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A STREAK OF THE AFGHAN WAR.—LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR DONALD STEWART'S MARCH FROM KANDAHAR TO GHAZNI, WITH ACTIONS OF AHMED KHEL AND URZU.

By Captain R. ELIAS, 59th Regiment.

In the spring of this year, when the snow had disappeared from the roads and plains between Kandahar and Ghazni, it was decided that the time had arrived to make the long-talked-of advance on the latter place, in order to convince the Afghans of the *fortiter in re* that lies hidden behind our *suaviter in modo* principles of warfare, and to give them unmistakable proof that, although our skirmishing line is in a great measure composed of silver, we possess reliable supports and reserves of lead and steel in the background.

The Ghazni Field Force was composed as follows:—

Lieutenant-General Sir Donald Stewart, K.C.B., Commanding.

1st Infantry Brigade, Brigadier-General Barter, C.B., Commanding: 60th Rifles, 15th Sikhs, 25th Punjab N.I.

2nd Infantry Brigade, Brigadier-General Hughes Commanding: 59th Regiment, 3rd Goorkhas, 2nd Sikhs.

Cavalry Brigade, Brigadier-General Palliser, C.B., Commanding: 1st Punjab Cavalry (with 1st Brigade), 2nd Punjab Cavalry (with 2nd Brigade), 19th Bengal Lancers (with Headquarters), 19th Punjab N.I. (with Headquarters).

Artillery, Colonel Johnson, R.H.A., Commanding: A | B R.H.A. (with Headquarters), G | 4 R.A. (with 2nd Brigade), 6 | 11 R.A. Heavy Battery (with 2nd Brigade), 11 | 11 R.A. Mountain Battery (with 1st Brigade), No. 4 Company Sappers and Miners, No. 10 Company Sappers and Miners.

Engineer Field Park, Ordnance Department, Transport Department, Survey Department, Commissariat Department, Section A, Section B, Field Hospital.

Total number of fighting men (including artillerymen) in round numbers, 7,000.

The 1st Brigade left Kandahar on the 29th March, moving by the left bank of the Turnak. On the right bank marched General Stewart with Headquarters who left Kandahar on the 30th March, and the 2nd Brigade which left Kandahar on the 31st March. On the 6th and 7th April Headquarters and the 2nd Brigade, respectively, reached Kalat-i-Ghilzai, and were joined by 2 companies 59th Regiment, 2 guns G | 4 R.A., and 2 guns 11 | 11 Mountain Battery, these troops having been on detachment there during the winter. A halt of two days was made, and some additional supplies and transport animals taken on. The latter consisted chiefly of camels, and considerable difficulty was experienced in obtaining a sufficient number for our force.

Fortunately the season and weather were favourable, and we lost comparatively few. To give an idea, here is a statement of the total number of transport animals belonging to the 2nd Brigade on the 24th April, viz., 1,597 camels, 786 mules, 114 ponies, 460 donkeys, 120 bullocks. The total number of camels at starting was 1,804; there had therefore been a loss of 207 camels—a loss of 11·47 per cent. The losses among the other animals were as small as to be scarcely worth mentioning—one mule, two ponies, &c., once more showing the miserable inferiority of camel transport.

On the 8th and 9th April, the march was continued from Kalat-i-Ghilzai. To give a detailed account of each day's stage would be tedious and uninteresting. The halting places on the right bank were nearly all the same as those encamped at by Keane's force in 1838, and described in the narrative of Major Hough, Deputy Judge Advocate with that force. They are as follows:—From Kandahar to Moman—Robat—Khel-i-Akhund—Shahr-i-Safr—Tirandaz—Jeldak—Pul-i-Sang—Kalat-i-Ghilzai—Sar-i-Asp—Naurak—Tazi—Shahjui—Chashma-i-Panjak—Ghojan—Mukar—Karez-i-Oba—Jamrud—Mashaki—Ahmed Khel—Nani to Ghazni (two marches). Total distance about 230 miles. These were the halting places of the Headquarters and 2nd Brigade. The 1st Brigade followed a parallel line on the other side of the river until reaching Jamrud, where the whole division concentrated and afterwards moved on together.

