



Nanda, the Punjaub, October 1849

Lieutenant Nelson Mansergh of the Bengal Artillery is now on the staff of General Sir Charles James Napier, the mercurial Commander-in-Chief in India – the 'Devil's Uncle'. Newly a father, Mansergh must leave Julia and baby John to escort an unorthodox university don in search of the tomb of Bucephalus, Alexander the Great's horse.

At remote Nanda, Mansergh becomes embroiled in the turmoil afflicting the unhappy 75th Bengal Native Infantry, including its bullying adjutant, Rugeley. Mansergh realises the sepoys' dissatisfaction: are Napier's fears his army will revolt justified?

Amid mutiny, a duel and a communal riot, Mansergh re-joins Napier's headquarters and serves in the Kohat campaign, there acquiring the nickname that plagues him ever after. Accompanying the headquarters to return to Julia, Mansergh realises that Napier's increasingly erratic behaviour is, perhaps, enough to imperil British rule in India.

Peter Stanley is Research Professor at UNSW Canberra. One of Australia's most active military historians, as well as writing on Australian military history he has published on the military social history of British India. His books include *White Mutiny: British Military Culture in India 1825-1875* and *Hull! hull!: The Santal Rebellion, 1855*. *The Devil's Uncle* is the third novel in the Mansergh saga.



