

# FEELS THAT WON THE EMPIRE---Historic Battle Scenes

(Continued from last Saturday)  
THE NIGHT ATTACK ON BADAJOZ

"Hand to hand, and foot to foot: Nothing there, save death, was mute: Stroke, and thrust, and flash, and cry For quarter or for victory. Mingle there with the volleys thunder."

Which makes the distant cities wonder How the sounding battles goes. If with them, or for their foes: If they must mourn, or must rejoice In that annihilating voice. Which pierces the deep hills through and through and through and new.

From the point of encountering blades to the hilt. Sabres and swords with blood were silt: But the rampart is won, and the spoil begun. And all but the after carnage done."

—Bryon.

It would be difficult to find in the whole history of war a more thrilling and heroic chapter than that which tells the story of the great attack on the Peninsula war. This was, perhaps, the least selfish war of which history tells. It was not a war of aggrandisement or of conquest; it was waged to deliver not merely Spain, but the whole of Europe, from that military despotism with which the genius and ambition of Napoleon threatened to overwhelm the civilised world. And on what a scale Great Britain, when aroused, can fight, let the Peninsula war tell. At its close the fleets of Great Britain rode triumphant on every sea; and in the Peninsula between 1808-14 her land forces fought and won nineteen pitched battles, made or sustained ten sieges, and bloody sieges took four great fortresses, twice expelled the French from Portugal and once from Spain. Great Britain expended in these campaigns more than £100,000,000 sterling on her own troops, besides subsidising the forces of Spain and Portugal. This "nation of shopkeepers" proved that when kindled to action it could wage war on a scale and in a fashion that might have moved the wonder of Alexander or of Caesar, and from motives it may be added, too lofty for either to comprehend. It is worth while to tell afresh the story of some of the more picturesque incidents in that great strife.

On April 6, 1812, Badajoz was stormed by Wellington; and the story forms one of the most romantic and splendid incidents in the military history of the world. Of "the night of horrors at Badajoz," Napier says, "poetry can scarcely be expected to credit the tale." No tale, however, is better authenticated, or, as an example of what disciplined human valor is capable of achieving, better deserving to be told. Wellington was preparing for his great forward movement into Spain, the campaign which led to Salamanca, the battle of which 40,000 Frenchmen were beaten in forty minutes. As a preliminary he had to capture, under the vigilant eyes of Scott and Harcourt, two great border fortresses, Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz. He had to use Napier's phrase, "jumped with both feet" on the first-armed fortress, and capture it in twelve days with a loss of 1200 men and 90 officers.

But Badajoz was a still harder task. The city stands on a rocky ridge which forms the last spur of the Toledo range, and is of extraordinary strength. The river Rivas falls almost at right angles into the Guadiana, and the angle formed by their junction stands Badajoz, oval in shape, girdled with elaborate defences, with the Guadiana 500 yards wide as its defence to the north, the Rivas serving as a wet ditch to the west, and no less than five great fortified outposts—Saint Roque, Christoval, Pizarra, Paredes and a fortified bridge-head across the Guadiana—as the outer zone of its defences. Twice the English had already assailed Badajoz, but assailed it in vain. It was now held by a garrison 5000 strong, under a soldier, General Philippon, with a real genius for defence, and the utmost art had been employed in adding to its defences. On the other hand Wellington had no means of transport and no battery train, and had to make all his preparations under the keen-eyed vigilance of the French. Perhaps the strangest collection of artillery ever employed in a great siege was that which Wellington collected from every available quarter and used at Badajoz. Of the fifty-two pieces, some dated from the days of Philip II. and the Spanish Armada, some were cast in the reign of Philip III., others in that of John IV. of Portugal, who reigned in 1640; there were 24-pounders of George II.'s day, and Russian naval guns; the bulk of the extraordinary medley being obsolete brass engines which required from seven to ten minutes to cool between each discharge.

