

THE TWO-BATTALION SYSTEM IN BRITISH ARMY 1803-1817: THEORY AND PRACTICE IN THE 30TH REGIMENT OF THE LINE

By Carole Dival

When the Peace of Amiens was signed in March 1802, it had a dramatic effect upon the composition of the British army. Addington's government, like most British governments in a similar situation, immediately took the opportunity to reduce the size of the army, inadvertently saddling itself with a half-pay list of officers which proved unaffordable. At the end of 1801, the infantry consisted of three Guards regiments and ninety-five regiments of the line, seventeen of which possessed a second battalion. All but two of these junior battalions, those of the two-battalion Royal Scots (1st) and the multi-battalion Royal Americans (60th) were disbanded as a result of reduction.¹

Unfortunately, this 'peace which all men are glad of, but which no man can be proud of', as Sheridan famously remarked, proved short-lived, as 'peace in our time' tends to. Indeed, 'In such a peace wise and far-seeing men, like Grenville and Windham, could see nothing but the prospect of military establishments maintained perpetually upon a footing for war without the satisfaction of hostilities.'² It is not the purpose of this article to apportion blame for the situation which led to the British declaration of war in May 1803; a convincing case can be made against either side, or both. What is significant, however, is the effect of the declaration of war on the British army establishment, which immediately swung from reduction to augmentation. Indeed, the

Militia had been augmented even before the peace collapsed.

In 1802 the 95th came into being, although this was the result of experimentation with Riflemen and the development of light infantry tactics rather than the fear that a patched-up peace would prove short-lived. More significantly, four further line regiments were added to the army establishment in the next two years, while fifteen regiments were augmented by a second battalion in 1803, thirty-nine in 1804, and seven in 1805. Thus there were now sixty-three multi-battalion regiments, with more to follow in the remaining years of the war, making the multi-battalion regiment the norm rather than the exception. This was a new situation as far as British infantry was concerned.³

The relationship between the senior and junior battalion of a two-battalion regiment was simple in theory. '...when the first battalion was sent abroad, it was expected to transfer unfit or otherwise unbattleworthy men to the more junior battalions [assuming there was more than one], and take in fit men in return. The junior battalion would, hopefully, help the sick and unfit to recover, train up new recruits and periodically send out replacements to the field battalions.'⁴ In other words, the senior battalion was the fighting battalion, while the junior battalion was a training and feeder unit.

¹ S.J.Park and G.F.Nafziger, *The British Military: its System and Organization 1803-1815* (Cambridge, Ontario, 1983) 92-107.

² John Fortescue, *History of the British Army* (Uckfield, East Sussex, 2004) IV (ii) 869.

³ National Archives (London): index to WO12

⁴ Richard Partridge and Michael Oliver, *Napoleonic Army Handbook* (London, 1999) 26.



A recruiting party of the 33rd Regiment, The Havacakes (Author's collection)

Practice, however, is generally more interesting and more complex than theory. To start with, if we search for the theoretical arrangement during the Napoleonic period of the wars, we find twenty-two regiments that fitted the prescribed pattern, which means that fifty-one did not, including battalions added after 1805.⁵ In other words, as the scope of the war spread the theoretical supposition that the first battalion would be sent abroad while the second battalion stayed at home proved impossible to sustain for more than two-thirds of the multi-battalion regiments. As a result, the complementary nature of the relationship between senior and junior battalions was also disrupted. For example, Wellington's infantry (excluding the Guards regiments) at Salamanca in July 1812 consisted of twenty-nine senior battalions, sixteen junior battalions, including detachments from the 2/95th and 3/95th and the dispersed companies of the 5/60th, and four single-battalion corps.

By the end of 1812 some of the second battalion units were very weak but, anxious to keep these experienced and acclimatized men, Wellington formed the six weakest battalions into three provisional battalions. As he informed Colonel Torrens, Military Secretary to the Commander-in-Chief, on the 2nd February, 1813: 'I am of opinion from long experience that it is better for the service here to have one soldier or officer, whether of cavalry or infantry, who has served in two campaigns, than it is to have two, or even three who have not. Not only the new soldiers can perform no service, but by filling the

⁵ Park and Nafziger 92-107

hospitals they are a burden to us. For this reason I am so unwilling to part with the men whom I have formed into the provisional battalions; and I never will part with them as long as it is left to my discretion.'⁶

The Duke of York, commander-in-chief of the army, was not to be persuaded. His reasons, however, introduce a different view of how a battalion functioned. 'Experience has shown that a skeleton battalion composed of officers, non-commissioned officers, and a certain foundation of old and experienced soldiers can be reformed for any service in a short time: but if a corps reduced in numbers be broken up by the division of its establishment, such an interruption is occasioned in its interior oeconomy [*sic*] and *esprit de corps*, that its speedy recompletion and reorganization for foreign service is effectually prevented.'

