

# **Nicholas Trant – The Military Governor of Porto and the Northern Militia Regiments**

*By Pedro de Brito*



**Colonel Nicholas Trant**

## **The Irish elites in the Peninsular War**

A detailed analysis of the British civilian and military authorities at the time of the Peninsular War will confirm the great weight of Irishmen among the political decision makers and the generals commanding the troops in action. Wellington was the third son of an Irish peer, the Earl of Mornington; of his three brothers the eldest, later created Marquis Wellesley, was British ambassador to the Spanish regency in Cadiz in 1809, and a couple of months later he became Foreign Secretary in the British Government, which post he held until 1812. The second brother, William Pole, was Chief Secretary for Ireland, from 1809 to 1812; finally, the youngest brother, Henry Wellesley, was British envoy to Spain, from 1809 to 1821. One of the most influent English politicians at the time was Lord Castlereagh – Secretary of State for War from 1805-1809, Foreign Secretary from 1812 to 1822, whose younger brother, Brigadier Charles Stewart, was Wellington’s Adjutant General in the Peninsula – they were both the sons of the Marquis of Londonderry, another Irish peer.

From the general officers of Wellington's *entourage*, the following were Anglo-Irish: William Carr Beresford (the illegitimate son of the Marquis of Waterford, an Irish peer); Lowry Cole (second son of the Earl of Enniskillen, also an Irish peer); Edward Pakenham, whose sister was Wellington's wife – both were children of Baron Longford (another Irish peer); Sir Dennis Pack, who was a long time commanding officer of a Portuguese brigade, had not himself any relation to the peerage, but was married to Elizabeth Beresford, a legitimate half-sister of William Carr Beresford.

This network exercised power in political-military decisions, and the nepotism that openly or surreptitiously permeated the careers of those aspiring to high commands. Wellington does not hide this in a letter to Lieut. Col. Torrens<sup>1</sup>, the military secretary to the Commander in Chief, the Duke of York, the second son of King George III.

But beyond the Anglo-Saxon and Anglican, Anglo-Irish aristocracy, there was in Ireland a Roman Catholic major elite, overwhelmingly Celtic, descendant of the old clans' chieftains that had been successively defeated by various expeditionary corps sent from England, from Elizabeth I to William III, and even by Cromwell, to

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<sup>1</sup> "I have never been able to understand the principle on which the claims of gentlemen of family, fortune, and influence in the country, to promotion in the army, founded on their military conduct, and character, and services, should be rejected, while the claims of others, not better founded on military pretensions, were invariably attended to. It would be desirable, certainly, that "the only claim to promotion should be military merit; but this is a degree of perfection to which the disposal of military patronage has never been, and cannot be, I believe, brought in any military establishment. The Commander in Chief must have friends, officers in the staff attached to him, etc., who will press him to promote their friends and relations, all doubtless very meritorious, and no man can at all times resist these applications, but if there is to be any influence in the disposal of military patronage, in aid or military merit, can there be any in our army so legitimate as that of family connexion, fortune, and influence in the country?" *The dispatches of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington during his various campaigns in India, Denmark, Portugal, Spain, the Low Countries, and France from 1799 to 1818*, (ed. Lieut. Colonel Gurwood), London, 1838, Vol.6<sup>th</sup>, p.325.

dominate them; but they had also supported the deposed Stuart Kings, as so called Jacobites. This Elite had naturally been denied the access to the political and military hierarchy in the eighteenth century, and had no alternative but to emigrate, mainly as mercenaries to the Catholic armies on the Continent. Thus the Spanish army at the time was full of Irishmen, of a first generation, but mainly of a second generation of emigrants – when the War of Independence began, a good number of them had reached general's rank<sup>2</sup>.

### **The Trants, a military Irish family**

The Trants, although of Viking origin, became strongly Roman Catholic. Edward Trant, who was in 1777 a cadet of the *Regimiento Irlandés de Infanteria Hibernia*, in the Spanish service, was exactly one of those emigrants, although nothing further about his progress in the Spanish army is known. The Trants were Irishmen originally of a Roman Catholic family, and another of three brothers, Dominick, fought for the American revolutionary forces which by 1781 had not yet made peace with the United Kingdom; the youngest, Nicholas, born in 1768, went as usual to attend a French military school, from which he went to serve as an ensign in the famous regiment of the Count Walsh Serrant, of the Irish brigade of Louis XVI's army. After the fall of the monarchy in France (1792), the Duke Fitzjames obtained from the British government that part of the Irish Brigade which would serve in the British army without having to abjure the Roman Catholic religion, which had been up till then a *sine qua non* condition to serve in England.

Nicholas could thus serve as a cornet in the heavy cavalry regiment the *King's Dragoon Guards* in the Flanders expedition, and obtained in October 1794 a company command in the Irish Brigade. He took part

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<sup>2</sup> General O'Donoju (O'Donahue), Chief of Staff of General Cuesta at the Battle of Talavera (1809); General Sarsfield – a distant relative of the famous Patrick Sarsfield – at command in the defence of Tarragona in May 1811; General Joaquin Blake, present with Beresford at the Battle of Albuera (1811); General Luis Lacy, Captain General of Catalunha in 1811; General Joseph O'Donnell, who in August 1812 was commanding the Spanish Army at Múrcia.

in 1795 in the expedition to the Cape of Good Hope, and then in the conquest of Minorca, in the Balears (1798). He was then promoted to major in a foreign regiment that had been recruited there, with which he took part in the expedition to Egypt and the Battle of Alexandria; the regiment was designated 97<sup>th</sup> (Queen's German) Regiment of Foot<sup>3</sup> and he was meanwhile promoted to lieutenant colonel – he was only thirty one years old, but thinking the Peace of Amiens (1802) meant the end of the war with Napoleon, he decided to leave the army, selling his colonel's commission, a British army usage until 1871<sup>4</sup>. When the war broke out in 1803, he enlisted again, but the fact he had sold his commission, meant he had to begin again from the bottom of officer's rank as an ensign in the Royal Staff Corps<sup>5</sup>. In 1806 he is listed as a lieutenant in that corps<sup>6</sup>.

### **Nicholas Trant, a lieutenant-colonel in the Portuguese army**

No information could be found regarding the conditions of how Trant began his service in the Portuguese army<sup>7</sup>, but this took certainly place before the British expeditionary force left for Portugal in July 1808, under the command of Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Wellesley. Having in mind Trant's little encouraging perspective in the Royal Staff Corps, he had much more chances of reaching again his original rank of lieutenant colonel in the Portuguese, than in the British army.

In his dispatch to Viscount Castlereagh on the meeting he had in Porto with the Bishop and Portuguese generals on the 24<sup>th</sup> July 1808, Wellesley does not mention that Trant was present, he refers instead to

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<sup>3</sup> S. Boaventura, Frei Fortunato de *Noticias biográficas do Coronel Trant – escritas por F.F.M.C.D.T.*, Lisboa, 1811, p.5.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Bruce, Anthony *The purchase system in the British Army, 1660-1871*, London, 1980.

<sup>5</sup> Luard, Clara Georgina, ed. *The Journal of Clarissa Trant 1800-1832*, London, 1925, pp.329-1.

<sup>6</sup> *A list of all the officers of the Army and Royal Marines on full or half-pay with an Index and succession of Colonels*, the 54<sup>th</sup> edition, War Office, 1806, p.308.

<sup>7</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, London, 1835, Vol.4, p.50 Trant had already served in Portugal in 1797-8, under the command of Sir Charles Stuart, and his daughter Clarissa was born in Lisbon in 1799 (Luard, p.1). At that time Trant must have acquired some knowledge of the local language, besides having established social and military contacts, which would have possibly made it easier to join the Portuguese army in 1808.

a Lieut. Col. Brown<sup>8</sup>, who must have served as intermediary (or interpreter)<sup>9</sup> with the Portuguese authorities. But in a letter dated 4<sup>th</sup> August, Wellesley sends a message to Trant through Brown, telling him he has not yet written as he has nothing to say<sup>10</sup>. But two days later he writes to Trant from Lavos confirming he will meet with General Bernardim Freire the following day at Montemor o Velho. He further explains that he has to decline the protection asked by a Portuguese commissary for a supply depot in Leiria, as he won't send his troops into adventure. Trant seems to be treated by Wellesley as the representative of Portuguese Army command<sup>11</sup>; in fact, the British General writes to Bernardim Freire on the 13<sup>th</sup> August telling him that Trant had begged him to promise to supply the Portuguese troops, which he was totally unable to do<sup>12</sup>; he suggested to Freire to send him just some of his troops<sup>13</sup>. If Freire wouldn't accept what he proposed, it would be better for Trant to come and join Wellesley himself<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, London, 1835, Vol.4, p.34

<sup>9</sup> Wellington (Wellesley) spoke and wrote fluent French, and communicated in French with Portuguese (and Spanish) speaking partners. From 1809 on permanently had an interpreter at his headquarters, who will be for a long time someone called Sodré.

<sup>10</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, London, 1835, Vol.4, p.49

<sup>11</sup> Bernardim Freire in his official report does not explain the reason why the "direction" (he does not use the word "command") of the troops sent to Wellesley was given to Lieut.Col. Trant, he just acknowledges the fact. (Vicente, António Pedro "Um soldado da Guerra Peninsular – Bernardim Freire de Andrade e Castro. Apêndice documental" in *Boletim do Arquivo Histórico Militar*, Lisboa, 1970, Vol.40<sup>o</sup>, pp.425-7)

<sup>12</sup> Soriano (Simão José da Luz) believes Freire feared the French, especially as the British had yet to prove its success. *Historia da Guerra Civil e do estabelecimento do Governo Parlamentar em Portugal*, Lisboa, 1870, 2<sup>a</sup> Epocha, Tomo I, pp.372-4, 395-6

<sup>13</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, London, 1835, Vol.4, p.85 In a letter dated 18<sup>th</sup> August, 1808, Wellesley writes the following to Lieut. Col. Gordon, military secretary to the Commander in Chief (Duke of York): "I was joined at Alcobaca, by 1650 Portuguese troops, viz.1000 regular infantry, 400 light troops, and 250 cavalry; and I engaged to feed these troops in the same manner as those of his Majesty are fed. The Portuguese General Freire stated, as his reason for not joining me with the whole corps, that he could not find subsistence for it, on the route towards Lisbon which I intended to take; and as I deemed it desirable on political, rather than on military ground to have with the British army a corps of Portuguese troops, I desired him to send the corps which joined me at Alcobaca, which I engaged to feed."

<sup>14</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, London, 1835, Vol.4, p.73 This is proof that even if serving in the Portuguese army, Trant was not a direct subordinate of Freire, but rather was serving as a liaison officer for the Supreme Government Junta at Porto.

## Trant in the command of the Portuguese 1<sup>st</sup> line troops at Roliça and Vimeiro

Officers of the British army were regularly recruited to serve with the Portuguese from March 1809 onwards, when Beresford assumed command of the Portuguese army, with the enticement of going up one step in rank – a captain in the British army, became a major, a major became a lieutenant colonel, etc. But Trant had only begun with the British rank of lieutenant in the Staff Corps, and was admitted to the Portuguese army with the rank of lieutenant colonel, clearly a sign that he had individually negotiated his admission. Both Soriano<sup>15</sup> and Oman<sup>16</sup> consider Trant was in command of the Portuguese troops that Freire detached to join Wellesley, but it's difficult to know whether he had been appointed specifically for that post, or simply that he was the most senior officer of the Portuguese army present at Roliça and Vimeiro. The Portuguese troops included in Wellesley's forces were not those to which he referred, but instead the following: 1,514 line infantry, 569 caçadores (light infantry), 299 troopers and 210 gunners; all being soldiers who after the disbandment of the Portuguese army by Junot, had been again regimented a month previously<sup>17</sup> and had only received weapons from the British expeditionary corps, after it arrived<sup>18</sup> – they did not look very soldierly<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Soriano, *op.cit.*, Segunda Epoca, Tomo I, p.375.

