

John Jack

Born 19th March 1780 Monquitter Parish Aberdeenshire Scotland

Died 12th May 1870 King Edward Parish Aberdeenshire Scotland

Life story by Richard Lyon, Great great great grandson of Charles (Militia) Jack, sibling of John Jack.

Available online at www.livesretold.co.uk

Contents

1. Early Life 1780-1803
2. Military Career 1803-1826
3. Out Pensioner Royal Hospital Chelsea 1826-1870
4. Press articles referencing John Jack's military experiences
5. Family Life and Descendants
6. Background and Sources



John Jack at age 90

Photograph taken by Joseph Collier, a son in law of John Jack.



John Jack's Medals

Peninsula War General Service Medal with twelve clasps

Valiant Stormalong's Medal

Waterloo Medal

1. Early Life 1780-1803

John Jack was born on 19th March 1780 in the farmtoun of Cairnhill in the Parish of Monquitter in Aberdeenshire.

His parents were Charles Jack (3rd July 1748 Auchterless – 1838) and Margaret Brodie (4th August 1741 Turriff - ?) and who were married on 16th August 1772 in Turriff.

The Jack family tree indicates that Charles's parents were George Jack (30th March 1725 Knockorth, Marnoch - ?) and Isobel Forsyth who were married in 1739 in Oyne Parish. Little is known of earlier antecedents except for George's father Alexander Jack (born c 1690 and died 1710).

Amongst John Jack's siblings are, firstly, his twin sister Janet, who married Alexander Bell on 3rd July 1813, in Monquitter.

Other siblings are:

Charles (Militia) Jack (23rd October 1774 Monquitter – 26th December 1858 131 Causewayside Edinburgh). This Charles Jack is the great,great,great,great grandfather of the author of this Life Story.

James Jack (10th October 1773 Monquitter - ?) assumed infant death.

And James Jack (12th July 1777 Monquitter - ?)

John's first job on leaving school was with the Rev. Alexander Johnston, minister of the parish, at £ 3-10-0 a year plus his keep. He saw little future as a farm servant so he went to Turriff and learned the trade of shoemaking, which he later practised in Aberdeen. This skill was also most useful to him when later he was in the army.

The story passed down tells of John being some fourteen years older than his future wife Barbara Innes, and that around 1803 Barbara's mother did not approve of the match. As a result John went away and joined the Aberdeen Militia as a substitute for a young farmer who did not seek military glory.

After John Jack's discharge from the army, some twenty three years later, in 1826, he returned to Scotland and two years later married Barbara, on 27th July 1828 in King Edward Parish, Aberdeenshire.

2. Military Career 1803-1826

In 1805, when John's regiment was in Edinburgh Castle, a recruiting party arrived seeking volunteers for the experimental brigade that was being formed by Sir John Moore. This was attractive to John who enlisted in the 52nd Regiment (later called the Oxfordshire Light Infantry). His first posting in this regiment took him to Shorncliffe Army Camp, near Folkestone, for innovative and rigorous training. This produced Britain's first permanent light infantry regiments. At Shorncliffe every man was taught to cook and tailor and lived in war conditions. They were trained to act as the forward screen of the army.

John's first overseas posting soon followed, with the 1st Battalion being sent to Sicily, sailing from Plymouth. The purpose of this posting was to try to stop any attempt by Napoleon to occupy Sicily. The regiment returned to Portsmouth on the last day of 1807, and was soon embarking for Sweden as part of a force to protect this country.

Recall soon occurred and in the summer the regiment sailed for Portugal for a much sterner test, which ended in January 1809 with the retreat to Corunna and the death of their much beloved general, Sir John Moore. In the retreat from Corunna, in dreadful conditions, John's skills as a cobbler were much in demand. The 1st/52nd was one of the battalions that covered the rearguard from Sahagun to Corunna. Their strict discipline during this time resulted in only light losses of one bugler and 92 men.

The British Army returned to the Peninsula in June 1809. The 52nd, together with the 1/43rd and 1/95th formed the Light Brigade under Robert Craufurd.

In the following six years John Jack took part, with his regiment, in twenty-seven engagements, culminating in Waterloo. John was a volunteer in the Forlorn Hope at the siege of Ciudad Rodrigo, and was severely wounded at Badajoz, when a musket ball passed through the lower part of his body. He was saved by a colleague who dragged him to safety, and he survived from his wounds.

