

Rifles – Six Years with Wellington’s Legendary Sharpshooters by Mark Urban.  
Faber and Faber 2003.

The professional army that is such a source of pride to many in the British Isles today owes its standing to many things, not the least of which is the camaraderie and commitment built between the troops and the officers who lead them. It was not always so. In the time of the Napoleonic Wars, poor leadership, desertion and insubordination were common, and senior officers easily referred to their soldiers as ‘scum’.

But the Napoleonic Wars also marked a turning point in the British Army, with the development of new tactics and a new fighting unit, the riflemen. Rifles tells the story of the development of the Rifle Corps as they fought their way through Spain and into France, culminating in their action at Waterloo.

Mark Urban, a former defence correspondent for the BBC, tells a story that is intriguing militarily and powerful in human terms, cataloguing in gruesome detail the battles of the 95<sup>th</sup> Rifles in Spain and France, the sacrifice of officers and men, and the skills that they developed which earned them respect and admiration at the very top of the existing military establishment. The riflemen were not saints, indeed some were serial sinners, but their heroism was extraordinary and their commitment to each other ennobling.

This is a fine book: informative, moving and detailed without being other than eminently readable.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh