

Edward Essex was born on the 13<sup>th</sup> November 1847, the fourth child of Thomas and Margaret Essex. He was born into a family which was supported by an income from a leather and tannery factory originally started by Edward's grandfather, called William Essex. William had been born in London, and was the father of eight children, the sixth of which was Edwards father Thomas, who was born on the 6<sup>th</sup> June 1810. William had spent his life in the leather business, and in recognition of this, was elected Master of the Curriers company in 1816.

Thomas Essex married Margaret Clay at Kensington in 1841 and settled down to married life at 20, Camden Road Villas, Camden, London. They soon became parents when their first child Margaret was born in 1842. A second girl, Amy, was born in 1843. Three boys then followed, Thomas was born in 1845, followed by Edward, baptised on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 1848 at St. Pancras old church, and then Harold in 1849. Their final child was Katherine, who was born in 1851. The children's parents chose not to send their children to school, but preferred instead to have them educated at home by a tutor. Disaster was to strike the growing family, when, on the 10<sup>th</sup> July 1854, Edwards father suffered a cerebral haemorrhage and died. Margaret decided that she would move with her family to Sussex and chose a house at 17, Medina Villas, Hove. She also took many trips to fashionable France, taking the children with her whenever possible. Edward was able on these trips, to practise the French that he had learnt at an early age. Their home was struck by tragedy when Edward's sister Amy, died only 18 years old, of Phthisis, a progressive wasting disease, on the 5<sup>th</sup> April 1862.

By 1864, Thomas Essex, then aged 19, decided that he wished to obtain a commission in Her Majesty's armed forces. After passing out from Sandhurst in September 1865, he was commissioned as an ensign in the 57<sup>th</sup> (West Middlesex ) regiment. Also in that same year, Edward's cousin Alfred, married Maria Walker. Maria was the eldest daughter of Greaves Walker, who also had two other daughters, Elizabeth and the seven year old Sarah Maud. It is unlikely that Edward would have paid Sarah Maud much attention at this time in her life, but she was destined to eventually become his wife.

Edward was now nearing maturity, and it was natural for him to start considering his future career. With no real connection with the family business of leather and no doubt being strongly influenced by the decision of his older brother Thomas to join the army, it was clear to him that his only course of action was that he should also apply for a commission. He requested permission to sit the entrance examination for the army, which was held once every six months. His request was accepted, and on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> December 1865, he began the week long winter examination at Chelsea Hospital, before Major-General F.W. Hamilton C.B. and other members of the council of military education. After completion of the examinations, Edward waited for the post to arrive which would bring him the results. Notification of his success was received on the 21<sup>st</sup> December, and duly published in "The Times" on the following day, where it confirmed that he had qualified in 8<sup>th</sup> place with 5,011 marks. Edward enjoyed his Christmas holiday before travelling to London, to be medically examined by a board of doctors. No candidates would be accepted for Sandhurst unless they were recommended by the board as being physically fit for Her Majesty's Service. Their recommendations were duly given, which meant that Edward was now able to travel to Camberley, Surrey on the 1<sup>st</sup> February 1866 to begin his course at the Royal Military Academy.

The college was operated within a purely military organisation. The Governor held the rank of a Lieutenant-General, and the Commandant was a Lieutenant-Colonel. The teaching staff consisted of about 20 Majors and Captains, together with a Riding master, Chaplain, Quartermaster and Surgeons. Edward's status in the first term was that of a "junior", later he would become "Intermediate" and finally in his last term a "Senior".

During his three terms, Edward learnt drill, equestrian and fencing skills, together with a study of Mathematics, Fortification, Military drawing and surveying, Military history, French, Chemistry, Geology and landscape drawing. Examinations were held at the end of each term, when the cadets had to achieve a success rate of at least 50%. If a cadet failed in two successive examinations or his progress was unsatisfactory in drill, riding, gymnastics or conduct, then expulsion was probable.

On Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> December 1866, the Royal Military College issued a list of successful competitors for commission without purchase, following the final examinations. Edward was delighted to learn that he had passed out in third place with 7,667 marks. This splendid performance of obtaining third place ensured that

Edward would now be able to go to a regiment of his choice. He applied to the Governor to be allowed to join the 75<sup>th</sup> regiment of foot, which later would be amalgamated with another, and become the Gordon Highlanders. Edward waited for six weeks to hear from the War office, until on the 19<sup>th</sup> February 1867, he was notified that :-

Gentleman cadet Edward Essex from the Royal Military College, was to be ensign without purchase vice William Frederick Fairlie, transferred to the 74<sup>th</sup> foot, to the 9<sup>th</sup> (East Norfolk ) regiment .

This meant that currently the 75th regiment did not have a suitable vacancy for another Ensign, so Edward had been gazetted to a regiment which had. However, on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 1867 he was advised that a vacancy had occurred in the 75<sup>th</sup> regiment. The War office official notification recorded his change of regiment :-

Ensign Edward Essex from the 9<sup>th</sup> foot to be ensign vice Teevan

Edward Essex's military career was about to begin. After packing his new uniform and other essential items, and bidding farewell to his family, he travelled to join the 75<sup>th</sup> regiment. Fortunately for him, it was currently serving at a home station, so after taking the ferry across the Irish sea, his journey finally ended at the military barracks at Waterford, when he reported himself ready for duty. Edward had only a little time to become familiar with the day to day running of the regiment, before it came under orders for embarkation. Shortly after his arrival, the regiment's establishment was increased to ten service and two depot companies totalling 929 all ranks. The 17<sup>th</sup> regiment relieved them at Queenstown, where on the 20<sup>th</sup> April 1868, they boarded the troopship "Orontes", and sailed for Gibraltar. It was an ideal posting and it gave Edward time to learn his new duties. July saw the regiment, equipped with the new Snider rifle, being held in readiness for a change of station. In November of that year, a vacancy for the rank of Lieutenant became available, and Edward purchased the first step upwards in his military career.

Having obtained the rank, to mark the occasion he presented a silver goblet, bearing the Royal tiger which was the honour won by the regiment for its previous Indian service, which became part of the regimental silver. A simple inscription on the goblet read :-

Presented by Lt. Edward Essex on promotion November 27<sup>th</sup> 1867.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1868, the venerable HMS *Himalaya*, a three masted and one funnelled troopship, which had once carried soldiers on their way to the Crimean war, eased its way out of the port of Belfast. It was under the command of Captain S.B. Spiers and carried the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment of foot on board, as well as other drafts of men for regiments in Cape colony, South Africa. The 28<sup>th</sup> regiment were under orders to relieve the 75<sup>th</sup> on Gibraltar. They disembarked on the morning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> October and marched to Windmill hill, where they had to camp until the 75<sup>th</sup>, who had been at Town range and Wellington front barracks, had left their accommodation. The 75<sup>th</sup> now boarded the *Himalaya* and settled themselves in for the long voyage to their next posting. It was to be half way around the world, because they had been ordered to go to the distant colony of Hong-Kong. The equator was soon reached, followed by arrival at South Africa. Edward did not realise at this moment, exactly how much this country was to be involved in his future. After coaling at Simons bay and delivering its drafts of troops, the *Himalaya* slowly steamed across the Indian ocean, stopping at Singapore, then Manila in the Philippines, and eventually reaching Hong-Kong on the 21<sup>st</sup> December 1868. One of the first things which Edward learnt on arrival was that his younger brother Harold had also decided to join the Army. All three brothers would now serve their sovereign as Officers of infantry. He wrote to Margaret, his sister, on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1869, to describe the conditions which he was enduring :-

