

The Taking of Mongat Castle (Lord Cochrane's "raid") July 31, 1808



Lord Cochrane disembarks on the beach.

Historical Events *Background Information*

The French troops occupied part of Catalonia under the command of division general Duhesme whose headquarters were at the Citadel of Barcelona in July of 1808. However, the majority of French troops were intent on making Girona their headquarters and the battle started on July 22 and would last until August 6th when the French were finally repelled. Girona would eventually fall on December 16 of that same year.

Opposition to the French had occurred throughout all of Catalonia and included armies of armed citizens, Miquelets, volunteers in addition to the standard troops that had arrived from Majorca and Minorca. During this time, the English had not been directly involved in military operations in the Iberian peninsula. We only have to recall the order that Moore had given in Portugal for his troops to leave and go to the peninsula in order to support the Spanish, arriving on October 6, 1808. The victory of Bailén took place on the previous 19th of July

and the news of the French defeat had already arrived to Catalonia.

The Royal Navy and Lord Cochrane

Although the British army was no longer concentrated in Portugal, the Royal Navy still played a prominent role throughout the Mediterranean where the Collingwood fleet had managed to block the majority of French ports. The warship HMS Imperieuse under the command of captain Lord Cochrane, was docked in Catalonia. Cochrane was the most famous of the English warship captains and infamous for his attack techniques on enemy positions on the Mediterranean coast. He managed to put all of the French communications systems in check, a system otherwise known as the telegraph. He had also got hold of a signal book that the French used in their coastal telegraph messages in one of his operations.

It goes without saying that Cochrane and his adventures inspired Cecil Scott Forrester with his famous

character Horatio Hornblower and later on, Patrick O' Brien and the legendary captain Jack Aubrey.

The Blocking of Barcelona's Port

In July, Lord Cochrane was in command of the 38 cannon HMS Imperieuse frigate, the old Spanish frigate, Medea, which was seized on the 5th of October, 1804 along with the so-called treasure fleet. (This scene is included in the game Sea and War Captain, which you can see at www.capitaingames.com). In addition to the Imperieuse, the HMS Cambrian was also present (both frigates carried twenty eight 18 pounder cannons, two 9 pounder cannons, and twelve 32 pounder carronades). According to Spanish sources, the commander of the HMS Cambrian was Francis Fane but he wasn't according to official military records. According to military records, Fane would not command the ship until 1810. Therefore, the commander who lead the boat at that time was Richard Vincent.

Both frigates were following orders to block the port of Barcelona since Lord Cochrane was the senior captain and oversaw the operations.

The Castle of Montgat Garrison

There was a castle close to the beach in Montgat. It was actually more of a fortified tower with trenches and approaches that was used as a garrison as well as a strong point on the road that came from Barcelona and ran along the coast towards Girona, Figueres and Rosas. As we have previously mentioned, the French had already made up their minds that they would rather be

in Girona despite their headquarters being at the Citadel of Barcelona. It was therefore of utmost importance to take control of the Montgat castle in order to control French communications. General Lechi (who commanded the Italian division) stayed behind in Barcelona.

It was not clear whether the Montgat castle was under Italian or Neapolitan command according to different sources. The truth was that Lechi's division was stationed in Barcelona and the 1st regiment from the Kingdom of Naples, the 2nd, 4th and 5th line regiments from the Kingdom of Italy in addition to some troops from the 7th and 16th French line regiments were also there. There was also a significant number of Italian cavalry and a contingent from the 3rd provisional cuirassers regiment.

What is clear was that the castle was defended by Italian troops and by at least one company made up of approximately 110 men (men who came from two different units). There were also seven cannons that were used by approximately 40 artillerymen. The garrison was under the Italian command.



The Royal Marines arrive from the frigates.



The two different disembarkation groups unite to attack the castle.



The French artillerymen defend the castle.

The defense troops were lined up in the trenches in front of the castle. They were a set up as an advanced type of guard in addition to troops inside the castle. The artillery was inside within the castle.

