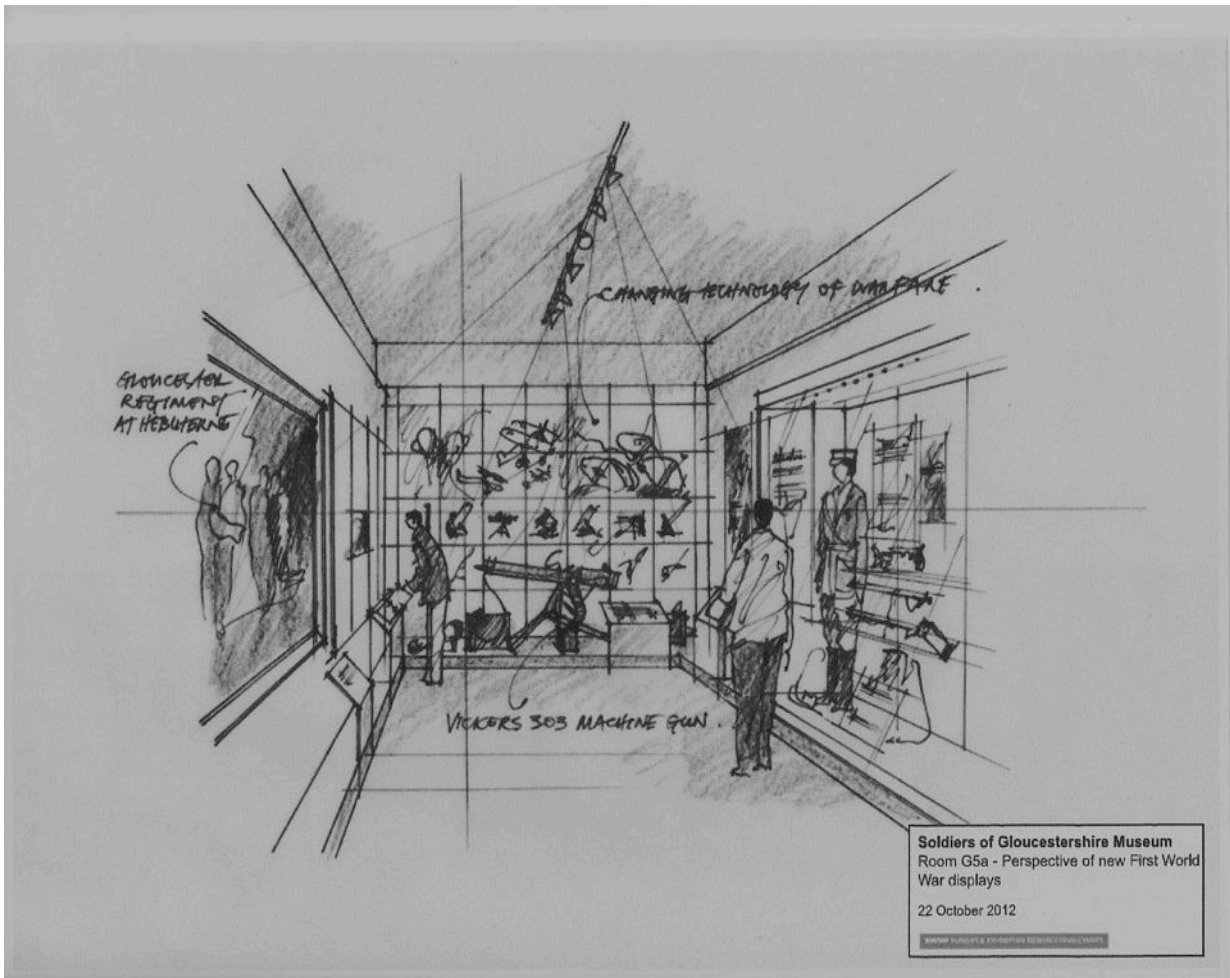


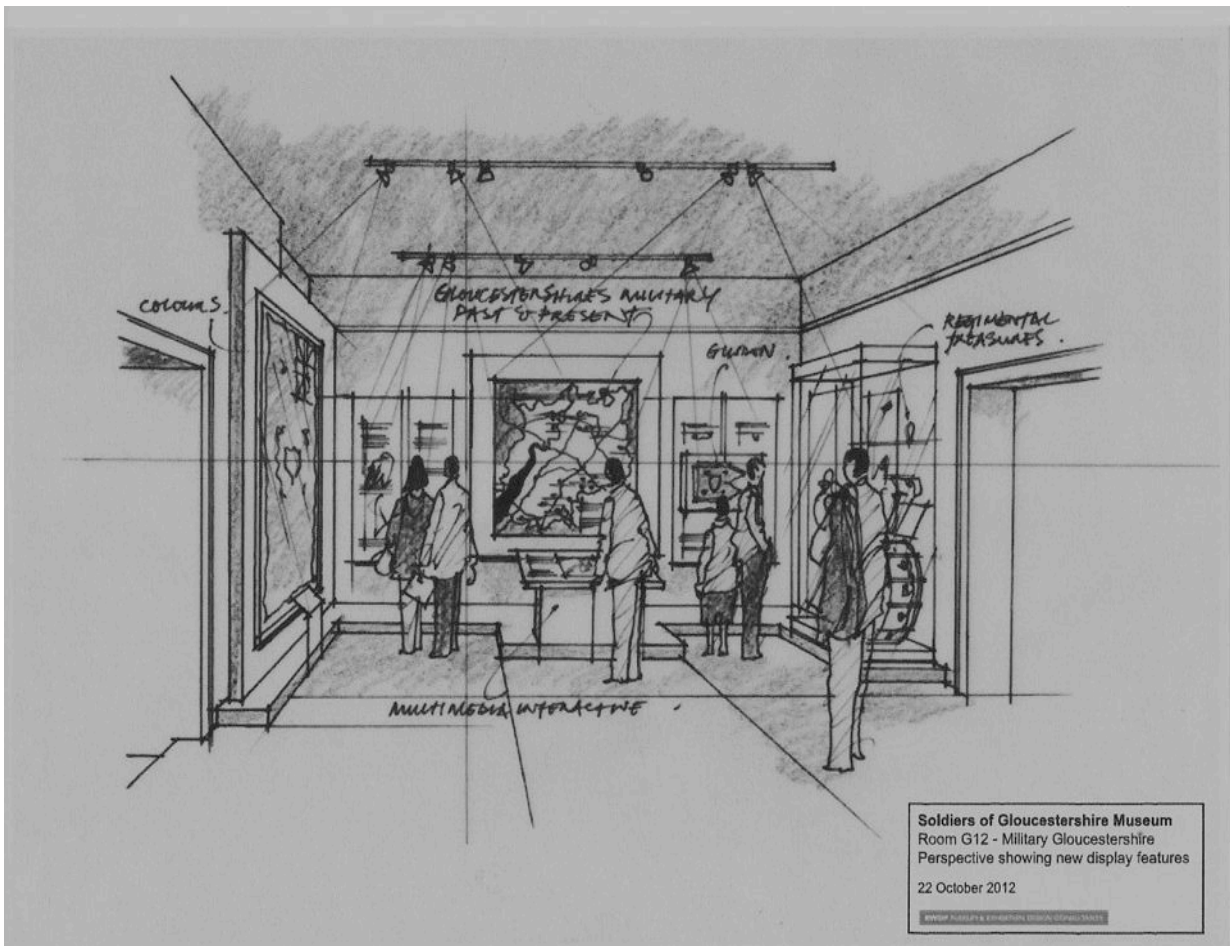
**NEWSLETTER**  
**THE FRIENDS OF**  
**THE SOLDIERS OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE**  
**MUSEUM**



