

Warrior

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British Infantryman in South Africa 1877–81



Ian Castle • Illustrated by Christa Hook

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The Marketing Manager, Osprey Direct UK, PO Box 140,
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The Marketing Manager, Osprey Direct USA,
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BRITISH INFANTRYMAN IN SOUTH AFRICA 1877-81

INTRODUCTION

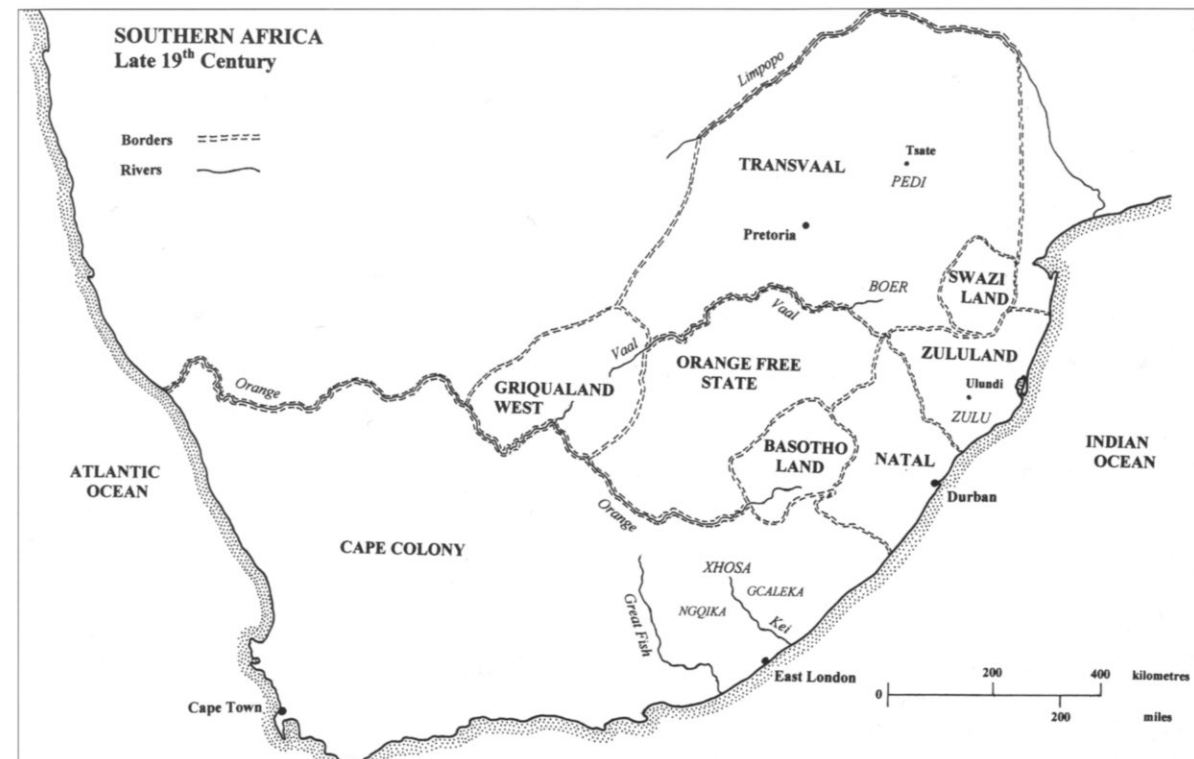
The 1870s heralded a period of great change for the British Army. Having stagnated in the years following the Napoleonic Wars the army that campaigned in the Crimea in the mid 1850s was still very much the same army that had fought at Waterloo in 1815. However, the failings and inadequacies exposed at that time, and freely reported in the press, did not lead to instant improvements. With the conclusion of the war against the Russians, Britain's army returned to the relative backwaters of colonial warfare, far away from the public gaze, fighting campaigns in India, China, New Zealand, Canada and Abyssinia (now Ethiopia). As such the clamour for reform slowed again. However, between 1860 and 1870 technical advancements exposed Britain to potential threats from her European rivals, leading to a gradual process of withdrawing garrisons from the less volatile corners of the Empire to bolster home defence.

The appointment of Edward Cardwell in 1868, as Secretary of State for War in Gladstone's Liberal government, refocused attention on the army, and he initiated a programme of reforms intended to tackle problems hindering its development. Prussia's success in the war with France in 1871 ensured the government took reform seriously.

As part of the new Army Enlistment Act of 1870 a soldier's terms of service changed. Previously a new recruit signed on for 12 years' service. Now, under the terms of short service, he still signed on for 12 years but this was divided into six years with the Colours (although at the end of six years re-enlistment was allowed), followed by a further six years in the newly created Reserve. Cardwell believed a trained Reserve force was essential – a force that could be utilised to bring peacetime home battalion strengths to a war footing in the face of a threat to Britain. But a number of senior officers opposed short service recognising that many trained and experienced soldiers would choose to leave after six years, their place on active service being taken by raw, inexperienced men.



Edward T. Cardwell, Secretary of State for War (1868-74). Cardwell was responsible for major changes in the structure of the late-Victorian Army. One of the most important of these, the introduction of short service, created a trained army reserve.



The two British colonies in southern Africa, Natal and the Cape, maintained their British garrisons through the 1870s. A long-running series of wars along the eastern frontier of Cape Colony against the Xhosa people necessitated maintaining a military presence. The ninth, and last, of these Frontier Wars flared up in 1877 to be followed by war against the Zulu in 1879, the Pedi, also in 1879, and the Boers in 1880-81. Many of those who served in southern Africa were products of Cardwell's controversial short-service enlistment plan. For those who opposed the wisdom of the new system, the poor performance of many of these young soldiers, rushed out to Zululand as reinforcements early in 1879, confirmed their doubts. However, by the time they fought the Boers 18 months later, many of these same soldiers proved they had learnt their trade well in the field and bore the mark of experience.

Map of southern Africa illustrating the main areas of conflict between 1877 and 1881.

CHRONOLOGY

- September 1877 to August 1878:** 9th Cape Frontier War
- 26 September 1877 – 2 December 1877:** The Gcaleka Xhosa and Colonial forces clash at Gwadana Hill, Ibeka, Lusizi and Holland's Shop.
- 7 December 1877:** Control of the war passes from Colonial government to the military.
- 27 December 1877:** A British force in three columns begins sweep through the Gcaleka homeland.
- 9 January 1878:** A united force of Gcaleka and Ngqika Xhosa, having avoided the British force, attack Fort Warwick and cause the defenders to retreat.

- 13 January 1878:** British force defeats Gcalekas at Nyumaga stream.
- 7 February 1878:** A combined Gcaleka and Ngqika army attacks the British position at Centane Hill but is defeated in the decisive battle of the campaign. The Gcaleka Xhosa are unable to offer further serious resistance.
- 4 March 1878:** Lieutenant General the Honourable Frederic Theesiger arrives in South Africa to replace Lieutenant General Cunynghame as the new General Commanding.

18 March 1878 – 30 April 1878: Thesiger orders three separate sweeps of the Amatola range but fails to flush out the Ngqika Xhosa.

8 May 1878: A fourth sweep gains control of the Amatola range but although the Ngqika are weakened they refuse to surrender.

9 June 1878: The body of Sandile, leader of the Ngqika Xhosa, is buried after being shot during a colonial patrol. In consequence the Ngqika surrender in early July.

August 1878: The 9th Cape Frontier War draws to a close.

11 December 1878: Ultimatum delivered to Zulu representatives.

11 January 1879: Expiry of ultimatum.

January – July 1879: Anglo-Zulu War.

12 January 1879: British No. 3 Column successfully attacks the stronghold of Sihayo kaXongo.

22 January 1879: British No. 1 Column defeats Zulu force at Nyezane.

22 January 1879: Zulu Army defeats part of No. 3 Column at Isandlwana.

22–23 January 1879: Garrison of Rorke's Drift beats off an attack by part of Zulu army.

28 January 1879: British garrison at Eshowe under siege.

11 February 1879: News of British defeat at Isandlwana reaches London.

11 March 1879: First British reinforcements arrive.

12 March 1879: British wagon convoy guard defeated at Ntombe river.

28 March 1879: British mounted force defeated at Hlobane mountain.

29 March 1879: Main Zulu army attacks Khambula camp but is defeated.

2 April 1879: Zulu force attacks Eshowe Relief Column at Gingindlovu but is defeated.

3 April 1879: The besieged garrison of Eshowe relieved.

11 April 1879: Last British reinforcements arrive.

31 May 1879: Second invasion of Zululand begins.

4 July 1879: Zulu army defeated at Ulundi, the final battle of the war.

September 1879: Deputation sent to Sekhukhune.

October–December 1879: Sekhukhune Campaign

24 October 1879: British column leaves Middelberg for Fort Weeber.

23 November 1879: Forward base occupied at Fort Albert Edward.

28 November 1879: British successfully attack the Pedi stronghold of Sekhukhune.

2 December 1879: Sekhukhune surrenders.

December 1880 – March 1881: First Boer War

16 December 1880: The Boers of the Transvaal declare independence.

20 December 1880: Boers attack and capture a British column at Bronkhorstspuit.

22 December – 6 January 1881: Boers initiate sieges of British garrisons in Transvaal.

28 January 1881: British defeated at Laing's Nek.

8 February 1881: Boers attack British column at Schuinshoogte (Ingogo) but are unable to prevent their withdrawal.

27 February 1881: Boers defeat British at Majuba Hill.

23 March 1881: Peace agreement signed.

ENLISTMENT

Gone for a Soldier

The Army still carried great stigma for many in the late-Victorian period. Having traditionally drawn its manpower from the lower ranks of the social spectrum, in-built prejudices were hard, if not impossible, to break down amongst the more respectable working-class families. A lieutenant colonel wrote in 1880, 'The conviction that the soldier's life is one of unbridled debauchery and black-guardism; that "to go for a soldier" is to take the final plunge into the lowest depths of degradation is ... almost universal'. Those who chose to join knew well the reaction they could expect from their loved ones. 'Never have I seen a man so infuriated,' wrote a recruit who signed on in 1876, when he announced his decision to his father, 'to him my step was a blow from which he thought he would never recover, for it meant disgrace of the worst type. His son a soldier!' A recruit, joining in 1877, informed his mother of his decision. She was equally horrified. In response she told her son that she would tell no one of his decision, 'For I am ashamed to think of it. I would rather bury you than see you in a red coat.' Another, who joined in 1878, did so without telling his family. Later he wrote to his brother explaining what he had done and asked him to pass the news on to their mother. Urging discretion, he implored his brother 'to let my poor mother know about it privately and I would like it to be private and not to let anyone know about it except our own family'.

If public perception of the army was so bad, what drew recruits to its ranks? Quite simply, in the majority of cases it was unemployment, and then only as a last resort. In 1877 about 62 per cent of new recruits gave their previous employment as 'Unskilled Casual Labourer'. This broad heading covered many types of work in both rural and urban environments where fluctuations in the workforce were commonplace. With no state benefit system anyone out of work faced the workhouse as a last resort – or the army. However, it would be wrong to say all recruits were destitute. Others joined to 'lose' themselves, evading the law, families, friends or perhaps the result of an amorous liaison. But there were others who just craved a change from their mundane lives, signed up on impulse, had an urge to travel, were sons or orphans of soldiers or actually just had a yearning for a soldier's life, often developed through service in the Militia.

The army showed a preference for recruits with a rural background. These men were considered generally more healthy and physically stronger than recruits drawn from urban slums. Yet the urbanisation of Victorian society reduced this desirable source of manpower and the mass emigration from Ireland in the 19th century reduced another particularly strong traditional source of rural recruits.

The army faced a constant struggle to bring in enough new recruits each year. The Cardwell Reforms followed on from earlier attempts to tackle this problem by rooting out many of the old, more dubious recruiting methods and introducing the Localisation Act in 1872, a system of linking battalions to 66 separate infantry sub-districts, the hope being that this would attract recruits for the two battalions based in each sub-district by strengthening local ties. However, this was a slow process and by 1875 only half of the sub-districts contained their full infrastructure of barracks and other facilities.

During the 1870s the 'bringing in' system supplied many of the army's recruits. New recruits brought into the recruiting office by any soldier, civilian or army pensioner and handed on to the recruiting sergeant were worth 25s (£1.25), to be divided between these individuals and the officer who supervised the enlistment. This rather dubious practice, clearly open to abuse, remained in operation until 1888. Many unwitting men, down on their luck, accepted the offer of 'a drink' from a new friend until, under the influence of alcohol, they found themselves standing before the recruiting sergeant.

At the recruiting office the new recruit signed on for the army and accepted the 'Queen's shilling', an actual payment, considered a legally binding contract. Then followed a medical examination.

The physical standards required in the Victorian Army varied according to the difficulty in obtaining recruits. In 1869 the minimum height requirement had been 5ft 6in. but in 1870 this was reduced by 1.5in. A year later it was increased by 1in. before reaching 5ft 6in. (1.67m) again in 1878. Minimum weight was set at 115lb (8st 3lb/52.2kg). In comparison with the general population about that time a government committee estimated that the average 18-year-old man measured 5ft 7in. (1.7m) and weighed 137lb (9st 11lb/62.1kg). From 1871 the minimum age for new recruits was set at 18 with a maximum age of 25. However, failure to attain these requirements did not necessarily exclude you from army service. Such was the shortage of recruits at times that as many as 20 per cent joined under



Public houses played a role in recruiting for the army, particularly as part of the 'bringing in' system. Many a man down on his luck would be enticed into joining up after imbibing a few drinks too many, courtesy of his new 'friend', who received a payment for each new recruit he brought in to the recruiting office.

the 'special enlistment' category. This allowed those who failed to meet one of the minimum requirements to gain acceptance if, in the view of the medical officer, they could attain it in about four months. Others outside the age range lied about their age to be accepted. In addition the Army took 'boys', often the sons of soldiers or their orphans, aged 15, who served an apprenticeship until they reached the minimum age for enlistment before formally joining a regiment. During this time they would train as drummers, buglers, tailors or shoemakers. A maximum of two per cent of battalion strength could be boys.

Those who passed the medical examination were required to appear before a magistrate between 24 and 96 hours later to attest by taking the oath of allegiance. Some who regretted their haste took this opportunity to abscond and never appeared for attestation. Those who did appear still had one legal way out of the army if having second thoughts. By payment of £1 'smart money', a not inconsiderable amount, the recruit could buy himself out. Those who did attest were required to give basic details of their background and could still be rejected for various reasons, admitting to marriage being one of them, but answers given were rarely subjected to close scrutiny.

There were still those recruits who enlisted, passed their medical, attested before the magistrate and then changed their mind. By then it was too late and the only option was desertion before joining their regiment.



Medical examinations checked that recruits matched minimum standards of age, height, weight and chest size, but these standards regularly altered depending on the abundance or dearth of recruits. If a recruit was blind in one eye but attained all the other requirements he could still join the army. (R. England)

Averaging the figures for 1870, 1874 and 1878 gives a general impression of recruitment during the 1870s. From an average figure of 35,800 new recruits each year the authorities would reject about 8,000, mainly on medical and physical grounds. Another 685 would abscond before attestation, 2,700 would pay 'smart money' and buy themselves out, 360 would desert after attestation, 255 would be lost to various other causes, leaving just 23,800 to join their battalions.

All for a Shilling a Day

Many of the men who marched off to their battalions did so believing they would be earning 1s (5p) per day not fully understanding the extent by which deductions would reduce their daily pay, although these were explained. In fact a soldier's pay of £18 5s (£18.25) per year trailed behind other unskilled workers; an urban labourer at this time could be earning from £40 to £49 per year. However, in 1878 the army estimated that, combined with the estimated value of accommodation, food, fuel, lighting and clothing, each soldier received the equivalent of just under £40 per year.

From his meagre pay a soldier could expect deductions for washing clothes and haircutting, tailoring, shoe repairs, cleaning materials, replacing damaged items of uniform, groceries, barrack-room damage and fines. An analysis of 700 soldiers in 1890 showed that after stoppages the average earnings per soldier amounted to 3d per day (1.25p). For many soldiers the only reason they received any pay at all was due to Army regulations stating that after all deductions a soldier must still receive a minimum of 1d per day. Official concerns over soldiers' pay led to the adoption of a deferred payment system in 1876. This granted each man an additional payment of 2d a day, only paid out on completion of service.

There were also means to increase daily pay. An officer's 'soldier servant' could earn an extra 1s 6d (7.5p) per week and additional pay was available to those becoming cooks or mess servants. Distinguished service brought financial rewards, as did proficiency in musketry and good conduct awards, which were for two, five, 12, 16, 18, 21 and 26 years unblemished record and added an extra 1d per day for each badge. In 1878 just over 80,000 soldiers had at least one, about 48 per cent of the army.



DIVERSIONS OF DRILL.

Jack Dragoon (who has made a miss). "I say, BILL, THAT LAST SHOT OF MINE IS LIKE DEFERRED PAY—'GONE INTO THE BANK, AND 'DIVEL ONLY KNOWS WHEN IT 'LL COME OUT AGAIN!"

The original caption of this 1879 cartoon reads: 'Jack Dragoon (who has made a miss). "I say Bill, that last shot of mine is like deferred pay - gone into the bank, and divel only knows when it'll come out again!"' Introduced in 1876, deferred pay granted an extra 2d per day but was only redeemable on the completion of service. Although intended to give the soldier a stake for his future, many simply squandered the windfall.

Promotion brought with it additional remuneration. The army worked to an ideal ratio of one NCO to six privates. While the first step on the ladder - promotion to lance corporal - brought with it no extra pay, the next step, to corporal, added an extra 4d a day to a soldier's earnings. The subsequent step to lance sergeant again added nothing extra to pay but, once promoted to sergeant, it rose to 2s 1d per day. There was a downside to this, however, as promotion brought with it additional financial burdens and even losses, as payment for good conduct was lost from corporal upwards. In fact many avoided promotion, happy to steer clear of the additional responsibility.

