

SIR,

Ostend, May 20. 1798.

Major-General Coote, in his dispatch yesterday, had the honour to inform you of the brilliant success of the enterprize, of which he had the command, as far as related to the destruction of the gates and sluices of the canal of Bruges.

The General having been severely wounded this morning, I have the painful task of detailing our unavoidable surrender soon after.

On our return yesterday to the beach at eleven o'clock A. M. where we had disembarked, we found, that, from an increase of wind and surf, our communication with the fleet was nearly cut off, and that it was impossible to re-embark the troops. The General, well aware of the risk we ran in staying in an enemy's country, naturally exasperated against us for the damage we had recently done them, attempted to get off some companies, but the boats soon filled with water, and it was with extreme difficulty the lives of the men were saved. It then became necessary to examine carefully the ground we were likely to fight upon; and such a choice was made as might have insured us success, had any thing like an equal force presented itself.

Major-General Coote took every precaution the evening and the night afforded to make our post among the sand hills upon the shore as tenable as possible, by directing Lieutenant Brownrigg, of the royal engineers, to make small entrenchments where it was necessary, and, by planting the few field pieces and the howitzer we had on the most favourable spots, to annoy the enemy in their approach to attack us.

In momentary expectation of them, we impatiently looked for a favourable opportunity to get into our boats, but unfortunately it never presented itself.

About four o'clock this morning (the wind and surf having increased during the night), we perceived plainly two strong columns of the enemy advancing on our front, and soon after we found several other columns upon our flanks.

The action began by a cannonade from their horse artillery, which was answered from our field pieces and howitzer with great animation. Our artillery was served admirably; and had not the enemy soon after turned our flanks, which, from their very great numbers, could not be prevented, they would have paid dear indeed for any advantage their superiority of numbers gave them. The force they employed, we have since found, was assembled from Ghent, Bruges, and Dunkirk; and General Coote and myself were very soon convinced that our case was desperate, and that we had no choice left but to defend our post, such as it was, for the honour of his Majesty's arms, as long as we were able. We maintained this very severe and unequal conflict for nearly two hours, in which extreme hot fire was interchanged, particularly on our left flank, which, as well as our right, was now completely turned. Wishing, however, to make one strong effort, Major-General Coote ordered Major Donkin, of the 44th regiment, on the left; with a company of light infantry, to endeavour to turn that flank of the enemy which had made most impression upon us, and Colonel Campbell, with his own light company of the Guards, to effect the same purpose by a concealed and rapid march round the sand hills. The uncommon exertions of these two invaluable Officers, when the signal was made for them to advance, are above all praise; their companies in the attempt were much cut down, and Colonel Campbell and Major Donkin, with one subaltern (Captain Duff); were wounded. About this time Major-General Coote perceived that part of the 11th regiment, towards our left, had given way, and was likely to distress the other parts of the front nearest to it. At the moment he was endeavouring to rally them, and had put himself at their head to regain the lost and advantageous ground from

which they had retreated, at that most critical period, when most conspicuous for gallantry and conduct, he received a very severe wound in his thigh; and being unable to go on; he sent for me from the right, where I was stationed.

We both found that our front was broken, and our flanks completely turned, the enemy pouring in upon us on all sides, and several valuable officers and many of our best men killed and wounded. It was evident we could not hold out ten minutes longer; and therefore we thought it more our duty to preserve the lives of the brave men we commanded, than to sacrifice them to what, we conceived, was a mistaken point of honour. Had we acted differently, it is probable that in less time than what I have just mentioned; their fate would have been decided by the bayonet.

Major-General Coote, by whose bed I am writing, has enjoined me to repeat the praises (and I am witness he has justly bestowed them) on the officers and men which he had the honour to mention in his dispatch of yesterday. And we hope that, although we have not been finally successful in re-embarking, our conduct and exertions, in having effected the object of the enterprize, will be deemed honourable by his Majesty and our country; and we rely upon his gracious acceptance of our endeavours and zeal in the attempt to extricate the troops entrusted to our charge from difficulties both unavoidable and insurmountable.

Major-General Coote and myself would willingly bestow praise where it is due, but, among many competitors, it is difficult to select without appearing to overlook others well deserving. We have, Sir; however, the honour of mentioning to you Colonel Campbell of the third guards light infantry, and Major Donkin of the 44th, whose conduct, if any thing could have protracted our fate, had been equal to the difficulty of effecting it. Captain Walker commanding the royal artillery, Captains Wilson and Godfrey, and Lieutenants Simpson, Hughes, and Holcroft, all of the same distinguished corps, after having done every thing which men could do, spiked their guns, and threw them over the banks, at the moment the enemy were possessing themselves of them. The latter gentleman, Lieutenant Holcroft, when all his men were wounded except one, remained at his gun doing duty with it to the best of his ability. Captain Gibbs of the 11th, and Captain Halkett of the 23d light infantry, eminently distinguished themselves by their cool intrepid conduct during the whole time.

All the gentlemen of the Staff conducted themselves much to the satisfaction of Major-General Coote and myself.

To Captain Cumberland of the 83d, and Cornet Nixon of the 7th light dragoons, who flatteringly offered to accompany me, and who acted as my Aid-de-Camp, I am much indebted; their attention and activity I found of most material service.

Mr Lowen, volunteer, attached to the 23d light infantry, was twice wounded, and was particularly conspicuous, and remarked as a most promising soldier. We think it but justice to the enemy to say, that our wounded are treated with humanity, many of them are in the hospital of this town, and are well attended by their surgeons.

Our numbers on shore were about 1000 men, of which we are afraid there are from 100 to 150 killed and wounded. The enemy, by all accounts, have lost about the same number; but it is impossible to give any just return of the number we have lost till we hear from Bruges, where the prisoners were sent.

I have the honour to be, &c.

(Signed) HARRY BARRARD, M. G.

Right Hon. Henry Dundas, &c.