

Translated by Greg Gorsuch
Volume 2 Part 11

SECOND SIEGE OF ZARAGOZA,

BY THE FRENCH ARMY OF ARAGON,
IN 1808 AND 1809.

Attack on the suburb. The first parallel and the advance routes were improved.

The death of General Lacoste left Colonel Rogniat, second-in-command, in charge of the attacks on the right bank. The advance route remained unchanged. The war of the houses continued until the Coso River was reached. The Spanish defended themselves with extraordinary tenacity; but the efforts of our soldiers increased in proportion to the obstacles they encountered, and the methodical advance of our routes ensured our success. As soon as a house was captured, it was entrenched and crenellated; wide passageways were opened through the partition walls to allow movement along the front walls; the doors and windows were blocked with sandbags, and the house thus became a veritable fortress, serving as a base for further penetration. If the enemy contested the entrance to a chamber, loopholes were opened opposite theirs, and skirmishes were exchanged on both sides. The chamber separating the combatants soon filled with smoke, allowing a sapper to slip in prone and reach the enemy's muskets. This sapper would then rise, strike the muskets repeatedly with a crowbar, and force the Spaniards to withdraw. Immediately, our grenadiers would advance, block the loopholes, throw grenades through them, and force the enemy to seek refuge in a more distant chamber, where a new battle would begin. When a thick wall halted our soldiers' advance, the sappers would reduce its thickness with pickaxes before making any openings, then they would topple it with a single blow onto the Spaniards. These various attacks had to be carried out simultaneously on each floor of a house, so as not to be exposed to enemy gunfire through the floors of the upper stories, or to grenades dropped from the chimneys. It was especially necessary to occupy the rooftops in force, as the Spanish were using them to launch sorties against our rear and cut our communications. The best marksmen in the regiments were also employed to great advantage; positioned in ambushes in the attics, they would shoot any Spaniard who appeared in the open, thus forcing the others to give free rein to our sappers. But of all the means of attack, mining was still the best, provided care was taken not to overload the blasting chambers, so that the houses would be opened up and not destroyed, and that some shelters would remain where one could take refuge from the plunging fire of neighboring buildings. But then the Spaniards decided to coat the timbers of the houses with resin and pitch, and to apply tarred bundles of sticks to the doors and windows. They would set these on fire as soon as they were forced to retreat, thus creating a barrier of flames between themselves and us. Since little wood is used in the construction of houses in Zaragoza, the floors being made of brick vaults on beams, the fire spread slowly and often formed an impassable

obstacle for several days, giving the Spaniards time to fortify themselves and prepare the defenses of the houses behind those that had been burned.

35th NIGHT, of 1st to 2nd February.

Attack on the right. We worked all night barricading the occupied houses and establishing communication lines. We recaptured some of the houses lost the previous day on Pabostria Street.

We had eight men killed and twenty-seven wounded in the last twenty-four hours.

Attack on the center. We erected barricades and established communication lines in the houses we had taken to the right of Santa Engracia Street. We continued work on the Trinitarian convent.

We had two men killed and three wounded.

Attack on the suburb. We established a communication line to the right of the first parallel, between the large enclosure and the mill on the right. We extended the second parallel to the right to reinforce it against flooding. But to achieve this, it was necessary to dislodge the enemy from a hovel and a battery they occupied in front. This operation resulted in a fierce exchange of gunfire, in which we had three men killed and several wounded.

Meanwhile, disease was wreaking havoc in the city. Four to five hundred people were dying there every day. The living were no longer sufficient to bury the dead, and corpses lay in the streets and cemeteries, or were placed in sacks and piled up in front of church doors. The putrefaction that decomposed them infected the city, when they hadn't already been consumed by the flames of the burning houses as the defenses retreated. Moreover, the garrison was beginning to run short of basic necessities: therefore, Palafox sent out a boat during the night, manned by seven men, to inform the Duke of the Infantado, whom he still assumed to be at the head of an army in Cuenca, of the critical situation in Zaragoza. This boat went down the Ebro at three o'clock in the morning; but having been sighted, it was boarded by a pontoon sergeant who had embarked in a skiff with a few men. Three of the Spaniards were killed; three others were taken prisoner; the seventh jumped in and managed to escape, although wounded in the head by several strokes of the oar.