**SPRING 2013**



*Artists designs for the new galleries of the Museum as the interior is upgraded.*



## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Good news! We heard in March that the Museum has been granted a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to redesign many of the exhibits, improve the lighting and provide many more interactive displays within the galleries. Understandably the Trustees are delighted and will move quickly to get the transformation under way. Plans for the museum development have been under preparation for some time and now that we have the funding, the work will commence later this year. As the Curator explains in his report, this will involve closing the Museum for several months to allow time for the major work to be undertaken. We will keep you informed of the exciting times ahead and look forward to meeting you when you visit the new layout, bringing family and friends with you.

Despite the problems of the recession we have done well to raise the usual funds this year to support the Museum, albeit from the same group of loyal Friends – some 350 only, many thanks to you all. As the Museum is revitalised I would like to see us enlarge the Friends and expand the help we can give the Museum, so please try and recruit new members this year.

Our programme last year included a very enjoyable Autumn Lecture; Dr Paul Skelton-Stroud spoke on 'Animals at War' and this year we have an equally distinguished speaker, Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield. Prof. Peter Hennessy went to Marling School, in Stroud and then to St. John's College, Cambridge. He is now the Atlee Professor of Contemporary British History at Queen Mary College, London. His talk, at Chavenage in October, will be on the secret plans for the continuation of the British State in the event of nuclear war in the 1950's and 60's, at the height of the Cold War.

Other events planned for the summer months are the opportunity to have lunch in the Royal Wessex Yeomanry Marquee at Badminton whilst you are shopping on the Thursday, at the beginning of the Three Day Event. We had arranged to hold this lunch last year but, you will recall the whole event was washed out by the exceptionally wet weather in May 2012. We have also arranged a Reception in the sunshine on the Museum terrace, on June 6<sup>th</sup> and then retire to the Long Room to hear the history of CGHQ, given by Tony Comer, the chief historian of CGHQ. He will also show us one of the Enigma machines, the producers of the coded messages that the Nazis thought were impossible to 'crack' but were broken by the staff at Bletchley Park. There will also be the opportunity to see the new 'Modern Army' display, with a chance to try on the current British equipment.

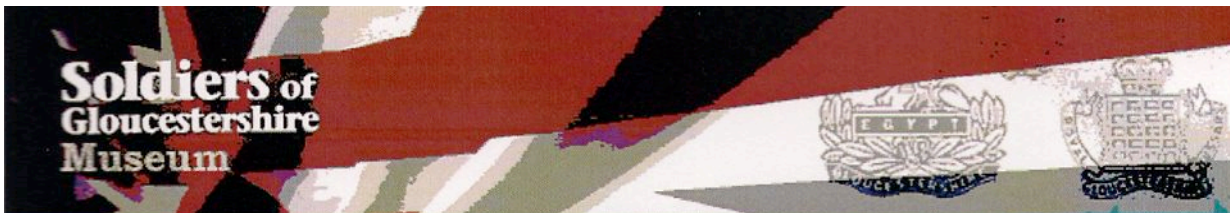
The information about these events will be forwarded by e-mail so, as the box below explains, it is increasingly important that we have an e-mail address book. Please act now. The biannual Newsletter will continue to be circulated by post, in view of its size, but we hope to make savings on other circulated news and events.

**Lt. Col Ralph Stephenson TD.**

### **Important - E Mail Address List**

*The cost of postage has become one of the primary expenses for the Friends of the SoGM. In order to reduce this, an e-mail address list is being compiled to ensure you hear about museum and other military events quickly and effectively. To make sure you are included please spare a minute to record your address with the Hon. Sec. at: [simoncolbeck@msn.com](mailto:simoncolbeck@msn.com)*





## **CURATOR'S REPORT**

With Cheltenham Races in full swing, it is very good to know that spring is just around the corner. Not before time as it has been a long, hard and very busy winter. Summer, of course, is our main visitor season and we look forward to improving on last year's dismal performance. We were not alone. What with difficult weather to start the year – drought and floods – Her Majesty's jubilee and the Olympics and Paralympics, quite apart from being in the teeth of a deep recession, it was not surprising that visitors were scarce. Talking to other museums outside London, they all suffered in a similar fashion.

