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Part 1

JOURNALS
OF THE SIEGES

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

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RUE JACOB, N^O 24.

**JOURNALS
OF THE SIEGES**

**MADE OR SUSTAINED BY THE FRENCH
IN THE PENINSULA,
FROM 1807 TO 1814;**

**WRITTEN, ACCORDING TO THE ORDERS OF THE GOVERNMENT,
FROM THE DOCUMENTS EXISTING IN THE WAR ARCHIVES
AND AT THE FORTIFICATION DEPOT.**

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PREFACE.



THE Peninsular War stands out among those which, under Napoleon, have set Europe ablaze. The causes which produced it, the number and variety of events which it gave rise to, the character of the people who supported it, and the atrocities which accompanied it, make it a war apart. It offers the imposing spectacle of a great nation raised en masse to take back its independence.

In this long and cruel struggle, the Spaniards showed an unexampled tenacity. They did not shrink from any kind of sacrifice. The greatest privations, the most unheard-of misfortunes could not shake their constancy, nor break their courage. Priests, monks, peasants, heads of families, all enlisted, all wanted to fight the French. Some went to reinforce the regular armies which, always beaten, immediately reorganized themselves and seemed to be reborn from the ground. Others, led by enterprising leaders, formed bands of guerrillas, which were swelled by numerous smugglers and a crowd of individuals whose habit of carrying arms and using them on the main roads disposed them to brigandage. The country was covered with these bands, which were no less to be feared, whether they were excited by patriotism, or whether they were animated by a spirit of disorder and pillage. They assassinated isolated soldiers and massacred detachments which were too weak or which guarded themselves badly; they intercepted couriers, stopped convoys, prevented the collection of taxes; and, far from laying down their arms after a defeat, they recruited new combatants in their flight, to whom exasperation or ever-increasing poverty put arms in their hands.

The obstacles arising from the disposition of the inhabitants were added to the difficulties of the ground. Spain is largely covered with mountains which, stripped of forests and under a sky that is always burning, present only uncultivated plateaus and bare slopes. Only, at the bottom of the valleys and near the watercourses, one finds a green edge where one follows, as if on a trail, the harvests, the plantations and the dwellings of men. Broom and heather cover entire regions. In some places, art profits with prodigious success from the fertilizing waters to obtain abundant harvests from the land, but next to these rich country sides, covered with inhabitants, there are immense deserts where the eye gets lost and where the thought is saddened by embracing the empty and solitary space. More than a third of the surface of Spain offers only arid lands. The rest of the country, poorly cultivated by a population that is too rare, produces barely one harvest every three years.

In such a country, the armies always had the greatest difficulty in subsisting, and the lack of provisions was constantly an obstacle to their operations. The famine spread its ravages on all sides, and, in the heart of the capital likewise, bread sold for up to forty sous per livre. Immense regions devastated by the war remained uncultivated for lack of arms and grains to be sown. A large number of towns and villages burned or abandoned offered only heaps of ruins; and entire

populations, taking refuge in the mountains at the approach of the French armies, ended up dying there of hunger and misery.

The small number of roads was also an obstacle to war. Only two royal roads, linked by a few secondary roads, leave the capital and end, one at Bayonne, by Burgos and Vitoria, and the other at Perpignan, by Valencia and Barcelona. These roads themselves are little frequented, the Spaniards hardly knowing the use of the post and doing almost all their transport on the backs of mules. Outside these two lines, communications are very difficult; the provinces are isolated from each other; the towns and villages are at great distances, often surrounded by superb olive forests, but rarely by hamlets and country houses; they are so many oases in the middle of a desert. The rivers rush down from the mountains by such a steep slope, that they only begin to be navigable at a fairly short distance from their mouths. The torrents which flow into them flow into deep ravines, the steep banks of which cut the country and make it almost impassable to artillery and even to cavalry. Between these ravines rise rocks or steep mountains capable of serving as retreats for isolated bands. One can imagine the difficulty of subduing such a country inhabited by agile, sober, courageous, passionate men, and less suited to fighting in a line than to acting as partisans.

The English chose the Peninsula for the battlefield in the struggle that the double interest of their commerce and their industry obliged them to sustain. There, they carried their immense resources; they supplied the Spaniards with money, arms, munitions; they raised Portugal, landed an army there, and gave themselves over to expenses such as no century, no country had seen the likes of.

The French armies covered the ground of the Peninsula and annihilated the Spanish armies, but, obliged to go to sea to find food, to ensure communications, to occupy the country and contain the inhabitants, they weakened in a war of detail, and formed only independent bodies which, although formidable, could however only combine slowly for major operations.

