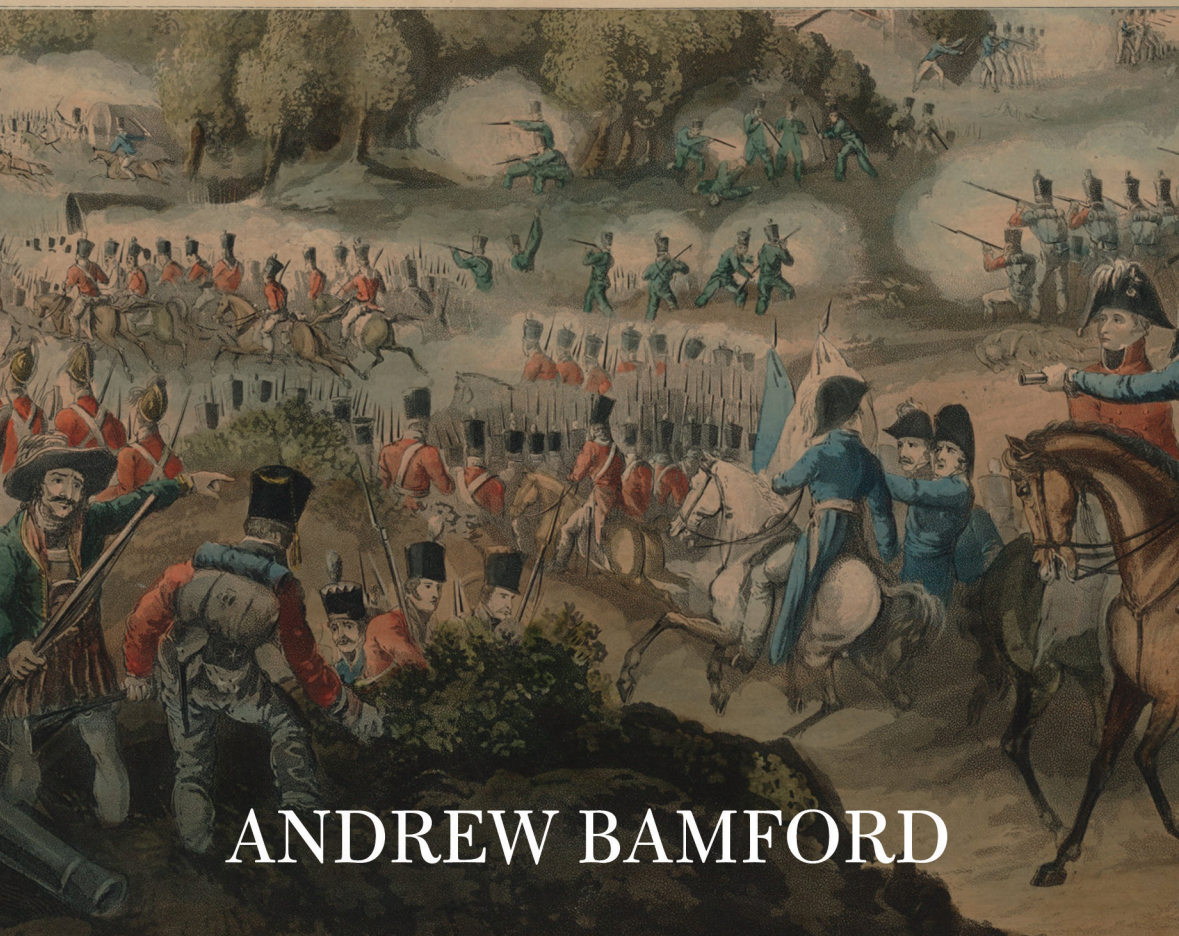


WITH
WELLINGTON'S
OUTPOSTS

*The Peninsular and Waterloo
Letters of John Vandeleur*



ANDREW BAMFORD

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Letters of John Vandeleur

Notes and commentary by

Andrew Bamford



Frontline Books



With Wellington's Outposts

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Preface



I first encountered the letters of John Vandeleur during research for a history of the 12th Light Dragoons during the Napoleonic Wars, now published by Frontline Books under the title *Gallantry and Discipline*. The Vandeleur surname was familiar through his more famous near-namesake, John Ormsby Vandeleur, who served as a brigade commander in the Peninsula and at Waterloo, but this young relation was unknown to me. Following up an obscure footnote in an old regimental history of the 12th in which a couple of extracts from these letters were cited, I discovered the existence of the 1894 publication entitled *Letters of Colonel John Vandeleur 1810–1846*, which was listed as having been ‘Printed for Private Circulation’ by Rivington, Percival & Company of London. Looking at the date range in the title, and bearing in mind the fact that the letters and their author had not cropped up before in the best part of a decade I had spent working on the British Army of the Napoleonic era, I assumed that there would perhaps be a handful of letters dealing with the period in which I was interested, with the remainder being Victorian family papers or accounts of peacetime soldiering. Only when I was finally able to track down a copy of the original text was it revealed to me how wrong I had been, and that in fact what I had in my hands was a positive treasure-trove of letters, almost all of which dealt with the Napoleonic Wars and their immediate aftermath.

The letters quickly established themselves as one of the main eyewitness sources for the latter portion of my history of the 12th, for Vandeleur served continually with that regiment – either

as a troop officer or on the staff of his namesake the general, commanding the brigade of which the 12th was a part – from 1812 until the end of the Peninsular War, taking part in the retreat from Burgos, the battles of Vitoria, the Pyrenees, Nivelle, and Nive, and finishing his service with the occupation of Bordeaux. All this was recounted in detailed and lively letters home, as was his subsequent service, again as a troop officer with the 12th, during the Hundred Days. For my immediate purposes this was an excellent resource, but there was more, for the initial batch of letters, covering 1810 and early 1811, were from Vandeleur's earlier active service as an ensign