

PART 8

Meeting the threat: Disbanded Specialist Formations



Airborne Soldiers from a London Unit in training,
waiting to jump, 1954



Voluntary Aid Detachments

The Territorial and Reserve Forces Act of 1907 made provision for a Voluntary organisation that could ally itself to the General Hospitals of the RAMC Territorial Force Detachments.

The Organisation came into being in 1909 with the raising of Voluntary Aid Detachments. Each detachment was attached to either the British Red Cross, The Order of St John or the County Territorial Force Association. Individually, the membership was known as VADs.

The detachments were either all male or all female. Most volunteers were female. The detachments were registered with and numbered by the War Office.

Each VAD received training in first aid and general nursing duties, and were expected to work in support of nursing professionals, and have a flexible approach to any task that they were asked to undertake from cleaning and cooking to ambulance driving.

At the outbreak of WW1, most male VADs had volunteered to serve in the Forces. There were in excess of 45,000 women serving in Voluntary Aid Detachments nationwide.

VADs, like the Territorials, were only intended for home service. However, like the Territorials, they were asked to serve overseas fairly soon after war was declared, seeing service in support of the army medical services in France, Belgium and Italy.

VADs worked in support of the RAMC Territorial Force (TF) in 5 military hospitals in London:

First London General Hospital (TF)
St Gabriel's College, Cormont Road, Camberwell, SE5

Second London General Hospital (TF)
St Mark's College, 552 King's Road, Chelsea, SW3

Third London General Hospital (TF)
Royal Victoria Patriotic School, Trinity Road, Wandsworth, SW18

Fourth London General Hospital (TF)
King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, SE5

Fifth London General Hospital (TF)
St Thomas' Hospital, Lambeth Palace Road, SE1

Additionally, there were in excess of 300 Auxiliary Hospitals situated all over the Greater London area that were voluntarily staffed by the local Voluntary Aid Detachment.

Between the wars, VADs continued their voluntary work. The original controlling body, the Central Joint VAD Committee was reorganised as the Voluntary Aid Detachment Council operating in an advisory capacity only. After WW1, VADs decreased in strength, however in the Greater London area this trend was reversed by the onset of WW2. VADs were now classed as 'mobile' or 'immobile' – the former on mobilisation being liable for postings to wherever hospitals required their services, and the latter being liable for service only in the neighbourhood in which they resided. In 1938, 'immobile' members were released from their obligations.

On the outbreak of WW2, all male VADs were enlisted into the RAMC. Women members were mobilised as and when required for services in Military Hospitals. In 1942, as a result of the extension of compulsory National Service for women, the Army Council proposed a merger of women members of the VADs and the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS). This unpopular proposal was eventually dropped and the VADs kept their separate identity.

There was now set in place several changes to the terms of service and the Central Joint VAD Council that had acted as an advisory body between the wars was replaced by a standing committee that was made up, as in WW1, of representatives of the Council of County Territorial Associations.

During WW2, members of the VAD were once again engaged in providing nursing and general support to the medical organisations of all 3 services, both overseas and in the UK.

The last member of the VAD was still serving with the Army in 1951.



The Royal Observer Corps

The Royal Observer Corps was a uniformed organisation that enjoyed a long association with the Royal Air Force. The badge of the Royal Observer Corps depicts a beacon lighter of Elizabethan times; these beacon lighters were recruited from the local population and were organised and paid by the County Sheriff, to care for and light the warning beacons in the event of approaching danger, time enough for Sir Francis Drake to finish his game of bowls. The motto of the Royal Observer Corps was: Forewarned is Forearmed.

Initially, recruitment was an all-male preserve until woman observers were admitted to the Corps in August 1941. Headquarters Observer Corps came to RAF Bentley Priory in July 1936, along with Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, who had been appointed Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the newly formed Fighter Command and of which the Observer Corps was to play an integral part. At this time, the Corps' first Commandant, Air Commodore E A Masterman, retired and was succeeded by Air Commodore Warrington-Morris, formerly Commandant of Southern Area Observer Corps, located at RAF Bentley Priory but soon to relocate to RAF Uxbridge from where Headquarters Observer Corps had so recently moved. From the beginning of WW2 through to 1955, the function of the Observer Corps was to report all aircraft movement over land and offshore to their respective centres and from there the information was related to the RAF Reporting and Control Network. During WW2, this service was provided 24 hours a day.

