

The Case of Colonel Davies' Horse.

By Ron Sheeley

The Court having heard the evidence adduced are of the opinion that Colonel Davies' charger died on 11th June 1879, from the effects of horse sickness...

This pronouncement must have been small consolation indeed for Colonel Henry Fanshawe Davies, Commandant of the post at Conference Hill on the border of Zululand. One of his beloved horses, personally brought all the way from Worcester to this faraway supply depot, had succumbed. A good steed was certainly a valuable commodity in 1879 Zululand. There was a shortage of good horses due to the military increasing demand during the ongoing war with the Zulus; therefore, Davies calculated that he had suffered a substantial financial blow. To assuage his loss for this bereavement Davies had appointed a Board of Enquiry to investigate his charger's death so that he could seek compensation as reimbursement for £120 spent on the horse. As he was then commanding officer of the post, it would seem highly unlikely that the findings of the Board, appointed by him, would be in Davies' favour. A written summation of the proceedings was forwarded to Major General H. Clifford VC, Inspector General of the Lines of Communication at his headquarters at Pietermaritzburg in Davies' quest for compensation.

Accordingly, for several individuals, the second invasion of Zululand along the route to King Cetshwayo's capital at Ulundi was put on hold while the matter of Colonel Davies' horse was considered. Above all, Colonel Henry Fanshawe Davies wanted his money.

Davies was certainly no pauper; he was an experienced officer of the Grenadier Guards having previously served in the Royal Navy in the Burmese War and in the Baltic during the Crimean War. He had applied to the War Office in February 1879 to be allowed to go on campaign in South Africa. His application was accepted and he was given command of the 1/24th Foot replacements being sent out to South Africa to replace the regiment shattered at Isandlwana. He made arrangements for his departure from his estate at Elmley Castle in Worcestershire and decided to take along two of his own horses named Taylor and James. The voyage was without incident until the morning of 2 April when, engulfed in fog, the troopship *Clyde* struck a rock and sank some seventy miles south east of Cape Town. Staggering amounts of equipment and munitions were lost but, fortunately, all lives were saved including Davies' two horses. Davies was seen to have exercised superb command during this desperate situation. Later, the *Tamar* re-boarded the troops and sailed to Durban for their eventual disembarkation. In command, Davies then marched his troops up-country towards the Zulu border. Frank Emery, in his book *Marching over Africa – Letters of Victorian Soldiers* published a letter, written by Davies to his son, then at Eton, in which he makes mention of his personal servants, named James and Taylor, who accompanied him on the long voyage to his new posting, and two horses, one of which was named 'Limerick'.

Griffin's Farm
Natal, April 25th 1879
My dearest Harry,

We are still marching up the country, tomorrow morning we go to Estcourt, when we shall have done just about half the distance between Durban and Dundee...I am flourishing, so are the horses. Taylor has got a touch of rheumatism in his knee, not much, and James has a blistered foot, with that exception they are well. If I go on staff I must have three.

Later he writes;

James, Taylor and the horses are well.

However, one of Davies' two English-bred horses did not stay fit for long. Only a little more than two weeks later, on 11 June at Conference Hill, one of them died from that dreaded bane of South African equestrians – horse sickness. This sickness, which is endemic today, is a viral disease spread by blood-sucking insects, which are most active from twilight until dawn; it does not affect humans. Generally it is prevalent in moist, low-lying areas such as marshes and valleys. The pulmonary form is

the most severe with symptoms of rising fever, severe breathing difficulties, extended neck and sudden death. The infected animal chokes, staggers and falls while discharging a great deal of froth from its nose and mouth. Once infected, there is no cure. A high proportion, up to 95%, of those infected die within a few days.

Davies' charger's sudden demise resulted in the session of the Board of Enquiry at Davies' request. A transcript of the original document follows and makes interesting reading.

