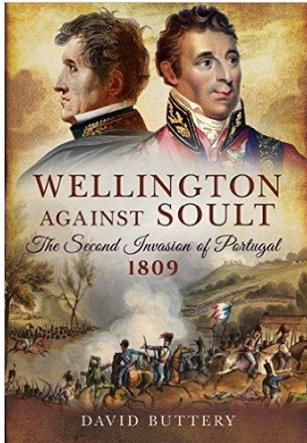


The Napoleon Series Reviews

Buttery, David. *Wellington against Soult: the Second Invasion of Portugal 1809*. Barnsley (UK): Pen & Sword, 2016. 256 pages. ISBN# 1473821436. \$39.95/£25



Nestled between Moore's retreat to Corunna and Wellesley's Talavera campaign sat a short campaign, lasting barely two and a half months, which pitted *Maréchal d'Empire* Jean de Dieu Soult against Lieutenant-general Sir Arthur Wellesley. The campaign is mainly notable for Wellesley's audacious river crossing at Porto. It figures less nobly in the history of the Peninsula War than it might; in his 4,200-page history Oman devotes only 160 pages to it, and that includes a 30-page digression into the state of Portugal and the history and organisation of the Portuguese army.

Noted Napoleonic and Crimean War author David Buttery has addressed the shortfall by providing *Wellington Against Soult: The Second Invasion of Portugal 1809*. No, not the 1814 backs-to-the-wall 1814 version of Soult, but an earlier version of Jean (only his enemies called him Nicolas), smarting from a perceived lack of recognition due to him from Austerlitz and the Polish campaigns of 1807. I found the biographical Chapter Two, 'The Duke of Damnation',¹ particularly intriguing. Soult got on with very few people, hated Berthier, and his enmity with Ney bordered on murder. He spent many of his formative years acting as chief of staff in the period 1794 to 1798, commanded a division in Germany and Switzerland in 1799 and was made commandant of the training camp at Boulogne in 1803 in preparation for the invasion of England. He was a strategist and administrator first and a front-line general second; he was not a man to expose himself to danger, and was not widely popular in the army, or with his peers. In all this we see the factors which explain some of his shortcomings in 1814 and 1815. The definitive history of the man has never been written, as the Soult family still holds and has never released his personal papers.²

Following the wintering of the French army after Corunna, it was only natural that they would turn their attentions to the thinly-defended kingdom of Portugal, and Soult duly invaded on 4 March 1809. Wellesley assumed command from Sir John Cradock in Portugal on 23 April and immediately put his small army in motion northwards. The significant part played by Colonel Sir Robert Wilson and his Loyal Lusitanian Legion (in addition to partisans) is explained and it seems that they were instrumental in preventing Soult's force being reinforced.

¹ Page 22

² Page 46

The account of the sack of Porto on 29 March 1809³ carries echoes of the later sacks of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz; the main difference being Soult's ability to promptly curtail the rapaciousness of his men and restore order not long after the fall.

The chapter of the battle of Porto itself is fairly short (16 pages) and I had expected more, however the battle was a brief affair and only incurred 120 British casualties to 1,500 French (most taken prisoner) so was only a skirmish by later standards. The only criticism I could offer is that it would have been nice to hear a few more French voices describe the action. The French themselves were sluggish on the day (Soult himself was quite ill) and I suppose there may have been little incentive to record a disaster. Soult's harrowing retreat through the mountains forms a longer chapter and ends with Soult's starving men entering Spain and requesting provisions and new artillery (having lost all their guns) from Ney. Ney refused and the two men came close to fighting a duel!

Wellesley had achieved much for very few losses however his victory was not roundly received in London. He had let the French escape; the Whigs were dismissive and he was not given any particular reward. It would take Talavera to remove any lingering doubts over his ability.

This book is in fact the second part of a trilogy by Buttery, coming between [Wellington against Junot](#) and *Wellington against Massena*, covering the three French invasions of Portugal between 1807 and 1811. I am happy to say I have read and enjoyed all three, and recommend them likewise to readers of the era.

Reviewed by: [Steve Brown](#)

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³ Page 76