

THE IBERIAN LEECH: NAPOLEON'S COUNTERINSURGENCY
OPERATIONS IN THE PENINSULA, 1807-1810

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ABSTRACT

THE IBERIAN LEECH: NAPOLEON'S COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS IN THE PENINSULAR, 1807-1810, by MAJ Mark A. Reeves, 98 pages

By 1807, Napoleon's victories over his European adversaries were legendary. His Grand Army had defeated the greatest European armies of the period. Each army, in succession, from the Hapsburg Empire to Russia, had been soundly beaten and had not been able to come to grips with how to deal with his lightning style of warfare. Yet, over a six-year period from 1807 to 1813, in the backwater Iberian Peninsula, Napoleon lost both his prestige and more troops than he lost in the infamous wintry campaign in Russia. How did an army of bandits, priests, and commoners along with a small expeditionary force achieve victory over the most powerful armies on the continent? The answer lies in that Napoleon did not only fight a band of insurgents and a small British led coalition army, but he also suffered from a combination of poor morale, weak leadership and a refusal to fully recognize the enemy situation. His overextended lines of communications covered an area that was bleak and poor in resources and he could no longer rely on foraging to feed and supply his troops, many of them suffering from starvation.

The Iberian Campaign cost Napoleon over 250,000 troops and drained the French of manpower and resources that could have been used elsewhere. The campaign bankrupt Napoleon's image of invincibility and sapped his armies' leadership and experience. Therefore, Napoleon would have to rely on more conscripts and an ever-increasing number of foreign troops to fill his depleted ranks. Napoleon's generals were entangled in a politico-military quagmire for which they were never prepared and for which they received little guidance. The Peninsular Campaign sucked the lifeblood of Napoleon's armies and they were never able to fully recover from it.

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CHAPTER 1

LOS BUITRES CARNIVOROS

Spaniards, your nation is perishing after a long agony; I have seen your ills, I am about to bring you the remedy for them.¹

Napoleon, 1807

A “whiff of grapeshot” fired into a mob. Through the smoke, noise and confusion, bodies lay motionless in the street, and people run in panic to find cover. The horrific picture, seemingly stolen from a scene of Paris during the Reign of Terror, was Madrid, on the second of May 1808. The invincibility of Napoleon’s Grand Army was about to be tested in Spain. By 1809, the victorious French legions that had crushed the greatest armies in Europe were facing an increasingly ferocious insurgency. The Madrid incident was just the spark that would quickly set the whole of the Iberian Peninsula aflame with the passions of a full out insurrection. In a very short time, it seemed as though the whole populace of Spain was in revolt. Suddenly, the French Army found itself surrounded by an enemy that did not wage war in the old familiar manner. Instead, this enemy blended in with local populace and could dissolve into the masses or the terrain as quickly as it had appeared. This adversary struck at times and places where he was not expected and, at times, in a much more dreadful way.

Insurgent warfare was nothing new to Napoleon and his troops. There had been revolts in Bavaria as early as 1806. A year before entering Spain, French troops had fought a bloody insurrection in Naples.² Some of the very same officers who had served in these earlier counterinsurgencies would find themselves once again caught up in the

midst of a cruel and frustrating war. However, this insurgency was characteristically different in two ways.

First, the culture of the Spanish people was significantly different from the rest of Europe. The Spanish were unique within Western civilization and so different from other European countries. Spain had been the crossover point from Africa to Europe since the time of the Phoenicians. The Roman, Vandal, and Visigoth conquests came and went, but this common background persisted for several centuries in much of central and northern Europe. What really made the difference was the arrival in Spain of the Moors early in the 8th century. From that moment on, Spain's development took on a distinctive character.

Spain . . . for all practical purposes, is an island. The country's insularity is proverbial. She belongs neither to Europe nor to Africa, but is a way station in between with qualities of each. Spain has ceased to be European by virtue of her Moorish blood. "Africa begins at the Pyrenees," is more than an apt phrase. It expresses succinctly the exotic, half-oriental quality which gives to the people and to the culture of Spain their most distinctive features. One must be careful to specify that the Africa here referred to is not the lower part of the Dark Continent peopled by black men. It is northern Africa, the ancient homeland of the Iberians, of the Carthaginians, a Semitic race, of the Jews themselves, and of the Moors, composed of many Arabic-speaking groups. All of these ethnic and cultural groups have poured their blood and energy into the dead-end funnel that is Spain. The towering Pyrenees have sealed that funnel off from the rest of Europe more effectively than the Alps have ever sealed off Italy.³

Also significant was the power that the Catholic Church exerted over the nation and how it impacted the culture of the people. More of how this affected and shaped the war will be discussed in later chapters.

The second significant difference in this insurgent war, as opposed to others, was the fact that this insurgency was reinforced and supported by a conventional force under the leadership of Great Britain. In 1808, responding to Napoleon's naked aggression

against Portugal, the British landed an expeditionary force of 30,000 troops on the peninsula to expel the French. Over time this force grew to approximately 60,000 British and 25,000 Portuguese troops.⁴ Thus, the beginnings of the oscillating campaigns between the Allied forces of Britain and Portugal and Napoleon's forces across the width and breadth of the Iberian Peninsula. Both of these aspects of the war had profound effects on French leadership and the tactics they attempted to counter this type of warfare.

The Peninsular War drained Napoleon's Empire of troops, energy, and materiel. The loss of these precious commodities had long term consequences not only in the ongoing operations in Spain, but throughout the Empire until its dissolution. Between 1808 and 1813, 200,000 to 300,000 Imperial troops were operating in Spain at any one time. Some 250,000 of those troops perished there along with hundreds of thousands of Spanish and Portuguese.⁵ Cost to the Empire was not only in human terms, but monetarily as well. The war cost the French close to 800 million francs in the first year of occupation and continued to grow substantially every year thereafter.⁶ The war also tarnished the Imperial Army's reputation of invincibility, something that would have implications when they would once again face their old familiar foes, Russia, Austria, and Prussia. The study of the early years of the Peninsular War, 1808-1810, is significant as it offers insight into the problems faced by the French armies in Spain, and their inability to deal with this asymmetrical threat. How Napoleon, his commanders, and his armies fought this threat, in the early period of the war, would shape the rest of the war and its outcome. Why did the greatest army in Europe, arguably the greatest army since the Roman Legions, suffer defeat in Spain? How did a collection of rebels and militants,

poorly equipped, and for the most part poorly led, continue to cause problems for the French? Were Napoleon's armies already beginning to see cracks in their invincibility in 1808? What made this particular conflict so different? How did the French armies and their commanders try to cope with this new threat?

Growing internal problems within the Imperial armies, stemming from continuous campaigning and overextension, and the inability to understand their enemies and quickly adapt new tactics to deal with fortified compound warfare, ultimately, led to the demise of the French in Spain. Many scholars claim that Napoleon had never been defeated until 1809, when the Austrians beat him at Aspern-Essling. Technically, this may be correct if one is considering the linear battles fought by Napoleon against the Allied forces in Central Europe. However, one could argue that the Empire had been losing a war, of a different kind, on the Iberian Peninsula since 1808.

The Peninsular War has been the subject for many Napoleonic historians. British authors have handed down the bulk of this scholarship. There were a number of well educated British officers and men who served in the Peninsular War and kept diaries and journals as they campaigned and published them after the war. However, most of the history, written by British authors, focused on Sir Arthur Wellesley's brilliant victories and not on the contributions of the insurgents. Another source of information is derived from French accounts. Most of this information comes from memoirs of French officers who had participated in the war and written long after its conclusion. Early French historians tend to ignore the guerrilla warfare aspect of the campaign. When the subject is discussed, there is little mentioned that would lead one to believe that the guerrillas had much of an effect on the French Army. Napoleon, himself, can be blamed for the some of

the biased history and inaccuracies written by early French authors. He worked laboriously to cover up the flaws of the Peninsular War. Napoleon's propaganda machine spread the message to the French people and the rest of the world that things were going smoothly in Spain. Unfortunately, the portrayals of the war by both sides gloss over the effects of the guerrilla warfare that raged throughout the country.

This paper will attempt to analyze why Napoleon's armies were unable to control the Peninsula and defeat the Spanish insurgency. In the past, three aspects led to Napoleon's successes on the battlefield: his soldiers and organization, his subordinate leaders, and the tactics he employed. First, the soldiers and organization of the armies sent into the Peninsula will be considered. Secondly, the leadership that directed the campaign will be explored. Lastly, the tactics and techniques that the French armies and their leaders attempted to use to deal with the guerrilla threat will be analyzed.

Before analyzing the varying aspects of the French Imperial armies, the environment in which Napoleon's troops operated must be understood. The Spanish Insurrection, beginning in 1808, was the first time that guerrilla warfare had been waged on a national scale. In fact, the very word, guerrilla, came into our lexicon from this war. The atrocities associated with the insurgency and the French counterinsurgency were some of the most shocking ever in the history of Western Europe. The nineteenth century Spanish court painter, Francisco Goya, gives only a glimpse into the horrors and brutality, committed by both sides during the years of incessant guerrilla warfare, in his famous etchings, *The Disasters of War*.

The situation that the French commanders found themselves in was quite complex and began in early 1807. Napoleon had defeated the major powers on the continent of

Europe and had consolidated his gains in Germany, Austria, and Italy. After a difficult campaign to defeat the Russian army at the Battles of Eylau and Friedland, Napoleon had signed the Treaty of Tilsit, in June 1807, with Tsar Alexander I and had persuaded him to join the Continental System. This system was aimed at the heart of the British economy in an attempt to deny its trade with the continent of Europe.

The British were being stretched to the limits during this time period. The Continental System of Europe was taxing the British economy; and the army, perennially too small, was burdened in the scale of employment. Economically, the country was starting to feel the effects of the embargoes and France's commerce raiders. The British had also incurred huge debts due to the American Revolution. Prices on raw materials were skyrocketing and her exports were being severely constricted. In short, England was suffering, perhaps, near to making peace with Napoleon, on his terms.⁷

The impatient Emperor, seeking another way to tighten the noose around England's neck, turned his eye on Portugal. Portugal was the only nation left in Europe that was not a participant in the Continental System, continued to trade with the British, and allowed the Royal Navy to refit in her harbors. As an added bonus, Portugal remained a wealthy nation with prize colonies that could aid in furthering Napoleon's conquests and paying for his armies. The Portuguese Army was small and Napoleon believed that the Portuguese could be defeated effortlessly. The French emperor saw Portugal as an easy target and another way to further strangle Great Britain's economy.⁸

The Emperor's only problem seemed to be in getting there. The French Navy, after its defeat at Trafalgar, was in no manner prepared to conduct an expedition into Portuguese waters against the Royal Navy. The only plausible route was to march his

armies through Spain. This dilemma lent itself to Napoleon's overall objective of controlling the whole of the Iberian Peninsula. In July 1807, Napoleon began to prepare the diplomatic and political battlefield. He issued instructions to the rulers of Portugal to close their ports to British shipping, place British subjects under arrest, and declare war. At the same time, he began to gather forces in France to march on Portugal.⁹

Napoleon only required an excuse for entering Spain. Fortunately, for Napoleon, he had help in the Spanish government itself. This came in the form of the court favorite of King Charles IV, a man named Manuel Godoy. Godoy had charmed his way into favor with the Spanish royal family and had become chief minister. He felt certain that Great Britain posed more of a threat to the interests of Spain than France and he began to court the Emperor into an alliance. Although Napoleon did not trust Godoy, he felt that he could manipulate him into furthering the Empire's interests in the region. After Napoleon's brilliant military successes against the Prussians at Jena and Auerstadt in 1806 and feeling pressure from the now, very powerful, French Empire, Godoy brought Spain into alignment with the rest of Europe in the denial of trade with Great Britain. Later that year, Spain let it be known that they would support the French invasion of Portugal. On October 18, 1807, an army of 25,000 French troops under General Andoche Junot, crossed into Spain on its way to Portugal.¹⁰

Prior to these events there were many problems within the Spanish monarchy that also aided Napoleon in his endeavors. The Spanish ruling family was splintering into various factions, each one vying for power. Godoy had wrested any real power from Charles IV through his various intrigues. Charles' wife Maria Luisa tried to maintain power and for a short time was able to cause Godoy to lose favor in the court. This was a

short respite, however, and Godoy found himself once again at the reigns of power, proclaiming attachment to Napoleon. Prince Ferdinand, heir to the throne, detested Godoy and was gaining popularity with the people who believed that he might be the savior of Spain. In order to gain support from the French in his bid for power, the prince made accusations against his own father. He claimed that Charles was being misled by Godoy and others and asked for the hand of a princess from the Bonaparte family to bind the two countries. The circumstances could not have been better for Napoleon. He had each of these persons trying to take power or retain power and all of them looked to him for help in their endeavors. Each of them would play into his hands.¹¹

The Emperor kept Godoy believing that he could gain some personal profit if he kept an alliance with France. At the same time, Napoleon demanded that Spain give up 14,000 of its best troops to join the Imperial forces.¹² This would weaken the Spanish Army in case the Spaniards decided to turn against him. Napoleon also began massing troops on the Franco-Spanish border while secretly negotiating with Godoy's intermediaries. The Treaty of Fontainebleau was the result of these negotiations. The treaty dealt with the parceling of Portugal that would take place after the French invasion. A principality would go to Godoy, while Charles IV would be guaranteed his European possessions and given title of "Emperor of the Two Americas." The most significant article of this treaty was that it allowed for French troops to cross Spain in route to Portugal and that the Spanish would also provide an army for the invasion. This lent legitimacy to Napoleon's incursion into the Peninsula.¹³

Initially, the campaign to subdue Portugal went well. The Spanish welcomed Napoleon's troops as they marched through the nation on their way to Lisbon. As the

campaign for Portugal progressed, Napoleon began to become more involved in the power plays and intrigues of the Spanish government. Most Spaniards welcomed Napoleon's endeavors in the region and believed that the French would restore the monarchy under Prince Ferdinand, who they believed would restore Spain to its old glory. However, Napoleon had other plans in mind. He saw this as an opportunity to set up a puppet government that he could control. Once he had troops in the kingdom, there was not much that Spain could do. He began to deploy more troops into the region until he had more than 40,000 soldiers in country. By this time, the Spanish government was growing concerned and Godoy recalled the Spanish Army, fighting alongside Junot's corps, from Portugal. Napoleon used this as an excuse to accuse Spain of not abiding by the Treaty of Fontainebleau. He considered the treaty no longer valid and declared that Spain could have the whole of Portugal, however, they would have to give up territory between the Ebro River and the Pyrenees and make a permanent and unconditional alliance with France.¹⁴

At his point Charles IV saw the events to come and with advice from Godoy made preparations for a hasty flight to the Americas. Ferdinand still believed, as did the people, that he would be placed on the throne aided by Napoleon. Napoleon had all the actors at bay and now openly made it clear that neither Charles nor Ferdinand would have the throne. Napoleon took the empty throne into his own hands. No sooner had he done this, than he looked for a suitable ruler from the Bonaparte family to further his empire.¹⁵ He found a suitable choice in his older brother, Joseph.

The populace, realizing Napoleon's true designs for their kingdom, became restless. Upon the departure of Ferdinand from the palace in Madrid, the local populace

rose up against the French and set upon a small contingent escorting their prince. A handful of French soldiers were wounded and a small number of instigators and bystanders killed. The uprising was seemingly insignificant. However, this was the impetus for an insurgency that welled up throughout Spain until the French were finally forced back into France in 1814.

Because of Napoleon's miscalculation of the Spanish mood, the French now faced a relentless battle against an insurgent populace. On top of this, he faced an indefatigable British Army that would repeatedly return for another fight. If this were not enough, the topography and climate of the region added its own set of challenges for the French. The Imperial veterans of campaigns in Central Europe were accustomed to a mild climate, verdant surroundings and small hamlets interspersed between large cities. Spain was much more expansive, rugged and dry. As French Marshal Louis Gabriel Suchet describes in his memoirs:

The Spanish peninsula . . . is covered with lofty chains of mountains extending in all directions . . . supported by the internal plateau of the country. . . . The result . . . is that the waters must . . . force their way to the sea . . . by . . . deep and rugged gullies. . . . It is impossible to travel the distance of a few leagues without meeting one of many of these defiles. . . . The ravines are generally dry, and yet impassable. . . . In every . . . direction, communications are extremely difficult: the provinces are isolated from each other [and] the towns and villages separated by immense distances.¹⁶

This harsh environment accompanied by the constant threat of guerrillas and banditry compounded the French logistical and administrative problems of feeding, supplying, and paying its troops. Long lines of communication and logistics were difficult to protect and required more troops to secure. These problems also made matters worse for an army that supplied most of its needs by "living off the land." Such lightning victories as Ulm-Austerlitz and Jena-Auerstadt campaigns were made possible partially

because Napoleon had stripped the Intendance system [French supply corps] of its large, slow, cumbersome supply trains.¹⁷ Imperial troops took sustenance and shelter from the local civilians as a means of supplementing the meager supplies furnished by the commissaries. This had the effect of freeing the French armies to out march their adversaries. In Spain, however, the inhospitable nature of the people towards the French invaders, the vast empty expanses of the country, and the guerrilla threat made this system much more untenable.

The constant threat of ambush and attack by bands of irregulars had a psychological effect on the troops. It seemed to most of the French troops that there were very few safe havens from the threat of attack.

