

SIGNIFICANT REGIMENTAL DATES

Sobraon Day 10 February (1846)

In the early 19th Century the Punjab, in northern India, was a separate Sikh kingdom. From 1839 there was considerable internal disorder, and relations with the British, who controlled most of the rest of India, steadily worsened. Late in 1845 Sikh forces moved into disputed territory, and the First Sikh War began.

After some small initial battles the British Army under Sir Hugh Gough attacked the main Sikh bridgehead over the River Sutlej, at Sobraon, on 10 February 1846. The position was strongly fortified and the Sikh forces outnumbered the British. Following an intense artillery bombardment the infantry assaulted. After very fierce fighting a break-in was achieved, and, their pontoon bridge across the river having broken, the Sikh army was completely defeated. Sobraon was the decisive battle of the First Sikh War, and Gough's forces subsequently occupied the Punjab.

The 10th (North Lincolnshire) Regiment of Foot played a prominent part in the attack, their brigade commander later commenting: 'The gallantry of Her Majesty's 10th will never be effaced from my memory. The 10th were the cornerstone of the victory ... I never saw anything to equal their cool and resolute courage on that day.' The 9th (East Norfolk) Regiment of Foot was also involved in the action, though not as heavily as the 10th, and both regiments were awarded the battle honour 'Sobraon'.

Sobraon Day was the main regimental day of the Royal Lincolnshire Regiment and is today marked by the 2nd Battalion. In addition, it is traditional for the 2nd Battalion to exchange greetings with 'our cousins', 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment, successors to the 29th (Worcestershire) Regiment of Foot; this commemorates the linking-up of the 10th and the 29th, who had attacked from different directions, on the ramparts of Sobraon.

Almanza Day 25 April (1707)

The War of the Spanish Succession, which lasted from 1701 to 1714, was brought about by disagreement between the European nations over who should succeed King Charles II of Spain who had died in 1700 with no clear heir. Had the French candidate been accepted, the thrones, and empires, of France and Spain would have been united and tilted the balance of power in Europe and abroad. To prevent this England formed an alliance with the Dutch Republic, Portugal and others to promote the rival Austrian candidate.

In 1707 an allied force under the Earl of Galway was in south east Spain aiming to march on Madrid. It encountered a far superior French and Spanish force at Almanza, which Galway decided to attack on the morning of 25 April. At first things went well as the assault developed on the allied left and in the centre. Portuguese troops on the right, however, failed to follow up, and were subsequently driven off by the French cavalry. This left the flank of the advance exposed and the bulk of the allied force was soon overrun. It was only by some gallant rearguard action that part of the force, hardly more than a quarter of those originally committed to the battle, was able to withdraw.

Steuart's Regiment of Foot, later to become the 9th (East Norfolk) Regiment of Foot, performed with conspicuous gallantry in this rearguard action and took heavy casualties. As Almanza was a significant defeat, no battle honour was awarded. However, it is believed that as a result of its conduct there Queen Anne granted the Regiment the right to wear the badge of Britannia. The badge was certainly in use by the Regiment later in the 18th Century, although the first official record that can be traced is a letter of 30 July 1799 'confirming' the Regiment's right to it, and it is on the Regimental Colour to this day. Blood's Regiment of Foot, later to become the 17th (Leicestershire) Regiment of Foot, also took part in the battle of Almanza, almost the entire regiment being killed or captured.

Almanza Day used to be celebrated by the Royal Norfolk Regiment but on the formation of the 1st East Anglian Regiment in 1959 the custom rather fell into disuse. It is, however, still marked by the 1st Battalion.

Royal Tigers' Day 25 June (1825)

The regimental day of the Royal Leicestershire Regiment was, unusually, not connected with a battle but with the grant of an honorary distinction on 25 June 1825 when His Majesty King George IV was pleased to approve the 17th (Leicestershire) Regiment of Foot 'bearing on its Colours and appointments the figure of the 'Royal Tiger', with the word 'Hindoostan' superscribed, as a lasting testimony of the exemplary conduct of the corps during the period of its service in India, from the year 1804 to 1823.'

This long period had involved a great deal of active service as British rule in India was consolidated and various lawless factions brought under control, and the Regiment had been given much praise for its efficiency and discipline.

The grant of this distinction is commemorated today by its presence on the Regimental Colour and on the buttons worn by all ranks of the Regiment in formal dress. Although the day is not specifically marked by the 2nd Battalion, there is an annual reunion at Leicester in the form of Royal Tigers' weekend.

Salamanca Day 22 July (1812)

Following the French Revolution in 1789, Great Britain was at war with France for most of the period 1793-1815 as Napoleon Bonaparte, seizing power in 1799, attempted to dominate the whole of Europe. Much of the action was at sea, but the Peninsular War, from 1808 to 1814, was the setting for the Army's major contribution to Napoleon's eventual defeat. For most of the time the British forces in the Peninsula were under the command of General Sir Arthur Wellesley, later to become the Duke of Wellington, and fought alongside Portuguese and Spanish allies.

On 22 July 1812 at Salamanca, north west of Madrid, Wellington's army, from a strong and well concealed defensive position, was able to launch a surprise attack on the flanks of the French forces. After repeated assaults the whole French army was driven back in confusion, and the way was open for Wellington to advance to Madrid.