<sup>16</sup> Oman M.A., Charles *History of the Peninsular War*, Oxford, 1902, Vol.I, p.234.

<sup>17</sup> Line infantry: R.I.12 - 605, R.I.21- 605, R.I.24 - 304 = Total 1,514; Light infantry: B.Caç.Porto - 569; Cavalry: R.Cav.6 - 104, R.Cav.11 - 50, R.Cav.12 - 104, G.R.Pol.Lisboa - 41 = Total 299; Artillery: R.A.1 – 210. Grand Total = 2,592 (Soriano, *op.cit.*, Segunda Epoca, Tomo I, p.399).

<sup>18</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, London, 1835, Vol.4, pp.30 and 44.

<sup>19</sup> "... our allies, the Portuguese, who, poor fellows, had little or no uniform, but were merely in white jackets, large broad-brimmed hats turned up at one side, some having feathers, and others none, so that they cut rather a grotesque appearance." (Leslie of Balquhain [29h Foot], *Military Journal*, Aberdeen U.P., 1887, p.40) The jackets must have been those of the service dress uniforms, in the original non dyed greyish wool colour. As to the hats, they must have been the usual civilian ones, which turned up on one side, with feathers added, were supposed to acquire some martial aspect – a shako,

At Roliça, Wellesley had deployed as his right wing Portuguese line infantry and 50 troopers of Portuguese cavalry under Trant, to try and outflank Delaborde's position. He had however kept the Porto caçadores battalion<sup>20</sup> in the main body, as a reinforcement for Craufurd's Light Division<sup>21</sup>. At Vimeiro, Wellesley now added the Portuguese line infantry under Trant's command as a reinforcement for Craufurd's 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, to try and outflank Junot's position from the left<sup>22</sup>. In both cases the Portuguese infantry contact with the enemy was not very intensive, which explains the small number of casualties<sup>23</sup>. As to the cavalry, at Vimeiro it was added to the 20<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons, and as this regiment at the end of the battle charged the French, the Portuguese cavalry turned around before contact – but not all of them rode away<sup>24</sup>.

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the then typical military head covering, was difficult to replace. To identify troops at distance, Wellington thought the shape of shakos was much more important than the colour of uniforms. In fact, in the bright daylight conditions of the Peninsula, identifying uniform colour at a distance was difficult – the same didn't apply to shakos' shape. Thus the concern of the British High Command was that the British shako shape should be completely different from the French one – first the "stovepipe" shako, then the "belgic" shako, inspired by the Portuguese 1806 model, but both completely different from the French "bell-topped" one (Author's note).

<sup>20</sup> Raised by Porto's Junta, it became the B.Caç. 6 on October 28, 1808 (Martelo, David *Os caçadores – Os galos de combate do exército de Wellington*, Lisboa, 2007, p.66).

<sup>21</sup> Chartrand, René / Courcelle, Patrice *Vimeiro 1808 – Wellesley's first victory in the Peninsula*, Oxford, 2001, pp.54/5.

<sup>22</sup> Chartrand, *op.cit.*, pp.66/7.

<sup>23</sup> Soriano, *op.cit.*, Segunda Epocha, Tomo I, p.399.

<sup>24</sup> According to a report by Joaquim Paes de Sá, an officer present there, during the charge both the death of Commandant Elisário, of the Guarda Real de Polícia de Lisboa (Lisbon Police) and the exemplary behaviour of Lieut. Pinto (Chartand p.76) stood out. Troopers of the R.Cav.11 and R.Cav.12 were present, and together with the R.Cav.1 the three would make up in the 1812 campaign in Spain the Portuguese cavalry brigade under the command of Benjamin d'Urban. After they had behaved well in that campaign at the Battle of Salamanca, they would repeat Vimeiro's episode at Majalahonda, but with more serious consequences. D'Urban wrote then in his report: "the men being so badly mounted that ... if they rode their horses well into the fight they could feel no security that they would bring them out of it." (d'Urban, Maj.Gen. Sir Benjamin, 1988 *The Peninsular Journal, 1808-1817*, London, p.282 n.1). In fact the remount in Portugal had so few resources that, the best horses being acquired by the

Trant did not take part in this cavalry action – his action as commander of the Portuguese troops was commemorated by Roliça, naming its main street as Rua do Cel. (Col.) Nicolau Trante (sic).

### **Trant in command of the military district**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> September 1808 Trant was appointed to the committee in charge of making way for the return of the spoils seized by the French, that would assemble at the Largo do Loreto (Chiado) No. 8 <sup>25</sup>. This committee's activity was not very positive, as it's proved by the numberless complaints about the thefts the French had to return, and which instead they were allowed to take to France in British transport ships; it's known how this scandal was one of the motives for the official inquiry on the Convention of Cintra, that took place in London, at the end of the year. Meanwhile Trant was kept in Lisbon and couldn't take part in the defence of Minho against Soult's invasion. It's also known he was not among the group of "British officers", referred to by Soriano, who together with the Baron von Eben, were at the battery of S. Francisco on the 28<sup>th</sup> March 1809<sup>26</sup>, as the Bishop of Porto's advisers, because Beresford had appointed him on the same day to commander of Coimbra's military district <sup>27</sup>. In fact, besides the line operational units (battalions, regiments and brigades – initially – but after also divisions), there were the military districts commands – the provincial ones, then the big forts assemblies (Valença, Almeida, Elvas, Peniche, etc). Trant belonged to the first British officers who served in the Portuguese army, and apparently the first one who was appointed to the command of a military district.

When at Coimbra on the 30<sup>th</sup> March he knew about Soult having taken Porto in the previous day, Trant moved energetically to mobilize

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British cavalry, the few left for the Portuguese were of very low quality – in 1808 the situation must have been worse.

<sup>25</sup> Soriano, *op.cit.*, Documento n°34, Segunda Epocha, Tomo V, P.I, p.120.

<sup>26</sup> Soriano, *op.cit.*, Segunda Epocha, Tomo II, p.149.

<sup>27</sup> Barreiros, Fernando *Noticia Historica do Corpo Militar Academico de Coimbra*, Lisboa, 1918, p.43.

forces that might oppose a predictable French advance to Lisbon. He used the patriotic enthusiasm of the Coimbra academy: the Corpo Militar Académico which in June 1808, following Porto's uprising, had gone to Figueira da Foz and expelled the Fort Santa Catarina's garrison<sup>28</sup>, had mobilized again and deployed immediately 150 men under Trant's command. These were joined by the Militia Regiment of Coimbra and by 200 men of the Viana do Lima's Militia; these 2<sup>nd</sup> line forces were then reinforced by 1<sup>st</sup> line ones<sup>29</sup>.

On 31<sup>st</sup> March Trant marched with these forces to try and organize a resistance behind the natural defences of the river Vouga and its tributary Águeda – their currents were so strong in winter that they couldn't be easily forded – on April 6<sup>th</sup> he divided his troops in two columns, one marching first to Aveiro on the coast, the other in the direction of Porto. When on the 7<sup>th</sup> this column caught sight in the distance of some suspicious horsemen, and the news spread among the Portuguese soldiers that the enemy might have crossed the Vouga, they immediately drew up a combat line at the Palhaça village. Once they checked it was a false alarm, they nevertheless didn't proceed, retreated instead to Avelãs do Caminho, following then the road to Porto up till Sardão on the south bank of the River Águeda opposite the similarly named township. All the forces under Trant's command were concentrated, and he inspected them on the 11<sup>th</sup> April, at the Mourisca heath, half a league to the north of Águeda<sup>30</sup>.

Always with a mounted escort of the Corpo Académico could the colonel check his force's numbers, that had meanwhile reached 3600 effectives (some of the troops that had escaped from Porto, came to reinforce the initial number). In the weeks between the 12<sup>th</sup> April and the 9<sup>th</sup> May, when they were reached by Wellesley's column, marching

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<sup>28</sup> Barreiros, *op.cit.*, pp.15-9.

<sup>29</sup> 557 men from one of the battalions of the R.I. 13 (Peniche), 420 from the R.I. 1 [Lippe], the grenadiers of the same regiment, and 200 troopers from the R.Cav. [Mecklemburg – Lisbon].

(Soriano, *op.cit.*, ...Segunda Epocha, Tomo II, p.216/7)

<sup>30</sup> Barreiros, *op.cit.*, pp.44/5.

from Coimbra to attack Soult at Porto, Trant patrolled the Vouga's left bank with his volunteers and militias, together with the already mentioned 1<sup>st</sup> line troops (whose efficacy at this time was not much over that of 2<sup>nd</sup> line troops). He placed them at the various bridges (Allumiar, Vouga's, Talhadas)<sup>31</sup>, where they patrolled, only stopping at night – which they spent on the left bank, from the river Marnel and Vouga bridge until the villages of Segadães and Trofa. When the French cavalry withdrew to Albergaria a Nova, Trant's men became more audacious and attacked a French patrol, killing five French troopers; on the 30<sup>th</sup> April, a detachment of truce negotiators under the command of the French cavalry general Dubel came to talk to Trant in a last attempt to convince him to surrender, which he declined. In fact, on the 1<sup>st</sup> May it became known Wellesley had arrived at Lisbon, and how he had gathered all the forces and marched to the north, and once the British army columns reached the Vouga (reinforced with four Portuguese battalions – two each from the R.I 10 and R.I.16), Trant's task was accomplished. If Soult had decided to march to the south, the forces commanded by the Irish colonel – despite their characteristics – would never have been able to stop him frontally; but they gave a cue of the kind of attrition they could produce in the enemy flanks. On the other hand the French cavalry was dissuaded to raid Coimbra without infantry support, just by the presence of this “irregulars plus regulars” band<sup>32</sup>.

And “band” may be the best description for these forces under Trant, because obviously the feeling of cohesion, discipline and solidity reported by Portuguese authors (Soriano, the official historian, and the sources used by Barreiro, etc.) do not probably correspond to reality. The indiscipline and anarchy of the great part of Portuguese forces that from Chaves to Porto tried to oppose the 2<sup>nd</sup> Invasion of the French is too well known for us to believe that by some magic stroke Trant would succeed in obtaining the opposite behaviour<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Soriano, *op.cit.*, Segunda Epocha, Tomo II, p.218.

<sup>32</sup> Barreiros, *op.cit.*, pp.46-9/Soriano, *op.cit.*, Segunda Epocha, Tomo II, pp.219/20.

<sup>33</sup> Napier, K.C.B., Maj. General Sir W.F.P. *History of the War in the Peninsula and in the South of France from the year 1807 to the year 1814*, London, 1899, Vol.II, pp.77/8.

The results he achieved accredit him even more – his and his people’s terrain cognisance allowed him to succeed in the secret operations ordered by Wellesley on the first days of May<sup>34</sup>, as well as he could inform Wellesley of Soult’s order of battle, and the dispositions he had taken to defend Porto<sup>35</sup>. This terrain cognisance, and his relations to the people under his command (including the local “ordenanças”) would allow him the great action of occupying Coimbra on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1810.

### **Governor of the Military District of Porto**

Following his description style of Trant’s military forces, Soriano entitles them “Trant division”<sup>36</sup>. But nowhere else is in the army battle order on the attack on Porto a column Trant to be found; one battalion of the R.I. 1, which had been under Trant’s command in the month of April, was now attached to the 60<sup>th</sup> Foot (5<sup>th</sup> Bat.), the 87<sup>th</sup> Foot and the 88<sup>th</sup> Foot (Connaught Rangers) who made up a brigade under the command of Cristopher Tilson. This brigade was part of Beresford’s column that had advanced to Viseu and Lamego, and it also comprised two battalions each of the R.I. 7 (Setúbal) and R.I. 19 (Cascais): the main column on the advance to Porto only included two battalions of the R.I. 10 and R.I. 16 – this does not mean that Trant’s Militias and volunteers were not present, but their military value was irrelevant to the point of not being mentioned in the allied armies order of battle.

