

**LIEUTENANT GENERAL
CROMMELIN, C.B.: ROYAL
(BENGAL) ENGINEERS; A
MEMOIR AND A RETROSPECT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649278329

Lieutenant General Crommelin, C.B.: Royal (Bengal) Engineers; a Memoir and a Retrospect by Charles Hervey

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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CHARLES HERVEY

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LIEUTENANT GENERAL CROMMELIN, C.B.

ROYAL (BENGAL) ENGINEERS.

A MEMOIR AND A RETROSPECT.

*(Forcing the Ganges at Cawnpore and march upon
Lucknow—Underground Warfare at the Second
Defence of the Residency :)*

IN THE YEAR OF THE MUTINY IN INDIA.

Posunt quia posse videntur.—(Virgil.)

BY

LIEUT.-GENERAL CHARLES HERVEY, C.B.

EXETER :
PRINTED BY WILLIAM POLLARD & Co., NORTH STREET.
1887.

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL CROMMELIN, C.B.

ROYAL ENGINEERS.

*(The passage of the Ganges by Havelock and Outram
on their advance upon Lucknow in 1857:*

*The Mining Operations during their beleaguement
there.)*

I charge thee, waft me safely cross the Channel.—*Henry VI. Part ii.*

And Miners crush'd beneath their Mines are found.—*Dryden.*

War tests men. Its annals present a continuous succession of heroes, and their bright deeds are our example. Every page resounds with their names: And yet the tide rolls on. Each in his turn has excelled. Admiration is our passing tribute, and as we read on, we suppose the next surpassed the last. And sometimes, too, we pause as we recognise a name, brilliant but for the modesty that surrounded its owner, whose equal worth was in the reluctance that restrained him to speak of himself, but the tale of whose good services would adorn the brightest page of military history. We single him out—pity, too! only when the hand that thins their ranks and places a limit on every lifetime, too surely searches him out and claims him—as but now.

Death in the battle-field will dim a victory, and our tribute of praise is forthwith yielded to the fallen hero. Homage is paid to the survivors at each recurring Roll Call. Equally is it due to him the brief account of whose unsullied career is now our loving task.

The history of the Sepoy Mutiny has yet to be sufficiently written, much as has been admirably narrated of it. For we learn more of events at a latter date from the side lights of private unpublished papers, than we had from the accounts and despatches of the time. The

"Fall of Delhi" alone would fill several chapters, but it has not yet found its complete historian. What have we yet heard, too, of the *first*, *second*, and *third* passage across the Ganges that led the indomitable troops of persistent Havelock and dashing Outram to the Relief of Lucknow, and over which Clyde and Mansfield, tenderly and with safety, conducted the eventually rescued garrison—men, women, and children—and noble defenders of the Lucknow Residency,—and flew to the timely and not too soon extended succour of hard-pressed Wyndham at Cawnpore? Or in adequate detail of that *second* Defence of the Residency, after Outram and Havelock had penetrated it and were in their turn beleaguered by the defiant hosts of Mutineers now become more furious from being so long baulked of their prey? Or yet of those fell under-ground Operations, *those Mines and Counter-mines*, ably planned and conducted by the Chief Engineer of the Force,—by him whose career we are engaged in re-counting?

William Arden Crommelin completed his four Terms at Addiscombe in December 1841, passing out as *First Engineer*, and carrying off among others, the much coveted prize of the *Sword for Good Conduct*. During his *third* term, some unruliness took place among the Cadets of the term above his, that is, of the senior or going out term, an unusually small one, his own being a very large one. This, and some consequent change among the Corporals, caused the unusual measure of promoting Corporals to it from the next lower class, the selection falling upon William Crommelin and four others. Being told off accordingly as "*Second Corporal*" to the *first* Division—that which contained the unruly element—he at first encountered strong opposition from those older Cadets whom he had to control. This feeling came to a head in the temporary absence of the "First Divisioner," the senior Corporal being so called. He was of their own number and his absence removed their allegiance. It is said that William Crommelin perceiving this, promptly marched off the Division (of which he was next in Command,) told the Cadets composing it that he was sorry to be the cause of their annoyance, but that he must be obeyed, and he thereupon

brought the ringleaders to account. This firm attitude and bearing, nipt the mutiny in the bud, quelled the ill-feeling, and he was soon afterwards on very good terms with them all.