in the 71st Highland Light Infantry during the defence of Lisbon against the invading French under Marshal Massena. The only part of that story missing is an account of the fighting at Fuentes de Oñoro, and that for the very good reason that Vandeleur was badly wounded in that action and left in no fit state to write about it. Lastly, for good measure, a handful of letters from 1819 deal with a family scandal that arose after Vandeleur's younger brother was involved first in a duel and then in the resulting court martial, and the last letter of all gives an account of the participation of a rather older and more senior John Vandeleur – by now a lieutenant colonel commanding the 10th Hussars – in the celebrations subsequent to the coronation of Queen Victoria.

All in all, the letters give an excellent first-hand impression of life as a young officer on campaign and in battle during the Napoleonic Wars, being rendered all the more interesting by their writer having variously served as an infantryman, a cavalryman, and as an aide de camp. That much of this service was spent with the army's outposts – hence the title for this re-issued collection – also adds to their appeal since we have accounts of picquets, patrols, and minor skirmishes, as well as the major battles in which Vandeleur was engaged. All of this therefore renders it all the more remarkable that they have been so little known, despite having been in print for over a century. Neither the listing of

memoirs in the back of Oman's *Wellington's Army*, nor the revised and exhaustive version of the same list assembled by Robert Burnham as part of his contribution to the 2006 *Inside Wellington's Peninsular Army*, makes any mention of Vandeleur. Nor, indeed, can one find a citation to the letters in the many histories that have been written of the campaigns in which Vandeleur took part; evidently, the limited print run and restricted circulation of the first and only edition has rendered the text thoroughly obscure, whilst the original letters, if they still survive, remain in private hands. This new printing, then, is intended to give the letters the place they deserve in Napoleonic literature and scholarship.

There is, however, one significant flaw to the original edition, which I have endeavoured to counteract here, and that is the fact that the 1894 text reproduced the letters and nothing but the letters, with no context provided. In the words of the original Preface:

By desire of his family, and at the request of many old friends, anxious to perpetuate the memory of one who was loved and respected both in his public and private life, the following letters of the late Colonel John Vandeleur have been printed.