A few days later, to maintain the enthusiasm of the Spaniards, Palafox promised to grant letters of nobility to the twelve peasants who distinguished themselves most by their courage¹.

DAY of 2 February.

Attack on the right. We recaptured in Pabostria Street all the houses we had lost the previous day on the side opposite the rampart, and in Quemada Street we reoccupied almost the entire first island on the right, up to Calle de los Clavos. Several soldiers fell victim to their curiosity and imprudence by appearing in the open at the windows to see what was happening, the enemy

¹ See supporting documents, no. 29.

always having skirmishers in ambush on the roofs, behind the chimneys, and in the houses. We also advanced considerably into the houses between Palomar Street and Pozo Street. These advances, on both the right and the left, forced the besieged to abandon a large part of the intermediate ground; so that by evening we occupied the entire Calle del Turco, half of the two islands between Calle de los Viejos and Calle de Añón, as well as Calle del Torre and Calle del Pozo in their entirety up to the corner of Calle de Palomar. These conquests were made despite the fire of the Spanish who were enfilading Calle de Palomar. Colonel Rogniat of the Engineers was wounded by a bullet in the hand in Calle del Pozo, but not seriously enough to resign from his command of the Engineers. Lieutenant Morlet of the Engineers was wounded by a bullet in the heel. At the breach in the center, near the Palafox battery, a path was opened to bring field artillery into the city.

Attack on the center. To the right of Santa Engracia Street, two tunnels were driven under the street that separated us from the Convent of the Daughters of Jerusalem to reach the base of the convent and that of a house adjacent to our right. Between these two tunnels, a cellar was found, from which the miners entered a gallery to build a third blast furnace and blow up the enemy if they remained in the convent after the first two had been detonated. The work was already well underway when we heard the enemy miner approaching us from the right-hand tunnel. An overloaded explosive mine was quickly built and set alight at half past five in the morning. The explosion nearly destroyed all the houses near the convent and also crushed our two tunnels to the left. The enemy must have suffered heavy losses, as they occupied the entire area we blew up, and their miners, safe in their position, had not ceased working. It was necessary to wait for the capture of the convent to take shelter in the ruins. New furnaces were immediately started to maintain a constant presence beneath the site. All day, efforts were made to establish communication routes in the houses along Santa Engracia Street.

On the left side of this street, access was still blocked by the burning houses.

Attack on the suburb. The work begun the previous night was improved.

36th NIGHT, of 2 to 3 February.

Attack on the right. Work continued to improve communication routes and barricades. The opening of Pabostria Street onto Quemada Street was closed off with a traverse made of gabions and sandbags.

Our losses in the last twenty-four hours amounted to seven men killed and twenty wounded.

Attack on the center. Efforts were concentrated on the Convent of the Daughters of Jerusalem. A house near Ballesta Street, from where the enemy was harassing our right flank, was set on fire. Work on the lines continued along Santa Engracia Street.

Our losses in the last twenty-four hours amounted to seven men killed and thirteen wounded.

A section of trench was opened at the left battery of the Trinitarian convent to post a guard. A thirty-meter-long quarters was constructed on the curtain wall to the right of the convent by reversing the parapet and filling in the ditch. One man was wounded.

Attack on the suburb. The second parallel was completed, with three zigzags leading out to the left to create a half-parade ground in front. The artillery began work on breach battery No. 23, consisting of six 24-pounder guns and two 12-inch mortars, to breach the Convent of Jesus.

DAY of 3 February.

Attack on the right. The advance continued parallel to Quemada Street, but without immediately flanking or crossing it, nor the streets of Los Clavos and Los Viejos, because they were intersecting progress was made separately in each block of houses. The advance also extended towards the Orphanage, located at the corner of Coso and Palomar Street; but progress here was slow due to the stubborn resistance of the besieged. Lieutenant Brenne of the engineers, who was directing the work, was wounded by three gunshots. The siege of the houses on the left side of Palomar Street was completed, and some houses on the right were occupied in order to enfilade the Frailes Street.

