



History of 20th Armoured Brigade

World War 2

The 20th Light Armoured Brigade was formed on 2nd September 1939 as part of the Territorial Army. The Brigade initially served under the Southern Command and its original regiments were the 1st Royal Gloucestershire Hussars, and 1st and 2nd Northamptonshire Yeomanry. On 14th April 1940 it was re-titled the 20th Armoured Brigade; a title it has retained ever since.

The Brigade played a vital role in the defence of the United Kingdom during the first year of the Second World War, including guarding aerodromes and other vulnerable points. In May 1940, due to the withdrawal of the British Expeditionary Force from France and the increased threat of invasion, a Brigade force known as the Yeomanry Armoured Detachment was formed to defend the coast of East Anglia.

The Detachment consisted of a composite squadron from each regiment in the Brigade and was commanded by Brigadier ED Fanshawe, concentrating in the Newmarket area as a counter-attack force to repel any potential Nazi offensive.

In June 1940 the Brigade became part of the 1st Armoured Division, which was being reorganised after it had returned depleted from Dunkirk. With the Battle of Britain being fought overhead, brigade troops were tasked with conducting anti-invasion exercises and the reconnaissance of all roads leading to the coast, covering most of Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

During October 1940 the Brigade came under the command of the 6th Armoured Division. On 12th September 1941, King George VI inspected 20th Armoured Brigade at Lakenheath in Suffolk during a parade and march-past of all the fighting vehicles in the Division.

It was the first time that an entire armoured division – at that time over 14,500 men and 4,500 vehicles – had been formed up complete in the same place. The logistical challenges of staging the parade and the scale of the air threat sealed the fate of the Brigade, contributing towards the decision in 1942 to halve the tank strength of an armoured division.

The Brigade continued to serve in Home Forces under various commands until 15th January 1943. At this time the Brigade became a training formation and its regiments, on conversion to the armoured reconnaissance role, were posted elsewhere.

Many former brigade troops subsequently saw active service in North West Europe including operations in Normandy and into Germany.

On 30th April 1943 the 20th Armoured Brigade was disbanded.

Cold War Era

On 15th September 1950 the 20th Armoured Brigade was reformed in the UK for a strategic reserve role. However the Brigade was moved to Münster, Germany in December 1951 to supplement the British contribution to NATO forces in Europe where it again came under the command of 6th Armoured Division, this time as part of the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR).

The 1957 Defence White Paper announced the end of National Service resulting in a number of reductions and changes across the Armed Forces. Part of this restructuring saw the disbandment of the 6th Armoured Division in April 1958. The Brigade survived as the new 20th Armoured Brigade Group, initially under the command of the 4th Infantry Division, and moved to Hobart Barracks, Detmold. It assumed the insignia of the old Division – the "Iron Fist" symbol that it wears to this day.

The pattern of life was determined by the BAOR training cycle and the demands of higher formation exercises as politicians and military commanders considered how best to face the threat of a Soviet invasion.

Brigade troops frequently found themselves supporting multi-national NATO exercises, often working alongside the fledgling Bundeswehr (German Army). In October 1961, the Brigade participated in Exercise Spearpoint which was designed to demonstrate that the BAOR was able to conduct large-scale intensive operations under both conventional and nuclear conditions.

In September 1959, The Royal Corps of Signals reorganised all of their independent squadrons into a single numbering system from 200 upwards. This meant that when the Brigade's Signal Squadron adopted the title "200" in 1962 it automatically became the 'Senior Signal Squadron' in the British Army by precedence.

Two years later it amalgamated with the Brigade's Headquarters Squadron and took over responsibility for the administration and defence of the HQ. This combined role is still in place today and together the two separate units are designated as "20th Armoured Brigade Headquarters and Signal Squadron (200)".

On 22nd June 1974, 20th Armoured Brigade and the Bundeswehr's 21st Panzer Brigade, based in Augustdorf, held a partnership parade to emphasise the confidence and understanding which exists between the allied forces of the NATO countries; this partnership continues today.

