

“WHAT A SITUATION THEN IN MINE!” WELLINGTON, THE ODIUM OF RELIEF AND THE CAVALRY GENERALS, 1812-1813

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The decision to remove a senior commander is never an easy one or lightly taken. Just within the past year, the removal of two American generals from Afghanistan raised a furor in the media, with the discussions harkening back to the last senior US general relieved from a combat zone, General Douglas MacArthur in 1950. Much more common however are the less senior officers who are often dealt with by shuffling them to positions of lesser importance and allowed to retire. The example of Lieutenant General Richard Sanchez, who left the senior command in Iraq in 2004, was never promoted to full general, and then retired, comes to mind.

This is not a new phenomenon, and little has changed since the 19th century. For most of his tenure as a commander in the Iberian Peninsula, Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington utilized whatever senior officers were sent from England. To one general looking for a position in 1813, Wellington wrote “I have nothing to do with the choice of General Officers out here, or with their numbers, or the army with which they serve; and when they do come, I must employ them as I am ordered.”¹ However this message was clearly more for public consumption than the actual case. To a degree, Wellington always had some say in the officers offered by the Horse Guards. In August 1810, Wellington wrote his concerns with the plans to send Major General William Erskine,

Brigadier General William Lumley, and two other general officers to the Peninsula.² The next month Colonel Henry Torrens responded that one of the officers was not coming out, and that Wellington should reconsider his objection to the assignment of Erskine due to Sir David Dundas’ high opinion of him.³ Then in early 1811, Wellington wrote Fredrick, the Duke of York concerning the plans to send Major General Charles Stewart, half- brother of Lord Castlereagh, to command the Second Cavalry Division in Portugal:

*Gen. Stewart is a very gallant and very able officer of cavalry; & I have witnessed the effects of his exertions in the command of small bodies; & I have no doubt that his abilities would enable him to command large bodies. He labours, however, under two bodily defects, the want of sight and of hearing, which must ever prevent him from forming an immediate judgment of what is going on in the field, and from acting in that judgment with the promptitude which is necessary in an officer in command of a large body of cavalry.*⁴

As Wellington’s cavalry increased in the summer of 1811, the issue of organization arose. Forming two cavalry divisions was the solution, but who should command these forces became the issue. With one division, Lieutenant General Stapleton Cotton commanded the cavalry since

¹ Wellington to Vandeleur, 26 April 1813, Wellington’s Dispatches, X, 330.

² Wellington to Torrens, 29 August 1810, WP 1/312.

³ Torrens to Wellington, 19 September 1810, WP 1/315.

⁴ Wellington to the Duke of York, 25 June 1811, Wellington’s Supplementary Dispatches, VII, 165-66.

Lieutenant General William Payne had returned to England in July 1810. But with two cavalry divisions, another lieutenant general divisional commander and possibly a third to oversee the two divisional commanders was necessary. But as Torrens reminded Wellington in a private letter, “you will recollect my dear gen’l that we have not the most choice set to select Genl officers from!”⁵ The search for competent cavalry officers, the arrival of new regiments in 1811, and deference of two invasion routes, kept the cavalry organization in a constant state of flux. Between July 1811 when the second division was created and eighteen months later in January 1813 when the cavalry formed a single division again, eight different structures were tried—an average of one change every nine and a half weeks.

