

PENINSULAR WAR MEDALS

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

The Army Gold Medal and Gold Cross

PRIOR to the year 1806 war medals, as we understand them now, were unknown. From that date until the conclusion of the Peninsular War in 1814, 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 Quarter-Master-General.

D.A.-Generals, and A.Q.M.-Generals, having the rank of Field Officers, and being at the head of the staff with a detached Corps, or distinct Division of the Army.

Military Secretary, having the rank of Field Officer.

Commanding Officers of battalions, or corps equivalent thereto;¹ and officers who may have succeeded to the actual command during the engagement, in consequence of the death or removal of the original Commanding Officer.

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 medal awarded to Major Gen Hoghton



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."

[Wellington's *Dispatches*. 1838. Vol. XI, pp. 294-5.]

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 distinguished conduct, with awards granted and of any wounds received in action.

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.

DECORATIONS

At this time there were no official decorations for gallantry. Meritorious service by senior officers was recognised by the award of the Order of the Bath. This is one of the oldest orders of chivalry and has three classes of member:

Knight Grand Cross (GCB)
Knight Commander (KCB)
Companion (CB)



Badge and ribbon of 'Companion of the Bath'

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 in our region. 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 beset by French and Polish horsemen from whom for a time, he was able to defend himself with his sword. At last, however, a French Hussar seized the remaining piece of of the Colour pike, and made a cut at him, inflicting a terrible wound which took off his nose and the side of his face. Quite undaunted, Latham continued to use his sword with effect until another blow severed his left arm. Dropping his sword he now seized the Colour with his right hand, and still continued to struggle with his

opponents, crying
 life would he
 until at last he was
 trampled on and
 So many men were
 every man striving
 trophy for himself,
 impeded the efforts
 kill the now
 Latham. So intent
 capture of their
 they failed to
 of the squadrons of
 which they were
 and Latham was
 moments of
 which to tear the
 and to conceal it in



out that only with his
 surrender the Colour;
 thrown down,
 pierced with lances.
 around him, however,
 to gain the coveted
 that each man
 of his neighbour to
 desperately wounded
 were they on the
 intended prize that
 notice the approach
 the 4th Dragoons by
 quickly scattered,
 allowed his last few
 conscientiousness in
 Colour from the pike
 the breast of his coat.

By kind permission of the National Army Museum

Minor Regimental Decorations

There may well be scores of these, but to complete the British Medal section, here are two that are held in the Royal West Kent Regimental Museum I Maidstone. They were both awarded to Quartermaster Benjamin Baxter.

The first is "a token of respect from his brothers in arm".



The other is an enamelled cross with his name engraved on the reverse.



Portuguese Decorations

A number of British officers serving in the Portuguese army were awarded decorations by the Portuguese Government.

Foremost among these was the Order of the Tower and Sword (*Ordem da Torre e Espada, do Valor, Lealdade e Mérito*). The order was founded in 1808 to mark the arrival of the Royal Family in Rio de Janeiro. Among the first to receive the order, were British Naval officers who had escorted the royal convoy. Since they were not Roman Catholics, they were not eligible for any of the ancient military orders and so this new order was created. (Chancelaria das Ordens Honoríficas, da Presidência da República)

The order has six grades:

- Knight or Dame
- Official
- Comendador (Commander?)
- Grand-Official
- Grand-Cross



Other Portuguese medals include:

- Gold medal of King John VI of Portugal.
This one was awarded to
Captain John Seaton RN



- Commander's Cross.
This one for 5 actions
- Campaign Cross for 4
Year's service
- Both awarded to Col.
Sir John Scott Lillie



- Portuguese silver cross for
2 campaigns
- Portuguese Commander's
Medal for 2 actions



The Portuguese campaign medals were issued in 1820, long before the British ones. The commander's cross would appear to be equivalent to the gold medal awarded to senior British officers. These medals were issued only to officers. A simple silver cross was issued to Other Ranks. Very few survive. Most were sold or melted down for their silver content.

Spanish Decorations

I know much less about these. However we do know that Staff Surgeon George Guthrie was awarded the Albuera medal, now owned by Dr Lewellyn Lloyd, who has kindly allowed us to reproduce it, together with Guthrie's General Service medal.

