

EN
TUNISIE

SOUVENIRS

DE SEPT MOIS DE CAMPAGNE

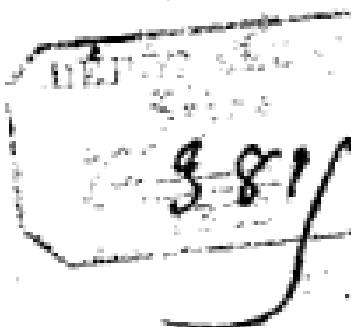
PAR

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Sfax: Combat dans les rues : mort de l'aspirant Léonnet.

Chapter XV

Sfax

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Sfax harbor, July 14.

On the 28th of June, the Moslem population of Sfax, excited by the fanatic preaching of the religious sects from Kairouan which didn't hesitate to maintain that Turkish troops were going to help them, spread in the streets preaching holy war against the unfaithful. The Bedouins who were in the city joined them and together they moved furiously towards the European quarter situated on the sea shore.

It is impossible to describe the confusion that reigned in Sfax. Panic stricken Christians and Jews rushed towards the wharf to take small boats in order to escape quickly on waiting ships. The natives pursued them armed with guns, sticks and pistols. Our consular agent, M. Mattei was the last to board, threatened with death by many people; but finally he was forced to throw himself into water, pursued by Arabs,

who wanted to kill him. A rebel struck him a heavy blow on his head with a stick. M. Mattei diverted the gun with his right arm which was broken; he was nevertheless protected by M. Gandolphe, a military interpreter whose behavior on that fateful day was worthy of praise, he was able to reach the battleship “the *Chacal*” which welcomed him on board. He was saved.

Nevertheless there were injured and dead persons. The shed blood called for an exemplary punishment.

Orders were given.

Admiral Cloué, Minister of the Navy knew he could rely on the fleet. He had commanded the Mediterranean squadron before Admiral Garnault, and on different ships there were many men who had served under his authority. So he didn't hesitate to give the squadron the order to invade Sfax.

In less than 24 hours, the squadron that was in Cette had now assembled at Toulon, taken on coal, food and munitions and left for Sfax

On the 14th of July, at the admiral's signal, the fleet dropped anchor in line from the front, facing the city, at a distance of 6000 meters. It was not possible to drop anchor any nearer. There was no depth.

It was the national holiday [Bastille Day]. The flag was hoisted and each ship shot series of 20 salvoes and a cannon shot.

At the natural harbor nearer to land are the three small escort ships which, under the authority of Admiral Conrad, composed the battleship division of the Levant,

At a distance of 2000 meters from the beach, the cannon boats had dropped anchor.

The story of the inhabitants, who took refuge on *mahones* (*Feluccas*) behind the battleships seemed to confirmed the story of the newspapers. The bombing having already took place, the gunboats opened fire on the batteries and hiding places. The firing was very efficient; but during the night the Arabs repaired the breaches made during the day. It seemed that foreign engineers guided them in the defense works.

From our battleships we could have the whole view of Sfax, which was with Bizerte the strongest and best defended city in the Regency.

Situated in the gulf on Gabes 225 km away from Tunis in the south-east with a population of 16,000 inhabitants, Sfax was divided into 2 cities by encircling walls, the upper or Muslim city and the lower or Frankish one near the port. All around was a jagged rampart pierced by 5 doors and flanked by round or square towers.

In the center, in front of the ramparts was a battery with a circular layout defending the surrounding area of the beach; on the right 2 small marabouts, a cemetery and big heaps of alfa that rebels arranged in the form of trenches.

Behind, the eastern gate (*Cherchi*), the pinnacle of the Great Mosque and a high square tower called *El Nadour* (the observation post) which dominated the whole city.

On the left were the massive walls of the *Kasbah* and the small dome of the Catholic church.

On the ramparts flapped the Tunisian standards and the green flag of the prophet.

Around the city a vast areas of gardens was laid out which surrounded Sfax with a green belt. They consisted of numerous enclosures separated from one another by hedges of cactus, and covered with cereals and fruits trees of all sorts. A Bordj or a

square house stood in the middle of each of these gardens that were watered by means of wells.

It was there, in the middle of olive, palm and oranges trees that Sfaxiens spent the hottest season. Very sweet-smelling species of jasmine, melons and cucumbers called *Sfakous* were cultivated there in abundance. They were well known in the whole regency. These last play a significant role in the Regency.

People even pretended they gave Sfax its current name which means “the city of cucumbers.”

In these gardens, the Muslim inhabitants of Sfax took refuge with their families. In the city were the rebels of Ali-Ben-Khalifa numbering around 1,000 or 2,000 men. A great number of Bedouins who were camped on the dunes of the beach were ready to rush to their help at the least signal.

