

# Scotland For Ever!

## Introduction

With almost 100 years between the motifs, one of the myths that will forever be linked to the English (Scottish) cavalry regiment Scots Greys, is mentioned here.

## The myth arises

The regiment *2nd or Royal North British Dragoons*, better known as *the Royal Scots Greys*, took part in 1815 as part of The Union Brigade in the Battle of Waterloo.

One of the many myths that arose after the battle was that the regiment attacked the French units together with the 92nd Foot (The Gordon Highlanders) and that it was The Gordon Highlanders who took advantage of holding on to the stirrups of the horsemen in order to advance faster. The event was subsequently referred to as "The Stirrup Charge".

However, the story has nothing to do with it. The Greys attacked the French and so did the Gordon Highlanders, but not in cooperation.



At one point the Scots Greys attack through the Gordon Highlanders, but it is most likely that some of the footmen were ridden down or pushed aside... and it cannot be ruled out that some have reached out for the horsemen and grabbed their stirrups, just as some have probably subsequently sought out together with The Greys, but there was no question of a coordinated attack.

One is of course the historical truth, quite another the images which many years later help reinforce the myths. A favorite motif in this regard are paintings from the late 19th century showing the two units in attack.

### **The myth is perpetuated**

The image on the left shows a section of one of the most famous images from the event. Unfortunately, the clip does not show the soldiers from the Gordon Highlanders who follow forward in the attack.

The painting is titled: **Scotland For Ever!** It was painted by Elisabeth, Lady Butler, in 1881, and has, if nothing else, helped to perpetuate the myth. Lady Butler was married to an officer, and had had an opportunity at Aldershot to study the regiment on drill, which she used to draw sketches of the regiment in attack. Regardless of the relationship to the historical reality, the artist cannot be denied the fact that she has produced an impressive image!

## The myth lives on

The myth lives on and during the First World War various artists take the opportunity to modernize the presentation of the myth. Here, however, there is not just a glimmer of truth over the story, but talk of pure imagination.

At the start of the war, the Royal Scots Greys were part of the 5th Cavalry Brigade [1](#)), which was then an independent brigade in the British Expeditionary Force in France. The regiment's efforts did not feature large-scale mounted attacks, and certainly not co-operative Scottish infantry units.



The drawing illustrates the myth of The Stirrup Charge in a new version.

Like Lady Butler's picture, here too there is plenty of action over the drawing, and the infantry's share in the attack is more predominant.

I am not familiar with the artist's name or the details of the drawing.

The image appears on the dust jacket of *The Diary of a World War I Cavalry Officer* (Source 2).

A note in the book states that the illustration is provided by the Military Archive & Research Services, Braceborough, Lincs.

The molds state that the riders cannot come from other regiments than the Royal Scots Greys, as this regiment was the only one to use molds. The footmen may be from the Gordon Highlanders, if 1.

The battalion was part of the Expeditionary Force's 8th Brigade. Uniforms and equipment are reproduced fairly correctly, although the footmen's gaiters belong to the peacetime uniform, while in war they wore short ones.



Among the regiment's treasures is also the group of figures shown here, made in bronze. Not that another presentation of the myth makes it more historically correct, but it emphasizes the sailing life in the story.

## Closing

The more curious part of the story of the Scots Grey's participation in the First World War is that the horses were obscured! Because of the moulds, it was easy to identify the regiment and thus the other units that made up the brigade - information that was common knowledge.

In order not to play this information into the hands of the Germans, the horses were smeared in a material called Condy's Fluid, which, among other things, consisted of potash.

The result was a sort of chestnut-brown color which, according to reports, should be able to last a month, of course, as long as the horses did not sweat very much.

The story says nothing about how the horses perceived this treatment, or whether the blur served its purpose at all. It is not clear from the available sources how long the regiment continued to veil their horses.

Per Finsted

## Sources

1. *In The Finest Tradition. The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards (Carabiniers & Greys) - Its history and Treasures* of Stephen Wood, John Dewar & Sons, Edinburgh 1988, ISBN 1-85158-174-X.
2. *The Diary of a World War I Cavalry Officer* of Archibald Home, Costello, Tunbridge Wells/Kent 1985, ISBN 0-7104-3004-3.
3. *A History of the British Cavalry 1816-1919, Volume 7: The Curragh Incident and the Western Front, 1914* of The Marquess of Anglesey, Leo Cooper, London 1996, ISBN 0-85052-437-7.

## To note

1) **5th Cavalry Brigade (and attached troops) (Brigadier-General Sir P.W. Chetwode):**

2nd Dragoons (Royal Scots Greys)

12th (Prince of Wales's Royal) Lancers

20th Hussars

J Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, and Ammunition Column 4th

Field Troop, Royal Engineers 5th

Signal Troop, Royal Engineers/Signal Service 5th

Cavalry Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps

*(Official History, Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1914 at J.E. Edmonds, Macmillan and Co., London 1922.)*



# The Stirrup Charge, 1914 - New information

In continuation of an earlier article where the subject has been dealt with.

New information has emerged about the First World War drawing of The Scots Grey's famous attack.

Source 1 thus mentions that the drawing was originally published in *The Illustrated London News* on 11 September 1914 and that the artist's name is Richard Caton Woodville (see also *Uniform Plancher - Territorial Army*). Situation is said to originate from the Battle of *St. Quentin* on 28 August 1914.

While the horsemen are from the Scots Greys, the footmen are from *The Black Watch* and - although the drawing is nice and with lots of *élan* - it is still a question of free imagination, which no team has in reality. Source 1 thus states that the myth was so tenacious that the author of the regimental history *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War*, Major General AG Wauchope, felt obliged to point out in the book that the situation never took place!

It is further mentioned that the National Army Museum in London has a statuette similar to the one in Scots Grey's collection, and that the artist is Countess Theodora Gleichen.



## Realities

This photograph probably comes somewhat closer to reality - the regiment is deployed on foot (outside the picture), while hand horses and horse handlers are further back.

Dating and description vary depending on where the image is used. Source 2, from which the picture originates, states that it shows the regiment at rest, at *Montreuil*, on 8 May 1918. It is worth noting that the dragoons are not in field dress - they only carry cartridge belts, but not their bread bag and kettle, which would have been worn over the right shoulder. Likewise, the horses do not seem to carry any special equipment.

## Sources

1. *A History of the British Cavalry 1816-1919, Volume 7: The Curragh Incident and the Western Front, 1914* by The Marquess of Anglesey, Leo Cooper, London 1996, ISBN 0-85052-437-7.
2. *The Diary of a World War I Cavalry Officer* by Archibald Home, Costello, Tunbridge Wells/Kent 1985, ISBN 0-7104-3004-3.