

Prince Rupert's Blew Regiment of Foote

A History



The Story of an English Civil War Regiment

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Prince Rupert's Blew Regiment of Foote
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Introduction

The regiments that fought in the English Civil War tended to be fragile. Although staunch in the field, their organisation and supply was so uncertain that they often fell apart after a campaign. When their numbers were reduced by losses, they would merge with other, equally flimsy units. This was particularly true of Royalist regiments.

The records for both sides are so scant that it is impossible to attempt a regimental history as we understand the term today. Nevertheless, this narrative tells something about the men in one Royalist regiment and the battles they fought...a regiment which survived throughout the main part of the Great Civil War, from 1642 until 1645.

It is the story of Sir Thomas Lunsford's Somerset men who eventually became Prince Rupert's Blew Regiment of Foote.

King and Parliament

In the summer of 1642 both King Charles 1 and the Parliament were raising troops and gathering supplies for the Civil War that seemed inevitable.

Royalist and Parliamentarians each discovered legal pretexts for issuing commissions for new regiments, and for calling out the local militia, or train Bands. In almost every county, representatives of one side or both inflamed partisan sentiments and tried to ensure that those whom they aroused took up arms.

Although the initiative in raising troops might be seized by supporters of the King in York or the Parliament in London, the country's natural leaders were still the local nobility and gentry, who acted according to their own lights.

Thus, when the King's commissioners arrived at Wells in July 1642 to inspect the Somerset Trained Bands, they found that Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Lunsford was already busy recruiting men for a regiment to be led by his brother, Sir Thomas. Henry had already selected the officers for the Regiment, and he hoped to re-enlist many of the men who had served under Sir Thomas in a campaign against the Scots in 1640.

Sir Thomas Lunsford - 'A Desperate Character'

Sir Thomas Lunsford, “an outlaw, a ruined and desperate character” according to the Parliamentarians, had led a wild and impetuous youth. Found guilty of conspiracy to murder, he escaped to France and embarked on a military career. After receiving a pardon from the King, he returned to England to raise and command a regiment in the “Bishops War” of 1640.



In December 1641, when the King needed someone of unquestioned loyalty as Lieutenant of the Tower, he appointed Lunsford to the post. This caused an immediate outcry in the City and Parliament...and some physical repercussions. On December 27th, Lunsford and some friends were jostled by the apprentices as they made their way through Westminster Hall, and they drew their swords, chasing the citizens around the Hall. Two days later, the courtiers and the citizens clashed again outside the Palace of Whitehall, when Lunsford again attacked the Londoners, wounding and capturing several. It was claimed, however, that in both of these incidents only the flats of the swords were used, to avoid killing anyone.

But, by this time, the King had (perhaps wisely) given in to the Londoners and Lunsford was removed from his post at the Tower.



Colonel Lunsford and co., perhaps using the flats of their blades, 27th December 1641

Sir Thomas was the epitome of the aggressive, flamboyant Royalist whom the Parliament supporters loathed. They soon made him a legend in his own time by accusing him of eating children. Prince Rupert's pet dog, Boye, was said to finish off the scraps...

The 1640 Campaign

Lunsford and the men he had led in the 1640 campaign were almost made for each other. The Somerset Trained Bands of 11640 were a stubborn lot, turbulent and ever ready to desert. They had assembled in late May for the march north. By June 14th they had arrived at Warwick, and Lunsford wrote "I find my regiment in the greatest disorder, divers of them in troops returned home; all are forward to disband...hues and cries are of no effect...we are daily assaulted by sometimes 500 of them together, have hurt or killed some in our own defence, and are driven to keep together on guard."

When they reached York, Sir Jacob Astley, the army commander, was forced to lock two of Lunsford's men up, whereupon some of the others threatened to burn down the city. These troublemakers were put in irons. By means of such measures, and by strengthening his own guard, Astley was finally able to control them.

