

= Edward Nicolls =

General Sir Edward Nicolls KCB (1779 ? 5 February 1865) was an Anglo @-@ Irish officer of the Royal Marines . Known as " Fighting Nicolls " , he had a distinguished military career , being involved in reputedly at least 107 actions across the world during his 40 years of service , and was wounded in combat numerous times .

Nicolls was born in Coleraine , Ireland , in a family with a military tradition , and raised there until entering school in Greenwich . In 1795 , at the age of 15 , he received his first commission in the Royal Marines , and began service with shipborne detachments of marines . During the Napoleonic Wars and associated conflicts in the Caribbean , Mediterranean , and North Sea , he served as a commander of ships ' detachments , and gained his reputation for ferocity and courage .

During the War of 1812 , Nicolls was posted to Spanish Florida as part of the British attempt to recruit local allies in the fight against the United States . As the war ended and after he returned to England in 1815 , he attracted controversy by advocating for the Creeks and other locals who allied themselves with the British . From 1823 to 1828 , he was the commandant of Ascension Island in the South Atlantic , which was followed by a posting from 1829 to 1835 , as Superintendent of Fernando Po off the coast of Africa . In 1835 , Nicolls retired from the Royal Marines with the rank of a lieutenant colonel . For his service , Nicolls was made a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath , among other honours , and was promoted to the rank of full general in his retirement .

= = Early life = =

Edward Nicolls was born in 1779 in Coleraine , Ireland , the son of Jonathan Nicolls and Anna Cuppage . Jonathan Nicolls (died 1818) was for a time controller of excise for Coleraine . Anna Cuppage (1757 ? ? 1845) was a daughter of the Reverend Burke Cuppage , rector of Coleraine , a close kinsman and friend of Edmund Burke . Anna had an older brother William Cuppage (1756 ? 1832) , who had an appointment secured for him at the Royal Military Academy , Woolwich by Edmund Burke . William was later a lieutenant general of the Royal Artillery and a neighbour of Edward Nicolls in Woolwich .

Edward was the oldest of six siblings , and some of his brothers had distinguished military careers as well , including Lieutenant Colonel William Burke Nicolls (1780 ? 1844) of the British Army 's 2nd West India Regiment , and Commander Jonathan Frederick Nicolls (1782 ? 1845) of the Royal Navy . All five of Edward Nicolls ' brothers and both of his sons died in or as the result of public service . Nicolls was educated at a grammar school in Coleraine and at Royal Park Academy near Greenwich prior to entering the Marines on 24 March 1795 . He was not yet 16 years old when he received his commission as a second lieutenant in His Majesty 's Marine Forces , in 1795 , and he was promoted to first lieutenant on 27 January 1796 .

= = Career = =

= = = Napoleonic Wars = = =

It was during his early career , during the Napoleonic Wars , that Nicolls earned his reputation as " Fighting Nicolls " , for as an officer on small ships , he was engaged in numerous fierce actions on small boats and at gun batteries . On 5 November 1803 , during the blockade of Saint @-@ Domingue , Lieutenant Nicolls took a 12 @-@ man cutting @-@ out party in the cutter from HMS Blanche and captured the French cutter Albion from under the battery at Monte Christi . Albion had a crew of 43 men and was armed with two 4 @-@ pounder guns and six swivel guns . The British lost two dead , and two wounded including Nicolls . In single combat , the French captain wounded Nicolls severely with a pistol shot before himself being killed . For his courage in this action , Nicolls was awarded with a sword valued at £ 30 by the committee of Lloyds . In 1804 Nicolls led another boat assault in the capture of a French brig , and led a landing party of Royal Marines in the siege of

Franco @-@ Dutch forces at Curaçao . Nicolls and his men withstood 28 consecutive days of continuous enemy assaults on their positions .

On 25 July 1805 , Nicolls was promoted to the rank of captain , and assigned command of a company which embarked in HMS Standard . During 1807 and 1808 , Nicolls participated in the siege of Corfu and in a foray to Egypt . It was during this period , too , that he was honourably mentioned in dispatches for his part in the Dardanelles Operation , during which he captured a Turkish flag . In 1808 he led the boat attack from the Standard which captured the Italian gunboat Volpe off Corfu .

