

General Sir Charles MacGregor: * A Profile

MAJ GEN B D KALE (RETD)

Sir Charles Metcalfe MacGregor, the founder of the United Service Institution of India, was a man of unusual drive and energy. His whole heart was in the Institution and he never ceased to labour for it.

Charles MacGregor was born at Agra on 12 August 1846. His father Major RG MacGregor was one of the managers of the Agra Bank. After living four years under the care of his maternal grandmother, he was sent to school at Glenalmond College in PERTHSHIRE and remained there until 1853.

When thirteen, Charles MacGregor joined Marlborough College as a boarder and developed firm friendship with FF Connelly, a fellow student. Mr. Connelly wrote "He was, I think, the first to start an improvement and produced a revolution by gaining a prize, an unheard of innovation. If I am not mistaken, it had something to do with the history of Charles XII of Sweden. He was reserved with all". On 20 October 1856, Charles MacGregor obtained Commission in the Indian Army. After a week at Calcutta, Charles was ordered to do duty with the 40th Bengal Native Infantry at Dinapur. After a few weeks stay at Dinapur, Charles was posted to the 57th Bengal Native Infantry in February 1857 at Ferozpur. After having volunteered four times to go down to Delhi, he was posted on 14 October to 1st Bengal Fusiliers. On 9 November he did duty at the Kashmere Gate and concentrated at Narnaul on November 15 for attack against Saunand Khan. On December 15, he moved to Kasganj and was wounded on the head by a sword. Lucknow was taken on the 20th. At that time, MacGregor was seventeen and a half years old. He loved fighting and did not know what fear or danger were.

In August 1858 Lieutenant MacGregor was attached for duty to HODSONS HORSE. Colonel HUME in his despatch of 18 Sep wrote, "Lieutenant MacGregor, in a most gallant way, led the irregular cavalry rather lower into the river and across, the water being well over their saddles and charged them and was severely wounded".

On February 20, 1859 MacGregor arrived at Cawnpore on his way to China. On the voyage, he learnt Chinese.

On 22 April 1859, he arrived at Kowloon. In a gallant charge he was

*1988 is the centenary year of the MacGregor Medal which was instituted in the memory of General Sir Charles MacGregor in 1888.

wounded though severely but not dangerously.

The war was over on 31 August 1860 and a treaty was signed at Kweiliang. On 26 September even though the wound had not healed, he rode fifty miles to Peking. He arrived in India via Hong Kong on 20 January 1861.

On 20 April he was appointed Adjutant of 2nd Irregulars at GONDA and engaged a Munshi to study Persian and Pushto. While at Bareilly he wrote a long paper on cavalry in India. On 27 October he gave a lecture at the soldier's institute on China. In November, he succeeded in getting an engagement to write for the Bombay Saturday Review on military subjects. In December, he gave a talk to the Rifle Brigade on the war in the Carnatic from 1745-1760.

On 15 August 1862 he was posted to the 7th Dragoon Guards. After a short stay on 11 November he was appointed Brigade Major to the Cavalry Brigade at Lahore. On 12 January 1863 when he was placed under orders to march to Hoti-Mardan, he came to know that he was superseded for the appointment of second-in-command. He met the Chief-Commander who sent his papers for the appointment of brevet majority. In July he wrote a paper on Mountain Warfare.

While posted as Brigade Major to Bhutan Field Force in 1863, he wrote a paper on his "Experience of the Bhutan Campaign" (On 30 September 1863, he was appointed Brigade Major to the Bhutan Field Force. He also carried out reconnaissance from DATMAH to CHIRANG.

In 1868 he volunteered for the expedition to ABYSSINIA and was appointed Assistant Quarter Master General of Cavalry and wrote a paper on the release of Abyssinian prisoners.

By August 1868 MacGregor was at SIMLA and was asked to work on the Gazetteer of Central Asia.

The wedding between Major Charles MacGregor and Frances Mary Durand who was barely eighteen, took place at Simla. She was the daughter of Sir Henry Durand (a member of the Governor General's Council).

