

With courage and conviction

THEATRE

Black Watch

★★★★★

Gregory Burke's 'unauthorised' biography of the Scots regiment marks the Fringe debut of the new National Theatre Of Scotland. And what a debut it is. With this production, brilliantly directed by John Tiffany, the NTS has finally arrived, producing what is nothing less than a modern Scots classic.

Brimming with breathtaking theatricality, inventiveness, style, thought-provoking intelligence, humour and heart, this is a show that should be seen by everyone who can and is sure to be lamented by those who can't.

From the moment you arrive at the drill hall venue - to a glass of whisky and the sound of a pipe band - it feels like the Tattoo. A booming voice-over declaring the arrival of the Black Watch suggests as much. Until, that is, Brian Ferguson's young squaddie in civvies steps gingerly into the spotlight. From there on we're given a lesson in what it means to be part of the Black Watch and to be part of the war in Iraq, viewed through the eyes of those

on the ground.

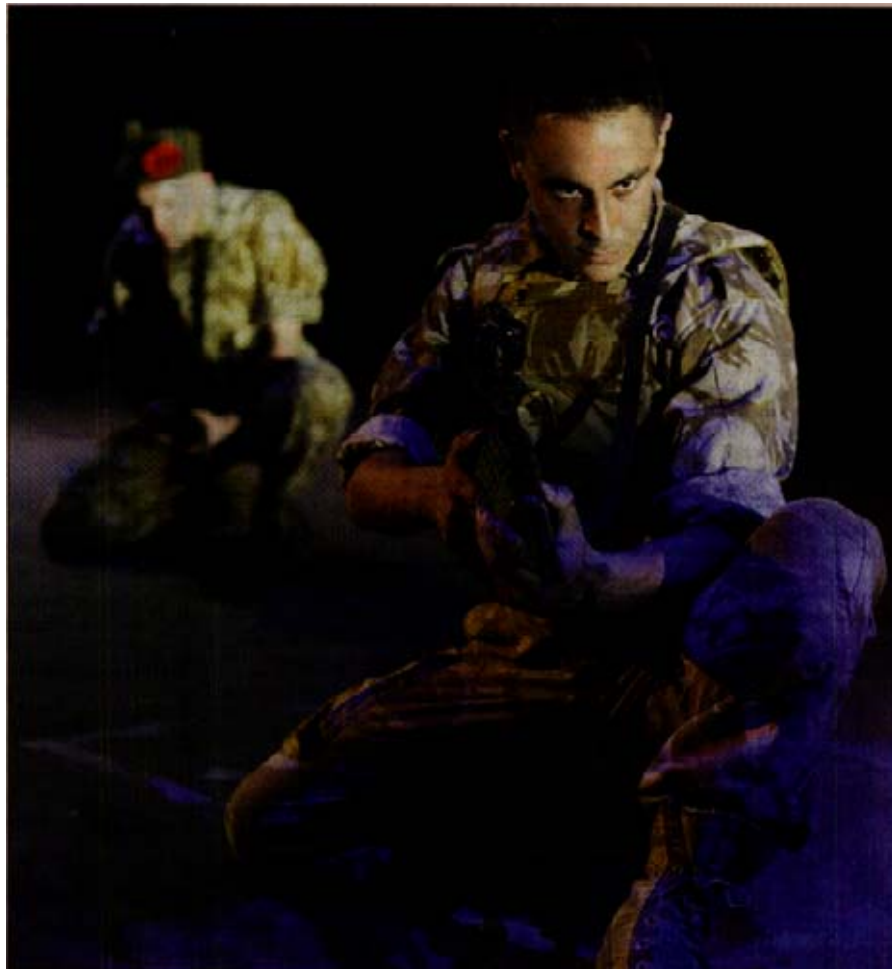
The piece alternates between a local pub, where a writer working on a play about the regiment has come to pick the brains of some young soldiers, and life on the front line at Camp Dogwood where the regiment was controversially sent to replace US troops: 'Like Perth Road on a Saturday night - but with air strikes.'

In terms of humour and pumping vitality, *Trainspotting* is what immediately springs to mind. Unforgettable moments include a beautifully choreographed time line of the regiment, during which Ferguson is fitted out with the regiment's uniforms down the years.

Politically, Burke condemns the war but not those who fought it, expressing righteous disgust at the breaking up of this most famous of regimental families as part of Government defence cuts. An unmissable piece of theatre.

Alan Chadwick

Until Aug 27 (not Mons), Traverse 4: University Of Edinburgh Drill Hall (V109), 8.30pm.
www.traverse.co.uk



Tartan army: Ryan Fletcher, left, and Emun Elliott in Gregory Burke's modern classic, *Black Watch*

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