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CHARLES ESDAILE

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THE PENINSULAR WAR of 1808-14 may justly be regarded as the true foundation of the duke of Wellington's military reputation, raising him from the level of a mere 'sepoy general' to the position of foremost British commander of his age. The object of this essay is by no means an attempt, to paraphrase the man himself, to pick holes in Wellington's jerkin. Indeed, it is founded upon the belief that the liberation of the Iberian Peninsula was in the last resort the work of Wellington's army. Much as the author, as an ardent hispanophile, might like to rewrite history, his intention will rather be to examine why the Spaniards, in particular, came to take second place in their own liberation. Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to emphasize the distinction that must be drawn between *resistance to the French*, and *the capacity to drive the French from the Peninsula*. For all the catastrophes that afflicted the Patriot cause between 1808 and 1814, Spanish resistance to the French never ceased, and in this sense the Spaniards may certainly be said to have earned their deliverance. Outnumbered as he was, Wellington could never have carried the war into the interior of Spain had not the continued Spanish resistance made it virtually impossible for the French to concentrate their superior forces against him. Furthermore, whilst the Spaniards kept Wellington perfectly informed as to the situation of his opponents, the guerrillas forced his opponents to operate in a 'fog of war' that has never been more opaque. Yet while paying every tribute to the Spaniards, it is still clear that they could never have driven the French over the Pyrenees on their own account.

To illustrate this point, it is necessary to examine the state of Spain at the moment in January 1812 when Wellington inaugurated her liberation through the recapture of the crucial border fortress of Ciudad

I wish to acknowledge the kindness of Mr Robin Thomas in allowing me to make use of the unpublished diary of his ancestor, Lieutenant Daniel Robinson, in the preparation of this essay.

Rodrigo. For the previous two years the Anglo-Portuguese army had been more or less bottled up in Portugal, leaving the majority of the invaders free to proceed with the conquest of Spain. After a series of French victories, the only areas of the country still remaining in Patriot hands were the interior of Catalonia, the area around Cartagena and Alicante, Galicia, and the besieged wartime capital of Cádiz. Spanish losses were immense – 18,000 men in Extremadura, 8,000 at Lerida, 7,000 at Tortosa, 14,000 at Tarragona, 25,000 in the Levante; and, in Badajoz alone, 240,000 rations, 150 guns, 80,000 pounds of powder, 300,000 infantry cartridges, and two pontoon bridges.¹ The desperate situation that ensued was described to perfection in an article in the liberal newspaper, *El Redactor General*, in September 1812:

In this state, with communications between the provinces cut off, the government disconcerted, and our resources at an end, it was extremely difficult to organize a grand army worthy of the name; and thus it is that since the loss of the Andalucías, we have only had a few divisions operating in isolation without either concert with the others or a common plan, that neither have been, nor ever would have been, enough to recapture the capital and free a large extent of territory. Sometimes they have triumphed; they have caused the enemy incessant losses; they have occupied their armies with continuous marches; they have reanimated the enthusiasm of the people and contributed to the triumphs of the Allies, but ... they would never have achieved the considerable and lasting advantages ... that would have provided the government with the means of raising armies ... The guerrilla bands have also been most useful ... they have intercepted the enemy's ... correspondence and supplies, raised the people against their infamous yoke ... gained infinite victories against small French units, and ... kept them in continuous disquiet and incessant danger. But all this was insufficient to liberate the Fatherland; this mode of waging war ... was only good because it was impossible to adopt any other.²

As the writer implied, the continued resistance of the guerrillas could not make the slightest difference to Spain's situation. This is not to say that the guerrillas had not caused the invaders enormous difficulty, for the effect of their depredations is amply attested to by British and French sources alike.³ Yet, for all that, they could do nothing to halt the inexor-

¹ C. Oman, *A History of the Peninsular War* (6 vols., London, 1901-30), iii. 308, iv. 61-3, 239, 525, and v. 44-6, 67, 73.

² *El Redactor General*, 14 Sept. 1812, pp. 1808-10, H[emeroteca] M[unicipal de] M[adrid] 6/3.

