

## ADMIRAL GEORGE BERKELEY AND PENINSULAR VICTORY, 1809-1812

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Seapower played a critical role in eventual Allied success in the Peninsular War. Admiral George Berkeley commanded Britain's Royal Navy squadron in the Tagus, and served as Lord High Admiral of the Portuguese fleet. In these positions he was the foremost exponent of leveraging seapower for three and a half years in the dangerous early phases of the war. By the time Berkeley departed Lisbon in July 1812, Portugal was secure and the shift to an allied operational initiative had taken place. The Admiral was astute enough to understand his was a supporting role, and he embraced it willingly. His foremost contribution was in ensuring the logistics lifeline was maintained for the allied forces. Further, his direct efforts provided significant enabling support in the defeat of the second (1809) and third (1810-11) French invasions of Portugal. Throughout, Berkeley maintained a very good working relationship with the other principal leaders in the war effort – namely Arthur Wellesley, later Lord Wellington, allied ground forces commander, Charles Stuart, British minister at Lisbon, and Dom Miguel Pereira Forjaz, minister of war and the navy for the Portuguese Regency. The British admiral's ability to effectively prosecute the war in this joint (multi-service) and combined (multi-national) environment was very important to the overall allied victory.

George Berkeley was 55 years old when he arrived at Lisbon in January 1809, nearing the end of a long and distinguished career. He had naval command experience at all levels from frigates and sloops, through frigates, ships of the line, and detached squadrons, as well as command of another foreign station – the North American command from 1806 to 1808. He had specific experience in preparation of joint defenses against French assault in the American Revolution at Plymouth in 1779 and Newfoundland in 1780, and in Britain in the 1798 and 1804-05 invasion scares. Further, he served in Parliament for 27 years and was Surveyor-General of the Board of Ordnance for six years – in which he oversaw extensive portions of Britain's artillery and engineer forces and its fortification systems. Therefore, Berkeley brought a wealth of useful experience to his position as commander-in-chief in the Tagus.<sup>1</sup>

Near the end of his tour, in late 1811, he wrote a short account of the role of his squadron in the Peninsular War. Today, I am going to share that account with you. It is interesting to see what he valued as important contributions and compare that with my own as a historian writing 200 years afterwards. For instance, he thinks it important during the Torres Vedras

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<sup>1</sup> See De Toy, Brian. 2004. George Cranfield Berkeley. In *Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: England.

campaign that he sent another vessel up the river to protect the right flank. Meanwhile, he does not mention what I think is of a great magnitude of importance – the shipment of 47 large ship cargoes of grain from American ports that provided essential food for not only the allied armies but also the entire increased population of the Lisbon environs during that long winter of 1810-11. He does not address the issue of prisoners of war – although his squadron provided the secure holding and trans-shipment to Britain of thousands of French troops. Nor does he mention that nearly every man, horse, mule, musket, cannon, uniform, shoe, powder barrel and, not least, shilling and pound, arrived and departed from Portugal in his ships or in convoys protected by his ships. Fresh supplies and reinforcements were brought in and sick and wounded and prisoners were taken out. These rather mundane processes are not mentioned by Berkeley, except in passing, while to me today they are the real sinews of victory.<sup>2</sup>

Further, because his account ends in late 1811, Berkeley does not address the support provided by his squadron in the important events of the first half of 1812. In short, Berkeley's efforts resulted in the shift of the British supply line from the Tagus to the Douro, especially the entire battering train, leading to the capture of the fortress of Ciudad Rodrigo in January 1812. Then, with Wellington's move to the southward and the investment of the fortress of Badajoz in late March, Berkeley provided the mass of the battering train from the resources of his squadron and the arsenal as it was too difficult to shift the pieces used at Ciudad Rodrigo in so short a time. Finally, as he was about to depart from the command, in May to July 1812, Berkeley oversaw the logistical efforts to support the campaign in west-central Spain resulting in the July victory at Salamanca. These three operations in early to mid-1812, resulting in the raising of the two-and-a-half year French siege of Cadiz, ensured the strategic initiative gained in the Torres Vedras campaign was secured for the remainder of the war. This was Berkeley's final, and critical, contribution.<sup>3</sup> Now, let us turn to Berkeley's account of the war and his view of the navy's role in it.

