

In Praise of General Stanhope: Reputation, Public Opinion and the Battle of Almenar, 1710-1733

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ABSTRACT

The War of the Spanish Succession was a time of conflict both on the battlefields of Spain and Flanders and in the coffeehouses of London. With partisan propaganda flooding the metropolis in the early 1700s, all aspects of the war became politicised. This article looks specifically at the iconic battle of Almenar that took place in July 1710 when General James Stanhope (1673-1721) killed the enemy commander in a 'personal encounter'. Stanhope's triumph would be used by writers to enhance his reputation as a general and as a minister. The battle provides a valuable case study on how a war record can be used as a powerful rhetorical tool, with the positive legacy of a brave warrior cultivating an image of working for the public good. Even after his death Stanhope provided a virtuous comparison to the perceived corruption of the administration of Sir Robert Walpole, a theme that was exploited by the first Prime Minister's opponents.

I

In 1733 a monument was erected in the choir screen of the nave at Westminster Abbey. The impressive marble sculpture, designed by John Rysbrack, was a physical testament to James Stanhope, 1st Earl Stanhope, who had died suddenly in 1721. The inscription speaks of the 'multifarious excellence of his genius' and in particular the 'summit of military glory' he achieved during the War of the Spanish Succession.¹ Although a towering figure in his day, his achievements were largely eclipsed by his contemporary the Duke of Marlborough. John Joseph Murray has claimed that Stanhope should even be considered 'a Marlborough of a much smaller stature'.² This

¹ 'James Stanhope & Stanhope Family', Westminster Abbey, <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/people/james-stanhope.html> accessed August 3, 2015.

² Horatio Walpole, *An Honest Diplomat at the Hague: The Private Papers of Horatio Walpole, 1715-1716*, ed. John J. Murray (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1955), p. 47.

I

statement though largely overlooks Stanhope's role and importance. He was after all the general who led the British presence on the ground in the in Spain, the theatre which was arguably where the important issue of the succession would be decided. The conflict was an attempt by the Austrians and British to resist the French-backed Bourbon claimant to the Spanish throne Phillip V, something which the alliance ultimately failed to do. It is probably for this reason that Stanhope, who ended up a prisoner of war, would not become as celebrated as Marlborough, who famously never lost a battle. Nevertheless, up until the end of 1710 Stanhope had also been remarkably successful and the actions of his troops had yielded several victories that reflected the battles and sieges of Marlborough in Flanders. This included the capture of Minorca in 1708 and the eventual entry into Madrid with the Austrian backed claimant Archduke Charles in September 1710.



*Fig 1. Stanhope Monument, Designed by John Rysbrack (c 1733)
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The War of the Spanish Succession and the early eighteenth century in general has often been neglected in the historiography. It is therefore not surprising that there has been no major study of Stanhope since Basil Williams' 1932 work *Stanhope: A Study in Eighteenth-century War and Diplomacy*. Williams focuses on Stanhope's career

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as a soldier and diplomat, which although revealing, offers little analysis of Stanhope's relationship with the public sphere. Similarly, Newman's *The Stanhopes of Chevening* is primarily a family portrait, concerned with the political and local implications of Stanhope's actions rather than offering any analysis of his cultural significance.³ In terms of broader studies of the period, the overlapping military and political experiences of individuals are frequently overlooked or treated in relative isolation. In the case of Stanhope, the energetic and resourceful officer of Hugill's *No Peace without Spain* should certainly not be separated from the bold and cunning diplomat of Michael's *The Quadruple Alliance*.⁴ This article seeks to redress some of these gaps in the current understanding of reputation and its association with the press, framing Stanhope's martial legacy in terms of how it developed over time, even as his primary responsibilities moved from war to politics and diplomacy.

The War of the Spanish Succession should be seen as one of the first wars of the media age. Representations in print of the leading men and women of the country had become fully established by 1710 when Stanhope would achieve his most iconic victory. The partisan culture that pervaded society after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 fed a population that was rapacious for news, comment and rumour. The dangerous mix of 'party rage and the Grub Street press' had come to the fore after 1695 when the Licensing Act was allowed to lapse, leading to a flood of cheap print, broadsides and pamphlets as well as a sharp increase in the number of newspapers and periodicals.⁵ Stanhope was part of a new generation of public figures that rose to prominence during this period of almost continual scrutiny in the press. Mark Knights has observed that by the start of Queen Anne's reign in 1702 'the pressure of public

³ Basil Williams, *Stanhope: A Study in Eighteenth-Century War and Diplomacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); Aubrey N. Newman, *The Stanhopes of Chevening: A Family Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1969).

⁴ For Stanhope's role in the War of the Spanish Succession see J. A. C. Hugill, *No Peace Without Spain* (Oxford: The Kensal Press, 1991), pp. 271-332; Phillip Stanhope, Lord Mahon, *War of the Succession in Spain* (London: J. Murray, 1832), pp. 247-340; Arthur Parnell, *The War of Succession in Spain during the Reign of Queen Anne, 1702-1711* (London: G. Bell, 1888) and David Francis, *The First Peninsular War* (London: Ernest Benn, 1975). In terms of his place in diplomatic history see Wolfgang Michael, *England under George I: The Quadruple Alliance* (London, Macmillan, 1939); Ragnild Hatton, *George I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) and Jeremy Black, *Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of George I, 1714-1727* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

⁵ Patricia U. Bonomi, *The Lord Cornbury Scandal: The Politics of Reputation in British America* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 99.

opinion was intense'.⁶ Reputations had therefore become to some extent public property, a common topic of discussion in taverns and coffee houses, informed through a myriad of competing printed representations.

