

The Final Campaigns in the West Indies

1808-1810

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Introduction

The war against 'Revolutionary and Napoleonic' France lasted from 1793 to 1815 with two brief interludes. Most peoples', and indeed historians', memories are focussed on British naval history culminating in the battle of Trafalgar in 1805, Wellington's campaigns in Spain, and his triumph at the battle of Waterloo and, of course, Napoleon's campaigns. Yet Britain fought a global war from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, Caribbean, South America, Cape of Good Hope, India and the East Indies. The war was fought not just against France. At times it involved the Spanish, the Dutch, the Danes and towards the end, the United States of America. At the start of the war, the Caribbean was the main centre of British imperial interest¹ and in a series of campaigns in the 1790s succeeded in capturing many of the French islands. However, they were achieved at a frightening financial and above all human cost, which according to Fortescue,² wrecked the British Army completely losing 100,000 men and nullified the ability to act elsewhere on land effectively for six years. From 1800, the British Government shied away from major commitments in the West Indies. Indeed it returned all the captures except Trinidad (Spanish) and Ceylon (Dutch) by the Treaty of Amiens in 1802. When the war re-started it only took advantage of small opportunities utilising whatever forces were available locally.³

¹ M. Duffy, *Soldiers Sugar and Seapower. The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France* (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1987), pp. 1-24

² Duffy, *Soldiers Sugar and Seapower*, pp. 327/328

³ M. Duffy., 'World-Wide War and British Expansion, 1793-1815' in P.J. Marshall (ed.), *The Oxford History of The British Empire* (Vol II , Oxford, OUP 1998) Kindle edition pp. 3919-3935

The background to the political and strategic situation post 1805 was more complex with Napoleon's triumph on the European continent after Austerlitz (1805), Jena/Auerstadt (1806) and the Treaty of Tilsit with Russia (1807). The "Ministry of All Talents" 1806-7 had tried to follow up the conquest of Cape Town by seizing the South American mainland colonies of Spain, attacking Buenos Aires twice unsuccessfully, which helped lead to the Ministry's downfall. The new administration under Portland, with Canning as Foreign Secretary and Castlereagh, as the new Secretary of War and Colonies, reverted to the Pitt tradition,⁴ which saw the continent as the main place to attack Napoleon. Napoleon attempted to cripple the British economy by restricting trade with Europe through the Berlin Decrees (November 1806) and Milan (December 1807) creating the Continental system, to which Britain responded with Orders in Council declaring a blockade of all French controlled ports and the USA placed an embargo on American exports (1807) with belligerents.⁵ The revolt in Spain in May 1808, following Napoleon's imposition of his brother Joseph as King of Spain, provided the opportunity to attack Napoleon on his flank in the Iberian Peninsula. Castlereagh and Canning committed the major portion of the expanding British Army to it, which did not leave many troops available for operations elsewhere.⁶ Nevertheless, in 1809-10, Britain captured the remaining French and Dutch colonies in the Caribbean, in a series of short, very successful, but basically, as will be shown, unknown series of operations, which compared very favourably with the operations in the 1790's.

⁴ J. Bew., *Castlereagh Enlightenment, War and Tyranny* (Quercus, London 2011) pp. 207-229

⁵ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean A Naval History of Great Britain 1649-1815* (Penguin Books 2006), p. 552

⁶ J. Steven Watson *The Oxford History of England The Reign of George III* (Oxford Clarendon Press 1960)

⁷ Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean* p. 556

According to Rodger, it was, however, the Spanish revolt which gave the opportunity to clear the remaining French colonies in the Caribbean.⁷ This assertion will be examined in the course of the thesis.

Michael Duffy in his *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower*⁸ has analysed the 1790s expeditions very thoroughly but stopped in 1801. The expeditions are barely mentioned in subsequent naval histories. William James, in his *Naval History of Great Britain*, written in the early 19th century, gave Martinique five pages and Guadeloupe a passing reference⁹; Rodger in his *Command of the Ocean*¹⁰ gave it six lines, basically saying that the Spanish revolt isolated the remaining French colonies and enabled them and the Dutch Islands to be taken. Richard Harding gave it three lines in his *Seapower and Naval Warfare*¹¹, but did provide the inspiration for this thesis, as, in an endnote, he said that 'the West Indian campaigns of 1809-1810 have not been very fully examined'.¹² Roy and Lesley Atkins in *The War for all Oceans* give one line for Martinique but several paragraphs on Guadeloupe quoting from naval personnel.¹³ Woodman in the *Sea Warriors*, (his book concentrating on naval heroes) describes some of the actions off Martinique and Guadeloupe, giving one paragraph for the capture of Martinique, more on the naval action at Les Saintes in April 1809 and one

⁷ Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean* p. 556

⁸ Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower*.

⁹ William James, *The naval history of Great Britain from the declaration of war by France, in February 1793, to the accession of George IV, in January 1820* (Vol 5 1808-1811 London, Harding, Leopard and Co 1826)

¹⁰ Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean* p. 556

¹¹ R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare 1650-1830* (UC L Press 1999) p. 275

¹² Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare 1650-1830* p. 340, note 42

¹³ R. And L. Adkins, *The War for all Oceans* (Abacus 2006) Kindle edition

paragraph on the capture of Guadeloupe.¹⁴ It is fair to say the Fortescue¹⁵ in his *History of the British Army* has narrated the land engagements in more far more detail.

Buckley has covered the creation of the British West Indies regiments through to 1815, but not the campaigns in any detail.¹⁶ The political and strategic situation of Great Britain in the early 1800's is covered much more variably. The general histories, such as Watson in his volume of the Oxford History *The Reign of George III* do not even mention the expeditions;¹⁷ neither does Bew in his very recent biography of Castlereagh.¹⁸ Duffy in Vol II of the *Oxford History of British Empire* gives an effective, but short, explanation of the strategic logic of operations in the West Indies post 1800.¹⁹ The basic policy was to marry commitments with the availability of local resources and only provide additional help if the French threatened anything from Europe as in 1805, when 5000 troops were readied at Cork in case the French threats that year materialised. Local opportunities were taken with Tobago and St Lucia recaptured in 1804 and then several Dutch and Danish islands between 1804 and 1807, but the trade threat was much lower as Santa Domingo, previously the major trading French island, had been devastated by the continual war from 1794. Hall in his *British Strategy in the Napoleonic War 1803-1815* provides a much more comprehensive review, covering the resources available as well as the strategy.²⁰ He points out the time difficulties of setting up operations to the extent that events might

¹⁴ R. Woodman, *The Sea Warriors* (Constable 2001) Kindle edition

¹⁵ Sir John Fortescue, *A History of the British Army* Vol, V11 Chap XXIV (Macmillan &Co London 1912)

¹⁶ R.N. Buckley *Slaves in Redcoats The British West Indies Regiments 1795-1815* (New Haven 1979)

¹⁷ Steven Watson, *The Reign of George III*

¹⁸ Bew., *Castlereagh : Enlightenment War and Tyranny* various

¹⁹ Duffy, *World-Wide War and British Expansion, 1793-1815* kindle pp. 3922-3938 and 4154

²⁰ C.D. Hall., *British Strategy in the Napoleonic War 1803-1815* Manchester University Press 1992

overtake the plans being made. A good example was Wellington's force at Cork in June 1808, scheduled for Central America and ending up in Spain. He stresses the pressures there were to favour a European Strategy particularly with Napoleon's anti British strategy. However, his brief (one and half pages) summary of the planning and capture of Martinique and Martinique has some inaccuracies.²¹ Fedorak in an article reviewing the success and failure of amphibious operations has argued that only two were successful namely the Egyptian expedition of 1801-2 and the original landing in Portugal and the subsequent support of the peninsular campaign 1809 onwards. Besides all the tactical problems of organising amphibious assaults, he also highlights the failure to appoint a single commander often leaving the military and naval commanders at loggerheads or ignoring each other. He does not mention the West Indies campaigns at all.²² Overall it is clear that the naval historiography is thin, the military side dated and the political variable, particularly concerning the period before the actual attack on Martinique. Therefore one objective of this thesis is to provide a comprehensive whole of the reasons for success.

However, whilst the military operations themselves will necessarily be covered, as they are relatively straightforward and already described in Fortescue, the intention in the thesis is to go wider. There were three main characters in the picture which unfolded, if you exclude the French opposition. The Secretary of State for War and Colonies initially Viscount Castlereagh and then from mid 1809 Lord Liverpool, Lieutenant-General George Beckwith who commanded the military forces in the Windward and

²¹ Hall, *British Strategy* pp. 184-6

²² C.J. Fedorak., *The Royal Navy and British Amphibious Operations during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* in *Military Affairs*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (Jul., 1988), pp. 141-146

Leeward Islands from June 1808 (and was also Governor of Barbados from later in the year) and Rear Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane who was Commander –in Chief- Leeward Island squadron. The potential conflicting interests of the naval and military commanders and the restrictive instructions Beckwith received will be examined in some depth to explain how the Martinique attack in January 1809, nearly never took place. The overall analysis must necessarily include considering the situation of the French colonists and their support from Metropolitan France, as captured information may have provided the trigger for the operations. It will also shed light on how well the army and navy worked together and how developed amphibious warfare had become. However, the main theme throughout the thesis will be how manpower considerations influenced the political/ strategic objectives of the British Government, the relationships between the two commanders, the decisions of the commanders and their concern of the adequacy of their forces both in terms of numbers and quality. In this context the specific role of West Indian troops and the effect on long-term casualties is particularly relevant, and to a much lesser extent the attitude of the British colonies, especially to ‘black’ regiments.

The first chapter will cover the political and strategic decisions which led up to the expeditions. Initially this will cover the strategic position of Great Britain in 1808, the policy of the new Tory government and the reforms and growth of the British Army instigated earlier by Castlereagh. It will discuss the imperative to fight on the European continent rather than overseas, the varying approach to the Iberian countries’ South

American colonies and the impact of the Spanish revolt against the French. It will review where the West Indies fitted into the overall picture and what the strategic and economic issues were including the relationships between the colonies and the British Government. It will then examine the process leading to the decision to attack Martinique and the limitations imposed on Beckwith. Chapter 2 will start by looking at the operational situation in the West Indies at the beginning of 1808 and will discuss in some detail the effect of taking Marie-Galante Island situated off Guadeloupe in early 1808 by Admiral Cochrane. The need to garrison this with naval troops and the call for help from the Army in August 1808 will reveal how the two arms differed on the need for the capture and also show up the issue of shortages in both army and naval forces.²³ This will involve reviewing such issues as prize money allocations which had bedevilled previous expeditions especially the Grey/Jervis expedition²⁴. It will then examine the instructions given to Beckwith and the planning of the operation including how the army forces were selected with the first widespread use of black regiments and also the decision to use troops from Halifax, Nova Scotia. The impact of the climatic and medical conditions on the both the timing of the expeditions and the subsequent occupations and need to supply garrisons for all the captured islands will be considered. This will involve explaining the reason for the formation of the black regiments and the attitude of the colonial assemblies to it and the impact of the Anti-Slavery Act of 1807. Most importantly the working relationship of the army and naval commanders in the preparation for the attack, especially General Beckwith's decision

²³ The National Archives (TNA) Colonial Office Files (CO) 318/34: Beckwith various September 1808, pp.69-94

²⁴ Duffy, *Soldiers Sugar and Seapower* pp. 106-114

to call off the operation in early January 1809 and its subsequent reinstatement will be examined in detail. The next chapter will cover the operational aspects of planning the attack, taking into account the French defences, the assault and capture of Martinique in February 1809 and the subsequent operations off the Les Saintes in April 1809, which concluded that season's campaigning. The emphasis will be on the co-operation between the two arms, but also the avoidance of army troops being involved in capturing islands which would become naval prize money. The next chapter will cover the political, strategic and military considerations in 1809-1810 leading up to the capture of Guadeloupe in 1810, the situation of the French and the campaign itself and then, briefly, the capture of the Dutch Islands. It will conclude with what happened subsequently. The final chapter will summarise the conclusions, indicating how far manpower issues dominated the campaigns and how professional the operational performance of the British army and navy had become in amphibious warfare.

The main sources of information are held in their original form, (not on line) in The National Archives (TNA) at Kew. They are the military despatches between the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, sent from Downing Street and Lieutenant General (later Sir) George Beckwith,²⁵ held in Colonial Office files CO318/34-41. There are then the despatches to and from the Admiralty from Rear (subsequently Vice)

²⁵ J. Spain., *Beckwith, Sir George (1752/3–1823), army officer and colonial governor* *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (OUP 2004-2013) Available: [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/ Beckwith Sir George](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/Beckwith%20Sir%20George) (accessed 16 Oct 2013)

Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane²⁶ in Admiralty files ADM 1/329-331. Both these set of files contain the official despatches of the operations, with abundant detail of the forces involved, the actions undertaken and the subsequent terms of capitulation. Frequently, they have annexes containing the reports of the subordinate commanders who actually did the fighting. There are important gaps in the correspondence especially from the Colonial Office to General Beckwith, which can be partly reconstructed from the replies sent. The War Office files have many references to the operations at this time and details on how troop numbers changed, due mainly to death from sickness, can be found in the War Office Muster Records. However, in addition to the operations themselves, the files cover the policy issues and more local matters which the commanders have to implement or respond to or which they want Governmental rulings on. In particular, prize money aspects and relationships with civil governors of the islands. Other records on individual colonies contained in other Colonial Office files provide more colour to some of the local issues on trade, the antislavery act and attitude to the coloured regiments.

