

= 77th Infantry Division ( United Kingdom ) =

The 77th Infantry Division of the British Army was formed during the Second World War , from the re @-@ organisation of the Devon and Cornwall County Division . During its existence the division changed roles several times . On 20 December 1942 , it became the 77th Infantry ( Reserve ) Division , training recruits in infantry and armoured warfare . New recruits to the army were assigned to the 77th to complete their training .

On 1 December 1943 , the division was once again renamed . Now known as the 77th ( Holding ) Division , it was responsible for retraining soldiers who had been on medical leave . Once recruits were fully trained , and men returning from injury retrained , they were allocated to formations fighting overseas . Notably , the formation was used as a source of reinforcements for the 21st Army Group , which was fighting in Normandy . After all available British army troops left the United Kingdom for France , the division was disbanded and re @-@ formed as a deception unit to give Germany the impression that the British army had more divisions than it did . The notional 77th Division was held in reserve within the United Kingdom .

= = Background = =

In 1940 , following the Second World War 's Battle of France , the United Kingdom was under threat of invasion from Nazi Germany . During the summer , the Battle of Britain dampened this threat . As the year progressed , the size of the British Army increased dramatically as 140 new infantry battalions were raised . During October , with the possibility of a German invasion during 1941 , these new battalions were formed into independent infantry brigades that were then assigned to newly created County Divisions .

The County Divisions , including the Devon and Cornwall County Division , were around 10 @, @ 000 men strong and assigned to defend the coastlines of threatened sections of the country , including the manning of coastal artillery . These divisions were largely static , lacking mobility and also divisional assets such as artillery , engineers , and reconnaissance forces . Using the recruits in this manner allowed the regular infantry divisions to be freed up from such duties , undertake training , and form an all @-@ important reserve that could be used to counterattack any possible German landing .

On 22 June , Germany launched a massive attack upon the Soviet Union ; this attack all but removed the threat of a German invasion of the United Kingdom . However , the British still had to consider the threat of a German invasion due the possibility that the Soviet Union could collapse under the German onslaught and the ease in which Germany could transfer troops back to the west . In late 1941 , the arrival of autumn and winter weather meant that the threat of invasion subsided . This , coupled with the production of new equipment for the British army , allowed the War Office to begin steps to better balance the army due to the large number of infantry units formed during the preceding year and a half . As part of this reform , the County Divisions were disbanded .

= = History = =

= = = Home defence = = =

During the war , the divisions of the British Army were divided between " Higher Establishment " and " Lower Establishment " formations . The former were intended for deployment overseas and combat , whereas the latter were strictly for home defence in a static role . On 1 December 1941 , the Devon and Cornwall County Division was abolished and reformed as the 77th Infantry Division , a " Lower Establishment " division . The division , like its predecessor , comprised the 203rd , the 209th , and the 211th Infantry Brigades . That day , the division was assigned artillery , engineers , and signallers . An anti @-@ tank regiment and reconnaissance troops joined the following month . The war @-@ establishment , the on @-@ paper strength , of an infantry division at this time was

17 @, @ 298 men . Major @-@ General Godwin Michelmores , who had commanded the Devon and Cornwall County Division since 30 October , retained command of the division . The 77th was assigned to VIII Corps , and remained based in the Devon area . The Imperial War Museum comments that the division insignia references " Arthur 's sword Excalibur , acknowledging the [ division 's ] connections with the West Country " and its predecessor division . After the division became a training formation , the insignia was only worn by the permanent division members .

= = = Training formation = = =

During the winter of 1942 ? 43 , the British Army overhauled how it would train new recruits . The 77th was one of three divisions that were changed from " Lower Establishment " units to " Reserve Divisions " . On 20 December , the division was renamed the 77th Infantry ( Reserve ) Division , becoming a training formation in the process . These three divisions were supplemented by a fourth training formation , which was raised on 1 January 1943 . The 77th Infantry ( Reserve ) Division was assigned to Northern Command . Soldiers who had completed their corps training were sent to these training divisions . The soldiers were given five weeks of additional training at the section , platoon and company level , before undertaking a final three @-@ day exercise . Troops would then be ready to be sent overseas to join other formations . Training was handled in this manner to relieve the " Higher Establishment " divisions from being milked for replacements for other units and to allow them to intensively train without the interruption of having to handle new recruits . For example , the 12th Battalion , Devonshire Regiment provided the additional training to the regiment 's new recruits before assigning them to other battalions within the regiment .

