The Great Game

The First Anglo-Afghan War
1839-1842
The Second Anglo-Afghan War
1878-1880

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VISITEZ L'AFGHANISTAN
Modern Afghan History

“The Great Game” (1836- circa 1900)
The British Empire vs the Russian Empire

- The First Anglo-Afghan War (March 1839-1842)
  “To insure the welfare of India”
- The Second Anglo-Afghan War (January, 1878-May, 1879)
  “Concern about Russian influence”
- The Third Anglo-Afghan War (May, 1919-August, 1919)
  “War of Independence”

The United States vs the Soviet Union

- The overthrow of King Zahir Shah by Mohammed Daoud Khan (July, 1973)
- The Saur Revolution - takeover by Nur Mohammed Taraki (April and May, 1978) Daoud Khan murdered
- Taraki murdered by supporters of Hafizullah Amin (September, 1979)
- Amin murdered by Soviet troops and the Soviet occupation (December, 1979) and replaced by Babrak Karmal
- Karmal replaced by Mohammed Najibullah (1986-1992)
- Soviet troops left Afghanistan (February, 1989)

“The Afghan Civil War” (1989 to Present)

- The Taliban (1994-2001)
- The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2002- )
General W. K. Elphinstone
and
The First Anglo-Afghan War
1839 to 1842
Stampless Letter from General W.K. Elphinstone to His Daughter Anne

Dated 18th April 1840 arrived 10th June 1840

From Meerut, North West Province, British India with red framed Meerut/Paid via Marseilles and red oval India, Initially incorrectly charged 1/- and altered to 2/8 with red London Foreign Branch Crown deleting 1/- and with London 10 Jun arrival date stamp.
Entire cross written letter with second sheet missing

This letter in General Elphinstone’s handwriting was sent approximately 8 months before his posting to Afghanistan.
Letter Transcription Excerpts

“The cold weather, as it is termed, commences in October; till then any one who can get away is going to the hills within Simla, Landour, or Missorie, although the two latter are in my division, I am prohibited from doing the same by an order of Lord W. Bentinck’s who suspected everyone of neglect and a share of indulgence.”

“My horse Hoogly has arrived here at last, not looking well. I should like to sell him as I have two others I like better to ride.”

“After the thunder storm the Himalayas for a short time after day break were visible from here and the snow on them, though more than 150 miles distant. I did not see this myself as I was too ill to get out.”

“I do not like your account of the new party, Conservative Radicals; the latter I do not like under any denomination. I was in hopes Canada was settled and our American differences.”

“P.S. There is an inmate of my garden that you would not like; for his twin see a wolf.”
General W.K. Elphinstone

- Who was General Elphinstone?
- What role did he play in the First Anglo-Afghan War?
- How did he die?
- What is his “legacy” from the First Anglo-Afghan War?
Background Notes About General William K. Elphinstone

- Commander-in-Chief of the British forces occupying Afghanistan in the 1st Afghan War, from March 1841 until his capture by the rebels during the Khyber Pass Massacre for which he has been held largely responsible, on January 12, 1842.


- Entered British Army in 1804 and saw service throughout the Napoleonic Wars rising to the rank of lieutenant-colonel by 1813. Led the 33rd Regiment of Foot at the Battle of Waterloo, 1815.

- Left the regiment in 1822, promoted to colonel in 1825 and served for a time as aid-de-camp to King George IV.

- Promoted to major-general in 1837, in 1839 commanded the Benares division of the Bengal army at Meerut, India, and in 1841 placed in command of the British garrison in Kabul, Afghanistan with 4500 troops, 690 were European and the rest Indian. The garrison included 12,000 civilians, including soldiers ‘families and camp followers.

- By this time Elphinstone was elderly, indecisive, weak, unwell (gout, etc.) and proved himself incompetent for the post.

- Later the government of India which selected him in full knowledge of his age, infirmities, and long absence from actual warfare deserved the blame.
Background

The British Government felt threatened by Imperial Russian movements into Central Asia. They believed the Russian forward policy was to reach British India and either diminish or replace British influence there. Russian agents were influencing events in Bukhara, Khiva, Herat and Kabul. They were also aligned with Persia who attempted to acquire Herat.

Afghanistan was viewed by the British as a “buffer zone” which separated the British Empire from the Russian Empire.

The First Afghan War (1838 to 1842) was fought between the Afghan army under King Dost Mohammed and the British Indian army.

