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Turning Point: The Peninsular War in the Careers of Napoleon and Wellington

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Introduction

Certain events in history can be viewed as being points of demarcation. In other words, events can shift the future potential for any one person or people. One such example, in the early nineteenth century would be the Peninsular War, part of the Napoleonic Wars. More specifically, the peninsular campaigns mark a shift for both Napoleon Bonaparte and Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington. Prior to military action beginning in Spain, in 1808 Napoleon was arguably at the peak of his power, having defeated the armies of Russia, Austria, and Prussia in several campaigns across central and eastern Europe. Napoleon's decision to enter the Iberian Peninsula would continuously sap both money and men from his empire. From this point of entry, we can distinguish that the stability of his situation both in the Peninsula itself and across Europe would become increasingly precarious over the course of the Napoleonic Wars. Although Napoleon is only present for a very short amount of time in the peninsula, the Peninsular War had a profound impact on military and political career. The Peninsular War therefore represents the beginning of decline for both Napoleon and his empire. Conversely, for Wellington the Peninsular War marked the beginning of his rise to military prominence, which would eventually aid him in his post-war political career. Prior to his involvement in the Peninsular War, Wellesley was not widely known, and he was not the British government's first choice to spearhead land operations against the seemingly invincible French army. However, over the course of the conflict, Wellesley would earn accolades and recognition for his achievements, including being elevated to the rank of Field Marshal and earning the title of Duke of Wellington.

In this thesis, I will demonstrate how Napoleon's decision to invade the Iberian Peninsula acts as a turning point for the military and political careers for both himself and the Duke of Wellington. The Peninsular War has been examined by many historians and I will draw upon

their research to highlight how the war represented a turning point for both Wellington and Napoleon. To fully understand how the Iberian Peninsula affected the military and political careers of both men, we must first begin our examination at the outset of the Napoleonic Wars. In doing so, a comprehensive understanding as to why the Napoleonic Wars shift to the Iberian Peninsula and how this shift forever alters the political and military careers of both Napoleon and Wellington will be achieved. Because of Napoleon's lack of presence in the theatre, this thesis will focus more heavily on Wellesley. Many historians have argued that the Peninsular War can be viewed as leading to the eventual downfall of Napoleon's empire. While I do emphasize the impact that the Peninsula has on his eventual downfall, the purpose of this examination is to highlight the impact that the Peninsular War had on the political and military careers of both Napoleon and Wellington. The war in the Iberian Peninsula begins in 1808 and continues until 1814 in one of the bloodiest and most protracted theatres of battle during the Napoleonic Wars. The Peninsular War would see the rise of Wellington from a place of limited stature, to being the most famous member of the British Army in the early-to mid-nineteenth century. He would use this prominence gained from battles such as Talavera, Torres Vedras, and Vittoria to his political advantage during a subsequent political career, which would see him become Prime Minister in the late 1820's. For Napoleon, on the other hand, the war marks the beginning of his decline as over the course of the Peninsular War, through event such as the Bayonne affair, his political and military ambitions deteriorated in advance of his final defeat at Waterloo.

Chapter One: Europe Ablaze

During and following the French Revolution beginning in 1789, France was under attack from all directions, as the rest of the major powers in Europe: Austria, Great Britain, Prussia, and Russia, sought to reinstall the Bourbon monarchy. However, with Napoleon Bonaparte in a leading role in both the French military and political theatre by 1803, France would soon begin to push back those who sought to impose their will on the country. In this chapter, I will survey the beginning of the Napoleonic wars in Europe beginning in 1803, leading up to the invasion and occupation of Spain in 1807. This broad survey is necessary to fully understand the significance that the Peninsular Campaign had for Napoleon and Wellington. Some historians have approached the Napoleonic wars as being a continuation of the French revolutionary wars. However, it may be argued that the Napoleonic Wars truly begin with the wars of the Third Coalition in 1803, as the cause of the War of the Third Coalition were due to Napoleon's actions. In the revolutionary wars we see the enemies of France attack her for her newly adopted political system. We see a shift in that the enemies of France attack her mainly due to Napoleon's actions. Therefore, I believe the War of the Third Coalition to be the true starting points of the Napoleonic wars.

The Treaty of Amiens negotiated with the British in 1802 ended the French revolutionary wars and finally brought peace to Europe after years of warfare. The outcome of the French Revolutionary wars solidified the French Republic's sovereignty. This peace granted the French a reprieve from combat, which was critical for the battle-weary country which had been ravaged by warfare for the better part of a decade. However, even though there was no war, this did not mean there was no trouble for Napoleon in France. It is essential to remember, that there were numerous people within the country, government, and military hierarchy who were not

necessarily content with the New Republic, or with Napoleon Bonaparte's leadership. This was highlighted by the numerous plots that occurred during this short period of peace. One example is the 'Conspiracy of Rennes', which was led by one of France's leading generals, who was head of Army of the West, General Jean Bernadotte. The conspiracy was led by Bernadotte's chief-of-staff and was designed to agitate a revolt amongst troops who were being concentrated in Brittany prior to being shipped out to the West Indies. Although this plot like others, was uncovered prior to it coming to fruition, it highlights the discontent and threats that Napoleon faced. As Charles Esdaile writes, one could argue that continuous warfare was essential for the safety of the French republic, both from internal and external threat.¹

It can be said that Napoleon's coronation was something that, in part, set Europe ablaze with conflict once again. The coronation ceremony held on December 2, 1804, in Paris reinforced the fear that Napoleon was installing himself and his family as the new royal family of France.² The crown that Napoleon wore was a laurel wreath, remarkably like the style that the Caesars of Rome wore. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, Napoleon wore a purple robe adorned with a bee. The bee was initially the badge of the great Charlamagne who lived over a thousand years prior to Napoleon's coronation as emperor. The significance of this adornment as Esdaile explains, is profound. As Esdaile writes, "Presiding over the ceremony was Pope Pius VII, whose presence Napoleon required as a means of legitimizing his rule, expressing the supremacy of temporal power and reinforcing his claim to the mantle of Charlemagne, who had himself crowned by Pope Leo III over a millennium ago."³ As Esdaile highlights, the coronation provided a sense of legitimacy to the rule of Napoleon. The ceremony also established his family as the new leading or royal family in France. Adam Zamoyski furthers this point as he argues that this new royal line would be a fusion of both church and state, while

grounding the ceremony with tradition which would legitimize his rule.⁴ However, it did not just provide legitimacy for Napoleon's rule, it was a statement that he viewed himself as one of history's leading men, akin to Julius Caesar and Charlemagne. Esdaile continues to explain the significance of Napoleon's coronation ceremony. He goes on to say that few could miss the significance of the new Emperor's actions, while still more troubling was the symbolism of the new regimental standards awarded to the French army. In place of a spearhead, the pole was now topped by a bronze eagle on the like those carried by the Roman legions.⁵ Esdaile's explanation speaks to the outlook that Napoleon had of himself, of his new French empire, and their military forces. It would seem as if Napoleon believed that his country's place in the world was like that of Rome in Antiquity. The French, much like the Romans before, were now a representation of the power of a new republic and its army.

The peace of Amiens was short lived, as many of the terms set out in the peace agreement were not fulfilled. Namely, Napoleon's meddling in the foreign affairs of Switzerland and the independent German states, as well as a dispute of the occupation of Malta, among other things. With Europe poised to breakout in war once again, Napoleon sought to re-organize his military forces so they would be prepared for the inevitable conflict, wherever it should come. Napoleon's standing army in 1805 was somewhere around 600,000 men, which was the largest standing army in history at the time.⁶ As Frederick Schneid explains, soon after Napoleon's victories of 1800 and during the European peace between 1802-1804, he set about reorganizing and reforming the French army administratively and tactically.⁷ Through this re-organization, Napoleon created what we now know as the Grande Armée. He also restored glamour of the ancien regime to the army, adorning the tops of the flags of each regiment with a golden eagle. Napoleon insured that every regiment had a band, and he even restored the identity of foreign

regiments such as the Swiss, Poles and Hanoverians.⁸ Moreover, Napoleon also began to include regiments with numbers instead of names and some provincial regiments were also reformed. The concept of placing numbers with regiments instead of giving them names was adopted by virtually every military and remains in place in most modern militaries to this day. Napoleon also reintroduced the role of marshal to the French army. Marshals were generals who Napoleon viewed as being outstanding and in 1804 he appointed 16 generals as marshals. Eventually this number would rise to 24 by the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Perhaps the most important development was Bonaparte's decision to reorganize the army into corps instead of divisions. The corps was a combination of foot soldiers, cavalry, and artillery. The corps numbered anywhere between 20,000 to 30,000 men, led by a marshal or lieutenant general.⁹ The corps was comprised of two or more divisions of infantry numbering 8,000 to 12,000 men, a brigade of light cavalry, which could number anywhere between 2,000 to 3,000 men, six to eight companies of artillery, engineers, medics, trains, and headquarters.¹⁰ In essence, Napoleon created smaller armies within the Grande Armée capable of engaging in a wider variety of ways due to the variety of troops organised in the corps format. Napoleon's emphasis was on improving morale, training, and organization, all of which would bear fruit for Napoleon and the French in the campaigns to come.

It seems somewhat fitting that the wars of the Third Coalition began with France and Britain, especially given the history of conflict between the two European powers. As Michel Franceschi and Ben Weider explain, "Britain had recently expelled the French from Canada. France had taken her revenge by contributing to the independence of the United States of America."¹¹ From this example we may begin to understand that conflict between Britain and France had been recent and significant, although, the conflicts mentioned were that of colonial

disputes. The wars of the Third Coalition wars see the theatre of conflict shift back towards Europe and increase significantly in scale. Aside from Britain there was one other major European power who was eager to renew the conflict with France: The Austrian empire. Austria, a staunchly absolutist monarchy, was the leading German-speaking nation and the last remaining remnant of the Holy Roman Empire. During the Revolutionary Wars, Austria had lost its grip over Italy and of independent German nation states, such as Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg. As a result of these loses, Austria was eager to regain what territory and influence it had lost and thus had joined the British in the wars of the Third Coalition against France. The last of the major powers to oppose the French were the Russians. The Russians had their own reasons to oppose the French, mainly since in the early 19th century Russia's way of life was contrary to the philosophies of the French Republic. Even more extreme than the Austrians, the Russians were a prime example of an absolutist monarchy. In Russia, the Tsar controlled the distribution of both wealth and power throughout his empire. If French ideals were to penetrate Russian society, the millions of serfs could potentially revolt and tear down the century's old way of life in Russia.