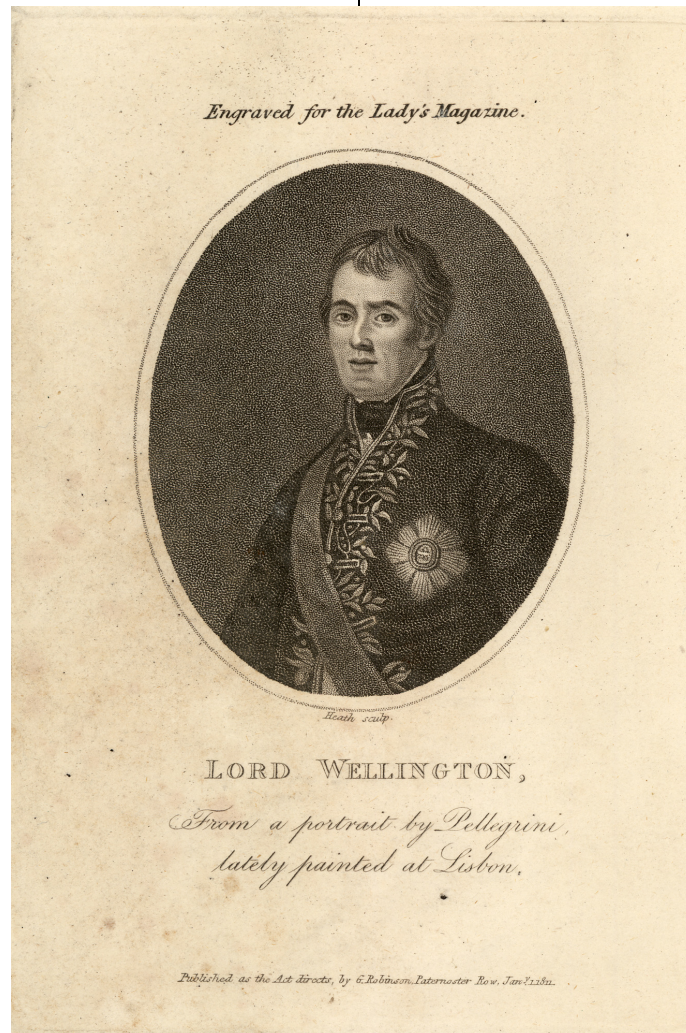
With Wellington’s promotion to the local rank of general on 31 July 1811, the issue of a senior cavalry commander took on a new importance. A natural choice was Lord Henry Paget, who commanded the British cavalry under Sir John Moore during the La Coruña campaign of 1808-1809. But he was senior in rank to Wellington in the British Army, and so could not serve under him when the Peninsula army was reorganized in 1809. Instead, he was used in the Walcheren campaign. Since then, he had remained at home.⁶ With Wellington’s local

promotion, Paget could waive his British army rank and serve under Wellington. Wellington opinion was neither sought nor considered on Paget’s command of the cavalry. This would make Cotton and Sir William Erskine, newly promoted to lieutenant general, the two cavalry division commanders, and it is likely that Cotton would view this appointment as a reflection on his abilities and ask to return home. Frederick, the

Duke of York, a friend of Paget’s, asked Paget in July 1811 whether he would want the position. To the surprise of those few who knew of these events, Paget declined to serve under Wellington.⁷ The cause for Paget not serving under Wellington until the Waterloo campaign is generally given as the elopement of Paget with Wellington’s sister-in-law; however it was Paget’s senior rank prior to 1811. As to why Paget declined the command, he revealed to his brother that the Duke of York asked him to examine and change the organization of the cavalry to improve its effectiveness. Paget viewed this as “insulting to Ld W[ellington] and

(what is perhaps of less consequence) to all his Officers of Cavalry.”⁸

What Paget observed was Wellington’s foremost problem - utilization of whomever the Horse Guards sent to the Peninsula, and the difficulty of removing those who performed poorly. Paget believed his appointment would do



⁵ Torrens to Wellington, 19 Sept 1810, WP 1/315.

⁶ Just prior to the British involvement in the Peninsula, in major general list Henry Paget was thirty-seventh in seniority (29 April 1802) while Arthur Wellesley was forty-second with the same date of rank. William Payne ranked 119th (1 January

1805) and Stapleton Cotton 129th (30 October 1805). *The Army List*, 10 January 1807, 7-9.

⁷ Liverpool to Wellington, 8 August 1811, WP 1/337.

⁸ Paget to Arthur Paget, 12 August 1811, *One Leg*, 120.

no good “unless I could take out with me a parcel of heads to place upon their shoulders.”⁹ With Paget’s declining to serve under Wellington, this issue was closed for the time but arose again the next year.

Since the middle of 1811, the mounted arm was organized formally into two cavalry divisions, each commanded by a lieutenant general. The two divisions were divided into six British brigades with an effective strength of 5,535, plus three additional Portuguese brigades.¹⁰ This organization was appropriate when the army protected both traditional invasion routes of Portugal, near Almeida in the north and Badajoz in the south. Separated by over 260 kilometers, distances were too great to allow any one commander to synchronize their actions. After the army limped home from the failed siege of Burgos in late 1812, the need for reorganization became pressing.

The battle of Salamanca devastated the British cavalry command. Stapleton Cotton was wounded the night of the battle, receiving a severe gunshot wound from a Portuguese sentry that nearly cost him his arm. Two brigade commanders were out of action. Major General John Le Marchant, one of the most promising cavalry officers was dead, and Major General Victor von Alten seriously wounded. Major General Eberhart Otto George von Bock temporarily assumed Cotton’s role, and three-quarters of the British brigades present at Salamanca had new leadership, hampering their effectiveness.