Military reputation was of particular interest to the public. This was partly the nature of the way news was reported. Unlike modern newspapers, most of the mainstream press in the early eighteenth century reported the foreign items first, relegating the domestic news to the back pages. Foreign and military issues were often of far more interest than the state of public finances or legislation, particularly when this concerned an eminent figure. Stanhope had another obvious advantage by being part of what Abigail Williams has termed 'the militarism celebrated in Whig poetry' and a martial literary culture that continued after the death of William III in 1702.⁷ Stanhope as a leading member of the Whig party would therefore see his military triumphs celebrated by willing partisan writers and journalists. This meant that by 1710 his exploits had already earned him a considerable degree of fame and recognition. The press often emphasised the role of the commander in the field. After his triumph in Minorca, the *London Gazette* noted how 'the Major-General [Stanhope] himself took the ordinary Guard of the Battery, and advanced to that Part of the Line which was next to him'.⁸

The drama of an engagement was often as important to the reading public as the details and it was particularly useful to have a prominent figurehead. Peter Burke has noted the importance of the 'warrior hero' and how in the eighteenth century the daring raid at Portobello by Admiral Vernon in the War of Jenkin's Ear would lead to popular cries of 'Brave Vernon, Britain's Hero' and 'Admiral Vernon the scourge of Spain'.⁹ Almost four decades before Admiral Vernon, another memorable battle would be used in order to cultivate public opinion and furnish an important legacy for its commander. In 1710 Stanhope fought one of his most famous engagements at Almenar, referred to in Britain as 'Almenara'. Writing over two decades later, Bishop Burnet gives a description of this 'action of great importance':

⁶ Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 95.

⁷ Abigail Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture 1681-1714* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 135.

⁸ *London Gazette*, 18-21 Oct. 1708. Significant reporting also occurred across the main London papers including *The Post Boy*, 11-14 Dec. 1708; *The Post Man* 16-19 Oct. 1708; *The Daily Courant*, 11 Oct. 1708; *British Apollo*, 24-29 Sept. 1708.

⁹ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994), pp. 157-8.

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‘As the two bodies were advancing one against another, Stanhope rode at the head of his body, and the Spanish General advanced at the head of his Troops: The two Generals began the action; in which, very happily for Stanhope, he killed the Spaniard: And his men, animated with the example and success of their General, fell back and broke the Spanish horse so entirely, that King Phillip lost the best part of his cavalry...’¹⁰

Described by Williams as a ‘hand to hand combat, in the ancient style of knights in armour’ this was to be Stanhope’s military legacy and a theme that would be returned to long after he ceased active campaigning.¹¹ For Whig writers it was a useful device, as their Tory opponents would be hesitant to criticise the military actions of ‘brave, General Stanhope’ directly. For Tories, the tactics ranged from either attacking Stanhope’s private life or to emphasise the unsuitability of his political as opposed to his military role.

This article will look at how the Battle of Almenar was used in both the press and in written and visual propaganda. Firstly, it will be important to assess how the battle was perceived during the War of the Spanish Succession and its use by writers in the election of 1710, where Stanhope himself was a candidate in the vital seat of Westminster. This will be followed by a look at the representation of Almenar during the reign of George I, with Stanhope’s role and actions as a foreign minister often being seen through the prism of his great victory. The final section will briefly look at Stanhope’s legacy after his early death in 1721 and analyse how Almenar and military reputations in general should be viewed within the context of the burgeoning public sphere and partisan print culture.

II

The battle on the plains of Almenar took place on the 27 July. This notable engagement was well suited to the new era of persistent press coverage of major events. *The Post Man* on the 12 August heaped considerable praise on Stanhope’s bravery; also noting that he had received a ‘Contusion on his Right Shoulder’ with little further information beyond general detail.¹² Apparently this was not enough for some readers; a letter in the *Tatler* appeared a week later demanding clarification and further information so as to ‘inform the Publick’.¹³ By the 19 August a more detailed description of the engagement appears, relating how Stanhope had been ‘slightly

¹⁰ Gilbert Burnet, *Bishop Burnet’s History of his Own Time*, vol. 2 (London, 1734), p. 555.

¹¹ Williams, *Stanhope*, p. 95.

¹² *The Post Man*, 10-12 Aug. 1710.

¹³ *The Tatler*, 15-17 Aug. 1710.

wounded' and two enemy Lieutenant-Generals had 'been killed'. Similarly, *The Postman* mentions the fact that Stanhope had 'a meeting' with the enemy commander, exchanging 'several cuts' before killing him.¹⁴ It took around another week before any writer seems to have deemed the action a 'personal encounter'.¹⁵ The delay was partly due to the slow travel of news in the early eighteenth century as well as the fact that Stanhope had omitted the event from his own official dispatch, which the *Daily Courant* and others seem to have used as their source. Stanhope's own descendent the 4th Earl Stanhope implies in his *History of England* that this was done out of modesty.¹⁶ Considering how he later seems to have viewed the event as a badge of honour, this can be considered questionable. It is clear that Stanhope himself during the battle seems to have been aware of the importance of managing the press when it came to his public persona. According to *The London Gazette* Stanhope had informed its correspondent 'that he had then no Intelligence of the Enemy' but 'within half an Hour he dispatched an Officer to inform us, that his advanced Guards had discovered nineteen of the Enemy's Squadrons'.¹⁷ What is beyond doubt is the narrative, which across all papers noted how 'the Victory is certainly owing to his [Stanhope's] Conduct, Diligence and Bravery'.¹⁸

The importance of Stanhope's role in the engagement was seemingly confirmed in the commemorative medallion that was struck following the battle. The image presented in the medal designed by John Croker (Fig.2), would certainly have aided in sealing a positive military legacy for Stanhope's actions in Spain. The image of Stanhope is dominant; his arm is raised grabbing the bridle of the opposing General Amezaga's horse. The enemy general in turn is observably in pain and clutching on for dear life. All this is going on amidst a scene of utter confusion and activity, the clouds of dust only accentuating the look of determination on Stanhope's face, who alone is in control.



