The Indo European Telegraph east of Teheran was under the control of the Indian Administration. It was quite distinct from the Indo European Telegraph Co. which operated the lines from London through Europe to Teheran. That Company had been set up through the influence of Reuter, who was trying to establish an Imperial bank in Persia. It was largely constructed by Siemens Brothers.

There had been much British effort to get effective telegraph communication to India and in 1863 there was a move to establish lines through Persia. The Persians were not entirely keen and their conventions were not to British liking. It was under these circumstances that Major Murdoch Smith of the Royal Engineers was sent out with three officers and twelve non-commissioned officers of the same corps and six civilians to construct the line. Edward Graves was one of the NCOS.

Graves was born on 5 December 1844 in the parish of Cliften near Shefford in Bedfordshire. He was the second member of that family to bear the name Edward, the previous one had died in early childhood.

He entered the Electric & International Telegraph Co. in 1857 and was posted, to Southampton. Some time later he was sent as a civilian telegraphist to Aldershot Camp and soon afterwards he joined the Royal Engineers.

The detachment of British Engineers who arrived in Persia in 1863 were viewed with universal suspicion from the Shah downwards. "It would be an endless task to describe the difficulties by which their task was surrounded. Success often seemed well nigh hopeless, but thanks to the tact and the zealous and loyal efforts of the widely scattered staff, suspicion gradually gave way to trust and enmity to friendship. A convention of 1865 improved matters considerably for the British. A second wire was to be constructed entirely by British engineers but at Persian expense. It was stipulated that they were to instruct Persians in its operation and that they would be withdrawn at the end of five years when it would be handed over entirely to the Persian government. However later conventions extended British involvement almost indefinitely.

Graves came home on privilege leave after about 10 years. He returned to Persia and officiated as Asst. Superintendent at Shiraz between 1/12/1873 and 31/12/1874 when he -appears to have suffered the first of two major injustices which had a marked effect on his career. As senior NCO he was requested by his colleagues to enquire whether as volunteers for service in Persia, their period of service would be limited. There were those who definitely wanted home. However this was considered to be a personal display of discontent and when he was sent on leave without pay and allowances to Bushire (one of the Persian ports for England). "I however charged my military pay which was retrenched by the Examiner of Telegraph Accounts. I appealed but without success. Subsequently when I reached Chatham I made a claim for this pay and on arrival at Teheran in Nov. 1875 for the Service of the Indo European
Telegraph (to which he was seconded as a 2nd corporal) was informed by Major Smith that the money had been passed to my credit and paid to me". It is well worth concentrating on this globe trotting for a second. Having been sent to Bushire he returns to England, where he appears to makes a successful bid to reclaim his pay. On his return to Persia, he along with the other Engineers are seconded to the Indo European Telegraph Department, which is now operating the lines which the Engineers had constructed and they are still under the command of Major Smith.

The second injustice occurred at Shiraz where the Superintendent, Mr Walker, reported me for mutinous conduct and inciting others to leave the service. Corporal King stationed at Dasht-Argin had been on the line to me complaining of the dreadful solitude of his outstation. He couldn't hold out much longer and that he would prefer to return to duty as a soldier then remain in Persia on good pay. In Feb 1875 he spoke to me on the wire, asking my advice. I told him to go through the proper channels. Walker was in circuit and reported us both to Major Smith who dismissed us both without the case being investigated and remanded us to military duty at Chatham, where I was first informed of the serious charges. I eventually left the Corps on completion of my limited tour of duty".

He was discharged as a Sergeant (7130) at Chatham on 11/8/1875. There may well have been a Court Martial since his discharge papers do not appear to be in their proper place in file W097 1851 (this file deals with end of service and health grounds discharge papers) in the Public Record Office at Kew (they may have been misplaced out of alphabetical order in the bundle but an exhaustive search would have taken more time then I had available. The absence of these documents are unfortunate as it might have given details about his marital status (His brother, James believed that he was first married to an Armenian woman from Isfahan). It would be possible to get these details from the annual musters of the Royal Engineers. Again this search would take several days.

Incidentally Walker subsequently admitted to Graves, when he became a civilian employee in the IETD, that he had a grudge against military involvement.

Grave's value as a telegraphist seems to have been beyond question. When the Prince of Wales visited Persia he was temporarily engaged by the Indo European Telegraph Department at Teheran. During his stay in Teheran his first wife died of typhoid on 6/3/1877. He returned to England via Bushire and on arrival in London he was asked if he would consider joining the Department as a civilian.

The Indo European Telegraph Department was a part of the India Office and as such appears to have had an incredible infrastructure modelled on military lines. Personal ability had little value compared with years of service and position on the promotions list.

The India Office Library in London contain his Articles of Agreement laying out his terms of employment.

4th grade clerk 1500 Rupees pa appointed 16/11/1878

Promoted 3rd grade signaller 1/11/1881
Home on leave in England from 16/8/1881 - 15/11/1881. He was married for the second time on 22/9/1881 and it is believed that his wife, Anne Elizabeth, accompanied him back to Persia.

