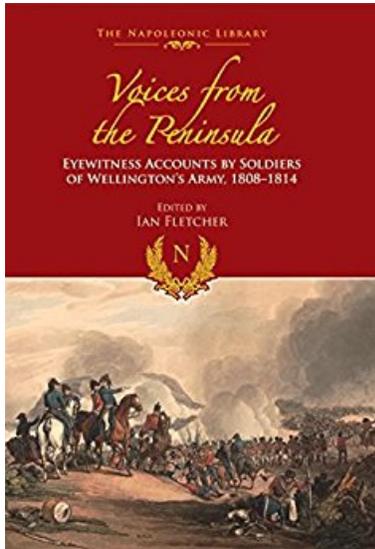


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Fletcher, Ian (ed.). *Voices from the Peninsula: Eyewitness Accounts by Soldiers of Wellington's Army, 1808 – 1814*. Barnsley: Frontline, 2016. £25 / \$40. 306 pages. ISBN# 9781848328044



*Voices from the Peninsula* was first published in 2001 by Greenhill Books and has been long out-of-print. As the title implies, it tells the story of the British involvement in the Peninsular War, from the landing in Portugal in August 1808 to the final victories in April 1814. Because it covers 68 months of the war, it focuses only on the major battles and campaigns. At first I was skeptical about the book, thinking how much could it really tell me? I was pleasantly surprised.

Mr. Fletcher uses the same basic format throughout the book. Each chapter is devoted to one or two battles, such as Roliça and Vimiero, or a campaign, like Corunna. He spends a page or two set the scene and then cherry picks the best descriptions left by a participant, or in some cases, participants, of the event. Rather than just throwing the eyewitnesses' story into the narrative, Mr. Fletcher gives a brief background of the individuals: their names and rank, the unit they were in, and the source the quote came from. Most of the quotes are multi-page.

The author points out that the number of memoirs written during and after the Peninsular War was unprecedented. He postulates that "This was due to a combination on an increase in literacy amongst British soldiers coupled with the fact that after years of under-achievement they finally had something worth writing about."<sup>1</sup> He quotes from 41 different sources and not surprisingly, most were written by officers. Most are written by infantrymen, but there are four from the cavalry, one from the Royal Horse Artillery, three from surgeons and assistant surgeons, and one by a commissary officer.

If you are looking for a book that includes the writings of general officers, this is not for you. Only four of the accounts were written by someone above the rank of captain (1 colonel, two lieutenant colonels, and a major). The voices in this book are of the men in the thick of the fight. Nineteen of the authors were junior officers and fourteen were enlisted soldiers -- seven written by sergeants and seven by privates. Here you will find what it was like to stand in a line and exchange fire with a French column, to be in a

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<sup>1</sup> Page 7

square about to be charged by cavalry, to assault the breaches in the walls of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz, and to be ridden down by enemy cavalry and taken prisoner!

For those who specialize in the Peninsular War, there really is not much new in the book. However, its narrative is so compelling that it would be a perfect gift to give someone who wants to know why you are interested in the Napoleonic Wars. The individual stories told in *Voices from the Peninsula* will draw them in and likely spark a new generation of Napoleonic historians! Recommended.

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: October 2016