

A HISTORY OF THE BRIGADE OF GUARDS ON AMERICAN SERVICE

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During the War of His Britannic Majesty's North American Colonies, 1775-1783, a composite brigade of men drawn from the three British Regiments of Foot Guards was dispatched to the scene of conflict. This history of the detachment is written in three parts: the early history of the three Guards Regiments; their service in America 1776-1783.

I. EARLY HISTORY OF THE FOOT GUARDS

A. FIRST GUARDS. A 12 company regiment of Guards was formed by Charles II in 1659 while he was in exile from England. The unit remained in Flanders when Charles returned home in 1660. At this time he created another regiment of Guards, also of 12 companies. In 1662 these two units were amalgamated to form the Royal or King's Regiment of Foot Guards. The name later became the First Regiment of Foot Guards, and was changed to Grenadier Guards in 1815 after Waterloo. Four grenadier companies were added to Regiment in the late 1600's. By 1776 the 28 companies in First Guards had been organized into 3 battalions, the 1st Battalion having 2 grenadier companies and the others only 1 each.

B. COLDSTREAM GUARDS - Col. Monck formed this regiment, which carried his name, in 1650 as part of the Cromwellian New Model Army. In 1660 he marched the unit from Coldstream, Scotland, to London in support of Charles II's return to the throne. In 1661 Charles designated the unit as second in seniority to the First Guards and bestowed the name of The Lord General's Regiment of Guards in honor of Monck's new title. In 1670, after Monck's death, the unit was redesignated as Coldstream Guards. Because its founding date precedes that of First Guards, the Coldstream to this day considers itself the senior regiment. It adopted the motto "Nulli Secundus" meaning "Second to None." In 1776 the regiment consisted of 18 companies divided into 2 battalions, with 1 grenadier company in each.

C. THIRD GUARDS - Originally formed as the Life Guards of the Army of Scotland in 1642, the regiment was deactivated when Charles II fled to France after the Battle of Worcester in 1651. It was reactivated by Charles in 1660 as part of the Scottish, rather than English, Army. With the Union of the two countries in 1707, the Scots Guards marched to London and became the Third Regiment of Foot Guards on the British establishment. In 1776 the unit was organized in the same fashion as the Coldstream.

II. AMERICAN REVOLUTION

A. FORMATION OF THE BRIGADE

On 13 February 1776 orders were issued from Guards Headquarters in London forming a detachment from the three Regiments of Foot Guards for service in the war in America. Under the command of Brigadier General Edward Mathew (Coldstream Guards), the detachment was to consist of 15 privates from each of the 64 companies of Foot Guards. Officers, non-commissioned officers, and musicians were also drawn from the regiments. A chaplain, surgeon, and surgeon's mates were recruited. The personnel were divided into 8 regular infantry or battalion companies, 1 light infantry company, and 1 grenadier company. The unit embarked for America on 2 May 1776.

Upon the detachment's arrival at Sandy Hook, New York, on 12 August 1776, General Howe ordered it to field as a Brigade composed of 2 battalions of 5 companies each. First Battalion consisted of the Grenadier Company (men and officers from all three regiments), the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Infantry Companies (men and officers from First Guards), and the Brigade or 4th Company (men from all three regiments, officers from First Guards). Second Battalion was composed of Companies 5 and 6 (men and officers from Third Guards), Companies 7 and 8 (men and officers from Coldstream Guards), and a Light Infantry Company (men and officers from all three regiments).

B. CHRONOLOGY

Shortly after the Brigade's arrival off Sandy Hook in 1776, the uniform was altered from the parade ground look of a London garrison regiment to the more rugged appearance of a combat unit. The smartly cocked hats of the infantrymen were let down and cut smaller, then turned up on one side only. The gleaming white waist belts were laid aside and the bayonet scabbards mounted on the cartridge pouches. Trousers and spatterdashes replaced breeches and gaiters for field service. Finally, the last vestige of the Guardsman's glory, the 18 yards of white lace, was removed from the uniform coats, with the First Battalion men retaining only the lace on their shoulder straps.

The Brigade began its American service on 22 August 1776 when it went ashore on Long Island and camped at New Utrecht. During the next few months it saw service at various locations in New York. The Guards participated in the Battle of Long Island on 27 August, after which they camped at Hell Gate until 15 September when the Army landed on New York (Manhattan) Island at Kip's Bay. The Brigade encamped near Turtle Bay during which time the men were called out to create a fire break to prevent the spread of the disastrous fire that burned one-third of the city of New York on the night of 21 September. The Guards accompanied Howe when the Army went north and landed at Frog's Neck on 12 October and Pell's Point on 18 October. They were present at White Plains on 28 October, although they did not see combat. From White Plains, the Army marched west to Tarry Town and then South towards New York Island again.