³ For example, Sydenham to H. Wellesley, 10 Oct. 1812, W[ellington] P[apers] 1/361 [University of Southampton]; H. von Brandt, *The Two Minas and the Spanish Guerrillas* (London, 1825), p. 58; L. Suchet, *Memoirs of the War in Spain from 1808 to 1814* (2 vols., London, 1829), i. 56-7.

able advance of the French armies. Though visionaries among the liberals, in particular, saw the wholesale fomentation of mass insurrectionary warfare as the obvious route to the salvation of Spain, in reality, as Sir Thomas Graham wrote:

There are points where it is of infinite consequence to the cause that there shall be armies, for, useful and important as the services of the guerrillas are, that is not enough, let them be ever so much spread over the country. They never can stop the march of a considerable body of the enemy and protect a country as Blake has done lately in Murcia, and as O'Donnell has so successfully done in Catalonia.⁴

The same point may be found in an anonymous analysis of Spain's misfortunes published in Cádiz in 1810:

It is believed ... that our arms cannot match those of the French ... Hence the mistaken decision not to increase them but rather to rely solely on the use of *partidas* and the defence of cities ... a foolish plan for a war whose character on the contrary demands powerful forces capable of imposing themselves upon the enemy. We can number twenty-two actions lost on the field of battle, and yet to them are owed the preservation of a few provinces ... It is true that Madrid was defended heroically by her own population, and we know too that La Mancha has consumed many Frenchmen without the aid of troops. The expulsion of the French from Galicia by the peasantry alone could be added to these examples, and yet we see that Madrid is held by our enemies, that La Mancha in truth belongs to them, and that Galicia will return to them unless large armies are formed that can impede them. They quietly go on widening their dominions whilst we celebrate an uprising in a village or the action of some guerrilla band.⁵

The central problem facing the Spanish government was that to have any hope of evicting the French, it needed to have access to the 'sinews of war' in the form of men, money, and supplies. The relatively dense population of the peripheral provinces provided it with an adequate source of manpower, but the loss of so much of the national territory had deprived it of a considerable proportion of its domestic revenue. Isolated in their coastal enclaves, the Patriots were largely dependent upon help from outside. Until 1810, much assistance had been received from the Spanish possessions in South America, but the outbreak of the Latin American revolutions led to an enormous reduction in the shipments of bullion from this source. As for Great Britain – the only source

⁴ Graham to Bunbury, 27 Sept. 1810, W[ar] O[ffice] Records] 1/247, p. 629 [Public Record Office].

⁵ *Medios de salvar el reino* (Cádiz, 1810), pp. 8-9.

of financial support remaining to the Patriots – she was herself so short of specie that she could spare little for the demands of her allies.⁶

It was not even possible to apply such limited resources as were available to the Spanish government to the best possible end. The establishment of a temporary capital at Cádiz had been particularly unfortunate in its effects. With the government in a state of virtual bankruptcy, the powerful commercial community there was quickly able to use its control of the markets to establish a significant influence over government deliberations.⁷ In particular, it was able to force the Regency to comply with its demands that an attempt should be made to bring the rebellious colonies – which were, of course, the foundation of Cádiz's prosperity – to heel. Although it could certainly be argued that the restitution of order in the empire would in the long term bring a solution to Spain's financial problems, in the short term the result was that precious men and resources were diverted away from the Peninsula at a time when the French were, literally, hammering at the gates of the capital; in all, the total number of troops sent to America in the period 1811-13 was 12,784.⁸

Further resources were wasted by the chaotic nature of Spain's mobilization in 1808. With the collapse of the central government in the wake of the Dos de Mayo, the leadership of the Patriot cause had fallen into the hands of a network of independent provincial juntas and military dictatorships. Confronted by the need to expand the armed forces available to them as quickly as possible, and sometimes to improvise a new army altogether, the new authorities had simultaneously shown much interest in enjoying the fruits of office. The result was a veritable deluge of promotions and appointments.⁹ The resultant superabundance of officers could only be accommodated by increasing the numbers of headquarters at every level. Of the large numbers of new regiments that were created in the course of the uprising, many had only a single battalion. The potential number of regimental headquarters was therefore greatly increased, but only at the cost of a similar rise in the number of non-

⁶ H. Wellesley to Wellington, 28 April, 6 May 1812, WP 12/2/3, pp. 78-82; H. Wellesley to Castlereagh, 20 Jan. 1813, WP 1/364-4; Maclean to Bathurst, 5 Jan. 1813, WP 1/382-2; T. Anna, *Spain and the Loss of America* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1983), pp. 57, 82-3.

