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All Roads lead to Verdun: British Prisoners of War in the Peninsular War, 1808-1814

Todos los caminos conducen a Verdún: los prisioneros de guerra británicos en la Guerra de la Independencia, 1808-1814

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Abstract: The French Revolution has generally been regarded as marking a water-shed in the conduct of war, a moment, indeed, in which the world embarked on an age of total war. This process supposedly affected eveery aspects of waging war, including, not least, the treatment of prisoners of war: according to the rhetoric of the more violent revolutionaries, and especially the Committee of Public Safety, indeed, prisoners of war were to be put to death, in which respect particular vehemence was expressed in respect of the soldiers and sailors of Great Britain. In this article, which is strictly limited to the situation that pertained in the theatre of war itself (the experiences of the prisoners concerned once they reached France are discussed by another contributor to this work), these claims will be examined via the prism afforded by the experiences of the 5,000 prisoners of war estimated to have been taken by the forces of Napoleon Bonaparte in the Peninsular War of 1808-14, these being catalogued in some detail by the memoirs and other works produced by them in the years after the conflict. By reference to these narratives, it is possible to establish that, if it ever existed at all, the new model urged upon the French armies by the Committee of Public Safety certainly made no appearance in Peninsular-War Spain and Portugal. Prisoners of war could expect a greater or lesser degree of brutality at the moment of capture and occasionally ran the risk of being killed in cold blood, but there was little difference here with the experience of earlier conflicts, whilst the continuities remained in place thereafter: for the rank and file, in particular,

conditions were rarely anything other than uncomfortable, but officers were invariably treated with a great deal of courtesy. As for the many men who were found to be wounded at the time of their capture, they were given such medical care as was available. In short, however much the men concerned may have suffered, their experiences were very much those of predecessors in earlier conflicts, the fact being that what is seen in Spain and Portugal is not the birth of a new age of barbarism but the survival of eighteenth-century norms of conduct.

Keywords: Napoleonic Wars; Peninsular War; prisoners of war; British army; laws of war.

Resumen: La Revolución Francesa ha sido vista generalmente como un momento clave en la evolución del modo de hacer la guerra; un momento en el cual el mundo se embarcó en una época de guerra total. Teóricamente, esto transformaba todos los aspectos de ese modo de hacer la guerra, incluyendo también la cuestión del tratamiento de los prisioneros de guerra. Así, según planteaban los revolucionarios más radicales, especialmente el Comité de Seguridad Pública, los prisioneros debían ser todos ejecutados, haciéndose particular referencia a los soldados y marineros británicos. En este artículo, que se ciñe exclusivamente a las experiencias de los prisioneros en los propios teatros de guerra (las vividas una vez llegaron a Francia se discuten en otra contribución a este mismo dossier), estas cuestiones se abordarán a través del prisma de los 5.000 prisioneros de guerra que se estima fueron capturados por las fuerzas de Napoleón Bonaparte durante la Guerra de la Independencia de 1808-1814, usando para ello las memorias y otros trabajos elaborados por los combatientes en los años posteriores al conflicto. El análisis de estas narrativas permite establecer que, si es que llegó a existir en algún caso, el nuevo que el Comité de Salud Pública impuso al ejército francés no se implementó ni en España ni en Portugal. La violencia y brutalidad ejercidas sobre los prisioneros podrían ser mayores o menores en función de las particulares condiciones del momento de su captura, por lo que ciertamente existía la posibilidad de que fuesen ejecutados inmediatamente. No obstante, en líneas generales no hubo excesiva diferencia con lo que había sucedido en conflictos anteriores, ni con lo que sucedería posteriormente: para la tropa en particular, las condiciones de su captura raramente eran buenas, aunque los oficiales fueron siempre tratados con bastante cortesía. De igual modo, los prisioneros que habían sido heridos recibían siempre toda la atención médica disponible. En definitiva, por mucho que estos sufriesen

durante su cautiverio, los soldados británicos vivieron una experiencia como prisioneros de guerra muy similares a las que habían vivido sus predecesores en guerras anteriores. De este modo, el modo de hacer la guerra que se vio en España y Portugal no fue en ningún caso el inicio de una nueva época de barbarie, sino más bien la supervivencia de las normas de conducta en el campo de batalla que habían caracterizado las guerras del siglo XVIII.

Palabras claves: Guerras Napoleónicas; Guerra Peninsular; prisioneros de guerra; leyes de la guerra.

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At the heart of the study of history there lies an important issue and probably one that stands out above all others. In brief, this may be defined as the question of continuity and change, or, to put it another way, the question of how far basic social norms, economic arrangements and patterns of life are affected by changing circumstances. Very often consideration of this matter has tended to suggest that continuity was often more important than change or, at least, that the rate of change was surprisingly slow, but there are a few events that are held to be so earth-shaking in their implications that they literally changed the world overnight. One such is, of course, the French Revolution, the consequences of this generally having traditionally been portrayed in terms of the complete transformation of all that it touched. Thus, in France absolutism was replaced by democracy whilst in Europe as a whole the Old Order was swept away as the armies of, first, the Republic and, then, Napoleon pushed ever further southwards and eastwards, creating a new society and forcing their opponents to initiate processes of change of their own that ended with all of them fighting the French with their own weapon of mass mobilization, whether political or military. To quote Tim Blanning:

> As Napoleonic France slipped into military dictatorship, it was the Old-Régime states which introduced programmes of modernization, mobilised citizen militias, declared total war and used the rhetoric of liberation.[1]

This brings us, of course, to the issue of warfare. In practice, the comfortable simplicities of the notion that the Revolution transformed France and Europe have long since been challenged by a wide range of historians, including, not least, the author of this paper - with regard to France, for example, we now know that the economic power of the nobility was but little affected by the events of the period from

[1] Timothy BLANNING: "The French Revolution and Europe", in Colin LUCAS (ed.), *Rewriting the French Revolution*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 206.

