The Battle of Waterloo
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The Battle of Waterloo took place in 1815. It was the last battle of the Napoleonic wars. Napoleon Bonaparte, the defeated French emperor, had escaped from the island of Elba, where he had been exiled (sent away to) after an unsuccessful war with Russia. However, he was determined to re-conquer Europe.

Unfortunately for him, his European enemies outnumbered him greatly so he planned to attack them before they could join together.

Napoleon’s troops marched into Belgium, and the British, led by the Duke of Wellington, went to meet the French army. Even with the arrival of Dutch and German allies the British only had 68,000 men against France’s 72,000. The French had twice as many cannons too. The British managed to hold out against the French until the timely arrival of the 50,000-strong Prussian army.
Napoleon’s army tried to divide Wellington’s troops from their Prussian allies and Wellington’s army was forced to retreat south of the town of Waterloo. On 18 June 1815, Napoleon’s French army attacked. At first the French seemed to be winning, but Wellington held his ground and when the Prussian forces arrived to help, they defeated the French. Napoleon had lost the battle. He was sent into exile for a second time, this time to St Helena, a distant island in the South Atlantic.

25,000 French soldiers were killed or injured at the Battle compared to 17,000 of the allied side.

"Wellington at Waterloo" by Robert Alexander Hillingford, 1815 (c).

Image courtesy of the National Army Museum, London
The Napoleonic Wars were a series of wars in the late 18th and early 19th century. Some historians call this the “First World War” because it was fought in different parts of the world. They were between France (led by Napoleon Bonaparte) and other European countries.

In 1796, he was given command of the French army in a conflict with Italy. Three years later, he was ruling France!

Over the next ten years he led France in many wars that resulted in him controlling most of Europe.

However, his attempt to invade Britain ended in defeat when his navy lost to Admiral Horatio Nelson and the British navy at the Battle of Trafalgar. However, the Napoleonic Wars continued for another ten years after Trafalgar. The French army known as the Grand Army or “Grande Armée” was made up of hundreds of thousands of soldiers.
Also with the Industrial Revolution, weapons were able to be massed-produced for his artillery, infantry and cavalry. Napoleon defeated Prussia in 1806 and pushed to the Russian frontier.

Meanwhile Portugal continued to trade with Britain as they were long-term allies.

The French and their Spanish allies invaded Portugal in 1807 forcing the Portuguese royal family to flee to Brazil. Spain had some problems of their own so Napoleon decided to invade Spain and installed his brother Joseph on the throne. This would be a turning point for Napoleon as the Spanish would fight for years using guerrilla warfare. The British landed in Portugal where both nations teamed up with the Spanish rebels against the French so beginning the Peninsular War which would last for six years.
Arthur Wellesley, later known as the Duke of Wellington, was a famous British soldier and politician. He rose to fame in 1815, when he led the British army at the Battle of Waterloo and defeated Napoleon’s French army with help from Prussian allies.

He also gave his name to Wellington boots!

Arthur Wellesley was born to a wealthy family in 1769, in Dublin. He went to school at Eton College, and joined the army in 1787.

Wellington was a very strict army officer and didn’t have much respect for the poorer soldiers that he commanded. He was known to refer to his troops as “the scum of the Earth”! He did, however, care for the welfare of his men and in turn they showed him loyalty and admiration.

Wellington’s name was given to Wellington boots, after the special boots he wore at the Battle of Waterloo.
The Duke of Wellington

Wellington became a Member of Parliament (MP), but after a short time he served as commander of the British, Portuguese and Spanish forces in the Peninsular War (1808-1814). After many victories, Wellington's army managed to make the French troops withdraw from Spain and Portugal.

Napoleon abdicated in 1814 and Wellington came back to England and was made Duke of Wellington.

In 1815, the RWF fought under his leadership at Waterloo when the French were defeated.

In 1828 Wellington, became Prime Minister - a post he held for two years. At the time Wellington was given the nickname of 'Iron Duke' because of his tough and firm approach.

Wellington's horse in the Battle of Waterloo was called Copenhagen.

