

## HISTORY OF THE FORTRESS

Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century the persistent attacks from foreign armies, plus French and English pirates obliged Santa Cruz to defend herself. Thus, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the defence of Santa Cruz was made up of such batteries as Paso Alto, Fuerte de San Miguel, Santa Teresa, Los Melones, San Antonio, El Pilar, San Pedro, El Muelle, Castillo de San Cristóbal, la Concepción, San Telmo, San Francisco, Castillo de San Juan and Las Cruces.

Three lion heads are present in the coat of arms of Santa Cruz, they represent the victories on Blake (1657), Jennings (1706), and Nelson (1797).

As a reminder to future generations we would like to recall this last battle.

*“On 22<sup>nd</sup> of July Rear Admiral Nelson’s fleet appeared off the shores of Santa Cruz. Nelson’s fleet consisted of three frigates with 32 to 38 cannons, a Cutter with 14 guns, one boat carrying a howitzer and a gunboat. All together there were 39 landing crafts split up into two divisions , one of those divisions, made up of 23 vessels, was directed at the dale of El Bufadero and the other with 16 vessels was directed at our front ...”*

Thus opens the account of the defence of Santa Cruz upon the attack of Admiral Nelson’s fleet written by don José Monteverde y Molina.

The Rear Admirals fleet, which consisted of a landing force of 2,000 men, confronted the island garrison, led by an honourable man, Field Marshall don Juan Antonio Gutiérrez de Otero y Santayana, with a force of 1,600 men and 91 cannons.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, part of the English troops was disembarked north of the town. They retired that night after being menaced by the isles forces, who held the crag of La Altura with 4 cannons of 3 and 4 pounds. On 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, the English remained out of cannons range. On 24<sup>th</sup> of July, at 9pm, two ships tried to reach the coast, but the batteries of Paso Alto and San Miguel opened fire and the attackers retreated. By midnight, Admiral Nelson had gathered all his fleet and taking command of them personally attempted his last landing. They were discovered and once again were forced back. In this battle Admiral **Nelson** was badly injured by artillery fire, fracturing his right arm, which resulted having to be amputated. The famous cannon “Tigre” (Tiger) is reputed to have fired the fatal shot. This battle was to be the only defeat suffered by Admiral Horatio Nelson, but it was a grand victory for Tenerife.



**Cannon “Tigre”**

1797 was a full year for Nelson. On 14 February he was largely responsible for the British victory at the Battle of Cape St. Vincent. In the aftermath, Nelson was knighted as a member of the Order of the Bath (hence the postnominal initials "KB"). In April of the same year he was promoted to Rear Admiral of the Blue, the tenth highest rank in the Royal Navy. Promotion to admiral at this time was not based on merit but solely on seniority and the availability of positions to fill. Able captains such as Nelson were

appointed commodore temporarily, a position which had the same pay and responsibilities as an admiral. Later in the year, while commanding Theseus during an unsuccessful expedition to conquer Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Nelson was shot in the right arm with a musketball, fracturing his humerus bone in multiple places. Since medical science of the day counseled amputation for almost all serious limb wounds (to prevent death by gangrene), Nelson lost almost his entire right arm and was unfit for duty until mid-December. He referred to the stub as "my fin."

The outcome of this battle realized the necessity to construct inland defence fortresses on the northern side of Santa Cruz. The decision to construct the Fortress of Almeida was taken in 1854 and was to be designed by Colonel Sebastián Clavijo y Plo. The fortress was of a semi-circular design and it would not be till 1884, thirty years later, when it was finally completed.

Into the 20th century, Almeida and its fortress - surrounded by the city's buildings - now house the Administrative Centre of the Mixed Regiment of Artillery, No. 93. Effectively it is the heart of the Regiment now as it was in the days of old.

In this Regimental Headquarters of Almeida, the regulation salvos are shot, either to render due honours to our authorities figures or to carry out gun salutes. Also since 1988 the fortress has inaugurated the Military Museum, which serves as a valuable exhibit, to both Tinerfeños and our visitors, of the military history of Spain.



Flag left behind by the troops of Horatio Nelson.

## RECOMMENDED ROUTE

The first thing that calls our attention at the entrance of the museum are the showcases filled with a large assortment of banners and flags representing different units (mostly quartered on the islands) as well as two flags pertaining to the Canary Islands Militia. Particularly significant to the Culture and History of the Canary Islands is the exhibit of Guanche artefacts i.e. "Guanarteme (ancient king of Gran Canaria ) Tenesor Semidán's Standard" (15<sup>th</sup> century), later to be baptised Fernando de Guanarteme, represented his royal court when they decided to collaborate with the conquerors, in so doing there would be no resistance to the Spanish Crown.

Examples from this era are "Añepas" (sort of sceptres) and two stone spheroids which the ancient Guanches used as clubs.

Other examples of armoury are a falconet (probably used by don Alonso Fernández de Lugos troops), a harquebus, rests of armours, swords etc. These items were found on the site of the battle of Acentejo and are of great historical value.

Also upon entry of the museum, you will notice a variety of figures dressed in period costume. Of particular interest is the costume of the so called "Rozadores de La

Laguna" (Harvesters of La Laguna) peasants dressed in white, red sash, black hat and traditional cloak. They were named after the tool they used to harvest: "Rozador".

Other showcases contain uniforms and personal belongings of illustrious military men, amongst whom we must mention those devoted to Leopoldo O'Donnell y Jorris:

Captain General, Duke of Tetuán, Count of Lucena, retired senator, President of the Kingdom's Council etc... born in Santa Cruz de Tenerife in 1809.

Also Mr. Wenceslao Molins y Leamur, Captain General of the Canary Islands in 1910, of who are displayed service records, cockade of H.M. Alfonso XIII assistant, decorations, etc...

Also displayed are personal belongings of two famous military men renowned for their dedication to Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Captain General Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau and Lieutenant General Francisco García Escámez e Iniesta.

Further on in the museum you will notice several objects that remind us of the famous battle against Nelson on July 25th, 1797. The cannon "Tigre" (Tiger), two flags, a cannon taken from the enemy, paintings of the battle and the surrender. In two memorial stones are engraved the names of the Spanish and the two French crew members who fell in the battle. There is a portrait of Field Marshall Juan Antonio Gutiérrez de Otero y Santayana, who led the Canarians to victory.

Of course the museum wouldn't be complete without models of the several fortresses that defended the city throughout history, such as San Cristóbal, Paso Alto, San Juan, San Pedro, Nuestra Señora de la Concepción and the tower of San Andrés as well as one of Almeida, in which we are now.

There are also exhibits of cannons from the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Several landscape paintings of Santa Cruz de Tenerife in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a collection of oil paintings by Antonio González Suárez, who was also a talented water colour painter from Tenerife. By 1940 he painted seven oil paintings of various types of cannons, displayed in the conference rooms of this fortress.

The famous Canarian watercolour painter Artillery Major Francisco Bonnin Guerin (1874-1963) completes the list with several of his works.

Finally a large and varied collection of arms and accessories can be seen in the museum, including many rareties of days of old such as front loaded guns and rifles and from more recent times a Borchardt pistol, calibre 7,65 mm, the first semi-automatic gun produced in 1893.