

Royal Sussex Regiment

The **Royal Sussex Regiment** was a line infantry regiment of the British Army that was in existence from 1881 to 1966. The regiment was formed in 1881 as part of the Childers Reforms by the amalgamation of the 35th (Royal Sussex) Regiment of Foot and the 107th Regiment of Foot (Bengal Light Infantry). The regiment saw service in the Second Boer War, and both World War I and World War II.

On 31 December 1966 the Royal Sussex Regiment was amalgamated with the other regiments of the Home Counties Brigade, the Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment, the Queen's Own Buffs, The Royal Kent Regiment and the Middlesex Regiment (Duke of Cambridge's Own) to form the Queen's Regiment which was later, on 9 September 1992, amalgamated with the Royal Hampshire Regiment to form the present Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment (Queen's and Royal Hampshires).

1 History

1.1 The Royal Sussex Regiment 1881 – 1914

Following its formation, the regiment was sent to Egypt in 1882 as part of General Wolseley's expedition to crush the Urabi Revolt and conquer Egypt in the name of the Khedive. The 2nd Battalion was stationed in Alexandria after its bombardment by the Royal Navy and the 1st Battalion was engaged in several of the decisive land battles in that short-lived conflict. Later, in 1884, the regiment was part of the Nile Expedition—the unsuccessful attempt to save General Gordon and his garrison at Khartoum during the Mahdist War. Twenty men of the regiment, led by Lt. Lionel Trafford, led the advanced party towards Khartoum. Having been informed that the enemy would flee at the sight of the British in their red coats, the Royal Sussex contingent, who had been issued with a grey serge campaign uniform, borrowed scarlet frocks from the Guards regiment of the Camel Corps. Nevertheless, the British relief force was two days too late, as Khartoum had fallen and Gordon was killed.

The 2nd Battalion, stationed in India, was part of the Black Mountain Expedition of 1888, as one of many battles fought along the North-West Frontier Province.

In 1900, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd (Royal Sussex Militia) Battalions of the regiment joined the British Army in the bloody Anglo-Boer War.

2 World War I 1914 – 1918

The Royal Sussex Regiment raised 20 battalions for the war, all of which saw action. The regiment had a battalion in every theatre including in Russia in 1919. The regiment lost 6,800 men during the war and four Victoria Crosses were awarded to men from the regiment. After the war St Georges Chapel, in Chichester Cathedral, was restored and furnished as a memorial to the fallen of the Royal Sussex Regiment. It now has all their names recorded on the panels that are attached to the chapel walls.^[1]

2.1 1st Battalion

The 1st Battalion was one of the few infantry battalions that remained in India throughout the whole war, being stationed at Peshawar.

2.2 2nd Battalion

With the 2nd Brigade, part of the 1st Division, the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment crossed the channel with the British Expeditionary Force in 1914 and fought through the war on the Western Front. It was during the First Battle of Ypres that the 2nd Battalion was given the unofficial title "The Iron Regiment" as an unsolicited testimonial by German prisoners captured on 1 November 1914.

The battalion subsequently fought alongside the 5th (Cinque Ports) Battalion during the Battle of Aubers Ridge on 9 May 1915. Later that year, on 25 September, during the Battle of Loos Sgt Harry Wells was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross, when the battalion took part in the attack in the vicinity of the Lone Tree in front of Hulluch. The battalion moved to the Somme in 1916 where it was involved in actions including High Wood, moving back to the Ypres Sector in 1917. The battalion lost 1,723 officers and men killed by 1918.

2.3 Battle of the Boar's Head

At Richebourg, in 1916, the 11th, 12th and 13th (South-downs) Battalions of the Royal Sussex Regiment, made up the 116th Brigade of the 39th Division in Kitchener's New Army. On 30 June 1916 they took part in the Battle of the Boar's Head, Richebourg L'Avoue. After a bom-

bardment of the German trenches the 12th and 13th Battalions went over the top (most for the first time) and, under heavy fire, attacked the enemy trenches, bombing and bayoneting their way in. The 11th Battalion supplied carrying parties. They succeeded in taking the German front line trench, holding it for some four hours, and even briefly took the second line trench for about half an hour, beating off repeated counterattacks, and only withdrew from the shortage of ammunition and mounting casualties. Over a period of less than five hours the three Southdowns Battalions of The Royal Sussex lost 17 officers and 349 men killed, including 12 sets of brothers, of whom three were from one family. A further 1000 men were wounded or taken prisoner. In regimental history this is known as **The Day Sussex Died**. The following day the **Battle of the Somme** began and almost 20,000 died on the first day. The Royal Sussex attack at Richebourg was just a diversion, not even considered a separate action in the history of the war, and remains largely unmentioned in any of the official histories. Edmund Blunden, a 2nd Lieutenant in the 11th Battalion, wrote an excellent account of this in "Undertones of War", his memoirs.

