

PART 7

In time of National Emergency: War-Raised and Auxiliary Units



Members of the 25th County of London (Blackheath) Battalion of the Home Guard on Exercise



The Royal Naval Division The Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve

The Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve was formed under the Naval Forces Act of 1903.

RNVR units were established as Divisions in London, The Clyde, Sussex, Bristol, Edinburgh and Tynside.

The London Division quickly recruited over 1,000 volunteers, who mostly lived and worked in and around the County of London and the City.

Training facilities were made available on the River Thames with the release of two former warships of the Royal Navy for use by the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. In addition, the London Division from their own resources purchased an old warehouse in Commercial Road, Lambeth, to use as a Drill Hall. This facility proved invaluable in providing a venue where all personnel in the Division could muster together when required.

A two-week training course at sea formed part of the annual training tests for all RNVR personnel.

The Royal Navy and its Reserves mobilised on 1st August 1914. However, it was quickly realised that the numbers generated by the call out of both the RNVR and the Regular Reserves of the Royal Navy would overwhelm the training facilities available, and in addition, it was calculated that the fleet could never find enough places for all the available reservists.

It was at this point that the First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr Winston Churchill, announced that all categories of naval reservists not required for sea duty would be directed for service on land. Churchill's idea was that all naval reservists not required for sea duty should be trained as sailors serving ashore as soldiers, so relieving the hard pressed infantry of the line. Sailors serving on land was not in itself a new idea.

Thus was born the Royal Naval Division (RND). The plan was not universally popular; neither at the Admiralty nor amongst the reservists themselves. There were, however, several points in the detail of the plan that would make it a little more acceptable to the bitterly disappointed members of the RNVR whose aspirations of joining the high seas fleet in the country's hour of need had been dashed overnight.

Although the general structure of the Division would be the same as the Army, the RND would remain under the control of the Admiralty. The Battalion Commanders would be Naval Officers and the terminology, rank structure and dress would remain that of the Senior Service.

Although later in the war many aspects of the RND would change, initially it comprised two naval Brigades and a third Brigade made up of reservists from the Royal Marine Light Infantry. Each Brigade would comprise of four Battalions. Each Battalion of the naval Brigades were named after famous admirals with the 1st Brigade being Hawke Battalion, Benbow, Drake and Nelson and the 2nd Brigade being Anson, Hood, Collingwood and Howe. Initially, the men from the London Division were spread across the companies of each Battalion, with each company being brought up to strength by Royal Naval regular reserve categories who themselves had not been drafted to the fleet. However, the RND would not reach its required establishment with reservists alone and recruiting offices were set up throughout the country including the London Division Drill Hall at Lambeth. Amongst recruits to the RNVR joining in London were the poet Rupert Brooke and the journalist and political commentator AP Herbert. Both received temporary RNVR commissions.

Initially, the men of the naval Brigades were sent to tented camps at Walmer and Betteshanger in Kent. However, after only six weeks training and preparation for their role as soldiers, they were called upon to support the marine Brigade and the Belgium Army in the defence of the strategically important port facility at Antwerp, where the Germans attacked on 2nd October and were dangerously close after breaking through

the Belgium line. At this stage, the RND had no supporting assets to speak of and the shortage of personal equipment was dire. Each sailor carried 120 rounds and some without bandoliers carried the ammunition in the pockets of their naval uniform. They were equipped with obsolete breech-loading rifles from Navy stock.

However, such was the crisis that by 6th October the RND were manning trenches in front of Antwerp and awaiting the onslaught of a German Army over 60,000 strong; from then on they were dogged with misfortune.

Poor communications and a retreating Belgium Army forced a withdrawal. The two naval Brigades lost 60 men killed and 138 wounded. 436 including 5 Officers were captured and 1,500 who had crossed the border into Holland were interned for the duration of the war. When the losses were known there was a public outcry.

On return to the UK, the RND were assembled at Blandford Camp, Dorset for re-fitting and training.

During this period the naval uniform of blue changed for army khaki field dress with some important exceptions; namely, the navy ranks and insignia were retained as were the sailor's cap and tally band.

Meanwhile, the Admiralty had set up a Divisional depot and training facility at the Crystal Palace in Sydenham, South London.

