



Captain John Chamberlain MC



The **South Wales Borderers** was a line infantry regiment of the British Army in existence for 280 years. It first came into existence, as the **24th Regiment of Foot** in 1689. Based at Brecon the regiment recruited from the border counties of Monmouthshire, Herefordshire and Brecknockshire, but was not called the South Wales Borderers until the Childers Reforms of 1881. The regiment served in a great many conflicts, including the American Revolutionary War, various conflicts in India, the Zulu War, Second Boer War, and World War 1 and World War 2. In 1969 the regiment was amalgamated with the Welch Regiment to form the Royal Regiment of Wales.

The regiment was formed by Sir Edward Dering, 3rd Baronet as **Sir Edward Dering's Regiment of Foot** in 1689, becoming known, like other regiments, by the names of its subsequent colonels. The regiment served under the Duke of Schomberg during the Williamite War in Ireland and then saw action again at the Battle of Scheenberg in July 1704 and at the Battle of Blenheim in August 1704 during the War of Spanish Succession.

The regiment was part of the amphibious expedition to the Caribbean and participated in the disastrous British defeat at the Battle of Cartagena de Indias in March 1741 during the War of Jenkins Ear. The regiment was ranked as 24th in the infantry order of precedence in 1747 and became the 24th Regiment of Foot in 1751. It took part in the Siege of Fort Philip in Menorca in April 1756 during the Seven Years War. It was also part of the amphibious expedition against, or descent on, the coast of France and participated in the disastrous British defeat at the Battle of Saint Cast in September 1758.



In June 1776 the regiment was sent to Quebec where it subsequently fought American rebels who had invaded the province during their War of Independence. The regiment was part of the 5,000 British and Hessian force, under the command of General John Burgoyne, that surrendered to the American rebels in the Saratoga campaign in summer 1777 and remained imprisoned until 1783. In 1782 it became the **24th (The 2nd Warwickshire) Regiment of Foot**. The regiment was deployed to Egypt in the aftermath of the Battle of Abukir in March 1801; a 2nd Battalion was raised in 1804 which suffered heavy losses at the Battle of Talavera in July 1809 during the Peninsular War. The vast majority of the 1st Battalion of was captured at sea by the French at the action of 3 July 1810 near the Comoro Islands; they had been on the East Indianmen *Astell*, *Ceylon* and *Windham* when a French frigate squadron captured the last two ships. They were released the following year. The 1st Battalion took part in the Anglo- Nepalese War in November 1814. The regiment was deployed to Canada in 1829 and remained there until 1842.



The regiment returned to India in 1846 and saw action at the Battle of Chillianwala in January 1849, where the regiment fought off the enemy with bayonets rather than rifles and 255 of its men died, during the Second Anglo-Sikh War. Meanwhile, 5 Victoria Crosses were awarded to men of the regiment who rescued their colleagues from cannibals on the Andaman Islands in May 1857. Some 35 soldiers of the regiment were killed by mutineers at their garrison in Jhelum in July 1857 during the Indian Rebellion: among the dead was Captain Francis Spring, the eldest son of Colonel William Spring.

Zulu War

Isandlwana

In 1879 both battalions took part in the Anglo-Zulu War, begun after a British invasion of Zululand, ruled by Cetshwayo. The 24th Regiment of Foot took part in the crossing of the Buffalo River on 11 January, entering Zululand. The first engagement (and the most disastrous for the British) came at Isandlwana. The British had pitched camp at Isandlwana and not established any fortifications due to the sheer size of the force, the hard ground and a shortage of entrenching tools.



The 24th Foot provided most of the British force and when the overall commander, Lord Chelmsford, split his forces on 22 January to search for the Zulus, the 1st Battalion (5 companies) and a company of the 2nd Battalion were left behind to guard the camp, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Pulleine (CO of the 1/24th Foot).

A Zulu force of some 20,000 warriors attacked a portion of the British main column consisting of about 1,800 British, colonial and native troops and perhaps 400 civilians. During the battle Lieutenant-Colonel Pulleine ordered Lieutenants Coghill and Melvill to save the Queen's Colour—the Regimental Colour was located at Helpmekaar with G Company. The two Lieutenants attempted to escape by crossing the Buffalo River where the Colour fell and was lost downstream, later being recovered. Both officers were killed. At this time the Victoria Cross (VC) was not awarded posthumously. This changed in the early 1900s when both Lieutenants were awarded posthumous Victoria Crosses for their bravery. The Battle of Isandlwana was dramatized in the 1979 movie *Zulu Dawn*.



