

As part of the post Napoleonic war economies, the 2nd Battalion 23rd Foot was disbanded in October 1814, and sent 447 other ranks to the 1st Battalion who were stationed at Gosport when the news arrived that Napoleon had escaped from Elba and re-established himself in Paris. Late in March, 1815, the 1st Battalion embarked to join the allied army gathering in Belgium and went into billets at Grammont. There they were inspected by the Duke of Wellington who wrote, I saw the 23rd the other day and I never saw a regiment in such order. They are not strong [in numbers], but it was the most complete and handsome military body I ever looked at.

It is possible to build up an accurate picture of the material of which this 'most complete and handsome military body' was composed. Leaving aside six Scotsmen and three men born overseas (Canada, Italy and Holland), there were some 660 men in the ranks. Out of every ten of them, six were from England, one from Ireland and three from Wales. It is clear that the system of allocating counties to particular regiments had not been a total success. The five counties awarded to the 23rd Foot in 1804 had provided only eighty-one men to the Waterloo battalion, of whom Denbighshire produced forty, while Caernarvonshire sent only six and Anglesey two. The counties of mid and south Wales provided 109, of which the largest contingents came from Montgomery (28), Cardigan (23) and Pembrokeshire (18). Every English county except Cumberland, Durham, Huntingdon, Northumberland and Surrey was represented, the most fruitful recruiting grounds being Lancashire (78), Norfolk (58), Cheshire (31), Somerset (28) and Cambridgeshire (26).

Since the United Kingdom was still predominantly agricultural, it was to be expected that more than half the recruits had given their trade on enlistment as labourer - one claimed to be a farmer - while one in ten had been weavers. The next largest occupational groups were shoemakers (39), tailors (26), miners and colliers (16) and blacksmiths (14). Among the trades having single representatives were vice-makers, silk-twisters, jockeys and sailors. The (regimental) sergeant major, an Irishman, gave his previous occupation as optician.

Compared to other regiments in the Waterloo army the 23rd was an experienced unit including only seventy-six privates who had signed on since the peace in 1814. 236 more had enlisted in 1813 but many of these, who would have done their basic training in the militia, had seen service in Spain and southern France. The majority of the private soldiers were twenty or less, with some seventeen and eighteen year olds. On the other hand there were men who had enlisted in their thirties and several were serving in their forties and fifties. The oldest was Corporal Samuel Mason who had taken the King's shilling at Worcester in 1794. At Waterloo he was in his sixty-first year and it is pleasant to know that he was made a sergeant before the end of the year and was retired with a pension of 10d a day in 1818.

The battlefield of Waterloo must have reminded many of the Regiment's veterans of Albuera with its gentle ridges facing one another, and it is probable that Wellington also saw the resemblance and expected Napoleon to turn his right flank as Marshal Soult had done to Beresford in 1811. Thus he placed the bulk of his strength, including the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, towards the right, a fortunate decision for the Regiment since the units stationed there lost fewer men than those who held the left and centre of the front. Not that losing four officers and eleven men killed with eight officers and seventy-eight men wounded could have been considered a light loss in any battle but one so Homeric as Waterloo where one officer found himself reflecting that 'I never heard of a battle in which everyone was killed: but this seems likely to be an exception.'

The Regiment's part in the battle was described twenty years later by Lieutenant RP Holmes: 'During the night of the 17th June, the 23rd bivouacked in a rye-field near the village of Mer be Braine, but early the following morning [18th June 1815] moved into the second line on the left of the Nivelles road, in rear of a battalion of Guards, where the Regiment deployed into line and lay on the ground, in consequence of the French having placed some guns on the Nivelles road which killed one of our captains and wounded some men. The Guards in the front line having been withdrawn to the support of Hougoumont, the 23rd formed square and moved up into that line. In consequence of the numerous attacks of cavalry we remained in square the whole day. I only recollect one attack of infantry (in column) during the day which did not alter our formation. Some regiments in our rear, I think the 71st [Highland Light Infantry], deployed into line and advanced with the 23rd square (a wing on each flank) The [French] infantry having given way, a charge of cavalry immediately followed. The regiment in line [71st] ran into square to our right, a little in advance and nearer to the garden of Hougoumont. I believe the

The 23rd Foot, The Royal Welsh Fusiliers

Waterloo 1815

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cavalry that attacked these two squares were nearly annihilated. Having suffered much from the squares they attempted to retreat by the Nivelles road, which was thickly lined with skirmishers, and the officer who commanded the left company of the regiment stationed on that road assured me at the time [that] scarcely a man succeeded in making his escape. After this charge, finding that we were suffering both from the French guns and the fire from the garden of Hougomont, we again retired to our former position, where we remained until the attack on the centre by the French Guards, when we again advanced some short distance in square, then deployed and advanced in line; but finding nothing to oppose us, we wheeled by companies to the right and moved in column on the right of the Charleroi road to [about 300 yards short of La Belle Alliance] where we bivouacked for the night ...

