

THE EXTREMELY RARE ROYAL ARTILLERY OFFICERS I.G.S. AND AFGHAN PAIR POSTHUMOUSLY AWARDED TO THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF NO1 MOUNTAIN BATTERY, WHO WAS KILLED IN ACTION AT THE BATTLE OF PEIWAR KOTAL ON 2 DECEMBER 1878, SHOT THROUGH THE HEAD WHILST LEADING HIS BATTERY IN SUPPORTED OF THE 72ND HIGHLANDERS AND THE 5TH GOORKHAS UPHILL ATTACK ON THE AFGHAN MOUNTAINOUS POSITIONS ON SPINGAWI KOTAL. ONE OF JUST TWO OFFICERS KILLED AT THE BATTLE



INDIA GENERAL SERVICE 1854-95, CLASP, JOWAKI 1877-8 'CAPTN. J. A. KELSO. R. ARTY.' IN ITS NAMED CARD BOX OF ISSUE; AFGHANISTAN 1878-80, CLASP, PEIWAR KOTAL 'CAPTAIN. J. A. KELSO. R.A.' IN ITS NAMED CARD BOX OF ISSUE

At the battle of Peiwar Kotal, No1 Mountain Battery, commanded by Captain Kelso, supported the 72nd Highlanders and the 5th Goorkhas uphill attack on the Afghan mountainous positions on Spingawi Kotal; subject of the famous painting by Vereker Monteith Hamilton. Captain Kelso would be killed whilst "bringing his guns into action, just beyond the first stockade" :

"At 10pm on 1st December 1878, 2,200 of Roberts' best troops filed out of the camp in complete silence, with the General himself in command. The climb to the Spingawi Kotal was long and difficult, with the column stumbling over the rough country in the darkness.

Roberts felt that the pace of the advance was too slow, and suspected his leading regiment – the largely muslim 29th Punjab – of deliberately dragging its feet. Those suspicions were confirmed when a few Indian soldiers fired warning shots to alert the enemy. Amazingly, the warning went unheeded, and after a few tense moments Roberts decided to rearrange his column, calling the elite 5th Ghurka Rifles and the highlanders to the fore:

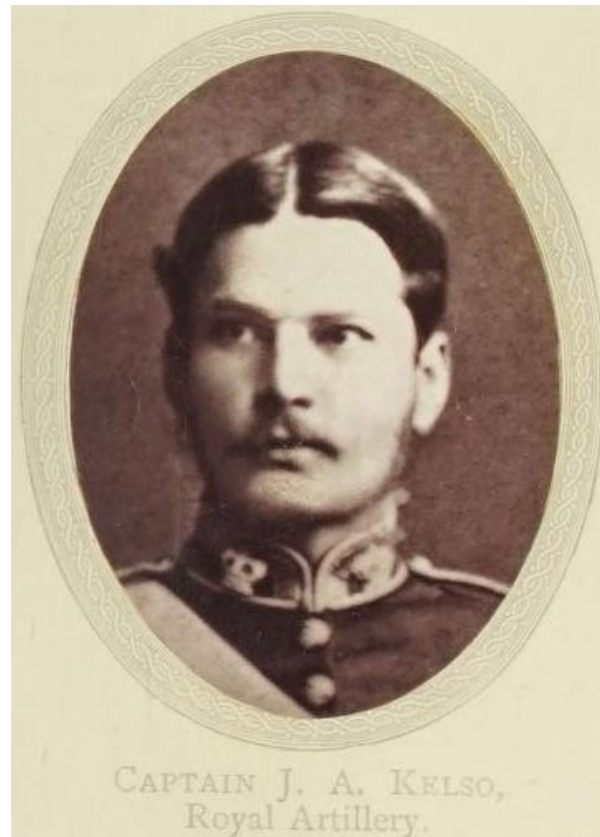
On the Gurkhas coming up, I told Major Fitz-Hugh, who commanded them, that the moment he reached the foot of the kotal, he must front form company, fix bayonets, and charge up the slope without waiting for further orders.

Soon afterwards, and just as the first streak of dawn proclaimed the approach of day, the enemy became aware of our presence, and fired into us, when instantly I heard Fitz-Hugh give the word to charge. Brownlow, at the head of his Highlanders, dashed forward in support, and two guns of the Mountain battery coming up at the moment, I ordered its Commandant, Captain Kelso, to come into action as soon as he could find a position.

The unfortunate Kelso fell, shot dead, a moment later – but the Afghan position was quickly captured. Taken completely by surprise, the Afghans barely had time to get a few shots off before the Ghurkas and Highlanders were upon them. Having consolidated his position on the Spingawi Kotal, Roberts could turn his attention to the Peiwar Kotal from which he was still separated by a mile-long wooded ridge.”

