

THREE WEEKS AT GRAMICHA

The Second Siege of Badajoz through the eyes of the Commander in Chief, Viscount Wellington

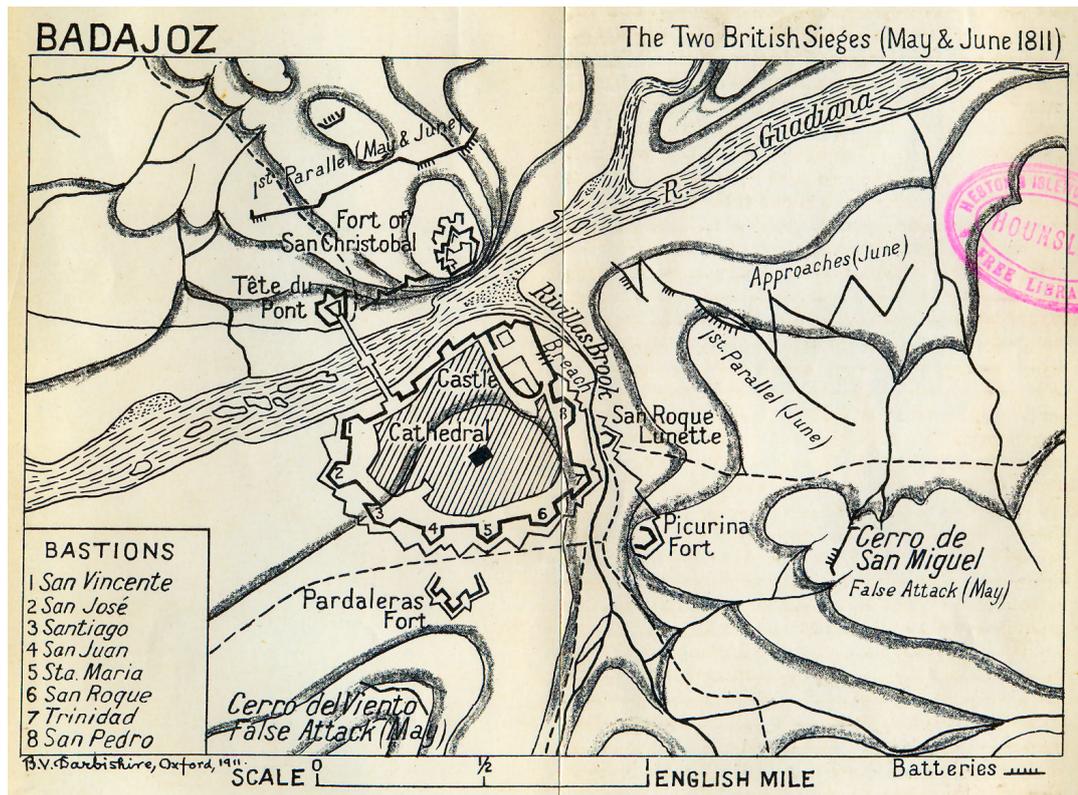


The Quinta de Gramicha has belonged to the Gonçalves family for generations. The owner at the time of which we speak was an ‘Alferes’ or Second Lieutenant in the Militia. He was promoted Captain, but without pay! The present owner’s wife, Marivi is Spanish and comes from a military family, her brother-in-law, a serving officer, obtained copies of all Wellington’s despatches, written while he was in residence at the Quinta. The Gonçalves family had these bound, together with some photographs and presented the bound volume to me on my birthday in 2003. I have also included a description of the cavalry action in front of Gramicha the day after Wellington left.

The Quinta de Gramicha lies in low ground about 4 kilometres from Elvas and 1 kilometre south of the main road to Badajoz. Over the centuries it must have witnessed at close quarters the frequent warfare between Portugal and Spain. Following the battle of Albuera, Viscount Wellington took personal control of the renewed siege of Badajoz and established his Headquarters in the Quinta. Ward, in his book “Wellington’s Headquarters” says, ‘The only occasion when Wellington and his personal staff, the A.G., and the Q.M.G. lived under the same roof was when Headquarters were placed in the Quinta de Gramicha’. This is surprising since when he later moved his Headquarters north of Elvas to the much larger Quinta de São João, his staff moved out to various other farms up to half an hour’s ride away.

He moved into the Quinta at the end of May 1811 but it is doubtful if he used it more than as a quiet base to conduct his voluminous correspondence and to sleep. The days were spent in the urgent business of reducing Badajoz before the French could amass sufficient force to drive the allies away.

The plan for the siege did not differ materially from the first, though more effort was given to the city south of the Guadiana. He felt that if he could capture the two strongest points – the Castle and the Fort of San Cristobal – quickly, the fortress would be indefensible, and would fall rapidly. Artillery was still in short supply, but by 29th May the indefatigable Major Dixon had gathered 46 guns from Elvas, twice as many as



for the first siege, but they were still antique brass pieces with variable and worn bores and with an annoying habit of unbushing (blowing out their vent fitting). Eight iron ship guns were on their way from Lisbon, but would not arrive until near the end of the siege.

On 29th May work was started in the old trenches in front of the fort of Pardaleras on the southern flank. This was a diversion to distract the French while the main body moved into positions in front of Cristobal and the Castle. On the night of 30th May work started in earnest on these sectors, with some 1,500 men put to work on each.

With this work well under way, Wellington devoted himself to his correspondence. On this night, Lord Liverpool was the recipient first of a report on the progress of the operations and Wellington's intentions and then a long exposition on the appalling state of Portugal's finances. "The great evil in Portugal is a want of money". More than half the Portuguese Army was already being fed by the British Commissariat and the time was approaching when British subsidies were the principal stabilising factor in the country.

Work progressed well in front of the Castle, where the ground was soft, but in front of San Cristobal it was a different story. There were only a few inches of soil over the rock and during the respite afforded by the battle of Albuera the garrison had scraped what there was away and tipped it down the cliff. The ground chosen for the first parallel was, owing to the exigencies of the contour of the hill, only 400 yards from the fort. The working parties were discovered at once and came under heavy fire, not only from San Cristobal, but also from the Castle. By dawn barely two feet of earth had been thrown up at the places chosen for the three breaching batteries. This and the gabions that had been used to give some protection were soon knocked over and the working parties had to be withdrawn.



At dawn 31st May every French gun that could be brought to bear on the works opposite the Castle opened a rapid fire. The workers and trench guards suffered greatly, but the work continued without interruption. Lt Michel of the French 100th Line sallied forth with 60 voltigeurs and succeeded in driving the allied sharpshooters back.

When the French realised that work on the trenches in front of Pardaleras had stopped they concluded that the main point of the attack would be against the castle, whose walls were ancient and apparently not very solid

At the end of the afternoon a British deserter arrived in the town, but since he would only say that Lord Wellington had arrived with more reinforcements, he was treated with suspicion and locked up.

By the end of the first day of June, the first parallel in front of the castle had been completed. This was 1,100 yards long with a parapet three feet high and a depth of three feet and wide enough to allow the guns to be brought up to their positions.

In front of Fort Cristobal, Private Wheeler was astounded at the speed the work advanced. It had been helped by Wellington's purchase of £400 worth of wool bales in Elvas that were found to be impervious to shot. But it was hard work. "The duty in the trenches is very fatiguing, almost suffocated for the want of air and nearly baked by the sun, parching with thirst, with a beautiful river close to us but might as well be an hundred miles off, for if any one only indulged the eye with a peep, bang goes half a dozen muskets at his head. Then we are kept in constant motion by swarms of flies, to say nothing of the vermin that has stationed themselves inside our clothes."

