

This is the story of one young man who was amongst a small but very brave band of British soldiers who were the defenders at the battle of Rorke's Drift, Natal, South Africa. Most people are aware of the film *Zulu*; this depicts the battle and although the facts are not 100% factual it is very good entertainment. Amongst that small garrison was Sergeant Henry Gallagher, the senior Sergeant of 'B' Company, 2<sup>nd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> Warwickshire Regiment of Foot. Henry's father was named as Henry Gallagher, born in Eire (Southern Ireland). Henry Gallagher (senior) was recorded as being a Merchant's Clerk and married a Mary Kennedy on 7 February 1854 at Killenaule Parish Church, witnessed by James Walshe and Ellen Fitzgerald.

Henry (junior) was born in about March 1855 at a place called Killenaule, County Tipperary, Eire. He was baptised on 28 October 1855; he had a sister although very little is known of her. The early part of Henry's life in Eire is surrounded in mystery. A family story has it that he witnessed a fire at the family farm where the other member of his family died. The derelict farm and land were then claimed by the Catholic Church in return for the care and education he received from them. Henry was a bright young man and quick to learn. As he grew older Henry obtained employment as a Clerk and it is not certain why he chose to leave his home country of Eire to join the British Army in Liverpool.

Henry had his enlistment medical conducted by H. D. Devlin, Surgeon Major of the Army Medical Department on 14 March 1874. Following a second medical he was attested at Liverpool on 16 March 1874 and joined 25<sup>th</sup> Brigade at Brecon on 17 March 1874. His papers show that his admitted age was 19 years 0 months, he was 5ft. 6ins. Tall with a fresh complexion, amber eyes and dark brown hair. His religion is noted as Roman Catholic. He was given the regimental number 25B/ 81.

During the following year he underwent basic training and by March 1875 he had been promoted to Corporal, probably getting rapid promotion due to his education in Eire as a young man and obtaining a 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Certificate of Army Education. Henry found himself in Dover and further promotion to Lance Sergeant followed in January 1877. Henry married on the 7 April 1877 Caroline Maria Stanley a spinster of 6 Dover Street, Charlton, Dover, Kent. Caroline was the daughter of a North Sea pilot who was reputedly the pilot who accompanied Captain Webb on the first ever-recorded cross Channel swim. They eventually had six children all the three sons all had careers in the Army.

June 1877 found Henry in Chatham, Kent. A further promotion followed to Sergeant in October 1877. In February 1878 he was ordered to join the troopship HMS *Himalaya* bound for South Africa with twenty -four Officers, eight Staff Sergeants, thirty-eight other Sergeants, forty Corporals, sixteen Drummers and seven hundred and fifty Privates.

They docked at Simons Bay to replenish supplies and finally reached East London on 9 March. Here they were ordered onto trains that took them to King Williams Town. Fighting, mainly skirmishing, took place in the Perie Bush during April and May with the amaXhosa in what is now known as the Last Kaffir War. During this time the 2/24<sup>th</sup> were stationed at Mount Kempt.

Sergeant Henry Gallagher found himself again on the move and was transported by mail boat to Durban and was landed by whaler onto the beaches. He then marched with the rest of the 24<sup>th</sup> Warwickshire Regiment towards Zululand, as part of the Centre Column of Lord Chelmsford's invading force. His wife Caroline, together with other wives, remained at Pinetown near Durban.

In January 1879 he was at Rorke's Drift as senior Sergeant of 'B' Company 2/24<sup>th</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Warwickshire Regiment. He had been rather aggrieved that the rest of the column had been ordered forward into Zululand and was camped at Isandlwana. He had to stay at Rorke's Drift with the rest of 'B' Company to wait for relief from Helpmekaar. On the morning of 22 January he was on top of the hill behind the Mission Station 'The Shiyane' (Oskarsberg) along with Colour Sergeant Bourne and three other NCOs. Rifle and gun fire could be heard coming from the camp at Isandlwana and smoke and muffled battle noise was heard. Following their own observations and reports from the column a hasty defence was constructed of mealy bags, biscuit boxes and wagons around the mission station. Henry, with several other sharp shooters, was in charge of the section of soldiers along the mealy bag wall on the south side between the two wagons and the hospital building. Fred Hitch was placed on the hospital roof as a look out. This part of the position was to take the first attack of about four hundred Zulus. These were first seen by Fred Hitch who informed Henry, Henry then turned to the Officers behind him and in his own words called out, 'Here they come as thick as grass and as black as thunder'. He stated that his little band of defenders first fired at eight hundred yards but totally failed to make any shots count. At this stage he felt terrified but after firing a few more shots the fear left him only to return after the battle. During the battle the continuous firing of rifles caused the rifle barrels to get very hot. Henry stated that during the hours of darkness they could be seen glowing red and he had to tear off the sleeve of his tunic to wrap around the barrel to stop his hands burning. The breech of the Martini also expanded

allowing black powder to flash back. This caused a tattooing effect on the side of Henry's right cheek and nose and he had this blue/black mark for the rest of his life.

