

= 66th Division ( United Kingdom ) =

The 66th ( 2nd East Lancashire ) Division was an infantry division of the British Army , part of the Territorial Force , which saw service in the trenches of the Western Front , during the later years of the Great War . Disbanded after the war , it was reformed in 1939 in the Territorial Army as the 66th Infantry Division but disbanded in 1940 , without seeing active service in the Second World War .

The division was created shortly after the outbreak of the First World War at the end of August 1914 , as the 2nd East Lancashire Division , a second @-@ line formation of the East Lancashire Division , composed primarily of soldiers from eastern Lancashire and the industrial towns around Manchester . After training and home service , it deployed to the Western Front in early 1917 ; its first major combat came in October of that year , at the Battle of Poelcappelle . In March 1918 , it suffered extremely heavy losses during Operation Michael the German Spring Offensive and was withdrawn from the line and reduced to a cadre to be rebuilt . It returned to the front in time for the Battle of Cambrai , part of the Hundred Days Offensive and the Battle of the Selle . Following the Armistice of 11 November 1918 , it was stationed in Belgium , where it was demobilised in March 1919 .

The division was not reformed after the war but was reconstituted as the 66th Infantry Division ( with no regional title ) , again as a duplicate of the 42nd Division , during the hurried expansion of the Territorial Army in early 1939 . It was active for slightly over a year , before being disbanded in June 1940 , having only seen home service with most of its component units being transferred to other divisions .

= = First World War = =

= = = Formation and home service = = =

The division was created at the end of August 1914 , as the 2nd East Lancashire Division , a second @-@ line formation of the East Lancashire Division . Territorial Force soldiers could not be deployed overseas without their consent and the Territorial units were accordingly split into a " first line " , with men who had volunteered for overseas service and a " second line " , which was intended for home service , by the ten percent who refused to volunteer on 12 August . The second line units also served to absorb the large number of recruits who had joined the Territorial Force following the outbreak of war . The first commander was Brigadier @-@ General Charles Beckett , a 65 @-@ year @-@ old retired officer , who had commanded a Yeomanry brigade some years earlier .

As with the original East Lancashire Division , the 2nd East Lancashire was organised in three infantry brigades of four battalions each . These were later numbered as the 197th ( Lancashire Fusiliers ) Brigade , composed of the 2 / 5th , 2 / 6th , 2 / 7th and 2 / 8th Lancashire Fusiliers ; the 198th ( East Lancashire ) Brigade , composed of the 2 / 4th and 2 / 5th East Lancashire Regiment and the 2 / 9th and 2 / 10th Manchester Regiment ; and the 199th ( Manchester ) Brigade , composed of the 2 / 5th , 2 / 6th , 2 / 7th and 2 / 8th Manchester Regiment . The 197th Brigade drew its men from Bury and Salford , Greater Manchester ; the 198th Brigade from Blackburn , Burnley Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne and Oldham and the 199th Brigade from Wigan , Manchester and Ardwick . The division also raised second @-@ line Territorial artillery , Royal Army Medical Corps and Royal Engineer units , all from the Lancashire ? Manchester recruiting area and had an attached squadron of the Bedfordshire Yeomanry .

For two years , the 2nd East Lancashire Division ( numbered the 66th Division in August 1915 ) , provided trained replacements for its parent unit and carried out home defence duties in England . Elements of the division assembled near Southport in late 1914 , then moved south to the Kent ? Sussex area in May 1915 and to Essex in early 1916 . In early 1915 , the 2 / 5th Lancashire Fusiliers , a second @-@ line battalion , was detached for overseas service and joined the 51st ( Highland ) Division . The battalion was replaced by another duplicate battalion , the 3 / 5th

Lancashire Fusiliers , which became one of the few third @-@ line territorial battalions to see active service . One of the three companies of Royal Engineers , was sent to France in 1915 to join the 48th ( South Midland ) Division and during 1916 , three of the four heavy and howitzer artillery batteries were withdrawn or broken up . Following the Military Service Act of January 1916 , all Territorial soldiers were deemed to liable for overseas service and in February 1917 , the 66th Division was instructed to prepare for a move to continental Europe and received a new and experienced commander , Major @-@ General Herbert Lawrence .

