

'It joined up recent conflict sufferers with the history of the old'



THIS MIGHT HURT: Mick Crumplin (below) with a capital amputation set and archaeologist Sam Wilson (right, pictured far right)

Taking injured military veterans to excavate a historic battlefield which still yields body parts might not seem the most obvious therapy but the results have been impressive. **Tim Tonkin** meets volunteers, including the surgeon who is an expert in the 'horrendous' practices of old



Change at Waterloo

'From [finding] this one musket ball, he was incredibly overcome with emotion and started thinking about things that he hadn't really talked about for a very long time.'

Former Army captain Mark Evans recalls the experience of a fellow military veteran participating in Waterloo Uncovered, the charity which he co-founded after leaving the Army in 2010.

The project is perhaps unique in that it seeks to help serving and ex-military service personnel, many of whom might be struggling with mental or physical health issues, by engaging them in archaeological work around the battlefield of one of Europe's most iconic military encounters.

Capt Evans, along with his friend and fellow Coldstream Guards officer Major Charlie Foinette, set up the project in 2015, the bicentenary year of the battle, and the size of its expeditions to the battlefield have continued to grow in size and scale.

By bringing together current and former members of the military alongside archaeologists and health professionals, Capt Evans says the project provides a safe and structured environment in which those with shared experiences and challenges can

hopefully begin to open up to one another.

The experience of the veteran who discovered a British musket ball, potentially fired by a member of his own regiment some two centuries previously, represented a small discovery in archaeological terms but a hugely significant one personally.

'He described it as being an incredibly powerful and emotional experience that helped him get through some stuff and brought some stuff to light that he hadn't really thought about and had clearly been suppressing,' says Capt Evans.

'Veterans all too often suffer in silence because they don't feel like they have permission to speak, don't want to seem weak or to burden other people.'

History as therapy

While not formal clinical treatment, Capt Evans says the project, which is also staffed by a variety of health professionals, has made a real difference to those who have taken part in it.

Retired surgeon and military medical historian Mick Crumplin is one of

EVANS: Veterans too often suffer in silence



MATTHEW SAMWELL

HIDDEN HISTORY:

Amputated leg bones (right), archaeologist Eva Collignon (below), retired surgeon Mick Crumplin and artefacts at the Military Surgical Museum



CHRIS VAN HOUTS

those who has lent his support to the project. Indeed, his participation is perhaps the logical conclusion to a life-long passion for the Napoleonic era.

'As a child I had always admired these ridiculous uniforms of the Napoleonic period,' he says. 'I'd always had an interest in military history and that spurred me to start studying the campaign of Waterloo.'

Napoleonic surgery

As a pupil at Wellington College, itself established in honour of the British field commander at Waterloo, he had opted to study medicine having been one of the few students in his year not to go into the Army.

During his career he trained at Middlesex Hospital, and worked at others in the capital, Essex and Wiltshire, before completing his surgical training in Birmingham and practising in North Wales.

His first medical history book *Men of Steel* focused on surgery in the Napoleonic wars. He has also researched the medical histories of a range of conflicts, from the battle of Agincourt to the war in Afghanistan.

'The Napoleonic wars were not a massive breakthrough [for medicine]. But they had a lot of good surgeons evolving who understood the demands of the military. The wars give you the emergence of military surgery, how people were trained and an increasing respect for surgeons.'

He says surgeons were on a 'rising curve' compared with physicians who were, for example, yet to have the benefit of antibiotics which were not developed until more than a century later.

Having donated a number of his own artefacts to the Military Surgical Museum at Mont-Saint-Jean farm in Belgium – the site of an allied military field hospital during the battle – Mr Crumplin became involved more directly in the work with Waterloo Uncovered.

With roughly 6,000 wounded soldiers treated

at Mont-Saint-Jean in 1815, the location has seen a number of significant archaeological finds, including limbs amputated and discarded following surgery.

'That was a very important time for me because it joined up recent conflict sufferers with the history of the old,' he says.