⁷ Graham to Liverpool, 24 July 1810, WO 1/247, pp. 460-2.

⁸ *El Español*, 30 Dec. 1811, p. 226, HMM AH4-2(713); Anna, *Loss of America*, pp. 101-2; H. Wellesley to Wellington, 11 April 1813, WP 1/368-3; report of minister of war to Cortes, 2 Oct. 1813, C[olección] D[ocumental del] F[raile], cccxlvi. 26-7 [Servicio Histórico Militar].

⁹ For example, P.A. Girón, *Recuerdos de la vida de Don Pedro Agustín Girón*, ed. F. Suárez and F. Berazluce (2 vols., Pamplona, 1978), i. 232; L. de Villalba, *Zaragoza en su segundo sitio* (Palma de Mallorca, 1811), p. 17.

combatants. Furthermore, because the new regiments had not been provided with any form of depot battalion, there was no means by which they could be kept up to strength.¹⁰ Moving up the military hierarchy, Spanish brigades and divisions tended to be smaller – and thus more numerous – than their counterparts elsewhere, whilst at the highest level of all still more headquarters were created by the survival of the territorial and field commands as separate entities (so that the captain-general of a province was not necessarily the commander of the field army stationed in that province). These headquarters were as burdensome as they were superfluous. As Wellington complained to the British ambassador at Cádiz, his brother Henry, ‘there are 1500 officers ... at Castaños’s headquarters at Valencia de Alcantara, each of whom has received more pay than those officers now doing duty with their regiments at Ciudad Rodrigo’.¹¹ Even then, for all the various sinecures and supernumerary positions, it proved impossible to find appointments for all the officers available. Those who were left without a post naturally gravitated to Cádiz, where they constituted a powerful interest group whose arrears of pay consumed a large percentage of the limited revenue received at Cádiz.¹²

The Spaniards were by no means unaware of these problems – from 1809 onwards, for example, repeated efforts were made to prevent the creation of any more new regiments and to limit the flow of patronage – but once inflicted the damage could not be remedied. The result was that the Patriot cause was caught in a vicious circle from which escape was almost impossible: although the territorial losses of 1810–12 had rendered the conduct of large-scale operations virtually impossible, it was only through such large-scale operations that the territorial losses could be recovered. The inability of either the guerrillas or the skeleton regular armies left to the Patriots to carry the war to the French can be illustrated by reference to the state of Catalonia following the fall of the vital fortress of Tarragona in June 1811. Tarragona was not only the only port of supply for the Spanish First Army and its principal point of refuge, but also the source of much of its revenue. Aside from the proceeds generated by its ‘vast trade in wines, brandy, fruits, hides, wool etc.’, the port carried on an entirely illicit but highly profitable trade with the inhabitants of Roussillon, exchanging the luxury goods so much

¹⁰ *Periódico Militar del Estado Mayor General*, 9 Jan. 1812, p. 5, CDF cxvi; F.X. Cabanes, *Ensayo acerca del sistema militar de Bonaparte* (Isla de León, 1811), p. 55; Castaños to Wellington, 12 March 1813, WP 1/382-3.

¹¹ Wellington to H. Wellesley, 14 May 1812, WP 12/1/5; Wellington to Liverpool, 6 May 1812, WP 1/347-1; Wellington to Carvajal, 4 Dec. 1812, WP 1/355-3.

¹² Graham to Liverpool, 6 Oct. 1810, WO 1/247, p. 641; memo of the duke of Wellington, 20 Nov. 1809, WO 1/242, pp. 387-97.

in demand in France for the cattle and grain needed by the Catalans. Graphic evidence of 'the vast value of the place and how much its loss would be felt' was provided by the 900 ships seen crowding its harbour by Lieutenant Daniel Robinson of the Royal Marines early in May 1811.¹³

