

SIEGE OF HEREFORD

Colonel Barnabas Scudamore (1609–1652), Governor of Hereford
to Kildare (c. 1627–1661), Baron Digby

September 1645

A numerous and active army closely besieging us has rendered me, and those engaged with me (in regard of perpetual duty, without relief of guards for five weeks together), incapable of presenting your lordship with an exact relation thereof. I can therefore hint it only for a better Mercury. The officers, gentry (whereof I shall send a list), clergy, citizens, and common soldiers behaved themselves all gallantly upon their duty, many eminently; to particularize each would be too great a trespass on your lordship's more weighty affairs. Briefly, believe me, my lord, the walls of their valiant breasts were all strongly lined with courage and loyalty.

On 30 July, I sent out a party of 20 horse over Wyebidge, who discovering their forlorn-hope of horse, charged them into their main body; and retreated in very little disorder and with loss only of one trooper (taken prisoner) some of the Scots falling. Immediately after this, their whole body of horse faced us, about ten of the clock in the morning, within the reach of our cannon, and were welcomed with our metal. Good execution being done upon them; their foot as yet undiscovered. About half an hour after, I caused a strong party of foot (seconded with horse) to line the hedges, who galled them in their passage to the fords, after whose handsome retreat, I began to ensafe the ports, which I did that night.

In the morning appeared their body of foot, and we found ourselves surrounded. I enjoined the bells' silence, least their ringing, which was an alarm to awaken our devotion, might chime them together to the execution of their malice. For the same reason, I stopped our clocks, and hereby though I prevented their telling tales to the advantage of the enemy, I myself lost the punctual observation of many particulars, which therefore I must more confusedly represent unto your Lordship.

Before they attempted anything against the town, they invited us to a surrendry, and this they did by a double summons, one from Leven,¹ directed to me, the other from the Committee of both Kingdoms (attending upon the affairs of the army) sent to the mayor and corporation. But we complied so well in our resolutions that our positive answer served for both parties, which was returned by me to their general.

This not giving that satisfaction they desired, they began to approach upon the first of August, but very slowly and modestly, as yet intending more the security of their own persons than the ruin of ours. But all their art could not protect them from our small and great shot, which fell upon them. Besides this, our men galled them handsomely at their several sallies over Wyebidge, once beat them up to their main guard, and at another demolished one side of Saint Martin's steeple, which would have much annoyed us at the bridge and palace. This was performed with the hurt only of two men, but with loss of great store of the enemy's men.

When they saw how difficult the service would prove, before they could compass their designs by force, they made use of another engine, which was flattery. The mayor and aldermen are courted to yield the town by an epistle subscribed by six of the country gentlemen, very compassionate and suasory. But upon our refusal to stoop to this lure, they were much incensed that they had been so long disappointed, and having all this while continued their line of communication, they raised their batteries, commencing at Wyebidge, from whence they received the greatest damage, but instead of revenging that loss upon us, they multiplied their own by the death of their much lamented Major-General Crawford² and some others that fell with him. This provoked them to play hot upon the gate for two days together, and battered it so much (being the weakest) that it was rendered useless, yet our men stopped it up with wool-sacks and timber, and for our greater assurance of eluding

¹ Alexander Leslie (1582–1661), Earl of Leven, commander of Parliamentary forces besieging Hereford.

² Major-General Lawrence Crawford (1611–1645)

their attempt, we broke an arch and raised a very strong work behind it.

The enemy frustrated of his hopes here, raised two several batteries—one at the Friars, the other on the other side of Wye River—and from both these played his ordinance against the corner of the wall by Wye side, but we repaired and lined our walls faster than they can batter them, whereupon they desisted.

About 11 August, we discovered a mine at Friar's Gate, and employed workmen to counter-mine them. When we had stopped the progress of that mine on one side of the gate, they carried it on the other; which we also defeated by making a sally-port. And issuing forth did break it open and fire it.

About the 13th, they raised batteries round about the town and made a bridge over Wye River.

The 14th, Doctor Scudamore was sent by them to desire admittance for three country gentlemen, who pretended in their letters to import something of consequence to the good of the city and county. Free leave of ingress and egress was allowed them; but being admitted, their suggestions were found to us so frivolous and impertinent that they were dismissed not without some dis-relish and neglect. And the said doctor, after they were past the port, coming back from his company, was unfortunately slain by a shot from the enemy.

