

Letter from George Rugg to his brother Robert from Meerut, dated 10th June 1839

To Robert,

This mornings post brought me your welcome and interesting letter dated 13th December last. I was exceedingly glad to hear that my first from Cawnpore had reached you and that the description I gave of myself and circumstances were so satisfactory. I was also much pleased with the account you gave of the health of my dear mother, yourself and wife and many others, but was sorry to hear that Mrs. Masters and Mrs. Bell were still such invalids and that Mr. Peale was so often visited by fits of depression of spirits. You mentioned a sum of £10 pounds having been paid by him to our regimental agents in London which I received about ten months ago and acknowledged it at the same time in a letter to whom I can not now recollect. I received another remittance of £10 about a month or six weeks since but not knowing where it came from or who to thank for so kind and bountiful a present I delayed writing until I received a letter from someone or other. You most probably know to whom I am indebted and I must beg of you to express my heartfelt gratitude to the giver. I was much concerned to hear of the death of my cousin Robert at Demerara but it must ever be a source of happiness to his friends to know that his life has been regulated by such moral and religious conduct as alone ensures happiness on earth and that his death was marked by that Christianlike spirit and faith in the all-atoning merits of his redeemer as must ever characterize the true believer. Concerning my own health I must say that without having anything particular the matter with me I do not feel so strong as I did a few months ago and I am certainly much thinner but it is to be expected that as the hot season advances the frame becomes weaker and more relaxed although my comrades tell me that I am (to use their own expression) sadly gone to the dogs,.

The annual sickness has not yet commenced and I am in great hope it will not be so severe as it was last year at Cawnpore because the station is more healthy and the men are becoming more seasoned to the climate. The probability of war here carries the same appearance it has

done for some time past. The accounts from the army of the Indus are very fluctuating but believe they may have suffered more from frustration and from hardships than from actual warfare. The native powers being extremely loathe to come to any decided measures. The British forces are still encamped in the neighbourhood of that river during the hot season but whether the campaign will reopen after the rains is whether the affair will be settled without further recourse to hostilities is very uncertain. In the event of the former we shall undoubtedly take the field. The cavalry have lost a great number of horses and camels by robberies of native banditts but more from the starvation a pound of corn and quart of water to each horse being frequently their daily allowance.

The men are stinted in like proportion even to the officers and yet with all these apparent difficulties I would willingly exchange the lazy, indolent life I am leading for one engaged in a similar expedition and can but think that a little more active service would be more conducive to my health. I am literally sick of having nothing to do. The ---- my couch alternately reading and sleeping from morning til night. Sometimes I think of studying the language of the country to enable me to write as well as speak it more grammatically. It is what is generally called Moors but I believe is a mixture of Hindustani and Persian. If I succeed tolerably well I am told the latter which is a more polite language is easily acquired at another time. I will have a great passion for music and vow that I will take lessons either on the flute or bugle and have more than once asked the price of a second hand fiddle, but all these unstable resolutions have gone off in a bottle of smoke and I find myself at the present time ignorant of these elegant acquirements as I was the day I first put my foot on shore. I have a fine large airy room all to myself which I have furnished and made as comfortable as my means will allow and I ask but the blessing of health although I am often told in a joking way that the only thing now necessary to complete my happiness is a partner for life but I can not say at all inclined follow their advice. I have seen too much of the evil and unhappiness arising from a married life in the army for men to think of matrimony as long as I am a soldier.

This is certainly a dull country for an Englishman but we endeavour to make as much variety as we can. We have our dramatic performances once a fortnight and I must say they have got up some pieces very well considering the great disadvantages under which they labour. We have our balls too (for so they are always called) and even now and then where country dances, quadrilles, gallopades and waltzes are danced alternately til morning with a room for cards and another for refreshments. It is the custom of India that when two English regiments meet the non-commissioned officers give each other a ball and supper, and I do assure you I have sat down to as handsome entertainment as ever I did in my life. The women too are generally very smart on these occasions and the officers sometimes honour us with their company.

My dear Robert you seem very solicitous about my purchasing my discharge in case my health give way under the influence of the climate but I can only say that practicable as this may appear to be I must not think of leaving the service until I have some better prospects of being able to get a living out of it nor could I bear the thought of hanging about home for any length of time depending on the kindness and hospitality of my friends.

An idea has for some time struck me that if I had any wish to return to England I have a tolerably good chance of doing so. The 16th Lancers now in India will be going home in about two years from this and as Col. Brotherton of the Maidstone Depot is their commanding officer I have not the slightest doubt but that a word to him either from yourself or Major stating my wishes to join his regiment would be quite sufficient to ensure my transfer. There is only one objection I could make to the plan which is that I should be obliged to return to the ranks as a private soldier. I do not speak of this complainingly or through any particular wish to crave the country but merely that if it would be any source of satisfaction to my friends for me to return the opportunity that offers itself seems worthy of embracing but after all it may not be advisable (sic) and avoiding by the opinions and wishes of any friends I shall patiently wait their decisions. I shall send this by the overland packet which ought to reach England in less than half the time it would by sea.

I shall now close my letter and desiring to be most affectionately remembered to all.

Believe me to remain,

Your most attached brother

George Rugg.

(Written on the outside by Robert Rugg):

Received this letter Oct. 31st 1839. We had the previous evening heard the intelligence of the signal victory gained by the army of the Indus under Sir John Keane on the 23rd July and of the triumphant success of the operation in Afghanistan particularly of the taking of considered impregnable fortress of Ghuzni on that day.