

C H A P T E R 1

Jamaica, Trelawny Town,
War, and Exile

The Maroons were warriors. Described as “active, hardy and brave,”¹ as “masters of guerilla warfare”² and as “a troublesome, wild people,”³ the Maroons were fiercely proud of their freedom and of their quasi-independent relationship with the government of British Jamaica. The origins of the Maroons are rooted deep in the history of that island. Lying green and white in the blue and gold of the Caribbean Sea, Jamaica was occupied by the Spanish by 1509 and was part of the first European colonial empire in the Americas. Only a small number of Spaniards settled in Jamaica, however, because “the riches of the American continent made [them] ... neglect their West Indian Islands. Jamaica became the home of a few cattle ranchers whose production was infinitesimal compared with New Spain.”⁴

Jamaica had no gold to satisfy the greed of its conquerors. Instead, Jamaica’s ranches and farms became a source of supplies for the Spanish armies in the West Indies and in the Americas. The native Arawak Indians were enslaved by the Spaniards and African forced labour was introduced as early as 1517.⁵ Because the Arawaks diminished in number very quickly,⁶ the Spanish imported increasing numbers of enslaved Africans to take their place. They served as cowboys, herders and hunters, caring for the thousands of goats, pigs and cattle owned by the Spanish. These occupations allowed them a degree of freedom and an opportunity to become familiar with the forests and secret trails of Jamaica.

For over 140 years Jamaica remained part of the Spanish Empire. During many of these years, and especially toward the end, “the island was badly defended, poverty stricken, underdeveloped and underpopulated; the Government officials corrupt or weak and ineffective. The

inhabitants were indolent and demoralized, money was scarce and trade was falling off.”⁷ In such a state the Spanish were not prepared to combat even the ill-disciplined English expedition sent by Oliver Cromwell in 1655 to capture nearby Hispaniola. While the fleet proved “inadequate for the task ... they managed to take Jamaica” and the island became the first English colony to be gained by conquest.⁸ When the 8,000 men from the 38 ships of the English fleet landed on 10 May 1655 the Spaniards abandoned their homes and defences “and fled to the mountains with their families” — a tactic which was “normal practice” whenever they were threatened by the raiders, buccaneers and pirates which were plentiful in the West Indies.⁹ The Spanish took some of their slaves with them, while others seized the opportunity and fled to freedom in the wild hills of the limestone plateau in West Jamaica’s Cockpit country where, “although the karst area does not encourage settlement, its inhospitableness [*sic*] made it a good hiding place.”¹⁰ Unlike earlier raiders, the English had come to stay. They accepted the surrender of the Spanish governor and provided transports to carry the Spaniards from the island. Many left, but a hard core, led by Don Christoval Arnaldo de Ysassi, formed a resistance movement that fought the British conquerors until 1660.

The end of the Spanish resistance did not, however, bring peace to Jamaica. After 1655 the former slaves of the Spanish had enjoyed the freedom of the hills and while some had fought for Spain, others had fought only to be free. In 1663, when the British called upon them to come down from the hills, they refused to comply. Instead, they established their own settlements, learned the art of self-government and mastered the skills of guerrilla warfare. These were the original Maroons of Jamaica. Orlando Patterson points out,

we do not ... know where the original band of Spanish ex-slaves came from The great majority of the rebels during the British era were Coromantee or Akan-speaking slaves from the Gold Coast. Another important group were also the Papawas, or slaves from the Slave Coast (now

Dahomey). It is significant that the two major groups of rebels came from the areas of the Guinea Coast where the great West African empires of Ashanti and Dahomey were at that time [1730] at the height of their imperial expansion.¹¹

The origin of the word “maroon” has been described variously, but the definition of a “fugitive slave who betakes himself to the woods”¹² is likely as useful as any. The term “maroon” was used generally and generically to describe a runaway, and “marronage” to describe the act and action of escaping slavery, whether temporarily or permanently.¹³

Under British rule and with the introduction of a superior quality of sugar cane, Jamaica prospered and became the wealthiest of the British West Indian Islands,¹⁴ one of its most important colonies, and “His Majesty’s prizest possession.”¹⁵ The economic importance of Jamaica to the Empire meant that it had to be protected from English buccaneers, from other Europeans, including Spain, Holland and France, and from raids by the Maroons. The sugar plantations that were the basis of this prosperity consumed large numbers of lives. On the plantations of Guiana, it was reported,