In 1809 , Nicolls commanded HMS Standard 's marines while the ship participated in the Gunboat War . On 18 May Nicolls ' marines assisted marines and seamen under the command of Captain William Selby of HMS Owen Glendower in the capture of the island of Anholt . In the skirmish , a Danish garrison of 170 men put up a sharp but ineffectual resistance that killed one British marine and wounded two before surrendering . Following the capture of Anholt , Nicolls was briefly assigned as the British military governor of the island . On 8 August 1810 , Nicolls received the brevet rank of major .

= = = War of 1812 = = =

= = = Posting to Florida = = =

During the War of 1812 , Nicolls was posted to Spanish Florida as part of an attempt to recruit the Seminoles as allies against the United States . He was to operate from a position established in April 1814 at Prospect Bluff (sometimes called the British Post , later the Negro Fort , replaced still later by Fort Gadsden) . Sailing from Bermuda in the summer of 1814 , the expedition Nicolls commanded stopped in Spanish Havana , where it was told not to land in Florida without prior request by the Captain General , Juan Ruiz de Apodaca . When Nicolls arrived at Prospect Bluff , Florida in August , the Spanish Governor of Pensacola , Don Mateo González Manrique , aware of the threat the Americans posed to Florida , requested the redeployment of British forces to Pensacola .

At Pensacola on 26 August 1814 , Nicolls issued an order of the day for the ' First Colonial battalion of the Royal Corps of Marines ' , and at the same time issued a widely disseminated proclamation to the people of Louisiana , urging them to join forces with the British and Indian allies against the American government . Both proclamations were reproduced in Niles ' Register of Baltimore . These were a ruse as to the real strength of the British . The " numerous British and Spanish squadron of ships and vessels of war " he described comprised two sloops and two sixth @-@ rates of the Royal Navy . The " good train of artillery " comprised three cannon and twelve gunners , whilst the " battalion " was a company @-@ strength group of 100 Royal Marines infantry , detached from Major George Lewis 's battalion .

The numbers of Corps of Colonial Marines and Redstick Creeks are difficult to ascertain , although Nicolls did arrive in Florida with 300 British uniforms and 1000 muskets . Manrique cooperated with Nicolls , allowing him to train and drill Creek refugees . Nicolls is mentioned in attempts to recruit Jean Lafitte to the British cause .

= = = Fort Bowyer and New Orleans = = =

Nicolls participated in an unsuccessful land and naval attack on Fort Bowyer on 15 September . In the fighting , Nicolls was wounded severely three times , and he lost the use of his right eye for life . The taking of Pensacola in November by an American force under Andrew Jackson forced Nicolls to retreat to the Apalachicola River with freed slaves from Pensacola . There , Nicolls regrouped at Prospect Bluff , and rallied Indians and refugee ex @-@ slaves living free in Florida , recruiting the latter into his detached unit of the Corps of Colonial Marines .

At the start of December , Nicolls was directed to join the expedition against New Orleans . Nicolls

joined General Edward Pakenham 's force , accompanied by less than 100 Seminole , Creek , and Choctaw warriors . At the Battle of New Orleans on 8 January 1815 , Nicolls was attached , with some of his men , to the brigade commanded by Colonel William Thornton of the 85th Regiment of Foot (Bucks Volunteers) . Nicolls was the senior @-@ ranking officer of the Royal Marines present at the battle , but Vice Admiral Alexander Cochrane forbade Nicolls to take part in the fighting personally , fearing that mishap to Nicolls might deprive the British of their most competent officer serving with the Creeks and Seminoles . The actual battlefield command of the 100 Royal Marines brigaded with the 85th Foot went to a less senior officer , Major Thomas Benjamin Adair , commanding officer of the Marine detachment on HMS Vengeur . Nicolls embarked HMS Erebus on 12 January at Cat Island Roads , and disembarked at Apalachicola on 25 January , accompanied by several Creek warriors and a number of Royal Marine reinforcements .

