

THE ASSEGAI

The 1879 Group



Isandlwana & Rorke's Drift

AUTUMN 2018

Newsletter of the 1879 Group

**The 1879 Group
Isandlwana & Rorke's Drift
Founded 23rd May 1998 at the Barracks, Brecon**

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The 1879 Group

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Mr Glynne Davies

Ms Vivien Watkins

Mr Roger Morgan

Mr Duncan McDonald

Mr Jimmy Patterson

Mr Richard Cartwright

Mr Bill Howells

1. EDITORIAL

Whilst our membership numbers remain reasonably stable it would certainly benefit the Group to increase numbers not only in terms of additional income but looking forward to the long term future of the Group. We do have a number of younger members but the average age profile of the membership does give some concern as to where we will be in the next few years or so. This is particularly true with the living history branch as participating in re-enactment events does require a high commitment and a degree of physical fitness and energy. We are coping with this at present but longer term it is essential that we attract more younger members with a view to eventually taking part in the re-enactment events and ultimately taking over from those who may wish to retire from such events. This also applies of course to committee members. It is perhaps true to say that many younger people do not have the same interest in heritage and history and desire to join groups such as ours when information technology is so comprehensive and readily available from the comfort of their own homes. At the same time there must be many who would be interested in joining if we could only reach them. Our re-enactment events, our website, the regimental museum and the Assegai play their part in making people know what we do and perhaps we should all now do what we can to be more pro-active in helping to publicise our activities within our individual situations and capabilities.

2. ANNUAL RORKE'S DRIFT DINNER 2018

The annual dinner was held once again at the Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod Wells on 13th January with 28 in attendance. Following pre-dinner drinks and meeting old friends, a three course meal with coffee, tea and wine was served which was certainly up to the usual excellent standard. Unfortunately Roger Morgan, our regular MC for the evening was absent through illness and good wishes were expressed for a rapid return to health.



The Group in the Powys Suite



Duncan with Douglas and Jimmy Patterson

Speeches following the meal were given by chairman Jimmy Reynolds when he thanked everyone for attending and for the support given throughout what had been another successful year for the Group. Our guest of honour and honorary colonel Tim Van-Rees then addressed the Group and also expressed gratitude for the work of everyone in keeping alive the memory of the regiment. In helping with this the importance of the interesting articles appearing in the Assegai were also mentioned in the ongoing research and education process.

He then provided an update on the Regimental Museum and was happy to report that there had been a significant increase in the number of visitors over the year which had helped the financial position. The leasing arrangement with the MOD was on hold however as a condition of the lease was that their nominated contractor for any building maintenance work had to be Carillion who were now in liquidation and that the situation was being monitored. The dinner concluded with toasts to the Queen, the Regiment, the Group and absent friends and also thanks given to the hotel and catering staff.

Socialising continued and of particular interest on display were Jimmy Patterson's original Mk.4 Martini-Henry rifle and Duncan's photo album giving a pictorial history of the Group from 1998 depicting the marches, parades and re-enactment events from many parts of the country.

3. ANNUAL RORKE'S DRIFT DINNER 2019

The dinner will again be held at the Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod Wells on Saturday 12th January. Details were included in the Spring News Sheet but for those who have not already responded these are : Cost of the three course meal with wine is £28 per person with accommodation rates at the hotel being : Standard twin/double room £49 per person per night. Executive twin/double £59 per person per night. Single room £59 per person per night. Double/twin room for sole occupancy £68 per person per night. When booking a non-refundable deposit of £20 is required. Tel 01597828590. A dinner booking form is enclosed, please forward to the Group Treasurer Mr. Glynne Davies.

4. MINUTES OF THE 2018 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 19th May

1. Chairman's Welcome and Introduction

Jimmy Reynolds opened the meeting by thanking all 24 present for attending which was followed by apologies for absences.

2. Minutes of the 2017 AGM and Matters Arising

The Secretary Danny Tully read out the minutes which had been published in the Autumn issue of the Assegai allowing members the opportunity to examine them and to raise any questions. There were no matters arising and as such the minutes were accepted as a true account.

He also confirmed that the minutes of this meeting would again be included in the next issue of the Assegai due for publication in the Autumn.

3. Chairman's Report

Jimmy started by confirming how well the group were now doing with regard to membership and finances. The number of Living History events had been reduced however to take into account the considerable effort required to organise and attend the events and encouraged non-uniformed members to support the displays and presentations.

