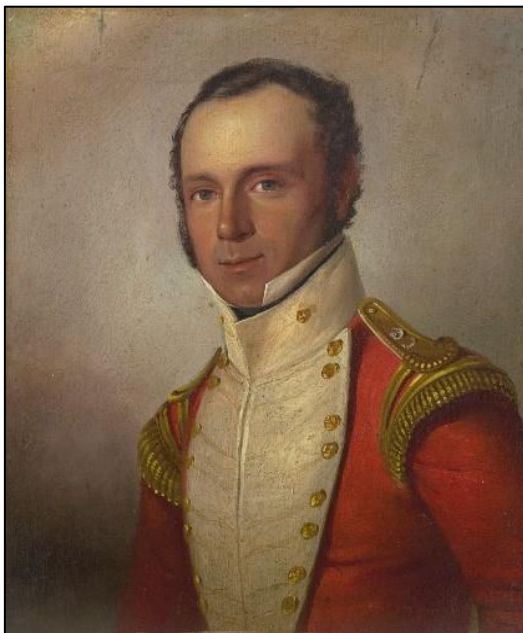


## **The Third Siege of Badajoz: The Blomfield Letters**

Original letters written by a Peninsular War veteran, reproduced with kind permission of Angela and Jason Blomfield, Queensland, Australia.

*By Thomas Valentine Blomfield*



**Thomas Valentine Blomfield**

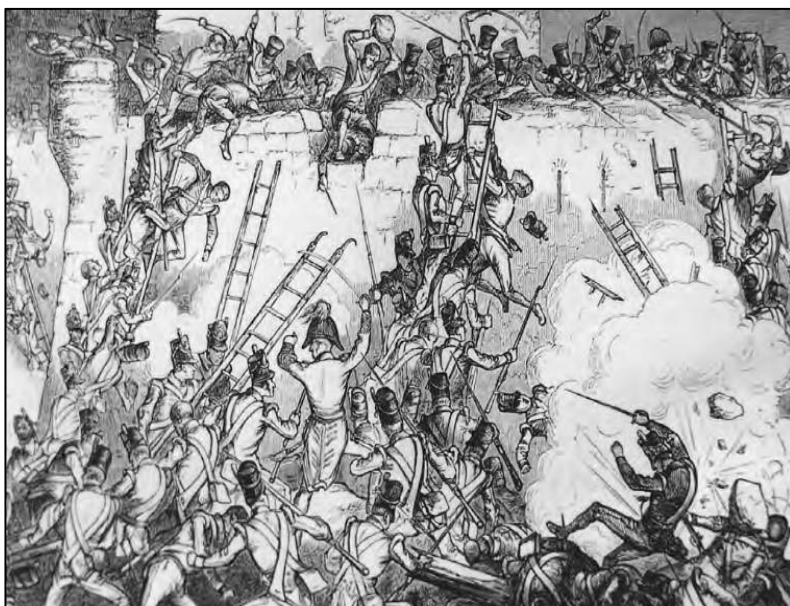
### **Introduction**

Thomas Valentine Blomfield was an officer in the British Army during the Peninsular War. The two letters reproduced below that he wrote to home, one from near Badajoz and the other from Portugal, give a graphic account of what it was like to be a soldier at that time and of the horrors of the Third Siege of Badajoz in 1812.

Blomfield was born on St. Valentine's Day, 1793 in Suffolk. He enlisted as an ensign in the 2nd Battalion of the 48th (Northamptonshire) Regiment in 1809. During the Peninsular War he fought in many of the major battles between 1810 and 1814. After the war, in 1817, his regiment was sent to Botany Bay, New South Wales, where he met Christiana Brooks, the daughter of Capt. Richard Brooks. They married in 1820. In 1824 Blomfield sold his commission and a year later was granted 2,000 acres of land in the Hunter Valley. He died in 1857.<sup>1</sup>

There is a display about him in the Australian War Museum in Canberra. Both husband and wife were prolific writers of letters. These were published in 1926 as *Memoirs of the Blomfield family: being letters written by the Late Captain T. V. Blomfield and his wife to relatives in England*,<sup>2</sup> from which the two letters below originate.