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<sup>34</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, London, 1835, Vol. 4, pp.252-255 and 282 some unintelligible references of two messages from Wellesley to Trant on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1809 had eventually to do with the crossing of the front line by French officers involved in the so called Argenton conspiracy, as Douglas was the British officer liaison officer (Oman, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, Section XIII, Chapter VI pp.273-85).

<sup>35</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, London, 1835, Vol. 4, p.295 - 9<sup>th</sup> May 1809 message from Wellesley to Beresford.

<sup>36</sup> Soriano, *op.cit.*, Segunda Epocha, Tomo II, pp.221-4 Not to forget that the big army unit designated “division” begins to be established by Wellesley only after the attack on Porto and thus, excluding other reasons, makes it little probable there was a “division” before.

Irrelevant does not apply to its commander, as he was the officer Wellesley thought the fittest to become the Porto Military District commander. Which meant in the long run his promotion to brigadier<sup>37</sup>. What mattered to Wellesley was not the operational command of troops (which could only be 2<sup>nd</sup> line ones, as those of 1<sup>st</sup> line – R.I. 6 (1<sup>st</sup> Reg. of Porto), R.I 18 (2<sup>nd</sup> Reg. of Porto) and Caçadores 6, were part of the operational army; both these infantry regiments will make up a brigade.

What mattered was that Wellesley might have someone he trusted to command the river harbour – in fact the waterways were from the logistical point of view to any British general the main means of communication and, though Figueira's and Setúbal's were also important harbours, they could in no way compare to Porto's or to Lisbon's. Until 1812 the river Douro<sup>38</sup> was to be the great transport route for supplies (but also for personnel and for casualties), and it is only at the start of that year that Porto's harbour will be replaced by Coruña's, Santander's, Pasajes, and finally Saint Jean de Luz's.

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<sup>37</sup> Promotion confirmed by the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1811 decree (*Lista dos Officiaes do Exercito em 1811*, Lisboa, s/d, p. VII).

<sup>38</sup> Through Wellington's dispatches it's thought that a certain doubt existed regarding how far the Douro could be navigated. On 13May, 1812 he writes to Chief-Engineer, Lieut. Col. Fletcher: "I beg to draw your attention to the enclosed reports from Lieut ..... (Author's note - whenever his references to people were not flattering, their names were suppressed in the dispatches publication) who is employed on the Douro; and to the reports from Captain Ross, made last year, which I likewise enclose. It appears to me, that the great obstacle which Lieut. ---- finds to the completion of the navigation of the Douro, is that which Captain Ross reported to have been overcome by the Portuguese Government at great expense (author's note – probably the one at Cachão da Valeira). I doubt Lieut. ---- being very capable of understanding the subject on which he writes; and it is really very desirable that we should take some decided steps in order to know whether we can, or not, render the Douro navigable to Barca d'Alva." (*The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, London, 1837, Vol. 9, p.144). According to Soriano (op.cit., 2<sup>a</sup> Época – Vol.IV – Parte I – p.33) it would have been rendered navigable by the military engineers up to the mouth of the Águeda, at Barca d'Alva; in fact, when Beresford was seriously wounded at the Battle of Salamanca (July 22, 1812), William Warre, his ADC, took him to Porto in a boat (Warre, Lieut. Gen. Sir William Warre *Letters from the Peninsula 1808-1812*, London, 1909, p.297). On the other hand, the military stores farthest up river were placed at S. João da Pesqueira – the conclusion seems to be that the "rabelo" cargo boats did not go beyond the Cachão, only small personnel boats did. Later, starting in 1813, the Douro lost great part of its military importance, as supplies began to enter through the harbours of northern Spain.

One of the immediate (and delicate actions) Wellesley charged Trant with as a commander of the Porto military district, was to make an inventory of the boats in the river and their cargoes<sup>39</sup>. Due to the discordance between Wellesley and Vice-Admiral Berkeley about the “prize money”, it was important that the relation between the land commander in chief and the naval one might not deteriorate, as both branches of the armed forces had to collaborate daily. This question was tested immediately, concerning the Frenchmen captured in the various actions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Invasion of Portugal<sup>40</sup>; there were about 2,000 of them, and many were wounded and sick. Wellesley had been warned by Trant

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<sup>39</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, London, 1835, Vol. 4, pp.348/9, 354/5, 363/4. The war at sea in Napoleonic times still kept many characteristics of that of the *ancien régime*. Even if practiced by the overwhelming percentage of the country's official navies, it kept many of the habits of privateering. Thus, ships captured by the Royal Navy were not auctioned only for the British crown's benefit; both war ships, and trading ships (and their cargos) were auctioned, profits – “prize money” – in diminishing (but fixed) percentages reverted to beneficiaries by this order: Crown, admiral who commanded the fleet in which the arresting ship was included, the ship's captain, officers, and crew – for many admirals and Royal Navy captains this meant sudden enrichment. When Wellesley's troops occupied Porto (supported by the Royal Navy, which was involved in the blockade), the Douro harbour was full of ships (including 30 loaded with wine for British clients). The ships had been hindered from leaving due to the bad weather, until Soult had occupied the city and after that because the British frigates were blockading at the mouth of the Douro. Curiously, Soult didn't destroy them when he escaped from the city, and once this potential booty was preserved, the commander of the Royal Navy fleet, Vice-Admiral the Hon. G. Berkeley wanted to claim what he considered as “prize money” (in navy and army joint operations, the booty was equally divided between both). But Wellington was not willing to accept this, what had probably to do with the claims of the “Portugal merchants” (about these cf. this author's paper “The Portugal merchants and Whig trade politics” in *The British Historical Society of Portugal – Thirty third annual report and review 2006*, Parede, 2007, pp.47-82). Thus controversy continued for a while, including even a query to the Judge Sir William Scott (Lord Stowell), a specialist in maritime law, but things were finally settled according to Wellesley's opinion – he had wisely acted from the beginning accepting an inventory drawn of ships and cargoes in the Douro harbour, of which inventory the ships' masters received a copy, allowing ships to leave for their destinations, with the “prize money” question pending on this inventory until the final solution. Wellesley trusted Trant's wisdom and diplomatic capacity, for an action that would not obviously be well accepted by the ships' masters and owners, by salesmen and clients with merchandise risking seizure – as far as it is known, he was successful in this difficult mission.

<sup>40</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, London, 1835, Vol. 4, pp. 352/3, 364/5

that the transport ships Berkeley had made available were horse transports which, especially for wounded prisoners, lacked hygienic conditions<sup>41</sup>. Trant received instructions to adapt those ships to minimal conditions of salubrity, which implied to mobilize all craftsmen in the fleet, in the army, but specially in the city, to execute the main alterations – finally Wellesley succeeded to obtain from the Admiralty apparently better store ships, facilitating Trant the boarding of the prisoners. Even so he had to intervene in the navigation of these transports while leaving the mouth of the river, and he received the corresponding praise from Wellesley<sup>42</sup>.

The dispatch from the commander in chief, dated Abrantes the 12<sup>th</sup> June, has further important references: the first announces the appointment by the Regency of Major General Bacelar to command the Porto military district, but confirms Trant in the command of Porto, that included the Porto harbour, which was the most important thing for Wellesley. The third mentions the urgent need to receive a list of all the ordnance recovered or taken from the French which had already been mentioned in a letter dated 1<sup>st</sup> June to Ambassador Villiers<sup>43</sup>. The fourth finally mentions a load of cotton that should be shipped at the soonest to Lisbon – in fact the cotton textile industry which had begun in an incipient way at the end of Pombal's rule was placed mainly at the centre of the country<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> It can be figured the risk of tetanus that would implicate a transport of prisoners with open wounds in horse transports.

<sup>42</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington ...*, London, 1835, Vol. 4, p.388 It is not exactly known how, but having in mind the navigational danger of the Porto mouth and eventual wrecks, the rescue of ill soldiers in any transport that might have wrecked was prepared. In a wreck that happened in 1814 at the same place, Trant had soldiers with torches along the beach so that those trying to escape would know where to go (Luard, op.cit., p.21).

<sup>43</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, London, 1835, Vol. 4, p.354.

<sup>44</sup> Macedo, Jorge Borges de *A situação económica no tempo de Pombal*, Lisboa, 1982, pp.127-9. This industry seemed to be increasing its production to correspond to the needs in uniforms (white shirts and trousers for the summer uniforms), and Wellesley, while insisting on the quick sending of this cotton, seemed to be interested in this increase. But this boost is somehow lost due to the total destruction that Massena's

## Wellington pleads for Trant<sup>45</sup>

Reference has already been made to the fact that Trant in 1806 was just a lieutenant in the Staff Corps. On the 20<sup>th</sup> October 1809, Wellington writes the following letter to Viscount Castlereagh: “I enclose a letter from Marshal Beresford, of the 16<sup>th</sup> instant, in which he desires that Captain Trant, who is acting as a Colonel in the service of Portugal, may not lose his situation on the permanent Staff of the Quarter Master General,<sup>46</sup> while so employed. If Captain Trant should be obliged to make the option, whether he would return to his duty at the Horse Guards or remain in Portugal, he must choose the former, and this country will lose the services of an officer who has made himself most useful, and who may hereafter be most usefully employed here. I hope, therefore, that this consideration ... will induce your lordship to urge the Commander in Chief to allow Captain Trant to retain his appointment in the Quarter Master General’s department.”

On May 9<sup>th</sup> 1810 he writes again to the Secretary of State for War, now the Earl of Liverpool:

“I addressed you on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 1809, regarding Colonel Trant<sup>47</sup>, and received a letter from your Lordship in reply to mine above referred to, dated the 14<sup>th</sup> of November, 1809, from which

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invasion will provoke in the main area where the cotton textile production was. The need for uniforms for the Portuguese Army will have to be covered by the English industry (both, wool and cotton), and the recovery of the Portuguese industry is proven to be slow and difficult.

<sup>45</sup> On the 4<sup>th</sup> of September, 1809, in sequence of the victory at Talavera, Wellesley was created by George III Baron Douro, of Wellington, a title which on the same day is elevated to Viscount Wellington (of Talavera and Wellington), from then on he signs as Wellington, instead of Wellesley. For new victories he gains elevated peerages. For taking Ciudad Rodrigo, Earl of Wellington (28<sup>th</sup> February, 1812); for the victory at Salamanca, Marquis of Wellington (3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1812): for the victory at Toulouse, Marquis Douro, title to be used by his eldest son, while he lives, having been raised on the same day to Duke of Wellington (11<sup>th</sup> May 1814).

<sup>46</sup> Stationed at the Horse Guards (seat of the War Ministry, in Whitehall – London-, of the whole British army).

<sup>47</sup> The letter had in fact been directed to Castlereagh, but as this one had been dismissed from government in the sequence of his duel with Foreign Secretary Canning on the 21<sup>st</sup> September 1809, the missive went to the hands of Liverpool who had replaced him.

I had understood that it was the intention of the Commander in Chief that this officer should continue to hold his situation on the Staff, while employed in Portugal.

He is a permanent assistant in the office of the Quarter Master General, from which situation I am informed that it is the intention of the Quarter Master General to remove him, if he should not relinquish his situation in Portugal.

I beg to refer your Lordship to my letters in favour of Colonel Trant. Since that time, having been nearer the place at which Colonel Trant is stationed, I must add that there is no officer the loss of whose services in this country would be more sensibly felt by the Government and the people, and Marshal Beresford and myself, than those of Colonel Trant.

Your Lordship is aware of the uncertainty of the tenure of his employment here, and you must be sensible how severe it would be upon him to require that he alone, of all the British officers allowed by His Majesty to serve the Prince Regent<sup>48</sup>, should be called upon now to make an option between his employment in England, and the situation which he holds in Portugal.

