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THE FRENCH INVASIONS

Over a period of four years Portugal endured three invasions, the first of which is briefly described elsewhere in this report. In 1809 events in the Peninsula called for the presence of Napoleon in Spain, where his army under Soult forced the British army to fall back on Corunna where Sir John Moore was mortally wounded during the evacuation.

After Corunna Soult turned his attention to, and occupied, the North of Portugal.

Meanwhile, in London, a court of enquiry acquitted Sir Arthur Wellesley of involvement in the painful episode, namely the Convention of Sintra and, ordered him back to Portugal to take command of the army. Sir Arthur lost no time and on May 12, 1809 he took Soult by surprise in Oporto and, after a few short sharp skirmishes he had him on the run and out of the country. Napoleon did not despair and before long a mightier army, under Massena, was poised at the northern gates of Portugal the fortress of Almeida, on the invasion route, kept Massena at bay until the garrison was forced to surrender following the explosion of the magazine.

The fall of Almeida compelled the British commander to retreat as far as Bussaco where in September 1810 he repelled Massena's massive assault.

Non military accounts of events at Bussaco are rare and the Society is grateful to the British Library for authorising the publication of extracts from the diary kept by Father José Silvestre, a friar at the Convent.

THE HON. EDITOR