The Observer Corps was one of the cornerstones of Dowding's air defence system and he said later in his despatch on the Battle of Britain, "It is important to note that at this time they [the Observer Corps] constituted the whole means of tracking enemy raids once they had crossed the coastline. Their work throughout was quite invaluable. Without it the air-raid warning systems could not have been operated and inland interceptions would rarely have been made." As the Air Chief Marshal in charge of the air defence of London and South-East England in 1940, Sir Keith Park was the Field Commander of the most critical area of the country during the Battle of Britain. Using a radar defence system and information gathered from the Observer Corps, Park carefully followed the movements of the bombers and fighters, constantly feeding information to his intercepting squadrons. In 1941 King George VI awarded the Observer Corps its 'Royal' title in recognition of its role in the Battle of Britain.

Post 1955, the Royal Observer Corps went into protected accommodation and undertook the monitoring of radioactive fallout in the event of a nuclear strike on the United Kingdom. The resultant warnings would have been issued to the military and civilian population alike. The bulk of the Royal Observer Corps, approximately 9,600 members, were stood-down on 30th September 1991 with a much smaller cadre remaining until 31st December 1995. With the exception of 69 full-time Officers, all members of the Royal Observer Corps were volunteers.

Aims of the Royal Observer Corps

The Royal Observer Corps was a civil defence organisation, composed mainly of civilian volunteers, under the command in succession of the War Office, the Air Ministry and finally FAR Strike Command and the operational control of the Home Office.

Initially (1925-1955), it was tasked with identifying and tracking hostile aircraft or missiles flying over the UK or the seabelt adjoining the coastline. During D Day Landings, the Corps provided armed merchant vessels and all US Navy ships with experienced aircraft observers who controlled all anti-aircraft fire from these vessels. During WW2, it also assisted friendly aircraft which were lost or in distress. Later (1955) it was given the nuclear warfare analysis and fallout warning role until its final stand down in 1995.

Rank Structure

Air Commodore, RAF: Commandant ROC

Observer Captain, ROC: Deputy Commandant ROC (1941-1983) Chief of Staff, Area Commandant

Observer Commander, ROC: Senior staff duties, e.g. admin, Operations, Deputy Area Commandant, Senior Officer (1992-96)

Observer Lieutenant Commander, ROC (full-time officers only)

Observer Lieutenant, ROC: ops training, admin, other staff duties. Obs Lt was also the entry level for full-time ROC officers

Observer Officer ROC: held under Royal Warrant, crew, nuclear reporting and group officer position

Chief Observer ROC: held under Royal Warrant, crew, nuclear reposting and group officer position

Chief Observer ROC: senior other rank (three bar) crew or nuclear reporting supervisor or head post observer

Leading Observer ROC: (two bar) crew or nuclear reporting supervisor or post instructor

Observer ROC: crew, nuclear reporting or post observer

Key Dates

1914-17 Initial successful experiments detecting and reporting aircraft within 60 miles of London to the Admiralty by Police.

1917-18 Control handed over to War Office and the London Air Defence Area.

1918-25 The function almost dormant until revitalised by a sub-committee of the Imperial Defence appointed to investigate the aerial defence of SE England.

1925-29 First Observer Corps groups (No. 1 in Maidstone with 27 outposts and No. 2 in Horsham with 16) were formed using volunteers enrolled as Special Constables. This rapidly expanded to include Hampshire, Suffolk, Surrey, Essex, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

1929-36 Control handed over to Air Ministry, Observer Corps HQ (RAF Uxbridge) created. First commandant appointed. The Corps grew slowly.

1936-39 OC HQ to Bentley Priory as part of newly formed Fighter Command.

Structure within area covered by Greater London:

Although during WW2 there were posts and clusters under group control nationwide, the defence of London was the highest priority. This involved literally hundreds of posts and clusters throughout SE England. Within London, its distribution was determined primarily by building height, with command and control centres underground wherever land-line communications could be easily established by the general Post Office, e.g. disused London Underground stations, viz: Aldwych, Highgate, South Kensington, South Kentish Town and under Waterloo Station.

