Thomas Lord Cochrane

The Defence of

Fort Trinity

November—December 1808

By Colin Jones
Thomas Lord Cochrane 10th Earl of Dundonald
(1775—1860)

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E-mail: colin1853@tiscali.co.uk

Front cover photo is Fort Trinity under re-construction in Sept 2004
In conjunction with the 2005 Bicentenary of the Battle of Trafalgar and the impending anniversaries relating to the Peninsular war (1807—1814) The Portsmouth Napoleonic Society would like to present a celebration of England’s maritime achievements and forgotten naval heroes.
Introduction

Operations on the east coast of Spain during the Peninsula war tend to be dwarfed by Wellington's campaigns in central Spain & Portugal. For one, there are innumerable British memoirs and recollections from the common soldier that will forever enforce this imbalance. Secondly, it would appear the French and their allied contingents would, in preference, write about the glorious victories over their European adversaries in battles such as Austerlitz, Wagram, Friedland, and Marengo. It is true indeed, that the Spanish war was an ungracious one, where lives were lost and forgotten and the inhospitable environment which every soldier encountered began to grind into the very hearts and well being of the men. Although, there were many occasions where honour and acclaim were waiting to be gained, promotion and recognition, for the common French soldier, did not seem to weigh in as much as if they were to participate in a similar battle on the central European front. In fact, some were decidedly loathe at the prospect of being sent to the Peninsula. The lack of French Peninsula Napoleonic memoirs compared to that of the allies bear witness to this.

If one is confined to solely reading English literature, then there is a marked bias in available material, particularly if it is necessary to study an area other than campaigns which actually involved either Wellington, Napoleon or Sir John Moore. It is therefore relevant to say that during November and December 1808 the armchair historian has rather focused on Napoleon’s entry into Madrid, Moore’s retreat to Corunna or Wellington’s inquiry into the Convention of Cintra. Simply because there are plentiful works on the subject, mostly English, written in an almost mundane repetitive fashion. The differences being so slight that a quest to find the primary source begins to take a preference as both may annoyingly disagree with each other in one small detail or other. Suffice to say the publications that cover the war as a whole are remarkably thin on the ground and the hunt for sufficient sources to gain the information herein gave additional pleasure to the work.

It is for reasons of clarity that I have decided to include a list of events relative to Cochrane’s operations during November and December 1808. It was a turbulent period of the war as it was the only time when Napoleon himself was present in the country. As the events unfold and Cochrane’s story begins to emerge, the reader will understand what was going on throughout the rest of the Iberian Peninsula at that time. A brief synopsis follows with the assumption that the reader already has some general knowledge of this colourful period in history.

**July:** The French General Dupont suffers a terrible defeat at Baylen by the Spanish commanders Reding And Castanos.

**August:** The French have had two crushing defeats by Wellington at the battles of Rolica and Vimeiro. A convention is signed to allow the French a safe evacuation from Portugal. The treaty is deemed controversial, the commanders including Wellington are recalled to England for an enquiry into the whole affair.

**October:** Sir John Moore takes command of the British army and decides to push into Spain.

**November:** Napoleon is infuriated by this series of reverses, not to mention Moncey’s repulse at Valencia in June, the unsuccessful siege of Saragossa and the fact that the northern areas around the Biscay were still not pacified. Napoleon decides to take matters into his own hands and directs 130,000 troops to Spain, reaching Bayonne himself on the 3rd November.
Cochrane at this time, in his frigate the *Imperieuse*, had left Gibraltar for Cartagena, passed Majorca and the mainland then anchored off Barcelona on the 12th. The city was in the possession of the French and Cochrane began to harass the land forces by bombarding targets close to the shoreline. It was not until the 19th that Cochrane received information that Roses, in Catalonia, had been invested by the French troops of St Cyr. Meanwhile further inland, Napoleon with his vast army were marching through central Spain. He had crushed the Spanish armies at Gamonal, Tudela and Espinosa and secured the important town of Burgos. On the 22nd Napoleon resumed his march to Madrid.

A little further to the west, Sir John Moore’s army entered Salamanca on the 13th but the success of the Imperial armies had made him reluctant to proceed any further. It was precisely at this juncture in time when Cochrane was to forever make his mark upon the history of the Peninsula war with his exploits at Roses and Fort Trinity. He took up his position in the fort on the 24th. On the 30th, Napoleon was to secure another victory at the Somossiera pass and then enter Madrid on the 4th December. The following day Cochrane’s struggle ends and Sir John Moore’s place in history was about to begin, culminating in the memorable ‘Retreat to Corunna’.

The *Spectator* review of Britannia’s Sea Wolf, in the wonderfully written work by Donald Thomas, sums up Cochrane’s life in one Paragraph; ‘do be sure you’ve had your fill of C.S. Forrester and Patrick O’Brian first. Otherwise you may find that their works are pale imitations of the real thing’.

Colin Jones. FINS. August 2005

General theatre of operations
Pink—Cochrane’s voyage to Roses. Blue—Napoleon’s advance into Spain and pursuit of Moore’s army. Red—Moore’s campaign and retreat to Corunna.
The Wolf at the door.

"Nothing can exceed the zeal and activity with which his lordship pursues the enemy."

