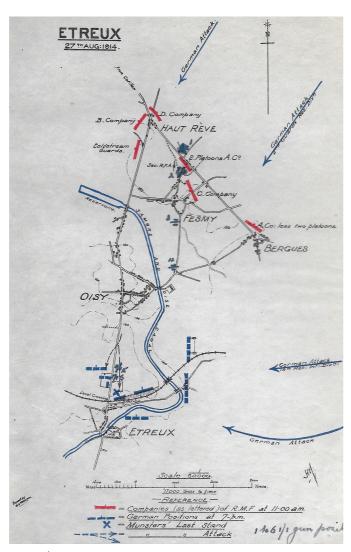
enemy advance was likely to be channelled. The initial dispositions are shown in red on the sketch map along the line Haut Rève to Bergues with the gun positions (shown with a gun symbol) numbered 1-6. By 09.00 hrs the French on the right were beginning to withdraw south while an entire German Army Corps (the 10th Reserve Army Corps) was approaching the Munster's positions on two parallel routes and the German cavalry elements Major Paul Charrier, Commanding Officer began to probe the defences 11.00 hrs the German 2nd Guards Reserve Division

consisting of 12 battalions advanced to attack from both flanks. In the south east, A Company (-) with rapid accurate rifle fire inflicted heavy losses on the enemy before withdrawing south. The enemy pushed on towards Fesmy where superior strength enabled him to penetrate and establish himself. In the village two wagons from the XXVIth Brigade Ammunition Column carrying 1st line ammunition for the guns were attacked, killing and dispersing some gunners and their horses. However, a counter attack was mounted by C Company which managed to drive the enemy out. On the left flank B and D companies, both strongly entrenched were able to hold their own. At around midday it began to rain very heavily and during this time both companies were able to extract themselves withdrawing towards Fesmy.

At 12.20 hrs Étreux was finally clear of the transport of retreating units and the 1st Corps formations were free to continue the retreat. At 13.00 hrs Maxse sent out orders to his four battalions to retreat 'At once.' Two copies of the order were sent to each battalion, apparently by cyclist, but neither reached the Munster Fusiliers.

At around 14.00 hrs although neither copy of the orders from Maxse had reached the Munsters, Charrier made the decision to withdraw towards Oisy with D company on the left, B Company on the right and C Company bringing up the rear. Munster casualties at this stage were comparatively light, however progress was slow due to difficulty in crossing the thick hedges surrounding the field in the area. C Company, in the rear, was subject to vigorous German attacks and fell well behind the other companies.

Elements of A Company and the 15th Hussars having pulled back from Bergues, took over the bridge crossing the Sambre and Oise canal from the Coldstream Guards who withdrew south. The main body of the rearguard, including the guns of 118th Battery did not cross the canal until around 17.00 hrs. C Company was left as the bridge guard with a detachment of Munsters under Lieutenant Awdry holding the north of the village of Oisy. Charrier continued south down the road with A, B and D companies, his machine guns and the two 18-pounders from 118th Battery.



Map of Étreux – 27th August 1914, from The 2nd Munsters in France by Lt Col H S JERVIS MC (Aldershot, Gale & Polden, 1922)

But at around 18.00 hrs, as the leading elements reached the outskirts of Étreux, they found German soldiers in the road ahead of them, cutting them off. As the Official History recounts: 'Then for the first time the Munsters began to fall fast. One of the two guns of the section of the 118th Battery was disabled, a single shell destroying the whole team. The other gun was promptly brought into action against the German artillery, but over three hundred rounds had already been fired, and ammunition was very nearly exhausted. Still undaunted, Major Charrier pushed forward two companies to clear the way through Étreux; but the Germans had installed themselves in the trenches dug during the fore-noon by the Black Watch, and also occupied a house, which they had loopholed, west of the road. A house east of the road now burst into flames, evidently giving the signal for a converging attack from all sides upon the Munsters. Major Charrier ordered the remaining gun to be brought up to demolish the loopholed house, but the range was so short that the team and detachment were instantly shot down.' 8 - This is the exact moment captured in the picture by Christopher Clark.



The Action at Étreux – 27th August 1914 by Christopher Clark (1875-1942) (Courtesy Royal Artillery Museum)

Despite further gallant attempts by Major Charrier to force a way through the German position on the edge of the village, there were increasingly heavy casualties particularly among officers and NCOs. Major Charrier was wounded twice and in a third attempt to capture the German strong point, was shot a number of times and killed instantly. An attempt to outflank the strong point including a charge with fixed bayonets was

unsuccessful. Survivors from the various unsuccessful attacks had gathered in an orchard near the main road where eventually with all ammunition expended, the survivors under Lt E W Gower (the senior unwounded officer), surrendered at 21.15 hrs. Nine officers including the CO had been killed and many more were wounded. Only 4 officers and 256 men, including many wounded, survived the action. No less than 1,500 German wounded were



Étreux British Cemetery from webpage: www.cwgc.org

60 Autumn 2025 Autumn 2025 61

<sup>7.</sup> Major Paul Alfred Charrier, aged 45, was reputedly the tallest man in the British Army. He had fought in the Ashanti Campaign and the South African War. 'His tactical ability and wide range of knowledge had already brought him into prominent notice at Aldershot'. JERVIS, Op Cit, p.2. 8. Military Operations; France and Belaium 1914, Volume 1; Mons, The Retreat to the Seine, the Marne and the Aisne, August-October 1914, Brigadier-General Sir James E EDMONDS.

assembled in the village of Étreux the next day. However, by their actions a space of twelve miles separated 1st Army Corps from the Germans whose advance had been delayed by more than 6 hours enabling the British rear formations to get through the bottleneck at Guise and withdraw south.

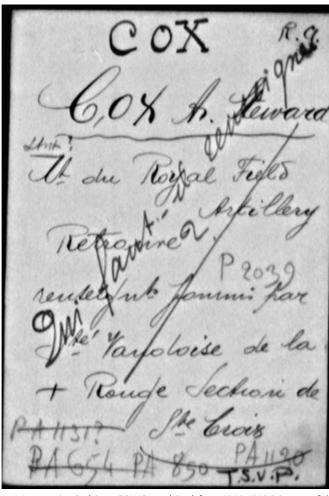
On the day after the battle, many of the dead were buried in the orchard where their compatriots had surrendered. After the Armistice the orchard was purchased by the family of Lieutenant Frederick Styles, an officer of the Munsters who had been killed in the action. The family erected a large Celtic Cross in the centre of the cemetery which lists the First World War battle honours of the Royal Munster Fusiliers as well as a stone memorial bench and plaque. In 1924 the cemetery was handed over to the French state and its care became the responsibility of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.<sup>9</sup>

In 118th Battery, both Major Bayly and Lieutenant Stewart-Cox had been wounded and became prisoners of war along with the 23 surviving soldiers. Lieutenant Stewart-Cox was initially in hospital in Paderborn but subsequently imprisoned in a camp in the *Husaren Kaserne* in Krefeld and remained a prisoner for the duration of the war. Major Bayly, who had been wounded in the