1789 to 1799; with regard to Spain that the notion of a people's crusade against the Napoleonic invasion is in large part myth; and with regard to Austria and Russia that the Napoleonic Wars brought little or nothing in the way of genuine reform[2] - but in one area - namely the nature and conduct of war - traditional ideas have remained strongly entrenched, if not downright dominant. To summarise, the French Revolution produced not just the idea but also the reality of the Nation-in-Arms in that, war now being waged for ideological ends, it became total and, with this, a no-holds-barred struggle that was waged, as Carl von Clausewitz put it, with the full weight of the national power. As the same observer wrote, «After a short introduction performed by the French Revolution, the impetuous Buonaparte quickly brought it to this point.»[3] Meanwhile, with increased commitment and, indeed, increased sacrifice, came the need to whip up popular support for the war effort. A large part of the resultant propaganda being directed at, on the one hand, the demonization of the enemy and, on the other, the reinforcement of the idea that the population as a whole had an intimate interest in the outcome of the fight, it followed that the opposing side became an object of hatred. In the words the same observer as before, then, «The more war is war in earnest, the more is it a venting of animosity and hostility.»[4]

As trenchant as it is powerful, such language has had a great influence on the historiography of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars - the episode of military history, after all, on which Clausewitz based his analysis - and it is therefore a recurrent them among commentaries on the subject. As Hew Strachan wrote in connection with an essay published to commemorate the bicentenary of the Revolution:

> Patriotism … breathed ferocity into France's soldiers. The *sans-culottes* applied the Terror to war. In the eighteenth century codes of honour operated between soldiers. By 1794 such attitudes were symptoms of an outmoded restraint.[5]

Here, too, is Michael Howard:

[2] Concentrate as this article does on the Peninsular War, the claim that the Spanish struggle against Napoleon was characterised by something other than popular fervour may be deemed to require some explanation. For reasons of space it is not possible to go into detail with respect to the thinking and evidence concerned, but these last are laid out in great detail in Charles J. ESDAILE: *The Peninsular War: a New History,* London, Allen Lane, 2002; Íd.: *Fighting Napoleon: Guerrillas, Bandits and Adventurers in Spain, 1808-1814,* London, Yale University Press, 2004; and Íd.: *Outpost of Empire: the French Occupation of Andalucía, 1810-1812,* Norman (Oklahoma), University of Oklahoma Press, 2012. For a succinct statement of the case, see Íd.: *The Wars of Napoleon*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2019, pp. 207-12.

[3] Carl von CLAUSEWITZ: *On War*, ed. by Anatoly Rapaport, London, Penguin Books, 1968, p. 369.

[4] Ibídem, p. 343.

[5] Hew STRACHAN: "The Nation-in-Arms", in Geoffrey BEST (ed.), *The Permanent Revolution: the French Revolution and its Legacy, 1789-1989*, London, Fontana, 1988, pp. 60-61

> "War is a violent condition", wrote Carnot. "One should make it *à l'outrance* or go home." And so long as terror was the order of the day at home, so it should be, *a fortiori* on the battlefield. "We must exterminate", he urged, "exterminate to the bitter end!" Wars were no longer to be … temperate.[6]

So powerful was the hold of these concepts, meanwhile, that in 2007 the American cultural historian, David Bell, felt able to publish an entire monograph on the subject, namely *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It*. In essence, the argument begins with the Enlightenment in whose *salons* war was as much a topic of conversation as reason, science and material progress. Given that there was but a single year of the eighteenth century in which Europe was free from conflict, this was hardly surprising, whilst it was equally scarcely a surprise that on the whole comment was extremely negative: war was seen as hateful and damaging in itself, certainly, but insult was added to injury by the fact that it seemed to achieve nothing and settle less: a province was gained here and a city lost there, and within a year or two the whole game would begin again. In the works of such thinkers as Guibert, then, there emerged the notion of a different form of struggle which would make use of resources far greater than those of the so-called "cabinet wars" of the eighteenth century - above all, of course, the proverbial "people numerous and armed" - and in the process produce results so decisive as to ensure that the blood and treasure expended on warfare would at the very least produce a commensurate reward. Ideas that tended in the direction of total war were therefore in the air well before France declared war on 'the King of Bohemia' in 1792, and the fact that the conflict was ideological ensured that they were for the first time put into practice and that with the most terrible of results, the Brissotins and Montagnards alike being caught up in the belief that, if the *ancien regime* could only be overthrown in one great war, then Europe could look forward to perpetual peace. In this respect, we hear a great deal about the atrocities inflicted in the Vendée and the Peninsular War, not to mention the cruelty with which Napoleon behaved in Egypt and Syria, first putting down the revolt of Cairo with terrible brutality and then putting to the sword 4,000 Ottoman troops who were captured at Jaffa.[7] Thus far, thus good, but then Bell stumbles: for his the-

[6] Michael HOWARD: *War in European History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1976, pp. 80-81.

[7] There is an ample literature on the atrocities that marked the war in the Vendée, as witness, for example, Raymond SECHER: *A French Genocide: the Vendée*, Notre Dame (Indiana), University of Notre Dame Press, 2003 and Hugh GOUGH: "Genocide and the Bicentenary: the French Revolution and the revenge of the Vendée", *Historical Journal*, 30 (1987), pp. 977-988. With regard to the Jaffa massacre and its provenance, meanwhile, see Nathan SCHUR: *Napoleon and the Holy Land*, Greenhill Books, London, 1999. For a particularly interesting comment in respect of the fighting in the Near East, meanwhile, we may turn to

sis to work he has to be able to demonstrate that such episodes were not just a question of the savageries typical of campaigns in which the enemy was a political, military, racial, religious or cultural "other": as witness the storm of Magdeburg in 1631, the taking of Wexford and Drogheda in 1649 or the scouring of the Highlands in the wake of the Jacobite rising of 1745-46, such atrocities were anything but absent from the annals of seventeenth and eighteenth-century warfare, just as the bombardment of the besieged city of Mainz in 1793 was prefigured by the equally ruthless bombardment of Chester and Newark in the long sieges that wrested them from the hands of the Royalists in Civil-War England.[8] To put it another way, what is required is proof that such savagery extended to the treatment which the rival regular armies accorded one another. In this, however, Bell fails, and, what is more, has to confess to his failure. Thus:

> Once the war began, not only did the rhetoric of a 'war to the death intensify, but it was joined by a ferocious outpouring of hatred against anyone who dared take up arms against France … The English … came in for the worst of this abuse "National hatred must sound forth", thundered Bertrand Barère, a member of the Committee of Public Safety, in 1794. "Young French Republicans must suck hatred of the name of Englishman with their mother's milk. The English are a people foreign to Europe, foreign to humanity: they must disappear!" Orators throughout France called for the "extermination" of the English, and the Convention formally endorsed the idea when it issued a decree forbidding French commanders from giving quarter to English soldiers … In practice … French forces largely ignored the 'take no prisoners' decree. The story even circulated of

David Jordan. Thus: «The Egyptian campaign was not different in kind from the Italian. French … armies were brutal, and Napoleon was not interested in moderating this aspect of war. Yet some of the episodes … stand out for their savagery.» David JORDAN, *Napoleon and the French Revolution*, Basingstoke, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012, p. 59.

