

INTRODUCTION

The poor morale of the French Army in Spain between 1807 and 1814 has become a historical commonplace. Unable to come to grips with both a guerrilla foe and the conventional forces of the Anglo-Allied armies, Napoleon's occupation forces were sapped physically and mentally by a war of attrition. These results were closely related to the difficulty of provisioning troops in hostile territory as guerrillas harassed forage parties and supply convoys. Because the French regime could neither conquer nor hold, the Allies, ultimately under Wellington's guidance, were able to drive the French across the Pyrenees. This chain of events is well covered in the historical literature. Missing, however, is an understanding of how the soldiers experienced the guerrilla war. This thesis explores the journals, memoirs and letters of Peninsular War imperial veterans and explains what bad morale meant for soldiers suffering from its effects. According to these sources, the sense of isolation, the frustration, the fear and the misery of those charged with the business of conquest and occupation resulted from a combination of factors that included terrain, weather, violence, hunger, and sickness that seriously impaired their will and ability to perform their duties.

The literature of the Peninsular War little marks the French soldiers' experience. Instead traditional histories of this very long war tend to refer to how the guerrillas aided the Anglo-Portuguese effort. Such references discuss how guerrillas prevented effective concentration of force by the French, helped the Anglo-Portuguese monopolize intelligence, and harassed imperial lines of communication.

Additionally, most of these histories speak generally of the war's brutality and of its negative effect upon French morale. Albeit most treatments of the war purposely focus on other perspectives, the lack of discussion of the war's strain upon the French soldier does not provide a full picture of the war. Several prominent accounts of the war provide well-studied histories of the war's course while serving to illustrate the historiographical deficiency.

David Chandler's *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, describes the build up and outbreak of hostilities in the Peninsula while briefly discussing the guerrilla war's effect on the troops.¹ During his history, Chandler gives limited but quality focus to the intangibles of guerrilla war, the brutality and its effects upon morale. With soldiers "scattered to hold down seething provinces," the guerrilla conflict severely undermined French morale in a war of torture and reprisal. While discussing a later French invasion of Portugal, Chandler makes passing note of the ambush of stragglers, couriers, and foragers. He also notes how the guerrilla war imbued the whole campaign with a "dark undertone of atrocity and counteratrocity." Chandler briefly quotes French accounts of the guerrilla war, but his intent of covering the whole of the Napoleonic Wars in one volume prevents a fuller discussion of the guerrillas' effects of the upon the mind of French soldiers.

In both *Britain and the Defeat of Napoleon* and *Salamanca, 1812*, Rory Muir writes excellent campaign histories from the British perspective while dropping bits of information about the guerrilla war.² Additionally Muir shows how the guerrilla

¹ David G. Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, (New York: MacMillan, 1966), 539-660.

² Rory Muir, *Britain and the Defeat of Napoleon*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), 115, 127, 165, 203; Rory Muir, *Salamanca, 1812*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), 7, 10, 236-237.

operations made in conjunction with the British navy to further tie down large amounts of British troops. Muir also notes the advantage guerrillas gave the British intelligence such as in the famous case of when all French dispatches were intercepted by guerrillas and turned over to Wellington during the preliminaries to the battle at Salamanca. Finally, Muir makes an interesting note about Wellington's 1813 decision to delay an invasion of France for fear that vengeful Spanish soldiers would cause the French to rebel. While this underscores Wellington's regard for the danger a guerrilla war posed for an invading army, like the rest of Muir's narrative, the guerrilla war is mainly seen from the point of view of commanders and armies. His discussions of the French inability to concentrate force, the problems along their lines of communication, and the monopoly of intelligence that guerrillas gave the Allies fall within the realm of the traditional history of armies, leaders and battles. On the views and experiences of individual French soldiers, Muir shows the usual generalities on how morale was adversely affected.

Charles Esdaile, while downplaying the role of guerrillas in favor of the Spanish army, does an exceptional job of looking at the war from the oft neglected Spanish perspective. His *The Spanish Army in the Peninsular War*, shifts from the Anglocentric point of view to that of the Spanish Army.³ His more recent and excellent *The Peninsular War* thoroughly shows the interplay of politics, diplomacy and battle in the conflict.⁴ In this work he deepens the understanding of the war's complexity with a particularly fascinating account of the make up and motives of guerrilla bands. There is, however, little mention of how the French soldier was

³ Charles J. Esdaile, *The Spanish army in the Peninsular War*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).

⁴ Charles J. Esdaile, *The Peninsular War*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

affected by the guerrilla war or his experience therein. In fact, he tends to downplay the French accounts as hyping up the guerrillas. This, he feels, excuses the loss by painting the victory as impossible and beyond the French army's control.

In addition to Esdaile, John Lawrence Tone and Don Alexander shed more light on the guerrilla struggle and the effects on the French attempts at conquest. Tone turns his focus on the guerrilla army in Navarre. There insurgents effectively "denied the French access to the resources of the countryside and forced most of the occupation troops to struggle for mere survival."⁵ Still, Tone follows the past example by limiting the French point of view to generalization and simplification. French soldiers "convince themselves," live in "constant hunger, fear, and frustration," while the war as a whole was a "demoralizing affair."⁶ Specifics are not provided and the French soldier remains faceless in a uniform crowd of soldiers. *Rod of Iron* by Don Alexander, a conventional history of an unconventional war, details Suchet's operations and administration in Aragon.⁷ His book sheds new light on the French conquest, administration and counterinsurgent efforts. Still, he takes the traditional perspective of governments and military operations rather than on the experiences of the men charged with occupation.

This lack of regard for what bad morale actually meant for the French soldier is notable because virtually every student of war, whether veteran or academic, acknowledges the importance of morale in waging war. The historical literature of war is replete with references to what most prominent scholars and all successful generals understand about morale's importance upon an army's effectiveness. Sun

⁵ John Lawrence Tone, *The Fatal Knot*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 178.

⁶ Tone, 181.

⁷ Don W. Alexander, *Rod of Iron*, (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1985).

Tzū speaks of an army “animated by the same spirit throughout all its ranks.” Napoleon spoke of this spirit of animation in his oft quoted statement that "morale is to the physical as three is to one." Clausewitz assents that “these moral elements are among the most important in war.” Further underscoring the importance, military theorists, including such luminaries as Sun Tzū and B. H. Liddell Hart, have incorporated the enemy’s mental state into their strategic tenets. The latter placed especial emphasis upon the importance of morale; in war, “we must never lose sight of the psychological.” Even these examples, however, are limited to generalizations from the perspective of the group and its capacity to execute the commander’s will or in regards to efforts to disrupt his mind and plans. Again, as in the historiography, the stated importance of morale amid the rank and file does not bear out in the scholarship. This may be in part due to the difficulty of studying morale.⁸

While the importance of morale in war is widely acknowledged, the lack of detail is understandable considering the problem of delving into a subject as nebulous as the state of soldiers’ mind. This grouping of the soldiers’ state of mind into the whole, into the so-called *esprit de corps*, stems from an admitted inability to quantify the subject matter. Compared to movements of troops, dispatches of soldiers, orders of battle and the closing reports of subordinates to commander and commanders to

⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans., (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 184; B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, (New York: Praeger, 1954), 34; Sun Tzū, *The Art of War*, Lionel Giles, trans., (Ch’eng Wen Publishing Co., 1978), 7, 17, 35. Sun Tzū tells readers to “attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected.” While the level of physical preparedness of an enemy position explicitly dictates the direction of an attack, the first clause also suggests that the mind of the enemy serves as the target. This bears out clearly in the second clause with the enjoinder to foil the expectations of the enemy with a thrust at points he has given little regard. This is what Sun Tzū called indirect methods. In the twentieth century, Liddell-Hart expanded Sun Tzū’s tenet into a complete strategic philosophy. With his strategy of indirect approach, the mind of the opposing commander is the target of operations along paths of least resistance, the goal of which is to unsettle his mind and disrupt his plans. But as with the military literature, the focus is on the commander.

governments, experience and its effects upon the state of mind of soldiers floats as a comparatively vague concept. Clausewitz stated as much; the concept of morale does “not yield to academic wisdom.” For him, because it cannot be summed up with exactitude, the element of morale, this generalized feeling of spirit, must be “seen or felt.”⁹ Recent historiography has attempted to do exactly that, to get a feel for the experience of war. This thesis proposes to do the same for the French soldier in Spain.

John Keegan pioneered a new regard for the experiences of the soldier in the history establishment. In *The Face of Battle*, Keegan noted how neglect of the individual state of mind of soldiers is endemic to military history. While seeking to recreate the feel of the battles at Agincourt, Waterloo and of the Somme, Keegan asserts that “some exploration of the combatants’ emotions ... is essential to the truthful writing of military history.”¹⁰ What he calls the “rhetoric of battle history,” compromises most accounts of war. This rhetoric includes a uniformity of behavior in which many act as one and with a shared state of animation. In a typical battle narrative, all present are characterized as a leader, the led, or a noteworthy hero. This results in what Keegan calls a “highly oversimplified depiction of human behavior.”¹¹ Such traditional histories do not create an understanding of how men experience war. In order to clearly understand war, Keegan proposes to move away from the rhetorical pitfalls of military history by moving more towards an understanding of the individual experience of war. He calls this the “human element in combat” and suggests that the issue of personal survival in the “wildly unstable physical and

⁹ Clausewitz, 184.

¹⁰ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, (The Viking Press, 1976), 32.

¹¹ Keegan, 36, 39-40.

emotional environment” of war be given more attention.¹² As a result of his work, the focus of more recent military history has begun to shift toward how soldiers react before, during and after combat situations.

Others have attempted to follow Keegan’s lead. In *Tactics and the Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon*, Rory Muir called this “an approach which acknowledges the humanity of soldiers, and places more emphasis on the intangible bonds of morale and cohesion.”¹³ Richard Holmes’ *Acts of War* takes this tack and helps fill the gap in knowledge about how men conduct and experience war on the individual level. Spanning accounts throughout history, Holmes focuses on what has been called the “actualities of war.”¹⁴ For soldiers, daily concerns seem to dominate what another called “the story of one man in actions involving many.”¹⁵ In his book, Holmes reveals a perspective is remarkably devoid of the strategic picture of commanders and armies. This thesis will add to this sort of literature by fleshing out the actual experiences of the men who found themselves stuck in a guerrilla war.

By drawing on the methods and goals of Keegan and others, this thesis works to show how the French soldier experienced the guerrilla conflict in Spain. Charles Carlton’s *Going to the Wars* will provide the closest model for this “social history of war.”¹⁶ Like Carlton’s study of individual experience during the English Civil Wars,

¹² Keegan, 47.

¹³ Rory Muir, *Tactics and the Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), vii-viii.

¹⁴ Field-Marshal Lord Wavell, quoted in Richard Holmes, *Acts of War*, (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 7. This fine statement deserves full account. Wavell wrote Liddell Hart; “If I had time and anything like your ability to study war, I think I should concentrate almost entirely on the ‘actualities of war’ – the effects of tiredness, hunger, fear, lack of sleep, weather ... The principles of strategy and tactics, and the logistics of war are really absurdly simple: it is the actualities that make war so complicated and so difficult, and are usually so neglected by historians.”

¹⁵ Samuel Hynes in Alan Forrest, *Napoleon’s Men*, (New York: Hambleton and London, 2002), 22.

¹⁶ Keegan in Foreword to Charles Carlton, *Going to the Wars*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), ix.

this thesis presents a “loosely chronological account of experiences,” in this case of the imperial soldiery facing guerrilla war in Spain.¹⁷ This will help fill the significant gap in knowledge on the subject due in part to the aforementioned failings of military history. For the Peninsular War specifically, this lack of scholarship resulted from what amounts to embarrassment on the part of the French for “an inglorious episode in the wars of Napoleon.”¹⁸ Another author elaborated on this point; “this furious hurly-burly ... did not receive the interest it warranted from the [French]. To be sure, national chauvinism does not easily get over the failure undergone by the Emperor, and moreover, none of the actions which took place could be labeled ‘imperial.’”¹⁹ Despite this reticence many accounts of the war remain extant.

Increasing literacy during the French Revolutionary era makes such accounts particularly valuable because they draw from a wider sampling of the social strata. The massive armies such as that employed in Spain drew from all levels of society and provide a “collective narrative of the men who took part.”²⁰ Though the best sources are letters and journals, memoirs and official reports also present valuable information. Alan Forrest described these as “the most immediate conduit we have to the thinking and mentality of those involved, and the most personal, in that they

¹⁷ Ian Gates, Review of *Going to the Wars*, by Charles Carlton in *The Journal of British Studies*, v. 35, n. 4 (October 1996), 544.

¹⁸ John Bowditch, Review of Donald D. Horward, *The French Revolution and Napoleon Collection at Florida State University: A Bibliographical Guide* and Jean Jacques Pelet, *The French Campaign in Portugal, 1810-1811*, translated by Donald D. Horward, in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 79, No. 2. (Apr., 1974), p. 521.

¹⁹ J. Paul Escalettes, “On April 10, 1814, Spanish and Portuguese at the Battle of Toulouse,” *New lights on the Peninsular War: International Congress on the Iberian Peninsula, selected papers, 1780-1840*, edited by Alice D. Berkeley, (The British Historical Society of Portugal, 1991), 271. Pp. 271-290.

²⁰ Forrest, x.

reflect the experience of individuals.”²¹ In such sources, the historian can look into the emotions, challenges, reactions, and observations of the soldiers.²² For the French, these memoirs tend to come from soldiers of the eastern front that were transferred to Spain for the campaign led by Napoleon in 1808 and 1809. The problems with such memoirs is that an author may seek to justify or excuse the actions in which he participated and possibly to grind a few axes.²³ As Esdaile put it,

these sources are not necessarily to be taken at face value: as representatives of the vanquished, their authors may well have been under a strong temptation to exculpate their defeat, or, even better, to show that victory had never been possible, and thereby that they themselves had no reason to feel any shame.²⁴

Regardless, careful reading of such memoirs, punctuated where possible by journals actually written on the spot, provide the only glimpse into the mind of the soldier during the long war in Spain.²⁵

It must be remembered that the War in the Peninsula was indeed an incredibly long war. Napoleon’s earlier campaigns usually ended in a matter of months. During the Austerlitz campaign of 1805, perhaps the emperor’s most famous success, four short months sufficed to annihilate combined armies of Austria and Russia. In Spain however, the seven years of the conflict entailed not only the unprecedented guerrilla war, but also long grueling campaigns in which gigantic armies battled each other in difficult terrain. The duration of the war, especially since there was no sign of impending victory severely affected the morale of the French army.

²¹ Forrest, 21.

²² Keegan, 33.

²³ Forrest, 23-4.

²⁴ Esdaile, “The Problem of the Spanish Guerrilla,” p. 193.

²⁵ Forrest, ix; Paddy Griffith, *Forward into Battle*, (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1991), 30; Keegan, 32.

While open hostilities only began in May 1808, French troops had been occupying parts of northern Spain and Portugal since the previous fall. Napoleon's attempt to close Portugal to English trade and, in Spain, oust the Bourbon dynasty became an open bid for conquest only after riots in March 1808 forced Charles IV to abdicate in favor of his son Ferdinand. By May, the series of political bullying that led to the occupation of Madrid, the imprisonment of the Spanish royal family and the installation of Joseph Bonaparte upon the throne unleashed the burgeoning hostility of the Spanish. In the face of this popular unrest, no less than four French armies, one each in Catalonia, Valencia, Andalusia and Portugal, met with failure over the next three months. These initial defeats culminated on July 21 when 18,000 men under General Dupont surrendered in Andalusia, causing King Joseph to skittishly withdraw imperial armies to the north of the Ebro River. To say the least, events of the summer had "disconcerted the plans of the Emperor."²⁶ Thus began the seesaw of offensives of the next few years. When the French advanced the Allies consolidated their forces and effectively parried the thrust. If the Anglo-Portuguese army advanced, the French would relinquish hold on territory to collect enough troops to send them back into Portugal.

