

The History of the Royal Irish Rifles From Inception to the Boer War

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HISTORICAL RECORD OF THE 86th, OR THE ROYAL COUNTY DOWN REGIMENT OF FOOT: CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF THE FORMATION OF THE REGIMENT IN 1793, AND OF ITS SUBSEQUENT SERVICES TO 1842.
JOHN W. PARKER, WEST STRAND. M.DCCC.XLII.[1842]
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MEMOIRS AND SERVICES OF THE EIGHTY-THIRD REGIMENT COUNTY OF DUBLIN FROM 1793 TO 1907 INCLUDING THE CAMPAIGNS OF THE REGIMENT IN THE WEST INDIES, AFRICA, THE PENINSULAS, CEYLON, CANADA, AND INDIA
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FROM SOUTHAMPTON TO BELGAUM, VIA EGYPT, IN DECEMBER, 1860.
FROM THE DIARY OF CAPT. & MRS. EDWARD WILLIAM BRAY,
83RD (COUNTY OF DUBLIN) REGIMENT.

HISTORY OF THE ROYAL IRISH RIFLES MOUNTED INFANTRY SOUTH AFRICA
1901-1902 (EDITED FROM ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS) AUTHOR UNKNOWN

This edition presents the edited content of the original volumes, with the addition of a new introduction, pictures, and diagrams by M.D. Holmes & K.I. Beegle.

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Introduction

For centuries the Irish, both north and south, have been known as warriors, soldiers, poets, and statesmen. Virtually every European war or battle has counted Irishmen among its ranks. The history of the Irish at war is so extensive that it would take an entire book by itself to list all the battles. A proud and honourable people, they have been praised by every nation who has had the honour of counting them as friend and ally, and by many nations who have had the misfortune of facing them in battle. From the ancient times of Cuchulain until the arrival of the English, the Irish fought primarily amongst themselves, stopping only occasionally to join forces to send an invading foe packing. It was actually an Irish tribe or clan which first brought the English to Ireland; an Irish Chieftain asking the English to help him against a rival tribe. Once the English had a foothold in Ireland it was not long before they had the Irish fighting for them in the form of the Galloglass and Irish Cavalry. As time progressed many Chieftains became landed gentry and even held high positions in the Royal Courts of England. One of the most famous was Hugh O'Neill of Tyr-own, now Tyrone. O'Neill had the ear of the Queen and as such was privy to the goings on in court. The Queen had her own agenda; she would use O'Neill against his own people. O'Neill being a very intelligent and eloquent man played the Queen at her own game for years. O'Neill's hand was finally forced and he gathered many of the remaining clans against the forces of the crown at Kinsale. Outnumbered by Crown forces, the clans were defeated. Many Irish chieftains were forced to leave Ireland for the Continent. This exile has since become known as "The Flight of the Wild Geese" or "The Flight of the Earls." Many thousands of Irishmen followed and Irish Regiments sprung up in the service of France and Spain. Again, it would and has taken entire books to list the battles fought even between the Irish and the English.

We have chosen, in this book, to focus on two Regiments which formed within the British Army much later in History; those of the 83rd and 86th Regiments, later the Royal Irish Rifles. With all of Ireland now under the Crown, these men whether they called themselves Irish or British, found their calling in the British Army. It is very important to point out that the men of the Irish Regiments within the British army have always been volunteers. The following book is actually a compellation of several books written from first hand accounts and records of the regiments. Due to the style of English spoken and written at the time, we have edited some of the following to make it friendlier for the modern reader. Getting around many of the terms, some of which I must confess I had to use an old English dictionary to sort out, became more of a challenge than some readers may be willing to spend time on. We have left some chapters as they were written to give the reader an idea as to the style of speech and writing of the period. Our main purpose with this book is to help insure that the first hand experiences and the exploits of these regiments continue to be history and are not lost with the passing of time.

Michael D. Holmes

SECTION I

HISTORY OF THE
SERVICES OF THE EIGHTY-THIRD REGIMENT,
COUNTY OF DUBLIN
1793 TO 1907

INCLUDING
THE CAMPAIGNS OF THE
REGIMENT IN THE WEST INDIES, AFRICA,
THE PENINSULAS, CEYLON, CANADA, AND
INDIA

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PART I contains the Services of 1st Battalion, from 1793, the date of its being raised, to 1817 when the 1st and 2nd Battalions were amalgamated at the Cape of Good Hope.

PART II contains the History of the 2nd Battalion from 1804 to 1814, and the Services of the Regiment during the Peninsular War.

PART III contains the Services of the Regiment in Ceylon from 1814 to 1829.

PART IV contains the Services of the Regiment from 1829 to 1848, including its Services in Canada.

PART V contains the Services of the Regiment in India, including the Indian Mutiny from 1849 to 1837.

PART VI contains the Services of the Regiment from 1838 to 1863, including the campaign of 1858 in Central India.

