

November
2011

The Rifleman

The Recruits' one



Season's End

Well, another successful campaign season comes to a close, and the men of the gallant 2nd Battalion dust down their uniforms, clean and oil their rifles, polish up accoutrements, grease swords and settle in for the winter months ahead - or at least they should be!

But all in all, it's been a good and varied year with a mixed bag of events. We've seen two bicentennial; one in Albuera and one closer to home in Bristol; four NA battle events; some old favourites in the form of multi period events; a new, 24 hour campaign trail at Stanton St John and of course, our annual Waterloo pilgrimage. But above all, we've spent some good times with good friends, shared the warmth of the campfire, uncovered a few research gems and (just as importantly) welcomed some new faces to our brotherhood of Riflemen.

And that got me thinking about what it was that brought us together - individuals from all walks of life; from student to lecturer, train manager to shop manager, vintner, researcher, Naval Architect (honest!), forces, ex-forces, rabbit-killer (don't ask!) and many more. All of us had our own reasons for joining - and not all was about firing guns and making lots of noise. So wondering just what it was that attracted us to the 95th and what we got out of it, I decided to ask some of our guys - from the newbie to the veteran - what their story was...

Eric Pratt's

'My Life as a Recruit'

It all started for me on a summer's day in 2010. I had always had an urge to do some reenacting and after a short lived affair as a pikeman in an English Civil War outfit (which resulted in bouts of unconsciousness and a steady stream of smelling salts), I decided to take the plunge - again.

I had an inkling I wanted to do something Napoleonic as I've always been a fan of the era, so it was either Redcoats or Riflemen. There were quite a few groups out there but after a few emails and reading of websites I found myself in a rain drenched field in the middle of March, dressed in recruits' whites, in the 2nd Battalion 95th Rifles!

Chiltern

This was a training weekend, so was mostly drill and, for us recruits, one hell of a learning curve. But the guys in the unit prodded me along and kept me going in the right direction! The first night was spent in an old 19th

century cottage, drinking wine by firelight and listening to tales of campaigns from as far away as Kelmarsh and Romsey! With such heady delights to come I was sold!

Dave Gower, sometimes serjeant, sometimes corporal, full time tailor, measured me up for my regimentals and my *undress* uniform - and hopefully I'd be ready for my first event at Newstead Abbey near Nottingham. I then went mad on kit. Although I was ready to beg, steal or borrow, you really need your own boots (£100ish) and, of course, the main deal - the rifle (£400, plus drilling and proofing, £70 - then shotgun license, about £50).

Newstead

Newstead was a perfect first event, glorious sunshine and I got to be involved in the morning training sessions. Having your own rifle makes all the difference as you can get a



lot more involved. After another night discussing war stories I kipped in the unit tent with 4 other riflemen which was a bit of a squeeze. Note to self, get a tent!



Waterloo

Next event was a bit of a surprise. I was offered a trip to Waterloo for the 196th anniversary of the battle and as it tied in with a weekend off, off went I double quick. I scrounged a uniform, got my shotgun certificate the day before, shot off to Kent and onto the ferry after spending the night at Andy's house.

Arriving at the site

and taking in the hundreds of reenactors, I started thinking maybe I had bitten off more than I could chew but once again the guys sorted me out and I fired the first rounds out of my rifle. The battles were pretty impressive: memories of running back to the British lines with a French Chasseur chasing me; clouds of musket smoke from redcoat volleys; hundreds of people watching; drinking wine and meeting lots of interesting reenactors from all over Europe. These were a few of the highlights and it was with a heavy heart I headed home on the Monday.

Kelmarsh

Next for me was the Kelmarsh *Festival of History*, a multi period event which I had been told was brilliant. It didn't disappoint, especially with the world's wierdest beer tent filled with everything from Ancient Greeks to German paratroopers, plus a live band! Thankfully, the next day there was lots of rushing around doing displays and skirmishing kept my head clear(ish) – and the public loved us! The 95th are popular it seems. *Sharpe* certainly has something to answer for.

'Blasts from the Past'

After Kelmarsh I found weekend work commitments encroaching more and more on my 95th time but still managed to get away for my last event of the year, '*Blasts from the Past*', another multi-period event near Romsey in Hampshire. Yet again ,another awesome social occasion. Vague highlights involved doing the hokey-cokey in full uniform in the beer tent and winning a bet for a Civil war roundhead artillery woman. (*Ah, living up to the best traditions of the 2nd – Ed*). Some cracking little fights with the French and lots of rounds fired off made for another successful weekend.

