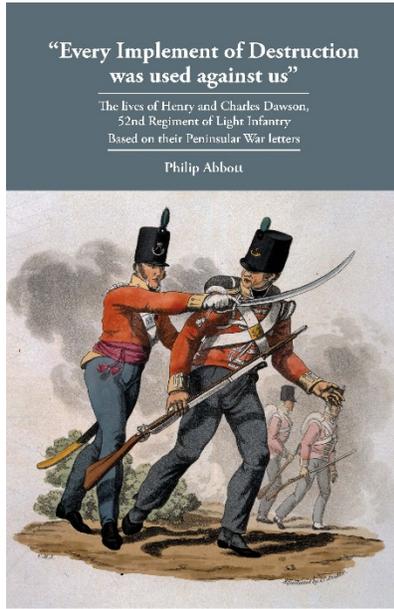


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Dawson, Henry and Charles. *"Every Implement of Destruction Was Used against Us": The Lives of Henry and Charles Dawson, 52nd Regiment of Light Infantry Based on their Peninsular War Letters*. Philip Abbott (ed.). Privately Published, 2015. 210 pages. ISBN# 9780952664024.



I am fairly tied into the publishing community and usually known when a new set of British memoirs come out. So I was surprised when I found *Every Implement of Destruction* in the Royal Greenjackets Museum last May. Especially since the book came out in 2015. It turns out the book was privately published and never made the mainstream catalogs or even Amazon. Which is a shame!

*Every Implement of Destruction* is basically a history of the British 52<sup>nd</sup> Light Infantry in the Peninsular War from 1810 to 1812 – as seen by two brothers who were junior officers in the regiment. Over a space of two years they wrote numerous letters to their father, of which 67 are included in this book.

The 52<sup>nd</sup> Light Infantry was involved in some of the army's heaviest fighting during the years 1810 to 1812. Henry and Charles Dawson were in the thick of it. In July 1810, Henry was in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and part of the covering force outside of Almeida. He fought at the River Coa on 24 July, was in the retreat to Portugal, and fought at Bussaco. Charles Dawson arrived in Portugal in March 1811 with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. Between the two of them, they fought in numerous actions that chased the French out of Portugal; were part of the screen that covered the border between Portugal and Spain after the French were back in Spain; fought at Fuentes d'Oñoro between 3 – 5 May 1811, and all the rest of the border skirmishes combats along the border during the rest of the year. They were at the siege of Ciudad Rodrigo in January 1812 and then marched to Badajoz. Both were seriously wounded during the assault on the city on 6 April. Charles was so badly wounded he was sent home to recover.

Unfortunately the last letter was written in June 1812. More might have been written but are not part of the collection. Henry Dawson was killed in action on 17 November 1812. Charles Dawson recovered from his Badajoz wound, returned to the Peninsula in 1813, and fought with his battalion at Waterloo, where he was shot through the lung. He spent a year recovering and was part of the Army of Occupation of France until he died in Chantilly France in July 1817, possibly from complications from his Waterloo wound.

Several things make *Every Implement of Destruction* unique:

- Most of the letters were written shortly after the events described in them occurred. So there is a sense of immediacy that you do not find in memoirs.
- Unlike most memoirs that tell mostly of camp life and other day-to-day events, but rarely about combat, almost all the letters are about the battles and skirmishes they fought in. For example, one of the first articles I wrote for the Napoleon Series was about the Action on the River Coa.<sup>1</sup> Henry Dawson fought there and was caught on the wrong side of the river after the battle was over. His letter home was about the fight, but also about how he led forty men from the various battles in evading the French and finding another way across the river. He only arrived back at his battalion after they had reported him and the men missing. This is the only source I have seen about this.
- Unlike most of the letters that were written home, the brothers made no effort to avoid talking about casualties and even their own wounds. . . which I am not sure their parents appreciated. They actually told them about downplaying the extent of their wounds to avoid having them listed in the official reports.
- One of the curious things about the letters was how aware these two officers in the front lines were knowledgeable about what was going on with the rest of the army in the Peninsula. For example on 27 May, Henry wrote home about the battle of Albuera which occurred on 16 May. The battle was fought over 300 kilometers away from his location.

The editor, Philip Abbot,<sup>2</sup> does a superb job editing the letters and providing much background information on what the two brothers wrote about. He draws heavily on a variety of sources, including other histories, and the many letters, journals, and memoirs written by the Light Division's officers and soldiers who fought alongside them.

This book is a must read for anyone interested in small unit combat in the Napoleonic Wars as experienced by a junior officer. Highly Recommended.

Unfortunately, I have not been able to find this book online and it is not available on Amazon. I found my copy in the [Royal Greenjackets Museum Shop](#). You should be able to order it from them. Proceeds of the book are donated to the Museum. You can also buy a copy of the book by ordering it directly from [Mr. Abbott](#).

Placed on the Napoleon Series: November 2018

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<sup>1</sup> [Action on the River Coa Virtual Tour](#)

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Abbott is the Archives and Records Manager at the Royal Armouries in Leeds, England.