[8] The wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and, more especially, the savageries which accompanied them, have attracted a number of general discussions, including, not least, André CORVISIER: *Armies and Societies in Europe, 1494-1789,* Bloomington (Indiana), Indiana University Press, 1979; John CHILDS: *Armies and Warfare in Europe, 1648-1789,* Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1982; Martin ANDERSON: *War and Society in Europe of the Ancien Régime,* London, Fontana, 1988; Frank TALLETT: *War and Society in Early-Modern Europe, 1495-1715,* Abingdon, Routledge, 1992; and Jeremy BLACK: *European Warfare, 1660-1815*, Routledge, London, 2002. Meanwhile, for the Thirty Years' War and the English Civil War, there can still be no better introduction than Cecily WEDGEWOOD: *The Thirty Years' War,* London, Jonathan Cape, 1938, and Íd.: *The King's War, 1641-1647*, London, William Collins and Son, 1958. As for the atrocities experienced in the Celtic periphery, see Micheal O'SIOCHRU: *God's Executioner: Oliver Cromwell and the Conquest of Ireland*, London, Faber and Faber, 2008 and Geoffrey PLANK: *Rebellion and Savagery: the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 and the British Empire*, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, pp. 53-76.

> soldiers who received orders from visiting deputies to kill prisoners only to retort that the deputies would have to do the deed themselves.[9]

If there are some historians who are inclined to follow Bell's lead in principle, if not in detail - a good example is the Germanist, Mark Hewitson, who has taken issue with the general tendency to play down the idea that the War of Liberation of 1813-1814 was a total war and explicitly offered the American author a degree of support[10] - the honesty we see here did not save him from a great deal of criticism, not to say castigation. On the contrary, the fact being that the only episode in Europe in which it could be shown that the French armies had put into practice the rhetoric of massacre against regular troops was the Battle of Quiberon, an episode in which the unfortunate victims of the fury of the Revolution were one-and-all either *émigrés* or prisoners of war who had taken up arms to escape the horrors of Britain's dreaded prison hulks, and therefore rebels or even traitors who could be considered as being outside the protection of convention, in a series of reviews he was thoroughly taken to task.[11] Thus, though a historian generally sympathetic to cultural approaches, in an important article Michael Broers pointed out that, whatever the rhetoric may have been, neither the rulers of *ancien-régime* Europe, nor their armies, nor even Napoleon himself ever waged total war, whilst there was for the most part little that was new about the actual fighting; as he says, indeed, «"Total war" was in the mind and even on the drawing board, but not yet on the battlefield.»[12] If this analysis is harsh, that of Jeremy

[9] David BELL: *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It*, Boston, Mariner Books, 2007, p. 143.

[10] Mark HEWITSON: "Princes' wars, wars of the people or total war? Mass armies and the question of a military revolution in Germany, 1792-1815", *War in History*, 20 (2013), pp. 452-490. In this respect, it is worth noting that in both the War of Liberation and the Waterloo campaign, Prussian troops were frequently noted as having shown little or no mercy to their French opponents, the fighting concerned certainly being waged to the accompaniment of the most ferocious rhetoric, in which respect see Karen HAGEMANN: "Francophobia and patriotism: anti-French images and sentiments in Prussia and northern Germany during the anti-Napoleonic Wars", *French History*, 18 (2004), pp. 404-425. A further participant in the debate, meanwhile, has been the Australian historian, Philip Dwyer, who in an important article has argued very strongly that the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars stand out on account of the high incidence of massacre and the killing of prisoners which they witnessed, something that in his view amounted to a return to the standards of a long-gone mediaeval past. See Philip DWYER , "'It still makes me shudder: memories of massacre and atrocity during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars", *War in History*, XVI (2009), pp. 381-405. Yet, try as he might, Dwyer is unable to move the debate away from the bitterness and ferocity of such places as Calabria and the Iberian peninsula: while he retails battlefield stories of prisoners being slaughtered in cold blood here and wounded men being burned alive there, these are either highly ambiguous or things that speak to general phenomena that have nothing particularly Revolutionary or Napoleonic about them.

[11] For the Quiberon affair, see Maurice HUTT: *Chouannerie and Counter-Revolution: Puisaye, the Princes and the British Government in the 1790's*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, vol. 2, pp. 269-323.

[12] Michael BROERS: "The concept of total war in the Revolutionary-Napoleonic period", *War in History*, 15 (2008), p. 268.

Back is still more damning. To quote the analysis of *The First Total War* that he published in *The English Historical Review*:

> Bell is an adept scrutineer of the language of power … adroit at studying shifts of ideas and … keen on the notion of essential concepts. Unfortunately this approach [offers] only a partial palimpsest of reality … [and] repeats out-dated, formulaic descriptions. It is as if he attempted to explain the French Revolution in terms of class action.[13]

At the heart of Black's critique of Bell is essentially a belief that, as a cultural historian, the American author's grounding in military history is simply too shallow, or, as he himself puts it, that «the fertility of [Bell's] critical intellect falls short of his understanding of military history».[14] In this paper we shall address ourselves to just one of the many areas that can be turned to to show that Bell would have been well advised to grapple more with the detail of the mainstream warfare of the period rather than concentrating on episodes that were, if not peripheral, than at the very least alien to the bulk of the fighting, namely the experiences of those British soldiers who were taken prisoner in the Peninsular War, first, at the moment of capture and, second, in the weeks - sometimes months even - that transpired before they crossed the French border *en route* for the various *depots* which were their final destinations.[15] The astonishing record of success of Wellington's army in particular ensured that the number of men concerned was not in fact very great, but, even so, the total was by no means insignificant (whilst there are no firm figures, an educated guess might be around 5,000). No British garrison ever surrendering in the style of those of Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz and San Sebastián, captures generally occurred in one of two circumstances. Thus, first of all, we have the many men who were taken when they were left behind, sank down by the wayside or for one reason or another strayed from the ranks, such losses being particularly severe in moments of crisis when difficulty, exhaustion and suffering were at their most intense: the retreats to La Coruña and Ciudad Rodrigo in January 1809 and November 1812 saw many stragglers fall into the

[13] Jeremy BLACK, review of David BELL, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It,* Boston, Mariner Books, 2007, *English Historical Review*, 123 (2008), p. 765.

[14] Jeremy Black, review of David BELL …, p. 766. In fairness to Bell, it is worth pointing out that, possibly in response to criticism of the sort advanced by Blanning and Black, a conference held at the University of Liverpool in 2010 saw him advance a much more nuanced version of his argument: other than in terms of rhetoric and a few local instances, it seems that total war was not arrived at after all. See David BELL: "The limits of conflict in Napoleonic Europe - and their transgression", in Erica CHARTERS *et al* (eds.), *Civilians and War in Europe, 1618-1815*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, pp. 201-208.

