

WELLINGTON AGAINST SOULT

The Second Invasion of Portugal
1809

DAVID BUTTERY

Wellington
Against Soult

Oh, Christ! It is a goodly sight to see
What Heaven hath done for this delicious land:
What fruits of fragrance blush on every tree!
What goodly prospects o'er the hills expand!
But man would mar them with an impious hand:
And when the Almighty lifts his fiercest scourge
'Gainst those who most transgress his high command,
With treble vengeance will his hot shafts urge
Gaul's locust host, and earth from fellest foemen purge.

George Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage**

* George Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, 3 vols (London, George Routledge and Sons, 1886), Vol. 1, p. 261. This quotation is verse XV from Byron's epic *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

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The Second Invasion of
Portugal, 1809

David Buttery



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Contents

<i>List of Plates</i>		vi
<i>Maps</i>		ix
<i>Chronology</i>		xv
<i>Preface</i>		xxii
Chapter 1	Under Threat	1
Chapter 2	The Duke of Damnation	22
Chapter 3	Invasion from the North	49
Chapter 4	The Fall of Porto	67
Chapter 5	A Change in Command	83
Chapter 6	The Marshal Who Would be King	99
Chapter 7	The Bridge at Amarante	112
Chapter 8	The Passage of the Douro	125
Chapter 9	Harried Through the Mountains	141
Chapter 10	Fortune Favours the Bold	160
<i>Notes</i>		181
<i>Bibliography</i>		207
<i>Index</i>		214

List of Plates

In 1809 the French army under Napoleon I appeared invincible but this was about to change. Engraving by Denis Auguste Marie Raffet (1804–60).

Napoleon's need to overcome Great Britain's naval supremacy lay behind the French invasion of Portugal. Engraving from the *Leisure Hour*, 1868.

Marshal Jean de Dieu Soult, one of Napoleon's most experienced generals, was ordered to invade Portugal for a second time in 1809.

General Sir John Craddock faced the unenviable task of defending Portugal while the British and Portuguese were uncertain about how to respond to the French threat. Painting by Sir T. Lawrence.

General Sir Arthur Wellesley (later Duke of Wellington) decided to march north and stop Soult's invasion in its tracks rather than adopt a passive defence.

French soldiers risked a grisly fate if they fell into the hands of Portuguese or Spanish guerrillas. Painting by Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes.

Outraged by guerrilla attacks, the French often responded in kind and summary executions and atrocities were common during the Peninsular War. Painting by Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes.

The British government debated whether to continue the war after General Moore's death at Corunna and the evacuation of his army from Spain. Engraving by Rouget.

Napoleon underestimated the strength of resistance he would encounter in the Peninsula as the Portuguese and Spaniards had been whipped up into a fury by the clergy. Engraving by Rouget.

A sentry guards a printing press shut down by the French authorities. Press restrictions were commonplace during the Napoleonic Wars and all sides published extensive propaganda. Engraving by Rouget.

Faced with tough terrain and challenging weather conditions in the Peninsula, the elaborately uniformed armies became increasingly ragged and encountered difficulties in procuring supplies. Engraving by Leopold Beyer, 1813–15.

Once they crossed the frontier, Soult's II Corps were attacked repeatedly by Portuguese guerrillas and militia as they marched south.

A nineteenth-century engraving of Porto (Oporto), Portugal's second city, printed in the *Illustrated London News*.

The bridge of boats over the Douro collapsed as the French assaulted Porto. Hundreds of Portuguese civilians were swept away and drowned. Engraving by Henri Félix Emmanuel Philippoteaux (1815–84).

Marshal Soult at the First Battle of Porto. Painting by Joseph Beaume (1796–1885).

An Allied landing supported by the Royal Navy was the kind of attack Soult predicted at Porto. The actual assault was quite different. *Landing troops in the Face of the Enemy* by M. Dubourg after J.A. Atkinson, c. 1820.

General Wellesley observes as his troops cross the River Douro.

General Baron Maximilien Foy was the first to learn that Allied troops were crossing the river. Engraving by Amédée Maulet (1810–35).

The 4th Light and 5th Line battalions counter-attack during desperate French attempts to push the Allies back into the river. Engraving by G. Browne.

The Bishop's Palace in Porto today. (*S. Hadaway*)

The Memorial to the Peninsular War in Porto. (*S. Hadaway*)

A detail from the Memorial to the Peninsular War in Porto showing Portuguese artillerymen dragging a gun. (*S. Hadaway*)

A plaque in Porto commemorating the lives lost on 29 March 1809 in the disaster on the river during the Portuguese retreat. (*S. Hadaway*)

A photograph of the Douro River which shows its width. (*S. Hadaway*)

The Bishop's Seminary where the Allies gained their foothold on the northern bank of the Douro. (*S. Hadaway*)

A view of the Douro with the Bishop's Seminary visible in the background under the bridge and the Serra Hill on the right. (*S. Hadamay*)

A view across the river with the modern bridge looking towards the Serra Hill where Wellesley placed his artillery to cover the attempted crossing. (*S. Hadamay*)

Constant skirmishing took place between French light infantry and Portuguese peasants and militia as Soult retreated through the hills and mountains.

Despite terrible losses, the British infantry stubbornly resisted French attacks at Albuera in 1811, causing Soult to comment, 'We had won the day but they did not know it and would not run away!'

