



The History of The Royal Regiment of Scotland

1800-1899
The 19th Century



The 19th Century saw all the Regiments serving in conflicts throughout the world, from the Napoleonic Wars to Crimea and India. Many of the traditions and honours of the Regiment come from this time.

Assaye 1803

Maj Gen The Hon Arthur Wellesley (later the Duke of Wellington) led a military campaign against the northern Mahrattas whose French trained army was continually raiding British territory in India. On 23rd September 1803 Wellesley and his army of 7,000 British and Indian troops encountered the main Mahratta army of over 40,000 men. The Mahratta army, with over 100 canon to Wellesley's 22, and with 20 to one superiority in cavalry, was strongly positioned by the village of Assaye. Wellesley attacked the Mahratta flank and after a bloody battle the Mahratta army was defeated. In later years the Duke of Wellington rated the Battle of Assaye as his greatest tactical accomplishment. The three British Regiments at Assaye, the 74th and 78th Highlanders and the 19th Light Dragoons, were presented with Honorary 3rd Colours by the East India Company. The original Colour of the 74th is held in Glasgow Cathedral and a replica of the 78th Colour, made in 1889, is in the Chapel at Fort George. Assaye Day is still celebrated each year and the Assaye Colour is carried on parade in 2 SCOTS.

Waterloo 1815

Our Regiments played a prominent role in the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. The 1st, 42nd, 71st, 73rd, 79th, 91st and 92nd all fought with great distinction but paid a heavy price; casualties were high with more than half of our troops killed or wounded. Three of our Regiments (42nd, 79th and 92nd) were specifically mentioned by the Duke of Wellington in his Waterloo Dispatch.

Piper Kenneth Mackay

The 79th Highlanders were first involved in the battle during the early afternoon of the 18th June. Moving forward through a hedge they engaged the French with a heavy volley of fire and followed up with a bayonet charge. The French retreated down a slope pursued by the British cavalry. French cavalry then launched a determined counter attack and the 79th had to form a 'Defensive Square'. As the French pushed forward in their attack Piper Kenneth Mackay, showing no fear, moved out of the protected square and began playing the traditional rallying tune 'Cagadh no Sith' (War or Peace - The True Gathering of the Clans). Piper Mackay was presented with a set of silver mounted pipes by the King for his individual bravery in the battle.



Piper Kenneth MacKay rallying troops of the 79th at Waterloo



The Troopship Birkenhead

Birkenhead 1852

On 26th February 1852, while transporting troops to South Africa, the troop ship Birkenhead struck rocks off Cape Town. The senior officer on board was Lieutenant Colonel Seton of the 74th and there were drafts of troops from the 73rd, 74th and 91st. Lieutenant Colonel Seton took charge of all military personnel and stressed the necessity of maintaining order and discipline to his officers. There were not enough serviceable lifeboats on board for all the passengers. Three lifeboats were launched, onto which all the women and children were placed and rowed away for safety. Only then did the ship's Captain order that those men who could swim should save themselves by swimming to the boats; Lieutenant Colonel Seton, however, recognising that rushing the lifeboats would risk swamping them and endangering the women and children, ordered the men to stand fast. The soldiers did not move, even as the ship broke up barely twenty minutes after striking the rock. Some of the soldiers managed to swim the 2 miles to shore over the next twelve hours; however, most either drowned or were taken by sharks. Captain Edward Wright of the 91st told a subsequent enquiry:

'The order and regularity that prevailed on board, from the moment the ship struck till she totally disappeared, far exceeded anything that I had thought could be affected by the best discipline; and it is the more to be wondered at seeing that most of the soldiers were but a short time in the service. Everyone did as he was directed and there was not a murmur or cry amongst them until the ship made her final plunge'—all received their orders and carried them out as if they were embarking instead of going to the bottom - I never saw any embarkation conducted with so little noise or confusion.'

Frederick William IV of Prussia was so moved by Captain Wright's words that he insisted they be read to all his regiments, while Queen Victoria ordered the erection of an official Birkenhead monument at the Chelsea Royal Hospital. This disaster started the protocol of 'women and children first', which became a standard evacuation procedure in maritime disasters.



