

THE VERY RARE FIRST BOER WAR 1881 'SIEGE OF POTCHEFSTROOM' D.C.M. PAIR AWARDED TO A DRIVER OF N/5, ROYAL ARTILLERY, FOR GALLANTRY DURING A SORTIE ON BOER POSITIONS, HE RESCUED A SEVERELY WOUNDED SOLDIER OF THE 21ST FOOT UNDER HEAVY FIRE AND SUCCESSFULLY BROUGHT HIM INTO THE FORT IN SAFETY. HE WAS SUBSEQUENTLY WOUNDED HIMSELF JUST OVER A WEEK LATER



DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT MEDAL, V.R. 'DRIV: A. PEAD. R.A. 22ND JAN. 1881.', SOUTH AFRICA 1877-79, CLASP, 1879 '4754. DRIV: A. PEAD. 5TH BDE. R.A.'

D.C.M. Recommendation submitted to the Queen, 21 September 1882; Royal Artillery Regimental Order No. 59 of December 1882:

'Her Majesty, on the recommendation of His Royal Highness the Field-Marshal Commanding in Chief, has been pleased to approve of the grant of... silver medals (without annuity or gratuity) to the undermentioned men in recognition of gallant conduct performed by them during the investment of Potchefstroom by the Boers, viz.:-

No. 10205, Driver R. Gibson, N Battery, 4th Brigade, Royal Artillery.

No. 10127, Trumpeter N. H. Martin, N Battery, 4th Brigade, Royal Artillery.

No. 16832, Driver A. Pead, T Battery, 1st Brigade, Royal Artillery.'

Note: Batteries and Regt numbers listed are those the above men served with in 1882, all were N/5 during the Boer War

In a report submitted by Major C. Thornhill, Officer Commanding the Royal Artillery at Potchefstroom, dated 23 March 1881, he records as follows:

“Further I have to bring to your attention the conspicuous gallantry of Drivers Gibson and Pead and Trumpeter Martin, who on the occasion of the attack on the trenches on the 22nd January went out under the very heavy fire, and at great Personal risk carried in 2 wounded men. In the first instance Dvr. Gibson and Trumpeter Martin carried in Dvr. Walsh N/5 R.A. who I regret to say has since died of his wounds - and in the second instance Dvr. Gibson and Dvr. Pead carried in Private Colvin 2/21st Royal Scots Fus. - Dvr. Gibson thus being present in both instances which occurred within a few moments of each other. These acts speak of themselves without any further comment of mine.”

Driver Alfred Pead was subsequently severely wounded in the left leg wounded at Potchefstroom on 1 February 1882.

The medal was presented by the Queen at Windsor Castle on 8 December 1882, the following report being published in The Ipswich Journal, on 12 December:

‘THE GARRISON - On Friday last, Mr Pead, late driver F Battery 1st Brigade Royal Artillery, and formerly stationed here, received instructions to proceed to Windsor to receive the medal for distinguished conduct in the field, for an act of bravery performed during the late campaign in South Africa. The following is a brief account of the circumstances - In February (sic), 1881, a small detachment of the British Forces of the Royal Artillery and 21st Fusiliers occupied at fort at Potchefstroom. The Boers held a sap not far off and greatly troubled our small detachment. Volunteers were called for to try and dislodge the enemy. Twenty men, under command of Lieut. Hay, 21st Fusiliers, immediately came forward. The attack was on the whole successful. One man was severely wounded when Drivers Pead and Gibson and Trumpeter Martin, under very heavy fire from the enemy, succeeded in bringing the wounded man into the fort in safety. Driver Gibson and Trumpeter Martin shared the honour of each receiving a medal at Windsor. Mr Pead is, we believe, a native of Ipswich.’



