

Basic Detail Report



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Title

New South Wales Naval Brigade officer's sword :
Lieutenant Staunton William Spain

Date

c 1890

Primary Maker

New South Wales Naval Brigade

Medium

Steel, bronze, gilt thread, fish-skin (shagreen)

Dimensions

Overall: 880 x 140 x 85 mm, 0.66 kg Display Dimensions: 880 x 140 x 85 mm, 660 kg

Name

Sword

History

The naval officer's sword symbolises the pomp of naval officers' dress and are an important ceremonial aspect of naval life. By the mid-nineteenth century, cutlers and manufacturers were active in many English industrial centres, notably Birmingham. The weapons were designed exclusively for use at sea and developed in the late eighteenth century, with the Royal Navy producing the first regulation sword pattern in 1905. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, these regulations were regularly revised. Officers usually carried swords when landed, and many preferred to maintain two swords: one for ceremonial use, and one for combat. By the early twentieth-century, swords were seldom used during boarding action, but were retained for ceremonial and presentation use. The NSW Naval Brigade was formed in 1863 of volunteers, many of them time-expired Royal Navy men, led by one paid commanding officer. By 1864, five companies of naval volunteers (four in Sydney and one in Newcastle) had been formed. The Brigade numbered over 300 men by the mid 1870s. The Brigade had few vessels: three gunboats were built in Sydney in 1863, four schooners were built in 1873, and two torpedo vessels were purchased in 1878. One commentator disparagingly remarked in 1882: 'they rarely, if ever, drill in daylight, and have never exercised afloat. The force, at present, if of no value for service afloat, and is not really a Naval Brigade'. The Brigade was sent to China in 1900 in response to the Boxer Uprising. Often called the Boxer Rebellion, the uprising began when a Chinese sect known as the Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists started agitating against Western colonial influences in the late nineteenth century. In 1900, the Society, having gained popular support in northern China, attacked Western outposts in Beijing and Tianjin. In response, European and Japanese forces combined to form the Eight Nation Alliance. They

brought 20,000 troops to China and suppressed the uprising in September 1901. Australia provided a contingent of several hundred troops from its colonial navies, primarily from the New South Wales and Victorian Naval Brigades. The NSW Naval Brigade Force, consisting of twenty officers and 242 men, all volunteers, departed Sydney on the 8th of August 1900 on the troopship SS SALAMIS. The ship arrived at Taku on the 9th of September, having missed the bulk of the action. The force undertook garrison duty in Beijing, primarily police and fire patrol work, before their relief in March 1901. The returned to Sydney in April 1901 on the SS CHINGTU. Lieutenant William Staunton Spain was born on the 9th February 1865. He achieved the rank of Midshipman in 1888, Sub-Lieutenant in 1891, and Lieutenant in 1900. Spain commanded the D-Company during the Boxer Uprising. During the campaign, Spain commanded the fleet of junks carrying baggage up the Pei Hoi River to Peking in October of 1900. Spain took a camera with him to China, and 'his photographs provide a visual record of the duties carried out by members of the NSW Naval Brigade'. After his return to Australia, Spain was made an honorary member of the 'Military Order of the Dragon', a society founded in New York 'to record the history and conserve the memory of the military campaign in China' Spain received the rank of Commander in the Royal Australian Navy in June 1918.