

My London Bill Mott

Garrison Sergeant Major Bill Mott (right) is the most senior non-commissioned soldier in the British Army. He is responsible for all ceremonial activities here in London, including the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace (p. 26), June's Trooping the Colour and state visits by foreign heads of state.

Interview by Jo Caird.



Which regiment do you belong to?

I'm a member of the Welsh Guards and a Warrant Officer Class One. In my eyes the Welsh Guards are the best regiment in the whole of the British Army.

When did you first perform guard duty at Buckingham Palace?

My first guard duty was in 1980, having joined the Welsh Guards at the end of 1978. You're not posted at the palace, but do a 24 or 48-hour guard there and then go back to your barracks, which in our case at the time was the Elizabeth Barracks in Pirbright, Surrey.

Were you nervous?

No, not at all. I say that, but then, I'm now a mature man with a lot of experience of the ceremonial world and I've probably forgotten any apprehensiveness I felt in the past.

Was it something that you always wanted to do?

My two brothers and three older cousins all served in the Welsh Guards. George, the eldest, was one of the coffin bearers to the Duke of Windsor [formerly Edward VIII, one of Britain's shortest reigning monarchs] in 1972. From a very young age I always wanted to join the Welsh Guards. When I went into the recruiting office, it was the only thing that I wanted to do.

Is your role purely ceremonial or do you have operational duties as well?

My role is entirely ceremonial but I work with both the Grenadier Guards and the Household Cavalry, who have

recently returned from operations in Afghanistan. My nickname is the 'Lone Arranger' because I arrange everything to do with the ceremonies in a solitary and mysterious manner!

How much of a Welsh Guard's time is spent involved in military operations and how much is spent taking part in ceremonial duties?

There isn't a set time. It all depends on your division or district and what tasks are required. As Guardsmen we are double-hatted with ceremonial tasks here in London, as well as operational duties. I stay here permanently now, as a ceremonial Garrison Sergeant Major, but the Welsh Guards move around.

Is the uniform very hot?

Yes, very! But with proper fitness, diet and fluid intake, it's not a problem.

Is it difficult not to react when tourists jump up and down in front of you and make strange faces?

It was at first but after a while nothing disturbs you.

What do you think about while on guard?

I don't do guard duty anymore, although I train and critique others on duty. You're required to keep an eye out for anything unusual and stay alert, but I must confess that my mind used to wander occasionally, thinking about family, friends, goals and money – not necessarily in that order.

What is your favourite aspect of the job?

I find it humbling when fine, honourable people work together to

ensure the best possible results.

What should every tourist do while in London?

Visit the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace at 11.30 (alternate days in August).

What is your favourite London attraction?

There are so many things that are lovely for tourists to see in London but my favourite is the Horse Guards (p. 29). I'm biased, of course, because of all the great men I've served with and my connection with their history. Buckingham Palace, the London Eye (p. 30), the Houses of Parliament (p. 29), Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London (both p. 39) – there are so many great places for tourists. They're spoilt rotten with the number of good things to see.

Have you met the Queen?

Many times. In fact, I understand she asked how my recovery was progressing after I injured by back recently. She's absolutely lovely, a million dollars really.

What do you love most about London in the summer?

The summer months bring out the best in people.

If you could travel back in time to any period of London history, where would you visit and why?

I'd like to be alone in a room with Oliver Cromwell, [the political leader who was instrumental in executing King Charles I and making England into a republican Commonwealth in the 17th century]. I'm a monarchist you see, so I don't mind people knowing that I would have taken him out before he did anything to the royal family.

The Changing of the Guard takes place at Buckingham Palace at 11.30 on alternate days (except in very wet weather). Alternatively, go to see the Mounted Guard Changing Ceremony at Horse Guards Parade, which takes place Mon-Fri at 11.00 and on Sun at 10.00 (both p. 26).

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