

Nottinghamshire Remembers

A Brief Summary of the Contribution of Nottinghamshire Armed Forces to World War II and VE and VJ Day



**With thanks to the representatives of the following
Armed Services for text and images.**

**Royal Navy HMS Trent
504 (County of Nottingham) Squadron RAuxAF
Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry
South Nottinghamshire Hussars Yeomanry
Sherwood Foresters
Queen's Royal Lancers**

The order given for the 5th May ceasefire was:

**'No advance beyond present position - stop -
No further harassing fire - stop -
No further tactical move unless ordered - stop -
BBC News Flash confirmed - stop -
German Army on 21 Army Group Front surrenders wef 0800 hrs 5th
May 1945 - stop -
Details as to procedure later - stop'**

Royal Navy HMS Trent



RIVER-Class Frigate ordered on 8th May 1941 in the 1941 War Programme from Charles Hill, Bristol and laid down as Yard No 291 on 31st January 1942. She was the 2nd of the Class built in this shipyard and was launched on 10th October that year by Mrs J Hodges whose husband worked for the shipbuilder. This ship was the 7th RN ship to carry the name, introduced in 1757 for a 6th Rate and previously by a vessel hired during WW1. Build was completed on was 20th February 1943.

Transferred to Trincomalee for duty with East Indies Fleet – deployed for convoy defence in Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal - January 1945

Took passage to Cape Town after VJ Day and was refitted in a commercial shipyard. She was transferred to the Royal Indian Navy at Bombay in May 1946, and renamed HMIS Khukri until 1951 when she was renamed INS Investigator.

504 (County of Nottingham) Squadron RAuxAF



Squadron Badge: The Motto
'Vindicat in Ventis' translates as
It avenges in the wind

504 (County of Nottingham) Squadron formed at RAF Hucknall, as a Special Reserve Squadron in 1928. Personnel were recruited predominantly from Nottingham and received much support from prominent firms within the city. A strong esprit-de-corps rapidly developed, standing the Squadron in good stead during the Second World War.

In August 1939 'Nottingham's Own' Squadron was embodied into RAF Fighter Command for active Service and transferred to RAF Digby in Lincolnshire. In May 1940, the Squadron moved briefly to France providing support for the British Expeditionary Force. On its return to the UK, the Squadron moved to Northern Scotland where it provided fighter defence for the Royal Navy Fleet anchorage at Scapa Flow. In September that year the Squadron moved south to play a decisive role in the Battle of Britain.

We are familiar with British wartime operations in Western Europe, but in 1941 members of 504's 'A' Flight were posted to form the nucleus of 81 Squadron. They embarked on an aircraft carrier, with a cargo of crated Hurricanes for Veanga, Russia. They undertook operational missions before training the Russians to fly and service the Hurricanes. The aircraft were subsequently transferred to the Red Air Force and the RAF personnel returned to the UK.

Throughout the War, 504 operated from over thirty airfields, in both the UK and Europe, and in a diverse range of roles including defensive patrols, bomber escort and interdiction raids across occupied France. Later wartime service included provision of top cover at Arnhem during Operation Market Garden. In March 1945 the Squadron moved to Colerne, Wiltshire, where it became the second RAF Squadron to be equipped with the Gloster Meteor Mk III, Britain's first jet fighter. VE Day, on 8 May 1945, occurred before 504 saw any operational action in the revolutionary new aircraft.

The Squadron operational record makes no formal reference to VE day simply commenting that 'training sorties continued'! Although there would certainly have been celebrations, personnel would have also reflected, with great pride, on the

Squadron's contribution to the War effort. Some thirty-five men gave their lives, and Squadron aircrew were awarded three Distinguished Flying Crosses (DFCs), Five Air Force Crosses (AFCs), two Distinguished Flying Medals (DFMs) and two of only four Orders of Lenin awarded to British aircrew.

Notable amongst the Squadron's personnel was Flight Lieutenant WB Royce, who was the first Auxiliary Air Force pilot to be awarded the DFC. Another Squadron pilot, Sergeant Ray Holmes, became a national hero during the Battle of Britain when, having run out of ammunition, he spectacularly rammed a German Dornier Bomber heading down the Mall to attack Buckingham Palace. He survived the impact and bailed out. After landing safely, he was escorted to a local hostelry by jubilant Londoners who promptly gave him a stiff brandy! The event is commemorated at the RAF Museum, Hendon, where the Hurricane Gate Guardian bears the markings TM-B, the aircraft Ray Holmes flew on the 15th of September 1940 whilst stationed at RAF Hendon at the height of the battle.

