

THE SUPERB AND POIGNANT CRIMEA MEDAL AWARDED TO CAPTAIN 34TH FOOT, WHO WAS KILLED IN ACTION DURING HIS REGIMENT'S DISASTROUS FIRST ATTACK ON THE REDAN ON 18 JUNE WHERE THE 34TH, ACTING AS STORMERS, LOST 75% OF THEIR NUMBER KILLED AND WOUNDED. A SOLDIER FROM HIS COMPANY DESCRIBES HOW DURING THE ATTACK, SHIFFNER WAS 'IN FRONT OF ALL, WAVING HIS SWORD AND SHOUTING FOR THE MEN TO COME ON FOR DEATH OR VICTORY' AND WAS LAST SEEN ALIVE 'ATTEMPTING TO MAKE AN OPENING IN THE ABATTIS BY HACKING THE PALISADE WITH HIS SWORD' HIS BODY WAS LATER FOUND NEAR THE ABATTIS, WITH A GRAPE SHOT WOUND THROUGH THE BODY AND A GUNSHOT WOUND IN THE LEG. HE WAS POSTHUMOUSLY MENTIONED IN DISPATCHES



CRIMEA 1854-6, NO CLASP 'CAPT. J. SHIFFNER. 34TH REGT.' Officially impressed naming, in named card box of issue

M.I.D. *London Gazette* 25 June 1855. A posthumous mention in Lord Raglan's dispatch

John Shiffner, son of The Reverend Sir George Shiffner, was commissioned Ensign in the 53rd (Shropshire) Regiment of Foot on 15 October 1841. Rising to Lieutenant on 31 March 1843, he was Commissioned Captain in the 34th (Cumberland) Regiment on 3 August 1849. The 34th joined the Crimean War later than most regiments, arriving at Balaklava on 9 December 1854, therefore missing the earlier great battles. However they played a prominent part in repelling the Russian sortie from Sebastopol on 22 March 1855 and again, whilst acting as stormers during the attack on the Quarries; 7 June 1855. However it was during the attack on the Redan, 11 days later that the regiment was sorely tested.

Captain Shiffner was killed in action during the First Attack on the Redan on 18 June 1855. This attack was a disaster for the 34th, who were acting as stormers during the assault. According to the Regimental history, of the 400 men of the 34th, who assaulted the Russian battery, 10 officers and 314 NCO's/Men were killed or wounded. Captain Shiffner himself was noted for his gallantry; contemporary accounts (below), mention him leading his men from the front, waving his sword and encouraging all. He was last seen alive, hacking at the Russian defences with his sword, his body later found where he had last been seen, with a bullet wound in his leg and a grapeshot wound through his body. He was posthumously mentioned in Lord Raglan's dispatches



Captain Shiffner 34th Foot, smoking a cigar in the camp before Sebastopol.

CONTEMPORARY MENTIONS OF CAPTAIN SHIFFNER DURING THE ASSUALT

The *Illustrated London News* 07 July 1855;

'As the 34th Regiment advanced, the supports, by some means or another, got mixed together with them and some confusion arose in consequence. On crossing the trench, our men, in stead of coming upon the open in a firm body, were broken into twos and threes. This arose from the want of a temporary step above the berme, which would have enabled the troops to cross the parapet were regularity; instead of which they had to scramble over it as well they could; and as the top of the trench is of unequal height and form, their line had quite broken. The moment they came out from the trench the enemy began to direct on their whole front a deliberate and well aimed mitraille, which increased the want of order and unsteadiness caused by the mode of their advance...'

The *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette* 05 July 1855 picks up the story;

'It is asserted that Colonel Yea at first starting to perceive the slaughter that must ensue if the assault was persevered with and its inevitable result and that he took steps to arrest it at once. He called for a bugler, with intention of sounding the retire but no bugler was at hand. In a few minutes too many of the troops were over the parapet and in advance to put off the attack. Colonel Yea fell just before reaching the abattis. He was hit in two places and his death must have been instantaneous. The abattis were found to be quite perfect; it had evidently been repaired and strengthened the night before... Captain Shiffner, of the 34th Regiment was killed while attempting to make an opening in the abattis by hacking the palisade with his sword. Of the few men who reached the abattis, some attempted by lying down, to seek shelter from the fire until reinforcements arrived. But it was plainly seen that to sent reinforcements was only to send more men to destruction.'