The regiment was in Newcastle by August 3rd, when a regimental roll was drawn up and, on August 26th, Lunsford's men received their baptism by fire at the battle (loosely termed) of Newburn, the only encounter in the 1640 campaign. The battle consisted merely of a target practice for the Scots artillery, with Lunsford's regiment as the main target. "The Scots with their Cannon...made a breach in the greater Sconce which Colonel Lunsford commanded, wherein many of his men were killed and began to retire, yet the Colonel prevailed with them to stand to their Armes. Presently a Captain, a Lieutenant, and some other officers more were slain in that work. Another Cannon-shot hitting in the Works amongst the Soliders, and killing some more of them, they threw down their Armes and would abide in the Fort no longer."

One can hardly blame them. They may have shown signs of being an undisciplined mob on occasion, but at Newburn they were sitting ducks and their retreat was only common sense.



This woodcut represents Prince Rupert a few months before he became Colonel of what was formerly Henry Lunsford's regiment. It shows the Prince leaving the garrison at Daventry and riding to the sack of Birmingham in April 1643. His dog Boye, who was killed at the Battle of Marston Moor, accompanies him.

The army withdrew as far as York, where another roll was taken, and stayed for several weeks until negotiations with the Scots were completed. The army was then disbanded.

In Somerset, 1642

The men in Lunsford's regiment who stayed on until the end must have felt some loyalty and probably acquired some small sense of discipline along with a taste for adventure. They had also been in battle. These were the men whom Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Lunsford was trying to recover in July 1642. There were new recruits as well, of course, and by August 5th Henry had raised about 240 men. On the previous day, at Marshall's Elm near Wells, Henry had demonstrated his grasp of strategy by using fourteen well-placed troopers armed with carbines to rout some 600 Parliament troops.

Henry and his men soon left Wells and marched by way of Glastonbury and Somerton to Sherborne, where Sir Thomas met them and took command of the regiment. From this point on, we are fortunate in having a list of many of the actions in which the regiment was involved during the next three years of the war. They are listed in the petition of William Stoakes of Shepton Mallett, who, in applying for a pension after the Restoration, listed the places where he had been wounded while serving with the regiment.

The regiment's first encounter in the Civil War was at Babylon Hill near Yeovil, a small skirmish fought on September 7th 1642. "We lost twelve men," Sir Thomas reported, "Sergeant-Major Banfield was taken, Captain Hussey, Lieutenant Hall and an Ensigne killed." About twenty common soldiers were also captured.

On September 23rd the regiment crossed over into Glamorganshire, after linking up with the main Royalist army, which was marching on London. On October 23rd, the pursuing Parliamentarians finally caught up with the King's forces at Edgehill.

The Battle of Edgehill

The Royalist army was arrayed for battle on the lower slopes of the hill, with Colonel Lunsford's regiment in the exact centre of the front line.

The battle began with Prince Rupert's famous cavalry charge on the flank which completely routed the Parliamentarians' left wing. In the centre, however, Parliament troops broke through and Sir Thomas Lunsford was captured. The final result was a drawn battle, but the Parliamentarians had failed in their objective of stopping the King's march on London.

With Sir Thomas out of action (he was imprisoned in Warwick Castle until 1644) his brother Henry was now given the command of the regiment. They were present at the storming of Brentford on November 12th. After the Royalist withdrawal from Turnham Green, they went into winter quarters as part of the garrison of Reading, a strong point in the ring of defences around the King's capital of Oxford.

Reading was besieged in the spring of 1643 and at the end of April the Royalists surrendered. They were granted safe passage to Oxford and arrived there on the afternoon of April 29th.

The Chalgrove Raid

In July, 500 men picked from various infantry regiments stationed in Oxford joined Prince Rupert in the Chalgrove raid. Colonel Henry Lunsford was put in command of this body of infantry, which must have included many men from his own regiment.

Rupert hoped to intercept a convoy bringing the pay for the Parliamentary forces based around Thame and Chinnor, but he failed because the convoy had been warned of his approach. The Royalists did manage, however, to beat up the rebels' quarters and capture several colours in a skirmish. It was there that the Parliamentary leader John Hampden received his death-wound.

But there were lapses in the Royalist planning: of the ten or twelve Royalists killed, some were slain by their own side because they did not have identifying scarves or did not know the field-word. Accompanying Rupert's cavalry and the 500 foot led by Lunsford were Lord Wentworth's Dragoons, including Wentworth's Lieutenant-Colonel, John Russell, whom appears again soon in the regimental history.