This disorder gave Wellington an opportunity. With his status increased as a result of the 1812 campaign, Wellington again asked for the authority to return incompetent officers to the home staff. Wellington specifically wanted four cavalry officers removed. The first was Lieutenant General William Erskine, commander of the Second Cavalry Division. Erskine served in a number of different positions since his arrival in 1811 but performed unsatisfactorily in each.

⁹ Ibid., Paget to Arthur Paget, 12 August 1811, 120.

¹⁰ Effective strength as of 1 July 1812, Public Record Office WO 17 series of monthly reports, 17/255 through 17/385.

Erskine’s lieutenant general rank restricted the positions that Wellington could place him. The problems with Erskine came as no surprise. Wellington characterized Erskine to Marshall William Carr Beresford when assigning him to command Beresford’s cavalry in 1811 as “. . . more intelligent and useful than anyone you have. . .” but also as “. . . very blind, which is against him at the head of cavalry, but very cautious.”¹¹ But this was not all the information Wellington had received on Erskine. Henry Torrens wrote to Wellington that

*Sir Wm Erskine is no doubt sometimes a little mad! But in his lucid intervals –he is an uncommonly clever fellow—and trust he may have no fit during the campaign—though by the bye—he looked a little wild a few days before he embarked! Sir David [Dundas] has a high opinion of Sir Wm who served with him in Germany—and he thinks some of our Gens. would not be the worse off [with] a little of his madness!*¹²

If only Erskine could be sent home, Wellington would reorganize into a single cavalry division and dispense with the requirement for a second cavalry lieutenant general.¹³

Another problem officer was Major General “Black Jack” Slade, the heavy brigade commander defeated at Maquilla that spring. Slade had felt Wellington’s wrath for a series of mishaps and the

¹¹ Wellington to Beresford, 24 April 1811, *Wellington’s Despatches*, VII, 503.

¹² Torrens to Wellington, 19 Sept 1810, WP, No. 1/315.

¹³ Wellington suggested to the Duke of York that there would only be one cavalry division in early December, not 27 December as stated by Oman. December 27 is the date of the letter approving the recall of the officers. The situation with the recall was kept very quiet for obvious reasons. As late as May 1813 Long was still under the impression that Erskine had not been recalled, and that the recall of Slade was due to Erskine’s death in February 1813, not Wellington’s decision to form one cavalry division. It is clear from the Duke of York’s references in the 28 December 1812 letter that the idea for the recall of the officers originated with Wellington in a letter to Torrens. It is unclear why Wellington, who had permission since late December to send Long home, failed to do so. Long was notified of his recall on 22 July in a letter received from Torrens, over six months later. York to Wellington, 28 December 1812, WP 1/354 folder 10/1; Torrens to Long, 22 July 1813, *Peninsular Cavalry General*, 288.

poor command climate in his brigade. The La Coruña Campaign of 1808 was Slade's first active service in his career.¹⁴ Slade was also well connected, a fact that accounts for his longevity in the Peninsula. When ordered overseas in 1808, Slade was serving on the staff in Ireland. His previous assignments had been with dragoon regiments, but arriving at Falsmouth, he discovered from the port master that he was to command the hussar brigade despite all his previous experience. On the quay he was met by the Prince of Wales, who personally handed Slade his light cavalry saber, hussar jacket, and pelisse.¹⁵

Major General Robert Long was the third officer. Long had a generally successful career as a brigade commander, but was a critical and astute observer of the war in the Peninsula. Long had served as a lieutenant in the 1st Royal Dragoons during the 1794 campaign under the Duke of York, and then was posted on the staff. The following years saw him rise through the ranks in cavalry units, attend the newly formed Royal Military College at High Wycombe, and serve as the commander of the 15th Light Dragoons when they transitioned to hussars in 1807-1808. For Moore's campaign Long was posted to the staff in the Peninsula but only arrived at La Coruña the day before the battle and held no command. Long returned to the Peninsula in March 1811 after serving as an adjutant general in the Walcheren campaign.¹⁶ His performance was marked by his first action in the Peninsula, the affair at Campo Major. This small, minor, and mismanaged engagement led to a series of increasingly bitter letters and tracts between Long's defenders and William Carr Beresford over the next twenty years. This mismanaged engagement of itself might not have been a problem if Long had kept his critical views confined to his journal. His practice of routing letters to his twin brother through a family friend at the Horse Guards meant that the Horse Guards often received information through this

informal channel before Wellington's official communiqué arrived.¹⁷

The final cavalry officer Wellington wanted removed was Major General Victor von Alten. Successful as a regimental commander in the first two years of the war, by August 1811 he became a brigade commander. His performance around Ciudad Rodrigo during the late spring of 1812 had shown him incapable of independent command as Wellington believed he had panicked, falling back precipitously from Ciudad Rodrigo to Castello Branco, an action that Wellington characterized in a letter to Lord Liverpool with a touch of humor. Major General Alten ". . . I hope misunderstood, as he disobeyed my instructions in every point."¹⁸

