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TWO BRITISH MEMORIALS ERECTED DURING THE PENINSULAR WAR

by Major Hallidie

It is curious that so few memorials to the many soldiers who fell in the Peninsular War exist today. When a new motorway was being built near Talavera a few years ago, great agitation developed as it was discovered that the road works were disturbing a mass grave where soldiers, who fell during the battle, had been buried. No memorial had previously been placed there.

Perhaps the largest British war memorial of this campaign is in San Sebastian, where it is to be found on one of the headlands that protect the bay near the city. Here Sir Richard Fletcher, who was in charge, under Wellington, of the building of the Lines of Torres Vedras fell during the siege of the city, and was buried with many more officers, but there are few other cemeteries.

There are however, two memorials to British soldiers who fell in this war on the eastern flanks of Portugal. The first is to a Lieutenant Colonel Charles Bevan of the 4th Foot who is buried at Portalegre and the second is the English cemetery at Elvas.

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Colonel Bevan's story is a sad one. He had been promoted to command the elite Light Company of the regiment, the 4th Foot, and had proved his effectiveness as an officer in previous campaigns. However he had the misfortune to have as his superior Major General Erskine, a less than successful leader of notorious unreliability, given to drinking and playing cards. At the battle of Fuentes d'Onoro the 5th Division [among whom were 4th Foot] had been out of the battle, when Wellington received intelligence of an

impending break-out of the French garrison of Almeida. Wellington passed a written order to move 4th and 2nd Foot to cut off the escape route which lay across the remote bridge of Barba del Puerto. Wellington's order was with Erskine at 2 p.m. but the family accounts have it that he put it in his pocket and at first forgot it. It reached Bevan at midnight. His camp was three miles or more from the bridge and, before he was under way, shots could be heard from picquets at the bridge. Putting on all speed, 4th Foot were too late to do more than engage the rear of the French column, though they attempted a rash pursuit which cost them an officer and ten men.

Subsequently Erskine evidently blamed Bevan to Wellington for having lost his way and that is how Wellington's despatch to the Horse Guards reported the incident. Wellington is also said to have castigated Bevan in front of his troops as "the Lions were late again" though 4th Foot had, like 28th, proved one of the best of the line regiments. Bevan was deeply upset and believed that his honour and that of the Regiment had been wrongly impugned. He applied forcefully for a Board of Enquiry. But this was an anxious time for Wellington who had trounced Massena at Fuentes d'Onoro and was keen to enforce the removal of French troops from Portugal - he turned the Army towards Badajoz - though after forced marches the French were found to be already there in strength. Accordingly the column went back. Fifth Division arrived at a huddled camp at Portalegre at the beginning of July 1811. On the 4th July Charles Bevan sent a perfectly normal letter to his wife. Evidently news then reached him that there would be no Board of Enquiry. Bevan shot himself.

The first letter to Mrs. Bevan from Major Piper, acting Battalion Commander, reported that the whole regiment had paraded with a firing party of 300, accompanied by virtually all the officers in the Division, and Bevan had been buried in a tomb in the Castle yard which was bricked up with a stone bearing the following inscription:

"This stone is erected to the memory of Charles Bevan Esq. late Lt. Col. of the 4th or King's Own Regt., with the intention of recording his virtues. They are deeply engraven in the hearts of those who knew him and will for ever live in their memories.

This tomb has, sadly, now disappeared and it is now proposed that a replica with explanation should be placed in the wall of the cemetery.

ELVAS.

The British Cemetery at Elvas is now well known. It is situated in the bastion of S. João da Corujeiro, high on the eastern wall and not far below the Castle, commanding a fine view over the plain to Badajoz. It gets its name from the hermitage let into the walls. The hermitage was founded by the Friars of St. John's Hospitallers in 1228, but was rebuilt after the earthquake of the XVIIIth century.

The cemetery contains four graves:

Major General Daniel Hoghton fell at the head of his brigade in the Battle of Albuera on 16th of May 1811. General Hoghton (or Houghton) was the 41 year old younger son of the late member for Parliament for Preston, Sir Henry Hoghton Bt. of Hoghton Tower. Gazetted into the 8th Foot, he was at this time in command of a Brigade in Stewart's 2nd Division. At the start of the battle this Division was in reserve, but was shortly moved to the south to relieve the Brigade of Zaya's Division of Spanish infantry, which had held the attack with great gallantry. For the rest of the day, Hoghton's Brigade was at the centre of the battle and gave no ground, but at horrific expense. 63% of the Brigade were casualties and, at the end of the day the senior officer of the Brigade was a Captain. In one battalion the Ensign of the Colour tore it from its staff and stuffed it into his jacket to prevent its capture. His body was

found by the only remaining members of his company: one sergeant and one corporal.

Generals Beresford and Stewart requested the Governor of Elvas that General Hoghton be buried there and the request was granted.

Lieutenant Colonel James Ward Oliver was a captain in the 4th Foot (King's Own Royal Border Regiment) until 1809, when he volunteered for service in the Portuguese Army. This involved two promotions. First he was promoted Major on the General Staff of the British Army and then Lieutenant Colonel in the Portuguese Army. He received the pay of both these appointments and commanded the 1st Battalion of the 10th Regiment of Portuguese Infantry. He had had a long and active career, seeing service in America, Holland, Hanover, Copenhagen, Corunna, Sweden, Portugal and Spain. He was captured by the French on passage home from America and escaped from Prison in Orleans. He died in Elvas on 17th June 1811 of wounds received at the first siege of Badajoz.

Major William Nicholas Bull died in Monforte on 14th February 1850 aged 50. At the time of Albuera he was a lad of ten. He served in the 20th and 21st Battalions of the 2nd Regiment of Brigada Real da Marinha. We have a letter of his of May 1833 regretting his recent resignation and requesting reinstatement in his original rank of Lieutenant in the Constitutional Army of the Duke of Braganza (D. Pedro IV). This was presumably granted as he died a Major.

Caroline Bull, who died on 28th June 1863 was the wife of Major Bull and was buried there by her daughter who had married into the Campos Araujo family.

The area of the graves is surrounded by an attractive cast iron railing which was installed on 20th August 1904 by the Military

Governor Brigadier João Carlos Rodrigues da Costa. This fact is recorded by a small stone engraved "G.P.E. (Governador da Praia de Elvas) 20-8-1904".

The reason given for the establishment of the cemetery is that at that time there was no public cemetery in Elvas, but it is more probable that Catholics would not, until recently, allow Protestants to be buried in their cemeteries and that this quiet bastion was allowed to be used following Generals Beresford's and Stewart's intervention.

For many years the cemetery lay within the area of military jurisdiction and access was extremely difficult. This is no longer so and the small British community in the area has undertaken its maintenance.

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