Amongst the battles fought, and amongst which are battles for which he was later awarded clasps to his Peninsula Campaign medal are:

Information taken from:

www.lightinfantry.org.uk and from
[https://wikipedia.org/52nd_\(Oxfordshire\)Regiment_of_Foot](https://wikipedia.org/52nd_(Oxfordshire)Regiment_of_Foot)

Iberian Peninsula

1808 - 2nd Bn. at Vimiera, 1st & 2nd Bn. at Corunna

Vimiero (21 August 1808)

Wellesley (Wellington), having landed with his expeditionary force the previous month, was marching towards Lisbon. At Vimeiro, 32 miles northwest of the city, he ran into 14,000 French (Junot) who had marched out to stop him. The French lost 1,800 men and thirteen guns in the attempt and were thrown back. British casualties, 720. The French agreed to evacuate Portugal if transported back to France in British ships. This remarkable and short-sighted arrangement gave Napoleon 26,000 veteran troops to use again against the British.

Corunna (December 1808 - January 1809)

Soult's 20,000 French tried to prevent the 14,000-strong British army, after a long and hazardous winter retreat, from embarking at the Spanish port of Corunna. The French were held off and lost 2,000 men; the British lost 800 and their commander, Sir John Moore.

1809 - 2nd Bn. to Walcheren, 1st in Peninsula

Walcheren (28 July - 30 September 1809)

The British sent an expedition of thirty-four warships and 200 transports to capture Antwerp from the French and based the 40,000 troops on malaria-infested Walcheren Island. Under an incapable naval commander (Richard Strachan) and an equally incapable general (Lord Chatham), the campaign never got properly started. In eight weeks the British commanders lost 217 men in action, 7,000 dead from illness and another 14,000 seriously ill.

1809 - 1st Bn. just missed battle of Talavera de la Reina (27-28 July 1809)

1810 - 1st Bn. at Coa, Busaco

Busaco (27 September 1810)

A notable British victory in Spain. The 25,000 British (with 25,000 Portuguese) occupied the heights of Busaco in the face of 40,000 French (Massena). The corps led by Ney and Reynier assaulted the British lines and after a particularly bloody and stubborn battle were beaten off. Casualties: French, 4,500; British, 1,500.

1811 - Sabugal, 1st Bn. at Fuentes de Onoro

Sabugal (3 April 1811)

General Reynier held positions on the Coa River where he was attacked by three divisions under Lord Wellington. The British swiftly forced back the French, who lost about 1,500 men to the British 200.

Fuentes de Onoro (3 - 5 May 1811)

Wellington, with 34,000 men, held a position behind Fuentes de Onoro, which Massena attacked in an attempt to relieve the besieged town of Almeida. He had an equal number of troops and guns, and though he could not take Wellington's lines he retired in good order. Each side lost about 1,500 men.

1812 - 1st Bn. at siege of Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz

Ciudad Rodrigo (8 - 9 January 1812) Second Siege

On January 8 Wellington surrounded this walled town, which barred his way to Madrid, and carried it by storm 12 days later. The fighting was fierce and bloody, the garrison of 2,000 inflicting heavy casualties on the British. 1,290 British were killed or wounded, 710 of whom died in the Forlorn Hope band of 300 stormers (including Generals Craufurd and Mackinnon); French, 300 killed or wounded, 1,500 prisoners and 150 guns.

Badajoz (16 March - 6 April 1812) - Third Siege

On March 17 Wellington surrounded this formidable fortress, garrisoned by 5,000 French, Hessians and Spaniards (Phillipon). With great difficulty breaches were made in the walls and the assault was ordered on April 6. The British lost 3,500 men capturing the town-fortress--they had already lost 1,500 during the siege--and for two days they were completely out of hand, committing terrible atrocities against the inhabitants, who were in fact their allies.

1812 - Salamanca

Salamanca (22 July 1812)

Wellington had captured the French-held fortresses of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz and was now moving in northern Spain, manoeuvring for an advantage over the French army (Marshal Marmont), also 40,000-strong. Marmont himself brought on the clash at Salamanca, but he was seriously wounded, and Clausel assumed command. The French were mauled, suffering 12,000 casualties before Clausel could withdraw his army. Wellington, who lost 5,000 men, marched for Madrid, but French pressure pushed him back to the Portuguese frontier.

1813 - Vittoria, San Sebastian, Vera, Nivelles, Orthes, Toulouse

Vittoria (21 June 1813)

Napoleon's brother Joseph, King of Spain, had evacuated Madrid and fled north, covered by an army of 66,000 under Jordan. Wellington, with 80,000 British, Portuguese and Spanish troops, outflanked Jordan by crossing the Ebro and routed the French with powerful assaults at three different points. The French lost 8,000 men and nearly all their artillery (151 guns, 450 wagons of ammunition) and transport. Allied casualties, 5,000. Napoleon's Spanish adventure was now nearly

over, as Wellington prepared to push the French from Spain.

