

The Napoleon Series

The Peninsular Journal of Major General John Randoll Mackenzie 1808-1809: December 1808

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Source: Mackenzie Papers Vol, XV Diary of Maj. Gen. J. R. Mackenzie 1808-09

1st Breakfasted at Carvalhos, a most superb house for an inn, but ill kept. There is no other house near it, if we except a convent & church. Dined at Rio Maior, a miserable place, and slept at Alcoentre, a poor village with an indifferent inn. The road still good. Most of the country from Coimbra, is but thinly peopled, and ill cultivated. Great extent of barren hills on all sides, which do not abound either in horned cattle or sheep. There are a few goats, and a great many pigs.

2nd After passing Alcoentre the country improves. Breakfasted at Castanheira [Castanheira do Ribatejo]. The cultivation now becomes much more extensive & the country rich. My mules were completely knocked up when I arrived at Villa Franca [Vila Franca de Xira], where we got fresh means of conveyance, and I was now mounted on a bad horse, which was nevertheless a great relief to me, being completely tired of the mule pace. Passed thro' Alhandra & several smaller places. Crossed the Sacavem [Sacavém] river, at the place of the same name, about a league & half from Lisbon. Found here a dragoon to lead me to my quarters, where I found Brigadier General Stuart¹, who waited dinner for me, and sat down to an excellent repast, to which I had for some time unaccustomed.

Having by an unfortunate mistake burnt my memorandums made generally from day to day since my arrival in Lisbon to the 11th of January 1809. I am under the necessity of endeavouring to supply this deficiency by occasional notes from recollection, which must of course be very defective, and indeed the more so, that circumstances (...) committed to writing are not apt to leave so strong an impression on the memory, as when that faculty entirely trusted to. This mistake of my lucubrations for waste paper, may be considered no mistake at all, and probably they deserved no better fate, but they were valuable to me for one reason, and the accident has suggested to me the necessity of entering my detached notes in a book; no small labour now, but which I

¹ Brigadier General Richard Stewart. A brief service biography: McGuigan, Ron. "British Generals of the Napoleonic Wars. 2006-2014." *The Napoleon Series*. Retrieved 26 March 2017.
http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/biographies/BritishGenerals/c_Britishgenerals127.html

undertake in the hope they may one day, afford some amusement to the only person I am solicitous to pleasure.

On my arrival in Lisbon on the evening of the 2nd December, I sent an immediate message to the Secretary to the Regency for the Home Department, to announce my arrival, and my anxious desire to pay my respect as soon as they thought proper to receive me. Next day the 3rd was accordingly appointed, and I was introduced in due form by General Stuart. No business is ever done on these state (...) and indeed very seldom at any time by the Regency as a body. The ministers generally act in their several departments, and report to the Regency for their approbation. On the next day the 4th I had a long conference with Mr. Forjas² the Secretary for the War Department, the result of which was, that from his own confession, they had nothing that could be called an army. The whole time since the establishment of the Regency by Sir Hew Dalrymple³ had been lost. Not a step taken to reestablish their army, to raise men, to prepare clothing, arms or officers. In short, nothing could be more deplorable than the state he exhibited, with all the gloss he endeavoured to throw over it. He complained of the complete want of money resources. This I believe to a great extent was true, but it was represented worse than the reality, in order to cover the misapplication of the means they possessed, and as an excuse for the neglect of every attempt at establishing a national defence.

