

# LETTER

FROM

**SIR ROBERT WILSON**

TO HIS

**Constituents,**

IN

**REFUTATION OF A CHARGE**

FOR

DISPATCHING A FALSE REPORT OF A VICTORY TO THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE BRITISH ARMY IN THE PENINSULA IN THE YEAR 1809;

AND

WHICH CHARGE IS ADVANCED IN THE QUARTERLY REVIEW, PUBLISHED IN SEPTEMBER, 1818.

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# LETTER

SIR ROBERT WILSON

Canal

REPUTATION OF A CHURCH

W. Flint, Printer, Old Bailey, London.

*Extract from the Quarterly Review, published in September, 1818.—Art. V. “A Sketch of the Military and Political Power of Russia.” (By Sir Robert Wilson.)*

“Sir Robert Wilson is, we believe, himself, well acquainted with an officer of high rank and of considerable reputation as ‘an able Partizan,’ who nevertheless thought fit to enliven a period of inaction during the Spanish war, by dispatching to head quarters a *false* report of a victory gained by the corps under his command; a circumstance, which, *to say no more of it*, has had a considerable effect in making us incredulous as to military details derived from extra official sources.”

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TO THE ELECTORS  
OF THE  
BOROUGH OF SOUTHWARK.

Oct. 6th, 1818.

It is the duty of a public servant to consider that his character is connected with national honor; but you, Gentlemen, who have appointed me as one of your Representatives, who, by the gift of your free suffrages, have conferred on me the highest distinction which the member of a free state can receive, have a right to demand that I should preserve an unblemished reputation. My disgrace would be your special reproach.

An insidious charge has been brought forward, which if it were substantiated, would justly deprive me of the good opinion and confidence of my countrymen; a charge, which accuses me of a professional offence, of which, if I am guilty, instead of having founded pretensions to reward, I should have ex-

perienced an almost reprehensible degree of indulgence and lenity.

It is true, the accuser is an *anonymous* adversary;\* but the literary character of the work which has been made the vehicle of the charge; the notorious fact that persons of the highest consideration officiate occasionally as Reviewers, in that work; and the internal evidence of the whole article invests him with an importance, which must be generally acknowledged, and which I should not be justified in treating with silent indifference.

Impressed with these opinions, I addressed a letter, dated Sept. 25th, to the Editor, in which I acquainted him "that my attention had been directed to a paragraph in the Review of my work on Russia, which from the introduction of the words 'active partizan,' seemed to indicate me as the person guilty of transmitting that *false* report to which the writer alluded;—that I was bound to repel such a serious charge; but as it might be made in error, and not in the spirit of defamation, I was anxious to correct such error in his mind, by affording him the means of information, and just grounds for redressing the wrong which he had done me.—I therefore inclosed a printed narrative of the operations of the corps under my com-

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\* If this attack had not been anonymous, I should have felt myself under the necessity of demanding a professional investigation, and from my experience of the justice of His Royal Highness the Commander in Chief, I should have relied with confidence on the readiness with which he would have afforded me the means of vindication.

mand, extracted from the *Moniteur*, and the *British Gazettes*."

I concluded by observing, "that reputation was the only fruit I had derived from twenty-five years' service. That I therefore felt persuaded, the Editor would not condemn the jealousy I expressed for its preservation, but assist the demand of justice."

On the 4th of October I received the extent of a letter, in which the Editor, in very polite terms, stated "that he had put my letter into the hands of the person principally concerned, but that the communication from him could not be published until the next number appeared, for neither attack or justification were ever permitted in the intervals. At the same time he thought it fit and right that I should seek to justify myself in my own mode, and at my own time and pleasure, for I was in no wise bound by any of the considerations which operated as restrictions upon him as Editor of the Review."

I at first proposed to wait the publication of the next number of the *Review*, in the assurance that I should find that reparation for an injury, which I had a right to expect from the pen of my accuser, if on investigation he should have been convinced that he had been deceived by malice or misapprehension; but I have yielded to the advice of friends, who thought I should not allow the calumny to circulate freely for so long an interval; and I was further confirmed in that course of proceeding, when I considered that an earlier explanation was due to those whom I now address.

That you may, Gentlemen, judge of the injustice of those imputations which would disparage my services in the Peninsula, I shall give a concise narrative of all the transactions in which I was engaged. My feelings certainly are wounded by the aspersions which I am obliged to refute, and when you have read my statement, perhaps you will also feel for the painful situation in which I have been placed, after so much zealous service in the cause of my country; but I have suffered no virulent expression to escape me, nor shall I notice the other misrepresentations, and unauthorized censures, which I could expose in the criticism on a work, which notwithstanding such perversion and reproof must, I am still willing to think, command increased consideration, as time develops the policy of cabinets, and the fortunes of nations, or as the impartial historian investigates the transactions which it records.\*