Though the letters were private ones, and do not pretend to be a complete history of the exciting surroundings amongst which their author moved, they furnish many interesting side-lights in an epoch so full of glorious memories for his fellow-countrymen.

Interesting side-lights are all very well, and they are certainly there aplenty, but quite a lot of what Vandeleur writes clearly assumes a knowledge that the original recipient possessed but which is lost to the modern reader. Having been working for some time on the 12th Light Dragoons when I first encountered the text, and being aware from work done for an earlier study of the activities of the 71st, many of the more cryptic comments

did make sense to me. Even so, others required considerable investigation and enquiry in order to ascertain just what was meant by particular passages. Even with the help of various experts, the precise meanings of some family references, in-jokes, and comments relating to neighbours back in Worcester where the Vandeleur family was then residing, remain hidden. For the most part, however, I have been able to add notes to identify places, military figures, and incidents referred to in the text, whilst at the same time providing a commentary that places the letters in context, discusses any more complex issues arising from Vandeleur's account of his activities, and fills in the occasional narrative gaps in the sequence. What I have not done here is re-tell the story of the Peninsular War, although I have referenced the summary provided to the appropriate sections of Sir Charles Oman's multi-volume history, as well as to other, shorter sources where appropriate. In terms of identification of military figures, two sources have been invaluable; the 'Peninsula Roll Call' compiled by the late Captain Lionel S. Challis, now available in electronic form via the Napoleon Series website, and the published *Waterloo Roll Call* assembled by Charles Dalton. In that they have been used so frequently, I have not provided citations on each occurrence.

For all my additions, however, it must be stressed that those wishing to read only the letters themselves, and to form their own opinions, may do so content in the knowledge that the basic text of 1894 has been reproduced in full, complete with John Vandeleur's occasionally unconventional approach to spelling and punctuation. The only editorial changes, and these stemming from the 1894 publication, are the deletion of a couple of names relating to persons back in England of whom Vandeleur evidently had a low opinion. Otherwise, no editing of content has taken place, and thus the views contained within the letters – sometimes factually erroneous, sometimes clearly showing a lack of faith in the outcome of events – are exactly as expressed 200 years ago. The

only concession to ease of reading is that I have added paragraph breaks to those letters that were originally lacking them.

Lastly, in addition to my notes and commentary, I have also included a series of appendices incorporating additional primary-source material relevant to the story. Some of this, relating to the departure of the 10th Hussars for India in 1846, was included with the original 1894 text; the rest is taken primarily from papers held by The National Archives at Kew, and by the Regimental Museum of the 9th/12th Royal Lancers in Derby. I hope these appendices add an additional dimension to the basic narrative provided by the letters, and supply an additional layer of contextual background. The cooperation of the regimental museum and regimental trustees of the 9th/12th Royal Lancers – not least in making available the archival material just mentioned, and also in finding a portrait of Vandeleur himself – has been invaluable in assisting with this project, and I must in particular thank Mike Galer at the museum and Christopher Glynn-Jones of the trustees for their continued support.

Thanks are also due to a number of individuals who have assisted in putting this work together. As always, the members of the Napoleon Series online discussion forum proved able to assist with a number of queries, and on this occasion I must name and give particular thanks to Mick Crumplin, Ron McGuigan, Steven H. Smith, and Dave Worrall. Elsewhere, Ronald Brighouse, Carole Divall and Ian Robertson were of great assistance in using their knowledge of Peninsular geography to help identify the places mentioned in the story, this process in many cases requiring considerable effort to unravel Vandeleur's occasionally novel attempts to provide a spelling for a place name that he had likely never seen written down. Paul L. Dawson shared his knowledge of the cavalry fighting at Waterloo, and David Blackmore and Adrian Philpott theirs of Britain's light dragoon regiments more generally. Dave Brown was again generous in loaning items from his extensive book collection, and Mick Crumplin in providing