Wellington's correspondence from Gramicha that night reflects his preoccupation with the siege and his conviction that his batteries would be able to open fire the next day, 2nd June. Letters went to Generals Picton, Spencer and Craufurd, commanding three of his Divisions, detailing the actions to be taken in certain eventualities. Charles Stuart the Minister in Lisbon received another long letter on Wellington's views of how best to help Portugal recover from the depredations of war. Lastly, he wrote to his brother in Cadiz with his news and asking for timely information on French troop movements in the south of Spain.

The allies did not open fire on the 2nd. The French worked frantically to improve their defences. In the castle, 150 infantry and 100 Spanish labourers worked on the retrenchment and a *cavalier*, a raised gun platform. Another 400 workers from all arms worked on other parts of the defences, especially at San Cristobal and the Bridge-head. The besiegers worked just as hard, but under continual fire from the

fortress. A deserter told the French garrison that the allied trenches were covered with corpses.

That evening Wellington took his mind off the problems of the siege to deal with the problems of the cavalry. Fresh horses were expected from England and Sir Stapleton Cotton, the Cavalry commander was given clear directions how they should be allocated. Brigadier Peacocke, commanding the Lisbon garrison was told to detain certain French medical officers in Lisbon, so that they could attend a number of wounded officers and soldiers of the French army.

In Badajoz the defenders worked all night to improve the defences and at 3 am they discovered that the allies had installed guns in four batteries. At 10 am all 24 guns opened fire. 'Firing was at first inaccurate, but as the gunners began to master the idiosyncrasies of their particular gun, it improved noticeably, even though the range to the castle was far too long for the pieces in use. By the late afternoon the castle wall had begun to disintegrate, but it was soon clear that at that point it was no more than a stone facing to a perpendicular wall of hard clay, which fell away in flakes without showing much sign of providing a practicable slope.'

The guns soon began to show their age. One of the 24 pounders in the castle battery blew out its bush, and a second became so hot from continuous firing that its metal softened to the extent that the barrel actually drooped at the muzzle. In the operation against Cristobal the French return fire was fast and accurate, and one 8 in howitzer was soon knocked out. A 10 in howitzer then broke its carriage; these pieces had had their wheels removed and were being used as mortars with their carriages resting on the ground. This was satisfactory provided the elevation of the barrel did not exceed 30°, but in this case it was raised to 40° and the carriage soon collapsed; yet another of the brass guns drooped and so became unserviceable, although the rate of fire was no more than one hundred rounds per day. Ammunition supply was maintained by means of one hundred and sixty mules, and one hundred and fifteen bullock carts.' ¹

Both sides were busy that night. For the French, Captain Coste with 40 sappers and 100 infantrymen cleared the rubble from the bottom of the castle wall, while the British extended the parallel in front of the castle to the right to enable a new battery (N^o 6) to be constructed closer to its target. The British fired at the French clearing the rubble, but because of the darkness with little effect. However, the main effect of the British bombardment was to drive the Spanish labourers away. General Philipon, the Governor, felt his garrison was too weak to try and force the inhabitants to work.

At 1 pm, scarcely three short hours after his guns had opened fire; Wellington was feeling very confident, writing to General Picton from Gramicha:

'My Dear General,
From the manner in which we are going on, I think it not impossible but that we may have a breach in the castle wall this evening, and if that be the case, I beg you to put a date to the enclosed summons, and send it into the town; if there should be no breach this day, the summons may be delayed till morning. If the gentleman should be disposed to capitulate, you may allow him to march out with honours of war; the garrison to lay down their arms on the glacis, and be prisoners of war; the gates to be given over to us to-morrow morning, at 5 o'clock.

You must refuse to allow him to make terms for the inhabitants or Spanish subjects, saying that we have no right to interfere in Spanish concerns. The Officers of the garrison may keep their *boná fide* property, and the men their knapsacks; but

everything taken from the inhabitants of the town, and the remains of all requisitions made upon them, must be restored to the inhabitants. All plans, returns of stores, &c., and papers belonging to the place must be given up. If the Commandant should refuse to give up the place upon this summons, the Officer who goes in may say that he will not be summoned again.

‘Believe me, &c.,

Wellington

Major General Picton

‘P.S. The terms above enumerated are of course not to be referred to, unless the governor should be disposed to capitulate, in which case you will go on with the capitulation on these terms, letting me hear from you, and I will come over immediately.

W.’

This letter and its directions are important because ‘Old military tradition in all the armies of Europe held that a garrison which refused to surrender when the breaches had become practicable was at the mercy of the conqueror for life and limb, and that a town resisting to extremity was the natural booty of the stormers.’

That evening Wellington settled down to some routine correspondence, with a letter to the Officer of HM Navy in charge of the flat bottomed boats at Juramenha, who was instructed to move the bulk of the boats to the crossing of the Tagus at Vila Velha, leaving a detachment of seamen at Juramenha to take care of the bridge there.

Brigadier General Peacocke in Lisbon received instructions on the priorities for artillery horses and guns.

At 4 am on 4th June the allies opened fire again with 40 heavy calibre guns, which was heavier even than the previous day, but the results were little better. The French repairs to the castle wall were soon brought down but the core of soil behind it remained as nearly perpendicular as on the preceding evening. ‘Eight inch shells fired against it would not penetrate it,’ wrote the disgusted Alexander Dickson, ‘but absolutely dropped back, and burst below among the rubbish.’³ By sunset only 13 of the original 20 guns were firing. French counter battery fire, muzzle droop and shattered howitzer carriages accounted for them. (The discrepancy in the number of guns is because Lemare the Commander of the French Engineers in 1811 quoted 40, while Oman writing a hundred years later preferred 20)

The effect on Cristobal was a little better, the flank of the fort which had been selected for breaching had had its parapet knocked to pieces and much debris had fallen into the ditch.

During the night the French removed the debris from the foot of the castle wall. At San Cristobal Sergeant Major Pérumont and 50 miners removed the rubble at the foot of the damaged scarps. In the castle 300 men worked on the retrenchment and the artillerymen finished arming the *cavalier*.

Meanwhile at Gramicha Wellington devoted himself to his correspondence. First he dealt with a complaint from the Deputy Commissary General relating to feeding Spanish troops with British rations after they had moved back to Spain. The decision he said had been his. Next he wrote to Beresford about the promotion prospects of British Officers serving in the Portuguese Army, pointing out that an officer’s service there

‘strengthens his claim to promotion to any vacancy which may fall in the British Regiment to which he may belong,’

Bringing his mind back to the siege he replied to a letter Col. Fletcher, his chief engineer had written at 3 pm. The engineers had constructed a new battery at the right-hand end of the parallel facing the castle and Wellington agreed that guns should be mounted in it. “The wall of the castle appears to be constructed of earth, and I can easily conceive that some time must elapse before a slope will be made in it by battering; but I recommend that we should persevere.” He had also noticed the retrenchment the French had made and realised that it would hinder the development of an entry and that the capture of Cristobal would be needed to provide the necessary support. He admitted he had not been able to see the progress at Cristobal that evening, but promised to visit General Houston early the next day and then move down to the river Gevora, which gave a better view.

General Spencer received a letter dealing with a couple of minor matters and expressing his continued optimism with the outcome of the siege, boosted by the news of the delay of Drouet’s possible movement towards Badajoz.

