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Charles Napier

Excerpt

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WAR OF SUCCESSION

IN

PORTUGAL,

ETC. ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DURING the inactivity of the enemy before Lisbon, and the festivities in consequence of the Queen's arrival, we were not idle in other parts. Captain Peak had possessed himself of St. Jago, a town twelve miles inland from Sines, but the guerillas having collected in great numbers, he was obliged to retire on the latter place, which was as well fortified as the nature of the ground would permit. Happily I had at my disposal

VOL. II.

B

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

2

WAR OF SUCCESSION

a considerable body of English and Portuguese marines, and two steamers, and was enabled to give succour to all parts of the coast in danger without waiting for the dilatory arrangements of ministers. Captain Peak was reinforced by ninety English marines, under Captain Birt, of the Don John, and about two hundred Portuguese collected from Peniché and Lisbon, under Colonel Almada. St. Jago was again occupied, and the whole country for a considerable distance cleared ; this done, Captain Peak sailed for Lagos, which was again in danger, and the English marines were embarked in the George IV. steamer for the same destination.

The frigate had hardly quitted the coast, when the guerillas again advanced in great force on St. Jago, which we were obliged to abandon for the second time. The English marines disembarked from the George IV., and joining the Portuguese, left Sines at night, and making a circuitous rout fell upon them at daylight, completely routed the whole party, who left one hundred and fifty on the field of battle. This example put an end to their depredations for some time, and the English marines

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[More information](#)

IN PORTUGAL.

3

proceeded to Lagos. The governor of that town Francisco Correa de Mendonca, had done wonders in its defence, and had been a long time left to his own resources. His applications for provisions and assistance had slumbered in the minister's bureau; and the place must have ultimately surrendered but for the assistance I was enabled to give him from time to time. He had been lately hard pressed, and resorted to a stratagem which completely succeeded. By means of spies it was communicated to the guerilla chief, that if he advanced at a particular hour to a given place, the town would be surrendered on making the preconcerted signal. Captain Peak arrived in the afternoon, and having made arrangements with the governor, stood out to sea, and returned after dark to the anchorage.

A little after midnight, on the 17th of September, the signal was made and answered, and the guerillas approached the walls. The garrison was under arms, and a profound silence reigned on the ramparts. They were allowed to come close to the gate, when a tremendous fire of musketry was opened upon them from all points. A sally was then made by

B 2

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[More information](#)

4

WAR OF SUCCESSION

the garrison, and the frigate's marines and seamen ; and as they retreated in confusion, they were exposed to the frigate's broadsides, which flanked the road. The George IV. with the English marines arrived before daylight, were landed, and completed the catastrophe. The loss of the guerillas was very great ; ours trifling. Excursions were made into the country, and the town was well stocked with provisions of every description, and got ready for another siege.

Setuval, the second best port in the kingdom, had been neglected by both parties ; all I could do for its protection was stationing a corvette there, and I became apprehensive that the Miguelites, who had a considerable force in the south, would for once do right and seize it. Captain Peak was in consequence ordered there in the Donna Maria, and Fort St. Philip was garrisoned by the marines ; the guns, which had been very improperly removed, were remounted, and a redoubt thrown up on a high point to the southward of the town, which, if in possession of the enemy, would have driven her from the anchorage. I went over for a day or two to examine the locality, and at once

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[More information](#)

IN PORTUGAL.

5

saw the importance of putting it in a proper state of defence ; and here I may observe that it is quite inconceivable how Don Miguel's advisers and generals could have neglected occupying this port, and garrisoning it. Had they ever entertained the least idea of procuring a squadron, Setuval was a port capable of receiving them ; it can be entered at all times, and would have been a safe place for receiving stores and ammunition from England, which facility no other port in Portugal offers during the winter, on account of their dangerous bars. On my return to Lisbon, a garrison composed of a few regulars and a regiment of Lisbon volunteers were sent there, and the town was put in a tolerable state of defence ; a small flotilla was also organized for the protection of the trade, and to facilitate our future operations on Alcacer do Sal.