The Devil's Uncle



Peter Stanley



THE DEVIL'S UNCLE

The Third
'Mansergh' Novel

PETER STANLEY



THE DEVIL'S UNCLE

The third
'Mansergh' Novel

Peter Stanley

Other books in the
Mansergh Saga

The Cunning Man

Alienation

The Weight of Light

... more to come

*A list of other books by Peter Stanley is
at the back of the book.*



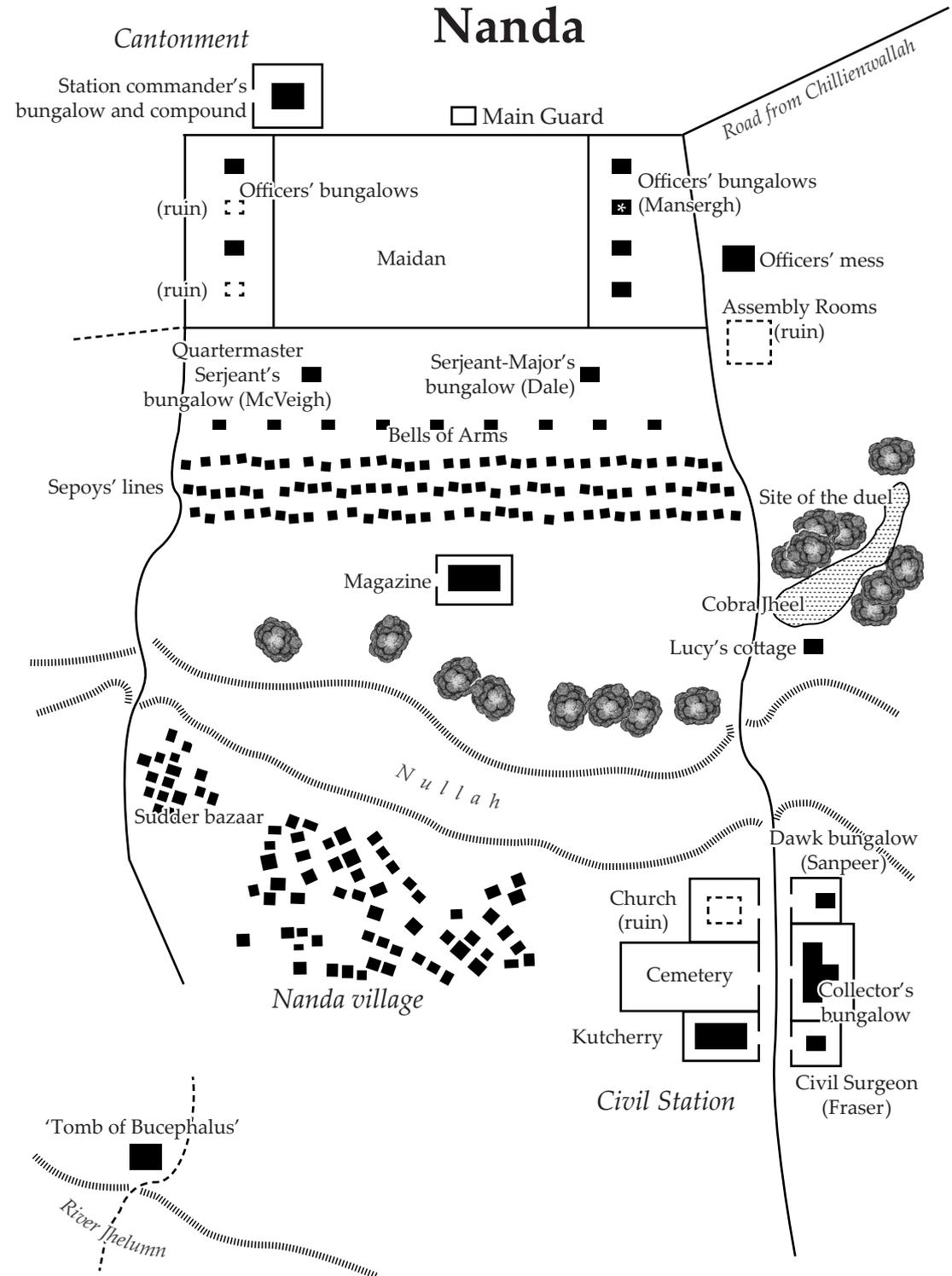
Two Dogs Leaping Press

Contents

<i>Northwest India 1850</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Nanda</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Glossary</i>	<i>vi</i>
Part I Simla	1
Part II Nanda	67
Part III In Camp	169
Part IV Simla	233
<i>Historical note</i>	<i>274</i>
<i>Other books by Peter Stanley</i>	<i>276</i>



'Our Station', depicted by Lieutenant George Francklin Atkinson, *Curry and Rice (on Forty Plates) or "Our" Station in India*, Day & Son, London, 1859, the image which inspired 'Nanda', the cantonment in which much of the plot of *The Devil's Uncle* is set.



weeks old – it had been published in London in mid-August – but the Indian news it contained had itself already been six or eight weeks old when it had been printed. But one snippet interested him especially – the one in which his promotion from second lieutenant to lieutenant had been confirmed. As Napier had promised him, it would take weeks to be finally promulgated, but here it was, in black and white, and soon the extra rupees had reached his bank account – and the extra payments for ‘staff duties’ – not that they were onerous enough to justify additional salary, but who would be mad enough to quibble with the Bengal Army's Military Audit Regulations?

Once he had finished surreptitiously admiring again his appearance in the ‘Bengal Army – Promotions’ column, Mansergh began reading about events dating back to the beginning of Napier's tenure as Commander-in-Chief. Then newspaper writers, in Bengal and in Britain, had been full of praise for him, expressing great hopes for how he would bring order, discipline and further honour to India's armies, which had seen a series of reverses, especially at the disastrous battle of Chillianwallah, before Lord Gough had recovered his will and defeated the Seikhs. Those early weeks of optimism had given way to ... to what? To a sense of ... discouragement? Disappointment? Disillusionment? Mansergh could not quite put his finger on the mood that now prevailed, not least because Simla was so damned far from British India's other centres of power, London and Calcutta. Time would tell. Indeed, Mansergh had not much been present at headquarters. Between spending time with Julia, he had several times been away, making sure that the printers, in Kussowlie, a cantonment in the foothills a day's ride away, understood printing the General Orders to Napier's satisfaction. He had not yet seen how the headquarters worked, and he looked forward to the first real ‘Lat Sahib's tiffin’ he had attended.



AT ELEVEN THE officers of the headquarters gathered in the largest of the sitting rooms in the headquarters bungalow, most on a mixed collection of dining and arm chairs, some lounging against a long sideboard. Though called ‘tiffin’ – lunch – a meal

was the last thing provided, though on the sideboard lay plates of samosas and other savoury treats, decanters of wine and bottles of pale ale standing in zinc tubs. The room was dark. The day was overcast, as it often was at this time of year, and the windows were obscured by curtains and cane chinks, and a couple of oil lamps burned in the corners.

Mansergh took his place with the junior officers who stood deferentially at the back of the room, furthest away from the door by which Napier was expected to enter. No one said much, but a couple of officers murmured – about arrangements to go shooting later that afternoon; about what had transpired after the previous evening's poetry recital. At a few minutes past the hour the officer nearest the door called out “Gentlemen!” and all of those sitting rose as Napier entered.

Mansergh could not help smiling at Napier's appearance. Apart from the fact – it was a fact, not merely a perception – that Napier radiated charisma, his appearance would excite ridicule if he were a man less appealing. He wore a plain dark blue jacket, with his orders and medals carelessly arranged upon his left breast. Around his neck he wore a woollen scarf, as if he were worried about catching cold – ludicrous since Simla was balmy, if damp. But his cream buckskin trousers were obscured by tall, highly polished jack-boots, more suitable for a ride than a meeting indoors. They had become used to his face, covered by a wispy beard reaching half-way down his chest, his eyes both magnified and concealed by a pair of tiny spectacles, over which he peered around the room.