When the Corps took on its nuclear reporting role (1965-1995) its distribution of posts within London was limited to eight, viz:

Middlesex and Greater London (Current Borough)	Opened	Closed
Acton (Ealing)	1961	1968
Bowes Park (Haringey)	1964	1991
Colindale (Barnet)	1961	1968
Dulwich (Southwark)	1965	1991
Enfield (Enfield)	1960	1968
Hounslow (Hounslow)	1966	1969
Northolt (Ealing)	1967	1991
Stratford (Newham)	1961	1991

County-wide	No. of posts (one estimate)	No. of posts (another estimate)
Essex	32	42
Hertfordshire	15	29
Kent	47	50
Surrey	15	15

During WW2 each Group commanded some thirty to forty posts, each about ten miles from the other. By 1945, there were some 40 Groups controlling more than 1,000 posts or clusters throughout the UK, less Northern Ireland which came on-stream with the nuclear threat in 1954.

After disbandment, the Royal Observer Corps banner presented by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II at a Royal Review of the Corps at RAF Bentley Priory on 25th July 1991, was lodged for safekeeping in the rotunda of College Hall, RAF Cranwell.



The Special Reserve

Richard Haldane's Reserve Forces Act of 1907 was intended to provide a well-trained reserve for the Regular Army that was capable of providing individual reinforcements or drafts at short notice as well as an efficient and cost effective Home Defence organisation.

Before the introduction of the Reserve Forces Act, Home Defence was the responsibility of the Volunteer Battalions and the Yeomanry and the Reinforcement of the Regular Army was the responsibility of the Militia.

Although each Militia Regiment was allied to a Regular Unit, as with the Volunteers the association was fairly loose and not entirely under the control of the War Office. Hence the training and administration of both left much to be desired.

Reserve Forces Act 1907

Haldane's Act would see the Yeomanry and Volunteers merged to form a new Home Defence organisation known as The Territorial Force and the Militia Regiments re-emerge as the Special Reserve.

The Army Council at the War Office had for years been critical of the training standards and efficiency of Militia. However, the Regular Army had for centuries relied heavily on the Militia Regiments as providers of individual reinforcement and draft finders in time of need as well as a steady source of recruits.

Whilst the creation of the Territorial Force involved much reorganisation and administration, including a considerable building programme, the conversion of the Militia to the Special Reserve proved a much more straightforward task as most of the Militia Barracks were already in place and would serve just as well for the Special Reserve.

The Special Reserve

This new organisation would have a similar role to the Militia; the big difference being that it would form the 3rd and 4th Battalions of a Regular infantry Regiment and in most cases would keep their original Militia title. Thus, the Royal Elthorne Militia stationed at Uxbridge would become the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion, The Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex Regiment) (Elthorne Militia). Other arms of service would add Special Reserve Formations in a similar way.

The Special Reservist

The recruit would be obliged to serve for a period of six years. During that time he would first complete six months continuous training at a Militia Barracks. These barracks were spread throughout the UK either as stand-alone, such as Barnet, or beside a Regular Army depot such as at Kingston in Surrey. By the outbreak of the WW1, most Special Reserve Battalions had moved out of Militia Barracks and into Regimental depots.

Having completed six months initial training, the Reservist would return to civilian life with an obligation of 28 days continuous training every year.

Personal weapons and equipment would eventually be brought up to the same standard as colleagues in the Regular Army and he would receive regular rates of pay. All this came with the obligation of mobilisation at any time within period of engagement. His Regimental number would be prefixed by the letters 'SR' for Special Reserve. However, like his counterpart in the Territorial Force, members of the Special Reserve remained essentially civilians.

The First World War

The Special Reserve Battalions were never intended to be mobilised as a fighting formation, but simply to provide trained drafts to their Regular Battalions in the event of a national emergency. In August 1914, the Special Reserve Battalions were made up to strength with an influx of Regular Army Reservists. From the outbreak of war until the end of 1915, these Battalions provided a steady flow of reinforcement drafts to their Regular Battalions, a task that eventually bled them dry of men. Thereafter the Special Reserve Battalions became training units for the new Kitchener Armies.

Disbandment

The Special Reserve Battalions were not reformed after WW1 and were eventually disbanded in 1921.

The Special Reserve more than fulfilled the role envisaged by Haldane in his reorganisation of the Reserves in 1908.



Special Communications Units

No. 1 Special Communications Unit

In 1940, The British Army formed the first of the 12 Special Communications Units (SCUs). Their purpose was to provide direct links between individuals or small covert units with their headquarters. Such operations could find units many miles away from their headquarters in isolated terrain, possibly behind enemy lines.

Communication via the normal command network would incur unacceptable delays with subsequent effects on operations.