On the 28th February 1915, the RND sailed for Gallipoli where they suffered many casualties and where Sub-Lieutenant Tisdall, a London Division Officer was to win his VC on 'V' beach.

In May 1916, the RND went to France fighting under the control of the Army and renamed the 63rd Royal Naval Division. The Division was brought up to strength in supporting arms and additional infantry Battalions. The 1/28th (County of London) Battalion The London Regiment, 1/1st Battalion Honourable Artillery Company, 2/2nd (City of London) Battalion The London Regiment and 2/4th (City of London) Battalion The London Regiment all served with the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division.

The Division memorial stands at the left hand corner of the Admiralty building on Horse Guards recording and commemorating the 11,379 members who lost their lives, including 179 from the London Division.



Volunteer Training Corps

The Volunteer Training Corps (VTC) was an organisation that came about with the surge of public enthusiasm to, in some way, give time towards the defence of the realm in Great Britain's hour of need.

Haldane's reforms to the Armed Forces had intended that the new Territorial Force (TF) would be responsible for Home Defence leaving the Regular Army to concentrate on landing an expeditionary force on the mainland of Europe, without the additional responsibility of defending Great Britain if need be.

War was declared against Germany on 4th August 1914 and within 19 days the first shots were fired at Mons by regular British infantry. However, as the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) began its retreat from that Belgian town it became clear that the rate of casualties amongst the BEF meant the reserves of the Regular Army would soon be exhausted. In September 1914, the British Army began to withdraw from its garrisons all over the world closely followed by troops from the armies of the British Empire in order to quickly reinforce the BEF, thus preventing its possible defeat and evacuation back to the UK.

However, before the Regular Army could leave the overseas territories they would have to be replaced, preferably sooner rather than later. The Territorial Force were therefore required to abandon their Home Defence role and instead go to the support of the Regular Army, both in the outposts of the Empire and in France and Belgium.

The result was that a major plank of Home Defence strategy disappeared in a very short space of time.

Shoring up the Defences

The fear of a German invasion of the UK mainland was an ever present threat in one form or another, from the declaration of war until the cessation of hostilities. Throughout that period there were several schemes in place for Homeland defence mainly using training establishments, reserves, Coastal Garrison Artillery and various B graded units. However, at this time there was a group of volunteers who were unable to enlist for a variety of reasons but were prepared to give their time in the capacity of Homeland Defence Auxiliaries later to be known as the Volunteer Training Corps.

The Role

Some, including the volunteers themselves, were quite clear as to which part of the Home Defence plan would be entrusted into their care. This included the defence of key installations such as factories and railway lines or any other establishment within the local area thought to be at risk from saboteurs or an invasion by a determined enemy force, if not a full scale invasion. Initially, when some form of invasion was considered a real threat, the volunteers spent much of their time digging trenches in defence of the Capital. It was, however, the guarding of key points where the VTC would have been most useful if only in relieving regular units for other work more directly involved with the war in Europe.

Recruiting for the VTC

Initially the VTC were recruited, trained and led from within their own community or by a group of like-minded individuals with similar past times. The VTC could not help but be similar in social structure to the Territorial Force and its predecessors, but there the similarity ended, for as much as there was encouragement from the civic community there was only tacit approval from a Government concerned with the cost involved and in addition there was a distinct lack of cooperation from the War Office. However, what was evident was that a military-style volunteer movement some 285,000 strong nationwide needed some form of national leadership and direction. Both came in the form of the volunteer committee that was set up in Finsbury Barracks acting as the Directorate of the organisation.

Whilst there was no shortage of men coming forward to volunteer for the VTC, there was a feeling in Government and from the War Office that apart from those in the organisation who were genuine in their claim to be in a reserved civilian occupation, medically unsuitable, too young or too old for military service, there would be others who would use service with the VTC as an excuse not to volunteer for the Regular Forces or the Territorial Army. As the war progressed and the calls for more men to join the fighting formations increased, so the VTC became a subject for constant scrutiny.

Uniform and Equipment

From its beginnings, the War Office were reluctant to encourage the VTC, but as the casualty lists from the front and the demand for manpower increased, there was some small recognition that the VTC might be useful and the organisation was afforded some small approval in as much as it could undertake basic military training. However, it would not be supplied with weapons or military uniform and would not be allowed to use military ranks. The authority for the members of the VTC to carry out their duties was invested in a red arm band with the letters G R in gold giving the organisation its nickname 'Gorgeous Wrecks'.