In travelling northward from Kandahar a considerable change is noticeable in the character of climate, country, and people all along the road. The hills look as bare and as barren as ever; but the strip of valley, sometimes narrow enough, sometimes opening out to a generous breadth on each side of the river, becomes gradually more and more fertile, better cultivated, and more thickly populated as the neighbourhood of Ghazni is reached. The people are finer and they all understand Persian, which was to a certain extent an advantage; the state of the case on our side being that hardly any of us know Pushtoo, a few know Persian, and most of us are innocent of any knowledge of either. The villages are larger and better built—still of mud—but the cottages and forts are better finished, so that at a little distance the latter especially look as if they were of stone. The number of forts is surprising; each village, and they are often only a few hundred yards apart, has its fort, sometimes two, and one cannot help being forcibly reminded of the likeness to the state of things existing not so very long ago on the English and Scottish border as portrayed in the "Lay of the Last Minstrel" and other works of Scott. It is noteworthy however that notwithstanding their frequent feuds and fights very few maimed individuals are seen about, from which it would appear that either the fights are not so frequent and serious as they are said to be, or that short work is made with the wounded. At the present time of year the crops are coming on and all looks peaceable enough in and around the villages, and we have remarked with satisfaction the absence of the privateering Ghazi,¹ so unpleasantly com-

¹ Literally, "hero," or "warrior;" but with us the word has come to signify a Mussulman fanatic.

mon in Kandahar. Foraging parties have once or twice been fired at, and on the morning of the 16th April, soon after leaving our camping ground at Mukar, Lieutenant Elverson, Transport Officer 2nd Brigade, who was coming up in rear of the column with some animals loaded with grain, escorted by a party of Goorkhas and 2nd Punjab Cavalry, had halted by the margin of a peacefully rippling brook, when all of a sudden a very lively and continuous, but badly aimed fire was opened on the party from some caves in the side of a neighbouring hill on the left of the road; as it was impossible to reply to it or to attack the natives in their hill, the only plan was to move on with as much dignity as might be, inclining perhaps a trifle to the right. Strange to say no one was hit, but a bullet found its billet in one of Mr. Elverson's saddle bags. Three incautious Afghans, having ventured on to the road with arms in their hands, were made prisoners and brought into camp. On the same day large bodies of the enemy were seen by the cavalry scouts on the right. For some days the dust had been seen of a large body of troops moving about 15 miles off, on our right, and parallel to our line of march—exactly as they did in 1838—and it was pretty well known that they had been marching up all the way from near Kandahar, increasing their strength on the way, with the intention of opposing our advance when a convenient time and place should be found.

On the 17th April, the whole division concentrated at Jamrud. In this part of the country the valley is broad and thickly populated, and many of the villages are inhabited by our allies, the Hazaras; these, taking advantage of our presence, and of the fact that nearly all the Afghan villages along the line had been deserted, looted everything that was left, and set fire to the buildings. On the whole these friends were of little service to us, rather the reverse. Much grain and bhoosa,¹ which would have fallen into our hands, and of which we were much in need, was appropriated by them. In physique they are inferior to the Afghans. They have the Mongol cast of countenance and but little hair on their faces. When (or if) we leave the country their fate, it is to be feared, will not be an enviable one. On the march to Jamrud a small party of the enemy, chiefly cavalry, hung about our rear and right flank, keeping however at a respectful distance.

On the 18th, we advanced to Mashaki by a sandy road, broken by nullas and watercourses. The Hazaras kept very close to us, and on each side of the road were seen many Afghan villages burning. The Hazaras had set them on fire. In the afternoon, after arriving in camp, a reconnoitring party went out, was fired at, and reported the enemy in force about 3 miles ahead in the direction of our intended march next day.

