

**THE RARE AN EMOTIVE SECOND AFGHAN WAR BATTLE OF MAIWAND D.C.M. AWARDED TO A GUNNER, E BATTERY, B BRIGADE, ROYAL HORSE ARTILLERY, FOR 'CONSPICUOUSLY GALLANT CONDUCT DURING THE ACTION AT MAIWAND AND SUBSEQUENT RETREAT TO KANDAHAR'. HIS AWARD SPECIFICALLY FOR THE RETREAT ITSELF FOR THE PART HE PLAYED IN 'BRINGING IN ITS FOUR REMAINING GUNS, THE FORGE-WAGGON, STORE CART AND ONE SMOOTH-BORE GUN AFTER A LONG AND TRYING MARCH OF UPWARDS OF FIFTY MILES'**



DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT MEDAL, V.R. '4278. GUNR. T. TIGHE. R.H.A.'

D.C.M. recommendation submitted to the Queen 1 February 1881, approved 5 March 1881:

*'For conspicuously gallant conduct during the action at Maiwand and subsequent retreat to Kandahar on 27th and 28th July last.'*

Gunner Tighe's and 3 others medals specifically awarded for the retreat itself:

*'The conduct of these NCO's and men during the retreat was most praiseworthy and to their example, energy and perseverance is due the success of E-Battery in bringing in its four remaining guns, the forge-waggon, store cart and one smooth-bore gun after a long and trying march of upwards of fifty miles'*

Thomas Tighe was born in 1846 in St George's Parish, Dublin, and worked as a labourer before enlisting in the Royal Horse Artillery (RHA) at Dublin on 27 December 1864, aged 18. His medical examination took place on 5 January 1865. It is possible, based on his Royal Hospital Chelsea Pensioner Service Record, that earlier in 1864 Tighe first enlisted in the 19th Regiment of Foot (the

Green Howards), but left them before he could be drafted to join the Regiment, which was on foreign service in India. On 1 August 1871, Tighe's Royal Horse Artillery Medical History sheet recorded his conduct as '*Regular. Good. Temperate.*'

Tighe became a Gunner in E/B Battery R.H.A., the former 3 Troop, 1 Bengal Horse Artillery. In 1880 it was in cantonments at Kirkee, India, equipped with six 9-pounder Rifled Muzzle Loading (R.M.L.) guns, which fired common shell, shrapnel or case ammunition. Studs protruding from each shell slotted into three spiral rifled grooves in the barrel and were rammed home onto the cartridge bag. Loading and ramming was Tighe's primary responsibility when the gun was in action.

E/B Battery was usually brigaded with cavalry, and it was ordered to join the second phase of the Second Afghan War. Up until then, the war had gone well for the British, enabling them to depose the Afghan Ruler and appoint a new Wali of Kandahar, who was presented with a battery of obsolete 6-pounder muzzle-loading smooth-bores (four unrifled guns and two howitzers) to stiffen his local levies. However, Ayub Khan took over from the deposed ruler and advanced into southern Afghanistan with a mixed force, which included Afghan Regular Army artillery and infantry, local irregular cavalry and hordes of tribal Ghazi fanatics, who had sworn to kill idolators and had been promised entry to paradise if they died in battle.

E/B left Kirkee on 16 January 1880, marched to Bombay, embarked for Karachi, and marched through the Bolan Pass to Quetta and Kandahar, arriving on 5 April 1880. As part of Brigadier-General Burrows's Brigade flying column, the Battery marched from Kandahar to Girishk on the Helmand River to support the Wali. However, the Wali's troops defected en masse to Ayub Khan. In an encounter with the mutinous local troops on 14 July, E/B succeeded in getting into action four times, and '*did a fair amount of execution*'. This contributed materially to the defeat of the enemy, who abandoned all their guns and retreated. These 6-pounder smooth-bore guns were formed into a Battery manned by men of the 66th Regiment of Foot, with a few E/B N.C.O.s detached to command each gun crew.

<https://www.britishempire.co.uk/forces/rha.htm>

### **THE MAIWAND DISASTER**

On 26 July, information was received that Ayub Khan's Afghan army was making for the Maiwand Pass. Stimulated by telegrams from Army HQ at Simla, Brigadier Burrows decided to move towards Maiwand the next day. His men, led by two guns of E/B, left camp much later than planned, although his Indian infantry had still not been fed by the Commissariat.

