

Official History of the Junior Leaders' Regiment Royal Corps. of Signals



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Regimental Motto

If there is anything more important than the will to succeed, it is that the will shall not falter.

In April 1957 the Junior Leaders' Regiment, (JLR), Royal Corps. of Signals was formed at Rawlinson Barracks, later renamed Denbury Camp, Newton Abbot, South Devon, England, from the 6th (Boys) Training Regiment, Royal Corps. of Signals, who relocated to Newton Abbot in September 1955.

The history of Boy's units providing communications to the British Army can in fact be traced back to the late 19th Century before the Royal Corps of Signals itself was formed in 1920.

The Royal Corps of Engineers initially provided the Army with communications with their Telegraph Battalion based at Brompton Barracks in Chatham Kent, England. They were called the "Tele-boys" and there were about ten of them at any one time and paid 23 pence per week. At first they were seconded to the General Post Office to gain valuable practical experience. They became proficient in sending and reading Morse via telegraph lines. Telephone operator training was carried out on two working exchanges at the School of Military Engineering also at Chatham. There was no wireless training as wireless sets were considered unreliable and had not made much headway. This continued until the Signals Service Royal Engineers became the Royal Corps of Signals in 1920.

The first Royal Signals Boys unit in 1920 was called "K" Company located at Maresfield in Sussex.

In 1925/26 it moved to Catterick Camp in Yorkshire and renamed "F" Company.

With outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 it was disbanded.

Revived again in 1949, it was renamed as the Number 6 (Boys) Training Regiment, Royal Corps. of Signals, located at Beverley in Yorkshire.

In 1955, another move to Newton Abbot in Devon.

1957 saw the unit renamed for the last time as the Junior Leaders' Regiment Royal Corps. of Signals.

It was formally disbanded on the 10th August 1967, due to changes in Ministry of Defence policies regarding the recruitment of Junior, or Boy soldiers into the Corps. of Signals.

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A Boy could join the Junior Leaders straight from school at the age of 15 years and graduated at 17-1/2 years into adult service. Boys from Northern Ireland could join at 14 years old: the school leaving age in Northern Ireland at that time.

Joining the Junior Leaders Regiment provided a Boy with a unique and early opportunity to find his feet in the Regular Army and to develop his own character, personality and powers of leadership.

On arrival at the camp a Boy was shown to his barrack room, issued with his bedding, uniforms and boots. He would then be issued with his AB 64 Part One and Two containing his army serial number, which had to be remembered and followed him throughout his army career: it is never ever forgotten. On joining all Boys were ranked as Junior Leaders. A Junior Leader, (JL), could progress right up the ranks to Junior Regimental Sergeant Major. At any time there could be some 500 to 600 other Junior Leaders, (JL's) undergoing training in any one year.

Pay & Leave. The basic pay on entry at 15 years old was £2.9.0d a week. Even then some of this money was compulsorily saved in a Post Office savings account for use on leave. Junior Leaders, like their adult counterparts also received Ration Allowance when on home leave. If a JL passed his First Class education exam and his Military Proficiency Standard B, his pay would rise to £4.7.6d. On leaving the JLR to enter adult service his pay rose to £5.19.6d per week if he had signed on for six years regular service, or £7.7.0d for a nine-year engagement. Boys received 10 weeks leave a year and free travel warrants to home and indeed overseas destinations if their parents were serving in the Armed Forces.

The role of the Royal Corps. of Signals at that time was:

The nerve system of the British Army. The Corps. provides the means of command and control of the Army throughout the world.

It operates and maintains the vital communications, which link together Battalions, Brigades, Divisions, Corps. and Armies in the Field. Links the Government and the War Office, (as it was called then), with all Armies and Formations throughout the Commonwealth and NATO countries.

Members of the Royal Signals can be found operating and maintaining Radio and Radio Relay systems, Telephony and Line Systems: carrying urgent despatches by road and air and staffing vital Communications Centres, all over the world. The Corps. will also be found working with all formations of the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force.

The aims of the Junior Leaders Regiment were to:

Further a JLs education and train young soldiers to become tradesmen and future Senior Non-commissioned Officers, (SNCOs), Warrant Officers and Commissioned Officers in the Royal Corps. of Signals.

With the distinct advantages of being a Junior Leader, many later went on to fill the highest non-commissioned ranks of Foreman of Signals for the technical trades and Yeoman of Signals for the operating trades. Many a Royal Signals Regimental Sergeant Major, (RSM) would proudly boast of his JL background.

