

Kincaid at Waterloo

by Graham
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Captain Sir John Kincaid served with the 95th and the Rifle Brigade from 1809 to 1831, a career that took him on the Walcheren expedition and via the Peninsular to Waterloo. His memoirs are not only an eye-witness account of history in the making but are also a mine of anecdotal observations on campaign life.

Kincaid awoke at dawn to find himself soaked to the skin from the overnight rain, and minus one horse. He had tethered it to a sword stuck in the turf and provided it with sufficient fodder to hold its attention, but during the dark hours, the beast had drawn its sword and marched off. It took Kincaid an hour to find his errant mount among the ten thousand others on the field, and he eventually found it a mere half mile away peacefully enjoying the company of its brothers in the Artillery.

The weather began to clear and the 95th were able to look to their kit in preparation for a possible engagement. They brewed up a large cauldron of tea to warm their spirits, which soon attracted the attention of passing staff officers and other important people.¹

When they were ordered to establish reserve ammunition dumps and to send their surplus impedimenta to the rear, Kincaid and his men were confirmed in their suspicion of action that day, strengthened by the rumour of the approach of 30,000 Prussians. The 95th occupied a small rise opposite the farmhouse of La Haye Sainte held by the King's German Legion, with a forward position in a sand or gravel pit being maintained by two companies of the 1st Battalion. The rise gave a good view of the movement of the French left towards Hougoumont, and when a cannon ball took off the head of the forward right hand man, Kincaid mused that his role as an idle spectator was destined to be brief.

The 95th had blocked the road between their position and the farmhouse with a barricade of tree branches and were standing back to admire their impregnable handiwork when a troop of British Dragoons galloped through it without a pause, and the whole thing had to be rebuilt. Scarcely had they finished than the French artillery opened up and the enemy began its advance. Kincaid could see Napoleon acknowledging the cheers of his passing regiments which made so much noise with their shouting and band music that the disciplined silence from the allied lines seemed inappropriate until suddenly broken by the roar of the big guns.

French skirmishers soon reached the forward position of the 95th whose rifles shot them down in untidy heaps, but in the face of the pressing mass of following infantry they sagaciously retired to a depression behind the rise and contended themselves with shooting at the enemy heads that appeared over its top. The French wavered at first, but then began to deploy. Called upon by name by Sir James Kempt to hold his position, and vowing to do so, Kincaid was alarmed to see a horde of Cuirassiers apparently making directly for him with obvious evil intent. On attempting to draw his sword, he discovered to his horror that the night rain had rusted it in its scabbard. His extreme embarrassment was relieved and his life saved by the timely intervention of the Household Brigade, which chased away the Cuirassiers.

The forward French infantry who had all day lain down and pretended to be dead while both sides galloped over them, then got up and ran away. The 95th moved back to its original position and Kincaid took note of the gaps in the line from that first engagement. His horse had lost one ear for England, and had been hit by two musket balls, but otherwise did not seem much the worse for wear.

Between two and three o'clock the 95th lay quietly undisturbed, speculating upon whom the next French ball would land. Behind them, the allied guns continued to pound the French, while far to their left, an occasional gun marked the slow advance of the Prussians.

Several hours later Kincaid's men encountered furious fire. The King's German Legion on their

¹Aylward's painting, *The Morning of Waterloo*, depicts the Duke being handed a steaming mug by an officer of the 95th.