A letter in the *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury* 12 April 1856 describes the sickening scene of the aftermath and the burial duty in detail (full account as with all above with research). He includes finding Colonel Yea and Captain Shiffner's bodies;

'The ground where they lay was very uneven, full of holes, and covered with long dry grass and weeds, which made it difficult to discover them. They were found lying in shell holes and other cavities, in which they had crawled for shelter; and being shot while crouching had so stiffened. There was one ditch, probably an old water course, which had been enfiladed by the enemy's fire, and was full of dead, who had run in to take refuge. Many were found close to the abattis – among them was Colonel Yea, who was frightfully disfigured and swollen so much as to be hardly distinguishable. He had been struck in the neck and hand by grape shot. He had been stripped of his sword, revolver, boots and epaulettes; and of course, he, as well as the others, had been deprived of everything valuable they had with them. Captain Shiffner, of the 34th was also found near the abattis. I knew him well; and as he was being carried off, I asked to have the cloth removed which concealed his face. He was the only one I saw who was not disfigured, and his features remain much the same as when he was alive. He had been killed by grape shot through the body and was also shot in the leg...'



A letter from a soldier in Captain Shiffner's Company, was published in the *Lancaster Gazette* 28 July 1855, sums up the action;

'The 34th At The Redan.

The following is from a Preston soldier, of the name of Minions, to his mother:-

My Dear mother, I am by the help of God, once more spared again to write to you a few lines and I can assure you that it is a great mercy that you can hear any of the 34th Regiment being alive at this time, for we have had such a cutting up as never a poor lot of fellows had in so short a time. On the night of the 17th, about half past eleven o'clock, we got orders to march down to the trenches, and to keep quiet until the signal was given; and were told out duty that night was for to attack and take the Redan battery. Well, we marched down, but a few of our men were so impatient for the attack, that they rushed over the parapets towards the Russians, before the signal was given. Of course we all followed them but we paid dearly for being so fast. We had about half a mile of ground to rush over and as soon as we began to charge the enemy, they commenced firing grape and canister at us as hard as they could fire; and when the other Regiments saw how we were served, they would not leave the trench for to come and support us. So we poor fellows were left by ourselves, except a few Rifles who were carrying woolpacks for us to fill the ditch, and some sailors who were carrying scaling ladders. Our men not knowing but what the other Regiments were following, rushed on towards the battery, while we were being shot down in dozens. Our Officers led us gallantly, until they were all killed and wounded. Our brave Captain J. Shiffner, behaved as a brave soldier ought to. He went in front of all, waving his sword and shouting for the men to come on for death or victory. Poor fellow, he was shot down, and we all got out orders to retire, and form up in our trench. Well when we formed up, we had not an Officer to lead us on, and the General found it out that it was no use to attack it without more men, as there was only our Regiment went up, instead of the whole division. We lost in our Regiment alone, 200 men killed and wounded and both our Captain and Lieutenant were killed. Thank God I have escaped unhurt, though there was not a man there that thought he would return safe again, for out of 500 men, 200 is a great deal of men to lose at once.'



The eventual breach in the Redan

18TH JUNE ATTACK ON THE REDAN FROM THE REGIMENTAL HISTORY

Fresh batteries were now erected against the Redan and Malakoff, and in consequence of the near approach to these works the daily list of casualties began to be much heavier, especially

in the British trenches, which had been pushed up to within four hundred yards of the Redan. After much preparation, it was decided to attack these two works on the 18th June, the assault to be preceded by as heavy a bombardment as the allies could pour upon them during the whole of the previous day, which was to be resumed for the three hours after dawn on the 18th, in order to destroy any works the enemy might throw up during the night, as well as to silence their guns, and also to prevent any large accumulation of troops within the Redan and Malakoff to repel the allied attack. Further arrangements provided that, as the guns of the latter completely commanded the former, the British were not to advance until the French had obtained possession of the Malakoff.

The British assault was made in three columns of four hundred men each from the 2nd, 4th, and light divisions, the right, consisting of four hundred of the 34th Regiment, under Captain Gwilt, and the left of a similar number of the 57th Regiment, were to assault the flank faces of the Redan, while two hundred each of the 41st and 62nd Regiments were to assault its salient angle as soon as the others succeeded in effecting a lodgement. Another column was to make a demonstration against the Russian works at the head of the Dockyard Creek ; so that, with three columns of assault from the French attack in addition, the enemy would have plenty of work to engage his attention. But this plan was departed from. On the evening of the 17th General Pelissier, now the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, waited on Lord Raglan and wished him to alter the hour of attack, and much against his lordship's conviction it was determined to attack at 3 a.m. instead of six o'clock.

