

AN OUTSTANDING AND RARE 41st FOOT ARMY OF INDIA 1799 WHO DURING THE AMERICAN WAR OF 1812 WAS A MEMBER OF THE LIGHT COMPANY OF THE 41st, THE ONLY COMPANY OF THE REGIMENT TO SERVE AT GREAT BATTLE OF LUNDY'S LANE WHERE HIS COMPANY WAS CONSPICIOUS FOR THEIR GALLANTRY. HE WAS LATER THE ONLY SURVIVOR OF 10 MEN OF THE FORLORN HOPE AT FORT ERIE THOUGH SUFFERING 4 BAYONET WOUNDS. ORIGNIALLY LISTED AS KILLED IN ACTION HE WAS LATER FOUND TO BE TAKEN PRISONER, NOT BEING RELEASED UNTIL APRIL 1815.



ARMY OF INDIA 1799-1826, 1 CLASP, AVA 'NATHL. SYDENHAM, 41ST FOOT'

Nathaniel Sydenham was born at Honiton, Devon, and was a tailor prior to his joining the 41st Foot at Chelmsford on 13 June 1811, aged 19. According to his discharge papers he served;

'In America for two years, received four bayonet wounds when one of a forlorn hope at "Fort Eyrie" and was the only survivor out of 10 men sent out on this occasion'. In France for five months and 8 days. In the East Indies for fifteen years one hundred and forty six days and was present during the whole of the Burmese War.'

He was twice promoted to Corporal, October 1823 to September 1824, and May 1830 to September 1832, but was discharged in the rank of Private on 25 July 1838, 'worn out by Service, frequent attacks of fever with abstinatne neuralgic affections of the muscles of the loins and lower extremities'.

Sydenham joined the 1st Bn. from the 2nd Bn. In 1812 but too late to be at Fort Detroit (and therefore not entitled to the MGS medal). Musters show he served in 6th or Light Company

under a Captain J B Glew throughout. This company was the only one of the 41st present at one of the bloodiest battles of the War; Lundy's Lane on 25th July 1814. Here they were specially mention for their gallantry during a charge that recovered three lost guns.

In a letter to Sir George Prevost, Lieutenant-General Sir Gordon Drummond would write:

'In the centre the repeated and determined attacks of the enemy were met by the 89th Regiment, the detachments of the Royals and King's and the Light Company of the 41st, with the most perfect steadiness and intrepid gallantry, and the enemy was constantly repulsed with heavy loss.'

A month later, both flank companies (6th and 3rd) under Captain Glew of the Light, were employed in the disastrous night assault on Fort Erie on the 15th August 1814, in the column commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William Drummond of the 104th Regiment. After some fierce hand to hand fighting, this column did actually gain entry into the fort but was subsequently shattered by a massive explosion in the fort. Casualties to these two Companies were dreadful, of the 140 rank & file of the 41st who went in with the column, 76 were noted as killed, wounded or missing. Sydenham would have been one of the members of the Forlorn Hope who spearheaded this attack.

The musters show Sydenham was listed as KIA on the 15th of August, however it later shows he was captured and not released until April the next year.

Two factors add greatly to the research of this medal; firstly, he was in Captain Glew's Light Company, which is mentioned much in published sources. The second is Shadrach Byfield was another member of the Light Company. He is best known as the author of a memoir of his wartime experiences, *'A Narrative of a Light Company Soldier's Service'* published in 1840 and much quoted. It has also been lately republished as *'The Adventures of Private Shadrach Byfield, 41st Foot, in North America 1812-14'*



Condition GVF , Ex Hamilton-Smith Collection 1927, Dalrymple-White Collection 1946, and Elson Collection 1963. Copy, discharge, musters for 1812-14 for the 41st and large amount of copied research on CD.

An extremely rare medal and probably unique to a member of a forlorn hope for the 1812 War. Certainly it's the only one known.

THE BATTLE OF LUNDY'S LANE

'The battle of Lundy's Lane was one of the hardest fought battles of the War of 1812. Although neither side won a clear cut victory on the day, the British held their ground against American attacks, forcing the Americans to abandon their campaign on the Niagara front.'

That campaign had begun well with a victory at Chippewa River (5th July 1814), but the American commander, General Jacob Brown, was aware that he would not be received reinforcements, and soon abandoned a move north towards Fort George at the northern end of the Niagara River. By late July Brown had under 2,600 effective troops.

When he learnt of the American retreat, the British commander at Fort George, General Phineas Riall, sent an advance guard 1,000 strong under Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Pearson south to take advantage of the retreat. On the morning of 25 July Pearson's advance guard took up a position when Lundy's Lane crossed the portage road around Niagara Falls, about a mile inland from the falls.

