

The unabridged 1879 Diary of Arthur C.B. Mynors
Lieutenant, 3rd Battalion, 60th Rifles

Edited by Adrian Greaves

Died near Fort Pearson, Natal, 25th April 1879, aged 22 years.

Friday March 21st - We were in tents and busy giving out stores and ammunition to the men, also getting all necessaries. At Durban there are good shops and coast very pretty.

Saturday 22nd - Went by train twelve miles to Sariatine, encamped; had dinner in dark; slept for hours, up at two o'clock in the dark.

Sunday morning - We started at four a.m., to march in utter darkness; unpitched camp, packed up and off; marched six miles on awful bad road to Verulam; the hilliest and prettiest country I ever saw; forded two rivers; stopped eight hours at Verulam; bathed, washed my clothes; and started at three o'clock p.m. in the afternoon, our baggage drawn by oxen, sixteen to twenty oxen in each waggon. Went to church at Verulam. Niggers awful looking beats, tall, strong, and active; wear no clothes at all, except very few around the waist. The battalion bathed in the Umhloti River. No more news about the war.

Weather very hot from 9 a.m. till 3 p.m. The march on Sunday night to Victoria was fearful, dreadfully hot; the sun right on our heads; and carrying our ammunition and arms, almost heartbreaking. We got there just in time to see to pitch our tents and tumble into bed for a few hours and on...

Monday Morning - Up at 2.20 in the dark see nothing and find nothing; started; crossed and bathed in the Tongati, up to our waists crossing, so wet and wretched. Our halt for mid-day in Compensation Flats in the sun, no shade to be found, and no rest; waited till 2.30 and marched for nine miles, the longest and weariest I ever marched; the men were almost dead with heat. Had only coffee and tea twice a day, and nothing else; unless we could pass a public house or shed, which were few and far between; and then what we bought was awfully dear. Still we scrape along; and at last at 7 o'clock we got to our camping place; put tents up in the dark; had some salt tinned beef and muddy water, and went to bed. Up next morning at 2.30 to a minute; lowered and packed our tents and off at 4 a.m.; crossed and bathed in the Umhali, - which - being dirty from the heat - refreshed us much, and then camped at the Umvoti River, up to our knees. Very, very hot; we washed some of our clothes, and this time a native who owned a mill was very kind and gave us some beer. We boiled our tinned meat and made soup; started much refreshed and in much better spirits. The country very hilly, and hot; Indian corn up to one's head in the fields. Some sugar-cane plantations also in the country, which when picked was sweet and juicy. The Zulus or niggers here are barely human beings, naked, and their shins are like leather; awful beasts to look at and very hideous. That afternoon we passed Stanger Camp; and halted a mile-and-a-half from the camp. The men just beginning to get into condition again; since they left the ship they had been in very bad training for marching, owing to no exercise on board ship. Next morning we got up at 2.45, and down tents, and crossed a river (shoes and stockings off) and marched by Newgelderland about seven or eight miles by seven o'clock, and camped by the Monoti River where alligators and hippopotami are numerous; we bathed notwithstanding. It was better than ever; the country beautiful and hilly; no fences; mostly grass about a high as your thigh. We heard yesterday that the column going to relieve Pearson had crossed the Tugela and was waiting for us before starting; also a large native contingent with them, some of the Naval Brigade and a few troops of cavalry. We shall cross the Tugela tomorrow.

Thursday 27th – A spy was caught yesterday at Fort Pearson in the camp. No one knows where the Zulu armies are; one day they are seen at one place, another at another; one meal lasts them for three days; and the bush they can creep through like snakes. Being nothing but Zulus (natives) about the country here, they come and watch us; in fact they know everything that goes on. They are awfully wily; they are never to be caught in open country, and will never unless at Ondini; the only time they will attack their enemy is before daybreak and at night when we encamp; and they won't attack a very big force.

My dear Papa and Mamma, I send you my diary.

Letter Fort Pearson, 27th March.

