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OF THE SIEGES

CONDUCTED OR SUSTAINED BY THE FRENCH
IN THE PENINSULA,
FROM 1807 TO 1814.

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JOURNAUX DES SIÈGES

FAITS OU SOUTENUS PAR LES FRANÇAIS

DANS LA PÉNINSULE,

DE 1807 A 1814;

RÉDIGÉS, D'APRÈS LES ORDRES DU GOUVERNEMENT,

SUR LES DOCUMENTS EXISTANT AUX ARCHIVES DE LA GUERRE
ET AU DÉPÔT DES FORTIFICATIONS.

PAR J. BELMAS,

CHEF DE BATAILLON DU GÉNIE.

Tome Troisième.



PARIS,

CHEZ FIRMIN DIDOT FRÈRES ET C^{ie},

RUE JACOB, N° 56.

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SIEGE
OF ASTORGA,
BY THE FRENCH ARMY OF PORTUGAL,
IN 1810.

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SIEGE OF ASTORGA,

BY THE FRENCH ARMY OF PORTUGAL,

IN 1810.



ASTORGA is a small town of four thousand inhabitants; encircled by ancient walls and situated on the main road to Galicia, on the near side of the mountains, it served the Spanish well as a strategic stronghold and supply depot at the gateway to the plains of Castile. After having been held successively by the British and the French, it was retaken by the Spanish in late July 1809, during the French troop concentration for the Battle of Talavera. The Marquis de la Romana had ordered its defenses restored and left a garrison of three thousand men there under the command of Colonel Santocildès. General Garcia Velasco was stationed nearby with a Spanish division to cover Galicia; to his left, General Mahy occupied Asturias with ten or twelve thousand men, while to his right, General Echeverría guarded the mountain passes toward Puebla de Sanabria with three thousand Spaniards and some Portuguese troops.

In early February, General Loison marched from Valladolid toward León with the first reserve division to create a diversion in Galicia in support of General Bonet, who was simultaneously entering Asturias. He appeared before Astorga on 11 February; however, as the town refused to open its gates, he was forced to withdraw to La Bañeza to await siege equipment¹. A few days later, the Eighth Corps, commanded by General Junot (Duke of Abrantés), arrived in Valladolid, and General Loison's division moved left toward Toro and Zamora to link up with the Sixth Corps, of which it formed a part. The Eighth Corps' first division replaced it along the Órbigo River. On 26 February, General Clauzel, commanding this division, conducted a fresh reconnaissance of Astorga and sent the governor a letter from General Junot urging him to surrender. The French officer bearing the message could not proceed beyond the Spanish outposts; the governor had sent word that, in keeping with the reply already given to General Loison, he would accept only dispatches dealing with matters unrelated to the town itself.

Towards the middle of March, the Eighth Corps, having received orders to lay siege to Astorga, General Clauzel advanced on the town once more and encamped beneath its walls on the 21st. The investment was completed two days later; detachments were sent to keep watch over the Manzanal and Foncebadón passes, located four leagues behind Astorga, where the new and old roads to Galicia cross the high ridge separating the Sil valley from that of the Órbigo. A brigade of dragoons under the command of General Sainte-Croix took up a position in front of La Bañeza to observe the enemy in the direction of Puebla de Sanabria. General Solignac established himself with the Third Division at Benevento and León to support General Clauzel's troops if necessary. The General-in-Chief remained at Valladolid.

¹ See supporting documents Nos. 1, 2, and 3.

Siege resources were extremely limited. Squadron Leader Noël, commanding the First Division's artillery, had at his disposal only one-horse artillery company, a foot artillery detachment, and a few pieces of 4; the bulk of the Eighth Corps' artillery had remained at Bayonne due to a lack of horses. Battalion Commander Valazé, commanding the Eighth Corps engineers, had only four officers and a detachment of thirty sappers under his orders. Upon leaving Valladolid on March 19, he had received an order reading as follows: *"It is the intention of H. Ex. the General-in-Chief that, immediately upon arriving at the First Division headquarters, you conduct a reconnaissance of Astorga and consult with General of Division Clauzel on erecting the works necessary to contain the garrison. Issue orders for these works to be constructed in such a way that they may serve not only against the besieged forces but also against any type of external troops."* Battalion Commander Valazé completed his reconnaissance of the stronghold the day after his arrival.

The wall surrounding Astorga crowns the ridge of the plateau upon which the city stands. It possesses neither a moat nor a covered way, and its parapet consists merely of a low dry-stone wall. The flanking towers and the castle, situated at one of the corners, were armed with twelve small-caliber pieces of artillery, including one mortar and one howitzer. The enemy had fortified the Reitibia² suburb to the west, stationing five hundred men and two pieces of 3 there. They also maintained outposts in the Puerta-Rey and San Andrés suburbs to the north and east, as well as at the Santo Domingo and Santa Clara convents located there. The plateau extending in front of the Reitibia suburb offered favorable ground for an attack; however, since capturing the suburb would not have eliminated the need to subsequently breach the wall lying behind it, Commander Valazé judged it better to attack the northern section of the fortifications directly, at the angle formed near the small gate of Iron. Admittedly, an attack from this side meant contending with the cathedral, which overlooked the approaches; yet it was the only point where a breach could be made from the ground in front. Elsewhere, the base of the wall stood so high above the valley that breaching batteries would have had to be positioned too far away. Furthermore, as the wall was backed for a height of six to seven meters by the natural rising ground upon which the city was built, there was a risk that, even after the outer masonry facing collapsed, the artillery would be unable to tear away the underlying earth slope to create a practicable ramp. Commander Valazé submitted his attack plan to the commander-in-chief, requesting eight to ten heavy-caliber guns, an equal number of mortars or howitzers, two thousand shovels, five hundred pickaxes, and sandbags. While awaiting orders regarding the plan's execution, he had the few available wooden shovels and vineyard mattocks gathered from the local area; however, all searches yielded only about thirty of them, which the troops used to entrench their camps.

On the 26th, the water supply was cut off to the mills located near the San-Andrés suburb, seven or eight hundred meters from the town; from that moment on, the town was reduced to relying on its hand-operated mills.

² Santocildès' diary, recounting events from 1809, uses the term "Reitibia" to refer to the neighborhood, while the memoirs of Jean Noel—a French officer present at the Siege of Astorga (1810)—cite the neighborhood's name as "Retebia" and "Retibia". However, a few years later, a letter from the same General and an official record from the Astorga City Council refer to the "Arrabal de Rectivía" and the "brecha de Rectivía", respectively.

Observing the shortage of tools, General Clauzel ordered the abandonment of works begun in the villages surrounding the stronghold, preferring to reserve the few available implements for the construction of entrenchments designed to hem in the garrison. Consequently, on the evening of the 28th, work began on "Work A" in front of Valdeviejas and around the icehouse, as well as on entrenchment "B" on the neighboring height.

The Commander-in-Chief announced his approval of the chief engineer's plan and tasked General Foucher, commander of the Eighth Corps artillery, with assembling a small siege train. Unfortunately, preparations then underway for the siege of Ciudad Rodrigo were consuming all available resources. It was possible to procure only four pieces of 24, one of 16, four of 12, and a six-inch mortar, along with a supply of five hundred rounds per piece, from Segovia and Burgos. To this were to be added eight six-inch howitzers belonging to the army corps, thirty-five thousand pounds of gunpowder, and four thousand five hundred sandbags. As for tools, none could be found in Valladolid; the artillery managed to secure only two hundred from Burgos, which it reserved for its own operations, so a search for more was launched in the countryside around Rio Seco, Benevento, and León. Since at least a fortnight would elapse before all this materiel could be brought to the walls of Astorga, the Commander-in-Chief ordered that, in the interim, work should begin on tightening the investment of the garrison and drawing as close as possible to the ramparts. *"Prepare your resources," he said, "so that when the artillery arrives, everything is ready to receive it and the assault on the stronghold can begin... Work with caution, and do not let a single man be killed needlessly."*

To comply with this order, General Clauzel and Commander Valazé decided against a direct assault on the outposts still held by the garrison; instead, they resolved to advance inch by inch using small earthworks, thereby securing a foothold each evening on the very ground from which the enemy would be forced to retreat further the following day. It was also agreed that, so as not to alert the enemy to the true point of attack, the parallel on the Tuilerie plateau would not be opened until the arrival of the siege train was imminent. They reasoned that, since the artillery required at least four days to travel from Valladolid, that time would suffice to construct the parallel and prepare a breaching battery within it.