4. Secretary's Report

Danny thanked everyone who helped over the year and particularly for making contact at reasonable hours. He then went on to remind everyone of the physical strain of taking part in the Living History events with regard to the relative ages of members and the need to change the emphasis of these events to include more public engagement during the talks and presentations and where possible to minimise marching displays and concentrate more on shooting and bayonet drills.

He also mentioned the new data protection act and the need for members formally agreeing for the group to hold some of their personal details. Vivien Watkins would formulate a way of doing this.

5. Treasurer's Report

Glynne Davies presented the financial report and balance sheet for the year which confirmed that the group's finances were in good order. Following a brief discussion it was agreed not to include the details as part of the next issue of the Assegai but copies are available to view should members have any specific reason to do so. In closing the Chairman thanked Glynne for all his efforts.

6. Membership Secretary's Report

Vivien stated that the membership last year including honorary members totalled 60. A number of members had still not renewed and she was in the process of sending out reminders of outstanding subscriptions for 2018/2019.

7. Assegai Editor's Report

Bill summarised the distribution for the year with 62 copies of the Autumn Newsletter sent to 55 UK addresses and 7 overseas. The Spring News Sheet went to 42 UK addresses and 3 overseas, these contained membership renewal forms together with the 2019 Rorke's Drift dinner booking forms. This move will help with the administration and organisation of the event.

He then read out a letter received from Bob Howells giving his apologies for being absent, congratulating the group on the spirit and camaraderie he had always noted and donating a cheque for £50 towards the printing costs of the Assegai. The editor was asked to send a letter of thanks.

8. Events Co-ordinator Report

Bob Coates spoke at length on the success of the Spetchley Park event in 2017 where there were over 1000 costumed re-enactors taking part and with the group being well represented there.

He then briefed everyone on the forthcoming events at Hay-on-Wye on 5th August commemorating the close of WW1 with our colour party parading there, and our last event being with the Worcester Re-Enactors at Spetchley Park on 10th/11th and 12th of August with a tented encampment, arena displays and parades. He then ended with the programme for the Rorke's Drift Rally displays and presentations which would start immediately following the AGM.

Danny also spoke on this and also thanked Bob for his work and added that Richard Cartwright had done an excellent job with the Martini ammunition and also thanked him together with Kevin Cartwright and Robert Palfrey for setting up the camp at the rally field.

9. 2019 Rorke's Drift Dinner

Danny said that he had to bring forward the date of the dinner for personal reasons to 12th January and it was important for those who are coming to book early so that he could finalise details with the Metropole hotel. With the details and booking forms included in the Spring issue Assegai News Sheet this will help members to confirm their attendance and allow the details to be finalised early.

10. Election of Officers and Committee

Douglas opened by speaking eloquently of the work, effort and enthusiasm of the Committee and thanked them for running the group so well and thanked all the membership for the support they provided. He had now been Honorary President for 11 years but confirmed his wish to stand down as his eyesight had deteriorated and that safe driving was becoming more difficult.

In line with the constitution he then formally terminated the committee. There being no new nominations for the future committee he then proposed that the immediate past committee in total be re-elected and asked for a show of hands from the membership. This was duly given and the past committee re-elected for 2018/2019.

11. Election of Honorary Life President

The committee confirmed their sincere wish to retain Douglas as President but also recognised the position he was in. As a result it was proposed to amend the constitution and create a new role of Honorary Life President. Bill Howells then read out a new Clause, 8.1 covering this. (see item 5)

This would confirm his Life Presidency and also his resignation from the committee in order to remove the need to attend meetings but at the same maintaining his right to attend any meeting or event as he wished. The matter was put to the members with Jimmy Patterson formally proposing and which was seconded by Bill Cainan. The proposition was then carried unanimously.

12. Data Protection

A further discussion took place on the new act now in force which requires all organisations to have approval from its members to hold personal details on their files. As all group members are formally registered this requirement is already in place. As a safeguard however all present were asked to sign a form before leaving but a formal document will be issued to all members later in the year.

13. Any Other Business

Bill Cainan offered to supply the 10 kilos of black powder he had in storage if needed by the Living History section. Richard Cartwright our Armourer thanked him for the offer but replied that currently the group were well stocked.

Jimmy Patterson expressed a wish to retire from the Living History section but would still be involved as a committee member. The committee accepted and thanked him for his help over the years.

Bill Howells displayed a Shako Helmet plate he had borrowed from a friend with a history that it could have belonged to Fred Hitch who of course was at Rorke's Drift. The shako had been examined by members of the committee and museum staff with the consensus that it was original and from the 1879 period. Unfortunately there is no provenance to go with it but if any further information is found an article will be included in the next Assegai Newsletter.

