



Torot Garenat

Limbo Creek

Porto di Capri

Porto di Anacapri

Porto Solara

Capri North

S. Mary

Porto di Anacapri

Capri

Porto di Anacapri

Porto di Anacapri

Porto di Anacapri

Porto di Anacapri

Porto di Anacapri

Porto di Anacapri

Porto di Anacapri

Porto di Anacapri

Porto di Anacapri

Porto di Anacapri

Porto di Anacapri

Porto di Anacapri

Porto di Anacapri

Porto di Anacapri

Marellino

1 Italian Mile.

1/2 1/4 1/8

Detachment of the Maltese.

The French Troops.



Travignara Point

Capri

Capri

Capri

Capri

Capri

Capri

Capri

Capri

Capri

Capri

Capri

Capri

Capri

Capri

Capri

Capri

Capri

Capri

Point Arcera

S. Calogera.

ISLAND OF CAPRI.

ROYAL REGIMENT OF MALTA.

LANDING AT DIAMANTE,

AND

CAPTURE OF THE ISLAND OF CAPRI BY THE FRENCH.

To the Editor of the United Service Journal.

MR. EDITOR,

In your journal of October last, you were kind enough to insert an article respecting the formation of military corps in Malta; since your Number was published, the *United Service Gazette*, of the 21st of November and 16th Jan. last, has contained attacks against the Maltese corps generally, and these attacks are made in such a way as to oblige me to express my wonder, that the author did not think it necessary to acknowledge his offspring. He ought to have considered, in the first place, that it can never be correct to charge masses with cowardice; in all nations there are some who are constitutionally brave, and others who are not exactly so; but this worthy, who terms himself Sentinel, appears to conceive that because 800 newly-raised men were subdued, and obliged to surrender to a body of veterans more than four times their number, they must be accused either of cowardice or treachery. I hope, Mr. Editor, that I shall be able to prove, in every way, that Mr. Sentinel has made a wanton,

unprovoked, and false statement, from the beginning of his articles to their termination.

Mr. Sentinel states, at the commencement of his first letter, that he is not prejudiced against the Maltese; and he then goes on with a cock-and-bull story about a valorous Maltese who defended what he calls Fort St. Anselmo, with twenty men, for a fortnight, against the French under Napoleon, when in fact no point in the island resisted them more than four or five days; not from the cowardice of my countrymen, but, as is well known, from the treachery of the Knights of St. John, and their commander: there is no fort in the Island named St. Anselmo. Mr. Sentinel has very probably been hoaxed by a more vigilant sentinel than himself, and has magnified the lamp-lighter of Fort St. Elmo into a second Chassé of modern times. The whole story is in reality devoid of truth. Mr. Sentinel may thus perceive that we reject with disdain even his praises, since they are as false as I hope to be able to prove the rest of his statements are.

It is not exactly possible to conceive what is the object of the writer of this pitiful attack; has he lived among the Maltese? does he know us? I should think not, and I conceive that if he were in Malta, and wished to ascertain if the people were so deeply imbued with cowardice, his opinion would be very different. It is easy to make charges against a race of people, but it is exceedingly difficult to substantiate them, particularly when they relate to mere personal courage, since that is to be found in the lowest grade of humanity, nay, even when every other good quality is wanting. I am obliged to notice these inaccuracies of Mr. Sentinel, as they will prove to the public that they ought not to pay more regard to one of his statements than to another.

I belonged to the Royal Regiment of Malta, and was present with it at the affair of Capri. Being therefore perfectly well acquainted with all that passed there, I feel

it to be my duty, both as an officer of that regiment, and as a Maltese, to deny flatly the accuracy of Sentinel's statements.

To prove to your numerous readers, Mr. Editor, that I feel my honour pledged upon this occasion, I shall give you my name at the termination of this letter ; but Sentinel dared not do so in making his wanton attack on my countrymen. Sentinel ought to refer to the *History of the Knights of St. John* during their occupation of Malta (before the epoch when the Knights themselves became recreants), and he would then discover how highly their personal valour was estimated by those who were well qualified to judge of it.

It appears from the statement of our adversary, that he is not too sure of his own accuracy, since he demands some allowance for what he terms "lee-way and westerly variation ;" but this I am not disposed to grant him, as he states the facts to be incontrovertible. Possibly Sentinel collected his information from the works of Dr. O'Meara. It is necessary to observe, that O'Meara wrote what had been told him by Cipriani Franceschi, and Franceschi received his information from the notorious Sussarelli ; for the character of this detestable spy of a double capacity, the public have only to refer to the works of Dr. O'Meara.

