

An Interesting Swede

Jonathan North

Adam Frederik Netherwood was born on 1 May 1772 to Captain Magnus Wilhelm Netherwood and Anna Elisabeth Stalhammer. After serving in the Swedish Army he transferred to French service as a volunteer in the 5th Hussars. By the time of the Egyptian expedition he was a captain serving on the staff. He took part in the advance into Syria and was present at the storming of Jaffa and the siege of Acre. He was later attached to Kleber's staff and then Menou's.

Following his return to France, and now *Chef de brigade*, Netherwood was inactive but still keen to serve. He wrote to Napoleon on 8 February 1801:

From Netherwood, Chef de Brigade, to First Consul Bonaparte:

At a time when many officers find themselves unemployed, I have little right to ask you, Citizen Consul, that I might continue to serve in the French armies; your generosity towards those who served in Egypt, however, gives me some reason to hope. Offers being made to me by the King of Sweden can not persuade me to leave your armed forces – I will always be happy wherever the French go whether it be in Europe, Africa or at the very ends of the world. I only request that I be permitted to go to Sweden for two months' leave.

Yours, with profound respect, Netherwood.

Netherwood spent those two months in Sweden but was soon back in Paris, at the Hotel de Chatelion, and seeking employment from the Ministry of War. On 18 October he volunteered to participate in the expeditionary force being prepared for Saint-Domingue (Haiti) where the French were hoping to reimpose rule over an independently-minded Toussaint Louverture and his army of former slaves. Napoleon's brother-in-law, General Leclerc, was in command of the expedition and on 24 October Netherwood was assigned a position on the staff, embarking at Brest on *L'Océan* along with Captain Musquinet-Beaupré, Captain Leclerc and Lieutenant Perrin as well as Leclerc's senior staff officers General Abbé and Alexandre Dalton.

Netherwood arrived in the Caribbean in February 1802 and his staff duties kept him busy as the campaign, initially successful, gradually wore down the expeditionary

army. Yellow fever decimated the French, and Leclerc was one of the many thousands to die in the epidemic.

Netherwood was offered the opportunity to return to France as part of the escort accompanying Leclerc's widow (Napoleon's sister, Pauline) and Leclerc's remains. He refused to quit the island, however, explaining why in a letter to the Minister of War (Berthier) on 9 November 1802:

Permit me, Citizen Minister, to present my respects to you via Citizen Dalton, who I have asked to remind you of me. I was designated, by my most unfortunate general before his death, to accompany his wife to France but as the colony is being attacked from all sides, I believe that it is my duty to do without the honour of accompanying her, but, instead, to share in the perils being faced by my comrades.

If, Citizen Minister, you agree to this, I hope that I will be recalled after eight months as family matters in Sweden demand my attention and, by that time, reinforcements will have arrived, the rebels will have submitted and the colony secured for France.

Please accept, Citizen Minister, my most respectful salutations, Netherwood.

Leclerc's body was shipped to France on 10 November, Pauline and her son, Dermide, also travelling on board Captain Hubert's ship the *Swiftsure*. General Abbé with three Guard officers and six soldiers and Leclerc's other ADCs (Dalton and Burcke) accompanied the widow.

Back in the unfortunate colony, Leclerc had been replaced by General Rochambeau, wayward son of the hero of the American Revolution, and he launched an offensive in late 1802 which attempted to secure the coastal towns for France. On 19 November, shortly after the departure of General Abbé, Netherwood had replaced General Abbé as commander of the colonial governor's Guard.

Netherwood was kept busy at Le Cap, distinguishing himself under General Clausel in February 1803, leading the Guard cavalry in a brilliant charge and putting 300 rebels to the sword.

Netherwood, like many of the expeditionary forces young officers, sought to improve his station in life by marrying into one of the rich colonial plantation families. He married Marie-Thérèse Lemit, born at Port-au-Prince on 22 July 1774 and daughter of Pierre Lemit (who had returned to the colony with his family in December 1801), an

architect, and Catherine-Thérèse Masson. The marriage bans were published on 27 March 1803 and the marriage took place two days later. A marriage contract was drawn up on 1 April 1803 by Judge Ludot and was signed by, among others, Netherwood's friend Colonial Prefect Daure, General Thouvenot, Admiral Latouche-Tréville, Chief of Staff Boyer and General d'Henin. Netherwood was gifted a coffee plantation and plantation house as part of the contract, along with a dowry of 6000 Francs.

Tragically, Netherwood was seriously wounded shortly afterwards at the storming of the fort at Petit Goave, seized by the rebels. He died on 26 April 1803. The entire situation in the colony was going from bad to worse and many families began to evacuate. Among them was Netherwood's widow, who quit the island and arrived at Bordeaux in August 1803. She took up residence in Paris, firstly in the Rue des Filles St Thomas, then in the Rue du Mail. Having lost most of her fortune in the chaos of Saint-Domingue she had to apply to Berthier for her widow's pension. On 16 December she wrote the following letter:

Citizen Minister!

Encouraged by the interest you have shown in my case, I dare to write to you to ask you to put into effect your promises as my misfortune lends me the right to claim your indulgence, as does the opinion you held of my husband. His widow, reduced to misery, implores you to present to the First Consul the report which is necessary to obtain the pension, and a few indemnities, which are now her only resource. I am sorry to trouble you with something which, for you, is of little import, but, for me, alas, it is all I have to hope for.

I have the honour to present my respects to you, Widow Netherwood.

This letter seems not to have had an immediate effect as she had to write again on 14 January 1804, this time providing more details concerning her husband and the couple's marriage. Another letter to Berthier followed on 6 February. This last piece of correspondence was perhaps unnecessary for she soon received news that on 23 February 1804 she had been granted her widow's pension of 600 Francs. She moved to the Rue Neuve des Mathurins and then Rue Joubert. In 1828, when the French government began to pay an indemnity to all the property owners who had lost property when the colony fell, the widow Netherwood claimed a sum in lieu for her coffee plantation. She seems to have died shortly afterwards.

Sources:

Personhistorisk tidskrift: Åttonde årgången 1906.

Bulletin number 232 of the Généalogie et Histoire de la Caraïbe.