

The Napoleon Series

Maps in the Peninsular War

Conclusions

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By the end of the 18th century, the fundamental and lengthy works of the geodesists and cartographers to produce detailed maps of countries were being printed :

- France : the Cassini Map of France in 181 sheets.
- Austria : Count de Ferraris created 275 maps of the Austrian Netherlands.
Joseph von Lichtenstern released the Map of Middle Europe in 64 sheets, plus a *General Map of the Austrian Empire* in 9 sheets.
- Russia : the Military Topographic Depot of the Academy of Sciences compiled the *Detailed map of the Russian Empire and neighbouring foreign holdings*, being a map in 100 sheets.¹
- Spain : *El Atlas Geográfico de España* by Don Tomás López.

Whilst those of Cassini and Ferraris, being based upon a trigonometrical survey, were more accurate, all the rest gave a tolerable representation of the ground and a moderately accurate notion of distances which would satisfy a traveller. Relief was portrayed by shading and hachures. The first significant use of contour lines was in 1791, when J.L. Dupain-Triel (who had worked with Cassini III) used contour lines at 20-metre intervals, hachures and spot-heights, in a map of France.²

However, the methods used for indicating the quality of the roads were almost useless to a general and his staff or a military topographer who required much more than the basic traveller. Only the 1810 Nantiat map in four pages started to address this problem.

For military purposes it was important to know the general features of the country through which they will pass; the state and breadth of the roads, whether they are practicable for artillery; the dimensions of rivers as well as the construction, strength, length and breadth of bridges; assessments of towns and villages to supply provisions, water and fuel. During

¹ *Подробная карта Российской империи и близлежащих заграничных владений* published by the Academy of Sciences 1797-1805.

An anglicized edition was produced by Nantiat / Faden in 1806, whilst the French had their version ready for the 1812 invasion - *Carte de la Russie Européenne en LXXVII feuilles exécutée au Dépôt général de la Guerre*.

² Dupain-Trie JLI, Géographe du Roy, *.La France considérée dans les différentes hauteurs de ses plaines...* However it would be some time before more similar maps were produced. By around 1843, when the Ordnance Survey started to regularly record contour lines in Great Britain and Ireland, they were already in general use in European countries.

the wars in central and northern Europe this sort of information had been collected for many years and stored away in the archives of the major capitals.³

However, by comparison, no similar major campaigns had been fought in the Peninsula and therefore, as a consequence, there was virtually no cartographic intelligence available. At the beginning of the Peninsular War, the inadequate maps used for planning the first French invasion of Portugal in 1807 could have resulted in the destruction of Junot's army. Similarly, Moore faced a lack of topographical information when preparing for his invasion of Spain in the autumn of 1808, which cost him critical time.

As the war progressed, the British had the advantage of being able to, fairly safely, send out individual exploring/sketching officers to collect this key information. Such information was able to 'put flesh on the bones' of the pictures portrayed by the variously available maps.

The French army, however, generally had the whole of the countryside against them in both Portugal and Spain, which meant that any such reconnaissance could only be carried out, if at all, by larger units of cavalry. Their General Staff only appear to have had the López maps available. It has been stated that in 1810 Masséna should have supplemented the use of the map by sending reconnaissances in every direction. He did so, as far as was in his power, but exploration far afield was only possible with large bodies of men, since the *Ordenanza* blocked every road to the isolated staff-officer. He also tried to collect oral information, but from the eighteen Portuguese officers on his staff, this was proven to be defective.

After the early campaigns, enquiry in Madrid will certainly have revealed just how these López maps had been created, which would then have further reinforced the judgements made following their use in Portugal. It is my contention, therefore, that Joseph and Jourdan only trusted these very same López maps as far as the main routes were concerned and doubted that large numbers could march through the wild country depicted to the northwest of the 'great highway'.

As with many of the weapons systems in use, the maps of the Napoleonic Wars were still in the process of improvement and sophistication. As such, there was still much further to go than many of the military appreciated.

To express it in modern terminology - if the maps of the time represented *imagery intelligence* (IMINT), then they still needed to make heavy investments in *human intelligence* (HUMINT) gathering.

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³ The *Dépôt de la Guerre* had been created by Louis XIV in 1688 and was considerably augmented after 1793 under the Republic and Empire. The *Hofkriegskanzleiarchiv* of the Habsburg monarchy was started in 1711. The *Depot of Military Knowledge* was created by the Duke of York in 1803.