



Welsh Delandres



Cinderella stamp collectors may well be familiar with the Delandre vignettes. These originally date from the World War I period, and were stamps for the various regiments of the French and other allied forces. They were produced by Gaston Fontanille who went by the name of Delandre. He had had a colourful history up to then as something of a con man, selling fake titles and creating false companies whose real life directors had no idea that their names were being used. For the stamps he hired many well-known military artists, had thousands of different designs, and it all fell apart when the military censors denied him the chance to distribute the stamps to the regiments. Undaunted, he recouped his losses by selling the stamps to collectors in little packets, a practice that still goes on today. They were successful enough, for not only needing reprints, but also new designs continued to appear. Similar vignettes appeared for the French Red Cross, but somehow the proceeds from these failed to be passed on, providing him with a further jail sentence. Despite their dubious background Delandres are popular and instantly recognisable. Hence we come to these Welsh Delandres.

Reference works on the Delandre vignettes have been published, but the full set will cost an arm and a leg; I would prefer to spend my hard-earned on the actual stamps! Anywho, I have fallen back on memory of those Delandres I have in my collection and seen for sale. And up to these I have never seen any Welsh Regiments featured. So are these for real? Are they what could be termed 'lost Delandres'? Equally possible is that they are fakes, or what may be termed 'inspired by'. I will let you, the collector, decide how to classify them. What I can say is that they do feature some of the less well known and more esoteric military units from Wales.

The Bardic Company

Formed during the reign of Llewellyn the Great of Gwynedd, the Bards were expected to provide poems to inspire the troops on the eve of a battle. It was no use them sitting safely at home writing the verse. It had to be up to date, and relevant to the situation at the time, so the Bards were seconded to all the other regiments. They had to work quickly. Coming up with an hour long epic poem to be read that evening is no mean feat, but time after time they inspired the troops to victory. At the Battle of Crecy the Welsh longbow men fired the successive waves of arrow in time to the metric of the poem written by Huw ap Meredith, who paced behind their line reading his lines. The Company survived right up to the Battle of the Somme, and there is some truth in the claim that the music hall song 'We're Going to hang out our Washing on the Siegfried Line' was lifted from a one such Bardic poem.

The Brecon Mountain Rangers

A short lived regiment, existing from 1845-1921, which spent most of its time living rough, or in bivouacs, on the Brecon Beacons. Only the hardest of

servicemen could survive such conditions. It is no coincidence that it is this landscape that is used by the SAS for survival training. The Rangers were formed due to the growth in rivalry between North and South Wales. Following the Industrial Revolution the villages in the valleys to the north of Cardiff and Newport became towns with coal mines by the dozen and blast furnaces by the score. The only limitation to further growth was a workforce, but the South Walians did not want the northerners coming south to take the jobs their children could take from the age of 10 onwards. So the Rangers were formed to send back those coming in over the hills. Their other task was to prevent those with a good singing voice absconding northwards to join a male voice choir for only there could they sing in their native tongue.

The Pembroke and Fishguard Militia

A most unusual regiment in that they were a private army, and entirely unofficial and amateur. Whenever a Welsh regiment was deployed into a war zone, the 'Old Corruptibles' would don their uniforms and follow them. They would camp about 5 miles away from the regular soldiers, and keep an expert eye on how the situation progressed. As soon as it looked like an enemy town would fall, the Militia would decamp, and arrive in town ahead of the battle weary troops. Here they would receive the praise and gifts from the locals for their liberation. The Militia commemorated each mission by producing their own medals, handing out the highest honours to those who came out with the best booty.

The Ladies of the Camp

From time immemorial there have been ladies who follow the military, performing all sorts of duties to make a soldier's life more bearable from washing their underwear to providing a shoulder to cry on. The Welsh recognised the value of these ladies and formalised them into a paid regular military unit. The illustration on the stamp shows the levels of sophistication and culture The Ladies brought to Welsh military camps.

The Carmarthenshire Guards

Nicknamed 'The Nappers' the Carmarthenshires, throughout their history, have been the regiment kept in reserve well away from enemy lines. It goes without saying that only those born and raised in Carmarthenshire would not realise why this should be and not take offence at this. On the few occasions when their military might was required and called upon the Carmarthenshires were found to be asleep - hence their nickname. Even when called up into action they invariably got lost or forgot their rifles. And that's why they were kept in reserve.

Military Inspection Unit

This is another example of how the Welsh Military looked after the interests of its soldiers - at least between 1812 and 1963. The MIU's mission was to inspect those premises where soldiers might visit off the camp, in order to ensure they were suitable for the troops. They would go to the inns and taverns and sample the beers and spirits on sale. They would go to the cafes and sample the food on offer. The same applied to other establishments that soldiers will frequent. The Unit would then issue a list of recommended premises to each battalion rating each for quality of service to vale for money. Those premises that did not impress were deemed out of bounds for the troops, and this would be enforced by the Military Police.