So, that was my first year with the 2/95th, a finer bunch of reneactors you'll be hard pushed to meet. A big thanks to everyone for the prodding and cajoling, the laughing at my misfortunes, the copious amounts of wine, the fine meals, the stink (*Sjt Gower I presume? – Ed*) and getting dirty. All in all, a cracking year!



The Newbie

I'm Craig Harris, a born and bred Londoner who now lives in Wales (how I ended up there is a long story). I'm twenty three and work as an optical assistant with the hope of becoming an optician myself one day. In my spare time I enjoy spending time with my very large family and having a beer or two with friends at the weekend. I also take part in a local amateur dramatic stage production as an actor as well as having a keen interest in the Napoleonic era (obviously).



Recruits being put through their paces at a Chiltern Open Air Museum

Before one brilliant day in August 2011, I had never met another person other than my grandfather who was interested in the Napoleonic era; so I was astounded to meet another person with the same interest, let alone a whole group of people all ages and from many different backgrounds. Everyone I met on my first weekend were extremely friendly and welcoming. After the first night I felt as though I had been a member longer than I actually had. I enjoyed talking with people and generally the whole experience of living in the early 1800's. The only disappointment was the fact that when Sunday came I had to return home and back to normal life where once again no one else around had the same interest. Joining the 2nd 95th was one of my top highlights of the year.

Learning the basics of rifle maintenance



Si's Story



My name is Simon Morrison, I'm 38 and I'm an area manager for a retail fashion label known as *Superdry*. I've always been interested in military history as well as fashion history and in my opinion the Napoleonic war was by far the best dressed conflict known to man followed a close second by the Crimean war.

One of my deepest regrets was not joining the army at the age of 17 as I was endeared to the 'band of brothers' ethos and sense of belonging so often spoken about by my Grandfather and various friends who had indeed signed up. 20 years later I had the opportunity to fuse two of my interests. The army and fashion.

In 2009 I endeavoured to finally get off my backside and join a reenactment unit of the Napoleonic era. Having looked online for various groups I came across the 2nd95th forum. Of course, I'm a big fan of the *Sharpe* series so this immediately grabbed my attention. After some forum banter I was ready to take the next step.

Eastleigh was my first event and once I'd found the camp (I managed to walk past the field with all the white canvas tents in) I was welcomed into the unit by Dave Gower, Den and Andy Rayfield and Blakey, followed shortly thereafter by the rest of the unit.

Not being a big fan of camping I was dubious as to how much 'fun' I was willing to take but after seeing the plush interiors of some of the members' tents I was convinced that 'campaign' camping was the way to go.

I quickly found myself drawn to the fire and the ladies of the camp were



grateful for the assistance in keeping it going. Dave was also glad to have a new tea-wallah. Dressed in my borrowed whites I was soon put to drill and discovered I really didn't know my left from my right but after several marches around a field by Serjt Gower and Serjt Blake, I was hooked (and I hadn't even held or fired a rifle yet).

I cannot express enough how very welcoming everyone was at my first event. I felt relaxed and at home with everyone from the outset and just a few short years down the line consider the members and affiliates of the 2nd95th to be very dear friends.

My third season has come to a close and I simply can't wait for the training weekends to begin.

This year every event has been an absolute blast (do please forgive the pun) and if I had to pick highlights this season it would be fighting in the streets of Plancenoit at Waterloo, night raids on the french camp at the Stanton St John campaign weekend (not to forget the amazing pork and chorizo we dined on that night after a hard days march) and attacking and taking many a french gun position at various events throughout the year. Attending the anniversary of the battle of the Coa at Almeida in Portugal was also an event I shall never forget. To be standing on the hills overlooking the bridge just as they did 200 years ago was incredibly moving.

Aside from the smart green uniform, the smell of the powder and thump of the rifle, there is nothing I like better than to sit around the fire with like minded individuals listening to the sound of the odd fiddle, fife or penny whistle and engaging in good



conversation away from the stresses and trappings of modern life. Heck, I even enjoy drill and am forever cursing for forgetting myself and ruining what could have been a well executed 'right about form'.

