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Best Archival Paper

The Polish Victory at Fuengirola 14 October 1810

By [Jonathan North](#)

Note: The account by Młokosiewicz was translated into English by Marek Tadeusz Łałowski and edited by Jonathan North.

In June 1808 Colonel Feliks Potocki's 4th Regiment of Infantry of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw had, along with the 7th and 9th regiments, been selected to be transferred to serve under French command. Marshal Davout inspected the regiment in Warsaw that August, finding the 2,566 officers and men adequately supplied in terms of uniform, with hats, no doubt the square-topped czapkas, and shakos, but, unfortunately, with 813 defective muskets which needed replacing. Davout thought that some extra equipment combined with the zeal of Potocki, whom he thought to be "useful on account of his great importance to the country and because of his connections", would bring the unit into shape.

The Poles were being readied to take part in the subjugation of Spain, a war that would turn out to be brutal, cruel and costly. Napoleon had deposed the Bourbons in May of that year, seeking to replace them with his elder brother, Joseph Bonaparte. But this act of hubris provoked a passionate and bloody revolt, degenerating into a lengthy insurrection, not for any love for the royal family as such, but more as a reaction to foreign occupation and the exactions that came with it. Resistance was soon intense and Britain fuelled Spain's popular uprising with guns and money and, eventually, expeditionary forces of her own. Alongside regular campaigns, in which Spain's armies were defeated in battle but never beaten in resolve, a ferocious conflict was waged by peasants and partisans stirred up by the clergy and often led by army officers. Napoleon soon found himself drawn into a long and costly war feeding in more and more troops in attempts to drive allied armies back and secure the country from the raging insurgency. Most of the troops he sent were French but many came from the various vassal states of the French empire, and they included thousands of Poles.

Potocki's regiment set off for Spain that summer, marching out of Warsaw on 7 August and, passing through Torgau and Leipzig, reaching Sedan in eastern France in October. At Sedan they met their divisional commander, General Valence, and made a good impression:

"The 4th Polish Regiment is very fine. The men do not seem so very tired after the long march they have just undertaken. They are well trained. Their clothing is in poor shape, but their headgear is still satisfactory. They are armed with French muskets."

The Polish division of three regiments plus some artillery and transport troops then passed through Paris, where the infantry was invited to dine with the Imperial Guard. The 7th was the first to be so honoured, and the celebrations passed off well, save for an incident when "a few drunken soldiers took to quarrelling and fighting with their bare-knuckles or swords, with seven or eight being wounded". The 4th was better behaved, or at least those who had arrived were, for 92 men had been left behind or deserted and 357 were in hospital. Even so they still impressed their French hosts:

“the men are of a good type, but the officers seem not to have mastered their role”. Napoleon, who encountered them near Rambouillet, was less generous:

“I encountered the 4th Polish Regiment. I found it to be in bad condition, and the commanders inform me that the others are pretty much the same way.”

The lack of greatcoats was a concern, but so too was the soldiers' footwear, for 50 men had appeared on parade in Paris in their bare feet. This proved difficult to rectify and General Lefebvre, who thought the Poles were, in any case, slow marchers, found it difficult to procure shoes as the Poles' feet were “too wide and too long”. Shoes would be vital as the Poles still had a long way to go.

Their last port of call before embarking on a campaign which would kill the majority was Bayonne in the south west of France. The 2,065 officers and men halted there to allow some of the laggards to catch up before, under the experienced gaze of Vicomte Valence, marching over the Pyrenees. The regiment first served around Madrid, with 1,095 officers and men then putting in an appearance against the Anglo-Spanish army at Talavera in July 1809. They were kept in reserve, suffering some 40 casualties, before being reunited with their compatriots and sent, under General Horace Sébastiani, to sweep through the area south of the capital. Potocki was wounded at the battle of Almonacid in August 1809, with Maciej Wierzbinski assuming command and participating in the glorious victory at Ocaña on 19 November. This, and other French successes in the south, enabled the French to embark on their conquest of Andalucia, and, in the early months of 1810 they swept south with Marshal Victor's V Corps taking Cordoba, King Joseph riding into Seville and Sébastiani conquering Grenada and marching into Malaga on 5 February. The Spanish were dismayed, their government, chased out of Seville, found refuge in soon to be besieged Cadiz, and the British, safe in Gibraltar, momentarily feared for the complete destruction of their struggling ally.

But the French, although seemingly all-conquering, replaced one set of difficulties with another. They now had to secure vast tracts of land, protecting their supplies from the attacks of bands of insurgents, and holding onto the towns despite probes by Spanish regulars and amphibious raids by the ubiquitous British. The Polish division was therefore broken up, its component regiments being scattered across the region and the regiments themselves divided into companies and allotted garrison duty in the cities and towns around Grenada. They were always to be overextended, fatigued, undersupplied and demoralised, but their generals were still ambitious. General of Brigade Louis-Joseph-Amour de Bouillé, Sébastiani's chief of staff, had warned his rash superior to consolidate but the restless Sébastiani hoped to extend still further by securing control along the coast to Marbella, a useful position from which to monitor Gibraltar. To do so he began to improve the roads towards Spanish-held Marbella, making use of small forts along the way to protect this work and keep the coast secure.

This became the duty of the 4th Regiment, now commanded by Tadeusz Woliński. A portion were kept in Grenada or Malaga, where Woliński kept the regimental headquarters and the Polish artillery, whilst the first battalion was scattered along the coast, taking up positions in the forts and fortified outposts between Malaga and Fuengirola. Captain Ignacy Bronisz, acting as battalion commander, ¹ took charge of a fortified monastery at Alhaurin with 300 men and 50 French cavalry from the 21st

¹ He was a captain but was promoted to chef de bataillon on 14 August 1811.

Dragoons, and a small detachment under Lieutenant Eustachy Chełmicki held Mijas, midway between Bronisz and another detachment under Captain Franciszek Młokosiewicz at Fuengirola. This fort, also known as Sohail, was situated on a height overlooking the estuary of the river Fuengirola and the small village of the same name, but, unfortunately, according to Młokosiewicz, it was in a bad state:

“In the year 1810 I was assigned to the command of the garrison at the fort at Fuengirola (five miles away from Malaga). This was one of the defensive positions the Spaniards had established to protect the Mediterranean coast, partly against the attack from the Barbary corsairs, and partly to protect merchant ships, which, when chased by the corsairs along the coastline, could shelter under the cover of the castle guns.

