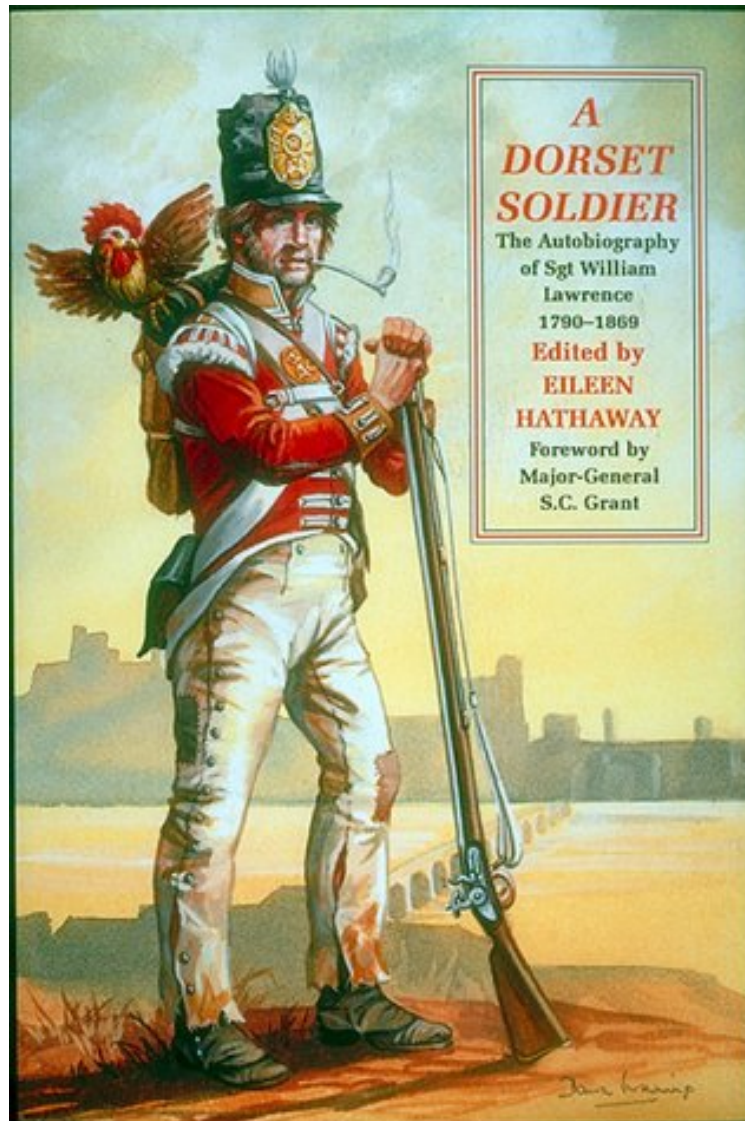


DORSET SOLDIER: The Autobiography of Sgt William Lawrence 1790-1869

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3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A boy goes to WarBy A. WoodleyAn excellent book for collectors of Peninsular War accounts, and especially those interest in light Regiments for this book follows the life of Sergeant

William Lawrence - or should I say the military life. It was first published in the 1880's, some 20 years after Lawrence's death - and this I believe is the first reprint since then. He was an illiterate man and dictated these when in his 60's, some 40 years after events. It begins when he runs away from his apprenticeship and joins the army - or tries several times to join the army and ending up with the 40th Regiment of Foot (the closest) just before they set off for South America in 1806. The book is just full of fascinating little detail of everyday life in the army - of transportation and some terrible (but brief) accounts of battles fought. In fact the book itself is very Brief - reminding me a lot of another published account by a non-officer - 'A Soldier of the 71st'. This gives a glimpse of life in the ranks. The editor, Eileen Hathaway, has done a phenomenal job footnoting the text so much of Lawrence's background and family is explained - and detail which might not be familiar in the Peninsular War - such as seige works - can be easily understood without specialist knowledge or dredging out other reference books. It also comes with a number of extremely useful small maps which illustrate small parts of the text - I really liked that feature. There are a number of black and white reproductions of pictures in the middle- I wish publishers would do these in colour - I'd be willing to pay the extra - they just look so drab, and it is hard to get enthusiastic about black and white reproductions of uniforms. Luckily the back cover has the 40th uniform reproduced in colour and I did like the watercolour on the front cover, which was painted especially for this book. Lawrence is an engaging story teller - not quite in the self-deprecating vein of someone like John Kincaid - but he is enjoyable. There is a great amount of detail in here which complements other Peninsular War accounts - but it is also wonderful for London and British travelling - Lawrence's account of sharp practices by London Hackney Cab drivers and Inn land-ladies makes priceless reading.

This is the first edition of William Lawrence's autobiography since 1886. A former child labourer in Studland, he ran away to join the army and saw action in some of the most notable campaigns of the Napoleonic Wars. A fascinating personal story and also an important piece of social history.