POTCHEFSTROOM TOWN

Alfred Pead attested for the Royal Artillery on 13 October 1870, aged 19, and was posted to “F” Battery, 18 Brigade. He subsequently transferred to “M” Battery, 2 Brigade (No. 1899) and then to “A” Battery, 5 Brigade on 1 March 1879 (No. 4754); to Cape of Good Hope, 11

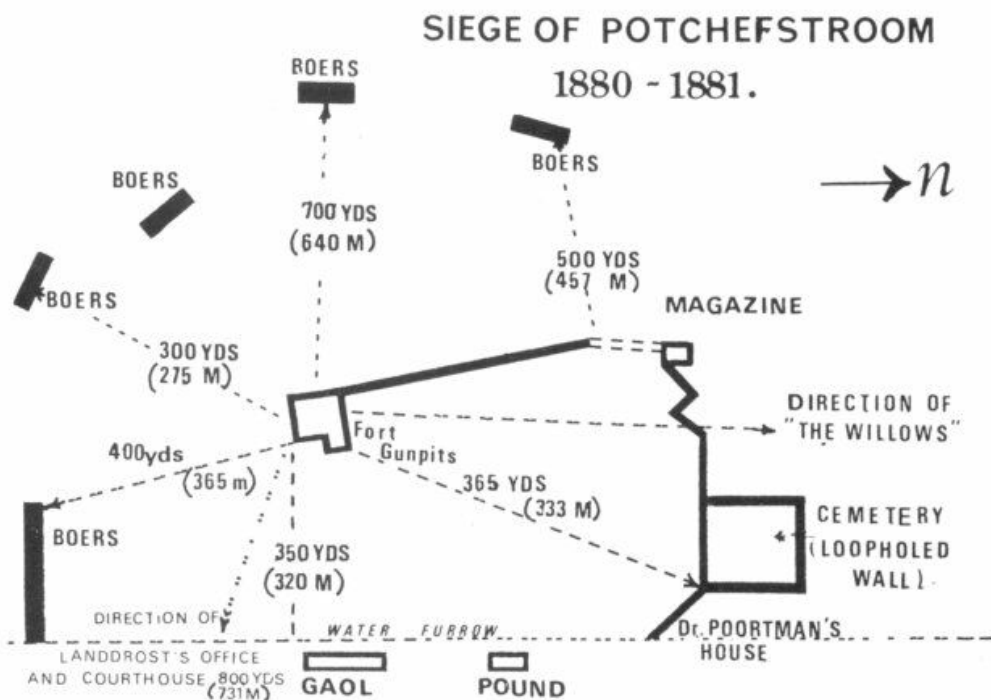
March 1879, and joined N/5 Brigade in South Africa and took part in the Zulu War of 1879 where his battery took part in the battle of Ulundi.

Pead continued to serve with this battery during the First Boer War until invalided from South Africa on 3 June 1881 due to wounds received at during the siege Potchefstroom, 1 February 1880. Transported home aboard the mail steamer Castle Duart and on to Netley Hospital, he was then then sent to Depot 5 Brigade at Woolwich. On 3 August 1881, he joined A/5 Brigade, this being renamed T/1 Brigade in April 1882 and Pead received a new number; 16832. On 7 October 1882, Pead was discharged time expired to Ipswich.

THE SIEGE OF POTCHEFSTROOM

On 15 December 1880, the South African Republic was proclaimed at Paardekraal and the elected triumvirate of Kruger, Joubert, and Pretorius established themselves at Heidelberg; on the same day a large Boer Commando rode in Potchefstroom and disregarding all protests, took over the printing works. The small British garrison under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel R. W. C. Winsloe, 21st Foot, comprising of nearly 200 Royal Scots Fusiliers, about 20 Artillerymen with two nine pounders, and some volunteers, took up defensive positions; 20 regulars and 46 volunteers fortified the brick courthouse, another 20 men defended the stone prison, and the remainder occupied a fortified earth work fort 30 yards square. Insults were thrown, and on the following morning shots were fired. After an argument as to which side fired the first shot a general action ensued - the opening shots of the First Boer War had been exchanged. The Prison garrison on the redoubt and the men in the courthouse surrendered two days later.

Food, rationed from day one of the siege, consisted of three pounds of Indian corn (intended as animal fodder) daily with four ounces of tinned meat on alternate days; water was found after digging down 15 feet. The defenders occasionally cried foul especially when severe gunshot injuries led to the assumption that the Boers were using explosive bullets, although these were probably caused by the balls from an 8 bore elephant gun. Hostilities were often suspended for lunch; wounded men were courteously exchanged; and Sunday was declared a day of peace.