Maj A Stewart-Cox RA (Author's Collection) - Photo taken after the War from early 1930s in his time as Military Attaché, Riga

head, was imprisoned in an *Offizierslager* in Torgau in Saxony, but was repatriated to Switzerland on 27th November 1917 where he acted as the Officer in Charge of Interned Prisoners of War in Switzerland for which (in 1919) he was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire.<sup>10</sup>



Lt A Stewart-Cox Red Cross POW Record Card from 1914-1918 Prisoners of the First World War ICRC Historical Archives, webpage: www.grandguerre.icrc.org

No awards for gallantry for the action at Étreux were made until after the end of the war when in accordance with the terms of Army Order 193 of 1919, Lieutenant Colonel Bayly was awarded the Distinguished Service Order. Captain Wise of the 2nd Battalion Royal Munster Fusiliers was awarded the Military Cross and a number of soldiers the Military Medal. One might assume that, had he survived, Major Charrier might have been awarded the Distinguished Service Order but there is no provision for its award posthumously. Lieutenant Stewart-Cox was mentioned in dispatches for hiis part in the action.

It is perhaps appropriate to consider the state of the 2nd Battalion the Royal Munster Fusiliers which, having taken on strength reservists from the Regiment's depots at Tralee and Fermoy, had left for France with a strength of 27 officers and 971 other ranks. After Étreux its strength was 5 officers and 196 other ranks, but after a spell of recuperation the Battalion saw action at Langemarck during the 1st Battle of Ypres on 22nd October. The Battalion was to remain on the Western Front throughout the war seeing action in 1915 at Neuve Chapelle during the 2nd Battle of Ypres. 12 In 1916 they took part in the Lievin Raid<sup>13</sup> on 25th June when Lt Arthur Batten-Pool won the Victoria Cross, and the Battle of the Somme in July. In 1917 they fought in the Battle of Messines, and at Paschendaele and in 1918 took part in the Hundred Days Offensive which was to bring about the defeat of the Germans. During the course of the War the 2nd Battalion lost 179 officers and 4,088 other ranks

who were killed, wounded or reported missing but retained its essentially Irish character and throughout was composed entirely of voluntarily enlisted men. Along with the other southern Irish Regiments, the Royal Munster Fusiliers colours were laid up at Windsor on 12th January 1922 before disbandment on 31st July 1922.

118th Battery Royal Field Artillery did not survive the reductions in the size of the Gunners following the end of the First World War and in 1922 it was absorbed by 36th Field Battery becoming 36/55 Field Battery in 22nd Field Regiment. As part of the 4th Division, it fought with the BEF and in North Africa and Italy. In 1947 the batteries were delinked and 36th Battery became 89th Training Battery in 31st Training Regiment, producing drivers for the Gunners, at Kimmel Park Camp in Rhyl. The Regiment and its Batteries were placed in Suspended Animation on 30th June 1961 and disbanded on 1 January 1962.



Étreux British Cemetery from webpage: www.ww1cemeteries.com/etreux-communal-cemetery © Johan Pauwels

<sup>9.</sup> Webpage, ww1cemeteries.com/Étreux British Cemetery.

<sup>10.</sup> London Gazette 3 June 1919.

<sup>11.</sup> London Gazette 30 January 1920.

<sup>12.</sup> On 9th May, before the Battle, the Battalion received Absolution from their Chaplain, Father Francis Gleeson which was depicted in the painting 'The Last General Absolution of the Munster Fusiliers at the Rue du Bois' by the artist Fortunino Matania. Originally published in The Sphere newspaper on 27th November 1916.

<sup>13.</sup> See webpage: Wikisource, How a Trench Raid VC Was Won (1916) by Daniel Desmond SHEEHAN (Originally reported in the Daily Express, 17th August 1916).

# Unveiling of the Colours of the 4th/5th Battalion



he recently conserved Colours of the 4th/5th Battalion (Queen's Edinburgh Rifles) The Royal Scots (The Royal Regiment) were unveiled jointly by Brigadier (Retired) George Lowder MBE and Colonel Phil Haigh TD VR, Deputy Regimental Colonel Royal Artillery, in the Drill Hall of Regimental Headquarters 105 Regiment Royal Artillery (105 Regt RA) on Fri 29 August 2025, exactly one hundred years after being presented by HRH The Princess Mary, Colonel-in-Chief The Royal Scots, to the Battalion in Holyrood Park. The Battalion converted from infantry in 1938, initially to a searchlight regiment and then a light anti-aircraft regiment, as part of the air defence forces protecting the UK from German air raids, and continued as a light anti-aircraft regiment in various guises until 1961. This was the culmination of a project of over 30 years in the making. Colonel Robert Watson OBE, being familiar with the history of the 4th/5th Battalion, had initially proposed the loan of the Colours to 105 Regt RA in 1993 and it is due to his commendable perseverance that this venture has come to fruition. The Colours were eventually delivered to 105 Regt RA in January 2022, and a campaign was initiated by the Royal Artillery Council of Scotland to raise the funds required for conservation and appropriate display of the Colours.

Once assembled, attendees were welcomed by Lieutenant Colonel Doug Bertram VR, Commanding Officer 105 Regt RA, who was hosting the event. Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Mike Blair MVO TD VR, Chairman of the Royal Artillery Council of Scotland and a former CO of 105 Regt RA recounted the events leading to the loan and conservation and provided a brief history to the Regiment's activities in the Second World War

"To come into an Artillery Unit's Drill Hall, or in modern terms, an 'Army Reserve Centre', and see a set of Regimental Colours displayed on a wall would surprise any Gunner. Traditionally, the Guns, or the other equipment with which we engage the enemy, are the 'Colours' of the Royal Artillery. Before the more formal part of these proceedings takes place, I should therefore briefly explain how they come to be here.

"A few years ago, Colonel Robert Watson was speaking to Major Willie Nicol and told him about the story of how 4/5 RS had been 'invited', or indeed 'volunteered' to become a searchlight unit in 1938 and their later history in WW2 as 52 Searchlight Regiment, then converting to 130 Light Anti-Aircraft [LAA] Regiment RA, and also as we discovered, as 14 LAA Regiment. After discussion it was agreed that the RA Council of Scotland would have the Colours conserved and put on display at RHQ 105 Regiment to commemorate this



Lt Col Mike Blair, Lt Col Doug Bertram and Col Phil Haigh.

service and the 'cross-over' between The Royal Scots and the Royal Artillery. This display is a special and indeed unique remembrance of the service of 4/5 RS both generally, and as Gunners during WW2.

"The Colours were conserved by Sophie Younger of Younger Conservation Ltd of Perth, who does textile conservation professionally for, amongst others, the National Museum of Scotland, and were framed by Joe Nicholson of 'Foursticks Framing' of Falkland with museum quality mounting and special glass. The total cost was over £7k, of which over £5k was raised almost entirely in Scotland by an appeal, and the remainder contributed by extra private donations.

