

Officers' Uniforms: The Household Cavalry c. 1890 by William Jones.
Photo © David Scheinmann Photography (used by permission)



The Household Cavalry – Pageantry Personified

James H. Hillestad, Member No. 6, highlights the two senior regiments of the British Army

In Volume 2, #15 of The Standard, the focus was the Brigade of Guards. This issue looks at the other component of the Household Division, the Household Cavalry – the Life Guards and the Blues and Royals.

RIGHT Life Guard Trooper, Collector's Club Figure 2009

The Life Guards are the senior regiment of the British Army. The origins of the unit go back almost 350 years to their role in the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. A reminder of these roots are the oak leaves and acorns which embellish



their helmets and tunics.

This stems from the escape of Prince Charles (later Charles II) from Cromwell's Parliamentary forces, during which he hid from his pursuers in the Boscobel Oak.

The Blues and Royals are the result of an amalgamation in 1969 of the Royal Horse Guards (the Blues) and the First (Royal) Dragoons. The

Royal Horse Guards were raised under Oliver Cromwell to be part of the New Model Army. After the return of Charles II, they were renamed the Royal Regiment of Horse and put under the command of the Earl of Oxford, whose blue livery gave them their nickname. In 1687, the unit was renamed yet again, the Royal Regiment of Horse Guards.

The First (Royal) Dragoons are the oldest line cavalry regiment in the Army. The Royals began their career as the Tangiers Light Horse, fighting the Moors in Morocco from 1662 until 1684. An historic aside – in 1894 Kaiser Wilhelm II

W. BRITAIN HOUSEHOLD CAVALRY

W. Britain has been producing miniatures of the Household Cavalry since the inception of the firm's production of hollowcast soldiers in 1893. Illustrated in this article are some of the many offerings, the latest being a Collector's Club figure of a dismounted Life Guard.



RIGHT 100 Years of Evolution Horse Guards Trooper 1897, 1946, 2000



Life Guards Winter Cloaks (#400)



Life Guard at Horse Guards Parade Whitehall (#8903)



ABOVE Life Guard Sentries (#2118)

became the ceremonial Colonel-in-Chief of the regiment. This appointment, not surprisingly, came to an abrupt end in 1914.

The Life Guards are distinguished by their red tunics and white plume, which is onion-shaped at the top. The Blues and Royals wear a dark blue tunic, and their helmets have a scarlet horsehair plume. The Life Guards wear their helmet chin-straps snugly under their lower lip; the Blues and Royals under the

point of the chin.

A custom unique to the Blues is that troopers and non-commissioned officers are permitted to salute officers when not wearing headdress – the only regiment in the British Army to be accorded this privilege. The custom started during the Battle of Warburg in 1760. The Marquess of Granby, who then commanded both the Royal Horse Guards and the Royal Dragoons, ▶

Dismounted Troopers



Life Guards Trooper, Trumpeter, and Standard Bearer



Kettledrummer
State Dress

drove the French from the field, losing both his hat and his wig in the encounter. Reporting to his commander, Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick, he apparently concocted a salute without doffing his hat, as he did not have one. When he later became Colonel of the Blues, the Regiment adopted the habit of saluting without headdress.

An intriguing footnote – there are no sergeants in the Household Cavalry, but rather Corporals of Horse. The popular myth is that Queen Victoria once declared “Sergeant means servant and there will be no servants in my Household Cavalry.” It was her son, King Edward VII, who declared that the rank of Private in the Household Cavalry be changed to Trooper. And it was his son, in turn, King George V, who observed that the Blues had no badge on their service caps, and offered his own cypher to be encircled with the Blues’ Regimental title. Such are some of the associations of the Royal Family with the Household Cavalry.

SUGGESTED READING

Russell Braddon, *All the Queen’s Men*
Barney White-Spunner, *Horse Guards*
G.R. Lawn, *Music in State Clothing*
Henry Dallal, *Pageantry & Performance*

A special thank you to Andrew Wallis, Curator of the Guards Museum and to Colonel P.J. Tabor, MVO, Commander of the Household Cavalry, for their contributions to this article.