War was an inevitability in Europe it seems, as the peace of Amiens simply could not last for several reasons. Firstly, Napoleon despised the British and sought to establish France as a superior power to Britain. For this reason, as Owen Connelly explains, Napoleon "barred British trade with France and all areas he could control or influence, including Holland and Naples. While damaging British commerce and violating the Treat of Amiens, he demanded that Britain surrender Malta."¹² As a country dependant upon its ability to export its industrial and mercantile goods, it was vital to the health of the British economy to access larger markets such as France. Napoleon's decision to prohibit trade with France and its occupied territories understandably provoked the British into action. In April 1803, Great Britain decided to withdraw her

ambassador from Paris and without a declaration of war, began to attack French ships wherever they could.¹³ Napoleon retaliated swiftly, by mobilizing his forces and occupying the area of Hanover, which was a possession of King George III of England. Additionally, He ordered the massing of troops at Boulogne and elsewhere along the British coast, threatening to invade.¹⁴ In mid-1805 Alexander 1 of Russia allied himself with Austria and Great Britain thus forming the Third Coalition against France.¹⁵

In the meantime, Spain was one of the most prominent naval powers in the world. As Esdaile explains, in November of 1804, Franco-Spanish relations were extremely poor.¹⁶ Initially, there was ardent support from the Spanish, which in part was owing to the royal favourite and dominant figure in the regime, Secretary of State, Manuel de Godoy. Godoy was an ardent supporter of the war for several reasons including that it offered the Spanish an opportunity to recapture the important port of Gibraltar. Additionally, given the series of diplomatic alliances Portugal being an ancient and important ally of Britain, would inevitably have been drawn into the conflict. This would have provided the Spanish with at least an opportunity to seize a slice of Portugal. However, the reality remains that Spain was going to become involved in the conflict one way or another. This was owing to the British determination to make war on the Spanish, along with the assumption that the Spanish would join the French in the fight against the British.¹⁷ Eventually on January 9, 1805, a convention was signed by the French and the Spanish whereby the Spanish promised to arm naval squadrons at several ports such as Cadiz and El Ferrol by the end of March. As Godoy was preparing the navy for war, he soon learned that Napoleon expected the Spanish to commit all her forces for the invasion of Britain.¹⁸ This was only the beginning of increasingly unrealistic demands made by Napoleon. Even when Godoy pressed Napoleon in 1805 to march on Lisbon with the Spanish, there was

little interest on the part of the French. All hopes of the French offering support to a Spanish campaign in Portugal or Gibraltar were dashed with the emergence of the Third Coalition. Napoleon no longer had any troops to spare for the invasion of Portugal; instead, he began to speak in terms of the Spaniards sending troops to Italy or even Germany.¹⁹ This is a trend that would only increase with the severity of demands to come in several years time.

While stationed in Boulogne, Napoleon had ordered the construction of transports capable of moving the Grande Armée across the English Channel. The cost of this was significant enough to become a burden on the French treasury. As Esdaile explains, France was in a serious financial crisis brought on by heavy government borrowing and the slow way the regime had been paying the numerous contractors engaged in the construction of ships for the invasion.²⁰ As is made clear from Esdaile's explanation along with the earlier detailing of the size of the French army stationed around Boulogne, it becomes clear why the cost of construction might place strain on the French government's finances. Additionally, on August 23, 1804, news had arrived at Boulogne that there would be a lengthy delay until the invasion flotilla could sail. This was due the naval superiority of the British and their control of the English Channel.²¹ The only hope for the French was to attempt to lure the bulk of the British navy away from the coast by joining forces with the Spanish either in the West Indies or to attack the British head-on. However, the first option, regardless of the outcome of the battle, would have meant that the French would have still been able to launch an invasion of England. An invasion of England of this magnitude would have left France exposed to the threat of invasion on its own territory. Moreover, control of the Channel was essential; without it, if Napoleon had launched an invasion, he potentially could have been stranded in England, if the British navy were not destroyed.

It was essential for the French therefore to lure the British Navy away from the coast long enough for the French to conduct an invasion of England. After successfully being able to slip through the British blockade at Toulon, French admiral Pierre-Charles Villeneuve was blocked from join with any other French squadrons at Brest or Rochefort, due to the British blockades. Eventually after much manoeuvring and being chased by the British admiral Horatio Nelson, Villeneuve was forced to the safety at the port of El Ferrol a city in northwestern Spain.²² The rest of the French fleet remained trapped in ports such as Brest and Rochefort. The British blockades of French ports prevented the French from massing their naval forces and was integral to the maintenance of British naval dominance. Effectively for the remainder of the war, the French would remain hemmed in at their ports, unable to challenge the strength of the British navy. The inability to earn a major victory to upset the balance of power in the sea lanes, or to draw the British navy away from the coast, effectively dashed Napoleon's hope of invading Britain. Napoleon would soon turn his attention east to the old advisories in central and eastern Europe.

In 1805, Napoleon made the fateful decision to rally his newly re-organized army and march into the heart of Germany to challenge the Austrians, thus truly starting the wars of the Third Coalition. Napoleon made this decision for several reasons. As Connelly explains, there is significant evidence to suggest that Napoleon still intended to invade Britain until about halfway through the year of 1805.²³ The evidence for this is the extensive practicing of amphibious landings of the troops stationed at Boulogne. With the French unable to control the coastline long enough for the invasion to take place, there was little chance that the invasion would ever actually occur. However, on the other hand, the other continental powers were beginning to stir. The French occupation of Hanover further complicated matters, as Hanover itself belonged to the

British King, George III. Moreover, Hanover is deep within Germany along the Elbe River, which created tensions between the French and Austrians, who had long been adversaries, but especially so since France had become a Republic. The French occupation of Hanover was also a point of concern for the other major German power, the Prussians. In May of 1805, Napoleon further insulted the Austrians by having himself proclaimed as the King of Italy; of which the Austrians controlled a significant portion. Additionally, Czar Alexander I and the Russians opposed the 'illegitimate' Bonaparte. The Tsar also wished for Russia to play a bigger role in Europe. Furthermore, Russian interests in the Balkans and the Mediterranean were challenged by France.²⁴

On August 23-24 Napoleon ordered his entire army to march on Germany. As Zamoyski explains, Napoleon's force in 1805 was enormous. Bonaparte's Grande Armée was comprised of roughly 200,000 men which were divided into seven corps under his recently created marshals; with 22,000 Cavalry under the command Marshal Murat.²⁵ Additionally, France's German allies of Bavaria, Wurttemberg, Baden and Hesse-Darmstadt provided an additional 50,000 troops.²⁶ In comparison, the Austrian forces numbered around 72,000 under General Karl Mack von Leiberich, although Archduke Ferdinand was the nominal commander as the Russians demanded upon dealing with Hapsburg Prince.²⁷ From these figures we can clearly see that the French enjoyed not only a significant advantage in numbers, but also in command structure. Due to the Austrians having in essence two commanding generals, in comparison to the clear command structure of the French forces, the French held a numerical as well as a tactical advantage. Moreover, the reorganization into the Corps system meant that the French would quickly maneuver and regroup thanks to the Corps system. As Jeremy Black explains in his survey of European warfare between 1660 and 1815, as the wars of the Third Coalition began, Napoleon

moved the Grande Armée into Germany through a series of rapid marches.²⁸ This march was effective, and it caught the Austrians by surprise. As Connelly explains, the Austrians had expected the French to arrive three weeks later than they did.²⁹ This highlights the effectiveness of Napoleon's ability to mobilize and transport troops and materiel faster than his adversaries were accustomed to doing or capable of replicating. This gave Napoleon a significant strategic advantage, as the Austrians were still waiting for the arrival of Russian troops, and they were now significantly outmanned by a superior French force.

Throughout late September and early October of 1805, Napoleon continued to march through central Germany, believing the Austrians were to the southeast. On October 9, Napoleon ordered Marshal Michel Ney and his corps to attack what he believed was a force of stray Austrian soldiers at the southwestern German town of Ulm. However, this was not just a garrison of stray Austrian soldiers, but rather it was the bulk of the Austrian forces under the command General Karl Mack. Unbeknownst to Napoleon, he had left the rear dangerously exposed while marching to where he believed the Austrians would be located. However, thanks to the dysfunction of their command structure, the Austrians were unable to take advantage of the situation to potentially deal a devastating blow to Napoleon and the Grande Armée.³⁰ Around midnight on October 12-13 the Emperor finally realised his error and organised his forces for a siege of Ulm. Before the siege could begin however, Archduke Ferdinand fled on October 14 with around 6,000 troops, claiming that he would not give Napoleon the pleasure of capturing a Hapsburg prince.³¹ On October 15 the Austrians were all but trapped in the city. By October 16, the French were bombarding the city with all the cannons they could muster. Mack refused to negotiate or surrender; however, his generals were not willing to fight to the bitter end and on October 20 Mack's forces surrendered. In total, roughly 25,000 Austrian troops surrendered at

Ulm.³² As Esdaile observes, in the short period of the Ulm campaign, the Austrians lost somewhere between 60,000 to 75,000 men either killed, captured, or wounded.³³ This strategic victory opened the way to Vienna, which would be occupied on November 12 less than a month after the surrender at Ulm.³⁴

The occupation of Vienna had not ended the war, however. The Austrians continued to fight on, bolstered now by the arrival of Russian reinforcements in the region of Bavaria.³⁵ But for the Allies of the Third Coalition, it was not all bad news, as just before the Ulm campaign, the British navy, under the command of Admiral Nelson, had earned massive victory over the French and Spanish at the battle of Trafalgar on October 21. This naval defeat essentially ensured the France would never be able to invade Britain, and limited Napoleon to the continent of Europe.³⁶ Moreover, on November 3 Prussia formerly joined the Third Coalition with the signing of the treaty of Potsdam.³⁷ With the Allied forces suddenly regrouping, Napoleon was forced to reassess the situation and develop a plan to deal with his enemies, preferably before they could consolidate their forces. According to Black, the Russians under the command of Tsar Alexander I sent help to the Austrian troops in the region of Moravia, which is in the modern-day Czech Republic. Being overconfident about the strength of his forces, Alexander decided to attack the French forces on December 2 at Austerlitz.³⁸

On this occasion, Napoleon was outnumbered, and he did not hold the tactical advantage, as the Russians occupied the high ground along the Pratzen Heights. The day before the battle, the French had fewer than 67,000 troops, most of which the allied forces could not see. However, the Russians could see that the southern flank appeared to be weakly-held by a part of Marshal Jean-de-Dieu Soult's corp. The Tsar planned to expose this weakness and planned to attack where the French forces looked weakest. Napoleon had ordered that Marshal Louis Davout and

part of his corps should march from Vienna along with Marshal Bernadotte's corps from south of Prague.³⁹ By the morning of December 2, the combined allied forces of Russians and Austrians numbered somewhere around 86,000 troops, whereas the number of French troops was somewhere around 73,000.⁴⁰ That day, the allied forces attacked under the overall command of Tsar Alexander. In the first few hours of the battle, the allies sent roughly 40,000 troops to attack the French southern flank. The Tsar decided he was going to attack what he believed to be the weakly guarded southern flank. This move would allow the allied forces to attack what appeared to be a point of weakness along with cutting French supply lines and the escape route back to Vienna. Unbeknownst to the Russians, Marshal Davout and his corps had relieved Marshal Soult's corps on the southern flank that morning. This proved to be disastrous for the Russians and helped lead to the French victory. Davout's corps were some of the best trained and battle-hardened troops in the French army. Despite being outnumbered by as many as four to one, Davout's men held the southern flank. Luckily for Davout, the terrain on the southern flank favoured him and his men. The French were on dry ground, whereas the Russians had to march through frozen marshes and found themselves in freezing waters and knee-deep in mud.⁴¹ As Connelly explains, "Davout's corps became the anvil on which Napoleon hammered the Russian army."⁴² As many historians have claimed, Austerlitz is the most complete victory in Napoleon's career. Despite being outnumbered Napoleon earned arguably his most prolific victory to date. The allied casualties in a single day of battle amounted to somewhere around 16,000 men, with an additional 20,000 being captured.⁴³ In comparison, the French had only lost around 8,000 men.⁴⁴

