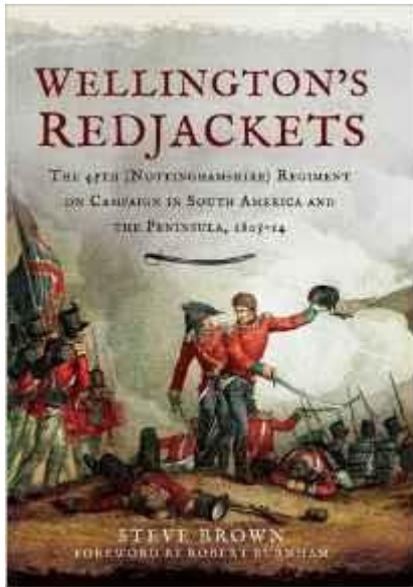


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Brown, Steve. *Wellington's Redjackets: The 45th (Nottinghamshire) Regiment on Campaign in South America and the Peninsula, 1805–14*. Barnsley (UK): Frontline, 2015. 290 pages. ISBN# 9781473851757. £25 / \$50.



Although there have been a steady stream of solid regimental histories focussed on individual British Army units during the Napoleonic Wars, surprisingly to date none of them have taken as their subject that rare thing, a two-battalion infantry regiment that functioned throughout the conflict exactly as the theory of the system dictated – first battalion at war, second battalion on home service. The 30th, subject of two books by Carole Divall, had a first battalion in India and a second that was active in the Peninsula and Northern Europe; the 23rd, subject of a book by Donald E. Graves, mostly relied upon its first battalion as its active component, but still sent its second battalion to Corunna and Walcheren; the Chasseurs Britanniques, chronicled by Alistair Nichols, were decidedly a special case as a foreign unit. One could go on, but the point is that Steve Brown's new offering, whilst very much the qualitative equal of these earlier titles, presents a different take again on the regimental experience, and as such reminds us that the British Army was very much a collection of regiments rather than a single unified body.

The first battalion of the 45th Foot saw active service in South America during the Buenos Aires debacle, and was then plucked from Ireland – where it had been sent to replenish its ranks – as a reinforcement for Sir Arthur Wellesley's little army on its way to Portugal. As such, along with the 1/40th and 5/60th, it became one of a handful of battalions to serve all the way through the Peninsular War, from Rolicca to Toulouse. Naturally, the focus of Mr Brown's book is predominately on the adventures of the first battalion, but the vital activities of the second in its role as a feeder unit are also given due prominence and serve in particular to emphasise the ties that existed between the regiment and its assigned county of Nottinghamshire. Until 1810 when it moved to the Channel Islands, the 2/45th was stationed around Mansfield in its "home" county, ensuring that the county title actually had some relevance and that there were Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire men in the ranks to counteract the inevitable and ubiquitous drafts from the Irish Militia. Even so, the drafts that were sent by the second battalion at home to the first battalion in the Peninsula steadily declined in numbers as the war went on, highlighting the manpower shortfalls that had begun to bedevil Britain in the closing years of the Napoleonic Wars.

The role of the second battalion in the cycle of officer promotions and appointments is also emphasised, with newly promoted officers from the first battalion moving back to the second to gain experience in their new rank before returning to the active battalion for a further "tour" in Portugal or Spain. What is particularly interesting in the case of the 1/45th is that this officer turnover extended up to the most senior ranks,

with no less than six commanding officers during the course of the war, not including temporary appointments to cover the gaps. Granted, one of these men was killed before he could even take up the post of CO, but, even so, this is quite a turnover. Since a lot of work on the regimental system stresses the role of the commanding officer as vital to unit morale and identity, it is interesting to see how the 1/45th coped without much in the way of continuity of leadership. The answer, for the most part, seems to have been excellent mid-level leadership from a core of officers which, though individuals came and went through wounds and promotions, remained constant throughout the battalion's time in the Peninsula. Coupled to that, Mr Brown emphasises the significance of the battalion's self-identification as a key element of the "Fighting" Third Division under Sir Thomas Picton, with the 1/45th playing a distinguished part in all of the division's combats alongside its brigade-mates the 74th and 1/88th. There is, it is true, little if anything that is new and revolutionary in the accounts that are offered of these battles, but what Mr Brown does do is to add considerable detail that is focussed on the specific regimental experience of the 1/45th in its various actions. Through detailed examination of the casualty returns, he also brings home the human cost of the war, enumerating the fallen and relating the often grim stories of those who survived at the price of a wound.

In adding such human detail, Mr Brown is lucky in that his choice of the 45th as his subject enables him to draw upon one of the period's lesser-known rank and file memoirs, namely the recollections of Private William Brown – no relation, we are assured! Such a view from the bottom up is an essential element in bringing to life all aspects of life in the battalion, but Mr Brown is not short of accounts from commissioned eyewitnesses either, and it is here that the book displays one of its greatest strengths. There are no published full-length accounts as such by officers of the 45th, but Mr Brown has nevertheless been able to dig up considerable eyewitness testimony. Some of this comes from James Campbell's *A British Army – As it Was, - Is, - And Ought to Be*, which contains much about the writer's service in the Peninsula as a company officer with the 1/45th and as a brigade major within the Third Division. Even more material, however, comes from the very rare regimental annuals of the Sherwood Foresters, successor regiment to the 45th, which have been mined extensively for material. Mr Brown's collaboration with the regimental museum to gain access to these sources is a model of what can be achieved by historians and museums working together, and it can only be hoped that the example will encourage other regimental museums to consider sharing their own archival resources with a wider audience. As this reviewer can personally attest, there are historical gems aplenty still to be discovered if one is prepared to look beyond the national collections and it is to Mr Brown's credit that he has done so and the regimental museum's that they have facilitated this.

There are occasional slips on matters not directly associated with the regiment – the unfortunate confusion of Warren and Nathaniel Peacocke being particularly unfair on the former – but the only real flaw is in the matter of the referencing. For some reason, these have been given in the form of chapter endnotes, which, with many short chapters, makes finding them a chore. Since a fair proportion of the notes represent supplementary information rather than serving as citations, one feels that it would have been more helpful to incorporate these directly into the text and give the remaining references either as conventional footnotes or endnotes. This, however, is to descent into nit-picking, and should in no way be taken as detracting from this

reviewer's recommendation of the work not only as a solid piece of exciting narrative history but also a study which, in its understated way, also offers much in the way of useful analysis of how an infantry battalion at war, and the regiment of which it was part, functioned as part of Britain's fight against Napoleon.

Reviewed by [Andrew Bamford](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: December 2015