= = = Flanders and Poelcappelle , 1917 = = =

The division arrived in France in early 1917 as part of the last batch of second @-@ line Territorial divisions to be sent from Britain , and was attached to the First Army . On 12 April , Brigadier @-@ General Godfrey Matthews , a former Royal Marine officer commanding 198th Brigade , was wounded by shellfire and died the next day . In June , the division was transferred to the XV Corps of the Fourth Army on the relatively quiet coastal sector in Flanders . During the summer , XV Corps was held ready for Operation Hush , an amphibious landing by the 1st Division and a coastal offensive by the rest of XV Corps , which was planned to support an advance from Passchendaele Ridge east of Ypres , by the Fifth Army . The operation was postponed several times and was cancelled in October . At the end of September , the 66th Division was relieved by its parent unit , the 42nd ( East Lancashire ) Division . After a few days of overlap , where many men were able to meet friends and relations they had not seen since 1914 , the division moved south to the Ypres area . The division was assigned to II Anzac Corps , a predominantly Australian formation and the 199th Brigade moved into the front line to replace the 3rd Australian Division on 5 October . The relief was badly mismanaged , leaving the Australian staff officers doubtful of the efficiency of the division . On 9 October , the division made its debut in the Battle of Poelcappelle .

On the night of 8 / 9 October , the 197th and 198th brigades had begun to cover the 2 @.@ 5 miles ( 4 @.@ 0 km ) to the front line , which usually took about 1 1 ? 2 hours . Despite starting ten hours before the attack , the 197th Brigade was late . At zero hour , the 198th Brigade attacked on the left flank of the divisional front , into defences which had been little damaged by the artillery bombardment , advancing behind a meagre creeping barrage and were held up 300 yards ( 270 m ) short of the first objective . The 197th Brigade arrived late on the right flank , exhausted and disorganised after a twelve @-@ hour march through mud but attacked as soon as it arrived . The brigade rapidly advanced over drier sandy ground and reached the final objective , 700 yards ( 640 m ) short of Passchendaele village at 10 : 00 a.m. ; an officer 's patrol entered the village and found it empty . Around midday , the 197th Brigade battalions near the village withdrew their flanks , to gain touch with the units on either side at the first objective ; the troops in the centre misinterpreted this and also withdrew the same distance . A German counter @-@ attack was repulsed at 5 : 10 p.m. and before nightfall , the divisional commander ordered a short withdrawal , to link with the 49th Division on the left and to avoid enfilade fire from the Bellevue Spur . The brigade ended the day 500 yards ( 460 m ) beyond the start line for the loss of 3 @,@ 119 casualties ; the division was relieved by the 3rd Australian Division on the night of 10 / 11 October .

A second senior officer was killed in action , when Brigadier @-@ General Arthur Lowe , commanding the divisional artillery , was killed near Ypres on 24 November . In late December 1917 , a new commanding officer , Major @-@ General Neill Malcolm was appointed to the 66th Division . Malcolm was a decorated veteran of several colonial wars , who had served in staff posts since being wounded in the Second Boer War and had most recently served as chief of staff of the Fifth Army . The division was reorganised over the winter , with the brigade machine @-@ gun companies being consolidated into a battalion and a pioneer battalion , the 1 / 5th Border Regiment joining the division . The most substantial change was the loss of three battalions , the 3 / 5th Lancashire Fusiliers and 2 / 8th and 2 / 10th Manchester Regiment , one from each brigade . This was a change made in all British divisions , to bring the remaining battalions in France up to strength and to increase the ratio of artillery to infantry . At this point , there was a general exchange of men between the 42nd and 66th Divisions ; the core of the 1 / 6th Lancashire Fusiliers , 1 / 4th East

Lancashires , and 1 / 9th Manchesters were transferred to the 66th Division , where they amalgamated with their second @-@ line counterparts , while the 42nd Division received the men from the disbanded battalions in the 66th Division . The division remained in the Passchendaele area until February 1918 .

### = = = Battle of St. Quentin = = =

In March 1918 , the 66th Division was assigned to XIX Corps in the Fifth Army , holding an area north of Saint @-@ Quentin , bordering the 24th Division of XIX Corps on the right and 16th ( Irish ) Division of VII Corps on the left . The corps sector was between the River Cologne in the north and the Omicron in the south . Under a new defence in depth scheme , small strongpoints in a " forward zone " was to delay and disrupt an attack , harassing it with machine @-@ gun fire . The main body of the division remained in a " battle zone " further back , to make local counter @-@ attacks into the forward zone or in reserve in a third " rear zone " . The British were used to deliberate attacks in trench warfare conditions , not the rapid counter @-@ attacks on the defensive that the German army had perfected since early 1915 and felt vulnerable in what they saw as exposed positions . Combat units were still kept too close to the front line ( across the front , 84 percent of battalions were in the two forward zones ) , leaving them vulnerable to an attack and a lack of manpower meant that very few of the defensive positions necessary for the scheme to work had been prepared in the rear zone of the Fifth Army .

