

Graveyard of Empires: Will the US and Britain “Meet Their Waterloo” in Afghanistan?

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“At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed.”
Frederick Douglas, 1852.

In the latest issue of the excellent online resource, Military Resistance, it transpires that the British have named a base at Sangin, Helmand Province: “PB (Patrol Base) Waterloo.” (1)

Either the British Army do not share the superstitions of their Royal Navy colleagues, or they have a wry sense of irony. The British may have won the Battle of Waterloo (commenced 18th June 1815) but at an unimaginable cost:

British regimental casualties:

1st Life Guards

□

6 officers and 72 men killed and wounded

2nd Life Guards

□

1 officers and 46 men killed and wounded

Royal Horse Guards

□

5 officers and 80 men killed and wounded

King’s Dragoon Guards

□

7 officers and 140 men killed and wounded

Royal Dragoons

□

13 officers and 173 men killed and wounded

Royal Scots Greys 2nd Dragoons

□

11 officers and 185 men killed and wounded

6th Inniskilling Dragoons

□

6 officers and 183 men killed and wounded

7th Hussars

□

7 officers and 179 men killed and wounded

10th Hussars

□

7 officers and 60 men killed and wounded

11th Hussars

□

5 officers and 45 men killed and wounded

12th Light Dragoons

□

6 officers and 106 men killed and wounded

13th Light Dragoons

□

10 officers and 80 men killed and wounded

15th Light Dragoons

□

5 officers and 69 men killed and wounded

16th Light Dragoons

□

5 officers and 36 men killed and wounded

18th Light Dragoons

□

2 officers and 83 men killed and wounded

Royal Artillery

□

29 officers and 264 men killed and wounded

Royal Engineers

□

none

1st Foot Guards (2 battalions)

□

15 officers and 472 men killed and wounded

2nd Coldstream Guards

□

8 officers and 296 men killed and wounded

3rd Foot Guards

□

12 officers and 327 men killed and wounded

1st Foot

□

15 officers and 128 men killed and wounded

4th King's Own Regiment of Foot

□

8 officers and 125 men killed and wounded

14th Foot

□

1 officers and 28 men killed and wounded

23rd Royal Welch Fusiliers

□

10 officers and 89 men killed and wounded

27th Foot

□

15 officers and 463 men killed and wounded

28th Foot

□

16 officers and 161 men killed and wounded

30th Foot

□

18 officers and 207 men killed and wounded

32nd Foot

□

9 officers and 165 men killed and wounded

33rd Foot

□

11 officers and 128 men killed and wounded

40th Foot

□

12 officers and 189 men killed and wounded

42nd Highlanders

□

6 officers and 44 men killed and wounded

44th Foot

□

4 officers and 61 men killed and wounded

51st Light Infantry

□

2 officers and 29 men killed and wounded

52nd Light Infantry

□

9 officers and 190 men killed and wounded

69th Foot

□

6 officers and 67 men killed and wounded

71st Highland Light Infantry

□

16 officers and 184 men killed and wounded

73rd Highlanders

□

6 officers and 225 men killed and wounded

79th Highlanders

□

13 officers and 171 men killed and wounded

92nd Highlanders

□

6 officers and 110 men killed and wounded

95th Rifles (3 battalions)

□

30 officers and 396 men killed and wounded (2)

“The field of battle, next morning, presented a frightful scene of carnage; it seemed as if the world had tumbled to pieces, and three-fourths of every thing destroyed in the wreck. The ground running parallel to the front of where we had stood, was so thickly strewn with fallen men and horses, that it was difficult to step clear of their bodies; many of the former

still alive and imploring assistance, which it was not in our power to give. The usual salutation on meeting an acquaintance of another regiment after an action was to ask who has been hit? But on this occasion it was 'Who's alive?' (3)

Dr Jan Myrdal's remarkable Anuradha Ghandy Memorial Lecture earlier this year, was coincidentally entitled: "Will the US Meet Its Waterloo in Afghanistan and Iraq?"(4) Though he stresses the inevitable US failure, its junior partner Britain and others of the "coalition" of the increasingly unwilling, will certainly suffer the same fate.

Dr Myrdal talks of the country he knows, has lived in and loves, with a poignancy and heart-torn hurt for the occupied people, who welcomed him and his wife, showered hospitality and protection, including in places the invaders refer to as "badlands" and "terrorist strongholds." His insights are a must read. But, he points out, had they been armed, they would have been an enemy. They, of course, were not, thus tradition and legendary Afghan hospitality, dictated they were under protection culturally extended to visitors.

" ... that the US and its empire in the longer run is doomed to failure is evident. No tree grows up into heaven. The US is a paper tiger ... It will follow the road of other world empires. The Roman and Spanish - and British ... But if it does so by meeting a Waterloo is another question., It is of course possible that its end will be of the Waterloo kind; a defeat like that of Napoleon by a coalition of powers. That is possible. Washington is after all waging its present wars on credit", assesses Dr Myrdal.

It is, so far, impossible to discover how this remote part of Helmand Province acquired its name, but "PB Waterloo", seems a less than auspicious title for a base in the "Graveyard of Empires." It is salutary to reflect wryly on Wendell Phillips (1811-1844): "Every man meets his Waterloo at last."

Clearly, which ever bright military spark lighted on a name to haunt, was not the contemplative type.

Notes

1. <http://www.militaryproject.org>
2. <http://www.britishbattles.com>
3. The Battle of Waterloo, described by Captain John Kincaid in: "Adventures in the Rifle Brigade." (Thanks to Lesley Docksey, Editor: "Abolish War.")4. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=17490>

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