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A CONCISE HISTORY OF:

VIII CORPS (HISTORY & PERSONNEL)

A concise history of VIII Corps, a higher level formation of the British Army in existence from 1940 until 1946. The corps saw operational service in North West Europe. In addition, known details of the key appointments held during this period are included.

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A Concise History of VIII Corps (History & Personnel)

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VIII Corps (8 Corps)

VIII Corps was formed circa July 1940, in Aldershot, under Lieutenant General Sir Harold FRANKLYN, in August 1940, the Corps Headquarters moved to the south-western defence area, covering Devon and Cornwall, parts of Somerset and Dorset.¹ The Corps Headquarters were based in Taunton. On 7 August 1940, the first divisional formation, the 48th (South Midland) Infantry Division came under command of the corps. The 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division joined this corps on 22 November 1940, and it remained until 17 March 1941 when it left to prepare to deploy overseas.

On 28 February 1941, the Devon and Cornwall County Division was formed by personnel from the South-West Area and came under command of this corps. This was a static formation with three brigades under command. The division was re-designated as the 77th Infantry Division on 1 December 1941. In November 1942, the corps was informed by the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, of his intention to form an armoured corps in the U.K., and this was made evident with the transfer of the Guards Armoured Division in early 1943. By the end of 1942, the handover to the South-Western District of its responsibilities was complete, and the Corps Headquarters left Taunton for Yorkshire.

The Corps Headquarters were located at a large modern hotel at Scotch Corner on the Great North Road, about six miles from Darlington. There were many changes in personnel, including staff officers, as older officers left, and younger ones were posted in. Lieutenant General LUMSDEN arrived on 20 January 1943 after service in the Western Desert. The first major exercise that the Corps was involved in was called 'Spartan', which troops were actually deployed on the ground, and it was run by G.H.Q. Home Forces. For this exercise, the Corps had under command the 9th and 42nd Armoured Divisions, but after the exercise, the 9th Armoured Division remained in North Yorkshire, while the 42nd Armoured Division moved to Somerset.

The Guards Armoured Division and the 11th Armoured Division both came under the command of this Corps on 17 March 1943. The 15th (Scottish) Infantry Division came under command on 20 June 1943, transferring from I Corps, which was also based in Yorkshire. This formation was destined to remain with VIII Corps for the duration of the campaign in North-West Europe, but as was usual in this campaign, it was attached for other formations for periods. The 6th (Guards) Tank Brigade was part of the 15th (Scottish) Division when it was a 'Mixed' formation, but when that type of division was abandoned, it joined VIII Corps with effect from 10 September 1943.

¹ The title of the Corps is variously expressed in official documents as VIII Corps, 8 Corps, or Eighth Corps.

The Corps Headquarters moved to Didlington Hall in Norfolk, a few miles from Thetford for a few months. In June 1943, the Corps Headquarters moved to Sandhutton Hall, six miles north of York. It ran several signals exercises, and the staff settled down. Lieutenant General LUMSDEN left in July, to be replaced by Lieutenant General McCREERY. Such was the 'churn' in the British Army that he was only in post for one month, being replaced by Lieutenant General BURROWS. In November 1943, a further change took place, with Lieutenant General HARDING taking over. In January 1944, finally, Lieutenant General O'CONNOR assumed command, being destined to lead the Corps in Operation 'Overlord' later on that year. There were more exercises, briefings and conferences, as the build-up to the invasion of Normandy continued.

On 6 June 1944, VII Corps had under command the:

- Guards Armoured Division
- 11th Armoured Division
- 15th (Scottish) Infantry Division
- 6th Guards Tank Brigade
- 31st Tank Brigade

On 19 June 1944, the Guards Armoured Division transferred to XII Corps, and it did not return to this Corps until 13 July 1944. On 23 July, it was transferred to II Canadian corps for a period of six days, returning to be under command of this Corps until 28 August 1944, when it transferred to XXX Corps for the advance through Belgium, and it did not return to command of this Corps.

The 11th Armoured Division remained with this Corps for the duration of the campaign in North-West Europe, although it was transferred to other formations for specific operations. On 13 July 1944, the same day that the Guards Armoured Division returned to VIII Corps, the 11th Armoured Division transferred to XII Corps. It returned to VIII Corps three days later. On 27 July, it was again transferred to XII Corps, this time for two days. On 14 August 1944, it was transferred to XXX Corps, with which it served until 16 September 1944. The 11th Armoured Division remained with VIII Corps until 17 February 1945, when it transferred to the 1st Canadian Army, and then the II Canadian Corps. It returned to this Corps on 11 March 1945, and remained under command (except for a short period under 2nd Army control in March 1945) until at least the end of August 1945.

The 15th (Scottish) Infantry Division was attached to other formations following the landings at Normandy. Between 23 and 29 July 1944, it was attached to XXX Corps, and then XII Corps between 14 August and 4 October 1944. It was again attached to XII Corps between 24 and 31 October 1944, and XXX Corps between 27 January and 25 February 1945.