Lord Collingwood.

Napoleon’s invasion of Spain, enrolled a hope of subjugation under a misconceived and vain belief that the Spanish people would give up the fight fairly early on. The invaders believed that as long as the key areas and cities were occupied or effectively destroyed, then the inhabitants, would either be forced to join in with the new regime or would simply lay down their arms and willingly partake in the new order of things to come. Any discontentment would be isolated and usurpers could be swiftly dealt with by the invincible Imperial armies. A practical embodiment of this concept would never come to fruition.

When Marshal Junot’s Army marched into Lisbon in November 1807, the Portuguese Royal family had fled to Brazil, leaving the country in the hands of the insurgent. By June 1808, Napoleon had installed his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne and Ferdinand VII, the rightful king, had been pushed into abdication. Most of the important cities had either surrendered, capitulated or were about to be put under siege. In fact, apart from a slight hiccup at the battle of Baylen in July, whereupon the Spanish regular army enjoyed a well deserved but brief victory, the French empire looked to be successfully expanding it’s military and political boundaries throughout the entire Iberian Peninsula. Despite a previous alliance with France, Spain was now going to be reduced to the state of a satellite power, under a foreign army of occupation and under the rule of a fraudulent puppet. It appeared at this particular moment in time, that the only saviour to reconcile with this awesome intruder would come by British intervention, a recognised sea power and avid opponent to Napoleon’s new world. The continental blockade, ensured that England could not trade from any European ports, and this more than helped to determine their inevitable participation in the war. While a British expeditionary force, under Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington, was landing in Portugal, another hero was about to make a significant reverse on the French army’s contempt for the resilience of the Spanish resistance. Only this time, it would be by way of the Royal Navy, now the undisputed sea power following the famous battle of Trafalgar.

The Life of Thomas Lord Cochrane is infinitely more readable than that of the great Nelson. As a radical believer against corruption in the Admiralty, he had won himself many enemies in the government, but with a marked brilliance for seamanship and shear pluck, he had gained the heart and confidence of the British people. Cochrane had been put to sea in the Imperieuse, a frigate of thirty-eight guns. She had previously been the warship Medea, when Spain was allied to France, but was captured by the Royal Navy in 1804.

Cochrane had continually harassed the Peninsula shoreline during the year of 1808 and was therefore not unfamiliar with the way in which the war in Spain was developing. Apart from the numerous land battles and sieges that were underway, Pamplona, Barcelona and Madrid had all succumbed to Napoleon’s marauding armies. Pockets of resistance sprang up everywhere and Guerrilla activity became an all important part of the war machinery in the struggle for Spanish liberation.
Geographically, the French position in north eastern Spain was dependent largely on the coastal roads and sea routes between Marseille and Catalonia. A main supply line lay over the Pyrenees between Perpignan on the French side and Barcelona on the Spanish, and thence from Tarragona through to Valencia.

In late October, the French Marshal St Cyr, with a considerable Franco-Italian army of some 24,000 men was ordered by Napoleon to go to the relief of General Dushesme, who was at that time holed up at Barcelona. He was also to safe-guard the communication roads against the rising insurgency of the local Guerrillas and just generally subdue the province of Catalonia as a whole. After crossing the Pyrenees St Cyr’s first objective was to invest the town of Roses, which housed a moderately sized fortified Citadel overlooked by an out work called Fort Trinity, that lay a little further to the south east. The bay of Roses could also be a vital supply route for vessels passing to Barcelona. It was imperative for St Cyr to have control of these fortifications in order to proceed any further into the province. One attempt on the town and it’s defences had already been carried out earlier in July/August by the French General Reille, but he had been forced to abandon the attack due to incessant guerrilla activity which threatened the rear of his investing army. It was perhaps because of this earlier experience that St Cyr handed over the siege to Reille whilst the commander himself remained with the covering army to stop any outside interference. The investment of the town began on the 6th November and after a few days Reille resolved to make an attempt on Fort Trinity. The attack was obstinately repulsed by it’s current occupants; eighty Spaniards, under the Irish Lieutenant-Colonel Fitzgerald, and twenty five marines from HMS Excellent, which lay in the harbour. The French General realised that to make any impression on either Trinity or the Citadel of Roses he would have to wait for his heavy artillery, which would not arrive from Perpignan until the 16th.

There were three British warships in the bay at this time, the Excellent, Lucifer & Meteor, all of which were playing an active part in it’s defence by supplying the garrison with Marines and bombarding their assailants from the coast line. The future Admiral of the fleet, Sir John West of the Excellent withdrew his marines from the fort when Captain Richard Bennett of the Fame arrived in the harbour to relieve him. Bennett threw as many men into the two key positions of Roses as was thought practical, although, after a few days Bennett decided that the castle of Trinity was untenable and he abandoned the Spanish to their own plight.