1st NIGHT, of 29 to 30 March.

Work began on fortifications C, D, E, and F across the three large plateaus surrounding the stronghold: the first two on the plateau facing the Santa Clara convent, from which the enemy was to be driven; the third on the plateau in front of the Reitibia suburb, to support a feint against that suburb, for which the artillery had already begun constructing a battery on the Galicia road in previous days; and the fourth on the Tuilerie plateau, in a position favorable for protecting the approach trenches and covering the trench supply depot and artillery park, which were established to the rear in the Carneros valley. Moreover, there was such a shortage of tools that General Taupin, whose brigade was providing laborers for the entrenchments on the Galicia road, personally demonstrated to the men how, in the absence of shovels, they could make do by scooping up earth with their hands and throwing it in front of themselves to form a parapet.

At daybreak, the enemy sortied from the Reitibia suburb with four hundred infantrymen, a few cavalymen, and two pieces of 4 to destroy the fortification being built on the Tuilerie plateau.

They drove off a thirty-man outpost stationed there, but a company of voltigeurs rushed to the scene and forced the Spaniards to retreat back into the suburb.

2nd and 3rd NIGHTS, of 30 March to 1 April.

The existing works were improved, and construction began on fortification G near Santa Clara.

4th NIGHT, of 1 to 2 April.

At nightfall, Engineer Battalion Commander Valazé went with twenty-five grenadiers and a few sappers to reconnoiter the Santa Clara convent, a position of importance due to the height and solidity of its walls. He circled the building and attempted to force the gate; however, the enemy was alerted and opened such heavy fire that our troops were forced to withdraw. Work began on new fortifications on the Santa Clara plateau, as well as on an entrenchment in front of the Reitibia suburb, to the left of the Galicia road. We seized the fountain located opposite the castle; it was the city's only source of drinking water, leaving the garrison and inhabitants with no choice but to use well water, despite its brackish taste.

On the morning of 2 April, we occupied the Santo Domingo convent, which the enemy abandoned after suffering two killed and ten wounded. This position was highly advantageous, as it allowed us to advance through the Puerta Rey suburb, support the left flank of our attacks against the cathedral front, and block the enemy from sallying out through the Grande Gate.

That evening, the Spanish troops, fearing they would be overrun within the Santa Clara convent, decided to evacuate it after setting it ablaze. As the fire promised to burn for some time, we contented ourselves with occupying the crest of the plateau overlooking the convent.

5th NIGHT, of 2 to 3 April.

The works already underway were improved. During the day, three Spanish soldiers, who had left the stronghold on 27 March disguised as peasants, managed to re-enter, bringing the Governor a note from General Mahy announcing his arrival at Villafranca with reinforcements of three to four thousand men. The note read as follows:

"I have arrived in good health and hope to see you shortly; please let me know how you are and if I can be of any assistance, for that is the purpose of my coming here today."

This news revived the garrison's spirits, offering hope of relief.

6th NIGHT, of 3 to 4 April.

Operations began in the Puerta-Rey suburb, starting from the Santo-Domingo convent, to draw closer to the wall; unable to halt our advance, the enemy set fire to the houses nearest the ramparts and walled up the Grande Gate. They also set fire to a few remaining houses around the Santa-Clara convent. We fortified the fountain post at the foot of the castle and established a two-gun battery there to breach the wall, which was visible all the way to its base. Although the

resulting breach would be difficult to traverse, it was intended to heighten the enemy's anxiety and divert their attention from the actual point of attack.

7th NIGHT, of 4 to 5 April.

Work began on a stretch of communication trench to the right of the Tuilerie post, in order to reach the site of the planned parallel facing the cathedral front. Some work was carried out on the Carnero road, which led to the Santo Domingo convent, to allow for a somewhat sheltered approach. A small redan, designated K, was erected on the Santa Clara plateau while awaiting the complete extinguishing of the fire at the convent.²⁵

Work continued on the feint attack against the Reitibia suburb, where the Spanish kept working, convinced that we intended to capture it. During the day, they burned the houses at the edge of the suburb, clearing a depth of about 100 meters, to expose the entrenchments they held further back.

The commanding engineer received 4,000 francs from León for the works; this was the total amount the army treasury could make available to him. General Solignac sent 1,200 unhandled tools from Rio Seco; these proved invaluable, as some of the wooden shovels used for the work had just been accidentally burned in a house. A few days later, the remainder of the army corps' sapper company and its two commanding officers arrived with a tool wagon.

8th NIGHT, of 5 to 6 April.

Troops established themselves amidst the ruins of the Santa Clara convent and began fortifying the position. A new work, L, was started on the ridge of the plateau behind the convent to provide flanking fire and, if necessary, to engage the Matadero Gate. Fearing an attack from this direction, the Spanish set fire to the houses backing onto the perimeter wall. They also set fire to the houses near the Grande Gate, on the side of the Puerta-Rey suburb. We advanced into this suburb to within 60 meters of the wall.

9th NIGHT, of 6 to 7 April.

Work began on a communication trench to descend from the plateau situated above Santa Clara, and the first houses of the San Andrés suburb were occupied. A few more houses were secured as we advanced into the Puerta-Rey suburb; additionally, work started on the Tuilerie plateau, 200 meters from the fortifications, on a redan (designated M) with 30-meter sides, intended to protect the left flank of the planned parallel. The enemy fired heavily at this work, but to no effect.

The artillery began constructing batteries No. 1 and 2 on the plateau in front of Reitibia: the first designed for ricochet fire against the attack front, the second to lob shells into the city and the suburb.

10th NIGHT, of 7 to 8 April.

The redan M, begun on the Tuilerie plateau above the Santo Domingo convent, was completed. The right-hand communication trench was extended by 80 meters to reach the site of the planned parallel, and work began on the left-hand communication trench.

The enemy frequently made small sorties through the Matadero Gate; to prevent this, we attacked the San Andrés suburb at 9 o'clock at night, reaching the houses closest to the fortifications. The Spaniards, who had defended themselves vigorously, launched a sortie at 9 o'clock in the morning to drive us out of the suburb and succeeded in setting it on fire. Our troops withdrew to the far end, and once the fire was extinguished, they advanced again. We then attempted to take shelter in the ruins of the houses near the ramparts, in order to create a breach by means of a mine; but the enemy hurled so many stones from the walls that we were forced to abandon the effort.

11th NIGHT, of 8 to 9 April.

Work began on a communication trench linking Santa Clara to the San Andrés suburb, and fresh attempts were made to establish positions in the houses adjoining the wall, though these proved unsuccessful. On the Tuilerie plateau, a new trench section was added to the right-hand communication line to reach the site of the planned parallel; simultaneously, construction began on Redan N to support the right flank of this parallel, link up with the entrenchments on the Galicia road, and counter any enemy sorties from a gate they had retained in the Reitibia suburb, located between the right flank of their trous-de-loup (wolf pits) and the Choristers' House. This work was heavily harassed by fire from the stronghold; nevertheless, our working parties managed to secure cover.