In order to increase production, the slaves are driven to the breaking point. If they collapse under the burden, [the plantation owners] ... buy others In this manner, we have seen some plantations swallow as many as *four slave complements* in a period of twenty-five years.¹⁶

This almost insatiable appetite for labour continued to assure that most of Guiana’s slaves were African born. Similarly, the mortality rate among slaves on Jamaican plantations was also very high. There were 40,000 slaves in 1690. Between 1690 and 1820, 800,000 were imported; but in 1820 there were only 340,000 slaves in Jamaica. Jamaica accordingly remained an important market for the West African slave trade. During the early years, the existence of the free and the enslaved in such

close proximity meant that there were always slaves willing to risk their lives to swell the ranks of the Maroons:

There were slave rebellions on the estates but they were punished by such cruel deaths, burning, hanging and breaking on the wheel, that it was some time before they spread. In Jamaica, however, there were at least twenty slave rebellions during the eighteenth century; one in 1760 spread to several estates, and sixty Europeans and four hundred negroes were killed before order was restored.¹⁷

Patterson argues, “Few slave societies present a more impressive record of slave revolts than Jamaica.”¹⁸

Among those who escaped to the hills during a 1690 rebellion was a young Coromantee captive named Cudjoe, who led the Maroons in the ongoing raids against the British that were called the Maroon Wars. In 1738-39, however, the first series of Maroon Wars, which represented 84 years of almost continuous warfare, and had engaged three generations of Maroon warriors, came to an end. In March 1739, a peace treaty was agreed to by the government of Jamaica and by Cudjoe and his people. It acknowledged and guaranteed the full freedom of the Maroons and gave them control over specified sections of land. However, it also insisted that British superintendents would live in the Maroon communities and that the Maroons would both return runaway slaves and fight for the British King. These provisions, according to Jamaican historian Carey Robinson, were to change “the entire character of the Maroons and reverse their way of life.” Robinson goes on to say:

The Treaty was really a one-sided document. It gave the Maroons little that they did not already have, but it placed them under the jurisdiction of their late enemies who, while giving them the appearance of autonomy, really had final authority over their affairs. It also provided the colonists

with a ready-made and well-trained mercenary force to help them maintain the iron control necessary in a slave society. It was the triumph of a literate, sophisticated, cynical society motivated by expediency and gain, over an illiterate, vigorous, but simple community skilled only in warfare and physical survival.¹⁹

Thereafter, while occasionally the “Maroons disturbed the peace ... [they] did not directly effect [*sic*] estate discipline.”²⁰ Nonetheless, theirs “was indeed a remarkable achievement of resistance. Here we have a group of free blacks during this early period of the colonial process who stoutly refused to have their lives fashioned by the dictates of their masters.”²¹ However, the Maroons soon proved to be useful to the English planters as slave catchers and as willing volunteers in the suppression of the occasional slave rebellion. As new colonial legislation continually restricted the freedom of the Maroons, slave catching was one of the few ways they could use their unparalleled ability as woodsmen and exercise their love of combat, and it offered both excitement and payment. In her comprehensive book, *The Maroons of Jamaica 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration, and Betrayal*, Mavis C. Campbell points out, “Another service to the state for which the Maroons were paid was that of hunting down and returning runaways to their owners ... Ironically, this occupation soon became a most — perhaps the single most — important source of income to the Maroons.” She adds that the runaways’ “chances of being returned to an owner alive would be minimal — especially before mile money was paid for each returnee instead of his ears.... In addition to the prize money for each runaway returned, each Maroon party member was paid for the duration of the search in the woods.”²² Genovese notes:

The British authorities had no doubt that the military prowess of the Maroons was playing a major role in discouraging slave revolts. Moreover, although the treaty terms forbade the Maroons from owning slaves, they did buy

some without provoking the intervention of the authorities. Maroons continued to marry slaves and to cultivate sympathetic relations with some, but increasingly the two groups diverged and passed over to animosity.²³

Although the Maroons were sometimes suspected of hiding run-aways and were known to find wives among the estate slaves, the respect and admiration that they had enjoyed from the slave population inevitably turned to hatred and fear.²⁴

