

Cameron Simpson's new book

The Frontier Light Horse in the Anglo-Zulu War 1879

Cameron Simpson's new book is a well-researched and detailed analysis of the men who volunteered to fight in the locally recruited Frontier Light Horse (FLH) alongside regular British troops during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. The book's narrative is based on a number of years' intensive research by Simpson in both South Africa and the UK and is unique.

The book gives full credit to the regiment's commanding officer, the highly popular Brevet Major Redvers Henry Buller C.B. of the 60th (The Kings Royal Rifle Corps). At the time of the British invasion of Zululand in January 1879 the FLH was sent to support the British Northern Column, No 4 (Left) Column, at Utrecht under the overall command of Brevet Colonel Sir Henry Evelyn Wood VC., C.B. These volunteers were, to a man, civilians living in South Africa who joined this independent mounted regiment, originally established to assist the under-manned British army, in the Ninth Eastern Cape Frontier War of 1877-78 and the following First Anglo-BaPedi War of 1878. When, just a month later, operations against the Zulus commenced, they were already an operationally experienced force that understood combined operations between infantry, artillery, mounted troops and native levies. The regiment was highly manoeuvrable and its men were 'the right stuff' having already made their way to South Africa, and familiar with South Africa's harsh rocky terrain. By the time of the Zulu campaign, they were already physically conditioned to the often extreme weather conditions of fluctuating torrential rain with blistering heat in the daytime and bitterly cold nights.

Much is already known of the Anglo-Zulu War and Simpson cleverly touches on the war's progress through the eyes of this mounted colonial regiment. It gives a full account of the regiment's engagements against the Zulus and illustrates how they fought independently and, in most cases, successfully, in support of Lord Chelmsford's ponderous regiments of slow moving red-coated foot soldiers. The regiment had its successes and disasters – the worst disaster for the regiment was its routing by the Zulus on the flat-topped mountain of Hlobane, through no fault of theirs, during which they lost 130 men, a severe loss for a tightly bonded unit, and between 200 – 300 supporting native auxiliaries.

Most of the regiment's strength was made up of civilian volunteers of British and European origin living and working in a variety of jobs and professions in South Africa, some with limited English. The regiment's senior officers, under command of Buller, were regular British Army officers seconded to the regiment with the junior officers chosen from civilians, preferably those with previous military experience. During this campaign many of the FLH died in service to the mother country, most were only in their twenties. Within the book are tales of gallantry, of sadness and accounts of great bravery;

their reports also show selflessness. Simpson has uncovered a true treasure trove of material and full details of the regiment's participants and their service can be found in the impressive Appendix.

One cannot but notice how many South Africa General Service Medals due to the Regiment were either returned to the Mint, were not awarded or not claimed by some entitled to the medal. The medal, soon known as the South Africa Medal, was issued to regular and auxiliary troops who had served in South Africa during the campaign. The soldier who never left Durban received the same medal as his colleague who fought in a number of engagements. If a soldier crossed into Zululand, then he was issued with the medal and a bar denoting the year *1879*. In the case of the FLH, Simpson believes the medals were returned to the mint where men could not be traced and, in a few cases, men just disappeared into the wilds only to resurface years later. Some men were not interested especially those of Boer extraction, while others received medals from another unit's medal roll from previous service and were ineligible for a second medal. Where two medals had somehow been issued, the government demanded one back, not always successfully. Another possibility is that some names were incorrectly transcribed or missed off the FLH medal application list. Even without any complication, it took some men a decade to finally get their medal.

Simpson's feat of research makes this book a conclusive account in its own right and a treasure trove of detailed information which adds materially to our knowledge of this campaign. A stunning work.

Cameron's book should be available by the end of the year and its availability will be advertised on the Society Website News page at anglozuluwar.com