

MALTA NAPOLEONTIC OCCUPATION 1798-1800

For 268 years (1530-1798) Malta had been ruled by the Knights of St. John. When, at the close of the 18th century, Napoleon was planning the conquest of the world he determined to use Malta as the starting point of his Expedition to Egypt, and thence to India, to shatter the British power in the East.

On the 9th June 1798 Bonaparte, with an overwhelming naval and Military force, appeared off the Island and on the flimsiest of pretexts, attacked it. The timidity of the Grand Master, the treachery of most of the Knights, and several other circumstances greatly favoured his plan, and within three days of his arrival, the island which his expert eye had discerned as "la place plus forte de l'Europe", was in his hands.

After publishing new laws, through which breathed the spirit of the French Revolution, Napoleon proceeded on the 16th June on his expedition to Egypt, leaving the Island guarded by a garrison of 3000 under General Vaubois.

For three months the people bore in silence the yoke of the first French Republic, but when their religion was attacked and their churches plundered they rose like one man against the French and compelled the garrison to shut themselves up within the fortifications. This was on the 3rd September 1798 and, with the help of the English who blocked the harbours, and later sent troops, they (the Maltese) kept the garrison closely besieged for two years. until the 4th September 1800, when Vaubois surrendered to General Pigot, commanding the British and allied forces.

FRENCH SOLDIER'S LETTER OF 1798

From Valletta, Island of Malta this 6th Messidore (June 24th) 6th Year of Republic.

Dear Father, Mother and Sister,

I have my pen in hand to enquire as to your state of health and that of As regards myself, I am fairly well, apart from very severe toothache, which I think is exacerbated by the fact that we suffer from very severe heat here, which flattens us to the shape of our hats.

I wrote you three letters from Corsica but have had none from you. We left the Island of Corsica on the 26th Floreal (15th May) arriving in

Malta on 21st Praireal (June 9th). We were 25 days afloat, but tied up in the Port of Madalena six days after leaving Corsica. The distance between Corsica and Malta is 300 leagues, so we are separated from each other by some 500 leagues, dear Father and Mother and Sister. I wonder when we shall have the joy of seeing each other again as we seem to be separated by such a great distance.

We captured the Island of Malta with a loss of not even 30 men, which is a victory for us as it is an impregnable fortress. They surrendered as they did not have enough troops to guard the fortress. The Island of Malta is not large as it only has a circumference of 20 leagues. It is flat and thickly populated but produces very little wheat, also some cats. Their main products are cotton and figs and they get their main supply from Sicily. We are some 30 leagues to the North of Barbary and the Island depends on Africa.

As soon as Malta was captured the Squadron left for Sicily where they found the English had landed. Both the English and ourselves landed in Sicily and I think we shall soon be going there ourselves.

I am writing this letter so that you may have news from me but I fear you may not receive it. Frankly I don't know where we shall be going.

All my compliments to the whole family whom I embrace with all my heart. Please pass on my news to my godfather Delime and convey my compiment to Nicolas Bouclie and all friends in our neighbourhood.

Dear father, mother and sister, I will now conclude by embracing you with all my heart.

Your son for life,

ANTOINE CHARIEZ.

Baptiste Bouclie sends you his regards and is keeping well.

We don't know where we are going. My address remains the same: In garrison at Valletta, Island of Malta.