

# 3 Regiments, 3 Traditions

The Toy Soldier Museum's James H. Hillestad examines unique traditions of a trio of distinguished British regiments

Text and Photos: James H. Hillestad

While recently surveying the collection of figures and militaria in my Toy Soldier Museum, I became inspired to explore British Army history by focusing on three distinguished regiments and their unique traditions.

## GLORIOUS GLOSTERS

What became known as the Gloucestershire Regiment was originally raised by Col. John Gibson at Portsmouth, England, in 1694. It became known as the 28th Regiment of Foot in 1751.

During the French and Indian War (Seven Years' War), the regiment participated in 1758's successful Siege of Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. The fall of the fortress led to the capture of Quebec City by British forces commanded by Maj. Gen. James Wolfe. The 28th Foot was amongst his Redcoats who prevailed in the brief but decisive Battle of the Plains of Abraham outside the city's walls Sept. 13, 1759.

The 28th fought in the Battles of White Plains, Brandywine and Germantown during the course of the American Revolutionary War from 1775 to 1783.

British regiments without Royal titles were given county titles to help spur recruitment in 1782. As a result, it was designated as the 28th (North Gloucestershire) Regiment of Foot.

Circa 1984  
King's Own  
Royal Border  
Regiment  
drummer in  
bone china by  
Michael Sully.



The "Glorious Glosters" eventually carried more battle honours on their regimental colours than any other British Army line infantry regiment.

It was at the Battle of Alexandria in Egypt March 21, 1801, that the 28th



ABOVE: Gloucestershire Home Service helmet front.

BELOW: Gloucestershire Home Service helmet back.



Gloucestershire Regiment  
Changing of the Guard by  
Steadfast Soldiers.

**RIGHT:** Gloucestershire Regiment No. 1 Dress by Britains. Note the blue U.S. presidential citation insignia on the sleeves of the uniforms.

earned a unique accolade. The regiment was attacked in front by a superior number of French grenadiers -- Gen. Napoleon Bonaparte's "Invincibles." Simultaneously, a squadron of French cavalry charged them from the rear.

The officer commanding, Lt. Col. William Chambers, responded by giving the historic order, "Rear rank 28th! Right about face!"

The rear rank turned around, standing with their backs to their comrades, muskets at the ready. When the French horsemen were almost upon them, the Redcoats calmly fired a volley which decimated the attackers. After the volley, they faced about again and resumed their fire on the enemy infantry in front. The "Invincibles" conceded the battle and withdrew.

As a perpetual reminder of the occasion, soldiers of the 28th were granted the unique privilege of wearing a badge at the back of their headdress as well as in front.

*"Hill 235, a terrain feature that later became known as Gloster Hill, was the site of a stand made by 650 men from the regiment's 1st Battalion. They became surrounded and battled 10,000 Chinese communists for days. At the clash's conclusion, only 40 of the Glosters were lucky enough to reach safety!"*

At first, it simply showed the regiment's number. But it was later replaced by a sphinx badge. In the process, the unit became known as "The Fore and Aft."

The regiment fought with great distinction at the strategic crossroads of Quatre Bras June 16, 1815, two days before the Duke of Wellington's Anglo-Dutch army and their Prussian allies decisively defeated Napoleon's forces at Waterloo in present-day Belgium. The men of the 28th staunchly resisted every assault by the French against their square. The action was dramatically portrayed in the famous painting "Quatre Bras" by Elizabeth Thompson (Lady Butler).

During the Korean War, the Gloucestershire Regiment earned another



**RIGHT:** Gloucestershire regimental side drum. Note the blue U.S. presidential citation insignia.



**ABOVE:** H.M. of Great Britain figures depict members of the Border Regiment in English period dress parading captured Napoleonic French drums on Arroyo Day observed Oct. 28.

*“The Border Regiment’s forebears fought in North America at Ticonderoga and Saratoga and saw service in the Crimea. The 34th formed part of the British square at the Battle of Ulundi in 1879, which shattered the Zulu army.”*

honour for gallantry in the Battle of the Imjin River April 22-24, 1951. Four battalions (three British and one Belgian) formed U.N. forces’ 29th Infantry Brigade, which fought a successful delaying action.

Hill 235, a terrain feature that later became known as Gloster Hill, was the site of a stand made by 650 men from the regiment’s 1st Battalion. They became surrounded and battled 10,000 Chinese communists for days. At the clash’s conclusion, only 40 of the Glosters were lucky enough to reach safety!

The 1st Battalion was awarded a U.S. Presidential Distinguished Unit Citation. The award, a blue ribbon in a gold frame, was worn on the shoulder sleeve of the uniform. It was also displayed on the regimental drums.

In conjunction with British Army reforms, the regiment was merged with the Duke of Edinburgh’s Royal Regiment to form The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment in 1994. It in turn was amalgamated with the Light Infantry, The Royal Green Jackets, and the Devonshire and Dorset Regiment to form The Rifles in 2005.