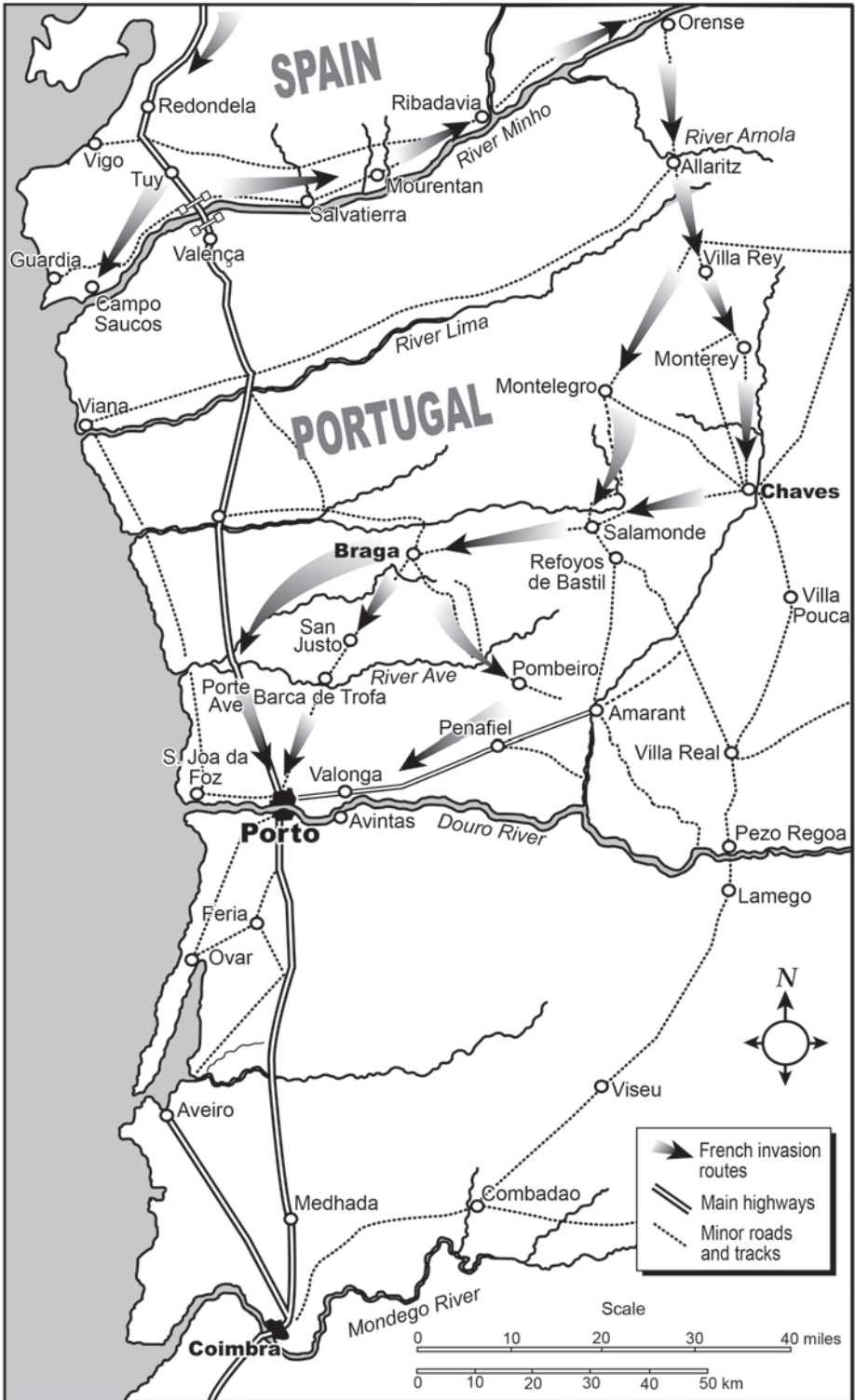
Following Napoleon's final defeat, Soult ingratiated himself with succeeding governments and became a pillar of French society. From a painting by Pierre-Louis de Laval, engraved by T. Johnson.

Maps

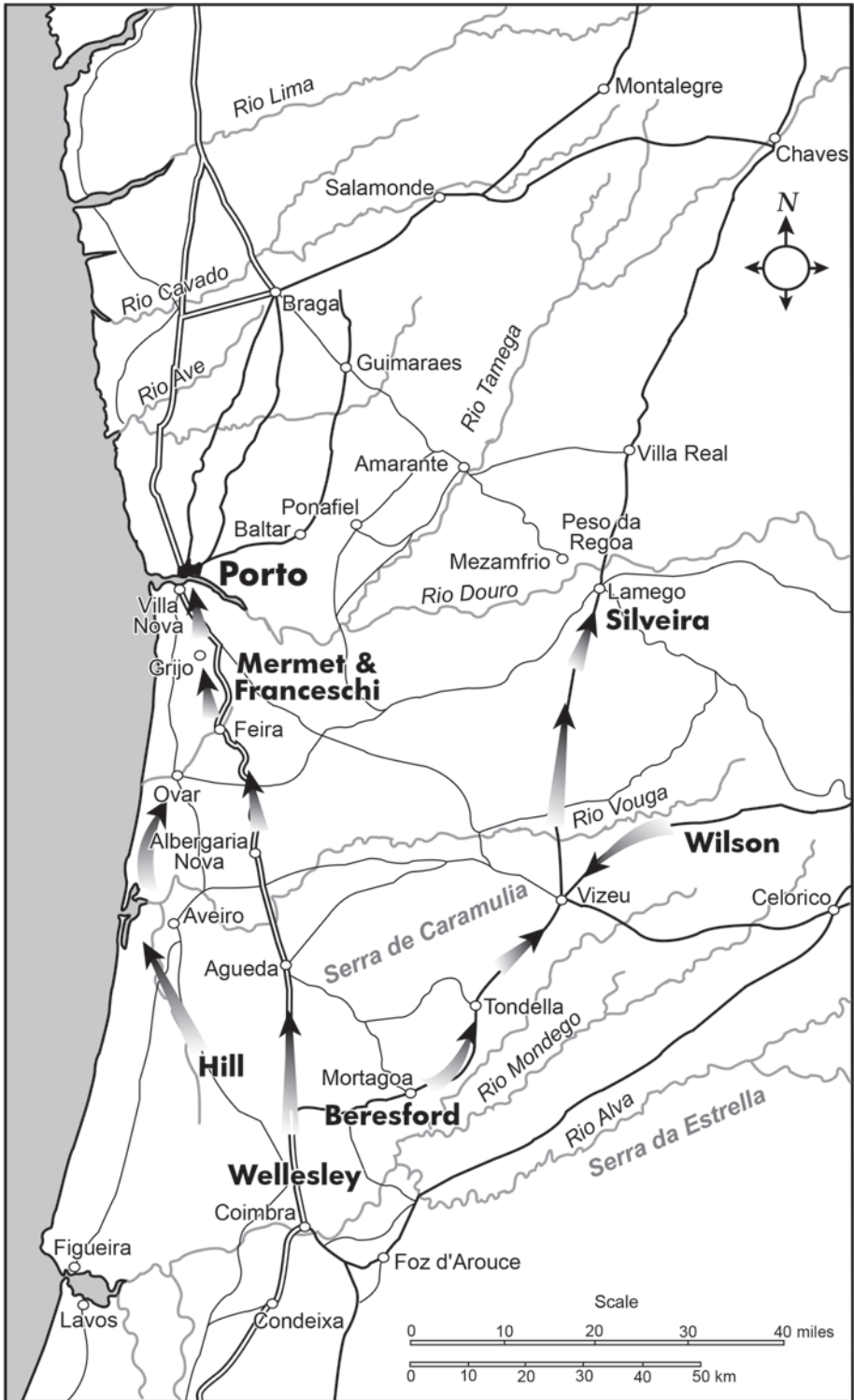
Portugal, 1809	x
Second Invasion of Portugal, February–March 1809	xi
The Allied March North	xii
The Passage of the Douro, 12 May 1809	xiii
Soult's Retreat	xiv