*Fig 2. Silver Medal
Commemorating the
Battle of Almenar, John
Croker, 1710.
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¹⁴ *Daily Courant*, 19 Aug. 1710; *Post Man*, 19 Aug. 1710.

¹⁵ *The Daily Courant*, 25 Aug. 1710.

¹⁶ Phillip Henry Stanhope, *History of England: Comprising the Reign of Queen Anne until the peace of Utrecht*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1870), vol. 2, p. 166. Also, see Williams, *Stanhope*, p. 95.

¹⁷ *London Gazette*, 17-19 Aug. 1710.

¹⁸ *The Post Man*, 19-22 Aug. 1710.

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Medals like this were fairly common with Louis XIV issuing as many as three hundred and eighteen in his reign.¹⁹ The extent of public contact with this medallic image is particularly difficult to measure. Commemorative medals were sometimes given out free as a public gesture, being 'thrown among the People'.²⁰ As well as the Gold Medal presented to Stanhope and the silver medal above, there was also a bronze version produced.²¹ It is therefore likely that it was meant as a commercial item. However, Peter Burke noted that most of the medals on the market in France were considered 'relatively expensive' and only struck in 'hundreds of copies'.²² If we take this to be accurate for the average medal of the time, the engravings sold in similar numbers to visual prints, although probably not enjoying the same degree of public display. The market would still have reached no lower than the wealthier middling sort. The timing of the battle though would mean that both this iconic image and the debate over Stanhope's role and abilities as a military commander would become an important subject of public discourse. This was due to a general election that was called for October and November 1710.²³ Stanhope had been chosen to stand as the Whig candidate for the important constituency of Westminster, one that unusually for the time was competitive with a large electorate.

The choice of Stanhope for this particular constituency is telling. It was clearly thought within Whig circles that a war hero who had recently defeated an enemy commander in hand to hand combat would easily rout the relatively obscure Tory candidate, a brewer by the name of Thomas Crosse. Stanhope would also have the distinct advantage of having the entire Whig press on his side to amplify his already relatively high public profile. As with Churchill in 1745 success on the battlefield or in war could only be taken so far, especially if one had to fight against the popular mood, which in 1710 was distinctly anti-Whig. This was partly due to disenchantment with the war, which had at that point been going on for over eight years; the main supporters for continuing the conflict were the powerful group of Whig politicians known as the Junto. The Junto had already been replaced by a Tory administration over the summer; which was now looking to shore up its position electorally in a general election. The hostile feeling in the country was further fuelled by a decision of the Whig Junto earlier in the year to prosecute the high church preacher Dr Henry Sacheverell over an incendiary anti-government sermon which in turn had led

¹⁹ Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XI* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 206

²⁰ *Evening Post*, 31 May-2 June. 1715.

²¹ Williams, *Stanhope*, p. 95. For the Bronze version see Edward Hawkins, Augustus W. Franks, Herbert A. Grueber (eds.), *Medallic Illustrations of the History of Great Britain and Ireland to the Death of George II*, vol. 2 (London, 1885), p. 373 [218].

²² Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, p. 16.

²³ Elections in the eighteenth century happened over several weeks.

to anti-Whig rioting in the street. The perceived martyrdom of Sacheverell was arguably still fresh in the mind of the voters who went to the polls. This election therefore was far from an easy fight for Stanhope who had been both a manager for the prosecution against Sacheverell and a leading general fighting an increasingly unpopular war.

Stanhope himself was still on campaign and so was represented in proxy by his cousin Lieutenant-General Sherington Davenport.²⁴ There are numerous examples of how Stanhope's name was used as a positive propaganda weapon during the contest. Handbills such as *Mr. Stanhope for Westminster* were designed to be thrust into voters' hands, encouraging supporters to 'cry up' and huzzah his recent victories.²⁵ Ballads were a particularly valuable tool in the eighteenth-century press arsenal. They were used to 'publicise news or rumour, information or entertainment' often set to memorable tunes.²⁶ One ballad *The Glorious Warriour*, was written as 'A Ballad in Praise of General Stanhope' and set to the popular tune of 'Fair Rosamund'. It was clear who the intended audience were, being dedicated to 'all those who have votes for parliament-men in the city of Westminster'. His talents as a field commander are emphasised so that with 'Brave Stanhope... They're sure of Victory'.²⁷ There is possibly a more direct reference to Almenar in one of the stanzas with the mention of a similar sword-drawn cavalry charge, emphasising Stanhope's fearlessness and desire to engage directly with the enemy be they an opposing general or a local brewer:

Then strait [sic], with glittering Sword in hand,
And Pistols by each Side,
He gallops towards th' Enemy,
As fast as he can ride.²⁸

Arthur Mainwaring on the 28 September in the *Whig-Examiner* makes a direct comparison between the two candidates for Westminster. Stanhope is portrayed as the hero Alcibiades who in a speech claims that he has been 'spilling my Blood' and 'reaping Lawrels [sic]', Crosse on the other hand has been merely 'gathering Hops

²⁴ Frank H. Ellis (ed.), *Poems on Affairs of State*, 7 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 402.

