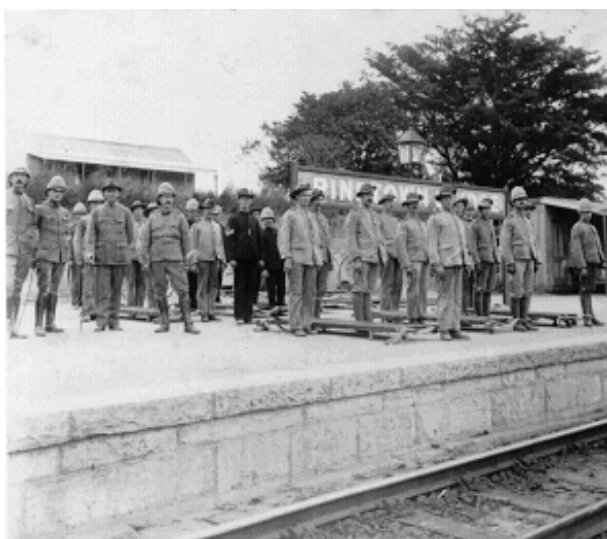


The Medals for South Africa and China 1899-1902

The St. John Ambulance Brigade in the South African War

The South African, or Boer war (1899–1902) was fought between Britain and the Boer South Africans. It was the culmination of longstanding tensions between the British and Boer leaders who were each seeking to exert their influence in Southern Africa.

As a trained, uniformed body of men and woman, one of the original aims of St. John Ambulance was to form a medical reserve for the Armed Forces in the event of war. In 1898, a discussion between the War Office and the recognised voluntary agencies had led to arrangements under which the British Red Cross agreed to deal with fundraising, the Order of St. John would organise the receipt and despatch of ambulance material and provide trained men to supplement the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), and offers of help by trained nurses would be dealt with by Princess Christian's Army Nursing Service Reserve. This arrangement was quickly to be tested when the South African War broke out in October, 1899.



Medical orderlies waiting on a railway platform for casualties at Pinetown Bridge

Under the Chief Commissioner, Colonel Bowdler, and the Chief Superintendent, William Church Brasier, the Brigade responded almost at once. The first notice appeared on 3 November 1899 and called for volunteers who were to be unmarried, aged 21 to 35, over 5 feet 6 inches in height and of good physique. Perfect health was demanded with fair eyesight and serviceable teeth. Character had to be exemplary and habits temperate! Field uniform was provided

for each man consisting of two khaki suits, one serge suit, one greatcoat, one worsted cap, two towels together with eating and toilet equipment and kit bag. In addition, each man was expected to supply for himself two sets of underwear, two flannel shirts, four pairs of socks, one pair of strong laced boots with spare laces, canvas shoes and Brigade uniform.

By 13 November, the first 23 men had arrived for kitting out at St. John's Gate and embarked for South Africa on 21st November. They were followed by over 1800 men, about one fifth of the total strength of the Brigade. As all were volunteers, some Brigade divisions and Corps provided more men than others and the largest contingents over 100 men each came from London, Oldham and Bolton. In Oldham, 128 of the 226 members of the Ambulance Division were enlisted. These men usually signed on for periods of six months and served in a variety of posts including General, Stationary and Field Hospitals as well as Hospital Ships and Trains. They worked as stretcher bearers, orderlies, wardmasters, clerks and dispensers and were paid on RAMC scales. One quarter of the



Litter Ambulance from hospital



Memorial to the men who lost their lives, from the Grand Priory Church, Clerkenwell (destroyed in the Second World War)

medical Orderlies serving in South Africa were St. John men. To their regret, however, the women Nursing members of the Brigade were not employed overseas, but many were involved in the despatch of supplies throughout the war.

Over 60 St. John men lost their lives on active service, particularly to enteric fever, typhoid and dysentery which raged among the troops.