Having got these out of the way he replied to Charles Stuart the British Minister in Lisbon, giving vent to his continued frustration with the Portuguese Government, whose failure to pay, feed and provide ammunition for their army, which was now a valued, indeed essential part of the allied forces, was creating unnecessary problems. He did not mince his words. “Nothing but a change of system can induce me to.... recommend to the King’s Government to support the contest one moment beyond that at which I shall see in the (Portuguese) Government, not only verbal professions, but a cordial desire and corresponding exertions to carry it on, and to save their own country. That has been my invariable sentiment, and upon that sentiment I shall evacuate the country as readily as I have defended it.....These dignitaries of the church are always dreaming of battles; but I should like to know whether they ever dreamt that a soldier with a musket could not fight without ammunition, and that in two hours he can expend all he can carry.”

At dawn on the 5th the fortress opened fire with nine 24 pounders located on the two cavaliers on the castle. Immediately seven more guns of the same calibre, a howitzer and five 10 inch mortars as well as the batteries of the fort, those of the lunette San Roque and those of San Cristóbal opened fire as well. Guns in the allied batteries facing San Cristobal were quickly unseated, but were soon replaced. Although the defenders were conscious of the limited stocks of their ammunition, they fired 2,980 shells throughout the day. The allied fire, with ample stocks was considerably heavier. The right-hand battery opened fire at 10 am and totally destroyed the revetment of the castle wall that had been repaired the previous day, ‘but the bank of earth at the breach still remained perpendicular’. The city suffered greatly from the bombardment of the besiegers. The bombs and grenades that flew over the fortifications brought devastation to all parts of the city. In spite of everything the defenders lost only 6 men and 18 wounded, relatively light casualties in view of the weight of the enemy’s fire.

‘On Cristobal the prospects looked more promising (to the British); so much of the wall as was visible over the edge of the ditch along the attacked front was demolished for a distance of many yards. As the result of the report of Lieutenant Forster, an engineer officer, who crept up to the edge of the ditch during the night of the 5th-6th, and saw much rubble therein, it was decided that with another day’s fire the breach would be practicable.’

However during the night 20 sappers and 100 infantrymen led by Captain Guillet and Lt Lessard removed the rubble from the castle breach. Another 50 labourers under Sergeant Majors Vallon and Thouin cleared the ditch of San Cristobal. On the ramparts sappers and artillerymen worked through the night to rebuild the parapet with fascines and sandbags. The allies realised this work was going on and fired shrapnel, but the darkness prevented any accuracy and only four men were wounded.

The state of the breaches in the fort of San Cristobal and the lack of height of the counterscarps indicated that an assault was imminent. The French were surprised that no attempt was made during the night and attributed it to lack of information or pusillanimity. The garrison of San Cristobal consisted of Captain Delcey of the 88th and 150 infantry plus a certain number of armed labourers. This small band were deployed as advantageously as possible and got little sleep that night.

Not satisfied with the results of the new battery, the allies made a new branch in their zig-zag to the right of their parallel approaching to within 150m of the Castle. A third battery was then begun for seven 24 pounders. Despite mortar fire from the city work continued throughout the day.

At Gramicha, Wellington settled down to his correspondence. Beresford was the first recipient and was invited to come to the Quinta between 5 and 6 pm when Fletcher, the Chief Engineer and Murray, the Quartermaster General and effectively the Chief of Staff would be present 'to settle our future proceedings'. He felt happy about the progress against San Cristobal and thought the breach in the castle wall would be practicable the next day.

Much of Wellington's excellent intelligence came from correspondence intercepted by Spanish Guerrillas. One such letter is analysed on this day and a memorandum sent to Hill, Erskine, Castaños and Blake. The letter from Baron de St Pol, commanding at Cordova gave details of the movement of the 9th Corps. This information was confirmed by other intercepted letters, but was positively contradicted by information from Castile, which led him to believe that the letters may have been planted to deliberately misinform. 'However,' he said, 'the intelligence should put us on our guard.' All commanders should make every effort to discover the true movements of the 9th Corps.

Major General Peacocke and Vice Admiral the Hon. George Berkeley received short letters addressing routine matters.

On the morning of the 6th the bombardment began everywhere with a new intensity and continued for the whole day. After several hours of battering, the parapet, which had been rebuilt the previous night, was again destroyed and the 12 pounder there reduced to silence. This gun was then moved to the foot of the rampart and with a howitzer placed in the gorge of the fort opened fire on the newest battery engaging the castle and caused prodigious damage. Nevertheless, the seam in the castle wall seemed much wider and the accumulation of rubbish at its foot began to look appreciable. Observers in the trenches held that a single man, climbing unhindered, might get up to the top, but this did not constitute a 'practicable breach'. The deciding factor was that the assaulting troops would have 800 yards of open ground to cover, not to mention the muddy bed of the Rivillas brook, which made the operation impracticable.

The allied bombardment caused immense damage to the houses near the castle and many civilians were killed. The garrison, with every man on the parapets, had no more than two killed and 13 wounded

However, both sides felt that the breach in San Cristobal was practicable in so far as sufficient rubble had fallen from the parapet and the top of the wall to make a ramp. The lower part of the wall, which was protected by the glacis was undamaged. As soon as night fell sixty men went down into the ditch and began clearing away the debris with such energy that there was a clear seven feet of undamaged wall below the battered wall. At the same time *Cheveaux de Frise* suspended on chains were installed in the breach and carts piled up in the breach and in the ditch with anything they could find to make access difficult.

In addition to these precautions 14" bombs were placed on the face of the bastion to be exploded in the ditch when the assault developed. Parapets were remade with fascines and sacks of earth and bales of wool. Grenadiers were stationed behind this with three muskets each. The defenders' morale was high.

While the garrison was doing everything imaginable to improve their position, the besiegers prepared for the assault. Why they waited until midnight was a mystery to the French, who made good use of the delay.-

The Division selected for the assault was the 5th under General Houston. Volunteers were picked from the 51st (King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry), 2/85th (Bucks Volunteers – Light Infantry) and 17th Portuguese.

“Ensign Dyas, 51st Regiment, a young officer of great promise, of a most excellent disposition, and beloved by every man in the Corps – an Irishman by birth and whose only fortune was his sword – volunteered to lead the forlorn hope.” The main body of the assault was composed of 155 men led by Major Mackintosh of the 85th and divided into two companies. The leading company carried ten ladders. At midnight the stormers broke out of the trenches, and ran as fast as possible up the 400 yards to the edge of the glacis. Although the French detected them at once and opened fire with grape and musketry, darkness ensured that little damage was done. The counterscarp being only four feet deep in front of the breach, the Forlorn Hope was quickly in the ditch but there they were stopped. There was no ramp of rubble for them to scramble up, but a clean wall of seven feet. The gap above it was filled with carts, *cheveaux de frise* and other obstacles. Their officers called them off and they were retiring with little loss, when the main body came leaping into the ditch. Hearing that the breach was impracticable, the assaulting companies made a series of attempts to escalate the unbreached parts of the scarp. However, the ladders were only 15 feet long and the scarp wherever they looked was 20 feet high. As they milled around in the ditch, the French maintained a relentless fire of musketry and rolled down among them the live shells that had been prepared in advance. After spending nearly an hour in the ditch, the mounting losses and impossibility of forcing an entry forced the attackers to withdraw. Out of the 180 men who had set out, 12 had been killed and 80 wounded, proof enough of the obstinacy of the assault. The French suffered 1 man killed and 5 wounded. “Everything,” pondered Sir Charles Oman, “seems to have been miscalculated in this unhappy affair.”

The Duke's correspondence this day showed his overriding interest in the movement of the French Armies, whose junction would threaten the siege. In one of four letters addressed to the Earl of Liverpool, Secretary of State he says “We have a chance, and in my opinion, not a bad one, of obtaining possession of Badajoz before the enemy can relieve the place; or we must raise the siege before the 10th, from all that I see of the enemy's movements.”

