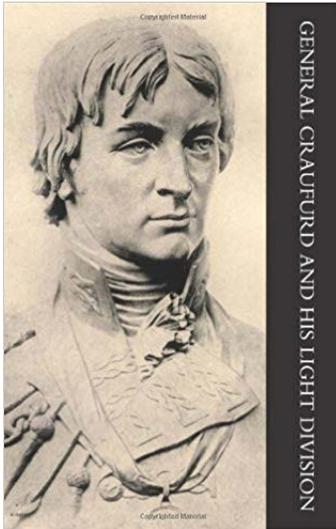


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Craufurd, Alexander. *General Craufurd and His Light Division*. Uckfield (UK): Naval & Military Press, 2004. 312 pages. ISBN# 9781845740139 PB £12.50/\$20



This book was first published in 1891 and I know of no other editions until it was published again in 2004.<sup>1</sup> Unlike many other books published in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, I cannot find a copy of it on Google Books. I knew nothing about the book but was intrigued by the title, so I bought it. I was hoping it would be a history of the British Light Division in the Peninsular War. Instead I found it was a biography of Major General Robert Craufurd, who led the Light Division from its formation in February 1810 until his death in 1812. During those two years, he made the division one of the most famous units of the Napoleonic Wars.

As expected of a biography, *General Craufurd* covers his whole life, not just the years 1810 – 1812 when he led the Light Division in the Peninsula. He was born in 1764 and was commissioned in 1779. He spent considerable time in central Europe and became fluent in German. Additionally he held a variety of posts in Ireland and India; and was even a member of Parliament. In 1806 – 1807, Robert Craufurd led a light brigade in the disastrous expedition to Buenos Aires, where he was forced to surrender to the Spanish.

Not surprisingly, 90% of *General Craufurd* covers his service during the Peninsular War. There is one relatively short chapter on the Corunna Campaign, while two lengthy chapters cover his time under the command of Wellington from his return to the Peninsula in June 1809 to his death at Ciudad Rodrigo on 24 January 1812. The first of these chapters is mostly devoted to the events of April – July 1810, when the Light Division was screening the army from the French forces besieging Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida. It was during this time the Light Division gained its reputation as the elite unit of Wellington's Army. Much attention is given to the combat on the Coa, when the division was surprised by the French and its only way of escape was across a narrow bridge. Although the division came out of the battle with many laurels, Craufurd came under intense criticism for his missteps during the fight that almost saw the destruction of his division.

The next chapter covers the role of the Light Division in the retreat to the Lines of Torres Vedras, including its key part in the battle of Busaco; the battles of Sabugal and Fuentes de Oñoro; the operations around Ciudad Rodrigo in late 1811; and his mortal wounding

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<sup>1</sup> This book was the only biography of the general until Ian Fletcher's *Robert Craufurd: Wellington's Wayward Martinet* was published by Pen Sword in 2012. According to Amazon.com the book is out-of-print.

during the assault on the city on 19 January 1812. The next chapter provides an eye-witness report on his funeral and two letters to his family about his death, including one by his aide-de-camp, Captain William Campbell, who was at his side when he died on 24 January. The final chapter and the appendix are my favorites. They have a series of anecdotes written by those who served under him. Some reinforce his reputation of being a stern disciplinarian, while others his deep concern for the welfare of his soldiers. These stories leave the reader with a vivid portrait of a man, who may not have been loved by his subordinates, but was respected.

*General Craufurd* was written by Reverend Alexander Craufurd, the grandson of the general. The author had access to many of General Craufurd's personal papers and he quotes extensively from them. One of the more interesting is a lengthy letter from General Sir John Moore commenting on his proposal to change how the army recruited soldiers and provide inducements to re-enlist. The author also used first-hand accounts from numerous officers and soldiers who served under General Craufurd. Most, such as John Kincaid, Edward Costello, John Harris, and William Napier, will be familiar to the reader.

Although there is a natural tendency to defend his grandfather, the author addresses many of the issues that have long been associated with Robert Craufurd. These include his famous temper, his aggressiveness, and especially the poor handling of his division at the River Coa. The author examines what the general's critics have to say and either agrees with them or provides counter-arguments to their criticism. In the end, the reader is left with a balanced portrait of one of the most famous generals in Wellington's Army.

Recommended for those interested in the British Army, Robert Craufurd, or the Light Division.

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: December 2018