In recognition of the Squadron's wartime contribution and close association with Nottingham 504 was awarded The Freedom of the City in September 1946.



Flying Ace Flight Lieutenant MEA Royce with the Squadron Wartime mascot 'Susie' the Bulldog



504 Squadron Pilots scramble during the Battle of Britain



Sgt Ray Holmes' widow, Anne, and daughter, together with current members of NO. 504 (County of Nottingham) Squadron RAuxAF in front of the Hurricane Gate Guardian at the RAF Museum, Hendon. The aircraft has been painted to represent the Hurricane Holmes was flying when he brought down a Dornier bomber over the Mall on the 15th of September 1940.

Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry

Having previously endured some long and hard fighting across North Africa, on D-Day the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry was one of the four specially selected armoured regiments given the task of landing in the vanguard of the biggest invasion force ever seen. Two squadrons landed early in the morning on Gold Beach in 'swimming tanks' and having fought their way off the beach and later joined by the third squadron which landed later, they, together with the Essex regiment, went on to liberate the town of Bayeux the next day.

The regiment was then involved in action for fifty of the sixty days it took to win the Battle for Normandy losing fifty tank commanders and many more tanks at the same time.

Following the break-out from Normandy the regiment was heavily involved in the battle for Geel, an action vital to secure the start line for Operation Market Garden. These became the bitterest three days of fighting since D-Day and where the regiment suffered its worst losses in Europe in a single action losing eleven of regiment's thirty two tanks. But had the regiment not fought so hard to maintain the important bridgehead over the canals at Geel the overall Operation could easily have been lost.

Later the regiment's Recce troop is acknowledged by a B.B.C commentator to have been the first of the British troops to enter Germany. Then the regiment finally ended the war on the outskirts of Bremerhaven when the following order came on the 4th May:

No advance beyond present positions. No further harassing fire. No tactical moves unless ordered. B.B.C news flash confirmed. German Army on 21 Army Group Front surrenders wef 08:00 hours 5th May 1945. Details as to procedure later.

All inhibitions were then thrown to the winds, Very lights shot up into the sky and all over the ground as well, causing danger to life and limb. Miraculously 20 bottles of Champagne were found by the Quartermaster. But later there was much less sense of joy but grief for all those friends and colleagues lost. The regiment then stayed at this location for the next week before moving to take over guard duties in Hanover and then Magdeburg. Later a farewell parade took place at Einbeck.

As Lieutenant General Sir Brian Horrocks who had the regiment under command from August 1942 to May 1945, wrote:

'I can hardly imagine a British Army without the Sherwood Rangers, and there is no doubt no armoured regiment can show a finer record of hard fighting'.

The regiment's success up to VE Day can also be gauged by its 30 battle honours, its 159 awards, including 78 for gallantry and above all the 827 casualties killed, wounded or missing.



THE FIRST BRITISH TROOPS TO ENTER GERMANY.
LIEUT. I. MCKAY with the Recce Troop.

A memorial service was held at St Mary's Church Nottingham on 21st September 1946 for the 245 members of the regiment who lost their lives. On that same day the City of Nottingham presented the Freedom of Entry into the City to the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry.



