

History and Tradition

The Royal Dragoon Guards formed on 1st August 1992 as a result of the amalgamation of the 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards and the 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards. As both these were in their turn the results of earlier amalgamations in the 1920s.

The Royal Dragoon Guards now carries with it the traditions and history of four of the finest regiments in the British Cavalry: the 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards, the 5th Dragoon Guards, the 7th Dragoon Guards and the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons. All four were raised between 1685 and 1689, during the protracted contest between James II and William of Orange for the English throne.

The Early Years - formation: 1685 - 1688

4th and 5th Dragoon Guards were formed in 1685 from Troops of Horse raised by James to defend London from William's expected invasion. These regiments, together with the rest of James's army, refused to support him and he fled to France, abandoning the throne to William of Orange.

The next year however, still claiming the throne, James landed in Ireland. Only Carrickfergus, Londonderry and Enniskillen held out against him. The town of Enniskillen raised three regiments from Protestants one of which was Conyngham's Dragoons, which became the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons.

In 1690 King William himself landed at Carrickfergus with a Protestant army, which included both the 4th and the 5th Dragoon Guards. On the 1st July that year all three regiments earned their first battle honour, fighting side by side at the Battle of the Boyne. James was defeated and returned to France.

Back in England in 1688 Lord Devonshire raised six Troops of Horse to mark his support for the new Protestant King. Devonshire's Horse, as they were known, became the 7th (Princess Royal's) Dragoon Guards.

The Wars of succession (1701 – 1748) to the Seven Years War (1754 – 1763)

The 7th (Princess Royal's) Dragoon Guards, together with the 5th Dragoon Guards, embarked for Holland and The Duke of Marlborough's famous campaigns, both regiments earning honours side by side at Blenheim, Malplaquet, Ramillies and Oudenarde, as well as the celebrated cavalry action at Elixem in 1705, where the 5th Dragoon Guards captured four standards from the Bavarian Horse Grenadiers.

In 1720 King George I conferred the colonelcy of 7th Dragoon Guards on Colonel John Ligonier. during his twenty nine year tenure the regiment was to reach a peak of discipline and training. It was at this time they acquired the nickname "The Black Horse" and, together with the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons, took part in the 1742 campaign in the War of the Austrian Succession, gaining further honours; Dettingen and Fontenoy.

At Dettingen in 1743, Cornet Richardson of the 7th received thirty seven wounds whilst defending the regimental Standard. This Standard, the oldest surviving in the Army, can still be seen today in the Regimental Museum.

Little more than ten years later the 6th and 7th again found themselves marching side by side, this time through Paderborn to the battle of Warburg, where both regiments took part in

the famous cavalry charge which won the day over the French for the allied forces under the Marquis of Granby. During this period the two senior regiments, the 4th and the 5th, were languishing in Ireland, clocking up a total of some one hundred and eighty years joint service in that country. However their moment was shortly to come. Both played a major role in Wellington's Peninsula campaign and gained honours, including Salamanca, where the 5th Dragoon Guards captured the Staff of the Drum Major of the French 66th Infantry Regiment.

This Staff is still carried today on parades by the RQMS(T). Colonel Sir William Ponsonby, who commanded the regiment at Salamanca, was later killed whilst leading the Union Brigade Charge at Waterloo. The Inniskilling's, who took part in this charge, were so praised by the Duke of Wellington that a statue of an Inniskilling Dragoon was erected on the Wellington Memorial in Hyde Park.

The Crimean War (1854 - 1856)

In 1854 the 4th, the 5th and the 6th, who last fought together at the Boyne, rode together again in the charge of the Heavy Brigade at Balaklava. In this action, eight hundred men, commanded by Major General J Yorke-Scarlett, himself a past Commanding Officer of the 5th Dragoon Guards, routed nearly three thousand five hundred of the Tzar's finest cavalry, with minimal loss to themselves, and so demoralised the Russian horsemen that they did not dare follow up the subsequent disaster to the Light Brigade later the same day.

