

PAGES OF BRITISH HISTORY.

Historical Battles—Noteworthy Events in the Story of the Creation of the British Empire.

(Continued from our last.)

St. Cas, 1758.

The year 1758 witnessed vigorous preparations for the prosecution of the war with France, and it was resolved to make at least one descent upon the coast of that country. Two squadrons were fitted out, and placed under the command of Lord Anson and Sir Edward Hawke.

A battalion from each regiment of Guards, and the four grenadier companies, formed in one battalion, joined the army, which was composed of sixteen battalions, with 6,000 marines, three companies of artillery, and nine troops of light horse, under Lieutenant-General the Duke of Marlborough.

Under Marlborough were Lieutenant-Generals Lord George Sackville, William Earl of Ancrum, K. T. (one of the veterans of Culloden), and four major-generals, Dury, Mostyn, Waldegrave, and Elliot, afterwards Lord Heathfield, the hero of Gibraltar, who led the light horse.

Twelve flat-bottomed boats, each capable of holding sixty-three men in marching order, were prepared; these were to be rowed by twelve oars each, and were not to draw more than two feet of water; and a vast quantity of baskets for fascines, sandbags to form batteries, scaling-ladders, and wagons for the conveyance of the wounded, were brought from the Tower to Portsmouth. So great was the enthusiasm in London, that the Viscount Down, Sir John Armytage, Sir James Lowther, and many other men of distinction, shouldered their muskets in the fleet and army as private volunteers. In all there were 13,000 fighting men, with 60 pieces of cannon and 50 mortars, destined for this useless invasion of France.

By the 5th of June the whole armament was running with a fair breeze along the coast of Normandy, so close in-shore that the houses, the farms, and even the people, could be distinctly seen without the aid of telescopes; and at two o'clock p.m. the squadron dropped its anchors in Cancale Bay, on the coast of Brittany, nine miles eastward of St. Malo.

A small battery of only two guns on the shore was soon silenced; when the commodore's ship with three others opened their broadsides to the land, and filled the whole bay with smoke, while for seven hours every rock and mountain echoed to the thunder of a cannonade which was fired on mere speculation at the trees and bushes, as there was a dread that masked batteries were among them. Under cover of this fire, the flat-bottomed boats, with three battalions of the Guards and eleven grenadier companies of the Line, commanded by Lord George Sackville and General Dury, were rowed inwards and landed safely.

The cavalry and artillery were next disembarked. The infantry, formed in quarter-distance columns, were silent and still, no sound being heard save the uncasing of the colours, and the examination of flints and priming. The night passed without alarm, and the noon of the following day saw the whole army encamped on an eminence which was crowned by an ancient windmill. The inhabitants of Cancale fled, according to Entick's "Late War" and their village was plundered, for which one soldier was hanged, and seven seamen flogged.

On the 7th the Duke of Marlborough began his march for St. Servan and Solidore, publishing as he went a manifesto to the people of Bretagne, that he came, not to make war on them, but on the troops of France. Eight ships, mounting 204 guns, fourteen merchant ships and many smaller craft, were destroyed by him, together with all the magazines at St. Servan, which may be termed the suburb of St. Malo. The grenadiers, as they advanced alongside the ships, threw fire and handgrenades point-blank on their decks and down the open hatchways; but the most destructive missiles were the anchor-balls fired by the artillery. These were filled with powder, saltpetre, sulphur, resin, and turpentine, and had a grappling-hook, which caught alike the rigging of a ship or the roof of a house; and ere long these sheeted the whole place with flames. £800,000 worth of property was destroyed; and with the loss of only twelve men, who were slain by one random shot from the castle of St. Malo. The Duke of Marlborough, on receiving information that an overwhelming force was gathering to attack him, deemed it prudent to return to Cancale

Bay and re-embark; and after threatening Havre, and actually having all the Guards in the flat-bottomed boats to land amid a wild tempest, he returned to St. Helen's on the 30th of June.

But the service of the army was not yet over. It was dispatched to France a second time, under Lieutenant-General Bligh, and the fleet came to anchor in Cherbourg Roads on the 7th of August. The landing was again successful, the troops being quite unopposed, and the fine basin of Cherbourg was completely destroyed. Designed by Vauban, it was noble and spacious. Two piers, one of a thousand, the other five hundred feet in length, had been built; and there were outer and inner basins large enough to contain line-of-battle ships, and closed by gates each forty-two feet in width.

To destroy these, General Bligh had 1,500 soldiers at work making blasts, and so skilful were they in the work of destruction, that the labor of thirty years and the expense of £1,200,000 sterling perished in a few days. All the bastions along the shore, from Fort Querqueville to the Isle Pelee were also blown up: 166 pieces of cannon were dismantled or flung into the sea, while two mortars and twenty-two beautiful guns of polished brass were put on board the flag-ship. Two ships were taken, and eighteen filled with stones were sunk in the harbor, while by beat of drum 44,000 livres were levied on the inhabitants. Ruin and desolation reigned around Cherbourg before the Count de Raymond could muster forces to oppose us, as France had then two armies in Germany. By the 17th of August, after this havoc, our troops were all on board and the whole armament ready for sea, exulting in having destroyed what was styled in the prints of the time "that most gallant thorn in the side of British commerce," our loss being only Captain Lindsay, of the Scots Greys, twenty-four others killed, and about thirty wounded in several of the skirmishes that occurred with out-parties of the enemy.