Quite simply, what is there not to like about reenacting in one of the best Napoleonic units in the world?

From Recruit to Rifleman.....How did that happen!?

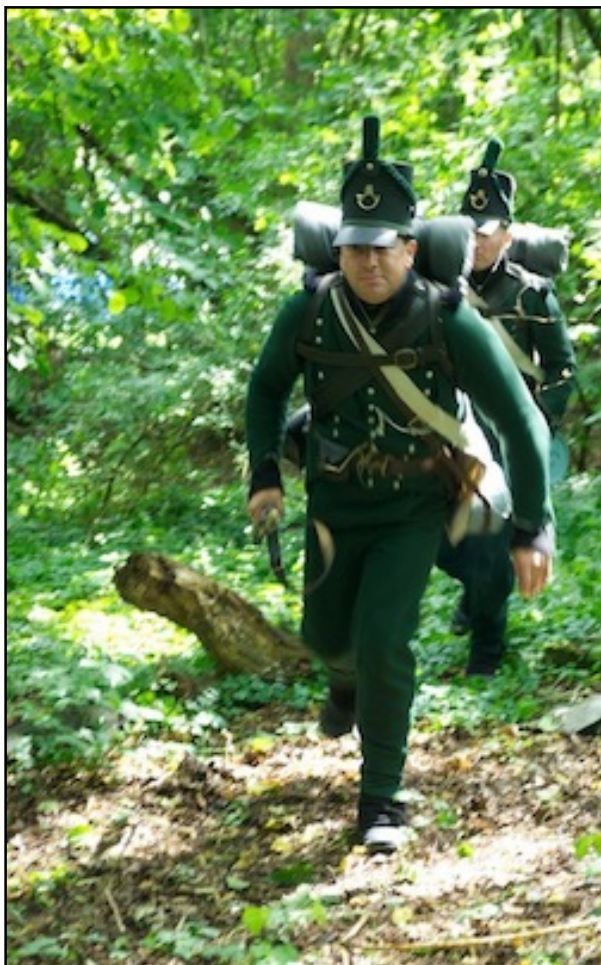
As many of you may know, after spending 23 years in the Royal Navy serving Queen and country, I joined the 2/95th Rifles in November 2010.

So why the 2nd? Was it masses of research into the best unit for me?

Was it an ambition to find a respected unit with a talent for historical accuracy? Or even word of mouth to find a friendly group that enjoyed what they do? Well actually none of the above.

Whilst on holiday early in 2010 I saw a display of 1760 English infantry complete a firing display in a castle on the island of Jersey. As a shotgun license holder for many years, I thought, "Lets get a black powder firelock", but which one? So back at home and after many hours trawling the net, I picked a Derbyshire Arms 1800 British infantry Rifle and placed an order with nothing more in mind than to own and fire a black powder weapon. Gary and Jeni from DA arranged for me to pick up the gun from the Dorchester event that fateful November – and this is where things really took off,

the big day, I arrived at a group of tents in a field and rushed to pick up my new weapon. It was only then, whilst walking back to the car, that I stopped to talk to some men in green; a handsome Serjeant (*couldn't be from our unit! — Ed*) and two upstanding



gents, namely Dave Gower, Ben and Marc – and it was these three most knowledgeable men who enticed me to join the unit. And I'm glad they did. This year has been a fantastic journey; from the freezing cold of training at Chiltern Museum to the windswept Bristol Downs and the hailstones of Waterloo. Every event has been a blast with some great guys that I am now privileged to call friends.

So whatever path leads you to the

2/95th – research, judgement or luck – stick with it as the destination is second to none. After all where else can you pull the trigger of a real gun whilst aiming at a Frenchman and not get arrested?

"God save King George and his 2/95th Rifles"

After weeks of excitement waiting for

Rifleman Sperring

The Veteran



What makes events for me isn't just the battles and parades, etc, but seeing how guys get on with each other. This starts at the beginning of the day when the first chap gets up, starts the fire, then another will emerge and cut wood or fetch water. No one has to tell them to do these jobs, it is done automatically.