This reasoning was particularly applicable to junior battalions. When such battalions were required for active service they had to shed both their own weaker men and those they had acquired from the senior battalion. Thus they were never likely to be at full strength when they went on campaign, while the exigencies of campaigning might quickly reduce them to the skeleton units referred to in York's argument.

The contemporary prejudice against the battle-worthiness of junior battalions was made explicit in a letter York wrote to General Graham in December 1813 when he apologized for the poor quality of the units Graham was to take to Flanders in support of the Dutch revolt against the French. Fortescue described this force as 'of extremely poor quality, including many boys and old men; for the battalions had been scraped together from the depots on the supposition that only garrison duties would be required of them.'⁷

The actual composition of the force supports this criticism. Two Guards battalions, the 2nd

⁶ Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, *The dispatches of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington, K.G. during his various campaigns in India, Denmark, Portugal, Spain, the Low Countries, and France. From 1799 to 1818.* ed. John Gurwood (London, 1834-39), X, 77.

⁷ Fortescue, X, 4.

Coldstreams and the 2nd Scots Guards, had served under General Graham in Cadiz and had fought at Barrosa (1811). The 2/30th and 2/44th had seen action in the Peninsula (1810-1813). The 2/78th had also seen some rather more limited action, in Italy (including Maida), Egypt and the Mediterranean (1806-1809). The 3/95th, like the Guards battalions, had been with Graham in Cadiz. Thus, only two of these six corps had seen recent and extensive military action. The remaining thirteen battalions that made up Graham's force in Flanders were untried, if we discount the expedition to Stralsund and the expedition to north Germany, both in 1813 (five of the battalions), and going further back in time the Walcheren disaster of 1809 (two battalions), and the brief campaign to take the Danish fleet in 1807 (one battalion). One other battalion, the 3/56th, had only been raised in 1813. Perhaps it is no surprise, therefore, that this force performed so inadequately, particularly at the assault of Bergen-op-Zoom, which ended in total disaster. As the men of the 2/30th, who were not involved in the attack, complained to their officers, "Why weren't we sent there?"⁸ After all, they had successfully escalated the San Vicente bastion at Badajoz.

If the theoretical relationship between senior and junior battalions was observed by less than a third of the multi-battalion regiments, then it is obviously of more significance to consider what happened when practice proved different from theory. As the Flanders expedition of 1814 demonstrated, junior battalions which had seen minimal or no

⁸ Unpublished journal of Edward Neville Macready.

active service could prove a liability when sent into action. And it is worth remembering that most of these second battalions formed part of Wellington's 'infamous' army during the Waterloo campaign. The junior battalions that served with Wellington in the Peninsula, however, proved to be units of a very different caliber. An examination of just one two-battalion infantry regiment of the line, the 30th, or Cambridgeshire, not only demonstrates what a junior battalion could achieve but also allows us to explore the practical relationship between the different battalions of the same regiment.



30th Foot, Private, 1806 (Author's collection)

The two battalions of this regiment in the period under consideration performed most of the duties expected of infantrymen on home, colonial or active service, which makes them a relevant example of how the system might work in practice.

Firstly, the relationship between the two battalions can be explored through official channels such as pay and muster lists, monthly returns, and inspection returns.⁹

When the 30th Regiment returned to England from Egypt (where it had played a significant part in the success of Abercromby's 1801 expedition) peace negotiations were

nearing completion. Addington's government was not so cavalier as to run down completely the strength of the army, and the much-weakened 30th was sent to the north east to recruit. By April 1803 it was obvious that the

⁹ National Archives: WO12, WO17 and WO27 respectively.

Peace would not last, and the regiment was now directed to support the activities of the naval impress officers, an order which demonstrates the primacy of the navy in the strategic thinking of the time. In June, however, the 30th was augmented by royal warrant into a two-battalion unit and ordered south to Ipswich. Total strength at this point was 518 NCOs and men.

If the question was where to find the manpower for a second battalion, the answer was the newly established Army of Reserve, Addington's response to perceived French military activity. Like the men of the Militia, these men were selected by ballot and were limited to home service; unlike the Militia at this point, they were encouraged to volunteer for general service. There has been much debate about the quality of the men raised by these means, but of the nine hundred who came into the 30th, nearly a third immediately volunteered for general service and another third followed their example during the following few years.¹⁰

Extra men in the ranks required extra officers. In January 1803, before augmentation, there were twenty six officers serving with the battalion. To make up the numbers, fourteen new officers transferred from other regiments, fourteen from half-pay (this was a means of reducing the half-pay bill), and twelve, mainly ensigns, were newly commissioned.