Trelawny Town, one of the five Maroon communities located in Jamaica, had been established by Cudjoe's original band. It was the Trelawny Maroons who eventually were settled in Nova Scotia. One of the leaders of Trelawny Town was Montague James, a true leader in war, resistance and peace in the tradition of better-known Maroon leaders like Cudjoe and Nanny. Likely of Ashanti or Akan descent, James emerged as a notable figure in the late 1770s or early 1780s. He was both captain and the assistant superintendent of Trelawny Town, the only Maroon to hold this commission. After years of loyal service to the colonial government that likely alienated him from his people from time to time, Montague James was removed from his position in the early 1790s in the movement that swept his superior and mentor, Superintendent Major James, out of office.

Fifty-seven years of peace between the Maroons and the Jamaican government came to an end in 1795 and it was the Trelawny Town Maroons who fought the last of the Maroon wars. The years of peace had limited the freedom of the Maroons, but had not affected either their pride or the way they felt about common slaves. Consequently, when two Maroons were convicted of stealing pigs and "whipped at the tail of a cart" in the presence of slaves and, even worse, at the hand of a runaway slave who had been recaptured by Maroons, the humiliation was complete. It was "a blow to Maroon pride and prestige and the whole Maroon community felt that they had been made the laughing stock of the slaves."²⁵ In consternation, the Maroons demanded of the authorities, "Do not subject us to insult and humiliation from the very

people to whom we are set in opposition.”²⁶ This event, together with an accumulation of ill-will, caused the Maroons of Trelawny Town to drive the government superintendent from their community and leave him with the impression that they were willing to fight.

Rumours and fears spread quickly among Jamaica’s white minority. The greatest fear of any slave-holding society was slave rebellion, and a Maroon uprising was something to avoid if at all possible. Not only would it mean that the Maroons’ role as slave hunters and suppressors of rebellion would be changed, but it could also provide a bad example for the slave population. On Jamaica, where black slaves outnumbered their white rulers by more than ten to one,²⁷ this imbalance was a real danger. In addition, Britain and France were again at war. Jacobin France had sent a fleet to the West Indies with a commander who used slave rebellions as a means of recapturing lost territory. The fear arose in Jamaica that French agents were exhorting the Maroons to attack the British²⁸ as a first step in a general slave rebellion and an invasion by the French forces.

Because of these fears, Alexander Lindsay, Earl of Balcarres, the recently (April 1795) arrived governor ordered his last regiment of regular troops, which was enroute to Hispaniola, back to Jamaica and declared martial law. Balcarres was an experienced and accomplished military officer. Born in 1752, he succeeded to the peerage while in his teens. His military career took him to various fields of combat. In 1775 he was a major of the 53rd Foot, then under orders to sail to Canada on the outbreak of the American Revolution. In command of a battalion of light infantry,²⁹ he demonstrated considerable ability as a military leader.³⁰ In 1789 he was made colonel of the 63rd Foot and in 1793 was gazetted major-general. He later commanded British forces in Jersey. He was a Scots representative peer (1784-1825) and was Governor of Jamaica from 1794 to 1801.

The over-reaction of the government to the Maroon dispute caused the Maroons to believe the negotiations that had almost assured continued peace had been undertaken in bad faith. As a result, on 12 August 1795, the Trelawny Maroons burned their village and disappeared into the hills:

The Trelawny stood alone. They had received no help from the slave population, had been abandoned by their Accompong brethren and in addition were greatly outnumbered. They had a limited supply of food and gun powder and about two or three hundred fighting men. They were facing 1,500 regular troops supported by several thousand militia men who had access to unlimited supplies. In their favour the Trelawnys had a great tradition of courage and skill as guerilla fighters and an unsurpassed knowledge of the tremendously rugged countryside which their ancestors had used so well. They were also fortunate at this time of crisis in being able to produce first-class leaders. Having made up their minds to fight, they went into action immediately.³¹