[15] Be it noted here that the situation that pertained in Verdun and the various other places in which the British prisoners were confined will be excluded from the analysis, for, whereas no attention has been paid to their experiences in the theatre of war, coverage of their experiences in France is relatively abundant.

hands of the French, then, whilst one could also cite the incident following the battle of Talavera when the latter captured the 1,500 British wounded who had been left in the town for want of transport (this last was beyond doubt the largest single haul of British prisoners secured by the French in the whole course of the war). The other category, of course, consisted of men who were taken in combat: at both the battle of Albuera on 16 May 1811 and the combat of Maya on 25 July 1813, numerous men were taken prisoner when their units were over-run in the course of French attacks, whilst the abortive disembarkation at Fuengirola in October 1810 ended in the capture of its commander, Lord Blayney, and some 200 men of the Eighty-Ninth Foot, another 150 men being taken in the course of the first siege of San Sebastián in July 1813, most of them officers and men of the First Foot who were wounded in the course of the disastrous assault of 25 July and could not be carried with them by their retreating fellows.[16] Several of the officers and members of the rank and file involved later writing accounts of their experiences, the net result is that it is possible to build up a picture in which the norm was very much the patterns of the limited warfare of the eighteenth century rather than, say, the horrors witnessed on the Russian front or in the Pacific in the Second World War.[17] That being the case, it is with some surprise that one reads in one of the latest works to treat the subject that between 1793 and 1815 the «shared code of "civilised" conduct» that had characterised the treatment of each other's prisoners of war on the part of Britain and France «would come under severe pressure».[18] If this was indeed the case, it was certainly not true of what occurred in Spain and Portugal.[19]

[16] Blayney was not the only British general taken prisoner in the course of the Peninsular War: also a victim was the then second-in-command of Wellington's army, Sir Edward Paget, who was captured by a French cavalry patrol on 17 November 1812 in the course of the retreat to Ciudad Rodrigo. Charles OMAN: *A History of the Peninsular War,* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1901-1930, Vol. 6, p. 147.

[17] There are, of course, serious problems with reliance on published prisoner-of-war narratives, amongst the many questions that have to be faced being the issues of narrator, memory, veracity and market. However, while this incident or that incident may be misplaced in the narrative, recalled but imperfectly or downright invented, it is the contention of the author, first, that, with the aid of judicious analysis, such works can nevertheless provide a reasonable impression of the prisoner-of-war experience, and, second, that it is only through their pages that the subject treated here can be approached at all. Nor are even the details provided by erstwhile prisoners of war necessarily to be despised: in his account of his adventures, for example, George Farmer makes a passing reference to French soldiers stationed in Burgos who perished of typhus being buried in a mass grave situated in a ravine just beyond the southernmost edge of the town, a claim that was verified in 2006 when workmen constructing a new motorway spur uncovered just such a mass grave in the very area mentioned by Farmer, the vast majority of the skeletons uncovered in the subsequent investigations proving to belong to males of military age who had perished from natural causes.

[18] Catriona KENNEDY: *Narratives of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Military and Civilian Experience in Britain and Ireland,* Houndmills, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013, p. 115.

[19] It would, of course, be possible to extend this article to cover the conditions experienced by British prisoners of war once they had reached France and all the more so as the material thus upturned would tend very strongly to reinforce the former's central thesis, but the subject has been treated at length elsewhere, most notably by the estimable Elodie Duché, whose work, of course, is featured in the current volume.

To give the author concerned her due, it is but fair to begin our analysis with a certain amount of coverage of the wider picture. In so far as this is concerned, it is perfectly true that the conventions which governed the treatment of prisoners of war and, indeed, who could legitimately be detained as representatives of the enemy, were tightened up. Thus, if the hysterical demands of the Convention that all British prisoners should be shot were ignored, in 1803 Napoleon ordered the detention of all British subjects, non-combatants included, who were caught within the bounds of his domains by the break-down of the peace of Amiens, but this decision appears to have owed less to concepts of total war than to the then First Consul's spleen at the manner in which the British government had defied him, and was in any case a move that was far from novel: as Renaud Morieux has argued, civilians who fell into the hands of the enemy in the course of such conflicts as the War of the Spanish Succession, the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War, at the very least ran a very severe risk of incarceration.[20] Equally, if it was true that the arrangements for the regular exchange of prisoners that had characterised the eighteenth century ceased to function as effectively as before, this was purely the result of circumstance in that, given the fact that the British captured roughly four times as many Frenchmen as the French did British, Napoleon kept trying to insist that, as well as their own men, the British should be willing to accept Hanoverians and, later, Spaniards and Portuguese in exchange for the release of French soldiers, this being something that successive Cabinets simply would not contemplate. Once incarcerated in France, then, most prisoners found themselves left with little option other than to hope for a rapid end to the conflict, but that does not mean that their material conditions or experiences were very different from what had gone before: indeed, in most respects they were identical, as witness the fact that the parole system continued to operate in a fashion that was entirely unchanged. More than that, indeed, the norms of the eighteenth century were actually reinforced by Napoleon via a series of regulations that essentially gave the day-to-day practice of the previous century institutional recognition.[21] To quote Elodie Duché, for example, «Whilst *parole d'honneur* was suspended with the Revolution, honour was reinvented during the Napoleonic conflicts.»[22]

[20] Renaud MORIEUX: *The Society of Prisoners: Anglo-French Wars and Incarceration in the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 33-34.

[21] For a useful discussion of all this, see Paul CHAMBERLAIN: "Prisoners of war in the Peninsula", in Ian FLETCHER (ed.), *The Peninsular War: Aspects of the Struggle for the Iberian Peninsula*, Staplehurst, Spellmount, 1998, pp. 131-148.

[22] Elodie DUCHÉ: "A passage to imprisonment: the British prisoners in Verdun under the first French empire", Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick, 2014, p. 148. For a general discussion, see J. David MARKHAM: "Wellington's lost soldiers: British POW's -Part I", *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, 144 (1999), pp. 83-89.