The outcome of the battle of Austerlitz dealt a death blow to the Third Coalition.⁴⁵ The defeat at Austerlitz forced the Austrian Emperor Francis I to seek an armistice, which was

completed by the treaty of Pressburg on December 26, 1805. Austria was forced to cede the territories of Venetia, Dalmatia and Istria to the Kingdom of Italy, Vorarlberg, Tyrol and Trentino to Bavaria, and the isolated pockets of territory that the Austrians still held in southwestern Germany were to be given to Baden and Wurttemberg.⁴⁶ This treaty was the killing blow to the Holy Roman Empire. With so many member states ceded, on August 6, 1806, a dispirited Emperor Francis declared that he would now simply be Francis I of Austria, not Francis II of the Holy Roman Empire.⁴⁷ After receiving news of the battle in Britain, Prime Minister William Pitt supposedly said, “Roll up that map of Europe. It is not wanted these ten years.”⁴⁸ The Battle of Austerlitz marked the end of the Wars of the Third Coalition, and the creation of the Confederation of the Rhine, the beginning of what is referred to as the ‘family monarchies’.

Peace did not last long in Europe, however, and it was less than a year after Austerlitz that Europe was at war once again. The conflict was partly derived from the outcome of the wars of the Third Coalition. The creation of the confederation of the Rhine particularly angered the Prussians as many Prussian nobles were upset over Napoleon’s actions. This is highlighted by Connelly, as he notes Napoleon’s high-handed actions in Germany, particularly the creation of Confederation of the Rhine angered many Prussians.⁴⁹ Having said that, it was not just the creation of the Confederation of the Rhine which angered the Prussians, but it was the French handling of Hanover. Word had reached the Prussian leader, Frederik Wilhelm III, that the French were attempting to offer Hanover to the British in exchange for peace. This angered the Prussians as per the Treaty of Basel of 1795 Prussia was one of the guarantors of Hanoverian independence.⁵⁰ After remaining neutral up until this point, Prussia finally picked a side, as they allied themselves with the Russians in July of 1806. Prussia, like the French, had a sizeable

army. In August, Prussia mobilized its forces of around 250,000 troops, with its three field armies numbering around 145,000 troops. In addition to these forces, the Russians also promised two armies of 60,000 troops each.⁵¹ The Prussians issued one last ultimatum in September of 1806 to the French to remove their forces from Germany or face war. Napoleon left Paris to take command of his forces stationed in Germany. On October 6 Napoleon took control of his troops at Bamberg. He had roughly 180,000 French troops while being supported by around 100,000 troops from his German allies.⁵² Fortunately for the French, the Prussians remained isolated for the time being, as the supporting Russian armies numbering a total of 120,000 troops were still a fair distance away, meaning that Napoleon held the advantage.

One of the major problems affecting the Prussians, much like the Austrians was the overall command structure. Since Frederik Wilhelm III was king of Prussia, and therefore overall commander of the army, the king's opinions needed to be respected. Moreover, some of the general staff were not on good terms with the king, including the commanders of Prussia's two largest field armies, the Duke of Brunswick who oversaw an army of 75,000 troops, and Prince von Hohenlohe who oversaw roughly 40,000 troops.⁵³ On October 8, Brunswick and his army were near Gotha and Hohenlohe and his army were positioned east of him along the river Saale, and a third Prussian army was positioned to the west. On October 13, Napoleon thought that the bulk of the Prussian forces, over 100,000 were based at Jena, which was incorrect. Only the field army of the Duke of Brunswick was stationed there. However, the Prussian army was marching to the Elbe to move closer to army of Hohenlohe.⁵⁴ Napoleon, unaware of his miscalculation had positioned the French army in such a way, as to force them to fight the ensuing battle on multiple fronts. Still, as the commander at the battle of Jena, he defeated the Prussians with 96,000 men while taking 5,000 casualties over the course of the fighting. The Prussians on the other hand

deployed around 50,000 troops and had 11,000 casualties with around 15,000 troops captured.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, several miles north near Austerdadt, Marshal Davout had won an amazing victory over the bulk of the Prussian forces. With just a single corps of men, roughly 30,000 men, he defeated the bulk of the Prussian army under the Duke of Brunswick, a force of 52,000 men.⁵⁶ This victory came at a high cost for Davout corps however, which lost 8,000 men or a third of its total number. Whereas the Prussian losses numbered 12,000 men and 3,000 were captured.⁵⁷ The victory at Austerdadt-Jena opened the road to Berlin, which fell without resistance on the 24 of October.⁵⁸

The occupation of Berlin is significant for several reasons, but for the purposes of this thesis, we see why the Napoleonic Wars shift towards the Spanish peninsula. Despite victories at Austerlitz and Austerdadt-Jena, there was still one major power that Napoleon had failed to defeat: Britain. The ‘decree of Berlin’ of November 21, 1806, was Napoleon’s attempt to bring Britain to its knees, much like he had done to the other major powers of Europe. The decree outlined that throughout the territories ruled by or allied to France all trade with Britain was to be ended. Furthermore, this decree would be strengthened by the decree of Milan in 1807 requiring that all British ships and cargo were to be seized by force.⁵⁹ Following the battle of Friedland and the subsequent treaty of Tilsit, Russia and Prussia joined this ‘Continental System’, meaning that Britain had no direct trade relations with the major European powers.⁶⁰ For this embargo, or ‘Continental System’ to work all of Europe would have join in its enforcement. Additionally, French troops would undoubtedly have to police the blockade. Accordingly, it is the continental system that takes the Napoleonic Wars from Central and Eastern Europe to the Iberian Peninsula because Portugal continued to allow British goods to come in through its ports.

Chapter Two: The Great Gamble

In 1807, Napoleon's empire had grown to be larger than Charlemagne's from a thousand years earlier.⁶¹ However, despite defeating the major powers of mainland Europe, Napoleon's greatest enemy, Great Britain, remained a threat. The British were not willing to allow one nation to control the balance of power in Europe. Great Britain's powerful economy allowed her to continue the fight against Napoleon, mainly by supplying Napoleon's enemies with arms or money.⁶² The problem for Napoleon remained that he could not directly attack England, as the British navy dominated the sea lanes to such an extent, that the French could not hold the British coast long enough to ensure a successful amphibious invasion along the coast of Kent or elsewhere. However, there was another way Napoleon believed he could bring Great Britain to heel. Napoleon had instituted what came to be known as the 'Continental System' to deprive the British access to the markets of Europe. For this plan to work, however, all European nations had to align their economic policies. This meant that all European ports needed to close themselves off to British trade. Following the defeat of the fourth coalition, all the nations of Europe agreed to close their ports to British trade, except for one: Portugal. They had been an ally and trade partner of Great Britain since the Middle Ages, and Great Britain was Portugal's largest trade partner, so they continued trade with the British thus forcing Napoleon to shift his focus from Central and Eastern Europe to the Iberian Peninsula.⁶³

Following the treaties of Tilsit in July 1807, Napoleon began to apply pressure on the Portuguese through a series of open threats to the Portuguese ambassador in Paris, demanding that the ports of Portugal and Brazil be closed to British shipping by September.⁶⁴ The French Ambassador to Spain was instructed to enlist the help of the Spanish First Minister, Manuel de Godoy to enforce this closure. Godoy agreed to a joint convention with the French, the terms of

which specified, that if Prince John, Regent of Portugal, declined to meet Napoleon's demands, Spain and France would have no other choice but to declare war on Portugal. Tensions were elevated, when on August 9, 1807, Portuguese shipping was embargoed at all French ports. Moreover, Marshal Junot's corps, which was stationed at Bayonne, was admitted into Spain on September 17 thus increasing the legitimacy of the threats made to the Portuguese.⁶⁵ Prince John of Portugal eventually agreed to close Portuguese ports to British shipping and declare war on Britain. The Prince Regent even agreed to seize all British residents in Portugal, but he refused to hand over their property to France.⁶⁶

This single caveat gave Napoleon his excuse to invade Portugal. While arrangements were being made between the British and Portuguese for the Portuguese fleet to leave for Brazil and for the island of Madeira to be given to the British as compensation for the lost revenue, the French prepared to attack.⁶⁷ Junot's army marched across Spain and entered Salamanca on November 12 and were in Lisbon by November 30.⁶⁸ Unfortunately for the French however, the Portuguese fleet, along with its princes had fled for the safety of Brazil. On November 29 a convoy of eight men-of-war, four frigates and twenty-four merchantmen set sail in the Atlantic, where they were met by a British naval squadron.⁶⁹ With the Portuguese fleet was not just the royal family, but the entire Portuguese treasury, the national archives, a large portion of the Portuguese nobility, the bureaucracy, along with roughly half of the coin in circulation in the country.⁷⁰ This meant that Napoleon had secured the closure of Portuguese ports for the time being but had failed in the larger picture of being able to capture both the Portuguese fleet, the royal family and the people who were most crucial to the basic functioning of the country.

