

**ANOTHER RESPECTABLE SPY:  
HENRY STANYFORD BLANCKLEY (1785–1819)**

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**Introduction**

Jock Haswell's book about the daring adventures of the resourceful Colquhoun Grant was one of the first to shed light on the activities of Wellington's Intelligence Officers during the Peninsular War.<sup>1</sup> While a number of Wellington's soldiers, most notably those undertaking light cavalry patrols, participated in the process of gathering intelligence, certain individuals – of whom Grant may be the best known – possessed special aptitude for this work and were entrusted with a greater role in penetrating the fog of war. These men were an exclusive company and less than two dozen of these British 'detached officers' have been identified.<sup>2</sup> A handful of them have attracted significant scholarly scrutiny,<sup>3</sup> but until now the part played by Henry Stanyford Blanckley has remained hidden. The remarkable career of this young officer of the Royal Welch Fusiliers deserves the kind of celebrity enjoyed by Colquhoun Grant himself.

Military historian S.G.P. Ward observed of Intelligence Officers that:

*It is difficult to speak adequately of the achievements of these men as, to avoid detection, they never stayed long in any one place; they committed as few names to paper as they could, and most of such documents as there were have been purposely destroyed. But their usefulness in helping Wellington to find out 'what they are doing on the other side of the hill', as he expressed it, must have been very considerable.<sup>4</sup>*

Even the nomenclature attached to their work tends to be elusive, euphemistic and changeable. They were referred to variously as: intelligence officers, detached officers, exploring officers, reconnoitring officers, officers on a 'particular service' or observing officers. The word 'spy' itself was avoided, at least in part because espionage had crude, underhand, ungentlemanly connotations. Furthermore, to be identified as a spy upon capture by the French was very likely to result in

<sup>1</sup> Jock Haswell, *The First Respectable Spy. The Life & Times of Colquhoun Grant, Wellington's Head of Intelligence* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1969). William Napier recounts Grant's exploits admirably too. See W. Napier, *History of the War in the Peninsula* (6 vols, London: Constable, 1993), Vol. 4, pp. 464–472.

<sup>2</sup> See: Rory Muir, Robert Burnham, Howie Muir & Ron McGuigan, *Inside Wellington's Peninsular Army* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2014), p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance: Julia Page, *Intelligence Officer in the Peninsula. Letters & Diaries of Major the Hon. Edward Charles Cocks 1786–1812* (Spellmount: Tunbridge Wells, 1986), Mary McGrigor, *Wellington's Spies* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2005) and Barrie Griffiths, *A Spy for Wellington: Sir John William Waters (1774–1842), Cefn Cribwr's Forgotten Hero* (Cynffig: Cymdeithas Cynffig, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Stephen George Peregrine Ward, *Wellington's Headquarters* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2017), p. 118.

summary execution. Sir James McGrigor's *Autobiography* details a telling instance of this when Colquhoun Grant was captured in April 1812 and interviewed by Marshal Marmont. He was reported to have said to Grant: 'It is fortunate for you, sir, that you have that bit of red over your shoulders (meaning his uniform), if you had not, I would have hung [sic] you on a gallows; twenty feet high.'<sup>5</sup> For this reason, Wellington himself urged officers to wear their uniforms when undertaking these duties. In fact, there exists a note to this effect from Fitzroy Somerset, Wellington's Military Secretary, to Henry Stanyford Blanckley himself:

*Valladolid September 8 1812*

*My dear Blanckley,*

*Lord Wellington approves highly of your proceeding to the other side of the Tagus for the purpose of procuring intelligence and desires you will communicate what you hear to Genl Charles Alten.<sup>6</sup> You may get as near the French as you please, but mind you are not taken & always wear your Regimentals, as the French are become excessively jealous of the manner in which we find out what they are about ...<sup>7</sup>*

Reconnaissance of the enemy's dispositions was only one function that these adventurous soldiers had to perform. For one thing, topographical reporting was crucial since Iberian cartography at the beginning of the Peninsular War was notably rudimentary: '... maps of both Spain and Portugal comparable in accuracy to those of other parts of Western Europe were not to be obtained. What maps there were, were infinitely inferior to the geodesic survey of France carried out and published by the Cassini family, and those of the Low Countries ... the two best-mapped countries of the continent.'<sup>8</sup> Then there was the assessment of local conditions and interaction with the populace. This task called for command of languages and dialects (Blanckley, for one, boasted knowledge of Italian, Spanish, Catalan and Minorcan),<sup>9</sup> as well as a degree of tact and patience in fostering relationships with the brave Iberian 'confidential persons' who supplied Wellington with information at risk of their lives.

Thanks to Haswell, Napier and others, we know a good deal about Colquhoun Grant's life and career. More recent scholarship has coaxed additional 'respectable spies' out of the shadows and, as a result, some of Grant's colleagues in the Intelligence service – notably his namesake John Grant, Edward Charles Cocks, Andrew Leith Hay, John Waters – and the work they undertook, have become

<sup>5</sup> Sir James McGrigor, *The Autobiography & Services of Sir James McGrigor, Bart. Late Director-General of the Army Medical Department* (London: Longman, 1861), p. 286.

<sup>6</sup> Sir Charles (Carl) von Alten (1764–1840) commanded the Light Division at this point during the Peninsular War.

<sup>7</sup> Newberry Library, Chicago, Blanckley Archive, Newberry MS 5029, 17 October 1796 – 25 May 1820, No. 6. Fitzroy Somerset to Blanckley, 8.9.1812. (Hereafter Blanckley Archive).