²⁵ Anon, *Mr. Stanhope for Westminster* (London, 1710).

²⁶ Adam Fox, 'Ballads, Libels and Popular Ridicule in Jacobean England', *Past & Present* 145 (1994), p. 58.

²⁷ Anon, *The Glorious Warriour* (London, 1710), p. 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

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for you'.²⁹ In what again is probably a reference to Almenar and the 'contusion' in his shoulder Stanhope as Alcibides rams home his eminent credentials for the seat by saying:

Behold these Scars, behold this Wound, which still bleeds in your Service;
What can *Taureas* [Crosse] shew you of this nature? What are his Marks of Honour? Has he any other Wound about him, except the accidental Scaldings of his Wort, or Bruises from the Tub or Barrel?³⁰

This brazen attempt to influence the voters by emphasising Stanhope's military record clearly alarmed the Tory satirist Jonathan Swift. Swift mentions in his *Journal to Stella* that he was riding in his coach when he found himself surrounded by Stanhope's supporters, so he had to appear "always on their side" for fear that his windows might be smashed by dead cats'.³¹ In his verse *A Dialogue Between Captain Tom and Henry Dutton Colt*, Swift attempted to show how the Whigs were trying to recruit a Tory mob by getting them to demonstrate in favour of 'Old Colt and brave General Stanhope', essentially on the merits of their own individual reputations.³² He rather sardonically points out in one of the stanzas that 'Let the Generals merits and mine be maintain'd/Turn off the old brewer and be not *Cross-Grain'd*'.³³ In tune with the public mood, Swift reminds the readers that although he may be a brave warrior, he had still been implicated in the Sacheverell affair:

Brave *Stanhop* for Fighting will have his Reward,
And the Queen, when she pleases, can make him a *Lord*,
But we are true Friends of the *Church* and *Sacheverel*;
And vote for a *Manager* surely we never will!³⁴

Swift had even more success in turning the tide against Stanhope with his direct parody of *The Glorious Warriour*. What is telling in the *Second Part of the Glorious Warriour* is what Swift chose to leave out. Opposition writers were often hesitant to attack a commander's military reputation directly, keeping largely to domestic or personal themes. During victories, the Tories would prefer to play down the influence of the commander, rather than make any negative representations:

²⁹ Anon, *The Medleys for the Year 1711. To Which are Prefix'd the five Whig-Examiners* (London, 1714), p. 29. See also Williams, *Stanhope*, p. 126; Ellis, *POAS*, 7. p. 481.

³⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 29-30.

³¹ Williams, *Stanhope*, p. 126.

³² Ellis, *POAS*, 7. p. 482.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 484.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 486.

Marlborough's victory at Blenheim was often credited to Anne for example.³⁵ Swift's ballad was little different, the most direct criticism being to point out that Stanhope did not win his victories alone, as the Austrian commander 'Staremburg was there'.³⁶ Swift's focus was on a far easier target, by ridiculing Stanhope's supposed homosexuality in crude verses such as 'he strives to mend your Breed/By trying t'other way'.³⁷ Evidence of the effectiveness of the accusations can be seen from the popularity of the ballad, which Swift notes was 'in great demand'.³⁸ An objective foreign observer Zacharias von Uffenbach actually witnessed the poll first hand. The emphasis on private morality seems to have worked on the crowds in spite of Stanhope's war record and recent victory at Almenar, with Uffenbach noting that the crowd yelled 'all manner of insults against General Stanhope' and 'vile remarks and insults' against his friends and supporters. He also points to the fact that most of Stanhope's supporters were in the minority and on the whole 'gentlemen of quality' but notes that at least one 'smith's apprentice' was 'running about in his leather apron, crying out; "Stanhope!"'³⁹

What this individual contest shows is that the campaign on the ground could be heavily influenced by the press, if the turnaround of opinion that Swift alludes to is to be believed. It also points to the central role reputation played in the print debate, as well as its importance in public discourse. A combination of attacks on his private morality and his role on the Sacheverell affair, seem to have been particularly potent and effective. However, it does not seem to have damaged the view of his credentials as an effective military campaigner. Public opinion of Stanhope at this time may best be summed up in another piece of print that was produced the same year, which again uses the battle of Almenar as a device to convey a particular message about Stanhope's public reputation.

³⁵ Williams, *Whig Literary Culture*, p. 142.

³⁶ Johnathan Swift, *An Excellent New Ballad: Being the Second Part of the Glorious Warriour* (London, 1710).

³⁷ *Ibid.* This was a long-standing rumour, which seems to have first appeared in 1703 in a ballad entitled *The Golden Age Revers'd*. See Frank H. Ellis (ed.), *Poems on Affairs of State*, 6 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 517; G. S. Rousseau, *Perilous Enlightenment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 156.

³⁸ Williams, *Stanhope*, p. 127.

³⁹ Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach, *London in 1710 from the travels of Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach*, trans. and ed. W. H. Quarrell and M. Mare (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), pp. 146-7.

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Fig 3. To the Immortal Memory of that Renowned Manager and Hero, 1710.