It is interesting that he wrote to Sir Brent Spencer that day that “Our breach in San Cristobal is not yet practicable, nor is that in the main wall.”⁴

Another letter to Lord Liverpool dealt with the effects of the appalling casualties at Albuera. The two battalions of the 48th (the Northamptonshire Regiment) were amalgamated, but he decided not to amalgamate the two battalions of the 7th (the Royal Fusiliers), which had suffered similar casualties, since he had been informed that 500 men of the militia had volunteered to serve in the regular army and this reinforcement, divided between the two battalions could bring them up to strength. He had formed the 3rd, 29th, 31st, 57th and 66th into a provisional battalion for the present. The 3rd (The Buffs), 31st (East Surreys) and 66th (Berkshires) had constituted Colborne’s Brigade with the 2/48th. With the exception of the 31st, they had been caught in the open by the French cavalry. “It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Colborne’s three leading battalions were annihilated in 5 minutes.” The 29th (Worcestershires) and 57th had held the centre of Hoghton’s Brigade on the heights of Albuera, where the 57th had earned everlasting fame as the “Diehards” and suffered 60% casualties, but Wellington goes on to say that he has little doubt that the 3rd (Buffs), the 29th (Worcestershire) and 57th (Middlesex), will again be very efficient. The Buffs earned a short-lived nickname as “The Resurrection Men” when so many returned to the colours, either by escaping from capture or recovering from their wounds.

He took the trouble to point out to Lord Liverpool the need for another 4000 barrels of gun powder and the difficulty of conducting a siege with 150-year-old guns. This last gibe seems a little unfair since there was a complete siege train in Lisbon, which could have been called up, although its transportation time was in the region of 4 to 6 weeks.

To General Spencer he expressed his disappointment at the failure of the assault on Cristobal, the lack of progress with the breach on the castle wall and the possibility that they might run short of ammunition.

‘The failure against San Cristobal convinced Wellington’s engineers that it was useless to try force till the works had been more severely battered, and three further days of artillery work were put in, before a second storm was tried. The old guns from Elvas continued to disable themselves, and on the 9th only thirteen were in proper order on the Cristobal attack. Things would have been still worse opposite the Castle if six good iron ship-guns from Lisbon had not come up on the 7th. These were put into a new battery on the extreme right, and worked very well. But, including them, there were only twenty pieces playing on the Castle breach on the 8th and 9th. Of the original forty-six guns and howitzers only twenty-seven survived!

The net result of these last three days of bombardment on the Castle side was still unsatisfactory. The ship-guns had at last brought down a good deal of earth and rubble, which was lying in a heap at the foot of the battered wall. But on each of the mornings of the 8th and 9th it was found that the French had, during the dark hours, scaped the front of the breach, and thrown aside so much of the debris that there was still a perpendicular face of six or seven feet high, between the top of the heap of broken earth and masonry and the bottom of the seam of broken wall. This work had been carried out by the garrison under great difficulties, for the British batteries had been throwing grape against the foot of the breach all night, for the purpose of preventing any such activity. But the French, trusting to the cover of the darkness, had continued to work on manfully, and though some men were hit, the task had on each night been more or less carried out. On the 9th the engineers came to the conclusion that they dared not

advise any attempt to storm on this side, considering the enormous distance-600 yards from the wall – at which the columns of attack would have to start, even if they debouched from the part of the parallel which was nearest to the Castle. There was also the Rivillas to cross, and the guns from that part of the Castle which was uninjured, and from the flank of San Cristobal, would cut up the stormers by enfilading fire.’

While the bombardment continued, on 8th June Wellington devoted himself to his never-ending correspondence. In a letter to Charles Stuart, he said what must have been at the front of his mind: “Badajoz may fall; but the business will be very near run on both sides. We are going on better with the breaches this day; but I have never seen walls bear so much battering, nor ordnance nor artillery so bad as those belonging to Elvas.”

Turning his mind to operations in the north of Spain, he wrote to Major General Walker describing his talks with General Abadia and his hopes that the operations in the Asturias in conjunction with General Mendizabal and the Navy might drive the French from that ‘interesting post’. This was followed up by a note to Vice Admiral the Hon. George Berkeley asking him to provide transport for General Abadia to Vigo.

His letters to his brother Henry and General Spencer holding the northern corridor reveal his disappointment with the progress of the siege and the appreciation that the French were moving troops south to reinforce Soult.

‘The engineers reluctantly concluded that nothing could be done against the Castle till San Cristobal had fallen, or till a second parallel had been pushed forward much nearer to the place. This was a confession that all their original plans had been erroneous, and that the immense store of shot and shell lavished on the Castle breach had been wasted.’

This supposed failure of the engineers rankles to this day. Their basic supposition that if the two strongest points – San Cristobal and the Castle fell, the rest of the defence would crumble was correct. Their failure was to realise just how strong these two points were. The lack of suitable siege artillery can more properly be blamed on the supreme commander and his staff and indeed on the Government in England who had not considered the possible need for it.

Siege warfare was an aspect of which the British Army had had very little experience. Badajoz was the first fortress they had tried to take by siege. Although their engineers and commanders were abreast of the techniques, the practice was lacking. The continental armies on the other hand had had centuries of first hand experience. It was rather harsh of Sir Charles Oman to say, “Contrary to all the rules of siegecraft, the besiegers had not sapped up close enough to the walls to prevent repairs from being carried out.”

At San Cristobal there were now two breaches, one large and one small. The parapets had been completed demolished. The fort looked a mere heap of rubble and most of its guns were out of action. The appearance was deceptive. The British guns had been unable to hit the base of the walls and the breach was dependant on the rubble from the destroyed parapets providing an adequate ramp for the attackers to ascend. The French spent much effort each night clearing this rubble away. At the same time, they collected every imaginable obstacle to impede the assault they assumed would be launched that night. Although the assault by the 7th Division was launched three hours earlier than the previous one, at 9 pm, the French had been given sufficient time to stop

the breaches with *Cheveaux de frise*, carts and timbers had been pushed into the ditch and the parapet rebuilt with sacks of earth and bales of wool.

For the assault 400 men were told off, twice as many as in the previous attempt. Lt. Dyas of the 51st again led the Forlorn Hope. Major McGeechy of the 17th Portuguese commanded the main body. Lt. Hunt RE was the guide. The advance started at 9 pm and came under a rapid fire of musketry – each defender had three muskets to hand. Hunt and McGeechy were both killed before the ditch was reached.

‘As on June 6th, there was found to be a gap between the top of the rubble in the ditch and the lips of both breaches, six or seven feet high. The ladders were therefore brought forward, and many of them were reared; but the musketry fire knocked over nearly every man who tried to ascend them, and the few who got a footing in the breach were met and bayoneted by the garrison, who showed splendid courage, running down the slope of the breach and charging any small knot of men, who struggled on from the ladders.’

The main body of the attackers, milled around in the ditch, harassed by the bombs and musketry of the defenders, until after an hour with no success a withdrawal was ordered. The French thought they had been attacked by between 8 and 9,000 men, which was a compliment to Major McGeechy’s small force. They were also convinced that this was only a prelude to a major assault on the Castle, where the Garrison was ‘Standing To’ in force. The casualties properly showed the result of the action; the allies suffered 54 killed, 81 wounded and 4 missing, a total of 139, while the garrison had two men wounded.

