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LETTERS FROM THE PAST

Letter written by Thomas Charnbury to his brother after Nelson's triumph over Napoleon at the Battle of the Nile in 1798

Oct 28 1798 Lisbon

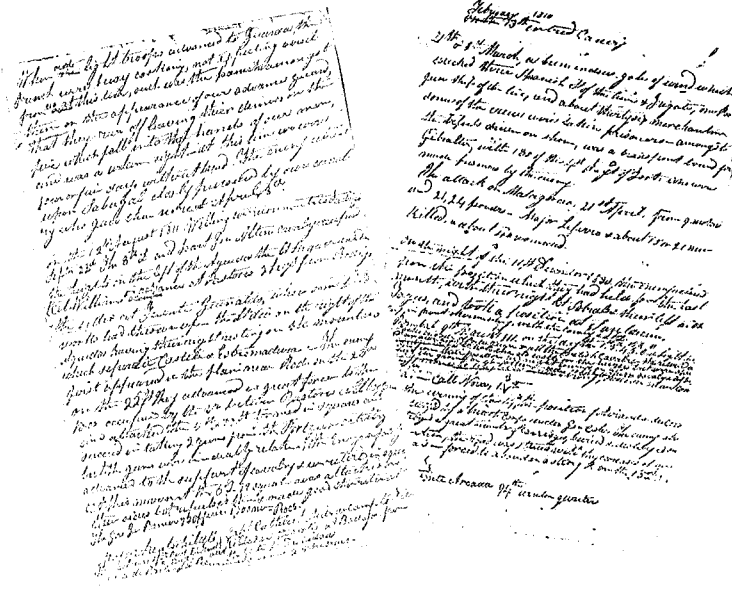
Dear Brother,

This comes with my kind of love hoping it will find you & all your family as well as it leaves me at present thanks be to God for it & to let you know that we had a very heavy action with the French.

I rote you a letter and sent it away 2 days after the action by the *Leandra*, a 50 gun ship but we are doubtful she is lost because wee can get no intelligence of her ever since. Now I should be glad if you would take notice what ship brought this news to England.

Now Bony Party sailed from Toloon with 200 sail of marching & 30,000 troops & 13 sail of the line & 4 frigates full manned & ready for battle & was bound for Egypt and Alexandria & they plundered evry land they came to.

Wee was blocking the spanyards in al Cadous & 9 sail of us was sent to join Admiral Nelson at Toloon with 3 sail & a 50 gun ship which made us up to 13 sails & after these wee started. When wee com to Siseley wee got intelligence that they was gone to Egypt & we with a fair wind made all sail wee could when wee com to Egypt and Alexandria and no french ships could wee see which made us think we had been all by som trechery. Wee tacked ship and staid our corse to Saraceuse & got new intelligence that the french fleet was gone to Egypt. Wee hov up our ancor & started on corse for Egypt again.



Original of a letter written by a footsoldier based in Scotland in the 1800s

Wee hov in sight of Egypt on the glorious first of August about noon & in sight of the enemy fleet 2 about o'clock in the afternoon.

We had 2 ships looking out to windward. Our admiral fired a gun to call them in & they soon was with us then a signal was made to form line of battle & they soon was all in line laying at ancor.

Wee hov down on them & com to ancor side by side & them a firing on us the time we was mooring ships which we was not a long time & then wee fell to. The action begun just at sunset which was about half past six in the evening & at half past nine wee had got 4 ships of the enemy totaly dismasted & we sunk & the french Admirals ship a 3 decker the noblest ship they had in france in flames of fire at the same time & the men jumping over board from all parts of the ship but she gave us good lite to decide the battle that night & at half past 11 o'clock she blew up & set fire to the Defence I was in & 2 more but with the help of God soon prevented it doing much damage and at 2 o'clock in the morning we made 5 more ships strike there cullors & one ship wee killed evry man on deck that there was not a man left to hall down the cullors until we borded them & halled down ourselves & you might walk almost from one end of the ship to the other on dead men & arms and legs. Wee had got 9 sail of them dismasted all in a line.

