

## 81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Division <sup>(1)</sup>

Headquarters, 81<sup>st</sup> (West African) Infantry Division & Defence Platoon

### 3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade Group <sup>(2)</sup>

Headquarters, 3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade Group & Signal Section

6<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Nigeria Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

7<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Nigeria Regiment, Royal West Africa Frontier Force

12<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Nigeria Regiment, Royal West Africa Frontier Force

1<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Auxiliary Group (The Nigeria Regiment), R.W.A.F.F.

3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa) Light Battery, West African Artillery

7<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Company, West African Engineers

3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa) Field Ambulance, West African Army Medical Corps

### 5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade <sup>(3)</sup>

Headquarters, 5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade Group & Signal Section

5<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Gold Coast Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

7<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Gold Coast Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

8<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Gold Coast Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa) Auxiliary Group (The Gold Coast Regiment), R.W.A.F.F.

5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Light Battery, West African Artillery

3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa) Field Company, West African Engineers

5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Ambulance, West African Army Medical Corps

### 6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade <sup>(4)</sup>

Headquarters, 6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade Group & Signal Section

1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Sierra Leone Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

4<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Nigeria Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Gambia Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

4<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Auxiliary Group (The Sierra Leone Regiment), R.W.A.F.F.

6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Light Battery, West African Artillery

6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Company, West African Engineers

6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Ambulance, West African Army Medical Corps

Divisional Troops

81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Division Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force (5)

1<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Light Anti-Aircraft/Anti-Tank Regiment, West African Artillery (6)

8<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Park Company, West African Engineers

81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Divisional Signals, West African Signal Corps

## NOTES:

1. The division was formed on 1 March 1943 in Nigeria. It was placed under command of G.H.Q. West Africa. The division was organised as three brigade groups. It left West Africa by ship on 91 July 1943 bound for India. The divisional headquarters arrived in India on 14 August 1943, and came under command of G.H.Q. India. It concentrated in India, having arrived in stages from West Africa.
2. This brigade was originally formed in Nigeria in December 1940. It came under the command of the division when it was formed in March 1943. This brigade was the last from the division to arrive in India on 8 November 1943. It was immediately transferred to Special Force to act as defence battalions for the strongholds envisaged by Major General Wingate.
3. This brigade was the second to arrive in India on 121 September 1943. At this time, the formation was organised as a brigade group.
4. This brigade was the first from the division to arrive in India on 14 August 1943. At this time, the formation was organised as a brigade group.
5. This regiment was the reconnaissance regiment for the division. It was organised on an infantry basis. On 1 January 1944, the regiment became part of the West African Armoured Corps, although it is believed this did not result in any change in the establishment or equipment used by the regiment.
6. This regiment consisted of the 61<sup>st</sup> and 62<sup>nd</sup> (West Africa) Anti-Tank Batteries and the 81<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> (West Africa) Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries.

## 81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Division <sup>(1)</sup>

Main Headquarters, 81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Division and Defence Platoon

### Divisional Troops

*81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Reconnaissance Regiment, West Africa Armoured Corps* (2)

11<sup>th</sup> (East Africa) Division Scouts (3)

1<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Auxiliary Group (The Nigeria Regiment) R.W.A.F.F. (4)

6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Light Battery, West African Artillery (5)

*(101<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Light Regiment, West African Artillery)* (5)

*(41<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Mortar Regiment, West African Artillery)* (5)

1<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Light Anti-Aircraft/Anti-Tank Regiment, West African Artillery

*(3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa) Field Company, West African Engineers)* (6)

81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Divisional Signals, West African Signal Corps

81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Division Troops Company Composite Platoon, W.A.A.S.C.

1<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Field Butchery

26<sup>th</sup> Motor Ambulance Convoy

5<sup>th</sup> Platoon, Burma Intelligence Corps

Air Support Liaison Section

16<sup>th</sup> Provost Section

6<sup>th</sup> Field Security Section

5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade (7)

Headquarters, 5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Brigade, Defence Platoon, Signal Section  
and Light Aid Detachment

5<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Gold Coast Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

7<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Gold Coast Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

8<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Gold Coast Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa) Auxiliary Group (The Gold Coast Regiment), R.W.A.F.F.

5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Light Battery, West African Artillery (5)

5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Company, West African Engineers

4<sup>th</sup> Survey Section

5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Brigade Group Company Composite Platoon, W.A.A.S.C.

4<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Butchery, West African Army Service Corps

5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Ambulance, West African Army Medical Corps

5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Hygiene Section, West African Army Medical Corps

5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Brigade Provost Section

6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade (8)

Headquarters, 6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Brigade, Defence Platoon, Signal Section  
and Light Aid Detachment

1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Sierra Leone Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

4<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Nigeria Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Gambia Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

4<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Auxiliary Group (The Sierra Leone Regiment), R.W.A.F.F.

