



Army Museum of Tasmania

Anglesea Barracks
HOBART

Information Sheet No 18

LIEUTENANT EDWARD Mc INNES, VC or COMMENDATION?

The Australian Army Museum Tasmania has in its collection a number of items which formerly belonged to Lt. Edward McInnes of the 9th Lancers. These include a silver cup, a cigar case containing the below transcribed letter and his medals.

McInnes was a contemporary of Cyril whose career is outlined in information sheet No 16 and 17. Both men served in the Afghanistan campaign in 1879. The British, responding to a massacre of their Kabul Embassy staff in September 1879, re-entered Afghanistan in force to impose their will upon the Government.

Three Columns of British troops advanced towards Kabul in December that year. The 9th Lancers formed part of General Massy's force which engaged a force of 10,000 Afghan tribesmen near the village of Killa Kazi. The field artillery had engaged the enemy at 2,500 yards (2,286 meters) but they came steadily on.

Edward McInnes gave his account of the action in a letter written home shortly after the battle:

*Kabul, Christmas Eve 1879
Heavy Snow all day*

Private

As you have no doubt seen by the papers our loss in the 9th Lancers has been very heavy and I can assure you that the action of the 11 Dec when the 9th – 126 strong – charged 8,000 Fanatics will not soon be forgotten by us. I must tell you that on the 10th – the day before the charge, one Squadron of the Regt under Scott Chisholme was sent out with GEN Macpherson's Brigade to feel the enemy in the direction of Ghazni, and on the morning of the 11th the Headquarters (consisting of COL Cleland and myself), with one squadron 126 strong under Stewart MacKenzie, with 4 guns RHA¹ marched in the same direction to operate on Macpherson's flank. We started at 8am and about 11 we sighted the enemy in thousands.

GEN estimated them at 10,000 and presently the guns opened fire, our Squadron supporting them, but their attack was so determined that the guns were compelled to limber up and retire. MacKenzie dismounted one troop to check their advance, but their overwhelming numbers enabled them to come steadily on, their line was one and a half mile long and 8 or 10 deep and in perfect formation. So MacKenzie remounted the troop firing, and the guns continued to retire, we covering the movement. A

¹ Royal Horse Artillery

few minutes afterwards they were so close upon us that we were ordered to charge at all costs and save the guns.

COL Cleland saw the madness of it, but our orders were to charge and they had to be carried out. At this time several of our men and horses had been hit and a hailstorm of bullets rained upon us but I am proud to say the 9th sustained their old reputation and when COL Cleland came up to us and said: "McInnes we are to charge," I said "Very well Sir, in extended files – Charge!" and away we went at a racing pace. The ground was frightful, being intersected by deep water courses and ravines: we charged right through them. It was a gallant sight – Cleland leading, MacKenzie, myself, Trower and poor little Ricardo in front. Just as we closed with the enemy I saw poor Hearsey join us – on my right – he had no business to charge with us as he was ADC to GEN Massey, but the gallant boy could not restrain himself when he saw his regiment going to their death ride.

Well – we got into them but with fearful loss to ourselves. COL Cleland dangerously wounded, ball in the stomach and right arm fearfully shattered, his Trumpet Major shot; poor Hearsey and Ricardo killed. The COL was led out by two of his men and MacKenzie, seeing our loss in officers, men and horses (and that by this time the enemy had overlapped both our flanks), ordered us to retire which we did, and on going 500 or 600 yards we found to our horror that the guns stuck fast in a deep water course.