The weather has quiet changed. It is now steaming hot, and I am obliged to sit in my room without my coat on. If it continues we shall take white clothing into wear ..... This paper is like blotting paper on account of the damp...The small insects will be just as bad as at Gibraltar I expect, although as yet they have not troubled me. There are many mosquitoes, and innumerable spiders as big as your hand. I find one nearly every morning in my bathroom.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> April 1869, Edward was gazetted to the role of Adjutant. It was most unusual to be requested to undertake the role without first becoming Assistant- Adjutant. However, a shortage of available officers necessitated this to occur. For an ambitious young Officer it was usually their first opportunity to participate in Staff duties, although the role was unlikely to gain that officer popularity with the troops. By 1871 a vacancy had occurred within the regiment, for the rank of Captain. Edward decided that he would purchase the vacant rank, although it was becoming clear to all that the purchase of commission was soon to be abolished. After negotiating and paying the requested price for the rank, he officially became a Captain on

the 31<sup>st</sup> May 1871 and should have relinquished the role of Adjutant from that date, but as a substitute was not available, he continued in that role until the 8<sup>th</sup> September.

Within weeks, the Regulation of the Forces Bill, which proposed the abolition of purchase, was put before the House of Lords. Their first re-action was to throw the bill out, but when Queen Victoria was persuaded to abolish purchase by Royal warrant, they reconsidered their decision and passed the Bill. This meant that Edward was destined to become one of the last officers in the British Army to have purchased his rank.

Edward heard of more tragic family news, when the death of his brother Harold occurred on the 6<sup>th</sup> June 1871. Harold had returned to his mother's house in Upper Norwood, Surrey when he learnt that he, like his sister Amy, had Phthisis. Desperate to help, Margaret sought medical treatment for her son, but it was unsuccessful. He was only twenty two years of age.

In August, the regiment was put under notice for a change of station. When the regiment reached Singapore aboard the *Tamar*, it was inspected by General Smyth, who considered the health of the men was so unsatisfactory that he decided their condition would be improved by the South African climate and therefore the whole regiment headed for East London and Natal. *Tamar* docked at East London on the 10<sup>th</sup> October 1871 and the right wing of the regiment under Major Charles Malan disembarked. Their destination was King Williams Town, which was then a frontier town and the third largest in the eastern province. It had seen several frontier wars with the Xhosa people and played an essential role in border defence. Meanwhile, the *Tamar* cruised slowly up the coastline to arrive at Port Natal on the 13<sup>th</sup> October. Here the remainder of the regiment left the ship and after leaving a company at Durban, marched to Pietermaritzburg in Natal.

Edward was due for some leave, and having been granted this, returned to the United Kingdom in April 1873. After the completion of his leave, he remained at the 75<sup>th</sup> regiment's home depot until February 1874, when he again rejoined his regiment in the Cape. The 75<sup>th</sup> meanwhile, had been performing garrison duties, undisturbed until November 1873, when a mixed force commanded by Major Anthony Durnford, was involved in a skirmish with amaHlubi warriors at Bushman's pass. It was only a minor affair, with comparatively slight injuries incurred by both sides, but the reaction to the engagement in Natal was overwhelming. It was decided that a decisive blow had to be struck at the amaHlubi and an expedition was arranged which included 200 men of the 75<sup>th</sup> regiment. An amaHlubi settlement was attacked, resulting in the death of over 200 people. Edward would meet Major Durnford at a later stage of his career, and in circumstances which he would never forget.

By the end of the year, it was known that finally the regiment were to be returning to a home station. It was eight years since they had seen their homes and everyone looked forward to the change, especially after the boredom of frontier garrison duties. The regiment returned to Ireland, and established detachments in Armagh, Newtownards, Belfast and Drogheda. Edward's leave extended to over two and a half months, which was quite usual as each year in the Army was divided into seven months devoted to training, and five months season of leave. After he returned to his regiment, Edward began to seriously consider the possibility of attending Staff College. Advancement in his career would be certain and employment in a Staff role would be assured to a successful candidate. At this time it was still very unusual for an Officer to make this request. He would probably be asked if the regiment was no longer good enough for him, and other officers would consider that whilst he was enjoying himself away from the regiment, it was they who had to shoulder his responsibilities. Although the Staff College had been in existence for over fifty years, it was still not seen by many as the way forward for career soldiers.

The entrance examination to Staff College was only held once a year and Edward travelled to London in August, to join other hopeful officers. Few applied who did not expect to succeed, as most tried to avoid the stigma of having failed and being returned to their regiments. The examinations covered a seven day period and were designed to stretch the understanding of the candidates to their fullest. Edward returned to his regiment which had moved to the Curragh Army camp, outside of Dublin, to await the results of the examination. Eventually, the confirmation arrived that he had passed the entrance examination and that he should report to the Staff College on the 1<sup>st</sup> February 1876, to undertake the two year course. The total intake of candidates each year was only thirty two, divided up between the Cavalry, Infantry, Engineers, Marines, Army Service Corps and Indian army.

After two years of study and examinations, *The Times* of Friday 11<sup>th</sup> January 1878 published a list of 21 officers who had passed the course including Edward, with a comment about him of "Special mention of voluntary subject German – good".

As Edward had now successfully passed out of Staff College, he could include the letters p.s.c (passed Staff College) in his correspondence and would see it in front of his name on the Army list. He could also

expect an appointment on the General Staff, but would remain seconded to his regiment throughout the appointment, which generally lasted about 5 years. After this time, he would again return to his regiment, pending further employment on the General Staff. The first role offered to Edward was that of garrison Instructor at Manchester, in the Northern district. He commenced this role on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 1878, whilst his regiment had placed their old Snider rifles into storage and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1877, received the brand new Martini-Henry rifle. They had also been posted to a new station during his absence, travelling to the isles of Guernsey and Jersey on the 28<sup>th</sup> May 1877.

Edward's stay at Manchester was of a very short duration, because with war looming in South Africa against the Zulus, experienced Staff officers with knowledge of the country would be required for active service. Edward was seconded from his garrison duties, and on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 1878, boarded ship for Natal. He was to be involved in an experience which few would survive and luck would play a large part for all those who did.

By the 24<sup>th</sup> August 1878, Sir Bartle Frere, High Commissioner for South Africa, was already drafting plans for an invasion of Zululand, in close co-operation with Lieutenant-General Frederick Augustus Thesiger. Their main concern was the common border that the Zulus shared with Natal. This border had to be protected against incursions, and the best way of defending it was to attack. The decision to conduct the war in Zululand meant that the troops would have to take all their provisions with them, loaded into ox drawn wagons and conveyed over tracks barely suitable for mounted men.

The biggest problem with the invasion would be the transport situation. Wagons would have to be found to carry the supplies, and oxen to pull the wagons. For this purpose, he desperately needed transport officers to purchase and maintain these vital commodities. Edward Essex, fresh from Staff College and with previous experience of affairs in South Africa would be an ideal officer for this particular contingency. When Edward arrived in South Africa, his first priority was to purchase horses for himself. As a Staff and transport Officer, he would need at least three to carry him in his quest for oxen and wagons. This number was not unusual, as every line Officer had three horses allocated to them when in the field, and usually required all of them.