During the afternoon the Commanding Officer, now Colonel Sir Henry Ellis KCB, had been struck in the right breast by a musket ball but remained in command until, faint from loss of blood, he started to ride to the rear only to fall from his horse while crossing a ditch. He was found and taken to a nearby farmhouse where his wounds were dressed. Even this was not the end of his misfortunes for during the night of 19th/20th June the building caught fire and, although he was pulled clear by an assistant surgeon, he died on the following day. He was 32 years old, had commanded for eight years and suffered eight wounds. On 22nd June the commander of the division in which the 23rd was serving was riding with Wellington and talking of the recent battle.

In respect of individuals lost upon the occasion, we spoke only of [Lieutenant-General] Sir Thomas Picton and Colonel Ellis. It was symptomatic of the high regard in which Sir Henry was held throughout the army. He is commemorated by a memorial in Worcester Cathedral and a plaque in the church at Waterloo.

The Regiment's last action in the Napoleonic wars was undertaken by the light company who took part in the escalade of Cambrai on 24th June. They lost an officer and four men but from there onwards they had an unopposed march to Paris where, on 4th July, they pitched their camp in the Bois de Boulogne.

Three months later the Regiment contributed a small but memorable footnote to the administrative history of the army and, indeed, to the English language. In October 1815, the Adjutant-General issued a General Order whereby 'each non-commissioned officer and Soldier of the Regular Army shall be provided with a book, calculated to shew the actual state of his accounts.' In a specimen 'paybook' provided, the name given was Private Thomas Atkins, a native of Odiham, Hampshire, serving with the 'Twenty Third Regiment, Royal Welsh Fuzileers'. It can hardly have been a coincidence that the officer over whose signature this order appeared, Lieutenant-General Sir Harry Carvert, had received his first commission in the Regiment and had gone into captivity with them at Yorktown in 1781. The name Tommy Atkins passed swiftly into the language as a generic name for a British soldier.

This extract is taken from *'That Astonishing Infantry'* by Michael Glover, London (1989).

THE WATERLOO ROLL CALL

23RD REGIMENT OF FOOT (OR ROYAL WELSH
 FUSILIERS).

		Rank in the	
		Regiment.	Army.
LIEUT.-COLONEL.			
¹ Sir Henry Walton Ellis, K.C.B., w.		23 Apr. 1807	Col., 4 June, 1814
MAJORS.			
² Thomas Dalmer		10 Dec. 1807	[1812 Lt.-Col., 17 Aug.
³ J. Humph. Edw. Hill, w.		12 Mar. 1812	Lt.-Col., 21 Sept. [1813
CAPTAINS.			
Joseph Hawtyn, κ.		11 Sept. 1806	Maj., 17 Aug. 1812
⁴ Francis Dalmer		10 Dec. 1807	Maj., 26 Aug. 1813
⁵ Thomas Strangeways Wm. Campbell		6 Apr. 1809 15 June, 1809	Maj., 12 Apr. 1814
⁶ Charles Jolliffe, κ. Thos. Farmer, κ.		18 June, 1811 16 Apr. 1812	
⁷ Henry Johnson, w. Henry S. Blanckley		14 May, 1812 6 Apr. 1815	21 May, 1812
FIRST LIEUTENANTS.			
Francis O'Flaherty		6 Aug. 1807	
James Milne		21 Oct. 1807	
Wm. Walley		10 Dec. 1807	
⁸ Evan M. Brown		20 Apr. 1809	
G. Fensham, κ.		4 Jan. 1810	
Ralph Smith		22 Mar. 1810	
Harry Palmer		11 Apr. 1811	
Isaac Watkins Harris		20 June, 1811	
J. Enoch, Adjt.		15 Aug. 1811	
Gismond Phillips		5 Sept. 1811	
⁹ John Macdonald		11 Oct. 1811	
George Fielding		7 Nov. 1811	
¹⁰ Robt. Pattison Holmes		12 Dec. 1811	
Charles Fryer		7 May, 1812	
W. A. Griffiths, w.		13 May, 1812	
¹¹ John Clyde, w.		14 May, 1812	
Alexander A. Brice		21 May, 1812	
Anthony G. Sidley		16 July, 1812	
¹² Alexander Clayhills		17 Sept. 1812	
¹³ Edward Methodd		23 Mar. 1815	
		Rank in the	
SECOND LIEUTENANTS.		Regiment.	Army.
¹⁴ Thomas Lilly		1 Oct. 1812	
George Dunn		15 Apr. 1813	
¹⁵ George Stainforth		29 July, 1813	
¹⁶ Gerald FitzGibbon		26 Aug. 1813	
Wm. Leebody, κ.		9 Sept. 1813	
¹⁷ Edward Thomas Ellis (Volunteer)			
QUARTERMASTER.			
George Sidley		14 Apr. 1808	
SURGEON.			
John Dunn		10 Sept. 1803	9 July, 1803
ASSISTANT-SURGEONS.			
¹⁸ Thomas Smith		2 July, 1812	
John Williams		13 May, 1813	
John Monro		26 May, 1814	

Facings blue. Lace gold.