Visitors are our life blood and I urge you to come and visit the museum whenever you can. How many times have I heard it said 'I never realised you had such and such...' or 'I've never watched this video all the way through...' It just goes to show there is a great deal to see in the museum. As Friends of course you get in for free, but may I suggest that when you have visitors from out of county, do bring them to see us.

As some of you will know, we have been successful in pursuing a HLF grant to refurbish the museum. The last refurbishment was when we opened in our existing form in 1992 and after twenty years some of the showcases, the designs and the layouts are showing their age. We will close in October after what we hope will be a very busy summer. This will give us six months to 'redo' the displays and live up to the aim of the project which is to "Renew the Vision". It will give us an opportunity to reopen with a flourish in time for the anniversary of the start of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. We are busy reviewing what we have and how best to present it. Interestingly, one point that the HLF assessors made was that we should not lose the excellent quirky character that the museum currently has. We shall make certain in the design process that there will be something to surprise and 'wow' everyone.

Meanwhile we have prepared a new Modern Army Display so we can demonstrate, particularly to the young what the current regiment is doing. It also emphasises the importance of the golden threads linking the present to the past. One thing that is apparent to all those who served in the 50s and 60s is the remarkable quality and thought that has gone into the design and manufacture of the equipment and uniform that the modern soldier has – it is quite wonderful. We hope that this will be focal point of our marketing for the summer and we expect to have a formal launch in early April. Also during the summer the Docks are putting on another Tall Ships Festival and this will normally attract large crowds as will the Garden Festival in the Quays over Easter, which illustrate the wide variety of events going on in the Docks.

We would very much like to see you in the museum. Meanwhile it goes without saying how much we appreciate the support and encouragement we get from The Friends. You have funded most of the new projects over the last 17 years that I have been in the museum and I am most grateful to you all.

**George Streatfeild**

## ‘CAVALRY OPERATIONS AT MATRUH’

**Following the embodiment of the Gloucestershire Hussars in 1914 the ‘Gloucester Journal’ printed a series of reports entitled "The R.G.H. on active service - A Troopers Diary "; cuttings of which, pasted into a small leather-bound scrapbook, have recently been passed to the RGH Historical Committee for safe-keeping.**

Unlike the majority of works from this period, invariably penned by officers, here we have a tale of one man's trench/saddle-eye view of life, referring as much to the day to day workings of his comrades and of the native peoples around him. So far all attempts to identify the author of these reports from the front have proved unsuccessful but indications suggest that he was a Trooper or NCO within ‘A’ Squadron, serving throughout the war and returning safely to Gloucestershire, some time after the fall of Jerusalem in 1918.

It would appear that while the bulk of the regiment was busily employed on the Gallipoli Peninsula during the November of 1915, there arose a significant threat to Egypt's western border which the powers that be believed would require the attentions of a Yeomanry Force. It is recorded by a colleague of the correspondent, who was involved in this otherwise unknown episode of yeomanry operations (interestingly the name Arthur Patten\* has been added, in pencil, to the margin of the book). He says -

“ — Most of us had just returned from various hospitals and under the peaceful conditions at Mena Camp were rapidly recovering from the effects of Turkish shrapnel experienced at Suvla Bay, or those numerous complaints which had devastated us in that dreadful zone. Pale faces were quickly vanishing, while the almost tropical sun which rose each morning behind the Great Pyramids of Gizeh was giving a healthy tan to the countenances of the once invalid warriors. We had been congratulating ourselves on our improved condition, while at the same time sympathising with those of our pals who had been left behind on the Peninsula, good food, no drills, and few fatigues appealed to the energetic as well as to the slacker after the strain of continuous trench digging and watching at sentry posts. We had almost forgotten that the war was still waging in all its fury while we were so fortunately placed.

It was a general expression that things were too good to last, and so it turned out, for on November 19th, after a fortnight of such luxury, I received one of those great shocks which so often come to the man on active service. Dinner over, I was about to indulge in a short mid-day nap, when I was suddenly warned, together with eight others of our regiment to pack my saddle in full marching order, undergo a hasty inspection by the doctor, and be ready to move off at a few hours notice. The Bedouins we were told, under Sheikh Senussi, had risen on the Tripoli frontier and were threatening the native port of Mersa Matruh and all coast-guard stations from Sollum to Alexandria. Several composite regiments were quickly formed from the cavalry bases and at once despatched to Alexandria. The 2nd Composite Regiment to which we were attached was composed of three squadrons drawn respectively from the Bucks, Berks, and Dorset Yeomanry, and was stationed on the site of our old camp at Chatby, where we Gloucester Yeo. had spent so many happy days prior to our departure for Gallipoli. Nine Gloucester Yeomen were included in this regiment: Sergt. Clark, Corporal Stanley (D Squadron), Corporals Springfield, Smart and Crook and Trooper Owen Anthony (A Squadron) being attached to the Dorsets; and Corporals A. W. Patten\* and Bruce Dudfield (A Squadron) and Trooper Rogerson (D Squadron) to the Berks Yeo.

*\*as it would appear that Patten was the colleague of the correspondent, this supports the evidence that the Journal's correspondent also served in ‘A’ Sqn.*



*100 men and all the horses were left at Alexandria as the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars Yeomanry embarked for Gallipoli on August 14<sup>th</sup> 1915.*

In the small hours of the morning on Friday, November 26<sup>th</sup>, three train loads of men and horses were travelling at full speed on the single line railway which skirts the shores of the Mediterranean as far as El Dabaa, this being at present the terminus of the line which will eventually link up all coastal towns from Alexandria to Tripoli. El Dabaa, though often in big letters on the map is only a very small place. From what I saw it could only boast of one dirty lane hedged in by half a dozen still dirtier shops, the whole surrounded by a few scattered Arab tents. The coastguard station, with its long camel sheds, is quite half a mile further on. Our destination for that day was five miles to the west.

