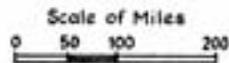


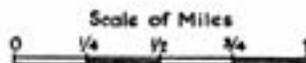
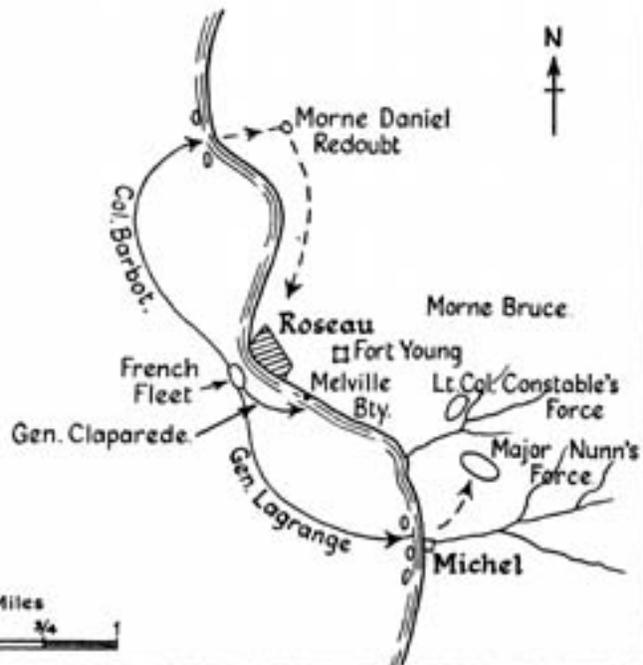
The West Indies 1805

MAP 1.



French Landings Near Roseau 22 Feb 1805.

MAP 3.



THE DEFENCE OF DOMINICA.

By LT.-COL. M. E. S. LAWS, O.B.E., M.C., R.A. (retd.).

ON 20 February 1805 a French naval squadron under Rear-Admiral Missiessy and having some 3,500 troops on board suddenly appeared off St. Lucia. This force consisted of the battleships *Majestueux* (120 guns), *Jemmappes* (74 guns), *Lion* (74 guns), *Magnanine* (74 guns) and *Suffren* (74 guns), the frigates *Armide* (40 guns), *Gloire* (40 guns) and *Indefatigable* (40 guns) and the corvettes *Acteon* (16 guns) and *Lynx* (16 guns). It had slipped out of Rochefort on 11 January and had been ordered to create a diversion by harrying British commerce in the West Indies, and then, after landing the troops at Martinique and Guadeloupe, to join Admiral Villeneuve's main fleet before returning to Europe. Admiral Missiessy chased a convoy of British transports escorted by H.M.S. *Alligator* into St. Lucia, but only succeeded in capturing one vessel on board of which was a British officer. This prisoner, however, so exaggerated the strength of the troops which had landed from the convoy that the Admiral decided not to attack St. Lucia as he had originally intended, but to put into Martinique for consultation with the French Governor who advised him to raid Dominica instead.

The totally unexpected appearance of a powerful French force in the West Indies came at an awkward moment for the British, whose available naval force was scattered and was considerably inferior to that of the enemy. The British garrisons in the various islands were sickly and much under establishment. Dominica in particular offered a tempting prize, for the island lay directly between the main French strongholds of Martinique and Guadeloupe and only 45 miles from the former. At that time the island had a population of only 1,600 Europeans, 2,800 free people of colour and 22,000 slaves; the interior

was mountainous and thickly wooded, so that the movement of troops from one district to another was a matter of great difficulty since there were no roads.

The Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Dominica was Major-General George Prevost, an able soldier who had almost fifteen years continuous service in the West Indies and who was at that moment about to take leave to England for the benefit of his health. The garrison of Dominica consisted of the following units:—

<i>Unit.</i>	<i>Commander.</i>	<i>Station.</i>
Detachment, Royal Artillery	Capt. C. Waller	Prince Rupert's, Roseau, Scott's Head, Grand Bay.
46 Regiment (8 very weak coys.)	Capt. R. James	Roseau, Scott's Head, Grand Bay.
1 West India Regiment (5 coys.)	Lt.-Col. C. D. Broughton	Prince Rupert's.
" " " (Light Coy.)	Capt. M. C. O'Connell	Roseau.
The York Light Infantry Volunteers (2 coy&.)	Capt. F. Nesselrode	Prince Rupert's.

