

A VERY SCARCE SUTLEJ 1845 AWARDED TO AN OFFICERS OF THE 53RD FOOT WHO WAS WOUNDED AT BOTH THE BATTLE OF ALIWAL AND SOBRAON



SUTLEJ 1845-46, ALIWAL REVERSE, CLASP, SOBRAON 'LIEUT JOHN CHESTER 53RD REGT'

John Chester, eldest son of Lt-General John Chester, was born on 6 May 1823 and was Commissioned Ensign of the 53rd (Shropshire) Regiment of Foot on 2 October 1840. Purchasing a lieutenancy on 1 July 1842, in August 1844 the 53rd Embarked for service in Bengal and landed in Calcutta in December. Proceeding to Cawnpore, in November 1845, the 53rd were and at Agra at the outbreak of the Sikh war, they proceeded to Dehli. Ordered to join the Army on the Sutlej in January 1846, the 53rd formed part of Sir Harry Smith's detached force. Chester took part in the action of Baddowal, 21 January 1846 and the brilliant victory at Aliwal a week later, Lieutenant Chester being wounded during the latter battle:.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Anglo-Sikh_war

His wounds not being debilitating nature, on 10 February 1846, Lieutenant Chester was present with his regiment at the great battle of Sobron, the decisive battle of the campaign. During the battle he was severely wounded, being 'shot through the lungs and back'.

Recovering from his wounds, he purchased a Captaincy on 3 December 1847, he exchanged into the

85th Foot on 6 December 1850. He was appointed Staff Officer of Pensioners on 1 May 1858 and advanced to Major on 20 February 1859, before retiring from the army shortly after.

John Chester's grandfather, brother to the 1st Lord Bagot, assumed the name Chester, and afterwards that of St Leger, under the will of his cousin, but it was not until 1863 that the surnames of John and his wife Philippa. were changed to St Leger. After changing his name to St Leger, John became a magistrate for Norfolk and the West Riding of Yorkshire and held the office of Justice of the Peace.

St Leger resided at Park Hill, Yorkshire, and later died on 9 August 1905.

His Army list entry:

"Major St. Leger served with the 53rd Regt. in the Sutlej campaign of 1845-6, including the affair at Buddiwal, and battles of Aliwal (wounded) and Sobraon (severely wounded by a musket ball through the body): Medal and Clasp."



From Historical Record of the Fifty-Third or the Shropshire Regiment of Foot:

"Reinforcements accordingly proceeded to the frontier, and the FIFTY-THIRD was one of the regiments ordered to join the Army of the Sutlej. The regiment, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Harry Shakespear Phillips, marched from Delhi on the 5th of January, 1846, and arrived at Kurnaul on the 10th of that month: two days afterwards the FIFTY-THIRD marched to join the portion of the army detached under the command of Major-General Sir Harry Smith, who was proceeding to the relief of Loodianah (celebrated for its manufacture of imitative Cashmere shawls), which was threatened by a force of twenty thousand Sikhs under the command of Runjoor Singh. The junction was effected on the 21st of January, on which day the regiment suffered severely from the heavy fire of the enemy's artillery on the march to Loodianah, sustaining a loss of thirty-six men killed. Major-General Sir Harry Smith, by a series of skilful movements, avoided a regular engagement, and effected his communication with Loodianah, but not without severe loss."

On the 28th of January the Major-General determined to attack the Sikhs under Runjoor Singh in their strong position at Aliwal and the result was a splendid victory. Runjoor Singh's camp, with all his baggage, ammunition, and stores, fell into the hands of the victors, and the left wing of the Sikh army was thus almost completely disorganised.

Her Majesty's FIFTY-THIRD, and the thirtieth native infantry, formed the third brigade, under Brigadier Wilson, and were opposed upon the left to the "Aieen" troops, called Avitabiles when the conflict was fiercely raging. The enemy, driven back on his left and centre, endeavoured to hold his right to cover the passage of the river; and strongly occupied the village of Bhoondree, which was carried by the FIFTY-THIRD at the point of the bayonet: the regiment then moved forward, in support of the thirtieth native infantry, by the right of the village.

