

The Natal Mercury 16th July 1879 (Two items – both unabridged).

‘A Glimpse at Isandhlwana’.

We extract the following from a private letter: -

‘On Thursday last I was at Isandhlwana, the major knew I was anxious to see the place, and he very kindly let me know that a party was going in under Col. Black to bury the dead. I did not require asking a second time, but rode off at once to Rorke’s Drift, and next day went in, in charge of a party of men. The place is very much as I expected to find it. There is a much better road to it, and more open country than I imagined. I had not time to follow down the whole of the fugitives’ track; but that it is very rough and bad I could see and people who go down it say it is a wonder that anyone ever escaped that way; there are no end of dead bodies scattered along it.

I was in the camp about 2 ½ hours and saw all I cared to see; it is not a cheerful place to be in, but there is a peculiar fascination about it. Looking for, and identifying the bodies is very interesting; the soldiers are very easily recognised by their dress. Most of the white men’s bodies in camp are buried now, but in a most superficial way, and the first heavy rain will expose them again, I speak of what I saw. Military only, and military doing it – I daresay the volunteers and police were done very differently. There are no skeletons, every body has the skin drawn tightly over the bones. The amount of valuable property destroyed is painful; there are over 50 wagons lying scattered all over the place, some in most extraordinary positions where the oxen had run away with them, and a most wonderful amount of miscellaneous property, papers and books no end – this too after the place has been visited over and over again by parties of men whose looting propensities are proverbial. Hundreds of tins of preserved meats, milk, jam &c., perfectly uninjured re kicking about the place and hundreds of others just pierced by assegais. Brushes and boots are a feature. It really is astonishing the amount of things it is thought necessary for a British army to drag about with them.

One of the kafirs found the place where the Zulus hid their dead, and it is to be reported upon. It has never been noticed I believe, what a suitable monument the Isandhlwana hill is for the 24th regiment. It is very much in the form of the Egyptian Sphinx, which is their badge. The direct road to the column is through Isandhlwana, from Rorke’s Drift, and a very good road it is – it is used daily now. Why the column should have gone in my way of Landsman’s Drift, which is a fearful round, is best known to themselves, the telegraph has also been laid to Landsman’s instead of Rorke’s Drift. Clever authorities’.

In Sight of Ulundi
(From a correspondent.)

Fort Evelyn Wood.

On Tuesday, July 2nd, I started with eight men to carry the mails and despatches on from Fort Evelyn to the front (called Fort Entongenini) and we arrived there lately in the afternoon.

We had also to escort two officers. On arrival, and after a welcome from some of our troop who are left at Fort Entongenini, we turned in for the night. The next morning (3rd) at 4.30 we turned out, fed our horses, and I had orders to take four men and mail

