

Excerpt from *Napoleon in America*

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GENERAL BONAPARTE IS MISSING

Longwood, 5th February 1821

TO MAJOR GORREQUER, etc., etc., etc.

SIR,—I sent in the Governor and Lady Lowe's enquiries. This answer came from Count Bertrand (who is in great distress), that the Countess was very bad. Doctors Arnott and Livingstone are both there. I have just seen Doctor Arnott, who says the Countess Bertrand is extremely ill, and in great danger.

General Bonaparte has not been seen out. Arthur Bertrand was with him this morning.

E. Lutyens

Count Montholon is recovered and out this morning.

Longwood, 5th February

6 o'clock, p.m.

TO MAJOR GORREQUER, etc., etc., etc.

SIR,—Countess Bertrand has just miscarried, and is now doing well. She was in very great danger a short time since.

Doctor Antommarchi is gone to inform General Bonaparte what has taken place.

E. Lutyens

Doctor Livingstone remains at Longwood this night.*

*Sir Lees Knowles, ed., *Letters of Captain Engelbert Lutyens, Orderly Officer at Longwood, Saint Helena: Feb. 1820 to Nov. 1823* (London and New York, 1915), p. 91.

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Island of St. Helena, 6th February 1821

AS SUN BROKE over the black wart in the Atlantic, a banging on the door disturbed the island's governor at his toilet.

"Your Excellency, he is missing," stammered Engelbert Lutyens, Captain of the Twentieth Regiment of Foot. "General Bonaparte is missing."

"Missing?" Sir Hudson Lowe snapped a towel across his half-shaven chin. "What do you mean?"

"When I breakfasted with Doctor Livingstone this morning, he mentioned that Arthur Bertrand had yesterday shown him a lock of General Bonaparte's hair. The boy said the General had given it to him as a farewell gift, at which point his brother hushed him. On hearing this, I inquired with Count Montholon, who said the General was indisposed last evening, so the Count had not seen him. Doctor Antommarchi said the same thing. On making further inquiries, I determined that no one at Longwood has observed the General since six o'clock yesterday evening. A thorough search has found him nowhere. The valet Marchand is also missing." The officer shook with the weight of what he was saying.

All color drained from Lowe's face. For a man who took alarm at the slightest irregularity, this was beyond calamity. Charged by the British government, on behalf of its allies Russia, Prussia and Austria, with ensuring Napoleon Bonaparte's enduring captivity on St. Helena, Lowe regarded his own death as a fate preferable to his prisoner's escape.

"How can this be?" he spluttered. "Were not the sentries on duty? Were not the guards at Longwood Gate? How could he go missing with five hundred men of the Twentieth Regiment encamped on Deadwood Plain and lookouts posted on every height?"

"The sentries were on full watch, as is our custom. There were many people going between Longwood and Captain Bertrand's, and to and from James Town, with the Countess being so ill. I looked for the General at his window last evening, but he did not show himself. As you know, that is not unusual, and as I assumed Doctor Antommarchi had seen him, I thought nothing of it."

"You thought nothing of it?" Spit shot from Lowe's mouth. "Am I to attribute this dereliction of duty to naïveté, incompetence or complicity?"

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How do I know that you yourself did not escort General Bonaparte off the property, given the lightness with which you seem to regard this matter and the affection in which you hold the residents of Longwood?"

Captain Lutyens, a good soldier and man of tact appreciated by his French charges, stiffened. "I would never neglect my duty or abuse the trust Your Excellency has reposed in me. As soon as I noted the General's absence I advised Major Jackson, who sent me to Major Gorrequer, who ushered me to you. The Major has alerted General Pine-Coffin, who is raising all regiments."

Lowe set aside his line of questioning, though not of thinking. With some twenty-five hundred troops on an island that stretched little more than ten miles long and six miles wide, possessed of few roads and brimming with cliffs that themselves formed a jagged prison wall, it was impossible for Napoleon to move without being seen, unless he had assistance not only from the French in his retinue but from one or more of the British who surrounded him. The governor was not himself susceptible, but he knew only too well that others could be swayed by Napoleon's charm, guile or bribery. Had Lowe not already sent away several who had become too close to the captive and smuggled communication to and from Longwood? Intercepted escape plans envisioned Napoleon in a servant's guise, a hiding spot in a trunk of dirty linen, a cliff-side rope, a boat camouflaged as a cask, even an undersea vessel. All of this was Lowe's job to forestall, and forestall he did, with niggling attention to surveillance and fortification.