Cochrane had been ordered by his commander-in-chief, Lord Collingwood to; ‘assist the Spaniards when ever it could be done with most effect.’ The Imperieuse sailed from Gibraltar at the end of October and headed up the east coast toward the Bay of Roses. This was to be his last, and most significant venture in the war.
Cochrane arrived in the town about the same time as Capt Bennett’s reappraisal of the situation in Trinity, having gone on ahead by gig when the Imperieuse was becalmed ten miles short of Roses bay. When he arrived, the garrison commander, Colonel Peter O’Daly, was fairly confident that a Spanish relieving force must surely soon appear. It was obvious that the town and it’s Citadel could not hold out indefinitely, and as a final desperate plea, O’Daly had sent out a cry for help to General Vives, the Spanish commander who had Barcelona under blockade, and was effectively cutting off Dushesme from any external succour. O’Daly’s hopes were thwarted when the Spanish reinforcements were too few to make any impression on St Cyr’s outlying covering force. Cochrane begged O’Daly to hold on until the arrival of the Imperieuse and her crew. His plan was to take possession of the fort which was about to be abandoned by Bennett and buy some time for the governor of the citadel. 

Even when the Citadel of Roses fell, St Cyr would not leave a fort such as Trinity in the hands of the enemy behind him. Cochrane would soon be the thorn in his side.

Directly the Imperieuse arrived in the bay on the 23rd November, Cochrane took 50 seamen, with 30 Marines and began to make preparations for the defence of the fort. Cochrane’s own description of Trinity bears little resemblance to the ruin we see today. 

It was constructed, he found; 

‘with walls some 50 feet high. Behind this and joined to it rose another fort to the height of 30 or 40 feet more, the whole presenting the appearance of a large church with a tower 110 feet high, a nave 90 feet high, and a chancel 50 feet. The tower having it’s back to the cliff as a matter of course sheltered the middle and lower portions of the fortress from a fire of the battery above it.’

Beautifully built to withstand artillery from the landward side but inadequately positioned to return the compliment due to it’s three gun platforms pointing out to sea. Cochrane’s men arrived to find that the fort was already in a fair state of dilapidation. Midshipman Marryat found, 

‘Heaps of crumbling stones and rubbish, broken gun-carriages, and split guns’.

Cochrane’s principal ground for a belief in the practicability of holding the fort, 

‘arose from the peculiar form and thickness of the walls, to penetrate which was no easy matter, if resolutely defended’.
The only way in which Trinity could be bombarded by the French artillery was from the still higher ground of the Puig Rom. Siege warfare in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries relied on trenches being dug to allow the cannon to move forward to a position where the ramparts and walls could be fired upon at a suitable range. The gunners would then repeatedly pound a precise section of the structure until a breach was made and the infantry could then enter the gap by storm.

Sure enough, the French had mounted their heavy guns on the height above and began firing at the leading tower. However, the elevated ground did not give the cannon a good line of sight, the guns could not be depressed sufficiently to hit the base of the tower. The gunners had to make do with an elevated breach that was some 60 feet up from ground level. This meant the storming party would need ladders to scale the walls. A valid flaw in any initial attack. Furthermore, on the 19th, the battery on the hill was temporarily silenced by a lucky shell from the Excellent which exploded the powder magazine and caused considerable delay, frustrating any hope of an early conclusion to events.

When Cochrane’s men arrived he took full advantage of the inadequate breach by evacuating the tower and concentrating his men in the other two, this allowed him to effectively booby-trap the leading tower in time for the inevitable assault. He first knocked out an internal arch so that the attackers would find there to be no floor surface beyond the breach. He also brought in deal planks from the Imperieuse, laid them as a platform across the lip of the breach and sloped them downward into the void below. He then coated them with ‘cooks slush’ or grease to help the assailants along their way. Upon entering the breach, they would in turn find themselves on a straight flume sliding their way down to a vaulted cellar with no means of escape. The assaulting infantryman would not find his footing on such a slippery surface and would eventually fall a good 50 feet down into the ‘bug trap’ as the English sailors christened the device. Here they could be dispatched or rounded up at leisure.
Furthermore, between the abandoned tower and the one behind it, where his sailors and marines were concentrated, he built a barricade, reinforced by sandbags. This makeshift redoubt within the fortress was also protected by top chains from the frigate to which large fish hooks had been fastened. Any enemy attempting to scramble over this obstacle would find themselves impaled helplessly on the hooks. A sort of nineteenth century barbed wire. He also had shells suspended on ropes from the main walls, and if this was not enough to dissuade an attacker from entering the fort, Cochrane had the breach mined as a secondary precaution; it didn't matter if he blew the leading tower up completely, none of his men were going to be in it. Cochrane was joined by a few dozen guerrillas, some Irish and Swiss mercenaries in Spanish pay, all of whom assisted in the preparations.

On the 25th November, some three hundred hits were scored on the massive walls of Fort Trinity. One of these salvoes brought down the Spanish flag, and it flurried down into the ditch below the fortress directly in the path of the French artillery barrage, and in the line of fire from their sharpshooters, who had positioned themselves on the hillside. In an astute act of showmanship, Cochrane walked out of the fort, picked up the flag and hoisted it triumphantly overhead amidst a hail of musket balls and artillery shot, without once being hit himself.

Cochrane was not always this lucky though. During one artillery barrage, he was hit by a flying granite splinter. It had broken his nose and penetrated through the roof of his mouth. He stumbled back to the care of the medical officer, but there was little time to convalesce, as the situation was deteriorating by the day. Midshipman Frederick Marryat who acted as Cochrane’s adjutant during the action, and later wrote a moving description of the defence, recalled the accuracy of the French guns;

“Such was the precision of the enemy’s fire, that we could tell the stone that would be hit by the next shot, merely from seeing where the last had struck”.

