

LT COLONEL CHARLES AUGUSTUS EDWARDS (1873-74)

He was born one 25 February 1864.

While serving in the Burmese Campaign of 1885-87 he was specially mentioned "for courage and activity in leading the advanced guard at the attack and capture of Mawbu" in 1886.

He greatly distinguished himself during the last 5 years of his life by fighting operations against the slave traders in Africa. According to 1st 60 years history he attacked them on many occasions and with such complete disregard of personal safety, carrying lake fortresses and walled towns by assault, firing villages and leading bayonet charges. His name became very widely known and was even invested, among the warlike Yao tribesmen, with magical properties!

He served in British Central Africa (now known as Malawi) between 1892-94, where his defeat of the slave trading chiefs Makanjira and others, paved the way for the pacification of Nyasaland. He was appointed the Senior Military Officer in British Central Africa in 1894 and Brevet Lt Colonel in 1896 – being the youngest officer of his rank in the Indian Army.

He died of Blackwater Fever at Zomba, Malawi on 10 May 1897 at the age of 33.

A memorial was erected in the College Chapel by his brother officers and is the earliest memorial in the Chapel.



His great nephew, Jeremy Rowe, was in touch in 2023 with the photo shown at the top of the first page and provided the following information from an auction catalogue when his medals were sold in 2003.

Charles Augustus Edwards was born in London on 25 February 1864, and entered the Army as a Lieutenant in the King's Own Scottish Borderers on 6 May 1885. He transferred to the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in the same rank the following month and proceeded to India, where he served during the campaign in Burma 1886-87 (Medal with clasp). He was appointed to the Bengal Staff Corps on 18 October 1887, and posted as a Wing Officer to the 35th Sikh Regiment of Bengal Infantry on 26 September 1888. In 1892 he was selected as second-in-command of the Sikh Contingent for service in British Central Africa, where he commanded the expedition against Chiefs Nyassera and Mkanda, in the Mlanje area, from August to October 1893. Edwards next took part in the second expedition against Makanjira, from November 1893 to January 1894, a combined operation with H.M. Ships Pioneer and Adventure, the naval personnel receiving the clasp 'Lake Nyassa'. Edwards and his Sikh's, however, received the Central Africa Medal, with ring suspension and no clasp.

In September 1895 Edwards commanded the second expedition against Zarafi, and Chiefs Mponda, Matapwiri and Makanjira, which ended the following November, and the expedition against Mlozi, 'Sultan of Nkonde', and his associates Msalema and Kopakopa, in December 1895. In January 1896 he led an expedition against Tambola, the paramount Angoni chief. For these latter expeditions, Edwards qualified for the clasp to his Central Africa Medal, and in recognition of his important services against the slave-trading Arabs in the British Central Africa Protectorate he received promotion from Lieutenant to Lieutenant-Colonel in the extraordinarily short period of six months and eleven days. Edwards commanded the armed forces in British Central Africa until his untimely death, of blackwater fever, at Tomba on 10 May 1897. Lieutenant-Colonel Edwards was barely 33 at the time of his death and was probably by far the youngest officer of his rank in the Army.

His obituary in The Times noted that 'his greatest achievement lay in his creation of a small native army, which, under English officers and Sikh non-commissioned officers, has proved such a potent arm for the defence of the new protectorate against Arab and Zulu aggressors. In this force slavers and former slaves were enrolled, and have since fought with unwavering courage and loyalty in the cause of the establishment of law and order in South Central Africa.'

I'm indebted to David Stuart-Mogg, co-editor of the Society of Malawi Journal, for this photo of Edwards, which it is believed was taken by William Wheeler. It appears on p. 118 in Sir Harry H. Johnston's *British Central Africa*. London. Methuen & Co. 1897. David goes on to say "According to Lieut. Edward Alston, Coldstream Guards, whose *Central African Journal* I am editing, Edwards affected an eye-glass and spoke with the delivery of a machine-gun. Alston died, similarly of Blackwater Fever, just weeks before Edwards."



LIEUT.-COL. C. A. EDWARDS

In his book "Imperial Connections – India in the Indian Ocean Arena 1860-1920", Thomas Metcalf includes the following piece :-

Confronted with this array of arguments, the Indian government sanctioned the further enrollment of Sikh contingents for Central Africa. One hundred men under Lt. C. A. Edwards of the 35th Sikhs sailed in February 1893. A further one hundred, to relieve Maguire's now depleted force, whose two year tour was approaching its end, followed a few months later under the command of Lt. W. H. Manning of the 1st Sikhs. How, one must ask, were these men selected? What induced soldiers of the Indian Army to sign up for service in remote Nyasaland? One might follow Lt. Edwards as he described his recruiting tour. He began by having the conditions of service translated into Urdu and Gurmukhi, with copies sent to the commanding officers of the regiments, six in number, from which he was authorized to accept recruits. From each regiment he was permitted to take no more than twenty men. The various commanding officers were requested to read aloud the conditions of service at roll call. Edwards then visited each regiment in turn, and had all those who wished to go, generally about 80 to 150 men per regiment, fall in before him. From among this number, Edwards selected some 30 or 35 "likely looking" soldiers and dismissed the remainder. He then examined the service records of these 30 and rejected those who were "of bad or indifferent character" or were "bad shots." The rest then proceeded to the regimental hospital. "After the medical officer had thoroughly inspected the men and signed a certificate that the men were physically fit for service in British Central Africa, I inspected again the men who were passed as fit, and finally selected the 20 men I required." After the final inspection the conditions of service were "most thoroughly and carefully explained to the men." Once he had secured the one hundred he was authorized to engage, he had them all dispatched to Agra, where they were outfitted and sent off together by train to Bombay and thence to Africa.²⁹

Edwards's 1893 batch, all Sikhs, came from five regiments, each of which supplied the full twenty men. He acknowledged that "very few havildars, buglers, and signalers volunteered so I hadn't a good number to select from," but as a whole, he insisted, the contingent comprised

“good men” who were all “very happy and are looking eagerly forward to active service in Central Africa.” The inducement to sign up for African service operated most strongly at the lowest level, that of the ordinary sepoy, and was weaker at the level of the noncommissioned officer (NCO) and skilled artisan. An 1895 recruitment drive for East Africa, for instance, produced only one subahdar and four jamadar applicants for six available NCO positions. Recruiting in 1898 for Central Africa, Lt. C. Godfrey found himself unable to procure soldier artificers from Pioneer regiments and, after taking all who volunteered, was still short of buglers and drummers. Ironically, forewarned by Edwards’s report that NCOs were in short supply, Godfrey accepted all who presented themselves in the early stages of his tour, in Burma and Bombay, only to find, when he did reach the Punjab, fifteen volunteers for the one NCO position he still had open. He grumbled, “If I had known this before I could have made a better selection of non-commissioned officers than I have done, as I should have obtained men from Punjab regiments thoroughly experienced in active service and naturally more valuable men to have had.”³⁰