<sup>8</sup> Ward, *Wellington's Headquarters*, p. 103.

<sup>9</sup> Blanckley Archive, No.3, Blanckley to HRH the Duke of York, 18.7.1809.

better known. Historian Huw Davies has recently surveyed the full tapestry of Intelligence operations at that time in unprecedented detail, including the role of the Royal Navy, the activities of the diplomatic service and the distinction between those officers who observed French manoeuvres from British-held territory and those who operated behind enemy lines.<sup>10</sup> Davies makes it abundantly clear how important their work could be: '... officers were ... key sources of operational information ...' and that: 'Put simply, operational and tactical intelligence served as a lens that sharpened and focused the [otherwise] rather blurred picture ...'.<sup>11</sup> However, and unsurprisingly given the essentially murky and secretive nature of much of Wellington's Intelligence network, gaps in our knowledge remain. Burnham has noted that: '... despite their near mythical adventures, very little has been written on the Observing Officers. Little is known about who they were, what their mission was, how they transmitted information back to Wellington, or even their more notable exploits.'<sup>12</sup> Thus, consideration of another 'respectable spy', Henry Stanyford Blanckley, should deepen our understanding of the part Peninsular Intelligence Officers played in the struggle against Napoleon. The Newberry Library in Chicago houses a collection of 25 items of correspondence and other documents connected to Blanckley's life and career and it is upon these that this article is largely based. The collection comprises Intelligence reports written between 1803 and 1813, letters of recommendation from senior officers in both the British and Spanish services, as well as a number of letters, drafts and 'memorials' petitioning for advancement and promotion. Additionally, there is included a lengthy document in Spanish, recording Intelligence that Blanckley assembled during 1812 and 1813, and finally a petition from his widow to HRH the Duke of York in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief.

### Biography

Henry Stanyford Blanckley was born on Saturday 5th March 1785 and baptised the following month at Hatfield Peverel in Essex.<sup>13</sup> He was the first son and second child of the soldier-diplomat and friend of Lord Nelson, Henry Stanyford Blanckley Sr (1752–1828). Blanckley Jr (known in the family as Harry) was to follow his father's path both as a soldier and, having gained some diplomatic experience during his father's consular work in the Balearic Islands, he later aspired to a career in the consular service also.<sup>14</sup>

Henry Stanyford Blanckley Jr's initial military experience came in the Army Commissariat: '... on my first entering the army in the year 1805, when

<sup>10</sup> Huw Davies, *Spying for Wellington: British Military Intelligence in the Peninsular War* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Davies, *Spying for Wellington*, p. 92.

<sup>12</sup> Muir, Burnham, Muir & McGuigan, *Inside Wellington's Peninsular Army*, p. 71.

<sup>13</sup> <<http://www.emmahamiltonsociety.co.uk/blanckley-1750-1799.html>> (accessed 17 June 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 21, Blanckley to the Duke of Wellington, 25.1.1815, in which he solicits Wellington's support for an application to the post of Consul at Marseille. Also: Blanckley Archive, No.15, Blanckley to Lord Castlereagh, 16.3.1815.

at Malta ... [I] went there with the expedition under the command of Sir J. Craig.<sup>15</sup> General Sir James Henry Craig was a veteran of the American War of Independence and led an abortive Anglo-Russian invasion of Naples in 1805. Blanckley was subsequently commissioned Second Lieutenant in the 23rd Foot, the Royal Welch Fusiliers, on 31st July 1806. He indicated in his record of service, and as a sort of afterthought, that he was present at the siege of Copenhagen in the late summer of 1807 (the 1/23rd was there as part of Sir David Baird's 2nd Division), although he supplied no further details.<sup>16</sup> He took part in the capture of Martinique at the beginning of 1809 when he distinguished himself: '... as Lieutenant of the Grenadier Company ... one of those under the immediate orders of Major General Sir E[dward] Pakenham ... which took and kept the heights of Surirey in the island of Martinique against a far superior force of the enemy's.'<sup>17</sup> His half-sister Elizabeth Broughton recorded that: '... we have received most gratifying accounts, that Harry ... was the ensign who first planted the British colours on [the] walls; he was at the moment in advance of his gallant regiment, the Royal Welsh [sic] Fusiliers, and surrounded by clouds of smoke, from which his indomitable standard emerged, amidst the cheers of his fellow victors: and, thanks be to God, he escaped unhurt.'<sup>18</sup> He subsequently found himself in Halifax, Nova Scotia as aide-de-camp to Sir George Prévost, Lieutenant-Governor of that Province. Prévost pursued a chequered career as a soldier and colonial administrator. Successes in Canada and the West Indies were followed by a much-criticised showing in the War of 1812 and, at the time of his death, he had requested a court martial in hopes of re-establishing his reputation.

In July 1809 Blanckley petitioned the Commander-in-Chief, HRH the Duke of York, to be allowed to serve in the Peninsula. He stressed that: '... my motives for thus offering my services [are] entirely disinterested, and that I [am] prompted to make this offer, sole[ly] for zeal for the service, and I [want] nothing for it.' He refers to his fluency in Spanish as a qualification for this posting thus: '... my knowledge of the Spanish language, manners and customs of its peoples which I ... gained by having lived many years under the Spanish flag in the island of Minorca and various parts of Spain, with my father ...'.<sup>19</sup> Following a communication from the colonel of his regiment, Richard Grenville, indicating that his request was denied, Blanckley remained in Canada during the following year but, as fate would have it, was destined to find himself in the Peninsula shortly after all.