Apart from minor changes, the letters have not been edited.



**British infantry attempts to scale the walls of Badajoz (artist unknown)**

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Valentine\\_Blomfield](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Valentine_Blomfield)

<sup>2</sup> <https://livinghistories.newcastle.edu.au/nodes/view/106320#idx366910>

## **In camp before Badajoz**

(Letter from Blomfield to Mrs J. Edwards (his sister), Framlingham, Suffolk, England)

23rd March 1812

My Dear Louisa

I received a letter from you a short time since but, unfortunately, I have lost it, and I do not recollect its date or contents. I think I received it on the march hither. I also received one written by Mr. E., yourself and Mrs Stanford dated 22nd January, and also one from my father of 12th December.

After the fall of Ciudad Rodrigo, which I told you about in my last, we remained in quarters until the 6th March, when we commenced our route for this place, and arrived on 21st inst., after some very long and dirty marches. It has now been raining for this last week, and you may conceive how wet, dirty and uncomfortable we all are.

Our men are in tents, but not near sufficient; we have about twenty in a tent. The day we arrived here, after a very long and wet march from Elvas, I had to go on picket quite close to the town, where we had to remain until last night, it was raining the whole time and not the least cover. Our trenches are very near the town – I believe they are not more than 300 yards from the wall, so that we fire musketry at each other.

The garrison, according to reports, consists of 4000 infantry and a few cavalry. The trenches are very dirty, up to our knees. I am now, you must know, a full Light Bob. I got into the Light Company soon after the fall of Ciudad Rodrigo. I have got a new jacket and a very handsome pair of wings, which cost me twenty dollars. I have also a second jacket and wings. I hope we shall take this confounded place this time – this is my second time before it. I hope all those confounded large balls and shells will pass over me as they have done heretofore.

If I escape when we storm the town I will try and get a good horse or two, or a few doubloons would satisfy me. I wish this rainy weather was over, and then this business would not be half as unpleasant. I have been wet every day for this last seven days. I suppose the siege will bring on a general engagement.

We have a very fine army, with plenty of British cavalry and artillery and an able commander, so that Mr. Marmont<sup>3</sup> must be cautious about what he is about. You see, they can do nothing without me at sieges and battles, for I am always employed; after my taking Rodrigo they send me to take Badajoz. I hope I shall succeed as well as at Rodrigo.

I shall not write any more today as the letters do not go off for England until Friday, and this is Monday. I shall write a little every day until then if I have time and a whole skin. Yesterday (Sunday) I had not time to write, as I was on duty in the trenches, and did not come off till two o'clock this morning. I was employed in making a magazine, and opening the embrasures in one of our batteries. Our batteries opened this morning upon the town at 10 o'clock, and they are now firing away at a great rate. One poor fellow of my party had his head knocked off while opening an embrasure.

The weather is now set in to be fine. I shall be heartily glad when this annoying business is over. I believe I shall not say any more until tomorrow.

.... Thursday: I think I had better conclude this epistle today, as tomorrow I suppose I shall have to go into the trenches. Our troops took a fort from the enemy last night within about 150 yards of the town. They took, wounded and killed about 300 of them. The Portuguese that were employed behaved uncommonly well. They leaped into the ditch, up the wall, and bayoneted every one they could meet. The French had 500 in the place.

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<sup>3</sup> Marshal Auguste Frédéric Louis Viesse de Marmont

The Earl of Wellington is also in camp with us. We have four Divisions round the place and the rest of the army are in advance. I saw Fred (or Frank) Aldrick yesterday and dined with him. We met when we were in the north. He belongs to the 95th Regiment, which of course you know. I believe we are to storm another work tonight.

The day that I arrived in this camp I received a letter from my good old friend Captain W. Garnham. They were then at Liverpool, which place he dislikes very much. He tells me that Harry St. Clair is now a private in the 11th Light Dragoons. I am sorry for him.

