

The Sieges of Ciudad Rodrigo 1810 & 1812

Within the spectrum of modern military conflict, siege warfare is all but defunct. The rise of the nation state on the one hand, and advances in weapon technology on the other, led to *inter alia*, greater mobility in both the attitude and execution of warfare. Napoleon, citing Frederic the Great as his source, established self-contained fighting formations and capitalised on the concept of manoeuvre; and Clausewitz, in his work *Vom Krieg*, provided the doctrinal endorsement. Nevertheless, during the Napoleonic era, siege warfare remained an essential tool and the struggle in Iberia, particularly on the Portuguese-Spanish border, provides appropriate illustration. The border forts at Almeida, Badajoz and Ciudad Rodrigo were captured and recaptured throughout the six years of war; Iberian topography dictated that these structures could not be masked or bypassed in the prosecution of campaign objectives.

Ciudad Rodrigo was besieged and captured by the French in 1810 and then recaptured by the allies in 1812; both sieges opened distinct chapters in the war, the 3rd French Invasion of Portugal for the former and the Salamanca Campaign for the latter. Both sieges were a success for the attacker; the outcome, therefore, was the same but the dynamics and processes of reaching that goal could not have been more dissimilar. Current British Military Doctrine would seem an odd tool with which to examine and gauge those dissimilarities and yet the three components of fighting power, conceptual, physical and moral, are an ideal apparatus.

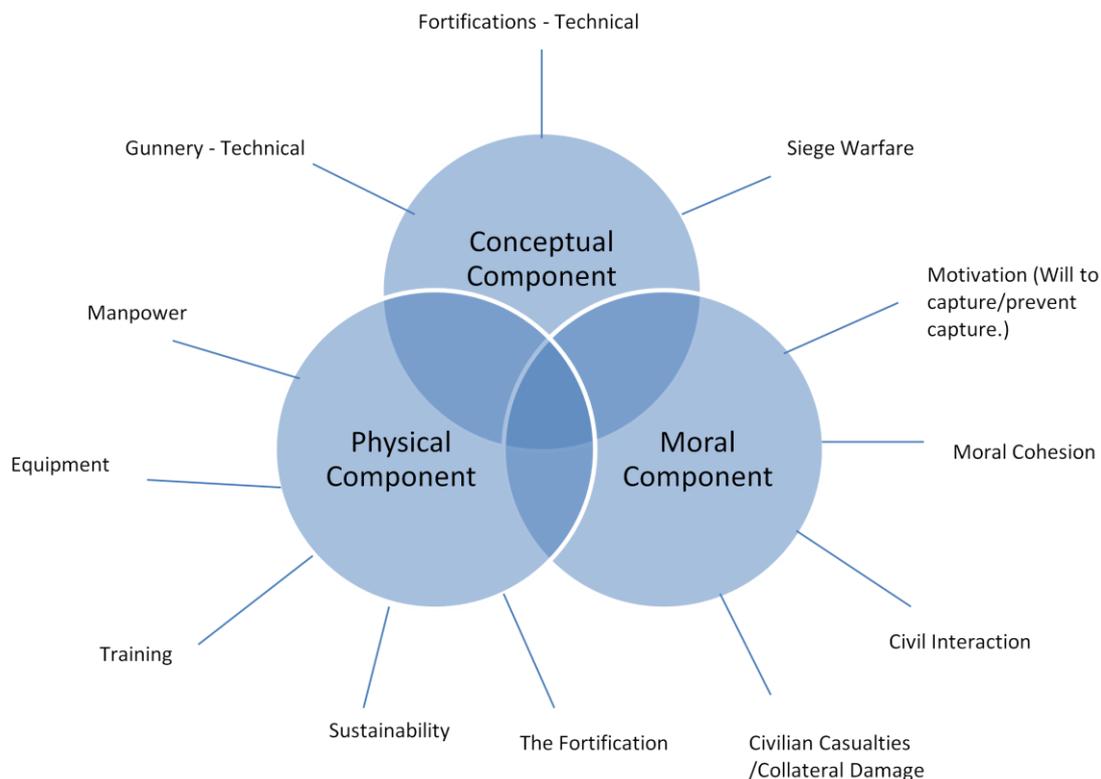


Figure 1: The Components of Fighting Power ~ Applicability to Siege Warfare in the Peninsular War.

When comparing conflicts, the physical components are a good starting point; a strong, well-equipped and trained force is unlikely to be defeated or held up overly long by a weak

opponent. Strength alone, however, is not a *sine qua non* for success in conflict. Consider David in his fight against Goliath; his use of tactics (weapon choice) and his will to win (moral cohesion) were enough to secure victory over a far stronger physical opponent. Nevertheless, the physical component is an area where comparison is easily measured and, with regard to siege warfare, the fortification itself is a pivotal factor.

The Fortress of Ciudad Rodrigo

The geographical location of the fortress of Ciudad Rodrigo on the border between two nations with an illustrious history and contemporaneous rivalry, is reflected in the fortified town itself. The town was founded as Miróbriga in the 6th century BC, by a Celtic tribe and conquered four centuries later by the Romans who re-named it Augustóbriga in honour of the emperor Octavian Caesar Augustus.¹ It was the object of centuries of Arab and Christian dispute and in the twelfth century was rebuilt and fortified in the name of King Ferdinand II of León. It remained loyal to the Spanish monarchy despite its capture in the Spanish Wars of Succession in 1706 and during the Guerra de la Independencia in 1810. The town stands on the north bank of the Agueda and drops sharply (about 25m) to the river below, where the old Roman bridge spans the river to the south bank and the suburb of Santa Marina. The fort is elliptical in shape, eight hundred yards across the longer axis and five hundred athwart the shorter. The original ancient stone and red brick wall was about 10 metres high and the same in depth but, following the breach in 1706, this old wall was supplemented by the construction of a *faussebraie* (in 1710) which surrounded the castle on all but the south side, where it was considered unnecessary. This revetted earth bank was, in conjunction with a number of ravelins, designed to cover the foot of the wall from fire and the soil for its construction was taken from the area immediately in front creating a six to eight metre dry ditch; the scarp and counterscarp had been faced with stones.²

To the east, north and west were the three convents of Santo Domingo, San Francisco and Santa Cruz respectively and between the former two structures the suburb of San Francisco had grown. In 1710, following the improvements to the construction, it was deemed technically sound but by the turn of the nineteenth century there was a fundamental flaw. Two neighbouring hills, the Teso de San Francisco and the Teso del Calvario; branded by the French the Teso Grande and Teso Chico respectively, dominated the north western salient angle. The Teso Grande was seven metres higher than the old city walls, twenty metres higher than the *faussebraie* and located at an almost optimal distance of 600 metres from the fortifications; ‘modern’ artillery was comfortable at this range and quite able of exploiting the gap between the *faussebraie* and the walls. Both the Spanish and French defenders realised this weakness but chose to deal with it in a different manner. On the Teso Grande the Spanish placed an infantry unit while the French elected to build a redoubt, called Reynaud after the French governor captured by a guerrilla group in October 1811, which housed 70 men and three guns. As it transpired, neither option caused more than a perfunctory delay to the besiegers.

¹ This town should not be confused with Moróbriga at Santiago do Cacém, Setubal district, Portugal.

² Arteche, vol. VIII, pp. 357-9; Belmas, vol. III, pp. 214-217; Horward, pp. 86-91; Myatt, pp. 56-7.



Major Alexander Dickson's Original Map of Ciudad Rodrigo (Author's Collection)

In support of these measures both the Spanish and French had incorporated the suburb of San Francisco within their defensive plans. Between the convents of San Francisco and Santo Domingo a two-metre high earthwork had been constructed and the convents (including the smaller convent of Santa Clara which lay between the outer two) had been strengthened and loopholed; as had the more isolated convent of Santa Cruz to the west. The main Salamanca road was barricaded and palisades erected between the convent Santo Domingo and the newly erected ravelin of San Andrés. Many of the smaller outbuildings and trees had been cleared to aid mutual fire support and clear the fields of fire.³ Following the capture of the town by the French in July 1810 their defensive plan changed little in concept from that of the Spanish but it was more elaborate. Both had deployed infantry in the fortified outer structures but the French had also placed two guns and a howitzer on the roof of the fortified convent of San Francisco to support the Reynaud Redoubt.⁴ In addition the outer structures had been considerably strengthened and the earthwork covering the suburb of San Francisco had been closed on either flank towards the walls in the north and to the San Andrés ravelin to the east. Neither defending force had made use of covered ways or countermines.⁵

³ For an excellent and detailed account of the Spanish preparations see Horward pp. 91-5.

⁴ Oman states 4 guns but Jones and Sarramon (quoting Marmont's memoirs) are clear that it was two guns and a howitzer.