Blanckley married Elizabeth Diana Foreman at Halifax, Nova Scotia on 4th October 1810. Elizabeth and Henry had four children, all sons: Henry Ellis, who appears to have died in infancy in northern France (post-Waterloo?), Edward

<sup>15</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 12, Statement of Blanckley's Military Career, 16.9.1814.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Henry Browne asserts he and Blanckley carried the Colours in this campaign. See Roger Buckley (ed.), *The Napoleonic War Journal of Captain Henry Thomas Browne, 1807-1816* (London: Army Records Society, 1987), p. 50.

<sup>17</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Blanckley Broughton, *Six Years Residence in Algiers* (London: Saunders & Otley, 1839), pp. 150-151.

<sup>19</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 12.

James (b. 27th July 1816 in Cambrai), Henry Stanyford (b. 11th August 1817 at Valenciennes, France) and Charles Brown (baptised 7th February 1819 at Westminster).<sup>20</sup> Blanckley's regiment was ordered to the Peninsula the very same month as their wedding. At this juncture Sir George Prévost proposed to Blanckley that he exchange into the 3rd Regiment of Foot, the Buffs, and remain on Prévost's staff in Canada. He evidently respected Prévost and, as a newly married man, he must have been very torn. Nevertheless, he turned down the offer and duly arrived with the Royal Welch Fusiliers in the Peninsula during November 1810. Apparently, Elizabeth remained in Nova Scotia and the couple must have seen nothing of each other during the next few years. Not to put too fine a point on it, the birthdates of their sons certainly support this interpretation! Oddly, no letters between the pair are extant, although Blanckley was evidently a diligent and affectionate correspondent.<sup>21</sup> He evidently felt such an intense loyalty to his regiment that he could not have done otherwise: '... I would not think ... of quitting the Welch Fusiliers at such a crisis, and therefore rejected Sir Geo: Prevost's [sic] kind offer ...'.<sup>22</sup>

Other offers and enticements came his way upon his arrival in the Peninsula, first from Sir Edward Pakenham who suggested he join the Portuguese service. As part of Marshal William Carr Beresford's program of revitalizing the Portuguese army some 350 British officers were attached to that nation's land forces during the Peninsular War. The chief incentive was promotion by one step in rank without sacrificing seniority in their own British regiments. Then Spanish General Don Carlos de España, whom Blanckley evidently already knew well, made a similar proposition that he join the Spanish service.<sup>23</sup> He turned down both offers, going on to see action with the Royal Welch Fusiliers at the battle of Redhina (12th March 1811), the siege of Olivença (April 1811), the second siege of Badajoz (April – June 1811), and at the Battle of Albuera (16th May 1811), where he: '... had the honor of commanding the Grenadier Company of my Regiment as my Captain was killed ...'.<sup>24</sup>

Shortly after Albuera, Blanckley received a message from General Rowland Hill, in command of the 2nd Division:

*... to say, that [Hill] wished me to go out to reconnoitre the enemy's army, that was then coming down from Castille [sic] under the orders of Marsha[l] Marmont to the relief of Badajoz. Lt Colonel Pearson assured me that my being employed in this manner would certainly lead to my promotion, without considering this, I instantly accepted ... Hill's offer, and was out on this service*

<sup>20</sup> <<http://www.emmahiltonsociety.co.uk/blanckley-1750-1799.html>> (accessed 10 June 2022).

<sup>21</sup> See: Princeton University Special Collections, Blanckley Family Papers, 1813-1890. Manuscripts Collection C1542.)

<sup>22</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 19, Blanckley to Lord Hill, 31.12.1814.

<sup>23</sup> Blanckley Archive, No.12.

<sup>24</sup> Blanckley Archive, No.12.

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*about seven weeks. Most of the time in the rear of the enemy army with only a servant. During this service, I was fortunate enough to be of service to a Spanish Corps under the command of General Morillo ...*<sup>25</sup>

Thus commenced his formal career in intelligence-gathering, although as we shall see, he had in fact operated under a similar remit on at least one occasion much earlier in his career.

Having first impressed Hill, Blanckley would presently come to the attention of the commander of the forces himself: 'On my return to our Army, Lord Hill took me to, and introduced me to His Grace the Duke of Wellington.'<sup>26</sup> There are around a dozen references to Blanckley and his intelligence-gathering activities in the Wellington Despatches, of which the following extract is typical:

*To Lieut. Gen. Sir R. Hill, K.B. Frenada, [Freneida] 1st Dec. 1812*

*Since I wrote to you this morning, at 11 o'clock, I have received a letter of yesterday, from Blanckley, from Monforte, who says that the enemy are moving every thing from Bejar and elsewhere towards the Puerto [Puento?] de Congosto and Avila. I am inclined to believe this.*

*I have another letter of the 29th, at 4 in the evening, from a clergyman at Batuecas, near Alverca, who says the enemy were moving on Plasencia. Blanckley was, however, so certain of the truth of his intelligence, that he was about to go towards Baños and Bejar himself.*<sup>27</sup>

In this case Blanckley was correct, as confirmed by Wellington's note to Hill of the following day.<sup>28</sup> (See also the extract from 'Diario de Noticias' below).

A sample of the type of information Blanckley forwarded to his superior officers appears in a letter he wrote to Lord William Bentinck, who commanded a diversionary campaign in eastern Spain following the failed siege of Tarragona in the summer of 1813. Dated 11th August 1813 and addressed from Headquarters at Lezaca (now Lesaka) in northern Spain, Blanckley had no qualms about expressing trenchant opinions regarding the viability and effectiveness of Spanish guerrilla general José Duran:

*... the character of General Durant [sic]... is briefly this, that he is a man by no means calculated for either military or civil employ – for the former he is too old, inactive and without a spark of 'esprit de guerre' – and for the latter he is*

<sup>25</sup> Blanckley Archive, No.12. Lt-Col Thomas Pearson was briefly in command of the Fusilier Brigade and subsequently the 1/23rd Foot. Gen. Pablo Morillo (1775-1837) fought against the British at Trafalgar before siding with his former adversaries against the French in the Peninsula.

