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Quinta Nova  
Carcavelos  
2777-601 PAREDE

Wellington

au Duc d'Abrantes le 27<sup>de</sup> Jan  
1811

Monsieur

J'ai appris avec grande peine, que vous  
avez été blessé; et je me suis plu de ne pas  
savoir si je puis vous envoyer quelque chose  
qui puisse servir à votre guérison, ou  
accélérer votre rétablissement.

Je ne sais plus de vous avec ces nouvelles  
de Madame la Duchesse. Elle est accouchée  
Ciudad Rodrigo à la fin du mois de Nov  
d'un garçon; et elle a quitté Ciudad Rodrigo  
et a été à Salamanca pour aller à Paris  
à Monsieur le Duc d'Abrantes  
dans les premiers jours de ce mois.

J'ai l'honneur d'être Monsieur votre  
obéissant serviteur

# THOUGHTS ON A LETTER FROM WELLINGTON TO JUNOT

by Clive Gilbert

The original of a letter from the Duke of Wellington to General Junot has recently been acquired by a member of our Society. The document is reproduced here by courtesy of Christopher Shiels.

The letter in question was written on 27<sup>th</sup> January, 1811 from Wellington's headquarters at Cartaxo and was addressed to *Monsieur le Duc D'Abrantes*. It expressed sympathy over the fact that he had been wounded and informed him that his wife had just had a son.

The original letter, written in French, is reproduced below:

"I have learned with much sorrow that you have been wounded; and I beg you to let me know if I can send you something which can help with the healing of your wound, or accelerate your recovery. I do not know if you have had any news of Madame la Duchesse. She has been delivered of a son at Ciudad Rodrigo at the end of November; and she has left Ciudad Rodrigo and has gone to Salamanca in order to go to France in the first days of this month. I have the honour, Monsieur, to be your obedient servant..."

Several thoughts come to mind on analysing this letter. First, if one is to observe the letter in today's terms it seems extraordinary that acknowledged enemies should correspond in this way showing concern for the other and offering assistance. But such was the military code of those days and many examples are available to illustrate this point. For instance during the winter of

1810-1811 much contact took place between the two armies as may be seen by the following: 'Then there were amateur theatricals, invitations from the English to watch football and horse-racing.'

The concern shown by Wellington over Junot's wounds and the information concerning the birth of his son may have gone a little beyond the code of honour. It probably was meant to show to Junot just how much the Allies were aware of exactly what was happening with the French army. Portuguese and Spanish militia regularly captured the French couriers together with the messages they carried. Wellington therefore was perhaps somewhat less concerned about Junot's welfare but in a way far keener that the French should be aware of the knowledge possessed by the Allies about everything that was happening to them, down to every detail. The second thought therefore was that this was probably nothing more than an exercise in psychological warfare expertly put into practice by Wellington who did not depend solely on winning on the battlefield. This exercise was designed to further lower the morale of the French who, having been beaten at Bussaco, were suffering a wretchedly hungry winter. They had spent one month in the barren area in front of the impregnable Lines of Torres Vedras, where they had arrived on 12<sup>th</sup> October, 1810. They then retreated on 15<sup>th</sup> November to the line of Santarem/Rio Maior/Tomar, an area less devastated by Wellington's 'scorched earth' policy, in the hope of alleviating their misery and also to wait for reinforcements.

The extent of the hunger felt by the French army may be seen by the fact that the foraging parties searching for food had to be sent further and further afield. One party travelled west as far as Roliça, the site of Wellesley's first victory in Portugal during the first invasion in 1808. A curious incident was recently related to the author by an elderly resident of Roliça whose great-great-grandparents were bakers in a hamlet near Roliça. On one particular occasion they were surprised by the intrusion of a group of French soldiers who demanded that the bread being baked at the time should be taken out of the oven. This was done and the starving

soldiers then promptly wolfed it all down, despite the fact that the bread was still unbaked and extremely hot, such was their hunger.

It is well known that Wellington was also keen on protecting his army. The whole concept behind his idea of the Lines of Torres Vedras is brought to our attention by his descendant, the present Duke of Wellington who says, "*If in the course of history of war a battle had taken place in which one side lost 30,000 men and the other a matter of a few hundreds, it would have echoed down the pages of history as the greatest victory ever won. But that, in fact, is the measure of Massena's defeat at the Lines of Torres Vedras. He entered Portugal with 65,000 men, and although he received 10,000 reinforcements at Santarem during the winter, the fact remains that he crossed the frontier on his retreat in the spring of 1811 with only 45,000 left.*"<sup>2</sup>

Finally and in view of the above, Wellington could well have been following General Sun Tzu's advice when he states that: "*To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the greatest skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the greatest skill.*"<sup>3</sup> Wellington again shows he had in all likelihood studied Sun Tzu when on the eve of the battle of Waterloo he heeded another of Sun Tzu's maxims, "*According as circumstances are favourable, one should modify one's plans*". On the eve of the battle of Waterloo Lord Uxbridge, commanding the cavalry went to the Duke in order to learn what his plans and calculations were for the morrow, because, as he explained, he might suddenly find himself Commander-in-Chief and would be unable to frame new plans in a critical moment. The Duke listened carefully and then said: "*Who will attack the first tomorrow - I or Bonaparte?*" "*Bonaparte*", replied Lord Uxbridge. "*Well*", continued the Duke, "*Bonaparte has not given me any idea of his projects; and as my plans will depend upon his, how can you expect me to tell you what mine are?*"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wellington MSS 28th December 1810, from General Graham

<sup>2</sup> The Lines of Torres Vedras by A.H. Norris and R.W. Bremner, 1986. The British Historical Society of Portugal. Foreword by His Grace the Duke of Wellington.

<sup>3</sup> The Art of War by Sun Tzu. (Chinese general and military philosopher, 4th century B.C.)

<sup>4</sup> Words on Wellington, by Sir W. Fraser

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