⁵ Mainly due to the rocky soil.

Otherwise, in terms of physical structures, there was little to distinguish the defence in mid 1810 with that of early 1812.

The Components of the 1810 Siege

An examination of the opposing forces at both sieges is less straightforward. Only those forces immediately involved in the defence or the siege and cordon are considered, not those forming a covering or (possible) relieving force. Therefore, while one could consider Wellington's Light, 3rd and 5th divisions, and La Carrera's division (from La Romana's army), as a force within striking distance, they will not be included in the Spanish defenders' organisation; nor will the additional troops found from Junot's 8th Corps in reinforcing the French cordon be included in the totals available to Ney. In 1810 General Andrès Herrasti was the commander of the Spanish forces and governor of the town; he had at his disposal 5,879 all ranks.⁶ Just over five thousand of these men were infantry from the regiments of Voluntarios de Ciudad Rodrigo (3 battalions), Mallorca, Voluntarios de Avila, Milicia de Segovia and the Guardia Civil from the town. Another 340 formed Julián Sánchez's semi-irregular cavalry force known as the Lanceros de Ciudad Rodrigo, while the artillery commanded by General Don Francisco Ruiz Gómez had 375 all ranks and the engineers, commanded by Brigadier Juan de Belestá about 60 men. The besieging forces numbered in excess of 28,000 men and consisted of Marshal Ney's 6th Corps complete with Marchand, Mermet and Loison's divisions and the cavalry brigade of Lamotte. Brigadier General Charles-Etienne Ruty commanded the artillery and Lieutenant Colonel Couche the engineers, numbering 3,178 and 373 all ranks respectively.⁷ Their appointments were, however, the cause of much friction within the French higher command for these were Ney's 6th Corps men; indeed, the engineer commander should have been the army (of Portugal) chief engineer, Major General Joseph-Félix Lazowski but he had only recently been appointed and was still en-route. Masséna and Junot had favoured Colonel Valazé but Ney insisted, won his case, and Lazowski did not arrive until the siege was almost complete. The artillery command was less clean cut with the army artillery commander, Jean-Baptiste Éblé, interfering (at Masséna's instruction) with Ruty's work and questioning his decisions throughout.

An examination of the equipment will be restricted to that associated with the immediate siege; guns, howitzers, mortars, ammunition and artillery and engineer stores. Herrasti's garrison artillery consisted of 98 guns of various calibres (55 siege and 43 field), 5 howitzers and 15 mortars. The total ammunition is difficult to state with any degree of accuracy but given that over 80,000 rounds (not including infantry ammunition) were listed in the French inventory at capitulation there would have been probably around twice that amount at the commencement of the siege.⁸ The French were authorised to use the army (read theatre) siege train by Napoleon which consisted of ten 24 pounder, seven 16 pounder and twelve 12 pounder guns, eleven mortars and eight heavy howitzers.⁹ A total of 48 pieces of ordnance

⁶ Belmas, vol. III, p. 314; Arteche, vol. VIII, p. 508; Horward, p. 93.

⁷ Belmas, vol. III, pp. 263-66.

⁸ Ibid, p. 310.

⁹ Ibid, p. 223; Napoleon, vol. II, pp. 121-2.

each supplied with 700 rounds. In addition, the field artillery from the 6th Corps, totalling 5 batteries, was also available and certainly used in a suppressing fire role during the initial engineer operations. The French established a large engineer and artillery park to the rear (northwest) of the Teso Grande but they lacked sufficient engineer stores, frustrating Ney in the early stages of the siege. Lazowski was at Bayonne trying to procure the necessary equipment consisting of 6,000 tools, 20 caissons and 120 mules but he had no funding and consequently received no tangible help. Amazingly, at about this time, 32 caissons with about 10,000 tools had moved from Bayonne to Zaragoza and another with a similar quantity from Bayonne to Madrid, but none apparently were designated to assist the army's siege train in their strategic task at Ciudad Rodrigo. Highlighting the difficulty of Napoleon's 'over the horizon' decision making apparatus and his failure, and that of the French higher command, to establish and adhere to clear operational objectives in support of the strategic aim, Couche was compelled to pool all the shovels and picks from the 6th and 8th corps to commence digging.

In terms of sustainability for the defenders, the blockade established on the 26th April, with the arrival of Maucune and Ferey's brigades on the south of the Agueda, did not prevent succour from being received. It was not until the 2nd June that the blockade became an effective cordon and it was from this day hence that ingress and egress of, *inter alia*, supplies, stores and ammunition ceased; it is also the day which marked the commencement of the siege in real terms. The French sustainment problems were of a different kind; the Quartermaster General Michaux, based at the army depot at Salamanca, was having a dreadful time securing sufficient supplies and the means to deliver them. Ney's Corps was, of course, not his only customer; in addition he had Heudelet's (subsequently Reynier's) 2nd Corps to the southeast shadowing La Carrera on the Portuguese border in the largely infertile northern Estremadura, and Junot's 8th Corps, which was in reserve around Salamanca. Ney, perhaps not unreasonably, considered his cause *primus inter pares*, and complained resentfully and frequently to Masséna. In early June he began to see the fruits of his overture as supplies began to arrive in sufficient quantities. However, sustainment was complicated by the need to move the siege train, artillery and engineer parks and the corresponding lack of prime movers – beasts and wagons. In addition, the roads were in a dreadful condition; in a letter of the 8th June General Ruty summed up the situation: 'The roads are damaged by the continuous rains that we have experienced for two months, offering the greatest difficulty to the artillery wagons, and especially the heavy calibre guns. The roads around Ciudad Rodrigo are actually impracticable for heavy artillery'.¹⁰

Training during a series of sustained campaigns and a prolonged war was more 'on the job' than formal and structured. Herrasti's forces were, with exception of the 2nd Battalion from the First Regiment of Mallorca and the majority of his gunners and engineers, all militia forces or newly raised levies. The Mallorca Regiment had seen action before as had the Voluntarios de Ciudad Rodrigo and Avila, although minor in scale and commitment for the latter two units. The rest had never been under fire, but none had experienced the difficulties of defending a fixed installation or the necessary brutality of repulsing an assault. During the

¹⁰ Horward, pp. 112-13 – from Correspondence: Armée de Portugal, Ruty to Masséna, dated 8 Jun 10.

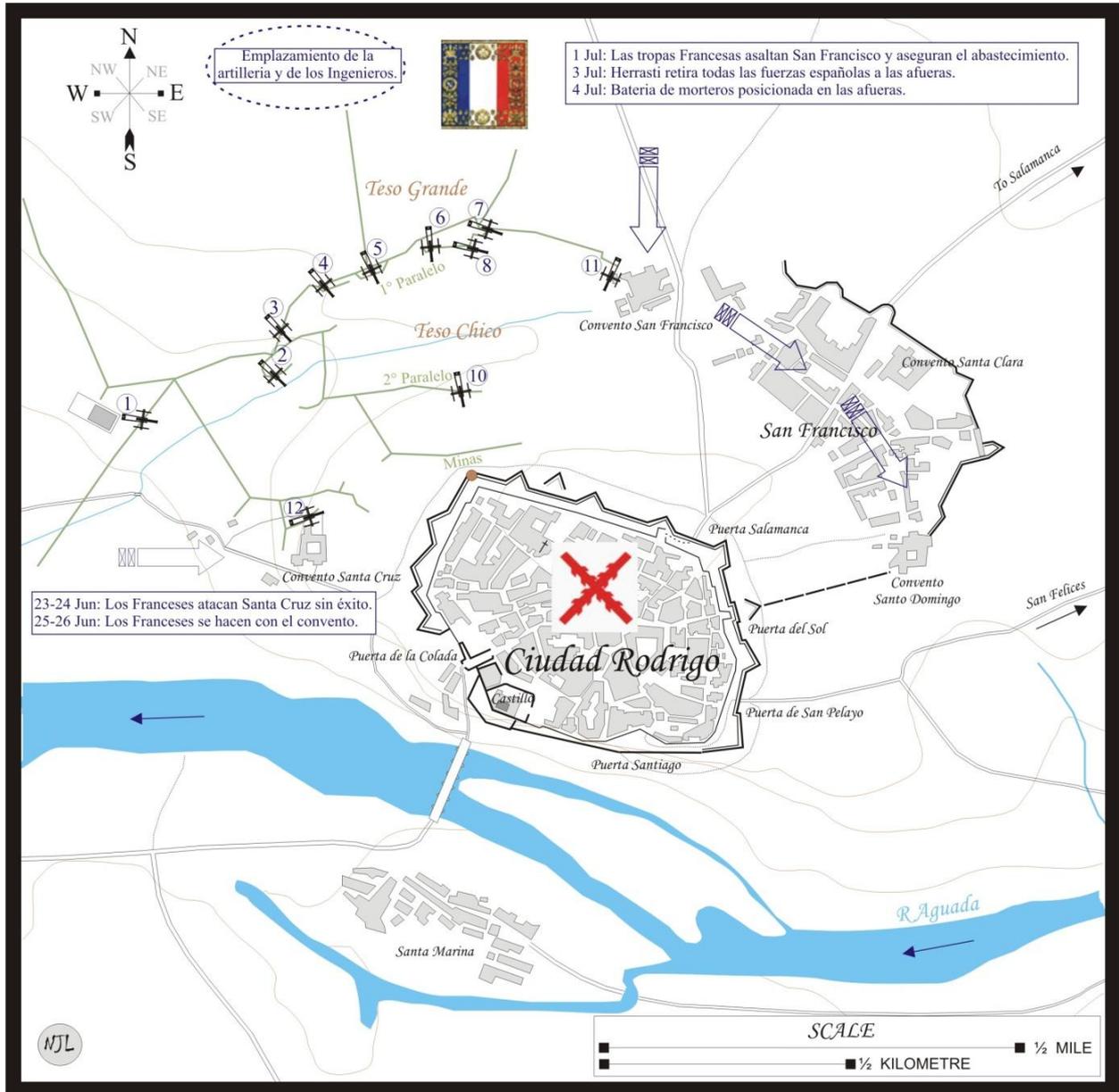
War of the Oranges the garrison would have been under arms and in a high state of readiness and no doubt a few ‘old sweats’ still permeated the ranks but they would be few and far between and, as the fort was never attacked, their experiences would be varying in span and utility. The garrison’s 375 artillery officers and rank and file would have been spread thinly to man the 118 pieces of ordnance, no more than three per equipment but, as luck would have it, there was a regional artillery school within Ciudad Rodrigo and so some form of training would have been provided to the infantry and some of the civil population, to assist the trained gunners in their task.