Einbeck Regimental Head Quarters
3rd October 1945



Einbeck Parade
Regimental Head
Quarters 3rd October
1945



Einbeck 3rd
October 1945

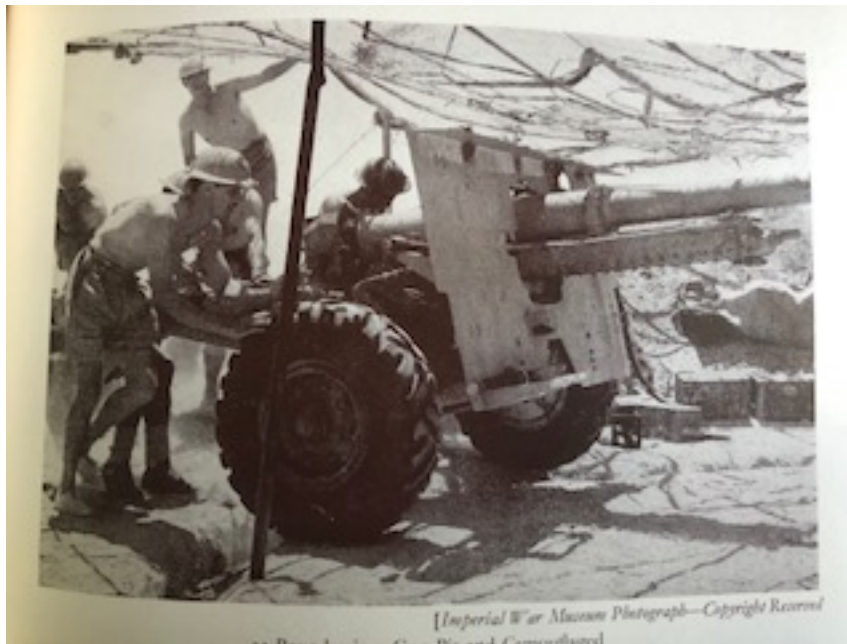
The South Nottinghamshire Hussars Yeomanry



The South Notts Hussars were formed as part of the Yeomanry in 1794 and served with distinction in the Boer War and World War 1 and were converted to the Royal Artillery in 1922.

As a territorial unit they were mobilised in the summer of 1939.

107th Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery (South Notts Hussars) served in the Western Desert, seeing early action against the Italians in 1940 and subsequently throughout the 8-month Siege of Tobruk in 1941. They 'Stood to the last round' against 2 Panzer Divisions at the battle of Knightsbridge in June 1942. Described as 'one of the most distinguished actions in the history of the Royal Artillery', the Regiment was effectively destroyed. The survivors reformed as a Battery of a Medium Regiment and fought at El Alamein, the Tunisian campaign and the invasion of Sicily.



Returning to the UK they were reformed as a Medium Regiment and fought in Normandy, the Low Countries, the Rhine and Germany.

The second line Regiment, 150th (South Notts Hussars) Field Regiment, became an Army Group Artillery Regiment and took part in the D Day landings, supporting the Airborne Forces at Pegasus Bridge, and then in the

Normandy campaign.

In April 1945 the South Notts Hussars supported the Canadians in the relief of Arnhem and were then deployed to Ramsdorf in Germany in readiness for the occupation of Germany. On VE Day the Regiment celebrated morning service and in the afternoon played an inter-Battery football competition, and in the evening lit bonfires in what was described in the Regimental history as "an atmosphere of conviviality".



They returned to the UK in March 1946 after nearly seven years continuous service.



The Sherwood Foresters



Europe 1939-1940

Dunkirk- 2nd Sherwood Foresters were sent as part of the BEF force in 1939 & 9th Battalion were sent as part of the BEF force in 1940. 1/5th were sent in October 1939 in a communications role and 2/5th were sent in April 1940. On the evacuation, at one stage 1/5th, 2/5th & Battalions were defending the perimeter.

Norway April 1940- 8th Sherwood Foresters landed in Norway in the fight against the invading German Army. 8th Foresters had very little training and weren't fully equipped. The Foresters were ordered to withdraw to Tretten, where a long battle took place and eventually forced to surrender. Some members of the Battalion were able to make it back to the UK whilst the rest of the Battalion taken as POWs.

Asia 1942



Singapore, 1942

1/5th Sherwood Foresters were sent to the Far East to defend Singapore against the Japanese. A few weeks later the Foresters and the rest of the British forces were forced to surrender. Conditions were harsh and many Foresters were subject to forced labour to build the Burma Thailand Railway.

Image: colonel Lily of the 1/5th Battalion The Sherwood Foresters, taken whilst a Prisoner of War in Singapore.

Africa 1942-1943

1st Sherwood Foresters were sent to Egypt in 1942 in the fight against General Rommel's forces and fought off German attacks at Tobruk on June 20th but by 6pm, they were surrounded and taken as POWs. The 14th Foresters were sent to Africa with General Montgomery's Eighth Army, where they fought with distinction in the Battle of El Alamein from 23rd October until 4th November 1943. El Alamein resulted in the defeat of the Axis powers.