Late in October 1808, Napoleon himself led 130,000 veterans in the second great campaign of the Peninsular War. By the end of the year, the French had again conquered all of northern Spain, reoccupied Madrid, and had driven an English force to the sea at Corunna. When the emperor left Spain in mid-January 1809 to face a growing threat from Austria, the French position in Spain seemed more secure than ever as their armies advanced into northern Portugal and besieged Saragossa in

²⁶ Mathieu Dumas, *Memoirs of His Own Lifetime*, (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1839), II, 175.

Aragon. This venture in Portugal was stalled by guerrillas and driven back into Spain by the British under Sir Arthur Wellesley. By summer, the same British army was threatening Madrid as the French attempted to consolidate their position in Spain. The invasion led to the bloody sloggng and pyrrhic Allied victory at Talavera in July.

After British withdrew into their Portuguese fastness, the French continued to grasp at more of Spain. They invaded Andalusia later in 1809 while their armies steadily conquered more of eastern Spain under Louis-Gabriel Suchet. Though the French invasion of Andalusia tied down an additional 70,000 men in occupation duties, they began preparations under André Masséna to again take Lisbon. This terrible campaign of 1810 and 1811 led to the famous sieges at Almeida and Ciudad Rodrigo, the bloody battle of Bussaco in Portugal, and the starvation of the French army outside Lisbon before Wellesley's, now Viscount Wellington, impregnable Lines of Torres Verdes. After the retreat from Portugal the French could not mount another offensive against that country. The campaigns of 1812 centered on Wellington's foray into northern Spain and the crushing French defeat at Salamanca in July. The next year resulted in the expulsion of the French from northern Spain after the battle of Vitoria. In a series of battles at the close of the year, the Anglo-Allied army entered southern France and on April 10, 1814 the last battle of the Peninsular War was fought at Toulouse. Throughout these long years, the dual guerrilla and conventional nature of this war played into the experiences of the soldiers. While this thesis shifts the backdrop of guerrilla war to the forefront, these campaigns must be kept in mind.

The guerrilla war meant a level of terror and misery that the French soldier had not experienced in either duration or violence during previous Napoleonic campaigns. The first chapter of the thesis will discuss initial impressions of Spain, its people and the challenges prosecuting war on the Peninsula. After crossing the Pyrenees, many soldiers felt a growing sense of isolation in the hostile terrain, in bad weather among a hateful populace. Additionally, the failure of initial campaigning and the lackluster results of counter-insurgent warfare often left them frustrated in their isolation. The second chapter discusses the cycle of violence in which the soldiers found themselves. Duties such as courier, convoy and garrison services, while ostensibly away from the battlefield, proved exhausting due to the constant threat of violence. This strain added to the frustration and isolation as lines between civilian and military became blurred in a brutal guerrilla conflict. The final chapter shows how the failure to pacify the countryside led to starvation, sickness and growing casualties all of which the imperial troops directly experienced. Ultimately, the combination of factors such as fear, exhaustion, hunger, and frustration severely retarded the ability and desire of the Imperial soldiers in Spain.

CHAPTER ONE

IMPRESSIONS OF SPAIN, THE SPANISH AND WAR IN IBERIA

In the wider context of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, imperial soldiers understood that hardship was to be expected. Until 1808, however, campaign difficulties were largely crowned with victory. The situation in Spain presented startling new realities of defeat in a distinctly foreign land among a hostile populace. The striking impressions of the land, the people and of campaigning therein that imperial soldiers described affected this change. These initial impressions would be reinforced by other factors to increase the misery of the war and its effect on morale. With observations that ranged across the beauty of the stark and difficult terrain to encounters with hostile locals, soldiers had a distinct sense of isolation. This isolation was further enhanced by preconceived ideas about the Spanish that distanced the invaders from any real contact with the already angry Spaniards. Finally, when complications arising from the guerrilla conflict, as happened in Portugal and Galicia in early 1809, collapsed the French strategic initiative, many soldiers became increasingly frustrated. It is worthwhile to take a quick look at how they regarded the war to better understand how their impressions combined with the whole experience to severely undermine their ability and will to fight.

The veterans who entered with Napoleon in late 1808 best characterize the rapid deterioration of French morale in Spain that affected their duties. The swagger of victory that characterized the veterans of the northern campaigns quickly

degenerated into a generalized exhaustion marked by repugnance for the war in Iberia. The detailed journal of Louis-Florimond Fantin des Odoards reads this shift. As a sous-lieutenant, Fantin des Odoards crossed the Pyrenees in Marshal Ney's veteran VI Corps on November 3, 1808. During the years of his stay he kept a fascinating journal of his participation in the initial victories of Napoleon's army, Soult's invasion of Portugal, his subsequent illness, garrison life and convoy duty. During this period he changed from a cocky junior officer in a victorious army to a disillusioned veteran trying anxiously to get out of Spain. In 1808, he had shrugged off warnings from French soldiers invalided out of Spain during the initial catastrophes. He wrote, "the old bands of the north, so many times victorious, arrive to avenge the defeat of the beardless [conscripts]." ²⁷ By late 1810, however, while stuck in garrison duty on the Tagus River, he sought every opportunity to move east and closer to the French border. Another junior officer, Heinrich von Brandt of the Polish Legion, summed up this process in relating a discussion with a veteran at Pamplona.

Mr Lieutenant, what goes on here breaks the hearts of the old veterans of Jena, Eylau and Wagram. Not a week passes without some outrage committed by this rabble who don't even have the courage to cross swords with us, man to man, as they did in Prussia, Austria and Poland. ²⁸

Though the dialogue was reconstructed many years after the fact, the veracity of sentiment cannot be doubted. Like Fantin des Odoards, Brandt's veteran of Pamplona harked to the former victories in the north and expressed the frustration at the inability to answer assaults on the field in kind. Like the veteran quoted by

²⁷ Louis-Florimond Fantin des Odoards, *Journal du Général Fantin des Odoards*, (Paris:Plon, 1895), (Bayonne, 2 November 1808), 185.

²⁸ Heinrich von Brandt, *In the Legions of Napoleon*, translated by Jonathan North, (Pennsylvania: Stackpole, 1999), 156.

Brandt, Fantin des Odoards, after years of meeting and defeating every continental adversary in field, found himself in a situation unlike any he had faced in north and central Europe.

The effect of the strain of the guerrilla war, the erosion of confidence and morale, permeates French accounts. Fantin des Odoards, while in Oporto with Soult's army in 1809, called this a "sickness of morale," brought in part by lack of communication with other French forces and the idleness caused by the inability to mount an offensive, both direct strategic results of guerrilla activity.²⁹ One officer of cavalry noted this general repugnance for the war in Spain in some graffiti in northern Spain; "this war in Spain means death for the men; ruin for the officers; a fortune for the generals!"³⁰ The same soldier referred to the invasion as "the wretched war in Spain"³¹ while Brandt spoke of "the bad feeling so prevalent in our armies in Spain."³² Marbot, who had been in Madrid during the May revolts identified with the Spanish, understood their resistance and stated "our cause was a bad one." He further claimed in the retrospect of memoirs that despite carrying out their duties, "the greater part of the army thought as I did and like me."³³ Accounts left by Napoleon's eastern veterans who participated in the counteroffensive of late 1808 reflected this rapid erosion of morale that would be so detrimental to their desire to fight. This later aversion to campaigning in Spain was reflected in the initial wariness impressions of terrain, weather and the populace.

²⁹ Fantin des Odoards, (Porto, 8 May 1809), 229.

³⁰ Charles Parquin, *Military Memoirs*, translated by B. T Jones, (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1969), 126.

³¹ Parquin, 150.

³² Brandt, 73.

³³ Marbot, 315.

Soldiers in Spain felt almost immediately that, though the forbidding landscape could be beautiful, they were in a distinctly foreign land. Whether entering Spain through a Pyrenean pass or tramping across the Bidossa River, the soldiers noted the contrast of beauty with a forbidding landscape. Heinrich von Brandt noted the beauty of the mountains. As a junior officer in the Vistula Legion, Brandt belonged to one of the many imperial contingents that swelled the ranks of the French army. Formed in early 1808 of three infantry regiments and one of lancers, this Polish force entered Spain in the summer of 1808 with Brandt leading a company of *voltigeurs*.³⁴ In 1810, he was awarded the Legion of Honor and only left the Peninsula when his regiment marched east in January 1812. In Spain he participated in various campaigns and counterinsurgency efforts under Marshal Suchet in Aragon while also varying missions of convoy and garrison duty. Years later he wrote a treatise on guerrilla warfare in addition to his informative and well-written memoirs.³⁵ He was struck by the beauty of Spain and described a pass in Aragon as “the most beautiful pass in the whole of Spain.”³⁶ During an offensive against the guerrillas along the border of Navarre and Aragon in February 1811, his *voltigeurs* moved along a high ridge to cover the flank of the main force to which they were attached. Brandt declared the spot to have been “such a beautiful location that even the soldiers were lost in admiration.”³⁷ Another officer, high atop a mountaintop gave pause to a

³⁴ *Voltigeurs* were light skirmishers and scouts. Each battalion had a company of these elite soldiers, whose function in battle was to harass attacking units before combat was closed. On the march they acted as scouts. They were the best soldiers of the battalion who were too short, by regulation no taller than 4' 11", to join the other elite company of a battalion, the *grenadiers*. From John Elting, *Swords Around A Throne*, (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 209-210.

³⁵ Jonathon North in Introduction to Brandt, 17-29.

³⁶ Brandt, 150.

³⁷ Brandt, 158.

mirage of the ocean set in a stunning landscape.³⁸ Captain Coignet of the Imperial Guard thought Vitoria a beautiful city while noting a magnificent church in Burgos.³⁹ To the east another officer marched through a Catalonia abundant with orchards of figs, olives and cherries.⁴⁰ Sébastien Blaze noted the beauty of an Andalusia abundant with oranges, palms, bananas, sugar cane, cotton, figs, olives, wheat, wine and lemons.⁴¹ On the other hand, he discounted Valladolid as “large, badly built, very irregular, very dirty, and did not offer much pleasure to travelers.”⁴² The soldiers had practical matters to consider other than the beauty of the countryside.

In many ways the land was distinctly foreign and with other factors added to the imperial soldiers’ sense of isolation. Had the French been quickly victorious in Spain the regard for the beauty may have left the strongest impression in many of the retrospectives on the war. That was not the case and immediately upon crossing the border many noticed the change. Sébastien Blaze was attached as a surgeon to the 2nd corps of observation of the Gironde in January 1808. Of the old robe nobility, his family having held the office of notary of Cavailon for 300 years, both he and his younger brother, Elzéar, an officer of the 108th Line, left memoirs of their experiences in Spain. For Sébastien, the poverty and the cries of the carters “announced that I was in strange country.”⁴³ Another soldier also felt the distinct change on entering a foreign land, “the moment we set foot on the Spanish territory, an evident difference

³⁸ Fantin des Odoards, (Potès, 29 November 1808), 191.

³⁹ Jean-Roche Coignet, *The Notebooks of Captain Coignet*, (London: Greenhill, 1986), 165.

⁴⁰ Sous-lieutenant Angelbault, *Mémoires sur les campagnes d’Espagne*, (Paris: Teissedre, 1997), 28-9.

⁴¹ Sébastien Blaze, *Mémoires d’un Apothicairer sur la Guerre d’Espagne*, (Geneva: Slatkine, 1977), I, 435.

⁴² Sébastien Blaze, I, 9.

⁴³ Sébastien Blaze, *Mémoires d’un apothicairer sur la guerre d’Espagne*, (Genève: Slatkine, 1977), I, 5.

was perceived in the face of the country, and the manner of the inhabitants.”⁴⁴ For another officer, his entrance into Spain was more dramatically announced just past the first village in Catalonia when in a defile his unit was fired on and the standard bearer killed.⁴⁵

Despite its rugged beauty, the difficult terrain of Spain and Portugal worried many imperial soldiers. Considering that the soldiers traveled by power of foot, they of course noted the rugged terrain and the state of the roads. Difficult roads added to the sense of isolation, especially for the garrison soldiers who knew that relief might be delayed. While terrain difficulties also plagued the other armies in Spain, for the French, the guerrilla war exacerbated the problems of supply and communications in an already rugged terrain. This increased the sense of isolation that contributed to the erosion of the invaders’ morale.⁴⁶ Bad maps and general ignorance of local terrain added to the problem and proved a significant and constant hindrance to operations in the forbidding landscape.⁴⁷ Like many others, Brandt remembered the “atrocious roads,”⁴⁸ the “terrible roads.”⁴⁹ In November 1808, shortly after entering Spain, Fantin des Odoards described, “an exceedingly bad route through uncultivated hills, without vegetation and with the most melancholy aspect.”⁵⁰ Later he cursed the “detestable roads.”⁵¹ On the march through the mountains between Old Castile and Aragon, a staff officer in Ney’s II Corps “found the roads steep and covered with

⁴⁴ M. de Rocca, *Mémorials of the Late War*, (Edinburgh: Constable, 1820), 21-2.

⁴⁵ Hyacinthe Clemenso, *Souvenirs d’un officier Valaisan au service de France*, (Paris: Teissèdre, 1999), 28.

⁴⁶ David Gates, *The Spanish Ulcer*, (New York: Norton, 1986), 106-107.

⁴⁷ Don Alexander, “French Military Problems in Counterinsurgent Warfare in Northeastern Spain, 1808-1813,” *Military Affairs*, v. 40, n. 3 (October 1976), 118; Gates, 106-107.

⁴⁸ Brandt, 89.

⁴⁹ Brandt, 160.

⁵⁰ Fantin des Odoards, (Féa, 27 February 1809), 209.

⁵¹ Fantin des Odoards, (Féa, 27 February 1809), 209.

rocks to the point of being obliged to lead the horses by the bridle.”⁵² Another complained that the lay of the land “makes Portugal the theater little suited for war.”⁵³ Sous-Lieutenant Angelbault, the junior officer who noted the abundance and beauty of Catalonia, also remarked on the bad quality of the roads that traced from France to Figueras.⁵⁴ He thought a land so cut up with ravines and crevasses dangerous for the invaders.⁵⁵ These threats played out for General Bigarré during the retreat from Portugal in 1809. An aide de camp to King Joseph, Bigarré described how “we suffered cruelly in the mountains and in the ravines that it was necessary to travel through.”⁵⁶ The threat of ambush in the mountainous terrain of Spain in particular fed the sense of unease. The weather in Spain only deepened the discomfort and foreboding.

Extremes of weather on the Iberian Peninsula added to the sense of isolation that affected the imperial morale and pervades the writings of Peninsular veterans. Whether it was the extreme heat and desolation of Extramadura or the famous snows of the Somo Sierra, imperial soldiers never ceased to comment on the weather.⁵⁷ One staff officer said of the mountain snows, “we never remembered so severe a cold in Poland.”⁵⁸ Weather could be extremely unpredictable and tended to highlight the ignorance of commanders, add to the misery of the experience, and, with the flash of

⁵² Emmanuel-Frédéric Sprünglin, *Souvenirs des Guerres d'Espagne et de Portugal*, (Paris: Teissèdre, 1998), 40.

⁵³ M. Guingret, *Relation Historique et Militaire de la Campagne de Portugal sous le Maréchal Masséna, prince d'Essling*, (Limoges: Bargeas, 1817), 12.

⁵⁴ Angelbault, 23.

⁵⁵ Angelbault, 28-9.

⁵⁶ Auguste Julien Bigarré, *Mémoires du Général Bigarré*, (Paris: Ernest Kolb), 248.

⁵⁷ Jean-Baptiste-Antoine-Marcelin baron de Marbot, *The memoirs of Baron de Marbot*, translated by Arthur John Butler, (New York : Longmans, Green and Co., 1892), 352.

⁵⁸ Anne-Jean-Marie-Renée Savary, duc de Rovigo, *Memoirs of the duke of Rovigo*, (London: Colburn, 1828), II, 18.

a flood, could isolate detachments in hostile territory. In mountainous terrain, flashfloods were a constant hazard. In Léon a cavalier complained, “the roads were cut and that winter the rivers had all burst their banks.”⁵⁹ Suchet noted that floods were responsible for one of the early French disasters of the war when an angry Cinca River isolated a section of infantry and cavalry in guerrilla country.⁶⁰ Brandt witnessed the event in 1809, calling it a “real Spanish tempest” that “brought water, rocks and logs crashing down upon us.”⁶¹ That May in Aragon, “meagre streams had been transformed into raging torrents and both men and horses could lose their footing in the slippery mud.”⁶² Another noted the delay of crossing the Guadiana River in tempestuous weather.⁶³ Brandt also experienced the misery of sleeping without shelter when “freezing northerly gales alternated with torrential downpours.”⁶⁴ Alternately, the “unbearable heat” of September brought mosquitoes that “formed a thick cloud, hovering above the ground, a veritable humming and stinging fog. We burnt masses of powder to try and drive them off, though this gained us but a brief respite and the cloud reformed and descended upon us once again.”⁶⁵ Physical isolation and severe discomfort was exacerbated by the general lack of human contact with the largely hostile Spanish populace.

