

Queen's Gurkha Signals History



The Origins: The Gurkha Signals Holding and Training Wing

British Army signalling can find its origins in the Royal Corps of Engineers in 1870, when the first Telegraph Battalion was formed. Signalling remained the prerogative of the Engineers for 58 years until the formation of the Corps of Signals in 1921. It is hardly surprising therefore that the initial employment of Gurkha signallers be in the three Indian Corps of Sappers and Miners (Bombay, Bengal, and Madras) in 1911. This development was rather haphazard and it wasn't until the First World War that whole companies of Gurkha signallers existed within these three Corps. In 1920 these companies were formed into the Indian Signal Service and each 'Line and Wireless' companies within the service were given a letter designation. In 1921 'G' Divisional Signals, which was approximately regimental size, was based in Rawalpindi and included British and Gurkha soldiers. 'G' Divisional Signals had a small Regimental Headquarters (RHQ), No 1 Company and No 2 Company, the latter incorporating three Infantry Brigade Signal Sections and three Royal Artillery Brigade Signal Sections. It was this No 2 Company which was totally Gurkha in composition and which grew to such a size that by necessity it had to be eventually split into two. These Gurkha signallers distinguished themselves in the Waziristan troubles in 1923 and during the state visit to Nepal in 1921 of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales on a hunting trip. But it was eventually decided in 1928 that there was an insufficient trained reserve of Gurkha signallers and that they should be allowed to waste out of the army.

When India gained independence from Britain in 1947 only 4 Regiments of Gurkhas, each of two battalions, were transferred from the Indian Army to the British Army. The 2nd, 6th, 7th, and 10th Gurkha Rifle Regiments moved to Malaya and Hong Kong in 1948. The impending Malayan Emergency provided the impetus in June 1948 for the formation of the 17th Gurkha Infantry Division and it was decided that the signals units for this new division should be Gurkha in composition. In July 1948 the training cadre, from which this new division's brigade signals units would eventually be drawn, was formed and initially consisted only of a handful of British Non Commissioned Officers (NCO) and other ranks. An establishment was created at the Command Headquarters site, in Kuala Lumpur, called X Brigade Signal Squadron and it was to this Squadron that Major A G C Cox MBE R SIGNALS was posted in October 1948. The X was used because no-one knew quite what to call them, but it was intended that this would be the first instalment towards a Gurkha Division Signal Regiment. The remainder of 1948 was used in forming the training cadre from experienced British and Gurkha instructors, and with gaining the approval of establishments for a Training wing and an Independent Brigade Signal Squadron from General Headquarters (GHQ) Far East Land Forces (FALELF). Although it had been envisaged that the first group of 110 trainees would arrive on 1 Jan 1949 the approval for the establishments was not given until May 1950.



MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA

The Trainees destined for this new Gurkha Division Signal's unit were to be drawn in the main from the signals platoons of

the eight rifle battalions, but as chance would have it, the burden of the 'Malaya Emergency' upon the battalions meant they were unable to release these trainees until the middle of 1949. The reasons were that the men were being used in operations and the infantry signals platoons were too deficient of trained men. This meant that a greater proportion of 1948's recruits made up the initial batch of trainees than was originally intended. The Gurkha Signals Training and Holding Wing, as 'X' Brigade Signal Squadron was now known (though unofficially until May 1950), spent the first half of 1949 improving their instructional technique and moving into their own premises in 64 Transit Camp, on Ipoh Road, Kuala Lumpur.

The 110 trainees were initially sent on a three month education course at the Gurkha School of Education, at Tampoi, Johore Bahru, commanded by Captain P T Prentice 7GR. On the 1st May 1949 the 110 trainees began instruction in reading, writing, English, mathematics and map reading to bring themselves up to a suitable educational standard to be Royal Signals tradesmen. On the 16th August 1949 the now 102 trainees (8 were rejected at the end of the education course) began their trade training as Gurkha Royal Signals at the Gurkha Signals Training and Holding Wing. Of the 8 who were rejected one was definitely a black sheep and a trouble maker, for it was later found out that he had been one of the ring leaders in an infamous Indian naval mutiny in Bombay at the end of World War Two, and so possibly not the ideal candidate from which to father a regiment.

