

SUPERB MILITARY GENERAL SERVICE, 8 CLASPS, 71ST REGT. SERVED AT THE CAPTURE OF THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE 1806, THE EXPEDITION TO SOUTH AMERICA, CAPTURE OF BUENOS AIRES 1806 AND SUBSEQUENT CAPTURE AT SURRENDER OF SAME. OFTEN QUOTED MEMOIRIST OF HIS PRIVATIONS AS A PRISONER TOGETHER WITH HIS FURTHER SERVICE THROUGHTOUT THE PENINSULAR WAR. IN ADDITION ONE OF ONLY 10 MEN OF THE 71ST TO RECEIVE THE TALAVERA CLASP



MILITARY GENERAL SERVICE, 8 CLASPS, ROLEIA , VIMIERA, TALAVERA, VITTORIA , PYRENEES, NIVE, ORTHES, TOULOUSE 'BALFOUR KERMACK, 71ST FOOT'

Sergeant Balfour Kermack from Ruthven, Forfar in Angus joined the 3rd Battalion Breadalbane Fencibles on 17th December 1796, transferring with his Captain to the 71st Foot on 18th July 1800. He was promoted Corporal in 1806 and Sergeant in 1815, before being finally discharged on 15th February 1816. His service notes him as being; '*a markedly well behaved soldier*'

Kermack served at the capture of the Cape of Good Hope 1806, including the action at Blaubeurg, expedition to South America, capture of Buenos Aires and taken prisoner at surrender of same 1806, paroled 1807. Served the peninsular war 1808-1814, including the battles of; Roleia, Vimiera, Oporto, Talavera, Fuentes D'Nor, Arroya D'Molino, Almaraz, Alba de Tormes, Vittoria, Puerto Maya, Pyrenees, Nive, Saint Sever, Orthes, Aire and Toulouse.

Kermack was one of only 10 men of the 71st to receive the Talavera clasp. Musters show these men to have been serving with the 2nd Battalion of Detachment which was made up of small numbers of men from various regiments who had been left in Portugal when the Army embarked for Britain after the battle of Corunna.

A memoirist of his privations as a prisoner together with his further service published in the Highland Light Infantry Chronicle. Kermack's memorial of his service is fascinating as it details his entire active service, from the battle of Blaubeurg in the Cape, the expedition to

South America to the capture of Buenos Aires and subsequent surrender. His captivity and movement into the interior of the country, final release. It then moves on to detail his service in the Peninsular where he talks of the battles he served and the soldiers views, experiences he has, close calls, comrades being killed, including his Captain who he considered to be his best friend etc etc. Kermack's wife was with him in the Peninsular; their two daughters were born whilst on Campaign and there is a very human side to his and indeed their story, which was clearly quite traumatic at times. The memorial itself has been copied 12 double column pages and in recent years has been quoted numerous times in relation to his service in South America.

After his service, Kermack went back to his place of birth; Bridgend, Ruthven, living there, as a Shoe Maker until his death in January 1862 aged 83. His obituary notes his War medal with 8 clasps being his principle legacy left to his daughters:

DEATH OF A VETERAN.—There died recently at Balbirnie, in the parish of Ruthven, Corporal Balfour Kermack, late of the 71st Highlanders. The deceased entered the army when a young man, and saw much service in his day. His first campaign was in South America, where he was taken prisoner. He afterwards served in the Peninsula, and was present in the various battles in which the gallant 71st was engaged. While many of his comrades fell by his side, and he himself made many hairbreadth escapes, yet he was never once wounded. He was a great reader, and very well informed, and few old soldiers could give a more minute and graphic account of what fell under his own personal observation. He was discharged with a pension in 1814, which he drew for the last time on the 11th inst., and closed his earthly campaign on the 14th, in the 83d year of his age. He has left three daughters, whose principal legacy is his war medal, with eight clasps, on which are recorded the following names, well known in the history of the British army:—Roleia, Vimiera, Talavera, Vittoria, Pyrenees, Nive, Orthes, Toulouse.