In the later part of 1879 he was moved to Utrecht and took no further part in the Anglo-Zulu conflict. In January 1880 he joined the troopship HMS *Orontes* at Durban bound for Gibraltar where he served for 294 days before returning to home service.

In January 1881 he was promoted to Colour Sergeant. His first child, Caroline Lillian, was born at Brecon on 17 August of the same year. During this time the Cardwell Reforms were taking place and the 2<sup>nd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Warwickshire Regiment became the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, South Wales Borderers. Colour Sergeant Henry Gallagher was ordered to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and given a new regimental number of SWB/1590. He remained in the U.K. for the next 2 years and 61 days. For his service in South Africa he received the South Africa Medal with Clasp 1877-8-9.

January 1883 saw Henry with his small family again bound for foreign lands, this time to India. On 17 June his second child, Henry Edward, was born in Secunderabad, later to serve in the Royal Engineers. A third child, William Alfred, was born in Madras on 13 October 1885. He too was to serve with the Royal Engineers later transferred to the Royal Signals as a Major. May 1886 saw the expanding family posted to Burma. Violet Elizabeth was born on 29 January 1888 in Toungou. Henry was awarded the India General Service Medal with clasp 'Burma 1887-89'. Henry and his family spent a total of 2 years and 185 days in Burma, returning to India on 10 March 1888. On 9 January 1889 Henry was once again promoted, this time to the Warrant Officer rank of Sergeant Major. Another addition was made to the expanding family on 10 February 1890 at Ranikhet when Daisy Dorothea was born. A period of 5 years and 6 days was spent in Indian service before, on 19 October 1892, he was posted to Aden on the troopship HMS *Serapis*. In Aden his records show that he was hospitalised for the first and only time of his service-life with ulcers of the feet and spent close to 3 weeks under medical supervision. He arrived back in the UK on 18 November 1893 and was stationed in Hilsea and then Gosport. On 9 June 1895, Lawrence Stanley, the last addition to the family was born. He was later to serve with the Royal Engineers, finishing his army career as a Colonel in the Royal Artillery. After only 1 year and 314 days, the family were once again on their travels this time to Egypt where they arrived on 28 September 1895.

In Cairo, he was Garrison Sergeant Major, a rank that in today's army would be Regimental Sergeant Major. His next step would to have been commissioned as he was now top of the Non-Commissioned Officer list. During his time as Garrison Sergeant Major in Cairo he was always very particular with regard to his turnout. His eldest daughter would always inspect him before duty to make sure that his turnout was immaculate with clean boots, no 'blanko' on his blue trousers and his medals gleaming. He was always aware of his short stature and held himself tall. He would not suffer fools gladly. It was at this time that he either lost, or had stolen his issued medals. The family belief is that they were stolen. For a senior NCO required to wear his medals at all times whilst on duty, this must have been a devastating blow. Henry is understood to have acquired another set of the two stolen medals and is believed to have 'bought or borrowed' a set from a soldier of the same surname returning home via Egypt from the Far East. He then had them carefully engraved with his own number, initial and rank. There are to this day two known sets, one in the hands of a private collector bought by him in London at auction for £8,500 in 1991 (perhaps the originals) and another at the Royal Artillery Museum, Woolwich together with his Meritorious Service Medal.

Henry and his family returned to home shores on 31 March 1897 for the last time and he was discharged from the service on 10 May 1897 after a total of 23 years and 56 days with the Colours. He gave his intended residence as Borstal House, 48 London Avenue, North End, Portsmouth. He only managed to be a civilian for one day as either he or the Army felt that they needed each other and he was appointed as Barrack Warden at Coleworth Barracks, Hilsea and Alexandria Hospital and remained as such until 1911. On 29 November 1910 he had been awarded the Meritorious Service Medal.

In retirement he lived happily with his wife Caroline at 'Wisteria', Augustin Road, Drayton. Hants. He enjoyed his garden and looking after his chickens. It is known that Fred Hitch, VC used to visit and they would talk of the old days. On these occasions the grandchildren were ordered to stay away from the old soldiers as their discussions were not for young, sensitive ears. He was also known to protect his young charges from the bigger boys of the area and would come out of the house armed with a knobkerrie and chase them off. He also loved to take walks on the Downs behind his house and when he had the grand-children with him it was always known as campaigning and he would tell stories both imaginary and of his days in the army.

On the anniversary of the Defence of Rorke's Drift, Henry used to become very remorseful and would want to be left on his own. He would sometimes have a few drinks to ease the pain of his memories - there was, of course, no counselling in those days. This was the time of 'the British stiff

upper lip'. While on his way to bed on 17 December 1931, he died of a heart condition at the admitted age of 75. His occupation is recorded as Warrant Officer Army Pensioner.

He was buried at Christchurch, Portsdown, with semi-military honours. In attendance were a number of Officers, Warrant Officers and men of the South Wales Borderers and many wreaths were laid. Fred Hitch's son, Charles, also attended and laid a wreath on behalf of the men of 'B' Company, 2<sup>nd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> Warwickshire Regiment from both deceased and surviving colleagues. The press at the time reported his great military service. His wife, Caroline, died shortly after and rests with him.