

# Leith war hero's medal goes up for auction

A bravery medal awarded to an heroic Scottish World War II stretcher bearer who saved up to four wounded comrades' lives in the middle of a minefield, is expected to fetch up to £1,200 at auction on Thursday.

The Military Medal was won by Private John Bell of the Highland Light Infantry for his actions in battle at Boersteeg, near the German Border, on 8 February 1945.

Pte Bell, from Leith, Edinburgh, was one of five stretcher men severely wounded in mine blasts after two had initially gone to help an injured German soldier.

He suffered multiple injuries but went from man to man administering life saving aid and ensured each one was carried to safety before he accepted aid for his own wounds.

Bell, 32, who also came under enemy fire, was praised for acting "with complete disregard for his own safety", knowing each step in the minefield could be his last.

Bell's Military Medal, presented to him by Field Marshal Montgomery, is among the highlights in Bonhams' online Spring Home & Interiors Sale, which runs until tomorrow [THURS MARCH 21].

The silver medal, inscribed "for bravery in the field", is presented together with a letter of congratulations signed by King George VI at Buckingham Palace.

Bell's Second World War and Defence medals, France and Germany star and 1939-45 star are also included.

Kenneth Naples, of Bonhams, said: "Private Bell's Military Medal is evidence of his extreme bravery and selflessness on the battlefield.

"Bell and the other stretcher bearers went to the aid of a German soldier deep in a minefield and were wounded themselves.

"Despite his own injuries, and the obvious dangers all around, Bell dressed their wounds and ensured they were all safely evacuated before he accepted assistance for his own wounds.

"This medal will appeal to many collectors, fascinated by such stories of heroism."

Pte Bell's citation reads: "During the attack on Boersteeg on the morning of February 8, 1945, two stretcher bearers went to pick up a wounded German lying near the railway track. In doing so, one of them stepped on a mine, severely wounding both.

"Private Bell and the remaining company stretcher-bearer at once went to their assistance, but he also stepped on a mine, which wounded both. A fifth stretcher-bearer trying to reach them was blown up and wounded.

"Private Bell, although suffering from multiple wounds, insisted on dressing all the wounded men and, in spite of knowing that he was in a dense anti-personnel minefield, moved from one to the other with complete disregard for his own safety.

"He completed all dressings but refused to allow himself to be

attended to until he had seen that all the wounded had been carried clear of the minefield and evacuated by jeep. By this time he was suffering from shock and had to be evacuated by stretcher in a state of collapse.

“During this time enemy defensive fire was falling in the vicinity.”

“The bravery and devotion to duty displayed by Private Bell may well have saved the lives of at least two of his comrades who were severely wounded and also set a splendid example to all ranks.”

The remarkable lot is being sold by Bell’s son Iain, 77, who said: “Like many of his generation, my dad never spoke about his experiences in the war, but we knew of his bravery, which was recognised in his Military Medal.

“I’m very proud of my dad – he was a good man too. I hope his medals will find a good home.”

The Military Medal was awarded to personnel below commissioned rank for “acts of gallantry and devotion to duty under fire”. The award was replaced by the Military Cross in 1993.