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engraver has almost certainly viewed the medallic representation and the fact that Stanhope is not mentioned by name implies that the image must have been reasonably well known or understood. At three pence per copy it was certainly not out of the reach of the vast majority of the population, and therefore not restricted to the elite. This ballad shows that Stanhope's abilities and conduct were clearly the subject of discussion, across a relatively wide social spectrum. It also highlights that his role as a commander is mostly beyond criticism, as opposition writers and

In the above ballad (Fig. 3) the anonymous author makes a direct comparison between Stanhope's bravery on the battlefield and his poor performance at the trial of Dr Sacheverell. Phrases such as 'Be more employ'd Abroad, and less at home' gives a clear indication of where the author believes Stanhope's strengths lie, implying his shortcomings are only in domestic politics.⁴⁰ This theme is reinforced with a powerful visual representation of Stanhope's 'personal encounter' at Almenar appearing in the banner. The depiction is a distinct evocation of the Croker medal, a chaotic battlefield with two prominent figures in duel, with a standard raised above. Even the shape that has been chosen to frame the image is near circular in form. The

⁴⁰ Anon, *To the Immortal Memory of that Renowned Manager and Hero* (London, 1710).

satirists feel the need to pay lip service to Stanhope's achievements. Stanhope's supporters no doubt hoped that his military achievements and in particular the battle of Almenar would be enough to disguise the unpopularity of his recent political role. In the end, it was not enough, even a good war reputation could not overcome domestic political trends. Stanhope was another victim of the Tory wind that blew through the election, giving the new government a large majority.

Stanhope's humiliation at the polls in November was followed by the loss of his freedom in December. His military career was cut short due to his defeat at Brihuega, where he became a prisoner of war. The defeat was largely greeted with shock; it was said at The Hague to be 'not believ'd'.⁴¹ He was nevertheless credited with a brave stand. Williams claims that he 'animated his men and is credibly reported to have taken a hand in the actual fighting'.⁴² The press painted the siege at Brihuega in a similar way, as another heroic action by the general, this time holding out to the end against all the odds, 'they [the allies] at last capitulated with General Stanhope, who continued to defend himself, but did then surrender, upon Condition that he should remain Prisoner of War'.⁴³ This is represented as an essentially selfless act by Stanhope, an attempt to atone for a military reversal. This is despite at least one report that points to Stanhope's 'obstinacy' as the primary cause of 'the disaster'.⁴⁴ The Duke of Devonshire wrote that Stanhope was 'justified in everything'.⁴⁵ Although the overall thrust of printed representations is positive, this did not stop occasional sniping by Tory writers. Swift wrote in *The Examiner* that 'we have already got one comfortable loss in Spain, though by a G...l of our own'.⁴⁶ This though is largely an exception. As with Marlborough, criticism of Stanhope was mostly taken away from the battlefield and restricted to the political arena. The timing was also somewhat convenient. As Brihuega occurred after Stanhope's loss in the general election – a time of heightened printed attacks – Tory writers may have decided it was simply unnecessary to attempt an extended character assassination. This does not mean though that the debate over Stanhope's role at Brihuega was forgotten by the public. As late as 1717 the diarist John Thomlinson wrote about a meeting with a soldier who had served under Stanhope at the battle. The soldier claimed that among other things the general 'would not let his soldiers have ammunition enough so that they were all taken prisoners'.⁴⁷ Clearly Thomlinson

⁴¹ *Evening Post*, 14-16 Dec. 1710.

⁴² Williams, *Stanhope*, p. 111.

⁴³ *British Mercury*, 22-5 Dec. 1710.

⁴⁴ Williams, *Stanhope*, p. 125.

⁴⁵ NFRO BL/T 3/1/ 20.

⁴⁶ Williams, *Stanhope*, p. 125.

⁴⁷ BL Add MS. 22560 (May 31st, 1717).

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considered this encounter significant enough to confide in his diary, perhaps being surprised at this negative depiction of Stanhope, one that went against a largely positive press narrative. Brihuega was the low point in both Stanhope's military and political career and came only five months after his great victory at Almenar. He would never take up the field again, although his military legacy would continue to be used and promoted in the new reign, where Stanhope would once more be in a commanding position, this time as a leading minister of state.

III

Stanhope was released from captivity in August 1712. The Tories held a commanding position, making peace through the Treaty of Utrecht with France in 1713 and creating a well-oiled propaganda machine to promote their message.⁴⁸ However, their future was almost entirely dependent on the health of Queen Anne, whose constitution was never particularly robust, especially after numerous pregnancies. When she died in August 1714 the crown passed to the nearest non-Catholic claimant, George-Ludwig, Elector of Hanover. As someone who had served in the field in the War of the Spanish Succession, it may not be surprising that George decided to reward both Marlborough and Stanhope with high office. Marlborough was reappointed as Captain-General and Stanhope would hold a succession of most of the major offices of state including Secretary of State for the Southern and Northern Departments and even briefly First Lord of the Treasury, although his primary responsibilities throughout lay in foreign policy.⁴⁹ Marlborough's later career was hampered by ill health, suffering a series of strokes that removed him from the centre of power. For writers considering the legacy and implications of the recent war, a shift in emphasis onto Stanhope, who was in the prime of his political life, is therefore understandable. The powerful effect of the war's cultural legacy in the new reign should not be underestimated, particularly in print.