This day arrived the most afflicting intelligence from Sir John Moore, of the defeat & dispersion of Blake's and Castanos'⁴ armies⁵, and the consequent necessity of his retreat without farther attempting a junction with Sir D. Baird, whom he ordered to fall back on Corunna, to reembark & proceed to the Tagus, while Sir John himself was to retire on the frontier of Portugal, which he was determined to defend. Sir John called on me to make all the arrangements for this event, to prepare depots, to procure information of the proper positions & points of defense, and make such dispositions of the force in Portugal as would be conducive to support & cooperate with him; looking ultimately to the means of embarkation if pressed by superior numbers. In the various occupations forced upon me by this dreadful change in the posture of affairs in Spain my time was so completely filled, that for several days I did not pass the door of my

² D. Miguel Pereira Forjaz (1769-1827). Portuguese brigadier and Secretary for the Foreign Affairs, War and Navy in the Portuguese Regency Council at Lisbon. See: De La Fuente, Francisco. *Dom Miguel Pereira Forjaz; his early career and role in the mobilization of the portuguese army and defense of Portugal during the Peninsular War, 1807-1814.* Lisboa: *Tribuna da História*, 2011.

³ Lieutenant General Sir Hew Dalrymple. A brief service biography: McGuigan, Ron. "British Generals of the Napoleonic Wars. 2006-2014." *The Napoleon Series*. Retrieved 26 March 2017. http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/biographies/BritishGenerals/c_Britishgenerals53.html

⁴ Francisco Xavier Castaños y Aragonry (1758-1852), afterwards Duque de Bailén. At the beginning of the Spanish insurrection he was appointed by the Junta de Sevilla commander of all the troops in Andalucía. He defeated and forced the capitulation of the French force under Dupont at the battle of Bailén (18 July 1808). Appointed President of the Military Junta and commander of the Army of the Center (2 October 1808) was defeated by Marshal Lannes at the battle of Tudela (23 November 1808) and replaced by the Conde de Cartaojal. See: Martinez, op. cit. pp. 606-608.

⁵ In the battles of Espinosa de Los Monteros and Tudela.

house, except on business with the different ministers, whose conduct & capacity have every day lessened them in my opinion. Confined and selfish in their ideas, without energy, and devoting that time to paltry intrigues which ought to be exerted in the reparation of their past errors. The Bishop of Oporto, the only man of the Regency who seems to possess any boldness or strength of character, has been deterred from quitting his home to join his colleagues by the jealousy they have shown, and the opposition he expects from their selfish views. Much might have been done had he been at first placed at the head of the Government, and something may still be expected, if he can be induced to assume his functions, and feels himself properly supported by the British Government. Even without power, as a private individual, his directions are obeyed, in the district of Oporto where he resides, with a promptness unknown to the commands of the Supreme Government, and of this influence they are jealous.

My days & nights are at present busily employed. Dispatches of various kinds, fill every hour not engaged in arrangements with the different departments, which are all now (...) at work. Depots forming, surveys of different parts of the country, movements of troops, naval preparations concerting. There is little time for sleep and less inclination. In a country to which I am a total stranger, as well to its language as its customs, its people, its topography, all these preparations & arrangements were doubly intricate. Fortunately I found all the departments very ready to execute their various duties, and the whole machine was soon in motion. I have reason to believe that if Sir John Moore retires thro' Portugal, he will find every thing [sic] prepared for him as well as he could have expected. It is scarcely to be credited how small the portion was of useful information which we could collect from the Portuguese government, or any of their officers, as to the state of the country, its roads, positions &c. and yet I believe they denied us none which they possessed. This ignorance & indolence is most inexcusable in a country which has been for centuries in a state of constant dread of attack from its neighbours. Every (...) of its territory ought to be perfectly known, and every mean of defence adapted to every emergency laid down. But no such thing. A few heavy memoirs, too general to admit of practical benefit, was all we could procure. The really useful information we were left to find for ourselves, and I do not doubt, when this crisis is past, that a far more complete collection of materials for the defence of Portugal will be found in the offices of our Q. M. General in London, than with the government of this country.