On the 19th of August the armament came to anchor in Portland Roads. The colors and brass guns taken at Cherbourg were exhibited in Hyde Park, and conveyed through the streets in triumph to the Tower, as the spoil of humbled France, whose time of vengeance was soon to come, when the Ministry, the 29th of the same month, resolved to pay her another flibustering visit—for these most injudicious and ill-planned descents on the French coast, were little better than such—and on the first day of September, once more the fleet, with the army on board reduced to 6,000 men, appeared off St. Malo, and came to anchor in the bay of St. Lunaire, where the whole force disembarked and encamped but a short distance from the shore. General Bligh at once dispatched 500 grenadiers to the small town of St. Briac, where they burned twenty vessels and destroyed some batteries.

A Council of War was held, when the admiral stated the impossibility of co-operating against the strong and beautiful castle of St. Malo, which was flanked with towers, that with four great bastions and the ramparts around the town render it a place of strength, while on the north it is quite inaccessible. All attempts on it were therefore abandoned; and as there was no safe anchorage in St. Lunaire Bay, the ships removed to that of St. Cas, a few leagues to the westward, while it was resolved to march the troops into the interior, taking care to proceed in such a manner as to keep communication with the fleet open. A poor French shepherd was compelled to act as guide on this occasion, and purposely misled the Coldstream Guards, who were somewhat in advance. For this Colonel Vernon ordered him to be hanged. "That officer," says Colonel Mackinnon, "used to relate that he never witnessed a more affecting sight than the efforts made by the shepherd's dog to interrupt the men as they proceeded to put the rope round his master's neck." "But" added the general, John Bull is a poor creature when it comes to a pinch. I could not find it in my heart to put the stubborn fellow to death for his patriotism, and after well frightening him, and almost breaking his heart by threatening to have his dog destroyed, I let him go, and the faithful creature with him."

Lieutenant-General Bligh marched on the 8th of September for St. Guillo, nine miles distant; and next day some armed peasantry, with shouts of "St. Malo for Bretagne!" by a fire from behind some hedges and houses, seriously annoyed the troops while crossing a stream at low water. The general sent a message by the cure of the village, intimating that unless "they desisted their houses would be reduced to ashes."

No regard being paid to this intimation, they were set on fire as soon as the troops had formed their camp, about two miles beyond the village. On reaching Matignon, two battalions of the French line were discovered, and dislodged by the artillery. When General Bligh, who had made somewhat of a circular movement, was encamped three miles from the bay of St. Cas, he was informed that the Duke d'Aiguillon, Lieutenant-General of Bretagne under the Duke de Penthièvre, at the head of twelve battalions of infantry, six squadrons of horse, two regiments of militia, with eight mortars and two pieces of cannon, was within five miles of him, and meant next day to avenge the destruction which had ensued at St. Malo and Cherbourg.

A Council of War was held, and it was resolved that the British troops should embark early that evening; however, by delays, they did not reach the beach until past nine next morning.

The bay of St. Cas was covered by an entrenchment which the enemy had thrown up to prevent or oppose any disembarkation; and on the outside of this work there was a range of sand-hills which could have served as a cover for the enemy, and whence they might have annoyed the troops in re-embarking. For this reason a proposal was made to the general that the embarkation should take place on the fair open beach between St. Cas and St. Guillo; but the advice was rejected, and indeed the whole operations of the little army savoured of rashness and blind security. Had the troops disembarked quietly, in the night, in all probability they would have reached the beach before the French had any idea that they were in motion; and in that case the whole might have got on board without interruption. But instead of proceeding thus cautiously, Bligh ordered all his drums to beat at two in the morning as if he intended to apprise the enemy, whose drums instantly responded; but so great were the delays and interruptions on the short march, that the beach was not reached, as we have said, till nine o'clock, and by that time the French were in possession of an eminence which fully commanded it, and from which their ten pieces of cannon and eight mortars opened a fire with the most disastrous precision, under an officer named M. de Villepatour.

Even then the embarkation might have been successfully achieved, had the transports lain near the shore and received the men as fast as the boats could take them off, without distinction; but many of the ships were anchored at a great distance, and every boat, with a punctilious abuse in such an emergency, carried the men rigidly to the transport to which they belonged, and by this, much time was lost.

The battery on the eminence fired round shot and grape alike on the troops and on the boats, and many of the latter were dashed to pieces and sunk with all on board.

The battalions of the Duke d'Aiguillon now began to march down the hills, partly concealed by a hollow way on the British left, with the intention of gaining a wood, where they might form and extend themselves along the British rear; but in their decent they suffered extremely from cannon and mortar of the shipping, which made great havoc in their ranks, and threw them into dire confusion. Their line of march for a time was staggered; then, deploying over a hill to their left, they advanced along a hollow way whence they suddenly rushed, full of fury and vengeance, to the attack.