*Untitled Account by Admiral George Cranfield Berkeley of the role of his Royal Navy squadron in the Peninsular War (written autumn 1811)*

“The Cooperation of our Navy in the Glorious Struggle now carrying on in Portugal, although not of the usual Style of the Service, have been [ ] of the greatest importance

<sup>2</sup> See De Toy, Brian. 1995. Wellington's Lifeline. In *Selected Papers of the Consortium on Revolutionary Europe*, 359-68.

<sup>3</sup> See De Toy, Brian. 2002. 'A busy, meddling folly': Wellington, Berkeley and the sieges of Badajoz. In *Selected Papers of the Consortium on Revolutionary Europe*, 184-95.

to the Operations of the Army. And wherever they have had an opportunity of distinguishing themselves the same steadiness of conduct & courage, mixed with that mechanical knowledge which render their assistance peculiarly useful, has been displayed, and the Officers of the Navy as well as the Men under the direction of their Commander-in-Chief have merited his warmest acknowledgements.

### 1809

Before the arrival of Sir Arthur Wellesley to take the Command, the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy had created a Marine Brigade [2 April] with which he garrisoned the Forts at the entrance of the Tagus and had made arrangements with Sir John Cradock for the embarkation of the Army if necessary, but on the arrival of Sir Arthur Wellesley, and the reinforcements, more active measures were necessary to be pursued, nor did he delay a moment in getting them into practice. On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, Vigo fell to the *Lively* and *Venus*, and Captain Crawford landed as Governor of its Castle with seamen and marines to garrison it. <sup>4</sup> [March 29<sup>th</sup>, actually]

When that great officer [Wellesley] determined to push for Oporto to attack [Marshal Nicolas] Soult, a Naval Force was immediately sent to cooperate, as well as to prevent the Enemy's Plunder escaping by Sea, and to assist in landing many troops in the Mondego.

Upon his own Idea and Responsibility the Admiral sent [6 May] for bullocks and mules for the use of the Army, to the Coast of Barbary, detaching ships on purpose to keep up a constant supply, which was most highly approved by Sir Arthur Wellesley afterwards. During the [ ] advance of the British upon Oporto, an idea was entertained of the Enemy attacking from the Eastward, and the remaining troops being sent out of Lisbon to reinforce General Mackenzie on the Banks of the Tagus, the Admiral landed all the Marines and took possession of the Citadel and Forts until their return. <sup>5</sup>

The Army being in the greatest distress for want of Shoes, and the land carriage being long, the Admiral proposed sending 20,000 pair by sea, which one of his cruisers accomplished in 6 hours after the Want was made known, by which the Army was enabled to march. [27 May]

The Army having moved to the Banks of the Tagus, [10 June] the Admiral went up to Abrantes to settle the plans of cooperation on the River, accordingly an Officer was sent up to survey and sound the River, and a Flotilla of Flat and Gun Boats equipped

<sup>4</sup> Berkeley does not address the tremendous efforts of his squadron in aiding the Spanish and Portuguese guerrillas and regular forces in their defeat of the French in Galicia. See De Toy, Brian. 2007. Defeating Napoleon's Designs: Littoral Operations in Galicia. In *Naval History Symposium*.

<sup>5</sup> Berkeley also sent several gunboats and the sloop *Jasper* up the Tagus to protect Mackenzie's flank.

to act upon it; Heavy Guns were sent up to fortify Abrantes, and Transports anchored as high as it was possible to go with supplies for the Army, and the Admiral personally examined the River from Abrantes downwards nearly 100 miles.

