



A HISTORY OF THE SUFFOLK REGIMENT

17th – 18th Century

The regiment began its life in 1685 when Henry, 7th Duke of Norfolk, raised a regiment in Norfolk and Suffolk as part of the forces of James II to meet the threat of the Monmouth Rebellion. The regiment was known in its early years by the names of the various colonels who commanded it.

After a few weeks in East Anglia, the regiment was moved to Windsor Castle and from there to Ireland where it was engaged in many actions including the Battle of the Boyne. In the next forty-five years it saw service in Flanders, the West Indies and the Balearic Islands, returning to Suffolk in 1730.

In 1742 the regiment left for Europe to take part in the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748). It was present at the Battle of Dettingen on 27 June 1743 against the French, the last time an English monarch (George II) led his troops in battle. The Adjutant at that time was James Wolfe, later to gain fame as General Wolfe of Canada.

In 1751 Infantry Regiments were numbered and no longer took the name of their commanding officer. The regiment became the XIIth Foot, indicating its seniority as one of the oldest regiments in the army.

During the Seven Years War (1756-1763), at the Battle of Minden, on 1 August 1759, six British Regiments of Foot, including the XIIth, defeated ten thousand French cavalry. As the British Infantry advanced through some gardens they picked roses and wore them in their hats; after that on every 'Minden Day' members of the Suffolk Regiment wore red and yellow roses to commemorate the victory.

1769 saw the regiment sail for Gibraltar, where it spent the next fourteen years. This period included the unsuccessful siege of the Rock by the Spaniards from 1779 to 1783. 1781 saw a further change in the title: in addition to XIIth Foot, it was also to be known as The East Suffolk Regiment. The years between 1783 and 1796 saw the regiment in widely scattered places: England, Ireland, the Channel Islands, Barbados, Martinique and Flanders.

19th Century

In 1796 the regiment paid the first of many visits to India, remaining there for the next ten years in operations against the French and local rulers, most notably in helping to overthrow Tippoo Sultan, the ruler of Mysore, at the battle of Seringapatam. In 1810 it took part in the capture of the island of Mauritius, and remained there on garrison duty until 1818. After the Napoleonic Wars there followed a long period of comparative peace with the regiment serving in various parts of the world.

In 1842 a Reserve Battalion was formed which took part in the 'Kaffir Wars' in South Africa (1851-1853) and it was a draft to reinforce this battalion which was on the troop ship Birkenhead when it was wrecked on 24 February 1852 with the loss of most of the troops.

In 1854 the regiment sailed for Australia and remained there, and in Tasmania, until 1860 when it went to New Zealand to help put down the Maori Rebellion. It was as a result this period that alliances with the Launceston Regiment of Australia and the Auckland Regiment of New Zealand were later formed.

In 1858 the Reserve Battalion became the 2nd Battalion. It sailed for India in 1864 and from then until 1907 one or other battalion was usually serving there. The 1st Battalion saw active service in the Second Afghan War (1878-1880) and on the North-West Frontier in 1888. In 1878 the Depot (later named Gibraltar Barracks) was built in Bury St Edmunds to act as a recruiting and training centre, and three years later the regiment finally became The Suffolk Regiment. At the time of the Boer War (1899-1902), in which the 1st Battalion served, along with contingents of Volunteers, approximately 90% of the strength of the battalion were Suffolk men.

20th Century

The creation of the Territorial Force in 1908 saw the arrival of two more battalions – the 4th, with its headquarters in Ipswich and Drill Halls throughout East Suffolk, and the 5th, based in Bury St Edmunds and covering West Suffolk.

1914-1918

During the course of the Great War the Regiment expanded to 23 Battalions. The 2nd Battalion formed part of the original British Expeditionary Force sent to France in August 1914; the other Regular Army battalion, the 1st, spent most of the war in Salonika. More battalions were created as part of Kitchener's New Army; these new units – the 7th, 8th, 9th, 11th and 12th Battalions – all served on the Western Front. In all, six battalions of the regiment were engaged on the Somme in 1916 and five in the battles at Arras in 1917.

Of the two Territorial battalions, the 4th spent the war in France while the 5th served in Gallipoli and then in Egypt and Palestine. Towards the end of the war the Suffolk yeomanry were converted to Infantry and transferred to the Suffolk Regiment where they served as the 15th Battalion, in Egypt and Palestine.

The Regimental Chapel in St Mary's Church, Bury St Edmunds, commemorates the 360 officers and 6,513 other ranks of the regiment who did not return.

During the twenty years between the Great War and the Second World War, the 1st and 2nd Battalions saw service in India, Shanghai, Gibraltar and Malta. The 4th Battalion (T.A.) was re-established and the 5th Battalion (T.A.) formed in 1939.

1939-1945

During the 1939-1945 War the regiment expanded again to eleven service battalions, five first line and six second line and holding battalions. The 1st Battalion went to France with the British Expeditionary Force in 1939, took part in the fighting in France and Belgium, the evacuation from Dunkirk and subsequently returned to France on D-Day fighting through to Germany until the end of the war.

The 2nd Battalion was on Internal Security duties at Razmak on the north-west frontier of India when war broke out and took part in the Burma Campaign and the fighting in the Arakan and at Imphal in March 1944. At the end of the war the battalion was stationed at Lahore in India.

The 4th and 5th Battalions (T.A.) were part of the 18th Division. The Division, comprising mostly Territorials from the eastern counties, left for the Middle East in October 1941, was diverted to Singapore when Japan entered the war, and on the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 spent three and a half years as POWs, many being involved in the construction of the Burma – Thailand Railway.

The 7th Battalion was formed in May 1940. In 1941 it was converted to Tanks, becoming the 142nd Regiment Royal Armoured Corps, but still wearing the Suffolk cap badge: it fought in North Africa and Italy until it was disbanded in January 1945.

The second line and 'holding' battalions consisted of the 6th, 8th, 9th, 30th, 31st and 70th (Young Soldiers) Battalions. The 8th Battalion spent the war years in the UK supplying drafts to other units. The 31st Battalion served as line of communication troops in North Africa and Italy and on garrison duty in Gibraltar.

Apart from these Army Battalions, 11 Home Guard Battalions were formed, together with two Motor Transport Companies for the local defence of the county.

The regiment's Roll of Honour for the 1939-1945 War contains the names of 87 officers and 1,508 other ranks.

1945 – 1959

After the war, the 2nd Battalion was disbanded and the 5th Battalion (T.A.) was not reformed. This meant that the Suffolk Regiment was once again, as before 1858, a one Regular Battalion Regiment, with a Territorial Battalion (the 4th) covering the whole of Suffolk.

In 1946 the Depot at Bury St Edmunds saw the first intakes of National Servicemen who served for 18 months with the Regular Battalion and then 3 years in the Territorial Army, mostly with the 4th Battalion.

Between 1946 and 1949 the 1st Battalion saw service in Egypt, Palestine and Greece before sailing for Malaya in July 1949 where it spent the next 3½ years involved in jungle warfare against Communist infiltration. During its service in Malaya the regiment gained a first-class reputation for jungle warfare and played a leading part in suppressing the communist threat.

On returning to the United Kingdom the battalion stayed in Colchester for a short time before moving to Trieste in 1953 to take up internal security duties. In 1954 it moved to Wuppertal in Germany. Leaving Germany in 1956 for Cyprus, on its last overseas posting, the battalion was involved in the EOKA campaign against General Grivas.

In May 1959 the Battalion returned to England and on 29 August 1959 was amalgamated with the 1st Battalion The Royal Norfolk Regiment to form the 1st East Anglian Regiment.