Others that dared to poke their heads above the ramparts were,

“picked off like partridges, by the Swiss corps on the hill close to us.”

Fort Trinity today looking from the position of the French guns on the Puig Rom.
It is also interesting at this point to let Marryat explain a peculiar observation concerning the allied mercenaries. Marryat continues, “There was one very singular feature in this affair. The Swiss mercenaries in the French and Spanish services, opposed to each other, behaved with the greatest bravery, and did their duty with unexceeded fidelity; but being posted so near, and coming so often in contact with each other, they would cry truce for a quarter of an hour, while they made inquiries after their mutual friends; often recognising each other as fathers and sons, brothers and near relatives, fighting on opposite sides. They would laugh and joke with each other, declare the truce at an end, then load their muskets, and take aim, with the same indifference, as regarded the object, as if they had been perfect strangers.”

Cochrane’s men had hardly established themselves in the fort when a half hearted assault was made by the Italian brigade of Mazzuchelli. I think in hindsight, this was more of a probe attack than an actual serious advance, endeavouring to glean information on just how feasible the breach would be in readiness for the main assault. Indeed, Mazzuchelli’s men did not even make any attempt to scale the walls, probably knowing that the decisive moment of glory would not be too long in the waiting.

Whether infused by Mazzuchelli’s effrontery or not, Cochrane resolved to make a surprise night attack on the Puig Rom battery. He hoped that if everything went to plan then the assailants could just wheel the guns straight over the edge of the height, to be smashed on the rocks below. Cochrane put the idea to O’Daly who immediately lent him 700 men from the town. Another 30 Marines taken from the Imperieuse were to lead the assault but all ended in disaster when the Italian division guarding the heights, half expecting a sortie of this kind, beat the assailants back down the slopes killing ten men, wounding another 20 and capturing more than 200 prisoners. Many others were scattered to the hilly countryside to the east never to return.

By the 29th November the defenders of the citadel in Roses were cut off from all assistance. The French infantry had entered the town and were establishing gun emplacements ready to finish off the crumbling walls of the citadel. O’Daly was at a loss and began to think of surrender. Worse still, the ship’s boats that communicated with Cochrane and the Imperieuse, which lay just off the coast, were driven away by the sharpshooters. He was now left in an extremely isolated predicament, with little hope of being supplied with the basic essentials required by his small garrison.
Midshipman Marryat recalls, 
“We all pigged in together, dirty straw and fleas for our beds: our food on the same scale of luxury.” Nonetheless, Cochrane insisted on having the hands piped to dinner, even when there was nothing but cold water to dine on. “Regularity”, he observed was good for the character.

Just before dawn on the 30th, Marryat was keeping watch from the wall overlooking the misty valley below, up which the attack was expected. Cochrane’s version of the incident is more melodramatic, he insisted that he awoke with an intuition of an attack. What is more likely, was that every defender, at this time, was expecting a finite conclusion to something that could not possibly go on for much longer. The attack on Trinity would come, Roses and the Citadel would fall and Cochrane’s men would have to make a perilous escape back to the safety of the sea and the relative sanctuary of the Imperieuse.

The sequence of events did transpire into this obvious order but no one could of anticipated the heroic spirit and ability which was evinced by Lord Cochrane whilst defending the cause. The very fact that he had decided to occupy the fort when both the future Admiral of the fleet Sir John West and Captain Richard Bennett, had abandoned the idea, both of whom had far superior resources to the Imperieuse, was to virtually convict them of a gross error of judgement. And clearly, just by his stubborn presence, Cochrane had disrupted the balance of the siege for the French General Reille and strategically, as a big picture, was preventing St Cyr from getting on with the main job in hand, namely, the capitulation of Roses and the relief of Barcelona.

This picture shows the close proximity of Trinity to the town of Roses across the bay. Cochrane could clearly see the progress of the French operations.
Removing the Thorn.
“We fought like Bull-dogs”
Frederick Marryat

The advance of the French storming party began under cover of the remaining darkness, just before dawn, and apparently the head of the advancing column had almost reached the foot of the walls before it’s occupants had even noticed. Combining the narratives of Cochrane and Marryat together, the story goes something like this:

Cochrane could not sleep and went out to the ramparts where he met Marryat who was on look-out duty. He appeared uneasy and thought he could see something unusual in the valley below. The Captain listened a moment and looked attentively through his night-glass and then put a taper to the touch-hole of a mortar that had been pre-positioned to fire on the pathway leading to the fort, which was thought to be the obvious proposed route of attack. The shell exploded revealing the winding black column of the enemy, ‘curling along the valley like a great centipede’. Cochrane shouted, to arms they are coming!’ and within three minutes every man was at his allotted post.

