

The Napoleon Series

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

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

March 1st Still in anxiety about my negotiation at Seville.

2nd This morning received a letter from Colonel Roche; my proposition was to be taken into immediate consideration. He would himself return with the answer if favorable, at any rate would write by next post. He expresses some doubts of the success of the measure.

3rd This day Colonel Roche has not appeared, nor have I received any answer to my proposition as he gave me reason to expect. I am in the utmost anxiety, and have dispatched another courier to Mr Frere & the Colonel. But in the afternoon of today I received letters by a courier from Mr Frere and from Colonel Roche by post. The Colonel's letter tell me of the failure of my proposition. Mr Frere's gives me a very full and satisfactory account of the Spanish cause. Mentions the failure of Soult's attempt to enter Portugal, and the great improbability that he will persist in it, and recommending in the strongest terms my proceeding with my detachment to Tarragona, where it will be of the utmost use to the Spanish cause. I take this night to consider of the proposition, which seems supported by such strong reasoning, that as he considers my detachment will not be wanted in Portugal, I am much inclined to accede to it, great as is the responsibility.

4th I have dispatched the courier to Mr Frere, acquainting him of my resolution to accede to his proposal, and that I shall proceed without the least delay to Tarragona. Every preparation is therefore made to proceed thither. But this evening arrives Captain Cooke of the Coldstream Guards, with dispatches from England for General Sherbrooke¹, who sailed from Portsmouth about six weeks ago with about 5 thousand men, but it seems his convoy has been dispersed. Captain Cooke touched at Lisbon, and brings me the most pressing directions from Sir John Cradock to return thither, he having received orders & being determined to defend Portugal as long as possible; that Soult is on the borders, and expected to enter it immediately.

¹ "Lieutenant General John Sherbrooke. 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_Britishgenerals24.html

5th Detained by contrary winds from sailing for Lisbon, as I determined on receiving Captain Cooke's message. Have written to Mr Frere, expressing my concern that this order forces me back to Lisbon, & prevents my being of that use which I intended to the cause in the eastward. But as the enemy is to be opposed, it matters little whether in Spain or Portugal.

6th Sailed this morning with a fair wind from east, as we proceed it trends more to the northward.

7th At sea. The wind still north.

8th Ditto. The wind still north & blows pretty fresh. This night appearances of a westerly wind.

9th At sea. The wind more westerly, and we are enabled to stand our course for the Tagus.

10th Still at sea, baffling & contrary winds, very much unsuited to the impatience with which I desire to revisit Lisbon.

11th Beating off the Rock of Lisbon, fell in with a fleet from England of merchantmen, under convoy of the *Endymion* & other frigates. Got into the Tagus this evening with a pleasant breeze, and sailed up to Belem. Nothing could be more beautiful than the banks of this delightful river.

12th Landed this morning and saw Sir John Cradock, who was much rejoiced to see us. Found that General Sherbrooke was before us in the Tagus. It seems that he arrived at Cadiz the day after we left it, so that we must have passed his fleet in the night, and as we stood more to sea than his fleet did, our missing each other was not wonderful. On receiving his dispatches, he turned about, & followed us to the Tagus, but keeping nearer the shore, contrary to all expectation he got a fairer breeze, and outstripped us completely. Dined today in the gun room of the *Semiramis*.

13th We are obliged, that is to say our troops, to remain on board this day, the boats being occupied in landing General Sherbrooke's corps, consisting of a brigade of Guards under Brigadier General Campbell² and the 87th & 88th Regiments under Major General Tilson³. The enemy are still on the borders, not having actually entered Portugal. The spirits of the people of Lisbon are better than when I left it. The prospect of our defending the country, has given them this fillip, but I fear they will give us little assistance in this defence. Major General Beresford⁴ is here, with the rank of

² "Henry Frederick Campbell. 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_Britishgenerals7.html

³ "Christopher Tilson. 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_Britishgenerals61.html

⁴ "William Carr Beresford. 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_Britishgenerals5.html

Lieutenant General in Portugal, to command their army, and the Portuguese Government has appointed him Field Marshal with unlimited powers over their army. He has several British field officers with him, and had this been done three or four months ago, some good might have followed. Now it is I fear too late.

14th The troops under my command landed this day. I have got the quarters at Ferreira's [Ferreira] house lately occupied by General Cotton, who has taken the field.

