

The Zulu War: A Question

By Nigel Farrance

On 7 January 1875 the 1st Battalion, 13th Somersetshire Regiment of Light Infantry landed at Table Bay, Cape of Good Hope, and camped on the Grand Parade at Cape Town. The battalion had started a foreign tour of duty in June 1867 and had spent the previous seven and a half years in Gibraltar and Malta. Picking up reinforcements of 3 officers and 133 men from their depot companies in England, the Battalion was also joined by a transfer of 52 volunteers from the 86th Regiment, bringing its strength up to 25 officers and 881 other ranks. On its arrival in Cape Colony the battalion was divided between different stations, a situation that was to last for the next 12 months, until reunited at Pietermaritzburg in January 1876.

With the prospect of problems with the Boers, the Somersets were sent up to Pretoria in May 1877 where they were well received. However the Transvaal was subsequently annexed by the British Crown and the possibility of problems with the Boers was replaced with a greater threat from various native tribes.

On 5 July 1877, six men from the 1st/13th were attached to 11th Battery, 7th Brigade RA and sent to Utrecht. These six men were to remain with that battery, based at Utrecht, until 22 July 1879 when they were returned to their own battalion.

Three companies of the 1st/13th were despatched to Utrecht in December 1877, to join a similar force of the 80th Foot, engaged in building and provisioning a stone fort. The work completed, the companies of the 13th returned to Pretoria in March 1878. August 1878 saw the start of the campaign against Sekukini and the 1st/13th took part in various columns and manned many small forts as the campaign progressed. A successful assault on Tolyana Stadt by a column under the command of Colonel Hugh Rowlands, VC, CB, on 27 October included four companies of the 13th Light Infantry and the regiment lost Colour Sergeant Pegg who died of wounds in this action.

On 22 December 1878 the 1st/13th marched into Utrecht at the end of the campaign. They were greeted by the 90th Light Infantry, just out from England. In his history of the Somersets, Major General Sir Henry Everett wrote that while the soldiers of the 90th were 'smartly turned out in good uniforms and white helmets': In strong contrast to the 90th, the 13th, although a fine lot of hard-bitten, muscular veterans, presented a strange appearance. Their uniforms were in rags, and patched with cloth of different colours, some had no boots; their helmets of the old Indian pattern were covered with old shirts to keep the cotton wool on the bamboo frame, and their belts and rifles dirtied to order.

The battalion now turned its face towards Zululand as a part of Colonel Evelyn Wood's column (No.4) for the actions against Cetewayo and his warriors. Setting out on 3 January 1879, Wood's column set up some advance bases and entered Zululand but did little more than march and counter-march. Wood's advance was not helped by the Blood River being swollen by rain nor the sound of distant gunfire on the 22nd, which turned out to be the disaster at Isandlwana where another British column was destroyed. A despatch from Lord Chelmsford sent Wood's column back to the White Umfolozi River and a fortified position was then chosen on Kambula Hill on the Ngabaka Hawane Mountain and a period of waiting ensued.

Repeated reconnaissance and patrolling was carried on and several skirmishes with the enemy were endured, during one of which Major Knox-Leet of the Somersets was awarded the Victoria Cross for saving the life of Lieutenant A.M. Smith of the Frontier Light Horse. Lieutenant Smith had had his horse killed and was being pursued by several Zulus until rescued by Knox-Leet.

It was not until 29 March 1879 that the defences of Kambula were put to the test. An attack started at about 1.30 p.m. and for the next four hours the defenders of the Kambula redoubts fought off 20,000 Zulu warriors. The casualties to the small column were 18 killed and 65 wounded. The 1st/13th lost 6 killed and 2 officers and 24 men wounded. Zulu casualties were estimated at 2,000 killed.

The British troops were now being reinforced, with further regiments and batteries on their way from England. The final battles were being planned and Ulundi took place on 4 July 1879. Once more an estimated 20,000 Zulus attacked the British in a square and on this occasion lost in excess of 1,000 killed in an hour. At the battle of Ulundi there was cavalry to follow up the defeated and retreating Zulus when many more were speared by the 17th Lancers or cut down by the 1st Dragoon Guards or Colonials. The British loss was 100 men killed and wounded of which the 1st/13th lost 2 killed and 10 wounded. Lieutenant Pardoe died on 14 July as a result of his wounds. The Zulu war was over.

What, then, of the six men of the 1st/13th who were attached to 11th Battery, 7th Brigade, RA? This battery was split between the 1st Column (two 7-pounder guns and one rocket trough) and Wood's No. 4 Column (four 7-pounders and two rocket troughs). After the losses at Isandlwana the British force

was reorganised to prevent a further disaster and so No. 4 Column became the Flying Column and No. 1 Column were re-designated the 2nd Division. These were both under the immediate command of Lord Chelmsford and worked together. On 1 June 189 they united and the Flying Column was to precede the 2nd Division as the campaign progressed.

