

**THE EXCEPTIONAL AND IMPORTANT OFFICERS FAMILY GROUP RELATING TO TWO OF THE MOST DISASTROUS BATTLES TO BEFALL THE 24<sup>TH</sup> FOOT IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY; THE FATHER A CAPTAIN OF THE 24<sup>TH</sup> FOOT WAS SHOT THROUGH THE LEGS AND TAKEN PRISONER AT THE BATTLE OF TALAVERA, HIS ELDEST SON, AND ENSIGN OF THE 24<sup>TH</sup> FOOT WAS KILLED WHILST CARRYING THE REGIMENTAL COLOURS AT CHILIANWALA, ANOTHER SON, A LIEUTENANT, SERVED WITH THE 6<sup>TH</sup> FOOT AGAINST THE BAZOTI BLACK MOUNTAIN TRIBES IN 1864 AND THE GRANDSON SERVED WITH THE ROYAL MARINES ON THE WESTERN FRONT IN 1916**



MILITARY GENERAL SERVICE 1793, CLASP TALAVERA 'CHAS COLLIS, CAPT 24TH FOOT', PUNJAB 1848, CLASP CHILIANWALA 'ENSIGN H.C.B. COLLIS, 24TH FOOT', INDIA GENERAL SERVICE 1854, CLASP NORTHWEST FRONTIER 'LIEUT. G.W.R. COLLIS H.M'S 1ST BN.6TH REGT.', BRITISH WAR AND VICTORY MEDAL 1914-20 '2ND LIEUT. C.R.H. COLLIS, R.M.', SPECIAL CONSTABULARY LONG SERVICE MEDAL G.VR 'CHARLES R.H. COLLIS'

#### **LIEUT COLONEL CHARLES COLLIS 24<sup>TH</sup> FOOT**

Charles Collis was born on 2 December 1784 in High Holburn, Middlesex and was commissioned Ensign of the 5th Foot on 23 January 1800. Advanced to Lieutenant on 17 September 1803, he became Captain of the 24<sup>th</sup> Foot on 31 October 1805. Serving with the 2/24<sup>th</sup>, he landed with his battalion at Lisbon in April 1809 for service in the Peninsular campaign. Serving alongside the 2/31<sup>st</sup> and 1/45<sup>th</sup> in Mackenzie's Brigade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, the 2/24<sup>th</sup> were among the small number of British troops engaged in the combat at Casa de Salinas on 27 July 1809, where the battalion suffered just 9 casualties of the 447 lost by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division. However the following day at Talavera, the 2/24<sup>th</sup> suffered an horrendous number of casualties when supporting the Guards, many of the wounded being burned to

death when the grass they were fighting over caught fire. Captain Collis was among the wounded, being shot through the legs and was left on the field of battle, where he subsequently taken prisoner by the French. After treatment for his wounds, he arrived at the notorious fortress of Verdun on 13 May 1810, remaining in French hands until released in April 1814.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Talavera](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Talavera)

According to analysis in Michael Lewis's *'Napoleon and his British Captives'* the Army accounted for only 25%, or 1,000 officers and other ranks, of a total of 4,000 British sailors and soldiers held as prisoners of war by Napoleon. Lewis indicates that a total of 229 Army officers were held as prisoners during the Napoleonic War. A particularly high number of officers were taken prisoner after Talavera, many wounded; Lewis indicating no less than 52. In addition, analysis suggests that perhaps 16 Surgeons and Assistant Surgeons elected to attend to the needs of the wounded after the battle in full knowledge that they would fall into captivity as Wellington's forces left the field. Captain Collis's period of captivity would have been spent largely on parole in Verdun, this at his own expense, having given his word not to attempt escape. He was released with the termination of the war with Napoleon in April 1814. Five other wounded officers of the 24th were left on the field at Talavera and subsequently taken prisoner. Assistant Surgeon Elkington of the 24th was also taken prisoner and it is likely he was one of those who volunteered to stay behind with the wounded.

After his release by the French, Collis's wounds prevented him from continuing active military service, though he was promoted Brevet Major 12 August 1819. He subsequently exchanged on half-pay of the 84<sup>th</sup> Foot in December that year, receiving a pension of £100 due to wounds received at Talavera. He was finally advanced to Lieutenant Colonel (half-pay) on 10 January 1837.

