

THE RARE NEW ZEALAND MOUNTED RIFLES QUEENS SOUTH AFRICA 1899 TO A TROOPER WHO WAS KILLED IN ACTION DURING THE HEROIC DEFENCE BY 80 MEN OF THE 7TH CONTINGENT AT THE BATTLE OF LANGVERWACHT, 23/24 FEBRUARY 1902, 65 OF WHOM BECAME CASUALTIES. ONE ACCOUNT SUGGESTING HE WAS KILLED DURING THE ACT OF SURRENDERING. OF THE NEW ZEALAND CONTINGENTS, 58 MEN WERE KILLED IN ACTION DURING THE BOER



QUEENS SOUTH AFRICA 1899, 4 CLASPS, ORANGE FREE STATE, TRANSVAAL, SOUTH AFRICA 1901, SOUTH AFRICA 1902 '4442 TPR. W. STEVENSON. 7TH N. Z'LAND M.R.'

Walter (Wattie) Stevenson a 20 year old Draper from Timaru, New Zealand, attested for service in the Boer War at Wellington on 8 April 1901. Serving in South Africa with 24 Company (Canterbury Section), 7th Contingent, New Zealand Mounted Rifles, he was Killed in Action during heroic defence by 80 men of his unit of the lines at Langverwacht (also known as Bothasberg) in the Orange Free State on the 24 February 1902. Aged 22. He is buried at the Garden of Remembrance, Vrede Public Cemetery, Orange Free State, South Africa.

58 Officers and men of the New Zealand Contingents were killed in action during the Boer War, 34 of this number being from the 7th New Zealand Mounted Rifles. A further 189 Officers and men were

wounded in action or died of wounds, again, the brunt of the casualties falling on the 7th New Zealand Mounted Rifles with 73 coming from this unit. 65 of the 7th casualties were sustained at the Battle of Langverwacht.

BATTLE OF LANGVERWACHT

At Langverwacht Hill, near the Orange River, a Boer force attacked a point on the line that was held by New Zealand's Seventh Contingent on 23/24 February 1902. The New Zealand line consisted of small posts of 5 or 6 men in shallow trenches (sangars). A small group of Boers drove a herd of cattle against the wire entanglements connecting the British blockhouses and used this distraction to overwhelm one of the New Zealand posts. They then advanced up the hill, overrunning a number of other New Zealand-held posts. After ferocious close-quarter fighting, the Boers opened a gap through which most of their force escaped. The New Zealand casualties were devastating and by far the highest number of casualties suffered by any New Zealand unit during the war. Off approximately 80 Officers and men of the 7th New Zealand Mounted Rifles who were holding the positions during the battle, no less than 24 of were killed and 41 wounded, or in the region of 80% of their number.

An excellent description of the battle and be found here:

<https://samilitaryhistory.org/vol136rs.html>

AN ACCOUNT BY STEVENSON'S SECTION COMMANDER

The following is taken from a letter home to his father from 4373 Corporal Edmund James Foster, 24 Company, 7th Contingent, who was in charge of Walter Stevenson's section during the battle of Langverwacht. In it he suggests Stevenson was killed by the Boers whilst in the act of surrendering:

"We have been after De Wet and his commando for the last two weeks....At daybreak we sighted some waggons about a mile off. The order to mount was given, and in extended order we were after them at a gallop. The Boers, on seeing us, made an effort to get away with their waggons, and left a strong rear-guard to keep us back, and to gain time. I can tell you they made it very hot for us. We succeeded in breaking through, and to our surprise, on reaching the convoy, we found three big guns getting got into position, a 15-pounder and two pom-poms. A field cornet and three men were shot dead at the guns before we took them. The Colonel of the column came up and congratulated us for bravery and stated it was one of the best mounted charges he had seen. About 200 of us started in the chase, but only about 70 reached the guns. I was among that number and feel proud of the fact. I am sorry to say we had two poor chaps killed and one wounded."

On the night of 23/24 February 1902 Edmund was in charge of a sangar holding the line against De Wet's forces at Bothasberg. During the attempted breakthrough by the Boers, all of Edmund's comrades were killed or wounded in the largest loss of life suffered by the New Zealanders in South Africa. He wrote of the event:

"I had No. 10 post, four of my poor fellows were hit while the Boers were 100 yards away. R. Westropp was shot through the hip, F. Rodgers through arm and leg, T. Frame through the head, and J. McClellan through the head, thigh, and ankle. W. Stevenson, of Timaru, and I stuck at it until we were surrounded, and then threw up our hands. Poor Wattie was shot with his hands up. I thought it was my turn then, but they were contented with rifling my pockets and taking everything of any value, including a number of rare Kruger coins."

A New Zealand newspaper account and details of casualties can be found here:

https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19020407.2.60?items_per_page=50&query=Langverwacht+stevenson&snippet=true



Lord Kitchener's despatch of 8 March 1902 :

"On the night of the 23rd a most determined and partially successful attempt to break out to the north was made by De Wet, Steyn, and some 700 of their followers, who had been driven east by Major General Elliot's advance to the Wilge River into the net of our approaching columns. The attack was delivered under cover of darkness at Langverwacht, 18 miles south of Vrede, the point where, at the moment, the right of Colonel Byng's column was in touch with Colonel Rimington's left. Here again, as on the occasion of his previous escape, De Wet adopted the plan of advancing under cover of a large mob of cattle, which were rapidly driven up by natives to the point where the rush through was to be attempted. This expedient met, it is true, with a part of the desired success, for there is little doubt that De Wet, Ex-President Steyn, and a number of their men thus managed to break out of the toils. As a whole, however, the Boer force was very severely punished by the New Zealanders of Lieutenant Colonel Garratt's column, who displayed great gallantry and resolution at a critical moment in resisting and in part repelling the attack. The conduct of the New Zealanders upon this occasion reflects the highest credit upon all ranks of the contingent, and upon the Colony to which it belongs. Nothing could have been finer than the behaviour of the men. The whole of the Boer cattle and vehicles were captured, and 31 of the enemy, together with over 160 horses, were killed at the point where the attempt to penetrate our line was made. Our own casualties were also severe, 2 officers and 18 men being killed, and 5 officers and 33 men wounded, the large majority of whom belonged to the New Zealand Contingent".

In each of his telegrams of 25th and 28th February, Lord Kitchener referred to the very great gallantry of the 7th New Zealanders. In his wire of 1st March Lord Kitchener added, *"All men worked day and night continuously, and, although tired, are in the best of spirits at satisfactory results obtained".*



Condition, GVF, attractive patina, couple of minor EK's. Sold with copy Attestation and other research. Note: Corporal Foster's Q.S.A. medal is listed elsewhere on this website

A rare New Zealand Contingent Killed in action medal