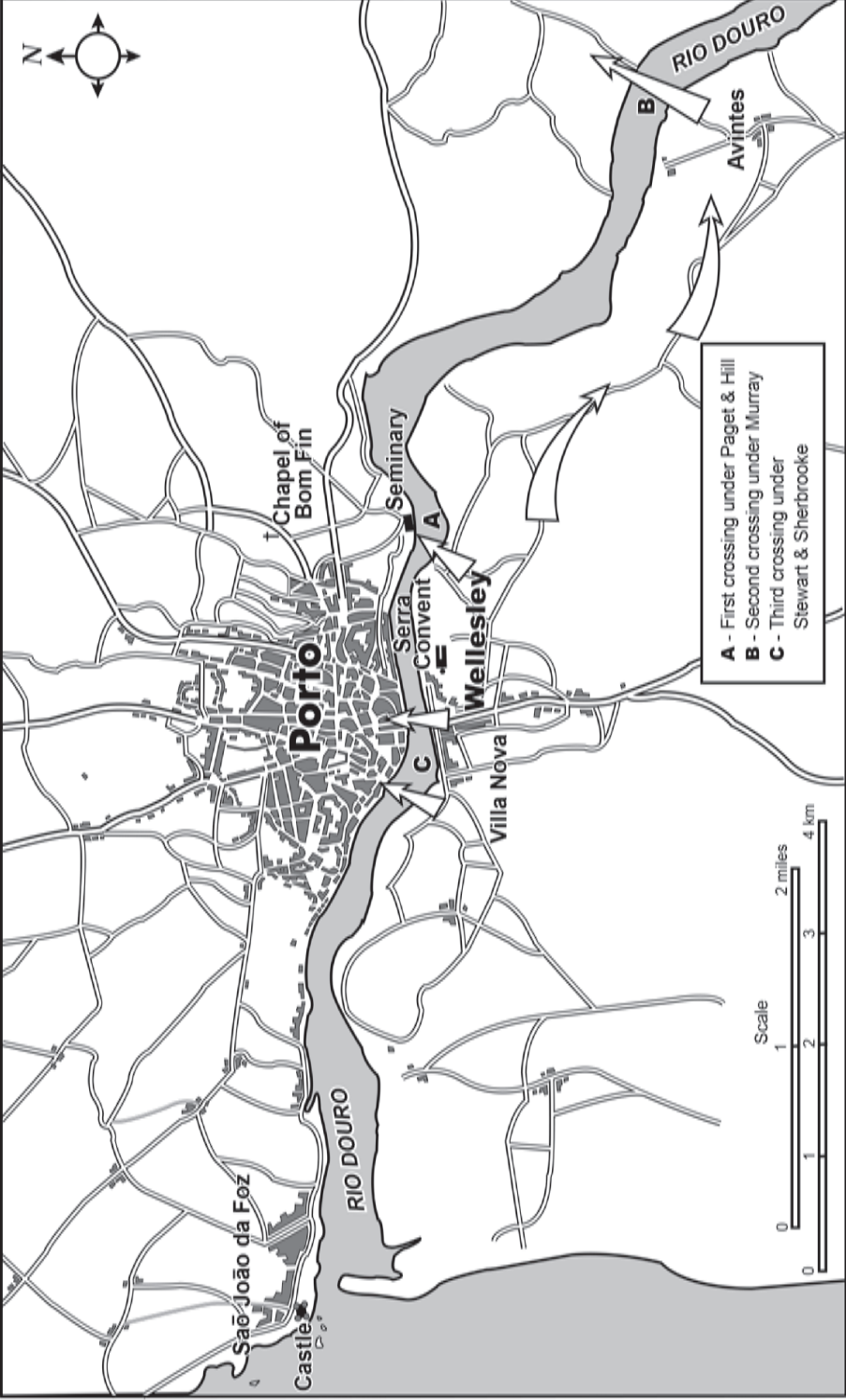
Portugal, 1809.