GEN Roberts again ordered us to charge and MacKenzie, Trower, and I with about 30 men did so, and on returning MacKenzie's horse was shot under him and Trower and I were the only ones near, as our men were retiring and the enemy was within 40 yards of us. No time was to be lost so I offered my horse to MacKenzie and dismounted and pulled his dead horse off him. By this time the Afghans were close upon us with their Sniders² and long knives and hoarse shouts of Allah! Binsullah! When luckily I caught one of our loose horses, the owner of which had been killed, and mounted dear MacKenzie. He was so badly hurt in the knee and ankle that he could no run a yard, so it's a mercy I caught a horse else I fear neither of us would have survived for they cut and mutilated all our wounded in a most shocking manner. I hurried MacKenzie on and soon met Gough with about 20 men and with these he and I held the enemy in check for a time by our dismounted fire. (Hythe)³ experience proved to be very useful; we bowled them over in heaps and then steadily retired until we joined the survivors in Kabul, and the gallant 72nd came out and gave them a decisive check, but fought all night.

Our loss was 2 Officers and Chargers killed, 16 men killed and 14 wounded. 36 horses killed and 10 wounded.

Since then we have been besieged in our cantonment by 25,000 Afghans and I regret to say that we have suffered heavily. On the 13th, I, with poor Butson as MacKenzie was disabled, went out over the (Siah Sang) heights with one Squadron and met a swarm of the enemy and charged them. We had only one squadron as the rest were engaged at other parts of the defence: poor Butson was shot through the heart, Trower slightly wounded and, Scott Chisholme severely wounded through the thigh but the bullet is now out. – We also lost a very gallant fellow – one of our Troop Sergeant Majors named Spittle – and 4 very fine men and horses.

Today GEN Gough marched in with 3 Regiments where upon the Cavalry Brigade were instantly marched out to search for the enemy. We passed the Bala Hissar and went to Chara Sailbs about 6 miles but the enemy had bolted – it snowed heavily all the time and we only got home at dark, both men and horses being very much done up. Fortunately we are all housed but the Troop horses are, I am sorry to say, out in the open. For my own chargers I have built a capital stable and they are very comfortable. I rode my second charger Rufus that I took from the ranks, on the 11th. He is a splendid jumper and carried me nobly and on the 13th I rode my 1st charger that I bought from CAPT Barker 10th Hussars for 100 pounds just before we came up, so I am glad she was not touched. Tell my dear Father that his good sword⁴ did capital service and accounted for several Afghans, but at close quarters my revolver was a useful supplement. Stewart MacKenzie has sent me a very handsome cigar

² Snider Enfield Rifle

³ Reference to the Army School of Musketry, Hythe, England

⁴ This sword is now in the hands of a Collector in the United Kingdom, Reference Classic Arms and Militaria Magazine Vol 1 No 12, 1994

case inscribed "In remembrance of 11th December 1879" and says he mentioned my saving his life under heavy fire. In the despatches he wrote to the CO.

COL Cleland underwent a dreadful operation, they took out his elbow joint and a lucky thing it was done for otherwise he would not have lasted many days. He is now, I am glad to say going on well, MacKenzie is convalescent and will be able to ride soon. Scott Chisholme goes home with a big hole in his thigh but as the bone is untouched his native air of Scotland will soon set him up. The Rest of our wounded are doing well.

General Massey's column retired in good order to Sherpur, although three guns had to be spiked and left. It had been a defeat but the courage shown by the 9th Lancers, and in particular Edward Mc Innes, was recognized.

The Army and Navy Gazette speculated that McInnes would be awarded the Victoria Cross however this did not occur.

Mc Innes joined the Army in 1865 and was commissioned into the 9th Lancers. He was twice mentioned in despatches (including the 11th December 1879) and appointed a Companion to the Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George in 1890 following service as Inspector General on the African Gold Coast. He later commanded the Local Forces at Trinidad (1890), the Inspector General of the British Guiana Police (1892), Special Duty on the Uruan Upper Cuyuni River (1896), Commanded the Colonial Cavalry at Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and retired from Colonial Service in 1902.



Edward McInnes Whisky Flask, Silver Cup and Cigar Case

Bibliography

S. H. Shadbolt, *The Afghan Campaign of 1878 – 1880*

John Murray, *The Second Afghan War 1878 – 1880, The Official Account*

Note the AAMTas. also holds E McInnes Medals. It would appear he had no family and his memorabilia passed to a relative in the 53rd Battalion AIF.