

= 61st Infantry Division ( United Kingdom ) =

The 61st Infantry Division was an infantry division of the British Army , raised in 1939 as part of the expansion of the Territorial Army in response to the Nazi German occupation of Czechoslovakia . The division was created as a duplicate of the 48th ( South Midland ) Infantry Division , and was assigned to home defence duties .

While the division was never deployed overseas , its headquarters staff was deployed to Norway and briefly fought in the Norwegian Campaign . Afterwards , the division was deployed to Northern Ireland for almost three years as a result of rumours of a German intention to invade . In Northern Ireland , the division manned static defences , conducted internal security , and trained for future operations . Returning to England , the division participated in numerous military exercises and was scheduled to join the 21st Army Group for the Operation Overlord ; the Allied invasion of German @-@ occupied France . By late 1943 , this role had been taken away from the division and it was assigned to train replacements for combat units . Throughout 1944 , the division aided Overlord in various deception formats while most of the men were posted to combat formations within 21st Army Group . In late 1945 , the division was re @-@ organized as a light division and was going to be deployed to the Far East to fight Imperial Japan . The Japanese surrender resulted in the move not being made , and in November the division was disbanded .

= = Background = =

Throughout the 1930s tensions built between Nazi Germany and the United Kingdom as well as its allies . During late 1937 , and throughout 1938 , German demands for the annexation of Czechoslovakia 's Sudetenland led to an international crisis . In an attempt to avoid war , British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain met with German Chancellor Adolf Hitler in September and brokered the Munich Agreement . The agreement averted war and allowed Germany to annex the Sudetenland . While it had been intended as an agreement to reconcile differences , and for future issues to be resolved peacefully , relations between both countries soon deteriorated . On 15 March 1939 , Germany breached the terms of the agreement by invading and occupying the remnants of the Czech state .

In response , on 29 March , the British Secretary of State for War Leslie Hore @-@ Belisha announced plans to increase the Territorial Army from 130 @,@ 000 men to 340 @,@ 000 and in so doing double the number of territorial divisions . The intended plan of action was for the existing units to recruit over their allowed establishments ( aided by an increase in pay for territorials , the removal of restrictions on promotion that had been a major hindrance to recruiting during the preceding years , the construction of better quality barracks , and an increase in supper @-@ time rations ) and then form ' Second Line ' divisions from small cadres that could be built upon . As a result , the 61st Infantry Division was to be created as a Second Line unit , a duplicate of the First Line 48th ( South Midland ) Infantry Division . In April , limited conscription was introduced . At that time 34 @,@ 500 ' Militiamen ' , all of the age of 20 , were conscripted into the regular army with the intent of being trained for six months before being deployed to the forming second line units . However , despite the intention for the army to grow in size , the programme was complicated by a lack of central guidance on the expansion and duplication process , and issues regarding the lack of facilities , equipment , and instructors .

= = History = =

= = Initial service = =

Despite the ongoing efforts and some regiments being able to recruit the required numbers to form new battalions , the whole process had ? in the words of historian James P. Levy ? " not progressed beyond the paper stage when [ the Second World War ] began in September . " By the outbreak of

the war , the division was active , under the command of Major @-@ General Robert J. Collins , and was composed of the 182nd , 183rd , and 184th Infantry Brigades and supporting elements . Following the division 's formation , it was assigned to Southern Command . At the end of November , Major @-@ General Adrian Carton de Wiart took command . The division was spread out , ranging from Birmingham to Portsmouth , and Cheltenham to Reading , and with the headquarters based in Oxford . On 15 April , Carton de Wiart , as well as the divisional staff , were deployed to Norway , and Major @-@ General Edmond Schreiber was given command of the division .

= = = Headquarters deployed to Norway = = =

In their opening assault upon Norway , German troops had seized Trondheim . In response , the British Army planned to launch a two pronged pincer attack to retake the city . The troops to undertake this attack came from the 49th ( West Riding ) Infantry Division ( a first line territorial division ) , which had already been earmarked for service in Norway prior to the German invasion . The division was temporarily broken up , with its brigades acting as individual commands . The 146th Infantry Brigade , which would make up the bulk of Mauriceforce and form the northern pincer began landing on 17 April . Due to time restraints and troops already assigned to the expedition , the division was not deployed to Norway . Instead , Carton de Wiart was given command of Mauriceforce and was allowed to select his staff which he drew from his headquarters . The southern pincer , 200 miles ( 320 km ) to the south and separated by mountainous terrain and rivers , was to be undertaken by Major @-@ General Bernard Paget 's Sickleforce that had landed at Åndalsnes .