One other issue clouded the cavalry command—would Cotton return to the Peninsula? Sailing for England soon after Burgos, supposedly to nurse his arm back to health, he was pressing his claims to be raised in the peerage and for the role as second in command in the Peninsula in case of Wellington's incapacitation. It is outside the scope of this paper to go into the details surrounded the second of command issues, but the decision that Beresford would take Wellington's place in case of the latter's incapacitation rankled Cotton, who was senior in the British army to Beresford. He took this as an affront to his abilities; private correspondence between Wellington and Lord Bathurst, secretary of state for the colonies, made it clear it was an issue of Cotton's experience since he had served almost exclusively with cavalry.¹⁹

¹⁴ *Dictionary of National Biography*, XVIII, 364.

¹⁵ Slade MSS, National Army Museum, 7201-19.

¹⁶ Long, *Peninsular Cavalry General*, 18-36; *The Dictionary of National Biography*, XII, 169.

¹⁷ Long's letters home were often left unsealed so that General Wynyard, a family friend who was employed at the Horse Guards, could read them. Long's letters often end with a comment such as "I shall leave this letter open for General Wynyard's perusal . . ." Long to his brother, 9 May 1812, *Peninsular Cavalry General*, 183.

¹⁸ Wellington to Liverpool, 16 April 1812, *Wellington's Dispatches*, IX, 64-65.

¹⁹ Bathurst to Wellington, 6 March 1813, WP 1/367 folder 8; Wellington to Bathurst, 26 January 1813, *Wellington's Dispatches*, X, 40-42.

Permission to remove the four officers finally came on 28 December 1812 but the need to find an appropriate Home Staff position delayed implementation. A Home Staff appointment created the illusion that these assignments were to positions of greater responsibility, and not a reflection on their abilities, soothing hurt feelings and protecting reputations.

Wellington turned to the army's organization to resume the offensive in the spring. Early in December, the Duke of York ordered a light brigade of hussars to the peninsula. The three regiments, 10th, 15th, and 18th Hussars all participated in the La Coruña campaign but because they lost almost all their horses during the campaign, had taken nearly four years until they were ready to take the field again.²⁰

These reinforcements came with a cost. Wellington must send home the three weakest light cavalry regiments to reorganize and return to full strength for future overseas service.²¹ In the past, when the subject of adding new regiments to the army had been discussed, Wellington wrote that one experienced soldier was worth two new soldiers in the Peninsula. The new arrivals, unused to the campaign rigors, were sicker; they were also

²⁰ The shoulder bone of a horse is primarily cartilage until the horse is five or six years old. Subjecting a horse to the rigors of a campaign before this cartilage had turned to bone risks permanent damage to the horses, rendering it unable to be ridden.

²¹ Duke of York to Wellington, 2 December 1812, WP 1/354

more likely to be undisciplined than an experienced regiment. Wellington, therefore, sent the Duke of York a counter-proposal. Instead of sending home the three weakest cavalry regiments, he would reduce the regiments with three squadrons overseas to two squadrons and send the men home to increase the depot squadrons. The horses from these squadrons would remain in the Peninsula and be redistributed.²² There had been no standard organization when cavalry regiments were sent overseas in the first years of the Peninsula War. In peacetime, a regiment consisted of ten troops, organized into five squadrons. Some regiments deployed to Portugal left behind four troops (two squadrons) to form the depot squadrons to insure a steady supply of

reinforcements and remounts while other regiments took eight troops out of ten. This meant that those latter regiments had good field strength for the first year and then rapidly declined because the two remaining troops could not supply the demand. In late 1811 the army standardized all deployed regiments to six service troops, with four remaining in England. Wellington's proposal meant that only four troops from some regiments would remain in the Peninsula and six would be at home supplying remounts. This would reduce the number of effective regiments available for empire. Wellington's proposal was disapproved since the only advantage was to the Peninsula army.



