

Major James William Anderson 1847-1893

83rd Regiment of Foot - Poona Horse - Afghan War 1878-80 - Sudan 1885



Ensign James William Anderson Gibraltar circa 1870

Born 27th May 1847 at 30 Caledonia Place, Bristol, the only son of Major James Anderson 1783-1850 and his wife Eliza Catherine Anderson (nee Dick) 1824-1868. James was the third child born to the couple between 1844 and 1847. James's siblings were Eliza MacKenzie Anderson 1844-1864 and Adela Blanche Anderson 1846-1910.

James's father was a Major in the East Essex Militia, a magistrate in Essex and Middlesex, and a one-time Deputy Lieutenant of Middlesex. Having lost his first wife in 1842, James's father aged 60, remarried a considerably younger Eliza Catherine Dick in October 1843, 42 years his junior.

Following the death of his father in 1850, James's mother remarried in June 1851, a doctor named Charles Henry Scott 1814-1891, himself a widower. The couple had one child together, a Catherine A G Scott 1855-1878.

Following his early years growing up in the Clifton area of Bristol, James attended Marlborough Boys College, where he studied from the aged of 10, until he left in December 1864 aged 17. Having completed his formal education, James purchased a commission as Ensign in the 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot 25th April 1868. After initially spending some time at the regiment's depot companies in England, James travelled to Gibraltar where his new regiment had been garrisoned since April 1867.

Britain had taken control of Gibraltar in 1713 and thereafter had retained a military presence there. During the Napoleonic Wars, Gibraltar had become an important base for the Royal Navy and was designated as one of four British fortresses (together with Halifax, Nova Scotia, Bermuda, and Malta). During the 19th century, the peacetime military garrison in Gibraltar fluctuated between 1,100 and 5,000 troops at any one time.



James Anderson sitting pictured with T P Powell
and RWS Burnett



and George Cartwright and Thomas Gibbs
Gibraltar circa 1869

In February 1869, Lieutenant Charles J Wyndham was appointed Instructor of Musketry for the regiment. In December the same year, the Broad Arrow newspaper reported, "By the annual Musketry Return for season 1868/69 we see that the 83rd Regiment still holds its position as best shooting regiment in the army.

The best judges of distance among the officers are reported to be Lieutenant Wyndham, Cartwright, and Metcalfe."



Charles J Wyndham



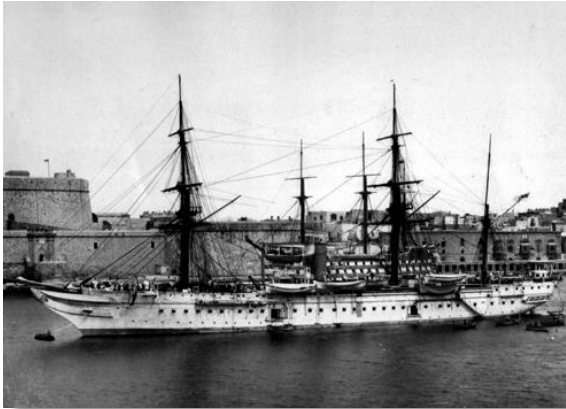
George E S Cartwright



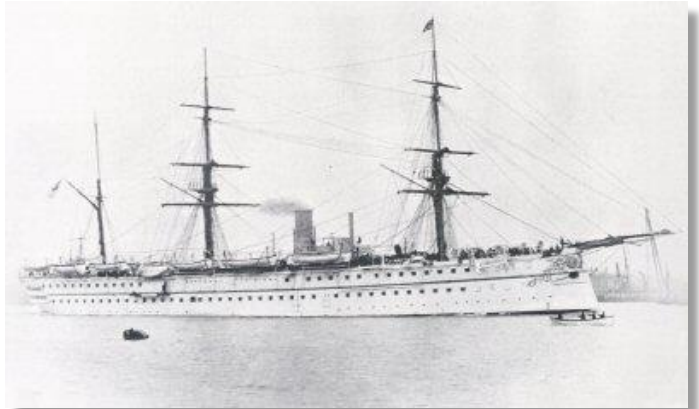
Booth H Metcalfe

On 5th January 1870, James was promoted to Lieutenant by purchase, only weeks before the regiment was due to leave Gibraltar for its next posting.

Having served their time at Gibraltar, the 83rd Regiment commanded by Colonel A. B. Hankey, embarked on the troopship "Tamar" 11th March 1870 and proceeded to Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt. From there they travelled to the port town of Suez on the Red Sea coast by rail and on 25th March embarked on the troopship "Euphrates" for onward transport to India. Arriving at Bombay 8th April 1870, the regiment proceeded to Poona where it was quartered in Wanourie Barracks.



