

The Napoleon Series

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

Transcribed, edited and annotated by [Moisés Gaudêncio](#) and [Anthony Gray](#)

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

The weather here is very mild, but the rainy season is in its height, and the torrents which have fallen, have so broken the roads & swelled the rivers & streams, that our troops have been harassed in their march both to & from Castello Branco, in a manner scarcely to be described. A very large proportion have fallen sick in consequence, indeed more than I ever remember from the effects of any march, in any climate, in so short a time. The river Douro has swelled to such a degree, that the navigation of it, from Lamego to Oporto, is too dangerous to permit the stores &ct. from Almeida to be forwarded in that way. At Oporto it is impossible to embark anything, so that the state of the troops & stores there is critical, as well as of those inhabitants & merchants who wish to retire with their property, to avoid another French visit. On the 6th of January the 2nd Battalion of the 9th & the 3rd Battalion 27th, with a troop of the 14th [Light] Dragoons & 100 men of the 5th Battalion 60th Regiment took up a part of the Sacavem position, under my command, which will be completely occupied on the return of Brigadier General Stewart's [sic] corps. From that time, till the 11th inclusive I have gone out daily to Sacavem, to regulate the details of duty, during which time little extraordinary has occurred.

I am now enabled to continue my Journal.

12th The accounts of Sir John Moore's situation, occasioned a proposition from the Minister Mr. Villiers, to detach immediately to Vigo, the 14th Light Dragoons; with the 2nd Battalion of the 9th & the 3rd Battalion of the 27th Infantry to support him. This is the whole British force, of British Regiments in or near Lisbon. General Cotton & myself are ordered to proceed with them. Lisbon & the forts will now be left in charge of two Battalions of the King's German Legion & 5 companies of the 5th Battalion of the 60th. This service has given a fillip to my spirits, and those of everyone concerned.

13th The embarkation of the dragoons requires more time than is consistent with our impatience to be off. The infantry cannot therefore be embarked till tomorrow. Various reports from different quarters of actions between Sir John Moore & the French, all in favour of the British. It is certain however the army from Madrid is advancing against him, and the corps which lately threatened us from Placencia, of which I have before remarked, has certainly advanced in the same direction. This last is ascertained to be a part of Lefebre's (The Duke of Dantzig) corps. An intercepted letter from Marshal

Berthier (Duke of Neuchatel)¹ throws a light on the movement of this corps to Placencia. It seems this Duke (Neufchatel) commands the advance of the force against Moore. The orders to Lefebre were to reconnoitre towards Placencia. Lefebre went beyond his instructions and advanced a large corps there, pushing on an advance towards Coria. This Berthier blames strongly, so that it appears now to have been a false & injudicious movement, having in fact no object, and only tending to defer the operations against Sir John Moore. This explanation acquits Bonaparte of making the false step, which it seems, lies with Lefebre. All this however will only delay Moore's retreat a little. If the Spanish troops under Romana are not very strong, it seems impossible the British can maintain their ground against such a force as is advancing to attack them. Bonaparte is said to be at the head of the army from Madrid. Soult² commands at Valladolid.

14th This morning the 9th & 27th embarked, from (...) in Lisbon, having marched in from Sacavem. The 27th at 10 o'clock and the 9th at twelve. The news this day from the north of Spain, casts a gloom everywhere. Sir John Moore has found himself in danger of being encompassed by such superior numbers, that no alternative is left but a retreat. The only action of any consequence we have heard details of, was between the cavalry & that of the enemy on the 29th of December near Benavente. General Lefebre³ (nephew of the Marshal) was taken prisoner with about 200 cavalry, and a great number were drowned in endeavouring to save themselves by swimming a river. In all the affairs of posts, as well as this, the British have maintained their usual superiority. How mortifying that so fine an army should be so unfortunately placed.

15th Farther confirmation of Sir John Moore's retreat, which suspends our sailing for Vigo, and I fear we may now drop all hope of supporting that army in the north of Spain. The situation of the affairs in this country becomes now very critical and embarrassing. The dispersed state of our little force, will require efforts of the promptest kind, to prevent their falling by detail into the enemy's hands.

