

Preparation for War

This article is a departure from the previous snippets as it concerns the period immediately prior to the outbreak of WWI.

In 1907 the War Office had disbanded all the voluntary army units sometimes nicknamed *The Saturday Night Army* including the Volunteer Force, the Militia and the Yeomanry.

Amongst them was the Tower Hamlets Volunteer Rifle Corps who had been raised in 1861. They originally met in Truman's Brewery in Spitalfields, later moving to Bow. The War Office replaced these various voluntary army units with a single Territorial Force. It was to be organised on a county basis with the Lord Lieutenant of the county as the President. The Tower Hamlets Rifle Corps became the 17th Battalion, London Regiment (Poplar and Stepney Rifles). The 17th Battalion's cap badge incorporates the South African Battle Honours won by the Tower Hamlets Volunteer Rifle Corps and the Rifle Brigade's badge.

The original purpose of the Territorial Force was to defend the country when the regular Army was deployed abroad. However, during WWI many units saw service abroad. The Poplar & Stepney Rifles served on the Western Front and also took part in the Macedonian and Palestinian campaigns. The Territorial Force was disbanded in 1920 and reformed as the Territorial Army. This is now known as The Army Reserve.



17th Battalion's cap badge

Image courtesy of Stephen Sellick