

## Sir Sidney Smith..... the heroic sailor

*By Kenneth H. Light*



**Sidney Smith as a Commodore in 1802, after the Siege of Acre<sup>1</sup>**

Brazilian historians have heard of Admiral Sir Sidney Smith principally and, almost exclusively, because of his participation in the journey of the Royal Family and court of Portugal to Brazil, in 1807-08. At the time he commanded the squadron stationed off the coast of Portugal. Subsequent to the arrival of the Royal Family, he became the first commander-in-chief of the naval base in Rio de Janeiro for two years.

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<sup>1</sup> Painted by Robert Ker Porter in early 1802, depicting how Smith looked during the Battle of Alexandria when General Ralph Abercrombie was mortally wounded. Smith had been hit in the right shoulder by a spent musket ball causing a painful contusion. The arm sling is made from the Turkish sash he wore during the Siege of Acre.

Upon safe arrival to Brazil after having escorted the Portuguese Royal Family, Smith was awarded by the Prince-Regent D. João VI the newly restored Order of the Tower and Sword. Whilst in Brazil he became interested in helping D. Carlota Joaquina in her ambition to rule a country of her own – Argentina. Abundant correspondence from him in French and from her in Spanish testifies to this ambition.<sup>2</sup> But this period of two years was, perhaps, the quietest in his agitated life.

A national hero in England whilst still alive, his accomplishments were the theme for many productions in the variety theatres of that time. His name was sung and recited in verse, in numerous pamphlets published in London, and distributed throughout the land. No other naval commander, with the exception of Nelson killed at the Battle of Trafalgar, received so much glory so soon.

Whilst the hero Nelson was recognized as such on a scale never before or afterwards seen, the same did not happen to Sidney Smith. Nelson was remembered by a statue on a majestic pedestal in one of London's most important squares. His mortal remains were buried in St. Paul's Cathedral – a rare honour. His funeral procession was led by the six royal dukes and thirty two admirals! As he had no legitimate descendants, the honours and pecuniary reward went to his brother, William; in addition to being created an earl, he was given £99,000 to buy a suitable estate and an annual pension of £5,000 in perpetuity. These values today would be £4 million and £200,000 respectively.

On the contrary, England was slow to officially recognize Sidney Smith's triumphs. Other countries – Portugal, the Ottoman Empire, the Kingdom of Two Sicilies, and Sweden – recognized his contribution and decorated him. Only in 1838, at the age of 74 and two years before his death did the young Queen Victoria award him the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath – at last he was an English knight!! The last few years of his life were spent in Paris, where he died and was buried in a simple grave in the Père Lachaise cemetery.

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<sup>2</sup> Held in the Imperial Museum of Brazil in Petrópolis.

Why these so evident differences?

We hope that, in describing his life, filled with many victories and a few defeats, and his complex character, we may contribute to answer this enigma. The little known history of this hero, who so much contributed in the fight against Napoleon and who was closely connected with Brazil during the years 1807-1810, began in London, in 1764, where he was born.

His first few years were very complicated. His father, Cornelius Smith, was considered an adventurer and a libertine. He met Sidney's mother, daughter of a rich City merchant, when she was over 30 – well past the age for arranging a husband, especially as life-spans, at that time, were much shorter than today. They eloped and her father, Pinkney Wilson, promptly disinherited her and renounced any contact with her and the three children that she bore. The intervention of an aunt was required to persuade the grandfather to pay for the education of his grandson. His parents were separated but, even then, Cornelius Smith did not give up writing to his father-in-law begging for money – many times young Sidney was the bearer of this correspondence, in the hope of obtaining a favourable decision.

His naval career began at the age of 13. Today, this method of entering the Royal Navy appears strange; at that time however, it was considered the most convenient way. Every naval captain had the right to 4 servants for every 100 men of the crew of the ship he commanded. In order for one to have a clearer idea, the most popular ship of the line, a 74 (gun) had a compliment of 600 men – so 24 servants! In practice the majority of these posts were kept for the captain's friends, who wanted to start their sons off in a naval career.

