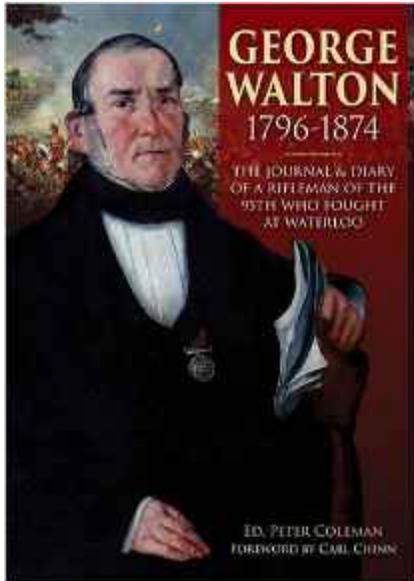


The Napoleon Series Reviews

Coleman, Peter. *George Walton 1796 – 1874: the Journal & Diary of a Rifleman of the 95th Who Fought at Waterloo*. Studley (UK): Brewin Books, 2016. 104 pages. Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-85858-456-2 £10.



The officers and men of the 95th Rifles were some of the most prolific writers of diaries, letters, and memoirs of the Napoleonic Wars. Although most were written by officers, a fair number were written by enlisted soldiers. These include Edward Costello's *The Peninsular and Waterloo Campaigns*, *The Recollection of Rifleman Harris*, and *Where Duty Calls Me: The Experiences of William Green of Lutterworth in the Napoleonic Wars* among others. *George Walton 1796 – 1874* is a welcomed addition to the list. The book was recently published by Brewin Books and is a set memoirs that have been in the family possession since they were written 160 years ago.

George Walton was a 17 year old apprentice who enlisted in the 95th Rifles in 1813. He was sent to Flanders in December 1813, with elements of the 2nd Battalion and fought in the winter campaign under General Graham. He fought at Waterloo, was at the occupation of Paris, lined the streets of at Queen Victoria's Coronation, and rode the train from Birmingham to London in 1839 on one of first trains between the two cities. He ended his career as a schoolmaster sergeant.

George Walton was compiled in 1856 and consist of two parts. The first is his memoirs that he wrote in 1856 and cover the period 1813 to 1818. The second part are from his diary he kept from 1819 to 1839. The book is filled with tidbits of life on campaign, especially that in the Flanders in the winter of 1814. Rifleman Walton writes a harrowing tale of surviving in freezing weather and the steps they took to stay warm; life on the picquet lines; skirmishing; and the clothes and the equipment they wore. During the Waterloo Campaign he claims that his battalion was dressed in white fatigue dress when they left their cantonments on 16 June 1815 and did not change into their green uniform until the morning of the battle of Waterloo. He described the state of his clothing on 18 June as “. . . it may easily guessed what sort of white they were after our toilsome march, wet through first with sweat, covered by the dust of the roads and lying about on the ground, then the heavy rain washing the blacking off our accoutrements on to them. . .”¹ He also provides a vivid description of standing in a square being attacked by French cavalry and having to be evacuated to the rear after being wounded in the shoulder.

¹ Page 26

I like to think of this book as the dark side of the 95th Foot. *George Walton 1796 – 1874* covers details on life in the Rifles that I have never seen in any set of memoirs or diaries from other members of the regiment. For example the before he was supposed to deploy to Flanders, he had still not been issued a shako. An old soldier advised him to get up early and steal one from someone who was not going! Most sources state that the Rifles rarely flogged their soldiers, yet he writes of flogging, including of a sergeant who was found drunk on picquet duty, reduced in rank to private, and received 300 lashes. Rifleman Walton also talks about the cowardice of two of his battalion's officers during the 1814 Campaign and at Waterloo. Surprisingly, he even names one of them. He tells of sleeping on picquet duty and on the retreat from Quatre Bras on 17 June, of receiving permission to take food from any house they came across, but no alcohol and no plundering anything else.

George Walton reminds me of what it must have been like to sit in a tavern in a small village in England and listen to old soldiers' stories as they drink a pint of ale. You wonder how much is true and how much has grown in the re-telling over the years. Much of what Rifleman Walton writes about can be verified by other accounts. One thing I was curious about was how much truth there was in the cowardice of one officer in particular. A quick check of the Lionel Challis' [Peninsula Roll Call](#) shows the officer in question was in Flanders in 1814. However, a check of Charles Dalton's *Waterloo Roll Call* and the *Waterloo Medal Roll*² has his name absent from both. Yet Rifleman Walton never states the officer was at Waterloo. It was after he had been wounded and was walking to Brussels, did he see the "Brave Captain. . . riding leisurely along on his grey horse, his servant riding behind him in a livery coat and gold band round his hat, instead of being in regimentals with his company. The Captain stopped to ask us questions, how far off was the Regiment, if the battle was over, etc. etc.: he did not appear to be in any hurry to overtake them. He remained behind in Brussels when the 1st Battalion marched from there. . ."³ Interestingly, none of the great chroniclers of the regiment, such as John Kincaid, Jonathan Leech, George Simmons, Harry Smith, or William Surtees, mention the officer in question.

George Walton 1796 – 1874 is entertaining and because of its allegations of misconduct it will be controversial. It might cause you to re-think what you know about the 95th Rifles. I highly recommend it.

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: June 2016.

² *The Waterloo Medal Roll*. Darlington: Naval and Military Press, 1992.

³ Pages 33 - 34