Shortly before the named hour, while it was yet dark, and before the signal for the French to advance was given, one of their columns, led by General May ran, attacked the batteries on the extreme right. The Russians were soon on the alert, and being able to concentrate their fire on this column were not long in repulsing it in extreme disorder. General Pelissier, as soon as possible, gave the signal for the advance of the other columns, but the enemy having been put completely on the qui vive by the premature attack of General Mayran poured forth so heavy a fire of shot, shell, grape, and musketry, that they were quite staggered, and after repeated attempts, with varying fortunes, they were at length compelled to retire into their trenches. During the height of the French attack Lord Raglan thinking to divert their attention a little gave the signal for the British to advance. The light and 4th division stormers at once leaped over the parapet and rushed to the flanks of the Redan, but they were quite prepared for their appearance, in fact the work was filled with the enemy's troops, who to be waiting for them, and they at once opened upon them a murderous fire of grape and musketry which almost swept them away. For a time they persevered under awful difficulties, but their losses had so weakened them that after some fruitless attempts to make a further advance they also were compelled to retire to the trenches. About this time it was observed that the French had been repulsed at the Malakoff, and as it was no use persevering in the assault, as they could not have held the Redan had they succeeded in effecting its capture, the troops were recalled. General Eyre's column had been successful in its attack upon the enemy's positions at the head of the Dockyard Creek, but on the failure of the other columns Eyre could not advance, neither in the open daylight could he retrace his steps ; he was therefore obliged to remain all day exposed to a galling fire until darkness set in and he was able to return to the trenches.

The 2nd division stormers did not leave the trenches, because, as before stated, they were only to assault in the event of the flank attacks proving successful, and the 55th, who, with the 1st Royals, formed the 2nd division supports, were so fortunate as to have only one casualty, a Serjeant who was severely wounded by a grape shot. But it was different with the 34th. The murderous mitraille to which they had been exposed had rendered more than three-fourths of their numbers Hors-de-combat. Captains Shiffner and Robinson, Lieutenants Hart and Alt, and fifty men were killed ; Captains Gwilt, Warry, and J. Jordan, Lieutenants Clayton, Harman and Peel, and two hundred and sixty-four men were wounded, making a total of ten officers and three hundred and fourteen non-commissioned officers and men who fell before the frowning ramparts of the Redan.



Part of the interiors of the Redan

As soon as the troops got under cover the whole of the batteries opened fire upon the enemy's works, and with such good effect that in less than an hour their guns were almost silenced, and then was seen the error of not having had the bombardment previous to the assault. When, therefore, Lord Raglan saw their fire subdued he proposed to General Pelissier to make another attack, with fresh troops, after a few hours longer bombardment, but the French were so dispirited with their reverses that Pelissier considered the risk too great to attempt it in their present mood, and consequently, as the British, who were quite ready for a renewal of the conflict, could not attack alone, the proposition was abandoned. These sad events caused to the British a loss of one thousand five hundred and fifty-three killed and wounded, including one hundred officers ; the French lost three thousand and fifty-one, whilst the Kussians owned to the loss of five thousand seven hundred and seventy-six, which was with good reason believed to be much understated. Of the many who distinguished themselves by their gallant conduct, there were of the 34th Lieutenants Boyce and Peel, Colour-Serjeants Smith and Pruth, Corporal Coughlan (the two latter assisted in carrying a scaling ladder, when the fire of the enemy was so heavy that nearly all the bearers were either killed or wounded) ; Private Gill, noted for tying up Captain Gwilt's arm under a heavy fire ; and Private Sims, who, when the regiment had retired into the trenches, nobly went out into the open and brought in several wounded men from under the enemy's fire, for which he was rewarded with the Victoria Cross.

THE MEDAL

Medal roll shows Captain Shiffner's medal was issued via the War Office and that he was entitled to Sebastopol clasp. This was clearly not attached to the medal itself and was very frequently the case, would have been issued loose for later attachment to the medal but has subsequently been lost.

Condition near mint, officially impressed naming, in named card box of issue. A quite stunning medal