Pte Wheeler also of the 51st and a member of both Forlorn Hopes describes the last moments of the attack:

‘I now saw Ensign Dyas calling to the men to leave the trench and retire to our rallying post. As we were retreating down the glacis, a misfortune befell me and I had a very narrow escape from being made a prisoner, being cut off from my comrades by the party who sallied. There were eight or nine in the same mess. These the enemy obliged to go into the Fort. However, I hit on an excellent expedient that answered well. I threw myself down by a man who had been shot through the head and daubed my white haversack with his blood. I shewed this to the enemy when they ordered me to get up and go into the fort. From the appearance of the blood they must have thought I had a very bad wound in the hip, so they all left me except one who searched my pockets, took my shirt, boots and stockings.’

The French had expected the Castle to be attacked simultaneously, since an attack on Cristobal could have no other objective than to protect one on the Castle. In this belief, all the rubble had been removed from the base of the breach in the Castle wall. Obstacles had been placed in the breach and the parapet was manned by 400 men. In spite of everything the rest of the night passed in calm, which contrasted starkly with the terrible noise at the beginning.

Wellington wrote only one letter on 9th June, before setting off to observe the assault on Cristobal. This was to his Commander in the north, General Spencer, speculating on the possible moves of Regnier’s Corps from the information he had received from interrupted French correspondence.

‘On the morning of the 10th the fire against the castle was continued with vigour, but on San Cristobal there was a six-hour truce, which was asked and granted, in order that the many wounded scattered along the slope below the fort might be gathered in.

The French, being able to work unmolested at repairs during the cessation of fire, had every reason for giving a polite and humane answer to the request made by the besiegers.’

Although the French under General Phillipon had repulsed two assaults on Cristobal and felt reasonably confident in being able to defeat an attempt on the Castle, they were running very short of supplies. No provisions had been got in since Beresford’s first siege began in April. His troops were now on half rations, but these would only last for ten more days. He had had no news from outside and although his losses in killed and wounded had been relatively slight, he had many sick and the strain of being constantly under arms and constantly working on the defences was beginning to be felt. He began making plans to cut their way through by the road to Montijo and Merida, but this was not to be tried until absolutely necessary.

At noon on 10th June, Wellington decided to raise the siege. Briefing his Divisional Commanders and the senior officers of artillery and engineers, he said: ‘It had been proved that it was impossible to storm San Cristobal without sapping up to the crest of the glacis, which was practically impossible on the bare rock. There was now a breach in the Castle, but it was too remote from the parallel.’ But he also had news ‘that Marmont and the 9th Corps would both join Soult in a few days; and the allied army must not be caught in the trenches, and forced to fight superior numbers in an unfavourable position.’

Settling down at his desk at Gramicha, he proceeded to inform Lieut. General Sir Brett Spencer, commanding in the North, Marshal Beresford, Charles Stuart in Lisbon and Captain General Castaños of his decision to lift the siege and withdraw to a defensive line based on Elvas-Campo Maior and his assessment of French intentions. He was much concerned that General Pack had destroyed the works of Almeida, which he felt might be of value to the British in the future. To Beresford, the man he always considered the most suitable to command the army if he, Wellington, should fall, he aired his inner thoughts. ‘I am certain there is something more in the wind than the desire to force us out of Estremadura and it is either...that they are for a dart into Portugal, probably to endeavour to seize our works at Almeida...or the siege of Elvas.’

He clearly felt that the junction of Soult and Marmont had been ordered from Paris and had a greater aim than merely lifting the siege of Badajoz. To Castaños he emphasised the benefits of Captain General Blake’s operations in the south, threatening Seville, where Soult was still hoping to be crowned king. Any threat there would speedily draw him away from Badajoz. The reality was that Marmont’s move south was made on his own initiative and in response to the news of Soult’s beating at Albuera.

In Badajoz, the garrison, unaware that relief might be on its way, laboured as usual to clear the rubble at the base of the breaches and prepared to receive another assault. Having beaten off two, morale was high. Previous experience gave them to believe that it would not be too soon; ‘still, the artillery fired shrapnel on all flanks, four companies of Grenadiers and 50 Miners, provided with pyrotechnics, guarded the top of the breach, four companies of voltigeurs were in position in the covered way in front of bastions 8 & 9 to enfilade the foot of the castle, and 400 men commanded by Lt Col Marquet were in reserve behind the retrenchment....at 2 am two deserters arrived who said that the decision had been made to lift the siege and that the British had begun to withdraw; in fact when dawn broke, much movement was observed in the camps and the trenches, which confirmed this happy news.’

Having made his decision, he ordered that the guns should be withdrawn from the batteries and the sending of stores, tools etc. back to Elvas must commence. Rumour adds that he muttered, more or less to himself, that ‘next time he would be his own engineer.’

All through the 11th and 12th convoys of ammunition, platforms, fascines, woolpacks &c., were being sent to the rear. At the end of that day all that was left were the troops to man the blockade and enough stores to maintain them. Wellington knew the garrison only had rations up to the 20th and he wanted to ensure these were consumed in the off-chance Soult or Marmont were delayed.

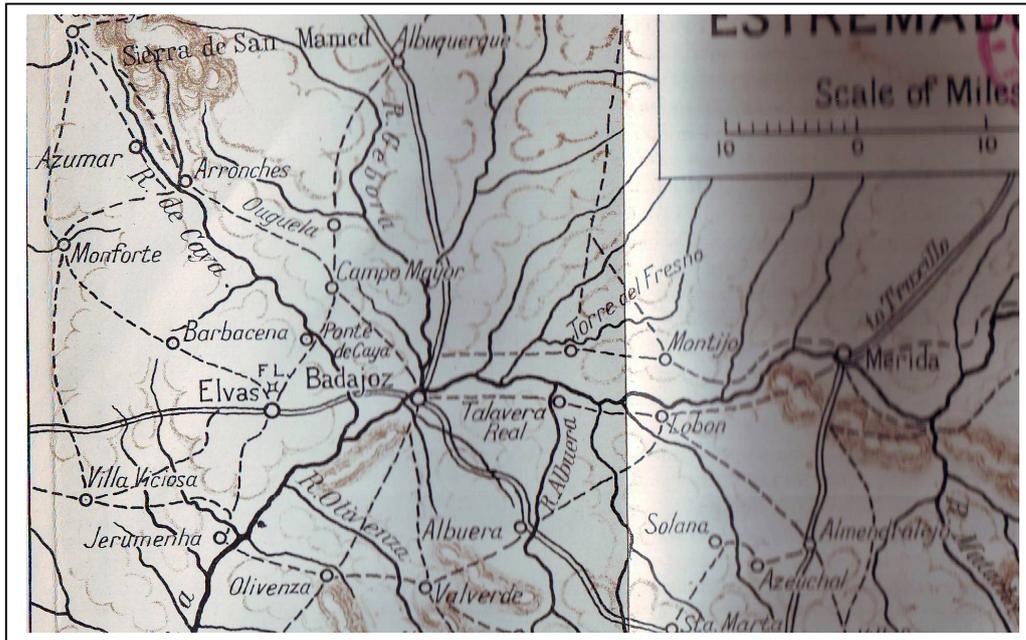
The garrison noticed that much of the material was being transported towards Albuera and Olivença. At about 10 am on 14th June about 100 Portuguese approached the fortress with the intention of driving off some cattle that belonged to the garrison and were grazing on the glacis. This affront to men already on short rations was too much and Lieut. Chateauneuf and 50 cavalry drove them off. The Governor and the whole garrison were well aware that if the blockade continued, there would come a time, not very far distant, when they would be forced to capitulate or attempt a break out through the enemy. These were cruel alternatives for a garrison that had twice successfully withstood a siege.

