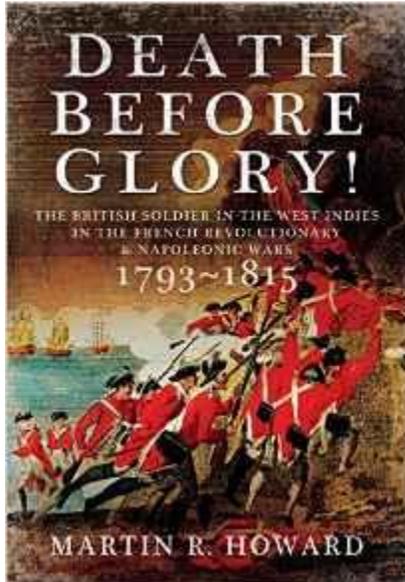


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Howard, Martin R. *Death Before Glory! The British Soldier in the West Indies in the French Revolutionary & Napoleonic Wars, 1793-1815*. Barnsley (UK): Pen and Sword, 2015. 241 pages. ISBN# 1781593418. Hardcover. US\$49.95, UK £25.00.



The campaigns in the West Indies fought during the Great War with France, 1793-1815 are too often overlooked as a sideshow and shunted aside in yet another study of the sun of Austerlitz, etc. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Her West Indies trade represented nearly half of pre-war France's income and the British conquest of her opponent's West Indian colonies not only deprived France of that income but correspondingly increased Britain's revenue and her ability to finance a prolonged war against her enemy and to subsidize her allies to do so. The West Indies were a very important theatre of war.

Martin Howard's new study is divided into three parts. The first, of two chapters, discusses the British units that fought in the islands and their opponents. The second part, of five chapters traces the campaigns in the West Indies from 1793 to 1815 and the third, of four chapters, provides insight into the personal experience of the men who fought in the theatre. In the latter part, the chapter on the illnesses prevalent in the region as the author quotes source that claim that 424,000 white and black troops suffered from illness, of whom 75,000 died. The two killers were malaria and yellow fever, the latter popularly known as the *vomito negro* or black vomit, because of one of its prevalent symptoms.

The result was that the early island campaigns of 1793-1796 more or less destroyed much of the prewar regular British army and the product of the increased recruitment of the first two years of war. The statistics are daunting: the 41st Foot lost 318 men in three months, 44% of its strength, while the 23rd Foot lost 319 men, 48% of its strength. Twelve months after their arrival, both regiments buried more than three quarters of their officer and men and the survivors were so weakened by sickness that most were discharged after their return to Britain. Britain paid an awful price for her success in these early campaigns and the resulting terror of being sent to the islands acted as an obstacle against recruitment for the entire period ending in 1815. It should always be noted that, in Britain, men could be conscripted for home defence, but only volunteers could be sent overseas and no man in his right mind wanted to risk being sent to the "white man's graveyard." As Howard points out, it was only when Britain began to recruit black regiments for service in the area that its garrison became stabilized as they were much less susceptible to disease.

Howard, a medical doctor, is well prepared to discuss the effect of disease on the campaigns in the islands. His treatment of the actual military campaigns themselves are

interesting but succinct, although one might wish that the author provided maps with military movements on them. His selection of material for the third part of his work, involving eyewitnesses, is judicious and the quotes are interesting.

Unfortunately, this book has a major flaw and that is in its method of citation. Footnotes are few and far between in the main text, particularly in the opening pages of a chapter, and one note usually contains numerous citation references. As an example, the first endnote in Chapter 6 is found after eight paragraphs of text, paragraphs that include three block quotes. This first note contains citations for no fewer than thirteen different sources so it is clear that this single note serves to source the preceding eight paragraphs. Unfortunately, it is nearly impossible to discern which statement in those paragraphs is based on which source. This annoying and unscholarly method of citation detracts from the quality of the book.

For this reason, *Death Before Glory!* will appeal less to serious students and more to those who like a "good read."

Reviewed by Donald E. Graves.

Placed on the Napoleon Series: December 2015