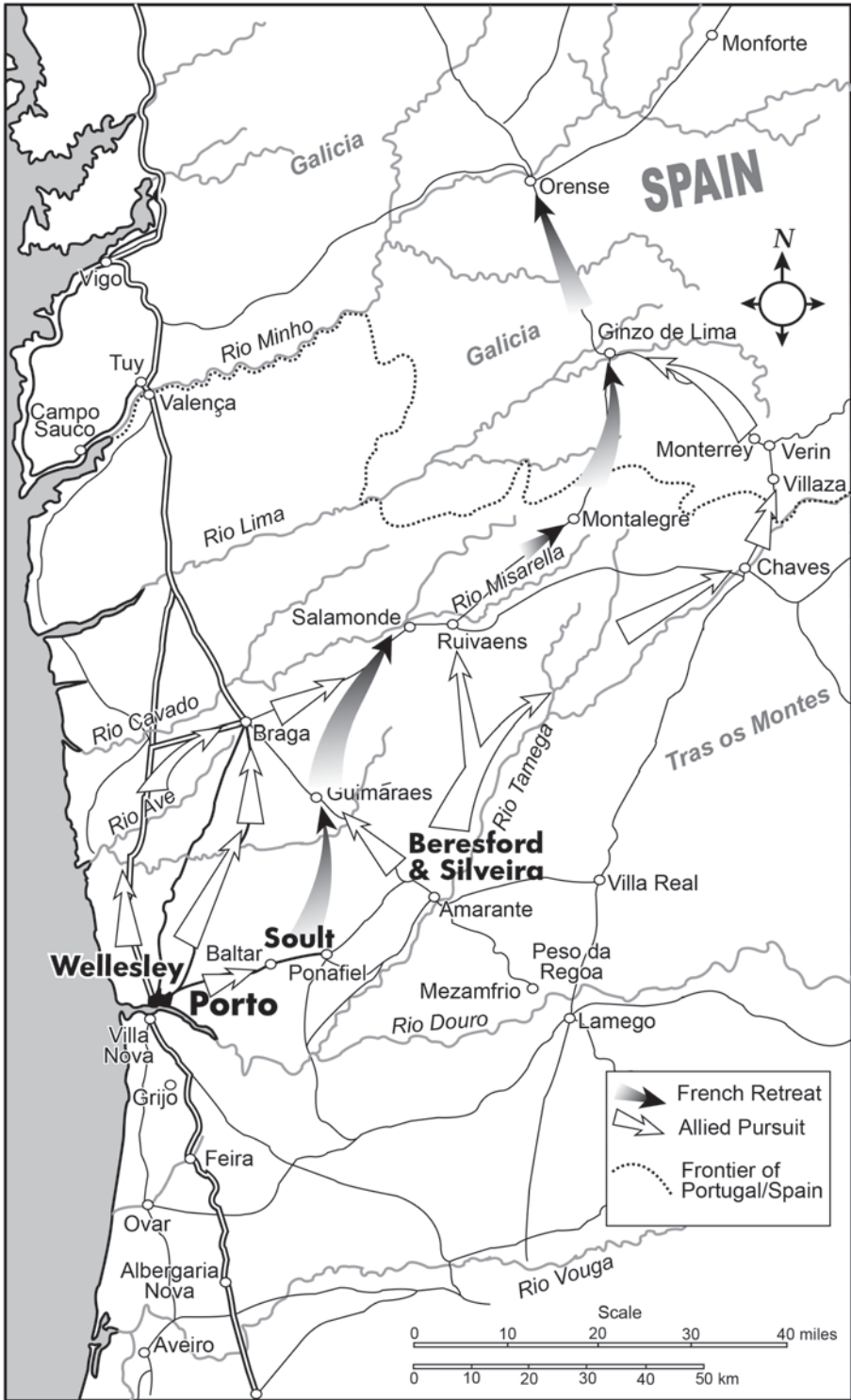
Second Invasion of Portugal, February–March 1809.



The Allied March North.



The Passage of the Douro, 12 May 1809.



Soult's Retreat.

Chronology

1769	29 March	Birth of Jean de Dieu Soult (at St-Amans-Labastide, Tarn)
	1 May	Birth of Arthur Wesley (later Wellesley)
	15 August	Birth of Napoleon Buonaparte (surname spelling later changed)
1781		Death of Lord Mornington
		Wesley enters Eton
1785	16 April	Soult enlists in <i>Régiment Royal Infanterie</i>
1787	7 March	Wesley joins the army as an ensign
	13 June	Soult promoted corporal
	25 December	Wesley promoted lieutenant
1790	30 June	Wesley becomes MP for Country Trim, Ireland
1791	31 March	Soult promoted <i>corporal fourrier</i> (Quartermaster)
	30 June	Wesley promoted captain
	1 July	Soult promoted sergeant
1792	17 January	Soult elected drill instructor
	20 April	France declares war on Austria and Sardinia
	21 September	Establishment of the National Convention Government
	22 September	French monarchy abolished
1793	21 January	Louis XVI executed
	31 May	Reign of Terror begins
	7 September	Siege of Toulon begins
	30 September	Wesley promoted lieutenant colonel
	16 October	Execution of Marie-Antoinette
	19 November	Soult promoted to captain on General Taponier's staff
	18 December	Toulon falls
1794	4 March	Bonaparte takes command of the artillery in the Army of Italy
	25 June	Jourdan defeats the Austrians at Fleurus (Soult present)
	June	Soult commands a brigade in <i>l'Armée de Sambre et Meuse</i>
	27 July	<i>Coups d'état</i> of 9 Thermidor – fall of Robespierre
	21 September	Battle of Dego
1795	5 April	Peace of Bâle between France and Prussia
	4–5 October	<i>Coups d'état</i> of 13 Vendémiaire (whiff of grapeshot)
	1 November	The Directory replaces the Convention government
1796	2 March	Bonaparte appointed commander of the Army of Italy
	26 April	Soult marries Louise Berg at Solingen
	3 May	Wesley promoted full colonel