Attack Plan

One of the leaders to the French opposition in the area of Montgat in the middle of July was Spanish Naval Lieutenant, Francisco Barceló. He realized in what a great strategic position the castle of Montgat was and he devised an attack plan. According to his plan, French communications would be disrupted if they could take the Montgat castle.

Francisco Barceló saw that the two English frigates were constantly lying in wait on the coast of Barcelona (Montgat was just 19 kilometers from the citadel of Barcelona) and decided to get in contact with the English ships in order to coordinate a joint land and sea effort in order to take the castle. After several failed at-

tempts, he was finally able to get in contact with Lord Cochrane and the English and they finally agreed to support the Spanish attack. The English would first open fire from the frigates and then send in a landing party.

The Spanish had irregular forces made up of armed citizens and Miquelets in addition to some volunteers all lead by the lieutenant Navio Barceló, captains Milicias Juan Solench, Pablo Belloch, Juan Barber and Mr. Remigio Calderó. It is not known exactly how many companies actually participated; some historians say that three did and other say there were more.

It was decided that the attack would take place on the 31st. Spanish forces would attack the castle grounds which were being defended by the French and the English would disembark and attack the castle of Montgat castle.

From the little data we have, it appears that the Spanish forces included approximately 150 men. As far as the English go, we know that Lord Cochrane lead a landing party that was made up of two different groups from the "raids" he had previously lead. The first group included 30 Marines that were the working crew on two ships while the second group was made up of a Royal Marines detachment. We have to keep in mind that following regulations, all the frigates had a working

crew of 48 Royal Marines which included officials and sub-officials. It is therefore likely that the Royal Marines detachment had approximately 40 men.

Therefore, there was a total of approximately 300 men between the Spanish and English against 150 Italian artillerymen.



The Italians take position in the castle.



The French prepare to attack the trenches.

The frigates bombarded the castle and the fortified positions before they disembarked and even though we do not have official data, it is more than likely that there were casualties and wounded men.

Combat

According to the plan, the Spanish would attack the French positions as soon as the British disembarked. The French put up a lot of resistance against the Spanish but withdrew into the castle when they saw the the British were disembarking. Meanwhile, the castle artillerymen opened fire against both the Spanish and the British.

The Spanish made a quick advance and made it castle's grounds where they engaged in hand to hand combat with the Italians. However, the Italians did not want to surrender to the Spanish as they knew what their fate would be in their hands. The British detachments arrived a short while later and after brief combat, the Italians raised the white flag. The Italians asked the Spanish and English to come closer to the castle in order to negotiate their surrender. They agreed to give the castle up only if they could be turned over to the British. Their request was granted. 63 soldiers were taken prisoner (including the captain and two

subordinates) once they were allowed inside the castle. They were later taken to Sicily by the British.