Rorke's Drift



A depiction of soldiers of the 24th Regiment repelling the Zulu attack on Rorke's Drift in January 1879

After the battle, some 4,000 to 5,000 Zulus headed for Rorke's Drift, a small missionary post garrisoned by a company of the 2/24th Foot, native levies and others under the command of Lieutenant Chard, Royal Engineers, the most senior officer of the 24th present being Lieutenant Gonville Bromhead. Two Boer cavalry officers, Lieutenants Adendorff and Vane, arrived to inform the garrison of the defeat at Isandlwana. The Acting Assistant Commissary James Dalton persuaded Bromhead and Chard to stay and the small garrison frantically prepared rudimentary fortifications.



The Zulus first attacked at 4:30 pm. Throughout the day the garrison was attacked from all sides, including rifle fire from the heights above the garrison, and bitter hand-to-hand fighting often ensued. At one point the Zulus entered the hospital, which was stoutly defended by the wounded inside until it was set alight and eventually burnt down. The battle raged on into the early hours of 23 January but by dawn the Zulu Army had withdrawn. Lord Chelmsford and a column of British troops arrived soon afterwards. The garrison had suffered 15 killed during the battle (two died later) and 11 defenders were awarded the VC for their distinguished defence of the post, 7 going to soldiers of the 24th Foot. The stand at Rorke's Drift was immortalised in the 1964 movie Zulu.

Third Anglo-Burmese War and Second Boer War

The regiment was not fundamentally affected by the Cardwell Reforms of the 1870s, which gave it a depot at The Barracks, Brecon from 1873, or by the Childers reforms of 1881 – as it already possessed two battalions, there was no need for it to amalgamate with another regiment. Under the reforms the regiment became **The South Wales Borderers** on 1 July 1881. This, understandably, led to the regiment having close links with South Wales. The 2nd Battalion was deployed to Burma and saw action in November 1885 during the Third Anglo-Burmese War. The 2nd Battalion then arrived in Cape Colony in early February 1900 and saw action at the Battle of Elands River in September 1901 during the Second Boer War.



A 3rd (Militia) Battalion formed of the former **Royal South Wales Borderers Militia**, was embodied in January 1900, and the following month embarked for service in South Africa, arriving in Cape Town on the SS *Cheshire* in early March 1900. A 4th (Militia) Battalion formed of the former **Royal Montgomery Rifles** was embodied in May 1900 and disembodied in December the same year.

In 1908, the Volunteers and Militia were reorganised nationally, with the former becoming the Territorial Force and the latter the Special Reserve; the regiment now had one Reserve battalion and one Territorial battalion.

First World War

Regular Army

The 1st Battalion landed at Le Havre as part of the 3rd Brigade in the 1st Division with the British Expeditionary Force in August 1914 for service on the Western Front. The 2nd Battalion landed at Laoshan Bay for operations against the German territory of Tsingtao in September 1914 and saw action at the Siege of Tsingtao in October 1914. After returning home in January 1915, the 2nd Battalion landed at Capes Helles as part of the 87th Brigade in the 29th Division in April 1915; it was evacuated from Gallipoli in January 1916 and then landed at Marseille in March 1916 for service on the Western Front.



Territorial Force

The 1/1st Brecknockshire Battalion landed in Bombay as part of the 44th (Home Counties) Division in October 1914 and then moved to Aden in December 1914 before returning to Bombay in August 1915.

New Armies

The 4th (Service) Battalion landed in Gallipoli as part of the 40th Brigade in the 13th (Western) Division in July 1915; it was evacuated from Gallipoli in January 1916 and moved to Egypt and then to Mesopotamia. The 5th (Service) Battalion (Pioneers) landed at Le Havre as part of the 58th Brigade in the 19th (Western) Division in July 1915 for service on the Western Front. The 6th (Service) Battalion (Pioneers) landed at Le Havre as part of the 76th Brigade in the 25th Division in September 1915 for service on the Western Front. The 7th (Service) Battalion and the 8th (Service) Battalion landed at Boulogne-sur-Mer as part of the 67th Brigade in the 22nd Division in September 1915 for service on the Western Front but moved to Salonika in October 1915.

The 10th (Service) Battalion (1st Gwent) and the 11th (Service) Battalion (2nd Gwent) landed at Le Havre as part of the 115th Brigade in the 38th (Welsh) Division in December 1915 for service on the Western Front. The 12th (Service) Battalion (3rd Gwent) landed at Le Havre as part of the 119th Brigade in the 40th Division in June 1916 for service on the Western Front. Welsh poet and language activist Saunders Lewis served in the 12th Battalion during the First World War.



Inter-War

The 1st Battalion embarked for Ireland in June 1920 to maintain order during the Irish War of Independence and to Wariristan in February 1937 in connection with disturbances on the frontier. Meanwhile, the 2nd Battalion was deployed to Palestine in 1936, returning home at the end of the year.

Second World War



Plaque commemorating the liberation of a bridge in Normandy by the 2nd Battalion, South Wales Borderers on D-Day in June 1944.