Bringing all available information together, a picture of our average 'Tommy Atkins' emerges. He is an English unskilled labourer from a city or town in his late teens and unmarried, he weighs about 130lb (9st 4lb/59kg), is about 5ft 7in. (1.7m) tall and has a chest measurement of less than 37in. (94cm). While he would never be rich in the army, he would benefit from a roof over his head, regular meals, clothes on his back, camaraderie and the chance to improve himself. In return he would be required to defend Britain's shores from invasion, support the civil power at home, provide garrisons for India and the colonies and join expeditionary forces formed to deal with colonial conflicts. From the dark and dirty back-street slums of Birmingham and London many of the recruits who joined the army in the late 1870s soon found themselves destined for distant southern Africa. In this totally alien environment they fought the elusive Xhosa in deep foreboding bush, they stood back to back against overwhelming Zulu attacks or marched into a hail of

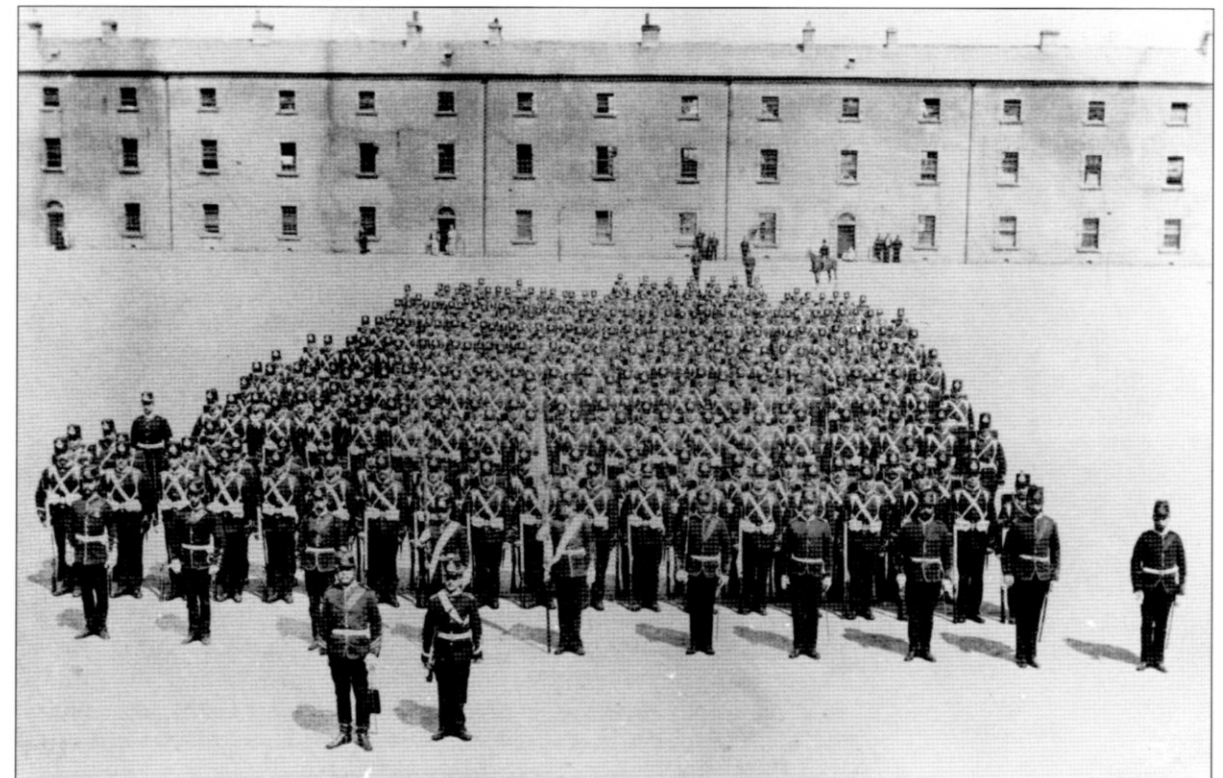
Boer bullets. It is testimony to the British Army that it could take such unpromising material and produce an army equal to these tasks.

With paperwork completed and the oath of allegiance sworn the new recruit left his civilian life of uncertainty and poverty behind, marching off into the unknown, to his new life as a soldier in Queen Victoria's Army.

LIFE IN THE ARMY AT HOME

Cardwell's Localisation Act specified that each of the 66 infantry sub-districts would support two linked line battalions. One of these would serve abroad while the other remained at home, creating a balance. New recruits arriving at the depot joined one of two training companies where they received their basic training before passing into the battalion. The battalions maintained at home varied greatly in establishment. The original proposal aimed for 71 battalions based at home while a further 70 operated overseas. Of the 71 home battalions, 18 would be maintained at 820 other ranks, these being the highest on the roster for overseas duty, a further 18 battalions would be at 700 men and 35 at 520 men. However, it proved impossible to maintain these levels with shortages of recruits and constant demand for battalions and drafts to serve overseas. In 1877-78 the home establishment listed only 64 battalions, with these at reduced levels - 18 battalions mustered with 740 men, the remaining 46 at 520. The demands of the Zulu War in 1879 further reduced this until only 59 battalions were based in Britain with 82 overseas.

The 2nd Battalion 3rd Regiment (The Buffs) in Ireland in 1876. The full battalion drawn up on the parade ground shortly before departure for South Africa. The war establishment of a battalion was set at 1,097 officers and men but for service in South Africa the Field Force establishment reduced to 896 all ranks. (Private collection)



Barracks

The recruit's new home varied enormously, from ancient castles or early 19th-century forts to urban barrack blocks or the large sprawling camps at Aldershot and the Curragh in Ireland. A government review of the state of Britain's barracks in 1857 highlighted lack of space, which at that time allowed each man a minimum of 450 cu ft, 30 cu ft less than that allowed in Scottish poorhouses. The report asked for an increase to 600 cu ft per man and highlighted the need for better lighting, heating, ventilation and sewerage dispersal. Recommendations for improved ablution facilities and separate married quarters were also mentioned. New barrack buildings incorporated many of these changes, although the guidelines failed to make any significant impact on existing ones. Improvements did gradually take place but it proved a long process and, after initial progress, government enthusiasm waned due to the vast expense. In 1860 the government spent £610,000 on the maintenance, improvement and construction of barracks but by 1876 this figure had reduced to £361,000.

Marriage

The army accepted the necessity of a limited number of women attached to each battalion to help with washing, cleaning, mending and nursing tasks. Accordingly, colonels allowed a maximum of seven per cent of privates to marry and place their wives 'on the strength'. This entitled them to receive half-rations and live in barracks. However, married quarters were rare, privacy for a husband and wife more often than not provided by a blanket strung across a corner of a communal room. One of the privileges of promotion allowed 50 per cent of sergeants to marry. Wives earned an income from taking in washing and sewing. Only limited numbers of wives could accompany a battalion overseas. From 1871 those left behind received a Separation Allowance and a proportion of their husband's pay.

Daily Routine

Emerging from his cramped and often insanitary barracks each morning the new recruit generally faced a day of repetitive boredom. Other than the occasional battalion field day and route marches it was the tedium of drill and fatigues that dominated the soldier's life. A typical day of a soldier in the home army of the 1870s ran as follows:

Reveille	6.00am (or 6.15)
Parade	7.00am
Breakfast	8.00am
Recruits' Drill	9.00am
Orderly Room business, fatigue duties	
Parade	12.00 noon
Dinner	1.00pm
Recruits' Drill	2.00 - 3.00pm
Tea	4.00pm
Free Time	5.00pm
Roll Call	9.30pm
Guard Duty or 'Lights Out'	10.15pm



Discipline

Discipline is essential if an army is to function efficiently. By submitting to discipline a recruit absorbs an instant and automatic response to orders, no matter how trying the circumstances. An avalanche of rules and regulations governing every aspect of his life in the army – from dress and appearance, through insubordination and drunkenness, to mutiny and desertion – engulfed the new recruit, but it was essential that he quickly adapt or life would become very uncomfortable for him. Fines, court martial, imprisonment, flogging (corporal punishment had been dying out but it revived dramatically on active service in South Africa – finally being abolished in 1881), and ignominious discharge awaited those who fell foul of the system.

Discipline also served to boost morale and high morale engenders a strong esprit de corps; a sense of loyalty and attachment to the regiment. This spirit was greatly encouraged in the British Army. Armed with this strong belief in the superiority of his regiment over all others, a soldier would do his utmost to maintain this perceived pre-eminence.

Alcohol was the root cause of most breaches of army discipline. For many soldiers drink provided an escape from the day-to-day drudgery of service life. Soldiers at home received their pay weekly, which often led to bouts of heavy drinking. Even with numerous deductions, weekly pay could purchase a fair amount of beer at 3d a quart (two pints). Keen to be free of the monotonous confines of barracks and the watered-down beer sold therein, soldiers often frequented local public houses. Here excessive drinking frequently led to fighting, increased incidences of insubordination, absenteeism and liaisons with prostitutes that resulted in approximately 29 per cent of the Army suffering from venereal disease in the 1870s.

Recreation and Education

To distract soldiers from the negative effects of alcohol improvements to recreational facilities gained momentum through the 1860s and 1870s. Soldiers' Day Rooms were provided where recreational pursuits and lectures could take place. By 1876 there were 150 libraries available to British soldiers at home and abroad, although only about 20 per cent of soldiers used the facility. From 1871 education in the army became compulsory for new recruits, each man being required to attend for five hours per week. The lowest of the four classes of certificate, Fourth

The wives of the 99th Regiment embarking for South Africa. Only a limited number of wives could accompany their husbands overseas, those fortunate to be selected being drawn by lot. The 2/4th took 37 women and 57 children to South Africa while the 88th had 50 women and 87 children. Those left behind received a Separation Allowance as well as a set proportion of their husband's pay, plus a small allowance for each child.



ABOVE A squad of recruits wearing the blue cloth helmet introduced in 1878. Recruits' drill introduced the basics of army drill: standing, dressing, turning, saluting, marching, wheeling and extended order. Once proficient the recruit progressed to company drill.

RIGHT From the 1860s the introduction of alternative means of recreation attempted to dissuade soldiers from excessive drinking. Soldiers' day rooms established in barracks offered a social environment where men could get together to play games, read, drink tea and coffee, and talk.



Class, required only basic reading ability and the calculation of a few simple sums. Even so, in 1882 about 40 per cent failed to pass. Subsequent certificates became harder to achieve; for promotion to corporal the Third Class Certificate was required and from corporal to sergeant the Second Class Certificate became necessary. The First Class Certificate, by far the hardest to attain, was essential for anyone attempting to make the rare step of earning a commission from the ranks. Despite this increased emphasis on education some 60 per cent of the army remained illiterate or barely literate through the 1870s, although the situation was slowly improving.

Sport gradually became more important with both boxing and football being encouraged to such an extent that in 1875 a team of Royal Engineer officers won the FA Cup. Soldiers' Homes, set up by civilian and religious bodies, provided other recreation facilities. These establishments, set up near large garrisons, offered a relaxed atmosphere with many facilities including, meeting rooms, games and smoking rooms, tea and coffee bars, baths and beds. Many enjoyed these facilities but equal numbers, deterred by the prohibition of alcohol and religious pressure, turned away. However, as outlets for recreation increased, so the levels of drunkenness and crime gradually diminished.

Food

One of the great attractions of the army for anyone unemployed and destitute was the guarantee of regular meals. While the food offered appears monotonous and unimaginative today, it was far better than many ate in the civilian world in the latter half of the 19th century. In fact the military diet hardly changed throughout the century. There were three meals a day: breakfast, dinner and tea, served at 8.00am, 1.00pm and 4.00pm. There was no provision for an evening meal.

The ingredients of the military diet were limited. Standard daily issue was one pound of bread, twelve ounces of meat, with an addition of an allowance of vegetables (usually potatoes), spices, tea and butter. Occasionally soup or dessert varied this menu. Bread made up breakfast while dinner time saw boiled beef and potatoes served. Once the meat was boiled down and the bone removed there was generally only about seven ounces of tough, stringy meat left. Tea would consist of any bread the soldier had managed to save during the day. Soldiers drank tea with every meal but the quality left much to be desired. Often the water came from the pots used to boil the potatoes. If the soldier required supper or something to put on his dry bread than he would have to purchase this himself from the barrack canteen. Instead many chose to spend their limited money on alcohol and tobacco.

Concerns expressed about the lack of nutritional value of the food, the amount served and the quality of the meat supplied were regularly raised but rarely elicited any serious response from the authorities.

Uniforms and Equipment

The uniform worn by the British Infantryman in the 1870s varied little across the period and few concessions to Foreign Service existed. In southern Africa a soldier sweated under an oppressive sun and shivered through a freezing night in basically the same uniform he wore at home for a night on the town.



Mealtime on board a troopship destined for South Africa. The military diet changed little through the 19th century – whether at home or abroad. Here the soldiers are drinking tea, often made with water previously used to boil the potatoes.

Highland Regiments wore a unique style of tunic and Rifle Regiments wore dark green but for the rest of the infantry, both Line and Light Regiments, the patterns of tunic were identical, individual identity only being apparent in facing colours, collar badges and regimental numerals.

Line and Light Regiments, whose designation by this time bore no tactical significance, received two jackets. The scarlet cloth full-dress tunic was fastened with seven brass General Service buttons. Only officers' buttons featured the regimental number. Collars of the same scarlet cloth bore a patch of facing colour cloth extending back from the collar opening, ending in a point, bearing a regimental collar badge. A line of white braid edged the bottom of the collar and ran down the leading edge of the tunic. The same braid also marked the two rear pleats in the skirt. Shoulder straps of the same scarlet cloth, edged all around with the white braid, carried numerals denoting the regimental number. The cuff design, formed by white tape braid came to a point before forming a trefoil knot. The design did not completely encircle the sleeve. A panel of facing colour cloth added within the cuff design completed the tunic. This was reserved for formal occasions and replaced at all other times by the serge frock.

The frock, made of looser-fitting unlined scarlet serge, fastened with five General Service buttons. Shoulder straps and collar details were the same as the full dress tunic but the frock did not bear the white braid on the leading edge. Officially, it seems, the cuffs of the frock remained red, edged in white braid similar to the tunic. However, some regiments sewed facing colours onto the frock cuffs as on their full dress tunics. Photos and illustrations suggest that the 2/3rd, 4th, 1/13th and 90th retained red cuffs while the 24th and 58th added their facing colours, but it is very difficult to be precise on this issue. It appears some units continued to wear the pre-1873 pattern of frock with only a single white braid loop as cuff ornament and complete collar of the facing colour.



A private of the 4th Regiment wearing the seven-button full-dress tunic. This photo shows a man who served in South Africa wearing his Zulu War medal. He wears a white chevron on his left arm, indicating two years good conduct. The change from right arm to left arm for this badge came early in 1881. (Private collection)



A private wearing the unlined, five-button, serge frock, the standard uniform worn on campaign. The Long Service and Good Conduct stripe on the right arm entitled the man to an extra 1d per day. Additionally he has the crossed rifles Marksman badge which also earned a financial reward. (Private collection)

The standard headwear for home service was the infantry shako introduced in 1869 and based on the French pattern. This shako was of dark-blue cloth with red and black braid running along the upper and lower edges. It remained in service until replaced by the blue cloth spiked helmet authorised in May 1878.

The dark-blue cloth Glengarry cap worn in undress had a black braid binding along the lower edge with two black ribbons hanging at the rear, Scottish regiments having the addition of a diced band. A regimental insignia fixed to the left front completed its appearance.

For Foreign Service a white helmet, introduced in June 1877, remained the only concession to service overseas during this period.

Trousers were of Oxford mixture, a dark-blue cloth, with a scarlet welt down the outside seam of both legs. In marching order the trousers tucked into short black leather leggings fastened by a series of linked loops. Boots were of black leather.

Only four units differed from this general appearance during the period highlighted. The 91st Highlanders landed in Natal in March 1879 wearing the serge doublet. Like the standard serge frock the doublet fastened with five brass General Service buttons but differed in a number of other aspects. Gauntlet cuffs, four inches deep at the front increasing to six inches at the rear, were piped with white tape braid and carried three buttons from which a line of white braid ran down to the bottom cuff edge. The swept-back front skirts of the doublet bore a pocket on either side, again with three buttons each with a line of white braid. Instead of the Oxford mixture trousers the 91st Highlanders wore trews of the Campbell of Cawdor tartan.

The 3rd Battalion 60th King's Royal Rifle Corps arrived in Natal in March 1879 for service in the Zulu War. Almost two years later, in January 1881, the 2nd Battalion arrived for service against the Boers, although they did not see action. The Rifles wore uniforms of a very dark rifle-green cloth which appeared black once exposed to the elements. The unlined serge frock fastened with five bronzed buttons and had scarlet braid piping along the bottom edge of the collar. Scarlet braid also formed the cuff, which came to a point, ending in a single loop. The rifle-green shoulder straps were piped scarlet and carried the battalion numeral of '2' or '3' also in scarlet. Trousers were of the same rifle-green cloth.

The 92nd Highlanders arrived in Natal late in January 1881 for service in the First Boer War. Their arrival provided an insight into the future for they came to southern Africa direct from India where they had been wearing white drill frocks dyed khaki. This was the first instance of an imperial unit wearing khaki-coloured cloth in South Africa. The 92nd also became the only unit to wear the kilt during this period (besides the pipers of the 2/21st and 91st). This was of the Gordon tartan and worn with a black sporran bearing white tassels.

The standard infantry equipment across this period was the 1871 Valise Pattern. This replaced the Knapsack pattern, which, with some alterations, had served since the Crimean War. Details of the whitened buff leather Valise equipment accompany plates A and H. Rifle battalions differed by having black leather equipment. The only unit not wearing the Valise equipment was the 92nd Highlanders. Arriving in South Africa the 92nd Highlanders still carried the pre-Valise pattern equipment



which combined a waist-belt with a black ammunition pouch on a white belt worn over the left shoulder.

The British firearm in use across this period was the Martini-Henry .450/.577 rifle. The Mark I pattern, introduced in 1874, was the first purpose-built breech-loading rifle used by the army, replacing the Snider-Enfield. A Mark II pattern followed in 1877, with both weapons seeing service in South Africa.

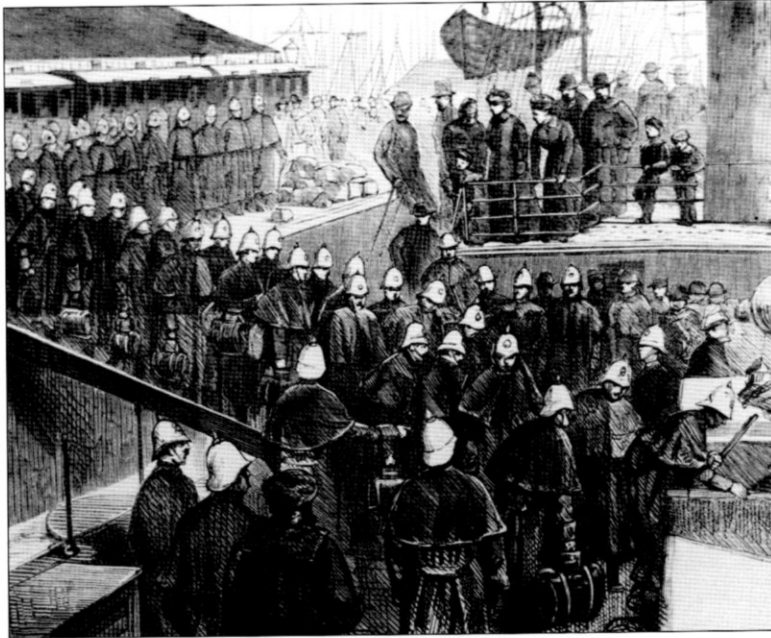
The original bayonet issued for use with the Martini-Henry was the 1853 pattern Enfield bayonet with the socket reduced by the addition of a sleeve to fit the reduced diameter barrel. Later, in 1876, a new longer bayonet designed specifically for the Martini-Henry added five inches to the weapon's reach. As with the two patterns of Martini-Henry rifle, both patterns of bayonet were used in South Africa.