The Spaniards having in vain applied to Portugal for a battering train to attack Corunna, the Admiral fitted out from the Squadron stores a complete one, and sent it round on 22 June with a mortar vessel to Vigo, which [vessel] not being wanted returned again. The Admiral having represented to the Commander-in-Chief how very much the passage of reinforcements would be saved if they were permitted to join the Army by water, by his consent a number of Flat Boats were appropriated on 20 June for this purpose, and continued ever since, by which 3 days march is saved and performed in 6 hours.

The British Squadron was sent by the Admiral on 29 July to equip the Spanish Line of Battle Ships, etc at Ferrol, which they performed and returned immediately.<sup>6</sup>

The Admiral fitted out a Flotilla of Gun and Mortar Boats, which were sent up the Tagus on 24 December with a Gun Brig and stationed as near the Ford as possible.

### 1810

The final arrangements were completed on 14 February in the Transport Service for embarking the Army, if necessary.

On 27 May, the Admiral sent round all the spare Provisions [and ] for the Relief of Cadiz, with Dispatches for General Graham.<sup>7</sup>

In August, completed the Telegraphs of which the Admiral had suggested to Lord Wellington, and sent 12 Officers and 36 Men from the Navy to work them by request of his Lordship.<sup>8</sup>

On 7 October a Frigate [was] sent to dismantle all the Forts on the outside of the Tagus. At this time the Army being likely to retire upon their Lines, the Admiral made every necessary preparation for supporting their right flank on the River by fitting out Battery Ships with the guns of the *Barfleur*, and having some large Gun Boats with heavy cannon and mortars and making arrangements for their acting effectually, and Frigates were stationed at particular points on the River to communicate between the Army and Lisbon, and a Body of Seamen landed under Naval Officers to work the guns on the Advanced Posts of the Lines at Alhandra.

<sup>6</sup> This was a tremendously important undertaking that Berkeley downplays. A squadron of sixteen warships, including five of the line (two of 120 guns) and six frigates, was kept out of Napoleon's hands. See De Toy, *Defeating Napoleon's Designs: Littoral Operations in Galicia*.

<sup>7</sup> Berkeley does not mention that his ships transported the first reinforcements and supplies to settle things at Cadiz when the French invested it in February.

<sup>8</sup> Enabling messages to be transmitted in minutes from anywhere on the lines to either Wellington's or Berkeley's headquarters.

On 14 October a Captain of the Navy and [a] Detachment of Boats [were] sent up the Tagus to assist in driving down all the Country Boats within our Lines.

On 15 October the Flotilla of Gun Boats under Lieutenant [Maurice FF] Berkeley made an attack on Villa Franca, in which the Enemy suffered a great loss and General de Croix [Eustache Sainte Croix] was killed. Our killed and wounded was 14.<sup>9</sup>

On 20 October took possession and erected a Battery on the Island of Liseria with 100 Marines and 2 field pieces, with a detachment of 50 seamen. This measure effectually secured all the Cattle and prevented any attack upon the Right flank of the British Lines, as well as keeping up a short communication between them and the south bank of the Tagus.

Reinforced the Flotilla at Alhandra with a Gun Brig on 21 October.

On 24 October the Admiral took every precautionary step to counteract the Enemy's preparations of Bridges to cross the Tagus, by exploding machines [ ].<sup>10</sup>

Detached ships to Vigo on 26 October to supply the Army and City with Cattle. The Captain and party of the Navy sent up the south bank of the River to explore and report the state of preparation which the enemy's bridges were in. [sent 26 October]

On 28 October a Lieutenant of the Navy and some seamen sent with 3 Light Guns to assist the *Ordenanza's* operations on the south side of the Tagus.

The Enemy's strength and position reconnoitred and reported by Lieutenant Berkeley on 30 October.

On 31 October the Admiral consulted with an Engineer sent by Lord Wellington [about] the best manner of constructing Bridges and sent his plans and the means of so doing.