The admiral gave the signal to prepare a powerful attack for the next day.

In Sfax there are tides like in Brest, as in Saint-Malo, yet the difference of level between the high and the low tide was less strong here.

In Brest the tide is 8 meters; in Sfax it is around 1 meter.

That tide was sufficient to hinder the disembarkation of troops. With the low tide, silt appeared. To allow the greatest number of men to land at the same time it was not possible to approach the shore except at high tide. Moreover it was necessary to wait until the time of high tide would be in the morning for the action to take place before the heat of the day.

These reasons forced us to choose the next day, July 16th, for the military occupation of Sfax.

Each ship would build a raft bridge with its own barrels and timber. The six raft bridges, solidly tied down to one another and pushed to the shore would facilitate the disembarkation of troops.

At 6 am in the morning the bombing began. Shells of 27 cent (weighing 180 kg), shells of 24 cent (weighing 120kg), and shells of 19 cent (weighing 62kg) fell on the walls and white houses of the city. With telescopes people could see walls crumbling. A missile removed the top of the tower “El Nadour”.

They fired from 5,400 meters away; the firing was rapidly adjusted and each ship sent its missile to the point ordered by the admiral. Every five minutes a shell fell in the city like the drop of blood on the coat of Kanut the Great in *Legende des siècles* (Legend of the Ages).

The English sailors on the Monarch admired the accuracy of our cannons and the skillfulness – to become proverbial – of our gunners.

On board, the assault companies passed inspection. Arms, munitions, food, all was there. The 65 millimeter cannons of the navy would receive their baptism of fire. The gunners are contemplating with love their beautiful pieces of bronze that are replacing – at last! – the ancient and ugly mountain guns.

The boats, armed for war, were ready. The sailors on the Hotchkiss (machine guns), gunners with Kropatcheks (magazine guns), knew their position. The leaders and the boats drivers had forgotten none of their equipment. The admiral could give the signal, the assault troops were ready.

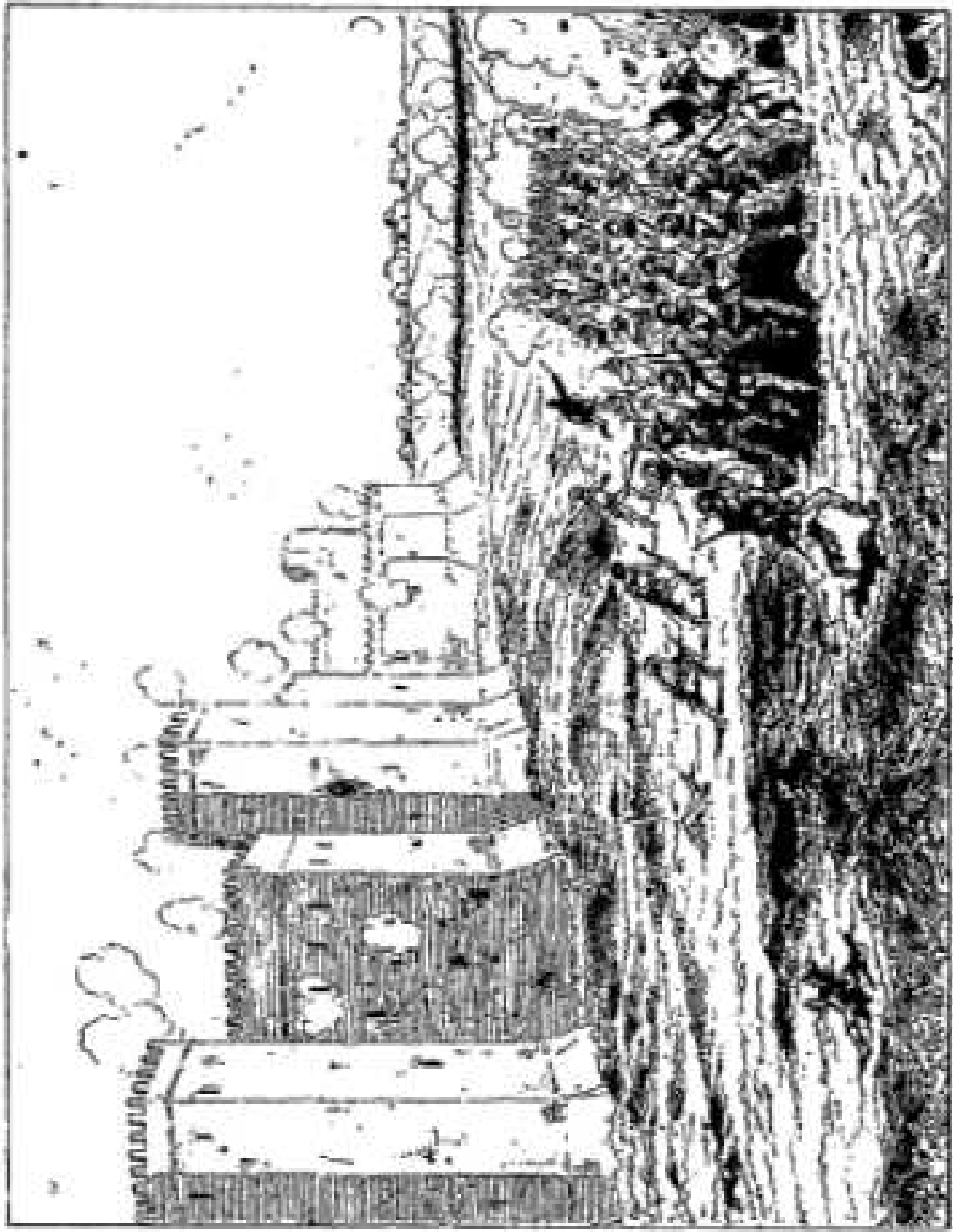
On board, Sailors and officers were full of enthusiasm and hope. Nobody had any doubt of success.