I will now confute the relation of the affair, as given by Mr. Sentinel ; he says that Sir Hudson Lowe "ordered a trench to be cut up, and a breastwork was thrown up, on the only landing-place ; a sandy shingle about 300 yards square, behind which they (the Maltese) were placed, with orders to fire upon the French while landing on the beach, while Sir Hudson kept the heights with his Corsican Rangers." I do not know if Sentinel intends here to speak of the usual landing-place in the island of Capri, or of the part at which the French really landed. At the former, it is

true that there was a battery with heavy cannon to defend it, but the Maltese were not there ; if he means the latter, I positively deny that any trench or breastwork was formed before the position of the Maltese regiment. The work to which our worthy probably alludes was a field redoubt, on an eminence above the heights of Monte Solaro, in the centre of the island, out of the range of artillery from the point at which the French landed. It certainly cannot be possible that the Maltese regiment was posted behind this, to prevent the landing of the enemy. I can positively assert that Sir Hudson Lowe was not during that day on the heights with his Corsican Rangers ; he remained in the town of Capri, below the heights, by a descent of about 500 steps. Two companies only of the Corsican Rangers came up during the landing of the enemy, under the command of Captain Church (still alive),* and that about three hours after it had commenced.

The statement then proceeds :—“The Maltese Regiment was officered by British, under the command of a Major, whose name I do not recollect, in the absence of Col. Sir Hew Dalrymple, who was on leave at Messina.”

No such thing. The officers of the Royal Regiment of Malta were British, Germans, and Maltese, with one Frenchman, one Corsican, and an Italian. Our Major's name was Hamill, and our Lieut.-Colonel was Sir John Dalrymple, not Sir Hew ; he had been to England on leave, and had returned to Messina about that period. Our other field-officer was Major Mead, on leave at Messina.

Now commences the most absurd and false part of Sentinel's statement :—“The French landed about two o'clock in the morning.” It is not so ; the landing commenced between eleven and twelve at noon. “The

* Now General in King Otho's service.

“only shot that was fired by the Maltese, was to kill the gallant Major.” To confute this, I will give an approximate statement of the ammunition expended by the regiment, in order to prove that more than one shot was fired, and not against the Major, but against the enemy.

Every man had sixty rounds in his possession, and twenty more were in charge of the Quarter-Master. If Mr. Sentinel is an old soldier, and belonged to the Sicilian army, he must be aware that this was the standing regulation of the army of Sicily, to which the troops at Capri belonged. The eighty rounds were expended, and Assistant-Surgeon Camilleri, who was stationed at the regimental hospital in the village of Ana Capri, avers, that the pouches of the men who were ill, and of those who were brought in wounded, were examined, the cartridges collected, and sent to the regiment; and as the demand for ammunition became every moment more pressing, he proceeded himself to a neighbouring convent, in which there was a deposit of gunpowder, and succeeded in sending three barrels of ball-cartridges off to the regiment; the whole of this was expended during the firing, which was kept up till late in the evening; and with the exception of a short interruption, about four P.M., the firing was incessant, from the moment the enemy attempted to land. At sun-set the greater part of the regiment were without a cartridge, and although message after message was sent to the depot (in the town of Capri) for a supply of ammunition, none was sent after that time; six barrels that were sent before (and the person who had charge of them is still living in Malta) were also expended. A small four-pounder was given into my charge by Major Hamill, knowing that I formerly belonged to the Maltese artillery. From this piece I discharged the whole of the ammunition attached to it (about fifty rounds) with good effect; I then continued to load it with loose powder from a barrel,

using grass for wads, and stone for shot. Up to that time the Major was still living, and sometimes speaking to me. I will now prove that Major Hamill did not fall by the hands of his own soldiers, but by those of the enemy. An old soldier, now a pensioner, is still living in Malta, who was groom to the Major, and within six or eight paces from him when he fell; he states that about nine o'clock in the evening, after he had ordered a charge of the bayonet, the French fired a volley, the Major was wounded, and fell upon a low wall of loose stones. The enemy then began to press forward, and he fell a victim to their bayonets, as well as many of our men who were near him, including Ensign Brickell.

The article then continues,—“who, frantic with rage, “after imploring them (the Maltese) to stand to their “arms, which they had thrown down, cut at them with “his sword right and left, till felled by one of his own “men, who discharged his musket at him.”