Troopship Tamar



Troopship Euphrates

Poona, located 120 miles southwest of Bombay in the western state of Maharashtra, was one of the most important military and administrative centres for the British in India in the 19th century. Established in the early 19th century, the Poona Cantonment (permanent military station) became a key base for British forces operating in the Bombay Presidency and the surrounding regions. The cantonment was strategically important because of its proximity to the Deccan Plateau and its distance from the coastal areas, making it a safer, less vulnerable location to potential attacks from coastal insurgents. The temperate climate of the region also made Poona an attractive location for British officers and troops, especially during the sweltering summer months in other parts of India.

The Poona Cantonment housed various regiments, including the British Indian Army's artillery and infantry units. This led to the development of infrastructure such as bungalows for officers, barracks, hospitals, roads, and a Bazaar. Over time, Poona became a major centre for British military operations in the western part of India, as well as a hub for the distribution of supplies and reinforcements.

Poona's military significance, however, extended beyond its logistical role. It was also a site of political and social importance. It was here that key military events, such as the rebellion of 1857 (known as the First War of Indian Independence), played out. While Poona itself was not the site of large-scale battles, the cantonment area saw unrest and dissent among the sepoys (Indian soldiers) stationed there. The Poona cantonment witnessed mutinies, desertions, and a general atmosphere of discontent, which reflected broader discontent in the Indian army that eventually culminated in the 1857 revolt.

Poona played an important role in British colonial military strategy, highlighting the widespread nature of British military dominance and their use of strategic locations for garrisons. British officers in cantonments like Poona exercised significant control over the local populace and ensured that their military dominance was firmly established in key areas. These cantonments were designed to support British control over the subcontinent, not only by housing soldiers but by shaping local economies, infrastructures, and communities around military needs.

Over the next few years James remained with the 83rd Regiment stationed at various sites throughout the Bombay presidency. In 1872, the whole regiment was assembled at Bombay, to provide guards of honour to Lord Northbrooke, the Viceroy, and for a viceregal durbar to invest the Begum of Bhopal with the "Star of India", before returning on detachment again.

The whole regiment was assembled again at Chinchivad in 1873 to take part in manoeuvres, before once again being distributed to various sites including Ahmedabad, Deesa and Mount Aboo.

In March 1874, James passed the special examination laid down in the Horse Guards General Order No 65, giving him the necessary qualification to join a cavalry regiment. At around this time, James joined the Poona Horse, a cavalry regiment in the Indian Army.

In May 1874 at Tanah, James married Catherine Louisa Coles, daughter of Lieutenant-Colonel Gordon Coles of the Bombay Staff Corps. Over the next nine years, the couple had four children, Eliza Catherine 1874-1944, Gordon Hay 1877-1959, Mary Verner 1878-1963, and a son Trevor Lee 1883-1884 who died at Kurrachee August 14th, aged just 18 months old.

Within weeks of his marriage, James was appointed as a probationer in the Bombay Staff Corps and then admitted to the Corps as Lieutenant Adjutant in March 1876. The Bombay Staff Corps was a branch of the Indian Army set up in 1861 to provide officers for the Indian native regiments and for the staff and army departments.

In September 1878, Lord Lytton the Viceroy of India ordered a diplomatic mission be sent to the Afghan capital Kabul, where he hoped to establish a political resident. By establishing a British political mission in the Afghan capital, it was hoped that British India could control the foreign relations of this 'buffer' state and reduce Russian influence in the region. When, however, the mission was turned back at the eastern end of the Khyber Pass, the British decided to replace the Afghan leader Sher Ali by force.

By November 1878, three British columns, consisting of 40,000 men, prepared to invade Afghanistan. One column was to march through the Bolan Pass and seize the city of Kandahar, a second to occupy the Ali Masjid fortress and secure the Khyber Pass before advancing to Jalalabad, while the third would advance along the Kurram Valley towards Kabul

Kandahar, in southern Afghanistan, was captured by Lieutenant-General Donald Stewart's force without a struggle 8th January 1879. In the months that followed, the occupation of the city was relatively uneventful, although an outbreak of Cholera in July killed an estimated 400 people.

One of those who died was a former 83rd Regiment officer, a Major Littleton Albert Powys 1840-1879, who was serving with the 59th (2nd Nottinghamshire) Regiment of Foot at the time. In the last days of July, Major Powys took command of a cholera camp, hurriedly set up to deal with the outbreak. The amount of labour which fell to his lot at this time was considerable. Within only days though, he too came down with the disease his camp was trying to contain. After the first seizure he rallied, but again losing strength, he died 6th August 1879. He was buried that evening in Kandahar cemetery by the Eidgah Gate.



