

**A FINE AFGHANISTAN 1878 TO THE ONLY OFFICER OF THE 66TH FOOT WHO WAS LEFT AT KANDAHAR DURING THE BATTLE OF MAIWAND. HIS DIARY OF THE AFTERMATH, THE SIEGE AND BATTLE OF KANDAHAR, BEING A RARE NARRATIVE OF THESE EVENTS BY A JUNIOR OFFICER**



AFGHANISTAN 1878-80, CLASP, KANDAHAR 'LIEUT. C. M. EDWARDS. 66TH. FOOT.'

Charles McKenzie Edwards, a Gentleman Cadet at the Royal Military College was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the 66th (Berkshire) Regiment of Foot on 22 January 1879. Promoted Lieutenant on 14 November 1879, he served with the 66th during the Second Afghan War. During the campaign of Lieutenant Edwards was with the main body of the 66th stationed at Kandahar in June 1880 but when the Regiment marched out of Kandahar as part of Burrows force on 5 July, Edwards was left in charge of around 25 men of the 66th who were left at the fort for administration purposes or were sick.

When news broke of the defeat at Maiwand, Edwards commenced writing a diary, written between 27 July and 9 September 1880. Consisting of the siege and battle of Kandahar, Edward's daily diary entries are of a most interesting nature as they are written by an Officer of the 66th who three weeks previous (and no doubt to his own disappointment), had watched his fellow Officers and men march out of the cantonments but was now watching the remnants drag themselves back. His diary is published in the outstanding *'Maiwand, The Last Stand of The 66th..'* by Richard J Stacpoole-Ryding. Some extracts from the diary follow:



*"27th July: News arrived 1.30am 'total defeat of General Burrows' Brigade. The poor 66th Regiment cut to pieces. Ordered at once to quit cantonments and retire into the fort. The whole day remnants of the Brigade kept coming in. Was very seedy and knocked up. Could not get any transport to take away kits, so lost the lot. There need not have been such a hurry. I think it was all confusion"*

*"July 28th: Our hopes for more arrivals was doomed to disappointment. On guard at 6pm"*

*"July 30th: Hard at work strengthening the place. Mounted guns on South Citadel redoubt. All Pathans ordered to leave the city."*

*"July 31st: Mounted guard at Badurain Gate. Pathans were being turned out. Reports say 276 killed, 2 Officers and 25 men wounded, including Doctor, Colours gone. Sorrowful day."*

*"1st August: Smart skirmish with the enemy, Poona Horse and 28th they killed 25 men"*

*"3rd August: In working party outside the Heart Gate. The enemy and strong party had worked around fighting. One man, 28th N.I. killed, and one man, 7th R.F. wounded. Bullets all over the place."*



LIEUTENANT EDWARDS

During the following days, the enemy increased its strength around Kandahar and Edwards diary would note he was variously serving in scouting parties, company and guard duty as well as serving as the 66th's Orderly Officer. He also notes fire being fired into a deserted village (Deh Kwaja)

*"12th August: This morning we has 24 shells into us, not doing the least hard. I buried Pte Holmes in the morning, have the evening before put poor Evans into his last resting place. My batman, Cunningham, wounded in the arms, poor fellow, I hope he will get safely over it."*

*"16th August: A party of 3 Sowars and 800 Infantry went out to attack the village opposite the Kabul and Badurain Gates. This was thought to be lightly held but sad to say this was not the case. It was strongly fortified and every horse loopholed. We suffered fearfully. 14 Officers killed and wounded and about 250 rank and file.... I was on the top Khana (Topkhana) gate and I think we bagged about 16 of the enemy from the bastion. A gun on Piquet Hill of the enemy said to be dismantled....."*

This was the disastrous sortie to the village of Deh Kwaja. The 66th were not involved bar those like Edwards who were firing in support from the cantonments. The 7th Royal Fusiliers were the main British force and suffered severely. During the retreat under fire, the 7th Fusiliers gained 1 VC's and 7 DCM's, mainly for acts of gallantry in bringing in wounded. For more details of this battle, see the following listing:

[https://www.jagermedals.com/\\_shop\\_section/medal\\_groups\\_and\\_gallantry/j3241.html](https://www.jagermedals.com/_shop_section/medal_groups_and_gallantry/j3241.html)

A week later, Edwards would form part of the party sent to Deh Kwaja to bury the dead:

*"24th August: Deh Kwaza quite deserted. We went and buried the dead, who were in frightful condition. Most of them recognised. Plenty of Bhosa and grain brought in and plenty more there. Ayab Khan gone."*

In the coming days, another visit to Deh Kwaja followed, and Edwards daily tells of the advance of Roberts reliving column.

*"31st August: Roberts marched in and what a splendid force he has, the 92nd (Highlanders) especially looking fine. He gave the men their breakfast and immediately set off to attack the enemy and gained a good position for the real attack the next day"*



Edwards would be at the battle of Kandahar the next day. Four companies of the 66th were present, mainly made up of the force from the 66th who had been detached from the Regiment and had come in with Roberts force. However some of the surviving Officers and men who had been at Maiwand reinforced these, as did Lieutenant Edwards.



*"1st September: Victory at Baba Wali (or whatever they chose to call it). After some splendid and hard fighting we sent them to the right- about. Captured some 31 guns and their camp, and cavalry were ordered to pursue them for 15 miles. Poor Mclean had his head almost cut off by the brutes and his body was found and is to be buried tomorrow. Such an awful sight I never wish to see again."*

*"3rd September: Rode to inspect Ayab Khans camp and in a good position it was too, but they never attempted to hold it but bolted like blazes"*

*"4th September: Still working at the camp. I was on guard duty all day at the Shiker Pre gate to search and to see no arms came into the city. Very slow work but had the pleasure when I came back of getting letters from all friends. 'by jove', what it is to get letters after one has been shut up for 5 weeks."*

*"9th September: C.M. on prisoners taken by Alab Khan. Part of Payne's force going to Musia in the evening. We had rain, which I hope will producer a change oif weather."*



OFFICERS OF THE 66TH AFTER THEIR RETURN FROM AFGHANISTAN (EDWARDS TOP ROW 3RD RIGHT)

This was Edwards final diary entry for the Afghan War

On 15 September 1882, Edwards was seconded to the 21st Bengal Infantry as a Wing Officer and was promoted Captain on 28 January 1884. He served in the Sudan Expedition of 1885-6, including the reconaissance to Hasheen, the actions at Hasheen and Tofrek, the operations and destruction of Tamia, and the action at Ginnig. Promoted Major in 1898, he saw further service during the Boer War, and retired with the rank of Colonel in 19-01. Recalled for War service in 1914, he raised the 7th Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment, but being too old to proceed with them to the Front was instead given command of a Garrison Battalion of the Royal Irish Fusiliers. He died in 1917.



Condition VF, some contact wear. A fine medal to the only Officer of the 66th left at Kandahar during the battle of Maiwand. His diary of the aftermath, the siege and battle of Kandahar, being a rare narrative of these events by a junior Officer