= = = = End of the war = = = =

The start of 1815 was to have seen a British offensive in the south , with the Royal Marine Battalions to advance westward into Georgia , to be joined by Nicolls and his forces from the Gulf Coast . These plans were overtaken by events , as peace was declared following the conclusion of the Treaty of Ghent . With the offensive cancelled , Nicolls and his men returned to Prospect Bluff . On 15 March 1815 , a U.S. Army aide @-@ de @-@ camp named Walter Bourke communicated to Major General Thomas Pinckney that conditions were difficult on the Georgia frontier despite efforts to reinforce American defences , and to negotiate the return of slaves who had joined the Corps of Colonial Marines under the command of Rear Admiral George Cockburn still at Cumberland Island . Cockburn was not inclined to voluntarily hand over British military personnel who risked being returned to slavery by the Americans , and professed difficulty in communicating news of the Treaty of Ghent to Nicolls .

Nicolls contributed to these post @-@ war diplomatic tensions between the United Kingdom and the United States , by attempting to represent the interests of the Native Americans and blacks who had taken up arms on the British side . Prior to returning to Great Britain , Nicolls engaged in a heated exchange of letters with U.S. Indian Agent Benjamin Hawkins . Hawkins accused Nicolls of being overzealous and of overstepping his authority in his personal defence of Redstick Creeks , Seminoles , and their Marron Creole allies , who some Americans in authority viewed as nothing more than runaway slaves and lost or unclaimed property .

Similar tensions existed with the Spanish . Writing from HMS Royal Oak , off Mobile Bay , on 15 March 1815 , Rear Admiral Pulteney Malcolm , Cochrane 's subordinate commander of the Mobile Squadron , assured Don Mateo Gonzalez Manrique , the Governor at Pensacola , that Post @-@ Captain Robert Cavendish Spencer (a son of George Spencer , 2nd Earl Spencer) of HMS Carron , had been detailed to conduct a strict enquiry into the conduct of Nicolls and Captain Woodbine , regarding the property losses of Spanish inhabitants of Florida . Malcolm believed that in cases where former slaves could not be persuaded to return to their owners , the British government would undertake to remunerate the owners .

= = = = Return to England = = = =

Nicolls received orders to withdraw his troops from the fort . The Royal Marine detachment embarked on HMS Cydnus on 22 April , and were duly returned to Ireland Island in Bermuda , arriving on 13 June 1815 , to rejoin the 3rd Battalion as a supernumerary company . Nicolls left in mid @-@ May 1815 with the Redstick Creek Prophet , Josiah Francis (also known as Hillis Hadjo , the Native American spiritual and political leader known for his role in the Battle of Holy Ground) , and an Anglo @-@ Creek @-@ Seminole treaty of Nicolls ' own initiative . On 7 June 1815 , Nicolls , Woodbine , and Francis arrived at Amelia Island , in East Florida , where rumours circulated that the officers were seeking to either obtain British possession of Florida from Spain , or to arm and supply the Florida factions resisting American territorial expansion . In fact , Nicolls had been heading to the Bahamas , and had unintentionally ended up in East Florida . In leaving West Florida

, according to the U.S. Indian Agent Hawkins , Nicolls had left local forces with the arms and means to resist advancing American encroachments which were leading up to Andrew Jackson 's First Seminole War . Nicolls embarked on the brig HMS Forward on 29 June " for passage to England " , and disembarked at Portsmouth on 13 September .

= = = = Aftermath = = = =

In England , Nicolls failed to obtain official support for the Creeks , and Josiah Francis failed to receive official recognition for his credentials as the Redstick Creek emissary from the Foreign Office , although he did receive recognition as a former Colonel of the British Army in Florida as well as publicized encounters with British notables , before returning to West Florida in 1816 . Josiah Francis and another Seminole leader , Nehemathla Micco , were summarily executed by the Americans in Spanish territorial waters in April 1818 . Nicolls himself was retained on full pay status in the duties of a captain and brevet major of the Royal Marines . While he was in America , he had the local rank of lieutenant colonel (by authority of Vice Admiral Cochrane) as he was commander of a battalion of the Corps of Colonial Marines . He was awarded a pension of £ 250 annually on 28 December 1815 for a total of 24 serious battle wounds suffered , and awarded a sword of honour by Britain 's Patriotic Fund . He was made a brevet lieutenant colonel on 12 August 1819 .

