

THE EXTREMELY RARE SOUTH AFRICA 1877-9 AWARDED TO GUNNER WILLIAM GREEN, N/5 ROYAL ARTILLERY ONE OF 35 IMPERIAL SOLDIERS TO SURVIVE THE BATTLE OF ISANDHLWANA AND ONE OF THE VERY FEW TO BE MENTIONED IN AN ACCOUNT GIVING DETAILS OF HIS ESCAPE



SOUTH AFRICA 1877-9, CLASP 1877-8-9 '665 GUNR W. GREEN. 5TH BDE. R.A.' NEF.

665 Gunner William Green, born in Tewkesbury, initially attested for the 29th Regiment in 1863 but transferred into the Artillery later that year, he served in the Zulu War with N/5 Royal Artillery and was one of 1 Officers and 11 NCO's/Other Ranks and men of his Battery to escape during the battle of Isandhlwana. Of the 12 survivors, just 4, including Green are mentioned in accounts detailing their actions during the battle and or their escape. Green's presence at the battle of Isandhlwana is also stated in his discharge papers.

Green was either Lieutenant Curling's Servant or Groom being described as such in Curling's diary:

"Both my servant and Groom were in camp and escaped in a wonderful way. They both got horses and got away in their shirt sleeve and on bareback horses" (this Driver Elias Tucker and Gunner William Green). It is more likely Green was Curling's servant as he was also Battery Clerk and Tucker was a Driver, thus would be more familiar with horses.

Gunner Green is also confirmed as one of the four survivors of the battery to reach Helpmakaar in a letter written six days after the battle by Elias Tucker, a Driver of N battery, to his mother. His letter was published in the Western' Morning News (Plymouth) on 28 March 1879. Tucker's letter reads:

'Battle-field, Helpmakaar, Jan 28th, 1879.

' Dear Father and Mother-It gives me great pleasure to think that I am alive to write to you. We had a severe cutting up on the 22nd of January. Lord Chelmsford went out with the column about three o'clock in the morning; he went about 15 miles from camp to attack the Zulus- to Isinlonana or the Lion's Mane. They left 2 guns and 65 artillery, 6 companies of the 24th Regiment, in all about five hundred men. The Zulus watched the column out of the camp, and then attacked the camp; they came into the camp like wild beasts, which they are.

We played well on them with the two guns, and the infantry fought well, cutting roads through them. We held the field from half past eleven in the morning until three o'clock in the day. We killed twelve thousand Zulus, but they were too strong for us. They came right round us, and massacred every one; there are only twelve left to tell the tale. Out of sixty-five artillery only four remain, and I am one of the four- Sergeant Costellan (sic), Lieutenant Curling (that's my master), and myself and Gunner Green. We four had a horse each, and we charged right through the Zulus and cut our way out. I was in my shirtsleeves carrying ammunition to the guns.

'We lost everything in camp; they burnt everything that would burn. All our waggons and carts we had for ammunition they filled up with dead white men. They cut everyone up, and took his heart and laid it on his breast, and put his right hand in where they took his heart from, and put all the skulls in a heap. I expect you will see the massacre in the papers before you receive this. I could not write before. We rode a hard gallop from the time we cut our way out of camp until four next morning, and we found ourselves in sight of Helpmakaar, and that gave us fresh strength, hoping to find some help there; but when we got there there were only six men on guard belonging to the 13th Regiment. We frightened them out of their lives. There is only one store in Helpmakaar, and that was filled with stocks of corn. We got that out and barricaded all the doors, and cut some loopholes through the sides and ends to fire through. We were afraid they would attack us here, but they have not been.

'Dear mother, still there is hope for us, for our relief came his morning.

A lot of Engineers and the 4th (King's Own) Regiment marched in here; we gave them three hearty cheers. Dear mother, I must now conclude, as they are sending out a mounted orderly tonight, and I want these few lines to go with him. I have not received any letters from England since October. The Zulus have taken possession of all the houses on the road and burnt them down.... Please drop a few lines to London to Tim and my sister to let them know that I am living and well, for I cannot get paper to write on. I gave a shilling for this envelope and paper, and it is cheap at that. We can not get paper or envelopes for love or money here in the midst of a wilderness and savages. Please give my kind love to all inquiring friends and tell them all I am alive and well, only a slight wound on the back of the hand. So, good-bye, and God

bless you all. They have sent to England for more troops, and we shall pay the Zulus out for this yet.

'Elias Tucker, Driver, N Battery. Royal Artillery, 'Colonel Glyn's Column

Regarding the 35 Imperial Survivors, this includes 11 men of the Mounted Infantry, who given they were mounted, had more chance of escaping.

Green was one of 11 Other Ranks (and lieutenant Curling) serving the two guns to survive the battle from a total of 74 Officers and men. 2 Other Ranks of the 1/24th who were also in firing line/camp survived. A further N/5 Other Rank survived who was detached to the Rocket battery, along with 3 Other Ranks of the 1/24th and 1 Gunner from 11/7 battery. The balance of survivors were Officers of various Regiments and units.



Condition GVF. A quite superb and extremely rare Isandhlwana survivors medal. Ex Spink Dec 2002