<https://www.britishbattles.com/second-afghan-war/battle-of-peiwar-kotal/>

Captain Kelso was one of two British officers to be killed at the battle of Peiwar Kotal, the other an Officer belonging to the Bengal Staff Corps. A further four British and Indian Officers were wounded



The following extracted from *The Afghan Campaign of 1878-1880*, by S. H. Shadbolt:

‘John Andrew Kelso, who was killed at the Peiwar Kotal on the 2nd December, 1878, was the only son of the late John Kelso, Esq., of the Indian Civil Service, a gentleman who for many years had charge of the Government Revenue. Survey in the Province of Assam. The subject of this memoir was born on the 2nd February, 1839. After passing the earlier portion of his life with his parents in India, he proceeded to England, and studied for several years at King's College, London, from whence he entered Woolwich. Passing out from the Academy after the usual course, he was gazetted, in November, 1860, to the Royal Artillery, and, joining his battery in India shortly afterwards, did duty

with it at various stations in the Bengal and Madras Presidencies for a period of seven years. In March, 1868, Kelso was posted Subaltern to No. 2 Light Field Horse Battery, Haidarabad. Contingent, and continued to serve with it until April, 1873, when he received his promotion and reverted to the regular service. After a twelve-months' interval, he was appointed Commandant of No. 2 Light Field Horse Battery, Punjab Frontier Force, which in January, 1877, was converted into No. 1 Mountain Battery, mules being substituted for horses. With this he served throughout the Jowaki campaign of 1877-78, obtaining the medal with clasp, and receiving honourable mention in Brigadier-General Keyes' despatches for the zeal and activity he displayed during the operations. Shortly after the conclusion of hostilities a severe attack of fever necessitated his proceeding on sick leave to the hill station of Murree:

Extract from No. 128 F. F., dated 8th March 1878, from Brigadier-General C. P. Keyes, C. B., to the Secretary to the Government of the Punjab, Military Department.

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“ Captain J. A. Kelso, R. A., Commanding No. 1 Mountain Battery, is deserving of much credit for the manner in which he took his Battery over the very difficult ground traversed by the left attack on Jamu, and for the admirable practice of his Battery on that occasion. He was most zealous and energetic throughout the whole of the operations, and rendered valuable aid to the Infantry at Paiah, Jamu, Ghariba (on two occasions), and the Naru Khulla.”



7pdr Mountain Guns as used by No1 Mountain Battery

THE AFGHAN WAR

‘In October, 1878, the battery was ordered up to Jamrud in view of the impending outbreak of war with Afghanistan, being detailed to Sir Sam. Browne's Division of the Army of Invasion, and Captain Kelso at once rejoined and resumed command of it. General Roberts, however, applying for its services, it was sent, a month later, to join the Kuram Force at Kohat, and proceeding from thence to Thal, took part in the subsequent advance of the division into the enemy's country. It was during the assault of the Peiwar Kotal on the 2nd December, in the hour of victory, that Captain Kelso met a soldier's death, being shot through the head at the moment when - to quote the words of an eye-

witness - he had *"moved up the steep slope with incredible rapidity, and, wheeling to the right, formed up on the left of the Highlanders, and opened fire."* Captain Kelso was an officer of high repute in the service, and the sorrow caused by his death was both deep and wide-spread. After referring in his despatch to the assistance rendered by the battery in the advance, and to the determined manner in which the guns were fought, General Roberts, coupling the name of the deceased with that of the late Major Anderson of the 23rd Punjab Pioneers, wrote as follows: *"The death of these officers is mourned by the whole force, for both were well known as brave and excellent soldiers;"* and in a private letter, after expressing his great admiration for Captain Kelso's very soldierly qualities, the General added:

"Few men could have done what he did with his battery in so short a time, and I considered myself extremely fortunate in having him with my column."

Captain Kelso married, in January, 1867, at Trichinopoly, Marion, third daughter of the late W. H. Ranking, M.D., F.R.C.P.L., of Norwich. He leaves a widow, with one son and three daughters.'

*Capt. J. A. Kelso
R. A.*

**INDIA
MEDAL.**

*Captain
J. A. Kelso
R. A.*

**AFGHANISTAN
MEDAL.**

Peiwar Kotal.

Lot 96 - 1

Royal Mint.





Condition, both medals lightly polished on the obverse, otherwise GVF. Boxes complete but pretty much flattened. One with its medal envelope within. A fine and very rare officers casualty pair

Sold with a digital copy of Historical Record of No1 (Khohat) Mountain Battery