Edward experienced at first hand just how difficult it was becoming to get the right sort of animals, but eventually managed to purchase suitable mounts. He then reported to Thesiger, who had by now become the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Chelmsford, following the death of his father, as the Transport director to number 3 column. His arrival occurred at a time when the transport situation was rapidly falling into a state of chaos. Edwards first major problem was his total inexperience. All his previous knowledge, and nothing that Sandhurst or Staff College had ever taught him, had involved the purchase or care of oxen. This was something which he had to obtain very quickly.

Southern Africa had very few heavy draught horses and those that there were, were liable to suffer from horse-sickness at various times of the year. Imported horses refused to eat the local grasses and fodder, and it was considered both expensive and impractical to transport too many to the country. This then meant that local ox wagons were the only way in which large loads could be moved. With each wagon requiring up to eighteen oxen, yoked in pairs to pull it, teams of oxen could not easily be replaced. Ox management also had to be learnt by the transport Officers. Edward had to understand the terms used, such as disselboom and trek tow, and how each team required the services of two natives, one to drive and one to lead. Oxen presented other problems which officers accustomed to horses did not usually understand. They required eight hours a day to graze and a further eight to rest and digest. If driven for the remaining eight hours, they then needed several more days to recover from their exertions. A good team of oxen would cost about £300 and with the cost of a wagon as well, the total price could rise to over £500. As about 1,000 wagons with full teams would be required, together with the hire of conductors, drivers and leaders, the cost was becoming prohibitive. Conditions became worse as the newly purchased or hired teams began to arrive at Ladismith, the initial base for the invasion. Teams were being driven for longer than the recommended eight hours and began to loose condition. Some drivers cared little for their charges and did not allow them time to graze or ruminate. Transport Officers had little time to spare to intervene in the wretched treatment the beasts were suffering. Very soon oxen were starting to die at an alarming rate. The few overworked transport Officers found out that it was their responsibility for supervising the burial of the carcasses as well.

By December, the forces of Lord Chelmsford could claim to control over two thirds of Natal's wagons and teams. The unglamorous role of transport had become the most vital part of the plans which were being prepared. The number of Officers required to cope with the daily problems continued to increase. It was unfortunate perhaps that while everybody knew about the glamour of the front line troops, the lines of communication went unnoticed. Sir Winston Churchill once astutely observed that:

Victory is the beautiful, bright-coloured flower. Transport is the stem without which it could never have blossomed.

In the final days before the invasion, Edward's role changed from the procurement of oxen and wagons to the equally difficult responsibility of ensuring that the wagons were correctly loaded and positioned where needed. Each company had its own wagons and the total for each Battalion amounted to seventeen. The supplies began to move slowly forward to Greytown, and then Helpmekaar, which was the forward base and head quarters camp of number 3 column. To assist him in his duties, Edward was given the services of Lieutenant Horace Lockwood Smith-Dorrien, who like him, was fresh from England and equally inexperienced in transport matters.

By the middle of December, the small hamlet of Helpmekaar had grown from a few tin huts, to a sprawling encampment which overlooked the Buffalo River and the green hills of Zululand beyond. In neatly lined up tents were "A", "C", "E" and "H" companies of the 1/24<sup>th</sup> Regiment, and their officers allowed Edward to join their mess when he arrived at this wind swept and soaking location. On Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> January 1879, the troops advanced in thick fog across the river at Rorke's Drift into Zululand. Chelmsford wrote to Sir Bartle Frere about the conditions he encountered:

The country is in a terrible state from the rain, and I do not know how we shall manage to get our wagons across the valley near Sihayo's Kraal. A large working party will start tomorrow to dig deep ditches on each side of the road which runs across a broad swamp – and I hope that under this treatment it may consolidate – 16 oxen is too few to draw even 4,000 lbs and I am sending an order for sufficient oxen to be sent up so as to make each span up to 20 - whether they are procurable remains to be seen - I am afraid our losses have been so heavy and the demands for draught oxen so great that the transport director ( Edward ) will find difficulty in complying with the demand.

Owing to the fact that many wagons had not been able to cross the river on the 11<sup>th</sup> January, Edward remained behind at Rorke's Drift. Troops were still crossing into Zululand and some empty wagons returned to refill and continue to shuttle the supply of stores forward. Chelmsford was already becoming frustrated by the conditions and looking around for scapegoats to blame for the delay. On this day he wrote to another of his column commanders and concluded by stating:

I wish my column were as well off as yours in energetic officers - My transport and commissariat is very weak in that respect.

It was difficult to see exactly what more could have been done in the current circumstances, and eventually it took the rank of a Major-General to try and bring some form of order into the chaotic situation which had arisen. Chelmsford was still deeply concerned about his transport situation and wrote to the War Office in London concerning the problem. However, he was not now blaming the transport officers directly, but trying to indicate where the problem was occurring:

Your department in South Africa has been once or twice since I have been in command, on the verge of a breakdown, principally I believe because your officers have not received in peace time, the training necessary to prepare them for the work which devolves upon them during operations in the field.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> January, the track was considered suitable for an advance to the next campsite at Isandlwana Mountain. The whole site became a vast tented area, with nearly 350 tents carefully aligned against one another. A large space was left for the wagon park to be fitted in between the southern end of Isandlwana and the track, which enabled the wagons to be unloaded and then sent back for more supplies when required. Edward would now be required at the camp to organise the unloading of supplies and the return of a convoy of wagons to Rorke's Drift. By the end of the day he had settled into a tent close to Colonel Glyn's headquarters.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> January, Edward's thoughts turned to the pressing problem of arranging the convoy of wagons which was due to leave the camp on the following day, returning to Rorke's Drift and collect fresh supplies which should have been delivered there. All day long, wagons which had spent the previous night camped out had continued to arrive at Isandlwana, so that now all the transport was gathered together in the wagon park or transport lines.

During the early hours of the 22<sup>nd</sup> an order was issued by Chelmsford cancelling the dispatch of fifty wagons due to return to Rorke's Drift. To do so would require a detachment of troops to be supplied to guard

the wagons and with the Zulu army known to be in the area, every man would be needed. Edward soon found that as the convoy of wagons had been cancelled and his subordinate was on his way to Rorke's Drift with a despatch, then he would not have any responsibilities for that day. He resolved to have breakfast and then catch up on writing his letters home, which he had been unable to do for the last few weeks. The day had become cloudy and humid but it would be his first day of leisure since his arrival in South Africa and he wanted to make the most of it. He was dressed in a dark blue patrol jacket, which was the usual style of jacket worn by Officers when not dressed in a tunic. The bugles sounded the fall in for breakfast at 7.30 am and the men lined up in front of the cooks for their first meal of the day. The meal had barely begun when the sound of distant firing was heard and a mounted officer was seen to descend from the plateau and gallop for the camp. The officer was from the Natal Native contingent and he brought news that a large body of Zulus had been seen advancing across the plateau. The men were fell in and stood for an hour in their companies, still expecting something to happen. Lieutenant Cavaye, and "E" company of the 1/24<sup>th</sup>, were ordered to take up a defensive position on the Tehelane spur connecting the camp to the plateau, and a company of the Natal Native contingent was sent out with them. It was not certain at who's order the men from "E" company were sent forward to the spur. Chelmsford, quoting Edward as the source of his information, later stated that Cavaye had been sent out at the order of Colonel Durnford. On arrival at the spur, Cavaye detached 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Edwards Hopton Dyson to a position about 500 yards to his left. Edward returned to his tent to continue with his interrupted letter, when the Zulus launched their attack on the unprepared campsite. Edward recalled:

About noon a sergeant came into my tent and told me that firing was to be heard behind the hill where the company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 24<sup>th</sup> had been sent. I had my glasses over my shoulder and thought I might as well take my revolver, but did not trouble to put on my sword, as I thought nothing of the matter and expected to be back in half an hour to complete my letters. I got on my horse and galloped up the hill, passing a company of the 24<sup>th</sup> on its way to the front and took a message from the officer for the others on the hill.

