



256 (City of London and South East) Multi-Role Medical Regiment

(Previously 256 (City of London) Field Hospital - Restructured as 256 MMR in 2023-2024)

Introduction

256 (City of London and South East) Multi-Role Medical Regiment, or **256 MMR**, was formed by the restructuring of **256 (City of London) Field Hospital** (the Army Reserve medical hospital for Greater London) after it incorporated **220 Squadron** from 254 Medical Regiment on 23 November 2023.^{1,2} The Formation Parade occurred on 10 February 2024.³ The unit is based at Braganza Street, Kennington SE17,⁴ and it carries on the distinguished heritage of the Volunteer medical units of London and the South-East.

The unit was originally formed as **256 (London) Field Hospital (Volunteers)** on 1 October 1995 by the amalgamation of three Greater London-based Territorial Army medical units.⁵ These were **217 (London) General Hospital (V)** (re-designated as 'A' Squadron) based at Braganza Street, SE17,⁶ **257 (Southern) General Hospital (V)** (re-designated as 'B' Squadron) at the Duke of York's Headquarters, King's Road, Chelsea SW3;⁷ and **221 (Surrey) Field Ambulance (V)** based at Kingston upon Thames, Surrey.⁸ These units

¹ Past and Present members of the unit and its predecessors are encouraged to join the 256 Past and Present Association, <https://www.256ppa.org.uk/>

² The distinguished history of 220 Squadron and its predecessors is appended as Annex 1.

³ The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea [Administration Committee – 13 January 2025, Full Council – 29 January 2025] - Conferment of Civic Honours on 256 (City of London and South East) Multi-Role Medical Regiment - Report of The Chief Solicitor & Monitoring Officer (dated 29 January 2025)
<https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/Committees/documents/s21975/A8%20Conferment%20of%20Civic%20Honours.pdf>
(accessed 21 February 2025)

⁴ The nearest Underground station is Kennington Tube Station on the Northern Line.

⁵ General Staff Order - Amalgamation / Change of Location Report ref: 217 (London) General Hospital RAMC(V), ref 1015, dated 6 Sep 1995

⁶ **217 (London) General Hospital (V)** had its Regimental HQ at Braganza Street, Walworth, in Kennington, London. A detachment (closed 1983) was based at Bunhill Fields, City of London, co-located with the Honourable Artillery Company. See footnote 47 regarding unit history, and Annex 3 regarding the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries.

⁷ **257 (Southern) General Hospital (V)** had its Regimental HQ at Duke of York's Headquarters, King's Road, Chelsea, alongside 144 Parachute Field Ambulance (V). This hospital had detachments in Ipswich (closed 1993), Norwich

were themselves the successors of previous Volunteer units, including two of the original Volunteer Medical Staff Corps units of 1885,⁹ whose origins are eloquently described in a centenary article in the *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*.¹⁰

On 17 July 1996 the unit was aptly re-designated **256 (City of London) Field Hospital (Volunteers)**,¹¹⁻¹² reflecting the lineage of one of its predecessors, 167 (City of London) Field Ambulance, and possibly catalysed by it then counting the Mayor of the City of London as one of its officers. The Mayor was Alderman (later Sir) John Chalstrey, who had served with the unit's predecessor, 257 (Southern) General Hospital (V) before joining the new unit, as well as being a distinguished surgeon at the City of London's St Bartholomew's Hospital. The new unit's role was to support the Combat Services Group (Germany), within the multinational Allied Rapid Reaction Corps.¹³

The unit dropped 'Volunteers' from its title in 2013, in common with all other Reserve units, as part of the Army 2020 Reforms. Until 2023 it was mainly based within the M25 and had squadrons (previously detachments) at four Army Reserve Centres (two in London, one in Surrey and one in Brighton): Regimental Headquarters (RHQ) and 'A' Squadron at Braganza Street, Kennington; 'B' Squadron in Iverna Gardens, Kensington; 'C' Squadron at Portsmouth Road, Kingston upon Thames, and 'D' Squadron in Dyke Road, Brighton (this being a former detachment of 217 Field Hospital, re-opened in 2011).

The unit, as 256 Field Hospital, has deployed twice, to Iraq on Op TELIC 4 (2004) and Afghanistan on Op HERRICK 11 (2009), while personnel have deployed separately as individual augmentees. The unit has also exercised abroad on annual camp, including to California alongside American field hospitals.

Future Soldier re-organisation (2023-2024)

Major changes occurred from 28 February 2023 under the Future Soldier programme, with a reduction in the number of Close Support Regiments (previously field ambulances) and the formation of Multi-Role Medical Regiments (MMR) containing both Role 1 pre-hospital and Role 2 hospital squadrons under a

(actually in nearby East Dereham), Harrow (relocated to Uxbridge 1995) and Chelsea. *See outline history below, and Annex 4 for unit history, affiliation with Worshipful Company of Barbers, and detail on Opinicus.*

⁸ **221 (Surrey) Field Ambulance (V)**, based at Portsmouth Road TA Centre, Kingston, had been formed on 1 April 1967.

⁹ **'Merger of Antiquities'** Article by the RAMC Historical Society, c. 1998 (Museum of Military Medicine, Brigadier Jones archive)

¹⁰ Brigadier TW Glenister. The Origin of the Volunteer Medical Staff Corps in 1885. *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 1985; Vol 131: pp. 152-158 <https://militaryhealth.bmj.com/content/jramc/131/3/152.full.pdf>

¹¹ General Staff Order – Authority for the Re-designation of a Unit, D/DASD/6/1382 (AMD 1b) dated 13 September 1996.

¹² 'Extension of Privileges to The London Regiment, the 256 Field Hospital (V), and the 31st Signal Regiment (V).' The Remembrancer, Corporation of London, to TAVR Association for Greater London, reference TA/CIT/AFP/CK, dated 11 December 1995. (Attached as Reference A to: 'Change of Title – 256 Field Hospital (V).' Headquarters Land, reference HQ LAND/G3 O&D 1291/1 dated 27 June 1996)

¹³ Commemorative booklet, 'Reception in recognition of **256 (City of London) Field Hospital (V)**, Mansion House Thursday 16th July 1998 [by The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor Sir Richard Nichols] (Museum of Military Medicine, Brigadier Jones archive)

20250221 – A History of 256 MMR, by Colonel (ret'd) David Vassallo L/RAMC.

unified command.¹⁴ As a result, 256 Field Hospital incorporated 220 Squadron from 254 Medical Regiment on 23 November 2023, restructuring to form **256 (London & South-East) Multi-Role Medical Regiment** on 10 February 2024. There are now two Regular and nine Reserve MMRs (including 256 MMR), in addition to four Regular Medical Regiments and three other Reserve units.¹⁵

The unit now has two Hospital Squadrons, one Role 1 Medical Squadron, and a Support Squadron on its establishment. It remains under command of 2 Medical Group (previously 2 Medical Brigade).

The individual squadrons of 256 MMR were re-designated on formation and are now located as follows:

Kennington (*previously RHQ and 'A' Sqn*): RHQ and 257 Support Squadron, 217 Hospital Squadron

Kensington (*previously 'B' Squadron*): 217 Hospital Squadron

Kingston upon Thames (*previously 'C' Squadron*): 221 Hospital Squadron

Brighton (*previously 'D' Squadron*): 221 Hospital Squadron

Maidstone: 220 Medical Support Squadron

256 MMR - Sqns	Army Reserve Centre Location
Regimental Headquarters - Kennington + 217 (Hospital Squadron). 257 (Support Squadron).	71 Braganza Street, Woolworth, London, SE17 3RF
217 (Hospital Squadron) - Kensington	1a Iverna Gardens, Kensington, London, W8 6TN
221 (Hospital Squadron) - Kingston	19 Portsmouth Road, Kingston Upon Thames, KT1 2QX
221 (Hospital Squadron) - Brighton	Quebec Barracks, 198 Dyke Road, Brighton, East Sussex, BN1 5AS
220 (Medical Support) – Ditton, Maidstone	Army Reserve Centre, London Road, ME20 6DB,

¹⁴ Future Soldier (programme published 25 November 2021; British Army Website <https://www.army.mod.uk/learn-and-explore/army-of-the-future/readiness/future-soldier/> (accessed 2 October 2024). Future Soldier Guide https://www.army.mod.uk/media/15057/adr010310-futuresoldierguide_30nov.pdf (accessed 2 October 2024)

¹⁵ See Current and Previous Unit Histories on Friends of Millbank website <https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/current-units> and <https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/previous-units>

Formation of Royal Army Medical Service (2024)

On 15 November 2024, the three Corps of the Army Medical Services (the Royal Army Medical Corps, the Royal Army Dental Corps and the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps) amalgamated to form the Royal Army Medical Service, with the approval of His Majesty the King.¹⁶

The new Royal Army Medical Service flag comprises the three colours of Dull Cherry, from the RAMC; Athol Grey, from the QARANC; and Victoria green, from the RADC and also for Project Victoria, under which the new Corps had come into being.¹⁷⁻¹⁸ The RAMS colours are shown on the title page of this history (above).



The cap badge and motto of the Royal Army Medical Service

Unit insignia

The shield is the centrepiece of the City of London's Coat of Arms emblazoned with the Cross of Saint George (Patron Saint of England). The sword in the top left quadrant represents the martyrdom of Saint Paul (Patron Saint of the City of London). The rod and serpent are Hippocratic symbols associated with medicine.

The insignia was approved by the Army Dress Committee on 28 June 1999 for use by 256 (City of London) Field Hospital (Volunteers). The unit had considered several options, but it was not practical to incorporate the emblems of the three former units within a small badge. With its association with the City it was therefore deemed that the most appropriate emblem was the City of London armorial design. The insignia was retained when the unit restructured in 2023. It is worn on Mess dress and Service Dress (No 2 uniform).

¹⁶ This had been announced in Parliament on 15 October 2024. <https://www.army.mod.uk/news/the-royal-army-medical-service-created-to-ensure-british-army-healthcare-is-fit-for-the-future/> (accessed 15 October 2024).

¹⁷ See <https://www.forcesnews.com/services/army/historic-creation-new-royal-army-medical-service-officially-marked-sandhurst> (accessed 16 November 2024)

¹⁸ British Army modernises medical services to keep soldiers fighting fit. *British Army / News* 20 November 2024 <https://www.army.mod.uk/news/british-army-modernises-medical-services-to-keep-soldiers-fighting-fit/>

The Unit's links to London's Livery Companies (see Annexes 3-4 for detail)

The three immediate predecessor units of 256 (City of London) Field Hospital were privileged to have links with the City of London through the Livery Companies: 217 was linked with the **Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London** (symbolised by the Rhinoceros, *see photo below and Annex 3*) and the **Spectacle Makers Company**; 257 with the **Worshipful Company of Barbers** (symbolised by the Opincus, *see Annex 4*); and 221 with the **Worshipful Company of Cutlers** (whose premises were originally those of the Royal College of Physicians).

256 (City of London) Field Hospital proudly carried those links onwards through the honour of bearing the name of the city in its title.¹⁹ The three main squadrons of the unit each carried the lineage of one of these three predecessors, aptly enough at the time in alphabetical order. Thus, 'A' Squadron (derived from 217) in Kennington maintained the link to the Apothecaries, 'B' Squadron (from 257) in Kensington was linked to the Barbers, and 'C' Squadron (previously 221) in Kingston was linked to the Cutlers.