Destruction of the Montgat Castle

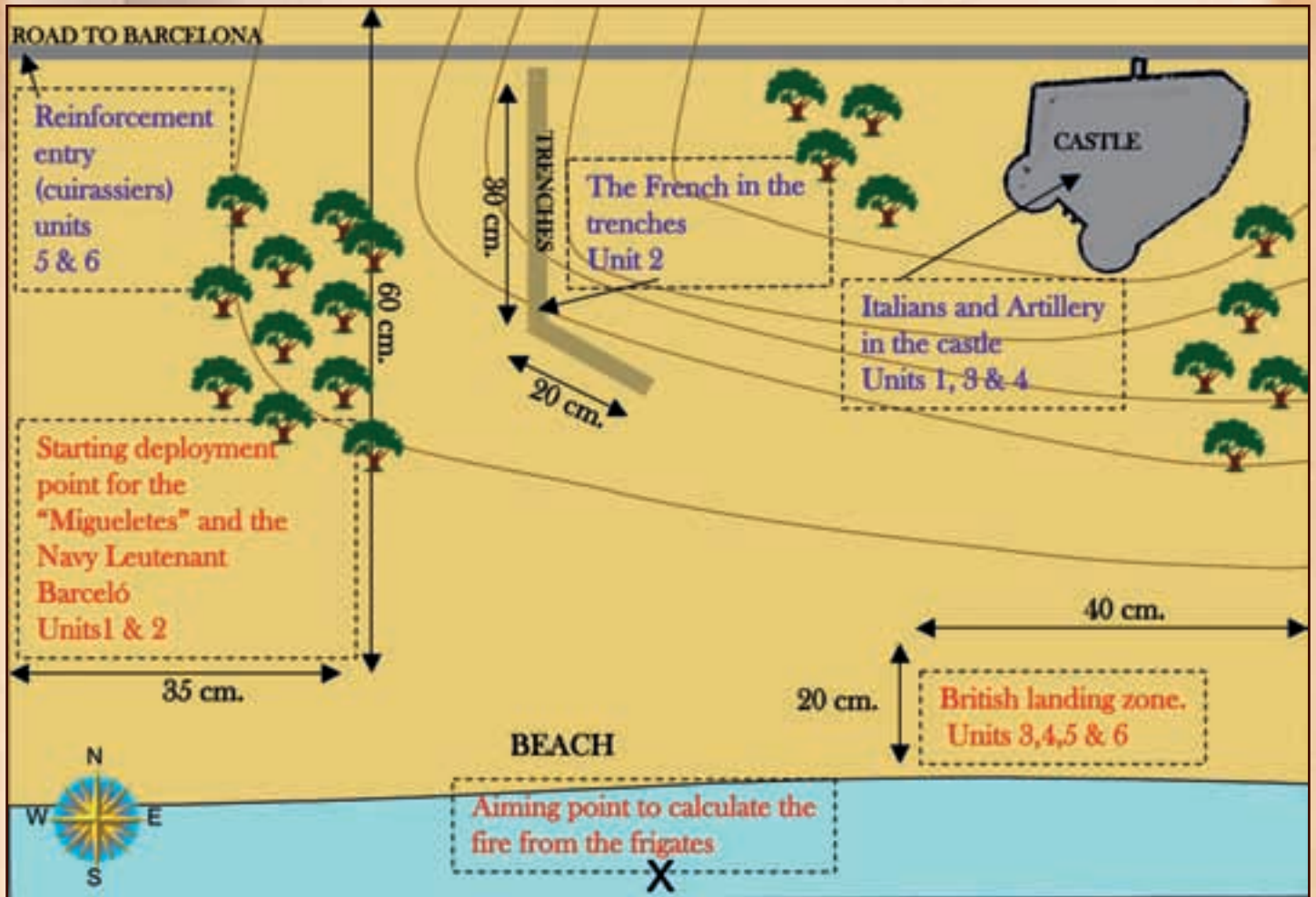
There are several versions as to what happened to the castle once it was taken. The British say that Lord Cochrane ordered its immediate destruction in order to keep the French from using it again.

Other sources that say that the French actually destroyed the castle in 1809.

It seems that the English detachment destroyed the castle at that time. However, it is likely that it was



Fighting in the trenches, Lieutenant de Navio Barcelo leads the attack.



probably reconstructed later and used again by the French who probably destroyed it a second time.

This would be the first operation that the English would engage in during the Spanish War of Independence. A short time later, Lord Cochrane and his marines would become involved in the events at Rosas from November 27th to the December 6th of that same year, but that's another story...

As we have already mentioned, the importance of the Montgat castle raid was not only the strategic effect of cutting of French communication lines but also the British's participation in the Spanish War of Independence otherwise known as the Peninsular War (as the British like to call it).

Scene: *Playing with the Captain*

Many of the events that took place during the Napoleonic wars and more specifically, the Spanish War of Independence, can not be classified as big wars in which tactics and divisional formations (rather typical of those times) were used, which is the case here. It may be considered a blow to authority. Centuries later, it would come to be known as a blow to command.