Major Littleton A Powys



The Eidgah Gate Kandahar 1880

Towards the end of 1878, the Poona Horse had been ordered to make themselves ready for service in Afghanistan, most likely for escort duties. By January 1879, the 1st and 19th Infantry and the Poona Horse were all made ready to join the field force commanded by Major General Primrose.

In February 1879, James was directed to officiate as 3rd Squadron Commander Poona Horse, at this time still based at Siru east of Bombay.

By May 1879, the Poona Horse were still held in reserve, some 290 sabres Poona Horse and two light cavalry and 1,100 men of the native infantry having been distributed throughout the Deccan, a large region west of Bombay. These troops were there to aid the civil power in suppressing the Dacoits, who at this time were active in the region. The Dacoits were a class of criminal that banded together in gangs to rob and murder.

In January 1880, it was reported that all the Bengal native troops would be withdrawn from Southern Afghanistan and be replaced by Bombay troops. The 3rd Cavalry, 2nd Schinde Horse, the Poona Horse including James Anderson, and the 9th and 10th native infantry regiments would all be ordered forward. The order to move came at the end of January, although it was not until mid February that the first Poona Horse were shipped from Bombay to Kurrachee.

One of the first Indian Government steam ships to leave Bombay carrying troops for Afghanistan was the "Tenasserine". On board were Lieutenant Colonel C D La Touché, Captain Erskin, Adjutant James Anderson, Surgeon Stewart, 4 native officers, 74 sowars, 23 public followers, 76 private followers and 87 horses of the Poona Horse.



Miri Fort Quetta 1880

Having disembarked at Kurrachee, James and the rest of his squadron traveled by train north-east to Quetta near the border with Afghanistan. Train journeys to Quetta at this time, however, were not without incident. During this period, several derailments and crashes had been reported, resulting in a number of fatalities. On one such train, were soldiers from the 66th Berkshire Regiment and the 1st Bombay Grenadiers, including Charles William Hinde, a former fellow officer of James Anderson from the 83rd Regiment. In a twist of fate, all would play a central role in the infamous Battle at Maiwand and its aftermath, just four months later.

Towards the end of April 1880, James was promoted to Captain in the field, having reached 12 years service in the army. Within weeks of his promotion, the headquarters and 2 squadrons of Poona Horse, including James, were ordered to join the garrison at Kandahar. On his promotion James relinquished his role as Adjutant to Lieutenant H Minchin and became 3rd Squadron Commander.

By June 1880, James Anderson was one of 454 men of the Poona Horse available to Major General Primrose in Southern Afghanistan.



Ayub Khan (sitting left) Umrjan Sahib Zadah (sitting centre) Abdulla Khan (sitting right)

A year earlier, General Stewart had headed north to Kabul with his British regiments and division of the Bengal Army, leaving Kandahar with a much weaker garrison of mainly Indian troops, under the command of Major General Primrose.

In April 1880, word had reached Kandahar that Ayub Khan, the younger brother of the deposed Ameer Yakoub Khan, had amassed an army with the intention of expelling the British from Afghanistan. The Wali of Kandahar urged the British to intercept Ayub's army before it reach Kandahar.

General Primrose appointed Brigadier General Burrows as commander of a field brigade sent to oppose Ayub Khan's army, with Brigadier General Nuttall commanding the cavalry. Two cavalry regiments, 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry and 3rd Scinde Horse rode out of Kandahar 4th July 1880, followed by the infantry and guns the next day.

The departure of Burrows field brigade left the garrison at Kandahar with a total of only 1,800 infantry troops to defend the city. In addition, the 180 men of the Poona Horse (Headquarters) were also left at Kandahar due to their numerical weakness.

The British force was supposed to join up with the Wali's troops at a village called Girishk, only to find that the Wali's men had mutinied, with many joining Ayub Khan's army. The British did manage to seize their six antiquated smooth bore guns and formed a makeshift battery, using soldiers from the 66th Regiment.

The British Force comprised:

66th (Berkshire) Regiment of Foot 474 men
Royal Horse Artillery 6 9-Pounder Guns and 6 smooth bore guns 182 men
No 2 Military Hospital
30th Bombay Infantry (Jacob's Rifles) 625 men
1st Grenadiers Bombay Infantry 641 men
3rd Bombay Light Cavalry 316 sabres
3rd Scinde Horse 263 sabres
2nd Company Bombay Sappers and Miners 43 men

A total of approximately 2,600 men.

The Afghan force, which it was thought to have been around 3-4,000 strong, had been vastly underestimated. The actual numbers were more like:

8,000 regular Infantry and Cavalry

3,000-4,000 irregular tribesmen including the notorious Ghazi warriors.

