

## The life and times of Charles Jenkins 1840-1919

Dr David Payne.

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**1840.** Charles Jenkins was born at Brading, Isle of Wight, the forth of eight children of George and Jane Jenkins. The family moved to Ventnor when Charles was about four.

**1854.** Charles joined the Royal Navy as a Boy 2<sup>nd</sup> Class. He took part in the Baltic Campaign of the Crimean War sailing aboard HMS Ajax. The Crimean War was the first campaign in which the British and French formed an alliance after centuries of fighting each other. At this time, Russian plans for expansion were raising tensions in Europe. In October 1853 Turkey declared war on Russia and hostilities broke out on the Black Sea. Britain believed that blockading Finland, with the Black Sea already closed, at the Dardanelles, would cripple Russia's overseas trade. The British fleet left for the Baltic from Spithead under Vice Admiral Sir Charles Napier on 11 March 1854 and war was officially declared on 27 March. Charles was awarded the Baltic Medal in 1856.

**1858.** Charles left the Royal Navy and emigrated to South Africa.

**1859-1868.** In a letter dated 4<sup>th</sup> January from Captain H. Paisley, captain and Adjutant, Cape Mounted Rifles, he wrote;

I have great pleasure in testifying to the good conduct and exemplary character of Sergt. Charles Jenkins, Cape Mounted Rifles I shall be glad to hear of his advancement on leaving the army to which he has been a credit so far as I have known him.

In 1869 the Imperial Government decided, for reasons of economy, to reduce the garrison in the Cape Colony and in 1870 the Queen's Regiment of Cape Mounted Rifles was called back to England and disbanded.

**1868.** He married Susannah Beavis on Christmas Day at Bonchurch Church. His father, George, attended and the ceremony was witnessed by his brother John and sister, Mary-Ann Coleman. His profession was recorded as a warder and he was living at Portsea. There was then a prison at Portsea which housed the overflow from the prison hulks in Portsmouth harbour.

**1871.** In the census he is still living in Portsea and working at the prison. He is living with his mother, wife and two children are recorded. It appears he then left the family home to return to South Africa – his wife is recorded as living with a Charles Dyer so possibly there was a marital split.

**1879.** Letter from Capt. Barton Commanding 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Natal Native Contingent. (NNC) dated 2 September 1879.

I have great pleasure in certifying to the Good Soldierly qualities of Lieutenant Charles Jenkins, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Natal Native Contingent. Lt Jenkins served with the

regiment as Sgt. Major and Lieutenant throughout the Zulu War of 1879 and was highly commended for Conspicuous Bravery at the battle of Inyazana on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January.

I have every reason to be satisfied with the careful and attentive discharge of all duties entrusted to Lt. Jenkins during the time her served under my command.

From; Capt. W. Fitzroy Hart, West Middle Drift, 21 September 1879.  
Staff Officer, Clarke's column.

I have great pleasure in making the following statement with regard to Lt. C. Jenkins in the hope that it may be of use to him.

Lt Jenkins joined when it was first raised for the Zulu War in 1879 it was then the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 2<sup>nd</sup> NNC. Lt Jenkins joined as a Sergeant, I was Staff Officer of the regiment and had the opportunity of observing that in action he was as brave a soldier as could be desired while his duties at all times were well performed.

In the engagement with the Zulus at Inyazana on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January he fought so well that he was recommended to General Lord Chelmsford for promotion to Lieutenant and this promotion he received in consequence.

Lieutenant Jenkins has served continuously throughout the whole Zulu War from first to last.

Signed by Capt. W. Fitzroy Hart.

In a newspaper cutting from the *Isle of Wight Mercury* dated 14<sup>th</sup> November 1919 they describe his action in the Zulu War.

He joined the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn NNC in which he served as a sergeant during the Zulu War of 1879. During this campaign he was highly commended for conspicuous bravery at the battle of Inyazana on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1879.

War Office memorandum.

I am glad to learn that the Government has granted an increase of the pension allowed to ex-Lieut. Charles Jenkins, a native of Ventnor, of the Cape Mounted Rifles, the additional grant having been awarded for "distinguished conduct in the field" during the Zulu War of 1879. Lieut. Jenkins daringly made the charge single-handed with revolver and sword upon a number of Zulus who were defending their own kraal, but who were forced by him to retreat, seven of the enemy being left dead. To his surprise, none of the men followed his lead into the kraal, but the men afterwards behaved splendidly in following up the retreat of the Zulus.