A sergeant of the RWF is part of the statue of the Duke of Wellington on Hyde Park Corner in London.
The Duke of Wellington died on 14 September 1852, aged 83, at Walmer Castle in Kent. He is buried in St Paul’s Cathedral next to Admiral Nelson.

Although Wellington didn’t like to travel on trains, his body was taken from Kent to London by rail for his state funeral. So many people wanted to attend his funeral that there was hardly any standing room. Queen Victoria declared him: “the GREATEST man this country ever produced.”
Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) was a French military commander, who conquered much of Europe. He was born in Corsica, France, in 1790 and went to military academy in Paris. He quickly rose up through the ranks of the army. In 1799 he led a successful plot to overthrow the government and became the new leader of France.

Napoleon fought many wars with other countries and in 1804 he crowned himself emperor of France.

Soon most of Western Europe (except Britain) was part of his empire. However following an unsuccessful invasion of Russia in 1812, he was exiled (sent away) by his European enemies to an island near Italy. He escaped and returned to power again, but was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo by his European rivals in 1815. He was exiled again to a distant island, Saint Helena, in the South Atlantic where he died 6 years later at the age of 51.
Napoleon Bonaparte

The Battle

Because of heavy rain that had fallen through the night Napoleon decided to delay his first major attack until the ground had dried out. His first move was to launch an attack on Hougoumont farm and began the battle by firing his cannons.

5,000 French troops headed to the farm, outnumbering the 1,500 British soldiers that were there. The attacks at Hougoumont lasted all day. At 12.30pm, they broke open the gates but the British quickly closed them again, trapping 40 French soldiers inside. They killed all but one - an 11-year-old drummer boy.

With a lot of Wellington's army defending Hougoumont, Napoleon took the opportunity to attack more of his troops. It looked like victory was now within Napoleon's grasp. If he took the other farm, La Haye Sainte, he could attack the remaining British troops at close range.

But at around 1pm, looking through his telescope, Napoleon saw something on the horizon and sent a troop of horsemen to investigate. It was the Prussians, who had come to help Wellington and his troops, but they were still far away.

With Napoleon's men advancing towards the British, Wellington had to do something - he sent the British horse guards to charge at the French.

Wellington could hear the cannon fire in the distance - he knew the Prussians were doing what they could to help him.
At the same time the Prussian's started to arrive. The joined forces and attacked the French. With Napoleon's men advancing towards the British, Wellington had to do something - he sent the British horse guards to charge at the French. Napoleon's cavalry came face to face with the Prussians, who had come to help out Wellington.

It didn't take long for the Prussians to defeat them and take over the high ground north-east of the village. This led to Napoleon sending more troops over to try and win back the high land - meaning the French army was split up. Wellington could hear the cannon fire in the distance - he knew the Prussians were doing what they could to help him. Napoleon's men were now fighting on both the west and east sides of the battlefield.

For the next two hours, wave after wave of heavily armoured French soldiers on horseback charged at them. In response, Wellington's soldiers changed formation into squares.
They managed to hold off the 4,000-strong French attack but their new formation made them an easy target to Napoleon’s heavy gun fire. Wellington was fighting back as much as possible and waited for the Prussian’s to help them.

Wellington’s men waited in the long grass behind the ridge as the French Imperial Guard headed towards them. When they reached the ridge, Wellington gave the order to stand and fire.

At the same time the Prussian’s started to arrive. They joined forces and attacked the French.

Wellington had a chance to kill Napoleon but ordered his men to hold fire. The Emperor was shielded by his men as they fled.

The Battle of Waterloo was over. Wellington had won.

The battlefield was covered with tens of thousands of bodies. Many were dead, others badly wounded and left to die.

As punishment, Napoleon was sent to the island of Saint Helena, where he died in 1821.
In 1808 the war with Napoleon was reaching its peak. The 2nd Battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers sailed from Falmouth in Cornwall with 671 officers and men, 48 wives and 20 children for Corunna in Spain. They got there on 13th October. They were to assist in driving the French out of Spain.

Just before Christmas, the British discovered that they were about to be trapped by Napoleon, who had an army twice as strong. The British decided to retreat over the mountains to Corunna.

