



## Soldier of the 19th Foot

The following article was published in the February 2003 edition of "Medal News". Kevin Morris has carried out some fascinating research into the military career of this particular soldier of the 19th Foot. His work, and the resulting article will be of immense interest to those researching the military careers of similar soldiers, or collectors of military medals of the period.

## Queen's Bad Bargain?

- Or just an average soldier of his time?

KEVIN MORRIS

*AS medal collectors every once in a while we come across groups of medals which are particularly inviting or attractive, but also throw up added interest when you can find out about the man behind the medals, particularly if there is an interesting history to the individual.*

One such group of three medals I have in my collection is a Crimea Medal with clasps for Alma, Inkerman and Sevastopol, Turkish Crimea Medal and India General Service Medal 1854 with North West Frontier clasp to Private Richard Davis 1st Battalion 19th Regiment.



*Three similar medals to the ones described in this article. These ones are held in the Green Howards Museum, and were awarded to Corporal P Thompson of the 19th Foot.*

I liked this group because while this combination of medals is not unusual to the 19th, to find a group with all three Crimea clasps which the regiment was allocated, combined with the India General Service Medal is now getting quite scarce. His papers were available in the Public Record Office and showed that he served for over 20 years. Could

he be entitled to a Long Service & Good Conduct Medal as well? On reading further into the documents I quickly realised that Davis was going to be one of those soldiers who would be "Excused Long Service & Good Conduct Medal".

Richard Davis was born in Westport, Co. Mayo, Ireland, in July 1828. He enlisted into the 19th Foot on February 3, 1848 at Westport, his trade on enlistment was given as Labourer and after being attested he was allocated the Regimental No. 2353. Following recruit training at the Regimental Depot Davis served in Ireland with the Depot Companies. Richard Davis would not have been the only Irishman in the battalion. Various accounts suggest that the 19th consisted of about 50 per cent Irish recruits during this period, indeed the Depot was often moved to Ireland in order to aid recruiting when the Battalion was posted abroad. It was not until much later that Regiments were allocated specific recruiting areas with fixed Regimental Depots.

The 1st Battalion was stationed in Canada during this period, part of a large body of troops stationed there to discourage the movements for annexation by the United States. Richard Davis was posted to Quebec, this was probably in July 1850 as his papers show him serving only four months in North America. Davis served in the 1st Battalion with no problems until October 4, 1850, when he deserted, along with three others, Laurence Gavis, James Harris and Peter Quinn. It is probable that the lure of getting to the United States was the driving force behind the attempt. This was a period of mass migration by the Irish to America and being so close you can image the attraction for Davis and his contemporaries. Unfortunately for them they were captured the next day and imprisoned awaiting trial.

All four of them were tried by General Court Martial on October 30, 1850, and Richard Davis and Harris were sentenced to 336 days hard labour as well as being branded with the letter "D". Davis also had all his former service and Good Conduct pay forfeited. Peter Quinn was probably thought of as the ringleader of the attempt as he was also branded but sentenced to 504 days hard labour.

Richard Davis was released back to the 19th Regiment on October 1, 1851. At that time the Battalion was stationed back in England in the West Country, having returned to England in June 1851. Davis seemed to have settled down and served with the Battalion without serious problems for the next few years.

In May 1852 the Battalion moved to Winchester and while there provided the escort at the Duke of Wellington's funeral at St Paul's Cathedral. During this period units stationed in England were moved fairly regularly, but in 1853 the 19th were moved at very short notice to Weymouth and Gosport after a near riot between them and the 38th Foot (North Staffordshire Regiment).

The 1st Battalion 19th Regiment was stationed in the Tower of London from February 1854 until they were sent to Turkey as part of the combined British and French Expeditionary Force to help Turkey in the war against Russia. They left England in the Transport SS Varnai on April 17, landing at Scutari in Turkey on May 10, 1854. They were then moved within a fortnight to Varna in what is now Bulgaria. Along with the rest of the Expeditionary Force they suffered appalling conditions for the next four months. During this period the combined force lost 10,000 casualties to disease, mainly cholera and typhoid. A contemporary account by Margaret Kerwin, one of the few wives who accompanied the Regiment records:

*"The men were dying so fast from Cholera, and what they called the Black Fever, that they had to be buried in their blankets. We moved then up country, and no sooner were we gone than the Turks opened up the graves and took the blankets from around the dead men. We were then ordered to bury them without any covering, except brambles and branches we picked up."*

During the delay in Varna Davis was again in trouble and June 27 saw him confined awaiting trial for theft along with George Crofford. They were tried by General Court Martial on July 4, 1854 and this time Davis was sentenced to be flogged. The sentence of the court was 50 lashes each. This was duly carried out and he was released on July 5 back to the regiment.

