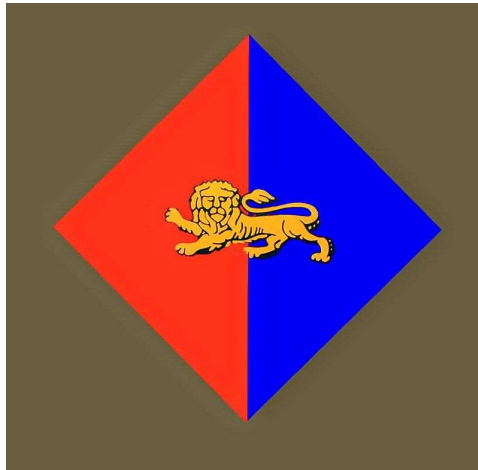


56th Anti-Tank Regiment Royal Artillery (King's Own).



Tactical Recognition Flash of the 56th Anti-tank Regt. Royal Artillery (Kings Own) worn in Burma

The 56th (King's Own) Anti-Tank Regiment was a Territorial Army unit of the British Army's Royal Artillery (RA), which converted from the 4th Battalion, King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster). During the Second World War, it first served with the 42nd (East Lancashire) Division in the Battle of France and Dunkirk evacuation in May–June 1940. In 1942, it was sent to join the 70th Infantry Division in India, where it was converted into a Light Anti-Aircraft/Anti-Tank Regiment. In this guise, it served in the Burma Campaign, mainly with the 5th Indian Infantry Division. It reconverted to the anti-tank role in late 1944 and in June 1945 it returned to India as a training unit. It continued serving in the TA postwar until 1961, when it re-merged into the King's Own.

Origin

56th (King's Own) Anti-Tank Regiment, Royal Artillery was formed in 1938 by the conversion of the 4th Battalion, The King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster), a Territorial Army (TA) battalion based at Ulverston in the Furness area of north Lancashire (now in Cumbria). It formed the anti-tank regiment of the TA's 42nd (East Lancashire) Division. The regiment comprised four anti-tank batteries: 221, 222, 223 and 224.

The TA was doubled in size after the Munich Crisis and 56th A/T Rgt formed a duplicate regiment at Crosby, near Liverpool, on 9 May 1939. Originally, this was to be 61st A/T Rgt, but the designation was changed to 66th Anti-Tank Regiment on 1 June, and it was recruited to full strength by July. The regiment consisted of 261, 262, 263 and 264 A/T Btys.

Second World War

Mobilisation

In September 1939, the unit was mobilised at Ulverston and went to guard important points at Barrow in Furness docks.

Battle of France

The 42nd Division joined the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in France in April 1940. The 56th provided the defence on a section of the Dunkirk perimeter before being evacuated:

- 3 April 1940 – Advance party of regiment move to France.
- 21 April 1940 – All of the regiment are now in France.
- 10 May 1940 – The German attack begins. The Regiment is bombed by air but received no casualties.
- 27 May 1940 – In area of Cassel with the 42nd Division. Regiment is ordered to withdraw to Dunkirk.
- 28 May 1940 – 223 Battery is in a heavy engagement with the Germans and accounted for the destruction of ten German tanks.

- 29 May 1940 – Regiment at Rousbrugge protecting Loc.
- 30 May 1940 – Some elements of the Regiment are withdrawn from Dunkirk whilst others defend. The remainder of the unit was later evacuated.
- June 1940 – Regiment based in the North East and Yorkshire in a defensive role.

Home service

Following its return to the UK, the 56th lost men and batteries to form other units.

In September 1941, 224 battery transferred to the newly formed 83rd A/T Rgt (see below), and raised a new 290 A/T Bty to replace it.

In November 1941, 223 Battery became 1st Air-Landing Anti-Tank Battery. It became the first Royal Artillery unit to fly into battle – on board gliders – serving with 1st Airborne Division in Sicily in 1942 and later at Arnhem in September 1944.