The sense of constant danger and hatred created an almost psychotic state of mind among the French . . . only in the largest cities, garrisoned by the French, was there any degree of security and a more or less normal life for them.¹⁸

The regular forces of the Anglo-Portuguese Army and the Spanish Army also beleaguered the French. The French had to come out of their garrisons and concentrate to meet the conventional threat posed by the Allied standing armies, but this entailed a logistical trail to support those forces while they were campaigning. This opened the French armies up to guerrilla attacks on their rear areas. The French commanders were then forced to take measures to protect their lines of logistics and communications. The effect of this was that even when Napoleon's commanders were victorious on the battlefield they did not have sufficient strength to finish off their opponent or they simply could not pursue the enemy further without suffering their own defeat due to being cutoff logistically by the guerrillas. This led to a seesaw campaign across the breadth of Spain and Portugal that went on for six years. This, combined with the guerrilla war, made for a

difficult predicament for the French armies and their leaders. However, this did not mean that these obstacles were insurmountable. In fact there were instances during this war when things seemed to go well for Napoleon's troops. So, why did the Imperial Eagles fail to control the Peninsula? Were there, perhaps, problems within the organization itself even prior to the invasion in 1808? Did the leadership recognize the problems and did they try to transform the army to meet the new challenges they faced? To answer these questions this paper will analyze the soldiers and organization of the French armies, in the Peninsula, from 1807 through 1810, the leaders and their tactics.

¹Lawrence Maulkin, "The First Spanish Civil War," *Military History Quarterly* (Winter 1989), 20.

²John L. Morgan, Jr., "The Army of Catalonia. Organization, Operations, and Logistics, 1808-1814" (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services, 1995), 2 vols., I, 3.

³John Crow, *Spain: The Root and the Flower: A History of the Civilization of Spain and of the Spanish People* (Harper & Row, 1963), 6.

⁴F.M. Kercheisen, *Napoleon* (New York: Books for Library Press, 1932), 539.

⁵Alan Schom, *Napoleon Bonaparte* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 571.

⁶*Ibid.*, 571.

⁷Charles Esdaile, *The Peninsular War: A New History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan Publishing, 2003), 4.

⁸*Ibid.*, 5.

⁹*Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 24, 25.

¹¹Michael Glover, *Legacy of Glory: The Bonaparte Kingdom of Spain 1808-1813* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 21.

¹²*Ibid.*, 24.

¹³Ibid., 46.

¹⁴Christopher J. Herold, *The Age of Napoleon* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Company, 1987), 188.

¹⁵Schom, *Napoleon Bonaparte*, 465

¹⁶Esdaile, *The Peninsular War*, 252.

¹⁷John R. Elting, *Swords Around a Throne: Napoleon's Grand Armee* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 554.

¹⁸Herold, *The Age of Napoleon*, 194.

CHAPTER 2

SOLDATS

“One of them, perched high on a rock above which served as a kind of pedestal, suddenly pulled down his trousers, stuck his posterior towards Spain and shouted out, ‘There you are, cursed country which has devoured so many of my comrades.’”¹

Description of a French soldier being withdrawn from Spain 1812

Who would have thought it possible that arguably the best soldiers in Europe could be defeated by a rabble Spanish army, of peasants, farmers, and priests, and a small coalition army of British and Portuguese? Napoleon’s armies had smashed the toughest Russian armies and out marched the finest Prussian soldiers. They had conquered the Austrian armies in Italy and were welcomed as heroes and liberators throughout much of Central Europe. What changed? Why did the French armies pay such a high price in the Peninsula?

Part of the answers to these questions is that by 1807 Napoleon’s armies were not the same well trained, veteran armies that had marched so swiftly from their training camps in Boulogne to defeat the combined Austro-Russian armies at Ulm and Austerlitz in 1805. Two years of hard campaigning in eastern Germany and Poland took its toll on soldiers and leaders. Napoleon had to rely increasingly on new, ill trained recruits and an ever growing number of foreign troops to intervene in the Peninsula. In order to continue to contain the Russians, Prussians, and Austrians in Central Europe, the Emperor had to keep a substantial number of soldiers as occupation forces. With the opening of the Peninsula Campaign, the Imperial armies began to feel stretched for troops to cover both fronts. Napoleon believed that the Peninsula would be a quick and easy campaign, and so

the war in Spain became a secondary effort and his Armies of Spain and Portugal never had enough troops to deal with the combined threat of conventional and unconventional warfare. Lastly, the forage system that the French adhered to nearly destroyed their army by starvation in an austere environment surrounded by hostile forces.

In 1807, Napoleon had just concluded a grueling campaign chasing the Russian armies through the frozen hinterlands of Eastern Germany and Poland. The result of this campaign was an exhausted French Army. Long marches punctuated by fierce, bitter battles had sapped the strength of Napoleon's troops. One of these battles, Eylau, was among the bloodiest of the Napoleonic Wars and was fought in possibly the worst conditions. A blinding snowstorm turned the battle into a mistake riddled bloodbath and, while indecisive, came at a cost of 20,000 French casualties.² The crucial battle of the campaign came at Friedland where Russian General Bennigsen moved against a single French corps only to be pinned by the skillful defense of Marshal Jean Lannes. With reinforcements quickly arriving, the French trapped the Russians against the River Alle and proceeded to destroy it. The Russian dead and injured were up to 18,000, but Napoleon's army still suffered some 10,000 killed and wounded.³ Shattered by his defeat, the Russian ruler Tsar Alexander met the French Emperor on a raft in the middle of the River Niemen and signed the Treaty of Tilsit. Napoleon was now at the zenith of his power and his armies were seemingly invincible, but at what cost?

The Emperor lost approximately 20,000 killed, 30,000 wounded, and nearly 2,000 prisoners at Eylau and 12,000 killed and wounded at Friedland, many of them veterans.⁴ In order to safeguard his gains, the Emperor was forced to keep a large occupation force in Central and Eastern Europe. The victorious French soldiers believed that they would

be quickly going home to France. However, this was not the case. Large numbers of troops stayed on in Germany and Poland longer than they had expected. Some soldiers even assimilated into the local populace. French soldiers, who were once farmers at home, helped local German farmers with field work. Most were simply bored and there was no ongoing training to keep the soldier's skills honed. Many of the corps conducting occupation duty in Central Europe lost their edge.⁵ Later, this would become critical as many of these corps would be called upon to serve in the Peninsula, units such as "Marshal [Claude]- Victors' and [Michel] Ney's corps [which] lost much [of their] training and discipline during occupation duty in Germany."⁶

Meanwhile in France, the Emperor assembled an expeditionary force to quickly assert his power in the Peninsula. Napoleon insisted that the subjugation of the Peninsula would be quick and easy. The Spanish and Portuguese armies were poorly organized, trained and led. They would never be able to defend against his powerful armies. Therefore, he saw no reason to send veteran units from Germany. Besides, he might still have need for his veteran armies in Germany if Austria tried to reassert itself in German affairs. Accordingly, the French Ministry of War began organizing the new Army of Spain with younger, untrained conscripts so as to maintain the strength of the Grand Army in Germany and the Army of Italy.

These new recruits were some of the youngest raised by the Imperial government up to this point in time. The average age of these soldiers was around twenty years of age. In his memoirs, the French general Baron Marcellin de Marbot, describes the first French troops that set foot on Spanish soil and the impression they made on the Spanish,

The Spaniards, flocking from all sides to behold the conquerors of Marengo, Austerlitz, and Friedland, saw only wretched recruits hardly able to carry their knapsacks and their arms, and looking when assembled more like a hospital delivery than like an army marching to conquer a kingdom. This sorry spectacle gave the Spaniards a very poor impression of our troops, and produced disastrous results in the following year.⁷

The veteran commander, Marshal Suchet, also illustrates the state of the first troops in Spain. As he took command of the French III Corps in 1808, he recalls that, “they were exclusively composed of young conscripts who were not in a condition to stand the test of combat in an insurrection.”⁸

These new soldiers were so quickly called up that their leaders and noncommissioned officers hardly had time to train them before they launched into the Peninsula. Most of these conscripts received their training while in route through Spain to Portugal. In fact, Marbot reveals that the soldiers were so poorly trained that the leaders were ordered to give them plenty of marksmanship training, but to conduct it out of sight of the Spaniards so as not to show the weakness of these troops.⁹

In an attempt to overcome the training deficiencies inherent in the newly formed conscript units, Napoleon introduced a reorganization of these units. The Emperor endeavored to bolster the inexperienced troops by mixing a higher proportion of noncommissioned officers and officers in with them. He did this by increasing the number of regiments. He divided regiments in two, so that there were now two regiments of four hundred men instead of one of eight hundred. This had the effect of combining the experienced troops with the inexperienced.

In another effort to get new recruits prepared and trained for deployment, the regiments detached one battalion to serve as a depot battalion. These depot battalions conducted reception, processing, and basic instruction to the conscripts. Normally, these

units were located near the frontier in fortress cities or ports. The fusilier companies would be grouped together into temporary provisional regiments to guard bases along lines of communications and between depots and their respective regiments. Another battalion would deploy into the theatre for combat operations. In this way, the French were making an effort to protect their bases and supply lines and to train and equip the new conscripts, all the while supplying troops into the forward area of operations.¹⁰

There were also difficulties in the French ability to supply a well trained, sustainable cavalry in the theater of operations. Napoleon's cavalry arm in Spain was short in both men and mounts. Spain furnished very few good horses for remounts and forage was in short supply. Counter-guerrilla operations and patrolling lines of communications required more cavalry than was available. Cavalry gives a counterinsurgent army the ability to quickly react to crisis over extended distances. The French also lost mounts to the guerrillas who vigorously made every attempt to acquire them. "The unwritten rules of guerrilla war said that any foot soldier who could procure a horse automatically entered the cavalry. The guerrillas became consummate horse thieves."¹¹ Endeavoring to solve his cavalry problem, the Emperor detached squadrons from regiments in France, Germany, and Italy for temporary duty in Spain. These squadrons were thrown together into provisional regiments for service in the Peninsula.

These infantry and cavalry provisional units did not last very long. Morale in these units was, by and large, lower than cohort units in the rest of the army. These units saw large numbers of strangers thrown together from various locations all over Europe, and most were unhappy over their transfer from their established units. In addition, the unit support and logistics were usually weak in these ad hoc units and eventually most of

these organizations were dissolved or converted back into regular units. General Maximilian Foy, vividly, describes the problems inherent in these provisional units in Spain:

Supplementary regiments (provisional battalions) had been created . . . in which were crowded together the forgotten . . . detachments, the returned deserters and the men from the hospitals. No corporate spirit . . . vivified these aggregations, formed today to be dissolved tomorrow. . . . Unacquainted with each other, unknown [by] their officers, whose names, even, they knew not, taken little care of, badly subsisted and irregularly paid, [the soldiers] existence was fluctuating and precarious.¹²

Many of the organizations that deployed to Spain were incomplete. A result of incessant campaigning, some were missing large portions of the staffs that normally managed the units. One example of this was the equipping and organizing of General Philibert Guillaume Comte Duhesme's corps as it deployed and served in Catalonia:

The Comte Duhesme's Corps d' Observation des Pyrenees Orientales was particularly important in the context of the beginning of the war. It was virtually thrown together with some of the greenest troops, an incomplete staff and no viable war plan.¹³

The strain caused by the initial reverses suffered by the French conscript armies in Spain, while maintaining a viable occupation force in Germany, necessitated a call for even more troops. In early 1808, Napoleon issued that call and conscripted the "Class of 1809" one year earlier than projected. The French war machine was depleting the nation of its available male population and this draft saw an even younger collection of soldiers. This levy of an additional 80,000 troops witnessed the average age of conscripts drop to eighteen and a half years. The condition of these troops was even more deplorable as witnessed by the call up of General Honore-Charles-Michael-Joseph Comte Reille's division, in May of 1808, to shore up the disastrous operations conducted by Duhesme's Corps in Catalonia:

The Emperor sent reinforcements in a division under General Honore-Charles-Michael-Joseph, Comte Reille made up of even worse troops, mere conscripts and National Guard completely incapable of handling the ever deepening insurgency which gripped the populace.¹⁴

The increasing drain on manpower in France and the Emperor's ever increasing demands for more troops also compelled the Imperial Ministry of War to look increasingly towards the use of foreign troops. This augmentation had its advantages and disadvantages. Conscription made more troops available for duty, but it had its limitations in raising troop levels. The nation could not afford to give up too much of its lifeblood without affecting its economy. Young men were still required on the farms, in the shops, and elsewhere to keep the economy running. The use of foreign troops aided in offsetting the use of more young Frenchmen to fill the empty ranks, but it did have its own drawbacks.

Except for a brief time during the early years of the Revolution, the French had not been averse to using foreign troops to bleed for her glory. Such foreign soldiers as Swiss mercenaries had long been used as the King's Royal Guard. So loyal were these particular troops that many died defending the monarch during the Revolution. As the wars of the Revolution spilled over into Holland, Italy, and Germany, the French began gathering even more foreign soldiers, even offering them civil rights, promotions, and cash for their service. In readiness for the 1805 Campaign, Napoleon increased the number of foreigners joining the Grand Army including soldiers from Italy, Naples, and the Confederation of the Rhine. By the time the Imperial armies marched into Spain, close to a third of the Grand Army was composed of foreigners. This continued practice of raising foreign units had a paradoxical effect.

Many of the foreign troops that were pressed into service in Spain were of good caliber. A good example was the Vistula Legion. This unit, consisting mainly of Poles, composed steady troops and served commendably throughout the war in Spain. French General Louis-Francois Lejeune praised the Legion's conduct during the siege of Saragossa declaring that they were, "very courageous, quicker and more alert than French soldiers in detecting and dealing with Spanish snipers."¹⁵

However, in most cases, the commanders leading many of these foreign troops found them to be more of a detriment than a benefit. A large number of these troops, particularly from satellite states, were of questionable value. Many of these organizations were made up of deserters, mercenaries, and prisoners of war:

Augmenting the conscripted forces in Spain, were a number of foreign units. Of these some were drawn from regular armies of the satellite states and were therefore relatively reliable, but over half the men concerned were mercenaries and prisoners of war who had taken up arms under Napoleon rather than face a long spell of imprisonment ... Such men were notoriously unreliable.¹⁶

The use of foreigners became so commonplace and prevalent that many of the French corps in Spain consisted of a mix of foreign units led by French officers. Marshal Francois Joseph Lefebvre's Corps in Spain is a good example of this. In 1808, his IV Corps consisted of Hessians, troops from Baden, Nassau, and the Netherlands. The only French soldiers in this corps were the officers.¹⁷

By late 1808, many of the foreign units had as bad a reputation as the first French conscript units. Notably, the Neapolitan troops are often mentioned in many reports as the worst. A large number of these soldiers were recruited from prison or prison ships. Oddly enough many of the Neapolitans, formerly brigands themselves, were now fighting against a host of bandits and thieves. A number of these deserted their units in Spain to

return to their old familiar way of life. At one point, an exasperated Suchet “asked that all Neapolitans be sent home as worthless nuisances.”¹⁸

The German and Italian legions serving in the Army of Spain were also susceptible to desertion. “The Navarrese Division (insurgent army in Navarre) attracted a number of deserters from the imperial ranks. . . Germans in the garrison of Pamplona deserted in 1809-10 in groups of 10-15 with all their baggage and arms.”¹⁹ As it seemed that the insurgents had enough food to eat, the Italians, wrought with hunger, were lured by the illusion that the insurgent armies would be able to feed them better than the French in Catalonia and some 200 troops deserted to the guerrillas from the 6th Italian Regiment.²⁰

According to most French commanders, the largest problem with the use of foreign units stemmed from disciplinary problems and language barriers. In the Army of Catalonia there were units representing six nationalities speaking four languages. Reports to higher headquarters had to be translated into French and replies translated back into the native language.²¹ Lastly, multinational operations led to another problem. The guerrillas focused such hatred of the French that they spared the Italians and Germans some of the loathing. This “drove a psychological wedge between the army’s contingents.”²²

These were problems that the French commanders did not need to deal with in the midst of fighting an insurrection. This only exacerbated a bad situation for the French and it had the effect of lowering the morale of soldiers in other units. The problems continued to mount even when the Emperor decided to intervene.

In November 1808, Napoleon, aggravated by the ineptitude of his generals and concerned about the growing gains made by the Allied army, decided to personally lead a

second invasion into Spain. Proclaiming, “I have sent the Spaniards sheep whom they have devoured. I shall send them wolves who will devour them in their turn,” he had at his command 230,000 men, led by some of his best generals, Claude-Victor Perrin, Nicholas Soult, Bon Adrien Jeannot Moncey, Francois Joseph Lefebvre, Michel Ney, and Adolphe-Edouard-Casimir-Joseph Mortier.²³ These corps came from the occupation forces in Germany and Poland. They were the same experienced troops that had been left behind after the defeat of Russia during the Polish Campaign in 1807. Occupation duty had, however, dulled the razor sharp edge attributed to these veteran corps. Dispersed throughout hamlets, villages, and towns from East Prussia and Poland to Silesia, these soldiers had assimilated into an easygoing life for over a year. Nevertheless, these were soldiers who had seen plenty of action in the past and would quickly return to their former prowess at the first volley of fire.