Sir George Drummond, the British commander in chief in Upper Canada then arrived on the scene and decided on a different plan. The 89th Regiment was sent to join Riall at Lundy's Lane, while a second force crossed to the American bank of the Niagara to attack the American supply depot at Lewiston. Brown responded by sending Winfield Scott and his 1,000 strong brigade towards Queenston, in an attempt to force the British to abandon their attack on the American bank of the river.

Late in the afternoon on 25 July Scott discovered the British force at Lundy's Lane. At this point Riall and Scott had roughly equal forces, although strong British reinforcements were on their way. Scott realised this, and ordered an attack, but Riall believed he faced Brown's entire army and ordered a retreat. Before that order could be implemented Drummond arrived at Lundy's Lane and countermanded it.

Scott's attack began at six, and for the next three hours his brigade bore the brunt of the fighting. By nine it had been reduced in strength from 1,000 down to only 600 men. The Americans succeeded in pushing back the British left, reaching Lundy's Lane, but had little success elsewhere along the line.



At nine Scott was reinforced by Ripley and Porter's brigades. Ripley's brigade managed to capture some British guns while attention was focused on an attack further along the line, but the British line held. Late in the day another 1,200 British troops under Colonel Hercules Scott arrived on the field, helping to secure the British line.

By now most of the senior officers on both sides had been wounded. On the American side Brown and Scott were both out of action, and Ripley was in command. On the British side Riall and Drummond were both wounded, and Riall was captured by the Americans when his stretcher bearers got lost. The battle ended when the Americans disengaged and returned to their camps.

American losses were reported at 171 dead, 572 wounded and 110 missing. Drummond reported his losses as 84 dead, 559 wounded, 193 missing and 42 prisoners. On the following morning it became clear that the Americans had been too badly mauled to consider renewing the battle, and Brown was forced to retreat back to Fort Erie.

Lundy's Lane has to count as a British victory. They were fighting a defensive battle, and successfully held their ground. The American failed to break the British line, and were forced to abandon their plans for a campaign west of the Niagara River. However the American troops at Lundy's Lane had fought with much more determination than in earlier battles. They would successfully hold on to Fort Erie against a determined but poorly organised siege.'

AN ACCOUNT OF THE STORMING OF FORT ERIE BY AN OFFICER OF THE 41ST FOOT

'Statement of Colonel H, (of the British Service):

We assaulted Fort Erie about two o'clock on the morning of 15th August, 1814. The plan of attack, as nearly as I can recollect, was as follows:

The right column of attack, under Colonel Fisher, of De Watteville's Regiment, was composed of 8th Regt., light company 100th Regt., and De Watteville's; destined to attack that part of the fortress called Snake Hill.

The centre column, under Colonel Drummond, of 104th Regt., composed of a party of seamen, flank companies of the 41st and 104th Regts.; to attack the angle of the fort nearest the river, or, indeed, the lake.

Left column, under Colonel Scott, of the 103rd Regt., was composed of the 103rd Regt., and was destined to attack at the water's edge, break through the breastwork, and enter the fort, if possible, by the gate fronting the water.

On the night previous to the assault, Capt. Dobbs, of the Navy, with a party of seamen, carried some boats from the river in rear of the fort, and hauled them above Snake Hill into the lake. Taking advantage of a dark night, they actually dropped down with the current, and captured two small schooners, anchored in front of the fort, and armed with long guns, which had been placed there to annoy the flank of the besiegers. This surprise and capture was well conceived and gallantly executed. A Lieutenant of the Navy, Ratcliffe, was killed, with a very trifling proportion of men.

Next day Sir Gordon Drummond issued an order, eulogising Capt. Dobbs and his seamen, calling upon the army to volunteer to storm the fort, and to emulate the conduct of the naval party. Accordingly, the army did volunteer, with the exception of Colonel Gordon and the Royals, Colonel Gordon remarking that his Regt. was ready for any service they might be wanted for, and, therefore, their volunteering was useless. This, I have heard, was not very well received at head-quarters; but I merely write from report current in the camp at the moment, not vouching for its truth.

There was also an order that the flints were to be taken out of the muskets, and that the troops were to move to the assault with the bayonet, of which they were recommended to make free use. Alas! if this absurd order had not been issued I have no sort of doubt that we should have carried the fortress.

The right column of attack was to have been commanded and led by Major-General Conran; but his horse having, unfortunately, the day previously, fallen with him, his leg was dreadfully fractured, and he was taken to the rear. Colonel Fisher, of De Watteville's Regt., the next senior, consequently fell into the command.

