

Lieutenant-General Sir John Moore KB (1761-1809)



Founder of the Light Infantry and Founding Father of The Rifles

JOHN MOORE was born on 13 November 1761 and in 1776, at the age of fourteen, was gazetted an ensign in the 51st (2nd Yorkshire West Riding) Regiment, an antecedent regiment of The Rifles. In January 1777 he joined the 51st in Minorca stating that: 'I have got into one of the best regiments in the service; as to the officers I never knew such a number of fine, gentlemanly lads.' A year later he transferred to the newly-raised 82nd Regiment, serving as a company commander during the American War of Independence and being placed on half-pay when the Regiment was disbanded in 1783.

In 1784 Moore became a Member of Parliament (until 1790). In

January 1788 he was appointed a major in the 60th (Royal American) Regiment, another antecedent regiment of The Rifles, before exchanging nine months later to his original regiment, the 51st, which he commanded in Ireland and Gibraltar from 1790-94. Thereafter, he assumed more senior appointments on active service in Corsica, the West Indies, Ireland, the Helder (Netherlands), the Mediterranean and Egypt. It was during this period that he witnessed and started to advocate the value of Light troops. He became a colonel in 1795 and a major-general in 1798, one of his superiors observing that: 'He is in love with his profession.'

On 8 May 1801 Moore was appointed Colonel of the 52nd (Oxfordshire) Regiment, yet another antecedent regiment of The Rifles, ensuring, two years later, that his regiment was the first to be designated Light Infantry. In 1802 he assumed brigade command in the south of England and in 1803 established a training camp for the 95th Rifles, 52nd Light Infantry and, from 1804, the 43rd Light Infantry at Shorncliffe in Kent - Moore's celebrated light brigade. He was knighted in 1804 and became a lieutenant-general in 1805.

Sir John Moore left England in 1806 for further service in the Mediterranean and, in 1808, in Sweden, before commanding an army of 35,000 men in northern Spain. His army, which included the light brigade so successfully trained at Shorncliffe, advanced deep into Spain before retreating to Vigo and Corunna (*A Coruña*), where he was mortally wounded in a battle against the French on 16 January 1809. He was buried where he died.

Moore's chief legacy was the system of light infantry training that he established at Shorncliffe, where he encouraged development of the values and soldierly skills which The Rifles most prize today. As an advocate of Light troops, and founder of the Light Infantry, there is no one more deserving of the title, which the Regiment has chosen to give him, of 'Founding Father of The Rifles'.

“SIR JOHN MOORE”

AN APPRECIATION.

“Nevertheless if not a stone had been raised nor a line written, his work would still remain with us: for no man, not Cromwell, nor Marlborough, nor Wellington, has set so strong a mark for good upon the British Army as John Moore.”

THE HON. JOHN FORTESCUE.

Experience has proved that a study of the methods and strategy of the great Captains has always been repaid. To-day, in some quarters, the inclination tends to a study of the leaders of foreign armies to the neglect of those of our own.

It is proverbial that a prophet has no honour in his own country. But it is submitted that there is much to be learnt by a study of our countrymen which we shall not discover from the lives of foreigners.

Men such as Wolfe, John Nicholson, Herbert Edwardes or Charles Gordon, who though not renowned in the same light as the great Captains or even as Cromwell, Marlborough or the Duke of Wellington, have made our armies famous in the face of difficulties undreamt of by Alexander, Turenne or Frederick the Great; these men understood the British temperament. They had to contend, as the soldier undoubtedly will again, till the crack of doom, with the obstructions of the politician, imbued, in his own estimation, with a Napoleonic grasp of all things military.

It is not the writer's intention to give even a brief account of “The Life of Sir John Moore.” Books and Diaries dealing with his life in full detail are to be found in any library.

Merely is it hoped to kindle an interest in his methods and to bring out the two aspects in which his greatness is above all challenge; firstly as one of the finest trainers of men and secondly as one of the finest characters that the British Army has ever produced.

