

BRITISH LOSSES IN THE CORUNNA CAMPAIGN

By Steve Brown

Just how many men did Sir John Moore's force lose in Spain? The question has long vexed historians. Appendix XIII of Oman Volume 1 provides figures based upon a comparison of returns between October 1808, 19 December 1808 and January 1809, at which time men missing from their regiments may not have re-joined. I have recently discovered a return in WO 1/904 which computed the total men lost in Portugal and Spain as of 6 May 1809, in other words, nearly four months after Corunna. This shows many regiments losing more men than reported by Oman.

There are two possible problems with Oman's numbers. Firstly, he based them upon 'Effective Strength' - i.e. men fit to take the field - rather than Total Strength, i.e. the sum of fit men plus sick men or On Command. A second problem is that his disembarkation strengths in England in January 1809 may not include various men who were detached or lost, and sailed with other regiments to other ports in the confusion. It is reasonable to assume that by May 1809 these men were well and truly accounted for with their parent battalions.

The 'Total Other Ranks left in Portugal' number in the WO return - 1353 other ranks - accords reasonably well with the men used to form the two battalions of Detachments (see http://www.napoleon-series.org/military/organization/c_detach.html) which show a slightly higher number (by only 50 or so), but with the knowledge that these units contained some men who were described as 'escaped from the French' or 'from the frontiers,' (in other words formerly listed amongst those 'missing in Spain' in the War Office return), which would account for the difference.

It also seems reasonable to assume that the vast majority of men still missing in Spain as of May 1809 were either dead, deserted or POWs, and would not be seen again until (at best) the termination of the war in 1814 - if ever.

The one deficiency within the May 1809 War Office return is that it provides no data for;

- 1st and 3rd Foot Guards
- KGL units
- Cavalry
- Royal Artillery
- Staff Corps

Therefore these units have not been included in the following summaries but have been discussed at the end. The 3rd Foot and the 5/60th Rifles, who left Moore before Corunna and returned to Portugal, are excluded.

SOURCES USED:

[1] WO 1/904, National Archives

[2] Andrew Bamford, British Army Unit Strengths 1808-1815; returns for 1 November 1808 (although where regiments joined later, the 1 December numbers are used)

[3] Oman, History of the Peninsula War, Volume 1 Appendix XIII.

LOSSES IN PORTUGAL AND SPAIN ACCORDING TO WO 1/904 AND OMAN

The following table is compilation of data from all three sources used;

Unit	Brigade	Total Other Ranks 1 November 1808 [2]	Effective Strength 19 December 1808 [3]	Disembarked England January 1809 [3]	Total Other Ranks left in Portugal as of 6 May 1809 [1]	Total Other Ranks missing in Spain as of 6 May 1809 [1]	Oman's Reported 'Deficiency' [3]	% Original Other Ranks lost in Spain based on [1]
1/6th Foot	Beresford	940	783	491	33	410	391	43.6%
1/9th Foot	Beresford	939	607	572	0	344	373	36.8%
2/43rd Light	Beresford	702	411	368	111	211	230	30.5%
1/28th Foot	Disney	1032	750	624	111	285	302	27.7%
2/23rd Fusiliers	Beresford	575	496	418	0	152	172	26.4%
2nd Foot	Hill	755	616	461	93	194	205	25.8%
1/50th Foot	Bentinck	943	794	599	71	234	264	25.0%
2/81st Foot	Manningham	719	615	478	0	164	241	22.8%
51st Foot	Leith	630	516	506	0	139	107	22.1%
3/1st Foot	Manningham	871	597	507	0	190	216	21.8%
1/26th Foot	Manningham	866	745	662	0	187	208	21.6%
1/91st Highlanders	Disney	895	698	534	154	190	212	21.3%
1/5th Foot	Hill	969	833	654	83	188	239	19.6%
1/82nd Foot	Fane	879	812	602	92	166	228	19.3%
1/32nd Foot	Hill	875	756	619	70	158	187	18.1%
2/14th Foot	Hill	621	550	492	0	108	138	17.4%
2/59th Foot	Leith	636	557	497	0	107	143	16.8%
1/52nd Light	Anstruther	877	828	719	0	139	143	15.9%

