A SCARCE EGYPT 1882 BLACK WATCH TEL-EL-KEBIR CASUALTY MEDAL. HIS REGIMENT PART IN THE BATTLE BEING IMMORTALISED IN ALPHONSE DE NEUVILLE’S FAMOUS PAINTING

EGYPT AND SUDAN 1882-9, CLASP, TEL-EL-KEBIR ‘16. PTE. M. RUSSELL, 1/R. HRS.

Private Matthew Russell was severely wounded at the battle of Tel-el-Kebir on 13 September 1882, and died of his wounds on 5 October 1882.

At Tel-El-Kebir, the Highland Brigade, 3000 strong, were ordered the attack the Egyptian trenches at the centre of the battlefield. This was by far the strongest position held by the enemy and consequently the Highland Brigade suffered 231 of the 459 killed and wounded suffered by the British army. The Black watch themselves would suffer 56 officers and men killed and wounded, their part in attacking the trenches would be immortalised in Alphonse de Neuville’s famous painting

FROM A HISTORY OF THE BLACK WATCH

‘..The order was at once given, "Fix bayonets!" and just as this was done the whole line of entrenchment in front was lit up by a blaze of rifle-fire. The order was to attack with the bayonet without firing, and "at the magic word ‘Charge!’ the whole brigade sprang to its feet and rushed straight at the blazing line." The distance to be traversed was only some 150 yards, but in that short space nearly 200 men fell. The point attacked by the Highlanders was almost in the centre of the enemy’s line, and, occupying the highest ground, was, with the bastions on either side, the key to the whole position. Bearing the entire brunt of the earlier portion of the assault—for it attacked just before daybreak, while the right-hand portion of the attacking force was still over 1200 yards distant—and exposed to a heavy fire from almost overwhelming masses of Arabi’s troops, the brigade suffered a momentary check; but General Hamley met this by pushing forward some small bodies he had kept in reserve at the ditch, and on the arrival of the 60th and 46th regiments—which formed the reserve behind the Highland Brigade—he advanced with the whole body against the lines of entrenchment already mentioned as leading back towards Arabi’s camp. "Up the bank," says one of the Black Watch;
"we went, and it was full of men, and they turned on us like rats in a trap; but the infantry did not stand long. However, honour to whom honour is due—the artillerymen stood to their guns like men, and we had to bayonet them. As soon as that job was done, I saw two regiments of cavalry forming up on the right. ‘Prepare for cavalry’ was given, and in less time than it takes to write this we formed in a square, and were waiting for them; but when they saw this they wheeled to the right-about and off; they would not face a square of Scottish steel."

The fighting was indeed over, and all that remained for the Highlanders to do was to occupy Arabi’s camp and capture the railway station. They "had done their work; they had secured a number of trains, the engines only escaping; had captured the immense commissariat stores and thousands of camels; and by seven o’clock had sat down comfortably to breakfast on the scene of the victory." The assault began at five minutes to five, the station was captured at half-past six, and at seven the whole brigade was again in order. "Thus," says General Hamley;

"in that interval of time, the Highland Brigade had broken, under a tremendous fire, into the middle of the enemy’s entrenchments; had maintained itself there in an arduous and dubious conflict for twenty minutes; had then captured two miles of works and batteries, piercing the enemy’s centre, and loosening their whole system of defence; and had finished by taking the camp and the railway trains, and again assembling ready for any further enterprise. No doubt these troops were somewhat elated—perhaps even fancied that they had done something worthy of particular note and remembrance. And, in fact, the Scottish people may be satisfied with the bearing of those who represented them in the land of the Pharaohs."

Condition EF, a scarce and desirable Tel-El-Kebir casualty