On leaving Addiscombe, he proceeded to Chatham to complete his professional studies, in the grade of a gazetted "Ensign"; and while there he paid great attention to the course of Boating and Pontooning Operations, and, as will be seen, he turned this special training to account in India.

He landed at Calcutta in November 1842, and in 1844 was appointed Adjutant of Engineers, and held several Offices in succession, as of Assistant Garrison Engineer, Fort William; Executive Engineer, Hazárebágh Division, etc. In 1846, he was moved up to the Punjáb, and as Assistant Field Engineer in the "Army of the Sutlej," he served under Colonel Abbott, R. E., in the construction of the Bridge of Boats across the Sutlej at Ferozepoor that served for the passage of the Army into Punjáb territory, and was present in the battle of Sobraon and in the subsequent Operations of that Campaign. In May 1846, he was told off to the Field Force under Brigadier General Wheeler, as Brigade-Major of Engineers in the operations against the Fort of Kót-Kángra, and superintended the passage of the Force with its heavy guns and siege train, across the river Beas, and the conveyance of the heavy ordnance and stores from that river to Kót-Kángra. The experience acquired by him in the construction of the Bridge at Ferozepoor, had led to his being specially ordered to construct that over the Beas in the Jullundhur Doáb. The latter Bridge served in 1847, to facilitate the communications between British Territory and Lahore when the *Treaty of Lahore* was under consideration and the Camps of Lords Hardinge and Gough, were pitched on the banks of the Beas at Byrowál near Umritsir.

Troublous times were now again at hand. Anderson and Vans Agnew and their noble defender, Khán Sing, had been treacherously murdered—the Dewan Moolráj was in open revolt at Mooltán—the Siege of that Fortress had commenced. Thus opened the *Second Sikh War*

(September, 1848,) and a renewed Campaign in the Punjáb, seemed inevitable. It was short and decisive—two battles—a march in pursuit of the defeated—the surrender to us of the entire Sikh Army—the *Punjab annexed!* But not in vain had Allard, Ventura and Avitable, and sometime Van Courtland and others, instructed and disciplined the troops of the *Lion of the Punjab*, and infused into them that martial ardour such fiery spirits were so ready to receive and to retain, and eager once again to display. The instruction they had imparted, had not been lost upon such ready learners. Despite their previous defeats, the Sikhs burned to be avenged; and their bold defiance and haughty, though hardly “insolent” bearing, and the manifest hostile attitude of the Khálsa Durbár, could not be brooked, even from such worthy foes. A fair field and an open fight was their aspiration, and this our own troops and leaders were not backward to afford them. And now, a second time, there was shot for shot, and blow for blow—stout resistance and keen encounter. The cleaving Sikh *Tulwár* crossed and clashed against British Steel—British Artillery, Horse and Foot, Troop and Battery, dashed to the front and poured shot and shell upon the advancing foe—Battery upon battery of Sikh *Golundáz* as undauntedly plunged forward, action front, and dealt equal destruction on their opponents. To the “*Salaam-Aleikoom*” of one, “*Aleikoom-Salaam*” was in a manner, shouted by the other. As when two combatants met to slay, were taught by old Fencing Masters, always first to salute each other, or gladiators their antagonists in the ampitheatre—so these their grim salutations as they entered on the mortal strife—and the soon torn up, shattered, and wasted field, resounded with the clash and clangour—those fields of carnage and of slaughter—on which British Chivalry never waned or slackened—but had almost been outshone—nearly out-generalled. The Action at Rámuuggur, the Field of Chillianwála, the Battles of Sadoolapore and Gujerat, the surrender of the Sikh army to Sir Walter Gilbert, are the well-known incidents of that “Punjab Campaign.” Chillianwála was fought on the 13th January, 1849—the Punjab was annexed on the 29th February:

" Where are the silent singers of dead years,
To tell that stormy story ? who shall write
The hundred battles of that twelve days' fight ?"