If this was the immediate context of the experience faced by British soldiers taken by the forces of Napoleon in the Peninsular War, we must also spend at least a little time examining the norms on which said context rested. Although these had evolved over time, these owed their origins in part to the 'military revolution' of the seventeenth century and in part to the tendency towards greater humanity generated by the enlightenment. In brief, in the Middle Ages, prisoners of war were the property of the individual lords, knights and captains who had captured them to be disposed of as they saw fit. For the rank and file, other than a minority of experienced specialists who found a way out by offering their services to the victors, this usually meant a grisly fate - lacking in any real economic value, they were often slaughtered out of hand - but for men of consequence, it was a different matter: representing, as they did, a valuable source of income, they were well cared for until receipt of a substantial ransom. As the state became ever more the prime mover in terms of waging war, however, so all this changed. All prisoners were now the purview of governments rather than individuals, while the fact that even the humblest soldiers were now professionals led to some improvement in the fate of the rank and file: spared rather than put to the sword, these last were now incarcerated in such accommodation as came to hand - generally castles, forts and citadels or the hulks of decommissioned men of war - and provided with basic necessities (necessities for which, admittedly, they often paid via being hired out as cheap labour or conscripted into labour battalions) - until such time as they could be exchanged for an equivalent number of men who had been taken by the opposition. On top of this, meanwhile, there was always a way out: with all armies eager for trained men and possessed of units composed of foreign deserters, turning coat was an option to which any of them could have resort at any time. For the officers, change was less pronounced in that men who were taken prisoner were generally kept in good conditions until ransomed by some prisoner exchange (something that might or might not be accompanied by a financial payment). That said, it was no longer simply the great and the good who enjoyed such courtesies, the fact that military command, even at the lowest level, was associated with gentility ensuring that they also extended to the lowliest of subalterns, something else from which all alike could benefit being the generalization of the custom of parole, a system which allowed all those who gave their word of honour not to attempt to escape were not confined at all but rather allowed a wide degree of latitude in respect of such matters as freedom of movement: it was common, indeed, for officers to be allowed to return to their home countries in exchange for a promise not to take up arms again in the current conflict, this being one of the rare cases in which Napoleon confirmed the harsher line that had been the aspiration of the

Revolution: under the Consulate and Empire, prisoners of war were not permitted to return home until they had been duly exchanged in the manner described above.[23]

So much for the background. Let us now move from the realm of broad-brush generalizations to that of a detailed consideration of events on the ground. The first thing to say here, of course, is that the experience of being taken prisoner was scarcely very pleasant. As in almost any conflict, particularly in the heat of battle, the soldier who found himself in the power of the enemy was initially in a position of some danger, the reasons for this being abundantly obvious. To quote Clausewitz once again, «An act of violence which any one commits upon us … will excite in us a desire to retaliate and be avenged on him.»[24] At the same time, too, meanwhile, there was also the influence of human nature, Clausewitz recognising, albeit somewhat coyly, that the simple fact of being in a position of power, not to mention a love of killing pure and simple, was enough to cause some soldiers to treat beaten opponents with no mercy.[25] Such was certainly the experience of British soldiers taken by the French in Spain and Portugal. At best, even officers could expect to be roughed up and relieved of their valuables, typical enough, perhaps, being the experience of Major William Brooke of the 48th Foot, a long-serving officer who had obtained his first commission as long ago as 1782, and was captured in the course of the famous cavalry charge that destroyed Colborne's brigade at the battle of Albuera:

> Part of the victorious French cavalry were Polish lancers. From the conduct of this regiment ... I believe many of them to have been intoxicated, as they rode over the wounded, barbarously darting their lances into them ... I was an instance of their inhumanity: after having been most severely wounded in the head, and plundered of everything that I had about me, I was being led as a prisoner between two French ... soldiers when one of these lancers rode up, and deliberately cut me down. Then, taking the skirts of my regimental coat, he tried to pull it over my head. Not satisfied with this brutality, the wretch tried by every means in his power to make his horse trample on me ... But the beast, more merciful than the rider, absolutely refused to comply with his master's wishes.[26]

[23] The conditions experienced by prisoners of war in the eighteenth century have not received as much treatment in the historiography as one might hope. However, for a very helpful introduction to the topic, see Evaristo MARTÍNEZ-RADIO: "Los prisioneros de guerra en el siglo XVIII y la humanidad en el infortunio", *Verbum: Analecta Latina*, 17 (2016), pp. 18-54.
[24] Carl von CLAUSEWITZ: op. cit., p. 186.
[25] Carl von CLAUSEWITZ: op. cit., p. 187.
[26] Charles OMAN (ed.): "A prisoner of Albuera: the journal of Major William Brooke from 16 May to 28 September 1811", in Íd., *Studies in the Napoleonic Wars,* London, Methuen, 1929, pp. 178-179.

Taken prisoner in the course of an abortive commando operation at Fuengirola, the British general, Andrew Blayney, also found himself in the hands of Polish troops:

> I soon … observed a column close in from the left, on whose caps I perceived the number 'four' with an eagle, and which proved to be the *quatrième polonais*. The troops with me, after firing a few rounds, charged this column, and a very severe conflict ensued, which unfortunately ended in my being made prisoner, having but nine men remaining of those that advanced with me. Those only who have suffered a similar fate can form any idea of my sensations at being thus obliged to surrender to a ferocious banditti, who loaded me with every vile epithet, but in whose outrageous violence I in great measure found my personal safety, for they crowded so thick on me that they had not room to give force to their blows. They tore my clothes, rifled my pockets and attempted to pull off my epaulets, and the resistance I made to this last indignity procured me several blows from the butt ends of their muskets that covered me with contusions … The scene that presented itself at this moment can never be effaced from my memory: both officers and soldiers had all the appearance of … desperate banditti, their long moustachios, their faces blackened by smoke and gunpowder, and their bloody and torn clothes giving to their whole appearance a degree of indescribable ferocity.[27]

Finally, we have Captain Thomas Browne, an officer of the Twenty-Third Foot who had secured a post on Wellington's staff and, with it, the unlikely distinction of being captured, albeit only temporarily, by the French at the Battle of Vitoria:

> The French rearguard … suddenly detached a body of cavalry which, falling on the few of the Eighteenth [Light Dragoons] who were in advance, killed some, wounded others and took some prisoners. In this last lot I was myself included, my horse having been killed and my head cut longditudinally with a sabre so as to knock me over. When I rose … half a dozen French dragoons occupied [themselves] in securing me and emptying my pockets, one of them having off with my cocked hat. They called me all sorts of opprobrious names in all the rage and vexation of a vanquished army, and the fellow to whom I was given in charge got off his horse to look for a cord to fasten my wrist to his stirrup. Luckily, he could not find

[27] Andrew BLAYNEY: *Narrative of a Forced Journey through Spain and France as a Prisoner of War in the Years 1810 to 1814*, Vol. 1, London, E. Kerby, 1814, pp. 35-38.

