



South Africa 1900-02 Hill 60 Villers-Bretonneux Ypres 1915-17 Amiens
Somme 1916-18 Hindenburg Line Arras France & Flanders 1914-18
Cambrai 1917 Calais 1940 North West Europe 1940

QUEEN VICTORIA'S RIFLES

A Brief History

THE ORIGINATING CORPS were the Duke of Cumberland's Sharpshooters, the St. George's Rifles and the Bloomsbury Rifles. The real ancestor, with the unbroken line, being the Duke of Cumberland's Sharpshooters, whose services were accepted by HM George III on 5th September 1803.

Although John Beaumont, later known as Barber Beaumont, was responsible for raising the Duke of Cumberland's Sharpshooters, the name of the unit was obviously derived from the Honorary Colonel, HRH The Duke of Cumberland.

In 1803 John Barber Beaumont raised this Corps of Riflemen after Napoleon's declaration of war on the 18th May. At the close of the Peninsula War all Volunteer Corps were officially disbanded but the Sharpshooters kept together, keeping their name and wearing their rifle green uniforms.

In 1835 the survivors of the old sharpshooters reorganised themselves as the Royal Victoria Rifle Club with Princess (later Queen) Victoria as the patron. The Members providing their uniforms and rifles at their own expense. In 1851 owing to the aspirations of Napoleon III official recognition of Volunteer Units arose and became confirmed by 1853. The official title became the Victoria Rifles with the second Duke of Wellington as the Commanding Officer. Headquarters was situated in St. John's Wood and in 1881 a Mounted Infantry Company was formed, remaining with the Regiment until 1908.

A unit, the St. George's (Hanover Square) Volunteers had been formed in 1792 and disbanded in 1814.

In 1853 The Second Duke of Wellington became the Commanding Officer for the Victoria Rifles. On the formation of the volunteer forces in the Fifties, the St. George's Rifles was raised in 1859, and in 1890 moved into the Headquarters at 56 Davies Street, London W1.

In 1892 the Victoria Rifles (who had already gone through different titles) were amalgamated with the St. George's Rifles at Davies Street, being named the Victoria and St. George's Rifles, adopting the uniform of the 60th Rifles (becoming the 1st Volunteer Battalion of the King's Royal Rifle Corps).

During the South African War the Regiment sent a contingent to the City Imperial Volunteers, and a special service company to the 2nd and later 3rd Battalion of the King's Royal Rifle Corps. The battle honour "South Africa 1900-02" being awarded.

In 1900 a detachment represented the Volunteer Force of the first Commonwealth Parliament of Australia. This being followed in 1903 by an inspection by King Edward VII in the grounds of Buckingham Palace upon the centenary celebration.

By 1908 with the formation of Lord Haldane's Territorial Force (Volunteers) the Bloomsbury Rifles (formed in 1859) were amalgamated with the Victoria and St. George's Rifles. This latest amalgamation became known as the 9th (County of London) Battalion, the London Regiment, (Queen Victoria's Rifles).

The First World War 1914-1918

Expanding into three Battalions the 9th London Regiment, QVR, the 1st Battalion sailed for France on 4th November 1914. At the Battle of Hill 60 in April 1915, 2nd/Lieutenant G H Woolley was awarded the Victoria Cross (the highest Military Honour for Bravery), the first Territorial to receive this decoration. Woolley at that time was described as Boy Officer, being under 21 years of age. A Memorial is maintained at Hill 60 to this day, being replaced after its destruction by the Germans during the 1939-1945 World War. It is of some interest that the first Other Rank to gain a VC was a former QVR Member who rejoined in 1914 into the London Rifle Brigade.

The 2nd Battalion arrived in France in February 1917. By January

1918, due to shortage of manpower arising from the heavy casualties, the two Battalions were amalgamated and after the Armistice served as part of the British Army of the Rhine until November 1919. Some twenty-eight or so Battle Honours were awarded. 9811 members of all ranks served of whom 1460 were killed.

1919-1939

Continuing its unbroken service, in 1938 the title was again changed to Queen Victoria's Rifles, The King's Royal Rifle Corps. The 2nd Battalion came into existence again in 1939 with the menace of Hitler and his ambitions

The Battalions being mobilised on September 1st 1939, war declared on the 3rd.

The Second World War 1939-1945

During the course of the war the 1st and 2nd Battalions became known as the 7th and 8th Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps (Queen Victoria's Rifles).

On 22nd May 1940, under instructions of Churchill, the 1st Battalion Queen Victoria's Rifles landed in Calais, the 3rd Royal Tank Regiment arriving the same day but with problems of unloading because of the heavy bombing. The Regular Army Units of the 2nd Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps and the 1st Battalion Rifle Brigade reaching Calais the following day.

The action at Calais in 1940 is well documented. The original intention to withdraw from the town, being rescinded for political reasons. In the end the ill equipped Rifle Regiments were unable to last for more than four days against the Panzer Divisions. However the delay to the German Units probably assisted the evacuation from Dunkirk of British and French forces. 2nd/Lieutenant Lucas escaped from the Germans by rowing across the Channel and Corporal Illingworth escaped through Spain but did not survive long afterwards suffering from the effects of a spell in a Spanish Prison before returning to England.

Those of the Regiment who survived this one sided battle remained Prisoners of War in Poland for the next five years.

In November 1940 the Headquarters at Davies Street was almost entirely destroyed by enemy action.

The 1st Battalion was reformed in England but was disbanded in

1943 to provide much needed reinforcements to other units. The 2nd Battalion became a holding battalion (eventually comprising King's Royal Rifle Corps and Rifle Brigade members).

In 1947 Queen Victoria's Rifles reopened for recruiting on 1st May with the Basement and temporary huts, adding the adjacent premises at 52 Davies Street.

1951

The Duke of Gloucester unveiled the Calais Memorial; he also opened the reconstructed Headquarters the following year, a period in which the Borough of St. Marylebone officially adopted the Regiment

1953

The coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and commemoration of the 150th year of the Regiment's continuous existence.

1961

On the 1st May amalgamation with the Queen's Westminsters to form a new regiment, the Queen's Royal Rifles. Thus the name of Queen Victoria's Rifles disappeared from the military scene.

1967

Eventually on the 1st April amalgamation with other Territorial Units resulted in the formation of the 4th (Volunteer) Battalion The Royal Green Jackets.

1999

With the heavy reduction of the Territorial Forces this year the 4th Battalion was reduced to two Companies and brought into The London Regiment composed of another four Companies drawn from former London Territorial Units.

N D Hummerstone MBE
Chairman, Queen Victoria's Rifles Regimental Association.

Battle Honours

South Africa 1900-02

The First World War

(3 battalions):

Hill 60, Ypres 1915 '17, Gravenstafel, St. Julien, Frezenberg, Bellewaarde, Somme 1916 '18, Albert 1916 '18, Guillemont, Ginchy, Flers-Courcelette, Morval, Le Transloy, Arras 1917, Scarpe 1917, Langemarck 1917, Menin Road, Polygon Wood, Passchendaele, Cambrai 1917, Bapaume 1918, Villers Bretonneux, Amiens, Hindenburg Line, Épéhy, Pursuit to Mons, France and Flanders 1914-18

The Second World War:

Calais 1940, North-West Europe 1940