

George Medal to go on sale this week

A George Medal, valued at £2,500 to £4,000, belonging to Lt. James Masson of the Highland Light Infantry who served with Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders will be sold at auction this week at Lyon & Turnbull's saleroom.

The George Medal was awarded to Lt. James Masson in 1936 when a suspicious suitcase had been left in the waiting room of Jerusalem Railway Station. Masson was joined by Sergeant Smith of the Palestine Police, an ex Royal Marine. Smith and Masson discovered that it was a bomb. Together they removed the suitcase from the building, carrying it out into the car park.

Smith then did a very remarkable and courageous thing. He ordered everyone out of harm's way, saying that he would tackle it himself, and that there was no sense in anyone else getting hurt if things went wrong. When Jimmy Masson protested, Smith said that though he may be the senior, but that Masson had dealt with the last booby trap and now it was his turn. Sadly, something went wrong, and the suitcase blew up with tremendous force. Smith was killed instantly; all the others – and the innocent people in the station were safe.

The George Medal is accompanied by other items of Masson's military career including his World War 2 service medals, various, his Glengarry with regimental badge, an Infantry Roll book. There is also his service and pay books, photographs of Masson and his regiment whilst in Jerusalem and Palestine. Documents include, citations, letters of awards and congratulatory letters.

In David Wilson's book – The Sum of Things he writes: "We had an excellent Pioneer Platoon Commander, James Masson, who quite irregularly (It was well outside his normal duties)

became an expert in sniffing out and dismantling bombs and booby traps of all sorts. He was joined by a Sergeant Smith of the Palestine Police, an ex Royal Marine, together they did a remarkable job and they must have saved many lives.”

“When I had the full report I decided that I would put in Smith for a George Cross. This is not an easy process. As for the Victoria Cross you need three independent witnesses to submit statements, but these we had. I submitted the dossier through Nicol Gray, the Head of the Palestine Police and a highly decorated Royal Marine commando in his day. perhaps I am not much good at writing citations; Smith got a posthumous King’s Service medal for Gallantry, in the Colonial Police Services the next highest award; Jimmy Masson received the George Medal which was nearly unique among the Argylls. It can be sometimes easy to be brave when the blood is up and battle on, but the cold-blooded courage of dealing alone with booby traps and high explosive is something very special. It was a privilege to have known such men “