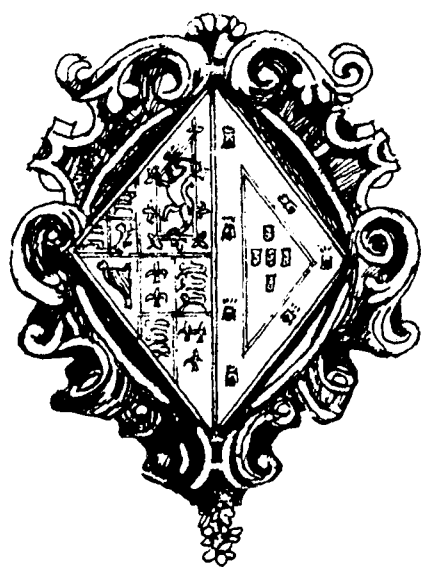


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## HUNTING IN THE PENINSULAR

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The sport of cousing was in great favour with the officers of the Peninsular Army, particularly when it lay behind the lines of Torres Vedras.

Meetings and individual matches were frequent, and hares, not being in possession of the necessary information to differentiate between enemy and British territory, frequently took their pursuing greyhounds into the French lines. On at least one occasion it is recorded that a well-known dog, which had thus involuntarily found itself a prisoner, was returned the following day under a flag of truce.



Wellington himself was later the principal in a yet more spectacular "course" which was much talked of in the Army at the time.

After the storming of Badajoz in the beginning of 1812, Marechal Marmont again invaded Portugal from the northward, much to the consternation of the Portuguese Militia, whose business it was to defend it.

The regular Portuguese troops, officered largely by British officers, had done well during their service in the Field with the British Army - in particular the Artillery. The Militia, however, on this occasion - unleavened by sufficient British element to invigorate them - did not wait for the report of the enemy cannon to remove themselves from the danger zone, but left on the rumour of their approach!

Marshal Beresford, then engaged in the reorganisation of the Portuguese Army, after giving them a good dressing-down in General Orders directed that each regiment concerned should lodge its Colours in the Town Hall of its respective district until they had provided themselves with a pair from the ranks of the enemy.

A contemporary writer states that he "never heard that any of them were redeemed in the manner prescribed." The details of the operations that followed, leading eventually to the well-known battle in the neighbourhood of Salamanca, (wherein the French General became a casualty) do not affect this narrative. The middle of June saw the British Forces in occupation of the heights of St. Christoval; an unsheltered, open ridge of country, unfurnished with either wood for bivouac fires or water to drink. Below them stretched a plain which Marmont descended, covered by a heavy cannonade of artillery, and placed his army almost within gunshot of their opponents who now had in their rear the town of Salamanca, evacuated by the French upon their approach.



Then occurred an incident which demonstrates how "Old Douro," - as Wellington was known to the rank and file, retained the respect of a sport-loving soldiery in spite of the severity of his disciplinary outlook and his conviction that the lash was the only method of controlling them.

As the British Line stood ranked upon the heights, and whilst the French cannon-balls played upon them to cover the manoeuvres of the many-coloured masses on the plains below, Lord Wellington rode slowly past the regiments, accompanied by a numerous staff. The summer afternoon was drawing to a close. The British troops, standing in line as was their wont and supported by their Portuguese allies, were receiving the fire from the French artillery with their accustomed stoicism. A few batteries were replying to this elevated discharge, but the majority of the Allied artillery was not engaged, whilst their cavalry were all disposed in rear and out of range. Below them the French columns wheeled and turned as at a review, whilst bodies of cavalry, cuirassiers, big men on big horses, dragoons, chasseurs-a-cheval, and false-whiskered hussars stood on either flank for their protection.

The English Commander-in-Chief halted in rear of one of his regiments, and engaged the Spanish General Castanos - a brilliant figure in a dazzling uniform - in earnest conversation. Their various staff officers sat respectfully, if anxiously, in rear, whilst cannon-balls ricocheted off the hard ground in their vicinity, or found their billets from time to time in the ranks before them.