Collis had married in 1825 at the age of 40, Emily Ridsdon, with who he would have 8 children; 3 daughters and five sons, by which time he was living in Milverton, Somerset. Of his sons, his eldest, Hector Crabb Bartholomew Collis, would follow his father into the 24<sup>th</sup> Foot and was killed at the battle of Chillianwalla in 1849. His 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> sons, Algernon Charles Lukyn Ridsale Collis (1832-1847) and Wyndham Trevellian Browne Collis (1834-1845) both died in youth and were buried in Somerset. However his 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> sons followed their father and elder brother into the army, joining the 6<sup>th</sup> Warwickshire Regiment of Foot. The 4<sup>th</sup> son Gustavus Wheatley Berry Collis (1840-1910) was Commissioned Ensign, 6<sup>th</sup> Foot on 24 April 1858 and retired from the army with the Honorary rank of Major on 17 April 1880. The 5<sup>th</sup> son Augustus Randolph Adolphus Collis (1842 -1913) was Commissioned Ensign, 6<sup>th</sup> Foot on 27 April 1860, Lieutenant, 1 December 1865 and Captain 12 May 1875. He served alongside his brother until Gustavas retired from the army in 1880 and Augustus retired himself the following year with the Honorary rank of Major. Unlike Gustavas, he did not serve in the Hazara campaign and had no medal entitlement.

Lieutenant Colonel Charles Collis died on 26 August 1849 a few months after the death of his eldest son. A memorial tablet in memory of Charles and Hector was placed in St Peter and St Paul Church, Bishop's Hull, Taunton, Somerset, where it still resides:

"THIS TABLET IS ERECTED TO THE MEMORY OF LIEUT COL CHARLES COLLIS AND HIS ELDEST SON, ENSIGN HECTOR C. B. COLLIS, BOTH OF H.M. 24<sup>TH</sup> REGT. LIEUT COL COLLIS WAS SEVERELY WOUNDED AND TAKEN PRISONER AT THE BATTLE OF TALAVERA IN 1809 AND DIES AT WILTON ON 26 AUGUST 1849, AGE YEARS. ENSIGN COLLIS WAS KILLED CARRYING THE QUEEN'S COLOUR AT CHILLIANWALLAH ON 13<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 1849 IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> YEAR OF HIS AGE."



## ENSIGN HECTOR CRABB BARTHOLOMEW COLLIS 24<sup>TH</sup> FOOT

Hector Crabb Bartholomew Collis was born in Milverton in 1828 and was Commissioned Ensign, 24<sup>th</sup> Foot on 7 April 1846. He embarked aboard Coromandel with a portion of his regiment for India on 7 May 1846, arriving at Calcutta on 29 September. After several moves, the 24<sup>th</sup> arrived at Agra on 5 March 1847 but with the revolt at Mooltan in April 1848, the regiment was one of those called for duty in the Punjab. Arriving at Ferozepore on 4 November, the 24<sup>th</sup> brigaded with two Bengal Native Infantry regiments (25<sup>th</sup> and 45<sup>th</sup>) to form the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade under Colonel John Pennycuik of the 24<sup>th</sup>. On 13 January, Ensign Collis was present at the battle of Chillianwala when he carried the Regimental Colour into action. During this hard fought battle, half the regiment were killed or wounded during a gallant but confused charge on the Sikh guns. After running the gauntlet of fire, still carry the colour, Ensign Collis was killed amid a shower of grape shot within yards of the muzzles of the Sikh guns. According to the Regimental history:

*"In wading through the sea of jungle in the attack on the Sikh position, the men were often completely lost to view but the colours, which were uncased, served as a sure mark to the enemy's gunners and the officers carrying them – Lieutenant Phillips and Ensign Collis, the latter the son of an old Peninsular officer of the regiment- as well as all the sergeants of the colour-party, were killed."*

The Queen's Colour was never found; however the Regimental Colour was taken Ensign Collis's body by Private Richard Perry and now hangs in Brecon Cathedral. The Regimental history tells how a small portion of colour-belt and clasp was taken from the body of Ensign Collis before burial and this was later presented to his family.



