



***RICHARD
CANNON***

***HISTORICAL
RECORD
OF THE THIRD,
OR THE KING'S
OWN REGIMENT
OF LIGHT
DRAGOONS***

Richard Cannon

Historical Record of the Third, Or the King's Own Regiment of Light Dragoons

**Containing an Account of the Formation of the
Regiment in 1685, and of Its Subsequent Services to
1846**

EAN 8596547358121

DigiCat, 2022

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PREFACE.

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The character and credit of the British Army must chiefly depend upon the zeal and ardour by which all who enter into its service are animated, and consequently it is of the highest importance that any measure calculated to excite the spirit of emulation, by which alone great and gallant actions are achieved, should be adopted.

Nothing can more fully tend to the accomplishment of this desirable object than a full display of the noble deeds with which the Military History of our country abounds. To hold forth these bright examples to the imitation of the youthful soldier, and thus to incite him to emulate the meritorious conduct of those who have preceded him in their honourable career, are among the motives that have given rise to the present publication.

The operations of the British Troops are, indeed, announced in the "London Gazette," from whence they are transferred into the public prints: the achievements of our armies are thus made known at the time of their occurrence, and receive the tribute of praise and admiration to which they are entitled. On extraordinary occasions, the Houses of Parliament have been in the habit of conferring on the Commanders, and the Officers and Troops acting under their orders, expressions of approbation and of thanks for their skill and bravery; and these testimonials, confirmed by the high honour of their Sovereign's approbation, constitute the reward which the soldier most highly prizes.

It has not, however, until late years, been the practice (which appears to have long prevailed in some of the Continental armies) for British Regiments to keep regular records of their services and achievements. Hence some difficulty has been experienced in obtaining, particularly from the old Regiments, an authentic account of their origin and subsequent services.

This defect will now be remedied, in consequence of His Majesty having been pleased to command that every Regiment shall in future keep a full and ample record of its services at home and abroad.

From the materials thus collected, the country will henceforth derive information as to the difficulties and privations which chequer the career of those who embrace the military profession. In Great Britain, where so large a number of persons are devoted to the active concerns of agriculture, manufactures, and commerce, and where these pursuits have, for so long a period, been undisturbed by the *presence of war*, which few other countries have escaped, comparatively little is known of the vicissitudes of active service, and of the casualties of climate, to which, even during peace, the British Troops are exposed in every part of the globe, with little or no interval of repose.

In their tranquil enjoyment of the blessings which the country derives from the industry and the enterprise of the agriculturist and the trader, its happy inhabitants may be supposed not often to reflect on the perilous duties of the soldier and the sailor,—on their sufferings,—and on the sacrifice of valuable life, by which so many national benefits are obtained and preserved.

The conduct of the British Troops, their valour, and endurance, have shone conspicuously under great and trying difficulties; and their character has been established in Continental warfare by the irresistible spirit with which they have effected debarkations in spite of the most formidable opposition, and by the gallantry and steadiness with which they have maintained their advantages against superior numbers.

In the official Reports made by the respective Commanders, ample justice has generally been done to the gallant exertions of the Corps employed; but the details of their services, and of acts of individual bravery, can only be fully given in the Annals of the various Regiments.

These Records are now preparing for publication, under His Majesty's special authority, by Mr. RICHARD CANNON, Principal Clerk of the Adjutant-General's Office; and while the perusal of them cannot fail to be useful and interesting to military men of every rank, it is considered that they will also afford entertainment and information to the general reader, particularly to those who may have served in the Army, or who have relatives in the Service.

There exists in the breasts of most of those who have served, or are serving, in the Army, an *Esprit de Corps*—an attachment to everything belonging to their Regiment; to such persons a narrative of the services of their own Corps cannot fail to prove interesting. Authentic accounts of the actions of the great, the valiant, the loyal, have always been of paramount interest with a brave and civilized people. Great Britain has produced a race of heroes who, in moments of danger and terror, have stood "firm as the rocks

of their native shore;" and when half the World has been arrayed against them, they have fought the battles of their Country with unshaken fortitude. It is presumed that a record of achievements in war,—victories so complete and surprising, gained by our countrymen, our brothers, our fellow-citizens in arms,—a record which revives the memory of the brave, and brings their gallant deeds before us, will certainly prove acceptable to the public.

Biographical memoirs of the Colonels and other distinguished Officers will be introduced in the Records of their respective Regiments, and the Honorary Distinctions which have, from time to time, been conferred upon each Regiment, as testifying the value and importance of its services, will be faithfully set forth.

As a convenient mode of Publication, the Record of each Regiment will be printed in a distinct number, so that when the whole shall be completed, the Parts may be bound up in numerical succession.

INTRODUCTION.

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The ancient Armies of England were composed of Horse and Foot; but the feudal troops established by William the Conqueror in 1086, consisted almost entirely of Horse. Under the feudal system, every holder of land amounting to what was termed a "knight's fee," was required to provide a charger, a coat of mail, a helmet, a shield, and a lance, and to serve the Crown a period of forty days in each year at his own expense; and the great landholders had to provide armed men in proportion to the extent of their estates; consequently the ranks of the feudal Cavalry were completed with men of property, and the vassals and tenants of the great barons, who led their dependents to the field in person.