His Royal Highness the Duke of York
(early 19th century lithograph)

²² Wellington to Duke of York, 26 December 1812, *Wellington's Dispatches*, X, 5.

These counter-proposals delayed the cavalry organization since the number of general officers required was tied to these decisions. As late as 2 February 1813, Wellington still waited for the Duke of York's orders because the instructions issued at the end of December appeared to leave the decision to Wellington. Although Wellington understood the Duke of York's rational and the need to keep the British army strong for contingencies, Wellington felt that he could not voluntarily make any decision that would weaken the army in the Peninsula. In Wellington's correspondence with Torrens it was clear that Wellington understood what the Duke of York was attempting to do, and that it was indeed better for the Empire as a whole but as the commander in the Peninsula he felt that he could not take any decision against his own best interests under directly ordered.²³

In mid-January the Duke of York offered a slightly different proposal. Instead of just the weakest light cavalry regiments transferring horses, Frederick suggested this also be done with some heavy cavalry regiments. This new proposal added more uncertainty. Wellington could not tell if his own counter-proposal on sending home one squadron from each regiment had crossed the Duke of York's letter in transit because this latest response did not mention Wellington's recommendations. Wellington, therefore waited until he was sure that his counter-proposal had reached the Commander in Chief.²⁴ The net result was to further delay the cavalry reorganization.

While the senior commanders worried about the organization of the regiments for the next campaign, the months of January and February were unpleasant for the cavalry. Though the cavalry billeted a large area of Portugal in order to improve the condition of the horses, the horses and their riders' conditions failed to improve. Of an effective strength of 5,757 men, 1,436 were sick and unable to attend to their duties; this was fully one-quarter of their strength. Sickness was uneven

among the cavalry regiments, with one regiment's sick rate as high as 39% and five other regiments between 32% and 37%.²⁵ Horses fared better with an average of 14% being ill. Under this cloud, Wellington prepared to carry out the Commander in Chief's instructions— if ordered. Wellington planned on one heavy regiment, the 4th Dragoon Guards, and two light regiments, the 9th and 13th Light Dragoons transferring their horses to other regiments and return dismounted to England. However, by the time he received the Duke of York's final instructions in early March, Wellington instead decided to send home the 11th Light Dragoons in place of the 13th because of the 11th's chronically high rate of sickness.²⁶

Wellington planned an additional measure to improve cavalry effectiveness but he needed permission. Wellington wanted to transfer both men and horses from the 2nd Hussars of the King's German Legion to the 1st Hussars of the King's German Legion and proposed doing the same between the 2nd Dragoons and 1st Dragoons of the Legion. In effect, this would combine portions of the second regiments in the first to bring it up to strength. If he did not get permission for this proposal, which went against the very basis of regimental cohesion and *esprit*, Wellington's alternative plan was to transfer the horses of the 2nd Hussars into the 1st Hussars and send the men home dismounted. No change would be made to the heavy dragoons.²⁷

²⁵ As of 9 January 1813, there were seventeen cavalry regiments in the Peninsula. Over 1/3 (six) of those regiments had more than a third of their men sick, a statistic that was truly alarming. The only unit with no sickness was the newly arrived Royal Horse Guards. To strengthen the cavalry, all regiments except the Royal Horse Guards had a remount detachment in route to the Peninsula. Most detachments consisted of twenty to thirty men and fifty to eighty horses. Only one regiment had a stronger remount coming. The 5th Dragoon Guards had thirty-eight men and 150 horses in route. Adjutant Generals Office, 9 January 1813 Return, WP 1/364.

²⁶ Wellington to York, 11 March 1813, *Wellington's Dispatches*, X, 182-83.

²⁷ *Ibid*, X, 182-83. Wellington's plan was to use the horses from the 4th Dragoon Guards, 9th and 11th Light Dragoons to strengthen the 3rd and 5th Dragoon Guards. The 1st Dragoons, 4th Dragoons, 12th, 13th, 14th and 16th Light Dragoons would give horses to the 1st Dragoons of the King's German Legion. Another related change was the transition of the two

²³ Wellington to Torrens, 2 February 1813, *Wellington's Dispatches*, X, 76-78.

²⁴ Duke of York to Wellington, 13 January 1813, WP 1/364.