The forlorn hope of this column was led by Major Powell, then on the Staff, and Lieut. Brooke Young, of the King's Regt. These gallant officers, after a good deal of difficulty, got into the fort, and, after having done so, Powell called out, 'Now, my men, open your fire.' To their horror the flints were wanting. The consequence was, that although they were gallantly supported, particularly by the King's and 100th, (De Watteville's giving way,) the whole party was forced back, and a fire sent amongst them which they could not return, nor stand against. The loss this column sustained I am unable to state.*

The centre column was commanded by Lieut.-Colonel Drummond, of the 104th Regt. The seamen and some soldiers proceeded, carrying the ladders. We were received with a heavy fire, and most of the men carrying the ladders were knocked down. Capt. O'Keefe, of the 41st Regt., a volunteer, and not belonging to either of the flank companies, succeeded in getting a ladder up to the battery, and it was shortly carried, by this single ladder, by the seamen and the 41st Regt., in a most determined and gallant manner. The order for taking out the flints was countermanded by Colonel Drummond; at least, I know that the companies I belonged to went into the action with them.



Colonel Drummond was killed very early in the affray, and the command of the column devolved upon Brevet-Major Glew, light company, 41st Regt.; but this officer being wounded, Capt. Bullock, 41st Grenadiers, became the senior of the second column. Some time after getting into the battery, Capt. Bullock observed to the writer of these notes, 'You, as well as myself, have been quartered in the stone buildings; collect what men you can of the light

company, join me, and attempt to get possession of the barracks,' which, as I have before observed, were of stone, and strongly loopholed. We succeeded in getting into the lower part of the building, but met with such a violent resistance that we were quickly driven out, the Captain having been seriously wounded in the head, and obliged to leave the fortress. Shortly after this I was myself wounded, and taken to the rear.

The third column was led by Lieutenant-Colonel Scott, 103rd Regt., and was called the water column, it being destined to break through the breastwork which was carried from the battery to the water's edge; and, if they succeeded, they were to push for the gate of the fortress fronting the lake. Failing in this, Colonel Scott made for the battery already carried by the second column, and a scene of great confusion ensued. The Colonel entered the fort, and, of course, assumed the command. We had already got in rear of the breastwork, and had opened a fire upon the Americans, by which they must have been driven from their entrenchments; but the Colonel rebuking the officer, the firing was ordered to cease.** Almost at this moment this gallant soldier received a wound which was mortal, and which deprived his country, in a very short period, of his valuable life and services.

When I quitted the principal battery the fort was in our possession, and I perfectly recollect saying, as I passed to the rear, to some of the Staff, 'For God's sake push on the reserve, (consisting of the Royals and Glengarry Riflemen,) and the fort is yours.' Shortly after this the battery was blown up, and a tremendous loss of life ensued.

Of the 8 officers of the 41st Regt. that went to the assault, 2 Captains and 2 Subalterns were wounded, 1 Subaltern killed, and 1 taken inside the fort after the explosion. The two companies, out of 160 rank and file that went into action, scarcely mustered 50 men afterwards, and the total loss of the whole amounted to nearly 800 men killed and wounded.

From this period the General commanding made a close investment of the place; but the breaching batteries were at too great a distance, and several sorties were made by the enemy. The first, if my recollection serves me right, was about the 4th Sept., in which they signally failed; the second was on the 17th of the same month, when they were equally unsuccessful, and the work of destruction was complete.

The batteries were in the keeping of De Watteville's Regt. and the Royals. The former regiment, composed of vagabonds from the hulks, and in no way to be depended upon, gave way, and the Royals, a weak regiment, were overpowered. Their much-beloved Colonel (Gordon) fell. This was greatly to their disadvantage: he was a good and gallant soldier, and much regretted by the whole Army.

The Americans boast of upwards of 300 prisoners; but this is not the fact. A number of De Watteville's Regt. deserted, as also some of the Royals; but they took very few, if any, prisoners. Those batteries were nobly retaken by the gallant old 6th and 82nd Regts.; and the American attacking party was severely and roughly handled by these two regiments.

I must here remark that, if any other corps in the Army had had the charge of the batteries, except the De Wattevilles, the disgrace of losing them would never have occurred. Shortly after this event the army retreated to the Chippewa, where I rejoined from sick quarters. There was subsequently little or nothing done on either side, and late in the autumn we embarked on board the fleet, and sailed for Kingston and Montreal, where we arrived before the navigation closed, and mustered at Trois Rivières. In the following spring we embarked at Quebec for Europe, peace having taken place with America; and, in consequence of the useless loss of time in lying and waiting at Quebec, the army arrived too late for Waterloo.'