

Birthplace of The Regiment

The Hon Secretary visited Governors Island in May 1995 and was given a guided tour by the US Coastguard who are the current incumbents of the Island. Sadly the Island is of little use and will shortly be handed over to the local authority, whose plans for it are unclear at this stage.

The Hon Secretary was assured that the 60th artefacts in the Chapel of St Cornelius the Centurion would be eventually transferred to either the Smithsonian Institute or to West Point.

The more knowledgable folks in New York are really well aware of our Regimental History and will certainly do their utmost to preserve them for posterity.



The Story of Governors Island

One of New York's most historic landmarks lies approximately a half mile off the tip of Manhattan in New York Bay. It is Governors Island, site of Fort Jay and since July 1946, station for Headquarters, First United States Army. Governors Island has been an American military post without interruption since 1794, however, its ties with the history of this country reach even deeper into the past.

The first white man to see the Island was probably the explorer Giovanni de Verrazano who reached the harbour in 1524. At that time the Island was thickly covered with oak, hickory and chestnut trees. Its Indian name, "Pagganck" and Dutch name, "Nooten Eylandt" or "Nuttan Island" referred to these groves of nut trees.

The story of the Island really begins with its purchase from the Indians of Manahatas on June 16, 1637. Then Wouter Van Twiller, the Director General of New Netherlands bought Pagganck from the Indians, Cakapeteyno and Pehiwas for what is believed to have been two axe heads, a string of beads and a few nails. Although Van Twiller may not have lived on Nutten, records show that he did keep 21 pairs of goats there. Not long after he became Governor, Van Twiller was charged with illegal trading and incompetence. Knowing that he would be replaced, he decided to take Nutten for himself. At a meeting of his Council attended by Cakapeteyno and Pehiwas, he arranged to receive Nutten as a grant. Later in 1638, Van Twiller was sent home and his purchase of Nutten was declared in violation of the West India Company's Charter. On July 1, 1652 the Director General and Council formally annulled the purchase and returned Nutten to public domain. From then on, it was set aside as an estate for the Dutch Governors and later, for their English successors. Van Twiller, thus, was probably the only private owner of the Island.

In 1664 the English captured New Amsterdam and renamed it New York. They also took Nutten which the Dutch had not fortified despite its strategic location. Nine years later, during the Third Anglo-Dutch War the Dutch regained their lost province, only to lose it again to England under the terms of the Treaty of Westminster, 1674.

In 1698 the Island was set aside by the Assembly as being "part of the Denizen of His Majestie's Fort at New York for the benefit and accommodation of His Majestie's Governors for the time being," and hence, it came to be called "The Governor's Island." The Island's name was changed officially from "Nuttan" to "The Governor's" by an Act of Legislature, March 29, 1784. Gradually "The" and the apostrophe in "Governor's" were dropped leaving the title as it is today - Governors Island.

From 1691 to 1702 the English Colonial Governors urged the fortification of New York Harbor. In spite of their efforts, only £1500 was raised for defenses at the Narrows, and in 1702 this was appropriated by Lord Cornbury for the construction of a mansion on Governors Island. Lord Cornbury's house was financed also by a series of unique taxes, including a levy of five shillings and sixpence on everyone who wore a pearl ring and two shillings and fivepence on every bachelor over the age of twenty-five. The house was put up on the high ground in the northeast section of the Island and was used by Lord Cornbury and following governors as the gubernatorial mansion. It was named, fittingly, "The Smiling Garden of the Sovereigns of the Province." Tradition places this house where Building 14 now stands

overlooking San Juan Dock, in fact, Building 14 may be the actual house. It is known to have been built prior to the War of 1812 when it served as a guard house and headquarters of the Island's Garrison. Its cellar then contained the famous "Black Hole," a cell for the solitary confinement of difficult prisoners. Until the Commanding General's Quarters were erected in 1840, Building 14 was the senior officer's home and was commonly called "the Governor's House." There is a legend that during the Revolution this house was connected by a tunnel to a private dock on Buttermilk Channel, by which the Governor could escape to his official barge if the Americans landed. Although there is no trace of this rumoured tunnel today, it is supposed to have been large enough to accommodate the Governor's coach and four horses.