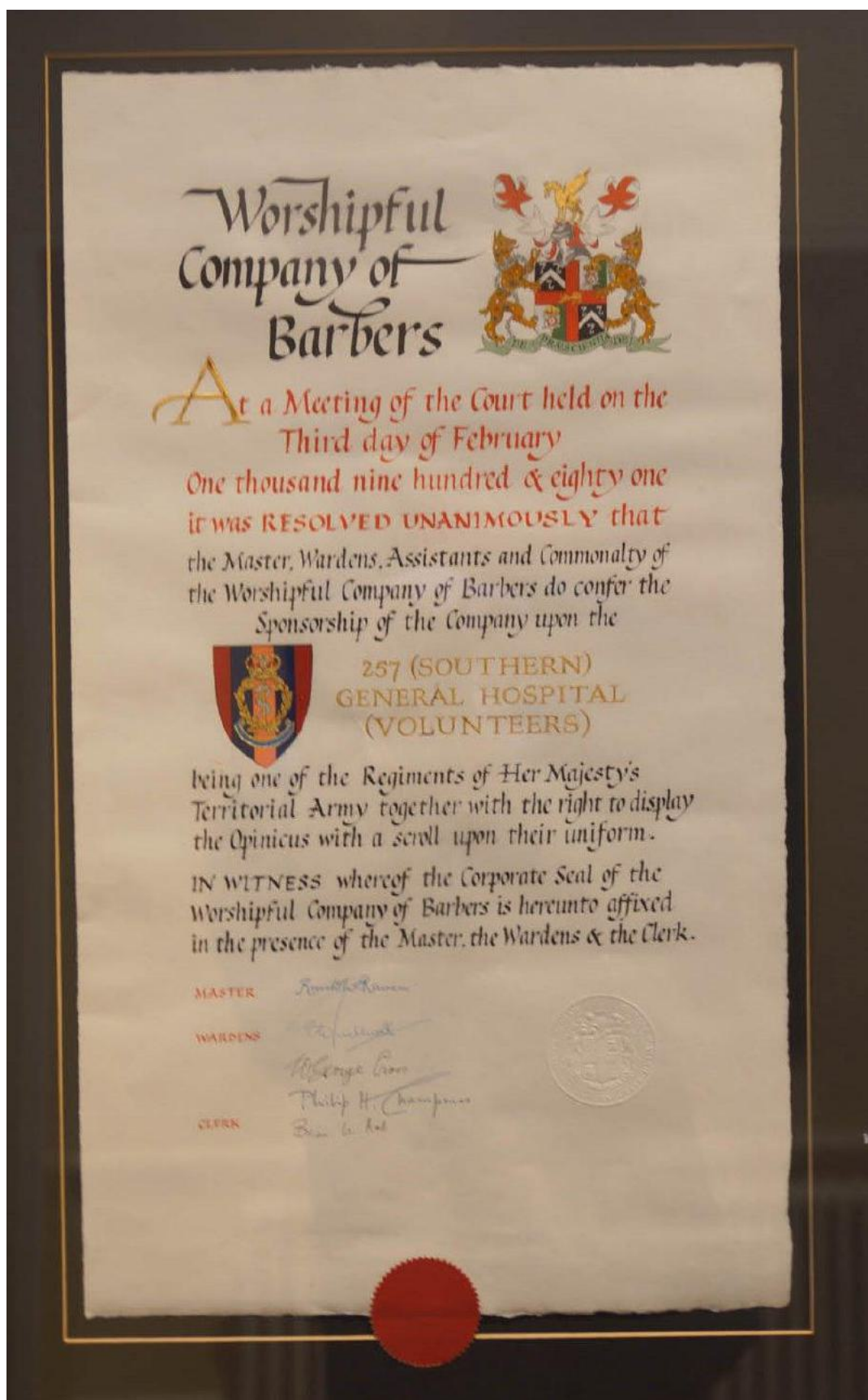
256 MMR. By virtue of Squadron re-designation and moves in November 2023, with 257 Support Squadron and part of 217 Hospital Squadron now co-locating in Kennington, and 'B' Squadron in Kensington re-designating as 217 Hospital Squadron, affiliation with the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London and with the Worshipful Company of Barbers has jointly devolved to both Squadrons. 221 Medical Support Squadron maintains the link with the Worshipful Company of Cutlers.



*Wooden Rhinoceros (christened 'Percy' by the unit, see below),²⁰ carved by Eluid Njuguna of Nairobi, Kenya
Presented to 217 (London) General Hospital RAMC (V)
by Lieutenant General Sir Alan Reay KBE FRCP, Director General AMS 1981-85, Honorary Colonel 1986-1990
(‘Percy’ remains proudly on display at 256 MMR Regimental Headquarters)*

¹⁹ Information from: Commemorative booklet, 1998. *Op cit*

²⁰ See Annex 3 for detail on The Rhinoceros Flash and the unit's affiliation with the Worshipful Company of Apothecaries. The peculiar siting of the second horn behind the rhino's ears is due to the fact that the original design for the 'Rhynoceros proper' for the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries in 1634 was taken from a painting by Durer who had never seen a rhinoceros. This was the only representation of a rhinoceros existing in Europe at the time. In 1970, Headquarters London District granted permission for members of 217 (London) General Hospital RAMC (V) to wear a 'Rhynoceros proper' on a wreath azure as a shoulder embellishment to uniform sleeves. This coincided with the release of a popular film, resulting in the rhino being promptly christened 'Percy', a name which persists. Details taken from Colonel John Heber's unit history '217 (London) General Hospital RAMC (V)', attached with Reference B to 'Change of Title – 256 Field Hospital (V)', dated 27 June 1996.



Sponsorship of 257 (Southern) General Hospital (V) by Worshipful Company of Barbers, 1981

A Brief History of the Unit's predecessors²¹



Family tree of 256 Field Hospital

(produced by Major John Funnell RAMC (V), 2008; digitised by Lt Col Alex Saunders QARANC, 2020)

Readers should note that 161 and 162 (East Anglian) Field Ambulances do not form part of the unit lineage and are only geographically associated: they had been disbanded in 1966-67, leaving only 163 (County of Norfolk) Field Ambulance to amalgamate with 10 (London) General Hospital and 57 (Middlesex) General Hospital on 1 April 1967 to form the new 257 (Eastern) General Hospital TAVR.²²

Pre-1908 Volunteer medical units in London

The **Volunteer Infantry Brigades** raised Bearer Companies in support of each Regiment in the 1880s, thereby forming the **Volunteer Infantry Brigade Bearer Companies (VIBBC)**, each commanded by a doctor in local practice, with men trained to St John Ambulance Brigade Standards. Separately, the **Volunteer Medical Staff Corps (VMSC)**, officially recognised in 1885, was formed from Volunteer Bearer Companies raised in medical schools and hospitals from 1883 onwards. The VIBBC and the VMSC were completely

²¹ Information collated from several sources, including *Synopsis of Histories TAVR Medical Units* (1975), and Major (Rtd) John Funnell, 256 Historian (contribution gratefully acknowledged)

²² 10 (London) General Hospital. *AMS Magazine*, 1967 (April), p.53.

separate organisations and should not be confused with each other. While the RAMC was formed in 1898, it was only in 1902 that the RAMC (Volunteers) was formed, with VMSC Companies becoming RAMC(V) Companies.²³ The VIBBC remained separate until the Haldane Reforms of the British Army in 1908.

Prior to 1908, the following Volunteer medical units (all lineal predecessors of 256) existed within London:

2nd (London) Volunteer Infantry Brigade Bearer Company

3rd (London) Volunteer Infantry Bearer Company

4th (City of London) Volunteer Infantry Bearer Company (*officially the Royal Fusiliers Volunteer Bearer Company but also known as the "Bovril Bearer Company" as most of the personnel worked for the company*)

Birkbeck College Volunteer Medical Staff Corps (formed 1885)

London Companies RAMC (Volunteers), from 1902 onwards, formed from the VMSC Companies.

Post-1908 Territorial Force medical units in London

In 1908, as a result of the Territorial and Reserves Forces Act, the Brigade Bearer Companies and the three companies of the Volunteer Medical Staff Corps, now RAMC (Volunteers), amalgamated to become field ambulances of the 1st London Division of the Territorial Force (TF).²⁴ The following TF field ambulances, general hospitals and sanitary companies (all precursors of 256) now came into being within the City of London and the County of London boundaries:

City of London units:

1st London Division Field Ambulances:

1st City of London Field Ambulance

2nd City of London Field Ambulance

3rd City of London Field Ambulance

1st London (City of London) General Hospital (based in Camberwell)

2nd London (City of London) General Hospital (based in Chelsea)

1st London (City of London) Sanitary Company

County of London units:

2nd London Division Field Ambulances:

4th London Field Ambulance

5th London Field Ambulance

6th London Field Ambulance

²³ RAMC Volunteers – A Brief History. In: *A Tribute to the Volunteer Military Reservists and Supporting Auxiliaries of Greater London* <https://www.stepsforwardlondon.org/the-royal-army-medical-corps.html> (accessed 26 September 2024)

²⁴ The Territorial Force (TF) was established under the Territorial and Reserves Forces Act (Part II) of August 1907, and formally came into existence on 1 April 1908. It was the brainchild of Richard Haldane, appointed Secretary of State for War when the Liberal Government was elected in December 1905.

3rd London General Hospital (based in Wandsworth)

4th London General Hospital (based in Denmark Hill) (subsequently renamed 1st County of London General Hospital)

2nd London Sanitary Company

London Mounted Brigade Field Ambulance

First World War

All the Field Ambulances served with Territorial Force divisions in various theatres of war:

The **1st City of London Field Ambulance**, commanded by Lt Col Richard Sleman, was one of the very first TF units to deploy abroad, embarking on 4 September 1914 for Malta, where they replaced the regular RAMC personnel who had deployed to France.²⁵ It served in Malta 1914-16, and in Salonika 1916-18.

The other Field Ambulances deployed to Salonika and Gallipoli, Egypt, Palestine, and France, as follows:

The **2nd** and **3rd City of London Field Ambulances** served with 28 Division, participating in the 2nd Battle of Ypres and Loos in 1915, and at Salonika 1916-18. They were re-designated as 84 and 85 Field Ambulances on 29 January 1915.

The **4th**, **5th** and **6th London Field Ambulances** served with 47 (2 London) Infantry Division on the Western Front (Aubers Ridge, Festubert, Loos 1915, Somme 1916, Messines, 3rd Ypres, Cambrai 1917, and Somme, Albert, Bapaume, Hindenburg Line and Lille 1918).

The **London Mounted Brigade Field Ambulance** served with various Yeomanry and Cavalry divisions at Gallipoli 1915-16, Salonika 1916-17, and Egypt & Palestine 1917-18.²⁶

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The General Hospitals were all mobilised, serving either in London or overseas:

The **1st (County of London) General Hospital** became a 1600 bed hospital in London. One of its officers was Lt Col Sir Anthony Bowlby from St Bartholomew's Hospital, who became the first consulting surgeon to the British Expeditionary Force.²⁷

The **1st** and **2nd (London) General Hospitals** provided officers to form 53 General Hospital which went to France in 1917. Disbanded in 1918, it reformed in 1921 as 2nd (County of London) General Hospital (TA), later renamed 13th (4th London) General Hospital (TA).²⁸

²⁵ See http://www.maltaramc.com/regsurg/rs1910_1919/rmo1914.html

²⁶ **Overseas service of the Field Ambulances** Historical Branch (Army), *'Centenary of Army Medical Services (TA) in London'* Loose Minute HB(A)6/74 dated 11 March 1985, Annex B: Overseas Wartime Service of London's RAMC(TA) Units)

²⁷ **First World War: the General Hospitals – UK service.** Synopsis of Histories TAVR Medical Units (1975).