General Fane and his Division crossed the Tagus on 2 November with a Captain of the Navy, 200 Marines, and 100 Seamen attached to it, with the Flotilla of Flat Boats with Field Pieces, with 2 exploding machines to destroy the [enemy] bridge over the Zezere. The Admiral received Lord Wellington's command to form a Brigade of Seamen and Marines to act on shore, which was instantly done consisting of 500 seamen and 500 marines under the command of Captain Lawford of the Navy, and occupied the Forts of St Julian and Bugio and the smaller forts which command the Entrance to the Tagus. Lieutenant [Christopher] Claxton of the British Navy reconnoitred the town of Santarem on 14 November, and found the Enemy had began their retreat. This was announced by the Telegraph Ships at 5 PM, and Rear Admiral Sir Thomas Williams with the Boats of the Squadron and Transports immediately were dispatched by the Admiral, and arrived on the flank of the Army at one in the morning and moved forward with them at daybreak. This very prompt movement afforded one of the Grandest Military

<sup>9</sup> Sainte-Croix was Marshal André Masséna's most trusted confidante in the campaign, and one of Napoleon's most promising cavalry officers; it was a significant loss.

<sup>10</sup> Exploding machines were the relatively new and untried Congreve's Rockets.

Sights ever exhibited, above 300 boats armed, moving and keeping pace with the Army on the Road, ready to transport it, while the Flotilla of Gun Boats were in advance to clear the roads and banks of the Enemy, and a division of country boats with pontoons and every necessary apparatus for constructing Flying Bridges brought up the rear. The Army took post on the Rio Mayor and occupied its banks to its embouchment into the Tagus. The Flotilla with all its attendant boats loaded with provisions, etc, to the amount of 5 or 600 anchored at Valada, and in six hours constructed a wharf and ferried over General Hill and his Division to the south side of the Tagus. Some days after this operation the Admiral, upon going up, found the health of the seamen impaired by the damp and marshy ground, and with Lord Wellington's permission, withdrew all but what appeared necessary to keep up the communication between the Armies on the two sides of the river, [and] detaching a Lieutenant (Claxton) with a division of Flat Boats to cooperate with General Hill up the Tagus.

Lord Wellington having determined to put the south side of the Tagus opposite to Lisbon in such a state of defence as would secure the harbour, application was made to the Admiral for assistance, especially in [providing] guns and carriages, there being none of the latter in the Arsenals, and the Artillery Arsenal stating there was not wood to make two. The Carpenters of His Majesty's Ships, as well as the Dockyard, were ordered to attempt a New [carriage] plan with such plank as they could muster, and [] of cannon were accordingly mounted in a very short space of time. At the same time, the Admiral fitted out two mortar vessels to act upon the flank of the Enemy, if these Lines were attacked [at Almada bay].

### 1811

On 7 January the boats of the Navy and Transports [were] employed in embarking the Marquess de la Romana's Army at Aldea Gallega to cross the Tagus at Lisbon.<sup>11</sup>

The River's having swelled and Lord Wellington having, in consequence, sent to the Admiral for assistance to cross the [Sorraia] to Benevente in case Sir William Beresford's Army should retire, an Officer of the Navy and Transports and with flat boats and materials were sent there, who threw a bridge across in 3 hours.

General Lumley having stated the use of Gun Boats opposite the Enemy's port at Santarem, Lieutenant Claxton and a Division was sent to that place and the Island of Mugem. This young Officer distinguished himself on 15 February by the capture of some forage boats of the Enemy, as also in several skirmishes.

<sup>11</sup> Earlier, in October, Berkeley had crossed Romana's division from the south bank to the north and they had taken a share of the defenses in the Lines of Torres Vedras. In January they were re-crossing in order to move to the relief of Badajoz.