The desertion of the countryside and the hostility of the Spanish with whom they came into contact further added to the sense of isolation. The empty countryside left a physical obstacle to peaceful interaction just as prejudices created a mental

⁵⁹ Parquin, 114.

⁶⁰ Louis-Gabriel Suchet, duc d'Albufera, *Memoirs of the war in Spain, from 1808 to 1814*, (London, H. Colburn, 1829), 17.

⁶¹ Brandt, 73.

⁶² Brandt, 73.

⁶³ Sébastien Blaze, I, 112.

⁶⁴ Brandt, 48.

⁶⁵ Brandt, 146.

barrier to establishing human accord. When the populace fled, the procurement of supplies became difficult, often leaving the soldiers hungry and frustrated. Virtually every journalist and memoir writer commented on this phenomenon. Brandt noted these characteristics of the guerrilla war through the collective hostility of the inhabitants. His idealized image from contemporary literature of the guitar players, lovely señoras, and tilled earth quickly evaporated under the "ferocious glances" of the Spaniards. Furthermore, the French met with what would be a common difficulty of requisitioning needed supplies. When an order went out to gather transport and draft horses, "the peasants had learnt of this almost before we had and both quadrupeds and bipeds had vanished into the mountains."⁶⁶ At another point he commented that "the Xiloca valley, normally swarming with people, was deserted."⁶⁷ Fantin des Odoards had a similar experience along his entire march from Irun to Corunna in Galicia where villages were abandoned.⁶⁸ Those inhabitants that stayed had, for the French, a "barely disguised hatred."⁶⁹ Brandt noted the difficulty of dealing with the Spanish who remained; "*Non saber* – I don't understand, I don't know – were the only words we could get from them."⁷⁰ The invaders also came into contact with the populace when they were billeted in their homes. Often the imperial troops were met with hostility. Brandt noted that he was billeted with an old man in Pamplona. In his house, "there was no contact between us ... [his household] would

⁶⁶ Brandt, 44.

⁶⁷ Brandt, 85.

⁶⁸ Fantin des Odoards (Near Vitoria, 7 November 1808), 187; (Santa Cruz, 20 November 1808), 190; (Au bivouac, 2 leagues from La Corunna, 14 January 1809), 194.

⁶⁹ Fantin des Odoards (Near Vitoria, 7 November 1808), 187.

⁷⁰ Brandt, 44.

file past us with eminent disdain, casting menacing glances.”⁷¹ Fantin des Odoards was housed with a host who treated him as if he were excommunicated.⁷²

Cultural prejudice worsened the rift between the invaders and the Spanish, increasing the sense of isolation felt by the imperial troops. Often French preconceptions dehumanized the Spanish as a savage and backward. The inability to normalize relations with the populace perpetuated the violence and atrocity of the war by hindering peaceful interaction and added to the sense of isolation among the troops. Many of the images of the Spanish were extensions of traditional prejudices that stemmed from tales of Spanish cruelty toward the Dutch and the Mexicans.⁷³ Elzéar Blaze homogenized Spain and the Spanish; “in Spain everything is alike.”⁷⁴ The Spanish were a passionate and excitable people who, as evidenced by the treatment as heroes of guerrillas, toreadors, smugglers, and brigands, sought the accolades of their fellows.⁷⁵ Elzéar also saw them as largely silent and taciturn in their daily existence.⁷⁶ To him, they were a disorganized and backward, to the degree that since the times of Charles V the “arts, agriculture, mechanics” had suffered a retrograde motion of progress.⁷⁷ This seemed to stem from an alleged laziness, an “hereditary indolence” of a parochial society.⁷⁸ Blaze also had a marked scorn for the poverty and scoffed at the beggar with his image of the Virgin or a saint,

⁷¹ Brandt, 84.

⁷² Fantin des Odoards, (Salamanca, 25 July 1809), 255.

⁷³ Louis Trenard, “Images de l’Espagne dans la France Napoléonienne,” *Les Espagnols et Napoleon*, (Aix-en-Provence: 1984), pp. 181-196.

⁷⁴ Elzéar Blaze, *Life in Napoleon’s Army*, (London: Greenhill, 1995), 110.

⁷⁵ Elzéar Blaze, 102.

⁷⁶ Elzéar Blaze, 96.

⁷⁷ Elzéar Blaze, 101.

⁷⁸ Elzéar Blaze, 105.

reading Psalms for *pesetas*.⁷⁹ Sébastien was more specific than his brother in stating which Spaniards were the worst. To him, the inhabitants of Valladolid, “after those of Madrid, are the biggest brigands of the Peninsula.”⁸⁰ He did not hesitate to demean the rest, however, calling them variously violent, angry, jealous, generally lazy, avaricious, sneaking, vindictive, haughty and “capable of doing the basest of acts.”⁸¹ In addition to being hypocritical and mean, a Swiss officer decried the peasants especially as “barbaric, superstitious, mistrustful, lazy, lying, filthy, badly housed, badly fed, covered with vermin.”⁸² Such loathing deepened the rift between the invader and the occupied. The brutality of the war made things worse.

As noted, the brutality of the war in Spain became immediately apparent to many of the veterans of the northern wars who crossed over the Pyrenees with Napoleon in late autumn 1808. This brutality was fed by hostility of the populace and the frustration felt by soldiers trapped in a cycle of violence. Blurring lines between civilian and military made it difficult to interact peaceably, to gather supplies while adding to the dehumanization of the Spanish and made atrocity much more likely. Fantin des Odoards crossed into Spain on November 3, a junior officer in Marechal Ney's VI Corps. In Bayonne, he had been warned by French amputees on their way home from the Peninsula that though the Spanish army was not such a threat, "the war had become national [and] all the inhabitants are our enemy."⁸³ Marbot, aide-de-camp to Marshal Murat, Prince of Berg, wrote that in the spring of 1808 he “found

⁷⁹ Elzéar Blaze, 108.

⁸⁰ Sébastien Blaze, I, 9.

⁸¹ Sébastien Blaze, I, 325, 405-6. Despite calling them lazy, after a few marches he was clear on the reason for siesta; “a burning sun obliges them to quit work in the fields, that they resume afterwards when the heat is less strong.” p. 429.

⁸² Gaspard Schumacher, *Journal et souvenirs de Gaspard Schumacher, Capitaine aux suisses de la Garde Royale*, (Paris: Fayard), 73.

⁸³ Fantin des Odoards (Bayonne, 2 November 1808), 185.

deep unrest in all the provinces I passed through, for they knew about the enforced abdication of Ferdinand VII, the people's idol, and also knew that Napoleon intended to annex the Spanish throne; consequently an insurrection was being prepared everywhere.”⁸⁴ Such warnings only increased the unease and suspicion that isolated the soldier from the Spanish.

To the serious detriment of the soldiers' morale, the impressions of the land and people were also influenced by the impressions of how military operations, both conventional and unconventional, would proceed in Spain. The guerrilla war affected the professional concerns regarding the business of winning the war. The guerrilla war in Spain and Portugal shook the confidence in the abilities of the generals and the French system of war. Frustration at the failure in Spain contrasted with the successes in Central Europe. The frustration was compounded because of the military inferiority of the guerrillas in pitched field battles. The frustration on the strategic scale directly affected the individual experiences of the rank and file. Throughout the performance of military duties, the frustration and isolation of dealing with a guerrilla foe in the midst of a hostile populace forced a constant vigilance upon the French living and serving in Spain. Convoys, couriers, stragglers and garrisons were under the continual pressure of vigilance from ambush, murder and atrocity. According to Suchet, guerrilla engagements “exhausted us far more than regular engagements.”⁸⁵ The Spanish governing body also recognized this fact. Between 28 December 1808 and 17 April 1809, after the success of the guerrillas against Ney's attempt to suppress Galicia, the Spanish Junta had the sense to encourage the

⁸⁴ Marbot, Vol. II, p. 33, in Chandler, 611.

⁸⁵ Suchet, 52.

populace in attacks on the French. Attacking only at an advantage and dispersing when pressed by the pursuing French, the guerrillas constantly frustrated the imperial soldiers eroded their ability to effectively fight.

By appearing where imperial forces were weak, the guerrillas created and exacerbated the frustration and constant stresses of isolation and vigilance felt by the soldiers. The guerrillas were everywhere the occupation forces were not. Search and destroy missions often met with desultory results in the rugged terrain with hardship that only enhanced the privation and frustration felt by the soldiers. A cavalry officer riding near Salamanca stated the guerrillas “function was not to engage forces against which they were almost certain to be defeated.”⁸⁶ This led Fantin des Odoards to write, “everywhere here, one is at an advance post, because the enemy is everywhere.”⁸⁷ As counterinsurgency duties led to long marches and countermarches often to no effect, this last point is almost a mantra of frustration in the writings of the veterans of Spain. Suchet repeated the oblation to exasperation as the guerrillas “made their appearance at every spot we did not occupy.”⁸⁸ Brandt, a soldier who served under Suchet in Aragon elaborated on the point. In Aragon in 1809, Brandt was part of a force that attempted to chase down guerrillas in the vicinity of Calatayud in western Aragon; “they were everywhere we were not, they disappeared upon our approach, escaped our clutches and reappeared behind us.”⁸⁹ After the Poles occupied the town, they departed only to have Villacampa return and oust the

⁸⁶ Parquin, 122.

⁸⁷ Fantin des Odoards, 288; Suchet, 53; Tone, 71. Fantin des Odoards entered Spain on 3 November, 1808 in Mermet’s division within Ney’s VI Corps.

⁸⁸ Suchet, 57.

⁸⁹ Brandt, 80.

*afrancesado*⁹⁰ government. Thus the imperial force had to retrace its steps and retake the town.⁹¹ Years later, Brandt conveyed the strain and frustration of the chase, “after all these years, [the name of Calatayud] still makes me tremble”⁹² Two years later, as Suchet advanced his army toward Tarragona in 1811, Brandt found himself in the same situation. Sent to pursue guerrillas along the frontier between Navarre and Aragon,

We marched incessantly, usually twenty to thirty miles a day along poor bridledways, climbed sheer rock faces, slid down precipices, endured time and time again in quick succession the burning heat of the lowlands and the icy winds of the heights, and all to get at the slippery enemy, so that we could foil their designs, or, at best, disperse them and force them to seek sanctuary some distance away.⁹³

The sheer physical strain of the chase is closed not by permanent victory, but by an “at best,” an imprecise end, a delay of more harassment. Just as around Calatayud, guerrillas “reappeared” where the French were weak.⁹⁴ Marshall Ney likewise wrote of his frustration to Nicholas Soult in April 1810 that “despite all the measures I have taken to destroy the bands of guerrillas ... these brigands continue to torment us.”⁹⁵ While counterinsurgency efforts such as these by units in force frustrated the French, other subsidiary but important duties left the French soldier isolated and exposed in the weakened state that made them prey to guerrilla tactics. This was hindered by slow communications that disrupted attempts to coordinate pursuit.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ *Afrancesados* were Spanish sympathizers to the French regime.

⁹¹ Brandt, 84.

⁹² Brandt, 82.

⁹³ Brandt, 163.

⁹⁴ Brandt, 160.

⁹⁵ Ney to Soult on April 18, 1810 in Baron Jean Jacques Germain Pelet, *The French campaign in Portugal, 1810-1811* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1973), 32.

⁹⁶ Alexander, “French Military Problems,” 119, 120.

A possible contribution to the stress that French soldiers and junior officers felt during the war arose from a French tactical system that did not give officers and soldiers the opportunity to use their independent judgment. In Spain, where the small engagements characterized the guerrilla war, officers may have, due to lack of practice, felt a certain amount of indecision. This added to the strain of combat in the guerrilla war and the sense of isolation and frustration because an unsure officer was cast entirely upon his own devices. Mainly the problem arose in that there was no tactical system, especially for the infantry. One military theorist noted that the cavalry has definite tactics ... essentially it knows how it fights; the infantry does not.”⁹⁷ An English prisoner of war, while watching French regimental maneuvers called this the “want of fixed principles of action.”⁹⁸ Relying on large columns of infantry to overawe the enemy before contact on the field, “the French were thinking of tactics at a higher level ..., and perhaps tended to be rather slap-dash about the details.”⁹⁹ On the battlefield, as larger units maneuvered in massive groups of men, junior officers simply moved their men hither and yon without the pressures of independent command decision. Suchet implied as much by remarking that the “petty tedious warfare” in a guerrilla campaign was good only for building experience in the officers and men in small unit fighting and independent command, the implication being that the French lacked such skills upon entering Spain even after fifteen years of fighting across continental Europe. The problem worsened when increased imperial commitments dispersed the formerly compact unit of the Grand

⁹⁷ Griffith, 31.

⁹⁸ Baron Andrew Thomas Blayney, *Narrative of a forced Journey through Spain and France as a Prisoner of War*, (London: Kerby, 1814), I, 113.

⁹⁹ Griffith, 30.

Armée. With the invasion of Spain, the Wagram campaign and the attrition of experienced officers and troops, second rate or middling commanders who may have performed well enough following orders under an umbrella command were called upon to lead.

The inexperience of the mid-level commanders, due in part to the lack of a French tactical system, also undermined the confidence of troops in their leaders' ability to successfully lead them in engagements with the guerrillas. This added to the strain of the war that already permeated their everyday existence. The inexperience of many commanders as independent leaders seemed to play out in some of the early French disasters of the Peninsular War. Dupont's experience as a distinguished divisional commander served for naught at Bailen where indecision plagued his independent command.¹⁰⁰ General Pierre Habert, Brandt's brigade commander in Aragon, was well noted as an excellent battlefield officer. In May 1809, however, he lost seven hundred infantry, a quarter of his total force, to the partisans after a flash flood in the rugged terrain of the Cinca River valley. Brandt noted that Habert, "so confident in open country, was not half the man he should have been in such a terrain."¹⁰¹ The rank and file were clearly conscious of the strengths and weaknesses of the individual officers and that they were put in situations beyond the ken of the leadership.

In the facing the unprecedented uprising that cast many middle echelon officers in independent command, the problem of inexperience also extended to the troops. Veterans had no confidence in the conscripts, and the generals had no

¹⁰⁰ Chandler, 616; Gabriel H. Lovett, *Napoleon and the Birth of Modern Spain*, (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 182.

¹⁰¹ Brandt, 72-73.

confidence in their troops' ability to effectively perform their duties. The testimonies of the veterans belie the common assertion that inexperience of the part of the French soldiery was largely responsible for the failure of the French morale. Despite this, early problems with morale were attributed to conscripts and Imperial troops levied from states in central Europe subject to the French. This is evident in the journal entry of Fantin Des Odoards noted earlier. An aide to Joseph Bonaparte also noted the troops' bad quality in 1808 and in fact blamed their youthful appearance for emboldening the Spanish.¹⁰² Marshal Suchet claimed that conscripts in the early part of the war could not cope in the contest created by the guerrilla war.¹⁰³ This in part is true, Dupont's corps at Bailen had been largely made of such forces and inexperienced conscripts, non-commissioned officers, and officers certainly affected the performance of the army in the early part of the war. Indeed, the practice of creating units entirely of conscripts that proceeded through the entire war instead of integrating green troops into veteran units, seriously damaged the effectiveness of the French army in Spain. This argument does not bear out for the 130,000 who crossed into the Iberian Peninsula after October 1808. The war in Spain corroded the morale of experienced and inexperienced troops alike adding to the loss of confidence of both men and commander.¹⁰⁴ Frustration within the army, of troops with commanders and vice versa led to underachievement, preventing bold moves when needed and leading to an inability to act that could often lead to disasters such as Bailen or on the Cinca or on the small scale hunkered down immobility of a

¹⁰² Gaspard de Clermont-Tonnerre, *L'Expédition d'Espagne, 1808-1810*, (Paris: Perrin, 1983), 111.

