

# More Letters by Captain Alexander John Ball, R.N. by Dr A. Bonnici

**I**n May 1798, Capt. A.J. Ball R.N., was transferred to the Mediterranean Station to serve under the Command of Lord Nelson, and was soon promoted to Command HMS *Alexander*, a 74-gun ship of the line, with 500 men on board. He achieved distinction in the battle of the Nile, off Aboukir Bay in Egypt, on August 1, 1798, where Nelson destroyed Napoleon's French Fleet.

On Sunday, September 2, 1798, the Maltese rebelled against the French garrison under the Command of General Claude-Henri Vaubois, whom Napoleon had left as Commander of the French Forces in Malta, after taking Malta from the Knights of St John, and expelling the Grand Master Ferdinand von Hompesch from the Islands.

The Maltese leaders knew of Nelson's victory over the French Fleet at Aboukir Bay, and that he was now trying to capture or destroy the ships that had escaped, so they immediately wrote to him, requesting to blockade Valletta, so that no supplies could reach the besieged French, and no French ship inside Valletta Harbour could go out and attack any supply ship coming to the help of the Maltese from Sicily.

This request reached him on HMS *Vanguard* on September 13, 1798 and he immediately instructed the Marquis Pinto Guldes de Nizza Reale, commanding the Portuguese squadron of four vessels, to blockade Valletta which he did on September 19, 1798.

In October, Nelson reappeared off Malta at the head of three ships and two frigates and took over the blockade from the Portuguese leaving Ball in charge. On October 25, 1798 Nelson sent the following dispatch to Ball:

*"You are hereby required and directed to take under your command the ships named in the margin [the Terpsichore, the sloop LA Bonne Citoyenne, and the fireship Incendiary], the captains having my directions to follow your orders, and to undertake the blockade of the island of Malta, and to prevent as much as in your power, any supplies of arms, ammunition or provisions getting to the French Army or Port in their possession, and to grant every aid and assistance to the Maltese, and consulting with the Maltese Delegates upon the best methods of distressing the enemy using every effort to cause them to quit the Island or oblige them to capitulate. And relying upon your*

*zeal and abilities in the service, in the event of a capitulation with the enemy the Island, Towns and Forts to be delivered to the Islanders, to be restored to their lawful sovereign."*

From now on Ball was entrusted with the responsibility of the blockade, and among the British ships effecting the blockade under his command we find *Audacious, Goliath, Emerald, Stromboli, Incendiary, Alfonso and Benjamin, etc.*

In February, 1799, the Maltese insurgents needing somebody of authority who could coordinate their efforts and assume the responsibility of commanding the besieging troops, requested Capt A.J. Ball to preside over the National Assembly, and to have full command of the Maltese troops. He gladly accepted.

During the Congress held on March 16, 1799, Ball read out two important letters he had received from Admiral Nelson and from the British Ambassador in Naples, Sir William Hamelton, whereby he was instructed to assume in the name of the King of the Two Sicilies the Land Command of the Maltese Islands, with the title of Governor, a title he continued to use until he was relieved of his post in Malta in February, 1801.

**D**Ovendo alcuni delli Maltesi aderenti a Francesi partire da questo Dominio, tra quali l'Avv. Calcedonio Fenech, Paolo Mallia, Antonio Pousiergues, ed il Fra Cappellano Stefano Libreri, ed essendo molto facile, che tali aderenti de' Francesi abbiano de' debiti in Malta; S. E. il Signor GOVERNATORE fa sapere a tutti quelli, che hanno o crediti, o altri affari da liquidare colli detti aderenti, dovere sino a tutta la prossima Domenica comparire in questa G. C. della Valletta, a dare nota di loro pretensioni colle opportune giustificazioni; altrimenti tali creditori, spirato detto termine, s'intenderanno aver perduto qualunque loro dritto, nè potranno mai più esercitarlo.

Dalla Segreteria di S. E. li 18 Settembre 1800.

*Sottoscritto = L'Uditor Felice Cutajar Segr.º di S. E.*

Charles Cameron who succeeded Ball in May, 1801, and his successors including Ball when he came back to Malta in October 1802, began to be called Civil Commissioners up till 1813.

The following unpublished letter is the earliest recorded letter by Alexander John Ball, after the capitulation of the French occupying forces under Vaubois on September 5, 1800.