Many Junior Leaders, (JLs) also went on to achieve very high commissioned rank, Lieutenant Colonel, in the Corps.

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Some JLs went on to serve as full members, or on attachment, to other specialist units of the British Army such as the Special Air Service, Airborne Units, Special Boat Service, Intelligence Corps. and the Royal Marines. Those who trained in signals intelligence could later be found in the British Secret Service units such as MI5, MI6 and the Government Communications Headquarters, (GCHQ).

Training.

Training in the JLR was in three parts:

One. Education. To provide each JL with the opportunity to study for and pass the then Army Certificate of First Class Education, thus qualifying him to eventually achieve Warrant Officer and Commissioned Officer rank. JLs could also study for GCE "O" levels.

Two. Military and Trade Training. Providing each JL his basic military training, teaching him the skills of Drill, Weapons handling, shooting and Physical Training.

Parade Ground Drill. Junior Leaders were taught parade ground Drill to an exceptionally high standard: a standard that marked them out as a former Junior Leader throughout the remainder of their Army career. This very high standard of drill and turnout was immediately noticeable when JLs graduated from the JLR and joined their first regular army unit. Come the very first morning "works parade", a keen-eyed drill sergeant or sergeant major could immediately pick up a former JL: a wonderful compliment to the training Staff at the JLR.

Weapons. Junior Leaders were initially taught to shoot and drill with the Lee-Enfield bolt-action No.4 303 rifle: a weapon that had served the British Army, with modifications, since the First World War. In 1960 the selective fire Self Loading Rifle, (SLR), based on the Belgian FN rifle was introduced and used the standard NATO 7.62mm ammunition. An indoor range in the camp for firing .22 small bore rifles allowed JLs to hone their shooting skills. As part of their infantry training, JLs were also taught to strip, load and fire the BREN light machine gun.

Trade Training. Junior Leaders were also introduced to the main operating trades in the Royal Signals such as:

Operating Military Radio Sets, mainly the No. 19 and C11 Sets and the JLR Amateur radio set.	Morse Code. Sending & Receiving	Typing and Teleprinter Operating on Creed No. 33 Teleprinters	Communications Centre Operation (COMCEN)	Field Telephony and Line Systems. Tele "J" & "F" Handsets. Don 8 and 10 cables.
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From 1964, driver training was introduced for JLs in their output year prior to attending Catterick for their Lineman and Electrician Driver trades.

From September 1963, Trade Boards were held at Denbury and some JLs in their output term passed Radio Operator and Comcen Operator at BIII level.

From April 1966 this extended to Electrician Driver and Linesman BIII, which meant JLs on passing out of Denbury, could be posted directly to a Royal Signals Unit.

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Three. Leadership, Adventure Training and Sports A special emphasis was given to leadership, so important for future SNCO's. Most outdoor training was carried on the rugged terrain of Dartmoor. Exercises included, canoeing, sailing, rock climbing, map reading, cooking in the field and survival in arduous conditions. Many JLs attended tough military and civilian Outward Bound courses in the UK and abroad.

A wide variety of sporting activities were available and competitions with many other military and civilian youth organisations in the UK and abroad were encouraged. JLs could even take a parachute course. Leisure time could also include dinghy sailing.

The Regiment supported a very active Band, which also played at civilian functions.

Accommodation: Was Spartan. JLs were housed in barrack rooms each accommodating between 12 to 14 boys. The barracks rooms were wooden with central heating. Barrack rooms had to be meticulously swept and cleaned every day, except for Sundays, to meet the rooms Junior NCOs exacting standard. Rooms were inspected every day and formal inspections by the troop officer once a week. Rooms not up to standard had to be cleaned again and re-inspected. Each barrack room had a three-foot centre lino that required "bumpering" with lashings of polish until it shone like glass.

Messing. Was plain but ample and provided in a central dining hall using a self-service system, supervised by Army Catering Corps. personnel. The good old NAAFI and Church Army canteens supplemented Army rations.

Clothing. New recruits were issued free of charge all their military necessities including sports clothes with the exception of football boots. After their first term JLs could wear 'approved' civilian clothes when off duty and out of camp.

Boots. The issue and subsequent maintenance of a JLs army-issue boots took a considerable amount of his time. All JLs were issued with two pairs of boots; one for every day wear, commonly known as "working boots", and the other, "best boots" for formal parades. Bulling boots to a Guardsman's standard occupied many Boys evenings as his toecaps and heels gleamed in order to satisfy his troop sergeants and squadron sergeant major's demanding standards. Such phrases as "much more work needed on those boots". Or, "I would cut my throat if I tried to shave in your toe caps", could be heard on morning parades.