General Cameron with the 97th, now on his march from Almeida for Spain, is in imminent hazard. Lieutenant-Colonel Guard with the 45th at Almeida, must fall back on Oporto, and endeavour to save as much as possible of the stores ammunitions &ct.. Colonel Kemmis⁴ with the 40th at Elvas, must retreat on Seville. This country is indefensible without a large army. The Portuguese are but just beginning to reorganize, without order, without officers, without money. The British troops are a mere handful. I therefore look to the evacuation of this country, as a measure that will very speedily become necessary. The last stake we will have to play in favor [sic] of the Spaniards

¹ Maréchal Louis-Alexandre Berthier, Prince de Neuchâtel (1753-1815). At the time chief-of-staff to Napoleon and the *Grande Armée*. See: Chandler, op. cit. pp. 54-55.

² Maréchal Nicolas Jean de Dieu Soult, Duc de Dalmatie (1769-1851). At the time commanding the II corps of Napoleon's army in Spain. See: Chandler, op. cit. pp. 416-418.

³ General Charles Lefebvre-Desnouëttes (1773-1822). At the time, in Spain, commanding the light cavalry of the French Imperial Guard. At Benavente was wounded and taken prisoner with more than seventy *chasseurs à cheval*. Escaped from Britain in 1812. See: Chandler, op. cit. pp. 244-245.

⁴ "Colonel James Kemmis. "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_Britishgenerals163.html

must be at Cadiz or Barcelona, and there our small force ought to unite with Sir John Moore's. If the Spaniards behave as ill there, as they have done in the north, they are not to be saved. I have just heard that 5000 troops are coming from England to the Tagus, with an ultimate destination, according to the circumstances, for Cadiz⁵. The number is too small to be of any service here. But if they & troops idling their time in Sicily, with us, were added to [those of] Sir John Moore, and sent to one point, something may yet be done. All will however depend on Sir John Moore's retreat being successfully accomplished.

16th It was this day proposed by Sir John Cradock to Mr. Villiers, to send the two infantry battalions now embarked, with the other two British battalions now under General Stuart, (on their way from Santarem to Sacavem) the whole under my command, to Cadiz. This seems to me a most desirable object, but unfortunately Mr. Villiers did not think himself authorized by the instructions and orders he has received from home, to give his approbation to it as a public measure, without which consent, Sir J. C. [John Cradock] cannot be answerable for carrying the plan into execution. It appears to me that Sir John Moore's movement must be to Cadiz after he reembarks. That the 5000 men must also go there, who are coming from England. In short that every man we can muster in every part of Europe should go there, and I have therefore no hesitation in saying, that our proceeding there, immediately, would be a most desirable commencement. It is now understood that Sir John Moore's force will embark from Betanzos bay, lying between Corunna & Ferrol. Probably this may be with a view of assisting Romana in embarking at Ferrol & carrying off the shipping.

17th It has rained from morning to night, with a violence & continuance I never witness out of a tropical climate. This is the second day of the same sort I have seen in Lisbon, since the rainy season commenced, which may be dated this year, from the middle of December, nearly a month later than usual. It has however been sufficiently heavy since it has begun, and the only advantage appears to be, that the dirty streets of Lisbon are less offensive. Lord Holland has sent me a Seville Gazette in which are published the terms of the capitulation of Madrid, with a most insidious letter from Morla⁶, who is the principal traitor, in this business. He endeavours to give a distrust of the designs of the English. His letter & conduct are properly commented on by the Supreme Junta, but the affairs of Spain wear a most unpromising aspect.

18th No other news from Spain today, than a report from Colonel Kemmis at Elvas. Captain Ellis whom he sent on for intelligence reports that there are no French troops nearer in that quarter than Toledo. Captain Ellis speaks of the bridge of Almaraz as a very strong post, tho' the Spaniards ran away from it, the moment it was threatened by

⁵ A force under the command of Major General Sherbrooke. See: Oman, op. cit. pp. 26-27.

⁶ Tomás Morla y Pacheco (1784-1811). Spanish Lieutenant General. In September 1808 the Central Junta appointed him Director General de la Artillería and in October member of Madrid's Junta Militar. When Napoleon advanced to Madrid he was responsible for the defence of the city; he surrendered Madrid in 13 December 1808. He remained there and joined Joseph Bonaparte's government. See: Martínez, op. cit. pp. 606-608.

the French cavalry some weeks ago. The Duke of Infantado⁷ according to the Seville Gazette has gained a trifling advantage over some French cavalry.

This being the anniversary of our Queen's birthday, Mr. Villiers gave a grand dinner to all the principal British officers. Lord & Lady Holland were present. Admiral⁸ and Lady Emily Berkeley also. The Admiral arrived two days ago, to take the command of the fleet in the Tagus. The lady seems a very agreeable, sensible woman. Is in very delicate health, which has occasioned her risking a visit to this place in these perilous times, in search of its beneficent climate. There is a report today that Sir John Moore means to make a stand at Lugo, but I give no credit whatever to it.