If the French were going to enforce the blockade of British trade in the Iberian Peninsula, they were going to need the help from their largest single ally, Spain. However, fortunately for

the British, or unfortunately for Napoleon, the Spanish were in utter disarray in 1807-8. William and Carla Phillips explain that by the Treaty of Fontainebleau in October of 1807, Spain acknowledged a humiliating dependence on Napoleon and his expanding empire and joined the “Continental Bloc” against England.⁷¹ Spain was facing several problems internally. First was, the state of the country itself. As Owen Connelly explains, “Spain was still almost medieval. The people's ‘nationalism’ was a zealous loyalty to the crown and the Church. The Inquisition was active, if no longer burning infidels, but banning books (particularly French ones) and sending liberal officials to jail or exile.”⁷² Moreover, many of the Spanish peasantry were illiterate, and the church had taught them that the French were agents of the devil and Napoleon was his representative on earth.⁷³ Despite France being a major ally of Spain, much of the population despised them either for their liberal ideals, or for their rejection of the church. The second reason for Spanish disarray was the state of the royal family. Prince Ferdinand, the heir to the throne, publicly disapproved of the new treaty and led a poorly planned uprising to oust his father and Prime Minister Godoy from power. However, loyal troops put down the rising, and King Carlos IV denounced his son. The situation was an embarrassing incident all around, adding to the discredit of the monarchy.⁷⁴

By late 1807 and early 1808, Napoleon was beginning to realize he could not rely on his Spanish allies. He also realised the state of vulnerability of his country. While planning for the joint invasion of Portugal with the Spanish, thousands of French troops began to pour into Spain through the Pyrenees and many Spanish citizens began to realize that they could well be targets of French aggression. By mid-March of 1808 the French had roughly three full armies in Spain, totalling 180,000 troops.⁷⁵ This fear of the growing presence of French troops in the country became so extreme that on March 18, 1808, King Carlos and his wife began to plan their escape

to the Spanish colonies in South America, along with their favourite nobleman and Prime Minister, Manuel de Godoy.⁷⁶ The Spanish, with their ardent love and need for the royal family, could not simply let them flee the country. However, this resulted in the ‘Mutiny of Aranjuez’ on March 19, in which a large mob gathered outside the royal residence at Aranjuez and would not let them leave.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the crowd began to shout their approval for the recently disgraced Prince Ferdinand and demanded the removal of de Godoy. King Carlos met the demands of the mob and dismissed Godoy from office. Moreover, Carlos then ceded the crown to his son, Ferdinand. These concessions were not enough to appease the mob. The people wanted Godoy dead, and as such the mob managed to surround him. However, before the mob could kill Godoy he was rescued by General Murat and escorted safely to France.⁷⁸ Like Godoy, Carlos also fled to France under the protection of Napoleon. On April 20 Napoleon summoned Godoy, King Carlos, and Prince Ferdinand to Bayonne for a meeting during which he offered to mediate their dispute.⁷⁹ After a week of negotiations, which included threats from both parties, Prince Ferdinand agreed to restore his father Carlos to the throne. Napoleon then began to press Carlos incessantly to abdicate the throne to in favour of himself. Carlos eventually met Napoleon’s demands and relinquished the Spanish throne to him on May 7.⁸⁰ The King and Queen were sent into exile at Compiègne, while Prince Ferdinand was sent to Valency under heavy guard.⁸¹ Napoleon ultimately decided to give the throne of Spain to his older brother, Joseph, who was already serving as the King of Naples. The title of King of Naples would be given to one of Napoleon’s most loyal marshals, who was also his brother-in-law, Joachim Murat.⁸²

Napoleon believed that the Spanish people would thank him for removing the corrupt and arguably inept Bourbon dynasty from the throne of Spain. However, he was gravely mistaken. While pressuring the Spanish royal family at their negotiations at Bayonne, the Spanish people

began to revolt against the French occupation of Madrid. One could even argue that Napoleon's actions in this circumstance to be naive and arrogant. This a great example of how one's ability to read a battlefield landscape does not necessarily translate to being able to read and prepare for a political landscape. As Robin Neillands explains, Napoleon omitted two elements from his calculations: the Spanish people and the Catholic Church. As much as the people disliked Godoy, the Spanish people detested heretical foreigners far more than anything else.⁸³ The French who had occupied their country were trying to implement customs and practices that were completely foreign to them. The Spanish Church exerted a thorough going influence over the people and shared in the Pope's detestation of the secularity of the French Revolution.⁸⁴ Despite the transfer of power from the Bourbons to the Bonapartes, most Spaniards were still loyal to the Bourbon dynasty.

The fight between the French and Spanish really began on May 2, or Dos de Mayo, 1808. A riot began outside the royal palace in Madrid when a contingent of French cavalry arrived with a carriage to take away the last of the royal children, Don Francisco. Word quickly spread and shortly thereafter all of Madrid rose against the French.⁸⁵ Napoleon had anticipated that trouble might arise in Madrid and as such he had instructed Murat and his men to give the Spanish 'A whiff of Grapeshot'. Napoleon had used grapeshot on rioters during the French revolution and he knew just how effective it could be in dispersing an unruly crowd. Murat had his men stationed on the outskirts of the city, ready to intervene at a moment's notice. French infantry and cavalry were able to drive many of the rioters towards the central square of the city, the Puerta del Sol. The Spanish rioters had no firearms, just household items such as kitchen knives. Other Spanish subjects threw projectiles such as cooking pots and chamber pots from rooftops and windows at the French troops.⁸⁶ Madrid was quiet by mid-afternoon and by the next morning French troops

were rounding up what they believed to be the leaders of the riot and began to summarily execute them in the streets.⁸⁷ French atrocities on Dos de Mayo, were most notably committed by Murat's Mamelukes from Egypt. According to reports, the Mameluke troops had entered houses; and had proceeded to behead men, women, and children, rolling their heads down the stairs of their respective houses.⁸⁸ Spanish propaganda began to write repeatedly that Napoleon and the French had brought Muslims, and even worse still, Moors to persecute Christians. Rory Muir explains that a false calm followed which lasted for several weeks while the people across the country absorbed the news and some secret preparations for a rising were made. Then, in the last week of May and the first days of June, province by province the whole country rose against the French and the long bloody war began.⁸⁹ This meant that Napoleon had just turned one of his most important allies, into a versatile adversary which would prove to be a constant thorn in his side.

Here it may be good to pause to examine the nature of the general uprising in Spain as well as in Portugal. Accordingly, it is necessary to properly identify the reasons the general populace used in deciding to revolt against the French occupation, as well the impact that this had, on the duration of the Peninsular Campaign. Charles Esdaile explains that there is arguably no event in the Napoleonic Wars that is more misunderstood than the reasons for the general revolt in Spain and in Portugal.⁹⁰ Generally, the reasons given for widespread uprising have been the influence of the Church, as well the importance of the Royal family in Spain. While it is clear that these two reasons played a significant role in causing the revolt, there were other factors at work as well. Indeed, it is arguable that there is no central reason which caused the sustained general uprising in Spain as well as in Portugal. Instead, there were a collection of reasons, which when used in relation to the feelings and beliefs of the people within a certain a region

resulted in them rising up and resisting French occupation. Esdaile provides a persuasive point when he writes, “In both Spain and Portugal the risings were actually very murky affairs that reflected many of the tensions besetting the body politic.”⁹¹ Esdaile’s interpretation of the circumstances, therefore, provides a more encompassing explanation of events.

While yes, the Spanish Church undoubtedly played a large role in churning up anti-French sentiment, there were other factors which gave the uprisings in Spain and Portugal the extra encouragement necessary for a general revolt. Esdaile expands on his original point of the general uprising being widely misunderstood by writing, “there was no concerted national uprising as such were engineered by a variety of dissident groups for their own purposes.”⁹² These dissident groups were most likely led by people seeking public office, radicals who were eager to receive some sort of promotion, conservative clerics who were concerned about the Bourbons’ anti-clerical shift, as well as members of the nobility opposed to the advance of royal authority.⁹³ As is highlighted by Esdaile, there were localised reasons for the uprising across Spain and Portugal but the leadership of the uprising would eventually be taken over by the establishment. Rory Muir explains that once established authorities agreed to take the lead against the French, the uprisings lost most of their revolutionary overtones.⁹⁴ From this example we may begin to understand that while there was a wide array of reasons for the people across Spain and Portugal to rise in rebellion, eventually the establishment would take the lead. The wide array of reasons to become involved in the general uprising meant that a great deal of the population would not only resist French occupation, but they were willing to sacrifice their lives for their beliefs. These additional factors, in combination with the adoration for the royal family and staunch commitment to the Spanish Catholic Church provide a more comprehensive explanation for the reasons of the widespread revolt in the Iberian Peninsula.

All the while, the British had been waging a lonely war against Napoleon through 1807-8. They were the only major European power to still be at War with the French. The British government, having learned of Napoleon's plans to invade their allies in Portugal, dispatched an army of 8,000 men under the command of Sir John Moore to Gibraltar in late Spring 1808 to support their Portuguese allies, if necessary.⁹⁵ Napoleon's blunder in the Iberian Peninsula had given the British exactly what they needed -an ally- at a time when they needed it most. Muir describes the timing of the events, as he writes, "Yet within a year Napoleon's blunder in Spain had rescued Britain from her isolation and provided her with an alliance which was to last until the end of the war."⁹⁶ Ever since the defeat of the Third and Fourth coalition Great Britain was looking for an ally, Napoleon, of all people was to deliver them this gift. When Napoleon overthrew the Spanish royal family, Spain was left without any form of central government. In response to this, following uprisings across the country, provincial governments or 'Juntas' were set up across Spain. These Juntas performed crucial duties following the revolt such as raising troops, seizing arsenals, and issuing arms to any Spanish citizen willing to fight against the French invader. Effectively, these Juntas quickly transformed "every hilltop into an observation post, every village a nest of resistance."⁹⁷ With the formation of the Juntas, Spanish subjects began to fight back against their French adversary. French governors in the provincial capitals of Cadiz and Badajoz were murdered, in the countryside French couriers were ambushed, and small patrols were massacred to the last man. These small bands of peasants or 'guerrilleros' were to give their name to a new style of fighting, striking quickly against French patrols and couriers and then melting back into the countryside.⁹⁸ The French no longer enjoyed the freedom of movement that they had previously. They could now only move from location to location in strength of numbers and arms.

The nature of the revolt throughout Spain gave the British government under the duke of Portland great enthusiasm, enough so that they felt it necessary to intervene in the Iberian Peninsula with ground forces. The main reason was that the Spanish had not necessarily been defeated, they were merely occupied. As Neillands explains, their King had left them, their government was useless, their armies had not yet assembled, yet the whole country was up in arms.⁹⁹ The British, realizing that they could turn an old enemy into a new crucial ally, made formal peace with the Juntas and proposed an alliance. In June 1808 therefore, the British government decided to send an expeditionary force to the Peninsula under the command of Sir Arthur Wellesley. Wellesley had earned his reputation primarily in India, where he spent 8 years. While in India, Wellesley had learned to command an army and how to campaign in foreign or hostile territory. Perhaps most importantly of all, Wellesley time in India had taught him the importance the maintaining good relations with the local population. Muir provides some insight into Wellesley's character prior to his deployment into the peninsula. Muir explains that Wellesley had demonstrated the intelligence and breadth to plan a campaign that was flexible enough to not be broken by any unforeseen circumstances. Moreover, he had developed the patience to deal with the difficulties brought about by bad weather and fickle allies. As we shall see, these traits were put to good use during Wellesley's time in the peninsula.¹⁰⁰ This would not just be a small-scale landing force, but a large professional force under the command of a man who had proven himself in India.

