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XXXV INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF MILITARY HISTORY

Dr John Peaty
International Secretary

The 35th Congress was hosted by Portugal and held in the city of Oporto from 30th August to 4th September 2009.

The subject was:

Warfare in the Age of Napoleon – Precedents, Military Campaigns and Lasting Impacts.

For the Portuguese 2009 is important as the bicentenary of the capture of Oporto by the French under Soult and its liberation by the British under Wellington.

The venue was the Alfandega International Congress Centre, formerly the Customs House, on the waterfront. A superb exhibition of Portuguese mapping from the Peninsular War was on display at the venue and an annotated extract of Wyld's map of Wellesley's Passage of the Douro in May 1809 was presented to each participant from the BCMH, courtesy of Dick Tennant.

The Congress began with meetings of the Executive, Bibliography, Archives and Education Committees of the ICMH and was followed by five working days with two or three Panels per day each with two to four speakers.

Visits included a reception and choral concert at the Monastery of Sierra do Pilar (from where Wellington directed his famous crossing in 1809), a day trip to the Minho (the verdant north of Portugal) included visits to the historic city of Guimaraes (known as the Cradle of the Nation) and the historic town of Ponte de Lima with its Roman bridge. More convivially, on the evening of Thursday 3rd there was a guided tour of Taylor's port cellars and the Congress ended with the ICMH business meeting followed by an evening banquet and Fado concert.

On Tuesday 1st a workshop was held in English for promising graduate students - three from Portugal, one from Brazil, one from the US and one from Italy. On Thursday 3rd a workshop was held on Portuguese and Brazilian archives. The same day a roundtable was held on books on the Peninsular War.

This year the British delegation was unusually strong, befitting a Congress hosted by Britain's oldest ally in a city liberated by British forces. It comprised Mr. Richard Tennant (the Treasurer), Dr. John Peaty (the International Secretary), Mr. Andrew Grainger (the Newsletter Editor), Dr. Huw Davies of King's College London at Shrivensham, Prof. Charles Esdaile of the University of Liverpool and Dr. Ian Speller of the National University of Ireland at Maynooth. Dr. Davies and Prof. Esdaile attended as guests of the Portuguese. Dr. Speller attended as a member of the Irish Commission. Dr. Davies spoke on Wellington's offensive operations and also participated in a roundtable on Peninsular War books. Prof. Esdaile gave the closing address on the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, a *tour de force*. Dr. Speller gave a paper on naval strategy while Dr. Peaty delivered one on Wellington's map-makers. Dr. Nick Evans was unable to attend through illness but his paper on the Light



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Infantry legacy was given in his absence by Mr. Grainger. The British contribution was much appreciated by our hosts.

As always, the papers varied considerably in terms of presentation, research, relevance and interest. Dr. Ed Coss (U.S.) on Wellington's tactics, Col. Dr. Heinemann (Germany) on C.S. Forrester's Hornblower novels, Brig.-Gen. Dr. Clemmsen (Denmark) on Jomini, Dr. de Brito (Portugal) on British officers in Portuguese service, Lt. Col. Dr. Klebanoff (Israel) on Turner's naval paintings and Prof. Amendolara (Argentina) on Robert Fulton stood out.

[I also recall good papers on the Impacts on the Portuguese Medical Services, operations on the Cape of Good Hope, Historiography and People's War, operations in the Baltic and a very good graduate paper on contemporary US perceptions of the wars. **Ed**]

Our Portuguese hosts are to be warmly congratulated on such a well organised, interesting and enjoyable Congress.

The ICMH Congress in Oporto – A Personal View

Your editor attended the Conference with seasoned veterans of the International Conference circuit Dick Tennant and John Peaty. I found that my emotions fluctuated rather more wildly than those of my compatriots. Both *'Welcome'* and *'Thank You'* fatigue set in early with appropriate speeches being made in four languages for what seemed like the whole of the first day and significant chunks of every reception thereafter. The diplomacy and charm of the ICMH President took my breath away. How on earth do bigger international organisations like the UN ever get anything done at all?

As John has said, the standard of papers varies enormously and proceedings are not free of the ritual neighbourly slugging off seen at the Eurovision song contest. One is also struck by the increasing use of English by participants, especially younger ones who can often speak the language more fluently than some inhabitants of the sceptred isle. Only a non-Brit could have said (at the Graduate School conducted entirely in English) that nowadays if you cannot write, speak and debate in English then *'Go elsewhere'*. I followed this up with an eminent member of the ICMH – he felt that there were in fact lots of indigenous historians in Europe doing very good work but he felt they were less likely to get published in their native tongue. If this is the case then encouragement for these individuals should surely be a high priority for the ICMH.

Other memories – some very good papers, a chairman who hijacked entirely the book review session, a speaker at that session who spent 20 minutes plugging his own book but failed entirely to communicate his thesis but inevitably my favourite – being addressed as Professor Grainger throughout the Panel session following my reading of Dr Nick Evans' paper. These Europeans - they can certainly spot talent!

Andy Grainger