

Dragoons or Lancers?

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“Lord Cardigan ordered his Light Brigade to begin the advance at a trot, with the 17th and 13th Dragoons leading the Brigade. The 17th Lancers drove through the Russian artillery before smashing straight into the Russian cavalry and pushing them back”

The preceding paragraph, taken from an account of the Charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War, gives the impression that two mounted units numbered the 17th were in the advance.

This is not so, and indeed the description is also not wrong as the 17th Dragoons was a Lancer unit.

The **17th Dragoons** was raised as the 18th Regiment of (Light) Dragoons in 1759 and renumbered the 17th in 1761. In 1806 it was deployed to South America. The 17th returned to England in 1807 and was sent to India shortly after taking part in the third Mahratta War. In 1823 the unit returned home only to find the unit had been re-rolled as a Lancer unit and renamed the **17th Regiment of (Light) Dragoons (Lancer)**. The Duke of York, Commander in Chief of the British Army at the time had

been impressed with the Polish Lancer units that were in Napoleon’s Army in the Battle of Waterloo and pushed for Lancer units in the British Army. The unit remained stationed in the UK until it was deployed to the Crimean War in 1854. 1857 saw them again in India to help quell the Indian Mutiny. While in India the unit, in 1861, was renamed **17th Regiment of Lancers** and returned home in 1863. In 1876 it gained Prince George, Duke of Cambridge as its Colonel in Chief and duly named:

17th (The Duke of Cambridge’s Own) Lancers.

Only six units were designated Lancer units and only one of these was not a Dragoon unit.

The 21st Lancers, so named in 1897, trace their lineage back to the 3rd Bengal European Light Cavalry raised by the East India Company in 1858 for service in the Indian Mutiny. They were subsequently placed under command of the Crown and moved into the British Army in 1862 titled the 21st Regiment of Hussars. In 1898 one year after becoming a lancer unit the unit was renamed

21st (Empress of India's) Lancers, being named for Queen Victoria, the Empress of India.

The 5th Irish Lancers can trace its origins back to 1689 when the unit was raised as Wynes Dragoons. The unit then had various names up to 1756 when it was named **5th or Royal Irish Dragoons**. The unit was used on mainland Ireland for duties for the apprehension of smugglers, highwaymen and other dangerous criminals, the control of the Irish peasantry and conducting garrison duties. This had a disastrous effect on the operational capabilities of the regiment. Morale suffered and the regiments unofficial song "Garryowen" bears testimony to this. In 1799 the unit was sent to Chatham, London and disbanded due to rumours of treachery and sympathetic leanings to the Irish rebels that had started an uprising against the British.



Trooper Royal Horse Guards
1806

In 1858 the regiment was re-raised in Ireland as the **5th (or Royal Irish Light) Dragoons (Lancer)** however; the unit was later garrisoned at Aldershot, London and deployed to India in 1863 where the unit was to remain for the next 10 years returning home in 1874.

Brigadier General Phineas Bowles raised a Dragoon Regiment in Berkshire, England in 1715 against the threat of the

Jacobite rebellion. In 1781 the regiment was posted to Ireland where it remained for seventy-five years. In 1751 the regiment was officially named the **12th Regiment of Dragoons**. In 1768 King George III bestowed another name change with the title of **The 12th Prince of Wales's Regiment of Light Dragoons** and given the badge of three ostrich feathers and the motto "*Ich Dien*". In 1811 the 12th saw service in the Spanish Peninsular and in 1814 the Regiment was among the first to enter Bordeaux. After a short respite in England the 12th was back in France in 1815 at Waterloo where the regiment was brigaded with the 16th not knowing in time the two units would be sister Lancer units. In 1816 the regiment became a lancer unit and renamed **12th (Prince of Wales's) Regiment of Light Dragoons (Lancer)**. The Regiment served with distinction in most theatres of war of the British Empire the most notable, South Africa 1852, The Crimea 1854, and the Indian Mutiny 1858-60. It was not until 1861 the regiment became the **12th (Prince of Wales's) Regiment of Lancers**.

In 1759 Colonel Burgoyne raised a regiment of light dragoons in Northampton, England known as Burgoyne's Light Horse but the official title in the British Army was the **16th Regiment of Light Dragoons**. After a successful campaign in Portugal against the French in 1762 and in recognition of the units exploits, the regiment became for the first time a Royal regiment and named the **16th The Queen's Light Dragoons** adopting Queen Charlotte's (the Queen consort of George III) cipher. The regiment was in America 1776-1779, Austria 1793-1796 and with Wellington's Army in the Peninsular Campaign 1809-1814. The Regiment was heavily engaged during the Battle of Waterloo on the 18th June 1815. In 1816 the regiment was renamed **16th (The Queen's) Regiment of Light Dragoons (Lancer)**. King George IV had a particularly bad relationship with his consort Queen Caroline. The 16th regularly and publicly toasted the Queen to demonstrate their loyalty to her which infuriated the King

and he posted the regiment to India in June 1822 where they stayed for 24 years. The unit saw service in Afghanistan. The courageous exploits of the 16th in India are too numerous to outline in this essay. On their return from India the 16th were garrisoned in Ireland and having just returned home did not deploy to the Crimea. In 1861 the unit was renamed **The 16th, or Queen's Lancers.**

The second Lancer Regiment in order of precedence dates its origins from 1715 during the Jacobite Risings as Owen Wynne's Regiment of Dragoons. In 1719 the Regiment became officially known in the British Army as the **9th Dragoons** then in 1751 **The 9th Regiment of Dragoons** followed by another name change in 1783 as **The 9th Regiment of Light Dragoons.** The Regiment's first combat service since 1715 was against the rebels in the Irish Insurrection of 1798. The Regiment remained in Ireland until 1803 and in 1806 saw service at the River Plate in South America and then in 1811–1813 in the Peninsular War in Portugal. In 1816 the unit was renamed **The 9th Regiment of Light Dragoons (Lancer)** and in 1830 the distinguished title of Queen's Royal, in honour of Queen Adelaide, consort Queen of William IV. **9th, or Queen's Royal Lancers.**

Service in India followed where they did good work in the Mutiny at Delhi and Lucknow. No cavalry unit has a longer list of VC's than the 9th. In 1861 their name was changed to **9th (The Queen's) Royal Lancers**

The **5th, 16th, 17th,** and the **21st** through previous amalgamations from 1922 were amalgamated in 1993 to form the current

The Queens Royal Lancers and in 1960 the **9th and 12th** formed **the 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's).**

The Lancers still perform much the same tasks for the British Army of today, with mechanized vehicles, as their predecessors did on horseback.

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