The castle at Fuengirola was one of the oldest, and most neglected, above all having been emptied of guns, which had either been spiked or thrown from the walls by the Spaniards as they retreated from the French army, and so it was in very poor condition when it was occupied by French troops. The castle was so positioned that it served as the key to Malaga coming from Gibraltar, whilst also being a hindrance to the British efforts to land guns and other supplies for the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Grenada, and above all in their efforts to maintain communications between various bands of insurgents active in these areas. The French General, and governor of the Kingdom of Grenada, General Sébastiani, recognized how important it was to have possession of this castle, and so allocated to it a permanent detachment of 150 men from the 4th Infantry Regiment of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, under my command, and simultaneously instructed that urgent measures should be taken to improve the defences and to ensure a sufficient supply of ammunition and food. These orders had only partially been fulfilled when, on 14th October 1810, a British squadron, consisting of two ships of the line, three brigs, four gunboats and several transports, appeared from the Strait of Gibraltar and anchored opposite the castle.”

Młokosiewicz’s men were, by now, veterans in the art of holding small positions surrounded by a surly or openly hostile population, and trained to keep a look out for predatory British ships used to mount raids and landings along the coast. But the scale of this expeditionary force took the Poles by surprise.

The squadron had been sent by Lieutenant General Colin Campbell in Gibraltar. He had decided to attack Malaga that October, planning to discomfort the French and thus winning breathing room for besieged Cadiz. Campbell and Major-General Andrew Thomas Blayney determined that such an attack was “the most effectual mode of interrupting the siege, and harassing the enemy, would be to send detachments to various parts of the Spanish coast”.

The timing seemed right, for Campbell and Blayney saw the French overextended, with 900 men at Ronda, “in all two hundred and forty French, the remaining six hundred and sixty being composed of Germans, Poles, etc, upon whom little dependence could be placed”. Near Gibraltar the French were hardly stronger: “The same information stated that at Fuengirola the enemy had but 200 men, at Mijas but forty, and at Ronda [sic] one hundred, chiefly dragoons”. Blayney thought that Spanish guerrillas “well armed, fierce and exasperated mountaineers” would collaborate with the expedition and he hoped his superiors in Gibraltar would “support and keep alive the animosity

of the peasantry” so that the French would be continuously obliged to maintain their own garrisons rather than pull an army together to assist in coming to the aid of any of their beleaguered comrades.

On 10 October Campbell issued orders to Major General Blayney “to prepare for secret service”. He was to take 353 men from the second battalion of the 89th Foot and 932 men from the first battalion of the 82nd, supplementing these with 516 men from a Foreign Recruits Battalion principally composed of Italian deserters but also including some Germans and Poles.² Despite instructing their officers to tell these dubious auxiliaries that their general placed “every confidence in their valour and good conduct” he belied his rhetoric by adding:

“I must particularly direct the attention of the foreign troops to the abstaining from plunder. They shall want for nothing that the nature of the service can afford; I therefore expect they may exert a spirit and pride amongst them, so as to keep a watch upon each other’s conduct, and prevent my having recourse to unpleasant measures. Any instance of that nature which may happen shall be severely punished; the offender shall be instantly stripped of the British uniform as unworthy of it, his arms taken from him, and left to the mercy of those he has injured. I hope and feel confident there will be no necessity for such an expedient.”

Blayney had little faith in “the motley troop of foreigners” but, having shown his allies the stick he now introduced the carrot and had them issued with “two hundred weight of tobacco and three hundred pair of shoes” to raise their morale. Along with his regular infantry, he would also bring with him four 18-pounders and a 32-pounder, ready to batter down any walls, and hoped that Captain George Miller of the 95th, an officer tasked with liaison with the partisans, would provide him with 24 horses or mules to draw his guns. In addition the Spanish at Ceuta were to supply 640 men from the Toledo Regiment, a unit “composed of a more orderly set of men than the generality of Spanish soldiers at this time”, whilst Molina’s guerrillas, it was hoped, would harry French detachments behind the coast and prevent them from intervening.

The initial idea had been to bombard the Sohail fort by Fuengirola and thus pull Sébastiani out of Malaga, then send the expedition on to that deserted port. Blayney even carried with him a proclamation which informed the inhabitants that “Lieutenant General Colin Campbell ... who keeps fleets and armies always employed merely for the protection of the helpless and oppressed ... has sent me with a force to relieve the good people of Malaga from French tyranny”.

Those fleets and armies were gathering. The British had troop transports brought from Cadiz, and the infantry would be escorted by a small fleet consisting of Captain George Burlton’s ship of the line *Rodney* (74), which arrived on 5 October, with Henry Hope’s *HMS Topaze* (32) and the brigs *Sparrowhawk* (18) under James Pringle, with John Parish’s *Onyx* (10), James Talbot’s *Encounter* (12) and Robert Hall’s *Rambler* (14), eventually joining. These Royal Navy ships would also be accompanied by the Spanish ship of the Line *El Vencedor* (74), a vessel supposed to transport the 82nd Foot but in such a state of disrepair that *HMS Rodney* had to tow it for repairs, thus

² The British were not the only ones to recruit Polish deserters and POWs, the Spanish did too as a French report from 20 April 1812 confirms: “On the 20th, four Polish soldiers, who had deserted from Ballesteros’s forces, presented themselves, along with their weapons and equipment, to the commandant at Malaga. They declared that they had been taken prisoner at Estepona.”

temporarily depriving Blayney of significant firepower and much needed infantry. Undeterred, the British sailed for Ceuta to meet their Spanish allies and to come under the critical gaze of Charles Bevan, commanding the British garrison there:

“The force is small and is probably rather to feel the way than any other thing. The only Englishmen are three hundred of the 89th Regt, the Spanish Regt of Toledo went from hence about 700 strong. The remainder of the Force consists of Poles & Germans, deserters from the French Army. What is expected from such a force so constituted? I ----- Mullins acting as Brigade Major to Lord B in the room of [Frederick Stovin] who has been obliged to go to England on account of his health.”