The 19th finally landed in the Crimea on September 14 at Calamita Bay. As usual the landing was an administrative nightmare with the men landing without much of their kit and only a blanket between them and the elements. Their knapsacks containing their personal kit were ordered to be left on board ship and when finally landed were found to have been looted. This lack of administrative support has been subsequently contrasted harshly against the French landings which were much more organised and controlled. After a few skirmishes the army marched on Sebastopol.

The first major battle of the war was on September 20 when the army crossed the Alma River and attacked the prepared Russian positions on the heights above.

What happened to the 19th during the battle was very confused, even accounts by those who were there differ greatly. What is clear is that everyone was weary and orders from the General Staff confusing. By 10am the 19th formed up on the right flank of 2 Brigade, which was on the left of the Light Division. At 11am the army was halted while a conference of the Allied Commanders was held. At 1 o'clock the armies moved forward again. As the battalion moved into line there was a great deal of confusion on the right where other units had converged. The British assault waited for the French to succeed in their objective and the men had to lay down in their ranks, suffering 90 minutes of hammering from the Russian guns on the heights above. Finally the order came to attack and everyone moved towards the river, through vineyards, over walls, climbing banks and taking casualties all the time. Eventually

the river was reached and into it they all plunged. Units became a confused mass, with troops trying to keep their weapons and ammunition dry by holding them over their heads. Many drowned, stepping into deep holes in the riverbed. Having crossed the river the brigade was halted as clear orders still had not been issued to the Brigade Commanders. The 19th were so mixed up with

Codrington's Brigade they never received the order and carried on to attack the feature the British had named the Great Redoubt. In the confused fighting, with the ground swept with roundshot, grape and canister from the redoubt, groups of soldiers were urged on by whatever officers were left standing. Taking heavy casualties the Brigade, with most of the 19th attached to it took the Great Redoubt.

Codrington managed to regain control of the scattered units to try and repel the inevitable Russian counter attack from the 10,000 Russian infantry which were still grouped round the position. The attack was not long in coming. During the confused fighting an unknown officer (not of the 19th) ordered the "Retire" to be blown. Many queried the order but eventually a retreat started which left the Russians in possession of the Redoubt once again.

Behind the Light Division in support was the 1st Division composed of a Brigade of Highlanders and a Guards Brigade. They were at last ordered forward, but too late to relieve the retiring units. They started to climb the hill into the attack, up the slope covered with nearly 1,000 Light Division casualties. Following the wounding of Colonel Sanders, Lt-Col Unett rallied what was left of the 19th and followed the Guards back up the hill in support. The Russians retired leaving the battlefield to the Allies. The survivors of the 19th stayed on the top of the hill for the night, scavenging Russian knapsacks for food.

It took two more days to clear the battlefield of the last of the wounded and to bury the dead. Richard Davis was among the wounded. His papers record that he was severely wounded in the mouth during the battle. Bearing in mind the pitiful state of the army medical service in the Crimea, it seems amazing that Davis not only managed to survive but was back with the 19th in time to be at the Battle of Inkerman on November 5. The 19th took little part in the actual fighting in Inkerman, being kept in reserve. This was borne out by their very low casualty figures of only five killed, one of whom was the Regimental Sergeant Major.

Richard Davis spent the next two years in the Crimea besieging Sebastopol and taking part in the numerous attacks to try and storm the city. During this time the Army suffered massive casualties due to the incompetence of the commanders and the lack of medical and other support services. The incompetence of the General Staff and Commissariat has been much written about and I will not dwell on it here. Davis appears to have come through this unscathed despite his earlier wound and is listed in the Green Howards Gazette in the 1890s as one of only about 190 men of the Regiment who spent the whole campaign in the Crimea from September 1854 until returning home in June 1856. Davis had by then seen the error of his ways and was awarded one penny per day Good Conduct pay on October 8, 1856.

