

**A VERY FINE BOER WAR PAIR AWARDED TO AN OFFICER OF THE GORDON HIGHLANDERS, WHO WAS SEVERELY WOUNDED AT THE BATTLE OF ELANDSLAAGTE, 21 OCTOBER 1899, A BATTLE WHICH SAW THE BATTALION SUFFERING BY FAR THE HEAVIEST CASUALTIES AND THE WINNING OF TWO VC'S. RECOVERING FROM HIS WOUNDS, HE TOOK PART IN THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH, WHERE HIS BATTALION WAS NOW BESIEGED AND WAS PRESENT AT THE BATTLES OF COLENZO, SPION KOP, VAAL KRANZ; THE OPERATIONS ON THE TUGELA HEIGHTS AND PIETER'S HILL. MENTIONED IN DESPATCHES, HE REJOINED HIS BATTALION AFTER THE RELIEF AND WOULD BE TWICE MORE MENTIONED IN DESPATCHES BY WARS END**



QUEEN'S SOUTH AFRICA 1899-1902, 6 CLASPS, CAPE COLONY, ELANDSLAAGTE, TUGELA HEIGHTS, RELIEF OF LADYSMITH, LAING'S NEK, BELFAST 'CAPT: C. W. MCD. FINDLAY. GORDON HIGHRS', KING'S SOUTH AFRICA 1901-02, 2 CLASPS, SOUTH AFRICA 1901, SOUTH AFRICA 1902 'CAPT. C. W. MCD. FINDLAY. GORD. HGRS.'

M.I.D. *London Gazette* 8 February 1901

M.I.D. *London Gazette* 10 September 1901

M.I.D. *London Gazette* 29 July 1902

Charles William McDiarmid Findlay was born in Edinburgh in October 1872 and was educated at Fettes. Commissioned into the Gordon Highlanders in May 1895, he was advanced to Lieutenant in



November 1897 and to Captain in July 1900. At the outbreak of hostilities in South Africa, he was Transport Officer of the 2nd Battalion, an appointment he retained until he was severely wounded at Elandsplaagte on 21 October 1899, suffering severe wounds in the arm and thigh.



Captain Findlay seated in centre

### **The Battle of Elandsplaagte**

The 2nd Battalion, Gordon Highlanders was one of the four infantry battalions which, along with three cavalry regiments and three batteries of artillery, were despatched from India to Natal in September 1899, when war was a foregone conclusion.

The 2nd Gordons were part of the force in Ladysmith, along with the 1st Devon and 1st Manchester, brigaded under Colonel Ian Hamilton. Present with Hamilton at the battle of Elandsplaagte, 21 October 1899:

*“The story of Elandsplaagte was one of the few bright days when bright days were sadly wanting. On 18th October General French arrived at Ladysmith. Early on the morning of Saturday, the 21st, he went out northwards towards Elandsplaagte, where it was known that a Boer force, which had cut the line to Dundee, was stationed. The general took with him part of the 5th Dragoon Guards, the 5th Lancers, five squadrons of the newly raised Imperial Light Horse, some Natal Volunteers, half the 1st Manchester Regiment, and the Natal Field Battery. After some skirmishing he found the Boers too strong for his small body, so about 9 am he wired for reinforcements. About two o'clock these came on the scene, the Devons, five companies 2nd Gordons, another squadron of the 5th Dragoon Guards, one of the 5th Lancers, the 21st and 42nd Batteries RFA The Boers were seen to be strongly posted on a ridge, but General French at once decided to attack. The infantry were put under Colonel Ian Hamilton. Roughly the formation was—the 5th Dragoon Guards, some Volunteers, and one battery on our extreme left; the Devons and a battery on the left centre, these to make for the left of the ridge. The Manchesters in the centre and the Gordons on their right rear to attack the extremity of the ridge,*



move along it, and crumple up the enemy. The 5th Lancers and Imperial Light Horse on our extreme right to work round the Boer left. In face of a terrible fire the Manchesters and Gordons pulled off their part of the task. The Boers were driven along the ridge, and the Devons pressed in, having assaulted two detached hills. When the enemy's guns were reached "and the end of the ridge gained from which the whole of the enemy's camp, full of tents, horses, and men, was fully exposed to view at fixed-sight range, a white flag was raised by the enemy, and Colonel Hamilton ordered the cease fire". Men rose up, thinking all was over, not yet having learned what an excess of individual initiative may lead to. At any rate the white flag was disowned by many Boers, who seized the grand target and poured in a fierce fire. Our men were staggered a bit, but soon gathered their wits, and, splendidly led, they charged and routed the remaining Boers, the cavalry charging through and through the enemy while they fled. Two guns and about 200 prisoners were taken, and Sir George estimated that 100 were killed and 108 wounded."



