

**AN OUTSTANDING AND RARE 91ST HIGHLANDERS SOUTH AFRICA 1853, COMMISSION DOCUMENTS, LETTERS AND DIARY GROUP FOR THE SEVENTH CAPE FRONTIER WAR; THE 'WAR OF THE AXE' TO AN OFFICER WHO HAD HIS HORSE SHOT FROM UNDER HIM AND WAS MID FOR GALLANTRY COMMANDING THE SMALL ADVANCED PARTY AT THE ATTACK ON THE CONVOY AT TROMPETER'S DRIFT, 21 MAY 1846**



**SOUTH AFRICA 1835-53 'LIEUT E. J. DICKSON, 91ST REGT', COMMISSION DOCUMENTS, LETTERS AND LEATHER BOUND DIARY 1846-8**



Major General Edward John Dickson was born Jersey, 16 May 1821 and was commissioned Ensign in the 75th Foot in 1839. He served in the Cape of Good Hope from 26 July 1840, until mid 1848, initially with the 75th Foot, then the 91st. During his service during the 'War of the Axe', 1846-7, he was mentioned in dispatches and was highly



commanded for his gallantry at the attack on the convoy at Trompetter's Drift, 21 May 1846. Here he commanded the advanced party, having his horse shot from under him and subsequently commanding a defence until ammunition was expended. The group for sale contains not only Dickson's South Africa Campaign medal but 5 original Commissions documents, 22 military related letters and an extremely rare leather bound personal journal/diary, kept by him throughout the War of 1846-7 and into 1848. The contents of the latter have remained unpublished.

*"Lieut. Edward John Dickson.— Ens. 75th Foot, 27th Sept. 1839 ; Lieut., 14th Oct. 1842 ; 91st, 11th Aug. 1843 ; Capt. Ceylon Regiment, 13th April 1849 ; half-pay 30th April 1850 ; Staff Officer of Pensioners I. of Man, 1st Sept. 1854 ; Brev.-Maj., 27th Dec. 1860 ; Brev.-Lieut.-Col., 15th Oct. 1871 ; Col., 1st Oct. 1877 ; retired with Hon. Rank of Maj.-Gen., 20th Mar. 1878. Served with the 91st in the Kaffir War of 1846-47, and had his horse shot under him when proceeding from Grahamstown to Fort Peddie 21st May 1846 (medal ; mentioned in despatches). "*

## THE ACTION AT TROMPETTER'S DRIFT

### THE CAFFRE WAR.

(From the Cape Town Mail of the 23rd of May, 1846.)

With regret we have to announce, that the frontier post which arrived this evening, brings intelligence of another of those unaccountable reverses which have already turned the attention of military men, with earnest scrutiny, upon the movements of the several commanding officers, engaged in this hitherto most disastrous campaign.

Another baggage-train, consisting of 41 waggons, with all the oxen and stores, designed for the relief of Fort Peddie, have fallen into the hands of the Caffres,—almost, apparently, without a blow being struck in their defence.

The Caffres are daily penetrating farther into the colony. Not only Lower Albany, but a greater part of Uitenhage and Somerset, are swept of cattle, and the buildings everywhere laid in ashes.

The following particulars are from the *Graham's Town Journal*, of the 23rd instant :—

At sun-set this evening the startling intelligence reached Graham's Town, brought by Mr. Hyde, Lieutenant to Mr. Lucas' Company, of the capture by the Caffres of no less than 41 waggons, about 30 of which were laden with forage, and other Government stores, on their way to Fort Peddie.

These waggons were sent from Graham's Town under the escort of the newly raised company of mounted men, commanded by Mr. S. Lucas. It appears that these waggons reached Driver's hill, 10 miles from town, on the evening of the 18th, where they remained for the night, starting at daylight the next day, and reaching Frazer's camp, 10 miles further, about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. About 3 o'clock they again moved forward towards Trompetter's Drift. This part of the road being considered dangerous, the utmost caution was exercised in placing the men, and the most careful vigilance exercised along the whole line of march. On entering the Fish River Bush, Lieutenant Dixon, 91st Regiment, commanding at Trompetter's Drift, with a small party of men, came forward to meet the waggons, and intimated to Mr. Lucas that he considered himself in charge of the waggons. The whole reached the post at Trompetter's Drift in safety the same evening.