His first posting was to the *Tortoise*, a 32 gun store ship. Her captain acted as if he was in command of a frigate – on his first day they stopped three ships, firing across their bows. Three months later they left for America, escorting merchant ships. It was there Smith was transferred to the *Unicorn* for the return trip. Whilst still off the

American coast he had his first exposure of battle. Whilst sailing in company with the *Experiment* they sighted the American frigate *Raleigh* and gave chase. *Unicorn*, arriving first, faced the *Raleigh* alone during three hours, until the *Experiment* could reach them. The brig lost 13 men and many wounded – including Smith whose forehead was opened by a splinter. Smith's luck was only just beginning, for during the journey, with a hard gale blowing, a squall broached the brig on her side. Smith, below in the sail locker, managed to scramble up to the top deck and help jettison the guns to right the ship!

His next transfer to the line-of-battle ship *Sandwich*, in September 1779, was very important – she was the flagship of the Channel Squadron, under the command of one of England's most famous admirals, Rodney. In January they captured a convoy of 23 merchant ships together with its escorting Spanish battle ship. A week later, near Cape St. Vincent, in an action that lasted a whole night in a gale, they captured 5 Spanish ships of the line leaving another on fire, which subsequently blew up. The behaviour during action, of the young Sidney Smith did not go unnoticed.

In September 1780 he successfully passed the examination for lieutenant. He must have lied about his age, as the legal lower age limit was 19 and in addition 6 years of service were required. He was 16 and had had but 3 years of service. Now, an officer, he was on the first rung of the ladder that would lead him to the post of admiral.

Next, he participated near Dominica in an engagement known as 'All Saints', against 34 French ships of the line. This battle was important as, for the first time, the line attacked at an angle of 90°, instead of parallel lines. Smith's behaviour must again have been noted as he was given the command of the schooner *Fury* and the task of carrying dispatches with the news of the victory back home. In February of 1784 he returned to England, now in command of the frigate *Alcmene*, with 32 guns and a crew of 300. He was still short of his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday by 4 months! How would a 19 years old son of ours behave with that kind of responsibility?

A peace treaty had been signed with America, France and Spain in 1783<sup>3</sup>; with hindsight we know that it would only be temporary. The need for officers was greatly reduced. However, those who so desired could continue with their careers, even though they would be temporarily laid off. They could place themselves at the disposal of the Admiralty and, in exchange, receive half-pay. Not surprisingly Sidney Smith, whose heart was in the Navy, did so. He thought that this would be a good opportunity to better his knowledge of the French language and try his hand as an amateur spy!

Whilst visiting Normandy he made notes of the coastline and of its defences. He verified that France was proposing to develop the port of Cherbourg as a naval base ‘on the scale of Portsmouth’ – the main English base. He described, in detail, the method being used to construct a breakwater. His observations were sent to the Admiralty. His French, although already fairly good, became excellent. Extending his activities as an amateur spy, he moved on to Morocco. There, in addition to reporting on the coastline and shipping he suggested a change in strategy. No squadron based in Gibraltar, he wrote, could control both sides to the entrance of the Mediterranean. A second squadron was needed based, for instance, in Lagos (Portugal). In fact he was right – even today the wind blows alternatively from the East or from the West; and in those days of sailing ships, with a strong wind blowing, they could either not enter or not leave the Mediterranean.

However his overbearing manner that was to be his ‘Achilles heel’ was already beginning to show itself. He wrote to the Admiralty that he, Sidney Smith, with his unrivalled knowledge of Morocco’s Atlantic coastline, would be the ideal person to command such a squadron. He did not mention that he was only 23 years old! Always restless, his next target was Sweden. That country was at war with Russia but, due to winter and its frozen seas, their squadrons were temporarily useless.

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<sup>3</sup> The Treaty of Paris was signed by the United States and the British on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1783, ending the American Revolution and giving America independence.

I won't describe the battles in which he participated as I would like to concentrate on his character. I would only say that his help in defeating Russia earned him – from King Gustavus – a knighthood of the Order of the Sword and, with permission from the British Government, he was allowed to use the title 'Sir'. His style of acting, described below, reflected his character; it would be repeated on many occasions throughout his career with highly negative consequences.