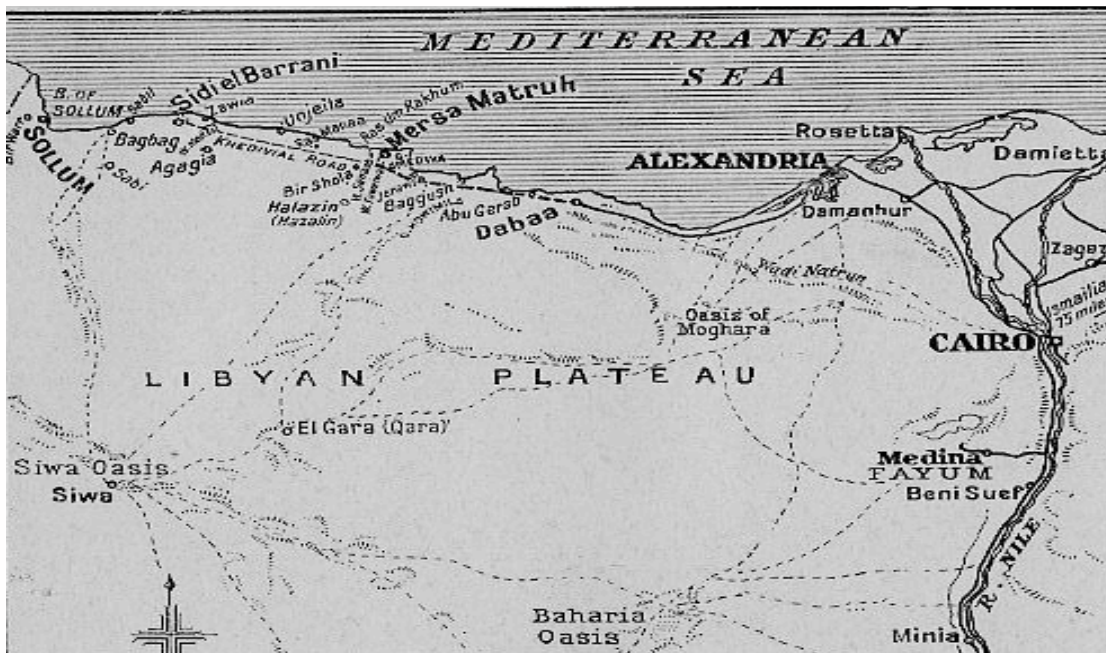
So after watering and feeding our horses, we commenced the trek under the guidance of an armed Bedouin and accompanied by an interpreter of very dark complexion, who informed us that he had been educated at Oxford and had also served with Lord Kitchener in the Soudan Campaign.

The water at El Dabaa was drawn from a very deep well by means of a rope running over a pulley, and having a large bucket at the end. The actual hoisting was done by a camel, which would walk about 40 yards from the well, thus bringing the bucket to the surface. The water was then emptied into a big trough, and the bucket again lowered. Our horses didn't like the look of the camel and were at one time on the verge of stampeding. They must have been very thirsty and yet it was with the greatest difficulty that we eventually persuaded the more nervous to drink. Our first halt was at Jamerneh, which our guide in a moment of excitement referred to as a village! An ideal situation for a camp, protected naturally by the sea on the north, while a semicircular ridge of hills completely shut us in from the land-side.

We stayed nine days in this out of the way place, each day doing a certain amount of drill, scouting, or perhaps escorting the transports to and from El Daba'a. It was here that we first experienced the effects of a real sandstorm, and all the discomforts which follow in its trail. For two full days a blinding storm swept through the little gap in the hills, and threatened to uproot every tent-peg or to snap the ropes in its attempt to flatten our tents, and expose the inmates to all its fury. To counteract these evil intentions we would pile the sand round the sides of the tents, but only to find this again scooped out a few hours later.

Our camp was protected during the day by Cossack Posts, consisting of seven mounted men—a corporal and six troopers. These were posted at vantage points on the surrounding ridge and were periodically visited by flying patrols. The few infantry who were with us relieved these mounted men at sunset each night, but we were again responsible for the outpost duties immediately round the camp.

On Sunday, December 6th, as we were falling in for Divine service, we received orders to push on to Mersa Matruh as quickly as possible. So the following morning at sunrise our convoy, extending over a mile and a half in length, moved through the narrow gap in the hills on to the ill-defined Khedivial road leading westward. It was a forced march of 83 miles to be completed in three days.



Fortunately all our spare luggage had been sent back and our packed saddles made as light as possible. Each man carried on his saddle an india-rubber ground sheet, one service blanket, great coat, shirt, and spare pair of socks, in addition to the usual equipment of a cavalry soldier. Our rations consisted of "bully beef" and biscuits—the latter rare teeth testers! The usual issue was five biscuits, but some days we were reduced to two. The question of water for our horses was our great anxiety; we therefore arranged our halting places where we knew we could get a supply, but even then the natives might have damaged the wells or tampered with the water. These wells were sometimes as much as twenty miles apart and in many cases the water was distinctly salty or heavily charged with mud. Each night we slept behind our horses and started off the following morning at daybreak. We occasionally met small parties of refugees on their way to El Dabaa and everywhere the country and villages were deserted. Yet there was evidence of recent occupation, in some cases fires still burning, and smoking pans suggested a hasty flight.

We had orders to search and disarm all natives carrying modern rifles; one man would cover the suspect with his rifle, while the other looked for firearms. This the Arab naturally resented and often "showed the whites of his eye" as we departed. On the first day of our trek we had the fortune to see a real "mirage of the desert," a wonderful optical illusion, which appeared as though there was an oasis with water and palm trees a few miles ahead of us and yet, as we journeyed on, it became no nearer and finally disappeared. We found, somewhat to our surprise that all the important watering places were already being held by small detachments of those fine Indian soldiers, the Sikhs. On the first day we covered twenty-one miles, and halted that night among sand hills at Bir Abu Jerab. The wells here having run dry, we were obliged to draw on our supply conveyed in the water carts. Our track during the second day lay over very rough ground and both horses and men were pretty well exhausted when we halted and took up our quarters for the night behind an old stone wall at Zowia Sidi Harum. While we watered and fed our horses our cook made tea, to which a drop or two of rum was added. We all slept soundly that night and were well satisfied with our march of thirty-one miles. Reveille was at 4.30 next morning, which just gave us time to pack our saddles and have a hasty meal before moving off at sunrise on the last lap of our tedious ride. We thought another thirty-one miles with tired horses almost an impossibility, as we started off to again take up our positions around the



convoy. Bir Jerawala was our last halting place before reaching our destination. Here trenches had been dug and the whole place prepared for an attack, which actually took place a few days later. The sun was just setting on the third day when we reached the outposts guarding the native port of Mersa Matruh and we were right glad again to take shelter in the "clouty hooses" which had been erected for us.