As for organizing the two battalions, the simple solution would have been to have kept the original battalion intact and to have built a new battalion around the incoming men and officers. As the Duke of York pointed out to Wellington, however, a cadre of experienced officers, NCOs and men was the necessary basis for a well-functioning battalion, both for efficiency and for *esprit de corps*. The adopted solution, therefore, was to combine old and new: long-serving soldiers, men from the Army of Reserve, and new recruits were divided between the two battalions, as were the NCOs. David

¹⁰ See Fortescue, *The County Lieutenancies and the Army 1803-1814* (Uckfield, East Sussex: The Naval and Military Press 2004 reprint) 73 and Carole Divall, *Inside the Regiment* (Barnsley UK, 2011) 33-34 for further discussion of this issue.

Glass, regimental sergeant major since 1801, transferred to the second battalion, where he remained until commissioned into the 4th Veteran Battalion in 1810. The three staff sergeants with the new battalion, Quartermaster Sergeant Robert Daniell, Paymaster Sergeant Luke Pickering, and Armorer Sergeant Joseph Peale, were all long-serving sergeants.

The officers presented a greater problem. Initially they were allocated on a fairly *ad hoc* basis. Amongst the company officers the division was reasonably even, nine old to eighteen new in the first battalion, nine to sixteen in the second, although all the staff officers except for the second lieutenant colonel and adjutant stayed with the first battalion. By the autumn of 1804, however, it was recognized that such an arrangement had implications for promotion through seniority, and it was decided that the senior officers at each rank would serve with the first battalion, the juniors with the second.

In January 1804 the two battalions sailed to Ireland. By the end of the year, when the first battalion sent its unsatisfactory men to the second and took the best men from that unit, the relationship between a battalion that needed to be kept fighting fit and a battalion that served as a feeder unit and depot was firmly established. Included among the unsatisfactory men were some who were considered too old or unfit for active service. They were quickly discharged or sent into garrison battalions (designed for home defense). The other sizeable category was men from the Army of Reserve who had not volunteered for general service. Since they could not be sent abroad, they were of no practical use to the first battalion although, as events were ironically to prove, many of them were fine soldiers. Indeed, a large proportion of the men balloted into the Army of Reserve were former soldiers or marines.

For the first two years of the two-battalion period, while both battalions were in Ireland, movement in either direction for both men and officers was easily organized. In November 1805, however, the first battalion sailed to England to join Lord Cathcart's expedition to north

Germany. After the failure of the Third Coalition, the battalion was then sent to India, sailing in May 1806. Thus 'a very serviceable body of men' with 'active and intelligent officers and NCOs'¹¹ was removed from the European theatre of war by a quirk of history. Only three officers and a few score men would return to see action with the second battalion. Some of the first battalion, officers and men, saw action as marines with Admiral Pellew in the Java campaign. Otherwise, the battalion merely moved from Madras to Trichinopoly, from Trichinopoly to Cannanore, and from Cannanore back to Madras over a period of eleven years.

As far as the junior battalion was concerned, for the next three years it continued to function in its allotted role as a feeder and trainer unit. At the end of 1806 many of the men from the Army of Reserve, who had been discarded by the first battalion, enlisted for general service with the second, which had implications for the future.

Recruiting activities

brought in a steady stream of newcomers, while a large number of boys were also enlisted, by special order. The best men (other than those from the Army of Reserve) were sent to India, a hundred NCOs and men in August 1808 for example, leaving the junior battalion as essentially an old-young unit.

By now Britain was committed to military activity in the Iberian Peninsula. In January 1809 the second battalion received marching orders for Kinsale. In March they embarked for Portugal. They were not a fighting-fit unit, however, and were quickly sent on to Gibraltar, with other of

the second battalions which had recently joined Sir Arthur Wellesley, thus allowing some acclimatized first battalions to join the British field army. At the same time, these second battalions would also have the chance to become acclimatized.

How long the 2/30th would have remained in Gibraltar had the French not laid siege to Cadiz is impossible to say, but from Cadiz, where the battalion served between May and September 1810, it was sent to Portugal, joining the field army that was taking up a position behind the Lines of Torres Vedras. Significantly, just before the battalion sailed from Cadiz, it received a detachment of two officers, two sergeants and eighty-two rank and file, many of them volunteers from the Irish Militia. There seems to

have been recognition at this point that the second battalion required the extra manpower rather than the first.

It is interesting to compare the manpower of the two battalions at

this point. When the second battalion was inspected in Cadiz, the total strength was fifty sergeants and 834 other ranks, of whom 133 had served for more than seven years. Against this moderate figure, 358 had served for less than four years. Furthermore, 467 were under thirty, a number which included half the sergeants.¹² The first battalion in Trichinopoly had a total strength of fifty-three sergeants and 1015 other ranks, of whom 611 had served for more than seven years and only thirty-three had served less than four years. All but three of the sergeants had served for at least five years. Like the second battalion, though, just over half the manpower was under



Recruits drilling, by J.A. Atkinson
(by kind permission of Philip Haythornthwaite)

¹¹ National Archives: WO27/90.