1797	14 January	Battle of Rivoli
	2 February	Surrender of Mantua
	4 September	<i>Coups d'état</i> of 18 Fructidor
	17 October	Treaty of Campo-Formio between France and Austria
1798	21–5 March	Soult serves at Stockach
	21 April	Soult promoted <i>général de division</i>
	19 May	Bonaparte sails for Egypt
	29 December	Soult fights at Ostend in Championnet's division
1799	25 March	Second Coalition against France
	4 May	Austrians defeat Jourdan at Stockach
		Seringapatam falls
		Wellesley appointed Governor of Mysore
	June–September	Soult serves under Massena
	4 June	First Battle of Zürich
	17–19 June	Battle of the Trebbia
	18 June	<i>Coups d'état</i> of 30 Prairial
	15 August	Battle of Novi
	25 September–	Second Battle of Zürich
	10 October	
	9 October	Bonaparte returns to France
9 November	<i>Coups d'état</i> of 18 Brumaire	
1800	15 May	Bonaparte crosses Great St Bernard Pass into Italy
	6 April–13 May	Soult fights near Genoa – wounded and taken prisoner
	4 June	Massena capitulates at Genoa
	14 June	Battle of Marengo
1801	9 February	Peace of Lunéville between France and Austria
	13 February	Soult given a command under Murat in Italy
	14 March	Prime Minister William Pitt resigns
		Viscount Henry Addington becomes Prime Minister
	23 March	Tsar Paul I dies – succeeded by Tsar Alexander I
1802	25 March	Peace of Amiens between France and Great Britain
	29 April	Wellesley promoted major general
	June	Soult's Italian command (under Murat) ends
1804	16 May	Great Britain declares war on France
	6 August	Second Mahratta War
	12 August	Ahmednuggur falls
	28 August	Soult appointed to command St-Omer camp near Boulogne
	23 September	Battle of Assaye
	29 November	Battle of Argaum
	15 December	Gawilghur capitulates
1804	7 April	Execution of the Duc d'Enghien
	10 May	William Pitt becomes Prime Minister
	18 May	Bonaparte crowned Napoleon I Emperor of France
	19 May	Eighteen generals created Marshals of Empire

		Soult created <i>Maréchal de l'Empire</i> (eighth in seniority) and Colonel General of the Imperial Guard
	1 September	Wellesley awarded Order of the Bath
	2 December	Napoleon's Coronation at Notre-Dame
1805	10 March	Wellesley leaves India
	March	Soult given command of IV Corps in Austria, Prussia and then Poland – holds post until 1807
	9 August	Third Coalition against France
	19 October	Mack surrenders at Ulm
	21 October	Battle of Trafalgar
	2 December	Battle of Austerlitz (Soult commands IV Corps)
	26 December	Treaty of Pressburg between Austria and France
1806	1 April	Joseph Bonaparte created King of Naples
		Wellesley becomes MP for Rye, Sussex
	10 April	Wellesley marries Kitty Pakenham
	14 October	Battles of Jena and Auerstädt
	21 November	Napoleon issues Berlin Decrees
1807	7 January	Britain declares a blockade of French ports and colonies
	8 February	Battle of Eylau
	3 April	Wellesley appointed Chief Secretary of Ireland
	14 June	Battle of Friedland
	7–9 July	Treaty of Tilsit between France, Russia and Prussia
	29 July	Napoleon orders a concentration of troops in Bayonne
	11 August	Portugal ordered to sever diplomatic relations with Britain
	2 September	Copenhagen bombarded by the British
	4 September	Dutch ports closed to Britain
	5 September	Junot takes command of the Corps of Observation of the Gironde
	7 September	British capture Copenhagen and seize Danish fleet
	25 September	Portugal offers to join the Continental System
	1 October	French and Spanish ambassadors withdrawn from Lisbon
	17 October	Corps of the Gironde enters Spain
	20 October	Portuguese close ports to Britain
	27 October	Treaty of Fontainebleau between France and Spain
	13 November	The Second Corps of Observation of the Gironde under General Dupont enters Spain
	18 November	Portuguese ports blockaded by Royal Navy
	23–4 November	Junot's army reaches Abrantes
	27–9 November	Prince Regent João VI and his court sail for Brazil
	30 November	Junot's vanguard enters Lisbon
	1 December	Spanish division under General Solano enters Portugal via Elvas to occupy southern Portugal
	13 December	Spanish Division under General Taranco enters Portugal
	15 December	Rioting in Lisbon

