

Early 20th Century 1902-1939

Queen Victoria had appointed her second son, HRH Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh and Duke of Saxe Coburg-Gotha as Honorary Colonel of the Royal Marines in 1882. He died in 1900 and on 2nd January 1901 HRH The Duke of York, the Prince of Wales' second son, became Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Marine Forces, a revised title which was much favoured by the Corps and an appointment he continued to hold when he became King George V in 1910. In 1902, as Prince of Wales, he led a brigade of four Marine battalions past his father, King Edward VII, at the Aldershot coronation review. When Queen Victoria died at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight on 22nd January 1901, Royal Marines bands played in the funeral procession, while RMLI sentries from Forton kept watch on the coffin as it lay overnight in the Royal Yacht *Victoria & Albert*. The following day Royal Marines from Forton were formed up as the funeral train steamed slowly past.

In 1903, the Royal Marines assumed responsibility for



One of the last Royal Naval Bands - HMS *Calcutta*

providing bands in HM Ships and RN shore establishments, and the Royal Naval School of Music was formed at Eastney. Divisional bands had been established at Chatham, Portsmouth, and Plymouth with their own methods of entry, training and engagement but ships' bands had always been found partly by privately engaging musicians for the commission and partly from a small naval band service founded in 1863. Now they would have their own pay, conditions, training and promotion structure leading to commissioned rank as Musical Directors.

The Fisher Reforms of the early years of the century had a disastrous effect on the Corps when, with the naval vote increasing, their numbers were gradually reduced and those who served spent most of their time at sea. Admiral Sir John Fisher was well aware of the under-employment of RM officers afloat, but as he hated the Army, the Navy's rival for public funds, he would not tolerate most RM officers' desire for military training and even employment ashore. He even introduced a scheme whereby all officers for the naval service carried out the same training and cadets appointed to the Marines were commissioned as Lieutenants (M). This was against strong opposition from the Corps and resulted in an acute shortage of junior officers when war broke out in 1914. No doubt if Fisher had been asked 'What are the marines for?' he would have replied that they were there to man the guns of the fleet. This held little truck with the seamen who were now a much more disciplined long-service body, and who excelled at naval gunnery themselves.

The Great War

On the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, the majority of the Corps was serving at sea, but a Royal Marine Brigade was immediately formed largely from reservists and partially trained recruits. The RMA, Chatham, Portsmouth and Plymouth Divisions each provided a battalion and in three weeks this formation was on the other side of the Channel. It was withdrawn after only seven days and the RMA battalion was relieved by one from Deal. It was now realised that Antwerp was the major threat and, after a visit from Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, the Marine