When the Territorial Army (TA) was reformed in May 1947, it was decided that there would still be a role for a Special Communications Unit in the Order of Battle of the new TA. No. 1 Special Communications Unit was formed on 1st May 1947. It only existed on paper. However, the first Commanding Officer was appointed in February 1948 with the priority to recruit suitable personnel and find TA Centre accommodation. The first accommodation consisted of a single room in Signal House – the TA Centre at 20 Atkins Road, Clapham, SW12. This was the home of 56th (London Infantry) Divisional Signal Regiment (TA). The sparse accommodation was unsuitable both in operational and recruiting terms.

The unit moved to Artillery House near Barnet, formerly used by the Government's radio security service. Although an improvement, Artillery House was not best placed for recruiting and after three months the Territorial Association offered premises at 89 Turnmill Street, EC1.

A trawl of people who had served in SCUs during the war produced 20 Officers and 15 other ranks, 6 of who were members of the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC). This group would form the training team for the first recruits to the unit, who were in the main ex-National Servicemen completing their obligatory service with the Territorial Army.

The Role of No. 1 Special Communications unit was:

- a. To provide communications between small field detachments using low powered hand speed Morse sets and static communication centres using medium power
- b. To provide radio teleprompter communication between static locations

In January 1954, the unit moved into the City of London Territorial Association TA Centre at Worship Street, EC2, a new building started pre-war in 1939 and completed in 1953.

In 1960, Detachments began to be sent overseas to training areas within NATO countries. This was at least six years before the average Territorial NATO unit could be sent on training overseas as a matter of routine. Several members of No.1 SCU were parachute trained.

The lineage of the unit was as follows:

1947 No. 1 Special Communications Unit (TA)

1951 Became No. 1 Special Communications Regiment (TA)

1959 Became 65th Signal Regiment (TA)

1961 Amalgamated with 328 Signal Squadron (TA) to become 65th Signal Regiment (Special Communications) (TA)

1965 Re-titled 65th (City of London) Signal Regiment (TA)

1967 65th Signal Regiment Disbanded to form 39th (City of London) Signal Regiment (V)

The Special Communications role finished in 1970.

The Phantom Signal Regiment

As with the Special Communications units, Phantom Signals were specialist units created between 1939-45 with the aim of providing Army Commanders with accurate information as to the dispositions and activities of all the units under their command.

On the reformation of the TA on 1st May 1947, the War Office decided that there was still a need for a 'Phantom' signals unit that should be within the orbit of the new TA.

The 1947 TA reforms called for some units to be re-rolled and the Princess Louise's Kensington Regiment, based at the Drill Hall at 180 Hammersmith Road, would convert from an Infantry Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment to a new Signals Regiment to be known as Army Phantom Signals Regiment (Princess Louise's Kensington Regiment).

Pre-war and wartime Kensingtons who re-joined the new unit faced the challenge of changing their previous occupation as machine gunners to an entirely new role in signals. The situation was eased by a few ex-Phantoms familiar with the role joining the new Regiment. In 1961, the advances in modern signal systems made the role of the Phantom Signals Regiment redundant and the unit was re-designated 41 Signal Regiment Royal Corps of Signals (Princess Louise's Kensington Regiment).



16 Airborne Division TA

After WW2, the Territorial Army was reformed. Part of the reformation was the creation of 16 Airborne Division (TA), a completely new formation intended to take the place of the now disbanded wartime 1st and 6th Airborne Divisions. The number 16 evolved from an amalgam of the divisional numbers of the wartime Airborne Divisions and would be purely Territorial in its nature.

Spread UK wide, the Division comprised of 3 Brigades with the 44th (London) Brigade based throughout what is now the Greater London area. In addition the Divisional Headquarters was situated within Duke of York's Barracks, Chelsea, SW3.