12th NIGHT, of 9 to 10 April.

Work continued on the communication trench intended to link the Santa Clara convent with the San Andrés suburb; however, rain had flooded the meadow and almost entirely destroyed the existing trench. The Spaniards set fire to two houses near the Puerta del Matadero and entrenched themselves within the ruins in front of the gate. They launched a sortie from the Reitibia suburb against Redan N, begun the previous night, but were repulsed. We suffered four wounded. One hundred gabions were added to the right-hand communication line on the Tuilerie plateau, and work proceeded on the left-hand line, which ran from the Santo Domingo convent to Redan M. The enemy finished razing the forward section of the Reitibia suburb on the Galicia roadside; consequently, our works at this point ended up being a hundred and twenty meters further away than originally planned.

However, General Junot, wishing to know if the enemy was preparing to relieve Astorga, ordered General Sainte-Croix to conduct a reconnaissance with three squadrons in the area between the Órbigo and Tera rivers. The General attacked the Spanish outposts, crossed the Tera, and pursued the enemy as far as Alcañices. That town was held by nine hundred Spanish infantrymen and two hundred cavalry, while Portuguese troops were deployed in the rear, stretching from Braganza to Miranda do Douro. Through various intelligence reports, General

Sainte-Croix confirmed that General Mahy was assembling ten to twelve thousand men at Villafranca to march to the relief of Astorga, and that the Galician Junta was making every effort to incite an uprising in the province, recruit the inhabitants, and reinforce the active army.

This news prompted General Junot to move closer to Astorga with the bulk of the Eighth Corps and to accelerate artillery preparations in Valladolid.

13th NIGHT, of 10 to 11 April.

We continued to entrench ourselves in the San Andrés suburb, which we occupied almost entirely, and resumed work on the communication line connecting Santa Clara to that suburb. Redan N, begun near the Reitibia suburb, was enclosed by a ditch and palisaded at the gorge. The artillery prepared a position there for two howitzers intended to enfilade the cathedral front and set fire to the Reitibia suburb. Rains had flooded the communication line leading to the right of the parallel, and the water could not be drained.

The artillery began constructing a two-gun battery on the plateau behind the Santa Clara convent to engage the Matadero Gate and take the city's eastern front in reverse, as fire from that sector was causing us significant trouble in the San Andrés suburb.

14th NIGHT, of 11 to 12 APRIL.

Attempts were made to set mine charges at the foot of the wall in the San Andrés and Puerta Rey suburbs, but these efforts failed. We lacked miners, and our sappers were not sufficiently trained to take their place; moreover, they were being crushed by falling stones and riddled with pistol fire. It was concluded that the use of mines would have to be abandoned. A hundred- and forty-metre trench was dug connecting to Redan N (begun in front of the Reitibia suburb); this work was palisaded at the gorge, and two zigzags were added to the right-hand communication line on the Tuilerie plateau to reach the site of the planned parallel. The enemy harassed these operations heavily with grapeshot and small-arms fire; they also lobbed several mortar shells at the battery being built on the plateau above Santa Clara.

In Redan M, anchoring the left flank above the Santo Domingo convent, the artillery began constructing Battery No. 3, mounting two six-inch howitzers and two pieces of 12. The aim was to destroy the dry-stone parapet crowning the town's defensive wall and to cover the establishment of a breaching battery within the planned parallel.

During the day on the 12th, work was completed on Redan N (begun in front of the Reitibia suburb), as well as on the connecting trench and the communication line to the rear. The enemy fired shells at us and made a sortie to drive off our working parties; however, not daring to advance, they withdrew. Some of the water filling the zigzag trenches on the Tuilerie plateau was drained off, and firing steps were constructed.

The artillery had finally succeeded in assembling the siege train at Valladolid, consisting of four pieces of 24, one of 16, four of 12, one six-inch mortar, and eight six-inch howitzers, along with the necessary supplies. Word was received that an initial convoy of thirty-six wagons would

arrive on the 14th, and that the ordnance would set out as soon as the roads, damaged by bad weather, were in a passable state. The division of Solignac and the brigade of Jeanin (from Lagrange's division) arrived to relieve the First Division, commanded by General Clauzel, who moved forward to cover the siege from the Manzanal passes on the main road to Galicia; simultaneously, General Sainte-Croix's dragoon brigade and an infantry battalion took up positions in the Foncebadón passes, traversed by the old road. Elsewhere, General Bessières's dragoon brigade occupied La Penilla on the road to Puebla de Sanabria, alongside the fourth battalion of the Forty-Sixth Line Regiment (from Jeanin's brigade). The remainder of Lagrange's division and the third dragoon brigade, under General Bron, remained on the Esla River between Benavente and Zamora to cover the left flank. Thus, all the troops of the Eighth Corps were positioned around Astorga to protect the siege operations.

The time had come to press the work forward vigorously. The commanding engineer officer had managed, with great difficulty, to assemble six hundred shovels and four hundred serviceable pickaxes, in addition to the sappers' tools, and had arranged for the construction of twelve hundred gabions. Everything was prepared for opening the parallel on the Tuilerie plateau.

15th NIGHT, of 12 to 13 April.

Using the flying sap method, a section of parallel, approximately four hundred and fifty meters in length, was constructed two hundred meters from the stronghold. The enemy directed heavy musket and canister fire at the work parties, but their aim was too high, and we suffered only one casualty. Another attempt was made to set mine charges at the base of the wall in the San Andrés suburb, but this effort also proved fruitless: the enemy rolled down massive stones that crushed the house from which our sappers had started, forcing them to abandon the work.

On the morning of the 13th, it was observed that the enemy had built a redan in front of the gate they still held in the Reitibia suburb, near the choirboys' house. Although imperfect, this redan's salient position threatened to disrupt the advance of our attack columns during the assault; consequently, the howitzers from Redan N were trained upon it. The enemy once again attempted to set fire to the houses to the left of the Matadero Gate. Work continued on improving the parallel, and its parapet was thickened.

16th NIGHT, of 13 to 14 April.

The parallel was extended to the left, reaching into the Santo Domingo ravine. Within the parallel, artillery crews began constructing breach battery No. 4, designed for four pieces of 24, one of 16, two of 12, and two six-inch howitzers. These last two pieces were intended primarily to prevent the enemy from working on the breach to erect obstacles during the night. The enemy fired with greater accuracy than usual; nevertheless, we suffered no casualties.

17th NIGHT, of 14 to 15 April.

From the parallel, a communication trench led off to the right, bringing the troops closer to the fortifications and allowing them to reach a small rise that commanded the enemy's works.

A Spanish peasant managed to slip into the stronghold; he carried a note from Brigadier Don José Meneses, commander of the Spanish troops in the Bierzo region. The note read:

"Governor, you are about to receive major reinforcements." —J. M.

Governor Santocildès believed that the British Army of Portugal was approaching to relieve the town. Skirmishes occurring simultaneously in the Manzanal and Foncebadón passes, the sound of which he could hear, reinforced this belief. The hope of relief rekindled the enthusiasm of the garrison and the townspeople, who signaled their presence. Several detachments sallied forth from the town to harass our outposts and make us fear a general sortie.

18th NIGHT, of 15 to 16 April.

Rain flooded all our works, and it proved impossible to drain the water filling the trenches. The communication route from Santa Clara to the San Andrés suburb became completely impassable. An attempt was made to extend the trench begun in front of the parallel, opposite the cathedral, but water was struck just a foot below the surface, forcing the work to be abandoned. All the firing steps established along the right-hand communication trench were trampled flat by the men passing over them.

The artillery continued work on the breach-making battery.

19th NIGHT, of 16 to 17 April.