¹² National Archives: WO27/98.

thirty, a reminder that the junior battalion still had more of the superannuated soldiers in its ranks.¹³



The 2/30th escalading the San Vincente bastion

The second battalion was now part of Wellington's army, serving in the fifth division. By the end of 1812, it had seen action at Fuentes de Oñoro, Badajoz, Salamanca and Villamuriel (some also claimed a bar for Ciudad Rodrigo in 1848, having served as engineers or artificers during the siege). They were a weakened corps, however, mainly through disease. In December the total strength of the battalion was 601 NCOs and other ranks, not counting prisoners of war and men recruiting in England and Ireland. Of this total only 269 were fit for duty, of whom twenty-six were on command. Six weak companies were sent back to England in January 1813, followed six months later by the four stronger companies which, with the 2/44th, had formed a third provisional battalion.¹⁴

The ten companies were reunited on Jersey. Thanks to some energetic recruiting and more volunteers from the Militia, the strength of the battalion rose to 816 by November, at which point an inspection by Major General Hallam identified the unit as fit for active service. A year later, another inspection, by Major General Mackenzie, revealed that no-one in the battalion had served for less than two years. Reinforcements arrived in the spring of 1815, but

¹³ National Archives: WO27/96.

¹⁴ Sending his weakest provisional battalion to England was Wellington's concession to the Duke of York's demand that all the provisional battalions should be sent home.

only fifteen of these were raw; that is to say, they had less than two years' experience, which indicates that the 2/30th were among the more experienced of Wellington's Waterloo battalions.¹⁵

In January 1814, while the first battalion remained in India doing not very much, the second battalion, as we have seen, became part of General Graham's army in Flanders. It was still there when Napoleon crossed the border into Belgium in June 1815. It is no accident that it was the one battalion in Halkett's British brigade which stood its ground at Quatre Bras when attacked by French cavalry, and then played a notable part in holding the center at Waterloo.

With Napoleon safely on St Helena, the British government reacted in its usual manner and immediately began a process of reduction. In March 1817, General Manners, Colonel of the 30th, was informed that the second battalion was to be disbanded on the 24th April, after which the regiment would become a single-battalion unit with a recruiting company. The men were quickly dealt with. Half of them were transferred to the first battalion. The remainder was pensioned off.

The officers, however, created a more serious problem which took two years to resolve. Although eleven lieutenants and eight ensigns had transferred from the second to the first battalion between May 1805 and April 1806, in order to preserve seniority, by June 1812 there were twelve officers with the first battalion who should have been with the second after promotion to a higher rank, and nine with the second who should have been with the first after moving up the list within their rank. Four years later, there were forty-one officers serving with the wrong battalion.

The distance between England and India meant it was months before the officers with the first battalion learnt of the new situation. There was also some horse-trading before the situation resolved itself. Some first battalion officers were prepared to go on half-pay, which meant second battalion officer could exchange back into the

¹⁵ National Archives: WO27/129 and WO27/134.

regiment. The commander of the second battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Hamilton, certainly offered to pay the difference for at least two of his officers so that they could remain in the regiment. 'Colonel Hamilton wrote me a most gratifying letter, requesting me, if I wished to return to the army, to lodge the regulated difference, and come with him to serve under the old colors in India. He afterwards evinced his kindness more strongly, by writing to our agent, under the erroneous impression that I had some difficulty in raising the money, desiring him on no account to delay the exchange, even if the difference was not lodged, as he would be answerable for its payment.'¹⁶ There was also a suspicion that extra money changed hands in some cases as commissions were put up for barter. 'After some delay, occasioned by the girouetterie and avarice of a brace of my brother officers, the business was at length satisfactorily arranged.'¹⁷ [Macready's journal]

Although the official history of the two battalions, as outlined above, is easy to establish through monthly returns, this history only tells us where the two battalions served and their relative strength, and identifies their respective complements of officers. Other evidence, such as the comments in inspection returns, muster rolls and court martial proceedings, when combined with the observations of some perceptive diarists, make clear that within a two-battalion regiment each battalion would quickly develop its own character and ethos.

At this point it needs to be remembered that although officialdom thought in terms of regiments, the regiment was merely an administrative concept. The battalion was the operational unit and each battalion functioned as a discrete corps. Consequently, both the manpower which constituted the battalion and the circumstances under which it served played a crucial part in establishing its character.