Consequently, the British expeditionary force set sail from Cork with 9,000 fighting men.¹⁰¹ Wellesley's force was only the tip of the spear which some Ministers from the Portland government wished to deploy in Spain and Portugal. In addition to Wellesley's 11,000 men there would also be 5,000 men under general Brent Spencer's command, 10,000 men under Sir John

Moore and another 10,000 which were undergoing preparations in England. This total force of 35,000 men would be the largest British army to take the field to this point in the Napoleonic Wars. However, Wellesley had only been promoted to Lieutenant-General on April 25, 1808, which meant he lacked the seniority to be the overall commander of British forces from the outset of the conflict.¹⁰² The British government eventually decided on Sir Hew Dalrymple, most likely the best-informed senior officer on the affairs of Spain in the British army.¹⁰³ Dalrymple was appointed to ensure that there was a senior officer in charge of the expeditionary forces, although he would not necessarily be directly involved with strategic decisions. As Rory Muir explains, “Dalrymple was appointed only 'for the present' and the cabinet imagined that he would play more of a supervisory than an executive role.”¹⁰⁴

Meanwhile in the Iberian Peninsula, the French general Henri Loison, in reprisal for attacks made against his men, massacred the entire population of the ancient Portuguese city of Evora. Following this appalling action, the Portuguese population rose in arms against French occupation. There were few British commanders at the time better suited for the task at hand in the Iberian Peninsula than Wellesley. By the time of the Iberian campaign, he had gained crucial experience from the Indian and Copenhagen campaigns of which he was apart. Wellesley knew how to command from the ground up, about the importance of logistics and of campaigning in hostile territory. Moreover, he knew his way around not only aristocratic court rooms, he was also a Member of Parliament. Wellesley was on familiar terms with several government ministers, but more importantly he understood that he needed to maintain support for his campaign at home.¹⁰⁵ Wellesley sailed ahead of the fleet and landed at Corunna on July 20, where he was given some vital news. Spanish authorities there informed him that Junot had around 15,000 troops in Portugal and that there were 10,000 Portuguese troops at Oporto.¹⁰⁶

Wellesley completed his landings at Mondego Bay by August 9 with a force of around 14,000 men.¹⁰⁷ The French, having heard of these landings advanced to meet the British and Portuguese forces near Roliça. There was a small battle between the two sides. The British heavily outnumbered the French forces and were able to earn a victory. The day following the fighting at Roliça, the British maneuvered their forces to Vimeiro to cover the disembarkation of several brigades that had just arrived from England.¹⁰⁸

Junot, realising that he needed to break the British beachhead before they had the strength to challenge him, decided to march out from Lisbon with a force of 13,500 troops while leaving 6,000 troops in Lisbon to maintain his grip on the city. Junot's decision not to bring his full force with him was, in hindsight, an error, as the combined British and Portuguese forces now numbered somewhere around 20,000 troops.¹⁰⁹ The French attacked the British at Vimeiro on the morning of August 21. For the most part, the French attacks were not properly coordinated leaving them largely ineffective. Due to this, by noon the French reinforcements were exhausted, and Wellesley was on the verge of ordering a general advance, which would have forced the French to retreat and to suffer a complete rout. However, fortunately for the French, Sir Harry Burrard intervened fearing that a general advance would leave the British army vulnerable to the powerful French cavalry. As Muir explains, Vimeiro should have decided the campaign. Even without pursuit, the French had been soundly defeated losing about 2,000 troops to the 720 losses of the British and Portuguese forces.¹¹⁰ On the morning following Vimeiro, Dalrymple arrived to take overall command of the expedition. Several hours after his arrival, the French sent a peace delegation led by General Kellermann to negotiate terms of surrender. It is necessary to note that Wellesley had limited say and was not in charge of the British delegation during these peace negotiations, Dalrymple was. Terms were agreed upon which allowed the French forces to

return to France with their arms via British ships and upon landing back in France, would be free to re-commence military operations. In return the British would receive control of Portugal. These terms were finalized in the convention of Cintra which was signed by both parties on August 30, 1808.¹¹¹ Considering the outcome of Vimeiro, these were unfavourable terms to agree to, especially when considering the arrival of Sir John Moore's corps off the coast of Portugal, which had swung the balance of power in favour of British and Portuguese forces. As Muir highlights, this in many respects reflects the pessimistic outlook that Dalrymple and Burrard had for the campaign.¹¹² However, for Wellesley, by September of 1808, he was the most prominent and successful young general in the British army other than his newly arrived colleague, Sir John Moore.¹¹³

When news of the Convention of Cintra broke in England, it was not met with the slightest bit of enthusiasm. According to Muir, "the King could hardly bring himself to believe that any British officers could ... think of agreeing to such a convention."¹¹⁴ The terms seemed so unbelievable that the Secretary of War, Lord Castlereagh, mentioned in a note to his half-brother Charles Stewart, that he believed the news to be a forgery, especially considering the victories at Roliça and Vimeiro.¹¹⁵ There was widespread condemnation for the man who was seen to be behind the convention, Dalrymple. When the Foreign Secretary George Canning, learned of the news, he said the convention was a "disgrace and a disaster".¹¹⁶ The public resentment towards the convention in combination with the dissatisfaction inside the British cabinet and Parliament led for an inquiry to be set up. This meant that Wellesley and Dalrymple were forced to return to London to defend their honour. The Court of Inquiry opened its proceedings on Monday November 14, 1808, and began to meet four times a week beginning November 21.¹¹⁷ Eventually, a final report was released on December 22 which exonerated Wellesley and

ultimately praised his military operations as highly honorable and successful, which was expected from a distinguished General at the head of a British army.¹¹⁸ But while Wellesley was forced to defend his honour, Napoleon had made significant advances in Spain. In a matter of weeks in November, Napoleon had won several crucial victories over the Spanish and was able to capture Madrid later on December 4.¹¹⁹ In response Moore, now the commander of British forces in Spain, decided to begin to move towards the coast and withdraw at the port of Corunna.

While the French were pursuing the British, Napoleon, believing the job was all but done, decided to leave Spain on New Year's Day, 1809.¹²⁰ However, there were other reasons for Napoleon's departure from Spain. While chasing the British, Napoleon received reports of a plot emerging against him in Paris. Furthermore, there were reports that Austria was preparing to mobilize its forces to renew military action against the French.¹²¹ Meanwhile, British troops continued their retreat to the coast, arriving at Corunna on January 9. Several days later, the French arrived under the command of Marshal Soult. He decided to let his soldiers rest before attacking Corunna on the 16 of January. The British were able to hold off the wide flanking manoeuvres attempted by the French and were eventually able to evacuate their forces by the night of January 18.¹²² However, unfortunately for Moore as commander of the British forces, he was not able to board the transports back to England and was killed in the fighting.¹²³ Napoleon had believed that the war in the Iberian Peninsula was all but over, having driven the British into the sea, defeated a great number of the Spanish forces, and capturing Madrid. However, several months after the British retreat from Corunna, another British army would arrive in the peninsula with Sir Arthur Wellesley at its head.

At the beginning of 1809, the allied prospects in the Iberian Peninsula seemed bleak. The Spanish had been dispersed and their professional forces had largely been defeated by the

French. However, Wellesley set sail on April 15 from Portsmouth to return to the Iberian Peninsula.¹²⁴ Sir Arthur arrived in Lisbon on April 22 and by the end of April he was in command of an army of 27,000 British and German troops. It should be noted that Sir John Moore had the very best men under his command at Corunna, whereas Wellesley's army was made up of many second battalions and many units who were sick or not at full strength.¹²⁵ Fortunately for Wellesley and the British however, the reports of a French advance that had given him some cause for concern prior to sailing from Portsmouth were not as dire as had been initially reported. As Muir explains, "In fact, the French armies in Spain had lost momentum, bogged down by logistical problems and the continuing insurrection across much of the country."¹²⁶ With the French being limited in their capacity to maintain military operations, Wellesley was left free to decide where his best opportunity lay. He determined that it would be best to first drive Soult out of Oporto and in doing so liberate Portugal's second largest city as well as free the northern provinces of the country. Wellington arrived at Oporto in late April with somewhere around 22,000 troops, while the French under Soult had around 20,000 men.¹²⁷ The Battle was not a large, pitched engagement, the opposite of so many of the battles over the course of the Napoleonic Wars. Rather, it was a single strategic decision which won the British the battle. On May 12 Wellesley ordered a small number of troops across the river Douro to establish a beachhead. The French were unable to break this beachhead despite repeated attempts thus forcing Soult to order his troops to abandon Oporto altogether.¹²⁸ During the retreat, Soult lost roughly a quarter of his men but was able to escape with much of his artillery and baggage train.¹²⁹

Initially, Wellesley was only authorized to undertake military operations in Portugal, but upon news of his success, in combination with news that the Austrians had renewed hostilities

with the French having reached London, cabinet quickly authorized Wellesley to extend military operations into Spain along those provinces immediately adjacent to the Portuguese frontier.¹³⁰ Due to the scattered pockets of resistance throughout Spain, the French were forced to maintain substantial garrisons throughout Spain, which meant the border along the Portuguese border was not heavily guarded. Seeking to take advantage of the situation, Wellesley, along with his Spanish allies, began to move towards Madrid. King Joseph was forced to meet the allied threat of 50,000 men to Madrid along with Marshal Victor, with an army of around 46,000 men.¹³¹ The two armies met near the Spanish town of Talavera on July 27. Some fighting throughout the evening caused several Spanish battalions to abandon their positions and almost resulted in the French being able to capture the key hill, 'the Medellin', had it not been for the quick response from British general Rowland Hill.¹³² On the morning of the 28 the French, believing the Medellin to be a strategically important though vulnerable position, massed 40,000 troops to the 20,000 British that were stationed there. Wellesley ordered his men to lie down on the hill, as to avoid the fire from French artillery, which proved to be a wise decision as the French cannonballs either skipped overhead or were shot directly into the hill.¹³³ The hill was attacked three times that day, none of the French assaults were successful. The French then attempted to simultaneously attack the British on the right flank. However, this attack was also unsuccessful. Eventually, all fighting ceased by 6 o'clock that evening. The result was a British victory, with the French losing more than 7,000 men, while the British suffered around 5,000 killed or wounded.¹³⁴

Following the battle, the British were unable to savour their victory however, as Wellesley began to receive reports that a French army of 25,000 under the command of Marshal Soult was threatening to cut off his escape route to Portugal.¹³⁵ This meant that Wellesley was

forced to retreat to Portugal, or risk being surrounded. The British returned to Lisbon in the late summer and therefore began to construct lines of forts and defensive positions which would come to be known as the Lines of Torres Vedras. Wellesley and the British would make this their base until they were able to go back on the offensive.¹³⁶ However, for Wellesley, the outcome of the summer campaign of 1809, more specifically of Talavera, would have a lasting effect on his career. On August 26 it was announced that he had been raised to the peerage with the title Viscount Wellington of Talavera and Wellington.¹³⁷ For Lord Wellington, the Iberian campaign marked a point of departure, as it resulted in him being named overall commander and chief of allied forces in the theatre, as well as being elevated to the peerage. For Napoleon on the other hand, Spain was becoming a drain on his energy, money, troops, and reputation. By the autumn of 1809, there were some 350,000 French troops either in Spain or ready to enter Spain from France.¹³⁸ The problem for Napoleon and the French was a concentration of forces was impossible because they were forced to hold strategic positions to keep lines of communication and supply open. As a result, the French had no choice but to pour a substantial force into the country which would be a strain on the French treasury. Moreover, the way in which Napoleon conducted himself during the Bayonne affair permanently tarnished how some of his closest supporters viewed him. As Murat's aide de camp wrote of the situation, "the conduct of Napoleon in this scandalous affair was unworthy of a great man. To offer himself as mediator between a father and a son to draw them into a trap and then plunder them both – this was an odious atrocity."¹³⁹ As we shall see, Napoleon's decision to turn on one of his most important allies in such a fashion would be a decision that would come back to damage the emperor in ways that he could not yet imagine.