Bill also mentioned that the following Wednesday 23rd May marked the 20th anniversary of the formation of the 1879 Group which brought out several nostalgic comments.

With no further business the chairman thanked everyone and formally closed the meeting.

5. AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION

In compliance with AGM Minute 4.11 above, an amendment to the constitution was drafted for approval at the meeting : ie. Addition to Clause 8.

Clause 8.1 Honorary Life President

'At the discretion of the committee and with the approval of the general membership the post of President may be elevated to that of Honorary Life President in recognition of an outstanding contribution to the success and increased status of the group. The incumbent will cease to be a formal member of the committee and will not be required to attend any committee meetings or events but will maintain the right to do so entirely at his/her discretion'. This was formally approved by all.

6. REPORTS OF THE 2018 EVENTS

The Rorke's Drift Rally

The first event of the year immediately followed the AGM at the Regimental museum on 19th May.

The uniformed lads dressed at the museum and then posed for group photographs outside which was quite formal until the bikers arrived dressed in mock Zulu garb which raised a few eyebrows but they certainly brought noise and colour to the proceedings in more ways than one. Members of the WW2 South Wales Borderers Re-enactment group were also present.

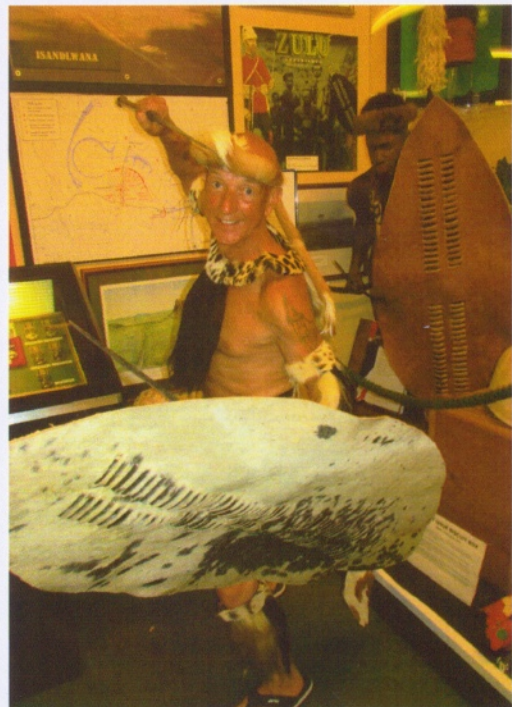
Following the photo shoot the uniformed branch with one Zulu in attendance in full battle dress marched off down the main road to the sports field (was this a first for Brecon!)

A small number of the group stayed at the museum with sentries stationed to greet the many visitors who came. Talks were given by Bob Coates on different perspectives of Rorke's Drift including the effectiveness of bayonet versus assegai. Marcus Coates was in general support and inside the museum Jimmy Patterson and Alan Gibbs answered many questions from the public.

Roger Morgan held talks in the forecourt on Victorian medical procedures and the use of anaesthetics and surgical instruments. The following photographs are just a few of the many taken.



At the museum : Zulu passive.



And Zulu active (behind you Danny!)



Kitted up ready with our new Life President at the museum forecourt



Roger explaining Victorian surgical techniques



Assembled at the museum entrance



Ready to march but before, and for the record



— Joined by the colourful Bikers

At the sports field the area was quite crowded with camper vans, tents and display areas of many other groups. The group camp was where the uniform members assembled for pre-display firing and bayonet drill practice. At 2.15 the group display started in the main arena. Danny using the public address system spoke on his Zulu battle dress and then the heroes of Rorke's Drift and how they were portrayed in the film Zulu compared with the reality. Richard Cartwright spoke on the use of the bayonet, followed by bayonet drill with the display ending with firing of the Martini Henry rifles. Applause at the end showed just how much the general public enjoyed the event.



Danny giving his pre-display briefing.



Pre-display bayonet drill practice.

Hay-on-Wye Commemoration

Sunday 5th August saw the WW1 Commemoration service 'Home at Last' to mark the centenary of the end of the war. At noon the parade marched through the town led by the Swansea Pipe Band followed by the Group colour party led by Danny and Jimmy, the British Legion, the WW1 Group and other re-enactment groups to complete a large representation for the march pass applauded by many onlookers.



This was followed with music by a band and choir from the area and at 2.00pm the service started with many notable persons present and a large crowd all gathered at the War Memorial in the town square. The service was quite moving with wreathes laid followed by 100 red roses handed randomly to those gathered to come forward and pay their own homage at the memorial. At the close Colonel Tim Van Rees addressed the crowd thanking the organisers and supporting groups for a memorable commemoration and reminding all never to forget and always keep alive the spirit of remembrance.