It must be recognised that most of the documents are the official correspondence between the military commanders and the departments in London and vice versa. The documents from the commanders, except those noted as confidential, are written on the basis that they may be published in the London Gazette as indeed many of the sea

²⁶ S. Howarth, *Cochrane, Sir Alexander Inglis* (1758–1832), *naval officer and politician Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (OUP 2004-2013) Available: www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/Cochrane_Sir_Alexander (accessed 16th Oct 2013)

and land battles were.²⁷ As such they clearly present the operations in the best light and as they were, mostly, very successful they have a congratulatory tone to them. The correspondence also shows graphically that all the writers sought to ensure that their own position was safeguarded as far as possible, and cast a favourable aspect on their own contributions. They did not want to be criticised either professionally or indeed politically as some of their predecessors had been and, as was happening in Parliament in late 1808 following the signing of the Cintra Convention.²⁸ The correspondence also discloses the tensions between the army and naval commanders as with the Marie-Galante affair and when General Beckwith cancelled the Martinique attack in January 1809.²⁹ So, they do reveal the commanders looking after their own interests both professionally and financially within the policy framework and the accepted standards of the day. Beckwith corresponds, privately with Edward Cooke, who was Castlereagh's political ears, as under-secretary³⁰ to try and influence policy outcomes especially in his disputes with Cochrane and as will be revealed to protect his reputation, Cochrane was still writing in 1813 about the cancellation of the attack. The other correspondence and files examined reveal some of the concerns of the colonies, both on trade and especially the existence of black regiments and the still

²⁷ *Bulletins of the Campaign 1809 and 1810* taken from London Gazette (A Strahan London no date)_downloaded from Googlebooks .co.uk on 16 Aug 2013

²⁸ Dew., *Castlereagh: Enlightenment War and Tyranny* pp. 236-241

²⁹ TNA, CO 318/35: pp. 5-100 and ADM 1/ 330 (not paginated) in January 1809 and Cochrane's position fully developed in WO1/27: pp. 143-283

³⁰ P. J. Jupp., *Edward Cooke* (1755-1820), government official and pamphleteer *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (OUP 2004-2014) Available: [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/Edward Cooke](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/Edward+Cooke) (accessed 16th Dec 2013)

heavy annual losses of European troops to sickness, which, as will be shown helps to explain the restrictive instructions given to the commanders.

This thesis will fill a gap in military historiography covering a successful series of operations which have been neglected, partly because, after Trafalgar, Britain's navy was supreme overseas and successes have been taken for granted and partly probably because Wellington's victories in Spain and subsequently at Waterloo have provided much more interest. Also it must be admitted the scale of operations, considering what was going on elsewhere were relatively small. Whilst it will show Britain had overwhelming military superiority, it will also demonstrate how successfully Britain had developed its amphibious operations recognising that it had learnt some of the painful lessons about operating in adverse climatic conditions. Above all it will show how manpower factors, arising from the disasters of the 1790s were the driving force in the decision making processes.

Chapter 1

British Strategic Policy and the West Indies

The decision to attack Martinique, made in the latter part of 1808, needs to be viewed within the context of the wider British strategy to combat the successes of Napoleon in 1805 -1807 and the introduction of the Continental System, which was Napoleon's response to Britain's naval pre-eminence resulting from the battle of Trafalgar. The strategy was also heavily influenced by Britain's experiences of their West Indian policies in the 1790's which had decimated the regular British Army but which, by 1808, was being rapidly expanded. The concentration on European involvement, with the option of action in South America, will be demonstrated. The historiography, such as Duffy and Hall's¹, covers this topic leading up to the decisive effect of the rebellion in Spain against the French seizure of the Spanish throne in mid 1808. The analysis will demonstrate that the West Indies did not figure significantly in the strategy and that the decision to deploy forces to capture Martinique almost came about by accident. Before discussing in detail how the decision was made, it will be necessary to consider, concisely, what had been happening in the West Indies from the restart of the war in 1803 illustrating the opportunistic capture of some islands. It will also highlight the issues concerning the British West Indian Colonies and their poor relationships with the British Government in London over trade, black troops and lack of supplies. The structure of command and control in the West Indies will also be illustrated to

¹ Hall, *British Strategy* and M. Duffy, *World-Wide War and British Expansion*.

understand the complications created. The actual decision to attack Martinique will then be considered in detail as it is not covered effectively in the historiography.

From the beginning of the Revolutionary Wars against France in 1793, Britain had several aims. The immediate objective was to prevent the French gaining control of the United Provinces with its navy, potential bases against England and its colonies. However, the prime strategic aim was to destroy France as naval and commercial power by taking her colonies especially in the West Indies, as this would give Britain the resources to sustain future conflicts.² This was well summed up in Parliament, 'to obtain indemnity for the past and security for the future'.³ Duffy has covered this period very thoroughly, demonstrating the initial success, because most of the islands apart from Santa Domingo were captured and French trade decimated. However, a lack of troops in 1794 resulted in the French recapturing Guadeloupe and, by emancipating and arming slaves and gaining support from disillusioned French settlers, encouraging revolts in captured British colonies in 1795. Britain launched a major expedition in late 1795, which restored British control on the islands in revolt, and captured St Lucia but did not re-conquer Guadeloupe or displace the French totally from Santa Domingo. However, the financial cost was enormous (it cost £1m just to hire the transport for the 1795 expedition⁴ and worse than this the casualty rates due to sickness amongst the British regular European troops were horrendous. There may

² M. Duffy, *World-Wide War and British* Kindle edition pp. 3817-3841

³ *Parliamentary history of England from the Earliest period to the Year 1802* London (1817-1819 xxx Col 715 quoted in M Duffy *Soldiers Sugar and Seapower* p.5

⁴ Duffy, *World wide-war and British Expansion* Kindle p. 3910

be doubts about the exact number but the general estimate is that up to 100000 troops were lost in the West Indies between 1793 and 1800 of whom about half died (primarily from sickness), being the bulk of the then effective regular army.⁵ After these losses, the Cabinet put its face against any more major expeditions and Henry Dundas, Secretary of State for War said the policy thereafter was to ensure Britain had enough resources and to strengthen its position at the bargaining table. In 1802, by the Treaty of Amiens, Addington's government handed back all the conquests except Trinidad which had been captured from the Spanish. All politicians had recognised by then, that European troops could not be stationed permanently in the West Indies as sickness rates were too high. Even with minimal fighting, and a substantial black regiment contingent the annual losses, basically due to sickness were up to 2000 a year.⁶ There was growing recognition that African slaves were not so susceptible to sickness and Dundas, against the Colonial Assemblies' wishes, had started creating West Indian regiments by purchasing slaves⁷ raising some 4000 by 1801. This policy was continued so that by 1807 there were eight battalions of the West Indian regiment comprising nearly 8000 men and just under a third of the garrison for the British West Indies possessions.⁸

British policy was increasingly concentrated on maintaining its naval supremacy and the benefits of commerce to enable it to finance war on the European continent and

⁵ Duffy, *Soldiers Sugar and Seapower* pp. 326-327

⁶ Fortescue *History of British Army Vol VII Chap XXIV* pp. 5-7

⁷ Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower* pp. 362-367

⁸ Duffy, *World wide-war and British Expansion* Kindle p. 3932

not seeking to conquer the French possessions in the West Indies. In addition to the manpower losses another factor was the high cost against the returns. It was considered that financial resources would be better husbanded for supporting other European powers to fight the French in Europe.⁹ Hall believes also that, after 1806, Napoleon did not make any real efforts in the West Indies¹⁰, and this is probably true although whether he could have done anything significant in the face of British naval superiority is questionable. Also with the continued disruption of trade from Santa Domingo, which had been the prize producer of colonial trade, the competition had been reduced and British colonial trade profits and taxes benefited. The defeat of the French navy at Trafalgar and as far as the West Indies were concerned Duckworth's virtual total destruction of L'Esperance's squadron off St. Domingo (6 February 1806) made the British West Indian colonies relatively safe from invasion, although the concern increased when the French took over the Spanish possessions.¹¹ It did not, however, reduce the Government's fears about losing naval superiority, as Napoleon embarked on a major and effective ship building programme increasing the number of ships of the line from some 34 in 1807 to 80 in 1813. In 1807 alliances with Russia and Spain and control of the United Provinces meant the British navy was stretched to meet its commitments.¹² Hall argues that British ministers were also so concerned about their naval supremacy, especially with the increased commitments in the Baltic,

⁹ Duffy, *World-Wide War and British Expansion* pp. 3907-3915

¹⁰ Hall, *British Strategy* p.95

¹¹ J. Holland Rose, *British West India Commerce As a Factor in the Napoleonic War*, *Cambridge Historical Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1929), p. 39

¹² R. Glover., *Britain at Bay Defence against Bonaparte, 1803-1814*, (George Allen and Unwin Ltd 1973) p19

that they did not want long distance commitments.¹³ This is perhaps somewhat contradicted by their interest in South America (see below).

The failure of the third coalition and Pitt's replacement by the Ministry of all Talents had led to a partial reversal of European involvement. The lack of importance attached to conquering the rest of the West Indies is demonstrated by the fact that despite the concentration on European matters, the conquest of the Spanish and assistance to the Portuguese colonies in South America regularly featured more prominently in the British Government's considerations. The successful capture of Cape of Good Hope in 1806 was followed by the failure of Popham's unofficial attack on Buenos Aires in 1806. The failed attempt to recoup the losses by Whitelocke's expedition the following year, which helped lead to the change of Government, did not change this view. Indeed, as Duffy has pointed out, South America had become a regular obsession with British Governments as a way of expanding trade but without the losses of manpower experienced in the Caribbean. However, these ideas were always subordinated to European interests.¹⁴ Under Portland, with Canning as Foreign Secretary and Castlereagh back as Secretary of State for War and Colonies, the policy reverted to giving priority to European events and in May 1807 Castlereagh and Canning agreed that the commercial value of attacking South America was less than the cost.¹⁵ The naval threat in Europe led to the attack on neutral Denmark in August-

¹³ Hall, *British Strategy* pp. 11-12

¹⁴ Duffy *World-Wide War and British Expansion* pp. 3940- 3980

¹⁵ Hall, *British Strategy* p. 96

September 1807 and the seizure of the Danish fleet in Copenhagen, which whilst driving Denmark to the French side neutralised the Russian threat in the Baltic, as Sweden stayed allied to Britain.¹⁶ However, the lure of Spanish American possessions had not entirely disappeared as in 1808 just before France took over Spain and the Spanish revolt; Castlereagh was considering deploying 15000 troops to attack Caracas and 9000 troops to Montevideo.¹⁷ By June 1808, 9000 troops had been concentrated at Cork under Major- General Wellesley for this purpose. By 1808, Britain was not only at war with France but also Denmark and the Dutch, whilst having to help the Swedes against the Russians as a result of the French imposition of the Continental system. This stretched naval resources greatly. It had a major influence in the Caribbean as it provided so many additional hostile places from which privateers could operate. There was also the continuing threat of breakouts from France to provide reinforcements or supplies. The revolt in Spain against Joseph's usurpation of the throne changed all this and the troops at Cork were sent instead to Portugal, showing again that European involvement took higher priority. The Spanish revolt did cause a major change in both the political and military situation in the Caribbean. Beckwith was indeed told that his previous instructions to concentrate four regiments at Barbados could be suspended if it helped with bringing over the Spanish colonies to the British side and this was less than a fortnight before the instructions to attack Martinique were given.¹⁸ It must also be stressed that the fear of French invasion still permeated British thinking. British

¹⁶ Steven Watson., *The Reign of George III* pp. 456-457

¹⁷ C. W. Vane. (ed.), *Correspondence Despatches and other papers of Viscount Lord Castlereagh (ed. C W Vane) Second series military and miscellaneous* Vol VII (London William Shoberl 1851). p.385-389

¹⁸ TNA, CO 318/33: 18 August 1808, Downing Street to Beckwith pp. 451- 453

Army recruitment especially under Castlereagh's innovative methods of getting the militia to volunteer for the regular army had resulted in an enormous expansion. This was despite the fact that the army had lost 17000 soldiers a year from 1803-1807 virtually all from sickness. In February 1808 British military forces had risen to nearly 310,000, (excluding the "Volunteers") of which 90,000 were Militia for home defence and some 93,000 were abroad from Gibraltar to the Americas West Indies and Far East but this left some 127,000.¹⁹ (These numbers did not include 'coloured' troops including the West Indies Regiments.) Nevertheless Castlereagh argued that only some 10000 troops could be spared for expeditions outside Europe. In December 1807 he had overruled the use of troops in the Mediterranean and Sicily as not contributing to the fight against expected losses.²⁰ These army numbers must also be put against the massive increase in the Navy which had an establishment of 145000 men in 1810 but was known to be short.²¹ This summary of British strategy clearly demonstrates that the West Indies did not figure greatly in the Government's consideration.

However, activity in the West Indies had not been totally quiescent. There had been minor successes from 1803 utilising local forces. French Tobago and St Lucia, the Dutch colonies of Demerera, Essequibo and Berbice in 1803, Surinam in 1804, and Curacao 1807 were all taken.²² In September 1807, General Bowyer had been instructed to gather troops to capture the Danish islands of St Croix, St John's and St Thomas and he

¹⁹ Vane (ed.) *Correspondence* Vol VIII pp.96-100

²⁰ Vane (ed.) *Correspondence* Vol VIII pp.96-100

²¹ Hall, *British Strategy* pp. 11-12

²² Duffy, *World-Wide War and British Expansion* kindle 3920

raised 2200 but said that it left the islands denuded and was allowed to wait until reinforcements arrived. In the event the islands surrendered in December without any fighting.²³ In July 1808, Governor Woodley of Antigua wrote to Castlereagh that he had 1850 troops which were plenty to take St Martin and St Eustatius (Dutch possessions) to prevent privateers having a base and he believed the colonists there would be well disposed to British rule.²⁴ To understand some of the complications of managing operations in the West Indies, it is necessary to briefly describe the arrangements. The British West Indian colonies had Governors appointed by the British Government and they reported to the Secretary of State for Colonies and War. Most islands had colonial assemblies and they had considerable power to impede the actions of the British Government if they wished and relationships generally in 1808 were not good (see below).²⁵ Captured islands had a Governor, who clearly had more absolute power. Naval operations were the responsibility of the Commander in- Chief, Leeward Islands, Rear Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane, who received his instructions from the Admiralty. The main repair harbour was English Harbour in Antigua, but Cochrane was usually on his flagship. Military command was more diffuse. Most islands had garrisons and for internal affairs came under the control of the island Governor. However, there was a Commander in Chief Windward and Leeward islands, initially in 1808 General Bowyer but from June 1808 Lieutenant-General George Beckwith, who was also appointed Governor of Barbados in October 1808. Again they reported to Castlereagh. The split of military responsibility meant that island

²³ TNA, CO 318/31: various 1807, pp. 327, 407, 415

²⁴ TNA, CO 152/91: 12 July 1808, Woodley to Castlereagh (no 24)

²⁵ Fortescue *History of British Army Vol VII Chap XXIV* p7

Governors could delay obeying Beckwith's instructions, by appealing to Castlereagh as will be seen in the next chapter.

