

Echoes of the Past.

THE MEDICAL DEPARTMENT OF WELLINGTON'S ARMY,
1809-1814.

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(Continued from p. 146.)

1812.

In January a fresh attempt was made on Ciudad Rodrigo, which was taken by assault on the 19th after twelve days of open trenches. Our losses in killed and wounded were 553. A General Order issued at Gallegos on the 8th stated: "Each Division will be attended by the Medical Staff belonging to it. A place will be fixed upon to which men who may be wounded are to be carried, and means will be provided for removing them from thence to cantonments." The wounded seem to have been sent mainly to Coimbra. Those of the 4th Division, in defiance of orders, were retained by Guthrie in their Regimental Hospitals about Gallegos and Aldea del Opisbo.

On January 12 James McGrigor landed at Lisbon to assume the duties of Inspector of Hospitals to the Army. He was then a man of 40, who, after nine years' regimental service, had come to the front as Superintending Surgeon to Sir David Baird's force during the Egyptian campaign of 1801. He was later in charge of the Southern District at home, and had just returned from Walcheren where he had been sent to reorganize the medical arrangements. His reputation as a strong and capable administrator as well as a skilful physician was already made, and his personality rendered him no less acceptable to his subordinates than to the Commander of the Forces; for, though a hard taskmaster, he possessed the gift of sympathy combined with a jealous regard for the welfare of his officers.

An inspection of the Lisbon hospitals and depots convinced him that a drastic system of weeding out was required, and that it was not the private soldier only who found the suburbs of that town more attractive than regimental duty. On his advice, regular medical examinations by a standing medical board was instituted, and all patients were boarded at the front before being sent down to the base. He believed strongly in the value of Regimental Hospitals, and was anxious to see a number of small hospitals established in divisional areas where men should be treated by their own surgeons, but this Wellington could not at first agree to, for reasons already mentioned.

In March the siege of Badajoz commenced again. McGrigor established his office at Elvas, about fourteen miles from the town where the medical supply depot was located. He had brought out a staff officer, Staff Surgeon James Forbes, with him from England and was thus able to keep in personal touch with the Commander of the Forces, whom he saw every morning and from whom he obtained information as to all movements of importance. A small field hospital was formed and a daily convoy of wagons was arranged between the front area and the hospitals at Elvas.

The final assault, in which three-fourths of the 5,000 casualties of the siege occurred,¹ was made on the night of April 16. The Fourth and Light Divisions, who attacked the breaches, were driven back with heavy loss, but, in the end, Picton's Division effected a lodgement in the Castle. An aid post for the first two was formed at the Quarry, well within musket range, in charge of Staff Surgeon Burnall, with whom was Assistant Surgeon Elkington of the 24th, a regiment not directly engaged. When the two divisions retired completely broken, they were unable to afford much assistance. The severely wounded they could not reach, and the slightly wounded would not remain under fire to be dressed. McGrigor remained at Wellington's side throughout the night. The sack of the town lasted two days and was only stopped by summary executions. It took another twenty-four hours to get all the wounded in. Each fatigue party sent brought a certain number into the Convent of S. André in the city, but, instead of returning for more, they went off in search of loot.

The arduous work imposed on the Medical Department was well performed, and their gallantry under fire during the assault was recognized by Lord Wellington, at McGrigor's suggestion, by a mention of their services in his despatch. Thus a precedent was set, which was followed in the future, for never previously had a civil department of the Army been so mentioned.

The capture of Badajoz and Ciudad Rodrigo secured for the Army important potential bases for future operations. The French forces were scattered. Marmont had fallen back on Salamanca, and Soult was on the Guadalquivir. Wellington now prepared to advance against the first. General Hill was despatched in May with 6,000 men to attempt the destruction of the bridge-head at Almaraz on the Tagus, and so sever the direct line of communication between the two French armies, an operation which was brilliantly performed. On June 13 Wellington crossed the Agueda.

