

History of The Household Cavalry



The Life Guards is the senior Regiment of the British Army. Founded, between 1660 and 1661, as four Troops of Horse Guards (joined in 1676 by two further Troops of Horse Grenadiers) the Troops' soldiers were all private gentlemen, some of whom had served in General Monk's Life Guard, and largely officered by loyal courtiers who had provided King Charles II with a mounted bodyguard during his exile.

From 1661 to 1778, the Troops saw action in the Jacobite Wars, the Second Dutch War (when they served as sailors) and the War of the Austrian Succession. In 1778 the four Horse Guard Troops and Horse Grenadiers re-formed as the 1st Life Guards. Both Regiments fought with distinction in the Waterloo campaign.

For the Egyptian War of 1882, Life Guards formed a Composite Household Cavalry Regiment with the Royal Horse Guards, making Royal Horse Guards, making the famous moonlight charge at Kassain. In 1894, for the relief of Khartoum, both Regiments contributed soldiers to the Heavy Camel Regiment and were again formed as a Composite Household Cavalry Regiment for the 2nd Boer War in 1900.

In the First World War the two Regiments initially fought as a Composite Regiment, but with the expansion of the Army, were later to field two complete cavalry Regiments. In 1916, Life Guard reservists were formed into the Household Battalion, a unit which fought as infantry for the rest of the war until it was disbanded in early 1918. In late 1918, both Regiments gave up their horses and re-formed as the 1st & 2nd Guards Machine Gun Battalions, reverting to their former identities and roles shortly after the Armistice.

In 1922, the two Regiments were amalgamated to form The Life Guards (1st & 2nd), which in 1928 was simplified to The Life Guards.

During the Second World War, The Life Guards, with the Royal Horse Guards, were re-formed into the 1st Household Cavalry Regiment (1HCR) and 2nd Household Cavalry Regiment (2HCR). The former, largely made up of Life Guards, saw service in Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Persia, North Africa, Italy and, at the end of the war, the advance into Germany.

In 1945, 1 & 2 HCR were re-formed into The Life Guards and the Royal Horse Guards (The Blues) and equipped with armoured cars, each Regiment contributing one mounted squadron to the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment for ceremonial duties in London. Since the Second World War The Life Guards have seen service in Egypt, Aden, Oman, Malaya, Hong Kong, Cyprus, Germany, Northern Ireland (in armoured cars, Land Rovers and as infantry) and were deployed for the last time as The Life Guards in the Gulf War in 1990.

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The Blues and Royals (Royal Horse Guards & 1st Dragoons) is the second most senior Regiment of the British Army and was formed in 1969 with the amalgamation of the Royal Horse Guards (The Blues) and The Royal Dragoons (1st Dragoons).

The Royal Horse Guards (The Blues) trace their origins to Cromwell's New Model Army but, at the Restoration in 1660, were re-officered with royalists, re-named the Royal Regiment of Horse (later the Horse Guards – popularly known as The Blues). The Regiment saw service in Flanders, at the battle of the Boyne, in the War of the Austrian Succession and in the Seven Years War. During the Napoleonic Wars, The Blues fought with distinction in the Peninsula and at Waterloo. Especially favoured by King George III and kept at Windsor, in 1820 the Regiment was elevated to the status of Household Cavalry by King George IV, after which it shared the duties of escorting the Sovereign with the two Regiments of Life Guards.

In the late 19th century, as already mentioned, Blues fought alongside Life Guards in Egypt, the Sudan and South Africa, and, at the end of the First World War, the Regiment was briefly re-formed as the 3rd Guards Machine Gun Battalion.

In the Second World War, the officers and soldiers of The Blues formed the main part of the 2nd Household Cavalry Regiment (2HCR). Starting the War at Windsor, 2HCR was part of the Guards Armoured Division for the invasion of Europe. In the advance across northern Europe, 2HCR were in the vanguard, and armoured cars of 2HCR were the first Allied troops to enter Brussels. 2HCR was also in the lead in the race to relieve the US, British and Polish troops holding Nijmegen and Arnhem.

After the Second World War, having reformed once again, The Blues spent the years prior to amalgamation in Germany, Cyprus and Windsor.

The Royal Dragoons (1st Dragoons), initially known as The Tangier Horse, were raised by King Charles II to form part of the garrison at Tangier, which had been acquired on his marriage to Catherine of Braganza as part of her dowry. Known as The Royals, during the 18th century the Regiment saw service in most of the same wars as The Blues, including the Peninsula campaign and Waterloo, where the Regiment famously captured the Eagle of the French 105th Infantry Regiment. However, in the 19th century, unlike The Blues, The Royals saw service in the Crimea and in India.

In the First World War, during which it retained its horses, the Regiment fought at Ypres, Loos, Hohenzollern and against the Hindenburg Line. In the inter-war years The Royals were stationed in Egypt, India, Palestine and, during the Second World War, fought at El Alamein and in the invasion of Europe. Prior to amalgamation with The Blues in 1969, The Royals served in Egypt, Germany and the Trucial States (now the United Arab Emirates).

Following amalgamation, The Blues and Royals served in Windsor, Northern Ireland, Germany and Cyprus and, in 1982, provided the only armoured reconnaissance troops in the Falklands campaign.