

# The Napoleon Series Reviews

## The Services of General Sir George Madden 1789-1814

Thompson, Mark. *The Services of General Sir George Madden 1789-1814*. Sunderland, UK: Mark Thomson, 2012. Available only as an e-book via Amazon. \$6.

In 1820, John Philippart published *The Royal Military Calendar or Army Service and Commission Book*. Unlike previous editions, this publication contained “The Services and Progress of Promotion of the Generals, Lieutenant Generals, Major-Generals, Colonels, Lieutenant-Colonels, and Majors of the Army According to Seniority”<sup>1</sup> and consisted of over 2200 pages in five volumes. Entries varied in length from the Duke of Wellington’s 192 pages to a much shorter length of ten lines for a lieutenant colonel. Although the author never states the source of the information for the entries, it is most likely it was provided by the individuals themselves.

The second longest biography in the five volumes is the one for George Allen Madden, who wrote his own entry and it is 70 pages long! To put this in perspective, his biography dwarfed that of the Duke of York’s (42 pages), Thomas Graham’s (27 pages) and Rowland Hill’s (9 pages)! So what was so special about George Madden’s service that merited so many pages? Well nothing except that at times it reads like a Flashman novel! According Mr. Thompson in the introduction to the book, George Madden’s

“ . . . active service covered twenty-four years and included being shipwrecked, resigning the service following a court martial, fighting a duel, being reinstated to the army, and then finally being asked to relinquish his command due to a squabble over seniority.”

Throughout the book George Madden presents his case as one who has been treated poorly by the Army hierarchy and thus missed out on his fair share of the glory. He does have a valid point at least in regards to his court martial and being forced out of the army. While in Egypt in 1801, he believed that his commander had committed perjury during a regimental court martial. When he raised the issue, he was placed under arrest and was court martialed himself for conduct unbecoming of an officer and disrespect. Sitting on the court martial were Sir John Moore as president, Thomas Graham, and Rowland Hill, among others. The court found him guilty. For as Mark Thompson put it “It appears that accusing your commanding officer of perjury, even if it was true, was classed as ‘un-officer-like conduct and disrespectful.’” Major Madden was sent back to England where the findings of the court were reviewed and upheld. However he was permitted to sell his commission.

Major Madden was re-instated in 1805 and promoted to lieutenant colonel. He would work with the militia until 1809, when he was offered the chance to be seconded as a brigadier general to the Portuguese Army. He would command a brigade of Portuguese cavalry for the next three years. What makes his memoir so interesting is that much of the time he commanded the brigade, he was attached to the Spanish Army of Estremadura operating in vicinity of Badajoz. He had orders that were often conflicting,

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<sup>1</sup> From the title page

for he was supposed to support the Spanish, but at the same time not risk the destruction of his brigade.

The memoirs are filled with anecdotes on what it was like to work with the Spanish Army and the problems he had with reconciling his orders. The Spanish commander had high expectations for the brigade and occasionally assigned it duties that were not appropriate for cavalry or placed the brigade in situations that would cause it heavy casualties. Additionally, General Madden and his men were at the very end of a long supply chain and it caused him many problems. He details them in numerous passages about feeding and sheltering his men and their mounts.

One of the most fascinating parts of the memoir is the brigade's participation in the battle of Gebora, on 19 February 1811. General Madden left the only eyewitness account by a British officer of the battle which saw the destruction of the Army of Estremadura. It is not a pretty story. The French cavalry broke the Spanish cavalry and General Madden gave his brigade an order to charge to cover their Allies who were fleeing. Madden was leading from the front when something caught his attention. He turned around to find that his brigade chose that moment to run away. His account of being left alone and surrounded by French hussars is worth the price of the book in itself!

In 1812, General Madden's Brigade was disbanded due to a lack of horses. The last part of the memoirs covers the year he spent commanding a Portuguese infantry brigade in the 6<sup>th</sup> Division. He led them at Vitoria and in the battles of the Pyrenees. In August 1813, he objected to an officer, who was many years junior in seniority to him, being placed in temporary command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division. In the past, Wellington had scrupulously allowed seniority to dictate which officer would command. He did not believe he could trust General Madden with the temporary command of a division. At the same time Wellington could not keep him in the division if he placed a junior over him. He resolved the issue by relieving General Madden of his command and sending him back to England.

George Madden's memoirs are only one of seven I know of by a British officer commanding Portuguese troops in the Peninsular War. His independent command working with the Spanish make these even rarer. When combined with Mark Thompson's superb job of editing and adding additional information to explain unclear passages, they become a must buy for anyone interested in the Peninsular War! It is a quick, informative, but entertaining read.

*The Services of General Sir George Madden 1789-1814* is only available as an eBook from Amazon. It can be ordered by clicking on [The Services of General Sir George Madden](#)

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

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