Even the nationality of the soldiers in the ranks might be significant to the character of the individual battalion. In April/May 1814 all three units of the 30th Regiment, the 1st battalion at

¹⁶ Macready's journal.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Cannanore, India, the 2nd battalion at Braashatt, Flanders, and the depot in Colchester were inspected within the space of a month. This gives us a comprehensive picture of the regiment in total, but also reveals some significant differences.¹⁸

The total strength was 231 NCOs and 1561 privates, somewhat unequally distributed, so that the senior battalion was nearly twice the strength of the junior, while there were 377 men at the depot, many of whom would join the second battalion in time for the Waterloo campaign. More interesting, though, is the composition of the three units. Although overall the regiment was two thirds English and one third Irish, with a very small number of Scots and foreigners, the proportion of English to Irish in the first battalion was 783:197, while the second battalion it was 259:229.

In theory, the high proportion of Irish in the 2nd battalion should have created a discipline problem, since the 'wild Irish' as Oman described them were noted for their somewhat casual response to rules and regulations. As we shall see, however, other factors meant that the situation in practice was rather different. More significant than the actual number of Irish in the 2nd battalion is their origin. From 1806, a steady stream of volunteers had transferred into the 30th from the Irish Militia. These were not only trained men and genuine volunteers but, since they could not serve outside Europe, they all went into the 2nd battalion, thus improving its fighting capacity. To balance this, however, the longer serving and thus more experienced men still tended to be in the first battalion.

Nevertheless, it is important to define what is meant by experience in this context. For the long-serving men of the 1st battalion it constituted eight years in India, although a handful of really long-serving men had seen action at Toulon (1793), Corsica (1794), Malta (1799) and in Egypt (1801). In the second battalion, however, even three years' service included the pursuit of Masséna from Spain and the three actions of 1812, Badajoz, Salamanca and Villamuriel, this last being a fiercely fought defensive action by

¹⁸ National Archives: WO27/126.

the fifth division to hold a position so that the rest of the Anglo-Portuguese army could retreat in safety. This experience, combined with the well-trained Irish militia volunteers, meant that the second battalion was the fighting battalion, in practice, even if not according to theory.



The bridge at Villamuriel

As might be expected by 1814, when the supply of recruits to the first battalion had been curtailed by the needs of the second battalion, there was a marked discrepancy in the age range of the two battalions. All but 135 of the first battalion were over twenty-five. The largest number (581) was aged between twenty-five and forty. In the second battalion 264 were under twenty-five, including eighteen lads and boys. These were young, fit men, for the death and sickness rate was now minimal. As we shall see, they were also less well acquainted with the sins of more experienced (or more bored) soldiers.

It was a truism of the period that good NCOs made for a good battalion, and in this respect there is little to differentiate the two battalions, except that the second battalion had a better ration of NCOs to privates, and sergeants to corporals, than the first battalion. In each unit, however, all the sergeants had at least six years' experience, although those of the second battalion were still generally younger. This battalion also appointed younger, and less experienced, corporals.

If these inspection returns reveal some of the reasons why the second battalion conducted itself so well in 1812 and would do so again in June 1815, another factor which needs to be

considered is the commanding officers of the two battalions.

When the second battalion was added in 1803 the senior lieutenant colonel, Charles Green, was in Grenada. He left the regiment soon afterwards, making way for William Wilkinson to take command of the first battalion. Wilkinson had been with the regiment since 1773, was intensely protective of its good reputation, and had clear ideas of an officer's duty. For example, when invited to complain about being drafted into marine service in the Mediterranean, he replied: 'If a soldier supposes he has a right to choose his service, there will soon be an end of discipline.' He also advised a young relative who was about to join the 30th: 'Be always respectful and obedient to your commanding officer, and never enter into cabals, either with or against any of your brother officers.'¹⁹ [Obituary notice 1840] He was a strict disciplinarian, but also a humane man who thought nothing of visiting soldiers who contracted the plague in Egypt.



A sketch of Gen. Wilkinson by Joseph Bovet, c.1830 (Author's collection)

In 1803 William Lockhart took command of the second battalion. He had been nineteen years with the 30th and seems to have decided from its

¹⁹ Obituary notice 1840

foundation that the second battalion should match the first battalion, both in discipline and in expertise. Within a year, however, he was second lieutenant-colonel with the senior battalion. When Wilkinson was appointed to the general list in 1810 Lockhart took over command but he was soon appointed to staff duties at Pondicherry, and command devolved on the senior major (later lieutenant-colonel), Philip Vaumorel.

