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THE BUFFS

HISTORIC REGIMENT IN TOUCH FIGHTING "DID NOT BUDGE AN INCH"

The Buffs is a County regiment, associated with East Kent. From the towns and villages of the Garden of England have come and are coming the same types of men who formed the "astonishing Infantry" of whom Napier wrote. Before this war ends in victory for the United Nations the enemy will be forcibly reminded of the justice of that memorable description.

The Buffs are the old Holland Regiment (the 3rd Foot). They take their origin from the Trained Bands of the City of London. On May 1, 1572, 3000 members of the Bands went through military exercises before Queen Elizabeth at Greenwich. Amongst them Captain Thomas Morgan, "an officer of distinguished merit", enlisted a company of 300 men, which included several experienced officers and many gentlemen, and went at once to Flushing to help the Dutch against the Duke of Alva. Those 300 were the nucleus of the many thousands of English soldiers who fought gallantly for the Dutch throughout their war of liberation from Spain.

A LONDON PRIVILEGE

Ninety-two years later, in 1664, several hundred of their successors, refusing to renounce their nationality, returned to England and were formed into the Holland Regiment by Charles II. The London origin of the Buffs is remembered in their right of marching through the City with drums beating, colours flying, and bayonets fixed. Only two other corps have the same privilege, the Grenadier Guards and the Royal Marines.

Since September, 1939, several battalions of The Buffs have been on active service outside the United Kingdom. One was abroad when hostilities began. This battalion had been for some time in Palestine where it had been engaged in active operations during the disturbances in that country. It had suffered casualties in the arduous work of maintaining order and had distinguished itself on many occasions, gaining awards for gallantry and devotion to duty in very trying circumstances.

The outbreak of war against Germany produced a harmony amongst the conflicting elements in Palestine, much to the disappointment of the Nazis who had hoped to exploit the unhappy differences which had torn the country previously. It says a great deal for the way the British Troops had done their unpleasant duty that as soon as war broke out, Arabs and Jews alike sank their differences and joined in the common effort to resist Hitler and his threat to the world. For some time there have been Palestinian Companies of The Buffs, proof positive that the Regiment had caused little or no rancour in the performance of duties which are always distasteful to British soldiers.

IN THE WESTERN DESERT

After an interval this battalion became part of the famous army of the Nile and for many months now it has played a big part in the operations in the Western Desert. Some idea of the extent to which it has been involved can be gained from the fact that it has lost two Commanding Officers in action.

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AN HISTORIC DAY

Last December when Rommel was making great efforts to drive the Eighth Army back into Egypt, the battalion was heavily engaged in Libya. They held off a Panzer Division for 24 hours and until overwhelmed by German tanks they stood their ground and hit back hard at the enemy. Many of the men engaged in that desperate fight must have thought, even in the heat of the battle, of what Buffs had done 130 years before at Albuera in the Peninsular War. Albuera is the greatest anniversary in Buffs history and from the time he joins a recruit hears of the way the Regiment fought that day. December 14 and 15, 1941, is likely to rank equally with May 16, 1811, in the Regimental annals. Of the 25 heavy German tanks which attacked the Buffs and their supporting guns that day eleven were not merely knocked out but destroyed beyond hope of recovery, according to reports from eye witnesses. The losses of the battalion were very heavy but they set about the business of re-forming at once and by now they are facing the enemy again in good heart and determined to avenge those who fell in December.

ON THE CONTINENT

Another battalion formed part of the British Expeditionary Force which moved over to France during September, 1939. When the storm broke in May, 1940, it moved up into Belgium to meet the Germans who were swooping through that country. The story of those days will only be fully written when the war is over and events can be placed in their proper perspective but everyone knows how Holland, Belgium, and finally France, gave up the struggle and left Great Britain alone to face the full fury of the Nazi assault; how after bitter rearguard actions fought without rest or respite the British Army reached the beaches at Dunkirk, to be extricated from their peril by the self sacrificing bravery and skill of the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force and that great company of fishermen, yachtsmen and volunteers who got 350,000 men back to England.

DID NOT BUDGE AN INCH

The adventures of the Battalion from the fateful 10th May when it moved up across the Belgian frontier can only be fully told when peace is restored. Many of the officers and men who survived are prisoners of war. In the nineteen days the battalion suffered over 450 casualties and lost its Commanding Officer who with his Headquarters, fought on when completely surrounded by the enemy. In this connection let us quote from a letter written by a distinguished general to the Colonel of the Regiment. He said "I hear that as usual the Buffs, when surrounded, did not budge an inch." In those simple words is epitomised the whole history of the British soldier whose dogged and immovable spirit has so often confounded his foes. Napier, the famous historian of the Peninsular War was inspired by these qualities to coin a memorable phrase when describing an action in that war. He spoke of "that astonishing infantry." He was talking of the peasantry of England who "won't be driv." Modern warfare, for all its mechanisation, still needs "that astonishing Infantry" and this war has shown that it is still getting them.

The Buffs in Flanders in 1940 were on familiar ground. At Oudenarde on the 20th - 21st May they fought on a battlefield on which Buffs had fought in 1708. Later at Armentieres and near Ypres and Baillouil they met the same enemy they had faced in 1915.

Two other battalions were in the fighting in May, 1940. They were rushed to the front at a moments notice to help to stem the onrush of the swiftly advancing Germans. From the first it was a forlorn hope but they helped to delay the advance and inflicted losses on the enemy.

HEAVY LOSSES

They too, lost heavily but they made the Nazis pay for their gains. These two Battalions, greatly depleted in numbers, were eventually evacuated by way of Boulogne and Havre.

The losses already suffered by the Buffs in this war are grievous but they have long since made good and this old and honourable regiment whose colours bear the names of many historic battles is daily adding to the story of its exploits in a war beside which earlier struggles seem puny.

MILITARY AFFAIRS