About the 16th, they discovered the face of their battery against Friar's Gate with five several gun-ports, from hence they played four cannon jointly at our walls and made a breach, which was instantly made up. They did the like on the other side, with the like success.

The 17th, a notable sally was made at Saint Owen's Church with great execution, and divers prisoners taken with the loss only of one man, at which time little boys strived which should first carry torches and faggots to fire their works, which was performed to some purpose, and so it was at the same sally-port once before, though with a fewer number, and therefore with less execution.

And I may not forget to acquaint your lordship with those other four sallies made by us at the castle to good effect, and what emulation there was between the soldier and citizens, which should be most engaged in them. Now their loss of prisoners, slaughter of men, and dishonour of being beaten out of their works—which they found ready to flame about their ears if they returned presently into them—had so kindled their indignation that presently they raised batteries against Saint Owen's Church and plaid fiercely at it, but to little purpose.

Which they so easily perceived that from the 20th unto the 27th there was a great calm on all sides, we as willing to provide ourselves and preserve our ammunition for a storm as they could be industrious or malicious to bring it upon us. Yet I cannot say either side was idle, for they plied their mine at Saint Owen's and prepared for scaling. We counter-mined, employed our boys by day and night to steal out and fire their works, securing their retreat under the protection of our musketeers upon the wall. And what our fire could not perfect, though it burnt fair and suffocated some of their miners, our water did, breaking in upon them and drowning that which the fire had not consumed. And this saved us the pains of pursuing a mine, which we had sunk on purpose to render theirs in that place ineffectual.

The 29th, Leven (a merciful general) assayed the town again by his last offer of honourable conditions to surrender, but he found us still unrelenting, the terror of his cannon making no impression at all upon our spirits, though the bullets discharged from them had done so much against our walls. This (though some of their chief commanders were remiss and cool at the debate, and some contradictory) drove their greatest spirits into a passionate resolution of storming.

And to that purpose 31 August and 1 September they prepared ladders, hurdles, and other accommodations for the advancing of their design and securing their persons in the attempt, and played very hot with their cannon upon Byster's Gate and the half-moon next to Saint Owen's Gate, intending the morrow after to fall on, presuming, as they boasted, that after they had rung us this passing peal they should presently force the garrison to give up her loyal ghost. But the same night His Majesty, advancing from Worcester, gave them a very hot

alarum, and drawing a little nearer to us, like the sun to the meridian, this Scottish mist began to disperse, and the next morning vanished out of sight.

My lord, I should give your lordship an account of the valour of our common soldiers and townsmen, who would hazard themselves at the making up of breaches (to the astonishment of the enemy) till the cannon played between their legs, and even the women (such was their gallantry) ventured where the musket-bullets did go. And I should acquaint your honour what frequent alarums we gave them by fire-balls, lights upon our steeple, by dogs, cats, and outworn horses having lit matches tied about them and turned out upon their works, whereby we put the enemy in such distraction that sometimes they charged one another; this recreation we had in the midst of our besieging. And one morning, instead of beating reveille we had a cry of hounds in pursuit after the train of a fox about the walls of the city, so little were we dismayed at the threats or attempts of them.

I may not forget one remarkable piece of divine providence that God sent us singular men of all professions, very useful and necessary for us in this distress, and so accidentally to us as if they had on purpose been let down from Heaven to serve our present and emergent occasions. As skillful miners, excellent cannoniers (one whereof spent but one shot in vain throughout the whole siege), an expert carpenter, the only man in all the country to make mills, without whom we had been much disfurnished of a means to make powder (after our powder-mill was burnt) or grind corn. That Providence that brought these to us at last drove our enemies from us after the destruction of four or five mines (which since appears to be their number), the expence of 300 cannon shot (besides other ammunition spent with muskets), the loss by their own confession of 1200 and as the country says 2000 men, we in all not losing about 21 by all casualties whatsoever.

Thus craving your lordship's pardon for my prolixity, I take leave.

John Webb, *Memorials of the Civil War Between King Charles I and the Parliament of England as it Affected Herefordshire and the Adjacent Counties* (London: Longman, Green, and Company, 1879), II:385–388. [modernized]