

THE RARE EGYPT 1882 OFFICER CASUALTY GROUP AWARDED TO THE SURGEON OF THE DUKE OF CORNWALL'S LIGHT INFANTRY WHO WAS ONE OF ONLY TWO BRITISH OFFICER KILLED IN ACTION AT KASSASSIN, 28 AUGUST 1882 - WHEN, 'RENDERING ASSISTANCE TO A WOUNDED MAN, VOLUNTARILY EXPOSED HIMSELF TO A SCATHING FIRE FROM THE ENEMY. HE WAS STRUCK IN THE TEMPLE BY A RIFLE BULLET'



AFGHANISTAN 1878-80, NO CLASP 'SURGEON. G. SHAW. A.M. DEPT.'; EGYPT AND SUDAN 1882-89, DATED REVERSE, NO CLASP 'SURGN. MAJ: G. SHAW. A.M.D.'; KHEDIVE'S STAR, DATED 1882, UNNAMED AS ISSUED

Surgeon Major George Shaw, Army Medical Department, the 35 year old son of a Dublin doctor, joined the army as a Surgeon in 1867 and served as the Regimental surgeon of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry during the Egyptian campaign of 1882. Taking part in the Battle of Kassassin, 28 August 1882, where his Regiment were heavily engaged, he was killed in action whilst attending a wounded soldier. Of his death, a soldier of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry would write:

"...Medical Officers and staff were busy doing their best to ease the pain and dress the wounds of those brave fellows whose blood was ebbing away in the countries cause. I saw out own regimental doctor bending over a wounded man, when with a cry, he threw up his hands, clutched frantically at the air and fell on his back, dead. He was shot through the head..."

On 28 August 1882, General Grahams brigade at Kassassin Lock was attacked by an Egyptian force numbering 7000 and led by Amed Urabi Pasha. Graham remained on the defensive throughout the day but sustaining heavy casualties and with the outcome of the battle in the balance, the cavalry force at Mahsamah was called up towards evening, these charging the enemy, who broke and fled. Surgeon Major, Shaw, the senior medical officer present, was the only British officer of General Graham's force killed in action at the battle.

Graham's force losing 1 officer and 7 men killed, 10 officers and 51 men wounded, total 69. A further Officer with the Mahsamah force; Lieutenant Gribble, was killed later in the day (medal sold DNW June 2008). This force lost 1 officer and 8 men killed, 1 officer and 17 men wounded, total 27.

Shaw would be one of 11 Officers killed during the Egyptian Campaign of 1882



SURGEON-MAJOR GEORGE SHAW, A.M.D.
Killed at Kassassin, Egypt, Aug. 23

The following is recorded in The Lancet, 23 September 1882:

'Very great regret is everywhere expressed at the sad death in action at Kassassin Lock of Surgeon Major Shaw. He had previously served with credit and great devotion in the Afghan campaign, and accompanied the advance of the first field hospital through the Khyber Pass in December 1878. He was beloved by all who knew him and endeared himself to the men of the regiments with which he served by his gentleness, his sympathy, and his devoted interest in his work. Every officer and man of the medical service of the army who knew him mourns for one of the most amiable of men who ever served in the army.'

Additional detail is provided in the Edinburgh Medical Journal of 1883:

'The engagement at Kassassin, in the recent Anglo-Egyptian war, afforded two illustrations of the bravery of the army medical officers which are worth of being recorded, especially as in the English army the surgeons are classed as "non-combatants" and are persistently denied their proper rank and recognition. The only officer who was killed on this occasion was Surgeon Major George Shaw, who, for the purpose of rendering assistance to a wounded man, voluntarily exposed himself to a scathing fire from the enemy. He was struck in the temple by a rifle bullet, which penetrated and lodged in the brain, and lived about three hours in an unconscious state.'

So far as we have seen, the lay press has had no word of commendation for the men who, relegated officially to an inferior social and military position, without the stimulus of the

tremendous excitement of the officers who make or mar the game of war, and with little or no prospect of sharing the honours in the event of success, thus coolly and unflinchingly risk and lose their lives in the performance of their duty.'



The action in which Shaw was killed was further described in The Nottinghamshire Guardian of 9 November 1882:

'The Egyptian guns thundered unceasingly. The white coated infantry were pressing in, and storm of bullets swept the position to which our men were clinging. The slender entrenchments and defences which had been hastily constructed afforded scarce efficient shelter, for some of Arabi's men were intentionally firing at a high elevation, and the bullets were dropping over. Thus Surgeon Major Shaw, while attending a wounded man behind the earthwork, was struck mortally by a shot which seemed to drop from above, piercing the brain.'

Often quoted as the only British Officer killed at Kassassin, it seems the fate of Lieutenant Gribble of the Mahsamah force was not established for several days and was no doubt left out of the initial cavalry despatch. Indeed, the often quoted casualty figures for the battle are just those of Graham's force.



Condition GVF. Sold with copied research, and image of recipient and a digital copy of British Battles on land and Sea, Volume 4 by Grant, which gives much detail of the battle of Kassassin.

