

HALBM: 1951-1953

LETTER FROM COL. A. TRANT TO GEN. BERESFORD,
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, PORTUGUESE ARMY,
REPORTING THE CAPTURE OF COIMBRA

Coimbra
7th October 1810
8 p.m.

Sir,

I have much pleasure in acquainting Your Excellency with my having successfully attacked the Town of Coimbra this day with the loss of only a few men killed and wounded.

In my letter of the 6th I had the Honor to inform you that it was my intention to proceed to Mealhada in the course of that day with an expectation of forming a junction with the Corps under the command of Brig.^{re} Gen.^l Miller and Col.^l Wilson, and combineing an attack on this city. But on my arrival there I learnt that those two corps were delayed from want of supplies in the very exhausted district extending immediately North of Busaca, and that the Cavalry attached to them could not move forward in consequence of the fatigue it had experienced in its previous marches.

I had now no other alternative in order to prevent any measures of defence taking place at Coimbra from whence I was only three short leagues distant, than to proceed on with my own division of the enemy's troops and have proved a reasonable supply to our own.

Amongst the prisoners are I should suppose about 80 officers — the Commiss.^{re} Ordinaire em Chef Mr. Flandin who represented as Governor will remain sick at Coimbra.

From the nature of the attack your Excellency will easily conceive how difficult it was to control the Soldiers or prevent the Armed Peasantry from plundering — those latter I am

sorry to say committed acts of violence, but I believe not more than Six or Eight Frenchmen were the victims of their Resentment.

I should here observe that nothing can possible exceed the state of wretchedness in which I found the city — the Enemy not content with sacking it to the very utmost extent, and stripping the few housekeepers who remained of even their personal cloathing — had wantonly sett fire to several houses and had heaped into the streets the wrecks of Furniture, eca, which they could not take with the Army — it could not therefore be expected that soldiers of whom about 800 were natives of the Town and its neighbourhood accompanied by their wretched relations could patiently witness a scene of devastation in which their properties had been thus unjustifiably destroyed.

I request Your Excellency however to be persuaded that every possible exertion has been used to give protection to the French who have fallen into our hands and after the first moments I succeeded in securing them from insult.

As Brig.^d Gen.^l Millar and Col.^l Willson's corps will arrive here to morrow — I propose to leave one of my Brigades behind and to march with the remainder of my Division in an Escort to Oporto — for such is the animosity of the People of this country excited by the late passage of the French Army that I consider my presence absolutely requisite particularly in the intermediate district between Mondego and Vouga.

I shall conclude this Report by assuring your Excellency that the spirit of the Militia upon this occasion was such as would do credit to any Troops of the line — and I have observ'd no Individual Exception — I do not therefor compliment any particular officer.

I have the Honour to be

Sir —

Your Excellency's most obedient and most Humble Servant

A. TRANT

His Exc.^s Field Marshal Beresford
Commd.-in-Chief of the
Portuguese Forces.

Colonel Trant
8th Oct. 1810