The area to the west of the Windward and Leeward islands was under separate military and naval command. Jamaica's military Governor was General Carmichael and in 1809 with help from Cochrane, he assisted the Spanish in finally overcoming the last French resistance on Santa Domingo. Vice Admiral Rowley commanded the Jamaica squadron. At the beginning of 1808, there were some 18000 European troops stationed throughout the West Indies most on garrison duties on newly captured islands or on the main British islands as security against slave uprisings as well as for external defence, plus the eight battalions of the West Indies regiment (WIR).

Cochrane, nominally, had over 80 ships most of which were smaller than frigates, primarily to protect trade from the activities of privateers based on hostile islands.²⁶ However, Cochrane when, in December 1808, replying to accusations from Lloyds of London ship masters that he had not prevented privateers seizing British ships said that for the whole of his command excluding capital ships he had only had available 4 frigates, one 44 gun ship, 20 sloops and 15 smaller vessels. The rest were under repair, on specific tasks or were stationary guard vessels.²⁷ The Spanish uprising was to ease his problems but not until 1809 and he was always stretched to try and neutralise all the bases available to privateers.

²⁶ Hall, *British Strategy* p. 184 and Duffy *World Wide war and British Expansion* loc 3932

²⁷ TNA, Admiralty (ADM) 1/329: 15 Dec 1808, Cochrane to Pole (ref. 2.175)

In the West Indies itself, relationships with the home government had soured over a number of issues. There had been opposition, since the 1790s, to the creation of the West Indian Regiments from a combination of the principle of arming black slaves, the offer of freedom and the competition, as to obtain numbers the army had competed in the slave markets. The latter was of minor importance by 1808 following the passage of the abolition of the Slave Act in 1807 although this was to have serious repercussions for manning the army and the fleet. Nevertheless the islands had initially done quite well with the devastation of the sugar trade from Santa Domingo under the slave revolt, but by 1807 the price of sugar had fallen from 72s/cwt in 1793 to 32s/cwt in 1807, although it did subsequently recover to the mid 50s/cwt thereafter.²⁸ However, as Rose had shown the trade position whilst it fluctuated, rising in 1808 falling in 1809 and then recovering in 1810 was relatively stable²⁹. More immediately for 1808 the situation was exacerbated by the British response of the Orders in Council, which in 1808 led to an American embargo on trade with France and Britain and caused major food shortages in the West Indian islands and posed more problems for the Navy.³⁰

The decision to attack Martinique appears to have been made in the late summer of 1808. Detailing exactly when and what instructions were given to Bowyer/Beckwith is difficult because several documents sent from the Downing Street Office of the

²⁸ Hall, *British Strategy* p. 96

²⁹ Rose, *British West India Commerce* p.40

³⁰ TNA, CO 152/91: 17 Mar 1808, Woodley (Governor of Antigua) to Castlereagh (*file not paginated*)

Secretary of State for War and Colonies in 1808 appear to be missing from the Colonial Office files and cannot also be found in the War Office files. That they were sent can be identified from the responses by Generals Bowyer and Beckwith.³¹ It is therefore necessary to try and reconstruct both timescale and the instructions. This can be helped somewhat by correspondence from Castlereagh to Major General Sir George Prevost, the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, where some 5000 British troops were stationed in Halifax. On 7 July Castlereagh instructed Prevost: 'as events may make it necessary to employ the corps you command on distant Service.....His Majesty commands that you keep it in readiness for foreign service'.³² On 18 June Beckwith received instructions from Castlereagh to bring to Barbados the 3rd West Indies Regiment (WIR) from Dominica, 4th WIR from Surinam and 8th from Trinidad, (the latter to be relieved by the York Rangers) and with the 1WIR already there to have them ready for 'service by 1st November.'³³ There is no indication in either statement for what purpose they were to be used. Castlereagh had indicated that 24000 troops were being earmarked for attacks in Central America, but the instructions to Prevost were issued after that decision had been cancelled and Wellesley's troops allocated to Spain. On 4 August Beckwith asked for 500 accoutrements to equip 8 WIR and 5000

³¹ The missing documents, all identified in correspondence in CO318/34 are No1 dated 22 July 1808, 18 Aug- movement of 4 WI regiments to Barbados, 20 Aug concerning WIR, No2 20 Aug contained intelligence on Martinique, 31st Aug Secret, Circular 3 Sept., No2 8 Sept., No3, ? Sept, 16 Sept., and 3 November. The most critical information missing is when Beckwith is told to prepare to invade Martinique and on what conditions. It is in either or both secret letters dated 20 and 31 August 1808. The evidence suggests the blockade is instructed on the 20 Aug and the invasion conditions on the 31 Aug.

³² TNA, CO 218/28: 7 July 1808, Castlereagh to Prevost p.282

³³ TNA, CO 318/33: 18 June 1808, Downing Street Castlereagh to Beckwith p. 213

stands of Arms³⁴ and on August 18 he was told that in the view of the changed Spanish situation he could suspend the concentration of troops on Barbados.³⁵ In a secret letter dated 20 August (received on 30 September), he was told that a close blockade of Martinique was to be implanted in the light of two captured intelligence reports (dated 16 April and 6 May) revealing the dire straits of the Island as result of the American embargo.³⁶ Interestingly Cochrane did not appear to receive the instructions formally to blockade Martinique until the middle of October, as only he acknowledged receipt of the instructions on 20 October.³⁷ He did, however, action it earlier after Beckwith had spoken to him on the 14 October.³⁸ It is perhaps worth commenting here that it generally took at least a month for correspondence to pass, between the West Indies and London. It could be as quick as three weeks but could be much longer if it went astray or the first packet ship was lost.

There appears to be two key letters concerning the actual decision, the 20 August and 31 August, both marked secret. On 10 Oct, Beckwith writing to Castlereagh referring back to instructions of 20 Aug Castlereagh said he must defer a decision until he had checked the state of the four black regiments concentrating on Barbados.³⁹ The second key letter is one dated 18 October⁴⁰ referring to secret correspondence which appears to be the letter of 31 August, in which Beckwith was clearly replying to specific

³⁴ TNA, CO 318/33: 4 Aug 1808, Beckwith to Castlereagh p. 425

³⁵ TNA, CO 318/33: 18 Aug 1808. Downing Street to Beckwith pp. 451-3

³⁶ TNA, CO 318/33: 20 Aug 1808, Downing Street to Beckwith p. 459

³⁷ TNA, ADM 1/329: 18 Oct. 1808. Cochrane to Pole at Admiralty ref. 2.137

³⁸ TNA, ADM 1/330: 6 Jan 1809, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2.4

³⁹ TNA, CO 318/34: 10 Oct 1808, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 171-172

⁴⁰ TNA, CO 318/34: 18 Oct 1808, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 141-144

instructions to attack Martinique as he complained of the failure to blockade Martinique effectively but implied Cochrane may have received his orders late, which is clear that he did. He reported that traders in St Bartholomew were supplying goods to French. Whilst he questioned his ability to take the island, if it was reinforced, he then said that with the addition of Prevost's troops from Halifax Nova Scotia, he should be able to do it and confirmed that he had asked for them. This is the first reference to these troops in Leeward island files (CO318). It is also the first clarification that the attack was only to be undertaken if it did not result in the significant loss of European troops.⁴¹ On 8 September, Castlereagh wrote to Prevost telling him of the state of Guadeloupe and Martinique as result of the American embargo and saying the French inhabitants may be willing to place themselves under British rule. Beckwith had been given 'wide latitude' and 'certain restrictions' and 'has been instructed to apply to you for troop assistance, which you are to agree and work with naval commander at Halifax.' Prevost is given some flexibility if the American situation deteriorated and threatened Canada.⁴² Beckwith's letter of 3 January 1809, when he cancelled the attack said his instructions forbade him from proceeding against Martinique "with a view of conquering the island simply by a regular military operation".⁴³ Similarly the real concern about losses to European troops is made quite clear. On both 14 December 1808⁴⁴ and 6 February 1809, he is instructed to return⁴⁵ them as soon as possible and minimise their fatigue.

⁴¹ TNA, CO 318/34: 18 Oct 1808, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 259-262

⁴² TNA, CO 218/28: 8 Sep 1808, Castlereagh to Prevost pp. 287-289

⁴³ TNA, CO 318/35: 3 Jan, 1809, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 5-9

⁴⁴ TNA, CO 318/34: 14 Dec 1808, Downing Street to Beckwith pp. 262-265

⁴⁵ TNA, CO 310/35: 5 Feb 1809, Downing Street to Beckwith pp. 113-115

Whilst it is clear that the British Government had alerted both the Halifax and Leeward Islands troops for “service” by July 1808, it does not mean that a decision had been made to attack Martinique. Rodger is right in saying that the Spanish revolt had eased the situation in the West Indies, but as had been shown Beckwith was instructed to stop his concentration of black regiments at Barbados, if that could help the Spanish colonies, only two days before the instructions to blockade Martinique. Almost certainly the diversion of Wellesley’s forces to Spain meant that there would be no Central American expedition and therefore Prevost’s Nova Scotia forces were ‘spare’. It appears that it was the combination of this and probably more importantly the captured intelligence information about the situation on Martinique which provided the trigger and approval was given in the two letters of the 20 and 31 August. Even then it was made abundantly clear to Beckwith that it was not to be undertaken if it could not be achieved quickly and with minimum loss to European troops. The consequences of these imperatives will be explored in the next chapter. This analysis has established that the capture of the West Indian French and Danish islands featured very low in the priorities of the British Government’s strategic planning. European troops and British money were not going to be squandered in the West Indies.

Chapter 2

Indecision

There is virtually no discussion in the historiography of the events which led up to the attack on Martinique nearly not taking place. The critical importance of manpower issues in decision making, strategy and personal relationships were revealed by the actions and events in 1808 and early 1809 when the final decision to attack Martinique was made. This will be demonstrated through three main areas. The first was how the issue of naval prize money could skew military decisions, exemplified by the naval seizure of Marie-Galante Island situated off Guadeloupe, in March 1808. This action be-devilled the relationships between the army and navy commanders for the next two years. Secondly, the explicit problems created by manpower issues. This was not only the strategic concerns of the British Government over losses to European troops, but also the effects of shortages of navy and army manpower in the West Indies, partly resulting from the Anti- Slavery Act of 1807. The raising and management of the black regiments provided another issuing dividing the Colonies and the British Government. Finally the reasons for General Beckwith calling off the expedition on January 3th 1809, despite the arrival of all the troops, Admiral Cochrane's reaction and the subsequent reinstatement of the attack on the 19 January 1809 will throw more light on this topic. In addition to illustrating how important manpower issues were, it will also fill a gap in the historiography..

One of the major benefits to the navy was prize money and this led to a major conflict

between the army and navy, when Admiral Cochrane ordered the capture of Marie-Galante Island, situated off Guadeloupe, and then decided to garrison it and treat it as a naval prize. This was carried out in March 1808. Admiral Cochrane justified it in the grounds that it would help with the blockade, only require some 250 men and Brigadier Shipley, the senior Royal Engineer commander, supported it. Captain Piggott would govern the island but still command the inshore squadron. The more likely reason for the seizure was contained in the next sentences:

‘The annual produce is one million weight of coffee- 3000 hogsheads of sugar and 300 bales of cotton’... “there is a quantity of Coffee, Cotton & Sugar stored here and as the island was taken by surprise without entering into any sort of capitulation, the captains are entitled to the whole as Prizes, but as I hope the island will be retained, I directed that only half of the Produce should be delivered up with which the Planters and Merchants have expressed themselves perfectly satisfied and content.’¹

Almost immediately, Governor Woodley of Antigua complained about Cochrane taking the produce of Marie-Galante as prize ‘. admiral has considered a great part of the Produce of those islands as Prizes which has created a considerable sensation of uneasiness in the Minds of His Majesty’s subjects in these colonies lest it should excite in the enemy a Spirit of Retaliation.’² Previously General Bowyer had written to Castlereagh informing him that he did not agree with the Admiral on the importance of this possession and on no account did he want it made an army responsibility.³

The dispute with the Army was serious as it raised the perennial issue of providing garrisons for so many islands and manning the fleet with marines. Cochrane had

¹ TNA, CO 318/34: 12 Mar 1808, Cochrane to Pole pp. 525-529

² TNA, CO 152/91: 26 April 1808, Woodley to Castlereagh (*not paginated*)

³ TNA, CO 318/33: 21 Mar 1808, Bowyer to Castlereagh p. 81

already asked the Admiralty for 150 men⁴ and then after reporting the capture of Marie-Galante said it could be garrisoned with 300-400⁵. On 22 August 1808, with a degree of prescience, Beckwith wrote a confidential letter to Edward Cooke (Castlereagh's right hand man) 'the marines of the squadron are sinking fast at Marie-Galante a military position of no comparative importance and exposed to the enemy beyond all sober calculation.'⁶ At the end of August 1808, the French counterattacked Marie Galante forcing Cochrane to see help from Beckwith to rescue his garrison. Beckwith despatched a force of 400 men which landed on 29 August and defeated the French force by 3 September.⁷ When he released the soldiers for the recapture of Marie Galante, he gave a specific instruction to the commander of the force that he was under no circumstances to spend more than ten days, subsequently extended at the commander's discretion to 16 days, on the island after disembarkation as he feared they would end up replacing the Navy's forces.⁸ Beckwith sent a private letter to Castlereagh saying that but for his prompt action the naval force would have been captured.⁹ By October with sickness affecting his marines Cochrane said he was going to raise a company of freed black slaves of 150-200 which, with 60 marines would be enough to garrison the island.¹⁰