The Grenadier Company suffered the loss of two of its officers early in the campaign. Capt. Bourne died in New York on 14 October and Capt. Madan was left sick in New York from October 1776 until May 1777. As a result, on 11 October Capt. Charles Leigh of the 6th Company (Third Guards) was assigned to do duty with the Grenadiers until otherwise ordered.

On 15 November 1776 the Guards were ordered to leave their camp standing near Kingsbridge, New York, and be ready to march at 4:00 the next morning carrying canteens, blankets and haversacks with one day's provisions. They were provided with a guide, a local loyalist who knew the territory. Their objective was Fort Washington, located on a prominent height at the north end of New York Island. Howe had planned a four-pronged attack on the fort. No attempt was made from the west, due to the high cliffs rising from the Hudson River. The main assault was launched from the north by German troops under General Knipphausen. General Percy, bringing up a column from New York City, formed line of battle from the south. The 42nd Regiment of Foot crossed Harlem Creek to storm the fort from the southeast. Meanwhile, Brigadier General Mathew led the Brigade of Guards and the Army Light Infantry in a waterborne assault down Harlem Creek from Kingsbridge to attack the fort from the northeast. The defenders surrendered to Knipphausen, and although the Germans suffered heavy losses in the fighting, there appear to have been no casualties among the Guards.

From Fort Washington the Brigade, with other elements of the Crown Forces under Cornwallis, crossed the Hudson River to New Jersey, participating in the capture of Forts Lee and Constitution. After marching through the Jerseys, Cornwallis sent his force to winter quarters. The Guards were quartered at Raritan Landing, just up river from Brunswick, New Jersey. After the Continental victory at Trenton, the First Battalion of Guards was ordered to the field for several days in early January 1777, while the Second Battalion stayed with Brigadier General Mathew to assist in the defense of Brunswick. During the remainder of the winter the Guards participated in several raids, feints, and foraging parties.

After going to the field in May of 1777, the Brigade was in combat at Short Hills, New Jersey. It took ship from New York with the British force destined for Philadelphia via the Chesapeake. The Guards saw action at Brandywine, Valley Forge, Germantown, and White Marsh before going to winter quarters in Philadelphia.

In 1778 the British forces, including the Guards, en route from Philadelphia to New York, met the Continentals in battle at Monmouth Courthouse, New Jersey. Due to a lack of officers, the Guards spent most of the next two years in garrison in and around New York City. The flank companies of the Brigade were sent to the field for raids and skirmishes including Portsmouth, Virginia and New Haven, Connecticut in 1779, and Young's House in New York in 1780. The entire Brigade saw action at Springfield, New Jersey in 1780.

Brigadier General John Howard (First Guards) was temporarily appointed to replace Brigadier General Mathew in 1780 until the arrival of the new commander, Brigadier General Charles O'Hara (Coldstream Guards). The Brigade embarked for the South in

October of that year, eventually joining Cornwallis in North Carolina in January of 1781. By that time O'Hara had joined the detachment. On 1 February the Guards forced the crossing of the Catawba River (North Carolina) with great gallantry and on 15 March suffered grievous losses at the battle of Guilford Courthouse, North Carolina, after which the Brigade was temporarily reduced to one battalion of 4 under-strength companies. They marched with Cornwallis to Yorktown, Virginia and surrendered to the Continental Army on 19 October 1781. General O'Hara, as second in command, surrendered Cornwallis' sword to Washington's representative, General Lincoln. Most of the Brigade's officers were paroled and the men marched into captivity at York, Pennsylvania, where they remained until 1783. During most their imprisonment, Lt. Col. John Watson Tadwell Watson (Third Guards) commanded the Brigade from New York. The Guards returned to England in two detachments, one arriving in January and one in July of 1783. After disembarking, the men marched to London to rejoin their respective regiments.

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**COMPANY AND BATTALION ORGANIZATION
OF THE BRIGADE OF GUARDS ON AMERICAN SERVICE
by Linnea M. Bass**

The Brigade of Guards for American Service was formed in a rather unusual fashion, and as a result, its structure was atypical. The detachment was not composed of any whole regiment. Instead, 15 men were drafted from each of the 64 companies in the Three Regiments of Foot Guards. These men, plus NCOs, musicians, commissioned officers, and additional staff were organized into 10 companies. The 120 drafts from the 8 existing grenadier companies (4 in First Guards, 2 each in Coldstream and Third) formed a composite Grenadier Company. The fifer and drummer assigned to the Grenadier Company were both from a Grenadier Company in Coldstream Guards. The 56 regular infantry companies (24 in First Guards, 16 each in Coldstream and Third) contributed a total of 840 privates. Ninety-six of them were diverted to form a Light Infantry Company, since there was no light infantry in the Guards at the time. The remaining 744 men were divided into 8 regular infantry companies of 93 men each.

