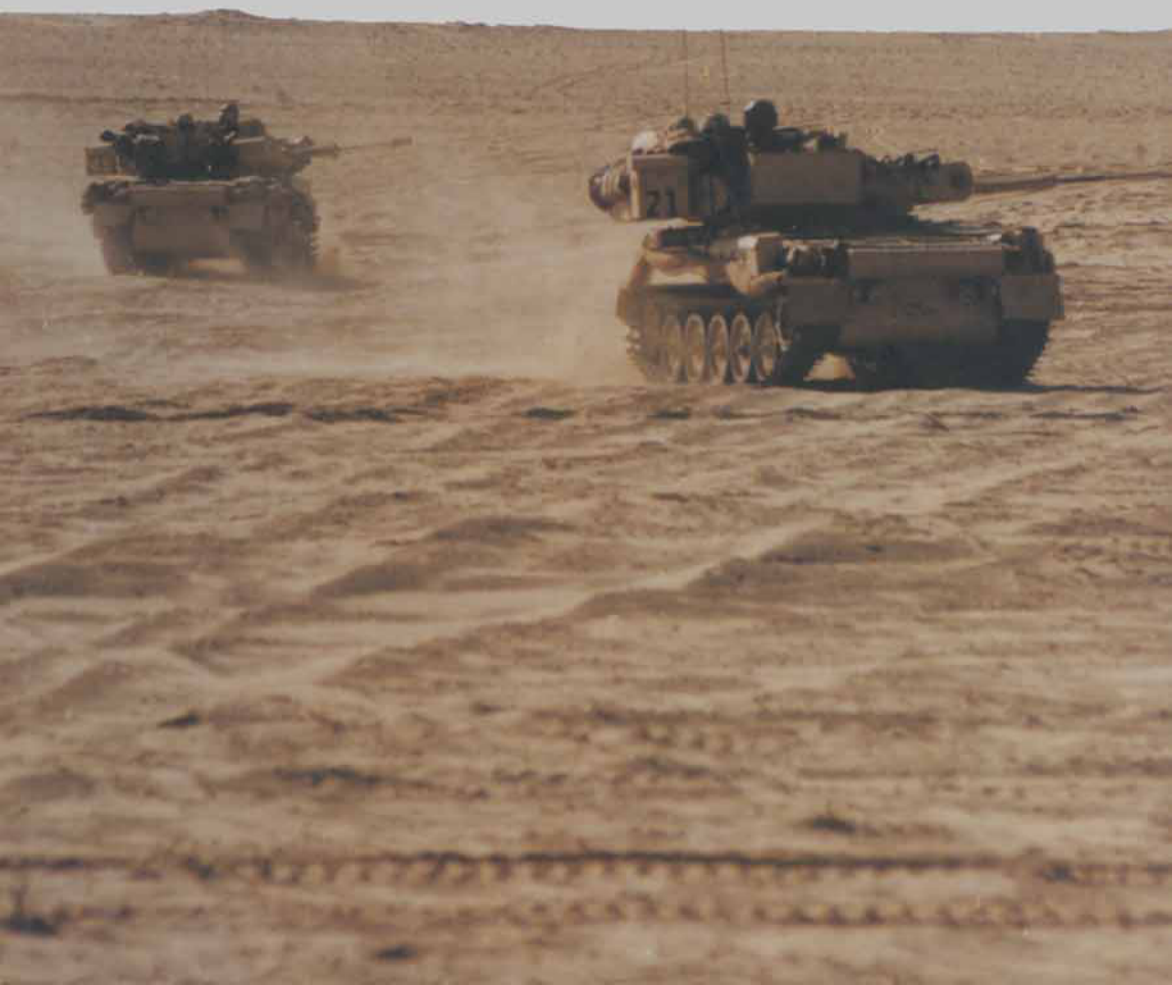
THE SCARLET LANCERS

The Story of 16th/5th The Queen's Royal Lancers 1689-1992

JAMES LUNT



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General John Burgoyne, "Gentleman Johnny"; soldier, playwright and Member of Parliament, raised 16th Light Dragoons in 1759. Portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds. *The Frick Collection*

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1689 - 1992

James Lunt

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TO THE REGIMENT

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FOREWORD
by
THE COLONEL OF THE REGIMENT

This is not a conventional Regimental history. It does not attempt to provide a continuous and detailed account of activities over the years — we already have volumes doing that for the 5th Lancers, the 16th Lancers and the 16th/5th Lancers from their respective formations up to 1961. Instead James Lunt (both a well-known author and a senior ex-officer of the 16th/5th Lancers) uses his own inimitable style to describe specific events and individuals and uses these to illustrate why these distinguished Regiments developed unique personalities.

He deals rather more fully with the recent activities of the 16th/5th Lancers, particularly those from 1964 to 1991, not least because the Regiment was heavily involved in a remarkably high proportion of the active service engagements of the British Army in this period. Aden and the Radfan, two years in Northern Ireland at the height of the troubles, Cyprus during the Turkish invasion, Beirut and the Gulf War are all covered, providing for the first time a coherent and fascinating view of the Regiment's so called "peacetime soldiering".