EXTRACTS FROM BALFOUR KERMACK'S THE MEMORIAL;

'...A. The capture of the Cape of `good Hope was the first of my active service, and it was accomplished with very little hardship to the soldier. We suffered no privations. Everything was as comfortable as circumstances would admit. I state an anecdote or two among many that came within my own observation. On the evening before the battle we were seated in small parties talking about the work tomorrow, some making their latter wills verbatim, others giving instructions to their comrades to acquaint their parents or relatives if they should fall, and all seemed anxious to seek honour at the cannon's mouth. Among the party where I was seated was a Corporal, a fine-looking fellow, who entertained the idea that he was to fall. We exhausted all our eloquence to turn him from such a foolish notion, but in vain. His spirits sank, and no persuasion could arouse him. Morning came, and we were soon in motion. When within range of the enemy's artillery we were ordered to halt in order to complete the necessary formation. The enemy began immediately to cannonade us, and while leaning upon our arms a cannon ball struck the poor Corporal in the abdomen and tore out his bowels, when he immediately expired. Captain D. M'Kenzie, who commanded the

Company, was looking through his telescope when a cannon ball grazed his side, passed through his wooden canteen, struck the handle of his sword, turned him to the right about, but did him no harm. The brave, hardy, weather-beaten Highlander, and without the least apparent emotion, coolly said-" Well, I'll be d--d, but that is close shaving!" I had now begun my military career, and had learned that gun powder had an extraordinary strength, but a disagreeable smell. Our stay at the Cape was short, and we soon left it, and embarked for Rio de La Plata, South America.



B. The capture of Buenos Ayres was an easy affair. The defence by the English before re-delivering it was a different thing. We sustained considerable loss, and the conduct of the Spaniards towards the dead was truly barbarous. Not content with stripping the dead naked, with fiendish delight they cut their throats, mangled their bodies in every form, cut the ears from their heads and wore them in their hats as trophies. Two days previous to our surrendering the place we were ordered to lodge our knapsacks in the castle in order to lighten us, as well as for their better security. Some days after the surrender of the place our packs were delivered to us plundered of their contents by the enemy, no useful article of any description being left. After remaining in prison two or three weeks we were ordered to be distributed in small parties through the different towns in the province of La Plata. It fell to the lot of the party to which I belonged to go to Saint Juan, a town on the frontiers of La Plata, situated at the foot of the Andes, and distant from Buenos Ayres one thousand miles. On this long and painful march I felt nothing but misery. My life was a burden to me. Having nothing to subsist on but beef, our living was filthy in the extreme. We had no cooking

utensils, no knives, no salt; our walking staff served for a spit; and, on pampas plains where neither wood nor water can be found, the dried excrement of animals served for fuel. There were neither towns nor villages; not a single house. We had nothing to shelter us from the inclemency of the weather but the canopy of heaven. How disagreeable the word "prison" sounds in the ear of a soldier! Captivity in a palace is but misery when compared with "sweet liberty." How often did I think of my native country on these trying occasions, and would cheerfully have given the gold mines of Mexico to be free! Although our course of living was filthy we were perfectly healthy, none having died, nor any sick. When a person is exposed to misery such as I have described it is easy to conceive the state the body must be in. We had nothing to wear, and were only mid-way upon our journey, having still five hundred miles to travel, and, having not once changed our body clothes, they had almost worn out. My shoes had long been worn out, and what remained of my red coat was turned parson grey. Nothing of the trousers remained but the waistband. of the shirt nothing but the seams, and the plumed bonnet, the Highlander's pride, with all its gaudy ornaments, totally disappeared on the barren plains of La Plata. After a period of twenty-eight days travel we arrived at Saint Juan, the place of our destination, and were once more committed to prison. Our situation for some time was truly miserable nothing but the bare walls of a ruined convent, damp floors, without bedding or any other comfort. Seven weeks had now elapsed since I was prisoner, during which time I had not shaved; and with some prospect of being permitted to rest, at least for a time, I pulled up courage, the spirits rose, and I commenced cleaning. I t absolutely became necessary to extirpate a certain bosom enemy. I accordingly commenced shaving, washing, and scrubbing, and in a short time I got rid of my troublesome neighbours. About this time the Governor of the place granted per mission, to any of the inhabitants who had a mind to, to select one or two of the prisoners, if they were agreeable to reside with them. A gentleman (an old Spaniard) and his lady (a Creole) selee-~~ted~~ted me-for what cause I know not; but the effect proved good. They carried me along with them to their hospitable home, for so it proved to me. . They had no family, and were both very delicate, and, so far as I could learn, had few relations. Their whole establishment consisted of three slaves (one man and two women), who were very kindly treated. I had now changed from a prison to a comfortable home; but before being permitted to sit at table it became necessary to instruct me in the principles of Christianity. Accordingly a Padre (their confessor) attended the house daily for some time. He commenced with telling me that the English were fine-looking people, good soldiers and seamen, but withal they were a nation of heretics and enemies of Christianity. He then pointed out the beauties of the Roman Catholic religion, and, after enumerating a host of saints, concluded by telling me that none would be eternally saved but Roman Catholics. I was then instructed to say the Lord's Prayer, creed, "Ave Maria," and also to make the sign of the Cross. I thought there was no harm in learning the Lord's Prayer and creed in the Spanish language. After I had learned these different articles, which I soon did, I was declared fit to be baptised and enrolled among Spanish Christians. I had by this time by study and practice learned a considerable part of their language. I was now to be baptised, take the oath of allegiance, become a Catholic and a subject of Spain. I told them I had taken the oath of allegiance to the King of Great Britain, that I was bound to maintain his laws, and nothing would induce me to betray my country. They told me that to destroy the principles of Protestants was to build up the true Church and serve God. I told them that the people of England had liberty to think and choose any principle of religion they may think best, and that there were many principles of religion in England, and that all expected to be happy. I had now lived six months with this excellent family, and had everything the heart could wish, and had acquired some knowledge of the customs and manners of the people, and I have every reason to believe that the people with whom I lived were interested in my future happiness and prosperity.