some of the images for the plates section. Steven Broomfield at HorsePower, the museum of The King's Royal Hussars, was extremely helpful in providing information on Vandeleur's later career with the 10th Hussars. The maps accompanying this book are the combined work of my wife Lucy and of David Beckford, which makes this the third book on which the two of them have successfully collaborated. Michael Leventhal, Stephen Chumbley, Kate Baker, and their colleagues at Frontline Books have been as professional and helpful as always, as has freelance editor Donald Sommerville. As ever, I must close the acknowledgements by thanking Lucy and the rest of my family for their continued support in my endeavours, and in particular my father, Mick Bamford, who has again done a stalwart job as a proof-reader and also assisted with aspects of the genealogical research. Needless to say, responsibility for any errors remains mine.

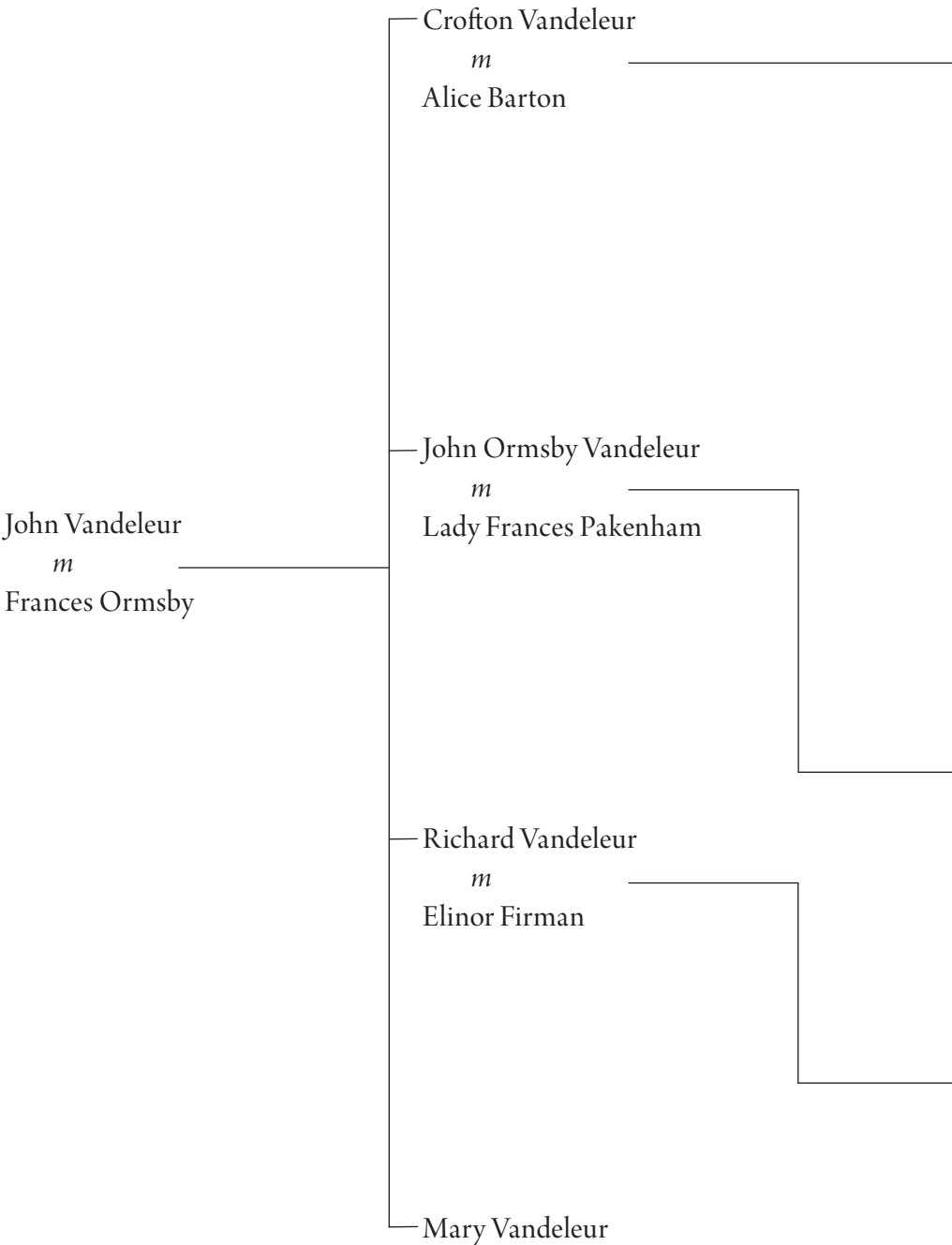
Introduction

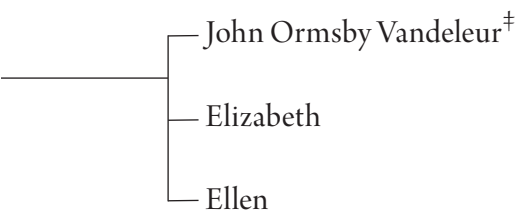
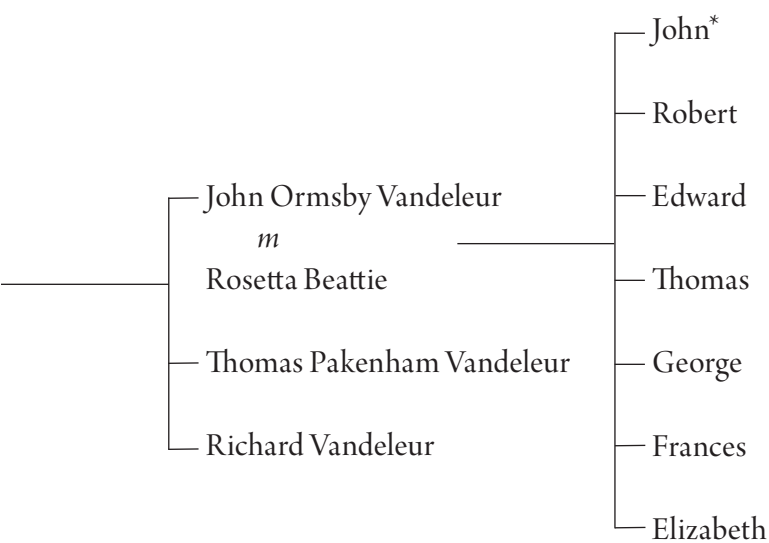
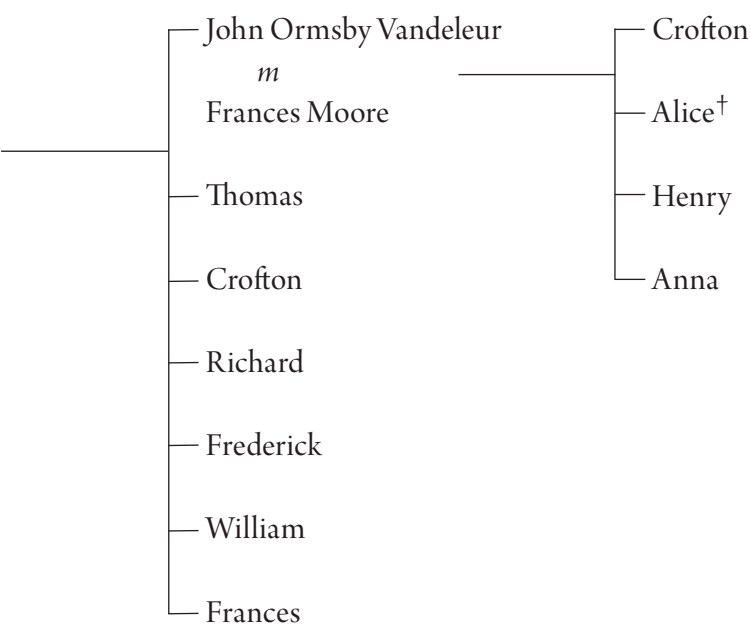