THE MOUNTED BANDS

Bandsman’s
State Tunic



When one looks at the mounted bands, one cannot help but be impressed by the kettledrummers, their drums and their magnificent horses. Both regiments have pure silver drums, weighing a total of 108 pounds. The Life Guards received theirs in 1831 from William IV. The Blues and Royals date theirs to 1805, when King George III presented them to the Royal Regiment of Horse Guards.

RIGHT Blues and
Royals Trooper and
Farrier



When performing their ceremonial duties, officers and troopers of the Household Cavalry carry swords. This fact caused an amusing brush with the Foot Guards that took place in 1951, when the Life Guard Band played for dinner at Windsor Castle. Two young members of the band, who had helped transport the music stands and instruments, were walking toward the Henry VIII gateway when they passed

On parade, the drums are draped with banners bearing the Royal Coat of Arms and the Royal Cypher. The kettledrums, until recently, were carried on the horse with the larger drum on the right – allowing for the drummer’s stronger right hand to play the main beat on the larger drum.

The Household Cavalry has three types of horses – drum horses (Clydesdale crosses, piebald, skewbald or roan, usually named after Greek heroes), greys ridden by the trumpeter, and blacks. The blacks and greys are virtually all unbroken Irish stock of three to four years old.

Prior to the amalgamation in 1969, the Royal Horse Guards horses’ manes were dressed to fall to the near side, whereas those of the Life Guards fell to the off side. It was thus possible for a spectator looking at the mounted sentries in Whitehall to know which regiment furnished the guard by observing the fall of the horses’ manes.

When playing in the presence of the Queen or other senior members of the Royal Family, the bandsmen wear gold and crimson tunics, emblazoned with the Royal Cypher, and dark blue ‘jockey caps,’ a uniform that has remained unchanged since the reign of Charles II.

a party of the castle Foot Guard in their grey greatcoats. The two boys were stopped at once by a sergeant who demanded to know why they had not saluted the officer. One of the boys, R. A. Walthew, replied that they didn’t know he was an officer. “Couldn’t you see he was carrying a sword?” the sergeant snapped back. To which Walthew replied “everyone in our regiment carries a sword.”

When the Household Cavalry furnishes a mounted escort to the Sovereign on State occasions, a ceremonial axe with a spike is carried by a Farrier Corporal-of-Horse. The reason? In former days, when a horse was wounded or injured so seriously that it could not be treated, its suffering was ended by killing it with the spike. The axe is also a reminder of the days when the Sovereign’s Escorts

accompanied royal coaches and when English roads were very bad. Horses often fell and became entangled in their harnesses – to be freed with the cut of an axe. It is also said that in those long-ago times, if a horse had to be destroyed, its rider had to bring back a hoof, hacked off with the axe, to prove to the Quartermaster that the animal had in fact been destroyed, and so prevent fraudulent replacement. The axe remains a symbol today of the Farrier's duties.

The Household Cavalry also have the Sovereign's Standards for each Regiment, which are carried by the Escort to the Queen on State occasions.

Members of the Household Cavalry are first and foremost professional soldiers. When not performing their mounted ceremonial duties, they are serving in armoured units at home and abroad. They have fought in all the major wars for over 300 years.



ABOVE Music Stand Banner, The Life Guards
RIGHT Regimental Side Drum, The Blues and Royals



"We represent our country, and we do so on a daily basis. Most people don't realise that we have an armoured reconnaissance as well as a ceremonial regiment, and that they're entwined. Everyone in our regiment can perform operational duties one moment, and ceremonial duties the next. We don't just look good - we're fighters, too." RCM Mark Kitching, Regimental Corporal Major

Jim Hillestad operates under the name "The Toy Soldier Museum." His museum, containing more than 35,000 figures and a large collection of militaria, is located in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania. For directions and hours, call him at 570 629-7227, or visit his new website at www.the-toy-soldier.com.



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