



# THE ROYAL DRAGOON GUARDS

A Regimental History, 1685–2018



PETER MACFARLANE





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A REGIMENTAL HISTORY,  
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## FRONT COVER IMAGES:

**Top:** The charge of the Inniskilling Dragoons at the battle of Fontenoy, 11 May 1745, during the War of the Austrian Succession. (RDG)

**Middle:** Corporal Stenton of the Royal Dragoon Guards giving covering fire during the evacuation of a wounded British soldier in Helmand, Afghanistan, on 21 July 2010. Corporal Stenton was fatally injured in this action and was posthumously awarded the Military Cross for gallantry. (RDG)

**Bottom right:** Regimental cap badge. (UK Ministry of Defence © Crown Copyright)

## TITLE PAGE IMAGE:

Sergeant Richards leading a strike operation by B Squadron of the Royal Dragoon Guards against insurgents in Basra in April 2008. Sergeant Richards was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry in this action. (RDG)

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# FOREWORD

By Colonel N. C. T. Millen OBE  
Colonel of the Regiment, The Royal Dragoon Guards

Regiments are living entities, and so with a change of role and a move planned for the coming years it seems a good time to reflect on the Regiment's heritage. This will further our understanding of how the Royal Dragoon Guards we know today has been shaped by its antecedent regiments, and what they have done, since they were raised over 300 years ago.

Colonel of the Regiment. (RDG)

Although our regimental history is already comprehensively covered in published books and numerous other documents, the whole story has never before been presented in such a concise and easily accessed format. With this book, those of us who have long since hung up our spurs, those still serving, and I hope those interested in joining can see how, in different times and circumstances and many places, our regiments have gone about their business. Our story is one of individual service and sacrifice, of triumph and disaster, and above all else of the comradeship that comes with the privilege of being a regimental soldier.

Whilst the story belongs to us all, the credit for presenting it here belongs to Lieutenant Colonel Peter Macfarlane. This book was Peter's vision and it is his passion for all matters regimental as well as his extraordinary commitment that made it happen. I thank him on behalf of us all.



# INTRODUCTION

All four founding regiments were raised between 1685 and 1689 during the protracted contest between James II and William of Orange for the English throne.

‘Arran’s Horse’ – the 4th Dragoon Guards – and ‘Shrewsbury’s Horse’ – the 5th Dragoon Guards – were formed in 1685 from troops of horse raised by James to expand the army. Both regiments, together with the rest of James’s army, refused to support him against William of Orange and in 1688 he abandoned the throne and fled to France. William immediately raised a number of new regiments including ‘Devonshire’s Horse’ – the 7th Dragoon Guards.

The following year, still claiming the throne, James landed in Ireland. Only Londonderry and Enniskillen resisted, both held by garrisons of refugees loyal to William. At Enniskillen the refugees elected officers and ‘formed themselves into a strong body of Horse with an adjunct of Foot’. These were formally established in 1690 and included ‘Conyningham’s Dragoons’ – the 6th (Inniskilling) Dragoons. William landed in Ireland in the same year with an army that included the 5th and 7th and all three regiments fought at the Boyne.