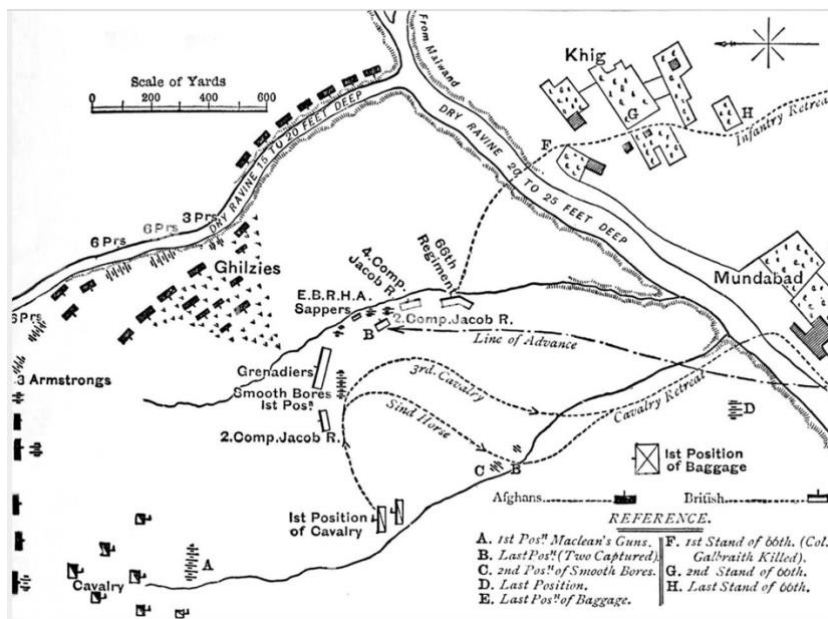
32 Field Guns including six Armstrong's.

A total of approximately 11,000 men. (Hills, The Bombay Field Force, 1880. P19.)

It is noteworthy, that in each account of the Battle of Maiwand, the estimated number of Afghan soldiers differs widely, with some accounts suggesting the figure was as high as 25-30,000. What is not in doubt is that the Afghan army that day significantly outnumbered the British and Indian forces, and that the superior number and quality of field guns possessed by the Afghans was a key factor in the outcome of the battle.

The Battle of Maiwand began at 10.30am 27th July 1880, near the village of Mundabad, with an artillery battle that initially lasted only 15 minutes. After some initial manoeuvres and engagements, Lieutenant Hinde and his Grenadiers were placed towards the left of the British line, between the Jacobs Rifles to their left and Royal Horse Artillery, Sappers and Miners on their right. On the far right of the British line were the 470 men of the 66th Berkshire Regiment.

From that point onward, the day developed into a series of fanatical infantry and cavalry attacks from the Afghan forces. A combination of superior artillery firepower and repeated mass attacks



from the Afghan infantry began to take a toll on the British line, and particularly on the morale of the Indian army ranks. By 2pm, problems in the supply of food, water and artillery ammunition were causing problems for some units. Breaks began to appear in the British lines, and when the British cavalry refused to charge, failing to reinforce the infantry, Ghazis started to penetrate the British lines.

Map of the Battle of Maiwand 27th July 1880

Without artillery and cavalry support, the British infantry lines could not contain the concerted attacks from overwhelming numbers of Afghan infantry and cavalry. By 3.00pm, the British Artillery disengaged and retreated, and so the British companies had no choice but to fight in retreat, falling back towards Mundabad village and towards Khig.

In the chaos of battle and in retreat, many brave and heroic acts were witnessed by those that managed to escape the battlefield that day.

When two companies of the Jacob's Rifles on the far left of the battlefield were rolled up by an onrush of dense masses of Afghan infantry, they were driven helpless and panic stricken into Lieutenant Hinde's Grenadiers. In an attempt to mount an organised defence and restore some order to an increasing desperate situation, an order was issued by Lieutenant Hinde to fix bayonets and form a regimental square. The pressure from the onrushing Afghan troops, however, only

resulted in the companies becoming 'jammed, and an arrow-shaped struggling mass of men were tightly packed together and unable to use their bayonets or fire a shot. The Ghazis taking advantage rushed in and cut them down, practically helpless for a time'. (Hills, The Bombay Field Force, 1880. P25.)

It has been suggested that had Lieutenant Hinde ordered company squares be formed, rather than a regiment square, it is possible that it may have slowed that Afghan advance at this point in the line. With hindsight it is easy to make these judgements, however, in the heat, noise and confusion of battle, with a rapidly changing situation, it may not have been that simple.