As part of the restructuring , the 211th Infantry Brigade was transferred to the 80th Infantry ( Reserve ) Division . The infantry brigade was replaced with the 11th Army Tank Brigade , in order to provide training facilities for the Royal Armoured Corps and retain reinforcements until they were ready to be deployed . On 1 December 1943 , the division was again re @-@ organised , and became the 77th Holding Division . As part of this restructuring , the 11th Army Tank Brigade was withdrawn . Lieutenant @-@ Colonel H.F. Joslen wrote that the division 's role was now " for sorting , retraining and holding personnel temporarily ? due to disbandments , medical and other causes . " For example , as part of the change from a reserve to holding division , the 14th Battalion , Durham Light Infantry was converted from a regular infantry unit into a Rehabilitation Centre . Ex @-@ prisoners of war , repatriates , troops who were suffering from morale issues or of low physique were sent to the battalion where they underwent medical , physical , and military tests . These tests were designed to establish what medical category the soldiers should be assigned , and what job or military capability would best suit them . Likewise , soldiers returning from long periods of overseas service were sent to the 11th Battalion , York and Lancaster Regiment for retraining .

On 30 June 1944 , the 77th Holding , and the training divisions , had a combined total of 22 @, @ 355 men . Of these , only 1 @, @ 100 were immediately available as replacements for the 21st Army Group . The remaining 21 @, @ 255 men were considered ineligible for service abroad due to a variety of reasons , ranging from medical , not being considered fully fit , or not yet fully trained . Over the following six months , up to 75 per cent of these men would be deployed to reinforce the 21st Army Group , following the completion of their training and / or having come up to the required fitness levels . Stephen Hart comments that , by September , the 21st Army Group " had bled Home Forces dry of draftable riflemen " due to the losses suffered during the Battle of Normandy , leaving the army in Britain ( with the exception of the 52nd ( Lowland ) Infantry Division ) with just " young lads , old men , and the unfit " . On 1 September 1944 , the division was disbanded . The 45th ( Holding ) Division was then formed ( the 45th Infantry Division having been disbanded on 15 August ) by Michelmores and his headquarter staff . Michelmores assumed command , and the 45th Holding Division took over the role of the 77th Division . Roger Hesketh states the reason behind this renumbering was due to the 45th Division being a " well @-@ known territorial [ formation from ] before the war whose [ number was ] familiar to the public and [ was ] therefore of recruiting value " .

= = = Deception = = =

During 1944 , the British army was facing a manpower crisis . The army did not have enough men to replace the losses to front line infantry . While efforts were made to address this ( such as transferring men from the Royal Artillery and Royal Air Force to be retrained as infantry ) , the War Office began disbanding divisions to downsize the army so as to transfer men to other units to help keep those as close to full strength as possible . The 77th Infantry ( Reserve ) Division was one of several " Lower Establishment " divisions , within the United Kingdom , chosen to be disbanded .

R Force , a British deception unit , seized upon this opportunity to retain the division as a phantom unit to inflate the army 's order of battle . A cover story was established to explain the change in the division 's status . It was claimed that , with the war nearing an end , several Territorial Army divisions would revert to their peacetime recruiting role and release their equipment and resources to other units . For the 77th , this equipment would be notionally transferred from the 45th Division . With the transfer of equipment , the 77th Division was notionally raised to the " Higher Establishment " . The notional division was held in reserve , within the United Kingdom , pending a future use elsewhere .

= = General officer commanding = =

Commanders included :

= = Order of Battle = =