

Translated by Greg Gorsuch
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JOURNALS OF THE SIEGES

MADE OR SUSTAINED BY THE FRENCH

IN THE PENINSULA,

FROM 1807 TO 1814.

The fighting had ceased, but not the fatigue: both parties spent the night entrenching themselves. The Spaniards had consumed almost all their ammunition and were short of provisions. Brigadier Torres, who had taken command of the town, wrote that same evening to Palafox to complain of the abandonment in which he had been left and to ask for help¹. On receiving this letter, the Marquis of Lazan set out from Osera with a battalion of Spanish guards, two carts of powder and three pieces of artillery; he forced the passage at the Gállego ford, where we had only a few cavalry posts, and entered the town that same morning. His arrival was regarded by the inhabitants as help from heaven. They had seen that it was possible for them to resist attacks by force and no longer feared them; the prestige attached to the preservation of the wall, and which had made them believe that all would be lost as soon as it was forced, this prejudice, so favorable to the besiegers, was completely destroyed. They prepared for combat with renewed ardor; they made piles of stones and bricks in the houses, to throw them from the windows and roofs; they worked, under the direction of the engineers, to raise barricades, and they built various batteries: 1st in the Saint-Gil Road and at the new market, to cover the approaches to the bridge; 2nd at the convent of Saint-Ildefonsus, to batter the entrance to the del Azoque Road, and deprive us of this communication; 3rd at the convalescent hospital, to cover the rear of the del Portillo Gate and the Saint-Paul district. The peasants and workers operated the artillery; the women brought the burning embers that served as wicks, and the children pulled the corpses with ropes across the Coso, to be thrown into the Ebro or burned².

On 5 August, General Verdier sent new proposals to the governor through prisoners to persuade the inhabitants to submit; they were unsuccessful, and partial fighting began again. The Coso separated us from the enemy. We made futile efforts to spread out on our wings; we fought from house to house; shots were fired from towers, windows, and balconies as soon as our soldiers appeared in the streets. The Spaniards attacked the houses adjacent to the general hospital, which we retained control of, as well as the gardens of the Daughters of Jerusalem. The Santa Catalina convent, after being disputed for a long time, remained in the hands of the enemy, who also occupied the botanical garden, but who evacuated the Trinitarian convent, near the Porte del Carmen, due to a lack of communications to reach it. We established a battery on Santa Engracia Street to defeat the enemy's opposite position, at the junction of Cinegia Street; two other batteries were established on the left, on the Plaza del Carmen, to defeat the

¹ See supporting documents, nos. 11 and 12.

² A sketch of this scene was made at the end of October 1808 by D. Francisco Goya, painter to the chamber of the King of Spain.

convalescent hospital and the convent of Saint Ildefonsus; several attacks we directed against these buildings were repulsed. We lost another three to four hundred men that day.

However, as we were in control of the city walls and several districts, the city was in great danger of succumbing when it was saved by counterattack at Baylen. On 16 August, General Verdier received a letter from General Belliard, King Joseph's Chief of Staff, dated 28 July, announcing the evacuation of Madrid and ordering him to be ready to lift the siege and move on Logroño, so that he could rejoin the army near Burgos, if circumstances required. It had taken six weeks to bring the siege equipment from Pamplona, using all means of transport in Navarre. This province was agitated by the events that had just occurred in Andalusia, and the same resources could no longer be relied upon. Fearing the loss of all equipment, the first step was to destroy the artillery captured from the enemy on the 4th and a large part of the ammunition.³

On 7 August, a new letter from General Belliard revoked the initial order and ordered the attack on Zaragoza to continue. It was then regrettable to have allowed the enemy nearly two days of rest, which they took advantage of to entrench themselves and regain their confidence.

