



Letter from Robert Hiron to his Father at Campden, Gloucestershire, dated at Aloes on the frontiers of Portugal, September 18th 1809 stating the particulars of the Battle of Talavera.

Dear honoured Father

Excuse me not writing before but we were ordered from Guernsey in such a hurry and since that I have not had an opportunity my Dear father do not make yourself uneasy when you read this for God has been on my side we arrived safe at Lisbon on the 27th of April and marched from there the 1st of May to join the Grand Army lying before Oporto. Before we reached the army Oporto was taken by the British Troops with little loss. The whole army then marched back to a town called Abrantes about one hundred miles from Lisbon on the River Tagus. There we lay in camp in a large wood but without tents or anything to cover us from the sun by day or the heavy dews by night. On the 27th of June Orders arrived from England for the whole British Army to proceed to Spain to drive the French out of that country but we were sadly deceived by the Spanish army; after seventeen days march we arrived within thirty or forty miles of Madrid. There we were joined by a large Spanish Army both horse and foot. On the 22nd of July we fell in with about fourteen thousand French four miles on this side of Talavera. The Spanish army was in front, the French engaged them a few killed on each side. The French retreated as soon as they saw the British towards Madrid we saw no more of them till the 27th instant in the morning when they spread like clouds both horse and foot. A reinforcement from Madrid with Joseph Buonaparte at their head and for more noble Generals. The report from the French wounded which fell into our hands was that they had sixty thousand in the field. Our army I suppose was not more than twenty five thousand effective but I reckon the Spanish army twenty thousand. But as soon as the Action began they ran away by Regiments so we may say that the whole weight fell upon the poor British. We were not fit to go into a field of battle after being fatigued in marching and countermarching from the 1st of May until the 27th of July and during that time had never seen a bed not even had our clothes off except shoes sometimes, such as had any, numbers of men without any, some days without any bread. Two or three days before the action commenced we have not half a pound of bread and day provisions could not be got. The engagement commenced about 3 o'clock on the Monday morning of the 27th a most dreadful discharge of cannon. The French drove our advanced guard back about six miles to the town of Talavera where the whole of our British and Spanish armies were formed in line of battle. The French came down like Lions made half drunk on purpose. We poor fellows had neither bit of bread nor even so much as a drop of water. The ground was very bad, stony and hilly [sic] so that five Regiment of Dragoons could not engage. The contest was obstinate and bloody. The face of the earth for miles was covered with dead, both men and horses. We continued on 27th from 3 o'clock in the morning until we could not see each other at night. I cannot say which left off firing first. On the next morning at the dawn of day the French, sure of victory, fired a gun of Defiance. We then had got a good position and some pieces of cannon on a very high hill. There our Commander in Chief Sir Arthur Wellesley made his headquarters and I may say if ever there was a day of slaughter that was the day for I thought the whole element was on fire, the French were much superior in cannon than us. We kept it

up without intermission from 3 o'clock in the morning till 10 o'clock when the French ceased firing and we have the same for the purpose of refreshment but the smell of the dead was all we received while on the other, the French was served out with half a pint of liquor called Augadent and some biscuit which they brought plenty of with them from Madrid. At 12 o'clock we began again, the French made great exertion to take the Hill and Town from us, but they found the Britons to stop their progress. We came bayonet to bayonet several times, we could scarcely walk for dead and wounded. About 5 o'clock in the afternoon the French tried their utmost for though their whole line was on fire, was returned by us to their hearts content, for many of them began to retreat leaving by their own account about ten thousand dead and wounded on the field of battle. We had nothing to brag of, only that we kept the field of battle. Our army was employed for two or three days burying the dead and bringing the wounded to the hospitals. Our Regiment have the Captain the Majors and several others wounded and Captain since dead, and two others the legs cut off and for men we cannot ascertain how many was killed but the whole killed, wounded and missing is three hundred and fifty and most of the Regiments in proportion. Thank the Almighty I escaped the shot but I'm very ill, me and my wife, with the fatigues and hardships. The army after leaving the field of battle for seven days was obliged to retreat for want of provisions. Our army is lying on the frontiers of Portugal. On the march since the battle we have been four days without a morsel of bread, some days served out with a quarter of a pound of flour as coarse as oatmeal. My dear father my eyes are open. I never saw any soldiering before now. If I was once more at home potatoes and salt would satisfy me as long as I should live. My nephew is very bad in the hospital with a fever in the same town with me. He was not wounded. May the Lord bless you all in England and think yourselves a happy people, the inhabitants of these two countries, Spain and Portugal, are distressed to the utmost; their little property taken and themselves drove God knows where. Fresh troops arrive almost daily from Lisbon, so God knows when this horrid campaign will have an end. Everything is excessive dear. May the blessings of the Almighty attend you in your old age is the sincere prayers of your ever loving Dutiful son and daughter

Robt & Eliz Hiron
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