It was owing to the actions of Lieut. Jenkins that an army of Zulus, who were coming over the hill of Inyazana (Nyezane River) to reinforce their own men in action with the English column in the bush, were successfully put to flight. General Hart personally complimented Lieut. Jenkins on the field of battle, and

said it had not been for his brave conduct the English column would have been annihilated. Lord Chelmsford afterwards recommended the soldier for promotion from Sergeant to Lieutenant.

Ex-Lieut. Jenkins wears three medals. One was awarded for services in the Navy during the Russian War, 1854-5, another for services during the Zulu War, with bar, 1877-8-9; and the third is a Cape General Service medal, with bar, for the Basuto War.

The Rev. R.W. Colquhoun heard of these facts, and immediately communicated with the War Office authorities and pointed out to them the brave services rendered to his country by this old soldier, and by said services, should be recognised by his countrymen. As a result of the thoughtful action of the Vicar of Ventnor, an additional pension has been granted to ex-Lieut. Jenkins.

**1881.** Basuto Gun War. Served with the CMP as a Private soldier under Sir. F. Carrington.

**1883.** November 1883 the *IOW Mercury* reported;

The friends and relatives of Mrs C. Jenkins, who for some time past has been residing at Newport in the house of Charles Dyer, Trafalgar Road, Ventnor were painfully shocked this week to receive the news of the death by burning of this unfortunate woman. It appears that on Saturday night, Mrs Jenkins went home the worse for drink and upset a benzoline lamp, igniting her clothes and thus remained for some time before any help was rendered. It will be remembered that her husband, after disposing of his bathing machines, went out to the Cape whither he has since resided. She died in the Union Hospital after an agony of suffering. The deceased's clothes were almost entirely consumed and the burns of such nature as to cause excruciating pains. The poor woman's recovery was considered hopeless from the first. At the time the accident occurred, the deceased was the only occupant of the house and although her cries for help attracted the attention of persons living in the neighbourhood, yet they were unable to render her any material assistance, so utterly powerless was the deceased to devise prompt measures for subduing the flames.

**1883.** December, the *IOW Mercury* reported;

The friends and relatives of the poor woman Mrs C. Jenkins, whose sad death by burning at Newport we recorded in last week's issue request us to state that it is incorrect that the poor woman 'went home the worse for drink' as we stated. From the statement of those who were with her just before, they are assured that Mrs Jenkins was quite sober and that the upsetting of the lamp was due to her dress becoming entangled in the legs of a chair beside the bed, on which the benzoline lamp was placed.

**1885.** Bechuanaland Expedition with Sir Charles Warren. Promoted to Sergeant Major and acted as interpreter to Sir Charles.

**1885.** 2<sup>nd</sup> July. From F. Carrington Commanding 2<sup>nd</sup> Mounted Rifles.  
No 287 Sgt. Major C. Jenkins served under my command in Bechuanaland in the 2<sup>nd</sup> mounted Rifles until disabled by an accident on duty. I found him most trustworthy.

**1889.** From the *IOW Advertiser* May 1889;  
News from South Africa. A Ventrnorian in a telegraph office in Cape Colony writes a very interesting letter. An extract of it concerns Mr C. Jenkins, the younger brother of Mr John Jenkins. 'The landlord of this hotel has a brother who was in the same regiment as Charlie Jenkins when he got his ribs crushed, also a Doctor Lennan who attended him. Knew him quite well. They wished to be remembered to him and were very pleased to hear he had recovered.

**1903.** A newspaper cutting from the *IOW Mercury* dated 7<sup>th</sup> February 1903 reads;  
In the Zulu campaign, he was pinned to his saddle by an assegai that passed through the fleshy part of his thigh. After being wounded in Zululand he came home to Ventnor for a while but did not stay long and returned to the cape and joined the cape mounted Rifles.

**1903.** From *IOW Mercury*.  
Charles Jenkins is to be congratulated upon having received the Cape of Good Hope general Medal with clasp for Basutoland 1881. 'Better late than never' is a true adage and Mr Jenkins will none the less appreciate the memento of his service rendered 21 years ago because of its tardy arrival.

**1903.** From *IOW Mercury*.  
Mr Charles Jenkins was run over by a loaded wagon and sustained a fracture of six ribs and a collar bone. He was then invalided as unfit for further service and was given a gratuity instead of a pension.