Attack on the center. The enemy had set fire to the houses separating us from the Jerusalem convent: it was assumed that they were not strong in the convent, and the decision was made to attack them there. Captain Prost of the engineers entered the convent, crossing through the flames, at the head of a detachment of sappers and a company of light infantry from the One-hundred fifteenth. A fierce battle raged in the apartments and the cloister, and the fire spread to the convent and the church. The Spaniards then retreated behind a crenellated wall, from where they unleashed a terrible volley of gunfire. Our troops were forced to withdraw; but soon they emerged from the right, behind the wall where the enemy had ambushed them, dislodged them despite their resistance, and seized part of the convent, waiting for the fire to be extinguished before occupying the rest.

On the left side of Santa Engracia Street, two houses were taken next to those we occupied along Las Recogidas Street; this cost us two grenadiers and a miner.

The work begun on the curtain wall to the right of the Trinitarian convent and in the houses near the Carmen Gate was completed.

Attack on the suburb. A small trench was opened, leading to Battery No. 23. The center of the second parallel was also improved, where the artillery began work on a new Battery No. 24, equipped with four eight-inch howitzers, to dislodge the enemy from the Convent of Jesus and disrupt communications with the suburbs.

That same day, a popular uprising took place in the city. A bomb fell on the military bed store, located near the Plaza de la Cebada, setting it on fire. Peasants, rushing to extinguish the blaze, found a few beds belonging to the hospital supplies; however, as the number of sick was very high, and beds had run out, these people suspected the storekeeper of treason, and, having

strangled him, they hanged him on a gallows on the Coso River, with this inscription: *Murderer of humankind, for having hidden twenty thousand beds.*

37th NIGHT, of 3 to 4 February.

Attack on the right. We continued the necessary work to establish ourselves firmly in the houses captured during the day, which extended parallel to Quemada Street. Similar work was carried out in the houses occupied on the left side of Palomar Street.

Our losses within twenty-four hours amounted to eleven men killed and fourteen wounded.

Attack on the center. We established communications in the Convent of the Daughters of Jerusalem and in the houses we had seized.

Our losses within twenty-four hours amounted to two men killed and seven wounded.

Attack on the suburb. We emerged, to the right of the second parallel, through two zigzag trenches, each one hundred and sixty meters long, to communicate with the hovel situated in front. The artillery positioned two howitzers and an 8-pounder behind a dike beyond the floodwaters to protect the right flank from attacks. The enemy fired all night.

We had two men killed and several wounded.

DAY of 4 February.

Attack on the right. We managed to occupy all the houses along Quemada Street, from Añón Street to the houses adjoining the Orphanage, opposite the opening of del Medio Street, and communications were immediately established.

We advanced into the island between Palomar Street and Saint Augustine Street, and towards evening, we captured three houses to the right of the latter street, which the enemy then set on fire with grenades, but without being able to dislodge our troops. At the same time, an explosive, loaded with one hundred pounds of powder, was set off at the foot of a house located opposite Oletta Street on the island between Saint Augustine Street and Palomar Street, in order to dislodge the enemy who were stubbornly holding out there. After the explosion, a detachment of Poles entered through the breach and barricaded themselves in. A few men, pushing to the left, occupied the neighboring house overlooking the Coso River. We had two men killed and six wounded, including an officer.

Attack on the center. A direct line of communication was established between the Santa Engracia convent and the Convent of the Daughters of Jerusalem. The miner was tied up in a cellar near the latter convent in order to cross Santa Engracia Street; but the enemy came to meet us and forced us to abandon our tunnel. We simultaneously began work on two other branches to cross the street that separated us from the general hospital.

We improved communication between the Trinitarian convent and the Carmen Gate, which we reached directly by means of a bridge thrown over the Huebra River at the end of the ditch on the right side of the bridgehead.