⁴ TNA, ADM 1/329: 12 Jan 1808, Cochrane to Admiralty ref. 2.8

⁵ TNA, ADM 1/329: 29 Mar 1808, Cochrane to Mulgrave ref. 2.37

⁶ TNA, CO 318/33: 22 Aug 1808, Beckwith to Edward Cooke p. 503

⁷ TNA, CO 318/34: 14 Sep 1808, Beckwith to Castlereagh p. 69 enclosing Lt Col Blackwell's report pp. 73-84

⁸ TNA, CO 318/33: 27 Aug 1808, Beckwith to Cochrane p. 503

⁹ TNA, CO 318/34: 15 Sep 1808, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 85-87

¹⁰ TNA, ADM 1/329: 18 Oct 1808, Cochrane to Admiralty ref 2.134

Before dealing with the events of late December and January, when the “off- on” decisions were made, it is necessary to consider further the manpower arrangements both for the Army and Navy as they reflected on the problems both had and also how it impacted Beckwith’s decision in January 1809. The West Indian regiments were critical to Britain because they saved European troops. From 1795, Dundas the Secretary of State for War had sought to establish the regiments to counterbalance the disastrous losses from sickness experienced by the European troops. The local colonial assemblies had strongly opposed it and defeated initial attempts at recruitment which led in the end to the Government authorising the direct purchase of slaves in the markets. Between 1795 and 1808, the Government purchased 13,400 slaves at cost of £92500. In 1807, with the passing of the anti Slavery Act and to over-ride, legally, all colonial objections, the Mutiny Act was modified to declare all slaves enrolled in the British army were free.¹¹ The anti Slavery Act had a major effect on recruitment, which was of real concern as the benefit of lower sickness rates in the black regiments was clear. From January 1808 to May 1810, the percentage annual death rate, for rank and file averaged around 5-7% compared with 14-17% in the European troops, (this includes deaths in action which, as will be seen, were very low). The five (out of eight in total raised) regiments in Beckwith’s command reduced in number of rank and file from 5237 to 4188, whilst the European troops numbers were maintained by replacements (see Appendix 1). The Government recognised this problem and had previously instructed General Bowyer to take any negro, confiscated or forfeited from

¹¹ Buckley, *Slaves in Redcoats* Chaps 2, 3 and 4

foreign ships in vice admiralty courts, into the army, provided they were fit.¹² The colonies did not like black regiments being stationed in their territories and did everything they could to make conditions unacceptable but whenever an issue arose the Government invariably supported the military. In 1809, Castlereagh made it clear to Governor Mummings of Jamaica that Beckwith had authority to move troops and it did not have to go via the Commander in Chief of the Army in London.¹³ Previously and although not part of the Leeward island command, correspondence from Castlereagh reflected both the attitude of the colonies, in this case Jamaica, and the Government's strong response.

re Jamaica soldier 'The pretensions of the Assembly to all the rights and privileges of the House of Commons is quite absurd.The control of the army does not belong to them...I cannot but very much disapprove of the steps taken by General Carmichael, pending these discussions, to disturb the ordinary course which the island supplies are furnished to the troops.'¹⁴

General Bowyer had to object to a proposal by a Mr Johnstone who proposed cutting meat and wine out of the Black troops' rations to save money and drunkenness. In the same letter he referred to the poor state of their barrack accommodation. He was worried about creating differences with how the white troops were treated.¹⁵ In 1809 Beckwith had to complain both about Governor Woodley refusing barrack accommodation and other Governors using black troops on civilian projects in preference to military ones.¹⁶ There was a general policy that the ratio of troops should

¹² TNA, CO 318/33: 11 April 1808, Downing Street to Bowyer pp. 159 -160

¹³ TNA, War Office (WO) 1/40: 7 June 1809, Castlereagh to Mummings p. 37

¹⁴ Vane *Correspondence*, 11 Feb 1808 Castlereagh to Earl of Manchester

¹⁵ TNA, CO 318/33: 10 Feb 1808, Bowyer to Castlereagh pp. 49-57

¹⁶ TNA, CO 318/36: 15 July 1809, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 567-587

never be more than one third black troops.¹⁷ Both General Bowyer and General Beckwith had expressed concerns about the state of the West Indian regiments as result of then being stationed too long on one island and proposed that they should be rotated and provided with better accommodation. This was strongly supported by Downing Street, with the main justification being that it should reduce European troop losses.¹⁸ On 10 Oct 1808, in a secret letter to Castlereagh, Beckwith raised his concerns about the state of the four West Indian Regiments, which prevented him from agreeing at that time to carry out the instructions he had received. It also stressed the absence of white officers and NCOs' and asked for their pay to be stopped if they were still in England in December and from them to be dismissed if not in their posts by 24 March 1809.¹⁹ However by 18 October, Beckwith must have been reasonably content with their state, as he told Castlereagh that with Prevost's troops, which he was sending for, on the 19 October, to arrive in Barbados by Christmas and the 13th Regiment from Bermuda, he thought he could undertake the operation.²⁰ The issue of European troop losses remained a key theme of British Government concern as previously noted. On 14 Dec, Beckwith was specifically instructed to spare the European troops under Prevost and return them to cool climates as soon as possible especially those used on Martinique.²¹

¹⁷ Buckley, *Slaves in Redcoats* Chap 3

¹⁸ TNA, CO 318/33: 20Aug 1808, Downing Street to Beckwith pp. 455-457

¹⁹ TNA, CO 318/34: 10 Oct 1808, Beckwith To Castlereagh pp. 171-172

²⁰ TNA, CO 318/34: 18 Oct 1808, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 259-265

²¹ TNA, CO 318/34: 14 Dec 1808, Downing Street To Beckwith pp. 262-2654

Manpower issues were also concerning Cochrane and were to be the excuse for Beckwith calling off the operation. At the beginning of 1808 Cochrane had asked for an additional 150 men.²² The problems of manning Marie-Galante have been mentioned, but again in November despite acknowledging he had had replacements, he asked the Admiralty for a further 300 and made specific reference to the negative effect of the Anti slavery Act which had deprived him of sure source of manpower.²³ As has been mentioned, it appears that Cochrane started the close blockade Martinique in mid October. On 2 November based on report from the captain of the Galatea, he informed the Admiralty about the difficulty in stopping single ships getting into Martinique due to activities of merchants on St Lucia and Dominica.²⁴ In his letters of 6 and 7 January 1809, he amplified this further stating that American neutral ships, with falsely labelled cargoes had been supplying the islands before the blockade and he could not stop small ships from landing supplies at night on Martinique and Guadeloupe from St Bartholomew.²⁵ Two other aspect of the naval situation, one of which impacted on the manpower situation needs highlighting. Cochrane was always under pressure from traders about loss of ships to privateers and at the end of 1808 had to write a long letter of justification in response to a complaint from ships masters at Lloyds.²⁶ Secondly, there was always the concern of a French squadron escaping from the French coast to reinforce the French islands and early in November Cochrane received advice (dated 24 August), that a French squadron was ready to put to sea.²⁷

²² TNA, ADM 1/329: 12 Jan 1808, Cochrane to Admiralty ref. 2.8

²³ TNA, ADM 1/329: 2 Nov 1808, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2.153

²⁴ TNA, ADM 1/329: 2 Nov 1808, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2.172

²⁵ TNA, ADM 1.330: 6 and 7 Jan 1809, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2.6 and 2.7

²⁶ TNA, ADM 1/329: 15 Dec 1808, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2.175

²⁷ TNA, ADM 1/329: 8 Nov 1808, Beckwith to Pole ref. 2.158

The importance of this was that Cochrane needed a full complement of marines to fight French capital ships, which, in practice, meant he had to ask the army for them.

In his letter of 7 Jan 1809, Cochrane said he was 1344 men short.²⁸

On 5 November 1808, Beckwith reported that he was satisfied with the blockade and that the French regular strength on Martinique was around 2000 men with 200 in hospital and 4000 militia.²⁹ A month later he sent two letters on the same date. The open one stated the arrival of the 13th Regiment from Bermuda and that he was expecting Prevost's troops from Halifax to arrive by Christmas and he should be able to undertake the attack in the first week of January.³⁰ On the same day he sent a confidential letter to Cooke summarising the situation and replying to letters of 12 Oct and 3 Nov but raised issues about soldiers having to man the fleet, where Cochrane said he needed 600 and complained about sailors being deployed on islands for prize money reasons.³¹ This correspondence reveals the shortage of manpower which both commanders experienced and how it impacted on their relationships. Meanwhile, Cochrane had written to Beckwith stating that Martinique was ripe for assault, despite the fact that the blockade was not totally effectively and encouraging him to attack and promising to provide troop and gun transports.³² Prevost's troops arrived in

²⁸ TNA, ADM 1/330: 7 Jan 1809, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2.7

²⁹ TNA, CO 318/34: 5 Nov 1808, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 317-319

³⁰ TNA, CO 318/34: 16 Dec 1808, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 415-416

³¹ TNA, CO 318/34: 16 Dec 1808, Beckwith to Cooke pp. 419-421

³² TNA, WO 1/27: 21 Nov 1808 (2 letters) and 1 Dec 1808, Cochrane to Beckwith pp.157-172 (*WO1/27 is a file of papers from 1813 from Cochrane to Earl Bathurst basically containing copies of all the correspondence pertaining to these events as Cochrane was still trying to ensure that his reputation was not affected.)

Barbados on 27 December.³³ Just before Christmas 1808, a French frigate, two vessels variously described as corvettes/brigs, and two schooners slipped through the blockade, bringing reinforcements and supplies. The extent was not properly known but believed to be several hundred regular troops.

On 2 January, Beckwith asked Cochrane to release the army detachments serving on Cochrane's ships to be returned to land and to put in writing the number of men he needed, which he did as 670.³⁴ At a meeting that day, Beckwith apparently raised the issue of the reinforcements to Martinique and Cochrane's need for army troops and said that, on that basis, his instructions did not permit him to go ahead with the attack.

On 3 January 1809, Beckwith wrote to Castlereagh saying that in light of the reinforcement of the island which he said raised the enemy force from 2000 to 3000 and the 'enfeebled' state of the naval squadron which could not continue the blockade without 700 -800 men which had meant that he had to give Cochrane the Royal York Rangers regiment, that his instructions of 31 August forbade him to undertake the operation if it was likely to turn into a protracted military operation, he was cancelling the operation. He said Cochrane had not challenged his decision. Cochrane was outraged and denied that his shortage of men meant that he agreed with Beckwith's decision and said the operation should proceed.³⁵ On the 5 January 1809, he wrote to Beckwith saying that as long as a French squadron did not arrive he would not need the

³³ TNA, CO 318/35: 4 Jan 1809, Prevost to Castlereagh p. 25

³⁴ TNA, WO 1/27: 2 Jan 1809, Beckwith to Cochrane p. 175 and Cochrane to Beckwith pp. 179-180

³⁵ TNA, CO 318/35: 4-5 Jan 1809, Beckwith to Cochrane various pp. 46-64 and WO1/27* pp. 175-187

troop detachments and in addition could provide 200 marines and 300 seamen to help with ordnance and stores, but would need 500 more soldiers if the enemy squadron arrived. Perhaps, more tellingly, he said that whatever Beckwith's instructions, which were written 'ministerial styled' they expected the Commander in Chief to take a degree of responsibility. 'I fear the nation will expect more from us and that the abandonment of the Expedition will be but ill received in England'. He hoped that the arrival of an expected packet from London will 'brighten our Prospects'.³⁶

On 7 Jan he received reports from his captains blockading Martinique that 'reliable sources' indicated the number of troops Martinique had received since start of blockade had only covered losses and that indeed the number landed recently was only 170 and not 250.³⁷ On 17 Jan, Beckwith stated correspondence from London from the latest mail packet in response to letter of 18 Oct 1808 did not change his view about cancelling the operation.³⁸ The following day he gave the go ahead after consulting Generals Prevost and his own subordinate Major General Maitland. What caused the change of mind cannot be certain. It was probably the combination of events. First, there was the growing evidence that the reinforcement was not significant; secondly, the willingness of Cochrane to be flexible on troop requirements; but thirdly, and probably above all, the fear of the political backlash from cancelling the operation. In his letter to Castlereagh, after the operation was cancelled, Prevost has said that he would remove

³⁶ TNA, CO 318/35: 5 Jan 1809, Cochrane to Beckwith pp. 51-53

³⁷ TNA, ADM 1/330: 4 and 7 Jan 1809, Cochrane to Pole (2.2 and 2.8) & WO1/27: 7 Jan 1809, Captain Brenton to Cochrane pp. 221-223

³⁸ TNA, WO 1/27: 17 Jan 1809, Beckwith to Cochrane p. 255

his troops to Bermuda around 16/17 January but 'would still like to use his troops should circumstances occur.'³⁹ Prevost, as Governor of Nova Scotia, was in the position to influence Beckwith and perhaps Beckwith could see himself able to associate Prevost with the decision if things went wrong. Perhaps this is what caused the then change of heart. The disagreement between Cochrane and Beckwith did not end there. Mr Haffey, a councillor on Antigua, whom Beckwith appointed as army agent for the Martinique operation, wrote a letter to a Governor of the Bank of England supporting Beckwith's decision and calling Cochrane a 'buccaneer'. Cochrane, by chance, saw this letter some months later and obviously thought Beckwith was associated with it, although he denied it. Haffey in February 1810 was forced to formally apologise to Cochrane to avoid a law suit. Cochrane's concern about his reputation was not allayed by this, as in 1813, he wrote to Earl Bathurst, the then Secretary of State for Colonies and War, justifying what had happened at the beginning of January 1809 and making it clear that he had challenged Beckwith but as the latter was not going to change his decision, he had just stopped arguing.⁴⁰ One must have some sympathy for Cochrane at that juncture.

