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Author(s): Thomas D. Veve

Source: *The International History Review*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Feb., 1989), pp. 98-108

Published by: The International History Review

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40105959>

Accessed: 01/12/2009 03:25

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THOMAS D. VEVE

Wellington and the Army of Occupation in France, 1815-1818

WITH THE VICTORY of the duke of Wellington and Marshal Blücher at Waterloo and the second abdication of Napoleon, Louis XVIII was again restored to the French throne. The Hundred Days had presented the allies with the problem of ensuring his position, for though Napoleon was now in exile under guard at St. Helena, the loyalty of the French army remained in question. The allies were not to be satisfied with battlefield victory as they had been in 1814; it was now necessary for the stability of Europe that France be restricted to her own borders. Therefore, the allies again turned to Louis XVIII because they felt he alone could keep France from interfering in the internal affairs of other states, and, in return, agreed to establish a multinational army to occupy France and provide him with the time necessary to establish his rule. This essay will review the success of the military occupation of France by the European powers and the role of the duke of Wellington as commander of the allied forces.

Establishment of the Allied Army

In July 1815, the British prime minister, the earl of Liverpool, proclaiming the 'magnanimous policy' of 1814 a failure, suggested that the allies should station an army of occupation in France.¹ In August, the duke of Wellington presented the detailed proposal for an army of occupation on which the allies ultimately based their decision. Although blaming Europe's woes on Napoleon, Wellington argued that the French had never fully supported him; if they had, the allied armies would never have been able to enter Paris a mere two weeks after Waterloo. Welling-

¹ Liverpool to Castlereagh, 15 July 1815, *Supplementary Despatches and Memoranda of Field Marshal Arthur Duke of Wellington*, ed. 2d duke of Wellington (15 vols., London, 1858-72) [hereafter *WSD*], xi. 32-3.

ton therefore urged moderation, fearing that harsh demands would put at risk the allies' aims of ending the French Revolution, ensuring their security, and reducing their military establishments. An occupation force, situated at strategic points and paid by the French government, would allow the French people time to adapt to peace while Louis XVIII strengthened his position and built an army loyal to himself. The duke favoured a concentrated position in northern France, controlling the French fortresses with an army of about 100,000 men, which should remain in place until the French had paid whatever reparations the allies might demand.²

Article V of the definitive treaty between France and the allies, signed on 20 November 1815, stated clearly the allies' determination to maintain peace. They agreed to set up a multinational occupation force of 150,000 men to be positioned along France's frontiers. The allied sovereigns were to pick the commander, and each of them was to provide 30,000 men, including infantry, cavalry, and artillery units. Additionally, Bavaria was expected to contribute 10,000 men, while Denmark, Saxony, Hanover, and Württemberg each provided 5,000. The French government was to maintain these troops, supplying their lodging, forage, provisions, and 50 million francs annually for their equipment, pay, and clothing. The troops were to be positioned along France's north-eastern frontier between Calais and Switzerland. They were not to be used to police or administer France, nor were they to interfere with the king's authority. They were expected to remain five years, but the allies promised to review the position after three.³

The allies named Wellington commander of the occupation army, stating, 'The Allied sovereigns trust the known prudence and discretion of the Duke of Wellington in full confidence he will not act without previously notifying the French King.' He was to be the liaison between the French government and the allies, with full authority to employ his units as he thought best. Each power was to maintain control and discipline of its own forces, under Wellington's overall authority; allied commanders were to report to him and obey his decisions on the disposition of these troops.⁴

² Wellington to Castlereagh, 11 Aug. 1815, *The Dispatches of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington*, ed. Lt.-Col. Gurwood (13 vols., London, 1834-9) [hereafter *WD*], xii. 596-600.

³ Military Convention to the Peace of Paris, [Great Britain, House of Commons.] *Sessional Papers*, 1816, xvii. 13; Additional Paper Relative to Occupation of a Military Line in France by Allied Forces, 22 Oct. 1815, xvii. 633.

⁴ *Sessional Papers*, 1816, xvii. 633; Allied Ministers to the duc de Richelieu, 20 Nov. 1815, *The General Orders of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington in the Campaigns of 1809 to 1818*, ed. Lt.-Col. Gurwood (London, 1837) [hereafter *WGO*], p. 527-9.