The available evidence indicates that all fifteen privates from a company of Guards in England were put in the same company for American Service. The 1776 records of the Third Company, commanded by Lt. Col. Sir John Wrottesley, indicate that it was composed of men from the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 11th Companies of the First Guards in England.¹ The Grenadier and Light Infantry Companies in the Brigade for American Service were made up of officers, NCOs and men from all three Regiments of Guards. The Fourth or "Brigade" Company was staffed by First Guards officers, but composed of NCOs and privates from each of the three regiments.² The First, Second and Third Companies consisted of First Guards personnel; The Fifth and Sixth Companies were Scots Guards; and the Seventh and Eighth Companies were Coldstream Guards. These ten companies were at first styled a "detachment," but upon arrival in America were, by General Howe's orders, reorganized into a Brigade of two battalions.

Over the course of the war in America, the companies in the Brigade of Guards were renumbered for a variety of reasons. Most often this was the result of a change in the relative seniority of the company commanders. For instance, when a draft of officers and men arrived in America from England in June of 1777, some of the lieutenant colonels were relieved and went home. The companies were then renumbered to reflect the seniority of their commanding officers. For instance, in First Battalion, the commander of the original Third Co. was now the most senior First Guards Lieutenant Colonel. As a result, his company became the First. At the same time, the Fourth (Brigade) Co. became the Third, and the First Co. became the Fourth. It appears that whenever this type of renumbering occurred, the men remained together and only the company designation changed. In 1779 the number of flank companies was increased from two to four. This was the most dramatic reorganization of the Brigade until late 1780 when the total number of companies was reduced from ten to eight and then six. Finally, after Guilford Courthouse, the Brigade was restructured into four companies in a single battalion. Unfortunately, there is no information as to what happened to the Brigade after that, other than the fact that reinforcements from England arrived while the Army was at Williamsburg later in the year.

Major Restructurings

1. In April 1779 the Brigade was reduced to six infantry companies by the activation of one additional grenadier company and one additional light infantry company. The original Grenadier Company became the First Battalion Grenadier Company and the Brigade Company (at that time the 3rd) was designated as the 1st Battalion Light Infantry Company. Companies 5 and 6 became the 4 and 5 respectively. The 7th was redesignated as the Second Battalion Grenadier Company and the 8th was renumbered as the 6th. The original Light Infantry Company was renamed the Second Battalion Light Infantry Company. The First Battalion then consisted of the 1st Grenadier Co., the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Companies, and the 1st Light Infantry Co. Second Battalion was composed of the 2nd Grenadier Co., the 4th, 5th, and 6th Companies, and the 2nd Light Infantry Co.

TOTAL: 4 flank and 6 battalion companies

2. In August 1779 a large draft of officers and soldiers arrived. It was decided that the 5th Company would take on the Brigade Company identity by absorbing supernumerary Scots and Coldstream Guards privates and NCOs who were not in the 4th or 6th Companies respectively.

TOTAL: 4 flank and 6 battalion companies

3. In October 1780 the 2nd Grenadier and the 2nd Light Infantry Companies were reduced to zero strength due to an insufficient number of officers. The personnel were reassigned to the remaining flank companies or to one of the "hat" companies. The 1st Battalion Light Infantry was transferred to Second Battalion.

TOTAL: 2 flank, 6 battalion companies

4. In December 1780, the Brigade was reduced once more, with the elimination of two more companies. This structure remained in force until after the combat at Guilford Court House in March of 1781.

TOTAL: 2 flank, 4 battalion companies

5. On 17 March 1781 the Brigade was temporarily styled as one battalion containing the Grenadier Company, the former 2nd Company (still 2nd), the former 4th Company (now 1st), and the Light Infantry Company.

TOTAL: 2 flank, 2 battalion companies

FOOTNOTES

1. The papers concerning Lt. Col. Sir John Wrottesley's Company, Guards Detachment in America. Newbold-Irvine Papers, General William Irvine Box 5, Manuscript Department, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

2. Some historians have assumed that the Brigade Co. was a headquarters co. No evidence has been discovered, however, to support that idea. Instead, it is evident that the name was a result of the composite nature of the company.

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