Attack on the suburb. We improved the approach undertaken in front of the second parallel near the flood, which was extended by sapping through the walls in the direction of the second trench.

38th NIGHT, of 4 to 5 February.

Attack on the right. The enemy, seeing us arrive at the Coso by occupying the last house on the island between Palomar and Saint Augustine streets, began to relentlessly bombard it with two 4-pounder cannons, one positioned on one of the towers of the old Valencia Gate at the entrance to Mayor Street, and the other in the Plaza de la Magdalena itself. We held out in the house for a while, but after taking out a dozen men, we decided to evacuate. The enemy then moved one of their cannons to the entrance of Palomar Street in order to enfilade it.

We built a parapet in Añón Street, thirty paces from its intersection with Quemada Street, to shorten communication along the enemy positions.

Attack on the center. We extended the lines of defense begun to the right of Santa Engracia Street.

We had three men killed and three wounded.

Attack on the suburb. The advance begun near the flood, in front of the second parallel, was extended to the enemy battery. The artillery began a new battery, No. 25, with two 16-pounders and six 12-pounders, to breach the Convent of Jesus and counter-batter the long branch of the suburb.

DAY of 5 February.

Attack on the right. The three houses at the corner of Saint-Augustin and Los Frailes streets, which had been unwisely abandoned after being taken on 4 February, were reoccupied without difficulty. A passageway was created in Saint-Augustin Street to connect with them. The advance continued along Los Frailes Street as far as Arcades Street. Communications were maintained along Saint-Augustin Street. The enemy set fire to several houses we were occupying with grenades.

We advanced through the buildings of the Orphanage Hospital, in the hills bordering the Coso River, between Palomar and Quemada Streets; but we couldn't take the house on the corner of the latter street, nor the adjoining church, as the enemy was defending them tenaciously in order to maintain their main thoroughfare across the Plaza de la Magdalena, which connected both the Coso and Quemada Streets.

Earlier that morning, we had started laying three mine shafts under Quemada Street to blow up the houses lining its left side. After advancing a short distance, we discovered a cellar through

which we reached the house facing Añón Street, which the besieged were not occupying, and which marks the end of Quemada Street on the Coso side. Thirty men were quartered in this house, and a parapet of sandbags was built across the street to provide cover for communication. A battalion commander from the Vistula was killed; several soldiers and a sapper were wounded.

Attack on the center. Work continued on the communication lines and the trenches begun to the right of Santa Engracia Street. To the left of this same street, they extended into the island between Las Recogidas Street and Munitions Street, part of which had been destroyed by the explosion of 1st February; and to provide cover from attacks coming from the left, a trench was cut through Las Recogidas Street.

One man killed and ten wounded.

At this point, the Trinitarian convent was in a state of defense, and its communications were secure. With the engineering brigade stationed there under Captain Henri becoming available, it seemed natural to launch a new attack on the city through the Carmen Gate, which we controlled; however, the army's weakness dictated that we concentrate our siege forces. Indeed, here were our forces and their disposition: the small Morlot division, reinforced by the Fortieth Regiment, numbered only five thousand men and held the enemy blockade before the castle, from the Ebro River to the Trinitarian convent, where it had a strong position, and could not divert any troops for other duties. The Gazan Division, seven thousand strong, was responsible for operations on the left bank of the Ebro. The Suchet Division formed an observation force to hold the surrounding countryside and disperse any gatherings outside the city. Therefore, only the Grandjean and Musnier Divisions, together nine thousand strong, remained for the attack on the city. The troops were on duty in half shifts, so we could never have more than four thousand five hundred men available for internal work, for guarding the houses we occupied, and for the daily attacks. Taking each house required an assault and was always bought at the cost of the blood of some brave men. These two divisions suffered greatly; they were exhausted, and the soldiers were beginning to give up in the face of constantly recurring obstacles, while the enemy always showed great resolve. Colonel Rogniat used the engineer brigade commanded by Captain Henri to conduct the part of the attack on the center that was taking place to the left of Santa Engracia Street, and Captain Prost, who until then had directed the entire attack, was now only in charge of the right flank.