Spetchley Park Event

The last event of the year took place at Spetchley Park on the 10/11/12th August when the Living History section took part in the M5 Multi Period event at the park which was organised by the Worcester Re-enactors. Most of our members arrived on the Friday afternoon to set up camp and were ready in uniform by 10am the next day awaiting the public to arrive which they did in good numbers.

Due to some confusion by the organisers, this time we were not scheduled to perform in the arena so decided to profile ourselves by walking around and engaging with all the visitors and also speaking to them at our camp. As well as the camp itself which is always an attraction, Jimmy Patterson had his rifle collection on display, Chris Tapster had a great exhibition showing the varied aspects of camp life, and Bob Coates had his Paymaster office as well. Tony Burrows, Phil Joynson, Jimmy Reynolds and Marcus Coates all made a point of engaging with the public at every opportunity. The weather was very good on Saturday and this allowed us to take part in the grand parade with over 1000 re-enactors. Danny Tully in his Zulu costume led the men through the middle of other saluting re-enactors which received many favourable comments from the onlookers. A good week-end for all and the last event of the year.



7. THE GROUP COMMITTEE

The Committee meets at regular intervals at the Regimental Museum in Brecon where matters are discussed and decisions made in the organisation and running of the Group. The secretary arranges the meetings and members travel, some from quite considerable distances to attend. Most members will know who they are from the Assegai and some will know them personally by attending events. For those who don't we attach a photo taken at the April meeting.



From left to right : President Douglas Bourne, Roger Morgan, Secretary Danny Tully, Chairman Jimmy Reynolds, Membership Secretary Viv Watkins, Armourer Richard Cartwright, Events Co-ordinator Bob Coates and Group Adjutant Duncan McDonald. (the editor is at the camera end!)

8. IN MEMORIUM – Barrie Evans

We learned last June that Barrie Evans had passed away. He had been suffering with cancer for some six months and died on 24th May. Barrie or Barrington as he was properly known joined the group in 2000 and went on the 2002 group tour to Zululand. Later he joined the committee and took over the role of membership secretary and was responsible for sorting through the many hard copy documents and converting them into digital format which proved a major task but one which he carried out with great success. He resigned this role some two years ago due to health problems. Barrie had a robust sense of humour and brought about many a smile and laugh at the committee meetings which he

attended and also at one point used to help the editor with the packing and distribution of the Assegai. During his time on the committee Barrie made a solid contribution towards the success of the group and there is no doubt he will be missed. The funeral which was private took place on 18th June at Margam Crematorium, Port Talbot.

Our condolences have been made to Barrie's wife Shirley and the family and a sympathy card sent.

9. THE FRED HITCH SHAKO PLATE?

One of the members of the Llynfi Valley Historical Society, Stephen Davies, of which the editor is the current archivist has recently loaned us a helmet shako plate seeking any information from the Group. The reason for the question mark will become clear. The story behind the acquisition is quite interesting. The owner of the shako was a Major Derek Louis Smith who was with the South Wales Borderers during the 1950's and Stephen worked with his daughter in a company called Miles Laboratories in Bridgend in the early 1980's. Knowing that Stephen was a collector of military badges and medals a meeting was set up with Major Smith which resulted in Stephen purchasing the shako. The story behind the shako was related by Major Smith who said that he had received it from a Bob Allen whom he had befriended and who was an assistant at the regimental museum. Bob Allen had been a school friend of Private Fred Hitch's son and who had given it to him sometime before the 1950's.



Could this then be the shako worn by Fred Hitch during his service in South Africa? A fascinating prospect but as there is no provenance to prove the story, it must remain unproven.

The shako has been examined by committee members and Bill Cainan also has come up with relevant comments. The 1869 – 1878 Infantry shako had the regimental number voided, that is it was cut out and not solid. This indicated it was used on overseas service as the home service regimental number was solid. After this the voided shako was withdrawn from service in favour of the solid blue cloth home service helmet though it is likely the voided type was being used for some time after 1878. One of the lugs on the reverse has been repaired probably after it was withdrawn from service. The shako has been compared with an original on display at the museum.

At some time in the past a number of items at the museum went missing for reasons unknown, could this have been one of those items?

Taking into account all these considerations the consensus is that the shako is of the 1879 period and is very likely to be genuine. But what a story and what a find if only the Hitch connection was proven!