The 2nd Battalion of the 44th (East Essex) Regiment of Foot, which had been raised in 1803, played a significant part in the battle, and Lieutenant William Pearce captured the Eagle Standard of the French 62nd Regiment of the Line. The 1st Battalion of the 9th (East Norfolk) Regiment of Foot, the 1st Battalion of the 48th (Northamptonshire) Regiment of Foot, and the 2nd Battalion of the 58th (Rutlandshire) Regiment of Foot were also involved in the action and, like the 2/44th, were granted the battle honour 'Salamanca'.

Subsequently the 44th Foot, as the 1st Battalion of the Essex Regiment, adopted an eagle as their badge. The tradition was continued during further reorganisations so that today the Regimental Colour includes an eagle and all ranks of the Regiment wear an eagle badge on the upper left arm in formal dress. Salamanca Day itself is marked by the 1st Battalion and a Salamanca Day Reunion is held annually at Area Headquarters in Warley. The Salamanca Eagle is displayed in the Essex Regiment Museum in Chelmsford, but from time to time taken out to appear on formal parades with the 1st Battalion.

Talavera Day 27 July (1809)

Like Salamanca, above, Talavera was a battle of the Peninsular War.

Wellington had advanced into Spain with the intention of bringing to battle a large French army. On 27 July 1809 his forces occupied high ground at Talavera, south west of Madrid, alongside a large Spanish force. Late in the evening the French attacked, before the left of the British line was properly in position, and occupied an important hill. A swift counter-attack, in which the 1st Battalion of the 48th (Northamptonshire) Regiment of Foot played a prominent part, drove the French off the hill and

other troops, including the 2nd Battalion of the 48th, came up to help to secure the position. A large-scale French assault the following morning was repulsed, but later in the day when the French attacked the centre of the British line a dangerous gap was opened up. Wellington summoned the 1/48th to plug that gap which they did with great dash and bravery. In his subsequent despatch Wellington wrote 'The battle was certainly saved by the advance, position, and steady conduct of the 48th Regiment.' Later, the 48th was granted the battle honour 'Talavera'.

Talavera Day was celebrated within the Northamptonshire Regiment and the 2nd East Anglian Regiment, and is today the main regimental day of the 2nd Battalion.

Minden Day 1 August (1759)

The Seven Years' War began in 1754 (although hostilities in Europe did not commence until 1756) and lasted until 1763. It was a result of tensions overseas between Britain and France, as each sought to extend their influence worldwide, and concerns regarding British interests in Hanover (the British Royal Family were at that time also rulers of Hanover). Prussia allied herself with Great Britain, Austria with France.

France invaded Hanover in 1757 and made significant advances. Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick initially had some success in driving the French back, but by July 1759 they had advanced again to a very strong defensive position around Minden (north western Germany). Ferdinand, his Hanoverians reinforced by a large British contingent, deceived the French as to his intentions and they moved forward in the early hours of 1 August only to find themselves exposed to the entire allied army. Although it was the result of an incorrect order, 6 battalions of British infantry and 2 Hanoverian battalions advanced against the entire French cavalry and by their steadiness, discipline and marksmanship survived 6 charges, then the onslaught of an infantry force, wreaking such havoc that the enemy fled in panic and confusion. Counter-attacks were given the same treatment, and by the end of the day the French force was in full retreat. The allied force had achieved a great victory.

As the British battalions passed through gardens on the morning of the battle the soldiers picked roses and wore them in their caps. The senior of those battalions, in the forefront of the action, was the 12th Regiment of Foot, later to become the Suffolk Regiment. The 12th were awarded the battle honour 'Minden', as were the other British battalions. The custom grew up of wearing red and yellow roses in headdress on Minden Day each year, and of placing rose wreaths on the Colours and drums if they are on parade.

Minden Day was always strongly commemorated by the Suffolk Regiment and this tradition was handed down to the 1st East Anglian Regiment then to the 1st Battalion of the Royal Anglian Regiment who today ensure that, wherever they are, it is a day of great celebration. In addition, there is an annual Minden Day Reunion at Regimental Headquarters, Bury St Edmunds.

Blenheim Day 13 August (1704)

Like Almanza, above, Blenheim was a battle of the War of the Spanish Succession.

In 1702 the Duke of Marlborough was appointed to command a combined English, Dutch and Prussian force which campaigned with some success against the French in the Low Countries (Belgium and the Netherlands). By 1704 Vienna was threatened so Marlborough took his English and Prussian troops down the valley of the Danube to Munich. Deciding that it was too strongly defended to capture, he pulled back and sought to engage a strong French force in a well defended position around the village of Blenheim.

Early in the morning of 13 August Marlborough began manoeuvring for his assault, taking the French by surprise. First attacking the flanks, the village itself being on the British left, he was able to get the French to send in reinforcements thus weakening their centre. He then launched his main assault, and after a long and very hard battle achieved a breakthrough, subsequently rolling up the flanks in turn. The French were completely routed, losing over 30,000 troops. It was a very significant victory, and many historians consider that it was pivotal to the subsequent history of Europe.

Stanley's Regiment, afterwards the 16th (Bedfordshire) Regiment of Foot, played a significant part in the assaults on the left flank, and was subsequently granted the battle honour of 'Blenheim'. In the adjacent brigade on the left flank was North's Regiment, later to become the 10th (North Lincolnshire) Regiment of Foot, and they too received the battle honour.

Blenheim Day subsequently became the main regimental day of the Bedfordshire Regiment, and is still marked by the 2nd Battalion.