<sup>26</sup> Blanckley Archive, No.12.

<sup>27</sup> Lt-Col. John Gurwood (ed.), *The Despatches of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington* (London: John Murray, 1838), Vol. 9, p. 549. (Hereafter Gurwood (ed.), *Wellington's Despatches*.)

<sup>28</sup> Gurwood (ed.), *Wellington's Despatches*, Vol. 9, p. 551.

*too unpopular, that is to say in all parts of the country where I have heard his name mentioned. I do not attribute all the faults to him, but I think he is badly advised.*<sup>29</sup>

The Newberry Library's collection of Blanckley's papers includes an unusual document entitled *Diario de Noticias de los movimientos de los enemigos y copias de cartas recibidas por el Capitan Ingles D. Enrique Blanckley de diferentes puntos de España* [*Journal of News of the movements of the enemy and copies of letters received by the English Captain D. Henry Blanckley from different points of Spain*].<sup>30</sup> Comprising 46 handwritten pages in Spanish (and evidently not in Blanckley's hand), the *Diario* covers a period of six months of his service, from 6th December 1812 to 18th May 1813, and contains reports from sources located in central Spain, including Avila, Medina del Campo, Segovia, Toledo, Salamanca, Béjar, Valladolid, Madrid and Alba de Tormes. These anonymous reports from 'correspondents and emissaries',<sup>31</sup> copied and collated, place Blanckley in the epicentre of the web of intelligence at this period. A dense catalogue of very specific details is supplied regarding French (and to a lesser extent Spanish) troop movements, along with occasional snippets from far-flung theatres (especially news from Napoleon's Russian campaign). The document opens as follows:

*Avila 6 December 1812*

*On the bridge of Congosto 200 infantry number 24 with 8 Dragoons number 14. Barco de Avila two companies of infantry number 24 and 24 Dragoons number 14.*

*Piedrahita 700 infantry number 24 with 130 Dragoons number 14.*

*Casas del Puerto de Villatoro 2 companies of infantry number 9.*

*Villatoro 2 companies of infantry number 9.*

*Muñana 2 companies of infantry number 96 with 20 horse number 21.*

*Serrada one company of infantry number 96...*

*Marshal Soult left Avila on the 3rd, the 3rd division revictualling at Barco and resting at Tiemblo in the direction of Toledo where he is trying to settle a dispute...*

*There is in Arevalo a garrison comprised of 300 to 400 infantry and from 60 to 70 horse dragoons of the number 27 of the army ['armada' in the original] of Marshal Soult who is said to be towards Toledo. Of the King [Joseph Bonaparte] some say is found at Madrid, others that he is in Segovia but of this I have not been able to ascertain the truth.*<sup>32</sup> [Author's translation]

<sup>29</sup> University of Nottingham, Correspondence from Capt. H.S. Blanckley to Lord William Bentinck, Reference: Pw Jd 738/1-2.

<sup>30</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 10, *Diario de Noticias*, 6.12.1812 to 18.5.1813.

<sup>31</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 10. The numbers cited refer to regiments comprising Soult's Army of the South: the 24<sup>e</sup> Ligne, 9<sup>e</sup> Léger, 96<sup>e</sup> Ligne, and the 14<sup>e</sup>, 21<sup>e</sup> and 27<sup>e</sup> Dragons.

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Blanckley seems to have played an important role in the combat at Béjar on 20th February 1813 when the French under General Maximilien Foy attempted to surprise a British outpost in its winter quarters. He claims to have been mentioned in the despatch which Colonel John Bacon Harrison, the officer commanding, wrote following the successful repulse of the French attack.<sup>33</sup> Presumably, Blanckley had some role in alerting Harrison to the impending attempted *coup de main*. Frustratingly though, his name does not appear in the portion of the report that is quoted in the Wellington Despatches.<sup>34</sup>

Promoted captain by purchase 21st May 1812,<sup>35</sup> Blanckley found himself a victim of his own success in the role of intelligence-gathering for he repeatedly applied for leave, both before and after the Burgos campaign in the autumn of that year, and was repeatedly denied. He wished to return to Canada: '... where I had some important private affairs to arrange' (presumably he wanted to see his wife!) and promised he would be able to return to active duty within six months. Flatteringly perhaps, but surely affording Blanckley only scant consolation, Fitzroy Somerset at one point indicated that his work was so valued: '... that [Wellington] would not hear of my quitting the Peninsula'.<sup>36</sup> At length however:

*... this indulgence was granted to me about the middle of August 1813 and His Grace the Duke ... at the same time requested me to be the bearer of King Joseph's state sword taken at the Battle of Vittoria [sic], to H.R.H. the Prince Regent. This trophy I had the honour of presenting to H.R.H. in person at Brighton in August 1813.*<sup>37</sup>

Blanckley duly proceeded to Canada (via Bermuda) before returning to Europe just after the conclusion of the Peninsular War. He was present at Waterloo in the capacity of Deputy Assistant Adjutant General to Lieutenant General Sir Edward Barnes, and emerged unhurt although, according to his wife, he had two horses shot beneath him during the battle.<sup>38</sup> And so, among other remarkable aspects of his life, he had made it through the bloodbaths of both Albuera and Waterloo unscathed.