Notes:—

46 Regiment is to-day 2 Bn. The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. In February 1805 companies only averaged about 30 men each.

1 West India Regiment had a company detached at St. Kitts and another at St. Vincent.

The York Light Infantry Volunteers was a foreign corps composed mostly of deserters. The two companies at Prince Rupert's were those of Capt. A. du Conders and Capt. N. de Hugenpoet. There were a few detached men from these companies at Roseau, probably employed as "additional gunners".

There was also the St. George's Regiment of Militia which had a nominal strength of 35 officers and 335 other ranks, though it is doubtful whether all those on the muster rolls were actually present with the unit when the French attacked. It should also be remembered that West Indian militia units had generally very poor records as fighting troops. There was also the St. Luke's Independent Company of Militia (Captain Serrent) and one weak company of the St. George's Regiment had been trained in artillery duties.

The main defence works in Dominica were at Fort Cabril which guarded Prince Rupert's Bay and which mounted five 32-pdrs., eighteen 24-pdrs, two 18-pdrs. and two 12-pdrs. besides field guns to cover the land approaches. But as the district around Prince Rupert's Bay was notoriously unhealthy owing to the presence of a large marsh, the British troops were quartered elsewhere and the garrison was composed of two companies of foreign troops and of the West India Regiment besides a few artillerymen. At Roseau there were two fortifications—Fort Young on high ground behind the town and Melville Battery on the beach. The former was armed with four 24-pdrs., one 12-pdr. and three field guns, but unfortunately the fire of its guns was partly masked by newly-built houses with the result that within a few minutes of the start of the action, the wooden houses of the town were set ablaze by the burning wadding from the guns. The resulting smoke and flames must have seriously interfered with the fire of the fort by hiding the enemy ships from view, and in addition probably had an unsteady effect on the militiamen who would be tempted to try to save their families and homes from destruction. Melville Battery was a less important work containing five 24-pdrs. and was intended merely to protect shipping in the roadstead from being cut out by enterprising privateers.

There was also a small fort at Scott's Head—the signal station on the windward point of the island from which direction attack was most likely—which had three 18-pdrs. and two 12-pdrs. together with a company of the 46th Regiment and a few gunners as garrison. Lastly there was a small fort at Grand Bay mounting a 24-pdr., an 18-pdr. and a 12-pdr. and with another company of the 46th Regiment and some artillerymen. The military headquarters were at Morne Brune which had three 24-pdrs. and an 18-pdr. in position.

In theory, the garrison of Dominica included Captain C. Waller's Company, 7 Battalion R.A., but an examination of the Muster Rolls in the Public Records Office (Series W.O.10/541) discloses that in fact only Captain Waller himself, one Bombadier and 7 Gunners were at Dominica. The rest of the Company was scattered in small parties at Barbados (21 all ranks), Demerara (3 other ranks), Antigua (3 other ranks), Grenada (3 other ranks), Tobago (1 other rank), St. Kitt's (33 other ranks), Surinam (4 other ranks) and England (5 other ranks). This is a good example of the curious way in which Gunners were scattered about the West Indies during the Napoleonic wars with very little regard for Company organization. The detachment of the Royal Artillery at Dominica in February 1805 was actually composed as follows:—