In 1947 the 16 Airborne Division units in Greater London were:

Divisional Engineers

Headquarters 16 Airborne Division RE (TA)	Duke of York's HQ, Chelsea
301 Airborne Field Squadron	Drill Hall Mitchum Barracks, Croydon
302 Engineer Park Squadron	Drill Hall, The Hyth, Hendon
131 Airborne Engineer Regiment	Pont Street, Westminster

Divisional Artillery

880 Forward Observation Battery RA (TA)	Drill Hall Algernon Road, Hendon
285 (Essex) Airborne Field Regiment RA (TA)	Drill Hall Stratford Green
291 (4 th London) Airborne Field Regiment RA (TA)	Drill Hall Ennersdale Road, Lewisham
292 (5 th London) Airborne Field Regiment RA (TA)	Drill Hall Reedworth Street, Kensington

Royal Army Medical Corps

144 Parachute Field Ambulance	Duke of York's HQ, Chelsea
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Divisional Column Royal Army Service Corps (TA)

Headquarters 16 Airborne Divisional Column RASC (TA)	Duke of York's HQ initially then moving to Hayes Bridge, Southall in 1949
1560 Company RASC (TA)	Drill Hall Park Lane, Tottenham
1561 Company RASC (TA)	Drill Hall Vine Street, Uxbridge
1562 Company RASC (TA)	Drill Hall Hayes Bridge, Southall

Other Units

4 th Airborne Workshop REME (TA)	Duke of York's HQ, Chelsea
21 st Special Air Service Regiment (TA)	Duke of York's HQ, Chelsea
16 th Airborne Division Royal Signal Regiment (Middlesex Yeomanry) (TA)	Duke of York's HQ, Chelsea

301 Airborne Field Park Squadron	Drill Hall Algernon Road, Hendon
302 Airborne Field Park Squadron	Drill Hall Algernon Road, Hendon
16 th Airborne Division Provost Company (TA)	Drill Hall 456 Uxbridge Road
16 th Airborne Division Field Security Section (TA)	Duke of York's HQ, Chelsea

4th Parachute Brigade

Infantry – 10th Battalion (County of London) The Parachute Regiment (TA)

Battalion Headquarters	Drill Hall 84 Victoria Way, Charlton
Defence & Employment Platoon	Drill Hall Rochester Row, Westminster
No. 1 Company	Drill Hall Rochester Row, Westminster
No. 2 Company	Drill Hall Poplar Walk, Croydon
Support Company	Drill Hall 84 Victoria Way, Charlton

Infantry – 11th Battalion (8th Middlesex) The Parachute Regiment

Battalion HQ & HQ Company	Drill Hall Hanworth Road, Uxbridge
A & Support Company	Drill Hall Twickenham
B Company	Drill Hall Churchfield Road, Ealing
C Company	Drill Hall Whitefriars Avenue Wealdstone
D Company	Drill Hall Church Lane, Edmonton

The establishment of the Division was 3,500 men and in 1947 there were high hopes that this target would be achieved. Recruiting was brisk with many experienced airborne veterans from the wartime 1st and 6th Airborne being first to join along with young men with no previous military experience. However, it soon became clear that such a large airborne formation relying on reserve force soldiers could not be recruited and trained to standards demanded in anything like the numbers required.

In 1955, 16 Airborne Division (TA) was reduced to a Brigade-size formation and became an Independent Parachute Group. Many of the formations that made up the Division were either disbanded or, like the 11th Battalion, reverted to their former Regiment, the 8th Battalion The Middlesex Regiment.

In 2014, the only units within Greater London that were once part of the mighty 16th Airborne Division and still in the Airborne role are:

B Company 4th Battalion The Parachute Regiment based at the Army Reserve Centre, White City, Shepherd's Bush W12 7RW

144 Parachute Medical Squadron based at the Army Reserve Centre, 2 Priory Road, Hornsey N8 7QT



The Ever Readies

The Army Reserve Act of April 1962 made provision for a special category of reservists from the Territorial Army to be known as the Territorial Army Emergency Reserve (TAER).

The Act gave serving territorials the option of joining the TAER, and thus the opportunity to serve with the Regular Army anywhere in the world should the need arise. In the meantime, the individual soldier would remain with his TA unit but under the provisions of the Act. Signing on for TAER waived the normal restrictions on mobilisation in force at the time, and call out could be immediate hence the nickname coined by the Armed Forces Minister at the time, the 'Ever Readies'.

In return for this commitment the soldier was offered an annual taxable bounty of £150 with a further £50 on call out. Other benefits included the opportunity to train abroad with the Regular Army, in locations including Libya and the Far East.

Apart from being an efficient trained soldier, the only other criteria for acceptance in the TAER was dictated by the number of vacancies allocated to the parent unit. If the allocation was full the volunteer was placed on a list waiting for a vacancy at his particular rank.