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\* One point I am, however, called upon to notice, as it seems to contain another *insidious* allusion.—The Reviewer states, when commenting on the arguments relative to the Convention of Paris, “ We believe it, but we could ourselves, if necessary, communicate to *Sir R. Wilson* the name of *him*, who at length discovered the new version of that state paper, and turned its language to the purpose of his *political friends*.”—My answer is, that this statement does not comprize the truth.—Messrs. Dupin and Berryer could verify on oath, that the appeal of Marshal Ney was instigated by no other person than *himself*, and that he carried the conviction of his right to make that appeal into his prison in common with Labedoyere and Lavalette, though they, from deference to the entreaties of relatives, buoyed up with false hopes, and fearful of offending the King, did not make the plea which Fouché had before told

In the year 1808 I was appointed, without any solicitation on my part, but at the request of the Portuguese envoy, the Chevalier de Souza, now Count Funchal, to raise a Portuguese legion at Oporto; but none of the emoluments usually derived from such foreign levies were granted to me, and I subsequently refused the pay of £1000 per annum. offered me by the Regency of Oporto, and which I thought I could not receive without prejudice to the service in which I was engaged.

The corps having been found efficient by Lieutenant-General Sir John Craddock, moved from Oporto, in six weeks after its formation had commenced, and entered the Spanish territory, to

them, (when they were confiding in it, and walking about Paris after the return of the King in the confidence of its validity,) would not be respected by the French Government, nor be enforced by the Allies. I certainly did what I could to assist that appeal when it was once made, but I did it openly, and stated it before public authorities in a way which I thought might be beneficial.—I acted in conscience from a sense of right, and not from political feeling; but I do not deny that if there had been no convention, I would yet have sought to save Marshal Ney. He had been our enemy, but a generous one, and I had for years been the admiring spectator of his courage and military merit.—I had been educated to remember—“*ut viri fortes etiamsi ferro interse cominus decertarint tamen illud contentionis odium simul cum ipsa pugna armisque ponent.*”—“That bravemen, although they might contend hand to hand, yet lay aside the hatred of conflict, when they quit the field, and sheath their swords.”

It is true, Marshal Ney quitted his colours at Fontainebleau and at Lans le Saulnier; on both occasions to avoid a civil war; but he had example for his defection in Turenne and Marlborough,

make a diversion in favor of Sir John Moore, and save Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida, which last fortress was about to be evacuated by the British garrison; and in which stores of very great value were endangered. The nature of Sir John Moore's retreat admitted of no forward movement in time to be of any utility, and a considerable French division under General Lapisse being returned from operations against his army, advanced rapidly on Salamanca. The protection of the fortresses, and the country between the Tormes and the Agueda, became then the objects of the service in which I resolved to engage, although urged from all quarters to relinquish an undertaking, which, after the embarkation of the British army at Corunna, and the advance of Marshal Soult to the Douro, appeared to persons in authority at a greater distance to be impracticable and destructive: I was therefore enjoined to quit the corps and provide for my own safety, and that of the British officers acting with me, who nevertheless, on the communication being made to them, individually resolved to remain, and share my fortune.

By successful manœuvre and unremitting activity, the feeble corps under my command, maintained an extensive and important territory, between the Tormes and the Agueda; re-animated the drooping spirits of the inhabitants in the Portuguese and Spanish provinces, which were menaced by invasion; kept open the gates of retreat for the Marquis of Romana escaping from Galicia; influenced, as acknowledged by General Cuesta, by the Spanish



government, and by the British ambassador, the preservation of Seville “at the most critical juncture;” prevented the union of General Lapisse from Castille with Marshal Soult at Oporto, and paralyzed that Marshal’s operations, and suspended the prepared evacuation of Lisbon, until Sir A. Wellesley arrived with fresh troops from England. The discipline and organization which had been commenced in my legion was now successfully introduced into the whole Portuguese army by Marshal Beresford.

These facts, however presumptuous they may appear, challenge denial; many witnesses of them are living, and still documentary evidence is in my possession, embracing the testimony of all the civil and military authorities in the Peninsula; nor would reference to Marshal Soult and the French generals, employed in that campaign, diminish the pretensions of this statement, urged in favor of the brave officers and men serving with me.\*

When the allied army marched against Marshal Soult, I was recalled to command Marshal Beresford’s advanced guard. The Marshal’s orders may be referred to for my conduct on that occasion, but they will not gratify the eye of those who would wish to find subject for the depreciation of my services.

When Sir A. Wellesley re-advanced into Spain, in the summer of 1809, I was appointed to cover that operation.

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\* During my absence the action was fought at the bridge of Alcantain, under Colonel Moira, where the legion behaved with its usual intrepidity.

Being reinforced by two Spanish battalions, and a Portuguese battalion of chasseurs, I was directed on the 18th of July to move by the Vera di Placentia on Escalona, and alarm the enemy in his positions. These orders were successfully executed. The corps occupied Escalona, notwithstanding the immediate neighbourhood of the French army, proceeded to Naval-Carneiro, and reached, with its detachments, the Guadarama river. Already a communication was established with the inhabitants of Madrid, and General Bellaïrd, aware of its approach, and the corresponding movements of General Venegas, from Toledo, proposed to evacuate the city, and withdraw into the El Retiro, which had been fortified as a citadel.