bags to Fort Evelyn. I got my mails off at 8 a.m., and Captain Marshall had to take the rest of our men on to escort the Hon. Mr. Dawnay, who had ridden 95 miles the day before with letters from Sir Garnet Wolseley to Lord Chelmsford, and had to reach him in the morning. I got to Fort Evelyn safe with my mails about 10 o'clock, and carried a letter from Fort Entongenini stating that Lieutenant Scott Douglas, of the 21st regiment, on the signalling staff, accompanied by Corporal Cotter, of the 17th Lancers, who had left Fort Evelyn on the evening of the 1st (Monday), had not arrived, and nothing could be heard of them. Just after they left on Monday the mist came on very thick, and they had evidently lost their way, and have, I am afraid, been killed and put out of sight. Well, as I told you before, I came back with the post on Wednesday afternoon, and no sooner got in than I volunteered to go with Lieutenant Warren and four men in search of the missing two. I gave out two days' rations to my men, and we started about 3.30pm, well armed, and prepared for the worst. I took the bearings by my compass of the camp, from the high hill over camp, and we made up our minds to search the whole of the kraals and hills to the right of the road. We went on with our work until we got inside an empty kraal, had tea (first posting a vidette on a ridge above the kraal), and after having tea we moved away in the dark to a little hollow in the hill, two miles off, so that we could see anything (by the light of the moon) approaching. Two of us kept guard together, and we lay down all the time, so as to not be observed; and our horses, which we had well fed at the kraal, were tied together, with bridles, and all ready for mounting. All went off well, but we felt the cold very much, as the frost lay on the ground quite thick. We started again at 5 a.m, and after skirting some hills and visiting some kraals, as the sun rose we rested for breakfast. After breakfast we got in amongst a lot of kraals and krantzes. We tried hard to see some traces of the missing ones, or to find the officer's cream coloured-horse, or see him in the distance; but we went on all day without success, and after going in and climbing most difficult and dangerous places, we arrived at Fort Entongenini. Here we were sorry to find they had not heard of the unfortunate ones, and to our surprise I found that four mounted kafirs were after me yesterday morning, when in charge of the post, and that I had passed 500 more. I feel certain that the three missing ones have mistaken their road and gone to the old mission station, where they have fallen into the hands of a band belonging to the above-mentioned gang. After arriving from our perilous search I washed and was having some food, when I was called to see Ulundi in flames, and no less than five other large kraals. The sight was grand, and the place was nothing more than one blaze. This is six miles as the crow flies from Fort Entongenini and we could see the stone wall round, by the light. Yesterday morning, 3rd July, while some of the 58th were washing and the cattle having just been turned out, about 7000 Zulus came down, shot one of the 58th and took the cattle. The whole of the cavalry saddled up immediately and went out to recover the cattle, which they did, and while recovering the retreat of the cattle, Trooper Peacock was shot through the arm. He was riding on when he halted for some reason, and was shot in the head, and fell at once. His body is missing, and as they had a great dance last night round something; it is supposed poor Peacock's body was the centre of attraction.

I hear that those who are left in this fort are not to get the Ulundi medal, but this would be very hard, as we have a great risk, as they are trying to cut off the posts. I had just turned in, very tired, when an order came that I was again to mount all men immediately, and escort Mr. Forbes, of the *Daily News*, back to Fort Evelyn, as he had telegrams from Lord Chelmsford to the Governor, and he had to catch the mail. We started at 8 p.m., and arrived about 2 a.m., horses and all tired. We saw many kraal fires in several places, and we kept clear of them and made as little noise as possible.

Mr. Forbes had an escort of Lancers waiting at Fort Evelyn, and after 15 minutes' rest, went on to Fort Marshall. We turned in tired and cold.

Later still (July 5th), our troops yesterday crossed the White Umvolosi for the purpose of burning the kraals and dispersing the enemy - time, about 7 a.m. We crossed the river safely, and were not attacked. The passage of the river was completed with great rapidity, considering the difficulties. The column then moved in the direction of the kraal where the heavy fighting was the day before.

The fire was kept up sharp for about thirty minutes. All this time they held the ground, sometimes retreating a little, then returning, but fighting most manfully all the time, keeping up an irregular fire. They then commenced to retreat in the direction of the neighbouring hills. The big guns and rockets were brought into play and worked fearful havoc among the retreating Zulus. The Zulus were soon lost amongst the hills and our troops then advanced round the hills and destroyed all the kraals and these burnt as if they were ready and willing to do so. The regular cavalry and irregular cavalry charged the Zulus while retreating, and I hear the charge was a grand one. The Durban troop under Lieutenant Arden were very steady and were complimented and all the irregular cavalry under Captain Whalley did great execution. Colonel Buller returned with some of the irregular cavalry about 6.30 p.m; and there is no doubt he is a fine officer.

The only prisoners brought in were those whom the Basutos found on their march back to the camp, mustering five. These Zulus said Cetywayo had left that morning, 4th, and had retreated to his new kraal about eight miles to the north-east of the old one. They also stated that twice the number of Zulus can be brought into action.

The Zulus lost about 2000 killed, as hundreds lay on the hill not yet counted, killed by shell, rocket, and Basutos. The Durban troop lost Trooper Peacock, who was found and buried on the ground.

July 6th

On the morning of the 3rd, whilst the Light House were retreating, one of them got wounded and a Zulu was in the act of assagaing him, when Lord William Beresford galloped up and with one thrust ran his sword right through the shield and killed him. He then put the wounded man up behind him and brought him back out of line of fire, for which he is recommended for the Victoria Cross.