

MEDALS AND DECORATIONS AWARDED TO BRITISH OFFICERS IN THE PENINSULAR WAR

From the beginning of civilisation certain acts and meritorious behaviour by individuals were proudly displayed to the community; from simple animal skins in the most primitive societies to more symbolic forms in ancient but more organised societies such as Ancient Egypt and Classical Greece. Public recognition was given by presenting a symbolic object. The recognition of individual merit, apart from being well deserved served as an incentive to others to reach great heights.ⁱ

The study of medals, orders and decorations is known as *Phaleristics*, It comes from the Greek (τὰ φάλαρα) and referred to medallions given for outstanding military or bravery. The Romans adopted the word as *phalera*.

BRITISH MEDALS AND DECORATIONS

For much of the information that follows, I am indebted to Lt. Col J H Leslie of The Royal Artillery

The Peninsular War, particularly if the battle of Waterloo is included was a period in which the concept changed very considerably. In 1806 the only award available to mark notable service was the Order of the Bath and this in only very limited numbers to very senior officers. It soon became clear that a medal was needed that could be awarded on a wider scale and in 1810 the Army Gold Medal was instituted.

However Waterloo was the first battle for which a medal was given to all ranks. Finally in 1828 The General Service Medal 1793-1814 was issued with a clasp for each action in which the bearer had served. It was not awarded posthumously.

The Order of the Bath

The Order was founded in 1725 by King George I and was initially limited to 35 Knights Companions. During the Peninsular Wars, so many recommendations were made that

the number was expanded in 1815 to three classes:

- Knight Grand Cross
- Knight Commander and
- Companion



The Army Gold Medal and Cross

Their award was *limited to Officers only*. In making a selection of Officers to whom medals should be granted, the choice of a commander of the Forces was restricted to the following ranks:—

General Officers

Commanding Officers of Brigades

Commanding Officers of Artillery and Engineers

Adjutant General and Quartermaster General

DAAGs and AQMGs, having the rank of Field Officer and being at the head of the Staff of a detached Corps or distinct Division of the Army.

Military Secretary having the rank of Field Officer

Commanding officers of Battalions and the equivalent; and

officers who may have

actual command

engagement, in

death or removal of the

Commanding Officer.



succeeded to the
during the
consequence of the
original

Army Gold medal
awarded to Maj Gen
Hoghton

The Regulations for the award of medals (*London Gazette* of 11 September, 1810, and of 9 October, 1813) laid down "that one medal shall be borne by each officer recommended for such distinction," and "that for the second and third events, which may be subsequently commemorated in like manner," an officer should bear "a gold clasp attached to the ribbon to which the medal is suspended, and inscribed with the name of the battle or siege to which it relates."

Army Gold Cross



If a person became entitled to a fourth award, a gold cross was given "in substitution of the distinctions previously granted," with the name of one of the four battles engraved on each arm of the cross. Clasps were added on the ribbon of the cross as required. In fact the original gold medal was retained.

Medals which would have been awarded to officers, had they not been killed in a battle or siege (or had since died), were transmitted to their families.

The medals were of gold, those for General officers being 2·1 inches in diameter, and those for other officers 1·3 inch, the name of the recipient being engraved on the rim.

The cross in design is that known as Maltese, 1·5 inch wide, with ornamental border: in the centre a lion statant, in relief. The back of the cross is the same as the front. The name of the recipient is engraved on the edges of the arms.

The clasps measure 2 inches by 6 inch, and, within a border of laurel, is engraved the name of the battle, or siege, for which it was granted.

The ribbon - crimson with dark blue borders—is 1·75 inch wide.

During the whole of the Peninsular War—i.e. from 1808 to 1814—only 619 medals were awarded to officers of the British Army (including those serving in the Portuguese Army) for 18 different battles, actions, sieges, and captures of fortresses.