The correspondence detailed above has demonstrated how important manpower issues were throughout 1808 and how they led to indecision. It is clear that the British Government saw an opportunity to destroy the remaining French influence in the West Indies, but patently they did not want an excessive loss of European troops.

³⁹ TNA, CO 318/35: 4 Jan 1809, Prevost to Castlereagh pp. 39-41

⁴⁰ TNA, WO 1/27: This file basically contains Cochrane's letter of 3rd September 1813 to Bathurst attaching all the original correspondence.pp143-283 There is also some other correspondence from Cochrane on matters pertaining to Guadeloupe

Fundamentally, they gave Beckwith instructions not to attack unless he was certain of success at minimal European manpower cost. Manpower difficulties bedevilled both the army and navy and were not helped by Cochrane's seizure of Marie-Galante which clearly rankled with the army. In all his responses Beckwith had been hedging his bets and the French reinforcement in December 1808 made him lose his nerve. With Cochrane, Prevost and Maitland urging the attack to go ahead, all of them possibly recognising the political difficulties which might result from the cancellation, Beckwith changed his mind again. Not the best attribute for a commander but one which was to result in an outstanding success. The correspondence has revealed how close the operation came to not taking place. It has also filled a gap in the historiography.

Chapter 3

The conquest of Martinique and the Battle of Les Saintes

The historiography concerning the operational planning, assault and capture of Martinique and the later capture of the Les Saintes is more extensive than that for the decision making process in 1808. The military operations on Martinique have been well covered by Fortescue¹ based on the despatches of Beckwith, his subordinates and Cochrane. The battle of Les Saintes, both the capture of the island and especially the naval encounters are less well covered although Cochrane's and Major-General - General Maitland's reports are comprehensive. Whilst they will be described, the emphasis in this chapter will be to examine the degree of professionalism and co-operation between the naval and army forces. Beckwith's planning of the attack based on the British knowledge of the French defences provides the start, but the actual cooperation between navy and army will be illustrated through the landings and then the support given by the naval to the siege operations. The reaction to the French attempt to reinforce its West Indian position which resulted in the naval and military battle of Les Saintes off Guadeloupe will further illustrate the co-operation between the two arms and ability to respond significantly at short notice. This will provide the first part of the theme on the success of amphibious operations. Beckwith's concern about the use of army manpower will also be confirmed. Prize money and appointments will feature as issues engendering irritation between the

¹ Sir John Fortescue. *History of the British Army*

commanders. In assessing the overall success, the ability of the French to resist the attack will be considered.

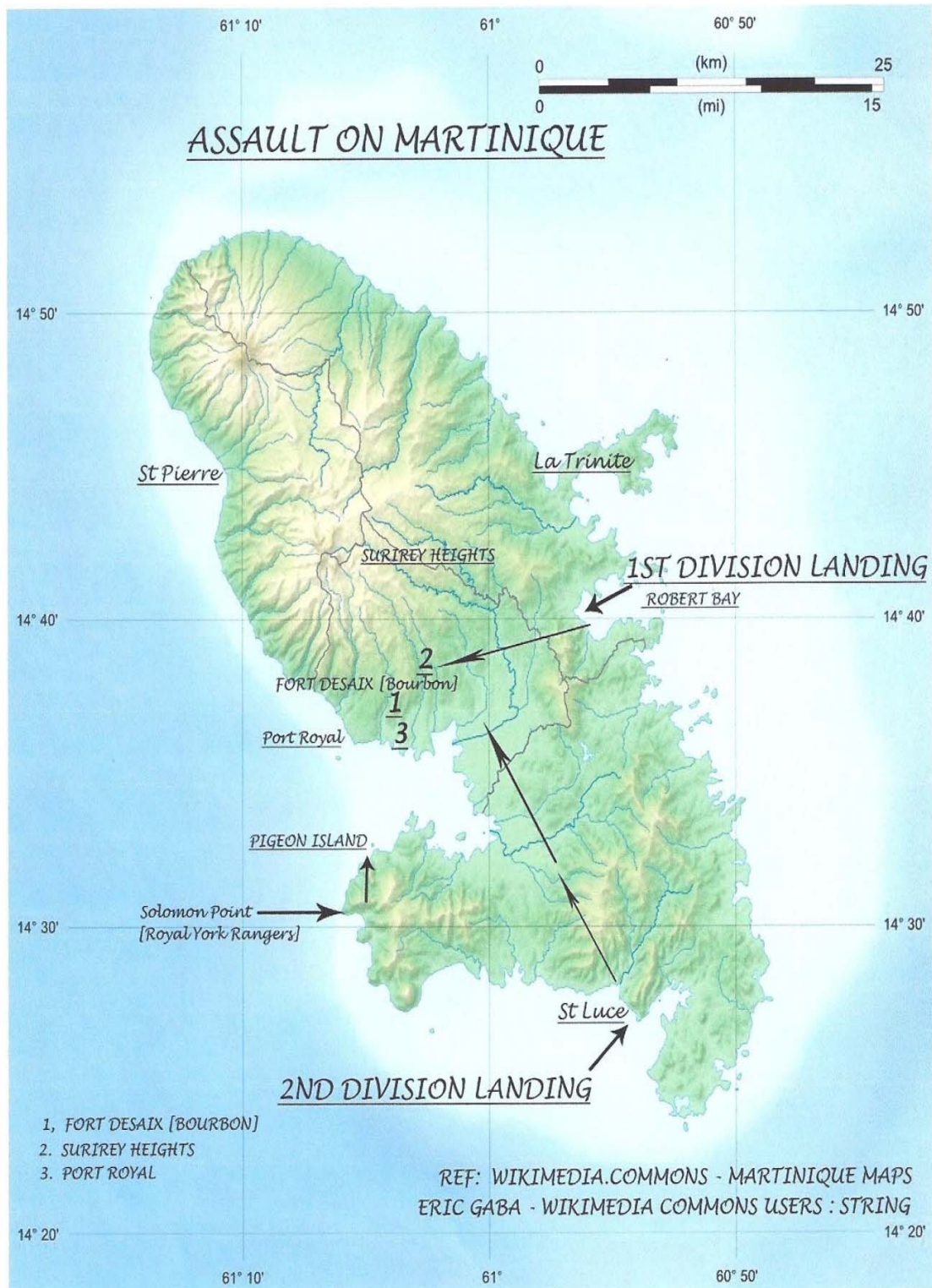
Whilst the previous chapter highlighted Beckwith's concerns about the reinforcement of Martinique, British knowledge about the island's defences was extremely good. Not only had they the previous knowledge from capturing it in 1794, but a spy sent to the island, described in Cochrane's covering letter² as a 'reliable gentleman' produced a comprehensive report just before the December 1808 reinforcement. Besides covering the food and ordnance reserves, it described in detail the number and quality of the French regular forces which were only some 2070, of whom some 200 were in hospital, including '7-800 unhappy conscripts and 600-700 discontented Germans'. There were some 6000 militia, 95 % of whom were coloured and many would look favourably on British rule. The main fort, Bourbon, was well fortified and had been improved but he considered it would only stand a siege of 14-20 days. Many of the other forts were in a poorer condition. He considered the planters would be overawed and not fight if the British landed with a significant force of some 10000 troops and promised to respect private property. Hall's comments that the garrison was reinforced by 2-3000 men is inaccurate and that Beckwith still seemed confident enough to attack³ is misleading given that he originally called off the attack.

With Prevost's force of some 4000 men from Halifax, Beckwith had a strength of over 10000 of whom some 3500 were from the four West Indian battalions and the

² TNA, ADM 1/329: 20 Dec 1808, Cochrane to Pole ref 2.189

³ Hall, *British Strategy* p. 185

remainder British troops including the 13th regiment from Bermuda. (The organisation of the British Army forces is shown at Appendix 2). His basic plan (see map) was to remove all organised opposition on the island prior to besieging Port de France, with



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its fortress Fort Bourbon. To this effect he planned to land his main force on the east of the island, whilst his second division, in strong conjunction with the navy cleared the south west coast and in particular the island and coastal forts which protected the anchorage of Port de France.⁴ Beckwith issued very comprehensive instructions to his commanders over the period starting in November under the title of General orders.⁵ After a general exhortation to perform well on 18 November⁶, his 8 Dec⁷ orders were detailed instructions of what the soldiers were to carry and wear, stressing 'lightest marching order' with the need to minimise weight. Field officers, commanding corps, were given discretion to reduce but not increase kit. It stated they were to land with three days' food, how many men were to be on each transport/naval vessel, each vessel was to be self contained for basic supplies and field officers commanding corps were to be in vessels near their troop transports. The 20 January instructions⁸ for disembarkation specified the troops must sit down and maintain absolute silence, not loaded or with fixed bayonets unless there was opposition on the landing area, then to form up on beach and must only be in lightest marching order. General Prevost was authorised to vary the equipment schedule for his troops from Halifax as they may be differently equipped. It also gave instructions when pickets should open fire and that any wounded were to be left for main body to pick up. On the 27 January⁹ just before the expedition sailed, there was another general exhortation, but also a warning that stragglers would be regarded as plunderers, with no pardon for anyone who sets fire to buildings. Later orders were generally commending actions but on 4 February, he

⁴ TNA, CO 318/35: 27 Jan 1809, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 261-263

⁵ TNA, CO 318/35: All contained in a comprehensive report on the operation 7 Mar 1809, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 253- 317

⁶ TNA, CO 318/35: 18 Nov 1808, p. 291

⁷ TNA, CO 318/35: 8 Dec 1808, pp. 292-295

⁸ TNA, CO 318/35: 20 Jan 1809, pp. 295-298

⁹ TNA, CO 318/35: 27 Jan 1809, pp. 298-301

authorised the execution of two soldiers of WIR rifle companies for robbery.¹⁰ These all reveal the professionalism of the commanders and the forethought given. It was not an amateurish approach.

The cooperation between the forces both for the amphibious landings and the subsequent support of land operations is well illustrated by the short campaign on Martinique. Cochrane deployed the bulk of his squadron to cover and support the attack (detailed at Appendix 3). The combined force sailed on 28 January and landed on the 30. Just before the landing, on 30 January, Beckwith and Cochrane issued a proclamation to the inhabitants of Martinique basically promising them that their private property, which included slaves, would be respected if they did not oppose the British forces. As Beckwith reported it had already resulted in many of the militia 'to manifest disposition everywhere to return to their homes.'¹¹ The first division under Prevost of some 6500 men landed at Bay Robert and by the morning of the 31st had marched seven miles inland through difficult country, especially for the artillery and supply wagons. Beckwith was very complimentary of the naval support under Captain Beaver who led the ships in to the bay and only two transports ran aground on the shoals. Beaver's own reports demonstrated the need to set out flags to mark the shoals and the difficulties of landing through the surf, as the weather was windy and squally, but 4500 men, with some artillery and horses were landed in an afternoon starting at 4pm.¹² The second division under Major-General Maitland, with some 3700 men, landed unopposed at Saint Luce and Pointe Soloman on the morning of the 30

¹⁰ TNA, CO 318/35: 4 Feb 1809, General Orders pp. 304-306

¹¹ TNA, CO 318/35: 1 Feb 1809, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 103-106

¹² TNA, ADM 1/330: 31 Jan 1809, Capt Beaver to Cochrane ref. 2.17

January and rapidly completed their immediate tasks. He sent the Royal York Rangers to take the Solomon Point battery and then move to heights which overlooked Pigeon Island. This was a critical move as the French guns on Pigeon Island prevented Cochrane's ships and transports from entering Port Royal bay. Capt Cockburn, shortly promoted Commodore, was in charge of the naval support to the attack and it was the exertions of his sailors that established the batteries on the heights on the night of the 3/4 February. Cochrane reported that the one mortar landed was not enough and the navy landed another nine guns of which five were dragged up to the heights. The bombardment started which led to the surrender of Pigeon Island on 4.¹³ Meanwhile Maitland's main force had advanced slowly along the coast and met the French militia at Lamartin, who dispersed without fighting. By the 5 February, he had reached Pointe Negroe and sealed off the west of Port de France, causing the French to abandon the city and retire into the fortress.¹⁴ Part of Cochrane's squadron entered the bay to support the forces, which resulted, in the French destroying their shipping in the harbour to prevent it falling in to British hands. Subsequently, the Navy supported the land attack through direct fire support, stores and supplies for the troops and parties of seamen to help erect and man the inland investing batteries. The success of the landings and the investment of the coastal side of Port Royal demonstrated the effective co-operation between the Army and Navy in amphibious operations. Meanwhile on the east coast the priority was to approach the French positions on the heights at Surirey, which protected Fort Bourbon from the east. For around 400 casualties, this was achieved over three days as the French withdrew for fear of being

¹³ TNA, ADM 1/330: 4 Feb 1809, Cochrane to Pole ref.2.17

¹⁴ TNA, CO 318/35: 8 Feb 1809, Maitland to Beckwith pp. 129-133

outflanked.¹⁵ Meanwhile amphibious operations continued with the port of Trinite to the north, which was outside the main operations on the east coast being captured separately by a naval force of marines and sailors,¹⁶ and St Pierre, a substantial town to the north on the west coast was taken by a detachment of the 63rd Regt being transported there by the navy.¹⁷ These latter actions again show the flexibility and efficiency in combined operations.