10. JOSEPH VEALE, AN EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNT

During 2014 the Daily Mail featured an article on the Anglo-Zulu war. This later generated a response from a Helen Forrester of Newcastle which appeared in their letters page. The letter is shown below with permission of the Letters Editor and as supplied by our own Bob Coates.

'My grandfather Joseph Veale was born in June 1858 in Newcastle-on-Tyne to a Scots mother and English father. For some reason he elected to join a Welsh regiment and was sent to Zululand. He would have been about 20 at the time at the battle of Isandlwana. When I was a young girl he often told me about his time there as an ordinary soldier. For a while he was batman to the Prince Imperial who went out on patrol with a few friends and was killed.

Later my grandfather was at the relief of Rorke's Drift. He told me about a young band boy whom the soldiers sometimes took with them when they went out on patrol. He was only 12 and if he got tired on the way back to camp they would give him a piggy back.

Granddad was there when Lord Chelmsford made his fatal tactical mistake in dividing his force. He was in the group that went with Chelmsford leaving behind the young boy who had pleaded to be taken along. At this point the old man had to force back the tears as he said 'he kept shouting after me,

take me with you Joe'. Not knowing how far they would be marching the older soldiers did not want to have to carry him. When Chelmsford returned to Isanldwana and his men discovered the massacre, Granddad told me the boy had been gutted (his expression) and thrown on a thorn bush. I've seen the film 'Zulu' several times but none so far has mentioned the boy so I was moved to read the latest account and remember how the regret stayed with my grandfather all his life.

My elder daughter as the last part of her training as a doctor had decided to do her elective training in Zululand. She enjoyed the time there and loved the people. She visited the battle sites but decided against relating her relationship to one of the soldiers at the time. When the battle of Rorke's Drift was re-staged on the site the locals didn't like it much.'

And there the story ends. Interesting to have a personal and rare eye-witness account and from this, Joseph Veale must have been with Chelmsford's split force and later went on to Rorke's Drift but could not have been at the battle itself as suggested in the text if he was already with Chelmsford.

11. THE REGIMENTAL PRAYER

All regiments have their own prayers as contained in the 'Collects of the Regiments and Corps of the British Army' which is authorised by the Chaplain-General of Her Majesty's Land Forces.

The original Collects date from 1930 when Rev. Matthew Tobias wrote his 'Collects for the British Army' which attempted to provide every cap badge with a suitable collect. In 1976 the Chaplain-General published an updated version consolidating all those collects issued from his office over the years and which dealt with the mid-century amalgamations, newly formed units and re-written collects. The re-organisation of the Army in the early 1990's called 'Options for Change' necessitated new collects and provided the opportunity to amend existing ones. The current 'Collects of the British Army' is the work of Rev. R A McDowell which also includes those of our Sister Services. They are printed in order of regimental precedence. The 24th Regimental Collect is :

'O Christ, who hast said, be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life, strengthen us The South Wales Borderers, who bear the crown in honour of those who died for their trust, so to fight the good fight of faith we may hold on eternal life in thee, who art with the father and the Holy Ghost for ever and ever. Amen'

Before 1929/30 there was no regimental prayer for any individual units and for those killed in the Anglo-Zulu war for example only prayers from the Bible were said at the graveside. Since 1929/30 the prayer would be said before a battle and again for the fallen after battle via a Drum Head service and which covered all denominations. For retired veterans who have died it is customary to say the regimental prayer at their funerals and it is also normal at regimental reunions to say the prayer with the grace at the start of the meal.

12. ZULUS, A BOY SCOUT'S TALE by Bill Howells

Long, long ago when I was still in short trousers there came a day when I changed my regulation school greys to the khaki coloured variety. Yes! I joined the boy scouts. Knots, good turns and the great outdoors became the order of the day and led to seven memorable years of comradeship, fun and excitement. Good turns came in the form of Bob-a-Jobs with car cleaning, gardening and shopping regular tasks and of course helping old ladies cross the roads and only once did I get a clip around the ear when forcefully informed that the good lady didn't want to cross in the first place. I also found myself popular with the town drunk with my knack of using the buckle of my scout belt to prise the top off beer bottles. Excitement came in the form of the local girl guide group who were just a mile down the road though Skip our scoutmaster always ensured the mile stayed as a mile.

But one of my early memories of the scout hall of the 1st Caerau (Maesteg) troop was that one wall displayed a number of Zulu war shields, crossed assegais, knobkerries, beadwork and other artefacts. Curiosity coupled with an interest in blood-thirsty weapons, so typical of males prompted enquiries which confirmed that a previous scoutmaster had brought these back from South Africa many years ago as there was in fact a connection between the scout movement and Zululand.