On the 9th December our aerial scouts reported the enemy thirty miles to the west of Matruh and advancing on the town, so two days later we started off to meet them. We had only gone about eight miles and were nearing a place called Jebel Medwa, when our advanced guard was suddenly fired on. We at once deployed, and our squadron attempted to charge, but unfortunately the ground was very uneven, and the enemy being quite secure among the rocks found our scrambling horses and men excellent targets. The Arabs then retreated through a deep "waddy", locally known as Dar Iswadia, which curved in the form of a horseshoe. Our men dismounted and fired on the enemy from both sides of this deep gorge, killing eighty-three and taking forty wounded prisoners. We lost about twelve horses and forty men, of whom eighteen of the latter were killed. Six armoured cars operated with us, doing splendid work and no doubt accounting for a goodly number of the retreating Bedouins. Having given the enemy their first shock we pushed on to the little village of Um Rakhum, where we were joined by about five hundred of the Royal Scots, a Company of Sikhs, and two squadrons of Australian Light Horse. On nearing Um Rakhum we were obliged to cross several deep "waddies," and those of us who were leading wounded horses had the greatest difficulty in descending the steep slopes and in finding our track in the darkness. The horses having been secured to our newly-laid lines, our veterinary department was very soon at work among the wounded and several animals had to be destroyed.

The following day, as a result of a reconnaissance, we captured eighteen Bedouins, twenty eight camels and about three hundred sheep and goats. Monday, December 13th however, was our greatest day. While about three miles west of Um Rakhum, we were suddenly fired on and had to dismount in quick style. Our led horses being taken back, we formed an extended line with the Australians on our right and the Sikhs on our left. We were altogether out-numbered and had no machine gun to help us. The enemy, since estimated at 2,000 strong, had three maxims and an old eighteen-pounder which they had captured from the Italians. The latter had little effect—the marksmanship being very bad, for nearly all their shells went harmlessly over our heads and into the sea. After holding the enemy all the morning and although the Royal Scots came to our assistance later on in the day we were ordered to retire gradually on Um Rakhum. We had to cover the infantry all the way back, retiring from waddy to waddy, eventually reaching our camp at dusk. Here we found the infantry already at work digging themselves in and preparing for a night attack, which everyone expected.

Up to the last retirement there had been no casualties among the Gloucesters, but as we were preparing to mount our horses for a final dash to camp, Corporal Crook\*, of the Cheltenham Troop, fell mortally wounded and although we applied the field dressing and mounted him on his horse our much-loved companion died before reaching camp.

Two small trawlers had been signalled earlier in the day and by means of these we were able to send our wounded on to Mersa Matruh, where our fallen comrades were buried in the little churchyard with full military honours, the exact place being marked by crosses, which we all subscribed to and upon which we engraved their names.

Our captured sheep, although killed, cooked and eaten the same day made a nice change from the "bully beef" ration. As some of the wells were beginning to fail us and being uncertain as to the actual strength of the enemy, it was decided that we should all retire to Mersa Matruh, which was well fortified and further protected by several gunboats lying in the harbour. Although very tired we were afraid to sleep too soundly. The chorus of howls from a pack of pariah dogs which wandered round and round our bivouac prevented, in my case at least, pleasant dreams and we were much relieved to see the last transport move off on its way back to Mersa Matruh.

*\*2545 L/Cpl Crook William H. – killed in action 13/12/15 and Remembered on Alexandria Military Memorial and War Cemetery. Born 1880 in Apperley, Gloucs and in 1911 was a butcher 47 Keynsham Street, Cheltenham, married to Kate Louise Crook of Stroud. She died in 1920 leaving one child, Phyllis Blanch Crook, aged 16.*





*Left behind in Egypt*

This retreat was not devoid of excitement, for our flank guards had a few exchanges with the enemy, who again brought the 'big gun' into action. This time, however, we had support from a gunboat, which undoubtedly prevented any serious attack on the convoy and soon silenced the enemy's artillery. On reaching camp we were told that our composite regiment was being broken up and that we were to proceed by boat to Alexandria to rejoin our units. General Briscoe, addressing the regiment just before departing, conveyed to us the much-appreciated congratulations of General Maxwell. Our journey over the Great Western Desert to Matruh had been a trying one, but the hardships we experienced were nothing to the discomforts of the voyage to Alexandria on board three miserable little trawlers. Sea sickness made some of the more desperate wonder whether life, after all, was worth living."

Mr. Larry Birkin

### **Dates for your 2013 Diary**

**2 May 2013 - Luncheon in Royal Wessex Yeomanry Marquee**

- at Badminton Three Day Event, Badminton Park from 12 midday.

*Have lunch whilst shopping at the event and bring your friends – only £17 pperson.*

Book by e-mailing the Hon. Sec.(see box page 3) or phone 01285 720146

**6 June 2013 - Reception in the Museum**

- talk 'The History of GCHQ' in the Long Room.

*Drinks on the terrace, a chance to see the Modern Army Display and a talk by the CGHQ Historian who will show the Enigma Machine of WW2 - £12 pperson, 6.45 for 7.00pm.*

Book by emailing the Hon Sec. or phone 01285 720146

**27 Sept 2013 - Gala Concert in the Gloucester Cathedral**

- *in aid of SSAFA Forces Help and the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum*

featuring Mary- Jess, the Warminster Military Wives Choir  
and The Band of The Prince of Wales Division.