Wellington distributed the four major contingents along the French frontier as follows: in the east nearest the German Confederation were the Austrians, headquartered at Colmar under the command of Baron Frimont; the Prussians were at Sedan under the count de Zeithen; the Russians at Maubeuge under Baron Voronzow; and the British, under Wellington himself at Cambrai. The smaller forces were interspersed among the main contingents.⁵

To prevent incidents between the army of occupation and the reconstituting French army, a demilitarized zone was created also running from the Channel to Switzerland parallel to the zone of occupation. From the department of the Somme south-east through Amiens, Reims, and Nancy, it turned south at Sarrebourg into the departments of Vosges and Upper Saone. Strangely enough, the French were also allowed to establish twenty-four small garrisons within the allied sector. These garrisons numbered in size from 100 to 3,000 men and were located in cities such as Calais, Boulogne, Metz, and Strasbourg.⁶

The British contingent was organized into a cavalry corps and an infantry corps. The cavalry, commanded by Lord Combermere, consisted of three brigades, each with two squadrons, and one troop of Royal Horse Artillery. Lord Hill commanded the British infantry, which was formed into three divisions of three brigades each. Each division was assigned one brigade of Royal Horse Artillery, with another artillery brigade available as a corps reserve. The First Division, located at Cambrai, was commanded by Sir Lowry Cole; the Second, at St. Pol, by Sir Henry Clinton; and the Third, at Valenciennes, by Sir Charles Colville. The British had twenty-five veteran infantry battalions available for action.⁷

Unit Inspection

The British held general inspections of each battalion in France every six months in accordance with their established army procedure. Normally conducted by the brigade commanders, these inspections were designed to test the capability of both units and officers, and to review the records of courts martial. The performance of most units generally met with approval, as one may see from the general report compiled by Wellington every six months based on all the individual reports he had received. The duke most often recorded favourable opinions, limiting

⁵ State of Allied Army, June-July 1816, W[ar] O[ffice Records] 37/12/94 [George Scovill MSS, Public Record Office].

⁶ *The Times*, 25 Nov. 1815, p. 2.

⁷ Weekly Returns of the State of the Forces, 1 April 1815-11 Oct. 1818, W[ellington] P[apers] 9/7/2 [University of Southampton].

derogatory remarks to the deficiencies of particular officers and to the need for improved unit training.

The Second Battalion, Coldstream Guards, was one unit that always received favourable reviews. During the first inspection of 1816, its commander was praised for his concern with troop discipline, always a Coldstream priority. He frequently resorted to court martial, usually for drunkenness, a problem stemming from the boredom of occupation. Another common problem was disrespect to officers and NCOs, which court martial figures from later inspections show gradually declined, along with drunkenness which fell off to a marked degree. Flogging was this battalion's punishment of choice at a time when other regiments were remitting lashes in favour of confinement. Nevertheless, the training posture of the battalion remained excellent, special attention being given to the training of subalterns. Training movements were stated to have been performed with precision, and formations executed with dispatch.

The reviews of one Irish unit, First Battalion, 88th Regiment of Foot, however, were normally unfavourable. In 1816 it was reported that its field officers were not concerned with the training of subalterns, that they were not enthusiastic in the performance of their duties, merely meeting minimum requirements, and that NCOs were poorly trained and insubordinate. Prejudice on the part of the inspector was clearly evident: 'They are not very well drilled, nor very sober, and when well looked after, are tolerably well behaved.' Theft and drunkenness were the primary disciplinary problems in 1816, and when drunkenness fell off in subsequent inspections, it gave way to higher absenteeism.

One cavalry brigade commander, General Richard Hussay Vivian, the best example for our purpose, found severe discipline problems in the 12th Light Dragoons, all of whose six-month court martial totals, save one, exceeded twenty. The squadron commander, who was normally away from the unit serving with parliament, enjoyed the support of Vivian, who felt the unit's problems lay with the privates, 'by no means a good body of men' because of whom 'this regiment is not very good'. The acting commander he judged incapable of leading cavalry, and the squadron – then in the process of conversion into a lancer unit – he estimated had at least one hundred men who would never make good lancers owing to their poor physique. Much training was needed before the unit could ever be considered satisfactory in use of the lance.

Conversely, the inspection reports for the First Battalion, 39th Regiment of Foot placed responsibility for most of the unit's problems at the feet of its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Sturt. In May 1816, the

brigade commander, General Brisbane, found Sturt incapable of keeping discipline and 'without the slightest claim to intelligence', and later credited him only with knowing enough to accept advice from his subordinates.⁸ When eventually removed from his command in 1817, Sturt appealed to the duke of York, commander-in-chief of the British army, who reinstated him rather than force him to sell his commission or retire on half-pay.

