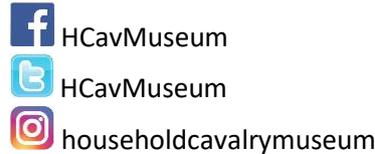




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## Podcast 17 ~ HOUSEHOLD CAVALRY ANECDOTES

### THE LIFE GUARDS AT SEA

In its 360-year history, The Life Guards has had to be more versatile than any other regiment in the British Army when it comes to the roles it has been called upon to play in warfare. Although officially a cavalry regiment, we have fought on horses, camels, and bicycles, before taking to armoured cars and tanks. In the First World War – in addition to our designated role as cavalry - we formed a siege battery, an infantry battalion and a machine-gun battalion. More recently, in Northern Ireland we served on one tour as Land Rover-borne infantry. When required, we have also turned out as highly effective firemen during the Great Fire of London in 1666 and as policemen during the Gordon Riots in 1780. Were that not enough when it comes to role diversity, we were equipped with helicopters in the 1960s and parachutes in the 1980s. Clearly capable of fighting on land and in the air, it is therefore not surprising to find that we have also occasionally taken to the sea.

When the Second Anglo-Dutch War of 1665-67 broke out, the Royal Navy was under the command of the younger brother of King Charles II, the Lord High Admiral, James, Duke of York. Among those who volunteered to serve with him were a number of Life Guards, all of whom had been in the Duke of York's Troop since the foundation of the Life Guards in 1660, and who felt a loyalty to accompany him into battle. Given special permission to temporarily abandon their cavalry horses, they went to sea acting effectively as marines. Charles Berkeley, Earl of Falmouth, the thirty-five-year-old Captain of the Duke of York's Troop, and one of his closest personal friends, joined up because *'he thought himself obliged not to be far from the Duke when he was to be engaged in so much danger.'*

The war at sea began with the Battle of Lowestoft on 3rd June 1665. An English fleet of 109 ships, under the Duke of York, defeated a Dutch fleet of 103 ships, under Admiral Lord Obdam. It was a resounding victory. The English lost one ship and sustained about 300-400 casualties; the Dutch lost seventeen ships and up to 2,500 of their sailors, while a further 2,000 were taken prisoner. Samuel Pepys, writing in London, recorded in his diary: *'All this*



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*day by all people on the river, and almost everywhere else hereabout were heard the guns, our two fleets for certain being engaged', adding when news of victory arrived: 'A greater victory never known in the world.'*

During the battle, at about two o'clock and after several hours of fighting, the Dutch flagship *Eendracht* engaged with the English flagship, the *Royal Charles*. This became a fierce and prolonged duel, lasting over an hour, in which the *Royal Charles* both delivered and sustained serious damage. At the height of the battle, a cannon-ball from the *Eendracht* shot across the decks of the *Royal Charles*, killing at one stroke Lord Falmouth, the Earl of Muskerry, and the Hon Richard Boyle. It narrowly missed the Duke of York himself, who was standing so near his friends that his face and clothes were spattered with their blood and brains. Sir Allen Apsley, who was an eyewitness, wrote to his wife on the day after the battle:

*Mr. Boyle was shot with a cannon bullet that took off his head from his body and struck down another man with part of the skull; part of his brains were beaten into my hair and upon my shoulder and left arm. The same unlucky shot that took away that virtuous good youth killed my Lord Muskerry and the Earl of Falmouth.*

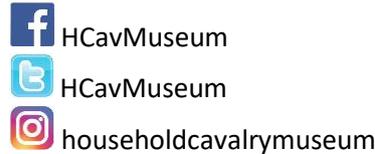
At about three o'clock the duel between the two flagships came to a dramatic end, when a shot from a gun on the lower side of the *Royal Charles* penetrated the powder-magazine of the *Eendracht* and blew her sky-high. The explosion was catastrophic. Nearly all aboard were lost, with only five survivors being recorded. Admiral Lord Obdam was unscathed in the battle and had last been seen calmly directing operations from a stool on his quarterdeck, but he perished with his ship. It was the beginning of the end for the Dutch fleet. The Earl of Falmouth, the Life Guard who had volunteered as a marine, was buried in Westminster Abbey on 22nd June 1665. His death was a crushing blow to King Charles II.

On a far happier note, and about 290 years later, Captain Michael Wyndham of The Life Guards took to sea again. Having spent three years in Washington on the British Joint Services Mission at the Pentagon, Wyndham re-joined the regiment in 1954, to find it



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deployed in the Suez Canal Zone in Egypt, and living in tents. This he found profoundly unsatisfactory, so he bought a motor yacht, aptly named *Siesta*, moored it on the canal, and moved on board with his brother officer, Captain Tony Chiesman. Although he almost certainly did not know about the early Life Guard marine, Lord Falmouth, Wyndham prided himself on being '*the first British officer to command troops from offshore since Lord Cardigan in the Crimean War.*' Life on board the *Siesta* gave rise to numerous anecdotes, one of which will shortly be published in *The Guards Magazine*.

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**‘NOT A LOT OF PEOPLE KNOW THIS...’**

**A weekly series of podcasts about the Regiments of the Household Cavalry  
written and recorded by  
Regimental Historian, Christopher Joll, formerly of The Life Guards**

**These anecdotes are drawn from  
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