Finally, the War Office became responsible for the VTC and the basic military dress, ranks and weaponry were put into place. As a further step towards regularisation, the original central committee was disbanded and the responsibility for the VTC was placed with the Territorial Associations.

Territorial Associations operating within the now Greater London area who were responsible for the VTC:

County of London

City of London

County of Middlesex

County of Essex

County of Surrey

County of Kent

Disbandment

The Volunteer Corps (VTC) was eventually stood down when the German Army was no longer capable of threatening the United Kingdom with invasion. Most of its duties at this stage were taken over by a new Regiment, The Royal Defence Corps.

Throughout WW1, there had been a serious, albeit lessening, threat of invasion and had the VTC been taken seriously by the Government and the War Office from the beginning, then other formations vital to the conduct of the war need not have been so entirely diverted to home defence.

By the outbreak of WW2 the lesson had obviously been learned, in that the Government called for volunteers for the Home Guard (Land Defence Volunteers) to enrol within eight months of war being declared.



The National Reserve

Having established the Territorial Force (TF) in 1908 and the all-important Territorial County Associations, Richard Haldane, the then Secretary of State for War, capitalised on the success of the TF by creating three further Reserve Organisations in 1910.

These organisations were to be known as:

- 1) The Territorial Force Reserve (TFR)
- 2) The Technical Reserve (TR)
- 3) The Veteran Reserve (VR)

The TFR was intended to retain the services of trained Territorials at the conclusion of their engagement in order that they could be recalled for service within their former TF unit, should the need arise. Similarly those leaving the TF or the Regular Army with technical skills could be retained as a reservist in support of the Army in the event of a national emergency situation. The third creation was the Veteran Reserve recruited initially from former regular soldiers and rifle volunteers.

The TFR and the TR proved unpopular from the start and were destined never to reach anything like the numbers envisaged to be viable auxiliary organisations.

The VR (later to be the National Reserve) was successful beyond expectation and in addition to attracting ex-regular soldiers and rifle volunteers, it also proved popular with former Territorials in preference to the TR.

The rapid expansion of the VR came about in spite of the fact that they had no access to uniforms, equipment and accommodation. In addition, there was no training organisation and no commitment on the part of the War Office as to what this reserve of former servicemen should be used for in an emergency.

The Territorial County Associations were made responsible for recruiting through the County Lord-Lieutenants and maintained a county register of volunteers.

In 1910, 1,300 volunteers from Surrey paraded for a review on Horse Guards and in March 1911, Lord Roberts became the VR Colonel-in-Chief.

In August 1911, the organisation's name was changed to the National Reserve (NR) – a much more agreeable title to all. However in spite of this welcome re-branding, the organisation was still little more than a register of names held by the Territorial County Associations. The change in name came with a new set of regulations that indicated some thought being given to the future use of the NR in an emergency situation. Part of the reorganisation involved the NR being divided into 3 categories.

Category 1: Officers under 55 years of age and other ranks under 45 considered fit enough to join a combat unit.

Category 2: Officers between 50 and 60 and men between 50 and 55 considered capable of combat, garrison, guard duties or administration work.

Category 3: Officers and men who did not fit category 1 or 2 but would be retained as influential and community ambassadors for the organisation.

In 1912, there were 36 Battalions of the NR within the County and City of London, totalling around 21,000 volunteers. The National strength at this time was around 76,000 men.

The NR remained without uniform or facilities but the mounting of parades and reviews tended to keep the NR in the public eye as well as attracting influential patronage and public support. In addition, button hole badges were issued to every National Reservist, stylised by county or borough and usually paid for by wealthy benefactors or public subscription.

Apart from the consistent popularity of the NR, the organisation itself remained unsupported in financial terms and without a special role in a National Emergency.

In 1913, the War Office issued new regulations and instructed the Territorial County Associations to trawl their NR registers in an effort to ascertain a realistic assessment of the capability of the organisation. The survey would involve a further classification, re-identifying NR volunteers as:

Class 1: Officers and other ranks fit enough to serve at home or abroad.