Now the firing ceasing a little and our Captain gave us adrink of wine each man & said My brave lads lay down and take half an hours sleep but most ships was still firing and the shots flying over us & cutting our riging away & we slept no more. At 4 o'clock in the morning the firing drouped.

When daylight appeared there was a line of battle ships & 2 frigates with their collors flying wee imediatly renewed action & before 8 that morning wee was master of the hole fleet & to see the numerous dead that was floating on the water round us and lack of shipping it is not in my power that was in it to express.

Now we are distressed for want of men to man the french ships & the night after the action 2 french ships & 2 frigates slipt their cables & got away because we had not enough men to bord them but we have got 9 men of war safe under our hands & 1 went down to old Pluto & 3 up in the aire besides several cutter brigs & the prisoners we have sent on shore amongst the Turks which wee expect the Turks are true to their promise will soon put them all to the sword & now to let you know that one of the french ships that got away after the action sunk 2 days & all hands perished.

And our Admiral Nelson stayed behind looking out for Boney Party & he has took the other 3 ships which compleats the hole 17 sail of the french fleet. Now he was obliged to burn 3 large ships for want of men. Now after a long werysom passage we arrived at Gibraltar with 6 sail of the line & staid 2 days & then sailed for Lisbon & arrived at Lisbon 28th October & we expect wee shall not bring them to England till spring. I am on bord one of the french ships.

I admitted to you before Capt Wells left our ship and am sorry not in action with us no more at present from your ever loving brother.

Thomas Charnbury

I am in hopes of coming to England in the spring & then I will tell you the particulars.

Direct for Thomas Charnbury on bord of the *Ld Franklin* in Lisbon.

We had in the night in action killed & dangerously wounded 9 hundred & 66 & of the french were killed took & destroyed & caused to be derstroyed 38 thousand 6 hundred & 70.

--ooOoo--

In 1798, Napoleon planned to invade Egypt to cut off Britain's trade routes to India.

Nelson was told to reconnoitre off Toulon and watch the French fleet but his ship was dismasted in rough weather and he returned to Gibraltar.

Earl St. Vincent, Commander-in-Chief of the British Fleet, sent ships to Nelson, bringing his strength up to 14 Ships of the line.

The French eluded the British fleet, sailing first to Malta which they seized from the British. A week later, the French sailed for Egypt.

Nelson found Toulon empty but correctly guessed that the French objective was Egypt. Because of a lack of frigates for reconnaissance, he missed the French fleet and reached Egypt first to find the port of Alexandria empty. Impetuously, he returned to Sicily where his ships were re-supplied.

Determined to find the French fleet, Nelson, once again, sailed to Egypt and, on arrival, sighted the French fleet of 13 ships of the Line and 4 frigates at anchor in Abu Qir Bay.

Although there were but a few hours left until nightfall and the French fleet was in a strong defensive position in a sandy bay, flanked on one side by a shore battery, Nelson gave the order to attack.

Several of the British ships were able to manoeuvre around the end of the French line of battle and were able to get inside and behind the French position.

After fierce fighting, the French Admiral's 120 gun flagship, by far the largest ship in the bay, at 10 p.m. blew up together with the Admiral and most of the ship's company. Fighting continued until all but two of the French ships were either destroyed or captured.

The British suffered 900 casualties, the French about 10,000 and Nelson was wounded in the head.

The decisive results of the Battle of the Nile were the isolation of Napoleon's army in Egypt which slowly disintegrated and the re-taking of Malta by the British.

--ooOoo--

Thomas Charnbury, his rank unknown, dictated his letter in Lisbon and it is reproduced as received.

His account tallies with the official records except for his estimate of French losses which, although precise at 36,670 was four times Naval historian's estimate of between 9,000 and 10,000. It would be interesting to learn from where Thomas Charnbury obtained his figure. Perhaps Nelson has a spin-doctor.