Details will be distributed in the Autumn Newsletter

**25 Oct 2013 - Autumn Lecture at Chavenage House  
Lord Hennessy of Nymphsfield**

*Attlee Professor of Contemporary British History, Queen Mary College, London.*

**'The Cold War Secret State – Britain and the Nuclear Threat'**

Invitation Cards will be sent out as usual with the Autumn Newsletter

## MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY AND TREASURER'S REPORT

As at 4 March 2013 the Friends have 347 members in all categories: 241 Life and 106 annual members including 27 overseas. New members continue to join at the rate of about one a month. Our finances remain healthy and we are well placed to continue our support to the Museum.

There are still 24 Friends paying annually who have not paid yet for the year June 2012 - May 2013. **Annual rates are £10 for junior, £20 for single and £30 for couples. Conversion to Life membership is a one off charge of £200.** Payment can be made:

- By cheque made payable to 'The Friends of the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum' forwarded to the Friends at the Museum address 'Custom House, 31, Commercial Road, Gloucester, GL1 2HE'.
- Over the internet through the Museum website at '[www.glost.org.uk](http://www.glost.org.uk)' – follow the link to the Friends' page on the Museum's Home page.
- By Banker's Standing Order. To save having to write cheques, pay for postage, or remember that you need to renew your subscription annually, why not complete a Banker's Standing Order Mandate? Receipt of your payment directly into the Friends' bank account will trigger action on my part to issue your new membership card. You can of course cancel a standing order with your bank at any stage so if you would like a Standing Order form please contact me at the Museum.

**Some Friends paying annually by Standing Order on 1 June or later may still need to amend their Standing Order with their Bank to reflect the increased annual membership charges effective from last June. Please check that your Standing Order is set at the correct value.**

Members using internet banking should be able to do this on line and those using telephone banking should be able to contact their bank direct to make the change. Any member requiring to amend their Standing Order in writing should contact me at the Museum and I will forward a new Standing Order form for action with your bank.

**Wg. Comd. Chris Campbell**



*The 14<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons descended on King Joseph's baggage train during the Battle of Vitoria, June 1813 and Capt. Henry Wyndham acquired Joseph's silver 'pot du chambre', which they christened 'The Emperor', see page 13*

*Their successors, The Kings Royal Hussars, still use the chamber pot, filled with champagne, at regimental mess dinners. The RGH Sqn of The Royal Wessex Yeomanry is affiliated to The Kings Royal Hussars.*

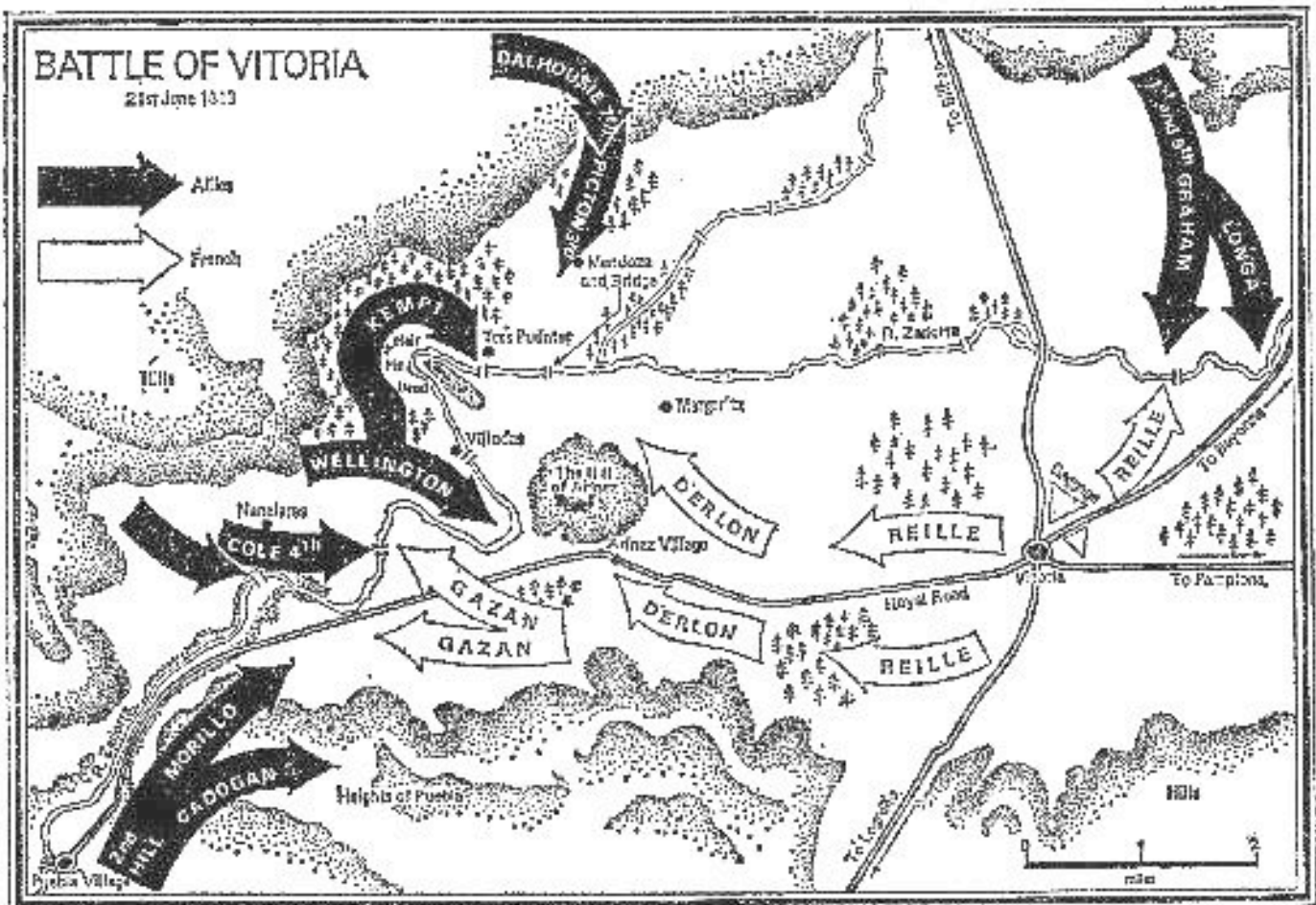
### THE PENINSULAR WAR 1813

Following the Battle of Salamanca, in July 1812, (*Newsletter Spring 2012*) the French Army retreated to Burgos to recover from the battle and collect new troops, quickly forming a formidable force which stoutly defended the town when Wellington spent four weeks besieging the garrison.

