

Indian Mutiny remembered in new book

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A new book marking the 150th anniversary of the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny was launched on, Friday 17 August 2007, at The Gurkha Museum in Winchester.

'Rifles and Kukris: Delhi 1857' is published by Lieutenant-General Sir Christopher Wallace, a Deputy Lieutenant of Hampshire and Chairman of The Royal Green Jacket and Gurkha battalions, both of whom were involved in the Indian Mutiny. The mutiny, although unsuccessful, marked the early beginnings of the end of British rule in India.

The fighting in Delhi was severe: 1,170 British soldiers, including Green Jackets and Gurkhas, were killed or wounded on 14 September 1857, the first day of the assault on the city.

The citizens of Winchester and Hampshire were not untouched by these events. Military reinforcements from the 60th Rifles and Rifle Brigade were despatched to India from the barracks on the Romsey Road in Winchester. One of these, Ensign Alfred Heathcote, was awarded a Victoria Cross for his gallantry during the siege and recapture of Delhi between June and September 1857.

Lieutenant-General Wallace said:

"The Indian Mutiny was a huge wake-up call for the British in India. Many Europeans were massacred and Delhi occupied by the mutineers. Its early recapture was critical if the greatly outnumbered British were to avoid being ousted from India. Fortunately the British Army rose to the occasion, aided by a number of loyal Native troops, including two battalions of Gurkhas.

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"After three months of fierce fighting in blistering heat, Delhi was assaulted and the mutineers defeated. Thereafter the mutiny was doomed to fail, with British rule prevailing for a further 90 years until Indian Independence in 1947. However, like the Battle of Waterloo, the recapture of Delhi was an extremely close run thing. On such events hangs the course of history – and it might all have been so different."

Both The Royal Green Jackets and The Gurkha Museums in Peninsula Barracks, Winchester, will be marking the 150th anniversary of the events at Delhi with a temporary exhibition in the Macdonald Gallery of The Gurkha Museum which will run from 18 August to 16 September 2007.

Alfred Spencer Heathcote V.C. is a fourth cousin to Sir William Heathcote 5th Bt.