Training

Troop training has always been an important objective of any military commander, and the British high command in France was no exception. Conducting training was often difficult due to the dearth of fallow fields, and to bad weather. The dispersion of units, which found regiments occasionally broken down into platoon or smaller elements, only added to the problem. Wellington was deeply concerned with training and normally issued instructions, based on the most recent conflict, on what manoeuvres he wanted practised: marching in line, formation of squares, or deployment into battle formation from the march. Rightly establishing training as a command responsibility, he insisted that, whatever the difficulties, units should train several days a week, beginning each time with fundamentals.⁹

In the cavalry, General Vivian, though well aware of the limited training facilities, refused to allow them to become an excuse for idleness. Though 'ready to make allowances for all the inconveniences arising from the circumstances under which the Regiments are placed', he was not willing to 'make allowances for any neglect of those means which are still within the power of commanding and troop officers'. As did Wellington, he issued guidelines for efficient training regardless of limitations. Officers were required to master cavalry fundamentals, men to go back to the basics. Vivian's cavalry had orders to get out of their barracks and train at least three days a week; those who rode poorly were required to attend riding school.¹⁰

The highlight of training was Wellington's annual autumn review held on the plains near Denain. It provided the means to assess the quality of the various allied contingents, success of training, and to conduct large-scale manoeuvres against opposing forces. While the review was

⁸ WO 27/137 through WO 27/145. These volumes contain all of the twice annual inspections for the regiments serving in France.

⁹ *WGO*, 28 June 1816, p. 514.

¹⁰ Letter book, 2d Brigade Cavalry, 8 March 1816 and 26 June 1816, general cavalry orders, 1 April 1817 and 17 June 1817; brigade order book, 5 April 1817, Lt.-Gen. Richard Hussay Vivian MSS [National Army Museum, London].

not designed to intimidate the French with allied capabilities, it certainly must have made them aware of the power available to Wellington.

Wellington's staff was responsible for planning the training, moving the troops to the chosen site, and conducting the actual manoeuvres, including the activities of the opposing force. Included were skirmishing, cavalry screens and charges, river crossings, passage of lines, and retirement of forces; the 1817 review, for example, was designed as a repeat of the battle of Waterloo, and included a cavalry charge against infantry squares. Each autumn the final event was a pass in review for attending allied dignitaries, which in 1818 after the conference of Aix-la-Chapelle meant the Russian tsar and the king of Prussia.¹¹

Apparently the troops did not find the fall reviews as exhilarating as did the command. They complained of the day-long rains, the long wait for the arrival of invited guests, and the artificiality of the exercises. Some are known to have abandoned their equipment and tossed their weapons in the mud.

This sham fighting, without prize or glory,
was to the poor soldiers not exciting,
They droop'd, and fell as fast I can assure ye,
as if they had been really fighting.¹²

Relations with the French

Like all military forces, the allied army was plagued with problems such as drunkenness, assault, robbery, and desertion. A degree of antipathy was to be expected from the French towards their occupiers, thus the British contingent worked hard to maintain good relations. Failure to do so could have brought on internal unrest, a threat both to the army and to Louis XVIII.

Wellington, who wanted his officers to be personally involved in maintaining discipline and good relations with the French, regularly reminded them to visit their men at irregular intervals to make sure they were present for duty and conducting themselves in an orderly fashion. Commanders were instructed to submit daily reports to their superiors concerning any incidents or complaints.¹³ Wellington himself took personal action when necessary to the point of turning several of

¹¹ Transcript of a memo on his uncle's service as a conductor of stores in the Waterloo campaign and the army of occupation in France, W.B. Whitman MSS, p. 120 [National Army Museum]; WO 37/12/96; Sir Lowry Cole MSS, P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice MSS] 30/43/3.

¹² *The Historical Memoirs of the XVIII (Princess of Wales's Own) Hussars*, ed. Col. Harold Malet (London, 1907), p. 180.

¹³ 26 Nov. 1817, and 10 April 1818, *WGO*, pp. 488, 497.

his own soldiers over to local authorities for making seditious remarks about Louis XVIII. He also authorized the payment of rewards for the return of convicted deserters. During the occupation, over two hundred men under sentence of court martial or commutation of punishment were returned to England. In one case involving arson, a British soldier was acquitted, but as Wellington thought him guilty, he obtained restitution for the townspeople. In another case, though Wellington found that the fire had been started by one of his soldiers, because the townspeople did nothing to minimize the damage, he sought no payment to them.¹⁴

