

# The Ever Open Eye - Om Guards Armoured Division's brand

## Background



In connection with Axel Willumsen's article about John Christmas Møller's service in the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards (see Chakoten 4/2001), the editor asked me to identify a mark that had appeared during the preliminary studies for the article.

The mark turned out to be that of the Guards Armoured Division. In the following, the history of the brand is presented as it is currently illuminated

## Guards Armoured Division 1941 - 1945

Fra *"The Story of The Guards Armoured Division 1941-1945"* af Captain the Earl of Rosse and Colonel E.R. Hill, Groffrey Bless, London 1956.

"Here it is appropriate to interrupt the report (about the formation of the division, etc.) to tell about why and how it was decided to use the famous "eye", which had distinguished the Guards Division during the war 1914 - 1918.

From the beginning, the division commander had wanted a mark which precisely symbolized the characteristics of a modern armored division, and he had asked for the units' proposals via his senior officers. A large number of diverse proposals quickly saw the light of day. Although many painters and draftsmen showed great talent, none of the proposals were sufficiently simple or original on the one hand and illustrated the "spirit" of the division on the other.

Sir Oliver (the division's first commander was Sir Oliver Lease and others) was initially not attracted to the idea of reintroducing the "eye" from the previous war, assuming that many of the officers, non-commissioned officers and privates who had served under this badge, wouldn't appreciate it being used by a brand new division. He therefore decided to seek advice from some of the most decorated officers who had served in the First World War. They turned out to be enthusiastic about the idea of continuing their old brand.

The division commander, for his part, was convinced that all those who had not fought in the First World War would appreciate the opportunity to carry on the honored traditions of the old division, and therefore decided to reintroduce the "eye" with certain modifications.

The well-known draftsman Rex Whistler 1), who served as a lieutenant in the Welsh Guards, was now involved in the case. He painted different "eyes" on a number of vehicles, which were subsequently displayed before a judging committee 2) made up of specially selected officers.

## Guards Division 1915 - 1918

The best illustration of the Guards Division badge that I have been able to find comes from a cigarette card -



On the back of the card is the following story to read:

"It is a common assumption that the 'eye' in the Guards Division badge has a special history - but this is not the case. The officer who designed the badge wanted a clear and easily recognizable mark, thinking of the human eye. The red and blue border represents the colors of the Guards Brigade. It is impossible to recall all the engagements in which the Guards Division took part - from its formation in September 1915 until it marched into Cologne. The Division consisted of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd 4th Battalion Grenadier Guards, 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Battalion Coldstream Guards, 1st og 2nd Battalion Scots Guards, 1st og 2nd Battalion Irish Guards Samt 1 Battalion Welsh Guards."

The illustration could be clearer, but unfortunately the source document does not allow this. Source: <http://www.gdfcartophily.co.uk>

In the book "*The Guards Divisions 1914 - 45*" by Mike Chappel, Opsprey Elite Series number 61, London 1995, ISBN 1-85532-546-2" Major Sir Eric Avery is mentioned as the originator of the first "eye".

Per Finsted

---

**To note:**

- 1) Rex Whistler - a talented young draftsman and painter - served as a tank platoon leader (Cromwell tanks) in the 2nd Battalion Welsh Guards, which was the reconnaissance regiment of the Guards Armored Division. He was killed by a mortar shell on 18 July 1944 in Normandy.
- 2) The judging committee quickly made their choice and soon after all the division's vehicles were fitted with their "eyes".