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THE PROFESSIONAL MILITARY GENEALOGY SPECIALISTS

Inside the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers Museum



Dr Eric Old, Honorary Administrator, Patricia Lynesmith, Honorary Curator and Captain Simon Gaskell, Adjutant to the Regiment, give us an inside look.



How did you become interested in the history of this regiment?

The Regiment has its headquarters at Great Castle House in the middle of Monmouth and has been associated with the town for nearly 500 years. Living locally we have absorbed the history of this ancient and unusual regiment.

The Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers is a territorial force; could you explain in what circumstances it would end up being sent to war?

The Territorial Army is no longer just for the defence of home territory. Though they are part-timers the TA personnel are an essential part of the Army and go anywhere at any time. Individual members of the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers currently serve in Afghanistan and other active zones, and in 2003 the regiment sent 170 men to Iraq for six months to help with reconstruction.

What kind of special skills or knowledge would lead someone to apply to this regiment over another?

The Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers (Militia) is now part of the Army Reserve (formally the TA). Tradesman such as carpenters, bricklayers and electricians may be attracted to the regiment due to the opportunities to practice their skills in a new and challenging environment. Individuals who currently work in construction and project management, as well as defence related technologies such as explosives development, also tend to be attracted to the regiment due to some similarities with the tasks the regiment is likely to carry out. In the past those with experience in rail line construction and engine maintenance would have been valuable.

Once at war, could you describe a little of what the men of the regiment might be expected to do?

When mobilised for operations the men and women of the regiment can expect to support the regular Royal Engineer regiments. Every individual is expected to be a soldier, combat engineer and tradesman. This means they could expect to conduct: infantry patrols, support tasks such as bridge building, camp construction and controlled demolitions, or utilise an artisan trade such as bricklaying or plant machinery operation. The officers and senior NCOs may also assist with project management of construction tasks, including the organisation and control of locally employed civilians. The regiment also has chefs, clerks and drivers who are able to bolster the administrative support provided during operations.



Your website says that 1/3 of the regiment's deaths in World War One occurred in the final month. Why was that?

The Western Front in WW1 was static trench warfare, and for most of it the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers supported infantry who were forward in the trenches. Towards the end it became more dangerous for the sappers, as they had to go ahead to prepare for the advance. Communication cables had to be laid (in the days before radio) to enable forward spotters to guide the artillery, and there were minefields to clear.

Could you describe a particular episode in the regiment's history during which you feel the unit proved its worth in battle?

In May 1940 the German Army blitzed through Belgium and threw the Allied forces into disarray. A party of nine men from 101 Coy of the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers, on attachment to the 9/12th Lancers, performed a valuable role by blowing up bridges over canals and small rivers during a period of 10 days. This slowed the German advance and bought critical time. It was a significant factor in enabling the British Expeditionary Force to be evacuated from Dunkirk - and fight on.

Is there a particular soldier that has served with the regiment whose story captures your imagination?

Col John Francis Vaughan was a local landowner who was in the regiment for over 40 years. He made a private visit to the Crimean War and wrote a booklet critical of its management. Later it was his vision and energy which caused the regiment to switch from an infantry to an engineer role (in 1877), so that it escaped the demise of the Militia and has become the only Militia regiment to keep its regimental status. His son and grandson both served in the World Wars.

Of all the archives and exhibits you hold, is there one that has proven of especial interest to genealogists in the past?

No - but one coincidence stands out. In 2002 someone from the north wanted to see records of his ancestor who had been in the Royal Monmouthshire Militia around 1860 - and we offered an appointment. Then a local lady wanted to come in, so we suggested she came a bit later. In fact they overlapped, so the curator dealt with one and the administrator with the other, but our museum is small and they overheard that they were researching the same soldier - and discovered that they were second cousins!

**www.monmouthcastlemuseum.org.uk
Admission is free - donations are welcomed
The Castle, Monmouth, NP25 3BS
01600 772175**

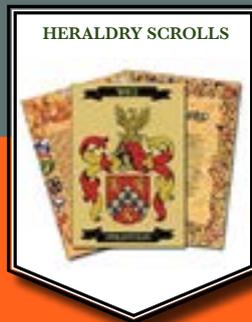
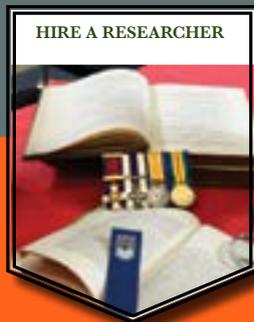




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...and many many more

