

# Everard Aloysius Lisle Phillipps VC – A Leicestershire Soldier in India

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It is now 156 years since the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny in 1857. During the intervening years much has been written about this event under a variety of names. Marx and Engels referred to it as ‘The First War of Indian Independence’. Later writers have called it ‘The Indian Rebellion’, ‘The Sepoy Revolt’, and ‘The Great Uprising in India’. The conflict has been explored from both British and Indian perspectives. This account presents the conflict largely from a contemporary nineteenth century British perspective, as seen through the letters of one young British officer.

It was a conflict which was to change India, and one which Everard Aloysius Lisle Phillipps, a 22 year old soldier from an old-established Leicestershire family found himself caught up in, and which led to him being awarded the Victoria Cross.

## *India: The Background*

Britain had traded with India since the middle of the sixteenth century. Good relations with the Moghul and Hindu rulers, along with the subsequent establishment of the (British) East India Company with its operational centre in India, and various victories over their Dutch and Portuguese trading rivals, further helped the British to develop a trade monopoly with India and the Far East.

By the early seventeenth century, India was vital to the Company’s wider interests in the Far East. To protect its interests, the Company created both a civil service and an army. Substantial settlements and trading posts were developed, and by the end of the eighteenth century, the Company was militarily dominant over the whole of Southern and Central India. The governors of the Company’s ‘Commercial Settlements and Interests’ became

‘Governors of Provinces’, and the Company became ‘The Honourable East India Company’ (HEIC), known colloquially as ‘John Company’, and by the Indian population as ‘Kampani Bahadur’. By 1857, the Company ruled some 500,000 square miles of India and 40 million people as a Trustee of the British Government.

Key to the Company’s army was the large contingent of native Indian soldiers, the majority of who were Hindu or Muslim. The infantry of which were known as sepoy and the cavalry as sowars. Prior to 1857 tension had been growing between the sepoy and the British Army officers, along with a groundswell of discontent and disaffection.

The spark which led to the war, and which was to threaten the British presence in India and toll the death knell of ‘The Kampani Raj’, was the introduction into the army of the Enfield 1853 pattern Rifle Musket. In particular, it was the change which required the cartridge to be bit before loading it into the new rifle accompanied by rumours that the cartridges were smeared with pig or cow fat, which were respectively unacceptable to Muslim and Hindu sepoy.



*Ensign Everard Aloysius Lisle Phillipps, Daguerreotype c1855. (Reproduced by permission of Squire Gerard de Lisle.)*

## *Leicestershire: Grace Dieu and the Phillipps Family*

Grace Dieu lies at the western end of the Charnwood Forest, five miles from Ashby de la Zouch. The original priory had been founded in 1240 and was dissolved in 1539. It was purchased by Sir Ambrose Phillipps in 1690 whose main family residence was Garendon Hall near Loughborough which he had purchased a few years earlier in 1684. Later, it was here at Garendon that Charles March Phillipps lived, and when his eldest son Ambrose Lisle March Phillipps married Laura Mary Clifford in 1833, Charles gave Grace

Dieu to Ambrose who built a new manor house there in which he took up residence. His marriage was by all accounts a very happy union which produced sixteen children.

Everard Aloysius Lisle Phillipps, born on 28th May 1835 at Grace Dieu Manor, was their second son. Everard initially attended the UK's oldest catholic school - St. Edmunds at Ware in Hertfordshire, before moving to Oscott College near Sutton Coldfield at the age of 13 which he attended as a lay student until 1852. Destined for the East India Company, Everard then moved to Paris to join his elder brother, and to learn Hindustani, this being a requirement in addition to Latin, Greek and Mathematics for officer entry into the Company. Meanwhile, the brothers became well-known in Paris, attending parties given by the Emperor Napoleon III, and Empress Eugenie. On completion of his studies, Everard sat and successfully passed the East India Company's officers entrance examination at their military college at Addiscombe. Family influence helped purchase Everard a commission as an Ensign with the Company in India. From his correspondence, Everard clearly felt that it was his duty to make his mark in India. Everard left England for India on 17th October 1854 aged nineteen. His Mother wrote at the time 'dear Everard bore the parting from us with great courage, though he seemed a good deal affected.' Neither knew then that he would never see his family again.

#### *Meerut, North West Provinces, India*

Everard arrived in India at Calcutta where he was posted to the 11th Bengal Native Infantry of the East India Company at Allahabad as an Ensign. He remained there for over two years, until his regiment was moved to the military cantonment of Meerut, two miles north of Meerut town, and 50 miles north-west of Delhi, in early May 1857.

At Meerut, the British troops of infantry and cavalry were quartered in brick barracks, with the more numerous Indian troops being separated from the barracks in mud huts. The barracks overlooked the mile wide and four miles long parade ground. Behind the barracks were the officers' family bungalows, each with its own garden. The population of the cantonment was predominantly Hindu.

Everard's arrival in Meerut coincided with the opening stages of the Indian Mutiny, his regiment being one of the first to revolt. A few weeks before Everard's arrival, a sepoy and devout Hindu, Mangal Pandey, had, according to the British version of events, been executed for exhorting his native colleagues to fight for their religion, and shooting and wounding a British NCO. Then towards the end of April, 85 out of 90 sowars of the 3rd Native Cavalry had refused to take part in a firing drill on the parade ground, refusing to

believe statements that the cartridges were either greased with tallow or were the same as they had been using for some time. The 85 men were tried between 6th and 8th May. All were convicted and taken to Meerut prison, having been sentenced to ten years imprisonment with hard labour.

Sunday 10th May was described as 'stifflingly hot'. The morning service at the cantonment's Christian church began at 7am, after which most of the officers and their families would have sought shelter from the heat. Meanwhile, the local markets and bazaars were buzzing with rumour and resentment, and whilst some Indian employees of the Company had warned their British employers and officers of impending trouble, most senior British officers remained remarkably complacent. It was later in the day, just before 6pm, that the Indian Mutiny began.

The native regiments that were immediately disaffected were the 3rd Light Cavalry and the 20th Bengal Native Infantry. Believing that the Queen's Regiment troops of the regular British army were on their way to disarm them, they broke into Meerut prison with assistance from the mob, and released the recently imprisoned 85 inmates. The native soldiers on duty apparently made no attempt to intervene.

At the same time, the 11th Bengal Native Infantry had broken into disorder. Everard, who accompanied his Commanding Officer Colonel John Finnis as he attempted to address them, related what happened in a letter home written on 1st June:

On Sunday the 10th about five o'clock we were suddenly called to the Parade ground by our Colonel whom we found speaking to our men who were violently excited. We were ordered to search our lines for any arms there might be hid. While doing so, we heard a great shouting from the 20th parade and, on going to see what was the matter, found the 20th had seized their arms and were advancing loaded upon us. We (officers) at once went towards the arms, to prevent our men getting hold of theirs, and succeeded in so doing for nearly half an hour when the fire of the 20th became too thick and near for us to remain. Some of our men entreated Colonel Finnis to let them have their arms, saying they would stand by us and drive off the 20th. The Colonel would not trust them, upon which several sepoys forced us from the parade and thus saved our lives.

As we were mounting our horses the Colonel fell by my side, shot through the heart. The 20th afterwards put 15 bullets into him. As I mounted my horse, my servant, who was holding him, was knocked over, bullets falling as thick as peas. Had not the brutes

been such infernally bad shots we would all have perished ... The sepoys were shooting every European they could meet and setting fire to their bungalows - the General and Brigadier General seemed quite paralysed, and for three mortal hours kept marching the Carabineers Rifles and Artillery backwards and forwards well to the rear of the fire.

At last, when we did reach the lines, not a sepoy was to be found. Every house was burnt to the ground, mine among the rest. Unfortunate ladies with babies in their arms were murdered or burnt ... five officers of the 20th were murdered and one wounded ... I have not been in bed since and this is Thursday, on Monday we went out to try to come up with the 11th and 20th and 3rd Cavalry. We killed a few of them, but the main body had made off for Delhi. I had the pleasure of killing two brutes, one of whom wounded my horse with his sword, whereupon I ran him through the body ... For the first three days I served with the Carabineers, now I am attached to the (60th) Rifles as orderly Officer to Colonel Jones.

With a contingent of the 11th Bengal Native Infantry now having joined the mutiny, and Everard back amongst the British lines, he was quickly attached to the 60th Rifles of the regular British army. He wrote home:

As soon as ever this row is over I shall retire from the Company's service ... Colonel Jones asked the Brigadier to attach me to him, which he has done, so I'm in his house now during the day, not at night. At night he goes about inspecting the sentries and I go with him ... He desires me to say that if you should see his brother or sister-in-law to say he's all right ... This outbreak just shows how the Company has endangered the country by their niggardly way of going on ... About 200 of the 11th sepoys have come back as they did not fire on their officers, and as some of them did their best to save us, are with those who come in by Sunday pardoned ... I had to go and read the proclamation to the ranks, certainly did not feel sure whether they would me shoot while doing so ... Try and get me a commission in The Queen's service ... Now perhaps I may fulfil your idea about distinguishing myself!! I tell you I never should at any rate with natives. Write and tell Grand Papa I'm all safe.