“ We will move forward! – We will not amuse ourselves like diplomats – the matter will be settled efficiently- it’s the Colonel who commands!”

The Colonel?

The men of the assault companies had thus baptized their commander. They have known him for 3 years. First of all on the *Richelieu* and then on the *Colbert*, flag captain of Admiral Cloué or Admiral Garnault, the commander Marcq de Saint Hilaire had always been at the head of the gunners, sailor gunners of the squadron

The instructions for July the 16th were: “always forward; retreat prohibited.” Prohibiting retreat was more than enough. the idea wouldn’t have occurred to the sailors.



Les faubourgs-marchés de la Surmeillocité et du Tréport, situés sur la grande tranchée d'Alba sous le fort des ramparts de Sfax (18 juillet).

Natural harbor of Sfax the 16th of July, 10 am

A long time before the daybreak the squadron was ready. the raft bridges were towed towards the beach; when the shallow sea bed didn't allow the towboats to move forward, the tows were abandoned; the boats drivers pushed with special oars and got near.

Not a shot fired! Evidently the city was abandoned. Two boats would fix their grapnel at 40 meters away from the razing battery. It was the fixed point that would maintain the floating dock on the beach.

On the ships there was much bustle. In accordance with the order to attack, rowing boats, longboats were ready for the warfare; the bugle rang. "Assault companies to land." Each squad had its appointed boat in advance. the *mahones* marked out for the first division, the one which was to receive ground troops of the *Intrepide* and the *Sarthe* were ready.

After 10 minutes everything was on board. "Push! push!" Each boat obeyed. The small fleet moved forward towed by steamboats towards the silent city. It was 4:30 am. At that moment the sun rose.

Boom! A cannon shot rang out from the *Colbert*. It the expected signal for the general bombing.

Immediately the 6 battleships of the squadron, the 3 battleships of the *Levant* division were covered with noise and smoke. The 4 gunboats imitated the maneuver. On each ship, the cannons of the strapping men fired with rage.

Shells of 24, of 19, shells of 14 poured on the *rasante* battery and the northern fortresses that the admiral had designated as goals.

Yesterday a meticulous firing took place; each ship was watching over the part of the city assigned by the admiral; Arabs must have supposed that only 5 shots could be shot in an hour, the quick bombing of that morning must have surprised them in their relative security.

We had all the time, the day before, to adjust our firing; so no missile was lost. In spite of the fact that *the Friedland* was anchored the furthest away, it was the most remarkable; all its missiles struck the same point. It was the one that destroyed the first part of the battery *rasante*. The same accuracy of fire was noticeable on board *La Surveillante* whose artillery was led by M. Gourdon, First Lieutenant, one of the most distinguished officers.

Under the dust of shells the small fleet of *mahones* moved forward with the assault companies of the squadron, the troops of the 92nd of line and the mountain guns of captain Naquet.

In the lead, were the dinghies of commander de Marquessac who was in charge of the disembarkation operation, the dinghies of the chief of command Marcq de Saint-Hilaire and of the commander Maréchal.

After that came in single file, the armed boats of the *Colbert*, the *Revanche* and the *Friedland* (first division of the squadron). They were going to clear the beach.

They were helped by the boats of the *Trident*, the *Surveillante* and the *Marengo* (second division of the squadron), which, for that moment, formed the rearguard. The

leaders responsible for the Hotchkiss guns, the crank in their right hand, the eye in the line of sight, were ready to fire.