> one. I, showing him that I was wounded, [and] declaring at the same time that I could not possibly make any successful attempt at escape, he ordered me to lay hold of his stirrup-leather, swearing that the instant I let go, he would cut me down, accompanying this threat with putting his broad-sword as close to my skull as he decently could. He continued muttering oaths and curses, death to all my entreaties for a mouthful of wine or water as my lips were parched and clotted with dust and blood.[28]

That some British prisoners had narrow escapes, then, there is no doubt. Among the men taken while trying to hold the line at Maya on 25 July 1813 was Joseph Sherer of the Thirty-Fourth Foot:

> In less than two hours, my picket and the light companies were heavily engaged with the enemy's advance, which was composed entirely of *voltigeur* companies, unencumbered by knapsacks and led by a chosen officer. These fellows fought with ardour, but we disputed our ground with them handsomely, and caused them severe loss … The enemy's numbers, however, increased every moment: they covered the ground immediately in front of, and around, us. The sinuosities of the mountains, the ravines, the watercourses, were filled with their advancing and overwhelming force. The contest now … was very unequal, and, of course, short and bloody. I saw two thirds of my picket, and numbers, both of the light companies and my own regiment, destroyed … and, surviving this carnage, was myself made prisoner. I owe the preservation of a life about which I felt, in that irritating moment, regardless to the interference of a French officer who beat up the muskets of his leading section, already levelled for my destruction. This noble fellow, with some speech about "un français sait respecter les braves", embraced me, and bade an orderly conduct me to Count d'Erlon.[29]

Once the actual moment of capture was passed, however, most officers found that their lot was not intolerable. Taken lying wounded on the same battlefield as Sherer by troops under the command of General Drouet, his commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel William Fenwick, was carried to his billet in the valley below and given the services of the Thirty-Fourth's own regimental surgeon, the latter having also been taken by the enemy, while, wounded in both legs during the failed assault on

[28] Roger BUCKLEY (ed.): *The Napoleonic-War Journal of Captain Thomas Henry Browne, 1807-1816*, London, The Bodley Head, 1987, pp. 214-215.
[29] Joseph SHERER: *Recollections of the Peninsula*, London, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1825, pp. 257-8.

San Sebastián, Lieutenant Harry Jones of the Royal Engineers was admitted to the garrison's hospital where a bed was found for him by the simple process of evicting some unfortunate Frenchman: soon joined by several other British officers, his wounds were treated as well as they possibly could be, while he and his companions were allowed the services of a Spanish barber as well as a visit from a young woman of the town who had expressed concern for their welfare.[30] Equally, taken by the French with the other British wounded at Talavera was another Royal Engineer named Captain Charles Boothby, and he too praised the medical care which he received, marred through the experience was by the fact that many of the men lost with him were plundered of all their possessions by French soldiers eager for loot.[31] Captured in the course of the battle of San Marcial when he strayed into the path of a force of enemy troops in the tangled terrain that lined the border between France and Spain, Wellington's Judge-Advocate-General, Francis Larpent initially was forced to "rough it" in the rain along with his captors, but he was soon sent to the town of Mont de Marsan along with some captured officers and found himself in conditions that were comfortable enough. Thus:

> We [have] met with every attention and civility here … are now all in officers' billets, the same as the French officers themselves, and have received for our days of march the same as they do on the march: a captain three *francs*, a colonel five, a lieutenant two and a half, etc. I am at the house of the principal engineer … I immediately applied to my patron for books, and he gave me the range of several. After a play or two of Racine's and a few of the *Contes Moraux*, I have attacked La Harpe's *Cours de Littérature*, and am yet well pleased.[32]

And, finally, once rescued from his Polish captors, Lord Blayney appears to have positively enjoyed his long journey from Fuengirola into captivity in France in the course of which he was wined and dined by a succession of French generals, afforded the most comfortable accommodation possible, treated to trips to bull-fights and the theatre, and allowed to take in a wide range of the local sights. At all times, meanwhile, the traditional courtesies were observed by the French, and that with some style. Here,

[30] Michael GLOVER: "The courtesies of war", *History Today*, 38 (1978), p. 470; Harry JONES, "Seven weeks' captivity in San Sebastían in 1813", in Edward MAXWELL (ed.), *Peninsular Sketches by Actors on the Scene*, Vol. 2, London, Henry Colburn, 1845, pp. 287-92.
[31] Charles BOOTHBY: *A Prisoner of France: the Memoirs, Diaries and Correspondence of Charles Boothby, Capt. R.E* , London, Adam and Charles, 1898, pp. 45-46.
[32] George LARPENT (ed.): *The Private Journal of Judge-Advocate Larpent attached to the Headquarters of Lord Wellington during the Peninsular War from 1812 to its Close*, London, R. Bentley, 1853, p. 261.

for example, is Blayney's description of his first meeting with the commander of the French forces in the Málaga area, General Horace Sébastiani:

> On approaching Fuengirola I observed the general surrounded by a large body of troops and was immediately presented to him. After the first salutation he enquired what had become of my sword, and, on my answering that some of the officers or soldiers had it in their possession, General Milhaud immediately took off his own and presented it to me, saying, "Monsieur le general, here is one that has been employed in all the campaigns against the Austrians, Russians and Prussians and is now much at your service." This speech, although tinctured with the vanity natural to a Frenchman was applauded by the bravos of both officers and soldiers who were within hearing. I accepted the sword and indeed felt somewhat gratified at being paid such a compliment by an enemy.[33]

Blayney, however, was a special case. Needless to say, more junior officers and the rank and file were not so lucky. Best off by far were men who were suffering from wounds when they were captured. Shot in the knee at Talavera, for example, Sergeant Daniel Nichol of the Ninety-Second Foot was among the 1,500 wounded left behind in the town's many improvised hospitals when the British and Spanish armies evacuated the town. Thus, far from the unfortunate man being plundered by the French, one soldier paid him a dollar for his boots whilst another gave him a paliasse and some improvised bedding in the form of a pair of curtains. Medical attention, true, was limited, Nichol and his fellows largely being left to fend for themselves with the result that many were swept away by fever or infection, but cruelty there was none, while the prisoners were given soup and barley bread, albeit on a rather infrequent basis, a considerable sum of money even being donated for their care by the French commander, Marshal Mortier. Eventually taken to Madrid by ox-cart, the survivors were assisted on the journey by some of their guards, while in the Spanish capital they were accommodated «in good accommodation, each patient having a bed and blanket and good provisions of white bread, one pound of beef with soup and a pint of wine twice a day».[34] Much more unfortunate were the able-bodied. Among the prisoners taken in a minor skirmish on the Portuguese frontier was a dragoon named George Farmer:

> During our stay at Badajoz we suffered a good deal by reason, not only of the indifferent nature, but of the scanty allowance of the provisions issued

[33] Andrew BLAYNEY: op. cit., pp. 43-44.
[34] Mackenzie MACBRIDE (ed.): *Sergeant Nichol: the Experiences of a Gordon Highlander during the Napoleonic Wars in Egypt, the Peninsula and France,* London, Leonaur, 2007, pp. 112-123.