On my arrival here I found Brigadier General Stewart [sic] in the command, and Cameron⁶ of the 79th a Brigadier on the staff, and Commandant of Lisbon. Brigadier General Sontag⁷ left of Sir John Moore's army, to take charge of the sick & recovering

⁶ Brigadier General Alan Cameron. A brief service biography: McGuigan, Ron. "British Generals of the Napoleonic Wars. 2006-2014." *The Napoleon Series*. Retrieved 26 March 2017. http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/biographies/BritishGenerals/c_Britishgenerals119.html

⁷ John Sontag. A brief service biography: McGuigan, Ron. *British Generals of the Napoleonic Wars. 2006-2014. The Napoleon Series*. Retrieved 26 March 2017. http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/biographies/BritishGenerals/c_Britishgenerals47.html

men of that army. Brigadier Generals Drieberg⁸ & Langworth⁹ commanding two brigades of the King's German Legion. The whole British force in Portugal consisted of about eight thousand effectives, including the garrisons of Elvas and Almeida, and those regiments I ordered to Almeida when at Oporto, as well as the German brigades. So that at Lisbon we had not five thousand effectives. That the whole of this force ought to have advanced with Sir John Moore, there can be little doubt. With him they would have been useful. At Lisbon they are useless. But we seem determined not to learn from our enemy any of his useful maxims. He thinks but of one object at a time, and (...) to it. While we fritter away our means, in attempting various points at the same time, and are thus beaten in detail, or our efforts rendered nugatory.

About the 9th or 10th December I received intelligence from Sir John Moore of a nature somewhat more favourable. The French instead of advancing on him as might have been expected, turned off towards Madrid. Forced the pass of Somosierra & the Guadarrama,¹⁰ and advanced to that capital. While they were thus engaged, Sir John called back Sir D. Baird, gave up the idea of retreat for this time, and has now every prospect of uniting with Sir David. His junction with General Hope's¹¹ column is almost certain. Still our preparation for his reception must not be relaxed. At this time I also heard to my great joy of the appointment of Sir John Cradock¹² to the chief command in Portugal. Various are the reports as to the proceedings of the French at Madrid. Some say the people are determined to resist to the last. Others that a capitulation has been entered into. The French prisoners remaining of Junot's army on the capitulation [are] giving at this time, much uneasiness to the Portuguese Government, it has been determined between Admiral Sir Charles Cotton¹³ & myself to send them off to France immediately.

On the 12th Sir Charles Cotton informed me that Sir John Cradock was off the Tagus in *Lavinia* Frigate, and on the next day the ship came in, when I waited on him on board, and laid before him the state of affairs, very different from the complexion they wore, when he left England. On the 14th he landed, and I introduced him on the following day to the Regency.

⁸ Brigadier General Ernest George de Dreiberger. A brief service biography: McGuigan, Ron. "British Generals of the Napoleonic Wars. 2006-2014." *The Napoleon Series*. Retrieved 26 March 2017. http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/biographies/BritishGenerals/c_Britishgenerals10.html

⁹ Ernest Langwerth. A brief service biography: McGuigan, Ron. "British Generals of the Napoleonic Wars. 2006-2014." *The Napoleon Series*. Retrieved 26 March 2017.

http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/biographies/BritishGenerals/c_Britishgenerals20.html
¹⁰ 30 November 1808.

¹¹ Lieutenant General John Hope. A brief service biography: McGuigan, Ron. "British Generals of the Napoleonic Wars. 2006-2014." *The Napoleon Series*. Retrieved 26 March 2017. http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/biographies/BritishGenerals/c_Britishgenerals19.html

¹² Lieutenant General John Cradock. A brief service biography: McGuigan, Ron. "British Generals of the Napoleonic Wars. 2006-2014." *The Napoleon Series*. Retrieved 26 March 2017. http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/biographies/BritishGenerals/c_Britishgenerals120.html

¹³ Charles Cotton. A brief service biography: *Three Decks - Warships in the Age of Sail*. Retrieved 26 March 2017: https://threedecks.org/index.php?display_type=show_crewman&id=278