Towed by the steamboats of the *Sarthe*, the *Intrepide*, the *Colbert*, the *Revanche*, the *Friedland*, the *Galissoniere*, the *Alma* and the *Reine Blanche* the small fleet of 'mahones' in the line from the front, followed the boats of the first division. On the left, the assault companies of the *Colbert*, the *Revanche*, the *Friedland* (9 mahones). In the centre, the ones of the *Galissoniere*, the *Alma* and the *Reine Blanche* (9 mahones). On the right were the companies of the 92nd of line under the authority of Colonel Jamais, who came from France on the *Intrepide* (5 mahones, 2 rowing boats, 1 flat boat).

It was by chance so common during the war that the fusiliers of the *Surveillante* and the *Trident* happened to disembark first, and with the soldiers of the 92nd of line, rushing to their help, endured all the efforts of the enemy on the far right.

The boats were 800 meters away from the beach. The reconnaissance ship, the *Leopard* hoisted the flag number one. All the ships of the squadron hoisted the same flag.

That was to say that all the small boats could come alongside. With what vigor the boatmen were rowing forward! Never in rowing races such an enthusiasm was expended. The boat were flying on water.

The squadron stopped firing the large cannon. As far as Sfax was concerned, all was calm; no a gun shot, nor a cannon shot. We were at 400 meters away from the shore. Everything seemed deserted.

- Is this to be like Tabarka? Let's go there gladly!

The second division was speeding up and very soon advanced in front of the others, delayed by the weight of the mahones.

That division turned off to the right. Its leader, commander Maréchal, wanted to know how deep was the sea.

- There is water everywhere, come alongside the beach!

The boats were already near the port, suddenly the green flag of the revolt appeared on the battery *rasante*. A huge flash of lightning – much smoke – a first round bullet made the water gush 5 meters behind the mahones.

Arabs hidden in high hiding places on the left side of that low battery, in ditches, bundles of alfa forming an impenetrable wall for the bullets, started an intense firing of musketry, happily too long.

At that moment, M. Couturier, ensign of the Trident, whose boat was the nearest to the beach, turned towards the commander *de Miot*, commander of the *Alma*.

- Can we attack?

- Go on!

Couturier rushed to the wharf established in front of the razing battery, while crying to his men "Follow me! Yes Captain!" He was on the beach, a sailor behind him; it's Martin, gunner first class. Another one, it's Landais who fell dead. Another one, Pichon; mortally wounded. The bold marine officer was already on the parapet; Martin behind him

An Arab, hidden in a corner of the window stood, took aim at him at short range. Without pulling out his sword or using his revolver, Couturier kicked the rebel down while a sailor pierced him with his bayonet.

At the same time, the fusilier Martin took the green flag of the revolt, and a quartermaster fixed on the parapet the tri-colored flag of the boats of the *Trident*.

The rebels who were in the battery didn't have time to reload their guns. Time was needed to throw in powder, which was in a bag "tied down on the starboard of their marine uniform," according to the picturesque expression of the sailors. Time was needed to seek lead which was in another bag tied down on the portside of the marine uniform. The Arabs had stayed in the battery, not thinking to run away. They all died in their position.

The sailors who liked to move forward rushed on the entrenchments of alfa full of Arabs on the left of the battery. Couturier prevented them from doing that. He positioned them in the corner of that small fortification and there without any danger for his men scanned the ditch with a rapid firing of Kropatchek guns. Five minutes were enough to kill everybody in the trench.

That brilliant act of bravery gave the greatest honor to M. Couturier, to whom such actions were customary. Midshipman in Chochinchine in 1873, he was promoted for an heroic action, where he had been injured.

The *Surveillante* arrived second and came alongside the beach just a moment before *the Trident*. There was no need for firing, the Arabs had hidden. We had to move forward if we didn't want to be machine gunned.

A new recruit who felt a bullet touching his cap, bent his head.

- You greet the bullet? So you know it? a soldier said to him.

- Into the water, ducks! commanded the well known voice of Lieutenant de la Motte, leader of the assault companies of the *Surveillante*.

The men moved forward and were already on the steps of the gunners of *the Trident*.

As soon as it disembarked, the *Surveillante* was attacked from the right; an intense firing came from the mountain of alfa situated at that side, and which our guns had already set on fire.

The sections faced a new enemy. With a single run up without ceasing, the sailors overtook two white marabouts, the burning alfa mountains, and arrived at the cemetery, clearing also the beaching place on a circle within a radius of more than 300 meters.

So with a cleared unloading point the raft bridge made from topyards could dock.

Commander Marcq de Saint-Hilaire set his headquarters in the second house, on the left side of the low battery. The sailors of the *Trident* hurriedly rushed and arrived at the gate of the Frankish city, the *Ville Franque*.