From this passage, Everard's open disappointment with the HEIC whom he blames for the mutiny is clear, as is his desire to leave the Company Service and obtain a commission in a Queen's Regiment instead.

A few days later, Everard wrote to his mother:

Being Orderly Officer to Colonel Jones may give me the opportunity to have a commission given to me, so much the better, but I may need to purchase as I want you at once to get me in the Regiment. If I am not granted a commission without purchase, I want you to use what I shall get out of the legacy which is settled on the younger children. ... This ought to be the death blow of the company, their niggardly way of going on has brought it all about. All they care about are large dividends.

#### *Delhi: The Siege and Assault*

Thousands of mutineers from Bengal and the North West arrived at the Red Fort in Delhi. With the East India Company being the main source of power in India, the mutineers turned to Bahadur Shah, the last Mogul King of Delhi to represent their interests for an India independent of the Company, making him their Commander-in-Chief and Emperor of the whole of India. Bahadur Shah, a noted Urdu poet, is said to have reluctantly agreed, empowering his sons to take effective control.

Events in Delhi followed a similar course as they had at Meerut, with the slaughter of European men, women and children.

On 27th May Everard left Meerut to join the newly designated Delhi Field Force of the British army commanded by Brigadier General Archdale Wilson. The small force leaving Meerut marched by night, but as they approached Delhi on 30th May, they came under cannon fire. Writing home later, Everard related his experience:

There's a causeway nearly a mile in length, at the end of which the enemy had placed one 9-pounder and one 8-inch howitzer which swept the causeway. On reaching the bridge the two companies extended, two more come in support and the long range of the rifles forced the enemy to abandon their guns. The Colonel sent me down to order the two leading companies to reform on the causeway and take the guns at the point of the bayonets. One of the 11th colours was with the guns - the sepoys carried it off on our taking the guns, one sepoy, Dars Singh of the 11th, fired his musket into a cart full of ammunition. Captain Andrews, Wilton and myself and about nine men were round a tumbrel when it blew up. Andrews was blown to pieces and four men killed. Wilton's head was bruised - God only knows how I escaped. I'm merely bruised, just a little blood drawn from about five places. The poor 'Creeper', the horse I was riding,

was shot in four places, in the rear fore-leg, in off hock, in hip and a fearful wound in the body. The shot that gave him the last wound almost melted my scabbard, a narrow escape for my leg. A most fearful affair. When the explosion took place, I thought I was hit by a shell and expected to go to pieces every minute. When the smoke cleared up the enemy had retired to a village strongly walled, on rising ground about 200 yards off. We fired a few shots and cleared it at the point of a bayonet. The sepoy fought like fiends - in one place we left about 35 all dead in a heap, killed altogether 50 and lost five men of rifles ... altogether it was a sharp little action.



Reinforcements from Madras and Bombay were mobilised, and troops en route to China were diverted to Calcutta in support. The Sikhs, together with the Gurkhas, remained loyal to the British. Outside Delhi, on a ridge about 1.5 miles from the Red Fort, the British pitched camp, and having drawn up their artillery, they commenced the siege.

Everard wrote home on 1st June urging his mother:

Mind you get me a commission in 60th Rifles. I've now seen service with them. I wrote to Papa about it by the last mail. I shall try to get Colonel Jones to recommend me ... he has mentioned me in the official report of the affair of the 30th May ... I will never serve with the native army again. ... The heat is awful and the quantity of water we drink is wonderful. Fancy a burning sun overhead and a burning village below in which we were for two mortal hours, men dying with thirst. I brought the men two skins of water from the river under a heavy fire of grape and round shot on my horse. I can't write any more. I want to get some sleep.' He added a soldier's postscript: 'I may not live to write again. All I can do is to trust in the same God that preserved me out of the explosion of the ammunition cart. Don't be alarmed if you don't hear regularly, as the post is uncertain.

Death was commonplace, not just from action but also from disease. Typhoid and dysentery were rife, and cholera had already killed the Commander in Chief, the Hon. George Anson, and would also kill his replacement, Major General Sir Henry Barnard in July.