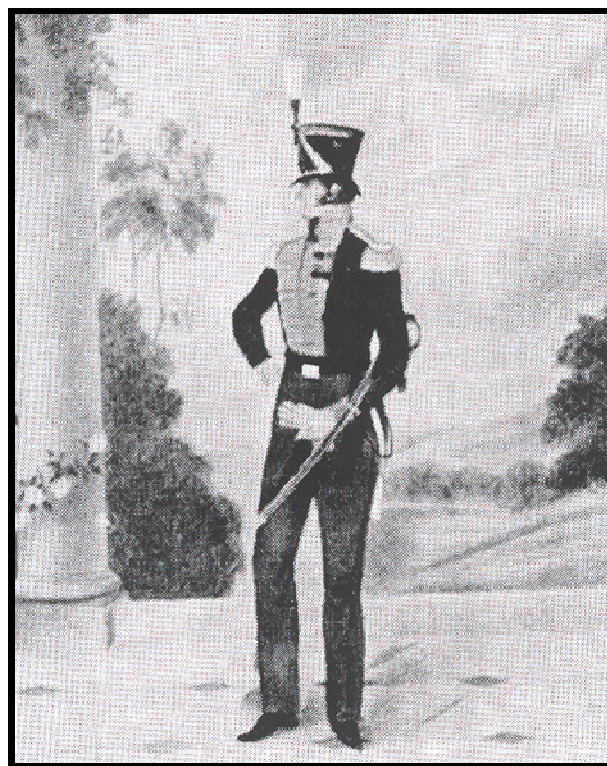
There seems little doubt that Vaumorel commanded in the style of Wilkinson and Lockhart, having already served with both of them for ten years at the beginning of the two-battalion period. When we look at the discipline problems he faced in India, however, we shall see that he had little choice but to be a martinet. On the other hand, he increasingly introduced punishments other than the lash, which suggests that his stringent approach to discipline was leavened by humanity. Vaumorel remained in command of the first battalion for the rest of the two-battalion period.

William Minet came into the 30th as lieutenant-colonel in 1804, taking the vacancy created by Green's promotion to the general list. It is tempting to see him as possibly the weakest of the commanding officers under consideration, mainly because his corps was dismissed by Wellington in 1809 as unfit for service and sent off to Gibraltar. This may be an unfair judgment, however, when it is remembered that he had inherited all the cast-offs of the first battalion in 1806, while having to surrender his own best men.

When the battalion was inspected by General Frazer in November 1809 Minet was described as 'a very zealous officer' supported by officers and NCOs who 'appeared desirous to perform their duties to the best of their abilities'. Against this, the men were 'not in general stout', although they were 'clothed and disciplined as soldiers'. Although there had been twenty-eight regimental courts martial in the previous six months, itself a relatively low number, there had been very few during the previous two months. Perhaps the most telling point is the comment that 'this Battalion having lately been upon

service in Portugal and having been much separated, and employed upon small detachments, I apprehend the marching and general appearance may be very much improved before the next inspection.'²⁰ [WO27 96] This would seem to be a reflection on Minet's 'zealous' approach to command.

When the second battalion left Cadiz in September 1810, General Graham wrote to Wellington, warmly recommending two officers. One of them, Major Alexander Hamilton, whom Graham had first met in Toulon in 1793 and who had been his brigade major in Malta, became the commanding officer of the 2nd battalion when Minet was promoted to the general list.



Lt. Col. Alexander Hamilton (Author's collection)

Like Wilkinson, Hamilton saw all his service with the 30th (1787-1830). He was probably the most distinguished, and certainly the most colorful, of the five commanding officers. When the lieutenant-colonel becomes a talisman to his men, and a friend in need to his most talented NCOs and officers, he obviously possesses qualities beyond the ordinary. One incident serves to sum up the man. At Quatre Bras 'with

²⁰ National Archives: WO27/126.

the generous solicitude he always evinced for his officers and men, but forgetful that his duties as commanding officer demanded he should not expose himself, ordered the battalion to stand fast, while he singly approached [a] hedge to reconnoiter. The cavalry were not visible; but two tirailleurs who had posted themselves in a tree, both fired at the Colonel: one of their shots hit him in the left leg, the ball obliquely passing between the bones.²¹ [Obituary notice 1838]

If his ability to endear himself to the battalion was one of his talents, the other was his ability to bring a corps rapidly and effectively to a high state of discipline and efficiency. As early as 1805, in Ireland, he had been given the responsibility of training a brigade of light companies. In the Peninsula in 1813 he quickly brought the provisional battalion of the 2/30th and 2/44th up to scratch, repeating the achievement later the same year in Jersey when he brought the four companies back to join the depleted six companies, now reinforced by recruits and militia volunteers.

Compared with the less fortunate experience of some other regiments, it is obvious that both battalions of the 30th were fortunate in their commanding officers. Although the way they exercised command differed greatly, as much because of circumstances as of character, all were commended for their zeal and all dedicated themselves to the good of the regiment. Vaumorel and Hamilton had distinguished themselves at Toulon and, along with Lockhart, again in Egypt. Hamilton continued to inspire the men of the second battalion throughout the period spent in the Peninsula and during the Waterloo campaign. Yet Minet and Hamilton's more relaxed style of command does suggest something about the character of the second battalion. And it seems safe to conclude that Hamilton was the only one of the commanding officers who was loved by the men in the ranks.

