

THE FINE AND UNIQUE I.G.S. 1854 TO AND OFFICER 2ND SOUTH WALES BORDERERS, ATTACHED TO THE 11TH N.I., WHO WAS THE FIRST OFFICER TO BE KILLED DURING THE THIRD BURMA WAR; LEADING HIS COMPANY AT THE ASSAULT AT MINH LA FORT, 17 NOVEMBER 1885, THIS THE FIRST AND MOST SIGNIFICANT BATTLE OF THE CONFLICT. A SCHOOL FRIEND OF KIPLING'S, HE WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR HIS POEM 'ARITHMETIC ON THE FRONTIER'. LATER POSTHUMOUSLY MENTIONED IN LT GENERAL PREDERGAST'S DESPATCH, 26 MARCH 1886. 15 OFFICERS KILLED DURING THE THIRD BURMESE AND GUERRILLA WAR 1885-7, THIS OFFICER THE ONLY ONE TO BE KILLED BEFORE THE OFFICIAL SURRENDER



INDIA GENERAL SERVICE 1854-95, CLASP, BURMA 1885-7 'LIEUTT. R. A. T. DURY 11TH. BL. INFY.'

Robert Ashton Theodore Dury was born on 7 July 1863 and was educated at the United Services College, Westward Ho! Commissioned Second Lieutenant in the 2nd Battalion, South Wales Borderers on 25 August 1883. Serving in India, he was attached to the 11th Bengal Infantry in mid-1885. Taking part in the Burmese war of 1885 under General Prendergast, Dury's regiment was one of three that were landed by the river fleet to assault on the stockades at Minhla Fort, 17 November 1885. The advance was stopped by a heavy fire from a prepared position in the middle of dense bush; it took some sharp fighting and more than one bayonet charge before the Burmans were driven back upon Minhla by the 11th Bengal Infantry and the 12th Madras Infantry. During the assault, Lieutenant Dury was killed whilst leading his company, which at that point were leading the assault. Total casualties were 1 officer and 3 men killed, and 4 officers and 23 men wounded.' This the highest number of

casualties suffered by British forces during the campaigns in third Burma war. The Burmese lost 170 killed and 276 prisoners.



Over the next few days, troops and sailors of the Naval Brigade captured a succession of Burmese river defences and gun emplacements at Nyaung-U, Pakokku and Myingyan. As the river fleet pushed on, it threatened to bombard Ava (Inwa), the former royal capital and King Thibaw ordered his troops to surrender on 26 November. Two days later, Mandalay was secured by British soldiers. However a guerilla war continued into 1887.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Anglo-Burmese_War

Lieutenant Dury was the first officer killed during the Third Burma War and strictly speaking the only one to be killed during the war up to the surrender of the King. He is buried at Minhla. A memorial to him is in Rochester Cathedral, the inscription as follows:

"Lieutenant Robert Ashton Theodore Dury, 2nd South Wales Borderers, attached XI Regiment Bengal Infantry. Killed in the assault on Minhla-Burmah. 7 July 1863-17 November 1885. Erected in token of their esteem by his brother officers."

Dury was posthumously Mentioned in Lt General Predergast's despatch, 26 March 1886. He was 1 of 15 Officers killed during third Burmese war and guerilla war 1885-7 but as noted, the only one during up until the official surrender.

THE BATTLE OF MINHLA

The Battle of Minhla, fought on November 17, 1885, was a pivotal moment in the Third Anglo-Burmese War, marking a decisive British victory. It was the first and most significant battle of the conflict, occurring during the British invasion of Burma in 1885. The British and Indian forces, led by Brigadier General White, stormed an Italian-designed fort at Minhla,

encountering fierce resistance from the Burmese garrison. The British ultimately triumphed, but the Burmese resistance was unexpectedly tough, resulting in a high number of Burmese casualties. The battle is considered a "black letter day" in Burmese history