Chapter Three: The Thorn and the Rose

Beginning in 1810, the situation in the Iberian Peninsula began to change, owing in part to the fact the conflict had progressed since 1808, but also because of the situation in Central and Eastern Europe. The French had controlled the majority of Spain and parts of Portugal for the duration of the conflict, yet pockets of stubborn resistance remained from the British in Portugal, and some Spanish regular troops and guerilla bands scattered throughout Spain. The urgency to stabilize the situation and ultimately achieve complete victory in Spain was becoming more apparent as Napoleon and the French were now having to worry about rumblings in Central and Eastern Europe. In 1809, Napoleon and the French had defeated the resurgent Austrians at Wagram, but this victory only brought about a fragile peace in central Europe.¹⁴⁰ Napoleon recognized that he would need to achieve a victory in the Iberian Peninsula in a timely fashion or be forced to wage war on multiple fronts. Therefore, he determined that the only way to control the situation in Spain and Portugal was to eliminate the British. To do this, Napoleon appointed one of his most capable and trusted marshals, Marshal André Masséna. As the conflict in the Iberian Peninsula continued on, we see the steady rise of the Duke of Wellington and the beginning of the fall of Napoleon Bonaparte, a process that would take until 1814 to complete.

The situation in central Europe had changed significantly. This was due to Napoleon's divorce from the Empress Josephine and his decision to marry the Archduchess of Austria, Marie-Louise who was just 18 years old.¹⁴¹ Napoleon hoped that if he were to take a bride of imperial lineage, who could provide him with an heir to the French throne, then perhaps he could create a kind of international alliance, as had been the case in the past with similar marriages.¹⁴² However, as Robin Neillands explains, the emperor was wrong to assume that such a marriage would lead to a grounded alliance with the Austrians. Neillands expands on this point as he

writes, “By the early decades of the nineteenth century, such marriages made little or no difference to national interests or political ambitions.”¹⁴³ From Neillands explanation we can begin to understand how Napoleon may have misunderstood that such marriages still acted as a kind of alliance as it once had. Moreover, during his initial pursuit of a new bride, Napoleon sought the hand of Emperor Alexander’s sister. This offer was rebuked primarily because of the age difference between the two, Napoleon being 41 years old and the emperor’s sister being only 16 at the time. However, it is believed that the Russian royal family wanted no connection to Napoleon and moreover, that Alexander was now seeking to end the alliance between himself and Napoleon as cutting of trade with England was having serious economic repercussions in Russia.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the treaty of Tilsit brought shame to the Russians, and the time was coming to regain their honour.

As the British retreated into Portugal in the latter part of 1809, they began to prepare for another French invasion of the country. The French understood that if they were going to achieve victory in the Iberian Peninsula, they would have to defeat the British. The British played both a land and sea role, as their navy continued to support its own troops in Portugal and their allies in Spain. The French decided that a sizable force would be necessary to uproot the British from Portugal. As such, Napoleon ordered his minister of war, General Henri Clarke, to prepare roughly 100,000 reinforcements for the conflict in Spain. Eventually, the total number of reinforcements being sent into the Iberian Peninsula would rise to around 140,000 troops.¹⁴⁵ Initially, Napoleon planned to lead these reinforcements himself, but his divorce from Josephine and his marriage to Marie-Louise shortly thereafter meant that he was not able to lead in person. Interestingly, Napoleon did not decide to name an overall commander for his armies in Spain, despite their numbering roughly around 300,000 troops.¹⁴⁶

This decision, in combination with the struggle to maintain lines of communication effectively, meant that local commanders oversaw the French forces. However, Napoleon himself made a point of supervising the operations throughout the Iberian Peninsula. These oversights while Napoleon was in France were reasonable, so long as his role remained a supervisory one. However, as Muir notes, “But when he was tempted to interfere in operational details his orders were so outdated that they were counterproductive or irrelevant.”¹⁴⁷ However, Napoleon was prepared to give command of the army of Portugal to one of his marshals. On April 17, 1810, Napoleon ultimately decided to give command of the Army of Portugal to one of his most trusted and capable marshals, André Masséna.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, Napoleon increased the size of the Army of Portugal from roughly 20,000 men, to a force numbering between 60,000¹⁴⁹ to 86,000.¹⁵⁰ In comparison, the combined British and Portuguese forces numbered somewhere in the realm of 55,000 to 60,000 troops.¹⁵¹ From these numbers we can see that despite the French having tens of thousands more troops in the Iberian Peninsula than the allies, they were unable to harness the strength of their numbers due to the situation throughout Spain and Portugal.

There were two passageways into Portugal from Spain. First was the north entry through the Almeida on the Portuguese side and Ciudad Rodrigo on the Spanish side. In the south, the entryway into Portugal was guarded by the Portuguese city of Elvas and the Spanish city of Badajoz.¹⁵² Regardless of the route which the French chose, they would be forced to lay siege to at least two cities to gain access to the interior of Portugal. The French decided on the northern passage into Portugal and therefore they laid siege to Ciudad Rodrigo. All the while, Masséna instructed Marshal Soult to pressure the southern entrance into Portugal as well.¹⁵³ The Army of Portugal under Marshal Masséna began the siege of Ciudad Rodrigo in late April of 1810.¹⁵⁴

However, bombardment on the city did not begin until June 24.¹⁵⁵ The town was able to hold out for several weeks and eventually surrendered on July 10.¹⁵⁶

It would take some time for the French to collect themselves and to move into Portugal as they did not enter the country until July 21.¹⁵⁷ Despite the cities of Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida being close to one another, the French did not establish the lines of siege at the Portuguese fortress until August 15. However, fortunately for the French shortly after beginning their bombardment of the fortress on August 26, a French cannonball struck the main gun powder magazine causing it to explode. This explosion left the garrison with limited ammunition and supplies within the city, which effectively ended the siege the following day.¹⁵⁸ However, following this quick success, the French were not able to quickly mobilize their forces to continue into the heart of Portugal. As Huw Davies explains, it would take Masséna another three weeks before his Army of Portugal could resume their march.¹⁵⁹ This inability to quickly mobilize the troops can partly be attributed to the presence of a distraction for Masséna. The Marshal had decided to bring along his 20-year-old mistress and, as such, Masséna was distracted. As Owen Connolly writes, Masséna was less interested in fighting than finding palaces for himself and his 20-year-old mistress.¹⁶⁰ From Connolly's example we may begin to have a more comprehensive understanding of the lack of urgency in the Army of Portugal. Its commander was not fully focused and committed to the task he had been given to complete, which resulted in the French making a very slow entry into Portugal giving the allies crucial extra time to prepare for their arrival.

Before the French entered Portugal, they were already moving slowly, which was only exacerbated by a policy that Wellington had implemented. He instituted a scorched earth policy instructing Portuguese civilians and troops, as well as British forces, to destroy anything that

they could not carry.¹⁶¹ This was particularly important as the French relied primarily on foraging for their supplies, as their supply lines were unreliable due to the presence of Spanish and Portuguese guerillas. Despite the French army moving slowly, Wellington sought to slow their advance even further. He decided to do this by forming up his army along an eight-mile-long ridgeway known as the Serro de Buçaco.¹⁶² The French had around 47,000 troops to Wellington's 33,000 Anglo-Portuguese force.¹⁶³ The French attacked up the steep slopes on September 27, but despite their numerical advantage, they were unable to break through the British and Portuguese lines. The British suffered only around 1,250 casualties in comparison to the 4,500 of the French.¹⁶⁴ Fortunately for the French, they had discovered an unguarded passage around the north side of the ridge and upon exploiting this, Wellington was forced to retreat.¹⁶⁵ This was a kind of pyrrhic victory for the French, as they were able to force the British back, but they sustained substantially more casualties than the allies. Moreover, the battle gave the Portuguese infantry a chance to showcase their abilities, which earned the admiration of many British officers, including Wellington.¹⁶⁶

Wellington knew that the French would have a difficult time in defeating the Anglo-Portuguese forces so long as they maintained a defensive posture, and if they used the terrain to their advantage. Wellington decided to combine these two in the form of the Lines of Torres Vedras. Wellington began planning the defence of the Lines of Torres Vedras in October 1809, almost a year before the French invasion.¹⁶⁷ The main crux of his plan relied on three lines of fortified defences including earthworks, redoubts and forts beginning from the Atlantic Ocean and going all the way to the Tagus River.¹⁶⁸ The terrain surrounding Lisbon was hilly and difficult to pass even without fortifications. The lines themselves were rather extensive pieces of work, as the first line of defences was 29 miles long and the second was 22 miles long. The lines

were designed to be defended by roughly 18,000 Portuguese militia however, the lines would be manned by many more than that.¹⁶⁹ With Wellington arriving with his troops at the beginning of October, the combined Anglo-Portuguese force occupying the lines rose to around 57,000 troops.¹⁷⁰ In comparison, the French arrived at the lines of Torres Vedras with only around 40,000 troops as Masséna's forces were depleted by disease, desertion, battlefield casualties and the need to man the fortresses which they had captured on route to Portugal.¹⁷¹ Due to the quality of defences and the numbers which occupied them, the French were forced to halt their advance on October 11 and began to skirmish with the defenders in the hopes of finding a soft spot in the defences. Upon Masséna hearing of such extensive defences, he was furious at the Portuguese officers serving with him for not informing him of the possibility of such defences surrounding Lisbon.¹⁷² The two sides then began a stalemate as the French were unable to mount an assault and the allied forces were not willing to sally forth and abandon their advantageous positions.