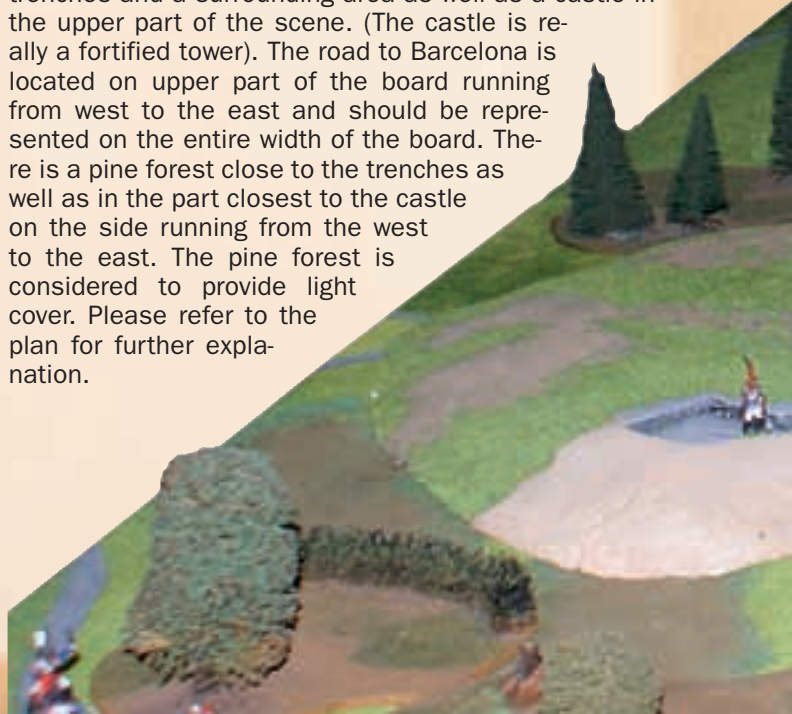
The Captain's rules (you can get them for free at: www.capitaingames.com) are perfect for representing these types of operations since we are playing with totally different units in each one. It allows us to recreate the combat conditions for smaller units (the companies, the disembarkation round, the reconnaissance matches and the advanced squads, etc).

The most difficult part in recreating the scene is designing it so that it is equal for both sides. For this pur-

pose, we have taken certain liberties in the scenes (in terms of "playability"). The scene is based on historical events; however, when selecting units and special rules, both sides are accommodated so that each side has the same chance of winning. This is what we mean when we refer to "playability" in the scene.

The Game Surface

We recommend that surface of the board follow standard dimensions which are approximately 1.20 x 1.80 meters. The scene should include a beach, a hill with trenches and a surrounding area as well as a castle in the upper part of the scene. (The castle is really a fortified tower). The road to Barcelona is located on upper part of the board running from west to the east and should be represented on the entire width of the board. There is a pine forest close to the trenches as well as in the part closest to the castle on the side running from the west to the east. The pine forest is considered to provide light cover. Please refer to the plan for further explanation.