Attack on the suburb. The enemy battery's ditch near the flooded area was filled in, and a section of the fortress was constructed on that side.

39th NIGHT, of 5 to 6 February.

Attack on the right. A shot was fired at the door of a house on the right side of Rue Saint-Augustin, approximately halfway between Place Saint-Augustin and Coso. The men took up positions in the house without resistance and cut a passage through the street to provide cover. Battery No. 14 was armed with four 24-pounder guns and two 8-inch howitzers to support the attack on the left bank.

Our losses in the last twenty-four hours amounted to two men killed and six wounded.

Attack on the center. Work on communication and mining continued on the right side of Rue Santa-Engracia. To the left of this same street, we established ourselves in the portion of the island we had captured during the day; we blocked the doors and windows of the houses with sandbags, and we built crenellations in the walls.

We had one man killed and six wounded.

Attack on the suburb. We extended the right-hand half of the parade ground, begun in front of the second parallel, to the site of Battery No. 26.

DAY of 6 February.

Attack on the right. From the house occupied the previous day on Quemada Street, opposite Añón Street, we advanced on one side to del Medio Street, and on the other to del Rincon Street. We made a futile attempt to reach the church and the last buildings of the Orphanage, which abutted the left side of the main thoroughfare of the Place de la Magdalena. Captain Guéry of the engineers was wounded.

We captured several more houses on the triangular island between the Calle Saint-Augustin and the Calle Barrioverde, which gave us uninterrupted communication on that island as far as the Calle de los Frailes. Captain Nempde of the engineers was wounded there by a bullet in the arm. A field howitzer was positioned behind the middle of the Calle de las Augustins and fired at the Coso house overlooking that street. An artillery company, commanded by Captain Joliciere, had been placed at the disposal of Battalion Commander Haxo of the engineers, the attack commander on the right flank, to man the field guns used in the town, and to operate some small mortars placed in the courtyards of houses to harass the enemy beyond the buildings that concealed them from our fire.

A mine was laid under Quemada Street to destroy the houses still occupied by the enemy on the left flank and to the rear, towards Pabostria Street.

Attack on the center. At two o'clock in the afternoon, one of the explosive mines set up under the general hospital, partially destroyed during the first siege, was ignited. Immediately after the explosion, one hundred fifty men from the One hundred and fourteenth, under the command of Battalion Commander Guillemain, and an elite company from the One hundred and fifteenth, rushed the breach and drove out the enemy who had forcefully occupied the undamaged section of the building. We suffered nine dead, including a sapper, and twenty-three wounded, including a miner.

To the left of Santa Engracia Street, the enemy still occupied several houses on our left in the island where we were located, just before Las Recogidas Street. We approached these houses by passing through two stables, and Major Breuille of the Engineers had two hundred pounds of gunpowder placed against the wall of the last one. The explosion rendered this house completely uninhabitable, and the enemy evacuated it. We suffered two wounded sappers.

Attack on the suburb. The right-hand demi-place d'armes was improved, requiring extensive digging, as were the rear communications, to provide cover from the heavy, plunging fire the enemy was directing from the roofs and bell tower of the Convent of Jesus, as our artillery had not yet been able to fire on the convent.

40th NIGHT, of 6 to 7 February.

Attack on the right. We crossed the Calle del Medio, protected by a parapet of sandbags, and reached the Coso, in the abandoned ruins of houses destroyed during the first siege by the explosion of a powder magazine. We improved some traverses in the Calle Palomar and Calle Saint-Augustin.

Attack on the center. We worked on the communication lines of the houses captured during the day.