The entrance into Madrid was concerted for the same night, when a peremptory order recalled the corps to the allied army, as a general action was expected.\*

Notwithstanding forced marches, the enemy's line of battle intercepted the communication. The corps was too weak and too exhausted to attempt any encounter with the enemy under such circumstances; ambushed in a wood opposite Casalegas, it was obliged to remain tranquil in the hopes of checking a fugitive column, and co-operating with the pursuers of a beaten army. The enemy, however, did not afford the opportunity, and

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\* For the importance attached to these movements of the corps, and the exaggerated estimate of its force, vide Appendix, extract from the Monituer, Marshal Jourdan's Dispatch.

the corps at nightfall passed silently by its right, and put itself in communication with the forces of Sir A. Wellesley. The next night a council was held in Talavera between Sir A. Wellesley and General Cuesta, and at which Colonel O'Donoghue, the Spanish adjutant general, Sir George Murray, Colonel Bathurst, military Secretary to Sir. A. Wellesley, and myself, were present. At that conference, from the knowledge I had acquired of the enemy's position, and the intervening country between him and Madrid, I undertook to make such a movement with my corps on the right flank of the enemy's army, which still continued under Marshal Victor on the Alberche, and within musket-shot of the Allies, as should oblige or influence him to fall back, and thus relieve Sir A. Wellesley from the apprehension of being attacked in rear, when retrograding to oppose Marshal Soult, who was advancing from Salamanca by the Puerto di Banôs with *three* Corps d'Armée\* through Placentia, or of exposing General Cuesta, who was charged with the defence of the position of Talavera, to an attack in his absence, which the Spanish army could not have resisted.

The Moniteur of Sept. 27, 1809, containing the report of Marshal Jourdan, to King Joseph, details the operation and its effect.

“ In the night, between the 31st July, and  
 “ the 1st August, Marshal the Duke of Belluno  
 “ informed your Majesty, that he was apprised

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\* Soult, Mortier, Ney.

“ the English army still remained at Talavera, with  
 “ that of Cuesta, and that a *Portuguese* column had  
 “ put itself in motion among the mountains to  
 “ turn the right of the first corps: he added, that in  
 “ consequence of this intelligence, he should quit  
 “ his position, and retire upon *Maqueda* again.  
 “ August the 2d the Duke of Belluno informed  
 “ your Majesty, by letter, that the enemy appeared  
 “ in the direction of *Escalona*, on the right bank  
 “ of the Alberche, that the parties which had  
 “ been sent from *Escalona* to *Numbella*, had  
 “ been attacked by some troops of the enemy’s  
 “ cavalry. The Marshal added, that he had sent  
 “ two regiments of dragoons, with orders to ob-  
 “ serve what was passing there, and that if he  
 “ learned that the enemy was directing his course  
 “ to that point, he would retire upon Mostoloz,  
 “ (behind the Guadarama river, three leagues  
 “ from Madrid), but that on the contrary case, he  
 “ should remain at *Maqueda*.

“ The report of the Duke de Belluno, did not  
 “ announce the march of the combined army: it re-  
 “ lated only to *Wilson’s* corps, which manifested an  
 “ intention of annoying the right of the first corps.  
 “ Your Majesty then thought it was not yet time to  
 “ join the first corps with the fourth, and the reserve;  
 “ but with a view to facilitate their juncture, if  
 “ necessary, you proceeded with your reserve in  
 “ the night, between the 3d and 4th of August,  
 “ to Mostoloz, and the fourth corps remained at  
 “ Illescas to continue to watch the army of Venegas.

“ Fresh reports, addressed to your Majesty on  
 “ the 4th by Marshal the Duke of Belluno, stat-  
 “ ed that the combined army had not yet advanced,  
 “ that it had only marched on some cavalry to-  
 “ wards Santa Olalla, and that the corps which  
 “ was at Numbella, was not supported by a con-  
 “ siderable body, as it had been reported that it  
 “ would.”

The Marshal added, “ that he had made arrange-  
 “ ments for attacking General Wilson at Numbella,  
 “ on the morning of the 5th.”

“ Again, Marshal the Duke of Belluno, by letter  
 “ of the 5th August, acquainted your Majesty, that  
 “ Vilatte’s division, which had been directed to at-  
 “ tack General Wilson at Numbella, had found no  
 “ enemy there. That General Wilson had retired  
 “ on the 4th, and that the inhabitants of Num-  
 “ bella had stated his retreat to have been occasion-  
 “ ed by the arrival of a French corps at Placentia.

“ Marshal the Duke of Belluno went, on the 6th,  
 “ to Santa Olalla, from which place he acquainted  
 “ your Majesty that the Anglo-Spanish army had  
 “ quitted Talavera on the 4th, proceeding towards  
 “ Placentia. That the cavalry of the first corps  
 “ would that day, the 16th, reach (return to) Tala-  
 “ vera, and that General Wellesley had recommend-  
 “ ed to him 4,000 wounded, whom he had been  
 “ obliged to leave behind him in that town.”