The Spanish were embarked, despite being “much dissatisfied with the nature of their provisions” and the entire Allied expeditionary force then sailed from Ceuta on the morning of 12 October. Blayney, onboard the *Topaze*, calculated that without the guns of the Spanish 74 and without the 82nd Foot he was unlikely to be able to secure and hold Malaga. He therefore determined to take the fort at Fuengirola and then act as the situation developed. The lack of mortars did not seem to perturb him, and disappointment that only ten or twelve guerrillas came forward to assist in his operations did not dent his confidence, he no doubt thinking that the unreliable Poles would be only too pleased to surrender to his regular infantry. At half past ten on the morning of 14 October the British started landing at Calle de la Morale “a small bay” five miles to the southwest of the fort. Blayney spent precious time detailing how bugle signals were to be used to direct his multi-national force, and only then did he determine that the road to Fuengirola was too bad to support heavy artillery. The British general had his guns transported closer to the fort by sea whilst the majority of his infantry trudged along the “extremely fatiguing and tedious” road towards the fort. Their appearance from this unexpected direction caught the commandant, Captain Młokosiewicz by surprise, as he relates in his memoirs:

“At about this time, a large band of Spanish insurgents gathered on the slopes of the nearby mountains and, suddenly descending towards the castle, seized 40 head of cattle from our slender herd, killed one of the guards, and wounded the other. In order to recover our abducted livestock, I sent out a unit of some 40 men under the command of Lieutenant [Jan] Ubysz, and it was only when this unit had moved some distance from the walls of the castle that I noticed that the nearby hills had already been occupied by British infantry. They had landed under the cover of these hills at a place called Cala del Moral. Without wishing to unduly worry the tiny garrison of the castle, I ordered the alarm sounded from the walls, summoning Lieutenant Ubysz back to the castle.

The enemy did not waste time and having deployed his forces and prepared himself to carry out an assault, sent me an envoy, probably thinking that the sight of such a great force would intimidate and prompt us to surrender at their first demand. Having no thoughts of entering into negotiations and being resolved to defend my post to the last, I refused the envoy. At around one o'clock that afternoon an enemy battalion, advancing in open order, approached the castle walls, whilst at the same time the enemy squadron opened an intense fire against the castle from the sea.”

Blayney had deployed the 89th on the right, the foreign battalion on the left and the Spanish in reserve in the centre, and he had sent his light companies forward to harry

the Polish position. As well as at Fuengirola, the arrival of the British had also triggered the alarm at Mijas where Lieutenant Eustachy Chełmicki commanded a small detachment, and he sent word to Bronisz with his 350 men at Alhaurin and he, in turn, sent a dragoon the 22 miles to Malaga to inform the French that the British had landed.

It was hope of relief which partly influenced the Polish officers' decision not to treat for surrender, a refusal which perhaps surprised Blayney, although he is quite neutral about the setback in a letter to Campbell: "Immediately on my arrival, I sent in a flag of truce, which was refused". Worse the enemy was fighting back, as Młokosiewicz relates:

"My garrison consisted of 150 men from the 4th Infantry Regiment of the Duchy of Warsaw, two old iron 16-pounder guns and two bronze 2-pound field guns. We had three old Spanish gunners in our service, but they quickly disappeared when the enemy squadron appeared. After positioning our guns and aiming them against the squadron, we opened fire with such a effect that from the first salvo one of the ship's boats along with all its cargo was sunk."

This lucky shot, credited to Sergeant Józef Zakrzewski who was now directing the Polish artillery, is confirmed by Blayney: "the enemy commenced a heavy fire on our gunboats, sunk one, and killed and wounded many of our soldiers in others."

As the ships' barges and gunboats, under the command of Lieutenant Corral, trawled backwards and forwards landing men, munitions and supplies, the Poles continued to do what they could to hinder the operation. Blayney, irritated by their resistance and skill, sought to put an end to the bombardment by drawing the enemy's fire and

".. now advanced close to the work with the foreign riflemen, supported by four companies of the 89th, when a brisk fire commenced on both sides; ours being confined to musketry, while the enemy had the advantage of firing grape from their artillery, by which Major [John] Grant of the 89th was mortally wounded, while receiving my instructions to take possession of a small ridge of hills, which, extending to the beach, would have afforded cover to the regiment."³

Blayney, after assessing the chances of successfully storming the fort, and finding that the advice of Captain George Harding agreed with his own caution, now fell back so he could spend the night in a defensive posture. That night bad weather troubled Blayney's men but it, and darkness, at least provided cover for the artillery to be landed:

"During a severe night of thunder and rain, the artillery, consisting of one 32-pound carronade, two 12-pounders and a howitzer with two swivels were landed."

Blayney had a battery established before dawn, the heavier 32-pounder taking up position on the beach, the rest on some heights close to the fort. Młokosiewicz saw them being readied, but could do little to hinder them:

³ Blayney wrote a more succinct account the day after the action, which reads "Upon which I advanced close to the works with the Germans and 89th, when a warm fire of musketry commenced, supported by grape from the fort. In this contest I lament to inform your Excellency that Major [John] Grant, of the 89th, was mortally wounded (since dead), with several others".

“Under cover of darkness, the enemy battery was entrenched on the hill, about 75 metres from the walls of the castle. It consisted of six guns brought ashore from the squadron, and they included a mortar and a howitzer. We could not quite discern the enemy’s movements due to the darkness of the night and to the continuous and heavy downpour, so we spent the night sheltering on the parapets of the castle walls.”

As well as placing his guns, Blayney made sure to position his men so that, the following day, they would be ready to force the surrender of the fort whilst, if need be, counter any French move from the direction of Malaga. He sent four companies of the Spanish, along with 100 of his Germans, to take up a position by the junction of the road to Mijas, thus protecting his flank from any French intervention from that direction. Captain Thomas Mullins, the staff officer leading the Spanish, chose to exceed these orders and was more ambitious, thinking that he would attack and take the town. However the garrison of 60 Poles also from the 4th Regiment, and lead by the youthful Lieutenant Chelmicki, eluded the Spanish, with Chelmicki making for Fuengirola under cover of darkness. His sudden appearance surprised Młokosiewicz:

“Lieutenant Chelmicki had been positioned with half a company, some 60 men, in the small town of Mijas, a mile from Fuengirola, on a high rocky mountain and thus almost inaccessible, and he was there to ensure communications between this castle and Málaga.