15th I find I am appointed to a new brigade, to consist of the 27th & 45th, who are to take the field on the 17th, to be quartered at Friulas [Frielas], Apalação [Apelação] & Camarate, about the center of the position reaching from Sacavem by Lumiar to Bellas.

16th The climate is now most delightful. Nothing can be more congenial to a British constitution, and I am told it will continue so for two or three months.

17th The 45th Regiment marched today for Friulas. The march of the 27th is suspended, till tomorrow, to ascertain the quarters.

18th The 27th Regiment marched this morning. I have been the whole of this day engaged in making up dispatches for England to go by the *Isis* commanded by my old friend Captain Macleod⁵. Bad news from the north. Chaves taken with some part of General Silveira's⁶ army by Soult's corps.

19th Further accounts of a disagreeable complexion from the north of Portugal. Silveira's army very much reduced and dispirited. Fears entertained for Oporto. Our army now fresh brigaded.

20th Came today to my station at Camarate. My brigade is quartered there and at Apalação [Apelação], Frielas, Ponte de Frielas and other villages on towards Lumiar. It consists of the 27th (3rd Battalion), 31st (2nd Battalion), 45th (1st Battalion), and the 1st Battalion formed from the detachments of Sir John Moore's army⁷, also 5 companies 5th Battalion 60th Regiment.

21st The place where I am quartered is very pleasant. The country at this season particularly, very picturesque & beautiful. Rode round before breakfast Friulas, Apalação &ct.. Set a General Court Martial of which I am president, on Lieutenant Keating of the 45th, for ungentleman like conduct. Adjourned at 12 o'clock till tomorrow. Rode again thro' a great part of the country, examining positions &ct.. The country delightful. The more I see of it, the more I am inclined to defend it against the rapacious

⁵ "Donald Macleod. 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=2556

⁶Francisco da Silveira Pinto da Fonseca Teixeira (1763-1821), Portuguese general, Conde de Amarante from 1811. At the time he commanded the Portuguese forces at the Trás-os-Montes province (northeast Portugal). After Soult's army entered the country by that province, Silveira retreated before the French but at Chaves part of his force, against his orders, tried to defend the town. The result was the surrender of the town and the capture of the defenders, at March 11. Silveira kept the rest of his force in the surrounding mountains watching the French. See: Lousada, Abílio P.. "A invasão de Soult e a reconquista de Chaves". *Revista Militar* n. 2943, 2009 p. 1169.

⁷ 1st Battalion of Detachment. See: Burnham, Robert. "The British Battalions of Detachment". Napoleon Series. Retrieved 6 May 2017. <http://www.napoleon-series.org/>

enemy that invades it. I shall be disappointed indeed if we fail in preserving it from his atrocious grasp.

22nd Yesterday as well as today has in great measure been taken up with the General Court Martial. Lieutenant Keating's trial is over today, but we are directed to try a deserter from the German Legion tomorrow. A report today gains ground, that Marshal Ney commands in the North of Portugal, instead of Soult, and that he has advanced to Braga within eight leagues of Oporto & that General Bernardim Freire⁸ having refused to march from Oporto with the Portuguese troops, to meet and fight Ney, has been murdered by the people, who are determined to resist.⁹

23rd Reports today from the north are very unfavourable, and so contradictory it is more difficult than usual to glean anything like truth. It does not appear that Marshal Ney is with that army. Soult has still the chief command, but who commands the advance at Braga, is uncertain. Some say General Laborde who was formerly Governor of Lisbon.

24th The reports still more unfavourable. Baron Eben who was forced by the people to take the command on the murder of Bernardim Freire, marched them against the enemy, but they were so unruly, the Baron could not restrain their foolish impetuosity. They engaged, in contradiction to his advice, to great disadvantage, and were consequently an easy prey to their better disciplined enemy. The Portuguese army in that quarter has consequently been dispersed.

25th Accounts have arrived that the French are in possession of Oporto¹⁰. We have farther learnt the disagreeable news that Cuesta's army has been obliged to quit the Tagus, and retire upon the Guadiana¹¹. This throws the frontier of Portugal open to Victor, who has been joined by Sebastiani with 15,000 men. It will now be seen whether Victor will come down upon us, or follow Cuesta to Seville. If he prefers the first, the French will now be advancing in three columns, by Oporto, Almeida & the Tagus against our small force. These three columns will consist of at least forty thousand infantry and seven or eight thousand cavalry. Great odds against 14,000 infantry & cavalry of ours united. Our cavalry is not 800.