With great difficulty he managed to reach the main naval base of Kartskrona and present himself to the commanding officer, the Duke of Söderland. Reports indicate that he did not spare praise for himself when offering his services! King Gustavus then invited 'Colonel Smith', as he became known, to join his forces. But, before accepting, he had to obtain permission from the Admiralty, which was normally given for a period of six months in peacetime, provided the navy in question was not that of a potential enemy. Next, he persuaded the British Minister in Stockholm to appoint him a 'King's Messenger', and he set off for London. He imagined that he was the bearer of important documents, but on arrival the authorities virtually ignored him.

After six frustrating weeks of unsuccessfully trying to obtain permission and, fearing that the ice would be melting and that hostilities would soon commence, he set off back to return to Sweden. He wrote to the British Minister in Stockholm that he was the bearer of information that was only for the ears of the King; which was untrue. Well impressed by the young British officer, the King appointed him chief advisor as well as commander of the flotilla of smaller ships. This appointment, as can be imagined, greatly upset Swedish officers. He then wrote another lie to the Minister – saying that he was following the King's ship on board a small yacht and hoped that this did not constitute employment, for which he had no permission.

Even though his contribution had been recognized by the King, on his return to London he was strongly criticized for disobeying the Admiralty and for the death of six British naval officers who had sought employment in the Russian Navy.

When war was renewed with France in 1793, Smith was serving as a volunteer with the Turkish navy; a pretext for continuing his activities as an amateur spy in that corner of the Mediterranean Sea. The news reached him when he was in the port of Smyrna. His immediate reaction, on noting that many unemployed British seamen were at the quay side, was typical. He purchased, with his own money, a small lateen sail boat, renamed her *Swallow* and, hiring a crew of 40 English sailors, set sail. In December they reached the outskirts of Toulon, the principal French naval base in the Mediterranean. Under the command of Admiral Hood a British squadron was blockading the port. Smith was an unemployed naval officer on half-pay and, for this reason, his plan was to make his way to London, present himself to the Admiralty and eventually be given the command of a ship. Whist outside the bay, waiting to start on this last lap of his journey, Hood invited him to participate at a meeting on board his flagship, the *Victory*. The captains present were greatly offended by his presence. Not only was he unpopular but, as unemployed, he had no right to be there. He defended himself saying that whereas they commanded ships of the navy with sailors paid by that institution, he owned the ship he command and his sailors were paid from his own pocket.

Even though he was officially unemployed, Hood appointed him commander of a small flotilla, with 2 captains, 14 lieutenants and 7 midshipmen under his command. His orders – in writing – were to enter the harbour and set fire to as many French ships as possible. I won't describe the details of this operation, just its results. Hood and the Royalists on shore managed to capture and cut out 4 line-of-battle ships, 8 frigates and 7 corvettes. Smith destroyed 10 line-of-battle ships, 2 frigates and 2 corvettes, reducing the Republicans' squadron to 18 line-of-battle ships, 4 frigates and 3 corvettes. The number of ships destroyed by forces under Smith's command was greater than at any battle up until then; battles that had brought honours and riches to the admirals involved. Although Hood wrote that Smith had distinguished himself, many criticized him for not having destroyed all the ships.



**The destruction of the French Fleet at Toulon by Sidney Smith in 1793<sup>4</sup>**

In reality it was but a reflex of his immense unpopularity, his Swedish title, his disobedience of orders and his habit of corresponding direct with the most important person in the Admiralty or in government, thus passing over the head of his superiors.

In London, Spencer, the first Lord of the Admiralty, pronounced himself satisfied with Smith's actions. He recognized his exceptional qualities but, at the same time the difficulties of managing an individual with an almost insane desire to promote himself, who believed that only his opinion was correct and who had the conviction of implementing it, even though it meant disobeying his superiors' orders. Smith was proclaimed, by the people, the hero of the new war.

Always alive with new ideas, Smith now argued that the north coast of France should be attacked and that boats of shallow draught should be employed, as they could get close to areas that were weakly protected. Spencer accepted his suggestions and during the next two

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<sup>4</sup> View of the conflagration effected at Toulon on the night of the 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1793 under the direction of Sir Sidney Smith: painted by Archibald Robertson, 1794.



years, Smith, in command of a flotilla of shallow vessels and fire ships (boats that were set on fire and then, without a crew, directed at the enemy), constantly harassed the enemy. Spencer, knowing his character well, maintained him as a direct subordinate to the Admiralty, rather than attaching him to the Channel Squadron. I would like to relate just three of the many actions that took place during this period.