Just as Edward arrived at Cavaye's companies position, the infantrymen opened fire at the first of the Zulu regiments who had ran to the edge of the Nqutu plateau and launched themselves down its steep sides. He observed that:

On arriving at the top I saw the company in extended order firing on a long line of Zulus 800 yards distant. I had been living with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 24<sup>th</sup> and knew their officers very well, and the men knew me. I therefore acted as a company officer, directing the men what to fire at and not to waste their ammunition.

The Zulus were still running past, heading for the rear of the camp, but not presenting a danger as yet to the extended companies. Edward admired their skirmishing skills, but noted tellingly that of the 3,000 men that were in the line of sight, very few were hit.

Captain Mostyn moved his company into the space between the portions of that already on the hill, and his men extended and entered into action. This line was then prolonged on our right along the crest of the hill by a body of native infantry .... I did not notice the latter much, save they blazed away at an absurd rate.

Within five minutes of Mostyn's company arriving, the line was visited by the adjutant of the 1/24<sup>th</sup>. He had been instructed by Pulleine to order the companies, which were out of sight of the camp, to fall back, as a very real threat was developing. Edward wrote that:

I was informed by Lieutenant Melvill.... that a fresh body of the enemy was appearing in force in our rear, and he requested me to direct the left of the line formed, as above described, to fall slowly back, keeping up the fire. This I did; then proceeded to the centre of the line. I found, however, that it had already retired. I therefore followed in the same direction, but being mounted had great difficulty in descending the hill, the ground being very rocky and precipitous.

The line of troops now appeared like a long arc, curving from the northern edge of Isandlwana and reaching out towards a donga, where Durnford's men were steadily falling back to. The line was stretched out for nearly two miles in length, with the troops separated from each other by several yards. Their positions were probably dictated by Pulleine's twin priorities to assist Durnford, and to help Cavaye and Mostyn fall

back safely. They were dangerously spread as thinly as possible, but great faith was being placed in their reliability and firepower. Edward considered that the situation was now becoming a serious matter:

The enemy's left had hitherto been concealed by a hill, but the attack now became developed, and I could see their troops formed a dense black semi-circle, threatening us on both flanks. Their line was constantly fed from the rear of its centre, which seemed to be inexhaustible. Affairs now looked rather serious as our little body appeared altogether insignificant compared with the enormous masses opposed to us. The 24<sup>th</sup> men, however, were as cheery as possible, making remarks to one another about their shooting, and the enemy opposed to them made little progress; but they were now within 500 yards of our line.

The steady volley fire of Martini-Henry rifles pouring out over 4,000 rounds every minute was managing to hold the Zulus back, but it was creating clouds of smoke which obscured the visibility in the still conditions of the day. To maintain the rate of fire necessary, an adequate supply of ammunition was required to replenish the seventy rounds the troops had taken into action in their pouches. The companies who had engaged the Zulus from the beginning had fired over 50% of their ammunition and a fresh supply had to be arranged before any major shortages occurred. Edward decided that he could arrange this delivery for them:

The two companies which had been moved from the hill were now getting short of ammunition, so I went to the camp to bring up a fresh supply. I got such men as were not engaged, bandsmen, cooks, etc., to assist me, and sent them up to the line under charge of an officer, and I followed with more ammunition in a mule cart. In loading the later I helped the Quartermaster of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 24<sup>th</sup> to place the boxes in the cart, and while doing so the poor fellow was shot dead.

When Edward arrived at the ammunition wagon, he saw that his fellow transport Officer, Lieutenant Horace Smith-Dorrien had returned from Rorke's Drift and was also actively rounding up spare men to assist in the distribution of ammunition. The 2/24<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster was Edward Bloomfield, who had been reluctant to release ammunition which had been loaded onto wagons, at Smith-Dorrien's request, was persuaded by Edward's rank to now do so. He was struck in the head by a Zulu bullet when assisting in the unloading of ammunition alongside of Edward. There was a feeling of apprehension in the camp that perhaps the Zulus had become too close. Edward observed that the companies of troops were gradually retiring on the camp and that many of the N.N.C. were starting to run back. He also witnessed just how effective the Zulu tactics were:

I looked round and was horrified to see that the enemy had nearly surrounded us and was beginning to fire from the rear, coming up in that direction at a tremendous pace. I galloped off to the centre of the line where our natives were to point this out to Colonel Durnford, and see what could be done. He had, I think, already observed the state of affairs, and was looking very serious. He asked me if I could bring some men to keep the enemy in check in our rear, but he had hardly said this when those natives who had not already stolen off turned round and rushed past us followed by thousands of Zulus.

The battle now entered the tented area of the camp, and soon dissolved into chaos. The tents had not been struck and consequently obstructed the view of the troops. Groups of infantry remained shoulder to shoulder, facing their opponents and continually losing men to both gunfire and spear thrusts. The only option now left to the men was to retreat. As they neared the neck, they suddenly saw that Zulus had appeared on the skyline. The right horn of their attack was closing behind Isandlwana and panic set in. Edward described the last moments in the camp as he remembered them:

We were driven up through the camp towards the road by which we had arrived, men falling right and left. The road immediately in rear of our camp led across a sort of neck between two hills. By the time we arrived here the retreat had become a stampede, horses, mules, oxen, waggons, all being carried in the same direction. The worst was yet to come. On gaining the neck, we found the circle of our enemy had drawn round us was nearly complete, the only space not yet occupied by them being a rugged and deep dry water-course to the left of the road. A rush was made to gain this before the enemy, and I gave myself up for lost. I had, thank God, a very good horse and a very sure footed one, but I saw many poor fellows roll over, their horses stumbling over the rocky ground.

The men rushed onwards towards the river, intent on survival but seeing all around them individuals being ripped from their mounts and quickly butchered. Edward noticed that:

The Zulus kept up with us on both sides, being able to run down the steep rocky ground quite as fast as a horse could travel..... It was an awful ride of ten miles, and I cannot describe the terrible scenes I witnessed further than to say that the Zulus take no prisoners, but employ the assegai in every case.

As he raced along the boulder strewn track on his sweating horse, a voice in Edwards head kept repeating, over and over again, the words he would recall in future years:

Essex, you bloody fool, you had a chance of a good billet at home, and now, Essex, you are going to be killed!

