



“Honest John”

Unlike the Corporal, which was a ballistic guided missile, Honest John was a simple free/flight rocket. Development began in May 1950. It entered service with the U.S. Army in 1954 and in all 7,799 M31 rockets were manufactured between 1952 and 1960. 7,089 M50 Improved Honest John rockets followed until the end of production in 1965.

If Honest John seems an unlikely name for a missile, the following from Redstone Arsenal's website may help:

The project was given the popular name Honest John. A former Redstone Arsenal Commander, Brigadier General (later Major General) Holger N. Toftoy, was responsible for the nickname chosen. As he related, "Knowing that troops usually came up with their own nicknames for weapons if they did not like the official name, we cast about for a catchy name, easy to remember. Before the actual test firing of the first 762 mm rocket, there was considerable controversy in the Pentagon as to its worth. In fact, there was serious consideration in the General Staff of cancellation on the grounds such a large unguided rocket could not possibly have the accuracy to justify further expenditure of funds. At this time, on a trip to White Sands Proving Ground, we ran into a Texan making statements hard to believe. When his veracity was questioned, he exclaimed, "Why around these parts I'm called Honest John." Feeling somewhat like the Texan at the time, I felt Honest John would be an appropriate nickname."

The M31 Honest John was an unguided 762 mm artillery rocket, powered by an M6 solid/fuel rocket engine, and spin/stabilized in flight by two M7 spin motors. Of all U.S. nuclear weapons of the 1950's, the Honest John was the easiest to operate. The rocket was transported from the depot to the launching unit by truck and trailer in three parts (warhead, motor, fins). Assembling the rocket, and mounting it on the M289 launcher was then accomplished by six men with a crane in about five minutes. The rocket was then ready for aiming and firing to a range between 5.5 km (3.4 miles) and 24.8 km (15.4 miles).

The decision was taken in 1958 that the Rocket Regiments of the Royal Artillery would be equipped with the Honest John tactical missile, to be replaced in due course by the Blue Water system. In

1959, Blue Water was cancelled, and it was decided to equip three missile regiments, each with two batteries of Honest John and two batteries of 8-inch (Nuclear) howitzers.

The chosen regiments were re-designated as, for example, 24 Regiment Royal Artillery to conceal their role; all Royal Artillery regiments were so designated on 4 October 1961. On 18 March 1964 roles were reinserted into regimental titles and batteries, the regiments becoming missile regiments and the batteries becoming missile batteries and heavy batteries as appropriate.

Initially, until at least 1962, the missile regiments were with NorthAG and 1 Artillery Brigade. Later, and by 1964, the missile regiments were part of the Divisional structure but from January 1971 they moved back to 1 Artillery Brigade of I (BR) Corps. The vehicle markings reflected this change.

NORTHAG/I (BR) Corps

These unit numbers were worn over an RA arm of service square and with a I (BR) Corps formation mark.

126	24 Missile Regiment*
127	50 Missile Regiment
128	39 Missile Regiment

Divisional

Markings worn in white on a black square. These markings were also worn pictorially for a short period prior to March 1964 (see John Mastrangelo's article Windscreen 106 page 54).

1/70	39 Missile Regiment
2/70	24 Missile Regiment
4/70	50 Missile Regiment

From January 1971 onwards

Markings worn in white on a black square.

134	24 Missile Regiment
135	50 Missile Regiment
138	39 Missile Regiment*

* I have no absolute confirmation of these markings.