Wellington, however, was strong in his own warlike genius and in the quality of the troops he commanded. He employed 18,000 men in the siege, and it may well be doubted whether—if we

put the question of equipment aside—a more perfect fighting instrument than the force under his orders ever existed. The men were veterans, but the officers on the whole were young, so there was steadiness in the ranks and fire in the leading. Hill and Graham covered the siege, Picton and Bernard, Kempt and Colville led the assaults. The trenches were held by the third, fourth, and fifth divisions, and by the famous light division. Of the latter it has been said that the Macedonian phalanx of Alexander the Great, the Tenth Legion of Caesar, the famous Spanish Infantry of Alva, or the iron soldiers who followed Cortes to Mexico, did not exceed it in warlike quality. Wellington's troops, too, had a personal grudge against Badajoz, and had two defeats to avenge. Perhaps no siege in history, as a matter of fact, ever witnessed more furious combat in the defence. The siege lasted exactly twenty days, and cost the besiegers 5000 men, or an average loss of 250 per day. It was waged throughout in stormy weather, with the rivers steadily rising and the tempests perpetually blowing; yet the thunder of the attack never paused for the inclemencies of the weather. The engineers attacked the city at the eastern end of the oval, where the Rivas served it as a gigantic wet ditch; and the Pizarra, a fortified hill, ringed by a ditch four feet deep, a rampart sixteen feet high, and a zone of mines, acted as an outwork. Wellington, curiously enough, believed in night attacks, a sure proof of his faith in the quality of the men he commanded; and on the eighth night of the siege, at the stroke of midnight, the third division was suddenly flung on the Pizarra. The fort broke into a ring of flames, by the light of which the dark figures of the stormers were seen leaping with fierce hardihood into the ditch and struggling madly up the ramparts, and the assaults fell literally in scores. Napier tells how "the axemen of the light division, compassing the fort like prowling wolves, discovered the gate at the rear, and so broke into the fort. The engineer officer who led the attack declares that "the place would never have been taken had it not been for the coolness of these men" in absolutely walking round the fort to its rear, discovering the gate, and heaving it down under a hail of bullets. The assault lasted an hour, and in that period, out of the 500 men who attacked, no less than 300, with 15 officers, were killed or wounded. Three men out of every five in the attacking force, that is, were disabled, and yet they won!

There followed twelve days of furious industry, of trenches dug and deepened, and of cannonading that only ceased when the guns grew too hot to be used. Captain Martiny, of the 50th Regiment, his left a curious little memento on the siege, full of incidents, half tragic and half amusing, which show the temper of Wellington's troops. Thus he tells how an engineer officer, when marking out the ground for a breaching-battery, very near the trenches, was always very French soldiers in eager search of human targets, "used to challenge them to prove the perfection of their shooting by defiance several times in the course of his survey; driving in his stakes and measuring his distances with great deliberation and coolness, and by an extra shake of his coat-tails an ironical bow before he stepped under shelter."

On the night of April 6, Wellington determined to assault. No less than seven attacks were to be delivered. Two of them—on the bridge-head across the Guadiana and on the Pizarra, the latter more formidable. But on the extreme right Picton with the third division was to cross the Rivas and escalate the castle, whose walls rose to twenty-four feet high. Leith with the fifth division was to attack the opposite or western extremity of the town, the bastion of St. Vincent, where the glacis was mined, the ditch deep, and the scarp thirty feet high. Against the actual breaches, Colville and Andrew Ross were to lead the light division and the fourth division, the former attacking the bastion of Santa Maria and the latter the Trinidad. The latter was fixed for ten o'clock, and the story of that night attack, as told in Napier's immortal prose, is one of the great battle-pictures of literature; and any one who tried to tell the tale will find him self slipping insensibly into Napier's cadences. The night was black; a strange silence lay on the rampart; the trench, broken from time to time by the deep voices of the sentinels that proclaimed all was well in Badajoz. "Sentinelle garde a vous," the cry of the sentinels, was translated by a British private as "All's well in Badajoz!" A lighted carcass thrown from the castle discovered Picton's men standing in ordered array, and compelled them to attack at once. Mac-

Carthy, who acted as guide across the range of wet trenches and the narrow ridge that spanned the Rivas, has left an amusing account of the scene. At one time Picton declared MacCarthy was leading them wrong, and, drawing his sword, swore he would cut him down. "The column reached the trench, however, at the foot of the castle walls, and was instantly overwhelmed with the fire of the besieged. MacCarthy says we can only picture the scene by 'supposing that all the stars, planets, and meteors of the firmament, with innumerable moons emitting smaller ones in their course, were descending on the heads of the besiegers.' MacCarthy himself, a typical and gallant Irishman, addressed his general with the exultant remark, "The glorious night, sir—a glorious night!" and, rushing forward to the head of the stormers, shouted, "Up with the ladders!" The five ladders were raised, the troops swarmed up, an officer leading, but the first files were at once crushed by cannon fire, and the ladders slipped into the water. "Dreadful their fall," records MacCarthy of the slaughtered stormers, "and appalling their appearance at daybreak. Of the latter remained, and, a private soldier, leaped over the ditch, and swarmed up it. The brave fellow leading was shot as soon as his head appeared above the parapet, but the next man, a private, leaped over the parapet, and was followed quickly by others, and this thin stream of desperate men climbed slowly, and in the teeth of the flashing musketry, up that solitary ladder, and carried the castle."