<i>Unit.</i>	<i>1938 Designation.</i>	<i>Capt.</i>	<i>Sgts.</i>	<i>Cpls.</i>	<i>Bdrs.</i>	<i>Gns.</i>	<i>Drms.</i>	<i>Total.</i>
Capt. C. Keane's Coy., 1 Bn. R.A.	Disbanded in 1819	—	1	1	1	18	1	22
Capt. W. Payne's Coy., 4 Bn. R.A.	16 Field Bty. ¹	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Capt. C. Gold's Coy., 7 Bn. R.A.	Disbanded in 1819	—	—	—	—	4	—	4
Capt. R. S. Brough's Coy., 7 Bn. R.A.	3 Field Bty. ²	—	—	—	—	4	—	4
Capt. J. Power's Coy., 7 Bn. R.A.	28 Field Bty. ³	—	—	—	—	2	—	2
Capt. C. Waller's Coy., 7 Bn. R.A.	Disbanded in 1819	1	—	—	1	7	—	9
Total of R.A. detachment		1	1	1	2	36	1	42

Notes: ¹In 1947 40 Training Battery, R.A.

²In 1947 13 Field Battery, R.A.

³In 1947 69 Field Battery, R.A.

Of this detachment from no less than six different Companies, most of the men from the 7th Battalion were Irishmen, since that Battalion had been formed less than four years before from the Royal Irish Artillery. But of the seven gunners of Captain Waller's Company at Dominica, four were Dutchmen enlisted at Barbados in 1804 from among prisoners of war taken in the West Indies. This detachment of 42 artillerymen was obviously inadequate to man some fifty heavy coast defence guns and also field pieces required for the support of infantry. To assist the regular artillerymen therefore, one company of the St. George's Militia Regiment had been trained in gun drill, and a number of men of the 46th Regiment had also been instructed as "additional gunners" under Lieutenant W. G. B. Schaw. The Paymaster of the 1st West

India Regiment who had had some experience of artillery work in America, also acted unofficially as a Gunner when fighting started.

General Prevost had already decided that in the event of attack he would attempt to hold only Prince Rupert's Bay, which was a magnificent fleet anchorage and was in fact the only place of strategical importance in the island. Roseau, the seat of government and the only town, was a purely commercial centre of no military value, but the possession of a secure and protected anchorage at Prince Rupert's Bay midway between the French bases—of Martinique and Guadeloupe was of great importance to the Royal Navy. General Prevost's defence plan therefore was to delay and harass an enemy attempting to land, but to ensure at all costs the security of Prince Rupert's Bay.

Admiral Missiessy, after a hurried consultation with Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse, Governor of Martinique, landed certain military stores at Port Royal, borrowed the local schooner *Fure* and some pilots, and set sail with his whole squadron on 21 February so as to arrive off Roseau before dawn next day. On board the French warships were some 3,500 troops. General Lagrange was in command of the troops with General Claparede as his second-in-command and Colonel Barbot as his chief-of-staff.

