

THE CITY AND THE BUFFS

It is frequently mentioned in the media that a certain civic authority has conferred upon a Naval Unit, a Regiment or an Air Force Squadron its so called "Freedom". It is generally stated that this gives the Martial Unit the right to march through the Streets with drums beating, colours flying and bayonets fixed; sometimes the words "and bands playing" are incorrectly added.

Whilst the desire of Civil Authorities to honour their Military Units is greatly appreciated, they are wrong to think that they can tell members of H.M. Forces how they shall march and conduct themselves on ceremonial or other occasions. Sailors, soldiers and airmen can proceed in any manner their Commanders may direct through any part of the Queen's Realm, except in the City of London.

The City's unusual position in this respect goes back to 1327 when King Edward III granted a Charter to the Mayor and Commonalty of London which provided that no Citizen should be compelled to go to War. An ordinance of Cromwell's Commonwealth Parliament in 1647 confirmed that no Citizen of London, nor any of the City's Trained Bands, should be drawn forth or compelled to go out of the City for Military Service without their free consent.

It thus followed that recruiting or impressment could not be conducted by the Crown within the City, and this was repeated in all the Militia enactments from the time of the Restoration onwards. There was an occasion, however, on Easter Sunday 1596, when the Lord Mayor and Aldermen obtained so called volunteers for foreign service by barring the doors of Churches with Congregations inside them. 1,000 volunteers were recruited to reinforce the trained bands in Holland.

In 1769 in assertion of our established rights to refuse to permit anything which savoured of Military intrusion the Lord Mayor complained to the Secretary-at-War that a Detachment of Guards, returning to the Tower after suppressing a Spitalfields riot outside our walls, had marched through the City "with drums beating, fifes playing and generally making a warlike appearance which raised in the minds of peaceable Citizens the idea of a Town garrisoned by Regular troops". His Lordship thus demanded to know by whose orders this unusual procedure took place.

The Secretary-at-War, in reply, gave it as his opinion that no troops should march through the City in the manner described without previous notice to the Lord Mayor. An undertaking was also given to deal with the Officer commanding the offending party, and to prevent any similar offence being given to the City or its Chief Magistrate.

These rights were challenged in 1842, but the Law Officers upheld the long established common law right of the Lord Mayor and Citizens to close the City's gates against entry by the Sovereign's troops.

And so to this day, whenever a party of the Armed Forces desires to enter the City, the Lord Mayor's permission is obtained. If, by chance or emergency, this is not done an apology is sent to the Lord Mayor. Such is the unique "Privilege" of the City of London; a survival of the realities of the mediaeval ages.

No Regiment has the unrestricted right to march through the City and none has had the "Freedom" conferred upon it, which is, of course, exclusive to individuals. In that respect it is interesting to note that all members of the City Imperial Volunteers were made Freemen upon their departure to the Boer War.

The Court of Common Council resolved on 20th December 1899 "That the Freedom of this City be presented to every Volunteer joining The City of London Volunteer Force, for service in South Africa, as a recognition of his patriotic conduct". (Quote "The Guild of Freemen of the City of London" by Deputy Dyer.)

Certain Regiments have acquired the "Privilege" of marching in a special manner once they have been allowed in; subject always to their having given prior notice to the Lord Mayor of their intention to do so. How this privilege came about can be guaranteed to start an argument in any Regimental Mess, but so far as my own Regiment, that which was The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment) or 3rd Regiment of Foot, is concerned the facts are well documented.

From very early times all Freemen of England were liable to serve in the Army when required, or to provide arms and equipment for others to serve in their place. Orders were issued during the reign of the first Elizabeth to register all those who were liable, and to select a convenient number to serve in person. These were sorted into bands and trained and exercised at the charge of the different Parishes in the country.

Henry VIII took great pride and interest in the trained bands of London and staged a big parade in 1539 — two years after his Charter to the Guild of St. George which brought the Honourable Artillery Company into being. The Tudors took a great interest in the Trained Bands and our London Guilds provided their own quota of men that were formed into Bands which were acknowledged to be among the best in England.

During the 16th Century the United Provinces of the Netherlands were struggling to free themselves from the dominion of Spain, then the most powerful country in Europe. But Queen Elizabeth doggedly stuck to a policy

of neutrality, with a Review of the Trained Bands, which she carried out in Greenwich Park on 1st May, 1572, acting as a warning to any potential aggressor. On the 24th April of that year the Burghers of Flushing sent a plea for help that was addressed to "great men who favoured their cause" and a famous veteran campaigner, Captain Thomas Morgan, quickly raised a company of 400 men specifically for the relief of Flushing where he arrived on 7th June.

Morgan returned with his troops in November, 1572, having successfully accomplished his mission. It is of interest to note that during his absence he sent a report to Burghley which leads one to believe that the Queen's chief adviser was a leading supporter of the Dutch cause.