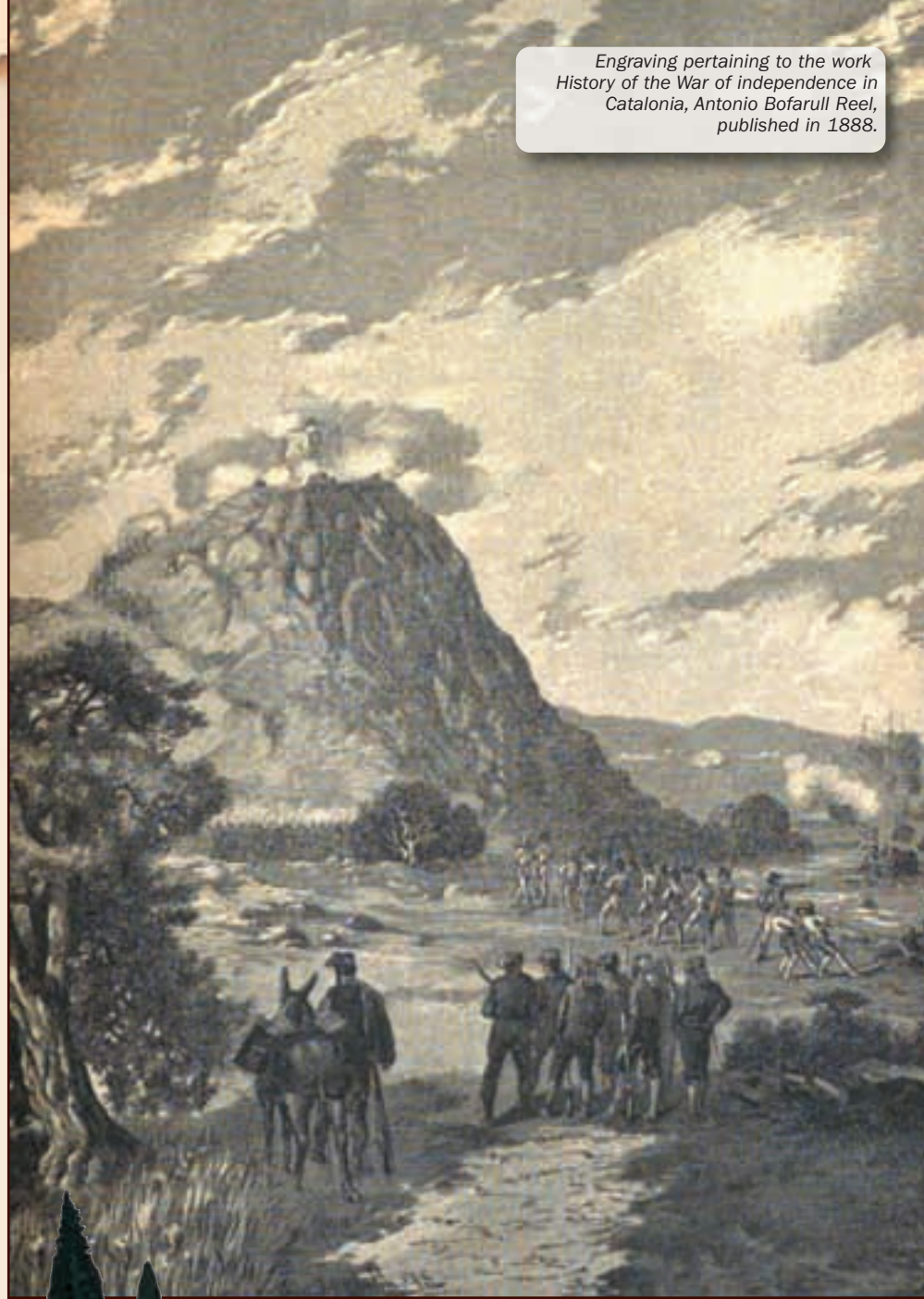
Any unit in the trenches in the area in front of the castle is protected by medium coverage and any unit inside the castle or within 10 cm of the walls is considered to be protected by heavy coverage and counts as fighting from a higher position (10 cm).

We assume there were seven cannons in the castle. The castle artillerymen may fire in any direction as long as their vision angle is taken into account and they will not be penalized for approaching or for moving. However, they may not leave the castle premises.

Special Scene Conditions

The scene is essentially a historical recreation but for the sake of the game, we will assume that the Italians were able to request backup. In order to incorporate this change, a six sided die is thrown on the 5th turn. If the result of the toss is 3 or higher, a detachment of cuirassiers with their commanders can come down the road from Barcelona. If the roll of the die is less than 3, then backup will arrive on the sixth turn.

The frigates may open fire against the reinforcement on the turn in which they arrive, when the reinforcement is sent or they may also shoot at them before moving using a type IV cannon (the crew is considered to be veteran, the cannon is a far range and





The two disembarkation groups and the remaining Miquelets start the final battle at the castle walls.

has cannon balls). Placing the artillery team is seen as if the cannon were in the center of the board on the southern edge (see map).

