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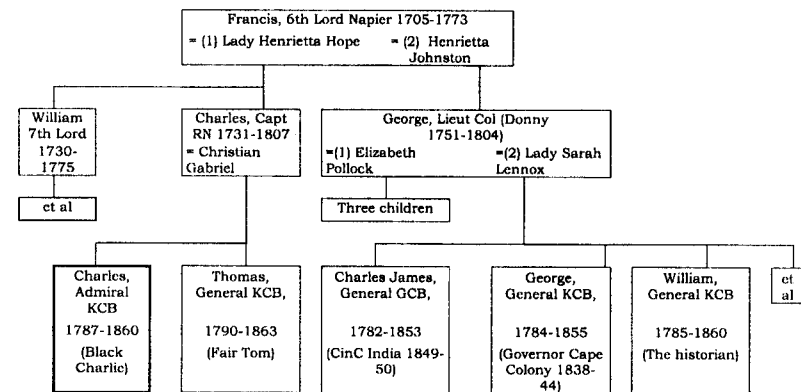
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BLACK CHARLIE ADMIRAL SIR CHARLES NAPIER KCB AKA CARLOS DE PONZA

by Colonel Gerald Napier

Accounts of the Peninsular War seldom progress far without some reference to one or more of the three Napier brothers whose exploits in battle were so often brought to Wellington's notice. Their renown owes much to the achievements of the youngest of the trio, William, as the historian of the war. * The eldest, Charles, is often more remembered for the punning signal 'Peccavi' attributed to him by *Punch* after his controversial annexing of the (then) Indian province of Scinde towards the end of his career in 1843.† The middle brother of the three, George‡ left an arm behind at Ciudad Rodrigo. It was after that siege that Wellington, in a letter to their

The confusing Napiers



The Napier family tree showing the relationship between Admiral Sir Charles Napier and his soldier brother and cousins.

* General Sir William Napier KCB

† General Sir Charles Napier GCB

‡ General Sir George Napier KCB

mother about the episode wrote ‘...having such sons, I am aware that you expect to hear of those misfortunes which I have more than once had to communicate to you.’¹ He eventually nursed the infant Cape Colony through a sensitive period of its early life, as its governor. Nevertheless, in their young days in the Peninsula the brothers seem to have represented the quintessence of heroism with honour that characterised the best of Wellington’s army. Their sense of family duty was strong and this extended to their sailor cousin, Charles. Sailor Charles had been known to his relatives as ‘*Black Charlie*’ for as long as could be remembered, to distinguish him from his soldier cousin. His swarthy appearance was contrasted with that of his own much fairer younger brother, Thomas.

Charlie particularly appreciated the family solidarity on the eve of the battle of Bussaco. Then a 24-year-old captain, who was already a veteran of many actions at sea, he was kicking his heels in Scotland between ships. Eager to see something of the war on land he was granted leave of absence to visit the Peninsula to seek out his cousins and his brother, Tom, then a captain serving in the *Chasseurs Britannique* in Cadiz. After several adventures he eventually caught up with the Allied army on the Bussaco ridge, preparing for imminent battle. A colonel to whom he had an introduction failed to produce the dinner that Charlie had anticipated, and of which he was in sore need after his journey (the army was on short commons at the time), and he was directed to General Sir Robert Craufurd’s Light Division. There he found not only George and William, who were then commanding companies in the 52nd and 43rd Regiments respectively, but also the senior brother, Charles, detached from his own regiment (the 50th) to serve on Wellington’s staff. Ration beef and biscuit washed down by rough country wine completed the family party.

The following day (26th September) the expected attack had not materialised but Charlie’s curiosity caused him to be one of the early casualties. As George later put it:

“He (Charles Napier) had gone out with me the evening before the battle to skirmish a little with the French pickets, as

General Craufurd thought that they had advanced rather closer to our advanced posts was right, so I was ordered to move down and push them a little farther back. Charles Napier, of course, WOULD take a little white pony I had to ride with us, notwithstanding that I told him that it was very foolish, for most certainly he would get hit, being the only person on horseback. But he chose to go his own way, and in less than half an hour he got shot in the calf of the leg; but very slightly, and I was delighted at it, the obstinate dog; he deserved it well! However, he was very good-humoured, and laughed as much as anyone at his own folly.”²

At daybreak Charlie was up with his cousins and witnessed the episode by the windmill in which, as William was to write later:

“Craufurd, standing alone on one of the rocks, had been intently watching the progress of this attack, and now with a shrill tone ordered the two regiments in reserve to charge! the next moment a horrid shout startled the French column and eighteen hundred British bayonets went sparkling over the brow of the hill.”³



Admiral Sir Charles Napier as a young man (from a miniature in the author’s possession).

