

## Hougoumont revisited...

Hello – my name is David Bilcliffe. Following the kind invitation of the Regimental Recruiting Warrant Officer, WO II (Andy) Johnson, I hope you will enjoy this article and that it might inspire those with an interest in living “Coldstream” history to step forward and join us.

As a regular visitor to ShinyCapstar.com it was a delight to read Andy Johnson’s editorial on the Regimental Colour and, in particular, his thoughts on Waterloo...

In response, we decided to send Andy a copy of the photograph taken of a 2nd Bn Coldstream Guards (1815) NCO outside the Chapel at Hougoumont taken on 18th June 2005 during the Service of Remembrance. This service was undertaken by military history enthusiasts, including many ex-servicemen, arranged by the European Napoleonic Association.

On the 28th November 2005 you may have seen the History Channel’s Battlefield Detectives – Waterloo. For the first time ever, historians re-traced the Battlefield Commanders steps in a virtual reality replica of the Battle of Waterloo, thanks to revolutionary 3D field laser-scanning technology.

This was “bought to life” when permission was granted for the Coldstream Guards (1815) Living History team to camp within Hougoumont and fire our flintlocks muskets through the gun loops carved into the walled gardens at Hougoumont by Coldstream Guards 190 years earlier. Quiet possibly the first time they had been fired through since 1815... Now that really did make the hairs stand up on the back of my neck!

Footsteps on historic battlegrounds is one way of finding out about your heritage, but some would say that to really understand what it must have been like you have to be there. But, you need to wear the linen and wool clothing, fit a leather stock, carry the trotter pack, load, ram rod and fire a period firelock charged with black powder!

Doing just that at Hougoumont, and marching on the Battlefields of Waterloo, is just one of the many ways that living history enables a magic combination; not only is it fun but on occasions it will dump you firmly in the history that made the Regiment what it is today – Second to None”.

So how did this start? Over the past ten years significant public interest has grown in re-enactment, but some “re-enactments” have been amateur, poorly organised and paid little attention to detail or historical evidence. As the oldest Regiment in continuous existence in the British Army, it seemed only fitting that such an ‘Elite’ Regiment should be represented as Living History, distinct from re-enactment.

What makes this group different? Five years ago an ex-army NCO, John Litchfield, with more than twenty-five years in “re-enactment” felt that he had had enough of the amateur flailing of others. Having studied the history of the Coldstream, John decided to establish a Living History interest group “Col George Monk’s Regiment of Foote” aimed at achieving the highest standards for research, exhibition and display. His original purpose was to portray the regiment at various important periods of its history, but our current focus is on the period leading up to and including Waterloo – very appropriate, given the many 200th anniversaries soon to come.

The group now numbers over 25, a significant number of whom are serving and ex-service men and women. In the past three years we have achieved a high degree of competence in the detail of 1807 drill and equipment; bringing the whole team together with one aim - to be “second to none” when it comes to Living History exhibitions and musketry displays.

Hard work and attention to detail is starting to pay dividends. We are now recognised by specialists within English Heritage and The National Trust as leaders in Living History presentation and as a valuable resource for Schools, Colleges and Universities. A major event this year (2006) will be a week long “The Art of Living History” at Sutton Valence School in Kent engaging over 250 students from the School, which in itself has a history going back to 1576.

Whilst professional in our approach, this is still a part-time hobby activity where we all (officers, soldiers, musicians and sutlers), work hard to achieve an accurate representation of 6 Company, 2nd Bn Coldstream Guards on campaign in Belgium circa June 17th 1815. As individuals from various military and civilian backgrounds, we take this activity seriously and, we also combine this with a lot of fun!

Adding to the “military members” who undertake display operations, we also have an excellent team of Sutlers (wives and girlfriends) - our ladies also embrace the period in detail; cooking over log fires, hand washing and repairing uniform in their own 1800s costume. Our sutlers ensure that a high quality of food, refreshments, care and repair is available. This invaluable logistical support is non-profit making, costs being spread equally amongst all those attending an event.

Uniforms and equipment are centrally sourced, to ensure standards and quality are maintained – the cost to each member is £15 per month paid by standing order to Col George Monk’s Regiment of Foote Bank Account. (For serving personnel and students the monthly subscription is reduced to £12.) In return for this monthly subscription all military members are provided with all that they need in the way of clothing, weapons and equipment. Subscriptions also cover the cost of upgrading clothing, weapons and equipment as we believe in constantly improving what we do. Rather than buy off the peg, we engage selected specialists to produce much of the clothing and equipment as we have found that this is the most affordable way of obtaining the high standard that we are aiming for.

In the evenings after the public has retired and the camp is in good order, we get down to some serious fun, enjoying

period sports such as cricket or occasionally pugilism, followed by a good few beers around the log fire. Discussion ranges through the complete spectrum of camel jokes and service humour that only living history teams can bring together!

The photographs in this section above and below were mostly taken at the Duke of Wellington's Country Park during a training week-end / public display held over the April / May 2006 Bank Holiday week-end.

Some may recognise ex-Guardsman Peter Knox, who took on challengers half his age under the tutelage of Dr Milo Thurston in the skilful art of Pugilism. This event was much appreciated by all who witnessed and Knox was correctly reported to have performed "an artistic display with great bottom" . Peter unfortunately lost, but then that happens to us all sometimes...

The 2nd Bn Coldstream Guards (1815) Living History Group has also achieved recognition in both Film and TV. In particular the BBC know our quality and expertise, we have appeared in TV documentaries such as "Fire Power" and "Nelson's Island. " Higher profile activities included adding drill and costume quality to Big Screen Films such as, "Vanity Fair" (2005), "Pride & Prejudice" (2006) and soon to be released, "Amazing Grace" (2007).

Family footsteps – the next generation of sons and daughters, from 12 years of age onwards, can join in with their parents; train as fire wood or cooks' monkeys and drummers/musicians. Then at 16, if their foot drill is good enough, take up their father's musket and join the rank and file.

It is against this back-ground and with a degree of trepidation that my colleague, Dr Milo Thurston (alias Captain Thurston) and I (alias Corporal Bilcliffe), would be delighted to hear from any serving or ex-Coldstream Guards. We believe that in understanding History it helps us all to understand ourselves and provide the current generation with access to "hands-on" history.

Come and join us for a week-end and find out for yourself. Dr. Thurston and I look forward to the opportunity of meeting you either at a public display or through the good offices of WO II (Andy) Johnson. Alternatively, please contact Dr Thurston ([milo.thurston@linacre.oxford.ac.uk](mailto:milo.thurston@linacre.oxford.ac.uk)) or the undersigned by telephone on 077 99 88 39 78.

Thank you.

David G Bilcliffe  
Technical Quartermaster  
2nd Bn Coldstream Guards (1815) – Living History Group  
The Old Granary Office  
Pinnock Farm House  
Pluckley  
Ashford  
Kent TN27 0SS

Tel: 0779 988 3978  
Fax: 01233 840 875  
Email: [DBilcliffe@glenealy-international.com](mailto:DBilcliffe@glenealy-international.com)