⁸Bernardim Freire de Andrade (1759-1809). Portuguese Lieutenant General, at that time commanding the Portuguese forces on the northwestern Portugal. See: Vicente, António Pedro. "Um Soldado da Guerra Peninsular - Bernardim Freire de Andrade e Castro". *Boletim do Arquivo Histórico Militar*, 40.^o volume (1970), pp. 201-576.

⁹Actually general Bernardim Freire was at Braga commanding the Portuguese force. He tried to avoid the hopeless fight with Soult and for that he was murdered by Braga's population. See: Vicente, op. cit. pp. 390-414.

¹⁰Actually Oporto fell to the French army at 29 March.

¹¹ The Spanish Army of Extremadura, under General Cuesta, tried to defend the line of the Tagus but was forced to retreat by the French corps under Marshal Victor (15 March 1809). See: Oman, op. cit. vol. II, pp. 152-156.

26th General Hill's¹² reinforcement is looked for every hour. He brings above 5,000 infantry, but if that is not followed speedily by more, and a large reinforcement of cavalry, we shall be overpowered. For notwithstanding the exertions of General Beresford, the Portuguese army, is so completely in its infancy, that we cannot yet place the least reliance on its cooperation. The part of the great position our little army at present occupies, reaches from Sacavem to Lumiar, crowning a chain of hills, and covered for above half way by the Sacavem river. Our advanced posts are on the other side of the Sacavem reaching from Louras [Loures] by Cabeça de Montachiga [Cabeço de Montachique], to Freixial, Bucellas [Bucelas], and some smaller posts on to Alhandra & Alverca on the Tagus. What we have already taken up is too extensive for our numbers, so that all to the left of Lumiar is unoccupied. The very essential post of Bellas, the command of the Mafra & Cintra roads &ct.. It would take at least thirty thousand men to occupy the whole.

27th The accounts from the north, of Soult are very contradictory. Some make his force in Portugal not above six thousand men. He seems to be advanced within about four leagues of Oporto, which the people have resolved to defend. Thus it appears that the report of his having got possession of that place is false. Our situation seems embarrassing; if we move forward towards Oporto, we leave Lisbon & the Tagus completely open to Victor's army. If we lie still here, Soult will undoubtedly make himself master of Oporto.

28th Accounts are received that General Silveira, who commands the Portuguese in the north, when the French advanced from Chaves to Braga, on Oporto, returned from the hills to Chaves, and has retaken it, with some loss to the French, & has shut up the remainder of the French garrison in the citadel, where he conceives they must surrender for want of provisions.¹³

29th A packet from England this morning. Instead of thinking on the vital interests of the country, and supporting this contest with every nerve, the whole of the papers & debates in Parliament are filled with the Duke of York's amours. Will it be believed at a subsequent period, that such an insanity should have seized on the country?

30th A dreadful storm last night & this morning gives us no small apprehensions about General Hill's army which ought now to be near the Tagus. Went into Lisbon today, where the Commander in Chief has been for some days. Had some discussion on the present posture of affairs. General Beresford, as Marshal & commanding the Portuguese force, wishes the united armies to march to the relief of Oporto. I cannot think this has the sanction of his own judgment, but has been suggested by the Regency, to quiet the clamors of the people of Oporto & the North. Unquestionably, if we had nothing to fear from Marshal Victor, for Lisbon, the march to Oporto would be most advisable. But to undertake a march of 200 miles, and leave Lisbon open to the

¹² "Rowland Hill. 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_Britishgenerals18.html

¹³The French garrison, around 1,400 men, mostly wounded and sick from the French hospital, surrendered on March 25. See: Lousada, op. cit. p. 1169.

enemy, would be from the frying pan &ct.. And I have no doubt but Soult is again a trap, for such an operation. Sir J. Cradock seems determined not to risk the loss of Lisbon & the country in a fruitless attempt to save Oporto. No man certainly had ever a more difficult card to play. It may be truly said he has only a choice of difficulties.

31st The storm continued all yesterday, last night, and is still violent. The wind higher than before. Of course our apprehensions for General Hill are not abated. This is called in Portugal their second rainy season or winter. It is more violent this year than usual, which they say arises from the unusual shortness of the first or proper winter that we have last had. It is probable this weather may continue some days longer. In some respect it answers to our equinoctial storm; but (as in every thing [sic] that appertains to seasons a weather) it can be calculated upon with more certainty in this climate, than in ours.

Placed on the Napoleon Series: January 2018