I soon got my nose into the pages of that bible of the scout movement 'Scouting for Boys' the author of which was of course Robert Baden-Powell (BP) and it was his amazing adventures and career in South Africa in the late 19th century which laid the foundations for the future scout and guide movements.

BP first went to South Africa in 1884 as a sub-lieutenant with the 13th Hussars where he scouted to gain information on the Boers and where he learned much about the native Africans, the country and wild life there. He then left the country but returned in 1887 as ADC to his uncle General Henry Smyth. Nepotism comes to mind but BP had already gained an excellent reputation from his earlier experiences and really was the best man for the job.

It was then in 1893 that he made first contact with the Zulus as trouble was brewing between the British and Cetshwayo's son Dinuzulu and an expedition was formed to go and rescue settlers besieged by Dinuzulu. The expedition comprised 400 mounted British troops and an impi of 2000 Zulus loyal to the British and led by John Dunn. The trouble was eventually put down but Dinuzulu escaped into the Transvaal only to later surrender.

It was during this period that BP substantially increased his knowledge of the Zulus which led to a growing admiration and high regard for their way of life. After his first encounter with them he wrote, 'I shall never forget my first meeting with a Zulu army. I heard a sound in the distance which at first I thought was of an organ playing in a church and for a moment thought we must be approaching a mission station over the brow of a hill. But when we topped the rise we saw moving up towards us from the valley below three long lines of men marching in single file and singing a wonderful anthem as they marched. The words of the anthem sounded like this, "Een gonyama. Invaboo! Ya boo!, Ya boo! Invaboo!" John Dunn was asked to translate and replied. 'They sing about their chief, He is a lion, yes he is better than a lion, he is a hippopotamus'.

This chant BP later included in 'Scouting for Boys' and it became a popular camp fire favourite.

(during camps we used to sing it around the campfire which perhaps uniquely was located in the middle of the ruins of a 13th century Norman castle just outside Maesteg, and known locally as Castell Coch - the red or burning castle, with our tents pitched just outside the gatehouse entrance. Our youthful attempts at singing a Zulu chant in the remains of a Norman castle certainly used to draw the attention of a number of cows in the field next to the campsite and also the farmer who to this day I'm convinced thought that all boy scouts were totally bonkers!)

BP continued 'Both the sight and sound were intensely impressive and the men themselves looked so splendid. They were as a rule fine strong muscular fellows with handsome faces, their brown bodies were polished with oil and looked like bronze statues. Their heads were covered with ostrich plumes and they had swaying kilts of foxes tails and stripes of fur while around their knees and elbows were fastened white cow tails as a sign they were on the warpath. They carried huge shields of ox-hide on the left arm, each regiment having a shield of its own special colour while in the right hand they carried two or three throwing assegais for hurling at the enemy and a broad bladed stabbing assegai which they kept for hand fighting. In their girdles was slung a club or axe for polishing off purposes.'

All this left an abiding impression on BP and over the next few years he learned much more about the Zulus which unknown to him at the time would be incorporated into the bushcraft of the later boy scout movement. Tracking and scouting techniques, building of small bivouac huts, the scout pace-part running part walking, eating up miles without undue fatigue, night time navigation using the 'Ingolubu' (the Orion Constellation), all these and more would be part of the scouts education on how to be self-sufficient and survive off the beaten track in the great outdoors.

BP left South Africa in 1889 but returned in 1896 to take part against the Matebele rebellion and later when the first Boer war broke out was Officer Commanding during the famous Siege of Mafeking. During the siege he formed the boys of the town into a cadet force to help with the defence of the town all equipped in a well thought out and functional uniform which would later form the basis of the boy scout uniform. Mafeking brought him huge fame throughout the UK which helped to drive forward his growing determination to form a new youth movement. All was in place for the founding of one of the great youth organisations of the world which culminated in 1907 in the experimental scout camp on Brownsea Island. The rest is history with the centenary celebrations of 2007 bearing testimony to the vision and energy of a remarkable man. So all those who were once boy scouts or girl guides will

recall the beginnings of the movement and hopefully reflect on an enjoyable part of their youth in the knowledge that a little of that distant bushcraft training of their formative years contained elements directly from the heart of Zululand.