The morning of the 19th April was close and sultry. We marched at 4.30, expecting that now at last we should meet the enemy, and we were not disappointed. The line of march was over a broad plain, rough and stony, and crossed at about 3 miles beyond Mashaki by a line of low sandy hills, where the Afghans had been seen the evening

¹ Chopped straw.

before. This line was passed without opposition and without even seeing an Afghan; but when we had advanced about 6 miles further, to just about the spot where we had intended to encamp, the crests of another and higher range of hills in our front and to the left of our road were seen to be covered with a large Afghan force of horse and foot. Very quiet and determined they looked on the tops of their hills, and it was impossible to tell how many more might be on the reverse slopes in rear of those we could see. Their main body, chiefly composed of men on foot, was on a hill to our left front, and a large party, many of which were horsemen, was moving slowly round the crests to a position rather lower down and directly on the left of our advance. These looked so uncommonly near that many were asking if they really were the enemy, and whether they might not be Hazaras. Standards, red, green, and white, were being carried about, others were planted in the ground. Some saw the mullahs blessing the weapons of the Ghazis before sending them down to fight. Two batteries, A | B R.H.A. and G | 4 R.A. were soon in position, the former on a hillock to the left of the road, the latter on rather lower ground to the left of and rather in front of A | B. A steady and effective fire was immediately opened on the main gathering of the enemy, first shot fired at 9 A.M. The infantry now came up and formed for attack on the left of the batteries, 59th on the left of G | 4, line continued to the left by the 2nd Sikhs, then the 3rd Goorkhas, 19th Punjab N.I. in reserve. In forming up, a gap was left between G | 4 and the right of the infantry line; this was filled by one company 60th Rifles and one company 25th Punjab N.I., both part of the Lieutenant-General's escort. Two squadrons 2nd Punjab Cavalry were on the right rear of A | B R.H.A., and of the other squadron one troop, as escort, was on the right flank, and one on the left of the two batteries. The main body of the 19th Bengal Lancers formed up in front of the rear of the left of the infantry line. Two troops had been sent forward to reconnoitre the enemy's right. 6 | 11 Heavy Battery halted about 1,000 yards in rear of the line and opposite the enemy's right. The field hospital was established in rear of the left; more to the centre was a hill, where the Lieutenant-General and Headquarter Staff took post. Intrenching tools were sent back, baggage halted in rear. 1st Brigade about 3 miles in rear.

Such, as nearly as may be, was the position when the action of Ahmed Khel was begun. The Afghans were in a well-chosen position, and if they had been wise they would have remained in it, and let us attack them after a hard pull up a steep hill; but almost before the infantry line was formed, they began to come down on us on all sides. In the centre, crowds of Ghazis on foot came swarming over the crest and down the side of the high hill opposite the infantry and artillery; the latter continued firing and the infantry now also opened fire all along the line, but not a whit did the Ghazis waver. Very curious was the appearance they presented as they came in a steady crowd, striding down the hill fast enough, but not appearing to rush, their legs very wide apart (as I suppose they must be, running down a steep hill), most of them big men, with long white robes flowing in the wind,

right arms with swords and other weapons extended, and trying to guard their heads (against Martini-Henry bullets!) with shields. Anyone with the semblance of a heart under his khaki¹ jacket could not help feeling something like pity to see them thus advancing with their miserable weapons in the face of our guns and rifles; but their courage and numbers made them formidable. As they came on, at about 600 yards, the effect of our fire began to be seen in earnest, and at 300 and 400 yards the slaughter was terrific—as the smoke rolled away the ground in front was seen to be simply strewn with prostrate Ghazis. Still they advanced with courage amounting to madness. Now supports and reserves were all in the fighting line, which was certainly rather too crowded, and the batteries, A | B and G | 4, began to fire case, and a little later inverted shrapnel. While this was going on in the centre, the enemy on the right and left had also advanced. On the right they came in masses of cavalry and infantry, making the most determined attempts to get round and attack us in rear; it was here that the 2nd Punjab Cavalry did good service by making repeated charges by troops, thus checking the advance; but they came in such numbers that it was impossible to drive them all back at once. On the left a similar turning movement was being attempted; here a party of the 19th Bengal Lancers, moving at a trot, came upon a large body of Ghazi cavalry, galloping round the spur of a hill. This happened so unexpectedly that the Lancers were irresistibly and unavoidably thrown back, and both parties, fighting hand to hand, came galloping in past the left of and through the Goorkhas, who formed company and rallying squares, and creating no small confusion in the 19th Punjab N.I., the field hospital, and among the occupants of the Lieutenant-General's hill; but the Ghazis, already without order or cohesion, were by the Lancers, the fire of the Goorkhas, the 19th Punjab N.I., and of other corps near, who could bring any fire to bear upon them, dispersed and driven beyond our line. These three attacks were made almost simultaneously, that on the left began a little later than the others. A party of the enemy also, some cavalry, some on foot, had made a move down the lower hill on our left rear and opposite to where 6 | 11 R.A. had halted. They appeared to be meditating an attack on the baggage, but Major Tillard landed a few shells from the 40-pounders among them, when any design they may have had on the baggage was speedily abandoned, and they were seen no more. And now came the critical moment, the turning point of the day. For three-quarters of an hour the Ghazis had been continually swarming on, right up to the muzzles of the guns and rifles. As soon as a knot of six or seven had been swept away by case-shot, as frequently happened, or mown down by the fire of the Martini-Henrys, their places were at once filled by others; their numbers seemed endless, and on the right, considerable bodies were actually inside our line. For this reason it was necessary to throw back that flank. The two batteries, the two escort companies (of 60th Rifles and 25th Punjab N.I.) and the 59th Regiment all retired (for about 200 yards on the extreme

