

## Zulu War Medals

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Participants in most wars are acknowledged by their country with the striking of a specially designed medal which can be proudly displayed on the veteran's tunic or, after retirement, on his best suit. Often made from silver, these had an intrinsic value and many an old soldier resorted to selling or pawning his medals in order to survive hard times.

Luckier individuals could display the addition of a medal awarded for a brave deed which discreetly set the wearer apart from his fellows. Certain high ranking officers were rewarded with more colourful awards such as the Distinguished Service Order and the various Orders of the Bath as well as foreign awards which included the Turkish Order of the Medjidie or the French Legion d'Honneur. Once the pain and misery of war began to settle in the memory, so an old soldier would be proud to wear an official memento of his contribution.

Three medals were awarded for the Zulu War; two were for gallantry and accompanied the third, the campaign medal. As the Victoria Cross was covered in the first edition of the Journal, this article will concentrate on the other two awards.

The alternative gallantry award was the Distinguished Conduct Medal, which was instituted in December 1854 for other ranks only. Before this date there had been no way of rewarding outstanding acts of bravery by ordinary soldiers and, in the rush of jingoism that accompanied the outbreak of the Crimea War, the press and the public demanded some form of recognition for their heroes. Moving with unusual speed, the Horse Guards produced the DCM, which carried with it a gratuity of £15 for sergeants, £10 for corporals and £5 for privates. Many of these medals, such as the Crimea War medal, were issued to men actually serving at the front, and were worn by them in the trenches before Sebastopol.

Like most medals of this period, it was designed by William Wyon. The obverse showed the young Queen Victoria's diademed head, while the reverse had the inscription, 'FOR DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT IN THE FIELD'. The medal was made of silver with a scrolled silver suspender which hung from a ribbon of red with a dark blue centre stripe. The result was aesthetically pleasing and generally well received.

The awarding of this medal, however, has a history of inconsistencies. For instance 770 were awarded during the Crimea War but only 10 for the Indian Mutiny, while 2,026 were issued for the Boer War but just 87 for the Sudan.

The Zulu War saw as many as 23 Victoria Crosses awarded compared with just 14 DCM's. One wonders why only 5 DCM's were awarded for the Defence of Rorke's Drift when there were so many acts of gallantry displayed. Indeed, one could argue that some of the Victoria Crosses awarded for this action probably merited the DCM instead. But then other motives were at work to lessen the impact of Isandlwana on the British public. The Rorke's Drift recipients of the 'Silver Medal', as it is sometimes known, were Corporal Francis Attwood, Army Service Corps, Gunner John Cantwell, Royal Artillery, the celebrated Colour Sergeant Frank Bourne 2/24th and Private William Roy 1/24th who was one of the brave defenders of the hospital. The fifth was Corporal Michael McMahon, Army Hospital Corps who subsequently had his award taken away for theft and desertion.

There were two native recipients, Sergeant Simeon Kambula and Troop Sergeant Major Learda, both of the well regarded Natal Native Horse. The former received his for saving life at the Umfolozi River, while the latter received his for a similar act at the Battle of Kambula. They were not, however, the first black recipients of the DCM as is generally believed. Several members of the West India Regiment have this distinction, for gallantry during the British Honduras campaign of 1872 and the Ashanti War of 1873/74. Private John Power 1/24th was attached to the Mounted Infantry and escaped from Isandlwana, he won his medal for three separate actions; Griqualand West in September 1878, and at Ulundi and Kambula in 1879. (1) Two recipients, Colour Sergeant James Philips of the 58th, and Gunner William Moorhead RA, received their medals for the Ulundi action. As the Zulu attack was defeated by overwhelming fire-power before they could get anywhere near the British, one wonders what exceptional bravery these men could have displayed within the security of the British square.

The Battle of Kambula provided three DCM's, all for rescuing fallen comrades under fire. Private Albert Page of the 13th, for instance, ran from the lines to bring in a wounded native from the cattle kraal. Corporal Edward Quigley R.A. brought in a wounded soldier of the 90th.