The war took a turn in favor of the Empire in the winter of 1809. The Spanish armies were effectively annihilated and portions of the British Army eventually evacuated the Peninsula. Napoleon had once again proved his mastery and the power of his Grand Army. What he had perceived was correct, in his mind. The Allies were weak and the populace easily subjugated. It simply took his personal attention to turn the tide and now all was well in Spain, or was it?

Napoleon’s renewed invasion dealt a serious blow to the Allied conventional forces in the Peninsula. For a short while the French seemed to have the upper hand in Spain. The instances of insurgent attacks dropped significantly for a few short months. However, it took a force of over 200,000 veteran troops on top of a force numbering close to 100,000 men already stationed there to bring about this victory. Certainly, the

sheer numbers of veteran troops aided in putting down the rebellious nation. The fact that Napoleon had with him some of his better commanders also bolstered the success of the campaign. However, there were still problems within the Imperial armies that continued to fester.²⁴

Logistical problems continually plagued the French Army in Spain. The French supply corps had to plan for operations in Spain from scratch. Officers, familiar with the Peninsular, were few and there were no magazines along the Pyrenees border. From the opening invasion to the Emperor's entry into theater, the French were hand tied by overextended supply lines, an undermanned, under funded Intendance, and a system that relied heavily on "living off of the land."

The earliest operations, under General Andoche Junot, nearly collapsed due to starvation. Only by luck was he able to capture Lisbon with 1,500 of his original 20,000 soldiers.²⁵ Off and on throughout the early campaign, the imperial soldier faced starvation and little or no pay. A German soldier serving in the Army of Spain in 1808 related this story:

The army was in miserable condition . . . and most of the soldiers are without shoes. There was but little to eat . . . we suffered a good deal. Many, forced by pangs of hunger, recovered corn feed from horse dung, washed it and ate it.²⁶

These sorts of deprivations continued throughout the war in Spain. Even prior to entering Spain, many organizations began their operations in poor condition. In early 1810, General Jean-Louis-Ebenezer Reynier took command of the 2nd Division of the Reserve Army of Spain. As he inspected his new command, in preparation for their entrance into Spain, he became exasperated as the division "had no artillery, and no wagons; munitions were short and there was a dearth of experienced officers."²⁷ In a

report to Napoleon's chief of staff, Marshal Louis Alexandre Berthier, General Reynier stated that his division would not be ready for combat for another month due to the lack of provisions. Nevertheless, Reynier was ordered to depart Bayonne immediately with a portion of his division that could march with the supplies he had on hand and the rest would follow once they received supplies.²⁸

As General Reynier's division pushed further into the interior of Spain the situation worsened. When supply convoys did make it to the division they were sadly deficient. Reynier complained to Berthier,

Large numbers are ill due to lack of food; when they become ill they have no place to go. The hospitals that exist in these provinces are quite insufficient for the large numbers of sick troops. Supplies are few, medicine bad, and linen non-existent.²⁹

Soldiers also went for long periods of time without pay and even when they were paid, the local populace was hesitant to accept francs for goods or services as this might be seen as collaboration with the enemy. Estimates in 1809 showed that the French government was overdue 12 million francs in payments to soldiers in Spain.³⁰ This along with repeat deployments and the psychological conditions of fighting a guerrilla war had a profound effect on the morale of the troops serving in Iberia. Many regiments were near mutiny and refused to march. The Imperial forces witnessed large desertion rates in occupied Spain.³¹

The National Guard from the 11th Military District in France under General Antoine Lomet suffered from poor morale as a result of consecutive deployments into the region and no pay. The general's chasseur companies had just served in Navarre and as it readied to redeploy into Spain, many troops refused to go arguing that they had been promised that they would never have to go back. Many of them were willing to risk

execution rather than go back. During the unit's occupation of the province of Arragon, this organization had disintegrated from 1,036 men to 432 soldiers and they had honed their abilities as deserters by deserting in groups of twenty to forty so as not to be murdered by the insurgents one at a time.³²

The logistical problems were just as severe when the veteran troops of Napoleon's reinvigorated campaign entered the theater. The Empire was straining to keep the large field armies fed and clothed after years of campaigning in Germany and Poland, occupation in Holland and Italy, and now war in Spain. The French Army of 1809 did not resemble the army of its past glories. At Bayonne, on the eve of his second invasion, Napoleon inspected the provisions:

Napoleon got everyone up and inspected the magazines and depots recently established. All in disorder . . . not one item of clothing! 'What's going on here – who is in charge?' After its journey from Eastern Europe, by cart and on foot, the Army of Germany's uniforms were in tatters, its boots worn-out. . . . The Emperor dictated . . . a letter to General Dejean, Minister for War Administration: "I have received your report of 2 November with the statement attached to it. From that, I should have at Bayonne 83,000 pairs of shoes, 140,000 shirts, 83,000 haversacks, 39,000 shakos and a large number of cloaks. All that is a child's fairy-tale. I have nothing, I am naked. My army is in want."³³

The Grand Army marched on despite the apparent lack of provisions and Napoleon routed the Allied armies in three short months. This lightning victory, however, blurred his opinion of operations in Spain and ultimately contributed to his defeat in the Peninsula. By early 1809, except for a few pockets of resistance, the Spanish armies had been defeated and the British army under Sir John Moore had evacuated the Peninsula.³⁴ In January 1809, Napoleon wrote a letter to his brother, Jerome, stating, "The Spanish business is finished."³⁵ It is easy to see why the Emperor continued to see the Peninsula as a secondary effort. After all he had defeated two armies in a matter of a few months

and, in his opinion, all that was left to do was to mop up a small remnant of insurgents and install a new government. What the Emperor failed to recognize was Great Britain's determination and ability to renew operations in the region. Believing that this campaign would be conclusive soon and upon receiving news of renewed stirrings in Austria, Napoleon, with a portion of his Imperial Guard, hurried back to Paris and left the Peninsula in the hands of his marshals.³⁶ The problems that Napoleon's generals faced were many. His generals had to operate with armies that contained a large number of untrained, novice troops and even his Grand Army was experiencing problems with morale and supplies. Interspersed throughout the French armies in Spain were a substantial number of foreign soldiers of questionable abilities and loyalties. He also left his commanders a logistical nightmare that threatened to defeat his armies through its own inability to feed, clothe, and shelter. The agrarian conditions in Spain made it difficult to feed an army off of the land and the Intendance system was simply stretched too thin to support them effectively. Fighting two fronts, one in Central Europe and one in the Peninsula, stretched his ability to allocate enough troops to maintain control in Spain and defend against the constant threat of Austria on his borders. This persistent danger of renewed hostilities in Central Europe relegated the operations, in the Peninsula, to a secondary effort. The French commanders, in the Peninsula, would continually have to fight for the support they required. The Peninsular armies of France seemed to always be last to receive supplies, money, and replacements. The Spanish ulcer continued to bleed and Napoleon's generals were left to remedy the situation.

¹Heinrich von Brandt, *In the Legions of Napoleon* (London: Greenhill Books, 1999), 178.

²David G. Chandler, *Napoleon's Marshals* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 15.

³*Ibid.*, 153.

⁴F. Loraine Petre, *Napoleon's Campaign in Poland, 1806-1807* (London: S. Low, Marston and Company, limited, 1901; Reprint London: J. Lane, 1907), 204.

⁵Georges Blond. *La Grande Armee*. (London, Armes and Armour Press, 1979) 21.

⁶John R. Elting, *Swords Around a Throne: Napoleon's Grand Armee* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 61.

⁷Marcellin Marbot, *The Memoirs of the Baron de Marbot* (London: Greenhill Books, 1988, 2 vols), II, 3.

⁸Louis-Gabriel Suchet duc de Albufera, *Memoirs of the War in Spain from 1808-1814*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1829, I, 2.

⁹Elting, *Swords Around a Throne*, 326.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 214.

¹¹John L. Tone, *The Fatal Knot* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 76.

¹²Charles Esdaile, *The Peninsular War: A New History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan Publishing, 2003), 64.

¹³John L. Morgan, Jr., "The Army of Catalonia. Organization, Operations, and Logistics, 1808-1814" (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services, 1995), 2 vols., I, 2.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵Elting, *Swords Around A Throne*, 379.

¹⁶Esdaile, *The Peninsular War*, 63.

¹⁷Elting, *Swords Around A Throne*, 61.

- ¹⁸Ibid., 397.
- ¹⁹Tone, *The Fatal Knot*, 171.
- ²⁰Morgan, "The Army of Catalonia. Organization, Operations, and Logistics," I 3.
- ²¹Tone, *The Fatal Knot*, 171.
- ²²Ibid., I, 56.
- ²³Michel Ney, *Memoirs of Marshal Ney* (London: Henry Colburn, New Burlington Street, 1832), 182.
- ²⁴Elting, *Swords Around A Throne*, 556.
- ²⁵F.M. Kercheisen, *Napoleon* (New York: Books for Library Press, 1932), 415.
- ²⁶John Christian Mampel, *The Adventures of a Young Rifleman in the French and English Armies from 1806 – 1816* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826), 125.
- ²⁷Milton Finley, "The Career of Count Jean Reynier, 1792-1814," (Florida State University, 1972), 219.
- ²⁸Ibid., 220.
- ²⁹Ibid., 221.
- ³⁰Elting, *Swords Around a Throne*, 583.
- ³¹Ibid., 583.
- ³²Don W. Alexander, *Rod of Iron: French Counterinsurgency Policy in Aragon During the Peninsula War* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1985), 82.
- ³³Blond, *La Grande Armee*, 204.
- ³⁴Alan Schom, *Napoleon Bonaparte* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 485.
- ³⁵Michael Glover, *Legacy of Glory: The Bonaparte Kingdom of Spain 1808-1813* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 21.
- ³⁶Marbot, *The Memoirs of the Baron de Marbot*, II, 357.

CHAPTER 3

LES GROS BONNETS

The conduct of a general in a conquered country is full of difficulties. If severe, he irritates and increases the number of his enemies. If lenient, he gives birth which only render the abuses and vexations inseparable from war the more intolerable. A victorious general must know how to employ severity, justice, and mildness by turns, if he would allay sedition, or prevent it.¹

One of Napoleon's maxims

Certainly one of Napoleon's greatest abilities was the art of persuasion. His ability to sway individuals, kings, queens, politicians, soldiers, and generals was legendary. The Emperor used every means of persuasion at his disposal. In some cases, he used the threat of force to bend an individuals or state's will. In many situations it was a certain charm he portrayed to get what he wanted. In the case of his generals and marshals, he used their own ambitions and their own personalities to get what he wanted from them.

Napoleon knew his generals well. He had fought side by side with many of them in the days of the Revolution and the Republic and he knew what it took to manipulate them. Napoleon once said, "men are led by baubles," a statement that epitomized many of his commanders.² He showered those that embodied his idea of great generalship with honors, orders, and decorations. The Emperor made many of his supporters into dukes, nobles, and princes. Many of these titles came with large sums of money; this was another way in which he attempted to ensure the loyalties of his generals. By the time he was at war in Spain, the Emperor had created fourteen Marshals of the Empire, ennobled many of his generals to dukedoms, christened scores of officers to knighthood, and

produced a vast array of barons and counts. This obsequiousness continued throughout the occupation of the Peninsula. One general received his baton during the Peninsular War, Marshal, Louis-Gabriel Suchet, and he was also created Duke of Albufera. This sort of flattery and system of rewards tended to feed these generals' ambitions and greed, but also kept them loyal to their master.

Many of the Emperor's generals had worked their way to the top. Prior to the Revolution, officers in the French Army had been of noble birth or had bought their commissions. The Revolution, with its ideas of egalitarianism, had purged much of the nobility from the ranks of the military. Although there were many nobles that continued to serve as officers, there were a larger number of officers that came from the middle class and worked their way through the ranks. Officers were promoted for talent, experience, and loyalty over status of birth. Their peers voted many of these men, because of their abilities, into their new positions of authority. This new method of filling the officer ranks had a profound effect on the French Army. The army had a collection of younger, energetic, and more ambitious officers that could mold an army of conscripts into a cohesive, professional, and lethal force. It was some of these same men, now generals and marshals, who commanded Napoleon's armies in Spain and Portugal.

What leadership challenges did Napoleon's commanders face in the Peninsula between 1807 and 1810 and why did they ultimately fail in their mission? Peculiar to this campaign, what problems did they encounter? How did they attempt to overcome these difficulties? Were there problems inherent in the Imperial leadership charged with directing the campaign? Ultimately, there were three main reasons the French leadership in the Peninsula contributed to the failure of the campaign. First, the Emperor saw this

campaign as an easy victory. He did not expect that the Spanish and Portuguese armies would put up as much resistance as they did. Neither did he expect the determined fight that the British were willing to put up. He never fully realized the gravity of the situation and because of far more threatening concerns to his throne, in Central Europe, he continued to view the campaign as a secondary effort and this contributed to failure in the theater. The second failure was that Napoleon never established an effective command relationship in Spain. Who was ultimately in charge in the Peninsula was a common question, as well as, whose orders were the commanders to obey? Lastly, most of the Emperor's commanders had difficulty adapting to a different type of warfare, one that did not adhere to the same rules of war practiced by other European armies, called fortified compound warfare. Fortified compound warfare is the use of conventional forces, such as the British Expeditionary Force, and unconventional forces, such as the Spanish guerrillas, to magnify pressure on an opponent.³ The key to its success is the ability to shield the conventional force from destruction while the irregular force continues to harass the enemy. Time and again, Napoleon's generals were just on the verge of defeating one of these entities when the other would suddenly reappear. This war combined conventional battle and ferocious guerrilla warfare that most of his generals had never encountered and never solved.

One of the most challenging tasks that a conquering regime must accomplish is recognizing that an insurgency exists and that it is a true threat. Effective response to an insurgency requires that the counterinsurgent leader acknowledge that a danger exists. Normally, new insurgencies begin as small, loosely organized groups that cause minimal difficulties. Because they are seemingly insignificant, the counterinsurgent may tend to

regard their activities as isolated incidents that can be ignored or contained with little or no energy. That is where the danger lies; if the counterinsurgent waits too long in putting down the insurrection he may never be able to overcome it as it grows and evolves. The difficulty is that the counterinsurgent government may lose face and legitimacy if it acknowledges that the populace has taken up arms against it. This causes problems for the incumbent regime in maintaining support from other nations that are observing its actions, by calling attention to the problem, the counterinsurgent may also encourage the movement to continue its struggle as the insurgent sees that his efforts may be working.⁴

This is the dilemma in which Napoleon found himself in the Peninsula in 1808. The riot in Madrid in May of 1808 seemed quite inconsequential at the time. There were very few French casualties and it was put down rather quickly and without much effort. However, there were a number of reports, prior to the Dos de Mayo, from French commanders that there was growing unrest in the region. In April 1808, a local priest in the village of Carabanchel Alto murdered a French captain.⁵ In the same month, General Lejuene reported from the city of Burgos:

I was just going to make a sketch . . . of the beautiful bas-relief on the gate of the bridge, when I heard the cry, 'Death to the French' and several musket shots. I ran as fast as I could to the guard in the Plaza Mayor, where our troops were under arms and ready for battle. . . . We lost a few men from cross shots, but the shots fired by the . . . crowds, which charged at us at a run, exhausted their ammunition . . . whilst our repeated orderly discharges . . . soon swept the place clear of our assailants.⁶

Napoleon refused to believe that these early incidents were of any consequence and trusted that his armies would quickly extinguish these insurgencies. In some respects, the Emperor was indeed correct. The very early revolts were small and were effectively put down. Besides, in many provinces, these small revolts seemed to be directed at small

cells of partisans loyal to the ousted Godoy. Many Spaniards held on to the belief that Napoleon would eventually place Prince Ferdinand on the throne and most prominent authorities were advocating submission and were not prepared to advocate a war with France. However, an insurgency was beginning to form during this crucial time.

Conspiratorial cells were starting to materialize in such locations as Valencia, Saragossa, and Seville.⁷ These small cells were composed of persons from varied walks of life such as doctors, merchants, a few army officers, a few government officials, and some malcontents.⁸ Early in the insurgency, these various cells had a common thread. They wanted to advance their narrow aims, avenge past wrongs, or to acquire greater prominence. Most were aimed at the Spanish authorities who had let down their country by supporting the corrupt Godoy or had somehow allowed Spain to fall into despair.

What Napoleon failed to see was that Spain was ripe for insurrection. Many in the Spanish government were advocating that the people should acquiesce to the French, while conspiratorial cells and opportunists were inciting much of the populace to rebel. All that was needed was a spark to set off a conflagration. Napoleon provided the spark when he forced the abdication of Ferdinand VI and announced that his brother Joseph would become the new King of Spain.⁹ It was with this announcement that the hopes and dreams of freedom of the people in a new Spain were finally dashed and the Spaniards recognized that the French were not there to liberate, but to occupy. This news caused uprisings all over Spain and as reports traveled it provoked further panic and mass demonstrations. It also gave the rather small cells of conspirators the impetus to precipitate further uprisings. This final insult against Spain, by Napoleon, also gave the

legitimate authorities reason to help seed further revolt. It was with the aid of these authorities that the beginnings of an insurgency emerged.