The conquest of Tarragona by Marshal Suchet in June 1811 would therefore have been a catastrophe of the first order, even had it not cost the Spaniards 13-14,000 men, all the First Army's artillery, and almost all the stocks of ammunition contained in Catalonia. Although the Spaniards still had 11,000 troops assembled outside the city, they were paralysed by internal dissension and wholesale desertions.¹⁴ In the general confusion, the French went on to further successes, leaving the remnants of the First Army to withdraw into the mountainous interior, from where they were to harass the French for the next two years. The Patriots found that the most they could hope to do thereafter was simply to survive. Driven back into the poorest and most inhospitable parts of the province, and cut off from all support, the junta of Catalonia found itself unable to maintain more than a greatly reduced force of troops. Desertion was a constant problem, for the French were more than happy to let men who slipped back to their homes in the occupied territories live in peace: in March 1813, as many as 12-16,000 deserters were estimated to be living with their families in the Ampurdán alone.¹⁵ Nor was it possible to replace this heavy wastage by a constant supply of recruits: even had sufficient manpower been available, the populace was hostile to service in the regular army and either refused to enlist or deserted as soon as they could be pressed into service.¹⁶

For the rest of the war, the First Army therefore hovered around a strength of 7,000 men. Although these were all hardened veterans, who were ultimately reckoned to be the best troops in Spanish service, they were too few in number even to prevent French raids into the interior of the Patriot zone, let alone to take the offensive against the enemy. In

¹³ 'Diary of Lieutenant Daniel Robinson', 3 May 1811, MS in the possession of Mr R.N.W. Thomas of the dept. of archaeology, University of Southampton; C. Zehnpfenning, 'Memorandum on the state of Catalonia', 1 Jan. 1813, WP 1/368-1.

¹⁴ Junta of Catalonia to Cotton, 6 July 1811, WP 1/343-3; Codrington to Pellew, 12 July 1811, WP 1/343-3; Zehnpfenning to Wellington, 16 Feb. 1813, WP 1/366-6.

¹⁵ Petition of the Junta of Catalonia, 18 Jan. 1812, F[oreign] O[ffice Records] 72/133, pp. 72-3 [Public Record Office]; Zehnpfenning to Wellington, 9 Nov. 1812, WP 1/353; Adam to Murray, 24 March 1813, WP 1/368-1.

¹⁶ C. Zehnpfenning, 'Memorandum on the state of Catalonia', 1 Jan. 1813, WP 1/368-1; Zehnpfenning to Wellington, 9 Nov. 1812, WP 1/353; H. Wellesley to Wellington, 25 Nov. 1812, WP 1/353-7.

addition, they lacked the artillery necessary to capture French strong-points, or the cavalry required to operate in the coastal plain.¹⁷ In theory, the regulars could be supplemented by the *somatenes*, an irregular local militia dating from the seventeenth century who could be called to arms in the event of war, but so unreliable were these troops when it came to regular military operations that the Catalan commanders were ultimately forced to abandon them as a factor in their calculations.¹⁸ Both British and Spanish observers were therefore agreed that the only thing that could remedy Catalonia's situation was an increase in the size of its regular forces. As this in turn required the reconquest of more territory from the French, the only way forward appeared to be for a powerful British expeditionary force to be sent to the province.¹⁹

What was true of Catalonia was equally true of the rest of Spain. Small Spanish field armies under such generals as Ballesteros and Santocildes constantly hung about the frontiers of the French zone of occupation and took the offensive whenever they were given the opportunity, but the French had only to concentrate a field force against them to force their retirement to places of refuge beyond the reach of the invaders. In the same way, although the guerrillas harassed the French incessantly, they could rarely hope to capture an enemy garrison, and never to retain one once they had captured it. On the 'other side of the hill', of course, the picture was equally frustrating: whenever the invaders concentrated against the Spanish regulars, they exposed their rear to the depredations of the guerrillas, just as the prosecution of the struggle against the *partidas* provided Ballesteros and his colleagues with the opportunity for fresh raids of their own. Faced by the unique Spanish combination of regular and irregular resistance, the French could still have overcome their opponents, but only if they had had access to sufficient troops simultaneously to provide garrisons for every square inch of conquered territory, to organize strike forces against the guerrillas, and to contain all the allied field armies, including, of course, the one commanded by Wellington. Every step that the invaders advanced therefore necessitated a corresponding influx of replacements and reinforcements from France if they were not to become dangerously overstretched.