In 1710 The Colonial authorities designated Governors Island a quarantine station for the large groups of Palatines who were arriving in America. From 7,000 to 10,000 of these exiles were camped on the Island at one time. later they were sent up the Hudson to Green and Columbia counties. One of these refugees, John Peter Zenger, later became publisher of the New York Weekly Journal and first famous defender of freedom of the press in America.

Until the middle of the eighteenth century Governors Island remained both unfortified and unguarded. Although there were many war scares and proposals for defense, nothing was done either in garrisoning a post or building works. During this period, Governors Island seems to have been primarily a sanctuary for birds and animals. Records show that in addition to Governor Van Twiller's goats, exactly 103 head of cattle were kept there in 1623. Later, in 1732, Governor Crosby used the Island as a preserve for English pheasants. It was officially designated a preserve for these pheasants in 1738.

The Island's First Garrison

Troops were stationed on Governors Island for the first time in 1755. This first garrison of trained soldiers was the 51st Regiment of British Colonial Militia under the command of an American born Major General, Sir William Pepperell. Pepperell had been Commander-in-Chief of the New England force that captured the French fortress of Louisbourg. He trained his men to fight in Indian fashion rather than according to traditional military principles, and was chiefly responsible for training the army that afterward was to achieve American independence. The 51st soon was joined by the 22nd Regiment of Foot, the 44th Regiment of Foot and the 62nd Regiment of Foot, styled the "Royal Americans."

The 62nd Regiment was a locally recruited unit of the British Regular Army. It was organised at Governors Island in 1755 and remained there for many years. In 1757 the 62nd Regiment was renamed "The Royal American Regiment, H.M. 60th Regiment of Foot." The first commander of the Regiment was John Campbell, the Earl of Loudoun. Lord Jeffrey Amherst was also a commander and Horatio Gates, later Adjutant General of the Continental Army, was an officer in this Regiment. There were four battalions in the Regiment and one was known as the "Governors Island Battalion." Prior to the Revolution the Royal Americans were ordered to the West Indies, however, the Regiment's band remained behind and gave concerts for the Loyalists in New York during the war. Following its tour in the West Indies, the Regiment was ordered to England where it eventually acquired its present name, "The King's Royal Rifle Corps."

In recognition of shared traditions, the officers and men of the King's Royal Rifle Corps presented their only ancient Royal American Regimental color to Governors Island on January 9, 1921. The inscription accompanying this gift read in part, "to serve as a memento that the Royal American Regiment and the regiments of New York fought shoulder to shoulder, not only during the many years of warfare which ended in the conquest of New France and the subjection of the Indian tribes bordering on the Great Lakes, but also, after a century and a half, against a common enemy in a more terrible European contest." This regimental flag now hangs on the north wall of the Chapel of Saint Cornelius the Centurion. In appreciation of this gift, authorities on Governors Island presented a Coehorn mortar to the King's Royal Rifle Corps on September 12, 1922. The mortar had been on the Island when the Royal Americans were stationed there. It was overlooked when the British withdrew and eventually was placed in the Governors Island Officer Club as an historical trophy. This mortar can now be seen in The Royal Green Jackets Museum Peninsula Barracks, Winchester.



Military Anecdotes

Captain Ochterlony and Ensign Peyton at Montmorenci, 1759

These officers belonged to the 2nd Battalion of the 60th. On the day preceding the battle the former had been severely wounded in a duel, but insisted on taking the field with a fusil in his hand. During the engagement he was shot through the lungs, but continued advancing until loss of blood rendered him too weak to proceed. About the same time Ensign Peyton was wounded in the leg, and the two friends being left together were approached by a French soldier with two Indians.