At this moment a hare, followed by a brace of greyhounds, passed before "The Lord" and his companion. Giving a loud "view

hello" the great man set spurs to his horse and galloped in pursuit, leaving his Spanish confrere gazing after him with blank astonishment. The hare was nearly beat; and after going a few hundred yards was pulled down by the leading greyhound.

After seeing this accomplished, Wellington cantered back to where he had started from, and resumed his conversation as if the pursuit of hares in battle was part of his usual occupation, and amidst the delighted comments of those troops who had observed the incident.



In the Peninsular the spectacle of the Commander-in-Chief appearing wherever his presence was most desired, and mounted on an English hunter, was ever an inspiration to the troops. To the Spaniards, accustomed to the lumbering progress of their own leader in his travelling coach which he rarely deserted, since bodily infirmity forbade, the contrast was productive of a surprising return of a confidence shaken by previous reverses.

Throughout the campaign the Duke of Wellington hunted a pack of hounds which he had sent out from England, in various parts of the country he provided excellent sport for the Headquarters Staff, and those who cared to join in. In addition to his, most divisions kept a scratch pack of hounds - and were encouraged to do so.

"The Lord," like many famous soldiers of later years, regarded hunting both as an excellent sport, and as an admirable training for teaching a soldier to learn how to find his way about a country as quickly as possible, and also to improve his horsemanship. He welcomed any one to his meets, and used to say that he got to know more officers by this means than by any other.

A useful, if ugly, horseman himself, there was no better way for a subaltern to obtain his rarely given approval than by being observed to go well to hounds. In Wellington's estimation this

accomplishment led usually to good powers of leadership in the field, and most officers will agree with him.

Fortescue's "Following the Dawn" tells us that the Duke's hounds were kept at Freinadas. "They have excellent sport and kill a great many foxes. As my horse only gets a little rye-straw and still less corn I cannot take the liberty of looking at them. Lord Wellington has worn out all his horses." (Letter from "an Ensign of Wellington," Dec. 1811.)

It was well known that the best moment to obtain the desired answer for any question concerning which his views were considered likely to be the reverse, or to gain any favour, was on a hunting morning as near the time of the meet as possible. For then the Duke, dressed either in his plain uniform coat, or in the yellow of the Old Berkeley Hunt, and about to get up on his horse, allowed nothing except the appearance of the French to interfere with his sport, and was also generally in the best of humours.

The period spent behind the lines of Torres Vedras saw, perhaps, the peak of Peninsular hunting achievement. On an average of three days a week hounds were out hunting fox, and all who could get near the meets were out too; some, simply because it was "the thing," and others for the love of it. The fields were therefore large. All rode in uniform - all arms being represented. The red coats, grey overalls, and furred *casquets* of Dragoon Officers were well to the fore, and with them went the thrusters of the Horse Artillery. Infantrymen of every regiment of the line, in every conceivable kit, and on every sort of horse, joined the main body of the field, whilst plainly turned-out Officers of the Staff took pains to keep their cocked hats within view of "Old Douro" as he cantered tirelessly in the van. Civilian Commissaries, anxious to keep in the limelight and break down some of the unpopularity which was their lot, bumped along as best as they might in the rear. His Lordship liked to be well in front, and near hounds - too near sometimes for the peace of mind of his huntsman, since, by emulation, the somewhat unwieldy field thus became inclined to "press" too closely for comfort.

Tom Crane was the Duke's huntsman. He had been a private in the Coldstream, and before that a huntsman to a border pack. Wellington had obtained his release from the shackles of marching and musket, and now, clad in a different kind of red coat, he pursued his legitimate occupation across the Plains of Spain and Portugal.

The country behind the lines of Torres Vedras was open, and free from too many obstacles, with enough cover to provide accommodation for foxes. The only forbidden terrain was past the Allied lines, and in the direction of the French. It was an understood thing that hounds were whipped off and the field stopped if "Charles" elected to seek safety for any appreciable distance beyond our outposts - a limitation that no professional huntsman could be expected to view with anything but distaste. In this respect Tom was no exception.