The 61<sup>st</sup> Regt., having suffered badly at Salamanca joined the siege, in the 6<sup>th</sup> Division, with just 200 men, three captains and five lieutenants. The 28<sup>th</sup>, part of a force which had been occupying the French Army throughout the year with feints and minor attacks, joined the 61<sup>st</sup> at Burgo as the failed siege was lifted and Wellington’s army retreated to the east of Salamanca for winter quarters.

The winter was passed with field-days, route marches and training of much needed reinforcements. Cricket, football and other ‘camp sports’ were held and officers hunted with hounds. Dances were held in barns and nearby towns and theatricals were improvised by some regiments, female parts being played by ‘young and good-looking men, dressed remarkably well’. As spring of 1813 arrived a confident army of 78,000 was marched back into Spain, Wellington dramatically shouting “Farewell Portugal” as they marched north-west in pursuit of the French army of King Joseph, Napoleon’s brother, who had ordered the destruction of Burgos. The town was blown up with 400 of his own men still inside.

In June the two armies met at Vitoria, the French well placed on higher ground at the head of a valley, leaving Wellington to take the initiative.





*‘On June 21<sup>st</sup>, as a cold, drizzling dawn broke, Wellington attacked with four columns; as the sun came out, the battle was opened by Hill's right column, the 2nd Division, commanded by Stewart, Ashworth's Portuguese Brigade and Morillo's division of Spanish infantry, crossing the Zadorra at Puebla to attack the heights overlooking the French position.*

*Shortly afterwards - and some 15km to the east - Graham's force comprising the 1st and 5th Divisions, Pack's and Bradford's Portuguese Brigades and Longa's Spanish Brigade began to press from the north against the road from Vitoria to Bayonne. By noon the road had been cut.*

*Crucially, Wellington learned late in the morning that the French had left the bridge across the Zadorra at Trespuentes unguarded. Kempt's Brigade was immediately despatched from the Light Division to seize the bridge. Concealed by high ground on the hairpin bend of the Zadorra, the light infantry were able to take the bridge virtually unopposed.*

*The pressure on the French position now rapidly became unbearable as allied attacks were pressed home from several directions. Picton's 3rd Division - supported by a flanking attack by Kempt's Brigade - stormed over the Zadorra to the east of Trespuentes. From the west, Cole's 4th Division and the rest of Alten's Light Division crossed the Zadorra. Meanwhile, Hill continued to press from the south.*

*Throughout the afternoon, the French were gradually rolled-up from the west before being finally sent into headlong retreat’.*



*Scenes from the Battle of Vitoria, with the town in the background.*



Accounts describe it as ‘a spectacle of unusual grandeur’ as the allies came on, ‘the brilliantly polished barrels and rifles shining in the sun’, the British in their waist length red tunics and stove pipe shakos, the Portuguese in the same style jackets, but in blue, the rifle regiments in green, as were the Caçadores, the Portuguese light infantry and the Spanish in sombre browns.

The 28<sup>th</sup>, in O’Callaghan’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade of Hill’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Division (bottom left of the map), were in action early, following up once the defile and the heights of La Pueblo, on their right, had been taken by the brigade of Spaniards and Cadogan’s 71<sup>st</sup> Highlanders. An account by Lieut. Charles Cadell (later Col. Cadell) details their movements after crossing the River Zadora at La Pueblo:

*We moved at double quick for about a league until we passed a defile formed by the heights and the river, which opened up to our view a magnificent sight of the French Army drawn up in battle array, with the spire of Vitoria behind them. Our Brigade, under Col. O’Callaghan, after being allowed a short breathing space, wheeled to the right, attached and drove the enemy from the village of Sabijana de Alva, which we kept during the whole action against many desperate attempts that they made to regain it. About four in the afternoon the French Army being routed in the centre and turned on their right, withdrew a large part of their force that was opposed to us when we advanced and drove what remained before us over the heights to our front. The sight was then beautiful – the enemy flying towards Vitoria, followed by the British and Portuguese.’*

Wellington's casualties from the battle amounted to 5,100. The 28<sup>th</sup>, some 800 strong before the battle lost more than a hundred; the 61<sup>st</sup>, to their dismay, where part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Div. tasked with guarding the magazines in the column and took no part in the battle.

Vitoria was a complete victory; Joseph suffered not only 8,000 casualties but also the loss of virtually all his artillery, some 150 canon, and transport. Not just military supplies it would seem, as the allied army captured baggage wagons, some 3,000 carriages (including Joseph’s and other royal and general’s coaches), horses, mules and donkeys, food, money (it was said that the whole of the French army’s pay had arrived in Vitoria shortly before the battle) and women. ‘There were so many women in Joseph’s army that a French officer described it as “un bordel ambulante”.’ The town was in chaos, Spanish peasants joining in, looting treasure chests and ladies handboxes so that the ground was covered in ‘doubloons, dollars, watches, jewels and trinkets’ – much of it looted from the Spanish people in the first place.

Wellington’s intention of capturing Joseph’s army as well his baggage and loot was unsuccessful. By evening not only had his troops been distracted by plundering and drinking but torrential rain added to the obstacles of the Pamplona road, such that the cavalry cut short their pursuit after five miles.

