

## Recruiting from the Militia

by Gareth Glover

A complimentary article to John Ellis' article: *Recruitment and Promotion in the Napoleonic British Army: A Study of the 28th (North Gloucestershire) Regiment of Foot, an English Regiment at Waterloo*

I read the article with a great deal of interest as a mass of extensive research had been carried out for John's dissertation. I am fortunate in that I have copies of two major studies upon the subject of recruiting for the British army at this time which John Ellis may not have available to him. These are *The County Lieutenancies and the Army* by Fortescue and both Richard Glover's *Peninsular Preparations* and *Britain at Bay*. These all provide original references for their information and could have been verified. From my readings of these two sources, the importance of Militia men to the army is patently obvious and the following information is designed to complement John's work.

In 1795 the Duke of York divided England and Wales into 15 recruiting districts, Scotland into four, and Ireland into 5. Each district was provided with an infantry Field officer, an Adjutant, a Sergeant Major and a few Depot Sergeants. In 1802 a District Surgeon was added to attest the recruits' fitness. These formed a base for the regimental recruiting parties as each regiment was still responsible for recruiting its own men. The regimental recruiting parties comprised an officer, sergeant, drummer and a few reliable men. In the latter six months of 1803, 360 recruiting parties were scouring the British Isles, approximately 2.5 parties per regiment (horse and foot). By 1806/7 there were 1,113 recruiting parties or approximately 8 per regiment! In 1803 some 6,000 men were recruited by these parties; this had risen to approximately 12,000 per year in 1806, and maintained this level to the end of the war.

As this recruitment level was totally insufficient to supply the army's needs (in 1807/8 the army was 35,000 short!), additional means were devised. The Militia, which was raised by ballot of all eligible men, should have shown a cross section of all walks of life, but as recruits were allowed to find substitutes (there was a thriving "insurance society" market where those insured would be provided with the funds to "persuade" another to join for them, this could be as much as £20!), the dregs of society filled the ranks. However, militia service precluded men from being taken up for the army, thus cutting off a large number of potential recruits to the army. Occasionally, the Government would allow militiamen to volunteer for the army and receive the "bounty." Pitt allowed this in 1805, and got 9,000 to join the army, and in 1806, the Irish militia was approached and 4,000 men obtained. In these early days the officers of militia units were unhappy with losing their men, but seem to have eventually accepted the inevitable, as Castlereagh allowed them to transfer again in 1808, and received 27,505 men! The following year another 28,492 transferred, and, in 1811, Palmerston tried again—gaining 11,453 men. In 1809, militiamen were allowed to transfer at any time and, in 1811, it was set that up to 10,000 could transfer each year.

In addition to this, the Army of Reserve act was laid down with the aim of recruiting some 50,000 men—again raised by ballot in each area. This led to even more "insurance society" activity for

substitutes. It eventually raised some 30,000 recruits and 7,000 underage recruits who were placed in garrison battalions until of age before this act was abandoned, in late 1804. These men were to form the second battalions for many of the line regiments but were restricted to home service. However, 19,533 of these men were persuaded to sign up for general service and therefore became eligible for bounty payment and could be used to bolster the first battalions overseas.

Volunteer units were also pressured to encourage men to enlist for the reserve army to reduce the number of volunteer units, which varied greatly in quality. The Lord lieutenants varied in their efforts, but Devon was particularly successful, General Simcoe could here report, in 1803, the total disbandment of a battalion of volunteers and that he had “swept every man into the Army of Reserve” and that he had “two thousand men ready for service,” where they bolstered the second battalions and could be persuaded to transfer to general service.

From the above evidence it can be seen that the militia was a major source of recruitment to the army in total. It should be made clear that recruiting parties could not directly recruit from those in the militia prepared to transfer. However, when the militia was allowed to transfer by parliament, regiments could vie with each other, using bounty money and the fame of their units to induce the men choose their regiment. For example, the Rifles were very successful because of their fame and glamour. The 28th, a lesser known regiment may not have the same draw.

#### **Numbers recruited for the army 1806 - 1811:**

Direct recruitment . . . 72,000 (6,000 per annum)

From the Militia . . . . 71,450

As can be seen, recruitment was about 50/50. This does not account for recruiting from the volunteers which, without delving into individual units, are virtually impossible to gauge properly.

However, the 37,000 recruited by the Army of Reserve in total and from volunteer units, probably did not bolster the army by more than 50,000 in total, of which some 60% opted for general service. These were recruited in the period 1802-04, when direct recruiting was at the rate of 6,000 per year; therefore, home recruiting accounted for some 63% in these years. The figure of 60% for home forces recruits to the army seems pretty consistent after 1802.

The fact that the units tested do not show this level consistently may be explained by the militia men leaving. Their service was originally set for the length of the war and six months, allowing many to terminate their service during the period between the end of the peninsular war and the beginning of the hundred days. Numerous memoir writers indicate theirs and their colleagues period of service terminating at this time and missing Waterloo. This indicates that there is a danger in interpreting the results of this sound research into a regiment at Waterloo and making assumptions on the make-up of the army in the peninsular. To make a valid statement regarding general levels of recruitment throughout the period would require further research into the make-up of the 28th throughout the 1800 to 1814 period. A daunting task!