1200 determined men had begun in silence to mount the breach, but now the element of surprise had gone, they flaunted their attack with the familiar beating of the drum to make sure everyone knew it was one of Napoleon’s legions marching to the attack. The word was given and a volley of musketry poured down from the ramparts above momentarily halting the Italians in their own wake. Soon they rallied and began to position their scaling ladders up against the wall under the breach. The gunners on the hill and the Swiss sharpshooters were firing and cheering their comrades onto the assault. A great pile of rubble lay at the foot of the wall which served as a ramp ensuring the scaling ladders would reach the hole. As the enemy began to make their ascent and a mass of infantry below were waiting to follow, Cochrane ordered the mine to be fired.

Marryat wrote,

“up they went in the air, and down they fell buried in the ruins. Groans, screams, confusion, French yells, British hurras, rent the sky!”

Ten minutes had elapsed since the firing began and the mine had blown the head of the leading column away, but still they rallied continuing on and were again half-way up the breach when the day began to dawn. The French grenadiers were an impressive sight, being selected for their height, they were rent even more imposing by their tall black headgear. Marryat cried with rage and excitement,

“we all fought like bull-dogs, for we knew there was no quarter to be given”.

Suddenly, the men of the Imperieuse, manning the position behind the breach were presented with the silhouettes of the enemy. They had reached the top of the breach and were entering the fort. The dark shadows of the assailants within the opening gave the appearance of a shooting gallery and the poor souls that did not slide onto the greased planks down into Cochrane’s ‘Bug Trap’, were shot down mercilessly. There was no way forward for them, and no way back, the pressure of others following up the ladders behind them made retreat impossible. Thus their predicament could only get worse.

From the top of the tower Cochrane had suspended small bombs, which could be released, with fuses lit, onto the enemy below. These coupled with the devastating effect of hand-grenades thrown down on to the crowds, as Marryat elegantly puts it,

“Broke their shins in glorious style”.

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There were now about forty men on the breach who were now in a pitiful situation, they could not go forward for fear of falling down the trap and they barely had time to load their muskets before being swept off by the fire of the defenders. Cochrane remarks, “There was now just light enough for them to see the chasm before them, and the wall was crowded with hesitating men”.

To have relied on muskets alone to turn back a major assault of this kind would have been foolhardy. A notorious inaccurate weapon that took too long to load. Cochrane’s ingenious preparations had paid off. Cochrane continues, “our hand-grenades were got to work, and these, together with the musketry, told fearfully on the mass—which wavered for a few moments, and then retreated amidst the loud huzzas of our fellows”.

The second assault was led by two gallant officers who were constantly beckoning their troops forward, both of which had gained Cochrane’s attention. The first poor fellow was dropped by a shot, “which precipitated him from the walls, but whether he was killed or only wounded, I do not know, probably wounded only, as his body was not seen by us amongst the dead”.

The second man was the last man to quit the walls, Cochrane raised his musket to cover him, he continues; “Finding escape impossible, he stood like a hero to receive the bullet, without condescending to lower his sword in token of surrender. I never saw a braver or prouder man. Lowering my musket, I paid him the compliment of remarking, that so fine a fellow was not born to be shot down like a dog, and that, so far as I was concerned, he was at liberty to make the best of his way down the ladder; upon which intimation he bowed as politely as though on parade, and retired just as leisurely”.

Marryat talks of another gallant colonel who appeared, “as cool and composed as if he were at breakfast”. Marryat threw a lighted grenade between his feet, whereupon he calmly picked it up and threw it away. “Cool chap enough that, said the Captain, who stood close to me: I’ll give him another, which he did, but this the officer kicked away with equal sang froid and dignity. Nothing will cure that fellow, resumed the Captain, but an ounce of lead on an empty stomach—it’s a pity, too, to kill so fine a fellow— but there is no help for it “.

From here Marryat explains how the Colonel’s demise marked any hopes for that day and any attempt to gain the fort forthwith was to end in failure.
The attack was at an end, but just as the storming party were making their way back down the path, a body of infantry were seen coming on again from the Puig Rom, presumably as a reinforcement. Reille must have been so convinced of success that these additional troops had previously been ordered to approach their objective at a certain time, and follow up the inevitable victory of the ‘forlorn hope’. Cochrane enlightens us further, 

“scarcely had we got rid of our assailants, when a numerous body of troops came down from the hills with muskets firing and drums beating, nothing doubted that their comrades were in possession of the fortress. Our lads, having their hands now free, returned their fire with excellent effect, dropping some at every discharge; when at length, finding that the assault had failed, and that we were able to offer effectual resistance, the detachment retreated up the hill as fast as they could, amidst the derisive cheering of our men”.

Cochrane states that other than a few minor casualties he had only 3 men killed, one marine and two Spaniards. A further two Spaniards were wounded, one being shot through the thigh and the Spanish governor of the fortress having been shot through the hand. The wounds of the enemy were much more severe, as one would imagine. Cochrane says their total loss was, 

“upwards of fifty—judging by the dead left behind”.

