

# On English Coastal Artillery, 1910-1940

## Introduction

In the following description, the main emphasis is placed on the volunteer artillery units that participated in the manning of the English coastal defenses throughout the period.

## The coastal artillery



*Royal Garrison Artillery, Territorial Force, c. 1911.*

After drawing by Richard Caton Woodville.

From Source 1.

The English coastal artillery consisted partly of units from the regular army, partly of volunteer units, from 1908 Territorial Force [1](#)).

The subdivisions of the coastal artillery units were called companies. The company commander was usually a major, who had a captain as second-in-command, and three lieutenants as platoon leaders.

The size of the companies varied according to the fortifications that a given company had to man, but usually consisted of 160 men.

The gunner in the foreground is wearing the Royal Garrison Artillery's (RGA) dark blue parade uniform, which in the Territorial Force was also the soldiers' exit uniform. The artillerymen manning the pamphlet in the background - possibly a 6-inch BL Coast Defense Gun - is instead wearing the Model 1902 khaki field uniform.



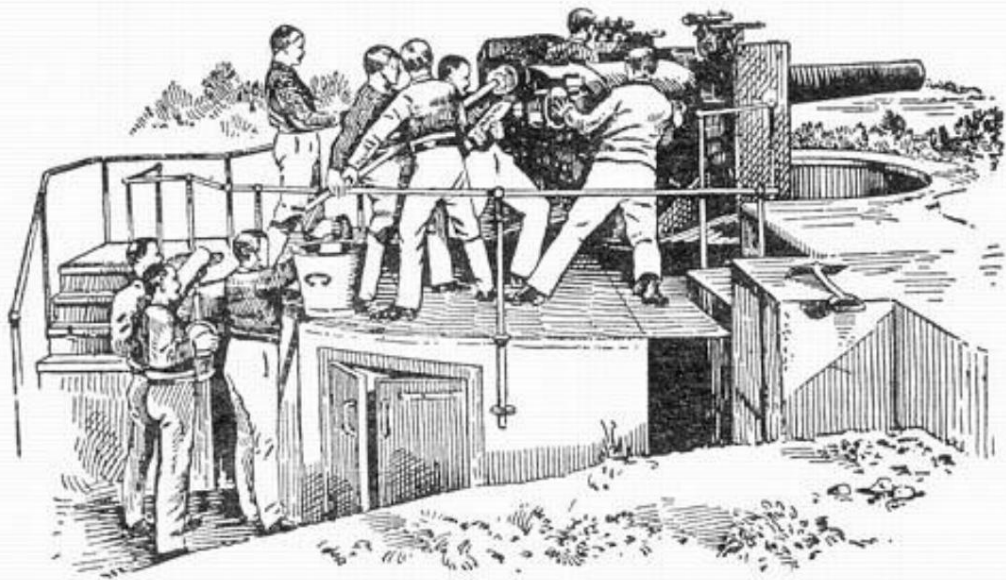
Example

The distinctive features that identify the soldier as belonging to the Territorial Force are the T above the regimental abbreviation, in combination with the abbreviated name of the unit.

The name cannot be deciphered from the drawing, but it could be like the example.

**Table 1: Coast Artillery Units, Royal Garrison Artillery, Territorial Force, 1914** (From Source 4)

<b>Territory</b>	<b>Coastal batteries at ...</b>	<b>Units</b>
Eastern Coast Defense	Medway & Thames	Essex and Suffolk RGA (2 companies)
Harwich Coast Defense	Harwich	Essex and Suffolk RGA (2 companies)
South Eastern Coast Defense	Dover & Newhaven	Kent RGA (Dover) Sussex RGA (Newhaven)
North Eastern Coast Defense	Tyne, Tees, Hartlepool & Humber	Tynemouth RGA (Tyne) Durham RGA (Tees & Hartlepool) East Riding RGA (Humber)
Southern Coast Defense	Portsmouth & Portland	Hampshire RGA (Portsmouth) Dorsetshire RGA (Portland)
South Western Coast Defense	Plymouth & Falmouth	Devonshire RGA (Plymouth) Cornwall RGA (Falmouth)
North Western Coast Defense	Mersey & Barrow	Lancashire RGA Cheshire RGA
Western Coast Defense	Milford Haven, Cardiff, Barry & Swansea	Pembrokeshire RGA (Milford Haven) Glamorganshire RGA (Cardiff, Barry & Swansea)
Scottish Coast Defense	Forth, Clyde, Tay, Aberdeen & Scapa	Forth RGA (Forth) Clyde RGA (Clyde) North Scottish RGA (Tay & Scapa) Orkney RGA (Scapa)



