

The Napoleon Series

Mercer's Troop at Waterloo

By Gareth Glover

MANY will have read the memoirs of General Mercer who commanded 'G' Troop, Royal Horse Artillery throughout the Waterloo campaign. His personal description of Waterloo is riveting and his memoirs are rightly held to be in the top flight of military memoirs ever written. It is an excellent book and I would recommend it to anyone as a thoroughly good read. However; whilst not detracting from Mercer's story, on reading his work I was struck by a number of discrepancies which I decided to investigate at the Public Records Office (PRO) in Kew. Additionally, Mr Dyer, the Librarian and Curator at The Royal Mint, Llantrisant, South Wales, was exceedingly kind in allowing me to delve into the original Waterloo Medal Roll. The Roll is the only document of this period not forwarded by the Mint to the PRO. Once I had researched this great tome, it became obvious that the Waterloo Medal lists at the PRO were incomplete. The questions raised by my research were as follows:

Did Alexander Mercer receive a Waterloo Medal?

The obvious answer to this question is "Yes," I presume; however, even the curators at Woolwich have so far been unable to confirm it. The question arose in my mind, because on the only two pages remaining of 'G' Troop's return of the names of those eligible for the Waterloo Medal on the microfilm at the PRO, Mercer's name heads the list but is clearly scored out. Following a little further research, I concluded that his name was removed from the 'G' Troop list because he was also included on 'D' Troop's list. This would have occurred because Alexander Mercer was second in command of 'G' Troop at Waterloo, being subordinate to Lt. Colonel Alexander Dickson, whose own peninsula diary is well known. With Dickson being ordered to command the army's Battering Train of heavy artillery, which was ready to bombard the French border fortresses when the planned advance into France, Mercer became de facto commander of 'G' Troop throughout the Waterloo campaign. Mercer succeeded to the command of 'D' Troop immediately after Waterloo after Captain Beane, it's former commander, had been killed in the battle. However, Mercer does not appear on the PRO's return for 'D' Troop either.

I therefore contacted the Royal Mint, which retains it's own list of those issued a Waterloo Medal, and was graciously allowed to view the book by Mr Dyer, Curator of the Royal Mint Museum. Pouring over the great tome, some eight inches deep, with the hand-written compilation of all those issued a Waterloo Medal was a moving experience, with many names of famous memorialists, leaping from the pages. However I scoured the book, searching every artillery unit, and even the great mass of addendum's at the rear, of medals issued later to families, etc. up to 1840, but Mercer clearly wasn't there. I'm sure he must have received a medal but can anyone confirm it? and why is his name absent from the rolls?

Casualties at the battle: How many?

Mercer quotes 140 horses and two thirds of his men hors de combat at the end of the battle—a frightening figure—but was this correct? The Waterloo Medal Roll was not much use on this subject as those that died in the battle were not allowed a medal, not even posthumously to their bereaved

families!

I therefore studied the Muster Roll for ‘G’ Troop before and after the battle to ascertain those that were sick before operations started, assuming then that all other sick shown on the Muster Roll (started before Waterloo but completed straight after the battle) were wounded. The lists do not specify sick or wounded separately, they are all marked sick. Only one man—Gunner Rees Harris—is reported as sick prior to Waterloo and sick after; therefore, he was probably left behind when operations began in earnest, did not receive a Waterloo Medal, and is reported as having deserted on 22 October 1815.

The June Muster Roll was started at Strytem, where the troop had been stationed some weeks prior to the commencement of hostilities but was not completed until after Waterloo. It lists the following staff in the troop (I have added their enlistment date where known) and those who were sick; i.e., sick, wounded, and, in some instances, killed:

Officers (Does not include Mercer, who had already moved to “D” troop.)

Second Captain Robert Newland
Lieutenant John Hincks
Lieutenant John Breton
Lieutenant Henry Leathes, supernumary
Assistant Surgeon Richard Hichens

NCO’s, etc.

Staff Sergeants John Hall (1793) and Henry Parson (1794)
Sergeants David Bust (1805), Robert Fuller (1790), John Nisbitt (1801)
Corporals William Johnston (1794), James Martin (1800) and William Green (1800)
Bombardiers Samuel Omey (1793), John Emmitt (1803), Thomas Anderson (1804), James Lomax (1807) and Thomas Masterson (1803)
Farrier Job Price (1803)
Saddle smiths Edward Brown, James Howden, John Petit (1809)
Collar Makers Robert Redhouse, Robert Alexander
Wheeler William Rockliff
Trumpeter Henry Bowen