San Sebastian (20 July - 8 September 1813)

The town was besieged by the British (Graham) and defended by a French garrison (Rey). An assault on July 25 was repulsed. Graham sent to England for heavy guns, and the siege turned into a blockade. Operations resumed, and on July 31 the town was taken by storm. Rey still held out in the citadel but, after bombardment, surrendered on September 9. The British lost 2,500 killed or wounded.

Nivelle (10 November 1813)

The French (Soult) were driven from a strong position by the British (Wellington) and retired behind the Nivelle. The French lost 4,265, including about 1,200 prisoners, 51 guns, and all their field magazines. British losses, 2,694, killed and wounded.

Orthez (37 February 1814)

In an amphibious operation, Wellington first besieged Bayonne and then drove the French (Soult) out of Orthez and across the Luy de Bearn. French casualties: 4,000 killed or wounded; Wellington lost 2,000 men.

Toulouse (10 April 1814)

Having forced the French out of Spain, the Duke of Wellington, with 25,000 British and Spanish troops, brought Soult's army of 30,000 to bay at Toulouse. The French easily repulsed a premature Spanish assault, but the British, led by Beresford, drove the French out of the city. Casualties: French, 3,000; British, 2,600; Spanish, 2,000. This was the last battle of the Peninsular War. Napoleon had already surrendered in Paris, and on April 11 he accepted exile on Elba. Paris, and on April 11 he accepted exile on Elba.

1813 - 2nd Bn. Holland, Belgium

1815 half of 2nd Bn. joined 1st Bn. remainder to England, disbanded in 1816

1st Bn. at Waterloo

1818 - last British battalion to leave France

1823-31 - New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Canada

From the Muster Rolls in the National Archives at Kew John Jack's Service Record includes:

Volunteer in the Aberdeen Militia 5 May 1805

Jul-Sep 1805 Shorncliffe, Nov-Dec 1805 Hythe, Dec 1805-Mar 1806 Capt. Edward Gibb's Company, Mar-Jun 1806 Broburn Lees, Dec 1806-Mar 1807 Melazzo Sicily, To June 1807. Aug-Dec 1807 at Canterbury, to June 1808. Jun – Sept 1808 Estremoz, Dec 1808-Feb 1809 Spain, Mar-Apr 1809 Deal, Kent, Jun-Sep 1809 Portugal, To Sep 1810 and to Mar 1811. Mar – Jun 1811 Lanara, Spain. To Dec 1811. Sick, absent Mar-Jun 1812. To Jun 1813 Spain. Sep-Dec 1813 France. To Jun 1814. Jun – Sep 1814 Chatham. To Dec 1814. Dec 1814 – Mar 1815 Lepines, Flanders. To Jun 1815, when 52nd was sent to Paris. To Dec 1815, then Clargu, France. Mar-Jun 1816 Thoumene , France. To June 1816, then Lampneur, France, to Dec. 1816.

The twelve clasps later awarded to John Jack with his Military General Service Medal in the Peninsula Wars included:

Corunna, Basaco, Fuentes D'onor, Cuidad Rodrigo, Badajoz, Salamanca, Vittoria, Pyrenees, Nivelle, Nive, Orthes and Toulouse.

The maximum number of bars that could be attached to the ribbon for this medal was fifteen. Wellington himself has only nine bars on the same medal on display at Apsley House, London. He was also qualified to wear a laurel wreath badge with the letters V.S.

The reference above to the Forlorn Hope describes a group of soldiers chosen, or who have volunteered, to take a leading part in a military operation, like an attack on a well defended position, where the expected risk of casualties is high. For volunteers for such a mission this was an opportunity for lowly ranked soldiers, if they survived, to gain promotion, cash gifts and added glory.

For this Life Story one wonders why John Jack, despite having volunteered for the Forlorn Hope at Cuidad Rodrigo, always remained a Private.

At Waterloo the role of the 52nd was in the decisive final stages of the battle, as is described in the following account:

Information taken from:

[https://wikipedia.org/52nd_\(Oxfordshire\)Regiment_of_Foot](https://wikipedia.org/52nd_(Oxfordshire)Regiment_of_Foot)

Waterloo (18th June 1815)

When Napoleon escaped from exile on the island of Elba to lead his army to the decisive battle of the war at Waterloo the 52nd found itself brigaded with the 95th and the 71st and started the day in reserve.

The British Army was positioned on the northern ridge, running east to west, of the field of battle, which was some 5.5km wide. In front was a shallow valley beyond which was a second ridge, also running east to west.

The 52nd were held in reserve in the centre left and behind Major-General Cooke's 1st Division. Following the battering of the British squares over the afternoon,

Adam's brigade was brought up to reinforce the right. In this position the 52nd endured heavy bombardment, of which Ensign Leeke of the 52nd reported afterwards "the old officers, who had served during the whole of the Peninsula War, stated that they were never exposed to such a cannonade as the 52nd squares had to undergo on this occasion for two and a half hours from the French artillery, ½ mile to the front." While the 52nd's squares stood waiting, British artillery fired over their heads.