Sergeants carried their own pattern of bayonet, the formidable-looking double-curved 1856 Enfield sword bayonet converted to fit the Martini-Henry, also issued to other ranks of Rifle regiments.

Sergeants of the 3/60th Rifles at Mount Prospect camp during the First Boer War. The Rifles wore a very dark green uniform which appeared almost black once exposed to the rigours of campaign life. Some wear stained helmets with badges while others have the dark green Glengarry forage cap. (Greenjacket Museum, Winchester)

LIFE ON CAMPAIGN

Having completed his basic training, grown accustomed to the routines of army life and trained with his new weapon, the recruit joined a company in the battalion. In the Victorian Army, with the constant demands of Empire, it was never very long before the call for service overseas came. However, before a battalion could sail it was necessary to bring it up to war strength. This involved accepting volunteers from other home-based battalions not called on for overseas service. Keen to escape the monotony of life at home, there was rarely a problem finding volunteers to fill the ranks – the problem was that generally they were young recruits with limited training and experience. This was due to a reluctance to send out experienced men coming to the end of their service, to avoid the additional expense of bringing them home again before the conclusion of the campaign. In February 1879 the 91st Regiment absorbed 374 volunteers drawn from 11 different regiments while the 94th Regiment took 348 volunteers before sailing for South Africa, about a third of their strength.

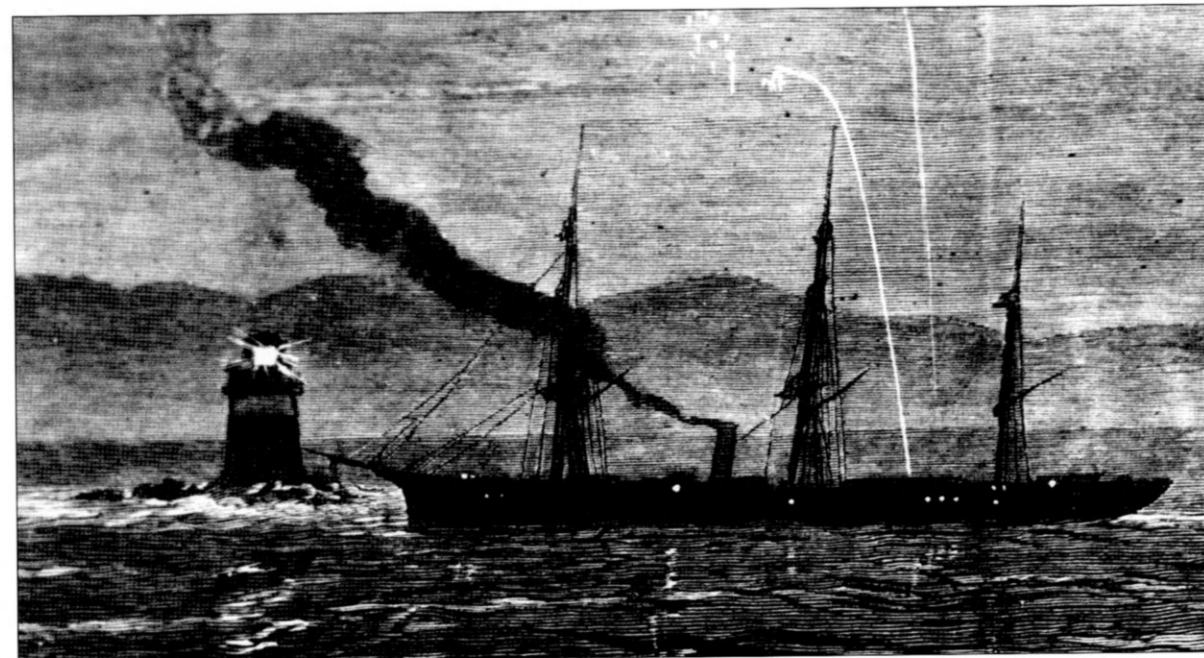


ABOVE The 99th Regiment embarking on the SS Asiatic at Southampton in 1878 en route for Zululand. Two companies and the Headquarters sailed on the Asiatic on 6 December, following two companies sailing on the SS Walmer Castle and four companies on the SS American.

Life at Sea

The journey to South Africa in the second half of the 19th century by sea was slow, monotonous and not without danger. Once on board a soldier stowed away uniform, arms and equipment and changed into his sea kit; 'a blue serge suit and a blue worsted cap with a red band around it'. There was little to do on board during the journey, which generally took about four weeks to reach Durban, with two or three stops on the way. Initially seasickness plagued the men but once they became accustomed to life at sea they amused themselves by playing cards, smoking pipes, reading or chatting. The monotony was

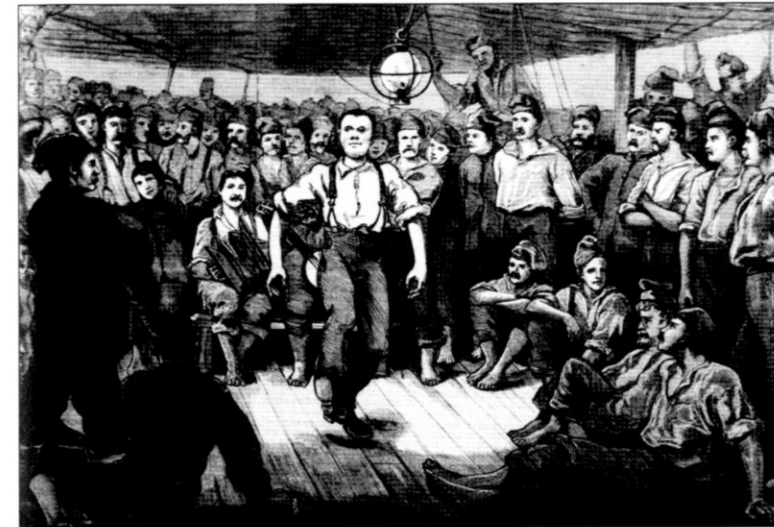
only broken during the day by mealtimes and the sight of an occasional passing whale or dolphin. In the evenings the soldiers organised singsongs. Besides these limited distractions it was just a question of surviving the heat, storms and irritations of rats, cockroaches and foul smells below deck before disembarking in South Africa. But there was danger too. In 1876 the *St Lawrence* was shipwrecked about 90 miles north of Cape Town leaving the 1/13th marooned on the beach for two days before rescue arrived. Two ships carrying reinforcements for the Zulu campaign also came to grief. The *Clyde*, carrying about 540



RIGHT The departure of the 91st Regiment from Southampton on board the SS Pretoria. The Pretoria sailed on 19 February, stopping at Madeira and Cape Town before disembarking at Durban in Natal on 17 March after a journey of 26 days.



BELOW The journey to South Africa was slow and monotonous. The men were forced to find their own amusements to while away the time. Generally they enjoyed playing cards, smoking and chatting during the day with singsongs in the evening. But many an experienced seaman relieved a naïve young soldier of his pay at the notorious Crown and Anchor board.



LEFT The SS City of Paris, which struck the Roman Rocks in False Bay, South Africa in March 1879. She was carrying 931 officers and men of the 2/21st when a sudden squall at night carried her onto the rocks at the base of the lighthouse. Fortunately no one was injured and after transferring to HMS Tamar, the battalion continued the journey to Durban.

volunteers to reconstitute the 1/24th decimated at Isandlwana, ran aground on a reef along the southern African coast, and the *City of Paris*, carrying the 2/21st, hit a rock in False Bay during a gale. Happily, in both cases, the men transferred to other ships and reached Durban safely.

Many of these men rushed out to Africa had received only limited training prior to embarkation. An officer travelling out for service in South Africa at the end of January 1878, shocked by what he saw, wrote, 'There were drafts on board, some two hundred men for various

regiments quartered at the Cape ... they seemed to have picked out the little children for these drafts, their musketry-returns showing that over one half have not been through even a recruit's course of musketry.' Even in March 1879 fresh drafts needed crash courses in musketry on the journey to South Africa. Early in 1878 an observer watched the 90th embarking and thought, 'a more miserable, limp, half-grown shambling batch of boys never left England inside Her Majesty's uniform'. However, the 2/24th received a positive reception. On arrival they were described as 'stout, healthy, well-built lads, with plenty of beef in their muscles ... Their only fault is youth.' But Lord Chelmsford's military secretary described the general youth of the soldiers sent to South Africa for the Zulu War as 'deplorable'. In contrast, the 1/24th had been in South Africa since 1875 and were portrayed as being 'no boy recruits,

but war-worn, matured men, mostly with beards'. Another commented they were 'old steady shots whose every bullet told'. Experienced battalions were very disparaging of the new arrivals. A soldier in the 1/13th resented the new drafts of the 1/24th joining them on escort duty. He wrote, 'To make room for a lot of inexperienced youths was very annoying to our column.' Yet the soldiers gained experience and learned quickly. The 'miserable, limp, half-grown shambling batch of boys' of the 90th that arrived in South Africa early in 1878, was, about a year later, considered one of the most hardened and reliable battalions in Zululand, which Colonel Evelyn Wood ascribed to 'marching 1000 miles, living in ... a healthy climate ... proper sanitary arrangements and the absence of public houses'.

Marching to War

Once ashore the new arrivals had little time to acclimatise themselves to the wonders of Africa. Very few would have ever been away from Britain before, their experience of life contained within the narrow confines of rural villages or urban slums. A soldier serving with 2/24th during the ninth Cape Frontier War wrote home telling of 'all wonders, every sort of birds, monkeys, and one particular thing I have noticed is a grasshopper, it is so big as a blackbird, wonderful size ... I get plenty to eat here ... I can say now that I have pulled oranges from the tree without asking anybody.'

Often a brief stretch of railway track would take the new arrivals from their port of arrival, but after that it was marching that would dominate service in Africa for most soldiers. Roads in South Africa were no more than tracks that in bad weather would quickly degenerate into thick clinging mud. River crossings, of which there were many, also caused problems. Between Durban and the Thukela river there were 17 and on the march from Kei Road to Kokstad undertaken by the 90th Regiment in 1878 there were 122. Ox wagons, normally drawn by 16 beasts, would need double the number to get across rivers in flood, while the men waded, often up to their armpits, with their rifles and ammunition pouches on their heads. A soldier of the 1/13th wrote of the hardships experienced on the march in Zululand. 'Day after day were we cutting drifts [river crossings] for our transport, and a great many hours' labour, although we were heavily accoutred, was bestowed on it; pick and shovel were constantly in requisition, drag ropes also, whereon 400 men were employed, dragging our heavy transport up steep inclines and ugly passages, through streams, dongas, and broken ground.' For new arrivals still acclimatising to a new country this was tough work. The 3/60th suffered accordingly.

On Monday morning up again at 2.20am in the dark, see nothing and find nothing; started; crossed and bathed in the Tongaati, up to our waists crossing, so wet and wretched. Our halt for mid-day in Compensation Flat in the sun, no shade to be found, and no rest; waited 'til 2.30pm and marched nine miles, the longest and weariest I ever marched; the men were almost dead with the heat.

On the Cape Frontier, in particular, the soldiers had to endure the back-breaking work of cutting roads through thick bush and in Sekhukhune's country, where there were no roads or tracks, the army

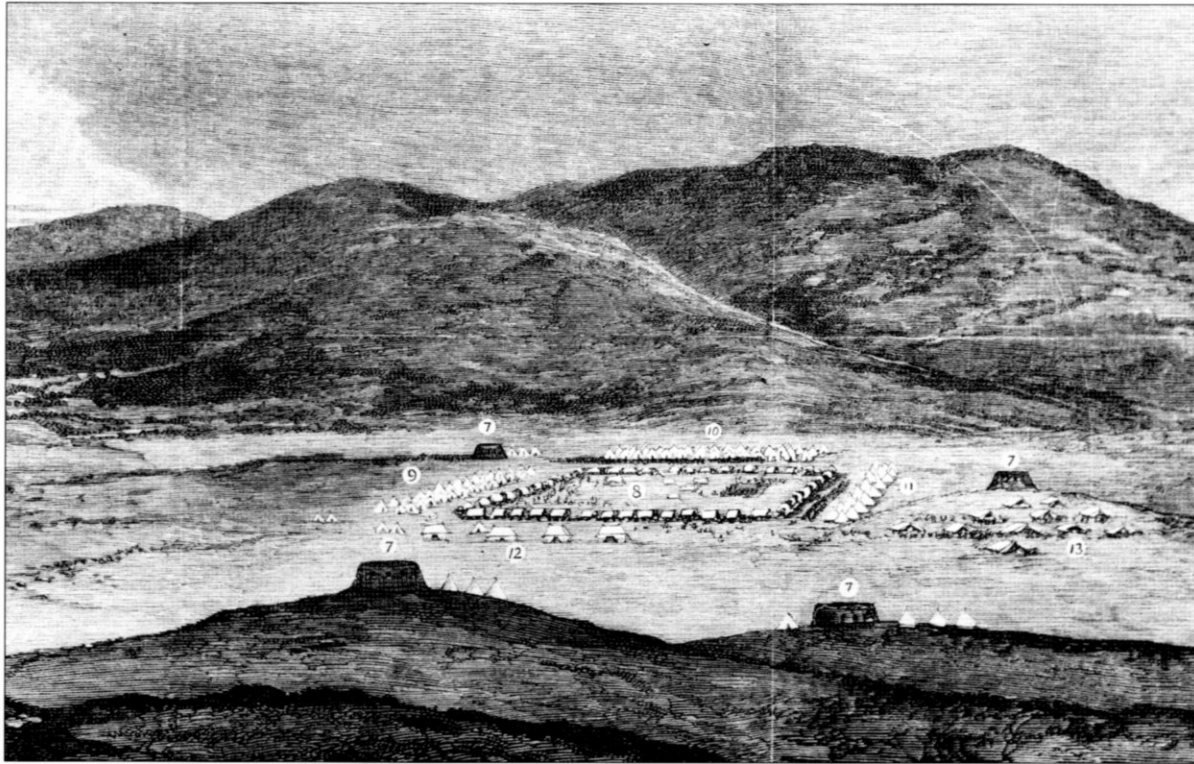


made its own as it advanced. A soldier in the 1/13th commented that they built roads in temperatures of over 86°F (30°C) in the shade, with a five mile march taking 10 to 12 hours.

Weather

From the temperate climate at home the British Army had to quickly come to terms with dramatic extremes in temperature and conditions which could change hourly. In the Amatola mountains during the Frontier War the temperature could swing from 25°C in the day to 0° at night. In July 1878, in a period of exceptionally cold weather, a number of men of the 2/24th suffered from exposure and seven died. Lightning strikes caused problems in the Transvaal – at Mount Prospect one killed a man recovering from a wound suffered at Majuba, while another killed the butcher of the 92nd Highlanders. In August 1881 the same camp awoke to find two feet of snow on the ground – one man of the 94th froze to death. On the night after the battle of Majuba the rain came on so heavily that in the morning the men manning a small fort were standing in 18 inches of mud and water. In Zululand, in May, the men awoke to a hard frost in the mornings with a half-inch of ice formed on water buckets, while in the summer months early morning dew would soak uniforms and boots. Constant rain for four or five days at a time was not unusual. Hailstorms were not infrequent either – the 94th experienced one with hailstones the size of hens' eggs, while the 1/24th at Helpmekaar in December 1878 had them 'as large as your fists'. Yet within hours of a freezing hailstorm or deluge of rain, a burning sun

Painfully slow-moving ox wagons, drawn generally by 16 beasts, carried the majority of stores and equipment needed by a British army in the field. Most days saw soldiers pulling, pushing and cursing these wagons up and down hills and through sandy-bottomed rivers and streams.



The camp at Mount Prospect during the First Boer War. Small circular redoubts, 30 feet in diameter, protect the central wagon laager. It was one of these redoubts that filled with 18 inches of rainwater on the night of the Battle of Majuba. The tents marked (9) are the 3/60th, those marked (10) the 58th and (13) the 92nd and 15th Hussars who, having come from India, had a different pattern.

could reappear, drying earth and clothes, with temperatures rapidly rising to 35–38°C in the summer.

Camp Life

At the end of each day's tiring march the men needed to erect their tents. These were circular bell tents, the men sleeping fully clothed on waterproof sheets wrapped in a blanket. In hot weather they sweltered, in cold weather they froze. The constant packing and unpacking of the often damp tents had a negative effect. Those of the 3/60th at Mount Prospect, in which they had been living for two years, were described as 'very old and rotten and leak like sieves'. On the march to Ulundi no tents were taken beyond Mthonjaneni to reduce the number of wagons needed on the final advance, forcing the men to spend the cold nights wrapped in dew-soaked blankets. There were no tents either for the besieged garrison of Eshowe. A soldier in the 2/3rd wrote, 'Doleful days were these; the rain used to come down in torrents, and we made our beds beneath the wagons, upon the damp ground, while creeping things crawled and ran over us as we slept.' At Rorke's Drift too, in the weeks after the battle, Colonel Glyn would not allow any tents erected, so everyone crammed into the confines of the fort each night, exposed to the cruelty of the elements, many men without even a blanket. The gallant defenders of Rorke's Drift, B Company, 2/24th, fared slightly better. In recognition of their deeds, they slept in the roof of the storehouse under a tarpaulin. Constant fears of Zulu attack at Fort Tenedos on the Lower Thukela meant that, while tents were erected outside the fort during the day, these were struck at night, with the garrison sleeping huddled against the parapets.