Work continued on extending the right-hand approach trench forward from the parallel, bringing it to within fifty meters of the small knoll intended to be crowned. Some of the water flooding the trenches was drained away. The enemy kept up a constant fire throughout the night. Two of our men were wounded.

On the 17th, General Junot arrived before Astorga with the remaining infantry troops. He established his headquarters at Castrillo de la Polvazares. General Foucher, the artillery commander, also arrived that day with three artillery companies and the siege guns.

20th NIGHT, of 17 to 18 April.

Work continued on the approach trench begun in front of the parallel. There was even hope of reaching the knoll slated for crowning; however, the enemy's fire on the work site was so intense that it could not be completed. Firing steps were constructed in the section already finished. One man was killed; Captain Mermet, Adjutant Major of the Second Sapper Battalion, was shot through the thigh. The enemy lobbed several shells into the breaching battery.

The Governor, possessing little artillery, deemed it necessary to concentrate it in order to crush our breaching battery. To this end, he ordered the construction of a battery mounting two pieces of 12 and two of 8 in the bishop's garden, adjacent to the wall and near the cathedral. The battery's platform was raised four meters above the natural ground level, allowing the rampart's platform to serve as a parapet once the small dry-stone wall crowning it had been destroyed.

Despite a lack of tools, the work was carried out with great zeal by the garrison soldiers and the local inhabitants.

21st NIGHT, of 18 to 19 April.

Work was completed on crowning the small knoll on the right, situated in front of the parallel. The left-hand communication trench was improved, and the right-hand one was made passable, although it could not be entirely cleared of the water that had collected there. Lacking sandbags to form loopholes on the parallel's parapet, a long firing slit was created by placing a course of saucissons (large fascines) eight to ten centimeters above the uppermost crowning fascine.

The artillery finished work on its batteries. One officer was wounded. During the day, the general-in-chief came to reconnoiter the stronghold.³⁸

22nd NIGHT, of 19 to 20 April.

A section of the assembly area was constructed using the flying sap method, one hundred and sixty meters from the wall, to facilitate the assault. All batteries were manned and supplied with ammunition.

At daybreak, our artillery opened fire with eighteen guns. The Spaniards returned fire vigorously throughout the day, displaying great tenacity; this was all the more surprising given that the stronghold's parapet was made of dry stone, causing numerous splinters to fly whenever a cannonball struck it. Ricochet battery No. 1 and direct-fire battery No. 3 failed to silence the enemy guns, which were shielded by houses and traverses. Battery No. 4 succeeded in breaching the perimeter wall; however, the breach was not yet practicable by day's end due to the two-hundred-meter range, the hardness of the masonry, and defects in two pieces of twenty-four, one, a long model, lacked accuracy entirely, while the other, a short model, was jolted out of its mounting by almost every shot.

Our shells rendered the cathedral tower uninhabitable and set fire to the roof of the sacristy, which overlooked the breach from behind the wall.

We suffered two gunners killed and seven wounded that day. Our total losses from 15 to 20 April amounted to eleven men killed and twenty wounded.

23rd NIGHT, of 20 to 21 April.

The artillery crews repaired their heavily damaged batteries, and in the morning, firing resumed with renewed intensity. A few shells reignited the fire in the sacristy, which was consumed by flames, as were several houses in the town and the Reitibia suburb. An artillery officer, three gunners, and a soldier from the train were wounded.

By midday, the breach was roughly passable across a width of about twenty-five meters. Our heavy artillery pieces were already in very poor condition, and one of the pieces of twenty-four was completely out of action. Before launching the assault, General Junot wished to let the

garrison know that he would offer them favorable terms if they agreed to surrender. Instead of sending an envoy, whose life might have been at risk, he used a Spanish corporal who had been captured a few days earlier at Foncebadón.

Shortly thereafter, a Spanish officer emerged from the stronghold to negotiate; however, as he demanded unacceptable terms, he was immediately sent back with orders to warn the Governor that the assault would begin in two hours and that neither the inhabitants nor the garrison would be shown any mercy. By way of reply, the Spaniards fired a cannon shot aimed precisely at the spot in the trenches where the envoy had been received by the Commander-in-Chief, surrounded by his staff, and where it was assumed, he still remained. This action demonstrated the extent of the enemy's fury. Hostilities resumed on both sides with renewed intensity.

The Duke of Abrantès, eager to capture the stronghold, decided to launch the assault at seven o'clock without further delay, even though true darkness would not fall until nine. Had the attack been postponed by just one hour, it would have been less perilous, and establishing a foothold on the breach under the cover of darkness would have been easier. Seven hundred men drawn from the companies of the siege division were formed into a battalion within the trenches, under the command of Captain Lagrave, the Commander-in-Chief's Aide-de-Camp. They formed two columns: the right-hand one, commanded by Captain Lagrave in person, was to set out from the half-assembly area in front of the parallel; the left-hand one, from a chapel in the Puerta-Rey suburb. Engineer Captain Borel-Vivier and ten sappers marched at the head of the first column; Sapper Lieutenant Schmitt and eight sappers followed the second. General Thomières was at the head of the reserves in the trenches, where two hundred men had been detailed to carry sandbags and ladders. Battalion Commander Barral was ordered to launch a feint attack, using a battalion of the Sixty-Fifth, on the Reitibia suburb, to the right of the Galicia road.

At the signal, the first voltigeur company of the Irish Regiment, leading the first column, dashed forward alone toward the breach to determine if it was passable. Captain d'Halen, commanding the company, and Captain Borel-Vivier of the Engineers reached the foot of the breach and struggled up its slope to the summit. Two companies from the right column and two from the left rushed up to support them. The breach was extremely steep, and the crest of the wall, jagged from the collapse of the masonry, formed a slope so slippery that footing was precarious; the soldiers could only ascend one by one, steadying each other. The core of the wall, acting as a rampart backing, consisted of tightly packed rubble held between the outer facing wall and the inner wall, which had remained intact. This inner wall presented a six-meter drop on the side facing the city. Several houses backed against it and rose above the rampart. The house immediately behind the breach had been partially ruined by our cannonballs; the enemy had removed its floors and was directing intense, point-blank musket fire from both the street and the house to the left, which featured a crenellated gable. At the house on the right, where the first floor was level with the rampart, the enemy had also removed the floors, shutters, and windows to command the entire interior; furthermore, a defensive cut lay to the rear in the cathedral square, anchored on one side by this building and on the other by the city wall. Finally, atop the thickness of the wall itself, which measured four meters, there was an entrenchment on either side of the breach: the one on the left was constructed of barrels and sandbags and fronted by a small ditch, while the one on the right was revetted with fascines and backed by a raised section of the wall. Upon scaling the breach, our grenadiers were halted by the vertical drop formed by

the inner face of the rampart. A few men, led by Captain Halen and Engineer Captain Borel-Vivier, dashed into the ruined house on the right; however, only the two officers emerged again, as all those who had followed them were killed or wounded. The grenadiers then turned their efforts against the entrenchment on the right, the very one Captain Borel-Vivier had been ordered to attack in order to seize the section of the perimeter separating the city from the Reitibia suburb, thereby isolating the Spanish troops guarding that district. Despite our efforts, the enemy managed to hold the entrenchment. They had initially abandoned the one on the left, but upon seeing that it was not under attack, they returned to occupy it and took our troops in the flank. The exchange of fire was intense. The remainder of the elite battalion assigned to the assault had rushed to the aid of the leading companies, but the mass of men clustered at the foot of the breach only added to the confusion. Pinned down by enemy fire and unable to break out, our troops found themselves in a highly critical position. Sandbags and ladders were requested, but the communication between the foremost approach trenches and the breach was cut off by fire from the stronghold and the Reitibia suburb, and above all by fire from a large building known as the Niños del coro (situated outside the perimeter), which the enemy had loopholed and manned with their best marksmen. It proved impossible to get a single man through; everyone who emerged from the trench carrying ladders and sandbags was killed or wounded. Our soldiers then attempted to return fire while taking cover on the reverse slope of the breach. When Grenadier Lanjuinais hit upon the idea of using his pack for protection, Captain Borel-Vivier immediately ordered all the soldiers to hand over their packs; using these and the bodies of the fallen, he managed to construct a small, sheltered position on the breach, without which our troops would inevitably have been forced to withdraw. By that point, our losses amounted to approximately three hundred men. The battalion of the Sixty-Fifth, tasked with the feint attack on the Reitibia suburb, suffered six killed and thirty-five wounded.