While remaining here the following day, information was given that many Caffres had been seen in that immediate neighbourhood, and that there was reason to believe their further passing through the bushy defile would be disputed by the enemy. In this emergency four civilians—namely, Messrs. Conway, Webb, Abernethy, and Nap—that, very spiritedly volunteered to proceed by a bye-path through the bush to Fort Peddie, to state their circum-

stances, and request a reinforcement from that post. Those persons started accordingly in the night, and succeeded fully in their enterprise. This distance from Trompetters to Peddie is about 12 miles—the parties returning from the latter place before daylight with the assurance from Lieutenant Colonel Lindsay that the necessary aid should be given.

Under the full expectation of attack by the Caffres, the waggon train started the following morning (Thursday) shortly after sunrise, under charge of Mr. Dixon. That officer and his party, and Mr. Lucas with thirteen men of his troop, went forward in front, Lieutenant Hyde, with the rest of Lucas's troop, bringing up the rear. The infantry were placed in the centre as before. On reaching the Blue River, a dry ravine which crosses through the thick bush, Captain Campbell, with a detachment of 60 men of the 91st Regiment, was found awaiting their arrival, and then immediately assumed the command, but without disturbing any of the arrangements which had been made by Lieutenant Dixon, that officer and Mr. Lucas still leading the advance. At the point where the train of waggons now was, the road is much broken, hilly, bushy and tortuous, and here the Caffres had posted themselves to dispute its progress. Whether the bush at this dangerous place was examined before we are not informed. However this may be, it seems that the advanced guard had reached the summit of the first ridge, and were just about to descend the opposite side, when the Caffres, who had posted themselves in the thick bush and rocks by the road side, opened a heavy fire upon the party, killing Lieutenant Dixon's horse under him, a horse belonging to Lieutenant Aitchison, and also a Fingoe. At this particular point there is an elevated bushy mound, on the sides of which, commanding the road, the savages had posted themselves. A little beyond this there is a patch of open ground, and the moment the first volley was fired the burghers under Lieutenant Dixon, plunged into the bush and gain this position. Mr. Lucas at the same moment fell back to the front waggon, and was quickly joined by Lieutenant Dixon. Dismounting from their horses they endeavoured to push their way through the bush with the waggon, but on reaching the spot where the first volley had been poured upon them, they were again met with a most destructive fire, by which seven of the oxen were shot dead, which, as they fell, were cut away from the yokes, in hopes with the rest they might struggle through the pass. At this time there were only five oxen left, and as it was impossible that these unaided should draw the waggon forward, the Caffres still pouring a fire upon them, Lieutenant Dixon and Mr. Lucas put their



shoulders to the wheel, and by this means, and some of the men of the 91st goading the oxen with the points of their bayonets, the vehicle was at length got down the hill to the open space before described. Here the party, with Lieutenant Dixon's Burghers, took up a good position. It was soon, however, found that though they had thus worked their way out of this perilous situation, yet the second waggon had to pass through the same ordeal. The Caffres on its approach opened their fire upon it, which was steadily and vigorously returned by the men of the 91st. This firing had lasted about ten minutes, when upon its suddenly ceasing a large body of Caffres was seen moving down the main road, apparently with the intention of cutting off the communication between this party and the rest of the waggons. Lieutenant Dixon then deemed it advisable to fall back upon the second waggon, on reaching which it was found partially deserted, retreat having been made to the waggons in the rear. The Caffres again opened a most destructive fire upon this gallant little party, and by which two civilians were killed, and several horses. Those who were spared struggled down this long train of waggons to the rear, where they at length found Captain Campbell, who immediately gave orders to retreat at the post at Trompetter's Drift, taking the lead himself in this retrograde movement, and directing Captain Lucas, who had been placed in front on the advance, to take charge of the rear. The casualties in this disastrous affair are, as far as we have yet been able to collect them, as follows:—Four men killed; One of Mr. Lucas' men, named Openshaw, is severely wounded in the arm, and also a man of the 7th Dragoon Guards. From sixteen to eighteen horses are reported to have been killed or lost, together with forty-one waggons, with all their oxen and stores. Fortunately the ammunition waggons had been left at Trompetter's Drift, and it is said that in the captured waggons there were not more than about 300 rounds of cartridge.



