

# Indexing defence: an indexer's defence

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*Every profession has its own language, history and nuances. The military is no different. It is a profession shot through with mystique and its own terminology. Minefields for indexers abound. Without a sound knowledge of the period, event, person or equipment being indexed, mistakes, easily spotted by an ever-more informed and sophisticated readership, can be made.*

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## Introduction

The wonderful names of the regiments, battle honours, accoutrements, equipment, vehicles and ranks of old have further been enriched by modern-day abbreviations and acronyms such as MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction – a phrase that must surely be the mother of all health warnings), WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction – actually I thought all weapons were designed to do this, given that the definition of mass is a quantity of matter) and terms such as ‘take out’ (kill), ‘neutralize’ (kill) and ‘destroy’ (kill) have been commandeered to make the military appear more distant from the realities of horror than would be palatable to mild-mannered politicians. I particularly acknowledge ‘surgical strike’, as used by General Schwarzkopf during Operation Desert Storm in 1991 to describe the attack by AH-64 helicopters on anti-aircraft radars as though there would be no human suffering – ‘collateral damage’ – involved. Now, of course, we know the helicopter as Apache, named after a North American Indian tribe who, to my knowledge, never had the slightest ambition of developing aviation skills or ‘taking out’ Iraqi citizens.

The great man Wellington has a lot to answer for. By and large people have had one title (Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms) and one name, save when marrying, throughout their lives. How thoroughly conventional and, frankly, civilian. Not so for Arthur. He rejoiced in several names: Wesley, Wellesley, Wellington. Not content with these, he chose to style himself with a variety of military ranks, Viscount of Talavera, Baron Douro of Welleslie and even, as though that were not enough, Prime Minister.

My first regiment was the Royal Regiment of Artillery (RA – not to be confused with the Royal Academy). I was immensely proud to be promoted to Lance Bombardier – no, not Lance Corporal. On commissioning I was sent to the Royal Horse Artillery, specifically Alkmaar Troop (a platoon-sized sub-unit) in the Chestnut Troop (a company-sized grouping known generically in the Gunners as a battery). The regiment itself was, in fact, of battalion size, two or more of which in the infantry would be declared a regiment. And here we have it: what is an indexer to do with such an embarrassment of traditional titles, nomenclatures, paradoxes and acronyms? Alas, there are no easy answers.

## Titles

In biographies, military folk have a habit of getting promoted. A lieutenant today will invariably be a general tomorrow. Easy – just attach the highest-gained rank to the entry. But what if the book is about General Ponsonby's years as a subaltern? What then? Who are we to deny the gallant officer his pension? And how should the diligent indexer cast the entry to, for example, Hugh Trenchard? As a major he did great things, as a colonel he did better, and later, as General, he knocked the Royal Flying Corps into shape. But then he not only gained five-star rank but helped form the Royal Air Force. The entry ‘Trenchard, Marshal of the RAF Sir Hugh’, does not betray his earlier army service. Cross-referencing is needed (he also complicated matters by being raised to the peerage in 1930). Invariably, however, editors shun the suggestion, complaining of lack of space. This is particularly the case in military biographies where so many subjects have earned a plethora of ranks and titles throughout their distinguished lives.

Coming from a military background, something else about ranks and titles also irritates. Armed Forces have their own pedantically-applied conventions regarding abbreviations. Indeed, I have always believed that army staff work would be just up any indexer's street. In over 20 years' service I have been programmed to write Maj Gen for Major General, Capt for Captain and LCpl for Lance Corporal.<sup>1</sup> How it grates to read Maj/Gen, Maj-Gen, Capn or Cpt, L/Cpl or L-Cpl. To write Pvt for Private is anathema. Pte is good enough for NATO, so it is good enough for me. Why, then, do some publishers insist that I write BrigGen, Sergt, FltLieut, etc? These are conventions of style familiar to the publishers alone – not the reader for whom the index is written and who must surely wince at such obviously ‘civilian’ affectations.

## Ships

What a fillip for British naval power was Nelson's heroic victory at Trafalgar in 1805. How inspired and dramatic were the manoeuvres of the British Admiral's ships. How proud we must have been of *Swiftsure*, *Formidable*, and how the citizens of England must have recoiled at reports of the successful manoeuvres of *Téméraire*, *Belleisle*, *Spartiate* and *Tonnant*. Well, no. The former were fine French vessels

under Villeneuve and the latter, confusingly, fought under Nelson (they were prize ships whose French names were kept). Doubly confusing was the fact that there were two *Swiftsures* at Trafalgar – one on each side – and throughout the years there have been many *Victorys*, *Royal Sovereigns* and *Intrepids* sailing in a variety of navies. Indexer beware!