Although their surname stood as evidence of a distant Dutch ancestry the Vandeleurs were by the eighteenth century firmly established as an Irish family, having first settled there in 1660. Judging by the marriage matches they made, the family quickly integrated itself into the Anglo-Irish Protestant ascendancy, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century the family tree had begun to sprawl to create a somewhat tangled web of cousins and second cousins, many of them – to the confusion of the historian – sharing the same Christian names. In terms of tracing the descent of the John Vandeleur who wrote these letters, we need to go back a half-century to his earlier namesake, who in 1749 bought what would become the family estate at Kilrush. This John, who died in 1754, was married to Frances Ormsby, with whom he had four children: Crofton, his heir; John Ormsby; Richard; and Mary. The recurrence of Ormsby as a middle name, almost always paired with John as a Christian name, becomes a confusing theme in the family; Frances would have her namesakes down the generations as well.

Beyond the fact that Richard would in due course father a son who would also be christened John Ormsby Vandeleur, who would go on to serve as a brigade commander in the Peninsula and at Waterloo, and to whom we will return in due course, the two youngest children of John and Frances Vandeleur have no further part to play in the story. Returning to the older siblings, Crofton, the heir, married Alice Burton and had a substantial family, beginning with yet another John Ormsby Vandeleur – of note only because his daughter, named Alice for her grandmother, would

John Vandeleur and his Relatives





* Author of these *Letters*.

† His wife.

‡ Major General in the Peninsula and
 at Waterloo.

eventually marry our hero – followed in succession by Thomas, Crofton, Richard, Frederick, William, and Frances. Crofton junior, Richard, and Frederick all became soldiers; Crofton rose to the rank of major general but died in 1806 on Antigua; Richard rose to be a major in the 88th Foot but died at Campo Mayor on 19 October 1809, of a sickness; Frederick also served in the Peninsula as a captain in the 87th Foot, and we shall meet him again. As an irrelevant but interesting point, it may be mentioned that Brigadier John Ormsby Evelyn Vandeleur, who commanded 3/Irish Guards during Operation Market Garden, and was portrayed by Michael Caine in the film *A Bridge Too Far*, was a descendant of this line and one of many Vandeleurs who continued the family's military tradition on into the twentieth century.

So much, then, for the pedigree line of the Vandeleurs, and the junior off-shoots. The line with which we are primarily concerned is that descended from the first John Ormsby Vandeleur, son of John Vandeleur and Frances Ormsby. He married in 1766 Lady Frances Pakenham, daughter of Thomas Pakenham, 1st Baron Longford: Lady Frances's brother, Edward, would in due course succeed to their father's title, and number amongst his children Kitty Pakenham, later the Duchess of Wellington, and Edward Pakenham, who rose to be a major general, served extensively in the Peninsula, and was eventually killed at New Orleans in 1815. John and Frances had three sons, John Ormsby Vandeleur, Thomas Pakenham Vandeleur, and Richard Vandeleur, all of whom became soldiers. Richard died young, and Thomas was killed in action at Laswari in 1803; John Ormsby rose to command the 5th Dragoon Guards before selling his commission and retiring in February 1803, apparently on health grounds, having obtained the brevet rank of colonel. He had previously married Rosetta Beattie, and together they had seven children beginning with the John whose letters form the backbone of this book. John was followed in due course by Robert, Edward, Thomas, George, Frances, and Elizabeth. By the time covered in these letters, the