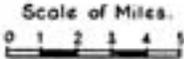
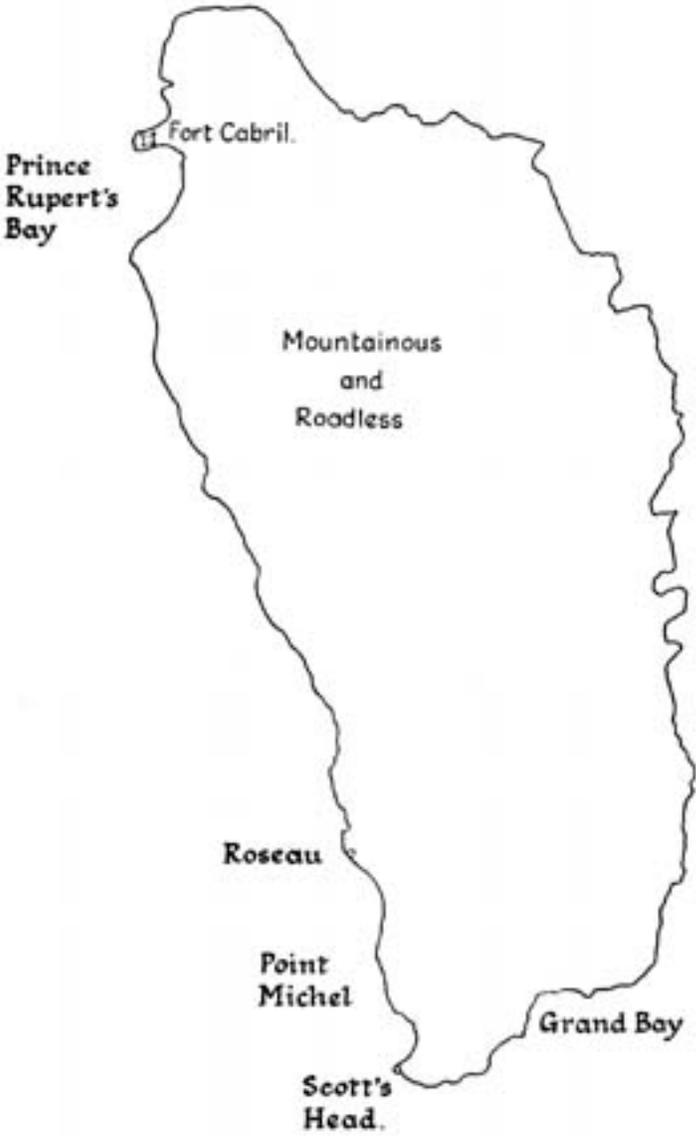
Though the British had as yet no knowledge of the presence of a powerful French squadron in the vicinity, they were not taken by surprise, and before dawn on 22 February alarm guns were fired by the fort at Scott's Head to indicate the presence of suspicious ships. As dawn broke, the strange warships were seen to be lying off Roseau flying British colours, but Captain Waller's gunners were still suspicious and fired on the leading ships as they came within range. By about 7 o'clock French colours replaced British on the enemy ships, and later nineteen barges crammed with troops were seen pulling towards the shore. The main body of the British troops about Roseau were concentrated at Morne Brune.

The main French landing force of some 900 men led by General La Grange in person made for the shore about three miles south of Roseau, and near the hamlet of Michel. The invaders were met on the beach by the St. Luke's Independent Militia Company which was speedily reinforced by the Light Company of the 1st West India Regiment and by the Grenadier Company of the 46th Regiment. The French were driven off, but when three of their frigates stood close inshore and opened their broadsides on the beach, General Prevost ordered his three companies to withdraw out of range of the ship's guns and to take up a position covering the approach to Roseau. He brought up the Grenadier Company of the St. George's Militia and another company of the 46th Regiment, placing the whole of the troops in this area under Major A. A. Nunn, 1st West India Regiment. This force was supported by two light field guns—apparently 6-pdrs.—manned by a mixed detachment of gunners and "additional gunners" of the 46th Regiment. Some assistance was also obtained from the distant fire of a 24-pdr. of Melville's Battery.

The French attacked this position but were repulsed, chiefly owing to devastating fire of the two field guns which were so cleverly sited that they could only be approached by the enemy on a narrow front. The enemy therefore withdrew to re-organize and to await the landing of further troops and of

Dominica 1805

MAP 2



some light field pieces. General Prevost then ordered two companies of the St. George's Militia and a weak company of the 46th Regiment—the whole under Lieut.-Colonel Constable of the Militia—to take up a position to protect the rear of Major Nunn's force, while he himself went back towards Roseau. There he found the French line of battleships in close action with Fort Young and Melville Battery, the guns of which were manned by a few Royal Artillerymen assisted by the Artillery Militia Company of the St. George's Regiment and by a number of sailors from the merchant ships in the bay. These thirteen British guns using red hot shot seemed to be holding their own against the immensely superior force arrayed against them, but the Wooden houses of the town had caught fire and were burning furiously.

News then came in of a second French landing about 9 o'clock some 1½ miles to the north of Roseau. Here some troops, led by Colonel Barbot and supported by the fire of the French frigate, got ashore at the foot of Morne Daniel though opposed on the beach with great gallantry by 100 men of the St. George's Militia Regiment. The defenders were, however, driven back by the gunfire of the warships, and withdrew in good order north-eastwards where they reformed. Colonel Barbot then attacked a small redoubt on Morne Daniel and captured it after a sharp fight though it was held only by a score of men with a single 3-pdr. field gun.

