

George Matthews **A Soldier's Life for Me**

The army has always interested me. This may have had something to do with my enjoyment of history at school. The army offered something potentially exciting, rewarding, and challenging. It also promised travel and a chance to be with like-minded individuals.



you did not have a day or even an hour off until your first leave weekend. We learnt the basics - rifle drills, marching, ironing, polishing, map reading and discipline. The day started at 05.30 with a water parade in the corridor

outside our rooms. This consisted of downing a litre of water and then singing the national anthem. We could then get changed into our immaculate uniforms and run to breakfast (through the snow that characterised the first two months of 2009). After breakfast it was time to get our rooms ready for morning inspection before starting the day proper which lasted until nearly midnight when our kit had to be 'squared away'

Flour Bags Adventure

Having lived in Shipton-under-Wychwood all my life I went through my first officer selection while still in the sixth form at Burford School. I passed but did not attempt the final tests until at university, but first an adventurous gap year beckoned, working in New York, trekking in Nepal, and visiting Germany and Poland, all paid for by hulking around flour bags in the family mill.

I returned and started at Cardiff University in 2005, reading History., During this time I passed the final Army officer selection board after deciding that a career in the army was definitely the right course for me. While others fretted over multiple job applications and interviews I could then relax as, I contemplated the next more demanding phase of my life.

A Soldier's Life is Terribly Hard

This began at Sandhurst one January afternoon along with other be-suited young men nervously walking up the steps of Old College with an ironing board under their arm. What then began was the dreaded 'first five weeks' where

All for Those Crimson Trousers

While discipline relaxed slightly after the first five weeks it was always 'go, go, go.' Each of the three terms brought new and more complex challenges such as gruelling week long no-sleep exercises in the Brecons in Wales or a defensive digging-in exercise, where we literally dug non-stop for 36 hours to create a company defensive position.

The senior term saw us doing crowd control riot exercises and more complex operations designed for use in Afghanistan. While this appears hard it was not as bad as it sounds. The platoon I was with was brilliant and I made some lasting friends.

Without doubt the proudest day of my

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life, December 11th 2009, was passing out as Second Lieutenant G Matthews commissioning into the King's Royal Hussars. We marched out of the mist onto Old College Square to the march 79th *Farewell to Gibraltar*. I had chosen the King's Royal Hussars and they had chosen me after numerous visits to them and other regiments. This is a tank regiment using the Challenger 2 main battle tank and the Scimitar light tank as a reconnaissance vehicle. They returned from Afghanistan last year where they used the new Mastiff patrol vehicles, and are due to return again in two years. They are a regiment with proud traditions and a professional reputation distinguished by the famous crimson trousers of the 11th Hussars. It is



a great privilege to be part of such a prestigious regiment. After four weeks with the regiment, they sent me as part of the King's Royal Hussars' team to the infamous Cresta run in St Moritz. This can only be described as a bobsleigh run but employing a metal tray while dressed in plus fours. It is similar to a skeleton bob but you can fall out. This was an enormously rewarding experience and I definitely hope to be returning next year. I am currently doing my tank troop commander's course in Bovington for six months before I take over my troop back at regiment. So far I

have absolutely no regrets, am enjoying it a lot and have a brilliant group of friends.

George Matthews

St. Mary's Church Choir at Birmingham Cathedral

It's not often that village church choirs fill in for cathedral choirs, but that's what

Shipton church choir did on 30th January. After an invitation from Birmingham Cathedral, 21 members of St Mary's choir sang full choral evensong. The



usual congregation were heavily outnumbered by our trusty and appreciated supporters from the Wychwoods! Stewart Taylor, my predecessor at Shipton Church, kindly

played the organ. Some of the choir were concerned about singing in a larger venue

but, apart from an unfortunate tuning-fork related incident at the beginning of the service, it all went wonderfully, at least well enough for the Cathedral's Canon Liturgist to express

delight and invite us back! Remember YOU can get to hear them here in the Wychwoods almost any Sunday of the year!

Bernard West