THE WATERLOO ROLL CALL

¹ Was sev. wnded. at Waterloo, in the breast, by a shot from a carbine. On his way to the rear he was thrown from his horse, whilst attempting to jump a ditch, and one of his men carried him to a small outhouse, where his wound was dressed. On the night of 19th June the hovel took fire, and he was with difficulty rescued by Assistant-Surgeon Munro, of above regt. He d. next day. This gallant and universally lamented officer was son of Maj.-Gen. John Joyner Ellis, and was a native of Worcester. He had served in Holland, Egypt, America, the West Indies, Spain, Portugal, and France. M.I. in Worcester Cathedral. Bd. at Braine l'Alleud, within a few hundred yards of the place where he fell.

² Afterwards Lt.-Gen. T. Dalmer, C.B., Col.-in-Chf. 47th Foot. Horse shot under him at Waterloo. D. 25th Aug., 1854.

³ Commanded a Portuguese regt. during the Par. War, and received the gold cross for four general actions. C.B. for Waterloo. Exchanged as maj. to 49th Regt., 2nd Oct., 1823. Out of the list 1829.

⁴ Brother to above T. Dalmer. Bt. Lt.-col. for Waterloo. Attained rank of col. and d. 2nd Oct., 1855.

⁵ Retd. on f. p. as capt. in 9th RI. Veteran Battalion. Living in 1830.

⁶ Youngest son of T. S. Jolliffe, of Ammerdown, co. Somerset, formerly M.P. for the borough of Petersfield, by his 2nd wife, Mary, dau. and heir of Samuel Holden. Served at Copenhagen, in North America, and the West Indies. Served several campaigns in the Pa. Sev. wnded. at Orthes. Had not entirely recovered from this wound when the tocsin of war once more summoned him to the field of battle.

⁷ Afterwards Maj. H. Cavendish Johnson. Served at Copenhagen in 1807; the West Indies, and the Pa. At the siege of Badajoz, Johnson fell from the breach pierced with gunshot wounds, which prevented his doing any regimental duty until 1815, when he served at Waterloo and was again wounded. D. in Ireland, 19th Feb., 1853, aged 78.

⁸ Promoted capt. 11th July, 1815. Appointed paymaster to above regt. 23rd Oct., 1817. Placed on h. p. 16th Oct., 1828. There are "Meredith Browns" at the present time, but whether related to above Capt. Meredith Brown I cannot say.

⁹ Promoted capt. 28th Aug., 1827. Appointed paymaster to above regt. 1828.

¹⁰ Afterwards Lt.-col. of above regt. D. at Quebec, 23rd July, 1819, as col.-comg. reserve batt. 23rd Fusiliers.

¹¹ D. from his wounds.

¹² Placed on h. p. as Lt. 67th Regt., 30th May, 1822. 2nd son of James Menzies-Clayhills, of Invergowrie, co. Forfar. M. Elizabeth, dau. of Gen. Hunter, of Burnside, and d. s. p. 18th June, 1865.

¹³ Afterwards capt. on h. p. list of 3rd D. G.

¹⁴ Capt. in Ceylon Rifles, 1839. Distinguished himself in the Kandian Insurrection of 1848, and commanded the only European troops employed on this occasion. Received the special thanks of Lord Torrington, Gov. of Ceylon, for his gallantry. D. as Lt.-col. April, 1862.

¹⁵ Placed on h. p. as 1st Lt. 25th March, 1817. Of Hutton, co. York. D. at Nivelles, Belgium, 27th April, 1860.

¹⁶ Afterwards sub-inspector of the Constabulary in Ireland. D. at Plymouth 7th Sept., 1844.

¹⁷ Nephew to Sir Henry Walton Ellis, col. of this regt., who fell at Waterloo. Mentioned in Lord Albemarle's autobiography. In the regt. in 1830.

¹⁸ Afterwards Surgeon-Major Thomas Smith, M.D. h. p. Joined the service in 1812; served in the campaigns of 1813, 1814, and 1815; was present at Vittoria, the Pyrenees, Nivelles, Orthes, and Toulouse. His commissions are dated: Hospital Assistant, March 29, 1812; Assist.-Surgeon, July 2, 1812; Surgeon, July 13, 1826; Surgeon-Major, Jan. 4, 1839. Living in 1874.