The unloading companies of the first division, which moved on the left side would invade the city.

The company of the *Marengo* stayed in reserve alongside the commander.

A firecracker blew up the gate. Immediately the fusiliers of the *Trident*, the *Friedland*, the *Colbert*, the *Revanche*, rushed into the Strada Reale, the main street of the *Ville Franque*.

They were soon followed by sailors of the *Galissoniere*, the *Alma* and the *Reine Blanche*.

It is necessary to assault each house. When everything was searched, we moved further. The sailors, armed with axes, break the locks. When the locks resist, shells must be used. Each ship made two bombs with fulmi-cotton. The army corps of miners was under the authority of M. Lafont, First Lieutenant of the *Colbert*.

It is necessary to enter into the Arab city. Behind the gate of the *Kasbah*, 40 Arabs were waiting. As soon as our sailors opened the door, they would open fire.

But they had not counted the detonators. A torpedo is fixed at the iron hinge; 50 meters of wire is unrolled, and the door vanishes in a flash. It was enough to press the button of the battery.

The forty Arabs are crushed, broken in pieces. Their comrades, amazed, flee as fast as possible, and hide in the cellars of the houses.

The street fighting starts again in the Arab city.

M. Léonnec, candidate 1st class, with the captain of weapons of the *Surveillante*, wants to seize a house: a ball strikes him full in the chest and knocked him down mortally wounded. Mr. Couturier is able to avenge him. He besieges the house. The Arabs do not want to be dislodged.

– Smoke them out! – an ensign shouts.

At once the sailors roll the bundles of esparto against the door and ignite them. Suffocated by smoke, the Arabs ask for mercy.

Admiral Garnault transferred himself onto the *Desaix*, to follow the events of the fight more closely. His flag hangs at the head of the foremast. It is from the *Desaix* that he gives its orders and that dispatches his aide-de-camps.

The British, who saw that the action would be in full swing, remembered their former allies of the Crimea.

The [British] commander of the *Monarch* offered to Admiral Garnault the help of his boats and doctors for the transport and care of injured persons. The Admiral accepted. The boats, carrying in front the red cross of Geneva, went down to the shore.

The British offered to our injured persons some drinks; they did the first bandages.

Colonel Jamais, on the raft bridge, led his companions on a different battlefields as they arrived. He didn't want his troops to be the last in the fighting.

There the 65 millimeter cannons were unloaded. They were taken rapidly to their position in the western side of the kasbah through the narrow lanes where bullets were flying.

As usual the sailor, even when the action was most serious, found a note of humor.

A gunner seized a donkey colt, he hitched it on the stretchers. It was not very helpful. The gunner had to drag the donkey with the stretchers. All that was very rapid.

The 65 millimeter cannons behaved themselves valiantly and received their baptism of fire with an admirable display for just little pieces. The navy had at last its small cannon!

About a hundred Arabs hid themselves in the great mosque. A small cannon was firing at this building. A first shell went through the Kouba (the cupola), a second one demolished the door. Terrified Arabs gave in prudently and were led outside the city.

There, the sailors tied their hands. At one moment a rebel seized a small dagger hidden in his sleeves and struck it in the back of one sailor, who fell down seriously injured.

Taking advantage of the first moment of confusion, the other Arabs fled and threw themselves into the water. The sailors' bullets killed them like seagulls and found them in their hiding place.

The strong point of action was far away on the right. There, fighting were the *Trident*, the *Surveillante*, the 92nd.

M. de la Motte, First Lieutenant, commander of the company of the *Surveillante* and M. Devic, ship's ensign, commanding the 2nd section were joined by a section from the *Trident*, which couldn't follow their company and joined with the fusiliers.

M. Renault, midshipman first class, who was commanding it, asked M. de la Motte if he could follow him. – Come with us.

We were in the cemetery. Everyone moved forward, passed the walls of that enclosure and were received by a hail of bullets. Arabs hidden behind bundles of alfa, which were like huge blocks of houses, shot at our men in the open. Two sailors fell dead; they were Guignen, soldier of the *Surveillante*, and a gunner of the *Trident*; many others were injured.



Prise de Sfax. — M. Couturier, enseigne de vaisseau, à la tête des fusiliers-marins du Trident, enlève
à la baïonnette la batterie rasante (10 juillet).

The captain of the frigate *Maréchal*, who commanded the 2nd battalion of the squadron, and who could be seen above all where there was danger, sounded the bugle.

- Call the bayonet with cannon!
- Sound the assault

There was a rush forward. The Arabs, who didn't like the blade weakened. Suddenly a cry: – Arabs shot at us from the ramparts. We faced to our left. Fortunately it was a false alarm.