To summarize the medical situation. At Lisbon there were the fixed hospitals and Convalescent Depots at Belem and Oeiras. Evacuation to that place was now, however, mainly confined to cases requiring embarkation

¹ Killed 1,035, wounded 3,789. 18,000 were engaged in the assault, of whom 823 were killed and 2,858 wounded.

to England, 2,000 of which were despatched in July. Discipline at the depots was now properly maintained, and the depot at Oeiras was closed in August. Coimbra, on the navigable waters of the Mondego, had been an important medical centre throughout the war, except during the sojourn of the Army behind the defences of Torres Vedras. It was in communication with Lisbon either through Figueras by sea, or by road through Santarem, where there was still a sick depot. Abrantes on the Tagus, from whence ran the lines of communication with the troops guarding the eastern line of invasion, had a hospital establishment, and the hospitals established at Elvas, Estremoz, and Alter da Chao during the operations round Badajoz remained open. To provide for casualties on Hill's line of retreat the hospital at Estremoz had been cleared. On the road between Ciudad Rodrigo and Oporto there were hospitals at Celorico and Vizeu. By this line McGrigor was prepared to evacuate his sick to the transports if necessary. Apart from the three spring wagons with each division, the means available for moving the sick was the returning supply trains, consisting chiefly of commissariat mules.

Medical officers were short. There were no reserves with the Army, and regimental establishments still had to be depleted to supply the new General Hospitals formed.

On July 22 the battle of Salamanca was fought, and Marmont was driven over the Douro. Valladolid was occupied, and on August 21 Wellington entered Madrid.

Our losses at Salamanca amounted to 693 killed and 4,266 wounded in a force of about 45,000. By Wellington's orders large hospitals were opened in the town. Only the most severe cases were removed to Ciudad Rodrigo, provided they were fit to be moved at all. There was also considerable sickness, and he desired to get the men back to duty as early as possible. Writing from Flores de Avila on July 25, he assured McGrigor that he was very sensible of the diligence and attention of the Medical Department, "of which I have reported my sense to the Secretary of State." The sickness he ascribed largely to the "irregularities" of the troops "and the ignorant presumption of those who think they know better than those who have been serving long in the country." The battalions recently arrived from home and the Mediterranean had no capacity for marching, and their internal economy and sanitary discipline was bad.

McGrigor remained some time at Salamanca to supervise arrangements. Finding on his journey to Madrid that a number of sick had been left on the road unattended, he assumed the responsibility of ordering up medical officers and purveyors from Salamanca. Wellington, who scarcely permitted initiative of this sort even to his staff, was furious when he heard of it. But it was the thin end of the wedge, and henceforth McGrigor was tacitly allowed to carry out much of the arrangements connected with the sick and wounded on his own responsibility.

Burgos was now invested. A garrison was left in Madrid under Hill's

command, and George Guthrie remained there as his P.M.O. The sick and wounded from the main army at Burgos were sent off in daily convoys by returning transport to Valladolid. On September 5 the morning state showed 29,169 effectives, sick present 1,454, sick absent 16,375. At the commencement of the campaign in June the last figure was about 12,000. On October 21 the siege was abandoned, and Wellington, confronted by forces nearly treble his own, commenced his retirement. Shortly before, there had been nearly 2,000 casualties in the hospitals at Valladolid, but McGrigor had been carefully watching the military situation. He had on his own initiative arranged for the clearance of the whole line of hospitals as far as Oporto and, taking advantage of every opportunity, had nearly cleared the front. When he received orders to move at twelve hours' notice there remained no more than sixty patients, all unfit to be moved out of Valladolid. These were left, with three medical officers and a purveyor's clerk, to the care of the enemy.

The retreat went no further than Ciudad Rodrigo, a distance of 180 miles, which was covered in thirty-five days. The weather was vile, the roads worse, the arrangements for supplies broke down, and the soldiers were out of hand. It cost Wellington 9,000 men. At the termination of the march there were 20,000 sick men to be dealt with, and typhus had broken out. In December the deaths averaged 400 to 500 a week.

There was not accommodation for a tenth of the sick in the General Hospitals, and McGrigor took the opportunity to renew his proposals for the treatment of the bulk of the patients locally in Regimental Hospitals supervised by the Divisional Surgeons. A G.O. dated November 29 directed that "When the troops move into cantonments a Regimental Hospital is to be formed for each Corps. Dr. McGrigor will transmit directions respecting the move of those necessary to General Hospital." Typhus raged through December and January. The First Guards practically ceased to exist. But the system of treating the cases where they occurred, thereby limiting the movement of the affected population, was founded on sound principles, and in the early spring the epidemic wore itself out. Meanwhile, on McGrigor's suggestion, wooden frameworks for huts were sent out from England, and by the summer a village of cottages capable of accommodating 4,000 sick had been set down near Castello Rodrigo within reach of the navigable waters of the Douro. Attempts were made to supplement the medical staff by enlisting the services of French and Portuguese doctors, but it was not a success.