While some of Blanckley's record and narrative comes to us solely from documents that he compiled himself and is therefore generally uncorroborated by any other source, it should be noted that he assembled an impressive portfolio of encomiums from the men under whom he served and, as we will see in his pursuit of advancement, he was going to need them. Thus, from Spanish General Pablo Morillo we learn that Blanckley:

<sup>33</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 19.

<sup>34</sup> Gurwood, (ed.), *Wellington's Despatches*, Vol. 6, p. 319.

<sup>35</sup> London Gazette, 23 May 1812.

<sup>36</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 12. For a very thorough description of this sword, which is housed in the Royal Collection, see: <<https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/1/collection/61170/robe-sword-and-sabbard>> (accessed 29 June 2022).

<sup>38</sup> Oddly, but not uniquely, Blanckley was issued with two Waterloo Medals with slightly different regimental naming. See [https://www.noonans.co.uk/auctions/archive/lot-archive/results/328885/?keywords=Blanckley&discipline=&category=&date\\_start=&date\\_end=&lot\\_no=](https://www.noonans.co.uk/auctions/archive/lot-archive/results/328885/?keywords=Blanckley&discipline=&category=&date_start=&date_end=&lot_no=)



*... has contributed to the success of my operations by the timely and interesting intelligence which he has communicated ... He leaves me satisfied with his... efficacy, zeal, and punctuality ... and I ought to do him the justice to recommend him to your Excellency [General Rowland Hill] as he is an officer worthy of the most honourable distinction.*<sup>39</sup>

In fact, Blanckley rubbed shoulders with an impressive roster of Spanish Peninsular War guerrilla leaders and Regular soldiers, including Don Julián Sánchez, General Francisco Mina and General Francisco Ballesteros. He became closely acquainted with numerous leading figures in the British Army too and recruited a good number of these to write letters of recommendation for him as he endeavoured to gain promotion. For instance, Sir Edward Pakenham was prepared to write on Blanckley's behalf to Sir John Sherbrooke. (Pakenham served in Canada, Copenhagen and Martinique, as well as the Peninsula, so may have had long acquaintance with Blanckley who also served in those places. General Sherbrooke pursued a long career in India, Flanders, the Peninsula and America in the War of 1812).

*Head Quarters Lezaca [sic -- Lesaka]*

*10th August 1813*

*My dear Sir John:*

*Permit me to introduce to your favorable notice Captain Blanckley of the Fusiliers ... from his knowledge of the Spanish language [he] has been long employed with the troops of that nation, and had more opportunity of exemplifying his untarnished zeal for the Cause than he could have done under any other circumstances, and in every point of him I can safely mention this officer as deserving consideration.*<sup>40</sup>

And Sir Rowland Hill wrote:

*Hawkstone January 4th 1815*

*As you wish me to specify my Opinion of you during the time you served under my command, I have great satisfaction in assuring you that your conduct merited my full approbation. I always found you attentive [.] intelligent, and very useful in the discharge of your duty, as a reconnoitring officer; and I shall be very glad, if any testimony from me, of your merits, can be of service in forwarding your wishes.*

*I remain*

*My dear sir*

*Your most faithful servant*

*Hill*<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 4, Letter of Recommendation, July 1811.

<sup>40</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 11, Sir Edward M. Pakenham to Sir John Sherbrooke, 10.8.1813.

<sup>41</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 13, Lord Hill to Blanckley, 4.1.1815.

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Blanckley's struggles to gain promotion and escape the misery of Half Pay were Sisyphean, if not untypical of the officer class in the post-war years. In contrast to the thrill and action involved with intelligence-gathering in the Peninsula, many of the Newberry documents detail the tedious business of importuning and canvassing for promotion. This, of course, was an almost universal and perpetual preoccupation for officers at all levels and even Wellington's highly valued Quartermaster General Sir George Murray harboured deep frustration and exasperation over Horse Guards' reluctance to recognise his services with appropriate promotion.<sup>42</sup> As we have seen, Blanckley's career had been somewhat disjointed in part due to the semi-unofficial nature of his Intelligence work and this led to a degree of confusion and delay. Thus, we find him importuning the Duke of Wellington from Cambrai in November 1816:

*... your memorialist in consequence of being employed by your Grace during the Peninsular War on the reconnoitring service has been unable to obtain his 3rd and 4th payments of the Peninsular Prize Money, having been returned by his Regiment – 'Employed on a Particular Service'... Your memorialist therefore solicits your kind interference with His Grace the Commander of the Forces, [the Duke of York] to obtain from His Grace an authority to enable him to recover the before mentioned payments ...*<sup>43</sup>

In an earlier petition to Wellington, dated at Paris 25th January 1815, Blanckley was scarcely able to suppress a sense of desperation (at this juncture he was seeking a Consulship and his frustration had been stoked by narrowly missing a personal interview with the Duke, who had departed for Vienna just hours previously):

*... nothing could be more painful to me at this moment, than being again obliged to trouble yr. Grace with my affairs, more particularly as I am well aware that your important occupations, at this crisis, are such as to admit of but little or no interruption ... I arrived, my Lord Duke, in this city late last night with the sole object of having the honor of waiting on your Grace, and of representing to you verbally the series of disappointments that have attended my military career, feeling confident that yr. Grace would listen to me with patience, and render me that justice which my case merited; but words cannot express the disappointment I experienced on learning that yr. Grace had quitted it for Vienna ...*<sup>44</sup>

Another source of grievance resulted from his not receiving promotion after having presented the Prince Regent with King Joseph Bonaparte's sword

<sup>42</sup> John Harding-Edgar, *Next to Wellington: General Sir George Murray* (Warwick: Helion, 2018). See for instance Chapter 13, pp. 210–223.