On the morning of 21 March , the German spring offensive began at the Battle of St. Quentin . Elements of the German 25th Division and 208th Division attacked through a thick fog at dawn , overrunning the two battalions ( 4th East Lancashires and 2 / 8th Lancashire Fusiliers ) which held positions in the forward zone . By 10 @. @ 30 am , they had reached the " battle zone " , where the fighting intensified . On the right flank , near the boundary with 24th Division , a reserve company of 2 / 7th Manchesters held a defensive position from 11 : 00 am to 7 : 00 pm , when they surrendered , having lost 70 percent casualties and run out of ammunition . To their left , the 2 / 6th Manchesters held out until the early afternoon , when the 160 survivors were forced to retreat further into the battle zone . The northern element of the division 's defensive plan was a fortified quarry outside the village of Templeux @-@ le @-@ Guérard , held by the 2 / 7th Lancashire Fusiliers and 1 / 5th Border Regiment but this had been quickly surrounded and bypassed by the attackers , to be mopped up later in the day , with only a few men escaping . The village was defended by the 2 / 6th Lancashire Fusiliers and an artillery battery ; in the course of the day , the battery was destroyed while the fusiliers were pushed back towards the edge of the village , clinging on to their positions as night fell . During the day , 711 men of 66th Division had been killed ; while detailed figures are not available this would suggest around 1 @, @ 000 men were wounded and another 2 @, @ 000 captured . British casualties for the day were 7 @, @ 500 killed , 10 @, @ 000 wounded and 21 @, @ 000 captured ; 66th Division is known to have lost 711 men killed .

On the morning of 22 March , German attacks continued to push back the remaining units of the 66th Division , now supported by the 1st Cavalry Division and a handful of tanks . The composite force managed a fighting retreat , with most units avoiding encirclement . Shortly after noon the remnants of the division were ordered to retreat behind the 50th ( Northumbrian ) Division , which were preparing fresh defences on the original Green Line along the edge of the rear zone . The 66th Division retreated through the new defensive line by 4 : 00 pm , with the aid of the 5th Durham Light Infantry ( DLI ) , which had been temporarily transferred to support them and the 50th Division took over the front line . Over the following days , the divisions of XIX Corps fell back towards the line of the River Somme , where the 66th Division ( plus the 5th DLI ) took up positions on the west bank of the river around Barleux and Foucaucourt @-@ en @-@ Santerre , west of Peronne . On 24 March , the German army crossed the Somme and the 2 / 8th Lancashire Fusiliers counter @-@ attacked the bridgeheads without success but continued to hold a line close to the river . Expecting a follow @-@ up attack the next day , 149th Brigade was temporarily attached to 66th Division and both units were slowly pushed back from the banks of the Somme , withdrawing to Assevillers as night fell on 25 March .

The remnants of the 66th Division were holding a position south of the Somme , with the 50th Division to the right and troops from the Third Army over the river to the left . An attack on the morning of 26 March , opening the Battle of Rosières , pushed back the units on the north bank and the 66th Division retired , losing contact with the 50th Division , which fell back on Rosières @-@ en @-@ Santerre to avoid being flanked . " Little 's Composite Battalion " with the remaining troops of the 198th Brigade , moved from reserve to Foucaucourt and defended the village until the early afternoon , retired to Framercourt and then filled a 3 @,@ 000 @-@ yard ( 2 @,@ 700 m ) gap between the 66th and 39th divisions . The battalion had been formed from stragglers and reinforcement drafts by Lieutenant @-@ Colonel W. B. Little , commander of 1 / 5th Borders , who had been on leave when the German offensive began and moved up towards the front line during 25 March . Other British troops were north of the 66th Division around Vauvilliers and by that night , the line south of the Somme was held by 16th , 39th , 66th and 50th divisions . The battle continued continued on 27 March , with the 66th Division pushed back to Harbonniers . That night , the division took up positions between Wiencourt and Guillaucourt , facing north on a line of about 1 mile ( 1 @.@ 6 km ) . The three brigade headquarters had moved forward to reinforce the front line ; until the 66th Division was reorganised later in the year , casualties were so numerous that the brigade structure was not reformed and the brigadiers took turns to command the infantry . On the morning of 28 March , a German attack broke through at Guillaucourt and the 66th Division retreated south to Cayeux @-@ en @-@ Santerre , with the 39th Division on the left . By nightfall , the line had been pushed back to Ignaucourt , a few miles from Amiens .