The first year of married life was a scramble and they visited DHARMSALA, LAHORE, PESHAWAR, CHAMBA, DALHOUSIE, NURPUR mainly to compile information for the Gazetteer. The Gazetteer was completed in September 1871.

While on leave in 1867, Lt Col MacGregor had conceived an idea of extending to the Indian Army the advantage of a local institute similar to the Royal establishment in White-Hall Yard; and at last after continuous exertions on the part of MacGregor, the United Service Institution of India was

founded at SIMLA in 1870. By 1871, the first annual report showed 800 members belonging to the Institution and the proceedings since published prove it to be an association not unworthy of the older society maintained by the sister services of Great Britain. After prolonged wanderings beyond the INDUS, Lieutenant Colonel MacGregor returned to Army Headquarters at SIMLA and completed his reports. In April Mrs MacGregor's state of health necessitated her proceeding to England. She was taken ill and died on 9 May just before the vessel reached SOUTHAMPTON. On hearing the news MacGregor sailed for England, and after leaving his child with an old friend of his wife he returned to INDIA. On 10 August 1873, MacGregor was posted as Assistant Quarter Master General to the Presidency District and organised the relief of Bengal Femine.

In 1875 Colonel MacGregor thought of going on furlough to Europe for change of work and General F Roberts, then QMG suggested that he collate information on routes beyond our border so as to have a Central Asia Route-book. Landing at BUSHIRE, MACGREGOR rode to SHIRAZ and on the suggestion of Colonel ROSS the British Resident, went on a reconniassance from SHIRAZ to YEZD. He left SHIRAZ on 24 April and by 6 May had reached YEZD. After a march of 70 miles across KAVIR he reached TABBAS on 24 May.

DUSHRUYEH was sixty five miles from TABBAS- till then never visited by an Englishman. On 8 June Colonel MacGregor arrived at BIRJAND. He then went on to HERAT. The Afghanistan Government did not like his visit and escorted him back to Persia. On August 7 the Colonel visited MASHAD and rode on to DARAGEZ. On August the Colonel reached and left for KOCHAN and then on to SHIRWAM. On August 23, he reached, BUJNURD in PERSIA. On September 2nd, at SHAHRUD he found a Russian spy taking undue interest in his movements. On 10 September he reached the shores of the Caspian sea at BUNDUR GEZ and took steamer to the port of REST, reaching TEHRAN on 29 September. At Tehran he met Capt the Hon NAPIER and the two proceeded on to TABRIZ. Leaving NAPIER at TABRIZ, MacGregor rode to the Russian Frontier and drove to NUKHVAN and reached home on 15 November.

His little daughter, Viva was by then three and half years old. On 31 December Colonel Macgregor was made a Companion of the Order of the star of India.

Lord Salisbury was particularly considerate and obtained the assent of the Council of INDIA to his returning to duty via Baluchistan. His friend Capatain Lockwood was also permitted to accompany him.

Colonel MacGregor and Captain Lockwood left UK on 25 September

and travelled through PARIS, VIENNA and PESTH; then steaming down to DANBUE to RUSTCHUK took rail to VARNA, and thence by steamer to CONSTANTINOPLE and TRBIZOND. From TRBIZOND they rode to ERZROUM and proceeded to KARS and examined the defences of the Fortress minutely, mounting some 300 guns.

On 25 November the travellers reached BAGHDAD and proceeded via BASRAH to JASK on the coast of MEKRAN. The explorers arrived at GHADAR on 1 January 1877. From GHADAR Captain LOCKWOOD undertook to reconnoitre from the mouth of DASHT river and MacGregor went via PASNI.

On 4 March it was settled that Lockwood should go to the most direct and practicable route from Lal Khan Chan via NUSHKI to BIRINARU in the BOLAN Pass and thence to JACOBABAD as far as possible. Colonel MacGregor traversed BRAHVI and by another route which led through the Pisi defile in the TAZINAN range. On 23 March Colonel MacGregor arrived at Major SANDEMAN's Camp and pushed on to JACOBABAD.