Promoted 1st grade signaller 5/5/1882

Clerk in Charge at Shiraz I/l/1883

Son, Edward Basil, born 15/3/1883

Acting Superintendent Shiraz 30/l/1884 - 5/3/1884

6/3/1884 handed over to Mr Fargues who had right of seniority

13/6/1884 - 30/9/1884 Senior Clerk in Ispahan during Mr Preece's period of leave.

1/9/1886 - 30/9/1886 on leave (hardly in England). His wife and child may have returned to England somewhere about this time.

Was off ill for 6 weeks during 1888. Reported to be suffering from geriphlitis??. On 20/5/1888 a report stated that he was incapable of even the lightest work and his retirement from the service on 10/60 full pension was proposed.

He recovered and was known to be Clerk-in-Charge at Shiraz 24/1/1891. Promoted to Asst. Supt. (2nd class) July 1891 on 350 Rupees/month. The gazette notification (332) was published on 19 Sept 1891.

August 1892 Asst. Supt. Ispahan, but superceded by Mr McMullan in Sept. 1893 as the latter had right of seniority.

1894 Asst. Supt. Teheran. There were however suggestions at about this time that he was to be transferred from the Persian section to the Gulf section. He was entirely opposed to this officially on grounds of health but unofficially one suspects that he was fully aware of the personal dangers to telegraph staff (quote from a paper on the IETD in 1928 "There was not a station which had not half a dozen graves of men who had been killed or had died in the execution of their duty"). He claimed that his health, which was not the best, would not stand the climatic conditions of the Gulf region. A medical report in 1894 in addition to mentioning his 1888 illness stated that during his residence in Teheran he often suffered malarial fever. He also suffered dyspepsia and vertigo and had on one occasion fallen over. On the basis of the medical report he was allowed 12 months leave in England with the instruction that he would nevertheless be posted to the Gulf section on his return.

During his leave he stayed with his wife and child at 8 Hartington Villas, Hove. Later in that year he wrote to his employers asking to be allowed to return within the period of his leave as his health had now fully recovered. This was granted. However he explained in a letter dated 13/8/1895 that as he had only 4 years of service remaining he wished to be allowed to complete
them in the Persian rather then in the Gulf section. This was refused and he was told to report to Karachi on his return from leave.

On 913/1897 it was reported that he had been promoted from Asst. Supt. Class 2 Grade 1 to Asst. Supt. Class 1 consequent on the retirement of Mr J.J. Fahie from the service.

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His death was reported by Mr C. Hardinge (First Secretary at the Embassy in Teheran) in a letter to the Marquis of Salisbury dated 9/12/1897. (PRO Persian letters)

".... to report the murder on the night of 2nd inst of Edward Graves a Commissioned Officer of the IETD and Supt. of the landline on the southern coast ....

..... from details since received it was accompanied with unusual ferocity and barbarism."

HM Consul General at Bushire (Col. Meade) has reported that Mr Graves's throat was cut and his body mutilated, and the tent cut to pieces and everything looted. Other information from private and independent sources indicate that he was murdered in his bed, his head severed from his body, which was disembowelled and pinned to the bed.

It is thought that the murderers believed that he was carrying a considerable amount of money, but Col. Meade reports that it may be due to the low ebb of British prestige and disorder in Persian Bilushistan. The fault lies entirely with the Persian authorities for permitting this situation to continue and they should be asked to provide compensation by way of a pension to his widow.

Some of the murderers were it appears recognised but the local headmen at Rapch and Karwan refused to assist Mr Graves's native artificer in having them seized ........

Hardinge's letter also mentioned that the telegraph employees at Jask and Charbahar had been in fear of attack for some time.

The London Office of the Telegraph Department had in fact received notification of the murder on 3 December, giving the location as Rapch River (Rapch is a hamlet about 11 miles from the coast). It stated that he would have a decent burial, that the three people involved were known and that the Persians were sending in their gunboat Persepolis with troops.

Persepolis arrived in company with the cableship Patrick Stewart off Rapch River at Galag on 13 December. The Persians landed on the 14th. Their complement was 100 men, a light field gun, 14 camels and 3 donkeys.

A report from Capt. P. Molesworth-Sykes mentions that the murderers were hiding in Karwan, 14 miles away and that the Karwanis had been given until 4 pm to hand them over otherwise the Persians would attack and destroy their date groves. He stated that the funeral of Graves would be held after Col. Meade comes and in the meantime he wished the authorities to forward him a
Presidency tent for Camp Rapch.

It would appear that the Persians didn't carry out their threat immediately because on the 26 of December it was rumoured that the wanted men had fled to Baskard. This made capture less likely and the British were asked to use their influence to prevent the Persians carrying out their threat.

Matters took a serious turn on the 26th when Mir Abdee the son of the late chief of the Baluchi's started looting British caravans and threatened to attack Charbahar and kidnap telegraph operators and their families. In fact a survey party was murdered and robbed near Charbahar on 9 Jan. There was an urgent request for troops and on 31 December the Persians moved out.

The British had been camped on the left bank of Rapch River since the 14th. This was about a half mile from the murder scene. Meanwhile Mr Seely of the IETD had provided a temporary telegraph line to the coast.

