

Damanhour

Bonaparte asked for the organisation of a mobile column to protect army communications, this was put together by Kleber by the 17th July. It comprised of a company of grenadiers, and 200 fusiliers from the 69eme, a company of Maltese grenadiers, and twenty dragoons.

It was a bitter march, the Arabs having filled all the wells, the soldiers near died of thirst and had no camels or mules to carry their essentials.

The marched with caution as the area was easy to ambush in, half a league from the town they were assailed by a large body of Bedouin, grenadiers and fusiliers wasted no time opening up fire : they charged the enemy, the Arabs quickly withdrew, they had killed one soldier and injured another. The column arrived in Damanhour, believing that they had overcome the worst. Yet as the city dignitaries were in parlez, a number of cavaliers surrounded the unit and gunfire broke out, the unit quickly formed square and opened up. They retreated thus to Berket – Gitas, stopping for four whole leagues these cavalry attacks. The elders of this town opened their doors to the French. Many were guided to water cisterns whilst a rear guard faced off the Arab attackers. The column took up the path to Alexandria and reached it on the 20th after a thirty league march in less than sixty hours. General Mui congratulated the unit for having put up with the exhaustion, and dangers with a courage without equal.

The 18th August, where as the demi-brigade went to Aboukir, the grenadiers under Mui's orders, left for Rosetta, which they reached the next day, where they boarded boats to take them along the Nile to reach El Rahmanieh on the 25th.

Combat at El Rahmanieh

Bonapart had decided to equip the expeditionary force with a nautical legion; he asked Kleber to inform the head of the 69eme that he trusted them with its organisation. Barthelemey received the letter from Kleber with the following information: 'You are authorised to recruit amongst the mariners, 300 men, which will make an increase by fifteen men per company. You should choose as much as possible young people from 18-25 years and give preference to those who have already served in an infantry regiment...' The sub-lieutenant Dupond from the 1st battalion was chosen to be the adjutant major of the new unit.

Shortly after its formation, the nautical legion had an opportunity to show its valour. The sub-lieutenant Dupond were pursuing a small group of Arabs with his 300 men between El Rahmanieh and Damanhour, when it was surrounded by 20,000 Turks. Asked to surrender, Dupond formed his men into a square and responded with a volley; he didn't withdraw an inch, every ball that left the ranks found an enemy. Frustrated to take them, the Turks set fire to crops where they stood hoping to make them perish in the flames: the detachment, in a middle of a

field of maize, did not budge, it was in the furnace and could hear the cries of joy from their adversaries. However the fire died at the feet of the men, and Dupont returns to El-Rahmanieh with four men killed, and thirty six wounded, having put 1,200 Turks out of combat.

In order to thwart the Turkish cavalry, the used of short stakes (4.5 feet) were used. These were thrust into the ground, and attached to one another with a short iron chain. These stakes formed a sort of palisade in front of the squares. Every soldier carried theirs with a strap slung over the shoulder.

Combat at Chabour

In October the first battalion was in El-Rahmanieh, the second in Rosetta, and the third in Alexandria. On the 4th November the 2nd and 3rd battalions received the order to go by land to Chabour.

The two battalions left with a cannon, at the crack of dawn under Murat's command. Upon their return from the mission Murat submitted this report:

'On the morning of the 16th November, I started off the march, and after two hours caught sight of four large moving columns. I ordered the chief of Brigade Barthelemy, to go after the column on the far right with a battalion. The adjutant general Escalé, with the second battalion, set off after the column on the left. Myself with two companies of grenadiers set off after the centre column at the charge. Six hundred Arabs dispersed in groups formed the rear guard of the enemy. We started to approach them, but scared by our fire and countenance, they abandoned their baggage laden camps, a few being killed in their escape. I did not want to stop there, I wanted to be master of some six thousand camels which were a little distance from myself, but despite my best efforts I saw this prey escape, it was impossible for me to reach them with infantry, because the Arabs made them advance as quickly as the horses. Only 20 of the slowest fell into our hands along with three large troops of sheep.'

Murat ended his report with ' I owe gratitude to the conduct of our troops, principally that of the leaders, there is no troop that marches better than the 69^e and with greater courage'.

Shortly after this mission, the 1st battalion was recalled to Cairo and Barthelemy, who had already recruited and organised the nautical legion, had to, on the 9th January, provide 15 of the hardest and most intrepid men to form the heart of a dromedary regiment to eradicate Arab brigandry.