In another account, it was reported that a Colonel Anderson of the 1st Grenadiers had given a similar or same order to Lieutenant Hinde, 'For Heaven's sake, my children, form square and steadily', cried out Colonel Anderson of the Grenadiers. 'Keep steady, and it will all be right,' he added in Hindustani. But this was too late. 'Too late' the Grenadiers scarcely hear their leader's cry. They are borne back by the wave of battle and the shields of the Ghazis upon the still unbroken ranks of the 66th, whose colonel was last seen galloping the gallant grey upon the swords and bayonets of the Afghan corps in his front". (Personal Records of the Kandahar Campaign, By Officers Engaged Therein, 1881)

During the fighting that followed, a group of about 100-150 men were separated from the main body of troops and found themselves defending a wall garden at the village of Khig.

By 4.00pm, General Burrows ordered the bugler to sound the retreat. By 5.00pm, towards Khig, the last eleven men of those trapped were killed by overwhelming numbers of the Afghan army. Killed at this point were later found the body of Lieutenant Charles William Hinde of the Grenadiers.



In another account, this time given by one of Ayub Khan's own officers, he stated that 'these brave men were surrounded by the whole army and that, when all but eleven were killed, these made a desperate charge and perished fighting to the last man'. (Cardew, Official Account, p.519).

Left Lieutenant Charles William Hinde 1st Bombay Grenadiers one of "the last eleven" killed in action at Battle of Maiwand 27th July 1880

News of the defeat of Burrow's forces at Maiwand, some forty-five miles from the city, arrived in Kandahar at about 3am. As the survivors of the battle were forced to retreat through a hostile country, perused by elements of the victorious Afghan army, few were expected to get back to the relative safety of Kandahar. In response to

the news, preparations were hurriedly made to send another force of troops from Kandahar, to assist and protect the retreating survivors of the battle.

That force and their actions that day, were described in despatches written by Brigadier-General Henry Francis Brooke 8th August 1880. Singled out for special mention that day were the actions of Captain James William Anderson of the Poona Horse.

Just eight days after writing this despatches, Brigadier-General Henry Francis Brooke aged 42 was killed in action in a sortie from Kandahar 16th August 1880, while endeavouring to save the life of a fellow officer.

Those despatches are as follows:

“From Brig.-Gen. H. F. Brooke, Commanding the 2nd Infantry Brigade, 1st Division, Kandahar Field Force, to the Assistant Adjutant-General Operations, Kandahar Field Force (No 300 “Field Operations” dated Kandahar, Aug 8, 1880.)

I have the honour to report that, in compliance with the orders received from the Lieutenant-General, I left cantonments at 5.30 A.M. on July 28, with the force, as follows, to proceed to Kokeran to cover the retirement of the force under Brig.-Gen. Burrows, whose movement on Kandahar was, as reported by an officer who had arrived half an hour previously, being endangered by the opposition of the country people, who had collected in large numbers for that purpose :—

Poona Horse - 40 sabres under Capt. J. W. Anderson.

C-2 Royal Artillery-two guns under Capt. W. Law.

7th Royal Fusiliers-three officers and seventy rank and file, under Lieut. R. P. B. Rodick.

28th N.I.-100 rank and file under Major F. C. Singleton.



Brigadier-General Henry Francis Brooke 1838-1880

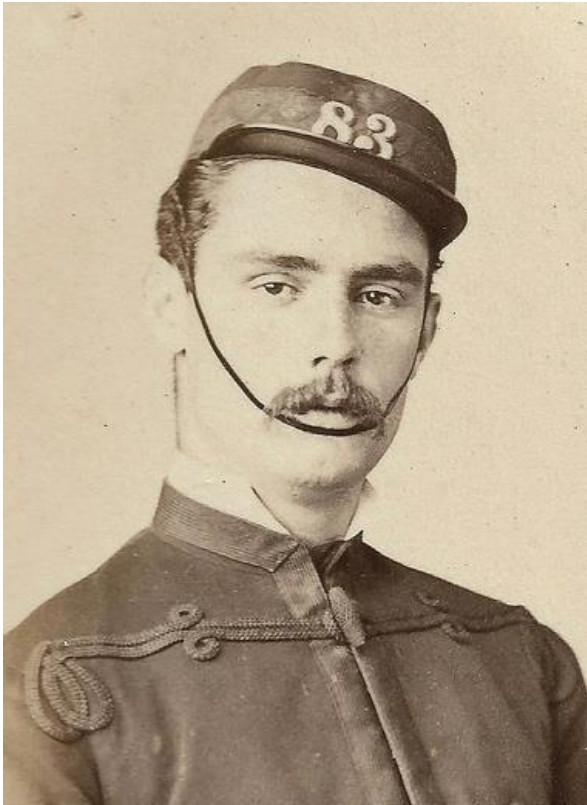
On leaving cantonments the only practicable road to Kokeran passes for about one mile (as the Lieutenant-General is aware) through walled gardens, and along the main street of the village of Abasabad, which is narrow and tortuous. The gardens were full of armed men, who, however, fell back without much resistance before my skirmishers and thus allowed the guns and the remainder of the column to pass unopposed through the village of Abasabad into the more open country beyond.