These measures improved the effectiveness of his mounted arm but meant a slight reduction in the number of men in the saddle. The benefit was a simplified command structure since less regiments would take the field in the coming campaign. The number of cavalymen dropped from 6,245 soldiers with 5,175 horses, to 5,119 men with no change in the number of horses.²⁸ Because there were nearly as many men as horses, this reduction did not affect the number of sabers actually in the front lines. Of course, another aspect of this reduction was the shifting from two cavalry divisions into one. This complicated the span of control for the senior cavalry commander and his staff who now had to personally direct the movement of more brigades. Previously, the First Cavalry division consisted of four British brigades and the Second two, each with one to two Portuguese cavalry brigades. After deactivation of the second division, with the influx of new regiments, the cavalry division now had eight British brigades, pushing to the limits the span of control of one senior officer and his staff. This decision affected the execution of the campaign and would force Wellington to institute an informal measure later as the army entered France. The overriding factor was of course that if the cavalry remained in two divisions, then there would be two lieutenant general positions and Wellington might have to accept a cavalry officer that was not capable for the position.

regiments of the heavy dragoons, King's German Legion into light dragoons and the three King's German Legion regiments of light dragoons as hussars. Much of this was cosmetic, as the two light dragoons regiments of the King's German Legion in the Peninsula were already known within the army as hussars; however, for the heavy dragoons it necessitated an equipment change as well. All of this was in the future however; the official date for the transition to be complete was 25 December 1813. Horse Guards Adjutant to the Duke of Cambridge, 13 March 1813, PRO WO 3/58 #195-6; Horse Guards to Deputy Secretary at War, 13 March 1813, PRO WO 3/158 #480.

²⁸ Wellington was as concerned about having too many horses as having too few. Every extra horse, defined as one without a rider due to sickness or injury took one man from the ranks to care for it. As slight shortage of horses therefore was better because cavalymen were always sick or unavailable for duty and this took those temporary shortages of riders into account. Wellington to Bathurst, 10 February 1813, *Wellington's Dispatches*, X, 102-04.

As proposal and counter-proposal were offered, a dramatic and unexpected event set the changes in motion. Lieutenant General William Erskine fell from a third story window at his headquarters and landed on the iron palisade in the front yard on the night of 12 February. The palisade punctured his thigh and he lay there for some time before being discovered. Erskine lived two days before dying on the morning of the 14th. Many officers speculated as to why he fell out the window. One was his reoccurring mental illness. He had been showing signs of mental instability during the 1812 campaign, a condition he had been committed for in the 1790s. Other observers blame his fall on a heavy bout of drinking or fever caused by drinking. Erskine was progressively drinking more heavily as the 1812 campaign progressed. If his deathbed comments can be relied upon, Erskine did not attempt to commit suicide, as some contemporary writers allude. After his fall, Erskine told the Judge Advocate General F.S. Larpent that he had not meant to kill himself; Long wrote to his brother that the army had lost Erskine due to an illness.²⁹

With Erskine's death, Slade commanded the Second Cavalry Division, and Wellington needed a home staff appointment to remove him. Rumors abounded of general officer changes. Adding fuel to the rumors was the fact that Slade's appointment to command the Second Cavalry Division was not published in a general order.³⁰ Indeed, the cavalry

²⁹ Long to his brother, 22 February 1813, *Peninsular Cavalry General*, 252; Larpent, *Private Journal*, 104; "Journal of the Royal Dragoons," National Army Museum 7401-46-6; "Journal of CPT R. Tate," National Army Museum 7409-12.

³⁰ Long was rather well informed of many of the changes being contemplated. In early February, he wrote his brother that he thought that the horses of the weakest regiments were to be transferred and the men sent home. Throughout this period, he wrote of various command changes that might take place. It appears there were only two changes he had no inkling. The first was Erskine's recall, made moot by his death; the second was Long's own recall which would take place that summer. Finally on 22 March Long seems to have heard a rumor, from Slade, that Long also was to be recalled. Long to his brother, 22 February 1813, *Peninsular Cavalry General*, 252; Long to his brother, 14 March 1813, 257-58; Long to his brother, 22 March 1813, 261.

organization remained in a state of flux without Cotton present, particularly when Slade's recall left both the First and Second Cavalry Divisions without a general officer named as the commander. As preparations for the 1813 campaign continued, changes to the brigades' organization languished. An example of illogical nature of the organization was the differences in the newly arrived hussar brigade and Long's light cavalry brigade. Major-General Robert Long's brigade consisted of a single regiment, the 13th Light Dragoons, after the 9th Light Dragoons departure on 4 April. This single regiment brigade had only 404 men fit for duty.³¹ Yet, the recently arrived Hussar brigade under a more junior Colonel Colquhoun Grant contained three regiments, the 10th, 15th, and 18th Hussars, and 1,517 men!³²

Numerous changes were still needed before the campaign, and with the Duke of York's final cavalry reorganization instructions, the regiments began the process in early March but without the brigade changes necessary because these affected the general officers.³³ The transfer was not as

³¹ PRO WO 17/37, April 1813 returns.

