

GENERAL LUIS DE LACY IN THE SPANISH SERVICE

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AS the President faces the deputies in the Cortes of Madrid, on his right hand, at the same side as the *banco azul* of the ministry, is a plaque bearing the names of Riego¹ and others who have served the cause of democracy in Spain in an outstanding manner. Prominent upon it is the Irish name "de Lacy." This name was placed there in 1820 by order of the newly constituted Cortes, who declared Luis de Lacy a heroic martyr in his country's cause. That he had met his death by the orders of his king only three years before this signal honour was accorded him is only another of the many ironic fluctuations of fortune in the life of this remarkable man.

Born in San Roque, a Spanish village near the frontier at Gibraltar, on January 11th, 1775, Luis de Lacy came, so Spanish historians tell us, of a "distinguished Irish family." He traced his descent from that John de Lacy of Limerick who married Lady Elinor Hurley of Knocklong at the end of the seventeenth century. Pierce de Lacy, son of John, was Luis de Lacy's great-grandfather. He married Lady Arabella Gould of Knockraun, Co. Cork, and had a large family—one of whom, Patrick, apparently the second son, is the General Patrick de Lacy y Gould of Spanish History. This General Patrick married in Spain and his son, Lt. Col. Patrick de Lacy, was the father of our Luis. There is some difference of opinion as to whether it was General Patrick or a cousin, General Count William, who was the hero of the siege of Oran in 1732. General William was also a Limerick man, and either he or General Patrick commanded the famous Irish Regiment of Ultonia in the relief of the Moorish city.

¹ "Himno de Riego," the National Anthem of the Spanish Republic since 1931, is called after this Riego.

General Patrick de Lacy y Gould had only two sons, Patrick and Francis. The former of these died young, having attained the rank of Lt. Colonel, and is famous mainly as the father of our Luis. The other is well known both for his military and diplomatic exploits. He conducted the siege of Gibraltar in the early seventeen-eighties and was later sent as minister plenipotentiary to both Russia and Sweden. In 1789 he became Governor and *Capitán General* of Catalonia and died in Barcelona three years later.

On the death of Lt. Col. Patrick de Lacy, Luis's mother, who is known to us only as Doña Antonia, married again, this time a Frenchman named Gautier. Luis, an only boy, does not seem to have agreed too well with his stepfather. Having entered the army at a very tender age, he accompanied M. Gautier and his brother on a military expedition to Puerto Rico. When they returned to Coruña in 1789, Luis, having evidently quarrelled with his stepfather, ran away and tramped on foot the long distance of some two hundred miles to Oporto. He was penniless, but his idea was to take ship to the Moluccas, in which project he was forestalled by M. Gautier, who followed the youthful adventurer to Oporto and brought him back to Spain.

At nineteen, Luis was a captain in Ultonia and accompanied his men to the Western Pyrennees, where he distinguished himself by his bravery against the French. As this Regiment of Ultonia, as well as being his own for a time, was also that from which he drew his posthumous title it may be well to glance briefly here at its history.

All through the seventeenth century there were short-lived Irish regiments fighting in Spain, but it was not until the beginning of the eighteenth century that Irish Regiments were accorded definite official recognition by being taken on the muster rolls of Philip V. (It must be remembered that Philip was a Bourbon and came from France). These regiments were formed by supernumerary officers out of the Irish Brigades in France; some authorities have it that a few officers followed Philip from France to Spain in 1701. Besides these officers a number of Irishmen deserted from the English

expedition of Roche and Ormonde to Cadiz, and these may have formed the nucleus of the body of the new regiments. Irish deserters from the enemy seem always to have been accorded a hearty welcome in Spain (as Luis de Lacy was himself to prove). This is probably accounted for by the fact that trained soldiers were generally at something of a premium in those days, as we shall see from the amount of time de Lacy spent in drilling and disciplining organised regiments as well as mere recruits.