<sup>43</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 16, Draft of a Petition from Blanckley to the Duke of Wellington, 20.11.1816.

<sup>44</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 21.

following Vitoria. It was customary for officers delivering victorious despatches to receive this reward (Henry Percy after Waterloo being perhaps the best-known example) but this practice was deemed not to apply in the case of Blanckley and the sword. In a letter to his sister dated 7th September 1813, Blanckley recounted that the Prince Regent had been charm itself and had personally entertained the young officer during his entire three-day stay in Brighton, but no promotion ensued.<sup>45</sup> One can sympathize with him.

Chiefly, however, it was the delay and bureaucratic imbroglio attendant upon his pursuit of promotion that exercised Blanckley. As he pointed out in another memorandum – this time to Lord Hill:

*... the Brevet step ... I lost by being detained on the Peninsula and not being permitted to return to Sir Geo. Prevost's staff. For with this object I purchased my company and gained but one step by it. Had I not purchased I should not only have had a company a few weeks after in my own battalion without purchase ... and to wind up my hard fate, by the late reduction of 2nd battalions I am placed on half pay ... which is all I have to look forward to for the support of my family ...*<sup>46</sup>

There is a good deal more in the same vein. How dreary and exasperating, not to say humiliating, it must have been for thrusting officers like Blanckley to endure such experiences. At any rate, he managed at length to recruit Sir Henry Torrens, Military Secretary to HRH the Duke of York, to his cause. Torrens told him: 'You are certainly the most unfortunate fellow I was ever met with; however I must bring it all up to you with wet sail.'<sup>47</sup>

Blanckley finally received his brevet majority on 21st June 1818 giving him rank in the Army as a major.<sup>48</sup> He sailed with the 23rd Foot to Cork, Ireland at the beginning of November 1818<sup>49</sup> and then exchanged into a cavalry regiment, the 13th Light Dragoons, with the regimental rank of captain,<sup>50</sup> He justified this decision by declaring that 'India appearing the only field at present for a military person.'<sup>51</sup> The regiment embarked for Madras, India in February 1819

<sup>45</sup> See: Princeton University Special Collections, Blanckley Family Papers, 1813–1890. Manuscripts Collection C1542.

<sup>46</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 19.

<sup>47</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 19. Torrens, a soldier, is here borrowing from naval terminology. Wetting sails was a technique employed to increase a ship's speed. The saying also had come to mean 'catching up after a delay', which is presumably Torrens' intention here.

<sup>48</sup> The National Archives (United Kingdom) Description Book WO 65–69 p. 82. The Royal Military Calendar volume 5 cites 21 June 1817.

<sup>49</sup> Arthur Deering Lucius Cary & Stoupe McCance (eds.), *Regimental Records of the Royal Welch Fusiliers* (4 vols., London: Forster, Groom, 1921), Vol. 2, pp. 8–9.

<sup>50</sup> However, volume 5 of The Royal Military Calendar mistakenly indicates that he joined the 13th Light Dragoons 30 June 1815!

<sup>51</sup> Blanckley Archive, No.23, Blanckley to Maj.-Gen. Sir Benjamin Bloomfield, 23.2.1818 [sic –1819?].

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and on arrival was initially based at Arcot in south-east India.<sup>52</sup> He survived only a few months, dying on 2nd November 1819, at age 34. His wife testified that he had fallen: ‘... victim to an affliction of the Liver, which [she had] every reason to believe was originally contracted during his services in the Peninsula ...’.<sup>53</sup> Oddly, there is a divergent account of Blanckley’s death, according to which he was: ‘... drowned in a boating accident on the Cauveryparck tank [south central India] along with another officer and their female companion.’<sup>54</sup>

### Exploits

As we have seen, Blanckley gives every impression of having been a ‘young man in a hurry’. Perhaps in emulation of his father, who had pursued a multi-faceted and geographically diverse career – born at Gibraltar, served in North America as soldier, then in the Balearic Islands and Algiers as a diplomat, retired to Bath, and died at Versailles – Blanckley junior is to be found variously at Minorca, Toulon, Nova Scotia, Copenhagen, Martinique, the Peninsula, Bermuda, Canada again, Waterloo, France, Ireland, and he finally died in India. A tone of urgency and zeal (a favourite word of his) permeates his correspondence and reveals the intensity of his ambition and energy. And in contrast to the mundane, not to say tedious chronicles of his seeking promotion, Blanckley’s correspondence contains two instances of what Robert Burnham referred to above as ‘exploits’.

The first such adventure took place in Toulon and was outlined in a dispatch, dated Marseilles 9th March 1803 and addressed to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Hawkesbury (later better-known as Lord Liverpool, Prime Minister from 1812–1827). Blanckley’s deed on this occasion cannot be primly filed away under ‘legitimate Intelligence gathering’, as pertained later during the Peninsular War. This was espionage pure, simple and risky. The Peace of Amiens (25th March 1802 to 18th May 1803) had ended the War of the Second Coalition. However, by the spring of 1803, the Treaty was increasingly viewed as a mere intermission in hostilities rather than a harbinger of lasting peace. Naturally, British statesmen like Hawkesbury were particularly exercised by Napoleon’s naval ambitions at this point:

*Items of constant and specific interest – during peace and war – included ... presence of foreign warships in French ports; the state and disposition of the French fleet; the defenses of the French coast ... the number and condition of ships at Brest, Rochefort, Toulon, Rochelle, St. Malo, Le Havre, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam ...*<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Blanckley Archive, No.23. The confusion regarding Blanckley’s chronology perpetrated by the Royal Military Calendar is here compounded as Blanckley mistakenly heads his letter 1818 rather than 1819. (Blanckley also gets the year he presented the Prince Regent with King Joseph’s sword wrong in this letter.) If it was 1818, that would put him in Ireland and India simultaneously. Then again, the ability to bilocate might be the ultimate attribute for a spy!