By one o'clock the situation to the south of Roseau seemed secure, for Nunn's force had repulsed several French attacks and had even advanced slightly. Major Nunn himself had been severely wounded and the command had devolved on Captain M. C. O'Connell, 1st West India Regiment, who was also wounded though he remained at duty. Around Roseau the guns of Fort Young and of Melville Battery were still stoutly holding their own against the French battleships. This was indeed a very fine achievement which has not received the recognition it deserves, for the British guns were outnumbered by twenty to one and had sustained the action for a full six hours. But General Prevost had no troops, except a handful of militiamen, to protect Roseau from Barbot's force now beginning to move in from the north. About this time also a third enemy force of 900 men under General Claparede was seen approaching the shore to the south of Roseau where it would be in a position to cut off O'Connell's troops from the town.

Under these conditions the British commander issued orders for all Regular troops to withdraw at once by forced marches to Prince Rupert's Bay. The Militia were instructed to surrender, though volunteers prepared to face the hardships of a march across the island would be welcomed at Prince Rupert's. Mr. George Metcalfe, senior Member of the Council, was authorized to surrender Roseau to the enemy and to make what terms he could for the town and for the civil population. General Prevost himself with two staff officers set out at once for the north-west, and by tremendous exertions actually reached Fort Cabril Within 24 hours. Captain O'Connell with the 46th Regiment, the Light Company of the 1st West India Regiment, the survivors of the Royal Artillery and a few militiamen arrived safely, carrying their wounded, after four days of hard marching over very rough trails. The small detachments at Scott's Head and Grand Bay also withdrew safely.

Meanwhile on General Prevost's orders Mr. Metcalfe had written at "past

8 o'clock 22 Feb." to Lieut.-General Sir William Myers at Barbados reporting the French landing near Roseau. General Sir William Myers, who commanded all the troops in the Windward and Leeward Islands, also received a report from the Captain of H.M.S. Alligator on 26 February. He correctly appreciated that the French were bent only on commerce raiding, for had they had any serious military objective in view they would hardly be "wasting their time and weakening their means by landing near Point Michel". He had complete confidence in General Prevost and knew that he would fall back on Prince Rupert's, which, as Sir William reported to London, "is the real point of importance". He was probably confirmed in his judgment of the situation by the receipt of a surprisingly accurate report on the composition and intentions of the enemy force sent to him by an anonymous agent at Martinique and dated 22 February. This report arrived by H.M.S. Alligator. The General therefore made no attempt to reinforce Dominica, but embarked his only immediately available reserve (the flank companies of 2 Bn. The Royals and of 11th Regiment¹—in all 9 officers and 160 men) on board H.M.S. Alligator on 26 February and despatched it next day to Antigua for the protection of the naval dockyard.

On arrival at Prince Rupert's Bay, General Prevost at once took steps to prepare for a siege, arranging for the storage of water and for the driving in of cattle. He had available only a Corporal and 16 Gunners of the Royal Artillery to man his batteries, but these were assisted by the seamen of H.M.S. Vigilant (a small tender to H.M.S. Centaur), which vessel had sought protection under the guns of Fort Cabril and had landed her crew. On 26 February he received a summons to surrender from General La Grange to which he sent a firm but courteously-worded refusal, adding an expression of thanks for the kindness shown by the invaders to the General's family at Roseau. Next day some enemy ships reconnoitred Prince Rupert's Bay, but Admiral Missiessy had no intention of attacking that well fortified post. Having dismantled the forts at Roseau and levied a contribution of £7,500 on the town, he embarked his troops and sailed on 28 February from Dominica, taking with him twenty-two small ships from the roadstead.