The next ten days were spent in encircling the fortress and erecting the batteries to subdue it. Conditions were very difficult with apparently continuous rain which made it very hard to get the artillery and stores in place as the roads were virtually impassable. Cochrane commented that 400 seamen and marines had been used to get four mortars and four 24 pounders from the Bay of Cohe to the heights of Surirey. His seamen also completely manned the Forville battery as well as firing from the ships.¹⁸ This was where the co-operation between the navy and the army was highly demonstrated. By 19 February, 6 batteries with 14 cannon and 28 howitzers and mortars had been constructed and supplied despite French counter-fire. Cochrane's report of February 25¹⁹ said the bombardment started on the afternoon 19 and lasted until noon of 23, when the French asked for negotiations. Their proposal to allow the regular soldiers to return to France was rejected and the bombardment re-started at 10pm and continued until 9 am on 24, when the French capitulated. At the surrender

¹⁵ TNA, CO 318/35: 5 Feb 1809, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 109-110

¹⁶ TNA, CO 318/35: 1 Feb 1809, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 103-106

¹⁷ TNA, CO 318/35: 8 Feb 1809, Lt-Col Barnes to Major-Gen Maitland pp. 157-158

¹⁸ TNA, ADM 1/330: 18 Feb 1809, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2..22

¹⁹ TNA, ADM 1/330: 25 Feb 1809, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2.25

some 2242 captured French troops were deemed fit to be moved off the island with several hundred more wounded or sick in hospital. By the 27, the great amount of public stores, from guns to fuses, number of shot as well trenching tools and wheelbarrows and supplies had been listed in minute detail so that their value could be calculated for prize money purposes.²⁰ The total army casualties between 1 and 25 February had been 551 of whom were 119 killed, 407 wounded missing and 3 died in hospital (this excluded those hospitalized by sickness).²¹ Thus the expedition had met the Government's requirement.

Clearly the commanders were elated at their success. Beckwith praised the shortness of the campaign of just 27 days, despite the incessant rain and heaped praise on his generals and the navy²², but it is worth quoting from Cochrane's report of the 25 February.

*'never did more Unanimity prevail between the two Services than on the present Occasion. One Sentiment one which pervaded the whole; and they look with confidence to a speedy and glorious Termination of their Toils •. I had on this Service: the Happiness to act with Lieutenant General Beckwith, an Officer I have long been in the Habits of intimacy with, from whose Zeal had everything to expect: and which the recent Events' have so fully realized. He did me the honour to consult me on various occasions and his Communications and Co-operation were friendly and cordial, which, on all conjoined Expedition, is the surest Pledge of Success.'*²³

This amity was not to last long for on the 1 March Cochrane was complaining to the Admiralty that Beckwith has taken over the island and was making appointments

²⁰ *London Gazette extraordinary* 13 April 1809, No XV (copy of Beckwith's report of 28th Feb)

²¹ TNA, CO 318/35: 7 Mar 1809, Beckwith to Castlereagh p. 277

²² TNA, CO 318/35: 28 Feb 1809, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 197-237

²³ TNA, ADM 1/330: 25 Feb 1809, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2.25

totalling ignoring the navy.²⁴ The rewards of success were not being shared fairly. A campaign of less than 30 days would suggest that the French resistance was feeble. Pigeon Island fell after a half day's bombardment with 135 prisoners and only 5 dead and few wounded.²⁵ Nevertheless, in the encounters at the beginning of February, the French inflicted over 400 casualties on Prevost's first division and a British attack on an advanced redoubt at Surirey was called off to avoid excessive casualties. This suggests that the French regular forces fought strongly. They were however heavily outnumbered and the British could always outflank any position so withdrawal to the fortress was probably inevitable. The only French hope had been that reinforcements would have arrived to enable them to hold the British off until the hot weather season. It is clear that if significant reinforcements had arrived, Beckwith would almost certainly have cancelled the operation in accordance with his instruction. Once the siege had started, its fall was inevitable as the navy would have prevented any serious reinforcements arriving to relieve it and the army force was overwhelming.

During the next few weeks, whilst arrangements were made to ship the French prisoners off Martinique and Prevost's troops set sail for Halifax on March 16 with only 84 deaths 59 killed and 25 dead of illness,²⁶ the French efforts to relieve Martinique, already too late, took effect. On 22 March, Cochrane wrote to Pole saying he had received belated intelligence a few days earlier, (sent on January 2) that the large French squadron based at Brest had evaded the British blockade. He positioned his ships to meet the threat.²⁷ The

²⁴ TNA, ADM 1/330: 1 Mar 1809, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2.30

²⁵ TNA, ADM 1/330: 4 Feb 1809, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2.17

²⁶ TNA, CO 318/35: 15 Mar 1809, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 353-356

²⁷ TNA, ADM 1/330: 22 Mar 1809, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2.36

manpower issue became pressing for Beckwith. He had written to Castlereagh that having to give more soldiers to the fleet to meet this threat, with Prevost leaving and Martinique needing a garrison of 3000 men, he could not return the 13 Regiment to Bermuda and needed two more regiments.²⁸ By the end of March the situation had clarified. The Brest squadron had been contained but a squadron of three ships of the line and two frigates had been sighted off Dominica and then anchored in the Les Saintes off Guadeloupe protected by batteries on the island. Cochrane asked Beckwith for soldiers to seize the island so that they could bring artillery fire on the anchored ships and force them out to fight where they could be destroyed. He originally believed that the French ships had brought 1200 men but this was corrected to provisions only. In his letter to the Admiralty, he suggested that he could hold Fort George on the Les Saintes with 100 men and that would prevent the French anchoring ships there again.²⁹ This, for Beckwith, clearly had echoes of Marie-Galante. It is worth commenting here that Beckwith and Cochrane's instructions did permit the capture of Guadeloupe if it could be done without a military expedition. It was known that some of the French inhabitants would welcome British rule and intelligence suggested the island was in difficulties. It was said General D'Ernouf had already evacuated Grand Terre and destroyed the batteries and had plans to evacuate the town of Basse-Terre in the event a British force turned up. Captain Maurice on Marie Galante had two French gentlemen who would confirm the position.³⁰

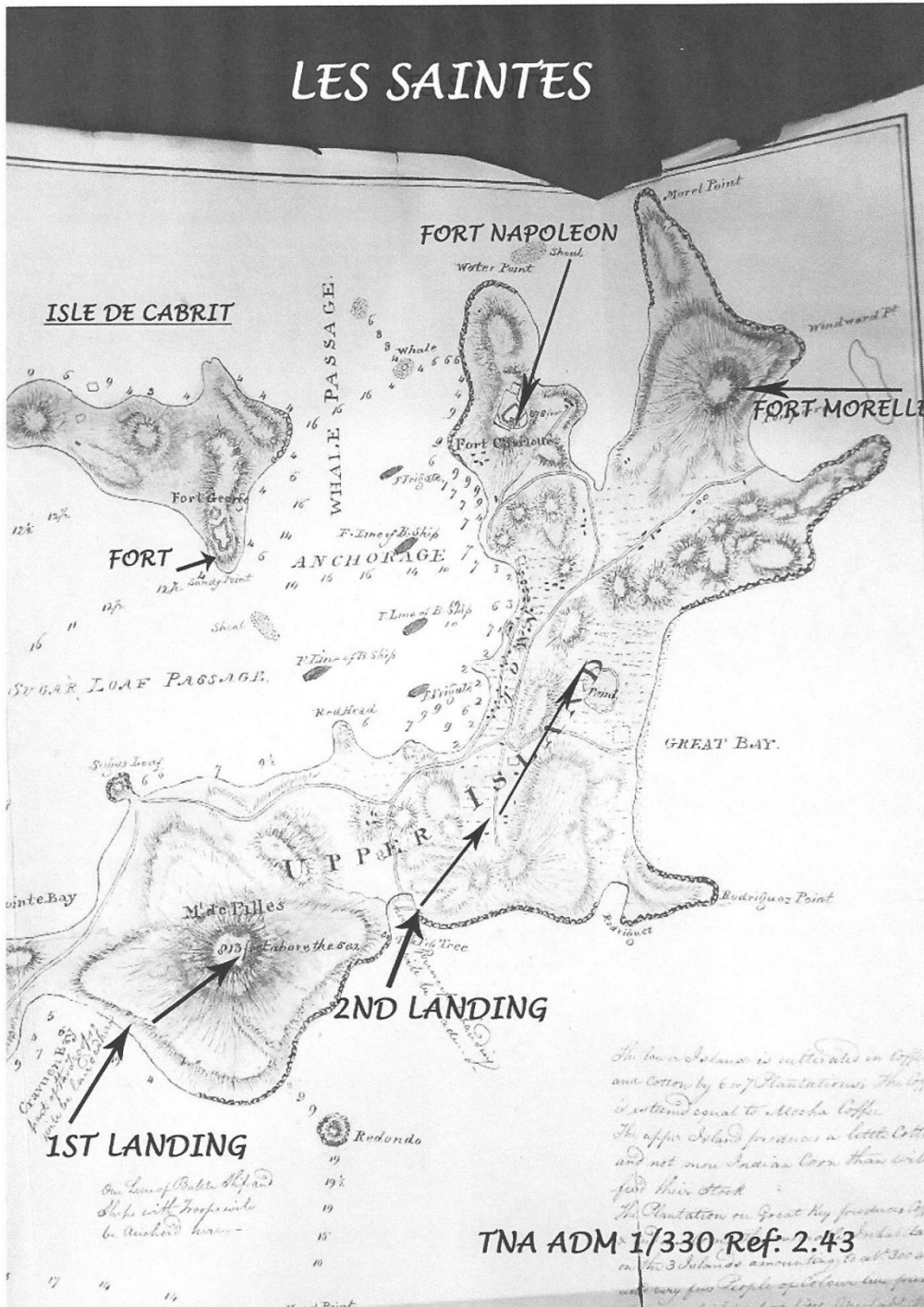
²⁸ TNA, CO 318/35: 13 Mar 1809, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 349-350

²⁹ TNA, ADM 1/330: 7 Apr 1809, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2.43

³⁰ TNA, ADM 1/330: 18 Mar 1809, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2.32

Beckwith did agree to provide a force of nearly 3000 men under General Maitland.

However, he gave strict instructions to Maitland that the troops were only to be used to capture the islands, help destroy the French squadron and demolish all the



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fortifications. They were to return as soon as possible as Beckwith wanted to get his troops back to their original bases before the hot weather season.³¹ This was agreed by Cochrane. From a military point of view, the expedition went splendidly. Maitland and Captain Beaver of the frigate *Acasta* worked in harmony. The troops arrived off Les Saintes on the 13 April and landed the following day virtually unopposed. An assault was required to clear the 800ft high Mount Ruffel, which left them facing the three forts. The following day most of the troops were re-embarked and landed at Ance Vanovre Bay once the opposition had been cleared by a land advance. This enabled batteries to be set up to fire on Fort Napoleon. On the night of the 15 a ridge close to the forts was seized by a surprise attack and a counterattack the following morning beaten off. Following this action the French surrendered with about 700 men. The British losses were 6 killed, 68 wounded and 1 missing.³² The French resistance was poor, probably because the bulk of their well outnumbered forces (only 6-700) were new conscripts from France. The naval actions were somewhat less successful. As Cochrane pointed out there were three exits from the anchorage and he had only five ships of the line and the French three. When they sailed at night, he did not know the direction and did not feel he could sail immediately as it would leave the troops and frigates ashore unguarded. The ships of the line were sighted the following day but although the *D'Hautpoult* was taken the better sailing qualities of the French ships enabled the others to escape.³³ The fortifications were destroyed and Maitland's

³¹ TNA, CO 318/35: 11 Apr 1809, Beckwith to Maitland pp. 481-483

³² TNA, CO 318/35: 18 Apr 1809, Maitland to Beckwith pp. 485-493

³³ TNA, ADM 1/330: 17 Apr 1809, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2.45

forces left the island on the 29 April and were back on Martinique on the 1 May.³⁴

Inter service amphibious co-operation was again excellent and manpower losses minimal.

A political issue later arose about a proclamation issued by Cochrane and Maitland to the inhabitants of the Saintes when they declared that the islands were to be transferred from Guadeloupe control to Dominica and would not be regarded as French subjects. This was not British Government policy and was subsequently overturned.³⁵ In another illustration of the British Government's concern for European manpower, Beckwith's proposal to destroy the fortifications of Fort Bourbon was agreed but with the proviso that he 'spared the fatigue of the European troops'.³⁶ There were also issues on prize money. Cochrane's complaint about Beckwith's appointments to Martinique has been mentioned. Beckwith asked that Prevost, who had the substantive rank of major-general, should receive the rewards of a lieutenant general, which was his honorary rank in Nova Scotia, but in the same letter complained about the army's share for the action at the Les Saintes which would only be 1/64.³⁷ However, the personal rewards of the campaign were not long in coming. There were commendatory addresses in Parliament and Beckwith was knighted³⁸ and Cochrane

³⁴ TNA, ADM 1/330: 1 May 1809, Beaver to Cochrane ref. 2.70

³⁵ TNA, CO 318/35: Various Beckwith to Castlereagh and Maitland pp. 529-537, and CO 318/39: 8 Jun, legal opinion copied to Beckwith pp. 181-193

³⁶ TNA, CO 318/35: 22 May 1809, Downing Street to Beckwith pp. 323-327

³⁷ TNA, CO 318/36: 17 May 1809, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 91-93

³⁸ J. Spain., Beckwith, Sir George (1752/3–1823), *army officer and colonial governor Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/ Beckwith Sir George (accessed 16 Oct 2013)

appointed a vice admiral in October.³⁹

The capture of Martinique and the action at Les Saintes achieved all the objectives of British policy. Martinique was captured with minimum loss of European troops, as described above, Prevost's forces were returned to Nova Scotia and the French naval threat repulsed. French resistance would seem relatively weak and certainly it was at Les Saintes where the forces were not made up of fully experienced and trained troops. However, at both Martinique and the Les Saintes the British forces had amassed overwhelming strength and were able to deploy sufficient artillery effectively to dominate the forts. Nevertheless the issue of army manpower being needed by the navy continued as was revealed by Beckwith's instructions to Maitland at Les Saintes. The amphibious operations showed a high degree of co-operation and effectiveness between the army and navy. The ability to concentrate forces from different islands, the actions of the navy in leading the forces ashore and then supporting them not only with supplies but also manpower especially in establishing batteries on Martinique, in apparently very difficult wet conditions was excellent. Whatever the differences of the two commanders on manpower and prize money, they did work together and the relationships between the subordinate commanders seemed excellent.