Early in 1812 this equation suddenly became unbalanced when the French conquest of Valencia coincided with the requirements of the

¹⁷ Adam to J. Murray, 24 March 1813, WP 1/368-1; Clinton to Wellington, 18 Jan. 1814, WP 1/393; Zehnpfenning to Wellington, 6 April 1813, WP 1/368-2; Clinton to Wellington, 28 Dec. 1813, WP 1/380-3.

¹⁸ Zehnpfenning to Wellington, 30 Nov. 1812, WP 1/353-8; Copons to Bentinck, 8 Aug. 1813, WP 1/374-1.

¹⁹ Zehnpfenning to Wellington, 17 March 1813, WP 1/367-4; Eroles to Wellington, 5 Feb. 1813, WP 1/367-10.

invasion of Russia. Whereas the former demanded that more troops should be sent to the Peninsula, the latter led Napoleon to withdraw 27,000 men for service with the Grande Armée. On the Portuguese frontier, Wellington had been waiting for just such an opportunity, and immediately struck to break the stalemate. Within eighteen months most of Spain had been liberated, thereby freeing the government from the vicious circle into which it had fallen in 1810. In theory, as soon as a substantial amount of territory had been reconquered from the French, the Patriot leaders should have been able to deploy an ever-increasing number of troops in Wellington's support. Yet nothing of the kind occurred, the Spanish armies remaining as threadbare and ill organized as ever. In view of the chaotic picture presented by Patriot Spain, this was hardly surprising. The liberated territories had been stripped of many of their resources, whilst they continued to be infested by bands of guerrillas who began to plunder the civilian population and the baggage trains of the allied army with as much enthusiasm as they had previously preyed upon the French.²⁰ Nor were the inhabitants particularly co-operative, many of them showing a marked antipathy to service in the regular army.²¹ In displaying such an attitude, they were reflecting the undercurrent of anti-militarism that had characterized Patriot Spain throughout the war, and had now become a favourite theme of the liberals who dominated the Cortes of Cádiz. Convinced that standing armies were the inveterate enemies of liberty, the liberals insisted on regarding the central aim of military reform to be not the creation of an efficient and powerful Spanish army, but the harmonization of the 'military constitution' with that of Spain as a whole.²² Their radicalism with respect to other issues, such as the Church and the powers of the monarchy, having in the meantime precipitated the emergence of an ultra-conservative party committed to the preservation of the old regime, the political life of the capital came to be characterized by an atmosphere of suspicion and intrigue. Away from Cádiz, meanwhile, a succession of petty military dictators established personal fiefdoms from which

²⁰ Escobeda to Wellington, WP 1/367-3; *El Conciso*, 1 April 1813, pp. 3-5, HMM AH2-5 (351); *El Redactor General*, 2 April 1813, p. 2645, HMM 6/3; Guillén to Wellington, 27 Feb. 1813, WP 1/382-3; 'Manifiesto de los Leales Castellanos', 9 Nov. 1812, WP 1/364-4; Espoz y Mina to Castaños, 12 March 1813, WP 1/368; Wellington to Hill, 1 Dec. 1812, WP 1/355-1; Beresford to Wellington, 4 Feb. 1813, WP 1/366-3; Heydeck to Wellington, 15 Nov. 1813, WP 1/382-10.

²¹ For example, Abisbal to Wellington, 30 Jan. 1813, WP 1/364-7; Wellington to Lacy, 27 Nov. 1813, WP 1/381-2; G. Hennell, *A Gentleman Volunteer: The Letters of George Hennell from the Peninsular War, 1812-13*, ed. M. Glover (London, 1979), p. 51.

²² For example, *El Tribuno del Pueblo Español*, 2 March 1813, pp. 133-43, HMM AH1-4 (121).

they defied the authority of the Regency.²³ Overcoming these problems would have taxed the abilities of the most dynamic regime, but that was not a description that could ever have been applied to the Cádiz government. Not only were the regents and their ministers very often no better than nonentities, but they presided over an administrative system that had been subjected to the utmost disruption and was no longer capable of functioning effectively. As if this were not enough, they were also in thrall to the Cortes, whose deputies overthrew no fewer than three different regencies between October 1810 and March 1813.²⁴ Spain, in short, was totally paralysed.