Wellington thought that an assault was unnecessary, as he believed the French would be forced to retreat. Wellington's priority was the preservation of the strength of the allied forces. And he was right to assume that the French would eventually retreat. As Rory Muir explains, shortly after arriving at the line of Torres Vedras, spirits within the French camp began to sink quickly. It is necessary to remember that the French arrived just before the beginning of winter and not having the time or the resources to construct proper lodgings, the French soldiers and their equipment would be exposed to the elements. Moreover, Wellington's scorched earth policy had left very little food for the French to scavenge in the surrounding landscape.¹⁷³ Shortly after arriving the hunger and rain made life miserable for the French. In a report sent from Masséna to Napoleon, he explained that he had lost a great number of troops. Upon entering Portugal, he explains that roughly 7,000 to 8,000 men had either been killed, wounded,

or were missing.¹⁷⁴ As such, Masséna informed the emperor that he did not have a force strong enough to launch an assault that would be capable of capturing Lisbon. Masséna was forced to withdraw after around a month, to winter in a more suitable spot with more food. Masséna was aware that he could not retreat, as this would bolster the confidence of the allied forces and lower the morale of his own troops. Months dragged on without any military action and eventually on March 5, 1811, Masséna was forced to withdraw his army to Spain.¹⁷⁵ The fruitless campaign is believed to have cost him as many as 25,000 troops. Moreover, he was forced to leave behind a significant amount of baggage.¹⁷⁶ The lines of Torres Vedras proved to be more deadly than any pitched battle over the course of the Peninsular Wars. Apart from a brief raid in 1812, the French were never again to return to Portugal as they now only controlled the fortress of Almeida.

The lines of Torres Vedras marks a shift in the Peninsular War as it can be viewed as the end of Wellington's defensive phase of the war. Following the French retreat from Portugal, we see Wellington and the allied forces go on the offensive. The defensive strategy and subsequent success against the French would ensure that the Iberian Peninsula would remain as the seat of British land operations against Napoleon.¹⁷⁷ However, Wellington now needed to recapture the frontier fortresses lost in the past year to prevent another French invasion of Portugal. Therefore, Wellington pinpointed the three frontier fortresses of Ciudad Rodrigo, Almeida, and Badajoz as the focal points of his frontier campaign of 1811. Wellington constantly harassed Masséna and the French as they limped out of Portugal. The British began to besiege the fortress of Almeida in the early Spring of 1811, but Marshal Masséna was unwilling to simply let the British recapture the crucial frontier fortress. Initial skirmishes between the two sides began on May 3 around the village of Fuentes de Oñoro.¹⁷⁸ The two sides formed up for a pitched battle on May 5. The French had just over 48,000 troops in comparison to the 37,000 British-Portuguese troops.

Despite being outnumbered, the allied forces were able to repel the French forces, suffering 1,789 casualties to the 2,850 French casualties.¹⁷⁹ This battle was significant in that it resulted in the eventual capture of the crucial frontier fortress of Almeida, but perhaps more importantly it resulted in Marshal Masséna being dismissed from the command of the Army of Portugal. Masséna was to be replaced by Marshal Auguste-Frédéric Marmont on May 7.¹⁸⁰

Having secured the northern passage into Portugal, Wellington quickly shifted his focus to securing the southern path into Portugal at Badajoz. He arrived there to take over command from General William Beresford who was unable to capture the crucial fortress from the French. However, after multiple attempts, the British were unable to capture the frontier fortress of Badajoz.¹⁸¹ The year of 1811 ended with few other actions taking place in the Iberian Peninsula. This fact was in part due to British preparations of offensive operations and to Napoleon's decision to begin to withdraw troops for the invasion of Russia in 1812. By January of 1812, Napoleon had ordered the withdrawal of some of his best troops from Spain, which included his imperial guard and his elite Polish regiments, which amounted to around 27,000 troops.¹⁸² As a result of combat operations being renewed on the eastern front, French troop numbers in Spain would eventually plummet from 354,000 in July of 1811, to 262,000 in October of 1812.¹⁸³ The end of 1811 marked a turning point in the Peninsular War. From this point on, the allies would begin to become more aggressive in their military actions. Moreover, the end of the year marked a clear point of departure when the momentum in the theatre of war began to clearly shift from the French to the allied forces.

The allies had learned from their failed siege attempts in the latter half of 1811 and now understood the importance of the ability to strike swiftly and hard. To this end, Wellington decided on besieging the Fortress of Ciudad Rodrigo in early January, which meant there were

still harsh winter conditions through which to fight. This abnormal approach caught the French by surprise, which had the added benefit of them being unable to call for reinforcements from nearby garrisons or armies.¹⁸⁴ The siege began on January 8 and the city was stormed and captured by January 19.¹⁸⁵ The siege resulted in roughly 500 casualties for the allies.¹⁸⁶ However, there was added significance to the capture of this fortress, as the Spanish regency awarded Wellington the title of Duque de Ciudad Rodrigo, which resulted in his advancing in the British peerage to an earldom on February 18, 1812.¹⁸⁷ Wellington's success in the Peninsula was giving him the opportunity to continue to move up the social and military hierarchy. However, he was not going to stop and bask in his newfound title and glory as he quickly collected himself and continued to soldier on as there were challenges for him to overcome.

The fortress of Badajoz which had been able to repulse the allied siege in 1811 offered Wellington his greatest offensive challenge yet. He again knew that if he was going to be successful, the attack would need to be swift and decisive, like the siege of Ciudad Rodrigo. The British arrived on March 16 and quickly outlined their plan for assault, which was to take place on Easter Sunday, April 6.¹⁸⁸ This assault would cost the allies roughly 4,000 troops and following the capture of the city, soldiers began to plunder the city. During this plundering, roughly another 1,000 soldiers were injured.¹⁸⁹ Eventually, Wellington was forced to erect a gallows to punish the insubordinate troops which all but ended the looting on April 8.¹⁹⁰ With the frontier fortresses now in their possession, the allied forces now controlled the northern and southern entryways from Portugal into Spain. This meant that Wellington could now shift his focus from the frontier fortresses to the interior of Spain.

It is important to remember that the British forces in the Peninsula remain outnumbered and therefore had to remain on alert. Despite having just captured and secured the northern

fortresses of Almeida and Ciudad Rodrigo, they were again under threat from the French. Wellington decided to march north to meet that threat. He left 14,000 troops under the command of General Rowland Hill to defend the southern flank while travelling north with an army of around 50,000 men.¹⁹¹ As the British moved north to engage the French threat, Marshal Marmont decided to withdraw towards the fortified city of Salamanca. The French did not occupy the city itself, but instead occupied crucial forts surrounding the city which created some trouble for the allied forces. Wellington entered Salamanca on June 17, but the fortresses did not surrender until June 27.¹⁹² However, the French forces under Marmont still lingered nearby, as Marmont was unwilling to simply let the allied forces take such a crucial city without a fight.

Marmont and Wellington manoeuvred their forces in the coming weeks until both commanders felt confident enough to commit to a pitched battle. Eventually, the French were able to manoeuvre themselves into a position which would threaten the British line of retreat. The two forces eventually met just outside Salamanca on July 22, the British with around 46,000 men and the French with around 50,000 men.¹⁹³ While Wellington was having lunch, he noticed a gap developing in the French line and he ordered his men to break a hole in the French line. During the battle, the leader of the French forces, Marshal Marmont was struck and injured which ultimately hampered the French command structure and left them for a time without a commander. This development proved crucial, and the French were left in state of disorder without a proper command structure.¹⁹⁴ The outcome of the battle was a decisive British victory. The British were able to rout the French army and cause roughly 14,000 casualties, including 7,000 prisoners in comparison to 5,000 casualties of their own.¹⁹⁵ Salamanca was the greatest French defeat in open battle since the revolutionary wars of 1799.¹⁹⁶ As well, it was the greatest triumph that Wellington had achieved to date. The allied victory at Salamanca meant the path to

Madrid lay wide open and solidified the confidence of allied commanders in the Iberian Peninsula.

Wellington and his forces pursued the French to the city of Valladolid and arrived in the city on July 30. However, with his lines and communication and supplies running thin, he decided to shift focus south towards Madrid.¹⁹⁷ Upon their march to Madrid, the British forces began to see something they had yet to encounter in the Peninsula; smiles on the faces of the Spanish.¹⁹⁸ As the British marched towards Madrid, King Joseph fled south to Toledo. The British arrived in Madrid on August 12 and the following day forced the surrender of the 1,200-man garrison which Joseph had left behind to hold the Retiro forts above the city.¹⁹⁹

Wellington's decision left the British in a precarious position, as they were now in between two French armies: Joseph's army of the centre stationed at Toledo, and the Army of Portugal now under the command of General Bertrand Clauzel. Wellington knew he could defeat these armies separately, but they would pose a problem to him if they were able to unify. As such, Wellington decided to focus his attention on the Army of Portugal which was stationed outside Valladolid. Wellington left three divisions under the command of General Rowland Hill to hold the Spanish capital while taking the rest of his army north to face the army of Portugal.²⁰⁰

The allied forces left Madrid on September 1. Upon hearing the news of the allied advance, Clauzel fell back towards the fortified city of Burgos. The British began to lay siege to it on September 19, but the French artillery outpowered the British guns which made the siege much more difficult than the sieges had been at Ciudad Rodrigo or at Badajoz.²⁰¹ Over the course of a month, the British made little progress and were only able to capture the outer wall of the fortress. With winter approaching and morale beginning to drop, the allied forces lifted the siege on October 19 and eventually withdrew altogether on October 21.²⁰² While Wellington was

retreating in the north, the situation in the south was also becoming precarious. The French were preparing for an assault on Madrid which forced the allies to consolidate their forces. On October 30, Hill and his men destroyed the stores in the forts surrounding Madrid and left the city for the French to occupy once again.²⁰³ The allied forces regrouped just outside Salamanca, but they were facing a far superior opponent. The French combined armies had around 90,000 troops in comparison to the less than 70,000 troops of the allies.²⁰⁴ The French were able to turn Wellington's flank which compromised the defensive position that he chose to occupy, and again forced the allies to retreat to Ciudad Rodrigo. The allied forces arrived on November 19 and prepared to winter there. The offensive campaign of 1812 had begun with great promise with victory after victory but the inability to capture Burgos forced the allies to retreat. Consequently, they ended up where they had begun the year, along the Portuguese-Spanish frontier.