Thus terminated my short command, and I believe no man ever panted more to be placed in authority, than I did to be relieved from it. During the time it lasted, I mixed but little with society, and was so little out of doors, that I can say but little of the people, or the country, unconnected with its government. I had heard much of the gaiety & sociability of Lisbon, and I believe much did exist in former & better times. Now the scene seems greatly altered, and it is not to be wondered at. The terrors of another French invasion, which if it should be successful, must overwhelm this city, as well as the whole kingdom, in such an abyss of misery, cannot but occupy the minds of the unfortunate inhabitants, and fill them with apprehensions, little short of the reality itself. If ever such an event should take place (and at present it seems by no means improbable) the disgrace the French arms suffered here some months ago, tho' inflicted by the English, will be revenged on the poor Portuguese. I do not doubt, but Junot, or some other favourite of the Arch disturber of the peace of the world, is at this moment feasting in idea on the spoils of this poor city & Oporto. In such a situation can it be a matter of surprises that the manners of the people, their feelings and their conduct, should have undergone a change, at least that they should appear in a very different light from their real character while this crisis exists? Indeed I cannot but sympathize with them, and deplore that horrible system of universal pillage, with which they are threatened. I cannot at the same time profess any respect for the Portuguese character particularly that of the higher classes, who are a trifling race, without energy, or any of the manly virtues. Their system of government has tended to depress the lower classes, who are, notwithstanding the tyranny & oppression of their superiors, the best & soundest part of the state. They are laborious & obedient, and if the higher classes could furnish good officers, they might yet form a good army. But there is the radical defect, and Portugal must fall under the dominion of France, if Spain cannot arrest her course.

Having on my first arrival, from absolute necessity declined any private engagements, I have not had a single opportunity of witnessing the amusements or entertainments of a private family either in the day or evening. I feel so little inclination to enter into that mode of spending my time, that unless from mere curiosity, I do not think I shall make any advance towards it. My observations on the appearance of the ladies are therefore entirely confined to the casual meeting them in their carriages, on the streets, or seeing them at the theatres, where I sometimes go. Their complexions are generally approaching to the olive. The fairest among them, are what we should call in England, Brunettes. They have generally black eyes, sometimes pretty, but the other features are seldom agreeable, and I cannot say I have yet seen a woman, who would be called handsome in our country. Of public amusements I know none, except the three theatres. St. Carlos, Salitre & Rua dos Condes. The first is an Italian opera, with ballets, much of the same principle as that of London. The Salitre is a national opera with dancing also. The third theatre is for national plays & farces. Their music seems pretty good, but I believe little of it, is native Portuguese. There are some tolerable singers at the Italian opera, and three or four pretty good dancers. Madame Zinti the first female dancer, who was induced to come here by Junot, would make a figure even on our Italian stage. The audience seem to be so much better pleased with agility than grace,

that even the best performers are obliged to exert themselves, in jumping & twirling round like a top[?], to the manifest destruction of every thing [sic] like elegance or gracefulness. Madame Zinti tho' obliged to give in also, to this prevailing taste, still possesses no small share of case[?] & grace. I am but little qualified to judge of the performances at the national theatres, being totally ignorant of the language, but their buffoon parts seem well acted. In all these theatres they have the same defect, of being totally unprepared with their parts, so that you may hear the whole from the prompter, who is head & shoulders above the stage, and is obliged to read so loud, as is quite offensive to an English eye & ear, and destroy everything like scenic deception.

Of the manners of the women it would be presumption in me to speak, untill [sic] I have a better acquaintance with them. In my intercourse with the men, ceremony appears to be their principal study. To neglect one bow out of three or four where due, or the attendance either to the door, or out of the room, or to the head of the stairs, or to the carriage, with the number of prescribed bows, according to the rank of the visitor, would be a most unpardonable omission, and not easily forgiven. Even at this time, when matters of the most serious importance press upon them, these ceremonials are most carefully attended to, even among those who ought to possess sufficient sense to despise them, and I am persuaded a minister of state who asked a favor [sic], would feel less mortified at a refusal, than at a neglect of the least of the marks of compliments considered due to his rank. Among people of such frivolous minds, how can any great exertion be expected? Indeed they are totally unequal to the task in which the present times imposes upon them.