General Zegallo was also crossed over to Aldea Gallega with one thousand infantry and two hundred cavalry, a force fully sufficient to have advanced on Zamora, and probably on Salvatierra, supported by the force in Setuval, which could have moved out ; but whether he had orders to remain

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Charles Napier

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6

WAR OF SUCCESSION

there, or had not sufficient enterprize to advance, I do not very well know. After remaining there a few weeks, he was recalled with his men to Lisbon, and the whole of that part of the country exposed to the incursions of the enemy, which, with the command of the Tagus in our possession, never ought to have been permitted. I neither was acquainted with the intention of sending or withdrawing him, and could offer no cooperation; indeed there seemed to be no plan; every thing was carried on by chance, without either system or consultation, as must always be the case when there are so many masters, all pulling different ways. Had the whole command been left to one head, without any interference on the part of ministers, things would have been managed very differently. On the 29th of September the Baron de Sa took possession of Obidos after a short resistance, the garrison and inhabitants taking flight: his loss was only two men wounded.

There appearing no further prospect of any movement against Lisbon by the enemy, preparations were silently made by Saldanha to drive them from their position in front of the lines.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

IN PORTUGAL.

7

Steam-boats were sent to Oporto for the twelfth caçadores and the Scotch and English battalions, the greater part of whom were landed at Peniché. The only effective troops left at Oporto were the tenth and fifteenth regiments of the line, now completed to six hundred strong, and the original volunteers. In addition to these were the first, second, and third fixos, twelve pieces of field-artillery, and some smaller corps, amounting to about two thousand four hundred men.

This force was by no means sufficient for the defence of Oporto, and the Miguelites, by their constant movements, seemed to indicate an attack. They were established to the north at Santo Thirso, about four leagues from Oporto, and on the south at Olivares de Azameis to communicate with Coimbra, Lamego, and Vizieu. Had the Miguelites shewed any enterprize, they would have stood a very fair chance of taking Oporto, and it was equally inexcusable in them not attempting it, as it was in the minister-at-war weakening it to the extent he did. He looked at the returns, which shewed about eleven thousand of all descriptions, but never took the trouble to consider whether

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[More information](#)

they were fit to contend against regular troops or not. Had Oporto fallen, which it ought to have done, the Miguelites would have gained confidence, and the war would have taken an entirely new turn.

At this time the enemy were supposed to have about twelve thousand men before the lines, including one thousand cavalry. Our force might be eight thousand regular troops and as many volunteers or moveable battalions, and not more than six hundred cavalry; in addition to this force there were about six thousand fixos and the three battalions of the naval and military arsenal and public works. The force of the enemy had very much diminished by sickness, desertion to their homes, and to the Queen's standard; though I must observe, to the credit of the Portuguese soldiers, that desertion to us bore no proportion to their losses by other causes, and yet Miguel's troops were ill-paid, ill-clothed, and ill-fed; but the Portuguese are generally true to their colours. The same praise is also due to the Queen's soldiers when suffering at Oporto under every privation. The desertion, though at once alarming, was nothing

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

IN PORTUGAL.

9

to be compared to what might have been expected. The regular troops on the Queen's side were certainly much superior to Don Miguel's, but little could be expected from the volunteer battalions, composed of all classes of citizens, badly officered, with little discipline, and totally unacquainted with war; nevertheless Marshal Saldanha contemplated driving the enemy from before Lisbon.

Independent of the troops within the lines at Lisbon, we had between two and three thousand men at Peniché, under General Nepomuceno and the Baron de Sa; and orders were sent there by the George IV. steamer to march upon Torres Vedras, and be ready to cooperate with Marshal Saldanha in the event of his succeeding in driving the enemy from their positions. On the evening of the 9th of October the minister-at-war desired that I might have the boats of the arsenal and the ships ready, in the event of their being wanted in the morning, to embark the troops at Almada under Colonel Raboca, but without communicating to me Saldanha's intention of attacking the enemy. Next morning he came to the arsenal, and for the first time I was acquainted with

B 3

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the marshal's intention, the minister observing at the same time that he was not himself aware of his plans till late the evening before. Whether this is true or not I cannot say, but it does appear that something must have been wrong in some quarter, if the marshal found it necessary to conceal so important a movement from the minister-at-war and marine, and in consequence from the commander-in-chief of the squadron.

Had the marshal contemplated making a reconnoissance, it was of less importance; but it ought to have been taken into consideration that that reconnoissance might cause the enemy to retreat, and every preparation should have been made to take advantage of circumstances; instead of which all that I could do to assist the marshal's movements was by moving up the flotilla, together with a brig and floating battery, and occupy the ground opposite Sacavem, to prevent a retreat across the river, and this at a considerable risk, because we knew nothing of the force the enemy had in that quarter, and the re-embarking, in the event of being attacked, was nearly impossible at low water. This, however, was done, and there we