'I took the veterans around the museum. I was a little bit hesitant to take amputees around and tell them about what happened [back then] because it was so horrendous in those days compared with these days. [However], it worked and I think they were very interested.'

'What really appals me [about] the number of programmes and books – and there are thousands – on military history is how little medicine comes into the story.'

'It's a distasteful subject to many I think, it's something they [historians] feel readers wouldn't be interested in but I think that's wrong. The history of medicine is a very popular item on the school curriculum, you can't know enough about it, it's a huge subject.'

Veteran support

Waterloo Uncovered aims to support veterans across five areas – including physical and mental recovery and health and wellbeing along – with issues relating to employment, education and the transition to civilian life.

Those participating in digs encompass a wide range of health needs, from those dealing with psychological trauma to amputees and those with mobility issues resulting from wounds or training injuries.

'One thing we both knew from our own experiences is that injured soldiers have a tendency to deteriorate quickly in terms of their interest, enthusiasm and mental health,' says Capt Evans. 'It's not unknown for soldiers with long-term injuries to fall by the wayside.'

Having served in Afghanistan in 2008, Capt Evans says that he himself battled with PTSD resulting from his experiences on the front line.



ALEX CAUVI

DUG UP: A British Army soldier and Waterloo Uncovered finds officer Hillery Harrison clean musket balls

FOINETTE: Set up the project with Army friend Mark Evans



CHRIS VAN HOUTS

GERADA: Impressed by the holistic approach



After receiving treatment during and after leaving the Army he eventually turned to archaeology, a life-long passion, as something to focus his energies and attention on.

These early forays eventually led to what would become Waterloo Uncovered, after Maj Foinette was asked by his commanding officer to stage a tour of the Waterloo battlefield for troops from his regiment.

In April 2015 he and Maj Foinette, who are both archaeology graduates, took 20 people out to Waterloo, half of whom were injured, serving soldiers and the rest volunteer archaeologists.

A follow-up expedition of twice the size as the original saw veterans joining serving soldiers – with last year's dig seeing between 130 and 150 people involved.

Capt Evans says the ease with which those who have been in the armed forces can open up and discuss their experiences with civilian health professionals is hugely varied.

'For me there was a real breakthrough when I started talking to a woman who was non-military,' he says.

'That for me was the moment where I found I could open up, [however] for other people it will be exactly the opposite; that they found they could not talk to a civilian about what they'd been through and that they needed to talk to somebody that had been there [the military].'

For those who fall into the latter category, Capt Evans says that bringing former soldiers together to uncover and examine remnants and artefacts from a 200-year-old battle enables people to reflect on their own experiences of war and the armed forces.

'The fact that you are allowing people who have been in the military to talk about military things inevitably means they end up talking about their own experiences,' he says.

'The archaeological process is about finding the little bits that help you try and understand what may or may not have happened [in the past]. A lot of what PTSD is, is being caught up in a world

where you struggle to make sense of your own past, and memories can change as you focus on different things – archaeology helps remind you that the past is confused and fragmented.'

Dig deep

GP and BMA council member Clare Gerada saw the charity's work first-hand after attending a dig last summer, and was impressed by the holistic and inclusive approach it took to supporting those with mental health issues.

'Waterloo Uncovered is a truly unique project in that it brings together people from different walks of life and with varying health needs and uses a shared interest and activity, in this case archaeology, to reach out and try to care for and empower those in need,' she says.

The mental health and personal and social challenges faced by those who have left the armed forces or who are seeking to transition to civilian life can be complex, and veterans can sometimes be hard to reach through conventional health services.

'Waterloo Uncovered's emphasis on inclusion and education, and what it seeks to do for those who have taken part, is an excellent example of the important role that socially prescribed and collaborative working can have in improving health.' ■

*Additional research by Alex Cauvi
To find out more about Waterloo Uncovered
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www.waterloouncovered.com/contact-us*

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