19th Another letter from Colonel Kemmis at Elvas. Captain Ellis has been as far as Talavera la Reina. Reports that there are certainly no troops at present, nearer on that side than Toledo. In consequence of this Lord & Lady Holland intend setting off for Seville as soon as possible, by Elvas and Badajos [Badajoz]. Colonel Kemmis is directed to retire to Seville with his corps from Elvas. There is a letter also from Sir Robert Wilson, stating his intention of defending the frontier of Portugal, and giving all the assistance in his power to Ciudad Rodrigo. His intentions seem greatly to surpass his means. We are in great anxiety & expectation relative to Sir John Moore's proceedings. General Cameron has retired on Lamego, and is therefore safe for the present.

20th Scarcely any thing [sic] has occurred this day worth remark. The 29th Regiment marched into Lisbon, on its return from its expedition under General Stuart. It has taken the old quarters of the 27th in St. Domingo convent⁹. The rest of General Stuart's corps are taking up the position of Sacavem. There is almost a deluge of rain again today.

21st A lugger has arrived from Vigo, after nine days passage. A column of about 3,500 [men] of Sir John Moore's army had arrived there the morning the lugger sailed, and was immediately embarked¹⁰. Sir John meant to proceed with the rest of his army to Betanzos bay, or Corunna, or both. Sir Samuel Hood¹¹ with all the empty transports had accordingly sailed from Vigo, for those places. Still uncomfortable wet weather but extremely mild.

22nd The lugger from Vigo farther states, that Sir John Moore meant to fortify a position to cover the embarkation at Betanzos. This looks as if he expected to be pressed by

⁷ Pedro Alvaréz de Toledo Silva Mendoza (1768-1841), Duque del Infantado. Spanish nobleman, politician and lieutenant general. Supporter of Fernando VII against the Minister Godoy. He was at Bayonne when the Spanish King abdicated on Napoleon and he recognized Joseph Bonaparte as king. Joined the patriots after Baylen and in December 1808 was president of the Junta de Defesa de Madrid. Later commanded the Army of the Center but after the defeat of his vanguard at Uclés (13 January 1809) was replaced by the Count of Cartaojal. See: Martinez, op. cit. pp. 45-47.

⁸ George Berkeley. "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=3373

⁹ Convento de São Domingos

¹⁰ Two british brigades, under brigadier generals Crawford and Alten, marched from Astorga to Orense and from there to Vigo. See: Oman, op. cit. vol. I, pp. 563-564.

¹¹ "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=1379

the enemy, and of course makes us uneasy as to his fate. I have written by the lugger to General Mackenzie Fraser¹², the first time since I came to Portugal. I have also had an opportunity of writing a few lines to the agent Mr. Donaldson, by a vessel for England.

23rd No farther [sic] news from Spain. By a letter from General Cameron it is probable he is now on his march with the Buffs [3rd]¹³, 45th & 97th to join us here. At this I am very well pleased, as I hope it will not only ensure their safety, but it will certainly add considerably to our strength if we are obliged to make a stand here. From a short conversation this morning with Sir J. Cradock, he seems determined to take a position at Bellas [Belas]. This looks like an intention to making a stand, every thing however must depend on our next accounts from Sir John Moore & England. This evening Mr Villiers gave a grand ball which was very numerously attended, and was the first opportunity I had of seeing any collection of Lisbon belles. I cannot say my opinion of their beauty has been much altered by it. There were only two or three tolerable pretty, and Admiral Berkeley's eldest daughter was by far the finest girl there. The dance was in the English Contra Dance stile [sic]. Two or three Gavots, between the Dances, were danced by two or three pairs of young ladies and very prettily executed. The Portuguese ladies have generally well turned ancles [sic], and walk well, which is rather extraordinary considering how little use they make of their legs in that sort of exercise. It is reckoned quite improper for any lady of mark or fashion to walk on the streets, and indeed they walk very little any where [sic], out of doors. The sort of ball or assembly we had tonight is a thing very rare in Lisbon. Their sociability as in Spain, is very much confined to family parties, with the occasional visits of acquaintances & friends in the evening, without regular invitations. I am told this mode of society is very pleasant, but I have yet to learn the experience of it, and it would be unfair even them to pass a judgment upon it, in the present distracted state of affairs, which cannot but to affect every individual of the higher classes. Everyone seemed satisfied with the ball, & we had an excellent supper. I left them dancing at 3 o'clock in the morning.