However, General Lefebvre, who had taken command of the siege troops on the 5th, having learned that Palafox was advancing along the Lerida road to attack the city with 4,000 regular troops and a large number of peasants, and that he was escorting a convoy of 600 artillery wagons, supplies, and ammunition, had gone to meet him with two battalions and the Polish lancers. He overthrew the Spanish rearguard near Villa Mayor, captured four of its flags, and seized its pay chest and baggage from the Aragon Volunteer Regiment; but finding himself too weak to attack the main body, he chose a position while awaiting reinforcements. News of the events announced by General Belliard then prompted him to retreat. Palafox entered the city on August 9th, accompanied by the convoy he was escorting, without us being able to stop him. The arrival of this relief brought the inhabitants' joy to a head: the air resounded with their cries of joy; at the same time, with the Spanish newspapers spreading the news of the events in Andalusia, Zaragoza momentarily forgot all its misfortunes⁴.

For nearly three days, almost all our troops had occupied the part of the city they had captured. This position was dangerous; the soldiers were exhausted. General Lefebvre left only strong posts in the line and had the rest of the army take positions in the rear, which were then entrenched. There, the soldiers relaxed from a fight that had lasted three times twenty-four hours and recovered a little. Our advances continued slowly under the protection of the crenellated walls that formed our line. Our sentries, placed on the roofs and in the bell towers, fired constantly, and we were losing men in the most desperate manner; for nothing is more dreadful than this kind of combat. The heat, which was unbearable, further increased the soldiers' fatigue. The besieged defended themselves with unparalleled ferocity; we could only gain ground by setting fire to everything, by moving from house to house, by piercing the walls from one to the other to establish communications and form new lines of battlements. It often happened that when knocking down a partition we encountered the enemy behind who were still defending themselves with the bayonet. The Zaragozans were sustained by the hope of being rescued; they knew that the Army of Valencia, under the command of Brigadier Saint-Marc and the Count of Montijo, was on the march to unblock them, and that the Army of Andalusia had occupied Madrid.

Such was the state of affairs when a formal order from King Joseph, delivered on 13 August by one of his aides-de-camp, instructed General Lefebvre to lift the siege that very night, to advance to Tudela, and from there to Milagro behind the River Aragon, to cover the left of the French army retreating to the

³Translator's note: dates are per the original, but make little sense, assuming the day numbers are correct, it may be 16 June and 28 July.

⁴ See supporting documents, nos. 13 and 14.

Ebro. Our position in Zaragoza was becoming more critical every day; six or seven thousand insurgents had advanced on Tauste, with the intention of cutting off our communications; the corps of Baron de Warsage had returned to Catalonia and was also preparing to act in our rear; our supplies were exhausted, as were the other resources amassed at Pamplona. We had also been forced to send a detachment of three thousand men to Tudela to hold this important position, and the Army of Valencia was now only two days' march from Zaragoza. The order to lift the siege was therefore timely. General Lefebvre had already evacuated most of the wounded to Pamplona and demolished part of the city wall. He set fire to the stores at Monte Torrero, the Convent of Saint Francis, and the General Hospital. The Convent of Santa Engracia was partially destroyed by a mine.

At midnight, the French army set out, the rearguard continuing to fire shells and cannonballs against the city to mask the retreat. Our movement was carried out with the utmost order. In addition to twenty-two field artillery pieces, well-mounted and supplied, we took two 12-pounders, three 8-pounders, three eight-inch howitzers, and three six-inch howitzers; the rest of the siege park and ammunition was destroyed, burned, or thrown into the canal⁵.

August 14th was a day of triumph for Zaragoza. After conducting several reconnaissance missions to ensure our departure, the people flocked to visit our abandoned camps and enjoy the spectacle of our retreat. That same day, our troops arrived at Alagon. The next day, they continued their march to Tudela, arriving on the 16th. General Lefebvre-Desnouettes stopped in this city for four days to evacuate the sick and some of the equipment to Pamplona. He left on the 19th, after cutting the bridge over the Ebro, and withdrew behind the Aragon River, where he occupied the positions of Milagro, Villafranca, and Caparroso, linking up with the rest of King Joseph's army at Lodosa.

Twenty-four hours after the lifting of the siege of Zaragoza, the army of Valencia, which had been held for a dozen days in Cuenca to complete its organization, arrived in Zaragoza; it was about fifteen thousand strong. The next day, this corps, supported by the troops of Baron de Warsage, advanced on Mallen. It sought to disturb us at Tudela; but its advance guard having suffered a setback, it withdrew to the foot of the mountains towards Tarazona, to link up with the other insurgent corps that were organizing everywhere⁶.