One of the rules governing the award of medals was "that an Officer shall receive a medal only for a particular action, in which the corps to which he belongs has been engaged with musketry." For this reason officers of the cavalry at Busaco did not receive a medal, and in all Wellington's recommendations the rule was most rigidly adhered to.

For the capture of Ciudad Rodrigo in January, 1812, the medal was awarded for the storm only, i.e. for the assault and capture. The officers of the besieging and covering forces did not receive it, and none of the Head Quarters' Staff. Two Artillery officers only (Borthwick and Dickson) received it.

Writing to Lieut-General Sir Stapleton Cotton, Bart., K.B, on 16 November, 1813, Wellington said that at the battle of Fuentes de Oñoro "there was a very heavy cannonade upon the troops, in which many were lost; but the officers of no corps were returned in the list for medals whose corps had not been engaged with musketry with the enemy. That is the rule, and I cannot depart from it."ⁱⁱⁱ It will thus be seen that to win a medal in the days of the Peninsular War was no easy matter.

The General Service Medal



In 1828 – and therefore not before time – the War Office eventually roused itself sufficiently to send a circular letter to

all serving and retired officers. It required them, on pain of losing their pensions, to complete a return giving a Statement of their Services, including details of their presence at any battles or sieges and on general campaigns, of any wounds received in action.ⁱⁱⁱ

From the returns thus generated, in 1847 a *silver* general service medal, with clasps, was authorized (Horse Guards' General Order, dated 1 June, 1847) for conferment "upon every officer, non-commissioned officer and soldier of the army, who was present in any battle or siege," etc., etc., for which gold medals had previously been awarded.

The order applied only to men living in 1847, and not to relatives of those who had died. The qualification for the medal was not as stringent as for the original medal, in that the "engaged with musketry" condition was not enforced.

Someone coming across a General Service Medal 1793 – 1814 should be surprised to see Queen Victoria's head on the obverse, with the date of 1848. Victoria was born in 1819, four years after the battle of Waterloo, which was the first battle for which a medal was awarded to all ranks. However her army was dear to her and I feel sure that her enthusiasm influenced the award of this medal to her soldiers.

This medal served as a pattern and a precedent for all subsequent campaigns.

Awards for outstanding individual acts of valour did not exist, but in a few cases regiments chose to award their own.

Regimental Awards. Occasionally, if a member of a regiment, of whatever rank performed an act of outstanding valour, the officers would subscribe to a medal, usually of gold, to commemorate the event. Two occasions spring to mind in the actions near Elvas. At Campo Maior on 25th March 1811, Corporal Logan of the 13th Light Dragoons killed Colonel Count Chamorin of the 26^e Dragons in single combat, earning the admiration of the army. The other was Lieutenant Latham of the 3rd Foot (The Buffs) at Albuera. The regimental history describes the event:

Latham was now Polish horsemen time, he was able his sword. At last, Hussar seized the the Colour pike, him, inflicting a took off his nose face. Quite continued to use until another blow Dropping his sword Colour with his continued to opponents, crying life would he



beset by French and from whom for a to defend himself with however, a French remaining piece of of and made a cut at terrible wound which and the side of his undaunted, Latham his sword with effect severed his left arm. he now seized the right hand, and still struggle with his out that only with his surrender the Colour;

until at last he was thrown down, trampled on and pierced with lances. So many men were around him, however, every man striving to gain the coveted trophy for himself, that each man impeded the efforts of his neighbour to kill the now desperately wounded Latham. So intent were they on the capture of their intended prize that they failed to notice the approach of the squadrons of the 4th Dragoons by which they were quickly scattered, and Latham was allowed his last few moments of conscientiousness in which to tear the Colour from the pike and to conceal it in the breast of his coat.