The first medals presented to Europeans serving in locally raised regiments were awarded to Corporal William Vinnicombe and Trooper Robert Browne of the Frontier Light Horse for bravery during the Hlobane debacle. (2) The latter also served as Colonel Redvers Buller's orderly and no doubt Buller's sponsorship smoothed the way for his award. As with the Victoria Cross, the award of the DCM was haphazard and reliant to a large extent on influential witnesses who were prepared to champion the candidate's cause.

Another favoured recipient at Hlobane was Private Alexander Walkinshaw of the 90th, who was Colonel Evelyn Wood's bugler/orderly. He risked his life under fire to retrieve a book of prayer from the saddle bag on

a dead horse so that his commander could conduct the rather bizarre burial, under fire, of Captains Campbell and Lloyd at the base of Hlobane Mountain. At the end of the war, Walkinshaw transferred to the 58th so that he could remain in South Africa, he later took part in the disastrous First Boer War of 1880/81. His DCM was a long time in being issued and he was finally presented with it in 1882.

During the First Boer War, the number of DCM's awarded was 20 but, unlike the Zulu War, the campaign was not afforded the recognition of a medal or even a bar.

The South Africa Medal, to give the Zulu War Medal its correct title, was given to all who were involved in the war effort and covered the period from September 25th 1877 to December 2nd 1879. The original design was by William Wyon RA and was the same as the 1853 medal issued to participants of the 'Kaffir Wars' or, as they have been politically corrected, the Frontier Wars, for three separate campaigns during the years 1834-35, 1846-47 and 1850-53. The medal is a silver disc measuring 35.5mm (1.4") diameter. The authority for the medal came from a Royal Warrant dated January 1880 which was followed by a further two Royal Warrants. This was followed by a General Order No. 103 published in August 1880. Due to its ambiguous drafting, a further clarifying G.O. No. 134 was issued in October 1880. The medal obverse shows the diademed head of a young Queen Victoria with the legend 'VICTORIA REGINA'.

The 'young Queen' design first appeared on medals as early as 1842 and was still used nearly forty years later on the 1879 medal. One might wonder why should this be when the other campaign medals of the 1870-80 period show a matronly head of the Queen. The probable explanation is cost. Some 36,600 medals, all struck by the Royal Mint, were issued and as there was already a die for the South African War Medal, it was a fairly simple matter to mint a further quantity.

The reverse was designed by L.C.Wyon, (a son of W. Wyon RA). Beneath the words 'SOUTH AFRICA' is the graceful illustration of the lion symbolising Africa and is usually wrongly described as stooping to drink from a pool in front of a protea bush. In fact, the artistic effect should convey submission. One Under-secretary hoped that "the lion doing penance will not be taken for the *British Lion*". In the exergue (the space below), the date '1853' was substituted with a Zulu shield and four crossed assegais. The recipient's name and unit were stamped or engraved on the rim in capital letters. After months of deliberation, Queen Victoria finally approved the ribbon of watered pale orange with two wide and two narrow dark blue stripes, which symbolised South Africa's parched terrain and many water courses.

Also issued for fitting to the medal was a date bar or clasp. Of all the medals ever issued, that to the Zulu War presents a bewildering number of permutations. Date bars for 1877, 1877-78 and 1877-79 were issued to members of the Colonial forces who fought against the Gcalekas. There was a separate 1878 bar for operations against the Griquas, also for Colonial forces only. There were also bars for 1877-78-79 and 1878-79 and the Imperial regiments like the 3rd, 13th, 24th, 80th, 88th and 90th were entitled to fix these to their medals, as were N Battery 5th Brigade Royal Artillery (3), the principle being that the year(s) on the clasp convey all the operations in which the recipient may have engaged in.

The 1879 bar was issued to all who took part in operations in Zululand. For those who remained in Natal, 5,600 medals without a bar were issued, with the largest number in this category being awarded to the sailors of H.M ships *Euphrates*, *Himalaya*, *Orontes* and *Tamar*.

