

THE OUTSTANDING QUEEN'S SOUTH AFRICA 1899 AWARDED TO A 17TH LANCER OFFICER, OFTEN QUOTED AS COUSIN OF WINSTON CHURCHILL, WHO WAS **'SHOT THROUGH THE BRAIN BY JACK BORRIUS'** DURING SMUTS'S DARING ATTACK ON THE 17TH LANCERS AT MODDERFONTEIN, SEPTEMBER 1901, A DISASTROUS, YET HEROIC ACTION FOR THE 17TH IN WHICH THEY SUFFERED MORE CASUALTIES THAN THEY DID DURING THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE! SUBJECT OF THE FAMOUS PAINTING BY RICHARD CATON WOODVILLE JR.



QUEENS SOUTH AFRICA 1899, CLASPS CAPE COLONY, JOHANNESBURG, DIAMOND HILL, WITTEBERGEN 'LIEUT RB SHERIDAN 17/ LCRS' IN FITTED CASE

Richard Brinsley Sheridan of Frampton Court Dorset was born 22nd May 1874, educated at Harrow and Commissioned into the army in June 1896 and promoted Lieutenant in 1898. He was killed in action at the action at Modderfontien/Elands River on 17 September 1901

A British post comprising 'C' squadron 17th (The Duke of Cambridge's Own) Lancers under Capt V.S. Sandeman with a 9 pdr gun and a maxim was located on the farm to deny the drifts across the Elands River to the commando of Asst Cmdt-Gen J.C. Smuts. Smuts, who's force was almost out of ammunition and supplies, attacked the post on 17 September 1901; it was overwhelmed and the camp and wagons destroyed. The commando was driven off by the arrival of 'A' squadron 17th Lancers. British losses were 35 killed and 39 wounded, out of strength of 130 men, more men than they lost in the charge of the light brigade! The Boers, whose assaulting force numbered about 60 men, lost about 13 killed and wounded.

Denys Reitz, author of 'Commando', was one of the Boers in Smut's Commando during the action and shot Lieutenant Sheridan and late 'acquired' his horse.

Excerpt from Reitz's 'Commando', that tells of Sheridan's death:

'..Nicolas Swart by my side shot two other soldiers in quick succession, as they tried to join those in the rocks. There was a young lieutenant a few feet from me. I found out afterwards that his name was Sheridan, and they said he was a cousin of Winston Churchill. Twice he rose to -fire at me and missed, at his second attempt I grazed his temple, and he dropped out of sight, but only dazed, for in a moment he was up again, swaying unsteadily on his feet, with his face streaming with blood, but still trying to level his rifle at me. While I was hesitating what to do, Jack Borrius shot him through the brain. Another soldier fired several hasty rounds at me, and I put a bullet into his heel, which was protruding from behind the rock near which he was lying. The sudden shock made him leap up, and again Jack Borrius, who was wonderfully quick, shot him dead as he rose.....I did not count the number of soldiers opposed to us, but there must have been about two hundred. They belonged to the 17th Lancers, one or the crack regiments of the British Army- Among their wounded was their Commander, Captain Sandeman, and Lord Vivian, whom I found among the rocks where we first rushed them. He it was who told me the fate of the three men killed and mutilated by the Basutos, the day that we crossed the Orange River. He pointed out his little bivouac tent, and said that it would be worth my while to have a look at it I was not slow to take the hint, with the result that having started that morning with a grain-bag for my chief garment, a foundered horse, an old rifle, and two cartridges I now appeared in a handsome cavalry tunic, riding- breeches, etc., with a sporting Lee-Metford, full bandoliers and a superb mount, a little grey Arab, which his coloured groom said had been the property of Lieutenant Sheridan...'



'ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF THEM' THE 17TH LANCERS AT MODDERFONTEIN BY R C WOODVILLE

The Commanding Officer of the 17th Lancers at this time was Colonel (Field Marshal) Douglas Haig, to one of who's Sisters, Lieutenant Sheridan was engaged. Haig wrote a brief account of what happened in a letter to his Sister:

Douglas Haig's account (from a letter to his older sister, Henrietta, 22 September 1901)

'You will have heard ere this of the terrible losses C Squadron 17th Lancers sustained on Tuesday last. I trained the regiment from Stormberg to Tarkastad to head Smuts' commando which had broken SW from near Dordrecht, The Squadron in question under a most capable officer (Sandeman) was holding a position about 14 miles from Tarkastad to prevent the enemy coming south. I was out with the squadron on the previous day (Monday) when it marched from Tarkastad. The weather for several days had been terribly wet. However it cleared for an hour about 3 o'clock and Sandeman lunched with me (off some of those nice tin things you sent me from Cabbett) on the fatal koppie on which next day so many poor fellows were killed. I got back to Tarkastad at 9pm. Next morning was very foggy. However his patrols reconnoitred the two passes at the exits of which Sandeman had his camp. All was reported clear, but about noon a message was sent to Sandeman that the Boers were advancing to attack his camp. A troop moved out at once. The officer in charge of it saw some men in khaki whom he took to be some of Gorrings column which was expected north of the post. These men levelled their rifles at him when about 200 yards [180m] distant. He shouted to them 'Don't fire. We are the 17th Lancers.' (These irregular corps often fire at one another by mistake.) The Boers, as such they proved to be, opened fire at once and emptied several saddles. Before the troop got back to camp the enemy had worked up a donga to the rear of the camp. Again their khaki dress assisted them. They were now between Sandeman's squadrons and another squadron which was about three miles [4,8km] distant. Seeing khaki dressed men in rear of camp, they were allowed to approach quite close before fire was opened on them. Our men held the position to the last, and not a man surrendered. Out of 130 men, 29 were killed and 41 wounded. The other men were still fighting when the next squadron came to their support and the enemy made off. All the officers were either killed or wounded. Such nice fellows too.'



A DESCENDANT OF SHERIDAN

Lieutenant Richard Brinsley Sheridan of the 17th Lancers, who was killed in the Boer rush on the 17th ult., was the son of Mr. Brinsley Sheridan of Frampton Court, Dorset. By a strange irony his mother was the daughter of the great eulogist of the Dutch Republic, J. L. Motley. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the dramatist, after whom he was named, was his great great-grandfather

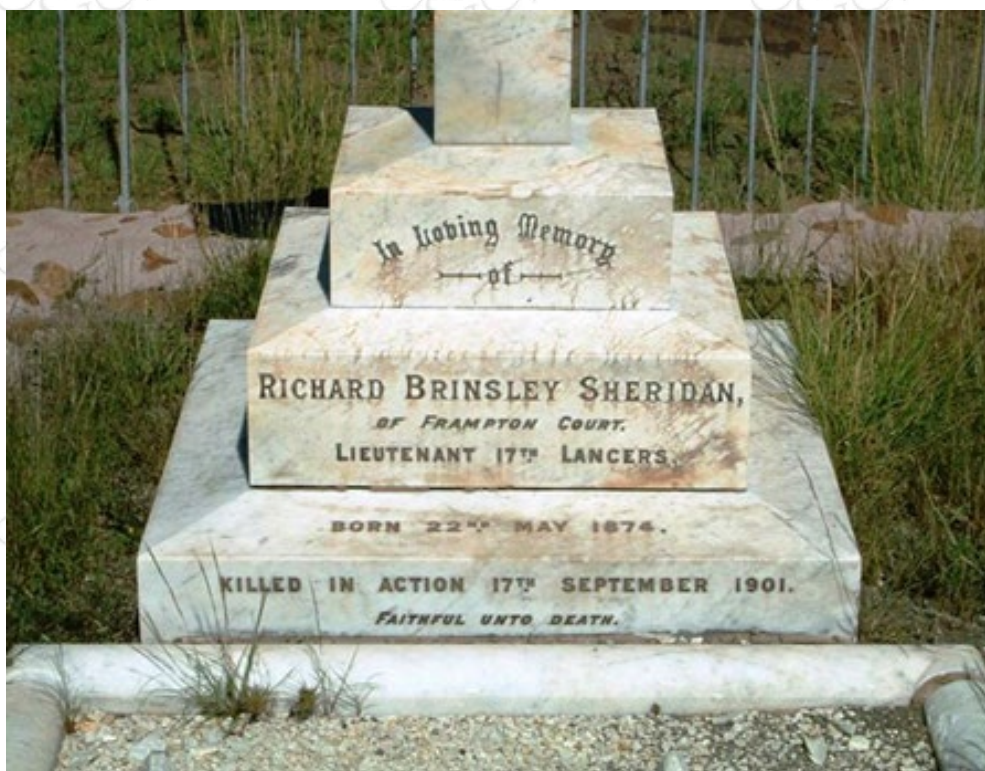
An excellent account of the action can be found at:

