

RUSSIAN EMPRESS AT SAN ANTON

I — THE GUARDED SECRET

from the diary of
Robert Ingham

Her Imperial Highness the Dowager Empress Marie Feodorovna, mother of Czar Nicholas II, with other members of the Russian Imperial Family, stayed at San Anton Palace from April 21 to 29, 1919, on the Empress's way to London during the Russian Revolution.

The Dowager Empress was a sister of Queen Alexandra of Great Britain and she lived with Her Majesty at Marlborough House on arrival in the British capital.

Publication starts on this page today of extracts from the diary which Captain Robert Ingham, who was Aide-de-Camp to Lord Methuen, then Governor of Malta, kept on the Governor's instruction.

This story by Captain Ingham, who was entrusted with the care of the Royal Party during their stay here, may help clear up the muddle created by recent allegations that the Grand Duchess Anastasia was brought to Malta by the Navy on the outbreak of the Revolution.

Majesty. I wish you to have the Palace cleared of all our things. Get new crockery, linen, blankets and everything necessary and I will leave all the best silver and glass for you, taking to Valletta just enough for our own use. Have the whole Palace cleaned and ready for their use by Tuesday morning."

Then he showed me the following decoded cable from the Admiral C-in-C:—

English Governesses and 2 English Nurses. Above will all go direct to Malta in H.M.S. Marlborough. H.M.S. Lord Nelson will take 2 Grand Dukes and their party to an Italian port before proceeding to Malta."

That evening H.E. Lady Methuen, Miss Methuen, Laurence Methuen, and myself all went to the opera, so as to make everything appear normal, as rumours had already begun to spread, and as Her

Church. We had a simple but beautiful Stone Altar carved from the local soft stone, which took only a few days. Salvo, the Head Gardener, went round putting finishing touches to the lovely private gardens.

On April 17 Lord Methuen handed me the following cable he had received from Lord Milner, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and asked me to make a typed copy of his reply, below:

"H.M.S. Marlborough due at Constantinople April 11th, and is proceeding to Malta, with the following on Board. Empress Marie, Dukes Nicholas and Peter and Suite. In all about some thirty people. They will arrive practically destitute, without clothes or money. They should be given temporary accommodation, but not where the Governor is in residence. They should be received unofficially, and it would be best for you not to meet them when they land. No notice should appear in local papers of their arrival.

"His Majesty (King George V) suggests San Antonio Palace, if available. All expenses for clothing, food etc., will be refunded to you."

The letter in reply:

"This must be a long letter, copied by my A.D.C., so there is no danger of others knowing its contents. On Saturday afternoon, 12th inst., I heard H.M.S. Marlborough with 30 Royalties and retainers was due on Tuesday 15th inst., and as we were living at San Antonio there was no time to spare, for my wife and I felt this Palace, from its solitude and perfect surroundings, the Gardens in full bloom, should be their residence. Later on came your Cable, saying the King suggested San Antonio. My wife rose to the occasion and by Monday morning we were in Valletta Palace, and she working from morn to midnight, had so arranged everything that by Tuesday morning at 9 a.m. I found all in order, the Guard mounted and two sentries on the main entrance. Imagine my feelings on finding on my return to Valletta the Marlborough would not arrive until 20th, or 22nd, with a cargo of 30



The author at the time of the Dowager Empress's visit.

Royalties and 31 retainers. However all will be in order and by your last instruction I shall go on board to receive the Empress, my wife going to the Palace of San Antonio. (Lord Methuen had received a further cable after the one shown above). I have placed 40 dozen 1906 Champagne which I had bought for Lord Plumer (he succeeded Lord Methuen as Governor) under lock and key, for I have no confidence in the statement that Russians have taken the pledge!

"My return to England may be delayed, for I shall not leave here until I have seen the Royal Party well settled down and I could not have two better people than Major General and Mrs. Hunter Blair to look after them."

The letter goes on to deal with other matters.