For some days after the arrival of Sir John Cradock we have had various accounts of the proceedings at Madrid.¹⁴ The French have most likely got possession of it, for the Supreme Junta, who at first had retired to Truxillo [Trujillo], have now fallen back to Seville [Sevilla]. About the 17th or 18th, we heard that a French corps of cavalry was advancing towards the bridges of Almaraz & Arcobispo [Arzobispo] on the Tagus¹⁵. It was about this time thought advisable to send Brigadier General Stuart on towards the frontier, to encourage the Portuguese to advance thither. The general was to take with him the 29th & 31st regiments & Brigadier General Dreiberg's brigade, consisting of two line battalions of the German Legion. This brigade would ultimately, if circumstances permitted advance to join Sir John Moore's army. After General Stuart's march, General Cameron became most uneasy at his situation here, and pressing to be permitted to go to Almeida, to proceed if circumstances would allow, with the 97th & what else could be spared, to join Sir J. Moore. All these movements I have seen with unconcern [sic], as I cannot but think, that in the present position of Sir John Moore's army, any reinforcements should be sent by sea to Corunna or Vigo. And in the present state of affairs I cannot but look on Cameron's scheme as a wild one. By our latest accounts Sir John Moore had advanced northwards to Benavente, in order to join Sir David Baird. Of course his communication with Almeida & the frontier of

¹⁴ Madrid surrendered to Napoleon in 4 December 1808.

¹⁵ The cavalry corps under generals Milhaud and Lassale. Oman, op. cit. vol. II, p.3.

Portugal, must soon be intercepted, for the French will naturally advance from Madrid in the direction of Salamanca.

Some days previous to the departure of General Stewart, Mr. Villiers¹⁶ arrived as Minister to the Court of Portugal. It will require all the abilities he possesses to (...) a spark of energy from the Councils of this kingdom, and I fear now his exertions will be made too late. Lord & Lady Holland have also arrived from the north of Spain, having travelled all the way from Vigo on mules, in the manner of the country. Their carriages have come round by sea, along with Mr. Stuart my A. D. C., who met them at Vigo. He was sent there from Corunna, and waited nearly a fortnight before he could be sent in his transport to Lisbon, in consequence of the uncertain state of affairs in Sir John Moore's army. Lord Holland is accompanied by his son & Lord John Russell, second son to the Duke of Bedford, and a Mr. Allen. The Honorable Mr. Wyndham formerly Minister at Florence, and Mr. Wynne (brother to Sir Watkin[?]) have also been here for some time. These, except Mr. Wyndham who is just come from thence, are bound for Seville & Cadiz. Mr. Wellesley, son of the Marquis¹⁷, is also anxious to go there, as are several others. Mr. Baillie son of the late Mr. James Baillie of Bedford Square, and a young Norwegian his travelling companion, of the name of Knudtson, are looking for a passage by sea.

Being assured that I shall be sent with the first reinforcement from England, which may come by this place for Sir John Moore, or which may be sent to him by sea from hence, I am perfectly at my case as to the advance made by Stewart [sic] & Cameron, being more & more convinced that the only rational means of sending assistance to Moore's army from hence, is by sea to Vigo. On General Cameron's departure I was appointed Commandant of Lisbon, on the 27th December.

General Stuart's corps is advancing on Castello Branco [Castelo Branco] while there are various reports flying about, of the advance of the French. After forcing the bridge of Almaraz, where the Spaniards scarcely made any resistance, they crossed and advanced to Truxillo, where they levied contributions.¹⁸ They then suddenly retired, recrossed the bridge of Almaraz, and advanced on the other side to Plasencia [Plasencia], which is in the direct road for an attack on Portugal, by the line of the right bank of the Tagus. The corps which crossed & recrossed the Tagus at Almaraz is said to have consisted only of cavalry, to the number of about 2000, but that which was assembled at Plasencia had about 6000 infantry already there. If this corps were destined at Portugal, it would be undoubtedly increased without delay. It was therefore desirable to collect our scattered force about Lisbon, it being impossible to defend the

¹⁶ John Charles Villiers (1757-1838). British politician and diplomat, afterward 3rd Earl of Clarendon; ministry plenipotentiary to the Portuguese Regency in Lisbon from November 1808 to January 1810. See: Black Jr, Frederick. "Diplomatic Struggles: British Support in Spain and Portugal, 1800-1810". Dissertation submitted to the Florida State University. 2005. pp.132-165.