A study of the medal roll reveals that most Imperial regiments were represented by officers who volunteered for duties ranging from staff duties to transport and commissariat, serving with locally raised outfits or becoming attached to British regiments. The Grenadier Guards supplied the highest number, 16, consisting of their Colonel, 3 Lieutenant Colonels, 3 Lieutenants and 9 other ranks. Two out of the three officers from the Coldstream Guards were killed at Hlobane while serving on Evelyn Wood's staff. (4)

Most of the detached officers brought their own batman. One of these servants seems to have temporarily bettered himself. Lance Corporal H. Lukin of the 53rd (Shropshire) Regiment accompanied Lieutenant L.A. White, who served with Commissariat and Transport Staff. Lukin, however, is shown to have served as a lieutenant in the 2nd Natal Native Contingent! The only representative of the 45th(Notts) was a Private W. Watson and one can only wonder as to what unique gift this lowly soldier had to warrant his being sent all the way to South Africa by his regiment.

Besides the Regular Army, there were also representatives from some obscure units like the Tower Hamlets Militia, Royal Anglesey Engineer Militia and the Ayr & Wighton Militia. Aristocratic officers, like Lord Beaumont of the West York Yeomanry and Lord St. Vincent of the 7th Hussars, were attached to crack regiments like the 17th Lancers. Lord Beresford, ADC to the Viceroy of India, took extended leave and, at his own expense, made his way to South Africa to serve as aide-de-camp to Redvers Buller. Like many of his class, he regarded a colonial war as a great adventure and a chance to advance up the promotion ladder. (5) If the Imperial recipients of the campaign medal appeared somewhat assorted, then the Colonials were positively bewildering. In order to understand how the medal and its bars were awarded, it would be helpful to show what was printed on the reverse of the medal application form. Quote:- The Medal will be granted to the Forces employed against:-

(a) The Gcalekas, Gaikas and other Kaffir Tribes from 26th September 1877

to the 28th June 1878 inclusive. (Year on Clasp 1877-78)  
(b) Against the Pokwane from 21st to 28th January 1878 (Clasp 1878)

(c) Against the Griquas from 24th April to 13th November 1878 (Clasp 1878)

(d) Against the Zulus from 11th January to 1st September 1879 (Clasp 1879)

(e) Against Sekukuni from 11th November to 2nd December 1879 and against Moirosi's Stronghold (Clasp 1879). (6)

Clasps for those who served throughout the conflicts were entitled to fit 1877-78-79 or 1878-79 according to which campaigns they participated in. (7) There were also a handful of veterans from the 1853 conflict who were only issued with date clasps to fit on to their old campaign medal. One of these was William Smith, who was a survivor of the wreck of the troopship *Birkenhead* that sank off Simon's Bay in 1852 with the loss of 454 men. He served with the 12th until he took his discharge in the Cape Colony. He then joined the Cape Mounted Rifles and was entitled to the 1877-8-9 clasp.

The total number of units raised by the Colonials during the period of 1877-79 was a staggering 225. Some of these regiments evolved into other units and the volunteers were pretty footloose about changing their allegiance. In the absence of their own standing army, the Colony relied on ex-soldiers and enthusiasts to raise their own troops and there was a plethora of short-lived regiments with names like Nesbitt's Light Horse, Harvey's Horse, Barber's Horse, Baker's Horse, Sansom's Horse, Stevenson's Horse, Ferreira's Horse, MacLean's Fingo Levies, Major Larkin's Police, Carbutt's Border Rangers, Pulleine's Rangers, Schermbucker's Horse and the ill-fated Border Horse. (8)

It seems as if almost every small community raised a volunteer unit with titles like Aliwal North Mounted Volunteers, Berlin Mounted Cavalry, Clanwilliam Volunteer Corps, Colesburg Light Horse, Fort Beaufort Hottentot Levy, Frankfort Burghers and Fingo Levies, Graaf Reinett Volunteers, Keiskamahoek Mounted Corps, Natal Hussars, One Star Diamond Contingent, Stockenstroom Rifle Volunteers and, shades of *Bertie Wooster*, the Wodehouse True Blues. (9)

As very few of these militia saw any campaigning, let alone action, it seems somewhat unjust that they were entitled to wear a date clasp on their medal ribbon, while those who did not cross into Zululand in 1879, were denied this distinction. Units like the King William's Town Veteran Volunteers were raised to patrol the streets of their town and not to take part in any fighting, yet the 29 members were entitled to wear the 1877-8 clasp.