2.4 Victoria Crosses during World War I

- Sgt. Harry Wells - (Posthumous in the Battle of Loos 1915)
- Lt. Eric Archibald McNair - (Hooge in Belgium)
- C.S.M. Nelson Victor Carter - (Posthumous at Richebourg l'Avoue in France 1916)
- Lieut. Col. D.G.Johnson - (Crossing the Sambre Canal in November 1918)

3 World War II

The Royal Sussex Regiment raised 14 battalions for the **Second World War**, although only a few saw active service during the war and most would be used in a home defence role or for training purposes or were converted into other roles. The regiment was awarded one **Victoria Cross** during the war, that of **Captain Lionel Ernest Queripel**.

3.1 Regular Army

The 1st Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment was a Regular Army unit that was based in Egypt at the outbreak of the **Second World War**, having been sent to Palestine in 1938. The battalion was initially part of the 23rd Infantry Brigade, serving alongside 1st Battalion, Essex Regiment and 2nd Battalion, Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own). In October 1940 the battalion was transferred to the 7th Indian Infantry Brigade of 4th Indian Infantry Division,

with whom it remained for the rest of the war.^[2] The battalion took part in the **Western Desert Campaign** and the **Italian Campaign**, where it had a terrible time and was involved in the bloody **Battle of Monte Cassino**. During the battle the elements of the battalion were ordered into an attack in which they sustained well over 50% casualties. In late 1944 the battalion was shipped across to Greece with **Lieutenant-General Ronald Scobie** and his **III Corps**, remaining there until 1946 to help calm the **Greek Civil War** after the German withdrawal.

The 2nd Battalion was based in Northern Ireland at the outbreak of war. They were joined with the 4th and 5th Battalions of the Regiment in the 133rd (Royal Sussex) Infantry Brigade as part of the 44th (Home Counties) Infantry Division. They were sent to France in 1940, taking part in the fighting and rapid retreat to Dunkirk where they were evacuated. The brigade was sent to North Africa in 1942 where they fought in the **Battle of Alam Halfa**. The 44th Division was reported to have performed badly during that battle and was disbanded afterwards, with the Royal Sussex Brigade being attached to various units after this. They fought at the **Battle of El Alamein**.

In 1943 the 2nd Battalion and volunteers from the 4th and 5th Battalions were formed into the 10th Parachute Battalion of the Parachute Regiment which was a part of the 4th Parachute Brigade, serving with the 1st Airborne Division. The brigade participated in **Operation Slapstick**, an amphibious landing on the Italian port of Taranto, as part of the Allied invasion of Italy. They then fought at **Arnhem** during the disastrous **Operation Market Garden** in 1944 with the rest of the 1st Airborne Division. **Captain Lionel Queripel**, from the Royal Sussex was awarded the **Victoria Cross** posthumously, during the **Battle of Arnhem**. After the battle the battalion and 4th Parachute Brigade were dispersed due to such severe casualties being suffered and were used to bring the battered 1st Parachute Brigade up to strength.

The 2nd Battalion was raised again, after the old one became the 10th Parachute Battalion, and along with the 4th and 5th battalions, which were merged to become the 4th/5th Battalion, was reformed with the 133rd Brigade which was sent to the forgotten theatre of war in Iraq and Persia in 1943 with the 6th Indian Infantry Division where they remained for the rest of the war, the 2nd Battalion joining the 24th Indian Brigade, and the 4th/5th Battalion joining 27th Indian Brigade.

3.2 Territorial Army

The regiment also raised the 6th and 7th battalions (both 2nd Line Territorial Army duplicates of the 4th and 5th Battalions) which were both in the 37th (Royal Sussex) Infantry Brigade, part of the 12th (Eastern) Infantry Division. They also served in France with the BEF in 1940 but suffered heavy casualties during the fighting and were evacuated from Dunkirk. The 12th Division was dis-

banded in July 1940 due to the amount of heavy casualties suffered. The main reason for such heavy casualties was because most of the men had had very little training and few had even fired a rifle. After the return to England, the 6th Battalion served as a home defence unit for the rest of the war and was disbanded after the war in 1946. The 7th Battalion defended Amiens against air raids and the German 1st Panzer Division who captured the town on 20 May. Of 581 men with the battalion, 70 survived to be captured and only three escaped back to the battalion HQ. The battalion was transferred to the Royal Artillery and converted into the 109th (Royal Sussex) Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.



General Von Arnim's Staff Car at Eastbourne Redoubt

3.3 Hostilities-only

The 8th (Home Defence) Battalion was raised in 1939, presumably from the National Defence Companies. The battalion was mainly composed of older and less fit men and remained in the United Kingdom throughout the war. In 1941 the battalion was redesignated as the 30th Battalion and was disbanded after the war in 1946.

The 9th Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment was created in July 1940. It was originally commanded by 41-year-old Lieutenant Colonel Gerald Templer, later destined to become a Field marshal and to serve with distinction in the war. The battalion formed part of the 212th Independent Infantry Brigade (Home), serving alongside the 6th South Wales Borderers, 10th Gloucestershire Regiment and 18th Welch Regiment. In October 1942 the battalion was converted to armour as the 160th Regiment Royal Armoured Corps and joined the 267th Indian Armoured Brigade, which included other infantry units converted to armour. As with all infantry units converted in this way, they would still have worn their infantry capbadge on the black beret of the RAC.^[3] However, it returned to the infantry role in April 1943^[4] and was sent with the 72nd Infantry Brigade to fight in the Burma Campaign with the British 36th Infantry Division, previously 36th Indian. The battalion saw action in the Arakan, was airlifted into Myitkyina and fought its way to Mandalay by April 1945. The battalion was in Burma when the Japanese surrendered.