Coming from such a source, Fortescue's praise of Moore is no light compliment. Cromwell, Marlborough and Wellington were all more successful than Moore in actual battle. But Moore had not the

like opportunities and he was invariably a victim to ill fate. He never went into action without being hit. His last campaign, as was the case when he was sent to Sweden, was really a fool's errand.

It is as a trainer and organiser of Light troops that Moore has left his mark, not as a victor of many fights. His system was the foundation of the training and discipline of the British Army in 1914. The four and a half years of the Great War proved it superior to the machine-like discipline of our foes.

His CHARACTER.

Moore was a man of high character, energetic, unselfish and possessed of a strong sense of duty to the public service. In all he did he was thorough. It is significant that the small training manual "Section Leading" summarises the chief qualities which go to make up character, as unselfishness, loyalty and determination. He possessed that priceless gift, a personality which inspired those under him to do their best. All who served under him, held him in devotion. It is easy to see from letters the impression he made upon even the most casual acquaintance. "His was the fire that warmed the coldest nature, and urged all who came in contact with him onward in the path of glory along which he strode so mightily himself. No man with a spark of enthusiasm could resist the influence of Moore's great aspirations."

His KNOWLEDGE OF HIS PROFESSION.

Moore's knowledge of his profession was profound. It was gained by assiduous study and deep thought. He had studied the military problems and tendencies of his day. He was ahead of military thought of his time in his conception of strategy and tactics.

In writing of the Corunna campaign, Lewis Butler says "His brilliant strategy, his resolution and the way in which he handled his troops stamp him as a master of the art of war and elicited the praise of Napoleon."

He did not, however, confine his studies to military history alone. He realised that the strategy and tactics of an army are largely dictated by that army's organization and interior economy.

The work of the Light Division in the Peninsula is a striking example of the development of a new era in tactics. The man who can break away from the old, take up the new idea and pursue it with

confidence must have laid the foundations of that confidence by close study of the conditions of his day.

To-day the question of the anti-tank defence of the Forward Troops requires development.

Armed with a mechanised light gun or heavy machine gun such duties would require the same spirit and high state of training which caused our 5th Battalion to be distributed by companies amongst the various brigades in Spain and Portugal.

Once again might the Regiment evolve a new form of tactics and so lead the way.

His INTEREST IN LIGHT INFANTRY.

As a major John Moore served for a time in the 60th Royal Americans. There he became acquainted with those Rifle and Light Infantry tactics which formed the foundation of the system he later inaugurated at Shorncliffe. There he saw the value of disciplined individualism as inculcated by Henri Bouquet and Francis Haldimand, two of the first Commanding Officers of our Regiment.

His tour in the West Indies showed him very clearly that a new form of discipline was required in the Army as a whole. Moore felt that the drill book of Dundas, founded on the system of Frederick, was too mechanical. He turned to "The Regulations for the exercise of Riflemen and Light Infantry."

This book, written by Lieut.-Colonel Baron de Rottenburg, Colonel of the 5th Battalion of the 60th, was the model upon which that Battalion and later the whole Army was trained.

Moore's opportunity came when the camp was formed at Shorncliffe of the 43rd and 52nd Regiments and the Rifle Corps (95th).

It is interesting to note that this same de Rottenburg succeeded Moore as the trainer of Light troops at Shorncliffe in 1808.

MOORE AS A TRAINER OF MEN.

Moore realised that the principles underlying sound military training in all stages of the world's history were identical - a sound organization and interior economy.

He saw that the whole development of war tended towards looser formations, with consequently greater demands upon the

individual whether officer or man. He was the first to see that what was required was “not a new drill but a new discipline, a new spirit that should make of the whole a living organism to replace a mechanical instrument.” In the methods which he inculcated at Shorncliffe, Moore built up the foundations of our modern system of discipline and training, a foundation which has stood the test of over a century of peace and war.