¹ Paulo Jorge Estrela – Ordens e Condecorações Portuguesas 1793-1824

¹ Wellington's Despatches. 1838. Vol. XI, pp. 294-5

¹ Peter Edwards – Talavera – Wellington's early Peninsular Victories 1808-9

PORTUGUESE AND SPANISH ORDERS AND DECORATIONS

The information on Portuguese and Spanish Decorations is based largely on *Ordens e Condecorações Portuguesas 1793 – 1824* by Paulo Jorge Estrela.

Military Orders have their roots in the Middle Ages and the Religious Orders and Orders of Chivalry that were founded to protect pilgrims and the Holy Lands. When, in 1808, D. Joao, the Prince Regent, and his mother the mad Queen Maria arrived safely in Brazil accompanied by some 15,000 of their subjects and escorted by the Royal Navy, he felt the need to recognise the services of the British officers who had made the journey possible. Because of their religion they could not be awarded any of the existing orders.

ORDEM DE TORRE E ESPADA

A new order was created – the Ordem de Torre e Espada, known to flippant British officers as the Tower and Spade. However since the ancient orders had become somewhat devalued, this new order became the most coveted.

In common with the majority of such orders, it was divided into three classes:

Gra-Cruz
Comendador
Cavaleiro

Grand Cross
Commander
Knight

Unusually, there are differences among medals of the same class. It would appear that the recipient often had it made privately. Certainly some were made in England and after the war, some in France.

The 'Knight's' class passed through three versions. This class was limited to 100 members. The medal was suspended from a blue ribbon and worn on the left breast.



1st Version

This was issued in 1808. Although the sword is shown on the reverse, the Tower is not included. These were made in Brasil.



2nd Version

In 1810 it was decided to bring the medal into line with the other classes, incorporating a tower at the top.



3rd Version

This appeared in the 1820s

The Commander's Class. This also went through three versions, each one more gorgeous than the last. The insignia was worn on a blue ribbon hung around the neck. There was also a badge or shield worn on the left breast



1st Version



2nd Version



Various versions of the chest badge for both Commanders and Grand Crosses



Design of the Order to be presented to the Duke of Wellington



Ordem Militar de Nossa Senhora de Vila Vicosa.

Although this splendid decoration is a military order, it does not appear to have been awarded to any British officers