They were moved forward to resist successive attacks by the French cavalry and their position was crucial when Napoleon launched his Imperial Guard in a final stroke against the centre of the British line, and which was to the 52nd's left.

The Middle Guard threw back the British battalions of Halkett's Brigade but were assaulted by the Belgian and Dutch troops of General Chassé and Colonel Detmers who drove them back down the hill.

The 3rd Regiment of Chasseurs approached the ridge opposite Maitland's Brigade of Footguards (2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 1st Foot Guards). Wellington called to the brigade commander "Now Maitland, now's your time". One authority had him saying "Up Guards, ready". The Foot Guards stood, fired a volley and charged down the hill with the bayonet driving the French Guard back down the hill.

The last of the French Guard regiments, the 4th Chasseurs came up in support as the British Guards withdrew back over the ridge.

The French were halted by the fire of Maitland's Brigade of Guards and, as they faltered, Sir John Colborne led the 52nd in a charge against the Chasseurs.

Sir John Colborne brought the 52nd round to outflank the French column as it passed his brigade, fired a destructive volley into the left flank and attacked with the bayonet. This turned the advance of the Chasseurs into a disorderly retreat and swept the rest of the French army away with it.

William Hay, a Light Dragoon watching from the right, later recalled that "so well-directed a fire was poured in, that down the bank the Frenchmen fell and, I may say, the battle of Waterloo was gained. Seeing the 52nd begin an advance, Wellington reputedly ordered "Go on, Colborne, they won't stand!" as the battalion then advanced diagonally across the field.

When this was followed by a bayonet charge of General Adam's 3rd Brigade the whole of the guard was driven back down the hill and began a general retreat to the cry of "La Garde recule".

Pursuing the French down the escarpment of Mont St. Jean, the 52nd crossed the valley floor (that at the start of the battle had separated the armies) and on the other side attacked the square of the Old Guard (part of the personal bodyguard of Napoleon,) that had formed up to the British right of the inn La Belle Advance and forced it to retreat.

The 1/52nd were the largest battalion at Waterloo, and one of the few British battalions operating at full strength. Of the 1,130 men and officers present, 168 were wounded and 38 killed.

After Waterloo the 52nd was in the army of occupation in France until November 1818, when it returned to the UK. In 1821 it was moved to Ireland, and from there sailed to Nova Scotia in 1823. It was on 19th September 1826 at Halifax that John Jack was discharged from the army. The discharge papers refer to the reason for discharge being “tired and worn out”. John is described then as being 5’ 9 1/2” tall, with grey eyes, brown hair and a fresh complexion. The papers are signed by his captain and testify to the fact he had conducted himself always as a gallant soldier and a good, honest man. He had served for 23 years and 8 months.

Unable to raise the finances to leave Canada, he joined the Royal Navy and boarded a ship in Halifax that was bound for England. He disembarked at Portsmouth and promptly walked home to Aberdeenshire, where he married Barbara Innes and settled down as a shoemaker in New Byth.

He was granted a pension of 1/1d per day (equivalent perhaps to a value today of between £3 or £4), as an out-pensioner of the Chelsea Hospital.

3. Out Pensioner Royal Hospital Chelsea 1826-1870.

The Royal Hospital was founded in 1682 by King Charles II as a retreat for veterans.

During construction in the reign of King William II and Queen Mary II, in 1689 a scheme was introduced for distribution of army pensions. This was available to all former soldiers who had been injured in service, or who had served for more than 20 years.

Eligible pensioners out-numbered the number of places available, those who were not housed in the Hospital were termed Out-Pensioners, receiving their pension but living outside it. By contrast In-Pensioners surrendered their army pension and lived within the Hospital.

By 1815 there were some 36,757 Out-Pensioners.

The Royal Hospital remained responsible for distributing army pensions until 1955, following which the phrase Out-Pensioner became less common, and “Chelsea Pensioner” was largely used to refer to the “In-Pensioners. Today Chelsea Pensioners who are within the hospital grounds are encouraged to wear their blue uniform. If they travel further from the Hospital grounds or are at a ceremonial event they should wear the distinctive Scarlet coats and black tricorne hats.

The pension awarded to John Jack started off in 1826 as one shilling and one penny per day, or some £19-14sh-4d per annum. This may be broadly equivalent to between £3 and £4 per day, or between £ 1095 and £1460 today.

In 1860, at the age of 80, John Jack decided to ask for an increase to his pension and he wrote to Charles Gordon-Lennox the 5th Duke of Richmond seeking an increase.