By this time the greater part of the British army, including the Coldstream Guards and half of the 1st Regiment of Guards, in all about 1,500 men, under Major-General Dury, remained to cover the embarkation, but having fired away all their ammunition, they found themselves placed between the sea on one side and the overwhelming masses of the Duke d'Aiguillon on the other, without a cartridge in their pouches.

General Dury, a brave and resolute officer, formed them in grand division squares of two companies each, and in this order they prepared, with the bayonet alone, to meet the great force that was rushing against them.

Under a dreadful fire of cannon and musketry, those splendid English guardsmen stood for two hours and a half, according to the French account unaided by sea or land.

General Dury was severely wounded and, rushing into the sea, perished in attempting to reach a boat.

"At length the Guards gave way," says an officer who was present. "The grenadiers soon followed; and as there was no place of retreat for them in an enemy's country, most of them plunged into the sea and endeavored to swim to the ships; several were killed in the

water, and all who could not swim were drowned. At one o'clock the firing ceased and the French sang—"Te Deum."

On an isolated rock one little band stood shoulder to shoulder and surrendered at discretion. There fell Sir John Armytage, Baronet, of Kirkclee, and with him more than one thousand chosen officers and men.

The Sanguinary Insignia of a British Regiment.

Somewhat akin to the party-colored plume of the Northumberland Fusiliers, again, was the red ball which used to appear on the shakos of the light company of the Forty-sixth Foot, says *Chambers' Journal*, describing old English regiments. During the battle of Brandywine, in the American War, this company by accurate shooting made great havoc in the ranks of the enemy, who threatened, when they could obtain a favorable opportunity for revenge to give the marksmen no quarter. In defiance, however, of this menace, and to make themselves more readily distinguished from their comrades, they dyed the ball in their caps red—with blood, according to tradition—in place of the green worn by the rest of the regiment. This distinction was subsequently sanctioned by the War Office authorities.

The Twenty-eighth Foot used to have a singular distinguishing feature in their number badge, which was affixed not only on the front in the usual manner, but also on the back of their caps. On one occasion in Egypt, when rather incautiously drawn up in line, a fierce onslaught was made upon the regiment, in rear as well as in front, by large bodies of French cavalry. There was no time to get into square formation to "receive" the charging horsemen; but the commanding officer, being a man of resources, shouted, "Rear rank, right-about-face. Fire!" The men carried out the order with promptitude; standing back to back, they simultaneously beat off both assaults; and to commemorate the affair, they were granted the unique distinction of the duplicate number badge.

History Repeats Itself.

The Greek and Roman galleys when compared with the ships of the Middle Ages show not only greater stability but, fitness for many uses besides that of merely cutting the water. In one we find at the water's edge a sheaf of twelve huge swords or pongs for tearing an enemy at the water-line, while above are two iron spear-headed rams to be run out violently by a concealed screw, and shaped either to smash in bulwarks or to hook on to or cut the enemy's rigging. From the platform above archers could discharge their arrows or repel boarders.

Other war galleys were provided with catapults, from which great masses of stone or marble shot were hurled upon the enemy's ship or amid his rowers. Some of the larger ships carried great cranes, which, being lowered to an opposing ship, lifted with great grappling irons her bow or stern high enough in the air to render her helpless for attack or defence. These machines, called "corvi" were invented by the famous engineer Archimedes, and was used by him with terrible effect at the siege of Syracuse, where the attacking galleys, according to Plutarch, advancing too close to the walls, were spread or grappled with great iron pongs, and after being lifted from the water by the ends were swayed to and fro, whirled in mid-air and dashed into fragments against the rocks.

Though we may doubt the saying that "there is nothing new under the sun," we certainly find naval architecture repeating itself, for our modern men-of-war are abandoning the open fighting-tops at their mastheads, and using the round basket-shaped fighting-towers which appear so often in old designs of Roman ships, especially of the time of Julius Caesar—in which we also discover a prow, ram or beak so closely resembling those of the Chicago, Atlanta and Main, that we might accuse the later designers of plagiarism. One has a bow the exact counterpart of the British ironclads Lord Warden and Royal Oak now in the Royal Navy.

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The Society is secret in its proceedings to enable members to protect each other and prevent imposition—for which purpose an initiation Ritual is provided, imposing obligations of fidelity to the principles of the Society on all who join it.

The Society is making rapid growth and has lodges extending over Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific shores, having a membership upwards of 12,000 at present, the ratio of increase being for greater as the Society's influence and usefulness is better known. Lodges have been started in South Africa and will soon probably be started in England, etc.

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Any further information will be cheerfully given by the undersigned.

JOHN W. CARTER,
Grand Secretary.

Grand Secretary's Office,
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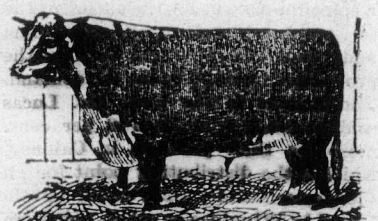
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