¹⁰³ Suchet, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Don W. Alexander, "French Replacement Methods during the Peninsular War, 1808-1814," *Military Affairs*, v. 44, n. 4 (December 1980), 192; John R. Elting, *Swords Around a Throne*, (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 61, 510.

frightened garrison in the mountains of, say, Navarre. The process of disaster brought on by the trials of the war in Spain was evident for even experienced commanders.

The failure of even the best of Napoleon's marshals would undermine morale the troops morale to the degree that they would seek ways out of the interminable conflict. Soult's invasion of Portugal during the winter of 1809 serves as a perfect example of how the guerrilla war affected the conventional campaigning at which the French had elsewhere excelled. Points to notice are the problems of food and supply, intelligence, communications, and garrisons. These severely affected the individual experiences of the imperial soldier. When Napoleon returned to France in late 1808, he transferred command of his army to Marshal Nicholas Soult. Pursuing the British deep into Galicia to La Corunna at the northwest tip of Spain and then turning south to invade Portugal, Soult became completely isolated from other French forces. Unable to destroy the British before rescue by the Royal Navy in January 1809, the French quickly felt the effects of guerrilla harassment to their rear. With long lines of communication across hostile territory, convoys required heavy escort and, in unguarded moments, outposts were overwhelmed by the hostile partisans.¹⁰⁵ When the British evacuated, however, the path seemed to be open for Soult to pursue an invasion of Portugal as Napoleon had instructed. As usual, the plan was to overwhelm enemy opposition. A three-pronged attack called for an invasion from Galicia by Soult who was to be joined near Oporto by a smaller force advancing from the east. To the south, Marechal Victor was ordered to move on Lisbon. Under normal circumstances this would have been a sound plan. Overextension due to heavy garrison commitments in the hostile territory had, however, reduced Soult's

¹⁰⁵ Dumas, 184.

force from 40,000 to 20,000 effectives. Complicating matters, insurgents in both Spain and Portugal rendered communication with the other two forces impossible and Soult marched in the blind, completely unaware of the location and actions of those with whom he was to move in concert. Furthermore, he could feed his army only with extreme difficulty because foraging parties did not have the strength to defend themselves from the hostile peasantry. Though this was partially alleviated by the capture of a Spanish naval depot outside La Corunna, starvation never trailed far behind his army.

Leaving II Corps under Marechal Michel Ney to hold Galicia, Soult easily took Vigo on the coast and Tuy on the Portuguese border. The necessity of leaving strong garrisons in those towns drew more men from his invasion force and high waters on the Minho forced him to take a circuitous inland route through the mountains. Often marching in file along winding tracks, the French were exposed to sniping and harassment from the natives. The difficult terrain compelled Soult to send his heavy artillery and wagons back to Tuy and the invasion lost another full division to escort duty. At Orense, Soult received one of the last missives from Ney who faced widespread insurrection in Galicia. Though this meant that reinforcements would not be forthcoming, Soult continued his advance. When on March 4, 1809 the French caught the irregulars in the field at Braga, Soult soundly beat the 25,000 Portuguese. On March 27th, the French reached Oporto. Thereupon Soult issued an ultimatum to the Portuguese; "I will give you the town for three days ... then the town will burn."¹⁰⁶ Though defended by 30,000 Portuguese and 200 pieces of artillery, the

¹⁰⁶ André Colomb, "Journal of André Colomb: Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur," ed. by Donald D. Horward, *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, XLVI, 185 (Spring 1968), 8. Colomb

16,000 remaining Frenchmen took the city two days later, inflicting an inordinate number of casualties upon the defenders.¹⁰⁷

Once in Oporto, the pattern of overextension and isolation became quickly apparent as the French stalled along the coast. Already Soult was deep in hostile territory, cut off from the rest of the French field armies as irregular forces sapped his strength and ability to fight. Even as Soult won the day in Oporto, up the coast Vigo fell to the Allies with the help of the Royal Navy. Further isolating in the invasion force, the Portuguese irregulars that had been driven from the field at Braga, showed a resilience that dogged the French throughout the war by rallying at Tuy on the Spanish border to harass the isolated garrison. With the coast road and the mountains through which he had passed blocked, Soult received no communications from any other French commanders. In a necessary act that guaranteed a shift to the defense, Soult dispatched a division north to contact Ney and another to the east to find the support column that was supposed to meet him at Oporto. The division sent north relieved Tuy from the guerrilla pressures and garnered news of Vigo's fall, of a massive Galician uprising and of Ney's complete isolation from Madrid. The division then abandoned the Minho Valley and any coastal line of retreat as untenable. To the east, the second division found no supporting column but did drive off a gathering force of Portuguese before hunkering down in defensive positions.¹⁰⁸

In what became a recurring nightmare for the French commanders, the isolation and frustration of fighting a guerrilla war in the hostile terrain stalled Soult's

served in the 17th Line Infantry. He entered Spain in December 1808. His journal begins in Oporto in Foy's brigade under Soult.

¹⁰⁷ Gates, 138-141.

¹⁰⁸ Gates, 142-3.

offensive as he depleted his main force to counter guerrilla incursions. Guerrillas denied him communication with his supporting commanders and closed his eyes to the developing British offensive to the south. His position tenuous at best, Soult sat helplessly on the defensive while “all the Portuguese took up arms against [the French] in an attempt to expel [them] from the country.”¹⁰⁹ These insurgents gave the British under Wellesley time and opportunity to prepare an offensive to expel the French from Oporto. Had a British spy not been apprehended and divulged the plan, Soult would have been taken completely by surprise. Even still, 18,500 British pushed him out of Oporto, while a Portuguese force under British leadership turned his inland flank to threaten his last path of flight over the mountains. Soult ditched his equipment, abandoned the city and with his army fled northward. Soult’s invasion of Portugal had ended in a disaster for the French.¹¹⁰

When on May 17 the famished army arrived at Orense in Spain, Soult learned that Ney and II Corps fared little better. In Galicia, the insurgency pinned an entire division around La Corunna and the rest of Ney’s 17,000 men were dispersed in isolated brigade-sized (how big) detachments. Ney faced 30,000 insurgents, a force of Spanish regulars and harassment from the Royal Navy. His need to survive far outweighed Napoleon’s orders to subdue the countryside and provide support for Soult. Additionally, the loss of a key town severed communications with Madrid and, in fact, this lack of news from the northwest compelled King Joseph to dispatch another 7,000 men to find out what was going on in Galicia. Linking with these reinforcements, Ney had taken Oviedo in Asturias, but when the French left, the

¹⁰⁹ Colomb, 10.

¹¹⁰ Gates, 149-152, 154-5.

insurgents returned. Ney returned to Galicia to recapture the ground he had lost to insurgents during his Asturian expedition in the preceding week. Elsewhere, the advance of other columns dispatched to support Soult ended in much the same way, either marching in circles or unable to move forward due to attempts to counter guerrilla incursions. Thus Soult had been left to his own devices against the British in early May.¹¹¹

To summarize, Soult, one of the Empire's finest generals at the head of a corps of veteran troops, failed miserably in the face of the widespread insurgency. The soldiers in Spain and Portugal quickly realized that the guerrilla war posed unique problems and left them isolated and frustrated despite their superiority in the field. In every pitched battle during the invasion the French had soundly defeated Spanish and Portuguese, both regular and irregular, in the field. Still, insurgent forces sealed the French in by regrouping where the French were not. Combined with the British offensive, the Portuguese and the Galicians had mounted the first effective guerrilla insurgency. Falling on isolated detachments and garrisons such as those at Tuy and Vigo, they rendered the strategic position of the French untenable. Under this screen of guerrillas, the French found themselves in a vacuum of information and with a shortage of food. Soult had neither news of Ney nor information of Wellesley's advance. During the retreat, the French "found no food except grass in the field" and barely staved off starvation.¹¹² After withdrawing into Leon along with Ney, Soult

¹¹¹ Gates, 145-9.

¹¹² Colomb, 10.

reported to the emperor that an attempted pacification of Galicia would be “extremely bloody, infinitely disagreeable, and seemingly endless.”¹¹³

The failure of the conventional campaigns played into the invaders’ foreboding impressions of Spain. The morale of the soldiers was quickly affected and seemed to sap any fire they may have had for the war, as in the case of Fantin des Odoards. To the invaders, Spain became a land of defiles and bad roads with a climate that was as inhospitable as the natives. The lack of contact with the Spanish further removed the French from any sort of peaceable common ground. Defeat in the field did not give them any assurance that the war would come to a speedy conclusion. While these problems may eventually have been corrected, the cycle of violence that came to characterize the experience of the guerrilla war added to the bad impressions of the land and people. The constant threat of death further eroded the French desire to fight in Spain.

¹¹³ Soult to Napoleon, 25 June 1809, in Sir Charles William Chadwick Oman, *A History of the Peninsular War*, (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1995-1999), II, 643; Gates, 156-157; Tone, 69-70.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

Along with its duration, the continual violence of the guerrilla war made the Spanish conflict exceptional. Without the threat of violence that hounded soldiers away from the battlefield where it could be expected, the war in Spain may not have been such a terrible experience that it affected their will to fight. The impressions that imperial soldiers had of Spain may not have been so marked, especially in the retrospective memoirs, had the soldiers not been threatened by continual violence in guerrilla war. The cycle of violence and the threat of personal harm are implicit in all the initial impressions, in the difficulty of the terrain, in the hostility of the populace, the lack of confidence in leaders and men, and in campaigning in Spain and Portugal. In those countries the strain of combat, the stresses of war found no respite especially from ambush and murder. The violence and counter-violence that characterized the guerrilla war placed the imperial soldier under continual mortal threat, under the stress of constant vigilance. The deaths of comrades, Spanish sympathizers isolated them and fed a cycle of vengeance and retaliation. The guerrilla war and the harsh occupation blurred the lines between civilian and military. Murders and executions blended into a chaotic jumble of reprisals, death, looting and rape. Having no rest, often hungry and feeling impotent to end the situation led to the poor morale endemic in the French army to Spain. Because they were in constant stress even away from conventional enemy forces, the front permeated even to light duties and added to the continual strain of the war while soldiers' will to fight.

During the execution of military support duties, ambush weighed on the minds of soldiers and added to the stress, the frustration and the isolation of imperial soldiers in Spain. Ambush in some form threatened all duties. Whether on convoy, couriers or forage duty, in and ambush surprise unhinged discipline, unit cohesion, and orderly reaction, therefore threatening life and survival. In a land where the enemy knew their every movement, the roads were bad, and mountainous terrain, canyons and gullies provided ideal cover from whence guerrillas attacked and through which they could safely retreat, the threat of ambush strained even soldiers who, with luck, traveled unhindered in hostile territory. Brandt painted the picture with more detail of how such stress could unhinge morale; “imagine moving along a path on the edge of a precipice, with a massive drop beneath you and dominated on the other side by a huge mountain, the slopes of which were covered by boulders ... and, along the difficult part of the road, were fired on by the enemy and returned their fire.”¹¹⁴ He described an ambush that occurred in one of the many defiles that crisscrossed the peninsula. Therein “the Spanish were showering the column with huge chunks of rocks and boulders and were making great efforts to pick out the officers.”¹¹⁵ Suchet noted an incident in which seventy men were ambushed and “nearly all put to death.”¹¹⁶ Throughout the war, “invisible hands” fired volleys on imperial soldiers, who had incredible difficulty exacting retribution.¹¹⁷

The total reliance of the French upon overland transport, communication and supply made the threat of ambush unavoidable. Due to the post-Trafalgar English

¹¹⁴ Brandt, 145-146.

¹¹⁵ Brandt, 147.

¹¹⁶ Suchet, 63-69

¹¹⁷ Fantin des Odoards, (Coimbraos, 2 April 1809), 214.

maritime dominance, French supply fleets were impracticable. For example, one that left Toulon for Barcelona in the early part of the war and was entirely destroyed.¹¹⁸ The French therefore had to supply their armies entirely by land. This put them at a severe disadvantage on the Iberian Peninsula. A maritime convoy traveled two hundred and seventy kilometers in a day, one going over land covered only 25 to 30 kilometers in the best of conditions.¹¹⁹ As remarked upon by the soldiers themselves, the Iberian terrain was far from ideal. As a result, the overland convoys were strung out affairs that constantly exposed the force stretched out in file along a track or a bad road. This prevented troops defending a convoy from bringing a enough force to bear on even a small ambush force of guerrillas. This was a constant source of stress knowing that no matter how many men were in the convoy, it was only one man deep at any give point where several guerrillas could concentrate an attack.

Because of the threat of violence, supply columns required extra vigilance. General Roch Godart gives a good sketch in his memoirs of what a convoy entailed. On October 23, 1811, he left Burgos in command of a convoy bound for Bayonne, France. It consisted of 30 carriages of army staff, 200 cars of sick and wounded, 300 English, Spanish, and Portuguese prisoners, and 100 imperial officers of all grades returning to France. As escort, he was provided with 8 companies of grenadiers and *voltigeurs*, 100 foot police or *gendarmes à pied*, 50 *gendarmes à cheval*, and two

¹¹⁸ Robin N. W. Thomas, "British Operations on the Coast of Catalonia 1808-1811," *New lights on the Peninsular War: International Congress on the Iberian Peninsula, selected papers, 1780-1840*, Alice D. Berkeley, ed., (The British Historical Society of Portugal, 1991), 51; also in "Pièces Justificatives," n. 50, Gouvion Saint-Cyr, *Journal des opérations de l'Armée de Catalogne*, (Paris: Anselin and Pochard, 1821), 498-9.

¹¹⁹ E. Muraise, "La guerre d'Espagne, 1808-1814," *Revue militaire générale*, 1968, p. 615, in Alain F. Berlincourt, "The Battle of Bailen – A New Approach," *New lights on the Peninsular War: International Congress on the Iberian Peninsula, selected papers, 1780-1840*, edited by Alice D. Berkeley, (The British Historical Society of Portugal, 1991), 73.

cannon. While five horsemen and twenty infantry scouted ahead of the column, four platoons of infantry served as an advance guard. They were followed by the carriages, an additional platoon, and then the prisoners who were escorted by the foot gendarmes with orders to shoot any strays. The wounded came next while four platoons covered the flanks and the rest served as rear guard. Godart justified his caution because between Vitoria and Tolosa only three months prior a convoy strung out over two and a half miles was annihilated in a defile by partisans.¹²⁰ In another case in January 1810, 8,000 men were diverted from offensive actions to protect a convoy traveling from Perpignan to Figueras, each man therein in a possible state of apprehension for his survival.

The immense number of men needed to protect convoys, in addition to draining the offensive capacity of the army, exposed more soldiers to the likelihood and threat of ambush. The stress of convoy reads throughout the journals of peninsular veterans. Fantin des Odoards, on a convoy from Madrid to Valladolid expressed his “great satisfaction at reaching a base along the way. During the last leg of the journey, shaken by an attack that left 12 casualties and 40 horses stolen, the troops became increasingly jumpy and there were several false alarms.”¹²¹ Brandt twice made reference to the stress of convoy duty where they were “under arms twenty-four hours a day and there was no time to make soup.”¹²² At another point, Brandt was horrified when his convoy became tangled with another at a crossroads deep in the night; guerrillas “could have made much from such chaos. The disorder

¹²⁰ Godart, 170-172.

¹²¹ Fantin des Odoards, (Valladolid, 13 November 1810), 285-6.

¹²² Brandt, 149.

thrown up by this nocturnal meeting was beyond belief.”¹²³ Such regular duties were normal for the French soldier in Spain and added to the sense of isolation and constant tension of duty.