**6-inch B.L. GUN, MARK VII. (IN ACTION)**

*6-inch BL Coast Defense Gun, Mk VII, approx. 1910.*

From Source 3.

## **Dorsetshire Royal Garrison Artillery, Territorial Force**

A department such as The Dorsetshire Royal Garrison Artillery, Territorial Force, consisted of 3 companies - No. 1 Company (Swanage), No. 2 Company (Poole) and No. 3 Company (Portland). The department's headquarters were located in St. Albans Street, Weymouth.

Dorsetshire Royal Garrison Artillery, Territorial Force, manned forts and batteries at Portland on the English south coast.

It is possible that the drawing shows a cannon crew of the Dorsetshire Royal Garrison Artillery, Territorial Force.

### **Table 2: Shore batteries at Portland, April 19182)**

Blacknor Battery	2 x 6-inch BL Coast Defense Gun Mk VII (1902-1913) 2 x 9.2-inch BL Coast Defense Gun Mk 10 (1913-1947)
East Weare Battery	2 x 9.2-inch BL Coast Defense Gun Mk 10 (1902-1947?) (also seen spelled <i>East Wear</i> )
Breakwater Fort Top <a href="#">3</a> <u>2</u>	2 x 12-pdr. 12-cwt QF Coast Defense Gun (1898-1920)
Breakwater Fort Jetty	2 x 12-pdr. 12-cwt QF Coast Defense Gun (1894?-1920)
New Breakwater Pier A	2 x 12-pdr. 12-cwt QF Coast Defense Gun (1902-1947)
New Breakwater Pier B	1 x 6-inch BL Coast Defense Gun Mk VII (1913-1919) 3 x 12-pdr. 12-cwt QF Coast Defense Gun (1913-1919)
New Breakwater Pier C	1 x 6-inch BL Coast Defense Gun Mk VII (1913-1919) 2 x 9.2-inch
Upton Battery	BL Coast Defense Gun Mk 10 (1913-1919)

The predecessors of the Dorsetshire Royal Garrison Artillery, formed in 1908 in conjunction with the establishment of the Territorial Force [4](#)), were the 1st Dorsetshire Royal Garrison Artillery Volunteers, formed in the 1860s.

**FOR KING & COUNTRY.**  
**TERRITORIAL FORCE.**  
**No. 3 Co. DORSETSHIRE**  
**ROYAL GARRISON ARTILLERY.**  
Captain C. H. A. HUXTABLE, Commanding.

**RECRUITS**  
ARE REQUIRED FOR THE ABOVE COMPANY.

AGE:  
17 to 35  
Years.



HEIGHT:  
5ft. 6ins. or over.  
" "  
CHEST:  
33ins. or over.

Full particulars as to conditions of Enlistment and Training may be obtained on application to the Sergeant-Major at the

**DRILL HALL, 1, LOWER ST. ALBANS STREET.**

**FREE KIT AND CLOTHING.**

**Free Rations & Army Pay & Allowances during Training.**

« GOD SAVE THE KING. »

*Recruitment poster*

*for the Dorsetshire Royal Garrison Artillery,  
Territorial Force, c. 1910.*

From Source 4.

The division consisted in 1907 of 583 men (out of a target strength of 640), organized into 9 companies in Bournemouth (3 companies), Poole, Swanage, Weymouth, Portland, Bridport, and Lyme Regis respectively. The corps had a good reputation, and was described as "... a fine regiment ... with a good reputation for gunnery." (Source 1)

The change from the Volunteer system to the Territorial Force meant that the 3 companies from Bournemouth were transferred to the Hampshire Royal Garrison Artillery, while the remaining 6 companies became 3. This change affected recruitment to the department to some extent. In 1911 the head of department was Lieutenant Colonel FG Lefroy, while Lord Digby was an honorary colonel.

