

Brumaire

By Alexander Saxton

XI Brumaire, Year II

In the name of the Supreme Being and of its angels, Reason and Virtue, I bid you greetings from the Vendee! Filled with Republican spirit, our journey from the Capital was swift, and we arrived in this rebellious Department after fewer days than might have been expected. While I am footsore & have already worn through one pair of boots, my revolutionary zeal is undimmed, and I count myself a happy man for the opportunity to give my all in defense of Liberty and the People. Never worry, brother, not even for a moment, that I forget the torment and indignity suffered by our parents under that petty tyrant who called himself '*Seigneur*'. My hatred of him and of the Second Estate shall last as long as time itself.

The war here, they say, has only recently begun to go well, thanks to the *Levee en Masse* and the Royalist defeat at Cholet. With our arrival, I think we cannot help but wipe out this rebellion, and soon. With luck, I shall be fighting alongside you against the Austrians by early Nivose.

Our column, I am told, is to pivot north, into the hills and forests south of Brittany. It is a territory firmly under the bootheels of those still calling themselves aristocrats, and the people there remain under the thrall of lying Catholic Priests. In such a dark land, it may be difficult to send the letters I write you, brother. Nevertheless, I shall send word as I can, and we shall soon bring reason's light to even the darkest woods.

Long live France, Long live the Revolution,

Your brother,

Jacques-Louis Mouron

XIX Brumaire, Year II

In the name of the Supreme Being, greetings from... somewhere north of Nantes. Ten days, twelve days since I have written you? This far from Paris, time seems to move differently. I swear, even the Lieutenant's wristwatch seems to tick out the seconds at an inconsistent pace. No wonder, then, that the people here are still stuck in the Middle Ages. I have had no word from you, brother, but I assume by now you will have single handedly taken Flanders. Please give my regards to messrs. Carnot and Jourdan, as I assume you are now sharing the generals' table! I would say I envy you the excitement of your assignment, but there has been no shortage of 'excitement' here: if you consider a series of desperate, nasty skirmishes to be excitement.

In truth, the Vendeeans have not welcomed their liberation from Aristocratic tyranny. Every inch of soil we have gained from the Royalists in the last (ten? twelve?) days, we have

gained at the cost of revolutionary blood. For what reason? The peasants have more in common, surely, with us, than with the bluebloods and cullion Jesuits who rule them. And yet they fight us with a fervour almost as great as that with which we fight them.

Perhaps it is the rumours out of Nantes that drive them into such a frenzy. There, it is said that the Representative On Mission has been conducting 'Republican baptisms', which is to say, chaining people together and then flinging them into the Loire to drown. Obviously, such rumours are preposterous and likely concocted by the British. And yet I sometimes worry our beloved Jacobins have had a tendency toward... sanguine behaviour, that makes rumours like these ones easier to believe. We are better than the highborn scum we have come to replace: surely, then, it is our responsibility to behave with less violence?

And yet: the brutality of the Vendeeans provides scarce opportunity to rise above. The villagers come by night to cut our throats: and so we must come by day with the justice of the firing squad. We came, offering the silk glove of Liberty: but they have bitten it, and now needs must have their teeth shattered by the brass fist beneath.

Long live the Revolution,

Your brother, Jacques-Louis.

III Frimaire, Year II

Greetings from, I believe, the Basse-Bretagne. It has been an eventful week since I last wrote you, brother. The Royalist army is on the brink of dissolution, after desperate maneuvers in which they marched north, trying to gain British aid by capturing Granville on the channel. Our unit was involved in a running fight (finally something resembling an actual battle- these endless skirmishes have worn my spirit down, brother), and though the Republicans overall have come out ahead, we were badly mauled, and our retreat has left us separated from the Army of the Coasts-of-La-Roche in hostile territory.

During our escape, the Lieutenant swallowed a musket ball, and, gruesomely, lived to tell of it for several hours. Although it is horrible to see any man in such pain, I am, in truth, not completely heartbroken by his death. The good lieutenant, for all his Enlightenment sympathies, was born a member of the old sword nobility. Though he was a capable officer, I cannot help but think the world is made better by the passing of such men. In isolation from army command, I have inherited his title and responsibilities, and, I must say, the position suits me well. The men like and respect me: they follow my orders without question, as is fitting. And is it embarrassing to admit I do not hate to wear a bit of gold braid? I think you would agree that it suits my complexion very much.

I have also inherited the lieutenant's gold pocket watch. I assume it was damaged in the fight, for, as we have begun our march into these deep woods which now surround me, it has altogether ceased to tick.

The Lieutenant is dead; long live the Lieutenant.

Your brother, Jacques Louis (Actg. Lt.)

Year II. Frimaire the... 28th?