The Infantry Regiment of Charlemont and the Queen's Dismounted Dragoons in France joined and formed the Franco-Irish Regiment of Galenoy. As there were far too many officers in the new regiment, Dermot Mac Auliffe and several others made their way to Spain to place themselves at the service of that country. In doing this they had the example of those who had gone before under the patronage of the Marqués de Castellar and formed what was at a later date to become the famous Hibernia. Mac Auliffe was able to officer his corps completely with Irishmen from his old regiment; but he had the right, as had the other Irish regiments in Spain, to admit non-nationals of any description into the rank and file. According to the Marqués Merry del Val, Ultonia consisted at its creation in 1703 of two battalions of ten companies, each battalion with one company of grenadiers and another of fusiliers. In those days it was still Mac Auliffe's Regiment, and he was breveted as colonel in 1709. Recruiting does not seem to have gone ahead as quickly as it might; for, despite the powerful composition adduced above, it is a fact that in 1710 Ultonia consisted of only 408 men—which, if it adhered to its full formation, would leave only twenty odd soldiers in each company.

In contradistinction to the white uniforms of the Spanish soldiers of the line the men of the Irish Regiments kept to the red coats of the French uniform, distinguishing amongst themselves by the colour of the facings, which in the case of Ultonia were blue as were their cuffs and breeches. On the regimental standard all carried the harp, making no attempt to show the arms of the particular name of the regiment.

After the battle of Campo Santo in 1743 and as a tribute to their great bravery on that occasion, Hibernia and Ultonia were ordered to add to their standards the motto "In omnes terras exivit sonitus eorum."

In view of the relations which have always existed between Ireland and Galicia, it is interesting to note that in September 1738 Ultonia recruited the whole of the rank and file of the Galician regiment of Santiago without however taking any of the officers. The three surviving Regiments—Ultonia, Hibernia and Irlanda—were joined together for the first time into a single Brigade under an Irish Brigadier in 1740 to fight until 1747 in the War of the Austrian Succession. In 1771, Ultonia was the first Irish Regiment in the service of Spain to cross the Atlantic, for it was sent from Cadiz to Panama in 1769 and came back from Vera Cruz two years later. But the Irish Regiments were gradually losing their national character, and from 1792 all admitted foreigners even as officers. About this time Ultonia absorbed a Walloon Regiment from Brussels, and from this on we find Spanish, Belgian and Italian names among those of the junior officers. That the seniors were still Irishmen is borne out by the testimony of an English naval officer who came into contact with Ultonia at Rosas at the beginning of the Peninsular War. He said that, though none of the privates or non-commissioned officers could speak a word of English, many of the seniors not only bore Irish names but could speak English as well as they could Spanish. Phillippe les Fleurs, first and last non-Irish commander of Ultonia, took charge in 1813 and shortly after the Regiment was disbanded.

The year 1795 found our young captain of Ultonia, Luis de Lacy, in the Canaries, where his exploits were now more amatory than military. Unfortunately for Luis his rival in love was no less a person than the *Capitán-General* of the Islands. A duel was fought, in which de Lacy wounded his opponent. The youthful Don Juan was banished to the Island of Hierro, a Spanish commentator adding that the Governor did this as "the only means of disposing of a rival as daring as he was fortunate." The action seems certainly

to have been dictated by jealous spite, and de Lacy's proud nature did not submit tamely to such an indignity. While in exile, he seems to have employed his enforced leisure in writing insulting letters to his superior. At any rate, whatever the content of these letters, they earned for the writer a summons to court-martial. The sentence was light: in view of "his good military record" he was condemned to no more than a year in prison at Concepcion de Cadiz. Unfortunately de Lacy's proud spirit would not brook even such a reprimand, and his resentment showed itself so violently that he was considered mentally unbalanced and taken off the active list of the army on his release from prison.

