

**The 24th (2nd Warwickshire) Regiment of Foot:
South Africa - Anglo-Zulu war 1879
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During 1877 and 1878, 1st Battalion, 24th Regiment was engaged in the Kaffir War with the natives of the Transkei, and was joined in South Africa by 2nd Battalion, 24th Regiment in March 1878. At the end of 1878, it became clear that a Field Force would have to be sent to bring the Zulu nation under control.

ISANDLWANA

On 11th January 1879, the Force crossed from Natal into Zululand in three columns. The Force Commander, Lieutenant General Lord Chelmsford, accompanied the left column, which was commanded by Colonel Richard Glyn, 24th Regiment, and comprised 1/24th and 2/24th, a field battery, some mounted infantry and two battalions of the Natal Native Contingent. This column crossed the Buffalo River at Rorke's Drift, and for the next week was engaged in road making tasks.

On 20th January, leaving B Company 2/24th under Lieutenant Gonville Bromhead to guard the drift, the stores and a hospital established there, the column advanced to Isandlwana Hill, ten miles east of Rorke's Drift.

During 21st January, a reconnaissance to the south-east came into contact with the Zulus and at 4 am on the 22nd January Lord Chelmsford with 2/24th, the artillery and some of the Natal Native Contingent moved out to bring them to battle. Left in camp at Isandlwana were the headquarters and five companies of 1/24th under Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Pulleine and G Company of 2/24th. Although there had been reports of Zulus to the north-east the previous day, Lord Chelmsford had taken no steps to verify this nor had the camp been put into a state of defence.

At 7 am Zulus were seen collecting in the hills to the north-east of the camp. The alarm was sounded, the troops stood-to, and a message was sent off to Lord Chelmsford, who apparently thought the news of no consequence as he took no action when he received it.

At 10 am Colonel Durnford of the Royal Engineers, arrived in camp from Rorke's Drift with a rocket battery, 250 mounted Basutos and four companies of the Natal Native Contingent. He was senior to Lieutenant-Colonel Pulleine, and promptly took his men out to attack the Zulus, telling Pulleine to send a company to support him; this he did, the company moving to a ridge 1,500 yards from camp. About mid-day Durnford's force was heavily attacked and he demanded more support. Pulleine reluctantly sent out a further company, leaving himself with only three companies of 1/24th, one of 2/24th and the Natal Native Contingent.

Masses of the enemy were now advancing directly upon the camp itself, Durnford's men were retiring and all the companies of the 24th were in action and hotly engaged. Vigorously as the attack was pressed, the 24th were standing their ground well, shooting steadily and confidently and making every round tell. The Zulus, though their main body had worked to within 200 yards of the 24th line, were finding the fire too hot and were on the verge of retreat. Indeed had the ammunition supply been maintained the attack might have been beaten off, but there was great trouble in getting the ammunition boxes off the kicking and plunging mules, and difficulty in opening them, as in those days the lids were screwed down.

Suddenly at about 1.15 pm the fire slackened, the Zulus seized their chance and dashed in with loud shouts, the Natal Native Contingent fled and the Zulus poured through the gap. In a short time all was over. The men of the 24th were found afterwards lying in groups back to back where they had stood to fight it out. Rings of dead Zulus all about them showed how they had held out till their ammunition failed. Only ten men of the Regiment escaped.

THE SAVING OF THE COLOUR

When Colonel Pulleine saw that all was lost he ordered Lieutenant and Adjutant Teignmouth Melvill and Lieutenant Nevill Coghill, who had a severely injured knee, to endeavour to save the Queen's Colour of the 1st Battalion. They mounted and rode off, Melvill carrying the Colour, and succeeded in reaching the Buffalo River which was in flood, about 40 yards wide and with steep banks. They plunged their horses into the stream. Coghill reached the far bank but Melvill, impeded by the Colour, was washed off his horse and carried downstream into deep water in which he lost his hold on the Colour.

Many Zulus had now reached the bank and were firing at Melvill struggling in the water. Seeing his plight Coghill, though himself in comparative safety, gallantly turned back to help him. Hardly had he plunged back into the river before his horse was shot and he had to save himself by swimming. Eventually both reached the Natal bank but Coghill's knee prevented him from climbing the steep bank, exhausted as he was, and Melvill gallantly stayed with him. By this time the Zulus had swum the river and the two officers, though only 30 yards from the top of the bank (where there were some Basutos with spare ponies), were too exhausted to reach it before the Zulus were on them.

On 3rd February, a search party found the bodies of Melvill and Coghill covered with assegai wounds and with several dead Zulus around them. Next day, the flood having subsided, the Colour on its pole was recovered further downstream. For their gallantry in the saving of the Colour, Lieutenants Melvill and Coghill were later each awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.

RORKE'S DRIFT

At about 3 pm on 22nd January news of the disaster at Isandlwana reached Rorke's Drift, where Lieutenant John Chard, Royal Engineers had under his command B Company 2/24th about 70 strong, led by Lieutenant Gonville Bromhead, 100 men of the Natal Native Contingent and some men of 1/24th and the Commissariat. The post consisted of two stone buildings about 40 yards apart, one used as a storehouse and the other as a hospital. When the enemy appeared the Natal Native Contingent bolted, leaving a garrison of about 140, of whom 36 were patients in the hospital.