24th Went today to Belem [Belém], and visited the Tower, the church of the Irish Convent, the Great Convent & church of Belem, the old & new palaces, & the museum. The Tower as a place of defence, is but ill adapted, but the Fort of Bon Sucess [Forte do Bom Sucesso], and a battery built by the French, have given this position a strong command of the navigation of the river above Fort Saint Julian [Forte de São Julião], and assisted by the Fort of Torre Velha, on the opposite side of the river must make any naval attempt to pass up, a (...). The church of the Irish Convent is tolerably handsome. I conversed with an Irish nun at the grate of the convent, who proved her parentage, by assuring me she was an Irish woman, born in Lisbon. The Convent of Belem is a very fine old gothic structure, but the church no person who goes to Lisbon ought to neglect seeing. It is not so great a scale as some of the churches I have seen

¹² General Mackenzie Frase. "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_Britishgenerals59.html

¹³ Sir John Moore, before advancing from Salamanca, sent the Buffs back to Portugal escorting a convoy of sick men and baggage. General Cameron picked them up in the border and returned by Oporto. See: Oman, op. cit. vol. I, p. 527 and vol II, p. 201.

in Spain, but it surpasses them all in the beautiful symmetry of its pillars & dome, all of very fine marble, carved with exquisite taste. The old palace is in a delightful situation, commanding a fine view of the river & shipping down to the bar. The new palace, of which only a small part is built, was intended to be carried on, to connect with the old one, in which last Junot was making extensive alterations & fitting up an elegant suite of apartments, where all the scaffolding is still standing, tho' the work is suspended. Nothing can be more magnificent than the plan of the new Palace, which was to have been entirely (like the part finished) of polished marble. Some of the pictures in the old palace are valuable, and narrowly escaped the grasp of the French during their visit. There is a small museum at the entrance of the gardens near the new palace, extremely well arranged, containing specimens of various minerals & fossils, a very fine collection of shells, of birds, of a few beasts, and savage armour principally Brazilian. In these gardens are the only public botanical collection in the country. It may have been valuable, but it is now much neglected, so as to require more knowledge of the science than I possess, to discover the plants from the weeds. Besides these, at Belem, I have seen in Lisbon, the foundation & commencement of the intended Treasury [building] which, to prevent the chance of accident by earthquake, has to have been built with a solidity of which there is no example in the world. The earth has been removed for the depth of about one hundred feet for the whole surface of the foundation, in order to get at a rock; and upon that, in solid masonry is built up as a foundation, the same thickness as had been removed of earth. The whole of this herculean labour appears, for the building had advanced no farther, than a few feet of the intended walls, when the scourge which has desolated this & other countries, came & forced the sovereign to fly. Who can contemplate the grandeur of these scenes, and reflect on the sad change which a few short months have worked on this once rich, happy & peaceful country, without a feeling of horror at his cause. How long this (...) may be permitted to black the fairest works of nature & of art, as it were, with a pestilential breath, it is now permitted us to scan; but the consideration of it is always attended with the most melancholy [sic] reflections in my mind, and the objects which give (...) to these reflections, are almost every minute before my eyes in this interesting city.

25th Took a ride this day with Sir John Cradock, to look at the position of Bellas. It is a very strong part of the great line, for the defence of Lisbon, and is generally considered the left point, the right being at Sacavem. But without examining more minutely than one day's ride would permit, I cannot help thinking the line would be incomplete without a part towards Cintra [Sintra]. This line would take at least twenty-five thousand men to defend it properly. Lumiar would be about the centre of it. As I mean to visit Cintra soon, I shall then have a better idea of it. We returned thro' Queluz, where there is an unfinished palace of the Prince Regent. It is worthy remark, that scarcely any public building or establishment, begun or planned of late years in this kingdom, have been finished or brought to maturity. A strong proof of the vacillating councils, & unstable dispositions of the reigning family. This trifling and unsteady turn is not peculiar to royalty here; it seems to be a national characteristic, except where the influence of the church reaches. And that influence is never exerted but for its own aggrandisement. In this point the perseverance of the Portuguese is never suffered to relax, and accordingly we see almost all their ecclesiastic & monastic establishments perfect.