THE ABOVE FROM A PERIOD ENGRAVING ENTITLED 'FINDING THE COLOURS OF THE 24TH REGIMENT AFTER THE BATTLE OF CHILIANWALLAH, JANUARY 1849'. THOUGH THIS DEPICTS THE COLOUR BEING TAKEN FROM ENSIGN COLLIS'S BODY AFTER THE BATTLE, IT WAS AS RELATED TAKEN BY PRIVATE PERRY DURING THE BATTLE.



## MAJOR GUSTAVUS WHEATLEY BERRY COLLIS 6<sup>TH</sup> FOOT

Gustavus Wheatley Berry Collis (1840-1910) was Commissioned Ensign, 6th Foot on 24 April 1858, Lieutenant, 1 December 1862, Captain, 27 February 1875, Honorary rank of Major 17 April 1880 and retired. He took part in the 1864 campaign against the Bazoti Black Mountain Tribes and was awarded the India General Service Medal with Northwest Frontier clasp.

## LIEUTENANT CHARLES ROBERT HANSLER COLLIS RMLI

Charles Robert Hansler Collis, son of Major Augustus Randolph Adolphus Collis (Colonel Charles Collis's youngest son.), was born in Dawlish, Devon, on 5 March 1885. He was commissioned Temporary 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, Royal Marine Light Infantry on 7 October 1915. Serving with the Plymouth Division, he was advanced to Lieutenant 7 October 1916 and demobilised 26 May 1919. He served in France from 7 July 1916 and joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Marine Battalion, 63<sup>rd</sup> Naval Division, in 'the field' at Fosse, five days later. The War diary notes Collis attended battalion bomb school between 6 and 12 August and then back to the trenches at Angres II. On 29 August 1916 he was admitted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Ambulance suffering from general debility but rejoined on 3 October 1916. His records are not very clear and say \*\*\* 'left leg', 2 November 1916, when he was sent to 1st Field Ambulance. He was invalided back to England on 11 November 1916. He later served in the Special Constabulary, being awarded the Long Service Medal. He died in 1966, Exeter district, Devon.



Condition; couple of EK's to first two, or NEF, IGS/WW1 pair better. All with attractive patina and original ribbons, the MGS/Punjab these on their original long ribbons. Medals came from the family, but alas the family no longer had Ensign Collis's Colour Belt section when purchased from them. Presumably the medals were handed down through the line of Major Augustus Randolph Adolphus Collis.

A quite outstanding and important group relating to Officers casualties of the 24<sup>th</sup> Foot, which along with Isandhlwana, Talavera and Chillianwala being the most disastrous battles in the regiments history, for which medals were awarded.

#### **THE BATTLE OF TALAVERA, 28TH JULY 1809**

“The 24th was probably one of the unluckiest regiments in the British army. They suffered great disasters in their history and Talavera was one of them. The recently formed 2nd battalion embarked for Portugal in April 1809, commanded by Lieut-Col Drummond, with a strength of 39 sergeants, 22 drummers and 778 rank and file, plus 4 boys. They were brigaded with the 27th, 31st and 45th regiments under Major-General MacKenzie and made some long and tiring marches. There was widespread dysentery and the men had not been fed properly for three days. On top of this the regimental baggage had been plundered by Spaniards.

On the 28th July the army of Wellesley faced the French under Joseph Bonaparte next to the River Tagus at Talavera. MacKenzie's brigade was in the middle and slightly back from the Guards brigade. There was an opening of artillery fire which killed many men and they were ordered to lie down. At 9am the firing ceased and a lull gave them time to remove the wounded. Then the French attacked General Campbell's division on the right of the line which came under great pressure. The 24th moved over to their right and fired on the French column which was forced to retire.

The regiment were then ordered to move back to their original position to support the Brigade of Guards, which they did as fast as they could but the Guards had charged forward to attack. The 24th took up a position vacated by the Guards but had to wheel back by companies to allow the retreating Guards through. They provided a steady fire on the French to cover the retreat. The battalion was badly depleted by now and could only form a single rank. Also the burning grass claimed many casualties, as men were burned to death or blown up by the powder they carried”.