In contrast, the French 6th Corps was a battle-hardened formation fresh from legendary victories at Ulm, Jena, Eylau and Friedland where, with Ney at their helm, they had played a pivotal role. However, Ney and his corps did not participate in the siege of Danzig and had almost no siege experience prior to 1810; Ney’s only real siege practice had been at Mainz in 1793, where he was wounded, but on that occasion he was on the inside looking out, not vice versa. Protracted sieges did not dovetail with Napoleon’s scheme of rapid manoeuvre and, as such, expertise in the *Grande Armée* was limited (mainly to the Revolutionary Wars) and yet it was the French who were, at the time, considered the innovators and trendsetters in siege warfare. Lazare Carnot was a civil engineer who fled revolutionary France only to return in 1800 as Napoleon’s First Consul; he worked on a number of engineering and mathematical projects but undoubtedly his masterpiece was *De la Défense des Places Fortes*, which was published in 1809. It was only fitting that as the Frenchman Vauban, had designed the lock, that another Frenchman should devise the key. Napoleon had challenged the centuries old convention that a defender could surrender with honour once a practical breach had been blasted through his defences and he had issued decrees obliging governors to stand *at least* one assault. It is not recorded whether Ney had seen Carnot’s work published the year prior to the French siege of Ciudad Rodrigo, but for the brave and arrogant Ney, the prospect of adding a successful siege to his curriculum vitae was too good an opportunity to miss. As Masséna was heading south to assume command of the newly formed Army of Portugal, Ney moved to invest Ciudad Rodrigo; hence the decision as to who would lead subsequent operations and with which force, was more or less presented as a *fait accompli* to the commander on his arrival.¹¹ Such circumstances were to have a profound effect upon the conceptual and moral components during the unfolding operation.

Conceptually, siege doctrine in the post Vauban era necessitated a series of steps. Following the establishment of blockading force (or outer cordon) and an investment force (inner cordon), an initial reconnaissance is undertaken. This reconnaissance determines the plan of attack and associated logistic implications, such as location of the artillery and engineer park and the equipment requirements (ammunition, engineer stores, etc.) necessary to complete the task. Normally, two or more areas are chosen as assault objectives, one main and one secondary, and any number of diversionary efforts as the situation and/or resources dictate. Digging starts either beyond the defenders cannon range or in dead ground and commences with communication trenches which advance to maximum canon range (or in the case of Ciudad Rodrigo, the point that emerges from the dead ground) where the first parallel

¹¹ In fact the decision was made by Napoleon: see Napoleon to Berthier, Paris 13 Feb 10, vol. II, pp. 105-8.

trench is then dug at a right angle to the target. Batteries are established along this first parallel in order to harass the defenders and neutralise their fire; hence, howitzers, mortars and lighter calibre guns would be used for this task, because at maximum effective range (about 1,000 metres) breaching guns could only be used if the selected target area was accessible and presented at the right angle (i.e. perpendicular to the line of fire). Once these batteries are effective then new trenches are sapped forward in a zigzag fashion (to



Map 1: The French Siege of Ciudad Rodrigo ~ 26 April to 10 July 1810.¹²

prevent the defender's guns being able to enfilade their length) until another parallel can be constructed at the optimum battering distance: this may necessitate the process being repeated a third and sometimes a fourth time. Speed is clearly of the essence and therefore the attacker's plan should, where possible, aim to get the breaching batteries into their effective

¹² The exact location of battery 9 is unclear, it was certainly somewhere on the First Parallel, probably towards the left hand side.

location as quickly as possible. Concurrently, additional supporting batteries are established to aid the assault and to optimise the harassment and neutralisation of the defender's fire; mine trenches are dug and mines laid, if necessary and possible. Once the breaching batteries are in place and having an effect, the assaulting forces (and equipment) are made ready, for once the breach is declared practical, that is to say that the infantry can gain ingress into the structure, then, following a summons to the defenders to surrender, the assault can be delivered without delay should that summons be rejected. To delay overly long at this juncture merely plays into the hands of the defender, who is able to spend the time rebuilding and retrenching his defences and isolate the breached area from the rest of the town, as occurred at Badajoz in 1812 and at San Sebastián the following year. Finally, a garrison's refusal to surrender once a practical breach had been established was considered a legitimate cause to sack the town should the attackers succeed in their assault. These were the siege procedures and conventions of the day; although exactly what constituted a 'practical breach' and just who decided this, was a moot point.

Ney had established a fairly ineffectual blockade of the town as early as 26th April and, once Masséna had arrived and consented to the siege, he then invested the fortress on the 30th May.¹³ The next day Ney conducted his reconnaissance with Ruty and Couche; they quickly recognised the weaknesses of the structure and the dominating hills to the northwest. A plan was drawn up accordingly. The first parallel was to house six batteries proving a mix of guns, mortars and howitzers; the decision to include two breaching batteries was not, at this stage, an error. However, it was to be a full two weeks before the trenches were opened; in the interim Couche and Ruty were furiously trying to arrange the movement of engineer supplies, the siege train and ammunition. This was a clear indicator that Ney had commenced operations prematurely and his rashness served only to reduce the morale of his men who had to endure some unseasonably wet weather and reduce the available field rations to dangerously low levels. The wet weather was to play havoc with the excavation work; the saturated ground formed underground springs which emptied into the trenches and parallel. Time was lost cutting lateral drainage ditches which, as it turned out, did little to alleviate the problem. The rocky ground also delayed matters throughout the operation and the heavy, sustained and accurate fire from the Spanish artillery, supplemented by a series of sorties from the fort and outer works, disrupted Ney's timetable and began to expose the weaknesses in his plan.