The first of June was also notable for a further reason. With the reinforcements coming into the theatre of operations had come Louis, the son of the last French Emperor, Napoleon III, and his wife Eugenie. With the overthrow of the French Empire, Napoleon III, Eugenie and Louis had been exiled to England where Queen Victoria had permitted them to live, surrounded by their supporters, ever in the hope that they would, one day, be returned to their situation in France. With the death of Napoleon III, Louis, the Prince Imperial, had become the exiled Emperor-in-waiting. Following representations from his late father, Louis had been permitted to enter the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich and train as an officer for the Royal Artillery. He was not intended to serve in any capacity in the British Army, just to be educated in the ways of the military pending his eventual return to France. The idea of a campaign against the natives of South Africa must have been seen by the young Prince as an ideal way of passing time. Although without any military standing, Prince Louis was permitted to serve in Zululand as an observer but his military education was known and accepted among the officers and it gave him a semi-official status.

Sailing on 28 February 1879, Louis was soon in Zululand where he was attached to the staff of the 2nd Division under Lieutenant Colonel R. Harrison, RE. who was Lord Chelmsford's Assistant Quartermaster-General. 1 June saw the Prince, with an escort of one officer, Captain Carey (who had only gone along for the ride) and six men, out in front of the 2nd Division carrying out a survey of the ground for the following day's march. Resting, without any of the normal military precautions being taken, the small party was surprised and suffered three fatal casualties, one of whom was the Prince.

On 2 June a party of over 1,000 men went out to search for the Prince Imperial's body. It was returned to camp and a funeral service was held that afternoon. The body was then escorted, by stages, back to Durban from where it was embarked for England, being received with full military honours throughout the journey.

The *Light Bob Gazette* for June 1925 recalled:

A moving incident which changed the history of France is recalled by the death of Mr. Charles Wall, of 17, Charlton Building, Twerton, whose funeral took place with military honours at Twerton Cemetery this morning. Mr. Wall served with the Somerset Light Infantry during the Zulu campaign of 1879, and was one of the party of soldiers who assisted in the recovery of the body of the gallant Prince Imperial, only son of the Emperor Napoleon III and Empress Eugenie, who was ambushed and killed by the Zulu hordes.

Since no mention is made in the muster roll of the battery as to where each gun was or who were the men with that gun, it has to be assumed that some of the men of the 13th Foot were serving with the artillery section attached to the 2nd Division. This would then explain how Private Charles Wall came to be one of the party recovering the body of the Prince. According to the Royal Artillery muster rolls, the men of the 13th Light Infantry attached to the 11th Battery, 7th Brigade, Royal Artillery were:

36/254 Private John GILL

Guard Room

(Insubordination) 9th June to 9th July. Awaiting trial.

Imprisoned 10 – 23 July. Attached to 2/3rd Regiment

On 23 July 1878. Deserted 24th August 1878.

36/195 Private Thomas HARDY

36/133 Private Thomas LOWERY

Rationed by Transport Department 2nd January 1879

36/489 Private Neil MANLEY

36/167 Private Robert McDONALD

36/581 Private Charles WALL

Private John Gill deserted on 24 August 1879 before qualifying for a medal. Privates Thomas Hardy and John Lowery received medals with the clasp '1878-9.'

Private Neil Manley received a medal with the clasp '1878'. Privates Robert McDonald and Charles Wall received medals with the clasp '1879'. Unfortunately I have been unable to find service papers for any of these six men.

Having rejoined their battalion on 22 July 1879, the 1st/13th Light Infantry departed the scene of their endeavours for Durban where, on 16 August, they embarked on the troopship *Euphrates*. On 19 September 1879 they landed at Devonport.

The medals and clasps awarded to the five men listed above (not counting Private Gill) are no different from those awarded to the rest of the 1st Battalion 13th Light Infantry but their story is just that little bit different. A couple of questions to which I would like an answer are: What were the duties of these six men and why did they get different clasps? Obviously some were with No. 1 Column, later 2nd Division, and some were with No. 4, later the Flying Column, but the clasps were '1878', '1879', and '1878-9'. Dealing with the men serving with the Regiment, those who were there from the start to the end (Sekukini and Zulu campaigns) received '1878-9', those who were home before 1 January 1879 received only '1878' and those who arrived late (after 31 December 1878) received only '1879'. There were also no-clasp medals for those who did not enter the war zone but served around the edge of the campaign area. Why the variety with the Gunners? Did Manley only serve against Sekukini while McDonald and Wall only served against the Zulus and Hardy and Lowery served in both campaigns.

Then the only question is: What did they do? One man per gun is hardly protection. Will I ever know the answer?

By kind permission of the Orders and Medals Research Society