The number of volunteer units who took part in the Zulu War numbered less than 50 and most were made up of only a dozen or so men. The Natal Native Contingent supplied the largest numbers while the mounted volunteers were drawn mostly from the Cape Mounted Rifles and the Frontier Light Horse. Baker's Horse, who rode all the way from Cape Colony, also volunteered. These mounted volunteers proved invaluable to the lumbering British columns that were without cavalry for the first phase of the War. They were involved in numerous scouting missions and skirmishes, particularly in the north, and eventually overcame the prejudice of the British against them.

Of all the campaign medals from Victoria's small wars, medal collectors today find the Zulu War Medal the most collectable. Prices vary according to the recipient, regiment and the action. Rorke's Drift recipients command the highest prices, usually in excess of £1000. A survivor of Isandlwana would be equally valued. Medals to soldiers of the 24th are more sought after than those of other regiments. An exception is for medals of the 80th who were at Intombi Drift. In 1998, an average 1879 medal with bar usually costs between £150-180, while a 'no bar' fetches about £100.\*

Colonial forces' medals are naturally more sought after in South Africa, with Hlobane participants the most desirable.

Because of their scarcity and mystique, Zulu War gallantry medals command very high prices and rarely appear on the market.

Although it can be an expensive hobby, medal collecting offers the enthusiast the spur to research and learn more about the individuals involved in this most fascinating of colonial wars.

\*By 2009 these figures would read at least £400 with bar and £200 without.

## **References.**

1. There are references to Power winning his DCM at Hlobane on 28/3/79. The date and action shown on the Submission to the Queen, however, is 29/3/79 Kambula. A similar confusion exists with the Victoria Cross won by Lieutenant Edward Browne. Although gazetted for Hlobane, a case has been made for his winning his award at Kambula.
2. Vinnicombe also served as a lieutenant in the Natal Native Contingent.
3. The experienced 1st Battalion of the 24th were almost wiped out to a man at Isandlwana and replaced by raw recruits. N Battery lost 59 men. The 80th were mauled at the Intombi River. They were largely side-lined as part of the ineffectual 5th Column under Colonel Hugh Rowlands. The 3rd "Buff's" were stationed on the Lower Tugela and were besieged at Eshowe. The 13th & 90th were with Wood's Column in the north and participated in the Battle of Kambula. The 88th "Connaught Rangers" missed out on any action as they were used for escort and guard duties in Natal. They were entitled to the 1879 bar as they were part of General Crealock's First Division during the second invasion.
4. Captain Ronald Campbell was killed while trying to clear some caves of Zulu snipers and was buried by Wood at the foot of Hlobane. Captain Robert Barton commanded the Frontier Light Horse, which was decimated on the summit. Barton escaped down the far side, was pursued by the Zulus and finally killed after a chase of six miles.
5. Beresford won the Victoria Cross for rescuing an unhorsed Mounted Infantryman at the Mfolozi River.
6. Although they were issued to a few men, the bars with the dates 1877 (170 issued) and 1877-79 (11 issued) were overridden by the Colonial Forces Order No.169 dated 14/9/1880.
7. In 1878, when the Colonial Office in London was asked to issue the South African War Medal for the Ninth Kaffir War, as the fighting of 1877-78 was known. Sir Michael Hicks-Beach was so sure that there would be fighting against the Zulus that he recommended delaying until one medal could be struck.
8. The Border Horse was all but annihilated on Hlobane.
9. The impressively named Count Frederick von Hirschberg served as a sergeant in the Wodehouse True Blues before being commissioned in the 4th Battalion N.N.C. He was entitled to the 1877-8-9 bar.

**The South Africa campaign medal of Lt. Curling RA.**