From 'Historical Records of the 91st Argyllshire Highlanders':

"Lieut. Dickson of the reserve battalion of the 91st, while commanding at Trompetter's Drift, frequently obtained the approbation of Sir Peregrine Maitland and Lt.-Col. Johnston for his great zeal and activity; and on the 21st of May, when a convoy of waggons, proceeding from Grahamstown and Fort Peddie, was attacked and captured by the enemy on Trompetter's Hill, the gallant conduct of Lt. Dickson, who had voluntarily joined the escort, was highly



commended by his Excellency the commander-in-chief, in general orders. In reference to this incident, Mrs Ward writes as follows : —

" On this occasion Lieut. Dickson, 91st Regiment, who had been ordered to assist in escorting the waggons a certain distance, till the other escort was met, nobly volunteered to proceed further, and led the advance ; nor did he retire till his ammunition was expended. On reaching the rear, he found the commanding officer of the party retreating, by the advice of some civilians, who considered the defile impassable for so many waggons, under such a fire. Lieut. Dickson's coolness, courage, and energy, in not only leading the men, but literally ' putting his shoulder to the wheel ' of a waggon, to clear the line, were spoken of by all as worthy of the highest praise. His horse, and that of Ensign Aitchison, were shot under their riders."

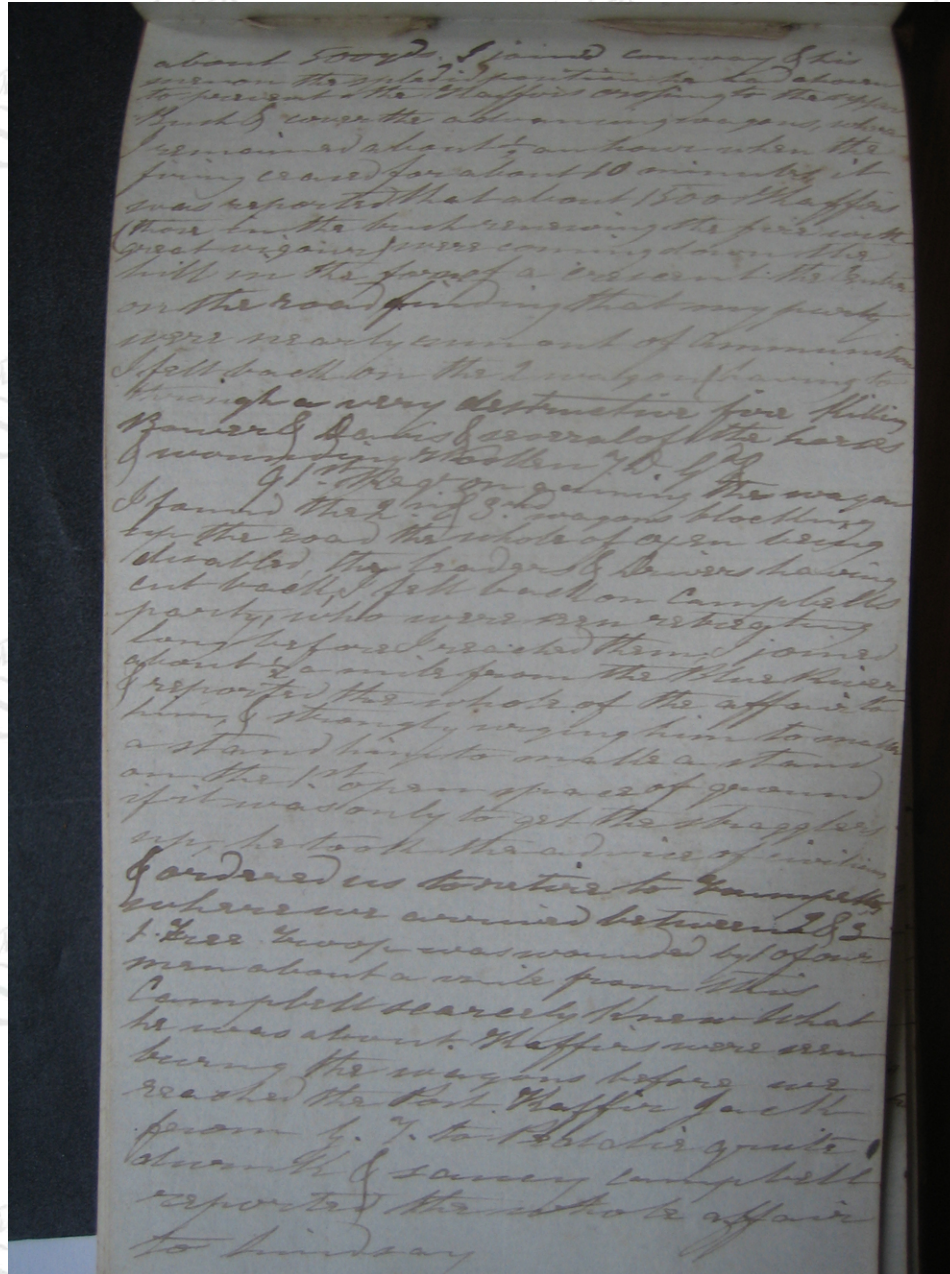
Lieutenant Dickson, gives a 3 page account of the episode in his journal (see picture of sample page).