Vivian took the same line with his cavalry officers. Cabaret proprietors were ordered to close their doors early to locally quartered soldiers to hold down excessive drinking, because 'nothing can be more prejudicial to the character of the British state – or the Regiment' than public drunkenness. Officers were required to meet with the mayors of nearby towns to discuss mutual problems; were directed to investigate all complaints lodged against their men; and were themselves forbidden to stay outside their assigned cantonments without authorization. Troops were warned that they would be made to pay for any damage they did because 'private property must be considered as sacred in this country as it is in England'. Vivian reminded his men to consider what their feelings would be should their homeland be occupied by foreign troops.¹⁵

Vivian took decisive action when required. After an incident in the village of Longvilliers in 1818, in which cavalymen of the 18th Hussars had drawn their swords during a fight with local townsmen, Vivian ordered the entire force to be replaced immediately. Even when it appeared to him that the French were deliberately trying to embarrass his men, he consistently attempted to solve problems and improve relations. All incidents were investigated by officers who spoke French, in an attempt to reduce any feelings of distrust on the part of local inhabitants.¹⁶

The Troop Reduction of 1817

In late 1816, the French began to call for a reduction of the occupation force, to save the expense of its support; Louis XVIII felt also that it

¹⁴ Wellington to Bathurst, 15 Feb. 1816, WO 1/209/17; Wellington to Bathurst, 5 Sept. 1818, WO 1/215; Wellington to Bathurst, 5 May 1816, WO 1/210/28; 11 Jan. 1816, *WGO*, p. 498; Return of men sent to England under sentence of court martial or commutation of punishment, WP 9/7/1.

¹⁵ Brigade order book, 2 June 1816, 1 July 1816, 22 April 1817, and 28 May 1818, Vivian MSS.

¹⁶ Brigade order book, 22 May 1818, and general cavalry orders, 20 Dec. 1815, Vivian MSS.

would increase the popularity of his regime. Once again, Wellington was expected to decide whether the allies should agree. The Austrian ambassador at Paris, Baron de Vincent, was advised to follow Wellington's lead, and the Russian representative, Pozzo di Borgo, was ordered by the tsar to vote 'according to the opinion of His Grace'. Similarly, the British ambassador, Charles Stuart, was instructed to 'be guided wholly by His Grace's opinion'.¹⁷

No more than any other commander did Wellington want to see a reduction in the strength of his force which might threaten achievement of the assigned mission, but he recognized his overriding responsibility to reach a decision acceptable to all Europe. His review of the question therefore began with a restatement of the rationale behind the creation of the army. Aware that the allied army of occupation met a need of the French monarch as well as of European security, he was initially opposed to its reduction. He saw, however, that by 1817 the chamber of deputies had become more loyal to the crown and had done much to restore order in France. Keeping the occupation force at 150,000 would only add to Louis XVIII's financial difficulties which in turn would increase French resistance to the allied presence. For these reasons, Wellington recommended a reduction in strength of 30,000 within one year, each contingent to lose one-fifth of its size, and the French provisioning requirement to be reduced accordingly. However, he rejected the suggestion that the reduction be achieved by the complete withdrawal of the smaller allied contingents.¹⁸

Wellington's recommendations were adopted, and the allied troop reduction took effect on 1 April 1817. The duke gave warning, however, that he would not agree to any further reduction in troop strength during the occupation. Even if tension between the French and the allies did not now diminish, a further cut was out of the question, as it would weaken the army too much.¹⁹

The Allied Withdrawal

The allies had agreed in 1815 that they would review the need for the occupation after three years. The French sought the earliest possible evacuation date, and the Parisian papers reported that Wellington had agreed to withdraw the force as early as August 1818. The London

¹⁷ Stuart to Castlereagh, 12 Dec. 1816, F[oreign] O[ffice Records] 146/11/471 [Public Record Office]; Cathcart to Stuart, 31 Dec. 1816, Londonderry MSS D/LO/C-49 [Durham County Record Office]; Stuart to Castlereagh, 22 Aug. 1816, FO 146/10/314; Castlereagh to Stuart, 6 Sept. 1816, FO 146/13/81.

¹⁸ Wellington memo, 8 Jan. 1817, FO 146/16/10, and 6 Feb. 1817, FO 146/16/50.

¹⁹ Wellington memo, 8 Jan. 1817, FO 146/16/10.