family were living at Barbourne, on the outskirts of the city of Worcester.¹

John Vandeleur was born in 1793, apparently on 17 May although this seems slightly uncertain since he only says, in a letter bearing that date, that ‘This, I believe, is my birthday.’ His father was then still a serving officer, and young John was prepared from an early age to follow him into the military profession. In order to give him a suitable grounding, John was sent to the Royal Military College as a gentleman cadet. Established in 1802 under the aegis of the then Colonel John Le Marchant, the Junior Department of the Royal Military College was situated at Marlow and intended to prepare young men for service as officers in regiments either of the British Army or that of the Honourable East India Company. There are no letters from Vandeleur’s time at the college, but a brief account of life as a gentleman cadet is contained in the memoirs of William Hay, who would later serve alongside Vandeleur in the 12th Light Dragoons. Hay, a rather light-hearted youth, enjoyed the military aspects but was initially somewhat lazy when it came to the academic work, notwithstanding that, as he recalled, ‘no cadet was eligible for a commission until he attained the upper fourth in arithmetic, French, landscape and military drawing, etc.’² Young Vandeleur, on the other hand, seems to have applied himself well, and was rewarded with a commission as an ensign in the 71st Highland Light Infantry. With this appointment, his military career began in earnest.

1. Family history primarily from genealogical tables at <http://www.stirnet.com/genie/data/british/uv/vandeleur1.php>, with details of those who served in the Peninsula from Burnham, ‘Lionel S. Challis’ “Peninsula Roll Call”.
2. Hay, Captain William, *Reminiscences 1808–1815 Under Wellington*, pp. 4–5.

Chapter 1

Defending Lisbon



John Vandeleur received his commission as ensign in the 71st Highland Light Infantry on 9 May 1809, a few days before his sixteenth birthday. At this time, the regiment was enjoying a brief respite after a period of varied and active service and had newly completed the conversion to light infantry that had been ordered the previous year. Originally raised in 1777 as the 73rd, and renumbered as the 71st in 1786, the regiment had always been a Scots one, but had undergone a series of changes that took it away from its original roots as MacLeod's Highlanders. Moves to broaden recruiting away from the highlands saw it given an affiliation to Glasgow in 1808, whilst at the time that young Ensign Vandeleur received his commission it had narrowly avoided losing its highland status altogether. Originally slated to be one of several highland regiments due to be 'de-kilted' in order to increase their recruiting potential, some astute bargaining on the part of Lieutenant Colonel Denis Pack had kept the 71st in tartan trews, until an eventual compromise saw it become the Highland Light Infantry. Trews were in the end replaced with trousers, but instead of a shako the traditional knitted bonnet was to be blocked up into a shako shape, retaining the diced band that distinguished highland units. Pack was also quick to ensure that the regiment kept its pipers.

This neat compromise owed at least something to the distinguished performance of the regiment's 1st Battalion under Pack's command during the South African, South American, and Peninsula campaigns. These had seen the battalion take part in

the capture of the Cape of Good Hope and of Buenos Aires, before itself being taken prisoner when the latter city was recaptured by forces loyal to Spain. Pack was eventually able to escape, along with enough soldiers to reconstitute a company's worth of the 1/71st, to take part in the fighting brought about by Britain's return to the Rio de la Plata in 1807. That operation ultimately ended in disaster, but the convention that secured the cessation of hostilities also secured the release of the remaining men of the 1/71st, and the whole battalion sailed for home in September 1807. Reaching Ireland in December, the 1st Battalion was brought up to strength with a detachment of 200 men from the 2nd, and readied for further service. Initially, the expeditionary force being prepared at Cork under the command of Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Wellesley was destined for a return to South America, but Napoleon's invasion of Spain turned the Spanish into allies and the troops were instead earmarked to take part in the liberation of Portugal. Again under Pack's command, the 1/71st fought with distinction at Roliça and Vimeiro, before joining Sir John Moore for his march into Spain. Further distinguished at the Battle of Corunna on 16 January 1809, which enabled the evacuation of Moore's army, the battalion returned home thereafter and was stationed at Brabourne Lees where it began its conversion to light infantry. It was brigaded with the 68th and 85th Regiments, both of which were undergoing a similar conversion from line to light infantry, and was again built up to strength by the arrival of over 300 men from the 2nd Battalion – then stationed in Scotland – as well as direct transfers from the Militia and several new officers.¹

