



***This Regency Resource
By
Stephanie Boles
Inspirational Author
Romance that Speaks to the Soul***

***The Duke of Wellington's Peninsular War
A Simple Chronology***



While reading Regency stories some readers frown at the constant mention of the Peninsular War. They ponder as to its exact history and certain expressions which relate to it. For instance, what is a Green Jacket soldier? This article will help readers of Regency understand the chronology of the Peninsular War.

When authors write a hero, otherwise known as the male protagonist, into their stories it is not uncommon for them to base the character on an actual historical hero. One such hero is Arthur Wellesley. But he is better known by the title, Duke of Wellington, which was created for him upon his return to England after Napoleon abdicated in 1814. But the Duke of Wellington is better remembered by the moniker...

Wellington

Born in May, 1769 to an Anglo-Irish aristocratic family in Dublin, his parents called him Arthur Wesley, but his family later changed their surname to Wellesley. Commissioned 1787 Arthur Wellesley became an ensign in the British army and thus began his successful army career. He soon established himself as a strategic campaigner and one of Great Britain's best known heroes.



Wellington's Peninsula Years

During the Peninsula War, also known as the Peninsula Campaign, Georgette's family lived on the Iberian Peninsula. Georgette is the main character in Book 1 of my "Called to His Purpose" Regency series. The Iberian Peninsula is located between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic in the Southwest region of Europe. Spain and Portugal share the peninsula.

Napoleon's campaign of domination began in 1799 when he took control of the French government. By 1807 his plan to take control of Europe had nearly been successful. To complete the process, he needed to restrict Great Britain's opposing powers because they exacted a toll upon Napoleon through the foreign mercenaries which they funded. Napoleon determined to stop them by implementing trade blockades. And seeing that a large portion of continental Europe suffered under Napoleon's domination, the notion that he might succeed struck terror into the hearts of many people.

Napoleon applied the Continental System which was issued under the Decrees of Berlin. This effectively hindered trade between Europe and Great Britain. The only European ports left open to Great Britain were in Portugal and the Baltic. To add insult to injury, the French Marshall Junot and 28,000 men traveled with orders to occupy Lisbon, Portugal. By 1808 Napoleon's Imperial eagles had begun to occupy areas of Spain

as well. Spain, however, responded with force. In retaliation Napoleon had the Spanish royal family kidnapped and sent to France. Napoleon's brother, Joseph, appointed himself as King.

In June 1807 Spain asked Great Britain to aid them in the fight against Napoleon. Troops gathered and prepared to travel to Portugal. From there they would march into Spain.

Arthur Wellesley embarked with 8000 men under orders to regain and occupy Lisbon. They landed in the Bay of Montego some distance north of Lisbon. And so began Wellington's Peninsula Campaign.



Major Battles of the Peninsular War

Four companies of the renowned 95th regiment fought in the first action. The hero in Book 1 of my series is a captain in the 95th. The 95th's are yet applauded for their precision with their Baker rifles. Although ridiculed for their drab green uniforms, thus being dubbed the Green Jackets, and because they traveled by foot, they distinguished themselves as the first line of defense during the Peninsular War.

In 1809 Arthur Wellesley won a decisive victory against the French at the Battle of Talavera. Ennobled Viscount Wellington of Talavera and of Wellington, he then became known as Wellington. He, in fact, won many victories against the French. But one of his best defenses against them occurred in 1810 when Marshal Andre Massena invaded Portugal intent

upon retaking Lisbon.

With the aid of Colonel Fletcher and many local laborers Wellington constructed the Lines of Torres Vedras, a defensive column of earthen trenches and redoubts which ran from the Atlantic to the Tagus River. The reason for the construction of the earthen works remained secret so the French War office would not get wind of it and report it to their commanders on the Peninsula. When Marshal Massena marched across Portugal he had no idea what he faced until he came to the fortifications.

Six months later, the French retreated. Wellington pursued them driving them out of Portugal. Only a small number remained at Almeida. Wellington placed them under siege. In 1811 Marshal Massena attempted to assist the French under siege at Almeida and Wellington defeated him. Finally the French abandoned Almeida, but retained two strongholds. Located on the mountain pass roads into Portugal these strongholds, Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz, did not remain under the control of the French long. Wellington soon took them as well. The loss of life exceeded 5000 at the storming of Badajoz. It is said that Wellington cried at the bloody aftermath of the storming of Badajoz. In Book 1 of my series the hero is severely injured during the storming of Badajoz.

Six years after beginning the Peninsula Campaign Wellington reached the Pyrenees and invaded France where he fought several battles and drove Napoleon to defeat and abdication. Ever tenacious yet cautious Wellington battled the Imperial Eagles to the end.

When the Peninsula War finally came to an end Wellington arrived home in England a hero. He returned to the theatre of war briefly in 1815, when the exiled Napoleon escaped from Elba determined to make war again. Napoleon met his defeat at the Battle of Waterloo, and the British transported him to Saint Helena. The Battle of Waterloo ended the Napoleonic Wars.



The Duke of Wellington went into politics after his military career ended. He proved to be as strong a leader in government as he had been in war. Unfortunately he provoked a division of his party when he forced the Catholic Emancipation Act through in 1829. Crowds of protesters angrily threatened. To keep them from smashing the windows in his London home Wellington covered the windows with iron shutters. He was dubbed The Iron Duke during that time.

The Duke of Wellington died in 1852 and was given a state funeral. Buried in a sarcophagus next to Lord Nelson in Saint Paul's Cathedral, he yet rests there today.

The Duke of Wellington is remembered with accolades of delight for his part in defeating Napoleon. I can only hope the heroes in my stories will be remembered with accolades of delight as well.

Interesting Fact

The Duke of Wellington's mother, Countess Mornington, once said of him, "I vow to God I don't know what I shall do with my awkward son Arthur".

References

"The Duke, being an account of the life & achievements of Arthur Wellesley, 1st duke of Wellington", by Richard Aldington, 1946, Garden City Publishers, ASIN: B0007DN9VW

"Wellington in the Peninsula 1808-1814". by Jac Weller. 1992. Greenhill Books.

ISBN-10: 1853671274

“The Lines of Torres Vedras: The Cornerstone of Wellington's Strategy in the Peninsular War 1809-12”, by John Grehan, 2004, Spellmount, ISBN-10: 1862272581

Photo Credits

All pictures are from my collection and/or public domain

Copyrighted Material

This is a free Regency Resource of Stephanie Boles. It is for personal use only. It may not be copied and distributed, traded, modified or linked to. Nor can it be sold.