

Unpublished Letters of Wellington, July–August 1812

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3. UNPUBLISHED LETTERS¹ OF WELLINGTON, JULY—AUGUST 1812

By I. J. ROUSSEAU.

[Enclosed with Sir Benjamin D'Urban's Peninsular "Journal"² and printed here by kind permission of his grandson, W. S. M. D'Urban, Esq., of Newport House, near Exeter, without whose assistance the forthcoming publication could not have been undertaken.]

THESE letters refer to the days immediately before and after the Battle of Salamanca (22 July), with D'Urban, Beresford's Quartermaster General, on detached service—his first independent command, not very much to his liking, for at the moment it seemed that, just as he had missed active service, when sent on extensive reconnaissance duties immediately after his arrival in the Peninsula (Oct. 1808), he was now going to lose "the best lesson and perhaps the most brilliant battle of the war." But D'Urban need not have been so despondent, for as Sir Charles Oman points out in his *History of the Peninsular War*, vol. v, p. 388, "the operations of his small (Portuguese) Brigade were of far more service to the main army than that of the whole of the Galicians."

This march of Wellington upon Salamanca, "the first great offensive movement . . . since Talavera in 1809" with its "delayed action," proved most puzzling to his officers, the outstanding exception being D'Urban, who as early as a month before the actual battle wrote in a letter of 23 June to his D.Q.M.G. Henry (afterwards Lord) Hardinge (incidentally responsible for the excellently drawn sketch-maps)³

" . . . The last three days have been full of expectation of great events, and this morning at day-light we found the Enemy had occupied, and taken up a position about two leagues from ours on the Valladolid road . . .

Lord W. will never have so advantageous an opportunity of defeating him,—

¹ To be published shortly with an introduction and edited by the writer. *Despatches of . . . Wellington*, ix, 289 *et seq.* and *Supplementary Despatches*, vii, 359 *et seq.*

² To be published shortly with an introduction and edited by the writer.

The "Journal," with its original sketch and printed maps of the time, its voluminous enclosures, etc., also in Portuguese and Spanish, during and after the war (D'Urban remained in Portugal till 1817), is of very great value for the period, especially for a life of Beresford, whose own private papers have unfortunately been lost—a biography that remains a *desideratum* in British military history.

³ Besides these there are upwards of forty contemporary maps, some of them the same and therefore as unreliable as those used by Masséna, except that from the first extensive reconnaissances were undertaken by the British, as shown by D'Urban's "Journal" and the sketch-maps enclosed. See Oman, III, 347 and the reference to the article of Mr T. J. Andrews in the *English Historical Review*, xvi (1901), 472, about the capture of Masséna's maps, their subsequent presentation to Queen's College Library, Belfast. It is interesting further that the two maps of Salamanca ("second part comprising the battlefield and the country around the city and of Cuenca") missing from the Irish collection are to be found enclosed with the D'Urban papers.

but under all views of the campaign, I am not sure whether he will not derive more essential benefits by his temperance in keeping his Army uncrippled, than have gained a great victory before the Spanish combination was sufficiently in forwardness to ensure the total destruction of his antagonist,—Pyrrhus-like his victories would ruin him. . . .”

These tactics Wellington then pursued towards the end of June and the first three weeks of July, D’Urban keeping himself informed of the enemy’s movements in the process of which he trained his Portuguese cavalry to a pitch of perfection he himself had not thought possible.

The letters which now follow speak for themselves.

D’Urban to Wellington.

Benialvo, 17th July, 1812.

MY LORD,

I have this moment received the enclosed intelligence from Toro and it appears to me to be of sufficient interest to warrant my sending it direct to your Lordship to avoid the possible delay which might be occasioned by its going first to the Head-Quarters of the Marshal [Beresford].

His Excellency informs me in a note that I have just now got, that I am to be favoured with your Lordship’s instructions through General Clinton. I shall be very happy to receive them as I am not aware of the precise object to which you wish me to attend. I mentioned to the Marshal in my letter of yesterday that the horses of the Brigade would be very much benefited by two days of rest. Tomorrow morning they will have had more than that, and they will be perfectly fit for any length of service. . . .

Pencil Note from Wellington.

July 21st, 1812, 5 p.m.

Brigadier-General D’Urban will send two Squadrons of his Brigade to Castellanos and Morisco to relieve the picquets of Major General Anson’s Brigade. Brigadier-General D’Urban will move his Brigade as soon as the men will have dined to Cabrerizos.

The next day (22 July) Wellington gained his victory—“the beating of 40,000 in forty minutes”—at Salamanca, D’Urban in his report speaking very highly of his Portuguese Caçadores.

There followed the pursuit of the French and the advance upon Madrid to which period the following letters refer.

No. 1.

Memn. for B.-Gen. D’Urban.

Olmedo, June [should be July] 28th, 1812. $\frac{1}{2}$ past 10 p.m.