The exhilaration of his men in the defence of the fort now increased Cochrane’s determination to hold the position a little longer. Providing the Citadel was holding out then he would remain undeterred. Surprisingly, on the 3rd of December the troops in the Citadel actually assumed the offensive and the men were led out to attack some infantry that had dug themselves in close by. The sortie was of little use tactically, but it served to lift the men’s morale as they could see that the Citadel’s walls were beginning to crumble, and the breach could not be closed. It was no surprise, when On the 5th, the garrison duly surrendered and fate had set its course. Cochrane received a message from the Imperieuse, that a gale was blowing up and the frigate must soon put to sea. At 11am signals were made to the ships in the harbour that the evacuation of Trinity was about to take place. Escape via the two main entrances would have been in full view of the enemy so the men climbed down rope ladders hung on the sea-ward side and protected by the fire of the Fame and Magnificent that had beat toward the allotted embarkation point. Meanwhile, the Imperieuse drew in close to the shore to receive the landing boats, all was quiet on the French side until the boats began to pull away from the shore towards the Imperieuse, when a hail of musketry was opened up from the Sharpshooters at the base of the hill. Fortunately no one was hurt and by 1 O’clock all were out of the castle except Cochrane and a gunner who lighted the port-fires attached to a train of explosives. The French, knowing that the castle lay empty, were still reluctant to enter the building. Cochrane continues;

“The French having become practically acquainted with some of our devices were on their guard, and did not take possession of the castle immediately on our quitting it, and it was lucky for them that they did not, for shortly after we got on board the first explosion took place, blowing up the portion of the fortress which they had been breaching; but the second train failed, owing, no doubt, to the first shock disarranging the port-fire. Had this not been the case, scarcely one stone of the castle would have remained on the other”.
When all were safely on board, and the *Imperieuse* got under weigh again, a moment of mortification came over the entire crew when they looked back at the fort they had so stubbornly defended for nearly two weeks. They witnessed the French Tri-colour flying aloft above the ramparts in disdainful triumph. Cochrane looked to his next mission. The Spanish troops were landed at La Escala and the ship sailed for Barcelona endeavouring to lend a helping hand to General Vives again. Just before Christmas Cochrane renewed his attacks by rounding up a convoy of seventeen ships in Cadaques harbour, a few miles north of Roses and at the end of January 1809 he took the Frigate back to Minorca and applied for leave. Two personal motives had urged him to return to England, firstly to suggest, to the authorities at home, a better strategy for conducting the naval war against the French coastlines, and secondly, to enlighten parliament of the corruption that he had seen within the governing bodies of the Mediterranean, particularly with regard to Prize monies.

The fascinating story of Cochrane’s next exploit at the Basque roads, deserves further attention, and is in fact, another astounding episode in the life of one of the most daring and successful real-life heroes the naval world has ever seen. It seems absurd that Cochrane’s independent contributions to the war would rock the Admiralty’s *status quo*, to such an extent that they would eventually force him to take his services elsewhere. Equally remarkable is that Nelson’s reputation stood in the least danger from Cochrane’s during the nineteenth century, and still continues to overwhelm all who follow.

“Lord Cochrane was, after the death of Nelson, the greatest naval commander of that age of glory. Equal to his predecessor in personal gallantry, enthusiastic ardour, and devotion to his country, he was perhaps his superior in original genius, inventive power, and inexhaustible resources”.

For his services rendered to King and country, Cochrane received no praise from the Admiralty, despite the fact that at home, he had become a hero of the war of liberation. In a letter dated the 14th December, His commander, Lord Collingwood wrote to the authorities expressing a sincere delight commending Cochrane’s activities as follows: “The zeal and energy with which he has maintained that fortress excites the highest admiration. His resources for every exigency have no end.”

The Spanish Gazette wrote of ‘This gallant Englishman’, telling the story of how he had rescued the Spanish flag from the ditch. Even the exalted Sir Walter Scott sang his praises pointing out that Cochrane had tied up the resources of the enemy that could of otherwise been employed elsewhere in the peninsula.

The lack of response from the Admiralty, and indeed, the deprivation of prize-money meant that all of Cochrane’s efforts during the siege were at his own cost, excepting the expenditure of ammunition. To make matters worse, in reply to Lord Collingwood’s account of the action at Fort Trinity the authorities sent a reprimand to Cochrane for his excessive use of ‘powder and shot.’ Furthermore, they had an evident dislike of his excessive use of the Imperieuse, which was apt to require more in repairs and maintenance than ships which kept out of harms way. This ludicrous remark rightly infuriated Cochrane who bitterly observed that captains who avoided combat and brought ships home unblemished were rewarded with pensions. Cochrane continues; “a strange contrast to some of the costly expeditions of the period for less results, and one which ought to have secured for me anything but the political animosity with which all my services were regarded”.

Cochrane himself received nothing for thirty years until at length he was granted the ordinary good service pension. Hardly a fitting tribute for even a captain.

During the year of 1808 and with a single frigate, Cochrane had caused havoc with the French armies invading Spain. This much he saw with his own eyes, and he began to realise that with a full squadron under his command, one could virtually paralyse operations in other sectors. Much of the French coastline and outlying islands were vulnerable. In addendum to this, Cochrane makes an extremely bold statement in his memoirs; “Had this permission been granted, I do not hesitate to stake my professional reputation that neither the Peninsular war, nor it’s enormous cost to the nation. From 1809 onwards would ever have been heard of”.