**1891.** The National census shows him living again in Ventnor – it is unknown when he returned there from South Africa. He is shown living with his second wife, Clara, and running a café/restaurant at No. 2 Albert Street.

**1904.** Letter from Maj. General Sir F. Carrington, supporting Jenkins's claim for an increase in pension.

I have much pleasure in testifying to the good services of Sgt. Major Charles Jenkins. He served under my command in the Basuto War in the Cape mounted Rifles and afterwards in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mounted Rifles during Sir. C. Warren's expedition in Bechuanaland where he was promoted to Sgt. Major for his efficiency and general good service. He unfortunately met with a severe accident when on duty by his horse backing into one of our wagons he was escorting – the horse being killed and Sgt. Major Jenkins having his

collarbone and six ribs broken. He was taken to Mafeking Hospital where for some time he lay in a precarious state. He is in possession of the Baltic medal, Zulu War medal, Cape general Service medal and clasp for Basutoland. He is, I know, in most needy circumstances never having regained sufficient strength to do much work.

Maj. General Sir F. Carrington,

**1906.** By this time he had given up the café, living with Clara at 24 Albert Street but in financial difficulties. He wrote to Major General Hart-Symnot about his problems and received the following reply;

Dear Mr. Jenkins,

I have communicated with general Barton the subject of your letter to him and me, and we are agreed the best course for you to take is to write to the Secretary of State for War laying a statement before him of your war services and your need of assistance and saying you have our permission to offer reference to us. You may, if you wish, enclose this letter as a voucher.

I remember your gallant fighting in the critical action with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Zulu Army on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January at Inyazana, and your promotion from Non Commissioned Officer to Lieutenant in our NNC by Lord Chelmsford, upon my report.

If reference be made to me by the War Office, I shall have great pleasure in endeavouring to duly describe the value of your services at that grave time.

Major General Hart-Symnot.

**1906.** November 1906. Royal Hospital Chelsea reply.

Sir,

I am directed by the Lords and others, Commissioners of this hospital, to acquaint you that having taken into consideration all the circumstances of your case they have been pleased to increase your pension from nine pence to fifteen pence per diem. The additional 6d per day is awarded for 'distinguished Conduct in the Field'.

For the Commissioners of Chelsea Hospital.

**1919.** Death of Lieutenant Charles Jenkins 7<sup>th</sup> November 1919.

IOW Mercury 14.11.1919.

Lieut. Charles Jenkins, a native of Ventnor, who after an exciting military career, settled here some 28 years ago. Aged 79, he had been suffering from bronchitis and complications for some time.

After detailing his army career as outlined above, it went on to say he always had a remarkable fund of anecdotes and that a talk with him was always interesting. He had in his possession many letters from eminent military men vouching for the high standard of duty he always set.

His funeral took place at Ventnor Cemetery. The bearers and firing party were provided by men of the Munster regiment. The Rev. Vickers officiated. Principle mourners were Charles Jenkins (nephew) and Frank Coleman. Two buglers sounded the Last post after the remains were interred. At the deceased's express wish, his war and service medals were fixed to the centre of a laurel wreath and rested on the coffin, which was enveloped by the Union flag.

His detailed Will left his military papers and medals to his family with the residue of his estate to his wife Clara Jenkins.

His funeral cost 7 gns and he is buried in Ventnor cemetery. The funeral directors were Ingrams Funeral Services.

### **The unusual medals of Lieut. C. Jenkins.**

These medals may be viewed by arrangement with Dr. David Payne of the *AZWHS*.

**1<sup>st</sup> medal**, Baltic Medal; engraved 'Baltic' C. Jenkins Boy 2<sup>nd</sup> C. H.M.S. *Ajax*

**2<sup>nd</sup> medal**, South Africa Campaign Medal; clasp 1877-8-9, engraved Lieut. C. Jenkins 4<sup>th</sup> Battn. N.N.C.

**3<sup>rd</sup> medal** Cape of Good Hope General Service Medal 1880-1897, clasp Basutoland. engraved Pte C. Jenkins C.M. Rif. (Cape Mounted Rifles Ed.)

Apart from his bravery, the Zulu War field promotion to Lieutenant was highly unusual, as is the increased pension award. It appears that Lieut. Jenkins later served as a Private in the Basuto campaign.