Soon after arriving , the 146th 's leading battalions began to move south . On 21 April , Carton De Wiart 's troops engaged in the first encounter of the war between British and German troops . The British troops , largely confined to the road network and advancing in deep snow , were engaged by a slightly larger German force that was supported by artillery and air support . The Germans , utilizing sledges , motorcycles , and ski @-@ troops were able to outmanoeuvre and force back the British . German follow @-@ up attacks did not materialize , however the Luftwaffe heavily bombed the small port at Namsos . Carton De Wiart cabled the War Office and stated " with my lack of equipment I was quite incapable of advancing on Trondheim and could see very little point in remaining in that part of Norway sitting out like rabbits in the snow . " The evacuation was not ordered until the end of the month and then completed in the early days of May , following the loss of 157 men of Mauriceforce . The lack of success in Norway , and the withdrawal of the forces attempting to retake Trondheim resulted in the collapse of Chamberlain 's Government . Carton De Wiart , considered a daring and aggressive commander , was ? per historian Jack Adams ? " hampered by ... climatic and geographic conditions " in addition to his troops being " inexperienced , poorly prepared and badly backed up " .

= = = Deployment to Northern Ireland = = =

As early as the middle of May , while the Battle of France was still being waged , the British Government began to fear that Germany would immediately launch an invasion of the British Isles . This fear was compounded by , as historian Paul McMahon commented , the " catastrophic Allied defeats " that soon followed , which produced " two hysterias in the summer of 1940 : first , fear of imminent invasion and , second , a ' fifth column panic ' . " The initial fear of invasion was aroused by the alleged capture of German documents , by the Dutch , which contained plans for a German invasion and also included information regarding a simultaneous attack on Ireland by paratroopers who were to be assisted by the Irish Republican Army ( IRA ) . This document , which no longer exists , caused panic within the British Government . This information was reinforced , in the following months , by reports warning of a German intent to invade Ireland from diplomatic missions and the Secret Intelligence Service ( SIS ) . On 14 May , following his return to the United Kingdom , Carton De Wiart resumed command of the 61st Infantry Division . After the British Expeditionary Force was evacuated from France , the British acted on the rumours of the German intent to invade

Ireland , and the decision was made to reinforce the garrison ( the 53rd ( Welsh ) Infantry Division ) by deploying the 61st Infantry Division ( Over the following 12 months , the division would be followed by the 5th and 48th ( South Midland ) Divisions and the 71st and 72nd Independent Infantry Brigades ) .

McMahon commented that the SIS had a history of " furnish [ ing ] unreliable information on the IRA 's foreign intrigues . " Yet , these past failures were ignored as the reports reinforced the fears of invasion . McMahon suggested that " It is even possible that the plans discovered in Holland were planted . Whether deliberate deception or not , British intelligence was well and truly deceived . " Historian Eunan O 'Halpin argued that while the Dutch document could be seen as a British fabrication , " it is now known ... that German deception operations prepared in anticipation of Operation ' Sealion ' included the manufacturing of rumours and stories of plans to attack Ireland as a feint during the build up to an invasion of Southern England . " Nicholas Mansergh commented that " Ireland had no place " in the initial Sealion plans , and it was not until 3 December 1940 that German planners even looked at the possibility before concluding that such an operation was not possible or if launched would result in failure . In his memoirs , Carton De Wiart commented " I can never believe the Germans had any intention of invading Ireland but I am very grateful for any reason which sent us there , for it was an ideal training ground for troops and the division improved enormously from the moment of our arrival . "

The 61st moved to Northern Ireland , and came under the command of Northern Ireland District on 20 June . The division was responsible for manning the static defences across Northern Ireland and defending Belfast , as well as being responsible for the internal security of the country . While based across most of Northern Ireland , it was largely positioned within County Antrim , County Londonderry , and County Tyrone , with the divisional headquarters at Ballymena . The division trained to repel seaborne invasions from German forces , in addition to airborne landings and small raids . The beaches of County Antrim and Londonderry were seen as the most likely areas for an invasion , and by the end of autumn , concrete pillars , barbed wire entanglements , and camouflaged firing positions had been constructed . During the division 's stay in Northern Ireland , Lieutenant @-@ General Henry Pownall took command of British forces in the country . His appointment resulted in Carton De Wiart losing command of the division on grounds of his age ( one month shy of his 61st birthday ) . Carton De Wiart was replaced by Major @-@ General Charles Fullbrook @-@ Leggatt , who assumed command on 6 April 1941 , and was in turn followed by Major @-@ General John Owen Carpenter on 15 September 1942 .

= = = Return to England , training , and Operation Overlord = = =

The division returned to the England on 4 February 1943 , and was placed under the command of XI Corps and based in Essex . Between 4 ? 12 March , the division participated in Exercise Spartan ; the largest military exercise ever held in the United Kingdom . David French commented that the exercise " was designed to analyse the problems that would arise after a force had landed on a hostile shore and was advancing from a bridgehead . " The exercise revealed weaknesses in elements of the senior leadership , in particular the officers in overall command of the armies deployed for the exercise , and highlighted the improvements made in general by the infantry . In May , the division was transferred to II Corps and moved to Kent following @-@ which Major @-@ General Charles Wainwright took command . The division was earmarked for a role in Operation Overlord and Marcus Cunliffe wrote that Exercise Spartan " seemed to be every indication that " the division was to be a front @-@ line unit . In September , the division in conjunction with the 1st Polish Armoured Division was placed under the control of II Canadian Corps for Exercise Link . In the months following the exercise , the division was relegated to ' Lower Establishment ' status . This meant that the division was now to be strictly used for home defence in a static role compared to ' Higher Establishment ' divisions that were intended for deployment overseas and combat . As part of this change in priorities , the division also became a training formation and one intended to find suitable replacements for fighting formations . By October , the division had also been assigned to anti @-@ invasion duties in Kent . While based there , German cross @-@ Channel guns

periodically shelled the area , and in 1944 V @-@ 1 flying bombs became a minor issue . In December 1943 , the division ( reinforced , for the exercise , by the 31st Tank Brigade ) played the defending force in Exercise Vulcan ; a four @-@ day training exercise aimed at improving the attacking process of the 43rd ( Wessex ) Infantry Division .

