



About the Unit



The 12th Light Dragoons Napoleonic Living History Unit, is a non-profit making organisation consisting entirely of enthusiasts. Our aim is to provide an exciting, interesting, historically accurate portrayal of one of the finest Light Dragoon regiments serving in the armies of Wellington's time. The proceeds of all events are invested in the Unit to renew and improve our displays.

We pride ourselves on the standards of our authenticity, safety and above all horsecare.

English heritage

For more than 5 years, the Unit has provided English Heritage with displays, both individually and with other units, all over the country. From under the battlements of castles such as Kenilworth and Pevensey to the elegant parkland of Whitley Court and Audley End, the troopers of the unit have paraded and displayed for the public.

We have taken part in the major, 2 day event 'History Through the Ages' at Kirby Hall, Lincolnshire which is the largest living history display in Europe.

Napoleonic Association

The 12th are also members of the Napoleonic Association and as such we have taken part in battle re-enactments both in the UK and abroad. Perhaps the finest was the 1995 anniversary re-enactment of the Battle of Waterloo, staged on the field of Waterloo itself with over 3500 participants.

Best Military Re-Enactment Group of the Year 1995

In recognition of our high standards of authenticity and professionalism, the Unit was awarded the prize as Best Military Re-Enactment Group of the Year 1995 by the magazine Military Modelling presented at the National Army Museum, London.

Sharpe's Regiment.

Our dedication to the subject also lead to us providing cavalry and dismounted extras for the filming of this episode of the extremely popular T.V. series starring Sean Bean.

Our horses.

Our horses are all highly trained and provided from a stables specialising in horses schooled for film and TV work. They are very much used to public attention - as at home in the middle of a battle re-enactment as standing quietly on the picket line for a 'photo-call'! The horses have been ridden by the likes of **Mel Gibson** in **Hamlet**, **Kenneth Brannagh** in **Henry V** & **Much Ado About Nothing** and **Nigel Hawthorn** in **The Madness of King George**. The horses are provided complete with grooms & all feed and if there is no enclosed area available on site, a portable electric horse fence can be provided to fence off a suitable area of pasture.

What we need.

Our commitment to the highest standards of horse care means that there are certain facilities needed for the provision of a either a mounted or dismounted display. The exact needs will depend on the number of days, the numbers of horses and type of camp required.

Such facilities include:

A fresh water supply for the horses,

A suitable paddock area / pasture, particularly if the horses are to be kept overnight,

A suitable area of sheltered grass for the camp enclosure, with nearby toilet facilities etc.,

A cordoned display arena if required (size & layout depending on the show).

We will be happy to talk these over in detail with potential sponsors to ensure that the event is optimally arranged for all.



Public Displays



The main work of the unit is to provide public displays and several levels and types of public event can be catered for depending on the sponsor's requirements and the availability of suitable space and provisions for horse related events.

The troop can provide any or all of the following during events.

Ceremonial / guard duty

Either in full dress (review order) or campaign dress (battle order) individuals or pairs of troopers can provide a guard either dismounted or, where appropriate, mounted.

This is ideal where space is limited for fuller arena displays but still offers the public the chance to see and feel the uniform and accoutrements of the light cavalry. It is also an excellent 'live' accompaniment to musical or dramatic events and is the usual vehicle for photographic opportunities with members of the public.

Parade duty

Half sections of 2 or 3 troopers can patrol larger arenas or venues where situations and safety regulations permit. This is particularly suited to larger or period venues where the steady patrolling of mounted troopers in full uniform, swords carried at the slope, helps to lend an air of history to a more static display.

We are also happy to provide a mixture of ceremonial and parade duty for public parades and four troopers could be detailed to provide an honour guard for VIPs or as escorts.

Drill displays

Conducted to the original commands or the musical marches of the regiment (recorded by the band of the 9th/12th lancers specifically for the unit), the troop can perform arena displays. These can be the tactics of manoeuvring in line & column, showing the scouting and skirmishing duties of the cavalry and, of course, the chilling cavalry charge. They may also be a more sedate display of riding, ideal as a backdrop to events such as 'son et lumiere'.

As part of a display, where suitable provisions exist for Public Address, the unit can provide a 'Show and Tell' educational display describing the troopers' and horses' equipment.

Skill at arms.

One of the most exciting displays offered by the unit is a show of exercises taught to more experienced troopers to practice their weapons skills. Such training became the forerunner of the skill-at-arms competitions still undertaken by the modern army and police forces.

Whether it be;

"Splitting the Turk's head" - sabre cuts delivered against cabbage 'heads' to teach the troopers to back cut at the face and neck

"Running the ring" - attempting to carry a 4 inch wooden ring, designed to practice accurately delivering the point of the sword during the charge

or

"Tent pegging" - spearing targets from the ground at the charge to practice use of the lance - one of the most feared of Napoleonic cavalry weapons,

For 1999, the unit hopes to also be able to offer a mounted pistol and carbine firearms display following clarification of the current firearms legislation.

(For safety reasons, such displays can only be offered where suitable provision of an appropriate arena separated from spectators is available. For more details of such requirements please see 'What we need' on the 'About the Unit' page.)

We are happy to mix displays to provide the most suitable combination for a particular venue and we would be happy to suggest suitable variations depending on a sponsor's specific situation. Please contact the unit to discuss any specific needs which may not be covered here.