They were crossing a barren, arid, dusty plain, when distant hostile movements became visible through the heat haze. An infantry line was gradually formed, with the guns in the centre, two Battalions on the right, one on the left. Initially the heat haze and dust prevented any accurate estimate of the enemy strength being made. Then enemy artillery began to come into action, until eventually the fire of 30 guns, including breech-loading rifled Armstrong guns, was concentrated on the British line. For nearly three hours this artillery duel continued, while the hordes of Afghan cavalry and infantry strove to work around the British left flank. Burrows moved his entire Indian infantry reserve to his left to meet this threat. E/B fired at least 120 rounds from each gun and still had a good supply of ammunition close at hand. The British 66th Foot anchoring the right flank also seemed to have enough ammunition for their Martini-Henry rifles.

Fatally however, the Indian infantry units on the left had fired off most of their Snider rifle ammunition, and their arrangements for supplying more rounds and more drinking water to their firing line had broken down. The smooth-bore battery had no ammunition wagons and when it ran out of ammunition after firing its stock of some 50 rounds per gun, it withdrew to the baggage train, well behind the firing line. The disappearance of the smooth-bore guns was followed by a general development of the Afghan attack. The Indian companies on the left, whose British officers had all

been killed, were broken, mixed up with swarms of Ghazi tribesmen, and forced back upon the guns of E/B.



### THE MELEE AROUND THE GUNS

E/B transformed its 9-pounders into giant shotguns, by firing off case rounds at Afghan infantry formations. Gunner Williams, who was holding a team of limber horses *'some twelve or fourteen yards behind the guns in action'* recalled:

*'the case-shot proved very effective, rows and rows of their infantry falling before us... but the enemy became more and more daring, and led on by their chiefs who carried silken banners of various colours, they charged down on our guns yelling and shouting as they came...'*

E/B began using 'reversed shrapnel', loading every round reversed (base fuse-end first) to achieve a deadly muzzle-burst of balls. Even this could not stop the crowds of swordsmen. All the N.C.O.s and men on the gunline had only a sword as their personal weapon. Swords provided individual close-quarter defence at best and were completely unsuited to fighting off a determined charge by hostile warriors. However, those gunners responsible for ramming the charges and rounds home down the gun barrels wielded long, stout ramrods, and each gun was equipped with sturdy handspikes (long crowbars) to help traverse and point it. In determined and agile hands, a ramrod or a handspike was an excellent close-quarter weapon, capable of being jabbed or swung to prevent swordsmen from closing within five metres. This is possibly what Tighe did to hold the Ghazis back from his comrades as they struggled to get their guns limbered up to their horse teams.

The History of the Royal Artillery 1860-1914, Vol III, records:

*'The gunners, who had borne the brunt of the Afghan fire throughout, made a gallant stand, until Captain Slade gave the order to limber up. Fortunately, the limbers and detachment horses were formed up, according to the drill of the period, only ten yards from the gun trails, so there was no delay, and the two of the sections [four guns, including Tighe's] got away.'*

Saving the Guns at Maiwand, a painting by Richard Caton Woodville, was a famous 1882 dramatic illustration of this critical moment.

Captain Slade, the Senior Captain of E/B, who took over its command when Major Blackwood was hit by a shell fragment, wrote an account of the R.H.A.'s battle:

*'For three hours, we were exposed to a very heavy artillery fire, and our horses and carriages suffered greatly, almost all our men were killed by artillery fire, in fact I don't know of any individual being killed by infantry fire, two or three were wounded by sabre cuts when we were retiring, and one man had his left arm smashed by a Snider bullet. The enemy had to advance a distance of about 600 yards and during this time were exposed to a very heavy fire of both musketry and artillery but though they fell in hundreds they were not to be deterred - and poor [Lieutenant] Maclaine waited a moment too long and lost his [two] guns - they were within 15 yards of us when I limbered up - besides being in our rear. I then formed closed interval and retired to a position about 400 yards back where I came into action again to cover the retreat. Owing to the artillery fire being so heavy I had to leave 67 horses dead or severely wounded on the field beside three wagons completely disabled.'*

E/B lost 3 officers and 18 men killed, an officer and 12 men wounded, i.e. 24% out of a total of around 140 effectives, two of its own 9 pounders and all but one of the smooth-bores. The casualty rate among E/B's gun crews in the firing line was 40-50%. In the subsequent waterless straggling retreat to Kandahar, the guns and their carriages were crammed with wounded and exhausted men.