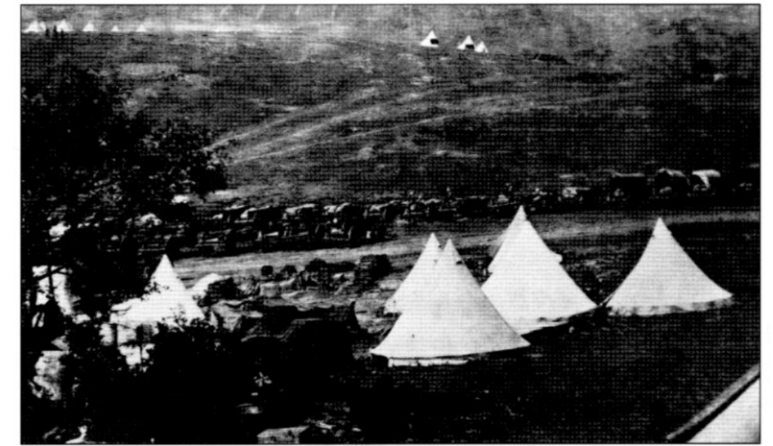
On the march in enemy country, particularly in the second stage of the Zulu War, it proved necessary to form the wagons accompanying the columns into a defensive formation known as a laager. Colonel Wood's Flying Column regularly practised this manoeuvre on the march and could construct three laagers in echelon in 22 minutes, about a quarter of the infantry being required to assist. The Eshowe Relief Column experienced some difficulty in determining the best dimensions for their laager. Only after three days' march was the best arrangement agreed upon. After a long march, aggravated by dragging wagons through rain-swollen rivers, the cold, wet soldiers of the relief force must have looked on the prospect of building an earth breastwork around each temporary camp with abject misery.

The British Army also constructed more permanent defensive fortifications in South Africa, the bulk of the fatigue work falling to the infantrymen, supervised by the Royal Engineers. By far the most impressive of these was the fort at Eshowe in Zululand. A soldier of the 2/3rd, which provided working parties involved in trench digging and bush clearing, offered a brief description of what was a very impressive construction:

The church tower in the centre was a look-out post for our best marksmen; and around the church, at a considerable distance, we dug a trench, some ten or 12 feet deep, and about 20 feet wide, and into this trench we planted stakes pointed at both ends. The earth from the trench formed a high breastwork, with steps formed on the inner side of the fort; and outside, beyond the trench, we dug small holes, at regular distances apart, into which we drove sharpened stakes, upon which we stretched wire to entangle the legs of the enemy who might venture within the maze.

Throughout southern Africa numerous other forts of all shapes and sizes were constructed, some built of earth, others of stone, of various designs. They provided safe depots for supplies and kept open lines of communication through hostile country.

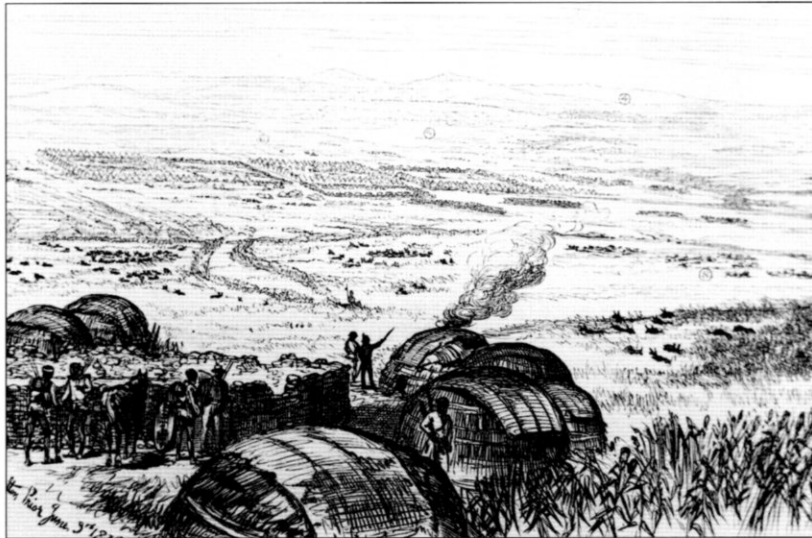
Whenever troops established camps recreation activities were organised. Prior to the second invasion of Zululand the bands of the 1/13th and the 90th Regiment played on alternate days to entertain the men. For the besieged garrison



ABOVE The British Army introduced the bell tent at the end of the 18th century. Officially it held 12 men lying with their feet nearest the centre pole. This was very cramped, but there is evidence that when there was a shortage of tents as many as 16 could cram in. (Private collection)

BELOW The 57th Regiment entrenching a wagon laager during the Eshowe relief expedition. According to the 1877 Field Exercise Manual, in 30 minutes one man could dig two paces (5ft) of shelter trench, 30in. wide and 18in. deep.





In the background is the large, sprawling temporary camp of the 2nd Division in Zululand in early June 1879. At the sound of an alarm, all tents were struck (collapsed) to allow a clear field of fire, as the men retired on the wagon laagers.

at Eshowe the band concerts played by the bands of the 2/3rd and the 99th Regiment initially provided a welcome distraction from their predicament, but the limited selection of music became trying after a while. Football and athletics were popular, with Colonel Wood being very proud of the 90th Regiment's tug-of-war team. Paper chases were popular, although it appears the soldiers could get a little too enthusiastic. At Lydenburg in September 1880 the local townspeople objected most

strongly to the knocking over of their walls during a chase. Cricket matches provided another distraction; at Mount Prospect during the First Boer War, pickaxe handles served as bats and ammunition boxes as wickets. However, not all soldiers showed enthusiasm for the athletic diversions on offer. The officer of the 94th Regiment who was commanding at Lydenburg in July 1880 complained of the lack of athletic prowess shown by his men, bemoaning the fact that 'they did nothing well but drink'.

Smoking and Drinking

Smoking and drinking provided the greatest relief from boredom. For the besieged garrison of Eshowe tobacco became an obsession. One wrote, 'We have scraped together a few dirty mouldy cakes, which we mix with the better ones to make our scanty stock hold out.' For those prepared to sell, prices rose sharply from three or four shillings (15-20p) an ounce in early March to 22 shillings (£1.10) later in the month. Those unable to afford these prices experimented by smoking dried tea, coffee grounds or herbs growing near the fort. One who endured the siege commented that the want of tobacco gnawed away at the garrison far more than the short rations.

Before the invasion of Zululand was under way, drink caused a problem. A group of men from the 99th Regiment on fatigue duty at the Thukela river stole a barrel of rum that they proceeded to sample. Their punishment was to remain on guard duty on the lines of communication for the rest of the war. Later in the war a group of men from the 88th Regiment committed a similar crime at the Thukela, but compounded their offence by going on a rampage through the camp. They each received two dozen lashes. For many soldiers returning from the Battle of Ulundi, drink featured high on their list of priorities. At Landman's Drift a group of 27 men unearthed a barrel of rum, hidden by men of another regiment, and drank themselves into unconsciousness – a stomach pump and court martial was the reward. At Rorke's Drift, Lieutenant Chard was concerned about a number of rum barrels held in the store. Aware of their attraction to the men and with the Zulu

attack imminent, he ordered any man interfering with them to be shot. A trader who came into Khambula camp and sold gin to the men against orders received 24 lashes and had his stock of alcohol destroyed.

Punishment

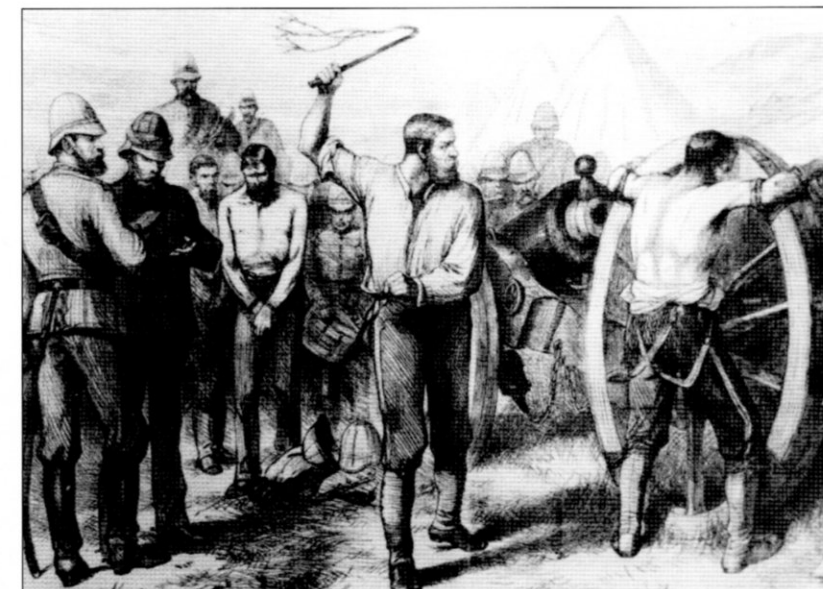
Flogging became the standard punishment on active service. Anyone found guilty of drunkenness, dereliction of duty, theft, insubordination or deserting his post – a fairly common crime for sentries standing out on a freezing night in the pouring rain – earned an appointment with the cat-o'-nine-tails. In 1880 an officer of the 94th Regiment in the Transvaal commented that he processed 24 courts-martial in July and 12 in the first half of August, most drink related. He observed that a combination of day-to-day drudgery, the availability of alcohol and the proximity of the goldfields encouraged many of his men to desert. He added, 'I shall be sorry to command a regiment in the field when flogging is abolished.' However, the 545 floggings ordered during the Zulu War raised fierce debate in Parliament, resulting in the abolishment of the punishment in 1881.

Uniforms

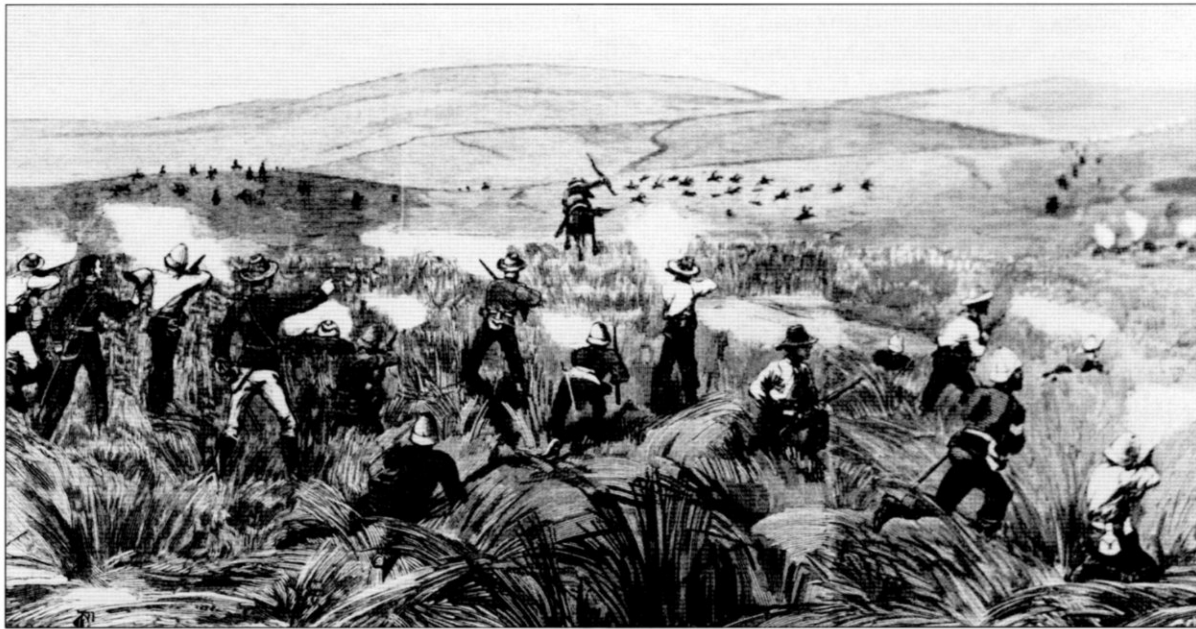
The smart uniforms worn at home suffered greatly from the constant wear and tear of active service and soon gave way to a 'campaign look'. In December 1878 the 1/13th were on their way from the Transvaal to join Colonel Wood's column for the invasion of Zululand. An observer who saw them wrote:

Having been so long on the march, far from depots, their uniforms, which had become torn and tattered, could not be replaced, and were therefore patched in places with any material that could be got, regardless of colour; while many of their helmets – of an old pattern never seen now – looked like squashed baskets with wadding sticking out at the top.

A soldier in the 1/13th expanded on this and described the regiment as ragamuffins as it marched into Utrecht with their uniforms, 'Red, patched with black; black, patched with white; wicker helmets all torn, dirty, daubed with yellow clay; bootless in many instances'. A sergeant of the 2/24th at Rorke's Drift in February 1879 wrote that his men were also in rags, 'some with no boots, some with their jackets and trousers patched with sheepskins and all kinds of things'. Soldiers all over Zululand slept in



Flogging had been more or less removed from the peacetime army but on active service it continued until 1881. A total of 545 men suffered this punishment during the Zulu War. Many officers regretted the abolishing of this form of punishment. (R. England)



Skirmishing at Standerton during the First Boer War. The garrison contained men from the 58th and 94th Regiments, both having served through the Zulu War. The effect on their uniforms is clear – some are in shirtsleeves, others without helmets.

their uniforms, fully accoutred, night and day. A private in the 90th wrote, 'We are not allowed to take our clothes off, only to unlace our boots.' The 2/24th suffered similarly. A sergeant wrote in July, 'I have not slept with my clothes and accoutrements off for the last six months.' In May 1879 a soldier in the 58th wrote, 'We do not take off our clothes at night, but lie with our belts under our heads, with our rifles by our sides.' The besieged garrison at Eshowe experienced similar sleeping arrangements and one of the men wrote that he took his boots off on 8 April, the first time since 13 January. By January 1880 the 94th had served nine months in South Africa, yet they were still clad in the same uniforms they wore when they left England. While eagerly anticipating a new issue an officer described the appearance of his men who had worn these uniforms right through the Zulu and Sekhukhune campaigns.

They wear wideawakes [broad-brimmed hats], black hats, fur caps, no caps – anything – and their coats and trousers are all colours – cords, blue serge, red ditto, any mufti they can lay hands on patched all over with sacking, skin or anything.

At Helpmekaar, such was the shortage of clothing after Isandlwana that some went one stage further, cutting holes in sacks and wearing them in place of greatcoats.

Helmets suffered badly under campaign conditions too and took on a very battered appearance, often doubling at night as pillows. The glaring white cloth received attention on active service to make the helmet a less obvious target. Experiments with various substances including cow dung, ant heaps, coffee grounds and boiled mimosa bark, made them 'pretty odoriferous for a day or two'.

After six months free from the chore of cleaning belts and equipment, on the night of 14 July 1879, Colonel Wood supplied the men of his column with pipe clay. At a parade the following day for Sir

Garnet Wolseley, he was able to report that 'although the clothing was ragged, the men's belts and rifles were as clean as if they had been parading in Hyde Park'. The men must have been delighted!

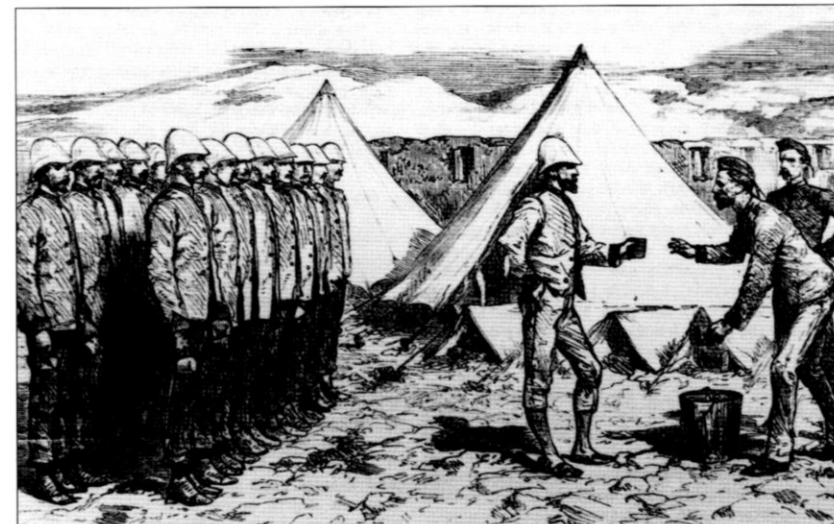
Food

The official daily food allowance in South Africa was made up as shown to the right.

An engineer on the road between Durban and Pietermaritzburg described his daily meal as 'tins of Australian or Chicago beef, which, with dry biscuits and coffee, makes up the repast. The beef is very good, and there is a liberal allowance of it – a two lb. tin between two men per day. There is also a ration of sugar and salt, and lime juice, instead of vegetables.' Colonel Wood always ensured the men of his column had fresh bread but a soldier of the 90th Regiment doubted its quality, commenting that it was 'made of Indian corn, or, what we call it, mealies, and half of it sand'. Slaughter cattle accompanied the columns on the march to provide fresh meat, with additional supplies provided by trek oxen that died in harness. These oxen were generally detested as meat by the men – one considered it 'so tough that we have had to throw it away after it was cooked', while a soldier of the 2/24th claimed that even the dogs would not eat it. In the Transvaal officers and men occasionally shot antelope to eat as a change from the monotonous unpalatable oxen. On the Cape Frontier sheep more commonly provided the fresh meat, but these caused constant alarms as they often escaped over the fenced enclosures holding them.

The besieged garrisons in the Transvaal during the First Boer War were forced onto short rations as the sieges dragged on, while those surrounded at Eshowe in the Zulu War were able to boost their dwindling supplies by raiding Zulu gardens and bringing in quantities of pumpkins and maize. Once troops returned to the coastal area of Natal they were able to buy oranges and bananas. In the Transvaal peaches were abundant; figs and apricots were common too. However, vegetables were in short supply which encouraged those in garrison to create gardens to grow their own.

Beef or Mutton	1 1/4 lb
Biscuit or Flour	1 lb
Bread	1 1/2 lb
Coffee	1/5 oz
or Tea	1/6 oz
Sugar	2 oz
Lime Juice	1 oz
Sugar (for lime juice)	1/2 oz
Preserved Vegetables	2 oz
Salt	1/2 oz
Pepper	1/4 oz
Preserved Meat (if any)	1 lb



Men of the 4th Regiment receiving their lime juice ration at Fort Bengough during the Zulu War. One ounce of lime juice, mixed with half an ounce of sugar, replaced the vegetable issue when it was unavailable.



ABOVE The field bakery of Colonel Wood's Flying Column in Zululand. Bread was baked in Hughes' field ovens, constructed from corrugated iron and the discarded iron rims of ox wagon wheels. (S. Bourquin)

BELOW Flies proved a constant irritation in South Africa. One man wrote, 'To get a cup of tea or coffee one had to cover the tea-cup with one's hand, leaving only enough room for the spout of the kettle while someone else poured the tea in, and even then they got in.'



