

Customs & Traditions

*Oh! Colonel Coote Manningham, he was the man,
for he invented a capital plan,
he raised a Corps of Riflemen
to fight for England's Glory!*

*He dressed them all in jackets of green
and placed them where they couldn't be seen
and sent them in front, an invisible screen,
to fight for England's Glory!*

– Old Rifle Brigade Song

All Rifle Regiments obtain their differences in drill, dress and customs from those of regular infantry from the original Riflemen of the British Army, since 1966 embodied in the Royal Green Jackets. Their direct descent from the former and famous British Regiments is clear and contains titles of Regiments who first gained enduring fame in campaigns in North America against the French and in the Napoleonic Wars. The Regiment consisted of:

1ST BATTALION THE ROYAL GREEN JACKETS

derived from:

1741 – The 43rd Regiment

1755 – The 52nd Regiment

1782 – The 43rd (Monmouthshire) Regiment, and the 52nd (Oxfordshire) Regiment

1803 – The 43rd (Monmouthshire) Light Infantry, and 52nd (Oxfordshire) Light Infantry

1881 – The Oxfordshire Light Infantry

1908 – The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, 43rd and 52nd

1958 – 1st Green Jackets (43rd and 52nd)

2ND BATTALION THE ROYAL GREEN JACKETS

derived from:

1755 – The 60th (initially 62nd) Royal Americans

1824 – The 60th, The Duke of York's Own Rifle Brigade

1830 – The 60th, The King's Royal Rifle Brigade (often shortened to 60th Rifles)

1881 – The King's Royal Rifle Brigade

1958 – 2nd Green Jackets (The King's Royal Rifle Brigade)

3RD BATTALION THE ROYAL GREEN JACKETS

derived from:

1800 – The Experimental Corps of Riflemen

1802 – The 95th or Rifle Corps

1816 – The Rifle Brigade

1862 – The Prince Consort's Own Rifle Brigade

1920 – The Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own)

1958 – 3rd Green Jackets (The Rifle Brigade)

The expression “Corps” or “Brigade” indicated a Regiment of several, usually four, battalions as opposed to the normal one battalion Regiment.

The three regiments were grouped together on 7 November 1958 to form the Royal Green Jackets Brigade. On 1 January 1966, the Royal Green Jackets was formed as a Large Regiment by the amalgamation of 1st Green Jackets (The 43rd and 52nd); 2nd Green Jackets (The King’s Royal Rifle Brigade); and 3rd Green Jackets (The Rifle Brigade). The Regiment, together with the Light Infantry, formed the Light Division.

In July 1992, the 1st Battalion merged with 2nd and 3rd Regiments. Four milestones can be selected in the development of Rifle Regiments, the formation of:

- The 60th Royal Americans in 1755
- The 5th Battalion 60th in 1797
- The Experimental Corps of Riflemen in 1800; and
- The Light Brigade in 1803.

1755

The 60th was raised locally in North America in response to the defeat of General Braddock by the French and the Indians in the summer of 1755. Scarlet jackets, rigid linear formations, overburdened soldiers, ponderous movement and conventional European tactics had contributed to the disaster. Though at this time they were neither a Light Infantry nor a Rifle Regiment, the 60th had a profound influence on the later development of these units. Primarily under Lieutenant Colonel Bouquet, a Swiss, the Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, new ideas were developed. He dressed the men in buckskin and homespun dyed dark green or brown, with black horn buttons made locally. Light equipment, simple drills and open formations were used. He looked to the welfare of his men and discipline was firm but not harsh. Mobility, marksmanship, individual initiative, constant alertness and concealment were stressed, and proven successful in subsequent engagements.

1797

The first battalion to be armed with the rifle, to wear the green jacket, to carry no colours, to use the buglehorn to direct movement and to abandon the rigid style of marching was the famous 5th Battalion 60th. Its first Commanding Officer, de Rottenburg, prepared the “Regulations for the Exercises of Riflemen and Light Infantry”, which Sir John Moore later accepted as the basis for the training of the Light Brigade.

1800

Colonel Coote Manningham raised the Experimental Corps of Riflemen from the pick of fifteen regiments. They were armed throughout with the Baker rifle and were the elite of what was, in a few years, to prove to be the best infantry in Europe, the British. In 1803, Coote Manningham, “the father of thinking Rifleman”, gave his famous Military Lectures on the Duties of

Riflemen, drawing on de Rottenburg's Regulations. Not only did these lectures serve as the basis for the operations of the Light Brigade (later Division) in the Peninsular War but they were remarkable for containing much that remains up-to-date. Modern infantry tactics, combining dispersion; movement supported by accurate economical fire; personal camouflage and concealment; the effective use of ground; mobility; and above all the use of individual intelligence and initiative were all anticipated some 200 years ago. His instructions consistently emphasized humanity, rare for a time when oaths, blows and floggings were a custom. He also looked after the well being of his Riflemen's families at a time when the authorities did nothing in this regard.