¹ Khaki = thin brown stuff, something like brown holland.

right, towards the centre somewhat less). Firing was kept up on the enemy already in and trying to get into the line, and they were thus kept on the right side of our guns and rifles. As soon as this was the case, the guns again came into action, two guns, G | 4, going to the right and four to the left; the infantry halted, fronted, and again opened fire nearly in the original direction. The line at this time was in shape very nearly the arc of a circle. After a few minutes more firing, it was plain that the rush of the Ghazis was broken. Crowds continued to come on, but not with the same vigour as before; then many were seen edging off to the right and left, some deliberately retreating. The entire attack seemed to open out and give way, the military atmosphere was clearing; a few minutes later the whole were in full retreat and the day was ours. The fighting had lasted a little more than an hour; most of the fugitives moved off in the direction of the river and the Shilghur Hills beyond, *i.e.*, eastward; but a large body collected on a hill more to the north, nearly a mile from us. As it was not quite certain whether they might not gather again, a general advance was made to some rising ground about 500 yards in front, but they had had enough: after a few well-directed shells, those on the hills also dispersed. The greater part of the cavalry, joined by the 1st Punjab Cavalry, which had just come up in time from the 1st Brigade, pursued the fugitives for about 3 miles; our horsemen were then recalled. They killed many, but if they had been allowed to go on, hundreds more would have been accounted for. A halt of about an hour's duration was made on the ground, and all were glad of a rest. During this time it was necessary to keep a sharp eye on the enemy's wounded and apparently dead, in order to guard against such mischances as the following:—A soldier of the 59th Regiment walked up to an Afghan, wounded and lying on the ground; suddenly a sword, sharp as a razor, flashed from under the folds of the prostrate man's dress and inflicted such a terrible wound just below the man's knee that his leg has since had to be amputated. There were several cases of wounded men doing their utmost to injure anyone who approached them; fortunately they were not generally successful.

It is difficult to estimate at all accurately the numbers of the enemy, but altogether there must have been from 12,000 to 15,000, but many of these never came down from the hills. The real attack, the rush of Ghazis, was made by 3,000 or 4,000, of whom about 600 were mounted. Their loss must have been about 2,000 killed and wounded, probably more. Our numbers actually fighting were approximately 1,800 infantry, 700 cavalry (not including the 1st Punjab Cavalry, which joined afterwards), 12 Horse Artillery and field guns, and the heavy battery, consisting of 2 40-pounders and 2 6·3-in. howitzers. Our loss, 17 killed, 126 wounded. Most of the Afghans were armed with swords and shields; there were among them a few Snider rifles. Some had bayonets on sticks, and about one-third was fitted out with matchlocks and flint and steel implements, with short thin stocks, very much bent, and generally inlaid with ivory, such as may be seen on the walls of any old armoury at home, where they repose in the character of antique curiosities. When fire is applied to the touch-