Briefly, these methods aimed at “encouraging to the utmost the intelligence and initiative of the individual; treating soldiers as men and not as machines.”

His training was systematic. He first of all took his officers, and after eliminating those who were quite unfitted to command, he instilled into them the three qualities which are essential to the training of men—energy, knowledge and sympathy. He then delegated to every officer real authority, in proportion to his rank, not only to train the men under him for war, but to look after every detail of their welfare; thus he taught the men to regard their officers not only as their leaders in battle, but as their guides and helpers at all times. He showed both officers and N.C.O.’s that true discipline is not the punishment of crime but its prevention. Officers were brought up to treat their men as comrades and join in their games. A maxim of the camp, unfortunately too often forgotten in the Great War, was “It is the duty of every officer to provide for the wants of his men.”

Lastly, he took the private soldier, awakened his pride in himself, encouraged him to use his intelligence, to become what the Americans in their Civil War called a “thinking bayonet,” and finally made him as keen as his officer on the efficiency of his unit.

Thus Moore extracted the utmost from *esprit de corps*, which has been proved again and again the surest rock on which to build the moral of a professional army. He saw that the good soldier must not only give to his profession his body and brain, but his heart also. Today this has become a platitude.

He found the men under a discipline based entirely on fear of punishment, a discipline which made no attempt to appeal to their minds or hearts. He left them under one based on individual keenness, mutual confidence, and a spirit of comradeship between officers and men; a form of discipline which has once more, in the greatest of all wars, proved itself superior to any other.

He so fashioned the units of the Light Division "that they were found to be soldiers unsurpassable, perhaps never equalled."

That his methods were successful is shown by the large number of officers trained under his supervision who rose later to high commands in the Army. His system has been too briefly outlined, but it is the foundation of the system of the British Army of today.

The criticism of a German general, speaking to a captured officer after the First Battle of Ypres, proves its value, "Your men all fight like N.C.O.'s." No higher tribute to individuality could be paid by friend or foe.

In conclusion, there seems to be at least four great lessons which we can learn from a study of Sir John Moore's life.

The first is to keep our minds supple and active throughout our service, and, like him, to look always ahead and not backwards in training for war. Moore never accepted things as he found them, nor did he wait until he became a General before he began to think about reform. Even as a junior officer, he never allowed himself to become hypnotised by tradition or routine; he looked with clear eyes into the future, saw that conditions were changing, made up his mind what reforms were wanted, and set steadily to work, in whatever position he found himself, to carry them through.

The Army stands again to-day, just as it did in his time, at the cross-roads. Mechanicalisation, with all its attendant problems, both moral and physical, has got to be faced. It is within the power of every officer serving to-day, whether senior or junior, regimental or staff, to do the same, and so help the Army along its new and difficult road.

The second lesson is to appreciate to the full, as he did, the value of the human factor in war. There is a real danger nowadays that in thinking of the machine we may forget the man. Man has always been, and always will be, the basic element in war; and we can learn from a close study of Moore's methods, that no sound superstructure of reform, whether in organization, training or tactics, can ever be built, unless the foundations, the regimental officers and men, stand firm and strong.

The third lesson is, like him, "to steer a straight course." We cannot all hope to become a military genius like Napoleon, or a master of diplomacy like Marlborough, but a career like that of Sir John Moore is not beyond our powers. Here was no outstanding military

genius, but a plain soldier, who nevertheless, by courage, clear thinking, determination and hard work, rose to the top of his profession in days when it was rare to get there by merit alone. Not only did he do this, but he left upon the Army a greater “mark for good” than others who are generally accounted more famous as Generals. If we, who have to carry on the traditions of the Army and the Regiment to-day, can follow even to a small extent the fine example he set of loyalty and unselfish devotion to duty, then we can feel that his life, in spite of its many disappointments, was not lived in vain; but that it will help us, when we in our turn have something to do, to “do it worthily.”

Lastly, “Be thorough.” Moore neglected no detail of the organization of his units either for their well being or interior economy.