Whilst on the subject of ships, what should they be called? Royal Navy vessels are termed His/Her Majesty's Ship (HMS) but this was not always so. Try as one might, no consensus can be arrived at determining the date on which the appellation was officially warranted. It was some time between 1650 and 1750, and not consistently, but how should one index *Royal Sovereign* (laid down in 1660), *Royal Sovereign* (1701) and HMS *Royal Sovereign* (1786) whilst wishing to imply they are all ships of the British line? And, as if nautical indexing were not difficult enough, ships had a fondness for changing their names – *vide San Francisco* previously CS (Confederate Ship) *Texas* later *Union*.

## Units

The ordering of entries for units – companies, battalions, regiments, etc. – can be problematic. Units change their names. They may have been referred to by their colonel's name and subsequently by number. They amalgamate. They transfer service. Cross-referencing is the key but, again, space is often at a premium. What should one make of 1 Squadron Royal Flying Corps (RFC), an army element in the First World War that was subsequently showered with honours when a Royal Air Force (RAF) unit. Should it be indexed 1 Sqn RFC or 1 Sqn RAF? How about The Royal Scots? A fine regiment (we will not sort the 'the'), but it was raised as Hepburn's Regiment in 1633, became The Royal Regiment of Foot (1684), subsequently the First of Foot (1751) and now The Royal Scots. But it is all the same unit. Should it be filed under First (under 'F' or numerically?), Royal or Scots? The context will usually dictate. However, how does one differentiate between its battalions (35 of them in the First World War)? A convention is to annotate battalions as part of their parent regiments thus: 1/2 GR being the first Battalion of the 2nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles. Apply that to the Royal Scots and one gets 15/Royal Scots, 35/Royal Scots. Fine – but how should they be sorted? Under Royal or Scots or numerically?

Speaking of numerals, what an intellectual delight it is to unravel unit and formation numbers. The British army is in the habit of mixing ordinals and cardinals, *viz* 1st Regiment Royal Horse Artillery (a unit that is of battalion size), but 1 RHA in short form, 43rd (Wessex) Brigade, 4th Armoured Division, then slipping into Roman numerals, e.g. XXX Corps, and returning to Arabic ordinals: 1st Army. These conventions applied until approximately the mid-1960s when we went all NATO and became a good deal more cardinal: 43 (Wessex) Bde, 1 (British) Corps, etc. Strict adherence to BS 1749 will determine sorting order.

## Ranks

Ranks in the British Army are logical and easy to understand. Private, Lance Corporal, Field Marshal. Straightfor-

ward? Well, no. Somewhere in the middle things get confused, with Lance Sergeant (a guards non-commissioned officer), Corporal Major (a cavalry rank), Brevet Lieutenant Colonel (not strictly a rank but a document conferring rank without the pay) and the favourite: Major General being junior to Lieutenant General.<sup>2</sup> All in all, however, things are straightforward. Not so in the Navy. Officers' ranks are sublimely simple with very few variations. Ratings, however, are another story. Strictly speaking naval personnel below commissioned rank have an appointment, a job, a position on board ship, a rating, not a title. This explains Master-at-Arms, Midshipman, etc. Sorting by seniority needs a clear head. The RAF has its quirks, also. For example, a Flight Lieutenant is in charge of a crew or section, a Squadron Leader leads a flight, whereas a Wing Commander commands a squadron. Whether this is all designed to confuse the enemy or indexers is not clear.

## Short forms

NATO, UN, EU – we are all happy with these. They trip off the tongue. Just to keep indexers on their toes, however, the military have designed some splendid abbreviations and acronyms that are not so hospitable. (Can I dispel here and now the fiction surrounding TLA as a three-letter acronym – it is not an acronym, it is an abbreviation.) Of course, the convention is to write the full term, showing the abbreviation in brackets. However, many readers, particularly of the 'popular' titles, are not familiar with military-speak so cross-referencing or double-posting may be prescribed. Again, we are in the clutches of thrifty editors. It is tempting to get sucked into the military psyche by abbreviating every formation, tactic, equipment and rank. However, one can get into serious trouble. Consider, for example, Supreme Headquarters Italian Theatre or Forward Arming and Refuelling Tender – be careful! A favourite is one which was used extensively in the Falklands Campaign of 1982: Ships Taken Up From Trade. Morale wavered in SS *Uganda* when we realised we were STUFT before we even had sight of the enemy!<sup>3</sup>