In 1965, the 1st Battalion The Royal Sussex Regiment was deployed to Aden for operations in the Radfan Hills. The ending of National Service amongst other things had left that Battalion understrength by one Rifle Company. On 14th April 1965, 175 Ever Readies were called up for service in the Middle East, the Far East and Cyprus and 123 would join 1st Battalion The Royal Sussex in the Radfan Hills in a largely counter-terrorist war that became known as the 'Aden Emergency'.

Most of the Territorials involved were from infantry units in the Home Counties, including 40 soldiers from 5th Battalion The Royal Sussex (TA). The remainder were drawn from the 3rd Battalion and 4th Battalion of the Queen's Surrey's (TA) and the 5th Battalion The Middlesex Regiment, the majority coming from units with Drill Halls situated in what is now the Greater London area.

After one month's intensive preparatory training at the Home Counties depot in Canterbury, the Ever Readies went out to Aden arriving on 27th May. After a short period of acclimatisation, they took their place with the Regular Battalion, which was undertaking internal security duties and counterinsurgency operations against hostile tribesmen. It was during such an operation that Lieutenant Jock Smith of the 5th Middlesex won the first Territorial Military Cross since WW2. The group returned home in October 1965. The use of the Ever Readies was hailed as a great success, although they were never used again. The TAER disbanded in 1967.



Home Service Force 1985 - 1992

In 1982, the Ministry of Defence issued a discussion document to Home Defence Battalions of the Territorial Army (TA) seeking opinions on a proposal to form a separate category of Home Defence unit. The aim of the new force would be to undertake static duties such as key point defence, thus relieving the Home Defence Battalions for the more demanding aspects of their roles.

At first there were reservations at creating a new force, mainly because of the cost involved, when the money could be better spent on assets for the moderately equipped Home Defence Battalions. However, the results of the consultation were positive and a pilot scheme was launched in 1982. The pilot scheme was entirely successful and the new force to be known as the Home Service Force (HSF) came into being in 1985.

The Role

Each Home Defence Battalion would have an HSF Company attached and would be responsible for its training and administration. The platoons of the HSF Company were to be attached to each rifle company known as the 'host' company. The main purpose of the HSF platoon was to provide static key point defence involving any establishment or facility essential to the security of the United Kingdom. With the Cold War still the main defence preoccupation, the HSF was seen as a reliable and efficient way to combat home-grown terrorism and special forces of the Warsaw Pact should they attempt to cripple the infrastructure of the UK during the build-up to hostilities.

The HSF Soldier

Aged between 18 and 60 years and medically sound, the HSF soldier would have served for at least two years in the Regular or Reserve Forces of the Crown, or the Cadets or the Police Forces of the United Kingdom. The requirement to have completed two years previous service was non-negotiable. As a result, The HSF attracted recruits who were either too old to join or rejoin the Regular Forces or who were for a variety of reasons unable to commit enough time to the Reserve Forces.

On joining the HSF, the soldier became a member of the TA category C which was liable for service in the UK only. He was equipped to exactly the same scale as his comrades in the host Home Defence Company, on whom he relied for transport, training support and all administration required to effectively carry out his duties.

Command Structure

In the Greater London area, the HSF companies came under the operational control on London District with the exception of the platoon raised by B Company 6/7 Queen's at Hornsey – a sub unit of a Home Defence Battalion based at Horsham in West Sussex and therefore under the operational control of South East District.

HSF Companies operating in the Greater London Area were:

A (HSF) Company The Honourable Artillery Company

B (HSF) Company The Honourable Artillery Company

348 (HSF) Squadron, Inns of Court and City Yeomanry

S (HSF) Company, 10th Battalion The Parachute Regiment

H (HSF) Company, 4th Battalion The Royal Green Jackets

Disbandment

With the peace dividend that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, a review of the TA and its future commitments saw no further need of the HSF and the organisation was disbanded. Those who had served with the HSF were permitted to remain with their host companies until the completion of their engagement. Many HSF soldiers were well-known by their colleagues in the TA as reliable soldiers who, when not on HSF duties, supported their host company in many ways such as frequently providing 'enemy forces' or making up depleted platoons on company weekends. Even after disbandment, former HSF soldiers filled the gaps in the ranks of the MT, Signals and QM platoon giving reliable and experienced service for as long as they were permitted.

Undoubtedly during its short existence the HSF provided a service to Home Defence in terms of enthusiasm, professionalism and value for money that to this day is hard to match.