Attack on the suburb. We extended the right-hand half of the parade ground to the left. The enemy, noticing this work, directed a very heavy fire from the Convent of Jesus, forcing our workers to retreat. But soon after, they returned to the trench and held their position despite two attempts by the enemy to dislodge them; and, at daybreak, they found themselves under cover. The dike that held back the flooding to the right of the attacks burst under the influx of water, and in an instant a section of the second parallel and the right-hand communication trenches were flooded. A cofferdam had to be quickly built in this parallel to prevent further damage, and a new trench was opened to replace those that were filled with water. Battery No. 25 was extended to the left to fire on the quay on the right bank.

DAY of 4 February.

Attack on the right. Two explosive mines had been prepared to finally overcome the enemy's resistance in the last building of the Orphanage overlooking the Coso; but the Spanish did not wait for their effect. They withdrew at the first demonstration by our troops, abandoning the main crossing of the Place de la Magdalena, which was now outflanked. We had barely begun to settle into the hospital, its wards filled with beds, each occupied by two and sometimes three men who had died from the epidemic raging through the city, when the Spaniards came and applied tarred fascines to the doors and shutters of the windows overlooking the Coso. A thick black smoke immediately rose, and the fire, engulfing the entire building, spread a foul stench produced by several hundred burning corpses. We were forced to return to our old positions behind the walls, waiting for the fire to burn itself out, which took several days. But then it became impossible for us to advance onto the ruins, where we were no longer under cover from the gunfire coming from the houses opposite the Coso.

The house overlooking the Coso, between Palomar and Saint-Augustin streets, was reoccupied. The miner began working under the latter street to attack the island of houses to the right. The triangular island between Oletta and Barrioverde streets was finally occupied. A battery of two 16-pounder guns had been set up on Palomar Street during the night of the 5th to the 6th; at noon, these two guns began shelling one of the towers of the Valencia Gate, where the enemy had a 4-pounder gun, which they were forced to withdraw.

Attack on the center. We seized the remaining buildings of the general hospital, as well as three adjoining houses, and a small alley to the right, parallel to the Coso, which was separated from it by a large white house. The miner started from a cellar of these houses to go under the alley and blow up the large white house that faced them. We also began digging three mine galleries in the cellars of the general hospital to pass under Santa-Engracia Street and attack the Convent of Saint Francis; but the enemy again came to meet our work, threw grenades and shells at us, and finally drove us from our galleries.

To the left of Santa-Engracia Street, we completed the connections between the houses we occupied and Munitions Street.

Attack on the suburb. We perfected the work begun the previous night.

No. 29

Palafax's proclamation to the inhabitants of Zaragoza.

At Zaragoza headquarters, 4 February 1809.

Zaragozans,

Among other rewards I intend to bestow upon the valiant defenders of the city, I have resolved to knight the twelve peasants who most distinguish themselves in this memorable defense. Zaragozans, a similar circumstance gave rise to the gentlemen, the titled nobles, and the grandees of Spain. The twelve peasants who receive this distinction will be covered in honors and glory and will pass it on to their sons and descendants. As there are many contenders, they will have to render most distinguished service to obtain this invaluable favor. Accordingly, I order the army commander, the post commanders, and the district mayors to give me a daily report of the heroic deeds of which they become aware, so that I may examine them fairly and confer the title of knight upon those who have earned it. I myself will arm them, in the name of our august sovereign Ferdinand VII, at the Sainte-Chapelle, where I intend to spend most of the day, and where we will give thanks to our Mother del Pilar for the victory we hope to achieve. Valiant peasants, think of your children and grandchildren, and the blessings they will bestow upon you if you raise them from the common class to the nobility, thus opening the door to the most brilliant positions and dignities. Do not heed the seductions that France's gold so clearly foments, making you appear, contrary to your nature, as cowardly and timid; the enemy believes this will secure his triumph and allow him to slaughter you. Sometimes a quarter of an hour is enough to reach the pinnacle of honor. The day you seriously pursue the enemy, you will repel him and drive him from our soil. The other day, a few more moments of fighting, and you would have forced him to flee from this city, perhaps even from its lines, and since then we would have lost fewer men. Courage, peasants! Valor, unity, and steadfastness! Always trust in God and Our Lady of the Pilar: with their help, we are sure of a swift victory.

Signed: PALAFOX.