He fired his revolver at any Zulus who came to close, keeping them at a distance, until the hammer fell on an empty chamber which told him that he had run out of ammunition. He hurled the useless revolver away, and hoped that his luck would remain with him. All he had now to defend him was the speed and endurance of his horse. The Zulus remained along side the diminishing number of fleeing men until the Buffalo River was sighted. The men came to a steep decline, from where the rushing river crashed over half submerged rocks which created strong currents. Edward hesitated for just a moment, and then forced his horse down the bank and into the water.

There was no ford and many plunged in only to be carried away by the strong stream. I chose what seemed to be the best place for crossing, though there was not much time for deliberation, and luckily passed over in safety, my horse swimming with me in the saddle. Our pursuers kept up with us until near the river, where they appeared to halt, but still kept firing on us.

On reaching the Natal bank of the river, a small group of exhausted men, still clutching their horses which had carried them across, gathered together to decide what they should do next. There were now about forty men, including just four regular Officers. All together the group numbered about half of all the known European survivors. They had the option of heading for Rorke's Drift, but as Zulus had been observed crossing the river higher up, they suspected that they might encounter these warriors if they moved in that direction. As most of the men lacked firearms, there was little they would be able to do against them. The other option was to travel back to Helpmekaar, where it was thought that a company of the 24<sup>th</sup> was stationed. As Edward was the senior Officer present, he took command of this small number of survivors. The garrison at Rorke's Drift was remembered, and a pencil written note was despatched, warning them of the approach of the Zulus who had been seen to cross the river. The receipt of this timely warning, gave the small garrison time to start preparing the defences they would so soon need. Edward then ordered the men to ride the fifteen miles to Helpmekaar. Quartermaster Dugald Macphail remembered the instructions given and also gave a vivid impression of the men's feelings at the time:

Captain Essex when he got through gave some orders but no one paid any attention to him. He said "We had better get into some order and go to Helpmekaar, but there was no order at all. Nobody took any notice, but a lot did go to Helpmekaar".

The men rode onwards, but started to loose some of the volunteers, who being local men, decided to go to their homes instead. As they drew nearer to Helpmekaar, it was obvious that the depot no longer had its defending company of infantry to protect the stores. The area was unusually quiet after the bustle of previous days. Edward continued with his narrative of the unfolding events:

We saw Zulus on our right for the first five miles after crossing the river, and arrived at Helpmekaar between 5 and 6 o'clock. A very large provision depot exists at that place, and we had, while still on the road, determined to entrench and hold this, hoping to be able to do so with the assistance of the company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 24<sup>th</sup> we expected to find there. On our arrival we learnt that two companies of that regiment had left a few hours previously for Rorke's Drift, so we had to depend on our own resources. I found I was the senior officer present, so I took the command and caused some waggons to be drawn up at a short distance all round the storehouse, a zinc building, quite indefensible. I had sacks of oats placed under the waggons and now had a barrier.

The decision to defend the depot was taken after a day on which every one present had seen at first hand what the Zulu army was capable of doing. It was amazing that any of the exhausted men, who after experiencing the horrors they had just witnessed, could be induced to stand and defend a sprawling encampment of tents, huts and supplies. All were traumatised by the events of the day, and some were

reacting in abnormal ways. The same decision to stand and defend had been taken at Rorke's Drift, and while Edward's garrison were building their defences, over 3,000 Zulus were throwing themselves at exactly the same sort of barricades down at the mission station. Edward recalled that:

We mustered, of those who had escaped, about 25 Europeans, the others, about 10 volunteers and camp followers, continued their retreat. A few others, such as owners of waggons, two or three farmers with their wives and children, now arrived, and my little garrison numbered 48 men, of whom, however, only 28 had rifles. We expected the approach of the Zulus every moment, but we had plenty of ammunition, and I told every one to fire away as hard as he could in the event of attack, so as to deceive the enemy as to the number with whom he had to deal. We had an anxious time after dark, as we could not see ten yards in front of us. Several false alarms were given...

As the evening drew on and the anticipated attack appeared immanent, so the resolve of some of the men who had originally decided to stay, started to weaken. In order to stop any desertions from the already depleted garrison, Edward gave an instruction regarding the horses. Quartermaster Macphail wrote:-

But Captain Essex, who was in command, gave such a foolish order that it cleared a lot of us out and we left him to fight the Zulus himself. He gave an order for all horses to be turned loose, and all near the camp to be shot. You could hear a swear here and a swear there. Some muttered "If the horses go, we go."

Very soon, the demoralised quartermaster and his comrades deserted into the darkness of the night. The situation was saved by the arrival of "D" and "G" companies of the 1/24<sup>th</sup>, who had tried to march down to Rorke's Drift during the afternoon. A figure stumbling into the depot after dark turned out to be Horace Smith-Dorrien, who had lost his horse crossing the Buffalo and had managed to run the rest of the way. He was totally exhausted and close to collapse, having ridden in excess of thirty miles during the day and then being forced to run nearly another twenty. Despite several false alarms being raised, the weary defenders continued to peer expectantly into the darkness for the arrival of the Zulus. As dawn started to break, the possibility of attack receded and the exhausted men tried to snatch a little sleep.

A few hours after dawn, a messenger brought in the good news to the men at Helpmekaar, that Rorke's Drift had not fallen to the Zulus as they had all feared, and that Lord Chelmsford had arrived at the post with the remainder of his troops. Edward and Smith-Dorrien, together with a party of mounted men, decided to ride down to the Drift to report to the General, despite dense fog hampering their movements. They discovered on their arrival what a desperate fight the defenders of the post had put up, and gazed at over 350 Zulu bodies killed during the action, scattered over and around the barricades.

A court of enquiry would have to be set up to discover who or what was to blame for the blow dealt to Lord Chelmsford by his adversaries. Only officers were called to give evidence, the first being Major Clery who had been out with Lord Chelmsford, and arrived back at the camp after it had fallen. The next to give evidence was Colonel Glyn. Glyn appeared to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown with all the worry, and had become extremely subdued. The five survivors of Isandlwana were called next, Captain Gardner being the first to give his evidence. Edward followed Gardner and confined himself to stating that:

I hand in a written statement of what occurred. I have nothing to add to that statement. This statement is marked "A".

Together with his statement was a rough sketch map of Isandlwana showing the positioning of the troops where he remembered them to have been. The findings were eventually handed to Lord Chelmsford, who approved the fact that they contained no opinions and in turn passed the report on to London. It was left for people to make their own minds up as to where the blame should be apportioned.