From the time of leaving Kandahar, parties of the retiring force were met, who reported that they had been attacked by the country people all along the route, but especially at the villages of Singiri and Kokeran.

I, therefore, pushed on as quickly as the weakness of my force and the necessity of clearing my flanks of the large number of armed men who crowded the high hills on my left, and the walled enclosures and strongly placed villages on my right, would allow. Although the resistance offered was not important, considerable time was necessarily occupied in clearing the numerous positions taken up by the enemy, and it was nearly nine o'clock am before I reached Kokeran.

Here I took up a position which enabled me to command the Herat road, the village, and the fortified residence of the Sartip; and at once sent on some cavalry to communicate with the force under Brig.-Gen. Burrows, which had at that time completed the crossing of the Argandab river, and was halted about a mile from Kokeran.

On the appearance of the force under my command, the village and fortified post at Kokeran were hurriedly evacuated by a very considerable body of armed men, who up to this time had been harassing and killing all small parties of the retiring force who had passed within their range. This body of men then established themselves in a village on the bank of the Argandab, about 800 yards from my right flank, from which position, however, they were quickly dislodged, and all further firing



from the enemy ceased until the rear guard of General Burrows's force had passed me on their way to Kandahar. I caused the Sartip's house to be entered by a party of the Royal Fusiliers, under Lieut. Rodick, but no one was found in it.

When the last man of the retiring force had passed me, I recalled that portion of my cavalry which, under Captain Anderson, had been watching the Ford of the Argandab, and as soon as they had rejoined my column, I commenced to return to Kandahar, picking up all stragglers who had been unable to keep up with General Burrows's force. In returning from the ford, Capt. Anderson's small party of cavalry were attacked by very superior numbers; but they quickly overcame the resistance and inflicted considerable loss on the enemy.

Pictured left Captain James William Anderson Poona Horse at Gibraltar circa 1869

Our return march was unmolested for about three miles and a half, when I received information from the front that the hills immediately over the village of Abasabad and the walled enclosures round it were strongly occupied by the enemy. I at once sent forward the two guns of C-2 Royal Art., under Captain Law, with a cavalry escort, following myself with the remainder of the cavalry and infantry, and, passing through General Burrows's force, which was then halted, pushed rapidly to the front, throwing out skirmishers to clear the gardens and village. Some excellently directed shells from the guns caused the enemy to evacuate their fortified posts on the hills, while the skirmishers cleared the walled enclosures of all opposition, enabling both my force and that of Brig.-Gen. Burrows to pass through the extremely difficult village of Abasabad with trifling loss.

On reaching the open ground on the Kandahar side of Abasabad, I again halted and formed up my force and so remained until the main portion of the force of Brig-Gen. Burrows had passed me, sending back a company of the Royal Fusiliers (obtained from the regiment) under Capt. E. W. Adderley, to keep the outskirts of the village of Abasabad clear of the enemy and bring in all stragglers. I then followed General Burrows's force into cantonments, where I arrived about 1.30 P.M.

The loss of the enemy in the operations above described must have been considerable, not only from our artillery and rifle fire, but also consequently on two well executed charges which were made by the Poona Horse, admirably led by Capt. J.W. Anderson, whom I desire to commend to the favourable consideration of the Lieutenant-General.

The conduct of the troops under my command was, in all respects, excellent and full of spirit.

The well directed fire of the two guns of C-2 Royal Artillery proved most useful. They were excellently commanded throughout the day by Capt. W. Law, whom I desire to bring to special notice as an officer of much professional knowledge, zeal, and forwardness.

I would ask the Lieutenant-General's special consideration and approval for my staff officers-Capt. F. W. V. Leckie, St Fusiers, Orderly Car, both of whom are officers of superior attainments and qualifications. The zealous assistance they afforded me throughout the whole day was invaluable.

I annex the usual casualty roll: Sowar Rugotoollah, Poona Horse killed."

An extract from the Private Journal of Henry Francis Brooke late Brigadier-General Commanding 2nd



Infantry Brigade
Kandahar Field
Force, Southern
Afghanistan, from
April 22nd to
August 16th, 1880.
Published 2014,
also describes the
attack of the
Poona Horse led
by Captain James
Anderson in
defence of the
retreating troops
from Maiwand.