It was transferred to 1st Canadian Army between 26 February and 6 March 1945, and then to XII Corps from 7 March until 4 April 1945. The division returned to VIII Corps on 5 April, and it was under command of this Corps at the end of August 1945.

The 6th (Guards) Tank Brigade landed in Normandy on 18 July 1944, and it was initially under command of 2nd Army. It served with its old parent formation, the 15th (Scottish) Infantry Division from 26 July until 10 August 1944, during the operation on the Oden salient and the capture of Mont Pincon in that period. The Brigade served with the 3rd Infantry Division between 10 and 17 August 1944, and again from 22 August to 2 October 1944. It returned to the command of this Corps on 2 October 1944, but it was transferred to XII Corps on 20 October 1944, and it did not return to this Corps during the rest of the campaign in North-West Europe. The 31st Tank Brigade was only under command of this Corps from 9 April 1944 until 22 June 1944, later joining the 79th Armoured Division and being equipped with specialist armour.

The Corps concentrated in the Gosport area ready to be ferried across to France. The Corps H.Q. landed in Normandy on 16 June 1944 (D + 10) and became operational on 24 June. The Headquarters was established in a chateau at Lanthueil. The Corps took up positions between XXX Corps on its right, and with I Corps on its left flank. The newly arrived corps was tasked with launching Operation 'Epsom', an attack towards, and across the River Odon towards the River Orne. The operation commenced on 26 June, and the advance made some progress, but increasingly fierce resistance eventually brought it to a halt. The advance was officially ended on 30 June 1944. There was a German counter-attack which was repulsed following some heavy fighting.

The next operation was called 'Jupiter', which called for a limited advance. This took place in 10 and 11 July 1944. The main offensive planned by the 2nd Army was Operation 'Goodwood', that took place on 18 July, and it lasted for three days. VIII Corps was given a key role in the main advance, by pushing towards the Bourguebus Ridge. A massive aerial bombardment preceded the advance, and initially the advance was successful. Resistance increased, and once again the advance ground to a halt. The Corps had advanced seven miles to the south, on a front six miles wide.

The Corps was moved into reserve on 21 July, and for a time, it was a formation without troops. This was not for long, as the Corps was warned to carry out Operation 'Bluecoat', to support a major offensive by the U.S. First Army. Eighth Corps took up a position to the right of XXX Corps, alongside V U.S. Corps. The advance began on 4 August 1944, and both VIII Corps and XXX Corps made progress. This proved to be important as the U.S. Forces made their breakout from Normandy.

As the Allies advanced through France and onto Belgium, VIII Corps moved up to advance across the River Maas to clear a pocket held by the Germans. Operations continued until the end of 1945 in the Netherlands and northern Belgium.

In the early months of 1945, VIII Corps was involved in Operation 'Plunder', the major offensive to cross the River Rhine, and to advance into the North German plain. VIII Corps was on the right, XII Corps in the centre, and XXX Corps on the left. The crossing was successful, and the Allies began to make rapid progress. The crossing of the River Elbe, which was codenamed Operation 'Enterprise'. This took place between 29 April and 1 May. The Corps captured Hamburg and Lubeck, as it made deep penetrations into Germany. On 2 May, German troops began surrendering in large numbers, and at 08.00 hours on 5 May, hostilities in North-West Europe ceased.

On 1 May 1945, the Corps had under command the:

- 11th Armoured Division
- 5th Infantry Division
- 15th (Scottish) Infantry Division
- 6th Airborne Division

The 5th Infantry Division joined this Corps with effect from 17 April 1945, on its transfer from Italy. It was attached to the XVIII U.S. Airborne Corps between 18 and 23 May 1945, and it left VIII Corps on 12 June 1945, after the cessation of hostilities, to come under command of XXX Corps District. The 6th Airborne Division spent two periods under command of VIII Corps, from 21 January until 20 February 1945, and from 29 March until 1 May 1945.

On 16 June 1945, the Corps was re-designated as VIII Corps District and assumed a static role as part of B.A.O.R. The Corps District assumed responsibility for the Schleswig-Holstein province of Germany. During this period, the corps had the following formations under command, namely:

- 7th Armoured Division
- 4th Armoured Brigade
- 15th (Scottish) Infantry Division
- The Jewish Infantry Brigade

The above formations started to draw down during 1946. The Jewish Infantry Brigade had arrived in Germany from Italy, where it had served during the war. The 15th Infantry Division was dispersed rapidly; the 227th Infantry Brigade disbanding in January 1946, the 44th Infantry Brigade the next month, with the final brigade (the 46th Infantry Brigade) and the divisional headquarters disbanding in April 1946. The headquarters, VIII Corps District disbanded circa April 1946.

There are two excellent books on the history of the Corps and its operations in North-West Europe, which are shown below.

