



Gareth Glover ed *An Eloquent Soldier: The Peninsular War Journals of Lieutenant Charles Crowe of the Inniskillings, 1812-1814* Frontline Books, £25

This is an excellent book. It is extremely well edited, reads well and is a most interesting account of the closing years of the war in the Peninsular. Gareth Glover has been studying the Peninsular War for over thirty years and has edited a number of memoirs of the war and other books on it. His expertise is seen in the superb footnotes throughout, identifying individual officers, commenting on what Crowe writes and above all in putting everything in context.

Charles Crowe was born in 1785 of respectable middle class stock. He enlisted in the West Suffolk Militia at the relatively advanced age of 25, rising to the rank of lieutenant very rapidly. He was appointed ensign in the 2nd Battalion 48th (Northamptonshire) Foot and in September 1812 he received orders to proceed to Spain with a reinforcement draft. By January 1813 he had transferred to the 3rd Battalion 27th (Inniskilling) Foot, with whom he served for the rest of the war in Spain and Southern France. He saw action at Vitoria, the blockade of Pamplona, the serious fighting at Sorauren, a number of actions in the crossing of the Pyrenees and finally at Toulouse. He was also absent from regimental duty for some considerable time with severe headaches, possibly the result of acute sunstroke and maybe brucellosis.

After the abdication of Napoleon he returned with the 2nd Battalion to England, and then to Ireland, and although he volunteered he was not sent to Belgium, and so missed the battle of Waterloo. Perhaps this was just as well since the 1st Battalion Inniskillings suffered more than any other battalion at Waterloo, having 477 out of 750 killed or wounded, leaving the battlefield with only three Lieutenants as officers. Crowe's is one of the few diaries of the Inniskillings from this period, and so is doubly useful. The 2nd Battalion was disbanded in 1817 and Crowe returned to Suffolk on half pay, married, and lived in Coddendam, where he died on 15 June 1855.

What strikes one throughout the book is how small the Peninsular army was. Not in numbers; Wellington commanded 79,000 at Vitoria. Rather that its members appeared to know each other so well. Crowe was happy to eat a meal with any regiment, and wherever he goes he seemed to have known somebody, whether it was an acquaintance from Suffolk, somebody he served with in the Militia, or from the 48th. He makes numerous friends in the army, and hardly a day goes past without him recording in his diary how he has met somebody. He was not impressed by the Guards, and on a number of occasions made deep criticisms of their officers. The relationship between officer and his servant is time and again emphasised, and also how important it was for each company to have good scroungers, as a continual theme is the shortage of food. Wellington might well have paid more attention than most generals of his time to logistics, but his army frequently out marched their supplies and all they received was a lump of meat, gristle and bone as the cattle or sheep that accompanied the army were slaughtered. Combat was actually rare, usually just a few days' serious fighting per year, but when it occurred it was savage, and at one stage Crowe is reduced to reporting to his divisional general, Cole, that while his company has only 1 officer and no men, the next company has no officers and 28 men. He offers to combine them!



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Page 2 / 2

There are vignettes of Wellington, whom Crowe clearly admires, and other senior figures such as Picton and Beresford. All in all it is a worm's eye view of the last part of the campaign, with all the advantages and disadvantages of such an account. The editor has managed to remove most of the disadvantages by placing the original diary and letters into the correct context. My one criticism, and it is quite a serious one, is that it has almost no maps. The only diagrams are those drawn by Crowe himself, useful and referenced to the diary well, but given that Crowe marched from Lisbon to Toulouse a series of maps would have made it a much easier read. Am I alone in believing that maps are an essential adjunct to military history and that every place mentioned in the text of a book should be shown on a map? I suspect I am not! Having made that criticism I can whole-heartedly recommend this book to any student of the war in the Peninsular.

Robin Brodhurst