I therefore request your Lordship's further protection of Colonel Trant, that he may not lose his commission of permanent Assistant in the Quarter Master General's department."

Further correspondence was exchanged, and in the summer of 1813, Trant had to go personally to England to deal with the matter<sup>49</sup>, but the two copied letters above clearly show how important Trant's active presence was for Wellington; on the one hand the intercessions for his officers' careers are quite rare in this British General's official correspondence; on the other hand, he was not given to exaggerations. If he said an officer was necessary, it's because he was indeed necessary.

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<sup>48</sup> They were some 400 (Cf. the author's "British officers in the Portuguese service 1809 – 1820" in *Actas do XXXV Congresso Internacional de História Militar*, Porto, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> And he got again Wellington's support for his démarches (*The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, Vol. 10th, pp. 417/8).

As already stated, at least until 1812, it was very important that someone he trusted would be in control of the Porto harbour. Another important aspect was to have someone wise with authority in a city to which the resident British merchants were beginning to return after Soult was expelled. These merchants had contacts with some of their fellow countrymen officers serving both in British or Portuguese units that made them informants for the city's merchant class.

Wellington established the headquarters of the allied Anglo-Portuguese armies at Celorico da Beira while he was waiting at the Beira border to oppose the invasion of the French Forces which were gathering in the Spanish Estremadura under the title *Armée du Portugal*, under the command of Massena. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of August 1810, the Supreme Commander of the Anglo-Portuguese Army wrote Trant <sup>50</sup> a long letter in which he blames the alarming news two letters written by army officers had spread in Porto, and he asks the Porto Military Governor to reduce the alarm generated. The authority and respect Trant had meanwhile made in the city is implicit for Wellington, and this makes him the right person for this initiative: complying with the wishes of his Supreme Commander, he was requested to assemble the British merchants to admonish them<sup>51</sup>.

As already referred to in the 9<sup>th</sup> May's letter to the Earl of Liverpool, Wellington informs that having been in these last times from close by Trants's positions, he could better appreciate his qualities. In fact all the available forces had been mobilized to resist Massena, and the Governor of Porto must have been by then patrolling with the Militia Regiments of the Porto district in Beira Alta, the flanks of the corridor Massena was going to use in the invasion of Portuguese territory. Wellington must have had occasion to observe nearer the able way in which Trant used second line troops, notwithstanding their low quality.

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<sup>50</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, London, 1838, Vol. 6, pp. 350-2.

<sup>51</sup> Valente, Vasco "O Governador Sir Nicholas Trant, apologista do Vinho" in *Suplemento ao Caderno n° 119 do Instituto de Vinho do Porto*, Porto, Nov. 1949, p.19

## The Military Command and the northern Militia

Less than a month after the attack on Porto, and his appointment to Governor of the City, Trant is supposed to have shown Wellesley greater interest on an operational command than on the administrative duties of a district command. Indeed in his reply to him from the 12<sup>th</sup> June, thus begins Wellesley:

“I have no doubts that you feel available to go into action in an advanced position, if Marshal Beresford or myself order you to do so. But if you do not receive such orders, I am also sure you won’t consider in anyway the chance of marching out of Porto.”

He was indeed going to be many long months away from operational activity, until leaving for the campaign against Massena. The 1<sup>st</sup> line units of the Portuguese army were to spend those months from May 1809 up to the summer campaign in intensive training, because Wellington did not think them yet fit to take part in the Talavera campaign of July 1809. However, the first line units – partially staffed by British officers and some drill-sergeants, who instructed them in the October-Winter of 1809/1810<sup>52</sup> – and the Militia regiments from Aveiro, Feira, Coimbra, Porto, Maia, Penafiel and Oliveira de Azemeis<sup>53</sup> did not benefit from the same training. In the summer of 1810 they left under Trant’s command to take part in the campaign that would become known in Portugal as the Third French Invasion. Nevertheless it was remarkable the action he took on the right flank of the *Armée du Portugal*, as he so well describes in his official report<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Brito, Pedro de, “British officers in the Portuguese service 1809-1820” [https://www.academia.edu/34780108/British\\_officers\\_in\\_the\\_Portuguese\\_service](https://www.academia.edu/34780108/British_officers_in_the_Portuguese_service)

<sup>53</sup> Oman, op.cit., Vol.III, p.179

<sup>54</sup> Report of Colonel Trant to General Manuel Pinto Bacellar:  
“Moimenta da Beira, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1810

General, Sir – Having permission to attack the enemy’s communication line, I marched on the 19<sup>th</sup>, in the afternoon through Segões, which is on the way to Vizeu, and 3 leagues far from Moimenta da Beira, and 4 from Vizeu. I couldn’t get there with my troops before three o’clock in the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, and having still a league and

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a half to go, or more or less three hours before reaching the main road from Trancoso to Vizeu, through which the French army had marched in the previous days, I was forced to suspend my operations for that night. Meanwhile I used the following day to make a reconnaissance, following which I neared my troops to the place of Castello.

Once informed of the enemies' movements, I knew that a considerable luggage train with much artillery (the French army's reserve park) was coming nearer, from Trancoso. I thus decided to attack it face to face. I made up a vanguard of my grenadiers and thirty dragoons, and rode before my column and the rest of my cavalry, but unfortunately the R.C. 6 squadron took an opposite way to the one I had taken, and was followed by the infantry, which caused a delay of more than one hour, and miscarried the more important enterprise, from which a total loss of Marshal Massena's financial resources would have resulted, because this train included the army chest, and the whole private luggage of the French commander in chief, of Marshal (sic) Junot and many other superior officers. The immediate escort was made up of three hundred foot soldiers, and more or less a hundred imperial gendarmes; but the escort of the artillery reserve, which was a league behind, was made up of ten infantry battalions and it was followed, as asserted by the prisoners, by a reserve of two thousand troopers commanded by General Montbrun. I only had with me two thousand men of the Porto division Militia and two hundred dragoons, because the brigade I was waiting for from Moncorvo had not yet arrived, and besides that I had been forced to leave a detachment at Moimenta da Beira to protect my way to Lamego. I also had different precaution posts, as well as some cavalry pickets. As my artillery fire would certainly cause alarm at Vizeu and among the battalions at Trancoso, I thought it convenient to place it on a hill near Castello, escorted by three hundred men, so that I might take refuge under the guns' fire in case of misfortune.

As soon as my cavalry arrived I headed to Adsoromil, village I took, making a couple of prisoners, seizing some victuals carts and some private luggage carts; but I was detected during the delay I mentioned, and the army chest was withdrawn before I arrived. Three mounted officers perceived my reconnaissance, and I had them followed by Colonel Wilson and three or four dragoons; although this officer could not reach them, he had occasion to be sure of the position to which the escort had retreated, and had no doubt about the efforts it was making to act in conjunction with the troops leading the artillery park, which was only half a league away to the rear of Adsoromil. I hastened my corps, and having advanced my cavalry I could make this train stop and take care; but even having reached the point I had wished for, my experience diminished as the night neared, not only because the sun was setting. But because my infantry had not yet reached Adsoromil. In these terms I thus came to the conclusion that if the enemy had not yet been reinforced, it would certainly be, and thus expected to be myself attacked in the rear by some detachment from Vizeu; I was left with only one expedient, and I adopted it.

I presented myself to the first enemy posts as mediator; a field officer came, and I proposed to him that he surrenders the luggage to me, and I would allow the officers to join their army with half of the cavalry to escort them; he seemed to hesitate and asked to submit the deal to a more graduate general staff officer. This one asked for time to decide; I refused him, but allowed to be consulted a third officer who was the commander in chief - Massena's first ADC. This officer only wanted to gain time, having in mind that overwhelming forces might face me. I broke mediation and told

Although the French cavalry general Marbot is considered a little like a French “Baron von Münchhausen”, his memoirs of this action<sup>55</sup>,

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them I would attack at once. By now it was already dark; danger grew from every side, and even to achieve a retreat, it was necessary to begin it immediately, because without this advance nobody would be able to withdraw without being pursued.

I had three close columns ready for the attack: I ordered them to march *in charging step*, and ordered the cavalry to attack the enemy’s right. I promised my men they would share in the booty. Although the troopers couldn’t succeed their aim, that is to brake the square drawn by the enemy, it nevertheless behaved with remarkable bravery. They had four dead and seven wounded, one being an officer, Lieutenant Joaquim Ferreira of the R.C. 6, and lost ten horses. The infantry columns advanced quickly until the enemy’s forward posts. Here the fire began and we returned it; but having suddenly ceased on the enemy’s side, I was persuaded that it had escaped during the night, which was confirmed to me in the following morning. I didn’t consider more to pursue it, but began to withdraw, so that without being interrupted I reached the position I had occupied in the morning. The infantry had more or less thirty men killed or wounded and I cannot calculate the enemy’s loss, but we made eighty prisoners from different regiments, including two officers, three N.C.O.s and two imperial gendarmes. To recommend my troops with reference to bravery, there are none that could behave better, a quality that concurred to render the spirits agitated, and to raise some confusion through their frenzy. Being the first time this Militia corps manoeuvred under fire, it is hoped that in any other occasion in the future, it will present itself with more discipline, since as far as I am concerned I have great trust in their intentions, etc, etc.

Illustrious and most excellent Lieut. General Manuel Pinto Bacelar, commanding the army in the northern provinces – *Nicholas Trant*

(Soriano, op.cit., Documento Nº 99-B, Segunda Epocha, Tomo V - Parte II, pp.212-6).

<sup>55</sup> “Il s’en fallut de bien peu que l’expédition de Masséna se terminât à Viseu, par le manque de prévoyance du maréchal, qui fit marcher son parc d’artillerie à l’extrême droite de la colonne, c’est à dire *en dehors* des masses d’infanterie, en ne lui donnant pour escorte qu’un bataillon irlandais au service de la France et une compagnie de grenadiers français.

Ce parc marchant sur une seule file, ayant une longueur de plus d’une lieue, avançait lentement et péniblement par des chemins très difficiles, lorsque tout à coup parut sur son flanc droit le colonel anglais Trent (*sic*) avec quatre à cinq mille miliciens portugais ! ... Si l’ennemi, profitant de la supériorité de ses forces, eût enveloppé le convoi et attaqué avec résolution, toute l’artillerie, les munitions et les vivres de l’armée étaient enlevés ou détruits. Mais le colonel Trent (*sic*), ainsi qu’il l’a dit depuis, ne pouvait supposer qu’un maréchal aussi expérimenté que Masséna eût laissé sans soutien un convoi de la conservation duquel dépendait le salut de son armée; pensant qu’une puissante escorte, masquée par les plis du terrain, se trouvait dans le voisinage, il n’osa avancer qu’avec circonspection. Il se borna donc à attaquer la compagnie de grenadiers français qui était en tête; celle-ci répondit par un feu terrible qui tua une cinquantaine d’hommes! ... Les miliciens effrayés reculèrent, et Trent, faisant ce qu’il aurait dû faire d’abord, enveloppa une partie du convoi. Cependant, à mesure qu’il s’avançait, ils’aperçut de la faiblesse de l’escorte, et envoya un parlementaire au commandant pour le sommer de se rendre, sinon il allait l’attaquer sur tous les points. L’officier français

in which he also took part, generally match with Trant's; memoirs of other authors accredit both reports<sup>56</sup>. Trant stresses his Militia regiments' inexperience, and Beresford, in the protocol attached to his report to the Portuguese War Secretary, Major-General D. Miguel Pereira Forjaz, even if praising the Militia's bravery, regrets it was not seconded by discipline, which would have allowed "to hit the enemy with a much more serious stroke". At the time of the close order combat, the only way to convince the troops about discipline and cohesion, was to impress it by constant and repeated drill, and the Militia, due even to the very limited service time, had little occasion to acquire that experience. Trant placed too much reliance on his second line units with resulting embarrassment.