223 Battery, having been permanently detached to 1st Air Landing Rgt, was replaced by 203 (Ross) A/T Bty. This battery had been part of 51st (West Highland) A/T Rgt of 51st (Highland) Division, most of which was captured at St Valery in 1940, remnants of the artillery escaping through Cherbourg. 51st A/T Regiment was placed in 'suspended animation' and 203 Bty transferred to 56th A/T.

Far East

The 56th had a wonderful record as a fighting unit; firstly, in Flanders during the 1940 campaign, after which it was evacuated at Dunkirk. Then, after a period at home on Beach Defence and Anti-Invasion roles, it went to the Far East.

In 1942–3, Fourteenth Army adopted a new policy with the formation of composite Light Anti-Aircraft/Anti-Tank regiments, each containing two LAA and two A/T batteries. This format was intended to help divisions distribute sub-units with balanced firepower and mutual support in close jungle fighting where battle groups often had to move independently. 56th A/T Regiment was one of those selected for conversion, transferring 203 and 290 Btys to 55th (Devon) LAA Rgt (thus retaining the two original King's Own batteries), and receiving 163 and 164 LAA Btys in exchange in July and August 1943. These were equipped with the Bofors 40 mm gun. The regiment was in training with XV Corps in September 1943, before joining 5th Indian Infantry Division in Burma in October.

The 5th Indian Division was facing the Japanese 55th Division on the coastal flank of the Arakan front. The defeat of the Japanese 55th Division, to which a large share of the credit must go to the Indian 5th Division, was the first decisive victory against the Japanese since they had invaded Burma two years previously. From the victory in the Arakan sector, the 5th Indian Infantry Division was air-lifted to the central front. 161 Brigade joined XXXIII Corps, which was beginning to arrive at Dimapur, and fought in the Battle of Kohima while the remainder of the division reinforced IV Corps, whose land victory at Kohima and Imphal, in which the Division played an important part, proved to be the turning-point of the Burma Campaign. Except for one period of rest and reorganization, the Indian 5th Division continued to fight and to advance throughout the rest of the war and took part in the final thrust by IV Corps down to Rangoon.

Demobilisation

During the period from June to August 1945, the 66th A/T Rgt was gradually placed into a state of "suspended animation" and its personnel were posted to the 56th, which had just come out of the line in Burma and was reforming as a Self-Propelled unit in India - approximately 80% of the original 56th's personnel were sent back to England for repatriation and replaced by personnel from the 66th. The 56th was itself also placed into a state of "suspended animation" while its remaining personnel and equipment were returned to England.

Commanders

The following officers commanded 56th A/T Rgt during the war:

- Lt. Col. B.H. Palmer. (1940–1941)
- Brigadier Claude M. Vallentin (Jul 1941 – Jun 1942)
- Brigadier Robert Mansergh (Jun 1942 – Sep 1944)
- Brigadier Geoffrey B.J. Kellie (Sep 1944 – Jun 1945)
- Brigadier R.G. Loder-Symonds (Jun 1945 – Aug 1945)

Postwar

When the TA was reconstituted in 1947, the 56th and 66th A/T Rgts reformed as 380 A/T and 390 LAA Rgts respectively.

Equipment

As an Anti-Tank Unit, the 56th was supplied with the then new Ordnance Q-F 6 Pounder 7cwt, which replaced the previous equipment of 2 Pounders, used in France and England. During the regiment's time in England in 1940 to 1941, it underwent training on the new 6 Pounder Anti-Tank Gun, which was continued in India prior to its deployment with the 5th Indian Division.

Initially upon conversion to artillery, the 56th A/T Rgt retained the King's Own cap badge in white metal, though in October 1939 this was replaced by the RA's grenade collar badge, worn as a cap badge. However, all ranks retained the King's Own buttons in service dress. While serving in Burma the regiment wore a white metal King's Own lion collar badge on a red/blue RA diamond patch on the turn-up of their bush hats. While serving with 1st Airborne Division, 223 Bty wore an embroidered shoulder title bearing the words 'ANTI-TANK BATTERY'. The 66th A/T Rgt also retained King's Own buttons on service dress. After the war the regiment wore a red lanyard in place of the white RA one, which it retained as R Bty of 306th HAA Rgt.



Regimental flag used unofficially during the Second World War.