The French noticed that the troops on the right (northern) bank of the Guadiana had been considerably reduced, which favoured the option of a break out on this side. The Governor, Philipon, the commander of the Engineers, Le Mare and Lt Col Marquet agreed that when the garrison was reduced to the last extreme, they would make their escape furtively by night, while at the same time detonating the mines that had been prepared for the first siege on the western side of the fortress. The withdrawal would be along the main road to Madrid. To deceive the enemy and confirm his impression that they had no intention of abandoning the fortress, much show was made on the 16th of the demolition of an arch of the stone bridge across the Guadiana, while the carpenters secretly prepared planks in the engineer park to bridge the gap. In the event, the junction of the armies of Soult and Marmont made these preparations superfluous.

Throughout these days, Wellington’s correspondence was just as voluminous, but was mainly concerned with administrative matters, getting Blake and his troops moving south, well supplied and behaving themselves while they were in Portugal. He found the traditional enmity between the Spanish and Portuguese a complication he could well have done without. To Colonel Gordon, the Commissary in Chief, he expressed his frustration with the Portuguese Government’s failure to provide for their forces, through incompetence, dishonesty and neglect of duty. He outlined how it could be corrected without much hope that his ideas would be implemented.

Some quick orders for redeployment were issued on the news on 13th June that Soult had reached Los Santos. Although he doubted the veracity, he ordered Hamilton’s Portuguese Division to Albuera.

Also on the 13th he complained to the Earl of Liverpool, Secretary of State about the Chasseurs Britanniques. This Corps had been raised to employ Royalists and genuine opponents of the French Republic, but he found that the Government had allowed deserters and prisoners to be enlisted. During this siege of Badajoz, 52 had deserted, providing the French with their most up to date intelligence.



The same night he sent to Lord Liverpool a long and detailed account of the siege of Badajoz, much of which must have been prepared by his staff, he cannot possibly have had time to write it all in his own hand, as an appendix he attached the return of Killed, Wounded and Missing. The total for this short period had been 118 killed, 354 wounded and 9 missing. It had been a busy night.

On 13th June a patrol of the 2nd Hussars of the King's German Legion 25 strong made contact with the French advancing from the South at Los Santos and totally defeated twice that number of enemy not far from the locality. *Leutnant* Meister and another four men were wounded and Hussar Lühring had his hand cut off; they brought six prisoners and ten captured horses of the 21st French Dragoon Regiment back with them.

The next morning, Wellington concentrated the 2nd, 4th and Hamilton's Portuguese Divisions on the old Albuera position, where he also established his headquarters. The bivouac of the 13th Light Dragoons and the 2nd Hussars KGL lay "precisely on the battlefield....Although many of the bodies had already been cremated in the nearby cork wood, a very large number still lay around us, revolting maggots and greedy birds of prey making their dreadful meal of them. It was particularly horrifying to ride patrols by night on this field of death, for our horses frequently trod on corpses and then recoiled, while the hoarse croaking of the vultures made an even more uncanny impression. Here, in a narrow stream with steep banks, we found a horse that had been shot but was still standing, probably having fallen into the stream at the moment of death and been kept upright between the banks. The rider, too, was still sitting dead on its back, with his saddlebag still behind him, having been killed by a stroke to the neck - a ghostly rider! We were short of water here, as the stream was full of bodies. At the place where the detachment halted, it seemed as though a troop of amputating doctors had been busying themselves, for all possible kinds of limbs and half limbs were lying about."

On the 15th June Wellington wrote to Stapleton Cotton, commanding the cavalry and to Beresford saying he had had unconfirmed reports from the Spanish that the enemy's cavalry had reached Sta Marta. In the same letter, he mentioned that the French

had entered Trujillo on the 13th and were expected to be in Mérida by the evening of the 15th. He concluded his postscript saying “I shall break up from hence this evening.”

He had already decided that the position to which he would retire, would be the line of low hills extending from Elvas to Campo Maior, with outposts at Juramenha and Oguela. The land between these hills and the Guadiana is low lying and open. Any movement of a large body of troops would be seen in plenty of time for him to re-arrange his dispositions. In many ways, it is stronger than the ridge at Buçaco.

Knowing full well how sensitive Soult felt at any threat to his ‘kingdom’ in Andalusia. General Joaquim Blake was despatched with his Spanish Army south to threaten it. Wellington was convinced that the appearance of Blake’s army before Seville ‘would bring back Soult in haste from Badajoz, and cure him of any desire to cross the Guadiana or besiege Elvas’. To assist Gen Blake, Wellington ordered Col Fletcher give him the four or five tin pontoons, now at Elvas, with their carriages and all the equipments belonging to them (excepting the horses). Col Fletcher was also ordered to take up the flying bridge between Elvas and Badajoz and remove all the bridging material from here and Juramenha to Elvas. General Blake was warned that he could not count on the British Commissary to feed his army and that he should make suitable arrangements at Olivença and Valverde.



This letter transcribed below, written in Albuera on 16th June 1811 at 8 am. to Lieut. General Sir Stapleton Cotton, Bart, illustrates well Wellington’s frustration when subordinates did not carry out his orders to the letter.

‘My dear Cotton,

‘I was in hopes that the cavalry would have been here some hours ago, in consequence of the orders sent to you yesterday and last night. This movement does not depend solely on what is passing in your front, but principally upon what is passing upon your left; and you must recollect that from hence you have six leagues at least to Elvas, near which place probably it will be necessary the cavalry should be to-morrow morning. Under these circumstances, I was anxious that you should be here early this

morning, in order that men and horses might have time to go to rest and feed, and that your baggage might have time to get off before you in the afternoon. 'Your note of 9 pm. did not arrive till after 4 this morning. The officer of the 4th Dragoons to stay with General Slade did not arrive till the troops had marched, and General Hill was leaving this also, about 4. All this shows how uncertain this description of communication is at night, and how desirable it is that a certain direction given to a particular body of troops, as part of a general combination, should be strictly adhered to. 'Believe me, &c.

'Wellington'

Still at Albuera, Wellington wrote to R.Kennedy Esq., pointing out the failure to supply the 2nd and Light Divisions with bread and telling him that the soldiers' blankets from the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 7th Divisions would be sent to Elvas, from where they should be sent to Lisbon for cleaning and then put into store.

Before leaving for Gramicha he felt it was necessary to write again to General Joaquin Blake, giving him the latest intelligence and encouraging him to time his troops' movement with the British across the Guadiana at about 2 am. He told Blake that he would remain at Albuera until 2 pm and then join General Hill until nightfall when he would return to the Quinta de Gramicha to sleep.

Wellington cannot have slept much that night. His next despatch is timed at 6 am. 17th June is addressed to Major Generals Campbell and Slade, with instructions for the movement of their forces south across the Tagus.

In Badajoz, the garrison noticed the raising of the blockade on this night – 16/17 June. Some sentries noticed on the roads to Elvas and Campo Maior, a detachment of cavalry move out to cover the withdrawal. No less than seven despatches including two comprehensive reports were written on 17th June. As they are dated variously from the Quinta de Gramicha and Elvas he must have been moving around a lot.

General Blake, to whom he always wrote in French, received a note containing the latest intelligence and encouragement to hasten to Andalucia without delay.

Generals Spencer, Campbell and Pack were sent their orders for the movement to the south, to form part of his new defensive position. Wellington was acutely aware that the junction of the two French armies gave them a superiority of numbers, and with one bridge and many good fords at their disposition, for the crossing of the Guadiana, the two Marshals had the power to thrust a general engagement on their adversary.