### THE RETREAT AND AFTERMATH

The battle of Maiwand was fought in such a searing heat, it was remarkable that Burrow's force was able to put up such a fight but the battle at Maiwand was just the start of the disaster. The trials and privations endured through the terrible retreat, in which for over thirty hours the troops were without food or water, equalled the horrors of the battle itself. Indeed, a large percentage of casualties suffered at Maiwand, actually occurred during the retreat:

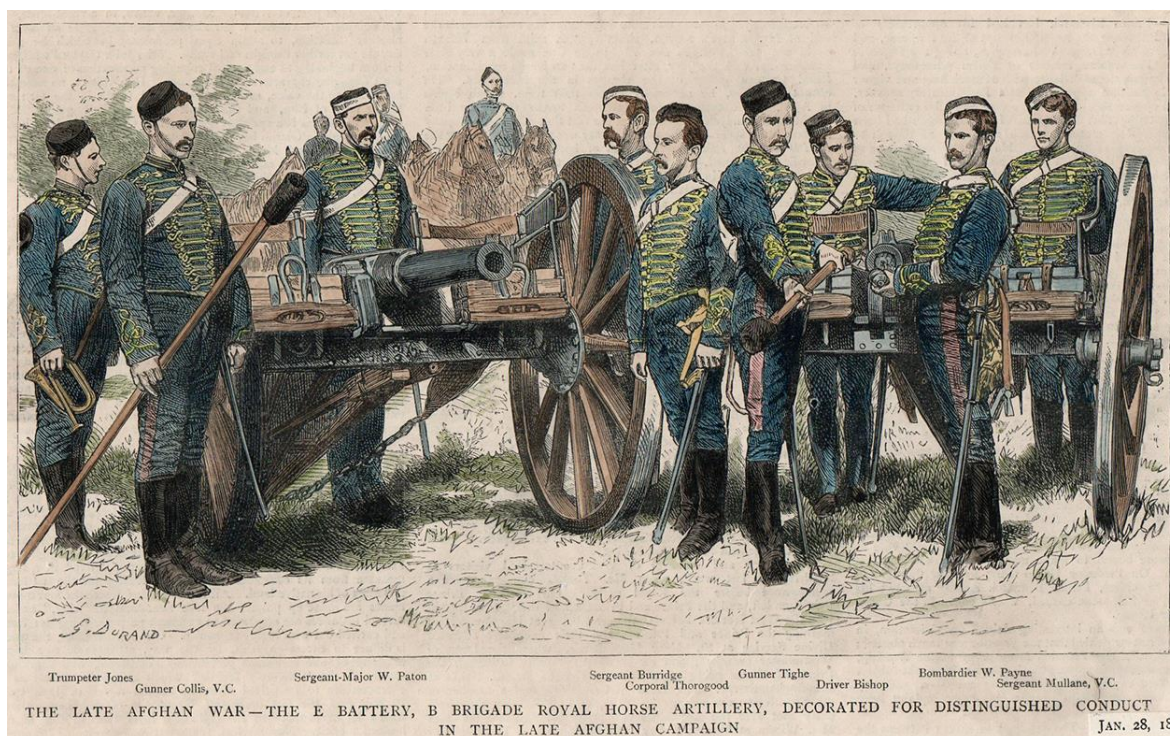
*"..The Afghans harried the tail of the retreating column and picked off stragglers, but did not otherwise try to cut off their progress. When a serious attack looked imminent the guns were unlimbered and brought into action. The retreat to Kandahar was one of those terrible episodes in the history of the British and Indian army dominated by the awful thirst, the suffering of the wounded men and animals, and the terror of passing near hostile villages. The journey was a nightmare, involving the crossing of a 16-mile desert and fighting against armed villagers..."*

After 33 hours of relentless pursuit by hostile tribesmen, the exhausted survivors reached Kandahar.