²⁸ In February 1939 a cadre from this unit formed 1st London General Hospital. This unit was mobilised on 2 September 1939 and in October became 17 (London) General Hospital RAMC, seeing service in France, UK and India by 1945. This unit was reformed in 1947 at the Duke of York's HQ, Chelsea, moving in 1961 to Braganza Street. See: **First World War: the General Hospitals – Overseas service.** Synopsis of Histories TAVR Medical Units (1975).

Inter-war years

In October 1921, when the Territorial Force was re-constituted as the Territorial Army, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd City of London Field Ambulances amalgamated to become the **1st London Division Field Ambulance**. At the same time the 4th, 5th and 6th London Field Ambulances amalgamated to form **140 (County of London) Field Ambulance** (a predecessor of 221 (Surrey) Field Ambulance).

Second World War

The London based TA General Hospitals, having been disbanded after the First World War, were reformed between 1937 and 1939. They were mobilised together with the Field Ambulances at the onset of the Second World War, and all served overseas as follows: **140 (County of London) Field Ambulance** with 56 (1 London) Division in Egypt, then with 50 (Northumbrian) Division in North Africa 1943, and thereafter with 56 Division in Italy; **167 (City of London) Field Ambulance** served with 56 (1 London) Division throughout the war, in the UK, Iraq, Tunisia, Sicily and Italy; **10 (1 London) Casualty Clearing Station** served with the British Expeditionary Force in 1940, Egypt and Libya 1942-43, and Montgomery's 21 Army Group 1944-45; **24 (London) General Hospital** served with 21 Army Group 1944-45; **8 Sanitary Company** served as dispersed Sections (14, 15, 16 and 19 Hygiene Sections, and 28 Field Sanitary Sections) in many locations.²⁹

They were demobilised following the end of hostilities.



*In memoriam - Field Ambulance service in the Second World War
(Scale model of Austin K2 Ambulance, presented to 256 Field Hospital WOs' & Sgts' Mess,
By WO2 (AQMS) Clive Armstrong REME on his retirement, December 2015)
(WO = Warrant Officer; AQMS = 'Artificer' Quarter Master Sergeant)*

²⁹ Historical Branch (Army), 'Centenary of Army Medical Services (TA) in London' Loose Minute HB(A)6/74 dated 11 March 1985. *Op cit* (Author's note: this HB(A) account does not mention the overseas service of 17 (London) General Hospital, see footnote above)

The Cold War (1947 – up to 1967)

The 1947 re-constitution of the TA re-formed the London based medical units into one field ambulance, one casualty clearing station, and two general hospitals, as follows:

- 167 (City of London) Field Ambulance** *previously 1st London Division Field Ambulance*
- 10th (London) Casualty Clearing Station** *previously London Mounted Brigade Field Ambulance*
- 17 (London) General Hospital** *previously 1st London (City of London) General Hospital*
- 57 (Middlesex) General Hospital** *previously 2nd London (City of London) General Hospital.*

Personnel from these units served in Korea, Suez (particularly at BMH Suez), and other trouble spots in the 1950s.³⁰



A memento of past conflicts and military hospitals
Wooden hospital sign 'BMH Suez', displayed at RHQ 256 MMR

217 (London) General Hospital RAMC (V), 1967 - 1995

217 (London) General Hospital RAMC (V) was formed in 1967 at Braganza Street originally as the 217 (Eastern) General Hospital (becoming 'London' in 1969) by the amalgamation of 17 (London) General Hospital, the 24th (Eastern) Field Dressing Station in Brighton, and 167 (City of London) Field Ambulance.³¹ The latter unit traced its descent through the 3rd London (City of London) Field Ambulance TF to the original Birkbeck Company of the Volunteer Medical Staff Corps formed at Birkbeck College (now London University) by Sir James Cantlie on 1 April 1885.

³⁰ Information from: Commemorative booklet, 'Reception in recognition of **256 (City of London) Field Hospital (V)**, Mansion House Thursday 16th July 1998' *Op cit*

³¹ The Centenary Celebration of the Volunteer Medical Staff Corps held at Duke of York's Headquarters London on Sunday 14th April 1985. *Army Medical Services Magazine*, 1985 (June); 39: 68-69



*The Brighton-based predecessor of 217 (London) General Hospital RAMC (V)
(Commemorated at 226 MMR HQ, Braganza Street)*



Regimental Sergeant Majors of 217 (London) General Hospital RAMC (V), 1967-1995

257 (Southern) General Hospital RAMC (V) (see annex for more detail)



Unit shield, courtesy of Chris Ward



Norwich Detachment sign (1967-1995)

The lineage of this hospital is as follows: 2nd London (City of London) General Hospital (1908-14), 54 (2nd London) General Hospital (1914-19); then 2nd (London) General Hospital (1937), becoming The Military Hospital, Shenley (using part of the pre-existing civilian Shenley Hospital to treat approximately 3,000 wounded servicemen), from 1939 until 1946.³² It was this geographical connection (to the Harrow area) that led to the TA general hospital, 57 (Middlesex) General Hospital, being established in Harrow (1946-67) during the post-WW2 re-organisation.³³

In 1967, 57 (Middlesex) General Hospital merged with the 10th (London) General Hospital and with the sole remaining East Anglian Field Ambulance, 163 (County of Norfolk) Field Ambulance RAMC TA at Norwich,³⁴ to form **257 (Eastern) General Hospital** (1967-69) at the Duke of York's in Chelsea, initially with detachments in Harrow, Norwich, and East Dereham (some 15 miles west of the City of Norwich). The unit was re-designated **257 (Southern) General Hospital** on 1 December 1969, and an Ipswich detachment opened in 1977 (closing in 1993). On 1 October 1995 the Norwich Detachment was transferred to the command of 254 Field Ambulance (based in Cambridge), on formation of **256 (London) Field Hospital (Volunteers)**.

³² Shenley Hospital Timeline. <https://www.stalbansoutofsightoutofmind.org.uk/content/place/shenley-hospital/hidden-minds/shenley-hospital-timeline> (accessed 16 September 2024)

³³ The hospital numbering reflects the geographical association with the **57th Foot**, who became the **Middlesex Regiment** and were known as the Die-hards for their exploits at the Battle of Albuera in the Peninsula War.

³⁴ **161 Field Ambulance** at Ipswich disbanded in 1967. **162 Field Ambulance** had a notable history. It was originally formed at Norwich (1908-22), deploying with 54 Division to France in 1914, then to Palestine in 1917, participating in the third Battle of Gaza. It was re-established at Harrow in 1939 from a cadre detached from 167 Field Ambulance, sharing a drill hall with a Company of the Middlesex Regiment (the 57th Regiment of Foot, known as the Diehards), thereby beginning a historic association. The unit moved from Harrow to Cambridge in 1948 and disbanded in 1966.

221 (Surrey) Field Ambulance RAMC (V)



Unit shield, courtesy of Terry Hissey

The information provided in the AMS Magazine 1995 history (extract scored through below) is reportedly erroneous ~~This Field Ambulance traced its lineage, via 221 (Surrey) Field Dressing Station, 47 (Home Counties) Field Ambulance (and a merger with 131 (Home Counties) Field Ambulance), 140 (County of London) Field Ambulance, and the 4th and 5th (London) Field Ambulances, to the Woolwich Company of the Volunteer Medical Staff Corps, also formed in 1885.~~³⁵ **Readers with accurate information are kindly asked to email the author at djvassallo@aol.com**



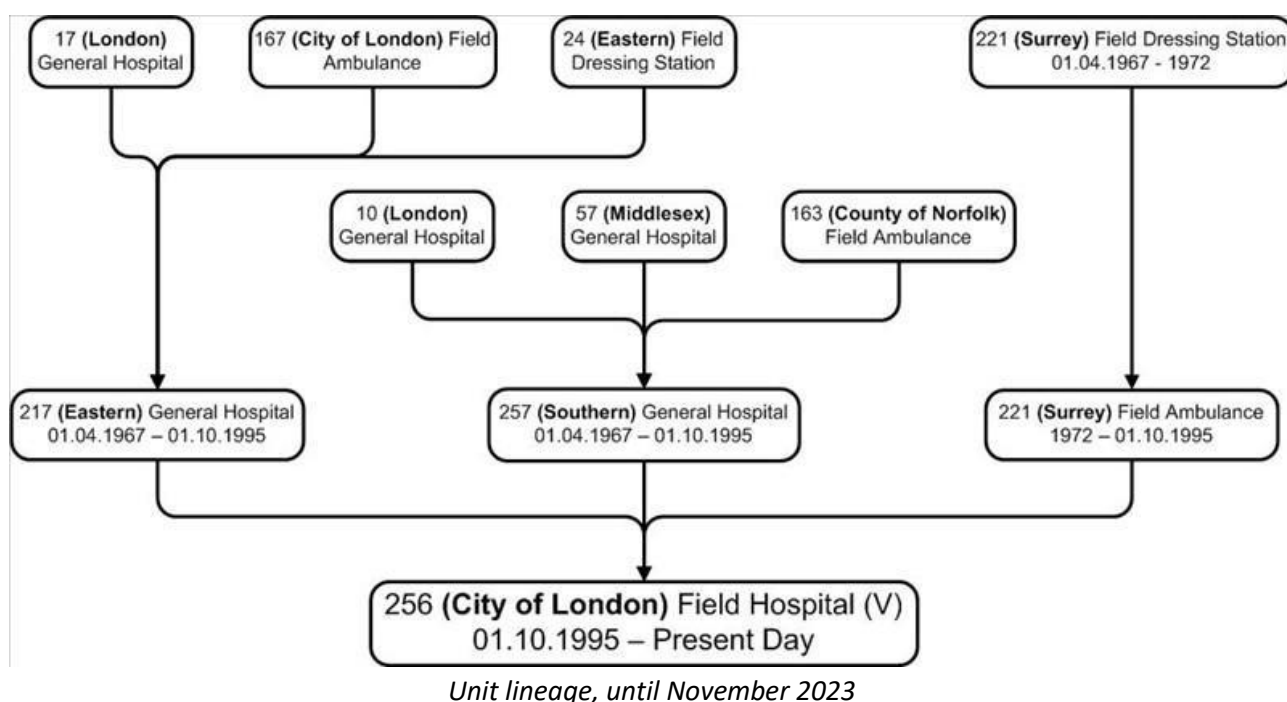
*Footnote to history – Officers' Mess letter rack from 221 (Surrey) Field Ambulance RAMC (V)
(Displayed at 256 MMR HQ, Braganza Street)*

³⁵ **221 (Surrey) Field Ambulance RAMC (V).** AMS Magazine 1985 (June); 39:69. **This account, apparently taken from the programme of the AMS 100 Review by the Surgeon General, is reportedly erroneous.**

1995 – Formation of 256 (London) Field Hospital (Volunteers)

On 1 October 1995, **256 (London) Field Hospital (Volunteers)** came into being through the amalgamation of three TA medical units based in Greater London.³⁶ These units were, as above: **217 (London) General Hospital (V)** at Braganza Street;³⁷ **257 (Southern) General Hospital (V)** at Duke of York's Headquarters, King's Road, Chelsea;³⁸ and **221 (Surrey) Field Ambulance (V)** at Kingston upon Thames, Surrey.³⁹

On 17 July 1996 the unit was very aptly re-designated **256 (City of London) Field Hospital (Volunteers)**.⁴⁰⁻⁴¹ The Mayor of the City of London was then one of its officers. The unit dropped 'Volunteers' from its title in 2013.



