

From *The Sevenoaks Chronicle* of March 14, 1924

Yet another fake ‘I was there’ man.

By Dr Adrian Greaves

By mere chance, I recently came across this 1924 newspaper article about an old soldier who falsely claimed to have survived Isandlwana. It's a pity he doesn't say how he managed to survive the battle but the most likely explanation is that he was probably with Chelmsford's column sent out from Isandlwana camp in the early hours of the 23rd January 1879. His family and friends clearly believed his story and thereafter treated him as a war hero. He received the South Africa campaign medal, without bar. This indicates he probably didn't even cross into Zululand.

The following report is unabridged from the original newspaper edition.

The Sevenoaks Chronicle March 14, 1924

‘IN MARCH 1924 Zulu War hero, George Thomas Langridge was buried at St Nicholas’ Church, Sevenoaks, with full military honours. He had died at his Buckhurst Avenue home, aged 66, after 42 years of military service, including several brutal years fighting Zulus in southern Africa. He survived the horrific massacre at Isandlwana on January 23, 1879, and consequently joined the relief column heading for the besieged mission station at Rorke’s Drift.

The Chronicle of March 14, 1924, reported how “with his accustomed keenness” Mr Langridge, of 44 Buckhurst Avenue, had been out on his allotment on the day of his death and only developed “serious symptoms” when he returned home around dinner time. He died peacefully a few hours later.

Of his funeral, the paper wrote: “Blinds were drawn, traffic came to a standstill and a hush fell over everything with complete cessation of movement as the remains of the old campaigner moved slowly to his last resting place.”

Hundreds lined the High Street as the funeral cortege bearing his coffin passed slowly along a pre-planned route, carried by his comrades from the Old Ready fire brigade, with whom he served for over 20 years. The *Last Post* was followed by a 21-gun salute delivered by the South Wales Borderers, the 24th Regiment.

Mr Langridge served in the 2nd battalion of the 24th Regiment when it crossed into Zululand at Rorke’s Drift on the Buffalo River as part of the No. 3 Column. On January 20, camp was made beneath the rocky, low hill of Isandlwana, in the middle of nowhere. However, a mistake saw most of the 2nd battalion sent off on a wild goose chase as part of a relief column sent to support an earlier patrol.

Mr Langridge would have missed the impending battle had he not been on outpost duty when the column left.

The battle of Isandlwana began when a British scouting party stumbled upon the Zulus waiting for the right moment to strike. The Zulus chased them right back to base.

Historians say 20,000 Zulus surprised the camp that day. They descended on five companies from 1st battalion of the 24th Regiment, six Natal Native Contingent companies the Natal Mounted Police and two seven-pounders of N Battery. The British forces fought heroically, until their ammunition ran out and the Zulus overran them.

Of 600 British infantry, 600 native infantry, 100 cavalry and 70 gunners, the death total was 52 officers and 1,277 other ranks, including 21 officers and 578 others from the 24th Regiment. Only six privates from the 24th Regiment survived. Zulu deaths were between 2,000 and 3,000.

Mr Langridge then joined up with the column heading towards Rorke's Drift, where Lieut Gonville Bromhead's B Company of the 2nd Battalion of the 24th Regiment and 130 men had held out for 12 hours against wave after wave of attacks from 4,000 Zulus.

Mr Langridge and his unit went on to India where he served for three years before returning to Buckhurst Avenue.

For 20 years he was a member of the old Volunteer Force in Sevenoaks. He held, in addition to the South African medal, the Volunteer Long Service medal. In 1914, aged 56, he volunteered with the Royal West Kents and survived another four years of war before being discharged as a sergeant in 1918. All five of his sons, George, William, Fred, Harry and Arthur, came through the war unscathed as well; three in the army and two in the navy'.