Exposed and isolated as they rode alone cross country, couriers had the even more nerve-wracking duty of carrying vital information between armies and commanders. In the field, officers relied on these individual men to communicate with commanders and subordinates. Often riding alone, the couriers of the French army were subjected to the isolation, the fear and stress of guerrilla war. Marbot claimed that couriers had the most dangerous job in the Napoleonic era, “having to go almost always alone through the midst of the enemy when carrying orders to the troops, he is exposed to the risk of assassination without the power of defending himself.”¹²⁴ During one mission, when sent by Marshal Lannes to the Emperor carrying tidings of the victory at Tudela, Marbot was pursued by two Spanish on horseback, took a saber cut to the head and was barely rescued.¹²⁵ Captain Rossetti, on Murat’s staff during May the Second, was sent with a message to Moncey on his abortive assault on Valencia. The captain was captured by riotous Spaniards at a post station while exchanging horses.¹²⁶ Noting the difficulties of the job, Marshal Gouvion St. Cyr complained that he had not received a letter in three months from Berthier, Napoleon’s chief of staff.¹²⁷ General Lejeune was very personal about his experience as courier, remembering friends who had been murdered on the same

¹²³ Brandt, 154.

¹²⁴ Marbot, 313.

¹²⁵ Marbot, 335-347.

¹²⁶ Général Rossetti, *Journal d’un compagnon de Murat*, (Paris: Teissèdre, 1998), (16 June 1808), 26-27.

¹²⁷ Gouvion St. Cyr to Berthier, in Saint-Cyr, 424.

route he traveled as courier; “It was not without worry traveling thus, without escort, in a country where there had been murdered in a few days the colonel Marbeau, the captain Ménard and two other officers.”¹²⁸ Another officer claimed that a certain Monsieur de Fénelon was captured carrying orders to Dupont to retreat from his position in front of Bailen.¹²⁹ For couriers, these very personal struggles for survival in the isolation of hostile territory were linked closely to the fate of armies.

As with couriers and convoys, soldiers serving in garrison duty also felt the pinch of isolation and the frustration of dealing with a hostile populace. Normally garrison duty was a time to rest. Instead in Spain, regardless of size, garrisons were harassed by insurgents. Soldiers on garrison duty often starved in fear because they lacked manpower to send out effective forage parties. Soldiers could be murdered inside the garrisons themselves and emboldened insurgents operated outside the walls under the very noses of sentries. This led to sieges without the works and to the feeling Spain meant no rest for exhausted and frustrated imperial troops. Early as November 1808, the large garrison at Barcelona felt the constant press of popular resistance. Foragers that ventured into the field to procure food for beleaguered garrisons were harassed. In Catalonia, a force of 25 *voltigeurs* was murdered after surrendering to guerrillas.¹³⁰ During the winter of 1809, the two regiments at Lugo in Galicia were surrounded, nearly starved into submission. They were rescued by the retreating army that Soult led back from Oporto, who, incidentally they mistook for a

¹²⁸ Lejeune, 125.

¹²⁹ Savary, I, 257.

¹³⁰ Journal of Barcelona, 13 November 1808, in Gouvion Saint-Cyr, *Journal des opérations de l'Armée de Catalogne*, (Paris: Anselin and Pochard, 1821), 328-9.

Spanish force.¹³¹ Even in such a large garrison town as Valladolid, a valuable crossroads in Old Castile, rumors during the Christmas of 1810 ran rampant of widespread assassinations, of a “Sicilian Vespers” against the occupying forces. As Fantin des Odoards put it succinctly, “We are in horror from Irun to Cadiz.”¹³²

Small garrisons were especially exposed to the isolation and tension engendered by the irregular nature of war in Spain. The diminutive size of a force exacerbated the stresses felt by the larger ones because they were deep in hostile territory, isolated, frightened, perhaps lacking experience and under constant strain. Brandt seconded Fantin des Odoards’ statement of horror in his description of the travails of the junior officers charged with holding fortified points in hostile country.

Frequently some unfortunate officer would be condemned to pass weeks, even whole months, with a detachment of thirty or forty men in some decrepit old building that had been transformed into a blockhouse. There he would be cut off from the rest of the world and had only himself to count on. He had to supply escorts for couriers, constantly embark on dangerous expeditions to procure food and even drinking water, through areas where everyone you met, or who you were seen by without ever seeing, was an enemy or a spy. He had to scrutinise every bend of the road, every hill and undulation of the ground and watch every one of the numerous chapels and hermitages dotted across the Sierra – places once intended for prayer but now devoted to ambush and death and where the smell of gunpowder had long since replaced that of incense. The commanders of these little outposts in the mountains were placed in the position of a man sitting astride a keg of gunpowder surrounded by people trying to set it alight and would consider himself fortunate not to be blown sky high. If he was blown to smithereens – well, he only had himself to blame.¹³³

While Brandt wrote in retrospect, Fantin des Odoards’ often wrote his journal on a day to day basis during the conflict and attests to the same. In the summer of 1810, he held just such a duty guarding the bridge on the Tagus at Puente del Arzobispo.

¹³¹ Fantin des Odoards, (At camp, near Lugo, Spain, 26 May 1809), 239.

¹³² Fantin des Odoards, (Valladolid, 10 January 1811), 287. “Nous sommes en horreur d’Irun à Cadix.”

¹³³ Brandt, 80-1.

With only two companies, on paper two hundred men and twenty-five dragoons, his garrison also served as a post station for couriers and convoys. His men were “hardly sufficient” to protect the routes upon which French dispatches and supplies traveled from the guerrillas who often showed themselves to the sentinels. Additionally, his men had to be constantly vigilant due to rumors of partisans dressing in captured imperial uniforms to gain entry into garrisons. Furthermore, the guerrillas prevented the populace from providing the garrison with food so the young officer had to resort to trickery in order to provision his men.¹³⁴

By focusing on the smaller detachments, the garrisons, convoys and couriers, the guerrillas exacerbated the sense of isolation by disrupting the unit’s cohesion. Disruption of unit cohesion, created almost a sense of separation anxiety, especially within veteran units who associated survival with his comrades and with his unit. Separation from that unit from that blanket of trust, that *esprit de corps* increased the stress and uncertainty of survival in the guerrilla war among a hostile populace where ambush threatened both isolation and death. Ideally within any army a certain *esprit de corps* develops over time through the hazards of military life. Beyond mere physical distance, separation from the unit left an emotional void. Fantin des Odoards likened this to the loss of family. When his division was shifted from Ney’s VI Corps to Soult’s II in November 1808, he explained this sentiment. “The habit of living together and of sharing the good with the bad fortune, and also still the glory acquired in common, gives an army corps, in times of war, a consistency and spirit

¹³⁴ Fantin des Odoards, (Puente del Arzobispo, 18 May 1810), 270, (Puente del Arzobispo, 17 August 1810), 272-4.

which makes it one family. Thus to be separated is a torment.”¹³⁵ After a difficult captivity, Sébastien Blaze could not find words to describe his gratitude for the “affectionate care” given by his comrades after his repatriation.¹³⁶ An officer of the 105th Line, when promoted and reassigned to another unit, said goodbyes to his fellows in the old regiment and “we all cried like infants.”¹³⁷

The duties that repeatedly exposed soldiers to guerrilla attack were also those most likely to separate a soldier or group of soldiers from the parent unit. Brandt and his men bemoaned convoy duty because they “knew from experience what this would entail. As soon as an escort reached its destination the units were broken up and assigned here and there or in guarding other convoys, and only gradually brought back together, having sustained considerable losses in the meantime.” In this case, Brandt sullenly reported that his unit was broken up “as predicted.” That such a prediction existed implies that the dread of being separated from their fellows followed the soldiers on the march and in the camp through the whole of the extended assignment.¹³⁸ This could not have been good for morale and the performance of duties. It remained common practice though and continued to sap manpower and morale. For example the 3rd battalion, 116th Regiment sent 800 men in June 1811 from depots in France. After being “diverted to rear area duties” on the way to the front it reached the parent unit on September 1812 with only 205 effectives remaining. The 4th battalion experienced the same erosion of personnel. After

¹³⁵ Fantin des Odoards, (Potès, 29 November 1808), 191.

¹³⁶ Sébastien Blaze, I, 324.

¹³⁷ Commandant de Lauthonnye, *Ma vie militaire*, (Paris: Teissèdre, 1997), 82.

¹³⁸ Brandt, 154.

leaving with 1,100 men, and a stint in Navarre, the 4th battalion reached the regiment with only 200 men fit for service.¹³⁹

The constant vigilance that such duties required for survival added to the strain of the guerrilla war for all imperial troops. The need for constant vigilance left soldiers with the sense of being constantly threatened and on the other, prevented them from recuperating from the stress of fighting and living in the hostile country. The need for vigilance, even in relative safe havens, prevented a feeling of security and exacerbated the isolation. Brandt stated that “we had to be vigilant at all hours of the day or night so as not to be taken by surprise and risk a loss of either life or honour.”¹⁴⁰ Despite the relative peace and luxury of Monzon in March 1809, the Polish garrison needed to remain vigilant. Brandt said of that town, “apart from the necessity of always remaining vigilant, our stay here was heaven compared to what we had just endured.”¹⁴¹ Fantin des Odoards noted that a failure of vigilance could mean a slit throat.¹⁴² In towns such as the beleaguered Pamplona of January 1811 abandoned by all but the garrison, the troops were “constantly on the alert.”¹⁴³ This constant vigilance left the imperial troops mentally exhausted.

Part of the stress of this vigilance was the knowledge that they as invaders were under the constant surveillance of the natives. Surveillance by the populace only enhanced this feeling for the need of constant vigilance and the anxiety and stress of the guerrilla war. Counterpoised with the French deficit of intelligence of the information variety, the surveillance of the populace underscored yet another

¹³⁹ Alexander, “French Replacement Methods,” 195.

¹⁴⁰ Brandt, 80.

¹⁴¹ Brandt, 69.

¹⁴² Fantin des Odoards, (Santa Cruz, 20 November 1808), 190.

¹⁴³ Brandt, 154.

failure of the French war effort and the difficulty of prosecuting the war in Spain. Furthermore, the soldiers operated with the knowledge that they were watched and this only increased the anxiety and stress of ambush or murder in isolation. The intelligence advantage that the guerrillas gave the allies is well noted, but the vigilance of the Spanish and Portuguese also added pressure to the invaders who could never seem to elude the prying eyes of the insurgents. Near Oporto, Fantin des Odoards looked upon the mountainous heights where “the insurgents appeared in arms, spying on our movements.”¹⁴⁴ As Parquin noted, even the cavalry was continually under surveillance; “the enemy was always aware of our movements.”¹⁴⁵ Sébastien Blaze complained that the population “warned of the departure of convoys that nearly always fell in their ambushes.”¹⁴⁶ Suchet complained that the enemy was “bent on counting our numbers” and offered an anecdote for example. A battalion was sent to collect forage and taxes. The commander approached a town and demanded provisions for his troops. The numbers he gave were inflated in part to requisition more and in part to intimidate. The *alcalde* rebuffed him shortly stating, “I shall order you to receive 780 rations of provisions and 60 rations of forage.” According to Suchet, that was the exact number of imperial troops in the battalion.¹⁴⁷

The need for constant vigilance, the hostile surveillance, the isolation and the frustration led to the general tension and excess jumpiness felt by imperial troops in Spain. The anxiety felt by the French soldiers was the result of the strains of fighting a guerrilla war. The strains arose from the continual threat of violence, of murder, of

¹⁴⁴ Fantin des Odoards, (Coimbraos, 2 April 1809), 219.

¹⁴⁵ Parquin, 125.

¹⁴⁶ Sébastien Blaze, II, 87.

¹⁴⁷ Suchet, 14-15.

ambush, in a forbidding terrain among a hostile populace. This eventually led to a desire to extricate themselves from Spain, based on a bad regard for the war and the dreadful situation in which they found themselves. Carrying dispatches between Irun and Burgos for King Joseph, Matheiu Dumas stated that “I will always remember how I was afflicted with great anxieties. Each day saw the murder of several Frenchmen, and I traveled over this assassins’ countryside as warily as if it were a volcano.”¹⁴⁸ Brandt noted the hair trigger tension while chasing the enemy; “the fires of the enemy were close by and there were several false alarms during the night.”¹⁴⁹

In addition to violence in pursuance of military duties that added to the isolation, frustration and strain on French morale in the Spanish guerrilla war, the nature of the occupation fed a constant cycle of violence in which the lines between civilian and military became almost nonexistent. The blurred lines between civilian and military were facilitated by 1) the frustration at not coming to grips with an elusive enemy, 2) the views of the Spanish as hostile and backward, 3) and a harsh military occupation. These factors fed the cycle of violence and counter-violence that threatened the soldiers with constant anxiety and death. Summary executions on the part of the invaders and the rumors of promised reward for the murder of imperial troops helped blur the lines between the civilian and military. Witnessing the atrocity, looting and other excesses around them, soldiers were certainly aware that this would only further strengthen opposition to the invaders, thus preventing any possible cessation of hostilities.

¹⁴⁸ Dumas, 178, 200, in Chandler, 639.

¹⁴⁹ Brandt, 78.

The irregular methods of war, the ambushes and murders caused guerrillas to be treated as criminals rather than as combatants by the French.¹⁵⁰ After Bailen electrified the Spanish and Portuguese “the transition was made to a new form of conflict, TOTAL WAR with limitless atrocities.”¹⁵¹ The irregular campaign in Spain devolved into a conflict without quarter. Pelet ignores the fact of the invasion and blamed the Spanish; “if some Frenchmen took limited reprisals against them later, it was only after they had been driven to it by the spectacle of their atrocities.”¹⁵² Several witnesses speak of the French violence. After Tudela, Brandt noted that the path of the retreating Spanish army was littered with corpses and especially “volunteers without uniforms, as the cavalry had shown them no quarter.”¹⁵³ Fantin des Odoards also noted this shortly after entering Spain in Napoleon’s great counteroffensive of 1808 that near Burgos “masses of peasant insurgents, cut down by our cavalry covered the countryside.”¹⁵⁴ Justification of such atrocity stemmed from the fear of attack in isolation; “Our men did not want to take any prisoners ... They said, ‘these men are brigands- they kill us when we march alone.’”¹⁵⁵ Another soldier claimed that “the Spanish blood assuaged a just vengeance.”¹⁵⁶ In fact, such atrocities were officially sanctioned as Fantin des Odoards implies when, instead of summarily executing five young and armed peasants, he set them free at the risk of

¹⁵⁰ Holmes, 387.

¹⁵¹ Alain F. Berliincourt, “The Battle of Bailen – A New Approach,” *New lights on the Peninsular War: International Congress on the Iberian Peninsula, selected papers, 1780-1840*, edited by Alice D. Berkeley, (The British Historical Society of Portugal, 1991), p. 76.

¹⁵² Pelet, 36.

¹⁵³ Brandt 46.

¹⁵⁴ Fantin des Odoards, (Burgos, 12 November 1808), 189.

¹⁵⁵ Castelanne, Vol. I, p. 23, in Chandler, 615.

¹⁵⁶ Sébastien Blaze, II, 93.

reprimand.¹⁵⁷ Occupation methods such as the summary executions that Fantin des Odoards ignored at his own risk further blurred the lines between civilian and military violence.

As with ambush, soldiers were constantly aware of and exposed to the threat of murder in isolation. Murder in isolation was the ultimate and obvious threat to the French. Whether on garrison duty, courier, convoy, this was the cause of much fear and commentary by the imperial journalists and also a primary source of frustration and motivation to give no quarter to the populace and the guerrillas. These disappearances and murders, what Guy de Maupassant called in another context “obscure vengeance, savage, but legitimate, unknown heroisms, mute attacks,”¹⁵⁸ constantly weighed on the minds of the soldiers. In Portugal, Fantin des Odoards called it imprudent to take to the road alone because “the peasants murder isolated men.”¹⁵⁹ Clermont-Tonnerre, as courier in the winter of 1808-1809 noted that the lines of march of the French armies were marked by bodies of soldiers.¹⁶⁰ In Aragon, Brandt attested that the French “had sentries carried off or disarmed by invisible enemies every night.”¹⁶¹ These actions added to the fear and isolation that fundamentally influenced the feelings of the Imperial troops in Spain and helped to undermine the morale of the French army.

The guerrillas also struck with violence, accounting for the fear of murder so prevalent in French accounts. Sébastien Blaze claimed that insurgents, “their

¹⁵⁷ Fantin des Odoards, (Coimbraos, 2 April 1809), 222.