Elements of the division remained in the fighting line as late as 30 March , when they fought in a counter @-@ attack near Aubercourt under the command of one of the 66th Division brigadiers . The division was relieved by part of the 18th Division on the night of 30 / 31 March . After ten days ' fighting , only 2 @,@ 500 men remained in the division and it had almost ceased to function as an organised unit . Two of the three infantry brigades and eight of the twelve infantry battalions had lost their commanders and the front @-@ line strength was reduced to 1 @,@ 200 riflemen , fewer than a company per battalion . A proposal to disband the division was discussed in the first week of April but quickly rejected . On 29 March , near Vauchelles @-@ lès @-@ Domart , Malcolm had been badly wounded in his good leg ( he was lame in the other , following an injury in South Africa ) and left the division to recover , command being taken temporarily by Brigadier @-@ General A. J. Hunter . On 31 March , Keppel Bethell , who had commanded the New Army 74th Brigade in the 25th Division since October 1916 , was promoted to take over the division . At 35 , Bethell became the youngest man to command a division during the war ; while a temporary Major @-@ General , he still held the substantive rank of captain .

A driven and mercurial figure , Bethell inspired both admiration and loathing from his contemporaries , who saw him as an outstanding commander but with a furious and often unjustified , temper . During his time at 74th Brigade , relations with his staff had diminished to the point where they refused to take meals with him . He also believed in commandeering from other units and after leaving 25th Division , he repeatedly returned to poach staff officers and battalion commanders . The 74th Brigade would later provide the new divisional GSO.2 , Walter Guinness ( transferred after Bethell 's intervention to the Chief of Staff at army headquarters ) and the GSO.3 , John Marriott ( simply taken by Bethell from hospital ) . This approach extended to reorganising his new command . On 2 April , Bethell sent Gordon Macready , the divisional GSO.1 , to acquire several hundred guns in order to reform the 66th Division as a machine @-@ gun division , an idea that appears to have been entirely Bethell 's own . After raiding other divisions and emptying the Machine Gun Corps training school , Bethell reported to Field Marshal Douglas Haig that the division was ready to return to combat ; he was surprised to find that his friend " Duggie " disapproved of these methods , rejected the proposal and informed him that his division would instead be withdrawn and used as a training unit . Bethell was later offered a new division but chose to remain in the 66th Division , hoping that it would return to the front lines at a later date .

= = = Reconstitution = = =

Following its losses , the 66th Division was reduced to cadre early in May ; which meant that infantry battalions were cut to ten officers and about 45 men , the surplus being sent to base depots ; the artillery , engineer and machine @-@ gun units were distributed among other formations . The divisional artillery was attached to XIX Corps during the Battle of the Avre on 4 April and with XI Corps at the Battle of the Lys later in the month . During the summer , Bethell continued planning for the rebuilding of the division , having recruited a staff he felt he could work with , expecting that experienced men would become available as drafts returned from the Mediterranean . Overseas divisions there had suffered fewer casualties and the reduction from four to three battalions per brigade meant that large numbers of men would be returning . While reinforcements were assembled , the divisional cadres of the 66th Division and the 39th Division were used to train five American divisions in the British zone . The training process was complicated by a rigid schedule laid down by the American high command , who strongly objected to any deviation from their plans . In July , the American divisions moved up to the front and British troops began to arrive from Salonika and Palestine , though the assembly of the division was delayed by the returning men being given home leave and having to spend time acclimatising .

The division had a complicated organisational history during this period , with a large number of units being attached or withdrawn for short periods , while others were merged or disbanded . About thirty infantry battalions were attached for short periods and the divisional artillery and supply columns remained in support of the front line , while one ambulance company was later transferred to serve with the American 27th Division . The future of the division was again in doubt by early September ; the 197th Brigade had been transferred to a training role and the division was expected to be disbanded . Bethell argued for retaining the division and was ordered to prepare it for front @-@ line service ; the 197th Brigade was replaced by the South African Brigade to bring the division back up to strength . By the end of September , following amalgamations and reorganisation , the division was left with the South African Brigade ( 1st , 2nd , and 4th South African Infantry regiments ) , the 198th Brigade ( 5th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers , 6th Royal Dublin Fusiliers and 6th Lancashire Fusiliers ) and the 199th Brigade , with the 9th Manchester Regiment , 5th Connaught Rangers and 18th King 's ( Liverpool Regiment ) . The divisional pioneers were the 9th Gloucestershire Regiment . Less than a year and a half after arriving in France , the division retained only the 6th Lancashire and 9th Manchester of its twelve original battalions and both of these had been amalgamated with other units from the 42nd Division .