From his elevated position, Lieutenant Chelmicki had watched the approach of the British squadron, and gauging its intentions, made a report to Málaga where General Sébastiani was then stationed. At the same time he also informed Captain Bronisz, the commander of the battalion, who was then stationed with his detachment about two miles away in the village of Alhaurin el Grande in order to watch the constant movements of large masses of Spanish insurgents who occupied the mountains of Ronda and the town of Yunquera.

Throughout the 14th, Lieutenant Chelmicki closely watched each and every movement of the enemy, but he could not stop himself from being besieged with his little force, only managing to dispatch a message to Captain Bronisz before evening, informing him of the state of affairs and the need for urgent assistance for the castle. He received no reply to his first report, as well as to the second; even so, and despite such uncertainty, the brave Chelmicki, caring for the fate of his comrades in arms, and conscious of their plight, took the bold yet risky decision to move on the castle and to join with them in order to share their dangers and contribute to the defence.

This plan was all the more difficult to accomplish as there was but one narrow path from Mijas to Fuengirola. Chelmicki’s hopes therefore relied on the opportunity offered by a dark night, the most extraordinary storm, which combined hail and rain, and a precise knowledge of the route that he had to follow. So brave Lieutenant Chelmicki began his march in perfect silence, passing through the torrents rushing down from the mountainsides, and picking his way carefully between the besieging Englishmen, who were lying on the ground covered with woollen blankets. Eventually he was beneath the walls of Fuengirola.

Having being alerted by a sentinel that an unknown body of men was making its way forward, and thinking that it simply could not be Lieutenant Chelmicki’s

detachment, I treated the sight of these men with caution. Although the voice of their commander seemed most familiar, I found it impossible to imagine that Lieutenant Chelmicki had somehow managed to penetrate as far as the castle especially when it was almost entirely surrounded by besiegers. I initially thought that he might have been taken prisoner and was being forced to persuade us to open the gates and thus let the enemy gain possession of the castle. I was therefore reluctant to open the gates, but when Chelmicki gave me his word of honour that he came freely and of his own will and that he was with all his troops, I felt most joyful, all the more so as I felt the need for urgent help.”

Blayney “ascertained by our advanced piquets that the enemy in the course of the night had received large [sic] reinforcements” was as disappointed as the Poles were relieved, commenting “I was greatly mortified at learning that these reinforcements had been received”. As a consummate professional Blayney nevertheless concentrated on the matter in hand, and was gratified to see his battery open up against the walls of the fort. Although ever since he landed he had been uneasy that “a considerable army” might be “on the march from Malaga under the command of General Sébastiani” he was confident that Captain Thomas Mullins and the Toledo Regiment could keep his flank secure. Further improving his confidence, the first salvos from Blayney’s guns, combined with a broadside from the ships, were proving most effective:

“A shell from our battery bursting killed most of the men at one of the enemy’s guns, and silenced it for some time; our shot also destroyed part of the parapet of the castle, and left the people much exposed to our musketry, which evidently did great execution.”

Młokosiewicz confirms the devastation wrought by the Allied guns:

“Early on the morning of the 15th October, the enemy opened up from the entrenched battery as well as from the naval squadron. This bombardment wounded a number of soldiers, and the old walls were also badly damaged. One of the bastions collapsed and nine men of the garrison were killed instantly. I was also particularly concerned about my gunpowder magazine, then located in one of the empty rooms without windows and doors, and protected only by being covered with wet cow hides.”

Despite the intensity of the bombardment, the Allies had at least not been able to open a practicable breach, and Młokosiewicz had not yet been reduced to even considering surrender:

“The enemy thought that after such a demonstration of his power and seeing the critical condition of the castle, where weak walls were crumbling after each and every shot, he considered that we would inevitably be weaker and more pliable than the day before. He therefore once again sent forward his envoy but, since I was resolved to defend our position to the last, I refused him entry, mindful not to enter into a conversation which might undermine the courage of my soldiers.”

This second rebuff triggered a ferocious response from the British:

“With this second attempt [at demanding the surrender] proving fruitless, the commander of the enemy forces angrily redoubled his efforts. Artillery fire from the battery, which had momentarily paused, started up again with greater ferocity. The walls suffered significant damage and a breach seemed inevitable. My garrison, constantly forced to exert itself despite lacking both rest and food, saw its resolve weaken, despite having maintained it thus far.

Lieutenant Chelwicki reassured me that he had indeed informed Captain Bronisz twice of my critical situation, but when no response was forthcoming, doubts began to grow that any help could be expected.”

The garrison held out though, and were perhaps right to do so, as, although they did not know it yet, assistance was on its way. Not from distant Malaga, as Sébastiani's troops were still some way off, but from Bronisz at Mijas. For at this insignificant village disaster had befallen Captain Thomas Mullins and the Toledo Regiment. Młokosiewicz later heard about this unexpected development:

“The enemy did not limit his nocturnal activities to establishing his battery, but in order to secure Mijas, and prevent any attempts to come to our aid, he sent 600 men against this place in order to capture Lieutenant Chelwicki's diminutive unit and prevent us also from communicating with that of Captain Bronisz. As Chelwicki was marching along those remote paths so familiar to him, he managed to avoid the enemy then advancing on Mijas, an enemy who was therefore surprised not to find the Polish unit they had been expecting. This was at six o'clock in the morning and as the enemy approached Mijas they instead encountered the forces of Captain Bronisz, who, with his mobile column of 200 men of the 4th Regiment of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and 80 dragoons from the 21st Regiment, was thoroughly prepared to receive the enemy. That enemy was astonished to see that instead of Chelwicki's small detachment, a considerable body of troops had come up through the heavy storm and darkness and was waiting for them. After a courageous fight between the belligerents, in which some of the Anglo-Spanish force made their way up to Mijas, Polish bayonets eventually triumphed and broke the enemy, pushing them out of the town and down through the surrounding mountains. The enemy lost some 20 killed and wounded men, about 40 were taken captive and the rest of the Anglo-Spanish troops were broken and ran away.”