It appears that the King [Joseph] after having passed the Puerta de Guadarama returned to Segovia last night; and there is general alarm throughout the country between Olmedo and Segovia, that he was arriving this way; and had arrived this day at Meble on the right of Sta Maria de Nieva coming this way.

It is desirable that as soon as the moon will rise B.-Genl. D'Urban should send a patrol from Olmedo through Bellequillo to Coca to ascertain what movements the King is making from Segovia. The patrol will hear at Coca whether the enemy have really moved on to Sta Maria de Nieva, and if they have what has been the subsequent movement, whether in this direction or by Bernardos across the Eresma towards Cuellar.

It is desirable that B.-General D'Urban's Brigade should come to Olmedo in the morning, and should wait here till the columns of Infantry on the march from the Zapardiel River to encamp tomorrow on the Eresma River, will have passed Olmedo with the baggage etc., and that he should then go and encamp with them, looking out for them towards Segovia.

I beg to have the report of the patrol to Coca sent to me here if the patrol should come back before day-light. If it should not let it be sent after me by the Puente de Mediana and Mojados to Portillo.

W.

No. 2.

Mojados, July 29th, 1812. 6 p.m.

MY DEAR GENERAL D'URBAN,

I have received your reports to $\frac{1}{2}$ past 11 a.m. this day. I still suspect that the intention of the King is to acquire intelligence and plunder. According to all accounts he is too much dispersed to have any serious intentions in view. I have a letter from the Guerilla Fonchas to which I enclose an answer which I beg you to peruse and forward to him. He tells me that he was forced back to Bercial yesterday by 500 Horse, and that this body was at Abbades.

The enemy are still in some force on this side of the river and I was not able to get the troops up to dislodge them this day. But I intend to do it tomorrow morning unless I should previously hear from you of a movement of the King's Army which should render it expedient for me to go the other way.

I propose therefore in the morning to move to the Douro, and possibly across that river with the 1st., 4th., 5th., 6th. and Light Divisions; Col. Ponsonby's, Genl. Anson's, and Genl. Alten's Cavalry; and I leave in their present position near Olmedo for the purposes of the King the 3rd., 7th., Divs., Genl. Bradford's Brigade, Don Carlo's Infantry, and your's and the German Cavalry. You will of course give me through this place the earliest intelligence of all that passes.

Ever Your's most faithfully,

WELLINGTON.

No. 3.

Boecillo, July 30th, 1812. 9 p.m.

MY DEAR GENL. D'URBAN¹,

I have received your letter of this day. I intended upon hearing at Valladolid of the probability of the junction of the King with Marmont on the Douro to make a movement with our right towards Cuellar, but from the

¹ D'Urban reports from Olmedo, 30 July, 1 p.m., the receipt of No. 2^d and continues: "I know from several peasants that the enemy was rather in expectation of a movement upon the part of your Lordship to attack him today..."

accounts of Pereira and yourself I think it best to confine to what is ordered, viz. the Infantry at Puente de Mediana and El Pino. The Infantry on the left want a halt; but on the day after tomorrow I will make a move with the whole upon the King which shall bring H.M. to a decision. In the meantime that done will give me a good start for the next day.

You must look well out towards Coca and [Sta] Maria de Nieva tomorrow; and let me and the officer at El Pino have the reports.

Ever your's most faithfully,

WELLINGTON.

The Marshal is doing well.

No. 4.

Mojados, July 31st, 1812. 9 p.m.

DEAR GENL. D'URBAN,

I have received your's of $\frac{1}{2}$ past 4 a.m. and before I set out this morning that of $\frac{1}{2}$ past ten p.m. The divisions which marched this morning to the Bridge of El Pino are well placed for any movement which the King can make, and the whole Army will be fresh tomorrow and equal to anything.

I shall stay here all day and will act according to the Intelligence which I shall receive from you.

Ever your's most faithfully,

WELLINGTON.

I enclose a letter which I beg you to send to the French advanced Posts by an officer of the German Cavalry well-mounted with a well-mounted Escort. He need not wait for an answer. Tell him to answer no questions and give no information excepting that Marmont's Army is totally annihilated as a Military Body; and to get all the information he can. Desire him to say he does not know where I am, and that I move every day.

[In D'Urban's handwriting. "Recd. at $\frac{1}{2}$ past 11 p.m."]

No. 5.

Mojados, July 31st, 1812.

MY DEAR GENL. D'URBAN,

Nearly at the time I received your note of $\frac{1}{2}$ past two I received one from Genl. Hope to inform me that 300 of the Enemy had passed this morning through La Lastra on the road towards Penafiel. This looks like covering Joseph's flank.

I have now a note of 5 p.m. from Col. Ponsonby whose Patrole was just come in from La Nova de Coca stating that the whole army was supposed to be in Segovia, although the fact was not certain of more than the Cavalry; it being uncertain whether the Infantry had come from San Gracia.

