

**Erdmann Neuparth**  
**Music in war, the Peninsular War in music,**  
**and the history of a military musician**

A presentation by  
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We all remember the haunting music from Kubrick's Barry Lyndon film as the Red Coats walk towards their enemy, men falling, shot at point blank range as the martial music plays on. This type of music was used to communicate orders to soldiers in battle or to control troops in formation on the battlefield.

There are two or even three types of historical traditions in military bands. The first is military field music - which includes bugles, trumpets and horns, bagpipes, or fifes and almost always drums. With the development of the keyed trumpet or the saxhorn family of brass instruments, a second tradition of woodwind brass military band was formed. They played at military parades, military reviews, military tattoos, or more importantly, boosted the “esprit de corps” or morale of the troops. A third type, that of a mounted band, served cavalry or mounted artillery, or if a police-band, a specific unit or brigade.

Each regiment in the British Army (scores were shown identifying the similarities between British and Portuguese music sheets) maintained its own military band. Until 1749, bandsmen were civilians who were hired at the expense of the colonel commanding a regiment. Subsequently, they became regular enlisted men who accompanied the unit on active service to provide morale-enhancing music on the battlefield. Instruments during the 18th century included fifes, drums, the oboe or hautbois, the French horn, clarinet and bassoon. Drummers summoned men from their farms and villages to muster for duty. In the chaotic environment of the battlefield, musical instruments were the only means of commanding the men to advance, stand or retire. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century each smaller unit had its own fifer and drummer, to sound the daily routine. When units massed for battle, a band of musicians was formed and as one fell, the others marched and played on ... as we were shown in Antony Quinn's film *The Buccaneer*, when the Highlanders advance to the drums at the Battle of New Orleans, 1815, or when the British line infantry attack to the beat of the march of [‘The British Grenadiers’](#) in Stanley Kubrick’s film *Barry Lyndon*.

But then in walks a real-life character: Erdmann Neuparth was the son of German farmers. A lover of music, he made his way to Strasbourg, playing in military bands, directing musicians, and then on through France to Bayonne with the French Army at the time of the Peninsular War and on again to Lisbon, with the Portuguese troops where he settles. His son and grandsons set up shop in the Chiado and it is a sorry tale indeed to hear that their famed instruments and scores were all lost when the shop of Valentim de Carvalho in the Chiado was burnt to the ground in the great fire of 1988.

This wonderfully musically-documented and pictorially-illustrated presentation ends on a happier note - with short excerpts from famous original wind compositions, orchestral arrangements and music composed specifically to commemorate Wellington's victories, or even more amazingly, a demonstration on screen by Dr. Maria João Albuquerque herself of how battles were reenacted in private homes - on a piano forte – to explain to the layman how victories were won, how retreats were called, how General Kellerman spoke to General Wellington, and even how the wounded were to be carried off to field hospitals...

And as the BHS members leave the room to attend their Annual Lunch, the nostalgic and haunting sound of the bugle and the drums linger in their ears then fade into the distance....

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Prepared by Ninna Taylor, based on Maria João Albuquerque’s presentation to the British Historical Society of Portugal’s Annual Lunch, 2020.