The 16th/5th Lancers is to amalgamate with the 17th/21st Lancers in the summer of 1993 to form a new Regiment to be titled "The Queen's Royal Lancers". Some might argue that James Lunt's book chronicles the end of the 16th/5th Lancers. I disagree. Rather it marks the end of one chapter in a book that has many chapters yet to be written. James Lunt uses history to demonstrate that we may confidently expect The Queen's Royal Lancers to uphold and indeed build on the distinguished records of its predecessors.

Baughurst, October 1991 *Alastair Dennis*

INTRODUCTION

THIS is the story of two cavalry regiments of the British Army, one raised in 1689 and the other in 1759, that came together in 1922 to form a third regiment, the 16th/5th The Queen's Royal Lancers. Since the older of the two regiments of this union, the 5th Royal Irish Lancers, had had a somewhat chequered career, having been disbanded in 1799 and re-formed in 1858, it ranked junior to the 16th The Queen's Lancers. This accounts for the 16th preceding the 5th in the title after amalgamation, a source of some perplexity for those who feel it should be the other way round. During the fighting in Italy in the Second World War, the Americans used to refer to British cavalry regiments with this kind of numbering as 'fractionalized' regiments.

As any reader of the Marquess of Anglesey's magisterial *History of the British Cavalry* will be aware, cavalry regiments of the line in the British Army have been subjected to frequent change, sometimes disbanded, occasionally re-formed, and more recently often amalgamated with another cavalry regiment. When I set out to write this book in September, 1988, any one who had predicted the imminent breakup of the Soviet Empire, the demolition of the Berlin Wall and the unification of the two Germanies, and a war against Iraq under the leadership of the United States, would almost certainly have been laughed to scorn.

However, this is what happened, changing the map of Europe, and having moreover a dramatic effect on the future shape and

size of the British Army. With the withdrawal of the Soviet occupation forces from Eastern Europe, it has made possible a considerable reduction in strength of the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR). This, coupled with reductions elsewhere, will mean a cut in the overall strength of the British Army of at least 50,000 officers and soldiers. Needless to say this must mean the disbandment or amalgamation of many distinguished cavalry and infantry regiments with their roots buried deep in Britain's past. Not the least among them must be the 16th/5th The Queen's Royal Lancers because the Royal Armoured Corps is to bear a high percentage of the forthcoming reductions. Therefore it might be argued by those so inclined that what follows in these pages is more an obituary than an historical narrative, but I believe that to be an unnecessarily gloomy view. Those who took this line in 1922 when the 16th and 5th Lancers were amalgamated, and there were more than a few of them, were later shown to be wrong. The regiment that resulted from the union was more than worthy of its illustrious predecessors.

It is of course permissible to question the Government's wisdom in making such large reductions in the Army's fighting strength. As we have seen in the case of the recent campaigns in the Falklands and Iraq, wars have a habit of breaking out when and where they are least expected. In my judgement it would have been wiser to have cut more deeply into the 'tail' in order to preserve the 'teeth'. The Ministry of Defence is certainly crying out to be reduced by at least fifty percent; too many admirals, generals and air marshals, together with their civil service counterparts, looking after too few warships, soldiers and planes. But perhaps this is too much to be hoped for.

Whatever the future may hold in the way of amalgamations, it is essential that we should retain the regimental system which has proved to be the bedrock of the British Army. It has been shown time and again that the merging of two regiments with proud traditions will strengthen rather than weaken the new regiment that will result from their union. There is more than enough evidence to prove this point. It was certainly true of the

16th/5th Lancers during the hard-fought campaigns in North Africa and Italy in the Second World War, and again more recently in Iraq. I am certain it will be repeated in the future. Although naturally I shall regret the passing from the *Army List* of the Regiment in which I, and my son after me, had the privilege of serving, I am sure that the phoenix which will arise from our ashes will preserve all our traditions and in the course of time create its own.

Tradition, as we know it in the British Army, is hard to define. It has only the most slender connection with the 'Tradition' recently depicted in a BBC Television Series of that name. That seemed to consist largely of officers in mess-kit lounging round mess tables laden with silver, and passing the port to each other. This may be the image that an ignorant public, and an equally ignorant television producer, has of the Army, and it is perhaps the most photogenic aspect, but it is as far removed from the real meaning as is the tank from the horse, or the sword and lance from the Swingfire guided missile. Tradition, I would suggest, is more of the spirit than anything more tangible. A regiment's deeds in the past help to strengthen it today, and in the future. As an example of what I mean, it was the custom on band nights in the officers' mess of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry for the Vice-President after the Loyal Toast to give the toast, 'Ensign Dyas and the Stormers'. This commemorated the outstanding gallantry of Ensign Dyas and the 'Forlorn Hope' of the 51st Light Infantry which he led into the breach at the storming of Badajoz in Spain in 1811. I find it comforting that such bravery should be recalled nearly two centuries later. This is what Tradition is all about.