It now remained for Lord Chelmsford to plan another Invasion of Zululand as soon as possible. Once again though, the biggest problem he encountered was with transport. Having lost so many wagons and oxen at Isandlwana, his first necessity was to replace them. Edward was appointed as a Director of transport and recommenced his original duties in trying to buy or rent what little the Colony of Natal could offer and getting the supplies moved to the concentration points. The invasion plans suffered another set back when the supply of carefully accumulated stores built up at Conference hill, well to the north of Rorke's Drift, was found to have been placed in the wrong area. These stores had been transported throughout April and May from Dundee, to the advanced base nominated by Lord Chelmsford, who was sure that a practicable track could be found. However, reconnaissance revealed that a wagon track was available from a drift further to the south, and to avoid the whole column having to travel further than was necessary, it was decided that

most of the stores should be brought back to the concentration area of Koppie Alleen. Naturally, a major delay occurred until the movement was completed. This additional problem was just another one which Edward had to deal with, as he had now been attached to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. By the end of May, the Division had supplies which would be sufficient to last them for a month. Lord Chelmsford was satisfied that this would be sufficient and ordered the advance once again into Zululand. Once the force was established in Zululand, the decision was made to prepare an intermediate depot for the supplies, and for more to be brought up from the supply dumps on the other side of the Blood River. It would be the biggest logistical exercise which Edward would have to have been responsible for on the campaign. The intermediate camp was built on the banks of the Nondweni River, together with a stone built fort called 'Fort Newdigate' to protect the supplies. A flying column, which was a days march ahead, were recalled to the camp, where essential supplies would have to be built up. All the wagons were unloaded and with only a few being retained, the remaining 650 made their way back to the Blood river under the escort of the entire flying column together with elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's Cavalry as well. The empty wagons stretched for miles, and the strung out escort of 4,000 men invited attack from any Zulus in the vicinity. However, the Zulus had not yet properly regrouped, and the convoy reached its destination unmolested. The loss of precious wagons and oxen at this point in the campaign could have been disastrous and would have certainly stopped the invasion for a second time.

By the 26<sup>th</sup> June, a strong mounted party carried out a raid into the Mpembeni valley, burning homesteads and carrying out valuable reconnaissance before retiring to the main column, who were advancing to the next campsite. This was to be on the Mthonjaneni heights, from which an impressive view of the whole of the Mahlabatini plain could be seen. On the plain could be observed the Mfolozi river, and beyond that the great enclosed area of huts, which was oNdini, now only seventeen miles ahead. It was decided that a strongly entrenched post would be established at Mthonjaneni, with two wagon redoubts and a large enclosure for the draught animals. About 500 wagons were to be left, together with any spare oxen, mules and horses. The remainder of the column would advance without tents, carrying only ten days supply of food and ammunition loaded into 200 wagons. There would be no water until the Mfolozi River was reached and the track ran through thorn bushes, which severely restricted the movements of the wagons. This would be the last organisation that Edward would have to do on the advance, and he would then accompany the column to oNdini as an interested observer.

By the 3<sup>rd</sup> July, it was apparent that the concluding battle was to be fought the following morning. Edward folded his blanket over himself to ward off the chill of the night and tried to get some sleep. In his immediate role of Transport Officer, he was not going to be required, so he was determined that he would accompany the troops across the Mfolozi, and be present when spear and bayonet crossed. The night was cold and misty, and few could sleep with the thought of the battle soon to take place. At 4 am on the 4<sup>th</sup> July, Edward was awake and sipping a warm drink to relieve the morning chill. A thick white mist shrouded the ground and reduced visibility to only a few yards. By 6 am the first of the regiments were starting to cross the shallow waters of the white Mfolozi, preceded by mounted troops who fanned on after crossing to protect the infantry. The infantry regiments, carrying their greatcoats and two days rations, quickly pushed forward to clear the scrubby country close to the river, and when clear, started to form an enormous hollow rectangle. By 7 am the whole column was across the river and preparing to take up their allocated positions. There was as yet, no sign of the main Zulu army, and eventually the huge block of men reached the position which Chelmsford had decided to fight from.

Just before 9 am, as the men continued to dress their lines, two strong columns of Zulus were observed coming down from the hills and disappearing into the valley. Another strong column started to leave the huts of oNdini, while to the sides and rear of the British rectangle, further bodies of warriors gathered. Gradually, a vast gathering of the different Zulu regiments closed in to entirely surround the troops standing on their hill. Most of the Zulu Army was present, over 20,000 men prepared to defend their King and country. A cold fear entered Edwards mind as the Zulus approached. He was one of a very few survivors who had seen the same tactics employed at Isandlwana to deadly effect, but as he looked at the infantry drawn up four deep rows, he realised that this time it would be very different. The men were shoulder to shoulder, locked together as British infantry loved to fight. The outcome was inevitable, as the Zulus were faced with an impossible task. They eventually withdrew, knowing that they had been fairly beaten in the field and that the war which had been forced upon them was over.

The campaign for Edward was ending as it had begun, as it became increasingly difficult for supplies to be moved to the troops garrisoning the forts. He was also starting to be called "Lucky" by his colleagues, following his escape from the battle of Isandlwana. His luck continued, when on July 10<sup>th</sup>, large amounts of

weapons were starting to be surrendered by Zulus, as tokens of their submission. On this day, two Martini-Henry rifles of the 2/24<sup>th</sup>, and one belonging to the 1/24<sup>th</sup> were handed in. These were weapons captured at Isandlwana, and with them was also an infantry sword without its scabbard. On the blade was the inscription *Essex*. It was Edward's sword which he had not bothered to put on at the start of the Isandlwana battle, and had been looted as a trophy when the Zulus ransacked the camp. With the number of things which had been taken from the tents, it was incredible that this sword should have been returned so soon, when so many other articles were never recovered.

Edward received his campaign medal for South Africa, with a clasp for the year 1879. He was also mentioned in official reports for his services, the reports being published in the London Gazette on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> March, for his assistance with the transport arrangements. In recognition for these services, he was granted a promotion to Major by brevet. By the New Year, Edwards duties had been completed in South Africa, and he boarded ship on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 1880 for the long journey home, and some very welcome leave.

It was not to last long, as unrest with the Boers soon reached a point that armed insurrection would become inevitable. In Britain, the decision was made by the War office to send out some troops, and some officers to assist on the staff of Major-General Pomeroy-Colley, who was the High Commissioner and General Officer commanding South-East Africa. With all the South African experience which Edward had, it was decided that he would be one of the officers to go.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> December 1880, Edward once again boarded a ship and headed back to a country he was now becoming so familiar with. While he was outward bound, the Boers took their first action against British troops at Potchefstroom, which ended any further negotiations about the Independence of the Transvaal. War had broken out and the Transvaal was placed under martial law. Colley began preparing to provide assistance for the surrounded garrisons within the Transvaal. The Boers knew that any attempt to relieve the garrisons must probably come across the Laing's Nek pass and so, on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1881, a force under the command of Piet Joubert arrived at the pass and began to patrol the immediate vicinity. Edward arrived in South Africa at the end of December, and moved across country from Durban to join the gathering forces of Colley at Newcastle. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1881, he arrived at Camp Newcastle and was appointed Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Staff Officer on Colley's Staff. Edward maintained a journal throughout the coming campaign, in which he recorded the important events of each day and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January, described how the men were addressed by Colley:

His Excellency the Major General reviewed the Natal Field force this afternoon. The troops marched past and afterwards formed a square and were addressed by his Excellency. Orders were issued for the march of the Natal field force tomorrow.

An early reveille roused the men on the 24<sup>th</sup> and Edward recorded the beginning of the advance:

The column marched at 5 am. Some difficulty was found in arranging transport in the prescribed order of march owing to the conductors and drivers being new to the work. The last wagon left camp at 7.30 am. At about 3 miles from Camp Newcastle, a long and steep hill had to be climbed. On account of the rain which had fallen during the preceding week, the ground was soft and this increased the difficulty to overcome. The wagons were taken up, one by one, by means of double 'spans' of oxen. About one half of the wagons had reached the top of the hill by 11 am and were halted on order that the leading battalion might breakfast for 4 hours. It was not until 3.30 that the whole of the wagons had completed the ascent. A laager was formed about 5 miles from the late camp. This was completed by 5 pm.

