

The History of the Guidon and the Sharpshooters

The word 'guidon' derives from the medieval French phrase 'Guydhomme' or 'guide man' who carried his lords coat of arms on a banner or pennant that was usually swallow tailed. This banner/pennant was used as a rallying point for the other mounted troops to follow in the confusion of battle. In the wars of the 17th century right through to the late 1800s, guidons (standards in the infantry and heavy cavalry) carried out the same task in providing a rallying point on often smoke-filled battlefields.

A guidon, like all colours, would have been presented by a member of the Royal Family and regularly trooped in front of the regiment to ensure that all ranks could identify it readily and defend it against all comers: a regiments honour was inextricably bound to its guidon or standard and to lose it brought great disgrace on the Regiment. The museum own several guidons dating from the 18th and early 19th centuries, although these were designed and presented by local supporters rather than by the Crown.

During the Napoleonic Wars the Regiments of Light Cavalry, by reason of their role, tended to carry their Guidons less and less until, in 1834, it was ordered that Hussar and Lancer Regiments should no longer carry Guidons. In the Yeomanry the choice was more arbitrary, but at the end of the nineteenth century the only Yeomanry Regiments still carrying guidons were those uniformed as Dragoons.

In 1956 the War Office authorised guidons for the Hussar, Lancer and Yeomanry Regiments as a means of displaying battle honours and distinctions.

The guidon was presented to the newly formed Kent and County of London Yeomanry (Sharpshooters) at Maidstone on 13th July 1963 by the Royal Honorary Colonel, HRH Princess Alexandra GCVO. The regiment had been formed in 1961 from the amalgamation of the then 3rd/4th County of London Yeomanry (Sharpshooters) (an enforced WW2 amalgamation of the 3rd and 4th County of London Yeomanry (Sharpshooters) that took place in Normandy in 1944) and 297 (Kent Yeomanry) Regt Royal Artillery.

In 1967 the Regiment was further reduced to squadron strength and became part of the Royal Yeomanry Regiment now The Royal Yeomanry (RY). In common with the other squadrons of the RY the guidon was retained so that uniquely on regimental parades RY would parade six guidons – a remarkable sight and not achieved by any other cavalry or yeomanry regiment. The guidon was retired, along with the other squadron guidons of the RY when the RY received its own guidon from Princess Alexandra at Buckingham Palace in May 2016. The former HQ Squadron at Bromley formed part of the London and Kent Regiment in the short-lived TAVR III as initially Royal Artillery and latterly Royal Signals when they eventually become 265 (KCLY) Signal Squadron (Sharpshooters) part of 71 (Yeomanry) Signal Regiment. In 1987 a Headquarters Sqn was formed at Bexleyheath where both squadrons were based together however the two squadrons were subsequently amalgamated into one in the mid 2000's.

Our predecessor regiments have been awarded a total of 54 Battle Honours commemorating service in the Boer War and both World Wars. The guidon is displayed in classic left to right format as if flying and the side on view bears the 13 battle honours awarded to the East and West Kent Yeomanries and to the Sharpshooters commemorating service in the Boer War and Great War. The reverse side (not visible) displays a selection of those awarded during World War 2 where the Sharpshooters who formed two regiments for service as armoured regiments were awarded a total of 41 battle honours a figure only exceeded by one other cavalry regiment – regular or yeomanry. The Kent Yeomanry were awarded theatre honours commemorating their service as regiments of the Royal Artillery during the Second World War.

The Royal Yeomanry's current guidon is unique in the Army Reserve as it includes the honour "Iraq 2003" to reflect the service of a composite squadron, including from the KSY.