Richmond (while the Earl of March) had served on Wellington’s staff during the Peninsula War, and during which time he volunteered to join the 52nd (Oxfordshire) Regiment of Foot’s advance storming party on the fortress of Ciudad Rodrigo. He formally joined the 52nd Foot in 1813. During Waterloo he was ADC to the Prince of Orange and following that man’s wounding he served as ADC to Wellington.

Richmond was chiefly responsible for the belated institution in 1847 of the Military General Service Medal for all survivors of the campaigns between 1793-1814. Until 1847 there had only been a Waterloo Medal. He campaigned Parliament and enlisted the interest of Queen Victoria. Richmond himself was awarded this medal and upon which there were eight clasps.

John Jack’s letter to the Duke of Richmond arrived on the night of the Duke’s death (21st October 1860), but his son passed the letter on and shortly afterwards John Jack was delighted to learn that his pension had increased to one shilling and sixpence per day, or some £4 or £5 per day, or £ 1460-£1825 per annum today.

The authorities may have thought that John would not enjoy the increase for long, but the old man lived on for another ten years, and only towards the end he could no longer go to Banff on pension days, but was confined to his chair, deaf and almost blind, but with his voice still vigorous, it’s accents (as his grandson recalled) “ not those to which one is accustomed in an Aberdeenshire village.”

John Jack died at New Byth on 12th May 1870, at the age of 90. A brief notice of 25th May 1870 in the "Aberdeen Journal" says: "Deceased had probably left none who have taken part in so much active service, he having been in no fewer than twenty seven engagements, from Corunna to Waterloo. He lived and died much respected by a wide circle of friends."

He was laid to rest in the Parish Churchyard of Turriff.

4. Press articles referencing John Jack's military experiences

When John Jack settled down as a shoemaker in New Byth and in the years before his death in 1870 a number of articles appeared in local newspapers including the Aberdeen Press and Journal and the Buchan Observer.

These included stories with many references to the “shoemaker” ie: aka John Jack.

The articles include a number of individuals who appear to be recounting their experiences with each other, perhaps over a drink in the local hostelry.

They provide a first hand account of many events in the Peninsula War as experienced by John, and are being recounted more than fifty years after the events themselves.

Captions to these articles include reference to “The Village of Redstone” and “By an old Residenter”. The former is most likely a fictional place in the Banff/Buchan area of NE Scotland.

In North-East Scotland, in Aberdeenshire and Buchan the local dialect is known as Doric and in these articles there is a fair use of this Doric dialect.

Below are examples of these articles transcribed for this Life Story:

.....I went forward and did so, and was subjected to a fire of questions about him- his health, his family, and his whereabouts. I thought there was a slight degree of a patronising air manifested in his way to me that I did not like. Indeed, this did exist in William, to some extent, as seen many time after. I could pardon it easily in relation to myself when I knew him better. He had seen a deal more than I had, and, perhaps, had a right to such a feeling. In many old soldiers I have seen the same, particularly in old Peninsula heroes. They had, no doubt, done wonders, and that fed the spirit, and soldiers of a later day were reckoned by several of them, that I have met with, as only shadows of what they were, and not even fit to talk on military topics. ‘Tut, what know they? Never saw soldiers moving but at a review, and never fired anything but a blank cartridge except at a target. Don’t speak about them’ At a later date great numbers of these took up a residence in the country villages, and often I have met with many of them, chiefly when they would come to a certain town to draw their well-earned pensions, and have enjoyed an hour listening to the ‘story of their battles.’ How they marched here and there. How they circumvented the marshals and soldiers of France on every field. The peculiar merits of their generals, of Moore, poor Moore, of Wellington, of old Hill, of Sir David Baird, of I know not how many. How they fought and how they fell. How many battles they had seen, and where they all had been, and what they had done.’ Ho, John, ye were at Badajos, come an’ get a dram, ye helpit tae chase the rascals o’er the heights of Busaco,’ ‘ William, de ye min’ on Salamanca?’ Ha Geordie, we cu’dna manage the

raw pork at the retreat of Corunna,' and so on each speaking louder and more jolly than another. Some with but one leg, dotting along the pavement as on a march; some with but one arm, brandishing the stick as if it were a sword; and some with a bullet mark through their teeth, talking as glibly, as though they were drilling recruits for immediate service. Oh! What a jovial company, a right-hand man of Moore, Myra, Napiers, Baird, Cameron, Crawford, Picton, Colburne, Hill, etc. etc. Thin, thin are they now, gone from this scene! But their deeds will live in the 'Pantheon of History.' After we had sat a while, and the questions had been asked by the soldier about those in whom he was most interested, and answered, my Uncle said:-

'Weel, William, it was a rash step I aye thocht yer wa-gain.