THE VITTORIA CAMPAIGN, 1813.

In May General Hospitals are mentioned at Coimbra, Vizeu, Celorico, Castello Branco, Abrantes, Santorem, and Lisbon. At the last Deputy Inspector Edward Tegart was in charge. No exertion was spared to get these hospitals cleared, and to return the convalescents to duty.

The result was striking: the increase of the fighting strength of the Army by something like a division at the outset of the Vittoria campaign.¹

Meanwhile Wellington had made every preparation for the operations of the summer. The discipline of the British troops was restored, reinforcements were received from England, and the Spanish army was more or less brought into line. The Portuguese under British officers were already troops to be relied on. In spite, however, of the efforts of Fergusson and his staff the sick wastage from their divisions continued to be high owing to the defective organization of their base hospitals.

"In the campaign of six weeks, commencing in May, 1813, Wellington marched 600 miles, passed six great rivers, gained one decisive battle, invested two fortresses, and drove 120,000 veteran troops from Spain." At Vittoria, on June 21, King Joseph's army was routed and broken with a loss to the allies of 5,176 casualties in a force of 80,000. Walter Henry, an Assistant Surgeon of the 2nd Division, has left a description of his own share in the battle:—

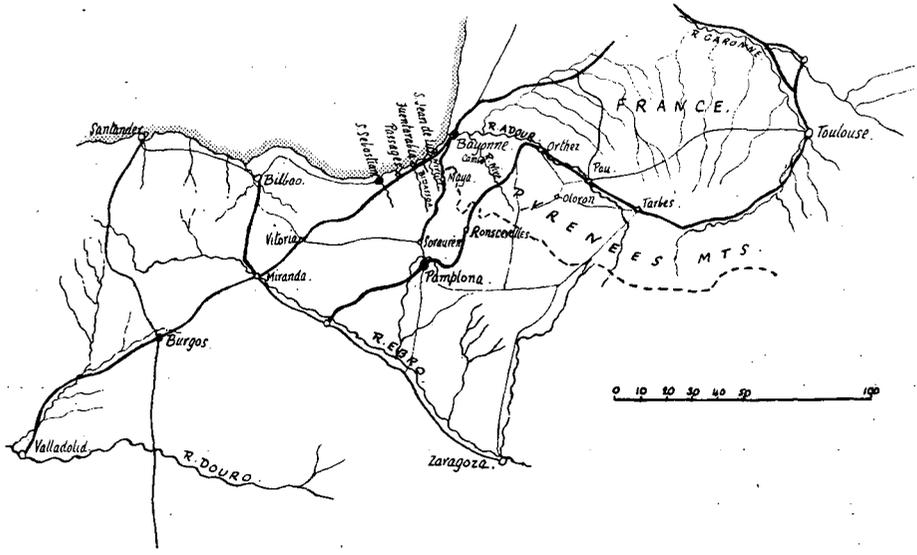
"Having from the commencement of the campaign been attached as Assistant to Staff Surgeon Wasdell, in medical charge of the 2nd Division, I moved with the headquarters of General Stewart and thus had the advantage of a wider range of observation and better accommodation than I should have had with my regiment. . . . When our division had advanced along the Vittoria road within long cannon range of the enemy's position, we were ordered into a field on the right and there halted. The Portuguese brigades of Sir Rowland Hill's Corps were also halted in the same place. The whole were ordered to pile their arms and walk about and refresh themselves for a few minutes while Sir Rowland Hill, General Stewart and a large staff including Mr. Wasdell and myself rode forward to a small height where there was a better view. But the mass of mounted officers having attracted the enemy's attention, a shot from one of the nearest batteries gave us a hint to keep our distance and the greater part of us were ordered away. Almost immediately afterwards General O'Callaghan's Brigade, consisting of the 28th, 34th and 39th regiments, marched to attack the village of Subijana D'Aliva half a mile to our front, and having there suffered a heavy loss, I was ordered to the assistance of the surgeons, and, soon after this, being the most pressing point, Mr. Wasdell joined us himself. We collected the wounded in a little hollow out of the direct line of fire, but within half musket-shot of the village, unpacked our panniers, and proceeded to our work. The Brigade had four or five hundred men killed and wounded in the course of an hour or two, so we were fully employed. A