The training for this first batch lasted until 1st August 1950 and they were then posted to the newly formed 48th Gurkha Brigade Signal Squadron commanded by Major L H Gregory MBE, which was launched on the 18th December 1950 at an inspection by Major General R C O Hedly CB CBE DSO. At this occasion the General said;

'I have served with the Gurkhas for twenty-eight years and have never known them to fail yet. You will not fail ..'

Two days later the squadron moved to Pahang to join the Brigade and became operational.

The men were trained in three main trades Operators Wireless and Line (OWLS), Linemen, and Despatch riders and although had come from a variety of backgrounds managed during training very well. Major Gregory tried to instil in the men a sense of identity by placing them in detachments and these became known as;

Okhaldhunga Det	Bhojpur Det
Dhankutta Det	Ham Det
Pokhara Det	Gulmi Det
Lamjung Det	Baglung Det
Tansen Det	Darjeeling Det
Syanja det	Chisangkhu Det

All the men were titled Gurkha Royal Signals and wore the badge of the Royal Corps of Signals, 'Jimmy'. Certain dress differences were soon established to set both British and Gurkha ranks of the Gurkha Royal Signals apart from their counterparts. But it was on the persistence of Major Gregory that the Regiment gained its prized Grant tartan and began its affiliation with the now 32 (Scottish) Signal Regiment (Volunteers).



Major Gregory proposed in 1952 that the Regiment should have a pipe band as many other Gurkha Regiments had and to this end an affiliation with a Scottish Regiment should be made. The only pipe band in existence in the Royal Corps of Signals belonged to the 51st (Highland) Infantry Division Signal Regiment based in Aberdeen, and so overtures were made to cement an affiliation. Help was very forthcoming from the 51st Highland Division Signal Regiment and a corps of pipes and drums were established with their help and the help of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, based in Malaya at the time. The affiliation was approved and formalised when Major (QGO) Parsuram Gurung MBE, who was in the UK for the coronation, visited the Regiment and presented it with a ceremonial Kukri and received a Quaich in return. From the 51st Division Signal Regiment the Gurkha Signals inherit their Tartan, which is the Grant tartan and which the regiment is permitted

to wear by the authority of Lord Strathspey, Clan Chief of the Clan Grant, and the Regimental March which is 'Scotland the Brave'. The affiliation of the Regiment now passes on to 32 (Scottish) Signal Regiment which was formed on 1 April 1967 and in which the 51st Division Signal Regiment has become 51 Highland Signal Squadron.

1951 to 1954 were definitely the formative years of the Gurkha Signals and many changes were undertaken on the road to formal recognition as a Regiment. On the 15 January 1952 the Gurkha Signals Training and Holding Wing closed in the old '64 Transit camp and began life anew as the Signals Training Squadron in the Depot of the 17th Gurkha Division, Sungei Patani. The RHQ of 17 Gurkha Division Signal Regiment (GDSR) which is also HQ Gurkha Signals was formed in October

1953 and in November moved to Lamjung Camp (Maxwell Road Camp), Kuala Lumpur. A certain amount of shuffling ended in November 1953 with the Brigades of 17 Division being served by units of 17 GDSR; 26, 63, 99, and 48 Brigades being served by 26(1), 63(K), 99(L), and 48(J) Troops respectively.

On 16th October 1953 17 Gurkha Divisional Signal Regiment was officially constituted but the day that has been adopted as the Regimental birthday is 23 September 1954. On this day Major General Brigade of Gurkhas, Major General L E C M Perowne CBE presented to the Regiment at Lumjung Camp, Kuala Lumpur, its own badge.