It only remains for us to examine why the Spanish army should have been unable to prevent the débâcle that afflicted Spain after 1810. British writers have generally explained the army's failings by referring either to the supposed iniquities of the erstwhile royal favourite, Manuel de Godoy, or to what Arthur Bryant calls 'the chaotic antiquity that overhung the Spanish army like a cloud of garlic'.²⁵ Neither explanation is of any service. Though by no means a paragon of virtue, Godoy had consistently sought to effect a far-reaching programme of military reform. As for the claim that the army was outdated, its problems did not stem from its obsolescence but from its novelty. Out of the national uprising of 1808 sprang a revolutionary army, composed largely of a mass of raw levies and volunteers in the style of the armies of the French Revolution. However, whereas in France it had been possible to graft the patriotic rabble on to the secure basis provided by the military institutions of the *ancien régime*, in Spain a number of factors coincided to prevent such a development. On the outbreak of war, large parts of the country had possessed very few regular troops, so that their new rulers had been forced to create new armies from scratch. Even where this was not the case, the provincial juntas still preferred to form new regiments of their own. Popular attitudes were also influential in the emergence of these units, for pre-war prejudice against service in the regular army

²³ *El Articulista Español*, 13 Jan. 1813, pp. 51-3, HMM AH13-6(2449); *El Redactor General*, 30 Oct. 1812, pp. 2007-8, HMM 6/3; *ibid.*, 12 Nov. 1812, p. 2062; *ibid.*, 23 Dec. 1812, p. 2232; *El Conciso*, 5 Jan. 1813, p. 8, HMM AH2-5(348); Conde de Toreno, *Historia del levantamiento, guerra y revolución de España* (3 vols., Paris, 1833), ii. 135.

²⁴ Wellington to Bathurst, 27 Jan. 1813, WP 1/365-3; *Indagación de las causas de los malos sucesos de nuestros ejércitos y medios de removerlos* (Cádiz, 1811), pp. 35-40; J.A. Canga Argüelles, *Apuntes para la historia de la hacienda pública de España en el año de 1811* (Cádiz, 1811), p. 26; A. von Schepeler, *Histoire de la révolution d'Espagne et de Portugal ainsi que de la guerre qui en résulte* (Liège, 1829), iii. 16-18, 25.

²⁵ A. Bryant, *Years of Victory* (London, 1945), p. 282; D. Gates, *The Spanish Ulcer: A History of the Peninsular War* (London, 1986), p. 13; Oman, *Peninsular War*, i. 96.

was still much in evidence.²⁶ Finally, as for the regulars themselves, a number of units disintegrated in the course of the uprising, and those which did not were sometimes starved of recruits. Even where the gaps in their ranks were made up, they had often been so badly under strength that they came to differ very little from the regiments of new creation.

Although the remnants of the Bourbon army played a leading role in the first campaigns of the Peninsular War, they did not form the basis of the armed forces of Patriot Spain, but were actually subsumed into them. As a result Spain was forced to rely, in the most literal sense, on the 'People-in-Arms': after 1808 her forces were composed of masses of poorly trained infantrymen organized into regiments which not only contained a very high proportion of raw recruits, but were often headed by officers as inexperienced as the men under their command. Yet armed civilians were no match for a regular army. The ability of such troops to perform the complicated manoeuvres of the Napoleonic battlefield was almost non-existent. The best that could be expected of them was that they would hold their ground if they were placed in a favourable defensive position; every Spanish victory, including Bailén, Alcañiz, Tamames, and San Marcial, had conformed to this pattern.²⁷

Even on the defensive, the Spanish armies were alarmingly prone to disaster. There was never any guarantee that the raw levies would not dissolve in panic at some sudden shock, as in the case of the famous rout on the eve of the battle of Talavera. At the same time, experience in the rest of Europe had demonstrated that the three-deep line was extremely vulnerable to the French infantry column unless it was screened by large numbers of skirmishers and supported by a numerous artillery. Neither condition could be met by the Spanish armies. Because their soldiers lacked the special training that was required to function effectively in open order, the Spaniards deployed very few skirmishers, whilst the few they did have were notoriously ineffective.²⁸ As for the artillery, logistical difficulties prevented the Spanish from bringing more than a limited number of guns into the field. As the army did not have its own artillery train, all the necessary conductors and draught animals had to be hired from the civilian population, but money was always short and suitable animals increasingly few and far between. At the same time, the number

²⁶ For example, Doyle to Castlereagh, 28 Aug. 1808, WO 1/227, p. 215; Carroll to Castlereagh, 16 Feb. 1809, WO 1/241, p. 391; A. Alcalá Galiano, *Memorias* (2 vols., Madrid, 1886), i. 202-3.