During 1944 , the division aided Operation Overlord in a number of formats . On 9 April , the 183rd Infantry Brigade ceased to exist as an formation and formed HQ Residue Concentration Area to aid the invasion preparation . The 4th Battalion , Northamptonshire Regiment and the 10th Battalion , Worcestershire Regiment were attached to 21st Army Group to aid 185th Camouflage Field Company , Royal Engineers . The men of the 4th Northamptonshire Regiment created 150 fake Landing Craft Tanks ( LCTs ) , made from steel tubing and canvas , and positioned them along the River Deben at Ipswich , as well as at Oulton Broad , Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth . The 10th Worcestershire Regiment constructed fake landing craft at Dover , Folkestone , and Harwich , in addition to fake LCTs on the River Orwell . By 6 June , the battalion had constructed 122 such dummy displays . In May , as part of Operation Fortitude , Juan Pujol García ( the British double agent known as Garbo ) reported to the Germans that the division was ostensibly based around Brighton and Newhaven . Here , in addition to 45th Infantry Division and Royal Marines , it allegedly took part in the build @-@ up of the notional First United States Army Group ( FUSAG ) . The division was then made part of the fictional British VII Corps , part of the equally fake Fourth Army , and ' travelled ' to Scotland before returning south to FUSAG . Furthermore , signallers from the division maintained wireless traffic to give the Germans the impression that VII Corps also included the notional 80th Division .

By mid @-@ 1944 , the five ' Lower Establishment ' divisions allocated to home defence duties ( the 38th ( Welsh ) , the 45th , the 47th ( London ) , the 55th ( West Lancashire ) , and the 61st ) had a combined total of 17 @,@ 845 men . Of this number , around 13 @,@ 000 were available as replacements for the 21st Army Group fighting in France . The remaining 4 @,@ 800 men were considered ineligible at that time for service abroad for a variety of reasons , including a lack of training or being medically unfit . Over the following six months , up to 75 per cent of these men would be deployed to reinforce 21st Army Group following the completion of their training and certification of fitness . For example , those eligible for overseas service from the 9th Battalion , Worcestershire Regiment were transferred to 21st Army Group . The battalion was then tasked with training those who were considered unfit , re @-@ training soldiers who had recovered from wounds , and training men from anti @-@ aircraft units to become infantry . On 18 July , HQ Residue Concentration Area reverted to its former infantry role . Two days later , the brigade staff of 184th Infantry Brigade became the headquarters of 183rd Infantry Brigade and likewise the headquarters staff of the 183rd became HQ 184th Infantry Brigade . In August , the 4th Northamptonshire was transferred to Force 135 that was planning to end the German occupation of the Channel Islands . Such an attack did not materialize , and the entire force was transferred to Europe to reinforce 21st Army Group . On 1 September , the 184th Infantry Brigade ( while remaining part of the division ) was transferred to the Orkney and Shetland Islands for a two @-@ month stint as the defensive garrison . Over the remainder of the year , and into 1945 the makeup of the division changed . However , the role of the division remained the same . For example , the 4th Battalion , Devonshire Regiment role was find drafts for other battalions fighting overseas .

= = = Light division , and disbandment = = =

In August 1945 , following the conclusion of the war in Europe , the division was reorganized as a light division . The light division concept had been undertaken during the Burma Campaign following the initial defeats . Historian F.W. Perry commented that the British Indian Army concluded that " existing Indian formations were over @-@ mechanised and road @-@ bound . " Therefore , the surviving 17th Indian Division was reorganised as a light division . This included being reduced to two infantry brigades , all non @-@ cross country capable vehicles being replaced with mules , jeeps , and four @-@ wheel drive trucks , and the field artillery either completely replaced by pack howitzers or mechanised . These changes greatly increased the off @-@ road mobility , and the

increase in pack animals allowed it to operate away from a road network for an extended period of time .

The 61st retained its three infantry brigades , although there were changes to the divisional troops along the above lines . It was intended that the division would be able to be transferred by air to any theatre of war , and its personnel trained to fight in any terrain encountered . Once on the ground , the entire division would be mobile utilizing only jeeps . To help adapt to this new role , training exercises were carried out . The initial destination for the division was the Far East to support the fight against Imperial Japan . However , the Japanese surrender resulted in the move being cancelled , and the division never left the United Kingdom . In November , the division was disbanded .

= = General officer commanding = =

= = Order of Battle = =