

A WATERLOO LETTER.

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THE following letter,¹ now published for the first time, was written shortly after the battle of Waterloo by Gunner John Edwards of A Troop, R.H.A. (A (The Chestnut Troop) Bty., R.H.A.). It was addressed to the writer's brother "Mr. Oliver Edwards, Blacksmith, Newtown, Montgomeryshire, North Wales", endorsed "From Gunner John Edwards, Royal Artillery" and postmarked "Foreign, Au 18 1815".

The letter was found among the papers of a family long resident in Caersws, a small town a few miles west of Newtown, Montgomeryshire. How it came into the possession of this family is not quite clear, though possibly the recipient could not himself read and took the letter to the local Squire to be informed of its contents.

There is some difficulty in identifying the writer of this letter as there were at least three Gunners of exactly the same name serving in the R.H.A. between 1808 and 1815 and two of them were in A Troop! It seems probable however that he was born in Flintshire in North Wales and enlisted at the age of twenty-three on 17/7/1795, being of "fair complexion, 5 feet 7¾ inches tall, with brown hair and brown eyes". A particular note was made against

¹ The owner of the letter is Mrs. H. Davies, through whose courtesy publication is now permitted.

his name that he could both read and write—unusual accomplishments for a miner in those days. He appears to have been transferred¹ in November 1803 to No. 2 Division of Capt. Churchill's Troop of the R.A. Drivers at Canterbury, but on 1st April 1808 he was transferred² as a Gunner to D Troop, R.H.A. (now V Field Battery, R.A.), commanded by Capt. G. Lefebure and then stationed at Canterbury. Early in 1810, D Troop, R.H.A., was sent to the Peninsula and on 1st June Gunner John Edwards was posted to A Troop, R.H.A., with which unit he remained until after the Waterloo campaign.

Thereafter Gunner John Edwards fought through the whole of the Peninsula campaigns with A Troop, being present at the Coa, Busaco, Pombal, Rehinha, Cazal Nova, Foz d'Arouce, Sabugal, Fuentes d'Oñoro, Sieges of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz, Salamanca, Vittoria, Pyrenees, Nivelles, Nive and Orthes. On the conclusion of the war in 1814, A Troop came home to Warley. It will be realized that Gunner John Edwards was by that time a thoroughly experienced soldier: during the whole of the fighting in the Peninsula he was absent from sickness on only one occasion—from July to December 1811.

The letter is printed below exactly as written, except for slight alterations in punctuation in a few places in order to make the meaning clear. In two cases the paper has been torn when the wax seals were broken and some words are therefore illegible. The missive was folded so as to form its own envelope and was secured by wax.

Saint Deinanens,³ France,
July 14th 1815.

My dear Brother,

I reseved your Kind Letter and I am Happy to Hear from you and with Plesur I take up my pen to informe you That I am in Good Helth at present and I hope you and your wife and family Are the same. After Wee marched from Birmingham to Warley wee Remained there But a short time, the rout⁴ Came for us. We marched to Woolwich and we were fitted out for pursuing searvice⁵ and messing. Happy I was we were reddy in 14 Dayes then wee embarked at Ramsgate and after a plesunt passage of 24 oures at sea wee landed at hostend⁶ in Flanderes.

Flanderes is a verrey fine cunterey and verrey fine Groves and Riveres and one of the finest Knells in the woorld. wee marched through Brussels and Gent and manney other fine townes.

It was at Brussels where Louis the 18th was. I seed him there 2 or 3 times. wee Remained threr 12 Dayes. the Rout came at 11 o'Clock on the Evning of the 15 June. wee marched all that night and it rained verrey hard all that night the action of the 16th begun before wee could get up. wee were soon a nuff to see the Kings Life Guards⁷ and 7th⁸ and 1st Garmany⁹ and

¹ It is possible that he was discharged from the R.A. after the Peace of Amiens in 1802 and re-enlisted in the R.A. Drivers. The records are incomplete, but show that he joined the R.A. Drivers 1/11/1803.

² He received a bounty of £1/10/0 on transfer.

³ Not identified.

⁴ Route—i.e. order to march.

⁵ Obscure.

⁶ Ostend.

⁷ Life Guards. This refers to the withdrawal from Quatre Bras to Waterloo.

⁸ 7 Hussars.

⁹ 1 Hussars, King's German Legion. ?

Scotch Greys charge the french and thay lost about 400 smuthered in a Bogg. The 16th and 17th it rained verrey hard and wee were at camp with our Horses in our hands and nothen in our aversackes. At 8 o'clock on the 18th of Jun the genneral action begun on our right flank. our troop was posted in the senter right and left of the main road. 3 guns one side and 8 on the other. wee been old hands at the tread they put us whare they thought there would be more danger. At about 9 o'clock the french brought 28 gunnes opposite our gunnes and then the game began. harmies and troops (illegible).

Every man that never seed a bullet would a thought that the world was at a end. about half past 10 o'clock the french Emperial Guardes dressed in steel armour back and brest plates,¹ they way about 32 pounds, charged up the maine road till thay came within 600 yardes they extended rite and left of the road. wee fired case shot at them and swep them of like a swathe of grass before a syth. The ground was cuvvered with men and horses in 5 minutes. wee limbered up but before wee could move one yard the french was all round us. Me and four more of our Gunnners left the gun and formed up with the 1st German Horse and charged the french cavallery, wee swept through them four times. with a good horse and a sharpe sord I caused 5 of them to fall to the ground. my horse reseved 4 cuts as I could not guard my horse and my self at one time. I have the onner of waren a blue and red ribbon² as a marke of that day. wee soon got our gun in action againe, only 4 men to man her and up to our knees in mud. Colonel Ross³ lost 5 horses shot under him. My gun was struck several times with the french shots. The prussians came up at 6 o'clock and then the charge was sounded from Right to Left. The french left behind them 2 hundred and ten guns and seven hundred (illegible ?waggon),⁴ and the ground covered with men and horses four or five miles. Louies the 18 marched over the ground the day after and I seed him pass through the town to Parris on th 7 of this month.

John Edwards.

My account may not be quite so great as you may have it in England—so my papper is dun and I must give over. Please to give my best respects to your wife and little John and Margaret.

I should be verrey happy if you will send directions to Catharine where to writte to me. I should be verrey happy of reseving a letter from her. I have sent to Mother and my unkel but I have lost Richards directions. my cuzen (illegible)? was to send word back when you reseve this hand that I may know you have rs it.

This town is 6 miles from Paris. everything is verrey cheep Brandy 1-6 a bottle and wine 0.0.10 pence a bottle.

so I remain your

loving Brother John Edwards til dath.

¹ Evidently Cuirassiers, not the Imperial Guard.

² This in not understood as the Waterloo medal was not authorized until 10 March 1816.

³ Capt. (*brevet Lieut-Col.*) Sir H. D. Ross. commanding A Troop R.H.A.

⁴ Lieut.-Col. Sir A. Frazer gives the total as 122 guns and 287 wagons and spare carriages. ("Letters of Col. Sir A. S. Frazer", page 550, London 1859.)