"The contributions of other arms to the RA of WW2 is not well known. Of over 800 Regiments of the Royal Artillery formed in WW2, about 120 were formed based on existing Territorial Infantry battalions and Yeomanry regiments; many, such as 4/5 RS, were the basis of more than one Gunner regiment. In Scotland there were 11 such units, which for the record were: 4/5 RS; 9 A&SH; QO Glasgow Yeomanry; 5/8 Cameronians, the Scottish Horse; 4 GORDONS; 6 A&SH; 8 GORDONS; the Ayrshire Yeomanry, and the Lanarkshire Yeomanry. In addition, we might also mention 2 Liverpool Scottish, and 3 London Scottish

"52 Searchlight Regiment RA, as the Battalion became formally in 1940, defended central Scotland with 3 AA Division, as part of the Air Defence of Great Britain. At its largest, ADGB consisted of the RAF Fighter Command, Balloon Command, and Anti-Aircraft Command. itself containing 3 AA Corps with 12 AA divisions. In addition, many served overseas, and a total of over 80 AA brigades were formed. Later in 1942, 52 Searchlight Regt RA converted to LAA, re-armed with 40/60 Bofors guns and became 130 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. They defended the south of England in 1943/44 against the Luftwaffe's 'tip and run' raids, and were part of the huge effort to defend against the V1 Flying Bombs (or 'Doodlebugs' or 'Buzz Bombs') in late 1944, known as Operation DIVER, being deployed on the Kent coast near 'hellfire corner' where the German coastal artillery guns in France could shell the English coast.

"14 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was based on A Company, 4/5 RS and was sent early in the war to Egypt where it took part in the North





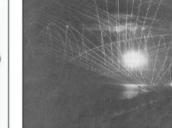
4TH/5TH BATTALION, THE ROYAL SCOTS 52 SEARCHLIGHT REGIMENT, ROYAL ARTILLERY 130 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT, ROYAL ARTILLERY 14 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT, ROYAL ARTILLERY













This photo board has been framed and placed to the left of the Colours to show what the regiments were involved in as they evolved.

Photo Board by Ross Potter, Mike Blair and Danscot Print.

Unveiling of the Colours of the 4th/5th Battalion

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

African Campaign and, under 4 AA Brigade, were part of the garrison of Tobruk in 1941 during the siege by German and Italian forces under Rommel. They took part in the invasion of Italy at Salerno in 1943, and the remainder of the Italian campaign up to VE Day.

"As far as is known, the Royal Artillery does not have any specific memorial to remember the service of these many regiments who came from the other arms and without which we in the RA could never have performed our wartime roles, and while we here particularly commemorate the service of 4/5 RS, they are an excellent, and indeed the senior example, of many others. That is a brief history, though Major Willie Nicol, Lieutenant Colonel David Jack and I have learnt a great deal more in researching this story.

"May I now please hand over to Brigadier George Lowder, the Chairman of The Royal Scots Regimental Trustees, to tell us more about 4/5 RS and lead in the unveiling of the Colours."

Brigadier Lowder thanked Lieutenant Colonel Bertram for his warm welcome, and Lieutenant Colonel Blair for his introduction.

"It is 100 years to the day since Princess Mary, who had been Colonel-in-Chief of The Royal Scots since 1918, presented these Colours to the 4th/5th Battalion at a very blowy King's Park, Holyrood on 29 August 1925.

"The 4th/5th Battalion traces its history back to 1859 when the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 1st City of Edinburgh Rifle Volunteer Corps were raised. These Battalions became the 4th and 5th Battalion in 1908 on creation of the Territorial Force. Mobilisation during the First World War resulted in expansion of each battalion to the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th of the 4th Battalion and 1st, 2nd and 3rd of the 5th Battalion. Generally, the reserve battalions were recruiting and home based to deliver trained Royal Scots to the deployed battalions who served in Gallipoli, Palestine, Egypt and, of course, on the Western Front. After service during the First World War, the battalions were amalgamated in 1921 to form the 4th/5th Battalion. The Battalion was known as The Queen's Edinburgh Rifles The Royal Scots.

"In 1938 the War Office, with war looming, realised the shortage of anti-aircraft defences in UK, and the need for additional artillery regiments. On 18 March 1938 the CO received a letter from the Director General of the Territorial Army conveying a request from the Army Council for 4th/5th Battalion to convert from infantry to become part of the Air Defences of the UK, an invitation that would have been



The Colours being unveiled by Brig George Lowder (I) and Col Phil Haigh as Lt Col Doug Bertram looks on.

very difficult to refuse. Assurances were given that they would remain as Royal Scots, albeit in a new role. While this did not stand the test of time, the title "Queens Edinburgh Royal Scots" was retained by the unit or at least one subunit until 1961. They formed the basis of two Artillery regiments. The transfer began on 1 November 1938, initially with most of the Battalion as 52 Searchlight Regiment, and on 1 August 1940 they were officially transferred to the RA. Mike has covered the wartime history of the rerolled unit.

"The Royal Scots are particularly pleased and grateful that RA Council of Scotland, RA Association and 105 Regiment RA have led and overseen the project to conserve these Colours, and we now entrust them to 105 Regt RA for safe keeping."

Colonel Haigh, on behalf of the Master Gunner St James's Park, the Royal Artillery Council of Scotland and 105 Regt RA, thanked Brigadier Lowder for entrusting the Colours on loan to 105 Regt RA, stating that it is a privilege and honour to be custodians of this element of shared heritage, and assured him that the Colours would be displayed with pride and great care. He also extended to The Royal Scots Association an invitation to visit and view the displayed Colours on appropriate occasions. A visit can be arranged through the Royals Scots Regimental Office.



I to r: Maj Billy Young, Maj Dennis Paterson, Maj Ronnie Young, Brig George Lowder, Maj Willie Nicol, Maj Lachlan McIntosh, Lt Col Mike Blair, Col Phil Haigh, Col Robert Watson, Mr Ron Cairns, Lt Col Doug Bertram, Lt Col John Sands, Lt Col Ran Shepherd, Sophie Lenihan, Col Roderick Morriss, Maj John Dent, Lt Col David Jack.

The following text has been framed and placed between the Colours to explain the context and the reason for their presence in an artillery drill hall.

#### Colours of the 4th/5th (Queen's Edinburgh) Battalion, The Royal Scots

52 Searchlight Regiment, later 130 (Queen's Edinburgh Royal Scots) Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, and 14 (West Lothian Royal Scots) Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, the Royal Regiment of Artillery

These Colours commemorate the service of 4th/5th Battalion The Royal Scots, and are representative of about 120 other Territorial Infantry and Yeomanry Regiments as part of the Royal Artillery during the Second World War.

These Colours were presented to the 4th/5th Bn RS on 29 August 1925. In the Royal Artillery in contrast, the Guns themselves are our Colours, rather than Colours made of fabric and silk.

The 4th/5th Bn RS traces its history back to 1859 when the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 1st City of Edinburgh Rifle Volunteer Corps were raised. These became the 4th and 5th Bns RS on the creation of the Territorial Force in 1908. After service during the First World War, the battalions wWere amalg amated in 1921 to form the 4th/5th Bn RS.