³⁹ S. Howarth, Cochrane, Sir Alexander Inglis (1758–1832), *naval officer and politician Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/Cochrane Sir Alexander](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/Cochrane%20Sir%20Alexander) (accessed 16 Oct 2013)

Chapter 4

Guadeloupe and the rest 1809-1810

Following the British successes in early 1809 at Martinique and the Saintes, the historiography, apart from Fortescue, tends to treat the remaining campaigns to capture the French possessions of Guadeloupe, the Dutch islands of St Martin (part French) and St Eustatius, plus the French hold on part of Santo Domingo, (which was outside the Leeward Islands command) as afterthoughts, as has been detailed in the introduction. However, it will be demonstrated that the British Government still required operations to be carried out on the cheap, as far as manpower was concerned, and indeed, after an initial burst of enthusiasm to capture the island, by the end of 1809 were casting doubts on the value of the enterprise. The continued impact of manpower will be concluded by examining the Government's attitude to garrisoning the West Indies after the conclusion of the campaign. Neither of these areas has been explored in any depth in the historiography and so some gaps will be filled. The operations to seize Guadeloupe and the other islands will be examined with the emphasis to see if it continued to demonstrate the professionalism in amphibious operations revealed the year before. This will then provide the opportunity to discuss the performance in the West Indies in the light of Fedorak's article on amphibious operations during the Napoleonic war.¹ The ability of the French to resist the planned attack will be assessed. There will also be further examples of the problems caused by prize money and appointments.

¹ Fedorak, C.J., *The Royal Navy and British Amphibious Operations during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars*, *Military Affairs*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (Jul., 1988).

The British Government had previously indicated that Guadeloupe was of interest if it could be taken without military force and in April 1809, Beckwith was instructed that he must enforce the blockade of Guadeloupe strictly.² The first instruction to assault Guadeloupe appears to be dated 21st May (letter missing) as on 28 June Beckwith referred to plans to take Guadeloupe, St Martin and St Eustatius and also possibly helping the Spaniards on Puerto Rico to dislodge the French from Santa Domingo. In this letter the recurring theme arose of manpower shortages. He said he needed 2000 men to garrison Martinique and a force of 8000 including two West Indian regiments and some flank companies from other West Indian regiments to take Guadeloupe. He recommended that the Dutch islands should be rendered defenceless and not garrisoned. He commented about his reducing manpower spread out in fifteen separate garrisons. With expected sickness rates, he needed 3000 additional men (or 2000 if Santa Domingo was excluded) by the first week in December from either Europe or Nova Scotia.³ The orders of the 21 May clearly contained instructions for a close blockade of Guadeloupe because Cochrane commented that he could not do it unless 'licences are recalled suffering British merchants to bring away sugar from that Island' and also that the Swedish authorities in St Bartholomew stopped the trade between their island and Guadeloupe.⁴ Definitive instructions were sent on 12 August. 'It is deemed of considerable importance to dispossess the enemy of a station which

² TNA, CO 318/35: 12 Apr 1809, Downing Street to Beckwith pp. 141-3

³ TNA, CO 318/36: 28 Jun 1809, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 347- 359

⁴ TNA, ADM 1/330: 2 Jun 1809, Cochrane to Pole ref. 2.85

has proved at all times a serious annoyance and which if not reduced will continue to occupy the attention of a large naval force'. It went on to say that Beckwith could not have the troops from North America (Prevost's forces) but had to find them from his own. He was to carry out the attack as early as the climate permitted and to use the maximum number of black troops. Trade was always a consideration when determining the terms of surrender and he was specifically instructed to ensure that no Guadeloupe produce was to be delivered to Britain unless specifically marked for re-export.⁵ Beckwith continued to complain about his shortage of troops. In private correspondence to Cooke he reverted to the Marie Galante issue raising matters of the navy using slaves from Guadeloupe and then went on to say that all the good troops were going to Spain and he was left with French prisoners of war, culprits and Africans which raised a greater chance of mutinies. He also questioned whether the blockade would be effective.⁶ By September, following the fall of Santa Domingo, which lowered the threat to other islands, he reduced his manpower demands for the capture of Guadeloupe, but still required an extra 2000 men to secure Martinique and Guadeloupe, as they would need 5000 men as garrisons and there were still the sickness losses to be covered.⁷ It seems that British Government recognised the justice of his arguments for they agreed to send him a fully manned battalion (2nd of the 60th - 1200 men) and 600 recruits for the other regiments. However, in the same letter they greatly weakened the importance of carrying out the attack- 'the operation is only to be undertaken in the event of your entertaining an opinion that it can be accomplished

⁵ TNA, CO 318/36: 12 Aug 1809, Downing Street to Beckwith pp. 75-80

⁶ TNA, CO 318/36: 30 May 1809, Beckwith to Cooke pp. 95-98 and 15 July, pp. 603-608

⁷ TNA, CO 318/37: 30 Sep 1809, Beckwith to Castlereagh p. 379

without much difficulty'. This was then defined as not too heavy a loss or extended length and specifically said the advantages of capturing the island would not outweigh the above. This suggests that the Government's major concern had switched back to avoiding manpower losses in the West Indies as they put increasing numbers of troops into Spain and had sustained serious losses from sickness from the Walcheren operation.⁸ The saving on naval resources, which was originally one of the justifications, seems to have been overridden.⁹ Manpower was still an issue between Cochrane and Beckwith. In November 1809, Cochrane received intelligence that a French Squadron of two ships of the line and four frigates had been seen at Madeira. He had organised his squadron to intercept them assuming that they were going to Guadeloupe but when he asked Beckwith for men to help man the *Abercrombie*, Beckwith refused. Cochrane was infuriated and wrote to the Admiralty saying that when situations like that arose, Beckwith must be instructed to supply the troops needed.¹⁰

It was clear that French situation on Guadeloupe was vulnerable. Whilst basically the island grew more than enough to feed the inhabitants and garrison, trade was blockaded and reinforcements for the garrison very spasmodic and the inhabitants support questionable. Two settlers had approached the navy with a report on the island including the various proclamations which the Governor, General D'Ernouf, had

⁸ Hall, *British Strategy* pp. 178-179

⁹ TNA, CO 318/37: 2 Nov 1809, Downing Street to Beckwith pp. 363-368

¹⁰ TNA, ADM 1/310: 23 Dec 1809, Cochrane to Croker (who had replaced Pole) ref. 2.16

issued between the 1 and 8 March after the fall of Martinique, indicating the weakness of the defence and the lack of public support. This was backed up by Captain Maurice who was the Governor of Marie- Galante and commanded the inshore squadron. Cochrane in his letter to the Admiralty containing this information believed the island could be taken with a minimal force.¹¹ This situation was confirmed by the capture of a letter to the French Marine office indicating that the 600 conscripts which had arrived and been used for the failed defence of the Les Saintes had been worthless. It said trained soldiers not conscripts were required and, moreover, it revealed that many of the inhabitants would welcome British rule if it re-established normal trading conditions.¹² The French Government made frequent efforts to resupply the island sending out frigates and corvettes often armed en-flute (most of guns removed so that they could carry supplies). However although some got through, most were captured. In late December, Beckwith reported that Cochrane had destroyed two frigates but not before they had landed some five hundred troops and another corvette had landed thirty. However this time it did not affect his decision to attack.¹³ As mentioned above, the blockade was hampered by the activities of British traders and the Swedish authorities on St Bartholomew. Woodman has described several of the frigate actions in '*Sea Warriors*' from the documents sent by Cochrane.¹⁴ The British ships were quite accustomed to attempting to seize ships from under shore batteries and in one of the last on 18 January 1810 both the ship and the coastal battery was destroyed.¹⁵

¹¹ TNA, CO 318/39: 18 Mar 1809, Cochrane to Pole pp. 13-38

¹² TNA, CO 318/39: 18 April 1809, Col St Fleury to Minister of Marine pp. 231-234

¹³ TNA, CO 318/38: 26 Dec 1809, Beckwith to Liverpool pp. 205-206

¹⁴ Woodman *Sea Warriors* Kindle 4552-4631

¹⁵ TNA, ADM 1/331: 22 Jan 1810, Capt Hayes to Cochrane ref. 2.29

According to Beckwith's report, the French had some 3500 troops but the bulk of these were colonial militia who were known to be very half hearted about making any defence at all. The number of regular troops was believed to be only 1100 including 400 conscripts and 50 artillerymen.¹⁶ The island however was hilly and the

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ASSAULT ON GUADELOUPE



Wikipedia Commons Guadeloupe Maps

Image: Guadeloupe places of interest map - fr.svg by Semhur

¹⁶ TNA, ADM 1/331: 23 Dec 1809, Cochrane to Croker ref. 2.16

¹⁷ TNA, CO318/40: 9 Feb 1810. Beckwith to Liverpool pp. 123-124

war.¹⁸ The inhabitants of Grande-Terre were known to have no protection so they were offered temporary terms on the 27 and 28 Jan,¹⁹ which they accepted.

The 1st Division and Reserve anchored off the westerly of the two islands Grande-Terre at Le Gosier on 27 and on the 28 landed unopposed on Basse-Terre at Capesterre. Over the next two days the army moved to Trois Rivieres where the French had fortified positions called the Petrizel. However, fearing outflanking, the French abandoned the position leaving their artillery. After a pause of two days to gather supplies, for which the navy was strongly praised, on 2 and 3 February the army made a further advance to secure the next range of hills the Palmiste, which were inland to the west of the town of Basse-Terre. Again, the French abandoned their positions spiking their guns.²⁰ The reason for the withdrawal of the French and to concentrate in their final position was that the 2nd Division, after making a feint at Trois Rivieres before the main force arrived, landed to the north of Basse-Terre town and marched the nine or so miles south with the fleet protecting its seaward flank. The inhabitants of the town sought to avoid a bombardment by Cochrane's fleet to which he consented after D'Ernouf had agreed not to fire on the town from the fort above it. On the 3 February, Cochrane sent in his marines to seize the town. Finally Beckwith authorised a flanking move, by the Reserve, around the French left to seize the heights to be carried out on the night of 3/4 February, but Brigadier Wale was

¹⁸ TNA, CO 318/40: 9 Feb 1810, Beckwith to Liverpool p. 53

¹⁹ TNA, ADM 1/331: 27 and 28 Jan 1810, Beckwith and Cochrane ref. 2.37

²⁰ TNA, CO 318/40: 8 Feb 1810, Major-Gen Hislop to Beckwith pp. 55-66

given local intelligence of a much shorter route into the French position which he used on the afternoon of the 3 February resulting in capture of the heights but at heavy casualties. According to Wale's report, the French position was held by 500 men but three companies of the Royal York Rangers attacked it holding their fire until 25 yards before storming the works and the French fled. The force of the attack and the success in gaining the highest ground seemed to have demoralised the French and the outcome was their capitulation on the morning of the 4 February with the terms settled on the following day. The overall British losses were some 52 killed, 250 wounded and seven missing, most them in the final attacks over the River Noire, when the Royal York Rangers lost over 100.²¹ French losses were 1309 prisoners embarked, 300 in hospital, 250 deserted and dispersed about the country; 600 Seamen similarly and from 5-600 killed and wounded.²² Hall again is inaccurate in his account of the taking of Guadeloupe as he says it was done with the help of troops from Nova Scotia,²³ which is not true.

Beckwith and Cochrane did not waste any time in completing the remainder of the conquests. Brigadier Harcourt with 2nd Division troops sailed with Commodore Fahie in the *Abercrombie*. They arrived off St Martin on the 14 February. The French part, which had been surrendered by D'Ernouf from Guadeloupe, capitulated immediately but the Dutch Governor gave an evasive answer which resulted in the landing of nine companies of the 25 Regt and one company of 4 WIR and 2 howitzers, the latter being

²¹ TNA, CO 318/40: 9 Feb 1810, Beckwith to Liverpool containing his and other reports to him pp. 39-81

²² TNA, ADM 1/331: 8 Feb 1810, Cochrane to Croker ref. 2.37

²³ Hall *British Strategy* p.185

hauled by seamen.²⁴ Terms were negotiated on the 15 but the Governor again procrastinated signing until the 16 but then 'at discretion' and not ratification as the British refused to agree to let the Dutch soldiers return to Holland.²⁵ No fighting took place as the total garrison was only 93. Harcourt moved on to St Eustatius which capitulated without any fighting on the 21 and the terms were ratified on the 22. The garrison was only 56, but the arsenal surrendered was quite considerable with 46 cannon of varying denominations and plenty of powder and shot. Harcourt's letter contained a fitting summary of the events 'It is with very sincere Pleasure that I am able to report to your Excellency, the successful Fulfilment of your Commands, in regard to the complete Expulsion of the Enemy from this quarter of the World'.²⁶ The subsidiary island of Saba surrendered to a naval brig.²⁷ The successful co-operation on amphibious operations, in assembling forces, landing troops and supplies, making feint attacks and protecting the seaward flank demonstrated both at Guadeloupe and Martinique was due to the good working relationships between the commanders. Fedorak, in his article on amphibious warfare during the Napoleonic war, said that generally British operations suffered from poor leadership as the British Government did not install a supreme commander and military commanders were individualistic whilst naval commanders would not take orders from military commanders and often diverted their attention to the seizure of prizes.²⁸ Despite their disagreements on manpower this would not seem to be the case between Beckwith and Cochrane.

²⁴ TNA, ADM 1/331: 17 Feb 1810, Fahie to Cochrane ref. 2.42

²⁵ TNA, CO 318/40: 17 Feb 1810, Brigadier-General Harcourt to Beckwith pp. 175-203

²⁶ TNA, CO 318/40: 22 Feb 1810, Harcourt to Beckwith pp. 219-229

²⁷ TNA, ADM 1/331: 22 Feb 1810, Lt Wells to Commodore Fahie ref. 2.42

²⁸ Fedorak, *The Royal Navy and British Amphibious Operations*

The aftermath can be summarised. The first and not surprising issue was the manpower needed to garrison the islands. Shortly after taking Guadeloupe, Beckwith had written to Liverpool about the inadequacy of his forces and also the poor quality of soldiers being sent particularly the 2/60. He reported that the flank company of the 2/60 and the Grenadier Company of 4/60 had behaved badly in face of enemy on Guadeloupe. He still required two good British regiments.²⁹ (The 60th was not a British manned regiment – it had been formed during the American War of Independence by loyal Americans and when transferred to Britain had basically recruited foreigners, criminals and deserters from other armies). At the end of the month he followed it up with his strategic proposals for the future. He needed 2800 men to garrison Guadeloupe as the island was unsettled from the time of the activities of Victor Hughes³⁰ in the 1790s and also the divisions between the pro and anti British inhabitants. He continued by saying he must have the two good British regiments and for the Government to stop sending criminals and deserters. The “white” Royal West Indian Rangers had twenty six deserters when two companies were embarked for special action. He reminded Liverpool that one third of his force was African. In the same letter he returned to his grievances about Marie-Galante and the Saintes (the latter which Cochrane had just re-occupied) and questioned the principle about a naval commander in chief governing islands.³¹ He received short shrift from Liverpool, who basically told him that the West Indies was bottom of the priority for manpower.