The Emperor was very displeased that Tudela had been abandoned: he would have preferred that this city be fortified, and that a corps remain in position there to cover Navarre and maintain free communication with France via Tolosa behind the French army stationed at Miranda. "By abandoning Tudela," he said, "the Ebro line is untenable. This position was also offensive against Zaragoza; it gave us a bridge over the Ebro; we could gather there all the boats that were on that river; finally, it gave us control of the entrance to the Imperial Canal which leads to Zaragoza. Artillery and food convoys take three days to get from Pamplona to Tudela; from Tudela to Zaragoza, three days; but, using the canal, one goes from Tudela to Zaragoza in fourteen hours: so when the supplies and hospitals are in Tudela, it is as if they were in Zaragoza." King Joseph's precise orders prevented us from taking advantage of this important point.

This siege cost us 3,500 men killed or wounded, and the Spaniards 3,000. It exalted the courage of the Aragonese to the highest degree⁷, and set a great example to the other cities of the Peninsula, which all sought to imitate the heroic defense of Zaragoza.

⁵ See supporting documents, nos. 15 and 16.

⁶ See supporting documents, nos. 17 and 18.

⁷ See supporting documents, no. 19.

No. 11.

*Letter from Brigadier Antonio de Torres, commander
in Zaragoza, addressed to Palafox after the battle of
4 August.*

Zaragoza, 4 August 1808, at ten o'clock in the evening.

My Lord, when the enemy had passed the cross of Coso, and the troops had withdrawn to the suburb, I went to Your Excellency's house to receive orders, but neither you nor your brothers were there. Consequently, I believed it necessary to take command temporarily. I gathered in the suburb what officers and soldiers I could, and I brought them back to the city, where I made every effort to prevent the enemy from taking control. After the fiercest fighting, the French were pushed back to Coso, and I seized all the avenues of the streets that extend from the small square of the Madeleine to the Convent del Carmen. The valor of the officers and soldiers is beyond all praise. The French committed a host of atrocities that I do not have time to recount here. Your Excellency is aware that I lack the most necessary items for defense. The major generals and engineers left me only to carry out my orders. Part of the city is in the hands of the enemy. He is at peace now, but only until tomorrow morning; and my position, the most critical a soldier has ever found himself in, gives me hope that Your Excellency will not forget me. So tomorrow morning, Your Excellency, or one of his honorable brothers, will, I believe, bring me relief and supplies, without which neither I nor anyone else could save the city from the danger to which Your Excellency has exposed it by abandoning it to the mercy of its cruel enemies.

God bless Your Excellency for many years to come.

Signed: ANTONIO DE TORRÈS.



No. 12.

Reply of Palafox to Brigadier Antonio de Torres.

Villa Mayor, 5 August 1808.

Mr. Governor, I have arrived on the heights of Villa Nova, where I am resting the troops, I have been able to muster, and whose impatience to attack the French is such that I can barely hold them back. I am immediately beginning my operations, the first of which will be to reestablish communications with the city. To this end, I have given my brother, the Marquis de Lazan, command of the elite troops, composed of the Spanish and Walloon Guards, and I am keeping with me the volunteers, the Catalans, and the Somanténs, who, in my presence, have just routed a detachment of ten lancers, killing one man. If I had not left the city yesterday, the battalion of volunteers I assembled would not have arrived. I ordered them to come and join me, and I had them march in front of me; the same thing happened to me with regard to fifteen hundred men whom I have two leagues from here, and who will join me next night. I am bringing with me four cannons and a sufficient number of artillerymen. In addition, I left two eight-pounders and a howitzer in a place which I will not indicate to you on the paper; I could not bring them with me, because they would have made my march longer and more perilous. I am short of provisions, but I will be able to find some, although the village is deserted. This night a considerable train of artillery should arrive; so all is well, and now our efforts can obtain a good result. What I need most are four hundred field tents which you will have ready to leave at the first request I make. I have ordered the waters of the mill to be left

running, and I will try to scour Ranillas⁸. I am sending you some of the provisions you requested for defense, and I hope you will receive them today. Stand firm; the city's safety is my sole concern. All hope was already lost for me; but now I admire the wonders that Your Highness has performed. May God be blessed; perhaps soon we will be free. If anything new happens, let me know, and ask me for anything you need.