On 1 January the fort was heavily attacked on three sides by about 1,600 men and the old ship's gun firing a 9 lb. roundshot. The firing lasted unabated for about three hours, but the men sat next to their posts, waiting for the rush at the fort that was expected at any time. The men sang part-songs to pass the time, with the ladies joining in the refrains, and the buglers played what pieces they could. The conduct of the women throughout the siege was magnificent, suffering the same hardships as the men they lived in a 9 x 5 foot shelter, and a dugout when the Boer gun took the fort in reverse. Two girls were wounded but recovered.

Improvements to the defence of the fort never ended. Ramparts were increased in height and damaged sandbags repaired each night, and more added. The tents which protruded above the ramparts were riddled by bullets, and had over 500 bullet holes in them. Cooking was done as well as possible under the circumstances, but because of the lack of fuel to eat the food was to eat disease. Torrents of rain often flooded the fort, washing over the stretchers of the wounded and leaving all articles of clothing swimming with rain. The two doctors, working under impossible conditions, wrought miracles of healing.

On 22 January, Lieutenant Dalrymple-Hay and twelve men attacked and cleared a Boer trench 300 yards south of the fort. Stretchers were later lent to the Boers to remove their casualties, and were returned the following day with fruit and carbolic acid for the doctors. At the end of January 1881 food rations were cut drastically; dysentery was rife and scurvy appeared; and typhoid and enteric fever cases joined the wounded in the hospital tents. February brought little let-up. A raid out of the fort produced five stray sheep and several sheets of iron- a treasure beyond price. But the end was near.



By early March the defenders were down to eight bags of rotten mealies and on 12 March out of physical necessity they sent out a flag of truce and asked for terms of surrender. Cronje, the Boer commander, unaware of their true condition, offered the British some most acceptable concessions. Officers and men were to keep their private property and arms except rifles; no prisoners were to be taken, and the garrison was to be permitted to march out with honours of

war to Natal. On 23 March, after 98 days under siege, the defenders of Potchefstroom marched out from their redoubt en route to Natal; flags flew at their head, bugles played, and over 400 burghers lined up on both sides of the road saluting their former adversaries. Almost at the frontier the British discovered the bitter truth - the war had ended on the very day that they had proudly marched out of Potchefstroom.”

The following is a summary of casualties:

Killed or died of wounds - 1 officer, 24 other ranks, 1 civilian

Died from disease - 4 other ranks, 2 civilians

Wounded - 5 officers, 47 other ranks, 2 civilians

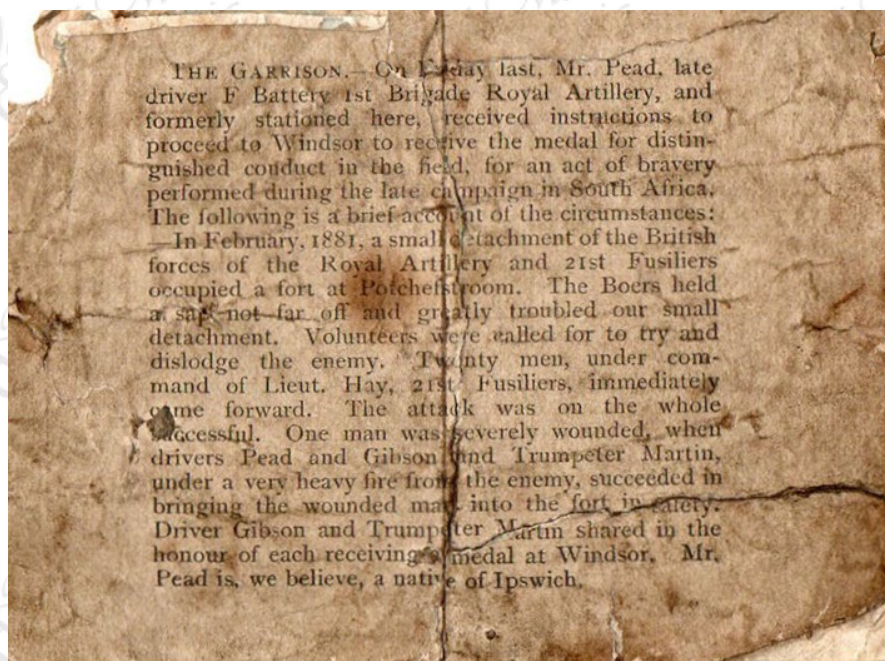
Total 81 casualties out of 213 all ranks, and 5 civilians, or approximately 37% of those besieged, an extremely high number.