After the repulse of Ney’s corps, Charlie went off the San Antonio de Cantaro sector where he knew he would find cousin Charles in attendance on Wellington. The latter was, at that time,

dealing with the crisis of the battle as Picton's division was being severely threatened by the enemy incursion on to the crest. Charlie's arrival was timely. Both cousins were mounted, obvious targets, Charles wearing the scarlet of his regiment and Charlie in plain clothes, his trousers stained with the blood from his wound, exchanging a few words. Suddenly Charles began to sway in the saddle, struck by a musket ball that entered his face by his nose and lodged in his jaw. Charlie was able to hold him and take him back to the Convent where the surgeons extracted the ball (Charles gripping his cousin's hand during the agonising operation) and parcelled up Charles' face.



Admiral Sir Charles Napier KCB, an engraving from E H Nolan's *The Illustrated History of the War against Russia*.

Having rendered whatever services he could to his cousin, Charlie returned to the scene of battle and observed the results of Wellington's measures to restore the situation. He then remained with the army for some weeks before taking himself off to Cadiz, almost certainly by way of Lisbon and the Algarve, to join his brother. There he spent some weeks, among other activities improving his Spanish in the company of two señoritas who...

"... would sometimes, with playful badinage, remark on the great difference of appearance between the brothers: the soldier being tall and fair – the sailor quite the reverse and I have heard the

latter relate that, on a particular occasion, one of these lively girls, while commenting on this circumstance, said, with arch naïvety: 'What, one so fair – the other so dark – *Ah de mi! Caballeros, que habra entonces hecho su madre, de Ustedes?*'"⁴

Early Life

Black Charlie was the second son of Captain the Honourable Charles Napier whose father was a minor Scottish peer, the Sixth Lord Napier. His cousins were grandsons of Lord Napier through his second marriage. Charlie determined upon a naval career early in his life and achieved it against the wishes of his father. He learned his trade as a midshipman, going to sea at the age of fourteen. Discipline did much to control the awkward streak in his character and his own determination to learn brought him successfully through his exams. He saw action at the age of fifteen (in the *Renown*, a 74-gun ship). When, in November 1807, after eight years in the service and aged 21 he received command of the brig *Pultusk* in the rank of commander, he had served in some seven of His Majesty's ships and had experience of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, the Caribbean the Channel and the North Sea.

Early in 1808 Charlie was transferred to the 18-gun brig-sloop *Recruit*. Some incidents in that command serve to illustrate both the courage in action and the seamanship for which he was rapidly gaining a reputation. The first was a running fight with a French corvette, the *Diligente* (22 guns). In the first exchange of a twelve-hour running battle his thigh was broken, the bone perforating the flesh. After three hours *Recruit's* mainmast was shot away but she nevertheless attempted to board her enemy which, however, sheered off. In the continuing duel *Diligente* was badly damaged and ran away before the wind. *Recruit* gave chase but was unable to catch her.

Early the following year (1809), *Recruit* took part in the expedition against Martinique, one of a fleet of some 26 vessels under Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane. After a preliminary action they anchored off Fort Edward overnight. At daybreak Napier

spotted that Fort Edward was vulnerable to storming and asked for marines to that end. His immediate commander rejected the idea as too hazardous so, to check things out, Charlie set off in his gig rowed by four volunteer sailors, scaled the wall and hoisted the British flag on the ramparts. The place was duly occupied by troops, which resulted in the capitulation of the neighbouring Fort Bourbon.

Napier's final escapade in *Recruit*, before taking up his next command as post captain, was a running fight against the French 74-gun ship *d'Hautpoult*. This vessel, in company with two other '74s' had evaded the blockade and slipped across the Atlantic to bring relief to the garrison at Martinique. The force thus ran up against the British expedition and diverted to the Saintes. A British squadron with 2-3,000 troops set off to attack them and, as the French made their escape, Charlie led the pursuit, the larger vessels dropping behind. *Recruit* hung on like a leech and in due course the *d'Hautpoult* was taken and Charlie put in command of the prize.

