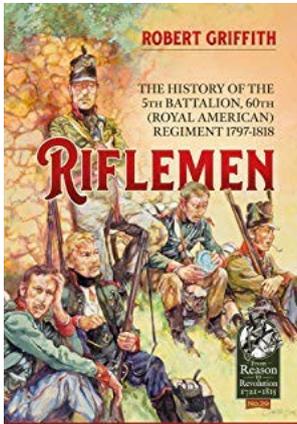


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Griffith, Robert. *Riflemen: The History of the 5th Battalion, 60th (Royal American) Regiment 1797-1818*. Warwick (UK): Helion, 2019. 368 pages. ISBN# 9781911628460. Hardcover. £35.00/\$44.00.



### Contents summary.

Twenty-seven chapters cover the formation, composition, equipment, early service, legacy and general service of the 5th Battalion 60th Rifles from 1797-1818. A great bulk of the work covers the battalion's active service in Portugal and Spain between 1808 and 1814. The book is illustrated with 10 colour illustrations, two of which (not including the cover) are modern reconstructions by Christa Hook and, 34 simple-draught but detailed maps, mostly showing positions of Corps, Divisions and Brigades. Citations are given in footnotes. A bibliography, index and like-matter appear as per convention.

### Review.

In the 19th century it was the common habit of officers, and some literate long serving soldiers, who had retired from service in particularly notable regiments, to spend their newly found leisure time in contemplation of their years wearing the King's Coat. Invariably a memoir would spring out of these reflections. Some were natural storytellers, others could produce little more than itineraries, and a few decided to collect accounts from their comrades and created regimental histories. But as the author of *Riflemen* notes, this didn't really happen for the 5/60th Rifles. The reasons vary from the fact that they existed under the umbrella of the 7 battalion strong 60th (Royal American) Regiment, to their mostly German composition, marking them as too foreign for interest, not being at Waterloo probably didn't help either, and most of all the celebrity of the 95th Rifles ensured them a monopoly on rifles memoirs.

All of which goes towards proving that, by and large, the 5/60th slipped very quickly into obscurity. This despite what we learn in this book. That it played host to one of the father's of the light infantry service, was engaged just as widely as the 95th and that it was in fact the first Rifle unit of the British army. That being said it would be an injustice to declare that the 'German Riflemen' of the 60th, as they were commonly called, were a shadowy nonentity. Far from it, the vast majority of Peninsular War readers, students and scholars know exactly what that distinctive mix of rifle green and scarlet stands for. Misconceptions still arise around them however, the biggest of which is the idea that the entire Royal American Regiment was composed of riflemen. With these things in mind, Robert Griffith, a historical novelist, but more importantly a reenactor with the recreated 5/60th unit, has gone the path of many real life soldiers before him and written a history of 'his' regiment.

In the last twenty years the most successful and probably the best work to cover the rifle armed troops of Wellington's army was probably Mark Urban's *Rifles*. Griffith's *Riflemen* is a worthy shelf-mate to it, and not just because they both have cover art by Christa Hook. Though not as gripping as Urban's journalistic approach to the story of the 95th, Griffith's makes up for narrative verve with vast amounts of contemporary and first-hand accounts. His original research is there to see at the bottom of each page in the footnotes. Introducing

a host of unfamiliar yet fascinating first hand testimony. Even so far as to sketch small, basic biographies of individual riflemen to build up the picture of the battalion. With this approach, Griffith denies the reader none of the intricacies of the adjutants desk. Court martial records, returns, dispatches, letters where they exist, all build each chapter into a snapshot of a battalion at work.

Details will averagely include the given position of the companies of the battalion, which were spread across the Peninsular Army; strengths and casualties, even for small skirmishes and interesting incidents. This level of detail and dedication to researching his subject allows the author to not only draw on and confirm older facts but to go so far as to challenge many of those 'Cornwell-isms,' that are still very commonly believed. *Riflemen* struggles here and there to be personal with many of its subjects. The challenge for Griffith was the great dearth of memoirs to draw on. Nevertheless, the human element, when it appears, can be by turns quite moving and shocking. Of particular note for me was the startling incident after the battle of Roliça given by Captain Landmann which could have been drawn straight out of a Cornwell novel but is all the more impactful for its authenticity. There aren't many units in the British army, either, that can boast of a former ranker retiring as a General, but Johann Schwalbach though he may not have had a Baton in his knapsack definitely had a general's braid in there.

One of the many deservedly admiring reviews that have appeared since the book was published has opined that Sharpe, Harper and their chosen men must now make way for the German heroes to be found in this book. While that might not be necessary for the real riflemen of the 95th, I am inclined to believe that, whether you are a buff or a scholar, you will agree with those sentiments by the end.

Reviewed by [Josh Provan](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: March 2019