It was a desperate march through thick snow with a shortage of food and boots. The men, still accompanied by the wives and children, were generally bare-footed. Their sufferings were made worse by a violent storm during the night of 8th January.

By the time the 2nd Battalion reached Corunna on the 11th January seventy-eight men had been lost.

Then the battle of Corunna took place on the 16th of January as they tried to leave the town. At 10 p.m. the troops began to load onto the ships and by the following morning only the two brigades which had covered the loading remained on shore. On the night of the 17th/18th the 2nd Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers was the last to leave this part of Spain.
The rear-guard was commanded by Captain Thomas Lloyd Fletcher, of the Royal Welch Fusiliers. He, with his corporal, were the last to leave the town. On their way to embark, and as they passed through the gates, Captain Fletcher turned and locked them. The key not turning easily, they thrust in a bayonet, and between them managed it. Captain Fletcher brought away the keys.

The keys are held together by a ring, on which is a steel plate, with the inscription 'Postigo de Puerta de Abajo' ('Postern of lower gate'). One key still shows the marks of the bayonet. Thomas Fletcher transferred to the 4th Ceylon Rifles in 1810. He retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1846 and lived at Maesgwaelog, Overton, and Gwern Haulod, Ellesmere, where he brought up his five sons and seven daughters. He died in 1850.
The 23rd Regiment left Gosport, England on the 23rd March 1815 and landed at Ostend, Belgium on the 30th March. The Regiment was moved by canal boat to Ghent, via Bruges. It was reviewed by Wellington, with the rest of the Brigade, at Oudenarde, on 20th April. From there it marched to Grammont on 24th April. It stayed there until 16th June.

The 1st Battalion of the 23rd were back in action soon after Napoleon’s return to power in March 1815.

Wellington reviewed the battalion prior to the Battle of Waterloo:

“I saw the 23rd the other day and I never saw a regiment in such order. They are not strong in numbers, but it was the most complete and handsome military body I ever looked at.”

Wellington
The battalion had proved steady at Waterloo in their famous square formations and withstood attack by the French cavalry.

During the afternoon, however, their commander, Colonel Henry Walton Ellis was struck in the chest by a musket ball. Although he remained on the battlefield for a while he was losing a lot of blood and felt faint. He rode to the rear but he fell from his horse. He was found and taken to a farm outhouse where his wound was dressed.

He died the following day. aged 32.
It then marched to Braine-le-Leud, arriving on the 17th and passed the night in torrential rain. Wellington placed the bulk of his strength to the right of his line. This was fortunate for the 23rd Regiment as it suffered fewer casualties than those in the centre and on the left. Even so, it lost four officers and eleven men killed, and eight officers and seventy-eight men wounded.

Early on the morning of 18th June 1815 the 23rd took up its position, in the second line, to the left of the Nivelles Road. In front of it was a battalion of the Guards. It deployed into line and the men were told to lay down as they were quickly under fire from French artillery on the road. The cannon fire killed Captain Thomas Farmer.

The 23rd moved into the front line to replace the Guards battalion, withdrawn to give support at Hougoumont. It formed a square and remained in that formation all day, facing many attacks by French cavalry. The Commanding Officer of the 23rd, Colonel Sir Henry Ellis commanded that no man should break rank, even to help a wounded comrade. The Regiment did not falter, even though the artillery fire continued.

The square retired to its former position, then advanced again and the 23rd finished the day by advancing in line finding nothing to oppose it.
Lieutenant Colonel John Hill
During the course of the battle
John Hill was severely wounded.
Fighting on foot, in the front line
of the square, he was wounded no
fewer than five times. He
received a splinter of bone (which
came from another soldier) driven
into his right eyeball and two
fragments of stone shrapnel in
his cheek. He also received a
musket ball wound to the left side
of his jaw and finally a half-pound
grape-shot punched through his
left breast and shoulder blade,
lodging in the back of his jacket!
Miraculously, he survived and
made a slow and painful recovery.
He died in January 1835, aged 59.
Henry was born in 1782. His father became Lieutenant-Colonel of the 23rd Royal Welsh Fusiliers in 1793 and Major-General in 1798. He was also the Member of Parliament for Worcester for some years.

