

ANALYSIS OF THE SIEGE AND STORMING OF CORFU

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The last decade of the 18th century is the period of major political changes in the Mediterranean region. The struggle of European monarchies with revolutionary France directed on the restoration of royal power in the state and suppression of the possible spread of the revolution across the continent finished by the failure. For the period of 1796-1798 the republican army headed by the brigadier Napoleon Buonaparte were conquering the Ionian Islands, Malta, the Northern Italy, invaded into Egypt.



F. F. Ushakov

The conquest policy of France affected the Russia's interests. Paul the I took a decision to make an alliance with the France's opponents including the Ottoman empire. By his order the Black Sea Fleet headed by F. F. Ushakov left Sevastopol for Istanbul on the 13th of August. This date was considered to be the beginning of the Mediterranean hike (1798-1800).

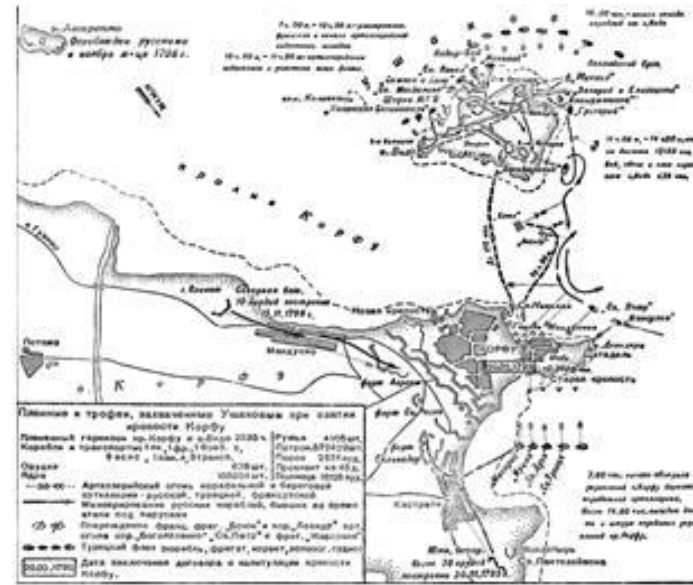


Based on the results of the negotiations, a joint Russia-Turkish squadron headed by F. F. Ushakov was created. It liberated all major islands for 6 weeks except Corfu. The capture of the latter arouses the greatest interest among researchers from the point of view of naval art.

The island is parallel to Albanian shore. Corfu had a defense system of 3 fortresses, the main of which had about 650 cannons, double walls and ditches, and 3 fortifications, defended from land. Corfu was also protected from the sea by the islands of Vido and Lazaretto. There were 5 batteries and garrison of 500 people at the first island and strengthened quarantine at the second island. Naval forces being located between the islands consisted of ship Le Genereux n Leander, frigate La Brune, bomber La Frimarie, brig l'Expedition and four small vessels.



Since the 4th of November 1798 till the 14th of February 1799 the methodical siege of the island lasted, Lazaretto was immediately abandoned. The fortress could not be captured for the shortage of artillery and ground forces, provisions, new clothing, footwear, poor supply of troops, distrust of the natives towards the Turkish soldiers and, especially, towards the Albanians.



From February 14, the preparation of the forces for the assault on Corfu and Vido began, a plan was drawn up. The assault began on February the 18th in the morning. In short time F. F. Ushakov on the flagship "St. Paul" and frigates destroyed batteries and bank buildings on Vido, after detachment was landed. Vido had been captured by 2 p.m. In Corfu, ships attacked the fortification of San Salvador and the southern batteries, which made the capture easier. Landed detachment successfully attacked the fortress. Fleet bombarded opponents' position till 5 p.m. The commander of the French garrison, General Shabo, having lost 1000 people, requested an armistice and surrendered Corfu on February the 20th.

In addition, they were not prepared for such lengthy sieges because of climatic conditions – a huge amount of snow. Besides, F.F. Ushakov repeatedly had to allocate several ships to help the allies.

The French lost one of strategic positions in Mediterranean region the significance of which is the possibility to expand eastward. For example, they could send support troops for Napoleon Buonaparte to Egypt. Acquisition of a new strategic point enhanced military-political influence in Mediterranean region. Immediately after the capture of Corfu the first Greek statehood in modern times – the Republic of the Seven Islands – was created. Besides, news about capture of Corfu by joint squadron triggered rebellion at Apennine peninsula.

The successful capture of Corfu after the four-month's siege with difficult conditions was triumph of F. F. Ushakov's naval genius. It was recognized by its contemporaries, the Russian emperor promoted F. F. Ushakov to Admiral. There is a famous A. V. Suvorov's statement : «... Why was I not even a warrant officer there?». In addition, F.F. Ushakov refuted the theory that it was inexpedient to take the coastal fortresses with the help of naval forces. This is a huge contribution of the Russian admiral to the development of naval art.