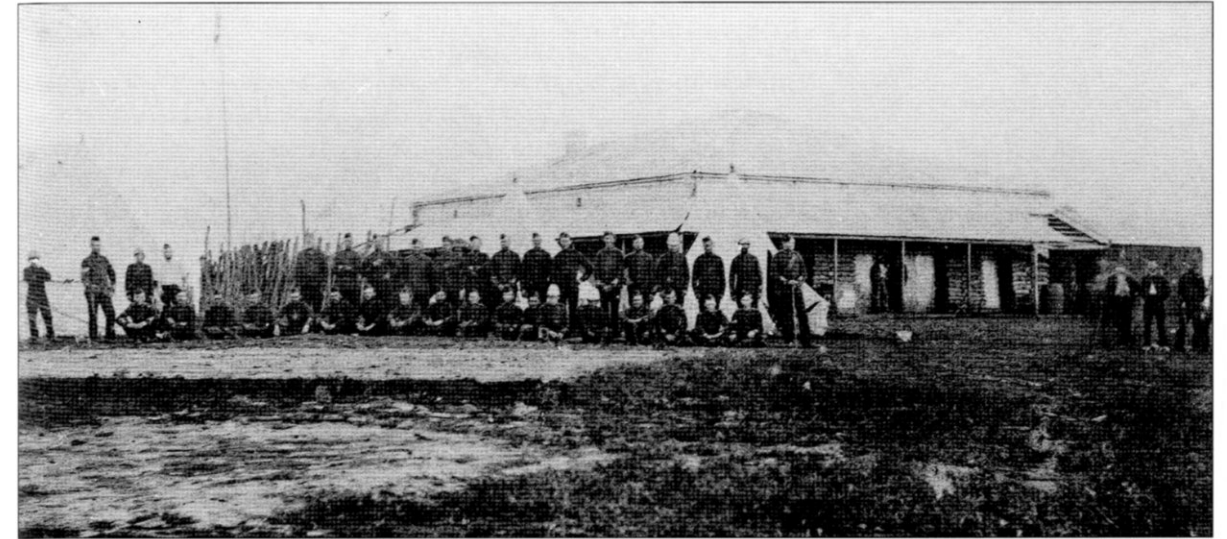
Wherever there were concentrations of men and food in South Africa, very soon swarms of flies would appear. Clouds of these insects followed the British columns as they marched, landing on the faces of the sweating soldiers seeking moisture and descending on their food as they attempted to spoon it into their mouths. To gain their revenge, when the flies settled for

the night in the tents, soldiers crept in with burning torches and 'slew many thousands every evening'.

Sickness and Death

While the men were on the move sickness and disease had limited effect, but once troops encamped for a time in cramped conditions, during periods of bad weather, sickness soon appeared. At Eshowe, where 1,500 men were crammed into the sodden earthwork fort each night, fever, dysentery and typhoid took a lethal hold. A man who survived the siege blamed the sickness on 'the constant exposure, one day to the sun and the next day to the rain, then turning in dripping wet, with the rain or cold wind beating in underneath the wagons'. Typhoid fever and dysentery also quickly gained a hold in the cramped fort at Rorke's Drift in the weeks after Isandlwana. At Helpmekaar, where No. 3 Column of the Zululand invasion force assembled in December 1878, the constant rain and cold nights brought on chills that led to pneumonia. Dysentery

was also present and constant marching in wet boots brought sores that soon became infected. Typhoid also claimed victims in the campaign against Sekhukhune. Scabies was present on the Cape Frontier and men carried lice wherever they served. A surgeon who inspected the teeth of men of the 1/13th mentioned that many had 'red flabby gums', in some cases bleeding, which he felt was probably due to a lack of fresh vegetables and a shortage of lime juice. He added that their teeth were also bad which he put down to eating an excess of 'jam and other sweet things ... the want of toothbrushes - and the tough meat they have to eat'. Without doubt, though, it was the men of the 1st Division, during the second invasion of Zululand, who suffered most from sickness. The climate in the humid coastal sector helped various fevers to flourish amidst the garrisons of Forts Crealock and Chelmsford. In early June 1879 some 800 men were on the sick list.



ABOVE Herwen Hospital near Stanger in Natal. Herwen, a coffee planters' house, served as a base hospital until the beginning of the second invasion of Zululand in June 1879. It accommodated 100 patients in the house with another 50 in marquees. Other base hospitals were at Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Ladysmith, Utrecht and Newcastle. (Private collection)



LEFT Some of the many gravestones in Zululand marking the last resting place of a now unknown soldier. This cemetery, close to Fort Pearson in Natal, contains the bodies of many who died of disease.

Death on active service was never far away, whether from wounds in battle or sickness. At Eshowe, those who died early in the siege received full military honours, but as the siege wore on attitudes changed. Concerns over limited ammunition and the negative effect on the morale of the living caused by these regular volleys over the graves brought an end to this final salute. When heavy casualties occurred on the battlefield, the bodies were buried in mass graves; at Ntombe in the Zulu War about 150 men worked on the grave for those of the 80th Regiment killed there. Mass graves were standard in the First Boer War and at Laing's Nek at least seven lie on the slope up which the 58th Regiment assaulted the Boer position. Those killed at Rorke's Drift in the Zulu War received individual burials but the dead at Isandlwana lay unburied for many weeks. When this task was finally undertaken only scattered bones remained, those in close proximity merely drawn together and buried under cairns of stones. Those who died at sea on

the long journey to or from South Africa were sewn into weighted hammocks and consigned to the deep.

British soldiers in South Africa faced many hardships. They travelled countless miles, faced extremes of climate and an alien terrain, endured poor food and risked death in combat and from disease – all for a shilling a day. Many soldiers who served in South Africa never returned home. Buried under Africa's soil they became a part of that country, far from their city or village homes, far from their loved ones. Their contribution is worthy of recognition.

EXPERIENCE OF BATTLE

For the men who endured the hardships of active service, the definitive moment in any campaign arrived when they came into contact with the enemy. The circumstances and environments in which these encounters took place varied enormously, as did the adversaries themselves. Searching for the elusive Xhosa in the choking bush of the Amatola Mountains, standing shoulder to shoulder against massed Zulu attacks, storming Pedi strongholds or facing the deadly fire of Boer marksmen – in every case the British soldier was forced to learn quickly how to face each new challenge. The performance of the Martini-Henry rifle on the Cape Frontier contributed to an overconfidence in the army as it entered Zululand. The subsequent defeat at Isandlwana demanded a dramatic change in tactics, which was ultimately successful, but not before the young soldiers rushed out as reinforcements suffered many a nervous night 'seeing' Zulu armies lurking in the shadows. In the First Boer War, the British again underestimated the determination of their opponents, but this time their adversaries carried weapons equal to their own. However, unlike the war against the Zulu, there was no time to adapt and gain redress before a political settlement ended the war.

The Cape Frontier

Initially, the colonial government had controlled the war against the Xhosa that began in September 1877, but lack of progress saw responsibility pass to the army. The military organised the first of many sweeps through the land of the Gcaleka Xhosa. This was a land of rolling hills and high plateaus, thick forests and suffocating, bush-choked ravines and valleys, all hemmed in by towering cliff faces. The sweep met with some success but failed to locate the Gcaleka army. Having evaded the British, the Gcalekas joined forces with the Ngqika Xhosa in open rebellion. In mid January 1878 a Xhosa force attacked a British position at Nyumaga stream. The formation adopted by the British showed a clear similarity to that prescribed later in Lord Chelmsford's *Instructions For The Consideration of Officers Commanding Columns When Entering Zululand*. Parallels can also be seen in the formations adopted at Nyezane, Isandlwana and in Lord Chelmsford's march back to Isandlwana on the evening of the battle in the Zulu War. Three weeks after Nyumaga the British faced the Xhosa again at Centane.

The British camp stood on a flat hill just to the south of Centane hill. The camp was commanded by Captain Upcher of the 1/24th and had two companies of his own battalion along with a small Naval Brigade,

Private, 90th (Perthshire Volunteers) Light Infantry, embarking for South Africa, January 1878



B

Training and Drill



Battle tactics in South Africa



C

Daily life



D

Bush fighting on the Cape frontier



E

The Battle of Ulundi



F

After the battle



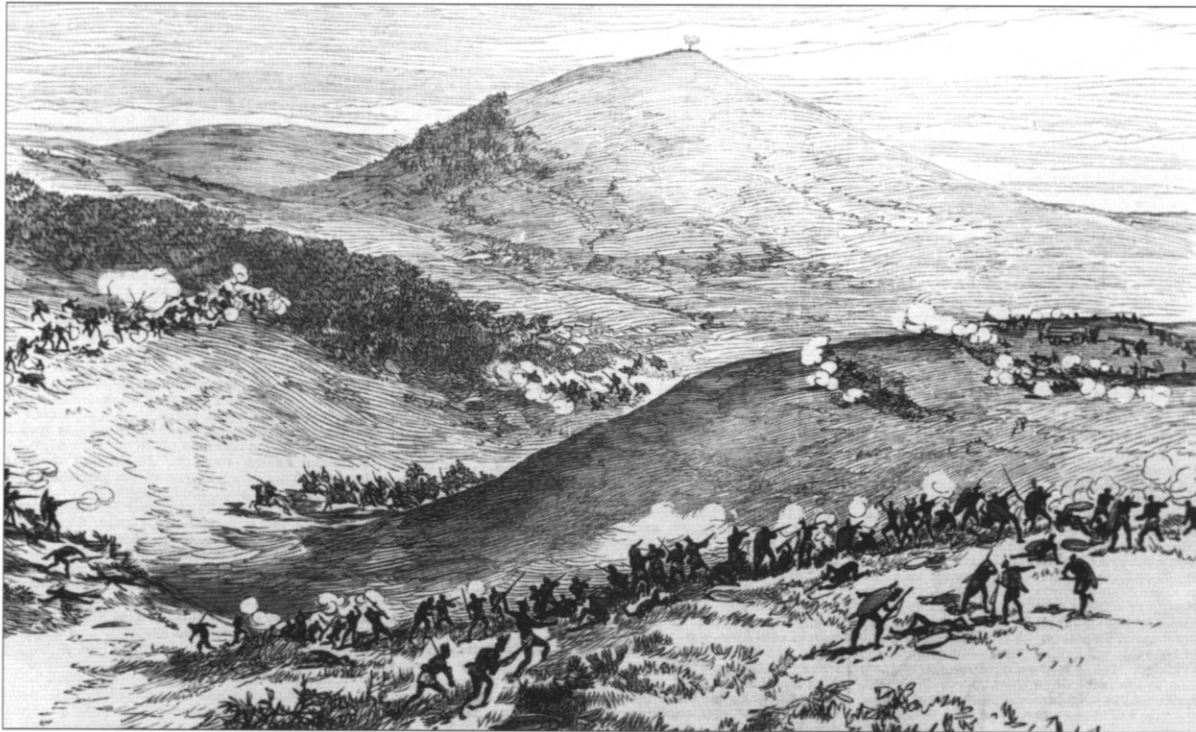
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some colonial police and about 300 Mfengu levies. On top of the hill Upcher formed a wagon laager and an earthwork, about 30 yards by 40 yards, in which he placed two artillery pieces and a naval rocket tube. On the slopes leading up to the camp he constructed a number of concealed rifle pits facing the bush. Prior to the battle about 50 men of the Frontier Light Horse (FLH) reinforced Upcher's force.

On the morning of 7 February 1878 the Xhosa emerged from the bush. The British struck the tents and the infantry took their positions in the rifle pits and the entrenchment, those in the rifle pits instructed to keep low and remain hidden. Concerned that the Xhosa may be disinclined to attack the position, a company of the 1/24th and the FLH moved out to lure the warriors on. The tactic worked very well. The Xhosa let loose a 'discharge of motley weapons - rifles, blunderbusses, sporting guns, with slugs, potlegs, and bullets as ammunition', while those armed with spears 'came pluckily on'. The commander of the FLH, out with his men and the company of 1/24th, reported, 'We played in front of them and their scouts dropped a few bullets among my troops.' Stung into action the Xhosa streamed forward out of a ravine and up the slope as the advance party fell back before them. The Mfengu levies, positioned ahead of the rifle pits, now fell back too, further encouraging the Xhosa to close with their enemy. Then, with their line of fire clear, the men of 1/24th manning the rifle pits stood up and unleashed a fearful volley into the bewildered warriors. One who faced this awesome display of firepower later recounted his experience: 'We joined in the attack, and ran towards the white soldiers' camp, until we came near to a little ditch in which the soldiers were lying quite quiet. Then came a blaze: our men fell like grass. We saw no more; we ran; our men fell fast, and our hopes were gone.' But it was not the end of the war. The Xhosa quickly learnt the futility of attacking British positions and returned to the bush to resume guerrilla warfare.

Fort Warwick, constructed by a company of the 1/24th at Mpetu, overlooking the Tyityaba valley. Although surrounded and attacked by the Xhosa in January 1878, a force including men of the 88th pushed through to relieve them. However, due to the exposed location it became necessary to abandon the fort.



The battle of Centane, the last attack in the open by the Xhosa before they retired to the bush. Two companies of the 1/24th took part in the battle, one company advancing with colonial cavalry to draw the Xhosa on. This tactic proved successful again at Khambula in the Zulu War.

A British officer who fought in the ninth Cape Frontier War described the difficulties of fighting in the bush:

The fellow [Xhosa] has a hide like a rhinoceros; the wait-a-bit thorn, that tears pieces out of your clothes, merely makes a white scratch on his bronze or reddened skin. His movements are therefore unheard; you may be surrounded by a crowd of [warriors] in the bush, and unless you have come across their spoor you may be ignorant of their proximity till, with a rush, a red form with a quivering assegai appears within a few yards of you.

It is difficult for white men with their clothes, their great helmets, and their boots, to move through the bush at any pace; and so a glade, or at least a bush path, is sure to be chosen if it leads in the proper direction. Your enemy knows this well enough, and will line the path in wait for you.

In April 1878 General Thesiger, later to become Lord Chelmsford, detailed a plan for converging columns to clear the Lotutu Bush in the Amatola mountain range. For one company of the 90th Regiment it brought home the horrors of bush fighting. One of the converging columns, led by Colonel Evelyn Wood, advanced up the Makabalikele Ridge towards the Lotutu plateau following a narrow path no more than six feet wide, through a mile of dense bush, choked with tangled trees, creepers, thorns and boulders. Wood extended one company of the 90th into the bush either side of the path then pushed another company up the path itself in single file. A hundred yards up the path, a single Xhosa warrior appeared whom Wood ordered shot. Then firing broke out from gunmen hidden in the bush on either side of the path. The Xhosa, at

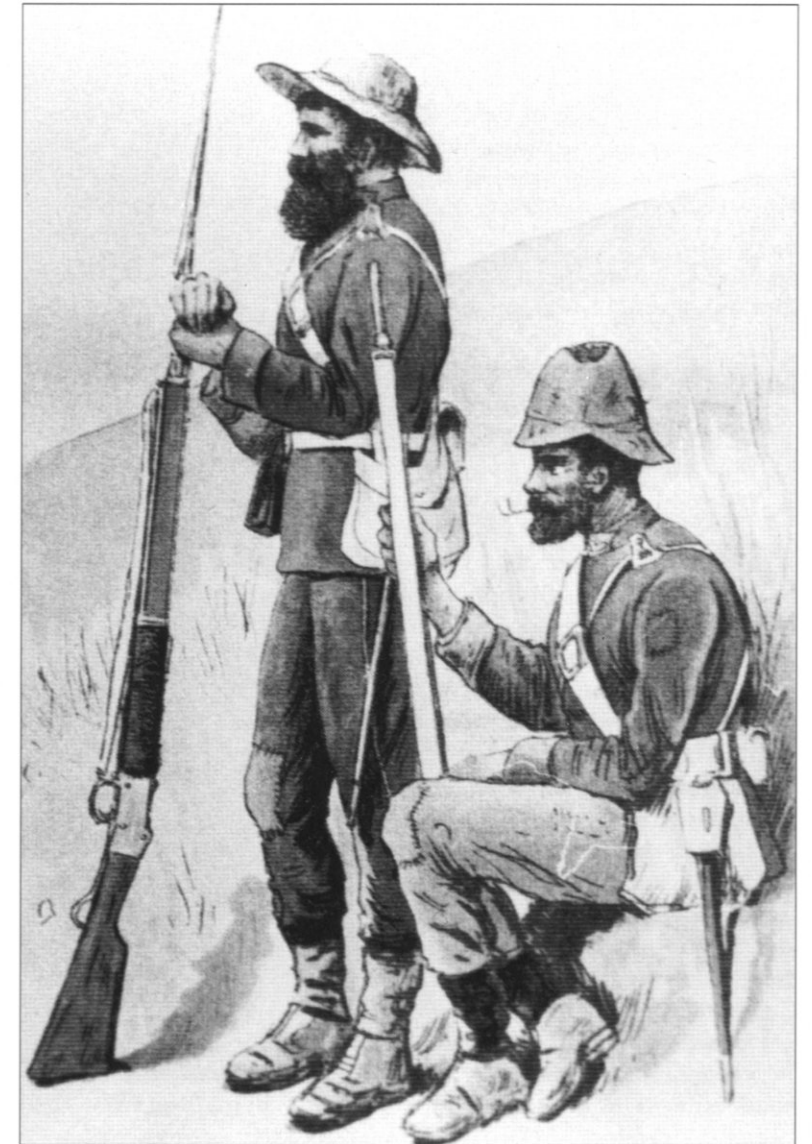
home in the bush, were able to approach right up to the British before firing at extremely close range into the startled soldiers. A Xhosa suddenly appeared in front of the officer leading the company and, firing at him at close range, the officer fell to the ground, his jaw smashed by the bullet. Another officer, leading the men on, had his chest ripped open by two close-range shots and fell to the ground dead. With their officers down and casualties mounting a number of the men panicked and fell back along the path, but the imprecations of a stalwart colour sergeant rallied them. Two 7-pdr artillery guns then rushed forward and fired case shot blindly into the bush to which the Xhosa had no response. The warriors melted away and the 90th, a little shaken, were able to continue their way to the plateau unmolested. It was only three months since the 'miserable, limp, half-grown shambling batch of boys' of the 90th Regiment had embarked at Southampton docks.

The Zulu War

For the soldiers who marched confidently into Zululand in January 1879 the war took an unexpected turn with the crushing defeat of a British force at Isandlwana. It quickly became clear that the Zulu provided a very different opposition to the elusive Xhosa. To combat this the army abandoned open formations, replacing them with compact defensive arrangements.

The first major encounter of the war took place at Nyezane, on the same day as the battle at Isandlwana. Here the British, surprised while on the march, engaged the Zulu in the prescribed fashion, with guns in the centre, regular infantry on either side and with the flanks withdrawn. But as the Zulu attack developed against the right flank, so it became necessary to considerably extend the line of men on that flank. A soldier in the 2/3rd, in his first battle, described seeing:

Puffs of smoke ... appearing in all directions from the bush away in front of us, and we therefore lay down, and fired at every spot from which a puff appeared ... We were told by our officers to



Experienced soldiers of the 1/24th at the end of the ninth Cape Frontier War. The wear and tear on their uniforms caused by constant patrols through the thick bush, torn by thorns and battered by boulders, is clearly visible.

keep cool and steady, and fire low; and I tried not to get carried away by the excitement, but it's not so easy, when you know that each puff may mean a dose of death to you or the man next to you.