There are of course many, both in the Army and outside it, who regard the perpetuation of the regimental system as an obstacle to administrative reform. They would like to see a Corps of Infantry and a Royal Armoured Corps in which both officers and soldiers can be freely cross-posted between the units that make up the Corps. This has been the case within the Royal Regiment of Artillery since the abolition of the separate branches of Horse, Field and Garrison after the First World War, and is similar to the practice in both the French and US

Armies. There is, however, much more cross-posting between units nowadays than was the case between the two world wars; it was certainly common enough in the days when officers purchased their commissions and subsequent steps in rank, abolished by Cardwell in 1871. The Duke of Wellington served in no less than six regiments in the course of his progress up the military ladder. I myself served in two.

Whenever I find myself called upon to defend the regimental system, I am reminded of F. Majdalany's account of the Battle of Cassino in Italy in 1944. Majdalany was serving at the time in the Royal Sussex Regiment:

'Under-supplied, without sufficient time to prepare, these few fought a lonely battle in the mountains and no one in the rest of the army had any idea what they were fighting. They had nothing to sustain them except that potent imponderable their regimental identity. It mattered to the Rajputana Rifles that they were Rajputana Rifles. It mattered to the Royal Sussex that they were Royal Sussex. In the end it was probably this alone that enabled them to hang on.'

I believe this says it all. And I leave it to the reader to judge whether we in the 16th/5th The Queen's Royal Lancers were faithful to the traditions we inherited, and which we pass on to our successors in the certain hope that they will be equally cherished in the future.

