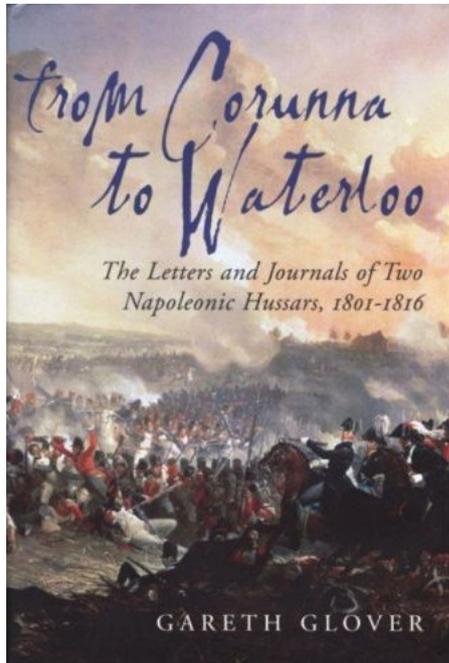


The Napoleon Series Reviews

Gareth Glover, Gareth (ed.) *From Corunna to Waterloo: The Letters and Journals of Two Napoleonic Hussars, 1801–1816*. London, UK: Frontline, 2015. 287p. ISBN# 9781848328440. Hardback. \$44.95/£25



I have read many volumes of letters and journals of the Peninsula War. I cannot think of one that I enjoyed more than this one; not only does it cover the entire duration of the Peninsula War and Waterloo in some detail, it also allows us to see hussars on duty in both war and peace. Between 1809 and 1812 the 15th Hussars undertook local policing duties in England, including the Luddite riots, which adds another dimensional to the central portion of the book.

Edwin Griffiths, the elder of the two hussars (being uncle to Frederick Phillips, although only seven years older) joined the 15th Light Dragoons in early 1801 at the age of fifteen. The 15th were at that time a traditional light dragoon regiment with Tarleton helmets; the conversion to hussars came five years later. At the time of conversion the men were ordered to grow Mongol moustaches, which were obviously considered socially unacceptable in the clean-shaven British society of the time, since Edwin notes that the men usually shaved the off the moment they went off on leave, and had to re-grow them on return.

Edwin's correspondence falls broadly into two categories, one being private letters to his family, the second journal entries jotted whilst on campaign. The former are familial, chatty, sometimes impish; full of references to people and places either in the news or on his mind. They in fact provide light relief between the more serious entries in his campaign diary, although they do occasionally add detail not found in his journals. What is enthralling about his diary is the directness and vivacity of the text. Unlike many of his contemporaries, writing elliptically in the usual early nineteenth century manner, Edwin tended to call a spade a spade; he likewise had opinion in spades. The Spanish in particular come in for harsh criticism, as do some senior officers, such as his CO, Colquhoun Grant.

The small details are often the jewels in campaign diaries and this book abounds. From his note about Sir John Moore galloping from regiment to regiment at Corunna entreating commanding officers to hold their men back from charging pell-mell at the French in revenge for the torments of the retreat; to the French hussar regiment opposite the 15th who preferred to use their old Bourbon title

than their Napoleonic number; to the fraternisation of British French veterans in Paris in late 1814; to his observations on the cleanliness and prosperity of Flemish villages and villagers encountered in 1815; and of the British cavalry being inspected by Wellington, Blucher and 'other big wigs' in early June 1815. I had no idea that Marshal Marmont was one of the big wigs!

Lieutenant (later Captain) Frederick 'Rico' Phillips did not join the regiment until 1808 so has less coverage within the book. His entries lack Griffith's bite, but nonetheless are still engaging and often fill in the gaps when Griffith's journals lack continuity, especially in June 1815.

As usual Gareth Glover – surely the busiest man in Napoleondom – stitches the journals together with interleaved text and explanatory footnotes in his expert manner. Thus people and places mentioned in the letters and journals are given context to the lives of Griffiths and Phillips, which aids enormously in the comprehension of the whole.

What the book did not prepare me for, however, was the sting in the tail. Not wanting to spoil it for potential readers I will not elaborate, although anyone knowing the history of the 15th Hussars at Waterloo will surely guess. Highly recommended.

Reviewed by: [Steve Brown](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: November 2015