One Autumn day in 1811 a by-day was proclaimed. Foxes had been running badly of late, nor had they been too plentiful. But a copse behind one of the redoubts held what was required, and, what was more, it was a stout fox who meant business that broke away in the face of the heterogeneous field. The sight of the many-coloured mass before him, however, soon caused him to change his direction; unable to get into cover with hounds close on his brush, he bore away to the Northward, and slipping almost under the belly of the first whip's horse, set his head for the open country that lay in that direction, and which led to the hills beyond.

With the aid of much blasphemy the General Officer, who was acting as Field-Master of the day, succeeded in stemming the rush of the over-eager until Tom had emerged from the wood and collected his hounds on the line of the fox, then away went this representative gathering of the British Army of the Peninsular - all intent upon keeping within sound of Tom Crane's horn, and the music of his hounds.



The pace was a cracker in the wake of hounds with a roaring scent to set it, and, after a mile or so, the field was strung out over the plain like the flight of a routed army.

Still well ahead of hounds went the fox, until he saw in front of him a working party of Infantry returning from the trenches. At the same time they saw him, and as is the general action of footmen who find themselves mixed up with a fox-hunt, they shouted and waved their picks and spades in his face, causing him to swing right handed towards the front line, and "no mans land."

Close in his rear by now, and cutting off the corner caused by this alteration of course, came the huntsman, apoplectic with anger at the heading of his fox end lashing the abashed Infantrymen with a fine flow of North Country epithet, as he galloped by without checking his pace. With him came the Field Master, the whips, and the foremost of the field. In view of them all was the fox heading straight for the forbidden enemy territory, and rapidly nearing the British outposts. "Shall I stop 'em, Tom?" shouted one of the whips, and "Hold hard, gen'lemen," cried the General. But Tom said never a word, nor withdrew his gaze for an instant from his hounds and the fox before him.

Thus the cavalcade swept down towards the post that marked the limit of Allied Territory, whose occupants had been too taken by surprise to head the fox a second time.

Discipline held, however, and the field began to get a pull upon their horses, whilst the whips, putting on all pace that they had, commenced to try to get round hounds.

As they passed the huntsman, he spoke. 'Leave 'em,' he shouted; then as the whips hesitated, he reined-in slightly and addressing the astonished Field-Master, added - "Where my fox goes, so do I, before sticking in his spurs and disappearing in a cloud of dust, and alone, in the direction of the French with his hounds in full cry before him.

Checked by the invisible obstacle which orders had laid down, the remainder of the hunt could do no more than watch him disappear. The Duke was not hunting that day, or who knows what military action might not have been undertaken to retrieve his truant huntsman and pack? As it was, however, the matter rested there, and the field dispersed whilst an officer was despatched to Headquarters to endeavour to explain away Tom's disappearance to outraged Authority.

Meanwhile, the unauthorised chase continued. Through covers they ran, over streams, and into the open space once more, until the gallant fox was run into and killed some distance behind the French line.

Flinging himself from his horse, Tom performed the ritual for breaking him up, and giving him to hounds with as much ceremony and whooping as if he had been on Border soil.

Only then did he realise the full significance of his situation and gathering the hounds about him he started his return journey in a somewhat sobered frame of mind.

His luck, however, could not hold for ever; the noise of the chase, with the strange sounds which had attended the death of the fox, had attracted the attention of a patrol of French light cavalry, and the puzzled Frenchmen found themselves the captors of a

strangely-clothed Englishman with a fox's mask and brush hanging from his saddle, and surrounded by, to them, strange-looking dogs who displayed the usual friendliness of fox-hounds to horses.