²⁷ Wellington to H. Wellesley, 22 May 1812, WP 12/1/4; Wellington to Liverpool, 23 May 1811, WO 1/249, p. 486; Wellington to H. Wellesley, 1 Nov. 1812, WP 1/351-9.

²⁸ *El Redactor General*, 25 Dec. 1811, HMM 6/3; J. Moscoso, *Avisos militares al Ejército de la Izquierda para la presente guerra* (Tarragona, 1809), pp. 7-8.

of guns that were actually available was steadily reduced by the tendency of the civilian drivers to abscond with their animals at the first hint of danger, leaving their pieces to be captured by the enemy.²⁹

The vulnerability of the Spaniards was redoubled by the weakness of their cavalry, which was always liable to be few in numbers and poorly mounted, thanks to the effect of generations of mule breeding on Spain's equine population.³⁰ Outnumbered and outclassed, it was soon apparent that the cavalry had no hope of matching their French counterparts; thus they became afflicted with an inferiority complex that on battlefield after battlefield led them to turn and run without the slightest attempt at resistance. Yet the open nature of the *meseta* of central Spain, where most of the major battles of the war took place, made a strong force of mounted troops doubly important. Deprived of this support, the Spaniards experienced repeated defeats (although it has to be said that their chances were not improved by the quality of many of their commanders). Whether on the offensive or the defensive, the infantry generally fought with ample courage and sometimes even temporarily got the better of their French counterparts. On their flanks, the cavalry would almost invariably have given way, however, leaving the unfortunate foot-soldiers to be ridden down from the flanks and rear, and killed or captured in their thousands.

Such defeats always entailed enormous casualties, the loss of much baggage and *matériel*, and the complete dispersion of the surviving troops, large numbers of whom invariably seized the opportunity to return to their homes or to join the guerrillas. After every lost campaign, the armies therefore had to be made good with fresh drafts of raw levies who were as vulnerable to disaster as their predecessors, especially as the endless succession of defeats precluded any chance of building up an adequate force of cavalry or artillery. The only solution would have been for the Spaniards to adopt a wholly defensive strategy, keeping their forces back behind the mountains surrounding the French-held Castiles. Yet the Junta Central that ruled Spain between 1808 and 1810 could not have adopted such a course. On the one hand, thanks to the irresponsible behaviour of the patriotic press, which was generally as ignorant as it was vociferous, public opinion was convinced that Spain ought

²⁹ Doyle to Castlereagh, 2 Aug. 1808, WO 1/227, p. 87; Leith to Castlereagh, 13 Sept. 1808, WO 1/229, p. 206; G. García de la Cuesta, *Manifiesto que presenta a la Europa el Capitán General Don Gregorio García de la Cuesta sobre sus operaciones militares y políticas desde el mes de junio de 1808 hasta el 12 de agosto de 1809* (Palma de Mallorca, 1811), p. 35; Wellington to Bathurst, 18 Oct. 1812, WP 1/351-5.

³⁰ M. de Godoy, *Memorias de Don Manuel de Godoy* (6 vols., Madrid, 1836-46), i. 292-5; Doyle to H. Wellesley, 22 Oct. 1812, WP 1/367-4.

to be able to repeat the – grossly exaggerated – triumphs of 1808. On the other hand, the junta was constantly threatened by a series of plots against its rule. If these were to be outfaced, and its authority consolidated – the only means, it must be added, by which it could have satisfied the constant British demands for political and administrative reform – the junta needed to increase its tarnished prestige. It therefore had no option but to hazard its limited resources in the ever more frantic search for military victory which was ultimately to produce the catastrophe of 1810.