They had a niece, a pretty brown lady, who frequently visited the house and seemed to be much interested in my welfare. She told me that her uncle had no family, that he had a large landed property, and in the event of his dying it would fall into the hands of those who had already too much, and that from her own knowledge she was certain that by me taking the oath of allegiance I would undoubtedly receive part of her uncle's property. This was no doubt a snare laid for me, but I was prepared to avoid it. By this time the Governor of the place had received intelligence of the defeat of the English in an attempt to retake Buenos Ayres, and at the same time, agreeably to the articles of capitulation, to send home the English prisoners as soon as possible. This brought matters to the point. The domestic circle was formed. The old Padre sat president. I was told the attempt to retake Buenos Ayres by the English had failed, how their General and his army were made prisoners, and how foolish it was for me to attempt to run the chance of a long and dangerous passage to England when I had it in my power to live in peace and comfort. I told them I had only one choice left. My kind benefactor and his amiable lady then told me that all I had to do in order to make me happy was to take the oath of allegiance to his Catholic Majesty, be baptised, and become a subject of Spain, and they would share their prosperity with me, and everything else that I could wish for. I thanked them kindly, and told them I had sworn allegiance to one Sovereign, and that it was out of my power to betray my country. The temptations to remain in South America were very strong. It took a great effort to resist them, and I must confess I was more than once like King Agrippa with Paul I was almost persuaded to become a Spaniard. The prisoners were very healthy. Only one died, and the inhabitants latterly became much attached to them-so much so that they supplied them gratis with every kind of fruit the place afforded. They insinuated themselves so far into the favour of the prisoners as to cause a great number of them to desert and betray their country. I now parted with my kind benefactor Don Pedro Bertaren and his amiable lady Maria Gracia, whom I sincerely loved, and now, after a lapse of forty-two years, I still remember them with a grateful heart. We were all assembled, and commenced our long and dreary march across Lapampa, nothing extra occurring, and after a march of twenty-eight days safely arrived at Buenos Ayres, dropped down La Plata in lighters, went on board British transports in Monte Video harbour, set sail for old England-the land of liberty-and after a quick and agreeable passage cast anchor in the cove of Cork, and landed just in time to gather fresh laurels in the Peninsula.....

F. Fuentes de Honor was a hard-fought action. In this battle I lost some friends whom I much esteemed. A Captain Mc'Intyre with whom I first entered the service, and who always treated

me as a son, was wounded. The ball lodged near the spine, and, being a brave, hardy Highlander, he determined upon having the ball extracted. After the operation he lingered for a short time and died. In him, though only a Captain, his country sustained a great loss. He was cautious, cool, brave, and humane, and in him I lost the best friend I had in the Army. He left a nephew, an excellent officer, who proved my friend as long as we were together. He was promoted, went to the West Indies, and shortly afterwards died, and I quitted the service. Captain James M'Intyre's servant, a man greatly esteemed after escaping the perils and dangers of eight years' active service, was accidentally killed the day after Waterloo. Some of the young soldiers had neglected to draw the shot from their pieces, and whilst in the act of drawing one the shot accidentally went off, and the ball passed through his head. Such was the account I got from his widow, whom I shortly afterwards saw in London. Such is war and its consequences.....