8th Battalion The Queen's Fusiliers (City of London)

The partial reorganisation of the Territorial Army in 1984 called for an increase of 3 Infantry Battalions, one of which would be raised in London.

There were at that time four detached company strength units in London; G (London Scottish) Company of the Highland Volunteers, D (London Irish) Company of the Royal Ulster Rifles, C (City of London) Company 5th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers (V) and B (Albuhera) Company 6/7th Battalion The Queen's Regiment (V). In addition, there were two Battalions entirely based within Greater London; 4th Battalion The Royal Green Jackets (V) and 10th Battalion The Parachute Regiment (V).

With the exception of 10th Battalion The Parachute Regiment, all the other units were asked to consider either raising a further Battalion or expanding to Battalion strength. All declined with the exception of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and the Queen's Regiment. Their TA companies were the last units representing their cap badges within the whole of Greater London. As both Regiments were in the Queen's Division it seemed logical that the best way to secure the foothold of both Regiments within Greater London was to pool resources and raise a Battalion that would be dual cap-badged. Thus on 16th May 1984, Albuhera Day (a common Battle Honour between both Regiments) both B Company Badged Queen's Regiment and C Company Badged Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, marched into the newly refurbished TA Centre at 27 St John's Hill, Battersea and the Queen's Fusiliers were born.

The Role of the Battalion

Known to all as 8QF, the unit was designated as a Nuclear Artillery Security Battalion and as such one of only three TA Battalions with that role. The task was simply to protect the Missile Batteries of 50 Missile Regiment Royal Artillery should there be a confrontation with the forces of the Warsaw Pact.

50 Missile Regiment was stationed in Germany and in an emergency 8QF would provide a Defence Platoon for each battery and would be responsible to the Royal Artillery Battery Commander for the Defence of his Missile Units, both in transit or operational locations.

Battalion Locations in Greater London

In order to complete its 3 Rifle Company establishment, an additional company was raised at Camberwell in South London where a completely new Drill Hall had been built on the site of the old 1st Surrey Rifles Drill Hall, in Flodden Road. The Battalion locations were:

Battalion Headquarters	27 St John's Hill, Battersea
Headquarters (Gazala) Company	27 St John's Hill, Battersea
A (Highwood) Company	Flodden Road, Camberwell
B (Albuhera) Company	Deansbrook Road, Edgware
C (City of London) Company	High Road, Balham

Unit Identity

Wearing the two cap badges of existing Regiments generally posed no real problems. A and B Company were badged entirely The Queen's Regiment and C Company remained Fusiliers. However, Headquarter Company would always of necessity be multi-cap badged and would have two sources of recruitment. Firstly, those who were posted in from The Rifle Companies and would keep their 'company' cap badge, and secondly, those who joined Headquarters Company as recruits. The latter were issued their cap badge

on the basis that every third recruit through the door would be badged Fusilier. However, the Battalion employed a degree of flexibility with this rule in that if for some reason a recruit asked particularly to be badged Queen's or Fusilier then, where possible, the request would be granted.

As 8QF progressed there was generally a comfortable feeling amongst most senior ranks accepting the twin Regimental identity. Nevertheless, the Battalion had earned the right to in some way to protect its own identity and there were at first low key proposals including 8QF stable belts, lanyards and shoulder slides of which only the latter came into being.

An application for the Battalion to be issued with Colours was refused by the Ministry of Defence on the grounds that it was unacceptable to have the Regimental badges of both the Queen's Regiment and the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers on a single Battalion colour.

In 1990, 8QF was honoured with the Freedom of the City of London.

Final Days

In 1992, with the collapse of the Soviet Union the threat from the Warsaw Pact receded to the extent that there was no longer a requirement for a Nuclear Artillery Defence Battalion, 8QF was in its entirety joined with G (London Scottish) Company of the Highland Volunteers and D (London Irish) Company of the Ulster Regiment to form the new London Regiment.

In its short four years existence, 8QF achieved success as an effective operational unit and in spite of what could have been a festering identity problem, the senior ranks, irrespective of cap badge, showed a determination to make their Battalion work, truly laying the foundations for the multi-cap badged London Regiment.

In spite of the disappointment of not receiving Colours, 8QF were honoured by the Freedom of the City of London and the right to wear the City Shield, which to this day are still proudly worn by C (City of London) Company and B (Queen's Regiment) of the London Regiment.