Class 2: Officers and senior NCOs under 55 and men under 50 fit enough for home defence in state positions or administrative work.

Class 3: Here reservists were subdivided into sections – those who declined any obligation but were fit and able enough to qualify for Classes 1 and 2, those who were considered for Classes 1 and 2, and those who were considered not suitable for any military service. Such men were considered as ‘honorary’ members permitted to attend drills and social events.

Class 1 and 2 men, although not specifically required to formally take on a military commitment in terms of mobilisation, were in fact asked to sign an ‘Honourable Obligation’ in that they would volunteer for active service in time of National Emergency.

On the declaration of War on 4th August 1914, many National Reservists did not wait to be mobilised but instead immediately joined the TF or re-joined the Regular Army or the Royal Navy. Those who reported to the Barracks of their former Regiments were immediately posted to the Special Reserve Battalions and were soon placed in reinforcement drafts on their way to France. The County Territorial Associations were requested by the War Office to encourage ex-senior NCOs who had not yet enlisted to volunteer as instructors for Kitcheners ‘New Army’.

Shortly after the war began, most County Associations could no longer wait for definitive instructions on what to do with the remaining mostly Class 3 men and proceeded to mobilise their NR, in some cases providing them with uniform from TF stocks relying on the War Office to provide weapons and ammunition.

Once mobilised, the NR were employed on guarding key points the length and breadth of the land including railway lines, bridges and factory installations. These groups were known as ‘protection companies’. This was uncomfortable work but it released the Territorial Force to continue training, ready for their eventual deployment overseas. In mid-1915 it was decided to reduce the number of protection companies. Officers and men fit enough to march 10 miles with rifle and 150 rounds and Class 2 reservists still within protection companies were invited to volunteer for service in the new provisional Battalions, soon to become part of the Rifle Brigade. These units were given titles reflecting the area where the protection companies had come from – therefore companies from London became the 18th (London) Battalion The Rifle Brigade.

In March 1915, the remaining protection companies became superumerary companies of the Territorial Force.

In 1916, the War Office placed the superumerary companies of the Territorial Force under central administration of the City of London Territorial Association, who eventually were further tasked with the amalgamation of the companies to form the Royal Defence Corps.

In mid-1916, the War Office instructed the County Associations to close their NR register, heralding the end of the National Reserve.

Conclusion

The NR was an organisation that, in spite of minimum encouragement from the Government, presented a consistently high rate of recruitment. When the call came they were not found wanting, whether it be guarding key points at home to providing immediate support to the hard pressed British Expeditionary Force in the early months of the conflict.

The successors to the NR were the Royal Defence Corps which was not disbanded as a Regiment until 1937, by which time it had become a Regular formation.



The Home Guard

The Home Guard was formed in May 1940 in response to the expected invasion of the United Kingdom by German armed forces, in particular airborne troops.

Originally called the Land Defence Volunteers (LDV), the Home Secretary at the time, Anthony Eden, broadcast nationally on 14th May 1940 calling for volunteers for the new organisation to give their names in at their local police station. Within seven days, over 250,000 Volunteers had stepped forward.

As with the Volunteer Training Corps formed for Home Defence at the start of WW1, the War Office would not permit the LDV to use military ranks and the leadership element of the organisation automatically projected itself from veterans of previous conflicts, industrial management and natural leaders. A Land Defence Volunteer armband was worn in order to allow the volunteers to carry out their duties with some legal standing, but the issue of sufficient weaponry and uniforms was still some months away.

On 22nd July 1940 and at the insistence of the Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the LDV became the Home Guard.

The Role of the Home Guard

As with any home defence organisation, the Home Guard had an advantage over the enemy in that it was familiar with the towns, villages, industrial complexes and public services that it would be defending whereas the enemy forces would not.

Initially the plan was that this lightly armed force would simply guard key points such as public service utilities, transport links and centres of communication, all essential to the war effort of the United Kingdom. Should there be a full scale invasion, then the Home Guard would face the enemy in whatever form and take its chances with other combat formations in the defence of the United Kingdom.

In the event, the Home Guard had to adapt and take on new roles as the war progressed including anti-aircraft and searchlight operations, prisoner escorts and assistance to the civil defence organisations.