3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa) Light Battery, West African Artillery (5)

6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Company, West African Engineers

3<sup>rd</sup> Survey Section

6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Brigade Group Company Composite Platoon, W.A.A.S.C.

8<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Butchery, West African Army Service Corps

6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Ambulance, West African Army Medical Corps

6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Hygiene Section, West African Army Medical Corps

6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Brigade Provost Section

## NOTES:

1. The division concentrated and commenced familiarization training for active service, under the command of Major General Christopher Geoffrey WOOLNER, M.C.\*, *p.s.c.*, who was known as 'Kit' WOOLNER. It was deployed to Burma on 8 December 1943 to come under the command of XV Indian Corps in the Arakan. It was deployed in the Kaladan valley, on the left flank of XV Corps as it advanced down the Mayu peninsula. The division was attacked by the Japanese and withdrew back to the Chittagong area.
2. This regiment was the reconnaissance unit for the division. It was became part of the West African Armoured Corps on 1 January 1944, being redesignated on 1 August 1944 as:  
**81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Reconnaissance Regiment, West African Armoured Corps**  
The battalion remained equipped as an infantry based reconnaissance regiment. It was detached from the division to come under the command of XV Corps Troops for most of the first campaign from February until September 1944. Lieutenant Colonel R. N. CARTWRIGHT commanded the regiment until 27 March 1944, when he was promoted to command the 6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade. Lieutenant Colonel B. A. SHATTOCK replaced him as commanding officer of this unit.
3. This unit joined the division on 20 January 1944, in lieu of the divisional reconnaissance battalion which was temporally absent from the division. It left the command of the division and was disbanded in March 1945.
4. Each West African Brigade had an Auxiliary Group allocated to their command. These Auxiliary Groups comprised unarmed soldiers who acted as porters, and a small number of armed soldiers who protected them. These Auxiliary Groups made the two West African divisions unique in their establishment within the British Army. Each group comped about two-thousand men, organized into a headquarters and four companies, in a similar manner to a standard infantry battalion. About three-quarters of the men acted as porters, head loading equipment and supplies up to about 85lbs per man. This gave the two West African divisions great mobility through country that was impenetrable to other formations, including Japanese formations that generally relied on roads, tracks and paths for their supplies carried on mules, or pulled by bullocks or elephants. The unarmed soldiers could be used to defend a perimeter, collect dropped supplies, or build airstrips.
5. The 1<sup>st</sup> Auxiliary Group was detached along with the 3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade for L.R.P.G. duties, but not being required by the Chindits, it returned to this division in February 1944. Lieutenant Colonel J. W. MURPHY commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> Auxiliary Group.
6. These Independent Light Batteries were allocated to the brigade groups, and each comprised two troops of 3.7 inch mountain guns, and one Mortar troop with four 3" mortars. In practice, the divisional Commander Royal Artillery controlled the three Independent Light Batteries. On 24 May 1944, the three batteries were consolidated into two regiments, with 3.7" guns coming under the new 101<sup>st</sup> Light Regiment under command of Lieutenant C. C. F. ANDERSON, and the mortar troops combining into the 41<sup>st</sup> Mortar Regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel J. A. MacNABB (later replaced by Lt.-Col. P. H. G. STALLARD). The regimental headquarters assumed command of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Light Batteries, although they were still allocated to support the brigades. Each was expanded to three batteries of jeep towed 3.7" howitzers. The Mortar Regiment comprised the 101<sup>st</sup>, 102<sup>nd</sup> and 103<sup>rd</sup> Mortar Batteries, West African Artillery, each battery composed of eight 3" mortars that were head loaded.