## BORDER REGIMENT

The Border Regiment’s origins can be traced back to the 4th, or King’s Own Regiment of Foot, formed in 1680 as the 2nd Tangier Regiment. It ranked fourth in

**RIGHT:** Flag of Company C, 5th Battalion, Suffolk Regiment.



Rose bouquet and accompanying card received by the British Consulate General in Chicago.

## ROSY ANECDOTE

An intriguing footnote: Every year since 1967, six red roses have been anonymously delivered to the British Consulate General in Chicago, Ill., USA, on Minden Day Aug. 1.

A note that comes with the roses lists the six regiments and says, “They advanced through rose gardens to the battleground and decorated their tricorne hats with the emblem of England.”

The identity of the sender remains a mystery.

--James H. Hillestad

seniority amongst the infantry units in the British Army.

The 34th (Cumberland) Regiment of Foot, established in 1705; and the 55th (Westmorland) Regiment of Foot, which dated to 1755; were amalgamated in 1881 to form the Border Regiment. Unit numbering inspired its “Two Fives” nicknames.

The Border Regiment’s forebears





**LEFT:** King's Own Royal Border Regiment tenor drum made by George Potter, Aldershot, England.

**BELOW:** The Glorious Glosters stand firm in the "Quatre Bras" painting by Lady Butler.

fought in North America at Ticonderoga and Saratoga and saw service in the Crimea. The 34th formed part of the British square at the Battle of Ulundi in 1879, which shattered the Zulu army.

A notable regimental tradition dates back to the Peninsular War, when the 34th confronted French troops at the Spanish village of Arroyo dos Molinos

Oct. 28, 1811. While the British main body attacked the French, the 34th and 28th (Glorious Glosters) were sent to cut off the enemy's retreat. In the process, the 34th captured the drum major's staff and the drums of their "opposite number," the French 34th Infantry Regiment.

The captured French drums -- with the drummers dressed in uniforms of the

Napoleonic era -- are paraded annually on Arroyo Day Oct. 28 to commemorate the event.

The regimental heritages of the 4th, 34th and 55th were carried on when the Border Regiment was combined with the King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster) to form the King's Own Royal Border Regiment in 1959. Further amalgamations saw it join the King's Regiment and the Queen's Lancashire Regiment to form the new Duke of Lancaster's Regiment (King's Lancashire and Border) in 2006. The King's Own Royal Border Regiment became its 3rd Battalion.

## SUFFOLK REGIMENT

Like the Border Regiment, the Suffolk Regiment (12th Foot) took its "Old Dozen" nickname from its regimental number.

It originated in 1685 as the Duke of Norfolk's Regiment of Foot, enlisting men from England's East Anglian counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. Subsequently, it was named after 10 different colonels before being designated as the 12th Foot in 1747.

The regiment distinguished itself at Fontenoy in 1745, continuing to fight on even whilst losing half its manpower as casualties.



Suffolk Regiment at the double by Harold Pestana, Soldiers of the Queen.



*“Every Aug. 1, British regiments involved in the great victory commemorate Minden Day by wearing roses in their hats and bedecking their colours with wreaths of roses.”*

The 12th Foot, along with five other British regiments, fought heroically against French forces in the Battle of Minden in Hanover, Germany, Aug. 1, 1759, during the Seven Years' War.

A huge mass of French cavalry appeared before them. Under the command of Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick, the British regiments were ordered to advance “at” the beat of drum. This order was misunderstood to mean “by” beat of drum, so the British

foot soldiers went off with a swinging pace across Minden Heath, undaunted by the massed cavalry arrayed against them.

When Ferdinand noticed the confusion, he sent swift orders for the half-dozen regiments to stop. But nothing would halt them. On they went with steady, majestic bearing. As they passed amongst rose briars in the heath, they snatched up blossoms and stuck them in their hats, coats and equipment.

It was recorded that French cavalry officers laughed at their audacity. For infantry to attack cavalry was considered sheer folly. The cavalry moved out to attack the six British regiments in one violent, glorious charge.

The British halted, loaded their muskets and coolly waited until the French were just 10 yards from them. Then they fired a crushing volley that blasted the horsemen from the field. Two more charges by French cavalymen met the same fate before they fled from the field.

Every Aug. 1, British regiments involved in the great victory commemorate Minden Day by wearing roses in their hats and bedecking their colours with wreaths of roses.

After three centuries of service, the Suffolk Regiment was amalgamated with the Royal Norfolk Regiment to form the 1st East Anglian Regiment (Royal Norfolk and Suffolk) in 1959. Its lineage lives on in today's Royal Anglian Regiment.

Figures by various makers and artifacts from my museum illustrate this article. ■

Suffolk Regiment Colour Party in celebration of Minden Day, with helmets and standards decorated with red and yellow roses.



### about the writer

James H. Hillestad is the proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum and shop in Cresco, Pa., USA.