Further details of the siege can be found here:

<http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol052jo.html>

And Colonel Winsloe diary:

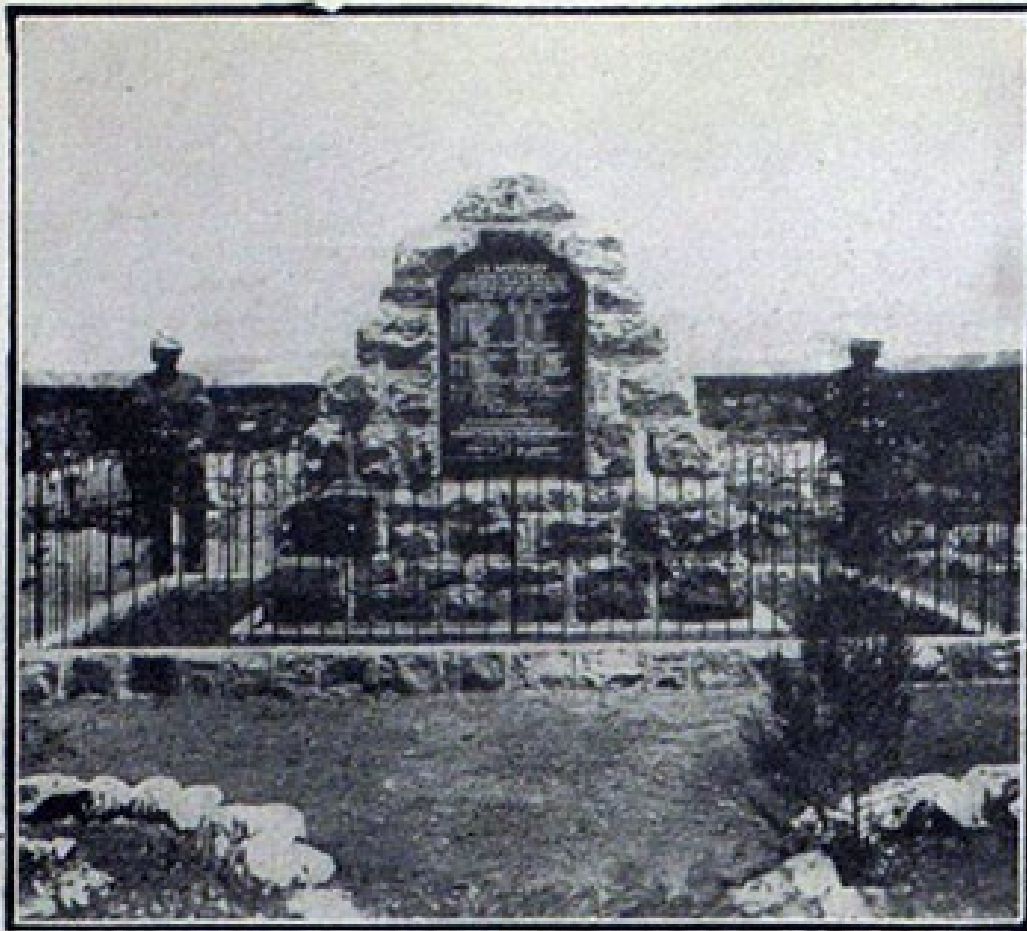
<http://samilitaryhistory.org/misc/potch80.html>



Condition some EK's and contact wear, otherwise about VF. Sold original cutting from The Ipswich Journal, as quoted above, and with full research including muster details and copies of the relevant War Office records from The National Archives. Ex City Coins 2003.



A very rare D.C.M. for gallant and distinguished services during the First Boer War , being one of just 20 awards



A MEMENTO OF THE BOER WAR OF 1881.

A monument has just been erected in the cemetery of Potchefstroom to the memory of those of the garrison who fell during the Boer War of 1881.