“ Marshal the Duke Belluno advanced to Talavera  
 “ on the 7th, with his whole corps; the same day,  
 “ the cavalry of the first corps formed a junction at

“Oropesa, and at Puerto di l’Arzobispo, with *the troops of the Duke of Dalmatia.*”

Thus, from the enemy’s own account, the movements of the corps under my command, threw back Victor’s army *above thirty* miles, prevented all knowledge of Soult’s advance on Placentia until the *5th*, and re-union of the French armies until the *7th*; during which interval Sir Arthur Wellesley had been able to evade the perils which menaced him from superior force, acting in front and rear of his columns of march, and to retire across the Tagus, at the bridge of Arzobispo.

On my return towards Talavera, (in consequence of the information that the Anglo Spanish army was about to abandon the right bank of the Tagus,) I witnessed the junction of the enemy’s cavalry at Oropesa, and I thus found myself and corps without any apparent means of retreat, for the enemy occupied all roads and passes leading to Placentia, or Allmaraz; a detachment of Marshal Ney’s corps, was posted on the right bank of the Tietar and in the Vera di Placentia near Villa Nueva, expressly to intercept my march in that direction, (as Marshal Ney’s subsequent dispatch will shew); and to prevent my escape across the mountains, Soult wrote to the governor of Seville a dispatch, on which I took a copy on a peasant employed to convey it.

“Wilson’s corps is cut off, and cannot escape; if you send 1,500 men to Candeladria, it must surrender.” Similar dispatches were at the same time sent to Marshal Jourdan, and other Generals.

Fortunately, I had, in anticipation of a disaster, sent off my guns, when I announced my retreat, with orders to gain the bridge of Arzobispo by all possible efforts. A brave and zealous officer, assisted by men, no less meritorious, executed my instructions, and Sir Arthur Wellesley, seeing them afterwards abandoned by the Spaniards at the bridge, and in great danger, kindly rescued them, and directed them to Badajoz; from whence I finally received them.

Thus circumstanced, I determined to attempt the passage of the Serra di Grejos, a mountain perpetually covered with snow, and which was thought by many, to be impracticable for troops; but as I learnt that it was occasionally traversed by shepherds, the attempt became justifiable.

The enemy occupied a village, from which it was necessary to dislodge them, that the proposed movement might be effected. At night-fall, the attack was made, and proved successful. The generous Spaniards, fully aware of our distress, volunteered their services, as guides; and such was their fidelity, that although my servant, and others, with several led horses of value, and money, for the payment of the troops, were cut off by an intervening detachment of the enemy, they sought them out in the glen, where they had retired, and conducted them to me, several days afterwards, in safety over the mountains. The passage of the Serra, was most difficult, and several of my men perished from fatigue: but we at length reached Bohoyo, a village which had

never been visited by troops, and which seemed insulated, like the romantic Las Batuecas. Here the inhabitants supplied all our wants, and I should have been inclined to have rested the corps, but its precarious situation allowed no indulgence, and by unremitting forced marches, we reached Banôs on the 11th.

On the 12th, I put the corps again in motion; and the following dispatch to Sir A. Wellesley, narrates subsequent occurrences.

*Mirandà de Casteñar, August 13, 1809.*

SIR,

I have the honour to acquaint you, that I was on march yesterday morning on the road of Grenadella from Aldea Nueva, to restore my communication with the allied army, when a peasant assured us, that a considerable quantity of dust, which we perceived in the road of Placentia, proceeded from the march of a body of the enemy.

I immediately returned and took post in front of Banôs, with my picquets in advance of Aldea Nueva, selecting such points for defence as the exigency of the time permitted.

The enemy's cavalry advanced on the high road, and drove back my small cavalry posts; but a picquet of Spanish infantry, which I had concealed, poured in on the cavalry a steady and well-directed fire, that killed and wounded many of them.

The two hundred Spanish infantry in advance of Aldea Nueva, continued, under the direction of



Colonel Grant and their officers, to maintain their ground most gallantly, until the enemy's cavalry and chasseurs à cheval, in considerable bodies, appeared on both flanks, when they were obliged to retreat.

The enemy's chasseur's à cheval and cavalry advanced in great numbers in every direction, and pushed to cut off the legion posted between Aldea Nueva and Banôts ; but, by the steady conduct of officers and men, the enemy could only advance gradually, and with a very severe loss from the commanding fire thrown on them.

The Merida battalion, (exclusive of two companies,) however, having given way on the right, a road was laid open, which cut behind our position, and I was obliged to order a retreat on the heights above Banôts, when I was again necessitated to detach a corps, in order to secure the road of Monte Major, by which I saw the enemy directing a column, and which road turned altogether the Puerto de Banôts, a league in our rear.