The Order of St. John Medal

At a meeting of the Chapter-General held on St. John's Day 1900, a suggestion that the Order of St. John should issue a medal to commemorate the service of the Brigade members was approved. Power to do this was conferred on the Order by its Royal Charter of 1888.

Designed by Emil Fuchs MVO, the medal is struck in bronze and 1½ inches in diameter. It hangs from a 1¼ inch ribbon of unwatered black edged white which is attached through a straight suspender. On the obverse is a bust of King Edward VII with the inscription EDWARDUS VII D.G. BRIT. REX. F.D. IND IMP. [Edward VII by the Grace of God King of Britain, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India]

The reverse shows in the centre a shield bearing the pre 1926 version of the arms of the Order superimposed upon the eight-pointed cross of the Order with a sprig of St. John's wort on either side. Above are the words SOUTH AFRICA 1899-1902 and below are the mottoes of the Order, PRO FIDE PRO UTILITATE HOMINUM [For the Faith; in the Service of Mankind]. Within a border surrounding the whole are the words MAGNUS PRIORATUS ORDINIS HOSPITALIS SANCTI JOHANNIS JERUSALEM IN ANGLIA [The Grand Priory of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in England].



South African war medal, awarded to Private F. Fields, Dewsbury Corps

1800 men were awarded the medal. It was awarded to every man who had served with the Brigade in South Africa and, additionally, to a number of those who had been

concerned in this country with the mobilisation of stores. Therefore, it is usually found paired with the Queen's South Africa Medal (see below) but it is possible for it to be found alone. An official medal, worn on the left breast, it was worn after the Service Medal of the Order.

The Queen's South Africa Medal

Every man who served with the Brigade in South Africa also received the official campaign medal in the same way as all the other forces involved. Of silver, the Queen's South Africa Medal bears on the obverse the bust of Queen Victoria with the words VICTORIA REGINA ET IMPERATRIX [Victoria Queen and Empress]. On the reverse is the figure of Britannia holding a wreath extended towards a party of marching troops. Above are the words SOUTH AFRICA. It hangs from a ribbon which has an orange centre separated from red edges by blue stripes and is attached by a straight suspender. Each one is officially impressed on the rim with the number, rank, initials and name of the recipient followed by the unit ST.JOHN AMB:BDE. Only two ranks were used: Orderly and Supernumerary Officer, the latter being equivalent to Sergeant.



Queen's South Africa Medal, awarded to Orderly H. Maltby

A number of clasps were issued with this medal to indicate participation in the various campaigns, but many St. John men received these later than their medal so they are often found loose on the ribbon rather than being attached. The commonest clasps appear to be those for Cape Colony, Orange Free State and Natal, but none are rare.

The King's South Africa Medal

Also of silver, this medal is identical to the Queen's South Africa except that it bears on the obverse the bust of King Edward VII instead of Queen Victoria and hangs from a ribbon of green white and orange in equal thirds. It was awarded to all those who had served for at least eighteen months in South Africa and so it is a very rare award to St. John Ambulance Brigade men as most members served only one six month contract. In fact, only 12 men received it.

The China 1900 Medal

Members of the St. John Ambulance Brigade served as orderlies on the Hospital Ship *MAINE*, which was a gift from American citizens to the British Army. After being used on the run from England to South Africa, the ship was used on a single journey to China to bring home wounded from the campaign against the "Boxers". This qualified the crew for the China Medal 1900 without clasp.

The medal is of silver and bears on the obverse the same bust of Queen Victoria as was used for the South Africa Medal. On the reverse is a trophy of arms in front of a palm tree with the words *ARMIS EXPOSCERE PACE* above and the words *CHINA 1900* on the exergue below. The ribbon is red with yellow edges and is attached by a straight suspender.

Only 11 members of the St. John Ambulance Brigade served on the *MAINE* as orderlies and received the China Medal. All had previously qualified for the Queen's South Africa Medal, whether aboard *MAINE* or elsewhere.



The Hospital Ship Maine