The first, in 1796, occurred when the Admiralty received confidential information that the French Squadron had sailed from their home base, Brest. Smith received orders to check this information. As the harbour was not visible from the open sea, he would have to first sail through a narrow, well protected, channel before entering the port. Preparations included disguising the *Diamond*, so that she looked like a French frigate and likewise the officer's uniforms. Her identity was suspected and then confirmed whilst still in the port; it was through Smith's excellent command of French and his extreme self-confidence that enabled him to escape from being captured.

The following year, Smith followed a convoy of 9 French ships into the port of Herqui, on the Brittany coast. He captured and then burnt them and later captured the forts that protected the harbour and spiked their guns. The lieutenant who had led the capture of the forts sailed for London with dispatches describing the victory, together with the captured ensign as a present for the Admiralty. People in the streets of London went wild with excitement and Covent Garden put on an Operetta, '*The Point in Herqui or The Triumph of British Courage*'.

The third episode occurred because Smith believed that it was possible to sail up the Seine and attack Bonaparte in his own capital. In April of that year he decided to enter the port of Le Havre, the estuary of the Seine. His plan was to reconnoitre the area – which would come in useful later should his plan to attack Paris come to fruition – and capture the *Vengeur* – a lugger privateer which occasionally attacked British merchant ships. During the night, he silently led several officers and 24 seamen into the port in 4 small rowing boats. The lugger was quickly taken, but the lack of wind prevented them sailing her out of

the harbour. Worse, her anchor cable had been cut and no spare anchor was to be found onboard. In spite of their best efforts to tow her against the current, she was drifting to an area where various other French boats lay at anchor. The same lack of wind prevented the *Diamond* coming in to help. When daylight came, it was obvious to all what had happened. As several vessels moved to attack the *Vengeur*, Smith put the crew on shore and prepared his defence. After an hour of firing, there being no escape, Smith hauled down the ensign after delivering a short speech to his crew. He was now a prisoner-of-war and was to waste two years.

Imprisoned in Paris, he ran the risk of being sent to the guillotine. Whereas as a naval officer he could expect to be treated decently and even be exchanged for one of the French officers held in England, his life was at risk, as the French claimed that he was a spy. There were many Royalists in France at the time who carried out a guerrilla war against the Republican regime. A small group began preparations to spring the ‘Lion of the Seas’, as he was known on both sides of the Channel, from his jail. They even rented a house that overlooked the window of Smith’s cell and signal language was invented to communicate with him. Depending on the warder of the jail at the time, Smith obtained certain liberties. He was allowed out into the town, during daylight hours, without being accompanied. He had given his word, as an officer, that he would not escape – which was considered to be more secure than handcuffs! One day, news reached him that he was going to be moved from his jail, which did not surprise him, as he had already been moved several times. Once in the carriage his guards revealed that they were, in fact, Royalists. The haste to get away was very nearly their downfall for their carriage overturned in an accident which led to their discovery. Chased across Northern France to the coast, they managed to put him on board a boat for the short crossing.

‘The Lion has returned’, the crowds shouted excitedly in the streets of London; once again his popularity was with the common people. Spencer received him in the Admiralty, Prime Minister William Pitt in Parliament and, at last, he was called to the presence of the King.

Meanwhile, at various ports in the Mediterranean, Bonaparte was collecting together a sizable army, whose destiny was unknown. There was, of course, much speculation, but nothing definite. Mystery deepened when ‘intelligence’ was received that 167 ‘savants’, as scientists were then known, were gathered ready to embark. Yes, this was the force with which Bonaparte planned to establish an empire in the East – first occupying Egypt and then taking the rich colony of India away from Britain. Nelson, who was subordinate to Admiral Jervis and based in Lisbon, received orders to investigate what was being planned for these French forces. He arrived too late – they had already sailed! The next two months were spent looking for them. No mean task in such a wide area. At last, on the 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1798, he found them. The squadron lay in the Bay of Aboukir, between Alexandria and the Nile delta. In what must rank as one of the most extraordinary battles in all naval history, Nelson annihilated the squadron that had taken the troops to Egypt, combining the highest degree of daring, courage and seamanship. The French now had no option. To reach India they would have to march up the coast through Syria (now Israel) and attack Constantinople, and then head eastward across Persia to reach India.