At this time Don Carlos Marquis d'Espagne came up with his battalion of light infantry, and, in the most gallant manner, took post along the heights commanding the road of Banôts, which enabled me to send some of the Merida battalion on the mountain on our left commanding the main road, and which the enemy had tried to ascend.

The battalion of light infantry with the detachment of the Legion on its right continued, notwith-

standing the enemy's fire of artillery and musketry, to maintain their ground ; but, at six o'clock in the evening, three columns of the enemy mounted the height on our left, gained it, and poured such a fire on the troops below, that longer defence was impracticable, and the whole were obliged to retire on the mountains on our right, leaving open the main road, along which a considerable column of cavalry immediately pressed.

The battalion of Seville had been left at Bejar with orders to follow me next day ; but when I was obliged to return, and the action commenced, I ordered it to Puerto Banos, to watch the Monte Major road, and the heights in the rear of our left.

When the enemy's cavalry came near, an officer and some dragoons called out to the commanding officer to surrender, but a volley killed him and his party, and then the battalion proceeded to mount the heights, in which movement it was attacked and surrounded by a column of cavalry and a column of infantry, but cut its way and cleared itself, killing a great many of the enemy, especially of his cavalry.

The enemy is now passing to Salamanca with great expedition. I lament that I could no longer arrest his progress ; but, when the enormous superiority of the enemy's force is considered,\* that we

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\* Ney's complete corps, contained not less than 14,000 men, with fifty pieces of artillery, &c.

had no artillery, and that the Puerto de Banòs, on the Estremadura side, is not a pass of such strength as on the side of Castille, especially without guns, I hope that a *resistance* for *nine* hours, which must have cost the enemy a great many men, will not be deemed inadequate to our means.

I have to acknowledge the services rendered me on this occasion by Colonel Grant, Major Reiman, Don Fermen Marquis, adjutant-major of the dragoons of Pavia, Captain Charles and Mr. Bolman; and to express the greatest approbation of *two companies* of the Merida battalions advanced in front, and of the commanding officer and soldiery of the battalions of Seville, and the Portuguese brigades. I have already noticed the distinguished conduct of Don Carlos, and his battalion merits the highest encomiums.

I have not yet been able to collect the returns of our loss. *From the nature of mountain warfare*, many men are missing who cannot join for a day or two; but I believe the enemy will only have to boast that he has achieved his passage, and his killed and wounded will be a great diminution of *his victory*.

I have the honour to be, &c.

ROBERT WILSON.

*Sir A. Wellesley, &c. &c. &c.*

With this dispatch I sent a private letter to Sir Arthur Wellesley, with whom I was in the habit of

corresponding, stating that I had myself narrowly escaped being taken, and that Colonel Grant had not rejoined me after the action, so I was in some uneasiness about him. I also sent my aid-de-camp, Captain Charles, to explain every particular of our situation, and to state that I might have avoided the engagement by leaving open the Puerto di Banos, but thought it was my duty to contend that pass, as it afforded me time to dispatch intelligence to Salamanca of the return of the enemy, and opportunity for the Spaniards, who had re-occupied that city, to retire from it with their effects, (which advantages were obtained.) I also had presumed that a corps of 14,000 men, within a few hours march on my right, might have moved and attacked the enemy in flank whilst I was opposing him in front, but that operation was not, under the circumstances of the campaign, thought expedient.

Sir Arthur Wellesley, in a private letter, which being very confidential on other topics, I do not think becoming to make public, but which, I may be allowed to cite without trespass on the sanctity of private correspondence, (and to which I am sure his Grace, from a sense of justice, will not disapprove my reference, without awaiting direct application to himself,) enclosed me the following copy of his letter to Lord Castlereagh, "that I might know what his sentiments were respecting me."

*Truxillo, August 21, 1809.*

**MY LORD,**

When I marched from Talavera on the 3d instant, with a view to oppose the French corps, which we had heard had passed through the Puerto di Banos, and had arrived at Placentia, Sir Robert Wilson was detached upon the left of the army towards Escalona; and before I marched on that morning, I put him in communication with the Spanish General Cuesta, who it had been settled was to remain at Talavera. I understood that General Cuesta put Sir Robert in communication with his advanced guard, which retired from Talavera on the night of the 4th: not so, he retired without such communication being established.

Sir Robert Wilson, however, did not arrive at Valada till the night of the 4th, having made a long march through the mountains; and as he was then six leagues from the bridge of Arzobispo, and had to cross the high road from Oropesa to Talavera, of which the enemy was in possession, he conceived that he was too late to retire to Arzobispo, and he determined to move by Venta St. Julien and Centinello towards the Tietar,\* and across that river towards the mountains which separate Castille from Estremadura.

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\* The correct route has been already stated; I could not descend so low as Venta St. Julien, Centinello, and Tornayenas.

Some of Sir Robert Wilson's dispatches having missed me, I am not aware by which of the passes he went through the mountains, but I believe by Tornavacas.