24th NIGHT, of 21 to 22 April.

Night finally fell, making communication with the breach less perilous. We were able to strengthen the lodgment begun atop the rampart and occupy the ruined house to the right of the breach, boarding up its windows. At the same time, Engineer Captain Génot, using a hundred laborers and the "*flying sap*" method, constructed a double-caponier communication trench leading from the advanced assembly area to the foot of the breach; all available gabions, as well as those from the right-hand communication line, had been gathered beforehand for this task. These works could not be completed quickly or without significant casualties. The operation would have taken even longer had Captain Borel-Vivier, who was due to be relieved, not remained all night at the breach (a position he knew intimately) and arranged for the delivery of gabions to his location; he then pushed the communication line outward from the breach to meet the incoming work, allowing the trench to be dug from both ends simultaneously. Fifteen sappers were put out of action during this work; Engineer Lieutenant Jaubert was wounded; and Commandant Valazé, already struck by gunfire during the initial assault, was hit in the head by a bullet that knocked him down, leaving him nearly dead. Infantry casualties amounted to twenty-four killed and one hundred and twenty wounded.

Meanwhile, the enemy, disconcerted by the unwavering tenacity of our troops, concluded that further resistance was impossible. The garrison commanders met in council at one o'clock in the morning. Recognizing that a mass breakout from the stronghold was out of the question, they

agreed that the time had come to capitulate. Following this deliberation, the Governor ordered the evacuation of the Reitibia suburb.

At dawn on 22 April, the white flag was flying over the town. A Spanish officer emerged as an envoy through the Puerta del Obispo and went to General Junot to negotiate the terms of surrender. While negotiations were underway, Battalion Commander Barral of the Sixty-Fifth Regiment established a foothold in the Reitibia suburb, and thirty grenadiers, led by an officer, managed to reach the Puerta del Obispo but were unable to hold their position there. Two hours later, the envoy returned to the town carrying the terms of surrender³. The Governor left the city to meet General Junot; he sought to commend the inhabitants to the General's care, requested permission to send an officer to General Mahy with a copy of the surrender terms, and asked that French troops not enter the city until the entire garrison had marched out. General Junot agreed to the latter request but refused passage for the officer. One of the first questions put to the Governor concerned the number of casualties caused by cannonballs striking the dry-stone parapet atop the ramparts; he replied that there were eight, as only the men strictly necessary for manning the guns were stationed on the ramparts, the main body of the guard remained in the street, leaning against the rampart wall.

At eleven o'clock in the morning, General Boyer, the Chief of Staff, entered the stronghold with an artillery officer, an engineer officer, and a military commissary to take possession of the depots. The Puerta del Obispo was guarded from the inside by a Spanish company and from the outside by a company of French grenadiers. At two in the afternoon, the garrison, preceded by sixteen horsemen, marched out of the stronghold with drums beating and colors flying. They filed past us with a degree of order and agility we had not yet seen in Spanish troops. They laid down their arms and were immediately marched to Valladolid under the escort of two battalions of the Irish Regiment⁴.

Twelve pieces of artillery were found in the stronghold, but very little ammunition. Food supplies were also almost entirely exhausted⁵.

At the very moment the stronghold was surrendering, an enemy column of two thousand infantry and two hundred cavalry, commanded by Colonel Don Ramon Navas, was advancing along the road from Puebla de Sanabria and attacking General Bessi res at Penilla. Three companies of the Forty-Sixth Line and the Sixth Provisional Dragoon Regiment sufficed to rout this column: the Spaniards left eighty-one dead, including four officers, and twenty wounded on the battlefield, along with more than two hundred muskets. Colonel Painteville of the Sixth Dragoons pursued them into the mountains, killing another thirty men and bringing back ninety-one prisoners. At the same time, another Spanish column was heading toward Astorga along the Villafranca road. General Clauzel's division routed it at Manzanal, pursued it beyond Bembibre, inflicted heavy casualties, and captured one hundred men. A force that had advanced to Foncebad n was also dispersed by General Sainte-Croix and forced to retreat, suffering losses of about a hundred men killed and fifty taken prisoner.

³ See supporting documents, No. 4

⁴ See supporting documents, No. 5.

⁵ See supporting documents, No. 6.

Thus fell Astorga, after twenty-four days of siege operations. The stronghold had been dismissed as a mere shack that would be easily taken, since it was enclosed only by a simple wall; yet that wall was solid, and the garrison was determined to defend itself. Nevertheless, had the necessary tools and artillery been available at the start of operations, the town would likely have held out for barely ten days.

General Junot treated the inhabitants with consideration, contenting himself with levying a modest war contribution on the city, a portion of which was distributed as a gratuity to wounded officers and soldiers. Peasants who had taken up arms were sent back to their villages; however, a Spanish soldier was shot for attempting to kill one of General Boyer's Aides-de-Camp as the general entered the city⁶.

According to the Governor's report, the garrison suffered fifty-one killed and one hundred and two wounded⁷. The Spaniards took great pride in their spirited resistance. Long after the capture of Astorga, they continued to sing enthusiastically a song recounting the details of the siege, the refrain of which proclaimed that Astorga had been the grave of the French. Yet this operation cost us only one hundred and sixty men killed and four hundred wounded; had the assault been delayed by just one hour, the losses would have been far lower⁸.

General Junot detached the Godart Brigade to establish contact with General Bonet, who was facing serious pressure in Asturias; he then moved closer to Valladolid with the bulk of the Eighth Corps to take part in the expedition Marshal Masséna was to launch against Portugal. Astorga received a small garrison and became an excellent base of operations for the troops tasked with covering the Old Castile frontier on the side facing Galicia.



⁶ The memory of this soldier was honored by the inhabitants of Astorga, and on 27 May 1814, when they exhumed his body with great ceremony.

⁷ See supporting documents, No. 5.

⁸ See supporting documents, No. 7

STATE

OF THE TROOPS DEPLOYED IN THE SIEGE OF ASTORGA.

HEADQUARTERS.

General Junot, Duke of Abrantès, Commander in Chief of the Eighth Corps.
 Boyer (Pierre), Brigadier General, Chief of Staff.
 Lagrave, Captain, Aide-de-Camp of General Junot.

INFANTRY.

1st DIVISION, General Clauzel.

1 st Brigade, General Ménard.	{	19 th Line.....	1	bn.	698	m. pres.
		25 th id.....	1		628	
		28 th id.....	1		646	
		34 th id.....	1		711	
2 nd Brigade, General Taupin.	{	36 th id.....	1		804	
		50 th id.....	1		775	
		75 th id.....	1		761	
3 rd Brigade, General Godart.	{	22 nd id.....	4		2765	

2nd DIVISION, General Lagrange.

1 st Brigade, General Jeanin.	{	46 th Line.....	1		631	
		65 th id.....	4		2871	
		2 nd Light.....	1		605	
2 nd Brigade, General Corsin.	{	4 th id.....	1		595	
		12 th id.....	1		578	
		32 nd id.....	1		691	
		58 th id.....	1		560	

3rd DIVISION, General Solignac.

