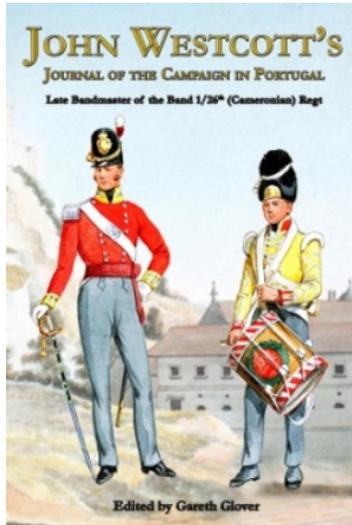


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Westcott, John. *John Westcott's Journal of the Campaign in Portugal: Late Bandmaster of the Band 1/26<sup>th</sup> (Cameronian) Regt.* Gareth Glover (Ed.) Godmanchester: Ken Trotman, 2018, 140 pages. £20



When I first hear of this book I was very interested, since it is the first set of memoirs written by an individual in the 26<sup>th</sup> Foot since 1854!<sup>1</sup> I was also intrigued that it was written by the regimental bandmaster, since only a handful of primary sources by musicians are available.<sup>2</sup> I was disappointed however when I read the Foreword and saw that the book only covered the period of June 1811 to June 1812. But more importantly the regiment was not engaged in any battles or campaigns during that period. Needless to say I was a bit skeptical about the book when I started reading it, wondering if I was going to waste my time. I am very happy to report that my fears were unfounded.

The author's unit was the 26<sup>th</sup> Foot, which was a hard luck regiment. It was part of the Walcheren Expedition of 1809 and saw some combat there, but it was struck hard by Walcheren Fever and lost many men. The survivors of the regiment spent the next two years recuperating from the fever, but most of them never fully recovered their strength and stamina. This would affect their ability to march and fight. Despite their infirmities, the regiment was sent to Portugal in June 1811, but within six months so many men had died or were in the hospital, they were down to 65% the effectives of that they arrived with. And this was after receiving several drafts of replacements. I should note that all these losses were due to sickness.

So if it does not talk about battles why should you read it? Some of its highlights are:

- He notes where he was every day, the conditions of the roads he marched on, and the quality of the places he was billeted. You will be able to track the movement of the regiment for a year.
- He writes of the daily marches from town to town and the effect on the regiment. Surprisingly he tells of the regiment getting lost several times as they move up country and the on way back to Lisbon.<sup>3</sup>
- He was the regimental bandmaster and in charge all of its musicians. He also provides comments on what the band on the march, in camp, etc. He was a keen

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<sup>1</sup> The other being Robert Butler's [Narrative of the Life and Travels of Serjeant ---- , written by himself](#). It was originally published in 1826 and its 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition was published in 1854.

<sup>2</sup> To see a list of known memoirs by musicians see [British Memoirs of the Napoleonic Wars: the Musicians](#).

<sup>3</sup> Pages 33 – 34;

- observer and criticized / praised the other bands he saw and heard. His band was often tasked to give concerts or play at the regimental officers' social functions.
- The 26<sup>th</sup> Foot was in General Edward Stopford's Brigade in the 1<sup>st</sup> Division and Bandmaster Westcott also writes of what it was like to be part of the both the brigade and the division.
    - o When one thinks of how discipline was enforced in the British Army at that time, flogging immediately comes to mind. However General Stopford took a different approach. When several men were convicted of looting, instead of being flogged the “. . . three soldiers who were found guilty of stealing honey, are to have their wine allowance stopped and it gave [sic] to the women of the regiment until the 14<sup>th</sup> of August, and at all times, when wine or spirit is deducted as a punishment from the men, the women are to have it divided equally among them.”<sup>4</sup>
    - o General Stopford also would call all the non-commissioned officers together for instruction. He “. . . spoke a considerable time to them, particularly desiring of them never to strike or use any improper language to any soldiers whatever, as there was other methods to be taken if a soldier committed a fault. He also told them that if a man had the spirit of a soldier, he could not stand to be insulted in such a degrading manner, and therefore he requested that no such unsoldier-like customs would ever appear in the brigade he had the honour to command.”<sup>5</sup>
    - o The 1<sup>st</sup> Division had the Foot Guards Brigade in it. They were given preferential treatment when it came to billets. This caused resentment in the other regiments. He felt that the pick of quarters should have been rotated among the brigades. However when it came to the order of march it was rotated. Theoretically the brigade that would be on the right of the line would march first, followed by the middle brigade, with the left brigade coming last. However sometimes the left brigade would lead, with the right brigade coming last.
    - o General Thomas Graham was the commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division and quite often would call it together to have mock battles. During them the brigades would practice maneuvering under a variety of conditions.
  - Route marches were highly regulated within the brigade and the steps were taken to reduce the number of stragglers and the loss of soldiers due to exhaustion.
    - o The regimental women were not allowed to accompany the regiment if they were pregnant or had children. They were left in Lisbon and provided rations.
    - o Because the regiment was so sick, carts were set aside to help carried the weak / infirmed. Soon the numbers were so great that they ran out of space on the carts. So many had to walk and the carts were used to carry their knapsacks. However, eventually there were so many sick for even this, that

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<sup>4</sup> Page35

<sup>5</sup> Page 49

only the worse off were given space on the carts and the others had to carry their own knapsacks.

- Other issues that were written about are:
  - o The commissary was unable to provide bread for many days and they were left to eat beef, because the division had a herd of cattle to feed it. Surprisingly this was a major complaint.
  - o The regiment was chronically short of blankets and due to the severe cold of the winter of 1812, they suffered greatly.
  - o Water, especially on long marches was often short and the troops were ordered to mix their water with their rum ration.
- Other things he saw that were not related to his regiment includes:
  - o A visit to the Bussaco battlefield, 18 months after it was fought<sup>6</sup> and the number of unburied bodies were still lying about.
  - o How the Portuguese militia treated French stragglers and foragers.
  - o The entry of General Amand Philippon, the captured French commander of Ciudad Rodrigo, into Lisbon.
  - o A visit to the military hospital at Coimbre in February 1812.

Interspersed throughout book are copies of brigade, division, and army orders that are relevant to his journal.

By January 1812, it became very apparent that the 26<sup>th</sup> Foot was too infirmed to participate in a campaign. It and the 79<sup>th</sup> Foot were sent to the rear and eventually the regiment was sent to Gibraltar to help garrison it. The journal ends shortly after it arrives there.

*John Westcott's Journal* is a fascinating read and will be invaluable to those interested in both the British Army and life of a soldier in Spain and Portugal during the Peninsular War. Recommended.

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

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<sup>6</sup> The battle was fought on 27 September 1810.