Stanhope's natural energetic and daring character, which served him well as a commander also prepared him for the issues he would face as foreign minister, later being the subject of universal praise. Stanhope's cosmopolitan upbringing, military experience and skills as a linguist helped him develop a strong personal relationship with the new monarch. His knowledge of Spain and warfare would come in use as he sought to check the power of Russia in the Great Northern War and the ambitions

⁴⁸ See J. A. Downie, *Robert Harley and the Press: Propaganda and Public Opinion in the Age of Swift and Defoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁴⁹ For most of the eighteenth century there were two secretaries of state that dealt with different geographical spheres of foreign policy.

of the Spanish Chief Minister Cardinal Alberoni.⁵⁰ Even as early as 1715 there were comparisons made in print between Stanhope's skills as a diplomat and soldier during the War for the Spanish Succession:

Mr Stanhope, who knows how to gain Advantages in Treating, as well as Victories in the field, made such a Treaty of Commerce with Charles III, as excluded the *French* from trading directly or indirectly to the *Spanish West-Indies*, and not only lower'd the *Spanish Duties*, but got us all the Advantages we could desire of trading directly to the *West-Indies*.....what flourishing and glorious circumstances would the nation have been in.⁵¹

The first crisis of the new regime and the new ministry was undoubtedly the Jacobite rebellion of 1715, the abortive rising that attempted to put the Catholic claimant James Edward Stuart on the throne. Although Stanhope did not take part actively in the fighting, there was clearly a sense by many that it was an advantage to have a former general taking a leading role in the ministry. In 1715 the poet William Somerville dedicated an ode to 'The Right Honourable James Stanhope' that pays an acknowledgment to his most notable achievement.

As when on *Almanara's* Plain the scatter'd Squadrons,
Vain are th' Attacks of Force or Art,
Where *Cesar's* Arm defends a *Cato's* Heart.⁵²

The timing of the poem is certainly important; a clear parallel is being made between Stanhope's exploits in the War of the Spanish Succession and the pressing threat at home. Another verse is narrated by a muse who uses Stanhope's illustrious military reputation to enhance her own glory, supporting 'her Flight with *Stanhope's* Name'.⁵³ The use of *Almenar* highlights the currency this battle still held with many in the public, being seen as a popular rallying cry. It should not be forgotten that this was in Hugill's words 'the last example in European history' of '*Spolia Opima*', which may

⁵⁰ The Spanish government was particularly eager to redress the perceived iniquities of the Treaty of Utrecht and win back the territory it had lost in Italy.

⁵¹ Anon, *An Address to the Good People of Great Britain, Occasion'd by the Report from the Committee of Secrecy* (London, 1715), p. 5. Of course, as Charles III lost the war, this treaty never came into being.

⁵² William Somerville, *An Imitation of the Ninth Ode of the Fourth Book of Horace. Inscribed to the Right Honourable James Stanhope Esq* (London, 1715), pp. 7-8.

⁵³ *Ibid*, pp. 1, 6.

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also explain why this battle might have carried more weight in public memory than Brihuega, allowing Stanhope's reputation to remain relatively untarnished.⁵⁴

Having a war hero at the head of the administration may have acted against the new ministry. Ever since the days of Oliver Cromwell the general public had been suspicious of a standing army or Generals who were seen as too political. This seems to have become a conspicuous theme of some Tory and Jacobite leaning newspapers in the early reign of George I.⁵⁵ The desirability of removing Stanhope from office is implied in one Jacobite ballad, 'nor *Stanhope* shall Command' as well as the general prejudices of the public with lines such as 'The People Murmur, and Contemn [sic] the Court'.⁵⁶ A Jacobite like Francis Atterbury made direct comparisons with the English Civil War and the implied dangers of government 'by a military Force'.⁵⁷ As Stanhope grew in power after 1715 there seems to have been concurrent fears over the arbitrary direction of a ministry pursuing 'transparently anti-libertarian' measures.⁵⁸ The diarist John Thomlinson feared the creation of a 'military ministry'.⁵⁹ Another author complained that the ministry headed by 'Mr. Secretary *Stanhope*' had behaved in a 'violent and military manner' willing to 'hang a Man first, and to try him afterwards'.⁶⁰ This focus of opposition attacks on the members of the government with a military background should not come as a surprise. Rogers claims that it was not the political or financial figures of the ministry such as Walpole 'who attracted plebeian anger, but the war generals Stanhope and Marlborough'.⁶¹ What is clear is that opposition attacks rarely discussed the personal reputation of commanders; the main concern being to stoke historic fears of military rule.

The public concern over an overtly militarised ministry does not seem to have affected how Stanhope was represented in Whig propaganda. The benefits of his war record appear to have outweighed any concerns. It helped that Stanhope's primary

⁵⁴ Hugill, *No Peace Without Spain*, p. 305. *Spolia Opima* Hugill defines as 'the personal killing by a general in single combat by his opposing commander'.

⁵⁵ See for example *Shift Shifted*, 11 Aug. 1716; *Shift Shifted*, 25 Aug. 1716; *Post Boy*, 24-27 May. 1718; *Post Boy*, 3-5 Feb. 1719.

⁵⁶ Anon, *The Landing* (London? 1715?).

⁵⁷ Francis Atterbury, *An Argument to Prove the Affections of the People of England to be the Best Security of the Government* (London, 1716), p. 5.

⁵⁸ Nicholas Rogers, 'Popular Protest in Early Hanoverian London', *Past & Present* 79 (1978), p. 98.

⁵⁹ Thomlinson made the entry on April 12th 1717. BL Add MS. 22560.

⁶⁰ Anon, *A Letter from an Unknown Hand, to Mr Pettecum the Holstein Minister, in Answer to that of Mr Secretary Stanhope* (London, 1717), p. 1.

