

A SHORT HISTORY OF BLANDFORD CAMP

Although the area of Blandford has been used by the military forces for many centuries the first documented military presence commences in 1824 when the 7th Hussars were moved to Dorsetshire on anti-smuggling duties. The first major presence was when an army formed in the area and exercise on Blandford Downs during 1756 to counter the threat of a French invasion.

In 1806, a relay station for the Admiralty Shutter Telegraph was erected at the North of the present camp as part of a system to convey messages from Admiralty London to Portsmouth and Plymouth. During August 1872 a large Army exercise was held in the Southern England and C Troop of the Royal Engineers, who were the forebears of the Royal Signals, sent half a troop to Blandford Downs to provide communications for the field Army.

In the latter part of 1914 the Royal Naval Division moved into a new hutted camp with battalions named after former naval officers of Drake, Benbow, Hawke, Hood, Howe, Nelson and Anson and, perhaps most famous in Blandford eyes, Collingwood. The men of the RND trained locally, building bridges over the River Stour, attacking Pimperne village and practicing trench construction. Traces of these trenches can still be found within the camp. There is a memorial to the Officers and men of the ill fated Collingwood battalion who lost their lives at Gallipoli on 4th June 1915. During 1918 the camp changed from being the depot for the RND to being the 'Intake Camp'

for the Royal Flying Corps, which was at the time reforming as the Royal Air Force. By the end of 1920 the military camp at Blandford Race Down had been demolished. With the build up of tension leading up to the Second World War it was decided in July of 1939 that a Militia Camp should be built on the site. After the fall of France the British Army went through a period of reorganisation and from August to November 1940 the 4th Battalion, Royal Northumberland Fusiliers trained at Blandford for their new role of being a 'Reconnaissance Battalion'. With the large build up of Allied Forces in the UK during 1943 – 1944 it was anticipated that Blandford Camp would no longer be required as a training camp and it was decided to convert the camp into a General Hospital for the US Armed Forces.

The staff of the first hospital, 22nd General Hospital, arrived in April 1944 with other hospitals arriving soon after, these being the 119th, 125th, 131st and 140th General Hospitals. The hospitals started receiving patients about 2 weeks after D-Day and many were brought from the combat area to the wartime airfield at Tarrant Rushton. The hospitals were often working at full capacity, receiving as many as 500 casualties during one night. In 1960 the first Royal Signals unit, 30th Signals Regiment moved into the camp. In 1967 the School of Signals moved from Catterick and in 1992 Her Majesty The Queen granted the Royal Title.

In 1996, The Royal Signals finally departed Catterick and transferred to Blandford. From 1 April 2004, as part of the Defence Training review, The Headquarters of The Defence College of Communications and Information Systems formed. The college consists of the Royal School of Signals, CIS training at RAF Cosford and RAF Digby and with responsibility for the Royal Navy CIS Training at HMS Collingwood.