Administrative problems were never far from his mind, so he informed Marshal Beresford that he had instructed the Commissary to send 20,000 rations to Campo Maior and that 14,000 rations had already been despatched to Juramenha.

Col Austin in Beja was instructed to make contact with General Blake when he passed by.

Having taken care of the less important matters he addressed himself to Charles Stuart, the British Minister in Lisbon. The first letter concerned a subject on which he felt very strongly. 'In the course of the last three months, the British army have had but few men less than 7000 wounded in the service of Portugal;''I find that the convents, &c., which were used as hospitals at Lisbon by the British army heretofore, are now applied to other purposes, and all accommodation of this description is now refused.' He urged Stuart to take the matter up with the Portuguese Government in the

strongest possible terms, or he would be forced to send an officer express to England to inform the Prince Regent, and his Ministers – his only fall back.

This was followed by another letter to Charles Stuart. In his opening paragraph, he said, ‘I have received your letters of the 12th, 13th and 15th; but as I have been forward with the troops for some days I have not been able to send you answers as regularly as I ought.’ Since we do not know the questions, some of the answers are meaningless, but a constant theme is his concern with the provision of rations and munitions to Elvas. ‘Under these circumstances, I should, and shall, avoid a general action if I can; but I must put a countenance upon the state of affairs, and matters must be risked till provisions be placed in Elvas.’

A few quiet days followed. On 18th June, Wellington advised Sir Stapleton Cotton of the arrival of two squadrons of the 12th Light Dragoons.

He next wrote to Beresford in great detail expressing his concerns with the defence of Elvas. He felt it should have four months’ provisions available in case of a siege and doubted the ability of the Portuguese commissariat to provide this. The ordnance was in general very bad. Carriages were worn out, the shot available did not fit the calibre of the guns. ‘Elvas,’ he said, ‘of all fortified towns in the world...ought to be the one in the state best prepared to stand an attack; but I am sorry to observe that, however respectable in itself as a fortification, it appears to me to be the fortified town that I have yet seen that is the least prepared to make a defence.’ He went on to list his criticisms. The major one was that the road from Vila Boim, which is the main road from Lisbon is ‘not seen at all from the Forte of Santa Lucia, or from the body of the place (Elvas); and it appears that a redoubt on the rock on the right of Sta Lucia would command that ground.’ This little fort or “fortim” was duly constructed, together with several other outlying forts, almost all of which survive to this day. The fort of which he spoke was named as the ‘Forte de São Pedro’ and is now surrounded by the suburb of that name. He also felt it would be prudent to remove the Headquarters of the province of Alentejo and to encourage as much of the population who had not four months’ supply of provisions to leave. Gen Leite improved the defences of Elvas, by clearing the ditch and removing some houses and trees that obscured the fields of fire.

Major General Peacocke in Lisbon was warned of the imminent arrival of the 12th Dragoons.

Lord Liverpool received a cover note to a transcript of an intercepted letter from Joseph to Napoleon. ‘It shows that this tyrant does not treat his relations, or even his brother, better than he does his people.’

No letters are recorded the next day, which is very unusual, but was probably due to the fact that his headquarters was moving to Quinta de São João, halfway between Elvas and Campo Maior, the extremities of his new defensive position.

At dawn, on 19th June a squadron commander escorted by a hundred horse arrived in Badajoz, bringing news that the armies under the orders of the Marshals, Dukes of Dalmatia and Ragusa (Soult and Marmont) were advancing to relieve the garrison. The junction of the two armies had occurred in Mérida the previous day. The combined armies, numbering some 60,000 men advance cautiously in three columns on Albuera where they expected to engage Wellington, but he, as we have seen, had already left.

Long, commanding the cavalry, ‘passed Albuera, blackened and still littered with the remains of the dead who had been burnt in heaps. At one point Long’s

guideless wanderings in a dark pine-forest looking for a ford across the Guadiana brought his cavalry under the guns of Badajoz. It was during this retreat that Long was appointed Major-General. Long's Brigade now consisted of the 11th Dragoons and two squadrons of the 2nd Hussars (King's German Legion).'

'On the 20th Marmont entered Badajoz in triumph, amid the blare of military music, and a few hours later Soult arrived and exchanged felicitations with him and the trusty governor.' Within Badajoz there was relief and congratulations for the defenders. A fortress that had taken the French eight days to capture had resisted the British for three months. General Phillipon and his garrison deserved the praises they received. The Allies had had their problems, but the French defence had been resourceful, courageous and eventually impenetrable.

Now settled into his new residence, Wellington passed on to General Picton the news he had just received that 1,500 to 1,600 cavalry had been seen entering Badajoz of whom 300 were said to be encamped upon the Gevora. Giving thought to his northern flank he rode over the ground between Campo Maior and Ouguela. Although the fortifications there had been largely dismantled, he felt it should be garrisoned by 200 men with two iron 6 or 4 pounder guns and had ordered General Picton to provide them this day. Marshal Beresford was asked to persuade General Leite in Elvas to replace this force with 100 of the line and 100 militia the next day.

The next task was to write a long and detailed report to the Earl of Liverpool, Secretary of State about the events from 13th June, when the Army of the South had reached Los Santos, near Zafra and the British had deployed to Albuera virtually the same forces that had fought that bloody battle a month previously. Once the enemy force had assembled at Badajoz he assessed their strength at around 60,000, including 7,000 cavalry. He hoped to have to oppose them about 41,000 or 42,000 effective rank and file of infantry, and about 4,000 cavalry, besides artillery. He was convinced that General Blake's move against Seville would have a good effect and noted that to achieve this concentration, the enemy had abandoned Old and New Castile, with the exception of a small garrison in Madrid.

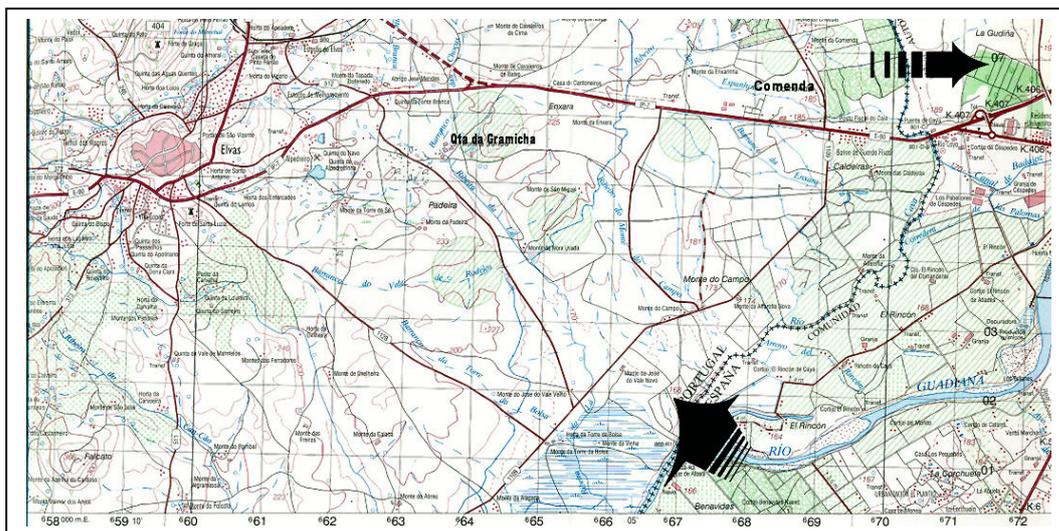
Given the enemy's superiority, especially in cavalry, for whose operations the country was particularly favourable, he therefore stated he was not prepared to risk an action, unless he should find it necessary in order to provision Elvas; notwithstanding that he had the fullest confidence in the result of any action in which he might deem it expedient to engage the troops. He had hopes that the convoys bringing supplies might reach Elvas before the 24th.

