

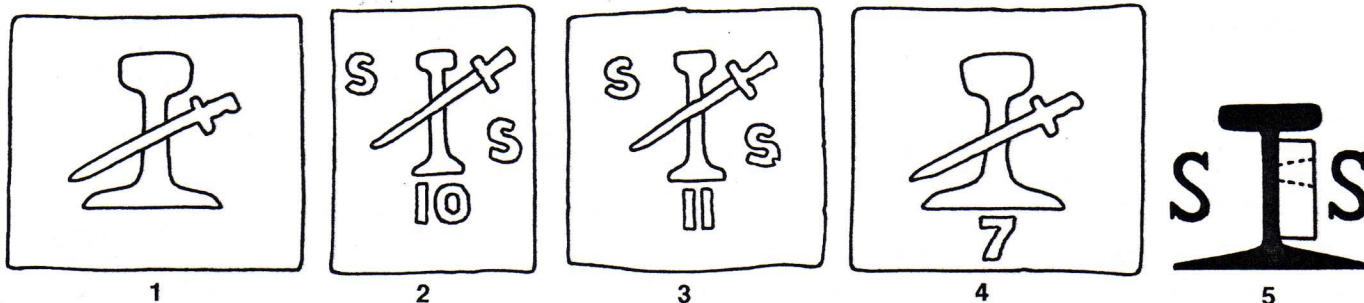
THE FORMATION SIGN



Founder & Past President Major John Waring FRGS FRHS FRSSStG DLI
 Past President Lt Col Howard N Cole OBE TD CStJ DL FRSA FRHistS

No 187
 July - Sept. 1997

GENERAL INFORMATION.



ROYAL ENGINEER SPECIAL SECTIONS AND THEIR INSIGNIA.

An article submitted by Lt.Col.Mike Jackson.

A long-standing mystery of the identification of a World War Two badge may be close to resolution. The basic design (fig.1) was a cross-section of a railway track in red diagonally superimposed with a yellow dagger all on a khaki rectangular background. This has for many years been believed to be Royal Engineer associated, with an obvious linkage to railway engineers.

Variants of the basic badge are known to exist. One has, in addition to the basic design, the letters 'S S' and the numeral '10', both embroidered in white (fig.2). This formed the subject of query No. Q 15314 for March 1989. Another sign, in the writer's collection, has the letters 'S S' and the numeral '11' (fig.3). There are probably others. [Richard Woods has sent in an illustration of a sign he has seen with the numeral '7' (fig.4)].

A person I have had correspondence with has written:

"I served as a Sergeant Instructor in 8 Military Training Battalion, R.E. at Longmore Camp. In 1943 we were running training courses for Special Sections composed of members of Railway Transportation and Port Operating Companies, R.E. in order to train them to carry out sabotage of railway and port installations, with or without the use of explosives. Two lengths of track were set out adjacent to Weaverdown for training exercises. After rolling stock had been derailed and track damaged, Railway Transportation personnel were exercised in repairing the damage".

"Those who successfully passed the course were awarded a shoulder flash the design of which, as far as I can recall, was a section of 90lb rail, possibly black on a red background, with a slab of gun cotton in the web of the rail section and the letters 'S S' either side".

My correspondent says that with the passage of time his memory may be at fault, but it is probable that the badge he describes and has illustrated (fig.5) is related to the examples that exist. It may be that the yellow dagger may have been substituted for the slab of gun cotton, to make a more clearly symbolic and attractive design.

Another informant has written that, while serving in 152 Railway Construction Company, R.E., he attended No.3 Special Service Course at the Railway Training Centre, Longmore from 27 October 1941 to 10 January 1942. He was awarded a badge on completion of the course the design of which he described as having a section of railway track and a dagger on a diamond shaped backing. Having returned to his unit in Scotland he, together with other similarly qualified Sappers, was attached to No.6 Commando for Operation Myrmidon.

The aim of Operation Myrmidon was to land elements of No.1 and No.6 Commandos in the mouth of the River Adour, near Bayonne in south-west France in order to sabotage military and economic targets and attack shipping. In the event the Operation was aborted after an attempted landing on 5 April 1942, because the sea approach to the mouth of the river was blocked by a sand bar. The force, which was carried on board the Landing Ships 'Queen Emma' and 'Princess Beatrix' disguised as a Spanish merchantmen, returned to England without incident.

My informant was posted to a bridging unit later in 1942 and, to his regret and prior to embarkation for Tunisia, removed his Special Service flashes and handed them in to his QM. He believes that the versions of the flash with the numerals were introduced later in the training programme for these specialist Royal Engineers.