GREAT STAUGHTON AND ITS PEOPLE

HOW A HUNTINGDONSHIRE VILLAGE MADE ITS MARK ON ENGLAND'S HISTORY

by

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The Rajpootana Column

Dundalk, where the 8th Hussars had been posted, must have been a dramatic and welcome change for the Duberlys from the roar of the canons and clatter of musketry in the Crimea, but the elegant social round they enjoyed was rudely interrupted seventeen months later when the 8th Hussars were summoned to a new military mission on the other side of the world. The Indian mutiny had broken out in May 1857 and although it had been quickly quelled, there were still outbreaks of popular discontent, in particular focused on the great central territory of India, Rajpootana (Rajputan).

So it was that on 8 October 1857, Fanny, Henry and his regiment, the 8th Royal Irish Hussars, together with the 17th Lancers and the 56th Regiment stood on the quayside of Cork Harbour, preparing to board Isambard Kingdom Brunel's masterpiece, the *SS Great Britain*. It was the wonder of the age; 322 ft long, built of iron and equipped with a screw propeller with secondary masts for sail power, the ocean-going passenger liner was the longest and most advanced passenger ship of its time. Capable of accommodating 120 crew and 360 passengers, the ship would certainly have been to the Duberlys' taste: they could take the air on the promenade decks prior to supper in the elegant state-room, before relaxing in their spacious cabins to enjoy the two-month voyage across the oceans to India. Under its Captain, John Gray, the ship was bound for Bombay, where the 8th Hussars were to take part in the military campaign to mop up the remnants of the Indian Mutiny.

Angry weather bedevilled their first few days at sea until they reached Gibraltar when suddenly the seas became tranquil and 'the days were golden and the nights were of silver'. The ship put in at Cape Town to take on more coal, giving the Duberlys the opportunity to spend a few days on horseback exploring the South African countryside. Three months later, on 19 December 1857, the *SS Great Britain* steamed into Bombay harbour.

Fanny's journal of the Indian Mutiny, *Campaigning Experiences in Rajpootana and Central India during the Suppression of the Indian Mutiny 1857–1858*, was published in 1859. Alas for Fanny, it was not to prove as successful as her Crimean *Journal* and the reason is not hard to find. It lacks the colour, the vigour and the visceral immediacy of the bloody brutal war in the horrific conditions of the Crimea. Instead, Fanny found herself participating in a messy, inconclusive 2,000-mile route march ('wanderings' she dubbed them), a largely fruitless pursuit of an enemy who succeeded at every turn in eluding the ponderous British forces across Rajpootan, the bandit country of central India. Here there was to be no Inkerman, no Balaklava, no Sebastopol. As with the Crimean *Journal*, Fanny made clear, early on in her account, where she believed her responsibilities lay as a writer, as an educated Englishwoman and a representative of a colonial power: 'if we desire to maintain our supremacy, it will not be enough to vindicate our mastership by force of arms. We must also prove our moral superiority and make that superiority an evident and incontrovertible fact.'

On arrival in Bombay, Fanny lost no time in conveying her initial impressions of the city. Making a foray into the busy heart of the city, she was appalled by the clamour, the unpaved streets crowded with merchants offering their wares, the huddle of rude wooden huts and the teeming bazaars with 'the funniest Parsee names, written in English characters'. This initial dismay rapidly gave way to a more generous opinion as she investigated the fashionable areas of the city around the fortifications. The tribulations of the Crimea became a distant memory as she and Henry inspected the luxurious accommodation they were offered in the city until the orders to mobilise

were given. It was a very far cry from the Crimea. The Duberlys took residence in a large double-walled and double-roofed tent, 16 feet long by 14 wide, fully equipped with carpets, armchairs, tables, lamps and to Fanny's delight, there was even a piano. A second tent served as a bedroom and beyond them both was the bathroom.