24 Missile Regiment

The regiment was in Sheerness until posted to Carlisle in 1955 to amalgamate with 59 Heavy Anti-Aircraft (HAA) Regiment to form 24 Medium Regiment. In December 1955 the

regiment moved to St Barbara's Barracks, Luneberg, equipped with towed 5.5" howitzers. It moved to Assaye Barracks, Nienburg in September 1957 as part of 1 Army Group Royal Artillery (AGRA). It re-rolled as a missile regiment on 15 September 1960 and was composed of 2 (Hinds) Heavy Battery, 34 (Seringapatam) Heavy Battery, 51 (Kabul 1942) Missile Battery and 76 (Maude's) Missile Battery. 34 (Seringapatam) Battery reformed on 10 December 1960 to join the regiment. 24 Missile Regiment moved to Barker Barracks, Paderborn in 1962, but moved to Ubique Barracks, Dortmund in November 1972. It disbanded on 31 March 1977, after much of its manpower had merged with the last remaining missile regiment, 50 Regiment.

39 Missile Regiment

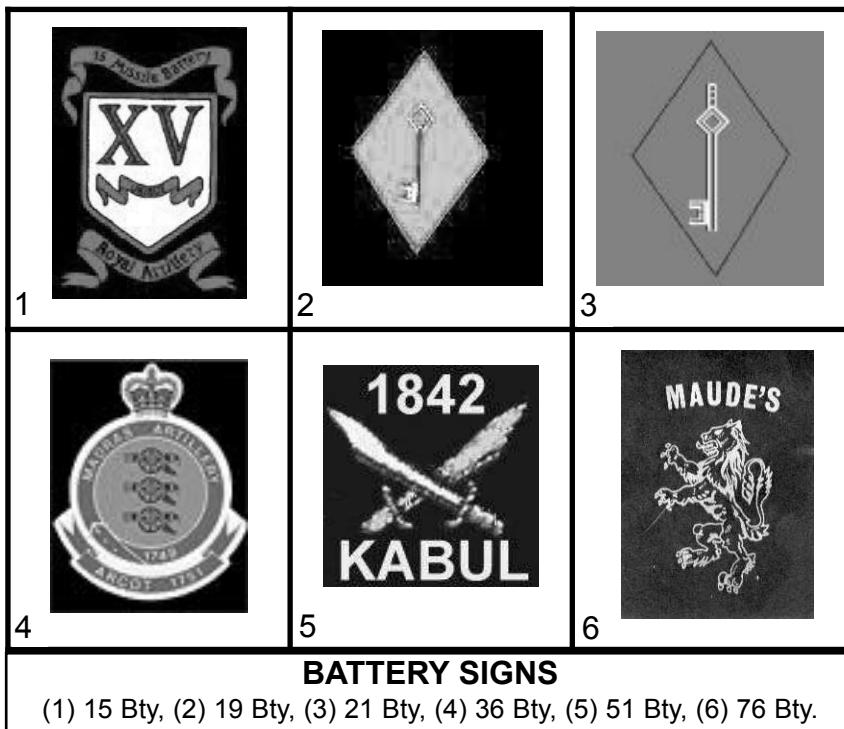
The regiment was based in the UK when re-designated 39 Regiment for the missile role on 15 December 1958; it moved to Dempsey Barracks, Sennelager, on 7 January 1960 where it remained for 35 years until it moved to Albemarle Barracks, Harlow Hill near Newcastle in November 1995. It consisted of 19 (Gibraltar 1779?83) Missile Battery, 36 (Arcot 1751) Missile Battery, 75 Heavy Battery and 171 Heavy Battery. In 1967 75 Battery was re-titled as H (Ramsay's Troop) Battery. The regiment lost the nuclear role in November 1972 and reverted to a medium regiment. Much of its Honest John equipment was used to strengthen the two remaining regiments.

50 Missile Regiment

50 HAA Regiment converted to medium in April 1955. It sailed for Cyprus in August 1956, returning to Troon in September 1957. It moved to Northumberland Barracks, Menden in November 1959 as a medium regiment, and remained there until disbandment in 1992. It re-rolled as a missile regiment on 15 September 1960, consisting of 15 Missile Battery, 21 (Gibraltar 1779?83) Missile Battery, 33 Heavy Battery and 78 Heavy Battery. It converted to Lance from 1976.