Scouting for Boys is still an amazing read, not only for the history but because it was written in the days of Empire and as such is seen from our 21st century perspective as very radical and politically incorrect to the extreme but which still contains a wealth of practical information and much common sense. The sentiments of dedication and duty runs strongly through the text and it seems very appropriate that these ideals stem from the same place and period which today form the focus of our interests and which is incorporated into the aims and objectives of the 1879 Group.

13. THE ZULUS AND FIREARMS by Bill Cainan

A common question that arises in relation to the Zulu War is how effective were the Zulus in using Martini-Henry rifles captured at Isandlwana. To answer this question we need to look at the whole issue of firearms within the Zulu army.

Most modern authors seem to accept that a large portion, maybe two-thirds of the Zulu army had some sort of firearm by 1879. The bulk of these would have been from trade sources as the Zulus had not fought and defeated any army equipped with firearms prior to the British invasion in January 1879. Nevertheless Zulu kings from Shaka onwards would have been aware of the impact that firearms could have and made efforts to get as many as they could for their warriors. However, getting the firearms is one thing, using them effectively is another and this is where the Zulus failed.

An European army of the 1870's would have considered and addressed a number of factors with regard to it's use of firearms. The first would have been standardisation, giving every soldier the same weapon which makes it easier to train and logistically it simplifies the ammunition requirements. Also the technology of ballistics enabled adequate drills to be developed to maximise the effects of the weapons. The Zulus addressed none of these considerations.

The likely primary weapon that the Zulus could obtain was the flintlock musket which had been obsolete in Europe for some 30 years so large surplus quantities would have been available for sale through Portuguese traders. Indeed many may have been ex-British army muskets. The musket was relatively simple to operate and the only major part that could have failed would be the main spring.

Black powder and flints could easily have been bought or even made with basic knapping skills. And

of course as an alternative to lead musket balls, small pebbles could be fired. Maintenance, cleaning and oiling of muskets would be patchy and would not be regulated as with an European army. Zulus could obtain these muskets by trading or direct purchase. They were sent to work in gold and diamond mines to raise revenue which they could have used for this purpose. It is likely that the King would present these muskets as a reward to favoured regiments and here is the major consideration that should be recognised, the firearm held by



a warrior was a symbol of prestige and whether it worked effectively was a secondary consideration. This was the point emphasised by Professor John Laband in a lecture on the subject in the National Army Museum a few years ago. The Zulus did not form firearm units, had no system of centralised training or maintenance and did not change their tactics to allow for firearm use. In an advance on an

enemy, Zulus with firearms would have most likely have discharged them at about 50 yards, drop them and then close in using the traditional iklwa or knobkerry.

In Europe in the 1850's the flintlock musket gave way to the percussion rifled musket (the Enfield 3-band rifled musket) which effectively increased the range from 80 yards to over 250 yards. Ignition was by percussion cap instead of a flint and in the late 1860's/early 1870's the percussion musket was modified to become the first breech-loader, the Snider-Enfield rifle using a cartridge.

This significantly reduced the loading time but again required training and a supply of cartridges.

It is likely that the Zulus may have obtained quantities of these rifled muskets and caps but it is unlikely that they would have many breechloaders and again as with the flintlock muskets there would have been no change in their tactical use.

In January 1879 following the defeat at Isandlwana, the Zulus recovered possibly over 800 Martini-Henry breech-loading rifles from the battlefield. The Martini-Henry was a significant step forward from even the Snider-Enfield. It had brass cartridges and had a maximum range of over 1400 yards. However it did have issues. It is capable of rapid fire of up to 12 rounds a minute which quickly goes through ammunition stocks and a British Infantryman carrying 70 rounds on him would have exhausted his supply in 6 minutes! The cartridges being brass were heavy and a man could only carry 70 rounds in specifically designed belt pouches supported by shoulder straps. Also the cartridges being made of thin brass quickly deformed if grouped loose in the pouches out of their packets which could cause the rifle to jam. The British soldier was well trained in the care and use of his rifle and he was allowed 90 rounds a year for practice. As well as the 70 rounds each man had a further 140 rounds which were allocated from the Company wagon where they were packed in boxes of 600. He was also trained to fire individually or in volleys, volley fire typically commencing at between 600 – 800 yards. He was trained in the use of the sights and NCO's were trained in the art of judging distance to make the most effective use of the sights. He was trained how to clear jams and how to keep the bore clear of fouling. He applied a leather sleeve around the barrel to prevent burning his fingers as the barrel got progressively hotter. At Isandlwana the Zulus obtained rifles and boxes of ammunition but it was not in their nature to carry them so they would have been broken open and the cartridges distributed. They did not wear ammunition pouches so could carry only 20 or 25 cartridges loosely in a shoulder bag. And because they were loose the thin brass cartridges were subject to denting and malforming. The sighting system would have been difficult for the Zulus to understand and a rumour persisted that they thought the higher the sights the faster the bullet would go! At 100 yards with the sights fully up, the round would pass at least 12 inches above the target and at Khambula British troops talked of swarms of bees buzzing above their heads indicating this! The barrel also had to be kept clean to prevent fouling and if not could result in a severe recoil. All these issues would be unknown to the Zulus, they had no school of musketry or training instructors and no specific units were formed and their tactics did not vary. If there had been there could have been very different outcomes during the conflict.

