

## The battle

The drums were rolling gravely as the garrison advanced slowly. Their roaring, hollow sound spread across the plain, joining the gleeful notes of the bagpipes. That jarring clash mocked their faces, made grimmer by anxiety, crushing any peace and arousing atavistic fears. With the points of their bayonets raised upwards, the soldiers proceeded one behind the other while the blurred shapes of the cannons loomed in the far distance.

John walked slowly in unison with his army comrades. His heart was pounding nervously, stirring a strange tremor. He had never fought before and was by no means eager to do so. Many among his comrades were driven by a passion for a fight, but he harboured a sense of uncertainty. They were expected to push the English back and protect their own land. Absolutely imperative as it was - or at least that was what he had been told - he, born a fisherman's son from the Isle of Skye, could do nothing but obey. The military training had been perfunctory, providing only the basic rudiments of wielding a musket and, soon afterwards, he had found himself in the battle.

In a good-as-new uniform, he looked at his kilt with pleasure, being careful not to crumple it. He had never had one before, and even the slightest splash of mud made him grimace. It was the one thing he liked best - that beautiful, spotless kilt.

The plain, coloured by the biting cold, was thickened with angry tears from the sky, which ran heavily down the soldiers' faces. Lashing on the meadows, the rain gave off vapour, which enshrouded the valley in a ghastly mist.

With his shoes caked in slime, he struggled to keep his balance under the first volley of cannonballs which thundered ominously. The horizon was tainted by Her Majesty's gaudy jackets, but in his eyes only dwelt the sea and his ears appeased to the rumbling sound of the backwash. How beautiful that stretch of sea was in August, with the sun reflecting the bright colours of the fishing boats on the yielding water surface. How sweet the noisy cries of the seagulls were when the deck was overladen with fish. Who knew if he should see the dusk again, or the transfixed setting sun glowing tiredly at night. That was the lords' battle and he - a humble pawn - was moving about on an unfamiliar chessboard.

Suddenly, the rattling gait of the horses disarranged the apparent order of the rank and, in next to no time, the clang of the scimitars echoed through the valley. Before very long, every balance was shattered, and the magic charm vanished at the first bloodstains. The strident blow of the cannons painted the sky with bright balls which, falling headlong to the ground, cast gloomy shadows of death.

Anticipating the next attack, the commander ordered to close ranks. Grasping his musket in dismay, John moved closer to his comrade's side. Who knew if he should see the dusk again.

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