Not knowing of Trant's Militia involvement with Massena's artillery column on the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> September, Wellington ordered him on the 19<sup>th</sup> through Beresford<sup>57</sup>, to march with his column to Águeda and Sardão, if possible crossing the Vouga at S.Pedro do Sul. Wellington knew that Trant was perfectly cognisant of the area where he had spent April-May of the year before, and he thought him the ideal person to command the troops in his left flank to stop a predictable attempt by

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consentit adroitement à entrer en pourparlers, afin de donner aux Irlandais, qu'il avait fait prévenir, le temps d'arriver de la queue à la tête du convoi. Ils parurent enfin, venant bravement au pas de course! ... Dès que l'officier français les aperçut, il rompit la conférence en disant à l'Anglais: 'Je ne suis plus traiter, car voici mon général qui vient à mon secours avec huit mille hommes!...' Chacun reprit donc sa position; mais Trent s'empressa de quitter la sienne et de s'éloigner, croyant avoir affaire à l'avant garde d'une forte colonne.

Le parc fut donc sauvé; mais le danger qu'il venait de courir, bientôt connu de toute l'armée, y causa la plus vive émotion. Ney, Junot, Reynier, Montbrun se rendirent sur le champ à Viseu, pour adresser de vifs reproches au général Fririon, chef d'état-major, qui déclara que, malgré ses vives réclamations, on ne lui avait même pas donné connaissance de la marche des colonnes, tout se décidant entre Masséna et Pelet. En apprenant un tel état de choses, les chefs des quatre corps d'armée, saisis de stupeur et d'indignation, entrèrent chez Masséna pour lui faire de justes observations."

(*Mémoires du Général Baron de Marbot II Madrid-Essling-Torrès Védras*, Paris-Plon, 1891, pp.378-80).

<sup>56</sup> Oman, op.cit., Vol.III, p.350.

<sup>57</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, Vol. 6, p. 455.

Massena to send forces to Porto<sup>58</sup>. Following orders from his direct commanding officer, Lieut.-General Bacelar who wanted to avoid confrontation between Trant and a small French force occupying S.Pedro do Sul, the Brigadier marched more in the north by the south of the Douro itinerary. When he reached the river Águeda on the 28<sup>th</sup>, Massena's vanguard had already begun to arrive at Boialvo in direction to the Porto-Coimbra road. Trant placed his forces, that did not reach a total of three thousand men, and were made up of the Militia Regiments of Porto, Penafiel and Coimbra, near the Vouga bridge; he sent out a cavalry squadron he had available to scout at Águeda and placed his Militia light companies, which he had assembled in a Caçadores battalion, half way between the rivers Águeda and Vouga. The action against the enemy that followed on the 30<sup>th</sup> September is described with some humour in a letter to his fellow officer Lieut.Col. John Wilson, who was nearby<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> It was argued afterwards (Oman, op.cit., Vol.III, p.399) that, if Trant had marched directly to S.Pedro do Sul, he might have ambushed the *Armée du Portugal* when in Boialvo it was coming out of the path through the Caramulo mountain which Massena used after the battle, to outflank to the north the Bussaco position. Those were not however Wellington's instructions and, had he known about the mountain path, if he really wanted to stop Massena at Boialvo, it's difficult to believe he would just send so weak forces as those of Trant. (*The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, Vol. 6, pp. 474/5 - Soriano, op.cit., Segunda Epoca, Tomo III, p.192/3 n.1).

<sup>59</sup> "I have once more been putting my fellows to a trial - my Caçadores battalion did not do as it ought, and had about thirty killed, wounded, and prisoners, without making scarcely any resistance - a pleasant business. On the 30<sup>th</sup> I was still at Agueda (Sardão and Agueda are one village, properly speaking, but divided by a bridge), though I was aware that the French principal force of cavalry was at Boyalva, only a league from Agueda, and I was completely cut off from the army. On that morning I had withdrawn the infantry to the Vouga, but placed my dragoons close to Agueda to observe the French, with the Caçadores at a half-way distance to support them. I put them in the most advantageous possible position, protected by a close pine wood, through which the French cavalry must pass. I had been from three in the morning till one o'clock, making my arrangements, and had just sat down to eat something, in a small village on the left of the Vouga, when a dragoon came flying to inform me that the French were coming on with two columns of cavalry in full speed. My coffee was not ready, and remained for the French to amuse themselves with. I had only time to get the Penafiel regiment over the bridge when the French arrived -five minutes sooner and I had been nabbed! I drew up in a good position, but the French did not cross the Vouga, and I returned to Oliveira without molestation - but not without a damned false alarm and

## Taking and defending Coimbra

Having returned later to Oliveira de Azemeis without great losses, he could check on Massena being only concerned not to risk his rearguard, while he was truly marching to Lisbon. Trant confirmed that in Coimbra only a garrison had been left with the main task of protecting the French casualties of Bussaco, which had been taken to this city; he still tried to wait for the forces (including further Militia) of Brig. Millar and Lieut. Col. Wilson, but when he was informed they were retained further north with food problems for their forces, he decided to try the attack on his own. Thus, on the 7<sup>th</sup> October, when Massena's troops had not yet faced the extension and solidness of the Lines of Torres Vedras, Trant advanced from Mealhada and attacked Coimbra at the head of his Militia brigade that now added up to 4.000 men and detachments of line cavalry from R.C. n° 6, and R.C. n° 11<sup>60</sup>. With his brigade he attacked

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panic on the part of the dragoons who were covering my rear. They galloped through the infantry, and carried confusion and all the comforts of hell to Oporto! Lieutenant-Colonel 'Bravoure Bombasto', who commanded the Caçadores, ordered his men to fire, but thought that enough for his honour, as he instantly left them to shift for themselves, and never looked behind till he reached Oporto. I put this fellow, with four of the leading dragoons, into the common dungeon of this place, and am about to inflict some divisional punishment, for I daren't report such conduct to the Marshal (Beresford), who does not punish by halves! My regiments of infantry - this is the brighter side of the picture - showed no agitation notwithstanding the attack on their nerves. The enemy's force, I now ascertain, was 800 cavalry, two pieces, and two infantry regiments. The cavalry alone would have done my business if they had crossed the Vouga! But they contented themselves with driving in the dragoons and the Caçadores battalion from Agueda. God bless you. N.T."

Oman, op.cit., Vol.III, pp.399-400 No.1.

<sup>60</sup> "Official report that Colonel Trant sent to Marshal Beresford, about taking Coimbra, when Massena was marching to Lisbon in pursuit of Lord Wellington.

Illustrious and excellent Sir. I am pleased to report to Your Excellency that I have attacked today the city of Coimbra with the loss of only a few killed and wounded.

I had already reported to Your Excellency that on the 6<sup>th</sup> I planned to march to Mealhada, hoping to join the forces of Brigadier Miller and Colonel Wilson, to discuss an attack on this city; but when I got there I was informed that these two corps had been delayed because of the lack of food in that district, that was so wasted, and extends itself right behind the north of Bussaco, and that the cavalry attached to them was unable to advance, in consequence of the exhaustion they had suffered from previous displacements. In this situation there was no other choice for me but to advance with my division, while there was a great chance the enemy ignored my arrival at Mealhada,

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so that I may avoid any measures taken for the defence of Coimbra, from where I was only 3 leagues away. So I marched until noon, having a squadron of cavalry under the command of that brave officer Doutel (author's note – Bernardo Doutel, to become Baron of Portela), whose name I had already occasion to mention to Your Excellency. This squadron was made up of two hundred troopers of the line, the Regiment of Coimbra Militia made up the head of my column, because that was the position required by honour.

My attack plan was to enter at two places at the same time: one division on the road to Porto; the other, parting from the column after going through Fornos, and covering east of the city, should go through the arches of Sant'Ana, marching through Loreto; but this formation would only be confirmed in case we found the enemy aware. At a small distance from Fornos, on the road to Mealhada, a little to the right of that place, I encountered an enemy detachment, which began to fire at us; but having the cavalry advance quickly from Fornos, I reached them and cut them from any communication to Coimbra; this enemy surrendered after losing a couple of men, and I found no further enemy posts. I ordered the cavalry to gallop through the main streets, cross the bridge over the Mondego, until reaching the road to Lisbon, and intercept communications with the main army. This was immediately executed by Lieutenant Doutel, with the loss of a single killed dragoon. I sent infantry posts to the main places in the city. There was irregular resistance for an hour, during which we only had two killed, and twenty six wounded, including Colonel Serpa Pinto of the Penafiel Militia regiment. This officer commanded the 1st brigade, and his behaviour deserves all praise.

On Mondego's bank, Santa Clara's side, where the greatest enemy force was placed at the Convent, there was some enemy fire while the cavalry was crossing the bridge; but the French commander, as soon as Lieutenant Doutel had crossed, proposed surrender; I only accepted their surrender at discretion, promising to protect them from the people's insults, and they surrendered.

I have reason to believe that the number of prisoners exceeds five thousand, from which almost four thousand have already left for Porto, including a full navy guards company of the Emperor. We found three thousand muskets, almost all of them loaded, which give us an idea of the number of people there were capable of defending themselves. I shared these weapons through the *ordenanças* of this region; but we found no artillery. We seized a quantity of oxen and sheep the enemy had gathered as food supply, and which provided us with valuable maintenance. Among the prisoners there are eighty officers. I am sorry to say that civilians committed some violent actions, but I don't think that more than six or seven Frenchmen were victims; it was a fair revenge for the state of misery the city has been left in.

The enemy, for whom plundering the city to an extreme, and stripping the few dwellers of the same clothes they wore, set fire barbarously to some houses, and threw to the streets all the furniture the main army could not take and thus could be expected that soldiers, eight hundred of whom were city and neighbourhood residents, along with their wretched relatives, would patiently witness a scene of ruin, in which their property had been in this unjust and irreparable way entirely destroyed.

As General Miller's and Colonel Wilson's corps must be arriving here tomorrow, I intend to leave in the city one of my brigades, and to march with the rest of my division, as an escort to the prisoners up to Porto, as the rage of this land's people is

the north entrances to Coimbra disrupting the guards left there by the French. The cavalry squadron galloped through the city downtown and occupied the bridge on the Mondego, thus cutting the French forces' communication with the Convent of Santa Clara, where the French casualties were being cared for; inside the city some French forces tried to resist, namely those that had assembled at the bishop's palace (the present Machado de Castro Museum) a building immediately below and to the north of the University. They were attacked by the Militia Regiment of Penafiel under the command of Col. Serpa Pinto, which suffered casualties.<sup>61</sup> Finally, both the French guard of the city and that at the convent surrendered, and Trant could go back to Porto with a column of ap. 3.500 wounded and 1000 French soldiers – he had to go along with them using his local prestige to avoid reprisals from the population against the prisoners, especially the inhabitants of those locals where Massena's columns had gone through (from Sardão to Coimbra)<sup>62</sup>. The Marshal was very ill considered in the French army for not having at least left a brigade to protect the wounded, who all finished up in captivity.

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such, stirred by the last go through of the enemy's army, that I consider my presence absolutely necessary, especially in the Mondego and Vouga districts.

I finish this report to Your Excellency, assuring you, that the hardihood of the Militia in this occasion was such, that it would be a credit to any 1<sup>st</sup> line troops.

God bless Your Excellency! Coimbra, 7<sup>th</sup> October 1810, at eight o'clock in the morning – To Illustrious and Excellent Marshal Beresford.

*Nicholas Trant*

(Soriano, op.cit., Documento N° 99-E, Segunda Epocha, Tomo V - Parte II, pp.219-22).

<sup>61</sup> Chaby, Cláudio de *Excerptos historicos e collecção de documentos relativos á Guerra denominada da Peninsula e ás anteriores de 1801, e do Roussillon e Cataluña*, Lisboa, 1863, Volume III, pp.233 e 233 n.2 Colonel Serpa Pinto was a brother of José Maria de Serpa Pinto, lieutenant in the 2nd Foot Regiment of Porto (R.I.18) who had died of wounds received at the Roussillon campaign, in 1793.