Roles in the Royal Artillery. In 1938, the War Office, with War looming, realising the shortage of anti-aircraft defences in UK, and the need for additional artillery regiments, requested the 4th/5th Bn RS to convert from infantry to become part of the Air Defences of the UK. They formed the basis of two Artillery Regiments, and this is their story.

The transfer began on 1 November 1938, initially with most of the battalion as 52 Searchlight Regiment, and on 1 August 1940 they were officially transferred to the RA. They deployed before the outbreak of the war and covered parts of the east coast of Scotland during the Blitz. In March 1942, the Regiment was converted to Light Anti-Aircraft with 40mm Bofors guns as 130 LAA Regiment. They deployed in eastern Scotland, but in early 1943 moved to the south coast of England, as part of the defences against the German 'tip and run' raids. In summer and autumn of 1944, they formed part of the 'Operation Diver' defences against the V1 Flying Bombs, claiming 35 were shot down in July and August '44. In early 1945, enemy air activity reduced, and in March, the regiment stood down.

The Linlithgow company of the battalion formed the basis of 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. This regiment went overseas to Egypt, formed part of the garrison of Tobruk during the siege by the Axis armies in 1941, and served in the North African and Italian campaigns.

After the Second Word War, the 4th/5th Bn RS remained in the Royal Artillery as 587 LAA Regiment (Queen's Edinburgh Royal Scots), and subsequently as 432 LAA Regiment RA until 1961

But for the help received from many Territorial units like the 4th/5th Bn RS during the Second World War, the Royal Artillery would not have been able to perform its numerous tasks, at home and overseas. 105 Regiment Royal Artillery take pride on behalf of the Royal Artillery in displaying these Colours in remembrance of that service.

Detailed accounts of the transition to Royal Artillery and operation in the Second World War can be found in editions of The Thistle 1938-1939 and 1946-1947.

#### Chronology of service of the Queen's Edinburgh Rifles 1859 - 1961

Date from	Name		
1859	Queen's Edinburgh Rifles Brigade, Rifle Volunteer Corps raised.		
1908	4th Battalion (Queens Edinburgh Rifles) The Royal Scots and 5th Battalion (Queens Edinburgh Rifles) The Royal Scots formed from the 1st and 2nd Battalions of 1st City of Edinburgh Rifles Volunteers on the creation of the Territorial Force.		
1921	The 4th and 5th Battalions merged to form the 4th/5th Battalion (Queen's Edinburgh Rifles) The Royal Scots.		
1938	A Coy forms cadre for 14 Light Anit-Aircraft Regiment RA (West Lothian Royal Scots) TA. Remainder of Battalion commences searchlight role.		
1 Aug 1940	The 4th/5th Battalion (Queen's Edinburgh Rifles) The Royal Scots becomes 52 Searchlight Regiment RA (TA).		
11 Mar 1942	The Regiment changed role and renamed 130 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment RA (Queen's Edinburgh Royal Scots) (TA).		
1 Jan 1947	The Regiment renamed 587 (Queen's Edinburgh Royal Scots) Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment RA (TA).		
10 Mar 1955	The Regiment amalgamated with R Bty of 471 Regiment, and with 514 & 519 Regiments to create 432 Light Anti- Aircraft Regiment RA (TA), comprising; P (Queen's Edinburgh Royal Scots) Bty Q (West Lothian Royal Scots) Bty R (City of Edinburgh) Bty		
1 May 1961	Regiment transferred to Corps of Royal Engineers and "Queen's Edinburgh" title ceased to exist.		

**Lieutenant Colonel David Jack** 

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

The Journal of the Royal Artillery

Book Reviews



Tel: 07970 712 852 rick@rickjenningsconsultant.co.uk





Firstly, by means of introduction I am Rick Jennings an Independent Silver Consultant based in South Yorkshire

I offer a wide range of services that stem from providing accurate valuations for bespoke military centrepieces, through to sporting trophies and numerous other pieces of silverware that I know often provide organisations with a unique link to their heritage.

I have a wealth of experience in the silver trade and understand the historic significance attached to Corps/Regimental Silver, some of which is irreplaceable, hence the importance of an accurate insurance valuation. I have specialised in providing insurance valuations and with over 20 years' experience working with over 100 Army Regiments, the Army Sports Control Board, The RAF, Sports Clubs, Manor Houses and Museums I am uniquely placed to provide Specialist insurance valuations which includes a full and comprehensive database and corresponding images of all pieces valued.





#### What Our Clients Say

If you want the best look no further than Rick Jennings, an Independent Silver Consultant who continues to exceed our expectations on all levels. In addition to his in-depth expertise as a highly experienced individual, his prompt response to queries, his thoughtful advice and guidance and, the speedy delivery of a perfectly laid-out valuation report neatly summarise the outstanding service he provides to his customers. The Regimental Headquarters of the Royal Logistic Corps appreciates the work to date, would have no hesitation in recommending your services to others and looks forward to working with you in the future.

Stephen Yafai, The RLC Regimental Secretary, RHQ The RLC

If you are interested in finding out more about our services, please get in touch for a chat and a free independent consultation by emailing <a href="mailto:rick@rickjenningsconsultant.co.uk">rick@rickjenningsconsultant.co.uk</a> or call me on 07970 712 852

# **Book Reviews**



### The Woolwich Rotunda

From waltzes to wargames



The Woolwich Rotunda
From waltzes to wargames
By Emily Cole, Sarah Newsome and Verena
McCaig
Published by Liverpool University Press on
28 June 2025
Paperback, pp 208
ISBN: 9781836244592

his soft-cover Historic England publication is a light and enjoyable read at under 180 pages with plenty of illustrations, which traces the story of the two very different lives of the Rotunda building. The first was as the Prince Regent's huge, tented ballroom on the Mall from 1814-18, and the second as an artillery museum in Woolwich from 1818 to 2000, since when it has faced an uncertain future after its emptying out following the establishment of the Firepower Museum. The book aims to highlight its historic importance and uniqueness, and thus draw support for its continued preservation.

There are many familiar names in the Acknowledgements, from the RA Museum,

the RA Historical Society, and Larkhill Garrison, giving the reader confidence that this is a historically accurate piece of research, with many fascinating details of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Woolwich and the Royal Military Repository.

Originally known as the 'polygon building', the Rotunda was designed by the Prince Regent's favourite architect, John Nash as a temporary ballroom in the form of a giant polygonal tent pitched in the gardens of the Prince's London home, Carlton House, Westminster. The Rotunda was one of a number of temporary structures erected as part of the celebrations of the 'False Peace' following the abdication of the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte in April 1814. It was first used in July that year to hold the 'Wellington Fete', a grand all-night party for 2,500 guests to honour the Duke of Wellington on his return in Field Marshal's uniform from six years of Peninsular campaigning.