Gunners

Thomas Preston, Joseph Millward (Mercer’s servant), John Butterworth (Dead), Joseph Dewsnip, John Death, Joseph Enser, Adam Pendleson, William Tallis, Richard Griffiths, Richard Halton, Thomas Elice, John Rinde (Sick), Linet Burton, James Putten, Samuel Springley, Peter Simpson, William Wallis, Robert Parry, Joseph Chambers, William Palfrey, George Ralston, Nathaniel Keeble, Joseph Burkinshaw, Benjamin Felton, John Taylor, Robert Mullett, James Philcox, William Childs, Samuel Weaver, William Cowley, George Almey, James Marshall (sick), George Ram, James Illingworth, Alexander Hunter, John Riley, Joseph Whittle, John Frail, Thomas Martin, Henry Pritchard, James Armstrong, William Blackie, Thomas Fife, John Ewan, Joseph Matthews, Joseph Hughes, John Berry, Christopher Carlton, William Johnston, John Hill, James Hadfield Snr, George Bannister (Sick), James Hadfield Jr, James Lambert, Thomas Marsden, William Smith (sick), George Barlow, Thomas Hutchinson, John Hay (sick), James Cameny, Phillip Hunt (sick)(Mercer describes his arm being shattered) , James Ward, Alexander

Hay, James Hutchinson (sick), Francis Barhave, John Farrer, Thomas Martin, William Farrer, Thomas King (sick), James Burch, John Woods, John Bloys (sick), Rees Harris (sick), Edward Chase, William Morton, Robert Smith, William Corbitt (sick), Thomas Nixon, John Dyson Richard Bell and David Williams.

Drivers

Edward Hadleigh, Joseph Slainer, Thomas Ball (sick), Samuel Lord, George Almond, Robert Dixon (sick), William Dismore, William Dale, William Lodge, Francis Wilkin, William Brycott, James Lowring, Henry G Wallocks, George Arlunn (sick), William Mainwaring (dead), James Mitchell, Samuel Wright, William Fox, Barnard Mc Manners, William Frail, George Leversage, Mungo Ewan, Thomas Miller, Richard Clifford, Adam Henderson, William Crabtree, Silvester Clail, George Townbey (sick), William Brogden, William Glassford, Joseph Packer, Thomas Andrews, James Allcock, Aguilly Pitman, James Boardman (sick), Francis Grantham, Thomas Shelder, John Darbyshire, James Fuller, Thomas Clark (sick), William Rose, William Lightfoot, John Pickiss, Walker Hill (sick), William Clipsom, John Horsefield, Phillip Bentley, John Bentley, John Clipsom, Thomas Dibbin (dead), Robert Hopkins, Joseph March, John Beardsley, Oliver Grass, John Woods (sick), William Baker.

This is the list of those who had medals ordered and struck for them (and their injuries after Waterloo), compiled between the PRO and Mint records. Three men are shown as dead above, however, the muster actually shows them as sick and they were included for medals, which they nor their families ever received. Gunner John Butterworth is described by Mercer as having lost both arms falling in front of a cannon as it fired, he was eventually found having crawled away, he had bled to death. William Mainwaring was recorded as missing until September when presumed dead. Driver Thomas Dibbin died of his wounds on 29th November 1815.

All those recorded as sick are presumed to be seriously injured as they do not appear as sick before Waterloo. Many slight wounds are not shown as they were not recorded if the man was still capable of proceeding with the troop, the total injured would therefore be higher. As an example, Lieutenants Leathes and Hincks were wounded but not recorded as such as they proceeded into France with the troop.

The muster roll also records a few other men who do not appear on the Waterloo Roll for obvious reasons. Killed- Drivers James Crammond—Mercer describes his horrible remains vividly —, David Bradbury and John Miller.

In total, the Muster Roll following Waterloo indicates 11 Gunners sick and 1 dead out of 81 total gunners who started the campaign; a 15% casualty rate. Also 9 wounded Drivers and 4 dead out of 80 who started the campaign; a 16% casualty rate. The muster list clearly records a loss of 69 horses out of a total of 216 horses in the troop, a casualty rate of 32%, which is high but not as bad as the 140 horses that Mercer claimed in his rough estimate.

ALL those that Mercer mentions in his book regarding death and injuries inflicted are recorded as sick or dead on the muster lists, thereby confirming his story. However, despite a number of minor wounds which were unrecorded, one is forced to conclude Mercer's estimated casualty rates of two third is greatly exaggerated. I can only conclude that writing his memoirs years later led Mercer to over emphasise the hardships and casualty rates of the troop, something we all do with age!

Where were the others?

A long list of men appears on the muster list for the troop but do not appear on the Waterloo Medal list. Why? The names are:

Bombardier James Downie (1803)

Drivers John Richardson, Thomas Purby, Samuel Farquar, Andrew Small, John Critchley, John McCall, John Buckley, Thomas Richardson, George Sykes, Abraham Greenhalgh, James Ricketts, James Badcock, Benjamin Mason, Timothy Wilks, William Potter, Jacob Jackson, Robert Booth, John Beswick, Walter Danton, Benjamin Edwards (sick), William Owlesworth.

This is a real mystery. If they were with the troop, then why no medal. There is one possible reason. Mercer records that to speed the troop away, he left his billet before his Commissary, Mr Coates, had brought the carts together to carry their provisions, largely because Mercer had overruled Coates and allowed the farmers to retain their carts until they were needed by the troop. Needless to say, when required, they were difficult to find and the troop starved throughout the next three days. The carts required drivers and it is quite possible that this group were left behind with Coates to help him.

