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NEW N.A.M. EXHIBITION: NAPOLEONIC FIGURES

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'The Road to Waterloo'

JULIAN HUMPHRYS

On 7 December the National Army Museum's new permanent exhibition devoted to the British Army during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars opens in its entirety. Entitled 'The Road to Waterloo: The British Army and the Struggle against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France 1793-1815', the exhibition will bring together items from one of the world's finest collections of uniforms; a large number of personal relics; and Siborne's restored model of the field of Waterloo, measuring over 400 square feet and containing over 70,000 model figures, which was completed after years of research in 1838 but which has not been displayed for nearly 30 years. The exhibition also features ten specially commissioned life-size reconstructions of British soldiers of the period, made by Gerry Embleton's 'Time Machine' (see '*MI*' No.23).

The subjects have been chosen to illustrate the human side of the soldier's life, including aspects not usually illustrated in paintings, prints, and collections. Costume, although as accurate as possible, represents what was actually worn on campaign rather than newly-issued regulation dress. To emphasise the individual humanity of the soldiers some figures will be given the names of known historical characters, matched as closely as research allows to the appearance of the reconstruction. Before the figures were delivered Gerry and I took four of them out into the countryside around 'Time Machine's' workshops at Onnens in Switzerland, to pose the photographs shown here. Some of these do justice to the startlingly lifelike effect of the figures.

The figures themselves were made by Gerry, Guillaume Feval and Christine Payot. During the research phase of the project Gerry and his staff combed every known source for reference of uniforms and other details of appearance — Lawson, Goddard & Booth, Hamilton Smith, Carman, the Fostens, the Reynolds MSS and Dighton's paintings, backfiles of the JSAHR for decades, dress regulations, inspection returns, diaries, letters and memoirs. Many of the limited number of surviving items were studied closely, both in the NAM reserve collection and elsewhere.

The costumes were finally made by Gerry, Ghislaine Montondon, and Keith Bartlett's 68th Durham Light Infantry group. Items such as buttons and belt and cartridge box plates were recast or carefully copied from originals by William Hutt of Debenham, Suffolk; lace and sashes were woven by the Wyedean Weaving Co. of Haworth, Yorkshire; and the NAM supplied original weapons. The groundwork for the displays was fashioned by Victor Shreeve, from contemporary accounts and with the advice of Dr. Peter Sabine, former chief geologist at the British Geological Survey, London.

The figures illustrated are as follows, in order of the key numbers on the colour pages; reproduction is by courtesy of the National Army Museum:

(Fig.1)
Rifleman, 95th Regiment; Spain, 1809. See also our front cover.
The rifleman takes aim from behind a tree overlooking a track. His Baker rifle, with which a marksman can put 24 consecutive shots into a man-sized target at 200 yards, gives him a decisive advantage over French skirmishers armed with smoothbore muskets.

There are many eyewitness accounts of the delapidation of the Peninsula Field Army's uniforms on campaign; though his dark green jacket and trousers are worn and patched, the colours of green uniform and black facings weathered until almost indistinguishable, and the black leather equipment scarred and incomplete, he is far from an

Above:
The Hanoverian officer of King's German Legion heavy cavalry, photographed as if off-duty outside a Spanish bodega. *(Time Machine AG)*

Left:
Rifleman of the 95th; while this photograph was being set up an unwary civilian hiker got the shock of his life. (Time Machine AG)

extreme example. Officers and men alike made frequent use of brown local cloth for replacement garments; all ranks sometimes found themselves virtually barefoot; and Lt. George Simmons of the 1/95th described the battalion in 1812 as 'a moving rag-fair'.