In the summer of 1817 Captain George Woodbine , one of Nicolls 's former subordinate officers , was present in Spanish East Florida together with the former British soldier and Scottish mercenary lieutenant of Simon Bolivar , Gregor MacGregor . Woodbine and MacGregor both left Spanish East Florida to rejoin the Latin American revolutionary movement prior to U.S. military intervention in East Florida . The names of Nicolls , Woodbine , and MacGregor had become associated with the arming of blacks as soldiers , militiamen , and even as mercenaries . The threat , real or imaginary , was an anathema to North American popular conceptions of the time .

Between July and October 1818 , the Niles ' Weekly Register of Baltimore published portions of correspondence between Nicolls and the former auxiliary Second Lieutenant Robert Chrystie Armbrister (1797 ? 1818) of the first " battalion " of the Corps of Colonial Marines . Armbrister was one of two British subjects executed in the Arbuthnot and Ambrister incident by order of Major General Andrew Jackson following a drumhead trial at Saint Marks in West Florida in April 1818 . In the correspondence , assistance was asked of Nicolls to intervene with the British government on behalf of former allies seeking asylum in Spanish West Florida from perceived American wrongdoing and injustice .

= = = Ascension Island = = =

In 1823 , Nicolls became the first Royal Marines commandant of Ascension Island , a small volcanic island in the South Atlantic , halfway between South America and Africa . In 1815 , HMS Zenobia and HMS Peruvian had taken the island to prevent it from being used as a staging post from which to rescue Napoleon Bonaparte from Saint Helena . From 1815 until Nicolls took over , the Royal Navy registered the island as a " small Sloop of 50 or 60 Men " , HMS Ascension , since the Navy was forbidden to govern colonies . The island had a garrison of about thirty , with a few families , servants , and liberated Africans . The Royal Navy came to use the island as a victualling station for ships , particularly those of the West Africa Squadron (or Preventative Squadron) , which were working to suppress the transatlantic slave trade .

Water was scarce , and an important task for Nicolls was to ensure that the island had a stable source of water . He achieved this by installing systems of pipes and carts to bring water to the settlement from the few springs in the mountains . Food was mostly shipped from England , but some could be procured locally : fish , a few vegetables grown on the island , feral goats and sheep , fishy @-@ tasting eggs from a tern colony on the island , and turtle meat obtained during the laying season from December to May . Due to Nicolls 's efforts in directing the harvest of turtles , turtle meat , an expensive delicacy in England , became so common it was fed to prisoners and pigs , and Marines complained of it . This surfeit of turtle irritated Nicolls 's superiors and the Lords of the

Admiralty , and when an admiral ordered Nicolls to stop feeding turtle to prisoners , he started selling or bartering it to visiting ships . With this monotonous diet , men on the island relied on rum for spice . Nicolls understood this , and gave large rations of grog when his men showed what he called " spirited and Soldierlike feelings " .

On the confines of the island feuds were vicious , and one surgeon went insane . Pirates were frequently seen off Ascension , keeping the garrison on edge . Nicolls was also busied by many infrastructure projects on the island , building roads , water tanks , a storehouse , and developing the gardens on Green Mountain . For these efforts , Nicolls had about sixty freed Africans sent to Ascension , and additionally asked for convicts .

Nicolls had many such grand schemes for trade between Britain and its colonies , but these all failed to materialise . These schemes included a plan to grow oaks in the unlikely location of Sierra Leone for Royal Navy ships , a plan to ship Ascension rocks to England , and a plan to ship New Zealand flax to England which he discussed in a letter to Henry Bathurst , 3rd Earl Bathurst . On 3 November 1828 Captain William Bate replaced Nicolls as commandant on Ascension . Nicolls was given the substantive rank of major before leaving , on 8 May 1828 .

= = = Fernando Po = = =

In April 1829 , Nicolls was appointed Superintendent of Fernando Po (now Bioko) , a tropical island immediately off the coast of Africa , which the West Africa Squadron used as a base for operations against the slave trade . Nicolls received the appointment after colonial administrator and anti @-@ slave trade crusader William Fitzwilliam Owen had refused the post , and after merchant John Beecroft was deemed unfit for the post . Owen , however , voiced his dissatisfaction with what he viewed as Nicolls 's harsh rule on the island , and Beecroft increased his influence in the area . Nicolls , in turn , attacked Beecroft for his dealings with former slavers . Nicolls 's health suffered in Fernando Po and by April 1830 he had left for Ascension . When Nicolls returned to England ill , Beecroft was placed in temporary charge of the island .