Although his army was spent as a fighting force, Joseph managed to get 55,000 men safely away and there was more fighting to come in 1813 and the next year, as the French left strong rearguards divisions to hamper the allies advance, but after Vitoria the French were driven back over the Pyrenees into France. Napoleon, exasperated by his brother’s defeat, recalled Joseph to France and replaced him with Marshall Soult. The Battles of the Pyrenees and Toulouse were yet to come.

The battle was of wide significance throughout Europe. The Emperor Napoleon was already reeling from the catastrophe of the Russian campaign; Vitoria helped to show that his



domination of the continent was coming to an end. The battle established Lord Wellington's reputation throughout Europe; he had marched 400 miles in forty days, a small victory in logistics itself, which earned him the salute that: 'Wellington's supplies were always hunting for his army; Joseph's army was always hunting for its supplies'.

*Miniature portrait of Lieutenant Samuel Sweeney of the 28th Regiment, 1809-1823 - 'Drawn by a brother officer'.  
(Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum)*

*Sweeney transferred to the 28th 17th May 1808 and lost an arm at the battle of Vitoria, 21st June 1813.*

**Lt. Col. Ralph Stephenson TD.**

### **BATTLE OF RABOT, ST. LUCIA 1795**

**Whilst researching my article on the 28<sup>th</sup> Foot and the capture of St. Lucia in 1778 (Newsletter Spring 2011), I came across another connection between St Lucia and the Gloucestershire Regiment, this time with the 61<sup>st</sup> rather than the 28<sup>th</sup>, through what is known and celebrated on the island (but nowhere else as far as I can see) as the Battle of Rabot, an event which occurred on 22 April 1795.**

However before I relate the events of that day, I need to reset the scene. The geopolitical landscape has changed radically over the intervening 17 years. The independence of the United States of America had become an established fact and, following the Treaty of Paris in 1783, St Lucia had been returned to France. However by 1795 France was no longer the Bourbon France of the Ancien Regime, but the revolutionary France of Danton and Robespierre. Holding true to its mantra of "Liberté, Egalité and Fraternité" on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1794 the French National Convention finally voted in favour of a decree to end slavery in all French colonies. Although over 4,000 miles away from Paris, the impact on the French sugar islands was felt almost immediately and was enormous. The slaves stopped working in order – and in consequence the local economy all but collapsed. The freed slaves, when not debating the Rights of Man, were now roaming round the island as lawless bands of hungry vagrants. Faced with this breakdown of law and order and with impending financial ruin, the plantation owners did the only thing left to then – they invited back the hitherto hated British.

Thus by the mid 1795 we were back on the French West Indies, but this time in the very position we did not want to be, garrisoning numerous islands in order to protect the sugar plantations and their owners from the runaway slaves who were now termed 'the Brigands'.

In addition to the French and the Brigands there was another and much more deadly peril that our forces had to deal with. This was Yellow Fever, otherwise known as Yellow Jack or the Black Vomit. It is now believed that the origins of the yellow fever virus lay in West Africa and it was probably brought to the West Indies by the slaves, who themselves were largely immune from it's lethal effects. The disease is transmitted from one infected person to another by the bite of a mosquito. However, once you have had it and survived, you develop an immunity which lasts for the rest of your life. Thus the French settlers suffered much less than our own troops fresh in from Great Britain, with no such immunity, who were also often closely packed together in barrack buildings and tented camps thus assisting the transmission of the disease. The clearances of the dense Caribbean vegetation, to make way for the sugar plantations also led to much more standing water in the rainy season, ideal breeding conditions for mosquitoes. So bad was the situation that one report from a highly reliable source estimated that the average life expectancy for new recruits in theatre was only three months.

Citizen Robespierre sent a trusted aide Victor Huges, with a team of revolutionary zealots plus military supplies and a portable guillotine to carry the revolution to the West Indies. Huges managed to establish himself on Guadeloupe and using this island as a base, proceeded to organise guerrilla campaigns in all the neighbouring British held islands. The various islands of the Lesser Antilles are strung out in a long arc like a string of pearls, running roughly north south, and are close together, often within sight of each other.

Despite the efforts of Royal Navy patrols, it proved relatively easy for small vessels to slip into isolated coves at dead of night to drop supplies to sustain the rebels. Thus these bands of runaway slaves, armed and led by French officers presented a real guerrilla threat. They even rather grandly had the impudence to call themselves 'L'Armee du Bois'.



1995 Anniversary publication showing the disposition of British Foot Regiments at the battle of Rabot



On 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1795, a British column consisting of the 9<sup>th</sup>, 34<sup>th</sup> and 68<sup>th</sup> Regts., as well as the 61<sup>st</sup>, marched north from Vieux Fort in the direction of the main rebel stronghold of Soufriere. Today this passage is made by a metalled road winding between steep densely wooded slopes with rocky outcrops at their summit – then it was a rough track. After several hours of marching they encountered a primitive rampart built across the track from boulders. High on the slopes above small cannon had been mounted which proceeded to fire down on the British column. The troops responded by attempting to engage the rebels on the rampart, while other sought to climb the hills to capture the rebel gun. Additionally the naval cannon that had been hauled along to act as artillery support fired upwards and with some accuracy on the rebel gun position.

The engagement lasted for over seven hours without the British troops being able to make any real impression until, with ammunition running low and night beginning to fall General Stewart decided to withdraw back to Vieux Fort. Little is recorded on the actions of the 61<sup>st</sup> that day other than fact that at one point they were assigned to assail the slopes on the right and took over 60 casualties with 9 killed and 5 taken prisoner.

The British abandoned the island on June 8th 1795. St Lucia was ruled by the Brigands for 9 months, under the leadership of a republican called Goyrand. The Brigands resisted successive British administrations in the island until they laid down their arms and surrendered to Col. Drummond in late 1797. Slaves in St Lucia were totally emancipated during the abolition of Slavery in the British West Indies on 1st August 1838.

**Mr. Christopher Ryland**



*Freed slaves, the 'Brigands', attempt to negotiate with the British.*