

THE ROYAL MARINES AND THE CITY

The Story of the Royal Marines connection with the City of London starts far away in 1664 – October 28th, when the Council Chamber in Old Whitehall Palace saw gathered round the table sixteen Privy Counsellors, amongst whom were the Dukes of York and Ormond and Albermarle, the Earls Lauderdale and Anglesey and indeed the Bishop of London.

From his high backed chair at the head of the table the King's Majesty presided, but his attention to the proceedings is only perfunctory while the formal business is read out . . . The report of the proceedings reads that "His Majesty was pleased to order and direct (amongst other things) that 1200 land soldiers be forthwith raised to be in readiness to be distributed to His Majesty's fleets and prepared for sea service. Each regiment was to have one Colonel and one Lieutenant Colonel and one Sergeant Major besides a complement of junior officers and non commissioned officers and be divided into six companies, each of two hundred men.

Recruits were to be drawn mainly from the trained band of the City of London, the latter of whom were volunteer militia, or citizen soldiers, and were trained in the use of arms for the defence of the City in time of trouble.

At the time of the formation of the Corps the trained band stood at about ten thousand men divided into six regiments known as Blue, Yellow, Orange, Green, White, and Red, so that there were ample numbers from which to draw. A great number were available then because there was much unemployment owing to the Act of Disbandment and the British Public's re-action against any military body was so strong that an Act was carried through Parliament to prohibit the continuance of any trained band except in the City. This occurred in March 1663.

Their uniform was a yellow coat, with red breeches and stockings. Hats were bound with gold braid and they were armed with firelocks, the latest type of small arms. 250 were sent afloat at once and the remainder temporarily quartered in various sea ports and towns.

A point about the yellow uniform was that this was the favourite colour of the Colonel in Chief, who was then the Duke of York and it was the same as worn by the Duke of York's Horse and the Duchess of York's Regiment of Foot.

War was then imminent against the Dutch and skirmishes between the two countries began in 1665 and there followed fiercely fought sea

actions namely the Battle of Lowestoft in 1665, and the Battle of St. James's Day in 1666, and on shore too they particularly distinguished themselves in the Defence of the Landguard Fort at Harwich when the Dutch Admiral Reuter endeavoured to follow a bold attack on our Warships in the Medway with an invasion attempt. The 2,000 troops that he landed were hurled back into the sea by marines. Amongst replacements for casualties was a John Churchill, who later became the famous Duke of Marlborough, who served in the Admiral's Regiment from 1672 to 1681. However, it must be said that the Corps had an uneasy passage in its first few years because whenever a Peace arrived, with the Dutch or anybody else at that time, with the hatred there was of any standing army the Marines were promptly disbanded.

At the time of the raising of the original 1200 men Royal Warrants were issued authorising the holders to beat up men for Service in the Regiment. Each warrant limited the holder to recruit only 200 men required for a Company, and one was presented to the Lord Mayor of London to endorse thereby granting a licence to the holder to recruit within the City. The warrant did not contain the proviso that the holder was obliged to acquaint the Lord Mayor of his wish to beat in the City. This first appeared in a warrant in 1666, when it is probable that someone had neglected the formality and this had led to remonstrance from the City authorities.

The recruiting Party used to march through the Streets beating a drum to attract attention, and then unfurl a colour to denote that recruitment was for the King's Service, and weapons drawn and displayed. Actual enlistment took place, on what is now the ground of the Honourable Artillery Company.

Other warrants were issued in subsequent years and it became customary for the Admiral's Regiment to recruit in the City. This assumption is supported by the famous case in 1746 when a party of Marines beating along Cheapside was required to desist by a Magistrate, who was in fact an Alderman. Upon being told by the Officer Commanding the Party "Sir, We are Marines", the Alderman apologised and begged them to continue!

The right of the City of London to close its gates against the Sovereign's troops was challenged in 1842, but the Law Officers upheld that the Lord Mayor and Citizens had the Common Law right established by a Charter by King Edward III.

The privilege claimed by the Corps of marching through the City with "drums beating, colours flying, and bayonets fixed" had been established by ancient custom and usage in that the Corps used regularly to beat for recruits in the City.