Living History.



The unit does not just provide formal displays and we are keen to offer continuous Living History throughout the period of public show. There are many aspects to accurately portraying of a troop of the 12th Light Dragoons as they would have appeared during the Napoleonic Wars. This extends from the uniform, weapons and equipment through the horse furniture and care, to the camp life and activities of the troop. The 12th has always been committed to the highest standards of Living History and we have been providing displays under the strict guidelines set down by English Heritage for over 5 years. In all aspects of our events we try to convey the look and the feel of the life of one of the classic light cavalry regiments of the Peninsula and Waterloo campaigns.

We also have lady members who form a group adding the genteel grace of the regency period to the military backdrop with empire line dresses, parasols and bonnets. This provides an opportunity for discussion to those members of the public interested in civilian life and dress.

Living History can be provided by the unit at several levels depending on the circumstances of our campsite and sponsor's requirements.

Full camp

A full working impression of a light cavalry picket's camp is the highest level of Living History that we provide. The camp could include:

- Canvas tentage for troopers and NCOs
- Officer's tent with regalia and regency ladies in attendance
- Wooden supply boxes, tables, and benches with canvas campaign furniture
- 'Cut earth' fire pit with roasting spit, chains and cooking pans
- A working trooper's tent with personal possessions and 'necessaries'
- Uniforms, equipment, saddlery, tack and horse furniture laid out and on display
- Horses picketed on a staked line with canvas water buckets, feed and straw just as they would have been on campaign

All part of the period camp is the atmosphere of working. Throughout the day, the camp is the base for the troop between displays and events with the horses being fed & groomed, uniforms cleaned, saddlery checked, weapons readied and men cooking and eating over a smoking fire just as they would have done in the early 19th century.

Public interaction.

In the interests of safety the public aren't allowed free access within the living history area but visitors are encouraged to the camp to experience the sights and sounds of a working cavalry picket. The members of the unit are happy to give talks to the visitors or answer questions between duties and we use 'third person living history' with members of the public to allow for an easier, more informative discussion.

Display board.

To act as a catalyst for public interest, we can provide a non authentic display stand on the perimeter of the camp which contains pictures, copies of letters etc. about the 12th on campaign and displays of troopers' personal equipment.



Uniform and Weapons



Introduced not long before the Revolutionary Wars, in the mid 18th Century, the new British 'Light' Cavalry soon developed a reputation for their blue uniforms (immediately distinctive in an army of red coats!) and their swagger and dash.

The 12th Light Dragoons was particularly handsomely uniformed in Navy (then called 'Royal') Blue with Yellow facings.

1806 pattern uniform

From around 1806 until 1812, during their Peninsula service the Regiment was uniformed in the classic light cavalry uniform. The unit will be offering the 1806 pattern uniform for displays from 1998 onwards.

Consisting of an elaborately braided, tight fitting dolman jacket of Hungarian influence and worn with tight white cotton breeches, the troopers look every inch the light cavalryman. The headgear is the striking tarleton - a peaked leather helmet crested with a full black bearskin 'comb' and finished with a silk 'turban', brass fittings and a red and white goose feather plume.

1812 pattern uniform

Worn from the latter days of the Peninsula campaign and throughout the Waterloo period, the 1812 uniform includes a continental style blue jacket faced with bright yellow turnbacks ('plastrons') and tails. The headgear is the black & white leather and felt 'shako' carrying a short feather plume and yellow cap lines.

All our uniforms are made to authentic design with original materials wherever possible. This gives the unit the authentic look of 'wool, cotton and leather' and provides an excellent source for discussion and demonstration with the public.

Horse furniture

An integral part of everything we do, our horses are as meticulously uniformed as the men. Dressed in the, hand embroidered blue & yellow shabraque (horse cloth), carrying a numbered equipment roll (valise), the trooper's cloak and a sheepskin saddle cover, the horses are always paraded to the highest possible standard. Together with a full decorative military double bridle, breast plate and light cavalry saddle, the horse furniture and tack is also a near copy of the period design. For display purposes, the unit possesses copies of original, unique, bridles and tack designed for the regiment by the Colonel and used during their service.

Personal Equipment

All troopers were expected to possess a long list of 'necessaries' not just for himself but also for his horse. Including stockings, spare shirts, spare breeches, shoes, cleaning equipment, horse grooming kit, firearms' tools and any other personal items, these all had to fit into the valise on the horse's back to be carried with him on campaign. The unit has several fully working valises to demonstrate that the essential needs of a soldier on campaign are not much different nowdays to during the times of Wellington.

Weapons

Sabre

The principle weapon of the light cavalry was the 1796 pattern light cavalry sabre. Still prized as one of the finest slashing weapons of its type ever made, the Unit practices regularly with the sword to be able to put on displays of swordsmanship that are not only exciting but safe for man and horse.



Lance

Just as the 12th Light Dragoons did during their Peninsula service, we practice with the French / Polish pattern lance. With its 8 inch steel blade and coloured pennant fluttering, the lance is not only one of the most striking of cavalry weapons it is also one of the most difficult to use.

Firearms

The Unit also uses replica flintlock pistols and carbine muskets from horseback. These weapons were notoriously unreliable, inaccurate and difficult to use from horseback but provide additional drama to the skill-at-arms display.