The slow progress and problems with ox transport must have seemed so familiar to Edward, as the camp was set up and meals prepared. The guns of the Royal Artillery were in demand everywhere. Two guns from N-5 Battery were currently helping strengthen the defences at Potchefstroom, together with forty three men of the Royal Artillery. Edward would have been surprised to know that Trumpeter Martin, who had sounded "Retire" during the Isandlwana battle, was one of those men, as well as Driver Elias Tucker. Like Edward, they both had the distinction of being Isandlwana survivors. The Naval brigade had brought with them rockets and two Gatling guns, which had been used to great effect against the Zulus only two years previously. Sadly, the Boers would not be throwing themselves against them, as the Zulus had obligingly done. The men advanced to a position which was about five miles from Laing's Nek, having now crossed the Ingogo River. The Nek ahead was reconnoitred and observed to be occupied by Boers in force. The site chosen for the camp was just east of the road, and was at a farm called Mount Prospect. This would be the

base for all future action against the Boers. On Friday 28<sup>th</sup> January 1881, the troops at Mount Prospect were aroused at 3.30 am and began to prepare for an attack on the Nek. At 9.25 the first gun fired, and within fifteen minutes Colley decided that the time had come to advance the men of the 58<sup>th</sup> regiment to their intended position on the right, ready for their drive along the top of table hill. The column began to move forward and as they did, Colley allowed his Staff to accompany the advancing men. Being mounted, the Staff officers advanced to the front of the column, and Colonel B.M. Deane as the senior Officer present, assumed command of the 58<sup>th</sup> as they trudged up the increasingly steep hill. The Boers had dug a trench about 150 yards long and were positioned behind the earth parapet, either kneeling or laying prone. Others were sited so as to be able to fire into the flank of the 58<sup>th</sup> as they advanced. The Staff officers were still mounted and riding at the front of the men, with all the visual panoply of their rank. They presented an ideal target to the Boers and Edward felt a bullet strike his helmet, which went spinning from his head and the next moment heard a dull thud, as a Boer bullet struck his horse. The animal crumpled to the ground, throwing Edward forward. As he struggled to free himself from his dead horse, he was amazed that he did not attract fire from any more Boer marksmen. After he stood up, he saw that the Brigade Major, Major Poole, and Lieutenant Henry Dolphin, lay stretched out grotesquely, more victims of Boer rifle fire. Dolphin was the senior Lieutenant of the regiment, and had previously served during the Zulu war. Poole had cared for King Cetshwayo, after the king's surrender following the final stages of the war.

The men of the 58<sup>th</sup> were in places only forty yards from the Boer positions and within half an hour the ammunition carried by the troops was starting to run out. As the senior officer present Edward could see that the situation was hopeless. As he glanced around him he could see that reinforcements were steadily arriving on the Boer side, while the 58<sup>th</sup> were losing men on a regular basis. There was no other option left open to him but to withdraw and at 11am, Edward called for a bugler to sound the retreat and the men scrambled to their feet to turn and fall back down the hill. The withdrawal was commenced on the right of the line, covered by two companies on the left who had borne the brunt of the engagement. Edward had moved across to two companies of the 3/60<sup>th</sup> as the 58<sup>th</sup> withdrew. He moved the companies to the shelter of a ledge and from there directed their covering fire against the Boers until it was time for the rifles themselves to start their withdrawal.

When Edward arrived back, he found that he was the only survivor out of the five Staff officers who had advanced so happily that morning. Once again his luck had carried him through an action where so many had fallen. If he had been referred to previously as 'Lucky', then the events of the day further justified it.

Colley wrote his official despatch to the Secretary of State for War, in which he described the battle and commendations for various actions carried out by the men serving under him. From this report, the London Gazette published on the 10<sup>th</sup> March, the details of soldiers who were specially mentioned:

Major Essex, staff officer of the column, who was with Colonel Deane in the attack on the hill, where his horse was killed under him, and distinguished himself by his courage and coolness, remained to the last, and directing the companies that covered the retirement of the 58<sup>th</sup> Regiment.

A further action took place on the 8<sup>th</sup> February near the Ingogo River where the General and his Staff were nearly encircled by Boers. Edward remained close to Colley, conveying his orders when requested. After their retreat during the hours of darkness, the only Staff officers who remained alive were Bruce Hamilton and Edward Essex. If Edward had been called "Lucky" previously, he was now also being known as "Bullet proof" and "Indestructible". He had spent the previous day following Colley around as they moved about the defensive position encouraging the men, and had come through, yet again, unscathed. Colley reported that:

Major Essex, Column Staff officer and Lieutenant B. Hamilton, 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment, my aide-de-camp, rendered me active and valuable assistance throughout the day.

H. Rider-Haggard considered that Edward's exploits required more of an explanation than Colley had actually described:

Of his staff officers, Major Essex now alone survived, his usual good fortune having carried him safe through the battle of Ingogo. What makes his repeated escapes more remarkable is that he was generally to be found in the heaviest firing. A man so fortunate as Major Essex ought to be rewarded for his good fortune if no other reason, though if reports are true, there would be need to fall back on that to find grounds on which to advance a soldier who has always borne himself so well.

Overwork, nervous fatigue and tiredness, together with the stress of combat had taken their toll on him during the last few weeks. Following the ill fated attack on Majuba Hill, the strain of the last few weeks manifested itself in the conduct of Edward that following night. There is no doubt that his demeanour, usually so reliable, was clearly unbalanced. Lieutenant Percy Marling of the Rifles was keeping watch that night, when Edward made his round of the outposts. Marling described his behaviour:

Essex, the Brigade Major, who had the wind up badly, came out and said I was to keep an extra sharp look out, as the Boers were coming down to attack the camp disguised in the 92<sup>nd</sup>'s kilts and the 58<sup>th</sup>'s red coats !!! The only bright spot that night. It was so dark you couldn't see a man three yards off.

Following the shambles of Majuba, Captain Robertson submitted a very unflattering report of the events which he had witnessed. After reading the report, Edward decided that the comments made in it should not be released and conveniently 'misplaced' it. Edward's decision to withhold Robertson's report backfired when General Sir Evelyn Wood demanded to see it. Amidst embarrassment, it was eventually 'found' and presented, to reveal the shambles of the retreat from the mountain. While initial peace talks were being arranged, Edward learnt that he was to be replaced. He had been seconded to join the 92<sup>nd</sup> Regiment. He left Mount Prospect, probably happy in the knowledge that his association with the wretched campaign was over, within three months of being seconded, the vacancy occurred for the rank of Major. As Edward was already a Brevet Major, following his service during the Zulu War, and a brevet rank took precedence over other Captains within the regiment, he was promoted to full Major on the 24<sup>th</sup> August 1881. The rank of Major also removed him from the command of companies of troops but ensured that he was responsible for the administration of the regiment, while acting as a second in command to the Colonel. The undemanding responsibility of garrison life in South Africa continued until the regiment received instructions to embark for home service. The 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion had been overseas for fourteen years and were delighted to hear that they would be returning to Edinburgh. On the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1883, Edward bade farewell to the country where he had gained his sobriquet of 'Lucky', never to see its shores again. He had not seen his own family for nearly two and a half years.

