



Battle Story: Maiwand 1880

Edmund Yorke

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The Battle of Maiwand was one of the most serious defeats of the British Army during the Great Game and one of the only times during the nineteenth century that an Asian force defeated a Western power. The battle commenced on 27 July 1880, as Afghan forces moved towards the Maiwand Pass in Afghanistan in an attempt to cut British communications between Kabul and Kandahar. Disastrously, the British underestimated the Afghan forces and ignored key intelligence, and so attacked Afghan forces at Maiwand, despite being outnumbered by nearly 3,000 British troops to 8,500-15,000 Afghan warriors. Despite superior British firepower, Afghan command skills and tactical flexibility led to swords and spears overcoming rifles. Nearly 1,000 British troops were killed during the encounter, but the Afghans also suffered heavy casualties (2,000). The battle taught the British that their military objectives in Afghanistan were difficult and costly to achieve, the defeat resounded throughout Victorian England.

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