Tropical illness took a toll on the Europeans at Fernando Po , where hundreds died during Nicolls 's time there . Nineteen of the 34 men in Nicolls 's first contingent died soon after their arrival , and only five of the original 47 Royal Marines who accompanied him to Fernando Po in 1829 survived two years of duty on the station . Nicolls , somewhat restored to health , served a second term as Superintendent of Fernando Po during 1832 ? 1833 . Despite his differences with Owen , Nicolls was just as determined to disrupt the slave trade , and equally energetic in his attempts to convince the British government to adopt a more aggressive stance . Frustrated in territorial annexation schemes , he invited the West African rulers of Bimbia , Old Calabar , Camaroon , Malimba , and the Bonny to Fernando Po to form an anti @-@ slavery alliance . To Nicolls ' disappointment , the British government ordered him to evacuate Fernando Po on 29 August 1832 , and put an end to operations there . Unfinished work and efforts to provide for the welfare of liberated and displaced slave populations delayed the end of Nicolls 's mandate for several months , and he did not return to England until April 1835 .

During his time in control of Fernando Po , Nicolls clashed with the Portuguese authorities on the neighbouring islands of São Tomé and Príncipe , regarding his refusal to return escaped slaves . In a February 1842 letter to The Times he said he was accused by the Portuguese governor , Senhor Ferreira , of deliberately enticing slaves to run away and of encouraging " thieves " and " murderers " . This charge he denied , asserting that he had never actively encouraged slaves from nearby islands to make the dangerous crossing to Fernando Po : but that if they chose to do so , it was his duty under British law not to return them to slavery . He considered those slaves who killed in the course of their escapes as legally and morally justified in their action ; nor did he regard them as thieves for having seized canoes to escape in . He offered to return any stolen canoes , and wrote that if Ferreira could persuade any of the escapees to return voluntarily to a state of slavery , he would not impede them . He wrote to The Times during the debate which followed the Creole case , in which slaves transported aboard the American vessel Creole had taken control of her and forced the crew to take them to a British @-@ run port .

= = Later life and family = =

Nicolls retired from the Royal Marines , and was given the substantive rank of lieutenant colonel , on 15 May 1835 . On 3 November 1840 , he received the brevet British Army rank of colonel , postdated to 10 January 1837 . He was awarded a good @-@ service pension of £ 150 per annum on 30 June 1842 . On 9 November 1846 he was promoted to the brevet Army rank of major general , in June 1854 he was advanced to lieutenant general , and just a year later in June 1855 he was promoted to full general . In July 1855 he was made Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath (KCB) .

In 1809 , while still a young captain of Marines , Nicolls married Miss Eleanor Bristow (1792 ? 1880) , who was also from northern Ireland . They had the following children :

Alicia Sarah Nicolls (1810 ? 1891) , married Thomas Ashworth in 1847

Eleanor Hestor Nicolls (1811 ? 1898) , married Macgregor Laird (1808 ? 1861) in 1837

Edwina Anna Nicolls (1814 ? 1902) , married John Hill Williams in 1853

Jane Mary Nicolls (1819 ? 1901) , married Royal Navy Captain Archibald Douglas William Fletcher (1821 ? 1882)

Elizabeth Nicolls (1821 ? 1856) , married the educator John Richard Blakiston (1829 ? 1917) in 1854

Lieutenant Edward Nicolls (1821 ? 1844) of the Royal Navy , who died attempting to save a man 's life while serving as first lieutenant of HMS Dwarf

Major Richard Orpin Townsend Nicolls (1823 ? 1862) of the Madras Staff Corps (British Indian Army)

Nicolls died at his residence in Blackheath , London on 5 February 1865 . Eleanor survived her husband 15 years , dying on 24 November 1880 at the age of 88 .

Nicolls has been described by Peter C. Smith in a history of the Royal Marines as " possibly the most distinguished officer the corps ever had . " An anonymous detractor during the War of 1812 described Nicolls as an " impatient and blustering Irishman " but " apparently brave " . A similar assessment was said to have been made in 1815 by Lord Bathurst , the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies , who called him " a man of activity and spirit , but a very wild fellow . "