Once they've had their first brew of the day they begin to chat about what's gone on the day before and what lies ahead. New recruits will chat to the old snoddies eager to learn from them. Then, by the time of the first parade, you'll get the ones, no matter how much time they've had, will always be late and those who were late to bed and had been on the lash will be first in line. And as for those poor souls who have the misfortune of being themselves and no matter how hard they

try always end up on the wrong side of the NCO's boot...well, 'nuff said!

But what's important is that everyone bands together to achieve our common aim - and it's this that I feel makes our unit special (more 'special needs' in fact). It takes all sorts to make up the 2nd 95th Rifles and make us a 'Band of Brothers' - a *Brotherhood of Riflemen*.

Serjeant/Corporal/Rifleman Gower



My favourite event of the year was probably Waterloo. It was the first time I'd been abroad for non-military purposes so it was new to me in that respect. It was the the largest concentration of re-enactors - despite a limitation this year - I'd seen in one place at one time for one battle. being allowed to fix swords (bayonets) on the field and actually being charged at by more than the 4/5 cavalry you usually get at any UK event was rather exciting.

A particularly memorable moment was whilst we waited on Plancenoit field - the Allied Brigade playing with a sponge ball in as many ways as possible including table football, snooker, rugby and skittles - in 1-1 scale.



Rifleman Dawson



Rifleman Wilkinson

The event that stood out for the Wilkinson family this year was Newstead Abbey. We had the anticipation of the first battle of the season plus the added extra that Amy was able to join the ranks of the French. There's nothing quite like a father and daughter shooting at each other!

The setting of the Abbey and gardens are fantastic and myself and Jane managed to get a look around for a change, which at some events you just do not get the opportunity.



Above: Amy and Fran turn French



Left: Fran almost gets her man at Trout's Farm

‘Glorious Field of Grief’

Albuera 2011



An important highway, N-432, takes vehicles that leave the city of Badajoz by a route that passes near the town of Albuera. If the traveller is driving quickly, he will probably not notice a mural at the entrance to the village on which can be read the first verse of a poem by Lord Byron: *‘Oh Albuera, Glorious field of Grief!’* In the same place one can see, in addition, an effigy of four soldiers: a Spaniard, a Briton, a Portuguese and a Frenchman. Underneath each one of them, in the language of his nationality, the inscription continues: *‘In rows, just as they had fought, they lay like hay in the open countryside...’*

The curious traveller who stops to explore the village further will find a commemorative monument of the battle that was fought in the fields nearby on 16th May 1811: a pedestal crowned by the bust of General Castanos, the victor of another battle which happened three years before– the famous battle of Bailen. To each side of the bust, two small columns are raised on whose bases the names of several allied generals appear: Blake, Lardizabal, Ballesteros, Zayas, Carlos de Espana and Penne for Spain; Beresford, Hamilton, Lumley, Cole, Stewart and Alten for Britain and Portugal.



Every year, towards the middle of May, several thousand people – up to 20,000 on occasion – go to the village to experience the spectacle of a recreation of the battle. Volunteers come from different countries and join the greater part of the inhabitants of Albuera, for a few days becoming the soldiers of the time. This event, first instituted in 1911 and incorporated annually in 1965, lasts three days and has grown to about 1500 participants on the battlefield. For the 200th anniversary of the battle these numbers included the 2/95th Rifles.

Attendance is heavily subsidised by the Spanish authorities and this enabled the Napoleonic Association to lay on two coaches for British participants at a mere £20 per berth. The journey lasted some 28 hours each way by road, but the time fled fleetly as some dozed while others engaged in manly acts of camaraderie on those foolish enough to fall asleep and leave themselves open to the tender ministrations of their mates.

The subsidy extended to basic accommodation and sporadic food issues at the far end. We found ourselves split between a canvas camp, and bunks in a commandeered

sports hall of a type familiar to veterans of these Peninsula trips. The camp was the usual re-enactment scenario of a size to rival the annual Waterloo shindig. Dry conditions and the surfeit of straw for sleeping on, scattered with abandon in and around the tents led to a nasty accident when an unattended fire spread to some of the tents of the Polish contingent, destroying everything within, though luckily no-one was injured. The distraught Poles left the battlefield to realise their passports, money, clothes, and return tickets had all gone up in smoke, leaving them destitute and stranded hundreds of miles from home – a powerful argument for staying aware of fire discipline at these events. A whip round enabled the victims to get home more or less in one piece, though the vision of them turning up at the border still wearing their uniforms and carrying their muskets, but with no ID raised a few wry smiles.