L. The passage of the River Nive upon the 9th of December was the commencement of a series of battles. That fought upon the 13th of December was the hardest. The weather was bad; it rained incessantly; and we were huddled together into any place that could afford shelter. The women and baggage were accordingly ordered to the rear. The morning of the 14th arrived. and we prepared once more to meet the enemy. At that time my wife was in a state that required the kindest treatment, and previous to the movement of the column I asked and obtained permission for half-an-hour to accompany her a short way, the column having to pass part of the way we were going. Time winged its course, the column was passing, and we must part--perhaps for ever. My poor wife and daughter clung to me, wept, and would not part from me until I was obliged to tear myself away. It aroused the finest feelings of our nature. It almost unmanned me. It for some time blasted courage and withered resolution. Such was my state of mind at this time that I entertained the foolish idea that I was certain to fall. I forgot that the all-protecting arm of Him who preserved me heretofore was still able to guard me in the battle I was about to enter. About twenty minutes after parting from my wife a cannon ball struck down the left-hand man in the Company in front of me and carried away his head above the ears. He fell on his face, drew up his limbs, and instantly expired. This scene was ill-calculated to cure me in my then state of mind. We soon came into contact, and after five hours of mutual destruction we drove the enemy from the field of battle. I escaped unhurt, but lost the Lieutenant of my Company and many good friends. We were huddled into

our former quarters, where we remained for some time in consequence of the inclemency of the weather. My wife, along with several others, had gone to the village of Cambo, about five or six miles distant from the field of battle, and situated upon the left bank of the River Nive. The poor inhabitants had fled, and it was formed into a military depot, and by this time was filled with the wounded of the late action. I had heard from my poor wife, and I asked and obtained liberty for forty. eight hours, got a bit of money from my Captain, and set out. On arriving at Cambo I found her as comfortable as circumstances would admit, and she made me a present of a young daughter. The church and manse of Cambo, as well as all the houses in the village, were converted into hospitals. The kitchen of the manse was occupied by sick and wounded, among whom was my wife. The parlour was filled by wounded officers, one of whom, I believe, belonged to the 92nd Regiment, and was wounded in the side, the ball having lodged near the spine. The surgeons extracted the ball, but he died in the course of the night. Our chaplain read the funeral service, and baptised my second daughter in the manse of Cambo, where she was born. I once more took leave of my family, where I shall leave them till we meet at Toulouse.....”



Condition VF, one small EK or NEF, nice patina and attractive brooch pins to ribbon. Contained in a contemporary a very fine hinged leather and glass case. Sold with a large amount of copied research, musters, books, articles etc on CD.

A fantastic medal in itself but a quite superb service and story in addition!

**A SHORT SKETCH OF THE CAMPAIGNS OF BALFOUR KERMAK, 71ST REGIMENT
HIGHLANDERS (LIGHT INFANTRY), FROM 1806 TILL 1814.
(WITH NOTES APPENDED POINTING OUT THE DANGERS AND PRIVATIONS INCIDENT
TO A MILITARY LIFE.)**

NO.	NAMES OF BATTLES.	WHERE FOUGHT.	DATES.	REFERENCES TO NOTES, ETC.
1	Cape of Good Hope	Africa	6th Jan., 1806	See Note A.
2	Buenos Ayres	South America	24th June, 1806	" B
3	Roleia	Portugal	17th Aug., 1807	{ The Regiment only partially engaged.
4	Vimeiro	Portugal	21st Aug., 1807	See Note C
5	Oporto	Portugal	9th May, 1809	" D
6	Talavera de la Regna	Spain	28th July, 1809	" E
7	Fuentes de Honor	Spain	3rd May, 1811	" F
8	Arroya de Molino	Spain	28th Oct., 1811	{ We destroyed the enemy, took 5 guns and 500 prisoners.
9	Almarez	Spain	19th May, 1812	See Note G
10	Alba de Tormes	Spain	10-11th Nov., 1812	" H
11	Vittoria	Spain	21st June, 1813	" I
12	Puerto Maya	Spain (Pyrenees)	4th July, 1813	{ " K
13	Puerto Maya	Spain (Pyrenees)	8th July, 1813	
14	Pyrenees	Spain	25th July, 1813	
15	Pyrenees	Spain	30th July, 1813	
16	Pyrenees	Spain	1st Aug., 1813	
17	Pyrenees	Spain	1st Dec., 1813	
18	Passage of the Nive	France	9th Dec., 1813	{ When driving the enemy from the village of Cambo I lost my Captain by a cannon shot.
19	Passage of the Nive	France	13th Dec., 1813	
20	Saint Sever	France	14th Feb., 1814	{ None of these actions severe. They consisted chiefly in skirmishing.
21	Saint Sever	France	15th Feb., 1814	
22	Saint Sever	France	17th Feb., 1814	
23	Orthes	France	25th Feb., 1814	See Note L
24	Aire	France	2nd Mar., 1814	" M
25	Toulouse	France	10th April, 1814	" N
Taken prisoner 11th Aug., 1806.				