There was in mid 1808, a series of small Spanish Armies and although geographically separated, poorly organized, and poorly led, there was a kernel from which to grow a guerrilla force. There were approximately 20,000 Spanish soldiers in Galicia, 40,000 troops in Andalucia, and another 9,000 in the Levante.¹⁰ There were also numerous garrisons of troops distributed throughout the country and an army of 15,000 still in Portugal that had been allied with the French forces during the invasion of that country.¹¹

By June 1808, much of Spain was in revolt and insurrectionary forces were beginning to form; yet Napoleon was not alarmed. On the ninth of June he told his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand, “All these little events are being calmed by the direction that is being taken by the principal inhabitants . . . of the kingdom, whilst . . . the king’s [Joseph] arrival will everywhere dissipate trouble, put an end to doubt and re-establish tranquility.”¹²

The Emperor’s downplay of the events taking place in the early part of the war shaped the future campaigns he fought in the Peninsula. As it appeared to him, these revolts would not last long and would be resolved rather quickly once the people were enlightened and understood the benefits of living as citizens of the Empire. After all the earlier revolts in the Tyrol and in Naples were of short duration and were put down without too much effort. He also believed that the insurrection would dissipate, once the British were no longer able to intervene. This perception and the more imposing threat posed by the Austrians in Central Europe forced the Emperor to make tough decisions on

how much manpower to allocate towards Spain and Portugal and which leaders he could afford to send to command those forces.

Napoleon's pick of generals to command his troops in the initial invasion clearly show that he judged this operation as a secondary effort. Having pressured the Spanish rulers in 1807 to ally themselves with him against Portugal, he had no reason to fear the Spanish armies and the Portuguese Army was so small that it did not present a credible threat either. Accordingly, the Emperor sent a small contingent of conscripts led by less experienced commanders. The first general to see action in the Peninsula was General Andoche Junot. Junot had served as Napoleon's aide in Italy and at Austerlitz prior to his entry into Spain. He had never held an independent command before leading his command of 25,000 troops through the length of Spain and into Portugal. It is also claimed that he was beginning to show signs of mental instability. A young Polish officer serving in the Peninsula wrote that Junot was, "not quite right in the head," and he would later be found mentally unstable and unfit for office.¹³ Arthur Wellesley (later the Duke of Wellington) defeated him in 1808 at the battle of Vimiero and he and his command were evacuated back to France aboard British ships. Some of the other commanders that went in the initial invasion were Generals Pierre-Antoine Dupont, and Philibert Guillaume Duhesme. Neither of these two officers had any experience commanding anything larger than a division and were now corps commanders. General Dupont would be the first French commander to suffer a major defeat since the inception of the Grand Army in 1804. His defeat at the hands of a Spanish Army, at Bailen, tarnished the Imperial standards and proved that the French were not invincible.¹⁴

The principle qualification for promotion in the French Army was bravery in combat. This is a good leadership characteristic, but is not completely sufficient for a counterinsurgent leader. An effective leader in counterinsurgent operations must also have patience, political common sense, and cultural sensitivity.”¹⁵

Most of the officers that Napoleon sent into Spain were brave and experienced commanders. However, many of these same men may not have been the right pick for the roles that they were to fulfill. Following on the heels of the initial invasion Napoleon sent Marshal Joachim Murat, one of his most courageous and daring commanders to Madrid. The Marshal had worked his way up through the ranks during the early days of the Republic and it was he that supplied the cannon to Napoleon who applied the “whiff of grapeshot” during the Vendemaire coup attempt in Paris in 1795. Later, Murat campaigned with Napoleon in the Italy, Egypt, Austria and Prussia and had distinguished himself as a dashing cavalry officer.¹⁶ In February of 1808 the Emperor appointed Marshal Murat as commander-in-chief of the Army of Spain and Governor of the Realm and ordered him to Madrid to enforce French rule.¹⁷ Thinking himself as a possible choice to secure the Spanish throne, on the 23 March 1808, Murat entered Madrid with all of the pomp and circumstance afforded a military conqueror and began to act as though a conqueror.¹⁸ Napoleon said of his marshal, “He is ambitious and ridiculously vain. He is under the delusion that he is gifted with political gifts to a superior degree whereas, in fact, he is destitute of any such thing.”¹⁹ After quickly quelling the riots of the Dos de Mayo, the Marshal set about executing hundreds of citizens in an attempt to rid the capitol of the conspirators of the revolt. In doing so, it appears he dispatched many

innocents and fueled further revolts in the kingdom. General Maximilian Foy described the scene:

Among those who were condemned were men who had not fought, and whose only crime was that of having had about them large knives, or other sharp instruments. They were executed without the assistance of a priest . . . a circumstance which still more exasperated a religious people.²⁰

Shortly after the Dos de Mayo Murat fell ill and, after the announcement of the Emperor's brother as successor to the throne, left Spain never to return.

During the second invasion, Napoleon brought with him, officers such as Marshals Michel Ney, Jean Lannes, and Nicholas Soult, men who were also skilled in the art of conventional operations and were brave men. However, bravery and experience were not enough to overcome the Allied conventional armies and deal with a guerrilla threat such as the one fomenting in Spain. This type of warfare called for leaders who were brave and daring, yet patient and sensitive to the socio-political circumstances. These French generals performed well, in most cases, when fighting conventional forces alone. In many cases, they fought well in the counterinsurgency fight, as long as they were not threatened by the conventional forces. Marshal Suchet proved to be a skilled counterinsurgent leader, yet in the early years of the war he was not threatened by the Anglo-Portuguese armies. After the destruction of most of the Spanish Army in 1808, he easily routed the small leftover Spanish Army contingents under General Joachim Blake in Aragon. From that moment on Suchet never faced a conventional threat by regulars in his province. Therefore, he could concentrate his efforts on destroying the partisan bands in Aragon.

The problem was that it was rare that any of Napoleon's generals fought purely conventional or purely unconventional campaigns. Almost inevitably, Napoleon's

officers would concentrate their forces on the Spanish armies or the Anglo-Portuguese armies leaving their bases and lines of communications thinly secure. This would give the insurgents a reprieve allowing them to attack the weakened supply lines and bases. This inevitably compelled the French commanders to abandon their pursuit of the conventional armies in order to concentrate on securing their supply trains. Once they had secured their lines of supply, the conventional forces under Wellesley would once again appear to threaten them.

Long after his departure from Spain, the Emperor continued to see the war in Spain as a secondary front. As the Austrians, Russians, and Prussians began to once again beat the drums of war in the east, he was forced to place more emphasis on defending the Empire from much more threatening forces. This forced him to keep a much more reliable cadre of marshals and generals in Germany and France rather than in Spain or Portugal.

Napoleon added another problem to the leadership dimension throughout this campaign. The Emperor expected quick results from his commanders serving in the Peninsula. His impatience coupled with his attempts to retain his better commanders in Central Europe, where he perceived his greater threat, was costly. Historically, counterinsurgent warfare is slow to develop and usually takes years of patience and perseverance to be successful. Napoleon's habit of appointing commanders to Spain and then pulling them out due to their lack of swift results or to due to his need of their services in Germany, destroyed any continuity of command. As an example, between June 1808 and April 1810, there was a succession of four commanders that governed the province of Catalonia.²¹ This had a devastating effect on the morale of soldiers and the

continuity of commanders trying to control a potentially hostile populace, defend against the Anglo-Portuguese forces, and defeat an insurgency.

Because of these problems, the morale in the French officer corps serving in Spain began to disintegrate. By 1809, as the insurrection began to make gains after a brief respite from Napoleon's second invasion, many French officers had nothing but disdain for service in the Peninsula. As the war clouds gathered over Central Europe scores of officers attempted to obtain assignments with the French units preparing for hostilities with Austria, "A great number of general officers and others, who were anxious to be engaged in the campaign about to be opened in Austria, solicited and obtained the favor of proceeding to that country."²²

After his victory over the Austrians at the Battle of Wagram, Napoleon was determined to put an end to the perplexing problems in Spain. The Emperor wanted to personally lead another army into the Peninsula. However, this time royal intrigues distracted him from this course. His divorce from Josephine and ensuing marriage to the Austrian princess, Marie Louise, preoccupied his mind and he decided not to go.²³ Once again, the war in the Peninsula took second place to other concerns that he perceived as more pressing.

As the war progressed and things worsened for the French, Napoleon turned a deaf ear to many of the grim reports that were emanating from his Peninsular commanders. His retorts to his commanders often angrily reprimanded them for not having the ability to solve their own problems, while he concentrated his efforts towards affairs in Central Europe. This led many officers to embellish the truth or to paint the picture that things were going better than they were, rather than present the truth and face

the wrath of the Emperor. A Polish officer, serving in the Vistula Legion, related a story of a report that he had made after an action against a small group of Spanish guerrillas:

I sat down and regurgitated a brief resume of what had happened, adding the number of dead and wounded. . . . I read all of this to the captain [responsible for sending the reports higher] and he pointed out that I had missed a couple of essential details. He then dictated some additions and corrections which had the effect of turning a minor skirmish into a colorful struggle of heroic proportions.²⁴

Marshal Suchet's report to the Ministry of War after the Battle of Alcaniz is another example of the typical embellishment of imperial correspondence coming out of the Peninsula during the war. The marshal's purpose for giving battle at Alcaniz was to destroy the remnants of the Spanish Army still operating in Aragon under General Joachim Blake. He described in his report that the battle was a reconnaissance in force made by his 7,000 troops against an enemy of over 19,000. Blake only had 9,000 soldiers at the battle. Suchet reported that he broke off the attack due to his inferiority in numbers and the poor condition of his troops. His report also showed that he lost 40 men and had 300 wounded, while in reality he lost 500 soldiers and 1500 wounded. The truth was that he lost a battle to an equally sized less professional army of levies and had to retreat under cover of darkness.²⁵

This sort of distortion of the truth had the effect of reinforcing Napoleon's own disillusionment with how things were progressing in Spain. In many cases these less than truthful reports led to the Emperor's further condemnation of his commanders who were painting a gloomier, but more truthful, picture of events in their area of operations. Many commanders also portrayed a rosier picture of their operations in their sphere of influence so as to show up their fellow commanders and gain favor with the Emperor. Some generals had nothing but disdain for their fellow commanders and would stop at nothing

to discredit them. Napoleon was partially to blame for this infighting. His favoritism towards certain Marshals or generals and his ability to dress down others, publicly, had damaging effects on his subordinate leadership. In the midst of this campaign, jealousies and hatred arose amongst the French leadership. An example of this is when Marshal Andre Massena took command of the Army of Portugal in April of 1810:

When Massena took command, relations between him and his subordinates were already poor. Junot was piqued at not having been made commander of the expedition. Ney was headstrong and disliked Massena and despite his renown as a soldier, Massena had the reputation of being a rake and of looting the countryside at every chance.²⁶

This posed coordination and cooperation problems for the French in Spain, where it was essential for commanders to cooperate in order to conduct successful conventional and counterinsurgency operations.

Another challenge that amplified the resentment and distrust between commanders was that Napoleon had setup military governments for the respective provinces that were presided over by a general or marshal. These territorial based generals tended to be less than cooperative with other commanders outside of their sphere. Historically, as the Imperial Army conquered territories in Europe, Napoleon bestowed large portions of territories upon those generals who had facilitated his great victories. His commanders expected this same system of rewards to carry over into the Peninsular Campaign and this led to some personal inequalities amongst the generals.²⁷ It follows that this type of system would encourage envy, covetousness, and jealousy and it did. At one point, during the campaign, the resentment between these territorial “governors” was so blatant that Napoleon made the statement that his Peninsular generals, “hate each other to such an extent that they are desperate at the thought of

carrying out a movement which might add to the glory of another.”²⁸ Jealousy and distrust were only two reasons that Napoleon’s generals would not cooperate with each other. Another reason was that by sending forces outside of their area of operations they weakened their own abilities to protect themselves from insurgents within their own borders. Also, sending small contingents from one prefecture to another could be dangerous business for the reinforcing unit. Contingents could not always count on the receiving headquarters for logistical support. If they did not obtain the support they needed from the receiving unit, it stretched their lines of supply thin and left them vulnerable to guerrilla attack.

This coordination dilemma aided the guerrilla tactics greatly. The insurgents learned quickly “that they could usually avoid pursuit merely by passing into a neighboring province, [as] communications were too poor and French commanders were too jealous of their autonomy to undertake joint operations.”²⁹

Compounding the troubles brought on by distrust within the French leadership was the failure to establish an effective command relationship. Napoleon once asserted that, “nothing is so important in war as an undivided command: for this reason, when war is carried on against a single power, there should be only one army, acting upon one base, and conducted by one chief.”³⁰

In May of 1808, Napoleon announced that his older brother, Joseph, King of Naples, would take the throne of Spain. Joseph was not at all like his younger brother. He was a more serene and gentle man who loved the arts. Joseph began his life headed for the clergy. However, he abandoned that course and later earned a law degree. He dabbled in governmental duties in France and married into a rich merchant family. His attachment

to his brother aided his career in politics and as Napoleon climbed the ladder of fortune, Joseph benefited along the way. In 1806, Napoleon placed Joseph on the throne of Naples. As King of Naples, Joseph performed quite well. He pacified most of the region, introduced a public education system, and improved the legal system.³¹ Napoleon admired his older brother for his culture and character, but he detested Joseph's lack of assertiveness and his empathy for his subjects. In fact, Napoleon had offered the Spanish throne to his younger brother Louis before he offered it to Joseph, fearing his older brother's indecisiveness. Joseph held his brother in high esteem, but thought him overbearing and intemperate. Ultimately, Joseph attempted to rule as a kindly monarch and install some reforms in Spain. He attempted to reestablish ties between the provinces and Madrid and created an administration based on the French model of royal commissioners. However, Napoleon always attempted to assert himself in his older brother's affairs and usually overruled or ignored his brother's proposals.³²

Napoleon constantly undermined the relationship between Joseph's court and his corps commanders. The Emperor simply ignored Joseph's place in governing the armies in Spain and sent his orders directly to his subordinate commanders. This confused many of the commanders in the field as to whom they served and whose orders they should obey. Knowing that the real power resided in Napoleon, the provincial commanders tended to ignore Joseph's commands and followed the imperial decrees from France. This frustrated Joseph and his court and in a letter to Napoleon he pleaded with his brother to clarify the chain of command. He wrote in late 1808, "I beg of your Majesty to give his orders on this point clearly and precisely . . . whoever commands the French

Army is master of such part of Spain as we occupy. . . . I must have councilors not masters.”³³

Tired of his brother’s continual complaints, Napoleon gave Joseph nominal command and allowed him Marshal Jean-Baptiste Jourdan as his chief of staff. Corps commanders were told by Napoleon’s chief of staff, Marshal Berthier, that they were to receive their orders from Madrid only. Marshal Givion Saint-Cyr, then military governor of Catalonia, was one of many of the Emperor’s marshals who ignored the order and continued to work with the Ministry of War in Paris.³⁴

Napoleon had no intention of allowing Joseph to exercise that command and continued to send orders directly to his corps commanders. The Emperor even went as far as establishing a special bureau in the Ministry of War to administer control of his armies in Spain, effectively cutting Joseph and Marshal Jourdan out of the decision making.³⁵ This had the effect of dividing the command and control of the government of Spain as well as the forces sent attempting to maintain order.

In his memoirs, General Suchet (later promoted to Marshal of the Empire in 1811) described the confusion that came about as a result of this command arrangement. In 1809, General Suchet commanded the French III Corps and governed the province of Arragon. In that same year, a partisan leader named Espos y Mina had recruited a large partisan band that was wreaking havoc on French forces in the neighboring province of Navarre. As Navarre borders with France, the French Ministry of War took notice of this threat and ordered Suchet to “commence operations in Navarre, with a view to quell the disturbances there.”³⁶ Suchet sent his subordinate commander, General Jean-Isadore Harispe, to root out Mina. After Mina’s partisans were pushed out, Suchet went to the

Navarre provincial capitol of Pampelona to reinstitute governmental operations. While Suchet was in Navarre, Napoleon returned to Paris after his victory over Austria and the Peace of Schönbrunn. The defeat of Austria in 1809, allowed the Emperor to turn his attention back on the problems in Spain. Napoleon's chief of staff, Marshal Berthier sent orders to Suchet to march against the city of Valencia. On receipt of those orders, Suchet's staff prepared the corps for operations against Valencia and upon the general's return to Aragon, the preparations were nearly completed. As preparations continued, Suchet was bewildered and believed that he still took his military orders from Madrid as, "there still existed, however, a regulation which left the chief command in the Peninsula to King Joseph."³⁷ However, he also had "secret" orders to relay all financial and administrative matters to Paris only and not to let those instructions be revealed to Madrid.³⁸ Suchet was uncertain as to what to do and asked for clarification from Madrid and Paris. In the course of this, Berthier sent an order to delay the Valencia expedition and instead ordered III Corps to cooperate with VII and VIII corps to lay siege to the cities of Lerida and Tortosa. The courier carrying this letter was intercepted by guerrillas and did not reach Suchet. In the meantime, King Joseph saw an opportunity to take Valencia. He had secret intelligence that led him to believe that Valencia was ready to hand over the city to the French without a fight and he ordered the corps to immediately march in two columns on the city. "Upon receipt of those precise orders and having not received orders from Paris relieving the army of the obligation there was little alternative [but to proceed]."³⁹ In accordance to his orders, General Suchet divided his corps and marched part of it, under General Harispe, while he followed with the rest. As Harispe approached the city, Suchet received a copy of the dispatch that had been captured

ordering him to Lerida. By this time, Harispe and his division had traveled too far to simply turn around and Suchet could not allow Harispe to stay in Valencia while he returned the rest of the corps to Aragon. His only alternative was to continue to march to Valencia. Generals Suchet and Harispe arrived at Valencia only to find that the city was not, as Joseph believed, ready to surrender, but was fortified and prepared for war.⁴⁰ Since the corps had left Aragon so quickly and, as Suchet had received intelligence that he would not have to fight for the city, the corps had not carried any siege equipment. The army sat for five days in front of the city and then returned to Aragon. The result of this confusion is that two key cities of Lerida and Tortosa were left in the hands of the enemy. Partisan bands continued to use those towns to conduct operations and Suchet had to besiege those towns later that year. Valencia was also left open to the partisans and III Corps would have to return the next year to lay siege to it. Lastly, Suchet took most of his corps with him to Valencia leaving a small force behind in Aragon to protect his line of communications and the major towns and cities. Because of this, Mina returned and his guerrillas made considerable gains in Aragon against the lightly defended garrisons and dampened the progress that Suchet had made against the insurgents that year.⁴¹ It was with these set of circumstances that Napoleon's generals endeavored to command the occupation armies and rule the people. This command arrangement confused his generals and wasted manpower and energy.