British Officers present during the Siege of Kandahar August 1880

"Almost last of all, followed only by a Cavalry escort, came poor Burrows himself, who, poor fellow, completely broke down when he saw me, and could not say a word. I made him get off his horse and take a little whiskey and water I had with me, and a bit of biscuit, and soon he was more composed and better. He, like them all, was relieved beyond measure to see me, and my diminutive following, as they knew their troubles were at an end. I agreed that they should all, to the last straggler, pass me, and that when they were half a mile ahead, I should follow slowly, and bring up the rear of all, covering them from all annoyance. Soon (all too soon, for they were but a very little company) they had filed passed, and I then recalled my Cavalry, which had been watching the ford of the Argandab a mile to my front. On their return over this mile the enemy, emboldened by our preparations for departure, suddenly rushed down in great numbers to cut them off, but Captain Anderson was equal to the occasion, and setting at nought the difference of numbers, charged them, and cut his way through, leaving, however, his very best soldier dead on the ground. Although I would have liked to have punished the enemy for this affair, prudence said no, and so I commenced my return for Kandahar, keeping half a mile in rear of General Burrows' column and picking up many poor fellows (putting them on my guns), who, even in this short distance, had begun to fall out again."

Following the defeat at Maiwand, the surviving soldiers that had managed to return to Kandahar formed part of the garrison that was besieged by Ayub Khan's victorious army. The nearest reinforcements were hundreds of miles away in Kabul and in Quetta, where forces commanded by General Roberts and Brigadier General Phayre were to be found. During the siege that followed the Poona Horse was employed every day on covering and working parties. The regiment also took part in the affair at Khairabad and the sortie Deh Khwaja.

In what has become known as an amazing feat of endurance, General Roberts managed to march the 10,000 troops at his disposal, some 300 miles across some of Afghanistan's harshest terrain, in just three weeks. Arriving in Kandahar 31st August 1880, General Robert's was keen to attack Ayub Khan's army without delay. The Battle of Kandahar started the next day, the British and Indian forces

totalled 11,000 men and 32 guns in the field, against Ayub Khan's 15,000 Afghan regular troops, tribesmen and 32 guns.

In a decisive battle that lasted less than 24 hours, the British had captured all of Ayub Khan's guns and forced the Afghan Army to withdraw from the field. During the battle, the Poona Horse was out with the Bombay Cavalry Brigade, under Brigadier-General Nuttall, and when the enemy was retreating, was detached to prevent stragglers escaping through the Kotah-i-Murcha Pass. British and Indian casualties were 250 killed and wounded, while Afghan casualties were estimated to be 2,500 killed, wounded, and captured.

On 8th September 1880, Headquarters and 200 sabres of the Poona Horse marched as part of Brigadier-General Daubeny's Brigade to Maiwand, for the purpose of searching for arms and prisoners, and burying the dead.

During the 19th Century, the health of the British Army in India and beyond faced significant challenges. The subcontinent's harsh climate, coupled with unsanitary living conditions, led to widespread health issues among the troops. Tropical diseases such as malaria, cholera, dysentery, and typhoid were rampant, posing a constant threat to the soldiers. Conditions in the field were particularly demanding, with the added physical and mental demands of warfare, combined with periods where the supply of clean water and good food were not always available.

By September 1880, James had been in India for ten years, and on active duty in the field for over six months. It seems that by November 1880, James had fallen seriously ill. On 11th November, the Bombay Government Gazette reported "that Captain J W Anderson Staff Corps Squadron Officer Poona Horse (Officiating Brigade Major Cavalry 1st Division) Souther Afghanistan Field Force is allowed furlough to Europe for 18 months on medical certificate."

By April 1881, James and his wife Catherine were back in England, living at 18 Henrietta Street in Bath, with their three children Eliza Catherine aged 6, Gordon Hay aged 4, and Mary Verner aged 2.

The following year, his health sufficiently restored, James returned once again to India where he took up command of the 3rd Squadron of the Poona Horse. In January 1883, James was asked to officiate as the Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General at Bombay. In February 1883, Catherine had their fourth child, at Marine Lines Bombay, a boy Trevor Lee. Trevor Lee Anderson died at Kurrachee aged just 18 months 14th August 1884.

In early 1884, a largely Egyptian force of 3,500 men commanded by Baker Pasha a British Officer, set out from Suakin towards the town of Tokar in the Sudan. At a halting place of El Teb, they were attacked by a Mahdist force of 1,000 men. Despite their superior numbers and weaponry, the Mahdists inflicted a heavy defeat on the Egyptians, only 700 out of the 3,500 returned to Suakin. Following this defeat, the British reluctantly agreed to divert some British units, the Royal Irish Fusiliers on their way returning home from India, 3 battalions from the army of occupation in Egypt, York and Lancaster Regiment from Aden and a battalion of Marines, were all sent to Suakin.