In the succeeding reigns the Cavalry of the Army was composed of Knights (or men at arms) and Hobiliars (or horsemen of inferior degree); and the Infantry of spears and battle-axe men, cross-bowmen, and archers. The Knights wore armour on every part of the body, and their weapons were a lance, a sword, and a small dagger. The Hobiliars were accoutred and armed for the light and less important services of war, and were not considered qualified for a charge in line. Mounted Archers[\[1\]](#) were also introduced, and the English nation eventually became preeminent in the use of the bow.

About the time of Queen Mary the appellation of "*Men at Arms*" was changed to that of "*Spears and Launces*." The

introduction of fire-arms ultimately occasioned the lance to fall into disuse, and the title of the Horsemen of the first degree was changed to "*Cuirassiers*." The Cuirassiers were armed *cap-à-pié*, and their weapons were a sword with a straight narrow blade and sharp point, and a pair of large pistols, called petronels; and the Hobiliars carried carbines. The Infantry carried pikes, matchlocks, and swords. The introduction of fire-arms occasioned the formation of Regiments armed and equipped as infantry, but mounted on small horses for the sake of expedition of movement, and these were styled "*Dragoons*;" a small portion of the military force of the kingdom, however, consisted of this description of troops.

The formation of the present Army commenced after the Restoration in 1660, with the establishment of regular corps of Horse and Foot; the Horsemen were cuirassiers, but only wore armour on the head and body; and the Foot were pikemen and musketeers. The arms which each description of force carried, are described in the following extract from the "Regulations of King Charles II.," dated 5th May, 1663:—

"Each Horseman to have for his defensive armes, back, breast, and pot; and for his offensive armes, a sword, and a case of pistolls, the barrells whereof are not to be under fourteen inches in length; and each Trooper of Our Guards to have a carbine besides the aforesaid armes. And the Foote to have each soldier a sword, and each pikeman a pike of 16 foote long and not under.; and each musqueteer a musquet with a collar of bandaliers, the barrell of which musquet to be about four foote long and to containe a bullet, fourteen of which shall weigh a pound weight^[2]."

The ranks of the Troops of Horse were at this period composed of men of some property—generally the sons of substantial yeomen: the young men received as recruits provided their own horses, and they were placed on a rate of pay sufficient to give them a respectable station in society.

On the breaking out of the war with Holland in the spring of 1672, a Regiment of Dragoons was raised^[3]; the Dragoons were placed on a lower rate of pay than the Horse, and the Regiment was armed similar to the Infantry, excepting that a limited number of the men carried halberds instead of pikes, and the others muskets and bayonets; and a few men in each troop had pistols; as appears by a warrant dated the 2nd of April, 1672, of which the following is an extract:—

"CHARLES R.

"Our will and pleasure is, that a Regiment of Dragoones which we have established and ordered to be raised, in twelve Troopes of fourscore in each beside officers, who are to be under the command of Our most deare and most intirely beloved Cousin Prince Rupert, shall be armed out of Our stoares remaining within Our office of the Ordinance, as followeth; that is to say, three corporalls, two serjeants, the gentlemen at armes, and twelve soldiers of each of the said twelve Troopes, are to have and carry each of them one halbard, and one case of pistolls with holsters; and the rest of the soldiers of the several Troopes aforesaid, are to have and to carry each of them one matchlocke musquet,

with a collar of bandaliers, and also to have and to carry one bayonet[4], or great knife. That each lieutenant have and carry one partizan; and that two drums be delivered out for each Troope of the said Regiment[5]."

Several regiments of Horse and Dragoons were raised in the first year of the reign of King James II.; and the horsemen carried a short carbine[6] in addition to the sword and pair of pistols: and in a Regulation dated the 21st of February, 1687, the arms of the Dragoons at that period were commanded to be as follows:—

"The Dragoons to have snaphanse musquets, strapt, with bright barrels of three foote eight inches long, cartouch-boxes, bayonetts, granado pouches, buckets, and hammer-hatchetts."

After several years' experience, little advantage was found to accrue from having Cavalry Regiments formed almost exclusively for engaging the enemy on foot; and, the Horse having laid aside their armour, the arms and equipment of Horse and Dragoons were so nearly assimilated, that there remained little distinction besides the name and rate of pay. The introduction of improvements into the mounting, arming, and equipment of Dragoons rendered them competent to the performance of every description of service required of Cavalry; and, while the long musket and bayonet were retained, to enable them to act as Infantry, if necessary, they were found to be equally efficient, and of equal value to the nation, as Cavalry, with the Regiments of Horse.

In the several augmentations made to the regular Army after the early part of the reign of Queen Anne, no new Regiments of Horse were raised for permanent service; and in 1746 King George II. reduced three of the old Regiments of Horse to the quality and pay of Dragoons; at the same time, His Majesty gave them the title of First, Second, and Third Regiments of *Dragoon Guards*: and in 1788 the same alteration was made in the remaining four Regiments of Horse, which then became the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Regiments of *Dragoon Guards*.