¹⁵⁸ Guy de Maupassant, “Ball-of-Fat,” *The Best Short Stories of Guy de Maupassant*, (New York: Airmont, 1968), 14.

¹⁵⁹ Fantin des Odoards, (Porto, 8 May 1809), 228.

¹⁶⁰ Clermont-Tonnerre, 235.

¹⁶¹ Brandt, 72.

cruelties made so famous,” murdered the sick and stragglers.¹⁶² At another point he told of “my comrade Parmentier, ... sawed between two planks.”¹⁶³ The French were aware of rumors that the governments of both Spain and Portugal offered reward to peasants for killing French men. For example, one peasant in Portugal who, just prior to execution, confessed to the murder of two French soldiers in the hopes of collecting a bounty offered for killing invaders.¹⁶⁴ In his disgust at the brutality, Blaze praised the Supreme Junta of Cadiz, the ruling body of Spanish resistance, for attempting to stop the cycle of violence by offering rewards for live French prisoners.¹⁶⁵

The methods of coercion used by the French occupation often set off a series of counter-atrocities. In Navarre, the French commander required that municipalities report on the numbers and locations of males. Those who were absent were assumed to be guerrillas and executed or levied fines when caught. Of course such measures elicited violent response from the guerrillas. In October 1809 in Pamplona, guerrillas replaced the hanged bodies of three insurgents with three French soldiers and marked them with a sign: “You hang ours. We hang yours.” The French in turn executed fifteen popular priests before rioting crowds.¹⁶⁶ These executions could be brutally ingrained in a soldier’s mind. A seventeen year old boy, a member of a firing squad, was ordered to execute a condemned priest. With three others he loaded two balls in his musket and fired. He states that “a piece of his skull struck me on the left side, and stained the belt of my sabre; these spots, in spite of all my endeavors, I was never

¹⁶² Sébastien Blaze, II, 87.

¹⁶³ Sébastien Blaze, II, 90.

¹⁶⁴ Fantin des Odoards, (Féa, 27 February 1809), 210.

¹⁶⁵ Sébastien Blaze, II, 93.

¹⁶⁶ Tone, 85-87.

able to eradicate.”¹⁶⁷ As a result some soldiers had a strong distaste for these executions, Brandt saying with some relief that he “had the good fortune never to be put in charge of one.”¹⁶⁸

The cycle of murder and reprisal characterized the actions of both sides in the contest and added to the strain that afflicted the soldier in Spain. Murder and reprisal, obviously threats to existence for the soldiers, were part of the unrelenting strain of the guerrilla war. Reprisals were also an exhibition of the frustration at not being able to conquer the Spanish completely. On the way to the theater in Madrid, a Spaniard who assaulted General Gobert was killed on the spot. As Gobert and his companion fled, the streets filled with cries for vengeance.¹⁶⁹ Captain Coignet of the Imperial Guard, in one of the rare journals left by an officer who began as an enlisted man, told of one incident in Burgos in 1808 where murder beget murder. By his account, a boy would lure grenadiers into a trap at a church wherein monks chopped off their heads. When the soldiers realized what was happening, “they slaughtered those scoundrels of monks.”¹⁷⁰ Sébastien Blaze told the story of the 15th Regiment of Chasseurs, who had 30 cavaliers taken prisoner and then tortured to death by the Spanish at Tamanés. Later, the 15th “exercised terrible reprisals ... The cry of Tamanés was the signal to kill.” They then proceeded to massacre 1,500 Spanish prisoners.¹⁷¹ Such actions were often justified by the commanders. While investigating accusations of excesses on the part of some hussars Marshal Grouchy excused the violence “after so many

¹⁶⁷ Johan Christian Mämpel, *The Adventures of a young rifleman, in the French and English armies, during the war in Spain and Portugal, from 1806 to 1816*, (London: Colburn, 1826), 156.

¹⁶⁸ Brandt, 68.

¹⁶⁹ Rossetti (26 May 1808), 24. Gobert was later killed trying to hold the flank against Redding’s encircling force at Bailen.

¹⁷⁰ Coignet, 165-166.

¹⁷¹ Sébastien Blaze, II, 91.

murders and the bad conduct on the part of the Spanish.”¹⁷² In Madrid, despite the tight police measures, murders occurred on a regular basis against Frenchmen throughout the war.¹⁷³

Spanish collaborators or *afransecados* were particular victims of terrorization by guerrillas. The treatment of collaborators increased the strain of the isolation, and perhaps created sentiments of guilt for the French soldier in Spain who befriended them. Met by what seemed to be a widespread hostility, friendly faces must have been a relief for the imperial soldier. Murders of sympathizers increased the sense of isolation in hostile territory by removing those who had established human accord with the soldiers. Brandt felt some guilt at the murder of a French sympathizer at Monzon with whom he often played music; “it seems most likely that my music and I had played an important role in the demise of this poor man.”¹⁷⁴ Another officer spoke of guerrillas punishing peasants for giving supplies and information to the French.¹⁷⁵

Murders led to other forms of reprisal as well and added to the strain of the war. In fact reprisal was often the order of the day with soldiers venting frustration through violence and pillage. Brandt talks of the so-called Black Town, Berceyte, where due to the mistreatment of imperial prisoners there, “we deliberately and methodically sacked the town.”¹⁷⁶ Again, in February 1811, Brandt participated in the razing of a village “to teach the inhabitants a lesson.”¹⁷⁷ In another case, while

¹⁷² Marquis de Grouchy, *Mémoires du Maréchal de Grouchy*, (Paris: E. Dentu, 1873), II, 390.

¹⁷³ Clermont-Tonnerre, 253; Dumas, 185.

¹⁷⁴ Brandt, 70.

¹⁷⁵ Pelet, 31; Tone, 182.

¹⁷⁶ Brandt, 146.

¹⁷⁷ Brandt, 157.

escorting prisoners to France, he stated that the junior officers “could not keep the soldiers from being unhappy with their duty and from venting their frustrations on those they were supposed to be escorting ... they would beat up those that tried to escape or just hit out at someone simply because they felt like doing so.”¹⁷⁸ Lashing out at the Spanish who came into their hands could be common. Those who were found with items lifted from the French were especially subject to violence. One man found with a wallet belonging to a Frenchman was shot down without hesitation. Marbot killed a Capuchin monk wearing French garb just before his own ambush on courier duty.¹⁷⁹ Near Oporto in May 1809, Fantin des Odoards, mentions how, in retribution for the murder of a cavalry officer the French sacked a village in the dead of night and massacred all the male inhabitants.¹⁸⁰

Murder and execution were part and parcel to the general brutality of the war in Spain that included hostage taking, pillage and rape. Hostages blurred the lines between civilian and military and contributed to the cycle of violence and counter-violence. Often hostages were abused or murdered, increasing the strain of the war for the imperial soldiers. Hostages were commonly taken by the French in order to get the populace to execute its demands for food or information. Public figures such as town officials or priests were held in exchange for safety of soldiers or for food. Brandt, holed up in an isolated town, had to send a Spanish messenger to get help. To ensure faithful correspondence he held the “priest, the magistrate and the registrar ... that they might keep me company.”¹⁸¹ Such benign understatement of hostage taking

¹⁷⁸ Brandt, 149.

¹⁷⁹ Parquin, 128.

¹⁸⁰ Fantin des Odoards, (Porto, 8 May 1809), 228.

¹⁸¹ Brandt, 86.

led to immediate reprisal in another circumstance after the aforesaid sack of Berceyte when insurgents ambushed a column of troops; “the execution of the two monks [held hostage did not] trouble them in the least.”¹⁸² In another case, the *alcalde* of Izaal was beaten in order to divulge arms caches.¹⁸³ Fantin des Odoards, who had a marked revulsion to the brutality of the war, resorted to hostage taking in order to procure food for his garrison on the Tagus. Sending men at night to take the local notables, he held them in exchange for provisions. It was effective. Within four days the formerly empty locales supplied “foods of all natures ... wheat, oil, wine, salt pork, barley” in addition to some excellent old wine and chocolate as gestures of reconciliation by the populace.¹⁸⁴

Though not necessarily unique to warfare of the time, looting was another form brutality took on the peninsula. Combined with the constant violence, pillage became another factor that aggravated the violence the made the war so exceptional an experience for imperial soldiers. The French were notorious looters throughout Europe, and loot and pillage was part of an unending cycle of enmity that increased the hostility of the Spanish for the French and the distaste of some soldiers for the war. Officially and unofficial looting acted as a vent to frustration and as an easy way to get at guerrillas by supposedly attacking their support base. Brandt was quite frank on the subject. After the fall of Saragossa, for instance, “*trips into town* began and no one came back empty-handed.”¹⁸⁵ At another point he brags about having

¹⁸² Brandt, 147.

¹⁸³ Brandt, 158.

¹⁸⁴ Fantin des Odoards, (Puente del Arzobispo, 17 August 1810), 275-277.

¹⁸⁵ Brandt, 63.

secured “an excellent mule” for himself during a raid on partisans.¹⁸⁶ Officers such as Marshal Suchet, who knew the importance of attempting to conciliate the Spanish, tried to discourage looting, but the practice continued on all levels.¹⁸⁷ From King Joseph’s entourage to the individual soldier, looting was a speedy means to procure wealth and food. In Old Castile, on the Ebro, at Miranda Fantin des Odoards attested that the inhabitants fled and “pillage was the order of the day.”¹⁸⁸ Another noted that in late 1808, Burgos was “pillaged after the battle and was still in a frightful disorder.”¹⁸⁹

Rape was another atrocity that the French perpetrated in Spain that added to the cycle of violence that strained the French soldier. Like looting, sexual assault was common in the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon. With the duration of the war, however, the indignity and violation exacerbated the tensions between the antagonists. In Portugal, Fantin des Odoards protected a peasant woman from a group of French soldiers who had murdered her husband and acted “without fashion” toward her.¹⁹⁰ Brandt spoke of an abandoned carriage with a woman inside. A cavalry officer took her into a farm and emerged having raped and murdered her, “guilty of a double crime.”¹⁹¹ Sébastien Blaze noted that guerrillas too were guilty of the crime, treating a lady “with the last indignity.”¹⁹² A Belgian officer described a

¹⁸⁶ Brandt, 75.

¹⁸⁷ Brandt, 75.

¹⁸⁸ Fantin des Odoards, (Burgos, 12 November 1808), 188.

¹⁸⁹ Lejeune, 105.

¹⁹⁰ Fantin des Odoards, (In camp at Larouco, 17 June 1809), 246--7

¹⁹¹ Brandt, 101.

¹⁹² Sébastien Blaze, II, 90.

father and daughter murdered by the French in which “the unfortunate girl had passed through many hands before dying.”¹⁹³

This violence that threatened the French throughout Spain made the war exceptionally hard on their morale. Without the constant strain of the guerrilla related violence, the ambushes and murders, such contemporary wartime regularities as pillage and rape would not have had a notable significance. Because the French could not conquer Spain, the excesses added to the erosion of French morale. Over the course of a very long war that from the outset showed no sign of resolution, excesses wore at the French will to fight.

¹⁹³ Henri Scheltens, *Souvenirs d'un grognard belge*, (Brussels: 1900), 101.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FINAL TOLL

The last two chapters have shown how the initial impression of the terrain, the weather, the populace, and of campaigning in Spain combined to give the imperial soldiers a sense of isolation and frustration. Furthermore, the violence that pursued the French everywhere in Spain continually threatened their lives and exposed them to excess and atrocity. Over the course of the seven years of French occupation and invasion, soldiers had little time for recuperation from the constant strain of vigilance and fear. The continual long term wear of the war manifested itself physically and mentally in ways that affected the morale of the imperial forces in Spain. While difficulty is a necessity of war, guerrilla control of the countryside made the procurement of food difficult for the French. Mounting casualties from piecemeal attacks on couriers, convoys and isolated units wore away at the personnel of units in the field. The gnawing hunger and casualties had a depressing effect on the soldiers. Rejecting the war effort, many sought to cope and escape by repatriation to France, desertion or suicide. By late in the war the combination of these many factors prevented the French soldiers from effectively performing its duties.

For the veterans of Central Europe, with memories of triumph and full German larders, the opposite experience of defeat and elusive victory and of empty bellies, highlighted the failure of the French war in Spain. By 1812, the best fed imperial troops survived on only two-thirds of the standard daily ration of 24 ounces

of bread.¹⁹⁴ The logistical and military failures combined to undermine their faith in the ability to achieve victory. Veterans especially longed for the relative luxury and plenty of Germany and Silesia. One soldier also lamented the “abundant villages” of Germany.¹⁹⁵ In November 1808, Fantin des Odoards bemoaned the dearth of provender; “accustomed to the abundance of Germany, our soldiers already repeat: cursed land, cursed war.”¹⁹⁶ Even at that early date, attitudes of the French veterans had little regard for the war.

The unceasing struggle for food in Spain heavily impacted both French morale and the health of the soldiers. Foraging exposed the soldier to danger while the endemic shortage of food left them hungry and painfully aware of the faltering invasion. Over the course of the long war, the effect on the French war effort and on the individual soldier cannot be overestimated. As Brandt noted, soldiers were expected to “collect contributions, gather supplies and dispatch them to Saragossa, and patrol the Xalon Valley and the neighboring heights incessantly.”¹⁹⁷ This exposed the soldiers to the partisans who hit the smaller detachments and, according to Suchet, compounded “the two greatest difficulties of the war - food and communications.”¹⁹⁸ The struggle for food dominated occupation duties. Partisans “compelled the rural inhabitants to flee approaching French columns, so that French patrols moved through deserted villages from which the people had fled with their specie, grain, transport, and livestock.”¹⁹⁹ A back and forth struggle persisted

¹⁹⁴ Alexander, “The Impact of Guerrilla Warfare in Spain,” 97. Elting, 575.

¹⁹⁵ Charles Tanera, ed., *Historique du 65e Régiment d’Infanterie de Ligne*, (Paris, 1878.), 30.

¹⁹⁶ Fantin des Odoards, (Burgos, 12 November 1808), 188.

¹⁹⁷ Brandt, 102.

¹⁹⁸ Pelet, 31; Suchet, 56-57.

¹⁹⁹ Alexander, “The Impact of Guerrilla Warfare in Spain,” 95.

throughout Spain. Near Figueras in Catalonia, the peasants warned the French that the Spanish were also making food levies. The French countered by taking the food before the guerrillas.²⁰⁰ Spain became “a quartermaster’s nightmare.” With partisans running off livestock and threatening the peasantry, “each French occupation corps had to endure in isolated misery, battling the partisans for every bushel of wheat and ounce of specie.”²⁰¹ Guillaume Duhesme, the invaders’ first commander in Catalonia called food “one of the principle objects of worry ... particularly grains and meats.”²⁰² André Colomb described how in preparation for the 1810 invasion of Portugal the soldiers were forced to harvest their rations “since the citizens of the country would not work for us.”²⁰³ In this struggle the French had varying degrees of success, usually predicated on the numbers of troops in the region. In 1811, a year in which Catalonia experienced a bad harvest, heavy imperial reinforcements successfully drove off the partisans and the invaders ate quite well. The next year, an abundant year, the French starved as soldiers were pulled from the region and those who remained lacked the manpower to collect food and effectively quell revolt.²⁰⁴ Furthermore, the problem of finding food brought the French soldiers into continual contact with the hostility of the populace. Food for the soldiers was a central issue of most of the memoirs. Hunger increased the misery of the war in Spain for the soldier and added to the strain of the war.

²⁰⁰ Angelbault, 25.

²⁰¹ Don W. Alexander, “French Replacement Methods during the Peninsular War, 1808-1814,” *Military Affairs*, v. 44, n. 4 (December 1980), 192.

²⁰² Guillaume Philibert Duhesme, *Mémoires de Duhesme, de Vaughn, de D. Marin Ris, et de Contreras*, (Paris: Michaud, 1823), 14.

²⁰³ Colomb, 12.

²⁰⁴ Tone, 5.