³⁶ General Staff Order dated 6 September 1995, to become effective 1 October.

³⁷ **217 (London) General Hospital (V)** had its Regimental HQ at Braganza Street, Walworth, London. A detachment was based at Bunhill Fields, City of London, co-located with the Honourable Artillery Company.

³⁸ **257 (Southern) General Hospital (V)** had its Regimental HQ at Duke of York's Headquarters, King's Road, Chelsea, alongside 144 Parachute Field Ambulance (V). This hospital had detachments in Ipswich (closed 1993), Norwich, East Dereham, Harrow (relocated to Uxbridge 1995) and Chelsea.

³⁹ **221 (Surrey) Field Ambulance (V)** was based at Kingston upon Thames. It had been formed on 1 April 1967.

⁴⁰ General Staff Order – Authority for the Re-designation of a Unit, D/DASD/6/1382 (AMD 1b) dated 13 September 1996.

⁴¹ 'Extension of Privileges to The London Regiment, the 256 Field Hospital (V), and the 31st Signal Regiment (V).' The Remembrancer, Corporation of London, to TAVR Association for Greater London, reference TA/CIT/AFP/CK, dated 11 December 1995. (Attached as Reference A to: 'Change of Title – 256 Field Hospital (V).' Headquarters Land, reference HQ LAND/G3 O&D 1291/1 dated 27 June 1996)

Deployments of 256 Field Hospital

Op TELIC 4B (Aug – Nov 2004)

The Unit, under Colonel Martin Deahl L/RAMC, deployed with over 90 personnel to take command of the UK Med Group on Op TELIC 4B, with unit personnel forming the core of the tented 75-bed Field Hospital at Shaibah Logistic Base outside Basra. Shortly after the start of this tour the Med Group became heavily involved caring for casualties arising from the Second Sadr Uprising (2 – 26 August).⁴²

Between August and November 2004, BMH Shaibah admitted some 700 patients, including 50 casualties resulting from Hostile Action with a variety of gunshot wounds, fragmentation and blast injuries. Disease and non-battle injury (DNBI) accounted for much of the workload: in the same period there were more than 5,000 primary healthcare attendances.⁴³

A Role 2 (-) Dressing Station was deployed to northern Iraq at the end of October on Op BRACKEN, the Black Watch mission supporting American troops in the Battle for Fallujah, a US offensive against fanatical Sunni insurgents holding the town. This Dressing Station would see serious action on 4 November when a suicide bomber caused multiple casualties, including the first death due to suicide bombing amongst UK troops.⁴⁴

Op HERRICK 11A (2009)

256 (City of London) Field Hospital (V), commanded by Colonel Peter Gilbert L/RAMC, was the lead Unit in the Role 3 Hospital at Camp Bastion (R3 BSN) from October 2009 – January 2010,⁴⁵ taking over from the Danish field hospital that had manned Bastion on HERRICK 10.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷ Other senior personnel from the unit were Colonel Ian Hicks (Deployed Medical Director), Lieutenant Colonel Liz Coles (Senior Nursing Officer, who would go on to command 256 Field Hospital in 2013) and Regimental Sergeant Major WO1 (RSM) David Hough.

The unit had been preparing for this deployment since being warned off in 2006:

‘The role of training activities such as AMSTAP and Ex MARBLE TOR in 2007 cannot be over-stated in terms of bonding the team and giving confidence in the environment. Many of the team had

⁴² Vassallo D. A brief history of Operations Telic and Herrick. Chapter 1, in: *Military Medicine in Iraq and Afghanistan – a comprehensive review* (Ed: Ian Greaves; CRC Press, 2019), pp.15-16. Available online at <https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/op-telic-and-op-herrick/>

⁴³ Rew D. *Blood, Heat + Dust: Operation Telic and the British Medical Deployment to the Gulf 2003 -2009* (2nd edition);17:7. University of Southampton, e-book: https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/449455/1/David_Rew_BHD_SecondEdition_Complete_3.3.2021.pdf

⁴⁴ Vassallo D. Organisation of the medical services in Iraq and Afghanistan. Chapter 2, in: *Military Medicine in Iraq and Afghanistan – a comprehensive review* (*Ibid*), p.54.

⁴⁵ Vassallo D. A brief history of Operations Telic and Herrick. *Op cit.*, p.29.

⁴⁶ Vassallo, D. A short history of Camp Bastion Hospital: the two hospitals and unit deployments. *J R Army Med Corps* 2015;161(1):79-83. (<https://militaryhealth.bmj.com/content/161/1/79>)

⁴⁷ Vassallo D. Organisation of the medical services in Iraq and Afghanistan. *Op cit.*, pp.70-72.

previously deployed on Op TELIC in 2004 and while in terms of severity and clinical management there are huge differences, this experience of “the system” remained hugely valuable especially for those in Head of Department and shift leader positions.’⁴⁸

A total of 82 personnel from the unit were deployed, 70 to posts within the Hospital and 12 within the wider Medical Group. The high tempo of operations on the preceding HERRICK 10 continued into the first half of this tour, with 180 Trauma Calls in the first six weeks before the pace slackened slightly.

Perhaps one can better sense the ethos and the measure of 256’s life-saving team work at Camp Bastion by realising that one particular casualty survived following transfusion in theatre of an astounding 274 units of blood and blood products. The four operating theatres were often all occupied simultaneously for many hours with major trauma cases.⁴⁹

Local Authority Civic Honours

256 (City of London) Field Hospital was awarded the Honorary Liberty of the London Borough of Southwark (1996), followed by the Freedom of Entry to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (2008), Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames (2009), and London Borough of Southwark (2013). It was granted the status of ‘a privileged Corps of the City of London’ in October 2021.

Following formation of the new unit, the Freedom of Entry to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea previously held by 256 (City of London) Field Hospital was reattributed and conferred onto **256 (City of London and South East) Multi-Role Medical Regiment** with effect from 30 January 2025.⁵⁰

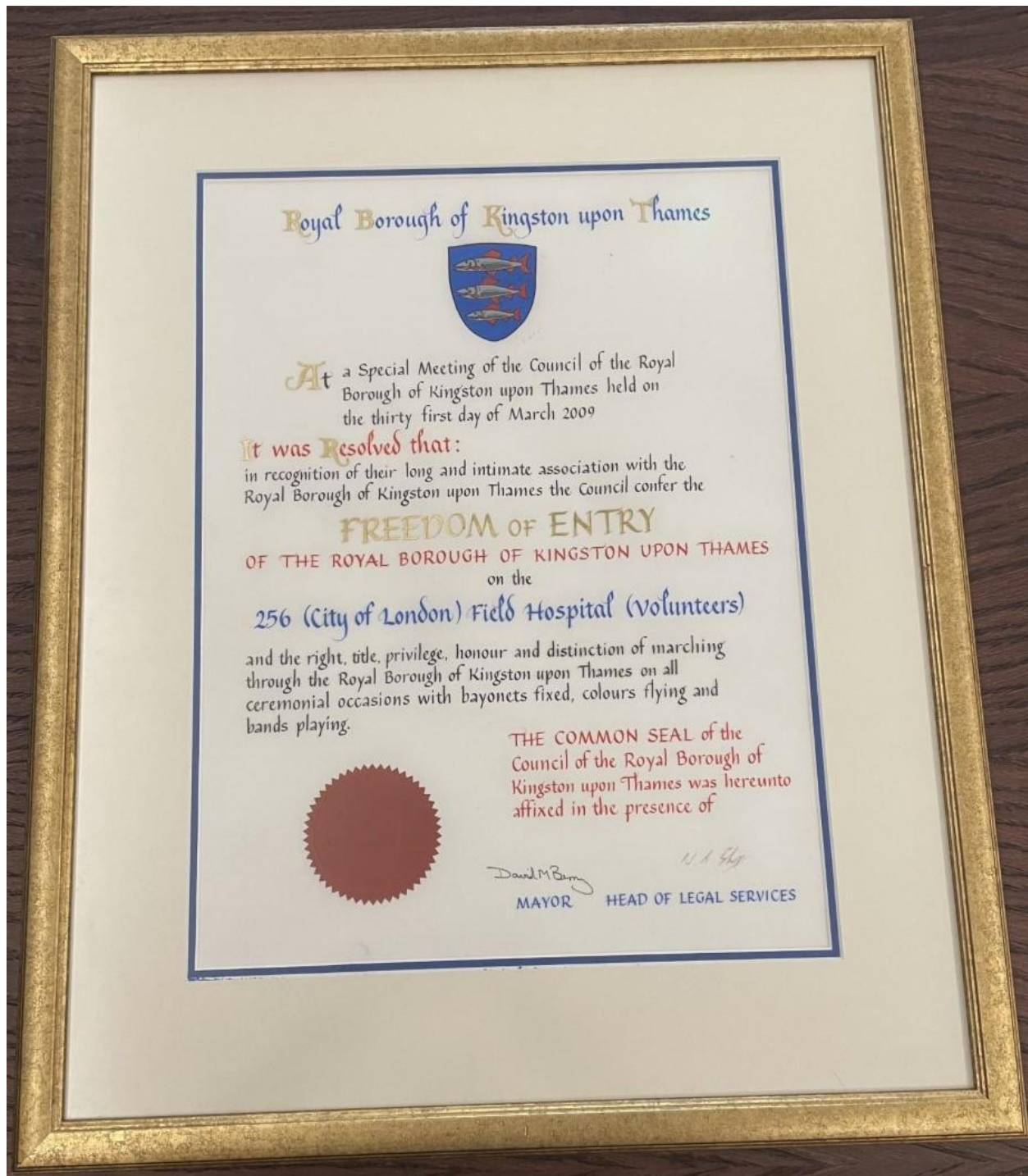
⁴⁸ Adapted from: Post Operational Report Op HERRICK 11A, Joint Force Medical Group, Role 3 Hospital Squadron, (256 (City of London) Field Hospital (Volunteers), dated 28 February 2010

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea ... Conferment of Civic Honours on 256 (City of London and South East) Multi-Role Medical Regiment ... (*Op cit*)
<https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/Committees/documents/s21975/A8%20Conferment%20of%20Civic%20Honours.pdf>
(accessed 21 February 2025)



Freedom of Entry, Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, 2008



Freedom of Entry, Kingston upon Thames, 2009 (courtesy of WO1 K Pye, RSM)



Freedom of Entry, Southwark, 2013



Recognition as 'a Privileged Corps of the City of London', 2021 (courtesy of WO1 K Pye, RSM)

**Commanding Officers, Matrons and Regimental Sergeant Majors
of 256 Field Hospital**



*Commanding Officers' Appointments Board, courtesy of WO1 (RSM) K Pye.
Note that the formation entry for 221 should read 221 (Surrey) Field Ambulance (V)*

Those keen on the history of female doctors in the Defence Medical Services will be interested to learn that Colonel Mary Heber, consultant physician, who commanded 256 Field Hospital in 2000-2003, was the first daughter (as distinct from son) to command what was effectively the same unit (being a direct successor) as her father, Colonel John Heber, consultant anaesthetist, who had commanded 217 General Hospital in 1975-78.⁵¹ Mary commissioned into the RAMC in February 1978 and her first camp, in Penhale, was under her father's command.