As the Zulu continued to press, an officer with a company of Royal Engineers joined the fight in extended order as the Zulus attempted to outflank the right of the line:

We no sooner showed ourselves ... than the Zulus, who were concealed in the bush 150 to 250 yards off, began firing at us, bullets whizzing close by one, right and left. We returned it in good earnest.

However, the Zulu attack continued to threaten to outflank the line. To oppose this the Engineer officer extended his company to even wider intervals and was 'glad to see immediately after a reinforcement come up from two companies of the Buffs [2/3rd], who extended themselves to our right.' The tide had turned and the officer was able to conclude, 'We then advanced upon the enemy through the bush, and after about an hour they were in full retreat.'

Even in this first battle the soldiers quickly recognised that the Zulu deserved respect. A colour sergeant in the 99th wrote home admiring the way the Zulu attacked 'with an utter disregard of danger ... I assure you that fighting them is terribly earnest work.' The soldiers who fought at Isandlwana would probably have echoed this view but, overwhelmed by the Zulu attack, no infantryman who stood in their path lived to tell the tale.

At Rorke's Drift, the same day, another battle ensued that has become famous throughout the world. Here a small band of desperate soldiers, with nowhere to run, defending themselves from behind a prepared position, were attacked by a Zulu force outnumbering them by odds of a least 30 to one. It is an epic tale. One of the defenders of the hospital building, Private Hook, left a marvellous account of the battle. Before the hospital began to burn, Hook related that:

The Zulus were swarming around us, and there was an extraordinary rattle as the bullets struck the biscuit boxes, and queer thuds as they plumped into the bags of mealies. Then there was the whizz and rip of assegais, of which I had experience during the [Xhosa] campaign of 1877-8. We had plenty of ammunition, but we were told to save it and so we took careful aim at every shot, and hardly a cartridge was wasted. One of my comrades, Private Dunbar, shot no fewer than nine Zulus, one of them being a chief.

As the Zulu attack against the hospital gained momentum, Private Hitch helped keep them back temporarily. Hitch used his bayonet freely and observed the Zulus seemed to fear it more than gunfire:



The courage and determination shown by the Zulu army in the opening battles of the Zulu War came as a shock to the army hierarchy who had anticipated the war developing along similar lines to that on the Cape Frontier. Following events on 22 January 1879 the soldiers quickly learnt to respect their new opponents.



The Zulus pushing right up to the porch, it was not until the bayonet was freely used that they flinched the least bit. Had the Zulus taken the bayonet as freely as they took bullets, we could not have stood more than fifteen minutes. They pushed right up to us and not only got up to the laager but got in with us, but they seemed to have a great dread of the bayonet, which stood to us from beginning to end.

Private Hook took part in the heroic withdrawal through the burning hospital, breaking through mud brick walls and defending the holes against pursuing Zulus until most of the patients were dragged to safety. Hook then took his place manning the barricades with the rest of the small garrison. He continued:

I took my post at a place where two men had been shot. While I was there another man was shot in the neck, I think by a bullet which came through the space between two biscuit boxes that

Outnumbered and alone, with nowhere to run, the defence of Rorke's Drift by men of B Company of the 2/24th is seen by many as the epitome of campaigning in Africa. The 11 Victoria Crosses awarded (six to other ranks of B Company) and its representation in the press in Britain did much to improve the image of the army. (Private collection)

were not quite close together ... Every now and then the Zulus would make a rush for it and get in. We had to charge them out.

The Zulu attacks continued into the night, their movements illuminated by the burning hospital. A commissariat officer who took part in the defence recounted that these attacks:

slackened from time to time; all firing ceased for the moment and profound silence reigned, broken only by the words of command of the Zulu leaders, which sounded strangely close. How we longed to know what they said! Every man was then on the alert straining eyes and ears to detect the rush which was sure to follow, only to be checked each time by a withering volley.

The gallant defence of Rorke's Drift brought to an end the first phase of the Zulu War. Meanwhile Lord Chelmsford rebuilt his forces and prepared to relieve the besieged garrison at Eshowe. Two battles, at Khambula and Gingindlovu, within the space of a few days and at opposite ends of Zululand clearly demonstrate how tactical thinking had changed.

Colonel Wood had been established in the Khambula area for a few weeks and developed a strong defensive position. The main body of his force manned a large wagon laager, supporting a smaller redoubt and a cattle laager. Wood had two regular battalions in his force, the 1/13th and 90th, both having gained valuable African experience in the Cape Frontier War.

To lure the Zulu right horn into a premature attack the mounted men rode out to goad them on as they had done at Centane. This they did most successfully and as the mounted men rode back into the laager the infantry opened up. A sergeant in the 90th watching from the redoubt saw the Zulus rush on 'in masses of thousands. A volley from the fort [redoubt] and waggons [laager], succeeded by independent firing soon stopped the advance, when the Zulus laid down in extended order,

and commenced firing.' Another man from the 90th thought the Zulus came on 'like a big rolling sea'. A soldier of the 1/13th felt the 90th laid down such a tremendous volume of fire from the wagon laager 'that it was utterly impossible for them to advance further'.

When the Zulu left horn eventually came into action it advanced along a valley, shielding it from most of the British fire. Eventually a number of warriors fought their way into the cattle laager where the defenders from Captain Cox's company of the 1/13th engaged in a

vicious hand-to-hand fight – bayonet against spear. Cox lost four men killed, while he and seven of his men received wounds before abandoning the laager to the Zulus, but not before 'many [Zulu] were thrust out of this world'.

Eventually the strength of the British firepower told and Zulu determination wavered. Sensing the moment, Wood ordered out the mounted troops who pursued the defeated Zulu army for miles, turning retreat into a rout. It was the turning point in the war.

On the same day that Wood defeated a Zulu army at Khambula, Lord Chelmsford set out with a large force to lift the siege of Eshowe. Each night his command formed a large wagon laager to protect the transport animals and surrounded it with a ditch and low earthwork breastwork manned by the infantry. It showed a new cautious approach and this pattern followed for the rest of the war.

At dawn on 2 April 1879 the Zulus came into view, advancing towards the laager. All watched silently as the Zulus steadily closed. Captain Hutton of the 3/60th, manning the front face of the laager, watched admiringly:

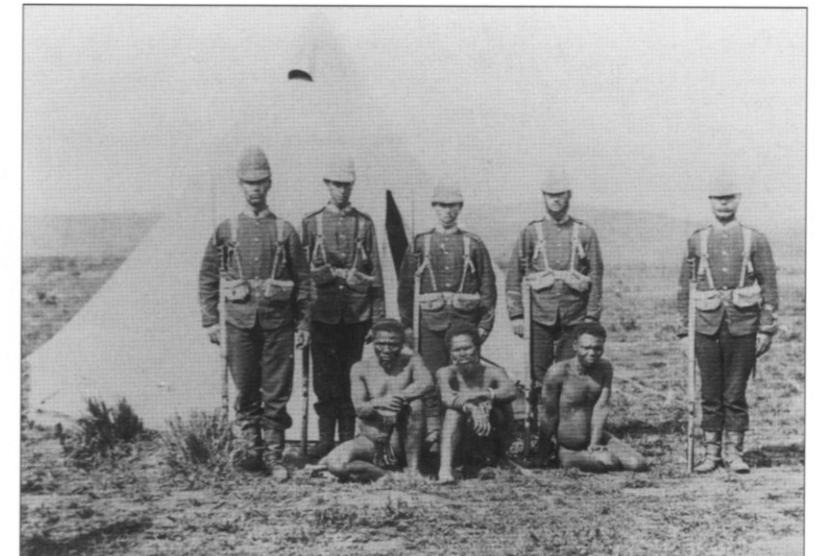
The dark masses of men, in open order and under admirable discipline, followed each other in quick succession, running at a steady pace through the long grass. Having moved steadily round so as exactly to face our front, the larger portion of the Zulus broke into three lines, in knots and groups of from five to ten men, and advanced towards us. Not a sound was heard except occasional short and decided words of command ... A small knot of five or six would rise and dart through the long grass, dodging from side to side with heads down, rifles and shields kept low and out of sight. They would then suddenly sink into the long grass, and nothing but puffs of curling smoke would show their whereabouts. Then they advanced again, and their bullets soon began to whistle merrily over our heads or strike the little parapet in front.

As the Zulus approached into range a general order rang out: 'Stand to your arms – saddle up – no independent firing – volleys by companies when they are within three hundred yards.' The eerie silence now broke as 'The Gatling began our fire – tut, tut, tut – and then there was a blaze of musketry all around our trenches, the two nine-pounders varying the row, and the rockets hissing through the air.' However, Lieutenant Wilkinson of the 3/60th, whose battalion had only landed at Durban 12 days earlier, was a little concerned by his men's fire discipline. After the Gatling opened up he reported 'we followed suit, firing volleys by

The battle of Khambula proved the turning point in the Zulu War. Infantry of 1/13th and 90th Regiments, the backbone of Wood's No. 4 Column, succeeded in driving off determined but uncoordinated attacks by a Zulu army of over 20,000 warriors.



These men of the 2/3rd (The Buffs) with Zulu prisoners, photographed in April 1879, illustrate the 'lived-in' appearance of soldiers on campaign. Men such as these fought in the square at Gingindlovu on 2 April, inflicting a second crushing defeat on the Zulu in the space of four days. (Private collection)



sections in order to prevent the smoke obscuring the enemy, and we had repeatedly to cease fire to allow the smoke to clear off, as some young aspirants out of hand paid little attention to the section firing.' Some of Hutton's men also began to forget their discipline. He commented, 'I ordered my men to go on firing very steadily. A few men showed signs of firing wildly, but a smart rap with my stick soon helped a man recover his self-possession.' Others not attached to the regiment, however, were less understanding with their appraisal of the 3/60th. A colonial officer, while having sympathy for the circumstances that brought so many young, untried soldiers to the front, described one Zulu attack as being 'a trifle too enervating for the over-worried, unfed and somewhat nervous youths who had to face it, very many of whom more than wobbled in the shelter trenches'. However, not all the regulars were formed of young soldiers. The 57th, who came to Zululand from service in Ceylon, 'were hotly engaged ... their volleys ringing out as clear as if they were at Aldershot.'

Again, as at Khambula, the Zulu attack lost momentum as it failed to close with the laager. As their attack faltered, the mounted men, released from the confines of the square, drove the Zulus from the field. The following day Lord Chelmsford marched unopposed to Eshowe and relieved the besieged garrison.

Lord Chelmsford was now able to concentrate on planning a second invasion of Zululand that would culminate in final victory at Ulundi. There a large British square stood in the open on the Mahlabatini plain and drew the Zulu army on for one last futile attack. But the final advance was not without problems. Many of the young reinforcements rushed out to Zululand found the dark African nights a breeding ground for their fears of the Zulu 'man-destroying gladiators' that had wiped out the British force at Isandlwana, tales embellished by those more seasoned campaigners who took delight in terrorising the new arrivals. All over Zululand night-time scares and panics led to many a sleepless night and in some cases casualties – a cloud passing across the moon or a breeze flapping a discarded item of clothing could become a Zulu impi in the mind of a nervous picquet.

One such scare took place at Fort Newdigate on 6 June 1879. The column had formed a large wagon laager and work had commenced on two small stone redoubts. An officer recalled:



The second invasion of Zululand in June/July 1879 suffered regularly from night-time false alarms caused by nervous infantry picquets. Many of the reinforcements rushed out after Isandlwana were young and inexperienced. Standing out in the dark, imagining the horrors of battle, surrounded by the mysterious sounds of Africa, played on the nerves of many of these men.

At 9.00pm we heard three single shots from the 58th sentries ... then two regular volleys, then the alarm sounded and musketry began all round the laager ... we heard a 9-pounder at the N.W. angle ... a regular blaze of rifles now going on round the laager, and men firing wildly ... Never saw anything so dangerous, and it was from beginning to end a false alarm.

Much of the fire was aimed in the direction of one of the incomplete redoubts that offered dubious shelter to a company of Royal Engineers who suffered a number of casualties from so-called friendly fire. It was rumoured many thousands of rounds had been fired and a 9-pdr gun fired at least two rounds of case shot. It was an embarrassing incident for all those involved and a rather frightening one for Lieutenant Chard of Rorke's Drift fame as he was one of the Engineers pinned down in the redoubt. On the return march from Eshowe another night-time panic resulted in the accidental deaths of two African scouts and five men of the 3/60th receiving gunshot wounds.

The Pedi War

The war against the Pedi of Sekhukhune was different again from those waged against the Xhosa and the Zulu. An attempt by a small British force to defeat the Pedi in 1878 had failed. Now, buoyed by the successful conclusion of the Zulu War, a second force set out to face the Pedi again, who, unlike the Zulu and Xhosa, preferred to fight from strongholds, hills prepared for defence with caves and breastworks. In November 1879 a force of British regulars, drawn from the 2/21st, 80th and 94th, and supported by Swazi allies and colonial irregular horsemen, surrounded Sekhukhune's chief homestead of Tsate and launched an attack against Ntswaneng, known to the British as the 'Fighting Koppie'.

The British had six artillery pieces with them and opened fire on the koppie while part of the infantry formed in skirmish order between the guns and their target. This brought 'a pretty brisk fire' from the Pedi

The force detailed to attack and capture Sekhukhune's 'Fighting Koppie' included six companies each of 2/21st and 94th Regiments, with a detachment of the 80th Regiment. Once the flanking attacks progressed a signal rocket screeched upwards and the infantry advanced towards the koppie at the double.



Part of the 'living wave' of British infantry that assaulted the Pedi stronghold, Ntswaneng – the 'Fighting Koppie'. Here the pipers of the 2/21st (Royal Scots Fusiliers) lead the way as the battalion advanced, supported by Swazi allies. (Private collection)



defenders who in turn received 'a rattling fire from our skirmishers on to the hole from which it came'. Flanking and rear attacks successfully pushed into Tsate heralding an attack on the koppie itself. A signal rocket went up and the attacking parties stormed forward. An eyewitness observed poetically that:

The sight was a soul-searching one as the living wave rolled on 'till it reached the base of the hill, up which it mounted like some billow of the deep which, meeting a tall, bare rock in its course, swells its crest and lifting itself aloft sweeps majestically over the summit.

An officer who took part confessed they expected to lose heavy casualties but later wrote:

Strange to say as we doubled over the open, though the bullets came very close no one fell, and the men were soon swarming up the rocks like bees. It is impossible to describe things as they were then, shots coming out of holes all around which killed two or three poor fellows ... The men fired down the holes and used the bayonets freely.

The attack proved successful but many Pedi held on, hidden in the holes and caves. Charges of gun cotton, exploded in the cave entrances, were used to drive them out. Men of the 94th, left to form a cordon around the 'Fighting Koppie' overnight, formed shelter trenches for groups of four men every 30 yards, set back about 150 yards from the koppie. The officer in command commented, 'we fired at them whenever they showed or fired at us', while another officer in the British camp recorded that those around the koppie 'had a lively time of it, firing going on almost all night, and at one time it sounded ... like quite a brisk engagement'.

The campaign was swiftly brought to a successful conclusion leaving the British commander, Sir Garnet Wolseley, a supporter of the short-service system, to reflect on the performance of the much-maligned 'youthful' British soldiers. In a letter he wrote, 'I wish you could have seen our young soldiers charge the key of the enemy's position ... I think those most opposed to the employment of young men would have been convinced that when fighting is to be done, young men are the best.'

The First Boer War

The First Boer War was different again from any of the others in the period covered by this work, inasmuch that unlike the Xhosa, Zulu and Pedi, the Boers were armed with modern firearms and generally were more expert in their use than the average British soldier. The British had defeated the Boers in the 1840s and a poor performance by the Boers in a campaign against the Pedi leader Sekhukhune in 1876 had done little to cause the British to revise their opinion. Startled by a Boer attack on two companies of the 94th Regiment at Bronkhorstspuit, in which all the officers except one were shot, forcing the wounded commander to surrender, the British nonetheless entered the war with great confidence. The accuracy of the Boer fire and the ruthlessness of their attack still did not cause the British to re-evaluate their opponents. It was a brutal introduction to the war but many more soldiers would testify to the accuracy of Boer fire before it was over.

In late January 1881 Major General Colley planned to break through the Boer defensive position extending across the high ground overlooking Laing's Nek in Natal, the gateway to the Transvaal. After a brief bombardment he ordered the 58th Regiment, veterans of Ulundi, forward, up an extremely steep slope, in a frontal assault against the entrenched Boer position.

Lieutenant Marling, who was with the 3/60th supporting the attack, watched the 58th go forward:

Their men were hustled up at a tremendous pace, without even being extended in skirmishing order, up a hill tremendously steep, and over very rough ground; and the consequence was when they got near the top they were so blown they could hardly move.

Private Tuck of the 58th who took part in the attack added that they 'were worn out in marching up the high hill with all their equipment on and not getting any rest going up'. Lance Sergeant Morris, also of the 58th, continued, 'Before we got half way up the hill many of us were mowed down one by one. We got to the top, when we opened fire, and kept it up for some time till the order came to fix bayonets and prepare to charge.' However, Private Tuck added, 'An order was given to charge but our men being so much exhausted it could not be done to any good advantage'. Four staff officers and the officer commanding the 58th were all killed attempting to

The attack by the 58th Regiment on the Boer positions at Laing's Nek proved a horrific experience for those involved. Advancing up an extremely steep slope in a compact column the men were unable to open into line and close with the Boers who opened an accurate fire from prepared positions.



charge the Boer lines. 'The enemy,' Tuck continued, '... now poured such a heavy fire into us and fell most of our men to the ground, one man getting 15 bullets pierced into his body.' Bugler Humphries of the 3/60th, watching from below, observed they 'lay in swathes, like grass beneath a scythe'. It was the end of the attack. The order was given to retreat and the 58th conducted an orderly withdrawal back down the slope, all the while under a heavy fire. A sergeant in the Army Hospital Corps, who was tending the wounded on the slope, was fearful for his own life. He wrote, 'The British troops had to retreat, beaten; but, oh, what a retreat it was, they were nothing but marks for the enemy ... I shall not forget to my dying day the whizz of those bullets past my head, and to see those men shot down as though they were dogs.'

British forces pinned down by accurate Boer fire became the dominant feature of the war. Eleven days after the defeat at Laing's Nek four companies of 3/60th Rifles, detailed to clear the road between the camp at Mount Prospect and the town of Newcastle, were surrounded by a Boer force on the exposed plateau of Schuinshoogte, above the Ingogo river. The 3/60th, with the mounted squadron and two artillery pieces, took what cover they could behind rocky outcrops and endured the Boer fire for about seven hours before extricating themselves under cover of darkness and a heavy thunderstorm, leaving the dead and wounded on the field.