Nearly all the officers were wounded, with one killed; Lieutenant Colonel Drummond leading 2/24th was seriously wounded, as was Major Popham, Captains Collis and Evans (last fatally so), Lieutenants Easter, Grant, and Skene, Ensign's Jesseman and Johnson with lesser injuries to Lieutenants Anderson, Stack and Vardy The rank and file lost 355 killed and wounded, or approximately 45% casualties. Only the 2nd Line Battalion, King's German Legion would lose more men with a total of 387





THE 24<sup>TH</sup> FOOT AT TALAVERA

“Some months later the officer commanding the battalion read the despatch of the battle and saw that the 48th regiment had received all the credit for supporting the Guards, with no mention of the 24th. He remonstrated with Lord Wellington who agreed that the 24th should be given credit and sent a letter home to that effect. But the letter was lost in the Marlborough Packet and did not get published. Thus the histories of the battle failed to mention the terrible sacrifice made by the 2nd battalion. The 24th were, however, awarded the battle honour TALAVERA on the 29th July 1817.”

Talavera was Sir Arthur Wellesley's first great battle after his return to the Peninsula in 1809 and he was elevated to the Peerage of the United Kingdom on 26 August 1809 as Viscount Wellington of Talavera

Most of the above taken from the following excellent website:

<https://www.britishempire.co.uk/forces/armyunits/britishinfantry/24thfoot.htm>

## **THE BATTLE OF CHILLIANWALA FROM HISTORICAL RECORDS OF THE 24TH FOOT**

“..Now, let it be said that the 24th carried the guns with the bayonet, "without firing a shot." This was about 3 p.m. With Mowatt's field battery between them, and three guns, under Lieutenant Robertson, on the extreme left, and companies of skirmishers extended in front, the two brigades then advanced by the left at a given signal, and after clearing about two hundred yards, entered a dense jungle, which precluded the possibility of seeing a hundred yards in any direction. On emerging with Hoggan's brigade into comparatively open ground at the end of half-a-mile, Colin Campbell first became aware that not only was his division not supported by eighteen horse-artillery guns, under Colonel Brind, as the commander-in-chief had promised it should be, but that the divisional guns had been withdrawn, without his knowledge or consent by some staff officer, whose name remains unrecorded. The advance of the entire division was thus unsupported by artillery, it being the only one so treated. Meanwhile, Pennycuik's brigade, consisting of the 24th Regiment, covered by its grenadier company under Captain Travers, extended as skirmishers, with the 25th Bengal Infantry on its

right and the 45th Bengal Infantry on its left, was pitted against the Sikh centre, the exact position of which was not known, although it could be clearly seen whence the round shot came that poured into the ranks with increasing fury. It had originally been intended that the attack on the centre should be simultaneous with those of Hoggan's brigade on the left and Mountain's brigade on the right, but this was frustrated by the impetuosity of the 24th, who began to charge when they were still twelve hundred yards away from the guns, thereby outstripping the native corps on their flanks, and imperceptibly inclining towards the right at the same time, so that the right of the regiment was engaged before the left was up. Within fifteen minutes from the start, the struggling line emerged into a small opening, broken by pools and scattered trees, at the far side of which was the Sikh battery, occupying a small natural berme. A moment's pause, a headlong rush, and the guns were won, and the men busy spiking them, some having been provided with jagged nails for the purpose. But the Sikhs returned to the conflict, and after furious fighting, friends and foes in one tangled mass around the captured guns, the shattered remains of the 24th were forced back into the jungle.



THE 24TH FOOT CHARGING THE GUNS AT CHILLIANWALA. NOTE THE COLOURS TO THE LEFT

*"It is impossible," wrote the future Sir Colin, "for any troops to have surpassed H.M. 24th Foot in the gallantry displayed in the assault. This single regiment actually broke the enemy's line, and took the large number of guns in their front, the commanding officers of the brigade and regiment, together with numerous subordinate officers, dying at the captured guns. Finding itself surrounded, and the leaders having been killed, half the regiment being hors de combat, a ruinous retreat became inevitable. While retreating, it met the Native Infantry, which then turned also. In a very difficult country, where sight is so much obstructed, it might be wrong to impute blame to the native regiments ; but, while sparing censure on them, it would be in the highest degree culpable not to mark, with the utmost precision, the circumstances in which a gallant regiment found itself, after a devotion to duty which has rarely been equalled, and never surpassed."*