⁵¹ In 1996-97, Colonel John Heber (d. 1999) compiled a history of **217 (London) General Hospital RAMC (V)** in two parts (previously un-published, now uploaded to https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/past_units). The first part consists primarily of memoirs of 17 (London) General Hospital before its merger in 1967 with 167 (City of London) Field Ambulance and 24th (Eastern) Field Dressing Station to form 217 (London) General Hospital. The second part



Matrons' Appointment Board, courtesy of Terry Hissey

covers the years from 1967 up to the formation on 1 October 1995 of **256 (London) Field Hospital (Volunteers)**. Information kindly provided by Colonel Mary Heber, October 2020.



*RSMs' Appointment Boards, courtesy of WO1 (RSM) K Pye, appointed RSM in 2022
Note that the formation entry for 221 should read 221 (Surrey) Field Ambulance (V)*

Annex 1: A short history of 220 Medical Squadron. Previously 220 (Maidstone) Medical Squadron, lineal successor of 220 Field Ambulance (V)

220 Medical Squadron was re-subordinated from 254 Medical Regiment to 256 (City of London) Field Hospital when the latter restructured as 256 (City of London and South East) Multi-Role Medical Regiment on 23 November 2023.

Introduction

220 Field Ambulance (Volunteers) had a proud history as the oldest Field Ambulance in the British Army. It had gone through various name changes since its official formation in 1887, it had always been based in Maidstone, and it had retained the honorary title of 1st Home Counties since the formation of the Territorial Force in 1908.^{52,53,54}

The unit was reorganised as **220 (Maidstone) Medical Squadron** when it amalgamated on 1 April 2000 with **4 Field Ambulance** and **222 Field Ambulance (V)** to each form squadrons within the new **4 General Support Medical Regiment**.⁵⁵ The Squadron moved to **254 (East of England) Medical Regiment** in April 2013. The Squadron's history over the next ten years reflects that of this parent unit, now re-structured as **254 (East of England) Multi-Role Medical Regiment** (*see separate history*).⁵⁶

220's history at a glance

- 1886 – Foundation of 5th Division, Volunteer Medical Staff Corps (VMSC)
- 1887 – Official Formation of 5th Division, VMSC
- 1892 – Re-designation as Maidstone Company, VMSC
- 1897 – Unit assists local Maidstone population during severe typhoid epidemic
- 1900 – 150 volunteers serve in Second South African War
- 1902 – Raising of a second Maidstone Company

⁵² The Squadron's history is based partially on information kindly supplied by Brigadier (retd) Alistair Macmillan L/RAMC and by then-Brigadier (retd) Peter Gilbert L/RAMC (the last Commanding Officer of 220 Field Ambulance, 1996-2000).

⁵³ The early history has been obtained from: Wood, Frederick. *The history of the Maidstone Companies, Royal Army Medical Corps (Volunteers)* (Maidstone: 1907)

⁵⁴ Relevant Information about the unit is taken from: Bourne, Robert. *A history of the 1st Home Counties Field Ambulance during the Second World War 1939-1945* (RAMC Association, Maidstone Branch: 1993)

⁵⁵ 'Authority is given for the re-designation, reorganisation and amalgamation of 4 Field Ambulance, 220 Field Ambulance (V), and 222 Field Ambulance (V) to form 4 General Support Medical Regiment (effective 1 April 2000)' General Staff Order: D/DASD/2/3328 (AMD 1) dated 1 September 1999. The new regiment was allocated to 101 Logistic Brigade.

⁵⁶ See Current Unit Histories on Friends of Millbank website <https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/current-units/>

- 1902 – Re-designated as Maidstone Company, Royal Army Medical Corps (Volunteers). Note that this happened subsequent to the formation of the RAMC in 1898.
- 1904 – Opening of new Monckton Drill Hall
- 1908 – Named **1st Home Counties Field Ambulance** in the Home Counties Division on formation of the Territorial Force. The Division was numbered 44 Division when it deployed to India in 1914, without its field ambulances.
- 1914 – Re-named **81st Field Ambulance** in support of 27th Division, deploying to France in 1914 and then on to Macedonia in 1916, demobilising in 1919.
- 1920 – **1st Home Counties Field Ambulance** reconstituted
- 1922 – Amalgamates with 2nd Home Counties Field Ambulance to become **131st (Home Counties) Field Ambulance RAMC** in the new Territorial Army, the only remaining field ambulance in 44th (Home Counties) Division.⁵⁷
- 1940 – Deploys on 31 March with 44 Infantry Division as part of the British Expeditionary Force. Evacuation from Dunkirk (200 personnel taken prisoner).
- 1942 – Deploys to Egypt in support of 7 Armoured Division (briefly as part of 132 Independent Infantry Brigade Group in 1942) and El Alamein.
- 1943 – Participates in Op HUSKY (invasion of Sicily), then into Italy (Salerno) then back to UK for 1944 deployment to NW Europe until end of WW2.
- 1947 – Re-designated as **133 Home Counties Field Ambulance** supporting 44 Infantry Division in reformed TA.⁵⁸
- 1948 – **133 (1st Home Counties) Field Dressing Station**.⁵⁹
- 1962. 75th anniversary of unit. Authorised by the War Office's Army Dress Committee to wear unit shoulder embellishment '1st Home Counties' under the corps shoulder title in battle dress.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Army Order 482 of 1922, Pamphlet No. 3: 44th (Home Counties) Divisional Area

⁵⁸ With war clouds gathering on the horizon, and the need to expand the military, His Majesty the King approved the formation of 22 additional TA field ambulances in *Army Order 236* of 1937, including a **133 (Home Counties) Field Ambulance RAMC (TA)**. This unit was based in Croydon. Following the re-organisation of the TA in 1947, a name swap occurred with the Maidstone unit.

⁵⁹ The unit's own records state that it was downsized to a Field Dressing Station in 1948, though the COs' appointment board does not mention this.

⁶⁰ To celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the unit, Lt Col Tony Glenister RAMC (V), then commanding 133 (1st HC) Field Ambulance, wrote to the Assistant Director Medical Services at 44 (HC) Division at Shorncliffe, Kent on 2 August 1962 for permission for members to wear a unit shoulder embellishment '1st Home Counties' under the corps shoulder title in battle dress. The original submission was for the flash to be made with dark blue cloth with ¼ inch letters in gold/yellow silk- two of the RAMC colours. For some reason the cloth became black. Authority was granted on 29 November 1962 by the War Office's Army Dress Committee, but it was to be provided locally at unit expense. The original supplier was Pipe & McGill Ltd of Bedford Street, WC2. By 1989 the embellishment was only worn by soldiers on their No. 2 dress uniforms. Information from Capt MF Cross

- 1967 – The major TA re-organisation temporarily results in the unit being designated **220 (Maidstone) Field Dressing Station**. This is changed to Field Ambulance later that year.
- 1967 – Becomes the 'senior numbered 200 series' field ambulance, as **220 (Maidstone) Field Ambulance Territorial & Army Volunteer Reserve (TAVR)**, also known by the honorary title of **220 (1st Home Counties) Field Ambulance**. Its mobilisation role in West Germany was in the rear area of 1st Armoured Division.
- 1980 – **220 (1st Home Counties) Field Ambulance (Volunteers)**
- 1998 (26 March) – Awarded the Freedom of Entry to the Borough of Maidstone
- 2000 (1 April) – Amalgamates with 4 Field Ambulance and 222 Field Ambulance (V) on formation of 4 General Support Medical Regiment,⁶¹ becoming **220 Medical Squadron (Volunteers)**, initially designated as B (220 - 1st Home Counties) Medical Squadron (V)
- 2008 – Re-designated as C (220) Medical Squadron on formation of 4 Medical Regiment
- 2010 – Re-designated as D (220) Medical Squadron within 4 Close Support Medical Regiment
- 2013 (1 October) – Re-subordinated from 4 Medical Regiment to 254 (East of England) Medical Regiment⁶²
- 2018 (1 December) – Parent unit restructured as 254 Medical Regiment. 220 Medical Squadron is re-designated as **220 Medical Detachment** (attached to 161 Medical Squadron).
- 2023 (23 November) – Re-subordinated to **256 (City of London) Field Hospital** on the latter's restructuring as **256 (City of London and South East) Multi-Role Medical Regiment**

220's history in depth

Formation Following a lecture at Maidstone Town Hall in May 1886, by Surgeon-Major Evatt, steps were taken by Surgeon-Major D H Monckton to form a Division of the Volunteer Medical Staff Corps (VMSC) in Maidstone, Kent. By September 1886, five officers and sixty-six men were recruited and an application for authorisation was sent to the Secretary of State for War. Terms of service included an entrance fee of 10 shillings and annual subscription of 10 shillings; however the uniform was free. Official approval by the Field Marshal Commanding-in-Chief for the formation of the **5th Division, VMSC** was received at the end of March 1887, with Surgeon-Major Monckton being the first Commanding Officer.

On 9 July 1887, only three months after it was formed, the unit took part in the Royal Review at Aldershot on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria. In 1892 the official title of the unit

⁶¹ 'Authority is given for the re-designation, reorganisation and amalgamation of 4 Field Ambulance, 220 Field Ambulance (V), and 222 Field Ambulance (V) to form 4 General Support Medical Regiment (effective 1 April 2000)' General Staff Order: D/DASD/2/3328 (AMD 1) dated 1 September 1999

⁶² In accordance with the Secretary of State for Defence's Parliamentary Army basing announcement of 5 March 2013; Army HQ: A2020 Measure 08-002A - Implementation Directive: Re-Subordination of D (220) Medical Squadron (Volunteers) from 4 Armoured Medical Regiment to 254 (East of England) Medical Regiment, dated 28 August 2013

was changed to the **Maidstone Company, VMSC**. In 1895, it was appreciated by the War Office that the addition of transport would enhance unit capability so the Maidstone Company was chosen, along with a Metropolitan Company for trials with the attachment of a Transport Section of 37 men and ambulance wagons. The scheme was so successful that Transport Sections were attached to all other Medical Staff Corps units, and the establishment was rapidly increased to 78 non-commissioned officers and men, 115 horses and 26 ambulance wagons.

Typhoid epidemic In 1897 a severe typhoid epidemic swept through Maidstone and the limited medical facilities at the time were unable to cope. The unit soon volunteered for nursing and 'soup-kitchen' work, and as many as 30 men per night were on duty, caring for and nursing the victims. Following this demonstration of their value, a special medal was struck by Maidstone Corporation and presented to all the volunteers in the unit (see photograph at end of unit history).

South African War In 1900, the first detachment from the unit, now a part of the newly formed Royal Army Medical Corps, was sent to the South African War, and by the end of the War, a total of 150 volunteers had been despatched, five of whom were killed.

In 1904 Colonel James Cantlie VD, the founder of the Volunteer Medical Staff Corps, became Honorary Colonel of the unit.



Queen's South Africa Medal, Imperial Service Medal, Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee Medal (Police) and Volunteer Long Service Medal of Sergeant Herbert Henry Joseph Clark, RAMC & RAMC Volunteers, Maidstone Company



Memorial to members of Maidstone Company on active service during 'Great Boer War' 1899 – 1902

Formation of Territorial Force In 1908, the War Office disbanded the 'Volunteers' and the unit became part of the new Territorial Force with the title of **1st Home Counties Field Ambulance**. Annual camps proceeded normally until 1914, when the unit was mobilised as the **81st Field Ambulance** in support of 27th Division (Regular) and deployed to France. Twenty-three Special Reservists from the unit were rapidly enlisted into the British Expeditionary Force and the unit expanded into four Lines.⁶³

⁶³ The Special Reserve came into existence through Part III of the Territorial and Reserve Forces Act 1907, a key part of the Haldane reforms of the British Army. Its primary purpose was the creation of a pool of trained men who could be called upon to reinforce the regular army in the event of war. <https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/the-special-reserve/> (accessed 21 February 2025)

First World War The First Line arrived at the Western Front near Dickenbusch in January 1915 and was quickly thrown into the tasks it had trained for. Within days of arrival it was receiving up to 200 casualties per day and working a two-shift system. It spent six months in the Ypres area before moving to the Somme, remaining there until November. Next came a move in 1916 to Salonika where malaria and dysentery became the main challenge until attacks were launched against the Bulgarians that September. The unit was involved in active operations for three months and several members of the unit were killed. Apart from a brief spell in the Black Sea area, the unit remained in Salonika until demobilisation in August 1919.

