
During the years 1877 to 1879 the British Army fought in South Africa and subdued various native tribes in the following operations and campaigns against the Gcalekas and Gaikas (1877-78), the Griquas (1878), Chief Sekukuni (1878 & 1879), Moirosi (1879) and the Zulus (1879). Of these campaigns and wars, the best remembered is the Zulu War of 1879. As everyone knows, the war started as a small colonial conflict, which soon reached notoriety following the disaster at Isandlwana on 22nd January 1879. For services rendered in South Africa during the years 1877, 1878 and 1879 a total of fourteen Infantry Regiments and two Cavalry Regiments were awarded a Battle Honour. These awards were announced on the 25th July 1882. However, what are these so-called 'Battle Honours', and what do they mean and represent?

The reigning monarch of the day, in appreciation and recognition of services rendered, can bestow a 'Battle Honour' on a Cavalry or Infantry Regiment for its part in a particular battle or campaign. When Battle Honours are awarded, they were to be emblazoned on the colours, standards and guidons and they may also appear on Regimental drums and horse regalia, etc.

To be awarded a 'Battle Honour', the system for selection has been shrouded with anomalies since the conception of the award. Up until 1914 there appears to have been a number of unofficial rules for not approving such an award. No 'Battle Honour' was to be awarded for a defeat in battle or participation in a lost war. Another stipulation was that the Headquarters of the Regiment concerned must be present in the action; with these restrictions, it meant that in our colonial history, some successful and notable victories are not celebrated, for example, in North America during the American War of Independence. Small insignificant skirmishes have been immortalised whilst major battles and gallant fights are not recorded with an honour and are subsequently lost in the mists of time. Further more, many years of conflict can be recorded by one single honour, whilst in some campaigns many if not all the battles are recognised with a 'Battle Honour'. On rare occasions a battle honour has been bestowed even when not actually participating and taking part in the fight. No account is taken in awarding the honour to the number of men involved be they in company or regiment strength or to the number of casualties incurred. However, over the years it mattered not, be it a victory or retreat, 'Battle Honours' have been awarded for both.

The first recorded 'Battle Honour', to be awarded was sanctioned by King George III with a Royal Warrant dated 1768. This battle honour was for, 'Emsdorff', which occurred on July 16th 1760 and was granted to the 15th Light Dragoon Guards; it still appears on the Guidon of the 15th/19th, the King's Royal Hussars. Because the British were slow in copying their European counterparts, very few 'Battle Honours' were awarded early in our military history. Over the years, as more and more Honours were bestowed, some Regiments who had participated in earlier battles and campaigns started to question the system and qualification for such awards.

Because of the dissatisfaction and various questions raised regarding the lack of system and anomalies, a committee was formed to review the whole scenario of the award system. This committee was known as the Alison Committee and in 1882, following a number of recommendations, several Regiments were awarded 'Battle Honours' for Marlborough's four great victories and 'Dettingen' in the war of the Austrian Succession and 'Louisburg' and 'Quebec' in the Seven Years War. Certain Regiments were also awarded 'Honours' for their part in India during the eighteenth century.

After a few years it was felt that the Alison Committee had not been successful and the system of awarding further 'Battle Honours' was again reviewed. A new committee was formed and under the guidance of the Adjutant General, more awards were bestowed to various Regiments during 1909; for example, 'Namur' (1695), 'Guadeloupe' (1759), 'Martinique' (1762) and 'Tangier' (1762-80). However, some 'Honours' were awarded relatively soon after the action that merited the award, for example the Peninsular War (1804-1814), which were granted before 1825, although the last award for 'Busaco' was not granted until 1910. For the Battle of Waterloo that took place on June 18th 1815, the award was granted the same year. As previously stated, some lesser known battles have been honoured with the award and some are still displayed on Regimental Colours of succeeding regiments. For example, 'Koosh-ab', (Persian War 1857), and 'Surinam' (1804), both awarded to the 64th Regiment of Foot, are still carried on the Colours of The Staffordshire Regiment.

It should be noted that during the Crimea War some Militia Regiments volunteered for services overseas. Recognition of their services was substantiated when some of them were granted 'Battle Honours'. Over the years there still exist anomalies in the awarding of 'Battle Honours', with some of the earlier restrictions being lifted. For in retreat or suffering a defeat, who would deny such awards to regiments whose men fought and died in actions such as Calais, Dunkirk or Arnhem.

In all, fourteen British Infantry and two Cavalry Regiments were awarded Battle Honours as a result of their participation in the Zulu War.

The following fourteen Infantry and two Cavalry Regiments were awarded Battle Honours;

South Africa 1877-78-79

24th (2nd Warwickshire) Regiment of Foot; post 1881, The South Wales Borderers; from 1969, the Royal Regiment of Wales (24th/41st Foot)

90th (Perthshire Volunteers) Light Infantry; post 1881, The 2nd Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) - disbanded in 1968

88th (Connaught Rangers) Regiment of Foot; post 1881, 1st Battalion Connaught Rangers – disbanded in 1922

94th Regiment of Foot; post 1881, 2nd Battalion Connaught Rangers – disbanded 31st July 1922

South Africa 1878-79

13th (1st Somersetshire) Light Infantry or Prince Albert's Light Infantry Regiment; from 1968, The Light Infantry

800th (Staffordshire Volunteers); post 1881, 2nd Battalion, The South Staffordshire Regiment; from 1959, The Staffordshire Regiment (the Prince of Wales's)

South Africa 1879

1st Dragoon Guards (The King's); from 1959, 1st The Queen Dragoon Guards

17th Lancers (Duke of Cambridge's Own); from 1922, 17th/21st Lancers

3rd (East Kent) Regiment of Foot (Bufs); post 1881, Bufs (Royal East Kent); from 1966, The Queen's Regiment

4th (The King's Own Royal) Regiment of Foot; post 1881, The King's Own Royal Lancasters and from 1959; The King's Own Border Regiment

21st (Royal Scots Fusiliers); post 1881 The Royal Scots Fusiliers and from 1959, Royal Highland Fusiliers

57th (West Middlesex) Regiment of Foot; post 1881, 1st Battalion The Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex Regiment), after 1966; The Queen's Regiment

58th (Rutlandshire) Regiment of Foot; post 1881, 2nd Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment; after 1964, The Royal Anglian Regiment

60th (The King's Royal Rifle Corps); post 1881, The King's Royal Rifle Corps; after 1966, The Royal Green Jackets

91st (Princess Louise's Argyllshire Highlanders); post 1881, The 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, (Princess Louise's)

99th (The Duke of Edinburgh's – {Lanarkshire}) Regiment of Foot; post 1881, 2nd Battalion Wiltshire Regiment; after 1959 The Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment

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