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**THE OBSERVER CORPS
ORGANISATION**

A Handbook for Police Officers
(1st Edition)

Home Office
(Air Raid Precautions Department)

September, 1936

THE OBSERVER CORPS ORGANISATION

The Observer Corps is one of the main elements in the Air Ministry's arrangements for collecting information of the movement of hostile aircraft over this country in time of war.

Apart from the officers in technical control at the head of the organisation, the personnel consists of special constables.

The expansion of the Corps from its present extent in the south-east of England is being undertaken progressively.

Observer Groups, Centres and Posts

The Corps is organised in a series of Groups. Each Group consists of a number of Posts, connected by telephone to one Group Centre. The Posts report to the Centre, and the Centre passes on the information to the R.A.F. The area covered by one Group may be as much as two or three counties.

When manned for operation a Centre requires 8-12 men and a Post two men, but to provide the reliefs needed to maintain constant manning a Centre should have a total strength up to 60 men and a Post a strength of 12 to 16 men. The men attached to each Centre or Post should all live in the immediate neighbourhood.

The officer in charge of the Centre is known as the Controller (he is a special constable), and each Post has its Head Special Constable.

Some kind of shelter will be provided at every Post as soon as possible after the observers have been called out to duty.

Observer Personnel

The personnel of the Centres and Posts consists of special constables enrolled locally by the Chief Officer of Police of the district concerned. The terms of service are as follows:—

(i) The Observer Corps consists of volunteers, enrolled as special constables, who undertake to carry out observation work in the air defence of Great Britain as part of their constabulary duties.

(ii) Enrolment may be for observation work only, and without acceptance of the general responsibilities of the Special Constabulary.

(iii) On ceasing to be special constables, members cease to belong to the Observer Corps; but members who so desire may, at the discretion of the Chief Constable, be retained as special constables for observation work only after the normal retiring age of the Special Constabulary to which they belong.

(iv) The duties are local, and members incur no obligation to carry out observation duties beyond the district of the local Special Constabulary.

(v) Members undertake not to resign from the Corps after they have been called out for observation duty in connection with a war emergency until either they are released from duty or a week has elapsed after an outbreak of war.

(vi) Members will act under the direction of the Chief Constable, and such Special Constabulary officers as he may appoint, as regards attendance for duty at posts and centres and all matters of administration, but for matters of technical training

and in operations they will act under the Observer Group Assistants and higher officers of the Observer Corps, and the authorities responsible for air defence.

(vii) Service in the Observer Corps will rank as approved special constabulary service, and duties performed in connection with the training or work of the Corps will rank as police duties for the purposes of the award of the Special Constabulary Long Service Medal.

It will be seen that enrolment may be for observation work only, and without acceptance of the general responsibilities of the Special Constabulary. This does not however in the least affect the position that observer special constables come under the Chief Officer of Police for purposes of administration and discipline in exactly the same way as other special constables.

Observer personnel will be supplied by the Air Ministry with a badge and a brassard, and with certain weatherproof clothing. Otherwise the Observer Corps has no special uniform.

Commandant of Observer Corps and his staff

There is a Commandant of the Observer Corps, with Area Commandants and Deputy Commandants. There is also in each Group an Observer Group Assistant who is responsible for the Posts (but not the Centre) in his Group. All these officers are appointed by the Air Ministry. They are responsible for choosing the sites for Posts and Centres, and for all technical matters, and for the training of the observer personnel. They

are available to advise Chief Officers of Police, but their existence does not detract from the responsibility of the latter for control over the special constabulary personnel.

Calling out Observers in an Emergency

The Observer Corps would have to be called out for duty *immediately* there was a threat of air attack on this country, whether or not war had formally been declared.

The order for calling out would be given by the appropriate R.A.F. Command, by telegram to Chief Officers of Police. It would then be essential to get the necessary personnel together with the utmost possible speed, and the Police should render all possible assistance to this end, by warning the Controller of the Centre, and the Head Special Constable of each Post, and by helping each to summon his men. A sufficient number of men to start every centre and post should be available, if necessary, within two hours from the receipt of the calling out telegram.

The code word for the active operation of the Observer Corps is READINESS. For the meaning of this stage, and other stages after the Corps had been called out, see the next heading below.

As soon as possible after READINESS has been first ordered in an emergency, there should be a full muster of *all* the staffs of every centre and post, to draw up a rota of reliefs and ensure that everyone knows his duties. This will be primarily a matter for the Controller and Head Special Constables, with any help the Police can render.

“READINESS” : “ALERT” : “RELEASED” :

The functions of the Observer Corps when called out for duty will fall into three stages:—

Stage 1—“READINESS”.

This stage will represent the full manning of all Centres and Posts, the men at the Posts being actually on the look-out, working in two or four hour reliefs.

Stage 2—“ALERT”.

In this stage the crew of two men should be at each Post, but they may be resting in the shelter or elsewhere, provided they remain within earshot of the telephone bell. The Observer Instrument should be erected and covered.

At the Group Centre, half the crew could be released, subject to immediate recall at any time.

All communications remain switched through. The conditions under the ALERT must be such that the Group can be at READINESS within *five minutes* of the order to that effect.

Stage 3—“RELEASED”.

In this stage all men can be released from duty, provided that arrangements are made to reach “Readiness” within two hours of the Police receiving an order to that effect.

The Observer Instrument at the Post should be dismantled and stored nearby.

The Centre table should be placed and connected up, but communications will not remain switched through to the Posts.

**Addresses and Telephone Numbers which every
Police Officer should note**

Every Police Officer who is in an area covered by the Observer Corps should note, for instant use if required, and keep up to date, the address and telephone number of the Centre of the Observer Group with which he is concerned, and either the name and address of the Controller of the Centre (if the Police Officer is on duty in that town), or the name and address of the Head Special Constable of any Post in his area of duty.

Space for these particulars is provided on the following pages.

Observer Group No.

(1) Address of Centre
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.....

Special Telephone No. in War

(2) *Either* Controller of Centre

Or Head Special Constable of the Post at—

.....

Name:

Private Address:

.....

(3) Head Special Constable of the Post at—

.....

Name:

Private Address:

.....

Observer Group No.

(1) *Address of Centre*

.....

Special Telephone No. in War

(2) *Either* Controller of Centre

Or Head Special Constable of the Post at—

.....

Name:

Private Address:

.....

(3) Head Special Constable of the Post at—

.....

Name:

Private Address:

.....

Observer Group No.

(1) Address of Centre

.....
.....

Special Telephone No. in War

(2) *Either* Controller of Centre

Or Head Special Constable of the Post at—

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Name:

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