



The Rifles Regiment Freedom of Wellington – Significance and Reasons

On Saturday 17th June 2023 The Rifles Regiment will be granted the Freedom of the Town of Wellington.

The honour of granting “Freedom” to military regiments dates back centuries to the medieval age. In this time, the town’s or city’s municipality would grant the freedom to a military unit that has earned their trust. This would allow them to freely parade through the streets, itself a symbol of the bond between the regiment and the citizens of the town.

The significance of this honour is now entirely ceremonial, though regiments granted the freedom of a town are still permitted and cordially invited to march through the town on ceremonial occasions. In Wellington, The Rifles will have the honour and distinction of marching through the town with “bugles sounding, bands playing and swords fixed”. The Regiment will also be presented with a hand-finished “Freedom Certificate” created by a local artist to commemorate the occasion.

The freedom of a town is traditionally granted to a regiment that holds ties with an area, either through its historical battles or in the location in which it gains most of its recruits. In the case of Wellington and The Rifles Regiment, there are ties in both respects.

The historical connection dates back to the Peninsular War and Waterloo, where Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington led antecedent regiments of The Rifles into battle against Napoleon’s forces.

The Somerset Light Infantry, one of the forming regiments of The Rifles, recruited from the Wellington area for many years, especially during the First and Second World Wars. On Wellington War Memorial, the names of 49 infantrymen from this regiment alone are listed, with many more casualties from other regiments that later formed to become The Rifles.