It is important to analyze the behavior of the French commanders during the formative years of the occupation and how their behavior shaped events that occur later in the campaign. Leadership is of great importance in an insurgency. A long list of charismatic men such as Tito, T. E. Lawrence, Ho Chi Minh, and Mao Tse-tung easily

come to mind when one thinks about insurgent leaders. Remembering names of charismatic successful counterinsurgent leaders is a much more difficult task. This does not mean, however, that leadership is not important to the counterinsurgent. The importance of leadership to the counterinsurgent is equally important. However, the kind of leadership required for the insurgent is different from that demanded by the counterinsurgent. Because an insurgency is so stirring, it attracts dramatic personalities. The insurgent leader must be a dramatic leader to be able to raise the esprit de corps of an organization, especially during the dark times.⁴² Historically, the counterinsurgent leader also fills the role of the head of the government. For this reason, the counterinsurgent does not need to be as charismatic as the insurgent. It is important that both have administrative skills. For the insurgent leader this is important, as he normally has to create an organization and supervise its operations. This quality is vital for a counterinsurgent leader as, “he must oversee the functioning of the army, supervise a large non-military administrative apparatus, supervise the development of regional/national⁴³ resources, and adjust the competing demands of groups within the country.

As mentioned before, many of Napoleon’s commanders had become spoiled to the tradition of taking whatever “spoils of war” they could get their hands on. European armies had, for centuries, looted and pillaged as they conquered territories. By the Napoleonic Era, pillaging was more or less loosely governed and enforced by “civilized” officers. Towns and villages that had to be taken because they refused to surrender were open to unrestricted pillaging. Cities that surrendered could safeguard their property and citizenry by appealing for protection from the siege commander.⁴⁴ Predominantly,

looting was frowned upon by most of the French leadership in Spain. Marshal Suchet and General Jean Reynier are examples of two officers who loathed looting and severely disciplined soldiers caught in the act. Early in the campaign there were, however, commanders who without regard for the second and third order effects of their behavior, allowed towns and cities to be sacked and pillaged as they made their way through the Peninsula. However, many of the cities in Spain, such as Sarragossa, would not surrender when under siege and therefore fell under the “rules” of allowable pillage. When General Dupont’s army sacked the city of Cordoba in 1808, they looted the city treasury and raped the women, angering the citizenry into a rebellion that resulted in scores of casualties for the French.⁴⁵ Part of the pillaging problem in the Peninsula can be connected to the overall poor supply system of the French that led to more destructive foraging by a starving army of occupation. As soldiers went hungry and went without pay, the “foraging” got out of control. A young French rifleman serving in the Spain observed this:

There were no provisions . . . every soldier was obliged to provide for himself, and therefore took what he could find . . . no house was spared, the property of the owners remained nowhere unmolested . . . even churches were plundered, although a strict order to the contrary was issued, and several soldiers caught were shot. The utmost severity proved to no avail; the thirst after money overcame all fear of punishment.⁴⁶

The looting and pillaging got so out-of-hand that one of Marshal Ney’s aides-de-camp remarked, “This is no longer a campaign that we are conducting; it is rather a devastation by bandits in uniform.”⁴⁷ This type of behavior by Napoleon’s troops and commanders quickly led to a hostile populace that saw the French only as conquerors set out to ravage their nation.

The anger of the hostile citizenry spilled over into acts of violence for which the Imperial leadership was unprepared. Napoleon's generals perceived themselves as romantic warriors. They fought by a soldierly code of honor, not unlike that of the feudal knights of old. An honorable soldier did not kill prisoners or torture them for information. In fact, prisoners were normally exchanged or simply allowed to go back to their homeland with the promise of not returning to fight again. Officers were to show courtesy and consideration for their enemy and minister to their wounded. This does not mean that these men were not tough fighters; "men like Ney and Lannes could be ferocious front-line fighters, but were magnanimous to a vanquished enemy."⁴⁸ The Spanish insurgents fought without a code. They committed unspeakable acts against their enemy. Captured French soldiers were often found castrated, missing feet, ears and noses, hung upside down over a slow fire. The Emperor's commanders were appalled by the savagery they witnessed. This usually led to one of two reactions by the French generals; retaliate in kind or safeguard their code and try to rise above this barbarism.⁴⁹ Those generals who chose the first course of action did so with horrifying effects that only escalated the problem and led to even more terrifying repercussions on the part of the insurgents. The leaders who followed the second course usually found it difficult to suppress the urge to retaliate after repeatedly witnessing the same horrific acts. In most cases, these commanders ended up turning a blind eye to the acts of retaliation committed by their own troops. However, a few generals had the foresight to realize the effects of their choices and attempted to try other means of controlling the violence. Whichever course of action they chose, there were long lasting effects and how they dealt with this dilemma was important to the outcome of this conflict. These are some of the difficult

choices that the counterinsurgent leader has to make and, in many cases, a mindset change is essential to solving these problems.

The French commanders in Spain had to take several things into account when deciding which strategy or tactic to utilize for any given situation. First, they had to figure out if they had the capabilities to carry out the strategy. Second, they had to know whether the strategy fit their overall political and military objective. And last, they had to decide whether the benefits outweighed the costs of using a certain tactic. In other words, the tactics or strategies they used might have the opposite effect than they intended and may not have contributed to the overall objective. For instance, the destruction of a village might destroy a few insurgents, but might be counterproductive politically, as this act may drive the citizenry of the village into supporting the insurgency. Strong evidence of this sort of strategy permeates the history of this war. Reports of whole towns being razed are prevalent throughout the war. In 1810, one of Marshal Ney's aides related these scenes while serving in Galicia:

The towns and villages half burned, the farm animals and mules killed or stolen, all the tools and instruments of the peasantry and artisans used as fuel . . . all the churches sacked and profaned; this is all that is left in this kingdom.⁵⁰

These were quickly followed up by reports of violence reciprocated by the inhabitants:

Some fifty [French] corpses . . . allowed us to assess the barbarity of the cowardly assassins of this town. Some had been beaten to death, others had had their heads smashed in by axes, and still others had been . . . plunged into cauldrons of boiling oil.⁵¹

There are a few of Napoleon's generals who did see the futility of these sorts of tactics. General Jean-Louis-Ebenezer Reynier was one of these commanders. Reynier was one of many generals who remained true to the principles of liberty, equality and

fraternity.⁵² He was also one of the first of Napoleon's officers to encounter the problems involved in partisan warfare as he had a prominent role in the earlier subjugation of Naples. Through his experience in Naples and his devotion to the ideas of liberty, Reynier learned that he had to deal severely with the culprits of the insurgency, but that a concern for the people could win their support. As he was successful in the Neapolitan campaign, Napoleon sent him to Spain as commander of the 2nd Division of the Reserve Army of Spain. As General Reynier moved his division into Vitoria, he found a majority of the local populace cooperative and he felt there was a chance to win their loyalty. He wrote:

The inhabitants are generally very discontented with the depredations that these isolated bands are presently committing. Daily, peasants come here who have seen brigands and ask for French detachments. Inhabitants of several towns have asked for arms with which to defend themselves.⁵³

Through evenhandedness, Reynier was able to control the local populace while harassing the insurgents without respite.⁵⁴ His subordinate commander, General Foy reflected,

He is assuredly one of our most just and sensitive generals. He has always professed and he still professes liberal ideas. If he had been consulted about the aggression in Spain, he certainly would have counseled against it. The Emperor wanted it, we are his instruments; the evil to which we are witness and the authors are the inevitable and even just consequence of an unjust principle.⁵⁵

The Emperor did want it, but did not make it any easier for his commanders to deal with it. Even with the efforts that General Reynier made to calm the local populace, his efforts were generally for naught as the support from Napoleon was lacking. The weakness of the French logistical system forced Reynier and his troops to forage the surrounding area just to stay alive. During past campaigns in Central Europe, the French armies would forage an area and then move on. Many of areas of Spain occupied by the

French were arid, almost desert like areas and as the French moved through them they would forage what they could to feed their armies. However, this quickly depleted these already barren territories of resources and once the French armies began to settle into an area and occupy it, there was next to nothing left to feed their troops. This meant that the French were forced to forage farther and take what was left from the local populace to feed themselves. This induced many of the local inhabitants into supporting the insurgents. Reynier wrote from Vitoria that his army was compelled to resort to forced requisitions for food. The general's foraging parties were reduced to ruthless, pillaging bands and he saw this a key motivator for alienating the once cooperative peasant and forcing the already impoverished peasants to become hostile bandits.⁵⁶ So, even those generals, such as Reynier, who attempted to rule liberally and justly found it very difficult to be successful because the conditions that Napoleon set for them made it almost impossible.

The generals who marched under the Imperial eagles into Spain were given a difficult task. Counterinsurgent operations are tricky and complex under the best of circumstances. However, they also had to deal with the constant threat of British and Portuguese armies conducting conventional operations against them. The Anglo-Portuguese Army could either give battle or withdraw achieving equal results. Giving battle, might attrit French forces by conventional means, while withdrawing would eat away at their forces by means of guerrilla attacks along their now extended supply lines. The British establishment of the Lines of Torres Vedras [a series of fortifications built across the Lisbon Peninsula from the Tagus River to the Atlantic] added another dimension to the oscillating battles along the Portuguese-Spanish border. The Lines of

Torres Vedras protected the British base of operations and supply in Lisbon. The assurance that this security gave them allowed them to continue to operate on the Peninsula. It also protected their site of embarkation if the French forced them out of Portugal. The fact that the British had the Royal Navy at their disposal also gave them an advantage. If all else failed, the British Army could quickly disengage completely from the area of operations through the use of the navy. This made operations for the French commanders very difficult. As they faced stalemate along this formidable defensive belt, the French soldiers faced the threat of starvation from their poor logistical system that was tenuous at best, but was made more fragile by the continual guerrilla threat.

The Emperor did not ease their pain. The threat of Austrian forces invading Italy, the German States, and even France forced him to see the Peninsula as a secondary effort; this increased the difficulties that his commanders faced. The French armies in the Peninsula were always last to receive money, supplies, and replacements. The officers Napoleon sent in the initial intervention shaped the campaign for the future. Their early losses to the less than capable Spanish and Anglo-Portuguese armies proved that the French armies could be beaten and gave heart to the Spaniards to continue the fight.

The failure to establish an effective command relationship doomed the French to disaster as much as anything else. Unity of command and effort is essential to a successful counterinsurgency as well as to conventional operations. Napoleon's continued intervention in the command structure created indecisiveness and confusion. If the Emperor had spent more time, in person, in the theater and retained complete authority, things might have turned out differently. However, his placement of Joseph as the nominal head of the armies in Spain and his continual issuing of orders directly to his

commanders despite the command structure created disharmony and confusion in the command. Also, with Napoleon's rushed departure in January 1809 to prepare for operations against the Austrians, overall supervision of French forces in the Peninsula vanished and individual generals began to pursue their own agendas. The Spanish partisan leaders used this time to reorganize and refit to continue the resistance.⁵⁷

Counterinsurgencies call for leaders who can think beyond the military applications and responses. As the French commanders in Portugal and Spain were faced with both a counterinsurgency and a conventional fight it made matters almost impossible. Napoleon's slowness to consider the introduction of social, political, and economic reform made the challenges of a counterinsurgency difficult and one that may have been impossible to solve as long as he was forced to fight a conventional fight against the British and Iberian armies. Lastly, Napoleon's commanders were not prepared for this type of warfare and had trouble adapting. The Emperor's inability to recognize the problems in the Peninsula did not help them in their endeavors and these inherited problems were left to them to figure out how best to deal with them.

¹David G. Chandler, *The Military Maxims of Napoleon* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 78.

²Christopher J. Herold, *The Age of Napoleon* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Company, 1987), 16.

³Thomas Huber, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, *Student Text History 200 : Military Revolutions Parallel Course*, "Napoleon in Spain and Naples: Fortified Compound Warfare," (Fort Leavenworth, KS: USACGSC, October 2004), 132.

⁴Donald Clark, *Insurgency* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 115.

⁵Charles Esdaile, *The Peninsular War: A New History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan Publishing, 2003), 38.

- ⁶Ibid., 38.
- ⁷Ibid., 47.
- ⁸Ibid., 47.
- ⁹Ibid., 48.
- ¹⁰Ibid., 60.
- ¹¹Ibid., 60.
- ¹²Ibid., 61.
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CHAPTER 4

TACTICS

The enemy were ubiquitous, and yet I could find them nowhere, though I traveled the length and breadth of the province.
1

Marshal Jaques MacDonald in Catalonia

Napoleon's Imperial armies were some of the most highly trained and best led armies in the world. The French *levee en mass* system produced large armies during the Revolution, which were emboldened by the ideas of liberty, fraternity, and equality. Although the Imperial armies were by 1803 conscript armies, the impetus continued. The citizen armies of France stressed flexibility and individual initiative at the small unit level in place of the old stiff, inflexible doctrine of the Old Regime. The French leadership, inspired by patriotism and the prospect of reward, were allowed to run their organizations with boldness and flexibility.²

Napoleon's strategy of keeping his opponents off balance by deep, slashing maneuvers and concentration of mass and fires at the precise place and time had defeated his enemies time and again.³ His expansion of the artillery and cavalry and his reorganization of the Intendance system facilitated this lightning strategy. However, tactically, Napoleon's armies functioned more flexibly than the French armies of the Bourbon Dynasty. Infantry units were employed in line, column, or a combination of the two and used a large numbers of skirmishers to wear down their opponent.⁴ The musket and the bayonet were still used to drive home the attack or solidify the defense. Although greatly expanded, the cavalry still tended to be used in a reconnaissance and security role or as the *coup de grace* against a weakened or retreating opponent. One of the largest

expansions in the French armies was in the artillery branch of service. Napoleon, having been an artilleryman, knew the power of this arm and grew the artillery corps to great proportions.⁵ The cannon continued to be used to attrit the enemy formations until a point of penetration was made and then exploited by the infantry or cavalry. These organizations and their particular contributions to the battle served the French well in campaigns against large standing armies in Central Europe and against British, Portuguese, and Spanish forces in the Peninsula. However, in Spain, Napoleon's troops confronted another type of enemy besides the Allied standing armies. They faced the Spanish partisans who did not fight using the rules of combat to which the French were so accustomed. Therefore, the French had to modify their tactics and organizations to combat the guerrilla bands.

The Spanish guerrillas played a significant role in the defeat of Napoleon's armies in the Iberian War. These partisan bands could not have freed their nation without the Allied armies, but they certainly aided in preparing the eventual defeat of the French. They wreaked havoc on French logistical convoys, depots, couriers, and small unit detachments as Marshal Suchet described:

They [guerrillas] destroyed our stragglers, and frequently our detachments when they were in small numbers and off their guard . . . [they] intercepted our couriers, arrested our convoys, and obstructed the return of the contributions or provisions we had raised.⁶

Because of this threat, French commanders could not ignore the security of their rear areas as they attempted to operate against the conventional forces of Great Britain, Portugal and Spain. This meant that an unusually large and robust force had to be apportioned to counterinsurgent operations in order to secure their supply lines and lines of communication and this stole combat power away from conventional operations.

There was also a psychological effect that resulted from this type of warfare. French soldiers had to always be vigilant and never let their guard down. In some regions, every peasant was a potential guerrilla and there was always the possibility of a hostile encounter. The constant threat of terror exhausted and, over time, demoralized Napoleon's troops and broke down their effectiveness.⁷ The horrible atrocities associated with this ubiquitous threat had an especially demoralizing effect on French troops as French Sergeant Charles Barboroux relates from his experience:

The first object that struck me as we entered the country was one of our soldiers horribly mutilated, and with his head separated from his body; the other with his clothes torn to pieces, bloody, and covered with wounds.⁸

This was the environment in which the French Imperial soldier had to operate. The French commanders had to figure out how to combat this kind of enemy. What kind of enemy was this? What were the tactics that the enemy used? What tactics and techniques did the French use to combat the guerrilla tactics and which seemed to work and which did not? The Allied armies of Great Britain, Portugal and Spain contributed greatly to the defeat of Napoleon's armies in the Peninsula. However, these forces fought a conventional fight and the tactics used by both sides differed very little from the tactics used in other campaigns by large standing armies throughout Europe. The enemy that the French forces faced in Spain needs to be analyzed, particularly the Spanish partisans, and what made them unique as an adversary. The tactics and techniques the French used to conduct counterinsurgent operations against the Spanish insurgents and how they attempted to govern the occupied provinces were key elements of the war and will be examined in this chapter.

