

## Clement Silas Anscombe – Second Afghan War

The regiment remained in Sialkot until mid-October 1878 when it formed part of the Peshawar Valley Field Force set up to confront Russian influence in Afghanistan in what became known as the Second Afghan War.

During the last thirty years the steady and menacing approach of Russia towards the northern and western frontiers of Afghanistan had caused anxiety to the British Government and to the authorities in India. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877 and the diplomatic intervention of Great Britain to prevent the victor's occupation of Constantinople led to strained relations between the two Powers, and it was feared that Russia might endeavour to exercise counter-pressure by intervention in Afghanistan, which had recently been racked by a series of murderous dynastic conflicts. Shere Ali, the successful candidate, rebuffed in his efforts to obtain British support against his internal and external foes, turned to Russia for aid, and agreed to receive a mission at Kabul. The Viceroy, Lord Lytton, at once demanded that a similar favour should be accorded to a British envoy, and, despite the Amir's dissuasion, sent a party to the frontier, where it was stopped and forbidden to enter the country. This insult was the occasion of the Second Afghan War, which broke out in November, 1878.

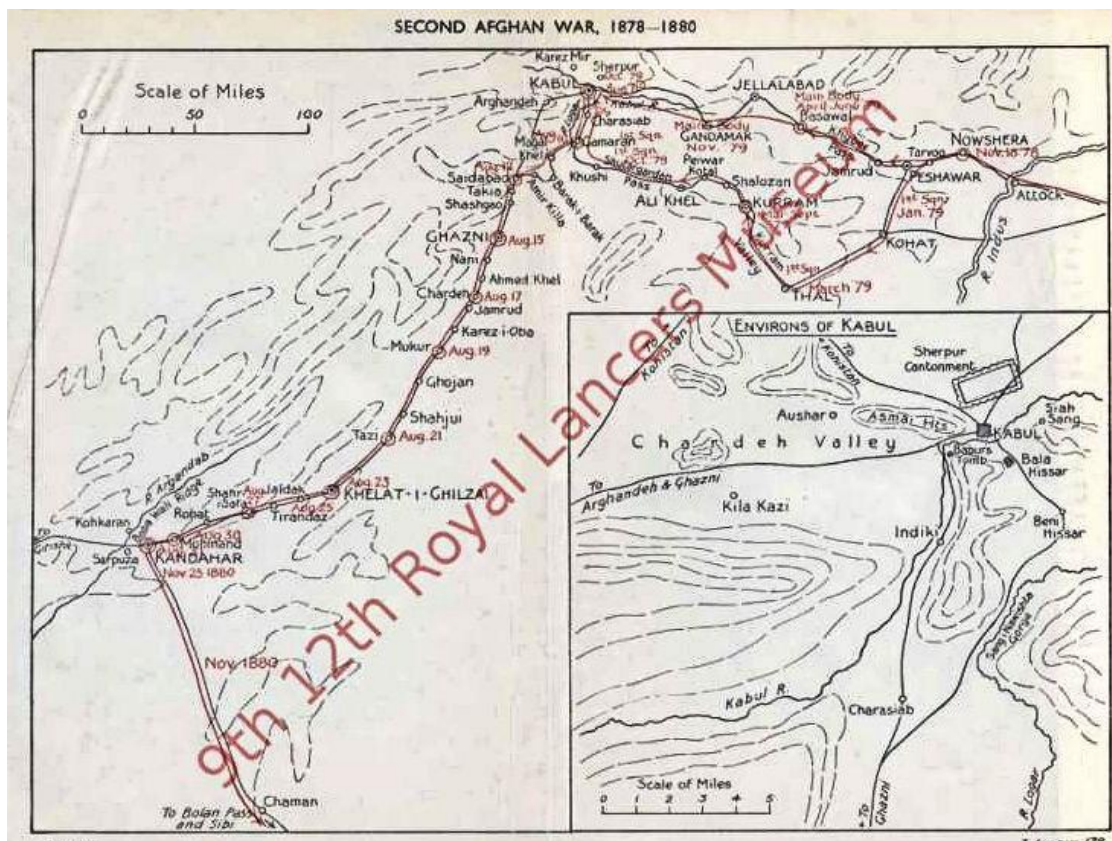
The military policy to be adopted in such an event had long since been decided upon; it comprised a triple attack on Afghanistan by three strong forces, moving respectively via the Khyber Pass, the Kurram Valley, and the Bolan Pass. The 9th Lancers were detailed to form part of the first-named expedition, and in the middle of October left Sialkot to join the Peshawar Valley Field Force. Major R. Cleland was in command, Lieutenant-Colonel Marshall being on leave in England, and the marching-out strength amounted to 18 officers, 302 other ranks, and 380 horses.