Deprived of his commission and prevented from re-enlisting in the Spanish army, Luis found himself on the eve of his twenty-first birthday a soldier without a country. The army was in his blood and he made his way to France, where he enlisted in a line regiment. His military genius, however, could not long remain hidden, and within a month he was appointed a captain in the Irish brigade which was being formed at Morlaix. It is said that this appointment was due to a personal interview with Napoleon, who had been apprised of de Lacy's family tradition and personal exploits by the Duke of Frettra, General Clarke. An officer once more he engaged in a Don Juanesque round of conquests, which ended in his marrying Mlle. Guerner at Quimper. As the family was strongly Royalist in sympathy, the match was definitely frowned upon; but the Señora de Lacy seems to have been rather independent for her time, as our main subsequent information concerning her is that she accompanied her husband on most of his campaigns, starting out for Antwerp three days after the wedding.

Despite the fact that he fought for France as far afield as Berlin, Spain seems to have held de Lacy's affections; for when in 1807, now *chef de bataillon*, he was ordered to proceed to Spain, he first endeavoured to get sent elsewhere and then tendered his resignation. His pleas were unheeded, his resignation ignored; so sending his wife and child to the Guerner home in Brittany, he proceeded to Madrid with his men.

He arrived there in 1808 to find the city in arms against the French ; so he quietly deserted and went over to his comrades of former days. He surrendered as prisoner of war, but was given a command instead of detention.

From this date onwards Spanish history begins to make frequent reference to Brigadier General de Lacy, and the French must have often regretted the day of his desertion. He fought against them from the Ebro to the Tagus, inflicting notable losses and capturing on one occasion three thousand enemy cavalry. At the retaking of Ocaña—near Aranjuez, now so familiar to us—he was one of the heroes of the day, and this is the more remarkable as from records of the siege we know that de Lacy's detachment was the last to come on the scene and that arriving by night it was unable to reconnoitre the ground. He commanded the first division of the army directed by Don Juan Carlos de Areizaga. On the 10th of November, 1809, de Lacy was aiding the cavalry of General Freire, and coming from Tembleque he dislodged the French from Ocaña. Of the subsequent crushing defeat of the Spaniards and the recapture of Ocaña Gómez de Arceche in his *History of the War of Independence* says : " We can all remember how, in the discussion of the plan of that campaign, so many people, favouring us with their views, echoed the opinion of their old comrades in arms who proclaimed de Lacy the man who had best resisted the entry of the enemy into Ocaña." In one of the phases of the combat, during a hazardous change of front to avoid an attempt on the part of the enemy to surround them, the forces of de Lacy were noted for the calmness with which they manoeuvred in such critical circumstances, while de Lacy was personally the hero of the battle, taking two cannon, wounding the French commander and killing his adjutant.

In 1810, when Cadiz was besieged by the French, the Regency decided to send out maritime expeditions which would land in the surrounding country and harry the besiegers. Amongst other honours heaped on de Lacy had been the command of the Isla de Leon on which Cadiz itself is situated, and naturally he was the man selected to command these

marine sorties. Having strengthened the fortifications, he embarked with 3,000 men on the 17th of June for Algeciras. The expedition was not completely successful, as they failed to get the fifty odd miles inland to take Ronda ; nor were they able, as they had planned, to fortify certain cities of the *serranía*, having instead to take shelter in Casares. Yet their journey could not be called useless if only because of the courage inspired in their partisans in the mountains. Eventually too they sallied from Casares and made fresh trips through the country surrounding Marbella. But they were attacked by an overwhelming force of French and had to take to the sea for Cadiz, which they reached on the 22nd of July. While in Cadiz, de Lacy prepared another expedition—this time landing at Huelva—which was more successful in that it drew off part of the French forces, obliging them to go to the assistance of Massena who was in command in Portugal. On his return to Cadiz on the 22nd of September de Lacy led a sally which destroyed many of the enemy posts. According to the French this corner of Spain was at the time the only part to give any trouble to the would-be conquerors.