The route of the British Army of the Indus lay in a south-west direction from Ferozepur, across the Indus at Bukkur and then north-westward through the Bolan Pass to Quetta and to Kandahar, then to Ghazni, and finally to Kabul. A second British Force followed shortly behind had been dispatched by sea and then up the river Indus to unit with the first force at Quetta.

The British installed Shah Shuja as the King of Afghanistan replacing Dost Mohammed and established forts and cantonments in Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad, Afghanistan.

In late 1841 and 1842 Afghan insurgents were successful in defeating the British garrison in Kabul, forcing it to retreat during the winter of 1842 which resulted in a near complete destruction of the British Army in retreat.
The Second Anglo- Afghan War
1878 to 1880
This cover was sent about 5 months after the Treaty of Gandomak was signed. Postmarks include:

- Oswestry October 30, 1879
- BWLCH-Y-CIBAU B 10 30 (1879)
- Sea PostOffice A Nov 7 or 17? (1879)
- 1 Dely Sitapur Nov 24
- Sitapur Nov 24
- 1 Dely Benares Nov 26
- Benares Dec 1
- Jelalabad Jan 9 (1880?)

Includes “Redirected” auxiliary marking.
The cover was sent from Bwlch y Cibau, England via Oswestry, England and addressed to Lieutenant H. Martin Sandbach, 1st Battery, 5th Brigade, Bengal. It was likely placed on train to London, then across the English Channel to Calais and again by train to Brindisi, Italy. From Brindisi, Italy the pouch was placed on a ship sailing through the Suez Canal to Aden. It was then transferred to a British ship sailing to Bombay, India.

Upon receipt in Bombay, India it was transited to Sitapur, India (where the 1st Battery, 5th Brigade was thought to be located, then forwarded to Benares, India and finally to its destination outside of Jalalabad, Afghanistan at Camp Pezwan Kotal which is near Gandamak, Afghanistan.

The stamps are cancelled Oswestry on October 30, 1879. On the back of the cover is a cancel of Bwlch y Cibau dated 10 30 (1879).

Bwlch y Cibau is a small village of a couple of dozen houses in the old county of Montgomeryshire, part of Powys in Mid-Wales.
Postal Route
(Actual and Suggested)

- BWLCH-Y-CIBAU, England
- Oswestry, England
- London, England
- Calais, France
- Brindisi, Italy
- Aden Camp, Aden
- Sitabpur, India
- Benares, India
- Jalalabad, Afghanistan
- Gandamak, Afghanistan
Where is Gandomak?
YA‘QŪB KHAN (1879)

The Treaty of Gandamak (Gandomak; May 26, 1879) recognized Ya‘qūb Khan as emir, and he subsequently agreed to receive a permanent British embassy at Kabul. In addition, he agreed to conduct his foreign relations with other states in accordance “with the wishes and advice” of the British government. This British triumph, however, was short-lived. On September 3, 1879, the British envoy and his escort were murdered in Kabul. British forces were again dispatched, and before the end of October they occupied Kabul. Ya‘qūb abdicated and was given exile in India, where he died in 1923.

THE BEGINNING ERA OF MODERN AFGHANISTAN

ʿABD AL-RAḤMĀN KHAN (1880–1901)

The British finally withdrew from Kandahār in April 1881. In 1880 ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Khan, a cousin of Shīr ʿAlī, had returned from exile in Central Asia and proclaimed himself emir of Kabul. During the reign of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, the boundaries of modern Afghanistan were drawn by the British and the Russians. The Durand Line of 1893 divided zones of responsibility for the maintenance of law and order between British India and the kingdom of Afghanistan; it was never intended as a de jure international boundary. Afghanistan, therefore, although never dominated by a European imperial government, became a buffer between Tsarist Russia and British India.
Camp Pezwan Kotal - Afghanistan
Early Afghan Postal History

• First postage stamp issued 1871

• First postal routes were:
  – Kabul, Afghanistan to Peshawar, British India (250 miles, 20 stages)
  – Kabul to Tashkurghan (300 miles, 25 stages)

• Transportation methods
  – Foot messenger
  – Horse or donkey
Kabul – Peshawar 200 miles (20 stages)
Kabul – Tashkurgan (Kholm) 300 miles (25 stages)
Kabul - Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat (maybe)
Internal mail.
“Deliver to the hand of Mia Mohammed Bakhsh and Mohammed Siddiq paracha” (shop keeper).

The manuscript (seal) cancel on the postage stamp is from Tashkurgan. It is mailed to Kabul.

There are two, possibly three languages used on the envelope and letter.
And is “The Great Game” still being played?

Questions and Discussion

Thank you