Unit	Brigade	Total Other Ranks 1 November 1808 [2]	Effective Strength 19 December 1808 [3]	Disembarked England January 1809 [3]	Total Other Ranks left in Portugal as of 6 May 1809 [1]	Total Other Ranks missing in Spain as of 6 May 1809 [1]	Oman's Reported 'Deficiency' [3]	% Original Other Ranks lost in Spain based on [1]
20th Foot	Anstruther	580	499	428	43	90	113	15.5%
1/71st Highlanders	C Craufurd	850	724	626	100	129	138	15.2%
1/42nd Highlanders	Bentinck	937	880	757	21	139	161	14.9%
1/4th Foot	Bentinck	960	754	740	73	138	149	14.4%
76th Foot	Leith	779	654	614	0	112	170	14.4%
1/38th Foot	Fane	955	823	757	55	136	143	14.2%
1/36th Foot	C Craufurd	862	736	561	67	113	243	13.2%
1/79th Highlanders	Fane	989	838	777	59	130	155	13.2%
1/92nd Highlanders	C Craufurd	975	900	783	66	126	129	12.9%
2/95th Rifles	R Craufurd	780	702	628	0	78	96	10.0%
2/52nd Light	R Craufurd	625	381	462	112	60	161	9.6%
2/60th Foot	Corunna garrison	272	0	0	0	22	0	8.1%
1/95th Rifles	Anstruther	857	820	706	31	68	157	7.9%
1/43rd Light	R Craufurd	898	817	810	0	66	85	7.3%
TOTALS		26043	21492	18452	1445	4973	5899	
% 1 Dec 1808 Strength		100%	82.5%	70.9%	5.5%	19.1%		

In summary: Applying Oman's disembarkation numbers to the total strengths on 1 November gives a 29% loss for the campaign, or 7,591 men. WO 1/904 arrives at a total of 6,418 men. The Oman-derived figure is probably too high since it excludes men detached from their regiments on disembarkation in England who subsequently rejoined, suggesting that the 6,418 figure is probably close to the true number.

LOSSES BY BRIGADE

The same data, re-presented by brigade, shows some interesting comparisons;

Brigade	Total Other Ranks as per return of 1 November 1808 [2]	Effective Strength 19 December 1808 [3]	Total Other Ranks left in Portugal as of 6 May 1809 [1]	Total Other Ranks missing in Spain as of 6 May 1809 [1]	% Original Men Lost in Spain based on [1]	Total Losses in Peninsula since 1 November 1808 from [1]	Oman's Reported 'Deficiency' [3]
Beresford	3156	2297	144	1117	35.4%	1261	1166
Disney	1927	1448	265	475	24.6%	740	514
Manningham	2456	1957	0	541	22.0%	541	665
Hill	3220	2755	246	648	20.1%	894	769
Bentinck	2840	2428	165	511	18.0%	676	574
Leith	2045	1727	0	358	17.5%	358	420
Fane	2823	2473	206	432	15.3%	638	526
Caitlin Crawford	2687	2360	233	368	13.7%	601	510
Anstruther	2314	2147	74	297	12.8%	371	413
Robert Craufurd	2303	1900	112	204	8.9%	316	342
Corunna Garrison*	272	250	0	22	8.1%	22	0
TOTAL	26043	21742	1445	4973		6418	5899

Given that Beresford's and Disney's brigades were only lightly engaged at Corunna on 16 January 1809 the above figures do not flatter those commanders. Bentinck, Manningham, and to a lesser degree Hill had borne the brunt of the French attacks on that day.

Robert Craufurd's 2nd Light Brigade had retreated via Vigo and thus was spared the battle at Corunna, nonetheless his brigade's low wastage rate supports all we know about 'Black Bob's' reputed iron discipline during the retreat.

Interestingly, because Oman's 'Deficiency' figures are based upon differences between October returns and disembarkation returns, it does not take into account losses amongst drafts of reinforcements who joined the expedition in December, whereas the WO 1/904 do so. Hence the 6418 figure will probably be a more reliable indicator than Oman's 5899 men lost.

* Oman's numbers do not include the 2/60th Foot who were garrisoning Corunna town.

THE MISSING DATA

The WO 1/904 returns excludes some units. These have been re-constructed using the returns from Oman and applying the same factors.

Unit	Brigade	Total Other Ranks 1 November 1808 [2]	Effective Strength 19 December 1808 [3]	Disembarked England January 1809 [3]	Total Other Ranks left in Portugal as of 6 May 1809 [1]	Total Other Ranks missing in Spain as of 6 May 1809 [1]	Oman's Reported 'Deficiency' [3]
1/1st Foot Guards	Warde	1359	1300	1266	no data	no data	74
2/1st Foot Guards	Warde	1110	1027	1036	no data	no data	66
7th Hussars*	Paget	676	497	575	no data	no data	97
10th Hussars	Paget	677	514	651	no data	no data	24
15th Hussars	Paget	675	527	650	no data	no data	24
18th Light Dragoons	Paget	671	565	547	no data	no data	77
3rd Light Dragoons KGL	Paget	563	347	377	no data	no data	56
1st Light Battalion KGL**	Alten	939	803	706	no data	no data	163
2nd Light Battalion KGL***	Alten	937	855	618	no data	no data	262
Royal Artillery****		1378	1297	1200	no data	no data	255
Staff Corps		134	133	99	no data	no data	38
TOTALS		9119	7865	7725			1136

These regiments are known to have had about 430 men 'sick absent' on 1 December. If we assume for the sake of the argument that Oman's Deficiency figure is slightly low as was the case for the previous study, this would give a total loss amongst these units of 1000 men after deducting the sick absent. As can be seen below, nearly 300 of these occurred after the campaign had ended.