BAOR experimented with a major restructuring towards the end of the 1970s as it reorganised into 4 Divisions, each with 2 task force headquarters. These task forces could command any grouping of units from within their division and were designated sequentially Alpha through Hotel. As a result, on 1st December 1977, 20th Armoured Brigade was temporarily renamed "Task Force Hotel" under the command of the 4th Armoured Division. However Task Force Hotel reverted to its Brigade designation on 1st January 1980 and its units were realigned under the Brigade Headquarters.

Further unit rotations continued throughout this period with many famous regiments and battalions of the British Army converting to the armoured role to serve within the Brigade. Typical were The Life Guards who served in Detmold during 1971-75 and again in 1980-84. As the Regiment moved to BAOR they became a Tank Regiment for the first time in their history,

only to re-role as an Infantry Battalion in order to deploy on three separate operational tours of Northern Ireland.

Post-Cold War

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the anticipated peace dividend following the end of the Cold War, the British government announced a series of cuts in defence spending under the 1990 "Options for Change" programme. As a result of the restructuring, in December 1992, the Brigade merged with the 33rd Armoured Brigade and moved its headquarters to Barker Barracks, Paderborn where it came under the command of the 1st (UK) Armoured Division. By 1994 the overall troop strength in Germany had been halved and BAOR was replaced by British Forces Germany (BFG).

In April 1995 Headquarters 20th Armoured Brigade, with some elements of the Brigade, deployed to the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) to take command of Sector South West under the United Nations mandate. Based at Gornji Vakuf in central Bosnia, the Commander was responsible for a large multi-national UN force as well as having responsibility for all forces in FRY. The end of the tour coincided with a declaration of peace and a shift in emphasis to a larger NATO-led force.

In October 1996, the Brigade returned to FRY as part of NATO's Implementation Force (IFOR). It was initially based at Sipovo, moving to Banja Luka in December 1996, while overseeing the transition from IFOR to the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) and Operation RESOLUTE to Operation LODESTAR. The Brigade returned to Paderborn in April 1997.

In August 1999, the Brigade again deployed to Banja Luka on Operation PALATINE, returning to Paderborn in December 1999.

On 20th August 2001 the Brigade Headquarters relocated to their current location in Antwerp Barracks, Sennelager as part of a reorganisation programme for Paderborn Garrison. In 2004, the Brigade deployed to southern Iraq on Operation TELIC 3 where it was based at Basra Palace as part of the Multinational Division (South East) (MND(SE)).

20th Armoured Brigade was awarded the Freedom of the City of Paderborn on 28th May 2005. The right to exercise the freedom was presented "as a contribution for consolidation of the Anglo-German friendship, the joint solidarity in NATO and a further element for the building of the joint house Europe".

The Brigade returned to southern Iraq again in April 2006 for Operation TELIC 8, and was deployed throughout Basra, Al Amarah and Al Muthanna Provinces. During the seven month summer tour Brigade troops contributed to the successful handover to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) of two of the four provinces within the MND(SE).

Today

20th Armoured Brigade today is founded on fine and historic regiments, including 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards (QDG), based in Sennelager, who provide the reconnaissance role with their agile Scimitar Armoured Vehicles. The Queen's Royal Hussars (QRH) is the British Army's senior light cavalry regiment equipped with the Challenger 2 main battle tank, also based in Sennelager. Meanwhile the Brigade's two armoured infantry battalions are located in barracks within Paderborn – The 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment

(1PWRR) and The 5th Battalion The Rifles (5 RIFLES) – both equipped with Warrior armoured vehicles.

1st Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales's Own) is a Light Role infantry battalion operating almost entirely on foot and recently moved to Münster from the UK in July 2008. As of August this year, a Gurkha company has been added to the regiment.

Headquarters 20th Armoured Brigade is currently located in Sennelager, on the outskirts of the city of Paderborn, north Germany.

20th Armoured Brigade is commanded by Brigadier Patrick Sanders DSO OBE.