But then Bronisz had paused to rest and feed his troops, just as the siege of Fuengirola was reaching a critical stage. For HMS Rodney and the first battalion of the 82nd Foot had arrived, considerably boosting Blayney's force and discouraging the harried garrison. However Blayney, for all his relief, was all too aware that it would take time to land his reinforcements and was, moreover, also now aware that he had trouble on his flank. The broken remains of the Toledo Regiment were straying back towards him and he was disconcerted to hear reports of large bodies of French troops coming along behind them. Blayney therefore made some adjustments to his dispositions:

“I accordingly gave orders to change our position, so as to have our right to Fiangerolla [sic], and left on a strong ridge of hills, with the sea close to our rear, and both flanks guarded by gunboats; a position, I conceived, capable of resisting any effort the enemy could have made. During this period I went to the rear, to arrange with Captain Hall the gunboats' station; when I heard an attack was made, chiefly directed against the left, where the foreign troops were

posted, who fled without resistance. The 89th were in front, employed in procuring provisions and the enemy possessed themselves of our artillery.”

Młokosiewicz, as yet unaware of Bronisz’s victory at Mijas, had caught sight of some movement by the shore. It heralded a welcome change in his dire situation:

“We had the first onset of hope when we caught sight of a small detachment of cavalry advancing from the direction of Malaga. It was a vanguard of one sergeant and 10 troopers from the French 21st Dragoon Regiment.”

The Polish captain knew his trade, and sought to exploit this new state of affairs through the judicious use of his reinforcements and the psychological effect of these few dragoons:

“I therefore determined to make immediate use of the effect that the arrival of such reinforcements would have on the enemy, and so I sent out 90 volunteers under the command of Lieutenant Chełmicki, ordering them to attack the enemy's battery with the bayonet. I issued out with an additional 40 men in order to cover him, whilst the rest of the garrison stood to arms in order to assist in securing our retreat to the castle. The impact of Chełmicki’s men, when combined with that of the dragoons, who had also ridden forward, had a wonderful effect. He fell upon the enemy battery without a shot being fired and, wielding a bayonet, he overcame the resistance of the enemy battalion defending it, took possession of the guns. He killed many of the English and took 40 of them prisoner, including one officer acting as an adjutant [George Hopper], whilst the rest of the enemy battalion scattered and escaped.”

Captain Józef Rudnicki of the 4th Regiment later heard how “this brave lieutenant, leading 90 volunteers with fixed bayonets, attacked a British battery of six guns and a formidable battalion under the command of Lord Blayney himself. With his natural courage he attacked the battery and seized it and a young sergeant, [Józef] Zakrzewski, along with a few soldiers, quickly turned the enemy guns around and opened fire killing the enemy with their own shot.”

However, as Młokosiewicz relates, the pursuit was perhaps too eager:

“The courageous Chełmicki then set out in pursuit of the fleeing enemy but, advancing too far from his supports, he was wounded and captured. Just as an enemy soldier was stripping him of his epaulettes, his own soldiers caught up with those escorting their prisoner away and more than a dozen Englishmen remained dead on the ground, with more being captured.”

Blayney later reported that the Poles had mounted a sortie with “650 infantry and 50 cavalry”, rather than the 130 infantry and 50 dragoons they actually used, but he had exaggerated the numbers to excuse his own incapacity. The Poles had launched their attack to coincide with the arrival of their reinforcements, but also because Blayney had been careless in his dispositions, as noted by the Polish commander:

“His exposed position should have rendered the general more cautious, and yet, despite being under the gaze of his enemy, he allowed his soldiers to disperse to collect their rations whilst at the same time going for breakfast with his officers. Such carelessness cannot escape with impunity, and, taking

advantage of the disorder I observed in the enemy ranks, I undertook to launch my initial sortie, the result of which, as mentioned above, was to capture the battery for the first time. This sortie would not have happened if the corps of Lord Blayney had collected their food at night whilst during the day his troops should have remained under arms ready to repulse our attacks.”

Blayney, whatever his faults, was suitably chastened by the loss of his guns and the blow to his honour their capture represented. With the 82nd preparing to land he determined to retrieve the situation through a determined advance with his own 89th. Unfortunately, however, “in advancing to the charge my horse was wounded, and soon after killed by a second shot, so that I was obliged to charge on foot.” He did so, later recalling “I instantly formed the 89th regiment, consisting of only two hundred and eighty rank and file, and proceeded to retake the guns, in which I was most gallantly supported by that corps, and succeeded after a resolute charge; the enemy fled in disorder.”

Młokosiewicz conceded the point, and conceded the guns, and his account largely agrees with that of his British foe, although he too exaggerates the odds:

“The enemy general was then at breakfast some distance behind the battery, and much of the rest of his regiment was also then collecting rations. As soon as he saw the battalion flee and the battery fall into the hands of our small detachment, he concentrated his forces and, with nearly 4,000 men, advanced to attack our men in order to retake the lost battery. By so doing, he would finally oblige the Poles to retreat, but not before incurring heavy casualties as our soldiers turned his guns against him and, for half an hour, played a well-directed fire against his columns. The general’s horse was killed beneath him, and an ammunition magazine caught fire, it proving impossible to salvage the munitions for lack of transport.”

The Poles fell back, and it was then that Blayney and his men noticed that “a strong body came running across us in front dressed precisely similar to the Spaniards, and a cry of ‘they are Spaniards’ at the same time took place”.

The dragoons under Captain Jean Antoine Autié had already made their presence felt, but it was now the turn of Bronisz’s slower-moving infantry who had advanced from Mijas and marched around the western flank of the fort to relieve pressure on the garrison:

“Captain Bronisz, meanwhile, having driven the enemy out of Mijas, certainly wished to come to our assistance, but not having received any explicit orders to do so, and conscious of the responsibility of moving against an enemy with a force so inferior to it in numbers, he sought counsel from his subordinates. On the one hand, he informed them that urgent help was required, but noted, on the other, the risks of advancing against a numerically superior foe. A decision in such circumstances was not at all straightforward, but the desire to come to the aid of their fellow countrymen overruled all other considerations and they unanimously decided to advance without further loss of time.