<sup>62</sup> Once again was Trant in charge of prisoners' transport, but here it was also his moral responsibility, because these were prisoners he had made. There was thus a demand to Wellington for him to intervene, inclusive in sending to Porto French military doctors, who were detained in Lisbon, as well as troop transports under command of Vice Admiral Berkeley. (*The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, Vol. 6, p.541).

As a reward for this action Nicholas Trant was decorated Knight Commander of the Tower and Sword Order, and the Portuguese Prince Regent presented him with a territory of ten square miles in Brasil, whose ownership was however never confirmed. Gold medals in his honour were also minted; one shows him on horse ahead of his column of troops, the other crossing the bridge at Porto with a column of prisoners behind, still another plucking feather by feather a huge French eagle<sup>63</sup>.

Once the prisoners' problem in Porto was settled, Trant returned to Coimbra, where he remained with his brigade, a total of 7 Militia Regiments, 3.000 strong, during the period of October 1810 to March 1811. While Massena proceeded to face the Lines of Torres Vedras, a dragoon regiment of Montbrun's brigade pestered Trants' forces from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> December 1810, but having confirmed the Irishman controlled the northern bank of the Mondego, he retreated without trying to cross <sup>64</sup>; thus, by his presence on the river, and by the patrols he sent to the south of it – until Redinha and Lourical -, Trant hindered French forces from crossing to the north, while looking for the most difficult food supplies.

On February 27, Trant had written to Wellington giving his opinion that Massena was going to retreat by the Mucela Bridge (on the river Alva, a tributary of the Mondego), opinion Wellington accepted. But on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, to Adm. Berkeley, he says that he is now sure Coimbra will be the Marshal's stage <sup>65</sup>. He therefore gave precise instructions to Trant and Wilson that they shouldn't try to stop Massena's crossing of the Mondego: the *Armée du Portugal* was too strong an eagle for Militia blackbirds. They should thus withdraw to the north of the Vouga, and concentrate their forces for an eventual defence of the access to Porto.

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<sup>63</sup> Luard, C.G., ed., *op.cit.*, p.331.

<sup>64</sup> Oman, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, Vol. 7, p.349/50.

As a matter of fact, Massena, on the 5<sup>th</sup> March, with his army suffering an almost complete lack of food, and not having received from Napoleon the reinforcements he considered indispensable to attack the Lines of Torres Vedras, having already retreated to Santarém, decided on the full retreat that would take him to the fortresses he had taken in the previous year – Almeida and Ciudad Rodrigo. Wellington began almost immediately his pursuit with the operational Anglo-Portuguese army, less some forces he had detached to oppose Soult on the Alto Alentejo Border. That Coimbra was finally avoided by Massena while retreating is due to various factors, the least of which is certainly not the action of a small Militia detachment Trant had left in the city to build the show of a false powerful garrison, and the audacity of artillery Sergeant José Augusto Correia Leal who was in charge of two guns to protect the bridge<sup>66</sup>. Menacing to blow up the bridge arches if he was attacked, he used the ruse of being dependant on the orders of his commanding officer who was far away to let anyone go through, which convinced the officer sent by Montbrun to parley, that it would thus be impossible for the French to use the bridge. Other Montbrun Brigade's detachments had looked for Mondego's fords, but there was too much water running in the Mondego in that month.

The answer the cavalry Brigadier took back to Massena was that a crossing of the river at Coimbra would be complicated and forcibly use large number of troops. It was a fact the *Armée du Portugal* was being closely harassed by Wellington, and on the 13<sup>th</sup> its rearguard had had to fight strenuously at Redinha and Casal Novo – all this would drive Massena to decide on retreat by the south of the Mondego, and Coimbra was thus spared a new plunder and the fires he set in all towns he went through<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> Oman, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, p. 149.

<sup>67</sup> With the intention, as he said, of delaying the allied troops that were pursuing him, and who apparently had to dispense soldiers as firemen, but indeed as an act of terror and revenge.

## **The great year of the Militias: (in)discipline and effort**

In the secular tradition of the crossbowmen of the roll, whose most recent successors they were, the Militia regiments were only supposed to serve in certain periods of the year, specifically those during which the terrain solidness allowed for fighting activity. But as military mobility had improved a little, operations like Massena's retreat had become possible in the rainy months. This meant the Militia soldiers must be available to serve in the rainy season, although this was against the tradition. The violence perpetrated by the Frenchmen, especially in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Invasions, had weakened in the Militia the natural reluctance against military mobilization out of order: they wanted to take revenge on the invaders, preferably on those who had set fire to their homes, raped their women and murdered their relatives. If this wouldn't be possible, then from those who had ravaged their lands and those near to them – thus the highest Militia activity was mainly that of those regiments belonging to the ravaged areas.

The years 1810 e 1811 were those of the longest service time of the Militia Regiments. The most active were the north and centre ones, as follows<sup>68</sup>:

- Regiments from between Douro and Mondego, under Trant's command:

Porto	Feira	Aveiro
Maia	Oliveira de Azemeis	Coimbra
Penafiel		

- Regiments from the district of Douro Litoral, having then advanced to Beira Alta, under Brig. Miller's command:

Val-de-Vez	Barcelos	Basto
Ponte da Barca	Braga	Vila do Conde
Viana	Guimarães	

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<sup>68</sup> Oman, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, p. 179 n.1

- Regiments at Trás-os-Montes, having advanced to Beira Alta, under Gen. Silveira's command:

Bragança Regiment	Moncorvo	Vila Real
Miranda	Chaves	Lamego

- Regiments at Beira Baixa, under Gen. Lecor's command:

Covilhã Regiment	Castelo Branco	Idanha
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The regiments of Trás os Montes and Alto Douro had already been very active in 1809, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Invasion, because they made up the bulk of Silveira's force; this general had acted with them against Soult in Chaves, and had gone back to Chaves after Soult had marched to Porto, having retaken the city on March 25, 1809. He had then defended the bridge at Amarante and had taken part in Beresford's column that tried to outflank Soult on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 1809<sup>69</sup>. More than a year after that, he would capture on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 1810 at Puebla de Sanabria, a battalion of the 2<sup>ème</sup> *Suisse*, taking their "eagle"<sup>70</sup>. When Massena was besieging the Lines of Torres Vedras, Silveira tried to disturb his reinforcement, attacking with success Gardanne's column, but unsuccessfully Claparède's<sup>71</sup>.

Lieut. Col. John Wilson, of Gen. Bacelar's Staff<sup>72</sup>, was appointed to command various Militia regiments from the north, as Brig. Miller had become ill, and would die even before the end of 1810. Wilson remained at Penacova, and the presence there of his force was persuasive enough to hinder any Frenchmen from crossing the Mondego; once Trant was informed that Massena had clearly given up Coimbra, he left the Vouga with the greater part of his regiments, and joined Wilson, and they began patrolling on the Mondego's north bank. On the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1811 he stopped at the bridge of Fornos (that

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<sup>69</sup> Azeredo, Carlos de *Aqui não passaram! O erro fatal de Napoleão*, Porto, 2005, pp.102-285

<sup>70</sup> Oman, *op.cit.*, Vol.III, p. 270

<sup>71</sup> Soriano, *op.cit.*, 2<sup>a</sup>Época, Tomo III, pp.278-80

<sup>72</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington*, Vol.6, p.543.

meanwhile was blown up) forces of the *Armée du Portugal*'s left flank that were trying to cross the Mondego <sup>73</sup>, and which will be forced to pursue to Celorico, so they might cross the river. Finally, on the 4<sup>th</sup> April, Trant was to help in the final push that will render Massena's *Armée (hors) du Portugal*; when Claparède was retreating with his division on the direction of the (Spanish) River Águeda, the Militia attacked him at the border – but the wolf was stronger than the setters that were harassing it, which would have laid Trant in danger, if British cavalry and horse artillery had not turned up<sup>74</sup>.

Meanwhile the French had been definitively expelled for the third time from Portuguese territory, and the role played by the Militia is not to be underestimated, although they would reach the coolness and cohesion necessary to oppose the experience of the French troops on the line of battle<sup>75</sup>. And their assiduity and discipline were to be wished for; Wellington about whom it is not known any experience of dealing with 2<sup>nd</sup> line British Volunteer units<sup>76</sup>, had some impatience with the indiscipline of the Portuguese Militia, and with the soft habits of Portuguese military justice<sup>77</sup>. But the hate, the resentment and the wish

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<sup>73</sup> Oman, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, p. 167.

<sup>74</sup> Oman, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, p. 199/200.

<sup>75</sup> At Bussaco, for example, the Tomar Militia Regiment escaped, although it was as reserve of Spry's 2<sup>nd</sup> line brigade. It panicked and flew before the advancing French column. (Oman, *op.cit.*, Vol.III, p. 376).

<sup>76</sup> The volunteer units which had abundantly turned up when the menace of an invasion by Napoleon was over England, but they had never to face the enemy, because the menace never became true. They supplied a lot of recruits for the regular army.

<sup>77</sup> "The officers and soldiers of the militia, absent from their corps, are liable to penalties and punishments, some of a civil, others of a military nature. First, they are liable to the forfeiture of all their personal property, upon the information that they are absent from their corps without leave; secondly, they are liable to be transferred to serve as soldiers in the regiments of the line, upon the same information; and lastly, they are liable to the penalties of desertion, inflicted by the military tribunals. The first two are penalties which depend upon the civil magistrates; and I should be very glad to have heard of one instance in which the magistrates of Lisbon, or in which the Government had called upon the magistrates at Lisbon to carry into execution the law in either of these respects... But the Governors of the Kingdom forget the innumerable remonstrances which have been forwarded to them on the defects in the proceedings of Courts Martial, which, in times of active war, render them and their

for revenge of many of the Militia men, who had been directly affected by the French depredations, were sufficient motivation for all retaliation, and made them fearsome fighters for flank action, especially against scattered troops. The fact they were near, made more than once French generals modify previously planned itineraries, and being forced to give up crossing bridges the Militia had blown up. On the other hand Portuguese Militia in arms meant expense, and rendered more difficult ammo and food supplies, in already complicated military logistics<sup>78</sup>. Thus, as soon as the British Commander-in-Chief could begin disbanding the Militia, this proceeded even before Massena had left the country<sup>79</sup>. Half a year later, at the siege of Burgos, Wellington confirmed Beresford his opinion that all Militia units should be disbanded – with the exception of two battalions in the north – so that the Regency could spare and pay all the 1<sup>st</sup> line troops<sup>80</sup>.

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sentences entirely nugatory. As an additional instance of these defects, I mention that officers of the Oliveira militia, who behaved ill in action with the enemy at Villa Nova do Foz Côa, in the beginning of August last, and for whose trial a Court Martial was immediately assembled, are still at the end of October, under trial, and the trial will probably not be concluded before Christmas. In like manner the military trial of these deserters of the militia, after assembling officers and soldiers for the purpose, cannot possibly be concluded 'till the period will have gone by in which any benefit might be derived from the example of the punishment of any one, or number of them.

This defect in the administration of the military law was repeatedly pointed out to the Government, and a remedy for the evil has been proposed to them, and has been approved of by the Prince Regent, but they will not adopt it; and it would be much better if there were no laws for the government of the army, than that the existing laws should continue without being executed." (*The dispatches of Wellington...*, Vol. 6, pp. 557/8).<sup>78</sup> There were conflicts between the commissaries of British supply and the commanders of Militia, and in one case Wellington had even to intervene with Trant (*The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, Vol.6 pp.107/8).