When assembled, a second expedition consisting of 4,500 British troops, supported by 22 guns and 6 machine guns, departed from Suakin 10th March 1884, commanded by Major General Sir Gerald Graham VC. Three days later, after a fierce battle, the British force inflicted a serious defeat on much larger Mahdist army. Their leader Osman Digna, however, escaped capture.

Despite this success, following the fall of Khartoum on 26th January 1885, the British once again felt the need to defeat the forces of Osman Digna, so a second British Expedition was planned against Digna. In command of the second expedition would again be Major General Sir Gerald Graham VC, who had defeated Digna's forces the previous year at the Battle of Tamai.

In 1885, James was seconded for service with the transport department of the Saukin Expedition to the Sudan. It was announced that a camel corps would be formed at Aden for service in the Sudan, the work of organising the corps being entrusted to Captain J. W. Anderson, Deputy-Assistant Quartermaster-General, assisted by Lieutenant J. C. Swann, adjutant of the 1st Bombay Grenadiers, who had been on special duty in Bombay in connection with the Quartermaster-General's Department.

By 12th March 1885, the British had assembled a field force of some 10,500 British and Indian troops at Suakin, consisting of:

Royal Engineers
King's Shropshire Regiment
East Surrey Regiment
1st Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment
Royal Marine Light Infantry
5th Royal Irish Lancers
20th Hussars
Royal Horse Artillery
Grenadier Guards
Coldstream Guards
Scots Guards
9th Bengal Cavalry
17th Bengal Native Infantry
15th Ludhiana Sikh Regiment
28th Bombay Pioneers
Madras Sappers and Miners

In addition, the expedition employed 7,000 transport men and 10,000 animals required to supply and maintain the presence of such a large force in the field.

The first action of the expedition was to send out a scouting detachment on 19th March to survey the area around Hashin, some 7 miles inland from Suakin. It was thought that a number of Digna's men were camped at Hashin, so General Graham led a force 8,500 troops accompanied by 1,500 transport animals to capture Dihibat Hill near Hashin, and to establish a zeriba (a fortified enclosure) nearby.

The force successfully achieved its objectives, losing two officers and only a handful of men, before returning to Suakin the same night.

On 22nd March 1885, within only 5 miles from the port of Suakin, a contingent of some 3,000 British and Indian troops, led by Major General Sir John Carstairs McNeill, was attacked by a Mahdist force. The Mahdists were heavily defeated, losing some 1,000 of their 2,000 fighters, compared to the loss of 70 British and Indian soldiers killed and over 100 wounded.

Within two months, however, the British government, in pursuing its anti-imperialist policies elsewhere, took the opportunity provided by events in Afghanistan, to abandon its military campaign in Sudan. Consequently, the Suakin Field Force was withdrawn during 1885.

Returning to India from the Sudan, James rejoined the Poona Horse, who in November 1885 were designated the 4th Bombay Cavalry, and in 1890 the 4th (Prince Albert Victor's Own) Bombay Cavalry (Poona Horse).

In February 1888, James was granted one years leave out of India on "personal affairs", and in September 1889 extended by a further 6 months on "medical grounds". Returning to duty in India

in March 1890, James was promoted to Major and appointed second in Command of the 4th Bombay Cavalry (Poona Horse).

Having spent three more years in India, James now 46 years old, was granted another year's leave of absence 18th May 1893 again reported on "private affairs", but almost certain on medical grounds. Intending to return to England, James was a passenger on the French Mail Boat "La Seyne," due to leave Karachi 13th May bound for Aden.

The Madras Weekly Mail published the following report in their 31st May 1893 issue:

"Major J. W. Anderson, who was for some time in command of the Poona Horse, died from dysentery on board the French Mail boat La Seyne in Aden Harbour on the 18th instant. He was buried with full military honour's the following day."

Although the cause of death was reported as Dysentery, the La Seyne was reportedly carrying Cholera only a few weeks later. No matter the cause of death, it seems that James, weakened by illness experienced over years of service in the far east, he finally succumbed to an illness he could not recover from.

The Western Morning News carried the following obituary in their 6th June 1893 edition:

"News has been received of the death at Aden, while on his way home from India, of Major J. W., Anderson, Indian Staff Corps, at the age of forty-six years. The deceased, who entered the Army in 1868, had seen considerable war service. He served with distinction in the Afghan campaign of 1879-80, being present at Kairabad, Maiwand, Candáhar, Deh Khoja, and the battle of Sept. 1, for his gallant behaviour in which he was mentioned in despatches, and granted the medal, with clasp. He also served in the Soudan campaign."

Following James's death, Catherine and her children returned to England and lived in Bath with her father Thomas G Coles 1826-1901. At some point thereafter Catherine moved to Canada where she died 6th July 1941, buried in Mount Ida Cemetery Salmon Arm, British Columbia.

Researched and written by Gary Hynard 2025