## Designation of equipment

The scourge of the Battle of Britain, apart from the weather, fatigue, hunger and fear, is well known to have been the *Me* 109 single-seat German fighter aircraft. Actually, it was not. The machine was, in fact, the *Bayerische Flugzeugwerke* (*Bf*) 109 and many authors have used the terms interchangeably but incorrectly. Willy Messerschmitt (1898–1978) owned the factory (*Bf*) and only later aircraft, such as the 209, 309 and 163 had the prefix *Me*. This is of little consequence outside the world of extreme pedantry until one comes to sort-order German aircraft. The *Me* 209, for example, was a late variant of the *Bf* 109. Should one sort under 'B' or 'M'? I always use a *see* cross reference from 'M' to 'B'.

Artillery pieces have their own vocabulary, with which many readers, particularly those of 'popular' military titles, are often unfamiliar. Gun, howitzer, mortar, cannon, machine-gun, rifle, pistol and firearm are all weapons which discharge shot of some sort. It is as well for

an indexer to know their differences. A howitzer, for example, can fire 'high-angle', i.e. it lobbs its shell rather than fires it directly at the target. A cannon, meanwhile, is really only a generic word for a gun, but can have specific applications, for example an aircraft-mounted gun. Anomalies can develop when classifying artillery pieces, or arranging them in logical sort-orders. A numerical sequence is not always appropriate. For example, over the last century there has been no common system of classifying them. The British army used 18- and 25-pounders. They also had 5.5-inch howitzers. In the 1960s the 105mm light gun was fielded and a decade later saw the FH70 (field howitzer 1970), with a calibre of 155mm, come into service. Russia and Germany stuck to metric classification of the calibres.

## Theatres of war

It is said that history is always written by the victor. Theatres and battles are invariably known by the name given by the winning side. However, several engagements in the American Civil War give the lie to this. For example, a Union man would talk of the battles of Bull Run (1861 and 1862) whereas the Confederates spoke of Manassas. They both referred to the same encounters and it can be extremely confusing for readers not totally familiar with the conflict. An indexer is wise to know about these things. Whatever the editor says, in the interests of objectivity (and neutrality) double-posting in these instances is preferable to cross-referencing. In the same vein, it pays to be aware of the trap that the *Confederate Army* were southerners and the *Federal Army* were northerners.

Similarly, an astute indexer will file Gravelotte, battle of, with a cross-reference to Rezonville, battle of. They are actually one and the same (of 1870 Franco-Prussian War vintage) and are strictly non-divisible; 'Rezonville/Gravelotte, battles of', as given in Richard Holmes' excellent *Oxford companion to military history* (2001), is quite correct.

The spelling of battles, areas of operation or places of significance can often be a problem. Pearl Harbor has never been *Harbour* (however many British authors think it should be so), Passchendaele has never been otherwise and

Sevastopol, commonly pronounced with a 'b', should always be spelt with a 'v'.

## Conclusion

The complexity of military terminology and vernacular can be a minefield for the indexer with no background in defence, either as a practitioner or observer. However, the popularity of battles, war machines and diverse militaria, as evidenced by the proliferation of television programmes, films, books and increased museum visits, seems to be growing rapidly. We live in far from peaceful times and are witnessing obscene horrors of inhumanity that most of our ancestors would have deemed unthinkable. Yet ironically the demand for, albeit vicarious, participation is escalating and being met by ever more books on war and warfare past and present. There is no shortage of work for indexers. However, the readership is getting more and more informed and sophisticated and demands an indexing job as professional as the subjects about which he or she reads.

## Notes

- 1 This format is laid down unswervingly in that excellent page-turner, *Joint service publication (JSP) 101 – the manual of service writing*. London: Ministry of Defence
- 2 Originally, the rank was *Sergeant Major General*, an officer responsible for logistic and adjutant matters.
- 3 Readers may question the grammar of 'in' not 'on' *SS Uganda*. One serves 'in' a naval ship, notable exceptions being *Opportune* and *Continent!*

## References

- Ministry of Defence (1987) *Joint service publication 101 – the manual of service writing*. London: Ministry of Defence.
- Holmes, R. (ed) (2001) *The Oxford companion to military history*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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