He and his wife had several children, the eldest of whom was Henry who was immediately appointed an ensign in the army on full pay.

Young Henry became a lieutenant in the 41st Foot in 1792 when he was 10, and captain in the 23rd Fusiliers (RWF) on 20 January 1796 at barely fourteen years of age.

He served with the Regiment over the next few years being wounded in battle eight times being and promoted to major in 1801 and commanded the 1st Battalion in Nova Scotia in 1808 and Martinique in 1809.

He proceeded with his battalion to Portugal in 1810, and commanded it in the Peninsula and south of France, during which he repeatedly distinguished himself, particularly at the Battle of Albuera at the siege of Badajos in 1812 (where he was wounded), and in the desperate fighting on the Pyrenees 28 July 1813.

Silver cup presented to Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Walton Ellis for his services during the Napoleonic Wars.
Colonel Sir Henry Walton Ellis KCB

He fought in the Peninsular Wars and was wounded at the Battle of Albuera (1811), at the Siege of Badajoz (1812), and was again severely wounded at the Battle of Salamanca (1812). For his services in the Peninsular Wars he was promoted to Colonel (1814) and made a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath (1815).

At the battle of Waterloo he was in command of the Welch Fusiliers. They were in reserve during the greater part of 18 June, but were brought up into the front line later in the day. They were charged by the French many times.

He was shot by a musket-ball in his chest. He left the field feeling faint from loss of blood, but fell from his horse when he jumped over a small ditch and sustained further injuries. He was carried to a small outhouse where his wound was dressed. However, the outhouse caught fire on the 19th of June and he was severely burned before being rescued. He died the following day, on 20th June 1815.

He was buried at Waterloo.
The officers and men of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers placed a monument, by the London sculptor, John Bacon, to his memory in Worcester Cathedral at a cost of £1,200.

It depicts Col Sir Henry Walton Ellis falling from his horse, with Victory crowning him with a Laurel wreath.
Jenny Jones

For centuries, women have joined men on military campaigns. Until the 1850s, women held various unofficial roles in the Army as wives, cooks, nurses, midwives, seamstresses and laundresses. They lived and worked with a regiment and even travelled abroad with it. These women played a significant role in caring for the physical and emotional wellbeing of soldiers.

Soldiers had to ask permission before they could marry. Only about one in twenty were allowed to do so and their wives were “official wives”. Those already married or married without permission had “unofficial wives”. Wives and children followed their husbands on long marches.

When the Regiment was sent overseas only a certain number were allowed to go and they had to take care of their husbands and other soldiers.

Jenny Jones of Tal y Llyn, Meirionnydd was at Waterloo with her first husband, Pte Lewis Griffiths of the 23rd Regiment (Royal Welch Fusiliers).
In 1876 an account of her life, as told by Jenny herself, was published in the “Cambrian News”.

Jenny Jones was born in Ireland in around 1797. She met her husband, Lewis Griffiths, in Ireland, where he was stationed. She was aged 14, the daughter of a farmer, and he was 19. The couple were married, apparently against the wishes of Jenny’s family, and she never spoke with them again.

Lewis Griffiths was from Tal y Llyn. When Britain declared war on France in May 1803 Lewis was called to duty and he joined the 23rd Regiment (Royal Welch Fusiliers) on 5th April 1814. His record describes him as a labourer, aged 19, a married man.

The 23rd Regiment joined Wellington’s army in Europe, marching against Napoleon. Jenny accompanied her husband on the Waterloo campaign acting as nurse, cook or laundry maid. She may by then have had a child.

Early on the morning of 18th June 1815 the 23rd took up its position. The cannon fire killed the Commanding Officer of Lewis Griffith’s Company and may have given Lewis his wounds, which were in the shoulder and, according to the story, were from cannon shot. After the battle Jenny searched for Lewis and eventually found him in a Brussels hospital.