The Frenchman snatched Ochterlony's watch, and one of the Indians shot this unfortunate officer in the breast, stabbed him with his scalping knife, and then finding him still alive, the three ruffians tried to strangle him with his sash, when Peyton who had a double-barrelled musket, shot one of the Indians and wounded the other who, in his turn, sent a bullet into Peyton's shoulder and thrust a bayonet through his body. A violent struggle ensued in which, happily, Peyton was victorious, and he was soon afterwards rescued by a party of the 78th Highlanders, but poor Ochterlony was taken prisoner and died a few days afterwards of his wounds.

EMINENT OFFICERS OF THE REGIMENT

Jeffery, Lord Amherst, K.B.

This distinguished officer was the son of Jeffery Amherst, Esq., of Riverhead, near Sevenoaks, in Kent. He was born in the year 1717, and obtained a commission as Ensign in the 1st Guards at the age of 14. He served at the battles of Dettingen, Fontenoy, and Roncoux, and in 1747 was on the staff of General (afterwards Lord) Ligonier. He was also present at Leffeldt and Hastenback as aide-de-camp to the Duke of Cumberland. He was then given the command of the 15th Regiment, and was subsequently appointed as Major-General to command the troops destined for the expedition against Louisbourg, which place he captured in July, 1758, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions 60th forming part of his army on this occasion. In September the same year he was appointed Commander-in-Chief in America and Colonel-in-Chief of the 60th Regiment. In 1759 he took Ticonderoga and Crown Point, and the following year captured Montreal, the 60th again serving under his orders. For this service he was made a Knight of the Bath and Governor of Virginia. In 1763 he returned to England, and was made Chief of the Staff, and appointed to the command of the 3rd Regiment of Foot. In 1771 he was appointed Governor of Guernsey, and the following year Lieut.-General of the Ordnance. He also received successively the command of the 2nd troop of Horse Grenadier Guards, the 2nd troop of Horse Guards, and the 2nd Regiment of Life Guards. In 1776 he was created Baron Amherst, of Holmesdale, in Kent; and in 1778 was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Forces. He died in 1797, and was succeeded as Colonel-in-Chief of the 60th Regiment by H.R.H. The Duke of York.

The Baron de Rottenburg, K.C.H.

This officer, after serving in three foreign armies, was appointed Major, and afterwards Lieutenant-Colonel, in Hompesch's Regiment. In 1797, when the 5th Battalion of the 60th was raised, De Rottenburg was appointed to the command. This was the first Rifle Battalion ever raised in the British service; the men were armed with rifles, carried leather "rifle-bags" instead of knapsacks, were dressed in green, and wore the moustache. De Rottenburg instituted a perfect system of light drill, which being approved by H.R.H. the Duke of York, was afterwards adopted for the army.

After serving in the Irish Rebellion of 1798, he proceeded the following year with his battalion to Surinam, and was engaged in the reduction of that place.

1808 he was appointed Brigadier-General, and commanded the exercise and instruction of four battalions of light infantry at the Curragh. The same year he was transferred from the Irish to the English staff, and stationed at Ashford, in Kent, where he was charged with the formation of three battalions of light infantry, viz., the 68th, 71st, and 85th Regiments. In fact he introduced into our army the light infantry system which, with certain modifications, still exists.

In 1809, he commanded the light troops in the attack on the island of Walcheren and at the siege of Flushing; and in 1810 was transferred to the staff in Canada, where he

assumed command of the garrison of Quebec. In 1812, at the breaking out of the American war, he was appointed to the command of the Montreal district and afterwards of the whole of the troops in the upper province, and was sworn President of Upper Canada. In 1814-15 he commanded the left division of the army, after which he returned to England, was made a Knight Commander of the Hanoverian Guelphic Order, and died a Lieut.-General in 1832.

The Baron de Rottenburg will always be remembered as the Father of British Riflemen.