He arrived, however, at Banôs on the 11th, and on the 12th was attacked and *defeated* by the French corps of Marshal Ney, which, with that of Soult, returned to Placentia on the 9th, 10th, and 11th, that of Ney having since gone on towards Salamanca.

I enclose Sir Robert Wilson's account of the action. He has been very active, intelligent, and useful in the command of the Portuguese and Spanish corps, with which he was detached from this army.

Before the battle of the 28th of July, he had pushed his parties almost to the gates of Madrid, with which city he was in communication; and he would have been in Madrid, if I had not thought it proper to call him in, in expectation of that general action which took place on the 28th of July. He afterwards *alarmed the enemy on the right of his army*; and throughout the service, shewed himself to be an *active and intelligent partizan*, well acquainted with the country in which he was acting, and possessing the confidence of the troops which he commanded.

Being persuaded that his retreat was not open by Arzobispo, he acted right in taking the road he did, with which he was well acquainted; and although unsuccessful in the action which he fought, (which may well be accounted for, by the superior num-

bers and description of the enemy's troops,) the action, in my opinion, does him great credit.

I have the honour to be, &c.

(Signed)

ARTHUR WELLESLEY.

Sir Arthur Wellesley, in a part of the private letter already noticed, adverted to my relation of the action, and observed, "He did not understand the nature of it, but had sent my letter home to speak for itself. He did not see how troops could have behaved so well, and yet should have dispersed so completely, that both myself and Colonel Grant should have been separated from them, that he should have been missing some time, and that I should have owed my safety to the swiftness of my horse. He was afraid I had given the troops more credit than they deserved, and that he considered it fatal to the interests of the country, and particularly to the honour of the British army, that the delusion respecting Spanish troops should be continued. He, therefore, should have sent the report back to me for revision if the communication had been easy, and if the delay in sending to England might not have been injurious to myself." At the concluding part of the letter, Sir Arthur Wellesley desired me to rejoin him, as it was his intention my corps should form a part of his army.

So far from being hurt by these observations, which were expressed in a letter replete with proofs of confidence and friendly sentiments; so far from

being mortified at the expression *Partizan* used in the dispatch, as it has been gratuitously presumed, because a well known popular writer forgot that a Loudohn and a Montecueuli felt themselves distinguished by that appellation, I was grateful to Sir Arthur Wellesley for the terms in which he had mentioned my services, and I replied to him in the following letter, dated August 30th.

Castello Branco, August 30, 1809.

MY DEAR GENERAL,

I have received your letter, enclosing the letter to Lord Castlereagh, which kind letter commands my grateful acknowledgments, and proves the sincerity of your friendship. With regard to the miscarriage of my letters, I must regret that my dispatch from Bejar did not reach you, as therein I detailed the causes and line of my movements, and this dispatch passed to Marshal Beresford, but was detained from the fear of being intercepted by the enemy.

In respect to the inconsistency of Colonel Grant's separation from myself, I must beg you to reconsider the position I had to defend: a *line of small posts from Aldea Nueva to Puerto di Bands*, which two companies of the Merida and detachments of the legion under Colonel Grant steadily protected, and from which they gradually retired, while the remainder of the battalion of Merida rapidly uncovered my right flank without firing a shot, and passed to the rear of Bands.



The elevation of the mountain, forming the part on the Estremadura side above the village, was the next point of defence. A high road passed between the mountains; *on each side my troops were placed*, and some also on the road, where certainly as long as the fire was only in front, every resistance that could be made was made *for seven hours*,\* and the enemy with all his artillery and infantry, could with great difficulty have forced me; but, when the height on our left was gained, and the French column passed rapidly on the high road, all communication between posts was cut off, and the only retreat that could be effected was on the mountains on each side and not along any road. Colonel Grant was from his situation, obliged to ascend and pass the hill to Candellero. I was on the main road, because I could give directions to all, *and could be only here on horseback*, the mountains on the right and left admitting of no cavalry passage.

At the instant of the attack, I was endeavouring to ascertain where the Seville battalion could mount the heights on our left, to form a reserve against the French columns mounting in front of our left. The enemy's cavalry drove along (all those who were mounted) on the high road, and if he had not been pressed for time, his infantry would have rendered the dispersion of my infantry far more disastrous: but generally speaking, the dispersion *was a separation by detachments*, and not individual flight.

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\* The action, from the first commencement, lasted altogether *nine*.

I am not anxious to give praise to the Spaniards where they do not deserve it, or encourage any erroneous impression of the conduct of Spanish troops.

My pointed censure of the Merida (by particularising two companies as doing their duty) is a proof, and every order I have given bears testimony *of my disdain to seek popularity by such dangerous misrepresentations.\** I am too solicitous for my own character to form a public opinion which compromises myself so much; for in the present state of the organization of the Spanish army, with their incapable officers and bad system, I feel the most serious concern in all military operations, and I should be the first officer to delineate their real character, and indeed of the Portuguese, for the best of them cannot act independent of constant superintendance; and they never will form, whilst in their own neighbourhood, so well as they could be made to do when more remote: but I believe it is the fault of the officer (in general) and not of the men, for the latter have many military qualities.

