

Hero has his Headstone – Rorke's Drift defender remembered.
By Jane Omara The Herald Plymouth.

The Herald, Wednesday March 25 2009



HONOURED: An RBL standard-bearer by Pte Luddington's new headstone

The hard work of a Royal Marine from HMS Raleigh has culminated in the dedication of a headstone to a man who fought in one of the world's most famous battles.

Family members of Private Thomas Luddington travelled from across the country for the dedication of a headstone on his grave at Weston Mill cemetery yesterday. Pte Luddington was one of three members of the Army Hospital Corps who fought at the battle of Rorke's drift during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. He died in 1934 aged 78 and is buried at Weston Mill next to his wife Jessie and two step-grandchildren, Ethel and Frank Anning.

In an epic 12-hour battle to defend the small supply base on the Natal border, 140 British defenders, including 120 infantrymen from the 24th regiment, fought more than 4,000 warriors. The battle was made famous by the 1994 film Zulu, which starred Michael Caine.

Royal Marine Corporal Tim Needham battled for five months to get a permanent commemoration to Pte Luddington, after being inspired by a book written by a woman whose great-grandfather also fought at Rorke's Drift.

Corporal Needham, aged 29, a member of the Royal Marines band, said "The ceremony was great. I didn't expect it to be so successful." He said he started sending letters in October asking for support for a headstone to be placed at the grave. Following publicity in The Herald, Co-Operative Monumental Services, based in Efford, got in touch and donated a black headstone with a silver inscription. Cpl Needham added "If it wasn't for them I don't think we would have been able to do it". At the ceremony, a dozen family members, representatives of the Royal British Legion, Royal Navy bandsmen, the Deputy Lord Mayor of Plymouth and well-wishers were told the story of Rorke's Drift by the Victorian Military Society's Michael Penreath before the service was conducted by Lt. Col. the Rev. Tom Hiney MC, Chaplain to Devon Royal British Legion.

Pte Luddington's great-nephew Frank Luddington, aged 89, travelled from Monifieth in Scotland. He said "I thought I'd come to represent the Luddingtons up in Scotland. It's been a long journey and it's been worth it. He was still alive when I was young but I never knew about it. I thought the service was excellent – very moving. It makes me proud to be a Luddington. I've met people here I never knew existed".

Pte Luddington's great-granddaughter Ann Cross, from Heybrook Bay, attended with her daughter Jane Cross and Jane's children David 12 and Anna 10. Ann is the granddaughter of Arthur Luddington, a famous rugby player in the 1920s.

Richard Luddington, aged 49, Pte. Luddington's great-grandson, unveiled the stone at the ceremony. After the event, guests made their way to the Mount Pleasant in Millbay Road for refreshments. Ann said, "The service was amazing; we wouldn't have known anything about it at all if Tim hadn't started it".