> out to us. Each man received *per diem* four ounces of bad goat's flesh with six ounces of black bread, but neither wine nor vegetables were served out, while, as to salt, we never knew that such an article had an existence … Our sojourn … was brief - only four days at the termination of which we set out on foot for Mérida. We suffered, as may be imagine, horribly during that march, for, besides [the fact] that several of us were wounded, cavalry soldiers are but little accustomed to pedestrian exertions, and the heat was quite overwhelming. Our lieutenant … became at last so weak that he fainted. Still, there was neither time given to rest, not horse, nor mule, nor any vehicle of any kind furnished for his conveyance. The French guard brought him to by shaking, and he was forced, at the bayonet's point, to struggle on … till we reached a halting place … We were all famishing, for no food had been issued ere we quitted Badajoz … The third day brought us to Mérida … We were halted in the market-place, where crowds, both of the inhabitants and of French soldiers, immediately surrounded us. The former expressed commiseration for our fate; the latter gloried in saluting us with such epithets as marked a feeling for us both of hatred and contempt. But they did us no serious injury, and, as we were permitted to halt here a day, our jaded limbs gathered a good deal of refreshment from the indulgence … As evening closed a quantity of loaves were thrown in at our window by the inhabitants till we soon had enough to last us, not for the day alone, but for a whole week, supposing the means of transport to have been accessible.[35]

The kindness reported by Farmer and, indeed, Jones, is interesting as it is suggestive of a degree of popular sympathy with the struggle against Napoleon. Meanwhile, that it eased the situation of at least some of the men concerned there is no doubt. Herewith, for example, the memories of the same William Brooke who was captured at Albuera:

> We marched this day [23 May] to Constantina. I was billeted on a carpenter, who received me in a civil manner, made up a bed for me in a corner of the room, and began to prepare food. I was not long seated when two graceful and elegant young Spanish ladies … entered the room … They addressed me in Spanish, but, finding that I did not well understand their language, made me comprehend in the best way they could that they had brought a surgeon to dress my wounds. He was called in, and was followed

[35] George GLEIG (ed.): *The Light Dragoon*, London, Henry Colburn, 1855, pp. 45-49.

> by a group of young women ... The doctor unbound my head, dressed it and tied it up again. Some of [the] girls were then called forward with a basket filled with sweetmeats, fruit and cake, and at least a gallon and a half of excellent wine, of which they pressed me to partake … They remained with me some time, [and] then, politely wishing me good night, left me to enjoy the rest that wearied nature craved.[36]

For some officers, Brooke amongst them, the patriotic solidarity of the sort on display at Constantina proved to extend not just to their sustenance but their salvation. Thus:

> Twenty-fifth July: on this morning I was sitting at the iron bars of my window reading the Old Testament, when a Spaniard … entered my room, and … gave me from his shoulders a Spanish cloak, took from out of his hat another one, and produced from his pocket a … paper of paint… which, toned in colour in colour with brick-dust from the walls, I … rubbed over my face and hands … We then passed from my cell through a small room where six British officers were confined … Five sentries kept guard here … There was also a strong … guard at the outer gate. All these posts I had to pass, being several times obliged to put my hand gently against the sentry to make him give way to let me pass. On my arrival in the open street … my preserver led me through many by-ways, in which we met French officers and soldiers innumerable, and at last … conducted me to his abode, where I found his wife ready to welcome me with a good supper … I was extremely anxious to go forward at once, but my preserver alleged that it would take time to fix me a route by learning in what direction the French troops were least numerous … Thus two days ran by, during which I learned that the French … had offered for my detection 5,000 *reales*.[37]

Brooke was particularly fortunate, but rescue by Spanish *résistants* was not the only way out of the predicament in which British prisoners of war found themselves. Thus, whilst the overall system of prisoner exchanges may have broken down, on the ground both sides had an interest in securing the release of prisoners - a good example is the Francis Larpent quoted above - before they were dispatched to France or Britain as appropriate, the result being that numerous local deals were struck, the negotiations invariably being conducted in the most friendly and civil of fashions. Here, for

[36] Charles OMAN: "A Prisoner of Albuera…", pp. 185-186.
[37] Ibídem, pp. 193-196.

example, is Lieutenant William Swabey's account of a mission which he undertook to arrange such an exchange in the summer of 1812:

> When we arrived at the outposts, handkerchiefs were tied over our eyes, a ceremony which, though performed with the greatest civility, was totally unnecessary on this occasion. We were carried to the general officer's quarters, ascertained that all due care was taken of some wounded men and officers, and set on foot their exchange, which was afterwards completed. By the time this was done it was nearly sunset and we were persuaded to remain to dine and sleep: there was nothing very extraordinary in this for there was always great rivalry in generous civility between … Count d'Erlon … and Sir Rowland Hill.[38]

All this said, the life of a prisoner of war could still be difficult and unpleasant. As noted before, this was particularly the case for those outside the charmed circle of the commissioned ranks. Passing through Madrid, for example, Blayney discovered that the large number of other ranks currently being held in the Spanish capital until such time as enough had been collected to make it worthwhile sending off a convoy to France were being denied their proper rations, and, in addition, that Spanish civilians anxious to succour their wants were being denied access to them.[39] Certainly George Farmer was bitter in his recollections of the conditions in which he and his companions were kept during the time that he spent in the city. Thus:

> Of all the places of confinement into which I ever was thrust this at Madrid was the most horrible. It had originally been a barn or a storehouse; it measured about twenty feet by ten, and there was no other opening in it but the … doors by which we were admitted … We found in it several infantry soldiers belonging chiefly to the … Buffs, and the state in which they were may be guessed at when I describe the sort of furniture with which the prison house was garnished. Some trusses of hay there to lie down upon, not only worn into powder, but literally alive with vermin. Then again, as the upper part of the cell was used for purposes which I need not particularise, the stench was horrible, while the squalid appearance of our countrymen told a tale of very hard fare and a general absence of soap and water. With respect … to our diet, it consisted of the prison allowance,

[38] Frederick WHINYATES (ed.): *Diary of Campaigns in the Peninsula for the Years 1811, 12 and 13 written by Lieutenant William Swabey, an Officer of E Troop (present E Battery), Royal Horse Artillery*, Woolwich, Royal Artillery Institution, 1895, p. 105.
[39] Andrew BLAYNEY: op. cit., pp. 260-9.