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the ending of WW2, some veteran Home Guardsmen now released from the strictures of the Official Secrets Act gave details of hitherto unknown training for covert activities by specially selected Home Guard personnel.

The Volunteer

Generally speaking, volunteers for the Home Guard would be aged between 17 and 65 and would be either medically downgraded for fulltime military service, employed in a reserve occupation or waiting to be called up for the regular services. The Home Guardsman would need to be of average fitness for his age. Within Greater London, his clothing and equipment would be supplied by any one of three Territorial Auxiliary and Air Force Associations depending on the location of his unit. The three administering associations were County of London, City of London and County of Middlesex.

Home Guard duties were fitted in around the individual civilian occupation. Personal weapons, clothing and equipment were kept at home or at certain times of high emergency kept nearby in the work place. In 1940, the Home Guardsman living within the London district area of control (now Greater London) would join any one of 135 Home Guard Battalions depending on his occupation (i.e. bus drivers and conductors would join one of the seven raised by London Passenger Transport Board).

These Battalions were organised in a similar way to standard infantry of which the smallest operational sub unit was the platoon, whereas Battalion and company headquarters were based in larger premises such as vacated TA Drill Halls. The platoon tended to train and be administered in smaller accommodation such as church halls and work canteens – in fact anywhere that afforded space for training and office facilities for unit administration.

Women were informally invited to join the Home Guard in December 1941. By that date the scope and reach of the Home Guard had expanded to include transport, artillery and specialist units and there was a need for an administration and logistical backup similar to that provided by ATS to the Regular Army.

In 1942, with the threat of invasion passed, the National Service Act allowed for compulsory enrolment where units were falling below strength. The organisation now came under the control of the Regular Army and was integrated into the Regimental system. As well as manning Anti-Aircraft guns and rockets, plus coastal defence artillery, the Home Guard was increasingly seen as a preliminary training ground for young men waiting to be called for regular service.

Command Structure

London District was the Army Command Headquarters within the Greater London area. Once the War Office had assumed control of the Home Guard, the units raised within the Greater London area came under the responsibility of London District who created a Chain of Command structure that divided Greater London into 4 sub areas: North East, North West, South East and South West. Each sub area was further divided into zones of responsibility that broadly coincided with Metropolitan police divisions.

One or more Battalions were responsible for the security of the area covered by their zone. In addition, there were several public utility companies providing essential domestic supplies or transport networks that were allocated their own security Battalions.

'Specialist' units of the Home Guard provided security for the London District military signals network as did smaller operational units such as the 'Upper Thames Patrol'.

There were 135 Battalions under the control of London District; each was numbered according to the chronological order of numbering of Home Guard Battalions within the county that they were recruited. Therefore Home Guard Battalions from the Greater London area and under the control of London District are listed as follows:

Administration of Home Guard zones, groups and specialist units within Greater London by TA and AF Association

The County of London TA and AF Association, Duke of York's Headquarters, Chelsea, SW3

North East Sub Area:	Zone H
South East Sub Area:	Zone D, G and N
South East Sub Area:	Zone L, N, P, R, Z
South West Sub Area:	Zone A, B, F, V, W
Railways:	LMS (London) Broad Street Station London Passenger Transport Group
Public Utilities:	London County Council Group Metropolitan Water Board Central London Electricity Metropolitan Electric Supply Company County of London Electrical Supply Company South Metropolitan Gas Company Wandsworth Gas Company

Special Units: Associated Operators (London District Battalion)
 1st American Squadron
 99th County of London (Taxi) Battalion
 Fisher Renwick & Co Ltd (1st City of London Battalion)
 Middlesex Company 'Upper Thames Patrol'
 HQ London District Signal Company

The City of London TA and AF association, Finsbury Barracks, City Road EC1

North East Sub Area: Zone J, K, C and E

Railways: LMS (London Group) Euston Station
 17th (City of London) (LNER) Battalion

Public Utility Companies: General Post Office
 Post Office London Telephone Communications Region
 Post Office London Postal Region Group
 Port of London Authority
 Metropolitan Transport Supply Company Ltd (No. 2 City of London Transport Battalion)

Middlesex TA and AF association, 20 Grosvenor Gardens SW1

North West Sub Area: Zone S and X
 South West Sub Area: Zone V and T

Battalions located in London County, Middlesex County and the City of London

City of London	1 st to 38 th
County of London	1 st to 59 th
Middlesex	1 st to 31 st

Battalions located in Counties under London District Command

Essex	51 st to 55 th
Kent	51 st to 57 th
Surrey	51 st to 63 rd

Included in Battalion titles were either the name of the town, area or public utility from where the Battalion was raised e.g. 3rd (Middlesex) Battalion, 55th (Sutton and Cheam) Battalion or 41st County of London (London Passenger Transport Board) Battalion.