	18 December	Spanish Division under General Carrafa enters Portugal
	22 December	Junot disbands the Portuguese army
	23 December	Indemnity of 100 million francs imposed on Portugal
1808	1 February	Junot created Governor General of Portugal
	25 April	Wellesley promoted lieutenant general
	2 May	Major revolt in Madrid
	6 June	Revolt breaks out at Porto and Vila Real against the French Joseph Bonaparte proclaimed King of Spain
	8 June	Revolt against the French at Braga
	9 June	Disorder in Porto – Spanish troops disarmed Revolt against the French at Braganza
	15 June	General insurrection throughout Portugal
	16 June	First Siege of Zaragoza begins
	19 June	The Bishop of Porto appointed head of the Supreme Junta
	21 June	Loison repelled at Teixeira by General Silveira
	25–6 June	Vila Vizosa and Beja are sacked by the French
	27 June	Fort of Santa Catarina at Figueira da Foz seized by the Portuguese
	29 June	Soult created <i>Duc de Dalmatie</i>
	5–6 July	General Margaron captures Leiria then retires towards Lisbon
	12 July	British troops under Wellesley sail from Cork
	16 July	Portuguese militia surround Almeida
	20 July	Dupont surrenders at Bailén
	29–30 July	Portuguese and Spanish defeated before Évora
	1–8 August	British land at Mondego Bay
	11–12 August	Wellesley meets with General Freire at Leiria
	14 August	First siege of Zaragoza ends
	17 August	Battle of Roliça
	21 August	Battle of Vimeiro Sir Harry Burrard takes command
	22 August	Sir Hew Dalrymple takes command Armistice at Vimeiro
	30 August	Convention of Sintra
	September–October	French evacuate Portugal
	21 September	Wellesley sails for England
	11 October	Junot disembarks at La Rochelle
	27 October	General Moore marches into Spain
	3 November	Soult given command of II Corps
	5 November	Napoleon takes command of the Army of Spain
	4 December	Napoleon occupies Madrid
	20 December	Second siege of Zaragoza begins
1809	1 January	Soult commands pursuit of Moore's army as Napoleon returns to France
	11 January	Moore's rearguard reaches Corunna
	13 January	Spanish army defeated at Uclés

16 January	Battle of Corunna
23 January	Soult garrisons Corunna and marches against Ferrol
26 January	Ferrol surrenders to Soult
2 February	Elements of Soult's cavalry reach the Portuguese frontier
15–16 February	Soult unsuccessfully tries to cross the River Minho into Portugal
20 February	Zaragoza falls
21 February	Soult's army reaches Orense
4 March	Soult invades Portugal
28–9 March	Spanish defeated at Medellín
	Vigo retaken by Portuguese guerrillas and Royal Navy
29 March	First Battle of Porto (Oporto) Soult storms and occupies the city
April	Wellesley resigns as Chief Secretary of Ireland and sails for Portugal
6 April	Archduke Charles invades Bavaria –war between France and Austria
12 April	Alcantara falls taken by the Allies
20–3 April	Battle of Eckmühl
22 April	Wellesley disembarks at Lisbon
23 April	Wellesley assumes command of the army in Portugal
10 May	Wellesley tries to encircle Soult's advance guard at Ovar (using an amphibious flanking manoeuvre)
	Beresford drives Loison from Pezo de Ragoa
11 May	Action at Grijó as the British approach Porto
	Loison is repulsed by Silveira's forces
	Elements of Wellesley's army reach the Douro River
12 May	Battle of Porto/Passage of the Douro – Wellesley defeats Soult
	Soult attempts to retreat along line of Douro
	Loison falls back from Amarante
	French begin retreat over Serra de Santa Catalina towards Galicia
13 May	Napoleon enters Vienna
	Soult abandons artillery and baggage
14 May	Soult combines with Loison at Guimaraes
	Wellesley advances north hoping to cut off Soult's retreat
	Victor takes Alcantara
14/15 May	Major Dulong storms the Ponte Nova (bridge)
	Beresford/Silveira advance in pursuit of Soult's army
15 May	Silveira attempts to block Soult's retreat by marching on Salamonde
	Wellesley reaches Braga
	Beresford reaches Chaves
16 May	Dulong storms Saltador bridge
	British vanguard fall upon French rearguard at Salamonde

	17 May	Napoleon annexes the Papal States
	19 May	Soult's army reaches Orense (Spain)
	20–3 May	Battle of Aspern–Essling
	3 July	British army under Wellesley enters Spain
	5–6 July	Battle of Wagram
	6 July	Pope Pius VII arrested by the French
	27–8 July	Battle of Talavera
	4 September	Wellesley created Viscount Wellington
	16 September	Soult appointed major general to King Joseph
	September–October	Wellesley orders the construction of the Lines of Torres Vedras
	July–September	British expedition to Walcheren
	4 October	Spencer Perceval becomes prime minister
	14 October	Treaty of Schönbrunn between France and Austria
	20 October	Construction of the Lines of Torres Vedras begins
	30 October	Duke of Portland (British prime minister) dies from a stroke
1810	2 April	Napoleon marries Archduchess Marie-Louise of Austria
	14 June	Soult commands <i>l'Armée d'Andalousie</i>
	24 July	Combat on the Côa
		Third Invasion of Portugal under Marshal Massena
	27 September	Battle of Busaco
	10–14 October	French halt before the Lines of Torres Vedras
	14 November	Massena withdraws to Santarém
1811	5 March	Massena begins to retreat
	11 March	Badajoz falls to the French
	3 April	Battle of Sabugal
		French leave Portugal
	3–5 May	Battle of Fuentes de Oñoro
	10 May	Massena relieved of command
	16 May	Soult narrowly defeated at the Battle of Albuera
1812	19 January	Wellington takes Ciudad Rodrigo
	6 April	Wellington takes Badajoz
	11 May	Prime Minister Spencer Perceval assassinated
	24 June	Napoleon invades Russia
	22 July	Battle of Salamanca
	18 August	Wellington created Marquess of Wellington
	14 September	Napoleon enters Moscow
	22 September	Wellington created Generalissimo of Spanish Armies
	27–9 November	French retreat over the Beresina
	14 December	French rearguard reaches the River Niemen
1813	3 January–1 July	Soult commands Old Guard (of the Imperial Guard)
	16 March	Prussia declares war on France
	3 May	Battle of Lützen
	21–2 May	Battle of Bautzen
	21 June	Battle of Vittoria – Wellington promoted field marshal