The siege commander did not fully appreciate the need to quickly capture and exploit both structures on the flanks of the first parallel, namely the convents of San Francisco and Santa Cruz. The latter was captured temporarily on the night of the 9th June but abandoned again the next morning amidst heavy fire from the fortress and immediately reoccupied by the Spanish. Another attempt at capture was not made for a full two weeks at about the same time the first six batteries were completed (see Table 1). On the 25th June, they opened with all 46 pieces of ordnance and received an equally warm response from the Spanish gunners. Masséna, who had been away since early June, had returned from Salamanca the day prior, and was less than impressed; he could see instantly that the work was way behind schedule,

¹³ This inner cordon was tightened on the 1st June to a double cordon within 'half a shot of the wall'.

the damage to the walls after a full day's firing was ineffective and it was abundantly clear that the plan required adjustment. Éblé was given clear instructions and an expanded authority over proceedings in general and Ruty's actions in particular; Masséna informed the army artillery commander. 'Everything demands that this siege be conducted with the greatest vigour. It is important to the health of the army that it be ended as soon as possible. Do not neglect the art of siege warfare so the fortress of Rodrigo falls'.¹⁴

Table 1: French Siege Batteries.¹⁵

<i>Battery</i>	<i>Completed</i>	<i>Equipment</i>	<i>Task</i>
1.	23/24 Jun	4 howitzers	To engage town and Santa Cruz.
2.	23/24 Jun	10 mortars	To bombard town.
3.	24/25 Jun	6 x 12 pounder guns	To engage defences of the town.
4.	23/24 Jun	7 x 16 pounder guns	To batter breach.
5.	24/25 Jun	9 x 24 pounder guns	To batter breach.
6.	24/25 Jun	6 x 12 pounder guns and 4 howitzers	To enfilade east wall and engage San Francisco.
7.	30 Jun/1 Jul	3 x 12 pounder guns	To engage San Francisco.
8.	29/30 Jun	2 mortars	To engage San Francisco.
9.	1/2 Jul	2 howitzers	To bombard town.
10.	8/9 Jul	8 x 24 pounder guns.	Main breaching battery.
11.	4/5 Jul	4 x 24 pounder guns.	Enfilading battery against counterscarp – left.
12.	6/7 Jul	7 mortars	Enfilading battery – right.

Sources: Belmas, Horward & Oman.

The six batteries continued their fire for two more days and on the 28th Ruty declared the breach practicable; Ney was sceptical, and was right to be, for the counterscarp was still intact but he was nevertheless keen for a speedy resolution and duly sent in a summons to Herrasti. It was, unsurprisingly, rejected out of hand and, to add insult to injury, during the lull (generated by the cessation in hostilities to deliver, debate and dismiss the summons) the garrison had taken the opportunity to repair the damaged wall. To reduce the counterscarp it was clear that the suburb and convent of San Francisco needed to be captured and heavy guns established there to enfilade the ditch wall. However, Masséna had seen enough and he called for a meeting the next morning with Ney, his divisional generals and the artillery and engineer commanders of the army and corps. The siege inner cordon had by this stage been in place 29 days, the siege itself (based on the day trenches were opened) was in its 15th day, much of the ammunition had already been expended and it was clear that neither Ruty nor Couche were up to the job. Éblé replaced the former and Valazé the latter and although Ney remained the siege commander, Masséna kept a close eye and tight hold on events thereafter. Valazé's plan was submitted on the 1st July; it proposed three changes: firstly, the construction of a second parallel on the Teso Chico on which a strong breaching battery would be established; secondly, the capture of the convent (and *ipso facto* the suburb) of San Francisco and the establishment therein of an enfilading battery (against the counterscarp) with four 24 pounder guns; finally, the establishment of an additional enfilading battery in the

¹⁴ Masséna to Éblé, 26 Jun 10. Horward, p. 139.

¹⁵ There was considerable movement of ordnance throughout the siege; this table depicts the equipment for which the batteries were initially designed.

convent of Santa Cruz. In addition, a sap from the second parallel would be taken to the crest of the glacis and a gallery sunk down to enable the area in front of the counterscarp to be mined. In nine days this plan succeeded in every aspect.

Napoleon in one of his maxims stated that ‘In war the moral is to material [physical] as three is to one’.¹⁶ The moral component is the least predictable of all three components; it is, to all intents and purposes, the human element. For reasons of science, technology, religion, economy, demography and media, changes in social values over the last 200 years have been exponential. Notwithstanding the fundamental origins of the French Revolution, *liberté*, *égalité* and *fraternité*, the divide between the officers and the men was enormous. Ironically, it is the third term of this tripartite motto which was the most problematic for the architects of modern France to shoe horn into the triad, and yet it is the very foundation of the moral component. ‘Any man aspires to liberty, to equality, but he cannot achieve it without the assistance of other men, without fraternity’.¹⁷ The dynamics of the moral component in an army of the era are, therefore, complicated and need to be considered as the shared values applicable to the officer class, irrespective of the colour of uniform, those employed by the men, largely amongst their immediate comrades, and finally those between the officers and the men. Another factor to be considered under the moral component is that of legitimacy, operating within the rule of the law; again, in an era which preceded any conventions, treaties and judgments on the laws of war, armies and their commanders relied on the church’s Just War Doctrine - *jus in bello*, the conduct of an ethical war. This was fine in the 18th century during the Age of Reason, when wars were limited in scope and aim but became vastly different when nations were in arms and the entire population was mobilised for the war effort. Nowhere was this blurring of the distinction between combatants and civilians more apposite than in the war in Iberia and it placed a considerable strain on the rules and conduct of warfare. Julian Sanchez’s lancers epitomised the guerrilla struggle enshrined in the legends of the war of independence but, to all intents and purposes, they and the many other guerrilla groups operating throughout Spain and Portugal, broke every hitherto accepted code of warfare and created a vacuum in morality and ethics. These three areas, motivation, moral cohesion and the code of warfare merit further consideration.

The 6th Corps was brimming with *esprit de corps*, indeed it was the very embodiment of the axiom; comradeship, example, pride, leadership and a warrior spirit. What better man to command such an elite group than Ney, ‘bravest of the brave’, and yet when one considers the values inherent to the moral cohesion: selfless commitment, courage, discipline, integrity, loyalty and respect for others, the capable Marshal Ney falls badly short on nearly all counts. Ney’s disloyalty to the new commander of the Army of Portugal manifested itself as early as the 20th May when he wrote ‘demanding a prompt decision’ which if not forthcoming he would be forced ‘to return [the troops] to their old cantonments’. His insubordination was soon to follow when on the 6th June he wrote to Junot suggesting the two corps join and attack the ‘British’ army, in complete contravention to Masséna’s orders. Junot had the presence of mind to refuse cooperation but within weeks he too began to demonstrate similar

¹⁶ Napoleon, *Maxims of War*, 5th Edition (Paris, 1874).

¹⁷ Mona Ozouf, *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française*.

traits towards Masséna. There is little doubt that the army commander was partly to blame but so too was Napoleon, for his failure to appoint a single commander-in-chief for the Iberian theatre was the principal cause of disunity and fickleness among his peninsular lieutenants. Conversely, the commander of the Spanish defenders, Herrasti demonstrated more leadership, professional competence, innovation, judgement, resolution and confidence than the entire French higher command. Herrasti's zeal in preparing for the defence of the town and his determination 'to defend this place to the death' were infectious to both his officers and men and to the town junta and civil population. There was a feeling of divine providence, invincibility and certainty that the defence would prevail; from Herrasti's perspective such confidence was, of course, predicated on the conviction that Wellington would intervene forcing the French to lift the siege.

The moral component within the French higher command was, therefore, faulty from the outset but that of the soldiers of the 6th Corps was little better. Although the French had four companies of sappers, these men directed the work; the lion's share of picking, shovelling, and riveting would fall to the infantry. Each of Ney's divisional commanders was tasked to provide 2,300 trench workers. The infantry hated this labour with a passion; it was dangerous, uncomfortable and backbreaking work. In addition, their colleagues had to provide protection from sallies by the defenders into the trench works and this too was less than satisfying work although it was infinitely more preferable having a musket in hand rather than a shovel. The appalling conditions in the trenches was not helped by having to work in mud and water and on half rations; morale was undoubtedly affected too by the failure to hold the convent of Santa Cruz and the apparent ineffectiveness of the first batteries in battering a suitable breach. When Ney presented his summons to Herrasti on the 28th June following the declaration of a practical breach, the Spanish commander instructed his officers to ply the messenger with stories of poor morale within the walls and the fact that they could only resist four to five more days. This was a subtle form of psychological warfare for when the fortress did not fall within those few days the affect on French morale was overwhelming, underpinning a lack of belief and resolution in their task. If Napoleon was right, that moral is to physical as three is to one, and there would be few who would doubt it, then it is also right that the fragile French morale could so easily have been exploited at this juncture with significant consequences. That exploitation lay in the hands of Wellington and La Romana but to state that their actions in not coming to aid Herrasti and his gallant garrison were an error, would be akin to examining the issue through a tube; there was much more on the periphery that also needed to be taken into account before judgement could be passed.

