

FIELD MARSHAL HENRY WILLIAM PAGET OF STAFFORDSHIRE

Nick Lipscombe

Field Marshal Henry Paget was one of the most distinguished cavalry generals of the Napoleonic Wars. After campaigning in Spain in 1808, Paget returned to England, where his subsequent affair with the wife of Wellington's younger brother scandalised society. Waterloo enabled Paget to restore his reputation, but also cost him his leg and his military career.



© Lieutenant General Henry William Paget (1768-1854) c. 1815 (oil on canvas), Stroehling, Peter Eduard (1768-1826)/National Army Museum, London/Bridgeman Images

Henry Paget, the cavalry general whose distinguished military career was brought to an end by injury at the Battle of Waterloo. *Lieutenant General Henry William Paget (1768-1854)*, c. 1815 by Peter Eduard Stroehling.

Henry was born in London on 17 May 1768, the son of Henry Bayly and Jane (*née* Champagné). The following year the family fortunes changed dramatically when Henry senior inherited a baronetcy and succeeded to the title of the 9th Lord Paget of Beaudesert. The new family seat was on the southern edge of Cannock Chase in Staffordshire but the family's good fortune was not to end there for, in 1780, they inherited large tracts of mining land in both England and Ireland. The young Henry Paget was to benefit from the family's new-found affluence; he attended Westminster School and Christchurch College, Oxford.

In 1790, on completion of his studies, he became the Member of Parliament for Carnarvon, but Paget was set on a military career. In 1793, at the outbreak of the French Revolutionary Wars, he raised the 80th Foot (Staffordshire Volunteers) from his father's estates and funding. As a militia lieutenant colonel he commanded the regiment from the outset and took part in the 1794 Flanders Campaign. The next six years were a whirlwind of activity. In 1795 he was formally commissioned into the British Army as a lieutenant in the 7th Foot; almost immediately he gained a captaincy in the 23rd Foot; in early May that was increased to enable him to become a major in the 65th Foot before, on 30 May, he regained lieutenant colonelcy of the 80th Foot.

A month later he transferred to the 16th Light Dragoons. If that was not enough to keep him busy, he also married Lady Caroline Elizabeth Villiers in July 1795.

In 1796 Paget switched parliamentary seats and became Member of Parliament for Milborne Port, Somerset, received

promotion to colonel and assumed command of the 7th Light Dragoons the following year. In 1799 he took the regiment to Holland as part of Sir Ralph Abercromby's Anglo-Russian force which failed to remove the occupying French; nevertheless, Paget's talents had been noted.

Daring missions in Spain

Paget did not experience military operations again until 1808, by which time he was a lieutenant general. He commanded the cavalry in Sir John Moore's army and fought two actions in December 1808 at Sahagún and Benavente in Spain, during the early stages of the army's harrowing retreat in the face of Napoleon's pursuing corps. The action at Sahagún, handled directly by Paget, was audacious in the extreme and the first triumph for the British cavalry in the war. However, on his return to England Paget's close liaison with Lady Charlotte Cadogan, the wife of the Duke of Wellington's younger brother Henry Wellesley, became too public, making it impossible for Paget to return to the Peninsula and serve with Wellington. Instead Paget was given command of an infantry division which participated in the ill-fated Walcheren expedition. On return he divorced his wife Lady Caroline and married the recently divorced Lady Charlotte. However, the affair was too much for Regency society and damaged Paget's reputation as well as causing considerable ill-feeling and distress with his eight children.

A reputation regained, a career lost

On his father's death in 1812 Paget inherited the title the Earl of Uxbridge. In 1815 he was given command of the British cavalry in Wellington's Anglo-Dutch Army. His initial meeting with the Commander-in-Chief was cold but



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Appointed Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire in 1849, Henry Paget is buried at Lichfield Cathedral with his Staffordshire ancestors.

Wellington showed no apparent animosity. Uxbridge's command of the retreat from Quatre Bras on 17 June, in conjunction with the horse artillery, was masterfully executed. During the Battle of Waterloo the next day he launched and led, perhaps too intimately given his position, the heavy cavalry brigades,

which checked the attack by the Comte d'Erlon, commander of the French I Corps, at a critical juncture. In the dying stages of the epic confrontation Uxbridge was injured by a shell splinter while saddled a few yards from Wellington. By God, sir, I've lost my leg!' he exclaimed in a rather matter-of-fact way, to which Wellington replied, equally impassive, 'By God, sir, so you have!' His right knee was shattered, necessitating amputation. It brought an end to his military career.

A month after Waterloo, 'One-Leg' as he became known, was awarded the title Marquess of Anglesey in recognition of his achievements and promoted to full General in 1819 and Field Marshal in 1846. He continued to serve in public office as Master General of the Ordnance (1827-1828 and 1846-1852) and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (1828-1829 and 1830-1833). He was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire in 1849. He died of a stroke at Uxbridge House on 29 April 1854 and was buried at Lichfield Cathedral. The Cathedral houses a monument and on the Isle of Anglesey a 27-metre column was erected to his heroism. Both are fitting memorials to one of Britain's greatest cavalry generals.

Nick Lipscombe is a Napoleonic Historian and Tour Guide. He spent 34 years in the British Army. Published work includes his award-winning *The Peninsular War Atlas* (Osprey Publishing, 2nd edn., 2014), *Wellington's Guns: The Untold Story of Wellington and his Artillery in the Peninsula and at Waterloo* (Osprey Publishing, 2013), *Wellington's Forgotten Front* (Gerrard Books, 2013), *Bayonne and Toulouse 1813-14, Wellington Invades France* (Osprey Publishing, 2014) and, most recently, *Waterloo – The Decisive Victory* (Osprey Publishing, 2014).

Further reading:

Ian Fletcher, *Galloping at Everything: The British Cavalry in the Peninsular War and at Waterloo 1808-15* (Stackpole Books, 2001).

George Charles Henry Victor Paget, Marquess of Anglesey, *One-Leg: Life and Letters of Henry William Paget* (Jonathan Cape, 1961).