

Cruelty of the Troops in India 1845  
Ma-massacre of Sikh Prisoners

(Reference in House of Commons on 17.8.1846, 19.1.1847, 25.1.1847)

Origin of Report: The Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury of Friday May 15, 1846, page 3, column 2:

The Late Battles in India

A letter from Private John Lunn, of the 80th regiment, to his father, of St Leonards Street, stamped, dated from the camp before Lahore on the 8th Of March, relates some incidents connected with the battles on the banks of the Sutlej which have not hitherto been published. The following are extracts:

"On the 6th of December, our regiment marched from Umballa to Moolkee, a distance of 150 miles; and on the 18th, in the evening after a fatiguing march, we were engaged for the first time: the battle commenced at 4 O'clock, and lasted till ten, when we were marched back to our camp having sustained a loss of only 7 killed and ten wounded. On the 19th, there was no fighting. On the 20th we started in pursuit of the enemy, and came up with them at 4 O'clock when the British forces formed for action, and engaged, the contest being carried on till ten the next morning: at that time the enemy retreated, and we thought they had relinquished the contest; but in about an hour after they came down upon us in thousands, severely harassing our comparatively small force: we, however, effectively resisted them, and at 4 O'clock in the afternoon they made a second retreat. At this time the weather being excessively hot, and our exertions overpowering, we were drawn up to receive rations and grog, when to our disappointment it was announced that the camel which had borne our grog had been shot and all had been lost. We then made for the enemy's camp, and helped ourselves (nearly famished as we were) to the best we could find: all we obtained was flour, with which we made some cakes and fried them, — glad indeed of anything, hunger and thirst having become almost insupportable: our officers were as badly off as the men, and in fact got nothing but what the soldiers divided with them. On the succeeding day morning we commenced hanging and shooting all the prisoners, which dreadful work occupied us nearly the whole of the day. On the 22nd we commenced our march towards Ferozpoore plains, which we reached in a few days, and then remained quietly in camp for a week."

"On the 10th February, having received orders to be ready at a minute's notice, we marched out to face the Sikhs, and confronted them at about 8 O'clock, when our big guns cracked about their ears, and their numerous guns about ours: we soon came to close quarters, and then many a brave man's life departed. A cannon ball pays no respect to persons: it will kill generals as well as private soldiers: and when such projectiles are flying about, it is every man for himself; though if a soldier does not want to lose the number of his mess, the closer he keeps to his work the safer. But at such times a curious sensation steals over even the bravest, for no one knows but that the next moment may be his last. At the time I went into the field and heard the roar of the guns, I confess that I felt rather curiously, though I do not consider that I was then, or

an now, anything of a coward. It was a horrid sight to see the mangled corpses of friends and foes, to hear the groans of the dying and the cries for help of the wounded; those who have never seen a field of battle can not picture its horrors; nor can they regret knew the regret a soldier feels at not being able to assist a wounded comrade. The enemy were stowed in thousands all over the field, and amongst them were to be seen the lifeless bodies of numbers of our brave countrymen. I had an opportunity of seeing a great deal more of the carnage than many others, as I was sent out the day after the action to assist in burying the dead, and to bring home the wounded. I am glad to say that we lost comparatively few of our men, although our regiment was in the thickest of the fight: by dead and wounded, we were deprived of 450; among the latter were Caleb Foreman, a Stamford man, who was twice disabled, but not dangerously."

The writer then mentions John Christian from Stamford, and Sam Woodward from Easton, both of whom were in the action, but received no wounds. Lunn was himself slightly hurt, but had recovered at the time he wrote the letter. A son of Abel Blades lost a leg (as stated in a former paper) and at the time of Lunn's writing was in Ferespere hospital in a state of great suffering, but was expected to rally.

Mercury: 21.8.1846: page 3, column 2:

A letter which appeared in the Mercury of the 15th May was the subject of some observations in the House of Commons on Monday night. It was from a private named Lunn, a native of Stamford, serving in India in the 86th regiment of infantry; and it stated a circumstance which a society in London, called the "Peace Society" has since published extensively as illustrative of the cruelty and horror of war. On Saturday last, an agent of the society was in Stamford, making enquiries as to the authenticity of the letter, and the respectability of the writer. He had an interview with the Magistrates, then sitting at the town hall; and he then learned some particulars of the former life of Lunn (who was stated to have been at least once in that hall under no very respectable circumstances), which satisfied him that it was possible that person's representation of the massacre of Sikh prisoners by the British army on the day after a battle might be a groundless calumny; and such we are bound to say, from all enquiries which have now been made on the subject of Lunn and his letter, we ourselves have no doubt whatever is the case.

Simla October 4, 1846

My dear Sir John,

I send you the Commander in Chief's letter in reply to yours.

You gave a true and indignant answer to the charge. I hope the officer's name will be forthcoming. Private Lunn of the 80th shall be examined - a more infamous fabrication never was attempted to be palmed off on public credulity.

The demonical ferocity alleged to have been committed by the army on the 22nd December is an impossibility. It is an enormous lie and I will not waste government time and mine by taking any further notice of it at present.

J-VII / (2)

If you.....that at the.....of Istihliff, the same charge was made. I denied the possibility of such cruelty either at Istihliff or Ghuznee, and both Sir Genje Pollock and <sup>George</sup> Sir William Nott, subsequently refuted the charge in strong terms of reprobation.

John

Yours my dear, Sir, very truly,

Hardinge

Sir John Hobhouse, Bart

---

British Museum: Add. Ms. 36475: Letter from Hardinge, Governor General of India to Sir John Hobhouse, Bart.