Since Crane was incapable of explanation, the Sergeant in charge of the patrol led this strange collection to the Headquarters of his unit the hounds jogging amicably beside their unaccustomed escort in the rear of their huntsman, who rode dejectedly between two bewhiskered troopers. The whole of the troops in the vicinity turned out to see this strange catch and to speculate upon what particular form of madness had now affected the English

By this time night was falling. The hounds were incarcerated in a nearby farm whilst Tom was taken before the Commanding Officer, who, with the aid of an English-speaking subaltern, soon elicited the facts as to his status and occupation. Finding, accordingly, that he was not an "English Milor" in spite of his attire, but merely a "Milor's" servant, he was taken to the Mess of the non-commissioned officers, and fed by the hospitable Frenchmen, being subsequently given a bed under the eye of a sentry.

Meanwhile his hounds, not caring greatly for the sustenance provided for them by their captors, and missing the sound of any friendly voice, commenced to demonstrate their disapproval in the usual manner of hounds. The alien efforts of the sentry on his beat to quiet them, merely added fresh volume to the din, until the whole camp rang with the howling of fox hounds.

Tom was awakened and ordered to quell the disturbance; which, accompanied by an attendant sentry, he proceeded to do, finally remaining within hail of the pack, since his departure was invariably the signal for a fresh outburst. The night passed rather restlessly, and morning brought orders that both huntsman and hounds were to be returned to the allied outposts.

Thus it was that a party of British Light Dragoons, returning home from a night patrol, with astonishment observed issuing from a wood in the direction of the enemy, and under cover of a flag of

truce, the Peninsular hounds and huntsman, apparently being whipped in to by a selection of French Cavalry and looking considerably the worse for wear.

History does not relate what passed between Crane and the Commander-in-Chief, but I dare say that the deed was forgiven for the motives that prompted it.

Crane continued with Wellington's hounds until after the war, when the pack found itself at Cadiz in the charge of the Earl of Saltoun (commanding the 3rd Grenadier Guards), who eventually presented them to the Garrison of Gibraltar. Their descendants are known to-day as the Royal Calpe Hounds, who have hunted the adjoining district in Spain ever since.

Tom Crane himself returned to Scotland and was, at one time, huntsman to the Fife hounds, where I have no doubt but that he took full advantage of the lack of restrictions as to where he went in pursuit of his fox!

There is a picture of him as huntsman to the Fife in Records of the foxhounds. It shows a hard-bitten looking man with a Wellingtonian nose, riding very short for that period on a cocktail chestnut horse and carrying his whip the right way up according to modern ideas. Crane was huntsman to the Fife from 1821 until 1830 when he died at Cupar.

The most spectacular example of Wellington bringing the spirit of the hunting field into battle was witnessed during the battle of Quatre Bras.

Soon after the beginning of the action, and when Ney had carried nearly the whole of the Allied position except on the right, the British V Division, followed by the Brunswickers, arrived just in time to restore the line and check the French.

The 92nd Regiment Gordon Highlanders, under Col. Cameron, was formed in line along the Charleroi road and ordered

by the Duke, who was on foot behind it with his Staff, to lie down in the ditch which, with a fence above, bounded this highway. The cannonade was very heavy, and Wellington and his Staff lay down also. In this situation the Highlanders were charged by the French Cuirassiers and Chevaux Legers, and repulsed them.

The 92nd remained all day in their position. About four o'clock in the afternoon, the Duke of Brunswick led his Hussars past their flanks to repel some French Cavalry who had broken his infantry and subsequently routed by their Light Cavalry.

At the beginning of this affair Wellington, mounted now on Copenhagen (his well-known thoroughbred charger which he had acquired during the Danish Campaign of 1807) had a central view of the whole field. As the defeated German Hussars fled to the rear with French – Red Lancers and Light Dragoons cutting and slashing amongst them, the British Commander-in-Chief became involved in the confusion and looked to be in danger of capture. He had his sword drawn, and was, for the moment, unaccompanied. Disengaging himself from the struggling crowd, he galloped back towards the hedge and ditch lined by the Highlanders, and, calling to them to lie still, rode at the obstacle and jumper it, men and all. As he landed he reined round and coolly ordered the regiment to be ready.

Whilst the fighting mass of Cavalry swept by their right flank, the Grenadier company, wheeling round, poured in such a volley as effectively broke up the pursuit.

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