The British casualties in this short campaign were as follows:—

	<i>Officers</i>			<i>Other Ranks</i>			<i>Total</i>			<i>Total all</i>
	<i>K</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>PoW</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>PoW</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>PoW</i>	<i>Ranks</i>
Royal Artillery	—	—	1	—	3	21	—	3	22	
46 th Regiment	—	1	—	12	7	—	12	8	—	
1 st West India Regiment	—	2	—	9	8	—	9	10	—	
St. George's Militia	—	2	—	2	10	—	2	12	—	
Sailors	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	3	—	
Total	—	5	1	23	31	21	23	36	22	

The Royal Artillery casualties were incorrectly reported by General Prevost in his despatch to Sir William Myers dated 1 March 1805 to have been 3 rank and file wounded with Capt. Waller, 1 Sergeant and 6 rank and file as

¹ To-day, The Royal Scots and The Devonshire Regt. respectively.

prisoners of war. An examination of the Muster Rolls and Pay Lists for January, February and March 1805 makes clear that, apart from the three rank and file wounded, the number taken prisoner were as follows:—

<i>Unit.</i>	<i>Capt.</i>	<i>Sgt.</i>	<i>Bdrs.</i>	<i>Gnrs.</i>	<i>Drms.</i>	<i>Total</i>
Capt. W. Payne's Coy., 4 Bn.	—	—	—	1	—	1
Capt. C. Gold's Coy., 7 Bn.	—	—	—	1	—	1
Capt. C. Keane's Coy., 1 Bn.	—	1	1	7	1	10
Capt. R. S. Brough's Coy., 7 Bn.	—	—	—	1	—	1
Capt. J. Powers Coy., 7 Bn.	—	—	—	1	—	1
Capt. C. Waller's Coy., 7 Bn.	1	—	1	6	—	8
Total	1	1	2	17	1	22

According to General Prevost's despatch, Captain Waller, one Sergeant and six rank and file were taken prisoner during the retreat to Prince Rupert's Bay, and it seems probable that the remainder were unable to withdraw from the forts at Roseau before the French entered the town. Two of the captured gunners of Captain Waller's Company—both Dutchmen and enlisted from prisoners of war—eventually joined the French service at Guadeloupe in May 1805, though under what conditions is not known.

On 2 May 1805 the Assembly of Dominica voted a sum of £1,000 for the purchase of plate for presentation to General Prevost, £300 for a monument in memory of Major Nunn, £100 for a sword for Captain O'Connell and £300 for a piece of plate to be presented to the 46th Regiment.¹ Moreover the Committee of the Patriotic Fund voted a piece of plate and a sword valued at £100 to be presented to General Prevost, swords valued at £50 each to Major Nunn and Captain O'Connell and a sum of money for distribution among the wounded soldiers. As a mark of His Majesty's "entire approbation of their spirited and meritorious services", both the 46th and 1st West India Regiments were later authorized to bear "Dominica" on their colours. This was an unusual distinction in the case of the 1st West India Regiment since in fact only the Light Company was present at the action on 22 February 1805, the Headquarters and five companies being at Prince Rupert's Bay and not being engaged.

In his despatch to Lord Camden dated 6 March 1805, concerning the part played by the Militia, General Prevost recommended "that it might be politic to encourage this description of troops by obtaining from His Majesty some mark of approbation for the St. Luke's Independent Company (Captain Serrant) and the St. George's Regiment". Presumably as a result of this report, the St. George's Regiment was styled "The Royal St. George's Regiment" General Prevost himself left Dominica on 5 July and landed at Brixham on 14 October 1805 for his long delayed leave.

It is unfortunately impossible to discover the details of the employment of the Royal Artillery detachment during the fighting on 22 February 1805 since the men were mixed with "additional gunners", militia artillerymen and merchant sailors. That the detachment was heavily involved is evident from the casualty list, and that both the few field guns in action and the 13 heavy

¹ This plate is still in possession of The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry.

guns of the coast defence batteries were skilfully and stoutly fought is proved by the official despatches. and by the fact that the French admitted having had three officers and twenty-two other ranks killed and five officers and seventy-seven men wounded, besides undisclosed losses among the ships' crews. Had the Gunners at Dominica all belonged to a single Company, no doubt some action would have been taken to honour their share in a very creditable defence, but since small detachments of no less than six different units were involved the affair has long since been forgotten by the Regiment.

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