As noted, the 2nd Gordons took a very prominent part in that battle, suffering by far the highest number of casualties in the British force. Out of the five companies present—about 425 officers and men—they had 123 casualties. Major Denne and 4 lieutenants were killed. Colonel W H Dick-Cunyngham and 7 other officers were wounded; 27 men were killed and 83 wounded. Only 3 officers present were untouched. The action brought two VC's to the battalion, those of Lieutenant Meiklejohn and Sergeant Major Robertson. Three officers and 1 non-commissioned officer were mentioned in Sir G White's despatch of 2nd December 1899.

<https://www.britishbattles.com/great-boer-war/battle-of-elandslaagte/>

### **Recovering from wounds and Relief of Ladysmith**

By the time Lieutenant Findlay had sufficiently recovered to rejoin the Battalion, it was under siege in Ladysmith, and he consequently joined the column sent to relieve that place. During his time with the



Relief Force, Findlay was present in the action at Colenso; the operations of 17 to 24 February 1900; the action at Spion Kop; the operations of 5-7 February; the action at Vaal Kranz; the operations on the Tugela Heights from 14-27 February; and the action at Pieter's Hill. Attached to the Natal Volunteer Ambulance Corps (The Body snatchers) for much of this time, he was Mentioned in Despatches by Sir Redvers Buller, V.C.

Interestingly, of the six Officers of the Natal Volunteer Ambulance Corps Mentioned in Despatches by Buller, four were 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Gordon Highlanders Officers; Major Wright and Lieutenant Findlay, both of whom were wounded at Elandslaagte and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants Stansfield and Stewart, neither of whom were at Elandslaagte. None of these Officers could not join their battalion which was besieged at Ladysmith and it seems they all volunteered for service so that they could take part in the relief. According to 'The Life of a Regiment', 'Some Boers took exception to Findlay's tartan, considering it a fighting uniform and not entitled to a Red Cross badge.'



### **Natal Volunteer Ambulance Corps**

*"This organization was hurriedly constituted by Colonel T. Gallwey, the Principal Medical Officer of Natal to carry the wounded from the battlefields. It eventually had a strength of over one thousand. Interestingly, it was supplemented by another 1100 Indians who made up the Natal Indian Ambulance Corps, a separate group led by Mahatma Gandhi. Even though Gandhi's sympathies were with the Boers, he realized the political value of contributing to the British cause. Although his offer was at first refused, increasing casualties persuaded General Buller, the newly arrived British military leader, to concede: The idea was that the NVAC bearers would run onto the battlefield under fire, place the wounded on stretchers and bring them out of the fight. The Indian Corps would then carry them further to the railhead. On December 14, the Corps left for the front, reaching the field hospital at Chieveley the next day. It was immediately employed in carrying the wounded from the Battle of Colenso. The bearers were then stationed at Estcourt before being summoned on the eve of the battle of Spion Kop. During the big battle there on 24 January 1900, when British suffered heavy casualties,*

*the Natal Volunteer Corps saved the wounded under fire and the Indian Corps carried them from Spion Kop to the base hospital at Frere, more than twenty miles away.*

*The Natal Volunteer Ambulance Corps and the Indian Ambulance Corps were disbanded a month later at the end of February 1900 - when the British, with large reinforcements, were able to take the offensive and relieve Ladysmith”*

<https://www.angloboerwar.com/unit-information/south-african-units/705-natal-volunteer-medical-corps1>



Captain Findlay in India

On rejoining the 2nd Battalion on 2 March 1900, Findlay resumed his duties as Transport Officer and was present at the actions at Belfast on 26 and 27 August 1900, and at Lydenberg between 5 and 8 September, having previously been present in the fighting around Laing's Nek in June of that year. He was again Mentioned in Despatches for his services here, and for a third time in Lord Kitchener's final despatch, in addition to receiving the Queen's Medal with six clasps and the King's Medal with two.



Condition GVF, minor contact wear. Sold with copied research including three photographic images. Ex DNW 2007.

A very fine and very early Boer War Officer Casualty and multiple M.I.D. pair



