

### **THE BATTLE OF THE SAINTS (12TH APRIL 1782)**

Twenty years after gaining its first Battle Honour at Martinique, the 69th Foot was again in the West Indies. At this time the American War of Independence was being fought, i.e., the revolt of our American Colonies against England. By 1781 the war on land had ended in favour of the Americans, but before this had happened the French had joined in with the Americans. When this unfavourable result had been reached, the French turned their attention to snapping up the British islands in the West Indies. To stop this, a fleet under Admiral Lord Rodney was sent out to join with the fleet already there. On arrival in the West Indies the 69th was embarked on board the fleet to act as Marines (a very common practice at that time and for some time to come). Admiral Rodney waited for the French fleet until it moved to threaten Jamaica. Off the Island of Dominica, the Battle of the Saints was fought which ended the rule of the French fleet in the West Indies. At the same time this successful battle raised the spirits of the English, sadly dampened by the result of the American War. For this action the 69th was included in the vote of thanks passed by both Houses of Parliament and was allowed to bear on the Colours a Laurel Wreath and a Naval Crown with the date of 12th April, 1782, over it. No other regiment in the British Army possesses this Honour.

Ten years passed, when the series of wars started which are known as the Wars against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. These covered the period 1793-1815. Both the 41st, by now a Regiment of the Line, and the 69th were to be fully employed in many different parts of the world, both by sea and by land. As soon as the War started in 1793 two companies of the 41st went off to the West Indies where they took part in the second capture of Martinique. The 69th once more embarked as Marines in the Fleet which was sent to aid the Loyalists who were holding Toulon (the great naval port in the south of France) against the Revolutionaries. One portion of the 69th was on board the *Agamemnon*, then commanded by Captain Horatio Nelson. For the next few years Nelson had a detachment of the 69th with him, whom he affectionately called his '*Old Agamemnons*,' a nickname well known in the Service for many years to come. The force landed at Toulon but the French brought strong forces against the town and closed it in. In the end the skilful artillery work of a little known French artillery captain, by the name of Napoleon Bonaparte, forced the town to surrender. Our forces were re-embarked and sailed to the capture of Corsica in which the 69th again took part. After this the 69th became Marines once more, and parts of the Regiment served in various actions along the southern coast of France and the Italian Riviera.

By 1796 the 69th, except for two detachments that were to serve at St. Vincent, were once more in the West Indies. This time they were sent to San Domingo, which had revolted against the rule of Revolutionary France. When the 69th arrived, the 41st had just left after spending two years there and being reduced to a skeleton by disease. The 69th was to spend two years there likewise and to suffer the same fate.

### **ST. VINCENT (14TH FEBRUARY 1797)**

The two detachments of the 69th Foot took part in this great battle; two officers and 128 other ranks in the *Britannia* and one officer and 58 other ranks in the *Captain* under Commodore Nelson.

This battle was fought to stop the navy of Spain (then under the control of France) joining with the French Fleet to threaten the English Channel. The battle took place off Cape St. Vincent on St. Valentine's Day, February 14th, 1797, and ended in the destruction of the Spanish Fleet as a fighting force.

The part played by Nelson and the *Captain* in this battle was particularly notable, especially in the boarding of the *San Nicholas*. A private of the Regiment, Matthew Stevens, broke one of the great stern windows and allowed Nelson to get aboard. Another private, John Ashcroft, struck the Spanish colours and hoisted the British colours before the boarders had made good their footing on the deck. The rest of the detachment was, as Nelson says, 'foremost on this service.' This Battle Honour is shared with no other regiment in the British Army.