**British troops land at Aboukir under fire, Smith stands in the foreground**

In London, Smith's name was remembered as someone who had good connections with the Sublime Porte – as the Ottoman Empire was then known – as he had served in their navy. Thus, gathering together a crew, including seamen from the *Diamond*, French Royalist friends, and many others, Smith sailed in the line-of-battle ship *Tigre*. His orders were to place himself under the command of Admiral St. Vincent, off Cadiz or in Gibraltar. Before leaving, the Foreign Minister nominated him joint Minister Plenipotentiary to the Ottoman Empire (the other minister being his younger brother, Spencer). The strategy was to take advantage of the fact that French forces had invaded Egypt, part of the Ottoman Empire, and thus make the Sultan an ally. Hopefully his forces would then be available to fight the French invaders.

In normal times, the two functions, of Captain in the Navy and Minister Plenipotentiary, would be complicated to manage and with Smith's character it was foreseeable that confusion on a grand scale was inevitable. And that is exactly what happened! Everyone complained about Sidney Smith. Some, such as Nelson, complained that he failed to show due respect required from a junior officer to an admiral when writing; but Smith believed that, as a senior diplomat, he was of a higher rank than an admiral! Others said that he did not respect the central command and that he took over ships belonging to other squadrons and that he flew the ensign of a Commodore – without having received the appointment. He wrote letters direct to the Admiralty, even though there were officers two ranks senior to him in the Mediterranean fleet. Nevertheless, his relationship with the Turkish authorities was a total success. Wearing typical clothes, complete with turban and moustache, he was elected to be a member of their highest council – the Divan.

Bonaparte meanwhile, after an easy victory over the Turks, proceeded to occupy Egypt. It was not long before his original plan began to be implemented. An army comprising some 10,000 infantry, 800 horses, and several hundred dromedaries set off, marching east and then north. As towns were captured – Gaza in February 1799, followed by Jaffa and El Arish – their inhabitants were all put to the sword.

The next town that stood in their way was Acre (today near the frontier between Israel and Lebanon). They expected to take it easily, in the same way that they had captured other towns. It was here in this fortress town of 15,000 souls that Sidney Smith decided to make his stand. Commanding in person – many times during the day and at night



**Commodore Smith at Acre, 1799**

on the fortified walls of the town – he led a mixed force of Turkish troops, Albanese mercenaries, Syrians, Kurds, and British sailors and marines, and managed to halt the advance of the French. Cannons, gun powder and shot were landed from the ships to reinforce the defences of this town which dates back to the Crusades. At sea, ships under his command destroyed the French reinforcements and provisions, as well as siege equipment being brought up to breach the walls.

The siege lasted two months. At first long-distance shots were fired to try and breach the walls so that infantry could get into the town. When this proved unsuccessful, a more direct approach was tried, digging adjacent to and under the walls, to place explosives. Many times this led to hand-to-hand fighting outside the walls and, when these were breached, even inside the first line of defence. Bonaparte watched and gave his orders from a distance. In the end, having lost half the army, in the fighting and through disease, he gave up and started the march back. It was the greatest feat in Sidney Smith's career. Many compare this victory with that of Nelson, at Trafalgar!

In fairness to Nelson, he heard of the results of the siege of Acre at the same time that he heard of Smith's diplomatic responsibilities (a failure in communications). Now he understood that Smith was not lacking in respect when writing to him. Nelson, as was his character, was extremely generous with his praise – '...the immense fatigue you have had in defending Acre ... has never been exceeded and the bravery shown by you and your companions merit every encomium that the civilized world can bestow ... Be assured, dear Sir Sidney of my esteem and regard ...'. In turn, the Sultan bestowed upon him the *chelengk* (a cluster of feathers, covered in diamonds, mounted on a rosette of diamonds that could be made to rotate by winding a clockwork motor, this, to be worn on a turban), and made him Companion of The Imperial Ottoman Order of the Crescent.

