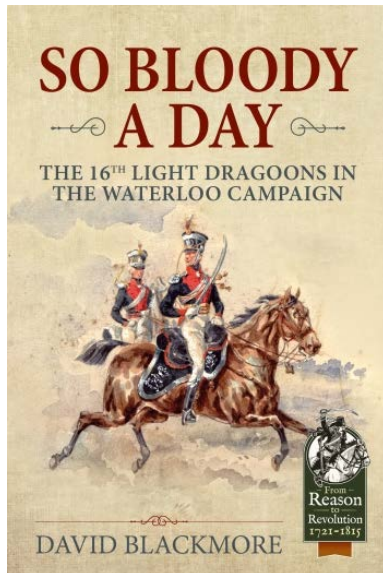


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Blackmore, David. *So Bloody a Day: the 16th Light Dragoons in the Waterloo Campaign*. Warwick (UK): Helion, 2018. 200 pages. ISBN# 9781912866663. £30/\$35.



The British 16<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons was one of the most distinguished British cavalry regiments during the Peninsular War and at Waterloo. It arrived in the Peninsula in April 1809 and served there until the war ended five years later. Although it earned six battle honours<sup>1</sup> during the Peninsular War, it is possibly best known for its service performing out post duty with the British Light Division along the Portuguese – Spanish border from 1810 – 1811. It also made a name for itself during the Waterloo Campaign. Although much has been written about its service in the Peninsula, but very little about its service in Belgium and France in 1815. *So Bloody a Day* rectifies this.

For such a famous regiment, there are not many primary sources from its members. The best known is William Tomkinson's *The Diary of a Cavalry Officer in the Peninsular War and Waterloo: 1809-1815* which was first published in 1894.<sup>2</sup> And of course there is *Intelligence Officer in the Peninsula: Letters & Diaries of Major the Hon. Edward Charles Cocks 1786 – 1812* which was edited by Julia Page.<sup>3</sup> There is even a biography of a subaltern, John Luard, who served in the regiment in the Peninsula and at Waterloo titled *Scarlet Lancer* and was published in 1964.<sup>4</sup>

*So Bloody a Day* is my kind of book. It focuses only on the Waterloo Campaign and tells the story of the regiment from March to December 1815. Essentially from shortly before the time it receives orders to go Flanders in early April until it returned from France in December 1815. More importantly it tells its story using the diaries, letters, and journals of its members. The diary of Captain William Tomkinson, who commanded A Troop, is quoted from quite extensively. I was very pleased to see that the author also had access to Lieutenant John Luard's diaries and journals and used them almost as much as Captain Tomkinson's diary. There are also letters from Captain Clement Swetenham, and Cornets William Beckwith and William Harris.

---

<sup>1</sup> Talavera, Fuentes d'Onor, Salamanca, Vittoria, Nive, and Peninsula

<sup>2</sup> It has been reprinted several times since, including in 1971. Newer reprints are available.

<sup>3</sup> Published in 1986.

<sup>4</sup> It is an interesting read. The author, Brigadier General James Lunt, appears to have access to John Luard's letters and diaries, yet he only used them to provide background information. There were occasional snippets from the material, but they were very short.

For those who own William Tomkinson's *The Diary of a Cavalry Officer in the Peninsular War and Waterloo* may read the above and ask themselves why should I buy this book, since I already have Tomkinson's diary? It is a valid question, however the author, in addition to having John Luard's accounts, he was able to find the Order Book for Captain Tomkinson's Troop! The Order Book is where all orders received from the regiment or higher were recorded. These were administrative orders, that affected the daily life of the regiment. They are not orders sent out during a battle. They contain some real gems such as:

- 8 January: Number of horses for which an officer was allowed to draw forage<sup>5</sup>
- 16 April: reports that the regimental commander was required to submit every week. These included, among others:
  - o Number of horses shod since last report
  - o Number of horse shoes in men's possession
  - o Number of horse shoes in store
  - o Number of sets of nails in store
- 7 June: a necessities trooper had to have and whether he wore it or carried it in his valise.

*So Bloody a Day* ends with short biographies of every officer in the regiment who was at Waterloo. Additionally, there is a list of every officer, NCO, musician, and trooper in the regiment broken down by squadron and troop. The names are annotated to show if the individual was killed or wounded.

In the past six years there have been studies published of the British 1<sup>st</sup>,<sup>6</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup>,<sup>7</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions,<sup>8</sup> plus the 12<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons<sup>9</sup> and the King's Dragoon Guards.<sup>10</sup> *So Bloody a Day* is a welcomed addition to this growing list. Yet, in a way the subtitle is a bit of a misnomer. It states it is about the 16<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons and it does cover its story well. However, it could just have easily been about Captain Tomkinson's A Troop. In addition to him, Cornets Beckwith and Luard were also in the troop. When combined with A Troop's Order Book, the reader is left with a fascinating account of a cavalry troop on campaign! Highly recommended!

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: January 2020

---

<sup>5</sup> This was important. If the officer exceeded the number of horses he had to buy the food himself for any horse above the authorized number.

<sup>6</sup> Ron McGuigan's and my [An Interview with Robert Burnham about His New Book: Wellington's Foot Guards at Waterloo](#)

<sup>7</sup> Gareth Glover's [Waterloo: the Defeat of Napoleon's Imperial Guard](#)

<sup>8</sup> Philip Haythornthwaite's [Picton's Division at Waterloo](#)

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Bamford's [Gallantry and Discipline: the 12th Light Dragoons at War with Wellington](#)

<sup>10</sup> Richard Goldsbrough's [The Cavalry that Broke Napoleon: the King's Dragoon Guards at Waterloo](#)