

OUT OF FOREIGN PAPERS

HOW SFAX WAS BOMBARDED AND TAKEN.

NEARLY A THOUSAND PROJECTILES FIRED BY THE FRENCH—LANDING THE TROOPS AND FIGHTING THE ARABS IN THE STREET.

Sfax Letter to the London Daily News.

During the night of the 15th of July several armed boats were sent close into the town to prepare a jetty for the landing parties. The electric light was kept upon the forts, &c., during the night, and any attempts of the Arabs to repair their batteries were immediately detected. The gun-boats at anchor at a distance of 2,200 yards kept up a deliberate fire the whole of the night with shell, which prevented the enemy preparing for the coming struggle; also the boat with the Hotchkiss kept up a continuous fire wherever the Arabs appeared. At 3 A. M. the French ships "sounded to quarters," and everything on board the different ships was activity; all available saïques (native boats) were at once alongside the troop ships, where they were immediately filled with troops, and the ships' boats carried their own armed blue-jackets, each iron-clad supplying about 150 rifles.

At 5 A. M. a shot was fired from the Colbert, which was immediately followed by all the ships and from all the guns which could be brought to bear, the vessels being moored *en echelon* off the town. The furthest, viz., the Friedland, was 7,000 yards; the nearest, with the exception of the gun-boats, 4,000 yards. Shortly after the commencement the town became obscured in smoke, but the distance being known the firing was kept up with the greatest vigor. The boats were now making their way on shore with all speed in tow of steam pinnaces, &c.; the ships were firing over them, but many shells prematurely exploded, and in close proximity to their own boats, which if they escaped without accident must consider themselves fortunate. At the expiration of 55 minutes nearly 1,000 projectiles had been fired. Naïour Tower was destroyed, and the esparto grass was on fire, throwing up a large column of black smoke. The boats in three divisions were within a few hundred yards of the beach, consequently the large ships were obliged to cease firing, and the boat guns, Hotchkiss, and rifles took up the work. The centre division, consisting of 24 boats, with blue-jackets, grounded about 200 yards from Spit battery.

The landing then commenced, many of the men wading through mud and water. The battery had been silenced, but many Arabs received them behind the ruined parapet. They had also dug a trench to the left, which afterward became their grave. Here the French met their first check on landing, but several boat-loads landing further to the right took the enemy in flank and dislodged them. Immediately the Arabs left their trenches they were mowed down by the destructive fire of the Hotchkiss and the rifles of the blue-jackets. Retiring into the houses and behind the ruined walls, they kept up a hot fire, but fortunately for the French their weapons (of the old gas-pipe pattern) did not do much damage, although several men were killed and wounded. After this it became street-fighting, the result being more serious. A party of skirmishers kept to the right, but were met near the cemetery by about 25 or 30 mounted Arabs. They were obliged to fall back upon their supports, as, in addition to the horsemen, they were under the fire of the Arabs upon the walls. The mounted Arabs remained a very short time, as, being outside the walls, they were under fire of the guns of the ship's boats, and several were killed.

On the left, the division landed consisted of a part of the Ninety-second Regiment and blue-jackets. They were met by Arabs behind the walls, on the top of the high wall of the fort, and at the windows, their number being about 1,500. The French were covered by the guns of the boats in which they landed. They had to run about 100 yards under fire of the Arabs from the top of the forts until they were directly under the walls, when it became impossible for the enemy to fire, the deadly volleys of the boats preventing them from exposing themselves. The French could form under these high walls and keep to the right or left. Several companies kept to the left, and on clearing the walls of the town threw out skirmishers in the open and commenced firing at any horseman who appeared, but had to fall back again. Intrenchments were immediately thrown up on the left of the town on the low ground. About an hour after the landing the blue-jackets had found their way into the interior of the large fort on the left, and firing ceased on this side, and also in the centre, with the exception of street fighting between the French and Arabs. The latter had their retreat toward the rear of the town cut off.

The right division landed about half a mile to the right of the town, and consisted of about one-third of soldiers and the rest sailors. They intrenched themselves on the beach. Very little resistance was offered here to their disembarkation, as for 300 yards it was open ground, and the Hotchkiss could sweep the beach, but many bold Arabs rode down at a gallop, and encountered them, but were repulsed with exceedingly small loss, their movements being so swift. I observed several mounted Arabs leaving the right of the town, and retreating along the beach, passing quite a thousand French, who kept up a continuous fire upon them. As far as I could see they all escaped, but their passing so close to their enemies seemed out of bravado, as they could have easily retired more into the interior instead of choosing the beach. At 11:30 all firing ceased and the French were in full possession of the town, having lost about 40 killed and about 60 wounded. The great proportion of killed was doubtless due to street fighting, where the doors of houses were blown open by gun-cotton or powder and a hand-to-hand struggle ensued, with little quarter given. The French behaved well to the enemy, though there were cases where they were obliged to kill some of their prisoners, as hidden weapons were drawn upon the sentries.

It is impossible to say how many Arabs were killed, but about 100 were buried in the trench that they made for their defense at the Spit Battery. With the exception of two or three old women discovered in a house, not a woman or child was found. These were taken care of by the French troops. Doubtless they were left where they were to die by their friends. The bombardment does not seem to have done so much damage as would have been supposed, considering the immense amount of shot thrown in.