At this stage of his life Charlie was 23 years of age and had served in the Navy for nine years. He now returned home to find he had been put on half-pay. He was furious at this apparent lack of recognition of his outstanding service, which would not have occurred had he remained in the West Indies. His reaction, as to all such slights in his life, was a letter to the First Sea Lord. His language in his petition may or may not have been as intemperate as his later communications were to become. No doubt, however, it represented an early brick in the edifice of anti-Napier feeling that was to build up in the Admiralty as the years, and Charlie's career, progressed. At least the interlude gave him the chance to attend university for two years and to take the break in the Peninsula which was the subject of the introduction to this article. He expressed his objections in a letter to the Admiralty in characteristic style: 'My leave of absence is just out. I don't think it worth remaining, for I expect you will give me a ship, as I am tired of campaigning, which is a d—d rum concern.'⁵

Frigate Commander

Two more commands were now to follow before peace was to bring a check to Charlie's career. This period was distinguished by the same courage, enterprise, professional competence and personal extroversion that marked his earlier experience. It is only necessary to touch on two affairs that were to have a bearing on his time in Portugal.

The first of these commands, the *Thames*, a 32-gun frigate, took Charlie back to the Mediterranean. He later wrote an account of his adventures for the *United Service Magazine*, but under a pseudonym, purporting to have been written by one of his own midshipmen. It thus reflects his own view of himself.

"Scarce was our new captain aboard ... before he poked his nose into every corner of the ship; nay, I believe, he was at the mastheads before dark. Orders were given to get ready for sea with all possible dispatch. The C— had just arrived from Calabria, where the trade was brisk, and our Captain thought that a sight of the coast of Italy would be more agreeable than all the fooleries of Palermo....we soon found the captain was a precious taut hand, and not very particular in rubbing up everybody, whether lieutenant, mid, or man, who neglected his duty or who, he fancied did so, which was pretty nearly the same thing".⁶

Many were the successes that came to the *Thames* in the form of victories and prizes taken largely off the Neapolitan coast. That in which he took special pride was the capture of the island of Ponza, another combination of fine seamanship and daring, in which he landed a 500-strong force of infantry without the loss of a man. It was from this incident that he was to adopt the *nom-de-guerre* he was to employ in his time in Portugal, necessary for legal reasons.

The war in Europe apparently over, an expedition now set sail from the Mediterranean to America where the War of 1812 had led to some humiliating setbacks for the Royal Navy. The expedition departed burning for revenge. Napier had by now been transferred to

the *Euryalus*, another frigate but far superior to the *Thames*. In August 1814 he took part in the brilliant punitive expedition up the Potomac river to Alexandria. In this Charlie was second-in-command to Captain James Alexander Gordon.* The affair was an epic of navigation and resolute action. Progress was fraught with difficulty from the uncharted shoals on which the ships were frequently stuck, sometimes presenting static targets for enemy fire. But the crisis came only three days into the voyage when a severe squall disabled both Gordon's command, *Sea-Horse*, and *Euryalus*. The damage to *Euryalus* suggested to Gordon that the attempt would have to be abandoned. Charlie assured him that all could be repaired quickly enough to allow progress, and so it was. Such refusal to admit defeat combined with confidence in the skills of his crew and his own ability to motivate them was Charlie's style and fundamental to his future successes.

Peace, family life and frustration

Peace in 1815 now brought an end to this hectic way of life. Charlie returned to Britain, married a naval widow who had been a family friend for years and embraced family life in the shape of four stepchildren with the wholehearted gusto and enthusiasm that marked all his activities. There then followed a period of fourteen years on half-pay during which he bombarded the Admiralty, not only with demands to be employed, but also with his own ideas on how they should be running the Royal Navy. A radical at heart, like all the Napiers, his views on flogging, impressment, the dwindling capabilities of elderly officers, American naval gunnery and many other topics did little to advance his own cause in an establishment satisfied with the system that had brought such manifest success.

Frustrating as all this was, Charlie was now a relatively wealthy man from the proceeds of his successful career and also from family inheritance through his mother. He and his new family were able to enjoy touring continental Europe which, typically, was marked with incidents arising from his robust personality. After a

* Thought now to be the model for C S Forester's Hornblower.

spell living in Switzerland, the family then settled in Paris for two years while Charlie pursued the main issue with which he was continuing to give the Admiralty the benefit of his views: iron steamships. The Admiralty's attitude is summed up in the statement of Lord Melville (Civil Lord) in 1828 that pronounced that:

"Their lordships feel it their bounded duty to discourage to the utmost of their ability the employment of steam vessels, as they consider the introduction of steam is calculated to strike a fatal blow at the naval supremacy of the Empire."⁷

Charlie backed his own convictions in a disastrous investment in steamboats on the Seine which, although they ran successfully, took most of his fortune on the way. The family returned to England in comparative poverty and, at last, Charlie was appointed to a ship, the elderly 42-gun frigate *Galatea*.