God grant you many years of service.

Signed: PALAFOX.



No. 13.

Proclamation of Palafox.

At the headquarters of Zaragoza, 13 August 1808.

Aragonese and soldiers defending Zaragoza, for two months the French armies, who claim to be invincible, have been besieging this capital, and are using the most cruel and vile means to fight us. Not content with desecrating churches, setting fire to the countryside, slaughtering the defenseless, and outraging the modesty of the unfortunate women whom fate has caused to fall into their hands, they have also ruined your city with more than five thousand bombs and grenades; they have attacked you furiously from all sides at once, and have given you no rest day or night. You have been able to resist all their attacks; your valor, your constancy and the sacred love of the fatherland and religion have made you forget rest and have made you prefer death to servitude and the humiliation of the Spanish name. Your wives and your sisters, the sublime Zaragozains, have erased by their courage all that history has ever recorded; they help you in the midst of the greatest dangers, animate you during the combat, and show their good feelings and their zeal by the help of every kind that they lavish on you. Europe admires the defense of Zaragoza. All of Spain addresses vows to the Almighty in our favor; and when it is known that the sight of so many misfortunes, the complete ruin of so many houses and the horrible cruelties of Bonaparte's vile slaves could not draw a single tear from you, and that you breathe only war and vengeance, posterity may doubt so much heroism, but it will not be able to forget the memory of so many worthy officers, so many heroes, military or peasant, who have made themselves known, and whose names will be published in more peaceful times. Soldiers! already your fate is decided, your triumph is assured; complete the work that you have so worthily begun and let not a single one of these perfidious destroyers of the peace of the human race escape. Already the brave armies of Spain, accustomed to triumph, are arriving by forced marches to rescue you. Be ready, and when the time comes to exterminate this French army that has covered itself with ignominy in Spain, rush forward, and may obedience to your leaders assure you victory.

Signed: PALAFOX.



⁸ End of the suburb located on the left of the Ebro, near Juslibol.

Nº 14.

Situational State of the garrison of Zaragoza on 13 August 1808.

CORPS DESIGNATION.

	Men.	Fusils.	Lances.
3 rd Battalion of Royal Spanish Guards	470	470	
Ferdinand VII	808	300	
Estremadura	925	524	
1 st Battalion of Aragon Volunteers	666	430	
2 nd Battalion id.	1043	962	
Battalion of Aragon Fusiliers	588	588	
Battalion in general reserve	379	334	
1 st Light Battalion of Zaragoza	577	200	
2 nd Light id.	640	85	
1st Tercio of Aragon Volunteers	191	148	
2 nd Tercio id.	195	119	
3 rd Tercio id.	782	515	
4 th Tercio id.	878	500	
5 th Tercio id.	634	164	67
Tercio of D. Geronimo Torres.	327	79	
Tercio of Barbastro	1112	650	220
Tercio of Huesca	1865	1865	
Swiss Foreigners	84	71	
Portuguese Chasseurs	62	62	
Company of Casamayor Foreigners	90	90	
Two companies of miquelets from Lerida	200	200	
Companies of Monzón	156	74	20
Companies of Ceresco	298	298	
Civil companies of Saint-Paul	154	154	
Companies of Tauste.	106	"	
Lancers of Almuña	109	9	100
Company of Benavente	36	36	
TOTAL.....	13375	8927	407

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No. 15.

*Letter from General Lefebvre-Desnouettes to the Major-General,  
on the lifting of the siege.*

Alagon, 14 August 1808.