Supporting Units

From 1974 the signals elements of the missile regiments were designated troops as follows with 550 and 551 Signal Troops supporting 50 Missile Regiment and 24 Missile Regiment respectively. As explained in the previous article on Corporal, the Nuclear Warheads were held by the US Army under the Heidelberg Agreement and the regiments were supported as follows:



BATTERY SIGNS

(1) 15 Bty, (2) 19 Bty, (3) 21 Bty, (4) 36 Bty, (5) 51 Bty, (6) 76 Bty.

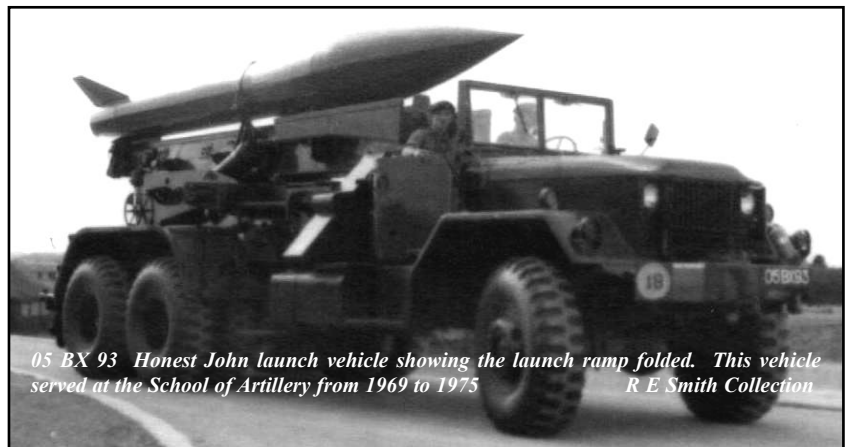
24 Missile Regiment, 15th US Army Missile Detachment, 39 Missile Regiment, 22nd US Army Missile Detachment, 50 Missile Regiment, 69th US Army Missile Detachment,

All these US Army units were part of 570th Artillery Group, 59th Ordnance Brigade.

In terms of Ordnance support, Honest John was much simpler than Corporal and resupply followed normal ammunition resupply lines. In other words, there was no special resupply unit.

The Vehicles

The main body of vehicles was serialled between 03 BX 00 to 06 BX 00. They followed on the BX series from the Corporal vehicles covered in *Windscreen 110*. They entered service from 1960 to 1962.



05 BX 93 Honest John launch vehicle showing the launch ramp folded. This vehicle served at the School of Artillery from 1969 to 1975
R E Smith Collection

There was a small additional purchase of two launchers, two trailers and two Heating & Tie Down units in 38 GB 85 to 38 GB 90. These would have entered service in early 1975. They are presumed to have been a purchase from another European NATO country to keep Honest John going before Lance arrived.

Honest John Launchers M289 & M386

Two different models were made; the M289 based on the 5 ton M139C chassis (shown), and the later M386 based on the 5 ton M139F chassis, both produced by International. The main difference between the M289 and the M386 was the length of the ramp, which had been reduced by 2 metres and made collapsible. The launcher was equipped with a 115V generator-set, generating power for heating the rocket. The approximate weight of the launcher was 19 tons without rocket and 21.5 tons with the rocket mounted.

The British Army received ten M289's (probably in 1960) although these were all struck off by mid 1962. They were never available in sufficient numbers to have equipped the three regiments and the Guided Weapons Wing of the School of Artillery. It

seems more likely they were used for initial familiarisation and training. The M289 was difficult to drive because of the obstruction to visibility caused by the two supporting arms for the rail and the M386 was much preferred by the drivers.

By 1961 the British Army began to receive the M386 and these quickly supplanted the M289's. In all it received twenty two launchers of this type (although a serial batch 03 BX 66 to 03 BX 79 - fourteen vehicles - was allocated, it appears they may have been cancelled or struck off before 1965), and initially there were two launchers per battery (i.e. four per regiment) and one at Larkhill. After 39 Regiment gave up its missile role in November 1972, 24 Regiment and 50 Regiment were strengthened to three launchers per battery (i.e. six per regiment). The remaining launchers were always held in reserve.