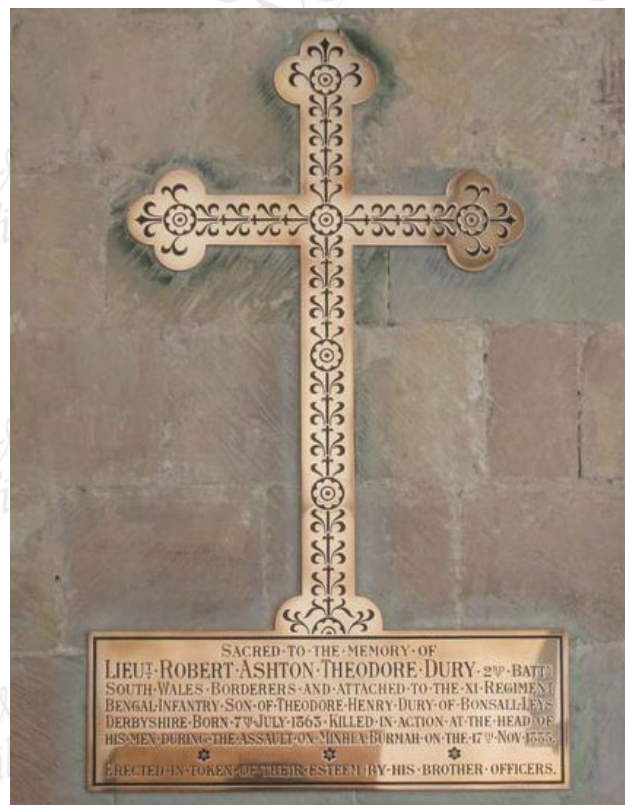
A good account of the battle was published in the Brisbane Courier 8 January 1886:

"THE WAR IN BURMAH - Tho latest news from General Prendergast's expedition was that Dulaj, which is 105 miles beyond the frontier, had been reached on the evening of the 22nd instant, and that the villagers appeared to view the advance of the expedition with Indifference. Papers which were found on one of the two Italian engineers who have been captured, prove that there was an elaborate scheme for blocking the channel of the Irrawaddy and defending the river by torpedoes which had been prepared. This scheme was frustrated by General Prendergast's rapid advance and the capture of the Burmese steamer. The special correspondent of the Standard, telegraphing from Minhla on the 17th of November, gives the following account of the capture of the Burmese position at Minhla :- "The forts on both sides of the Irrawaddy at Minhla were taken by storm to day. Parties were landed simultaneously at Paton ago, on the left bank, and on the opposite bank, a little above Malohn. The troops on the right bank were the 2nd Queen's Own Bengal Native Infantry, the 11th Bengal Native Infantry, and the 12th Madras Native Infantry, under the command of Colonel Harris, of the 11th, and Colonel Baker, of the Queen's Own." Difficulties commenced from the very moment of landing. The jungle, though low, was inconceivably dense; so much so that an advance could only be made along the narrow country lanes. Behind the cactus hedges which lined those lanes the Burmese had concealed themselves and fired upon us from all sorts of unexpected places. The closeness of the thicket-growth and the difficulty of hewing a way through rendered the work of dislodging them, or even of returning their fire, no easy task. This, however, was steadily done, and at length a stockade, about a mile west of the town of Minhla, was reached. In, itself it was too hastily, constructed to be strong; but the surrounding jungle, swarming as it was with the king's troops, made the approach a matter, of extreme difficulty. It was stubbornly held and the Burmese kept up a sustained musketry fire, aided by a few light fieldpieces. The stockade was attacked from two sides, Colonel Harris led the assault on the left or river front, Lieutenant Downes, 'Adjutant of the 11th, that on the right. On the left Lieutenant Dury, temporarily attached to the 11th was mortally wounded while gallantly leading his company. The command was then taken by Major Hill and Captain Peile."



The stockade having been captured by a rush, the Governor's Palace, immediately beyond it; was then taken, and burned. "The troops 'thereupon wheeled to' the right and advanced eastward on the town of Minhla, The country was still thickly covered with jungle, but enough could be' seen to direct the march an 'a high masonry building, which mounted eleven guns, several of them-rifled, beside a number, of jingals and culverins. The Government river-steamer the 'Irrawaddy and the armed launch the Kathleen had for some time been sheiling this position, but without much success in silencing the Burmese fire. Our troops on shore had some severe fighting in the jungle to the north and east of the town before they arrived within striking distance. The thickness of the cover had separated the men, and when the assault was made it was by a dozen men of different regiments. The Bur-mese waited for the attack, which had to be de-livered up a long ramp. The party was gallantly led by Lieutenant Downes, of the 11th Bengal, and Lieutenant Wilkinson, of the 12th Madras. The latter was dangerously wounded by a slash on the head from a sword. The first handful of attackers were backed up by another party under Major Hill."