Their time in England was short as the Indian Mutiny was raging and in July 1857 the 1st Battalion was sent to India as reinforcements, landing in Calcutta in November. During the time they had been at sea on passage, the Mutiny had all but been suppressed and the Battalion was only engaged in the latter stages, guarding prisoners or pursuing bands of mutineers. They did not qualify for the Indian Mutiny Medal.

On June 26, 1858 Davis forfeited his hard won Good Conduct pay, but had it restored a year later. He was awarded twopence per day Good Conduct pay on January 26, 1861. Whatever he had done before was forgiven and he was allowed to re-engage for a second term on June 11, 1861.

What is not so well known is that up to this period the soldiers had to make their own arrangements to move their families between postings. This led to great hardship among the families, for example in May 1861 the Lahore Chronicle reported great distress amongst the families of the 19th who had just moved to Meerut from Cawnpore, a move of 700 miles. The journey apparently took nearly three months by bullock cart which had to be hired at 15 rupees a month, while the allowance for a wife was only 5 rupees a month. As troops were moved around cantonments every year or so, and sometimes more often, this must have caused a great deal of financial hardship to the soldier with a family.

The Battalion was moved to Delhi in February 1862, but later in the year moved to Nowshera in modern Pakistan. Davis managed to survive the cholera epidemic which swept the regiment in the summer of 1862. The history of the regiment records that less than 50 per cent of the 144 men, women and children who caught the disease survived. They lost 64 men, two women and five children.

Davis was awarded Good Conduct pay at threepence per day on January 16, 1864. Davis's good conduct paid off and on February 10, 1864, he had all his forfeited service restored. He was awarded Good Conduct pay at fourpence per day on February 7, 1867.

This peaceful existence was soon to be shattered as the 19th were ordered to join an expedition against the Hazara Tribes on the North West Frontier. The cause was an attack by the tribesmen on a police post. This led to reprisals and the inevitable full scale insurrection. Surprising as it may seem this was the 19th's first real brush with warfare on the North West frontier. The 19th did not see much action during the expedition but learnt a lot about frontier warfare and having to live and march in the harsh Indian hot season.

The climax of the campaign was an assault onto the summit of the Black Mountain. This involved a climb of 10,000 feet through rugged country, much of it covered in dense forest. Two days after setting out, the column reached its objective. Despite holding the upper slopes in superior numbers the sight of the Green Howards and 2nd Gurkhas coming up the slope towards them caused the tribesmen to reconsider their position and they drifted away. Having proved to the tribes that their

hill fortresses were not impregnable the column returned to base. It is recorded that there was no further trouble in the Black Mountains for another 20 years.

Richard Davis took part in the Black Hills expedition against the Hazara Tribes with the Battalion in 1868 and was awarded the India General Service Medal 1854 with North West Frontier clasp to go with his Crimea medals.

He again forfeited one penny of his Good Conduct pay on December 22, 1868.

On November 4, 1869, a Regimental Board was convened at Rawalpindi under Lt Col Chippendall to enquire whether Davis was owed, or did owe any pay before he was sent back to England. Davis was returned to England after spending almost 12 years in India. He was restored Good Conduct pay at fourpence on December 22, 1869.

His service record continued at the Depot from November 5, 1869 to February 16, 1870. He was discharged on March 16, 1870. His conduct on discharge was described as "Very Good" despite having a record of 35 entries in the Regimental Defaulters book, having been tried twice by General Court Martial, flogged and branded with the letter "D" for desertion. His intended place of residence was Netley near Southampton.

I have subsequently tried to find him in the census returns to see what happened to him after he left the Army, unfortunately to no avail. It may be that he returned to Ireland, but I often wonder if he managed to emigrate to America so many years after trying to desert to get there.

I leave it up to the reader to decide on whether Davis was one of the "Queen's Bad Bargains" or if he was just an average soldier of the time. Despite his troubles and many faults Davis served his country for over 22 years in many different countries, and even after being court martialled twice was considered reliable enough to serve for a second term in the army.

Sources:-

The Green Howards Gazettes.

POWELL, Geoffrey, History of the Green Howards.

Public Record Office.