At around two o’clock that afternoon Captain Bronisz, having decided to rescue us, now set off with his company along the road to Fuengirola. As this road is already quite difficult for infantry, it proved nearly impossible for mounted troops

and so the infantry kept to their rocky path whilst the dragoons were sent to the left so they could advance along the seashore.”

It was the Polish infantry in their shakos and blue coats that Blayney had mistaken for Spanish troops, and his delay in identifying them proved fatal to his success and, ultimately, to his liberty: “I was cautious of firing until I could ascertain the fact. My horse being previously shot, I could not go by the rear to the left so as to ascertain it, and was obliged to go in front.” Doing so presented him with a better view, but it was immediately apparent that it was an unwelcome one:

“I soon, however, observed a column close in from the left, on whose caps I perceived the number 4 with an eagle, and which proved to be the *quatrieme polonais*. The troops with me, after firing a few rounds, charged this column, and a very severe conflict ensued,⁴ which unfortunately ended in my being made prisoner having but nine men remaining of those that advanced with me.”

Młokosiewicz confirms the essential facts in this tale of woe, and shows how the garrison joined forces with Bronisz’s reinforcements to inflict a stinging rebuke on Blayney and his men:

“The enemy was not long in enjoying having recovered the battery, for after reinforcing my detachment with the rest of the garrison, I ordered that an assault on the enemy’s right wing be undertaken just as Captain Bronisz appeared with his unit and attacked the enemy’s left, thus hampering his ability to reform and deploy. The enemy’s battery was recaptured, and Second Lieutenant [Franciszek] Lalewicz, serving under Captain Bronisz, was versed in the use of the abandoned artillery. He thus made a skilful and efficient contribution to the enemy’s confusion. Some of their troops were cut off and taken prisoner, and among them was General Blayney, their commander-in-chief, as well as approximately a dozen officers. We also seized a considerable amount of ammunition. The battlefield itself was covered with wounded and dead Englishmen, the rest having saved themselves by means of a confused retreat.”

Blayney was incredulous that he had been beaten and taken by a band of “banditti” and, in his memoir, heaped abuse on them for their conduct as they lay hands on him:

“They loaded me with every vile epithet, but in whose outrageous violence I in great measure found my personal safety, for they crowded so thick on me that they had not room to give force to their blows. They tore my clothes, rifled my pockets, and attempted to pull off my epaulets, and the resistance I made to this last indignity procured me several blows from the butt ends of their muskets, that covered me with contusions. I was indeed probably indebted for my life to a Lieutenant [Jan Fryderyk] Petit, of the Polish regiment, who opportunely came up on horseback; he was the only French officer in the corps, and his humane and gentlemanly conduct did honour to his country.”

As Blayney was recovering from this personal assault, the more general Polish offensive was winning ground, especially when the 21st Dragoons returned to the offensive. They had ridden in under Captain Jean Antoine Autié and were now

⁴ In a letter written on the next day he specifies that this was hand-to-hand combat of a sort rarely seen in the peninsula: “Here a warm contest ensued, chiefly with the bayonet, and I was obliged to surrender, having but nine men remaining on the hill.”

combining with the infantry to push the British perilously close to the shore, as Captain Autié, commanding the squadron, recorded:

“On 14 October [sic] at Fuengirola the squadron carried out a charge against the English infantry, forcing them to abandon a battery of four guns, which were then seized along with General Blegue [sic], commanding the expedition, as well as 40 men and 7 officers. The squadron’s brave manoeuvre before the English as they attempted to besiege the fort at Fuengirola, forced them to desist in their scheme.”

Młokosiewicz confirms that it was a joint endeavour:

“In the meantime Captain Bronisz’s company, along with a third part of my garrison, was pursuing the enemy as he fled, and if it had not been for the grape shot coming from those ships covering the enemy’s escape, his corps would have been captured on the beach as there confusion reigned. The ground here was much more favourable for the French cavalry, which provided effective support between the rocks as the Polish infantry launched a series of stubborn and brave attacks. A large number of the English had, out of fear of being thus cut down, waded out into the Mediterranean, and some drowned as they sought safety in the gunboats and ships’ boats.”

Indeed the Foreign Battalion would not hold, the 89th had been routed when Blayney fell, and the Spanish had become mixed up in the retreat, with the confused mass heading for the beach whilst the Poles, having turned the British guns against them, added to the Allied discomfort. Considerable confusion reigned as the Rodney and El Vencedor added their firepower to the mess, opening up, along with the gunboats, in an attempt to impede the Poles. It helped stem the tide of defeat, as Młokosiewicz remarked above, but it was the landing of the elite companies of the 82nd which seems to have done most to stop the rout. George Wood, an officer in the 82nd Foot then observing the scene from the Spanish ship, remarked:

“We proceeded after the expedition with all sail possible, but only reached them as this unfortunate affair was terminating, and that with the greatest disaster. Our flank companies, however, landed to support them; but now support was almost too late, for they were withdrawing in the greatest confusion and haste to our boats, into which they got, and which ought to have been sent back for the remainder of the regiment.”

For a while the grenadiers and light company of the 82nd Foot held the Poles back, winning time for the imposition of some order on the beach. Wood gives a hint as to the chaos:

“The artillery was lost, and a great number of prisoners taken, among whom was the commander-in-chief himself; but the greater part of the troops had the good fortune to escape under the fire of the Rodney man-of-war, and our flank companies, who were the last that reembarked.”

Those who could escape, had escaped. Baron Blayney was, however, very firmly in his enemy’s power. He had been put on his feet and escorted into the fort:

“On entering the castle I was met by Captain Makosovitz [sic], a Pole, who commanded, accompanied by several other officers; the former accosted me in the most brutal language, demanding ‘if it was I who had the insolence to send him a flag of truce, and who had caused so much bloodshed’, at the same time pointing to three houses in which the dead bodies were collected. To this I replied ‘that it was to prevent the effusion of blood that I had sent in a flag of truce, and that he would indeed have had reason to complain had I not done so’.”