A tantalising theory for all Napoleonic enthusiasts without doubt, but there may be true words of wisdom here; Cochrane projected the idea that if the French coast lines were harassed with enough vigour then there would be more employment for their troops at home and thus rendering any external operations harder in it’s exercise. If this idea had been pressed to execution then Napoleon may have been forced to look to his own shores before marching endlessly over other peoples. In a hypothetical scenario, Spain and Portugal could have been left alone. The natural line of the Pyrenees would of acted as a secure frontier instead of a route to political expansion, and what was later to become known as the ‘Spanish Ulcer’. In turn, these additional resources may of given Bonaparte a more satisfactory outcome in Russia or indeed the invasion scare of Britain could of become a reality.
The bay of Roses has been an important harbour for centuries. Archaeologists have discovered early signs of human presence dating back as far as the Neolithic period. During the Roman empire, Roses became a bustling trade route through the Mediterranean and many settlements began to spring up within the immediate area. The Citadel started out as a fortified village and monastery which expanded into a fully functional star shaped fort along with the advent of heavy artillery around the middle of the 16th century. The first map of the Citadel depicting the modern bastions and bulwarks dates from 1552. The Trinity castle was conceived as a coastal battery to provide a 180 degree protection at the entrance to the bay. It was built at the bidding of Charles I, who decided to replace an existing tower occupying the site with a building more suited to the new artillery. Construction of Trinity began in 1544 by the same Castilian engineer drafted to build the Citadel, Luis Pizano. The history of the Citadel and that of Trinity would always be closely linked, both being subjected to the same sieges and assaults. The strategic value of Roses made the Citadel one of the most coveted fortifications throughout the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries, during the endless warring between the Spanish and French monarchies. The first French siege took place during the War of Succession in 1645. The second was led by the Duke of Noailles in 1693. Both ending in the capitulation of Roses.
The beginning of the 18th Century saw great unrest throughout Spain and Portugal. The will of the deceased monarch, Charles II, allowed a French Duke to assume the Spanish crown, and this in turn, led to an allied intervention with the English. Interestingly, this war of the Spanish Succession, between the years of 1701 & 1714, draws many parallels between those events of the Peninsular War, one hundred years later. In 1794, during the war between Charles IV and The French Convention, Marshal Perignon made the first significant damage to the defences of both forts. Perignon quickly discovered that the key to the Position was the ‘Fort of Trinite’, nicknamed *le Bouton de Rose*. The commanding firepower of this little ‘Pimple’ had to be suppressed before any effectual attempt could be made on the Citadel. On the 1st of January 1795 three batteries on the heights pounded the fort into submission breaking the Spanish will to resist. Their walls breached, the small garrison escaped by rope ladders just before the storming. A month later the Citadel surrendered, the north eastern walls being shattered by heavy bombardment. Despite the garrison getting clean away, the 70-day siege ended in a decisive victory for the French and was directly responsible for the dilapidated defences that Cochrane first saw upon his own arrival thirteen years later. In fact, Reille had taken up, more or less exactly the same positions as Perignon had done when he had conducted his winter siege. Although the entrenchments had to take a new line as the previous parallels had long been filled in, the walls of both forts were pounded at exactly the same weak points as neither had been fully restored.

Many of Spain's fortifications fell during the Napoleonic wars. Following Cochrane's evacuation and the surrender of the Citadel, Roses came under French occupation until the middle of 1814. Its defences were rendered untenable when the French commander Suchet left Catalonia shortly before Napoleon's exile to the island of Elba on the 3rd May. The monastery inside the citadel had already been destroyed during the 1795 siege, and the destruction of the outer walls are still visible to this day. It is no wonder that the fort of Trinity is currently undergoing a major refurbishment. The riggers of two sieges and Cochrane's train had removed the main tower completely, and a presumption can be made, that the French destroyed the western bastions, when they left, as this is the area where most of the reinstatement works are taking place.
Le Bouton

The building has an irregular ground plan, with a slightly star-shaped quadrilateral form with four bastions or points, well adapted to the hill on which it was built but ill-conceived for replying to any attack from the landward side. Although the tall north facing tower gave some protection to the interior, all the gun platforms faced out to sea. Cochrane explains:

“Nothing, in short, for a fortress commanded by adjacent heights could have been better adapted for holding out against offensive operations, or worse adapted for replying to them; this on our part being out of the question, as the French battery was too much elevated on the cliff for artillery to reach, whilst the tower which prevented their shot from annoying us, would also have prevented our firing on them, even had we possessed artillery”.

One can assume that the ‘three towers’ relates to the name ‘Trinity’, as in, God, The Father and the Holy Ghost. Cochrane also places a resemblance of the fort in an ecclesiastical form:

“A pretty correct idea of our relative positions may be formed if the unnautical reader will imagine our force to be placed in the nave of Westminster Abbey, with the enemy attacking the great western tower from the summit of a cliff 100 feet higher than the tower, so that the breach in course of formation nearly corresponded to the great west window of the abbey. It will hence be clear that, in the face of a determined opposition, it would be no easy matter to scale the external wall of the tower up to the great west window, and more difficult still to overcome impediments presently to be mentioned, so as to get down into the body of the church. These were the points I had to provide against, for we could neither prevent the French from breaching nor storming”.

