



THE
HOUSEHOLD
Cavalry
MUSEUM

Horse Guards, Whitehall, London, SW1A 2AX



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A Life Guard always dresses to impress

In 1950, the late Captain Michael Wyndham of The Life Guards was posted to Washington DC to act as ADC to Air Chief Marshal Sir William Elliott, Chairman of the British Joint Services Mission. The Americans at the Pentagon were perpetually confused by Wyndham's Service Dress uniform of breeches, boots, spurs, Sam Browne belt, and the three brass Garter stars of a Life Guards Captain on his shoulders, assuming him to be – despite his evident youth – a 3-Star General from some unspecified South American country. His spurs also made their mark. A secretary in the Pentagon, when writing handover notes for her successor, wrote:

Captain Wyndham is the one who continuously needs to rest his legs – on the desk. Do not object to this, but if you would be so kind as to note each morning whether he is or is not in possession of his spurs, you will be doing Captain Wyndham, The Life Guards, and the Pentagon Stationery Office a great service. The spurs are apparently necessary to prevent his feet from sliding off the desk.

The Colonel's tipple



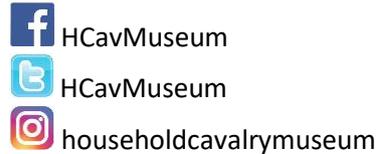
In August 1969, 'B' Squadron of The Life Guards was the first armoured car unit to be posted to Northern Ireland as part of Op BANNER. This was an operation to provide military support for the Northern Ireland garrison, in the face of the violent Protestant backlash, which followed the Catholic civil rights protests and the minor Stormont parliamentary reforms of 1968. It was the start of a succession of tours of duty for The Life Guards in Northern Ireland, which continued virtually unbroken until 1982.

From early-1969 until mid-1971, The Life Guards was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Desmond Langley (later Major General Sir Desmond Langley and the Governor of Bermuda). An amiable but highly professional officer with a carefully controlled stammer, like many of his colleagues Langley enjoyed the comfort of a drink, providing it was taken in moderation.



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Although he was not in Northern Ireland in 1969, Langley found himself there in 1970. A larger formation of Life Guards, including Regimental Headquarters (RHQ) and HQ Squadron, had been sent to the Province in armoured cars for the second time, although the vehicles had long-since shown themselves to be completely unusable in urban riot situations.

Based at a Nissen-hutted, Second World War RAF station called Long Kesh, which was later rebuilt as the notorious Maze Prison, RHQ had to content itself with deploying its armoured car-equipped Troops to support the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), and the recently-formed Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), with armoured vehicle patrols along the porous Ulster-Eire border between Newry and Crossmaglen.

In the course of these military activities, Langley became friendly with his opposite numbers in the RUC and UDR, one of whom presented The Life Guards' Commanding Officer with a spoil of war which had been acquired during a police raid on a suspected IRA house. Although the raid had not produced any Catholic terrorists, weapons or bombs, it had resulted in the police uncovering an illegal whisky still. The spoil of war was a green glass medicine bottle of poteen, the bootlegged and home-distilled potato spirit reputed to be as alcoholically powerful – and as dangerous – as absinthe.

Rather than send the poteen back to the Regiment's museum, then located in Windsor, Colonel Langley decided to try it for himself. He found that neat, poteen was completely undrinkable. He then experimented by diluting the potato spirit with a variety of different mixers. At last he found a combination that was palatable. '*You know,*' Langley said before lunch one day, '*it's really not that b-bad if you d-dilute it with a splash of t- tonic water.*'

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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 the Regimental Historian, Christopher Joll, formerly of The Life Guards**

**These anecdotes are drawn from  
Christopher Joll's recently published books:**

***The Drum Horse in the Fountain: Tales of the Heroes & Rogues in the Guards*  
&  
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