In theory at least, one of those officers was John Vandeleur. As a new and junior ensign, Vandeleur should have begun his career with the regiment's 2nd Battalion in Scotland, but instead he is returned as being absent without leave, not having joined since appointed. By late 1809, the turnover of officers meant that his

1. Hildyard, Lieutenant Henry J. T., *Historical Record of the 71st Regiment Highland Light Infantry*, pp. 52–71; Reid, Stuart, *Wellington's Highland Warriors*, pp. 159–74.

seniority as ensign now entitled him to a place in the 1st Battalion, but its returns for early 1810 show him as having obtained the Commander-in-Chief's leave to be absent from 30 December 1809 to 24 August 1810, allowing him to complete his military education at Marlow. Thus, it was not for more than a year after his appointment to it that Vandeleur actually joined his regiment, which had in the meantime seen further hard service. In common with the majority of the infantry that had returned from Corunna, the 1/71st had been earmarked for the 'Grand Expedition' against Antwerp, forming part of a light infantry brigade under Brigadier General Francis de Rottenburg along with the 68th and 85th. Taking part in the landing on Walcheren, the battalion remained in the Scheldt until November 1809, incurring substantial losses through the fevers that crippled the expedition. Still on leave, Vandeleur thus avoided exposure to the sickness that could well have ended his military career before it had properly begun. Finally, in the Monthly Return of 25 August 1810, the name of Ensign John Vandeleur appears as amongst the officers present for duty with the 1/71st. The battalion was then stationed at Deal, and already under orders for the Peninsula. Early the following month it sailed, and, with this, the written record of John Vandeleur's military service begins.

In the Downs, 10th September 1810¹

My Dear Father,

The unexpected tidings which I am going to announce, I hope will not break your spirits. You have met with such changes yourself, to you I may venture to disclose, that by the time you read this, your son, your dear son, has sailed for Portugal. Open it gradually to my Mother, that it may not have too strong effect on her gentle feelings. She is but a woman, and they are not born to suffer such. I will write by the first opportunity, so God Almighty bless you both until my return, which I trust will be soon.

1. In the original text, p. 1.

From your ever dear and affectionate son,
John Vandeleur

At the time that the 1/71st returned to Portugal, the course of the Peninsular War seemed to be running in favour of the French. Although Portugal had been cleared of the invaders for a second time in 1809, following the allied victory at the Second Battle of Oporto, the subsequent Anglo-Spanish offensive aimed at retaking Madrid had ultimately failed in the face of French numbers, following which the remaining Spanish forces in Andalusia had been smashed and the French advance carried to the gates of Cadiz. Falling back into Portugal, the British troops under the newly created Lord Wellington were now working with the rejuvenated Portuguese Army in order to defend that country. As part of the rebuilding and remodelling of the Portuguese forces, under the direction of Lieutenant General Sir William Beresford, a number of British officers had been seconded to the Portuguese service. For the most part these were regimental officers, but more senior men were also needed as brigade commanders, and one such officer was Denis Pack, who had volunteered for service whilst his battalion was still recovering from Walcheren, and who had been given command of an independent Portuguese brigade.

Pack had envisaged returning to command of the 1/71st once the battalion reached the Peninsula, but he had proved so effective as a brigadier that he was prevailed upon to remain where he was.¹ Accordingly, the 1/71st was taken out to Portugal by Major (brevet Lieutenant Colonel) Nathaniel Peacocke, although he swiftly returned to Britain and command of the battalion went to Lieutenant Colonel Hon. Henry Cadogan who had previously commanded the 2/71st in Scotland. Because so many men were still on the sick list after Walcheren, only six companies initially

1. Pack obituary in Anon., *The Annual Biography and Obituary of 1823*. London, A. R. Spottiswoode, 1823, pp. 345–67.