

THE OUTSTANDING AND EXTREMELY RARE 3 CLASP AFGHANISTAN 1878 TO AN OFFICER OF THE 72ND HIGHLANDERS WHO WAS KILLED IN ACTION LEADING HIS COMPANY DURING THE BATTLE FOR ASMAI HEIGHTS BEFORE KABUL, 14 DECEMBER 1879. PREVIOUS TO THIS HE WAS ONE OF THOSE WHO WITH THE 5TH GURKHAS, ASSAULTED THE PEIWAR KOTAL AND AT THE BATTLE OF CHARASIA, WAS WITH THE TWO COMPANIES OF THE 72ND WHEN THEY SO SPLENDIDLY CARRIED THE RED RIDGE, THE ENEMY'S RIGHT CENTRE.



AFGHANISTAN 1878, 3 CLASPS PEIWAR KOTAL, CHARASIA, KABUL 'SUB LIEUT: C. H. GAISFORD. 72ND HIGHRS'

“Cecil Henry Gaisford, who fell in action before Kabul on the 14 December, 1879, was the eldest son of Lieut.-Colonel Gaisford, of The Grove, Dunboyne, late of the 72nd Highlanders. He was born at Galway on the 20 September 1856, and was educated at Eton. Entering the army in September 1876, he proceeded, twelve months afterwards, to India; and on the 30 of November

1877, joined, at Sialkot, the headquarters of the 72nd Highlanders, his father's old regiment, to which he had been gazetted.

On the eve of the outbreak of the Afghan War, in the autumn of 1878, Gaisford was on detachment at Ranikhet in command of a company, his Captain having left for England. The responsible duty of marching his men and followers a distance of 500 miles to overtake the regiment, then en route for the front, consequently fell to him. He accomplished this in two months and, joining the right wing, served with it in the whole of its subsequent operation till the day of his death. He was one of the Officers who took part in the successful and gallant assault of the Peiwar Kotal on the 2 December, 1878. Here the 72nd Highlanders and the 5th Goorkhas made an uphill attack on the Afghans mountainous positions on Spingawi Kotal and carried in spite of the desperate resistance of the enemy; this the subject of the famous painting by Vereker Monteith Hamilton.



<https://www.britishbattles.com/second-afghan-war/battle-of-peiwar-kotal/>

A few days afterwards he took part, with 250 of the 72nd, in General Roberts' reconnoissance to the Shutargardan; and on the 15 December he was present at the repulse of the Mangals in the Sapiri defile. During the spring and autumn of 1879, he acted as Adjutant to his regiment, and as Brigade Major at Ali Khel. On the renewal of hostilities, in September 1879, he was again at the Shutargardan, in General Baker's Brigade; and at the battle of Charasiab, on the 6 October, was with the two companies of the 72nd when they so splendidly carried the Red Ridge, the enemy's right centre.

<https://www.britishbattles.com/second-afghan-war/battle-of-charasiab/>

On the 14 of December 1879, Gaisford commanded one of the three companies of the 72nd consisting 194 rifles, which under Colonel Brownlow, stormed the Asmai heights. The operations on this occasion have been variously described, but all accounts agree that the capture of the highest peak by the 72nd and Guides was "*splendid.*" Of this there can be no doubt, for it was in full view of Sherpur. It was in the evening of the same day, whilst elements of the 72nd were covering the retirement of troops from the hill which had been so bravely won, that Gaisford received his death-wound. The awful suddenness of the shock could not, however, quell the gallantry of his spirit. Indicating his sword, he called on his comrades to take care of it, "*because it was his father's.*"

"*He died like a soldier, full of courage*" wrote Colonel Brownlow, his Commanding Officer, in a letter to Colonel Gaisford. "*I never saw anyone more cool or self-possessed under very trying circumstances. He was a most promising officer and you already know I thought very highly of him. During the whole of the day and during the retirement, accomplished under the heavy fire of the enemy, he was hardly a moment out of my sight, and he could not have behaved better than he did*"



Testimony of his worth joined in by Major Stockwell, who wrote: "*Under fire he was as brave as the best.*"

It will perhaps not be out of place here to add that before he was eighteen years of age he had gained the Royal Humane Society's medal for gallantry in saving life, and that in his own home

circle he was lovable and beloved, having ever a bright smile and a kindly word for all. The peasantry in the neighbourhood appreciated his rectitude so fully that his decision used invariably to be accepted as final in the adjustment of the little differences they were in the habit of referring to him.

Lieutenant Gaisford was buried with military honours in the cemetery near Sherpur, at the extreme west end of the Bemaru heights, where his comrades have placed a marble slab over his grave."

For their gallantry during the fight for Asmai Heights on 14 December 1879, no less three Victoria Crosses were awarded including one to Lance Corporal George Sellar of the 72nd:

"For conspicuous gallantry displayed by him at the assault on the Asmai Heights, round Kabul... in having in a marked manner led the attack, under a heavy fire, and, dashing on in front of the party up the slope, engaged in a desperate conflict with an Afghan who sprang out to meet him. In this encounter Lance-Corporal Sellar was severely wounded".

Colonel Brownlow's force during the attack consisted of 194 Officers and Men of the 72nd Highlanders, 70 Officers and Men of the 92nd Highlanders and 422 of the Guides



The 72nd lost 2 Officers and 9 Men killed, 1 Officer and 25 Men wounded at Asmai Heights. The medal to the other 72nd Officer Killed at Asami Heights; Captain Spens, was sold at DNW in September 2004 (£8500/£10,300)

A very good contemporary account of the action can be read here:

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP18960820.2.10>



Condition near mint, still retaining frosted finish to bust. A quite superb and extremely rare medal to a Highland Officer Killed in Afghanistan.