The one constant, other than the fort itself, between the French siege of 1810 and that of the Anglo Portuguese in 1812, was the civil population. There is no doubt the civilians assisted the Spanish in their defence in 1810; indeed, like Zaragoza, the local junta organised the civil defence allocating tasks to fight fires, distribute water, resupply ammunition, tend to the wounded and prepare food for the garrison. 'Excited by examples of their parents and by the patriotic spirit exhibited by the garrison and inhabitants of the town and further encouraged by the sight of danger, [the children] demonstrated a most ardent zeal for the

public cause and the fact that noble and valiant Castilian blood ran through their veins'.¹⁸ As every day passed, the passion of the French to seek vengeance by the sword, on the garrison and population of Ciudad Rodrigo, grew in intensity. It was, after all, part of the code of conduct and the accepted tenet of siege warfare and many of the French officers did little to temper the expectations of their men. Indeed, when the time came for the assaulting troops to prepare, there were many who considered the moment for a further summons to have passed but Masséna, acutely aware of the interest being shown by Joseph Bonaparte as 'king' of Spain, was keen to conclude the siege in a humane manner. While Herrasti and the junta pondered, the assault troops went in but were not challenged and as they were ascending the breach the white flag was raised. The nature of the capitulation denied the soldiers the vengeance they sought but an inspection of the town revealed that not one house remained intact, most of the buildings had been ruined or reduced to ashes; a total of 28,286 shells and 11,859 bombs had been fired into the town which, to the French, presented a legitimate target, minimising collateral damage was simply not an issue. The Spanish garrison and townsfolk having suffered 1,800 casualties succumbed after a remarkable defence lasting 35 days.

The Components of the 1812 Siege

The eighteen months between the French siege and that of the Anglo Portuguese in January 1812 witnessed a remarkable change in the strategic situation in Iberia. Marshal Auguste Marmont had assumed command from Masséna in May 1811 and immediately set about reorganizing his new charge. He stripped out the 9th Corps and sent the remnants south to support Soult but most significantly he dismantled the corps system and replaced it with six strong divisions; Junot and Loison, who had replaced Ney after he had been relieved of command, were sent home and Reynier stayed only a few months longer as there was no real role for him under this revised structure. The corps d'armée, essentially the first formal system of combined-arms grouping, which had been so devastatingly effective in central Europe, had ultimately failed in Iberia. Masséna's unsuccessful invasion of Portugal led to his final defeat at the Battle of Fuentes de Oñoro in May 1811; the same month, to the south, the allied attempt to capture Badajoz led to the Battle at Albuera, a narrow but costly victory for the allies, but it was Napoleon's aspirations and corresponding directives which were the main drivers for change, marking a watershed in the war. His plans to invade Russia in 1812 resulted in troop withdrawals from Spain and, although numbers were not extensive, the knock-on effect was significant. In addition, Napoleon, encouraged by Marshal Suchet's success, which shone like a beacon in a sea of subordinate mediocrity, then ordered another 15,000 men to be redirected from the other French armies in Spain to assist operations on the east coast which were, by mid 1811, the French main effort. Joseph argued that to strip out the capital would be decidedly unwise and so the lion's share of these reinforcements was to come from the Army of Portugal. The divisions of Foy, Sarrut and Montbrun were despatched east to link up with D'Armagnac (from the Army of the Centre), who was already at Albacete, and then move to assist Suchet. At a stroke Marmont lost a third of his force and, with the Army of the North having provided the bulk of the troops destined for Russia,

¹⁸ Herrasti, *Relacion Histórica*, pp. 40-41. Horward, p. 143.

Marmont's options for both defence and reinforcement in his sector of responsibility had been severely curtailed.

Wellington had already decided in mid 1811 that Ciudad Rodrigo was to be his next target and had ordered his siege train to Almeida accordingly. When he did so, he had no idea just how strategic decisions and tactical successes were to play directly into his hands. The former, for the reasons outlined above, led to Marmont's force being spread thinly across his area of responsibility and when they moved into their winter cantonments this further complicated and extended the timetable of any French concentration. In late December, when this operational picture became clear, Wellington realized his opportunity and struck. However, a tactical success by Julian Sánchez and his 'irregular' cavalry brigade was also to provide the allies a significant advantage for the forthcoming siege. In October 1811 they had captured the French commander at Ciudad Rodrigo, Brigadier General Reynaud; his replacement was Brigadier General Barrié, the only available general officer at Salamanca. Barrié did his utmost to avoid the appointment. He arrived in November to discover a much reduced garrison which, since the Army of Portugal had captured the town and then departed on the third invasion of Portugal, had been the responsibility of General Dorsenne and the Army of the North. Dorsenne, keen to reduce the logistic burden of a regular garrison, had chosen to reduce numbers during the winter. Consequently, Barrié's total force numbered less than two thousand men and included two infantry battalions, the 34e Léger (Fourtine) and the 113e Ligne (Téras), two companies of artillery under Major Husson and a small company of sappers under Captain Cathals.¹⁹ It was a woefully inadequate force for a fortress the size of Ciudad Rodrigo.

Wellington had seven divisions in cantonments to the north and of these he selected the 1st, 3rd, 4th and Light divisions, along with Pack and Power's Portuguese brigades to conduct the siege, while the balance established a covering force and screen. Thus the besieging force numbered in excess of 26,000 men, each division providing troops for labour and protection on a rotational basis every fourth day. Despite Wellington's protestations that, following the failures at Badajoz the year prior, 'he would be his own engineer next time', Lieutenant Colonel Sir Richard Fletcher once again held the post with a mere 18 engineer officers and another 18 rank and file from the Royal Military Artificers.²⁰ The artillery siege commander was a young brevet Major who was still serving with the Portuguese artillery but who had caught Wellington's eye the year prior during the brief siege of Olivenza and that at Badajoz.²¹ Alexander Dickson, was undoubtedly technically competent but above all he was positive and pro-active in his outlook and execution; traits which the other commanders of the artillery sent by the Board of Ordnance were, in Wellington's opinion, most certainly not.²² Dickson was fortunate, for assisting him in his task were two other technically

¹⁹ Belmas, vol. IV, pp282-3; Sarramon, pp. 127-8.

²⁰ Burgoyne, p. 135.

²¹ In fact the new artillery commander (Major General Borthwick) had only just recently arrived but Wellington, who took an instant dislike to the man, directed all his artillery questions and requests directly to Dickson.

²² This Board, created by Henry VIII and initially concerned with the manufacture and supply of guns to the army and navy, controlled the Ordnance Corps which embraced the Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers and was independent from Horse Guards, which exercised control over the rest of the Army.

competent artillery officers, Lieutenant Colonel William Robe and Major John May and a artillery grouping of 541 men, although he could, and did, call upon the men from the four integral batteries from the besieging divisions.

The Board of Ordnance have often been criticised for failing to provide Wellington with an adequate siege train in a timely manner. In fact the long-awaited battering train had arrived at Lisbon as early as March 1811 (and possibly earlier) but Wellington had decided not to use it, or to disclose its presence, for the first two attempts on Badajoz.²³ Once the decision had been made to target Ciudad Rodrigo, Dickson and Fletcher were tasked with moving the siege train to Almeida. The train, which was still on board Royal Navy transports, was sent by sea to Oporto where it was reloaded on to barges and taken upriver to Peso de Régua at which point the whole was transferred to carts and transported by road to Trancoso and finally to Almeida. The train consisted of 78 pieces of ordnance: 34 x iron 24 pounders (644), 4 x iron 18 pounders (440), 8 x iron 10 inch mortars (525), 20 x iron 5½ inch howitzers (348), 10 x brass 5½ inch howitzers (348) and 2 x brass 8 inch howitzers (215).²⁴ Wellington's orders to commence the movement were issued in mid July 1811 and Dickson was given two months to complete the task. In fact, when Wellington ordered the commencement of the siege in early January 1812, Dickson's task had still not been fully completed; such was the enormous scale of the undertaking. Like Ney in 1810, Wellington was also able to call upon his integral field artillery and at the tail end of the siege one field gun and one howitzer were brought up to battery five and they fired throughout the night to prevent the defenders making repairs in the vicinity of the two breaches.

Barrié and Husson conversely had a huge amount of artillery, the majority of the 108 pieces from Herrasti's garrison had survived the 1810 siege but, in addition, the Army of Portugal's siege train had been left at the fort. Consequently, the French garrison had in excess of 150 heavy guns, mortars, howitzers and, most importantly, adequate quantities of ammunition. Husson's problem was, of course, that he only had 168 gunners with which to man the ordnance and, unlike Francisco Ruiz Gómez, he could expect no help from the civilian population and with only two infantry battalions there were no soldiers to spare. Figure 2 depicts the manning requirements for a typical (in this case field) gun; with 8 trained artillerymen for each piece, Husson cannot have manned, assuming all the gunners were fit for duty and at their post, no more than 21 guns – a mere 15 per cent of the total available.

²³ WD vol. IV, p.683. Letter from Wellington to Vice Admiral Berkeley, from Arganil dated 20 Mar 11. There were many French prisoners in Lisbon awaiting transportation back to England. Oman is mistaken in assuming that the 19 Jul 11 Memorandum (Footnote 27) indicated the arrival of the siege train into theatre and his comment that it ' would have been invaluable in May for the breaching of Badajoz' is therefore invalid.

