

AN EXCEPTIONAL MGS 1793 TO 40TH FOOT LIGHT COMPANY OFFICER WHO WAS FIVE TIMES WOUNDED; DURING THE DISASTEROUS SOUTH AMERICAN CAMPAIGN OF 1807; AT THE STORMING OF MONTEVIDEO, HIS COMPANY LED THE STORMING OF THE CITY, HIS CAPTAIN BEING KILLED AND HE RECEIVED AN 'ALARMING WOUND IN THE HEAD'. FIVE MONTHS LATER HE WAS THREE TIMES WOUNDED AT STORMING OF BUENOS AIRES WHERE HE WAS ALSO TAKEN PRISONER AND WAS FINALLY SEVERELY WOUNDED AT THE BATTLE OF VIMIERA, A WOUND THAT EFFECTIVELY ENDED HIS FRONT LINE SERVICE. HE FINALLY RETIRED AS BREVET LT COLONEL IN 1843



MILITARY GENERAL SERVICE 1793-1814, TWO CLASPS, ROLEIA, VIMIERA 'C.H. SMITH, CAPT. 40TH FOOT.'

Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Hervey Smith, of Aspley House, was born on 7th October 1783. He is listed as a 19 year old Captain in the Bedford Militia in 1803 before purchasing a commission of Ensign in the 40th Foot in May 1805 and of Lieutenant on 26th December 1805. He was with his regiment in South America in 1807 and as an Officer in the Light Company, he served with the Light Battalion during the operations. Lieutenant Smith received an 'alarming wound in the head' at the storming of Monte Video but carried on duty, almost certainly taking command of his Company after Captain Rennie was killed during the latter battle. At the storming of Buenos Aires, where the Light Battalion played a prominent part, he received three wounds, two of which were severe and was taken prisoner. Promoted Captain 26th May 1808, he commanded the Light Company in the Peninsula, during the campaigns of 1808-09. Taking part in the battles of Roleia he was severely wounded in the thigh at the battle of Vimiera. This seems to have ended his service in the Peninsular. He joined the 36th Foot in 1814 and was placed on Half Pay in October 1814. However he is noted as serving as Major of Brigade, Western District from late 1814, being given a Brevet of Major and exchanged back to the 40th in May 1815. He was again placed on Half Pay by reduction of the Regiment in late 1816. Awarded the rank of Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel in

1838 and promoted full Major May 30th 1843. He finally retired on 14th August 1846 Major and Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel.

On 19th August 1814 Smith was given a pension of £70 for wounds, backdated to 1811. Lt Colonel Smith had married to Francis Dale on April 18th 1811 and had 6 children. He died in 1857 at Aspley House, Aspley Guise, Bedfordshire.

ATTACK ON MONTEVIDEO

On 2nd February 1807 a practicable breach had been made on the walls of Montevideo and the Spanish Governor was called to surrender. His answer was defiance, as he had reports that relieving forces of 4,000 men were on their way to the town. Sir Samuel Auchmuty's force therefore decided on an attack at dawn.

The force consisted of a Forlorn Hope, mainly of men from the 54th Regiment under Lieutenant Everard of the Queen's. The storming party consisted of two companies of Rifles and the Flank Company of the 38th with the 40th in support. The remaining Rifle Company and the 87th would wait at the North Gate, which was to be opened by the storming party once they had gained access. The remainder of Auchmuty force would be held in reserve in the event of the Spanish relieving arriving.



THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN RENNY THE OTHER OFFICER PROBABLY LIEUTENANT SMITH

At 3 o'clock on the 3rd February the attacking column moved towards the breach in total darkness, and was almost at the foot of the walls before they were discovered. The first guns fired from the defenders and struck only one man but the next swept away 25 of the 30 of the Forlorn Hope. Major Gardner and Captain Dickerson moved towards the walls with the covering and storming parties of Riflemen, but due to the Spanish placing hides into the breach giving the appearance of an unbroken wall they could not find the breach and spent fifteen minutes milling around under a terrific fire trying to locate it. It was Captain Renny of the 40th that located it with his Light Company, but as Renny climbed onto the breach he was

shot dead and Lieutenant Smith was wounded; according to Smith he suffered an '*alarming wound in the head*'. Some sources claim it was Lt Harry Smith of the 95th who was wounded with Renny, however Harry Smith was not wounded and in fact went back to guide in other elements of the stormers who had missed the breach. Indeed their may have been more confusion in later works on the battle due to their surnames. Once over the breach the stormers had to drop 12 feet into town where others turned to their left and carried the various batteries along the wall. The rest of the 40th also had trouble finding the breach and had to endure heavy fire from the batteries from the walls until they also found it (led by Lt Harry Smith).