It was this appointment that was to lead eventually to his momentous involvement in Portuguese affairs. *Galatea* had been despatched to the Azores in May 1831 to oversee British interests during the trouble that was brewing up between the Constitutionalists, who were setting up their power base on the island of Terceira, and the Miguelites who were intent on overthrowing them. A successful small scrap ashore involving some marines sufficed to discharge his responsibilities on this occasion. However, in the course of his duties on behalf of the British government, Charlie struck up a sympathetic relationship with the Constitutionalist leaders (including the Count of Villa Flor). For their part, their admiration for the decisiveness and professional skills that Charlie had displayed were to lead to the approach the following year for him to take over Donna Maria's fleet from the present commander, Captain Sartorius.

Before this call came, however, *Galatea* was paid off and, once again on half-pay, Charlie made the first of his efforts to enter Parliament where, he increasingly believed, his voice might be more effectively heard towards the reforms that he desired in his beloved

Royal Navy. Fortunately, perhaps, for Queen Maria da Gloria's aspirations, he was unsuccessful.

The Intervention in Portugal

Charlie Napier had kept in touch with Portuguese affairs, ever since the Azores trip, through his Constitutionalist contacts. The cause had made some progress with a successful expedition to Oporto but Charlie believed that the Constitutionlists, under close siege there, would be unable to sustain their position on the mainland without a bold move against Lisbon. In September 1832, Queen Maria's Prime Minister, the Marquis of Palmela, came to England to canvass British support for her cause and offered Napier the command of her fleet. His readiness to leap at this opportunity was tempered by a number of factors. First was the refusal of the British government (under the Duke of Wellington who ought to have known better) to be involved in any official way. Nor did Charlie wish to supersede the present incumbent, Sartorius, who was an old friend, without clearing the proposal with him. He was able, however, to discover that there was no problem there because Sartorius had become disenchanted with his position and the lack of support from his employers, including non-payment of salaries due for several months. That led directly to the question of the terms under which Napier and the other British sailors would be employed. They would be jeopardising their whole careers by taking part in this risky enterprise without official backing. Their names would be struck off the Navy List and, should they lose their lives in action, there would be no pensions or support of any kind from the home government. The adoption of *noms-de-guerre* was just one of the ploys to overcome possible future legal difficulties of this sort. The political ambivalence in London is well illustrated by the statement by Mr Croker the former Civil Lord of the Admiralty, no admirer of Charlie's:

"A thing has occurred which by giving the Lords an opportunity of doing something, may postpone the necessity of coming in direct collision with the Commons at present. A strange, wild, Navy Captain, half-mad, of the name of Charles Napier, became a Radical in the hopes of being returned for Portsmouth.

Failing there, he has turned his energies towards Portugal, has engaged with Pedro to take Sartorius's place, and has collected and sailed with a large steamer, a couple of transports, and 1000 men..."⁸

It was not until May that these difficulties were overcome and Captain Napier, or Don Carlos da Ponza as he now styled himself, was able to set off accompanied by several more British officers including his stepson, Lieutenant Elers Napier. Eventually they landed near the castle of Foz at the mouth of the Duero where the Constitutionalist General Saldanha was in command. Saldanha, the successful and experienced general who had served with distinction both under Beresford and in Brazil, was one of the brighter prospects in the situation. He helped the party forward into Oporto, under the fire from the besieging Miguelites, to where the various Constitutionalist leaders were located, including Dom Pedro (the Emperor and Regent) and the Duke of Terceira (formerly the Count of Villa Flor). It was immediately clear that all was not complete harmony in the Constitutionalist camp. Various misunderstandings about Napier's possible role had to be ironed out until Dom Pedro accepted the position. Charlie gave him to understand that a condition of his acceptance of his new command was that an expedition to Lisbon would be immediately decided upon. There was an element of farce in these negotiations because Charlie was in agony from an acute bout of neuralgia contracted just before his departure and all his discussions were conducted with his face wrapped in a towel.



The dog 'Cartouche' belonged to Dom Miguel, was wounded in the thigh at the battle of Cartaxo, and taken by General Saldanha and given by him to Dom Pedro's wife, who being afraid of him gave him to Lady Napier, wife of Admiral Sir Charles Napier. Painted by George Cole (landscape painter). (Caption from the original painting in the author's possession).

