

Best Shot of Victorian Military Forces Medal

Michael Downey wrote about the Best Shot Medal for the Victorian Military Forces in the April/June 1986 issue of Sabretache¹. This article simply expands on Michael's information with recently discovered details of the recipients, as well as clarifying some confusing issues.



Zebina Lane's First of Five Best Shot Medals

Source: Museum Victoria / Photographer: Jennifer McNair

In the 1800s skill in civilian rifle shooting was encouraged by the Victorian colonial government with musketry competitions. The government provided rifle ranges, funding, arms, ammunition and rail travel vouchers to and from practise etc. The aim was to ensure that a large number of trained men were available in the event of the colony facing an external threat.

At the same time, skill in musketry in the permanent forces and militias, was fostered by encouraging excellence with various rewards such as badges, medals and trophies.

Men in the full time and part time naval and military forces were required to undertake the trained-soldier musketry course.

This course included²:-

- Firing over five distances
- An Advance and Attack course
- Volley firing from 400 to 500 yards
- Firing five shots within 50 seconds at 200 and 300 yards
- Firing ten shots at 500 and 600 yards from any position

Any man who achieved a score of 120 or more, out of a possible score of 220, was classed as a marksman and received a Marksman Badge. The man with the highest score in the company received a Best Shot in the Company Badge, while the best shot in the regiment received a Best Shot in the Regiment Badge. These badges were worn on the left arm for the year following their award. The Sergeant of the best shooting company was awarded the Best Shooting Company Badge which was worn on the sergeant's right arm.



Marksman Badge

Photo: AWM/06892



Best Shot in Company Badge

Photo: AWM REL/12646



Best Shot in Regiment Badge

Photo: www.diggerhistory.info



Best Shooting Company Badge

Photo: www.diggerhistory.info

Trained-Soldier Musketry Course Badges

Although winners were announced prior to the musketry year of 1892-3, there does not appear to have been any special badge for the best shot in the Victorian Naval and Military Forces. This oversight was rectified when the man achieving the highest score of all military participants in the colony, received the locally designed and struck silver medal, known as the Best Shot of the Victorian Military Forces Medal. This medal was awarded annually from 1892-3 until 1900-1. It was worn on the right breast on all occasions in uniform until the following year's medal had been issued³. Although nine medals are recorded as having been presented, there were in fact only five recipients. Zebina Lane won the medal five times while Edwin Jewell, G. Hawthorn, C. Pierd and Con Burrow won it once each.

The Best Shot medal has the same obverse as the Type II Victoria Volunteer Long and Efficient Service medal. The simplified stars of the Southern Cross are on a plain cross with the motto, *Pro Deo et Patria* (For God & Country), in the garter surmounted with a crown. The words Local Forces Victoria surround the central design elements. Whereas the Long Service medal bears the words "FOR LONG AND EFFICIENT SERVICE" on its reverse, the Best Shot medal instead has the words "BEST SHOT OF VICT. MILITARY FORCES" on its reverse. Whereas the Long Service medal has a small scroll below the words, the Best Shot medal has the scroll above the words, so as to leave room for a date to be engraved at the bottom of the medal. The Best Shot medal has a blue ribbon and the Type II suspender.

Inconsistent Dating

Two of the three known Best Shot medals have the recipient's name, rank and unit impressed on their rim. Sergeant Zebina Lane's first of five Best Shot medals has the date 1893-4 engraved on its reverse. Some confusion has been caused by Lance-Corporal Edwin Jewell's medal having the date 1894 engraved on its reverse. From newspaper reports⁴ we know that Edwin Jewell won his medal for the 1892-3 musketry year. A possible explanation as to why Edwin Jewell's medal was dated 1894, is that the Type II dies were not ready to be used until the 30th of April 1894.⁵ When Edwin Jewell was presented with his medal in May 1894, it was presumably incorrectly engraved with the current year's date by mistake.

The Godfrey Medal

Although two of the three known Best Shot medals were impressed & engraved, the third known medal, which was last sold at auction in 2006, has no markings. As this third medal was obtained from the Godfrey family, it was assumed to have been awarded to James J. Godfrey of the Queenscliffe Battery. However, the winners of the Best Shot medal have been identified for every musketry year from 1892-3 up to 1900-1, and there is no mention in the press of anyone named Godfrey winning the best shot medal. It is therefore more likely that the "Godfrey medal" was either an unissued medal, which would explain its lack of markings, or that it was actually awarded to one of the five known winners, and not to James Godfrey.