7. This company joined the division on 24 May 1944 from the 3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa) Brigade group as that brigade reorganised for the long range penetration role as part of Special Force. The company was not deployed with the division during the first campaign in the Kaladan valley.
8. Brigadier (Temporary) E. H. COLLINS commanded this brigade throughout the Burma Campaign. Lieutenant Colonel C. F. COX commanded the 5<sup>th</sup> G.C.R., until he was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel C. G. BOWEN on 26 March 1944. During the campaign in Burma, Lieutenant Colonel H. I. S. HILLYARD commanded the 7<sup>th</sup> G.C.R., and Lieutenant Colonel R. AMES the 8<sup>th</sup> G.C.R.. Lieutenant Colonel G. BLACKBURNE-KANE commanded the 3<sup>rd</sup> Auxiliary Group, and Major M. NIXON the 5<sup>th</sup> Field Company.
9. Brigadier (Temporary) J. W. D. HAYES commanded the 6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade until 25 March 1944, when Brigadier (Acting) R. N. CARTWRIGHT was promoted to assumed command of the formation. Lieutenant Colonel R. A. BAILLIE commanded the 4<sup>th</sup> N.R., until Lieutenant Colonel C. E. B. WALWYN assumed command of 25 March 1944. Lieutenant Colonel K. P. M CARTER commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> S.L.R., with Lieutenant Colonel G. LAING commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> G.R. until Lieutenant Colonel J. A. J. READ took over on 30 March 1944. Lieutenant Colonel L. A. HOLLOWAY commanded the 4<sup>th</sup> Auxiliary Group, and Major R. A. J. SMITH commanded the 6<sup>th</sup> Field Company.

## 81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Division <sup>(1)</sup>

Main Headquarters, 81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Division and Defence Platoon

### 5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade

Headquarters, 5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Brigade, Defence Platoon, Signal Section & L.A.D.

5<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Gold Coast Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

7<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Gold Coast Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

8<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Gold Coast Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa) Auxiliary Group (The Gold Coast Regiment), R.W.A.F.F.

5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Ambulance, West African Army Medical Corps

1780 Composite Platoon, West African Army Service Corps

Detachment 1001<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Mobile Workshops, W.A.E.M.E.

### 6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade

Headquarters, 6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Brigade, Defence Platoon, Signal Section & L.A.D.

1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Sierra Leone Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

4<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Nigeria Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Gambia Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

4<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Auxiliary Group (The Sierra Leone Regiment), R.W.A.F.F.

6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Ambulance, West African Army Medical Corps

1781 Composite Platoon, West African Army Service Corps

Detachment 1002<sup>nd</sup> (West Africa) Mobile Workshops, W.A.E.M.E.

Divisional Troops

81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Reconnaissance Regiment, West African Armoured Corps (2)

1<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Auxiliary Group (The Nigeria Regiment), R.W.A.F.F.

101<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Light Regiment, West African Artillery (3)

(H.Q., 3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa), 5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) & 6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Light Batteries, West African Artillery)

1<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Light Anti-Aircraft/Anti-Tank Regiment, West African Artillery (4)

41<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Mortar Regiment, West African Artillery (5)

(H.Q., 101<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) & 102<sup>nd</sup> (West Africa) Mortar Batteries, West African Artillery)

3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa) Field Company, West African Engineers

5<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Company, West African Engineers

6<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Company, West African Engineers

8<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Field Park Company, West African Engineers

81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Divisional Signals, West African Signal Corps

## NOTES:

1. The division reorganised in September 1944 into a standard infantry divisional establishment. It then took part in the late 1944 offensive in the Arakan advancing down the Kaladan Valley for a second time. The division met up with the 82<sup>nd</sup> (West Africa) and captured Myohaung in a joint attack. After this, the division was withdrawn from active service, having been on operations for over twelve months. The division left Burma on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1945 to return to India. On arrival in India, the 3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa) Brigade rejoined on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1945 following its release from Special Force. It still comprised the same three battalions, namely:

3<sup>rd</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade

6<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Nigeria Regiment

7<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Nigeria Regiment

12<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Nigeria Regiment

The division was allocated to XXXIV Indian Corps for the invasion of Malaya. With the cessation of hostilities, the division was no longer required, and remained in India. It started to run down in late 1945, with troops being repatriated back to West Africa, and by May 1946, the division had ceased to exist.

2. This regiment was still organised on an infantry basis despite now belonging officially to the West African Armoured Corps. The regiment was placed on a head load establishment.
3. This regiment was organised with three batteries, each equipped with 3.7" howitzers. It did not support the division during the second Kaladan campaign, but supported the 82<sup>nd</sup> (West Africa) Division as that division entered the campaign.
4. This regiment was reorganised as an anti-tank regiment on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1944, losing the two light anti-aircraft batteries and gaining one additional anti-tank battery. The regiment redesignated on 22 October 1944 to become:  
21<sup>st</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force  
It then consisted of the 61<sup>st</sup>, 62<sup>nd</sup> and 65<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Anti-Tank Batteries.
5. This regiment was formed in June 1944. It joined the divisional establishment on 25 September 1944, when it was designated the 103<sup>rd</sup> Mortar Regiment. It was redesignated as above on 6 October 1944. The regiment comprised two batteries, the 101<sup>st</sup> and 102<sup>nd</sup> Mortar Batteries.

## SOURCES:

Please contact the Webmaster, or look at: <https://www.librarything.com/catalog/RobPALMER>