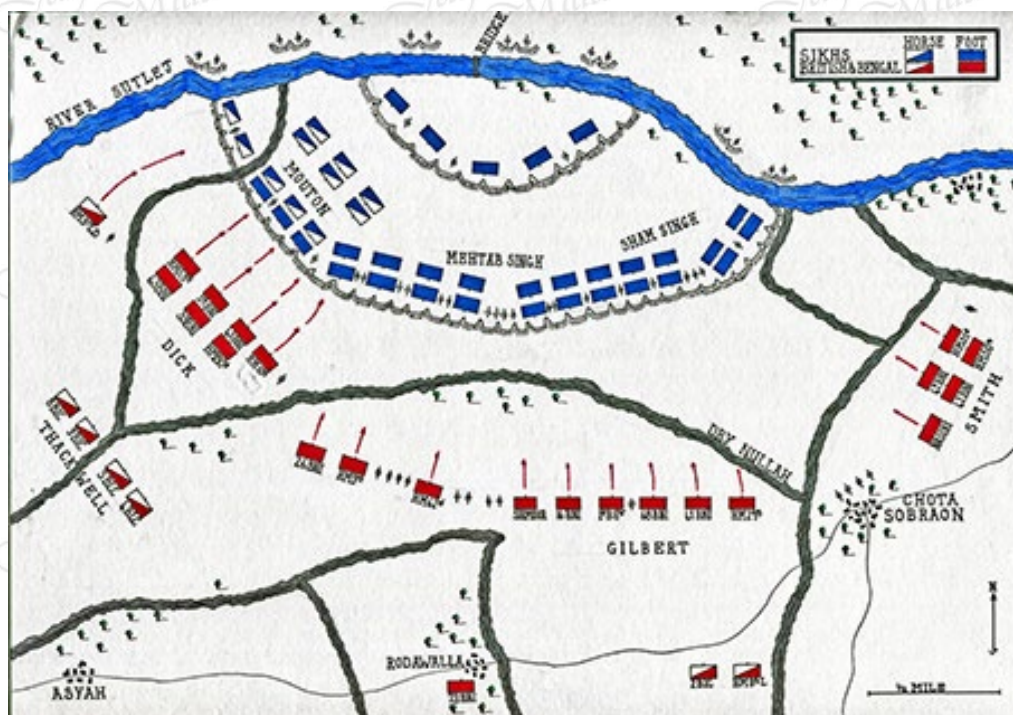
After expressing his thanks to Lieut.-Colonel Phillips of the FIFTY-THIRD regiment, Major-General Sir Harry Smith added in his official despatch:--

"I have only to report upon Her Majesty's FIFTY-THIRD, a young regiment, but veterans in daring gallantry and regularity; and Lieut.-Colonel Phillips's bravery and coolness attracted the attention of myself and every staff-officer I sent to him."

The casualties of the regiment were limited to three men killed and eight wounded.

Although the Sikh army was much disheartened at the sight of the numerous bodies which floated from the battle-field to the bridge of boats at Sobraon, yet in a few days they appeared as confident as ever of being able to retain their entrenched position, and to prevent the passage of the river.

On the 3rd of February the regiment marched from Aliwal, and joined the head-quarters of the Army of the Sutlej on the 8th of that month. The heavy ordnance having arrived, the Commander-in-Chief resolved to storm the formidable entrenchments of the Sikhs at Sobraon and finally expel them from the territory they had invaded. This was an undertaking of some magnitude. It was ascertained that the entrenchments were defended by thirty thousand of their bravest troops; besides being united by a good bridge to a reserve on the opposite bank of the river, on which was stationed a considerable camp, with artillery, which commanded and flanked their field-works on the British side of the Sutlej.



On the 10th of February the FIFTY-THIRD formed part of the attacking division, on the extreme left of the army, under the command of Major-General Sir Robert Dick. It had been intended that the cannonade should have commenced at daybreak, but the heavy mist, which hung over the field and

river, rendered it necessary to delay operations until the sun's rays had cleared the atmosphere. Meanwhile, on the margin of the Sutlej, two brigades of Major-General Sir Robert Dick's division, under his personal command, stood ready to commence the assault against the extreme right of the Sikhs. His seventh brigade, in which was the tenth foot, reinforced by the FIFTY-THIRD regiment, and led by Brigadier Stacy, was to head the attack, supported at two hundred yards distance by the sixth brigade under Brigadier Wilkinson. The part the FIFTY-THIRD sustained in the conflict cannot be better expressed than in the words of the despatch of the Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Hugh Gough:--

"At nine o'clock, Brigadier Stacy's brigade, supported on either flank by Captains Horseford's and Fordyce's batteries, and Lieut.-Colonel Lane's troop of horse artillery, moved to the attack in admirable order. The infantry and guns aided each other correlatively. The former marched steadily on in line, which they halted only to correct when necessary. The latter took up successive positions at the gallop, until at length they were within three hundred yards of the heavy batteries of the Sikhs; but notwithstanding the regularity and coolness, and scientific character of this assault, which Brigadier Wilkinson well supported, so hot was the fire of cannon, musketry, and zumboorucks kept up by the Khalsa troops, that it seemed for some moments impossible that the entrenchments could be won under it; but soon persevering gallantry triumphed, and the whole army had the satisfaction to see the gallant Brigadier Stacy's soldiers driving the Sikhs in confusion before them within the area of their encampment. The tenth foot, under Lieut.-Colonel Franks, now for the first time brought into serious contact with the enemy, greatly distinguished themselves. This regiment never fired a shot until it had got within the works of the enemy. The onset of Her Majesty's FIFTY-THIRD was as gallant and effective. The forty-third and fifty-ninth native infantry, brigaded with them, emulated both in cool determination...

One Officer; Captain Warren and eight rank and file of the 53rd regiment were killed. Eight Officers were wounded, two of whom; Captain Smart and Lieutenant Clarke died in a few days of their wounds. Lieutenant Dunning, who was promoted after the battle, also died of his wound on the 6th of April following. One serjeant and one hundred and four rank and file were wounded, twelve of these men later died of their wounds.

See this fine website for details of the various battles etc:

<https://www.anglosikhwars.com/battles/>



Condition VF, light contact marks. Sold with digital research

A scarce 53rd foot medal to an officer wounded at two battles during the first Sikh War