Many of Napoleon's generals attempted to adapt to an unconventional style of warfare and some had success. Most of his commanders understood the threat to their supply lines, lines of communications and rear areas and endeavored to secure those areas using various techniques. There were also attempts, some more successful than others, to recruit and raise counter-guerrilla organizations from the local populace. Quite a few French commanders tried to reorganize their units in order to maximize their combat effectiveness. Fewer still, made efforts to win over the Spanish people or at least keep them neutral through various political and social means.

Napoleon's second attempt to subdue the Peninsula, in the fall of 1808, had pushed most of the Allied armies out of Spain and shattered the Spanish Army. As the Spanish Junta tried to rebuild their conventional armies, they were left with only one course of action if they were to continue their fight against the French occupation forces. The course they took was an all out insurrection. On January 1, 1809, the Central Junta [Spain's ruling council left behind by Prince Ferdinand] issued the "Manifesto of the Spanish Nation to Europe." This proclamation described the unwarranted invasion by the French and the acts of savagery that they had committed against the Spanish people. The imperial invaders had profaned the Spanish people, "with the rape of mothers and daughters who had to suffer all the excesses of this brutality in sight of their dismembered fathers and husbands while their children were pierced with bayonets and carried in triumph as military trophies."⁹ This manifesto justified mobilizing the civilian populace and attempted to unify the nation to rise up against the French and called upon all able bodied males to form guerrilla bands to act as auxiliaries to the Allied forces by attacking logistical bases, convoys, and undermining French morale.¹⁰ This type of

propaganda fed the Spanish psyche and fired up the populace. The Spanish people had a unique background and history that explains why the insurgency was effective and why it was so violent. Suchet sums up their history in this way:

Various nations have successively invaded it. History exhibits them seizing upon Spain after long and sanguinary wars, establishing their dominions on various points, without being able wholly to subdue the Spaniards, and defeated at last by the constancy of the inhabitants.¹¹

Their history also gives some insight into why the Catholic Church had so much influence in this war and explains the difficulties the French had in trying to isolate the power of the church.

As mentioned in the first chapter, the Moorish occupation had made the most significant impact on Spanish culture. By the middle of the 8th century the Moors had conquered much of the Iberian Peninsula and stayed on for nearly eight centuries. The Moors were a fierce, warrior people that spread such fear and loathing in Spain, that the Spaniards in Napoleon's time still feared them.¹²

In the early ninth century, small Christian groups in Spain grew and eventually took the reigns of power from the weakening Moorish Empire.¹³ The victory the Christians achieved after nearly 800 years of effort against the Moors gave them a feeling of superiority and forever enplaced the Catholic Church as the most powerful entity in Spain. This feeling of superiority, coupled with the power of the Catholic Church led to a concept closely resembling a manifest destiny. The idea that God was on their side and that He would protect them as they spread their ideology took hold and led, later, to the establishment of the Spanish Empire.¹⁴ The Empire, formed after the marriage between Ferdinand and Isabella, began a great territorial expansion. At its height in the sixteenth century, under Charles V, Spain had conquered much of the New World and had holdings

in Italy and the Netherlands. Spain, by this period was the most powerful nation in Europe, but intrigue and greed began to take its toll.¹⁵

By the late eighteenth century, the Spanish Empire had declined to such a degree that it no longer posed a serious political or military threat to her European neighbors. The monarchs found themselves slowly losing their colonies to pay for their extravagancies. Meanwhile, the Spanish people were floundering in the depths of poverty. In some parts of the kingdom, banditry had become the only means of survival and a way of life.¹⁶

Spain's historical background had a profound effect on the culture of her people. They were a stubbornly proud, but poor people, who had once conquered much of the known world. The Catholic Church that had been the catalyst for the expansion of an empire still had a powerful grip on the people who owed it so much for the glory they once knew. This had the effect of isolating Spain from the Enlightenment period that spread over the rest of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁷

This meant that the French had to deal with a people who were poor financially and, by Northern European standards, intellectually lagging. Yet the Spaniards saw themselves as superior to the French. Although they bordered each other, France and Spain were worlds apart as described by a French soldier:

France and Spain are joined together like two halves of those masks called night and day, the one black, and the other white, without any intermediate shades. The bad humor of our hosts, rather than their language, soon told us we were in an enemy's country.¹⁸

The French also had to deal with a people who held tenaciously to their religious beliefs. The Spaniards held onto religious beliefs that most of the rest of Europe had long since disregarded. Even the Spanish Inquisition was not completely dead by the time

Napoleon invaded. Heretics were still sought out and, if found, tortured.¹⁹ The French had outlawed torture after the Revolution. Catholic priests continued to exact taxes from the peasants and even the poorer priests were considered nobility. The French had separated the Church from the State during the Revolution and degraded it to a much lower status in the affairs of the country. The history of the Spanish peoples shaped some of the unique characteristics of the culture and explains some of the reasons they fought the way that they did. Although it explains many of the reasons that the Spanish fought, it does not fully answer all of them. The motives are as varied as the peoples who populated the nation. Many were inspired by patriotism and a few by religion. However, just as there were many who were inspired by high ideals, there were just as many motivated by economics. The additional burden of contributions to the French Army for its upkeep and the stationing of troops on Spanish lands annoyed a large number of citizens. The insurgency cut across social boundaries and affected the whole nation. Suchet writes in his memoirs, “peasants, land owners, fathers of families, priests and monks, unhesitant abandoned their dwellings in order to swell the guerrilla bands that were forming against us.”²⁰ Such an understanding helps to rationalize why Napoleon and his generals had such difficulty in putting down the insurrection.

The physical and demographic features also influenced this war. The great expanses made communications difficult for the French. The towns and villages were widely separated in many places and this meant that couriers and convoys had to move great distances between imperial held strongholds, leaving them open to attack by guerrilla bands.²¹ The rugged mountain chains such as the Iberians, Pyrenees, Sierra

Madre, Cantabrans, and Catalans provided safe havens for guerrillas to disperse into and refit, reorganize and conduct ambushes on favorable terrain.

As for the tactics used by the guerrillas, ambushes seemed to be the tactic of choice for the Spanish guerrillas, as they could not hope to defeat the superior French forces in a conventional linear battle. In order to even the odds, the guerrillas would look for places that afforded them the advantage of surprise. The guerrillas would seek vantage points that would force the enemy into a tight spot, where their maneuver tactics and superior firepower were degraded and left them vulnerable to attack. The guerrillas used another tactic of luring the French into a designated ambush site and then attack them on their assailable flanks or rear. The availability of weapons also dictated the choice of tactics used by the partisans. Many in these guerrilla bands were armed with only shotguns and blunderbusses and so close ambush tactics worked well. There are many examples when the partisans resorted to throwing stones at their enemy as they either did not have enough weapons or were simply conserving ammunition for most guerrilla bands were short. A young Polish officer serving in the 2nd Vistula Legion described a typical mountain ambush:

As we were in the process of passing through a deep gorge we came under attack from the very locals as we had come to pacify. They [guerrillas] had blocked off the exit to the defile by means of a kind of barricade and my voltigeurs were having great difficulty in demolishing this obstacle. Meanwhile the Spanish were showering the column with huge chunks of rock and boulders and were making great efforts to pick out the officers, most of whom ended up wounded, more or less severely. This inevitably put the column into disarray. Some soldiers kept order, others ran this way or that and seemed like they could not get away quick enough. The six companies formed one huge disordered mass, the enemy were firing into the crowd, the morale of the men plummeted.²²

There were other reasons that necessitated the use of mountainous terrain. The guerrillas used the mountains because most of them were on foot. There was a shortage

of good horses that could be used in mounted warfare. For centuries, the Spanish had devoted most of her defense spending on building a navy to protect her trade and colonies. During this time period, the cavalry arm of service was expensive to raise and maintain. Therefore, the cavalry made up a small branch of service in the Spanish Army. There was also a shortage of decent mounts due to centuries of mule breeding.²³ Since the shortage of horses forced most of the rebel bands to resort to infantry style warfare, they were vulnerable to French cavalry and artillery in open terrain. The guerrillas, therefore, used complex, defensible terrain such as mountains and woodlands to even the odds.

Another problem that tied down the French troops in Spain was the use of cities by guerrilla bands and the Spanish armies. Guerrilla bands used small villages and cities to recruit, stockpile ammunition and supplies, and hide out. The Spanish Army defended from many of the cities, as Napoleon's juggernaut advanced through the Peninsula. The Spanish cities were excellent places from which to defend, as most of the cities had been fortified to protect the local citizenry from the many varied armies that marched across Spain from Africa to Europe and vice versa. These walled cities were everywhere and ranged from large cities such as Valencia and Sarragossa to smaller towns like Lerida and Tortosa. The battles for these cities drained the manpower of the French armies that could have been used in operations elsewhere such as those against the British. Many of the battles for these Spanish towns went on for days or weeks and were hotly contested as described by one Imperial soldier at the battle for Tortosa:

Our casualties were mounting. The enemy were frighteningly close to us and we could make out their every feature. Their faces seemed contorted by an implacable hatred of us . . . they [partisans] were directing a murderous and much

more accurate fire on us than I had ever experienced from Spanish troops . . . indeed, it still gives me trouble to this day, reminding me of that first day at the siege of Tortosa. That fierce struggle had cost me fifty-two men dead and wounded.²⁴

More often, the insurgents focused their attention on more lucrative targets such as lightly defended or carelessly unsecured couriers and convoys. The insurgents were usually assured of numerical advantage in these engagements, which were normally profitable as the guerrillas either gained supplies or intelligence from these objectives. As the partisans usually lacked ammunition, their attacks had to be planned in detail and swift in execution. The leaders of these bands would designate a place and time for the attack. They would position their men so that they were close enough that they could fire one volley and have better odds of hitting the enemy, but this also allowed them to immediately charge in and close with the enemy. In this way, they were able to conserve ammunition and quickly get in amongst the enemy. This tactic also made it more difficult for the French to use their cavalry or artillery as the partisans were mixed in with friendly troops.²⁵ When it was over, these small bands would then simply disperse into the mountains or forests almost as quickly as they had appeared.²⁶

Finally, some larger guerrilla bands conducted operations against lightly defended and isolated garrisons. Capture of these garrisons usually rewarded the partisans with supplies. The guerrilla tactic used in these situations was to surround the stronghold and harass the garrison enough to show them that they should not venture out of their safe haven. It was then a matter of time, dependant upon the amount of supplies that the defenders had on hand, the weather, and the distance that a relief column might have to travel in order to lift the siege.²⁷

Napoleon's generals had to devise tactics and techniques to deal with the strategies that the insurgents were employing. Fortunately, some of the French commanders in Spain were experienced in this type of warfare. Generals such as Reynier, Reille, and Massena had served in Naples during that insurrection and had learned how to deal with the partisans there. Many more did not have that background and had to learn as they conducted their operations.

The tactics that Napoleon's commanders followed were generally the same methods that generals had used since Alexander the Great. After a territory was conquered, armies would occupy the major cities and establish control of the main roads. In hostile provinces, commanders would establish fortified campsites within a day's march apart from each other along principle roads. These would provide shelter and protection for troops and convoys. A system of patrols would keep the roads under surveillance and guerrilla bands were pursued by flying columns of troops.²⁸ The French used these same types of tactics in Spain.

In the early stages of the revolt the insurgents often targeted French stragglers and less secure convoys as their bands were not well disciplined and the targets were easy. Most of Napoleon's generals were quick to react to this threat and endeavored to secure their lines of communications and concentrate their troops. In the fall of 1808, Marshal Ney's VI Corps was on the offensive conducting operations against Allied forces. As his corps moved it was attacked by small partisan bands all along the way. Ney quickly transmitted this order to his subordinate commanders, "keep VI Corps concentrated, never dispersed to unit points which guerrillas might feel strong enough to attack. Supply lines are to be doubly protected."²⁹ As the guerrillas gained experience and grew in

numbers, French commanders conducting offensive campaigns found that they had to leave more and more of their combat power to guard their logistical tail. While operating in Catalonia in 1810, the guerrilla threat forced General Suchet to create an elaborate system to safeguard his rear areas:

A connected series of fortified posts . . . had been established all along the principal roads, which served at the same time as lines of operation and communication. The object of these was to ensure the safety of troops that had charge of the passage of couriers, and to protect the parts of isolated and detached parties, as well as to see to the furnishing of provisions, the collection of contributions . . . the whole of this army of stations which [we] were compelled to leave in our rear amounted to about 12,000 men.³⁰

The need for security was true for the static French occupation forces as well. In the fall of 1810, General Reille had 4,700 troops occupying the province of Navarre. However, he could only utilize 2,000 troops for field duty as 2,700 soldiers were required for garrison duty.³¹ Some of the fortifications used in the occupied provinces were highly sophisticated for that time period. A number of them contained communication towers that used a semaphore system as a means of sending warnings and signals from one garrison to another.³² The process of setting up garrisons had several effects on both the insurgents and the Imperial forces. In regards to the insurgent, it had the effect of impeding their control over provinces. As for the French corps, this system provided protection for soldiers and for pro-French Spanish administrators.³³ It also had a negative effect on the Imperial soldier. The garrison soldiers only ventured outside of the fortress in large formations, usually when foraging. Many of these troops faced constant hunger, disease, and depression. Desertion rates were high for soldiers spending endless hours in garrison.³⁴

A crucial piece of this system of garrisons was the use of patrols or “flying columns” along the highways and in between stations. The purpose of these mobile columns was to watch the highways for bandits and guerrillas and then, if possible, pursue them. A technique that the French used was to employ several mobile detachments between garrisons in order to pursue the guerrilla bands in relays until they were exhausted and either surrendered or were destroyed.³⁵ General Reynier employed this method in and around Vitoria in 1809. The Basque country was infested with brigands operating in small bands that continually menaced communications and isolated imperial garrisons. Reynier garrisoned the small towns surrounding Vitoria and sent mobile columns all along the roads. This quieted the province for a time.³⁶ An officer in III Corps wrote this description of a combat patrol in Aragon:

This time it was his [the guerrilla’s] turn to be surprised and forced to beat a hasty retreat. During this expedition, I was in command of the detachment . . . another detachment maintained communications with the small punitive column and was placed between us and them. We sent messages using olive tree leaves of specially shaped pieces of blank paper, the messages of which were agreed beforehand [and] carried by local people. In this way we were able to surprise many them.³⁷

The French also created special units specifically designed to patrol their increasingly threatened lines of communications. One of these organizations was the *Gendarmerie d’Espagne*. This unit was filled by an elite group of cavalrymen and veterans. The French formed twenty squadrons of these mounted and dismounted police, many of whom were armed with lances that the Spaniards feared.³⁸ Among the many duties they were tasked to perform were patrolling lines of communications, providing escort duties, and managing prisoners of war.³⁹ Overall, the gendarmerie was successful and became famous for their many victories over the guerrilla bands.

The overall effect of this system of forts and patrols was that the French had to disperse their resources in occupation duties and had difficulty in concentrating combat power. This is, of course, one of the desired results of guerrilla warfare. In the Peninsula this dispersion of troops, preoccupied with securing themselves, was what allowed Spanish and British regular armies to survive against the French. In the provinces, it allowed the insurgent leaders to unite their troops for campaigns in the knowledge that without some other outside help, the French occupation troops could not, in most cases, overwhelm them.

Napoleon's leaders had to be creative in their counterinsurgency operations. The French had two major advantages over the insurgent. They wielded superior firepower in their artillery and infantry and they possessed an effective cavalry.⁴⁰ However, the tactics employed by their insurgent enemies and the austere Spanish environment required they try different ways to employ these branches of service.

In order to effectively pursue the Spanish irregulars in mountainous regions, the French raised a number of battalions of *chasseurs des montagnes*. These were made up of French National Guardsmen from border departments along the Pyrenees border with Spain. These soldiers earned a reputation for hunting down guerrillas in the mountains.⁴¹ Another such innovation was the recruitment of small bands of Spanish irregulars to form units called *contra-guerrillas* or *miquelets Francais*. There was much internal strife between and within many Spanish guerrilla bands that facilitated recruitment for these organizations. As a way of enticing these irregulars the French gave these units special privileges. They were supplied double rations, were given extra pay,

and had plunder rights and most of these organizations were reasonably successful in the counterinsurgency fight.⁴²

In many places in Spain, there was a shortage of food and water for horses. Along with poor road conditions the French were forced to reorganize and refit their artillery batteries. The standard artillery pieces in the French armies were the 6 pounder and 12-pounder cannon. The artillerists slowly replaced these larger guns with smaller, lighter 4 pounders and 8 pounders that were easier to move along the rough Spanish roads.

