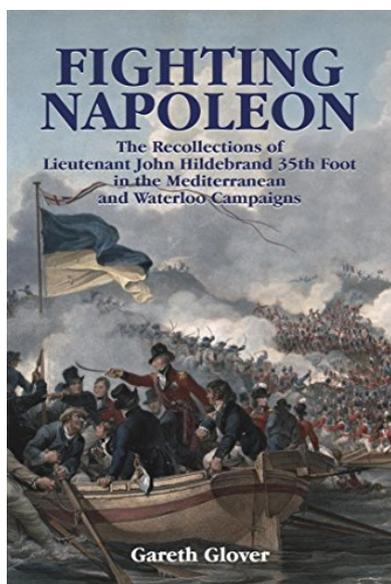


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Hildebrand, John. *Fighting Napoleon: The Recollections of Lieutenant John Hildebrand 35th Foot in the Mediterranean and Waterloo Campaigns*. Gareth Glover (editor). Barnsley: Frontline, 2016. 212 pages, ISBN 9781473886841. Hardcover. \$39.95/£19.99.

List of Maps. Forward. Acknowledgments. Chapter 1 John Hildebrand and his Family. Chapter 2 Reporting for Duty. Chapter 3 Passage to Malta. Chapter 4 Malta 1810. Chapter 5 Sicily 1810. Chapter 6 The Ionian Islands 1811. Chapter 7 Lissa 1812. Chapter 8 Attack on Lagosta 1813. Chapter 9 Commandant of Lagosta. Chapter 10 Ragusa Vecchia, 1813. Chapter 11 The Blockade of Ragusa 1813-14. Chapter 12 A Near Run Thing. Chapter 13 Seeking Reinforcements. Chapter 14 Ragusa Surrenders. Chapter 15 Italy 1814. Chapter 16 Corfu 1814. Chapter 17 Belgium 1815. Chapter 18 18 June 1815. Chapter 19 Cambrai and Péronne. Chapter 20 Paris. Appendix I Forced Billet and Good Reception. Appendix II Sleep in Water. Appendix III In the Wood. Appendix IV St Denis and Paris. Appendix V The Garrison of Lissa. Bibliography. Index.



This probably one of the most interesting and original Napoleonic Memoirs I've read, a unique service record of a junior officer from a neglected regiment fighting in a neglected theatre, often found over his head but with a flair for adventure and blessed with good luck.

In his preface, Gareth Glover writes that there has not been a single memoir or collection of letters, of the many he has produced that have not brought something new to his understanding of the Great War against France. I must confess to not quite realising how special the remembrances of John Hildebrand were until the book actually arrived. Therein I can testify to the truth of the editor's statement, I would confidently calculate that the operations conducted east of Sicily and amongst the Ionian Islands are some of the least studied campaigns conducted by the British armed

forces during the Napoleonic Wars.

Hildebrand's service in the Adriatic reads like an Alastair Maclean novel never written, or at least C.S. Forester. Everything seems to be there for a classic adventure story. Exotic and rugged landscapes, freedom fighters, a powerful enemy, low level irregular operations and daring missions, interspersed by storms and battles, all undertaken under the command of a young subaltern not out of his 20's. Hardship and misfortune however are not far away, making this a very human tale of singular service. Indeed had fate been kinder John Hildebrand might have been remembered as the lieutenant who accepted the surrender of a town from a French General.

Few Lieutenants of his seniority could own to having commanded their own island, nor yet supervised the blockade of a fortress. Yet despite the passage of years, this book was written for the entertainment of the author's family when he was in his 70s, and the common discrepancies as to dates, have been assiduously caught by the editor who lends a concise commentary to each chapter, it sharp, lively and loaded with detail.

In this backwater of the Napoleonic Wars small pockets of British troops were allied with rugged guerrillas, and eccentric deposed noblemen for the control of strategic islands that commanded the Adriatic coast. The reduction and capture of these strongholds are the great untold story of the struggle against Napoleon. Making accounts like this one almost priceless.

To speak of style, the original book is written with an eye for a good yarn rather than history. Though the old man hoped it might serve as useful for new officers as what might be done in ticklish situations with a bit of pluck, and there seemed to be no shortage of material for demonstration. Thus one suspects there are to be the odd embellishment, especially as one learns that the memoranda he kept from that time were irretrievably lost twice, yet by and large Hildebrand seems to have recounted his days of service with commendable integrity.

When it came to Waterloo he, with his regiment formed part of the 4th division, and thus heard more than they saw, last four chapters are highly interesting because they deal with subjects that don't see the light of day very often in Waterloo circles. As it is, they are not boring either, for the 4th division by its almost undamaged state formed the van of the army when it invaded France. Hildebrand found himself not only providing cover to the Duke himself as he scouted Cambrai, but being mooned from the battlements by an audacious Frenchman.

One can imagine from the well-formed passages that the book was principally composed from many an often heard story, some perhaps at the expense of history. It's common to read of old soldiers, being pressed by relatives to write their accounts down, or at least speak of their experiences, and very often the result is that the soldier has faded away before he can do so, that is if he even has the inclination. Hildebrand only just managed to finish this fairly rough but rattling account of his military exploits before his death, and thus it very nearly was lost to us. Not just the authentic voice of an old soldier, whose writing is filled with comparisons to the present day in which he was writing, including a perhaps resentful mockery of the practice of rewarding medals as being somewhat out of keeping with the noble dignity of the British army of his day.

Reviewed by [Josh Provan](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: April 2017