= = = Hundred Days Offensive = = =

The division reached the forward areas on 27 September , under the command of XIII Corps , the reserve corps of the Fourth Army and moved into the line on 5 October , relieving the 25th Division . The division attacked at dawn on 8 October , in the opening phase of the Second Battle of Cambrai and captured the village of Serain by nightfall against determined resistance . After this breakthrough , the division moved forward 14 miles ( 23 km ) in three days , with patrols of the Connaught Rangers entering the outskirts of Le Cateau on 10 October . On the night of 16 October , the divisional pioneers and engineers bridged the Selle and the South African Brigade crossed in thick fog to capture Le Cateau , in a costly attack . The river crossing was the opening stage of the Battle of the Selle ( 17 ? 25 October ) , the final advance into Germany .

The division was withdrawn for a short rest , moving back into the line on 2 November . From this point onwards the 66th Division moved almost continually , in close pursuit of the retreating German army . It supported the 25th Division at the Battle of the Sambre on 4 November and on 7 November leapfrogged past the 25th Division to advance as one of the leading units of the Fourth Army . Supplies ran short and the supply services struggled to bring up sufficient food and ammunition over cratered roads and wrecked bridges and the main British advance was forced to halt . On 9 November , to maintain the pursuit , the Fourth Army improvised " Bethell 's Force " , consisting of 5th Cavalry Brigade , the South African Brigade and two RAF squadrons , along with various support units from 66th Division . It began pushing forward on 10 November and advanced several miles along a broad front , with a second advance on 11 November , only stopped at the last minute

by the divisional staff , who had received warning that the armistice would begin at 11 am .

At the Armistice of 11 November 1918 , Bethell 's Force had reached the Sivry ? Beaumont area . From 27 September to 12 November the division had incurred 2 @, @ 195 casualties , and during the Hundred Days offensive was one of only two Allied divisions to succeed in every attack . The 66th Division was ordered to move north to secure eastern Belgium . On 18 November , it began to move north into the Namur region , where it was stationed between Huy and Rochefort . The division remained there while it demobilised and was disbanded on 24 March 1919 . Bethell remained in Germany as Colonel @-@ Commandant of the 2nd Rhine Brigade , headquartered at Wiesbaden .

= = Second World War = =

= = = 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 66th Infantry Division was to be created as a Second Line unit , a duplicate of the First Line 42nd ( East Lancashire ) 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 = = =

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 . " The 66th Infantry Division finally became active on 27 September 1939 , although its constituent units had already formed and had been administered by the 42nd ( East Lancashire ) Infantry Division . The division was headquartered in Manchester , and was again composed of the 197th , 198th , and 199th Infantry Brigades . Major @-@ General Arthur William Purser was given command , and the division was assigned to Western Command . In November , the division was transferred to Northern Command . On 10 January , Major @-@ General Alan Cunningham was given command of the division . By May , the division was based north of Manchester , spread out across parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire .

The war @-@ time deployment of the Territorial Army envisioned it being deployed piecemeal , to

reinforce the regular army that had already been deployed to the European mainland , as equipment became available . The plan envisioned the deployment of the whole force in waves , as divisions completed their training , with the final divisions not being deployed until a year had elapsed from the outbreak of war . As a result , the division did not leave the United Kingdom as the British Expeditionary Force was evacuated from France during May and June of 1940 .

As soon as the troops returned from France , the British Army began implementing lessons learned from the campaign and re-organizing formations . As part of this , the army 's five motor divisions ( made up of two brigades ) were to be reformed as regular infantry divisions ( made up of three brigades ) . As a result , the 66th Infantry Division was disbanded on 23 June . The 197th Infantry Brigade was transferred to the 59th ( Staffordshire ) Infantry Division , the 198th Infantry Brigade went to the 1st London Division , and the 199th Infantry Brigade was assigned to the 55th ( West Lancashire ) Infantry Division .

= = General officer commanding = =

The division had the following commanders during the First World War :

The division had the following commanders during the Second World War :