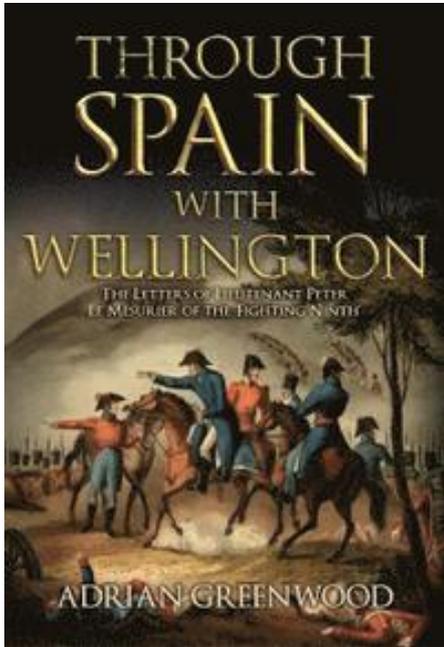


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

*Through Spain with Wellington: The Letters of Lieutenant Peter Le Mesurier of the 'Fighting Ninth.'* Adrian Greenwood (ed.). Stroud, UK: Amberley, 2016. ISBN# 9781445654560. £20



Peter Le Mesurier was commissioned as an ensign in the 9<sup>th</sup> Foot on 13 August 1808 just a few days before the first battalion of the regiment took a prominent part in the storming of the heights of Roliça, the first British victory of the Peninsular War. As a new officer Le Mesurier missed this campaign, but before the end of the year he headed for Spain as part of Sir David Baird's expedition with a detachment of recruits. This detachment had an adventurous time when it was ordered to escort a supply of bullion to the main army under Sir John Moore, but had to retreat into northern Portugal to avoid the French. After various peregrinations Le Mesurier and his men found their way to Vigo and were evacuated along with Craufurd and the Light Brigade. The outline of this episode appear like the plot of a novel by Bernard Cornwell or C. S. Forester, and although Le Mesurier's letters describing his experiences are restrained and

fairly brief there is plenty here to spark the imagination.

Over the next two and a half years Le Mesurier served at home, at Walcheren and at Cadiz before returning to the Peninsula in the middle of 1811. He vividly describes the scene at Ciudad Rodrigo on the morning after it was stormed in January 1812, and gives an interesting account of the successful advance of Leith's Division at Salamanca in July of that year. But it is Le Mesurier's letters describing the Siege of San Sebastian where the Fifth Division took a leading part, that contribute most to the historical record of Wellington's operations, adding many new details and the perspective of a regimental officer in a line regiment which is – unusually – not well represented for this siege. As is well known, the first attempt to storm the fortress failed and there was some criticism of the commitment of the officers and men of the division in the attack, and Le Mesurier shows the response to this within his regiment. More generally there is much useful and fresh material in the volume, for example on the ways that under-performing officers were encouraged to leave the service, and on the vexed issue of plundering, especially when a fortified town was taken by storm.

Peter Le Mesurier emerges from these letters as a pleasant, conscientious, rather serious young man: he was only eighteen when he received his first commission. Some of the most interesting aspects of his letters are the light they shed on the life of regimental officers at the time, at home as well as on campaign. He did not particularly like many of his fellow officers, finding them uncouth and licentious, openly mocking religion, drinking too much, boasting of their sexual exploits, and bullying anyone who did not fall in with their ways. He was not wealthy and tried hard to make his inadequate pay go as far as possible, apologizing to his father with obvious sincerity when he occasionally had to draw on him for £10 to cover the cost of new clothes or a mule. He was warmly affectionate towards his family and

rejoiced in the letters he received from them, while he was careful not to grumble too much in his letters home, and clearly protected them from some of the hardships he endured and the horrors that he witnessed. Yet for all its discomforts he enjoyed active service more than life in barracks, and appears reasonably happy in his choice of career, despite chafing at the slowness of promotion and the uncertainty of his prospects.

Adrian Greenwood has performed a most valuable service in editing these letters from copies made in the early nineteenth century, which he tracked down to a library in Wigan. The result is a substantial and fascinating addition to the literature of the Peninsular War, giving a rounded voice to one of the otherwise almost anonymous officers in a line regiment in one of the less famous divisions, who made up the flesh and blood of Wellington's army.

Reviewed by [Rory Muir](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: February 2016