Another advantage to the smaller calibers was that the Spanish predominately used 4s and 8s in their army and the French could use captured ammunition.⁴³ Providing effective artillery fires on partisan forces in the mountains required innovations as well. The French artillery commanders modified 3- and 4- and 12-pounder howitzer gun carriages so that they could be more easily moved, assembled and disassembled in the constricted, mountainous terrain. The howitzers' high arc made them an effective weapon against guerrillas using boulders and ravines for cover.⁴⁴

As mentioned earlier, the French raised and organized some special mounted units to deal with the insurgent threat. During this period, the French cavalry was organized into three classes, light, line and heavy. The light cavalry normally conducted reconnaissance and security operations. The heavy cavalry was predominately used for shock effect, while line or medium cavalry could be used in many of the same roles that heavy and light cavalry might operate. The line cavalry, or dragoons, could fight either mounted or dismounted. Armed with a "dragoon musket" and bayonet along with their straight sword these cavalrymen were designed to be a mounted infantryman. These soldiers proved their effectiveness against guerrilla forces as they could quickly get to the

battle and fight dismounted to flank guerrilla ambushes or cover withdrawals. The French high command sent twenty-four regiments of dragoons to Spain beginning in 1808.⁴⁵ These mounted riflemen were used so extensively in the war in Spain that they also became known as “Spanish Dragoons.”⁴⁶

No matter what counterinsurgent tactics or techniques the French attempted to utilize, one important lesson was that they had to maintain pressure on the insurgent. This was difficult, at best, when the Imperial forces were threatened by the Anglo- Portuguese and Spanish armies and by irregulars. However, during periods in which the conventional threat to French forces diminished, they did reasonably well against the insurgent threat. For instance, after Napoleon’s appearance on the Peninsula in 1808, the French occupation forces made significant gains against the guerrillas. The Spanish forces were effectively destroyed and a portion of the British forces evacuated the Peninsula. This allowed the French occupation armies to focus their attention on the guerrilla threat. General Suchet’s campaigns in Aragon, Navarre, and Catalonia from 1809-1810 are a shining example of these gains made by the French.

As provincial governor of Aragon, Suchet had the difficult mission of pacifying that province, a hotbed for insurrection. The province was flanked by the formidable Pyrenees in the east and the Catalan mountains in the west and was an ideal location for bandits and guerrillas to operate. There were numerous walled towns and villages that dotted the Ebro River valley and provided shelter and supplies for the partisan bands. The largest of these was the city of Saragossa, where one of the bloodiest and longest sieges of the war took place. The siege of Saragossa, directed by Marshal Lannes, lasted nine months from June 1808 to February 1809 and claimed the lives of 54,000 Spanish

soldiers and civilians and 3,000 French troops.⁴⁷ The heroism displayed by the defenders of that ancient city became a symbol of resistance to the Spanish populace and impressed upon the French the character of the people they were fighting. A French officer made this remark after the battle, “the great character displayed in these circumstances by the inhabitants of Saragossa is one of the finest spectacles ever found in the annals of a nation since the sieges of Saguntum and Numantia.”⁴⁸ Suchet, who witnessed the aftermath, knew full well the stubbornness of the Aragonese people whom he was to govern. However, after the fall of Saragossa, the Aragonese resistance all but collapsed. When General Suchet took over the reins of III Corps and set about trying to pacify and govern the district, he quickly realized that hostile bands, mainly remnants of the Spanish Army under General Blake and partisans from neighboring Navarre, were everywhere operating in Aragon.⁴⁹ He knew that he did not have nearly enough troops to cover the whole region and if he concentrated his forces in one direction he would necessarily reduce his forces in another area and be subject to attack in his weaker areas. Suchet, knowing that he was not going to be reinforced anytime soon resolved to “multiply them [his soldiers] by the rapidity of their movements.”⁵⁰ The general went on the offensive to cleanse the province of the guerrilla infestation. Instead of marching on the insurgents with large, unwieldy formations, he used smaller detachments, usually of battalion size, to go after them. One of his first concerns was for his lines of communications with Paris. The fortress of Jaca overlooked the shortest line of communication back to France. This small garrison had been taken over by a guerrilla band. Suchet quickly sent one of his mobile columns to Jaca to take back that vital fort. His next concern was the larger remnants of the Second Spanish Army under General Joachim Blake. In quick

succession, his corps defeated Blake's forces at the battles of Maria and Belchite.⁵¹ He then sent one of his subordinate commanders, General Habert, to clear a large guerrilla band threatening the towns of Barbastro and Huesca. Habert quickly pursued this band and drove them into the mountains.⁵² The upper Ebro River valley effectively cleared of insurgents, Suchet turned his corps on the guerrilla bands operating around the lower Ebro. Once again using the same method, he sent his "flying battalions" south and cleared the lower Ebro. Suchet records how tactically proficient his subordinate commanders had become by the time they engaged forces in the lower Ebro. General Habert sent one of his regiments under Colonel Robert to drive out a guerrilla band holding up in a village, under the command of a guerrilla leader named Renovales:

Colonel Robert [regimental commander under General Habert] felt it necessary to resort to a stratagem, in order to induce [Renovales] to quit his unassailable position. After a few weak attempts, [Colonel Robert] feigned a retreat, and drew the insurgents after him, when rapidly turning around, he overtook them and put the greater part to route.⁵³

Many small engagements in Aragon followed and played a more minor role in the defeat of the partisans, but this successful campaign and those engagements afterward had a great effect on the French as well as the local populace. These small, but important battles raised the morale of the French soldiers. They also aided in growing good future commanders as they learned to act independently while leading autonomous detachments. This campaign also impressed the local people and guerrillas as to the superiority of the French soldiers.⁵⁴

In just a few short weeks, General Suchet had extended his control of the province from the border with Navarre to the borders of Valencia and Catalonia.⁵⁵ He was able to

do this by aggressiveness and putting continual pressure on the insurgents to allow them no safe refuge.

One of the other keys to trying to defeat the insurgents was through intelligence gathering. The French attempted many tactics to try to root out the leaders who were fomenting rebellion. One technique used to attract collaborators was the offer of rewards to informants who turned over rebel instigators to authorities. In January 1810, King Joseph's viceroy, the Duke of Mahon, offered rewards for information leading to the arrest of any insurgent.⁵⁶ This approach did not seem to get the results that Madrid was after, as most of the populace was suspicious of Joseph's government.

Since it did not seem that monetary rewards were effective, the ruling French government directed another method. In the same month, the Duke of Mahon ordered the local provincial officials to produce lists of names of civilians who were absent from their homes over a designated amount of time or had vacated their premises.⁵⁷ The assumption was that those persons must surely be insurgents who were leaving their residences to join their guerrilla brothers on campaign. Those persons who were absent from their homes for an unauthorized amount of time were subject to execution.⁵⁸ Government officials who did not collaborate with these directives were subject to deportation.⁵⁹ Towns were directed to supply information on clergy members preaching anti-French propaganda and inciting riots.⁶⁰ These techniques also failed to produce the numbers of informants or to capture as many guerrillas as the French governors had hoped. The reason for this was that many of the Spanish citizens feared the retribution of the guerrilla bands as much as that of the French and therefore did not cooperate.

Military campaigns and intelligence gathering were not the only operations the French occupiers had to worry about. Once the French commanders had subdued the bulk of the guerrilla forces or forced them out of their provinces they had to deal with the day to day governing of the citizenry. Falling back on their previous experiences, the French high command expected that they could establish a government on the French model much like they had done in Holland, Naples, or Germany where there was a pre-existing structure. Unfortunately for the French, the insurrection destroyed the pre-existing government system in most of the provinces and they had to rebuild the governments completely.⁶¹

French military governors differed in the ways they presided over their districts and this very often depended on the scale of guerrilla activity in their region, the strength of the local economy, and the experience of the commander. Many military governors such as Marshals Suchet and MacDonald performed quite well in setting up a government. Others, such as Generals D'Agoult and Reille did not prove themselves well as administrators of their provinces.

In Navarre, the terrain and social aspects strongly supported the growth of guerrilla bands. However, after the initial French invasion, Navarre was one of the quietest provinces in Spain. One of the reasons for this was the province's strategic importance. The whole French invasion of the Peninsula depended on controlling Navarre, since the province was a jumping off point for the French who needed the passes through the Pyrenees to resupply and reinforce their armies in Portugal and Spain. The French poured troops into the province to prevent a resistance from acquiring a foothold in the district.⁶² The second aspect that delayed a robust insurrection in Navarre

was the Spanish victories over General Dupont at Bailén. This along with other reversals forced the French to withdraw north of the Ebro River. During the summer and fall of 1808, when most of Spain was liberated, Navarre became a staging base for a large invasion army for the reconquest of the Peninsula. By the end of 1808, the French had over 100,000 troops in the province, which made resistance nearly impossible.⁶³ After the crushing defeat of the Spanish Army in 1809 and as Napoleon's troops busied themselves in Portugal, the pool of French occupation soldiers dwindled in Navarre and guerrilla activity grew again.

One of the features that was important for the growth and maintenance of guerrilla bands in the province and made this area hard to control was the guerrilla leadership that operated in the region. Many of the famous guerrilla leaders of the war hailed from that territory, men such as Espoz y Mina and his brother Javier.⁶⁴ These men were able to raise and resurrect partisan bands time and again and made it especially frustrating for the French commanders in Navarre who could never quite vanquish them as much as they tried. This fact helps to explain the techniques they used to govern the province.

In the province of Navarre, the military governors implemented relatively harsh methods to coerce and control the population. The military governor in early 1809, General Comte Charles D'Agoult, directed all Navarrese citizens to register and take an oath of allegiance to King Joseph. He suspended all holidays and prohibited gatherings of large numbers of people. Travel required a passport and persons managing hotels or public houses were to provide names, birthplaces, residence, length of stay, and purpose of all of their customers.⁶⁵

General D'Agoult's successor, General Dufour, added several decrees to D'Agoult's proclamations in the summer of 1809. One of these was that for any partisan who was captured and had not been previously reported, a penalty of 4,000 reales would be levied against his township.⁶⁶ Another directive announced that families who were found to have sons serving with the guerrillas would have to provide a male member of the household for service with the Imperial Army.⁶⁷

In July 1810, Comte Reille took over the reins of power in Navarre. His response to the insurgency in the region was quite severe. The general routinely hung insurgents along the roads and highways as a way of using terror to fight terror.⁶⁸ He also created a police force headed by a man named Jean Mendiry. Mendiry had authority over "crimes of the state." These "crimes" could be as simple as disaffection or disapproval of the military government. The police commander placed informants all over the countryside, in churches, meeting places, and taverns.⁶⁹

For the French, these harsh implementations did have an effect on operations in Navarre. These measures brought the French, in the spring of 1810, close to pacifying the province. Villagers who had earlier fled to the guerrillas returned to their homes. Officials, begrudgingly, gave open support to the government. Towns accepted the protection of French occupiers and began to inform on guerrillas, and to solicit and obtain arms with which to defend themselves.⁷⁰ However, this brief period of hope for the French occupation troops quickly slipped away as the Imperial focus turned to trying to destroy the Duke of Wellington's Anglo-Portuguese army in Portugal. This pulled resources away from occupation forces and poured them into the campaign being waged

against the British by Marshal Massena and his Army of Portugal and once again the guerrillas survived to fight another day.

In Aragon, circumstances were quite different. The Aragonese were exhausted after such a long struggle with the French at Saragossa and the local guerrilla bands had not become firmly entrenched before Suchet was able to engage and scatter them. After General Suchet's lightning military campaign in Aragon, he set about governing the province. This was not an easy task. He did not have autonomous control over his district. He continued to be plagued by the inefficient command arrangement. King Joseph was essentially ineffective, but his directives were not to be completely ignored and he still had to answer the orders of the Emperor even if they contradicted those from Madrid. The general ended up taking liberties with both and conducting affairs as he best saw them.⁷¹ His province was still threatened by hostile guerrilla bands who were contending for resources and the loyalty of the people.⁷² He set out to administer his territory with as much civility as he could under the circumstances.

First on the general's agenda was to reassure the people of his intentions to rule benevolently. His first proclamation acclaimed:

My troops will not impede your harvests nor overcrowd your cities, they will live in the countryside ready to protect you. . . . The maintenance of the army will be distributed equally. . . . A deputy from the chief place of each area will form a committee to assure just reparation charges. . . . Religion and clergy will be respected.⁷³

General Suchet endeavored to have as much of the government, as possible, run by the local Spanish officials. He surrounded himself with the talented men who had stayed on after the fall of Saragossa. The Bishop of Saragossa, Mariano Dominguez [once the supply officer for General Palafox in the defense of Saragossa], and Villa y

Torre, head of the justice department, were a few of the men kept in positions of authority.⁷⁴ He committed most of the authority to men such as these and encouraged their work. Suchet established a police force made up of Aragonese and reestablished a fair justice system. The use of the local citizens to have some rule over themselves helped Suchet in two ways. First, the people felt that at least in some small measure they had a hand in their own future and this calmed the citizenry and made them less likely to join the partisans. Secondly, because of this base of support, he had fewer problems when he campaigned outside of Aragon. His lines of support were much stronger and he was able to procure supplies easier as many of his supplies were “conveyed to his troops by Spanish conductors.”⁷⁵ The French governor worked with the Aragonese government to present an annual budget and helped revive the local economy. Spanish officials received their pay, and taxes were collected in an equitable way.

General Suchet was keenly aware of the cultural differences between the Aragonese and his French soldiers. He attempted to soften those differences by making overtures to the citizens of Aragon. In one instance, after the battle for Roncal, the general left a detachment to secure the area. In the city of Roncol was the venerated church of San-Jaun de la Pena. This church was the burial site of the ancient kings of Aragon. Suchet, knowing the soldiers’ propensities for plunder, ordered the commander of the detachment to ensure that neither the church nor the tombs were defiled. He also gave the locals money to aid in the preservation of the tombs.⁷⁶

Suchet deserves much acclaim for the forward thinking progress he made in Aragon, but this does not mean that problems did not exist. No matter how hard Suchet tried to make his rule appear legitimate, he and his army were still foreigners occupying

Aragonese lands and because of this the local citizens still recognized them as the enemy and were not always cooperative. His ability to keep contributions to an equitable level only lasted so long. Up until the early part of 1810, the French government subsidized French soldiers' pay and contributions made by the locals defrayed some of the costs for the upkeep of the army. By 1810, the war in the Peninsula, the recent war with Austria, and the maintenance of an occupation army in Germany was taxing the French government and Napoleon decided that the Spanish people would have to cover a greater share of the burden for French occupation troops safeguarding their provinces.⁷⁷ The French Ministry of War sent the following letter to the provincial governors in Spain:

The Emperor desires me to make known to you his intention that you employ the revenues of the country, and even impose extraordinary contributions, if necessary, with a view to provide for the pay and subsistence of your corps d'armee, it being no longer in the power of France to defray these expenses. France is impoverished by the removal of the enormous sums of money which the public treasury is constantly sending to Spain; The country which you occupy, and which is possessed of abundant resources, must henceforth supply the wants of your troops.⁷⁸

With this decree, Suchet was forced to press the local government for more contributions. The additional burden, from then on was always a point of contention and cause for unrest in the region.

Suchet, many times, was pulled away from Aragon to conduct expeditions in neighboring Navarre, Catalonia, and Valencia to reinforce French occupying forces in those provinces. This pulled resources away from his territory that could have been used to continue counter-guerrilla campaigns and it also allowed the guerrillas a respite to recruit and refit. In all, Suchet performed brilliantly as a military commander and provincial governor and his province remained more passive longer than any other, but he could not do it alone.⁷⁹ The French would need many more men like him if they were

going to have a chance of pacifying the Peninsula. Napoleon said it himself, “had he had two such Marshals in Spain as Suchet, he not only would have conquered the Peninsula, but likewise retained possession of it.”⁸⁰ However, Suchet was but one man in the midst of an inflamed nation and he too would succumb to the “Spanish ulcer.”

The French tactics used in the early part of the Peninsular War had mixed results in defeating the guerrillas but more importantly, had implications for the future of the war. The French commanders caught on to the need to secure their supply lines, rear areas and communications. For the most part, the system of garrisons and mobile columns worked, but this structure consumed an enormous amount of combat power that could have been used to defeat the more pressing problem, the British conventional forces. Most of the innovations such as special mountain infantry and artillery, devised to counter the guerrilla tactics, worked well, but there were never enough troops. Unfortunately for the French, the drain on resources and maintaining troops on two fronts, Germany and Spain, did not allow for more of these types of soldiers and equipment. Except in a few cases such as Aragon, most of the French governing techniques did not work. The monetary burden placed on the local population to shoulder the maintenance of imperial troops made it very difficult for most of the commanders to gain the support of the people for their cause. In many cases, the constant harassment by the ever present guerrilla bands, frustrated the French governors and they gave in to fighting the guerrillas with their own brand of terror. This behavior did not convince the citizenry that the French were in Spain to liberate them and hardened many of them to continue the fight.

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²Rory Muir, *Tactics and Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon* (New Haven, 1998), 7.

³*Ibid*, 148.

⁴*Ibid*, 69.

⁵*Ibid*, 33.

⁶Louis-Gabriel Suchet, *Memoirs of the War in Spain from 1808-1814*. 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1829), 56.

⁷John L. Tone, *The Fatal Knot* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 5.