I shall move to Villa Velha on the 3d, and after my communication with General Crauford, direct my farther march towards you, on such points as I think you would wish: but I hope to meet Captain Charles on the road. With grateful esteem,

I remain, my dear General,

(Signed)

R. WILSON.

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\* I alluded to the general description of officers. But there were some brilliant exceptions in the Spanish and Portuguese army.

I subsequently saw Sir Arthur Wellesley at Badajos, and was authorized to feel assured my explanation had been quite satisfactory. Some time afterwards, at Lisbon, Sir G. Murray, the adjutant-general, met me and congratulated me on the arrival of a *Moniteur* with the following dispatch of Marshal Ney, which, he said, ascribed much more importance to the action than my own dispatch had done, and must be gratifying to me, as it was the justice rendered by a generous enemy, in which sentiments Sir Arthur Wellesley, on the evening of the same day, concurred, and I never have had the slightest cause to suspect a change of opinion.

*Report of the Duke of Elchingen to Marshal Soult.*

On the 8th, while the army was taking the bridge of Arzobispo, I had detachments on the right bank of the Thietar, near Villa Nueva, to watch the corps of the English General Wilson.

On the 12th, the corps of the army set out *en masse*, from Placentia. On reaching Oliva, I learnt the enemy occupied in force Aldea Nueva, and principally the heights and defiles of Banôs. My advanced guard, under General Lorcet, composed of voltigeurs of the 25th light infantry, 2750; 59th regiment of the line, 23d dragoons, and 15th hussars, a battalion of light artillery. Colonel Armano's brigade of dragoons, &c. actually fell in with the enemy at Aldea Nueva. The attack and

success were equally rapid. The position was taken, and the 3d hussars made an admirable charge. The routed enemy rejoined, in small companies, his principal corps on the heights of Banôs. These were occupied by General Wilson with 4 or 5,000 men. That General, who considered his position impregnable, had added to the difficulties of ground, by obstructing the accessible paths with abattis, ditches, and masses of rock. As soon as the artillery of the army had closed at Banôs, they marched against the enemy, and forgot their fatigues. The 59th and 60th regiments advanced against the heights with great boldness, and made themselves masters of the heights, which *were obstinately defended.*

General Wilson, however, *rallied his troops for the third time*, and even endeavoured *again to act on the offensive*, hoping to overthrow us in his turn; but this attempt was extremely disastrous to himself. The advanced guard had united, *and an engagement with the bayonet commenced*, in which the enemy was overwhelmed.

The hussars and chasseurs assisted in putting him completely to the route: in short, this little corps, which left 1200 in the field, is entirely destroyed. *Our dragoons fought on foot* on several occasions, and distinguished themselves. *The artillery also behaved well.* The loss that we have sustained in the late battles amounts to five officers and thirty subalterns and privates, killed; ten officers and 14

subalterns and privates wounded; several dropped dead in the ranks from heat and fatigue.

Monsieur di Terrier L'Enque, Colonel of the 3d hussars, distinguished himself in several charges, and that regiment lost forty horses. Colonel Cosel, of the 59th infantry, killed an officer, who, while charging, attempted to take his horse.

(Signed)

NEY.

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Gentlemen, you have now the whole of my case before you. When you have made your reflections, when you have compared my dispatch with the dispatch of Marshal Ney, I flatter myself that you will acquit me of the charge of falsehood or even exaggeration, and that you will not attribute either vanity or arrogance to my pretensions of having honorably and usefully executed my duty during that period of the war in the Peninsula.

ROBERT WILSON.

*Charles Street,  
Berkley Square.*

# APPENDIX.

*From the Moniteur. Paris, Sept. 27, 1809.*

## REPORT TO THE KING, COMMANDING THE FRENCH ARMIES IN SPAIN.

SIRE,—Your Majesty has ordered me to draw up a general report of the operations of the army, from the 23d of July last to the 15th instant. I have strictly complied with your commands.

Before I give your Majesty an account of the marches of the different corps of the army, and the brilliant actions which have conferred glory on the Imperial troops, I think it necessary, for the elucidation of my Report, to describe the position of the respective corps of the Imperial army, and that of the hostile armies on the 20th of July.

## POSITION OF THE IMPERIAL ARMY, AND OF THE ENEMY'S ARMY, ON THE 20TH JULY, 1809.

At this time the 4th corps, commanded by General Sebastiani, was posted at Consuegra and Madridéjos, watching the army of Venegas, 30,000 strong. This army occupied Manzanares and Daymiel, and had its advanced posts on the Guadiana.

The 1st corps, commanded by Marshal the Duke of Belluno, was posted on the left bank of the Alberche, in front of Casalegas, covering the pass from Talavera towards Madrid. The advanced guard of this corps of the army occupied Talavera de la Reyna.

Marshal the Duke of Belluno watched the army of Cuesta, 30,000 strong, which had crossed to the right bank of the Tagus, by a bridge thrown over that river at Almaraz, and by the bridge of Arzobispo.