¹ The sick returns were as follows:—

	Effectives	Sick present	Sick absent
January 1 ..	33,542	2,802	14,896
March 7 ..	35,893	4,310	9,906
May 2 ..	40,014	2,701	6,538

stray cannon shot from a battery firing on the village would occasionally drop among us by way of an incentive to expeditious surgery, and, after one of these unpleasant visitors had made his harmless appearance, a young chironurgeon of my acquaintance became so nervous that, although half through his amputation of a poor fellow's thigh, he dropped the knife, and another hand was obliged to complete the operation. But this was only temporary weakness. At my suggestion he lay down on the grass, took a little brandy and soon recovered, and did good service the whole day. Spring wagons were in attendance, in which we placed the worst patients and sent them to Puebla, where Dr. McGrigor had, early in the day, made the most judicious arrangements for their accommodation.

“When Subijana was taken, and we had attended to all the wounded we could find, a message came to the Staff Surgeon from the Puebla



mountain on our right that our First Brigade had suffered great losses and required medical aid. I was again detached up the hill on this urgent requisition. When galloping up the hill, le Cor's Portuguese Division, belonging to Sir R. Hill's Corps, was moving up to the same place. The enemy dropped some shot and shell among them. When one of these fell amongst the columns there was an awful scream, not merely I believe from the men struck, but their comrades also, which never is the case when a British square is hit. I reached the top in time to witness the last moments of Colonel Cadogan of the 71st. I proceeded to assist the Medical Officers of the Brigade and remained with them until the urgency was over, returning thence to Subijana. The wood being now abandoned by the French light troops, and the artillery withdrawn from the hill behind, Mr. Wasdell, two other surgeons and myself here set to work afresh, after swallowing some wine and bread, and we remained collecting, dressing,

amputating, packing the wounded into spring wagons and sending them to the temporary hospital till 7 o'clock. When our work was done and we had packed off every wounded man in the neighbourhood of the village, we pushed on to join the Division now far in front."¹

After the battle of Vittoria, S. Sebastian was besieged and Pampeluna blockaded, while positions were occupied among the trackless mountains from Roncevalles westward to the sea. The northern Spanish ports, including Santander, Bilbao, and Passages were used, so far as the weather allowed, for landing supplies. The sick from the main army in the Pyrenees were mostly brought down to the hospitals at Vittoria, the first part of the journey in blankets slung on poles and carried by Spanish peasants. Rest stations (Passing Hospitals) were established on the route. A hospital, which included fifteen portable huts, each for fifty patients, was also opened at Santander, and two large establishments in a convent and a rope-walk near Bilbao. In the latter town wheeled traffic was forbidden and sledges had to be employed for ambulance work. Later a hospital and medical store depot were formed at Passages, and the civil hospital at Fuentarabia was occupied. Casualties from S. Sebastian were brought to Bilbao by sea. The Vittoria hospitals were cleared by evacuation to the coast, but means of transport were a constant difficulty.

At the end of July Soult struck at the right of our position, and during the last week of the month there was hard fighting among the mountains for which the honour "Pyrenees" was granted. The removal of the wounded after the engagement of Sorrauren was a serious problem which called for all McGrigor's ingenuity. The horses of d'Urban's cavalry brigade were employed, and the wounded of both armies were collected in the village church of Berrioplano, and eventually removed in spring wagons and carts to Vittoria. On August 1 Wellington wrote: "Although our wounded men are numerous, I am happy to say the cases are, in general, slight, and I have great pleasure in reporting that the utmost attention has been paid to them by Inspector of Hospitals, Dr. McGrigor, and the Department under his direction." There was much hospital gangrene, but some progress had been made in treatment. The mortality seems to have been about thirty-two per cent. In general organization a great advance had been made, resulting in a decreased case mortality both for wounds and sickness. On August 24 the hospital establishment at Lisbon was closed. S. Sebastian fell by assault on August 31. On October 7 Pampeluna surrendered, and Wellington commenced the invasion of France by the crossing of the Bidassoa. In this operation two of the Divisional Surgeons, John Hennen and Theodore Gordon, were wounded.

Meanwhile the behaviour of the Spaniards, never particularly friendly, had become almost openly hostile, and caused special embarrassment to those responsible for the hospitals in the rear. At Santander the Health

¹ "Events of a Military Life."

Officer, who had been invited to visit the hospital whenever he pleased, on the pretext that some of the patients looked rather jaundiced diagnosed yellow fever. A Spanish guard was put over the sick and the port placed in quarantine.