⁶¹ Rogers, 'Popular Protest', p. 93.

role was diplomatic, therefore not involving himself much in the domestic arena. Perhaps learning from the criticism he had received in 1710, Stanhope seems to have personally decided to remain more aloof from home affairs or the political intrigues that beset court and party. Stanhope's own views of image management may also have been taken into consideration, with martial themes reflecting his own opinions of how he wanted to be represented. Williams has argued that Stanhope during this period had a 'hankering once more for a military career'.⁶² He was often seen as the natural choice to succeed Marlborough, with one writer claiming it was 'intended Lord Stanhope should be appointed Captain General' which was apparently 'talked on everywhere'.⁶³ The fact that he was most proud of his military achievements and reputation as a commander can be seen in the portraiture of the period. Stanhope may also have desired to send a positive statement to counter any questions of his own ensuing failures after Almenar, heightening his successes in visual depictions. The repeated emphasis on this one single battle throughout his ministerial career created a degree of positive re-enforcement for Stanhope's own previous actions. A portrait of the Earl⁶⁴ (Fig. 4) was painted around the same time he was achieving notable success as a diplomat, securing first the Triple and then Quadruple Alliance. In the painting though Stanhope bears a breastplate and carries the military baton of a commanding general. It is clear from this image that the clash of Almenar was considered a proud personal achievement as it clearly appears in the background.

This painting would likely not have been seen by many members of the public as it was never intended as an image for mass consumption. The battle of Almenar though does seem to have been reasonably well known. The image of Stanhope as a knight on horseback was used to enhance Stanhope's reputation as a paragon of nobility and chivalry. This can clearly be seen in the way his diplomatic missions were represented. As Williams has stated Stanhope had little 'regard for narrow departmental limits' and was able to wrestle control of the diplomatic agenda away from his own colleagues and even the King's Hanoverian advisors by 1717.⁶⁵ The internationalist policy that Stanhope pursued during his tenure in office amounted to a complex series of alliances with the principal powers of Europe, known as first the Triple and then with the accession of Holy Roman Empire, the Quadruple Alliance. Part of Stanhope's 'great system' was the successful conclusion of an alliance with France, a radical departure from traditional English diplomacy.⁶⁶ He developed his

⁶² Williams, *Stanhope*, p. 439.

⁶³ Quoted in Williams, *Stanhope*, p. 439.

⁶⁴ Stanhope was made first a Viscount in 1717 and then an Earl in 1718.

⁶⁵ Williams, *Stanhope*, p. 285.

⁶⁶ Wolfgang Michael, *England under George I: The Quadruple Alliance*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1939), vol. II, p. 91.

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own unique approach, one that saw him conducting many of the important negotiations himself. Most Secretaries of State would delegate the face-to-face talks to ambassadors or specially appointed envoys and a good proportion of the dialogue took place via the foreign dispatches. Stanhope by contrast championed an innovative style of personal negotiation, making numerous continental trips.⁶⁷ This eighteenth-century form of 'shuttle diplomacy', earned Stanhope the nickname the 'Knight errant of English diplomacy'.⁶⁸ Although originally meant sardonically, the public perception of Stanhope as a knight in both battle and diplomacy built on the reputation that had been steadily crafted since Almenar.



Fig 4. James Stanhope, 1st Earl Stanhope, attributed to Johan van Diest (c.1718).

© National Portrait Gallery, London

⁶⁷ Williams, *Stanhope*, p. 285, for details see, pp. 162-8, 297-9, 344, 427.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Williams, *Stanhope*, p. 322.

he emphasis of continuity between Stanhope's military and diplomatic reputation can be clearly seen in 1718, when Stanhope was conducting one of his personal negotiations in Paris. He was sent to both formalise the Quadruple Alliance and discuss with the French Regent Dubois how best to check the threat from Spain, which had threatened war. This was clearly a popular issue of discussion with one newspaper report claiming that, 'The voyage of My Lord Stanhope to Paris has been the principal Part of the Week's conversation, every Man discoursing of it, not as Information, but rather as Opinion guided'.⁶⁹ This sense of excitement was most likely encouraged by the production of pro-Stanhope propaganda such as John Tickell's *An Ode on his Excellency the Earl Stanhope's Voyage to France* (Fig. 5). The fact that it was advertised in both the Tory *Post Boy* and Whig *Post Man*, highlights the wide appeal of Stanhope's daring mission.⁷⁰ Like previous examples during 1710, the image in the banner bears a striking resemblance to the medal struck after Almenar. Here though, the image has been updated and represents Stanhope's shift from warrior to diplomat. The image on the right of Figure 5 is likely a metaphorical representation of the high level diplomatic negotiations with the French. Invoking the battle directly with the word 'Almanara' Stanhope is again called upon to engage one to one with a fearsome opponent, although in this case it is the French Regent and the stakes are the peace of Europe. The scene cleverly utilises the image of Stanhope and his opponent on horseback but this time replaces the more antagonistic charge with a side on canter. The sword has been replaced with a baton, a symbol of Stanhope's authority. There are, however, hints of the fact that Stanhope is meant to be the more dominant of the two, winning in the negotiations as he once did in battle. Stanhope as the figure on the left keeps his hat resolutely on whilst the Regent deferentially doffs his in respect. The use of Almenar was also a direct warning to Spain, who could once again suffer a similar defeat if it continued to threaten war (this time facing an allied Britain and France). If this was not abundantly clear, it is again referenced in the text of the ballad:

*With half the warring World engage,
Oh! Call to mind thy Thousand Slain,
And Almanara's fatal plain.⁷¹*

The use of the 'personal encounter' at Almenar was meant to evoke a powerful image, strengthening the hand of the ministry at home and abroad. Compared to the career politicians that made up the majority of the Cabinet, Stanhope was often seen

⁶⁹ *The Weekly Journal or Saturdays Post*, 28 June. 1718.

⁷⁰ *The Post Boy*, 14 June. 1718; *The Post Man* 3:5 July. 1718.

⁷¹ John Tickell, *An Ode, On his Excellency the Earl Stanhope's Voyage to France* (London? 1718).