“I bid you good morning, gentlemen,” Napier said brightly, “pray be seated.” He moved with surprising celerity for an older man and swiftly settled into a chair at the head of the gathering.

The officers mumbled their greeting as they followed him, distributed around the room as if the headquarters dufter were a gentlemen's club hosting a meeting of amateur scholars or a literary society.

“Now, gentlemen, I wish to discourse upon the subject of the Punjab irregular regiments, the formation of which His

said, "are you alright, old man? ... Serjeant Cooper!" he shouted, "fetch the gharry!"

Mansergh said he felt faint and dropped like a stone to his knees.

They carried Mansergh to the shade of a tree beside the dusty field, loosened his neck-cloth and gave him water from a goatskin mussick carried by the party's bhistee.

Vibart, who assumed that Mansergh had suffered from a touch of the sun, though the October day was not especially warm, fanned him and asked if he needed to see a doctor – not that there was one closer than Nanda. Mansergh did not – could not – explain what had occasioned the sudden fit of anxiety, though he knew well that Frankford would have summoned up Alienation. Being here again, the source of nightmares of death, interment and decay, had brought on the familiar sensations.

Vibart would not allow Mansergh to proceed until Mansergh reassured him that he felt well enough. At that moment Mr Sanpeer returned, and Vibart accepted that someone could be responsible for Mansergh's well-being.

"You're going to Nanda?" he asked. "Look out for the adjutant of the 75th, Rugeley," he warned, "he'll have you with drawn pistols at daybreak if you're not careful. Goodbye."

Part II

Nanda



DRIVING INTO NANDA from the east, the track passed over a slight rise, formed by æons of the River Jhelum's flooding. From it Mansergh could see the station of Nanda spread out exactly as he had expected, and his approach as the gharries trotted together toward the station's boundary pillars confirmed his supposition. It was an unprepossessing sight.

The station was not, Mansergh could see, at its best. Nanda had been constructed only a few years before, following the first Seikh war, but its buildings already looked care-worn and neglected, if not actually ruinous. It had been abandoned by its sepoy garrison, called to fight the rebellious Seikhs (as the British saw it) and then occupied by them in turn. The Seikhs had found its bungalows and warehouses useful for their own purposes and had not interfered with it unduly. Still, the Assembly Rooms and some of the officers' bungalows had burned down, the newly-planted trees taken for kindling, and the buildings looted. Some of the balls that had killed the men Mansergh had buried at Chillianwallah had come from Nanda's magazine.

Nanda resembled a score of such cantonments created by the East India Company's military engineers across the length of Bengal. It was among the least prepossessing, housing only a regiment of native infantry, some five hundred men strong, mainly Brahmin Hindoos from Oudh, but including a few Mussalmans and Seikhs. It was constructed around the broad, rectangular bare-earth maidan, where the sepoys drilled and paraded. On each side of the maidan stood the half-dozen mostly intact officers'

"Dinner serve sahibs," a white-coated bearer said before striking a large and very shiny gong.



LETTERS FROM JULIA continued to reach him every week or so, sent by dawk up the Grand Trunk Road. Of course they included news of John – though it was always the same (not that Julia seemed to realise it), in slightly different words each time, but always welcome for all that. She always included a word about her father; more rarely about her sister Harriet.

Mansergh discovered that the more he included in his letters the more Julia responded to and commented on his interests and questions. A voracious reader of the mofussil newspapers, the various official gazettes, the *Calcutta Review* and the *Benares Magazine* and as many home papers as she could find, she took to sending him clippings and snippets. She sent him clippings belatedly reporting Mr Sanpeer's progress from Calcutta, dutifully reported by correspondents writing to the various newspapers, and clippings from the gazettes detailing the locations of the other officers of the 75th.

As they neared Jullunder he opened another letter and a little scrap of paper floated down – another clipping from a newspaper. He stooped to retrieve it and read:

TO THE HARD OF SIGHT!!!!

Mr Tobias Grenage, Esq., OCULIST and Maker of *LENSES*

formerly of
B'HAM,
LONDON,
PARIS, &ct.