The Thin Red Line - The 93rd under command of Colonel Colin Campbell at Balaklava

Crimea 1854

Our Regiments were equally to the fore in the Crimea. The 1st, 21st, 42nd, 74th, 79th, 92nd and 93rd gained the highest honours during the campaign. Inkerman, Alma, Sevastopol and Balaklava 1 (the Thin Red Line) are among our Battle Honours. Balaklava Day is still remembered and celebrated as a Regimental Day by 5 SCOTS on 25th October and Inkerman is remembered each year on 5th November in 2 SCOTS.

Thomas Beach VC

The 1st VC was won by a soldier from the Regiment. On 5th November 1854 at the Battle of Inkerman, Private Thomas Beach of the 92nd whilst on sentry duty, observed several Russians robbing wounded British soldiers. He attacked the Russians single-handed; he killed two and stayed to protect his wounded comrades until help arrived.

Indian Mutiny 1857

Many of our Regiments served with distinction during the Indian Mutiny. The 42nd, 71st, 72nd, 73rd, 74th, 75th, 78th, 79th and 93rd all served in the bitter battles of that conflict. There were numerous acts of individual and collective bravery. In all, 27 soldiers from our Regiments won VCs during the campaign. The 78th won six VCs on the 25th September 1857, the 93rd won six VCs on the 16th November 1857 and similarly the 42nd won four VCs at Fort Ruhya on 15th April the following year.

William McBean VC

The previous month, on 11th March 1858, William McBean of the 93rd killed 11 of the enemy with his own hand in the main breach of the Begum Bagh at Lucknow and was also awarded the VC. During his army career William McBean held every rank from Private to Major General. As a young soldier he was continually barracked by the drill instructors for having a 'rolling gait'. He is said to have been asked by a friend to take the Corporal behind the canteen and give him a hiding. He replied 'Man, that would ne'er do. I intend to be in command of this regiment before I leave it. It would be an ill beginning to be brought before the Colonel for thrashing the drill Corporal'. He served in the Crimea from Christmas Day 1854 and was at the Siege and the Fall of Sevastopol, taking part in the assaults on the 18th of June and the 8th of September. He was actively involved in the Expedition to the Sea Of Azov and in the capture of Kertch and Yenicalé. When he was commended on the action that won him the VC he commented, 'It didna' tak me twenty minutes'.



William McBean VC - Private soldier to Major General

Lord Cardwell's Reforms 1881

Lord Cardwell, the Secretary of State for War, is chiefly remembered for his organizing of the infantry into two-battalion regiments and establishing geographical recruiting areas. The Cardwell Reforms saw our Regiments structured as nine regiments (**Royal Scots, Royal Scots Fusiliers, Kings Own Scottish Borderers, Black Watch, Highland Light Infantry, Seaforth Highlanders, Queens Own Cameron Highlanders, Gordon Highlanders and Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders**) each of two battalions; one battalion to serve abroad and the other at home, with the latter providing drafts of trained men for the overseas battalion.

Tel-el-Kebir 1882

No sooner had Lord Cardwell's reforms taken effect, when Scottish battalions deployed to Egypt under command of General Sir Garnet Wolseley to restore order after the Egyptian Army revolt against Turkish rule. The Highland Brigade was commanded by Major General Sir Archibald Alison, late of the **72nd Highlanders**, and was made up the **1st Camerons, 1st Black Watch, 2nd Highland Light Infantry and 1st Gordons**. In addition, **1st Seaforths** were also part of General Wolseley's Army. These Regiments all fought alongside each other and were awarded the Battle Honours Tel-el- Kebir and Egypt 1882.

William Edwards VC

Lieutenant Edwards of **2nd Highland Light Infantry** won the VC for his actions at Tel-el-Kebir when he stormed the enemy fortifications at the head of his men killing the artillery officer in command and capturing the guns before being knocked down himself.