Further political problems then arose, not least because the commander of the army was the French Marshal Solignac who was touchy and jealous of his position. After much wrangling the final decision was that an expedition would go ahead and Charlie was able to accept his commission as Vice-Admiral, Major-General of the Portuguese Navy and Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet with authority to appoint his officers. The land element of the expedition turned out to be a small land force of 2,500 men under the Duke of Terceira. Even this modest decision, agreed under repeated threats from the Admiral that unless his wishes were met he would haul down his flag and return whence he came, caused Solignac's resignation. In the resulting reshuffle Dom Pedro himself took command of the Army with Saldanha as his chief of staff.

Now aboard his flagship, the *Rainha de Portugal*, the new admiral was presented with endless problems to solve. Chief among them was manning. Many of the vessels he had brought with him from England had mutinous crews on whom he had already had to impose his authority. The British crews already in the fleet had been promised their return home and no inducements would persuade them, other than some of the officers, otherwise. Nevertheless the squadron set sail on 20th June 1833 with the Admiral's exhortation no doubt etched in their minds including:

"... My lads! We have battles to fight and great exertions to make. Preserve discipline and look up to your officers, and we shall succeed. The eyes of every free man in Europe are on you. Your countrymen – ay and country women also – are longing to welcome you home; and when the battle is won, and you return to your native homes, you will be hailed as men who rescued suffering Portugal from tyranny and oppression."⁹

The fleet with which he hoped to accompany this great mission comprised five men-of-war: *Rainha de Portugal* (46 eighteen-pounders, Captain Wilkinson), *Dom Pedro* (50 short eighteen-pounders and 32 carronades, Captain Goble), *Donna Maria* (42 various guns, Lieutenant Peak), *Villa Flor* (18 eighteen-pounders, Captain Ruxton), *Portuense* (20 thirty-two pound

carronades). There were also a number of steamboats and naval transports.

They headed off southward, the flagship also carrying the Dukes of Terceira and Palmela and their staffs in extremely crowded conditions. Demonstrations were made at various points along the coast but, in the end, it was the Algarve rather than Lisbon for which they headed. Terceira and his force landed in the Bay of Cacellas, just west of the mouth of the Guadiana. Success attended these moves and the local people declared for the Queen. Meanwhile Charlie led his squadron off towards Lisbon. On 3rd July when they were off Cape St Vincent, the Miguelite fleet of nine men-of-war was sighted, mounting a total of 372 guns to the Constitutionalists' 176.

"It was a majestic sight, and I turned the hands up to show the crews how well they looked and to exhort them to pay attention to the management of their guns, as the surest means of success. I had never been in a general action, and, although delighted at the prospect before me, I could not but feel appalled at their great superiority and the magnitude of the task I was about to undertake."¹⁰

Some manoeuvring then took place while Charlie looked for his opportunity. The sea was too high for boarding. However, he managed to prevent the enemy from forcing him inshore towards Lagos Bay. Towards daybreak on the 5th the wind dropped and he made the decision to engage, planning to use his steamers to tow his ships into position for boarding. All but one flatly refused without a large down payment. The whole operation was in jeopardy. Fortunately a slight wind got up and Napier called his captains on board to deliver his orders under which they would attack with the benefit of only one of the steamers. At 2.00pm *Rainha* led the attack and by outstanding seamanship managed to work her way alongside her quarry, also called the *Rainha*, suffering only minor damage and a few casualties from the massive broadside that greeted her. They boarded, and so began the hand-to-hand battle in which Charlie, against his original best intention, took energetic part, as did his

gallant stepson. This was punctuated by broadsides from which the flagship suffered severely.

It was a bloody business. Napier's small force lost 90 killed including twelve officers. Both Napiers were wounded, the young Lieutenant Elers Napier severely while killing five of the enemy on the way. Victory against admittedly an ill-trained enemy came from boldness and good leadership. In the end the Constitutionalist fleet was immediately increased by two ships of the line, a frigate and a corvette. Two more corvettes and a brig escaped but joined the Constitutionalist side later. Three weeks after the battle, the squadron reached an ecstatic Lisbon. On the way Charlie had had to deal with an outbreak of cholera on his new flagship, the former Miguelite *Don John*, the *Rainha* having had to return to Lagos for repair. He had also learned of his promotion to full Admiral and ennoblement by the Portuguese title of Viscount Count Cape St Vincent. Congratulations poured in from home as well, including from both cousins, Charles and William, the victory being seen as a British success. Not all were overjoyed that it should have come by the hand of such an outlandish personality as Black Charlie, however, and some embarrassment was felt in the supposedly neutral corridors of power. Moreover the King, William IV, who had earlier as a midshipman suffered the rough edge of Charlie's tongue and whose sympathies on the Portuguese issue were obscure, took the achievements of 'this unprincipled Firebrand and Adventurer of the most dangerous description' as a personal affront.¹¹