If the photograph on the poster is compared with the above drawing of a 6-inch BL Coast Defense Gun Mk VII, it turns out that it is exactly the same subject.

However, it is not known whether the poster shows the device itself or is simply a simultaneous press photo.

But I wonder if the local *County Association*, which was responsible for the recruitment, has made sure to show just one of their own units?



*Essex and Suffolk Royal Garrison Artillery, Territorial Force Church Parade at Harwich, 1914.*

From Source 4.

The coastal fortifications' electrical installations, such as searchlights [5](#)), as well as telephone equipment were operated by soldiers from the Royal Engineers. In Portland it was the Dorsetshire Fortress Royal Engineers, Territorial Force, who fielded an *Electric Lights Company*. The company numbered 137 men (in 1909), which was also the strength measure.

Until 1907, the Royal Engineers were also responsible for the sea mine service at some of the fortified ports. For the latter purpose there were special units, the Volunteer Submarine Miners, which numbered subdivisions at Tyne, Severn, Clyde, Humber, Tees, Forth, Tay, Mersey and Falmouth. (Source 7)

During the First World War, 31 *Coastal Fire Commands* were established, directing coastal defense within their respective areas of responsibility. At Portland, it was No. 5 Coastal Fire Command [6](#)). —

Although the image depicts one of the other Coast Artillery divisions, this is to show what a Coast Artillery unit looked like when on parade.

<b>Table 3: Gun Types (1910)</b>	<b>In service Number (1918)</b>	
10-inch BL Coast Defense Gun	1888-1925	
9.2-inch BL Coast Defense Gun	1899-1959	56
6-inch BL Coast Defense Gun	1885-1956	103
6-inch QF Coast Defense Gun	4.7-inch 1894-?	19
QF Coast Defense Gun	4-inch QF Coast 1888-1959	42
Defense Gun 12-pdr.	12-cwt QF Coast 1906-1939	13
Defense Gun 1894-1956	6-pdr QF Hotchkiss Coast Defense Gun 1885-1920?	103
1885-1920?	6-pdr QF Nordenfeldt Coast Defense Gun 1885-1920?	
1-pdr QF Pom-Pom	<a href="#">7</a> 1899-1920?	

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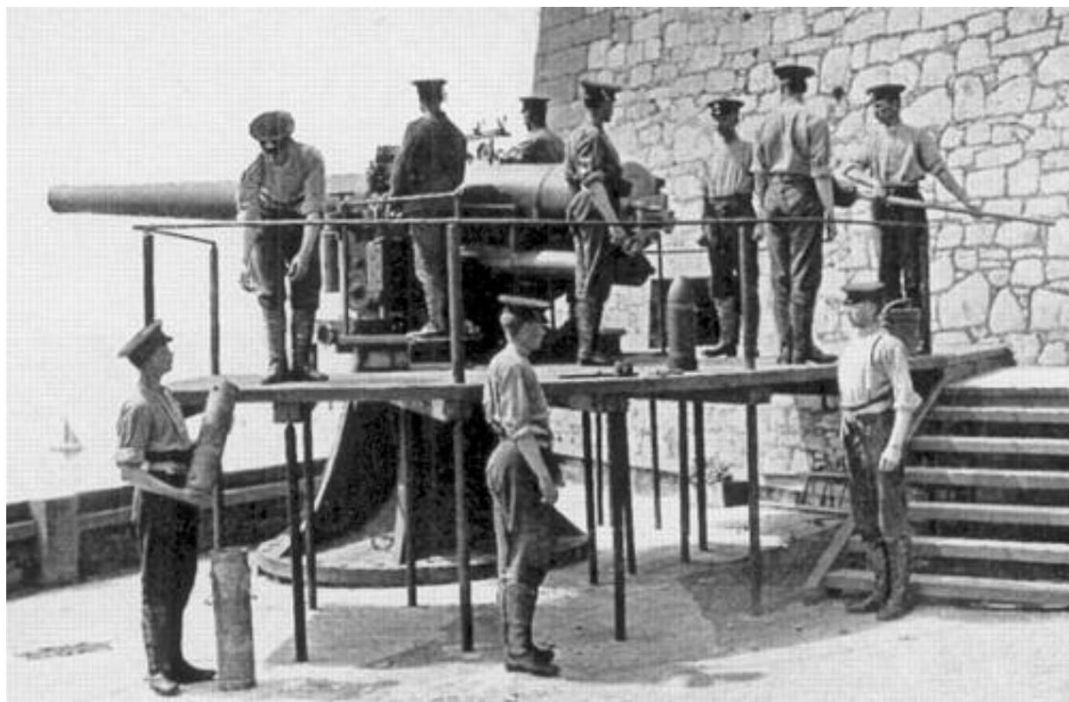
### Protection types