<sup>53</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 25, Memorial of Elizabeth Diana Blanckley, 25.5.1820.

<sup>54</sup> Janet & David Bromley, *Wellington’s Men Remembered* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2012), Vol. 1, p. 67.

<sup>55</sup> Steven E. Maffeo, *Most Secret & Confidential. Intelligence in the Age of Nelson* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000), p. 8.

Toulon was the major French naval base in the Mediterranean, and a natural point of focus for British ministers anticipating the imminent collapse of the Treaty and the resumption of hostilities. It is unclear whether Blanckley had any official sanction for his activities at this point and the event described below pre-dates his initial commission by a couple of years. Was he 'freelancing?' Blanckley related that he arrived at Toulon on 3rd March 1803 and infiltrated the Arsenal, despite a strict prohibition against the admittance of foreigners. Having spent an entire night reconnoitring, Blanckley reported:

*... they have an immense quantity of oak and other ship timber regularly marked numbered and squared for immediate construction, the Stores full of every kind of Stores [sic], a great number of men employed in the Rope Houses, particularly on cables of large dimensions. On the stocks are four Ships of the Line, two of 80 and two of 74 guns, from their appearance [they] are in that state of forwardness I judged and was afterwards informed, they would be ready to launch in the course of Eight or Nine months ...*<sup>56</sup>

He related the state of readiness of *La Formidable* (80 guns), the *Berwick* (74 guns), the *Swiftsure* (these two last were originally British and would be recaptured a couple of years later at Trafalgar). He also mentioned: 'The *Muiron* Frigate of 40 Guns ... at anchor in the Inner Road, and when the wind permits, is ... to convoy several vessels laden with merchandise for St. Domingo.'<sup>57</sup> The picture Blanckley painted is one of strenuous re-armament:

*There is the greatest exertion in the Arsenal forwarding these ships - daily are employed (including 3600 galley slaves) 6000 workmen of different descriptions, and on particular occasions are added 700 labourers.<sup>58</sup> The fortifications around the town of Toulon had been for some time neglected, but are now beginning to be put in order - few cannon are mounted - the garrison does not exceed 3000 men.<sup>59</sup>*

Chancing to luck, Blanckley decided to repeat the experiment and returned the following evening accompanied by: 'an officer of the *Corps de Génie*' (that is, an Engineer Officer, perhaps a covert Royalist sympathiser) who told Blanckley there was no risk. However:

*I had not proceeded 200 yards before I was discovered to be a stranger, I was surrounded by a Serjeant and 12 men with the Warder [Warden?] of the Gate. - owing to the presence of mind of the officer who brought me in, I owe my*

<sup>56</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 2, Blanckley to Lord Hawkesbury, 9.3.1803.

<sup>57</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Napoleon had a weathervane policy on slavery, reinstating it in 1802 (after it had been abolished by the Convention eight years prior) but later decreeing its abolition during the Hundred Days.

<sup>59</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 2.

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*escape, who immediately seizing one by the arm and abusing the warder, said to me, come with me to the officer of the Guard, and I will make that impertinent pay for his insolence, to which the Warder replied, if the Captain of the Guard permits this Gentleman to pass, I have no more to say ...*<sup>60</sup>

Having thus evaded capture, Blanckley's guide urged him to remove the national cockade from his hat, abandon his greatcoat and make his way out of the Arsenal by mingling with departing workers at the close of their shift. Once outside, Blanckley rendez-voused with a Captain Nicholas R.N.<sup>61</sup>

*... we immediately proceeded to the hotel and under pretence of going into the country, took our baggage from thence by two boys hired for that purpose from whom by giving them a trifle we took it ourselves, being then quite dusk, and proceeded to the Bureau de Diligence first depositing our portmanteau behind the gates of the coach house, taking our places in feigned French names and to avoid the vigilance of the Police, retired to the hay loft over where the diligence stood, and remained in that situation until two o'clock in the morning, the hour of its departure. – Most fortunately we escaped to this place [Marseille].*<sup>62</sup>

Blanckley was 17 years of age when this took place. He concluded the letter with youthful zest and buoyancy:

*Your Lordship will pardon I hope my giving so long a detail of my personal risques, as zeal for the service I am totally actuated by – and have only to lament that I had not a more ample field to have given your Lordship a stronger proof of it – the information I am now able to give I hope sincerely will meet with your Lordship's approbation, and my future endeavors whenever occasion occurs I shall eagerly embrace to prove myself worthy of your Lordship's protection.*

*I have the honor to be*

*etc etc*

*Signed*

*H.S. Blanckley*<sup>63</sup>

Had Blanckley been captured what would have been his fate? Execution seems unlikely, given that France and Britain were temporarily at peace, although that or impressment into the French navy (or even the ranks of the galley slaves he mentions) may not have been totally out of the question. Presumably a protracted spell in prison at Verdun or Givet would have been the likeliest outcome. At best,

<sup>60</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Unemployed naval officers were often favoured in this line of work. See Maffeo, *Secret & Confidential*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>62</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 2.