In retiring, several groups of men rallied in the jungle, but it was thought best to get back into the open ground. Lieutenant Lawrence Archer and Colour-Sergeant Eastall rallied the remains of No. 7 company in the village of Chillianwallah. They were joined by men of other companies, and by Ensign Hinde, Lieutenant Clark, Ensign Baillie, Lieutenants Mackechnie,



Drew, and Lutman, and again advanced in line by order of Colonel, now Sir Edward, Lugard, the adjutant-general of the Queen's troops, who rode away to the front before them. Captain Blachford, with a party of men, joined during the advance, and also many more collected by Lieutenant Berry, who, though wounded, had remained on the field. The regiment advanced to the support of Hoggan's and Mountain's brigades, but the Sikhs by this time were in full retreat towards Russool, having abandoned the guns they had fought so hard to save.....

The regimental loss was exceedingly heavy. One-half of the men and two-thirds of the officers were killed or wounded. Brigadier Peunyuick, a grey-haired veteran of many Indian campaigns, was shot through the heart during the advance. His son, the junior ensign, a stripling fresh from Sandhurst, was shot dead over his father's body. Lieutenant-Colonel Brookes, Captains Travers and Shore, and other officers fell at the muzzles of the Sikh guns. Major Howell Paynter's horse bolted with him out of fire, but not before the rider had received a shot through the lungs that ultimately proved fatal. Major Henry Harris, a tall portly old officer, whose horse had been shot under him, was seen by Lawrence Archer as the men were falling back, in a state of great exhaustion. He is believed to have been cut down by a Sikh sowar who had previously ridden at Archer.





General Lutman dashingly spiked a hot gun with his own hands. He came out of the conflict untouched. Lieutenant Williams had the fastening of his sword-belt struck by a ball, which, in spotting phrase, "knocked the wind out of him," just before reaching the guns. He fell into a bush, and the Sikh horsemen, swooping by, cut at and prodded him, inflicting on him twenty-three wounds with sword and lance. His skull was fractured, and his left hand sliced off at the wrist, a loss of which he only became aware when attempting to wipe away the blood fast streaming into his eyes from the fresh sword-cuts.

Thanks to a vigorous constitution he speedily recovered from his injuries, and is still living. Thelwall, the lieutenant of the grenadier company — afterwards the late Major-General Thelwall, C.B. — had also a fortunate escape. He was regimental orderly officer, and mounted for the day. His horse was killed under him, and he himself severely wounded in the thigh. Not long before, he had parted with a favourite horse to Captain C. R. Harris, the major of brigade. After that officer was killed, the horse, wandering riderless in the jungle, recognised and came up to its old master, and was the means of carrying him out of danger. In wading through the sea of jungle in the attack on the Sikh position, the men were often completely lost to view, but the Colours, which were uncased, served as a sure mark to the enemy's gunners, and the officers carrying them — Lieutenant Phillips and Ensign Collis, the latter the son of an old Peninsular officer of the regiment — as well as all the sergeants of the colour-party, were killed.



The Queen's Colour was never found. It was supposed that when the bearer was shot it dropped into a pool through which the Colour-party struggled. According to one account the staff was broken, and the colour was rescued by Private Martin Connolly, of the regiment, who wrapped it round his body, but he was subsequently killed. It seems certain that it never came into the hands of the enemy, or Shere Singh would assuredly have shown it to his prisoner, Lieutenant Bowie. The reasonable supposition is that it was looted for the sake of the embroidery by our own camp followers, who were very busy that night. The officers offered a large reward for its recovery, but without success. The Regimental Colour (now in Warwick Church) was brought in by No. 841, Private Richard Perry, an old soldier, who for this distinguished service was promoted to corporal 30th June, 1849, and sergeant 1st July, 1850. A small portion of colour-belt, with clasp, taken from the body of Ensign Collis before burial, was presented to his family.

On the morrow of the battle the bodies of the thirteen officers and of Sergeant-Major Coffee were brought in by a patrol and reverently laid in the officers' mess tent until evening, when they received burial on the mound before spoken of, near the village of Chillianwallah, upon which now stands an obelisk to the memory of the slain, f An attempt was made to bring in the bodies of the non-commissioned officers and men, but this was found impracticable. The melancholy duty of collecting and interring the bodies of the rest of the dead on the field of battle was therefore performed by the flank companies on the following day, the Sikhs, who came down in a threatening manner, looking on from a distance the while. “