

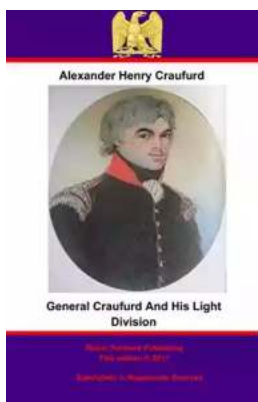
General Craufurd And His Light Division: The Elite Troops of the Peninsular War

During the Peninsular War, one name stood out as a symbol of bravery, strategic thinking, and leadership: General Robert Craufurd. With his Light Division, he solidified his place in history as one of the finest military minds of his time. This article explores the life and achievements of General Craufurd and sheds light on the unparalleled success of his division.

A Fearless Beginning

General Robert Craufurd was born on 5 May 1764 in Scotland. From a young age, he displayed remarkable courage and a thirst for military knowledge. After receiving education at the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich, he joined the British Army.

In 1793, Craufurd was appointed as a captain in the 75th Regiment of Foot. He saw action in Flanders during the French Revolutionary Wars and quickly established himself as a daring officer willing to take risks for victory. His skills on the battlefield earned him the reputation of being an exceptional leader.



General Craufurd and his Light Division

by Daniel Y. Kim (Kindle Edition)

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The Light Division: The Birth of an Elite Force

By 1807, Craufurd had risen through the ranks and was appointed as the commander of the newly formed Light Division. This division was composed of light infantry regiments specially trained to operate independently and excel in reconnaissance and raiding missions.

Under Craufurd's command, the Light Division became renowned for its agility, discipline, and endurance. Craufurd's emphasis on intense drilling and improved skirmishing tactics turned the division into an elite force capable of dealing significant blows to the enemy without the need for heavy artillery or a large number of troops.

The Peninsular War: Proving Ground for Craufurd and His Division

When the Peninsular War broke out in 1808, Craufurd and his Light Division found themselves at the forefront of the conflict. They played a crucial role in the early stages of the war, engaging in rapid raids and deadly skirmishes against Napoleon's forces.

Craufurd's ability to outmaneuver and outsmart the enemy made him a thorn in Napoleon's side. His division's expertise in reconnaissance and swift attacks disrupted the French army's plans, often forcing them to retreat or abandon their positions. Craufurd's reputation as a formidable commander grew with each successful encounter.

Battle of Bussaco: A Turning Point

One of the most defining moments for Craufurd and his Light Division came during the Battle of Bussaco in 1810. Facing a much larger French force under Marshal André Masséna, Craufurd's division held the key position on the ridge, preventing the enemy from advancing further into Portugal.

In the face of overwhelming odds, Craufurd's division fought with unparalleled determination and resilience. Despite heavy casualties, they managed to hold their ground until reinforcements arrived, inflicting significant losses on the French. The battle showcased the division's unmatched combat skills and Craufurd's exceptional leadership.

Legacy and Later Years

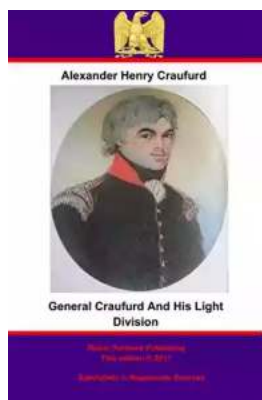
Craufurd's success in leading the Light Division made him a legendary figure. His emphasis on discipline, training, and rapid maneuvering set the standard for light infantry tactics in future wars. His name became synonymous with elite troops capable of achieving great feats against superior forces.

However, General Robert Craufurd's remarkable career was cut short during the Battle of Ciudad Rodrigo in 1812. While leading his division's assault on the heavily fortified city, Craufurd was tragically struck down by enemy artillery fire.

Though his life was extinguished too soon, General Craufurd's legacy lives on. His Light Division left an indelible mark on military history, paving the way for future elite forces. Their remarkable achievements in the Peninsular War continue to inspire military strategists and historians alike.

General Craufurd and his Light Division were a force to be reckoned with during the Peninsular War. Their innovative tactics, unmatched discipline, and unwavering courage made them a formidable opponent for Napoleon's forces. Under General Robert Craufurd's guidance, the division solidified its place in

history as an elite force that achieved extraordinary success against the odds. Though his life was tragically cut short, General Craufurd's legacy as a military genius lives on, reminding us of the remarkable achievements of his Light Division.



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The Duke of Wellington was faced by numerous problems as the head of the British Army in the Peninsular War from 1809, not least of which were the number and quality of the sub-ordinate generals that he was sent by the powers that be at Horse Guards. Ranging from blind cavalry commanders such as Baron von Bock, to Sir William Erskine, who was “generally understood him to be a madman.”, however set apart from these characters was Robert “Black Bob” Craufurd, leader of the Light Division. He was, apart from a handful of errors, as dependable, hard fighting and able a general as the Iron Duke would have under his command in the Peninsular. He died the death of a gallant general, from wounds sustained at the head of his troops at the breach of Ciudad Rodrigo in 1812, after numerous successful battles and engagements.

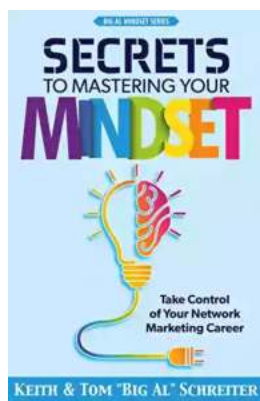
Craufurd’s Grandson, Alexander Craufurd, decided to write a memoir tying together historical documents and the numerous memoirs left by the men of the

Light Division, the 43rd, 52nd and 95th Regiments. He does not attempt to gloss over the failings of his grandfather although as might be expected he does his level best to explain them and with the help of eye-witnesses excuse them.

General Craufurd, had a long career of soldiering in varied locations before his service, including India and South America where he established his reputation as an outstanding regimental officer and very unafraid of condemning what he saw was bad generalship. In character he was stern and often sullenly broody, a strict disciplinarian, whose men could not be said to love him by they definitely trusted his judgement and were glad to be commanded by a man who looked after their basic needs. He was a “scientific officer” who trained his men to excel in their roles at the outposts, at the forefront of advances and the rearguards of retreats. His officers however roundly disliked him but as Sir George Napier said; "Although he was a most unpopular man, every officer of the Light Division must acknowledge that, by his unwearied and active exertions of mind and body, that Division was brought to a state of discipline and knowledge of the duties of light troops, which never was equalled by any Division in the British army, or surpassed by any Division of the French army."

An excellent book on one of the finest British Generals of the Peninsular War.

Author – Alexander Henry Craufurd – (1843-1917)



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