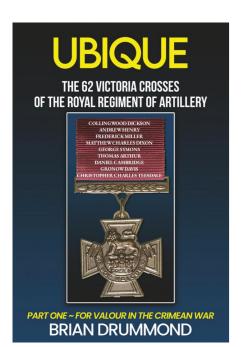
By 1818 the Rotunda and associated temporary structures were increasingly neglected, and that Summer the Prince Regent directed that the Rotunda be moved to Woolwich for 'the conservation of the trophies obtained in the last war, the artillery models, and other military curiosities usually preserved in the Repository of the Royal Artillery.' He was influenced in his repurposing decision by a personal favourite. Sir William Congreve (the younger), inventor of the eponymous rocket, and Superintendent of the Royal Military Repository. By November 1818 the Rotunda was re-erected in the Repository grounds in Woolwich. The Repository grounds included a linear training fortification, artificial lakes, slopes and defiles, and and was one of the earliest purpose-built training landscapes in Europe. It had been developed by the senior William Congreve by 1774, as a school for teaching the mounting, dismounting and manoeuvre of heavy guns for both the Royal Artillery and the Royal Military Academy. By May 1820 the canvas tent was ready for its new museum role, encased within a circular brick wall, roofed with weatherboards and a painted canvas outer covering, and strengthened to take the weight of the new roof by inserting a sandstone Doric column in the centre of the interior.

For the next 180 years the Rotunda was the home of the Repository's evergrowing collections; the younger Congreve compiled the museum's first catalogue in 1822, with the forward-looking aim of not just being 'an archive of everyday war' but also an inspiration for further technological developments. Open to the general public from the start, it was later championed by Major General Sir John Lefroy, scientist, War Office official and one of the founders in 1838 of the RA Institute, formed for the education of artillery officers on all subjects of professional and scientific interest. He rose to become Secretary and then President of the Ordnance Select Committee, and as such was responsible for a new catalogue of the Museum of Artillery in 1864, the building of a small northern extension to house small arms, and the reroofing of the whole building with lead sheeting.

The Rotunda is now Grade II\* listed, but has been on the National Heritage at Risk Register since 2007, and in late 2022 with the roof visibly failing, the canvas inner lining and rope swags were removed to allow scaffolding support to be inserted. This can only be a temporary solution, and a new role or roles for are now urgently sought for the third phase of this unique building's eventful life.

## By Lieutenant Colonel Peter Thompson

68 Autumn 2025



Ubique, the 62 Victoria Crosses of the Royal Regiment of Artillery

Part One - For Valour in the Crimean War By Brian Drummond

Published by Barnthorn Publishing Ltd on 11 Jan 25

Paperback, pp 365 ISBN 978-1917120180

Prian Drummond served for 23 years in the Royal Artillery with 3rd RHA, 5th Regt RA, 25th Regt RA and finally as RSM of 101st Regt RA. A passionate historian, this is the first of six volumes where the author sets out the context of each of the Gunner VCs awarded for actions during the Crimean War. Brian fills a valuable gap in the Gunner historiography by bringing the stories of all 62 Royal Artillery VCs together into one set of dedicated volumes.

The awards and their circumstances act as the framework for a wider understanding of social, political and economic context; the careers and family backgrounds of the recipients together with the campaigns in which their act or acts of valour took place. The author includes the Royal Warrant of 29th January 1856 which sets the conditions for the award of the Victoria Cross. There is a noticeable and probably unsurprising centrality of Woolwich in many of the stories and a number of the recipients cited in this first volume are buried in the local area. Plymouth and The Royal Citadel also feature in several narratives.

It is also noticeable from the author's portraval that the nature of the award is not quite the same as it is today. 111 medals were awarded for Crimea. Today's campaigns would see a pyramid of awards with the majority being CGC, MC, DSO, KCVS and MID, with the VC being reserved for the very highest acts of valour and awarded in very small numbers. The DSM was introduced in 1854 and was presented to and highly prized by other ranks. The author highlights that there was widespread distribution of state awards too along with foreign orders and campaign medals, the wearing of which is evidently not as tightly regulated as it is todav.

There is a sense that valorous acts were 'easier' to accomplish and survive (posthumous awards were not considered until 1902) in the age of musket, muzzle loading cannon, sword and lance whereas some 40 years later on the Veldt, or later on the Western Front, any such attempted act of courage would be sanctioned by accurate and deadly fire. Brian takes the reader into the complicated world of brevet ra nk against regimental rank and the original organisation of the Royal Regiment which saw the Gunners organised into companies and battalions which then formed batteries on campaign (or as part of a fortress) with the horse teams and their drivers being sourced separately (only the RHA came as formed batteries – albeit known as 'Troops').

The author's description of the Crimean War is essential in order to understand the long-forgotten detail of this campaign from another era, but which today holds tragic geographical relevance. In his introductory remarks the author acknowledges his potential errors and occasionally there is some loose language and the odd spelling or grammatical error but these do not detract from the overall quality of the work which is very readable. There is also some copy and paste from Royal Artillery heritage publications which in some cases represents an efficient means of conveying background information but the Royal Artillery Museum update on page 56 can probably be removed from later additions. The author is inevitably challenged by the fact that the Crimean War background detail does not need to be repeated for each recipient and this challenge is the greater when there are numerous recipients for the same action. This leads to looking elsewhere for material with forays into biographies and circumstances that are not always of immediate relevance to the main subject.

Collingwood Dickson's story is truly fascinating; a member of the British Legion in the Carlist War in Spain and an officer whose career is as impressive in its technical depth as it is in the operational sphere. His father was Wellington's CRA, Sir Alexander Dickson, who went on to become the Master Gunner of St James' Park. This was also to be Collingwood's destiny. He bears the distinction of being the first Gunner VC and distinguished himself at the siege of Sebastopol on 17th October 1854 where he commanded the essential resupply of gunpowder while under fire. His overall conduct throughout the campaign is noteworthy for his energy, leadership and skill. He further distinguished himself at Inkerman on the following 5th November where he withdrew two 18 pounders from the siege batteries to engage Russian guns to great effect with counter battery fire during their large scale sortie. He went on to be attached to the Turkish army in the Kertch expedition to secure the entry to the sea of Azov, first as a brigadier and later as a major general. Of note, he had already served in the Ottoman Empire as part of a British training mission in the 1840s and spoke Arabic. In later life he rose to the rank of general, was knighted and made a Companion of the Bath. On retirement in 1885, he served as the Master Gunner from 1891 to 1904. He is buried in Kensal Green alongside fourteen other holders of the VC.

Andrew Henry was a sergeant major with the 4th Company of the 11th Battalion Royal Artillery, now 49 (Inkerman) Battery. He was from the Woolwich area and started his military service with the Royal Artillery Band. His company formed a mixed battery of four 9 pounder guns and two 24 pounder howitzers: one of two batteries in the 2nd Division. This shows how limited the field artillery component of an eight battalion strong infantry division was in 1854 compared to what it could become half a decade later. At the battle of Inkerman, Henry commanded gun number six and defended his piece against a Russian attack under the cover of the fog and rain. In the defence of the colours, he was bayonetted in twelve places but survived. He went on to commission and completed his military service with the Coastal Artillery in Plymouth, where he died aged 46 and is buried in Ford Park cemetery within the city.