Ships could not easily approach St. Helena, except from the southeast, and could be spotted from the hills as far as sixty miles away, more than a night's sail. There were four obvious landing points, all well defended, but Lowe had identified nineteen other places—as hard to access from land as from sea—where a rocky landing could be attempted. To guard against this, at least two frigates were always at anchor and two brigs constantly circled the island in opposite directions, while armed launches patrolled the mountainous inlets. No other vessel was allowed to navigate during darkness; any transgressor could be gunned on sight. The island bristled with five hundred pieces of artillery.

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In daylight every ship was accompanied until it was permitted to anchor or sent away. On land there was a curfew after sunset and no person could pass the many guardhouses or sentries without knowing the countersign. The walled grounds of Longwood, Napoleon's residence, were ringed by soldiers who closed in at night to surround the house. Within minutes anything untoward could be communicated through a series of semaphore towers and the entire island placed under arms.

Escape was highly improbable but not impossible, and the governor would find those culpable. But even as he combed his trembling mind for possibilities, Lowe knew it mattered not. Whether stuffed in a cupboard, fallen down a precipice or safely on a ship to disturb the peace of Europe, as he had so expertly done on his escape from Elba, Napoleon was missing, and he, Lieutenant-General Lowe, as Commander-in-Chief, would be held to blame.

As the alarm sounded and soldiers scrambled, Lowe galloped along the narrow, twisting road to Longwood, followed by his aides and Lutyens. For the past four-and-a-half years, Napoleon had refused to receive the governor's visits. Ushered into the parlor, the damp boards sinking underfoot, Lowe was shocked at the intervening decay. He cursed Napoleon's obstinacy in not occupying the comfortable new house Lowe had ordered constructed nearby.

Servants were in flutter, the women weeping, the two Corsican priests muttering and crossing themselves. Lowe addressed himself to General Henri Bertrand. "Where is General Bonaparte?"

Napoleon's long-serving aide-de-camp, loyal companion on Elba, stalwart through Waterloo and—despite his wife's protests—devoted bearer of trials in the confined menagerie on St. Helena replied, "We do not know the Emperor's whereabouts."

"How and when did he leave Longwood?"

The Grand Marshal of the Palace of the Emperor, a title Bertrand insisted on retaining despite the British refusal to honor it, said, "We do not know."

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Lowe drew himself up in full scarlet splendor. "You would have me believe that your master could take leave of Longwood without any knowledge or assistance on the part of his staff?"

"It is no more incredible than your insinuation that the Emperor could depart Longwood without the knowledge or assistance of an English soldier." The speaker was Charles de Montholon, an aristocratic French general of shifting allegiance and undistinguished service, but of sufficient dedication on St. Helena to have won Napoleon's favor. "The Governor has great confidence in our Emperor's power of concealment if he thinks His Majesty could leave the grounds with sentries so close a cat could not pass without being seen."

Lowe glared at Lutyens, who was still stinging from the earlier rebuke. He continued to address himself to Bertrand. "When did you last see General Bonaparte?"

"Madame Bertrand has been very ill. Until five o'clock yesterday she hovered between life and death. Once she was out of danger, I came to tell the Emperor."

"He said nothing unusual?"

"He expressed his pleasure at the good news; that is all."

"What about the bit of hair he gave your son Arthur?"

"A trifle to amuse the boy, who was distressed about his mother."

"But he said it was a farewell gift."

"But of course, a gift on parting—until the next time. Arthur is but four years old. He speaks little French, the Emperor little English. When they part they say adieu. Nothing more was meant."

Lowe turned to Montholon. "Did you see General Bonaparte yesterday?"

"I sought an audience with the Emperor in the evening, but Ali said he was indisposed and did not wish to be disturbed."

Lowe looked at Louis Saint-Denis, second valet, appointed Mameluke and christened Ali by Napoleon. "So you were the last to see him?"

Ali shook his head. "It was Marchand who told me His Majesty did not wish to be disturbed. He said I was to stay outside the Emperor's rooms and let no one enter." Louis Marchand was Napoleon's first valet.

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“You did not find this odd?”

Ali shrugged. “His Majesty has not been well. He frequently stays in his bedroom.”

“And where is Marchand?”

“We do not know.”

Lowe looked in despair at the faces before him. Sequestered from the outside world for five-and-a-half years, bickering and jealous but united in their fealty to Napoleon—he would draw as much information from them as from stones.