The Second Line remained in the UK until 1917 when it moved to Ypres, and on 9th August 1918 had to deal with a total of 625 casualties during this one day.

The Third and Fourth Lines served in the UK for the whole period of the War.

Twenty-seven members of the unit died during the Great War and three Distinguished Service Orders and five Military Crosses were amongst the honours awarded.



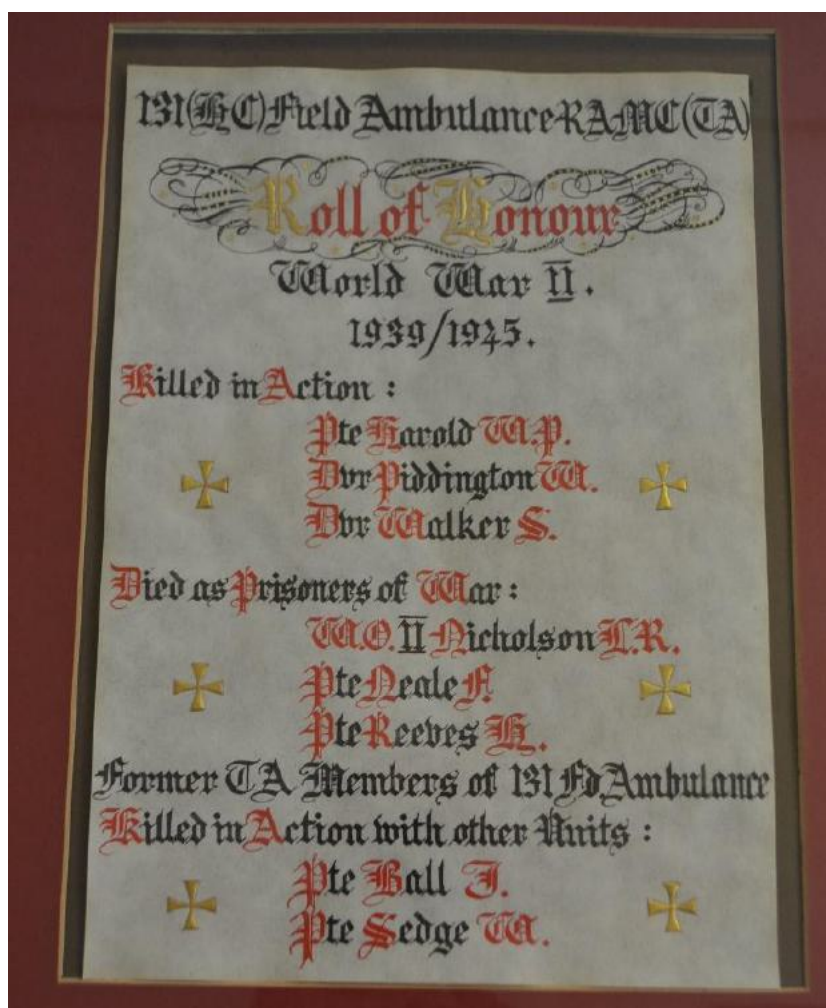
War Memorial, All Saints Anglican Church,
Bishops Way, Maidstone



Scroll at same location
in honour of Private Alfred Greenaway RAMC
Died 11 November 1918

Interwar years After the War the unit was reconstituted as the **1st Home Counties Field Ambulance** and remained an active Territorial Army Unit, being renamed **131 (1st Home Counties) Field Ambulance** in 1922.

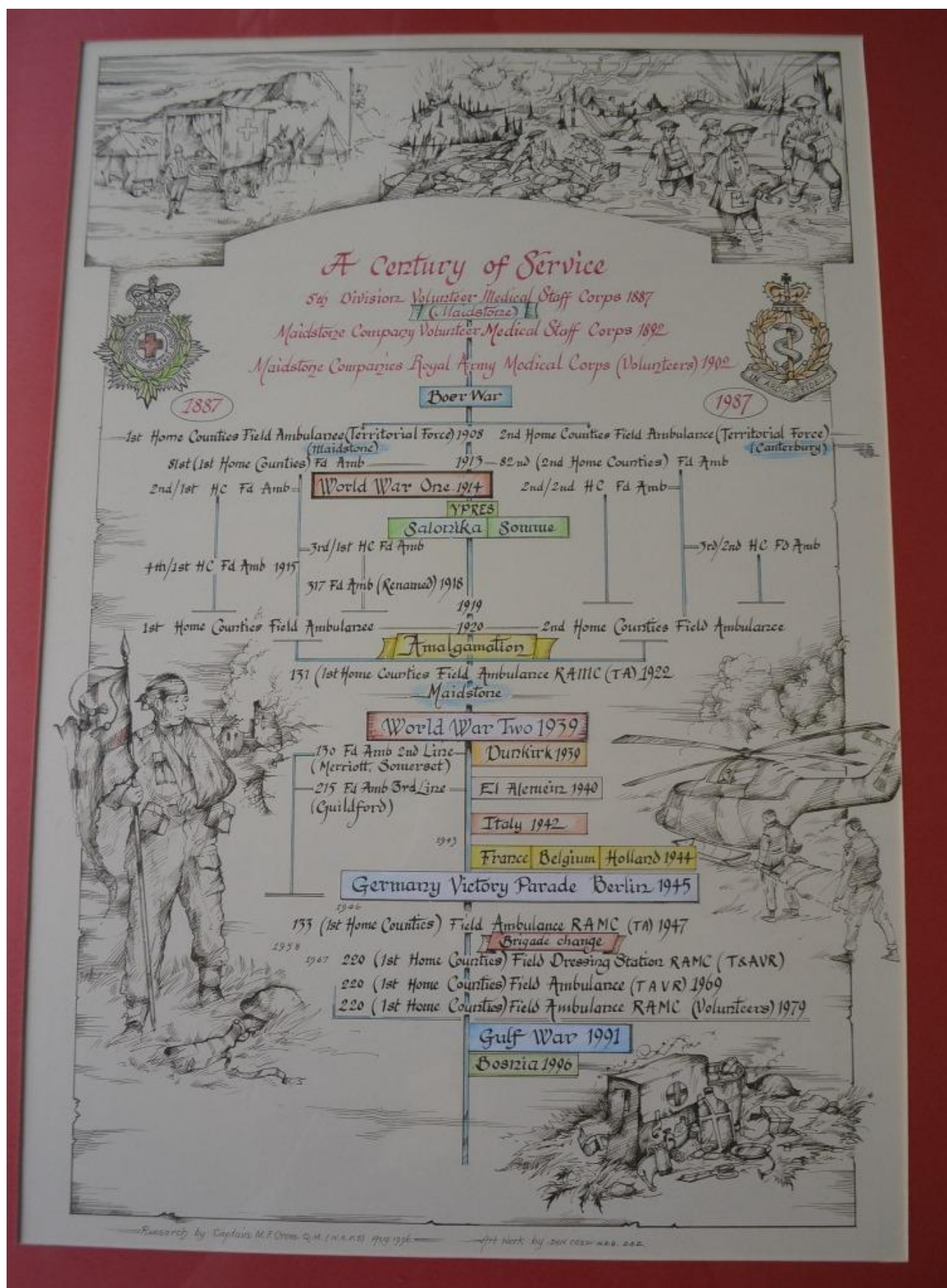
Second World War The unit was mobilised at the outbreak of war, deploying to Belgium on 31 March 1940 with 44 Infantry Division as part of the British Expeditionary Force. Unfortunately half of the unit's personnel was captured at Dunkirk and spent the rest of the war in captivity. The other half was evacuated to the UK, and after being reformed and re-kitted, the unit departed for the North Africa campaigns, from El Alamein to Tunisia, where it served with 44 (Home Counties) Division. During this time it was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General, CB) Trevor Furnivall, awarded the DSO on 14 October 1943. Having completed its battle tasks in North Africa from Alamein to the Mareth Line, the unit retrained for the Sicily landings and thereafter landed at the Salerno beach-head, now being under the command of the United States 5th Army. The advance into Italy took the unit north through Naples to the River Volturno when it was brought back to the UK to train with 7th Armoured Division for the D-Day landings. Just after D-Day, on 7 June, the unit landed in Normandy and was soon involved in the treatment of casualties around the beach-head and later in the battles for Caen. After the breakthrough, the Field Ambulance supported 7th Armoured Division through France, Belgium and the Netherlands and was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel W.S. Harvey. By 4 May 1945, four days before VE Day, the unit had reached Hamburg and finally moved on to Berlin where a detachment took part in the Victory Parade. This has given the unit the distinction of being amongst the few who served from Alamein to Tunisia, from Sicily into the Italian mainland and from Normandy to Berlin. On 30 June 1946, the unit was stood down and reverted to its peace time role.



Roll of Honour, World War Two (five Killed in action, three Died as Prisoners of War)(displayed in unit)

Post-war years In 1947 the TA reformed into six infantry divisions, an airborne and two armoured divisions as well as eight independent infantry and armoured brigades plus a beach brigade. This dictated the number of field ambulances in the order of battle. The Home Counties Division changed around the numbers of the brigades under command. In parallel with this it was decided to swop over the local TA field ambulance numbers as well.

Thus, in 1947, 131 (1st Home Counties) Field Ambulance in Maidstone swapped number with 133 (Home Counties) Field Ambulance in Croydon. The Maidstone unit was renamed **133 (1st Home Counties) Field Ambulance** and became part of 44 (Home Counties) Division TA, training in a Home Defence role until the TAVR was formed in 1967. The unit was briefly reduced to a **Field Dressing Station**, before reverting in 1969 to a **Field Ambulance**, with the name **220 (1st Home Counties) Field Ambulance RAMC (V)**. Since its beginning in 1886 until it became a **Squadron** within the new 4 General Support Medical Regiment in 2000, the unit had managed to survive three Wars and numerous Volunteer and Territorial Army reorganisations, and claimed to be the longest serving field medical unit in the British Army.



A century of service 1887 - 1987 (researched by Captain MF Cross QM, Artwork by Don Cross)

220's Centenary Medal, 1987

Officers of '220', presented to unit in 1994 (Commanding Officer: Lt Col Ian Brooman)

Commanding Officers of 220 (Maidstone) Medical Squadron and predecessors





Unit shoulder embellishment (see footnote 60)



220 (1st Home Counties) Field Ambulance RAMC (V), the final Unit shield as a field ambulance (1980 – 2000)

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following individuals in particular for assistance with this history of 220 (1st Home Counties) Field Ambulance RAMC (V):

Brigadier (ret'd) Alistair Macmillan for Information about East Anglia's previous field ambulances, Gp Capt Peter Gilbert RAF (previously Brigadier (ret'd), L/RAMC, and the last Commanding Officer of 220 Field Ambulance, 1996-2000), Major Alex Smith (254 Medical Regiment), and Terry Hissey (Historical Branch Army). The author apologises for any errors or omissions.