I see no chance of getting home at present, but, however, I shall try when this business is over, if we are quiet. How happy I shall be when I see myself seated amongst you all, and telling you my hairbreadth escapes, etc., etc.

I believe I have nothing more to say at present. Remember me to Mr. E., Mr S. Wingfield, and my good friends at Tannington, particularly to the female creation. I will write again to some of you when this business is over. I fear there will be a good many lives lost before we can call this place ours. The Drum-Major has now come for the English letters.

Adieu, my dear Louisa. Remember me to all friends and relations, and believe me to be,

Your affectionate brother

TVB

NB: His Lordship expects to have the place by the fourth of next month.

TVB.

## Camp at “Povoa”, Portugal after the Siege of Badajoz

(Letter to his father, Captain Thomas Blomfield)

6th May 1812

My dear Father

I am well aware you expected to hear from me long before this. I should have written to you immediately after the fall of Badajoz, but had no time. My servant was wounded and everything in confusion. However, I will proceed to give you a description of the siege and assault and likewise what I have been doing since the fall of Rodrigo, and then I think you will see I had sufficient excuse for not writing before.

After the fall of Rodrigo we remained in quarters in some miserable villages in the north until the 27th February, when we commenced our march for Badajoz, but most of our regiment unfortunately having the itch we were halted after the first day's march for six days to get rid of that unpleasant companion, and then we proceeded on our way to the above mentioned place, where we arrived after a very pleasant march by ourselves, except the last four days that were wet. However, we were too late to help our brave lads to open ground, as that was done on the night of the 17th. We had very bad weather for about a week, so that we were seldom dry. We had only three divisions employed in the work, which were the 3rd, 4th and the Light, so that we were very hard worked, relieving every six hours.

Some poor fellows, in fact most of them, had not a night's rest out of seven. They did not fire so much from the garrison as at Rodrigo, but they contrived to destroy a considerable number of us. I had, of course, many narrow escapes. One morning in the main breaching battery one shot and a shell that were thrown nearly at the same time killed and wounded 17 of the party that I had at work. I received no injury except a crack on the head by a stone, which rather stunned me. Our works were remarkably fine.

As well as I can recollect, our flanking batteries opened on the 23rd and our breaching ones a few days after. An incessant fire was kept up until the 5th, when the breaches were thought practicable, and we received the order to storm that night at 10 o'clock, but the order was countermanded and our batteries directed to breach in another part of the wall, which was effected by the evening of the 6th, the wall being very soft in that part. The columns were put in motion for the assault at dusk.

The 3rd Division were directed to escalate the Castle, and the Light and our Division (the 4th) were ordered to storm the breaches. One brigade of the 5th Division escalated on the left of the town near the Guadiana. We all started to our different points of attack by 9 o'clock. The garrison very soon found that we were coming and opened a tremendous fire on us. The grenadier companies of our division led the van.

The night being very dark it looked as if the Heavens were on fire. It was the grandest sight I ever saw. We had made three breaches and they had 1000 men at each, and notwithstanding the immense fire that had been kept up from our batteries they had contrived to cut the breaches completely off from the town. They had also finished breastworks at the top of the breaches and immense chevaux-de-frizes<sup>4</sup> and loop holes made in the house, near the breaches; in fact they left nothing undone that they thought would impede our progress. They had also planks stuck full of iron spikes laid on the slant of the breaches at the top, and on the top of the wall very large shells ready to light, which I saw them do, and roll them down on us.

We moved up in very good order under an immense fire into the glacis<sup>5</sup>, and there we remained for a length of time and could not get on. We first had to get down over the palisade and then by ladders into the ditch, which was wet. I was standing up to my breech in water for two

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<sup>4</sup> *Chevaux de frise*. A defensive obstacles made from sword blades.

<sup>5</sup> The slope leading up to the (first) defensive ditch, designed to disguise the depth of the ditch and to deflect or absorb incoming cannon ball fire.

or three hours. I made an attempt at all the breaches, and did all I could to get up, but they knocked us down as fast as we ascended. I was knocked down several times by the poor fellows who were killed. My cap was knocked off my head and torn to pieces, and the breast of my jacket was also torn. We had such obstacles in our way that it was impossible to surmount them, and were obliged to retire out of the ditches in complete confusion, the two divisions being quite intermixed.