It is remarkable that men enlisted as I have indicated and were then drafted to a ship with very little training. An extract from Pepys diary on a Summer's day in June 1666 (the year of the Great Fire of London) tells of Pepys waiting on the River Stairs at Blackwall for an appointment, and presently came straggling down the winding alley a stream of men whose broad brommed hats and bandoliers, yellow coats and scarlet stockings proclaimed them to be a Detachment of newly raised Maritime Regiment of Foot. With the eager curiosity that characterised him, Pepys talked to the men until they had all tumbled into the boats and pulled off to the Man of War lying in the River, he records that incident in the following words:

“Down to Blackwall, there saw soldiers (who by this time had most of them gotten drunk) shipped up, but Lord, to see how the poor fellows kissed their wives and sweethearts and let off their guns was strange sport”.

The privilege of marching through the City with bayonets fixed is zealously observed and it is interesting to note that the Royal Marine Batallion which carried out London duties in August 1935 was the first to exercise the privilege for over two centuries.

I have seen an article from the “Globe and Laurel” of 1928 which referred to a Dinner of the Royal Marines Old Comrades Association in London when a Colonel Drury proposed the health of the Lord Mayor, and he referred to an episode in 1914 when at the Funeral Procession of Field Marshal Roberts, where reference is made to the City boundary being crossed, apparently one of the platoons from the very long column withdrew from the procession, fixed bayonets and rejoins the column later on.

It is said that one of the nick names by which Royal Marines are known are “The Jollies” which was a name from the original trained bands of London and reference is made to this by Kipling, when he wrote:

“After I met him all over the world, a-doing all kinds of things, like landing himself with a gatling gun to talk to them 'eathen Kings. 'E sleeps in an 'ammock instead of a cot, and 'E drills with the deck on a slew, and he sweats like a jolly Her Majesty's Jolly, a solider and sailor too”.

Another nick name in the Corps is bootneck, or leatherneck, and this comes from the fact that there was a leather flap inside the collar of the uniform of the Marines. They were also sometimes known in the past as “Lobster soldiers” as the Royal Marine light infantrymen wore an orange red uniform. The Corps had two component parts since 1804 when Marine Artillery Companies were formed as distinct from Royal Marines Light Infantry and this continued until 1923.

At one time in the fleet the Royal Marines were always responsible for the guns of one turret on all ships.

A reference to the Waiting Books in the Guildhall Library (being a record of decisions taken by the Lord Mayor) shows a record of the first warrant to a Colonel Sir William Killigrew, and reads:

“These are to authorise you to beat up drums raising for your Company of Foot consisting of 200 men for Service with His Majesty at sea, under the Command of His Royal Highness the Duke of York and to quarter such men as you shall raise in the Inns Ale Houses and Victualling houses until they be completed and then to march to . . . and Justices of the Peace and Constables of the several towns where your men shall quarter are to be assisting to yourself and the officers employed by you and the equal quartering of your men and the officers are to take care on the march and in quarters that the soldiers behave themselves civilly and orderly and pay for what they shall receive from their landlords” . . .

Another warrant of 30th October 1666 was for a further 100 men for “filling up your Company in His Royal Highness the Duke of York’s Regiment under the Command of Colonel Chester Wray, and in case you should beat up your drums in the City of London or the Liberties thereof, you are first to acquaint the Lord Mayor of London therewith”. You will note the difference in that in this case the Lord Mayor is to be “acquainted” with what they were doing first of all. This was addressed to a Captain Silas Titus and the warrant was signed by Lord Albermarle. After 1666 there are five more notices of such warrants up to 1678 in the Waiting Books. Spun off into the Army were certain regiments who became Lancashire Regiment, Queens Royal Surrey Regiment and the Somerset and Cornwall Light Infantry. The fourth Foot served as Marines from 1703 to 1711 and subsequently became the Kings Own Royal Border Regiment.

