

THE SCARCE NEW ZEALAND MOUNTED RIFLES QUEENS SOUTH AFRICA 1899 PAIR TO A N.C.O. WHO COMMANDED A SECTION 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. LEAVING AN ACCOUNT OF THE ACTION, HE WAS THE ONLY ONE OF 6 MEN IN HIS SECTION NOT KILLED OR WOUNDED



QUEENS SOUTH AFRICA 1899, 4 CLASPS ORANGE FREE STATE, TRANSVAAL, SOUTH AFRICA 1901, SOUTH AFRICA 1902, '4373 SERGT MAJOR E.J. FOSTER, 7TH N. Z'LAND M.R.', NUMBER AND RANK RE-ENGRAVED, BRITISH WAR MEDAL '7/1805 SJT. E. J. FOSTER. N.Z.E.F.'

Edmund Foster was born at Christchurch, New Zealand on 7 December 1879, educated at Sydenham School, and was working as a coach-painter and residing at New Brighton when he was accepted for service with the Seventh Contingent in April 1901. Edmund was promoted to corporal being embarking with 24 (Canterbury) Company on the Gulf of Taranto on 6th April 1901. During the 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, Foster commanded a section of 5 men from his unit, all except him being killed or wounded.

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>



CORPORAL FOSTER'S ACCOUNTS OF ACTIONS

In letters Edmund wrote to his father, he referred to key events involving the contingent, including the accidental killing of 4372 W J Byrne at Pongola Bush in October, and of the running fight near Heilbron in early February 1902 which resulted in the capture of three guns (two pom-poms and a 15-pounder) from De Wet's convoy:

"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."

POST WAR

After the war, Edmund married Catherine Riordan and had a son, John. Tragically John died when he was just 2 years old, after falling into a scalding hot bath. During the First World War Edmund embarked as Quartermaster-Sergeant of the Canterbury Mounted Rifle, 8th Reinforcements. On formation of the New Zealand Division in March 1916 he transferred to the 2nd Battalion, Canterbury Infantry Regiment, serving in France during May and June 1916. After a period of hospitalisation in the UK, Edmund transferred to No. 5 Light Railway Operating Section, with whom he served throughout 1917 and early 1918. He was promoted to sergeant in March 1917.

Edmund Foster died 24th August 1949 in Auckland and is buried in the Our Lady Star of the Sea Churchyard.

THE Q.S.A. MEDAL

The number and rank on the medal have been contemporary but unofficially re-engraved, giving him the rank of Sergeant Major. Further research may reveal the reason for him changing the rank but when issued, the medal would have had the rank of corporal, this confirmed on the medal roll. His B.W.M. has the rank of sergeant which has not been upgraded, which suggests the rank of Sergeant Major would have been pre WW1. The suspension claw has been tightened and the 1901 clasp has been unofficially rivetted to the Transvaal clasp as is common for date clasps which were issued loose.



Despite the change in rank on the medal, this is a very scarce medal to one of the section commanders at Langverwacht, especially one who left an account. Note: The Q.S.A. medal to Trooper Stevenson who was in Foster's section at Langverwacht, and was killed during the action, is listed elsewhere on this website