

Arrival

Bonaparte asked the Directorate to form an expeditionary force to Egypt, a force was assembled at Toulon. Troops were accompanied by academics and scientists as an integral part of the adventure.

The 18 floreal, Bonaparte arrived at Toulon and accelerated preparations and in 11 days they sailed in a flotilla of 500 ships of all types, 25,000 men and 8,000 sailors.

They stopped off in Genes to pick up the units left in Italy, part of which included the 69eme Demi-brigade. At that time, 17th March, it had its 1st battalion at Pavie, and two others at Tortone, in total 1,800 men. The three battalions, under the orders of General Brune, were brought together at Genes and embarked on different ships, the Dubois, and Cause amongst others.

The 69eme was incorporated into Menou's division and was brigaded with the 13e under General Vial.

Malta was taken, the 21 prairial, by General Reynier. Provisional government was formed, ships restocked and water taken on, before continuing onto Egypt. 69eme does not appear to have taken part in the taking of Malta.

The taking of Alexandria

On the 12 messidor, the troops sighted the African, in the evening that day they were in front of Alexandria. The next day, (1st July), despite the wind that blew violently and agitated the sea, the debarkation started. The ships were moored two to three leagues off the shore-line, the men had to row extremely hard against the strong seas. Menou's division placed on the left closest to the shore came ashore the first.

The columns, made up of some 4000 men, were immediately formed and marched on Alexandria without waiting for artillery, in an attempt to surprise the town. It was two thirty in the morning, skirmishers opened up the attack.

Bonaparte gave the order to each column to stop at canon range, and in order to prevent bloodshed, was prepared to discuss terms, when a wave of artillery fire came in, that indicated the intentions of the enemy. The drums beat the charge, despite the fire, despite the hail of stones thrown from the walls, the generals and soldiers alike prepared to scale the fortress. Menou was thrown back at the head of his division. Already the guide Joseph Cala, the grenadiers Labruyere and Sabatier of the 69eme, were on the ramparts without fear of the projectiles falling all around them, helping their comrades to climb. Afraid the defenders ran off into the town, the general Menou was given the honour of being the first to enter the town.

Master of Alexandria, Bonaparte immediately left for Cairo (17 messidor); he took the 69eme from the division to guard the town, accompanied by some engineering and artillery units. This mission was extremely perilous and demanded great tact

The 69eme Demi-Brigade in the Orient:

Egyptian and Syrian Campaigns 1798-1801

Part One

with the locals always on the point of revolting. For example the orders of the day were to perform frequent patrols day and night. The military honours were to be returned to the Muslim chiefs decorated with a tricolour scarf over their shoulder.

The rest of the army went onto Cairo, after having defeated the Mamelucks at the village of Chebreiss, the army arrived at the battle field of the Pyramids (21 July), at 4am it dispersed the Muslim army and entered victoriously into Cairo the following day.

Life in Alexandria where the 69e remained was delicate and difficult. The local people made life difficult for them, distributing food at very irregular intervals, leaving them with very little to keep themselves fed. Even wood was in short supply.