	6 July	Soult commands armies in the Pyrenees (until mid-April 1814)
	20–30 July	Battle of the Pyrenees
	12 August	Austria declares war on France
	31 August	San Sebastian falls to Wellington
	16–19 October	Battle of Leipzig
1814	1 March	Treaty of Chaumont
	31 March	Allies enter Paris
	10 April	Battle of Toulouse
	11 April	Napoleon abdicates
		Treaty of Fontainebleau
	26 April	Louis XVIII proclaimed King of France
	3 May	Wellington created Duke of Wellington
	4 May	Napoleon reaches Elba
	20 May	First Treaty of Paris
	5 July	Wellington appointed Ambassador to the French Court
	1 November	Congress of Vienna begins
	4 December	Soult appointed Minister of War
1815	26 February	Napoleon escapes from Elba
	1 March	Napoleon lands at Golfe-Juan
	20 March	Napoleon enters Paris
	9 May	Soult appointed major general in <i>l'Armée de Nord</i>
	16 June	Battles of Ligny and Quatre Bras
	18 June	Battle of Waterloo
	22 June	Napoleon's final abdication
	26 June	Soult's officially leaves <i>l'Armée de Nord</i>
	7 July	Allies enter Paris
	5 October	Napoleon reaches St Helena
	20 November	Second Treaty of Paris
	7 December	Execution of Marshal Ney
1816	12 January	Soult flees France
1819		Soult permitted to return to France
1821	5 May	Napoleon I dies in exile
1830	17 November	Soult appointed Minister of War (until mid-July 1834)
1832	11 October	Soult appointed President of the Council of Ministers (until July 1834)
1838	28 June	Wellington and Soult are present at Queen Victoria's Coronation
1839	12 May	Soult reappointed President of the Council of Ministers (until March 1840)
1840	29 October	Soult reappointed Minister of War (until 1845) and President of the Council of Ministers (until 1847)
1847	26 September	Soult appointed <i>Maréchal-Général de France</i>
1851	2 December	Napoleon III crowned after seizing power in a <i>coup d'état</i>
	12 December	Death of Marshal Soult at St-Amans-Labastide
1852	14 September	Death of the Duke of Wellington

Preface

The early campaigns of Sir Arthur Wellesley (soon to be created Duke of Wellington) usually receive far less attention than his later exploits during the Peninsular War. This titanic struggle strongly influenced the outcome of the Napoleonic Wars with the French invading Portugal no less than three times, hoping to conquer the Portuguese and drive their British ally into the sea. The Third French Invasion of Portugal, by forces under Marshal Massena in 1810, usually garners the most scrutiny from writers and historians, while the first invasion under General Junot in 1807 gains less coverage. Yet in comparison with both of these, the Second French Invasion of Portugal in 1809 is even more obscure.

Why this should be so is puzzling as this invasion includes numerous incidents that should be of interest to historians and enthusiasts of this period. Perhaps the lack of a large battle accompanied by the enormous casualties typical of the Napoleonic Wars goes some way to explaining this with some assuming that little can be learned from the campaign as a consequence. Examination of the invasion and the conflicts fought during the campaign prove this to be anything but the case. For example, incidents that occurred during the First Battle of Porto made this an immensely important event in Portuguese history. Furthermore, Marshal Soult's invasion was beset with difficulties including a treacherous conspiracy that appears more akin to fiction rather than reality, and which fatally undermined his command.

The end of the campaign also witnessed a remarkable river operation that surprised one side so much that great strategic advantages were gained for relatively little loss of life when compared with other Napoleonic battles. Bafflingly, costly victories that gained far less in strategic terms have received far more attention from historians. The retreat that followed earned the opposing commander great plaudits and the entire campaign had enormous political repercussions in Portugal at a time when the population wavered

between resisting or reluctantly embracing the French cause. In addition to providing valuable insights into the personalities of Wellesley and Soult (who both became hugely influential during this period), the outcome of the second invasion had a great effect on the way in which the Peninsular War would be fought. Consequently, those studying the Napoleonic Wars should find this campaign both historically relevant and of great interest.

This title is part of the ‘Wellington Against’ series and it should be borne in mind that in May 1809 Sir Arthur Wellesley had not been honoured with the ducal title by which he is so well known. Nevertheless, he is referred to as Wellington in the title for its recognitive value and to maintain the spirit of the series. I am not alone in this as there are many other publications, such as Jac Weller’s *Wellington in India*, Charles Grant’s *Wellington’s First Campaign in Portugal* and Ian C. Robertson’s *Wellington at War in the Peninsular 1808–1814* and others books, that describe events prior to Wellesley gaining his peerage.

In this volume, I have used modern Portuguese spelling in the main body of the text. Therefore, for example, rather than referring to the city of Oporto (commonplace in British accounts of the time) the Portuguese Porto has been used. However, regarding quotations from contemporary works of the time, the original spellings have been retained as the original writers intended.

I have made great use of the libraries and archives of my former university (the University of Leicester) during my research and this has provided access to many sources that would otherwise have been unavailable to me. I would particularly like to thank librarian David Charlton of the David Wilson Library, whose help has extended far beyond what I have a right to expect. Indeed, he has sought out books and Internet sources that I would probably never have found but for his assistance. I am profoundly grateful for his help during the compilation of this book.

Likewise, my old friend Stuart Hadaway has given me access to his personal library and photographs and once again provided me with helpful advice and support. As the two founder members of Historians Inc., we have often collaborated to produce books and other works and travelled far and wide together in our quest to discover more about the past, visiting sites in Britain, Portugal, France, Spain, Belgium and Israel among others.

Having worked as a proofreader in the past, I would like to acknowledge the help I have received with this in relation to this book and other projects from Pauline Buttery, A.E. Godley and Stuart Hadaway, and Pamela Covey (of Pen & Sword), who have all checked through my work for me. They have saved me from committing errors on several occasions and their help is greatly appreciated. Books are rarely free from mistakes and any that remain are entirely my responsibility.

