**Artist’s note**

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**Picture Credits**

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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 peace-time 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.

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.

CHRONOLOGY

September 1877 to August 1878: 9th Cape Frontier War
23 September 1877 – 2 December 1877: The Gcaleka Xhosa and Colonial forces clash at Gwadana Hill, beka, 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 Ngaka 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 Ngaka 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 Frederick Thesiger arrives in South Africa to replace Lieutenant General Cumynghame as the new General Commanding.
ELINTMENT

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 blackguardism; 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 housework 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 1879 this was reduced to 5ft 5in. A year later it was increased by lin. 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 'brining 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.

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.6d. (£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.
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-divisions 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.

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
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, 50 cu ft less than that allowed in Scottish poohouses. 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 fatigue that dominated the soldier’s life. A typical day of a soldier in the home army of the 1870s ran as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:00am (or 6:15)</td>
<td>Reville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00am</td>
<td>Parade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00am</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00am</td>
<td>Recruits' Drill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orderly Room business, fatigue duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 noon</td>
<td>Parade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00pm</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00 – 3:00pm</td>
<td>Recruits' Drill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00pm</td>
<td>Tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00pm</td>
<td>Free Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30pm</td>
<td>Roll Call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15pm</td>
<td>Guard Duty or 'Lights Out'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discipline
Discipline is essential if an army is to function efficiently. By submitting 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
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.
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 loose-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.
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 sweep-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 bronze 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 died 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 sporrain bearing white tassels.

The standard infantry equipment across this period was the 1871 Valise Pattern. This replaced the Knapsack pattern, which, with some alternations, had served since the Crimean War. Details of the whitened buff leather Valise equipment carried by 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.

**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.
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 sing-songs. 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 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 aclimatize 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 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 we were 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 2.30am 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 branding 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 hen’s 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
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 hands of the 1/13th and the 90th Regiment played on alternate days to entertain the men. For the besieged garrison
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 99th 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 ammunitions 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 89th 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 Kambula 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-on-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
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beef or Mutton</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biscuit or Flour</td>
<td>1 lb</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bread</td>
<td>1/2 lb</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>1/2 oz</td>
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<tr>
<td>or Tea</td>
<td>1/2 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>2 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lime Juice</td>
<td>1 oz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sugar (for lime juice)</td>
<td>1/2 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserved Vegetables</td>
<td>2 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>1/2 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepper</td>
<td>1/2 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserved Meat (if any)</td>
<td>1 lb</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 1/15th 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 Ports Crealock and Chelmsford. In early June 1879 some 800 men were on the sick list.

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 Ntombi 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,
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 musket weapons – rifles, blunderbusses, sporting guns, with slugs, podels, 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.
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 Theissiger, 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 impregnations 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
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 at 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 hanger 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
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 Kambula 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 Kambula 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 rear-guard at the wagon 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 Kambula, 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 5/60th, 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 intactly 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 knout 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 5/60th, 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
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 Kambula, 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:

At 9.00pm we heard three single shots from the 38th 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 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 Bronkhorstspruit, 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
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 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 McCann 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 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.

**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 Zwelethini. 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, Treewern, 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.angloczluluwar.com The website of the Anglo Zulu War Historical Society.
www.keysnhamlightslighthousehorse.com A website devoted to researching biographies and tracking down the graves and memorials of those involved in the Zulu War.

www.rorkesdrifttv.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 buttsocks, 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 'Olive' 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 woolen ball tuck 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 veiled 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) 2nd (East Kent) Regiment (The Buffs)
- b) 13th (Somersetshire) Light Infantry
- c) 80th (Staffordshire Volunteers) Regiment
- d) 57th (West Middlesex) Regiment

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 22½ in. 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 Longer. It had a triangular blade of 22½ in.
- 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 exercises, 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 696. 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 sergeants and two drummers (buglers in Rifle and Light Infantry regiments). Setting aside supernumeraries (bandsmen, pioneers, drivers) this allowed a company strength of about 80 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 flanks, 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 Nyzma 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 124th to the right. The remainder of the 124th formed a second-line reserve with mounted men on the flanks. This formation was advocated for use against the Zulus 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 driven 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.

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)
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 Eerwoude 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 earthworks 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 Lotulubu bush, all the following day, the Chelmsford took place of the company but had left of the company when two shots were fired so close to him that his chest was knocked away." Saltmarsh fell to the ground dead leaving the company without officer. 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 Silverstein 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 march 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. 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 Zulu did not follow the Xhosa pattern of warfare and, while Chelmsford was away, the main Zulu army concentrated on his camps, destroying it and most of the defenders.

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 waggons through clawing mud. These waggons formed the basic mode of transport for supplies in southern Africa. They were about 18t 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 waggons 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 waggons 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 impediments. 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 waggons over, and when rain set in progress become 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 elements survived.

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 ULUNDU
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.'

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, the Zulus mutilated them and struck them with the assegai all over the body ... Everything we had was destroyed.
& 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 loose wrapped and secured with blue and brown twisted twines.

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 1½ in., which is an alloy of 12 parts lead to one part tin.

6: Collar badges
a) 21st (Royal Scots Fusiliers) Regiment
b) 89th (Connaught Rangers) Regiment
c) 34th 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 8½ lb 12oz and a total length of 48½ in. (124.6cm). It was sighted up to 1,400 yds but was at its most effective up to 400 yds. 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 saw 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 stem 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 Xhosas, Zulus 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.

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 hlonula, 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 from the bodies of the 92nd Highlanders.

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.
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