

A RARE DATED BOER WAR D.C.M. AWARDED TO A RIFLEMAN OF THE COMPOSITE RIFLE BATTALION FOR HIS GALLANTRY AT THE BATTLES FOR HART'S AND WYNNE'S HILLS DURING BULLER'S FINAL PUSH TOWARDS LADYSMITH ON 23 FEBRUARY 1900



DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT MEDAL, V.R. '9520 PTE. W. T. ADAMS, 2ND RIFLE BRIGADE 23-2-00'

D.C.M. *London Gazette* 19 April 1901; Army Order 163 of 1901; details are from General Buller's dispatch, 30 March 1900, published in the *London Gazette* 8 February 1901:

'23 February 1900 - "9893 Private J Brown and 9520 Pte T Adams, 23rd February: Gallantry in repeatedly carrying wounded to dressing station under very heavy fire".'

William Thomas Adams, an 18 year old laborer from Poplar, London. He enlisted into the Rifle Brigade on 6 March 1888, noting previous service with the 3rd Battalion Middlesex Regiment (Militia). Adams served in the East Indies, 12 February 1890 – 29 November 1894 and Hong Kong, 30 November 1894 – 5 February 1896, before a period of home service. He then served in South Africa (Boer War) from 13 December 1899.

Adams service during the Boer War

The 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade had arrived in South Africa on 26 October 1899. Rifleman Adams arrived in South Africa with drafts towards the end of that year, his service papers noting he was posted to the 2nd Battalion, dated 3 January 1900 (Depot

crossed out). However, since the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade was part of the force besieged at Ladysmith, the drafts that arrived for the 2nd Battalion, along with drafts for the 1st and 2nd battalions of King's Royal Rifles, were formed into a scratch battalion, variously known as the Composite Rifle Battalion, or the Rifle Reserve Battalion. This battalion was initially posted to Frere and then Chieveley, mainly on guard duty, before joining General Buller's force in its final push to relieve Ladysmith. The battalion was involved in battles around Hart's and Wynne's Hills on the 23 February and it was for his gallantry on this day that Rifleman Adams was awarded the D.C.M.



On Ladysmith being relieved, the Composite Rifle Battalion was disbanded, the Officers and men joining their battalions which had defended the town.

Adams remained in South Africa with the 2nd Battalion until 28 February 1901 and was discharged from the Army on 9 June 1901. He was further entitled to the Queens South Africa medal with clasps Tugela Heights, Relief of Ladysmith, Laing's Nek, Belfast and South Africa 1901.

Composite Rifle Battalion (Rifle Reserve Battalion) from the superb angloboerwar website

"Towards the close of 1899 there arrived in Natal various drafts, among whom were the reservists for the 2nd Rifle Brigade, which had sailed from Crete before war was declared, and for the 1st and 2nd King's Royal Rifles, which had both been in South Africa before that date. These men were formed into a battalion commanded by Major Montagu-Stuart-Wortley of the King's Royal Rifles. During the time General Buller was at Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz the battalion was at Frere and afterwards at Chieveley, assisting Major General Barton in guarding the line and rail-head and in making

demonstrations. In the last and successful endeavour to relieve Ladysmith the battalion was put into the 11th (Lancashire) Brigade under Major General Wynne and had an honourable share in the fourteen days' fighting. They were the first troops to enter Colenso on 20th February. Next day they crossed the river, and on the 22nd had heavy fighting, gaining various positions, which were, however, as difficult to hold as to seize. On the night of the 22nd the Boers attacked the positions, coming up very close. Captain Baker-Carr's company rushed out with fixed bayonets, killed several of the enemy, and drove them off. On the 23rd it was necessary to relieve two companies holding two kopjes in advance.

The relief had to be effected by men and officers rushing out singly. In this movement 3 officers were wounded. On the 27th the battalion was posted on the slopes south of the river, and along with the Border Regiment was employed all day in long-range firing on the Boer positions.

Three officers of the battalion were mentioned in General Buller's despatch of 30th March and 3 men recommended for the distinguished conduct medal. Seven additional officers were mentioned in the general's final despatch. After marching into Ladysmith the men joined their regiments. An account of the battalion's work is given in the Rifle Brigade Chronicle of 1900.

General Buller, in his despatch of 30th March 1900, referring to Major Montagu-Stuart-Wortley, said, "I was much struck by the way in which a battalion made up of the drafts of three regiments, and officered chiefly by second lieutenants, worked under his command".

FROM THE LONDON GAZETTE 8 FEBRUARY 1901:

From Field-Marshal Lord Roberts to the Secretary of State for War. Army Head-quarters, South Africa, Government House, Bloemfontein, My Lord, 28th March, 1900. I have the honour to submit for your Lordships information a despatch, dated 14th March, 1900, from General Sir Redvers Buller, V.C., G.C.B., E.C.M.G., describing the operations of the force under his command from the 29th January up to the 1st March, 1900, the day succeeding that on which the relief of Ladysmith was effected.

...27. During the afternoon of the 22nd and morning of the 23rd, the enemy's positions near the Langerwachte, and all the dongas leading thereto, were thoroughly searched by shell fire, and on the afternoon of the 23rd, General Hart advanced with the 5th Brigade, supported by two battalions of the 4th Brigade, to attack the position east of the spruit.

28. It had been my intention that this attack should be made by five battalions, but the advance up the railway was necessarily slow, and, in some places, the enemy brought a heavy fire upon it, both rifle and Maxim-Nordenfelt, causing many casualties and checking the advance considerably. It was getting late, and General Hart attacked the hill when two battalions only were up, thinking his supports would follow. For the reason

I have mentioned, the supports arrived but slowly, and the attack was made by two battalions, supported by a battalion only—the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, the Connaught Rangers, and the Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

29. The attack was delivered with the utmost gallantry, but the men failed to reach the top of the hill. The regiments suffered severely, but their loss was not unproductive, their gallantry secured for us the lower sangars and a position at the foot of the hill, which ensured our ultimate success.



30. That night the enemy made a heavy attack on our left. There was hard fighting, a good deal of it hand to hand, prisoners being taken and retaken, and several bayonet charges being delivered. The Rifle Reserve Battalion, a scratch regiment made up by combining the drafts for the three rifle battalions in Ladysmith, under command of Major Stuaux-Wortley, behaved very well. The men withheld their fire, and, waiting in their sangars till the enemy were within 20 yards, went in with the bayonet.

31. The enemy also attacked in the evening the position taken during the day by General Hart, but in both cases our positions were held and the enemy repulsed.

32. We had now been fighting continuously for 72 hours, had obtained a position in front of Onderbrook Spruit, which divided the enemy, and forced him to make a long detour if

he wished to reinforce his forces to the east of us from those on Grobelaars Kloof and the Ladysmith road, while the advance of General Hart's Brigade gave us a position in front of the enemy's extreme left. I saw that if I could effect a crossing nearer to the east of the –position occupied by General Hart, I should be able to turn the enemy's left and drive him from his positions.....



Condition very minor edge bruise, otherwise NEF, lovely patina. Sold with copies of QSA roll and LG pages as well as two articles from the OMRS Journal (June & December 2003) on Dated Boer War DCM's. Ex DNW 2016.

Not only is the a rare dated D.C.M., being one of about a dozen known but having a citation giving the reason for the award is very scarce as most Boer War D.C.M.s have none.