Many of the launchers are shown carrying the missile covered in an electric blanket to keep the rocket engine warm.

Heating & Tie Down Unit M55/M46

Two missiles could be carried to the launcher in a vehicle which appeared externally to be a lengthened american-style cargo truck. It towed a transporter trailer (see below) which could carry a further missile. Although it appeared to be a fairly standard International cargo truck (normally M54), it was designated a Heating & Tie Down Unit M55. It was so designated because it had special cradles for the missiles and a 115 volt generator pro-

04 BX 51 Diamond T 5 ton 6X6 Heating & Tie Down Unit. Vehicle of the School of Artillery seen at Aldershot Army Day on Queen's Parade, June 1970. R E Smith Collection.



viding power for warming up the engine. To cater for the length of the missiles and the weight, it had a longer chassis and heavily reinforced frame for the body.

Some of the Heating & Tie Down Units received by the UK were manufactured by Diamond T and these were designated M46.

In total, 32 Heating & Tie Down Units were received.

3 ton, 4 wheel, Transporter Trailer M329A1

This was a four wheel close-coupled trailer of 3 ton rating. It was capable of carrying a single missile and was fitted with a heating unit in a similar way to its towing vehicle - the M55 (M46) Heating and Tie Down vehicle. It was fitted with a sheerlegs for lifting the missile using a block and tackle.

Early versions of this trailer were produced by Spencer Stafford and Dorsey although these had no sheerlegs. These seem to have been disposed of prior to 1965 and replaced by the later type. I am unaware of the manufacturer of the later version.

International & Diamond T Recoveries M246



3-ton guided missile trailer, showing the hoist with sheerlegs erected. Mike Conniford Collection.

Although these were designated as Recovery Vehicles, they were used as cranes to load the missile on to the launching rail from the trailer of the Heating and Tie-down Unit. The vehicles were manufactured by International and Diamond T.

Some of the M246 vehicles acquired for use with Corporal continued in service after Corporal's demise with Honest John missile batteries.



03 BX 57 International 5 ton 6X6 M386 Recovery. Vehicle marked as "62" of the Guided Weapons Wing of the School of Artillery at Larkhill Artillery Day, July 1963. R E Smith Collection.

05 BX 28 International 5 ton 6X6 M386 Recovery lifts Honest John warhead from Bedford RL Cargo at Larkhill Artillery Day. July 1963.



Wind Measurement Trailer M101

Because Honest John was a long range unguided missile, winds were an issue in calculating its impact point. Consequently each launcher was allocated its own Wind Measurement Trailer. These were two wheeled 3/4 ton two wheel cargo trailers carrying an anemometric mast and electronic equipment for calculating the impact point of the missile allowing for expected wind velocities. There were three different manufacturers - Lexington, Linn and Garwood. These trailers were towed by a standard Bedford RL cargo vehicle.

Finale

Honest John was eventually withdrawn, as the Lance missile system entered service during 1976 and 1977. Lance served with the only surviving missile regiment - 50 Missile Regiment based at Northumberland Barracks, Menden. I may cover Lance in a future article.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to David Payne, the R E Smith Collection, Robert Swan, Redstone Arsenal website: http://www.redstone.army.mil/history/systems/HONEST_JOHN.html, Fletcher and Swan, 'The Gunners 1945-2005' as yet unpublished. Lord & Watson 'The Royal Corps Of Signals Helion 2003'. Phelps: 'A History of The Royal Army Ordnance Corps 1945-1982 RAOC 1991'. 'Pugh Fighting Vehicles & Weapons of the Modern British Army Macdonald 1962'. 'Smith British Army Vehicles & Equipment', Ian Allan 1968. Elkins USAREUR 59th Ordnance Brigade <http://usarmygermany.com/Sont.htm>.