Oxford, June 1991. *James Lunt.*

CHAPTER ONE

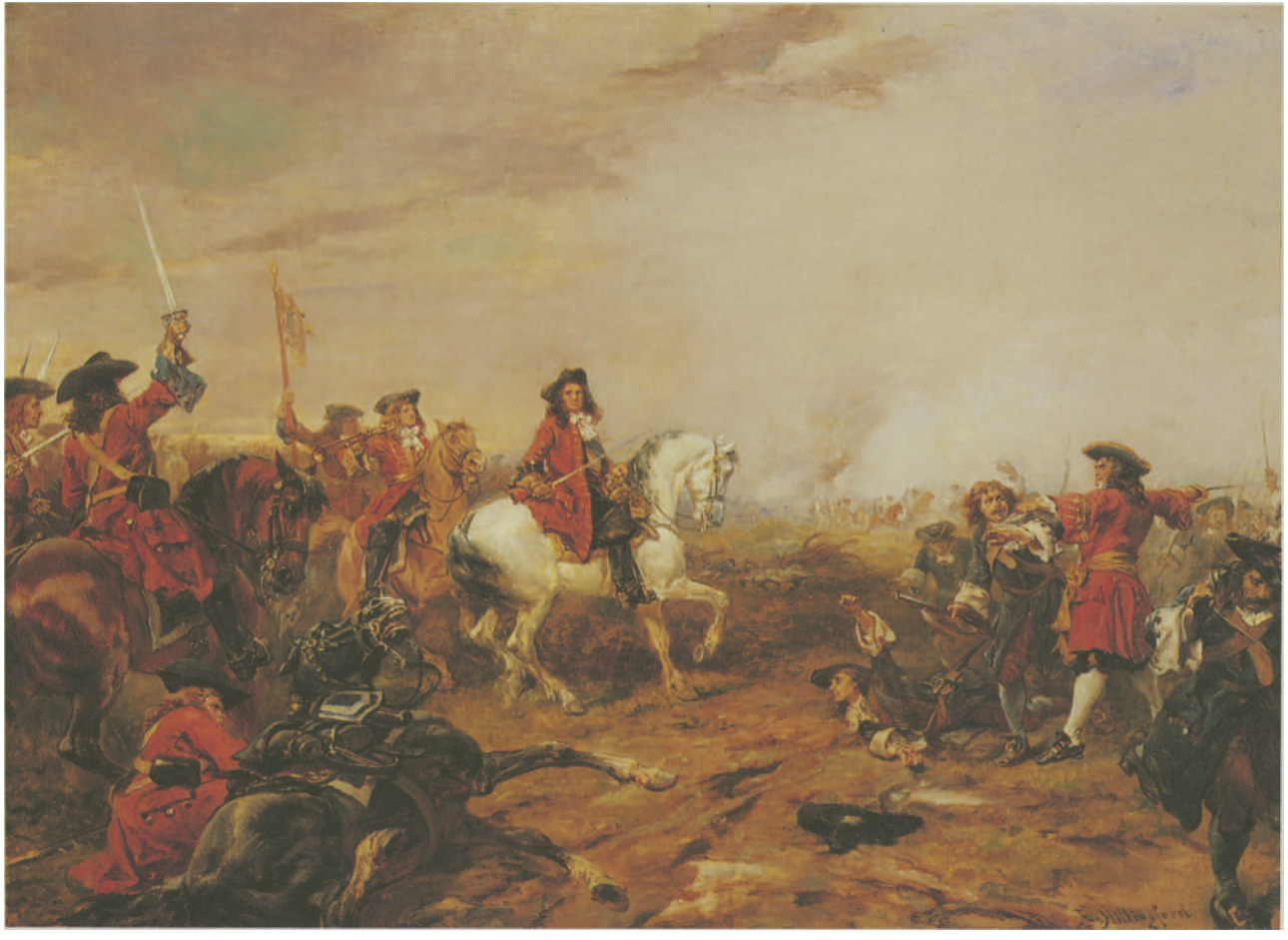
The Royal Dragoons of Ireland

THE English, with their concern for civil liberty, have always been suspicious of a Standing Army, even before Oliver Cromwell's military rule convinced them that they were right.* But in 1689 Parliament legalized the existence of a Standing Army by passing the Mutiny Act, the intention of which was to prevent desertion from the army of King William III to the army of King James II. It has, however, been usually regarded as the beginning of the Standing Army, although in fact an army of sorts had been in existence for many years previously. When regiments of Foot or Horse had to be raised in those days, it was the custom for the King, or some official acting on his behalf, to call upon gentlemen of substance in the country to raise so many officers and men, the regiment so formed usually taking for its title the name of the man who had raised it. Thereafter to all intents and purposes the regiment became the property of its Colonel who might not in fact lead it in battle – he could appoint a Lieutenant-Colonel to do that for him – but who would confidently expect to make a lot of money out of his investment. In 1689 such a regiment of Horse was raised in Enniskillen in Northern Ireland on the orders of Gustavus Hamilton, Governor of Enniskillen. The man entrusted with this commission was Captain James Wynne, 'a gentleman of Ireland, but then a captain in Colonel Stuart's Regiment'. Wynne was appointed a Colonel of Dragoons with the pay of 15 shillings a day. His regiment's title was 'Wynne's Inniskilling Dragoons'.

* I use the word 'English' advisedly. The Scots have always been much more conscious of their regiments than the English.

Wynne's Inniskilling Dragoons 1689. A silver statuette

It is a melancholy reminder of the state of Anglo-Irish relations down the centuries that three hundred years ago Protestants and Catholics stood face to face, as they do today, at the gates of Londonderry. King James II, recently ousted from his throne, had landed in Ireland and placed his fate in the hands of the Earl of Tyrconnel. Protestants in the north rallied under Gustavus Hamilton to defend the cause of King William III. Two regiments of Dragoons and three of Foot were hastily raised in Enniskillen. In July, 1689, General Kirk arrived from England to relieve Londonderry, and on the 20th of that month issued commissions to the officers of the Enniskillen regiments in the name of King William III, who subsequently ratified them. Together with the other Enniskillen regiments, or more



The Duke of Marlborough campaigning in the Low Countries. Ross's Dragoons were "in the thick of the fight" at Blenheim. An oil painting by R. Hillingford

The Honourable Hugh Somerville joined the 16th Light Dragoons on its formation in 1759. Lieutenant-Colonel 1763. Portrait by Tilly Kettle

properly levies, Wynne's regiment was brought on the establishment of the Regular (or Standing) Army by a Royal Warrant dated 'the first day of January, 1689, in the first year of our Reign'.

It was not an efficient unit, even when judged by the not very exacting standards of the time, and has been compared to a mob of undisciplined boys led by officers who were ignorant, negligent and drunken. However, they could fight well enough, drunk or sober. In those days Dragoons were essentially mounted infantry, using their horses to convey them to a suitable tactical position, dismounting thereafter and fighting on foot. More of Wynne's regiment probably went on foot than in the saddle, horses being in short supply in Ireland. So bad were the arrangements for the shipment of horses from England to Ireland that one regiment lost every horse during the sea passage. It was fortunate for William III that Tyrconnel's troops were in no better shape, and that he was given time to get the raw Enniskillen levies into some kind of order.

This was the task of Marshal Schomberg, a German veteran reputedly aged 80, who had been appointed Commander-in-Chief by King William. He arrived in August, 1689. By then Wynne's regiment had been blooded at the Battle of Newton Butler towards the end of July, when we are told 'the name of the Enniskillen men became a terror to the Irish'. Schomberg was so struck by 'the horrid and detestable crimes of profane cursing, swearing, and taking God's Holy Name in vain,' that he issued a special order of the day on the subject, dated 18 January, 1690, in which he charged and commanded all officers and soldiers to 'forbear all vain cursing, etc etc'. It would seem that in this respect at least soldiers have not changed all that much down the centuries.

William III took the field himself on 14 June, 1690, and shortly afterwards defeated James II at the Battle of the Boyne on 1 July. The battle started inauspiciously for King William. His Commander-in-Chief, Schomberg, was killed at the outset while reconnoitring the river bank. Tradition has it that he was shot by an Irishman with his duck gun. He was buried in St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin where more than 200 years later

the 5th Royal Irish Lancers erected a monument to commemorate their comrades who had fallen in the South African War; the monument is close beside Schomberg's grave.