The exact shape of the 1801 felt 'stovepipe' shako is not constant in contemporary illustrations and surviving examples; some are tapered, as here, some straight-sided, and all became distorted with use. One example studied measured 7in. high at the front, 6in. at the back, 7¼in. across the top, with a 2¼in. deep peak. This cap has the regiment's white metal buglehorn badge, and the green cockade (in place of white, according to an 1800 inspection return) awarded to marksmen who put four out of six shots into the target. The green tuft and festooned cords have long since been lost to wear and tear; the chin-tapes are tied over the crown, and a rag is worn around the face and neck. (Photos: Time Machine AG)

(Figs. 2 & 3)
Officer, 2nd (Heavy) Dragoons, King's German Legion; Spain, 1812.
Typical of the campaign appearance of junior officers of horse and foot alike. Many accounts describe the ruin of officers' splendid 'regimentals' after a few weeks' hard lying, and the practical, if motley expedients adopted. Locally made-up clothing was common, like the rough beige drab greatcoat worn over his gold-laced, black-faced scarlet jacket by this Hanoverian officer. Civilian items were often worn; corpses and captured baggage were enthusiastically looted (though normally by an officer's soldier-servant); and there is even a record of British officers in the Pyrenees *buying* trousers from their French opponents!

While rough and practical, this officer's outfit is far from disreputable: the regulation bicorn is covered with oilskin against the rain, and the ubiquitous leather-reinforced overalls are worn over, or in place of, the white breeches and high boots. Officers on campaign supplied themselves with such necessaries as the tinned canteen, here covered with old coat-cloth; and a tarred haversack like those of their soldiers, here bearing a painted badge taken from one of a number of differing German sources. The crimson sash was often the only mark of officer's status visible at any distance.

Umbrellas were quite widely carried for protection against both sun and rain; indeed, the tendency of some Foot Guards officers to carry them in battle irritated Wellington into one of his most famous rebukes: 'Lord Wellington does not approve of the use of umbrellas during the enemy's firing, and will not allow the "gentlemen's sons" to make themselves ridiculous in the eyes of the army.'

Apart from the fact that it was unavoidable, this latitude in dress was tolerated without a second thought — within normal limits of dignity — among Regency gentlemen. When in the field it would not be considered any business of a military superior to question what his social equals chose to wear for the working day. (Photos: Time Machine AG, Julian Humphrys)

(Fig.4)
Recruiting Sergeant, 68th Regiment; England, 1808.
Since there was no 'press' for the army, shortage of manpower was a major factor in British military thinking throughout the period. The life of a Line infantryman was unenticing to most, apart from the desperately hungry, the fugitive, or the unwary drunk — a farm labourer could usually earn twice the redcoat's shilling a day. The Line also had to compete with the more attractive conditions of the Militia, which served only in the British Isles. So recruiting parties — usually consisting of an officer, two sergeants, a drummer, and from two to five men, picked for their stalwart appearance, neatly uniformed, and bedecked with ribbons and 'favours' – were a common sight in the towns and villages of Britain. To the tuck of drum and squeal of fife they paid for oceans of free beer, clinked purses, and promised riches, glory and glamour to the staring yokels.

The 68th (Durham) Regiment returned from the West Indies very understrength in 1806; in 1808 it was converted to Light Infantry status, and later fought at Walcheren and in the Peninsula. This handsome, smartly uniformed NCO sings the praises of his regiment to anyone who will listen, ever mindful of the 15s.6d. the rankers of the recruiting party will share for each enlistment.

As a sergeant he wears a jacket of brighter scarlet cloth than the duller red worn by common soldiers, and his lace is all white; but he wears a bunch of regimental-pattern lace like ribbons on his shako — a detail shown in Walker's *Costume of Yorkshire*, 1814, and other prints. As Light Infantry the 68th wore tufted shoulder 'wings' throughout, rather than only in the battalion's two 'flank' companies. Regulation white breeches and black knee-length gaiters complete this home service uniform, set off by a sergeant's sash of crimson worsted with a centre-stripe in the 68th's green facing colour. For this special duty he swaggers around with his jacket partly unbuttoned over a fine frilled shirt, carrying white gloves and a silver-topped cane.

Once again, the vexed question of the 'stovepipe' or Light Infantry shako led to much discussion. The basic question has always been, was the cap worn by Light Infantry different from the 1801 felt cap worn until c.1812 by other regiments? Gleig, who served in Spain with the 85th, described the Light Infantry shako as 'distinct from the stovepipe infantry cap, being slightly lower and smaller at the top' — which pre-

The field equipment worn by the unfortunate soldier of the 13th Foot in the West Indies. (Time Machine AG)

sumably means tapered, as in this photograph. However, at a late stage of the work it was decided to replace this reconstruction with a straight-sided example based on surviving originals, to reflect the variety seen in contemporary illustrations and among surviving caps. (Photo: Time Machine AG)