Blayney, sure that it was never right to admit to wrong, now looked about him and at his captors. He was not impressed:

“The scene that presented itself at this moment can never be effaced from my memory; both officers and soldiers had all the appearance of those desperate banditti described in romances; their long moustachios, their faces blackened by smoke and gunpowder, and their bloody and torn clothes, giving to their whole appearance a degree of indescribable ferocity.”

More depressing than being captured by such ruffians was the task ahead of him. His Polish captor relates how:

“Returning from the rampart, I found the general in the courtyard in conversation with some of the English prisoners. When he returned from the courtyard he told me that as soon as he showed himself on the rampart, and was seen by the naval squadron’s commander, then all firing would cease. We therefore went up onto the ramparts together, where the view of the naval flotilla so affected the general that he spoke about his lot with tears in his eyes. He had been on the victorious side in 58 battles, but now fate had treated him severely, for despite being in command of such a fine and formidable expeditionary force, he had been captured by a handful of Poles, men whom he had only recently expected to surrender without offering any resistance. Shortly after the general appeared amongst my guns, the fire of the English squadron ceased, and this fleet magnificently set sail before dividing into two with one part sailing towards Gibraltar, and the other for Africa.”⁵

Blayney is more matter-of-fact in his account of the same episode:

“I went on the rampart, from whence I had a full view of the shipping. The fort was still firing at the Rodney, and at the boats with the troops, which approached close to the shore. A few minutes would have brought them to my assistance, and they would certainly have changed the fortune of the day in my favour; but fate ordered it otherwise.”

After ruminating on his defeat, the general was interrupted by a visitor:

“I was roused by the Polish commandant slapping me violently on the shoulder and addressing me with, ‘Allons, camarade, venez boire un coup d’eau de vie, vous n’etes pas chez vous’ [come and drink a glass of brandy, comrade, you are not at home any more]. I accompanied him to a room in which every thing

⁵ The El Vencedor was soon to meet disaster and sank at the end of October near Minorca on its way to Port Mahon.

was in disorder, and where officers and men were promiscuously helping themselves to *agua ardiente*, from jars, while a succession of ruffians was every moment entering and displaying the spoils taken from our unfortunate soldiers made prisoners, or dressed in the clothes and accoutrements stripped from the dead; the entrance of each of these plunderers was loudly applauded by bravos from the whole assembly. In order to show their good fellowship, some one or other of this banditti would every moment slap me on the back, crying 'Allons, camarade, buvons, buvons' [come on, comrade, let's drink, let's drink!]. The torment I suffered from my bruises, which produced a spitting of blood, was much increased by these acts of manual kindness; nevertheless, knowing I should meet no commiseration, I concealed my feelings and suffered in silence; and accepted some *agua ardiente* and water, which was the first thing I had tasted for twenty-four hours."

This account of defeat and humiliation sits in contrast to the more respectful account by Blayney's captor, Młokosiewicz. He would later contradict the general and find fault with that officer's version of his reception:

"Whilst not doubting the military talent of General Lord Blayney and rendering homage to his personal courage, Lord Blayney is mistaken in the third chapter of his Narrative when he states that when he entered the castle I commanded, and meeting me and the other officers, he was greeted with the rude words: 'Drink a glass of brandy! You are not at your home now!'. He then continues, relating how my vulgar soldiers and their officers, in the utmost disorder, were patting him on the shoulder whilst telling him, 'Come on comrade, let us drink!'. I ought to mention that these accusations are completely unjustified, for it was never my custom, even when addressing an officer of inferior rank, to stoop to such confidentiality, and even less so when it came to addressing a general, who, even though our prisoner, still enjoyed the right to respect for his rank, as well as, in this case, for his difficult position. Thus I could not have treated him impolitely, making his fate even more painful than it already was."⁶

Divining the truth from such opposing accounts is the stuff of history, but both sides at least agree that there was brandy and a toast. Młokosiewicz's version stresses how much consideration was shown to the captor:

"Returning to my quarters we there met with an officer who had been taken prisoner during the first attack on the enemy battery. This officer, who introduced himself as the general's aide, greeted his superior in English. Being convinced that the general must be both physically and morally exhausted and in need of some refreshment, and not forgetting my obligation of pure hospitality, I [Młokosiewicz] asked him what he might like to drink, adding that the choice was not difficult, as we had only Secco Malaga wine and Spanish brandy in our cellars. Having thought for a moment, he replied that he preferred brandy over wine. After bringing in the brandy, I took a glass, filled it to the brim and drank to the health of the general. When I started pouring out a glass for him, the general said that was enough when it reached the half-way mark, and

⁶ The Pole might have taken consolation that the Quarterly Review agreed with him: "He [Blayney] is undoubtedly one of the worst travellers we have ever known – of the worst, in every sense; for he not only wants the literary qualifications for that character; but he seems to be intolerant of either toil or trouble; easily dissatisfied, hard to be pleased, very impatient of bad fare, very angry when he does not receive the ordinary attentions, and not very grateful when he does."

requested that water be added. I replied that there was no water in the castle, for indeed the well had been occupied by the enemy at the beginning of the action. I also added that by making this demand he was insulting his own people. Upon inquiring how this was so, I replied 'Englishmen and Poles are the two nations in Europe that are famous for fighting well and for drinking well.' So the general said, 'lend me a hand', and he drank to my health, as did the other officers."

Brandy and humble pie consumed, Blayney was then sent off on the first stage of the long road to France:

"The commander of our battalion, Bronisz, having collected the wounded, both the Polish and the English, now escorted the prisoners of war, which included Lord Blayney, eight officers, as well as over two hundred English soldiers, to Mijas. Before this detachment set off, I bade farewell to the general, and we embraced each other warmly whilst he declared his regret that we were to be separated so quickly. I then instructed the commanding officer to take good care of the general and of the convoy of prisoners of war."

Blayney confirms this, and notes that the officers were provided with various mounts to ease their passage:

"I was, with the rest of the prisoners, ordered to Mijas, and, after being paraded we set off with a strong escort of cavalry and infantry; Ensign [George] Hopper and the rest of the wounded remaining in the castle. Lieutenant Petit, of whom I have before spoken, provided me with a horse, and the other officers were furnished with mules or asses."⁷

With his difficult guest out of the way, Młokosiewicz set about drawing up a written account of his victory:

"Málaga and the general was most concerned about the fate of Fuengirola because, when passing through Torremolinos, he had received a message from the commander there that I been blown up along with my garrison. The probable explanation for that rumour was that an some of the English ammunition had burnt and exploded following the initial seizure of the battery."