The acme of Fanny's delight came when she discovered the phalanx of reliable servants that the couple were to have at their disposal. A butler was the first to be engaged and the recruitment process for the other servants took shape very quickly. Thus, there was a cook, a *mapaul* to clean the lamps and cutlery, a *bheestie*, or water-carrier, a *dhobie*, or washerwoman, a *dirsee*, or tailor 'to repair the ruthless damages done by the *dhobie*', a tent lascar, a *gariwallah* to drive the covered bullock cart (necessary for excursions in the sun) and finally, the wonderfully named *ghorawallah* to tend each horse. To complete the retinue, two horses were purchased in anticipation of the campaign to come: Pearl, 'my little nutmeg grey' for Fanny, and The Rajah, 'a very handsome mottled Arab four-year-old' for Henry.

The first three chapters of Fanny's narrative are expansive descriptions of her environment both geographical (the glories of nature) and social ('balls and dinner parties succeed each other rapidly').

The Duberlys were not principally in India to enjoy wedding celebrations or marvel at the glories of nature. There was an insurrection going on and a job to be done. The causes of the Indian Mutiny were many and varied but two principal reasons stand out: firstly, discontent amongst the native sepoy regiments of the British army and secondly a decree by Governor-General Dalhousie, known as the Doctrine of Lapse, which stripped the heir of a deceased ruler of his rights to inherit, often on the spurious grounds that the Governor considered the claims of the heir were without merit. The territory would therefore pass to the East India Company, 'with their usual grasping and illiberal spirit of covetousness', which thereby painlessly increased the territory, power, wealth and influence of the company. There were small indications of native unrest. Fanny reported that two suspected rebels had been 'blown away from guns' a picturesque phrase that disguised a brutal reality. Hapless insurgents were tied to the mouth of a canon, which was then fired.

Brutality was not a monopoly of the British. A princely warrior called Nana Sahib, incensed by the injustice of the Doctrine of Lapse, mustered a huge force of rebels against British rule and in May 1857 stormed the garrison town of Cawnpore. Despite a promise to allow safe passage, he first slaughtered what was left of the garrison. His next act was destined to reinforce the hatred felt by British troops (and Fanny Duberly) for the mutineers. He ordered the women and children in the garrison to be summarily butchered and their remains thrown down a well. A matter of weeks later, Nana Sahib's forces captured the garrison town of Lucknow. In the six-month siege that followed, two relief attempts were mounted but it was not until November of 1857 that British forces finally managed to overcome the rebels. Savage reprisals were taken on the insurgents by British troops whose war cry, with memories of the recent massacre still fresh, was 'Remember Cawnpore'. Lifting the siege came at the heavy cost of 2,500 British casualties. Fanny read in the Calcutta papers news of the aftermath of the siege and had her own 'Remember Cawnpore' moment. 'When I think upon this terrible insurrection, and recollect how deeply the rebels have stained themselves with English blood, the blood of English women and of little helpless children, I can only look forward with awe to the day of vengeance, when our hands shall be dipped in the blood of our enemies and the tongues of our dogs shall be red through the same.'

Nana Sahib was one of three formidable opponents whose forces would harass the British during the campaign. His most accomplished general, the mastermind behind the guerrilla war that

gave the Rajpootana Column the run-around for nearly a year, was Tantia Topee (Tanya Tope), a brilliant strategist who quickly understood that the way to undermine British morale was to ravage towns and villages and then swiftly withdraw before British troops could respond. Nana Sahib's second important ally was perhaps the most remarkable figure of all in the campaign. Not only was she a woman, albeit one who exercised at weightlifting, wrestling and steeple-chasing (all before breakfast) but she became an inspiration to her troops by her oratory and her courage. She was the Rani (queen) of Jhansi, or more correctly Rani Lakshmibai, who led her forces into battle dressed as a man. She too had fallen victim to the Doctrine of Lapse. On being dispossessed of what she considered her rightful inheritance, she declared 'I shall not surrender my Jhansi.' Fanny, also a woman in a man's world of soldiering, found it difficult to conceal her respect and admiration for this 'warrior queen' whose courage and brutality quickly earned her the nickname of 'the Jezebel of India'.