No fitter praise and no more striking lesson for to-day can be given than in the order published by H.R.H. The Duke of York, Commander-in-Chief, on Moore’s death:

“His life was spent amongst his troops.”

A. E. L.

From The King’s Royal Rifle Corps Chronicle 1927

A Tribute to Sir John Moore by Marshal Nicolas Jean-de-Dieu Sault

“You requested that I shed some light on the pursuit of General Sir John Moore on his retreat from Corunna in 1809. I need not offer any details of the operation as they must be well known, but I would seize with relish the opportunity to give an account of his leadership, which was excellent. His dispositions were always most appropriate to the circumstances and he skillfully took advantage given him by the terrain to demonstrate his talents and valour, offering an energetic and calculated resistance to me. It was thus that he met a glorious death at Corunna on a field of battle that must honour his memory.”

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The Burial of Sir John Moore after Corunna

NOT a drum was heard, not a funeral note,
As his corse to the rampart we hurried;
Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot
O'er the grave where our hero we buried.

We buried him darkly at dead of night,
The sods with our bayonets turning,
By the struggling moonbeam's misty light
And the lanthorn dimly burning.

No useless coffin enclosed his breast,
Not in sheet or in shroud we wound him;
But he lay like a warrior taking his rest
With his martial cloak around him.

Few and short were the prayers we said,
And we spoke not a word of sorrow;
But we steadfastly gazed on the face that was dead,
And we bitterly thought of the morrow.

We thought, as we hollow'd his narrow bed
And smooth'd down his lonely pillow,
That the foe and the stranger would tread o'er his head,
And we far away on the billow!

Lightly they'll talk of the spirit that 's gone,
And o'er his cold ashes upbraid him-
But little he'll reck, if they let him sleep on
In the grave where a Briton has laid him.

But half of our heavy task was done
When the clock struck the hour for retiring;
And we heard the distant and random gun
That the foe was sullenly firing.

Slowly and sadly we laid him down,
From the field of his fame fresh and gory;
We carved not a line, and we raised not a stone,
But we left him alone with his glory.



Sir John Moore Memorial in St Paul's Cathedral, London was erected by order of parliament on 25 January 1809.

The inscription reads:

Sacred to the Memory of
Lieutenant-General Sir John Moore, K.B.
who was born at Glasgow in 1761.
He fought for his country
in America, in Corsica, in the West Indies,
in Holland, Egypt, and Spain:
and on the 16th of January, 1809,
was slain by a cannon ball,
at Corunna.

“Sir John Moore”

**The Rev'd Henry John Symons 1781 - 1857
- the man who buried Sir John Moore at Corunna**



H J Symonds LLD
Chaplain to the Forces

Whilst many generations of schoolchildren will have been familiar with the Rev'd. Charles Wolfe's epic poem of 1816 "The Burial of Sir John Moore after Corunna" with its often roguish emphasis on the line "The sods with our bayonets turning" how many I wonder have given a thought to the man who conducted this famous burial service and what became of him?

The Rev'd Henry John Symons was born at Hackney in 1781 the son of Jelinger Symons, Rector of Whitburn, Co. Durham, and after education at Merchant Taylors and St. John's College, Oxford, also took Holy Orders. After a spell as a Curate at St, Ann's, Holborn, he became a Chaplain to the Forces in 1805 and was appointed to the Brigade of Guards. Thus it was at the age of 28 he found himself not only campaigning in Spain, but after the battle of Corunna in 1809 summoned to General Moore's lodgings to administer the last rites to the mortally wounded General and next morning in a south westerly gale conducting his burial service.

