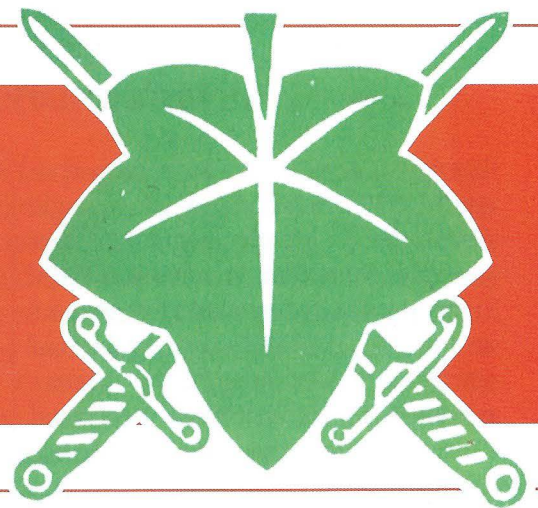


THE FORMATION SIGN

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THE HOYLAKE GUNNERS

In May 1940, Walter Beckingham, a 25-year old warehouse packer from South East London was called up and became 978636 Gunner, Beckingham, WA. After basic training Walter was posted to 149th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery formed in 1939 from 106th Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery (Lancashire Hussars) as part of the doubling of the Territorial Army. Walter may at first have felt like a fish out of water as many of his longer serving fellow Gunnners came from Cheshire, the regiment's headquarters and original recruiting area being Hoylake on the Wirral peninsula.

Having arrived in Egypt in April 1941 the 149th was reorganised two months later as 149th Anti-Tank Regiment (Lancashire Yeomanry). With the soldier's headdress at the time of the regiment's arrival the tropical helmet, the 149th adopted a pagri flash depicting the Hoylake lighthouse (shown below), one of two built in 1763 to ensure safe passage into the town's anchorage; whilst still a prominent town landmark it had ceased operating in 1866. The badge probably disappeared after Middle East General Order 1366 of October 1942 instructed that the issue of Helmets, Universal, Khaki was to be curtailed; troops arriving in the Middle East between 15th April and 15th October were to keep them for a month to acclimatise after which they were withdrawn. They were no longer to be issued to the 8th Army, Delta and Canal Areas, Palestine including Transjordan, Syria (except desert areas), Lebanon and Cyprus.



Equipped with the 2-pdr anti-tank gun the 149th served with the 8th Army and 5th Indian Division before transferring in September 1942 to 4th Indian Division with which it remained until 1945 serving in Palestine, Italy and Greece. Walter ended the war with 61st Super-Heavy Regiment, RA with which he served in North West Europe and was finally demobbed, still a Gunner, in June 1946, described as 'a hardy, sober, hardworking reliable man'. Thanks to **Robin McGregor** for sharing this collection of Walter's memorabilia.