Because of the difficulty of procuring food, imperial troops used coercive force on the populace. This of course angered the populace and fomented the cycle of violence that left the soldiers strained and exhausted. Finding food was the constant focus of the soldiers in Spain and the leverage of force was the most effective means of extraction from the reluctant populace. Brandt participated in a food raid on La Carbonara. When the guerrillas fled, the Poles “made a sizeable haul of forage and food.” The imperial troops then demanded the villagers to bring more food or face reprisal.²⁰⁵ Sometimes a surprise attack on a guerrilla band would yield plenty. At Granollers in Catalonia the French scored “a great quantity of bread and meat.”²⁰⁶ In Portugal, Fantin des Odoards drew a direct link between French hunger and acts of atrocity; “the inhabitants have taken or destroyed their foodstuffs; the soldiers avenge by burning the houses.”²⁰⁷ For him such methods were terrible but necessary; “such a mode of provisioning is detestable, but what other way is there when all the inhabitants are our enemy and we cannot get away from combat?”²⁰⁸ Furthermore, as Jean-Auguste Oyon noted on his entry into Portugal, that “we no longer demanded, we took with brutality; discipline is lost.”²⁰⁹ Hunger fed the frustration of the soldiers and made them more prone to use coercion on the Spanish. and such methods increased the hostility of the populace.

Even with the use of force to commandeer food, the soldiers were constantly hungry and morale suffered with their bellies. Besides feeding the cycle of violence

²⁰⁵ Brandt, 160.

²⁰⁶ Journal of Barcelona, 17 October 1808, in Gouvion Saint-Cyr, *Journal des operations de l'Armée de Catalogne*, (Paris: Anselin and Pochard, 1821), 322.

²⁰⁷ Fantin des Odoards, (Coimbraos, 2 April 1809), 214.

²⁰⁸ Fantin des Odoards, (In camp at Larouco, 17 June 1809), 245.

²⁰⁹ Jean-Auguste Oyon, *Campagnes et souvenirs militaires (1808-1814)*, (Paris: Teissèdre, 1997), 98.

with the forcible requisitioning of food and emphasizing the frustration and isolation of the war in Spain, hunger increased the misery of an already dangerous existence. Adding to the problem, corruption within the French army depleted stocks of food. Brandt asserted that “the commissariat would resell the best of the herd for its own profit and the escort (foragers), in its turn, would appropriate its share for its fires and grills, but it was usual to write *died en route*.”²¹⁰ The theme of hunger runs throughout most accounts of the war in Spain. Very early in his Spanish campaign, in November 1808, Fantin des Odoards commented that a morsel of beef was defended with pain and that soup eaten with “the voracity of cats.”²¹¹ When the soldiers came across food, they ate anything they could lay tooth upon. During the summer of the next year, while pursuing La Romana, the force with which he marched reached Monforte de Lemos in an “agreeable valley that produced in abundance wheat, beans, fruits and wine that was not without merit.” For him and his soldiers who had trekked from Galicia into Portugal and back it seemed a “promised land” and they ate from “morning until night.”²¹² Two weeks later, however, they were again taking food where they could, as he put it wryly, “it is no longer a question of abstinence.”²¹³ While a prisoner, Sébastien Blaze rued “the hardship, the fatigue, especially the hunger, the hunger!”²¹⁴ On the retreat from Oporto in 1809, General Bigarré, attached as King Joseph’s observer to Soult’s invasion force, said that “many unfortunates lost their lives from starvation.”²¹⁵ Colomb describes the misery of the

²¹⁰ Brandt, 87.

²¹¹ Fantin des Odoards, (Santa Cruz, 20 November 1808), 190.

²¹² Fantin des Odoards, (Piñeiro, 7 June 1809), 242.

²¹³ Fantin des Odoards, (Au bivouac de Pedralba, 25 June 1809), 249.

²¹⁴ Sébastien Blaze, I, 131.

²¹⁵ Bigarré, 248.

winter of 1810 and 1811 as the French army languished near Santerem in Portugal.

They went

four months without eating wheatbread, and we lived on a little Turkish wheat and some grass we found in the fields on the fruit from the trees in spite of the poor season. Although this country is not rich to begin with, the Portuguese took everything from the land that they were able to carry. Moreover the French army had never suffered such a famine in which so many soldiers died.²¹⁶

After the French defeat at Salamanca in 1812 forced the abandonment of Andalusia, an artilleryman noted how “during this time, the 19th and 21st dragoons ate their horses.”²¹⁷ Conversely, abundant food improved morale. Brandt noted that in abundant territories, “our men were especially pleased with the abundance and high quality of foodstuffs.”²¹⁸ Another noted how in Portugal in 1811 when forage parties returned, “the joy of need satisfied shined an instant on all the faces; if the marauding was fruitless, the faces lengthened, and the spirit stayed sullen.”²¹⁹ Unfortunately, most invading faces remained sullen.

The importance of food to the soldiers is highlighted by the detailed catalogues of what they ate and when they ate it, even if written years later. Soldiers left detailed recollections of the exact morsels food collected such as Fantin des Odoards’ register of the foods and wines he collected at Puente del Arzobispo in exchange for the Spanish hostages he had taken. Elzéar Blaze described the local staple, *olla*, as a soup cooked in a pot into which went water, grey peas, garbanzos,

²¹⁶ Colomb, 13.

²¹⁷ Manière, *Souvenirs d’un canonier de l’Armée d’Espagne, 1808-1814*, Germain Bapst, ed., (Paris: Rouam, 1892), 33.

²¹⁸ Brandt, 120.

²¹⁹ Guingret, 121.

cabbage, capsicum peppers, bacon or meat set to boil.²²⁰ His brother, Sébastien summed the local staple up as merely “bread, rice and lard.”²²¹ On the march into Aragon, Brandt recounted how bread was replaced with rice and beans and “as for the meat, one sheep was allocated to every thirty men but the insides of the animal were always missing and then meat reached us in such an advanced state of putrefaction that it was utterly repugnant.”²²² In another instance, Brandt described a “soup made of rancid butter followed by a still worse wine with sugar.”²²³ In Alagon, he gnawed upon “leathery mutton.”²²⁴ Things were no better in Catalonia where the quartermaster of St. Cyr’s V Corps complained that the state of meats, forage and grains in Catalonia as “deplorable.”²²⁵ Upon entry into Spain, *sous-lieutenant* Angelbault noted the bad quality of food in the abandoned villages.²²⁶

Serving as nourishment and an anesthetic release from the frustrations for the war, wine was another dietary staple for the troops. In Extramadura in August 1809, Fantin des Odoards and his men coped with the desertion of the countryside and towns; through the “grace of plunder, an excellent wine maintained a constant gaiety.”²²⁷ Wine was highly sought after by the invaders. Brandt happily noted when his men came upon “as much wine as could be asked for.”²²⁸ When wine was found, it was quaffed with vigor and the stocks quickly vanished as when near Saragossa,

²²⁰ Elzéar Blaze , 99.

²²¹ Sébastien Blaze, I, 7.

²²² Brandt, 48.

²²³ Brandt, 54.

²²⁴ Brandt, 51.

²²⁵ Quartermaster of V Corps to Minister of War, in Gouvion Saint-Cyr, 346-348.

²²⁶ Angelbault, 22.

²²⁷ Fantin des Odoards, (Galisteo, 20 August 1809), 256.

²²⁸ Brandt, 120.

where “it soon became impossible to procure for love or money.”²²⁹ At another point his disappointment was marked by a dearth of wine. While in Sixena, “my battalion was lodged in a convent renowned for its excellent wine. Unfortunately the soldiers of V Corps had passed through just before us and the famous cellars were now nothing but a distant memory.”²³⁰

While no statistics exist, widespread drunkenness may have reflected the faltering morale of the French army. As a release from the war of the war, the frustration and strain, the abuse of alcohol accentuated the bad morale of the French. Acting as a means of palliation or mental escape, soldiers in wars throughout time used alcohol or drugs to detach themselves from the stresses of war.²³¹ Apparently the wine of Spain was particularly well suited to the task. Served from the *botta* or *pelicco*, a goatskin turned inside out and corked at the hoof, the taste was so bad that Elzéar Blaze spit it out, declaring that the inventor “must have had his throat lined with horn.”²³² His brother elaborated on the flavor of wine Spaniards fired across tables from the skins into each others mouths without loosing a drop; “the wine of Spain always had the taste of resin that the tar left.”²³³ Captain Coignet warned his men as they entered Spain in 1808 that “the wine of that country is fierce stuff, a drop of it lays you low.” Despite this, after a week in Valladolid he noted that “we had to feed the soup to our drunkards: they trembled so that they could not hold their

²²⁹ Brandt, 48.

²³⁰ Brandt, 73.

²³¹ Marcel Baldet, *La Vie Quotidienne dans les Armées de Napoléon*, (Hachette, 1964), 241; Holmes, 29.

²³² Elzéar Blaze, 98. In fact the older bags were highly valued as the taste of goat and tar began to be superseded by the actual wine.

²³³ Sébastien Blaze, I, 8.

spoons.”²³⁴ Brandt had to tell the bugler that accompanied him as emissary to a Spanish garrison “to smarten himself up and warned him to remain sober.”²³⁵ While chasing Moore in late 1808, Marbot reported that his friend got so drunk on Kirsch that he fell from his saddle.²³⁶ On convoy duty in 1811, Brandt was accompanied by a unit of gendarmes, “many of them were drunk and quite a few could not keep up.”²³⁷ Drunkenness affected discipline. Brandt related how some soldiers refused to march under an unpopular major. Several of the non-commissioned officers later admitted that many of the soldiers “had been drunk.”²³⁸

Another, perhaps more essential liquid, could also be difficult for the French to find in the arid clime of Iberia. The lack of water constantly plagued the French. At Bailen, one historian contended that the “French fight for water.”²³⁹ Near Madrid Coignet penned that “there was not enough water in the castle to supply us ... and we had to shave ourselves with wine” foraged from nearby in large quantity.²⁴⁰ In Extramadura, Fantin des Odoards wallowed with thirst in the heat.²⁴¹ Another described how during the retreat from Valencia in 1808, the soldiers were so thirsty that “when we came to a well, the crowd was so great that men were frequently pushed in.”²⁴² While thirst and hardship could be common in war, lack of water, like the hard terrain and the extremes of weather added to the misery of campaigning in

²³⁴ Coignet, http://www.napoleonic-literature.com/Book_13/Notebook_5.htm.

²³⁵ Brandt, 127.

²³⁶ Marbot, 351.

²³⁷ Brandt, 154.

²³⁸ Brandt, 161.

²³⁹ Alain F. Berlincourt, “The Battle of Bailen – A New Approach,” *New lights on the Peninsular War: International Congress on the Iberian Peninsula, selected papers, 1780-1840*, Alice D. Berkeley, ed., (The British Historical Society of Portugal, 1991), 67.

²⁴⁰ Coignet, 167.

²⁴¹ Fantin des Odoards, (Galisteo, 20 August 1809), 257.

²⁴² Mämpel, 118.

Spain. Combined with the frustration of hunger, the inability to subdue the guerrillas, and the exhaustion of constant vigilance, difficulty in meeting daily needs became one among many factors that eroded French morale.

The frustrating marches and countermarches brought on by the guerrilla war also left the soldiers exhausted. Marching always by foot, fatigue was a constant issue. Sébastien Blaze spoke of being “horribly fatigued” on his march into Spain.²⁴³ André Colomb described the exhausting retreat from Oporto in 1809, “we marched for twenty-five days without halting since we found no food except grass in the field.”²⁴⁴ General Bigarré wrote that in the same retreat men died because they could not keep up with the Soult’s army because their “feet were torn up by the march in the rocks and in the woods.”²⁴⁵

Due to the excessive malnourishment, hardship and the extremes of the weather, the imperial armies in Spain were afflicted by illness and physical suffering. Napoleon ordered that his medical corps be prepared for more than one-eighth of his army to be ill at any given time. In late 1808 in Spain 25 per cent of the army was off the lists due to illness. At the same time, over one third of the foreign troops in the imperial army were sick.²⁴⁶ In 1812, 20 per cent of the occupation force was on the sick list.²⁴⁷ Colonel Delagrave claimed that “hunger and sickness decimated the troops.”²⁴⁸ Brandt noted that in III Corps in Aragon, “sickness was rife.”²⁴⁹ In 1810,

²⁴³ Sébastien Blaze, I, 82.

²⁴⁴ Colomb, 10.

²⁴⁵ Bigarré, 248.

²⁴⁶ Elting, 288.

²⁴⁷ Alexander, “The Impact of Guerrilla Warfare in Spain,” 97.

²⁴⁸ André Delagrave, *Mémoires du Colonel Delagrave*, (Paris: Delagrave), 183.

²⁴⁹ Brandt, 48.

Loison's division had 3,000 of its 12,000 men incapacitated by illness.²⁵⁰ In Navarre and Biscay, another officer claimed that "sickness did what [the enemy] could not, we lost close to 400 men."²⁵¹ At Alagon, in December 1808, Brandt noted a prevalence of fever and typhus under a lingering stench of rot and decay.²⁵² In 1809, Fantin des Odoards was bedridden with sickness for twenty days in Oporto.²⁵³ During a winter of captivity in 1809, Sébastien Blaze fell under "a long and cruel sickness" and was "extremely feeble" for weeks.²⁵⁴ General officers were not immune to sickness. In June 1810, General Roch Godart fell sick near Zamora and was forced to recuperate in Salamanca. Rejoining his unit at Ciudad Rodrigo later that summer, he declared that "this country is so unhealthy, that I lost 500 men in the brigade in a month."²⁵⁵

Despite this, the sickness, hunger, violence, pockets of normalcy and kindness did exist in Spain, though it served mainly to accentuate the chaos of the war. One officer described a state of normalcy between Valladolid and Madrid where it was difficult to believe that a war was going on as "all the fugitives had returned from the mountains, the villages were inhabited, the food shops were open and displaying goods, the markets busy."²⁵⁶ Brandt noted the peaceful resumption of life while escorting prisoners along "the superb road" built by order of Suchet that "was of considerable benefit to the region as a whole." At Caspe in Aragon, "everything now seemed to be flourishing"²⁵⁷ He even spoke of the amity that grew between the

²⁵⁰ Sprünglin, 138.

²⁵¹ de Lauthonnye, 71.

²⁵² Brandt, 51.

²⁵³ Fantin des Odoards, (Porto, 28 April 1809), 225.

²⁵⁴ Sébastien Blaze, I, 133, 142.

²⁵⁵ Godart, 141, 144.

²⁵⁶ Clermont-Tonnerre, 328.

²⁵⁷ Brandt, 150.

Spanish prisoners and the escorting troops.²⁵⁸ During the Soult's Portuguese campaign, Fantin des Odoards noted that, contrary to their reputation for brutality, French soldiers attempted to save drowning civilians fleeing city in overloaded boats.²⁵⁹ During the retreat back into Spain, commented on how the wounded left at Orense during the advance were not massacred to their "great astonishment." He added that "such humanity was not ordinary in Spain; it was necessary there to bear the pain of death."²⁶⁰ Despite the passing kindnesses, even the officer who noted the peace of northern Spain noted that in the passes and beyond Madrid the effects of war became obvious with empty villages and signs of pillage.²⁶¹ Such respites of hope only highlighted the drain of the war on the imperial troops, both in morale and in numbers.

In Spain, the eroding effects of continual violence, the losses through sickness and from the strain of war sapped the numerical strength of the French army. General Bigarré an aide to Joseph for five years in Spain, claimed the French lost 180,000 men to the guerrillas, a rate of a 100 men each day, through the course of the war.²⁶² Don Alexander places the direct losses to the partisans at around 100,000 men, while leaving open the possibility that Bigarré's larger number is plausible when factored with the indirect casualties due to starvation, sickness and desertion.²⁶³ David Chandler placed the casualties from guerrillas at around half of the French losses in

²⁵⁸ Brandt, 152.

²⁵⁹ Fantin des Odoards, (Coimbraos, 2 April 1809), 223.

²⁶⁰ Fantin des Odoards, (At camp, near Lugo, Spain, 26 May 1809), 238.

²⁶¹ Clermont-Tonnerre, 328.

²⁶² Alexander, "The Impact of Guerrilla Warfare in Spain," 91.

