

## The Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians) A Short History



Capbadge of The Prince of Wales's  
Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians)

The Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians) formed part of the British Army from 1881 until its disbandment in 1922. It came into being through the merger of two antecedent regiments that had been raised in the 1850s, one in India and the other in Canada.

The **3<sup>rd</sup> Bombay European Regiment** was raised at Poona in 1853 to augment the forces of the Honourable East India Company. It served with distinction during the suppression of the Indian Mutiny (1857-58), being awarded the battle honour 'Central India' and one of its soldiers (Private Frederick Whirlpool) winning the Victoria Cross. After the Mutiny the regiment was absorbed into the British Army, assuming the designation of **109<sup>th</sup> (Bombay Infantry) Regiment of Foot** in 1862. The regiment included a large contingent of German soldiers at this time. These men had originally enlisted in the British German Legion during the Crimean War and had subsequently volunteered to serve in India.

Apart from a detachment to Aden (1864-66), the 109<sup>th</sup> Foot served in India until 1877, when it was ordered to move to England.

The Indian Mutiny caused a surge in Canadian loyalty to Britain and the Empire. An infantry regiment was raised in Canada in 1858 for imperial service as a distinctively Canadian component of the British Army. However, the Mutiny had been suppressed by the time that the troops were ready to embark and the new regiment sailed for England instead. It was incorporated in the British Army as the **100<sup>th</sup> (Prince of Wales's Royal Canadian) Regiment of Foot**. HRH The Prince of Wales – later King Edward VII – presented the regiment with its Colours at Shorncliffe on 10 January 1859.

The 100<sup>th</sup> Foot served in Gibraltar from 1859 to 1863 and was then transferred to Malta. The regiment was posted back to Canada in 1866 and thus participated in the ceremonies inaugurating the Dominion of Canada on 1 July 1867. Although the number of Canadians serving in the regiment declined over the years, the 100<sup>th</sup> Foot maintained a great pride in its Canadian origins. Maple leaves embellished regimental insignia and stationery and were used to decorate the Colours.

In 1875 the regiment was officially recognised as the successor to a previous 100<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot that had been raised in Ireland in 1804, stationed in Canada for thirteen years and finally disbanded in 1818. The new 100<sup>th</sup> Foot thus inherited its predecessor's only battle honour – 'Niagara' – which had been won in Canada during the 1812-14 war between Britain and the United States.

The 100<sup>th</sup> Foot left Canada in 1868 and served at various stations in Great Britain and Ireland until 1877, when it was posted to India.

Under a major reform of the British regimental system, the 100<sup>th</sup> (Prince of Wales's Royal Canadian) and 109<sup>th</sup> (Bombay Infantry) Regiments of Foot merged on 1 July 1881 to form **The Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians)**. The amalgamated regiment perpetuated the 100<sup>th</sup> Foot's historical links with Canada and the Indian origins of the 109<sup>th</sup>. The regiment also gained a new territorial association, being allocated a recruiting area covering King's County (now Offaly), Longford, Meath, Queen's County (now Laois) and Westmeath – five counties in the Irish province of Leinster.

The 100<sup>th</sup> Foot was in India at the time of the merger, becoming the new regiment's 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and remaining there until 1894. The 109<sup>th</sup> Foot was in Aldershot and became the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. It moved to serve in Ireland from 1882 to 1888 and then spent a further period in England. The militia regiments of King's County, Queen's County and Meath became the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Battalions respectively and the regimental depot was established at Birr.

In 1894 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion moved from India to Ireland and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion from Aldershot to Malta. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion remained in Ireland until 1898, although it did send a detachment to the composite battalion that fought in the Ashanti War in 1895. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion moved on to Bermuda in 1895, to Halifax in Nova Scotia in 1897 and then in 1898 to the West Indies. 1898 also saw the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion move from Ireland to take over from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion in Halifax, making it the last-ever British infantry battalion to garrison Canada.

In 1900 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was deployed to take part in the war in South Africa, where it remained until after the conclusion of hostilities in 1902. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion also served in South Africa over the period 1900-02; it had been embodied for home defence duties but its men volunteered for active service overseas. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion arrived in South Africa from the West Indies in 1902, serving in the final months of the war and then forming part of the British garrison. The battle honour 'South Africa, 1900-02' was awarded in 1905.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion spent nine years in Ireland and England following its return from South Africa in 1902. In 1905 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion moved from South Africa to Mauritius, then two years later to India.

In 1911 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was moved to India and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion to Cork in Ireland. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was thus able to deploy to France soon after the outbreak of the Great War, landing at St. Nazaire on 12 September 1914. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion remained on the Western Front until the end of the war, absorbing the remnants of the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion of The Connaught Rangers in April 1918 after the latter suffered heavy losses facing the German spring offensive.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion arrived on the Western Front from India in December 1914 but in November the following year it was transferred to Macedonia. It moved to Egypt in September 1917, subsequently serving in the Palestine campaign.

The regiment also raised two service battalions for the conflict – the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion (which served at Gallipoli and in the Macedonian and Palestine campaigns) and the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion

(which served on the Western Front). The 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Battalions were embodied for their home-based reinforcement role in 1914 and thus did not serve overseas.

During the course of the Great War the regiment was represented in four theatres of operations; approximately two thousand officers and men were killed and many more received serious wounds. Four members of the regiment won the Victoria Cross and thirty-two battle honours were awarded (to be added to the honours 'Niagara', 'Central India' and 'South Africa, 1900-02' that had been awarded previously).

At the end of the war the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was reconstituted at Portsmouth and then returned to India, where it stayed until 1922. In the meantime the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had settled into barracks at Colchester but was detached for post-plebiscite duties in Upper Silesia from June 1921 until March 1922. HRH The Prince of Wales – later King Edward VIII – was appointed Colonel-in-Chief in 1919.

The five counties from which the regiment recruited became part of the Irish Free State in 1922. The regiment was disbanded on 31 July that year, depositing the Colours of its two regular battalions at Windsor Castle and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion presenting its silver to the Government of Canada.