¹⁷ Probably Richard Wellesley, the eldest son of Richard, Marquess of Wellesley.

¹⁸ On the 24th December 1808, Marshal Lefebvre's corps forced the bridge of Almaraz and crossed the Tagus scattering the Spanish force, under General Galuzzo, that defended the line of the river. See: Oman, op. cit. vol. II, p. 4.

frontier with our limited numbers. General Stuart was therefore ordered to fall back with his corps, and a position was fixed at Sacavem, to be defended in the case the enemy should advance that way. The line of the Sacavem river is very strong, but rather too extensive for our numbers. Still if the enemy advanced by that road, which is the best to Lisbon, we could have given him a strong opposition. It was however not likely he would advance on a line so well defended, and it was to be expected he would endeavour to turn our left; we were therefore prepared to take another position towards Lumiar, and dispute the ground inch by inch. This was all under the idea that the enemy advanced in a force not greatly exceeding ours own. But as it was more probable, if he made us a visit, it would be with overpowering numbers, we are preparing for the worst by embarking our women, sick & all remains of our heavy baggage & useless stores. So that a reembarkation of the troops may be made with as little confusion as possible. Various are the accounts we hear daily of Sir John Moore's army. About the end of December Major General Cotton¹⁹ arrived in the Tagus, with the 14th Light Dragoons, which were landed on new year's day, with the intention of proceeding to join that army [Sir John Moore's], if a communication could by any means be found; or to assist in the defence of Portugal, should the enemy advance from Placencia. On this subject, of the advance of the French at this time to Portugal, I always had strong doubts, altho' the information received made it a matter of prudence, if not of necessity, to take the precautions we have done, of drawing our troops as much as possible to one point. Nothing else than his having such an army as to numbers, as would enable him to overwhelm Moore & us at the same time, could induce Bonaparte to make so large a diversion, and in spite of the positive information of their advancing on Portugal, I have daily looked to find, that the corps at Placencia would ultimately act against Sir John Moore. Early in January the movements of this corps, as directed against Portugal began to slacken, and in a few days more, Lieutenant-Colonel D'Urban²⁰ who followed & watched them, has ascertained, that the whole of this force, composed a part of Marshal Le Febre's corps (The Duke of Dantzic)²¹ and were now advancing to Avila [Ávila], to act on the right & rear of Sir John Moore's army. Our accounts now daily give us reason to believe that Sir John Moore will be obliged to retreat, being it is said outnumbered by above three to one. The whole of his force cannot exceed twenty six thousand men. The reports of the strength of [Marquis de la] Romana's army²², are, it is to be feared, exaggerated greatly, if not fabulous.

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¹⁹ Lieutenant General Stapleton Cotton. A brief service biography: McGuigan, Ron. "British Generals of the Napoleonic Wars. 2006-2014." *The Napoleon Series*. Retrieved 26 March 2017.

http://www.napoleonseries.org/research/biographies/BritishGenerals/c_Britishgenerals34.html

²⁰ Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin D'Urban. At that time assistant quartermaster general surveying the spanish-portuguese border. See: *The Peninsular Journal of Major General Benjamin D'Urban, 1808-1817*. London: Greenhill Books, 1988.

²¹ Maréchal François Josef Lefebvre, Duc de Danzig (1755-1820). At the time commanding the IV Corps in Napoleon's army in Spain. See: Chandler, op. cit. pp. 243-244.

²² Spanish Army of Galicia.