The Battle of the Boyne was hard fought and at one stage William found it necessary to place himself at the head of the Dragoons from Enniskillen, saying, 'Gentlemen, I have heard much of your exploits, and now I shall witness them'. The English cavalry then crossed the river and charged with such fury that they scattered the enemy infantry but then galloped off out of control. Fortunately for King William the Irish infantry broke at the crucial moment and took to their heels; they were only saved by the gallantry of the Irish cavalry who charged time after time. The pursuit after the battle was nevertheless a bloody one.

Wynne's Dragoons later took part in the unsuccessful sieges of Limerick and Athlone. There is a sadly contemporary note in the description of an assault at Limerick during August, 1690: 'For three hours did a sharp fight continue, in which the Irish women boldly joined; and when they failed to obtain more deadly missiles, threw stones and broken bottles' (shades of the Falls Road, 1970!). Wynne's Dragoons were also present at the Battle of Aughrim on 12 July, 1691, which virtually concluded the war and where, according to an eyewitness, Captain Parker, the Irish never fought so well in their own country as they did on that day, although their gallantry was in vain.

In May, 1694, Wynne's Dragoons were sent to Flanders to join the allied armies collecting there to fight the French. Wynne's regiment was ill-horsed, most of the animals out of condition after a long time at sea while crossing the Irish Sea and English Channel. There was, however, time enough to improve on this since warfare at that time can hardly be described as fast-moving. It was more a matter of sieges and patrol actions than set-piece battles; when the latter did take place, it was all according to the manuals of war and extremely formalized. But men were killed, and men were wounded, most of the latter dying, since medical attention was mainly confined to amputations and to bleeding. Wynne was wounded in the knee at Moorsleede, where his Dragoons defended a convoy

The Battle of the Boyne

of supplies against enemy attack. Although the wound was slight, Wynne died from it. King William gave the colonelcy to Charles Ross who had served as one of his aides-de-camp. In July, 1695, Wynne's became Ross's Dragoons.

The war in the Low Countries ended in 1698. Ross's Dragoons lost far more men from disease than from enemy action and like every other regiment they had many deserters. The wonder of it is that men could be induced to serve under such wretched conditions, with inefficient officers, scoundrelly commissaries, and doctors who made better butchers than surgeons. But for men who came from the backward rural areas of Ireland, life on campaign in Flanders was in some ways preferable to the brutish conditions at home; at least there were far better opportunities for loot. Ross's Dragoons returned

to Ireland where the strength of the garrison was fixed at 12,000 men. Ross's Dragoons were reduced to eight troops, amounting in all to 362 officers and soldiers, who were billeted in inns and lodging-houses throughout the Province of Connaught.

Maintaining discipline among these scattered detachments was always a problem in Ireland, where the army operated as a gendarmerie, and although life was on the whole easy-going, punishments when ordered could be draconian. Six men from Ross's Dragoons were sentenced by Court Martial in December, 1698, 'to run and be whipped several times by an entire regiment of Foot drawn out for that purpose on three several days on St Stephen's Green'. The punishment, known as the Gatloup, was carried out by troops paraded in open ranks. Each man carried a stout stick. The ranks were faced inwards and the prisoner, stripped to the waist, was marched up and down the lines of men. Each man was expected to strike him with maximum force on the 'naked back, breast, arms, or where his cudgel should light,' while the screams of the victims were intended to be drowned by the drums which beat throughout the punishment. Many men died while undergoing this savage ordeal.

In March, 1702, Ross's Dragoons were dispatched to join Marlborough's army in the Low Countries. They were present at Blenheim where they were in the thick of the fight. Marlborough's pencilled note to his wife, Sarah, written in the fading light after a long and exhausting day, must surely be one of the shortest dispatches in history:

'13 August, 1704

I have not time to say more, but to beg you will give my duty to the Queen, and let her know her army has had a glorious victory. Monsr. Tallard and two other generals are in my coach, and I am following the rest. The bearer, my aide-de-camp, Colonel Parke, will give her an account of what has pass'd. I shall do it in a day or two by another more at large.'

Ross had petitioned that his Regiment should be known as The Royal Dragoons of Ireland and in March, 1704, that title was formally conferred on the Regiment. Therefore it was as the

Royal Dragoons of Ireland that the Regiment charged at Blenheim, capturing three French kettle-drums which Marlborough directed should henceforward be carried at the head of the Regiment. These kettle-drums are reputed to be those still in existence in the Queen's Armoury in the Tower of London. When the Regiment received its first Guidon from the Queen at Buckingham Palace on 19 March, 1959, the Blenheim kettle-drums were brought from the Tower and piled in front of the parade. On them was laid the Guidon before its consecration by the Chaplain General to the Forces, 255 years after their capture at Blenheim.