Not all of the Indian population took up arms against the British. Indeed, many, particularly the powerful Nawabs, Maharajahs and princelings of the provinces made a point of demonstrating their loyalty to the East India Company, de facto rulers of India. It was in the central province of Rajpootana that intelligence reports of insurrection amongst the sepoys of the British army became so serious that the order to mobilise was issued.

On 29 January 1858, the 8th Royal Irish Hussars received orders to sail to the port of Mandavee (Mandvi) some thirty-five miles from Bhooj (Bhuj), the principal town of the Cutch (Kutch) district in the Central India province of Rajpootan. From here they were to march to Kotah (Kota), 500 miles east of Bhooj, where insurgents under Tantia Topee had already taken the town. On 31 January 1858, the troops, now to be christened the Rajpootana Column, were assembled at the fort town of Mandavee and at 2 am, after two days uncomfortably encamped on the beach, the Column began its long procession 'through very ugly country' to their first objective, Bhooj. Here they were joined by the 10th Native Infantry.

The daily routine of the campaign became a monotonous litany: *reveille* at 1 am or 2 am, departure at 4 am, five hours' march until breakfast at 9 am, a further five hours' route march until mess dinner at 2 pm. Throughout the twelve months and 2,000 miles of the campaign, the British forces battled intense heat and freezing cold, waded through mud, made a perilous crossing of the mountains, all in pursuit of a largely invisible enemy who refused to engage with them in the pitched battles to which Fanny had been accustomed in the Crimea. The Indian campaign was a mopping-up operation, a frustrating guerrilla campaign waged by an agile and well-equipped foe who by nimble footwork led the ponderous British forces on a wild-goose chase across the hostile 'bandit country' of central India, between Delhi in the north and Lucknow and Cawnpore in the south. The rebels held the upper hand. Their 'attack and withdraw' tactics, avoiding pitched battles, forced the British into a demoralising route march, which took them through towns and villages that would become wearisomely familiar over the long months: Mandavee, Bhooj, Kotah, Chuppra, Chandaree and the 'Delhi of the north', Gwalior.

For Fanny, there were compensations. The ten days at Bhooj were made more acceptable to the Duberlys by the offer from the Political Resident, Colonel Trevelyan, of a suite of rooms in the Residence. Such generous tokens of hospitality were to be repeated over the next twelve months.

Fanny eagerly accepted an invitation to visit the local Rani. Inside the opulent palace, she was taken aback by the amount of jewellery on show: 'I never saw such a profusion of jewellery in my life.' Every woman was adorned with a sumptuous array of jewels and gold, seemingly on every exposed part of the body, eyelid, nose, bosom, arm, ankle and glittering on dress and shawl. There

were brooches, necklaces, bracelets, strings of pearls, a spectacular gold circlet and even the toes were embellished with gold. This was no mere fashion display: the Rani proved to have a shrewd grasp of the political situation in Europe and was well informed about Fanny's exploits in the Crimea.

The monotonous routine of the daily march was often enlivened by the senior officers' enthusiasm to get in some hunting practice. On several occasions throughout her narrative, Fanny mentions Major Chetwode who had made fleeting appearances in the pages of her Crimea *Journal* but in the Indian journal he took a more prominent role as commander of the 8th Hussars. Wherever the Column halted, Major Chetwode could be relied upon to brandish his sporting guns. Thus, on one occasion, he summoned a small army of beaters and disappeared into the undergrowth, returning several hours later bearing a substantial amount of the local wildlife, including a 'beautiful' antelope.

The most tiresome aspect of the entire campaign, apart from scarcely confronting the enemy, was the immense labour involved in striking camp. No fewer than seventy camels were required to transport the mess equipment alone and the native servants often took most of the night to load all the baggage. Once underway, the Column maintained a steady pace of between three and four miles per hour, too rapid for the *ghorawallahs* and the *gariwallahs* on foot to keep up. This was the routine that endured for the eleven months that the Rajpootana Column was pursuing the remnants of the Indian Mutiny.

