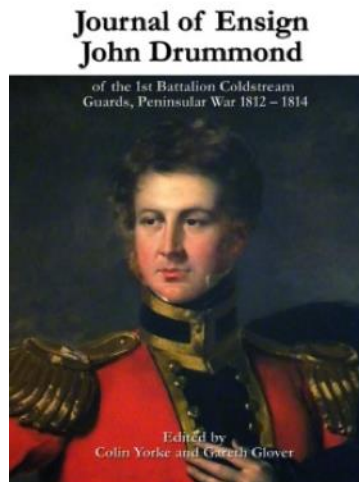


The Napoleon Series Reviews

Drummond, John. *Journal of Ensign John Drummond of the 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, Peninsular War 1812 - 1814*. Godmanchester, UK: Ken Trotman, 2016. 90 pages. £18.50



John Drummond was a 19 year old ensign in the Coldstream Guards when he was sent to Portugal to join the 1st Battalion in late 1812. Over the next 19 months he kept a detailed diary of his travels through Portugal, Spain, and France. His trip did not start well, for he spent two weeks in a heavy storm sailing to Portugal. He and six other officers spent several days confined to their single cabin because the seas were too high to let any passengers on deck. Unfortunately five of his cabin mates were sea sick and he left a vivid description on what it was like to be in the cabin with them.

After landing in Lisbon, Ensign Drummond was in no hurry to join his regiment. He spent over a month in Lisbon before he joined a detachment of soldiers heading north to where his battalion was. It took him almost three weeks to link up with his regiment. Once there, except for one entry, he stops writing in his diary for three months, but begins again when he starts on the campaign that would culminated 11 months later with the abdication of Napoleon. During those eleven months he marched over a thousand kilometers, fought in the battles of Vitoria, Nivelle, Nive, and Bayonne; and participated in the siege of San Sebastian. Because he was one of the junior officers in the battalion, he was selected in December 1813 to travel to Bilbao and take charge of his division's sick and wounded who were recuperating there. Unfortunately, he did not consider his time in Bilbao worthy of writing about in his diary, so there is a three month gap until he was allowed to re-join his battalion in March 1814. His battalion was part of the force that was investing Bayonne

Journal of Ensign John Drummond reads like a travelogue at times. The author faithfully records his travels every day he was on the road. . . where he went, how long it took him to get there, a description of the terrain, the weather, and any unusual events of the day. It was written for his eyes only and there are casual mentions of things that most other 20 year old officers would not have experienced. He was from the upper levels of society and the diary reflects it. Upon arrival in Lisbon, he dined with Sir Charles Stuart, the British ambassador. The following year he had dinner with Lieutenant General Sir John Hope, his Corps Commander. He writes of spending £200 in Lisbon outfitting himself for life on campaign and once he hits the road, he travels in style. His retinue

includes 3 mules, a pony, a goat, and his servants. Among his personal items is a dressing gown.

In addition to his observations of life on campaign, Ensign Drummond kept a log of where he was every day from the time he started on campaign on 10 May 1813 until he arrived in England on 27 July 1814. In it are the names of the place he spent the night, how many leagues he marched that day, the weather, condition of roads, type of countryside they marched through, and whether they were bivouacked, encamped, or in quarters.

What is noticeable about the diary is that except for one entry in December 1812, he never mentions another officer in his battalion or his brigade commander until the sortie at Bayonne in April 1814. And even then, it was only to give the name of two who were killed and the fact that General Edward Stopford had been wounded.

There are many primary sources from officers who served in the Peninsula and after Napoleon abdicated in April 1814. Ensign Drummond however, continued his diary and until his battalion embarked on transports for England on 20 July and arrived in England a week later. During those two months, he continues in his travelogue mode and writes of the places he visits and the people he meets.

If you are looking for descriptions of combat this is not the book for you. During the time Ensign Drummond was in the Peninsula, the Guards Brigade was in four battles and one siege: Vitoria on 21 June, the siege of San Sebastian in July and August, Nivelle on 10 November, Nive on 9 – 13 December, and the sortie from Bayonne on 14 April 1814. His battalion was only lightly engaged in them, except at Bayonne, where they had almost 250 casualties, including 2 officers killed and another 6 wounded. The entry in the diary for the action is about 250 words and describes what the battalion did and its casualties. He also writes of an interesting comparison made by the veterans to the battle of Talavera, where the battalion took extremely heavy casualties.

The strength of *Journal* lies in that it records the daily life of a young, privileged officer on campaign. His writing is straight forward and records what he was thinking, whether it is about the quality of food, the customs of the locals, the weather, or the problems with his mules.¹ These thoughts are in themselves worth the price of the book. However, when combined with his record of the routes he took, the conditions of the roads, the weather at the time, and whether they were able to secure billets or had to rough it in tents, makes it invaluable to someone researching Wellington's final

¹ For those who might be interested in contrasting Ensign Drummond's life style to an officer who was living on his pay and much of it home to support his parents and siblings, I recommend you read George Simmons' *A British Rifleman: Journals and Correspondence during the Peninsular War and the Campaign of Wellington*.

campaigns in the Peninsular or just life as a Guards officer in the latter stages of the Napoleonic Wars.

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: July 2016