The months that followed were the most confused in Sidney Smith's career. In the unsuccessful fight to take Acre, Bonaparte lost so many men that he now realized that the Eastern Empire project would have to wait. In spite of Smith's warnings to the Admiralty to be on the look-out, Bonaparte sailed in the frigate *Murion* and reached France. Smith was again caught in a dilemma. As Nelson, his naval commander, made it clear that there was to be no negotiation and that not a single French soldier was to be allowed to return to France; his instructions, as Minister from London and reinforced by the Sultan, were to get the French out of Egypt and the Levant, by any means possible. After intense diplomatic activity, led by Smith, the treaty of El Arish was agreed between France and Turkey, although not signed by Smith – the French army would be allowed to return home.

When the news reached the British government, it repudiated the treaty. Seen as the only solution, troops were landed and, at the Battle of Alexandria, the British army triumphed. It was their first land victory over the French. The cease-fire then agreed was very similar to that negotiated by Smith and signed at El Arish. Had the former been accepted by Britain, then countless lives would have been saved.

Smith now sailed home carrying the news of his victory. Had he been an admiral, then the defence of Acre would have warranted him an earldom and a substantial sum of money. As there were still 100 names in the official seniority list for promotion to admiral, he had to be content with less. Both Houses of Parliament formally recognized the greatness of his victory and voted him an annual sum of £1,000 (some £20,000 at today's values). Smith and Nelson were now firmly established as heroes of the war.

The following year he was invited to represent the town of Rochester, in Parliament. Although it was not really what he enjoyed doing, he vigorously took the opportunity of defending the naval budget. At this time Smith lived in Blackheath, a London suburb. Not far away lived the estranged wife of the Prince of Wales and future King George IV, Princess Caroline of Brunswick. Reports from her servants and those that frequented her court appear to confirm that Sidney Smith became her lover in 1802. The following year a child was born, albeit not necessarily his, as she entertained many men friends.

He dedicated the next period of his life to inventions and inventors, firstly the catamaran, then a submarine developed by an American, Robert Fulton and finally, torpedoes and mines. As enthusiastic as ever, Smith tried to persuade the Admiralty to adopt these new tools of war, but without success, for the Admiralty was a very conservative body, as demonstrated by the long time it took him to reach the rank of admiral.

Finally, in 1805, whilst waiting to join Nelson to command one of the divisions of his squadron, news was received of the Battle of Trafalgar and of Nelson's death. Two days later Smith's name finally reached the head of the list of captains and he was promoted to Rear Admiral of the Blue.<sup>5</sup> In 1806 he was given command of the inshore squadron in the Mediterranean, under Admiral Lord Collinwood, with special responsibility for Sicily.

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<sup>5</sup> A senior rank of the Royal Navy of the United Kingdom, immediately outranked by the rank Rear-Admiral of the White and ultimately by Rear-Admiral of the Red.

The Bourbon King of France, Ferdinand IV, and his wife Queen Maria Caroline (sister of Marie Antoinette, who was beheaded in Paris) were under considerable pressure from Bonaparte's troops. Their kingdom, of Two Sicilies, was made up of an area on the continent south of Naples and the island of Sicily. The mainland portion of the kingdom had been invaded and Bonaparte was preparing to crown his brother Joseph as King of Naples. British troops, aided by Sicilians and Corsicans, were sent to prevent the invasion of the island. Once again Smith would have to deal with British generals and diplomats. The King of Naples had named him Viceroy of Calabria and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Thus he would have to accumulate political and military responsibilities, in addition to those of a rear admiral. Smith had not bothered to obtain permission from his superiors or from the government in Britain before he accepted these appointments.

Contrary to the opinion of the British generals, but with the encouragement and support of the French Queen, Smith decided to attack the mainland. His opinion was that an attack on the continent was the best way to defend Sicily. He first took the Isle of Capri, next door to Naples. Then, embarking 5,000 British troops from the Island's garrison, and Corsican irregulars, he landed an expeditionary force in Calabria. The Calabrese mountain fighters, the Massi, were waiting to help them. The subsequent Battle of Maida, fought on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1806 produced the second British victory on land. The British Minister<sup>6</sup>, Hugh Elliot, was livid; not only had he not been informed of the landing, but the money he had given Smith for intelligence-gathering had been used by him to arm the Massi. In London, innumerable complaints were received about Smith's behaviour, his independence, and his disrespect for authority. These were very similar to the complaints made against Smith in the Levant; where the Sultan had given him command of all Turkish forces, both on land and at sea. Finally the pressure became too great and he was recalled.