A newspaper correspondent who accompanied the British patrol found himself pinned down with the rest of the men, his horse being one of the early casualties. He immediately 'took to earth' and later wrote:

There was a small outcrop of stone there, not more than a foot high, and as the bullets struck now and again, and came tearing

The 3/60th pinned down at Schuinshoogte (Ingogo) in February 1881. Four companies of the battalion lay on this exposed plateau for about seven hours under Boer fire. Fortunately, outcrops of rock provided some cover, preventing even greater casualties than the 40 per cent recorded.



with an angry buzzing sound through the short grass, I calculated that the Boers' shooting was remarkably good ... After the excitement of the first set-to had subsided ... there was positively nothing to be seen but our men potting away and the Boers potting back in reply.

The artillerymen, standing in the open to serve their guns, attracted much of the Boer fire and it became necessary for the riflemen to supply volunteers to aid the beleaguered gunners. Surgeon McGann set up a small hospital, its sheltering walls formed by the bodies of dead artillery horses. At one point a number of Boers worked around the British lines to an advantageous position from where it would be possible to sweep the plateau with long-range fire. A half company of the 3/60th was despatched to oppose the threat and found themselves exposed to a very destructive fire. The correspondent, who later visited the position, was shocked by what he found:

There is not a stone there above the ground-level higher than would shelter a man's head when that man is lying flat on his face ... For months after the fight, no one who went to the spot, and saw the face of every stone that had partially concealed either a Boer or man of the 60th, literally whitened over with the splash of lead, could refrain from saying it was a marvellous sight.

The 3/60th suffered 40 per cent casualties during the engagement yet remained steady throughout the firefight and maintained their composure on the stealthy night retreat. Almost two years in Africa had brought a marked improvement in the performance of the battalion that had received much criticism at Gingindlovu in 1879.

The final battle, on Majuba mountain, was the worst defeat suffered by the British during the First Boer War. The British commander led a force on a night march to occupy the summit of Majuba, overlooking the Boer positions on Laing's Nek. He took a curiously mixed force: two companies of the 58th Regiment, two companies of the 92nd Highlanders and a company strength Naval Brigade drawn from two ships' crews, leaving other detached companies along the line of march. When the Boers realised the British were on Majuba their first reaction was to abandon the position, but once it became clear no supporting attack was being made against Laing's Nek the Boers became emboldened and began to advance, and it was now that the geography of the mountain worked against the confident British. As the Boers steadily climbed, utilising an excellent understanding of fire and movement tactics, the British were unable to fire down effectively. Every time a soldier peered over the perimeter of the flat-topped mountain summit, clearly silhouetted against the skyline, he drew accurate Boer fire.

When the Boers occupied an isolated knoll connected by a spur to the summit British confidence drained. From here the Boers could fire on the men of the 92nd Highlanders, thinly spread along the perimeter, clearing a 60-yard section of defenders. Part of the mixed reserve was sent forward to reinforce this position in extended order. An officer in the front line watched them advance:



The men manning Majuba's perimeter made no determined attempt to provide themselves with cover. Some scraped small piles of stones together but these proved largely inadequate. Any man peering over the perimeter, silhouetted against the skyline, offered an instant target for the Boers positioned below.

I fancied by their manner that they must have been startled by being so suddenly hurried up ... they lay down considerably short of where my men had been, and opened a heavy fire, though I don't quite think they saw what they were firing at.

There was a brief pause in the firing by both sides, then:

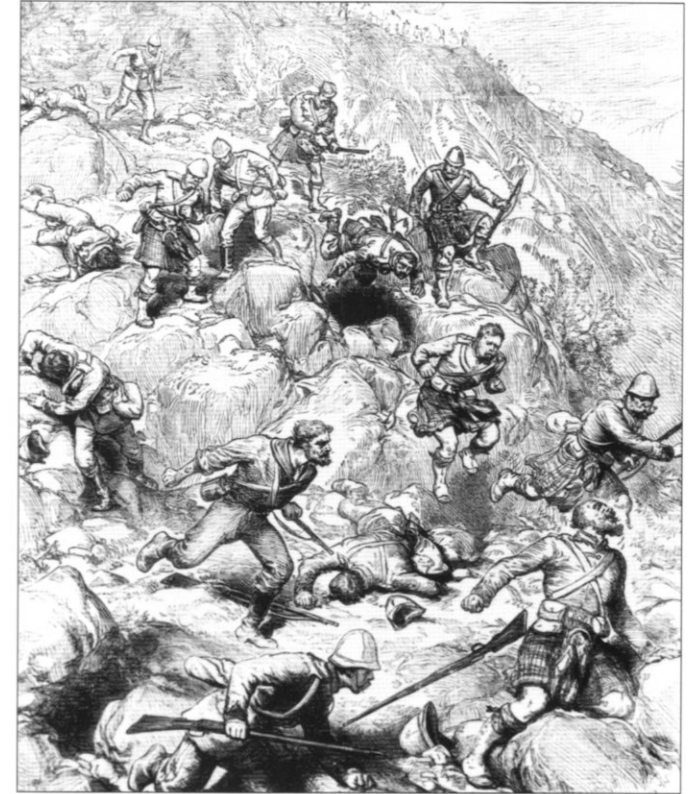
a terrible fusillade commenced from the knoll. About sixteen of the reserve were knocked over in no time, when being unable to stand it any longer they got up and retreated into the dip which runs across the centre of the plateau.

Now exposed, the Highlanders in the firing line also fell back to a position behind a rocky ridge protecting the sunken plateau. Here there was some confusion as the men rallied – redcoat, Highlander and sailor all intermixed. The Boers, who had driven back the firing line, commenced a heavy if inaccurate fire on the rocky ridge 'with a fury that could not be excelled', pinning the British in their position. The tumult of battle was tremendous but above the sound of rifle fire the shouts of officers could be heard, 'Now, my lads, wait till they show up; fire low, fire low! Now, give it them!' As the smoke obscured the view, officers could again be heard shouting, 'Cease firing there! Cease firing! What are you aiming at? Be steady!' as individual shots followed.

All the time the British were pinned behind the ridge other Boer groups were working their way unseen around the mountain to approach the flanks of the British position. Nervous and exposed, many men abandoned the perimeter and joined those gathered behind the ridge.

The men now became concerned with their line of retreat, afraid that the Boers would appear in the rear. Confusion on a knoll on the right of the line resulted in some defenders falling back, allowing Boers to follow up and open fire into the flank of the main line. Two or three men broke ranks and made for the rear, more followed, then there was a rush. Colley shouted for the men to retire and rally at the ridge where they had gained access to the summit, but few were listening. The Boers rushed forward and occupied the now abandoned rocky ridge. The fleeing British soldiers made easy targets, 'on every side, men were throwing up their arms, and with sharp cries of agony were pitching forward on the ground'.

It was a humiliating defeat, Colley was dead and almost 60 per cent of his force killed, wounded or taken prisoner. For the soldiers of the British Army, who had done so much to enhance their reputation over the previous four years, it was a humiliating end to the 'redcoat' era in South Africa.



The mixed British force on Majuba, drawn from the 58th, 92nd and naval personnel, grew nervous as the Boer forces appeared to be encircling their position. One or two men broke ranks and others followed. The British commander ordered the men to retire but it was too late; the men were already fleeing.

MUSEUMS

Of the many Regimental museums in the United Kingdom there can be no doubt that the Royal Regiment of Wales Museum in Brecon, Wales, offers the best display of items relating to the wars in South Africa. This is due to the regiment being the successor to the 24th Regiment, which was heavily involved on the Cape Frontier and in the Zulu War. Besides uniforms and equipment, and many items recovered from the battlefields of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift, the museum also holds six of the seven Victoria Crosses awarded to the 2/24th for the defence of Rorke's Drift, although because of their value only copies are on display. Amongst the more extraordinary items is the musket ball that injured Corporal Lyons at the battle, which he wore in later years on his watch chain.

The National Army Museum in London has an interesting range of items relating to this period but unfortunately limitations on space mean that few of these are generally on view. A special exhibition at the museum, 'Ashes and Blood – The British Army in South Africa 1795–1914', which ran a few years ago displayed many of these. However, a very fine book of the exhibition including colour photographs of all the exhibits is available through the museum. Perhaps the most famous exhibit is Charles Fripp's iconic painting *The Battle of Isandlwana*, 1879.

In South Africa, the Talana Museum in Dundee has a very interesting Zulu War display and there are also displays in the museum at Rorke's Drift and in the Visitor Centre at Isandlwana.

RE-ENACTMENT

Re-enactment of the British Army of the 1870s and 1880s in South Africa is a small area of the historical recreation field in the United Kingdom. The most well-known group is the 'Diehard Company', the re-enactment arm of the Victorian Military Society. Originally formed in 1993 to recreate a Home Service battalion circa 1886, and based on the 1st Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment, the 'Diehards' have extended their brief more recently. In 1999 the opportunity arose to visit South Africa and take part in commemorations to mark the 120th anniversary of the Zulu War. In response the 'Diehards' adopted new uniforms and visited Zululand as the '24th Regiment'. At Isandlwana, in the shadow of the mountain, they 'fought' an impi raised from local Zulus in front of a huge crowd, which included the Zulu king, His Majesty King Goodwill Zwelithini. Other displays were performed at both Rorke's Drift and Eshowe. At displays on home soil the 'Diehards' form a living history encampment and perform the drills and demonstrate the daily life of a soldier of the 1870s and 1880s. More recently the 'Diehards' have formed a Naval detachment, representing the crew of HMS *Shah* in Zululand. To contact the 'Diehard Company' write to: Graham Gilmore, 81a Wainwright, Werrington, Peterborough, Cambs. PE4 5AH, United Kingdom.

'The 1879 Group' is another that recreates the Zulu War period. Formed in 1998 the group stage living history displays with members wearing uniforms of various British and Colonial units. The group's aim is to raise money to renovate graves and to place markers on unmarked graves of those soldiers who fought in the Zulu War. To contact the '1879 Group' write to: Maurice Jones, Trewern, Talybont, Ceredigion, Mid Wales SY24 5EY, United Kingdom.

INTERNET

There are a number of Internet sites that offer information on this period, although they are mainly focused on the Zulu War.

www.kwazulu.co.uk A wide-ranging website looking at all aspects of the history of Zululand and the war of 1879.

www.anglozuluwar.com The website of the Anglo Zulu War Historical Society.

www.keynshamlighthorse.com A website devoted to researching biographies and tracking down the graves and memorials of those involved in the Zulu War.

www.rorkesdriftvc.com A site devoted to the Battle of Rorke's Drift, although it has also developed a very lively Zulu War discussion forum.

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The Diehard Company at Rorke's Drift in 1999. Originally created to represent the 1st Battalion Middlesex Regiment on home service circa 1886 the group now also interpret the 24th Regiment on active service in South Africa, 1878-79.

COLOUR PLATE COMMENTARY

A: PRIVATE, 90TH (PERTHSHIRE VOLUNTEERS) LIGHT INFANTRY, EMBARKING FOR SOUTH AFRICA, JANUARY 1878

1: This infantryman is wearing the five-buttoned unlined red serge frock, the standard wear at all times except when the full-dress tunic was required. The only concession to overseas duty is the issue of the Foreign Service helmet. The standard infantry equipment across this period was the 1871 Valise Pattern. This consisted of a black-varnished canvas folding bag, which carried the soldier's spare clothing and personal items. The valise rested on the buttocks, secured by braces and straps to brace rings through which the equipment balanced. A further strap secured these rings to the waist-belt. Once on campaign the valise was generally consigned to the regimental transport. Ammunition was carried in two 20-round pouches worn on the waist-belt and in an additional black leather ammunition bag, holding 30 rounds. This hung from the right-hand brace ring or from the rear intersection of the braces when the valise was not worn. Other straps secured the greatcoat and mess tin. A white haversack and 'Oliver' pattern wooden water bottle completed the equipment.

2: 1869-78 infantry shako

Standard headwear for home service, the dark-blue cloth shako had a universal brass shako plate fixed above the flat black leather peak. The shako had a woollen ball tuft set in a brass fitting: red for Royal Regiments, two-thirds white over one-third red for all others.

3: 1869-78 shako plate (57th Regiment)

The universal brass shako plate was of stamped brass with regimental numerals voided through the central disc.

4: Blue cloth Home Service helmet

Authorised to replace the infantry shako in May 1878.

5: 1878-81 helmet plate (99th Regiment)

The universal brass helmet plate. Numbers fixed in the centre void on a cloth backing showed regimental distinction.

6: Collar badges:

- a) 3rd (East Kent) Regiment (The Buffs)
- b) 13th (Somersetshire) Light Infantry
- c) 80th (Staffordshire Volunteers) Regiment
- d) 57th (West Middlesex) Regiment

7: Bayonets:

- a) Martini-Henry 1871 pattern sword bayonet. Issued to infantry sergeants and rifle regiments, this pattern was converted from the 1856 Enfield sword bayonet. This formidable-looking weapon had a blade of 22³/₄in. with a double curve, the so-called 'yataghan' style.
- b) Martini-Henry 1876 pattern. Officially designated as the Bayonet, Common, Long, it soon earned itself a more practical name from the soldiers: the Lunger. It had a triangular blade of 22⁷/₈in.
- c) Martini-Henry 1871 pattern. Converted from the 1853 pattern Enfield socket bayonet. The bayonet was triangular in form and had a 17-in. blade designed for thrusting.

8: Glengarry badge (24th Regiment)

All infantry units wore the Glengarry cap in undress order. Badges were unique to each regiment.

9: Other Ranks button

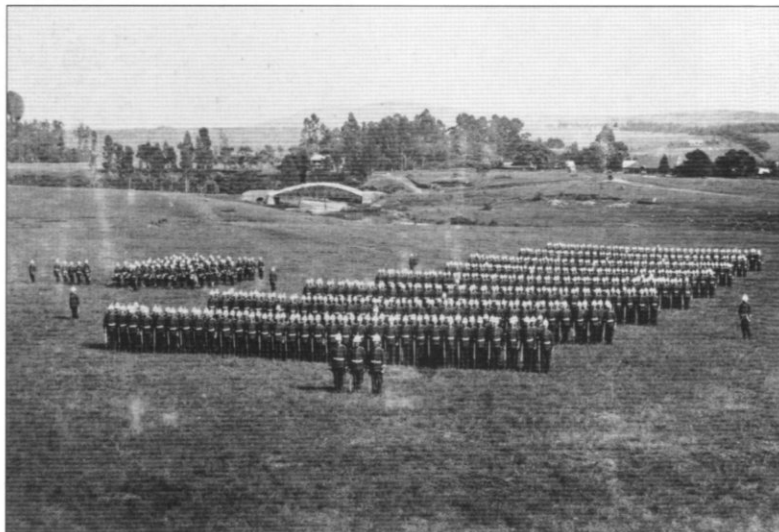
The brass General Service button bearing the Royal Coat of Arms, worn on both the full-dress tunic and serge frock.

B: TRAINING AND DRILL

For all new recruits the finer points of repetitive barrack square marching and arms drill quickly introduced them to the disciplines of army life. The army had a great belief in the effectiveness of the bayonet, which featured prominently in these drills. However, musketry practice was limited due to restrictions on ammunition. Regulations allowed each man only 200 rounds per year with an additional 400 rounds permitted for field firing, but this was generally restricted to those battalions housed at Aldershot. Lack of suitable ground saw the phasing out of large-scale field manoeuvres after 1873, and it was not until 1898, when the army purchased a large tract of Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire, that they were re-instigated.

An infantry battalion at full war establishment theoretically mustered 1,097 all ranks, but regulations set the establishment for service in South Africa at 896. The battalion was divided into a headquarters and eight companies, the companies being further divided into four sections. A captain and two lieutenants commanded each company, supported by a colour-sergeant, four

A full battalion formed in quarter column of companies with regimental band. This photograph, taken at Pietermaritzburg, gives an excellent impression of how a battalion, newly arrived in South Africa, appeared before embarking on active service. (Private collection)



sergeants and two drummers (buglers in Rifle and Light Infantry regiments). Setting aside supernumeraries (bandsmen, pioneers, drivers) this allowed a company strength of about 93 junior ranks (corporals and privates).

The 1877 edition of the Manual of Field Exercise witnessed a change in tactical thinking. Prior to this the accepted method of attack featured a line in close order screened by skirmishers. This new edition advocated attacks developing in depth. When advancing on the enemy two companies were pushed forward, opening into extended order two ranks deep, each company occupying about 200 paces of ground. Behind this firing line another two companies in line drew up in support about 180 paces further back. The remaining four companies formed in line about 300 paces to their rear. As the force closed with the enemy the leading two companies formed into a single line; they would then be joined by the two supporting companies, gradually increasing the overall firepower, with the reserve feeding forward as required, in line or extended order.

C: BATTLE TACTICS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The original tactics promoted for use in South Africa specified that British infantry form the front line with artillery in the centre and the flank companies thrown back. African levies held a position in echelon to the rear of the infantry while behind them any mounted troops formed on the flank, ready to envelop the enemy flank and rear, with a reserve of infantry held well in rear of the centre.

In the successful engagement at Nyumaga against the Xhosa the British placed two 7-pdr guns in the centre of their line with a company of the 88th Regiment to their left and one of 1/24th to the right. Another company of the 1/24th formed a second-line reserve with mounted men on the flanks.

This formation was advocated for use against the Zulu too. At Nyezane Colonel Pearson's initial dispositions followed this plan but as the Zulu attack developed in

strength against his right it became necessary to extend continually on that flank. His deployment saw two artillery pieces positioned on a knoll with a company of the 2/3rd on either side. A third company of the 2/3rd extended the right while the Naval Brigade formed a thrown-back left flank. Dismounted Natal Volunteers operated on both flanks, those on the left some distance behind the Naval troops, with levies held in the centre rear. The tactics proved successful, but later the same day, at Isandlwana, a similar formation was overwhelmed and the British force destroyed.

In response British forces no longer deployed in lines against the Zulu; instead compact square formations offering all-round defence and no open flanks became the standard formation. At Gingindlovu a wagon laager 130 yards square was drawn up, inside which the draught animals were placed, and a surrounding earth breastwork, dug some 15 yards further out, provided protection for the infantry drawn up two deep behind it. Artillery strengthened the corners. Unable to penetrate this solid formation the Zulus fell back, pursued ruthlessly by the mounted forces and African levies.