<sup>79</sup> On the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1811, while in full pursuit of Massena, Wellington wrote to Beresford from Arganil instructing him to send Lisbon's Militia and *ordenança* back home; the regiments of Covilhã, Castelo Branco and Idanha, could go back to Beira Baixa, and eventually to be dismissed to their homes: the same for the Regiments of Torres Vedras, Santarém, Leiria and Tomar; the Regiment of Setúbal should go to Palmela, and that of Viseu to Viseu, to be there kept together, according to circumstances. He informed Beresford that as soon as he had pushed Massena to the Coa, he would send the Militias from the north to the right bank of the Douro. (*The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, Vol.7 p.375).

<sup>80</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, Vol.9 p.441.

## Trant in the 4<sup>th</sup> Invasion

With the withdrawal of Massena's troops from Portuguese territory and his defeat at Fuentes de Oñoro (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> May, 1811), the French Marshal had lost all credibility as a great strategist which he had had until then – from then on he will be reduced to final obscurity. Napoleon's orders that called him back to Paris, and replaced him by Marshal Marmont, had been issued on April 20, but only reached him on May 12<sup>th</sup>.

Although the historical convention that there were three Napoleonic invasions in Portugal was established, there was still another which, although it only lasted three weeks (from March 31 to April 22 1812)<sup>81</sup>, and didn't penetrate deeply in our territory, it nevertheless was accompanied with violence and destructions (the city of Castelo Branco was strongly affected). It had also the specific trait that on the Anglo-Portuguese side only 2<sup>nd</sup> line Portuguese units were directly involved.

It's been noted how Wellington wanted fervently to give up the Militia, and only kept it on duty when he didn't have enough 1<sup>st</sup> line troops for the tasks he had in mind; thus, after Fuentes de Oñoro, having to support Beresford who was soon to get involved with Soult in the bloody Battle of Albuera (16<sup>th</sup> May, 1811), he couldn't leave many forces of the operational army on the Coa border. He thus kept on duty in Beira Alta the north Militia regiments under the command of Trant and Wilson which, according to Napier played a dissuading role on the French operational plans for the north of the Peninsula<sup>82</sup>.

Tension must have softened by June 1811, to the point that Trant could order his two children to be brought from England in July, could

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<sup>81</sup> Not to forget that the Second Invasion also lasted only little more than two months, from the 10<sup>th</sup> March to the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1809 – but the First and Third Invasions lasted almost more than half a year.

<sup>82</sup> "Galicia with its lordly junta, regular army, fortified towns, rugged fastnesses, numerous population, and constant supplies from England, had been of less weight in the contest than the five thousand Portuguese militia conducted by Trant and Wilson." (Napier, *op.cit.*, Vol.III, p.186 – Oman does not agree with this opinion – *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, p.474).

go to Lisbon to fetch them, and travel on land as in a touristic trip until Porto, as will be mentioned further on; on the month of August he will be enjoying bathing on the beach at Foz do Douro. Major Alexander Dickson who spent that month at the Porto Arsenal (at present the Military Logistics store of Lordelo), organizing the transshipment of the siege guns and corresponding artillery ammo to be used on the assault of Ciudad Rodrigo, from the navy transports to the “rabelo” boats that would take them on a first stage up river to Régua, registers in his journal Trant’s arrival on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August. But Dickson, having fallen ill with ague, did only present himself at Foz do Douro on the 30<sup>th</sup>, joining the Brigadier for dinner on the following day<sup>83</sup>.

Until March 1812 no more news about Trant can be found, excepting a reference on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 1811 in Wellington’s correspondence to the fact that the Military Governor of Porto had been decorated with the Order of the Tower and Sword (*Torre e Espada*). But on the following March, when Wellington had once again to displace the operational army to the south, he gave orders to Lieut. Gen. Bacelar to have the Militia Regiments under Trant and Wilson march to the Beira Alta where, together with Gen. Silveira’s regiments, they should protect Almeida and, above all, the important army stores at Régua<sup>84</sup> and S. João da Pesqueira, as well as those of Celorico de Basto. Trant then camps with his troops on the left bank of the Côa, west of Almeida, and it is there that the divisions under Clausel sent by Marmont are going to find them<sup>85</sup>. The information passed by Marmont to Clausel, that Almeida was well protected, were decisive in the French Marshal’s campaign planning, which met Wellington’s wishes: instead of progressing through Beira Alta and endangering the stores placed on the river Douro, which would have seriously affected the logistics of the 1812 summer campaign, already being planned by Wellington, Marmont marched to Sabugal through Fuenteguinaldo.

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<sup>83</sup> Dickson, Major-General Sir Alexander, *The Dickson Manuscripts*, Woolwich, 1908, Vol.3, pp.449-51.

<sup>84</sup> The designation of Régua does not appear in English documents of the period – Régua was the river harbour for Lamego, where the stores of military supplies unloaded from the “rabelo” boats coming from Porto, are usually designated as ‘the Lamego stores’.

<sup>85</sup> Oman, *op.cit.*, Vol.V, p. 281.

To cover Marmont's inversion of objectives, Bacelar had Trant's and Wilson's forces march on a parallel direction to Guarda. There Trant, always given to initiatives, develops a project for which he defies Wilson: to attack Marmont's forces at Sabugal, as the Marshal had been meanwhile reduced to few troops, considering the punitive columns he had sent to Beira Baixa, where they will commit the usual depredations and brutalities at Penamacor, Fundão and Covilhã, as well at the city of Castelo Branco and surrounding areas.



**The medieval castle at Sabugal**

On 11<sup>th</sup> April, Trant writes the following to Wilson:

“Hasten up your division: there never was a finer opportunity of destroying French corps, in other words and in my opinion, their 2<sup>nd</sup> Division: but I have no certainty of what force is the enemy. At any rate send me your squadron of cavalry, or even *twenty* dragoons. I am very ill-treated by Bacelar in regard to cavalry. Push on yourself personally. You know how happy I shall be in having you once more as the partner of my operations.”

It was exactly Bacelar who refused to authorize this imprudent adventure<sup>86</sup>. The Lieutenant-General was a discreet man and not very daring, but he accomplished with rigour all the orders received. Those from Wellington were always clear – show yourself to the enemy with all the available forces, but keep observing and avoid contact at all costs. With the irony of destiny, the reverse actually happened, for when he found out at Sabugal that a Militia force in Guarda was facing him, Marmont, decided to attack at once. Trant's report tells how he was surprised<sup>87</sup>; the retreat that followed began well, but ended in disaster<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> Oman, *op.cit.*, Vol.V, pp. 284 n.2 e 285.

<sup>87</sup> "Now it so happened that on this same night Marmont had marched from Sabugal in order to attack me in Guarda; he had at the least five thousand infantry, some reports made his force seven thousand, and he had five or six hundred cavalry. My distrust of the militia with regard to the execution of precautions such as I had now adopted, had induced me at all times to have a drummer at my bed-room door in readiness to beat to arms, and this was most fortunately the case on the night of the 13th April, 1812, for the very first intimation I received of the enemy being near at hand was given me by my own servant, on bringing me my coffee at daybreak of the 14th. He said such "as the report in the street, and that the soldiers were assembling at the alarm rendezvous in the town. I instantly beat to arms, and the beat being as instantly taken up by every drummer who heard it, Marmont, who at that very moment was with his cavalry at the very entrance of the town (quite open on the Sabugal side more than elsewhere), retired. He had cut off the outposts without their firing a shot, and had he only dashed headlong into the town, must have captured Wilson's and my Militia divisions without losing probably a single man. I was myself the first out of the town, and he was not then four hundred yards from it, retiring at a slow pace. I lost no time in forming my troops in position, and sent my few dragoons in observation. When at a couple of miles distant, Marmont drew up fronting Guarda, and it turned out, as I inferred, he expected infantry." (Napier, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV. p.451).

<sup>88</sup> The publication in the Army Order of the 7<sup>th</sup> May 1812, of reprehension and collective penalties dictated by Beresford, contains a detailed description of what happened: "His Excellency Marshal Beresford, Count of Trancoso, after having been presented with a recent new motive to show his satisfaction, and grant the Portuguese troops the praises they deserved (author's note – in the siege of Badajoz), feels himself very much sorry with the need, and unfortunately, with a very sound reason, to express his displeasure for the way the Militia divisions of the Porto Military District and part of those of nearby Minho Province behaved. These troops got away with no reason from near Guarda, shamefully from before the enemy. This says enough for these corps to feel the dishonour they underwent, as they are Portuguese. His Excellency observes here that fear always causes the danger it tries to avoid. These 6000 to 7000 thousand men, were near Guarda as the enemy appeared from the side of Sabugal in greater number: the commanders wisely ordered the retreat, and this took place regularly in the

In face of this debacle Trant and Wilson withdrew in turbulence from Celorico, but Marmont, whose troops were tired from marching from Sabugal, didn't pursue them. Only on the following day, the 15<sup>th</sup> April, did the marshal send a column in pursuit to Lajeosa do Mondego. The British Brigadiers commanding the Militias set fire to the stores at Celorico and crossed the Mondego to escape to the north, less the 1,500 prisoners taken by the French and the 2,000 militiamen lost in the Serra.

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face of the enemy cavalry all over the plateau of more than a league which exists there. While the infantry withdrew in order, the enemy cavalry didn't dare to attack it even though on flat land, and all the infantry came in good order to the steep slope from the Guarda heights on the Mondego side. Here, all danger originating from the enemy cavalry was extinct, as forty firm foot soldiers would be enough to contain it. The Porto Militia Regiment was placed on the slope, holding the rearguard; the enemy ordered a couple of men to dismount, who shot the same number of shots, while the rain hindered the greater part of the Porto Militia Regiment from firing, which filled with panic the whole regiment, that run amok and extended the panic to other regiments.

"The enemy cavalry had not planned to go down the mountain, but when it saw this extraordinary rout, it went down and made 100 to 200 Militia men prisoners, and His Excellency thinks the enemy had found on the ground five regimental colours abandoned by the flag bearers in their dismay, and some men had drowned in the Mondego, into which they had thrown themselves in despair. His Excellency reaffirms fear is always blind and produces the dangers trying to be avoided: if these troops had kept their order, the enemy couldn't have advanced, and they would have quietly taken a new position without losing a single man. The Porto Militia Regiment is the first cause of this shameful event, the first that has taken place in these last three years among the Portuguese troops. His Excellency orders this regiment to place its regimental colours in the Porto Town Hall (His Excellency begs the town hall officers to take care of them) where they will remain until the regiment will clean the stain that fell on it in the heights of Guarda, or by its rule, discipline and zeal might show its repentance and the resolution to make this bad reputation of a Portuguese corps disappear.

Follows the mention that the officers of the said regiment behaved well, in an event that should show Militia officers the need to maintain subordination and obedience in their corps. To the same loss of regimental colours were also condemned the Militia Regiments of Aveiro and Oliveira de Azemeis, those leading them having to face court-martials. The Penafiel Regiment of Militia, which lost one of the regimental colours, was condemned to place the other in the local Town Hall. As to the fugitives, about 1,600 a few days after the rout, Colonel Trant was ordered to submit those he thought deserved it to a court martial - the first ones who gave the bad example of escaping, and the rest should become 1<sup>st</sup> line soldiers. To the same penalty were 300 deserters or fugitives from the Wilson division, made up of the Guimarães, Braga, Vila do Conde, Barcelos, and Barca Regiments, plus two Union Battalions. Brigadier Lecor was praised in the same order of the day for his brilliant conduct, as well as well as the three Militia regiments under his command - Castello Branco, Idanha, Covilhã". (Soriano, op.cit. 2<sup>a</sup> Epoca, T.IV – Parte.1, pp.145-7).

