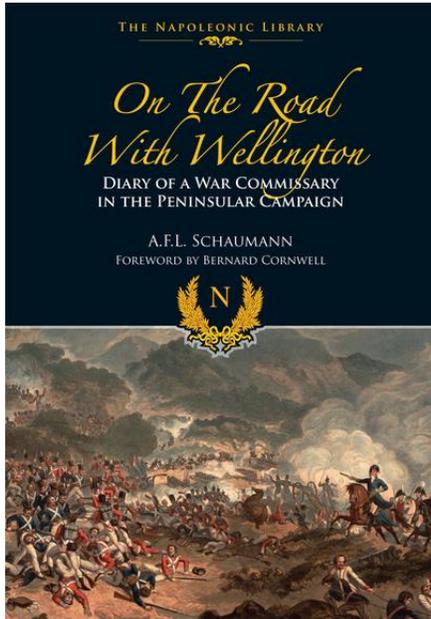


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Schaumann, A. F. L. *On the Road with Wellington: Diary of a War Commissary in the Peninsula Campaign* (with foreword by Bernard Cornwell). Barnsley, UK: Frontline Books, 2015. 416 p. ISBN# 9781848328396. Hardcover. £25



These are the Peninsula War memoirs of August Friedrich Ludolph Schaumann, a Hanoverian who served as commissary to successively the 1st Light Dragoons KGL, 9th Light Dragoons and finally 18th Hussars. “When I was writing the novels of Richard Sharpe’s exploits in the Peninsula War,” Bernard Cornwell notes in his foreword to this book, “and had much recourse to diaries and memoirs, I used Schaumann twice as much as any other source.” It is not hard to see why.

Schaumann was born in Hanover in 1778, and after an unhappy childhood spent some years in the Hanoverian army before finding civil employment as a clerk, ending up in England and later, Sweden. In 1808, he joined Sir John Moore’s fleet at Gothenburg and was accepted as a commissary in the King’s German Legion.

Schaumann’s original draft ran to over 800 pages and mercifully for modern readers, the whole was edited down to slightly over 400 pages by his translator Anthony Ludovici for the original English edition in 1922. Schaumann himself finished the memoirs in 1827, using his original Peninsula War diaries as basis for later elaboration. This mixture of writing dates occasionally lets slip in the text, as the tense sometimes alters within a single paragraph, thankfully not often. However, the reader is always left to wonder what percentage is authentic as against judicious augmentation at a later date with the benefit of hindsight. The translator also provides corrections throughout based upon data extracted from Beamish, Oman and Napier; an example of this is an account of an auction held near Fuentes d’Onoro in 1811, where Schaumann’s cousin (an officer in the KGL) apparently auctioned off the marshal’s baton and full-dress uniform of Marshal Soult, captured a few days earlier. The correction notes that these were the effects of General Pierre Soult, younger brother to the marshal. However, on balance, most of the corrections are minor in nature; Schaumann had the bulk of his facts more or less correct.

The book is chock-full of delicious character observations and occasionally, character assassinations. His attitude towards Wellington, distinctly cool in the early days,<sup>1</sup> warms

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<sup>1</sup> Schaumann refers to AW as “that inflated god almighty” on page 237.

throughout the book to the point of heroic adulation by the end. We get an account of Major von Arenschildt of the Portuguese artillery, eccentric and with the most miserly dining table in the Peninsula; “Arenschildt invited many officers to dine with him, but none went a second time.” Of Robert Ballard Long: “A good little man... who hardly ever shows his face.” Colonel John Skerret, “haughty and puffed up... gone completely off his head.” General Pakenham is recorded as seen riding behind the lines with a party of provosts just after the allied entry into France, shouting “Let the scoundrel be hanged immediately!” to a captured looter. Lt Col Colquhoun Grant of the 18th Hussars comes in for the greatest roasting; “His whole manner bore the stamp of unbounded pride and crassest ignorance.”

Schaumann displays his Hanoverian national outlook boldly, making it plain that he considered the KGL Light Dragoons (to which he was attached) so superior to the English cavalry at all times as made no odds. “... the English cavalry were so deficient that it was nothing new for a French bearer of a flag of truce, together with a trumpeter, to ride between the English sentries without being noticed” is one example.<sup>2</sup> “The English cavalry was notorious for its inferior horses, the majority of which were not even shod”<sup>3</sup> is another.

Roadside adventures abound throughout, some of which seem to have made their way into Peninsula folklore – for example, of the KGL Dragoons filling their canteens from a huge vat of red wine in Rio Mayor for several weeks until the dregs revealed the rotted remains of a drowned French soldier. One reported fact that I had not previously known was Schaumann’s observation that Wellington banned Freemasonry – then widely practised in regiments – in 1812, following complaints from the Spanish clergy. The officers instituted pony, mule and donkey races instead!<sup>4</sup> Schaumann spent a few months in Lisbon in 1812 and provides a picturesque account of life on the streets; “English and Portuguese soldiers; priests; idlers; chefs and cooks; sailors; Greek seamen in red caps and short wide trousers; sullen-looking Algerians and Tunisians in their turbans, embroidered velvet waistcoats, ample short trousers and yellow Moroccan leather slippers...”<sup>5</sup> In 1813 he records bumping into the Spanish General Alava whilst in an insignificant village near the French lines, the Spaniard dressed incognito and plainly on a spying mission for Wellington, a scenario that seems distinctly Sharpeian. In late 1813 he provides an account of eating captured French canned food, a brand-new invention.<sup>6</sup> Following the end of the war he and his workers are threatened and abused by a Spanish regiment returning to Spain from the south of France, who waste no time letting him know that they have no regard for Wellington.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Page 235

<sup>3</sup> Page 252

<sup>4</sup> Page 326

<sup>5</sup> Page 343

<sup>6</sup> And another instance of war accelerating invention, as invariably happens.

<sup>7</sup> Page 409

The count of women bedded in this book would rival Sharpe's list. Schaumann claimed to quite literally have a senorita in every village, on one occasion having his way with a Portuguese officer's mistresses whilst the said officer snored in the next room.

Schaumann provides a wide-screen version of the Peninsula War which, despite its length, makes for an easy and entertaining read. I would regard this as being in my Top 10 of Peninsula memoirs.

Reviewed by [Steve Brown](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: June 2016