²⁶³ Alexander, "The Impact of Guerrilla Warfare in Spain," 95.

the Peninsula for a total of 220,000 men.²⁶⁴ Due to attrition from combat, sickness, and desertion, at the height of the conflict the armies in Spain absorbed between fifty to sixty thousand recruits per year.²⁶⁵ In Portugal between September 15, 1810 and April 1, 1811, Colombs regiment declined from 1,398 men to 1,010.²⁶⁶ With the diversion of reinforcements and replacements to the invasion of Russian, the effects of attrition became abundantly clear.²⁶⁷ Between the beginning of 1812 and up to the Battle of Vitoria in July 1813, the Armies of South, the Center, the North, and of Portugal declined from approximately 150,000 effectives to 69,000. Over half of those were lost through the daily drain of attrition rather than in pitched battle. During the same period in eastern Spain, where the armies fought no major engagements, the numbers reduced from 75,000 to 50,000. Faced daily with hundreds of low casualty engagements across Spain, the French army suffered huge losses in Spain.²⁶⁸ Everywhere “guerrilla bands, disease, desertion, and a completely collapsed logistical system had proved to be even more deadly than Wellington’s Peninsular Army.”²⁶⁹

Imperial soldiers were well aware of the casualties and this knowledge affected morale. Caught in a never-ending cycle of violence, forced into constant vigilance, hungry amid a hostile populace, the growing numbers of casualties sapped hope from the soldiers as they began to doubt their chances for survival. This could especially grind on the morale of men whose units had seen limited heavy combat.

²⁶⁴ David G. Chandler, “Introduction: Regular and Irregular Warfare,” *The International History Review*, XI, 1 (February 1989), 7.

²⁶⁵ Alexander, “French Replacement Methods,” 196; Alexander, “The Impact of Guerrilla Warfare in Spain,” 91.

²⁶⁶ Colomb, note p. 14.

²⁶⁷ Alexander, “French Replacement Methods,” 196.

²⁶⁸ Alexander, “The Impact of Guerrilla Warfare in Spain,” 93

²⁶⁹ Alexander, “French Replacement Methods,” 196.

Fantin des Odoards attributed most of 5,000 casualties of Soult's abortive Portuguese campaign to peasants.²⁷⁰ While escorting the Spanish General Blake to France in 1811, Brandt passed former fields of battle and became "was acutely aware and heart-broken by the fact that in less than a year at least half of my company had perished in Navarre, Aragon or before Sagunto and Valencia."²⁷¹ After the siege of Saragossa, III Corps regiments were at half strength.²⁷² At another point, Brandt commented that his regiment absorbed a fifth replacement battalion and "from this it is quite clear how many men were being consumed by this Peninsular War."²⁷³

As the conflict ground on, this exasperation with the war in Spain can be seen also in the ambivalent regard for the guerrillas themselves. Like Marbot, Fantin des Odoards and Brandt each show this contradictory scorn and praise for the insurgents. On one hand, when a veteran general who had passed unscathed through all the wars of the Revolution and early Napoleonic period died in Portugal, Fantin des Odoards exclaims "he died at the hand of a Portuguese peasant!"²⁷⁴ While the exclamation implied his exasperation at the low nature of the death, in the same journal entry he describes the patriotism and valor of the Portuguese with the praise that "antiquity was not more heroic."²⁷⁵ Brandt also expresses this ambivalence, describing the "the honourable occupation of banditry; a profession so akin to that of the guerrilla."²⁷⁶ He praised the leadership of Javier Mina, the guerrilla chief that organized resistance

²⁷⁰ Fantin des Odoards, (At camp, near Lugo, Spain, 26 May 1809), 239.

²⁷¹ Brandt, 172.

²⁷² Alexander, *Rod of Iron*, 5.

²⁷³ Brandt, 152.

²⁷⁴ Fantin des Odoards, (Coimbraos, 2 April 1809), 218.

²⁷⁵ Fantin des Odoards, (Coimbraos, 2 April 1809), 225. ("L'antiquité n'arien de plus héroïque.")

²⁷⁶ Brandt, 84.

in Navarre.²⁷⁷ Another officer also praised some of the guerrilla leadership for its patriotism, courage, and character and went so far as to say that “these men who could have restored to the Spanish name as much glory as had been acquired under Charles V.”²⁷⁸ General Bigarré noted that though initially guerrillas tended to be smugglers and deserters in search of personal gain, after the initial outbreaks of war they “took a military consistency and began to become more redoubtable.”²⁷⁹ This ambivalence is critical when set against the negative feelings about the French war effort. Though the soldiers certainly had a hatred for the guerrillas as threats to themselves, in almost the same breath there seems to be a removal, a stepping back from the direct threat to praise the sentiments that motivated the insurgents in Spain and Portugal. There is not a concomitant process for the French position where the Imperial forces are regarded in another, more positive light. In fact, Brandt cynically noted that in the war Napoleon’s “main concern had been to put his brother on the throne.”²⁸⁰ Given the situation and feelings for the war, the soldiers naturally sought ways to cope.

In such a stressful situation it was only natural that men looked in some degree to the supernatural. While most commentary on religion hinged on descriptions of the Spanish, there are occasional references by soldiers to their own beliefs. After long stress and stressful campaigning, Brandt entered a church and “fell on my knees uttering the most fervent prayer I have ever prayed in my life.”²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ Brandt, 120. Brandt later wrote a scholarly treatise about Mina’s guerrilla leadership. I could not, however, find it.

²⁷⁸ Pelet, 30.

²⁷⁹ Bigarré, 277.

²⁸⁰ Brandt, 76.

²⁸¹ Brandt, 151.

He further noted that after the fall of Saragossa Germans of the Vistula Legion listened as for “perhaps the first time a Protestant, with Luther’s Bible in his hands, had preached before the main entrance of Saragossa cathedral.”²⁸² Brandt also suspected that one gentleman Spaniard who hosted the officer at dinner “rued ever having invited a heretic to this table.”²⁸³ The Gospels were not the only place soldiers turned as Brandt himself related; “I also believe that these supernatural stories and presentiments of approaching death, as related by reliable witnesses, are not rare in war.” He then told of a Captain Rakowski, rumored to have “a sixth sense” who predicted Brandt’s first wound, his friend’s death in the mountains, and, years later, his own death on the Beresina in Russia after giving his effects to one of the few officers he seemed to know would survive.²⁸⁴

The general rejection of the French war effort affected the performances of soldiers’ duties. Many sought repatriation to France, deserted, or committed suicide. Fantin des Odoards’ frankly expressed the urge to get back to France in his journal. He bemoaned the war and the difficulty of obtaining leave to cross the Pyrenees into France unless he had been severely wounded. In order to get out of Spain, he worked his way from garrison duty at Puente del Arzobispo southwest of Madrid to Valladolid via convoy duty in November 1810. By February 1811 he was in Burgos and he reached France later that month. Throughout his journey he was continually agitated by the thought of obstacles to his exit from the Spain. At the border, he was

²⁸² Brandt, 76.

²⁸³ Brandt, 76.

²⁸⁴ Brandt, 108-110.

seized by transports of joy as he finally left the “cursed land.”²⁸⁵ Brandt noted the happiness of his men at crossing the border as his unit withdrew for the Russian campaign. One of his men “perched high on a rock above which served as a kind of pedestal, suddenly pulled down his trousers, stuck his posterior towards Spain” while shouting curses over the death of comrades left behind.²⁸⁶ For another, Spain seemed an Eden compared to the Hell of Portugal in 1811;

we had drank in such disgust for Portugal, that at our return to Spain, against which we only called up sad memories, and only promised a dangerous future, however, it seemed to us to feel the same joy as when treading anew on the soil of our homeland after a long absence.²⁸⁷

Even his relief was tempered by the ultimate goal of a return to home. Another relieved soldier sighed, “the 22 July 1810, we finally returned to France.”²⁸⁸

Monsieur de Rocca returned to France and invalid after two musket balls struck his left thigh and body, “even at the price I paid, I was most glad to quit a war so inglorious and unjust.”²⁸⁹

Another portent of the general disillusion with the war in Spain came in the efforts of soldiers to escape through desertion and suicide. Imperial levies from French satellite states in Germany and Italy were particularly susceptible, having “little inclination to die for Napoleon in Spain, and so they were very prone to desert.” In 1811, for example, the Kingdom of Northern Italy had deployed twenty line battalions and two replacements battalions to Spain. By late 1813, only seven

²⁸⁵ Fantin des Odoards, (Valladolid, 13 November 1810) 284; (Burgos, 12 February 1811), 288; (Bayonne, 25 February 1811), 290.

²⁸⁶ Brandt, 178.

²⁸⁷ Guingret, 190.

²⁸⁸ Schumacher, 72.

²⁸⁹ Rocca, 181.

battalions consolidated from the original force remained after having fought no major battles, the majority probably having deserted.²⁹⁰ The Spanish encouraged desertion. Both Brandt and Fantin des Odoards noted this activity on the part of insurgents. While on convoy duty to Madrid in 1809, Brandt attested that the welcoming populace circulated among the invading troops “whilst slipping them proclamations calling upon them to desert.” These were written in French, German, Polish and Italian.²⁹¹ Escorting a convoy of sick and wounded to Madrid in November 1809, Fantin des Odoards was caught in an ambush in which partisans attempted to recruit deserters.²⁹² Duhesme claimed that most deserters were imperial soldiers.²⁹³ French soldiers were not, however, immune to desertion. According to Brandt, while in Navarre in 1811, the imperial army “lost, in a couple of days, some forty men, as many French as Poles.”²⁹⁴ Another officer, on the staff of Massena’s invading “Army of Portugal” reported that “from time to time we heard the guerrillas being given commands in French – shouts of ‘tighten the ranks’ – and a few of them marched and fought with some order.”²⁹⁵ Later in the war, units would surrender wholesale to avoid prolonged fighting.²⁹⁶

While it is impossible to find any comparative figures for suicide rates in other Napoleonic armies, the war in Spain certainly drove some soldiers to take their own lives. This Marbot noted as early as 1808 in describing “veteran grenadiers of the guard, unable to march any further, and unwilling to fall to the rear at the risk of

²⁹⁰ Alexander, “French Replacement Methods,” 194; Alexander, “The Impact of Guerrilla Warfare in Spain,” 97.

²⁹¹ Fantin des Odoards, (Madrid, 27 November 1809), 263; Brandt, 158.

²⁹² Fantin des Odoards, (Madrid, 27 November 1809), 263.

²⁹³ Duhesme, 63.

²⁹⁴ Brandt, 164.

²⁹⁵ Pelet, 57.

²⁹⁶ Alexander, “The Impact of Guerrilla Warfare in Spain,” 97.

being tortured and massacred by the peasants, to blow out their brains with their own muskets.”²⁹⁷ Whether through suicide or desertion, soldiers took direct action in their efforts to get out of the French Army. The widespread desertion and occasional suicide calls attention to the morale issues facing the Imperial soldier, while adding to the material drain on the already strained manpower resources of the French army in Spain.²⁹⁸ Another form suicide took was a soldier forcing his own execution. The murder-rapist Brandt spoke of in the previous chapter turned himself in to his commander, was tried and executed. Brandt thought this strange, since the confusion of an army on the move would very easily have allowed him to escape. This can only be regarded as suicide.²⁹⁹ A fourteen year old regimental band member did much the same after trying to desert. The boy could not be condemned due to his age but “requested his punishment.” He was shot.³⁰⁰

Suicide is the most extreme example of how the guerrilla war affected the will of the soldiers to continue the struggle. Unlike other Napoleonic campaigns, the seemingly endless war in Spain gave soldiers no sense of eventual respite. Many took it upon themselves to end the conflict on an individual basis through desertion or suicide. Others had no choice, either murdered or suffering from hunger induced sickness. Others simply waited out the course of the war in the ranks while grudgingly performing their duties. Over all the war was a miserable experience for the French soldiers and the combination of the duration of the war with the various miseries sapped their morale and will to fight.

²⁹⁷ Marbot, 354.

²⁹⁸ Tone, 170-171.

²⁹⁹ Brandt, 101.

³⁰⁰ Mämpel, 137.

CONCLUSION

The French soldiers in Iberia viewed the invasion and occupation of Spain with a repugnance stemming from exhaustion and frustration, hunger and fear. Their early impressions of Spain, their military duties of conquest and occupation revolved around the threat of violence and counter-violence. This encompassed most aspects of their daily existence. The basic military duties away from the battlefield, of garrisons, convoys and couriers, and including the getting of food and interaction with the populace, subjected soldiers to the constant threat of ambush, murder and outright attack. For many imperial troops in Spain, constant vigilance, isolation and frustration undermined their attitudes toward the war. Hunger and disease compounded these problems, creating what conventional military historiography referred to as the bad morale of the imperial army. This culminated in an inability and a lack of will, through hunger and sickness, desertion and suicide, to perform their duties.

The central point of this thesis has been to better understand what the experience of bad morale entailed for the imperial soldiers in Spain and Portugal. From the journals, letters and memoirs of soldiers of all ranks serving in the occupation forces, the bad experience arose from a complex set of factors. From the initial impressions of Spain and the war, to the continual threat of violence, and the general misery of the experience, the average soldier came to hate the war. The perpetual mental strain eroded morale and led to strong desires to get on the east side of the Pyrenees. When discussing the difficulties of communication, supply,

intelligence, and occupation, the reader of many good histories of the war in Spain easily forgets what exactly those military necessities entailed. Communications in the Napoleonic age meant an individual soldier with a message, running or riding in fear through hostile terrain between the communicants of various field forces and headquarters. Supply columns likewise comprised of hundreds of individuals grouped in slow moving convoys that stretched sometimes miles in a thin line along a bad road in the constant awareness that other men may be hiding behind rocks with the intent to kill them. Likewise for intelligence and occupation; individual men in uniform searched for the enemy or held a fortified position far along a distant track, fearful, tired, and hungry.

From almost the first step into Spain, the impressions soldiers gathered created a sense of isolation and frustration. The countryside, with its rugged terrain, bad roads, and harsh weather boded ill for the practical considerations of war, of supply, communications and support. The absence of some of the populace and the hostility of the rest distanced the soldiers from any accord with the natives. The prejudices that some imperial troops held for the Spanish further reduced the likelihood of peaceable human contact. This isolation added to the frustration that the soldiers quickly encountered in their unsuccessful attempts to conquer. Often inexperienced and unsure of the ability of both soldier and commander, the imperial army was unable to subdue the insurgency. Even when soundly defeated in a pitched battle, the insurgents reappeared where the French were not in strength, severing contact between field forces. The guerrilla activities severely hamstrung the French offensive capability.

In addition to campaigning, occupation duties subjected the French soldier to a cycle of violence. The threat of ambush and murder hovered in the minds of the soldiers throughout their stay in the Peninsula. Convoys, strung out over miles narrow mountain paths, exposed huge numbers of soldiers to guerrilla sniping and outright attack. Isolated couriers were harassed and murdered. Garrisons starved and frightened waited for relief. All duties threatened to separate soldiers from the unit. Furthermore, the harsh occupation and the guerrilla war blurred the lines between civilian and military personnel. The frustration of the war led to reprisal and general brutality. Murder begat murder and vengeance was widely excused. French soldiers pillaged to punish and the Spanish could be arbitrarily murdered and the women raped. Such violence gave no respite to the soldiers and strained them near to breaking.

Due in large part to the isolation, frustration and violence, the war in Spain was a miserable experience. Soldiers were acutely malnourished. For them, replacement troops meant dead friends. In the end, they hated the war. The soldiers were disgusted by the brutality and grim at their own prospects for survival. Ultimately, they began to feel that the best chance of survival lay on the opposite side of the Pyrenees. For many, the desire to get out for the able-bodied was satisfied with the build up for the Russian campaign during the course of late 1811 and early 1812. For others, a wound meant a ticket home. Most felt absolute joy on entering France. Others took matters in their own hands, deserting the army despite the risk of execution. Some even committed suicide.

While ultimately the mental strain of the war was not the sole factor in the French defeat, it certainly played a significant part. The battle of Vitoria sealed the strategic position of the French and forced the invaders to march eastward across the Bidossa River and the Pyrenees. Exhausted even in the defence of their homeland, the French soldiers could not be counted on to hold their positions as Wellington's army marched inexorably through southern France. Four days after Napoleon's first abdication, the battle of Toulouse in April 1814, was fought. Like the whole of the Peninsular War, the battle proved both bloody and unnecessary.