Fourteen days and 200 miles of steady marching, without encountering the rebels, brought the Column to the 'English station' of Deesa, where they were joined by the Queen's 89th, the 10th and 17th Native Infantry, a native cavalry regiment and Captain Bolton's company of Royal Artillery. It was this formation, more or less (Fanny was herself never wholly clear on the composition of the Column), that was to pursue the rebels over the next twelve months.

At Deesa, the Column was informed, on the first of many occasions, of a change of plan, brought about by conflicting intelligence reports of rebel movements and the British forces' divided command structure. The Rajpootana Column was ordered to traverse the perilous eight-mile long Chutterbhooj ghaut (Chaturbhuj pass), a feat never before attempted by regular soldiers burdened with baggage carts and camels. The plan was to save sixty miles and join up with troops under General Roberts. After leaving Deesa, en route for the pass, the Column had its first frustrating engagement with the rebels at Rowa, a small village two days' march distant. A group of insurgents, some 200 strong, had taken the village. By the time the 95th Regiment launched their attack, the rebels had fled, prompting Fanny to remark on their tactics: 'they [the rebels] appear unexpectedly, descend like vultures, sack and pillage without mercy'. It set the pattern that would be repeated throughout the campaign.

At five o'clock in the morning of 16 March, the Column began their march along the rough and rocky path to Chutterbhooj pass, keeping up their average speed of four miles per hour. The crossing of the pass was fraught with danger; it was eight miles in length, impassable for carts, with no supplies of fresh water and ambush by rebels just one of the hazards. The path was narrow and treacherous underfoot with a sheer drop on one side and the possibility of insurgents concealed amongst the rocks on the other side picking off soldiers in the Column one by one. The many caves provided secure homes for another danger, bears. The Arab horses, usually careless on level roads, picked their way forward confidently, unconcerned at the peril around them. At four o'clock the next morning the Column began its slow and equally perilous descent down the rocky mountain path, eventually reaching the town of Chutterbhooj itself. They had traversed the path

unscathed. To their dismay, they found that they had a further twenty-five miles to march before reaching the next camp and by the time they arrived, they were too tired to do anything but sleep.

The Column had paused by a river and Major Chetwode, ever alert for shooting opportunities, spotted an alligator basking on the river bank. When it saw a potential lunch approaching, the reptile slid forward towards the Major who quickly let off a couple of rounds into the beast which slithered, mortally wounded, into the river. None of the beaters were willing to risk their lives to bring out the wounded and no doubt angry reptile so the bold sportsman Chetwode immediately launched himself into the water and after a brief struggle landed the hapless eight-foot-long beast on the river bank. In the absence of a visible human enemy, the alligator provided a modicum of excitement.

After two months and 570 miles of marching the most exciting action the Column had seen was Major Chetwode wrestling with an alligator but as they approached Kotah on 30 March 1858, hopes were high that there would be action against a rumoured 22,000 rebel forces. The Column was now two months into the campaign and had virtually nothing to show for it. Fanny recorded the bitter complaint of a Hussar from the 8th: 'I should like to see a live rebel … I begin to doubt if there are any at all.' The assault on Kotah began at dawn with a heavy artillery bombardment.

At 10 am, the massed ranks of the infantry stormed the town via the Rajah gate, overwhelming the insurgents and forcing them to flee through the East Gate. Meanwhile, the 1,500 strong cavalry, led by the 8th Hussars, had been despatched seven miles upriver to cover the open side of the town, the only escape route for the rebels. With little or no fire coming from the battlements, Fanny rode with Henry the mile and a quarter to a promontory overlooking the Rajah's Palace in Kotah to inspect the results of the preliminary bombardment. As they watched, a huge explosion rocked the battlements, killing several men and, as it would later become clear, causing immense damage to the town. The insurgents, meanwhile, had fled to their safe haven, the 'Rebels' Village', where they were busy re-assembling their forces.