Lord Chelmsford employed a square formation again at Ulundi, the next and final battle of the Zulu War. Here, however, he did not base the formation on a wagon laager. The square, or 'living laager', as some of the African levies called it, was formed by 33 companies of infantry drawn from six battalions. Again, unable to penetrate the square, the Zulus withdrew. It was clear to both sides the war was over.

The Diehard Company demonstrating skirmishing in extended order with supports. Extended order allowed three paces between each man (7¹/₂ft), but the officer in command had leeway to open out further if required. Instructions issued for the Zululand campaign allowed companies to fight in either closed or extended formations.





A new system for outpost duty, introduced during the ninth Cape Frontier War, proved successful and continued through the Zulu War. Permanent groups of four, preferably formed of friends, occupied stationary positions, as, particularly at night, it was felt constant movement diminished the ability of the sentry to use his eyes and ears. With one man on lookout the other three could rest.

D: DAILY LIFE

For soldiers serving in Africa most days meant marching, whether from the coast to their assembly points, searching for the enemy or guarding supply convoys. Soldiers marched in all weathers, waded waist-deep rivers, fought their way through thick bush and hauled cumbersome ox wagons through clawing mud. These wagons formed the basic mode of transport for supplies in southern Africa. They were about 18ft long with a rear axle span of 5ft 10in., a rear wheel diameter of about 5ft and a front wheel of about 4ft. An unladen wagon weighed about 3,000lb and on good roads could carry about 8,000lb, however as few good roads existed the average load was reduced to about 3,000lb. Each wagon needed a span of about 16 oxen, arranged in pairs, to pull it, as well as a driver and three men directing the oxen. A wagon occupied about 32 yards of track and a battalion of infantry needed at least 17 to transport its baggage and camp impedimenta. The oxen needed to spend eight hours a day grazing and a further eight hours digesting, while during the remaining eight hours available for work it was recommended that they should rest for a further two hours. In Zululand 10 miles a day was considered good progress, but at difficult river crossings it could take all day to get the wagons over, and when rain set in progress became excruciatingly slow.

Wherever the army went in southern Africa the soldiers built forts. These served as defensive strongpoints, supply depots and communication centres. This was backbreaking work yet it is testament to their efforts that traces of some

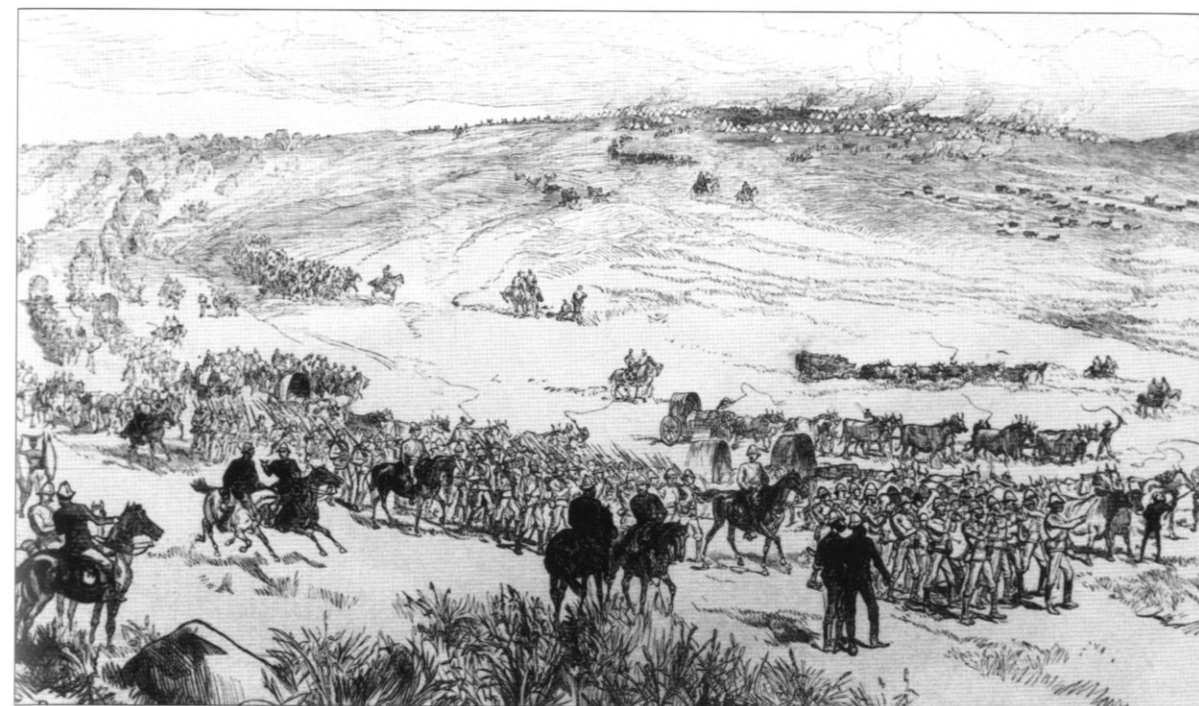
are still visible. The designs employed varied greatly from simple rectangular earthworks as built at Centane on the Cape Frontier, to the highly developed defences of the besieged fort at Eshowe during the Zulu War. Stone forts and redoubts were also constructed in Zululand; it was one of the stone redoubts at Fort Newdigate that featured in a false alarm, detailed earlier. The more permanent forts became quite sophisticated, incorporating huts for the men as at Fort Chelmsford and interior defensive structures. Forts also played a central role in the First Boer War. When war broke out the Boers surrounded isolated British garrisons dotted around the Transvaal. These outposts retired into their earthwork forts to await relief. As the British attempted to break through into the Transvaal they met with defeats at Laing's Nek and Majuba.

E: BUSH FIGHTING ON THE CAPE FRONTIER

For many new recruits their first experience of combat in South Africa took place in the foreboding, dark and claustrophobic bush-choked ravines and forested valleys of the Amatola mountain range. To clear these fastnesses, British columns pushed forward, sweeping through the bush. It proved almost impossible to retain any cohesion moving through this type of terrain, so whenever possible they kept to existing narrow paths – or built their own. Knowing this the Xhosa found it easy to plan hit-and-run attacks on British columns. Often these were over very quickly, but they were a terrifying experience for those inexperienced in bush warfare.

In an incident referred to earlier, in the Lotutu bush, all the fighting typically took place at close quarters; a company of the 90th Regiment were exposed on a bush path while the Xhosa mostly remained concealed. Initially the Xhosa fire had generally been high, but when a warrior appeared from the bush and fired at point-blank range at Captain Stevens, the bullet smashed into his upper jaw 'knocking a big hole in his face'. The men responded by firing blindly into the bush. Lieutenant Saltmarshe pushed forward with orders to 'Go to the head of the company, fire two or three rounds, then advance 50 yards and drop again.' Saltmarshe took control of the company but had only pushed on a short distance when two shots were 'fired so close to him that his chest was knocked away'. Saltmarshe fell to the ground dead leaving the company without officers. A number of the African levies panicked and ran, taking about six redcoats with them. In the confusion a bullet fired by a comrade hit Private Silvester in the chest and he fell dead. Corporal Hillier was severely wounded twice, shot in his shoulder and chest, while a bullet passed through his left arm and entered the chest of Private Stoney, leaving him mortally wounded. With the company on the verge of panic, Colour Sergeant Smith rallied the men and, with a stream of abuse, led them forward again but not before three more of the men had fallen wounded. However, with support arriving in the shape of two artillery pieces the Xhosa dispersed and the nightmare was over.

Later, Chelmsford feared the war in Zululand would evolve along similar lines. When he received news, early in that campaign, that a strong force of Zulu had been located about 10 miles east of Isandlwana, he split his force, determined they should not evade him. But the Zulus did not follow the Xhosa pattern of warfare and, while Chelmsford was away, the main Zulu army descended on his camp, destroying it and most of the defenders.



Wood's Flying Column passing the camp of Newdigate's 2nd Division in June 1879. The band of the 1/13th or 90th Regiment leads, followed by a company of infantry and an artillery battery. The wagons are advancing on a wide front, each driver attempting to find the best line of advance for his vehicle.

F: THE BATTLE OF ULUNDI

On the morning of 4 July 1879 Lord Chelmsford led his men on to the Mahlabatini plain and formed them into a great hollow rectangle. The 'square' occupied a gentle rise from where a sergeant of the 90th Regiment, observing the advance of the Zulus, wrote, 'We could see the Zulu army creeping up from the bush near the main kraal. Then came an army from the hills in the rear, and widened out in good order to surround us.' The battalions forming the sides of the square faced outwards, four deep, with the front two ranks kneeling and artillery pieces deployed in three of the corners, with others placed amongst the infantry. As the Zulu army closed the mounted men withdrew into the square.

A bandsman of the 90th Regiment saw the Zulus advancing 'steadily in silence', as the artillery opened fire. When they closed to 400 yards the order was given for the infantry to fire volleys by companies and the action became general. A newspaper correspondent described the British fire as a 'deadly storm of lead'. Despite this the Zulus worked their way to within 60 or 70 yards in places before finding it impossible to close but on other fronts the Zulus were unable to get closer than 200 yards. Inside the square Melton Prior was preparing sketches for the *Illustrated London News*, noting that the Zulus had commenced firing and 'the air seemed alive with the whistling bullets and slugs and pieces of cooking-pot legs fired from elephant guns as they came banging in amongst us from all directions.'

The illustration shows part of the rear face of the square, manned by two companies of the 2/21st. Here the Zulus made their most determined assault. Melton Prior rushed to witness the attack and saw the men 'heavily engaged with some Zulus, said to be 6,000 strong and 30 deep'. Lord Chelmsford was also drawn to the danger and, according to Prior, implored, 'Men, fire faster, can't you fire faster?' Reserves rushed forward but the steady fire from the rear face, supported by two artillery pieces firing case shot 'made them stagger, halt and fall back ... leaving a heap of dead and dying on the ground'. Prior later noted that the nearest Zulu lay only nine paces from the square.

All around the square the Zulus began to pull back slowly, 'the infantry commenced cheering like mad', Chelmsford ordered the cavalry out and the Zulu retirement became a ruthless pursuit. The battle was over and so was the war.

G: AFTER THE BATTLE

'Nothing save a battle lost is so terrible as a battle won.' These words, uttered by the Duke of Wellington after the Battle of Waterloo, may well have echoed through Lord Chelmsford's mind when he returned to the camp at Isandlwana on the night of the battle. An artillery sergeant who spent that night surrounded by the dead wrote to his father of his harrowing experience:

When we saw what had happened every man could not help crying to see so many of our poor comrades lying dead on the ground ... I could not help crying to see how the poor fellows were massacred. They were first shot and then assegai'd, the Zulus mutilated them and struck them with the assegai all over the body ... Everything we had was destroyed.



The sight of the naked and mutilated bodies of those killed at Isandlwana appalled those who saw it. The post-battle rituals of the Zulu were generally unknown to the average British soldier who saw in it a frenzy of wanton destruction. As a result the Zulu War largely developed into a war without prisoners.

Those who saw the stripped and mutilated corpses of the dead were appalled, not recognising these acts formed part of strict Zulu post-battle rituals. Repeated stabbing of an already dead opponent, known as *hlomula*, demonstrated respect for a brave foe, but any man who had killed in battle was considered tainted. Part of the complex cleansing process that followed involved wearing clothing taken from the corpse and to prevent the spirit of the dead man haunting him, the warrior needed to slash open the stomach cavity of his victim to allow its release.

At Khambula, later in the war, it was the mass of Zulu dead that focused the attention of those who witnessed the destruction. Having taken part in the battle, a sergeant of the 90th Regiment joined those disposing of the bodies of those killed in the attack. It was a sobering time:

A more horrible sight than the enemy's dead, where they felt the effects of shellfire, I never saw. Bodies lying cut in halves, heads taken off, and other features in connection with the dead made a sight more ghastly than ever I thought of.

The First Boer War presented a different post-battle image. The illustration shows the situation on the summit of Majuba shortly after the conclusion of the battle. With the British driven off the mountain the victorious Boers

wandered freely amongst the dead and wounded. Surgeon Mahon dealt with the wounded as best he could:

I had all the wounded, 36 in number, placed on one spot near the well, and luckily we found blankets and just enough waterproof sheets to cover them all. All we had to give them was water and opium, the Boers having taken all our brandy.

Some Boers, mainly the older ones, were helpful and sympathetic to the wounded but accounts suggest some of the younger Boers needed restraining to prevent them from shooting the wounded. Many Boers took whatever valuables they could find as souvenirs – the most prized trophies being the sporrans of the 92nd Highlanders.

H: PRIVATE, 94TH REGIMENT, TRANSVAAL, 1880

1: Some battalions sent out to South Africa as reinforcements for the Zulu War early in 1879, stayed on to take part in the campaign against the Pedi and also in the First Boer War in 1880–81. New uniforms, scheduled for issue twice a year in April and October, failed to reach those who left Britain in February 1879. The 94th only received theirs some time in the first half of 1880, but replacement helmets had still not arrived when the battalion took part in the campaign against the Boers. While marching into Pedi country an officer of the 94th gave this description of his battalion:

You would laugh if you saw the state of rags our men are in. Their coats are all in rags having been patched ... with every conceivable colour

& stuff and their braces are positively absent. Some few managed to buy corduroy trousers at Greytown and they simply are in rags & torn ... Lots of the bayonet scabbards are lost and the men make rough coverings for the bayonets of the skins of the beasts as they are killed.

2: 1871 Valise pattern waist-belt and bayonet frog

This buff leather waist-belt shows a brass locket of the 24th (2nd Warwickshire) Regiment. The belt length was adjustable and had two 'D' rings fixed either side of the locket that attached to straps from the brace rings.

3: 1871 Valise pattern ammunition pouch

Two pouches were worn on the waist-belt, one each side of the central locket. Each pouch held 20 rounds in two 10-round packets. The first pattern of pouch was of black leather but later these were replaced by pipe-clayed buff leather. Both types appeared in Zululand although the white was more common.

4: Ammunition packet

A 10-round packet of Martini-Henry ammunition. The packets were loosed wrapped and secured with blue and brown twisted twine.

5: The short-chamber Boxer-Henry .450 calibre cartridge

The case of the cartridge, made from thin-rolled sheet brass, holds the bullet, measuring about 1 1/4 in., which is an alloy of 12 parts lead to one part tin.

6: Collar badges

- a) 21st (Royal Scots Fusiliers) Regiment
- b) 88th (Connaught Rangers) Regiment
- c) 94th Regiment
- d) 58th (Rutlandshire) Regiment

7: Mark II Martini-Henry rifle

The Martini-Henry .450/.577 rifle came into service in 1874 as the first purpose-built breech-loading rifle, replacing the Snider-Enfield. It had an overall weight of about 8lb 12oz and a total length of 49in. (124.46cm). It was sighted up to 1,400yds but was at its most effective up to 400yds. Towards the end of 1877 a Mark II version followed. The barrel of the Martini-Henry had a tendency to become extremely hot with repeated firing. To combat this soldiers would sew a sleeve of leather around the barrel to protect the fingers.

8: Oliver pattern water bottle

The wooden water bottle was 'D' shaped in section with bands of galvanised iron at the top and bottom. The bottle held a quart of liquid and was carried on a buff leather sling. The bottle had a galvanised stopper only removed for filling. The removal of a small wooden plug in the stopper allowed the soldier to drink.

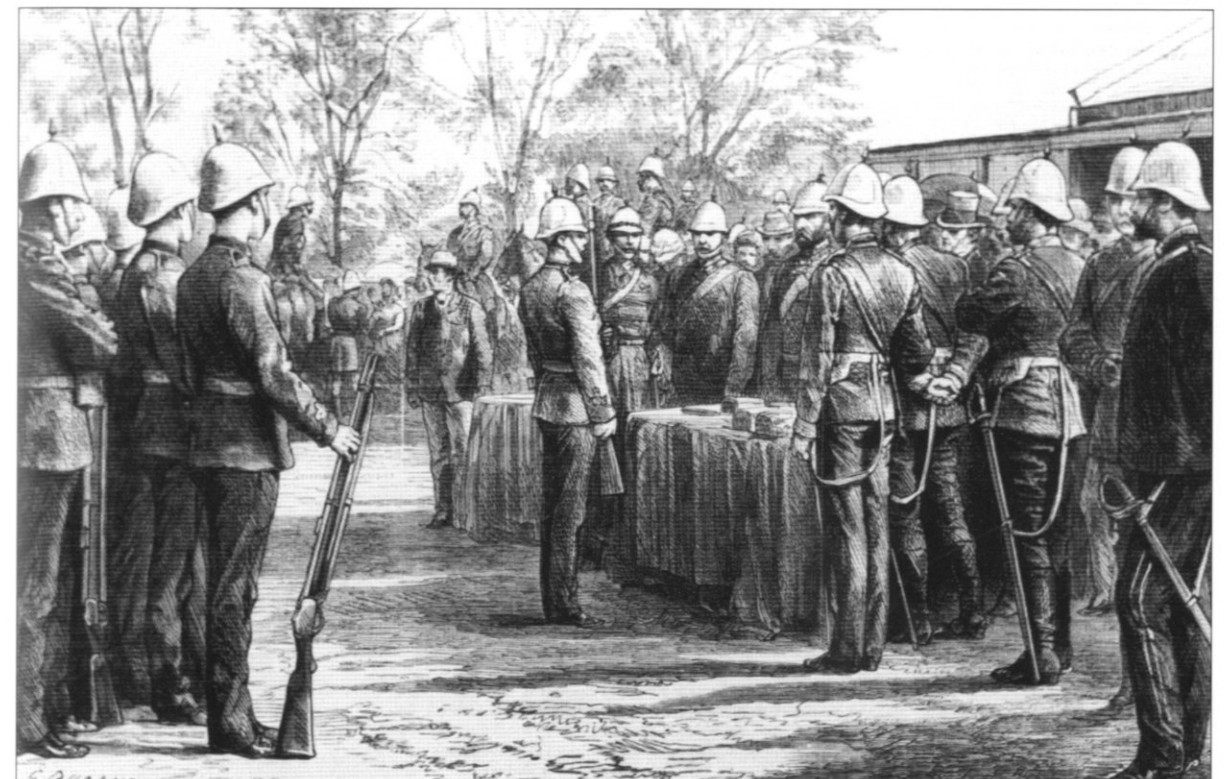
9: The South Africa medal

Issued for all campaigns in South Africa between 25 September 1877 and 2 December 1879. The medal was issued with one of six bars – 1877, 1877–78, 1878, 1878–79, 1877–78–79 and 1879. There was no medal or bar awarded for service in the First Boer War.

a) Obverse

b) Reverse

The 58th Regiment receiving their medals for the Zulu War in Pietermaritzburg. The campaigns against the Xhosa, Zulu and Pedi saw the issue of one medal with date bars. There was no similar reward for those who fought in the First Boer War.



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