²⁹ TNA, CO 318/40: 9 Feb 1810, Beckwith to Liverpool pp. 123-124

³⁰ Duffy *Soldiers Sugar and Seapower* various

³¹ TNA, CO318/40: 25 Feb 1810, Beckwith to Liverpool pp. 231-237

Liverpool referred to a report, written in 1794 by Sir Charles Grey recommending the garrison levels following the capture of Martinique, Guadeloupe and St Lucia. This indicated Beckwith had 5000 more troops than in July 1794 and even adjusting for the additional possessions, he had more than enough. The numbers of troops for each island were specified but Beckwith was allowed to vary them, especially for the smaller islands. Finally he was told that the Government was prepared to accept the risk of the temporary loss of a small island if the French should ever be able to mount an expedition which escaped the navy's clutches.³² On 19 June, Beckwith responded to Liverpool reducing his request to one British regiment and adding that he had seven additional islands not four, as the Grey report indicated, which currently held 4536 rank and file. Also his numbers had reduced from Oct 1809 as 37 Regt had been sent back plus 180 invalids and the 46 and 70 Regiments were worn down and should return to England. His annual loss was still around 2000 men.³³ To no avail, for the future Beckwith was to continue to receive the dregs of white soldier replacements, but African recruiting was to improve from 1812 when General Bowyer's suggestion, made in 1807 in response to the passing of the anti Slavery Act,³⁴ to establish a recruiting depot in Sierra Leone was implemented, which added to those few acquired via the vice admiralty courts in the West Indies.³⁵ The issue of rewards and prize money also re-surfaced. The public property captured when an island was taken by a combined expedition was split by rules set by the Prize Act. However, Cochrane

³² TNA, CO 318/40: 19 Apr 1810, Liverpool to Beckwith pp. 261-267

³³ TNA, CO 318/41: 19 Jun 1810, Beckwith to Liverpool pp. 75-79

³⁴ TNA, CO 310/40: 3 May 1809, Horse Guards to Castlereagh and Bowyer letter of 10 Dec 1807, pp. 435-451

³⁵ Buckley *Slaves in Redcoats* Chap 7 pp. 127-134

complained that the Army received more because they had more general officers than he had subordinate admirals. In the middle of the campaign he had the time to send a letter containing five schedules showing how the money was differently distributed according to the one used.³⁶ Although they worked well together on operations, manpower and prize money continued as bones of contention.

The Guadeloupe campaign was a great success. Apart from a reinforcement of 2000 men, which only basically restored Beckwith's forces to the level twelve months earlier, it was achieved using the local resources with minimal casualties. Whilst the British Government went from a strong commitment to capture the island to a take no risk on manpower losses approach, Beckwith showed none of the hesitation he had in 1808. He had very good intelligence on the French strength at Guadeloupe and Cochrane's forces had prevented all but a limited number of reinforcements and provisions into Guadeloupe despite frequent French attempts. Whilst the navy had a less active role on land than at Martinique, the co-operation at operational level was excellent and the professional expertise at amphibious warfare demonstrated again. With the resources available, British success was certain but it was achieved most effectively and economically, in the face of what appears to be, perhaps understandably in the circumstances, an irresolute defence. Beckwith's reward was to be told his area of command was now a backwater.

³⁶ TNA, ADM 1/331: 8 Feb 1810, Cochrane to Croker ref. 2.45

Conclusion

The British conquest of the remaining French and Dutch islands in 1809 and 1810 was a resounding success achieved at a minimal manpower cost and apart from the reinforcement from Nova Scotia in December 1808, accomplished with local forces augmented by the annual replacements for losses due to sickness. At operational level, the navy and army worked harmoniously together. The Navy under Cochrane managed to limit the reinforcements sent by France to augment the garrisons of Martinique and Guadeloupe. It was then able to concentrate the troops needed for the assault, convey them to the landing points and land them effectively and quickly. At Martinique they landed over 4000 troops in an afternoon. Marines and sailors helped move the heavy artillery needed to subdue Fort Bourbon across difficult terrain in heavy rain and then man some of the batteries. In both major assaults they helped deliver the supplies needed by the army. In all the co-operation between the two arms showed a high degree of professionalism and demonstrated their ability to carry out effective amphibious operations. It would appear that Fedorak did not consider them significant enough to consider in his appraisal of amphibious operations during the Napoleonic wars. Clearly given the disparity of forces, once started success was certain, but this does not detract from the performance. Whilst the historiography on the military campaigns is well covered by Fortescue, the very effective co-operation in amphibious operations is less well highlighted.

Whilst Duffy and Hall both explain the overall British strategy, there is no detailed examination of how the actual decisions to take the islands were made. The documents show clearly that the British Government was far more concerned about potential military losses than taking the islands per se. Whilst the Spanish revolt relieved pressure in the West Indies, it appears that it was the intelligence about the difficulties the inhabitants of the two islands were having which provided the trigger to capture them. However, although they recognised that capturing them would remove much of the threat of privateering to trade and enable both the naval and military forces to be reduced, this was a secondary consideration to the fear of incurring losses to European troops. All the correspondence stressed the need to return Prevost's troops as soon as possible and to spare European troops from unnecessary exertions leaving that to the black regiments. After the success on Martinique there was strong Governmental support to complete the task by taking Guadeloupe, but by the time the firm orders were issued in September 1809, the priority had reverted to ensuring that troops were not put at risk of significant losses. After the capture of Guadeloupe, Liverpool made it quite clear that the Leeward Islands command was to become a backwater as far as troops was concerned. Equally existing historiography does not cover how manpower issues also bedevilled the relationship between Cochrane and Beckwith. Both had lost their source of African slaves with the result that they were dependent on what replacements were sent from Britain. Both commanders complained that they were getting poor quality and both were short of the numbers they wanted. In particular if fighting a fleet action, Cochrane considered he needed more soldiers to take on the role of marines. Beckwith agreed in January 1809 and but

refused in November 1809. The issue of the seizure of Marie- Galante Island had clearly poisoned the atmosphere where the military, probably quite rightly, regarded its seizure as being done for prize money not strategic benefit requiring manning which deprived the navy of marines. Patently, the decision made in the late 1790s to raise black regiments, despite the opposition of the colonies had been validated. Sickness casualties were nearly two-third lower and despite the absence of white officers, the formations could take their place in the battle, although most of the major attacks were made by “white” regiments.

Another aspect, which has been highlighted, is the problem of command and control at a distance in the days of communication by letter. Whilst the precise wording of Beckwith’s instructions on Martinique in August 1808 has not be found it is clear from subsequent correspondence that he was instructed not to take any risks. Despite this it is still difficult to understand why he called off the operation on January 3 1809.

Prevost’s troops had arrived bringing his force up to 10000 men and even if his estimate of the reinforcement of Martinique in December 1808 was correct, it still only brought the French force up to 3000. His subsequent change of heart most likely can be put down to the pressure put on him by Cochrane and probably Prevost and Maitland on how badly it would look in London if the attack did not take place.

Beckwith saved his reputation by success. The importance of reputation can be seen in all the letters sent and above all by Cochrane’s quite correct attempts to ensure that the cancellation of the Martinique operation was not put down to him.

These historically ignored, successful, but relatively minor campaigns have provided a fascinating insight into the concerns of the British Government on military manpower, following the disastrous losses in the 1790s and despite the enormous growth in the size of the British army by 1808. It demonstrates how they influenced strategic considerations and that the West Indies featured much lower in priority than it had at the start of the war in 1793. Additionally, it has revealed how manpower affected the relationships between the local commanders. They also show how professionally competent the British forces in the West Indies were in amphibious operations, admittedly with over whelming force against a weakened enemy. Overall the historiography has been expanded.

Appendix 1

Losses of Rank and File Leeward Islands

		European Regiments			West Indian Regiments		
1808		On Books	Died	Deserted	On Books	Died	Deserted
1st	Jan	6289	63	22	5237	20	1
1st	Feb	6418	51	25	5242	11	4
1st	Mar	7904	48	24	5281	24	5
1st	Apr	7979	114	17	4843	16	6
1st	May	7762	85	13	4833	11	4
1st	Jun	8050	86	24	4805	32	3
1st	July	9386	85	24	4685	28	3
1st	Aug	9265	115	12	4775	17	3
1st	Sep	9096	153	28	4749	23	6
1st	Oct	9009	234	2	4724	22	3
1st	Nov	9074	208	4	4675	27	5
1st	Dec	9531	186	4	4646	17	2
		99763	1428	199	58495	248	45
Month average		8314			4875		
Loss over year			14.3%			5.1%	
1809							
1st	Jan	10042	149	25	4599	19	3
1st	Feb	10062	113	14	4586	14	1
1st	Mar	9918	112	13	4554	34	3
1st	Apr	9969	123	26	4542	14	2
1st	May	10828	113	46	4498	19	2
1st	Jun	10706	144	19	4489	12	0
1st	July	10668	85	18	4466	22	3
1st	Aug	10467	112	5	4450	21	1
1st	Sep	10322	154	13	4420	31	2
29th	Sep	10160	165	7	4391	27	3
29th	Oct	10284	164	9	4363	27	4
29th	Nov	10200	133	5	4233	31	2
		113584	1418	175	48992	252	23
Month average		9465			4083		
Loss over year			15.0%			6.2%	
1810							
29th	Dec	11133	149	17	4319	19	0
25th	Jan	11437	179	11	4291	22	6
25th	Feb	11154	200	17	4251	44	4
25th	Mar	11475	162	40	4237	12	4
25th	Apr	11372	128	13	4213	21	3
25th	May	11253	133	28	4188	25	3
		67824	951	126	25499	143	20
Month average		11304			4250		
Loss over 6 months			8.4%			3.4%	

Monthly muster rolls of Leeward Islands garrisons

Source TNA:WO 17/2499 and 2500

Army Forces for Capture of Martinique

Lieutenant-General Sir George Beckwith

1st Division Lt-General Sir George Prevost (Total 7071)

1st Brigade Brigadier-General Houghton

7 Regt (981) 23 Regt (979)

1st West India Regt (part) (450) RA and artificers (60)

2nd Brigade Brigadier-General Colville

8 Regt (998) 13 Regt (833)

1 WIR (part) (347) RA (43)

3rd Brigade Brigadier-General Nicholson

3/60 and 4/60 (700) 4 WIR (850)

25 Regt Flank companies (140)

Reserve Major Campbell

Light Companies Bn (550) Artillery 2 brigades (1440)

2nd Division Major-General Maitland (3710)

1st Brigade Lt- Colonel Baird

63 Regt (600) Royal York Rangers (750) Barrow

Brigade Lt-Colonel Riall

15 and 40th Regts Light companies (230) 15 Regt Bn companies (190)

York Light Infantry Volunteers (350) 8 WIR 3 companies (350)

Brigade Lt-Colonel McNair

90th Regt (460) 3 WIR (700)

Royal Artillery and artificers (80)

Source, TNA: CO 318/35 7 Mar 1809, Beckwith to Castlereagh pp. 257-259

Cochrane's Squadron for Martinique

List of the Squadron employed in the Reduction of Martinique

Ships of the Line

<i>Neptune</i>	<i>York</i>
<i>Pompee</i>	<i>Captain</i>
<i>Belleisle</i>	<i>Intrepid</i>

Frigates

<i>Acasta</i>	<i>Circe</i>
<i>Penelope</i>	<i>Ulysses</i>
<i>Ethalion</i>	<i>Eurydice</i>
<i>Aeolus</i>	

Sloops

<i>Goree</i>	<i>Swinger</i>
<i>Wolverene</i>	<i>Forrester</i>
<i>Cherub</i>	<i>Recruit</i>
<i>Stork</i>	<i>Star</i>
<i>Amaranthe</i>	<i>Eclair</i>
<i>Haughty</i>	<i>Frolic</i>
<i>Express</i>	

(Signed) ALEX. COCHRANE. -----
Neptune, Fort Royal Bay, Martinique,
February 26, 1809.

Source TNA: ADM1/330 2.25

Army Forces for Capture of Guadeloupe

Lieutenant-General Sir George Beckwith

1st Division Major-General Hislop

3rd Brigade Brigadier-General Maclean

Light Infantry (500) 90th Foot including flank companies (500)

8th West India Regt including flank companies (400)

4th Brigade Brigadier-General Skinner

Composite 13th and 63rd Regts (600)

Detachment of York Light Infantry Volunteers (200)

4th West India Regt (862**)

2nd Division Brigadier Harcourt

1st Brigade Brigadier-General Harcourt

Light Infantry (500) 15th Foot including flank companies (300) 3rd WIR (400)

2nd Brigade Brigadier General Barrow

Grenadiers (300) 25th Regt incl. Flank companies (600)

6th WIR including flank companies) (350)

Reserve Brigadier-General Wade

5th Brigade Brigadier- General Wade

Grenadiers (300) Royal York Rangers (900) Royal Artillery (300)

Source:

Sir George Beckwith to Earl of Liverpool 5 Feb 1810, London Gazette Extraordinary 16 March
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CO 318/34 Original correspondence no date But was Aug 1808-Dec 1808

CO 318/35 Military Despatches Jan-May 1809

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