In 1706 the Royal Dragoons of Ireland, brigaded with the Scots Dragoons (Scots Greys), distinguished themselves at the Battle of Ramillies on 23 May. The two regiments captured the entire King's Regiment (*Régiment du Roi*) while charging the enemy, and followed this by taking two battalions of the *Régiment de Picardie* prisoner, and destroying the third battalion. For this feat both regiments of Dragoons, Scots and Irish, were given the distinction of wearing Grenadier caps, thereby differentiating them from the rest of the cavalry. Captain Molesworth of the Regiment, who was serving as aide-de-camp to Marlborough, was instrumental in saving his General's life. The Duke, in the thick of the fighting, was thrown from his horse and was in imminent danger of capture. Dismounting, Molesworth handed his horse to the Duke, who was able to escape, leaving Molesworth on his own. He managed to recover the Duke's horse and took it back to Marlborough. While the Duke was remounting, the equerry holding his stirrup had his head taken off by a round shot. Molesworth later had a medal struck in his honour, a very unusual distinction. He reached the rank of General, as Viscount Molesworth, and was Colonel of the Royal Dragoons of Ireland from 1737 to 1758.

Ramillies was probably Marlborough's hardest fought battle; he was in the saddle for nearly 24 hours, and, as already described, was in the thick of the fighting at times. The Royal Dragoons of Ireland were also present at Marlborough's other two great victories, Oudenarde on 11 July, 1708, and

The 5th Royal Irish Dragoons about 1740

Malplaquet on 11 September, 1709. They helped to capture Bruges in 1706 and took part in what many regard as the most brilliant of Marlborough's operations – the passage of the French lines on 4 August, 1711. It is sad that this brilliant feat should have been followed by Marlborough's recall and subsequent disgrace. Few British commanders have been loved so well by their soldiers as Marlborough, or 'Corporal John', as they called him.*

Life in the ranks was still as hard and as brutish as it had been when campaigning under William III, but Marlborough did at least give them victories and organized a more reliable supply system. There was a great deal of peculation and nepotism, as is evidenced by this letter from Marlborough to Lord Cardigan,

* General 'Bill' Slim comes nearest to Marlborough in receiving the affection of his soldiers, in my opinion.

who had requested that the son of the late Major-General Brudenell should be given a company:

'I have so just a sense of the father's good services that I shall always be glad to embrace any opportunity of showing it to his family; but your Lordship tells me he is not above five years old!'

Charles Ross, now a Lieutenant-General of Horse, took some part in the negotiations which concluded the war. In June, 1713, he was told 'the Regiment under your command is to be put on the Establishment of Ireland and to be paid for by the revenues of that country'. Ross himself was sent to Paris three months later as Envoy Extraordinary. He was lucky to avoid the slow deterioration in military efficiency that seemed to be inseparable from service in Ireland during the 18th century.

It was to be the fate of Ross's Regiment to serve continuously in Ireland for the next 86 years. The 5th Royal Irish Dragoons, as they are shown in the 1752 Army List, were never given the opportunity to escape from the dreary round of garrison duties that was the lot of regiments on the Irish establishment. They hunted down smugglers, galloped after highwaymen, held down the discontented and impoverished peasantry, and came together only once or twice annually to take part in a review. Writing of the cavalry regiments on the Irish establishment, Sir John Fortescue says they were 'absolutely useless and untrustworthy'.* He also says they were 'dispersed in small parties all over the country for the protection of isolated buildings and individuals. This in itself was sufficient to ruin all discipline; and the evil was not mitigated by the absence of great numbers of officers from their posts'.**

Not everyone was critical. 'Cavalry Corps in Ireland were extremely select,' wrote Surgeon John Smet of the 8th Light Dragoons in 1784, 'as from the very low establishment, it was in the power of the Colonels of choosing among a number of young gentlemen of distinction who might wish to get a commission, and who all could easily afford to add a hundred pounds a year to their pay. The warrants were also purchased at a high price, often by the sons of gentlemen for as much as five hundred guineas. The privates were always young men well recommended and whose connections were known.

* *History of the British Army* Vol 3, p.532
** *Ibid.*, Vol 4, p.518

Indeed, the dragoon service was at that time extremely easy and pleasant, so much so, that when a vacancy happened, several desirable recruits always offered, and the men selected in general, got no more than one shilling bounty'.*

Pleasant it may have been, but it was certainly not soldiering. Smet tells us that two-thirds of the officers were away for most of the year on leave. The men did not do too badly either. They took their horses home with them and seldom wore uniform. To save the expense of forage, horses were put out to grass for as long as possible and must in consequence have been unfit for hard work for most of the year. 'Such a service had many attractions,' says Smet. The annual review brought everyone together again, and, 'The Officers now meeting again, after such a long separation from each other, in affluent circumstances, which they had improved while they lived with their friends, justly looked on the time of year they were to be reviewed in as the pleasantest season. The mornings were spent at exercise and the remainder of the time in festivity'.

It was not always easy to find a field of suitable size on which to review a regiment. Lieutenant-Colonel the Hon Charles Stewart, brother of the Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh, was commanding the 5th Royal Irish Dragoons in 1785 when he drew attention to the problem in a letter from Clonmel on 16 June:

'That your Memorialist took a field of exercise for the 5th Dragoons during their assembly and review at Cashell, in the last and present months, as there was no common ground near that town. That he was obliged to pay 13 guineas for that field, as he could not get a proper place for less money. Praying to be allowed to charge the said sum to the contingent bill of said Regiment in the usual manner.'