During the siege of Kandahar by Ayub Khan in August 1880, E/B's remaining 9-pounder guns were mounted on the city ramparts, three on the Herat face and one over the Idgah Gate. At the decisive Battle of Kandahar on 1 September 1880 the Battery covered the advance of Brigadier Baker's Left Infantry Brigade and recovered its two 'lost' guns plus the five smooth-bores after the defeated Afghans abandoned them. On 8 October 1880 E/B left Kandahar and returned to Kirkee via Bombay, where it was complimented by the Commander-in-Chief and the Governor of Bombay. A public dinner was given to the Non-Commissioned Officers and men.

For its service in Afghanistan E/B received the special thanks of the Commander-in-Chief in General Orders. Two VCs and eight DCMs were awarded on the recommendation of Captain Slade, who was himself awarded the C.B. The D.C.M.s went to Sergeant-Major Paton, Quartermaster Sergeant Monroe, Sergeant Burridge, Corporal Thoroughgood, Bombardier Payne, Driver Bishop, Gunner Tighe and Trumpeter Jones. Photographs of the men were made available and used as the basis for an artist's impression of them wearing parade dress and grouped around two 9-pounders. This important colour drawing appeared in the Illustrated London News on 28 January 1882. Although the individual faces are reasonably accurate, it gives the impression that those awarded the D.C.M. served in the same gun crews, which was not the case. Gunner Tighe is standing at the muzzle of a gun, holding its long ramrod in both hands. Interestingly, Tighe was the only Gunner to be awarded the D.C.M.



Captain Slade sent an informal, contemporary account of E/B's fight to Captain Saward, who had left E/B a year before on appointment to the staff. The letter was certainly looked upon as important by Saward, for he kept it carefully until his death, and then left directions for its preservation as an historical document."

*'Camp, Kokeran 9th Sept. My dear Saward, the 27th July was certainly an unfortunate one for the British Arms - but I think when the truth is known, Gunners will be found to have done their duty. Nothing could have been steadier in my opinion than the behaviour of both NC Officers and men of E/B both in the action and in the retreat, & I have already brought to the notice of Lt Genl Comdg the distinguished and conspicuous conduct of five or six of the men, & I trust if you can further their interest that you will do so, as considering the panic-stricken state of nine out of every ten individuals present it was all the more praiseworthy on their part. Sergt Major Paton's conduct was everything to be desired, his conduct under a very heavy fire was as cool and collected as if on parade - & in the retreat he stuck by me and assisted me most efficiently during the whole night. Sergt Mullane I was in*

hopes would have got the VC, but unfortunately I could not collect sufficient evidence, but his behaviour was most gallant, as when I gave the order to limber up, he ran back under heavy fire & to within some 15 yards of the enemy's infantry & picked up one of our own wounded men (who unfortunately was then dead) & placed him on the limber. Corporal Thorogood, Trumpeter Jones, & Gunner Collis, are also mentioned for individual acts, so I trust they may be rewarded with the Distinguished Conduct Medal.'

In November E/B fired the Royal Salute at a formal parade for Lord Ripon. The Viceroy ordered his carriage to stop close to the guns, stood up and announced:

*'As I pass this Battery I cannot resist the impulse to address a few words to you officers, non-commissioned officers and men to express my deep sense of the gallant services of this Battery at the Battle of Maiwand, when in the hour of difficulty and danger you upheld the reputation of the distinguished Corps to which you belong, and when, as I may say without exaggeration, you wreathed fresh laurels around the guns of the Royal Artillery.'*

Tighe's Afghanistan Medal with clasp 'Kandahar' was despatched to E/B Battery at Mysore on 29 June 1882, and there is no record of his extending his service once the usual 18 years had elapsed. Tighe's later medical history is entered in his records as *'Bad: addicted to drink and absence, but a clean, smart soldier, obedient and respectful to his superiors.'* Importantly, no punishments are noted in his records. An objective modern medical report for this Gunner might well read: *'A good and effective soldier of proven bravery, lately subject to attacks of PTSD and alcohol abuse following arduous service in Afghanistan.'*



Condition GVF, a little contact wear from campaign medal. Sold with copied research. Ex Seaby's 1979 and Morton and Eden 2023.

A rare and emotive DCM for one of the most disastrous battles of the Victorian era. If ever paired with Tighe's Afghanistan medal, the value of the D.C.M. will double at the very least.