In 1811 de Lacy was sent to Catalonia to replace the Marqués de Campoverde who had lost Tarragona. He took charge at Vich on the 9th of July and placed himself, his troops and the Junta in Solsona. He left his second in command, Baron de Eroles, to defend the mountain and monastery of Montserrat, which lie between Solsona and the captured port of Tarragona. Having taken the fortresses of Cardona and La Seo, de Lacy next undertook the task of reforming and disciplining the army. This was not too difficult, because the men had lost confidence only in their leader. Under the famous de Lacy they still had faith in ultimate victory ; and so when he appealed on the 15th of July for volunteers to strengthen his forces, many flocked to his standard. In August a rumour was put about that he was to leave Catalonia, whereupon the General published a manifesto to the effect that he would rather die with his last soldier than abandon his post.

Not alone was de Lacy the life and soul of the struggle

in Catalonia during these trying years, but he also sent reinforcements to the defence of Valencia. This was of course good military strategy, as by keeping the invaders busy in Valencia de Lacy saw to it that they could not withdraw any of their men to send them against the CATALAN province. These reinforcements broke the important line of communication established by the French between Barcelona and Lérida and enabled de Lacy, knowing the enemy to be occupied elsewhere, to devote himself to his recruits in the mountain fastnesses. He had fortified certain points in the high Sierra de Busa and thus made a safe place for his military academy. When he felt that his troops were sufficiently drilled, de Lacy led a successful expedition into the enemy territory, burned several villages as a reprisal for French incendiarism, levied tribute in the towns and generally terrorised enemy sympathisers. The moral effect of this short campaign was excellent; the weakly Spaniards became the invaders and the aggressors.

De Lacy's next move on his return from this punitive expedition was to set about capturing the Medas Isles in the mouth of the Ter. With this object in view he sent Eroles with the English colonel Green who disembarked on the Islands on the 29th of August. They took and destroyed the French fort there, but the Englishman thought it best to abandon it. This did not suit de Lacy's ideas; so on the 11th of September he himself embarked for the fort, which he rebuilt, garrisoned and fortified sufficiently to resist attack. He then renamed the islands, Isles of the Restoration.

On his way to Berga, where the Junta had need of his presence, he engaged the French at Igualda on the 4th of October and drove them back to, and eventually out of, a neighbouring Capuchin monastery with the loss of some 200 men. The following December, hearing that General Decaen, who had replaced Marshall Mac Donald in the enemy command, was sending a convoy to Barcelona, he decided to "disturb" his march. He had not a sufficient number of troops at his command to prevent the convoy from reaching its destination; so he arranged an ambush on the heights of La Garriga. On the 5th of December Decaen came along with 5,000 infantry,

400 horse and four cannon; de Lacy not alone routed them but, in the person of his subordinates Casas and Manso, pursued them to Granollers, where they had to turn aside and leave Vich and Comarca untroubled. These triumphs of de Lacy and his methods of fighting gave birth to crowds of guerrilleros, who saw that the enemy had never a period of unbroken peace and kept them constantly in difficulties as regards communication with France.

The following January (1812) found de Lacy in Reus, a few miles from Tarragona, keeping a watch on that lost city. Taking advantage of a careless move on the part of Laforce who had been sent out from Tortosa specially to watch him, de Lacy fell on a battalion left in Villaseca under Dubarry and almost destroyed it. Then fearing an attack projected by Decaen on Vich, the Irishman decided to intercept the enemy march. He halted on the 26th and 27th in Coluspina; but the French made no move and de Lacy proceeded to Moya. There he discovered that the enemy were at Centellas and San Felice; so advancing on these posts he gave battle and routed them completely.

In May, taking advantage of the fact that the French were changing their positions both in the north east and near Tarragona, de Lacy made for Mataró in hopes of taking the fortress which had been made out of the Capuchin monastery there. He failed in this despite the aid of the English naval artillery, as both French commanders turned on him, Lamarque descending from the north and Decaen coming over from Lérida. For safety de Lacy had to send the artillery back to their ships and retire with his men to Llinas. He had been appointed on the 17th of April to the supreme command of the army in Catalonia with the rank of Lieutenant General, and he may have wished to celebrate his appointment by showing that he could recapture Tarragona, which had been lost by his predecessor. But though he failed in this his prime objective, his harrying tactics disturbed Decaen to such an extent that the French commander sought a parley at Reus. Nothing seems to have come of this interview.