Home Guard Battalion titles should not be confused with London Regiment TA units. Battalions were badged as per the county Regiment or the Territorial Army or the Territorial Army London Regiment. The Regimental cap badge issued to Home Guard units were manufactured in plastic as a war economy measure.

Casualties

During WW2, the Home Guard throughout the United Kingdom suffered 1,765 casualties on duty. 760 were fatalities, the majority killed by enemy action during the blitz on London. Several members of the London Home Guard Battalions added the George Medal and George Cross to an already impressive list of medals for bravery.

The Stand Down

The Home Guard was finally stood down in October 1944 with a parade to mark the occasion and the salute being taken by King George VI. Male members were entitled to a certificate of appreciation for their service signed by The King. If a Home Guardsman had served for more than three years he would be entitled to claim the defence medal, but it was not until 1945 that women who had helped as auxiliaries were recognised with their own certificate.

As the WW1 Armistice had been signed only 21 years before the Home Guard was formed, many of the Officers and men who served in its ranks were already experienced and some highly decorated. This helped greatly in the rapid progress from the enthusiastic but poorly equipped LDV to the efficient and professional reserve army that the Home Guard had become by 1944, when contrary to popular myth the average age within the Home Guard was under 30.

As a final accolade, the Home Guard provided a marching detachment in both the victory parade in 1946 and, almost 10 years after stand down, the Coronation procession of 1958.

In 1960, the TA and AF associations were still responsible for administering the Home Guard in a National Emergency.



No. 30 (Balloon Barrage) Group Auxiliary Air Force

No. 30 (Balloon Barrage) Group was formed on 17th March 1937 at Stanmore Park, Middlesex and was commanded by an Air Commodore.

Balloon Barrages in the UK were first flown over London in 1917 as another level of protection against aircraft attempting to bomb the Capital.

Having proved their worth in WW1, not least as some assurance to the civilian population, a scheme was approved by Government in 1936 whereby 450 barrage balloons would be available as part of the strategy for the Air Defence of London.

The Barrage Balloon Squadrons that were to make up 30 Group would be manned by the Auxiliary Air Force.

No. 30 (Balloon Barrage) group locations

Headquarters RAF Stanmore Park

No. 1	Balloon Centre – Kidbrook
901	(County of London) Balloon Squadron Auxiliary Air Force
902	(County of London) Balloon Squadron Auxiliary Air Force
903	(County of London) Balloon Squadron Auxiliary Air Force
No. 2	Balloon Centre – Hook
904	(County of Surrey) (Balloon) Squadron Auxiliary Air Force
905	(County of Surrey) (Balloon) Squadron Auxiliary Air Force
No. 3	Balloon Centre – Stanmore
906	(County of Middlesex) (Balloon) Squadron Auxiliary Air Force
907	(County of Middlesex) (Balloon) Squadron Auxiliary Air Force
No. 4	Balloon Centre – Chigwell
908	(County of Essex) (Balloon) Squadron Auxiliary Air Force
909	(County of Essex) (Balloon) Squadron Auxiliary Air Force
910	(County of Essex) (Balloon) Squadron Auxiliary Air Force

The Balloon Centres were responsible for maintenance and supply to the Balloon Squadrons in its area as well as balloon repair and flight control.

Balloon Barrages proved to be an effective method of protecting strategically important areas against air attack, in that should enemy aircraft fly into the winch cable the damage inflicted would almost always result in destruction. Should enemy aircraft attempt to avoid the cables by flying above the Barrage Balloons then they could not bomb their targets with accuracy.

On the formation of Balloon Command, 30 Group, Headquarters moved to a new location at Chessington, Surrey where it remained from 1st November 1938 to 7th January 1945.

Balloon Command was disbanded in February 1945.

