

Gurkhas bring their skills to the UK

Martin Sayers discovers why the British Army and Royal Navy are so delighted with G4S's new unit of Nepalese ex-soldiers

The reputation of the Gurkhas tends to precede them. The British Army first recognised the military prowess of these tough Nepalese hill men over 200 years ago and formed an alliance that lasts to this day.

Famed for their self-discipline, loyalty and bravery in battle,

Gurkhas have served with distinction in all branches of the British Army, from Logistics to Special Forces.

Gurkha soldiers are recruited exclusively from their native Nepal and competition is fierce, with only the fittest and most motivated being selected. Of 28,000 applicants last year, only 230 were enlisted.

In recognition of the flexibility and quality of these special soldiers, G4S Gurkha Services was established in the UK in September 2007. The unit is built around former British Army Gurkha Regiment soldiers with at least 15 years of exemplary service in the forces – many with recent operational service experience in



Iraq and Afghanistan.

But Gurkha Services seeks to employ the *most appropriate* men and women for each contract, so individuals with key skills or experiences are utilised if they can meet the exacting standards set by the Gurkhas themselves.

The unit is now in the very capable hands of John Whitwam, MBE, a former Lieutenant Colonel in the British Army who served for 20 years, commanding his infantry regiment of 700 across Northern Ireland, Iraq and Cyprus.

"The Gurkha Services business has been a real success story," he observes. "Although there are many men from the Gurkha Regiment

working within the security industry in the UK, G4S is the *only* security company employing teams of ex-Regiment soldiers working within a tight management framework. We closely replicate the culture and regime of the British Army's Gurkha Regiment and this means that we have a highly trained group of security officers who can be relied upon in any situation.

"They are flexible, effective and astonishingly reliable – not a single one of our Gurkha Services personnel has dropped a shift or reported in sick since Gurkha Services was set up."

One of the major roles of G4S Gurkha Services is in the training

of British Army soldiers prior to postings in Afghanistan. Gurkha Services provides a fully flexible training support group to the Ministry of Defence and their extensive military experience is used to assist the Operational Training and Support Group (OPTAG) in training soldiers in mock situations, before they are deployed on operations.

This is an absolutely vital role, →





ABOVE: G4S Gurkha Services personnel carry out some of the UK's more important security duties.

PREVIOUS PAGES: the Gurkhas pictured on parade in the 1920s would have found it hard to believe that one day men from their regiment would be protecting key facilities in the UK and assisting with training for British troops.

as this type of training is the last stop before soldiers are sent to an actual war zone where they could face such situations for real.

The Gurkha Services personnel adopt the dress and mannerisms of Afghans to closely replicate the reality of what soldiers are about to face. Their extensive military experience means that they can accurately mimic the nature of the chosen enemy during the exercise. They also know how best to test soldiers, highlighting any weaknesses that may need to be addressed by the trainers.

Not only does this provide

invaluable training support to the army, it also relieves a significant burden in terms of manpower. Before the involvement of G4S, personnel were supplied from the field army to assist the training support group, which meant soldiers had to be taken away from other essential tasks.

Chief instructor Tony Harnett, OPTAG operations manager, is delighted with the new relationship: "Since we've worked with G4S, the training is getting better and better," he observes. "They're proactive, want to help, and the end product is as realistic as we could hope for. We have a terrific relationship with G4S that is hugely beneficial to the army."

The success of the training contract is now being used within the armed forces as an example of how successful the outsourcing of resource-intensive tasks can be. As a result, G4S Gurkha Services has already won a contract to provide similar training to the Royal Navy.

However, G4S Gurkha Services is involved in more than training. Many of the UK's more important guarding duties are undertaken by G4S Gurkha Services.

Recent deployments have included providing security during the recent climate change protest at Heathrow Airport and various power stations. Teams of Gurkha Services staff were deployed to protect sensitive infrastructure sites, sometimes living at the austere locations of the power stations themselves.

"What we are providing is a top-end security service the like of which simply did not exist before the formation of the business," observes John Whitwam. "At

short notice, we can guarantee high grade security officers with unprecedented levels of military experience and reliability. The response to this has been fantastic and revenue has increased by 100 per cent year-on-year since the business was established."

It is not just in the UK that G4S has a Gurkha presence. In Hong Kong G4S has had a Gurkha unit since 1993, which covers high profile sporting events, such as the Hong Kong Rugby 7s tournament, and provides close protection services for visiting dignitaries and VIPs. Recent clients have included visiting sport teams such as Real Madrid football club and the US Olympic basketball squad.

The unit is also training its officers for maritime deployments onboard commercial vessels world-wide.

"We have very close links to the Nepalese community in Hong Kong," says Ken May, G4S regional managing director for Greater China, "and this means that we have an extremely strong and reliable recruitment base for G4S Gurkha Services. All our security officers are either ex-army Gurkhas or the sons of Gurkhas who have been brought up within a Gurkha environment and are trained by senior ex-army officers to meet our high standards."

The Gurkha presence in Hong Kong, combined with the newly formed British unit, means that G4S is now the world's largest private-sector employer of former British Gurkha Regiment soldiers and officers.

It seems certain that these formidable former soldiers will be a feature of the security industry for some time to come. ■

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