Times had no objection to withdrawal, provided it had been agreed upon by all the allies. The major holdup appeared to be a satisfactory plan for the payment of French reparations.²⁰

Again the allies looked to Wellington, who posed four questions to be answered as a prerequisite to withdrawal. Did the circumstances that the treaty of Paris sought to achieve now exist? Should the allies demand the sums scheduled to be paid to them during the fourth and fifth years of the occupation? What alternative barrier to French expansionism would replace the army of occupation? And what would be the effect of withdrawal on the diplomatic relations between the allies and the French? Wellington replied to his own first question that if Louis XVIII and the French legislature and its political parties all wanted the army of occupation to leave, then keeping it in place would undermine rather than prop up the new regime.

In answer to his second question, Wellington admitted that the withdrawal of the army of occupation would entail some risk of default, but assumed that the French government had too great a stake in maintaining its credibility to provoke allied retaliation by bad faith. As the French had already contracted with Barings to raise the money they owed, he recommended a short payment period to settle the reparations issue quickly.

Wellington thought some sort of military standby was needed to replace the army of occupation, but not the corps of observers in the Netherlands which had previously been rejected. The German Confederation, which could field an army of 300,000 very quickly, while the French standing force numbered only 80,000, would better suit the allies' purpose. An added deterrent was the Prussian presence on the west bank of the Rhine. As long as no real danger existed, Wellington felt any obviously preventive measure would only discredit the allies, and within a few years, the completed reconstruction of the Dutch barrier fortresses would provide an effective alternative to the army of occupation.

Lastly, in regard to the diplomatic status of France, Wellington argued that as long as the allies kept France under such close watch, Louis XVIII could not enter the concert of Europe, for he would then be acting as an agent of the occupation of his own country. If France met her obligations and wanted to join the allies, the threat to peace would be much greater if she were kept out of the alliance system.²¹

The arrangements to end the occupation were signed at the confer-

²⁰ Castlereagh to Stuart, 16 June 1818, FO 146/28/32; *The Times*, 1 Aug. 1818, p. 2, 27 Aug. 1818, p. 2, 15 Sept. 1818, p. 2, and 25 Sept. 1818, p. 2.

²¹ Wellington memo on the projected conference at Aix-la-Chapelle, WP 1/602.

ence of Aix-la-Chapelle on 9 October 1818. All allied forces were to be removed by 30 November; French support of the army to end the same day; and allied fortresses to be returned to the French Army.²² The allied withdrawal did, in fact, begin almost immediately, and all British forces were disembarked in England within a few days of the planned departure date.

Conclusion

The allied army of occupation had played well its role as peacekeeper after a generation of war, forming a key part of the larger system that prevented a general European war for another century. This success was largely derived from the dominant role of Wellington as its commander-in-chief, and the rationale behind its establishment and operation.²³ As a result of his victories in the Peninsula and at Waterloo, Wellington enjoyed the full support not only of his own country but also of all the other major European states. There was little question that when an army of occupation was decided upon, Wellington was the man to command it. He was its link with the European states supporting it, and he carried full responsibility for its deployment.

Both the victorious allies and France gave their consent and support to the army of occupation, for both had a large stake in its success. The unity of the allied powers shows in their recruitment of five smaller states to join in the effort to keep the peace throughout Europe. When the army was reduced in 1817, Wellington correctly rejected the attempt to remove the smaller contingents completely. France, too, had much to gain from the allied presence: the Bonapartists were kept from power, Louis XVIII was able to consolidate his regime, and France avoided the risk of war, and its threat to her very existence.

It must also be remembered that the army of occupation was not the only agency involved in peacekeeping. Rather it was part of a larger system, which included the reconstruction of the Dutch barrier fortifications, the payment by the French of reparations, and the Congress System. Rather than being a risk, the army's withdrawal in 1818 was another step towards a final peace settlement.

²² Convention for the Evacuation of Allied Troops, 9 Oct. 1818, signed by Castle-reagh, Wellington, and Richelieu, WO 1/215.

²³ See United States Army Field Circular 100-20, *Low Intensity Conflict* (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: US Army Command and General Staff College, 1986), chapter 8. This chapter presents current US Army doctrine for the methods required for a successful peacekeeping effort. The occupation army met most of these requirements.

The British prince regent expressed the feelings of everyone in a letter thanking the duke of Wellington for his services in France. Noting that the duke's commission had 'presented difficulties of no ordinary magnitude which could be surmounted by no ordinary measure of judgement and discretion', he thanked Wellington for maintaining good discipline among troops so long from home, for keeping harmony in a multinational army, and for doing so while acting in the best interest of the former enemy, France. In conclusion, he stated that these 'achievements which will carry your name and the glory of the British Empire down to the latest posterity' were part of a command hitherto unique in its character.²⁴

Marquette University

²⁴ Prince regent to Wellington, 27 Nov. 1818, WO 6/16/12.