We are not told whether the Commanding Officer was successful or not.

Charles Stewart presumably had purchased command of the 5th Royal Irish Dragoons when he was still very young. He could not have been better connected, son of the Marquess of Londonderry and brother of the Foreign Secretary. He was Wellington's Adjutant-General in Spain and acquired a certain

* *Historical Record of the 8th Hussars* (Smet)

reputation as a cavalry leader, although it was said that he was hampered in the field by his poor eyesight. He became Marquess of Londonderry in due course, as well as a General. Stewart was specifically absolved by Cornwallis (Lord-Lieutenant in Dublin 1798-1801) of any responsibility for the poor state of the 5th Royal Irish Dragoons when it was decided by George III to disband the Regiment; Stewart was at the time commanding the 18th Light Dragoons which he took to Portugal, but he cannot be entirely innocent of blame. It is a truism in the British Army that a regiment takes its tone from its commanding officer. If that were the case with the 5th Royal Irish Dragoons, Stewart would appear to have failed.

Ireland was in a sorry state towards the end of the eighteenth century. There was appalling poverty and almost continuous discontent. Had this not been the case, there would have been no requirement to scatter the troops round the countryside in small groups to keep the peasantry in order. The consequences of such service were absentee officers and bored and demoralized soldiers. Mutiny was not infrequent, insubordination was common, and desertion an almost daily occurrence. When General Abercromby arrived in Dublin as Commander-in-Chief in 1798, he was appalled at the state of affairs he found. 'The very disgraceful frequency of courts-martial, and the many complaints of irregularities in the conduct of troops in the Kingdom, have too unfortunately proved the army to be in a state of licentiousness which must render it formidable to every one but the enemy,' stated Abercromby's first General Order. He followed it up by resigning, handing over to his deputy, General Lake, who was later to find India a more rewarding country than Ireland in which to win military distinction.

If regiments recently arrived in Ireland succumbed so quickly to the general malaise, it is hardly surprising that a regiment like the 5th Royal Irish Dragoons, which had known no other garrison since Marlborough's campaigns, should have been in such a sorry state. Their inspection report in 1797 could not have been plainer: 'A very essential change is absolutely necessary to put the 5th Regiment of Dragoons in a condition

for service which at present they are entirely unfit for'. Nothing was done, however. The good officers and NCOs took themselves off, leaving behind the lazy, drink-sodden and incompetent. On 23 May, 1798, a rising took place in Ireland and the detachments of the 5th Royal Irish Dragoons found themselves fighting for their lives. Like all rebellions of its kind, that in Ireland in 1798 was marked by cruelties on both sides. There were various engagements, the best known of which is Vinegar Hill, but by September the authorities had regained the upper hand. There was now time to consider the problem of the Irish garrison in general, and of the 5th Royal Irish Dragoons in particular.

The regiments on the Irish establishment had been found deficient in the essential military virtues, but it is not clear why the 5th Royal Irish Dragoons were made the scapegoat for the failings of the rest of the garrison of Ireland. This is the more surprising in view of the fact that its last Commanding Officer had very powerful connections in the government, and not only with his brother, the Foreign Secretary. The whole business remains obscure and may owe something to the fact that King George III, already mentally unstable, was obsessed with the fear that his Prime Minister, William Pitt, was determined to bring about Catholic emancipation in Ireland. It may have been thought that by taking such drastic action as the disbandment of one of the oldest and most senior regiments on the Irish establishment, it would be clear how strongly the King was opposed to any suggestion of Catholic emancipation. Beyond this, which can only be supposition, it is hard to know why the government acted as it did.

Unfortunately there can be no shadow of doubt that the Regiment was in a very poor state, although whether this was so bad as to merit Lord Cornwallis's strictures in his letter of 1 January, 1799, to the Secretary at War (the Duke of Portland) can only be a matter of conjecture.

'The highly improper, dangerous and disloyal conduct of the non-commissioned officers and private soldiers of the 5th or Royal Irish Regiment of Dragoons, and generally speaking the irregularity, the want of discipline, and inattention of the

officers, have given me much anxiety and uneasiness for some time past,' wrote Cornwallis, 'but at present, the information I have received respecting them is of so serious a nature that I am under the necessity of reporting their misconduct, formally, to your Grace for the immediate information of His Majesty'. He went on to say that some deserters from the Regiment had been apprehended and would be tried by a General Court Martial, but this, in his judgement, would not be enough. He strongly recommended the removal of the Regiment from the Irish garrison.

We do not know whether Cornwallis was surprised by the reaction in Whitehall. In a despatch dated 12 January the Secretary at War expressed the King's concern and displeasure at the conduct of the Regiment, going on to say, 'His Majesty has therefore determined that the Fifth or Royal Irish Regiment of Dragoons shall be immediately disbanded'. The Regiment was concentrated in Newry prior to embarkation under the guns of the frigate, HMS *Ariadne*, after which it was conveyed to Liverpool early in February, 1799. It then proceeded on foot by march route to Maidstone, and thereafter to Chatham where it was formally disbanded on 10 April, 1799.