That they faced very different problems is brought out by the section of the inspection returns which deals with discipline, the record of regimental courts martial, as well as by the proceedings of general courts martial. There is

also a clue to the difference between the two battalions in the muster rolls. Taken on the 25th of each month, they record the exact circumstance of each soldier on the roll on that date, including those who were prisoners.

Initially, when both battalions were in Ireland, the figures for men returned as prisoners tended to be similar, but a greater discrepancy emerged the longer the first battalion was in India. In 1808, for example, the figures were seven for the first battalion and one for the second. Four years later, the figures were twelve and none. In 1816 the second battalion is still recording none, but the first had risen to sixty. Although a small number were serving sentences of solitary confinement, the discrepancy is difficult to explain other than by the greater indiscipline of the first battalion or lax command of the 2nd. Since the latter situation would have been commented upon in inspection reports, if it existed, the former is the more likely explanation. Furthermore, these are the figures on twelve specific days of a year. When notionally multiplied across the whole year, we can see that indiscipline was obviously much more of a problem in the first battalion than in the second.

Simple comparison suggests that indiscipline affected all ranks in the first battalion. For example, whereas only two officers in the second battalion stood a general court martial, and one was acquitted, thirteen in the first battalion were prosecuted, with two acquittals. Similarly, there were four demotions of staff sergeants in the first battalion against one in the second. Demotion of NCOs to the ranks was also proportionately more common in the senior battalion.

A survey of the records of regimental courts martial (where regimental officers sat in judgment and passed sentence) reveals some significant differences. Between 1812 and 1816 there was an average of fourteen trials a month in the first battalion, against three per month in the second, a discrepancy which cannot simply be explained by the greater strength of the senior battalion.

The actual offences also differed greatly. Nearly half the charges in the first battalion

²¹ Obituary notice 1838

involved drunkenness, the most common offence of the time, against fewer than one in ten in the second. The figures for India include fifty-one NCOs, against none in the second battalion, although a color sergeant was demoted to sergeant for sitting with a soldier who was drunk.

Against this, theft was fairly rare in the first battalion (5% of charges), but more common in the second battalion (13%). Significantly, though, most thieving in the first battalion was committed against fellow soldiers, whereas there was only one instance (pilfering a shirt) in the second battalion.

Two offences account for similar percentages of charges in each of the battalions, disrespect and “making away with regimental necessities”, presumably to turn the stolen items into money. The latter tended to be a stand-alone charge in the second battalion but was frequently connected to drunkenness in the first, which suggests what the money was used for. Men in the first battalion generally showed disrespect to officers, while in the second battalion the target was NCOs. This definitely suggests a difference in the ethos of the two battalions. It is not surprising, perhaps, that men who followed their officers into action felt more respect for them in the day-to-day life of the battalion.

There is a raft of offences found only in the first battalion: malingering, abuse of women, children and local people, fighting, false report and malicious gossip. These imply much about the soldier’s life in India, suggesting as they do boredom, frustration and a definite lack of fellowship. Linked to the incidence of suicide and attempted suicide and mental breakdown (all unknown in the second battalion), these more personal offences suggest the stresses that ran through the battalion as some men found life in India difficult to cope with. Significantly, perhaps, more than half the officer courts martial involved dueling or challenges within the regiment (the rest were charges of drunkenness). The acquittal in the second battalion was on a charge of murder, but Lieutenant Richard

Heaviside had killed a man from another regiment.²²

Punishment also showed some notable differences. Flogging was the norm in both battalions, as in most other regiments of the time, and the average sentence was not markedly different, 224 lashes in the first and 183 in the second. However, the average number of lashes actually inflicted was 217 in the first battalion and 119 in the second. There was also more chance of a pardon in the second battalion, 14% against 3%. Hamilton consistently showed mercy to those whose conduct was generally good, perhaps agreeing with the often expressed opinion, that a flogging could turn a good man bad.

The extent to which a battalion might respond positively to its commanding officer is implied by some statistics from the period after reduction. When Hamilton took the remnants of the second battalion to India in 1818, he was initially junior to Vaumorel. This of itself must have been a difficult situation, for the commanding officer of a battalion was independent, whatever his seniority within the regiment and Hamilton now found himself junior in command to Vaumorel. Furthermore, Edward Macready implies in his journal that Vaumorel deliberately insulted the battle-hardened officers and soldiers.