PART VII contains the Services of the Regiment from 1864 to 1907, including the campaign of 1881 in South Africa

PART I
SERVICES OF THE 1ST BATTALION, 1793-1811

1793

In September 1793, Major William Fitch obtained a letter of service to raise a regiment, which after being numbered, became the 83rd. The formation bearing date was 28th September and the major was appointed lieutenant-colonel commandant. The regiment was embodied at Dublin and quartered in the old Custom House at Essex Bridge for about two months. It was called upon to take a portion of the garrison duties due to a great number of troops having been drawn from the garrison for the purpose of embarking for the West Indies. The regiment then moved to the Royal Barracks. The establishment of the regiment at this period was fixed at 72 sergeants, 26 drummers, 1200 rank and file with an additional lieutenant added to each company.

1794

In October 1794 a second battalion was added to the regiment and the establishment of the first battalion was reduced to 52 sergeants, 22 drummers, and 1000 rank and file. The 2nd Battalion soon afterwards was numbered and became the 134th Regiment. On the 7th of November 1794 the regiment embarked at Dublin and sailed for England. It landed at Pill and marched to Bath in Somersetshire where it was quartered several months. It then marched to Poole in Dorsetshire where it remained about five months and from there to Southampton.

1795

On the 5th of May 1795 the regiment embarked at Stokes Bay for the West Indies and sailed in about ten days afterwards. (On clearing the harbour, one of the transports with a company on board was so damaged by another vessel running foul of her as to be unable to proceed; her company was re-landed on the Isle of Wight and rejoined the head-quarters at Saint Domingo in 1798.) On the arrival of the regiment at Martinique it received orders to proceed to Jamaica, and after a few days' sail arrived at Port Royal on the 16th of July 1795.

The regiment was then removed from the chartered ships to men-of-war and transports and sailed for Saint Domingo. The Maroon insurrection having broken out a few days after the regiment had sailed, Governor Lord Balcarras dispatched a schooner to recall them. She was only able to overtake two ships with about half the regiment which landed at Mondego Bay and was marched into the interior. The regiment was actively employed in the suppression of the Maroon insurrection for about eight months and sustained a loss of 70 killed and wounded. Amongst the former was the Lieutenant-Colonel Commandant William Fitch who died four days later. Also wounded, Captains Lee and Brunt.

On the 13th of September 1795 Major-General James Balfour succeeded to the colonelcy, replacing Lieutenant-Colonel Fitch killed in action.

1798

The few men that remained of the detachment that went to Saint Domingo in 1795 returned to Jamaica in 1798.

1802

The regiment remained on the north side of Jamaica until the beginning of June 1802, when it embarked in men-of-war at Savannah le Mar, Falmouth and Mondego Bay, for Port Royal, and on its arrival marched to Spanish Town. Shortly afterwards the men were allowed to extend their services in the 60th and 85th and a few to the 2nd West India Regiment.

On the 4th of July 1802 the regiment embarked on board His Majesty's ship *Delft* and landed at Portsmouth on the 22nd August following. Regimental strength was 1 lieutenant-colonel, 2 majors, 9 captains, 16 subalterns, 29 sergeants, 11 drummers, and 294 rank and file. During the service of seven years of the regiment in the West Indies it received drafts and volunteers from several regiments amounting to 410 rank and file. Deducting men who were drafted and volunteered on its embarkation from England, the regiment appears to have lost by deaths 870 non-commissioned officers and rank and file, from the period of its arrival in the West Indies to its return to England in August 1802.

During this period the following officers also died:

Dr. Weir, 6th August 1795.
Col. Fitch, 12th September 1795
Lt .Rawes, 2nd September 1795.
Capt. Lee, 18th September 1795.
Ens. Horridge, 24th October 1795
Lt. Armstrong, 27th October 1795
Lt. Morton, 28th October 1795.
Lt .Cove, 30th October 1795.
Capt. Hansald, 9th November 1795.
Capt. Hay, 14th November 1795.
Lt. Wilton, 14th November 1795.
S. Mat Clancy, 14th November 1795.
Ens. Byrne, 17th August 1796.
Ens .Morris, 20th August 1796.
Capt. Stone, 20th August 1796.
Lt. Trumane, 20th April 1797.
Ens. Lawton.
Lt. Batt, 20th August 1800.
F. Smith, 8th August 1800.
Ens. Hill, 30th September 1800.

Major White, 27th November 1800.

Lt. Gibson, 4th October 1800.

Capt. Wilson, 7th June 1801.

Lt. Williams, 1st December 1800.

Lt. Wright, 12th December 1801.

Lt. Farrell, 26th January, 1802.

The regiment upon disembarking proceeded to Hilsea Barracks where it remained about three weeks and then proceeded to Chelmsford. In March 1803 it received the route for Portsmouth and on its arrival embarked for Jersey on board the *Acasta* frigate and other vessels. The regiment then disembarked and quartered at Grove Hill.