³² Of course, Wellington knew that Long would be recalled as soon as a position on the home staff became available which would contributed to this very odd brigade organization and the fact that a colonel was commanding 1,500 men while a Major General only 400. Wellington contemplated a reorganization that would give Long's brigade the 1st Dragoon and 3rd Dragoon Guards; however this plan never was put into effect. Even as the campaign began, no changes took place, and it would not be until Cotton's return that the brigade was reorganized. PRO WO 17/32, 17/41, 17/45; Wellington to Cotton, 23 April 1813, *Wellington's Despatches*, X, 317.

³³ The General Order for the change was dated 13 March 1813. The outrage among the regiments selected can be imagined and was the response that Wellington expected. Lieutenant Colonel Sherlock of the 4th Dragoons was outraged that his regiment was selected for the dishonor of being sent home dismounted. Wellington's response laid out two principles in his decision. The first was that he had been ordered by his superiors and must obey; the second was that he alone choose what regiments would be sent back based upon what would be the least disruptive to the army. Wellington also added that he was answerable to no man in the Peninsula for his decision. Wellington's feeling of having his hands tied in many matters of organization is clear. Wellington wrote to another officer seeking a brigade command that "I have nothing to do with the choice of General Officers out here, or with their numbers, or the army with which they serve; and when they do come, I

simple as ordering the horses to be exchanged between regiments. Transportation had to be arranged for the dismounted men and transfer of horse appointments coordinated.³⁴ Along with the transfer of horses and the disposition of the dismounted men, the new regiments were of concern. American privateers captured one of the transports carrying the 18th Hussars and Wellington sought better naval protection for the convoys.³⁵ The cavalry reorganization was also delayed by finding posts on the home establishment of the three remaining officers.

By 1 April Major General George Bock was the acting commander of the entire cavalry and the brigades formed a single division, eliminating the need for a second lieutenant general.³⁶ The eight British brigades varied greatly in their strength and it appeared the regiments were assigned without thought or logic. Wellington's hesitancy on changing the brigades' organization came from not wanting to make any changes before Cotton's return. As the senior cavalry officer, Bock hesitated to push his authority. During the campaign's opening days, Sir Thomas Graham used the cavalry with his wing to supplement the newly formed Staff Corps of Guides, the military

must employ them as I am ordered." Bock to Wellington, 7 April 1813, WP 1/368; Wellington to Vandeleur, 26 April 1813, *Wellington's Despatches*, X, 330; Wellington to Sherlock, 17 March 1813, X, 202.

³⁴ At least one regiment threatened violence on their way to Lisbon. On 4 April, Wellington received a letter from Victor von Alten that the 2nd Hussars of the King's German Legion threatened to act up when ordered to transfer their horses to the 1st Hussars. Wellington told von Alten to "advise the regiment to bear their fate quietly, and as good disciplined and brave soldiers ought to do, and to behave on the march every where as such." Wellington, not a commander to be trifled with, threatened to order their colonel to march with them, and withhold any favorable mention of their services in a general order unless the regiment embarked without incident. The threat to their honor kept the regiment quiet. The General Order praising their performance was published after they sailed. Wellington to von Alten, 6 April 1813, *Wellington's Despatches*, X, 256-58; General Order, 12 June 1813, *Wellington's Supplementary Despatches*, VIII, 635.

³⁵ The American privateer soon released the transport, and it arrived in Lisbon a few days after the rest of its regiment. Murray Papers, National Army Museum 7406-35-26-6 #1.

³⁶ Bock to Graham, 8 June 1813, WP 1/371.

police of Wellington's army. Bock's letter to Graham protesting this decision is almost apologetic in tone and Bock felt compelled to add "...in the absence of LTG Stapleton Cotton I felt it my particular duty, to make the representation and I beg, you will have the goodness to view it in that light, the liberty I have taken, by thus advancing the interest of the cavalry."³⁷ This was not a very forceful protest by the senior cavalry officer present!