Lewis Griffiths was discharged from the Regiment on 6th April 1821. He received no pension and his Waterloo Medal was stolen. Lewis and Jenny returned to Tal y Llyn to live in a house named Cildydd. They had several children - possibly six. Lewis Griffiths worked in the slate quarries at Corris, to which he would walk over the hills from home. Lewis was killed in 1837 in Aberllefenni Quarry, aged 45. He was buried in an unmarked grave in Tal y Llyn churchyard.
After a few years as a widow, Jenny married a John Jones of y Powis, Tal y Llyn on June 1st 1853. It was not a happy marriage as Jones was a lazy man, and instead of easing it, the marriage increased Jenny’s poverty.

She died on April 11th 1884 and buried in Tal y Llyn parish churchyard. Her final resting place is marked by a rather fine gravestone, far beyond what she could ever have aspired too. Its inscription forms the final mystery regarding Jenny Jones. It reads:

“I will never leave you nor forsake thee
This cross was placed here by a friend.
Sacred to the memory of Jenny Jones
Born in Scotland 1784
She was with her husband of the 23rd Royal Welch Fusiliers at the battle of Waterloo and was on the field three days.”
The Eagle

Eagle standards (symbols) were carried by the French soldiers. Each unit swore (promised) to defend it to the death and to lose it brought shame to the soldiers.

The Eagle was as important to the French regiments as the colours were to British regiments and to lose the eagle would bring shame to the regiment.

The French Imperial Eagle is a figure of an eagle on a pole carried into battle as a standard by the Grande Armée of Napoleon during the Napoleonic Wars.

The French Eagle captured at Martinique in 1809 by the 23rd of Foot. Now at the RWF Museum, Caernarfon.
Although regiments were presented with regimental colours, Napoleon's regiments tended to carry at their head the Imperial Eagle.

Like the Roman legions centuries before them, Napoleon Bonaparte's armies carried eagles proudly at their head.

The Eagle measured 31 cm in height and 25 cm in width. On the base would be the regiment's number.

Martinique is an island in the Caribbean. It was a base for French activity in the West Indies. The British naval and military commanders decided on an expedition to capture the island. The 1st Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers, landed with the Fusilier Brigade on 30th January, 1809. The French repeatedly returned any attack on them with drums beating. They eventually surrendered after being forced back to Fort Bourbon which was bombarded by artillery. The Royal Welch were awarded 'MARTINIQUE, 1809' as a Battle Honour which to this day is on the Regimental Colour. The Napoleonic Eagle of the 82nd Regiment of Infantry was captured at Martinique and was presented to the Regiment.
False teeth
By the early 1800s, the transatlantic slave trade had made sugar more available and affordable in Europe. The popularity of sweet treats, coupled with poor dental hygiene, meant rotten and missing teeth were common.

People then wanted false teeth. False teeth could be carved from hippopotamus, walrus, or elephant ivory, but these looked less real and rotted more quickly than human teeth. Human corpses were the best source of replacement teeth. After a major battle, like the one at Waterloo in 1815, scavengers would scour the field with pliers, ready to loot the mouths of dead soldiers to make sets of false teeth that people would buy!

The Marquees of Anglesey
Another story from Waterloo concerns the Earl of Uxbridge who became the Marquees of Anglesey. At Waterloo he commanded the British cavalry. He had his leg shot off by cannon fire at the battle while he was right next to the Duke of Wellington himself. On the occasion, Henry coolly said, “By God, Sir, I’ve lost my leg.” The Iron Duke replied, “By God, Sir, so you have.”
The severed leg of the Marquess of Anglesey was put on display in the village of Waterloo in Belgium, where it had been amputated, and remained a notorious tourist attraction for years after the Battle.

Plas Newydd, Anglesey displays items from the family’s history including the wooden leg!

Fact or Fiction?
This is a story about a man from Beddgelert who had fought at Waterloo. At the battle he was shot in the knee and when the battle was over only the dead and wounded remained. Then he saw a woman going round the dead stealing things. If she found someone still alive she hit them on the head with a hammer. The man had his gun by his side, so he quietly stretched out his hand, picked it up gently, and pointed it at her.

“The next minute she was tumbling head over heels,” said he, “And that was the last shot at Waterloo!”