This charge has been refuted by what I have already stated. If the Major were frantic, it was rather through enthusiasm than anger, for at about four o'clock P.M., during the short interval of the firing which I have before mentioned, he stated to me, and three or four other officers (one of whom was Lieut. Trevisan, who remembers the circumstance exceedingly well), that he was happy to have seen his regiment behave so well during the day; and instead of cutting at the men, I saw the brave Major put his flask to the lips of one of his wounded men.

During the cessation of firing, we called the attention of the Major to the propriety of sending some detachments down the hill, to discover those of the enemy's force who were hidden by the cliffs; but he objected to it, saying that it would be useless to expose us to the grape-shot of the enemy's vessels, because as they have not been able to gain ground, they will be off as soon as it becomes dark,—so anxious was he to spare the lives of his men.

Sentinel continues :—“ Sir Hudson Lowe, however, kept the French at bay, as he retained possession of the heights until the arrival of some artillery from Messina, who relieved the place ; but the enemy marched off with the honours of war.” And further he tells us, that “ he gives this statement from recollection.”

With respect to Sir Hudson’s retaining possession of the heights, I have already mentioned, that on the day of the enemy’s landing he was not upon the heights, nor were the heights retained, as they fell into the hands of the enemy ; and pray, Mr. Sentinel, where were you at this period ?—at Capri, at Messina, or in what part of the world ? not to know that Capri was not relieved, but that Sir Hudson, with the Corsican Rangers, in a few days capitulated with the French, who retained the island, and therefore had no occasion to march off with the honours of war.

I have now only to notice the concluding paragraph :—“ The incontrovertible fact that 800 Maltese laid down their arms the moment the enemy appeared ;” we shall see if it really was so.

The medical officer Camilleri, of whom I have already spoken, assures me that at sun-set, on the day of the landing, there were in hospital at Ana Capri two captains, Lindsburg and Kilsburg, with above seventy non-commissioned officers and men of our regiment, wounded ; and if so many men were wounded, some must have been killed, yet according to the veracious Sentinel, no fighting took place. How was Ensign Brickell killed ? and how did it happen that the French had above 800 killed and wounded ?

I will now give a detail of the affair as it really happened, in the shortest possible manner, with a map of the island of Capri, being a copy of one made by myself while prisoner of war at Naples.

In September 1808, the Royal Regiment of Malta was

ordered from Melazzo to the island of Capri. We embarked on board of transports, under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Bryce of the Royal Engineers, with a detachment of 100 men of the 58th Regiment under Capt. O'Brien. On our way our orders were to assault the town of Diamante, on the coast of Calabria, which was to be carried into effect in conjunction with a blockading force under the command of Capt. Pierce, R.N., and Capt. Prescott, with H. M. Brig *Weazle*. In this affair His Majesty's forces were successful. We took the town and destroyed all the batteries of the place, carrying away the ordnance and stores; and the enemy, composed of about 600 civic guards and a considerable portion of French troops, betook themselves to the mountains. Thirty-eight sail of the enemy's vessels richly laden, and four large gun-boats, fell into our hands, which were sent to Messina.

After the destruction of Diamante, we sailed for Capri, and had scarcely been a fortnight in the island, when on the 4th October 1808, at day-break, a large expedition was discovered coming out of the Bay of Naples; the sea was nearly calm, with an occasional light breeze.

This flotilla was composed of a frigate, a corvette, a large armed polacre, and 26 gun and mortar boats, escorting a number of coasting vessels, called feluccas, with troops, the number of whom, we afterwards ascertained, amounted to 6000 men, being six battalions, viz., two battalions of Germans, one of Corsicans, two of Neapolitans, and one battalion of French infantry. Between ten and eleven o'clock they made a feint against the usual landing-place of the town of Capri, which was defended by heavy artillery; two companies of our regiment were sent thither; the French soon left that part, and coasted along round Point Arcera, to the place at which they landed; in addition to the companies before mentioned, we had another, which was detached to Limbo, a creek at the southern extremity

of the island. The remaining seven companies were distributed on the heights, crowning a steep declivity towards the sea, terminating by a lofty cliff: about our centre, there was a small ravine, declining towards the sea, and forming, at its termination, a small creek, and as this was the weakest part of the coast, a high wall about sixteen feet high had been built across the gorge, to prevent a landing being effected.