'Rash enough' was the reply, 'I shortly thought to myself. For a time the excitement and ill-nature kept me up. I was mad at being slighted, first by the parents, for I considered myself as good as they were, and then by the meeting not taking place as I had planned and expected. But I was not long in this country, my training ground was the camp on the Kentish shore, and lying there I had time for reflection; but it was too late, too late.' I frequently thought of my poor mother who had struggled so hard for me, and who then had a claim on my energies. I frequently thought, too, of another who had given me her best treasure, the faithful love of an artless heart, for I had come to the conclusion that she was still true, and I the only false one of the two, and ye may judge what my feelings were. While there I was urged not to desert by a poor fellow who did so. I would not try that trick I told him and dissuaded him, but he was no better of my advice, and went away, to be brought back again with a disgrace I couldna have brooked. I was a year there, and then we dodged about from place to place, both at home and abroad. Part of my regiment was at that affair with Denmark of which so much was said at the time, but I was ill of measles when they embarked, and was left at home with several more of our fellows, and did not see any enemy till the ill-fated retreat from Corunna the year after.'

'Ye waur there?' said the shoemaker; 'weel, I aye thocht a great deal of Moore, and though his sun seemed o'er cast for a while in that affair, it set in glory, poor fellow, at last, an' his worth will be mair highly estimated the better his circumstances are kent.'

'That's true,' said the soldier 'We liked Sir John, he was a gallant dashing general; and I am sure, had it been possible to do greater things in the circumstances, it would have been done. But the circumstances were desperate.

'I believe at the best he could only muster about 25,000 men' said the shoemaker, 'an Nap had 300,000 in Spain.'

'I daresay you are not far from the mark,' was the reply. 'Of course Napoleon's troops were not concentrated, and only say one-third of them were available for hindering our advance, but 70,000 was too much, and although we pushed forward boldly, retreat had to come.'

'Was Nap with that army himself?' asked one of us.

'For sometime, While we were advancing he was conducting the siege of Madrid, but it was said when he heard that Moore was so near, he hastened from that city to meet us, like enough fearing that mischief might be done that wouldna' retrieve. I believe he had hard work to get our length, or near us, for a storm, and had himself to lead through the passes that his officers declared impassable, for snow. He did

not continue the pursuit in person, however, very long, it appeared. His previous presence was required elsewhere, but it was no the less vigourously for all that.’

‘I believe the idea of retreat was repugnant to every soldier’ I said.

‘O yes’ he replied. ‘At least, to all I saw; we were in high spirits at the idea of meeting the soldiers of France, and defeat never entered our heads, for a’ the odds against us, only we knew very little of the enemy. On Christmas day we got the command to go to the right about, and for three weary weeks we had to retrace our steps, and ye can have no conception of our condition. The men got sulky, discipline was gone, whenever opportunity occurred drunkenness was indulged by very many. Oh! How we suffered – cold-hunger-rage- I shudder yet at the remembrance of it.’

‘Were the common people as careless of you as the Government has been?’ I asked.

‘Careless enough’ he answered. ‘Confounded pride pervades them all, and they had not yet been sufficiently humbled to think British help a blessing. In passing through one of their villages, I entered a baker’s shop, and offered to buy a piece of bread. No, no; I could not get it. I was not then acquainted with their cursed lingo, but I understood by gestures I had better go away. I had some money, and laid down what I thought was sufficient, took my loaf, and went away, and oh! It was very sweet.’

‘Well at one period of the three weeks, four days on end, nothing except a bawbee biscuit. It was a terrible time. There was neither opportunity nor means of getting food prepared. The division to which I belonged was sorely harassed. We had the retreat to cover, and for a good while had a continuous look-out, until we out-marched our pursuers. One day we got pork, but raw, and I could not stomach it, and could not cook it. I tried also eating raw potatoes, but they were worse. The sweetest thing I got in that time in which we were all most hardly pressed, was a few blades of green kail, which I plucked as we went through a yard..’

‘Were you much engaged with the enemy, in what might be called battle, or pitched engagements?’ I said.

‘O no. We had some affairs, and courted a general attack or two, as at Lugo, but they came to nothing, until the last engagement at Corunna, where our gallant general fell. We had out-marched them, and had time to make slight preparations, the natives helping us here, and though the ground was not so good as could have been wished, we repulsed them, and got embarked. I believe some have said we should have fought them earlier when we had better ground. What know they? Moore knew best, and he thought no. Men sitting on sofas* can arrange all these matters, and criticise, and throw blame very lavishly, but they know nothing about it. It was a severe retreat on us, but a splendid retreat, and akin to victory, for not a cannon nor colour fell into the hands of the enemy.’