During this time de Lacy was anxiously awaiting the

arrival of the Anglo-Sicilian Fleet, which was due to arrive at any moment. Yet when it did come, he sent it to Alicante where he thought it was needed more, though according to some he was obliged to do this because the Catalonian government could not pay the fleet. When he found that the Catalans resented the requisitioning of horses for the army, he ordered that all taken should be paid for and so held their allegiance. On the other hand, the cruelty of some of the French generals led him to shoot some prisoners he had taken and threaten worse reprisals if the conventions of war were not respected. The Government, never very enthusiastic about de Lacy, now stepped in and accused him to the Regency on a charge—of all things—of inactivity. The result must have surprised them somewhat, as their services were quietly but firmly dispensed with. But the end of his time in Catalonia was at hand. The whole Spanish army was in need of reorganising, and de Lacy was selected as the obvious person to undertake the task. He left, therefore, for Santiago.

In Santiago de Lacy found himself appointed to the Reserva de Galicia. This Regiment, which was supposed to be at the service of Wellington, was composed of some 50,000 men. De Lacy devoted himself to the task of reorganising and disciplining his men. Then Ferdinand VII returned to Spain, and the time seemed ripe for de Lacy to receive official recognition of his long and valuable services to Spain.

But Ferdinand was not the man to appreciate such a character as that of de Lacy. In October 1807 Charles IV arrested his heir Ferdinand on a charge of conspiracy against the crown. The prince managed, by betraying his accomplices, to avoid the worst consequences of his guilt. In the following year he managed, by exaggerating the resentment of the people because of his mother's favourite, Godoy, to prevail upon his parents to abdicate in his favour. This was in March, and in May he found himself, despite the oath of allegiance he had received from the army, Napoleon's prisoner. He spent six years in Valençay, during which time a prudent Cortes decided that no engagements made by him in captivity should be considered valid. When Napoleon resolved to set

him free in 1814 on condition that he banished the English from Spain, the Cortes referred to their previous decree and also passed another refusing to acknowledge him until he should have sworn to recognise the constitution. This was the very last thing Ferdinand was prepared to do. Like all weak crafty natures he was particularly attached to power, and he decided that as king this power should be absolute. He came back to a people for whom he had no affection, a small band of nobles presented him with a petition for a return to the *ancien régime*, and this was sufficient for Ferdinand. He commenced to put his ideas for an absolute monarchy into execution.

In common with many others, de Lacy decided that Ferdinand could not be allowed to continue his policy unchecked; so, having spent a couple of years brooding over the injustice and oppression so prevalent in the country, he joined in 1816 with an old Catalan comrade named Milans in a military rising against the monarchy. Other insurrections had been attempted before, but unsuccessfully; history must not be allowed to repeat itself. From Madrid to Catalonia went de Lacy, planning, organising, inspiring. But someone betrayed his plans. On the night of the rising only a few scattered companies and isolated officers were at the meeting place in Caldetas. They were forced to fly; Milans escaped, but de Lacy was captured, taken to Barcelona and sentenced to death by courtmartial. He was still the popular hero however, particularly in Catalonia, and any attempt to have him executed there would have been inviting a popular insurrection. He was smuggled by night across to Mallorca and there shot, facing death with "the same bravery which he had shown in defending his country," as we read in one account.

Luis de Lacy, despite his long and brilliant career as a soldier, was only forty-two when he was executed on July 5th 1817. Exactly three years later he was accorded a public funeral in which Ferdinand himself, baulked by now of his absolutism, took part; and in addition to the honours conferred on his memory by the Cortes, the king posthumously created him Duke of Ultonia.

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