‘We had two hundred as fine fellows as ever stepped, and nine officers, of whom seven had seen good service. Next day we were told off to companies, and all our men put to drill. This was not a measure calculated to produce much cordiality between the men of the two Battalions, as a soldier who had seen such days as 6th April 1812 [Badajoz], 22nd July [Salamanca] and 25th October [Villamuriel] of the same year, and the 16th and 18th June 1815, could hardly be supposed very deficient in the knowledge of his duty, nor could he feel particularly gratified to see men who had never heard an angry shot or seen an enemy, lolling and enjoying themselves in their cots, while he was called on to exhibit himself

²² See Divall, *Redcoats against Napoleon* (Barnsley, 2009) 40 for further discussion of this court martial and its unexpected outcome.

three hours a day for many weeks as a young and ignorant recruit.²³

Vaumorel returned to Europe for recovery of health late in 1818, dying two years later. Under Hamilton's command there was a significant decrease in the number of regimental courts martial, to six a month in 1820, for example. Although the figures fluctuated from year to year, they remained consistently lower and some regular offenders actually disappeared from the records.

These recidivists, the King's hard bargains, were a problem for most battalions. Sir John Colborne (later Lord Seaton) was of the opinion that a battalion with less than fifty of such characters could count itself lucky. If so, then it would appear that the second battalion of the 30th was one such unit. In the surviving records, only three men made as many as three appearances before regimental courts martial, two of them English, incidentally. A further four men were sentenced to transportation for life by general court martial, three of them having been involved in the same theft in Gibraltar and the fourth for assaulting a Portuguese peasant.

In the first battalion, in contrast, fifty-seven men made at least three appearances before regimental courts martial (most of them English), the record being held by James Lee, who made ten between 1812 and 1816 alone. Not surprisingly, when he was discharged in 1827 his conduct was described as 'very bad', although this did not stop him from receiving a pension. No man from the first battalion was sentenced to transportation although several faced a general court martial and some chose to commute a heavy sentence (500 or more lashes) to service in a penal regiment, as was a soldier's right.

The opinion of Macready upon his first encounter with the senior battalion sums up why it emerges from any investigation as the less satisfactory of the two battalions. 'The men of the first battalion appeared well drilled and set up, but were terribly emaciated and had a dissipated (or what the French would call demoralized) appearance. They were

considerably superior to the other regiments on the Madras establishment but being accustomed to the strict discipline and orderly behavior of our troops at home, and totally unacquainted with the license which custom has made the right of the English soldier in India, I must confess I was sadly prejudiced against them on our first acquaintance.' In contrast, he noted that upon the arrival of the remnants of the second battalion: 'Many of the Officers of the Regiment came to see us, and remarked that they had never seen such a detachment land in India.'²⁴

It is a pity that none of the adjutants of the first battalion kept a journal (unless such a journal survives, undiscovered). Lieutenant and Adjutant William Stewart of the second battalion did keep a journal, however, and the volume that runs from September 1810 to May 1811 has survived. What is notable is the absence of any reference to discipline problems, since dealing with these would have been part of his responsibilities. He does refer to his other duties, such as supervising drill, which seems to have given him particular problems. For example, he recorded on the 23rd December, 'At Brigade Drill this evening we had a great display of Errors throughout the maneuvering' while on the 26th February there was a 'Field Day under Major H[amilton] – our movements as usual extremely rappid [sic] & tolerably confused!!'²⁵ The lack of any reference to misbehavior, therefore, suggests that it was not a problem, even though there are no inspection returns for the same period to confirm this conclusion.

Macready was not neutral in his estimation of the two battalions, having joined the second battalion in January 1814 and served with it through the drama of the Waterloo campaign. Nevertheless, he was a perceptive judge who wrote of the second battalion: 'This brave corps – which will be remembered as long as the names of Fuentes d'Onor, Badajoz, Salamanca, [Villa]Muriel, Quatrebras [sic], and Waterloo are emblazoned in the brightest pages of British achievement – was not more distinguished by its professional exertions, than by the cordiality and brotherly unanimity that pervaded its internal

²³ Macready's journal.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Unpublished journal of Lieutenant William Stewart.

regulations. The men were devoted to their colors and their officers; never, while the regiment [battalion] existed, had they been known to shrink from either; the officers, scrupulously attentive to their soldiers, entered with feeling into their wants and wishes, and received a pleasing return when circumstances threw the power of obliging into the hands of the private.'

Having referred to the many thanks the battalion received from the generals it served under, Macready continued by quoting from the final inspection returns, that "'the internal oeconomy [*sic*] of this regiment has seldom been equaled, but never surpassed by any in the service;" and that "this gallant corps substantiates its claim to its country's gratitude, not more by its exertions in the field, than by its uniformly exemplary conduct in quarters.'" Thus 'it was not brutal fierceness, but a truly noble feeling for the honor of their country and corps that excited their energies on the day of action.'²⁶

No battalion could want a finer epitaph and the second battalion of the 30th regiment could be said to have marched into history with their colors flying, knowing they had proved that when circumstances demanded excellence a second battalion could live up to expectations as easily as a first battalion. Whatever the theory of the system that pertained in the army, harsh necessity proved that it could be circumvented when circumstances required.

²⁶ Macready's journal.