Slavery abolished—*Thuggee*, the inveterate practice from old time of the Muzbee Páriah, and at that period rife throughout the country, extinguished—the Sikh Warriors flocking to our standards and converted into our finest Native Soldiery—those Muzbees enrolled and formed into corps of admirable Pioneers—the land of the Five Rivers smiling with a rich cultivation—the fields and hillsides abounding with industrious husbandmen, no longer with sword and buckler hanging on their ploughshares—law and order restored—the demon of misrule and oppression exorcised—a contented people—these were very soon the fruits of that well conceived Annexation.*

" Referring to the intelligence from Mooltan " (wrote Colonel Patrick Grant, Adjutant-General of the Army, to the Secretary to the Government of India, under date 20th September, 1848,) " the Commander-in-Chief has deemed it necessary that the usual Bridge of Boats across the Sutlej, should be immediately constructed at Ferozepore, and has ordered Lieutenant W. A. Crommelin, Garrison-Engineer at Lahore, and now on leave of absence on medical certificate at Simlah, to repair to Ferozepore for the purpose forthwith."—This Work was required for the passage of the Army to invade the Punjáb, and Lieut. Crommelin thus specially selected

* *Postscriptum*.—While this is in type, Telegrams from India announce the progress of Her Majesty's Jubilee there :—The Punjáb, which, Fifty years ago, was under the Rule of Mahárajah. Runjeet Sing, was celebrating the occasion with the utmost enthusiasm ; the Native States in the Punjáb, with every demonstration of loyalty—At Lahore fifteen societies and local bodies, including the Punjáb University, presented addresses for the Queen and a commemorative Persian Poem—The Hill Chiefs lit bon-fires on their Mountain peaks—The Durbár with Dera-Ghazi-Khán, was attended by many Belooch Chiefs with their retinues, and a large sum was subscribed for a free Caravanserai, to be called the *Shah-i-Serai*, in honor of the Empress of India—Festivals were held at the headquarters of various Belooch Tribes—And at Umbala many independent Wuzcers attended prayers for Her Majesty at the Grand Mosque. Such in substance, have been the Telegrams of the present "brilliant results" of the subjugation of the Punjab—results which lend added lustre to the glorious Reign in which that Conquest stands recorded.

for the duty of constructing it, at once hastened to the spot. Warned by the experience he had gained during the passage of the same river by the Army in 1846, when the marching of the troops, and more particularly the conveyance of their baggage, were very seriously impeded, owing to the sandy bed of the river over a length of about eight miles, ten days having elapsed on that previous occasion before all had crossed over, Lieut. Crommelin now set to work and constructed a Causeway of Fascines across the entire sandy track, and by so doing, enabled the Army, with its baggage, to pass over as if on an ordinary line of march, without in any way feeling the impediment of the River ! During the short Campaign that followed as above told, he accompanied the Head-Quarters of the Army of the Punjab and was mainly employed with the charge of the Pontoon Train and general Bridging operations. In that capacity he bridged *every one of the five rivers of the Punjab* for the use of the Army—the Sutlej, the Rávee, the Chenáb, the Indus and its tributary the Beas, *with Boats* ; and the Jhelum, with *Pontoons*. The passage of the Jhelum was pointed to by the late Sir Howard Douglas, in his Work on "Military Bridges," as "an example of bridging with Pontoons," and in the opinion of the same high authority, it was "by the uncommon intelligence, enterprise and skill of Lieut. Crommelin, that the important operation succeeded and was followed by such brilliant results." This was high testimony.—For these services he received the Medal and Clasp.

The brief Campaign over, he was sent to Pesháwur as Garrison Engineer to the largest Force ever cantoned at one place in India ; and as such, in addition to the several Bridging operations already enumerated, he constructed yet another Bridge of Boats, on this occasion across the *Cabool River at Nowshera*, by which to complete a communication for our Troops into the Eusofzai Country : And further flung a large Flying Bridge across the River Swát as a communication between the Pesháwur Valley and the Fort of Aboozye ; and again a Lattice Bridge over the river Bára to complete the military communication between Pesháwur