It was quite an achievement and Sébastiani was delighted:

"I came out of the castle in order to receive General Sébastiani who had come up to the walls and seeing the six English guns, politely declared his approval of my conduct and expressed his congratulations. He inquired about the battle in the minutest detail and inquired after General Blayney. When informed that he had been sent on to Mijas with the intention of then conveying him further to Málaga, he ordered his aide-de-camp to take a squadron of cavalry and bring him back to Fuengirola. He also had ordered that one of his horses be provided for that general. After this he and his entire staff accompanied me as we inspected the battlefield, with me obliging him by describing all the enemy's

⁷ Blayney wrote a sad account of his capture and captivity, and his being "obliged to mix with all descriptions of persons, from the general to the private soldier, and with Spaniards, French, Poles and that motley and debased species of German that forms the contingents of the Confederation of the Rhine".

movements and the details of our attack, and this was to serve as a the basis of an outline of the battle so that a report could be drawn up and sent on to France.”

That report of Sébastiani’s was short but gave credit where credit was due for a significant victory:

“On the 14th an English squadron bombarded the fort of Fuengirola and carried out a landing on the coast. On the morning of the 15th all the heights around the fort were covered with English troops and insurgents and a battery of five guns was established 150 toises away from a position which could dominate the fort. The English general summoned the commander of the fort, Captain Młokosiewicz of the 4th Polish Regiment, but his envoy was not received. As soon as he heard the cannonade, Chef de Bataillon Bronisz left Alhaurin at nine that evening, bringing his 200 men to Kajas [Mijas] where he found Lieutenant Chelmicki with 60 men. On the 15th the enemy attacked them but were repulsed and the lieutenant managed to penetrate into the fort with his men. That afternoon, the commandant Młokosiewicz ordered a general sortie and he carried this out with such impetuosity that the enemy was thoroughly beaten and his guns taken. However he counter attacked with fresh troops and retook the guns. Chef de Bataillon Bronisz and a squadron of the 20th Dragoons [sic] then came up and drove the mass of English and Spaniards back, pursuing them down towards the coast and as far as the beach. Many were drowned and 177 of the English were taken prisoner, including General Blayney, who was wounded, and several officers as well as five guns, 300 muskets, 60,000 cartridges (some spoiled) and a number of tools.”

Młokosiewicz was also gallant enough to name those officers who had contributed most to what was his victory:

“The following officers distinguished themselves throughout this battle: Chief of Battalion Captain Bronisz; Captain Wladyslaw Płachecki; Lieutenants Eustachy Chelmicki, Wojciech Osiecki, Jan Ubysz and Fryderyk Petit; Second Lieutenants: Franciszek Lalewicz, Michał Otfinowski, Andrzej Ośniałowski and Sergeant Józef Zakrzewski. All of these were from the 4th Regiment of Infantry of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, but honourable mention must also be made of the officers of the 21st Regiment of French Dragoons: Captain [Jean Antoine] Autié and Lieutenant [Louis Etienne Jérôme] Petion [de Villeneuve].”

And it was largely a Polish victory, for, contrary to many accounts, Sébastiani and his men had played no role in the defeat of the expedition. This defeat at the hands of an inferior force marked for Blayney, personally, the ruination of his reputation. Worse, he was now brought back from the inn he was lodged in at Mijas to be paraded before his captors:

“On approaching Fuengirola, I observed the general surrounded by a large body of troops and was immediately presented to him. After the first salutation, he enquired what had become of my sword and on my answering that I supposed some of the officers or soldiers had it in their possession, General Millhaw [Édouard Jean-Baptiste Milhaud] instantly took off his own and presented it to me, saying ‘Monsieur le General, here is one which has been

employed in all the campaigns against the Austrians, Russians and Prussians, and it is now much at your service.”

Blayney’s sword had indeed been captured and is now on display in Kraków (Cracow). Blayney himself was then once again marched off for Malaga, under an escort of Polish lancers of the Vistula Legion, towards Grenada and from there to captivity in France. For the British, more generally, the defeat was a humiliation and, coming as it did at the same time as setbacks in Portugal, it seemed as though Napoleon’s armies were turning the tide. Wood, who had witnessed the disaster from the relative comfort of a Spanish battleship, was dismissive of the affair:

“I will not enter into particulars, as there was no great honour attached to this undertaking. I shall only observe that those who escaped were exceedingly glad to reach their comfortable station again.”

Charles Bevan in Ceuta was more understanding:

“I have mentioned to you under the command of Lord Blaney [sic] has most completely failed – My Lord a Prisoner, several Officers killed and wounded & prisoners, among the latter I greatly fear is poor Mullins who was Major of Brigade to Ld B. But I have not yet heard the particulars of how this ill-conceived and I fancy ill-conducted enterprise. It appears that the French General Sébastiani who commands that Province, and whose head quarters are at Grenada, only six and thirty hours march from Malaga, was perfectly aware of the Expedition, and took his measures accordingly. Our friends the Regt of Toledo which went from Ceuta I hear behaved very well. But I am sorry to say that this does not appear to have been the case with all the Troops.”

The 89th had suffered the most, and, of the 350 who had landed, some 240 were killed, wounded or captured. Amongst the prisoners were Lieutenant Roger Sheehy, Adjutant George Hopper, ensigns Osman Watts and Edward Moulson, as well as Blayney himself. General Bouillé’s fairly accurate reckoning was that “the six guns remained in our power, along with their caissons, and 180 men of the 89th Regiment, including five officers, were taken prisoner”.

Despite the loss and humiliation, the battle was, strategically, irrelevant, and contributed little to the curtailment of British ambition to keep the south of Spain in revolt. But this should not diminish its importance as a victory for the Poles. It represented another instance of Polish valour and prowess against the odds, and of victory in adversity. Fuengirola therefore acted as an important symbol, and consolation, for soldiers constantly sent on cruel campaigns in foreign countries and who thus might need virtues such as fortitude and perseverance if they were ever to achieve their ultimate hope of independence for their own native land.

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