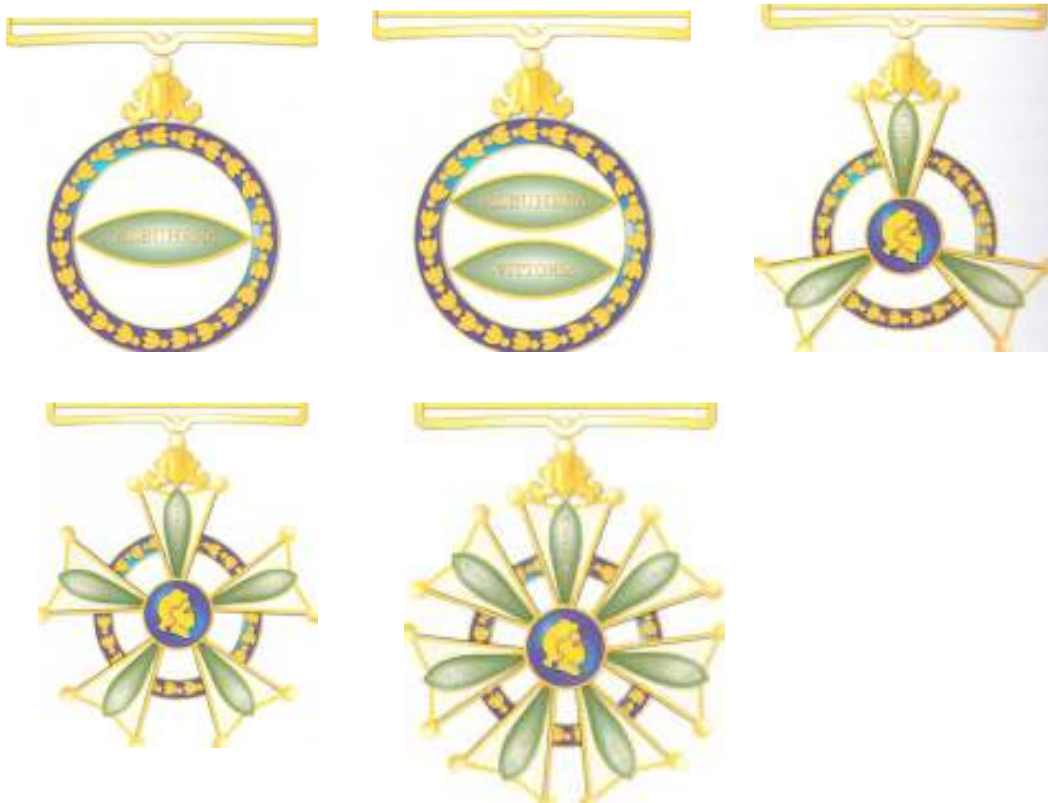
General Service Medals

By the end of the Peninsular War Portugal was very proud of her army and there was considerable discussion on how this should be recognised. Finally on 28th June 1816 D. Joao VI signed a decree stating that all military personnel, whether Portuguese or British, Officers, NCOs or Private soldiers should be considered for these decorations whether they were in units of the 1st or 2nd Line (milicias) and of whatever Arm or Specialisation. After due consideration, the following were chosen:

Medalha de Comando das Campanhas da Guerra Peninsular
Cruz de Condecoracao das Campanhas da Guerra Peninsular
Medalha para Civis das Campanhas da Guerra Peninsular

Medalha de Comando das Campanhas da Guerra Peninsular

Each action which qualified was inscribed on an olive leaf. It was awarded to officers commanding Cavalry or Infantry regiments, Cacador battalions and Artillery batteries. Generals commanding Brigades and Divisions involved in these actions were also eligible as were their staff officers down to the rank of Major. Officers of the rank of Major and above representing the Adjutant General or Quartermaster General in these Headquarters were also eligible. Officers had to buy their own medals, which led to a certain amount of variations. It was worn on the right breast.





Cruz de Condecoracao das Campanhas da Guerra Peninsular

This medal could be translated as the Peninsular War Campaign Cross and was worn on the left breast. It was more like what we would now call a campaign medal and was conferred on the following scale:

200 to each Regiment of Infantry of the Line

120 to each Light Infantry (Cacador) Battalion

25 to each Cavalry Squadron

30 to each Artillery Brigade (Battery in modern terminology)

25 to each Company of Engineers

Garrison troops could be considered if their fortress was threatened or captured in any of the nominated campaigns

Officers of Militia Regiments who had been involved in two or more of these campaigns were also eligible; and 100 crosses were given to each regiment for distribution among the Non Commissioned Officers and soldiers.

It was issued in two classes:

1 – Gold

2 – Silver

The silver version is now the rarest as the soldiers to whom it was awarded either melted them down or sold them

The War of the Brothers

The years after the Napoleonic wars were filled throughout Europe with the struggle between Liberalism and Absolutism. The ideas that had inspired the French Revolution were taken up by the intellectuals and the middle classes, while the more conservative elements, which included most of the aristocracy, the church and the rural populations wished for a return to the old idea of a Monarchy with absolute powers.

In Spain this gave rise to the Carlist Wars and in Portugal to the struggle between the King's two sons – Pedro and Miguel. Although the Peninsular War was over a considerable number of British officers were involved in both wars.

One event, known as the 'Abrilada' was the cause of the creation of one of the loveliest and most sought after decorations of the period. It was on the 30th April (hence the name) 1924 that D. Miguel led his absolutist followers in a Palace Coup to force his father D. Joao VI to abdicate. The Palace of Bemposta was surrounded, effectively imprisoning the King.