The 10th Battalion was another hostilities-only battalion also raised in 1940 and joined the 219th Independent Infantry Brigade (Home), later the 203rd Brigade until 21 September 1943 when it was disbanded.

The Royal Sussex Regiment raised another five battalions throughout the war, mostly for home defence or as training units used to supply the battalions abroad with trained infantrymen and, as a result, none of them saw active service overseas and remained only in the UK.



The Eastbourne Redoubt South Seaward facade

4 Post 1945

On 31 December 1966 the regiment was amalgamated with the Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment, the Queen's Own Buffs, The Royal Kent Regiment and the Middlesex Regiment to form the Queen's Regiment.

The Regimental Museum is at the Eastbourne Redoubt, Royal Parade, Eastbourne, East Sussex, United Kingdom. The Royal Sussex Regiment appeared in *Atonement* as the regiment in which Robbie Turner was a Private during the Battle of France, although the film incorrectly identified Robbie as serving with the 1st Battalion.

5 Battle honours

- *From 35th Regiment of Foot*: Maida
- Gibraltar 1704-05, Louisburg, Quebec 1759, Martinique 1762, Havannah, St. Lucia 1778, Egypt 1882, Abu Klea, Nile 1884-85, South Africa 1900-02
- *The Great War (23 battalions)*: Mons, Retreat from Mons, Marne 1914 '18, Aisne 1914, Ypres

1914 '17 '18, Gheluvelt, Nonne Bosschen, Givenchy 1914, Aubers, Loos, Somme 1916 '18, Albert 1916 '18, Bazentin, Delville Wood, Pozières, Flers-Courcelette, Morval, Thiepval, Le Transloy, Ancre Heights, Ancre 1916 '18, Arras 1917 '18, Vimy 1917, Scarpe 1917, Arleux, Messines 1917, Pilckem, Langemarck 1917, Menin Road, Polygon Wood, Broodseinde, Poelcappelle, Passchendaele, Cambrai 1917 '18, St. Quentin, Bapaume 1918, Rosières, Avre, Lys, Kemmel, Scherpenberg, Soissonais-Ourcq, Amiens, Drocourt-Quéant, Hindenburg Line, Épéhy, St. Quentin Canal, Beauvevoir, Courtrai, Selle, Sambre, France and Flanders 1914-18, Piave, Vittorio Veneto, Italy 1917-18, Suvla, Landing at Suvla, Scimitar Hill, Gallipoli 1915, Rumani, Egypt 1915-17, Gaza, El Mughar, Jerusalem, Jericho, Tell 'Asur, Palestine 1917-18, N.W. Frontier India 1915 1916-17, Murman 1918-19

- Afghanistan 1919
- *The Second World War*: Defence of Escaut, Amiens 1940, St. Omer-La Bassée, Forêt de Nieppe, North-West Europe 1940, Karora-Marsa Taclai, Cub Cub, Mescelit Pass, Keren, Mt. Engiahat, Massawa, Abyssinia 1941, Omars, Benghazi, Alam el Halfa, El Alamein, Akarit, Djebel el Meida, Tunis, North Africa 1940-43, Cassino I, Monastery Hill, Gothic Line, Pian di Castello, Monte Reggiano, Italy 1944-45, North Arakan, Pinwe, Shweli, Burma 1943-45

6 See also

- History of Sussex
- In the 2007 film *Atonement*, the character Robbie Turner serves in the regiment and is at the Dunkirk evacuation.

7 References

- [1] Atkinson, Pete; Poyner, Ruth (2007). *Chichester Cathedral*. Norwich: Jarold. p. 4. ISBN 978-0-7117-4478-3.
- [2] http://www.britishmilitaryhistory.co.uk/webeasycms/hold/uploads/bmh_document_pdf/4_Indian_Division_1940_.pdf
- [3] George Forty, "British Army Handbook 1939-1945", Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998, p. 51
- [4] The Royal Sussex Regiment [UK]

- Fox, Sylvia, ed. (2013). *Not Forgetting The 9th: The War Diaries of Sgt. Cyril Grimes 1944–1945*. Time-Box Press. ISBN 978-0-9550219-1-6.
- Gillings, Murray. *The Shiny 9th*.

8 External links

- The Royal Sussex Regiment history
- The Royal Sussex Living History Group Website - Source of much information on The Royal Sussex Regiment and The Regimental Association
- Royal Sussex Society - US Living History
- Badges of the Royal Sussex Regiment
- British Regiments site
- The Day Sussex Died - The Battle of the Boar's Head 30 June 1916
- Eastbourne Redoubt Fortress Military Museum (Home of the Royal Sussex Regimental Museum)
- Royal Sussex Southdowns (Historical Information about 11th, 12th, 13th and 14th Royal Sussex Battalions)
- Royal Sussex Regiment Victoria Crosses

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