

THE FINE AND RARE SPECIAL SERVICE OFFICER'S ASHANTEE 1873 MEDAL AWARDED TO CAPTAIN A. W. BAKER, CORNWALL RANGERS (MILITIA), LATE 66TH FOOT, KNOWN AS "BAKER OF THE BOBBIES", WHO DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF AS INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF ARMED FANTEE POLICE, COMMANDING AN ESCORT FOR MAJOR-GENERAL WOLSELEY DURING THE ADVANCED TO AND BATTLE OF COMMASSIE. VERY MUCH A 'MAN'S MAN', WOLSELEY WAS IMPRESSED BY HIM IN BOTH IN A MILITARY SENSE AND FOR HIS STAMINA. KEPT ON IN HIS POSITION POST CAMPAIGN, IN 1877 HE BECAME INSPECTOR-COMMANDANT OF POLICE IN TRINIDAD.



ASHANTEE 1873-4, CLASP, COOMASSIE 'CAPT: BAKER, COMM. OF POLICE, CAPE COAST CASTLE, 73-74'

Arthur Wybrow Baker was the son of the Reverend John Durand Baker of Bishop's Tawton, Barnstaple, and the brother of Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Durand Baker, K.C.B. Baker was educated at Rugby, originally commissioned into the 66th Regiment in July 1862. Seeing service in the East Indies from 1863, he was advanced to lieutenant in August 1865 and was appointed musketry instructor in November that year. Retiring from the Army in June 1869, in November, he married Flora Louisa FitzsMaurice, daughter of the Hon W.E. FirzMaurice, late 2nd Life Guards.

In December 1872, he was Commissioned Captain in the Cornwall Rangers (Militia) and with news of a coming expedition against the Ashantee, he volunteered his services to the British cause. The following letter to Downing Street from Major-General Wolseley, gives details of Baker's subsequent appointment as one of Wolseley's picked Special Service Officers:

"I cannot over state the importance of having this post [Inspector-General of Police] filled at the present moment by an able organizer, and by a man full of energy and of great physical

health and strength. No one but a military man would be fit for it, as the efficiency of this police force will depend largely upon the manner in which strict discipline is maintained in it. The management of bodies of armed men is an art that few possess intuitively, and is one that can only be acquired by military service.

I have therefore selected Captain A. W. Baker, late of the 66th Regiment, who, having left the army, is one of the many similarly circumstanced who have recently come to the coast at their own expense to join the force under my command.

He is no relation of mine and I never heard of him until quite recently, but I have selected him for what I consider to be his especial fitness for the post of Inspector-General of Police.

The force at present numbers 438 men, but its efficiency is by no means what it ought to be. It has been hurriedly collected and time has not admitted its organization and the selection of men enlisted being properly attended to: much remains to be done before it can really be a thoroughly efficient force.

Captain Baker assumed command of it today [16 December 1873] as explained to your Lordship in my despatch previously alluded to ...”



During his service in the Ashantee campaign, Baker would serve an important role superintending police duties and commanding a police escort for Major-General Wolseley and as such, taking part in the battles that the General did. Wolseley was clearly impressed by

baker, both in a military sense and for his stamina. On 9th January, Baker arrived at the General's forward camp and;

"rendered us from that day forward the most invaluable services, accompanying us on the march to Coomassie, superintending the police duties and the postal arrangements, besides commanding a police escort for the Major-General and being with us in all the fights"

The day after Baker's arrival, Wolseley would write in his journal:

"Captain Baker, Inspct. Genl. Of police arrived yesterday morning having walked from Cape Coast to Barraco (about 6 miles in the rear) in three days, 68 miles in three days is not bad going for an Englishman in this Climate.."

As evidenced by Wolesley's subsequent despatch regarding the Coomassie operations, dated 7 February 1874, Baker quickly knocked his police force into shape:

'The police duties in connection with the recent military operations have been most effectively performed by Captain Baker, Inspector-General of Police. He has rendered the force under my command most valuable service and his zeal and energy mark him out as peculiarly suited for the post he occupies ...'

And in later minutes sent to London, regarding his plans post campaign, Wolseley would write:

"The present European Staff of the police here consists of an inspector-general and of an inspector. Captain Baker, who is at present occupying the former post, is an admirable officer, and in every way well suited for the duties of his post..."

Baker's service entry from *Story of the Ashantee Campaign* lists:

"Baker, Captain. Succeeded Captain Thompson as Inspector-General of armed Fantee Police; organised the post-office runners. Went to Coomassie. This officer, who is much beloved by his men, will remain on the Gold Coast, holding present appointment"

It is not immediately clear how long Baker stayed on the Gold Coast but his sterling service set him on course for future similar appointments in the Colonial service

POST ASHANTEE SERVICE

After his success in Africa, Baker went on to be employed as part of the Police Service in Trinidad. He was appointed Inspector Commandant of Police in 1877, Inspector Commandant & Inspector of Weights & Measures in 1881, and as Inspector of Prisons in 1904. The following is given in *The Years of Revolt, Trinidad 1881-1888* by Fr. A. de Verteuil, with regards to this period of his career:

'Baker, the Chief of Police, Arthur Wybrow Baker was a man's man. At this period he was over forty, but still a fine figure of a man, over six feet tall and broad in proportion, with dark black hair and moustache and striking eyes. He was a "broth of a boy" as the Irish say, with a loving wife and children. Keen on athletic sports, and well mannered on top of that, he was the clean type of man that everyone in that Victorian age could look up to. Even the French creoles who hated the English officials admired him; "With the exception of Captain Baker", one wrote, "there is not a single one (of the English officials) that any man with the slightest pretension to respectability would introduce to his family or his club." As a macho man he appealed to the lower class blacks who could measure his worth even on the purely physical level.

As Inspector Commandant - Chief of Police - Baker had been an immediate success. A man of integrity and energy, of coolness in action and firmness in decision, possessing a close sense of identification with most of his men, he won their respect and the respect of all. Even "the very rowdies whom he kept down with a strong hand, admired him for his courage and fearlessness in tackling them". As head of the Voluntary Fire Brigade, he graced their social functions, with his wife and was in the forefront to put out the frequent fires. When Carter's Races (on 1st August, Emancipation Day) fell into decline, Captain Baker instituted athletic sports which afforded lots of sport to the police, soldiers and the general public for many years.

Before his arrival in Trinidad, he had spent three years in the 66th Regiment in India, and was in command of the Houssas on the West Coast of Africa; and by 1884 he had been in command of the police in Trinidad for eight years. After he had been some years in Trinidad, he relaxed the reins a little and let his subordinate officers have more of a free hand. This was regrettable, as some of them at the very least, lacked sound judgement, and gave the police and Baker a bad name. As a man of colonial experience, he fitted in well with the circle of British officials in Trinidad and particularly with the commander of troops at the St. James Barracks. And so - "He was a man, take him for all in all".

But marred, fatally marred by the stamp of one defect. As a typical British official of the time, he looked down on all non-English mortals, and this in an age of growing Trinidad nationalism. In three years in India he had not acquired a word of Hindustani. So he bravely bore alone "the white man's burden" to the end for better - or perhaps worse. A strong man, in more ways than one, his impact on Trinidad went beyond the police to politics.'

Baker died in London of acute Pneumonia on February 1908, aged 66



Condition GVF, with silver ribbon brooch bar. Sold with a copy a photograph of recipient in uniform, and copied research. A very fine and a rare award to a Special Service Officer. Ex DNW December 2003