It should be noted that there is only one battle honour borne by the Corps on their Colours, and this is Gibraltar. This marks the capture of Gibraltar in 1704 by Admiral Rook with the Marines, commanded by Prince George of Hesse. On 21st July Prince George landed 1800 British and Dutch Marines in the Bay and seamen from the fleet made a frontal assault in the boats and Marines battled a way into the Fortress. The Governor surrendered and Prince George hoisted the standard of the Archduke Charles, but Rook promptly replaced this with the Union Flag. It should be said that Admiral Rook was formerly an Officer in the Royal Marines.

In October of that year, a Franco Spanish Army of 16,000 began the siege of the Rock. The siege went on for eight months and finally de-

sisted, by which time half the original garison had become casualties.

Apart from Recording Gibraltar, it will be noted that on the colours there is also a laurel, this celebrates the second great landmark in its History, when in 1761 a combined operation was staged to capture the fortified Armoury of Belle Isle off the coast of Brittany the Marines were commaned by a Major Collins, whose son was destined to become Governor of Tasmania. The Marines made a surprise landing and eventually took the chief town by storming the cliffs.

Following the French Revolution the French Government declared War on England in 1793 and this ended in 1802 and in April of that year King George III directed that they were in future to be styled "The Royal Marines".

The man who did much to obtain this for them was Admiral of the Fleet the Earl of St. Vincent, the Victor of that Battle, then first Lord of the Admiralty, and known as Old Oak, and referring to the recommendation for the grant of this honour he made the remarkable tribute in obtaining for them the distinction of "Royal":

"I but in-efficiently did my duty, I never knew an appeal made to them for Honour Courage or Loyalty that did not more than recognise my expectations, if ever the hour of real danger should come to England, they will be found the Country's Sheet Anchor".

In 1827 George IV directed that the Globe encircled by Laurel should be the Corps distinguishing badge and his own cypher was forever to appear on their colours.

During the next 2½ Centuries little connection occurred between the City and the Corps. The link was however maintained by the Exercise of Charitable Funds for Soldiers and Sailors, which was set up by Sir John Langham, who was the 6th Baronet and a descendant of John Langham who was Sheriff of London in 1642 Alderman of Port Soken until 1648 and of Bishopsgate in 1648 to 1649 and M.P. for London in 1654 and 1655, Sir John a royalist and was deprived of his Aldermanry in 1649 as were other Cavalier Aldermen. He was knighted on 25th May 1660 and created a Baronet in June 1660 and came from Northamptonshire. This Trust is still running having been administered by the Court of Alderman. He left six thousand out of his stock in New South Sea Annuities and it was laid down by the Court of Aldermen that "each year 25 poor distressed soldiers and 25 poor distressed sailors, having families but receiving no pension from the government should each receive £4 apeeice." Some of the original Petitions are still extant with dates about 1771 one being from a Thomas Armstead from the Ports Divisions asks:

"That your poor petitioner has poor health and family and is in

the most indigent circumstances and is incapable of providing for them having been discharged His Majesty's Service with a Consumption, as appears from your Petitioner's discharge and is attended by a weakness in your Petitioner's eyes, so as to deprive him of procuring the common necessities of life, which disorder has been contracted in the Service, and having no Pension your Petitioner most humbly solicits that he partake of the gift of our generous benefactor."

Another Petition stated that "Your Petitioner had served His Majesty in the last War as a Marine in the 59th Company under Colonel Richard Bendyshe for the space of seven years and four months, but have got the rheumatism and was discharged in the year 1763 coming home from the West Indies", he goes on to say that "having a wife and family to provide for and growing in years and my eyes fail me very much which makes me Petition to your Worships". The witnesses of the Petition go on to say that they "know him a very honest man for the said gift".

I am glad to say that the Charity is still going strong, and now half the annual income goes to the Army Benevolent Fund and the other half to the Royal Naval Benevolent Trust. John Langham died in 1766 and it is interesting to note that the income today is about £1300 and there are still 17 beneficiaries still receiving £4 a year, the Aldermen having on 10th June last year, altered the arrangement so that in fact the income goes to the two funds I have mentioned. (I note that before 1956, however, some £11,000 nominal was in Treasury 2½% 1975 or after).