Charlie at once saw that winning this battle, crucial though it was, had not won the war. This view did not appear to be fully shared in Lisbon. Partly this was due to blindness, brought on by euphoria, to the threat from the Miguelite armies; partly it was because of the unsettled political attitudes among the Constitutionlists themselves. The Admiral's first responsibility was to the navy, however and the future of that hung much upon the efficiency of the Naval Arsenal at Lisbon for which he was now responsible and to which he turned his energies. He found it in a deplorable state 'the receptacle of the blind, the lame and the lazy.' The officials were 'quite indifferent ... whether the men worked or

not...when they did work [they] took special care to do it in the manner most pleasant and agreeable to themselves, anything like fatigue being quite out of the question.'¹² The measures necessary to rectify these abuses, together with many other actions for which the Admiral sought official support, now brought him into conflict with the Marine Department, with which he was to suffer friction for the rest of his time in Portugal. Nevertheless, by constant supervision and attention to detail he was able to improve the situation for the fleet.

While this was legitimate business for the Admiral, involvement in the war on land was less so. But, ever since his experience at Bussaco and as a follower of the subsequent fortunes of the Allied armies, Charlie had developed a hankering for fighting on land. He took a close interest in the battles around Lisbon until the besieging Miguelites made off for Santarem. He admitted in a letter to his wife that he had no business there but could not restrain himself. It was at this stage that he managed to arrange for her and his family to join him in Lisbon. To add to their amusements, Charlie presented them with a dog, a fierce looking brute, which had originally belonged to Don Miguel. Wounded in the thigh at the battle of Cartaxo 'Cartouche' was liberated to the Constitutionalist side. However he proved too much of a handful for Don Pedro and was handed on to Mrs Napier.

Even after the departure of the Miguelite army from the immediate area round Lisbon there was much to be done to establish the Queen's position. Much of this would mean fighting on land but if the approach was by sea and the ports would thereby be secured, this was fair game for the Admiral. In March 1833 he set off for the north with the grudging permission of the Emperor and his ministers. He had to go via Setubal to pick up some marines and, while there, he was recalled. Foreseeing disaster he replied that he was going anyway and landed at Guarda on the Spanish side of the Minho. From there he advanced on, and took Caminha and continued southwards down the coast, with the support of the guns of two of his ships, the *Dom Pedro* and the *City of Edinburgh*, as far as the River Lima. Opposition was negligible due to his having arranged with the

commander of the garrison at Oporto, Baron Pico de Celeiro 'Old Torres', to mount a simultaneous advance northward. The Admiral then decided that he could tackle some bigger game in the shape of the substantial fortress of Valença. He received the surrender of this four days later by a combination of a swift march, deception, threat and coercion. Not a shot had been fired although Napier had taken the precaution of ordering up guns and mortars from the *Dom Pedro* to act as a siege train if necessary.

Presented with this success, the Emperor was forced to swallow his anger at his Admiral's insubordination and Charlie returned to Lisbon, after being fêted in Oporto, with one more land campaign awaiting his attention when the sea conditions would allow. Such was the intrigue in the capital, however, that he nearly became disenchanted straightaway and had to be dissuaded from throwing up his command. Prospects improved in April with the signing of the treaty between Britain, France, Spain and Portugal recognising Donna Maria's right to the throne.

