Red Alert!
The British Are Coming!

As the British army marches over the hill, their guns are held high. The soldiers' bright red coats make the army look like a huge red wall. Sometimes it's enough to scare their enemies into running away!

The British army did not always wear red coats. At first, the soldiers did not have uniforms, so it was hard to tell friends from enemies. Soon after the British government formed a national army it made a new law. Soldiers in new British army had to wear uniform and their uniforms had to be red.

Why did the British government choose the color red? Its purpose was to give soldiers a uniform that was clearly recognizable. At that time, soldiers used muskets, which produced black smoke. The muskets' black smoke soon made it hard for soldiers to see one another. The bright red coats kept British soldiers from being shot accidentally.

The nickname "Redcoats" was first used during the American war for independence. Many Americans did not have uniforms, so the British soldiers with their red coats were easily recognizable.

The life of a Redcoat was hard. Being in battle far from home was dangerous enough, but the Redcoats also received very little pay. In addition, they had to buy their own food and uniforms.

After rifles were invented, soldiers' guns no longer made smoke. Soldiers could easily see one another in battle. The way armies fought also changed. At first, armies lined up in fields and charged each other. Later, soldiers began hiding and surprising their enemy. Soon, it became clear that uniforms should help soldiers blend into their surroundings.

Soldiers in the British army then began wearing tan uniforms. These uniforms made them less visible from a distance. Today, British soldiers wear red coats only in ceremonies.