The next direct connection is the formation of the Royal Marine Forces Volunteer Reserve which took place after the last war and the unit was established and is now known as the Royal Marine Reserve (City of London). The first recruits were attested on the Artillery Ground by the then Lord Mayor Sir Frederick Wells on 6th November 1948. A link has been established between the Stationers Company since 1949 on discussions between Major General V.D. Thomas a past Master of the Armourers and Braziers Company with Liverymen Colonel Oliver Crossthwaite Eyre MP who served in the Corps during the War, and persuaded the Master who was then Mr. Bernard Guy Harrison to place the matter before the Court and it was thereupon agreed. What the Master did not tell the Court was that the original idea had been an association with the City of London Royal Marine Reserve, as they were then described and not for the whole Corps. General Thomas tells the tale of a Dinner at which he and the Commandant General were present at which the Master was first to make an announcement about the Link. The Master in spite of tugging at his coat tails insisted on announcing a link with the whole Corps and a Committee was set up in May 1949 and a formal link took place in Summer of that year.

The most concrete evidence of this is the present of the old Colours of 45 Commando RM in the Hall having been laid up there in November 1969. The present assistant Clerk of the Stationers has served as a subaltern in that Unit in 1954 and they are thought to be the only Colours laid up in a City Livery Company Hall.

The next time the link was activated was at the time of the Ter-Centenary in 1964 when the Corporation gave an early evening Reception in Honour of the Corps 1,000 persons including 700 officers and men of the Royal Marines and their ladies and a number of distinguished guests attended. After the Ter-Centenary Unit had marched through the City and been inspected by the Lord Mayor.

It was at this time the occasion of the Ter-Centenary Dinner at the Royal Naval College on 23rd July of that year that a note was passed by Mountbatten to the Queen at her request, for a suggestion to give the Royal Marines the privilege of drinking the Loyal Toast seated.

The strengthening of the link was made in 1974 when the association with St. Lawrence Jewry was formed. This was brought about when the first threat to the closure of the barracks at Deal was raised and the then Commandant General Sir Ian Gourlay realised that there would not be a church central enough for the use of the Corps and he asked his Military Assistant to go and do a reconnaissance on various Churches of different sizes and positions, and the Assistant met the Reverend Basil Watson at St. Lawrence Jewry, and it was felt that apart from it altogether being the Church of the Corporation, it had the great advantage of being about the right size and having Guildhall Yard which would serve as a very fine Parade Ground.

The matter was pursued and a Service of Affiliation held, which was later memorialised by the gift of a wrought iron Screen crafted in the Corps Workshops at Plymouth and sealed by the dedication of the Screen on 20th March 1975 in the presence of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh and the late Earl Mountbatten, during the year of office of Sir Hugh Wontner. Once again 41 Commando Paraded and the Lord Mayor entertained as many as could be in the Egyptian Hall and others at Guildhall, and they duly marched through the City exercising their ancient privilege.

It might also be added that it was rather essential to find a Church for the Corps because on Royal Marine Association Parades we used to hold the Services at the Church of St. Martins in the Fields, which has Naval connections, and in the latter years, the Association used to March from Wellington Barracks to St. Martins in the Fields, and as this took place on a Sunday it frequently got involved in various demonstrations in Trafalgar Square, thus one can say, possibly, that there is both a spiritual and a practical link between the Royal Marines and

the City.** Sir Ian Gourlay said when he requested the Lord Mayor to accept the Screen on behalf of the Churchwardens and Congregation of St. Lawrence Jewry that the gift was offered “in the humble hope that it would provide lasting recognition of the historic links which bind our Corps to the City of London and which will we trust remain strong in the years ahead.” He closed “with the sincere hope that it would prove a source of pleasure pride and satisfaction to the Vicars Wardens and Congregation and remind them of the unique and warm hearted affiliation of the Royal Marines with the Church of St. Lawrence Jewry and indeed with this Great City in which our roots have been firmly embedded for over three hundred years”.

**The metal work incidentally came from First Commando Ship H.M.S. Bulwark.