hole or the trigger is pulled, they sometimes go off, sometimes they do not. The Hazaras, to the number of about 2,000, remained spectators of the fight, but they did not join in it; they joined however in the pursuit. During the hottest part of the fight, just when the right was being thrown back, a colour-sergeant of the 60th Rifles, at some distance in front of the line, was wounded and unable to move. Dozens of Ghazis were making for the spot to despatch him, when Second Lieutenant Twynam, 59th Regiment, gallantly ran out to his assistance; he got close up to him, was cut at by a Ghazi, parried the cut, and ran another Ghazi through the body; but the soldier was hacked to pieces in a minute, and Mr. Twynam only just got back to the line in time to save himself from a similar fate. A like bold attempt was made by Major Frampton, 59th Regiment, in the case of another wounded soldier; but it was impossible to rescue any one who was down—the Ghazis immediately swarmed round him like hounds breaking into a fox.

The Afghan commanders were Shir Jan, Taraki, and Mahomed Aslam Khan, Tokhi. It is said that a son of Mushki Alam was present at the action. The chief tribes concerned in it were Tarakis, Tokhis, and Suleiman Khels.

At midday the whole division, now together, commenced a general advance in line of columns over very rough ground. No more was seen of the enemy, except those unfortunates who had not been able to get far away from the field. The advance was continued to Nani, a village about 7 miles beyond Ahmed Khel, where we encamped for the night. Soon after pitching the tents a party of armed men, apparently Afghans, was seen approaching the camp. The alarm was sounded. All turned out, when, lo! it was no enemy, but some of our old friends, the Hazaras, again. With many smiles and salaams they came in, and reposed for the night in the neighbourhood of the 59th guard tent. The whole force broke up from Nani early next morning and marched towards Ghazni, the road leading through a broad fertile valley, covered with fine orchards and fortified villages. We encamped on a plain 6 miles short of Ghazni, the fortress being visible under the hills in the distance. A strong party of cavalry was sent on and found the place undefended. On the 21st, we marched to Ghazni and encamped just outside. But few people showed themselves, the shops (such as they are) were shut, and supplies were scarce. Ghazni is not an imposing-looking place. It is well placed in the country to form a rallying point for malcontents and other gatherings, but it lies at the foot of the hills, is commanded by the neighbouring heights, and from a fortification point of view is not specially formidable. A large quantity of powder was found there, also a battery of 6 small brass guns, made at Sherpur, and 4 guns of larger calibre. Two of the latter were brought away, the remainder left there.

On the 22nd it was reported that a large body of the enemy were gathered in the villages of Urzu and Shalez, 7 miles south-west of Ghazni. It was determined to attack them next day. Moved out from the camp, therefore, under the command of Brigadier-General Palliser, C.B., at 3 A.M., on the morning of the 23rd, the whole of the

1st Brigade, reinforced by the 2nd Sikhs and 2nd Punjab Cavalry, with A | B R.H.A., and 11 | 11 Mountain Battery, and 1st Punjab Cavalry. Followed in reserve an hour later under Brigadier-General Hughes, the 59th Regiment, 3rd Goorkhas, 4 companies 19th Punjab N.I., G | 4 R.A., and 19th Bengal Lancers. All carried with them one day's cooked rations. Remained for protection of camp 6 | 11 Heavy Battery, and piquets and guards of all corps. The reserve moved about one mile out of camp and halted so as to be ready in case of need, while the troops under General Palliser marched on to attack and surprise the villages. The advance was over stony and uneven ground, and a ridge of hills immediately in front hid the villages from view until within two miles of them. On reaching the crest of this ridge, General Palliser saw that the surprise was complete enough, and great was the excitement and loud the inspiring tones of the tom-toms when our early visit and its nature became apparent. The early bird is pretty sure of its Afghan worm, as the latter never has any piquets out. It was also seen, however, that the mud walls were very thick, that a large force was gathered within, and the ground just in front of them looked from our position, low, broken, marshy, and uninviting to advance over. The two villages were nearly half a mile apart; there was a great deal of cultivation around but no large trees, so that the villages stood very clearly exposed to view from the ridge of hills above mentioned. The guns were at once pushed forward and began to shell the places, but the occupants declined to be dislodged. The bombardment was kept up for an hour, but the outer walls and those of the houses were so thick that the light 9-pounder shells had but little effect. *J'y suis, et j'y reste* seemed to be the policy determined on, and was being very obstinately carried out. An advance of cavalry and infantry was productive of little result, and it became clear that with the numbers at General Palliser's disposal, nothing short of storming the places would drive the enemy out. Such a proceeding, although pretty certain of success, must inevitably have cost many lives, a sacrifice which the occasion did not demand, and which our small force could ill afford. A message was therefore sent back to the Lieutenant-General (with the reserve) explaining the state of things, and the 3rd Goorkhas, and a half battalion 59th were sent forward as a reinforcement. These were soon afterwards followed (9.30 A.M.) by the Lieutenant-General and the whole of the troops in reserve. By the time the 2nd Brigade (i.e., reserve) had reached the ridge of hills, the enemy had received some reinforcements from neighbouring villages, and many, some cavalry, but mostly infantry, were now outside in rear of the open space between the two villages, but well out of range. Twice they formed up, and made a feint to advance, but were careful not to commit themselves to any rash action; they behaved very differently to the Ghazis at Ahmed Khel. At 11 A.M., an advance was made by a long line formed of the combined brigades. The artillery at once commenced shelling the villages, and the party opposite the interval; the latter, still in no way rash, retiring slowly as soon as our advance began. The infantry opened fire as soon as they got within range. There was not much to fire at, for the occu-