--ooOoo--

Contributed by d'Arcy Orders

Letters from a soldier to his parents

Gramle Barracks 17th January 1810

Dear Father & Mother I received your loving letter on Sunday last and am happy to hear you are all well as this leaves me at present thank God for it -

Dear Parents I am Sorry to Inform you that we have this day received Orders to embark on Friday first to join Sir Aurther Wellesby's Army in Portugal this peice of news came very Suden for we did not expect to leave this place this some time yet. Altho we heard a Rumour of us goig abroad yet we paid no respect to it but now we find it too true.

Dear parents do not greive nor trouble yourselves about me as I hope in God I shall yet return but if it should be my lot to fall as I hop in God that must be the case, consider your not Alone there is many a one has a Son in the same situation be Comforted and hope that you may yet se me return after having seen a little of the World you may Depend on hearing from me the first opportunity you need not attempt to write to me til such time as you hear from me and know how to direct.

Give my Compliments to my sister and all my friends and acquaintances and let them know that I am well I am happy to hear that little James is coming on so well and I wish he may make a better use of his young days than ever his uncle has done and with the Assistance of his Mother let him have what education can be afforded or be put to a trade of which he can earn a decent livelihood and I hope in God he will never be so foolish as I have been, perhaps I may never see him again yet let him know that he had such a friend who wishes him well and I hope I may yet live to do him good.

Dear Mother I am infinately obliged to you for your kind offer which you mentioned in your last letter but I have a very good kit of shirts at present and if i was ever so willing to Accept them it is Impossible to get them conveyed in time I am happy to hear James McNair is so near done with his time -

We are all provided with three pair of Shoes a man and the Officers are all provided with small Knapsacks haversacks and Canteens there is only five Warrents to a Company to go with the Regiment and the rest are to have as much money as will carry them home My Officers which you wished to hear on Account the Captain is the Colonel's brother about seventeen years of age very good Natured and no way strict and indeed the Officers in General are all very good and they are all Scotch Ken the Most of them has seen a good deal of Service in India -

John Taylor who staid with you in Dumfries has his Compliments to you -

I have No more to add at present but remain your
Loving and Affectionate Son
James Kirkpatrick

--ooOoo--

To: John Kirkpatrick
Kirkgate Street
Dumfries
North Britain

(Passed by) Mr E. Williamson – Lt. Col.

Plymouth Dock, 8th February 1814

Dear Father & Mother my last letter that I wrote you left me in Portugal & in good health in a few days was taken badly with pain in my limbs that i was forced to go to Hospital and i don't know how long i may remain here this is the worst trouble that ever i had yet i have great hopes that i will be able to come down to Scotland sometime in the beginning of Summer.

I am badly off here at present i have upwards of three Pounds due to me before i left Bellern and i can't get a farthing as long as i am in Hospital and i am in more need of it now than ever, there was ten large Transports with Invalids and French Prisoners under Convoy of a Frigate Sailed out of Lisbon along with the Ships that i was in and we had a very favourable passage till we got into the English Channel where we had a very hard gale of wind that lasted several days at last we got into Falmouth calm the Ships that i was in having all sick men onbord was ordered to go to Plymouth it being higher than Portsmouth we left the fleet in Falmouth the night of the 12th of January and gott safe into Plymouth the Morning of the 13th but did not land till the 15th. It was blowing so hard that no boat could land when we got on Shore we got the News that the Queen Transport one of the fleet we left in Falmouth was drove on a rock & went all to pieces there was upwards of four hundred Souls onbord mostly Artillery Men and about Sixty Women and Children there was only a hundred Men and four

Women saved out of the Shipe. The Shipe that i was in was very lucky in getting in to Plymouth the time we did. The other Ships went to Portsmouth there has been a great deal of snow in this place the Oldest people does not remember to have seen as much before. Everything is very high in this place the.....
Is a Shilling Beef & Mutton 10 pence & 1 penny per pound potatoes six pence a Gallon Butter from sixteen to eighteen pence a pound and everything else the highest price let me know all that is new amongst you give my Compliments to my Sister and little James and all enquiring friends. Let me know if the Dumfries Militia is in Dumfries there is Scotch Militia Regiments here the Perthshire & Renfrewshire. Write me as soon as this comes to hand and direct to me 94th Regiment General Militia Hospital Stock, near Plymouth. Excuse me for not writing sooner i meant to have wrote the day that i landed but i could not find a opportunity so favourable as the present. No more at present