1 st Brigade, General Gratien.	{	15 th Line.....	2		1113	
		47 th id.....	2		1177	
		Regiment of Prussia.....	1		486	
2 nd Brigade, General Thomières.	{	70 th Line.....	2		1149	
		86 th id.....	2		1122	
		Irish Regiment.....	3		1214	

TOTAL.....					20580	m.
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CAVALRY.

DIVISION OF DRAGOONS, General Trelliard.

1 st Brigade, General Sainte-Croix.	{	1 st Provisional Regiment of Dragoons.....	4	sq.	669	m.	695	h.
		2 nd id.....	4		694		744	
		3 rd id.....	4		571		606	
2 nd Brigade, General Bessières.	{	6 th id.....	4		586		622	
		7 th id.....	4		689		684	
		8 th id.....	4		661		664	
3 rd Brigade, General Bron.	{	9 th id.....	4		680		698	
		10 th id.....	4		590		634	
TOTAL.....					5140	m.	5347	h.

NOTE. The infantry brigade of General Corsin and the cavalry brigade of dragoons of General Bron remained on the lower Esla. The division of General Clauzel and the brigade of General Sainte-Croix were stationed in observation on the road of Galicia.

ARTILLERY.

HEADQUARTERS.

Foucher, Division General, Commandant of the artillery of the Eighth Corps and of the siege.
Hullot, Battalion Chief, Chief of Staff.
Noël, Squadron Chief.
Reguis, Captain, Aide-de-Camp of General Foucher.
Charpentier, Captain.
Perrin, id.

TROOPS.

Foot Artillery.....	{	6 th Regiment.....	9 th co., det.....	1	off.	20	m.	h.
		7 th id.....	20 th company..	2		89		
		8 th id.....	11 th company..	2		107		
		Artillery of Berg.....	Detachment....	1		30		
Horse Artillery.....	{	2 nd Regiment.....	6 th company...	1		71		75
		6 th id.....	8 th company...	4		95		99
Workers.....		" "	12 th co., det....	"		15		
		1 st Principal Battalion.....	Detachment....	"		26		48
		3 rd id.....	id.....	"		9		22
		8 th id.....	id.....	"		18		35
		9 th id.....	id.....	"		21		39
Train Artillery.....	{	12 th id.....	id.....	"		17		39
		3 rd Battalion (<i>bis</i>).....	id.....	1		87		163
		8 th id.....	id.....	"		15		22
		9 th id.....	id.....	"		13		18
		Train of Berg.....	id.....	2		77		126
		Train of Württemberg.....	id.....	"		22		37
TOTAL.....				14	off.	732	m.	723 h.

NOTE. The siege equipment consisted of four pieces of 24, one of 16, four of 12, a six inch mortar, and eight six inch howitzers.

ENGINEERS.

HEADQUARTERS.

Valazé, Battalion Chief, Commandant of the engineers of the Eighth Corps and of the siege (wounded).

Génot, Captain, Chief of Staff--Major.

Borel-Vivier, Captain.

Jaubert, Lieutenant (wounded).

Mermet, Adjutant--Major of sappers (wounded).

TROOPS.

Sappers.....	2 nd Battalion.....	2 nd Company....	{	Leroy, Captain.....	}	2	off.	91	m.
				Schmitt, Lieutenant.....					

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS.

No. 1.

Report from General Loison to Prince Berthier, Major General.

At the La Bañeza headquarters, 12 February 1810.

Monseigneur,

The reports I had received led me to hope that it would be possible to capture Astorga by a sudden assault. Consequently, I set out yesterday to advance upon the stronghold with General Simon's brigade, while General Ferey marched towards Puente de Órbigo, as I had the honor of informing Y. H. in my report of the 7th of this month. A reconnaissance I conducted today, during which I skirted the town's perimeter within musket range, convinced me that artillery is required to force a quick attack and avoid dragging things out. Y. H. is familiar with the position of Astorga; the Spaniards have repaired its fortifications, added new works, and entrenched the Villafranca suburb. The garrison numbers between three and four thousand men, although an approximately equal number of troops left the town to join General Garcia's army corps at Ponferrada, a force estimated at twelve to fifteen thousand men.

As the two pieces of 8, two pieces of 4, and two six-inch howitzers I had with me did not seem sufficient for a vigorous assault, I chose to limit myself to reconnaissance rather than remaining before the town without taking action. I therefore ordered General Ferey to return to the position at Puente de Órbigo that he had occupied the previous day, and I withdrew with the Simon Brigade to La Bañeza. Thanks to the detachments these two brigades maintain in all the surrounding villages, the town of Astorga is cut off from drawing any resources from the Kingdom of León.

To be in a position to attack, I require eighteen pieces of artillery; I am renewing my urgent requests to General Kellermann, and I am also writing to Marshal Ney to ask him to lend me the necessary artillery from the siege train attached to his army corps. I am applying to the General-in-Chief of the Army's artillery, reminding him of the orders he must have received from Your Highness. While these arrangements are being made, I shall take measures to procure provisions. I can assure Y. H. that once I have the artillery, six days will suffice for me to reduce Astorga, despite the oath sworn by its inhabitants and garrison to emulate Saragossa and bury themselves beneath the ruins of the stronghold.

I left behind two battalions that had been ordered to take up a position at Puerto de Pajares and link up with General Bonet; however, heavy snow and the appearance of the enemy in force at that location prevented them from holding their ground. They have withdrawn to Busdongo, from where they are keeping watch over the passes into Asturias.

A Spanish corps of five to six thousand men, commanded by a certain Echeverría, is at Sanabria. General Simon's brigade, stationed at La Bañeza, is keeping watch on this force, as well as on Ponferrada and the garrison of Astorga.

I have the honor to remain, with profound respect, etc.

Signed: COUNT LOISON.



No. 2.

Letter from General Loison to Colonel Santocildès, Governor of Astorga.

At the camp of La Bañeza, 6 February 1810.

Monsieur Governor,

The staff officer who will have the honor of delivering this letter to you has given me a high opinion of your character and military knowledge. For this reason, I wish to find an opportunity to enter into correspondence with Your Excellency.

The King has entered Seville amidst the acclamations of all the inhabitants, and Andalusia is now subject to his authority. The Junta has been dissolved, and the people have arrested several of its members; yet, before dissolving, its final resolution was to strip the Duke del Parque of his command. Such is the state of affairs in Spain.

Consequently, both out of regard for the character of Y. E. and in fulfillment of my own duty, I must bring these events to your attention so that you may weigh their significance. Almost all Spaniards, recognizing the benefits of the new order of things, have implored the clemency of their sovereign, who treats them all like a father. This example set by others is worthy of the consideration of Y. E. By following it, you will save your garrison, and the town's inhabitants will owe it to both you and me that they may remain undisturbed in their homes; for me, this would be the most gratifying triumph.

Should you doubt, which I cannot believe, the accuracy of the facts I have the honor of sharing with you, the officer delivering this letter is authorized to make whatever proposals you deem appropriate to convince you.

I hope Y. E. will be willing to come and speak with me, with the confidence inspired by military honor, and will indicate a place where we might confer.

I beg Y. E. to accept the assurance of my sincere sentiments; in the meantime, I have the honor to be, etc.

Signed: LOISON.



No. 3.

Reply from the Governor of Astorga to the preceding letter.

Astorga, 6 February 1810.