Annex 2: 256 Field Hospital's link to the Army Medical Services Band (Volunteers), 1984 – 2002 (contributed by LCpl Terry Hissey RAMC, Band Archivist 2009-14)

Following the disbandment of the regular RAMC Staff Band in April 1984, it would have been easy for the AMS to have relied on other Corps for musical support. Instead, the decision was made to form a Territorial Army AMS Band, as a detachment of 257 (Southern) General Hospital. Thereby, ironically, the musical tradition of the Corps, which had commenced with the formation of the Volunteer Medical Staff Corps Band in 1886, reverted to its lineage in the Territorial Army.⁶⁴

A suitable rehearsal venue, storeroom and office were found within the Duke of York's HQ in Chelsea, where 257 was based. This was in close proximity to the Royal Army Medical College, Millbank where the annual round of functions still required musical engagement. The Staff Band's last Band Sergeant Major (BSM), WO2 Michael Feehily, became the inaugural Bandmaster and the Non-Regular Permanent Staff. He oversaw the transfer of all the assets, stores and library of the former Staff Band. Recruiting musicians for the fledgling band began in June 1984 and WO2 Feehily and his team recruited the necessary volunteers from local contacts and some ex-members of the Staff Band. Unlike its Regular predecessors, this was to be a mixed unit and the women recruited initially became members of the QARANC. Although uniforms posed a bit of a problem, the Band were able to function and to the delight of Lt Gen Sir Alan Reay, DGAMS, performed at a Regimental Dinner at Millbank on 22 November 1984, six months ahead of schedule. Their first camp was held in June the following year at Keogh Barracks, where everyone qualified as a Combat Medical Technician Class Three (Volunteer) to fulfil their secondary role.

After two years of hard work raising the Band from scratch and developing standards, formal authority was given by the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall for its official establishment from 1 April 1986.⁶⁵ At its first Kneller Hall Inspection in May 1991 a grading of 'Very Good' was awarded. 1993 saw a small band attend annual camp with 257 Gen Hosp at Saughton Camp, Chester. All members took part in Exercise PETIT MASH, a casualty simulation exercise in a mock hospital environment with army cadets as casualties.

In September 1995, the Kneller Hall Commandant, Col Tim Hoggarth, and Principal Director of Music, Lt Col Clifford Ross, made an informal visit to the Band. They commented very favourably, particularly on the turn out in an original design of new mess dress. The following month saw the amalgamation of 257 Gen Hosp into the new 256 (London) Field Hospital. A large farewell parade was held at Saughton Camp where the unit, led by its own Band and closely followed by the CO, Col John Hamilton, marched past the DGAMS, Major General Brian Mayes, and off the square into history. To strengthen its identity, and in line with the complete assimilation of women into the RAMC, the female members were rebadged from the QARANC that year. Their new uniforms were seen in public for the first time at the Lord Mayor's Show where the Band participated as a marching contingent. It was no coincidence that the Lord Mayor, Alderman (later Sir) John Chalstrey, was a member of 256 Field Hospital's immediate predecessor and subsequently of 256 Field Hospital itself!

⁶⁴ Brigadier TW Glenister. The Origin of the Volunteer Medical Staff Corps in 1885 *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 1985; Vol 131: pp. 152-158 <https://militaryhealth.bmj.com/content/jramc/131/3/152.full.pdf>

⁶⁵ General Staff Order: D/PS(A)/112/63/2/ABO

As a result of the aforementioned visit, an invitation was received to take part in a Kneller Hall open air concert in July 1996. The first appearance of the TA Band at this long established series was a new and enjoyable experience for many members. Annual camp was held the same month in Germany at the British Military Hospital Rinteln. A key event was the unit exercising its Freedom marching through the town for the last time led by the Band. The following October saw another Kneller Hall Inspection where a grading of 'Very Good' was once again obtained.

Following the return of a Labour Government in 1997, a *Strategic Defence Review* was published on 8 July 1998. Nine out of the twenty-four established TA bands were to be disbanded by 31 July 1999. Geography appeared to be the deciding factor as to which bands would be kept – one per military district, except for London where two bands were retained. Disappointingly the AMS Band was listed to be cut despite a huge infusion of posts into the Defence Medical Services. For example, 256 Fd Hosp was authorised to expand their number of squadrons from three to five. History was to repeat itself for the AMS as it was decided to retain its own dedicated musical unit with sponsorship from 2nd Medical Brigade. Every TA Hospital was to take band members onto their respective strengths, thereby complying with the intent of the Review, yet retaining the ability to form up the band on demand.

As a result, notwithstanding the administrative disbandment, there was a determination that the 'show must go on'. 1998 saw many high-profile events supporting the RAMC Centenary. These included the Corps service in Westminster Abbey, the Centennial Banquet, a Freedom of Maidstone Parade for 220 Fd Amb and a reception for 256 Fd Hosp at the Mansion House hosted by the Lord Mayor of London.

Annual camp in 1999 was undertaken with 256 Fd Hosp in Leer, Germany where all members took part in Exercise FORGED SHIELD. Here all had the opportunity to work alongside medical professionals undertaking basic and general duties in a mock operational environment. Unlike the previous joint camp, the hospital was set up within a mass of tents in the middle of a parade ground.



The AMS Band on annual camp with 256 Field Hospital, 1999

The Queen's Golden Jubilee year of 2002 saw many band personnel awarded the official commemorative medal. It also saw the relocation, in October, of the Band to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, Camberley as part of the drawdown of the Duke of York's HQ. Fortunately, with one exception, all personnel transferred to the new location. It did, however, signal the end of the Band's relationship with its host unit after 18 years. The Band played on as an unofficial entity thereafter, before being attached to 306 Hospital Support Regiment in 2008, but that is another story...

Annex 3: 217 (London) General Hospital RAMC (Volunteers)

The Rhinoceros Flash and the unit's affiliation with the Worshipful Company of Apothecaries

Contributed by Terry Hissey with thanks to John Ford – Worshipful Society of Apothecaries

Soon after the formation of 217 (Eastern) General Hospital on 1 April 1967, the Private Court of the Worshipful Company of Apothecaries recommended, on 5 June, that the Company should formally adopt the unit. This proposal was agreed by the Full Court on 30 June. In a subsequent formal Court dinner in the Queen's Room of Armoury House, City Barracks, London EC1 on 14 August, the guests included Col Claude Nicol, the inaugural CO and Maj Peter Bodley representing 217's City of London Detachment. A discussion took place between Col Nicol and Col Richard Marks, Assistant Director of Medical Services London District and 217's Honorary Colonel. They felt that a unit flash should be designed in recognition of the Company's adoption, and to demonstrate the unit's pride in cementing the new relationship.

The proposed design stemmed from the rhinoceros which surmounts the Company's crest, taken from the Letters Patent of Arms signed by William Camden, Clarenceux King of Arms, upon its formation in 1617. The peculiarities of the beast, principally the second horn behind the ears, was due to the fact it was adopted from the only drawn representation available at the time. Albrecht Dürer, a European artist who had never visited Africa nor seen a rhinoceros, produced the drawing from descriptions of those who had in 1515. The Company adopted the rhino presumably because of the perceived medicinal properties of the horn.



*Wooden Rhinoceros (christened 'Percy' by the unit, see below), carved by Eluid Njuguna of Nairobi, Kenya
Presented to 217 (London) General Hospital RAMC (V)
by Lieutenant General Sir Alan Reay KBE FRCP, Director General AMS 1981-85, Honorary Colonel 1986-1990
(‘Percy’ remains proudly on display at 256 MMR Regimental Headquarters)*

The proposal of a 'Rhinoceros proper on a wreath Or and Azure' unit flash received unanimous approval from the Company's Court of Assistants on 6 December 1969. In the same month the unit was renamed 217 (London) General Hospital. A successful application was made, via the Council of Colonels Commandant RAMC to the Honours & Distinctions Committee, for the flash to be worn as an embellishment to the left sleeves of Service, Number 2 and Mess Dress uniforms. This was noted by the Army Dress Committee on 5 November 1970. The unit members named the rhinoceros 'Percy' after the release of a 1971 film of the same name.



217 (London) General Hospital unit flash, 'Percy'.

The blue-edged version (left) was for use on Number 2 uniform. (Courtesy of Terry Hissey)

On 1 October 1995, 217 became part of 256 (London) Field Hospital and the Company was allocated 'A' Squadron to maintain continuity. The unit was renamed 256 (City of London) Field Hospital on 17 July 1996, however, authority to wear the rhinoceros flash by this squadron was granted by the Army Dress Committee on 7 October 1996. This ceased when a new unit arm badge bearing the City of London armorial design was authorised on 28 June 1999.

To indicate the Company's continued support for the unit the rhinoceros flash has been worn on the Worshipful Company of Apothecaries' Master's gown since 2012.

Annex 4: 257 (Southern) General Hospital RAMC (Volunteers)

The Opinicus Flash and the unit's affiliation with the Worshipful Company of Barbers

(Contributed by Terry Hissey and Ruth de Wynter – Archivist, Worshipful Company of Barbers)

The formation of **257 (Eastern) General Hospital** occurred on 1 April 1967,⁶⁶ as part of a large-scale national restructuring of the Territorial Army. Its immediate forebears were 10 (London) General Hospital in Chelsea, 57 (Middlesex) General Hospital in Harrow and 163 (County of Norfolk) Field Ambulance in Norwich. The unit was renamed **257 (Southern) General Hospital** on 1 December 1969.



Unit crest showing the Opinicus (photo courtesy of Chris Ward)

The Worshipful Company of Barbers has a much older lineage. The first mention of the Barbers' Company occurs in 1308 when Richard le Barbour was elected by the Court of Aldermen of the City of London to keep order amongst his fellow barbers. Members of a particular guild within London, comprised of people following the same craft or trade, could be identified by their ceremonial dress, or livery, therefore these guilds became known as livery companies. Within London a Guild or Fellowship of Surgeons, whose Ordinances were approved in 1435, developed alongside the Barbers' Company. The Fellowship claimed the right to practise surgery which inevitably led to power struggles and disputes. This was temporarily resolved in 1462 when the Barbers' Company was granted its first Royal Charter by King Edward IV. Its power to regulate the practice of surgery in London, maintain professional standards and stamp out impostors and charlatans was established. Their respective roles in London were defined by a 1540 Act of Parliament which created the Company of Barbers and Surgeons of London. This Act decreed that no

⁶⁶ General Staff Order - Authority: B to A/20/Misc/5164(ASD5c) dated 9 March 1967

surgeon was to perform the tasks of a barber and vice versa, but both could continue to draw teeth. In 1745, at the request of the Surgeons, a Bill was passed and they left the Company to form what eventually became the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

Affiliation with 257 (Southern) General Hospital RAMC (V)