De tweede motie. 17

The 2^d motion.



De derde motie. 18

The 3^d motion being Shouldred



Deft v Spies achter waerts op de Schouder in 3 motie de eer motie

Charge to Rears motions the first motion.



De tweede motie. 20

The 2^d motion.



De derde motie. 21

The 3^d motion being Charged



Herstele v rechts en draegt v Spijs schuyts de eerste motie

Recover v Pike and Sholder in 3 motions The first motion.



De tweede motie. 23

The second motion.



De 3 motie v Spijs op de shouder

The 3^d motion being Shouldred.



v Spijs herstele. 25

Order yo^r Pike.



Hoult v Spijs aende punt de eerste motie

Checks yo^r Pike the first motion.



De tweede motie. 27

The 2^d motion being Checked



Sleept v Spijs de derde motie

Trayle yo^r Pike.



Herstele v Spijs

Charge yo^r Pike and Charge



Palmt v Spijs

The 2^d Palming motion.



Herstele v Spijs

Charge yo^r Pike.



Order at close Order.

The

Herstele v Spijs de eerste motie

Charge yo^r Pike

Order at close Order.

Charge for her stand draw yo^r sword

The Siege of Bristol

On July 18th, Prince Rupert began his march from Oxford to the siege of Bristol. Rupert's army included Col. Henry Lunsford's regiment, and Lunsford's Lieutenant-Colonel, Nathaniel Moyle, was the Major of the brigade of which the regiment formed a part.



Having arrived at Bristol, Rupert sent Lunsford and Moyle, amongst others, to search for a good position to place the Royalist cannon. The regiment was placed at the foot of a hill, within musket-shot of the enemy.

The full-scale attack on Bristol was well organised. The first rank all brought bundles of straw, and the second rank carts, to fill up the moats and ditches; the third rank were musketeers; the fourth, pikemen with wild-fire on the ends of their pikes; the fifth rank had hand grenades, and the sixth were musketeers.

At one point, Colonel Lunsford himself found a ladder which the Parliamentarians had left in the field, and climbed up one of the forts as high as the palisades - a notable piece of bravery or foolhardiness - but was forced back down.

As Lunsford's men were assaulting the fortifications at Windmill Hill, word was brought that the city had been entered at another point. Hearing this, Lieutenant-Colonel Moyle said of the Parliamentarians, "They run, they run." And so encouraged the soldiers on.

Lunsford's men soon forced their way into the suburbs, where Moyle showed his initiative by commanding thirty musketeers from another regiment to man a house in a strategically important spot, "which much annoyed the enemies." But the Parliamentarians, too, had musketeers firing from house windows and, at Christmas Steps, near the Frome Gate, both Moyle and Lunsford met their fate. Henry, "an officer of extraordinary courage, industry and sobriety," was shot through the heart and died instantly; his "excellent" Lieutenant-Colonel Moyle died of his wounds some time later.



Left to right: Prince Rupert, Colonel Murray, Lieutenant-Colonel Russell

During the Interregnum rule of Cromwell, Colonel John Russell risked imprisonment as a loyal and active member of the 'Sealed Knot', a secret society that worked for the restoration of the monarchy, sending coded letters to the court in exile. At the Restoration in 1660 he was commissioned to raise a regiment of foot guards for the King's personal protection, known as the King's Regiment of Guards. This was merged with the Royal Regiment of Guards in 1665 and Russell became the commander of the 1st Royal Regiment of Foot Guards.

A New Colonel

The loss of these two seasoned officers again left the men leaderless, for the second time in less than a year. Prince Rupert, who must have been impressed with the regiments' fighting qualities, and who had known Henry well when he selected him to lead the infantry at Chalgrove, now made the regiment his own. From this point on it is always referred to as Prince Rupert's Regiment of Foote.



Rupert is best known as a cavalry commander and in fact he eventually became Commander-in-Chief of all of the King's forces. Naturally, therefore, he had little time to lead an individual infantry regiment in the field. He soon appointed John Russell as his Lieutenant-Colonel and the regiment's actual commanding officer.