The report to Major Fagan HM Consul at Muscat stated that Graves had paid himself for November but that there was Rsl56/4/6 missing from his camp. His servant was due Rsl2 for food and Rsl2 for wages.

There were various offers of help but the British treated these as suspect. At the end of January however they were in a strong enough position to start their own pursuit. On the 31st the village of Hean was searched by Capt. Creagh. In the huts belonging to Malekhind, Lulla and Shai Mohamed they found pieces of paper, a broken lamp, filters etc belonging to Graves. There was further luck on 1 February when the search of another village turned up record books, a new line sketch book, an empty medicine chest a broken hair brush and a razor strop. The report continues "the date groves of these villages are now being destroyed. There is also a mention that only two of the guns which had been amongst Graves's camp inventory had been recovered.

A reward of Rs500 was offered for the capture of each of the murderers who were now named as Malekhind bin Shahbeg, Lulla bin Shahbeg, Shai Mohamed bin Goobel and Sabair bin Sugurulla. This was not as productive as hoped and on 3 April senior Karwanis were taken as hostage until the murderers surrendered.

On 12 April Shai Mohamed was brought in. Malekhind bin Shahbeg was killed while being captured. On 20 April Sabair bin Sugurulla gave himself up. Sworn evidence was obtained against Shai Mohamed but as there was none against Sabair, he was released. It was discovered that Lulla had fled and taken asylum with the Shawardi tribe. Accordingly on 28 April his son was taken hostage but this does not seem to have had the desired effect.

On 26 May a scaffold was erected at Jask. Shai Mohamed was raised up on pulleys and then shot by a file of Persian soldiers.

At an early stage there had been hurried telegrams to London enquiring whether Graves had made a will; he hadn't. However he had taken out a life policy for £1,000 at some time but there was somewhere over £200 owing in unpaid premiums.
Anne Elizabeth Graves appears to have been an annoyingly pathetic and complaining woman. She wrote to the IETD on 7 December, 5 days after her husband's death. She had no money, she was delicate, their son was delicate and was just recovering from a badly broken arm.

There was a public auction of Graves's effects (with the exception of his signet ring, keys, 2 pairs of spectacles and private papers) and the settlement of his estate in Persia £18 - 10s -2d together with the above named items and his watch were returned to his family on 11/3/1896. Probate of his estate in England (valued at £1066 - 3s - 6d) had been granted to his widow on 4/2/1898.

She wrote to Lord George Hamilton on 8/5/1899 requesting assistance for her sons future. It was agreed that £500 should be paid to provide for this purpose on the basis that it would be deducted from the indemnity being claimed from the Persian Government. On 13/5/1899 it was put on file that Edward Basil Graves (now aged 16) was somewhat backward at school. It was decided to pay Anne Elizabeth £100 pa for life and £18 pa to Basil until he reached the age of 18.

Anne Elizabeth wrote to the Department on 14/11/1899, giving an address c/o H.J. Bosser, 17 Craven Rd., Harlesden. She wished to defer the question of the monument to her late husband until she had settled in a permanent residence. "....have it in a local church where I and my son worship. He leaves school at Christmas and then we will settle down...." In the letter she mentioned that her mother lived at 56 Forbury Rd., Clapton. They were still at Craven Rd, Harlesden in 1900 when she was writing to the directors asking for a nomination to the Bank of England for Basil who was at that time taking his exams. At this point in the file there is a photograph of a memorial tablet erected by the staff of the Indo European Telegraph Department to the memory of Edward Graves. It fails to mention its locality but a search in Harlesden could be fruitful.

Comments on file in 1903 suggest raising her pension to £150 pa. It also quotes Anne Elizabeth as being 47 years of age in that year. A note on the file indicates that the £5,000 indemnity claimed from the Persians had not been paid and probably never would be.

Almost the last item in the Edward Graves file in the India Office Library is a letter from Anne Elizabeth Graves dated 7/6/1920, in which she asks for an increase in her pension. The accompanying comments mention that she had originally been awarded a pension equivalent to an army captain killed in action. It also mentions that her son had served in the Great War and had since died. A search through the death indeces in Alexandra House confirm that he died during the first quarter of 1919.
MAP TO ILLUSTRATE THE
TELEGRAPH LINES
OF THE
INDO-EUROPEAN TELE DEPT
AND
CONNECTED SYSTEMS.

ARABIA

PERSE

GULF

AFGHANISTAN

BALKHISTAN

REFERENCE
WIRELESS STATIONS &
RAILWAYS

MIGADAR

ARABIAN SEA
Sketch to illustrate Operations at Karwan.
View of Rapch River region from GoogleEarth
The hut at Raphel erected over the grave of Mr. Graves, the late line Officer, who was murdered whilst on a previous inspection.

Along the Raphel River, about Pole 1567, he inspected the hut erected over the grave of Mr. Graves, who was murdered whilst on inspection there. It was said that he was killed because of a rumour that he had a money-making machine. It was really his cash box. The hut is made of sun-dried bricks, and a photograph of it appears on this page.

From "Some of the difficulties encountered in maintaining landlines across southern Iran"

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