

## The missing wagons from Isandlwana.

By Adrian Greaves

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I recently came across an account written by a journalist from the *Natal Mercury* who had been with Lord Chelmsford's column for the first invasion. At the time of the disaster at Isandlwana he had been with Chelmsford's detached column near Mangeni and on passing back through Isandlwana had been obliged to leave his belongs where he had left them. Later, as an 'accredited' journalist with the invasion force, he was able to accompany the teams responsible for burying the Isandlwana dead. He wrote;

'I had the melancholy satisfaction of seeing my own tent, or rather the remains of it, with all my papers, letters and books lying torn up, but nothing of value was left, and I only succeeded in bringing away with me a few letters from my wife, a book containing some tales written by me, and a photo that had just reached me two days before the massacre. The skeletons of my servants and horses lay just behind my tent, as I was in the habit of having them picketed in that place.

One officer in the Dragoon Guards, while out with his squadron burning kraals, found in one signs of very recent occupation, and the staff of the Colour of the 1.24<sup>th</sup>. He also later on came across a kraal full of skeletons of Zulus, and this fact, taken in conjunction with the findings of large graves on the left of our camp containing bodies of the enemy, goes far to prove and substantiate my statement made in a former letter that the Zulus did move their bodies, and as the kraal was two miles off where skeletons were found, they probably also moved them in our wagons. The 40 wagons we brought away included two water carts in good preservation, one gun limber, a rocket battery cart, and three Scotch carts. All that we left behind, in number not more than 20, were in a partially or entirely disabled condition. Counting all there, therefore, there are still sixty or seventy wagons missing, which may have been taken away at different times'.

This account comes from original 1879 papers recently acquired by the Society from the family of the late Sonia Clarke, which had earlier been given to her by the Oppenheimer Library for whom she was a researcher.

Ian Knight comments; Yes, I think that is right - although the numbers could be exaggerated. Certainly there are reports of a number of wagons being recovered *en route* to Ulundi as the war progressed - I think a couple were found at one of Sihayo's homesteads, and Harness mentions one of N/5's turning up somewhere (he says he was pleased he'd gone to the trouble of having them marked with the battery number, so he could claim it back again!) Possibly the Zulus did use some to carry bodies - although a lot went into those dongas below St. Vincents, and of course those buried further off were probably killed further off, by artillery fire etc. And I imagine they also dragged them quite a way anyway, to the nearest dongas. In short, yes the Zulus took away wagons - and they may well have used them to carry the dead, although of course that might have spoilt the appeal of the wagons as loot, if they were covered in blood-stains!