He was wise to be cautious, but the French commanders, from past experience, had good reason to be very careful before attacking Wellington on ground of his choosing.

On the 21st he returned to Gramicha to dine and wrote to Lieut. General Sir Brent Spencer, giving the latest intelligence and asking for some more gallopers. He finished by saying: 'I am only three or four leagues from you, and dine at 3, and shall be glad to see you any day that you will come over.'

The next day, the 22nd, the French made a reconnaissance in force. 'On the French left flank, Godinot's Division advanced from Olivença to a point opposite to Juramenha, from where the Portuguese garrison bombarded them without great damage. Two dragoon regiments under General Bron forded the river, but found no allied regiments in the area.'

‘On the right, Montbrun, with two cavalry brigades of the Army of Portugal, passed the Badajoz bridge, and marched on Campo Maior. After driving in a cavalry screen belonging to De Grey’s and Madden’s regiments, he found himself feeling the front of a defensive line, which he estimated at two divisions of infantry and 1,400 horse, and could get no further forward. He reported that Wellington was prepared to fight.’



‘In the centre, where Latour-Maubourg in person, with fourteen squadrons of dragoons and Polish Lancers, forded the Guadiana almost in front of Elvas, there was hard fighting.’ The allied screen, divided by the main Elvas-Badajoz road, was provided on the right by the 2nd Hussars of the King’s German Legion and the left by the 11th Light Dragoons, only recently arrived in Portugal.

The two squadrons of the 2nd Hussars KGL that were to provide the piquets south of the road had moved to the Quinta de Gramicha on 19th June. The land on the right bank of the Guadiana in this area is flat for the first two kilometres. Much of it is now rice paddy, but in 1811 would have been marsh in winter and although dry in summer broken by numerous small streambeds. Further inland, the ground rises into low ridges, divided by streams, now dry. The French force must have used numerous fording points. Fourteen squadrons, even divided into two lines would have had a front of several hundred metres. The Guadiana was clearly very low.

Rittmeister von Stoltzenberg of the King’s German Legion took over the piquet in the early morning hours of 22nd June. At about 8 am the enemy was seen advancing towards the river. He takes up the story: ‘We sought as far as possible to hold up his fording of the Guadiana by firing into his columns, and the officer riding at the head of the enemy was shot in the water by Corporal Burgdorff. In view of the greatly superior numbers of the enemy, however, I had to abandon my post, all the more so because the enemy had also forded the Guadiana above my piquet and had already advanced so far that I was in danger of being cut off. Consequently, there was nothing I could do but retire at a full gallop, in which process a stone bridge that had become unsound due to a hole had to be crossed, at which two men of my piquet, Hussars Bremer and Nott, fell and were immediately captured.’ (Bremer was an intelligent and resourceful man. During his short imprisonment, he managed to make a plan of the fortress of Badajoz and then organised his escape with another 36 Germans, who he marched to Wellington’s headquarters. This earned him promotion to Sergeant.)

Stoltzenberg again: ‘I managed to gain a lead, and Leutnant von Issendorff, who had noticed the speedy advance of the enemy, immediately hurried towards me with the picket we had relieved. The two of us succeeded in holding up the enemy until Rittmeister Schulze with about half of the Hussar detachment from Quinta de Gramicha was able to come up – joined voluntarily by a Troop of the 11th Dragoon Regiment under Lieutenant Crawford. Wachtmeister Fiedeler, commanding the picket on my right, had also been driven from his post by the superior numbers of the enemy. In hand-to-hand fighting, he was so seriously wounded that he died the next day in the hospital in Elvas. Another three men of his piquet were lost including Hussar Brake of the 7th Squadron. Rittmeister Schulze immediately attacked the vanguard of the French cavalry, which consisted of two squadrons of Polish lancers and beat them back, inflicting significant losses. Unfortunately, he pressed his advantage too far and, although Rittmeister Wiering came up with the remainder of the Hussars from the Quinta da Gramicha, we were nevertheless compelled by the new masses of enemy cavalry coming up to make a speedy retreat. During this, and while crossing a ravine, we lost more men: a Wachtmeister, a Trumpeter and eleven horses were left on the field and twenty men were taken prisoner or were missing. We took up our positions again before the Quinta da Gramicha, and as the 11th Dragoon Regiment was also approaching from Elvas, the enemy advanced no further.’

A few hundred metres in front of the Quinta da Gramicha, the ground rises steeply in a bluff. When Latour-Maubourg reached this point, he could see the squadrons of the 2nd Hussars KGL and the 11th Dragoons drawn up behind the Quinta, but looming behind them were the massive walls of Elvas bristling with guns. There was enough military activity to convince him that there were significant numbers of infantry, although he was unable to assess their actual strength. However, any further move towards Elvas was clearly unwise, so he veered off to his right and shortly turned to make his way back to Badajoz, to the north of the highway.

Liaison between the German Hussars and the 11th Dragoons was non-existent. Captain Lutyens, a promising officer, who had been especially recommended to Wellington was unaware of the action proceeding on his right flank. Rittmeister von Stoltzenberg had tried to warn him by sending Corporal Burgdorff, the riverside marksman. However Burgdorff could not get through and only just avoided being taken prisoner.

The first indication to the 11th Dragoons was to see a large body of cavalry moving towards them from Elvas. This, they assumed were either Spanish or Portuguese. Headdresses and uniforms were disastrously similar. When Lutyens realised his mistake, he decided his only option was to try and break through. He closed his men and charged the front French squadrons, which he broke through. But a second line was behind, and he and his whole squadron of sixty-four sabres were ridden down and captured. Only one wounded officer – Lieutenant Binney - cut his way through and brought news of this disaster.

Wellington was always very nervous of his cavalry. It was always outnumbered by the French and such training as it had was directed to producing stirring displays on Wimbledon Common, rather than the scouting work, which could produce such excellent information when well exercised. In the Peninsula, its value lay in providing early warning of the enemy’s movements. He hoped these two regiments, not long in station would learn from their more experienced colleagues. ‘The hussars ought to have retired skirmishing – it was not their duty to try to fight five regiments of French. The light dragoon piquets had clearly not kept touch with the detachments on their flanks, or

they would have heard of the advance of the enemy in force.’ He also blamed Long for the overall responsibility of this reverse. ‘Let him attend to the directions he before received from Sir Stapleton Cotton, to throw out only *small piquets of observation* on the Caia and Guadiana.’

For the French ‘to assemble the force now lying by Badajoz, Andalucia and Leon had been stripped of all disposable troops.... If Wellington could be beaten, the concentration was justified; if he were left unmolested, nothing had been gained, save the reprovisioning of Badajoz – and the game could go on for ever....but neither Soult nor Marmont would advance.’ Napier wrote, ‘Marmont’s army was conscious of its recent defeats at Buçaco, at Sabugal, at Fuentes de Onoro; the horrid field of Albuera was fresh; the fierce blood there spilt still reeked in the nostrils of Soult’s soldiers.’ ‘The Generals, no less than the rank and file, felt a qualm at the idea of attacking Wellington in a position which he had taken up with deliberation, and where he showed himself serenely expectant of their attack.’

Oman concluded that ‘in short, the offensive spirit was gone: the French armies in Spain found themselves thrown on the defensive; and so things were to remain for the rest of the Peninsular War.’

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