



The Last Stand of the 44th Foot at Gundamuck, 1842, William Barnes Wollen, 1898, oil on canvas, 75.9 x 122 cm, Chelmsford Museum. (Artwork courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Letters of False Hope

A Timeless Story from Afghanistan

Maj. Kyle McCarter, U.S. Army

Author's note: *The author wrote this piece following the collapse of the Afghanistan government and the subsequent American retreat. The following fictional letters are written from the viewpoints of three men from three different forays into Afghanistan: the British, Soviet, and American*

invasions. All three stories highlight aspects of American hubris in our war in Afghanistan: the failure of belief in the power of democracy and in the trust of honor among combatants, and the belief in absolute military power and in definable goals and a clear victory.



British Army Entering the Bolan Pass from Dadur, First Anglo-Afghan War, 1838-1842, James Atkinson, 1842. (Artwork courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

The Hope of Love

January 5th, 1842—Kabul, Afghanistan

Tomorrow, we are finally going home. Our commander, Watson, arranged with the Afghan commander, Akbar Khan, to protect our withdrawal from Kabul. He promised us safe passage, food, and fuel for the crossing of the Hindu Kush. We assume we can leave unmolested back to India. Home to you, my dear wife. Our trip will be slow as we have our sick and wounded with us and too many camp followers to count. There are more than twelve thousand in our great column.

—Johnathan

January 8th, 1842—The mountain pass to Jalalabad, Afghanistan

My hope was folly! For the past three days we have been harassed and attacked on all quarters. Each morning we awake to the frozen, stabbed, shot, or missing. Daily we lose men to hunger, thirst, and even lions. There is no respite to this hell, our sherry and rum are even depleted. As I write this letter my shelter is yet again being hammered by a blizzard. More will surely die tonight. Only the morning's light will tell.

—Johnathan

January 12th, 1842—Gandamak, Afghanistan

I know my hope to see you again is lost. My poor dear wife. Our force now numbers less than two hundred. We started with twelve thousand. I feel we are simply in an opening chapter of a great game here in Asia. Our enemy is armed with gear and weapons from the czar. I fear we will not learn from our sacrifice and will be back in this god-forsaken place. This will be my last letter to you.

—Yours Truly, Captain Johnathan Morgan,
44th Regiment of Foot

The Hope for Future Glory

Comrade Commissionaire,
28 December 1979

I am writing to inform you of our spectacular victory over the mujahedeen. During the last twenty-four hours, the glorious Soviet Army erased all religious and anti-communist resistance from the face of Afghanistan. We easily reestablished the government of our comrades in Kabul. It brings me great joy to have been present for this battle and the glory it brings to the Soviet Republic. I know that you will tell the tale of our victory to the entire precinct and raise my worth in the Party's eyes.

I am hopeful that America and her Western European dogs are struck with fear. It took us less than a day to drive our eighty thousand soldiers, two thousand tanks, and five thousand armored fighting vehicles into the heart of this rugged nation. I can only imagine the dread of the NATO forces in occupied West Germany as they watched our advance.



The last Soviet troop column crosses Soviet border 15 September 1989 after leaving Afghanistan. The banner reads "Слава солдатам отечества! Слава сынам родины!" (Glory to the soldiers of the fatherland! Glory to the sons of the motherland!) (Photo courtesy of the RIA Novosti Archive via Wikimedia Commons)

NATO does not have the Hindu Kush to hide from our armored columns, only the open plains of Europe. At this same speed we could take Munich and Paris in a day! London and Washington would not dare fight our power.

My stay in Afghanistan will be short. Our commanders are sure of a hasty establishment of the Party in Kabul. No local fighter would dare fight against the might of the Soviet Army. My only regret is more of my comrades were not here to witness this day, I feel they have missed their chance for glory here in Afghanistan. I will drink with you for the new year!

Yuri Varennikov
старший лейтенант рода войск
(Senior Lieutenant of Branches)

The Hope of Conclusion

2LT Kyle McCarter
1-32nd Infantry Regiment
May 2nd, 2011

Dad,

First, I love you and Mom. Please tell my brothers and the rest of the family I am safe and well. The remainder of the letter is for you only. I figured I could talk to a Vietnam vet.

I have only been here two months, but I have seen more than I ever thought I would see. As you know, we are losing men and women every day in this meat grinder. Most of our soldiers are injured by IEDs. This enemy does not have the courage to fight us face-to-face ... or they are too smart to fight us face-to-face. None the matter though, we will win this war. I know that when I look at the soldiers in my platoon and company and I see their drive and heart. They are here fighting for something bigger than this dusty hole in the map.

On a brighter note, Pops, I doubt we will be here the full twelve months. We heard this morning that the Navy SEALs killed Osama bin Laden. Your squids for the win! He is the reason I joined the Army in 2001, and now I am here in Afghanistan on the day we finally took our revenge. Now all the promises we made to the victims of 9/11 are fulfilled and we can bring our young men and women home with honor and get out of this god-forsaken land.

I am hopeful that the leaders of the Army or our Nation have read a book or two. I hope they realize that these are the same sands and

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Marines with Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force–Crisis Response–Central Command provide assistance during an evacuation at Hamid Karzai International Airport, Kabul, Afghanistan, 20 August 2021. Service members were assisting the Department of State with an orderly drawdown of designated personnel in Afghanistan. (Photo by Lance Cpl. Nicholas Guevara, U.S. Marine Corps)

mountains that crushed Alexander the Great, set the sun on British-India, and caged the mighty Soviet Bear. I have faith we will leave soon as our job here is done. I have faith they will not keep us here for no reason.

I am hopeful we can head the warning of *The Princess Bride's* Vizzini: “Ha-ha, you fool! You fell victim to one of the classic blunders, the most famous of which is ‘Never get involved in a land war in Asia.’”

—Love, Kyle ■

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