As can be seen, some of the pamphlets had a lifespan of more than 50 years, and were only withdrawn from service in connection with the abolition of the cannon defenses of England's coasts in 1956.

Regarding the number of pamphlets in 1918, it should be noted that the overview in Source 5 also contains a few other light pamphlets (47), whereby the total number reaches 383.

The very light pamphlets, which were intended for close defense, are not included in the overview.

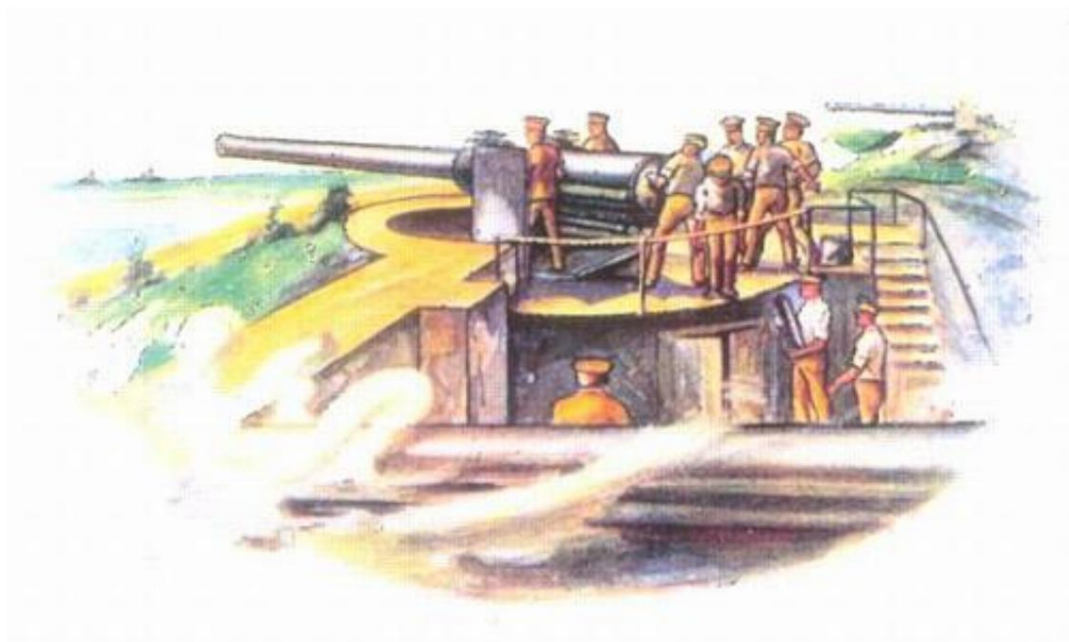
The overview is based on information from Sources 2, 3 and 5.



*English Coastal Artillery, c. 1914.*

From Source 8.

The pamphlet is possibly a 6-inch BL Coast Defense Gun.



*English coastal battery, approx. 1914.*

From Source 8.

## World War One

During the war, a few of the coastal batteries engaged German ships.

The most "prominent" skirmish is probably the attack on Hartlepool on 6 December 1914, when three German ships carried out an hour-long bombardment of this town on the English east coast.

The pamphlet is possibly a 6-inch BL Coast Defense Gun, Mk VII.



*Lieutenant-Colonel Lancelot Robson,  
Durham Royal Garrison Artillery,  
Territorial Force.*

From Durham Royal Garrison Artillery  
(Heugh Gun Battery, Hartlepool Headland).