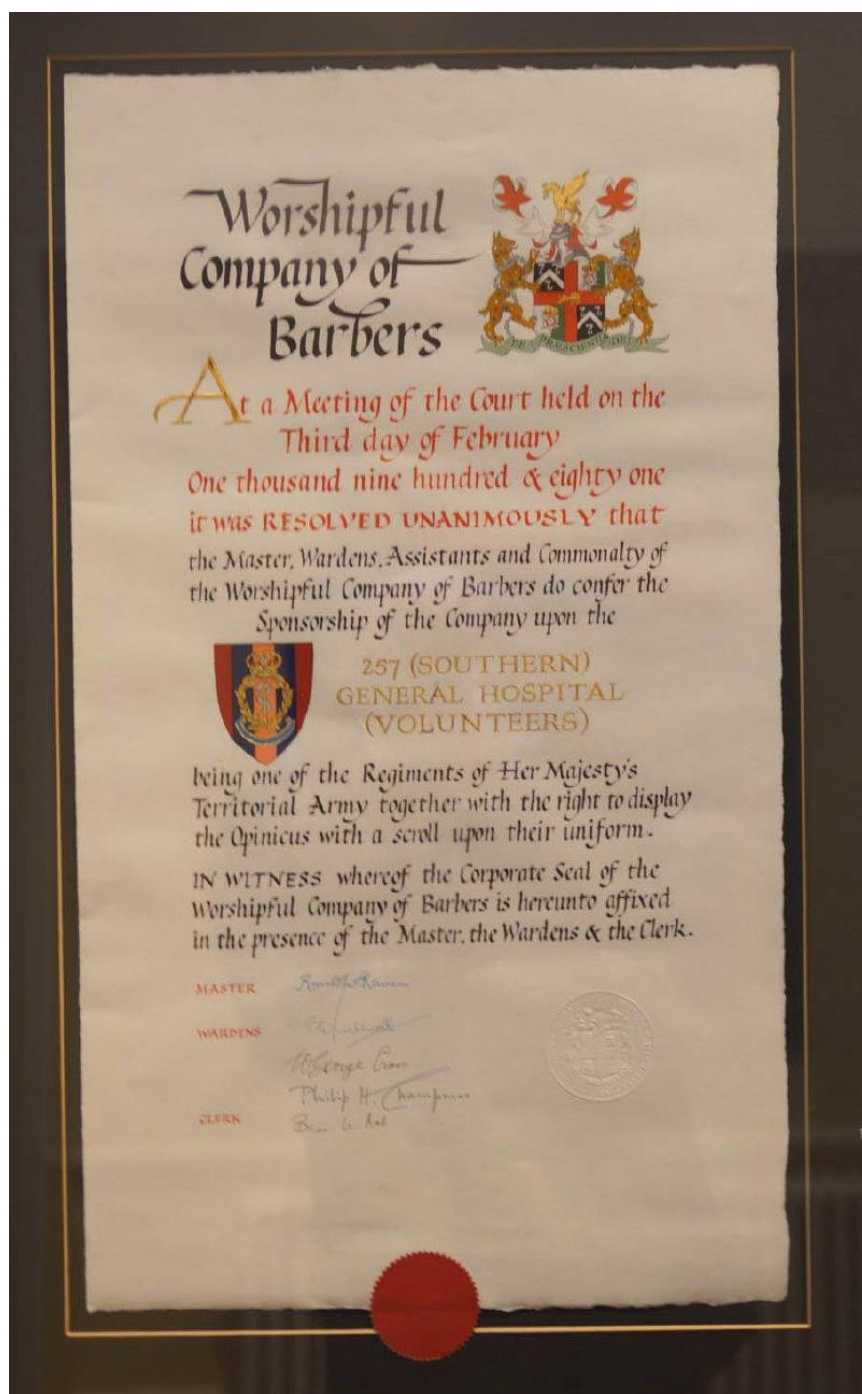
An affiliation with 257 (Southern) General Hospital was first discussed at the Barbers' Company's Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting on 11 November 1980 at the Barber-Surgeons' Hall, Monkwell Square, EC1. The Company's Master, Ronald Raven OBE OSTJ TD, put forward his suggestion on why the Company should consider sponsorship of the unit. According to the minutes: *"No financial aid would be required, but the Company would be personally participating in the historic link between the City and Regiments in the Army."* He pointed out that the unit incorporated 57 (Middlesex) General Hospital, which he had commanded for some time, and had a pipe band. His view was that the Company's badge could be worn upon the unit's uniforms and he highlighted the support the unit could provide, through the band, for special occasions. Past Master Cyril Bloomfield proposed a recommendation to the Company's Court that the idea should be pursued and all present were in favour. At the Court meeting on 3 February 1981, it is recorded: *"The Court formally resolved that the Company should sponsor 257 (Southern) General Hospital (Volunteers) and approved the use by the Unit of the Opinicus. The Court approved the preparation of a Scroll commemorating the commencement of the sponsorship"*. (See photo of Scroll, below)

The Company Archives contains correspondence between its Master, the Clerk and the Hospital's Commanding Officer, Colonel Michael Burton OSTJ TD, regarding the proposed uniform badge. They reveal that Colonel Burton had discussions on the design with Colin Cole CVO TD, the Garter King of Arms. In a letter to the Company dated 3 March, he stated that Garter had advised:

"...that the colours to be adopted for the shoulder badge should be as follows:

The opinicus to be of gold on a dark blue background and between its feet the scroll should be of white with the adoption date 1981, in red lettering. These colours are the appropriate colours for the City of London. The Army Dress Committee and our Colonel Commandant for the Medical Services have been contacted for permission to wear the badge. We await their guidance."

For some unknown reason the production of a badge was not pursued. However the affiliation ceremony duly took place on 9 May. The robed Master, Wardens and Court of Assistants, escorted by the Commanding Officer with two Pipers and led by the Beadle processed from Barber-Surgeons' Hall to the forecourt adjoining St Giles Church, Cripplegate. The guests included the Mayor of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Councillor George Pole, the Director General Army Medical Services, Lieutenant General Alan Reay OSTJ QHP and Colonel Maxwell Summers DSO OBE OSTJ TD, who had founded the pipe band. The Master inspected the unit on parade, received a General Salute and formally presented the Commanding Officer with a casket containing the illuminated affiliation scroll (*shown below*).



Sponsorship of 257 (Southern) General Hospital (V) by Worshipful Company of Barbers, 1981

Prayers were offered by the Unit Padre; the Master took the salute at the march past and the platoons proceeded to Barber-Surgeons' Hall where a reception was held. At its conclusion Colonel Burton gave a speech, including a short account of the historic association of the City with the Army and the Surgeons who had served in the Armed Forces. He then presented a plaque engraved with the Arms of the Company and of the Royal Army Medical Corps. The Master in reply thanked him, complimented the unit and its band on their smart turn-out and high quality performance. He pointed out that this ceremony was a historic event in the Company's history, which had now forged again a link with the Army. As part of the affiliation, ongoing invitations were made for the Master and his fellow Barbers to visit the unit at annual camps, and a number of officers dined in Barber-Surgeons' Hall in a reciprocal gesture.

The Opinicus

The Opinicus which surmounts the Company's crest is an imaginary creature depicted with the head and wings of an eagle, the body and legs of a lion and occasionally has the neck and tail of a dromedary. It is rarely used in heraldry and according to the College of Arms, it was first used as the supporters to the arms of the Worshipful Company of Plaisterers of London in c1545. Heraldically blazoned as *"two bestes callid Opimacus half serpent and half beste Vert wynged membrid and eyed geules the throte and bely purfled golde"*. It has been said that the qualities which can be attributed to the component parts are strength and nobility from the lion; the eagle as the king of birds; but in particular the medicinal qualities accorded to parts of the camel in the 16th Century. The current Company arms derive from an augmentation, granted on 15 July 1561, by patent of William Harvey, Clarenceux King of Arms to those which were carried by the original Company of Barbers prior to its amalgamation with the unincorporated Fellowship of Surgeons.

As per the 1981 resolution, a unit flash bearing an Opinicus was eventually designed. The Company Archives record that it was undertaken by Lt Col John Hamilton TD, with a £250 contribution made by the Company towards their purchase in July 1991. It was worn across the unit as an embellishment to the upper left sleeve of combat jackets.



Unit flash for combat jackets



Unit flash for mess dress, on black background

A wire embroidered design was also commissioned to be worn in the same position in mess dress. This was in two versions, upon a red or black background, depending on the jacket being worn. However the designs were never placed before the Army Dress Committee for approval and remained unofficial for the rest of the unit's existence, being worn until 1995.

The Barbers Trophy

To strengthen the affiliation, it was decided to instigate an annual competition within the unit. The offer of a suitably engraved trophy, featuring the Opinicus in its design, was approved in principle by the Court in November 1987. It was made by Liveryman Grant MacDonald, a silversmith, and the Court endorsed it with the name **'The Barbers Trophy'** on 7 June 1988. Teams from the Harrow, Chelsea, Norwich and Ipswich detachments competed in first aid, military skills, field works and shooting at Calvary Barracks, Colchester, where the inaugural presentation was made on 26 June by the Master, John Bootes. Captain Elizabeth Spruce received the trophy on behalf of Norwich Detachment.



Disbandment of 257 (Southern) General Hospital

On 1 October 1995, 257 (Southern) General Hospital became part of 256 (London) Field Hospital. A Disbandment Dinner was held at the Chester Grosvenor Hotel on 29 September where the guests included the Director General Army Medical Services, Major General Brian Mayes CB CStJ QHS, and the Barbers' Company Master, Donald Barltrop, a former RAMC National Service Officer. The final Commanding Officer, Colonel Hamilton, presented the Master, who accepted on behalf of the Company, an appropriately engraved circular armada dish. He also presented the unit with the 1981 illuminated scroll, newly reframed and mounted with two images of the affiliation parade. The Master was also present the following day when the unit had its disbandment parade at Saighton Camp, five miles south east of Chester, and marched off the parade square into history.

Continued affiliation

Upon 256 Field Hospital's formation, each of its squadrons continued the respective livery company affiliations, with the Barbers being devolved to B Squadron (from 257) at Chelsea (now moved to Kensington). Less than a year later, on 17 July 1996, the unit was renamed 256 (City of London) Field Hospital. It was found too difficult to incorporate the emblems of its three former units within the design of a small badge. Therefore a unit flash, appropriately bearing the City of London armorial design to reflect its new name, was authorised on 28 June 1999.

The Barbers Trophy continued to be awarded, but its purpose was changed to recognise outstanding performance or contribution by a member of B Squadron.

Epilogue - Current Squadron affiliations with Livery Companies (2024 onwards)

Under **256 Field Hospital**, the three main squadrons, each carrying the lineage of their predecessors, continued the respective livery company affiliations, coincidentally (and aptly) in alphabetical order. Thus, 'A' Squadron (derived from 217) maintained the link to the Apothecaries, 'B' Squadron (from 257) was linked to the Barbers, and 'C' Squadron (from 221) was linked to the Cutlers.

On formation of **256 MMR** in November 2023 and as a result of squadron re-designations and moves, with 257 Support Squadron and part of 217 Hospital Squadron now co-located in Kennington, and 'B' Squadron at Kensington becoming 217 Hospital Squadron, the affiliation with the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London and with the Worshipful Company of Barbers has devolved jointly to both Squadrons.⁶⁷

221 Hospital Squadron maintains the link with the Worshipful Company of Cutlers.

The Rhinoceros ('Percy'), the Sponsorship Scroll, and the Barbers Trophy, and other unit memorabilia, remain highly visible evidence of the unit's pride in the ongoing affiliation with the Livery Companies of London.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following individuals in particular for their assistance with this unit history: Lt Col Joanne Cooke QARANC (First Commanding Officer of 256 MMR, 2023-), Colonel Mary Heber L/RAMC (Commanding Officer 2000-2003), Major John Funnell RAMC (V), WO1 (RSM) K Pye, and Terry Hissey (Historical Branch Army). The author apologises for any errors or omissions.

If you notice any errors or wish to submit additional material for inclusion, please contact the author, Col (retd) David Vassallo L/RAMC at djvassallo@aol.com or chairman@friendsofmillbank.org

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Supporting the Museum of Military Medicine.

⁶⁷ Confirmed by WO1 (RSM) Kelvin Pye (email to Terry Hissey, 5 April 2024)