

**A RARE MILITARY GENERAL SERVICE TO A PRIVATE IN THE LIGHT COMPANY OF THE 88<sup>TH</sup> 'DEVILS OWN' CONNAUGHT RANGERS WHO SERVED AT THE BATTLE OF PLATTSBURG WHERE HIS COMPANY WAS HEAVILY ENGAGED, THIS BEING THE ONLY COMPANY OF THE 88<sup>TH</sup> PRESENT AT THIS OR ANY BATTLE DURING THE AMERICAN 1812 WAR**



**MILITARY GENERAL SERVICE 1793, CLASP TOULOUSE 'B. COMERFORD, 88<sup>TH</sup> FOOT'**

Bernard Comerford, a 26 year old labourer from Monagh, Monaghan, Ireland, enlisted in to the 88<sup>th</sup> Foot at Belfast on 20 August 1813. His active service started during the invasion of France and shortly after he was sent to America to take part in the 1812 War. His service record stating:

*"In the South of France 3 months in north America from august 1814 to June 1815. In France with the Army of Occupation from august 1815 to may 1817 and the remainder with the depot & Regt a home. Was present at the battle of Toulouse & the attack on Plattsburg."*

He was finally discharged from the army on 13 April 1834, his conduct being described as 'good'

Musters show Comerford joined the Captain Nickle's 1 Company (Light Company), 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 88<sup>th</sup> Foot in France on 8 March 1814 and therefore was present at Toulouse. Musters also show a number of men killed or died shortly after, which suggests the Light Company was one of the 3 companies engaged. Along with 5 and 7 companies.

### **BATTLE OF TOULOUSE**

At the battle of Toulouse, the 1/88<sup>th</sup>, who formed part of Brisbane's Brigade, Picton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, went into battle with a strength of just 447 Officers and men, though a percentage of this number

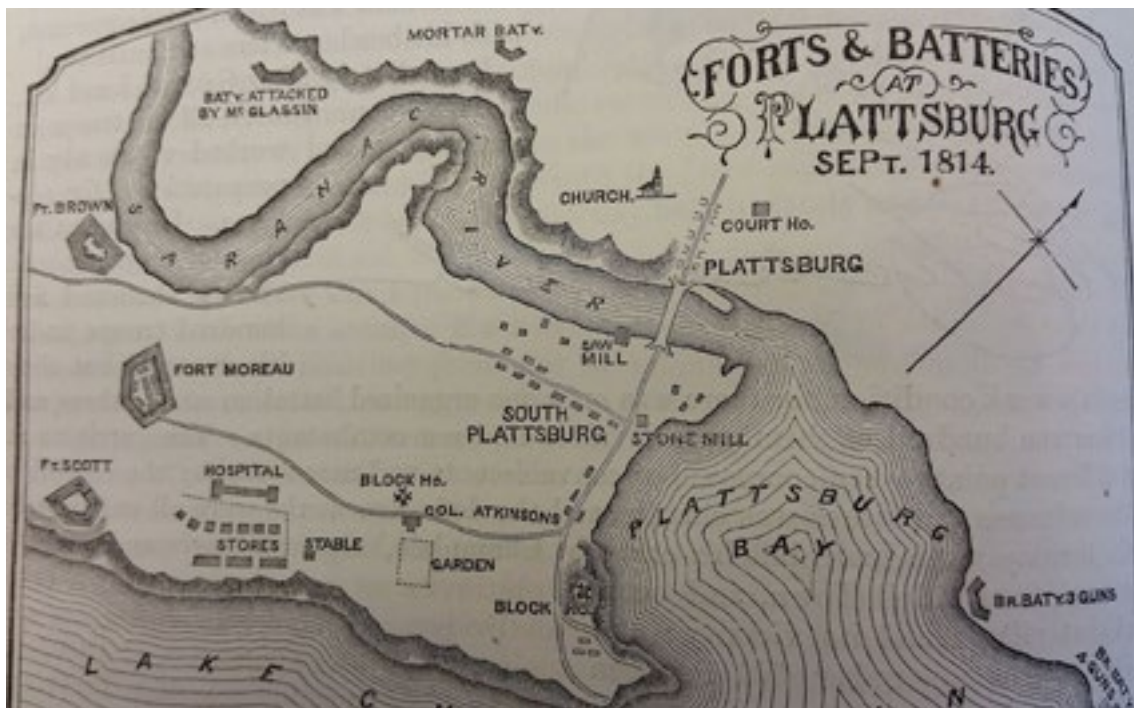


would be held in reserve, with only 3 companies actually taking part in the battle. Of this number they suffered severely, losing 86 Officers and men killed and wounded.:

*“Picton has his Division, after much too-in and fro-in, in a holding stance in front of Petit Granague a small hamlet on the Blagnac road and close to the Royal Canal. This waterway is a serious military obstacle, its bridge at the Ponte Jumeaux being heavily fortified, sealed off with an abatis and well provided with both artillery and veteran voltigeurs. Brisbane's Brigade is to the front of all of this as the day begins. 3rd Division orders are to merely demonstrate and hold in place as many defenders as might be seen reasonable, this form of action, quite sedentary for the vigorous members of this fighting Division is endured until the day is well advanced and there appears to have been little in the way of visible success anywhere about them.*

*Picton by 2.30pm can stand this no longer and gives his "fighting villains" the chance to show their worth. Probably because of the decimation of its first two companies at Orthez one half of 1/88th is held as a reserve while the rest of the Brigade goes about the assault of the canal defences. As it turns out this is no better than a forlorn hope at any fortress breach, excepting that here there is no weakness to exploit, the defenders are gifted a "turkey shoot" until the truth of the matter comes home to the men thus being slaughtered. For the 'Rangers this affects the battalion numbers as much as though the whole unit had been engaged 8 men are killed, 76 men are wounded along with Captain Nickle and Lieutenant Walter Poole and the Brigadier Brisbane is also hit. Fortunately the battle is ultimately won elsewhere and for 1/88th that completes their war in the Peninsula and southern France.”*

Still shown on the musters as serving with the Light Company at Plattsburg, this company was the only company actually present at the battle of Plattsburg.



## AMERICAN WAR AND THE BATTLE OF PLATTSBURGH

Shortly after the battle of Toulouse in April 1814, the 88<sup>th</sup>, was sent to Canada to take part in the War against American and arrived at Quebec in August 1814. The regiment clearly took its reputation with it as its Officers were centre of attraction anywhere they were based.

The 88<sup>th</sup> was involved in Sir George Prevost's Lake Champlain campaign (August-September) and the battle of Plattsburgh on 11th September. Here Captain Nickle's light company of the 88<sup>th</sup>, including Comerford, two other Officers and 63 men, were heavily involved, distinguishing itself at the forcing of the passage of the Sarniac and Savannah under heavy enemy fire. They had been detached from the rest of the battalion and attached to General Power's 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade and with other light companies of the Brigade were in advance of the Army, attacking the enemy when to their consternation were ordered to recross the river and join in the retreat of the main Army. **The rest of the Battalion were left on the lines of communications when Plattsburg was fought and therefore medals to men in the Light Company are the only ones of this famous Regiment who took part in any battle in the American War.**

Mention of Nickle's will be found several times in Grattan's '*Adventures of the Connaught Rangers Volume II*' including the following concerning the battle of Plattsburgh:

*'.. Meanwhile the gallant Captain Robert Nickle, of the 88th, accompanied by his three lieutenants, Hacket, Hill, and Delme, and the light companies of the brigade, forced the passage of the Saranac, although opposed by upwards of two thousand Americans; the river was rapid, the water high, and the soldiers, with their cartridge-boxes under their arms, crossed under a heavy but ill-directed fire. \* A panic seized the Americans, and they fled in disorder before one hundred and fifty undaunted British soldiers. The troops in the fort caught the contagion, and, either exchanging their uniforms for other clothes, or running away in their shirts, many made their escape. This was the moment to strike; but not a blow was struck, and the advance troops were ordered to re-cross the river, and join in the retreat of the main body!'*

Note Service papers and medal roll spelt 'Camerford', Regimental musters and medal 'Comerford'



Condition VF, several small EK's

Scarce to have confirmation of service at the battle of Plattsburg as more often than not, service papers will note service in 'North America' but will not detail specific battles unless wounded. However confirmation that Comerford was one of the small number of men of the 88<sup>th</sup> that served in the Light Company at Plattsburg makes this a rare piece indeed.