On the 4th of May 1805 the regiment embarked at St Heliers. They joined the expedition at the Cove of Cork destined for the Cape of Good Hope under the command of Lieutenant-General Sir David Baird, and landed at the Cape on the 6th January 1806. The regiment was actually employed in the reduction of that settlement, where its head-quarters were stationed, and where it remained quartered. In October 1817 it was joined by a large detachment of the 2nd Battalion, under Lieutenant-Colonel Collier, on the reduction of the 2nd Battalion at Armagh in 1817. The whole of the regiment now reunited and forming one battalion, was collected together at Simon's Bay, Cape of Good Hope, in September 1817 and embarked for Ceylon on 1st October 1817.



Colonel William Fitch

PART II
HISTORY OF THE 2ND BATTALION AND SERVICES
OF THE REGIMENT DURING THE PENINSULAR WAR
1804 to 1814

The 2nd Battalion, 83rd Regiment, was raised in the year 1804. Being fixed at 600 rank and file and under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Hutchison, who had previously belonged to the 1st Battalion, the head-quarters of the 2nd Battalion were first established at Horsham Barracks, Sussex, where it remained a few months and was then removed to Chichester, at which time it received a draft of 300 men, chiefly from the 3rd Royal Lancashire Militia.

1805

During the stay of the battalion at Chichester, Lieutenant-Colonel Hutchison was removed to the Staff, and Lieutenant-Colonel Gordon succeeded to the command of the regiment.

1806

The battalion removed to Newport, in the Isle of Wight, at which time it sent 270 rank and file, with a proportion of officers and non-commissioned officers (being all of those fit for active service), to join the 1st Battalion at the Cape of Good Hope. In August the battalion marched to Chipping Norton in Oxfordshire and the following November removed to Battle Barracks, Sussex, where its establishment was increased to 800 rank and file. After a short stay at this station it was ordered to Brabourne Leas and Ashford in Kent and in March 1807 proceeded to Portsmouth and embarked for Guernsey.

1807

Having remained a few days in Guernsey it re-embarked, set sail and was quartered at St Owen on the Island of Jersey. The following September it embarked for Ireland, but owing to contrary winds the whole battalion was not assembled at Cove until January 1808 at which point it marched to Kinsale, County Cork.

1808

In January of this year the battalion was marched to Birr, in King's County where its establishment was augmented to 1000 rank and file with an additional lieutenant being appointed to each company. From Birr, 14 officers and 214 rank and file were sent to reinforce the 1st Battalion at the Cape of Good Hope. The following May the battalion marched to Dublin and occupied the Palatine Barracks and in December marched to Fermoy.

1809

In January 1809 the battalion marched from Fermoy to Cork and embarked at Cove for Corunna. However, intelligence having been received about the battle of Corunna and the evacuation of Spain by the British, a ship of war was dispatched to recall the transports and the regiment disembarked and marched back to its old quarters at Fermoy. In March 1809 the battalion received orders to march to Cove for embarkation for Lisbon. Having been previously inspected by Brigadier-General Rowland Hill, they proceeded to Cove and upon embarking on transports, sailed to join the British army in Portugal.

On the 6th of April 1809 the battalion, now 900 strong and under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Gordon, landed at Lisbon and was immediately dispatched to join the British army under the command of Sir John Cradock at Coimbra. It was there brigaded the 9th Regiment (1st Battalion) and placed under the command of Brigadier-General Alan Cameron.

CAMPAIGN AND BATTLE OF TALAVERA

1809.

In all the movements and discomforts of the British army in this advance, the 83rd bore its full share, and on the 27th and 28th of July while under Sir Arthur Wellesley, it fought and won the glorious battle of Talavera. The battalion was most severely engaged and particularly distinguished itself in the gallant and impetuous charge on the enemy's line made by General Sherbrook's division with the bayonet.

In this battle, General Alan Cameron's brigade, composed of the 61st and 83rd Regiments, was posted to the left centre of the front line, with the brigade of Guards on its right, the German Legion on its left, and about 100 paces to its front. Occupied by Light Infantry, was the dry rocky bed of a mountain torrent.

On the 27th, the French attempted to turn the allies' left and to take a height in front of General Hill's division. In this they were unsuccessful, but the following day at about 2 p.m., they renewed their efforts and made a general attack on the whole line. The battle then recommenced and raged with redoubled fury. The French guns played with murderous precision on General Cameron's brigade and the men of the 61st and 83rd Regiments were mowed down by sections. Under cover of this fire, the French Infantry in imposing masses advanced rapidly and steadily to the attack.

The 83rd Regiment had been previously ordered to lie down to avoid the tremendous cannonade directed against them, but on the French battalion nearing the ravine on its front, they rose up and with the 61st advancing steadily to meet them, they allowed the French forces to approach to within thirty paces of their ranks. While pouring in a well-directed and destructive volley, they dashed impetuously forward through the ravine and charging vigorously with the bayonet, drove the enemy with great slaughter headlong before them. The regiment followed in pursuit until it received the command to retire, when, facing about and carrying off its wounded, it steadily re-crossed the ravine and amid the warm encomiums of General Cameron himself, resumed its original position in the line. The Regiment (together with the 61st) maintained unflinch-