MY DEAR PAPA AND MAMMA,

Since I wrote yesterday, I find we are here for a day. We got here this morning and encamped; we shall cross the river tomorrow or the next day, and then we relieve Pearson. They can signal from here to them. Pearson says he is pretty well off, but has 9 officers and 150 men ill with dysentery. We got up two regiments in front, then the wagons with native infantry to protect them, we and the 57th are rear guard. When Pearson is relieved, we by ourselves stay here; the other regiments return and make a depot between Fort Pearson and Eshowe where Pearson is encamped, and can carry stores and provisions there, then we shall march to Undini, the king's kraal. At first it is a pretty clear road to Pearson, but afterwards there is a large bush which we have to get through to get at him. We shall be at Eshowe for about three weeks. We are about four miles from the sea; and the river is about a quarter of a mile across. Everything looks like business. Colonel Hopton, when we march up, remains in command here, and at Fort Tenedos, the other side of the river. I saw him this morning; he asks after everybody at home. It is very jolly getting here; and having a day's rest, and some bread, and fresh meat. All in very good spirits. Everything I have, and the rest of us, is washing and drying. My camp equipage is first rate; everything I want. The Zulus are very fine men, use assegais and rifles of some sort. They treat the wounded fearfully; spear them through and through, at least, their women do. I enclose my diary of the march, as I have no time to copy it. With best love to all, dear papa and mamma,

Ever your most affectionate son,

Arthur

Thursday morning, March 27th – We left the Sinkwasi River and got up to Fort Pearson at about 8 o'clock. General Chelmsford inspected us. We stayed there until Friday afternoon, getting everything ready. Colonel Hopton came over to look me up.

Friday 28th – We crossed the Tugela, being towed across. The men bivouacked and spent an awful night in pouring rain. Colonel Hopton gave me a bed in his tent. Most of the officers stood up in the rain all night.

Saturday March 29th – We started for Etshow(sic) and marched about twelve miles. The column was about five to six miles long, and we went awfully slow. There we laagered a shelter trench outside. It would have taken 100,000 Zulus to take it. I and Keith (Turnour) on outpost duty all night; (blue funk) and both dark and wet. Luckily no enemy came. Returned to camp tired after the column had marched off.

Sunday March 30th – Started at ten. Much delay caused by waggons crossing a brook. Warm march. Burnt a lot of kraals along the way. Enemy flying in small detachments. Arrived at

Amatakula River, one mile from river on Natal side. Great bother about laager being put up, and much confusion. Early to bed. Bright moonlight until twelve.

Monday 31st March – Under arms at four; expecting an attack early, two armies having been seen in different directions, one NE the other E and moving W. Great preparations; expecting rear attack. Front advance, crossed and took up position on other side of the river, while we guarded the rear. Enemy moving W. Very hot; no wind; no shade. Over 2,000 bullocks in our train. A buck ran into camp this morning and was assegaied; after much sport amongst the natives. Good fish here. Rumour of Cetshwayo having offered peace; not believed one word of it. We crossed the wagon in the afternoon when all waggons had been got over; and got into camp about 5.30 where we bivouacked; very short of water.

Tuesday April 1st – Under arms at four. Marched about eight o'clock with great care, Zulus having been seen by scouts hovering about. This morning the order of advance was reversed-

57th

The sailors with a Gatling and Rocket

Ourselves

Our train

Rear Guard – 99th

Marines and 91st

Two regiments of natives

protecting our waggons on the flanks. We were drawn up to receive the enemy twice; but they retreated. We reached our camping place at about four o'clock; laagered as usual; and made entrenchments around it; only making them double the height. About one hour after we got in it began to thunder, and the rain came down in torrents, wetting us through and through. Our feet had been wet for the last two days; in fact we are never dry. No clothes to change, or anything; as now we have only got with us what we have got on, a mackintosh sheet and a great coat. We slept as well as we could. Had the sentries doubled, the enemy being expected to attack us next morning.