'Where was the cavalry?' Fanny asked in exasperation. Why hadn't they cut off the fleeing insurgents? As the cavalry was fording the river, with some difficulty, a keen-eyed soldier imagined he had spotted a sniper crouching on the opposite bank training his rifle on the approaching troops. The cavalry halted whilst the situation was assessed. It took some time before it emerged that the alleged sniper was in fact a harmless grazing water buffalo, but the incident had caused a serious delay. Having crossed the river, the cavalry halted on the river bank and stood at ease, watching unconcerned as the rebels, ousted from the town by the infantry, fled across the plain, carrying their guns and ammunition and the town treasury. Eventually, after a confused series of orders and counter-orders, a squadron under Major Chetwode, commanding the 8th Hussars, set off in belated pursuit of the rebels who were reported to be retreating deeper into Rajpootan.

When Fanny and Henry finally rode into the devastated city of Kotah to survey the damage, their horses had to pick their way amongst the bodies and streets strewn with plunder – garments, cushions, furniture and all manner of household utensils. Everywhere, bodies littered the streets and the ruined shells of buildings. Dogs and pigs were busy at their gruesome work.

The couple slowly made their way to the Residency where there was more bloody evidence of the rebels' handiwork. The walls of the building were still smeared with the blood of Major Burton, the Resident, and his two sons. He had apparently been betrayed by his clerk Lalla who, with a force of 1,500 men, had overcome the garrison until only Major Burton and his two sons remained. They had barricaded themselves in an upper room of the Residence and had a fought a hopeless, last ditch battle against 1,500 determined rebels. They managed to hold them off for a while but the ultimate outcome was never in doubt. The Major urged his sons, both excellent

swimmers, to escape by the river, but they refused to abandon their father to his inevitable fate. They were overcome and their bodies hurled down to the waiting populace below.

Heroism was not confined solely to the plucky British. Whilst Fanny and Henry were contemplating the aftermath of the battle, she heard a story of what she termed 'antique heroism' by a leader of the rebels as British forces closed in on the city. The battle was going badly for the rebels and to gain an overall view of the increasingly desperate situation, one of the rebel chiefs manoeuvred his horse with great difficulty to the rocky promontory at the top of the fortifications. From his vantage point he quickly realised that the position was lost. To fall into the hands of the British was an unpalatable and dishonourable option. For an honourable and brave warrior there was only one way out. He plunged his spurs savagely into the flanks of his horse, furiously urging the steed towards the walls of the fortifications. Without a moment's hesitation and without losing impetus man and horse cleared the parapet wall and plunged 120 feet onto the ground below, where their bodies lay crushed together in one tangled bloody mass, a prey to feral dogs and pigs.

The fleeing rebels of Kotah, whom the cavalry had shamefully ignored, now continued their murderous path towards Gwalior, the chief garrison town of Rajpootan, some 200 miles to the north-east. Nothing stood in their path as they ransacked village after village stealing horses, wagons and food and slaughtering anyone who stood in their path.

It was April 1858 and the hot season was approaching and throughout the month and into May, the Column proceeded at a rate of ten miles per day. The temperature rose steadily, reaching 109°F and five degrees hotter inside the tent. The nights were equally oppressive; Fanny spent one hot night alternately bathing and fanning herself. Her servants were still several hours behind the main contingent and Fanny's *hand-punkah* was not available to waft cool air over her mistress.

There was some light relief when the Column reached Chuppra on 1 May. The Secretary of the Nawab of Tonk, accompanied by an escort of soldiers armed with swords, matchlocks and blunderbusses and arrayed like a medieval army, conducted the Column to their encampment. That evening, the Secretary sent an elephant to Fanny so that she might make an appropriately impressive entry into town. Sadly, it was not to be; a ladder was required to mount the beast, lacking which the only recourse was for Fanny to make an undignified ascent via the animal's trunk, a gymnastic challenge she gracefully declined.

Four days later, on 5 May, the rightful commander of the Column, Brigadier Smith, joined them. Despite the oppressive heat, the Column maintained its ten miles per day, heading steadily towards Gwalior, the important stronghold that Tantia Topee had in his sights. The heat inflicted terrible damage on the Column. Fanny witnessed the horrific onset of heatstroke: the soldier falls, as if shot, his body is shaken with convulsions and his lips and face turn black. In moments, he is dead. One reason for the high death toll, as Fanny noted, was the heavy uniform the soldiers were obliged to wear, utterly inappropriate for the sweltering Indian climate. It cost £100 to equip and send a soldier to India, wrote Fanny in her narrative. Would it not make more sense, she mused, to have a uniform more suited to Indian conditions? A footnote in Fanny's narrative revealed that the 95th Regiment were subsequently kitted out with a lighter uniform.

