

History of the Gurkhas

Gurkhas have been part of the British Army for almost 200 years, but who are these brave fighters?

Gurkhas are people from Nepal. According to a legend, they got their name from a warrior saint, Guru Gorkhanath, who lived 1200 years ago. He had predicted that his people would become world famous for their bravery. The word Gurkha also comes from the name of a city, Gorkha, in western Nepal.

Britain tried to invade Nepal when it was trying to conquer the northern parts of India. The British soldiers had fine rifles whilst the Gurkhas were armed only with their traditional knives called Kukris. But the Nepali soldiers were such courageous and clever fighters that the British soldiers could not defeat them. After six months of fighting, Britain decided to make peace with Nepal.

The British army began to recruit Gurkha soldiers because they wanted them to fight on their side. Since that day, the Gurkhas have fought alongside British troops in every battle across the world.

Nepal became a strong ally of Britain. One hundred thousand Gurkhas fought in the First World War. They fought and died in the battlefields of France in the Loos, Givenchy, Neuve Chapelle and Ypres as well as many other countries.

Again the whole of the Nepali army fought for Britain during the Second World War. There were 250,000 Gurkhas in total. They were used by the British to put down revolts in India. Gurkhas fought in Syria, North Africa, Italy, Greece and against the Japanese in Singapore and in the jungles of Burma.

The King of Nepal gave the British government large sums of money for weapons and equipment, as well as money to buy fighter aircraft during the Battle of Britain. This was a great sacrifice from a small country which was not as rich as Britain.

In the past 50 years, Gurkhas have served in the British army in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Borneo, Cyprus, the Falklands, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan.

These days Gurkhas are stationed in seven different military bases in the UK. One of these is the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst where the Gurkhas help to train the British soldiers.

The Gurkha soldiers are still selected from young men living in the hills of Nepal. They have to pass some of the toughest tests in the world. One of the tests is to run uphill for 40 minutes. At the same time they have to carry a basket on their backs filled with rocks weighing 70lbs.

The Gurkha brigade has won 26 Victoria Crosses, which is the highest award for bravery. Of these, 13 Victoria Crosses were awarded to British officers who commanded these brave soldiers and 13 were won by the Gurkha soldiers themselves. That makes the Gurkha Brigade the most decorated regiment in the British Army.