Wednesday, April 2nd – Under arms at four; and just as the day was beginning to break our pickets reported the enemy advancing. Everything was got into readiness; the trenches manned; the pickets recalled. We saw the enemy coming out of a dingle in files, and opening out, they surrounded us in most splendid skirmishing order. The bravest fellows I ever saw. Our face was attacked first, as they had not got time to get round to the other side. At about 6.20 the first shot was fired, and soon all our men were blazing away; shots whizzing over our heads; the Gatling at the corner pounding it into them. They advanced at the double, creeping in shelter of the grass. we were so strong they could do nothing. Still they advanced to within 20 yards, where afterwards some were picked up dead. Our men were awfully frightened and nervous at first, could not even speak and shivered from funk, so we – the officers – had enough to do to keep the men cool. We repulsed them in about 20 minutes; whilst on our flanks and rear, where the other regiments were, the battle was still going on. Two of our companies were then taken round to relieve the other side, one of which was mine; so we marched under their fire to the rear face, and acted as a support. It was soon all over. We repulsed them on all sides. The native cavalry and native contingent were then let loose to pursue them (all this time our natives were shut up in the middle of the laager to be out of the way) which they did, assegaing most of the wounded on their way, and not doing much damage to the enemy. I saw one cavalry sergeant kill two. The second one he killed lay down, and he could not reach him with his sword. The nigger assegaied his horse. The sergeant jumped off and killed him with his sword. There ought to have been a great many more killed; but all the men were excited and nervous and had not been under fire before.

We counted 474, but a great many were found the same day by our scouts, wounded and hiding in bushes some miles off. We finished about 7.10; and the rest of the day we were burying them, and our own five poor fellows, and one officer, Johnson, of the 99th. I think we had 30 wounded. In our regiment one man was killed. He was in my company; shot right through the head; and Colonel Northey badly wounded, the shot entering at the shoulder and lodging itself in his back. It was got out. He is very weak; I only hope he may recover. Three other men in the regiment were wounded. It was a fearful sight – so many of these brave chaps lying about and covered with blood, and gore. They must have had a great many more wounded, whom they took away with them. I myself did not quite like the first few shots as they whizzed about over our heads; but I found I had quite a lot to do to keep the men in order and telling them when to shoot, that I did not mind it a bit. The Zulus were all armed with rifles and guns of some sort. One or two which were taken from the dead were found to have belonged to the 24th Regiment. We did not move at all on that day.

Thursday 3rd – We started early and had the longest and hardest march I ever remember. We reached Etshowe at about 4p.m; scarcely able to crawl in. We (60th in advance, 57th Marines and 91st) came to Etshowe, leaving the Native Contingent and 99th, and some of the Naval Brigade at Ginginhilovo (the place where the fight was). Great caution was observed all the way; as the ground was very favourable for an attack from the enemy. However, we got to Etshowe without a shot, and found Pearson's column there.

Friday 4th – I was on picket with my company, also the ensuing night. Pearson moved away about four miles.

Saturday 5th – We caught him up by 9 o'clock, having started early. We left Etshowe quite empty; having burnt the king's brother's kraal the day before. We halted for two hours, as our lines of waggons with Pearson's was so long. It was awfully hot. The country is perfectly lovely; such grass and woods, hills, most beautiful flowers and trees; if only inhabited it would be one of the most charming countries in the world. The climate is bad. So hot in the daytime and cold at night. Dew like rain. I saw, on our route today, after halting in the sun for a couple of hours, six or seven fellows fall out from sunstroke.

Sunday 6th – Poor Colonel Northey died. We had a scare, or rather a false alarm, at about 3.30 this morning. Colonel Pemberton has got dysentery. We began half rations today. Men not in good health.

My dear Papa and Mamma,

I again forward you my diary, as I have no ink or paper here. I hope this will find you all well at home. Here there is nothing but hard work, and very little to eat from morning till night. I am afraid it will be a long affair. After the battle 270 pieces of arms were found that the Zulus had thrown away when retreating. I am writing this by moonlight, to catch the courier to the Tugela. Very best love to all.