(Fig. 5)
Private, 13th Regiment; San Domingo, Caribbean, 1795.
This poor devil is feeling the first symptoms of 'yellow jack', and unless he is extraordinarily lucky he will very shortly become a melancholy statistic. Between 1793 and 1815 Britain lost about 70,000 Europeans dead in the West Indies, of whom less than a tenth fell in battle. Yellow fever, malaria, and rum killed Europeans like flies; a posting to the West Indies was thought tantamount to a death sentence, leading to mutinies, outright lying to embarking troops, and the collapse of morale. One Lt. Howard wrote of Haiti in 1796: 'Some regiments, seeing the Mortality around them, gave themselves totally up for lost, and instead of attempting to stop the progress of the Disease did everything in their power to promote it in order to be the sooner out of their misery.' (It was not only in the pestilential Caribbean that disease carried soldiers off much faster than enemy shot: in 1811, the year of 'bloody Albuhera', the British army lost some 23,000 men in all — of whom only about 3,000 fell in battle.)

The 13th (1st Somersetshire) Regiment of Foot left Cork for Barbados in 1790. By August 1795 on San Domingo they had some 60 men left fit for duty — surviving officers and NCOs were returned to England and the men dispersed to other units.

Some attempt was at least made to adapt the uniform to extremes of climate. Warrants and inspection returns describe this outfit: a 'round hat' with a narrow lace band, and the usual tuft and cockade — some of these hats were made in white fabric; a plain, single-breasted red jacket with regimental yellow facings at cuff, collar and shoulder strap; and light, close-fitting, single-piece 'mosquito trousers'. He still has to carry the standard field equipment, however: the crossbelts for cartridge box and bayonet, a haversack for rations, a heavy wooden water canteen, and a canvas knapsack of the folding 'envelope' type. (Photo: Time Machine AG)

(Fig.6)
Private, Light Company, 3rd Foot Guards; Waterloo, 1815.
This figure was photographed while it was still being worked on in *Time Machine's* studios. Late research satisfied the team that the unit had in fact worn white trousers in June 1815, so the standard grey type were later changed. Points to note include the 1812 'Belgic' shako in its oilskin foul-weather cover. It is reconstructed from originals, but their exact measurements vary; an average is a height of 6½in. at the back, 5¾in. at the sides, 6in. at the front, 8½in. to the top of the false front, with a 2¾in. deep peak.

The figure is named after Pte. Matthew Clay, about whom we know a good deal. A later portrait survives (in the Guards Museum), and we know that he had blue/grey eyes, a high complexion, and fair brown hair. We also know in some detail how he spent 18 June 1815: that he fought in the hedges and yards of Hougoumont after a soaking night in a clover field, and after falling into a flooded ditch up to his neck. We even know that his musket kept misfiring due to the rain-soaked wood of the stock jamming the spring.

The figure will depict Clay at a late stage in the battle, realistically covered with the filth of bad-weather campaigning and black-powder fighting. (Photo: Time Machine AG)

* * *

Other figures, which we hope to illustrate in future issues of '*MI*', will include:
Private, De Roll's (Swiss) Regiment, 1801. Clad in the white drill jacket, he is marching on the spot being instructed in the flat-footed 'goose-step'.

Above:
The recruiting sergeant of the 68th, Durham Light Infantry, appealing to the patriotism, thirst, and gullibility of his audience. (Time Machine AG)

Left:
The Time Machine process, involving casting faces and hands from life, creates an extraordinarily lifelike impression. (Julian Humphrys)

Three members of a soldier's family on campaign in the Peninsula, to illustrate the camp followers: an Irish casualty's wife carries him piggyback at the tail of the marching column, while their child carries his kit.
A Canadian Militiaman in winter clothing during the War of 1812.
Sgt. Ewart of the 2nd (Royal North British) Dragoons at Waterloo.
And finally, *a crippled ex-soldier of the 27th (Inniskilling) Regiment*, begging for his bread. MI

The National Army Museum is in Royal Hospital Road, Chelsea, London SW3; the nearest Underground station is Sloane Square. The museum is open, admission free, from 10 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. Monday-Saturday, and 2 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. on Sunday.

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