After the capture of this central post the resistance was slight. "The enemy fled in all directions, and was vigorously followed up, and many were shot down. Great part of the town was burned, aa well as the Governor's residence. The shells from the river fired a few houses, and the conflagration rapidly spread among the flimsy bamboo huts. After the town had been captured, a mine was unexpectedly exploded by I some concealed Italians. The Kathleen, which I was alongside, was undamaged, but had a narrow escape. Major Macneil of the Staff, was wounded early in the day, and, having nevertheless continued to advance, was again hit at the taking of the stockade. His injuries, however, are slight. On the opposite side, where the fort was, the fighting was comparatively unimportant. The troops engaged were the 2nd Battalion of the Liverpool Regiment, the 21st and 25th Madras Native Infantry, and the 1st Madras Pioneer Native Infantry. No officers were wounded here, and only one man of the Liverpool Regiment. The fort was abandoned, so that no assault had to be delivered. The Casualties among the officers were all on the right bank."



From the Illustrated London News, 5 December 1885:

THE LATE LIEUT. DURY.

At the storming of Minhla by the forces of the Burmah Expedition under General Prendergast, on the 17th ult., Lieutenant Dury, of the 2nd Battalion South Wales Borderers, attached to the 11th Bengal Infantry, was the only officer killed, while gallantly leading on his men. Robert Ashton Theodore Dury was the youngest son of the late Mr. Henry Dury, of Bonsal Leys, Derbyshire, formerly of the 10th Hussars. His family shows a long line of soldiers. His great-great-grandfather was General Alexander Dury, some time commanding the Grenadier Guards, who was killed when commanding the rear-guard of the British troops at the battle of St. Cas, in September, 1758. His son, Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Dury, received a commission in the same regiment (Grenadier Guards) when a boy, and left it as Lieutenant-Colonel, having served in Holland with his regiment. A son of this officer, Captain Alexander Dury, was in the Royal Artillery, and died in that regiment when a Captain. Another son was Ensign Francis Dury, who was killed in the American War, obstinately defending the colours of the 19th, in which regiment he was an Ensign. Lieutenant Alexander Dury, a Lieutenant in the 67th Regiment, died in that regiment from the effects of yellow fever, contracted while serving with his regiment in the West Indies. An elder brother of the late Lieutenant Dury is Major Alexander William Dury, late of the 4th King's Own and 54th Regiments, who is at present on temporary half-pay from illness caused by long service in India. The General Alexander Dury above mentioned had a brother also in the service, General Theodore Dury. This family was originally a French one, and had a large property in Picardy, besides the Château de Beauregard, near Paris; but had to leave that country and seek an abode in England as Protestant refugees at the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

SCHOOL FRIEND OF KIPLING

As noted, Dury was the first officer killed during the Third Burma War, just 11 days after the declaration of War. The poet and novelist Rudyard Kipling had tried unsuccessfully to persuade the editor of the Civil and Military Gazette to send him to Burma to cover the campaign as a journalist, and upon reading the casualty list he noted the name of Dury who had been had been a school friend of his at the United Services College. In a letter to Lionel Dunsterville, Kipling wrote: *'I tried to go to Burma for the paper but I couldn't be spared. By the way, did you see that poor Durey [sic] was killed by those swine? There's £1,800 worth of education gone to smash and a good fellow with it.'*

The following year, Kipling would write 'Arithmetic on the Frontier', with the third stanza inspired by Dury's death:

*'A scrimmage in a Border Station
A canter down some dark defile
Two thousand pounds of education
Drops to a ten-rupee jezail.
The Crammer's boast, the Squadron's pride,
Shot like a rabbit in a ride!'*

It seems this was not the only time Dury's death was used by Kipling:

"...As it happened, the first officer casualty of the war was someone he had known and admired at school, Lieutenant Dury, Indian Army, killed in the capture of Minhla Fort, one of the positions on the Irrawaddy that the Burmese hoped would somehow block an advance on Mandalay. In a sharp action, infantry stormed the fort while the ships gave covering fire. Eight years later, in a magazine article about his old school, Kipling was to describe Dury's death:

"The best boy of them all—who could have become anything—was wounded in the thigh as he was leading his men up the ramp of a fortress. All he said was, "Put me up against that tree and take my men on" ... when his men came back he was dead."

"An English School" (1893), collected in Land and Sea Tales, 1923."

https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/readers-guide/rg_webb_burma.htm



Condition EF. Sold with copied research including an engraved image of the recipient and the History of the Third Burmese War (digital)

A unique and important Third Burma War Officer casualty medal