Some soldiers of the 92nd line, noticing the flag of the rebellion on the northern forts, climbed through a gap caused by a shell and removed them. Only the white headdress of their kepis could be seen; that was the cause of the brief terror.

The brave soldiers of the 92nd, hearing shots, got down the ramparts and rushed towards an Arab village situated on the right side of the city on a sand dune.

When they reached those houses, a hail of bullets from adjacent olive woods in a flash killed two officers and thirty soldiers .

That company rallied the *Surveillante* and the *Trident*. The cannon-revolvers swept away on the dune the Arab horsemen, who waved their long moukalas as sign of triumph and were ready to attack our young infantrymen withdrawing.

A moment of interruption. The bugle called to attack again. Everybody, sailors and soldiers, with enthusiasm attacked the stores of alfa, where each alley was conquered step by step. Only these words were to hear.

- You will let yourself caught by the soldiers.
- The sailors are going this way. We have to go there!

There, Luizen fell, the lance-corporal of *Surveillante*. A sailor, Sebastiani, avenged his lance-corporal by skewering the Arab who had killed him and had wanted to hide behind a bundle of alfa. He wanted to take away his trophy: impossible; too heavy.

Another Arab swung his saber at the commander Maréchal with his sword. but before he did it, the same Sebastiani laid him on the ground.

“The first one in the back ; the second one in the stomach!” that brave Corsican said to us.

At 10 In the morning everything was over.

The French flag waved on all ramparts and mosques. There was nothing but isolated incidents. The soldiers, warned, let themselves surprised by unsubjugated Arabs, who crawled up to them and wanted to kill them.

Luckily, they prevented their enemies and made them to pay for their audacity.

At half past ten, Admiral Garnault went back on board and testified his satisfaction to the army. In the evening, an order of the day was put up in the batteries and congratulated the commanders, the officers and all the staff.

“ Everybody devoted himself – with such enthusiasm! The admiral will not forget it – to the preparations of this difficult operation!... The assault troops rushed down on the ground with a great fervor and boldness that made the admiration of all and they didn't weaken for any second... The admiral was proud to lead such men!...”

The sailors and the British officer of *the Monarch* had seen us. They would say if their old enemies, later become their allies, whom they had somewhat forgotten in 1870, had degenerated.

Unfortunately the victory was expensive. The navy reported eight dead, the army three. There were about forty wounded. The enemy was harshly punished. The eight or nine hundred Arabs who were defending the city were all killed except forty, who were spared as prisoners. The reprisals, as we saw it, were terrible.

With the night, the assault companies went back their respective ships. Some sailors of the *Trident* took with them gargoulettes (water jars) made out of coarse clay that they had taken in a shop of the Arabic city.

Their chief M. Couturier made them get rid of those objects because he didn't want people to say that our soldiers stole something, no matter how cheap it was.

Sfax remained occupied and guarded by land troops.

Sfax, the 17th of July

That morning, the boats (*mahones*) requisitioned for the disembarkation of troops went back to their prior tasks. Those that, beyond the cannon boats, formed a floating village, a refuge of the Europeans of Sfax, came near the Naval port and were ready to load the bundles of alfa which escaped the flames.

These *mahones* [feluccas?] in common use on the east coast of Tunisia had a graceful form like Venetian boats. But their two masts, one tilted in front and the other in the back – with their badly cut sails – were such that the whole was not beautiful.

I took advantage of one of these to go ashore and to visit Sfax.

Patience is a good thing: it's the virtue of the Muslim but not of the French. I would have preferred a steamboat. After a while that seemed long to me, the *mahone* finally reaches the wharf. It is a bridge of planks which comes towards the sea a distance of 20 meters.

The *mahones* were loaded at this jetty; sometimes they were at the same level as the platform, sometimes below it, according to the tide.

While stepping on the jetty, I saw at thirty steps distant two cannons aiming fixedly at me through the embrasures.

It was the low battery (*rasante*). It menaced the sea in the form of an arc of a circle. 11 pieces of 30 pounds weight mounted on tarred wooden supports in the embrasures are covering the approaches in all directions. The top of the masonry was removed by the big cannon of the squadron.

The Arabs had reinforced the wall, by gathering in the front bundles of alfa covered with earth. That improvised armor was intended for slowing down and stopping the course of the missiles. The Arabs didn't anticipate the remaining speed. Bundles of alfa and stones were easily pierced; the stone had only one effect, to facilitate the functioning of the percussive fuse that formed the point of the shell and then to assure the explosion of the missile.

I went on the parapet – with less danger than M. Couturier – but maybe more difficulty from the point of view of gymnastics, for the bundles of alfa were already removed and the breaches were being repaired.