On November 10 Soult was driven from his fortified position on the Nivelle; on December 9 he was again defeated on the Nive. The General Hospital opened in the church at Cambo after this engagement remained open to the end of the war. On February 18 Wellington crossed the Adour, manœuvred Soult out of his position at Bayonne, and nine days later defeated him at Orthez. The war terminated with the battle of Toulouse on April 10, a hard fought battle in which the Allies lost 4,659 killed and wounded, or about 13 per cent. Of this battle, George Guthrie, who was present as a Deputy Inspector, says: "Nearly all the wounded had every possible assistance and comfort. The hospitals were well supplied with bedsteads, the medicines and materials were in profusion. The sick and wounded, 1,359, including 117 officers, were in charge of 2 Deputy Inspectors, 10 Staff Surgeons, 6 Apothecaries and 51 Assistant Staff Surgeons, and the whole worked from morning to evening with the greatest assiduity. The surgery of the Army was at its highest pitch of perfection it attained during the war; every broken thigh was in a straight splint, and the success greater than ever before."

In December the hospitals at Ciudad Rodrigo, Salamanca, and Toro had been closed. During this month those at Abrantes and Castello Branco were broken up. Besides the wounded at Toulouse there remained establishments at Orthez, Fuentarabia, Passages, and S. Jean de Luz. In May the patients in these were embarked for home, while many of the hospital stores and a number of the huts were despatched to the force engaged in America.

When the Army was broken up, almost all the senior medical officers, being without employment, were placed on half-pay. The doctors, as non-combatants, were ineligible for the Military Order of the Bath, but McGrigor became a Knight Bachelor and a Knight of Hanover. After the Walcheren campaign of 1809 the old Medical Board had given place to one of military officers consisting of a Director-General and two Principal Inspectors, and, after a few months of unemployment, he was appointed Director-General. This position he continued to hold for the next thirty-six years. George Guthrie enhanced his surgical reputation in civil practice. He worked hard during the remainder of his life to inculcate the correct principles of military surgery, and his clinic was free to the Medical Officers of both Services who desired to attend. He was three times President of the Royal College, and survived till the year following the Crimean War. James Franck died in 1843. Fergusson left the Army in 1817 and practised at Windsor, where his patients included members of the Royal Family. His "Notes and Recollections," published by his son after his death in 1846, are of permanent interest and value.

AUTHORITIES.

For the medical history of the war, Sir James McGrigor's Autobiography, though all too brief, is a classic. Walter Henry's "Events of a Military Life" is a most readable book and gives some interesting details of the life of an Assistant Surgeon in the Peninsula. John Hennen's "Observations on Military Surgery" contain references to his experiences in Portugal and Belgium, and Charles Boutflower's Journal, and J. G. Van Milligan's "Stories of Torres Vedras" may also be mentioned, though of no great medical interest.¹ Guthrie's Clinical Lectures, first printed in the *Lancet* and reprinted in 1853 as "Commentaries on the Surgery of the War," contain many good stories and much caustic comment on medical military administration. Wellington's Despatches and the General Orders have numerous and important references to medical affairs, including a number of Morning States. The first is unfortunately not indexed. Napier and Sir John Fortescue are of course indispensable to the student of this period.

Sport.

SOME FISHING NOTES FROM THE U.P., INDIA.

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ENCOURAGED by the very favourable comments which were received by me, both in private letters and in some local newspapers, on a series of notes written some six years ago on fishing in the Nilghris, I am venturing once again into print in the hope that the following notes may be found equally useful. The section of country covered by these notes is a far cry from the Nilghris, and the fishing differs considerably from the lovely trout-fishing of those fascinating hills.

These notes do not in any way pretend to be exhaustive or learned, but are merely a series of jottings, which may be useful to any of those of the Corps or other branches of the Service who find themselves stationed in or near the U.P., and who have had the foresight to bring their rods and tackle with them, and may save them waste of valuable hours.

It is the habit usually in any dissertation on fishing, or even in the smallest of published notes, to commence by giving an exhaustive account of rods and tackle, and the writer's pet theories are often heavily exploited, or some special rod-maker's fancy gadgets are described and illustrated.

It is not my intention to follow this example; but I trust that any

¹ The chief interest in Milligan's book is the account of the eccentric Irish Assistant Surgeon, Maurice Quin of the 81st, whom James Grant probably had in mind when he described Dr. Quin in the "Romance of War." Quin was certainly not typical of the army surgeon of that date, who was more usually a sober-minded Scotsman.