Upon Edward's return to the United Kingdom, his secondment to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Gordon Highlanders ceased. He was granted home leave and spent it with his family and friends. Edward was offered the role of instructor in topography and surveying at the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, and accepted the position. The first of his terms there commenced on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1883, and he began to explain to the gentleman cadets, the importance of accurate maps and field sketching. The closeness of Sandhurst to Chelsea, together with frequent leave, also meant that Edward had many opportunities to visit the home of Greaves Walker and his youngest daughter. As the year progressed, Edward and Sarah Maude reached an understanding that as soon as Edward's Army career came to an end, then they would marry. Edward finished his attachment at the Royal Military College, on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 1885, and awaited news of his next destination. The War Office took some time in coming to a decision, but eventually advised him that he was to have another overseas posting. The information was relayed in the *Times* on the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> August 1885:

The troopship *Tamar*, 4,650 tons and 2,500 horse power, embarked at Chatham on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 1885 officers and men for Alexandria. The *Tamar* will embark at Portland tomorrow, Major Essex 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Gordon Highlanders, Lieutenant W. Booth 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Hampshire Regiment, Lieutenant C.D. Winter 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Hampshire Regiment, and 141 non commissioned officers and privates of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Dorset Regiment for Malta. The officers named being attached for duty to the draft of the Dorsetshire Regiment.

It would be Edward's responsibility to oversee the boarding of the troops and their safe delivery in Malta. The single funnelled *Tamar*, which had carried Edward to South Africa in 1871, arrived at Portland harbour on a very blustery day.

Upon arrival in Malta, Edward's duty had been carried out and he was now free to rejoin his own regiment. For him it was like joining a completely new one, as he had not served with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion for ten years. As Edward had been a brevet Major since 1879 and a full Major since 1881, he could now confidently look forward to becoming a Lieutenant-Colonel soon. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Gordon Highlanders had changed stations from Edinburgh to Guernsey in 1886 and their Lieutenant Colonel was due to retire. Montague Hope finally left the regiment in May and his departure left a vacancy to which Edward was delighted to be appointed. He rejoined the regiment with which he had served for 2 ½ years in South Africa, but now as its

second in command. Edward enjoyed the warm comfort of the regimental family, and eventually found out that on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1887 he would take command as a brevet Colonel of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Gordon Highlanders. He had barely assumed the responsibility of command when he was notified that the regiment was to prepare to embark. The Idyllic but quiet station of Guernsey was to be exchanged for another home station, this time in Ireland. The preparations that were necessary to move the regiment were made, farewells exchanged and then the regiment boarded the "Assistance" on the 26<sup>th</sup> August 1887 for the short journey to Belfast. It took only four days for the ship to arrive, and the troops then marched to their barracks close to the town.

On Monday 29<sup>th</sup> June 1891, the *Times* printed a list of regimental Lieutenant Colonels who would complete their period of service during July, and amongst them was Colonel Edward Essex, commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Gordon Highlanders. After twenty four years of service, Edward decided that he would finally retire from the army, and as the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1891 arrived, he sadly relinquished command of his Battalion. He was replaced by Major Robert Henry Oxley, whose appointment was officially announced on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1891.

After his retirement from the army, Edward returned to his mother's home in London, and began to accustom himself to civilian life again. After such a long time within the confines of the regiment, the totally different world of civilian and married life was difficult at first to adapt to. After having obtained a special licence, the marriage date was fixed for Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> June, and Edward asked that his cousin should be his best man. The newspapers announced the event with the following statement:

On the 16<sup>th</sup> Inst, at All Saints Church, Highgate, by the Rev Edgar Smith, M.A.; Colonel Edward Essex, late commanding 92<sup>nd</sup> Gordon Highlanders, to Sarah Maud, youngest daughter of the late Greaves Walker, of Tunbridge-Wells.

Edward renewed his acquaintance with the author H. Rider Haggard, whom he had met during his service in South Africa. By now, Rider Haggard had written his famous *King Solomon's Mines* and had achieved much acclaim for the book. He continued to write books with a strong African theme, frequently including Zulus and the Zulu war in their text. He contributed to *The True Story Book* which was published in 1893, and was a collection of heroic tales for children, with an article entitled *The tale of Isandhlwana and Rorke's Drift*. When the article required proof reading, he ensured that it was correct by:

Sending the proofs to my friend Colonel Essex, who was one of the three or four officers in camp who survived the disaster, as subsequently he did those of Laing's Nek and Ingogo.

As an interest, Edward developed a consuming fascination for Genealogy, and tried to research the ancestry of the Essex family. The family had owned large areas of land and subsequently had been fairly easy for him to trace. As the years drew on, Edward and Sarah Maud began to consider moving to a new home, this time in the fashionable seaside town of Bournemouth. Edward was now in his early seventies, and felt that they would both benefit from the air and location. After some time, they found a house in Talbot Avenue, which they considered to be quiet suitable. By 1920, the sale was completed and Edward and his wife moved down to the south coast for their retirement home. Advancing years meant that Edward remained mainly at home. His great niece remembered a visit her family made to see Edward and Sarah Maud in 1937. As a young girl of six years old she recalled:

We were shown into a dining room with a refectory table, windows with leaded glass triangles, and behind the door a black lacquered tallboy with paintings on it in bright colours and gold. Sarah Maud came in first, she was quiet small. Then a gentleman came in who seemed tall but slightly stooped. Both were kindly, elderly people.

The years were beginning to run out for the indestructible Edward Essex. Old age was taking its toll where Boer bullets and Zulu spears had failed. He began to suffer from senility and by 1939 his life span of ninety-one years was rapidly coming to an end. In September, kidney failure and uraemia developed and he fell into a coma. There was nothing that the doctors could do, and on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1939, the luck of "Lucky Essex" finally ran out. Edward was the last of the Isandhlwana surviving officers to die and nearly the very last survivor of that battle as well. His old adversary, Quarter Master Dugald Macphail held that distinction, until his death in the 1941. His funeral was arranged for the 13<sup>th</sup> September, and on that day the cortege carried his coffin the short distance down the road to the Wimborne Road cemetery. A low, red marble tombstone later covered the grave. It was neat and angular, and in a style befitting a military man. It was also very similar to the style of the family gravestone in Hove. Inscribed on the stone were the simple words:

In loving memory of Colonel Edward Essex, 92<sup>nd</sup> Gordon Highlanders, died 10<sup>th</sup> September 1939 aged 91. *Resurgam* (I will arise).

The conclusion to the story of Edward Essex's life occurred upon the death of one of Sarah Maud's relations. She had been given Edward's jewellery, watches and papers by Sarah Maud. Amongst the possessions was Edward's South African medal, which was destined to be returned to the home of his old regiment. Only two South African medals for the year 1879 were earned by members of the regiment. Edward Essex's medal is now on public display at the regimental museum of the Gordon Highlanders in Aberdeen, together with a photograph of him. The story behind it is scarcely believable. It represents a unique character, a born survivor and a very lucky man.

### Acknowledgements.

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