Fort Trinity in its heyday, which bears little resemblance to the ruin we see today. Although much of the fort is being kept as original, the present concrete reconstruction will leave much to be desired. The new platforms will present fine views across the bay, but many of the finer details will vanish. Compare this picture with the front page.
Order of battle for the storming of Fort Trinity.  
30th November 1808.

Franco/Italian.  
7th Corps: General Gouvion St Cyr.  
5th Division (Field commander, General Reille).  
Pino’s Italian Division. Most of the men were taken from General Balabio’s 3rd brigade.

3 x companies of Voltigeurs from the 1st Leger Regiment 366  
3 x companies of Carabiniers from the 1st Leger Regiment 366  
3 x companies of Voltigeurs from the 6th Ligne Regiment 489  
3 x companies of Grenadiers from the 6th Ligne Regiment 489  

1710 men in total.  
Diarists also recall 300 Swiss sharpshooters who fired on any landing parties that were put to shore and could also cover some of the fort’s perimeter & ramparts.

Note: This total is an establishment strength taken from St Cyr’s memoirs, the actual men involved were no doubt less. Most sources agree the storming party consisted of approximately 1200 effectives to which they have obviously referred upon Cochrane’s narrative for this figure.

Cochrane states that the fort was assaulted by approx 1200 men from the 1st Light Regt of Italy. 1 x Company of Grenadiers, 2 x Companies of Carabiniers and 4 x Companies of Voltigeurs.  
Oman states the party composed of 6x Grenadier & Voltigeur companies of the 1st & 6th Regiments.

We are now presented with a dilemma as both, in some degree, must be incorrect.  
Firstly, Cochrane’s list only amounts to around 936, but he could have been including the sharpshooters as part of the mass total of 1200. Secondly, If Oman’s company numbers are correct then the total of 1710 effectives, taken from St Cyr’s source, are way over the top. Unless, of course, we decide to include some of these in the second wave that never actually reached the fighting.  
Lastly, the elite companies in a Leger battalion are technically called Carabiniers so the Grenadiers must be from the Ligne. However, this type of misunderstanding is quite common in contemporary memoirs and journals, particularly where the writer is relying on memory.

A small touch of educated conjecture is called for here, and I have opted to settle on Cochrane’s narrative as he gleaned this information from his two prisoners.  
The more probable Italian company strengths at the storm are as follows:

1 x Grenadier company from the 6th Ligne 163  
2 x Carabinier companies from the 1st Leger 244  
1 x Voltigeur company from the 6th Ligne 163  
3 x Voltigeur companies from the 1st Leger 366  
Swiss Sharpshooters 300  

1236 men in total.
Franco/Italian Artillery & Casualties
Artillery on the Puig Rom heights: 3 x 24pdr’s cannon.
After the 24th Nov a further 3 x 24pdr’s were added to the battery.
(Note: curiously Oman’s map on page 8 shows another battery further down toward the shoreline, but I can find no other reference to this effect).

Casualties for the 30th November: 2 x officers and 40 men either killed or wounded and 2 men taken prisoner.

Naval and Allied forces
Cochrane’s force inside Trinity at the time of the attack was as follows:
80 x Spaniards (composing of a mixture of local levies)
20 x Irish mercenaries
50 x Sailors from the *Imperieuse*
30 x Marines from the *Imperieuse*
The only workable artillery inside the fort was 1x 6” mortar mounted on the ramparts.

Casualties were extremely light being only 3 men killed and two men wounded.
4 of whom were Spaniards.

Royal Naval vessels that lay in the harbour
HMS *Excellent*. (Departed on the 21st November)
HMS *Fame* (Arrived on the 21st November)
The frigate *Imperieuse* (Arrived on the 23rd November)
There were also two bomb-vessels, the *Meteor* and *Lucifer*
HMS *Magnificent* arrived shortly before the evacuation of Trinity.

Cochrane mentions the following names in his dispatch to Lord Collingwood:
*H.M. Ship ‘Imperieuse’ Bay of Rosas, 5th December, 1808.*
Lieutenant Johnson, of the navy, Lieutenant Hoare, of the Marines, Mr Burney, the gunner, Mr Lodowick, the carpenter, and Messrs Stewart, Sloven and Marryat, midshipmen.
Bibliography
and suggested further reading.

As always with any research, no single reference can give the reader the full picture. The particulars of the siege and the struggle to hold Fort Trinity have been gleaned from the following sources. Also a visit to the actual site in the autumn of 2004 gave an in-valuable secondary perspective.


**Marryat**, Capt Frederick. *Frank Mildmay*. Although in novel form, this book is not a work of fiction. It contains some of Marryat’s own graphic recollections of the event.


**Clausewitz**, Carl Von. *On War*. Everyman’s library 1993. His sections on fortresses provide an excellent insight into the mechanics of a siege.

**Guide**, Museu de La Ciutadella De Roses. A wealth of information can be found on site in the Citadel museum. The town is a bustling holiday resort during the summer.

**Portsmouth Dockyard**. The Library and archives hold a wealth of information and can be viewed by appointment. Open 10am—4am weekdays only.

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Looking at Trinity from inside the Citadel of Roses.

This picture clearly shows the elevated height of the Puig Rom on the left compared to that of Trinity on the lower right slope. The new building in the foreground is the visitors centre at the Citadel’s main entrance.
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