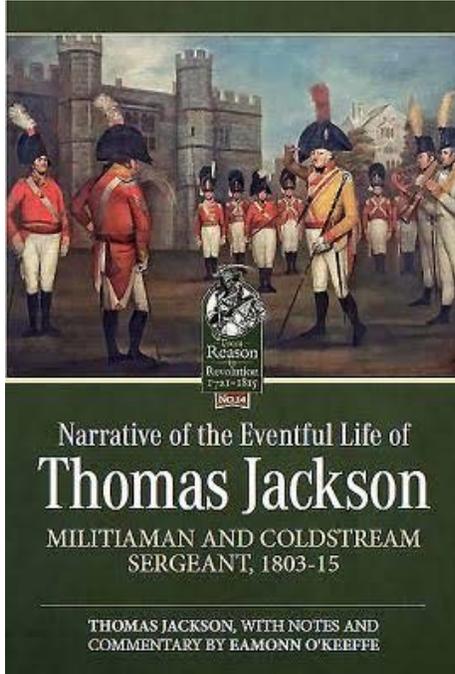


The Napoleon Series Reviews

Jackson, Thomas. *Narrative of the Eventful Life of Thomas Jackson: Militiaman and Coldstream Sergeant, 1803 - 1815*. Eamonn O'Keeffe (ed.). Solihull (UK): Helion, 2018. \$29. ISBN# 9781912390120



Memoirs written by soldiers who served in the British militia and fencible regiments are rare. Although there are eleven known accounts about service in the militia,¹ most only mention it in passing. *Narrative of the Eventful Life of Thomas Jackson* is one of the exceptions.² About a third of the book is about his time in the Staffordshire Militia Regiment from 1803 to 1812. During that time he was in the Light Company and eventually was promoted to sergeant. Sergeant Jackson was a full time soldier much of the time that he was with the Staffordshire Militia.

Despite very little training almost as soon as the regiment was organized it was sent to Windsor Castle. There it spent many years guarding it and King George III when he was in residence there. The book is filled with many anecdotes about his duty at Windsor Castle and his encounters with the King.

In 1812, Sergeant Jackson volunteered to join the Coldstream Guards. Because he was able to convince twenty soldiers from his company also to volunteer he was able to keep his rank. He was assigned to the Light Company of the 2nd Battalion. He would serve with them until for the next 18 months. In December 1813 six companies of the 2nd Battalion Coldstream Guards were sent to Holland. Sergeant Jackson and his Light Company was among those sent. He fought at the battle of Merxem and the disastrous assault on Bergen-op-Zoom, where he was wounded and captured. Sergeant Jackson's wound to his leg was so severe it was amputated and he was eventually discharged.

Narrative of the Eventful Life is filled with much detail on topics that I have not found in any other set of memoirs. Some of the most interesting are on the life and duties of a non-commissioned officer in both the militia and a Guards regiment. It includes stories about recruiting duty (which he did poorly at), escorting prisoners – including military prisoners being transported to Australia and French prisoners-of-war, and corporal punishments, including floggings and one I had never heard of, the Porcupine. He also discusses the

¹ For a listing of memoirs by militiamen see [British Memoirs of the Napoleonic Wars: Militia and Fencible Regiments](#).

² The other is "[Marching with Thomas Skeel](#)" who served in the 2nd Somerset Militia.

personal relationship he had with other NCOs in the regiment, and the resentment he faced when he joined the Guards because he came in as a sergeant and had passed over others who had been in the regiment for years. He also tells of working with the battalion adjutant who had so much impact on his daily duties.

About 50% of the book covers Sergeant Jackson's participation in the 1813 – 1814 Campaign in Holland. He writes of the role of his company in the battle of Merxem and the struggle with the weather and poor rations. His description of the assault on Bergen-op-Zoom is one of the few existing accounts by a non-commissioned officer. The heart of the book though is about his wounding and capture. After being shot in the lower leg, he was left to freeze to death in a meadow for about 24 hours. He survived by crawling to a building that was filled with dead British soldiers. He was eventually found but it was several days before he received any medical treatment. Several pages are devoted to the brutal treatment he received by the French soldiers.

Sergeant Jackson goes into great detail about his subsequent medical treatment, including the amputation of his leg with a dull bone saw, the evacuation of wounded to a British hospital, and the incompetence of junior surgeons who worked on his amputated leg while he was in the hospital. He even writes about how a chaplain would make visits to provide spiritual comfort and the soldiers' reaction to it. There are several pages about the evacuation of the wounded to England and the treatment in the Coldstream Guards Hospital in London. He wound was slow in mending and he was still in the hospital in June 1815.

Sergeant Jackson was medically discharged from the army in 1816 and given a shilling per day pension. He and his wife returned to his home town. The final part of the book is how he struggled to make a living in the depressed economy that came about when the Napoleonic Wars ended.

Narrative of the Eventful Life of Thomas Jackson is extremely well written. Its wide variety of unusual topics will hold the interest of even the casual reader. It is destined to be a classic among Napoleonic memoirs. Highly recommended.

Reviewed by: [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: October 2018