Frederick Miller's life and VC was covered in fabulous detail by Major Mark Martin in an RAHS webinar in February 2024.<sup>1</sup> Miller also defended his guns against the Russian sortie at Inkerman and is remarkable on the basis that his award was made after the deadline for recommendations and was based on his own application for recognition which was entirely within the conditions set out in the Royal Warrant. Of note, this narrative sees the author made a segue into the life and death of another gunner, Major General Thomas Fox-Strangways, veteran of Waterloo, who received the Russian Order of St Anne at the Battle of the Nations (Leipzig 1813) and was wearing it when he fell at Inkerman to Russian gunfire. Miller went on to be a history lecturer at the Royal Military Academy Woolwich.

Academy Woolwich. Matthew Dixon was awarded the VC for maintaining fire against the enemy despite his battery having been blown up when an enemy shell penetrated the magazine of his siege works. His early career saw him serve for eight years in the coast artillery in Ceylon and then at The Royal Citadel in Plymouth. He concluded his career as a major general. George Simmonds was a sergeant at the time of the action that led to his award. There is an interesting side track in his story which leads to Bridlington when he becomes the administrative officer of a volunteer unit and is present during the Great Gale of 1871. The author also talks to the institution of the DCM which is finally superseded in 1993 by the CGC. The author uses gravestone inscriptions to inspire and inform his narrative and offers a What Three Words (W3W) location description to take the reader to the tomb of the VC recipient.

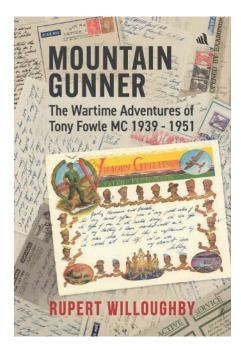
Gunner Thomas Arthur is cited for two actions on 7th June and 18th June 1855 during the assaults on the Redan where he carried powder to the infantry. Bombardier Daniel Cambridge was injured while evacuating infantry wounded from the final assault on the Redan on 8th September 1855 for which he volunteered to join the party that was to spike the enemy guns. The commander of this raiding party of some twenty gunners, was Captain Gronow Davis who also received the VC for his actions that day. In addition to his VC and British Crimea medal, he was also awarded a Turkish order and campaign medal. Other VC recipients also received French and Sardinian decorations.

The last recipient in Brian Drummond's first volume is Charles Teesdale. He is the eighth Crimean War Gunner VC but is unique in that his service was not in the Crimean Peninsula. He is cited for his actions in the defence of the Turkish fortress at Kars on 29th September 1855. He too served at Woolwich and The Royal Citadel, Plymouth and at one point, he lived in Bristol. As ADC to Colonel

William Williams RA who was the commander of the Turkish Garrison, as a major general and pasha in the Turkish service,<sup>2</sup> Teesdale himself while being a Gunner lieutenant was gazetted as a lieutenant colonel in the Ottoman Army. Brian embellishes the narrative by describing several of the allied officers present at the siege of Kars and the wider theatre. The siege was to last from 18th June until 25th November 1855 where the 40,000 strong Russian force sought to starve out the defending garrison of 17,000. On 29th September the Russians attacked, and Teesdale was commanding the guns in the central redoubt from where he led a counterattack and, in the aftermath, prevented Turkish reprisals for which he earned the gratitude of Russians. His letter to his father is included by the author and is most valuable in its description of the action, like that of Andrew Henry above to his brother, in offering a very personal account. When Kars was surrendered, the besieging Russians offered the garrison the honours of war and the British officers were invited to retain their swords. Teesdale bears the distinction of being the first South African born officer to receive the VC and left the army with the rank of major general.

So, in this first volume of six, Brian Drummond has offered us an excellent and very clear portrayal of the first nine Gunner VC holders. Once completed, this will be a remarkable piece of scholarship which provides the Gunner historiography with a complete set of accounts of the 62 medals awarded to the Royal Regiment of Artillery and their recipients set in the context of both campaign and career. We look forward to the second volume.

#### By Brigadier Jon Cresswell



Mountain Gunner
The Wartime Adventures of
Tony Fowle MC 1939-1951
By Rupert Willoughby
Published by Chiselbury Publishing 1 October
2025
Hardback, pp 324
ISBN: 978-1-917837-12-5

iven its title 'Mountain Gunner', it would be a mistake to assume that this book was a treatise on the Mountain Regiments, their equipment, tactics and a detailed history of their operations; it is not. However, it is more the story of one young man's ambition and determination to join a Mountain Regiment and to earn, in his view, that coveted recognition of being a Mountain Gunner.

The book is a thoroughly interesting read. It has been written on the instigation of Lt Col Tony Fowle's four (adult) children who, in their own foreword, admit to having viewed their father as a "rather conventional figure, slightly old-fashioned in his tweed jacket with his pipe in hand, and perhaps, a tiny bit boring". In their school years they did not think of him as a "Cool Dad" nor in their view, having led an exciting or glamourous life. On his death in 2016, they discovered in his effects, some 230 personal letters that he had written to his parents over the period from 1938 to 1951. It changed their view totally and revealed the younger father with the attributes that they longed for, but which older age and a sedentary civilian career had masked.

1. RAHS Webinar 20 Feb 24 Frederick Miller VC.v

2. Like Dickson, he too had served on loan as part of an advisory mission to the Ottoman Army in the 1840s. He went on to command in Canada.

**Book Reviews** The Journal of the Royal Artillery The Journal of the Royal Artillery **Book Reviews** 

The letters were given to the author, Rupert Willoughby, to compile into book form. They span his last year at school and his waiting (working in the forestry commission in Scotland) until old enough to ioin up and seek a Gunner Commission. The book takes the reader through Tony's war in N. Africa then a transfer into the Indian Army and service across Palestine, Iraq, Persia and Syria, a theatre that probably not many know existed. The reader is then drawn through time spent with a Mountain Regt (Tony's ultimate goal) in Peshawar, into post war India and the Partition, and onward to the Korean War. The original letters themselves were obviously typical of wartime correspondence i.e. they were heavily censored with little or no mention of units, deployment areas or key operations. They served mainly to reassure his parents that he was 'safe and sound' in his area of operations.

The 230 letters have provided the author (Willoughby) with the basic timeline and framework on which to construct the book and to create a seamless narrative. He has made a considerable effort, with the benefit of post war history and military records, to fill in the gaps and information that were not included due to security and censorship at the time. A small observation is that the author (Willoughby) frequently references certain events to a particular letter (e.g. Letter 85 or 159), but this referencing serves little purpose for the reader as there is no access to the actual letters if one wished to follow up the referenced point.

We have the story of a young man already adapted to outdoor living who, in a different age may well have been a military or political officer involved in the 'Great Game' of the mid to late 1800s or with T.E. Lawrence's Arab Revolt during WW1 or, as an explorer such as Thesiger. He had an ability to master languages, amongst them Arabic, Pashtu and Urdu. He appears as one who was physically fit and thrived on Spartan living in severe terrain and climates. His letters home provide a fascinating account of a subaltern in WW2. He recounts the troopship journey via S. Africa up to Egypt and into N. Africa.

