

## The Man behind the Medal

### A.W. Oliver

QSA – Pte. A.W. Oliver IMP Lt Infantry No. 659 – *bars Tugela Heights, Relief of Ladysmith, Transvaal, South Africa 1901;*

1914-15 WW1 Star – S.S.M. AW Oliver, 1<sup>st</sup> S.A.H.;

WW1 War Medal – C.S.M. AW Oliver, S.A.N.L.C.;

WW1 Victory Medal (bi-lingual) – C.S.M. AW Oliver, S.A.N.L.C.;

QSA (re-named) – Sgt A.W. Oliver 1<sup>st</sup> J.M.R. No. 400 – *bars Tugela Heights, Relief of Ladysmith, Transvaal*



In 2002 I bought a Queen's South Africa medal (Boer War/South African War 1899-1902 medal issued to all Colonial Forces who fought against the Boers), with no clasps to Private. A.W. Oliver, Regimental number 659. It was listed as him having seen service during the 'Boer War' with the Imperial Light Infantry. On researching the above, by obtaining the Regimental Roll for the Imperial Light Infantry, I established that there was an A.W. Oliver who was entitled to three bars – Transvaal, Tugela Heights and Relief of Ladysmith. With those bars, and with the Imperial Light Infantry having been in action at the Battle of Spioen Kop, I put in an offer on the medal. Being a Liverpool supporter, and having been born on 24 January, medals to anyone who might have been at the Battle of Spioen Kop, are for me, a 'no-brainer'.

Being successful with my bid, I now had to find the relevant bars associated with my medal. This I did when I bought a damaged medal with the needed bars. I then arranged for those bars to be removed from that medal, and placed on my medal to Oliver – who was now 're-united' with his deserved bars.

***End of story .....*** not quite.

I then, as I normally do, consulted the 'Boer War Casualty Roll 1899 – 1902' and found the following entry:

*Oliver 562 Pte, Wnd Spion Kop 24/01/00 Imp L I*

Absolute disappointment – the regimental numbers were different – 659 on my medal and 562 in the Casualty Roll.



I did further research on the rolls (including the complementary rolls), of the Imperial Light Infantry, and found that there were two Oliver's who served with the Regiment during the Boer War:

659 Private A.W. Oliver, *and*  
1342 Private Alfred Oliver

So, where did the 'Casualty Roll' get an Oliver with the Regimental number 562? On 'digging deeper' I found that the regimental number of 562, which was associated with the wounded Oliver at Spioen Kop (in the Casualty Roll), was in fact the regimental number of a certain W.C.I. Brock. So, when recording the wounded soldier, did the medical orderlies mistake Oliver for Brock, or 659 for 562?

I was now starting to wonder whether I had the medal to the soldier wounded at Spioen Kop on 24 January 1900 or not?



*A British Soldier buried where he fell on the slopes of Spioen Kop*

**End of story .....**again, not quite.

In 2004, on another auction, I spotted a group of four medals to an A.W. Oliver – a Queen's South Africa medal with four bars (Tugela Heights, Relief of Ladysmith, Transvaal and South Africa 1901), together with a World War 1 trio. What was of interest to me was that Oliver's service during the South African War (1899-1902) was listed as having been with the Johannesburg Mounted Rifles, and his regimental number was given as 400.

The story that accompanied the group said – "*Albert William Oliver, a bricklayer, attested with the 1<sup>st</sup> S.A. Lt. Horse on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1915, aged 35 years. After serving in East Africa he was discharged, as medically unfit, on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1916, with a total service of 243 days, his military character being reflected as "very good". He subsequently attested again with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion South African Labour Contingent on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1916 with the rank of Col. Sgt. and served in France from November 1916 until his repatriation to South Africa in October 1917. His service documents do not reflect any service in GSWA. The issue of the WW1 trio including the 1914-15 Star are confirmed. The QSA medal rolls held at the PRO confirm his entitlement to a QSA medal*



*with the four bars as listed. A scarce 1914-15 Star for East Africa. Worthy of further research. (QSA renamed, date bar loose)."*

On reading the copy of the 'Roll of Individuals entitled to the South African Medal and Clasp', that I had for 659 A.W. Oliver, in the 'Remarks' column was written 'J.M. Rifles' – Johannesburg Mounted Rifles. On the documentation that accompanied the lot that I had acquired (research supplied by Winifred Scott), it was confirmed that Oliver was with the Imperial Light Infantry (Regimental Number 659) and that he then served with the Johannesburg Mounted Rifles. On his Attestation Form (Army Form B.217), when he attested for service in German East Africa at the outbreak of World War 1, he listed previous service as being with 'Imperial Light Infantry, Johannesburg Mounted Rifles, and the South African Horse'.

In October 1916, when he enlisted for service in France, he gave his age as 35 years and 9 months. This would make his date of birth as probably being January 1881. He stated that he was born in Durban, but had moved to Johannesburg as his address in 1916 was given as being in Turffontein. Did he lose his QSA and then rename another medal to complete his Group? Did the person who first bought his WW1 trio, through research, establish that he was entitled to the QSA, and to complete the Group add a renamed QSA to the trio they had just bought? We will probably never know.



*Graves to British Soldiers on Spioen Kop*

I have the group filed with my other Spioen Kop casualties. Am I taking a chance, as I can't get to the bottom of the 'Boer War Casualty Roll 1899-1902' recording the wounded Oliver at Spioen Kop as having the Regimental number of 562? I am happy that the medal roll (referred to above) is correct, and that the Casualty Roll has an error. I now have a 'confirmed' Group of medals – and a renamed QSA – and I am sure there are many around.

This is what (I believe) medal collecting is all about.

**REMEMBER** to keep an eye on our website ([www.battletoursza.com](http://www.battletoursza.com)) - our blog has regular posts on Anniversaries / Battles / Activities / Births & Deaths / etc.

**Allan Gordon**