(to be continued)

Author’s note

**The term “armchair general” is a derogatory term for a person who regards themselves as an expert on military matters, despite having little to no actual experience in the military, or alternatively it can mean a military commander who*

does not participate in actual combat. There are many 20th century examples of use of this term, but it is most unusual to find earlier examples such as in this article from the third quarter of the 19th century.

.....'Poor Sir John!' said the Shoemaker, 'I believe he lived long enough to see the victory.

'O yes, said the soldier, ' he had that comfort, and it was, no doubt a great one to him.'

'His death has been celebrated in a bonny bitty poetry that I hae seen, ca'd "The Burial of Sir John Moore."'

'Hae ye seen't?'

'No, Shoemaker said the soldier, ' can ye repeat it?'

'Oh aye.'

"Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note, etc."

He repeated the whole piece, which has often since then been repeated-an ode full of the tenderest pathos. I believe it first saw light some four years before, and is said to have been suggested by an account of the death and burial scenes as recorded in the Edinburgh Register (1808). The authorship was not known at the time, nor for long after. Indeed, it is said that a tale of dishonesty hangs on its history. But ultimately the name of the right author was made public by his friends and the wood-be aspirant for literary honours had to 'hang his diminished head.'

'It's a beautiful piece that; I would like to copy it in my best hand some spare day after, which I did.'

'Well, said Tilly, who had, like more of us, been little other than listener, 'you then came hame?'

'Ay, ay we then came home. But that was a sore job in the state we were in when we left. Our ranks were considerably thinned before with fatigue, disease, and fighting, and on board ship we grew thinner. Our clothes were in a wretched state with filth and vermin. The excitement was all gone, and fever broke out. When we landed at Portsmouth we were all fit for hospital, and the residue of our company were taken to it every man. By constitution I was pretty strong, and recovered amongst the first. But I remember well how weak I was. One day the order was given me, after I had been well a week, to take up to our ward a small bag of coals. It was so small that I could now swing it over my shoulder with one hand; but then I could not lift it on my back, and after it was put on I had to let it off half way up the stair and do my best at dragging it from step to step; but most of us recovered, although there I lost many a brave companion in arms.'

'Weel, nae doot the retreat o'Corunna,' said the Shoemaker, 'was a sad affair fae the beginnin' tae en,' an' some parties were greatly tae blame. Bit it wasna Moore, I aye say that. It lay wi' the Ministry at hame an' the loozy beggars o'Spaniards. Napoleon himsel' has said that Moore saved the British army wi' fat he did. Some hame generals said he sud hae focht sooner. Weel, I hae nae little faith in British pluck, but the difference in number was o'er great, an' seener or later he wad hae been crushed. I believe, for ae thing, he hadna stores enough. Weel, we hae heard that he cou'd hae lived o' the country. Lived o' the country! Gin he had ance begun tae dee that like the beggarly French, the same folk wad hae wagged their tongues at 'im wi' a vengeance. Things were different fan Wellington gaed; better arrangements at hame an' abroad, for as ill's they waur, we learn't a lesson.' After

this deliverance of the Shoemaker's it was found to be late, or rather early, and we proposed to go home. My uncle was to call down after rising time, and let the old mistress know, and go further down for the son, when the way was prepared. He attended punctually to these arrangements; and no doubt his was the first step to the making of two happy hearts- a mother's and a -----well, ultimately a wife's, and I may say also, a third one, a son's and husband's.

5. Family Life and Descendants

Following John Jack's walk back to his home in NE Scotland he married his sweetheart Barbara Innes on 27th July 1828, in the King Edward Parish of Aberdeenshire.

He was then aged 48 and she was 34. They had four children:

(1) Alexander Bell Jack born 26th May 1829 in King Edward Parish and who died aged 80 on 30th September 1909 at New Deer. Alexander married Jane Collier on 27th June 1856 in King Edward Parish and they had 9 children. Alexander initially trained in his father's profession as a shoemaker, but he later became a schoolteacher and his gravestone in New Deer Kirkyard records his 40 years as a schoolmaster. The 1881 census records Alexander as headmaster living at Knaven Public School, New Deer. One of Alexander and Jane's sons, also named Alexander Bell Jack (1861-1942), also became a schoolmaster and worked in a number of schools including Kingussie Public School, Addiewell Public School, Leaverseat Public School, before his final appointment as Headmaster of West Calder Public School, Midlothian. Married to Jessie Grant their son, also named Alexander Bell Jack (1885-1918) followed the teaching profession, at New Cumnock and Midlothian CC, before joining the army for WW1. A sergeant in "A" Company, 2nd Battalion of the Royal Scots and he was awarded the Military Medal on 6th March 1918. He died on 12th April 1918 with no known grave. He is remembered on the Ploegsteert Memorial, Comines-Warneton, Hainaut, Belgium on Panel 1, in the Berks Cemetery Extension, one of the memorials put up where the graves are not known. It serves the area from the line Caestre-Dranoute-Warneton, on the north to the line Haveresque-Estaires-Fournes in the south, in which the best known features are the towns of Haebrouck, Merville, Bailleul and Armentieres, the forest of Nieppe and Ploegsteert Wood, and it covers the period from the arrival of the III corps in this area in 1914 to the date of the armistice. The battles of Ypres and Messines fall to the north of these limits.

