

A SUPERB AND RARE 'NIGER 1897' AND GREAT WAR M.B.E. GROUP AWARDED TO A LEINSTER REGIMENT MAJOR, WHO AFTER SERVING IN THE 1882 EGYPTIAN CAMPAIGN, SERVED ON SPECIAL SERVICE DURING THE NILE EXPEDITION AND AGAIN DURING THE NIGER CAMPAIGN OF 1897 WHERE HE SAW A GOOD DEAL OF ACTION COMMANDING NO.5 COMPANY OF MAJOR ARNOLD'S EXPEDITION AND THE BATTLES OF BIDA AND ILORIN.



THE MOST EXCELLENT ORDER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE, M.B.E. (MILITARY) MEMBER'S 1ST TYPE BREAST BADGE, HALLMARKED LONDON 1919; EGYPT AND SUDAN 1882-89, DATED REVERSE, 1 CLASP, THE NILE 1884-85 'LIEUT: T. A. G. SANGSTER. 1/R.W. KENT R.', EAST AND WEST AFRICA 1887-1900, 1 CLASP, NIGER 1897 'CAPT: T. A. G. SANGSTER. LEINS: R.', ROYAL NIGER COMPANY MEDAL 1886-97, 1 CLASP, NIGERIA 1886-1897 'CAPTAIN T. A. G. SANGSTER. LEINSTER REGIMENT.', KHEDIVE'S STAR 1882

M.B.E. *London Gazette* 3 June 1919: 'For valuable services rendered in connection with the War. - Major, retired pay, Leinster Regiment (Reserve of Officers).'

The Royal Niger Company medal was awarded in silver to 36 British officers and N.C.O's., 46 Royal Niger Company officers, and 10 Royal Niger Constabulary.

Thomas Alexander Gardner Sangster was born in Paddington, London, on 12 May 1863, and was educated at the United Services College and at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. He was first commissioned as a Lieutenant in the Gloucestershire Regiment on 22 October 1881. He transferred in the same rank to the 1st Battalion (Queen's Own) Royal West Kent Regiment on 10 May 1882 and served with his Regiment in the Egyptian expedition of 1882. Serving in Cyprus from October 1882, he returned to Alexandria on Special Service in February 1883, there serving as a Transport Officer in the Army of Occupation. He further took part in the Nile expedition of 1884-85, serving with the Bayuda Desert Column, during which he volunteered to carry despatches for General Sir Garnet Wolseley and Colonel Redvers Buller. He afterwards commanded the rearguard at the evacuation of Dongola, July 1885, after the blowing up of the fort. Serving in India 1886-7 with the Indian Staff Corps, he was reappointed to 'The Queen's' in the latter year and was specially promoted Captain for his service in Egypt; 18 January 1888.

THE LEINSTER REGIMENT AND THE NIGER CAMPAIGN OF 1897

Sangster joined the Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadian's), on 12 September 1894 and was again employed on Special Service duties in Africa; 24 October 1896 to 23 August 1897. During this period, whilst in command of No. 5 Company, Royal Niger Constabulary, consisting of 65 men and a Maxim gun, he took part in 1897 Niger Sudan campaign. This campaign was launched by

the Royal Niger Company to weaken the military power of the Sultan of Sokoto by obtaining the submission of his feudatories at Bida and Ilorin.

The following regarding the Niger 1897 campaign, comes from 'African General Service Medals' by R.B. Magor, with added accounts relating to Sangster from Vandeleur:

"Army Order No. 155 of 1897 authorised a medal of the same design as that for operations on the West Coast of Africa with the Clasp inscribed 'Niger 1897' to the forces which took part in the operations to Egbon, Bida and Ilorin or formed the garrisons of Fort Goldie and Lokoja between 6th January and 25th February 1897. This campaign is described in detail in Lt. S. Vandeleur's book Campaigning on the Upper Nile and Niger,' and was the first real trial of strength between Sir George Taubman Goldie's Royal Niger Company and the Mohamaden Fulani Tribe.