Russell, brother of the Parliamentarian Earl of Bedford, had previously been Lieutenant-Colonel of Lord Wentworth's Dragoons. He had taken part in the Chalgrove raid and the storming of Cirencester. His only other claim to fame thus far was of the dubious distinction of having John Pym as his fellow MP for Tavistock in the Long Parliament.

A painting executed by the court artist, William Dobson, for the Lieutenant-Colonel shows Russell and Prince Rupert looking on whilst a Colonel Murray dips the cockade on his hat into a glass of wine, as if to christen it. Russell holds a hat with a similar cockade, composed of a bunch of black, rose and silver-grey ribbons. This painting probably represents Russell's appointment as the regiment's commanding officer in 1643.

This seems more likely than the tradition which states that the painting shows a meeting where Rupert and Murray persuaded Russell, who had considered giving up his commission and abandoning the Royalist cause, to stand by the King and continue as the regiment's commander. It would be unusual for an officer to wish to commemorate the fact that he had considered defecting. In any case, if the cockade shown in the painting is, in fact, a badge of Prince Rupert's Regiment of Foote, it is the only one known to have existed in the Civil War.

It is possible that Prince Rupert himself **did** lead the regiment in its next encounter, the siege of Gloucester. William Stoakes, in his petition, says that he was “by him (Prince Rupert) commanded to the siege of Gloucester”, and then goes on to tell what happened “afterward under the Command of...John Russell”. Stoakes also notes that by this time he had been made a Sergeant.

The siege of Gloucester had been broken up by the arrival of the Earl of Essex with a large contingent of the London Trained Bands, and it seems that the regiment was then retired to Bristol. They served in the garrison there throughout the winter of 1643-44. On December 22nd, Russell wrote from Bristol to the Prince, giving him the sad news of the death of a Captain Ventris. At the same time, he promised: “I shall send Captaine Dean over to your Highness within this few days concerning clothes for the regiment”.

Bolton and Marston Moor

Russell, and presumably his men, were still at Bristol in late February 1644, but by the beginning of May they had joined up with Rupert’s army which was then assembling at Shrewsbury for the march to York. Having captured Stockport and relieved the Countess of Derby and Lathom House, this army arrived before staunchly Puritan Bolton, the ‘Geneva of the North’, on May 27th.

When the attack on Bolton began, two of the four regiments involved entered the town but were driven out. Prince Rupert’s regiment and one other were beaten back before they could enter. These four regiments between them lost 300 men killed, while Colonel Russell himself was wounded and his Major taken prisoner. The town was finally captured by a fresh regiment which had not been involved in the first attack and many of the inhabitants are said to have been put to the sword.

The army later went on to take Liverpool, and then, marching by way of Skipton and Knaresborough, relieved York on July 1st.

On the following day, Rupert and the Marquess of Newcastle marched their men out to meet the Parliamentarian forces on Marston Moor. Prince Rupert’s regiment formed the bulk of the ‘folorn hope’, a brigade of infantry placed some distance in front of the main Royalist front line.

The folorn hope was probably designed to break up the line of the on-coming Parliamentarians and disorder their attack.

After many hours of waiting for the battle to begin, the Royalist army finally sat down to eat their supper. Suddenly their opponents attacked at a running march, one of the rare occasions that infantry are known to have done this in the Civil War.

Unfortunately, nothing positive is known about the regiment's part in the battle. The surprise attack may well have caught the folorn hope out in the open; William Stoakes, at least, claimed to have received "many dangerous hurts" at Marston Moor.

Bluecoats at Chester and Leicester

In January 1645, the regiment was again in action while forming part of the garrison at Chester. A poorly organised surprise attack against Parliament forces at Christleton (1 mile from Chester), started badly when the Parliamentarian garrison received warning of the sortie.

The situation worsened when the vanguard of the Royalist army, of which Rupert's formed part, were separated from the main body and engaged the enemy while some of the main body were still passing through the suburbs of Chester. The Royalists were driven back to the outworks of Chester and suffered heavy losses. A Royalist account reported "The Bluecoats ran ere they shott, and flange away their drummes; wheeling towards the waterside to save themselves".

The regiment was probably still suffering from having their morale shattered at Marston Moor, or being filled out with raw recruits. But by 9th May, Rupert's Bluecoats, as they were now referred to as, had recovered their morale sufficiently to be in the premier place of the Royalist army gathering at Evesham for the march to Leicester.