Capatain Lockwood was taken ill at MULTAN and succumbed to dropsy and Brights disease. Throughout 1877 Colonel MacGregor worked hard in the Quartermaster General's Department and wrote numerous papers, the most notable being on HERAT.

Colonel MacGregor was appointed Adjutant and Quartermaster General of the 1st Division Peshawar Field Force and organised security of the lines of communication.

On his thirty ninth birthday Colonel MacGregor was CB, CSI CIE, a brevet Colonel with five medals and Deputy Quartermaster General at Army HQ, with a record second to no other officer of his standing (twenty three years service) in the Indian Army.

On 7 September the HERAT Regiments broke out in a rebellion and attacked the Residency. The Residency was burnt and the whole mission was massacred. MacGregor who was Chief of Staff, arrived at Residency on 8 September. By 12 September, 6000 men had been concentrated at and near Ahklel when Sir Frederick Roberts arrived. On 1 November 1879 the Camp at SIAM-SANG was broken up, and the 1st Division moved in to SHERPUR. Surgeon Major Bellew, CB was chosen on account of his linguistic attachment and extensive knowledge of the people and Mohamed Hyat Khan, CB as being a Moheemadan and, therefore, more able to enter thoroughly into the feelings and prejudices of the Afghans than any European could hope to do. On 2 August, the force marched to Ghajen and a sortie to Deh Khwaga and took Kandhar on 31 August without a fight.

On September 24, Brig Gen MacGregor with the 25th Punjab Native Infantry and four guns of 11-9 Mountain Battery, marched from Quetta towards KHUSHI with the object of opening the road to SIBSI and then launch a punitive expedition into the main Country.

After the main Expedition on 10 December 1880, MacGregor was given the local rank of Maj General (then 40 years old and 24 years service) and made Quarter Master General. On 1 March 1881 he was raised to the rank of the Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath.

Soon after he sailed for INDIA and settled down in his work. On 14 April he obtained a full year's furlough.

On 6 February 1883 Sir Charles married Miss Jardine and a fortnight after the wedding started for INDIA along with VIVA, his ten year old daughter.

In 1884 Major General MacGregor took his wife on sight seeing through the state of Rajputana. In August, General MacGregor was despatched by Lord Dufferin to PESHIN to report on the frontier defences beyond Quetta. In December 1885, Sir Charles was ordered to the Camp Exercise at DELHI where he commanded a division under Sir Frederick Roberts.

On March 7, 1886 he left for BANNU as BUNER expedition was in the offing. At this stage the doctors found him suffering from an irregular action of the heart and disease of the kidneys. The Government decided not to send the expedition and Sir Charles applied for leave and sailed on 16 April. As he was seriously ill, the doctors gave little or no hope for recovery, but agreed to let him go abroad in search of warmth and sunshine.

On 16 December Sir Charles and his wife left London enroute for Egypt. The long journey had been most tiring. On 2 February the doctors decided to perform an operation as they saw signs of disease of liver. He died in his sleep on 5 February at Cairo.

Full military honours were shown by the Garrison of Cairo to the remains of Sir Charles MacGregor and the Burial service was held at GLENGYLE as he wished.

The news of Sir Charles MacGregor's death caused general regret throughout military and official circles and Sir Frederick Roberts, the Commander-in-Chief, assembled at a meeting held at SIMLA on 18th May to take steps to raise a memorial to the late Major General. It was agreed that the memorial should take the form of gold and silver medals as prizes for reconnaissance, a memorial tablet in St Pauls Cathedral and a portrait of the General in the United Service Institution of India.

On 3 July 1888, the ceremony of unveiling the portrait of Sir Charles took place in the United Service Institution of India at SIMLA by the Viceroy Lord Dufferin.

Sir Charles had great love for strict justice and fairness. It has been said of him by those who knew him best, that he was generous to a fault, even at the cost of his own personal risk and disadvantage. A somewhat hasty temper and brusque manner concealed from the outside world a most kind affectionate heart. He was a true friend with absolute devotion to duty, knowledge of the art of war and a chivalrous warrior. His exemplary record of service, his indefatigable industry and his determination to bring to a successful end any kind of work entrusted to him, had made him a remarkable man.