Your most affectionate son,
Arthur.

Sunday April 6th – GINGHILOVO – Up at four. We came back here in the morning, after leaving Pearson to our right, who was going straight back to the Tugela to review his troops. We encamped about three-quarters of a mile from where we had our battle. Passing the ground the stench was fearful, owing to natives who had dragged themselves off and died. Since the battle nearly 500 pieces of arms have been found, which had been thrown away when our cavalry pursued them; also, our scouts say, there are at least 400 or 500 bodies unburied, the Zulus having tried to carry them off, but were obliged to leave them in their haste to escape the cavalry. N.B. – Our cavalry consist of native troops, mostly officered by our own men, and not more than 150. They are of great use, because they can pursue the enemy, whereas it would be impossible for our infantry to pursue them in such a country as this, without being cut off.

Monday 7th April – Lord Chelmsford with his staff, some Marines, eight companies of the Buffs, and 99th Regiment, went back to the Tugela, leaving the 57th, 91st, and ourselves, 1500 Natives (who are really useless as regards a stand up fight) and a few Marines to make a fort here, for provisions etc., to be brought to, to be in readiness for us to move up to Ulundi, or wherever we may be sent; in fact a base of operations for the force on this side. Roorke's Drift (sic) will be made a base of operations for Wood's column in all probability. Colonel Pemberton still remains on the sick list; and several of the officers have been suffering from diarrhoea, caused by bad water. In my last letter I said we were on half rations; but it only lasted for about two days, as we got some more sent to us. We hear that Wood lost 18 officers and 150 men in two days' fighting (Hlobane) and that he killed about 3,000 Zulus. In the afternoon we moved up to a small hill in a first rate position, but water bad, and that a mile off, and even that not likely to last long. We have also on the next hill another laager for the natives and bullocks. It is, of course, a necessity to keep them out of the camp because they make the place smell so. In the daytime it is awfully hot, the sun having such power, and at night cool, and very heavy dews, wet you through, if you did not wear a mackintosh. the men begin to improve in spirits, but it will be awfully slow here for a fortnight on the saltiest of pork and hard biscuit, pork unfit to eat.

Tuesday 8th – We were under arms at four, in fact we have to be every morning. In the daytime we began our entrenchments, and did not do very much, excepting that we had a scare, the alarm sounding, and small bodies of natives being seen about. They soon retired when they saw us and nothing more was seen of them. We have burnt several kraals about, which enrages the Zulus very much.

Wednesday 9th – I was on duty from 3 to 4 a.m., another scorching hot day. A great deal of long grass has been burnt about the country, of course by the Zulus. Captain Tufnell, who was assuming command of the regiment, as we had no other officers, also very ill. We sit in the shade under the waggons out of the sun. Of course we cannot go more than a couple of hundred yards from the camp, except in armed parties, so we find it rather dull. I got your letter from Mereworth, and was very glad to get it, always like having as much news as possible, as we seldom see a paper, even news of the Oxford and Cambridge boat race, anything to read. I walked round our new fort this afternoon. It is very strong, to say the least, and would keep any Zulu army in the world off. We have one Gatling, two rocket tubes, and two 9-pounders. We manned the trenches at 7 p.m. and to bed soon after..., as it is dark at 7, and no light after 7.30 allowed. Up at 3 next morning.

Thursday 10th – My company was on outpost duty, so I was out all day long, and did not do much, except keep a look out. Most of the troops suffering from dysentery and want of substance. We expect a convoy soon, as we only have six days more provisions. Awfully hot again today. The country around our fort is more or less plain to the N. S. and E. where the king feeds his cattle. To the W. it is very mountainous, very like Scotland, only hills, I should say, higher. We

see the Zulu fires at night in the distance. I wish we could get from here, but I believe we have to wait until all the forces are ready to advance. I don't know whether I told you about the Native Contingent. They are all black like niggers, and awful looking beasts, have scarcely any clothes on at all. They are armed with rifles, but are very bad shots; the only good they are, is, after a victory, to pursue the enemy, as they are very active; also they do not make bad scouts; they are very sharp-sighted, and can hear very quickly. We must in the end give the Zulus a thrashing, but the hard thing is to find them. We can never attack them because we never know where they are, and they will take god care only to attack us when we are in the bush or crossing rivers, and perhaps at night. When they advance at close quarters they come like cavalry; but of course any English army can stop them, if properly handled.

