

Letter from Surgeon (Isaac) James to his brother, Richard James, Esq., of Dumbleton, Worcestershire, re the medical situation after the Battle of Waterloo

Publication/Creation

1815

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Copy of the 'Waterloo' letter given me by Gordon-Taylor and sent by me to the
R.A.M.C. Museum.

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Addressed to Richard James Esq
Dumbleton nr Evesham
Worcestershire
England

Brussels June 29th 1815

Dear Brother,

I have written to you according to your desire to give an account of the first battle. I had not the honor of being present therefore I shall not be able to give you such a satisfactory account of it as I could had I been on the Field. It seems that Buonaparte's intention was to make one desperate effort and crush our Army for which purpose he had collected the greater part of his force and I am sorry to say he had too nearly succeeded as you will perceive by the following. The Duke of Wellington was not apprised of Buonaparte's advance till late on the 15th. Immediately the 5th Division had orders to march to meet him. This was the only part of our Army here at that time. The Duke didn't leave till 7 o'clock a.m. on the 16th. Buonaparte had been fighting (sic) with the Prussians the day preceding and obliged them to retreat. Our Army was engaged at 2 o'clock p.m. of the 16th and most desperate fighting commenced and which terminated in favour of the French owing to their immense force and the Duke fell back to receive reinforcements which were coming up. Nothing of any importance was done on the 17th but on the 18th there was a general engagement which was most bloody and desperate. The French fought better than ever they were known and were not the British Army almost invincible it must have been beaten. The French were not defeated till evening and before it was doubtful as to our success. Thirty thousand Prussians arrived about the time the French began to retreat which of course greatly assisted at the important crisis. The Duke exposed himself very much, he was at the Head of the Army. The Duke never was opposed to Buonaparte before and I am very glad he has been so successful.

I have been extremely fatigued having so many wounded to attend. I was up on only the three first nights after the engagement. We have had lots of legs and arms to lop off. The inhabitants are most particularly kind to the wounded; their attention to them is unremitting. I have not given you any minute particulars of the Battle as you will see them in the papers. There was a general report here that we had been defeated. The consequence was that many retreated to Antwerp. Some of our Department had the honor and felicity of riding upon Waggon so far. For my part I gave myself up to be taken and all of us that remained behind. I cannot say more at present. Remember me to all. I am yours sincerely

J. James.

P.S. I received the money quite safe. I have not left Brussels since I came neither do I want for the gentleman with whom I am billeted is most particularly polite and he gives me as much wine as I choose to drink. The news here is now that Buonaparte has abdicated the throne in favour of his son; this is only a finesse of his to get a little time to recruit his army. But the Allies will not pay much attention to him on that score, I should think (sic) knowing him so well before.

Brussels June 29th 1815.

Dear Brother,

I have written to you according to your desire to give you an account of the first battle - I had not the honor of being present, therefore I shall not be able to give you such a satisfactory account of it as I could had I been on the field. It seems that Buonapartes' Intention was to make one desperate effort & crush our Army for which purpose he had collected the ^{greater part} ~~the whole~~ of his force & I am sorry to say he had too nearly succeeded, as you will perceive by the following - The Duke of Wellington was not apprised of Buonapartes' advance till late on the 15th & immediately the 5th Division had orders to march to meet him. ^{That was the only part of our army here at that time} The Duke did not have till 7 o'clock

a. m. of the 10th Buonaparte had been fighting
with the Prussians the day preceding & obliged
them to retreat - Our Army was engaged at
2 o'clock P. M. of the 10th & most desperate
fighting commenced & which terminated in
favor of the French owing to their immense
force & the Duke fell back to receive re-
inforcements which were coming up nothing
of any importance was done on the 11th but
on the 11th there was a general engagement
which was most bloody & desperate the
French fought better than ever they were known
& won not the British Army almost invin-
cible it must have been beaten the French
were not defeated till evening & before it
was doubtful as to our success. Forty thousand
Prussians arrived just as the about the time
the French began to retreat which of course
greatly assisted at that important Crisis -
The Duke exposed himself very much he
was at the Head of the Army The Duke
never was opposed to Buonaparte before

I am very glad he has been successful.
I have been extremely fatigued, having so many
wounded to attend. I was up nearly the three
first nights after the engagement. We have
had lots of Legs & Arms to Cop off. The

Inhabitants are most particularly kind to the
wounded, their attention to them is unremitting

I have not given you any minute particulars
of the Battle, as you will see them in the

There was a general report ^{the} ^{per} ^{the}
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I am
Yours sincerely,
J. JAMES.

WATERLOO LETTER.

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LETTER GIVEN BY THE LATE SIR GORDON GORDON-TAYLOR TO
SIR ZACHARY COPE AND PRESENTED BY HIM TO THE R.A.M.C.
HISTORICAL MUSEUM.

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July 29 1961

From: Major General R.E. Barnsley, C.B., M.C., (Retired).

R.A.M.C. 394

R.A.M.C. Historical Museum,
Keogh Barracks,
Ash Vale,
ALDERSHOT, Hants.

Tel: Farnborough 41481 ext 92.

19 May, 1965.

T.R. Guffie Esq., M.A., F.R.Hist.S.,
Hon. Editor,
Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research,
c/o The Library,
Old War Office Building, Whitehall, London S.W.1.

Dear

While going through our Waterloo material the other day I came across rather an interesting letter on the battle written by Surgeon James.

I seem to have read a review of a book on his journals published during the last few weeks but I do not think the author can have had access to the enclosed which was given to us by Sir Zachary Cope who, in turn had it from Sir Gordon Gordon-Taylor, both very keen Army Medical Historians.

I think James's initial should be 'I' and not 'J'. The following are the particulars of the only James I can find in our records who was in the Waterloo Campaign.

Isaac James

Hospital Assistant	12 May 1815
half pay	24 Dec 1815
full pay	21 July 1821
Assistant Surgeon 7th Foot	19 Nov 1821
Staff Surgeon	12 Sep 1824
died at Malta	19 Jul 1825
Waterloo Campaign.	

As this is the 150 anniversary year of the battle I thought perhaps the letter might be of some interest to readers of the Journal.

Looking forward to seeing you at the A.G.M. on the 26th.

Yours

RAMC 394

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