Hartlepool was defended by two coastal batteries - *Heugh Battery* (2 x 6-inch BL Coast Defense Gun, Mk VII) and *Lighthouse Battery* (1 x 6-inch BL Coast Defense Gun, Mk VII) - manned by the Durham Royal Garrison Artillery, Territorial Force, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Lancelot Robson.

This history is thoroughly documented in the Heugh Gun Battery, Hartlepool Headland, which among its many sub-pages also contains a mention of the Durham Royal Garrison Artillery.

The German attack, carried out by the battlecruisers SMS Seydlitz and SMS Moltke and the heavy cruiser SMS Blücher, was part of a larger plan to force the British *Grand Fleet* into battle; the operation culminated in the Battle of Dogger Bank 24 January 1915 [8](#)).

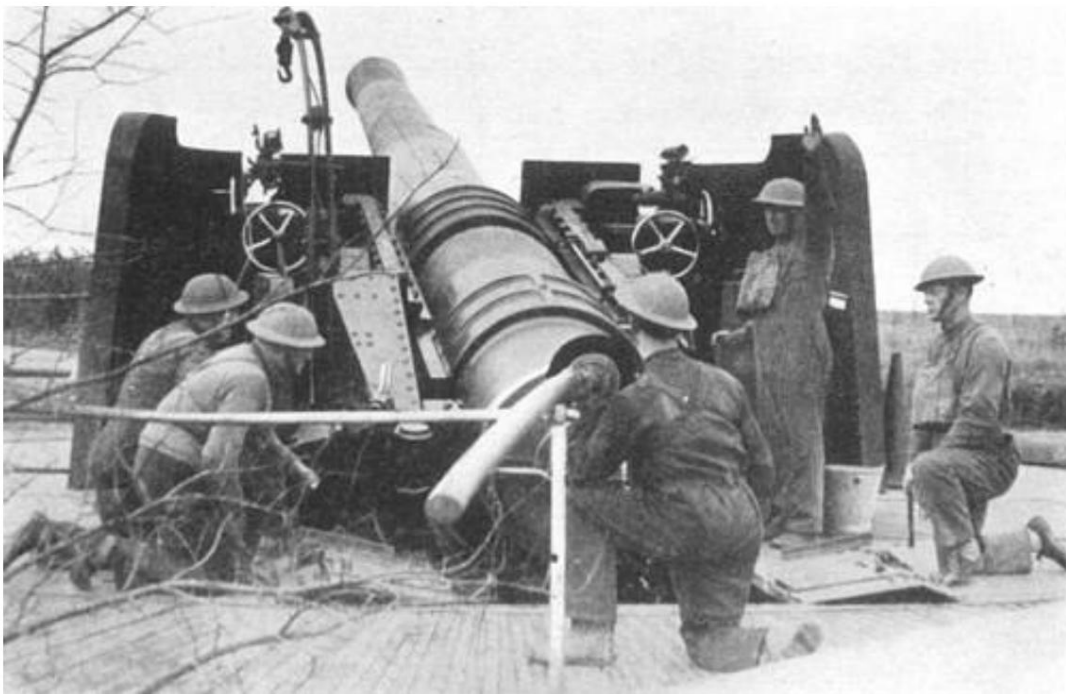
The German vessels fired 1,150 shells at Hartlepool, resulting in widespread destruction as well as civilian casualties of 112 dead and more than 200 wounded.

The two coastal batteries fired 123 shells at distances from just over 2 kilometers to just over 10 kilometers. The shells hit Seydlitz three times and Moltke once, resulting in only light damage and 1 wound. Blücher, on the other hand, was hit several times and suffered damage to the bridge (on the starboard side) as well as putting two of the secondary guns out of action. The losses at Blücher were 8 dead and 1 wounded.

The coastal defense forces suffered the following losses:

- Durham Royal Garrison Artillery, Territorial Force: 2 killed, 18th
- (Service) Battalion (1st County) Durham Light Infantry: 5 killed and 7 wounded
- Durham Fortress Royal Engineers, Territorial Force: 6 wounded, of whom 1 died 7 December 1914.

