Survivals of American Service in British Regiments

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NOTES AND QUERIES

SURVIVALS OF AMERICAN SERVICE IN BRITISH REGIMENTS. Only a few British regiments had their beginnings in the New World, yet many retain reminders of their services on this continent in such forms as nicknames or peculiarities of uniform. Quite recently the officers and men of the Royal Berkshire Regiment began to wear a patch of red cloth as background to their cap badge, a distinction heretofore belonging solely to the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. Records, recently discovered, reveal that the Royal Berkshires were linked with the latter unit in the exploit which won them their right to display the patch.

On the banks of the Brandywine Creek, on September 26, 1777, a battalion composed of the light companies of several British regiments, including those of the Forty-sixth and Forty-ninth Foot (now the 2nd Battalion, Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry and the 1st Battalion, Royal Berkshire Regiment, respectively), made a surprise night attack upon a detachment of General Wayne's brigade, inflicting considerable loss upon them. The Americans subsequently sent word that "the light bobs had better look out as no quarter would be given them." Thereupon, the men of the light battalion stained the white feathers in their hats red and informed the Americans of what they had done, in order that no other British troops might suffer on their account.

At the conclusion of the War of Independence, the light company of the Forty-sixth Foot alone continued to display the red feather. In accordance with a change general throughout the British army some years later, the feather gave place to a red ball, worn on the shako, which, after the abolition of flank companies, was adopted by the entire regiment, and worn until the shako was replaced by the cloth helmet. The design on the helmet plate of the D. C. L. I. at first showed, among other commemorative details, two red feathers in brass on a background of green velvet. Later, the affair at Brandywine Creek was recalled by the display of a brass feather on the helmet plate together with a background of scarlet cloth, and today the regiment continues to show the red patch behind the badge on the khaki cap, the observance which the Royal Berkshires have just begun to share.

While on the subject of the wearing of patches under the badge, one example of the earning of such a distinction, not precisely on this continent nor in battle, but nevertheless in the Western Hemisphere and under most trying circumstances, is of unusual interest. In the eighteenth century, a man enlisted in the British Army for life. Furthermore, the control of that branch of the fighting forces was vested in thirteen different government offices, with an almost complete absence of central authority. These facts often resulted in regiments being sent overseas and left there, almost on their own, for long periods of time. The men of the South Staffordshire Regiment now have a visible reminder that their predecessors once suffered this fate for a stretch of almost sixty years.

Barely three years after the regiment, then listed as the Thirty-eighth Foot, had been raised, it was sent, in 1705, to the West Indies. Of the original group which went out, only a handful ever saw England again. At one period the officers were unpaid for seven years and the men at last became so crippled from sickness in the unhealthy climate of that part of the world that they were barely able to move about. From 1705 to 1763 they never once received a new uniform and to commemorate the sacking with which the clothing was at first mended and later which became their sole costume, the present regiment now wears small patches of brown holland under the cap and collar badges. In 1909, almost a hundred and fifty years after they had been earned, battle honors were awarded to the regiment for their services at Martinique and Guadaloupe, during the Seven Years War.

Five short black ribbons fastened to the back of the collar is a peculiarity of the uniform, both dress and service, of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. In 1808, when the wearing of the pigtail by British soldiers was discontinued by order, the famous regiment was in Nova Scotia and did not comply. Upon returning to England the men were not permitted to retain their queues, but as a mark of distinction the five ribbons, known as the "flash," were adopted in place of the queue-bag in which the pigtails had been enclosed in order to protect the men's coats from grease and hair-powder.

The men of the Gloucestershire Regiment, then known as the Twenty-eighth Foot, are said to have acquired the nickname of the "Slashers" at the Battle of White Plains in October, 1776, when, running short of ammunition, they attacked with their short swords. The "Springers" are the Wiltshire Regiment, which fought at the Battle of Stillwater in 1777, as the Sixty-second Foot, and acted as light infantry. "Spring up" was a light infantry word of command in those days, and after the action General Burgoyne (who later was to surrender at Saratoga) rode up to the Sixty-second with the greeting "Well done, my brave Springers!" — their nickname to this day.

The "Bloodsuckers," the nickname of the Manchester Regiment, also originated in America, in a most curious fashion. After the capture of Guadaloupe in 1759, the regiment, then the Sixty-third Foot, adopted the French fleur-de-lys as their badge, and this was carved on the tombstones of those of the Sixty-third who fell in the Revolutionary War. The symbol, being made very small on this occasion, suggested a mosquito rather than a fleur-de-lys, and the regiment had acquired its nickname.

The Fifty-fourth Foot, now the 2nd Battalion of the Dorchester Regiment, earned its nickname of the "Flamers" when the men had a hand in the burning of New London in 1781, and the Twenty-ninth Foot, now the 1st Battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment, were given their nickname of "Vein-openers" by the people of Boston when they drew first blood in the struggle between England and the Colonies at the "Boston Massacre" of March 5, 1770.

The havercake is a round oatmeal cake peculiar to the West Riding of Yorkshire. The custom of recruiting-sergeants for the Duke of Wellington's Regiment going about their duties in that part of England, during the War of Independence, with havercakes on the points of their swords has given the men of the regiment the nickname of the "Havercake Lads." It is supposed that the enticement worked satisfactorily because of the prevalence of famine in that section of the country at that time. However, the Thirty-third Foot, by which title the regiment was then known, surrendered with Cornwallis at Yorktown.

No honors were granted to British regiments for services in the Revolutionary War, but a few were earned during the War of 1812. These are "Niagara," "Bladensburg," "Queenstown," "Detroit," and "Miami," and these names are displayed on the colors of the regiments concerned.

EMIL JOHN RUCKERT

THE CENTENNIAL OF A UNIFORM. There have been few regiments in any army which have worn an almost identical uniform for as long as one hundred years. Yet the Seventh Regiment, New York (107th Infantry) have continued to use their distinctive full dress for an even longer period of time with only minor changes in the form of the headdress. A drawing of this century-old uniform, together with the outline of its story, was prepared for the JOURNAL by the late Brigadier General DeWitt Clinton Falls a few weeks before his untimely death in England on September 7, 1937. Most of the details will be found in Colonel Emmons Clark's monumental *History of the Seventh Regiment of New York* (2 vols., 1890). General Falls' illustration, the last to come from his talented pen, is accompanied by a photograph taken in 1937 of the modern uniform, kindly furnished by the present organization.