I made a tour of the low battery, in the interior. I was shown in the middle of the platform the hole dug by Arabs to make a powder magazine.

The powder magazines were primitive. The powder, contained in open barrels, was, not only exposed to the air – it never rained during this season of the year, that was what explained the carefree attitude of the insurgents – but also – what explained it the least – exposed to the fire of our shells.

A missile exploding near a barrel, everything would be blown up – artillerymen, providers, gunners, all the defenders of the battery.

That work was filled with munitions of all calibers, round shells and grapeshot of cannon. Two dismantled pieces wheeled against the powder magazine. The other cannons had been destroyed by the sailors of the *Trident*.

Six bodies of Arabs wearing Gandoura gowns, the legs and arms naked, were lying against the embrasures, in a pool of blood. They were wearing a green turban, sign of a moslem who went on pilgrimage to Mecca.

One of these poor soul, who had half of the chest removed by an enormous shell explosion, still held in his hand a piece of bottle brush.

While turning to the quay, to the left side, I found the hiding places made out of alfa that the rebels occupied at the south end of the city. The windows, 20 meters apart, allowed the volley of flat piece to pass.

Some soldiers, filling at that moment the gap behind the sustaining wall. There rebels were lying who had been killed at their position, trapped yesterday by the shots of the sailors of the *Trident*, who killed them from the low battery.

The Arabs wanted to flee towards Gabes but the armed boats of the *Marengo*, the *Trident* and the *Surveillante* fired their Hotchkiss guns and made that attempt to escape doubtful.

A vast area spread before the walls of the European quarter. It was like an irregular quadrilateral.

The four sides were formed by the parapet of the razing battery, the shoulder of alfa, the house of the French consul, which was used as headquarters by the commander of troops, and finally the high battery; a little to the left and behind the low battery.

In the middle of that place were two appliances to compress alfa and to make the bundles, a boat under construction, and heaps of broken water jars.

Ozone could still see the furrows of shells; they were about 60 centimeters deep and 2 to 3 meters large. Those furrows looked like pancakes used during the war.

The high battery, on its face, showed 3 enormous breaches. One recognized the passage of our missiles. The gap in the middle on which the standard of the rebels had hung was located under a large tattered tower. That damage was caused by the 27mm shells of the *Friedland* fired from 6,500 meters away. Uncommon chance: a large shell had remained in its position on the fragments of an embrasure. Suspended in the air by a miracle of balance, it seemed as if it was still threatening our soldiers with its bronze face.

The wall of the European city which faced the sea was not seriously damaged. It was not indicated as a target for the eyes of the experienced gunners. The gate was intact, when the sailors approached it. They broke it down with the 65 millimeter cannons.

Today the city is quiet. Let's go in.

On each side of the gate, in the *Strada Reale*, the most beautiful street of the city, were two 90mm campaign pieces. The other pieces of that battery are in the *Kasbah*, under the responsibility of Captain Nicaud.

The *Strada Reale* crosses the city in a straight line. It goes from the European gate to the gate of the Arab city. There are the houses of almost all the consuls. To the right and left are wine traders, all Italians. Further a convent of Roman *capucins*, whose bell was removed by a shell which had partly felled the bronze cross.

This house, with ornamental grill and green shutters was occupied by commander Marquessac and the captain of the artillery. On the opposite side was an [ambulance].

Higher, the small mosque where seven Arabs defended themselves so valiantly. A shell entering from the top left and going out by the right and bottom had astonished them by going through the holy place in spite of the protection of Mahomet and his red flag. They rushed overcome and stupefied towards the yard. They couldn't go further.

The small streets perpendicular to the main artery all looked alike; only one street was not made the same way. It was an angled street: at the bottom we saw white walls sparkling in the sun from the high battery.

While going on the *Strada Reale*, we passed in front of oil stores which, transformed into a prison, contained, before their departure for France, rebels who had been caught and asked for mercy.

At the end of the *Strada Reale* was the first gate of the *Kasbah*. Outside the Frankish city, one could go to the left or right along the walls of the Arab city.

To the left, at around 100 metres, we found ourselves outside the walls at the foot of the western fort. To the right, at the foot of the crenelated ramparts was a major road. The ramparts, on this side, were riddled with enormous breaches made by shells, from a distance of 5400 metres.

The road turned in a right angle and became perpendicular to the sea. We again found large furrows dug by the projectiles. All the houses were more or less destroyed.

The mosques have not been protected – something strange! – by the prophet! The minarets were not cut off. The Marabouts' hair was messed up. Their round skullcaps took the most erratic forms under the energetic resolve of the shells.

While going out of the city through the northern gate, we found ourselves in the plain of sand dominated by north and north-east forts where the fighting was the most intense.