Monseigneur,

Although I do not doubt the truth of the contents of your letter of today, delivered to me by your staff officer, Don Saturnino Agnos, I would deem myself unworthy of the high opinion you hold of me were I not to reply that the time has not yet come to enter into negotiations with Y. E. As I am resolved to fulfill the duties of a good soldier until the very last moment of my life, pray spare me further proposals; and should fate prove more favorable to you than to me, you may then do as you see fit with the garrison and the obedient populace who, inspired by their valor and patriotism and led by me, will have discharged the duties they swore to uphold.

I remain, Your Exc., etc.

Signed: SANTOCILDÈS



No. 4.

Capitulation of Astorga.

ARTICLE Ist. The garrison shall become prisoners of war; they shall march out of the stronghold with the honors of war and lay down their arms one hundred paces from the gate. Soldiers shall retain their knapsacks, and officers their personal baggage.

ART. II. Immediately following the surrender of the stronghold, the commander shall deliver to the Chief of Staff a return of all corps comprising the garrison: this return shall include volunteer companies and those of armed inhabitants, in short, all individuals who served within Astorga, so that their arms may be collected, as well as a detailed inventory of all magazines of every kind within the stronghold and their contents; military and civil chests and their ledgers; inventories of artillery and engineer stores; the number of horses and mules; and, finally, all items belonging to the various branches of civil and military administration.

ART. III. To ensure that everything pertaining to Catholic religious worship is respected and that nothing is removed under any pretext, the ecclesiastical head of Astorga shall take charge of all religious objects belonging to the churches that were present prior to the siege. All such objects must remain in place, and the General-in-Chief strictly forbids his troops, under the severest penalties, from removing even the smallest part of them.

ART. IV. As soon as these terms are accepted, guards shall be posted at the city gates, at church entrances, and in the main squares to maintain order and ensure respect for religious worship, property, and individuals⁹.

At the trenches before Astorga, 22 April 1810.

The General-in-Chief commanding the Eighth Corps, Governor of Paris.

Signed: THE DUKE OF ABRANTÈS.

The Colonel of the Santiago Regiment, Governor of Astorga.

Signed: JOSÉ MARIA DE SANTOCILDÈS.

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<sup>9</sup> Under a special agreement, no French troops shall enter the city until it has been evacuated by the garrison.

## No. 5.

*Return of the troops comprising the garrison of Astorga  
and the losses sustained during the siege.*

(Extract from Colonel Santocildès's Spanish account.)

| RÉGIMENTS.                          | FORCES POUR LE SERVICE. |             |              |           |           |                         | MORTS. |        |            |           |                         | Blessés<br>et contusionnés. |        |            |           |                         |        |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------------|--------|--------|------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|------------|-----------|-------------------------|--------|
|                                     | Chefs.                  | Capitaines. | Subalternes. | Sergents. | Tambours. | Caporaux<br>et soldats. | Total. | Chefs. | Officiers. | Sergents. | Caporaux<br>et soldats. | Total.                      | Chefs. | Officiers. | Sergents. | Caporaux<br>et soldats. | Total. |
| Lugo.....                           | 2                       | 2           | 15           | 48        | 11        | 628                     | 687    | »      | »          | »         | 4                       | 4                           | 1      | 5          | 4         | 9                       | 19     |
| Santiago.....                       | 1                       | 3           | 9            | 28        | 14        | 900                     | 942    | »      | »          | »         | 10                      | 10                          | »      | »          | 3         | 20                      | 23     |
| Volontaires de Léon.                | 4                       | 9           | 31           | 47        | 11        | 572                     | 630    | »      | 2          | »         | 14                      | 16                          | »      | 3          | 2         | 32                      | 39     |
| Chasseurs de Léon..                 | 2                       | 4           | 15           | 15        | 12        | 263                     | 290    | »      | »          | 2         | 14                      | 16                          | »      | 1          | 1         | 8                       | 10     |
| Tirailleurs du Bierzo.              | »                       | 2           | 5            | 6         | 2         | 146                     | 154    | »      | »          | »         | 3                       | 3                           | »      | »          | »         | 4                       | 4      |
| Cavalerie. Hussards<br>de Léon..... | »                       | »           | 2            | 1         | »         | 12                      | 13     | »      | »          | »         | »                       | »                           | »      | »          | »         | 2                       | 2      |
| Artillerie.....                     | »                       | »           | 2            | 2         | 1         | 40                      | 43     | »      | »          | »         | 2                       | 2                           | »      | »          | 1         | 4                       | 5      |
| TOTAUX...                           | 9                       | 20          | 79           | 147       | 51        | 2561                    | 2759   | »      | 2          | 2         | 47                      | 51                          | 1      | 9          | 11        | 79                      | 102    |

## No. 6.

*Return of the principal items of artillery found in  
the fortress of Astorga on 22 April 1810.*

|                                 |   |        |        |
|---------------------------------|---|--------|--------|
| Cannons.....                    | { | of 12. | 2      |
|                                 |   | of 8.  | 2      |
|                                 |   | of 4.  | 4      |
|                                 |   | of 3.  | 3      |
| Mortars of four pounds.....     |   |        | 1      |
| Howitzers of seven pounds.....  |   |        | 1      |
| Caissons.....                   |   |        | 6      |
| Fusils.....                     |   |        | 2,600  |
| Cartouches of the infantry..... |   |        | 70,000 |
| Gunpowder (kil).....            |   |        | 500    |

NOTE: There is very little ammunition and little cast iron.

## No. 7.

*Report from General Junot, Duke of Abrantès, to Prince  
Berthier, Major General.*

Astorga, evening of 22 April.

Monseigneur,

As I had the honor of writing to Your Serene Highness yesterday, the grenadiers, having performed prodigies of valor in the assault on Astorga, gave further proof of their courage by holding their ground at the breach. Despite several extremely fierce and deadly attacks, their stubborn and valiant resistance overcame every obstacle to establishing a foothold at the breach, a gap measuring no more than three or four feet in thickness at its crest and backed by a vast drop that formed a natural moat for the stronghold; its sides, heavily palisaded and fortified, appeared impassable. Yet, even with the moon shining as brightly as day, these brave men managed to secure positions in two nearby houses, braving an extraordinary hail of bullets raining down on a space roughly ten toises long and two wide. While this small band of men contended with such overwhelming numbers, my primary concern was finding a way to open a line of communication from the demi-place d'armes to the breach in order to reinforce the troops stationed there; however, the forty toises stretch separating the two points was so heavily defended and swept by such a dense crossfire that work seemed almost impossible without certain death, especially given our limited supply of gabions and sandbags. Nevertheless, a thousand workmen from the First Division, commanded by Battalion Commander Bragueras of the Twenty-Eighth Regiment and led by about ten sappers, with the encouragement of Engineer Commander Valazé and Engineer Captain Génot (the corps' chief of staff), succeeded in establishing the vital communication link we needed. We suffered twenty-four killed and one hundred and twenty wounded among the workmen. Engineer Commander Valazé was struck by two bullets that knocked him down; I feared I had lost this excellent officer, but fortunately his wounds are slight, and a few days will suffice for him to resume his duties. Finally, Monseigneur, by six o'clock in the morning, the connection was complete, and the enemy had lost all hope of driving us from the breach, and consequently of preventing us from advancing into the city. They had suffered heavy casualties and were disheartened by our steadfastness and intrepidity.

At ten o'clock in the morning, the commander of Astorga sent a lieutenant-colonel from the Lugo Regiment to offer me a capitulation. I immediately dictated the terms I wished to impose, without the need for any discussion between the commander and myself and sent the envoy back into the stronghold. An hour later, the commander himself emerged from the town and came to surrender his sword, requesting the honors of war for both himself and his garrison. I granted his request and returned his sword, in recognition of the garrison's conduct during the previous evening and night.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, thirty-five hundred fine troops, well-armed with English muskets and well-clad in English greatcoats and uniforms, laid down their arms and were marched in two columns to La Bañeza, from where they will continue their journey to France.