In June, battered by debilitating temperatures of 114°F and the fruitless marching, Fanny, in extreme pain, was confined to a *dooley* (a stretcher borne on men's shoulders). She confided her situation to the journal: 'It is sad to lie in pain and weakness amidst such stirring scenes; and to be so dependent, helpless, and exhausted, as to feel that the sleep of death would scarcely be sufficiently deep to afford relief.' 'True heroism', she wrote, 'is not to ride gallantly amid the braying of trumpets and all the pomp and circumstance of war, but to wrestle alone, in solitary fight, with darkness and the shadow of death.' Things were not going much better for Henry; he had sprained

his ankle and complications set in, which had led to his leg becoming inflamed and swollen; he was confined to a *gharry*, a horse-drawn wagon. She tells us frankly what she was up against – a husband who seemed to display little enthusiasm for his work, was frequently afflicted with a feeling of boredom and lacked the energy and dynamism that she, Fanny, had in spades.

The Column crossed the Antree (Antri) pass without incident and was soon encamped a mere fifteen miles from Gwalior, 'the Delhi of Central India', and the eagerly anticipated encounter with their principal foe, Tantia Topee, whose forces now occupied the town. Fanny grasped Tantia's tactics: 'We now begin to understand the object of Tantia Topee's erratic marches. He has evidently been endeavouring, by the rapidity of his transits from place to place, to draw away or separate the British forces, so that a passage might be left open for the Nana.' She gave grudging praise to this brilliant general. 'However we may abhor the crimes he has committed, we cannot refuse our respects to his good generalship and brilliant talents.'

Over the next few hours, the battle intensified and Fanny was in the thick of it as rebel shot screamed into the camp, bouncing dangerously around the tents and camels. Casualties, from wounds and heat stroke, poured into the makeshift hospital tents. Emergency operations were carried out; a soldier's shattered leg was hurriedly amputated. One of Henry's comrades, Lieutenant Reilly, dropped dead with sunstroke moments after leading a daring charge into the thick of the battle. As the battle raged furiously around her, Fanny was fortunate to escape the shells bouncing around her; *gariwallahs*, *ghorawallahs* and *dooley* bearers were fleeing in all directions from the carnage. Reinforcements swelled British ranks as Sir Hugh Rose's contingent belatedly arrived.

The fort of Gwalior occupied an almost impregnable position atop a vertical outcrop of rock but the infantry, crawling painfully up the hillside, managed to seize the enemy guns and turn the fire on the rebels. After the infantry had routed some of Topee's forces, confining them to a grove at the other end of the plain, the cavalry, led by the 8th Hussars, set off in hot pursuit of the enemy across the plain, thus atoning for the Kotah fiasco. Fanny, watching the action amidst a cloud of dust and the noise of the guns, could no longer resist the impulse to join the cavalry in a short, exhilarating gallop. 'I never, never shall forget the throbbing excitement of that short gallop, when the horse beneath one, raging in his fierce strength, and mad with excitement, scarcely touched the ground.' The battle won, the Maharajah of Gwalior could now safely resume his throne. Eager to show his gratitude, the Maharajah ordered vast quantities of champagne and beer to be distributed to the parched British forces.