It is a historical letter written to His British Majesty's Agent and Consul in Tripoli, Barbary Coast, Mr Simon Lucas on October 11, 1800, in which Ball announces the surrender of Valletta, and expressing his elation that this was achieved without having the need to bombard and damage the city, and without suffering any casualties among the British Troops.

He pays tribute to Vaubois who resisted for two years on seven month supply of rations, and for the French Troops not to have received any pay for nineteen months.

Ball expressed his wish to establish good relations with the Bashaw of Tripoli, and informed Lucas that he was enclosing a letter to be delivered to the Bashaw, with whom *“he hoped to establish Commerce between his Dominion and Malta, from which will arise great reciprocal advantages”*.

As soon as Malta passed under British protection all the North African states were informed, and consequently all Maltese slaves were to be set free, or face the consequence — Gun-boat diplomacy — but it worked. All Maltese Nationals were set free. This did not please everybody, as those slaves who were either born in slavery, or those who had been slaves for a very long time had lost all connection with Malta, their delivery from serfdom suddenly meant being without a guaranteed roof and food.

The supply of corn, the staple food of the Maltese, was always a big headache to the authorities. In the footnote, Ball asks Lucas to send him “Two thousand Salmi of corn, if the price is right”.

*Malta, 11th October, 1800*

*“My Dear Sir*

*“I have the pleasure to announce to you the surrender of La Valette the 5th of last month, without being driven to the necessity of Bombarding or Damaging the Town, or having a single British Soldier wounded. The French had only two days' provisions left — Vaubois had subsisted his garrison two years on seven months' rations; they had not received any pay for nineteen months. So that the wonder is under all these privations their*

holding out so long. I send you a letter to the Bashaw, with whom I hope to establish a commerce between his Dominion and this Island, from which will arise great reciprocal advantages. I forward to you a letter from the Duke of Portland and a few papers. MaCauley is writing and will tell you the news.

"We have the most Sultry Weather that has been experienced for many years.

"I hope to go through without feeling any bad effects from it.

"Adieu my Dear Sir,

"Believe me with much esteem

"Your most faithful and obedient servant.

Alex J. Ball."

"Simon Lucas Esq.

"His Brit Maj. Agent & Consul in the state of Tripoli, Barbary,

"Pray send us two thousand Salms of Corn as soon as possible if the price is reasonable"

Malta. 10<sup>th</sup> Dec<sup>r</sup> 1800

My Dear Sir

I have the pleasure to announce to you the Surrender of La Vallette the 5<sup>th</sup> of last Month, without being driven to the necessity of Bombarding or Damaging the Town, or having a single British Soldier wounded. The French had only two days Provision left. Vaubois had subsisted his Garrison two years or seven Months.

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out so long. I send you a letter to the  
Bashaw, with whom I hope to establish  
a Commerce between his Dominions, and  
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great reciprocal advantages - I forward  
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and a few Papers - Macaulay is  
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we have the most sultry weather  
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feeling any bad effects from it

adieu My Dear Sir

Believe me with much  
Esteem

Your most faithful obedt servt

Alex<sup>r</sup> John Ball

Simon Lucas Esq

His Brit<sup>h</sup> Maj. Agent & Consul  
in the State of Tripoly  
Barbary

may send us two thousand Salms  
of Coin as soon as possible if the price  
be reasonable

Captain Alexander John Ball was recalled back to Naval duties on his ship HMS *Alexander*, leaving Malta on February 19, 1801 and was given a Baronet by the British Government on June 10, 1801. Ferdinand of the Two Sicilies bestowed upon him the blue ribbon with a narrow red border of Commander of the Order of St Ferdinand together with Troubridge and Hallowell and the Czar Paul I of Russia, on Nelson's recommendation, made him Knight Commander of the Order of Malta.

Cav. Sir Alexander John Ball, Baronet, was sent back to Malta on July 10, 1802 as Civil Commissioner and became Rear Admiral of the Blue in 1805, and Rear Admiral of the White in April, 1807, which meant that he was able to carry on with his Naval duties as well as those of Civil Commissioner, as the following unpublished letter shows:

By Sir Alexander John Ball, Baronet  
Rear Admiral of the White

"You are required and directed to proceed without delay off Previsa in Albania, taking under your convoy the trade bound thither, or to any of the



ports in that quarter, and having seen them in safety to their destination proceed to join the squadron off Corfu, and having fallen in with His Majesty's ship Belle Poule, which you will probably find cruising off the Island of Faro, put yourself under the Orders of Captain Brisbane, and follow his directions for your further proceedings.