About five hundred wounded men remain in the hospitals; judging by their own reports, the death toll must be high.

I found ten cannons and two mortars in Astorga, but few supplies; the thirty-three-day blockade had severely depleted the food stores, which I found very poorly stocked.

The capture of Astorga reflects great credit on the troops of the Eighth Corps; all of them, each at the post I had assigned, did their duty, whether holding off the enemy from without or attacking the enemy within. Yet nothing surpasses the conduct of the elite battalion formed for the assault. I request the rank of battalion chief for its commander, Captain de Lagrave, my Aide-de-Camp and an officer distinguished as much by his education as by his valor and intelligence, a promotion merited by over seventeen years of service as a captain; I also request the decoration of Officer of the Legion of Honor in recognition of his brilliant conduct on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Commandant Valazé, who directed all siege operations with great intelligence, contributed significantly to the success through his bravery, and sustained two bullet wounds, deserves His Majesty's favor. I request the rank of colonel for him.

The artillery, commanded by General of Division Foucher, performed with great distinction; and despite the limited resources at this general officer's disposal, he achieved results that could scarcely have been hoped for; for of the four pieces of 24 and one piece of 16 arming the breaching battery, one short-barreled gun was put out of action after the very first shots, and a long piece of 24 fired so erratically that none of its shots could be relied upon. It was with these meager means that a breach was successfully made in a stone wall nearly twenty-four feet thick, a wall far stronger, according to the engineer officers, than any revetment wall found in modern fortifications. I beg Your Highness to bring General Foucher's conduct to His Majesty's attention.

I also ask Your Highness to kindly intercede with His Majesty to secure the decoration of Officer of the Legion of Honor for Captain Vivier of the Engineers; he joined the assault with the first company of voltigeurs and carried out all possible engineering works to establish the troops in their position. One noteworthy circumstance demonstrates the dedication of this elite battalion even more clearly: Grenadier Lanjuinais of the Forty-Seventh Regiment, nephew of the senator of the same name, suggested to his comrades that they give up their knapsacks to start a traverse intended for their left flank; they all complied, and a stone traverse was subsequently erected upon this novel foundation; only today did they go back to retrieve their packs. I must also commend Grenadier Delêtre of the Fifteenth Line and Corporal Vanau of the same regiment; three times they descended from the breach to deliver orders, and three times they climbed back up with equal bravery.

I request the decoration of the Legion of Honour for: Captain Montagnet, Aide-de-Camp to General Thomières, who suffered a broken leg from a bullet; Captain Génot of the Engineers; Captain Leroy of the Sappers; and Lieutenant Jaubert of the Engineers, who was wounded.

I am forwarding to Your Highness a list of requests for promotion or decoration, organized by division and branch of service, for the men who most distinguished themselves at Astorga. I ask

that you kindly present these proposals to His Majesty; their approval is recommended both as a means of rewarding brave men and as a way to replace the officers we have lost.

We mourn the loss of several brave soldiers.

The Prussian carabineer company had the following casualties: one lieutenant, one corporal, and nine carabineers killed; one captain, one sub-lieutenant, two sergeants, two corporals, and fourteen carabineers wounded.

The grenadier company of the fourth battalion of the Forty-Seventh, had: the sergeant-major, a sergeant, and seventeen grenadiers killed; the captain, the lieutenant, two sergeants, one quartermaster-sergeant, three corporals, and thirty-four grenadiers wounded.

The grenadier company of the fifth had: the sergeant-major, a sergeant, two corporals, nine grenadiers killed; the captain, the sub-lieutenant, a sergeant, three corporals, and thirty-one grenadiers wounded.

The voltigeur company of the second battalion of Irish, which was the first to storm the breach, had: a corporal and ten voltigeurs killed; a sergeant and fifteen voltigeurs wounded.

The voltigeur company of the fourth battalion, Forty-Seventh, had: the captain, the lieutenant, the sub-lieutenant, a sergeant, and seven voltigeurs killed; the sergeant-major, two sergeants, one cornet, and thirty-one voltigeurs wounded.

The voltigeur company of the Forty-Sixth had: a quartermaster-sergeant (fourrier) and four voltigeurs killed; three corporals and six voltigeurs wounded.

The Sixty-Fifth Regiment, which had been tasked with a feint attack on the suburb, and which pressed its attack with excessive zeal, had a captain, a sergeant-major, a sergeant, a corporal, and three voltigeurs killed; and two lieutenants, two sergeants, a quartermaster-corporal, two corporals, and twenty-eight voltigeurs wounded.

The Irish Regiment had: twenty-one men killed and thirty-eight wounded.

The Seventieth, eight men killed and fifty-one wounded.

The Engineers had four men killed and ten wounded.

The Artillery had two men killed, and an officer and eleven soldiers wounded.

The capture of Astorga cost the Eighth Corps, from the start of the siege, approximately one hundred and sixty men killed and four hundred wounded, both during operations against the stronghold and in various skirmishes with the enemy forces outside. We killed over fifteen hundred of the enemy and took about five thousand prisoners. At three o'clock this morning, while we were at the breach, an enemy column, comprising two thousand infantry and two hundred cavalry, arriving from Puebla de Sanabria under the command of the colonel of the

Benavente Regiment, attacked General Bessi res at Penilla. He immediately dispatched reinforcements to his outposts, sending the two elite companies and one center company from the Forty-Sixth Regiment battalion under his command, along with the Sixth Provisional Dragoon Regiment; these three companies sufficed to put the Spaniards to flight. Colonel Painteville of the Sixth Provisional Dragoons pursued the enemy as far as Quintanilla and ordered his dragoons to dismount in order to reach them further up in the mountains; he killed thirty of their men and took ninety-one prisoners. The enemy left eighty-one dead, including four officers, twenty wounded men, and over two hundred muskets on the battlefield at Penilla. They must have carried off many wounded, as a trail of blood marked their retreat. The colonel of the Benavente Regiment, who commanded the force, was shot in the chest, and a lieutenant-colonel from the same regiment was also wounded. This engagement reflects great credit on the fourth battalion of the Forty-Sixth. General Bessi res makes special mention of Captains Beuvar and Leroux, commanding the grenadier and voltigeur companies. He also commends Battalion Commander Vigier. The Sixth Provisional Dragoon Regiment, commanded by Colonel Painteville, also performed admirably that day and pursued the enemy vigorously.

Meanwhile, General Clauzel's division drove the enemy beyond Bembibre, capturing one hundred men and killing a greater number, while Brigadier General Sainte-Croix, with his cavalry and an infantry battalion from Lagrange's division, drove the enemy from Foncebad n, taking about fifty prisoners and killing around a hundred men.

The entire division of General Solignac, engaged in the siege, conducted itself bravely at every point of the attack. Brigadier General Thomi res was in command of the trenches on the day of the assault and contributed significantly, through his composure, to establishing the line of communication.

Your Serene Highness may assure His Majesty that everyone did their duty well and that the Eighth Corps merits his confidence and favor. I take this opportunity to remind His Majesty of the requests I have repeatedly made regarding my aides-de-camp; these officers, brave, intelligent, and possessing long service records, truly deserve his favor.

I am highly pleased with the diligence of General Boyer (Pierre), my chief of staff, as well as the zeal of the administrative services. Commissary Michaux succeeded in maintaining a steady supply of provisions for a large number of troops in a region with few resources; he organized the medical services as effectively as possible, and our soldiers received treatment right in the trenches and at the foot of the breach. The medical officers conducted themselves admirably. I must offer special praise to Chief Surgeon Malraison, who was in charge of the ambulance service.

I have the honor to be, Your Serene Highness, etc.

*Signed:* DUKE OF ABRANT S.