The Fulani lived in the Niger Valley. They owned slaves, lived in walled cities and fought on horseback. They rode on high peaked saddles with enormous brass and iron stirrups, their ponies were covered with trappings and they were armed with swords and spears. The horsemen were generally dressed in white robes with large turbans and were attended by two or three squires to carry their guns, spears etc. The infantry was armed with guns and rifles. Bida, the capital of the Nupe State, part of the Hausaland Empire, as a walled town of 6,000 inhabitants situated about 25 miles north of the Niger River. The Emir of Bida had sent a large raiding party across the river and set up a war camp at Kabba which was even threatening the Niger Company's headquarters at Lokoja. Sir George Goldie determined to put a stop to the Emir's activities, and, incidentally, spread the power of his Company. He obtained officer reinforcements for the Company's Constabulary and concentrated at Sokoto. Major A. J. Arnold, 3rd Hussars, was in command and had at his disposal about 1,000 Hausa troops of the R.N.C. armed with snider rifles. His force consisted of 30 officers and other Europeans and 513 Constabulary. Their armaments included one 9-pdr. and one 12-pdr. Whitworth field guns, rockets, five 7-pdrs. R.M.L. and six maxim guns of '45' caliber. There were 900 carriers.

Two Mallams (the West African term for a Mussalman Holyman) accompanied the expedition to prevent the Constabulary being suborned by the Fulanis preaching a jeddah to their co-religionists against the Europeans. The guns were dragged by hand at great labour and the infantry advanced in square with the guns in the centre. A halt was made on commanding ground near the town and the guns were brought into action upon masses of the enemy thronging its outskirts. Thereupon the square was surrounded by hostile swarms who loomed up from all sides, but the steady musketry and maxim fire kept the Fulanis at a distance...



The tactics were to attack the Emir's army south of the river and prevent the Fulanis joining up by patrolling the river with a flotilla in the charge of William Wallace, Goldie's Assistant Director. This flotilla consisted of two stern wheelers, Empire and Liberty, and twelve other vessels, some of which must have been quite commodious as they could carry up to 300-400 men. Some were

armoured with steel plates and carried two Nordenfelt shell guns on wheeled carriages, presumably 1-pdrs.

Captain Sangster, who was initially tasked with the defence of Lokoja, was then with smaller force, to be carried in the boats and sail to Egwa, securing riverside villages on the way. Egwa was a crossing point on the Niger, which it was believed Emir Makum retreat across if Arnold's force were successful.

The force marched on Kabba without contacting the enemy who had retreated north-west. Sir George Goldie there held a ceremonial parade, declared Kabba free and abolished all slave trading.

Captain Sangster was then ordered up to join Arnold's force, now in pursuit of Emir Makum and the rest of his army and;

'The force then marched north to Egbon, crossed the Niger, which is 850 yards broad at this point, and continued on towards Bida. At this stage Major Arnold's force consisted of 32 Europeans, 507 Constabulary and 565 carriers, making a total of 1,104. Their advance was disputed by masses of horsemen estimated at between 20-30,000 in number. The Fulani attacked again and again until they had been driven back to the great ten-foot high crenulated red mud wall of Bida. It was obvious that although the Nupes attacked the square recklessly and with great gallantry they could not succeed against the fire of the artillery, maxims and rifle volleys of the Constabulary who stood firm against the charges of the cavalry. Bida was shelled and the Nupes fled in panic. The Fulanis' losses were described as enormous, but the British only lost 1 officer and 7 other ranks killed and 9 wounded, which was a small cost for inflicting such a crushing defeat on the Fulani horsemen. As to Captain Sangster's part in the battle, a period account notes;

"As the companies closed in to form square, No. 5 Company under Captain Sangster, formed the rear face, and had its work cut out in stopping the ugly rushes of the now elated and triumphant enemy, who closed in upon us from all sides. The men were also controlled by Major Cunningham and Lieutenant Festing, it being now almost an impossibility to make oneself heard above the din of the fight."

The force, which then re-embarked in the S.W.S. Empire and Liberty and S.S. Soudan and Florence for an expedition against Ilorin, consisted of 21 Europeans, of whom 15 were officers (including Captain Sangster), 320 soldiers, 20 gunners and 488 carriers, a total of 829. Their armament included two 7-pdr. mountain guns and four maxims. The Constabulary marched south to Ilorin on the 10th February and it was hoped that the town would submit without fighting. However, the column having formed square was charged by Fulani horsemen who showed complete disregard of the British weapons. The square advanced, beating off attacks, and again very heavy casualties were inflicted by the maxims.