Coates and the provisions did not appear with the troop again until the early hours of 19 June and were gladly received by the troop. As they were absent from the battle they would not be eligible for a medal.

Driver Edwards is specifically shown as being sick. I therefore presume he was merely sick and not wounded, as he was not listed for a medal.

James Alcock (not listed above) is not listed as sick in the June/July musters but is recorded as having died in France on 22 August 1815, presumably from disease as he also was not allowed a medal.

Why not Robert Newland?

Second Captain Robert Newland was second in command of 'G' Troop at Waterloo. Mercer describes Newland joining vice Pakenham later, i.e. close to Waterloo. This cannot be possible. The troop, while in England in March 1815, when it was Sir Augustus Fraser's troop, clearly shows Mercer and Newland as captains in the troop at Colchester. Mercer is not over-generous in naming his fellow officers and is particularly silent regarding Robert Newland, the only time he is named is as joining above, the others all get at least a dozen mentions. Why?

One has to conclude, after reading Mercer's memoirs, that Mercer and Newland were not on the best of terms. (Interestingly General Sir James Marshall-Cornwall concludes that Mercer did not get on with another officer in the troop for a while, Lieutenant William Ingilby, who left a memoir. *Journal of the Royal Artillery* Vol. 109.) *

* See *The Waterloo Diary of Lieutenant William Bates Ingilby, RHA* on the Napoleonic Literature Website.—*Editor, Napoleonic Literature*

Perhaps it was professional jealousy. Mercer was a Second Captain from 1806, Newland only from 1814, but Mercer had little foreign service (River Plate only), while Newland had served throughout much of Spain (GSM with bars for Salamanca, Vitoria, Orthes and Tarbes). Surely his superior knowledge of campaigning must have ruffled Mercer's feathers, especially as Mercer candidly admits numerous mistakes because of a lack of campaign experience, one can see Newland's disapproving looks through the pages!

What about the Courts-Martials?

Second Captain Dyneley took over 'G' Troop from Mercer immediately after Waterloo, but what happened in France? The musters record that Bombardier Emmitt was courts-martialled on 1 August 1815, and reduced to Gunner, and Bombardier Thomas Anderson was courts-martialled on 25 August and reduced to Gunner. Both men were very experienced, having served in the artillery some 12 years each. What did they do in France that was serious enough to result in courts-martials? I have yet to find out. Dyneley's letters unfortunately give no mention of this at all.

What happened to them afterwards?

Second Captain Alexander Mercer became Colonel Commandant Royal Artillery, and died at Exeter in 1868.

Second Captain Robert Newland went on half pay in 1820, sold his commission in 1831, and died in 1861.

Lieutenant Henry Leathes resigned his commission in 1819, and died in Lowestoft in 1864.

Lieutenant John Hincks became a Captain, retired on half pay in 1826, and died in 1842.

Lieutenant John Bretton retired on half pay in 1820, and died at Lyndhurst in 1852.

Assistant Surgeon Richard Hichens, went on half pay in 1816, became a surgeon at St. Ives in Cornwall, and died in 1866.

Staff Sergeant John Hall attained the rank of sergeant Major, was discharged in 1821 with a 'Good' conduct rating and pension awarded, and became barrack Master at Woolwich Arsenal.

Staff Sergeant Henry Parson was discharged in 1824 with a 'Good' conduct rating and awarded a pension of 51/4 d per day.

Bombardier Thomas Masterson became a Staff Sergeant and retired at age 46 in 1836, due to severe inflammation of the legs, with an 'Exemplary' conduct rating.

Farrier Job Price was discharged in 1817 on a pension of 1s per day, and was living in Chester in 1828. He was still living in 1854.

Saddle Smith John Pettit was discharged in 1818 on a pension of 9d per day.

Gunner Phillip Hunt (wounded), survived the amputation of an arm, was discharged in 1815, and was still living in Colchester in 1854.

Gunner John Death a Chelse was a pensioner from 1830, and was still living in 1854.

Gunner James Putten claimed a Chelse pension in 1825, and died in Lanark in 1840.

Gunner Samuel Springley claimed Chelsea pension from 1827, and was still living in Gloucester in 1854.

This is the sum of my research into the men of 'G' Troop to date. If anyone can add to this information, I would gladly accept your data so that I can be added to this article. My email is: geegee.glover1@ntlworld.com

May I finally say that the above observations are simply a personal view based on intense research of the troop, I would gladly receive criticism, both pro and con, on my findings.

Sources:

Dalton, Charles, *The Waterloo Roll Call*.

Dyneley, Lt. Gen. and Whinyates, Col, *Letters written on active service 1806-15*.

Marshall-Cornwall, Gen Sir James, *Waterloo Diary of Lt Ingilby RA*.

Mercer, Gen Cavalie, *Journal of the Waterloo Campaign*.

Muster lists for 'G' troop 1815 and WO100, at the Public Records Office, Kew, Waterloo Medal Roll, Royal Mint.

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