The next day, on 2nd June, Everard wrote again to his father:

Get me a commission now and the fact of having attained it for service with the Regiment may be the

*Hindoo Rao's House and the Gurkha Sirmoor Battalion, Delhi.*  
(Image © The National Army Museum)

making of me, and then perhaps Mama's dream of my distinguishing myself may come true. I never could in the Company's service in which I am determined not to remain one hour longer than necessary.

Delhi was now held by some 20,000 mutineers who were experienced troops, used to close engagement. Meanwhile, the British Force numbered less than ten percent of that figure. Reinforcements and the siege train were due but needed to fight their way in. Everard and a picket of the 60th Rifles, together with the Gurkha Sirmoor Battalion, were stationed in the fortified post known as 'Hindoo Rao's house', some 1200 yards from the walls of Delhi being both the nearest post to the city and the most exposed.

The siege lasted through June and July, and into August and September.

On the 8th July Everard wrote to his brother Ambrose Charles:

I'm writing from Hindoo Rao's house, it's now our main picket. Shot and shell come rattling into it like blazes. We had some very heavy fighting on the 27th, the loss to the enemy very great, ours trifling ... We daily expect to make an attack. We were all named for an attack the other night, place to be taken by escalade, it was just put off. What a state of anxiety everybody in England must be in. India hangs by a thread, a failure at Delhi and India is gone ... Nearly the whole of the Bengal army has mutinied, only some ten regiments out of the seventy-four have not as they were near Europeans who kept them in order. I delight in the profession and life of a soldier ...' Everard continued: 'Tis a glorious regiment the 60th

Rifles, whilst adding: 'There's not a single native regiment we can trust, except Sikhs and Goorkas. Irregulars are the greatest brutes of all.'

On the 11th September Everard wrote his last letter to his mother:

I am writing under tremendous fire from city walls. We have advanced our position within two hundred yards. Four Batteries nearly ready to open and one mortar battery of ten mortars and some fifty guns in all. The whole of our guns will open tomorrow at latest and in three days we shall be in Delhi ... Very hard work for all now. Not been in bed since 7th and this is 11th. One battery of ours just opened up.

I cannot write, such a row going on. Not heard from you since 10 July. I sincerely hope to hear about my commission and see myself in Gazette of 1 August. My best love to all at home. Ever dearest Mamma, Your most affectionate son, Everard Lisle Phillipps.

Despite being heavily outnumbered and fighting on unfamiliar ground, a British assault on Delhi was ordered by Brigadier Wilson. The city walls were breached, and fire from number 3 battery smashed the Water Bastion overlooking the River Jumna. Some of the damage from the initial assault was made good overnight. Meanwhile the British troops moved into position, and early in the morning of the 14th September, after further bombardment, the assault on Delhi started. According to the records of the 60th Rifles, once inside the ramparts, Everard 'who had been attached to our Regiment since the departure from Meerut and received the vacancy created by Ensign Napier's death, captured the Water Bastion at the head of some Riflemen and turned the guns against the retreating enemy.'

Apparently another Regiment, the 8th Queen's had been marked to storm the Water Bastion but were reluctant to face the withering fire, and according to a witness: 'Ensign Phillipps thrust forward, getting a footing on the Bastion with the aid of seven Riflemen, the remainder following.' Also present at the Water Bastion was Bengal Engineer Lieutenant Arthur Moffat Lang (1832-1916) who wrote '...on we rushed shouting and cheering while the grape and musketry from every bend and street knocked down men and officers ... the whole air seemed full of bullets.'

The street fighting continued. Everard and the 60th occupied the Delhi Bank House and brought their fire onto the King's Palace, the King and his family having already escaped. It is unclear exactly where Everard was when he was shot and killed on 18th September. Some accounts state he was at the Bank House, others that he was building a protective breastwork elsewhere with his men, and on looking through a peephole to observe the enemy, received a shot in his eye killing him instantly.

Nearly 1200 men were killed or wounded out of a force of 5000 in the assault on Delhi, 1900 of whom were Indian native soldiers. From May 30th to September 20th some 2500 officers and men had died in addition to those killed in the assault. Over 1000 died of disease.

By 20th September the fighting was all but over, and the British re-took Delhi, retaliating by looting, pillaging and killing. Although the Mutiny had received a crushing blow at Delhi, further fighting with atrocities committed by both sides, took place during the last few months of 1857 and well into 1858, notably at Lucknow and Cawnpore. Thousands of civilians and sepoys died in the war, and whilst the number of rebel soldiers was significant, the majority of the native soldiers remained loyal and played a major role in suppressing the rebellion. In the regions affected by the war, the British regained ground and by July 1858, peace had largely been restored. On 2nd August, Queen Victoria approved the bill to transfer the administration of India from the East India Company to the British Crown, and on 1st November 1858, authority for the government of India was passed to the Crown.