The King's salvation was due to the intrepid action of the Diplomatic Corps, especially the French Ambassador, Baron Hyde de Neuville. Hearing of the action he went to the Palace with several other diplomats. They forced their way through the cordon and entered the Palace. There they persuaded the King to summon his rebellious son, who surprisingly obeyed his father's command. Pressured by the foreign diplomats and not wishing to upset openly the European powers, D. Miguel ordered the troops back to their barracks and the release of the liberals who had been imprisoned during the coup. However the members of the Cabinet had taken refuge in places of safety and had real doubts about the situation in the city, since the persecutions continued and the atmosphere was very unstable.

Once again the Diplomatic Corps was decisive in resolving the new situation. Using subterfuge and at considerable danger to themselves, on 9th May 1824 they managed to transport the King to the bank of the river Tagus on the pretext of the customary waterside picnic. The King and his two daughters then embarked on the royal Brig, escorted by armed British Marines, eventually boarding *HMS Windsor Castle*, which with the frigate *HMS Lively* and the French brig *Le Zebre* awaited at anchor the outcome of the political situation and possible evacuation of foreign residents.

D. Miguel was summoned again and amazingly obeyed the order. He was summarily stripped of all his appointments and sent into exile in France on a French warship.

On 14th May the King disembarked in Lisbon and was welcomed by a jubilant public. Very shortly afterwards a list was published of the honours and decorations to be awarded to all the diplomats and foreign military officers involved.



The Abrilada Medal

It is described as 'Hanging from a ribbon in the Royal Colours, with a portrait of His Majesty surrounded by a circle of diamonds.' It was awarded in 4 classes, which is shown by the number engraved on the reverse and by the number of diamonds on the obverse – the greater number of diamonds, the lower the class as the larger stones were more valuable. The recipient's name and sometimes his rank were engraved on the reverse and the name of the ship on the edge.

Scale of awards

Ship	1st Class	2nd Class	3rd Class	4th Class	Total
Windsor Castle	1	2	11	25	39
Lively	1	2	6	13	22
Le Zebre	1	1	2	3	7
Total	3	5	19	41	68

SPANISH MEDALS

At the beginning of the Peninsular War, the situation was very similar to that in Portugal and indeed most of European countries. Joseph Bonaparte "El Rei Intruso" created the *Real Orden de Espanha*, but with his departure in 1813, this was abolished.

Spain was the European nation that created the greatest number of decorations, both during and after the War of Independence. The various regional juntas created medals to honour the units that fought in their areas. On 11th August 1808, the Supreme Junta of Seville created the first commemorative medal to award all those who had taken part in the important battle of Bailen – the first defeat of a French army on the battlefield. It is most unlikely that any were awarded to a British officer.

The Bailen Medal



The Battle of Albuera (16 May 1811)

Since this battle features high on the list of most prized battle honours of the British Army a considerable number were issued to British officers from Marshal Beresford down. It was created by Decree on 1st March 1815. In the centre F. VII stands for Ferdinand VII, surrounded by the inscription ALBUHERA. The Battle Honour on British Colours is spelt the same way although the village, even then was known as La Albuera.

The Albuera Medal



The battle of Barrosa, known to the Spanish as Chiclana (5 March 1811)

Chiclana Cross

It is not known, at least I do not know, if any British officers were awarded this medal. Given the mutual recriminations after the battle, it is probable that none were awarded.



The Battle of Vitoria (21 June 1813)

Vitoria Medal

Again, I have no definite information if any British officers received this medal. It is however, likely, since at this time Spanish troops were under the overall command of the Duke of Wellington. The medal was created on 2 April 1815 and like the Albuera medal was 'conceded abundantly to Portuguese military'.



ⁱ Paulo Jorge Estrela – Ordens e Condecorações Portuguesas 1793-1824

ⁱⁱ Wellington's Despatches. 1838. Vol. XI, pp. 294-5

ⁱⁱⁱ Peter Edwards – Talavera – Wellington's early Peninsular Victories 1808-9