However, the 3rd Division succeeded in gaining the castle, or we should not have taken the town that night. But the enemy had not the least idea the castle would be attacked, as it was the strongest part of the town and therefore were not so well prepared, having the greatest part of their force at the breaches. We had ladders 40 feet long for the castle. The strength of the garrison when we commenced the siege was 5000; they lost 200 during the siege, which was a considerable number.

As soon as they found the castle was in our possession they were panic struck and almost immediately threw down their arms. We then all got in and secured the prisoners. Then the town was given up to plunder for 24 hours, and such a scene I never before saw. Every door that was fastened was immediately opened by firing into the keyhole. Some fellows loaded themselves with church plate, others with doubloons, dollars, and other kinds of coin, and others making off with horses, mules etc., etc.

If I had not been a great simpleton I might have got several horses or mules. I might have bought them off the men for a very few dollars ... they sold fine horses for 6, 10, and 20 dollars each, which were worth 100 and more, but not having any money in my pocket I could not purchase, as the fellows wanted ready money. However, I thought perhaps I could find one myself, and away I started. It was not long before I fell in with a cavalry mare, ready saddled. I directly mounted her and rode off to my tent. I have her still. She is rather clumsy but suits me very well.

The soldiers very soon got drunk and things were carried to a pretty pitch, committing rapes, murder and plunder – in fact every sort of devastation was going on. They even shot one another, and it was impossible for any officer to interfere. As to the plunder they well deserved all they got, but it is impossible for me to describe the scene to you. It was four or five days before we could get the men into any kind of order at all. We had 3 officers killed, 10 wounded (one of which – a captain – is since dead), 29 men killed, 116 wounded, besides six sergeants. Of course many of the brave fellows are since dead.

I understand that Earl Wellington said he wished every officer and soldier in the army to see what preparations the enemy had made to receive us. All officers who were judges of the matter said it was impossible to enter at the breaches defended as they were. During the siege Marmont, in order to create a diversion in favour of Badajoz, entered the north of Portugal and pushed some of his cavalry as far as Castello Branco, and some as far as Guarda, robbing and plundering wherever they came. They surprised a considerable body of Portuguese militia at Guarda and routed them and, as the report says, took six stand of colours, but when they found that Badajoz had fallen and we had crossed the Tagus after them, they retired over the Agueda. Our station now is about two leagues from the Douro, in order, I suppose, to get well supplied and have a little rest. I believe the Light Division is in Ciudad Rodrigo, and all our cavalry are on the bank of the Tagus.

The country about here is very mountainous and the villages very miserable. The French have never been here. Wine is very cheap – about 4d a pint. It is astonishing to see the dirt and filth the inhabitants of this part of the country live in, and the habitations – I cannot call them houses – so very uncomfortable, although they have plenty of money. I wrote to Louisa a day or two after I arrived at Badajoz. I think I told her I was a Light Bob. I am afraid I shall not be able to come to England for some time, as we have so few officers in the Regiment. I have had the command and payment of the Light Company for the last two months.

T.V.B.

## Acknowledgements

Mark Crathorne and Andrew Shepherd.



*Thomas Valentine Blomfield is Jason Blomfield's ancestor. Jason and Angela Blomfield live in Queensland, Australia. Jason's grandfather, Richard Henry Blomfield, continued the 'warrior' character of the Blomfields and was awarded the Military Cross for his actions and bravery during WWI in France, where another brother met his death.*

*The name 'Blomfield' is derived from the French 'Blom d'ville'. The family came from Normandy and it is reputed that Richard 'Blomville' arrived in Britain with William the Conqueror in 1066, and was possibly a nephew of his.*

*Further details about Thomas Valentine Blomfield's life in Australia in the early 19th century can be found on the website of the 'Monaro Pioneers'.<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.monaropioneers.com/>