

## Toussaint Louverture: “I granted their lives...”

1796

The wars in Saint-Domingue were many-sided: black against white, French against Spanish, French against English, black against free-colored. Here Toussaint’s black French troops have met and captured a troop made up of free men of color who expect the worst.

### **22 Ventose, Year II of the Republic**

Having learned that the English had gathered a large part of their forces out of St Marc, l'Archahaie and Port-au-Prince; that they'd attacked and pushed back our brothers from the mountains of Charbonnière and of Camp Neret; and that they proposed to attack Léogane, I set out for Mirebalais in order to foil their project in this section. I sent out a strong detachment of infantry and cavalry to Grands Cahos and gave the order to the commander of that sector to gather all the troops of his section, to join them with those I'd sent him, and to immediately march them to surround all the enemy camps of Petite Montagne; and that as soon as they were encircled not to attack, but to call upon them to surrender to the Republic.

In order to be close enough to direct the operation of that small army I went up to Grands Cahos. The day of my arrival in this quarter I received a letter from Claude Prunier, commander of the small army, who told me he had taken a camp called La Terrasse Blanche that had surrendered after having put up some resistance; that he had all the garrison as prisoner and that he'd burned and destroyed the post and was sending me the prisoners. From there he was going to reinforce the detachment that encircled another camp called l'Acul du Sac. In order to learn the location of that post I went to join Claude Prunier, who I found surrounding said camp of l'Acul du Sac. The commander of the camp, seeing me arrive with a large cavalry detachment, came down from the fort, came before me and asked to surrender. As Claude Prunier had told me that he'd fired upon the tricolor flag I told him that I didn't know anything about surrendering, and that he had to deliver me the fort if he was French.

I then went up to the fort with him and had them lay down their arms. I disarmed them all and, in order to judge what we'd do with these men taken arms in hand who'd fired on the tricolor flag, I assembled the war council. The large number of women and children of color who were in said camp threw themselves at my feet and, making the most moving lamentations, asked grace for themselves and the men. This caused me much emotion and at that moment listening only to the movements of a French heart and humanity, I granted their lives to the men and women. I sent

them to la Petite Riviere. I had the camp burned and destroyed and gave orders to Claude Prunier to go encircle the other camps.

There I received your letters of the 14, 17 and 19 of this month, in which you ask me not to waste time bringing anything back. Before leaving I went to visit a camp called La Tourne Broche. Arriving before the camp I called for the garrison to surrender. Not having received a response, and the messenger I sent having returned, I gave my orders. As I was leaving I met a man Claude Prunier had sent who told me that the camp he'd been sent to surround had surrendered, and that the men who'd been with it were marching with him to reinforce the detachment surrounding La Tourne Broche. I again gave my orders and left to go to l'Artibonite, and from there to where your letter asked me to go.

This expedition is the cause of the delay in answering you.

The number of men taken in the three camps is 124, and about 700 women and children. About seven or eight families make up this number. They are almost all people of color; there are only two whites.

This is the march I made in an attempt to deliver our brave brothers Rigaud and Bauvais. As I finish this letter I receive some packages of stockings from Brigadier General Rigaud; one is addressed to you and one to Brigadier General Villatte. I pass them on to you. He also writes that Léogane wasn't attacked.

I kiss you a thousand times and hope you enjoy perfect health.

*Salut*

*Toussaint Louverture*

P.S. the assurances of my attachment to all our brothers in arms in Le Cap.

**Source:** Toussaint Louverture a travers sa correspondance (1794-1796); ed. by Gérard M. Laurent. n.p., Madrid, 1953;

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