Wellington treated the cavalry brigade organization as Cotton's prerogative and waited until Cotton arrived to institute changes. Wellington wrote Cotton on 7 April concerning the changes needed and wanted to gain his views. The questions were specific—which brigade should the 13th Light Dragoons should be assigned; which brigade Major General Henry Fane should command; and which officer, Slade, Long, or von Alten, should be sent home to make room for Fane; and whether any others should also be removed before the campaign commenced.³⁸ Whether Wellington deferred these decisions to Cotton in an attempt to entice Cotton to return to the Peninsula cannot be determined. These letters are interesting because of the level of involvement Cotton had in these decisions and flies in the face of the argument that Wellington did not trust or ask his subordinates' opinions.

Once Wellington received permission to send the generals home he bowed to Cotton's opinions as to which to retain and remove. Wellington's wrote Cotton that "I wish to have your opinion on these points ... and you will let me know what regiments you wish should be in each brigade, and what General Officer at the head of each brigade."³⁹ Whether Cotton was consulted on the initial memorandum requesting officers removed cannot be known.

The scope of these questions left the final decision to the judgment of Cotton. Wellington allowed him to make decisions concerning cavalry organization throughout the war, so this was not an unusual request. What Wellington could not know was that by deferring to Cotton on the cavalry's organization, the campaign would begin without the reorganization complete. Cotton's return from England was an unusually long passage of twenty-eight days; he arrived after the decisive battle of the campaign. One change however did not wait until Cotton's return. After months of the illusion that these recalls were caused by the need for these officers to assume greater responsibility on the home staff, one slip ruined the illusion. A general order published on 30 April 1813 listed the newly arrived Major General Henry Fane as commanding the dragoon brigade. The problem was Slade, commanding that brigade, had no inkling of this change until the order was published.⁴⁰

In many ways, Major General Robert Long's relief was even crueler. Commanding the brigade with a single regiment of 400 men, Long fought the campaign and the battle of Vitoria with this organization. Finally, Long received his assignment to the staff in Scotland in August. Ironically, the letter informing Long of his recall from the Horse Guards arrived the day he rode to army headquarters to discuss with Wellington the possibility of getting a leave of absence to recover his health. Instead of being pleased with the opportunity to return home, Long viewed his recall as part of the political manipulations of Colonel Grant to regain command of a brigade. This view was reinforced by Wellington's comments that he had no personal involvement in the entire affair, and that the idea of recall had originated back home. This, of course, was untrue. Wellington discussed the removal of Long as early as December 1812 with Torrens and stated that although zealous, Long and the others--Slade, Erskine, and Victor von Alten-- all had risen to levels of command which they were unable to

³⁷ Bock to Graham, 8 June 1813, WP 1/371

³⁸ Wellington to Cotton, 7 April 1813, *Wellington's Dispatches*, X, 267-69.

³⁹ Wellington to Cotton, 7 April 1813, *Wellington's Dispatches*, X, 267-69

⁴⁰ Slade seemed to have learned of his recall on 30 April. "Journal of the Royal Dragoons," National Army Museum 7401-46-6.

perform effectively.⁴¹ The timing of Long's removal in particular rankled. His brigade was stationed in the passes of the Pyrenees where they could look down into France. The end of the war was nearly in sight but Long would not be there to see it. Long's reply to Torren's letter was blunt. Long declined the appointment to the Home Staff because he found it "wholly inconsistent with any principle of service to hold any military situation at home, the duties of which I have appeared to have not displayed satisfactory abroad."⁴²

Of the four officers Wellington wanted removed, only Major General Victor von Alten remained. He was particularly difficult to find an appropriate position for since it must be with the King's German Legion. His challenge had been with independent command, and his shortcoming mitigated by keeping his brigade near senior leadership. The slow pace of cavalry operations after moving into the Pyrenees in August also helped. By January 1814, von Alten asked permission to return home due to his deteriorating health, which was immediately granted.⁴³

So what conclusions can be drawn from this narrative? The entire process took more than a year from the Duke of York's approval to the final officer's removal, and nearly double that when the initial discussions on these possibilities are considered. While one can argue that the feeling and compassion shown to these officers' reputation was admirable, the more pertinent question should be at what cost in lives and in blood was paid by keeping commanders who had risen above their ability. Wellington's lament that he had no say in which generals came out and how they were to be used was clearly hyperbole, but the delays due to patronage and the officer's personal connections clearly harmed the effectiveness of his mounted arm.

⁴¹ Wellington to Torrens, 22 January 1813, WP 1/365.

⁴² Long to Torrens, 12 August 1813, National Army Museum 6807-219-5; Wellington to the Duke of York, 28 December 1812, WP 1/354.

⁴³ Beamish, *King's German Legion*, II, 270.