At present there are only three Regiments which are styled *Horse* in the British Army, namely, the two Regiments of Life Guards, and the Royal Regiment of Horse Guards, to whom cuirasses have recently been restored. The other Cavalry Regiments consist of Dragoon Guards, Heavy and Light Dragoons, Hussars, and Lancers; and although the long musket and bayonet have been laid aside by the whole of the Cavalry, and the Regiments are armed and equipped on the principle of the old Horse (excepting the cuirass), they continue to be styled Dragoons.

The old Regiments of Horse formed a highly respectable and efficient portion of the Army, and it is found, on perusing the histories of the various campaigns in which they have been engaged, that they have, on all occasions, maintained a high character for steadiness and discipline as well as for bravery in action. They were formerly mounted on horses of superior weight and physical power, and few troops could withstand a well-directed charge of the celebrated British Horse. The records of these corps embrace a period of 150 years—a period eventful in history,

and abounding in instances of heroism displayed by the British troops when danger has threatened the nation,—a period in which these Regiments have numbered in their ranks men of loyalty, valour, and good conduct, worthy of imitation.

Since the Regiments of Horse were formed into Dragoon Guards, additional improvements have been introduced into the constitution of the several corps; and the superior description of horses now bred in the United Kingdom, enables the commanding officers to remount their regiments with such excellent horses, that, whilst sufficient weight has been retained for a powerful charge in line, a lightness has been acquired, which renders them available for every description of service incident to modern warfare.

The orderly conduct of these Regiments in quarters has gained the confidence and esteem of the respectable inhabitants of the various parts of the United Kingdom in which they have been stationed; their promptitude and alacrity in attending to the requisitions of the magistrates in periods of excitement, and the temper, patience, and forbearance which they have evinced when subjected to great provocation, insult, and violence from the misguided populace, prove the value of these troops to the Crown, and to the Government of the country, and justify the reliance which is reposed on them.

Footnote

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[1] In the 14th year of the reign of Edward IV. a small force was established in Ireland by Parliament, consisting of 120 Archers on horseback, 40 Horsemen, and 40 Pages.

[2] Military Papers, State Paper Office.

[3] This Regiment was disbanded after the Peace of 1674.

[4] This appears to be the first introduction of *bayonets* into the English Army.

[5] State Paper Office.

[6] The first issue of carbines to the regular Horse appears to have taken place in 1684; the Life Guards, however, carried carbines from their formation in 1660.—*Vide* the 'Historical Record of the Life Guards.'

ON THE INSTITUTION OF LIGHT CAVALRY IN THE BRITISH ARMY.

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The records of the military events of the remote ages speak of heavy-armed horsemen being accompanied by others mounted and equipped for light services. The Barons and Knights, who rode the powerful horses celebrated by historians, and took the field completely cased in steel, had a few light-armed attendants; the feudal horsemen were variously armed; and the practice of employing Light, as well as Heavy Cavalry, was adopted, to a limited extent, by several commanders of antiquity. Armour, proof against arrow, lance, and sword, and men and horses of colossal appearance, in whom the greatest amount of weight and physical power, consistent with a moderate share of activity, could be combined, were however held in the highest estimation; but eventually the great advantage of having a portion of Cavalry in which lightness, activity, and celerity of movement, might form the principal characteristics, was discovered. The introduction of fire-arms occasioned armour to be gradually laid aside, or limited to a few heavy horsemen; superiority of weight was no longer thought so necessary; and in the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries the use of Light Cavalry became more general than formerly.

During the seventy years' war between Spain and the United Provinces of the Netherlands, Prince Maurice of Nassau (afterwards Prince of Orange) selected a few English and Dutch heavy-armed Lancers, and constituted them *Carabineers*, for skirmishing, and other services of a similar character. The Emperor of Germany formed regiments of Hungarian *Hussars*, who were light men on small horses. The Carabineers were of an intermediate class, being much heavier than the Hussars, and lighter than the English Lancers and Cuirassiers, who rode powerful horses, and wore armour on the head, body, and limbs. The French monarchs adopted the practice of having a few Carabineers in each troop of Horse; and, in 1690, Louis XIV. added a troop of Carabineers to each Regiment of Cavalry. During the campaign of 1691, these troops formed a Carabineer brigade; but their motley appearance, and the defects of the plan, occasioned them to be constituted a regiment of Carabineers, and clothed in blue. In 1693 the French King added a regiment of Hussars to the Cavalry of his army.^[7]

In England the same principle was partially carried out; the heavy horse laid aside their armour, excepting cuirasses; they were mounted on horses of less weight than formerly, and they were supplied with carbines by King Charles II. In 1685, King James II. raised several independent troops of *Light Horse*, and one of them (Sir Thomas Burton's) was retained in his service until the Revolution in 1688, when it was disbanded. In 1691-2 King William III. constituted the Seventh Regiment of Horse, now Sixth