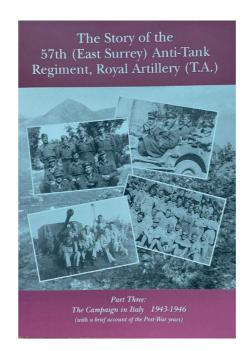
He records the system in place to hold Battlefield Casualty Replacements (BCR) and the expectation that you had to be able to move within 24hrs to an unknown unit deployed somewhere and get yourself there. He had a brief sojourn as a member of 2 RHA in actions in the Western Desert and the Battle of Knightsbridge and how he was luckily, away from the Regt when it was overrun at Mersa Matruh. Posted then to 2nd Indian Fd Regt, a step closer to a Mountain Regiment, he recounts the solo journeys he had to make from Egypt, up through Palestine, and then into Iraq to try to find his Regt which formed part of the Persia and Iraq Force (PAIF) and which had been deployed to defend the oil fields of the region. His travels over weeks also involved him being 'Shanghaied' by 1st Indian A/Tk Regt as a temporary Adjt until finally finding his Regt's location. Names of places, familiar to those who have served in the modern Iraq wars abound and have a familiarity to them (names and locations being latterly deduced by the author's research).

1944 saw Tony Fowle finally realising his ambition of joining a Mountain Regt (29th Indian Mountain Regt). The Regt was based in Peshawar, in the then India. Unfortunately for Tony the Regt was in action in Burma, and he was unable to join it until he had completed an intelligence assignment in Syria; by which time the Regt had returned and he missed the chance of action against the Japanese. He remained in Peshawar on and off with the Mountain Regt until the Partition in 1947, where he witnesses and records the brutal and pointless slaughter of both Moslem and Hindu refugees numbering a million (+). After a UK Gunnery Staff Course in which he excelled, he returned to the newly formed Pakistani Artillery School and records amongst other things, the early fighting over Kashmir. He expresses very forthright views as to the cause; namely poor governance and border delineation by the British during Partition. He also recounts the real risk of British Officers on secondment to either the Pakistan or Indian militaries, getting drawn into the conflict where they might end up fighting each other.

The latter part of the book covers Tony's deployment to Korea in 1951 and his part in the ensuing battles of Imjin and its immediate locale. Here he operated as a Tp Comd in 170 (Independent) Mortar Bty RA. He had some very close encounters with the Chinese forces but one, was a typically British incident. He broke the rules and went fly fishing in a river outside the defended perimeter. He suddenly became aware of a patrol of Chinese infantrymen who had sneaked up on him and who were watching the mad Englishman fishing. Trusting to a belief that it would be very poor form to shoot a chap armed only with a fly rod, he casually offered his quite sizeable catch to the Chinese patrol who accepted it with great alacrity. As they moved off, he casually returned to his casting with his heart in his mouth - until they were out of sight, then he beat a hasty retreat and got back within the perimeter! Tony's descriptions of the living and fighting conditions in Korea. especially in winter, form a good individual's record. It was during the actions of the Imjin Battle and other engagements in the area

The book is an enjoyable read. It is the descriptions of one man's war and the adventures trials and tribulations undertaken and for the most part overcome. It makes a refreshing change from the normal 'big picture' accounts. It also describes other less known theatres of war (e.g. The PAIF and crossing a route (MSR) with British supply trucks and supplies being driven by Russian soldiers up to the Russian border). He has an ability in his letters home to bring to life what the world was like in the '40s and early '50s, with remarkably good descriptions of life in the regimental areas, of the rugged terrain and climate, of the flora and fauna local to him and his obvious ability to get on with (or to fight), the local tribesmen. These along with detailed descriptions of ancient Babylonian towns and cities that he took the opportunity to explore, all combine to make the book a different and refreshing read which I can recommend.

#### By Major Bob Begbie



The Story of the 57th (East Surrey) Anti-Tank Regiment, Royal Artillery (T.A.) Part Three: The Campaign in Italy 1943-46 By Ray Goodacre Printed by Precision Proco, Sheffield https://precisionproco.co.uk Paperback, pp 185 ISBN 978-0-9555780-3-8

his third and final instalment in the regimental history of the 57th (East Surrey) Anti-Tank Regiment, Royal Artillery (T.A.) provides a fitting conclusion to a meticulously documented wartime journey. Focusing on the regiment's role in the Italian campaign from 1943 to 1946, the book covers a less widely appreciated theatre of the Second World War with impressive depth, clarity, and pride in the regiment's undertakings. It stands as a valuable contribution to both the history of one unit, as well as the impact the size of the Royal Artillery had in World War Two.

Beginning, with a short preface on the Regiment's history prior to arrival in southern Italy, author Ray Goodacre succinctly summarises the previous two books on the 57th; however those seeking the full story would undoubtedly benefit from reading the entire trilogy. Moving into the end of 1943 Ray Goodacre, moves swiftly into the landings at Salerno in September 1943. From there, the regiment's story unfolds across a series of hard-fought campaigns, including key operations along the Volturno and Garigliano rivers, the infamous Anzio beachhead, the brutal mountain fighting

that led to the breaching of the Gothic Line in 1944. It closes with the final year of the war with the regiment being brought into action along the Senio River and during the final push northwards to the Po and beyond, culminating in a post war role during the Trieste crisis.

This volume's strength lies in its detail. The text reflects a deep engagement with regimental war diaries, operational reports, and personal recollections. Rather than presenting a dry chronological account, he offers a rich and textured narrative, capturing the complexity of the regiment's taskings, demonstrating how as the campaign evolved, the 57th was often employed in roles far beyond its core anti-tank function; including infantry duties, mortar support, and transport operations. This adaptability, a hallmark of the regiment, is skilfully brought to life.

Of particular note is the description of life at Anzio. Here, the regiment operated under extreme pressure for four months in a confined and exposed beachhead, regularly under fire and facing the ever present threat of counterattack. The book conveys not only the tactical challenges but also the psychological strain endured by the men. The Italian terrain; mountainous, exposed, and demanding, posed a constant challenge, not only operationally but also logistically, and the author does well to articulate how the 57th met these obstacles with professionalism, grit and

The inclusion of maps, photographs and further appendices enhances the book's value as a reference work. Detailed charts showing unit movements, structures, and battle plans, help to orient the reader and contextualise the regiment's actions. A further testament to the work of the author, is the inclusion of a roll of honour of the seven men killed in operations between 1944 and 1946, as well as the names of the two Gunners awarded the Military Medal for their actions in the campaigns; Sgt George F Falcolner and Sgt Lawrence T Behan, something often missed as authors focus on Grand Strategy and the commanders.