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<sup>6</sup> The equivalent of a modern-day ambassador.



Meanwhile Bonaparte had captured the Eastern border of the Adriatic Sea and was negotiating permission with the Sublime Porte for his troops to cross Turkey, Levant and Egypt, the final destination being India again. As a consequence, Smith's orders to return home were revoked and was to proceed immediately to Constantinople and place himself under the command of Sir John Duckworth, as he was the only senior officer who knew that part of the world well and, in addition, he was friendly with the Sultan. Officially he should have been given the overall command of the squadron, however this was not to be as he had so many enemies amongst the politicians and the military high command.

Whereas the policy of the Smith brothers, eight years previously, had been to attract the Sultan with friendship and cooperation, Duckworth was in favour of aggression. He threatened the Sultan with destruction of his navy and the bombardment of his capital, should he yield to Bonaparte's demands. The mission was a total fiasco. For as the squadron entered the Sea of Marmara having sailed through the 38km long Strait of the Dardanelles on the eastern instead of the western side, the strong currents made the approach to Constantinople impossible. Smith, who was at the rear, was still in the Strait when the main force entered the Sea of Marmara, otherwise he would certainly have intervened, as he knew those waters well. After two months, the British expeditionary force abandoned the mission in June 1807.

Smith returned to England, where he move to Bath – to take the medicinal waters. He was much in demand socially, both for his extraordinary memory that enabled him to recite poems in English, French and Latin, and also for his creative participation in charades. This 'good life' however, was not to last. The Admiralty recalled him, and on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1807 he led a squadron out of Plymouth on the *London* bound for Portugal. His instructions were to remain off the Tagus to blockade the harbour of Lisbon until further orders. His was to provide an escort, should the Portuguese Royal family decide to move to Brazil, or, alternatively he was to take the ships of the Portuguese Navy to Britain, until the end of the war against Napoleon.

Following the invasion of Portugal by the French under Junot, the Portuguese Royal family and court sailed for Brazil on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 1807, after months of preparation (this invasion had been foreseen by D. João, the Prince Regent). Sidney Smith detached four line-of-battle ships to escort them, as had been agreed with the British. On the 7<sup>th</sup> March 1808 the final destination of Rio de Janeiro was reached. All 12,000 passengers and 36 Portuguese ships arrived safely.

Sidney Smith arrived shortly afterwards, on the 17<sup>th</sup> May, to establish a naval station at Rio de Janeiro, which he was to command. On the 4<sup>th</sup> June 1808, to mark the anniversary of George III, Sidney Smith hosted a banquet onboard the *London*. The Prince regent used this occasion to register his gratitude for the support he had received from the British Navy. The Naval Chronicle officially records the event:

‘... At Brazil, on 4<sup>th</sup> of June, Sir Sidney Smith gave an entertainment to the whole Portuguese royal family and court on board His Majesty’s ship *London*. On quitting the ship, the Prince Regent presented to the Rear Admiral, with his own hand, the standard of Portugal, to be borne as an augmentation to the coat of arms and declared the revival of the Order of the Sword instituted by Alfonso V surnamed the African in 1459, of which order Sir Sidney is to be created Grand Cross. All the English captains before the Tagus, under the command of Sir Sidney Smith on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November are to be created Commanders of the Order. The first lieutenants of each ship, as well as Mr. Hill – His Majesty’s Secretary of Legation to that Court – are to be created Knights of that same Order’.<sup>7</sup>

Ever ready to befriend members of the Royal family, as he had done in Sicily, Sidney Smith now gave his total support to D. João’s wife D. Carlota Joaquina in her ambition to rule Buenos Aires and La Plata in Argentina, in the name of her brother, Ferdinand VII, King of Spain.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Naval Chronicle 1808, vol. XX. P. 438.

<sup>8</sup> Only up until the 6<sup>th</sup> May 1808, when Napoleon put his brother Joseph on the throne.

The British Minister, Lord Strangford, strongly opposed this support for D. Carlota Joaquina, which Smith completely ignored. It was only a question of time before Strangford wrote to London asking for Smith's recall in 1809. In all fairness to Smith, his real intention for wanting to invade La Plata was that he feared that France planned to establish a base in that area. Indeed, a disastrous expedition, with that same objective had taken place in 1806, under the command of Sir Home Popham. On his return to London Smith was heavily criticized by Canning, the Prime Minister, until it was explained that he was acting under orders of the War Office, issued on the 5<sup>th</sup> August, 1808.