“If your General is as ill as you would have me believe, he courts a hazardous enterprise in attempting to steal away.”

Montholon said, “The Emperor has been prey to the most cruel agony without any hope of alleviation, but he would not run away like a common fugitive. That would be to admit you English had the right to imprison him, whereas he freely delivered himself to your government’s protection.”

“Then perhaps he would steal away to seek his own death.” This would be a stain on Lowe’s reputation but preferable to the alternative.

Bertrand dismissed the suggestion. “The Emperor says people kill themselves to escape shame, not misfortune. If he has met his end, it is more likely a terrible accident. Even now he could be lying shattered in the Devil’s Punch Bowl.”

“If he is on this island, we will find him.”

“If he is not on this island, where would he be?” Montholon raised his hands in innocence. “Can he swim on a plank to a continent four hundred leagues away? It would take a fleet to release him, and there is no fleet in sight.”

The alarm gun fired from the fort on Ladder Hill. A soldier rushed in with a message for Lowe. “Sir, with the mists parted there is a ship spotted to the north.”

“Give chase,” Lowe commanded. He hurried to the window, from which he could see the ocean above a grove of gum trees. It was seven hundred miles to the nearest island, twelve hundred miles to Africa, two thousand to Brazil. The Royal Navy ruled the Atlantic. The ship could

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be intercepted. Lowe would continue with his search. Yet he knew his career was splintering as rapidly as the silvery ripples that broke upon the shore.

Looking back across the same stretch of water, Napoleon Bonaparte stood at the rail of the black schooner *S raphine* in his grey greatcoat and bicorne hat, flush with the heaving wet spray and the thrill of having given the slip to his warden.

“I have escaped my assassin,” he triumphed.

Marchand lifted from his pocket a silk tricolor cockade, carefully set aside during exile, and pinned it to the Emperor’s hat. “In view of better days, Your Majesty.”

Touched, Napoleon tried to reply but instead doubled over from a razor-sharp pain in his stomach.

“Quick!” Marchand shouted to the captain. “Help me get the Emperor below.”

As they struggled to carry Napoleon to his cabin, the captain nodded at the receding island. “You must be glad to be free of that godforsaken rock. It’s got death stamped on every corner.”

If Napoleon was glad, Marchand was glad. Yet the rock had doctors while the ship did not. Tenderly Marchand tucked a blanket around his Emperor. “We must pray that this journey is not stamped with His Majesty’s death.”

NEWS REACHES EUROPE

London, 4th April 1821

LORD LIVERPOOL'S HURRIED entrance did not go unremarked by the ladies at Prince Leopold's soiree, especially those perched around Field Marshal Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington. The Prime Minister awkwardly but politely extracted the Duke from his glittering admirers and handed him the dispatch.

"I have just come from the Admiralty." Rain slipped from Liverpool's cheek in the stiff heat of the salon. "I thought it best to give you the intelligence directly, before news from the Cape squadron engulfs London."

Wellington scanned Lowe's painful letter. His soldier's heart quickened. "Devil take me. So Boney has again sprung his chains."

"It is a nasty business." Despite having attained his position only due to the inability of any other person to form a ministry, Liverpool had conscientiously steered Great Britain through the conclusion of a long struggle to victory over Napoleonic France. "We have communicated with the ambassadors of the Holy Alliance and of France, who have dispatched couriers to their courts. We will blockade the European ports, but assuming he set sail some hours before Lowe's dispatch, and without cognizance of the ship he is on, there is slim chance of laying hold of him at sea. We must be alert to any rumor of where he lands." Pressing close to be heard above the orchestra, but not by the satiny cream of London society, he asked, "If you were to speculate, where would you expect him to turn up?"

"I am not a reader of Buonaparte's mind." Wellington used the Corsican pronunciation of the name, common among Napoleon's opponents, to emphasize the former French ruler's non-French origins. "As to rumor, I would put no faith in reports from Europe. At the time of his first

News Reaches Europe

abdication, I was told twenty times that Buonaparte was dead, that he had died of a wound, or was poisoned or shot, the whole being false. Boney is a man apart, yet not even Prometheus got off his rock without the help of Hercules. Find the flag behind the plotters who aided his escape and you will have a clue to his destination. Whatever shore he crawls up on, I trust it will not be our own. Whoever it belongs to will have greater worries than we do.”

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