England's involvement in the Netherlands did not become official and continuous until 1585, and it is from 7th November of that year that a line of unbroken Buffs' descent can be traced from Sir Philip Sidney's appointment as Governor of Flushing through his brother Robert, who succeeded him when he died of wounds on 17th October 1586.

Sir Philip Sidney was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral to the roar of a salute fired by the Musketeers of London's Trained Bands, but sadly his commemorative tablet in St. Paul's was destroyed by the Great Fire of 1666. With the approach of the 400th anniversary of his death funds are being raised to replace it.

In 1616 England's tenure of Flushing was ended. At this stage King James created Robert Sidney as the Earl of Leicester and recommended to the Dutch that they should appoint his eldest son, Robert junior, as Colonel of the Regiment based on Flushing. This was accepted and Sidney's became the fourth English Regiment serving the Protestant cause in the pay of the Dutch but under the cross of St. George.

There were also three Scottish Regiments, identified by the cross of St. Andrew. Together they formed a British fighting force during the campaigning seasons and when the War was won in 1648, they remained to garrison the towns which they had done so much to liberate. For the English fighting man it was his first experience of the life of a regular soldier.

When the Dutch went to War with the British in 1665 the English Regiments in Holland were called upon by the Dutch to swear allegiance to them, or be dismissed.

Just over half of the officers and men refused the demand, though they knew that by doing so they were facing almost certain ruin and destitution. Many had spent almost their whole lives fighting in a foreign country, while other had even been born there. For all of them the hopes of further employment in their martial profession were slight.

Somehow, and at their own expense or through the generosity of Sir George Downing, the English Envoy at The Hague, the officers and men reached England where on 31st May, 1665, King Charles II, who had obstinately, or idly, declined to summon them back as Regiments, formed the survivors into a single unit which he called the Holland Regiment. They at once went to war against Holland as sea soldiers with the Royal Navy, under command of the veteran Colonel Robert Sidney. Sidney was the third son of the second Earl of Leicester, and had been one of the boon companions of Charles II in exile. He was born in 1626, entered the Dutch service at the age of seventeen, and died in 1668. He was the only Colonel in the Dutch service who refused the oath and was almost certainly the father of Monmouth, having had Lucy Waters as his mistress in The Hague, at the appropriate time of conception.

It is interesting to note that in those days the Colonel of a Regiment was an active Officer in command of it, and was present with his men at home and in the field. The pay and allowances were issued to him in bulk, and he and his Captains were responsible for enlisting their men.

Any money saved by reducing the expenses of enlistment became the perquisite of the Captains, and in consequence the Colonel and the Field Officer also had Companies, and drew the pay of Captains in addition to their own. The actual command of the Colonel's company was in the hands of a subaltern Officer, who held the rank of Captain-Lieutenant.

In 1668 when Colonel Sidney died, General Sir Walter Vane was appointed in his place and, on 29th April, 1672, one hundred years after Queen Elizabeth had inspected the trained bands, a Royal Warrant was issued giving the Colonel of the Holland Regiment permission to "any Captain in his Regiment from time to time to raise recruits as they may be required" by beat of drum in the City of London on producing the warrant for the Lord Mayor to see. This is believed to be the only blanket warrant ever issued and it enabled The Buffs to claim the privilege long before any other Regiment did so, though others were earlier recipients of occasional warrants.

The first recorded authorisation to members of the Holland Regiment to beat the drums within the precincts of the City of London is contained in a warrant issued on 23rd September, 1670, to Sergeant John Mowat of Captain William Manley's Company. The Company was then stationed at Jersey in the Channel Islands, and the warrant authorised the recruitment of 32 volunteers, with a proviso that if recruiting within the City of London the warrant was to be shown to "our right trusty and well beloved Lord Mayor" before the beat of drums.

In those days recruiting parties also carried a colour, and this is the origin of the privilege which the Holland Regiment passed on to its proud successors, enabling them to march through the City of London, with drums beating,

bayonets fixed and colours flying.

During 1689 the Holland Regiment became the 3rd Regiment of Foot, and King William III appointed his brother-in-law, Prince George of Denmark, as its Honorary Colonel. He held this appointment until his death in 1708 when the connection with the Royal House of Denmark lapsed. To the joy of the Regiment this link was revived in 1906, when HM King Frederik VIII of Denmark, the brother of King Edward VII's wife Queen Alexandra, was appointed Colonel in Chief of The Buffs. It is a connection that was never again broken.

In the first officially compiled list of 1751 the Regiment was shown as the "Third Regiment, or The Buffs." This had evolved from the early nickname of "Old Buffs", which presumably sprang from pique when the new junior regiments appeared wearing the buff coloured facings and waistcoats that had been originated by the Holland Regiment.