Monseigneur,

Our situation had changed little since my dispatch of the 9<sup>th</sup>. Deprived of orders from Your Majesty and receiving none from the King, I had decided to continue our operations against the remnants of Zaragoza. However, everything was in place to prepare for a departure that could be predicted to be imminent. The evacuation of the wounded continued briskly, and not a moment was wasted in properly organizing a field artillery park. Our position was becoming more critical every day. The enemy, fueled by the hope of receiving considerable reinforcements, put up the most stubborn resistance. We were informed that six to seven thousand insurgents had advanced on Tauste, with the intention of cutting our line of communication by seizing Tudela, where they were to be joined by the Catalan Corps. Our food supplies were almost entirely exhausted; and General d'Agoult had informed me that he no longer had any ammunition to send us from Pamplona.

In such a worrying state of affairs, I decided to secure our rear completely and await further orders. I assembled a force of three thousand men at Tudela to protect this place from attack.

Finally, a letter from General Belliard dated the 10<sup>th</sup>, which reached me yesterday morning, rescued us from the uncertainty in which we were. This letter contains very urgent orders from the King to leave Zaragoza and take up position at Milagro, between the Ebro and the Aragon River. The retreat was completed last night, without the enemy attempting to disturb our movement. In addition to the twenty-two field artillery pieces with their full supplies, we carried two 12-pounders, three 8-pounders, three eight-inch howitzers, and three six-inch howitzers. Everything we left of our siege park was destroyed and thrown into the canal.

Before our departure, we demolished the city wall and burned the convents most favorable to its defense; that of Santa Engracia, which had presented us with so many obstacles, was destroyed by a mine. The part of the city we abandoned is now nothing more than a pile of rubble through which it is now difficult to penetrate.

Tomorrow I will continue my march to Tudela, where I will arrive the day after. I will be forced to stay there for two days to complete the evacuation of our wounded to Pamplona. From there, I will occupy the position indicated by the King.

*Signed:* LEFEBVRE-DESNOUETTES.

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No. 16.

Letter from General Lefebvre-Desnouettes to the Major General.

Tudela, 16 August 1808.

Monseigneur,

I have the honor to report to Your Highness that the troops under my command arrived today in Tudela.

I will now focus on completing the organization of our field park, which will have twenty-four well-stocked guns; the rest of our artillery will be sent to Pamplona. There will be about twenty pieces that we brought from Zaragoza.

The evacuation of this artillery and that of the wounded, of whom there are only about three hundred left in this city, will require us to spend three or four days there; however, we will devote all possible effort to this task.

I hope that I will be able to reach Milagro, the position the King has ordered me to occupy, without going through Caparroso. In that case, I could get there in a day.

The enemy hasn't bothered us on our march. The corps of Tauste hasn't made any movement. I know that a detachment of the enemy army that headed for Madrid is on the march to attack Mallen. I don't know how far it is from that city.

I have the honor to be, with deep respect, etc.

Signed: LEFEBVRE-DESNOUETTES.



No. 17.

Letter from General Lefebvre-Desnouettes to the Major General.

Tudela, 18 August 1808.

Monseigneur,

The evacuation of the wounded and the artillery to Pamplona will be completed tomorrow. The day after tomorrow, I will march to Milagro, where I hope to arrive in one day.

I had the honor of informing Your Highness that an enemy force was marching on Mallen. A division of fifteen thousand men, having left Valencia under the command of General Saint-Marc, a former captain in the Walloon Guards, arrived in that city the day before yesterday. This troop organized in Cuenca, where it was joined by various detachments of Aragonese. It marched night and day on Zaragoza, arriving there twenty-four hours after our departure. Its vanguard presented itself yesterday morning before our outposts; a cavalry picket charged it, killed about a hundred men, and took twenty prisoners, including three officers. The enemy then left the main road to move towards Ablitas and Mallen, skirting

the heights. I had made preparations to attack them this morning; but I was informed by our patrols that, during the night, they abandoned their position and advanced as far as Tarazona. This is the last news I have had of this corps. The reconnaissance I have sent will soon tell me where they are definitely heading. We believe they intend to reunite with their army, or to go up the Ebro by the right bank as far as Calahorra.

I have learned nothing about Palafox's corps, which appears not to have left Zaragoza yet. Once I arrive at Milagro, I will establish a substantial post at Caparroso, to have complete control of the road to Pamplona.