²⁴ Jones, vol. I, p. 81. The figures in brackets indicate the ammunition for each piece of ordnance.

Duties of the Gun Crew on a French Field Gun

Gun Number 2: Rank - Gunner 1st Class.

Assisted the number 2 in sponging the barrel and collecting the cartridge from the number 7, placing it inside the muzzle for the number 2 to 'ram' home.

Gun Number 3: Rank - Gunner 1st Class.

Responsible for 'sponging' the gun to ensure it was clear of burned powder after firing, and rammed home the cartridge (projectile and

Gun Number 5: Rank - Gunner.

Carried the primer tubes on a belt around his waist. He would pierce the cartridge bag by pushing a long needle down the vent hole and then push the primer down the hole until it contacted with the cartridge bag.

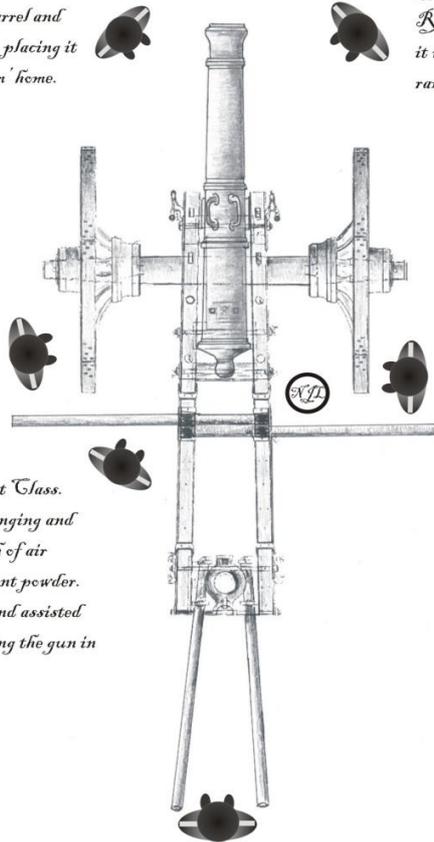
Gun Number 4: Rank - Gunner.

Carried the match (portfire), normally mounted on a finstock (a long pole); his task was to fire the gun. He also helped the number 1 and number 6 move the gun in azimuth with the lever.

Gun Number 6: Rank - Gunner 1st Class.
Plugged the vent hole during the sponging and loading of the gun to prevent the rush of air through the vent igniting any un-burnt powder. He also worked the elevating screw and assisted the number 1 and number 4 with moving the gun in



Gun Number 7: Rank - Gunner.
Ammunition handler, responsible for handing the cartridge to the number 3.



Gun Number 1: Rank Corporal. Commanded the gun, gave fire orders and moved the gun in the azimuth by lifting the two levers and traversing.

Gun Number 8: Rank - Gunner.
Ammunition resupply from the limber.

Duties of the full crew when running up the gun.

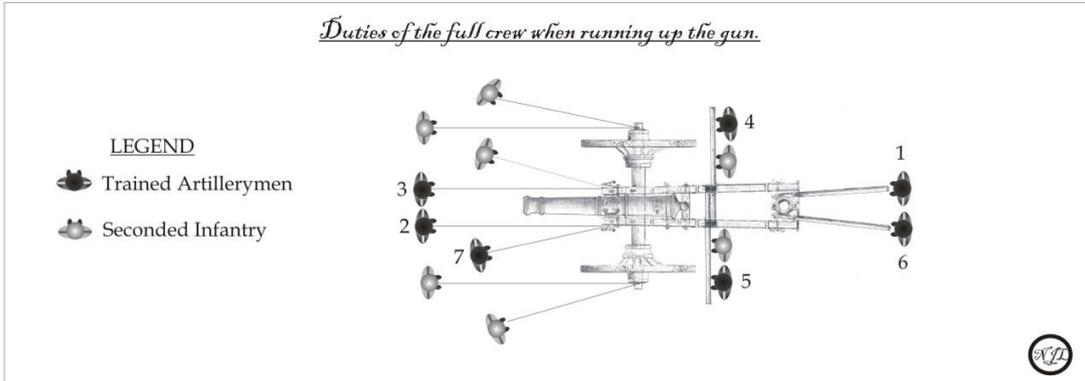


Figure 2: Details of Duties and Manning of Artillery.

Despite having large amounts of ammunition and powder and even though General Thiébault had managed to resupply the structure in a clever and bold operation in early November 1811, supplies were already running out by the end of the year prompting Barrié to write to Dorsenne and Thiébault outlining his concerns that should the enemy stir he would

not be able to hold out overly long as his supplies would run out as early as February.²⁵ Of course, the situation with regard to supplies for the civil population is more difficult to determine but it can be readily supposed that their situation was probably worse than that of the occupying garrison. Wellington's sustainability problems were no less acute; accelerating the operation by a matter of months caught the commissary off-guard and most of the available carts and bullocks had been fully employed in the movement of ammunition, powder and engineer stores. Food stores at this time were seasonally low; it was one of the principal reasons that large-scale operations were generally not conducted during the winter months and it provided some explanation as to the tardy French response once the siege opened in earnest.

‘Indeed, as a result of general experience, it may be assumed, that should an army, unprovided [sic]with sappers and miners, and the necessary materials and means to render their services efficient, be opposed by a place fortified according to the modern system, so as to have its walls completely covered, all the usual and known efforts to reduce it would prove unavailing; no period of time, nor sacrifice of men would purchase success, and the prudent plan would be to decline the attempt’.²⁶ Wellington's army certainly lacked sufficient sappers and miners but he now had a more than adequate siege train and, by 1811, a lack of artillerymen was no longer an issue, but the fact remained that the British army in the early nineteenth century was wholly unskilled at the art of siege warfare; true, Wellington had some experience from India, but this was against forts that were not built or converted to the *modern* system. Learning on the job was not an option, for the one thing Wellington would not have, once the siege opened, was time. Wellington had selected Dickson because of his technical knowledge and willing attitude; but there was another reason: the young brevet major was unlikely to argue against the commander's wishes. Prior to and during the siege, Wellington made two decisions of a technical nature; the first was that, for humanitarian reasons, no mortars or howitzers were to be used during the siege and secondly, the principal breaching batteries were to be included, in order to save time, within the first parallel. He certainly made the latter in consultation with his engineer and artillery advisors; it is unclear whether he consulted Dickson on the former.

Major John May, who was the artillery Brigade major (i.e. chief of staff), and possibly the most technically competent artillery officer in-theatre, had strong views about both these decisions. ‘The reason why mortars were not allowed to be made use of at Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz, was from a motive of humanity, these towns being inhabited by Spaniards, our allies. But though a proportion of mortars and howitzers should in all cases form a constituent part of a bettering train, yet when a place be sufficiently garrisoned, it is not against the town but only for the destruction of the enemy's artillery, to prevent the breach being retrenched, and to clear all impediments as to fire in going to the assault, that their powerful effects should be employed’.²⁷ With regard to Wellington's decision to batter the walls from the first parallel to speed the process of prosecuting the siege, he commented that

²⁵ Thiers, vol. XIII, p. 350.

²⁶ Jones, vol. I, p. xvii.

²⁷ May, p. 19.

‘it therefore becomes interesting to inquire why they [the French] should be blindly and implicitly followed, since it is evident that the British, without suspecting it, by striking out methods of their own, have arrived at ameliorations in their service, and indeed in most of the mechanical arts, superior to their ingenious and warlike neighbours’.²⁸ With regard to the first observation, May is absolutely correct; the fact that, in particular, the howitzers were not brought forward to the park and utilised in the siege was a fundamental error and a misunderstanding of that equipment’s role and capability. However, the second, with his assertion that the British had re-written the siege warfare rule book, is less convincing.

Table 2: Allied Siege Batteries (Source: Jones).