The Buffs do not appear to have fully exercised the privilege accorded them by their warrant until they were stationed at the Tower of London in 1793. Having issued due notice to the Lord Mayor, who is said to have been 'extremely tenacious of any infringement of the City's privileges', they marched past him in full array, colours flying, drums beating and bayonets fixed. The first recorded instance of the "Privilege" being recognised by the City Corporation in ceremonial form was by The Buffs in September, 1821, and other occasions followed in October, 1846, December, 1861 and October, 1862.

Thereafter they proudly exercised the "Privilege" whenever they could, on occasions coming to the City specially for that purpose. They twice did this to receive new colours from the Lord Mayor, when on the 16th May, 1906, Sir Walter Morgan gave the First Battalion their new colours, and on the 27th July, 1928, when Sir Charles Batho did the same for the Second Battalion. Both these events took place at the HAC Headquarters. One of those colours has survived, and now rests in the Church of St. Lawrence Jewry.

Another date writ large in the Regiment's history was 4th May, 1974, when Queen Margrethe of Denmark came to the City to present colours to the four Battalions of the newly formed Queen's Regiment as Allied Commander-in-Chief.

There were two phases to The Buffs absorption into the Queen's Regiment. The first came in 1961 with the amalgamation of the regular element with their Kent County colleagues to form the Queen's Own Buffs, The Royal Kent Regiment. The second was completed on the last day of 1966, when the Queen's Regiment was formed by the unanimous decision of the four Home Counties' Colonels of Regiments. And so the traditions and privileges of the

four were inherited by the one.

The two Territorial Army battalions of The Buffs, the 4th and 5th, retained their identity longer than the regular battalions and were not, in fact, absorbed by the reorganisation until April, 1967.

Earlier, their day of post-war fame came in July, 1960, when King Frederik IX of Denmark presented them with new colours bearing a selection of the 121 Battle Honours that had been awarded the Regiment since its foundation. I had the great honour to command that particular parade as a very proud Commanding Officer, and it was with similar pride that, as the first Buff to become Lord Mayor of London, I entertained the 2nd Battalion of the successor Queen's Regiment at Guildhall on 8th July, 1981, after they had marched from the Tower of London and through the City, with colours flying, drums beating and bayonets fixed.

As a postscript it is interesting to note that in 1924 certain Regiments not on the City's list claimed the "Privilege". After a great deal of correspondence in the press, and some heated arguments in the Court of Common Council an inquiry was set up.

As a result the Privilege was confirmed in the case of the Royal Marines, The Buffs, the Grenadier Guards and the Royal Fusiliers. Surprisingly enough it would seem, from the Lord Mayor's reply of 13th October, 1924, that the Honourable Artillery Company had never been considered by City authorities to be one of the Privileged Regiments for, instead of confirming the claim to the right, the Lord Mayor notified the Commanding Officer that the Privilege would in future be extended to his Regiment. And so a practice, which for 250 years had been based upon ancient usage only, now became officially recognised.

The Privilege was extended to the Coldstream Guards in 1952 and the Royal Dragoons (now the Blues and Royals) in 1961. One should not conclude this stirring story without mentioning that 600 (City of London) Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force, who signed the sky with their honour during the Battle of Britain, held the Privilege until they were disbanded in 1957.

Antecedents of The Buffs — Royal East Kent Regiment — 3rd Foot.

Stow's Annals is the Authority for Muster at Greenwich of 3000 men of Trained Bands, who had been called up on 25th and 26th March 1572 for training thrice weekly at the Miles and St. George's Field. They were Officered from the Gentlemen of the HAC.

Lord Mayor. In 1596 the Lord Mayor and Aldermen were attending St. Paul's Cross, and during the sermon a Royal Courier arrived with a letter from Queen Elizabeth I, ordering them to furnish 1000 men for immediate service. They left their devotions and had the number completed by eight that evening.

Similar orders were issued on Easter Day; upon which the Lord Mayor, attended by proper Officers, went from church to church during divine service, and shutting the doors, speedily obtained the number required, who marched next night to Dover: but before they had arrived, intelligence was received that Calais had surrendered, and they returned home after a few days' absence.

On the 25th and 26th of March 1572, by commandment of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the citizens of London assembled at their several Halls. The Masters then selected three thousand men, the most likely and active persons from their companies, for thrice weekly drilling.

On the 1st of May 1572 this force of 3,000 men paraded outside the palace at Greenwich. Captain Thomas Morgan, a veteran Captain, mustered 300 volunteers to go to the aid of the burghers of Flushing.

The date of the departure for Holland is not recorded but it appears to have been very promptly after the Greenwich Parade.

In about March 1665 those so wishing returned to England and by Royal Warrant on 31 May 1665 The Holland Regiment was formed.

Right to march through the City of London granted by King Charles II on 29th April 1672.