In 1810 he was promoted to Vice-Admiral and, in that same year, at the age of 46, he married a widow four years his senior, Caroline Rumbold, the widow of a diplomat, Sir George Rumbold, with whom Smith had worked. With the end of the Napoleonic Wars and advancing in years, Smith became increasingly eccentric. He founded and named himself Master of the Knights Liberators of the Slaves of Africa. Several years previously, in Cyprus, he had been given the cross that had belonged to Richard I and he now imagined that he had been invested as Grand Prior for England of the Order of the Templars!

A generous man, he spent well beyond his means and, in spite of receiving considerable sums from the government as reimbursements of moneys spent on its behalf, his debts kept growing. He decided to move to Paris, which he liked, in spite of his imprisonment there, for he felt that he would be safe from his creditors and the inevitable debtor's prison. In 1826 his wife died. In 1838, Queen Victoria, who had been crowned the previous year, presented him with the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath. Two years later, at the age of 76, he had a stroke and died. A memorial to his memory can be seen in the National Maritime Museum.



## Apologia – D. Carlota Joaquina

I could not conclude this brief and modest study on Sir Sidney Smith without refuting an aspect which, even without proof, is often repeated by historians. That he had been yet another lover of D. Carlota Joaquina.



**D. Carlota Joaquina, c. 1809**

In her defence, in this case specifically and in a general way, I would like to affirm that, having studied over many years the period in which she lived, I found only but one reference, of infidelity, written by someone who lived at that time and frequented her court – William Beckford. The heir to one of Britain’s largest fortunes. Beckford was forced to leave the country in 1787, at the age of 28, because of his non-conventional activities – in particular his love letters to William, Lord Courtney’s 13 year old son. He sailed to Portugal,

where he was befriended by the Marquis of Marialva, who hoped he would marry his 15 year old daughter, Henriquetta. Beckford was more interested in the Marquis’ son, the 17 year old D. Pedro Vito. Entries in Beckford’s diary show that they engaged in a homosexual relationship.

Some 45 years later, Beckford wrote that, on the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 1794, D. Pedro Vito was seduced by D. Carlota Joaquina. He further speculated that he was the father of D. Miguel, later the King of Portugal, although this was clearly impossible, as D. Miguel was born, eight years later, in 1802! D. Pedro Vito, who became the 6<sup>th</sup> Marquis in 1799, was a trusted friend of D. João VI. In a last attempt to appease Bonaparte, he was sent with a large quantity of diamonds and an offer to wed João VI’s son, D. Pedro to Bonaparte’s niece. Later, in 1814, he negotiated the marriage of the Arch-Duchess D, Leopoldina to D, Pedro, using his private fortune. Would he have received such important missions if D. João had not had complete trust in him?

Marcus Cheke, one of D. Carlota Joaquina's principal biographers, describes her as: 'one of the ugliest royal princesses that ever existed. She was about 4 feet 9 inches tall, her eyes apoplectic and spiteful, with an aquiline nose and hard chinned; her purple lips would open to show teeth as uneven as Pan's pipes; in addition, she limped, the result of a fall whilst riding'. Is this the woman that history would have us believe was a seductress and a nymphomaniac? The allegations of infidelity, were, without doubt, invented subsequent to her death and were the product of political intrigue – writes Cheke. No serious historian, he assures us, can endorse this supposed infidelity with concrete proof.

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<sup>9</sup> Britain and the Portuguese Navy, 1760-1810, 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Report, 1995, <https://www.bhsportugal.org/library/articles/britain-and-the-portuguese-navy-1760-1810>; The Portuguese and British Navies, 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, 1999, <https://www.bhsportugal.org/library/articles/the-portuguese-and-british-navies>; The Arrival of the Portuguese Royal Family, Rio de Janeiro, March 7, 1808. 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, 2000, <https://www.bhsportugal.org/library/articles/arrival-of-the-portuguese-royal-family-rio-de-janeiro-march-71808>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ihgb.org.br/>