

Nicholas Lipscombe, *Wellington's Eastern Front: The Campaigns on the East Coast of Spain, 1810-1814* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2016), xiii + 241pp.

Reviewed by Zack White

The Duke of Wellington famously said that he was much exposed to authors. His comment is as true now, two hundred years after his great victories of the Napoleonic Wars, as it was during his lifetime. The bicentenary of the Peninsular War and Waterloo have resulted in a huge volume of scholarly work on his campaigns. Much of this work simply recovers old ground, retelling the well-known stories of Wellington's career, but a number of valuable pieces have been produced which explore the nuances and neglected aspects of the conflict.

Nicholas Lipscombe's latest publication, *Wellington's Eastern Front* is an example of the latter. Lipscombe has already established a reputation for producing high quality research on previously neglected aspects of the Peninsular War. This new work continues in that mould. The campaign on the eastern coast of Spain has received little attention from historians since Charles Oman wrote his multi-volume *A History of the Peninsular War*. The significance of the armed struggles in other parts of the Iberian Peninsula has long been recognised. Wellington's plans during the campaign of 1812, for example, were underpinned by operations in other parts of Spain keeping the French occupied, and preventing them from uniting against the Anglo-Portuguese force that he commanded. However, no-one has ever conducted a detailed, dedicated study of the struggle in Valencia.

Lipscombe sheds new light on the topic, highlighting the unique and crucial role that the eastern coast played in realising Wellington's wider aims, especially in the campaigns of 1813 and 1814. This is especially well demonstrated by an analysis of Wellington's incredibly detailed memorandum on how the campaign in Valencia should be conducted. Whilst Lipscombe is right to point out that there was an element of flexibility in the orders that he gave, the realisation of the extent to which Wellington controlled events on the east coast from afar alters scholarly understanding of how the Duke waged the Peninsular War.

Another area of considerable interest is Lipscombe's findings on the vital role of the Royal Navy in the successful execution of campaigns during the Peninsular War. This reflects a growing appreciation of the impact that naval support had on the outcome of the conflict. If anything, it is frustrating that he is not able to explore this further, although it would be unreasonable to expect him to analyse this in great detail as it is not the central focus of his work.

Lipscombe's analysis is balanced and well measured. He takes care not to overplay the importance of the campaigns in Eastern Spain, but successfully explains the significant impact that they had on the wide conflict in the Peninsula. The book is written in a clear and engaging style. Lipscombe maintains the momentum of the story of the campaign, without becoming stalled with excessive detail. A series of excellent maps are used to effectively support the narrative of the campaign. (Maps are one of Lipscombe's strengths following his success with the superb *Peninsular War Atlas*). These accolades combine to make the narrative of the campaigns on the east coast a compelling one. This is essential to the success of this book, as ultimately the single greatest contribution that this work makes to scholarly debate is furthering understanding of exactly what happened in this theatre.

One significant area of frustration with this work is the footnotes. Given that Lipscombe is breaking new ground here, detailed footnotes, should have been a necessity. Unfortunately, the footnotes are rather brief, and generally only serve to clarify the origin of specific quotes that are used. This, therefore, is a lost opportunity, as footnotes filled with anecdotes and suggestions for further reading could have opened a wealth of new avenues of nuanced debate on this topic.

In summary, Lipscombe has triumphed again, producing a well-researched work that breaks new ground. He has struck a happy balance between scholarly research and well-written history which is accessible to the average reader, resulting in a book that will interest and excite students and novices alike.