The army arrived before Leicester on May 29th, and on the last day of the month the town was stormed. The Prince's regiment attacked, crying "God and the Prince!" and were the first group to enter the town, where they immediately fell to plundering.

Naseby

A fortnight later, the Kings' army faced a superior force of Parliamentarians in Naseby field. The Bluecoats were kept in reserve with the King's Lifeguard. There are contradictory reports of the size of the regiment at Naseby; but it seems likely that the Bluecoats and the size of the Lifeguard totalled around 800 men.

After the Royalist right wing of horse had scattered the cavalry opposite them, as at Edgehill, the Parliamentarians tried the same trick on the opposite flank.

Langdale's horse, on the Royalist left, were broken by the Parliamentary assault, and although some of them regrouped behind the shelter of the Bluecoats' pikes, the cavalry were soon driven from the field.

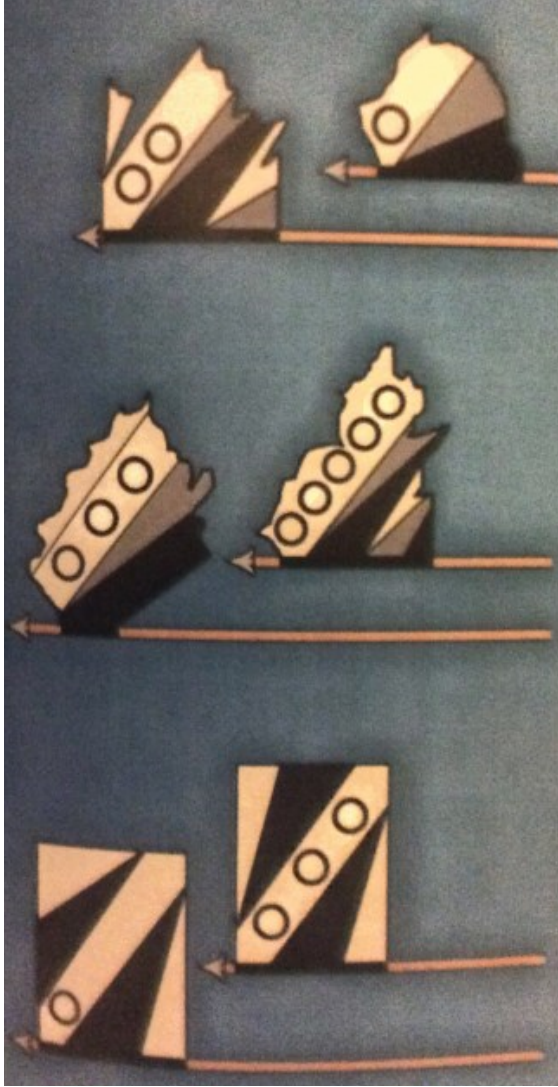
Fairfax's troopers now turned on the infantry, and "charged in the flank of the Blew regiment...who stood to it, 'till the last man, abundance of them slaine, and all the rest surrounded, wounded and taken. These, the hope of the infantry being lost, we (the Parliamentarians) became masters of all their infantry".

Another Parliamentary eye-witness remarks on the Bluecoats' "incredible courage and resolution, although we attempted them in the flanks, front and rear, until...Sir Thomas Fairfax called up his own regiment of foot...which immediately fell in with butt-end of muskets, the General (Fairfax) charging then at the same time with horse, and so broke them". And again, "the blew regiment of the King did fight most bravely, and held out to the last man".

Not even the famous stand of Newcastle's Whitecoats at Marston Moor received such consistent praise from the Parliamentarians. This heroic incident was a stand of Homeric proportions, possibly the greatest of the war. It was in marked contrast to the behaviour of much of the Royalist infantry, who are said to have surrendered in droves on the condition that they be allowed to keep their plunder. The regiment had come a long way since 1640.

There is another, silent testimony to the Bluecoats' valour at Naseby. An illustrated contemporary record the standards captured there by the

Colours of the Regiment in 1645



At Evesham, May 9th 1645

Captured by Parliament at Naseby, June 14th 1645

Parliamentarians shows four of the Bluecoats' colours. All the hard-won judging by their very ragged and torn appearance.