After a fierce fight the British cleared the town leaving only the Citadel still holding out but by eight thirty the garrison surrendered. The British loss in total was 6 Officers and 110 men killed, and 21 Officers and 258 men wounded. The Spanish losses were very heavy about 800 killed and 500 wounded with 2,000 taken prisoner. The rest of the garrison escaping in boats across the harbour.

ATTACK ON BUENOS AYRES

Over the next few months more British reinforcements landed at La Plata, finally including Lieut-General John Whitelocke (with Major-General Leveson-Gower as second in command) who would now take over from Auchmuty. Between the taking of Montevideo and 6th June, several smaller successful actions took place in which the original force of 2 companies of the 95th, the 40th and the Light Infantry battalion were all heavily involved.

By mid June Whitelocke force was now complete and he could plan his attack on Buenos Ayres. Leaving a garrison of 1,300 men at Monte Video, Whitelocke divided his force into two divisions. The 1st Division of two Brigades under Auchmuty and Brigadier General Craufurd, and the 2nd Division was Lumley's and Mahon's Brigades. Craufurd's Brigade became known as the Light Brigade and consisted of 9 Light Infantry companies from various regiments (including Lt Smith's 40th Company) and 8 companies of the 95th Rifles.

On the 29th June, forces were landed to advance on Buenos Ayres with Craufurd's Light Brigade as the advance guard and on the 3rd July Gower received orders to press on to Buenos Ayres and take possession of the northern suburbs of the city and establish communications with the fleet. With his two brigades about five miles apart Craufurd Light Brigade in front spotted some Spanish gaining some high ground near the ford. Craufurd gained permission to drive them off, which he did unopposed and then instead of waiting for the rest division to catch up he continued towards the city. Twice Gower sent orders for the Light Brigade to halt and Craufurd with his famous temper replied "*he considered it very desirable to proceed until he gained the Corral or slaughter yard*" {a large open space}. Gower finally caught up with and halted the Light Brigade. As they rested the Spanish opened up with grape and round shot. Craufurd instantly ordered an attack. The Riflemen and Light Infantry companies with a cheer rushed forwards in a crescent formation straight for the guns. The Spanish Artillerymen fled and left their guns, as did the infantry whilst being hotly pursued by the Light Brigade through the outer suburbs of the city. Gower yet again sent orders to Craufurd to return which he did but swearing that he would have captured the town if he were permitted to.

Meanwhile the Whitelocke and the 2nd Division had arrived, though at this crucial moment, Whitelocke did not attempt to enter the city, but twice demanded the city's surrender. During this time, Buenos Aires' mayor organised the defence of the city by digging trenches, fortifying buildings and erecting fences with great popular support for the Creoles hungered for independence. Finally, 3 days after forcing the troops under Liniers to retreat, Whitelocke resolved to attack Buenos Aires.



Just before dawn on the 5th July the Whitelocke's force was in position, some 5,000 men attacking a defending force of about 15,000. The attacking columns had to make their way through the streets, which were continually swept by grape shot, and fire from barricades and rooftops, with the British having to seek cover in the surrounding houses, which they held. Under sustained fire for hours and unable to move forwards or back, isolated regiments began to surrender.

In the centre right Craufurd Light Brigade made their attack. The left hand attacking column under Lieutenant-Colonel Pack was made up of 5 companies of Light Infantry, 4 companies of the 95th and one 3 pounder gun. The column moved through the streets with little opposition and when they were about four blocks away from the Fort Pack turned left with the front three companies and two blocks back he ordered Lieutenant-Colonel Cadogan to do the same. This brought them within range of the Spanish defences. Cadogan got as far as the west side of the Jesuit's College, but after sustaining a heavy loss from the Spanish firing from the housetops was obliged to fall back leaving the gun behind due to all its crew and horses either killed or wounded. Trying to gain access into a strong building but was unable to gain entry ordered his men to occupy other houses. Pack reached the east side of the collage but again came under a destructive fire in which Pack himself was wounded. Unable to continue Pack decided to fall back to Residencia, doing so they came upon the second Light Brigade column under Craufurd himself with 4 companies of Light Infantry, 4 companies of Rifles and another 3 pounder gun. They were very near the convent of St Domingo and both decided to take possession of the convent and then take if possible the Franciscan Church. Meanwhile Lieutenant-Colonel Guard of the 45th at the Residencia detached the Grenadier Company and sent them towards the town centre where they meet up with the Light Brigade. The state of the British attack was now in dead lock and the Brigade commanders unaware of the plight of the other Brigades, and not receiving any news or orders from Whitelocke.