### **CAPTAIN CAMPBELL'S COURT MARTIAL**

General Orders Headquarters, Cape Town, Jan.27 1847 "At a General Court Martial held at Fort Peddie, ceded Territory, of the Cape of Good Hope, on the 4th June 1846, and subsequent days, Capt. Colin CAMPBELL, 91st Regt, was arraigned upon the undermentioned charges, viz: 1st: For conduct unbecoming an officer on the morning of the 21st May 1846, when in command of a detachment of troops escorting wagons from Trompetter's Drift to Fort Peddie, ceded Territory, Cape of Good Hope, in not supporting Lt. DICKSON, 91st Regt, nor making himself personally acquainted with the situation of that officer, during about two hours that he, Lieut. DICKSON, continued engaged with the enemy, with the advanced guard under his orders, on the occasion set forth in this charge. 2nd: For having shamefully abandoned, on the morning of the 21st May, a certain number of wagons, containing public stores and supplies, of which he had charge for the purpose of escorting to Fort Peddie. Sentence of the Court The Court having found the prisoner guilty of part of the first charge, and also guilty of the whole of the second charge preferred against him, which being in breach of the Articles of War, do now sentence him, the prisoner, Capt. Colin CAMPBELL of the 91st Regt. to be cashiered from H.M. Service. Recommendation of the Court The Court having performed a painful duty in sentencing the prisoner, Capt. C. CAMPBELL, 91st Regt, to be cashiered, feel themselves called upon strongly to recommend him to H.M. most gracious clemency, it appearing from the prisoner's having made two attempts to reach the front, after the attack on the wagons by the enemy had commenced, there does not appear to have been any want of personal courage, but the Court attribute his having so hastily abandoned the wagons to want of judgement, the novelty of the position in which he found himself placed in charge of a large convoy of 43 wagons through a dense wood, and his ignorance of the character of the enemy with whom he had to contend..."







PAGE FROM LIEUT DICKSON'S JOURNAL RELATING TO TROMPETER'S DRIFT, 21 MAY 1846

Before leaving South Africa in June 1848 to attend a Medical Board in the United Kingdom (he contracted a serious illness while in South Africa) Lieutenant Dickson also served as Temporary In Charge of the 'Fingoe Levies' at Fort Hare. After his good service in South Africa, Dickson's military career included an expensive purchase into the 'Ceylon Rifle Regiment', and subsequent administrative appointments in the United Kingdom, latterly on the Staff looking after Pension Establishments in the Isle of Man. He retired as a Major-General in 1878

### THE DOCUMENTS SOLD WITH THE MEDAL

1). A leather bound journal/diary, approximately 7" x 4.5", as carried by Dickson during the War of the Axe. The diary covers the period 1846-48. This relates to his services on the frontier in South Africa, and includes mentions of many British Officers as well as NCO's and Other Ranks of the 91st. The book ends with his return voyage to the United Kingdom in 1847. Estimated in excess of 150 entry pages of text, the entry pages all in legible long hand, also a few pages with tables and abstract lists. Leather covers notated with his name and shows use. Binding is weak, pages with occasional spotting and some sprung loose but complete.

2) Five original Commissions/Warrants documents for the ranks of:

Lieutenant, 91st Foot, 11 August 1843

Captain, Ceylon Rifle Regiment, 13 April 1849

Staff Captain to Command detachments of Pensioners in the Isle of Man, 1 September 1854

Lieutenant Colonel, 25 October 1871

Colonel, Land Forces, 1 October 1877

3) Twenty two hand written letters variously dated 1845 - 1860, these relating to appointments, and testimonials from senior Officers who had served in South Africa , some written in South Africa, others in the UK. Includes May 1846 copy of General Orders in which Lieutenant Dickson is mentioned for his gallantry, as well as those to/from Horse Guards concerning his request for suitable appointments, and medical board reports

Additionally a photocopy of a portrait of the recipient with wearing his South Africa medal, on which the footnote indicates he became a 'Major-General'



Condition: Medal is VF, nice original ribbon and brooch buckle. Original documentation relating to the British Infantry in the Kaffir Wars seldom appears on the market, and much less so in company with the recipients medal. A very fine a rare group that will prove a most interesting research project