

Oxfordshire

THE DUKE STREET SKIRMISH, JANUARY 1643

A True Relation of a Late Skirmish at Henley-upon-Thames, wherein a great defeat was given to the Reading Cavaliers, lately assaulting the aforesaid town of Henley; being the true copy of a letter sent from one Captain Samuel Turner, then in the said service, to his brother in London; January 26, 1643

Published at London, 1643

Note on date: since the new year then began in March, this would normally imply 1643/4. However, the Henley parish registers record the burial of those killed under January 1642/3, and other evidence confirms that the skirmish took place in January 1643 modern style.

Loving brother,

But to give you a full and true relation of what myselfe was an eye-witnesse of, from the beginning to the end.

About nine of the clock at night we came to this town, where before we could get in, by reason the bridge was not quite laid down, we were enforced to stay an houre and an halfe at the least; so soon as we were come in, and our men gone to their quarters, some of us, amongst which myselfe was one, rid round to view the town, how it lay; which when we had done, we appointed four companies to watch that night, one towards *Redding* [*Reading*], and the other at the Bridge, a third at the upper end of the town, and myself having the maine guard, it being mine for that night, as I was eldest Captaine of those that watched: I divided my company, and sent my Lieutenant with about forty men to guard some works which the town had made on the way to Oxford, I having the rest on the maine guard, which was kept in a little round house, close by the Towne Hall, where the four wayes divide themselves [*i.e. near the central crossroads close to the old Guild Hall*];

having thus ordered our men, and having placed our ordnance [cannon] which were but three in all, one of our biggest pieces towards the Redding Road, and the other which was our best, towards Oxford, and the third, which was but a Drake, wee planted toward the upper end of the towne; by that time this was done, it grew neere eleven of the clock,

half an hour after, being in company with Captain Beton, it being my place to goe the grand round, he desired to goe along with mee, we went with six musketeers round about the hills which compasse the towne, halfe an houre after twelve, we came in again and found all quiet and well;

about two of the clock in the morning, being in a house with the Mayor, and most of our gunners, discoursing together, news was brought that the enemy was come, and had fired upon our sentinels, which caused an alarme through the town. We all (through God's assistance) put on resolutions to withstand them to the utmost. They came furiously on with a loud cry, 'the town is ours', and did no way question to have broke through all, being most of them troopers and dragooners, the number, as we heare by an ensigne whom we took prisoner, who was mounted for the service, was about one thousand horse, riding two and two on a horse. The first centinell who made discovery of them, having given fire, presently ran away to the court of guard, who presently were in a readinesse, and came forth and fired upon them, so as that they could not come into the towne so soon as they made account of, but being all horse, save only ten or twelve of their dragooners which were on-foote, at last they broke their way through, and came along the lane [*i.e. Duke Street*] towards the towne, the way they came being but narrow, and not above a flight's shot, or little more in length, from their first entrance, we being in readinesse to have fired upon them, durst not, by reason they drove our men before them all along the way, -

our parliament dog [*cannon*] lay ready to fire upon them, which being laden with one great shot, and two cases of shot, containing 120 musket bullets, at length the way being cleare of our owne men, but full of theirs, we let flie, myselfe being within a yard or two at most when it gave fire, and saw the execution it did; some of their horse came so desperately on that they were even ready to enter upon the mouth of the cannon, as presently after the shot was given appeared, for we found three men and four horse lie dead within lesse than a quaites throw, off the mouth of the piece, and an ensigne which was found half dead and halfe alive, having his leg shot short off, and some three shots more in his body beside, yet living, who confessed the whole businesse.

I think they were so bit, that they will scarce brag of their victory, or come again in hast; the number of men which we found of theirs were but four which were killed outright, and five horse; one horse the gunner, took alive, and another, which by reason of their great hast in running away, as wee conceive, crowding along a narrow way, who should get first away, fell into a muddy ditch [*the town brook at the bottom of Duke Street*], and there was left till morning, where we tooke him out. One of these four men, as our soldiers were stripping of them, spoke a word or so, and so dyed, that he was the first Captaine of the Lord Grandison's regiment, and desired to be remembered to his Colonell, and dyed immediately, he having received above a dozen wounds. Another, as we heare, was a Serjeant-Major, and since we heare of sixe that were found dead in a wood, lying together on a heap, one of them a Captaine, and we are informed by some who came from a place called Causame, that there are divers lie wounded there, beside our men saw them lift up on their horses which they carryed away, some dead, others wounded, so that we conceive they lost thirty men at least.

The whole skirmish from the time they entered to the time they ran away was not a full quarter of an houre; we lost of our men but three in all, one of which was mine, who was first slaine; he was shot as he was standing on the left of my company, as I had drawne them up, with a musket bullet, which went in at his left breast, and came through at his back, on the right shoulder, so as he fell presently downe, with his armes spread out, not moving any part of his body, so that I conceive the shot went through his heart; he was honourably interred the next day, attended with a great number of soldiers. - One Thos Hyatt, a fishmonger's man, who lives in your division, was shot through the body with a pistoll shot, as hee was comming from his quarter to the Court of Guard; hee was forced to make use of their language to save himself, and to cry out, 'Where are

these Round-headed Rogues', but they pursuing him, struck him through the hat with a pole-axe, but missed his head. I have great hope of his recovery; he hath told me since hee hopes to live to have a revenge on them.

Thus as well as I can remember, I have given you a narration of what passages hapned. Truly hee is more than blind which could not see God manifestly in every particular working deliverance for us, and confusion to our enemies, we may truly say, never lesse of man seen, and more of God, for I had almost forgot to tell you that the two troopes of horse, which were appointed to be with us, left us at the towne's end, and went away to their quarters, so that we were left naked, onely God fought on our sides: if the enemy had got into the towne, I believe few of us had been alive at this present, thus fearing to be over tedious to you, I rest

Your loving brother
SAMUEL TURNER

Extract from the *Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*, ed. CH Firth (2 volumes 1894), I, 48-9:

"I do not remember any thing remarkable performed by either party this winter, save only an attempt of the enemy upon one of our quarters at Henley, , where two regiments of foot (one of which was Major General Skippon's) then were, who being tired with a long march, and dispersed at their respective quarters, were fallen upon by a great body of the enemy, that had advanced to the town's end undiscovered; but a small party of our men getting together, one of our gunners hastened to the artillery, which was planted upon the avenue, fired once or twice upon them and made so great a slaughter, especially of those officers who were at the head of their party, that they retreated in great disorder, without any further attempt."

Ludlow was Paliamentarian Lieutenant-General of Horse

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