Major Dickson had the following guns: 34 x 24 pounder guns (24G) & 4 x 18 pounder guns (18G)

	<i>Battery Task</i>	<i>13 Jan</i>	<i>14 Jan</i>	<i>15 Jan</i>	<i>16 Jan</i>	<i>17 Jan</i>	<i>18 Jan</i>	<i>19 Jan</i>
<i>Battery 1</i>	<i>Initially San Francisco then Main Breach</i>	<i>2 x 18G</i>	<i>2 x 18G</i>	<i>2 x 18G 3 x 24G</i>	<i>3 x 24G</i>	<i>3 x 24G</i>	<i>3 x 24G</i>	<i>3 x 24G</i>
<i>Battery 2</i>	<i>Main Breach</i>	<i>2 x 18 G 7 x 24G</i>	<i>2 x 18 G 7 x 24G</i>	<i>2 x 18 G 9 x 24G</i>	<i>2 x 18 G 9 x 24G</i>	<i>2 x 18 G 4 x 24G Note 1</i>	<i>2 x 18 G 4 x 24G</i>	<i>1 x 18 G 4 x 24G</i>
<i>Battery 3</i>	<i>Main Breach</i>	<i>16 x 24G</i>	<i>15 x 24G Note 2</i>	<i>15 x 24G Note 2</i>				
<i>Battery 4</i>	<i>Second Breach</i>						<i>7 x 24G</i>	<i>7 x 24G</i>
<i>Battery 5</i>	<i>Prevent repairs to both breaches during the night of 18-19 Jan 12.</i>							<i>Note 3</i>

Notes:

- 1. Struck in the muzzle and destroyed, four additional 24 pounders were temporarily immobilised.*
- 2. Gun burst through having a shot jammed half way down the bore.*
- 3. This battery was originally intended for 6 x 24 pounders but was manned with 1 x 6 pounder and 1 x 5½ inch howitzer from a field brigade.*

Wellington conducted a reconnaissance of the town on the 7th January and issued orders on the 8th to commence the investment; his plan of attack was, initially, the same as that the French had used in the 1810 siege. The capture of the Redoubt Reynaud, by way of an immediate preliminary operation, was essential and this was achieved in the most daring manner, by Lieutenant Colonel John Colborne and 450 British and Portuguese soldiers from the light regiments, on the first night. Digging the only communication trench commenced immediately that night but had not advanced far enough as to enable the workers to continue in daylight on the 9th January. The (four allocated) divisions were taking it in turns, 24 hours each, to provide the labour and protection parties: the Light Division commenced on the 8th, the 1st Division the 9th, the 5th Division the 10th, the 3rd Division the 11th, and so on until the assault. On the 13th January, Wellington was concerned that the construction of a second parallel, to house the breaching batteries, would take too long and therefore provide time for Marmont and Dorsenne to relieve the town and, following consultation with Fletcher, decided to try and breach the walls with batteries from the first parallel on the Teso Grande. However, he also decided to continue with the construction of the second parallel by way of a back up; this decision necessitated the capture of the Convento Santa Cruz, which was

²⁸ Ibid, p. 8.

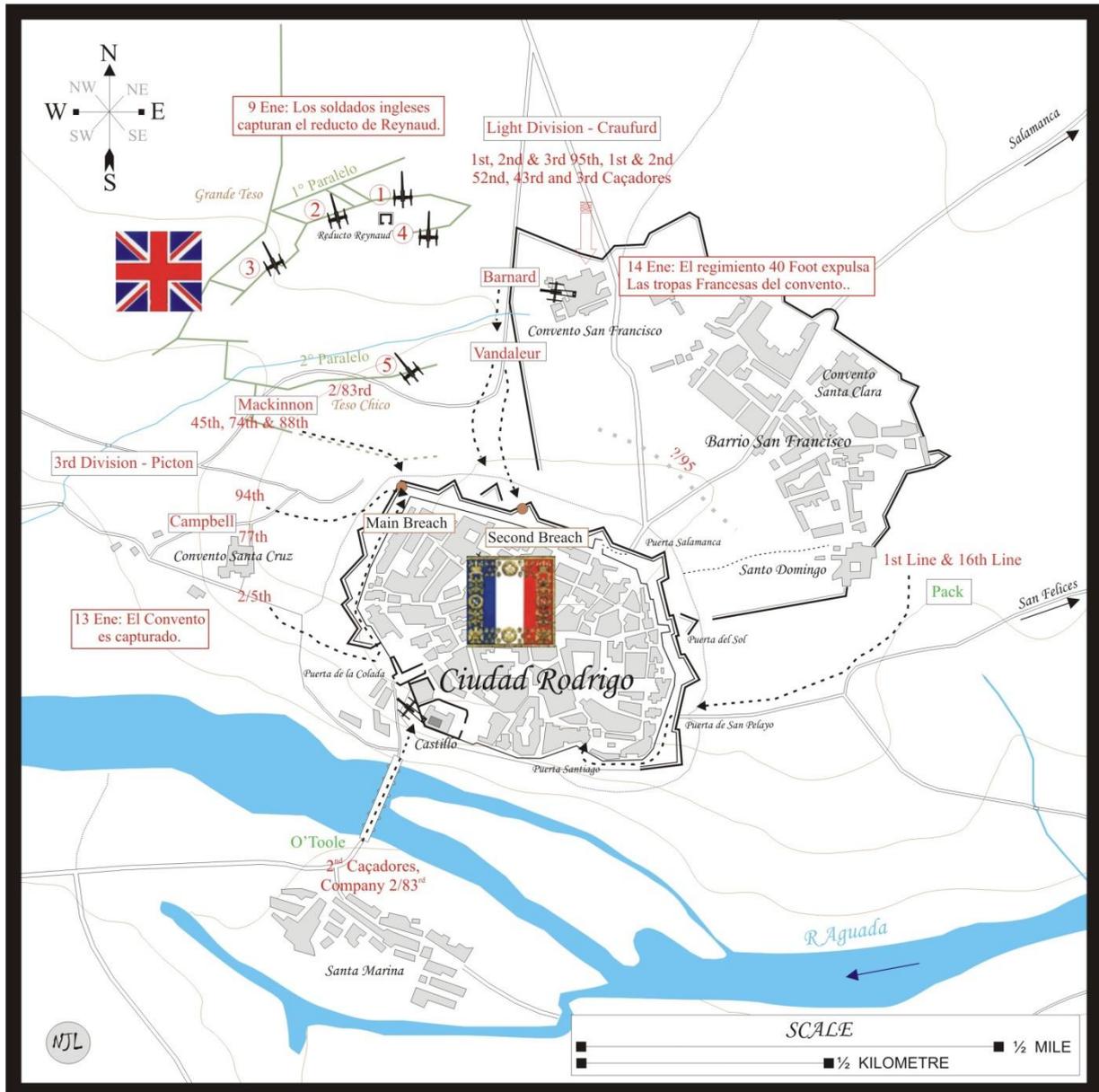
achieved on the night of the 13th January. The same night 27 guns were moved into battery positions one to three – see Table 2.

The 14th January was a busy day for both besieger and besieged; the latter executed a sortie with 500 men who recaptured the Santa Cruz and damaged a considerable amount of the second parallel, and the former spent much of the rest of the day recovering and making good their losses and opening fire on the walls. That night, the Convent San Francisco was also stormed, by three companies of the 40th Foot, prompting the French to withdraw completely from the entire suburb; abandoning the two guns and howitzer they had placed there. It was clear, during the day of the 15th January, that the breaching guns were succeeding in battering the walls; ‘both the main scarp and the *fausse-braie* walls were so much shaken and injured as to give hopes of speedily bringing them down’.²⁹ By the 18th the fourth battery was complete and manned with seven 24 pounder guns which were to target the tower above what was to become the second breach. The effect was immediate and devastating. By mid morning on the 19th January, Wellington considered that no more could be undertaken to improve the breaches and the guns were turned onto the town’s defences and, as there were no plans to extend the trenches to the walls or to use mines, orders were issued for an assault that night. The attack commenced at ten minutes to seven. A preliminary operation captured, and rendered ineffective, the two guns by the castle which enfiladed the entrance to the ditch through which elements of Campbell’s brigade passed moments later. At the main breach, the balance of Campbell’s Brigade and that of Mackinnon assaulted, while the Light Division attacked the secondary breach. On the far side of the town Pack’s Portuguese Brigade executed a diversionary attack. By eight o’clock the town had been ‘liberated’.

The inhabitants of Ciudad Rodrigo had every reason to celebrate their freedom from occupation, but what happened next exposed, and left open to question, the very core of the moral component of Wellington’s Anglo Portuguese army. For although the one constant between the two sieges of Ciudad Rodrigo was the civil population, the first siege was one where, once lost, the inhabitants *could* reasonably expect a loss of liberty; conversely, following the second, when won, they *would* naturally expect a restoration of their former independence. From the ethical point of view, things started well when Wellington directed that no howitzers or mortars would be brought up to bombard the town and, *ipso facto*, its people and its property but, following the siege by assault few, if any, of the officers in Wellington’s force considered the possibility that the men would run riot once inside the structure. Wellington’s desire to execute an assault before Marmont and Dorsenne were able to unite and send a force to relieve the garrison resulted in greater than ‘normal’ casualties. Major Jonathan Leach who was with the 95th Rifles that night explained that ‘when a town is stormed, it is inevitable that excesses will be, as they have ever been, committed by assailants, more particularly if it takes place at night. It affords a favourable opportunity for the loose and dissolute characters, which are to be found in all armies, to indulge in every diabolical propensity. This was the case to a certain extent, on the night in question, no one

²⁹ Jones, vol. I, p. 118.

will deny...'³⁰ Such sentiments are fine when you are attacking a fortress held and populated by the enemy; they are simply unacceptable when you are fighting to liberate a town populated by one of your allies.