<http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol131rs.html>

A quote from the end of this very much sums up the action, giving full credit to both the skill with which the Boers conducted the action and the bravery of the Lancers;

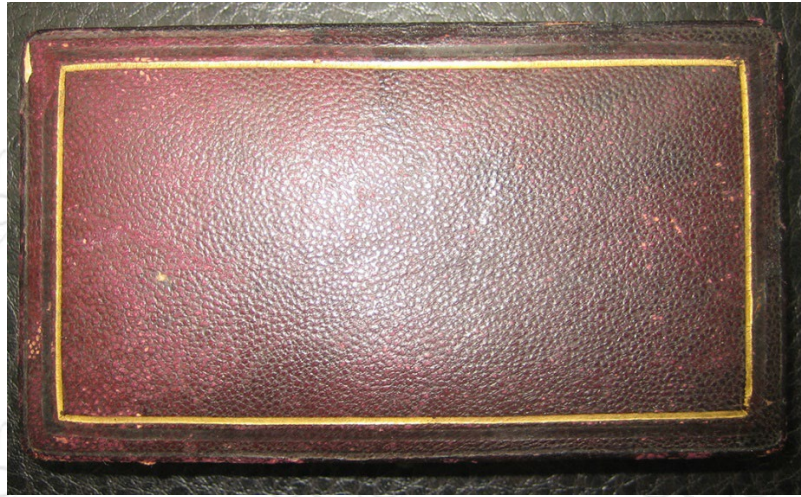
'On 17 September 1901, a squadron of one of the British Army's crack cavalry regiments was overwhelmed by the Boers at Modderfontein in the Eastern Cape. All previous accounts give the impression that a mob of Boer irregulars descended on the camp, which was taken completely by surprise. The writer does not support this view, believing instead that the attack was conducted in a thoroughly professional manner by experienced Boer soldiers. No white flag was hoisted and in a speech given in England some years later as a guest of Douglas Haig, General Smuts himself paid the following tribute to the fighting spirit of the Lancers: 'How gallantly those boys fought against us, many being killed because they knew not how to surrender.' Several had thrown down their rifles when confronted by Boers at point-blank range and at least one had given in when he bumped into Reitz at the corner of the kraal (Reitz, 1929, p 230).

The Lancer camp was located in a less than ideal place for defence purposes. They had encamped there on arrival in the area in pouring rain, after finding that they were unable to cross the Elands River with their transport. The farm's field and the shelter in the lee of the dolerite dyke, to say nothing of the comfortable farmhouse, provided a solution to this problem. Also, they were positioned close to the river which solved the problem of acquiring water for men and beasts. Unfortunately, however, the camp site was dominated on all sides by higher ground, and the Boers, with their eye for such things, took full advantage. Another factor contributing to the disaster was that 'C' Squadron, 17th Lancers, also consisted largely of new recruits who had little experience of combat. In spite of this, they fought well, fitting the tradition of the regiment and badge, the Death's Head and motto 'Or Glory'. That they suffered more casualties on 17 September 1901 than on any other day in their history is testimony enough to their heroic defence.'





MEMORIAL IN FRAMPTON CHURCH



Condition GVF, few minor EK's, nice toning with faint ghost dates. In fitted leatherette case. Also entitled to 1901 SA clasp which was issued separately and never fitted; ears of upper clasp bent inwards.

An outstanding and rare KIA officer medal, to a very desirable regiment. Sheridan is mentioned a good few times, including a biography in Cam Simpson's and Max Fahler's outstanding 2019 book; *'A Tight Corner – The battle of Modderfontein – 17 September 1901'*