

The National Artillery Association

Timeline 1865 to 2026



1850s to 1913

1850s There was a part-time **Reserve Force** in existence during the first half of the Nineteenth Century which included the Honourable Artillery Company, the Militia Force and the Yeomanry Force. Despite the formation in 1855 of a new **Regular Military Force** (what we now know as the British Army) the Reserve Force remained separate from the Regular Force.

1859 In response to heightened threats of a French invasion of Great Britain, authority was given in 1859 for County Lords Lieutenant to form Artillery Volunteer Corps ('AVCs') in tandem with the formation of Corps of Rifles as part of a plan to form a Home Defence Force. The initial role for the AVCs was to man coastal defences as auxiliaries to regular units.

1862 The number of Artillery Volunteers in 1863 was 26,052 (from a standing start in 1859) rising to its highest number of 50,327 in 1900. There were originally some 360 AVCs (formed Units).

1865 The National Artillery Association ('NAA') a volunteer organisation, was formed to advance and promote the practice and science of artillery within the AVCs (following the formation of the National Rifle Association model in 1859) with competitions and the development of a competitive spirit were used to underpin the core NAA objective.

1865 The first NAA Competition was held at The School of Gunnery at Shoeburyness – with 25 coastal gun detachments manned by approximately 250 volunteer gunners. Similar competitions were also held in Scotland run by the 'City of Edinburgh and Midlothian' and the 'West of Scotland' Associations.

1865 to 1907 The NAA competitions were held annually at Shoeburyness during this period (apart for the South African/Second Boer War 1900 to 1902) until 1904 when specific equipment venues were utilised. The competitions were originally organised for coastal defence and garrison artillery based on the performance of individual coastal and mobile guns for the landward defence of coastal fortresses.

1884 This year saw the merger of the City of Edinburgh and Midlothian and the West of Scotland Associations into the Scottish National Artillery Association which ran centralised competitions for Scotland until 1907 when the Scottish NAA merged into the NAA.

1908 The Territorial Force ('TF') was formed as part of the Haldane Reforms 1906-1912. The new TF, in addition to the retention of the coastal defence role, was now required to find field artillery and mobile heavy artillery for the 14 Divisions from the existing Yeomanry Regiments and the AVCs. The individuality of the single gun was also now subsumed into the collective efforts of a battery of guns firing under the orders of its commander and completing the transition away from Shoeburyness.

1909 to 1913 New competitions were instigated by the NAA to accommodate the newly formed Regiments and Batteries of the new TF.

1914 to 1919 World War 1 ("WWI") – No competitions were held.

1919 to 1945

1920 to 1921 The TF Units were re-organised into the Territorial Army and competitions were re-instigated.

1925 The Territorial Artillery in this year consisted of 3 Horse Batteries, 220 Field Batteries in 58 Brigades, 1 Pack Brigade, 34 Medium Batteries in 11 Brigades, 38 Heavy Batteries and 12 Anti-Aircraft Batteries in 4 Brigades for whom competitions were organised by the NAA.

1930 By 1930, 3 separate NAA competitions were being held:

- One for the Horse, Field and Medium Artillery (either horse or mechanically drawn);
- One for the 9.2 inch guns of the Heavy (Coast) Artillery; and
- One for the Heavy (Coastal) Artillery

“Entry level” competitions took place during Annual Camp (normally held at either Larkhill, Redesdale, Trawsfyndd, West Down, Buddon and Okehampton) with the winners of those competitions then being invited to compete in the “Winners” competitions at Larkhill.

1938 The first “unofficial” air defence competition took place in 1938 for the Sunday Times Trophy and the Daily Telegraph Cup.

1939 to 1945 World War 2 (“WW2”) – No competitions were held.

1945 to 2008

1945 to 1961 No competitions were held by the NAA (although the unofficial Anti-Aircraft Competition was re-started in 1954) as both the Regular and Territorial Armies were both in a continual state of retraction and re-organisation whilst recruitment across the board was proving difficult.

1962 Queen Elizabeth II became the Patron of the NAA. Competitions were re-instigated for horse, field and medium artillery batteries. A prizegiving ceremony was held at the Mansion House, London.

1963 100th Anniversary of the NAA – HRH Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone presented the Trophies at the Mansion House with a Ladies Dinner Night taking place at Woolwich Officers Mess. In this year, the Lord Mayor of London was also appointed a Vice-President of the NAA.

1967 to 1968 The “Healey” Defence Review of 1966 replaced the existing 44 Artillery Regiments and 3 independent Batteries with 6 Regiments and 4 independent Batteries. These units were primarily under command of 23 Artillery Brigade whilst being tasked to support 1st British Corps in Germany. This profound change saw the Battery (rather than the Regiment) become the assessed unit within the NAA competitions, whilst the Chain of Command increasingly took responsibility for the setting and judging of the competitions with the NAA providing impetus, oversight and Awards Ceremonies. The inaugural UOTC Competition was held in 1967 and in 1968 the NAA took over the organisation of the Anti-Aircraft Artillery Competitions.

1969 to 1981 In this period, new competitions were instigated to test all types and levels of the TA Regiments e.g. for the best Light Air Defence Battery, the best Air Defence HQ Battery and the best Observation Post Battery etc., as well as introducing individual skills competitions e.g. NBC, recognition, first aid.

1982 to 2008 “Options for Change” in the 1990s saw several operational changes in the early 1990s e.g. the introduction of FH70 for 100 and 101 Regiments, the formation of 106 Regiment and the subsequent re-equipment of 101 Regiment to MLRS. The mid-2000s saw 100, 103 and 105 Regiments being re-equipped with the Light Gun whilst 104 Regiment was equipped firstly with Desert Hawk, a UAS, and then the Light Gun. The NAA competitions, as ever, closely supported these re-training cycles. This period closely mirrored the momentum of the pre WW1 and pre WW2 competitions in terms of the number of competitions and the commitment of the competing units. 14/15 NAA competitions were held annually supported by high profile Prize-giving Ceremonies at the Guildhall in London providing opportunities for All Ranks to be formally recognised for their professional and technical Gunnery skills and the opportunity to celebrate their successes. The Prize-giving Ceremony moved to Larkhill in 2008.

2009 to 2025

2009 to 2025 Limited competitions during this period have been held during this period due to the uncertain future for the Reserve Forces through a lack of man training days, equipment and resources. The NAA has, however, continued to support the Reserve Regiments by sponsoring individual Regimental activities and encouraging the spirit of competition, as appropriate. The close relationship with the Royal Family was illustrated in May 2024 when it was announced that **His Majesty King Charles III**, had accepted the Patronage of the NAA, taking over from his mother.

The NAA has had an illustrious history since 1865. Its objectives have essentially remained the same, as set out below:

“To promote the military efficiency and morale of the Royal Artillery Reserve including advancing the science and practice of Artillery and fostering the traditions of the Royal Artillery.”