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as the figure ‘above politics’ and who had through his actions continued to be seen as a man of integrity. In 1720 during the financial crisis of the South Sea Bubble Stanhope alone amongst the top politicians was never truly implicated in the affair. John Carswell notes that the government had an ‘increasing dependence on Stanhope’ as he was seen to have ‘nothing to do with the inner history of the scheme’.⁷² His name was therefore used for pro-government purposes such as in one verse poem, ‘Since, as Earl Stanhope, at that pow’rful Board/Whose Councils make *Great Britain Europe’s Lord*’.⁷³ His early death in 1721 at the height of the affair was arguably what brought the ministry down, no longer having a fig-leaf of perceived virtue. His death was as dramatic as his life had been, collapsing in mid-speech in parliament as he sought to defend the government.⁷⁴ In the dedications that appeared following his death, the public were treated to a timely reminder of his great exploits. How he was represented in death confirmed his status as a warrior. One pindaric explained in the dedication that the verses would aim to ‘*Speak the Heroic*’ as this was ‘*more suitable to his Great Character*’.⁷⁵ One verse shows how indebted the ‘British Lyon’ is to the former General, ‘STANHOPE he weeps, who taught him how to roar/Who made him Victor on th’ HISPANIAN Shore’.⁷⁶

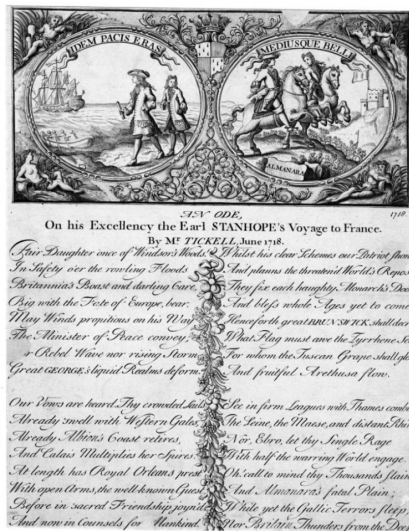


Fig. 5. John Tickell's *An Ode on his Excellency the Earl Stanhope's Voyage to France, 1718*. © Trustees of the British Museum.

⁷² John Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), p. 229.

⁷³ Mr Arundell, *The Directors a Poem Addressed to Mr Stanhope* (London, 1720), p. 6.

⁷⁴ Williams, *Stanhope*, p. 440.

⁷⁵ James Downes, dedication of *A Pindarick Sacred to the Memory of the Illustrious James Earl Stanhope* (London, 1721), p. ii.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 8.

IV

In the years following Stanhope's death, the ministry came increasingly under the control of Robert Walpole who would be beset with accusations of corruption and a failure to stand up for British interests abroad. It is therefore understandable that many looked back to the period before with increasing fondness. Lord Stanhope's ghost became a perfect weapon an 'anti-Walpole' character that could be used to highlight the contemporary prime minister's failings. In a letter to Robert Walpole in 1733 even a Jacobite like Charles Forman felt it worth mentioning that in comparison to Walpole's craven attitude to the Austrians in the War of the Polish succession 'My Lord Stanhope and the *British* Troops had chiefly contributed, by their Conduct and Bravery, to the Victory at Almenara'.⁷⁷ This was printed the same year that Stanhope's great monument would be erected at Westminster Abbey. Stanhope's marble effigy clearly shows a desire to be remembered above all for his military accomplishments. The sculpture consists of a stately figure of Stanhope 'reclining on a sarcophagus wearing Roman armour and holding a baton'.⁷⁸ The medallions at the bottom were chosen as representations of his life and achievements which are nearly all taken from his service in Spain. It is therefore unsurprising that the first one represents a graphic illustration of 'the cavalry battle at Almenara'.⁷⁹

This illustrates the continuing importance placed on this particular event, one which best represented Stanhope as the very personification of the virtuous knight. The two horses facing each other in either physical or metaphorical combat had been used by various propagandists throughout the period. Stanhope's military reputation was evidently of great interest to the public as well as a useful device for Whig writers, enabling them to use a clear example of heroism as a way of deflecting focus away from difficult domestic problems. This was often hard for the opposition to counter. Instead of taking the issue head on, Tories and Jacobite's tended to focus either on personal issues or generic fears of military power. However, as can be seen in the election of 1710 or later during the South Sea crisis, a focus on martial prowess can only take you so far against broader political trends. Timing was also key, with defeat at Brihuega arguably having less impact on the public sphere as a result of the fall of the Whig ministry and Stanhope's retreat into relative obscurity as a prisoner of war. Almenara can then be seen as having a longer-term impact, building on Stanhope's mythology in the new reign of George I. His knowledge and

⁷⁷ Charles Forman, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Sir Robert Walpole* (London, 1733), p. 15.

⁷⁸ 'James Stanhope & Stanhope Family', Westminster Abbey, <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/people/james-stanhope.html>. accessed August 3, 2015.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

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experience as a general made him well suited to the role of a skilled and intrepid foreign minister and adaptable to the new post-war Europe, where he would again have to try and check a direct challenge from Spain. His 'knight errantry' on the continent also gave him the advantage of being seen as 'above politics' and working towards the common good and peace of Europe, largely avoiding the domestic bickering of his colleagues. Military reputation in this context was useful but only if it was accompanied by a perception that the gallant actions displayed at Almenar was a true reflection of Stanhope's personal character, something that both friend and foe alike would largely concede as accurate. Perhaps Stanhope, who died at the height of his power and reputation, should no longer be seen just as a 'Marlborough of a much smaller stature' but rather a significant figure in his own right; one who was able to effectively craft and build on his martial reputation, fashioning a lasting legacy that was effectively promoted and understood by the public.