

Arthur Sandes

Biography from Adrian Sandes

Arthur (0405) was born at Listowel on 5 February 1793. He lived in Dublin before (or after) joining the Army Commissariat Department and was present at the battle of Waterloo in 1815, but left the Army when peace was declared the same year. In 1817 he joined an expedition organised in London by Gustavus Hippisley, a half-pay officer and son-in-law of the Knight of Glin, in response to an appeal by Simon Bolivar for arms and volunteers to liberate South America from Spanish rule.

The expedition consisted of some eight hundred officer and NCO cadres for regiments to be raised and trained in Venezuela, and Arthur accepted a commission in the 1st Venezuelan Rifles, under Campbell who had served in the British Army. Having reached Venezuela, the expedition suffered many desertions and deaths from yellow fever and typhoid on the two hundred mile journey taking many months up the Orinoco to Bolivar's HQ at Angostura, but the battalion was quickly raised from the Indian missions down river, and after little training was soon in action.

After some fighting, Arthur took command of the battalion in May 1819, and it was soon brigaded with the 2nd Rifles in the British Legion, so called because all its officers were from Britain and Ireland. After exhausting struggles across swampy plains and the high Andes mountains, losing a quarter of their strength, the battalion fought two engagements against the Spanish, in which Arthur was twice wounded and highly commended. Two weeks later, in August 1819, at the battle of Boyaca, he led his men straight at the enemy guns, and was promoted Lieutenant Colonel in the field. In further operations in 1820 and 1821, including the battle of Carabobo, which led to the virtual liberation of Venezuela, Arthur continued to distinguish himself, and was promoted acting Colonel. Moving west into Ecuador, the unit did so well at the battle of Bombona, in April 1822, that Arthur's promotion was confirmed and his battalion renamed 'Rifles of Bombona, First of the Guard'. Further action followed on the Colombian border, and a move to Peru by sea where they rejoined Bolivar in September 1823, but with only ten English officers. In December the next year, Arthur's great day came when his battalion saved the rebel army from disaster at a cost of almost a third of its strength; for this they received the honour 'Liberators of Peru', and he was recommended for promotion to Brigadier-General and appointed second-in-command of his division. In subsequent fighting between Peru and Colombia, Arthur was given command of one of the two Colombian divisions, and was taken prisoner at Lima on 26 January 1827 by the traitorous 3rd Colombian Division, but again commended after the battle of Portete de Tarqui in 1829, in which the Peruvians were defeated by General Sucre.

After peace had been declared, Arthur filled important administrative posts in Ecuador, including governorship of the province of Azuay, probably from 1829 to 1831, but before long succumbed to a tedious illness which ended in dropsy, from which he died at Cuenca on 6 September 1832. It is recorded that he was in love with the beautiful and flirtatious Mariana Carcelen y Larrea, daughter and heiress of the Ecuadorean Marques de Solando of Quito, and that he asked for her hand in marriage, unaware that she had already been promised by her father to Arthur's general, Antonio Jose, Marshal de Sucre. Mariana accepted Arthur, but it seems that he and Sucre could not settle the matter except by tossing a coin for her, which they did one night at an inn at Huamachuco where

Arthur and O'Connor were taking a little rum; Sucre won, and married her four years later. Arthur is not known to have married, but descendants may have been living in Venezuela as late as 1911.

Bolivar's extremely high opinion of Arthur is well known; 'Where is there another courageous and heroic Sandes?' is quoted. He is also honoured in Ecuador, where an avenue is named after him in Cuenca, a large portrait of him hangs in the governor's office in that town, and his name is also engraved on the marble monument on the battlefield of Tarqui.

It is remarkable that so distinguished a member of the family was apparently unrecognised as such by his relatives; all that they seem to have recorded of him was the place and date of his death. It was not until 1983, when I happened to note a possible mention of him in an article in *The Times* about Bolivar, and was able to contact Eric Lambert who had written a history of the British and Irish volunteers in the Bolivian wars, that I became aware of his stature. I believe that either his family lost touch with him when he went off to South America, or more probably that they did not wish to know him because he was a revolutionary, like his Uncle Nicholas. For in a letter written from Quito in 1822 to Daniel O'Connell, the Irish politician from Cahirciveen, Co. Kerry, who was famous for his battle for Catholic emancipation, and was known as *The Liberator*, he referred to the love of liberty which had engaged O'Connell's son in the defence of an oppressed people being a truly Irish virtue, and ended by asking that his friends in Kerry be informed that he was well: significantly, he did not suggest that his family in Kerry be told!