NB. Images shown on previous page, from the top are :

Enfield 3 band percussion rifled musket. Snider-Enfield Breech loader. Martini-Henry rifles Mk 1/11 and Martini-Henry Cavalry carbine. The short land pattern flintlock musket, Brown Bess would also have been widely available to the Zulus. (not shown)

14. ANGLO –ZULU WAR BOOK REVIEW by Bill Cainan

Each year sees a new crop of books published on the Anglo-Zulu war, most are re-hashes of previous works but every now and again something different or interesting comes through such as these three recent publications.

1. Lost Souls – the Forgotten Heroes of Eshowe. Book three Anglo-Zulu war series by James Mace. This is the third in a series of historical novels based on the Anglo-Zulu war. A 500 page paperback which details the events that occurred with the coastal column commanded by Col. Pearson. Superbly researched and written this is an apt follow up to his previous two novels that covered Isandlwana (Brutal Valour) and Rorke's Drift (Crucible of Honour). The books have been proof-read by Ian Knight and myself. Recommendation. A very good buy.

2. Rorke's Drift Diary – An Account of the Battles of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift Zululand 22nd January 1879. by Captain William Penn Symons produced by the Victoria Cross Trust. Immediately following the battles of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift, Captain William Penn Symons an officer of the 24th Regiment who was out with Chelmsford on that fatal day was tasked with writing the official accounts of the battles. His account has formed the 'official' story to this day. Two copies of the manuscript account exist, one held by the Victoria Cross Trust in Doncaster and the other by the Regimental Museum in Brecon. This publication is based on the former copy. Unfortunately the emphasis contained in the original manuscript is lost in between transcription and re-printing. The introduction is by Neil Thornton, a published author of the Anglo-Zulu war. However of greater importance is that the copy held at Brecon has manuscript amendments which clearly indicate some degree of official censorship. This will shortly be subject to a detailed examination by Julian Whybra. Recommendation. Wait for the Julian Whybra article which will be sold by the Brecon Museum

3. Bloody Night – The Irish at Rorke's Drift by Lt. Col. Dan Harvey

An attempt to link any Irish connection to the men who fought at Rorke's Drift . (A previous title of his was 'A Bloody Night – the Irish at Waterloo'). Lt. Col Harvey has taken a quite unique approach to the battle by applying modern military tactical jargon. A very interesting and unusual technique. He has also gone to great lengths to identify Irish connections whether it is where a soldier was born, lived or where his father was from. Unfortunately this approach has led to a 'can't see the wood for the trees' result and his knowledge of the actual battle is very poor. For example he is confused between John Williams and John Fielding ending up with calling him John William Fielding! He also has John Chard qualifying from Warwick instead of Woolwich and William Allan is named as Corporal Alan Williams! The plethora of errors makes this a poor read especially when there are enough recent books from which he could have obtained the correct information if only he had researched thoroughly.

Recommendation. Avoid like the plague!

15. THE 1879 GROUP PRIVACY POLICY

In compliance with the new Data Protection Act noted under item 4.4 of the AGM minutes above, the Group's Private Policy document has been formalised and sent out to all members. If anyone has any comments or queries then please in the first instance contact the Membership Secretary.

16. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Danny Tully, Bob Coates, Bill Cainan, Phil Joynson, Jimmy Patterson and Arfon Williams of the Regimental Museum for providing material and editorial support for this issue. Also for our printer Andreas Haaf and son of Port Talbot for his services, interest and support. We are always keen to publish any appropriate material on our favourite subject or any comment on our activities. If anyone has anything suitable then please send it in. Any contribution will be fully acknowledged.

17. ADVERTISING

The Assegai reaches all members of the Group both in the UK and overseas. Should anyone wishing to sell any article or acquire any specific item, then please send in the details which will then appear in the next issue. Also if you have any comments on this issue then please make contact.

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The Rorke's Drift Rally. Duncan about to lead the Swansea Pipe band into the arena.