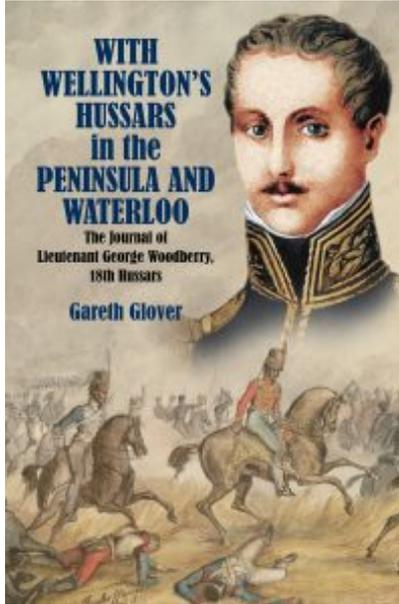


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Woodberry, George. *With Wellington's Hussars in the Peninsula and Waterloo: the Journal of Lieutenant George Woodberry 18th Hussars*. Gareth Glover and Colin Yorke (ed.). Barnsley: Frontline, 2018. £25 / \$40. ISBN: 9781473893979



How *With Wellington's Hussars* came to be published is an interesting story. George Woodberry wrote his daily journal in English whenever he could, often at odd moments throughout the day. For the sake of clarity I will call this version of the journal the rough draft. He usually then expanded the rough draft within 24 hours of writing the original entry. This I will call the refined version. His plan was to send the refined version of the journal home for safe-keeping when he filled up the book it was written in. The first volume was completed just before Vitoria and it made it home safely. Unfortunately his second refined journal was lost when his baggage was stolen and he stopped writing it after that, but continued to write the rough draft.

George Woodberry resigned his commission in 1818 while he was stationed in France as part of the force that occupied the country after Waterloo. He left the rough drafts of his journal with his lover in France when he went to South America and joined Simon Bolivar's army to help free Venezuela. Mr. Glover and Mr. Yorke were able to find an English copy of the refined journal that was sent home prior to Vitoria, but not an English copy of the post Vitoria and Waterloo journals. However, in 1898, a French translation of his journals were published in France. The editors now had two versions of the early part of the campaign and only the French version from Vitoria to Waterloo. The editors translated the French version back into English and the two early versions were compare to ensure their accuracy. There were minor changes, usually with the rough draft saying "we are going somewhere" while the refined journal saying "we have arrived, etc."<sup>1</sup> The end result is this book.

The 18<sup>th</sup> Hussars saw little action in the Peninsular War. It was part of the ill-fated Corunna Campaign and lost most of its horses during the evacuation in January 1809. It took four years to rebuild the regiment and it was not until January 1813 that it returned to the Peninsula. It would fight there until Napoleon abdicated in April 1814. The regiment returned to England in July 1814, but participated in the Waterloo Campaign in 1815. During its time in the Peninsula, the 18<sup>th</sup> Hussars had the well-deserved

---

<sup>1</sup> The editors do note when there were discrepancies.

reputation of being the most undisciplined regiment in Wellington's Army. At one point Wellington was so disgusted with the regiment that he told it them that if they did not improve he would dismount them, distribute their horses to other regiments, and send the officers and men back to England in disgrace!

George Woodberry's journal covers his time with the regiment when it was in the Portugal, Spain, and France in 1813 and 1814, as well as the Waterloo Campaign. He is quite candid and does nothing to dispute how poorly disciplined the regiment was. In fact he does the exact opposite. His account reinforces its poor reputation. What you will find in *With Wellington's Hussars* are

- Numerous court-martials both in garrison and on campaign
- Looting
- Stealing from the peasants
- Assaults
- Its actions at Vitoria where Wellington claims that if the regiment had continued pursue the retreating French instead of stopping to plunder the French baggage train the Allied victory would have been much greater.

And this is just among the enlisted soldiers. Lieutenant Woodberry is very honest in his journal and also provides great detail on the misbehavior of the officers. There are numerous accounts of the officers getting drunk both in garrison and on campaign; officers taking leave without permission; getting into fights and challenging each other to duels; hatred for their regimental commander (Lieutenant Colonel Henry Murray) and brigade commander (Colonel Colquhoun Grant); being drunk on duty; and even abandoning their posts while on picket duty. (In one case he writes about leaving his pickets to take a tour of a town that was an hour away from where his men were.)

What comes across in the book is that the officers had no idea that their own actions were the cause of most of the discipline problems in the regiment. Although Lieutenant Woodberry did comment on the hypocrisy of serving on courts-martial of soldiers who were caught plundering after Vitoria, yet admiring one officer who walked away with £2000 after the battle.

To keep from losing his journals, George Woodberry sent them home for safe-keeping. It is likely he wrote to share them later with his friends, but I am not sure he ever meant to publish them. I say this because unlike most diaries and journals of the time, he made no effort to conceal the names of the individuals he wrote about, including those who were involved in some of the more infamous incidents. Furthermore, although he writes many times of his love for a woman at home, he also tells about his dalliances with Portuguese, Spanish, and French women. . . never with much detail though.

*With Wellington's Hussars* is the personal journal of George Woodberry and can be read as such. However, it is a fascinating study of how a magnificent regiment self-destructed through poor leadership. Strongly recommended.

In a sad note, Colin Yorke who was one of the editors of the book, died shortly after it was published. He was very active in the British Napoleonic community. He will be missed.

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: August 2018