The year 1815 witnessed the final defeat, abdication and exile of Napoleon Bonaparte, the redrawing of the map of Europe and the end of the North American War of 1812. It is often assumed following two decades of global conflict, the general peace that followed would leave navies and armies, after being reduced in size to peacetime strengths, with little to do. Such were the supposed fiscal benefits of what modern politicians refer to as the ‘peace dividend.’

For Britain, these dividends were short lived. Colonial wars, anti-slaving operations, the suppression of the Barbary States and pacification of indigenous peoples and other military operations kept the navy and army occupied. It also contributed troops to the allied army of occupation in France. British Prime Minister Lord Liverpool first introduced the idea in July 1815, during the negotiations for the second Treaty of Paris. Ultimately, the posting of 150,000 men in the northern and eastern departments of France, for a period of seven years, became a condition under which the allies would continue their negotiations with France.

Historians have found little interest in the history of this occupation of army. Sir John Fortescue limited his description of the British contingent to the adventures of those officers who “hunted and coursed and rode races and steeplechases,” and of the “pack of hounds”¹ kept by Wellington and Harry Smith. Thomas Dwight Veve wrote the only book length history of the occupation, told from the British perspective, while Ron McGuigan has examined the organizational history of the army of occupation in the pages of the Napoleon Series Website.²

None of these accounts reveal much about where the units making up the British contingent came from, whether that be from Britain, Ireland or elsewhere. It comes as no surprise that with 48,153 experienced men serving in well-equipped and well-manned regiments in British North America, occupying American soil, or off the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts of the United States, these men contributed nearly two thirds of the infantry component.³
The course of the negotiations between the allied powers and France that established the army of occupation will not be considered here in detail, suffice to say that a settlement was concluded on November 20, 1815. The military convention appended to the treaty outlined the establishment of a multi-national military force that would be stationed along the northern and northeastern frontiers of France and under the overall command of the Duke of Wellington.4

Nine countries contributed to the allied occupation force. The four main powers, Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia, each provided 30,000 men, while another five countries contributed another 30,000 men: 10,000 from Bavaria, while Denmark, Saxony, the Kingdom of Hanover (the Monarch of Great Britain was also King of Hanover) and Würtemberg each contributed 5,000 men.5

Aside from his being nominated as commander-in-chief of the Anglo-Allied occupation force, the Duke of Wellington also commanded the British contingent. Wellington established his British field headquarters at Cambrai, while his overall command headquarters was in Paris. He organized the British troops into an infantry corps of three infantry divisions, each with three brigades, and a cavalry corps.6 Of the nine infantry brigades, seven had three infantry battalions, while the rest had two. Each brigade also incorporated a brigade of horse artillery, while another horse artillery brigade was allocated as corps reserve.

In selecting units for the infantry corps, Wellington pressed the government for veterans from Iberia, whom he considered “the best in the world.”7 Lord Bathurst, the Secretary State for War and the Colonies complied, and of the 25 battalions provided, 21 had previous service in Portugal and Spain (five of the six cavalry regiments had also served in the Peninsular Army); 16 had recent service in North America. They had been among 31 infantry battalions8 sent to reinforce the army in North America in the spring and summer of 1814.9 Twelve of those battalions were from the Peninsular army, and the other four (1/21st, 1/27th, 29th, and the 1/81st Regiments of Foot) had come to North America from garrisons in Italy, Great Britain, Gibraltar and the East Coast Army, which operated in Spain in Italy. Of the latter, the 1/27th, 29th and 1/81st had previous service with Wellington’s army.10

All four of the brigade commanders sent to British North America in 1814, and two from the Gulf Coast Campaign, all of them Peninsular veterans, were assigned to the army of occupation.
Major General Sir James Kempt had commanded a brigade at Kingston intended for an attack on the American naval base at Sackets Harbor, New York, while Major Generals Sir Thomas Brisbane and Sir Manley Power served in the Plattsburgh Campaign. Major Generals Sir John Lambert and John Keane were both veterans of the Gulf Coast Campaign.

Kempt, Lambert, and the 1st/4th, 1st/27th and 1st/40th Regiments also share another distinction, by having been present at the Battle of Waterloo. Kempt assumed command of the 3rd British Division, following the death of its commander, Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Picton, while Lambert’s 10th Brigade (1st/4th, 1/27th, 1st/40th) had marched from Brussels (where it had left the 1st/81st) onto the field the afternoon of the battle. Due to the absence of its commander, Lambert immediately took command of the Anglo-Hanoverian 6th Infantry Division. During the battle, the 1st/27th Regiment suffered 463 casualties, the highest of any British battalion present.11

The initial order of battle for the infantry corps of the army of occupation as established in November 1815 appears below.12 Those general officers and infantry battalions with service in the North American war are identified in bold text (note the Hanoverian contingent of six battalions, a regiment of cavalry and battery of artillery is not shown):13

British Infantry Corps (Lieutenant General Lord Rowland Hill)

First Infantry Division (Lieutenant General Sir Lowry Cole) HQ at Cambrai

1st Brigade (Sir Peregrine Maitland)

- 3rd Battalion, Grenadier Guards
- 2nd Battalion, Coldstream Guards

7th Brigade (Sir James Kempt)

- 1st Battalion, 7th Foot
- 1st Battalion, 23rd Foot
- 1st Battalion, 43rd Foot

8th Brigade (Sir John Lambert)

- 1st Battalion, 27th Foot
- 1st Battalion, 40th Foot
- 1st Battalion, 95th Rifles

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Second Infantry Division (Lieutenant General Sir Henry Clinton) HQ at St. Pol

3rd Brigade (Sir Robert O’Callagan)

