

A RARE HEIC MADRAS ENGINEER OFFICER'S 'JAVA' MILITARY GENERAL SERVICE 1793 WOUNDED AT FORT CORNELIS 1811. ONE OF 3 SUCH MEDALS ISSUED. LATER LIEUTENANT GENERAL ROYAL ENGINEERS



MILITARY GENERAL SERVICE 1793, CLASP, JAVA 'D. SIM. ENSN MADRAS ENGINEERS'

Duncan Sim, the son of James Sim, Brewer, was born in Aberdeen in 1791 and was commissioned Ensign in the Madras Engineers on 7 July 1810. On 1811, he was selected to take part in the Java expedition, being one of a small contingent of Officers from the Madras service selected (the vast majority being Bengal).

Ensign Sim and Captain Smith (the latter Bengal Engineers) were wounded on 24 August 1811 whilst surveying the distances for the final attack on Fort Cornelis which would take place the following day. This dangerous duty would have taken the Engineers Officers beyond the British lines to produce accurate plans for the attack. This being done under the noses of the defenders, would have resulted in fire from the defenders, which clearly happened. Sim is noted as having lost his forefinger of his right hand during this action.

In January 1920, he married Catherine, the daughter of Abraham Couperus, a Dutch Governor and widow of Captain McCleod, 73rd Foot.

In September 1812, he is noted as doing duty under Lieutenant Caldwell as special surveyor of the defenses of Vellore, Rayacottah, Bangalore, and Seringapatarn. Advanced to Lieutenant, 7 December 1813, in 1815 he is recorded as doing survey duty at Karical and Tanjore. Between April 1816 and November 1819, he was on survey duty at Pondicherry under British Commissioners, for the restoration of Pondicherry and Karical to the French. He went on to make similar surveys for the restoration of Pulicat to the Dutch, and Mountford reports:

“ Lieutenant Sim, hitherto employed on political surveys, having lately been appointed to the Tank Department, the expense of his salary ceases with the present return. His work at Pulicat has been completed and the plan of the villages belonging to His Netherland’s Majesty has been delivered to the Commissioner”

In 1820 he was appointed Inspector General of Civil Estimates, late CE, Madras and promoted Captain on 9 May 1821. His later promotions were: Major, 4 November 1826. Lieutenant Colonel 2 September 1836, Colonel 9 November 1846. In June 1854, he transferred to the Royal Engineers with the rank of Major General and was promoted Lieutenant General 13 February 1861. Lieutenant General Sim died on 20 December 1865 and is buried in a mausoleum at Kensal Green Cemetery, London.

The above brief outline of his early service taken from ‘Historical Records of the Survey of India’ and Army Lists. However the India Office holds records related to Sim which have as yet not been viewed and should add details to his service.



STORMING OF FORT CORNELIS

‘Meester Cornelis (Fort Cornelis) measured 1 mile (1,600 m) in length by between 600 yards (550 m) and 800 yards (730 m) in breadth. Two hundred and eighty cannon were mounted on its walls and bastions. Its defenders were a mixed bag of Dutch, French and East Indies troops. Most of the locally raised East Indian troops were of doubtful loyalty and effectiveness, although there were some determined artillerymen from Celebes. The captured station at Weltevreden proved an ideal base from which the British could lay siege to Fort Cornelis. On 14 August the

British completed a trail through the forests and pepper plantations to allow them to bring up heavy guns and munitions, and opened siege works on the north side of the Fort. For several days, there were exchanges of fire between the fort and the British batteries.

A sortie from the fort early on the morning of 22 August briefly seized three of the British batteries, until they were driven back by some of the Bengal Sepoys and the 69th Foot. The two sides then exchanged heavy fire, faltering on 23 August, but resuming on 24 August. The Franco-Dutch position worsened when a deserter helped General Rollo Gillespie to capture two of the redoubts by surprise. Gillespie, who was suffering from fever, collapsed, but recovered to storm a third redoubt. The French General Jauffret was taken prisoner. Two Dutch officers, Major Holsman and Major Muller, sacrificed themselves to blow up the redoubt's magazine.

The three redoubts were nevertheless the key to the defence, and their loss demoralised most of Janssens's East Indian troops. Many Dutch troops also defected, repudiating their allegiance to the French. The British stormed the fort at midnight on 25 August, capturing it after a bitter fight. The siege cost the British 630 casualties. The defenders' casualties were heavier, but only those among officers were fully recorded. Forty of them were killed, sixty-three wounded and 230 captured, including two French generals. Nearly 5,000 men were captured, including three general officers, 34 field officers, 70 captains and 150 subaltern officers. 1,000 men were found dead in the fort, with more being killed in the subsequent pursuit. Janssens escaped to Buitenzorg with a few survivors from his army, but was forced to abandon the town when the British approached.

Total British losses in the campaign after the fall of Fort Cornelis amounted to 141 killed, 733 wounded and 13 missing from the Army, and 15 killed, 45 wounded and three missing from the Navy; a total of 156 killed, 788 wounded and 16 missing by 27 August.



A rare Military General Service medal, only 46 medals to soldiers of the HEIC the vast majority Bengal who supplied a large number of troops. Only 12 medals were issued to the Madras Service (all ranks); Infantry, Artillery and Engineers, the Madras only supplying men on attachment or Staff. Just 3 to Madras Engineers.

Condition GVF, original ribbon. A rare Madras Engineer Officer medal.