Marshal Beresford having applied [10 April] for boats to construct a Bridge across the Guadiana below Badajoz, nothing remained but to endeavour to convey the flat boats across the land from the Tagus to that River, an attempt which appeared almost impracticable, from the weight of the boats and their unwieldy form. The perseverance, however, of the Officers and Men of the Navy and Transports sent upon this duty surmounted every difficulty, and in those mountainous and rocky points of the road where all the bullocks could not drag them, the mechanical powers and skill of British Seamen conquered every obstacle and to Marshal Beresford's Astonishment twelve flat boats accomplished a journey over land of nearly 60 miles, and afforded his Army a safe and commodious bridge to advance or retreat across the Guadiana at Juromenha, with a body of Seamen and artificers ready to remove it to any other part of the river which the military operations might require. This service being accomplished in the month of June, the boats were ordered back to Villa Velha upon the Tagus, where Lord Wellington wished a bridge to be constructed. The difficulties and hardships which the Detachment of Seamen encountered in this journey almost exceeds belief, and after the Flat Boats were replaced at Villa Velha by pontoons built by the Admiral, for this express purpose. The dangerous navigation of the river for the flat boats, down cascades and rapids in which one of them was dashed to pieces, only afforded a fresh proof of what difficult tasks British Seamen are capable of undertaking and overcoming.<sup>12</sup>

On receiving information in August 1811 of the [ ] of the Enemy's [naval] equipments, Lord Wellington coincided with the Admiral upon the necessity of placing the Mouth of the Tagus in the best State of Defence, and consequently three Batteries which were within the Lines were again [ ] by the Admiral and armed with Heavy Guns and furnaces for [ ] Shot erected. In these works as well as in the Jetties which were constructing at Fort St Julians, the cooperation and advice of the Navy was constantly called into action, and the perfect and unlimited confidence which the Commander-in-Chief placed in the Admiral's directions upon these Subjects, is not only the best proof of the Estimation in which he was held by him, but must afford to the Public a most satisfactory conviction of the Harmony and Cordiality in which the Joint Services by Land and Sea are carried on in this Arduous and Important War."<sup>13</sup>

In closing, let me share a few thoughts from Berkeley and Wellington. The relationship between these two commanders-in-chief, far from home in a difficult campaign, was critical to allied success. During the Torres Vedras campaign, the admiral wrote to his superior in

<sup>12</sup> Berkeley to John Wilson Croker, 5 August 1811, National Archives, London, England, UK, Admiralty 1 / 342. "Such were the Fresh Water Difficulties which they met with that I believe not one of them wish to Act upon that part of the Element again."

<sup>13</sup> Untitled and undated Account by Admiral George Berkeley of the Role of the Royal Navy in the Peninsular War. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England, UK, AGC / B / 3.

London, the first lord of the Admiralty, that "If the example of everything that is worthy and great will inspire me, I have Lord Wellington continually in view," and he reflected that if good relations "can produce success, the British never had a fairer chance."<sup>14</sup> A year later, the general wrote to his superior in London, the secretary of War and the Colonies, "It is impossible for 2 officers to be on better terms than we are." Further, "I have always found the Admiral not only disposed to give us every assistance in his power, but to anticipate and exceed our wishes in this way," and "that we go on very well with him."<sup>15</sup> This was high praise, indeed, from a man who bestowed it ever so rarely. It was fortunate for the allied cause in the Peninsula that, at the most critical period of the war, George Berkeley served as the naval commander-in-chief. His incredible work ethic, prodigious energy, and resolve to do everything in his power to support the plans of Wellington truly shaped the eventual victory. Today, we are fortunate that he has left us not only an incredible collection of professional material to examine but also this more private and telling portrait of his role in the war.

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<sup>14</sup> Berkeley to Charles Philip Yorke, 9 December 1810, Warwickshire County Record Office, Warwick, England, UK, CR 114A / 616.

<sup>15</sup> Wellington to Robert Banks Jenkinson, earl of Liverpool, 4 December 1811. *Wellington's Dispatches*, VIII, 433.