In May 1834 the opportunity came for the final expedition and Charlie set off for Figueira da Foz at the mouth of the Mondego. The treacherous waters there claimed the lives of the crew of one of his boats before the force was finally landed. He marched south to Pombal where he met up with a force under Colonel Vasconcellos, and from there to Ourem the garrison of which adopted a thoroughly hostile pose. Vasconcellos and his force was ordered to join the main army under the Duke of Terceira but the Admiral was now further reinforced by a Scottish battalion under Lieutenant Colonel Shaw and some Portuguese light infantry. Together they persuaded the garrison to surrender, much as Charlie had done at Valença, and marched on to join Terceira. To his great disappointment he missed the final battle, Asseiceva, which clinched victory for the Constitutionalist cause. Thus, wrote Napier:

"... finished the civil war in Portugal – a war undertaken by a handful of men against a large and well-disciplined army; a war undertaken by an ex-Emperor of Brazil to establish his daughter on the throne of Portugal, which had been usurped by her affianced

husband and uncle; a war conducted by imbecile and intriguing Ministers, who hardly ever did one act that was not favourable to Miguel; and a war brought to a successful termination by a chain of events that could never have been calculated upon."¹³

The Admiral did not, however, finally haul down his flag until October 1834. He had hoped to be able to persuade the government to accept his proposals for the reform of the Navy. However, the political will was absent, no doubt helped by the collapse of the Miguelite threat, and Charlie returned home to much acclaim and another unsuccessful attempt to enter Parliament. He was to make two further visits to Portugal. The first was only three years after his departure. His main aim was to obtain the payment of the money due to him and those who had served under him. However, it is probable that he also hoped to do something to influence for the better, as he saw it, the deteriorating political situation. The 'War of the Marshals' was now in progress in which his old friends and colleagues, the Duke of Terceira and Marshal Saldanha were endeavouring to overthrow the government that had formed in hostile reaction to the Queen's marriage. He was under suspicion throughout his time in Lisbon and, although his financial mission was successfully accomplished in the end, he realised he had no further place in Portuguese affairs at that time.

It was not until 1847 that he returned, this time in the exalted position of Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Squadron sent there officially to watch over British interests during the continuing civil war. The British government believed that Charlie's former good relations with the Portuguese would help in stabilising the situation and it seems that his actions, which included some vigorous exercises and trials as well as his own diplomatic efforts, earned the approval of the British government. They did not, however, allow him to use the Portuguese title, now converted to Count Napier St Vincent, even as a compliment to the Portuguese. The success of this tour of duty was given a bitter flavour, however, when *The Times* published an article that accused Charlie of abusing his position by trying to press yet again for overdue payments of his Portuguese pension. The matter was proved groundless but it, and a further

accusation in the press of having showed political bias in his dealings in Lisbon, illustrate the manner in which a controversial senior officer could be pilloried by hostile elements with their own agenda to follow. Charlie's cousin, General Sir Charles, was to be similarly attacked for his activities in Scinde.

There is little doubt that Charlie's style had earned him some enemies both within the service and the political world. It was hard to stomach his habit of 'speaking plain', his prickliness on matters he believed affected his honour, his endless demands for righting wrongs. To add to that were his eccentricities particularly in dress. He accepted himself that he was slovenly in appearance although he insisted on high standards from his subordinates.

His main appointment in the years before this last visit to Lisbon had been in the Syrian expedition of 1840-41. He had taken the *Powerful* (84 guns) out to join Sir Robert Stopford's fleet in the Mediterranean. There was a highly complex and delicate situation brewing up in which the British and French had agreed, unusually, to work together to inhibit Russia's efforts to obtain access to the Mediterranean. However, this abnormal alliance became severely strained over whether to support the Ottoman rulers (favoured by the British), or their sworn enemy, the Albanian-born Egyptian leader Mehmet Ali (a popular hero in France). War, fuelled by these imperial rivalries, seemed a strong possibility. The story of the resulting events has no relevance to Portugal. It will therefore suffice to record that Charlie Napier's role was as high profile as ever. As Commodore with his own squadron he led successful expeditions against the odds both on land and at sea. In these he took initiatives against the advice, and sometimes against the actual orders, of his superiors. Now in his mid-fifties Charlie was displaying phenomenal energy and subjecting himself to considerable privations in achieving his aims. He excited admiration and antipathy in equal measure. Sailing close to the wind (figuratively) in various negotiations that he undertook ashore he managed, despite his reputation for rashness, to step short of creating political disaster.

His final coup was, on his own initiative (albeit having consulted Palmerston), to negotiate a deal with Mehmet Ali, which effectively settled the whole affair to the satisfaction of the British government. In the negotiations Mehmet Ali seems to have warmed to Charlie's habit of 'speaking plain' in contrast to the more obscure manner of the French representative. Coals of fire descended on Charlie's head from diplomats and from some naval colleagues and superiors at this intrusion into their perceived areas of responsibility. Nevertheless 'his' convention was in the end adopted by the four powers and he received a gratifying letter from Lord Palmerston.