And fight they did. Using the few advantages they had available to them, they staged ambushes, penetrated enemy lines, and emerged to fight again where they were often least expected. If faced by superior firepower, they simply withdrew and faded into the hills to await a better opportunity. Under the leadership of Montague James and Johnson, and captains John Jarrett, Smith, Dunbar, Leonard Parkinson, James Palmer, Charles Shaw and others, the Maroons moved in and out of the Cockpit County, which consisted of "500 square miles of land within the parishes of Trelawny, St. Elizabeth, and St. James,"³² and inflicted serious losses on the local military. Campbell observes, "It appears that Montague [James] soon became the brains behind the revolt, leaving the more active combat to the younger men and women."³³ However, not even the leadership, skill, and bravery of the Maroons could prevent Lieutenant-Colonel George Walpole (promoted to major-general by Balcarres and in August 1795 put in charge of the campaign against the Maroons) from tightening the noose around their necks. Gradually, he "succeeded in limiting their food and water supply and appeared, if given time, to be on a victorious course."³⁴ Walpole, "by fighting the Maroons in their own way paved the way for their surrender."³⁵

If overwhelming enemy forces, Walpole's howitzer, a lack of supplies, and an outbreak of measles were not formidable enough foes, the Maroons received word that they had to face an additional enemy. In the late fall of 1795 the Jamaican House of Assembly asked Lieutenant-Colonel William D. Quarrell to negotiate with the Spanish government of Cuba to procure dogs and their handlers used to hunt escaped slaves. On 17 December 1795, "forty Spanish chasseurs and 104 savage Cuban dogs landed at Montego Bay"³⁶ to be used to rout out the defiant Maroons. However, before the dogs and their handlers arrived on 21 December 1795 the Trelawnys had agreed to a truce:³⁷

The proposed peace terms were that the Maroons should beg His Majesty's pardon on their knees, that they should go to any place to which they were sent and settle on whatever lands the Government, Council and Assembly might think proper to allot them, and also that they should give up all run-aways. Walpole added a fourth, important term which was between the Maroons and himself and for which he took personal responsibility. He promised them that they would not be banished from Jamaica.³⁸

Governor Balcarres ratified the Walpole-Montague James Treaty on 28 December 1795, and fixed 1 January 1796 as the date on which all the Trelawny Maroons should surrender.³⁹ Four days was, however, far too short a time to notify all the Maroon units scattered throughout the hills that they should come in. In addition, many of the Maroons found it difficult to overcome their distrust of Balcarres and his government. Consequently, the Maroons trickled, rather than rushed in to accept the conditions of their surrender. The various Trelawny units were eventually informed of the peace treaty and by March 1796 the last Maroon War was over.

Impatient with any delay, Balcarres ordered Walpole to again advance against the Maroons. Balcarres was determined to use every advantage to secure internal peace and restore civil order to Jamaica at

a time when the entire British empire faced the threat of revolutionary France. Thus Balcarres “engineered for his own benefit the pretext of deporting them on the grounds of [their] having broken the treaty. To him, the final solution to the Trelawny Town Maroon was deportation.”⁴⁰ Because the majority of the Trelawnys had not surrendered within the prescribed time and because very few runaway slaves had been recovered, the Governor declared that the terms of the treaty had been violated. Over the objections of General Walpole, who had given his personal and private word that the Maroons would not be deported, and those of his officers (who pointed out that Balcarres had privately agreed that surrenders could be accepted until 14 January),⁴¹ but with the agreement of a special secret committee of members of the Council and Assembly of Jamaica, and with the approval of the Duke of Portland, the British secretary of state, Balcarres decided to get rid of the Trelawnys.

Balcarres’ rank and lineage would suggest a person of a certain suavity and sophistication. However, Campbell contends:

Balcarres kept one of the most dirty and depraved households in Jamaica. Lady Nugent, wife of Governor Nugent who succeeded Balcarres, was disgusted with his awful table manners, where with unwashed hands and dirty nails he would ‘dip his fingers into every dish’; she was shocked by the dreadful ‘scene of dirt and discomfort’ at his residence. ‘Never was there a more profligate and disgusting scene, and I really think he must have, been more than half mad.’ . . . [His] favorite pet was a little black pig that had free run of the house.⁴²

The Trelawny Town Maroons certainly never forgave Balcarres for their exile. Writing from Nova Scotia in 1797, Maroon Captain Andrew Smith asked his brother, Charles Samuels, who was then in England, to “Beg Massa King for no send any of dem Cotch Lord for Gubner again” (Ask the King not to send another Scotch lord to be Governor again).