Unit Layout

As we have already mentioned, the following counters from the Captain's game will be used to represent the units that participated.

The Spanish and the English:

- 1.- **The Lieutenant Navío Francisco Barceló:** Is represented by commanding unit card 14102, Field Helper / Lieutenant Navío San Juan, with all his special abilities. **303 total points.**
- 2.- **The Migueletes and the army of armed citizens:** Are represented by unit card 11210, The Baron of Eroles match, with a total of 12 figure with all their special abilities. In addition, the special Guerrilla fighter rules are used. **545 total points.**
Both units will have 35 cm on the western side of the board available to them and 60 cm on the northern side (see plan). Units may not be placed at a distance less than trench charging range.
- 3.- **Lord Cochrane:** Is represented by commanding unit card 21116, HMS Imperieuse Lord Cochrane, with all of his special abilities. **261 total points.**
- 4.- **The Marine landing party of the HMS Imperieuse match:** Is presented by unit card 21116, HMS Imperieuse, Royal Navy / Landing Party, with a total of 10 figures with all their special abilities. **470 total points.**
- 5.- **The Royal Marines command:** Is represented by commanding unit card 21118, Royal Marines / Captain Atkinson with all his special abilities. **275 total points.**

- 6.- **The Royal Marines:** Are represented by unit card 21117, Royal Marines / 1° Battalion with a total of 12 figures with all their special abilities. **624 total points.**

All these units disembark on the area indicated on the map as well as Lord Cochrane, and units 3 and 4 on the first turn. The Royal Marines, Captain Atkinson and units 5 and 6 disembark on the second turn.

The French:

- 1.- **French Command:** Is represented with unit card number 81105, 5eme Rég. Royaume d'Italie / Capitano Valetti, with all his special abilities. **243 total points.**
The command inside the castle.
- 2.- **The French troops in the trenches.** They are represented with unit card number 51106, 15eme Reg. De Ligne / Grenadiers, a total of 8 figures with all their special abilities. **441 total points.**
They should be placed in the trenches.
- 3.- **The Italian troops in the castle:** They are presented by unit card number 81104, 5eme Rég. Royaume d'Italie / voltigeurs, with 12 total figures with all their special abilities. **569 total points.**
- 4.- **The castle artillerymen** are represented with unit card number 53104, Corps Imperila de l'Artillerie de la Marine, with a total of five figures and an Obus IV and all of their special abilities. **315 total points.**
Both units should be placed in the castle.
- 5.- **The Barcelona back-up command:** They are represented by unit card number 52104, 13eme Rég. Cuirassiers / Chef d'Escadron Robichon with all their special abilities. **269 total points.**
- 6.- **Barcelona reinforcement:** They are represented by unit card 52104, 13th Cuirassiers regiment, a total of 6 figures with all their special abilities. **383 total points.**

Reinforcement should enter on the western side from the Barcelona road.

Total Allied Points: 2,478

Total French Points: 2,220

Tactical Considerations

The allies have a total of three command units. This makes their mobility superior to the French who only have one command unit until reinforcement arrives with their own command unit.

Despite everything, the French are at an advantage in the trenches and their artillery is lethal since they have a heavy Obus bomb launcher. This keeps the Allies from getting closer to the castle in closed formation. They should take advantage of the deployment and unit cohesion.

The initiative of the command is crucial in taking the lead but they should use caution as the French troops could use their special shooting ability.

Victory Conditions

If the allies have taken the castle before the 7th turn, the allies and the reinforcement from Barcelona are the winners although they may be in engaging in combat and withdrawing. If not, the final result should be subtracted from the battle.

The rules, game pieces as well as the unit cards can be found at: www.capitangames.com



Author: Miguel Costa (Designed of the Capitangames rules).

Figures: From the author's collection
Migueletes, Marines, Royal Marines Marine Officials Figures are Steve Barber's Models: www.sbarber-models.clara.net/main.html

French and Italian figures from Old Glory
www.oldgloryminiatures.com

Artillerymen: Front Rank figures from Front Rank :
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