Paradoxical though it might appear, the outbreak of guerrilla warfare may in some respects have hastened Spain's prostration. By joining the guerrillas, Spaniards could avoid the brutal discipline, starvation, and defeat associated with the regular army, whilst yet striking a blow against the French; they could also hope to remain in the neighbourhood of their homes and thus watch over their property and their families.³¹ But, above all, the guerrillas were associated with plunder. In 1809 the beleaguered Junta Central had sought to stimulate resistance by decreeing that all money and personal effects taken from the French should be the property of whoever had seized them.³² The result was that the guerrillas became firmly associated with the idea of personal gain.³³ Many recruits who might otherwise have joined the regular army therefore flocked to the guerrillas, whilst the latter sometimes imposed a conscription of their own and occasionally even swelled their ranks by kidnapping isolated groups of regulars.³⁴ Nor was this the only manner in which the guerrillas undermined the regular army, seizing horses that were desperately needed by the hopelessly outnumbered Spanish cavalry, eating up resources that might have maintained large numbers of regular troops, and providing the ill-used Spanish soldiery with an ever-present haven of refuge.³⁵ It could, of course, be argued that the resources devoured by the guerrillas would otherwise have fallen into the hands of the French, as would certainly have been the case once the

³¹ F.X. Cabanes, *Historia de las operaciones del Ejército de Cataluña* (2 vols., Tarazona, 1809), i. 48; Schepeler, *Histoire de la révolution*, iii. 171.

³² *Real Orden*, 25 Feb. 1809, *cit. Diario de Badajoz*, 10 March 1809, pp. 261-2, HMM AH14-1 (2457).

³³ For example, Castaños to Wellington, 27 June 1813, WP 1/371-4; Schepeler, *Histoire de la révolution*, ii. 430.

³⁴ Mahy to Del Parque, 6 Oct. 1809, A[rchivo de la] G[uerra de la] I[ndependencia] 5/8/4-16bis [Servicio Histórico Militar]; Bonnet to Caffarelli, 31 Aug. 1811, WO 1/261, p. 500; La Romana to Mahy, 25 July 1809, AGI 5/8/2-1.

³⁵ For example, Castaños to Wellington, 30 Aug. 1812, WP 1/349-7; Sydenham to Wellesley, 10 Oct. 1812, WP 1/361; Junta Superior de Burgos to Wellington, 9 June 1813, WP 1/371-2; *Apuntaciones militares para la actual guerra* (Cádiz, 1811), p. 31.

invaders had occupied most of the country. Until the end of 1809, however, it is apparent that the Spaniards could still have hoped to prevent such an eventuality, and further that spontaneous popular resistance was in some respects a major obstacle in the way of the Junta Central's success.

Between them, defeat and desertion caused the junta's armies to dwindle away almost to nothing, and thus enabled the French to overrun the irreplaceable resources of Andalucía in January 1810. The Spaniards continued to defend themselves with unabated heroism, but they had no further hope of driving the French from Spain. Instead, the most that they could do was to pave the way for their liberation at the hands of the Anglo-Portuguese army. For example, at the very time that renegades from amongst the guerrillas were causing such havoc in the liberated areas of Spain in early 1813, their cousins who remained behind the French lines were tying down a large proportion of the troops who should have been containing Wellington behind the Portuguese frontier. Yet whereas the Spaniards had initially borne the brunt of the struggle against the French, they were now reduced to the position of mere auxiliaries, a fact which they themselves were effectively forced to recognize when they offered the supreme command of their forces to Wellington in September 1812. The cost of this humiliation should not be underestimated. Having waged an incessant struggle against the French, and honestly believing it to have sown the seeds of Napoleon's downfall, the Spaniards felt they were now being cheated of the glories to which they were entitled by their sacrifice.⁸⁶ Militarily sensible though it undoubtedly was, Wellington's decision to leave behind the bulk of the Spanish forces when he invaded France in October 1813 could not have been more wounding. Viewed in this light, the troubles with which the Duke found himself beset as commander-in-chief of the Spanish army become far more understandable. Ungrateful and obstructive though the Spaniards may have seemed, they had a genuine grievance and certainly did not merit the disdain and condescension with which they have been treated by generations of British military historians.

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⁸⁶ For example, *El Español Libre*, 4 May 1813, FO 72/144, 162-84.