

The Light Division in the Peninsular War 1811-1814: The Unsung Heroes of Guerrilla Warfare

The Peninsular War was a significant conflict that took place in the early 19th century, shaping the course of European history. During this war, which lasted from 1807 to 1814, the Light Division played a crucial role in several campaigns and battles against the occupying French forces. Despite their pivotal contributions, the Light Division has often been overshadowed by other military units. In this article, we will explore the important role played by the Light Division in the Peninsular War, highlighting their distinctive tactics, accomplishments, and the impact they had on the ultimate success of the Allied forces.

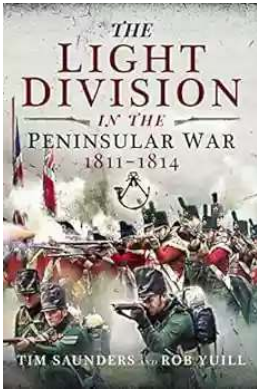
The Birth of the Light Division

The Light Division was officially formed in 1808, as part of the British Army's response to French aggression in the Iberian Peninsula. It was initially commanded by Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Wellesley, who later became the Duke of Wellington. Wellesley recognized the need for a highly specialized and agile force that could effectively counter the French in the challenging terrain of the Peninsula.

The Light Division consisted of infantry, cavalry, and artillery units, carefully selected for their ability to operate independently and rapidly across vast distances. What set them apart from other divisions was their focus on light infantry tactics, which emphasized speed, mobility, and the effective use of skirmishers and guerrilla warfare.

The Light Division in the Peninsular War, 1811–1814 by Edward Hancock (Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 4.9 out of 5



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Screen Reader	: Supported
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
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Mastering Guerrilla Warfare

The Light Division's strength lay in their expertise in guerrilla warfare. They capitalized on the rugged landscape of the Peninsula, utilizing hit-and-run tactics, ambushes, and surprise attacks to harry and weaken the French forces. Unlike conventional warfare, guerrilla tactics relied on mobility and flexibility rather than sheer numbers.

One of the key elements in the success of the Light Division was the use of rifle-armed skirmishers. These sharpshooters were highly skilled marksmen who provided cover fire while their comrades moved swiftly through the terrain. By employing this tactic, the Light Division was able to slow down and disrupt the advance of the French troops, inflicting significant casualties in the process.

Another crucial aspect of their success was their ability to exploit the local population's support and knowledge of the terrain. The Light Division effectively utilized guerrilla fighters, known as the Portuguese Caçadores, and Spanish guerrillas, who provided valuable intelligence and assistance in navigating the treacherous landscape. This collaboration between the Light Division and the

local fighters proved instrumental in disrupting French supply lines, communication networks, and morale.

Notable Campaigns and Battles

Throughout the Peninsular War, the Light Division played a vital role in numerous campaigns and battles, setting the stage for significant victories against the French forces. One such campaign was the Battle of Bussaco in 1810, where the Light Division skillfully employed guerrilla tactics to hold their ground against a superior French force. Their resistance allowed the main Allied armies to regroup and plan a strategic retreat, ultimately leading to the French withdrawal.

In another remarkable operation, known as the Battle of Salamanca in 1812, the Light Division played a critical role in Wellington's decisive victory. By skillfully maneuvering through the rugged terrain, the Light Division forced a gap in the French lines, paving the way for the Allied forces to exploit the weakness and achieve a resounding triumph.

The Light Division's contributions extended beyond specific battles. Their ability to disrupt French supply lines, gather intelligence, and constantly harass the enemy was a constant headache for the French command. This unrelenting pressure weakened the French troops and significantly contributed to their ultimate defeat in the Peninsular War.

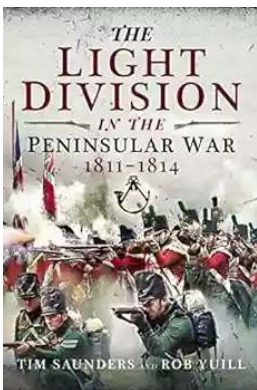
Legacy and Recognition

Despite their pivotal role in the Peninsular War and the ultimate Allied victory, the Light Division has often been overlooked in historical accounts. The greater focus on Wellington and other well-known commanders has resulted in the relative obscurity of the Light Division's achievements.

However, historians and military experts recognize the significant impact of the Light Division's tactics and their role in the ultimate success of the Allies. Their expertise in guerrilla warfare and the invaluable support they received from local fighters were key factors that contributed to the French defeat.

Today, the Light Division's legacy lives on in the light infantry units of modern armies. Their tactics and strategies continue to inspire military scholars and serve as a testament to the effectiveness of guerrilla warfare in certain operational contexts.

The Light Division's contributions during the Peninsular War of 1811-1814 were invaluable to the Allied forces. Their mastery of guerrilla warfare, ability to navigate difficult terrain, and exploitation of local resources played a pivotal role in the ultimate success against the French forces. Despite being overshadowed in historical accounts, the Light Division's legacy endures and serves as a reminder of the unsung heroes who shape the course of history through their courage, skill, and innovation.



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By the middle of 1811, Brigadier General Robert Craufurd's Light Division was emerging as the elite of the Peninsular Army and Wellington was seeking opportunities to go over to the offensive, following the expulsion of Marshal Masséna from Portugal.

After a period of outpost duty for the Light Division on the familiar ground of the Spanish borders, Wellington seized 'the keys to Spain' in the epic sieges of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz. Still reeling from the loss of General Craufurd, 'The Division' led the army against Marshal Marmont and after a protracted period of marching and counter marching, the French were finally brought to battle at Salamanca. As a result of King Joseph being driven out of Madrid, the French marshals united and in the autumn of 1812, the British were driven back to Ciudad Rodrigo in another gruelling retreat.

With news of Napoleon's disaster in Russia and with reinforcements from Britain, Wellington prepared his army to drive the French from the Peninsular. A lightning march across Spain to cut the Great Road found King Joseph and Marshal Jourdan at Vitoria and the resulting battle, in which the Light Division fought their way into the heart of the French position, was a triumph of arms for Wellington's light troops.

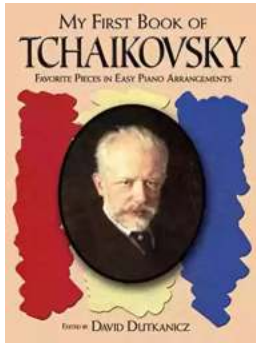
The pursuit into the Pyrenees, had a sting in the tail when Marshal Soult mounted counter offensives in an attempt to relieve San Sebastian and Pamplona. Having thrown the French back and with the Sixth Coalition intact, the Light Division fought their way through the mountains and into Napoleon's France.

With the allies closing in on all sides, the French fought on into 1814 and the Light Bobs had further fighting before the spoils of peace in a war-weary France could be enjoyed.



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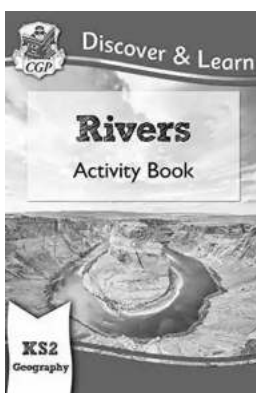
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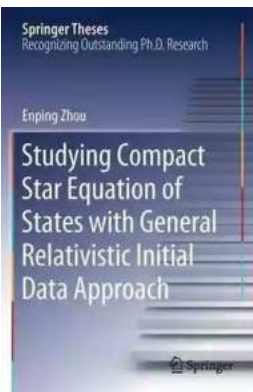
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