VIII Corps

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Operations of Eighth Corps – Account of Operations from Normandy to the River Rhine
(Uckfield, The Naval & Military Press Ltd., n.d. – reprint of 1948 original)
[ISBN 978-1-4745-3764-3]
2. Corps Staff
The River Rhine to the Baltic Sea – A narrative account of the pursuit and final defeat of the German Armed Forces March – May 1945.
(n.k., n.k., undated)

Corps Commander

20 July 1940 – 17 May 1941

Lieutenant General Harold FRANKLYN, C.B., D.S.O., M.C.

19 May 1941 – 14 December 1941

Lieutenant General Kenneth Arthur Noel ANDERSON, C.B., M.C.

7 November 1941 – 14 January 1943

Lieutenant General (Acting) Arthur Edward GRASETT, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

15 January 1943 – 23 July 1943

Lieutenant General (Acting) Herbert LUMSDEN, D.S.O.*, M.C., *p.s.c.*

24 July 1943 – 24 August 1943

Lieutenant General (Acting) Richard Loudon McCREERY, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*

22 August 1943 – 5 December 1943

Lieutenant General (Acting) Montagu Brocas BURROWS, D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*

15 November 1943 – 31 December 1943 (15 January 1944)

Lieutenant General (Acting) Allan John HARDING, C.B.E., D.S.O.**, M.C., *p.s.c.*

21 January 1944 – 1 December 1944

Lieutenant General (Acting) Sir Richard Nugent O'CONNOR, K.C.B., D.S.O.*, M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

2 December 1944 – April 1946

Lieutenant General (Acting) Sir Evelyn Hugh BARKER, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*²

Brigadier General Staff – (B.G.S.)

19 July 1940 – 18 February 1941

Brigadier (Acting) Manley Angell JAMES, V.C., M.C., R. Sussex R., *p.s.c.*

19 June 1941 – 14 January 1942

Brigadier (Acting) Archibald Pennant CAMPBELL of Achalader, O.B.E., *p.s.c.*

15 January 1942 – January 1943

Brigadier (Temporary) Philip Geoffrey WHITEFOORD, O.B.E., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

January 1943 – March 1943

Vacant

March 1943 – October 1944

Brigadier Sir Henry Robert Kincaid FLOYD, Baronet

9 October 1944 – 1946

Brigadier (Acting) Robert George Victor FITZ-GEORGE-BALFOUR, M.B.E., M.C., C. Gds

² Created K.B.E. and knighted on 5 July 1945.

Deputy Adjutant and Quarter-Master-General – (D.A. & Q.M.G.)

8 June 1942 – 8 November 1942

Brigadier (Temporary) Harry Hamilton DEMPSEY, *p.s.c.*

18 January 1943 – October 1943

Brigadier (Acting) Geoffrey LUCAS, R.T.R, *p.s.c.*

October 1943 – 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) Edgar Patrick SEWELL, C.B.E., S. Wales Bord.

Corps Commander, Royal Artillery – (C.C.R.A.)

22 October 1941 – 11 December 1942

Brigadier (Temporary) Campbell Manning CHRISTIE, M.C., *g.*

12 December 1942 (19 November 1942) – 18 April 1943

Brigadier (Temporary) Leonard Charles MANNERS-SMITH, *p.s.c.*

19 April 1943 – 22 March 1946

Brigadier (Acting) Arthur Gordon MATTHEW, D.S.O., R.A.

Chief Engineer – (C.Eng.)

31 March 1944 – June 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) Henry Haskins Clapham SUGDEN, D.S.O., O.B.E., *p.s.c.*, R.E.

Chief Signal Officer – (C.S.O.)

18 February 1943 – 2 November 1944

Colonel (Temporary) Cyril KNOWLES, O.B.E., R.Sigs.³

1 November 1944 – 13 October 1945

Brigadier (Acting) William Russell SMIJTH-WINDHAM, D.S.O., R.Sigs.

Deputy Director of Supplies and Transport – (D.D.S.T.)

1944 – 1945/6

Colonel W. H. BLACKIE, M.C.

Deputy Director of Medical Services – (D.D.M.S.)

December 1942 – February 1945

Brigadier (Acting) Hugh Llewelyn Glyn HUGHES, D.S.O.*, M.C., Captain, retired pay, Reserve of Officers.

1945 – 1945

Brigadier J. MELVIN, O.B.E., M.C., T.D.

³ Promoted Acting Brigadier in post on 7 September 1943, Temporary Brigadier on 7 March 1944, and awarded the C.B.E. on 1 February 1945.

19 June 1945 – 1946

Brigadier (Acting) Benjamin James DAUNT, O.B.E.

Deputy Director of Ordnance Services – (D.D.O.S.)

1945 – 1945

Colonel W. T. GRIMSDALE, O.B.E.

Deputy Director Mechanical Engineering – (D.D.M.E.)

January 1943 – 1945

Colonel Michael. A. W. McEVOY, O.B.E.

Senior Civil Affairs Officer and Deputy Director Military Government – S.C.A.O./D.D.M.G.

1945 – 1946

Colonel G. H. PHIPPS-HORNBY

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