Finally, many thanks to all those wonderful people I met in Portugal who gave me an insight into the Portuguese view of the Peninsular War. Foremost among these are Jorge Estrela, Rodolfo Beghona, Helena Rafael, João MacDonald, José Sardica, Rui Ribolhos Filipe and his partner Dina Spencer da Graça as well as many others. Their hospitality and kindness made my research visits to Portugal a great pleasure. I hope they enjoy the book and feel that I have shown their nation and people due respect through this work.

Chapter One

Under Threat

Between 1808 and 1809 the outcome of the Napoleonic Wars lay in the balance and there was great uncertainty throughout Europe as national leaders pondered over whether to support France, which had dominated the Continent for nearly a decade, or to oppose her. Napoleon I, Emperor of France had reached the zenith of his power by 1807 but cracks were appearing in his First French Empire and his army no longer seemed invincible.

The Revolutionary Wars during the late eighteenth century had shocked observers when the French revolutionaries not only successfully defended their new republic but also turned on the monarchies set against them and brought the war across the frontiers of France to challenge the old order. Although the rise of Napoleon and his imperial form of government tempered revolutionary fanaticism to an extent, warfare continued throughout the imperial period.

The French army humbled the powers of Austria, Prussia and Russia in a succession of conflicts that ultimately saw France emerge victorious. Renouncing his former allies, Tsar Alexander I of Russia signed the Treaty of Tilsit in July 1807, which saw Napoleon and the tsar dividing much of Europe between them. France had become incredibly strong with numerous allied and satellite states supporting her. Yet, this had been accomplished at great cost with Napoleon coming close to losing the Battle of Eylau in 1807 and only achieving a decisive victory at Friedland a few weeks afterwards with both sides sustaining horrific casualties.

Great Britain was the only major power still at war with France by the end of 1807, stubbornly refusing to make peace until the balance of power was restored. British military efforts to damage French interests had only enjoyed limited success up to this time, but the Royal Navy dominated the oceans and, until the French navy could overcome their sea power, Britain

2 Wellington Against Soult

was secure against invasion. Safe on their island, the British could employ their impressive financial muscle to support France's enemies, fermenting rebellion and giving hope to defeated nations who dreamt of challenging France once more.

Napoleon's solution to this dilemma was to introduce his 'Continental System' – a commercial embargo designed to bankrupt Britain by preventing the British from trading with Europe. The French employed diplomatic pressure to close Continental ports to British ships with varying degrees of success since, although the British were unpopular in some quarters, business with them was commercially lucrative. For example, the Royal Navy relied upon Russian timber for shipbuilding and the Russian nobility refused to cancel contracts that yielded great revenue, regardless of what they thought of their mercantile partners.

Portugal was also reluctant to conform to Napoleon's wishes. Following centuries of disputes and conflicts with Spain (their only neighbour on land), Portuguese trade was heavily reliant on seaborne commerce, which the Royal Navy could easily disrupt. Furthermore, Portugal was England's oldest ally and British and Portuguese merchants had trade agreements dating back centuries, particularly within the wine industry. Portugal's best policy was clearly neutrality and, although politically hostile to former French revolutionary governments, the Portuguese had remained so except for one brief conflict in 1801. With their small army they realised they had little hope of successfully fighting France on land but severing trade links with Britain could see their coastline blockaded and potentially destroy their economy.

The emperor viewed Portuguese neutrality with a cynical eye due to their strong links with England and knew that the Royal Navy frequently used Portuguese ports for supply and refitting. This could result in the British landing troops if the Portuguese chose to allow it. Furthermore, after the catastrophic defeat of the combined French and Spanish fleets at Trafalgar in 1805, Napoleon wished to rebuild the French navy so that it could challenge British naval power. If the Portuguese navy fell into his hands, he would gain valuable ships of the line to add to his fleet. After all, the British could only be truly overcome by invading across the Channel, and until the French navy could challenge the Royal Navy's supremacy at sea this would never be possible.

While the French were busy constructing new ships, it was better to acquire existing vessels and (even more crucially) experienced crews. Therefore, the emperor hoped to employ the Portuguese fleet, which comprised eleven ships of the line, ten frigates and numerous smaller vessels.¹ The British had already attacked Copenhagen on 2–7 September 1807 (even though Denmark was a neutral state) and seized the Danish fleet there to prevent it falling into French hands. While Britain had strong ties with Portugal, the government might be prepared to seize their ally's fleet rather than risk invasion.

Consequently, Napoleon applied diplomatic pressure to the Portuguese, demanding that they sever all links with France's enemy and seize British-owned assets and property in their country. British diplomats attempted to convince the Portuguese to remain neutral and implied that Portugal would face a naval blockade and risk the seizure of their navy should they side with France. Caught between two superpowers, Prince Regent Dom João and his government made every effort to placate Napoleon while privately assuring the British that any war against them would be in name only. Although the Portuguese agreed to most of Napoleon's demands, he decided to invade and occupy their nation nonetheless. On 13 November 1807, General Junot led a French army into Spain, tasked with capturing Lisbon, securing the navy and deposing the Bragança royal family. While Junot entered central Portugal, two Spanish armies would invade simultaneously, marching into the northern and southern provinces.

Although the Portuguese chose not to resist militarily, Junot encountered enormous difficulties as a result of the appalling weather, dreadful roads, poor supplies and the harsh terrain he was forced to march through. Large numbers of men were lost through illness, starvation and exposure to the elements, rendering the bulk of his army ineffective. Determined to fulfil his promise to the emperor, Junot reached the capital with a small advanced guard on 30 November. Lisbon capitulated and its fall was accounted a major triumph in Paris, one source commenting, 'As everyone knows, Junot took possession of Lisbon, of the army that was there, and of the entire kingdom, without having at hand a single trooper, a single gun, or a cartridge that would burn ...'.²

However, the Prince Regent, his court and many officials set sail from the capital as Junot's army approached, taking the fleet with them. Dom João