Map 2: The Allied Siege of Ciudad Rodrigo ~ 8-19 January 1812.

The argument that such behaviour had taken the commanders, senior and junior, by surprise is fair, in this case, and there is clear evidence that the officers did all they could to restore order which was achieved after about four hours, at around midnight. However, Leach, in his reminiscences, continued that he ‘felt convinced that no town taken by assault did or ever will suffer less than Rodrigo’.³¹ Leach wrote his memoirs in the late 1820s and was of course making a comparison to what happened at Badajoz in 1812 and San Sebastián in

³⁰ Leach, p. 250.

³¹ Ibid.

1813. Leaving aside the flawed nature of his initial assessment, this comparison to subsequent sieges where atrocities were conducted by allied troops on the civilian population (of one of the allies) is a clear indication that, the surprise expressed following the soldiers' behaviour at the initial siege at Rodrigo, had clearly not manifested itself as a lesson learned, and insufficient action had been taken to prevent a recurrence at the subsequent sieges. The often unwritten professional code of conduct, that encapsulated organisational morality, was clearly out of kilter in Wellington's army.

At the other end of the moral component, no one can deny that the allied soldiers' will-to-win was unquestionable; this was all the more remarkable given the harsh conditions in which they were working and living. January 1812 was a bitterly cold month with temperatures below freezing during the night and barely rising above a few degrees during the day. The soldiers on duty had to ford the Agueda as their camps were all (less for the 3rd Division) on the south bank of the river and the paucity of villages in the area meant the men had to bivouac on the ground, huddled around large fires when firewood could be collected. Thus the infantry, who hated siege work in the first instance, were soaked even before they reached the trenches; at least the work kept them warm. For those poor souls on sentry duty it was simply too much and some of these sentinels were found frozen to death at their posts in the morning. Despite this, the motivation of the men remained high, in contrast to their French colleagues holed-up in the fortress who were commanded by a man who made no secret of the fact that he did not want the job, who considered his position vulnerable from the outset and who considered his garrison and provisions inadequate. Such negativity was bound to affect the garrison's morale. Barrié's overriding aim was to hold out until Marmont arrived with a relieving force, but two of his three messengers, despatched on the 9th January, were apprehended by Julian Sanchez's soldiers on the many roads to Salamanca. Consequently, the news reached Thiébault at Salamanca on the 13th January, and Marmont the following day; by the time the Commander of the Army of Portugal reached Salamanca to orchestrate a relieving force, he was greeted with the news that the town had fallen to allies three days previously – the news stunned and bewildered him. Wellington, conversely, had the first of the keys to Spain and his focus had already shifted south to Badajoz.

Comparisons and Conclusions

The two sieges of Ciudad Rodrigo during the Peninsular War were both successfully conducted by the besiegers; they bear some similarities in their planning and execution but in other areas, particularly those of the moral component, they were significant differences. Two areas of the physical component, which were similar (or equal) for both attacker and defender at both sieges, were the difficulties of sustainability and the fortification itself. The former is no real surprise, as sustainability was an issue throughout the war, but the latter needs the additional caveat that the main breach wall was clearly considerably weakened from the first siege so as to make the task easier for the second siege.

In terms of equipment both sieges possessed sufficient ordnance to undertake the task of attack and defence: the attackers had 48 and 38 pieces against 118 and 153 respectively. This provides ratios of 1:2.5 and 1:4 respectively, which compares with Badajoz (1812) at 1:3, but

contrasts interestingly with San Sebastian (second siege 1813) at 1.5:1. As we have seen, the more favourable defender to attacker ratio for the second siege was rendered ineffective because of the number of trained gunners and small size of the garrison – in fact, it was closer to 1:1 than 1:4. The manpower was, therefore, a considerable disadvantage to the French defenders in 1812. The attackers had similar numbers; 28,000 in 1810 vis-à-vis 26,000 men in 1812 but the defenders' numbers differed considerably from under 6,000 in 1810 to fewer than 2,000 in 1812. In short, the garrison of 1812 was inadequate for the task; this was a significant error by the French higher command.

In 1810 the *Grande Armée* were better vested in siege warfare than the British; however, the expertise was not even across the French armies and corps and Ney's 6th Corps in particular had virtually no siege experience. Although the initial plan was reasonable, there were two fundamental errors in the early execution: the first was the poor sighting of the breaching batteries in the first parallel, which were clearly not effective, and secondly the failure to appreciate the importance of early capture and exploitation of the flanking structures of Santa Cruz and San Francisco. Once Valazé and Éblé had replaced Couche and Ruty, the siege progressed rapidly and effectively. However, the French siege took 40 days while that of the allies took 10 days, a quarter of the time, but it would be wholly incorrect to accept Major John May's assessment that the British had 'arrived at ameliorations in their service, and indeed in most mechanical arts, superior to their ingenious and warlike neighbours'³². Firstly, the French garrison was inadequate; secondly, the walls at the main breach were far weaker than they had been at the commencement of the 1810 siege; and finally, Wellington was prepared to take risks to conclude the siege before any French relieving force arrived in the area and, as such, accepted the greater danger on his infantry. Masséna was equally under time pressure but not to the same extent and not for the same reasons. Nevertheless, the achievements of the Anglo Portuguese engineers and gunners in executing the 1812 siege, and the infantry in their assistance to that execution and the conduct of the subsequent assault, were faultless and worthy of considerable merit under difficult and harsh conditions.³³

That faultless performance, however, ceased once the besiegers were inside the walls of the structure. However, it is important to place what happened in January 1812 inside Ciudad Rodrigo into perspective: there is no doubt that allied civilians were abused and their property destroyed or stolen but compared to the damage caused by the French indiscriminate bombing of the city during the 1810 siege where 400 civilians were killed or wounded and most of the buildings reduced to rubble, the actions of the British and Portuguese soldiers seem almost insignificant. It is debateable whether this episode would have been recorded in quite the same manner if the subsequent sieges conducted by Wellington's army at Badajoz and San Sebastián had been less brutal on the civilian population; the former in atrocities committed after capture and the latter in collateral damage during the siege. The excuse that the officers had not considered the possibility that the men would run riot once inside the

³² May, p. 19.

³³ Leaving aside the failure to use heavy mortars or howitzers to engage the garrison and prevent repairs and retrenchment during hours of darkness.

structure is feasible and had this been the only instance of such behaviour it would have been fair to have given the officers, and men, the benefit of the doubt. However, sadly, it was not.

In closing, there is one area that has not yet been fully examined – why the allies failed to come to the relief of Herrasti's garrison during the French siege. This is a difficult issue and is perhaps best observed through Wellington's perspective of strategic and operational events as he saw them in the middle of 1810. The bulk of the 138,000 French reinforcements, which continued to arrive in Spain throughout 1810, were designed *inter alia* to form the nucleus of the newly formed Army of Portugal. As the name of this formation asserts, its *raison d'être* was the recapture of Portugal and the operation to secure Ciudad Rodrigo was the first phase of this campaign. Wellington had, out of necessity, split his force with Hill's Corps to the south screening Mortier's 5th Corps and the southern half of Heudelet's 2nd Corps; he had at his disposal 33,000 men, just under half of which were his untested Portuguese troops. Even without counting the troops from the 2nd Corps, the Army of Portugal had 30,000 men around Ciudad Rodrigo and another 30,000 which could be brought up within one to two days. Following the disastrous autumn campaign (October and November 1809) the Spanish armies of Estremadura and La Mancha were, to all intents and purposes, out of commission and that of La Romana stretched, covering two hundred kilometres of frontier. His nearest division, that of Martin Carrera, was fully occupied screening the 2nd Corps. In short, therefore, numerically Wellington's available force was considerably weaker than that to his front; to have concentrated more forces in the region would have left exploitable gaps along the frontier which either the 2nd or 5th corps (or both) could have rapidly capitalised upon. Wellington needed time to complete the Lines of Torres Vedras, without which he stood no hope of protecting Lisbon and the nation's executive, and risking that project by a pre-emptive strike in May or June against Ciudad Rodrigo was ill-advised. When viewed from the strategic and operational perspective Wellington's decision was, without doubt, the right one under the circumstances; of course when examined from the tactical point of view it was harsh and met with considerable criticism from a number of quarters. However, you don't win wars with a tactical vision alone, and that is what set Wellington, the future Duque de Ciudad Rodrigo, apart from most other military men of his day.

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