Given on board the Trident  
at Malta the 2 November 1808

Alex J. Ball

To E.A. Down Esq,  
Commander of HM Sloop Redwig

By Command of the Rear Admiral Francis Lang.

By Sir Alexander John Ball Esq  
Rear Admiral of the White

You are hereby required and directed to proceed without delay off Civita in Albania taking under your Command the Sloop bound thither to any of the Ports in that quarter and having seen them in safety to their destination proceed to

join the Squadron Stationed off Corfu and having  
fallen in with His Majesty's Ship Belle Poule, which  
you will probably find cruising off the Island of  
Fano put yourself under the Orders of Captain  
Misham and follow his directions for your further  
proceedings.

Given on Board the Frigate  
at Malta, the 2<sup>d</sup> November 1758

Albion Ball

To

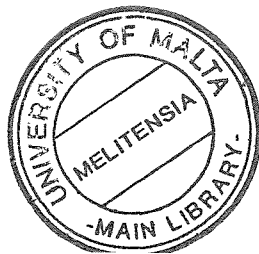
L. A. Down Esq.

Commander of H. M. Ship

Bedford

By Command of the Rear Admiral  
Thomas Lewis

As Civil Commissioner Ball assumed enormous administrative and Executive powers. All petitions were addressed to him and he had the power to grant or deny the requests made.





Callina

Callaro C. G. Singso 1809.  
Assegnano alla Supte. come vedova del 1.º M.º. Muss  
monti in attuale servizio la pensione di rend. locale  
al mese da conseguirsi dal p.º del corrente Singso.  
Il Regio Cir. Com.º

Alpheo Gralle

Calla vedova dell' Uditore Ferdinando Mus.  
cat. Cor. Una, ed Avee di R. C. si fa licito  
nel p.º te. nuovo richiamare alla mente  
di R. C. i vantaggi prestati dal Defunto  
per una tantissima serie d'anni, quando  
stato impedito fin dal 1.º.º. o mica, e quelli

incialm<sup>e</sup> prestati nel tempo dell'insur-  
rez. e sotto il felicissimo Governo Inglese  
di V. C. che lo reggeva, e continua a  
reggere coll'universale sodisfazione, per  
delle grazie che si vive, e si gode, perfino  
che si compiacca destinare quell'ape-  
gnaz. mensuale che suol esser l'at-  
testato della gratitudine, e della ricono-  
scenza del governo verso i servizi presta-  
ti dal Defunto, che formerà nello stesso  
tempo una parte di consolazione, per la  
vedova Orca nelle sue afflizioni, ed ec-  
citerà un nuovo motivo di obbligaz. a  
V. C. a cui della grazia  
G. F. Torregiani

The above petition was written on May 16, 1809 to Ball, by Advocate G.F. Torregiani, on behalf of the widow Carla Muscat whose husband Ferdinand Muscat had died while holding the Office of "Uditore". Ball granted Mrs Carla Muscat the monthly pension of 30 scudi (Private Collection)

# LINES,

ON HIS LATE EXCELLENCY,

SIR ALEXANDER JOHN BALL, BARONET,

*Kc. Kc. Kc.*



VICTOR at last, Death strikes one Hero more,  
Who faced his shafts unnumbered times before.  
He, whom the Battle's rage so often spared,  
Who NELSON's dangers with his glory shared;  
Undaunted BALL, who sailed o'er every wave,  
With Victory's wings, fit leader of the Brave;  
Now only vanquished, ends a bright career,  
And leaves his Glory, where he stamped it, here.

Where HE first bade Britannia's standard fly,  
MALTA receives her Hero's parting sigh;  
Now doomed to see funereal banners waved  
O'er the blest Isle His arms and Genius saved,  
And bid the walls he rescued from her foes,  
Attest, at once, his Valour and repose.

Where her brave son, her ABERCROMBIE, sleeps,  
Fame on those walls eternal vigil keeps;  
And while each grateful Isle \* shall grave the name  
Of BALL, 'midst towers as lasting as his fame,  
To Her award let future ages trust,  
To tell his worth, and consecrate his dust.

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\* Great Britain  
and Malta

H. F.