- 1st Battalion, 3rd Foot
- 1st Battalion, 39th Foot
- 1st Battalion, 91st Foot

4th Brigade (Sir Dennis Pack)

- 1st Battalion, 4th Foot
- 1st Battalion, 52nd Foot
- 1st Battalion 79th Foot

6th Brigade (Sir Thomas Bradford)

- 1st Battalion, 6th Foot
- 29th Foot
- 1st Battalion, 71st Foot

Third Infantry Division (Lieutenant General Sir Charles Colville) HQ at Valenciennes

2nd Brigade (Sir Manley Power)

- 3rd Battalion, 1st Foot
- 1st Battalion, 57th Foot
- 2nd Battalion, 95th Rifles

5th Brigade (Sir Thomas Brisbane)

- 1st Battalion, 5th Foot
- 1st Battalion, 9th Foot
- 1st Battalion, 21st Foot

9th Brigade (John Keane)

- 1st Battalion, 81st Foot
- 1st Battalion, 88th Foot

Other attachments that had come from North America included two of the seven batteries of foot artillery (Carmichael’s and Holcroft’s Batteries) and two of the five companies of the Royal Sappers and Miners (2nd Battalion, 8th Company and 2nd Company, 4th Battalion).14
The Sectors assigned to the Major Powers of the Army of Occupation, 1815-1818
(from Thomas Dwight Veve. The Duke of Wellington and the British Army of Occupation in France, 1815-1818.
Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992, 23)

Following the peace of 1815, the allies remained concerned that instability created by political opposition to the reestablishment of the French monarchy and dissatisfaction within the army might result in the resumption of hostilities. Britain was also sensitive to the security of the Netherlands and wished to deny France access to the port of Antwerp. Wellington’s main concern was to withstand an attack which might arise from the French army before Louis XVIII could complete his reforms. British units were billeted in and around centres such as Valenciennes and Cambrai, where improvements were made to defensive works, barracks and hospitals, magazines were constructed and stores stockpiled. Until Britain completed improvements to the Netherlands’ defences, troops garrisoned several fortresses in the north east of France, such as the Citadel at Cambrai, which lay on the route to the Dutch border. If military operations against France resumed, the army of occupation was to hold a lengthy line that lacked depth, until reinforcements arrived from Britain and the allied countries. 15

The inspection reports for the infantry battalions revealed a number of difficulties. While they were all fit for operations, the inspection reports noted deficiencies in the leadership of several junior and senior officers. More importantly, the combat skills of the NCOs and men were generally rated as excellent. There were also disciplinary problems, equipment shortages and other minor difficulties, all of which could be addressed over time, as the routine of the occupation army was established. Proof of improved discipline is evidenced by the reduction in

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the average rate of desertion, which between 1816 and 1818, dropped from six to four men battalion.\textsuperscript{16}

Once the army of occupation was in place, no problems were encountered with the French Army, while good relations were established with the civilian population. Public order was maintained and France held to its indemnity payments and initiated internal reforms. The success of the peace, aided by the occupation force, and the desire of government to reduce military expenditure provided impetus to advancing the end of the mission. In June 1816, Wellington supported a proposal made by the French government to reduce size of the force. In January 1817, each contingent was reduced by one-fifth, or an overall reduction of 30,000 men.

In the British contingent, Wellington authorized the removal of six battalions, and the removal of 2000 men from each of the two foot guard battalions. The dispatch of the 3rd/1st to England, and the 21st, 27th, 40th, 81st and 88th Regiments of Foot to Ireland, led to the reorganization of the infantry corps to two divisions, the first having four brigades and 10 battalions, and the second with three brigades and 10 battalions. Finally, in the autumn of 1818, a convention was signed to withdraw the entire force, and by November the last British troops had departed.\textsuperscript{17}

The employment of the British Army between Napoleon’s first abdication the disbandment of the Army of Occupation requires additional study. For the veterans of the Peninsular War and of the North American War of 1812, the conclusion of both conflicts brought new demands, as veteran units from both conflicts joined the Army of Occupation in France. Men who had campaigned through Spain and France until 1814, and thereafter in the Canadas, the Chesapeake, the Gulf Coast, Maine, or other parts of the United States, found unique employment in France. They were there to demonstrate allied resolve and guarantee British interests; if France rose again to challenge the allies, they were to defend their positions until the arrival of reinforcements. Fortunately, the situation in France remained stable, the peace held, and troops were allowed to enjoy conditions of service that were far more pleasant than they had endured over the last several years.

\textsuperscript{3} The National Archives. War Office 17 Muster Rolls, 1812-1815.
\textsuperscript{4} An overview of the negotiations is in Veve, The Duke of Wellington and the British Army of Occupation, 16-18.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid, 20.
\textsuperscript{6} The British Cavalry Corps under Lord Combermere, was comprised of the First Brigade (Lord Somerset), with the 2nd Dragoon Guards and 3rd Dragoon Guards; the Second Brigade (Sir Richard Hussay Vivian) with the 12th Light Dragoons and 18th Hussars; Third Brigade (Colquhoun Grant) with the 7th Hussars and 11th Light Dragoons.
\textsuperscript{7} Wellington to Bathurst, 23 October 1815. Quoted in Veve, The Duke of Wellington and the British Army of Occupation, 34.
\textsuperscript{8} Sixteen of the 31 battalions came from Wellington’s Peninsular Army, while the remaining 15 were from other garrisons.
9 This figure does not include two battalions of the West India Regiment or the 2nd Battalion, Royal Marines.
13 This order of battle is as it appears in Veve, The Duke of Wellington and the British Army of Occupation, 33.35.
16 Ibid, 55, 56, 58.
17 Ibid, 116, 117, 158, 159.