By about 10 o'clock Lieutenant-Colonel Cadogan with Major Travers of the 95th was compelled to surrender their position after heavy fighting and a great loss of both officers and men. About midday Liniers sent out an officer with a white flag to Craufurd with the news of the 88th and others who had surrendered and that Craufurd should do the same, Craufurd refused. However Craufurd realised his Brigade was the only force in the centre of the town that was still fighting but he was totally surrounded and being attacked from all sides. One attack on the gate of the convent, which was protected by the 3 pounder, was repulsed by a charge made by the Grenadiers and some Light Infantry, many of them fell but the gun was saved. With Craufurd and the remains of the Light Brigade confined to the convent with only the Riflemen providing the defence by firing from the rooftop. But this was stopped when the Spanish brought up cannons and raked the convent with grape shot. Maintaining this defence till 4 o'clock Craufurd thought about making a retreat, but with so many Spanish surrounding them, the loss would be too great. After consulting Lieutenant-Colonels Pack and Guard and Major McLeod of the 95th, they decided to seek a truce and surrendered to the Spanish. Early next day Liniers sent out a message to Whitelocke informing him of the capture of Craufurd and over a thousand men and offered their release and those captured the year before, if the British would withdraw from La Plata. The British losses so far were 401 killed, 649 wounded and about 1,924 were prisoners, which made up almost half the British attacking force. Lieutenant Smith was among the wounded, suffering three wounds, two of which were severe. It is not known if the Light Company of the 40th was with Pack or Craufurd when they surrendered but Smith was one of those who was made prisoner with one of these.

THE BATTLES OF ROLICA AND VIMIERO

Coming ashore with Wellesley on 2nd August 1808, the 1/40th were brigaded with 1/36th and 1/71st under Major General Ronald Ferguson they are not heavily engaged at the battle of Rolica on the 17th August but are in line at the battle of Vimiero on 21st August. At this battle the 40th were involved late in the action performing that classic short range full volley fire and bayonet charge for which this army became famous, the enemy after a repeat reception of this tactic turned tail and ran leaving their part of the field free for an advance, not however before leaving on the ground some 46 killed and wounded of 1/40th, amongst them the newly promoted Captain Charles Smith of the Light company, who was severely wounded in the thigh and Lieutenant Thomas Franklyn. A follow-up of the partial victory never took place as the Lieutenant General Hew Dalrymple/Lieutenant General Harry Burrard duo took the battle out of Wellesley's hands.

From his 1829 Statement of Service for Retired Officers:

"SMITH, Charles Hervey, Capt., 40th Foot: 1829 Statement of Service for Retired Officers: Aged nineteen when he joined the Militia, twenty-one on first appointment to the Army. Capt., Bedford Militia, 1803 Ensign 40th Foot, May 1805; Lt., 40th Foot, 1806 or early 1807' (Army List gives 26th Dec. 1805); Capt., 40th Foot 26th May 1808; Capt., 36th Foot 1814; Half Pay Oct 1814, by reduction; Capt., 40th Foot 1815; Bvt Major, Half Pay 1816 at the close of the year' by reduction; Employed since 1814 as Major of Brigade in the Western District' where serving when wounded: South America and subsequently Portugal via Monte Video, an alarming wound in the head. Buenos Ayres, 3 wounds 2 severe, Vimiera, 1 severe wound in each instance in the 40th Foot. Details of Pension: Seventy pounds. The certificate of the Medical Board bears date August 19th 1814, The Pension was issued for 1811, and subsequently. Family Married in Somerley Leicestershire 18th April 181. Six children now living. Where generally resident during the last five years: Plymouth"



Condition GVF. Sold with a large amount of research both paper and on CD, including, statement of service, promotions and Half Pay papers, Gazettes, Regimental histories and narratives of the South American Campaign.

A really quite exceptional medal to a Light Company Officer who saw a great deal of action.