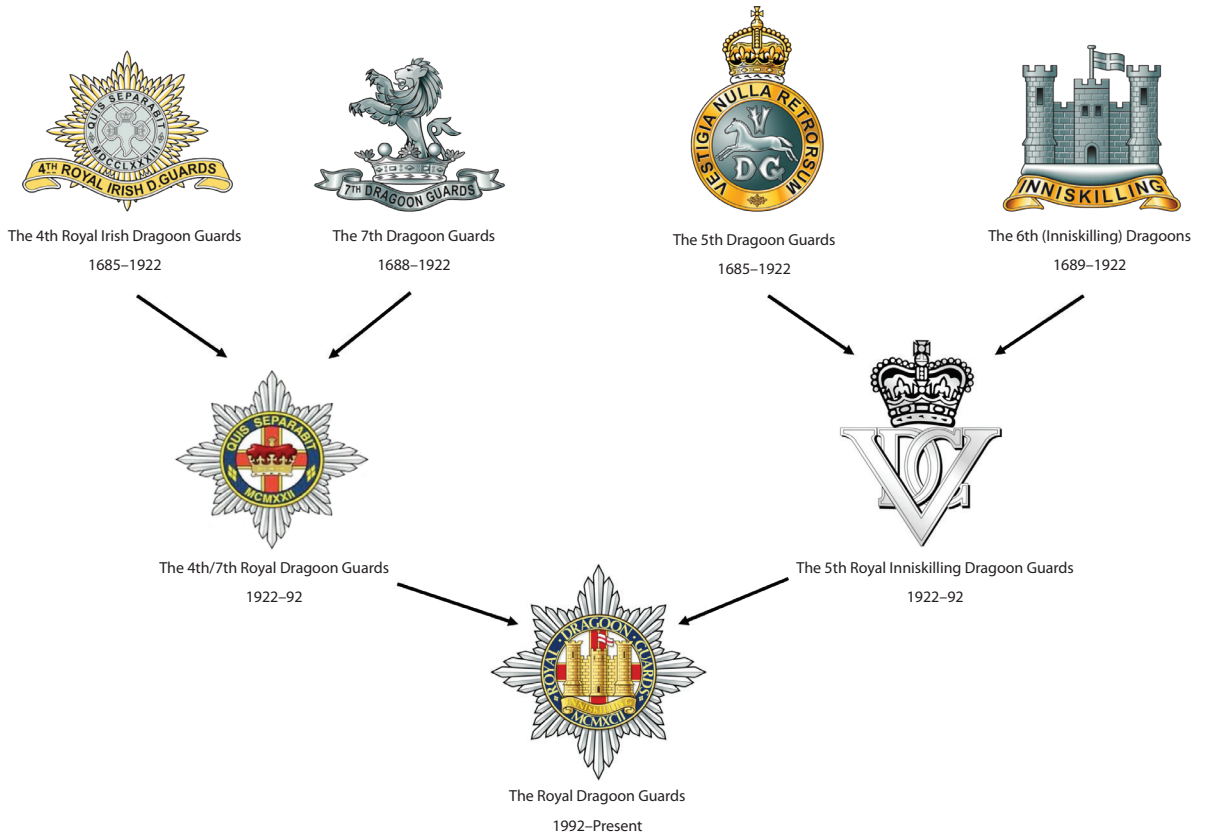
The 4th and 5th also accompanied William to the Low Countries to confront Louis XIV in the War of the Grand Alliance, the first of many British campaigns in north-west Europe. The peace that followed was short-lived and the War of the Spanish Succession broke out in 1702. The 5th and the 7th campaigned under Marlborough and participated in all his major actions. After the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 they joined the 4th in Ireland. The Inniskillings spent much of the century in Britain and were involved in suppressing the first Jacobite Rebellion in 1715. Both the Inniskillings and the 7th also served in the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years’ War.

Meanwhile, the 4th and the 5th languished in Ireland where they accumulated some 180 years of joint service. They were joined for lengthy

## **Commission for raising Devonshire’s Horse**

*We, reposing especial faith and confidence in your fidelity, courage and good conduct, do by these presents constitute and appoint you to be Colonel of a regiment of Horse to be forthwith raised for our service, and likewise to be a Captain of a troop in the same regiment. You are therefore to take the said regiment as colonel, and the said troop as captain, into your care and charge, and duly to exercise as the officers as soldiers thereof in arms; and to use your best endeavours to keep them in good order and discipline. And We hereby command them to obey you as their Colonel and Captain respectively. And you are to observe and follow such orders and directions, from time to time, as you shall receive from Us, or any, your superior Officer, according to the rules and discipline of War, in pursuance of the trust We repose in you.*

Dated ye 31st December 1688



spells by the 7th, endured a monotonous routine of mounted constabulary tasks, and sank into a low state of effectiveness and discipline. Another war with France in 1793 briefly took the 5th to the Low Countries with the Inniskillings. They returned to Ireland in time to join the 4th and 7th in crushing a French-backed rebellion in 1798.

Napoleon was thwarted in his plans to invade Britain in 1805, but two years later he turned his attention to the Iberian Peninsula, occupying Portugal and forcing the evacuation of a British expeditionary force in 1809. Later that year the future Duke of Wellington returned to Portugal with another expeditionary force and began the campaign that culminated five years later in France. The 4th and 5th joined him in 1811 and the Inniskillings took part in Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo in 1815.

For the next 30 years all four regiments spent much of their service on garrison duty, which included aid to the civil power. The 7th also saw active service in southern Africa in the 1840s, in a foretaste of future campaigns on that continent.

By 1854 the army had suffered years of neglect and none of the 4th, 5th or Inniskillings were in good shape for what they would encounter in the Crimea. They nonetheless acquitted themselves with distinction at Balaklava.

From 1858 onwards each regiment had extended spells of service in India. The Inniskillings served in South Africa, the 4th and 7th campaigned

The antecedent regiments of the Royal Dragoon Guards.  
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