Captain Sangster's company was clearly in the thick of the action, as another account relates:

"After the fire had cleared the ground in the immediate vicinity, Major Arnold ordered the square to advance. Whether owing to the previous practice in marching in square before Bida, or the small size of it only 80 yards in length and less in breadth, which will give an idea of the smallness of the forces engaged on our side the square advanced at a great pace, 2 to 3 miles an hour, with the carriers and guns in the centre.

Two halts were made, and Captain Sangster with No. 5 Company had a great deal to do in clearing the way for the advance. The Maxims on the front face also opened fire with great effect. Masses of the enemy, noticeable in their white garments, could be still seen pouring down the road from Ilorin, evidently intending to dispute the passage of the river Oyon, where, behind the crossing, two large brown rocks covered with boulders and stunted bushes rose up about 100 yards in rear of it, offering splendid cover for the enemy's riflemen.

The two 7-pounders, under the direction of Under-Officer Boshier, now opened fire, aimed on the enemy's reserves, drawn up on the high ground south of the stream. Shrapnel shells with

percussion fuses were used, and must have sadly disturbed our opponents. Two common shells were also fired, bursting right among them. A second advance was made to within 400 yards of the river, and fire was again opened, which had the effect of driving the enemy right back to the top of the ridge opposite and away from the river. It was now 10.30 a.m, and the fight had lasted two hours. Camp was formed here, it being considered too late to fight our way to Ilorin and capture the town in the same day. Major Cunningham with Nos. 1 and 5 Companies advanced to force the passage of the river, which was still held by a few of the enemy's skirmishers. It was a pretty sight, and we from camp were able to watch all that went on. One good volley rang out from No. 5, which was drawn up in line on our side of the river and No.1 crossed and formed up on the other side..."

After two days ' fighting the horsemen fled and Ilorin was taken after being bombarded. A treaty was made with Emir Sulimain placing Ilorin under the protection of the Company.



HORSE AND RIDER ARMED AGAINST MAGIC AND FOEMAN'S SPEAR
Sokoto cavalry carry large shields of oryx hide and tie charms to their reins. They provide a thrilling spectacle when they pay a corporate salute. Brandishing their weapons and shouting, they charge at full gallop towards the person complimented, and when within a few feet of him suddenly pull their horses up on their haunches by means of their severe bits

The following East West Africa, medals with the 'Niger 1897' clasp (or clasp only) were awarded for the campaign:

Sir George Goldie and 13 civilians - 15
British Officers - 24
British N.C.O.s - 7
Royal Niger Constabulary - 651
European Civilian employees – 15
Total – 697 medals/clasps

As noted previously, The Royal Niger Company medal was awarded in silver to just 36 British officers and N.C.O.'s, including those that took part in the above 1897 campaign

'*Campaigning on the upper Nile and Niger*' by Seymour Vandeleur, gives an excellent account of the 1897 campaign, a copy of this on CD, is included with the research, as are photo copies of relevant pages.

BACK TO THE LEINSTER REGIMENT

Captain Sangster returned to the 2nd Battalion, Leinster Regiment and served with his Battalion during the South African War in 1902, taking part in operations in the Transvaal, March to 31 May 1902; and operations in Orange River Colony, February to March 1902 (entitled to the Queen's medal with 3 clasps). Captain Sangster was promoted to Major on 22 November 1902, and retired on 27 May 1903. Recalled to service at the outbreak of the Great War, Major Sangster joined the 6th (service) battalion, Leinster Regiment and served with them at various locations in Ireland. In 1915, he was transferred to the East Kent Area Recruiting Staff, based at Canterbury and was recommended to 'distinction' for his special service. He finally served at the Ministry of National Service (Dover) between November 1917 and January 1919. For his services during the War, he was awarded the M.B.E. in June 1919. As he did not serve overseas, he was not entitled to any Great War medals. Major Sangster died in Dover on 13 May 1935 and is buried in Dover (St James's) Cemetery.

Entry from the Army List: "*Major Sangster served in the Egyptian war of 1882 (Medal, and Khedive's Star); and in the Soudan campaign in 1884-85 (Clasp). Served in the Niger Soudan campaign under Major Arnold in 1897 including the expeditions to Egbon, Bida, and Ilorin (Medal with Clasp). Served in the South African war with the 2nd Battalion Leinster Regiment, and took part in the operations in North East Orange River Colony, Feb. and March 1902.*"



Condition VF, some contact wear and a few minor EK's or better. Ex John Etkins Collection.
Sold with a large and compressive file of copied research. A rare group of medals to an Officer with a superb service in various parts of Africa