pants of the villages kept as much as possible out of sight, and their friends in the field out of range—a feeble and ineffective reply to our fire was kept up, and the enemy appeared to have two guns,¹ which were heard but not seen. Steadily advancing, our long line reached the walls of the village, our flanks overlapped, and began to turn them; then, fearful of being surrounded, and caught in a trap, all the Afghans rushed out and made off over the country in full retreat. At this time many were killed—their loss is said to have been about 400; ours, two men killed, and three or four wounded. The cavalry pursued for a short distance. Foraging parties were sent into the villages, and secured a few bags of flour, and some sheep and bullocks. At 3 p.m., the troops marched back to camp, arriving when the shades of night were falling, after a hard day's work (more than twelve hours); hard on account of the heat, the dust, the rough ground. The fighting was insignificant. We had left our camp 7 miles behind, not very strongly protected. What if the whole affair had been a ruse to inveigle us out, while a large force came down from the hills in our absence and burned all the tents, stores, &c., but the Afghans are not an enterprising enemy, and there was probably nothing to fear! Those in camp had, in case of accidents, thrown up shelter trenches, and other hasty defences,—some very good breastworks made with camel saddles.

On the 25th April, the force broke up from Ghazni marching by the well-known Shir Daban (Lion's Mouth) Pass northwards towards Kabul. No enemy has been met with since.

The Ghazni Field Force, as such, is now dissolved, and most of its component parts find themselves summering in the Logar Valley.

I have put Afghan "War" at the head of this narrative. Let it stand. "Armed political intervention" would have been more exact. It may be much wiser to proceed according to the latter method; but it is not war in the old sense of the word, certainly not war as the Afghans understand it. We do not inspire them with the terror of our arms and name; even when we beat them in the field, they are ready to fight again in a few months, or in some other part of the country. We do not devastate nor destroy—do not even take the supplies we require without paying an exorbitant price for them. To all the inhabitants for miles away from our forces, our occupation has been an unmixed blessing. To "scatter plenty o'er a smiling land" is doubtless very noble, but it is not exactly war. Except in the case of the mother and wife of Yakub Khan, we have never interfered in any way with the women or families of the natives. If, instead of two, 200 princesses or ladies of the best families had been similarly expatriated for a time, it would probably have had a considerable effect in bringing the chiefs to reason. We are too civilized to make war with such people.

If it should be decided to annex the country—as soon as such a decision became known as certain—we should have many adherents among the people. Hazaras, Kizilbashs, possibly Tajiks, all the more

¹ Probably large jezails.

orderly tribes; especially when all understood that the practice of their own religion would not be interfered with. Many now think that if we took over the country we should force our religion upon them, just as they would do themselves in a similar case; and of course the mullahs,¹ when stirring them up against us, do not omit to foster and promulgate ideas and notions so well calculated to aid their purpose.

But I will sternly cut the thread of this discourse, as it is gradually getting beyond the sphere of a regimental Officer.

¹ Priests.