Before the spell as Commander-in-Chief Channel, already mentioned, Charlie achieved his ambition of entering Parliament, as a Liberal for Marylebone. His outspoken criticisms there of naval administration may have influenced the government to appoint a more acquiescent officer to the Mediterranean command when that vacancy arose, despite (or because of?) Charlie's efforts to push his own credentials. A public row broke out and no doubt opinions became further polarised. For a spell Charlie seemed to be finally on the scrap-heap as an 'irascible old windbag'. It was all the more surprising when he was then appointed to command the scratch fleet that was assembled to operate in the Baltic on the outbreak of the Crimean War.

Once again controversy was to follow in the wake of his actions there. Now well into his sixties, he was despatched with vague orders in which protection of his fleet was paramount. It seems that the administration secretly hoped that the old impetuous Charlie might break out and achieve some coup such as the surrender of the fortresses of Kronstadt or Sveaborg. If he succeeded, well and good; if he failed, he the blame for the inevitably disastrous losses could be laid at his feet. As it was, he carried out his orders to the letter, including some tricky diplomatic work. He held the Russian fleet at bay, though it never emerged to fight. He effected a thorough reconnaissance of the two major fortresses, assessed with the support of his subordinates that he had inadequate forces to attack them but made recommendations as to how they should be attacked the following year. He did successfully attack and destroy the Russian

base at Bomarsund in the Åland islands. Finally he returned home with no losses. His reward was to be invited to haul down his flag and hand his command over to another officer who, despite a much-strengthened fleet the following year, failed to make any impression on the Russians.

This final slight on his professional skills and judgement hurt Charlie to the quick. His entire career he had been sensitive to such criticisms whether open or implied. To bring such an illustrious career to an end in this manner was mean, vindictive and unjustified. He fought hard to clear his name and demanded a court martial, which was denied him. Finally, with support from many quarters, he succeeded through his own efforts in Parliament, to his complete satisfaction. However, this had not quite been achieved when he was informed that the Queen had approved a recommendation for the GCB.

“... a kind of sad pride stood in the way. Explaining the circumstances to the Prince Consort in a short letter, he ended: ‘I do not think I can accept an honour until my character is cleared.’ That was that and Charlie was never employed again.”¹⁴

Charlie did not long outlast his vindication. He died at his Hampshire home in 1860. There had been much in common between Charlie’s career and that of his cousin Charles whose frank but sometimes intemperate manner denied him the honours normally due to anyone whose military or naval record far outstripped their contemporaries, at least if performance in action be the criterion. One of the satisfactions of their later years had been the coincidental purchase of houses near to each other in Hampshire. In the years before Charles’ death in [1853] they frequently met, sharing banter about their gardens and situations. No doubt they also discussed the extraordinary experiences of two active lives with the particularly intimate bond forged when one of those had nearly come to an untimely end at Bussaco more than 40 years before.

--ooOoo--

Colonel Gerald Napier retired from the Royal Engineers in 1985 after a full career as a regular soldier. He then became Director of the Royal Engineers Museum at Chatham to oversee a £1 million project for its redevelopment. He retired from that in 1993 and now pursues his interest in the history of military engineering. To this end he and his wife have made several visits to Portugal, a habit they hope to maintain. Gerald is descended from Francis, 6th Lord Napier, the grandfather of the subjects of this article.

¹ *Wellington Despatches*, IX, 20 January 1812, quoted in Longford, Elizabeth, *Wellington, the Years of the Sword*, p. 266 Harper, 1969.

² Williams, H. Noel, *The Life and Letters of Admiral Sir Charles Napier KCB*, Hutchinson, 1917, p. 20.

³ Napier, Major General Sir W F P, KCB, *History of the War in the Peninsula*, Vol III, p. 27.

⁴ Williams, p. 24.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Williams, p. 26

⁷ Napier, Priscilla, *Black Charlie. A Life of Admiral Sir Charles Napier KCB*, Michael Russell, 1995, p. 43.

⁸ Napier, Priscilla, p. 54.

⁹ Williams, p. 94.

¹⁰ Williams p. 100 quoting from Napier, *Account of the War in Portugal*.

¹¹ Napier, Priscilla, p.75, quoting from Ziegler, Philip, *William IV*.

¹² Williams, p. 117, quoting from Napier, *Account of the War in Portugal*.

¹³ Williams, p. 135, quoting from Napier, *Account of the War in Portugal*

¹⁴ Napier, Priscilla, p. 214.