

# Royal Artillery (Anti-Aircraft Command)

## Introduction

Drawings by Ernest Ibbetson were used in a series of postcards published by Gale & Polden Ltd., Aldershot. The motifs were English, with navy, army and air force uniforms from the period during and immediately after the Second World War.

## The postcard



**On Active Service, 1943 - Gunners of Anti-Aircraft Command, on a gun site in the Air Defense of Great Britain.**

The units of the Home Army were not as highly prioritized as the units at the front, and initially many of these units were therefore equipped with uniforms and other items of equipment of an older model.

The postcard illustrates this mix of newer and older uniform systems - the new is the Battledress (from 1937), while the older is belt clothing and gaiters made of leather, as opposed to the normal version in webbing. Anti-aircraft guns of the type *3.7in Anti-Aircraft Gun 1*) [can be seen in the background](#).     

The private has five years of total service behind him, which is evident from the five red angles on the right forearm. In the calculation of the service time, any previous service in the Territorial Army (the army's voluntary reserve units) and the Home Guard (Home Guard 2)) was included.

The sergeant's sleeve insignia bears, according to the provisions for the uniform of the artillery, a golden cannon above the angles.

That the soldier carries a rifle is perhaps in itself very natural, but especially in the first half of the war, the home army's anti-aircraft units were not always equipped with firearms! Source 1 mentions that certain units (1941/42) were equipped with spikes (lead pipes on which a bayonet was attached)! At the time, it was common knowledge that certain units of the Home Guard were equipped in this way, but that this could also be the case in the anti-aircraft artillery [3](#)), was not something to brag about. Anti Aircraft Command was therefore asked to keep a very low profile in this area.

### Shoulder marks (from above)

- **Shoulder Title** (= name of the unit): Royal Artillery in red, on a blue background.
- **Formation Badge** (= the higher unit of which the department is part): Anti-Aircraft Command. (See below.)
- **Arm-of-Service Strip** (= type of weapon): Red and blue, which were the colors of the artillery. The badge was worn on both sleeves, and as seen on the figures, the red color was always worn forward.



## Formation Badge/Anti-Aircraft Command

Description: In black on a red background, an upturned bow and arrow.

The badge was originally worn only by the staff of Anti-Aircraft Command, but in 1943 was introduced to all units that formed part of Air Defense Great Britain (ADGB).

Source: <http://www.ra39-45.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/adgb>

## Packaging system 1939

Although not mentioned in standard works on the uniforming of the British Army, Source 5 mentions that in 1939 a leather version of the Packing System 1937 (webbing) was produced.

The production is seen as analogous to the situation from 1914, when a leather version of the Oppakkingssystem 1908 was produced. The production of webbing could not keep up with the demand in any way, as several hundreds of thousands of soldiers had to be clothed quickly. Packing system 1914 was used all the way

to the end of the First World War.

The figures on the postcard appear with waist belts, and in the case of the private artilleryman also with shoulder straps, in leather. Buckles on the waist belt and shoulder straps are very similar to the 1937 packing system, so unless it is an artistic freedom, then it must be the 1939 edition.

The ammunition bags can originate from the 1903 packing system or be part of the 1939 packing system.

## Sources

1. *Ack-Ack - Britain's Defense against Air Attack during The Second World War* by General Sir Frederick Pile, Georg G. Harrap & Co., London 1949. Frederick Pile was Chief of Anti-Aircraft Command 1939-45.
2. *British Army Uniforms & Insignia of World War Two* by Brian L. Davis, Arms and Armor Press, London 1983, ISBN 0-85368-609-2.
3. *Formation Badges of World War 2 - Britain Commonwealth and Empire* by Howard Cole, Arms and Armor Press, London 1973, SBN 85368-078-7.
4. *Anti-Aircraft Artillery, 1914-55* by NW Routledge, in the series History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, Brassey's, London 1994, ISBN 1-857753-099-3.
5. *The Armed Forces of World War II - Uniforms, Insignia and Organization* by Andrew Mollo, Military Press, New York 1987, ISBN 0-517-54478-4.

---

## Notes

1) See possibly the drawings of the anti-aircraft gun in my article on clipping sheets *Danish soldiers - Artillery, 1946*.

2) It is possible that the figures are intended to show personnel from the Home Guard, who in large numbers supplemented the personnel in the air defense units in England. Anti-Aircraft Command was under constant pressure to provide its youngest cohorts for frontline service, so it was necessary to utilize all available manpower resources. Well over 200,000 men and women served in the Air Force of the British Isles. (Sources 1 and 4.)

3) Source 1 also mentions that a department - in connection with local instructions on the training of personnel equipped with girls - was inspired by a regulation from the 17th century.