1803

General Sir John Moore, considered to be perhaps the finest trainer of British infantry, formed and trained the Light Brigade, consisting of the 43rd, the 52nd and the 95th. His ideal was the thinking fighting man, in essence the infantryman of the future. A former Major with the 60th, Moore drew on this experience, the work of de Rottenburg and Coote Manningham and his own study of foreign light corps, in developing and training the Light Brigade.

He regarded soldiers as human beings, who could be trained to use their individual initiative, to be self-reliant and to improve themselves given the opportunity. Harsh and brutal punishment was abandoned. Discipline was firm and aimed at preventing rather than discouraging crime. Whenever possible orders were clear and explained to their recipients as opposed to a demand for blind obedience. Realistic training for war rather than ceremony was the practice.

Constant alertness and readiness for action were emphasized. Marksmanship was stressed and practised, with all movement covered by effective fire. Field drills were practised first in close order on the parade ground and then in extended order directed by bugle-horn and whistle. The men were trained to march freely and easily to obtain maximum speed with minimum fatigue.

The Light Brigade was trained to carry out tactical reconnaissance and to cover both the advance and retreat of an army (both heretofore traditional horse cavalry roles), responsibilities it carried out with outstanding success and enduring fame during the Peninsular War of 1808 – 1814, led by the colourful and famous "Black Bob" Craufurd, a former Lieutenant Colonel of the 5th Battalion 60th.

The 5th Battalion 60th had one or more of its ten companies attached to each of Wellington's seven regular (or heavy) infantry Brigades. A remarkable tribute to the effectiveness of these companies was given in a dispatch of the French Marshal Soult. To explain his disproportionately high loss of officers, he said it was caused by these companies. The men were "armed with a short rifle, selected for their marksmanship", they acted as scouts and picked off officers, "whenever a superior officer goes to the front, he is usually hit".

Wellington also ordered that these companies be formed on the left of the Brigade, perhaps the origin of a Rifle Regiment's place on the left when on parade with other units. This was, of course, not the companies' position in battle.

All of a Rifle Regiment's fundamental customs and traditions derive from their practical application to these roles; in the words of Colonel Coote Manningham "to do everything that is necessary and nothing that is not".

Rifle Regiments have been foremost in individual marksmanship since their inception; it was emphasized in training. Riflemen were classified as first, second or third class shots; first class shots were called marksmen, who were distinguished by a green cockade, and the best shooting Company was given place of honour on parade. Riflemen were expected to make every shot count. Equipped with the rifle, the Rifle Brigade and 5th Battalion 60th were the elite of an army whose musketry was superior to all others. The British Army was the only army in the Napoleonic Wars to consistently inflict more than half the casualties on the enemy with small arms fire.

The rifle, a Baker, was lighter and shorter than the standard infantry "Brown Bess" smooth-bore musket. The barrel was 30 inches long as compared to the 46 inch barrel of the musket. While the old smooth-bore could only hit a man at a range of 100 yards or less, the Baker rifle was capable of great accuracy up to 300 yards and, in the hands of an exceptional shot, 500 yards. It was equipped with a long sling which riflemen were trained to use to steady their aim. It was found that when the short triangular bayonet of the musket was fixed, riflemen were at a disadvantage when confronted by infantry armed with a musket and a bayonet, so they were given a 27½ inch long sword-bayonet fitted with a sword handle – hence the use of the term "sword"; the term "bayonet" is never used. Officers' swords were lighter than regular swords, with a bugle-horn decoration on the hilt in lieu of the Royal Cypher.

Colours are never carried. Their original purpose of being easily seen and identified to serve as a rallying point in time of crisis did not fit either the riflemen's need for concealment or their role, which involved operating in widely dispersed groups. Regular infantry display their battle honours on their Colours. Rifle Regiments ordinarily had their battle honours on their cap badges and latterly on their drums. However, drums originally had no place in a Rifle Regiment.

Traditionally an instrument of alarm and only considerably later used to beat marching step, drummers patrolled the street and "beat to quarter's soldiers who were scattered throughout the town or village where they bivouacked". This was not needed by units of the Light Division who were usually bivouacked on a wide front and whose battalions were seldom assembled as formed bodies. Trained to a constant readiness, word or mouth, the whistle, and occasionally the bugle-horn sufficed to bring them to full alert. Today, Retreat is sounded by rifle regiments, rather than beaten.