Your Majesty had received orders from his Imperial and Royal Majesty, directing that the Duke of Dalmatia should unite, under his command, the 2d, 5th, and 6th corps, consisting of 80 batalions and 30 squadrons, amounting to upwards of 60,000 effective men; that he should march against the English, should seek them out wherever they might be, and engage them.

Meanwhile the 2d corps still occupied Salamanca and Zamora.

The 5th corps was in Valladolid and its environs, and the 6th occupied Benevente, Astorga, and Leon. The latter corps had in its front the troops commanded by La Romana, and the insurgents of Galicia and the Asturias.

Independently of the armies of the insurgents, report announced that an English army, 30,000 strong, was assembling in the environs of Placentia, under the command of General Wellesley.

On the 22d of July, your Majesty received intelligence from Marshal the Duke of Belluno that the English army, under the command of General Wellesley, had formed a junction between the Tagus and the Tietar, with the army of Cuesta, and that this combined force was on its March towards Talavera; while a corps of eight or ten thousand men, commanded by *General Wilson*, was advancing towards Escalona, along the right bank of the Alberche. The danger was imminent; and it was necessary to take decided measures.

The same day (22d) your Majesty sent orders to Marshal the Duke of Dalmatia to unite speedily, at Salamanca, the three corps of the army under his command, and to advance rapidly to Placentia, in order to break the line of operation of the hostile army. You, at the same time, ordered General Sebastiani to proceed, by forced marches, with the 4th corps, from Madridejos to Toledo. Your Majesty left Madrid in the night between the 22d and 23d, with your reserve composed of the Royal Guard, and the brigade of General Oudinot, formed of the 12th regiment of infantry, the 51st regiment of the line, and the 27th regiment of horse chasseurs. The command of this reserve was entrusted to the General of Division, Dessolles.

In proceeding to Naval-Carnero, your Majesty had a two-fold object: to check the march of *General Wilson*, who endeavoured to get in the rear of the 1st corps, by Escalona, and to form a junction with Marshal the Duke of Belluno, with a view to enable him to keep the enemy in check till the junction of the 4th corps, and till the result of the march of Marshal the Duke of Dalmatia should be ascertained.

Meanwhile, in the evening of the 23d, Marshal the Duke of Belluno informed your Majesty, that, on the 22d, the advanced guard of his corps of the army had been obliged to quit Talavera de la Reyna, and to retire along the left bank of the Alberche; that he was certain he should be attacked on the 24th, by the combined armies of the English and Cuesta; and that, unwilling to hazard the 1st corps against such a superior force, he should march in the night between the 23d and 24th, and proceed in two days to the left bank of the Guadarama, at its conflux with the Tagus, near Toledo, in order to effect a junction with the 4th corps. Your Majesty will highly approve the movement of Marshal the Duke of Belluno; for, if that Marshal had retreated upon Naval-Carnero, instead of retiring to Toledo, the junction of the 1st and 4th corps would have been rendered extremely difficult, and perhaps even impossible.

It is likewise very certain, that Marshal the Duke of Belluno had formed a correct judgment of the designs of the enemy.

Orders found upon the Officers have proved, that the 1st corps was to have been attacked, on the morning of the 24th, by the English army, and that of Cuesta, in its position on the Alberche, whilst *Wilson's corps* was to have endeavoured to cut off its retreat towards Madrid; by advancing from *Escalona* upon *Naval-Carnero*.

Your Majesty, on receiving the letter of Marshal the Duke of Belluno, took the resolution of proceeding also towards Toledo, with your reserve, in order to form a junction with the 1st and 4th corps; and to present to the enemy a body, imposing not from its numbers, but from its valour.

On the 24th, your Majesty advanced with your reserve to Cañavara, three leagues from Toledo. The next day, the 25th, you fixed your head-quarters at Bargas.

The same day General Sebastiani, after ably disguising his movements from Venegas, arrived with the 4th corps at Toledo. Lastly, the 1st corps had taken a position on the left bank of the Guadarrama; so that all the troops which it was in your Majesty's power to oppose to the enemy, were united.

Your Majesty ordered a detachment to be left at Toledo, to guard that city and the bridges.

On the 26th, your Majesty ordered the whole army to pass over the bridge of Guadarama, and advance upon Torrijos. The first corps opened the march. General Latour Maubourg commanded the whole of the cavalry of the first corps, to which your Majesty had joined the division of light cavalry, under General Merlin, which had previously been attached to the 4th corps.

On the 25th, Cuesta's army took up a position at Santa Olalla; it was to continue its march on the 26th, to advance upon Toledo, with a view to attempt a junction with Venegas. The English army had not yet quitted Talavera, but had pushed its advanced guard to Casalegas, on the left bank of the Alberche. *Wilson's corps* had continued its movement, and had pushed its advanced posts to *Naval-Carnero*. Then follows the account of the battle of Talavera, &c.

FINIS.