⁸Charles Barboroux, *The Adventures of a French Sergeant During His Campaigns in Italy, Spain, Germany, and Russia from 1805-1823* (London: Henry Colburn, 1898), 82.

⁹Tone, *The Fatal Knot*, 71.

¹⁰Don W. Alexander, *Rod of Iron: French Counterinsurgency Policy in Aragon During the Peninsula War* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1985), 7.

¹¹Suchet, *Memoirs of the War in Spain*, 52.

¹²John Crow, *Spain: The Root and the Flower: A History of the Civilization of Spain and of the Spanish People* (Harper & Row, 1963), 46.

¹³*Ibid*, 80.

¹⁴*Ibid*, 82.

¹⁵*Ibid*, 165.

¹⁶*Ibid*, 223.

¹⁷*Ibid*, 209.

¹⁸Barboroux, *The Adventures of a French Sergeant During His Campaigns in Italy, Spain, Germany, and Russia from 1805-1823*, 80.

¹⁹Crow, *Spain: The Root and the Flower*, 229.

²⁰Suchet, *Memoirs of the War in Spain*, 52.

- ²¹Ibid, 51.
- ²²Heinrich von Brandt, *In the Legions of Napoleon* (London: Greenhill Books, 1999), 147.
- ²³Charles Esdaile, *The Peninsular War: A New History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan Publishing, 2003), 45.
- ²⁴von Brandt, *In the Legions of Napoleon*, 123.
- ²⁵Tone, *The Fatal Knot*, 77.
- ²⁶John C. Mampel, *The Adventures of a Young Rifleman in the French and English Armies from 1806-1816*. (London: Henry Colburn, 1826), 104.
- ²⁷Suchet, *Memoirs of the War in Spain*, 63.
- ²⁸John R. Elting, *Swords Around a Throne: Napoleon's Grand Armee* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 548.
- ²⁹Raymond Horricks, *Marshal Ney: The Romance and the Real* (UK: Midas Books, 1982), 90.
- ³⁰Suchet, *Memoirs of the War in Spain*, 190.
- ³¹Tone, *The Fatal Knot*, 119.
- ³²Ibid, 121.
- ³³Anthony Joes, *Guerrilla Conflict Before the Cold War* (Westport: Praeger, 1996), 33.
- ³⁴Tone, *The Fatal Knot*, 181.
- ³⁵Elting, *Swords Around a Throne*, 548.
- ³⁶Milton Finley, "The Career of Count Jean Reynier, 1792-1814," (Florida State University, 1972), 220.
- ³⁷von Brandt, *In the Legions of Napoleon*, 69.
- ³⁸Elting, *Swords Around a Throne*, 415.
- ³⁹John L. Morgan, Jr., "The Army of Catalonia. Organization, Operations, and Logistics, 1808-1814" (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services, 1995), 2 vols., I, 31.
- ⁴⁰Tone, *The Fatal Knot*, 77.

- ⁴¹Elting, *Swords Around a Throne*, 222.
- ⁴²Ibid, 365.
- ⁴³Ibid, 262.
- ⁴⁴Ibid, 253.
- ⁴⁵Ibid, 237.
- ⁴⁶Ibid, 238.
- ⁴⁷Raymond Rudorff, *War To The Death* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1974), 266.
- ⁴⁸Ibid, 1.
- ⁴⁹Suchet, *Memoirs of the War in Spain*, 44.
- ⁵⁰Ibid, 59.
- ⁵¹David G. Chandler, *Napoleon's Marshals* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 492.
- ⁵²Suchet, *Memoirs of the War in Spain*, 59.
- ⁵³Ibid, 64.
- ⁵⁴Ibid, 75.
- ⁵⁵Chandler, *Napoleon's Marshals*, 492.
- ⁵⁶Tone, *The Fatal Knot*, 80.
- ⁵⁷Ibid, 80.
- ⁵⁸Ibid, 86.
- ⁵⁹Ibid, 86.
- ⁶⁰Ibid, 80.
- ⁶¹Morgan, "The Army of Catalonia. Organization, Operations, and Logistics, 1808-1814," 3.
- ⁶²Tone, *The Fatal Knot*, 62.
- ⁶³Ibid, 63.

⁶⁴Ibid, 72.

⁶⁵Ibid, 86.

⁶⁶Ibid, 85.

⁶⁷Ibid, 86.

⁶⁸Ibid, 110.

⁶⁹Ibid, 110.

⁷⁰Ibid, 88.

⁷¹Chandler, *Napoleon's Marshals*, 493.

⁷²Ibid, 493.

⁷³Ibid, 492.

⁷⁴Suchet, *Memoirs of the War in Spain*, 311.

⁷⁵Ibid, 189.

⁷⁶Ibid, 64.

⁷⁷Ibid, 294.

⁷⁸Ibid, 295.

⁷⁹Chandler, *Napoleon's Marshals*, 494.

⁸⁰Suchet, *Memoirs of the War in Spain*, xlix.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Not a Frenchman then doubted that such rapid victories must have decided the fate of the Spaniards. We believed, and Europe believed it too, that we had only to march to Madrid to complete the subjection of Spain and to organize the country in the French manner, that is to say, to increase our means of conquest by all the resources of our vanquished enemies. The wars we had hitherto carried on had accustomed us to see in a nation only its military forces and to count for nothing the spirit which animates its citizens.¹

Swiss soldier serving in Napoleon's army, 1808

Napoleon gave little thought to the potential challenges of occupying the Peninsula in 1808. He believed that his soldiers would march through the Peninsula and it would be little more than a "military promenade."² The results and effects of some of his past decisive military victories, extending from Austerlitz to Friedland, deceived Napoleon into believing that the war would be just another in a series of seemingly endless triumphs. The Emperor envisioned that the destruction of the Spanish Army and the occupation of the major Spanish cities would put a close to the Peninsular chapter in his quest for European domination. Never did he imagine that that conflict would continue for so long and end in such an agonizingly different fashion.

Napoleon's miscalculation resulted in a protracted struggle of occupation that lasted nearly six years and ultimately consumed approximately 250,000 of the Empire's troops, almost four times larger than the force Napoleon originally had projected for the war³ Put into perspective, many consider France's wintry defeat in Russia as supreme in the loss of life for a Napoleonic campaign. However, estimates place the losses from the Russian Campaign at 210,000, slightly less than those lost to the Allied armies and a

largely untrained, poorly led band of insurgents in the Peninsula.⁴ The sapping of the Empire's resources and energy in countering the Spanish resistance had far-reaching implications and proved to be the beginning of his undoing.

Many of Napoleon's commanders had combat experience in the Vendee and Neapolitan insurrections and understood the potential effects that such warfare could produce against conventional forces. Napoleon dismissed this type of warfare, which was rooted in the people and drove a wedge between conventional military victory and the accomplishment of his strategic aims. Military victory by itself cannot bring about political triumph.⁵ The French grand strategic plan required an understanding as to what winning popular support of the Spanish people actually involved. In this regard, Napoleon demonstrated almost complete ignorance. The realities of his tragic oversight were not fully understood until long after conventional combat operations had halted and various elements of the Spanish population had seized the initiative.

However, simply "winning the hearts and minds" of the people would still not have been enough to carry the day in the Peninsula. The Allied forces under Lieutenant General John Moore and Sir Arthur Wellesley forced the French into a dilemma. They could devote their full attention neither to the British, Portuguese and Spanish regulars nor to the Spanish guerrillas, and so they did not deal adequately with either.⁶ The French Army and its leaders were not prepared for this kind of warfare. The continuous campaigning and the constant stress on resources were beginning to fray the seams of Napoleon's armies. In Spain, the fabric was starting to show signs of unraveling.

It is important to understand that the employment of an army, consisting primarily of conscripts, during the initial invasion had a significant impact on the rest of the war. It

was with these conscript units that Junot and Dupont engaged the Spanish and Allied armies. Many of these young conscripts could not even fire their weapons properly. Their inexperience put them on par with the poorly led, poorly trained Spanish levees and contributed to the initial reversals suffered by the French. These early defeats not only gave heart to the Spanish Army, they also impassioned the Spanish leaders to continue the fight even after the destruction of their army. There were also implications outside of the Iberian Peninsula, proof that the French were vulnerable and could be defeated. This impetus gave men, like the Tyrolean Andreas Hofer, the courage to start insurrection and unrest in their respective nations. The large influx of foreign troops into the Imperial armies was also a factor in Napoleon's eventual defeat. The language barrier, as well as the questionable quality of the soldiers, added to the French commanders' problems. Commanders spent an inordinate amount of time and energy attempting to keep these soldiers from deserting or rounding them up when they did desert.

Troop desertions in Spain were a constant source of frustration for the French throughout the war. A major contributor to this problem was lack of provisions and pay. French forces quickly exhausted the local food supplies of the provinces they occupied and the supply system was unable to sustain them. The long lines of supply and the constant attacks on convoys reduced the food supplies. Compounding this problem, the Intendance staff that was sent early in the war were of lower grades, hastily chosen, and often unqualified.⁷ During many periods, Imperial soldiers literally starved, which led to more destructive pillaging and increased the irritation between the troops and the local populace. In many ways, the weak logistical system did more to destroy the French Army's chances of success than the guerrillas.

Perhaps, an even worse problem, the French lacked an effective counterinsurgency command; indeed they lacked an effective command relationship of any kind. Napoleon's inability, due to competing demands, or his unwillingness to place more personal energy into the war did considerable damage to the war effort. The placement of his brother in nominal command, the creation of a special "Spanish affairs" bureau within the Ministry of War, and the continuance of trying to fight the war from Paris added to the confusion for his provincial commanders. The Emperor's insistence on rotating commanders from one province to another, even from one theater to another, made it difficult for them to be effective. It seemed that, as soon as a commander was familiar with the terrain and population in an area, he would be moved to another and would have to adjust to a new environment. This wasted time and energy and, ultimately, led to demoralization in the officer corps. Napoleon's blindness to the reality of the situation also demoralized his subordinates. Many of his commanders endeavored to portray the truth of the war to Napoleon through their correspondence. In many cases, Napoleon chastised his commanders for not doing enough to remedy their own situation, or he would characterize them as exaggerators or complainers. This led many generals to gloss over their reports in order to avoid rebuke or embarrassment and this contributed even more to Napoleon's tainted view of the real state of affairs. This dilemma surfaced often when commanders requested more reinforcements. The demand for troops in Germany, Italy, and Spain sapped manpower from France and the government could only produce as many soldiers as the economy could support. However, when asked for more soldiers to reinforce his corps in Spain, Napoleon's usual response was that his commanders in Spain had enough soldiers to conduct their operations. He never fully

appreciated the unique problems his Peninsular commanders endured, which affected troop strengths and morale. Baron de Marbot provided an example of this cyclical problem when he described the state of affairs borne by Marshal Soult:

Under an illusion which turned out disastrous, Napoleon never understood the enormous difference which the fact of Spain and Portugal being in insurrection produced between the nominal state of the French troops in the Peninsula and the actual number of combatants which could be arrayed against the enemy. Thus the strength of the II Corps under Soult animated to 47,000; but, after deducting the garrisons at Santander, Corunna, and Ferol, the 8,000 men employed to maintain the communications and 12,000 sick, the number of those at present under arms did not exceed 25,000, and these were tired out with fighting all through the winter in a mountainous country; were short of shoes, often of provisions; and had only broken down horses to drag the artillery over bad roads. It was with means so feeble as these that the Emperor ordered Marshal Soult to enter Portugal.⁸

Napoleon's legions attempted many methods to defeat the insurgents while governing the populace. These ranged from recruiting locals to fight the guerrillas to introducing enlightened governance. Some were more successful than others. Suchet gives us a good example of how the French might have been able to both defeat the guerrilla threat and win the support of the people. However, Marshal Suchet's operations from 1808-1810 were an anomaly in the Peninsula. With the exception of his initial battles against General Blake's Second Spanish Army, he never battled large standing armies while defending against the partisans. Where the French commanders failed, in Spain, was that they made little effort to secure public support. Naturally, in order to secure the support of the Spanish people the French would have had to understand them and the underlying social intricacies that made them unique. The northern provinces of Aragon and Navarre, although unique in some aspects, are a microcosm of Spain that provide some insight into some of the causes for guerrilla resistance. The British blockade of Spain after 1796, stymied emigration to America to seek employment or

opportunity, and the economic tightening caused by the blockade made work in Madrid and the larger cities more difficult to find. What the French governors found in Navarre and Aragon in 1808, was a densely populated, rugged country full of young men with no prospects. Therefore, the combination of economics and demographics in Northern Spain provided a base for recruiting of guerrillas.⁹

The historical lack of influence of Spanish central authority over its citizenry proved to be an interesting challenge to the French as they attempted to superimpose their form of government. Napoleon and his marshals had been accustomed to the occupation of northern European countries, where they found the people conditioned by militarism and centralization. For the most part, the Germans and Austrians were unable or unwilling to act without the permission of their superiors.”¹⁰ The Spanish were not at all like the northern Europeans and this difference made it all the more difficult for the French as they wrestled with occupying an independent and spirited Spanish citizenry.

This independent spirit made its way into the relationship of provinces with the central government of Spain. Many Spanish provinces had never been accountable to the royal edicts coming out of Madrid. Many of the provinces displayed an open contempt for the policies distributed by the national government. This environment of regional independence and political tension, led many of the Spaniards to “disdain anything done for them by a foreigner.”¹¹ This was especially true in Navarre, where the people had an allegiance to the local government and had been appeased by the national government. Madrid, in an effort to retain a degree of control, allowed Navarre some privileges not permitted in the rest of the country. One of these privileges was its separate customs border. In an attempt to encourage industrial development, the Bourbons had

created a single, national market that restricted the importation of finished manufactured goods and the exportation of raw materials. Navarre, however, controlled its own borders and was exempt from these restrictions.¹²

Napoleon's invasion dispersed Spanish soldiers all over the countryside. These soldiers no longer had an income and were left to roam the countryside trying to survive. The French imposed strict limits on movement and clamped down on many traditions which made opportunities to find alternative sources of income limited. As industry was at a standstill, many landowners were unable to pay their domestic servants or hire new ones.¹³

Because of these desperate environs, many young men, former soldiers [many soldiers ordered to form guerrilla bands by the Central Junta] and civilians joined the guerrilla bands out of economic necessity and this intensified the patriotic zeal in Northern Spain. A degree of understanding might have provided the French a base from which to work towards gaining some level of cooperation from the people or, if nothing else, neutrality. In the end, French failure to gain public support, along with widespread intimidation, compelled the Imperial Eagles to rely on military force to crush the insurrection, which contributed to an escalation of violence on both sides.

Certainly the Spanish insurrectos played an important part in defeating the French legions. However, their role should not overshadow the larger problem for Napoleon. Through each campaign, the armies of France were never able to complete the destruction of the Anglo-Portuguese Army. Perhaps, had Napoleon completed that task, he would have been successful in defeating the insurrection. Proof that this outcome was possible is apparent in early 1809 after Napoleon's second invasion. While the Allied

Army was licking its wounds from the trouncing brought on by Napoleon's juggernaut, the insurrection quieted down. By early 1810, the French seemed to be having success against the partisans in many parts of the country. Meanwhile, by the middle of 1809, the British had been able to reintroduce their army into the theatre and the French found themselves fighting two distinctly different types of wars, conventional and unconventional, against two conspicuously different types of enemies, the Spanish guerrilla and the British regular. The major contribution, made by the guerrillas, seems to be that by attacking convoys, reducing the food supplies, disrupting communications between Napoleon and his commanders, and inflicting large numbers of casualties, they were able to establish a space in which the British Army could insert itself. The partisans were able to prevent the French from concentrating effectively against that army, diverting and exhausting large numbers of forces needed in other parts of Europe, and lastly, keeping alive the vision of defeating Napoleon's seemingly invincible war machine.

In the final analysis, the French armies in the Peninsula wrestled with many internal problems. Amongst the many problems they faced, they struggled with large numbers of barely trained conscripts, a weak logistical system, and no unity of command. These problems, in and of themselves did not lose the war for the French, but they did make things much more arduous. Coupled with battling the harsh environment, the elusive Allied conventional armies and the constantly harassing guerrillas, Napoleon and his Imperial Eagles were finally bled dry by the Spanish leech that unceasingly sucked the lifeblood from them.

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²Lawrence Maulkin, "The First Spanish Civil War." *Military History Quarterly* II (1989): XVII, 20.

³Chandler, David, G, *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1966), 659.

⁴Owen Connelly, *Blundering to Glory: Napoleon's Military Campaigns* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1987), 112.

⁵Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, 660.

⁶Anthony Joes, *Guerrilla Conflict Before the Cold War* (Westport: Praeger, 1996), 104.

⁷John R. Elting, *Swords Around a Throne: Napoleon's Grand Armee* (London: The Free Press, 1988), 556.

⁸Marcellin Marbot, *The Memoirs of the Baron de Marbot* (London: Greenhill Books, 1988, 2 vols), II, 88.

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¹⁰Maulkin, "The First Spanish Civil War.", 20.

¹¹Charles Esdaile, *The Peninsular War: A New History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan Publishing, 2003), 253.

¹²*Ibid.*, 271.

¹³Don W. Alexander, *Rod of Iron: French Counterinsurgency Policy in Aragon During the Peninsula War* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1985), xviii.

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