Best Shot Medal Winners			
Musketry Year	Winner	Details	Score
1892-3	Edwin C. Jewell ⁶	Impressed – EDWIN C. JEWELL, LANCE CORPORAL, "F" COY. VICT. RANGERS. Engraved – 1894. ⁷	184/220 ⁸
1893-4	Zebina Lane	Impressed – ZABINA LANE, SERGT. "B" COY. VICT. RANGERS. Engraved – 1893-94. ⁹	
1894-5	Zebina Lane	Sergeant "B" Company Victorian Rangers. ¹⁰	
1895-6	Zebina Lane	Sergeant "B" Company Victorian Rangers. ¹¹	199/220
1896-7	Zebina Lane	Sergeant "B" Company, St Arnaud Rangers. ¹²	207/220
1897-8	G. Hawthorn	No. 1625, Private, 2nd Battalion Mounted Rifles. ¹³ Kerang Detachment, I Company, Mounted Rifles. ¹⁴	201/220
1898-9	Zebina Lane	Sergeant "B" Company Victorian Rangers. ¹⁵	200/220
1899-1900	C. Pierd	Sergeant, Rosedale section of the Rangers. ¹⁶	
1900-1	Con Burrow ¹⁷	Colour Sergeant, 3rd Battalion. Ballarat. ¹⁸	



Zebina Lane (Shown in 1900, aged 70)

Not only did Sergeant Lane win the Best Shot Medal five times, his 1896-7 score of 207 was the highest of the known winning scores. Zebina won his last medal in 1898-9 at the age of 69, six years before suffering a stroke in 1904, and his death two years later.

Photo: *The Australasian*, 21 July 1900



Edwin Campbell Jewell

Served in the 1st Victorian Contingent in the Boer War. Corporal Jewell fell ill on board the *Medic* & was hospitalised in Cape Town.¹⁹ He was invalided home to Australia in 1900 and awarded a pension.²⁰

Photo: Ancestry.com



Arthur Charles (Con) Burrow (Shown in 1884)

Joined the Grenadier Guards aged eleven as a drummer boy in 1868. Served in the Egyptian campaign & was present at the Battle of Tel-el-Kebir. Served as an Instructional Sergeant-Major with the Victorian Military Forces, mainly with the 3rd Battalion in Ballarat. Returned to Britain & completed 21 years with the Grenadier Guards. Re-joined the 3rd Battalion in Victoria in 1889 & won a number of musketry competitions. Served in the Great War as Drill Instructor for the Home Defence Corps.²¹

Photo: Argus Newspaper Collection of Photographs, *State Library of Victoria*.

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- ¹ *Sabretache, the Journal & Proceedings of The Military Historical Society of Australia*, Volume XXVII, No. 2, April/June 1986, page 25.
- ² *Bendigo Advertiser*, 8 June 1901.
- ³ *Victorian Government Gazette*, 17 August 1894. page 3378
- ⁴ *The Argus*, 11 May 1894, page 5.
- ⁵ *The Victoria Volunteer Long and Efficient Service Medal 1881-1901*, R.D.Williams, Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1976.
- ⁶ *The Argus*, 11 May 1894, page 5.
- ⁷ *Sabretache, the Journal & Proceedings of The Military Historical Society of Australia*, Volume XXVII, No. 2, April/June 1986, page 25.
- ⁸ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 8 February 1894, page 2.
- ⁹ Museum Victoria.
- ¹⁰ *Mornington Standard*, 30 May 1895, page 3.
- ¹¹ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 12 December 1896, page 3.
- ¹² *The Mafra Spectator*, 1 April 1897, page 3.
- ¹³ *Bairnsdale Advertiser & Tambo & Omeo Chronicle*, 20 August 1898, page 2.
- ¹⁴ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 19 May 1898, page 3.
- ¹⁵ *Williamstown Chronicle*, 11 August 1899.
- ¹⁶ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 20 July 1901, page 6.
- ¹⁷ *The Ballarat District Citizens & Sports 1916* by M. M. McCallum, Tulloch & King, Ballarat, on page 17 lists Con Burrow as winning the Best Shot of the Victorian Military Forces for the years 1900-2. *The Argus* of 6 June 1902 only lists him as the Best Shot in the Battalion. It is likely that the Victorian Military Forces Best Shot medal was discontinued after federation.
- ¹⁸ *The Argus*, 1 November 1901, page 9.
- ¹⁹ *Table Talk*, 11 January 1900, page 5.
- ²⁰ Boer War Nominal Roll, Australian War Memorial.
- ²¹ *The Ballarat District Citizens & Sports 1916* by M. M. McCallum, Tulloch & King, Ballarat, on page 17

The author is keen to learn further information of any of the Best Shot Medal recipients. John@JohnRogers.com.au
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