*The Water Bastion, Delhi, photographed by Felice Beato in 1858. (Image © The British Library Board, ref no. 25/13, Montgomerie Collection.)*



*Everard Aloysius Lisle Phillipps and his horse King David, painted by Louis Desanges. Everard's sister was used as the model for his features. (Reproduced by permission of Squire Gerard de Lisle.)*

#### *The Victoria Cross and Postscript*

Everard was buried in the Old Delhi Military Cemetery at Rajpura. Colonel Jones wrote to Everard's father:

It may be some consolation to you to know that during the time he has done duty with my Regiment he has always behaved in the most gallant manner. He was a born soldier and fond of his profession and had it pleased God to have spared him he would have obtained a commission in the Corps and I should have been proud to have him as an officer of the Regiment. He was a universal favourite with the Officers of the Regiment and they hoped and trusted he would have succeeded in obtaining what he wished. It is the wish of the Officers of the Battalion to have placed in any place you choose to select a tablet in his memory in testimony of the esteem in which your son was held by them all.

There was to be some confusion about whether Everard had been recommended for an award. Two brother officers Lieutenants Gough and Moller wrote separately to Everard's family:

General Wilson has recommended Everard for the Victoria Cross for his conspicuous gallantry at the

storming of the Water Bastion when he led the way with seven riflemen when the storming party could not be induced to proceed. The firing was the hottest old soldiers had ever seen, yet Everard was marvellously untouched.

It will be a great consolation to you to know that up to the day of Everard's death, his conduct in the trying scenes he passed through had been such as to gain marked notice, his name being amongst those who were recommended for the Victoria Cross, a distinction that few of us have had the good fortune to obtain.

When Everard's family queried this information with Colonel John Jones of the 60th, Jones' reply was discouraging to say the least.

The communication you have received in regard to your son's name having been recommended for the Victoria Cross is the first I have heard of it, nor would such a thing be done without coming through his Commanding Officer. It may have been the talk of some young ones amongst themselves by which means Mr Gough may have heard of it.

However on the 21st October 1859, the London Gazette published a memorandum:

Ensign Everard Aloysius Lisle Phillipps, of the 11th Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry, would have been recommended to Her Majesty for the decoration of the Victoria Cross, had he survived, for many gallant deeds which he performed during the Siege of Delhi, during which he was wounded three times. At the assault of that city he captured the Water Bastion with a small party of men, and was finally killed in the streets of Delhi on the 18th of September.



*Plaque to Everard Phillipps, Old Delhi Military Cemetery. The cemetery no longer exists, only this plaque and an arch remain. (Photographed by the Author.)*

None the less, the Victoria Cross was not awarded posthumously at this time, and there matters rested for the next fifty years, until following pressure over VC awards

during the Boer War, the London Gazette published a further memorandum on the 15th January 1907:

The King has been graciously pleased to approve of the Decoration of the Victoria Cross being delivered to the representatives of the Officers and men who fell in the performance of acts of valour, and with reference to whom it was notified in the London Gazette that they would have been recommended to Her late Majesty for the Victoria Cross had they survived.

By family consensus, Everard's Victoria Cross was presented to his oldest surviving brother Edwin. Family correspondence in 1956 suggests there were at least 3 VC's in Everard's name. One was returned to Hancox, the makers, with a misspelling and not destroyed. Two more - the original and a nineteenth century copy are both still in the family's possession.



The prominent granite memorial tower erected at Cademan Wood near Temple Hill, Charnwood, in memory of Everard Aloysius Lisle Phillipps. Now demolished. (Reproduced by permission of Whitwick Historical Group.)

According to the King's Royal Rifle Corps Association web site, 'Everard's untimely but glorious death made a great sensation in Leicestershire, and a fine Gothic tower of rough hewn granite was built to perpetuate his memory on top of one of the rocks in High Cadman Wood in Charnwood Forest, overlooking Grace-Dieu and the villages of Whitwick and Coalville, and can be seen from miles around. Few soldiers in England have such a fine and enduring monument.' Erected by public subscription in 1863-64, the monument was 80 feet high. Designed by E. W. Pugin, it was said to replicate the Water Bastion in Delhi, had an internal spiral staircase, the tower being originally surmounted by a flag-staff. Whilst the monument has not endured to the present day having been destroyed by vandals in 1946, the memory of Everard Aloysius Lisle Phillipps lives on.

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