The beauty of this day's ride cannot be surpassed. It is melancholy [sic] to see so fair a portion of the Globe, blessed with the finest climate & the richest soil, producing everything Man can desire. To see such a country so neglected, and by the iron hand of despotism, its inhabitants so greatly debased. But it is still more melancholy [sic] to reflect how great a chance there is, that it may again fall under the rod of a barbarian crew, whose aim seems to be to renew the ages, when the Goths and Vandals buried the learning of ages in the (...), and established dark ignorance on a civilized world. The issue of the present contest, will probably determine how far this dreadful prognostic will be realized. I sincerely hope there never will be occasion for making the comparison at a nearer point of resemblance.

26th Crossed the Tagus, and had a beautiful view of Lisbon from the heights of Almada on the opposite side. The rains have ceased for some days, and the country looks beautiful and smeling [sic] in every direction. We were much disappointed today. Two frigates arrived; of course we looked for English or Corunna news. But one is from Madeira, the other from Cadiz, so that neither could bring any thing [sic] new or interesting.

The weak government of this country have been endeavouring to arm the people, in the best way they can. In this town there are now above twenty thousand pike men. I do not blame this; but the Regency seem to have abandoned the police of the town to the mob. Sometime ago they encouraged the arresting [of] Frenchmen, or people supposed in that interest. Now this is increased to an alarming degree. Those cowardly fellows, who would pass thro' the eye of a needle to escape an armed Frenchman, are now very bold in arresting every harmless, unarmed creature, who is only called after by a child, or any idle person, by the name of Frenchman or Jacobin (which last word they have no definite meaning for). The government seem afraid to interfere, but I think it will be necessary for our Minister & Commander in Chief, if an immediate stop is not put to this dastardly & cruel proceedings, to make some declaration to exculpate the British name from any participation in these contemptible & shameful proceedings. Several innocent people, totally unconcerned with France or French principles have already been maltreated, abused & confined by this mob government. A little vigour for a day or two, would soon make these cowardly wretches shrank within their shells, from which they have just emerged for a moment.

27th Nothing extraordinary has occurred today, except an order to disembark the cavalry. This was owing to the representation of Colonel Hawker who found they were falling sick. Went to a musical party at Dr. Hume's, where I saw some of the Portuguese ladies & gentlemen. Few young ladies were present, it being contrary to the general practice of the Portuguese to permit them to visit before marriage. This costume is sometimes dispensed with, as was the case at the ball given by Mr Villiers.

28th General Cotton, Captain Neville of the 14th Dragoons & myself took a ride to Cintra, intending to sleep there, and return next day by Mafra. We took an extensive ride to see all worth seeing, about Cintra, on asses. It is impossible for language to describe the effect of the scenery of this extraordinary place. It is rich, grand, romantic, rugged, in such variegated beauty, as I never before saw united. All the nobility, gentry & rich people of Lisbon, are anxious to possess *Quintas* or country houses here, where

they retire in the summer, from the heats of Lisbon, and no place can be better adapted. We found an excellent inn here, the landlady an Irishwoman married to an Italian of the name of Deça. It is to her management that Portugal may boast of one good inn. She is very communicative, and in a few hours we had more of the anecdote of Portuguese nobility, than in all residence here. Just on our return from our ride, I found an express calling me back to Lisbon immediately, on urgent service. Accordingly returned by 12 at night, and found that a detachment under my command, was to be sent to Cadiz without delay.

29th The force which I am to carry to Cadiz, is fixed four British battalions, and one brigade of artillery. I am to be joined there by the 40th regiment, which marches from Elvas, so that the whole force will consist of nearly four thousand men. Brigadier General Stewart [sic] will go with me. General Cameron is on his return from his expedition, and has now under his command the Buffs [3rd], 45th & 97th, besides some recovered men of Sir John Moore's army, who were sent back sick. The recovered men of that army who were at Elvas, are marching for Lisbon also. General Cameron will be at Torres Vedras this day. Nothing but vague accounts of the situation of Sir John Moore. He is stated to be at Corunna, and that a large French force is near him.¹⁴

30th No news received today, except a report of a column of the enemy being at Monterey [Monterrei, Galicia, Spain], a frontier town of Portugal, on the Minho. I have been busy in preparing for embarkation tomorrow.

31st The 2nd battalion 31st regiment marched in today from Sacavem, and took up the barracks of the 29th who embarked in the morning. The force to go with me, are now all embarked except the 31st, viz. the 2nd battalion 9th regiment, the 3rd battalion 27th & 29th regiments with a company of artillery. The ship intended to carry the 31st (one of the Russians) not being quite ready, I apprehend she must be left to follow us.

Placed on the Napoleon Series: January 2018

¹⁴ The battle of Corunna was fought on the 16th of January 1809, twelve days before this vague accounts reached Lisbon.