The official news of the recapture of Gwalior was contained in a despatch from Sir Hugh Rose: after an engagement lasting five and a half hours, it read, Gwalior had been taken. There was a brief note added to the despatch: 'Ranee of Jhansi killed.' Various stories emerged on the fate of this charismatic woman warrior. It was said that a private of the 8th Hussars, having broken through the ranks of enemy forces, had run his sword through the body of a man dressed 'in a white turban and crimson tunic and trowsers'. It quickly emerged that this was the Ranee of Jhansi, who led her troops into battle dressed in a soldier's uniform. Another story related that she had suffered two gunshot wounds. Mortally wounded, she had been carried from the battlefield and taken back to her palace. Close to death, she had commanded a pyre to be built on which she was solemnly placed. In the traditional ceremony of suttee, she then ordered the pyre to be lit and thus, this most charismatic of leaders went to her death. Ranee's sacrifice, concluded Fanny, in her epitaph to the fallen leader, was an 'instance of fierce and desperate courage that I can only listen to with wonder … on 17th June, her restless and intriguing spirit passed away: a subject of regret perhaps to those who admired her energy and courage'.

There was a curious conclusion to the Duberlys' sojourn in Gwalior. Invited to meet the Maharajah's mother, the Maharanee, Fanny was presented with a 'fine piece of Chandaree cambric' and she also received acknowledgement of her deeds in the Crimea. The Maharajah's mother was also keen to meet 'the Englishwoman who had gone with the armies to make war against the Ruski'. The Maharanee, then seventy years old, recalled the time when she too knew the realities of battle: 'I, too, have ridden at a battle: I rode when Wellesley Saib drove us from the field, with nothing but the saddles on which we sat.' From one hardened battle veteran to another. That was not all. The Maharajah, 'a good-looking man' then made an appearance and solemnly informed Fanny that he had designed a decoration to be given to all the troops who took part in the relief of Gwalior and he intended to ensure that she was also a recipient of the honour. Fanny, still bristling with disappointment at not receiving the Crimea medal, consoled herself with the thought that 'an Indian prince knows how to appreciate a woman's fortitude'.

From the luxury of Gwalior, Fanny found herself back on the road on 3 July. The Column pursued a zigzag course, heading for the town of Sepree where they had encamped a month before. The monsoon season had arrived and the progress of the Rajpootana Column was painfully slow, and that, together with the unremitting rain, thunder, wind and lightning, cast Fanny into depressive isolation. As the Column marched, casualties were high; horses and camels slipped up to their necks in the mud and many were lost. Rations were short, boots were disintegrating and the men were in abject misery. Unreliable communications (telegraph cables were cut) and contradictory orders given by inexperienced commanders, coupled with the horrors of the monsoon, added to the horrors of the march. The result of these conflicting orders was that the Rajpootana Column found itself marching back and forth at the whim of senior commanders who were unable to give any strategic direction. 'Sir Robert Napier would have us march due north, General Roberts … almost due west, and General Michel urgently required us south-east!' Fanny wrote in dismay. It was little consolation to her that on 27 September 1858, Fanny Duberly celebrated her 29th birthday.

Fanny's dejection was compounded in October by learning of the peaceful death of Bob, her steadfast companion of the Crimea campaign. 'I have to tell you of what I fear will give you pain, poor Bob's sudden death not by bullet, but in the common course of nature.' Fanny's favourite horse died peacefully after taking his morning feed. Fanny's mind was taken off the tragedy by a natural phenomenon: Comet Donati, one of the two most brilliant comets of the nineteenth century, first seen by Fanny on 29 September, began to pass out of sight by October 1858. At first the camp followers enquired whether the comet portended good or evil, but for Fanny, 'I cling to the hope that it will prove the herald of peace.'

Ominous news reached them in early October that Tantia Topee had entrenched himself strongly in Chandaree with a force of 12,000 men. Brigadier Smith proposed a bold plan to defeat the enemy. The town was located on the bend of the Betwa river, which was swollen at that time of year and unfordable. Lieutenant Colonel Robertson would cover the western approaches to the town, whilst the northern and central roads would be blocked by Brigadier Smith. General Michel's cavalry would secure the southern approach and the river Betwa would close the final escape route. It could have put a decisive end to the insurrection. The weak point was the alleged rumbling stomachs of Michel's men. In a late communication to his fellow commanders, General Michel declared that he was unable to move his troops for nine days as his Europeans were out of groceries and could not march until they arrived. In nine days, the river would be fordable and the rebels would be able to make their escape. With heavy sarcasm Fanny offered her opinion on

General Michel: 'Without inspecting the invoice we could not tell what condiments might be considered necessary to enable this luxurious force to move.'

