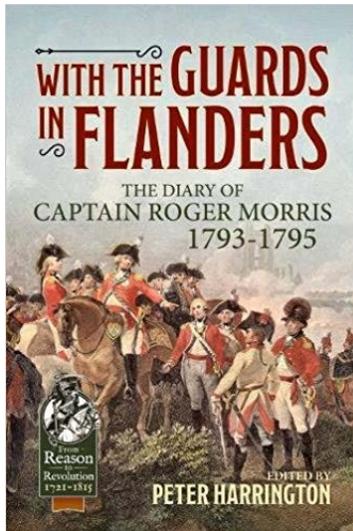


The Napoleon Series Reviews

Morris, Roger. *With the Guards in Flanders: the Diary of Captain Roger Morris 1793 – 1795*. Peter Harrington (ed.) Warwick (UK): Helion, 2018. 168 pages. £14. ISBN# 9781911628156.



The past several years has seen a renaissance in the literature of the military campaigns in Flanders during the wars of the French Revolution. There are Geert van Ulythoven's *The Secret Expedition: the Anglo-Russian Invasion of Holland 1799*, Paul Demet's *We are Accustomed to do our Duty: German Auxiliaries with the British Army 1793 – 1795*, and soon, Steve Brown will be adding to the collection with a book on the 1793 – 1795 Campaign. In addition to these, we now have *With the Guards in Flanders; the Diary of Captain Roger Morris 1793 – 1795*.

In early 1793 Great Britain, declared war on France and in February sent the Brigade of Guards to Flanders. Roger Morris initially did not go with his battalion, the 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, but joined them three months later. Assigned to the Grenadier Battalion, which was formed by taking the grenadier companies from each of the Guards' three battalions to form an independent battalion, he served with the Grenadier Battalion for the next 21 months until the British Expedition was withdrawn in the winter of 1795. During that time, he kept a daily diary, which in 1940 was transcribed and published as a mimeograph. *With the Guards in Flanders* is an updated and edited edition of the 1940 manuscript.

Roger Morris was meticulous in writing his diary and a keen observer of the men, events, terrain, and weather that made up his daily life and filled with both the mundane and the extraordinary. He provides descriptions of the villages, towns, and cities he passed through, including noting where the name of the place where he and his battalion were located; the quality of his and his men's' quarters; and his daily duties, such as baggage guard, headquarters guard, and picquet duty. He also wrote of the terrain and weather with a tactical eye, noting the impact it would have on movement or fighting a battle.

What Roger Morris excelled at was writing about the numerous battles and skirmishes in which he fought. These are not in depth descriptions of the battles, but of what he and his battalion fought in. There are numerous accounts of serving on outpost duty and he recorded what the terrain was like, how many men he had under his command, and any contact with the enemy. I was surprised at how much small unit actions there were. Most of it was the French probing the Allied lines.

Captain Morris practiced little operational security when writing his diary. He regularly recorded the order-of-battle of the army, his and other units' locations, and even their strength. If the French had found his diary it could have provided valuable intelligence. He was fortunate, as well as future readers, because at one point his servant and baggage were captured by a French patrol. Apparently he kept the diary with him and it was not lost. However, he did not appear to take warning of the possibility of losing it and he continued to write in his diary the same sensitive information.

It is obviously that Captain Morris wrote the diary for himself or his immediate family and never meant to publish his diary. He was quite frank with his observations about the competence of the various general officers he served under and took no efforts to disguise whom he was criticizing. Although Captain Morris never comes out and says so, *With the Guards* is quite damning of the incompetence of the Adjutant General's Department when it came to issuing orders. His diary is full of examples of his unit receiving orders that at times were confusing or contradictory, while at other times they were incomplete; and occasionally his battalion would not receive them while the units around them would.

With the Guards is the only primary source that I know of that goes into detailed description of the British Army's retreat from Flanders into Germany from which they were eventually evacuated at Bremen. This retreat took place in the dead of winter, and like the retreat to Corunna in the winter of 1808 – 1809, it is filled with horrors and hardships that seem to plague the British Army whenever it was forced to retreat.

On a side note, Roger Morris was very interested in church organs. Whenever he had the time he would visit the local churches to see them and left descriptions of their state of repair, quality of sound, etc. Occasionally he would even play them!

The editor of *With the Guards* is Dr. Peter Harrington, the curator of the Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection at Brown University. His chief focus of research is artists and images of war and he is well known throughout the Napoleonic community for his generous efforts in providing rare sketches, portraits, paintings, and other artwork from the Brown Military Collection for authors to use in their books. His knowledge about art of the period is demonstrated in *With the Guards*. It is illustrated with over 40 contemporary portraits, uniform plates, paintings of battles, and maps.

Dr. Harrington does a superb job editing the diary. There are numerous notes providing background information on the people, events, and locations Captain Morris writes about. It is filled with numerous descriptions of skirmishes and combats that were too small to have made it into the histories of the campaign. Combined with his daily notation of the town or city his battalion was located in, the book will serve as a reference book to anyone researching the campaign. As importantly, it provides a vivid picture of the life of a junior officer on campaign in this little chronicled campaign of the era. It will keep the interest of both the scholar and the casual reader. Highly recommended.

Reviewed by: [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: December 2018