After the Crimean War came several years service at home and in India for all our parent regiments. The peace time routine was broken briefly for the 4th and the 7th in 1882, when they took part in the short, but spectacularly successful, campaign to defeat the forces of Arabi Pasha in Egypt. The campaign culminated in the battle of Tel-el-Kebir, when an Egyptian force of thirty eight thousand men and sixty guns was defeated with the loss of only fifty seven men of all ranks killed; the 4th and 7th Dragoon Guards escaping without a single casualty.

The Boer War (1899-1902)

Such one-sided success was not to be repeated however during the Boer War of. The 5th Dragoon Guards formed part of the forces besieged at Ladysmith, whilst the 6th Inniskilling's and the 7th "Black Horse" earned their spurs in innumerable skirmishes and many long patrols over the veld.

Two officers serving with the Inniskilling's at that time were later to achieve worldwide fame. The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Baden-Powell was to put his South African experience to good use as the founder of the Boy Scout Movement, while Captain L E G Oates became a legend of self sacrifice when, as a member of Scott's ill-fated Antarctic Expedition of 1912, he chose to sacrifice himself rather than impede the progress of his comrades.

The Great War (1914 – 1919)

Both the 4th and the 5th Dragoon Guards saw action from the outset of the First World War. Indeed history allows C Squadron, the 4th Dragoon Guards the honour of the first action by the British Army in the War, with Corporal Thomas firing the first shot and Captain Hornby the first officer to draw blood with his sword. Only a few days later the Commanding Officer of the 5th Dragoon Guards, Lieutenant Colonel G K Ansell, was killed in action at Nery.

By October 1914 the Inniskillings (affectionately known as "The Skins") and the 7th had arrived in France from India. All four Regiments spent the greater part of the next four years acting in the dismounted role, but the last weeks of the War found both the 5th Dragoon Guards and the 7th Dragoon Guards in action again on horseback; the 5th capturing or

killing over seven hundred German troops when they attacked a troop train at Harbonnieres, and the 7th claiming the last cavalry action of the War when they captured the town of Lessines on the 11th November 1918.

In 1922, the large reductions in the strength of the Army brought about widespread amalgamations of cavalry regiments. The 4th were combined with the 7th to form the 4/7th Dragoon Guards, while the 5th and 6th amalgamated to form, initially, the 5/6th Dragoons, but in 1927 this was changed to the 5th Inniskilling Dragoon Guards. 1938 brought about mechanisation for both regiments, with both initially equipped with the 4.5 ton two-man MK2 Light Tank.

The Second World War (1939 – 1945) and beyond

Only one year after mechanisation came mobilisation and the start of the Second World War. The two regiments were the first armoured units to be deployed to France in support of the British Expeditionary Force, fighting side-by-side in the desperate but gallant withdrawal to Dunkirk.

Both regiments spent the next four years training and re-equipping with heavier tanks in preparation for the Normandy landings, and in 1940 a cadre of men from both regiments was formed which was to be the nucleus of a newly raised cavalry regiment, the 22nd Dragoons (the sum of the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th). The 22nd Dragoons were disbanded after the War. On D-Day the 4/7th, as part of the Eighth Armoured Brigade, were the first tanks to land on Gold Beach in Normandy leading the advance on Caen; their tanks were also the first to cross the river Seine and they led the rescue column to Arnhem.

The Regiment still wear the same identification flash on the Service Dress that was first worn by the 4/7th in 1939 prior to their deployment to France. The Skins for their part were in almost continuous action from after Normandy to the end of the War, taking part in the successful action to capture S-Hertogenbosch and the breakout from the Rhine bridgehead.

After the War, the 4/7th were dispatched to Palestine to help in the peacekeeping operations there. The Skins completed tours in Korea and the Suez Canal and from the mid 1950s to 1992 both regiments served in the Middle East, Aden, England, Germany, Northern Ireland and Cyprus.