This war, which involved a host of memorable battles, sieges and combats, produced excellent soldiers. Each commander-in-chief, obliged to conquer the territory of his government, to keep it and to defend it, had to, in order to maintain his troops, know how to create resources and show himself to be both a good administrator and a skilled warrior. Each officer, each detachment leader, often isolated in the midst of enemy populations, found more than once the opportunity to develop all the resources of his talents and his energy. The soldiers, endured by several years of combat, fatigue and privations of all kinds, all became elite men. It was from their ranks that, recalled by detachments to be poured into the new levies, came these swarms of brave men who promptly formed at their school the victorious troops at Lützen, Bautzen, Dresden, Montmirail.

The defensive art played an especially important role in this war. To subdue a country where the inhabitants took such an active part in the struggle, it was not enough to roam it in all directions with victorious armies. It was necessary to seize all the fortified points; to occupy permanently the principal positions; to secure the arms and ammunition depots, the stores, the hospitals, to assure communications, and to keep the populations always ready to rise up, despite their frequent defeats. Madrid became the center of operations of the French armies. The roads which

leave from there to communicate with France and with the different provinces, were guarded by fortified posts, having a more or less numerous garrison according to their importance. In each city or village, a castle, an advantageously situated convent, was transformed by ingenious works into a citadel, capable not only of maintaining the ill-disposed population, but also of resisting other enemies who would have wanted to lay siege to it. Such were the redoubts of the Retiro in Madrid, of San Vicente in Salamanca, of the Cartuja in Seville; the castles of Alba de Tormes, of Granada, of Valencia, of Saragossa, etc. The great road to Bayonne, on which nearly fifty thousand men were always stationed, was defended, independently of the places of Pamplona, San Sebastian and the fort of Burgos, by eleven military posts between Bayonne and Burgos, and by eight between Burgos and Madrid, on the line of Aranda and Somosierra; eleven others protected the less direct road which passes through Valladolid, Segovia and Guadarama; fifteen points assured the line from Valladolid to Saragossa; eight, that of Valladolid to Santander; nine others linked Valladolid with Villafranca del Bierzo by the road of Benavente and Astorga; two others between Benavente and Leon. Similar posts existed in Aragon, Catalonia, Andalusia, the Kingdom of Valencia, Extremadura, and La Mancha. Together they formed a vast reservoir that covered the whole of Spain.

Under the support of these posts, convoys and detachments could travel, if not in complete safety, at least without too great danger. They found there a place of rest and refreshment, a depot for their sick and wounded, a refuge in case of attack, and a supply point to take in food and ammunition. Mobile columns were also charged with holding the countryside in pursuit of the bands that infested the country and bringing relief to the points attacked.

It was usually enough that these posts were sheltered from a sudden attack and capable of resisting for a few days the enterprises of the bands which, obliged to take refuge in the mountains at the approach of our columns, rarely dragged artillery in their wake. The enemy nevertheless managed to take several of them by mining, and thus in 1811 the bands of Castile seized, after a siege of nine days, the entrenched convent of La Merced in Calatayud defended by five hundred men. Woe then to the garrison which allowed itself to be forced, because the guerrillas rarely took prisoners!

To all the works of such a system of defense, we must add those of the new roads, undertaken to facilitate the operations of the armies, to avoid dangerous defiles, to conduct artillery; the fortifications raised to increase the strength of a position, to close a passage, to cover a depot, to guard an outlet. This is how the fortified lines of the Ebro, the Douro, the Tormes, the Tagus, the Guadiana were built; thus were undertaken the immense works of Massena in Portugal, on the Rio-Mayor and on the Zêzere; those of Marshal Suchet in Aragon and in the kingdom of Valencia; those of Marshal Macdonald, of Generals Decaen and Lamarque in Catalonia; those of Marshal Soult in Andalusia, in Extremadura, in the Pyrenees, on the Nivelle and on the Nive, around Bayonne, in Toulouse.

Stronger behind entrenchments than in pitched battle, the Spaniards did not neglect the aid of fortification either. Several positions were fortified by them, such as the passage of the Somosierra, the defiles of the Sierra-Morena, the lines of Guadalaviar and Jucar in the kingdom of Valencia. They grouped themselves especially skillfully around their strongholds, which they

defended with determination. The obstinacy of their character was shown even in the defense of their posts.