On June 21st, the Parliamentarians paraded all the captured standards from Naseby through London in triumph, and those of Prince Rupert's Blew Regiment of Foote were among them.

The regiment had ten colours in all, one for each company. They all had some features in common: black rings placed diagonally and black wedge-shaped 'piles'. The number of rings and the number and shape of the piles varied, so that every soldier could recognise the colour of his own company and rally around it in battle.

...And the end

Although the bulk of the King's infantry had been killed or captured at Naseby, the Royalists still held out in the West and Prince Rupert still held Bristol for King Charles. Lieutenant-Colonel Russell, who had been wounded at Naseby but managed to escape, was with the Prince as a member of his Council of War. But on September 9th, Parliamentary forces under Fairfax assaulted the town, and the next day, for good military reasons and with the concurrence of his Council of War, Rupert surrendered.

The loss of the great seaport and its supplies was a serious one and this was the chance for which Rupert's enemies at Court were waiting. They convinced the King that Rupert was a traitor. Charles disregarded the justification prepared by Russell and the rest of Rupert's Council of War, and ordered the Prince to leave the country. One week later, "by letters from the King, the Lords discharged the Prince from his generalship, cashiered his regiments of Horse and Foot, his troops and firelocks".

The Royal pen thus completed the work of the Parliamentary swords, pikes and muskets; the Bluecoats ceased to exist. Individual members of the regiment met happier fates: Prince Rupert regained the King's favour and continued to lead an active and adventurous life; Lieutenant-Colonel John Russell became the first Colonel of the Grenadier Guards, and ultimately a Major-General; Captain Valentine Pine became Lieutenant of the Tower and Master Gunner of England; Sergeant William Stoakes received his pension of forty shillings per annum, with which to support "a wife and five small children".

Summing Up

As this narrative has shown, the Bluecoats were not 'just another regiment'. Their organisation and esprit de corps enabled them to exist as a recognisable unit for four years - no mean achievement in the Civil War where regiments disintegrated with alarming regularity. The bravery and initiative of the regiment's officers were amply demonstrated at the storming of Bristol in 1643, and the courage of the men was recognised when they were chosen for the forlorn hope at Marston Moor, even after suffering heavy losses at Bolton.

Possibly they lost control a bit when they plundered Leicester, but they would not have been chosen for the reserve at Naseby had they not been thought of as a well disciplined and reliable troops. And their valiant performance at that battle sets them apart from any other infantry regiment on either side in the Civil War, with the possible exception of Newcastle's Whitecoats alone.

Prince Rupert had recognised the regiment's qualities when he made it his own after the storming of Bristol. The fact that the survivors of the stand at Naseby were disbanded was for political reasons, and not for any fault of their own. Their record is a proud one, and is an excellent example of the courage, loyalty and perseverance which distinguished the best of the King's supporters in the Great Civil War.

Appendix

Colonel Sir Thomas Lunsford's Regiment in 1640

Lunsford's 1640 regiment contained about 800 men in ten companies. On August 3rd, at Newcastle, each company drew up a roll, and six of these rolls from Lunsford's regiment still exist. The breakdown of the men in each of these companies is as follows.

Capt. Francis Martyn	74 strong	47 muskets	17 pikes
Capt. Hugh Pomeroy	95	56	29
Lt-Col Henry Lunsford	68	38	21
Capt. Roger Powell	74	43	21
Sgt-Major Tho. Cooke	70	37	23
Capt. Thomas Cupper	71	40	21

Each Company has ten officers: a captain, a lieutenant, an ensign, two sergeants, three corporals, and two drummers. The ideal ratio of musketeers to pikemen was 2 to 1, and it seems that Lunsford's regiment kept fairly close to this.

No such rolls exist for the regiment raised in 1642, but many of the men in the 1640 regiment probably re-enlisted. There is a list of officers of Prince Rupert's Regiment of Foot who asked for financial assistance after the Restoration, including Major Aeneas Lyne and eighteen captains, lieutenants and ensigns. It is interesting to note that only one of these men was from the regiment's original home country of Somerset.