Italy 1943-1944

5th Sherwood Foresters landed at Salerno in September 1943 and continued fighting up to the Cassino area. 2nd Foresters landed at Anzio in January 1944, and were later joined by 14th Foresters. After the fall of Rome 2nd, 5th & 14th Foresters continued the fight up the length of Italy, where Captain Brunt who was attached to 6th Lincolns earned a Victoria Cross for his leadership on 9th December 1944.



VE Day 1945

1st & 8th Foresters were based in England.

2nd Foresters in Palestine, both days (8th & 9th May) celebrated as holidays. It is noted in the Battalion history that along with drinks and food, the highlights included racing on horse, mules and camels.

5th Sherwood Foresters were in Italy at Bertinora, where they celebrated VE Day.

6th & 7th Foresters were based in Germany in Anti-Aircraft roles. 7th (Robin Hoods) had been awarded the Belgian Croix de Guerre for their actions in the Antwerp Box.

12th & 13th Battalions based in India trained officers and soldiers in India for the 14th's Army campaign in Burma. On VE Day, the 12th Battalion held a Parade in India.



The 1/5th Battalion remained as POWs until the Japanese were defeated in August 1945. 450 officers and men were casualties because of the conditions.

Forester Facts for WW2:

- 17 Battalions raised
- 26,940 officers and men served,
- 1,520 Casualties
- 25 Battle Honours awarded

The Queen's Royal Lancers

The Second World War: North Africa 1942-43

The 16th/5th & 17th/21st Lancers fought together during WWII as part of 26th Armoured Brigade. The Brigade first saw active service as part of 1st Army in North Africa from November 1942 until spring 1943, both Regiments campaigning in Tunisia, the objective being Tunis itself.



The Regiments fought in the battles of Kasserine, Fondouk, and the final battle for Tunis. After a hard-earned victory in North Africa, the Brigade was withdrawn to reorganise, re-equip and rest in preparation for the invasion of Italy.

Message received from 26th Armoured Brigade in the Field, 13th May 1943:

The Corps Commander sends his heartiest congratulations to all ranks in this Brigade and wishes them to know that it was largely due to their efforts that all the enemy both east of Tunis and opposite the 8th Army were either killed or captured.

The Second World War: Italy 1944-45

The 16th/5th Lancers landed in Naples in January 1944, at the outset of a sixteen gruelling months' campaign in Italy. Unlike the North African desert, Italy was not ideal armoured country. On the whole it was very close and dotted with vineyards and olive groves, complemented by formidable mountain ranges.



Meanwhile the 17th/21st Lancers arrived in Italy during the preparation phase for the assault on the Gustav Line, a defensive line running the entire length of Italy and hinged on Monte Cassino. The assault began on 11th May 1944 with the crossing of the River Gagliano. The 17th/21st moved to its bridge-crossing site 'Amazon' during the night, only to find that the bridges had not been laid, due to all the Engineer bulldozers having been knocked out. As a result, the Regiment was forced to improvise, using tanks to shunt a Bailey bridge into position and thus effect a crossing.

The advance north of Rome proved even harder than in the south. There were only three routes capable of supporting armoured formations, with the Germans covering all of them with direct and indirect fire. The delaying action the Germans fought was so effective it took the Allies four months to reach the Gothic Line.

The Regiments' record in Italy was most impressive: actions at Cassino in May 1944, fighting as dismounted infantry in the Apennine Mountains outside Florence during the winter of 1944/45 and fighting in the final battles for the capture of Perugia, Argenta Gap and crossing of the river Po into the Po Valley.

On 2nd May 1945 the German army in Italy surrendered, followed days later by the unconditional surrender of all enemy forces.

VE Day was greeted by the 16th/5th Lancers in the area of Vigarano with a half day holiday. The officers arranged a small cocktail party whilst the Squadrons organised 'Smokers'.

Meanwhile the 17th/21st Lancers occupied an area around Fontana. The Po plain was in full flower and there were asparagus, strawberries and smooth red wine of the district. Foraging parties searched the countryside for luxury food items and, more importantly, horses.