Discipline. The British Army is founded on discipline. The emphasis in the JLR was on self-discipline rather than rigidly imposed restrictions. Provided a JL conducted himself as expected of a soldier, army life presented no problems for him. However, miscreants were dealt with in the time-honoured British Army methods of, Jankers, reporting in full kit to the guard commander for inspection during off-duty hours and could even be locked in the Guardroom cells. The junior NCOs maintained much of the day-to-day discipline.

Hobbies and Recreation. There was always a wide variety of hobbies and entertainment in off-duty hours, such as:

A cinema showing cartoons and films some evenings.

The NAAFI and Church Army provided canteens and recreation facilities.

Amateur Radio. A JLs first introduction to Morse code and operating radio sets.

Cooking in the cookhouse: always keenly supported and well attended.

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Graduation into Adult Service. The highlight of a JLs time in the JLR was his Graduation, or Passing Out parade, attended by family and friends. Boots had never been so shiny. Trouser and jacket sleeve creases could have sliced bacon. Hats with cunningly sliced peaks jammed firmly on the head and chinstraps polished like diamond. A parade a JL would never forget. Next would come his posting to a training unit or direct to a Royals Signals unit. Many went to Catterick in Yorkshire. A few were selected for officer training and went to Sandhurst Royal Military Academy. Some, who had been talent-spotted, were interviewed with a view to changing their military career and completed their training outside of the Royal Signals.

On completion of their Regular British Army engagement, many ex-JLs were eagerly recruited by Commonwealth armed forces, notably Australia.

Notable Achievements of the Regiment. The main enduring legacy the JLR gave to the world and is still in existence today, is the Ten Tors Expedition. Run each Whitsun between Ten Tors on Dartmoor. It was founded in 1959 as the JLRs own training course and then opened up to other units: the first being in 1960 by the then Commanding Officer of the JLR, Lt-Col. L.H.M. Gregory MBE. Today, many teams both military and civilian from all over the world attempt this demanding course.

The JLR regularly entered teams for the annual Nijmegen Marches held in Holland. Marching a very arduous 25 miles per day for four days. This march is sponsored and supported by major commercial companies, with the proceeds going to the World Health Organisation.

Easter 1960 saw the first Devizes to Westminster Bridge canoe race covering some 126 miles: the JLR entering both junior and senior teams.

The 12th of May 1961 saw 240 Junior Leaders with the Corps. of Drums and Pipes march to Courtney Park, to receive from the Chairman of the Urban District Council of Newton Abbot, Cdr HH Gribbon, a pipe banner and a sealed copy of a Resolution recognizing the close ties that existed between the town of Newton Abbot and the Junior Leaders Regiment Royal Corps. of Signals.

Finally, a note to readers and future researchers. Should you come across a mature gentleman standing tall and proud with very shiny shoes, he may well be an ex-Junior Leader of the Royal Corps. of Signals.

Commanding Officers and Regimental Sergeant Majors of the Junior Leaders Regiment.

Commanding Officers

1955-1956 Lt Col RA Connor
1956-1959 Lt Col RE Baker OBE
1959-1962 Lt Col LHM Gregory MBE
1962-1964 Lt Col A Holifield MC
1964-1967 Lt Col DE Higgins MBE

Regimental Sergeant Majors

1955-1958 WO1 Thompson MBE
1958-1960 WO1 FJ Pavey
1960-1961 WO1 JR Latimer BEM
1961-1963 WO1 SG Pavey
1963-1964 WO1 D Haughey
1964-1965 WO1 WT Leeson
1965-1967 WO1 MBF Garland

Acknowledgements and Further Information.

Special thanks to the following three Ex-Junior Leaders Web Sites for the use of material for the compilation of this Regimental History.

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Tony Gask for the material on his Website: <http://www.denburydays.co.uk/index.php>

John Thompson Owner of the Yahoo Site: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/denbury_boys

Steve Wright's Site: Denbury Junior Leaders: <http://www.denburyjuniorleaders.com>

Further information on the Royal Corps. of Signals can be found on the following Web sites:

The Royal Corps. of Signals Web Site: <http://www.army.mod.uk/royalsignals/index.htm>

The Royal Corps. of Signals Museum: <http://www.royalsignalsmuseum.com>

Royal Signals Association: <http://www.army.mod.uk/royalsignals/rsa>

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