In the meanwhile the fourth and light divisions had flung themselves into the angle of the ditch, and the light division leaped into the ditch. It was mined, the fuse was kindled, and the ditch, crowded with eager soldiers, became in a moment a sort of flaming crater, and the storming parties, 500 strong, were in one fierce explosion dashed to pieces. In the light of that dreadful flame the whole scene became visible—the black ramparts, crowded with dark figures and glittering arms, on the one side; on the other the red columns of the British, broad and deep, moving steadily forward like a stream of human lava. The men of the light division, who were the first to reach the breach, were amazed at the sight. "Then," says Napier, "with a shout that matched even the sound of the explosion, they leaped into it and swarmed up to the breach. The fourth division came running up and descended with equal fury, but the men of the light division, who were filled with water, the head of the division leaped into it, and, as Napier puts it, "about 100 of the fusiliers, the men of Albion, perished there, and the breaches were impassable. Across the top of the great slope of broken wall glittered a fringe of sword-blades, sharp-pointed, and the British, in their fixed in ponderous beams chained together and set deep in the ruins. For ten feet in front the ascent was covered with the bodies of the dead, and the living, who were actually thrust his head beneath them till his brains were beaten out, so desperate was his resolve to get into Badajoz. The breach, Napier describes it, "yawning and glittering with steel, resembled the mouth of a huge dragon belching forth smoke and flame." But for two hours, and until 2000 men had fallen, the stubborn British persisted in their attacks. Currie, of the 52nd, a cool and most daring soldier, found a narrow ramp beyond the Santa Maria breach only half-ruined; he forced his way back through the tumult and carnage to where Wellington stood watching the scene, obtaining an unbroken battalion from the reserve, and led it towards the broken ramp. But his men were caught in the whirling madness of the ditch, and swallowed up in the tumult. Nich-

olson, of the engineers, and Shaw, of the third with some fifty soldiers, actually climbed into the Santa Maria bastion, and from thence tried to force their way into the breach. Every man was shot down except Shaw, who stood alone on one bastion. "With inexpressible coolness he looked at his watch, said it was too late to carry the breach," and then leaped down! The British could not penetrate the breach; but they would retreat. They could only die where they stood. The buglers of the reserve were sent to retreat; the troops in the ditch would not believe the signal to be genuine, and struck their own buglers who attempted to repeat it. "Gathering in sudden desperation, the British, while the enemy, stepping out on the ramparts, and aiming their shots by the light of fireballs, which they threw over, asked for their victims to die. They did not come into the breach."

At this while, curiously enough, Picton was actually in Badajoz, and held the castle securely, but made no attempt to clear the breach. On the extreme west of the town, however, the fifth division made an attack as desperate as that which was failing at the breach. The stormers actually reached the bastion, the Fortiguera battalions, who formed part of the attack, dismayed by the tremendous fire which broke out on them, fled, leaving their ladders and fled. The British, however, snatched the ladders up, forced the barrier, jumped into the ditch, and tried to climb the walls. These were thirty feet high, and the ladders were too short. A mine was sprung in the ditch under the soldiers' feet; beams of wood, stones, broken wagons and live shells were poured upon their heads from above. Showers of grape from the flank swept the ditch. The stubborn soldiers, however, discovered a low spot in the rampart, placed three ladders against it, and climbed with reckless valor. The first man was pushed up by his comrades; he in turn, dragged others up, and the unconquerable British at length broke through the wall, and the assault still stormed and raged at the eastern breaches, where the men of the light and fourth divisions were dying silently, and the men of the fifth division marched at speed across the town to take the great eastern breach in the rear. The streets were empty, but the silent houses were bristling with lamps. The men of the fifth pressed on; they captured mules carrying ammunition to the breaches, and the fast-approaching column, and finding themselves taken in the rear, fled. The light and fourth divisions broke through the wall, and the assault still stormed and raged at the eastern breaches, where the men of the light and fourth divisions were dying silently, and the men of the fifth division marched at speed across the town to take the great eastern breach in the rear. 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