(2) Jane Jack, born 17th February 1831 in King Edward Parish. Married John Ingram, a shoemaker, on 22nd December 1850 and with whom they had 12 children.

(3) Jessie (Janet) Jack born 9th November 1832 King Edward Parish, married 16th June 1866 to William Galt, with 5 children. She was a house servant and later a dressmaker in New Byth.

(4) James Jack born 1835. He is recorded on the 1861 census in New Byth age 26, but thereafter his whereabouts are unknown.

From these four children of John Jack and Barbara Innes there are some 26 grandchildren, 23 great grandchildren, 21 great great grandchildren, 21 great great

great grandchildren and 17 great great, great, great grandchildren currently recorded on the family tree.

This family tree dates from c 1982 and is compiled by Douglas Merson a great great grandson of John and Barbara.

This is a total of some 112 known descendants of John and Barbara Jack and amongst whom are many teachers, a few engineers, architects, Army and RAF staff, and a photographer.

Andrew Morton heard the story from an aunt who died at the age of 98 who had, when younger, lived with her grandfather who, as a grandson actually knew John Jack. Andrew asked her if she had ever asked him for stories about John with the reply forthcoming being "I did, but he had got so fed up with his grandfather droning on about the war that he didn't pay any attention!"

A Tribute to Private John Jack by Donald Jack, b 1939, a great great great grandson of John and Barbara Jack.

The Ballad of John Jack

John Jack, he was a shoemaker. In Buchan he was bred.

Till he joined up as a soldier, it was in another's stead.

He had a notion in his head, the infantry it beckoned,

So he went south to Oxfordshire to join the 52nd.

Now Bonaparte had a notion, too, some territory to claim.

He sent his armies plundering through Portugal and Spain.

Retreating to Corunna the British faced defeat;

The soldiers were so weary, there was nothing left to eat.

John found his skills at shoemaking were greatly in demand.

To restoring worn out boots he once more turned his hand.

With Wellesley they soon returned to fight King George's cause.

At Ciudad Rodriguez and the siege of Badajoz

John proved himself a hero with the Forlorn Hope he fought.

He was a Valiant Stormer until a musket ball he bought.

Recovered and back to battle John surely won respect
From officers and comrades, his medals to collect.
But Napoleon faced his downfall and our John was present too
When Boney was defeated on the plains of Waterloo.
From France and on to Canada the 52nd went
Where John Jack, he was discharged for being old and spent,
But John had life a plenty, not ready to lie down,
He joined a British naval ship to sail to Portsmouth town.
It was a long and weary hike on the road to Aberdeen
But John was a tough old soldier, much wearier he'd been.
Back home at last, new life to start in the village of New Byth
He met up with Barbara Innes there, she was soon to be his wife.
John lived till he was ninety years, when the proud, old hero died
And left us, his descendants, to remember him with pride.

6. Background and Sources

For the creation of this Life Story Richard Lyon is indebted to others, including direct descendants of John Jack, who have undertaken earlier research some of which is included above, and who include: Donald Jack and Andrew Morton, and the late Douglas Merson,

Richard Lyon's mother May Alexandra Jack (1919-1998) passed down a Victorian Photo Album with photos of Jack family members.

The late David Webster, first cousin to Richard Lyon, was a genealogist who did much research on the Jack family tree, taking it back to the end of the seventeenth century. The Scottish family history records are easily accessible on the website www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk or by visiting New Register House in Edinburgh. Records available there include:

Old Parish Registers for Births and Marriages pre 1855

Statutory registers of Births, Deaths and Marriages for 1855 onwards.

Census Returns for:

- 6 June 1841
- 30 March 1851
- 7 April 1861
- 2 April 1871
- 3 April 1881
- 5 April 1891
- 31 March 1901
- 2 April 1911

The Aberdeenshire and North East Scotland Family History Society holds many family history records at their Research Centre, at 158-164 King Street, Aberdeen AB24 5BD. See also <https://www.anesfhs.org.uk/guest-home> The National Archives at Kew hold the Army Discharge records, amongst many other official records. Online sites include:

www.chelsea-pensioners.co.uk

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/52nd_\(Oxfordshire\)_Regiment_of_Foot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/52nd_(Oxfordshire)_Regiment_of_Foot)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peninsular_War

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Waterloo

www.lightinfantry.org.uk