The 1st Battalion, as part of the 10th Indian Infantry Division, was sent to Iraq to quell a German-inspired uprising in Iraq in November 1941. The battalion saw subsequent service in Iran. The battalion sustained enormous casualties in Libya near Torbruk when they lost around 500 officers and men captured or killed during a general retreat.



The battalion found itself cut off when the German forces outflanked them, the Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. F.R.G. Matthews, decided to attempt to escape around the enemy and break through to British lines. It turned into a disaster with only four officers and around one hundred men reaching Sollum. To the surprise of the survivors the battalion was ordered to disband in Cyprus and the remnants of the battalion were transferred, with the exception of a small cadre that returned to the United Kingdom, to the 1st Battalion of the King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster). A few months later the battalion was re-formed from the cadre and the 4th Battalion, Monmouthshire Regiment.

Upon the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, the 2nd Battalion was serving in Derry, Northern Ireland, under command of Northern Ireland District, having been there since December 1936. In December 1939 the battalion left Northern Ireland and was sent to join the 148th Infantry Brigade of the 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division, a Territorial formation. In April 1940 the battalion was again transferred to the newly created 24th Guards Brigade (Rupertforce), and took part in the Norwegian Campaign, and were among the first British troops to see action against the German Army in the Second World War. The campaign failed and the brigade had to be evacuated. Casualties in the battalion, however, had been remarkably light, with only 13 wounded and 6 killed and two DCMS had been awarded.



The 2nd Battalion returned to the United Kingdom and, on 7 December 1941 (the day the United States entered the war), transferred to the 37th Independent Infantry Brigade (re-designated 7th Infantry Brigade the day after). On 1 March 1944 the battalion was transferred to the newly created 56th Independent Infantry Brigade, alongside which were the 2nd Battalion, Essex regiment and 2nd Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment and trained for the invasion of Normandy. The battalion had the distinction of being the only Welsh battalion to take part in the Normandy landings on 6 June 1944, landing at Gold Beach under command of 50th (Northumberian) Infantry Division and fought in the Battle of Normandy, under command of 7th Armoured Division for a few days in June 1944, before reverting to the 50th Division. In August 1944 it was briefly under command of the 59th (Staffordshire) Infantry Division and fought in the Battle of the Falaise Gap. On 20 August the brigade joined the 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division, replacing the disbanded 70th Brigade. With the division, the battalion fought in the operations to clear the Channel coast, where they captured Le Havre in Operation Astonia. Afterwards the battalion enjoyed a short rest and, on 22 September, moved to join the rest of the 21st Army Group fighting in Belgium. In October, shortly after the failure of Operation Market Garden, the division was sent to garrison 'The Island', the area of land between Arnhem and Nijmegen, where it remained throughout the winter of 1944. The last major action for the battalion was in April 1945 when, with the rest of the division, they fought in the Second Battle of Arnhem.



The battalion ended its war in Germany, and remained there, as part of the occupation forces, until 1948 when it returned home. During the campaign in North-western Europe the battalion had suffered over 100% casualties. The 6th Battalion, South Wales Borders served in the Burma Campaign with the 72nd Infantry Brigade, 36th British Infantry Division, previously a division of the British Indian Army before being re-designated the 36th British Division.



Cigarette tin owned by John Chamberlain with regimental button fixed on top



John Chamberlain was a successful businessman, born on 22 December 1881, the younger son of Arthus Chamberlain JP of Green Moor Hall, Green Moor Lane, Moseley, Birmingham. He enlisted in the 6th Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment on 9 September 1914 and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the 3rd Battalion South Wales Borders on 6 October 1914. John requested a posting to France, and so joined the 1st Welsh, serving with them at Second Ypres in April 1915 where he was shot in the stomach. After recovering he was promoted Captain and joined the 15th Welsh on October 1915, serving with them until after the fighting at Mametz Wood. John then took the Seniors Officers' Command School Course at Aldershot in the first two months of 1917. He returned to the front in April as Second in Command of the 14th Welsh, and was in temporary command when he was killed by a stray shell at Boesinghe in the Ypres salient on 14 May 1917. On hearing of his death, brigade commander, Brigadier-General T O Marden, wrote:

“he was in every sense a pal of mine.....The country can ill afford to lose men like John, who had such independence, brain power and keenness”. In his Colonel's opinion, “he stood out above all others whom I ever met, as one who knew well what his duty was, who did it, capably because he was clever, finely because he was a fine clean man, and cheerfully because he was endowed with a clear conscience and a merry wit”. Also noted in his Obituary at the University of Birmingham is; “John Chamberlain was probably the most prominent British industrialist to be killed on the Western Front”. John was awarded the 1914/15 Star, British War and Victory medals, as well as his Military Cross, which were claimed by his widow, Mrs Gurney Dixon (remarried), of ‘Ober House’, Brockenhurst, Hants.