Conference Hill
13th June 1879
From Colonel HF Davies Grenadier Guards
Comdt. Conference Hill
To; Inspr. Genl. Line of Communications
Pietermaritzburg

Sir,
I have the honour to forward here—with the proceedings in duplicate of a Board of enquiry on the death of a horse belonging to me & my claim for compensation for the same, the horse having died from horse Sickness & therefore not from natural causes. I trust I may be paid the full value of the horse who is a serious loss to me
I have etc.
(sig) H.F. Davies Col. GG
Comdt. Conference Hill

Proceedings of a Board of Enquiry held at the camp, Conference Hill, South Africa on 12 June 1879, by order of Col. H.F. Davies Gren. Gds. Comdt. Conference Hill, to enquire into & report upon the death of a horse belonging to Col. H.F. Davies Gren. Guards.
Capt. Benthall K.D. Gds. Present
Lt. Wyndham 21 Hussars Lt. Ridley Regt. (Members)

The Board proceeded to view the dead horse & to take evidence to the case.

Evidence.

Col. Davies Gren. Guards states: The horse seen by the Board is my property & has been so for the last 3 years. I paid 120 pounds for him & he has always done his Regimental work as my charger since I bought him. I rode him a long distance on duty two days before he died which took place on 11th last.

2nd Evidence.

Vety. Surgeon Moore King's Dragoon Guards states:
I visited Col. Davies charger on 9th & 10th last. I found him suffering from the disease called Horse Sickness. I visited him on the morning of the 11th also and found him a little better, yet very ill. At noon of the same day the horse took suddenly worse & died. Having made a post-mortem examination I found that the horse had suffered from the above disease, but the immediate cause of the sudden death was rupture of one of the large bowels which had caused in all probability by the horse having slipped causing the bowel to give way, they being in a weak diseased condition. The lungs & bowels were severely affected.

Opinion.

The Court having heard the evidence adduced are of the opinion that Col. Davies' charger died on 11th June 1879, from the effects of Horse Sickness which produced a weak & diseased condition of the bowels causing them to be ruptured by a slight slip being the immediate cause of death.

(Sig) J.M. Benthall Capt. *
K. Dragoon Gds. Present
(sig) J.C. Wyndam Lt. 21 Hussars A.R. Ridley 2/4
K.O. Reg

Claim of Colonel H.F. Davies Gren. Guards Comdt. Conference Hill to compensation for the loss of the under mentioned horse which died at Conference Hill on 11th of June 1879.

Col. Davies' horse died of Horse Sickness, as will be seen by the evidence of the Veterinary Surgeon in the annexed Proceeding of Board. The horse was passed perfectly sound by a Veterinary Surgeon when I purchased him & had never been sick for upwards of 3 years & was perfectly well 3 days before he died. First Charger- actual cost 120.00 pounds.

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true & correct statement of my loss on the occasion referred to. That at the time I was not deviating in any respect from the order of the Genl. Officer Comdg. & that I have neither received nor applied for indemnification on account of the above loss through any other channel than that in which the present claim is submitted.

Dated at Conference Hill (sig) H.F. Davies – Col. Gren. Gds.

This 13 June 1879 Comdt. *Conference Hill*

It is interesting to note the extraordinary amount of time, investigation, and paperwork involved in the above claim. In addition to hand-written duplicates of the Board's proceeding forwarded to the Inspector General on the line of Communication, several officers were obliged to be members of the Board when they would certainly have been better employed elsewhere, including Veterinary Surgeon Moore who was called upon to perform a post-mortem and then give expert testimony.

While one hears much about the epic battles such as Isandlwana, Rorke's Drift, Hlobane and Ulundi, seldom are the more common and ordinary events of campaign life brought to notice. In the larger context, Davies' loss of his charger and his quest for redress are of minor importance, however, on a level personal to Colonel Davies, the death of his beloved mount was a serious matter.

The document on which this article is based was one of a number acquired from a private source in Worcester in May 1999. They consisted of the Zulu War correspondence of Colonel Henry Fanshawe Davies who at various times held command at the posts of Landsman's Drift, Conference Hill and Fort Newdigate. He was thus in a position of considerable importance and his papers are a valuable resource reflecting on the day-to-day operation of a campaign.

This is the second article on the Davies' collection of correspondence to appear in the AZWHS Journal. Future contributions examining different items in this archive will be forthcoming.

* Captain J.M. Benthall, 1st Dragoon Guards, was later put under arrest for sleeping in an ambulance; he having got wet through. He was eventually released with a severe reprimand. (Sonia Clarke, *Invasion of Zululand* p. 201.