



# FUSILIERS MUSEUM OF NORTHUMBERLAND

**70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the Battle of the  
Imjin River, Korea  
22nd – 25th  
April, 1951**

## Welcome!

The Museum will be able to open to visitors from 17<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

The grounds at Alnwick Castle have been open since the end of March and it is a pleasure to see, and hear, visitors enjoying the venue once again.

The Museum will have to wait a little longer before opening but our Front of House Team are looking forward to welcoming you soon!

## Cultural Recovery Fund

The Museum is delighted to announce a successful bid for a share of the Arts Council's government funded, Cultural Recovery Fund.

The award of £25,000 will enable the Museum to move forward after a challenging year and recover shortfalls caused by Covid-19.

The Chairman of the Museum Trustees said:

*"The Cultural Recovery Fund's award is great news for us. We'll be opening on 17 May after more than a year of shut-down, and the award means we can afford the staffing and the precautions needed to welcome visitors safely. And it means we can go ahead with imaginative initiatives to develop our offers for outreach as well as for visitors. The award is a huge encouragement and a great help."*

## Royal Northumberland Fusiliers in Korea, 1950-1951

After the defeat of the Japanese in the Second World War, Korea was divided into the communist North and the American-supported South. In June 1950 the North Koreans launched an invasion which threatened to overwhelm the South. The United Nations (founded in 1945) came to the defence of the South. The First Battalion, Royal Northumberland Fusiliers (1RNF) was deployed to Korea as part of 29 Brigade, the UK's ground contribution to UN Forces.

Initially the Government considered National Servicemen too young to be sent to Korea. Civilians who were on reserve were recalled.



Reservists re-join the Regiment, Bury St Edmunds



*"I was on reserve and I was waiting to finish with the army anyway, I'd had enough of it. 1950 come and they recalled me for the Korean War. I had to go, I was on reserve, I was still a soldier, couldn't refuse, I had to go ..."*

Fusilier Thomas McMahon, 1RNF

Thomas McMahon had been a prisoner of war in Italy and Germany during the Second World War. Years later he was interviewed and was asked how he felt about having to rejoin, he said

*“Well it’s not what I felt, it’s what my missus felt, because then I’d only just got married. See I wasn’t married when I was a prisoner, I got married in 1946 ... and I hadn’t all that long been married ... I had two children and actually, when I was going on the boat over to Korea, my missus was pregnant then ...”*

Transcribed from an interview with Thomas McMahon, recorded by the Imperial War Museum, 1999.



A few of the wives and families left behind in Bury St Edmunds.

## Ready and waiting



**Above:** 1RNF waiting to embark ship at Southampton, October 1950

**Right:** Civic welcome for Fusiliers arriving at Pusan, South Korea, November 1950

*“At Pusan we were welcomed by an American band, the band leader who reminded me of ‘Snakehip Johnson’! They were all prancing about on the quayside, there were crowds of Koreans cheering and clapping and shouting”*

Captain Andrew Scott, 1RNF

1RNF embarked the Empire Halladale at Southampton on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1950 and sailed the following day. The Regimental Band was playing as family and friends waved from the dock.

Calling at Port Said, Aden, Colombo, Singapore, the Battalion disembarked at Pusan, South Korea on 20<sup>th</sup> November, 1950.

*“They [the soldiers] were very badly equipped ... a string vest, a shirt, a pullover, a jacket, an overcoat and a balaclava helmet, it’s not enough to keep you physically or mentally alert at 3 o’clock in the morning when the temperature is pushing minus 50° or minus 60°.\**

Capt Tony Perrins, 1RNF

\*Equivalent to -18°F / -27°C



## All aboard



**Left:** 1RNF board the Empire Halladale, October 1950

*“Still vivid in my memory I can see the misery of refugees, their hunger and degradation through no fault of their own.”*

Fusilier Preston Little, 1RNF

**Below:** South Korean refugees leave everything behind and head south to Seoul

*“Vehicles were frozen to the ground, you couldn’t shift them. Tanks were frozen to the ground, weapons, we had to have a lamp under the machine gun so it didn’t freeze up at nighttime. You covered the thing up with a tarpaulin so that the enemy couldn’t see it ... if you didn’t have it there the chances were that when you came to fire it, it would jam.”*

Captain Charles Chester, 1RNF



## The Battle of the River Imjin - 22 April to 25 April 1951

70 years ago, on St George’s Day, soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Royal Northumberland Fusiliers (1RNF) were unable to celebrate their Regimental Day in the manner in which they were accustomed. Upholding tradition, the Fusiliers proudly displayed Red & White Roses in their headdresses throughout the battle.

Four Fusilier Companies were positioned at various outposts on hills overlooking the River Imjin. In the week before the battle commenced, reconnaissance patrols had ventured deep into enemy territory, but had seen no sign of the enemy.



‘Y’ Company transporting rations to Company positions in the hills

On 22nd April the Battalion was preparing to celebrate St George's Day. In the afternoon, air reports revealed that the enemy were approaching and were expected to attack that evening. The attack came along the whole front, simultaneously, and lasted for a couple of hours. A lull followed, punctuated by calls from the enemy for our troops to surrender. Shortly afterwards the enemy launched their main attack. By the early hours of St George's Day (23rd April) the situation had become critical.

*"I have a great deal of respect for the Chinese peasant soldier, I think he was a worthy adversary, and I would like to feel that if I had to go into action again it would not be against the Chinese or the North Koreans."*

Ashley Cunningham-Booth  
Non-Commissioned Officer, 1RNF

By all accounts Chinese soldiers had a particular flair for moving swiftly and undetected. Thus, they managed to infiltrate a gap between the Belgian UN contingent (stationed north of the Imjin River) who later withdrew, and the Fusiliers of 'Y' Company who became cut off. Further surprise attacks resulted in the enemy gaining a hill position. The Fusiliers' counter-attack was forced back and in the early hours of 24th April they too were forced to withdraw. The Gloucestershire Regiment, stationed on a nearby hill, had become surrounded. The enemy attempted to cut off lines of communication for the Fusiliers and the Royal Ulster Rifles. From around 8 pm that evening the enemy made constant attacks. A subsequent counter-attack by the Fusiliers was successful and they continued to fight until they were withdrawn from the line at first light on 25th April.

The Battle of the Imjin River had claimed the lives of 3 officers, including their Commanding Officer Lt Colonel Kingsley Foster and 10 other ranks; 7 officers and 76 other ranks had been wounded; 3 officers and 43 other ranks were missing.

It is estimated that the enemy numbered the equivalent of 3 Divisions ... there may well have been more.

## Gallantry awards for the Regiment in Korea

**George Cross (1); Distinguished Service Order (4); Distinguished Conduct Medal (3); Military Cross (8); Military Medal (5)**

## In Memory

During their entire service in the Korean War the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Royal Northumberland Fusiliers sustained the following casualties:

<b>Killed</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Wounded</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>Prisoner of War</b>	<b>45</b>

## From the archive



**Above:** George Cross winner, Derek Kinne, with his mother outside Buckingham Palace after receiving his medal from the Queen, 1954. The award was made for bravery while a prisoner of war in Korea

**With thanks to our regular subscribers and supporters**  
special thanks to  
**Alnwick Castle and the Regiment**

**museum  
development**  
NORTH EAST



Tony Perrins' excellent book about 1RNF in Korea, **'a pretty rough do altogether'** is available from the Museum or to order online.

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