A further thorn emerged in the side of British forces when a malcontent insurgent named Maun Sing was reported to have collected a sizeable force of 3,000 rebels and ejected the garrison at Fort of Powree, a stronghold of the Maharajah of Gwalior. On 12 November, believing that Maun Sing was planning an attack in the area of Dum-Dum, the 95th Regiment and the 10th Native Infantry advanced towards that town. It was to be the last battle action witnessed by Fanny Duberly in the Indian campaign. At 3 am on 20 November, a surprise night attack was launched against the sleeping insurgents. Fanny was unable to resist the thrill of the chase. She rode with her husband amongst the advance guard as the bullets flew all around them.

The Hussars and Lancers set off in hot pursuit of the fleeing rebels with Fanny Duberly in the midst of the swirling horses; bullets and gun smoke filled the air but the cavalry, undeterred and probably relishing the all too infrequent action, continued their charge, killing several hundred rebels. In the panic and confusion women and children were abandoned to their fate. A little girl, no more than twelve, wept by the body of her father. A small dog and a six-month-old baby were found lying on a bed and were rescued from the fray. Fanny adopted the dog. Maun Sing took to his famous cream-coloured horse and galloped for his life, fleeing the carnage. His ultimate fate is unknown. Fanny speculated that he would withdraw to some holy place, change his name and dress and live the rest of his days in obscurity.

Whilst Fanny was savouring the last scent of battle, that most implacable enemy of the British, the resourceful and daring General Tantia Topee was fighting his last battle at Sikar on 16 November 1858 where he and his forces were soundly defeated. Surprisingly, Fanny gives no account of the defeat of Tantia Topee. He was brought to trial and executed on 18 April 1859.

Between October and Christmas Day 1858, the Rajpootana Column marched over 200 miles on a zigzag route that took them back to Seronge, a town that they had passed through twice during the previous months. Fanny's narrative finishes abruptly on 11 January 1859, some three months before the Mutiny was finally put down, and almost a year since the untidy and frustrating Odyssey began and virtually in the same place. That day they found themselves within twenty miles of Kotah and it is here that Fanny ended her account. Her verdict on the campaign: 'It seems to me that all this Indian warfare is unsatisfactory work … there have been cases of ruthless slaughter, of which perhaps the less said the better.'

She concluded her narrative with the proud statistics of her journey: 'I close the record of our first year's Field Service in India, wherein that part of the Brigade, which was accompanied by my husband and myself, passed only one European station, Deesa, and marched in spite of Indian sun and Indian rain, and in the toilsome pursuit of an ever flying foe, a distance of 2,028 miles, more than 1,800 of which I have myself accomplished on horseback.' After eleven gruelling months, Fanny's judgement of English rule in India may still resonate today: 'the Englishmen in India are not all evil, if they are not all good; and we must hope that the new administration will encourage and strengthen all that is good, and set its face against the evil'.

The Duberlys were to spend a further five years in India. Henry retired from the army in 1881 with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and the couple moved to rural Wiltshire, a popular retreat for retired army offices and close to Fanny's family. Henry Duberly died in 1890 and a tablet to his memory was erected by his wife in St Andrew's Church. Fanny outlived her husband by a further twelve years, dying in Cheltenham in 1902 at the age of seventy-three. She is buried in St Peter's Church in Leckhampton. During the long years in rural seclusion, she was reluctant to talk about the campaigns she described so vigorously in her journals. It was only after a century of neglect

that the exploits of this remarkable woman finally received the recognition they deserved, and the *Journals* of her experiences in the Crimea and India regained their rightful place as important historical testimonies to British power and global influence. In her eulogy for the Ranee of Jhansi, Fanny recognised the qualities that drove this remarkable female warrior: 'restless … intriguing … energy … courage', attributes that animated another courageous woman and bold spirit, Frances Isabella Duberly.