Upon the whole I have thought it best to move tomorrow to Cuellar. If you should find that the Enemy move towards the Douro before morning

"Some accounts make the King's force amount to 14,000 Men. The more general opinion only to 11, or 12,000; (what may be the strength of the Garrison of Madrid to which Pereira alludes, I don't know, your Lordship of course does.)

I beg you to move with the troops at Olmedo upon Pedrajas de St Estevan, and thence across the Piron to the Cega, by Aroyo de Cuellar, if possible your front as far as Vado de las Bacas. You might leave the Infantry, Artillery, and German Cavalry on the Piron. This movement will be instead of that ordered by the Q.M.G. in the general arrangement for tomorrow.

If you should make this movement it will be necessary that the German Cavalry should send in the morning for the Squadron to Bellequillo which is now with the 7th Division.

I shall stay here till day-light in the morning, and shall go from hence to Cuellar. Let me hear from you if you get any intelligence.

Ever your's most faithfully,

WELLINGTON.

No. 6.

Cuellar, August 1st, 1812. 7 p.m.

MY DEAR GENL. D'URBAN,

I have detained your Officer till now in order to carry to you the disposition of tomorrow.

I have intercepted letters from the King from which it appears that there was some intention of joining the Army of Portugal at Valladolid; and I have a report this evening that some of the latter were arrived at Roa; but I think the general direction of their March is Burgos, and the King will ultimately retire upon Madrid. It is not easy for me to prevent either movement more particularly as my troops are falling off terribly and cannot make a long march. I therefore propose tomorrow to make a short movement to the left to make it quite sure that these armies cannot join, which will bring me nearer to Segovia; and then if the King remains I can move upon him and make him go quicker than he will like.

The movement which you proposed would answer well if we could make it in a manner to conceal it; but that is impossible, and I should only make long marches and distress my troops, and get further from my object (which must be the Douro) for no purpose. I think that you will not move tomorrow, but you will get the orders from the Q.M.G.

Ever your's most faithfully,

WELLINGTON.

No. 7.

Cuellar, August 2nd, 1812. 12 at noon

MY DEAR GENL. D'URBAN,

I have received your account, confirmed by others, of the evacuation of Segovia by the King's Army, leaving behind a body of troops. It is desirable to ascertain whether they propose to remain in possession of Segovia or not, and I shall be obliged to you if you will feel your way on with your Brigade, and the German Light Infantry if you should think them necessary, and two pieces of Capt. McDonald's Troop of Horse Artillery. You might go part of the way this evening and the remainder early in the morning.

The Brigade of German Dragoons and the remainder of McDonald's Troop might go to Aldea del Rey, or Caracuellar Puente on the Piron River, by which

they would keep up the communication between you and this by our left Corps which is placed at or near Molino del Lauron on the Cega.

I propose that the Army should halt tomorrow.

Ever your's most faithfully,

WELLINGTON.

If you make the Light Infantry march far, let some of your Dragoons carry their knapsacks.

No. 8.

Cuellar, August 3rd, 1812. $\frac{1}{2}$ past 9 p.m.

MY DEAR GENL. D'URBAN,

I acknowledge that I have no faith in the success of any of these attempts to cut the French off. It appears to me very obvious that it cannot be done at Segovia, and the result of the attempt would be to fatigue the troops to get into Segovia, which might as well be done without fatiguing them.

I wished to know whether the Enemy mean to retain possession of the Castle of Segovia, and have an opportunity of examining this building, and of seeing whether it is expedient for us to occupy it or not, or take any further measures to render it useless to the Enemy.

I don't understand from your report whether you think yourself strong enough or not to enter Segovia. It is plain the Enemy do not mean to hold the place as a fortified Post; but can you Patrole into it? Can it be examined by our Engineers? Can we work at it or place a Garrison in it?

It is not inconvenient, indeed it is otherwise, to halt tomorrow; and I shall hope to receive from you an early Report whether you can or not enter Segovia, and what becomes of Espert; in order that I may determine whether I shall move forward other and what number of Troops.

Ever your's most faithfully,

WELLINGTON.

I have just received your note of $\frac{1}{2}$ past 2.

No. 9.

Cuellar, August 5th, 1812.

DEAR GENL. D'URBAN,

I have ordered the Troops to march tomorrow and I shall be myself at Aldea del Rey or Mozencillo. Patrole forward towards Madrid, and do everything in your power to discover what the King does.

Ever your's most faithfully,

WELLINGTON.

The correspondence is now carried on by Wellington's subordinate officers until 11 August, the day alas! when at Majalahonda D'Urban's Portuguese Dragoons failed him so grievously. This "devil of an affair" did not however prevent Wellington's entry into Madrid the next day amid the shouts and plaudits of the jubilant Spaniards, at last freed from the detested French occupation.