Still, Wellington, despite being vastly outnumbered, had managed to achieve great success in 1812. The biggest advantage gained over the campaign of 1812 was not territorial, but psychological. Despite having to retreat to Portugal, the morale of the troops was lifted by the reports of Napoleon's defeat in Russia.²⁰⁵ This defeat meant at the very least that there would be no reinforcements coming over the Pyrenees, as the French would now be forced to fight a war on two fronts. In fact, it meant that Napoleon would be forced to pull yet another 15,000 troops from Spain.²⁰⁶ This decision now left the French with roughly just 200,000 troops in Spain at the beginning of 1813.²⁰⁷ The French position was becoming increasingly precarious, therefore as they were now forced to hold Spain with significantly fewer troops than the previous year. Additionally, it would be against an increasing number of guerilla forces, who had been emboldened by the success of the allies.²⁰⁸

The allied army broke camp on May 22 and advanced on Salamanca. They made good progress and were pressing the French aggressively. King Joseph, who had moved his capital from Madrid to Valladolid, was forced to retreat to Palencia. Joseph and the French were again forced to retreat from there on June 7 towards Burgos. However, Burgos was not as formidable as it once was as the damage from the siege in 1812 had not yet been repaired. Accordingly, the French destroyed the fortress on June 12 and continued to retreat towards Vitoria.²⁰⁹ Eventually the two sides met just outside the town of Vitoria on June 21.²¹⁰ The French army numbered around 57,000 troops in comparison to 75,000 of the allies.²¹¹ The problems of central command for the French became evident during this battle as King Joseph let the commanders of the different Corps select their positions of battle. This lack of central strategy left gaps between the formations about which the British quickly took advantage of.²¹² The result of the battle was a resounding allied victory; however, casualties were surprisingly light for a battle of this size which was due to the French flank being exposed, forcing the bulk of the army into a disorganized retreat.²¹³ The battle cost the allies roughly 5,200 casualties and the French roughly 8,000.²¹⁴ The allied forces were unable to encircle the French forces as Wellington had hoped, however. This was due to the presence of a substantial wagon train which allied troops plundered following the battle. The loot train contained roughly 5 million francs which Wellington hoped to use to pay for his campaign.²¹⁵

The impact of Vitoria was immense as it all but eradicated French control over northern Spain. Effectively, it marked the end of the Bonaparte kingdom of Spain. The battle also resulted in Wellington being elevated to the rank of Field Marshal.²¹⁶ Moreover, in the aftermath of Vitoria comparisons were being made between Wellington and Napoleon for their potential as military commanders.²¹⁷ Furthermore, Wellington's victory at Vitoria sent shockwaves across

Europe. The allied victory gave the Austrians, who were already emboldened by Napoleon's defeat in Russia, the confidence to renew hostilities against the French.²¹⁸ Consequently, Wellington sought to continue to press his advantage and mobilized his forces to advance on the French border along the Pyrenees mountains. He attempted take the city of San Sebastian on July 25, but the hasty assault failed.²¹⁹ The French, following their defeat at Vittoria, quickly reformed their army in Spain over the course of just three weeks. The forces in Spain were now combined into one single force known as the Army of Spain which was divided into three corps under the overall command of Marshal Soult.²²⁰ The army was deployed immediately to attempt to break the sieges at both San Sebastian and Pamplona. Over the course of several days of shadowing manoeuvres the allied forces were able to repulse the French attack and force them to retreat from Spain for the second time in a six-week period.²²¹ Soult attempted to break the siege at San Sebastian on August 31 but was repulsed once again on the Bidassoa river.²²²

Wellington, meanwhile, was forced to wait before he could advance into France, as there were ongoing peace negotiations between the French and the allied powers of Europe. Following the breakdown in talks, Wellington began to plan for another assault. However, he had to remain cautious, as Marshal Suchet still commanded an army of 60,000 soldiers in Catalonia and Aragon which posed to a threat to the allied flank and to their lines of communication.²²³ After over a month of fighting Wellington finally broke through several lines of French defences but was forced to halt his advance in November due to inclement weather.²²⁴ Hostilities slowed down between the two sides as winter set in. However, after the French defeat at Leipzig, Napoleon had ordered several infantry divisions to be transferred from the Army of Spain to Paris to create a new army.²²⁵ This left Soult in a precarious position at the beginning of 1814

with roughly 40,000 troops in comparison to the 60,00 allied troops under Wellington's command.²²⁶

By the middle of January, the combined allied forces of Prussia, Sweden, Russia, and Austria had all invaded France. On February 12, 1814, Wellington renewed his campaign by pushing into southern France. Marshal Soult was not going to let the allied forces enter France unchecked, however, and so he organized his army around Orthez on February 27.²²⁷ The battle was brief, lasting only half a day and the result was an allied victory. The French lost roughly 4,000 troops in comparison to 2,164 allied casualties.²²⁸ Following the battle, the French forces began to disintegrate as those men who had been conscripted into the army began to desert by the thousands.²²⁹ Soult was left in a difficult position as he was now forced to look at where he should make his last stand in the south of France: Bordeaux or Toulouse? He ended up selecting Toulouse as it had a strong fortress as well as being a supply depot.²³⁰ Soult arrived on March 24 and the allies arrived shortly after on March 27.²³¹ On April 10 an assault was launched on Toulouse which caused so much damage to its defenses that the French were forced to evacuate from the city.²³² Meanwhile, in the north of France the allied forces had beaten Napoleon, occupying Paris on March 31 and forced Napoleon to abdicate unconditionally on April 10.²³³ However, word did not reach Wellington until April 12.²³⁴ Having received word of Napoleon's abdication of the throne, Wellington and Soult signed the convention of Toulouse on April 18, which ended the war in the Iberian Peninsula.²³⁵ The culmination of the war and the success of Wellington led to one more honour being bestowed upon him. The British government bestowed a dukedom upon Wellington.²³⁶ He entered the Iberian Peninsula as Sir Arthur Wellesley, but by the end of the war had a new name, a new title, and endless opportunities before him. Whereas Napoleon had entered the Iberian Peninsula as an emperor with seemingly endless prospects, he

left it as an exile with no empire. The Iberian Peninsula was a thorn in the side for Napoleon and the flowering of years of methodical planning and leadership for the new Duke of Wellington, Arthur Wellesley.

Conclusion

It is interesting to note that while the Iberian Peninsula was important for both Napoleon and Wellington, the two never actually commanded a battle against one another until the battle of Waterloo in 1815. There were many complexities and influences in the Peninsular War that set the stage for Wellington ultimately taking the field against Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo. I have highlighted many of these in this paper. However, there were many moving parts in both the political and military arenas at this moment in history. Europe was changing and evolving, so further research is still possible and indeed helpful to truly understand the impact of the War. For instance, the impact the guerillas had on the outcome of the Peninsular conflict is one such area. One could also examine the impact that both Wellington and Napoleon had on their respective military organizations, as both men made various changes to the organization and training of their armies.

The Peninsular War sapped the strength of the mighty Napoleonic Empire and contributed to the end of its ruler's reign. As Andrew Roberts writes, "What had started as a minor irritation for Napoleon had become a festering sore in the Iberian Peninsula – an ulcer in his own words".²³⁷ As a conflict that was initiated under the guise of enforcing the Continental blockade of British trade, Napoleon estimated that the campaign in the Iberian Peninsula would come at the cost of around 12,000 lives. By the end of the Peninsular War, the French sustained roughly 250,000 casualties in comparison to just 36,000 for the British.²³⁸ Moreover, between 1808 and 1814 the French spent approximately 3-billion gold francs on the conflict which undoubtedly weakened the empire.²³⁹ Napoleon's decision not only to enter the Iberian Peninsula but also to remove the Spanish Bourbon dynasty from power forever altered his military and political career. He was no longer viewed as a liberator, but now as a foreign conqueror. French

forces faced stiff resistance from Spanish, Portuguese, and British regular troops as well as from the peasantry who formed a brutal guerilla resistance to fight French occupation. The result of these actions is that the French were forced to maintain a massive number of troops in the Iberian Peninsula. At the peak, there were over 300,000 French troops in the Peninsula.²⁴⁰ Yet despite this great number of troops, Napoleon was unable to seize complete control over the Iberian Peninsula. Napoleon's decision to invade and subsequently occupy the Iberian Peninsula can be viewed as a point of demarcation, as he entered the Peninsula at the peak of his powers with the world seemingly at his fingertips. The gamble to overthrow the Spanish Bourbon dynasty and to force the Portuguese into the Continental System alters the trajectory of his military and political career.

While the Iberian Peninsula marks a turn for the worse for Napoleon, the complete opposite can be said for Wellington. Prior to war breaking out in the Iberian Peninsula, Wellesley was not a revered or highly sought after general. He was junior in both age and rank to many of his colleagues. However, after some initial successes, he was eventually granted overall command of British forces in the theatre, and he never looked back. Despite being limited by both the size of his army and by Parliament back home, Wellesley earned victories where he could boost morale within the army and bolster support for his actions at home. During the Peninsular War, he defeated six of Napoleon's 24 marshals and he was unbeaten in the field in 1808, 1809 and 1810.²⁴¹ Over the course of the conflict, Wellesley would earn promotion in both military and social terms. By the end of the Peninsular War, he had earned the military rank of Field Marshal, and he had been raised all the way to the title of Duke because of his success on the battlefield. The Iberian Peninsula also resulted in Wellington becoming a kind of national hero as his popularity across Britain increased with every victory. His military success in the

Peninsula ultimately led to him being appointed to command the allied forces during the Waterloo campaign. Following his exit from military life after the battle of Waterloo, Wellington would draw upon this popularity in a highly successful political career. The campaign in the Iberian Peninsula forever altered the military and political career of Wellington, as it too that of Napoleon.

Notes

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- ¹C. J. Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars: An International History, 1803-1815*. (London: Allen Lane, 2007), p. 114.
- ² Ibid, p. 197.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Adam, Zamoyski, *Napoleon: A Life*, (New York: Basic Books, 2018), p. 370.
- ⁵ Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars*, p. 197.
- ⁶ Owen, Connelly, *The Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon, 1792-1815*. (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 115.
- ⁷ F. C. Schneid, *Napoleon's Italian Campaigns: 1805-1815*, (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), p. 3.
- ⁸ Connelly, *The Wars*, p. 115.
- ⁹ Andrew, Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life*, (New York: The Penguin Group, 2014), p. 365.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, p. 116.
- ¹¹ M. Franceschi, & B. Weider, *Wars Against Napoleon: Debunking the Myth of the Napoleonic Wars*: Vol. 1st ed. (New York: Savas Beatie 2008), p. 9.
- ¹² Connelly, *The Wars*, p. 115.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid, p. 119.
- ¹⁶ Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars*, p. 213.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid, p. 214.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Ibid, p. 211.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid, p. 212.
- ²³ Connelly, *The Wars*, p. 119.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Zamoyski, *Napoleon*, p. 389.
- ²⁶ Connelly, *The Wars*, p. 121.
- ²⁷ Ibid, p. 120.
- ²⁸ Jeremy, Black, *European Warfare, 1660-1815*. (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 185.
- ²⁹ Connelly, *The Wars*, p. 121.
- ³⁰ Ibid, p. 122.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life*, p. 373.
- ³³ Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars*, p. 225.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life*, p. 374.
- ³⁷ Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars*, p. 222.
- ³⁸ Black, *European Warfare*, p. 185.

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- ³⁹ Connelly, *The Wars*, p. 126.
- ⁴⁰ Zamoyski, *Napoleon*, p. 395.
- ⁴¹ Connelly, *The Wars*, p. 126.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Roberts, *Napoleon: A Life*, p. 390.
- ⁴⁴ Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars*, p. 226.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
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