Greetings from God-Knows-Where. The two days since I became Lieutenant have been almost unbelievably eventful. An ambush by Royalist forces obliged us to make a fighting retreat up into rough country. I say 'Royalist', but it is difficult to tell, this far from the front, who it is exactly we are fighting. At its height, the army of the Vendee barely wore shoes, let alone uniforms. Now that their uprising has collapsed back into petty insurgency, it seems absurd to call them by the same name as those emigree nobles who cool their well-shod heels in London. These people do not care for the crown of Citizen Louis Capet, and they do not weep for the pretty, severed head of Marie-Antoinette. They do not know the new names of the months: I sometimes think life has been unchanged here for so long, that they do not know the Gregorian calendar, let alone the Revolutionary one. Why then do they fight us? I think because we are an army, and it has been in the nature of these people to struggle against armies since the time of Julius Caesar.

Two days. Can it have been only two days? I have barely slept, but it seems we have travelled enough hills and mountainsides, forded enough black rivers, and fought enough desperate engagements to account for weeks of travel, for half a lifetime.

The rebels here do not fight us with muskets, but with billhooks, rusted shooting-pieces from the last century, and sometimes bows-and-arrows. Last night, I shot a man dead who was wearing a breastplate that might have dated to the hundred-years-war.

We have had to be very harsh with these rebels, and as the commander here, it has been my responsibility to issue the orders. I take no joy in this, but the men respect resolve. So far from home, and from pay, I worry that if my resolve weakens, the men will desert, our cause will have failed, and all my hopes will be dashed.

And so we push on. We shall head for the sea: once we are out of these godforsaken woods (Yes-'god'forsaken': we do not speak of the Supreme Being this far from Paris), we may find ourselves in a land that is recognizably modern France again.

Your brother,

Lieutenant J. Louis Mouron.

Year II. Month of Nivose. Yes, I am sure of it. It must be Nivose.

Greetings brother. After, I am saddened to say, much regrettable but necessary torture, a captured royalist told me we were in the forest of Brec-Helean, a location I can find on none of our maps. I believe Brec-Helean must be some barbaric local nickname for a location that would be immediately recognizable if it were rendered in honest French. Alas, the prisoner choked on his teeth before he could be convinced to speak our tongue.

Nevertheless, Greetings from Brec'Helean. Despite the constant damp, the forest is quite beautiful to see. Constant fogs shift and blow, throwing rainbows in the soft light, and though it is now midwinter, the leaves are emerald green and brilliant gold. Sometimes in the woods, you hear the most beautiful singing, though the men who go off in pursuit of it do not often return. I have had to be strict with those who try, but the men forgive me, for I provide them with victory. Just last night, I led an ambush against a force of locals, who were processing through the woods in strange robes and masks whose colour I cannot quite remember. We destroyed them utterly, and from them seized a great trove of supplies which they had intended to offer at the altar of their local saint. Forgive me brother: as a boy, I paid little attention during catechism: which saint was it, again, who wore the antlers of a deer and had owl's eyes? Forget the question, it matters not: after the skirmish, the men raised me on their shoulders and hailed me as Captain. It is irregular, surely, but why should I not accept the promotion? In the days of Rome, from which our Republic draws such inspiration, did not the men of the army choose their officers, even up to the rank of Emperor itself? It may be an issue when we rejoin the main army, but I think, in times of crisis such as these, that they will be glad to ratify the promotion of a skilled officer.

Something to consider, for certain.

With love, your brother,

Louis, The Golden Captain

Year II. Pluviose? Ventose?

I still have heard nothing from you, though I give my letters to the Rider every time he comes by. Could it be that he is not a Republic courier? His dress is so strange, and he has no face to speak of, but his voice is warm and buzzing. Give me your letters, he tells us, and we do. Now that I come to think of it, he has never said he will deliver them. I begin to suspect that he feeds upon them: that the information and affection we pour from our pens onto the torn-out pages of stolen bibles, give him a form of nourishment. How else does he sustain himself, then, given that he has no mouth?

It is against ordinances to eat the mail of good Republican soldiers. The next time this Rider comes around, I shall make him present his credentials. Failing that, I will have him summarily shot, again.

Greetings, brother, from outside the walls of Château Malheur-Infini. Since I last wrote two days ago, our route to the sea has been blocked by a strong enemy position and though the men have despised me for it, I am now vindicated in my decision to have them carry our Gribeauval 4-pounder cannon through all these dark strange woods whose trees move when we do not look, over these bare hills, crowned with standing stones that hiss for blood, and across

these black rivers, where the bodies of drowned women reach out for wrists and ankles, and beckon us with lewd writhings.

Though the Castle does not fly the white banner of the Bourbons, it is assuredly hostile, for it sent its birds against us long before our initial arrival outside the walls. These birds, larger than a man, and with brass talons initially pressed us severely but we were rescued by some quick work with the Gribeauval. Make sure you take note of this, brother: if the Austrians attempt to use Birds against you, canister shot makes for a most effective counter-strategy. The sky itself turned red; it was like a prophecy.