I have the honor to be, with deep respect, etc.

Signed: LEFEBVRE-DESNOUETTES.

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No. 18.

*Letter from General Lefebvre-Desnouettes to  
the Major-General.*

Milagro, 21 August 1808.

Monseigneur,

Yesterday we occupied the position of Milagro. Leaving Tudela, I had an arch of the bridge destroyed: the insurgents had not yet entered it yesterday evening; but the people had risen up again. I know that a corps coming from Catalonia, which is to be commanded by Baron de Warsage and composed of about five thousand men, must have joined Saint-Marc's corps. Another corps coming from the five cities of Aragon and said to be six to seven thousand men strong, is expected today at Mallen. I would have liked to have been able to fight Saint-Marc's corps, but just as I was preparing to attack them, they moved to the foot of the great mountains; we only saw him for a moment, and in the last position he had taken, an engagement with him would have been fruitless. Since the rout of his advance guard near Fontellas, he hasn't dared send a single patrol, and ours were almost heading for his camp.

I occupy Milagro with two brigades and some cavalry. General Freyre, Portuguese, is with four battalions and a squadron at Villafranca. General Habert is with his brigade at Caparroso; this last post is essential if we want to cover Pamplona. In a few hours we can regroup. I see hope of providing food for a while.

We are beginning to have fevers in the army. I have been very pleased with the conduct of the troops since Zaragoza.

Almost all the senior officers are wounded, killed, or sick; I have regiments commanded by captains. I only have General Habert left for the six brigades, General Grandjean having been forced to leave the army corps due to illness.

I have the honor to be, with respect, etc.

*Signed:* LEFEBVRE-DESNOUETTES.

No. 19.

*Palafox Manifesto on the occasion of the lifting of the siege  
of Zaragoza.*

Zaragoza Headquarters, 15 August 1808.

After such unhappy days, we are finally reaching the long-desired moment I have been waiting for from your constancy and valor in the defense of this capital. We have already seen the shameful flight of these vile slaves of despotism, who abandoned their artillery and all the booty amassed by their insatiable rapacity, and we have fulfilled our first duty, in giving thanks to the Almighty, who has struck with vengeance these miserable soldiers who profaned the altars and sacred images of the Divinity, and whose immorality makes them unworthy of being counted among men. Let us leave their Emperor prey to remorse and anguish, which are the punishment for perfidy, and let us pray to the just God that he may grant to the two armies that are in pursuit of this vile herd of cowards the power to rid the world of them. What then has their invasion produced in our homeland? The blood of more than eight thousand of them flooded the fields and streets of Zaragoza, thus paying for the temerity of the one who commanded them. Europe and the whole world will curse the names of Lefebvre and Verdier, their generals, who rewarded, with the most unheard-of cruelties, the warm welcome we gave their prisoners and their compatriots. The true value of the difference that exists between an ambitious and dishonest system of government and one that has the justice of its principles as the basis of its preservation and happiness, which leads it to establish a difference between its true enemies and those who have not adopted the failings of their nation will be appreciated. France will long mourn the evils that this war with Spain is preparing for it, and it will not be able to think without shame of the infamous means employed to wage it. Farmers, artisans, religious, orphans, widows and old people, who have been reduced to misery by the loss of your fields and your goods, and the ruin of your houses, you from whom the French have taken a fortune which, although modest, was sufficient for your existence, be without worry, you have the happiness of living in Spain, and the glory of having defended the capital of Aragon, and of having prevented our enemies from completely ruining our beautiful province. You have suffered with resignation and hidden your sorrows; you have made little of your fortune, and you have even sacrificed it for the public good; my heart cannot without emotion see so much heroism, and I will not rest until all your pains are appeased. I have specially charged the General Intendant of the Kingdom, D. Lorenzo Calvo, when the serious occupations in which we find ourselves have left him some rest, to take care of the most effective means for your relief, and you can count on the generosity of all true Spaniards, and on that of our beloved King, whose cause we have so valiantly defended, to obtain compensation for your sufferings.

*Signed:* PALAFOX.