This is very much a regimental history, and proudly so. The author makes no attempt to offer a grand strategic analysis of the Italian theatre: rather, he focuses on the daily experiences, actions, and hardships of the men of the 57th. It is this focus that gives the book its authenticity and emotional resonance. While the broader movements of armies and corps are acknowledged, they are only discussed in so far as to how they affected around Cassino, and the drawn-out battles the regiment and whilst this narrow lens

may limit the book's appeal to a general readership, for those with a connection to the unit or an interest in the realities of the application of anti-tank capabilities in a conventional war then this is an excellent

Throughout the account, it is clear that Ray Goodacre's passion for the Royal Artillery in the Second World War, has driven him to create a thoroughly researched, clearly written, and deeply respectful tribute to the men who served in the 57th (East Surrey) Anti-Tank Regiment. Crucially it opens up the readers to the actions of ordinary men, thrown into extraordinary circumstances, offering a unique insight into the, overlooked Italian campaign. It highlights the vital and versatile contributions of anti-tank units in an evolving combat environment. For veterans, families, historians, and enthusiasts of regimental history, this volume is an essential and rewarding read, and I commend Ray Goodacre on his

#### By Matthew Yuill

72 Autumn 2025 Autumn 2025 73 Letters and Submissions The Journal of the Royal Artillery The Journal of the Royal Artillery Royal Artillery The Journal of the Royal Artillery The Journal

#### Letters to the Editor

Sir.

The article about D Day Gunners in the Autumn 2024 Journal was of great interest to me as my father, Captain James (Jim) Harrison commanded E troop of 324 Battery, 103 (Heavy Anti-Aircraft) Regiment and landed on Sword at about H+4 on D Day with his Advance Party on White sector of Queen. I still have his original air photographs issued on the Landing Craft. The guns, radars and equipment were to land that night. Some did!

He was wounded that evening by a stray German bomber dropping armour piercing bombs near the Hermanville Cross Roads. He remained in action until about D+5 or 6 when he was evacuated home. He was MID.

On D day they did have the satisfaction of seeing the one gun that did come ashore (from "A" troop 322 Battery, sited near Coleville) shoot down, apparently with one round, a JU 88 that then crashed almost on top of them.

Most of the Regiment came ashore that night and on D+1, and almost all were in action by D+2; the AAOR (Anti Aircraft Operations Room) and RHQ by D+4. Most of the delays in landing

were apparently "due to the Rhino Ferries being completely useless for the most part"!

The Regiment was part of 80 AA (Anti-Aircraft) Brigade, with 73 LAA (Light Anti-Aircraft), 86 (HAC) (Honourable Artillery Company) HAA (Heavy Anti-Aircraft) Regiment & 114 LAA Regiment who all trained as AA Assault groups with 3 Division... There is very little about them in the various books on Gunners & Sword Beach except in the tables. They were very busy though... firing 4728 rounds from 6-13 June...no less than 3600 being in the Field role!

Sincerely, David Harrison (Captain, Royal Artillery ...... Long Retired)

Information & quotations from my father's copy of the 103 Regiment Royal Artillery History May 1940 - Nov 1945.

## **Letters and Submissions**

The correspondence page of any professional journal is extremely important allowing, as it does, readers to air their views, comment on articles and correct any mistakes. The Editor therefore invites letters and emails from readers. A guide on the submission of letters and articles is given below.

#### Letters to the Editor

he Editor welcomes correspondence from readers on articles or book reviews and other matters arising from discussions in The Journal of the Royal Artillery.

Please mark all letters for the attention of the Editor, and send either by email to: RARHQ-RAJ@artycen.ra.mod.uk or by post to: The Journal of the Royal Artillery, RHQ RA, Royal Artillery Barracks, Larkhill, Salisbury SP4 8OT.

Letters should be no more than 700 words.

Publication in the Journal is at the discretion of the Editor. Offensive or anonymous letters will not be considered.

#### Submissions

The Editor invites the submission of unpublished manuscripts on all topics related to national and international defence and to the organisation, application and future development of artillery in all its forms, and military history with an artillery slant. Published articles will become the copyright of the RAI.

Guidelines for submissions are:

- Articles should be the author's original work. Where the work of other authors is quoted this must be clearly stipulated either within the text or as an endnote.
- Articles should be relevant to the Journal's defence and artillery focus
- Submissions should be between 2,000 and 6,000 words and should be fully referenced by endnotes. Responsibility for factual accuracy lies with the author.

- Pictures, tables or artwork should be supplied separately in highresolution (minimum 300dpi) and not embedded in the text. Authors must ensure they have permission to use any supplied imagery. If asked, the Editor may be able to help with copyright issues.
- Submissions should be sent electronically by email as Microsoft Word files. Please include a brief biography and contact details and send to: RARHQ-RAJ@artycen.ra.mod.uk
- If accepted for publication articles will be edited to meet the Journal's house style. The Editor reserves the right to make alterations for space and clarity.
- Anonymous articles will be accepted under a pen name, but the author must disclose his or her identity, in confidence, to the Editor.
- Authors are not paid. However, they will receive complimentary copies of the issue in which they are published.

#### **Book Reviews**

The Editor welcomes the submission of unpublished reviews of important or useful new books on all aspects of defence and artillery. Reviews should be submitted in line with the guidelines for articles above and should be between 700 to 1,000 words. Wherever possible a high resolution picture of the book's cover should be submitted, as should details of the publisher and where it can be purchased. If you would like to suggest yourself as a reviewer for a newly published book please contact the Editor. Book reviewers are not paid, but where appropriate will be allowed to keep the copy of any book they are sent.

# Royal Artillery Historical Society 2025/26 Programme

Date and Timings	Event	Subject	Lecturer/Lead	Bookings Close
Wednesday 19 November 1930 hrs	Webinar	Lessons Learnt: Constructing the 1914 British Expeditionary Force	Dr Spencer Jones RA Regimental Historian	Friday 14 November
2026	THEME	ARMED READINESS		
Wednesday 21 January 1930 hrs	Webinar	Panic in London: Gothas, Bombs and Rockets in Two World Wars	Dr Linda Parker Author & Secretary British Modern Military History Society	Sunday 18 January
Wednesday 25 February 1930 hrs	Webinar	The Brassington Animations Part 2. 12.5in RML Gun 1885. 12in Siege Howitzer 1918.	Mr Rob Brassington Animal Creator	Sunday 22 February
Wednesday 15 April 1045 to 1600 hrs	Congreve Lecture Day and AGM. Lunch in RA Mess Artillery Centre Larkhill	Fishguard 1797: The Last Invasion of Britain. The Royal Garrison Artillery 1899-1924	Mr Phil Carradice Author Mr Philip Magrath Curator of Artillery RA Museum	Wednesday 1 April
Wednesday 24 June 1930 hrs	Webinar	Ready for the Wrong War: the Fate of Hannover and the German States 1866	Col Michael Phillips	Sunday 21 June

Please book places with the RA Historical Society Secretary: Lt Col R S (Dick) Clayton, 10 Harnwood Road, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP2 8DD

E Mail: richard.clayton312@gmail.com

74 Autumn 2025 75 Aut



# FOR ON AND OFF DUTY