## World War II



9.2-inch Coast Defense Gun, approx. 1939.  
From Source 9.

After the First World War, part of the coastal batteries were decommissioned, while others were mothballed.

During the mobilization in September 1939, however, the coastal defenses were re-established and manned with a view to countering a German invasion as well as port control at the various ports.

Under the impression of the threat of a German invasion, a large number of *Emergency Coast Batteries* were established in 1940, as a supplement to the existing coastal defences. These batteries were equipped with guns, 510 in all, which were transferred from the fleet.

As the threat of a German invasion receded, the manpower from the regular army was transferred to other artillery units and in 1944 part of the operation passed to the *Home Guard*.

The history of coastal artillery during the Second World War can be seen in *The Defense of Workington Dock during WWII* (Russell W. Barnes).



9.2-inch Coast Defense Gun, approx. 1939.



From a contemporary English postcard, seen for sale on the Internet.

The card comes from a series of 18 postcards, published by Valentine & Sons Ltd. in the late 1930s.

A brief discussion of the Coast Artillery units can be found in Royal Artillery, Coast Regiments, 1940-1945 (Derek Barton).

## Sources

1. *His Majesty's Territorial Army - A descriptive account of the yeomanry, artillery, engineers and infantry with the army service and medical corps, comprising the 'King's Imperial Army of the Second Line'* by Walter Richards, Virtue & Co., London (ca. 1911).
2. *British Artillery Weapons & Ammunition 1914-1918* by Ian V. Hogg and LF Thurston, Ian Allan Ltd., Surrey 1972, SBN 7110-0381-5.
3. *ABC of the Army* by Captain J. Atkinson (ed.), Gale & Polden, Aldershot, 1910.
4. *The Territorial Artillery 1908-1988* by Norman EH Litchfield, Privately Published 1992, ISBN 0-9508205-2-0.
5. *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery - Forgotten Fronts and Home Base, 1914-18* by Sir Martin Farndale, Royal Artillery Institution, London 1988, ISBN 1-870114-05-1.
6. *The British Army of August 1914 - An illustrated Directory* by Ray Westlake, Spelmount Limited, Tunbridge Wells, Kent 2005, ISBN 0-86227-207-7.
7. *Submarine Miners* by Ray Westlake, Military Modelling, March 1985.
8. *The Royal Artillery*, Gale & Polden, Aldershot approx. 1915. Reprinted by D&G Publishing i The 1980s.
9. *The Wonder Book of Soldiers* by Harry Golding (ed.), Ward, Lock & Co., London, c. 1940.



*English coastal battery, approx. 1940.*

From Source 9.

The pamphlet is possibly a 6-inch BL Coast Defense Gun, Mk VII.

Per Finsted

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**Notes:**

- 1) The overview *The British Army, 1914* (Mark Conrad) shows the peacetime organization of the British Army per July 1914, of which i.a. the distribution of companies of the Royal Garrison Artillery, regular as well as volunteers, appears.
- 2) Information about some of the batteries, incl. photos of how they go out today can be found at *Exploring Portland* (Geoff Kirby). Information on armament comes from Source 5 and the Military Structure Database (UK Fortifications Club). Dorset's Coastal Defenses (The Heritage Coast) are also used.
- 3) The information about Breakwater Fort comes from *Portland Breakwater Fort* (Palmerston Fort Society), whose website also contains a lot of interesting information about English coastal fortification.
- 4) The Territorial Force became the Territorial Army in 1920. For the history, see e.g. *Uniforms - Territorial Army, circa 1911*.
- 5) See e.g. my article *On British searchlight units and anti-aircraft artillery during the First World War*.

6) From RGA, Coastal, 1914-1918 (The Long, Long Trail) and Source 5.

7) See e.g. my article On English Anti-Aircraft Artillery, 1914.

8) See Battle of Dogger Bank (1915) (Wikipedia). Here you can also find information about the German vessels that were deployed at Hartlepool. The German side of the operations at Hartlepool is documented in German Bombardment of Hartlepool, Whitby and Scarborough on 15th and 16th December, 1914 (WWI The Maritime War)