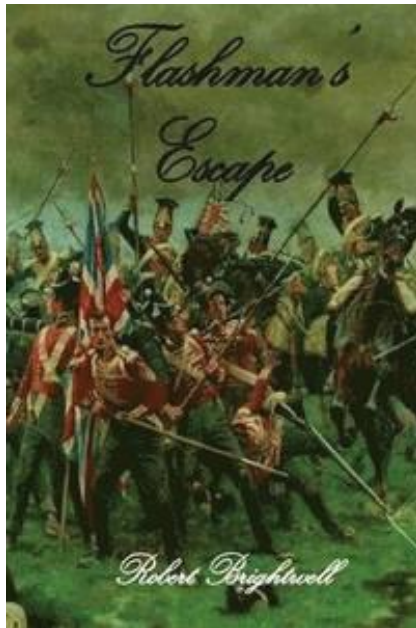


The Napoleon Series Reviews

Brightwell, Robert. *Flashman's Escape*. UK: FeedaRead. 2015. 276 pages. ISBN# 9781785101021. Paperback. \$14

According to the introduction of *Flashman's Escape*, the book is based on the memoirs of Thomas Flashman, which “. . . were recently discovered on a well-known auction website”¹ How much of that is true is yet to be seen, however it turns out that Thomas is the uncle of the better known Victorian general Sir Harry Flashman, whose adventures were chronicled by George MacDonald Fraser.



Like his more famous nephew, Thomas Flashman is a craven coward and his personal philosophy to life and war is best summed up by a quote from his memoirs

“Several of the spectators shifted uncomfortably at the implication that I lacked honour. Of course it was true: I would do whatever it took to protect my precious skin. I also tried to protect my reputation, but it would not have been seemly to call him out for a duel at his moment of triumph. More importantly, I already had discovered that he shot straight.”

Thomas Flashman was a captain in the British Army serving in the Peninsular War in 1811 - 1812. Despite his best efforts to avoid any act that may cause him harm, it appears that as hard as Captain Flashman tried to stay out of danger the more it found him. In the previous volume,² Captain Flashman was one of the Duke of Wellington's exploring officers, but has fallen out of favour and has been assigned as a company commander in the 3rd Foot, also known as the Buffs. Before long he finds himself at Albuera, where his regiment is ridden down by Polish lancers and he is seriously wounded.³ After recovering from his wounds, Captain Flashman is allowed to rejoin Wellington's staff ... just in time for the siege of Badajoz. On the night of the assault on the breaches in Badajoz's walls, he is sent by Wellington to observe the attack. While desperately trying to keep from getting killed, he accidentally falls into the ditch at the base of the main breach, but true to his nature makes no effort to lead in the assault.

These two misadventures only take up a small part of the book. Most of *Flashman's Escape* deals with his relationship with Major Colquhoun Grant, another of Wellington's

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² *Flashman in the Peninsula*

³ The Buffs have the dubious distinction of suffering the most casualties of any British regiment in the Napoleonic Wars. At Albuera, 85% of the men were killed, wounded, or captured.

observing officers.⁴ Major Grant actually existed and his life is chronicled in Jock Haswell's *The First Respectable Spy*.⁵ Flashman and Grant do not get along due to a variety of reasons, but mostly because Flashman thinks Grant is a complete idiot, while Grant thinks Flashman is dishonourable.

After Badajoz is captured, Major Grant is sent on a mission by Wellington and is captured by the French. Wellington orders Flashman to rescue him. Unfortunately, Grant has given his parole and feels it would be dishonourable to break it by escaping. Over the next five months, Flashman links up with Grant while masquerading as a French officer, gets captured by Spanish guerrillas, escapes to France, and makes his way to Paris in a carriage with French General Souham. In Paris, Flashman and Grant have to avoid the French police while making arrangements to escape. While doing so, Flashman becomes involved with the Malet Conspirators, whose goal is to overthrow Napoleon who is away in Russia.

Like his more famous nephew, Captain Flashman was a lady's man and always seems to find a lover, regardless of the circumstances or her status. The book opens with him cuckolding the wife of an NCO in his company and ends with him sleeping with Victor Hugo's mother. In between them he finds time to seduce several other women, including a peasant girl while he recovers from the wounds he received at Albuera, a novice nun at the sack of Badajoz, and the Maid of Saragosa. Sometimes these dalliances cause him problems, but often they are solutions to the predicaments he finds himself in.

One of the problems I have with historical novels is often the author has not done his homework to ensure the book's history is correct. Mr. Brightwell draws heavily on Guy Dempsey's *Albuera* and Jock Haswell's *The First Respectable Spy* for much of the background information. So there are few, if any, historical mistakes.

Flashman's Escape is an entertaining and quick read! It will appeal not only to those who read Napoleonic fiction but also to fans of the Flashman books.

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: September 2015

⁴ Major Grant served as Wellington's chief of intelligence during the Waterloo Campaign.

⁵ A review of it can be seen at: [The First Respectable Spy](#)