After our arrival on the island, a night picket was sent to this spot: a week before the attack, Lieut. Trevisan being there on duty, saw by the light of the moon, a boat approach the wall, and some men, apparently in a military dress, endeavouring to place something like a ladder against it: after he had challenged them, they pulled back without answering, and several shots were fired at them; he immediately reported the circumstance. On the next day, Major Hamill told him that Sir Hudson Lowe was sorry an alarm had been created among the troops, on account of a boat which was most likely fishing by his permission. Trevisan assured the Major that the men in the boat appeared to be French, and that he was certain they were measuring the height of the wall.

About 12 o'clock, the French having arrived before the wall, they immediately sent forward the boats with the troops destined for landing. As soon as they reached the shore, they could be no longer seen by us, from the position which we occupied, so that it was completely in their power to raise their ladders: we ought decidedly to have sent a detachment down the hill, but the Major did not wish to expose his men to the grape-shot of the enemy's vessels. We had, therefore, no means of attack except against those who dropped over the wall, and were for a certain time exposed to our fire, until they could protect themselves among the precipices.

At about 3 o'clock P. M. two companies of the Corsican Rangers, under the command of Captain Church,

joined us from the town of Capri, and remained with us during the rest of the day.

After the enemy had landed in considerable numbers, they endeavoured to gain ground, by scaling the precipices, but whenever their heads appeared above them, they were repulsed by our fire ; three times some of them advanced a few yards with a flag, but each time they fell under our musketry.

This continued till about sun-set, when an extraordinary movement appeared among the flotilla ; the opinion of our Major was, that the enemy were preparing to re-embark their men who had landed. It was, however, preparatory to the disembarkation of their second division, as we learned afterwards.

Between 8 and 9 o'clock P.M. the French advanced up the ravine before-mentioned ; our regiment occupied the same ground as before dark. As they approached, some of our men informed the Major that they were advancing ; he insisted that it was impossible, but some firing having commenced at the moment, convinced him of his error, and he then ordered the regiment to charge : the French troops then fired a volley at a short distance from us, by which the Major, and some of the men around him, fell ; the enemy then rushed on and he was bayoneted.

At this period, I was towards the right flank of our position. After throwing my little piece of artillery over the hill, I joined a party of our regiment under Ensign Prohaska. We then attempted to retreat to the village ; but, meeting with a column of the enemy, we defended ourselves for about half an hour, until we had not a cartridge left, and being surrounded on all sides, we were obliged to surrender.

Lieut. Mitrovich, now a captain in the same corps with myself, informs me, that he commanded Captain Lindsburg's company after the latter was wounded.

When the French came up, he found himself also enveloped in the same way, but was fortunate enough to succeed, with only twenty men, in reaching the redoubt of Monte Solaro. Here he found some officers and men belonging to our regiment, amounting altogether to about ten officers and 250 men; he also found in the redoubt the two companies of the Corsican Rangers. Captain Church having received an order written in pencil from Sir Hudson Lowe, to leave the redoubt, he retreated with the two companies of the Corsican Rangers, about midnight, by a path over a precipice, to the town of Capri. The Maltese, from their short residence in the island, were totally unacquainted with this path, and it is rather extraordinary that the Maltese were not ordered to retreat at the same time, as the redoubt was well known to be untenable; it was without guns or ammunition; there was no water, and the provisions which were found, consisted only of two barrels of salt meat, four bags of biscuit, and a small cask of brandy,—scarcely sufficient for one day's rations to the whole of the troops collected there. The want of water was felt immediately, and absolutely prevented our retaining possession of the post. Captain Dudreneau of our regiment, the senior officer, retired to Monte Solaro, requested Captain Church on his leaving the redoubt, to acquaint Sir Hudson Lowe that he did not know what had become of Major Hamill and the rest of the regiment; that he was in the redoubt with about ten officers and 250 men, and was desirous to know was he also to retreat to the town of Capri, but no orders were ever received.

Ensign Perry having volunteered to return to the village, to fetch the Regimental Colours from the quarters of the Major, two sergeants were sent with him; in this they succeeded. The colours were immediately detached from the poles, which were burnt, and the colours were

concealed under the dress, and round the waists, of two of the officers.

Next morning a flag of truce was sent to Monte Solaro by General Lamarque, to say that he would grant a capitulation ; but that, if they did not avail themselves of the offer, he would afterwards allow them no terms whatever, adding, that he hoped the officers would not determine to resist, although they commanded the brave men who had fought so gallantly on the preceding day ; that resistance would be useless, as he was determined to take the redoubt at any risk. It was then arranged to capitulate ; the stipulations were, that the troops should march out with their arms, and with drums beating, as far as the village of Ana Capri, where the men were to lay down their arms. The officers were to preserve their swords until exchanged.