Always prudent and methodical, Lord Wellington had almost all the positions he occupied fortified. Most of his battles were defensive and took place on terrain studied and prepared in advance; this was one of the principal causes of his successes. The lines of Torres-Vedras saved his army and decided the fate of the Peninsula.

There are few campaigns which present a more varied and extensive use of the resources of fortification. The study which one could make of the war of the Peninsula from this special point of view would be full of interest and usefulness. The necessity is all the more felt, as there exists in general a gap in the history of our wars on everything which relates to military works. Many authors complacently describe even the smallest details of an advance guard action or a simple reconnaissance, and barely say a word about so many works of places, defensive lines, fortified positions, establishments created, bridges, roads, dikes and canals, which, by changing the very data of the war, were able to influence to such a high degree the results of a campaign.

Napoleon, who attached great importance to military works, and who liked to compare his own with those of the illustrious generals of antiquity, had desired that this gap be filled, at least as regards siege works, where combats mixed with industrial efforts do above all honor to French arms, and offer the most useful lessons for the future. By an order of 1 February 1811, he prescribed to the Major General *"to have the plans of the attacks and sieges of the different places taken in the last three German wars, such as Danzig, Raab, the places of Silesia, etc., collected at the fortifications depot."* On 9 July of the same year, he requested similar work for the places of Spain. *"My cousin,"* he wrote to Prince Berthier, *"it is necessary to have the plans of the sieges of Saragossa, Lerida, Mequinenza, Tortosa, Tarragona, Girona, Ciudad-Rodrigo, Almeida and Badajoz drawn and engraved, both for the instruction of the engineering officers and for the honor of the soldiers who distinguished themselves in these sieges."*

To these collections of the sieges of the places of Germany and Spain, requested by the Emperor, would have been added that of the sieges of the places of Italy, and their whole would have made known a very important part of the history of our recent wars.

This enterprise had not been able to be carried out. In 1812, the collection of the sieges of the places of Spain had begun at the fortifications depot by engraving the plans of Saragossa, Lerida and Badajoz. Lack of funds and the events of 1814 had caused this work to be suspended, and under the Restoration it had been abandoned. It was not until 1832 that Marshal Soult, Minister of War, had it resumed and at the same time ordered the collection of materials necessary for the reduction of the siege journals that were to accompany the plans.

This fine collection has just been completed. Marshal Maison, Minister of War, has ordered its publication. The twenty-five years that have passed since the events it recounts will not have been wasted. They allow the truth to come to light, and these events can be recounted impartially,

today that the passions aroused by the war have calmed down. A large number of individual documents, reports and memoirs, successively published, have been able to be consulted, and more facts and more details have been collected.

This work is written according to the reports and correspondence of the generals in chief, and of the commanders of the special arms; according to the orders of the Emperor, of the major general and of the minister of war; finally, according to the memoirs, plans, situation reports, and other various information, the whole of which, both at the war depot and at that of the fortifications, forms for the war of the Peninsula alone a collection of more than one hundred thousand pieces. The principal works published in Spain on this war have been translated and analyzed, but particularly the reports given by the governors of the besieged places. The *Moniteur*, the English and Spanish newspapers have been consulted; the printed memoirs of Marshals Gouvion Saint-Cyr and Suchet, of le Noble, of Ney, of la Grèbe, of Guingret; the *Victories and Conquests*; the unfinished work of General Foy; the writings of Jomini, those of the English colonels Napier and John Jones, of the Italian Major Vacani; the Spanish works of Count Toreno, Father Ferrer, Doctor Ibieta, Lieutenant Colonel Cavallero, Generals Contreras, Herrasti, Santocildes, etc. In addition, a large number of generals and officers, actors in the war, were kind enough to share their observations on the facts they witnessed.

So much information, drawn from various sources, and checking each other, has allowed the facts to be recounted in a complete and faithful manner. It has therefore been possible, for each siege, to describe the work of the different arms, to give the details of the assaults, and to trace the movements of troops. It has been possible to make known the situation of the besieged, the passions which animated them, and their means of resistance, thus making the defense march in front of the attack. In addition, a large number of supporting documents accompany the rotation of each siege, and greatly increase its interest, in that they let the characters who are on stage speak, and reproduce their impressions at the moment of the action.

The role of the places in the war, their intimate relations with the operations of the armies, did not allow each siege to be considered in isolation. It was therefore necessary to indicate how it had been brought about, in what circumstances it had been undertaken, and what were the strength and situation of the belligerent armies. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to first present a summary of the whole war, which makes known the principal events. This summary, written according to the most authentic materials, is intended to serve as an introduction to the siege journals.