Extract from 'The Ninth Queen's Royal Lancers 1715 - 1936' by Major E. W. Sheppard

On November 18th the regiment reached Nowshera, where it halted for a month. "It was a pretty sight this morning," wrote Lieutenant James Hunter of the regiment, on the 17th, "crossing the Indus by the bridge of boats at Attock, with all the lances glittering in the sun as we wound down the steep hill under the old fort to cross the bridge, which is about 400 yards long. It is very cold in the mornings now; one's fingers get quite numb; while in the daytime the thermometer is generally about 80° in the shade; and yet this sudden change from hot to cold agrees with us wonderfully, everyone eats enormously, and the only thing we are frightened of is growing too fat."

During this long halt the unit was served out with Martini-Henry carbines, its pistols being handed into store. "Life here is healthy, but very dull," wrote Hunter on December 1st, "as there is nothing whatever to do, and there is no prospect as yet of our moving."

Progress at first was slow and it wasn't until January 1879 that "A" and "C" Troops of the 9<sup>th</sup> Lancers formed the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron and was ordered to head for the Kurram Valley and they finally reached the open plain south of Kabul on October 5<sup>th</sup>. The way to Kabul, however, was blocked by rocky ridges either side of the Logar river north of Charasiab. The position was held by regular Afghan troops. After a number of engagements with the Afghans the British troops managed to enter Kabul on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1879. However, the Afghans were not going to give up easily and there were a number of battles in the area around Kabul until eventually in April 1880 the Afghans appeared to have surrendered.



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There followed a period of quiet between May and July while negotiations to establish a new ruler were concluded. Such that at the end of July the army were preparing to evacuate Afghanistan. But then news came in that a British force in the south had been defeated and were surrounded in Kandahar. This led to the decision to send a force of 10,000 men plus 7,000 followers and 8,500 animals to relieve the troops. The force left Kabul on 8<sup>th</sup> August and by 31<sup>st</sup> August had marched the 340 miles to Kandahar. Once the force had arrived the Afghan troops offered very little resistance and Kandahar was soon relieved.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Lancers remained in the Kandahar area for some time after this and finally left Afghanistan for good on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1880 and headed for their new quarters at Ambala where they arrived on 13<sup>th</sup> December.

For his involvement in the Second Afghan War Clement Silas was awarded two medals:

- Afghanistan Medal 1878 – 1880 with 3 clasps; Charasia, Kabul & Kandahar
- Kabul to Kandahar Star 1880

These would have been awarded to him in a special parade in April 1882.

When in April, 1882, Lieutenant-Colonel H. A. Bushman, who had been appointed to the command on Lieutenant-Colonel Cleland's death on August 14th, 1880, paraded the regiment to present to those who had earned them the medals for the second Afghan War, 293 officers and other ranks came forward to receive them. Of these 255 were also decorated with the bronze star awarded to all those who had participated in Roberts's famous march from Kabul to Kandahar.

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The catalogue entry for Clement Silas's medals says that he joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dragoon Guards as a sergeant on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1880. I think this is partially incorrect as there are several clear indications that he was still with the 9<sup>th</sup> Lancers until at least 1888. However, it is quite feasible that he was promoted to Sergeant after the battle at Kandahar and he did transfer to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dragoon Guards, but that was several years later.