Now my dear papa and Mamma I must finish off. I hope this will catch the mail on Tuesday. I hope all the farms, etc., are doing well. With very best love to all, Martha, Jubber and Pussy.

I am, ever your affectionate son,

Arthur.

GINGHILOVO.

Good Friday – Our company was again on duty in the other laager where the niggers live. there was very little to do all day, and that night our company slept over with the niggers, and we returned from duty next morning at six. I was taken awfully seedy in the night with diarrhoea.

Easter Sunday – I was obliged to go on the sick list as my complaint had turned more to dysentery. The bad water and lowering food and bad climate is enough to kill anybody; still we struggle on, the same for everybody.

Monday 14th April – Convoy arrived all safe last night, another starts tomorrow on the same principle as the one before, 1 company goes with it. By the mail last night poor Keith Tornour heard he had lost his father. I am awfully sorry, as I could not do any work, being still on the sick list. My dysentery still sticks to me with bad pains in my insides, but I feel otherwise well in myself. I slept under a cart last night – quite a luxury, as it keeps the dew off. Today we are burning the grass round our laager, so that the Zulus cannot set fire to it and attack us at the same time. The men have had fresh meat the last two days as several bullocks have come up from the Tugela. They are killed at eight in the morning and eaten at one. We got some jam up last night, so we are doing pretty well now. The only thing that I wish is that the Zulus would attack us again. It is getting quite slow doing nothing. Captain Tufnell is off the sick list today, and takes command of the regiment. How are uncle Tom and aunt Conty getting on? Having no end of fun, I'll be bound. Our laager is about twenty miles from Fort Pearson on the Tugela, and sixteen miles from the now abandoned Etshowe, which we can see with our telescopes. We are all becoming very learned cooks, as we cook all our meat, salt meat etc., make soup and different kind of them. The worst of it is we have very few materials to cook in, mostly provided by the waggon conductors. We made some mealie cakes of Indian corn, which were first rate at the time, but awfully indigestible afterwards, I'm afraid the fault of the cooking, I wish I had taken some lessons from Miles before I left.

Tuesday 15th April – The convoy of empty waggons left early to go to the Tugela; spent a very bad night from diarrhoea and felt much weaker today, still I hope I shall get over it soon. Some of the fellow got leave to shoot, and they shot five golden plovers, which are very acceptable to our laager. I felt awfully dull, nothing to do but sit under a cart out of the sun and try to sleep. The scouts went out about six or seven miles today and burnt several kraals. Four Zulu women and a boy were brought in yesterday, the most hideous creatures I ever saw, more like wild animals. I am going to post my letter tonight so as to be certain to catch the mail. I hope you are all well and love to everybody.

Ever your most affectionate son,
Arthur.

Lieutenant Arthur Clynton Baskerville Mynors, 3rd Battalion 60th Rifles died on Friday, 25th April 1879 near Fort Pearson on the Tugela River, Zululand. He was buried under a mimosa tree, a company of the Buffs acting as the funeral party. He was carried to his grave by a small party of the 60th. Colonel Hopton and Captain Cardew followed the body.

In early May some men of the 60th put up a small wooden cross at the head of the grave. The following inscription was cut on it;

In Memory
of
Lieut. MYNORS
3/60th
Who died April 25, 1879
Aged 22 years.

Spelling and grammar are as used in the original diary. (Ed.)

A faded 1879 sketch of site of Lt. Mynor's grave at Fort Pearson – artist unknown (Ed.)