After that, we encircled the Castle and set up siege-lines in accordance with standard doctrine. It is a pair of brothers who seem to own this Castle for the Royalists. Is Green the colour of the Comte D'Artois? Perhaps these men are in his service, then, for both are green, and their skin is covered in translucent horn. Like most aristocrats, I think these men are fools with no understanding of military strategy. They have already sallied out several times with cavalry, attempting to break through an entrenched infantry position on the backs of their flayed horses.

I am confident that soon we will be flying the tricolour above the walls of Chateau Malheur-Infini, and that with this fortified position under our control, we will be able to quickly reach the coast and reestablish lines of support with the main army.

Until then, I remain your brother,

Louis, I think.

Year II?

Brother. The pocket watch tells me it is now Prairial, which is strange, one because it is broken, and two, because it is only supposed to tell minutes and hours, not months. Nevertheless, greetings from Chateau Malheur-Infini. Since last I wrote you, I did have the courier shot. I am convinced he was no Frenchman: perhaps a Piedmontese spy? Damn this Coalition that tries to stamp us out! Yes, when we cut open his belly, we found that it was quite dry, and all our letters contained inside. As I suspected. But since then, the Lord of Birds has come to us and sued for peace. I drove a hard bargain, and exacted heavy territorial concessions, for his forces were quite unable to stand against us. Now, the sky between here and midafternoon has been created as a constitutional sister-republic to France, and the Lord of Birds has agreed to pay us some one million Francs as a war indemnity. From this money, I have drawn back-pay for the soldiers, as well as given them a large bonus. I know the government frowns upon generals giving patronage to their troops, for fear of creating another Caesar, but the men had been too long without pay.

All this is to say, that the Lord of Birds (Now styled, Citizen-Director of Birds) has agreed to deliver all our letters. And so, I hope, finally, to hear from you soon.

With the Birds having joined our side of the war, Chateau Malheur-Infini found its supply cut off, and began to starve. Eventually, we allowed the Castle to surrender, on generous terms,

though the Green Brothers (In the absence of Madame la Guillotine) I ordered to be given the Republican Baptism. When both of them turned out to float, I had them shot.

Though our way to the sea is now open, the men and I are determined not to return home. We are now well-supplied, and the pool of manpower provided by the capture of these lands has allowed us to draw new recruits. So what if these recruits have the heads of deer or dogs? So what if their feet face backwards, or they have faces where their genitals should be? Simply because they are not men, does it mean they cannot be Frenchmen? And if they have too many hands, does that prevent them from loading a musket? No, I say, and no again.

There are new lands to conquer, before we return home. For the new year, I am planning an offensive down along the coast, into the sunken lands, to reclaim them from the tyrannous *ancien regime* of the Sea. The Sea will return these lands, or we shall drag them up at the point of a bayonet. When the sea itself is ours, we shall rejoin with the army of the Coasts of La Roche, and I will lead them across the seafloor to Britain itself, yes, Britain, and yoke it with chains to the Great Beast of the Ocean's Belly, to be dragged across the oceans forever, as punishment for its crimes against the Revolution.

In Strength and Honour,
Your Brother, The Architect of Victory

Year I, the Calendar of Louis

Brother, I hope my bird finds you well, though it is made of living bone and glass, and cannot fly. Before I can march, there are diplomatic considerations to be addressed. Though Chateau Malheur-Infini is ours by right of conquest, people will rise up unless they consider themselves ruled by a legitimate government. The Green Brothers had a sister, whose name is Endless Hunger. She, too, is green, though of a pleasant disposition, and comely, provided you do not dislike her many teeth. I have made a proposal of Marriage to Endless Hunger, and we are due to be wed (you will be relieved to hear, *not* by a catholic priest) by the end of Louisidor. By marrying her, I shall become the legal *Seigneur* of Chateau Malheur-Infini, and solidify the gains made by the arms and sacrifice of French soldiers.

Yes, I shall become a *Seigneur*. The very thing I once most hated. And yet, don't you see, brother? It is exactly *because* I hate power and privilege that I must take them on. Do not think that I have become counter-revolutionary. Indeed, I do all this in the *name* of the revolution. Yes, I now wear a robe of gold links, and a garnet mask crowned with black feathers.

But these trappings of power are but useful splendour: a practical necessity for maintaining order over a population who demands such things from their leadership. Do not think that I enjoy the wealth, or the power, or the silver dishes that overflow themselves with steaming human blood. These are mere necessities to me. In my heart, I am still the same humble soldier who parted from you in the Cordelier District. If I had my choice, I would wear only the stained uniform of a Republican soldier, and the red liberty cap.

May the Revolution live until time has lost all meaning.

Yours truly,

Louis I, Seigneur de Malheur-Infini, First Consul of the Sky, Duke of the Sunken Lands, King, Caesar, Pope and God-Emperor, and most of all, your loving brother.