Now of Court
House lane,
CALCUTTA

Announces to Residents of
MOFUSSIL STATIONS he will be visiting THIS SEASON
And can be contacted on request at the Dawk Offices of
*BARRACKPORE, DINAPORE, BENARES,
ALLAHABAD, AGRA, ...*

He frowned in puzzlement, and then turned the clipping over, seeing, in a black-edged box:

Dead: Nanda

Fanny, only daughter of Maj. W.R. Carse, 75th B.N.I.
and the late Mrs. Carse,
who died on 25th Dec. 1849, of fever,
aged 18 years, 8 months and 24 days;
endeared to all by her amiable qualities and
affectionate nature: mourned by all at Nanda.
Her premature passing a source of deepest affliction.

R.I.P.

So, Fanny had succumbed to one of the diseases that made life in India such a lottery. So poorly favoured in life – motherless, her father a slow-moving, slow-thinking booby; exiled to a remote cantonment, denied female companionship, derided by oafish subalterns, unwilling or unable even to leave her father's compound in daylight, and finding fulfilment only in painting, paintings she would never show. And now, to be carried off by 'fever', and on Christmas Day.

Mansergh sighed. Poor Fanny; poor Major Carse. Her only notable service was to ensure the escape of a man now hunted as a fugitive duelist and arguably a murderer.



AS THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF'S caravan slowly processed down the Grand Trunk Road the work of the staff went on, and with it the periodic tiffins. Soon enough the proceedings of the court-martial of Private Rickwood of the 14th Light Dragoons came before the Commander-in-Chief at one of his regular staff meetings. As Colonel King had affirmed, he had charged Rickwood immediately with 'insubordinate conduct tending to the prejudice of good order and discipline in that ... Private Thomas Rickwood did abuse his superior officer, calling him a "coward" and "a disgrace" and saying "You are a scandal, sir, and your regiment do disown you!" or words to that effect.'

"Yes, sir. I will send a dawk to Lahore posthaste communicating the burden of your decision."

"Capital! I think that concludes our business, gentlemen," Napier said smiling, heedless of Pryse's discomfiture. "Let us dine."

Just before he was swept out by the press of officers wanting fed, Mansergh saw Pryse sitting silently, his head in his hands.



ON THE FINAL evening before the staff began the two-day trek along the bridle trail through the foothills to Simla, a dawk arrived for Colonel Pryse, just as Mansergh was passing the time chatting to the dawk serjeant.

"For Colonel Pryse?" Mansergh said carelessly, though he noticed the stamps on the wrapper indicating that it had come from Lahore. "I'll take it to him. I have business in his dufter."

He did not, but he was concerned that the envelope held nothing very good for his old patron. He found Pryse preparing for the evening's Lat Sahib's tiffin, and Mansergh could sense that he was attending reluctantly. It would never have done for Pryse to reveal his actual feelings about Napier's disregard of Pryse's concern for discipline and the way that releasing Rickwood would surely undermine the subordination of the 14th Light Dragoons.

"Good evening, sir," Mansergh said neutrally. "A letter from Lahore for you."

"From Lahore?" Pryse tore open the envelope and swiftly scanned the paper.

"Good Christ!" he exclaimed. "King's killed himself!"

"What!"

"Here," Pryse said, "read it for yourself. It'll be all over the public prints within the week."

Mansergh read with incredulity a terse message from the adjutant of the 14th Light Dragoons.

'Sir

It is my painful duty to inform you that yesterday evening Lieut-Colonel King despatched himself in his bungalow. Our surgeon reports that his mind was much perturbed by the matter of Private Rickwood's insults, and by the response of His Excellency the Cdr-i-Chf, who has compounded the offence by taking the side of a Bad Soldier against an Officer and Gentleman who never did deserve the contumely and affront he has suffered at the hands of a man he formerly revered. In the days before his self-inflicted demise Colonel King was heard to speak of Chillianwallah and took to repeating 'only wants leading' to himself. It is this that lead our surgeon to determine that while the balance of his mind was disturbed he took his own life – I found him myself. The poor old man had blown off the top of his head with his own pistol, God forgive him.

I write in a state of profound sadness and agitation. You will excuse my candour.

I am, sir ...'

"Good Lord! *Mai Duw yn rhoi gweddill i ei enaid* – May God give rest to his soul." Mansergh thought that this was an imprudent letter to write to a senior officer in Napier's headquarters – no doubt the adjutant was upset at having discovered King as well as at the fact of his suicide. But Mansergh saw that Pryse's sympathies were entirely with King.

"So, King is the last man to die because of Chillianwallah," Pryse said at last.



BY THE TIME the Commander-in-Chief's tiffin convened everyone on the staff knew of King's suicide, with additional details circulated by letters received from friends in Lahore. The full story came out: poor King, assailed by the twin calumnies of Rickwood's strictures on his courage – repeated before his men and seemingly unpunished by higher authority – and Napier's insinuation (as the Light Dragoons saw it) that King's regiment