Blanckley might have shared the fate of the stranded British *détenus* who were mostly corralled at Verdun – in many cases for years – following the collapse of the Peace of Amiens.

In a journal from 1812, Blanckley recounts a second exploit that took place in the Peninsula around Truxillo (modern-day Trujillo in Extremadura, located some 50 miles from the border with Portugal). His mission was to observe French movements to the north, particularly in the vicinity of the bridge of Almaraz, during the British siege of Badajoz in April of that year. One of Marshal Marmont's divisional commanders, General Foy was at Jaraicejo 10 miles north of Trujillo on 8th April and occupied the latter place the next day with some 3,000 men. Foy's movement was a feint or demonstration intended to distract the British and Foy later stated simply that he subsequently decided to withdraw upon hearing of the fall of Badajoz, which had taken place during the night of 6th April.<sup>64</sup> Charles Oman's *History* follows this line too.<sup>65</sup> However, Blanckley has a somewhat different tale to tell. When news was received of Foy's initial advance from the north towards Trujillo:

*... gloom had taken such possession of the hearts of my friends the Estramadurians that I could only compare the place to a calm after a storm. I did not think it prudent to remain the night at Truxillo, therefore retired to La Cumbre a small village on a green about two miles to the rear & commanding a fine view of Truxillo. Early next morning I returned to Truxillo, & asked the desponding inhabitants if their 'friends' [emphasis in original] were coming ... I now went to the top of the Castle, leaving my horses in the Square, from whence with my glass I perceived the approach of the Enemy in Two Columns. I remained at the top of this building till the Enemy's advance gained the outer suburb when I thought it high time to be off ...*<sup>66</sup>

Blanckley, suspecting that he may have been spotted by the advancing French, retired to another village, Botija, and it is as well he did for: '... before daylight the next morning, two parties of Dragoons surrounded the Village [La Cumbre] and carried off my Patron (Landlord) a spirited little Priest, and the Alcalde (Head Magistrate) prisoners to Truxillo when Genl. Foy questioned them particularly about me ...'<sup>67</sup>

In the meanwhile, Blanckley received a note from Colonel John Campbell, in command of a brigade of Portuguese cavalry at Cáceres, 26 miles to the west.<sup>68</sup> 'The instant I received this communication, I ordered my horse, and went to

<sup>64</sup> Maurice Girod de l'Ain, *Vie Militaire de Général Foy* (Paris: Plon, 1900), p. 159.

<sup>65</sup> Charles William Chadwick Oman, *A History of the Peninsular War* (7 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902–1930), Vol. 5, p. 233.

<sup>66</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 8, 'Stratagems at Truxillo against Gen. Foy', n.d.

<sup>67</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 8.

<sup>68</sup> Col. John Campbell had a wide-ranging career, serving in the infantry, the cavalry, the staff and the Portuguese army. Campbell was mentioned in Marshal Beresford's despatch following the combat at Tarbes in 1814.

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meet Col. Campbell, when I related to him what was going on at Truxillo ...'.<sup>69</sup>  
And then he proposed to Campbell that they attempt a *ruse de guerre*:

*I ... pointed out what advantage might be derived if he would despatch a party to Montánchez to oblige the peasantry to cut brush, and make large fires above that place that night, as it would correspond so well with that part of my letter to my friend at Truxillo, where I state [sic] to him that a Division was to halt that day at Miajadas. Col. Campbell instantly came into my views, and immediately despatched a Portuguese Lt. Col. of the 10th Regt. of Portuguese Cavalry and a small party of men to achieve this object.*<sup>70</sup>

Foy did indeed assume the brush fires to mark the advance of an allied force. The stratagem worked:

*At dusk it was reported to [Foy] that a [illegible] was discovered from the top of the Castle. He [Foy] then called together the Magistrates, and some of the principal inhabitants of the place, and took them to the top of the Castle, and requested they would say how long Troops would be marching from the fires in sight, but as fires appear so much nearer at night than they really are, or as these people were in hopes [that] by saying they were nearer than they really were, that they might frighten away their unwelcome guests, they all agreed that Troops would be at Truxillo from the fires in view within three hours. This was sufficient. Foy, Division and all struck tents, and at 3 A.M. that morning moved off without beat of Drum, or blow of horns, and recrossed the Tagus at Almaraz. At eight the same morning, I received an account of this from my worthy friend, at the same time begging and praying that I would not quit the country at that moment [and] that I had saved Truxillo and country around ...*<sup>71</sup>

### Conclusion

And so, in a frantic life of only 34 years, Henry Stanyford Blanckley Jr acted with the diplomatic service, the army commissariat, the infantry and the cavalry. He campaigned in the Baltic, the West Indies, the Peninsula and at Waterloo, and saw service in Canada, Ireland and India. He attained the rank of major, married and had four children, associated with a cavalcade of Napoleonic era notables (including Wellington and the Prince Regent), spied at Toulon, duped one of Napoleon's best generals in Spain, and more. Blanckley compiled a *curriculum vitae* sufficient to inspire a series of historical novels. However, in conclusion, it should be noted that there are certain unanswered questions, puzzles and obscurities associated with his life and career. How exactly did he find himself

<sup>69</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 8.

<sup>70</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 8.

<sup>71</sup> Blanckley Archive, No. 8.



spying at Toulon at seventeen years of age? Why are there so many inconsistencies in dating his career? What explains the confusion surrounding the manner of his death? Puzzling or even frustrating as these loose ends may be, one might reflect that a certain lasting intrigue and elusiveness is perhaps not inappropriate for a man who flourished in the murky world of intelligence-gathering and was, after all, one of Wellington's 'respectable spies'.

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