The battles were large and spectacular with the 2/95th working with other UK Rifle groups to hold a hastily erected facsimile of the village of Albuera represented by a couple of sheds. We were honorary members



of the KGL lights for the weekend and showed them how to die with style as the overwhelming numbers of French infantry steam-rolled our isolated position and incinerated the sheds we had clung to so nobly. The country was excellent for cavalry, being on a field outside the town, and on an area of the battlefield where the allies were initially deployed, rather than on the famous hard-fought sites. Over 100 horses were provided, enabling the French to field enough lancers for the



notorious destruction of the Buffs to be recreated in some style.

The evenings developed under the influence of Spanish hospitality in the form of copious cheap or free drinks. The culmination of the most memorable evening was a trip to Albuera's unique re-enactor's village; an artificial plaza outside the town, ringed by permanent clubhouses for each of the re-created units belonging to every hamlet and village for miles around. Its fair to say that the welcome extended to the foreign re-enactors who stayed up long enough to fiesta here was unforgettable. We staggered from bar to bar, being plied with tapas and cocktails until we couldn't stand to kiss another senorita. Luckily, those who needed their beauty-sleep and turned in a little early before the evening proper started had the pleasure of hearing all about it from the others when they staggered in at some ungodly hour in the morning.

The weekend culminated with a round of memorial services at the monuments to the Fallen, and a trip to the museum for those who could gain access before a return to the



sportshall to tinker with kit. The combined 1st, 2nd and 3rd 95th had other plans however and performed a text-book ford clearance in the face of the enemy across the river historically defended by the KGL. No boot was left dry and one individual took things further with a mis-step followed by an impromptu swim.

These bicentennial commemorations are a great opportunity to visit the battle-fields and strike up new bonds with overseas re-enactors and the local people. There is also something in the air at these occasions that brings the British groups together in a way that we do not always manage at UK events. I urge anyone who feels they missed out to book leave for the Salamanca event in 2012. The coach party walked part of the field of Salamanca on our way back North, and hiking

across the battlefield one gets a sense of the ground and the accomplishments of our ancestors in



a way that merely reading the books seldom achieves.

—*Rifleman Townsend*

Links to other reports:

<http://peninsularwar200.org/reenact%20albuer%20report.pdf>

<http://mliyr.multiply.com/video/item/49>



So if you've a mind to take the King's Shilling and would like to don the famous green of The Rifles, then why not join us at one of our training events at Chiltern Open Air Museum early next year.



Photographs courtesy of Phil Thomason and members of the 95th. For more photos of Phil's work go to; www.thomason-photography.net

Taking the Shilling

Rifle Corps!

COUNTRYMEN!

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP:

Half the 95th Battalions in the Service are trying to persuade you to enlist;
But there is one more to come yet!!!

The 2/95th; or, Rifle REGIMENT,

COMMANDED BY THE HONOURABLE
Lieutenant D.s Rayfield,

The only Regiment of RIFLEMEN in the service to wear the entire regimental uniform and re-create the RIFLEMEN'S drill:

THINK. Then CHOOSE. Whether you will enter into any old Rifle Battalion, or prefer being a 2/95th RIFLEMAN.

The first of all Services in the British Army.

In this distinguished Service, you will carry a Rifle no heavier than a fowling piece. You will knock down your Enemy at Five hundred Yards, instead of missing him at Fifty. Your clothing is GREEN, and needs no cleaning but a Brush. Those men who have been in a Rifle Company, can best tell you the comfort of a GREEN JACKET.

No Pipeclay! No Tam 'o shanters!

On Service, your Post is always the POST of HONOUR, and your quarters the best in the Army, for you have the first of everything; and at Home you are sure of Respect because the 2/95th is a byword in the Re-enacting world for DOING IT RIGHT.

The Rifle Sergeants are to be found anywhere, and have orders to treat their Friends gallantly everywhere. If you enlist, and, afterwards wish you had been a 2/95th RIFLEMAN, do not say you were not asked; for you can BLAME NOBODY BUT YOURSELF.

GOD SAVE THE KING! And his Rifle Regiment!

TAKE THE SHILLING HERE:

recruit@95th-rifles.co.uk