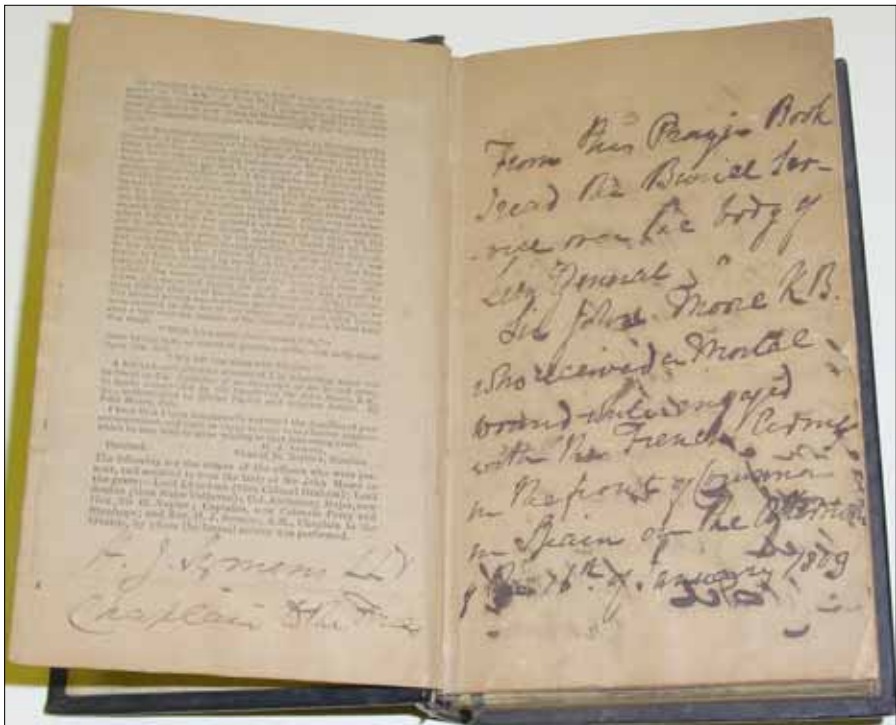
It was of that gale that a witness wrote "fluttered his black skirts and white bands as he undertook his sad task already threatened by the possibility of a serious attack by the enemy".

The General's body was dressed in full regimentals and wrapped in a soldiers blanket overlaid with a General's cloak and lowered into Spanish soil on the long crimson sashes of four officers of his family. One of these sashes plus Moore's own bloodstained sash can be seen at the National Army Museum, together with Symons prayer book used at the service.



Symons continued his military career until the peace of 1814, later becoming Chaplain to the Duke of Kent and the Duke of Cambridge and finally taking up the living of All Saints with St. Martin Hereford in 1824 and later St. Martins Hereford in 1850, dying seven years later in what would seem almost anachronistic and 21st century in a manner for a man born during the 18th century - running for a train! He is buried at St. Martin's Hereford.

Although it is now 226 years since his birth we can in fact see this photograph of him taken late in life wearing his campaign medal which is on display at the Royal Green Jackets Museum at Winchester. The Rev'd. Wolfe's (also a Chaplain) poetic description of Moore's burial by moon and lantern light inspired by artists and writers of the period to such an extent that his version became fact.



The handwritten note by Rev'd H J Symons on the previous page states:-

"From this Prayer Book I read the Burial Service over the body of Lieut. General Sir John Moore KB, who received a mortal wound whilst engaged with the French Cavalry in the front of Corunna in Spain on the afternoon of 16th January, 1809."

Thus in 1852 to set the record straight and in answer to correspondence on the accuracy of the poem the Rev'd Symons picked up his pen and wrote as follows to Notes and Queries:

"It was now daylight. The enemy immediately opened fire on the ships in the harbour and the funeral service was performed without delay, as they were exposed to the fire of the enemy's guns".

But the poem sound more romantic! And one wonders perhaps if similar stories exist behind other graphic and popular descriptions of events such as the much depicted Death of Nelson etc.

The Rev'd. Charles Wolfe penned his ode to the fallen General and sent it to the Newry Telegraph where it appeared anonymously as a space filler, but overnight became a word of mouth hit. In 1822 Byron declared it the finest ode in the English language but sadly however Wolfe died of consumption the following year.

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