> namely a pound and a half of bread per day, not made from wheat but almost entirely from beans, and soaked, if we chose it in cold water.[40]

Desperate to escape these conditions, Farmer eventually accepted the offer of work as the man-servant of the commander of the Berg lancer regiment, whilst other men, albeit a handful only, enlisted in one of the foreign corps of the French army, usually the so-called Irish Legion, and that despite the fact that they risked execution by firing squad if they ever fell into the hands of their erstwhile comrades: passing through Burgos *en route* for incarceration in France, Nicol claims that he saw many such men.[41] Yet in truth the conditions endured by men like Nicol and Farmer were no worse than those that were endured by the many French prisoners confined in the dreaded hulks moored in the Thames estuary, or, indeed, those which many common soldiers taken prisoner had experienced in earlier conflicts such as the Seven Years War. As for the hunger experienced by Farmer in Badajoz, as he himself admitted:

> I believe that, in point of feeding, we were not by many degrees worse treated than the French themselves who could derive no advantage from the surrounding country and into whose magazines time had already made grievous inroads.[42]

Nor, meanwhile, is there any record of the French according British prisoners the same treatment as that which meted out to any Spanish prisoner who fell out in the veritable death-marches which the thousands of men taken in such battles as Ocaña underwent *en route* for the French frontier, Boothby, for one, recording that the high road from Madrid to Bayonne with strewn with «the carcasses of Spanish soldiers … upon whose bodies the uniform declares their nation and the wounds the manner of their death».[43] If ill treatment was experienced, then, it seems more likely to have occurred in France than in Spain and Portugal, the experiences of British soldiers sent to such *dépôts* as Briançon, Bitsche and Verdun occasioning many protests. Here, for example is Charles Sturt, a Whig politician who in the 1790's had been a sharp critic of the government of William Pitt, not to mention an advocate of a compromise peace with France, only to find himself a prisoner of Napoleon when the breakdown of the Treaty of Amiens surprised him in the midst of a visit to Paris:

[40] George GLEIG: op. cit., pp. 52-53.
[41] Mackenzie MACBRIDE: op. cit., p. 132.
[42] George GLEIG: op. cit., p. 45.
[43] Charles BOOTHBY: op. cit., p. 226.

> It is a painful task to recite the numerous instances of barbarity exercised by those who are entrusted with the care of British prisoners. The robberies, the arbitrary and cruel exercise of the authority given to the commandants, has been strongly represented to the tyrant [i.e. Napoleon] himself … by myself and many others and not the slightest redress given nor even enquiry made ... Berthier ... Clarke, Fouchet, all were apprised … of the rapacious and infamous conduct of General Wirion, commandant of the *dépôt* for English prisoners … conduct that would dishonour the greatest brigand known … Every wicked practice has been exercised by that wicked man that human ingenuity or depravity could devise.[44]

In arguing thus, Sturt admitted that in the Peninsula the experience of British prisoners of war had on the whole been very different - in fact, that «I am aware that our gallant countrymen in Spain receive the kindest and most generous treatment from the French army in that country».[45] For this, however, there was, in his eyes at least, a simple explanation. Thus:

> If principles of honour did not make a strong impression on the bosom of the French soldier, other feelings operated very strongly: he knew retaliation would be exercised, and [that], if any wanton cruelty was exercised, we should have taken ample revenge. There have not been wanting instances of … the most dreadful barbarity towards our soldiers notwithstanding, but they have been checked, if not stopped, by our retaliating.[46]

For Sturt, then, the idea that British prisoners owed the relatively decent manner in which they were treated not so much to French gallantry as to French cowardice. As the fear of retaliation did not pertain across the Pyrenees, the real nature of Napoleon's soldiers could therefore not but come to the fore. As he continued:

> It is not the French army in Spain that I complain of, it is the conduct of … the officers of the gendarmerie and the soldiers of that corps … The regular soldier … is exposed to the chances of war, and daily exposed to be taken a prisoner, [and] interest therefore prompts him to restrain his disposition to be cruel, but these police-soldiers, whose service is so disgusting

[44] Charles STURT: *The Real State of France in the Year 1809 with an Account of the Prisoners of War and Persons Otherwise Detained in France*, J. Leslie, London, 1810, pp. 77-78, 87.
[45] Ibídem, p. 88.
[46] Ibídem, pp. 87-88.

> that they are steeled against every principle of humanity … are little deserving of respect.[47]

Eventually released on the grounds of ill-health in 1810, Sturt returned to Britain a broken man destined for an early grave, while he was also deeply embittered at the manner in which his naïve faith in the French Revolution had been so rudely disillusioned: the many pages of abuse which he devotes to belittling Napoleon's character are spectacular indeed. However, that conditions for the rank-and-file and, indeed, anyone without private means could be extremely grim. For a good example, we need only cite the memoirs of Daniel Nicol, a fair-minded observer who was always ready to recognise instances of humanity on the part of the French. After a relatively comfortable journey from Madrid - he and the thirty-odd fellow prisoners travelling with him were throughout given places in wagons, whilst the commander of the column proved to be a decent man who did his best to ensure that his charges were well looked after - conditions in the citadel in which Nicol eventually found himself were at the very least suggestive of systematic neglect. As he later complained:

> As we entered the grand square, we saw above 1,500 of our countrymen in a miserable condition, one half of them being nearly naked with pieces of old blanket round them. A cold shudder came over me as I looked at them. Their condition was a disgrace to the French nation for there was an abundance of clothing in the stores … There are good bomb-proof barracks all round the square which were used for the accommodation of prisoners. There we were taken and put into messes … Our provisions were scanty, consisting of twelve ounces of bread and six ounces of beef with a very small allowance of rice … barely sufficient to support nature … What bedding we had was rotten and full of vermin.[48]

To conclude, then, in so far as the experience of British prisoners of war is concerned, the Peninsular War did not witness any real change in the practices of earlier times: more than that, indeed, the situation laid out in the current paper was in all probability little different from that encountered by the soldiers of the Duke of Galloway one hundred years previously. Nor is this surprising: British soldiers may have been keen to fight the French, but, as the recollections of Larpent suggest, the more educated elements of Wellington's army were anything but averse to engaging with French culture. On top of this, meanwhile, there were the special conditions typical of

[47] Ibídem, pp. 88-89.
[48] Mackenzie MACBRIDE: op. cit., pp. 142-143.

war in the Peninsula. Not only did Spain and Portugal constitute a theatre of war that was singularly bleak in physical terms, but British and French soldiers alike were united in their contempt for the indigenous inhabitants, the Catholic nature of Iberian society and the cruelties endured by those men unfortunate enough to fall into the hands of the Spaniards and Portuguese. As a result, there emerged a strong feeling of mutual respect and understanding that militated against any move away from the conventions of the past, the fact being that British and French soldiers were invariably far more likely to fraternise with one another than they were to engage in the brutality of an age that was yet but in the process of dawning (the exception, of course, were the much sterner gaolers whom the British prisoners encountered in France, men who, perhaps, had been through the horrors of the Peninsula and in addition believed themselves to be beyond all retaliation).[49] In short, to return to the issue with which we started, if this paper has a key-word, it is therefore very much continuity rather than change.

[49] For the issue of fraternization, see Anthony BRETT-JAMES, "Fraternization in the Peninsular War", *History Today*, 12 (1962), pp. 354-361; Phillip HAYTHORNTHWAITE: "Carrying on the war as it should be: fraternization", in Ian FLETCHER, op. cit., pp. 115-130.