Remains Yours till Death

James Kirkpatrick

--ooOoo--

To. John Kirkpatrick
No 14 St Michaels St
Dumfries

General Hospital Stoke, near Plymouth
March 1814

Dear Father and Mother I received your welcome.....five days after, DateI received the Draft you Sent which came very Seasonably for i was not in so much need for Money this twelve months before and I hope that i shall be well in the course of a month i can walk about with the aid of a stick but as so very weake that it will be a long time before i gett my usual strength. I am happy to hear that my Father is getting better it is the cold weather that i on Bord of the Shipec coming to coming to England that has hurt me so much not being used to the Cold since i left home and i feel it so much that i am forced to keep in the Room but the Weather is getting very fine and i expect to gett better as the weather gets better. –

There is twelve Hundred Wounded arrived here from Spain they are forming the Barracks into Hospitals to receive them as the Hospital is full but they are going to send all the men away that is unfit for Service to Chelsea to pass the Board immediately

There is great talks of Peace here and i hope that it will be the Case soon and i may have a Chance of getting off from the army altogether being a 7 years Man and five years service again the 7th April. There is a young Lad here in Hospital the Regiment of the Name of William Gray his Parents live in Maxwilltown in that Street used to be called the Stakford

Bridgend my father may recolect a Brother of his that once served with William Milligan at the Rosside if you could see any of his People to let them know that William can get no word from his Brother John he wrote to him had the letter Franked and put it in a penny with it as usual but the letter was returned back to him with Word that no letter was to be sent out of Britain with Paying Full Postage and he will not be able to write till he gets out of Hospital for a Patient in Hospital can scarce get a penny to buy a Sheet of paper, he is getting better and intends to write to his brother as soon as he gets out of Hospital

Give my love to my sister and little James and Elizabeth Jackson. My compliments to Gordon William & John

My best respects to Mr John McGhie and lett me know.....

Olde Master is Situated lett me know all that is New

I am very well pleased to heare there is such great Ingoing on in Dumfries lett me know if you live in

for i am afraid that you will have the Place so altered that

be hard to find out by the time I gett home.

Direct as usuall General Military Hospital Stoke near Plymouth Dock.

No more at present but –

James Kirkpatrick

--ooOoo--

From: James Kirkpatrick Soldier
94 Regiment

To: John Kirkpatrick
No 14 St Michaels St
Dumfries

(Passed by) Capt E. Kingman

Edinburgh Castle October 1814

Dear Mother and Father on Friday night last we have received a letter of readings to go to Ireland and join the Regiment it is come very unexpected and we expect to March in the Course of this week – in my last letter to you which I suppose you received I mentioned that I expected a Pays in a short time but now I must be contented til such a time as the Payes comes out of the Regiment and then I shall have as good a chance to get home as the rest of the Regiment – Therefore I hope you will be under no uneasings on account of my going to Ireland for there will be no Troopes going on Foreign Service this Season and it's to be hoped that there will be a Peace with America before long When we will all be sent home that's for 7 years. let me know in your next if any of my Cousins was at Dumfries at the fair. I am Sorry that I will not be at my Cousin Mary's Wedding but there is no help for it. I hope before long I will be my own Master again. The Bagage is going from Leith & we are expecting to March to Grenock and Embark there we expect to March on Wednesday therefore you need not write till such time as you heare from me again which will be the first sailing Day or the first opportunity but we are very uncerting yet wether we will March this Week or not if we don't I will write again and let you know.

So No more at present

from yours

James Kirkpatrick

P.S. If you think proper you may write and direct to me
Depot of the 94 Regiment Edinburgh Castle or elsewhere.

--ooOoo--

The 94th Regiment which had its depot in Edinburgh in 1814, was the 94th (Scotch Brigade) Regiment of Foot which was given the number in 1803 and disbanded in 1818.

Contributed by Brian and Barbara Hughes by courtesy of David R. Driver of Prestwich, Manchester