Whatever their failings may have been in the past, the 5th Royal Regiment of Dragoons in their hour of trial appear to have behaved in exemplary fashion. A report on the Regiment's last days comments favourably on its good behaviour while awaiting disbandment. 'We cannot conclude,' says the report, 'without expressing our regret that a Regiment which has so frequently deserved well of its country should have incurred His Majesty's displeasure. Let us hope that, like the Phoenix, it may some time or other rise out of its own ashes, be restored to the Army, and add fresh laurels to those of Ramillies and Hochstet [Blenheim].'

As far as can be established there were only three soldiers from the 5th Royal Irish Dragoons who were court-martialled for belonging to the Fenians (United Irishmen). Two of them were executed; the other turned King's evidence and was transported for life. There is nothing to show that others in the Regiment had been disloyal. Many of the officers and soldiers

were transferred to the 18th Light Dragoons under their former Commanding Officer, the Honourable Charles Stewart. There could have been no one better to separate the sheep from the goats!

The 5th Royal Irish Dragoons had been granted a special kettle-drummers' allowance by the Duke of Marlborough to commemorate their capture of the French kettle-drums at Blenheim. This amounted to six pounds, four shillings and has never been claimed since. Nor has any trace been found of the Regimental Standard which may have been claimed by the Regimental Colonel at the time, General Lord Rossmore.

The exact circumstances of the disbandment of the 5th Royal Irish Dragoons remain a mystery to this day. None of the Dragoon Guard regiments on the Irish establishment, formerly the First to the Fourth Horse, converted in 1788 to the Fourth to the Seventh Dragoon Guards, described by Fortescue as being 'valueless and obsolete,' were disbanded. Instead it was only the 5th Royal Irish Regiment of Dragoons who were, in Fortescue's words, 'swept... with ignominy from the list of the Army'.

CHAPTER TWO

Burgoyne's Light Horse

During the wars between Frederick the Great and the Austro-Hungarian Empire a new kind of cavalry appeared on the battlefields of Central Europe. They came to be known as Hussars, a Hungarian word by derivation, and they were primarily intended for outpost duties and as scouts. Recruited from the great plains of Hungary where living on horseback was a way of life, they were very lightly equipped and mounted on ponies which could live off the country and make up in speed and endurance for what they lacked in looks. It was not long before other armies began to copy the Austrians, and as a result there developed three distinct types of cavalry – heavy cavalry for shock action, light cavalry for reconnaissance, and a form of mounted infantry which most closely approximated to the cavalry of the preceding 200 years. In the latter case the horse was merely the means for transporting the soldier to the scene of action where thereafter he fought on foot; cavalry of this kind were usually known as Dragoons.

In 1759 the British Army decided to follow the example of the continental armies and form regiments of light cavalry to be styled Light Dragoons (later Hussars and Lancers). On 17 March, 1759, orders were issued for the raising of the 15th Light Dragoons, and four months later similar orders were issued for the raising of the 16th Light Dragoons. It was then the practice, whenever a new regiment was to be raised, to nominate either a country magnate or some sufficiently distinguished serving officer to form the regiment. In the case

of the 16th Light Dragoons the officer nominated was John Burgoyne of the 2nd Foot Guards. He is known chiefly, if not entirely, for his surrender to superior enemy forces during the American War of Independence, at Saratoga on 16 October, 1777, but he was a much abler soldier than that unhappy event might indicate, as well as being a man of many parts.

Burgoyne was born in London in 1722. He was the second son of a Bedfordshire baronet who lived in fine style but who died in a debtor's prison. In later years Horace Walpole spread the rumour that John Burgoyne was the natural son of Lord Bingley, at one time ambassador in Spain, who was Burgoyne's godfather, and who left Burgoyne's mother a considerable legacy. Walpole was a notorious scandalmonger and nothing has been found to substantiate his charge. Burgoyne was educated at Westminster School where he became friendly with Lord Strange, son of the Earl of Derby, which in turn led to his forming a relationship with Strange's sister, Lady Charlotte Stanley. Burgoyne could hardly have been considered the perfect match for the daughter of one of the most powerful men in England, which resulted in the infatuated couple eloping to France where they were married in 1751. At the time of his elopement Burgoyne was serving in the 1st Royal Dragoons (the Royals) but he had been compelled to escape his creditors by fleeing to France. In 1756 he returned to Britain and purchased a Captaincy in the 11th Dragoons, presumably with money provided by the Derby family. War broke out soon afterwards with France and Burgoyne distinguished himself in the operations against St Malo and Cherbourg. This presumably brought him to the notice of King George II who fancied himself as a soldier; he was the last British sovereign to take the field in person – at Dettingen in 1743 where he proved to be more of a nuisance than an inspiration.

Already well known in London society for his handsome appearance, his social graces, his daring as a gambler, and his connection with the Derby family, it was not long before Burgoyne was promoted into the 2nd Foot Guards (Coldstream) as a Captain and Lieutenant-Colonel. He was then aged 36, and when it was decided to raise two regiments of light