But Marmont did not continue with the pursuit, because on the same day he received the news of the fall of Badajoz, and he knew that if he failed to escape in time, Wellington would come with the Anglo-Portuguese army by forced march if necessary to reach the Frenchman in Portugal, or on the border. As he still had to gather his columns from Beira Baixa, he went back to Sabugal in a hurry, and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April, the last French forces that Napoleon had sent against Portugal left the country for ever. Two days later Wellington made the following comment in a letter to the Secretary of State Earl of Liverpool:

“The partial success over the Portuguese Militia while retreating from Guarda, and the murder and plunder of the inhabitants of a few villages in Lower Beira, already suffering from the enemy’s former depredations, are the only fruits of Marshal Marmont’s expedition within the Portuguese frontier to divert our attention from the siege of Badajoz”<sup>89</sup>.

But for Trant it was indeed the last time he took part in fighting in the Peninsular War, and this must have left him a bitter taste in the mouth.

### **The aftermath of the War**

With the French leaving Portugal, in effect warfare was finished for Trant, the operational commander. The War would still go on for two years, but only Portuguese 1<sup>st</sup> line units were involved, and all the officers commanding garrisons were removed from it<sup>90</sup>. As referred to above, Trant had had his two children brought from England to be by his side, as his wife had passed away in the previous year – in 1806. The precious source of information on this British officer’s life, who served in the Portuguese Army, came from his daughter, Clarissa.

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<sup>89</sup> *The dispatches of ... Wellington...*, Vol.9 p. 87.

<sup>90</sup> With the exception of Silveira, who took part with his Militia Regiments in operation at the Spanish Douro region, from which 2<sup>nd</sup> line forces should have been dispensed, as it was outside the Portuguese territory.

Born in 1799, when she arrived at Porto in August 1811 she was 12 years old – when one reads her diary her precocity impresses<sup>91</sup>. She tells first about her landing in Lisbon, where her father had waited for them, and the reception at the Countess of Peniche's (D. Maria José de Almeida Portugal) and her daughters, belonging to the upper kingdom's nobility, in whose house they were lodged until they left for Porto. It can immediately there be demonstrated her lively spirit in the appreciation of the Portuguese nobility's idiosyncrasies<sup>92</sup>. They then make the journey to the north, with various episodes, among them a visit to the tomb of the Marquis of Pombal in his home town. Trant shows profound respect for this eighteenth century politician<sup>93</sup>. There follows a colourful description of the reception held at Coimbra in Trant's honour. This city considers itself as indebted to Trant for not having been again plundered by Massena's troops in his retreat, and holds a grandiose welcome ceremony, where fireworks were not missing, which Clarissa comments are never missing in any Portuguese festivities. To the visit will only be one side trip, the visit to the Quinta das Lágrimas, the property where Inês de Castro was murdered, and her history<sup>94</sup>.

The Trant family settled in Porto at Foz do Douro and were able to go to the beach until the middle of October. One curious thing for Clarissa were the canvas tents where ladies and gentlemen changed from the clothes they wore to bathing suits in thick blue cloth, in which they went all mixed up into the sea, while they exchanged greetings between each other<sup>95</sup>. On the 15<sup>th</sup> October they moved over to the present building of the Criminal Police at the R. de S. Bento da Vitória, that belonged to D. Ermelinda Allen<sup>96</sup>, a lady with abundant

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<sup>91</sup> Luard, C.G., ed., *op.cit.*

<sup>92</sup> Luard, C.G., ed. *op.cit.*, pp.7-8.

<sup>93</sup> Luard, C.G., ed. *op.cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>94</sup> Luard, C.G., ed. *op.cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>95</sup> Luard, C.G., ed. *op.cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>96</sup> Valente, *op.cit.*, p.22, Nota 1 – D.Ermelinda Allen, afterwards Baroness of Regaleira. Before becoming the present seat of the Criminal Police, it was many years used for the Secondary School of Porto.

descendants in Porto nowadays – but Clarissa complains about the house’s discomfort, where they nevertheless receive all the distinguished visitors to the city. She also spends a lot of her time at the convent of the Benedictine nuns of São Bento de Avé Maria, situated where the São Bento railway station now lies.

When Trant has to march again with his Militia regiments to the border on the Coa in May 1812, as described in the previous chapter, he leaves Mrs. Mary C. McCrowan, the wife of an Irish officer of his staff, to supervise his children; Clarissa complains bitterly of her governess, Mrs. McGee. On the presence of English officers’ relatives in Portugal by an anonymous memorialist, published by Durval Pires de Lima it’s told that on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1808 a lot of ships came through the Douro’s mouth, after having accompanied a fleet of troop transports that were landed that month at Figueira, bringing those ships “more than a thousand women, ladies and servants of officers and soldiers of the British army”<sup>97</sup>.

Trant returned to Porto on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 1812, and remained in Porto the rest of 1812, and the whole 1813 – excluding a journey to England – and part of 1814, busy with the instruction of his Militia, and with administrative and logistical activity. There is the good humoured description of a wedding at S. João da Foz, and one excursion to the Vizela spa, apparently the most popular spa for the people of Porto. They stayed there at the house rented by Mr. Kopke, a wealthy merchant resident in Porto.

After various illustrious visitors, including Beresford – whom Clarissa is convinced harboured a disguised envy of her father’s successes<sup>98</sup> – they were visited in December 1812 by the Prince of

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<sup>97</sup> Lima, Durval Pires de (ed. & n.) *Os franceses no Porto 1807-1808 – Diário de uma testemunha presencial*, Porto, 1949, 2ª Parte, p.82 – Where did the ladies took refuge? At Lisbon and in Porto? What happened to those of Porto in the second invasion, and to those of Lisbon in the third? All of these questions would be interesting to answer, but the necessary research is missing.

<sup>98</sup> Luard, C.G., ed. op.cit., p. 15.

Orange, the son of the Staathouder of Holland, who had been expelled from that country as a consequence of the invasion by the French revolutionary armies. He had been at the Battle of Salamanca as Wellington's ADC, and was to become the first Dutch king in succession to Louis Napoleon, with the name William I. Snobbish as any sound English lady of that period, Clarissa delights with a description of that visit, and the intimacy with Royals it provided, with a ball in honour of the prince, in the house of the above-mentioned Kopke. This house in the R. de Vilar, was inherited by Kopke's descendants – the van Zeller family – and is now the Colégio de N. Sra. de Lourdes, with a gate to Campo Alegre.

Another house inhabited by Trant with much more pleasure was the Quinta de Cedofeita, or das Águas Férreas<sup>99</sup>. They moved there in the winter of 1813, and Clarissa hoped her father would be able to recover there from the poor health condition he was in, as a result of the many efforts developed in the previous five war years. But the official visits succeeded and Trant, to be able to recover, went in May to the Gerez spa following the usual road that went through Braga. Clarissa's description of the trip is curious, describing boar hunting; however, the Gerez spa was too uncomfortable and the Trant family went to Vizela, where the Brigadier made trips of historical and archaeological interest.

As Trant had to go to England in the summer, and only came back in September, it was during that month that they went to Foz, where they spent the winter. Clarissa refers to how, notwithstanding the cold, flowers such as roses, myrtles and geraniums flourished ten yards from the ocean, She describes with horror one of the frequent wrecks at the mouth of the Douro<sup>100</sup>. In May 1814, Trant made a long inspection trip to his Militia regiments, interspersed with visits to various convents and manors on the way. He took along his children, as well as a couple of

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<sup>99</sup> Valente, Vasco, *op.cit.*, p.28 It was the farm of Santo António da Boa Vista, ou das Água Férreas.at the time belonging to José de Sousa e Melo. Placed on today's first cross street to the right of R.da Boavista, when coming down from the Praça da República.

<sup>100</sup> Luard, C.G., ed. *op.cit.*, p. 22.

officers from his staff. From Porto to Valongo, and from there to Penafiel, then crossing at Entre-os-Rios to the Convento of Alpendorada, where they stayed overnight at the manors of the local nobility, for whom Clarissa retains a mordant criticism. From Alpendorada they went on to Vimieiro, and then on to Penalva do Castelo, to the manor of Ínsua<sup>101</sup>, of the Albuquerque family. João de Albuquerque was then ten years old, and he and his sisters, Cristina and Constança, were the children of the Porto High Court, Judge Manuel de Albuquerque, and grandchildren on their mother's side of General Forbes of Skellator. Maybe because their mother was Scottish, they could speak English, which seldom happened then with the Portuguese nobility, and they became Clarissa's best companions, with whom she spent her last evening, when she left Porto: João then accompanied her to the mouth of the Douro in the boat that was taking her to Lisbon, from where she returned to England<sup>102</sup>.

The last stage of her father's inspection tour was the city of Aveiro, about which Clarissa had few pleasant things to tell<sup>103</sup>. The only exception – a snobbish one – was the visit she paid to the Marchioness of Ponte de Lima, who was exiled there, as her husband had been banished to Aveiro by the Regency as he had collaborated with Junot.

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<sup>101</sup> Vasco Valente, *op.cit.* p.34/5. "It is regrettable that in her 'Diary', Clarissa failed to recall her impressions of the long travel from Vimieiro to Aveiro, through Beira, as she says that they spent two days with the Albuquerques, obviously the 'young Albuquerques', which at one point she refers to as her childhood favourite companions: João de Albuquerque de Melo Pereira e Cáceres and Cristina and Constança Forbes de Albuquerque. She must have stayed at the family's manor in Castendo (Beira Alta), the Casa da Ínsua".

Vasco Valente, *op.cit.* p.35 N1. Manuel de Albuquerque de Melo Pereira e Cáceres, the Lord of the Casa da Ínsua, was then resident at Porto as a High Court Judge. He had married D. Ana Benedita Forbes de Almeida, daughter of General John Forbes of Skellator, who bore him the three above-mentioned children. The two girls died single and João de Albuquerque, who inherited the *morgados* (entailed estates) of Ínsua, married D. Camila Ribeiro de Faria, from Porto, with whom he had children. On October 5, 1832, João de Albuquerque, then a cornet in the Chaves Cavalry Regiment, was decorated 'on the field of battle' with the Order of the Tower and Sword, and later granted the title of Count of Ínsua by D. Miguel I, which he never used.

<sup>102</sup> Luard, C.G., ed. *op.cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>103</sup> Luard, C.G., ed. *op.cit.*, pp. 26-27.

On 7<sup>th</sup> August, Trant fell off his horse on Rua do Almada going to the barracks of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Foot Regiment of Porto, the R.I.18. He was too shaken to proceed with the military command of Porto and presented his resignation to the Regency. He was sent for recovery to Rio Tinto, but he left Porto forever on the 11<sup>th</sup> October, destined for England.

He was promoted to Major-General in the British Army, as told by his biographer (but in reality to *Marechal de Campo*, the Portuguese corresponding rank). In 1818, he went to Brazil to regularize his situation, where he was received by D. João VI with all deference. The king offered him the government of a province with the rank of Lieutenant General, which he did not accept, as it implied he had to stay in Brazil. He succeeded within twenty days to be paid his full wage for life, with the possibility of living wherever he wanted to<sup>104</sup>. He returned to London, and it can be confirmed he kept meeting distinguished Portuguese personalities. With characteristic snobbery, Clarissa writes about her visit to Pompey with the Fronteira family (marquises)<sup>105</sup> and the visit she paid to the young queen D. Maria II, when she was exiled in London<sup>106</sup>. Nicholas Trant finally died in London, in November 1839, five years before his daughter.

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*Pedro de Brito was born and educated in Porto, and served as a reserve lieutenant in Portugal and Angola up to 1965. Back from Africa he worked in his family company, of which he became C.E.O. in 1976. He retired from the company in 1984 to study History at Porto University, graduating top of his class in December 1988. He then pursued post graduate research in Modern History, choosing the early modern social and economic field. He specialised in the merchant bourgeoisie, as well as in military social history and the Peninsular War, in which capacity he assists the Porto Military Museum.*

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<sup>104</sup> Vasco Valente, ed. *op.cit.*p.40.

<sup>105</sup> Luard, C.G., ed. *op.cit.*, pp. 166-7.

<sup>106</sup> Luard, C.G., ed. *op.cit.*, pp. 248-252.