The Jamaican Assembly, however, voted seven hundred guineas to present Balcarres with a sword to mark his contribution to the colony. Perhaps Alexander Lindsay, Earl of Balcarres, with the confidence of ancient rank and privilege, and sure of his duty, cared little for the opinions of Lady Nugent or the Maroons.⁴³

The Maroons were moved from Montego Bay to Kingston to await their banishment, and they decided to face their future as they had shared their past. When some, who had surrendered prior to the treaty date, were told that they could stay, they asked to be allowed to share the fate of their brethren so as to remain together.⁴⁴ “A very telling example of Maroon attachment to family ties was demonstrated by those who were entitled to remain in the island — Smith, Dunbar, Williams, and the two boys who had surrendered before January 1.” While the Assembly had also extended this allowance to some others, it would not offer it to their extended families and “both categories of Maroons petitioned finally to be allowed to accompany the others, and some fifty of them joined the fate of exile with their kinsmen.” Because he could not keep his entire family in Jamaica, Smith accompanied them to Nova Scotia stating that “they must live and die together.”⁴⁵

The Maroons were not the only subject people of the empire to face deportation. Like the Acadians of Nova Scotia or the Caribs of St. Vincent, or indeed like many within the British Isles itself, the Maroons stood in the way of a peaceful and profitable imperial order. Like the earlier deportation of rebellious Highland Scots, and the later Highland Clearances, the “wave of deportations from the Caribbean in the latter part of the eighteenth century rested on two British preoccupations: heightened fears for security generated by the Napoleonic Wars in the region, and the colonial planters’ perceptions of land scarcity.”⁴⁶ In the face of these preoccupations, the Maroons, like the Highlanders, were expendable.

Balcarres was convinced that his decision to deport the Trelawnys had “saved the island,” but Walpole was angry that his word had been broken. To express his anger and to demonstrate his contempt, he resigned his commission and refused to accept a gift of 500 guineas

from the Jamaican Assembly, to purchase a sword of honour.⁴⁷ As early as July 1796 the *Halifax Journal* had informed its reading public of Walpole's refusal and noted, "[W]e understand a difference of opinion as to the observation of the Articles granted to the Maroons to be the cause."⁴⁸

After this Walpole returned to England and was promoted to colonel. By this time he had been in the army 20 years having accepted his first commission in 1777 at 20 years of age. In 1795 he became lieutenant-colonel in the 13th Light Dragoons and went with the regiment to the West Indies. He entered politics in 1797 being elected to the House of Commons as MP for Derby (1797-1806), then represented Dungarvan (1807-1820). He became a vocal member of the radical Whig opposition led by Charles James Fox, serving as under-secretary at the foreign office (1806-1809) and then as comptroller of cash in the excise office for the rest of his life. Because he was chronically short of funds it "was supposed that Walpole needed parliamentary immunity from his creditors."⁴⁹

After the decision to banish the Maroons was made,⁵⁰ the further decision of where to send them had to be addressed. Several destinations were considered, including Sierra Leone, the Bahamas, and Canada. Finally, Balcarres chose British North America and decided that Halifax, the forty-seven-year-old capital of Nova Scotia would be at least their temporary destination because British military transport ships that could take the Maroons there were leaving Jamaica:⁵¹

On June 3 Balcarres wrote to the new Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia, Sir John Wentworth, that he was sending the Maroons to Halifax in three transports, with provisions to follow. He asked neither Wentworth's permission nor his advice, and since he had decided six weeks earlier on this course of action, he clearly meant to present the Nova Scotian Governor with a *fait accompli*.⁵²

Balcarres explained to Wentworth that "the very great scarcity of

provisions, and the convenience of getting the Transports puts me under the necessity of sending them away to another port. I have therefore to request that they may be permitted to come to anchor at Halifax until his Majesty's pleasure is signified." He also informed Wentworth that the Jamaican Assembly had made it a felony for the Maroons to return to Jamaica. Moreover, apparently, slaves held by the Maroons were not to accompany them to Nova Scotia.⁵³

In June 1796, 568 Maroons, "of whom 401 were old men, women, and children, 167 arms-bearing men,"⁵⁴ were marched aboard the transport ships, *Dover*, *Mary*, and *Ann*⁵⁵ and set sail for Halifax on 6 June 1796, in the company of a large fleet bound for Europe under convoy of HMS *Africa*, with *Reasonable*, *Iphigenia*, and *Scorpion*.