April 20, 1919, Sunday

As the Empress had not yet arrived it was decided to carry on with a farewell Rally of the Malta Boy Scouts in honour of Lord and Lady Methuen who were shortly leaving the Island on conclusion of H.E.'s term of Office. I came to Valletta so as to be present at the Rally in my capacity of District Commissioner for Scouts and then had to hurry back to San Antonio, for at 5.15 p.m. H.M.S. Marlborough had arrived, with Her Majesty on board, and it was not known whether disembarkation would take place that night or on the following morning. However the landing took place next morning, Monday April 21, 1919.

(Continued)



The Dowager Empress Marie Feodorovna

"Empress Marie with attendants 3 women, 3 men. Grand Duchess Xenia and 5 children with attendants 6 women and 1 man. Prince and Princess Yousouff senior, with attendants 4 women 3 men. Prince and Princess Yousouff junior and 1 child. Princess Orloff and Prince and Princess Orloff junior, and 1 child with attendants 4 women. Princess Dolgourouki, Prince Dolgourouki and 2 children with attendants 3 women and 1 man. Princess Obolensky, Maid of Honour. Admiral Prince and Princess Wlasemsky. Countess Mengden and Mademoiselle Everinoff. Ladies-in-Waiting, with attendants 3 women. Colonel Prince Orbellani, General and Madame Chatelain and 1 child. General Foguel. (Total ?) 20 Personages including 10 children and 31 attendants. Attendants include 3

Majesty was fleeing for her life H.E. thought it possible that wireless might have got through to Constantinople and have been transmitted to various other places, including Malta, and one never knew what enemy agents were about.

Next day, Sunday, I had a quantity of things packed by 2 p.m., and lorries waiting to convey them to Valletta Palace.

Then came the difficulty. We had been at San Antonio a few days only and our things had just been unpacked ready for a three months' stay, so the Butler (Carl Micallef), Miss Methuen and everybody wanted to know why we were returning to Valletta so soon. Lord Methuen said that I need not actually tell a lie, but if anybody asked me for an explanation I could murmur the word "DRAINS". We had no trouble after that — all worked with a will, ready to be off.

However, by Tuesday at 9.30 a.m. all was ready for the Royal party — H.E., the family and just enough servants to look after them all safely in Valletta Palace. San Antonio completely re-equipped.

9.30 a.m. arrived but no Royal Party. Instead came a Cable to say that they would not arrive until about April 20 or 22.

By this time a personal Body Guard for Her Majesty had arrived. It was composed of one Officer and men of the 1st Bn. King's Own Malta Militia.

Finding that the Officer — Lieut. Wolsey de Piro — was a friend of mine I asked H.E. to let him stay and sent the men back to Barracks.

April 13 to 29, 1919

All this week we continued to make everything even more perfect in the Palace and fitted up an old Chapel, making it conform as far as possible to a Greek Orthodox

April 12, 1919

HIS Excellency the Governor of Malta, F.M. The Lord Methuen, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., G.C.M.G., to whom I was A.D.C., called me into his room, told me to close the door and listen to what he had to tell me. He said: "What I am going to tell you I don't wish you to mention to a soul, not even to the family. (I understand that he naturally told Lady Methuen, but nobody else).

"Send the following message to Commodore Baird R.N., and tell him to keep it secret:— 'Can you or Admiral Barttelot provide linen? — I can put up people at San Antonio.'"

Much mystified, but keeping my own council, I telephoned Commodore Baird, who replied:— "Tell H.E. the following words — They are coming."

When I gave this message to H.E. he said:— "Please keep your own council, for I may tell you that the Dowager Empress of Russia, Marie Feodorovna and Her Majesty's Suite are expected to land in Malta the day after tomorrow. (April 14, 1919).

"I shall have to give up San Antonio to them and will return to Valletta Palace with my wife, Seymour and Laurence.

"You will remain here at San Antonio to look after Her

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