* The 7th Hussars lost 56 men drowned on the return voyage to England.

** The 1st Light Battalion lost 22 men drowned on the return voyage to England.

*** The 2nd Light Battalion lost 187 men drowned on the return voyage to England.

**** The Royal Artillery lost 31 men drowned on the return voyage to England and in Corunna Harbour.

ANALYSIS

All of this suggests that 1445 men were left behind in Portugal and 4973 were lost in Spain, based upon the WO 1/904 return of May 1809, or 6418 in total. As this return does not include the Guards, cavalry, KGL light battalions or artillery, these estimated losses need to be added. Losses amongst those units appear to be about 1000 men, of whom it is assumed few or any ended in Portugal other than the 'sick absent'. This gives a total estimated campaign loss of 7400 men.

The total number of men lost in Spain according to our figures appears to be 4973, plus the lion's share of the 1000 losses amongst the Guards, cavalry etc. So this number might be 6,000 men. This is almost identical to the 5998 men 'actually lost in Spain' according to Oman in the conclusion to his Appendix. Of these, documentary evidence tells us that 2189 ended up as prisoners in France. By a different route, and using different data, Oman's overall figures appear to be validated, although there are obvious discrepancies if studied on a unit-by-unit or per brigade basis.

Most brigades lost between 12% and 20% of their men on the campaign.

APPENDIX: DISTRIBUTION OF MILITIA RECRUITS IN MAY 1809

The campaign losses were largely made up in May 1809 by volunteers from the militia. Data also from WO 1/904.

Unit	Total Other Ranks left in Portugal and missing in Spain as of 6 May 1809	Total Other Ranks prior to receiving militia recruits 6 May 1809	Militia recruits received 6 May 1809	Total Other Ranks after militia recruits	Went to Walcheren?	% battalion are militia recruits
1/95th Rifles*	99	799	1282	2081	No	61.6%
2/14th Foot	108	460	583	1043	Yes	55.9%
20th Foot	133	472	518	990	Yes	52.3%
2/43rd Light	322	441	473	917	Yes	51.6%
2nd Foot	287	470	451	921	Yes	49.0%
1/52nd Light	139	645	372	1017	No	36.6%
1/82nd Foot	258	596	343	939	Yes	36.5%
1/9th Foot	344	672	369	1041	Yes	35.4%
51st Foot	139	408	216	624	Yes	34.6%
1/5th Foot	271	678	332	1010	Yes	32.9%
2/59th Foot	107	565	195	760	Yes	25.7%
76th Foot	112	645	218	863	No	25.3%
2/23rd Fusiliers	152	475	151	626	No	24.1%
2/81st Foot	164	539	162	701	Yes	23.1%
1/36th Foot	180	659	133	792	Yes	16.8%
1/42nd Highlanders	160	714	127	841	Yes	15.1%
1/71st Highlanders	229	578	69	647	Yes	10.7%
1/26th Foot	187	660	40	700	Yes	5.7%
1/92nd Highlanders	192	789	47	836	Yes	5.6%

Unit	Total Other Ranks left in Portugal and missing in Spain as of 6 May 1809	Total Other Ranks prior to receiving militia recruits 6 May 1809	Militia recruits received 6 May 1809	Total Other Ranks after militia recruits	Went to Walcheren?	% battalion are militia recruits
1/32nd Foot	228	610	27	637	Yes	4.2%
1/28th Foot	396	622	21	643	Yes	3.3%
1/91st Highlanders	344	543	16	559	Yes	2.9%
3/1st Foot	190	776	0	776	Yes	0.00%
1/4th Foot	211	707	0	707	Yes	0.00%
1/6th Foot	443	475	0	475	Yes	0.00%
1/38th Foot	191	760	0	760	Yes	0.00%
1/43rd Light	66	887	0	887	No	0.00%
1/50th Foot	305	598	0	598	Yes	0.00%
2/52nd Light	172	687	0	687	Yes	0.00%
2/60th Foot	22	188	0	188	No	0.00%
1/79th Highlanders	189	768	0	768	Yes	0.00%
2/95th Rifles	78	860	0	860	Yes	0.00%
TOTALS	6418	19746	6145	25894		

* It was due to this large draft of recruits that the 3rd Battalion of the 95th Rifles was formed at Canterbury.