The bugle-horn, in Rifle parlance the "horn", occupies a place of honour because of its importance in the Light Division. Movement in extended order could not be controlled by voice, so it was directed by the officers' and

sergeants' whistles, worn on their cross-belts and by cow-horns carried by buglers with every company and platoon. Different calls were devised to meet those needs, many of which were later adopted by other units of the British Army. Calls ended on a short, clipped note, which was the executive for action as in a word of command. Bugle "calls" are not referred to as "calls" but as "horns".

Differences in drill all derive from the practical aims of ingraining alertness, eliminating unnecessary movements, minimizing fatigue and being ready for action; ways suited to the battlefield as opposed to ceremony. Exaggerated movements, long pauses between movements, stamping of feet, slapping of the rifle and crashing of rifle butts to the parade square have no place in the drill of the Rifle Regiments. Both men and weapons are too highly regarded to permit such abuses. Noise is avoided because it can give a position away to the enemy.

A relic of the pike-carrying days, the "slope-arms", with the rifle carried on the left shoulder with muzzle pointed upward at an angle so the weapon posed no danger to the comrade behind, has never been used by Rifle Regiments because it was an unnecessary drill movement and it made the man conspicuous.

The command "attention" is never used. Riflemen were left at the "stand easy" to avoid fatigue caused by standing at a rigid position. On the cautionary "look/stand to your front" they come to the "at ease" position and to "attention" on the order party, guard, platoon, company, battalion or Rifles as appropriate. This was done to instil into all Riflemen the need to be alert at all times. The Royal Green Jackets and The Royal Winnipeg Rifles return to the "at ease" positions after all drill movements to show their traditional regard for the man.

Swords were rarely fixed because the flash of their blades could give the bearers away and because it lessened their accuracy of the rifle. To this day, swords are not fixed on ceremonial occasions.

The need to move quickly in recce or rearguard actions, or to form a screen, required fast marching and occasional double marching. As compared to the regular infantry pace of 120 per minute, the Rifle pace is 140 per minute. On ceremonial parades march pasts are done in both quick and double time, the latter 180 paces to the minute.

Avoiding unnecessary commands and demonstrating alertness and quickness, in close order drill on the order "quick (or double) march" Riflemen come directly to the "trail", and step off with the rifle held balanced in the right hand and parallel to the ground, a position suited to movement in battle. Subsequently, on the order "halt", rifles are returned to the "order" without further command (see Note 1). On sentry duty the rifle was cradled close to the body on the left forearm, called the "carry" (sometimes called the "cradle"), a comfortable position where the rifle is ready for instant use. The "march at ease" position with the rifle slung over the right shoulder, muzzle down, a comfortable position which is less fatiguing, and which protected the barrel from the rain, was originated by the Green Jackets.

Note 1: modern weapons are too short to allow the old “at ease” to be adopted. The small arms are kept in the “shoulder” for “at ease” and is held across the body for “stand easy”. The “carry” is no longer used.

Camouflaged modern combat dress was anticipated by the wearing of buckskins in North America, the green jacket and black leather in Spain and, later, black buttons. These buttons were all of one size, whether worn in front of the tunic or on pockets; the reason was the practical one should an important button be lost it could be replaced by one that would fit, from a less essential place. Cloth rank badges and all leather equipment, boots, belts scabbards, *et cetera* are black. Up until WWI officers of the Rifle Brigade wore black Sam Browne belts (other regiments wore brown) with two shoulder straps so that from a distance they would appear to have the same equipment as their men and also denote that in peacetime they were always ready for action.

Officers, warrant officers and sergeants wore black leather cross belts over their left shoulder. Mounted on the front was a lion head with a chain attached to a whistle (The Royal Winnipeg Rifles have replaced the lion’s head with a buffalo head and changed the whistle holder to resemble a quiver of arrows), with the regimental badge centred between. The whistle holder was on the right; the whistle was drawn and held in the left hand while the right grasped the sword. Whistle lanyards are worn on the right shoulder for left hand use of the whistle.

Tradition is essential in a regiment to develop that pride of unit, morale and esprit de corps, which bring success in war. Our traditions are founded on substance, not to belittle those of others and must be known and understood by every member of the Regiment. This is particularly important, not just for recruits but for those who have joined after training or service elsewhere, where they have learned habits which must be discarded before they can claim the proud title of “Rifleman”.

False customs acquired through ignorance, decree or whim must be vigilantly guarded against.

The import of Bouquet, de Rottenburg, Coote Manningham, Moore, Craufurd and in particular the Rifle Brigade, with whom The Royal Winnipeg Rifles are privileged to be allied since 1923, should be known to all. This alliance was transferred to the Royal Green Jackets in 1966, and in 2007, all rifle and light infantry regiments in the British Army were amalgamated to form the elite The Rifles, which The Royal Winnipeg Rifles are proud to retain our links with a Regiment of such famous origins.

Remember, Voltigeurs are the French equivalent of rifle regiments.