There fought the company on the *Surveillante*, a section of the *Trident* and a battalion of the 92nd of line.

On the right was the cemetery: the section of the wall on the side of the town fell with the explosion of our shells. Further were the alfa stores in the open air. It was necessary to dislodge the Arabs from each row; drive them back into the ditch and from there, over the wall of sand of 2 metres high.

The 92nd which began to chase after the Arabs in the olive gardens that drew their dark belt on the dunes situated on the right couldn't carry on the chase and joined the company of the *Surveillante*.

The improvised hiding places made out of alfa which were used to defend that side of the country, were still in place. The four marabouts standing in front were riddled and pierced by shells. A section of the wall in ruin and heaps of white ashes were the

only remains of a big store of alfa that had burned.

The soldiers of the 92nd and the 71st were policing the streets; the Kasbah was under military occupation. Everywhere in the Arab city, houses presented the aspect of the most lamentable destruction. The doors of mosques and houses, in spite of the huge iron trimming that covered them, had been broken down by the axe of carpenters attached to the assault companies, and the debris is strewn on the floor.

This morning, I had before me the image of a strange masquerade: the soldiers while searching the houses found a number of women's clothes, and dressed themselves like Jewish and Arab women. On the shoulders of the colourful clothes a shining silky fabric was used as petticoat.

In each street kitchens were set up in the open air in front of the squadrons. Window bars were very useful for that purpose. Placed on two large stones, over the fire, they supported the terra cotta pots, that had been found in great quantity, and where dinner was cooked for the soldiers.

A gentle slope led from the Frankish city to the Arab city, into which people entered by a vaulted gate situated at the end of the *Strada Reale*.

The gate was watched by two civil servants and a guard. Let's turn to the right. A second gate 500 metres away, in a more pure oriental style, that the bombardiers had blown up with filmic cotton; a third gate like that one got the same fate.

Under the effect of powder, the heavy doors covered with iron splintered. We were under the vaults in the middle of the ceiling. Everywhere on the wall, were the blood patches of the unfortunate Arabs, who were crushed by the explosion. Against a heap of stones were many Arab *burnous* (coats) covered in blood.

The corridor turned to the left at a right angle. In a small hiding place dug into the thick wall, four big keys in cast iron were found, tied together with a small chain. They were the keys of the Kasbah, that Admiral Garnault had to send to the Ministry of the Navy with three of the many flags removed from the works of the enemies.

A fourth gate, guarded by two other officials, looked out on to the Arab city. Let's go through the gate. There was a street ascending, that went from the *Strada Reale* to the southern gate. At the end was a small mosque. There was found the 'smoked' house in front of which the unfortunate midshipman *Leonnec* was mortally wounded.

Many soldiers camped in that street, their guns leaning against the houses. On the other side of the houses, some grocery stores were leaning against the crenelated wall. On the floor, numerous small bottles, "but empty, unfortunately!" a sergeant told me.

Near these buildings, others, transformed into stables, contained three or four horses.

Having arrived at the grand mosque, if one turns to the left, one would go to the southern forts, through small and steep lanes.

The houses are open. All the furniture is still there: we can especially see lamps made out of green pottery, multicoloured shelves, in the fashion of Algerian shelves, coffers with bright colours, etc.

In the small mosques were mats, iron and glass lamps, ostrich eggs that people hung after having taken a vow, books with Arabic characters, etc.

If one turns to the right, one can go to the bazaar which is closed naturally, and presents a gloomy aspect with its dark vaults and its closed shops.

Today the town is commanded by Colonel Jamais, who has under his authority 4000 infantry and artillery men.

This morning Admiral Garnault, Admirals Conrad and Martin, all the commanders of the fleet, all the army officers, Colonel Jamais, and the artillery with Captain Naquet, accompanied to the cemetery the victims of duty, those who died gloriously while fighting.

That cemetery is situated on the beach, to the right of the Frankish city, at the place where the company of the *Surveillante* fought bravely on the 16th of July. Through the indentation made by our shells in the gate of the enclosure, one could see the blue waves of the Mediterranean.

The bodies had been brought, placed on cannon wagons pulled by our sailors, five of them in coffins, four draped in a tri-coloured muslin flag.

The priest of the squad was celebrating the mass, assisted by two Italian priests. Just as the corpses were laid side by side in the trench, the men were ready to remove the flags that covered them. "They died in the shade of these flags." said Admiral Garnault. "Leave them so that they will serve as a shroud!"

Two days later, a sad ceremony brought us again around the coffin of the midshipman Leonnec, killed, under the walls of the *Kasbah*, with a bullet in the chest.

Pulchrum pro patria mori!