The capitulation was executed at about ten o'clock in the morning. General Lamarque, after the arms were piled, went along our line, telling the soldiers that they had shown great bravery on the previous day, and that it was merely the fortune of war that made them prisoners, and not any fault of their own.

After we were sent to Naples, while at Castel Nuovo, we were informed that the French intended to search the persons of the officers, to find the Regimental Colours, as by some means they had discovered that they were still in our possession.

It was therefore determined to burn them immediately in the fire-place of one of the officers' rooms, which was done.

Captain Mitrovich adds, that, some days after our arrival at Naples, he went to the hospital to see Captain Lindsburg, who had been removed thither from Capri ; he found him in a large room, in which there were several of Murat's officers, who had also been wounded at Capri.

Some conversation taking place respecting the landing, they all declared, that, if the regiment had moved down the hill, not one of those who had landed could have escaped, as their position allowed them no means of attack, and they must have been killed or driven into the sea; that the Maltese would only have suffered in descending the hill, from the fire of the armed vessels; they stated, at the same time, that they had about 800 men killed and wounded in the attack.

A most respectable individual (Mr. J. Casha), now living in Malta, a professor of mathematics, was at that period in the service of Murat, in the Naval Arsenal at Naples; he asserts that, on the day after the attack on Capri, he saw more than 600 wounded brought from thence and landed at the Arsenal.

When the town of Capri capitulated, after a few days' siege, General Lamarque complimented Sir John Dalrymple, our Lieut.-Colonel (who had just returned from England, and was present at the capitulation), on the bravery displayed by his regiment; and Sir John sent us a message to Naples to that effect, by General Lamarque's aide-de-camp. From all the circumstances which I have mentioned, you must perceive, Mr. Editor, that the soldiers did not lay down their arms when the enemy appeared, nor that they fired only one shot, and that against their commanding officer; on the contrary, had a small number of them been allowed to descend the hill, they would have driven the enemy back to their boats or into the sea, and permission to do so was requested.

You will perhaps be surprised that the place where the French landed, acknowledged to be the weakest part of the island, was not fortified. Two or three pieces of heavy artillery would have defended it most effectually, but this oversight was not the fault of the Maltese; the French made a feint against the strongest point, and then attacked the weakest. Aware of the error which had been

committed, the French lost no time in landing six pieces of heavy artillery, and placing them in battery on that spot, to prevent any surprise on the part of the English cruisers and Sicilian flotilla, stationed at Ponza, a neighbouring island.

I have now given you, Mr. Editor, what I believe firmly to be a faithful account of the whole affair relating to the capitulation of the Royal Regiment of Malta, and of their becoming prisoners to the French, under the command of General Lamarque, after his attack on the island of Capri ; and I hope it will remove from every unprejudiced mind, any idea that the slightest imputation of cowardice or treachery should rest on the names of brave, though unfortunate soldiers.

I must not neglect to observe, with regard to the word treachery, that none of the men, while prisoners of war in France for six years, suffering under privations, ever enlisted into the French service, though continually pressed to do so. It ought to be remembered that the Maltese had been engaged, some years before, in their own Island, in a " *guerre de mort* " against the very troops they were opposed to, and against whom they had the most inveterate aversion, in consequence of occurrences which took place while Malta was in possession of the French forces.

Before concluding, Mr. Editor, I have only to mention that Lieut.-Colonel Cowell, now on half-pay of the 42nd regiment, was our senior captain, and was present with the regiment on that day ; he was one of the officers who returned to Malta in 1809 on parole, and joined the Regimental Depot, shortly after which he was promoted to a majority in the regiment, which is a proof that the corps behaved bravely, otherwise promotion would not have been given to its officers. As Lieut.-Colonel Cowell is still living, I appeal to him for the correctness of my statements ; and as it may be asked why the corps was

not reorganized, I have simply to answer, that new colours were sent out for the regiment from England, but as it was found impossible to raise recruits at that epoch in Malta, from the boundless prosperity and wealth of all classes in the island, an order from the Secretary of State was received to disband the regiment, which took place on the 26th April, 1811. I have the honour to subscribe myself, Mr. Editor,

Your very obedient humble servant,

F. BUSETT,

Capt. Royal Malta Fencibles.

Malta, 4th February, 1836.