The garrison immediately set to work to loophole and barricade the buildings and build makeshift defences, using mealie bags to make walls connecting the two buildings. At about 4.30 pm the Zulus appeared to the south-east. The first party, headed by a chief on a white horse, halted for a moment and then advanced at a run, as if they expected to surprise the camp. At 500 yards the 24th opened fire with telling effect. Numbers dropped but the Zulus pressed on, taking full advantage of the broken ground, and established themselves in the garden and some uncleared bush near the buildings.

Only a minority had rifles and these mostly took post on a ridge in rear, from which they maintained a heavy but fortunately inaccurate fire. The majority, armed with stabbing assegais, crept forward till close to the defences and then tried a rush. However the garrison kept their heads, despite odds of about forty to one, and shot steadily and effectively.

Time and again the Zulus swarmed up to the barricades. Their courage was extraordinary and they cared nothing for losses as they tried to get over the barricade and into the end room of the hospital. Many times Lieutenant Bromhead, collecting a few men, had to drive them off with a bayonet charge. Some, especially daring, seized the defenders' rifles and tried to pull the bayonets off. No flanking fire was possible along the defences. Only by tremendous exertions were the Zulus kept at bay, especially as the fire from the hill in rear, though inaccurate, took the defenders from behind and caused several casualties.

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At about 6 pm the Zulus succeeded in setting fire to the thatched roof of the hospital. This made the building untenable and the problem was to keep off the Zulus while the sick, many of whom were too ill to walk, were evacuated to the comparative safety of the storehouse. There were gallant deeds done at Rorke's Drift that day, but for courage and devotion to duty nothing can exceed the conduct of the half dozen privates of the 24th who formed the garrison of the doomed building. They fell back room by room, fighting fiercely with bullet and bayonet to cover the escape of the sick, nearly all of whom reached safety.

With the evacuation of the hospital the defenders could concentrate round the storehouse, where an inner line of defences, made of biscuit boxes, had been built. But the attacks continued; again and again the Zulus rushed the defences and each time they were repulsed by the defenders, who after nightfall were helped by the light from the burning hospital. As the night wore on so the attacks lost their sting and as dawn broke the last of the enemy withdrew.

Soon after 8 am Lord Chelmsford's column appeared. The losses of the garrison were 17 killed and 10 wounded, while 450 dead Zulus were found. For gallantry at the defence of Rorke's Drift, Lieutenants Chard and Bromhead, Surgeon-Major Reynolds, Assistant-Commissary Dalton, Corporal Schiess of the Natal Native Contingent and Corporal Allen, Privates Hitch, Hook, Robert Jones, William Jones and John Williams, all of the 2/24th were each awarded the Victoria Cross; the highest number ever awarded to a unit for a single action. Colour Sergeant Bourne of B Company and Private Roy of I/24th were awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for their part in the action.

THE WREATH OF IMMORTELLES

On the return of the 1st Battalion to England, Queen Victoria expressed a wish to see the Isandlwana Colour, and with her own hands placed upon it a wreath of immortelles, directing that a silver replica should always be borne round the staff of the Queen's Colour of both battalions, to commemorate the devotion of Lieutenants Melvill and Coghill and the noble defence of Rorke's Drift by B Company of the 2nd Battalion. This silver wreath with the Sphinx won in Egypt was adopted in 1898 as the cap badge of the Regiment. It also appeared as the centre badge of the Regimental Colour, encircling the Roman numeral XXIV. This Queen's Colour was carried by the 1st Battalion until 1933, and now hangs in the Regimental Chapel in Brecon Cathedral. Beneath it, in an oaken case, is Queen Victoria's original wreath.



Location of Units/Officers
of the 24th (2nd Warwickshire) Regiment of Foot
on 22nd January 1879

Battalion	Sub-unit	Officers	Location
Staff		Glyn (No. 3 Column Comd), *Coghill	Chelmsford's Column, *Isandlwana
1st Battalion 24th Foot	HQ	Pulleine (CO), Degacher W, Melvill (Adj), White (Pmr), Pullen (QM), Sergt-Major Gapp	Isandlwana
	A	Porteous	Isandlwana
	B	Harrisson, Spring, Roche	Fort Harrisson, Southern Natal/Pondoland border
	C	Younghusband, Hodson	Isandlwana
	D	Upcher, Heaton, Lloyd	Moved independently from PMB to Helpmekaar
	E	Cavaye, Dyson	Isandlwana
	F	Mostyn, Anstey, Daly	Moved independently from PMB arriving Isandlwana 21 January
	G	Rainforth, Clements, Palmes	Moved independently from PMB to Helpmekaar
	H	Wardell, Atkinson	Isandlwana
	Band		Isandlwana
2nd Battalion 24th Foot	HQ	Degacher HJ (CO), Dunbar, Black, Trower, Phipps, Weallens, Sergt-Major Hogan	Chelmsford's Column
	A	Tongue	Chelmsford's Column
	B	Bromhead	Rorke's Drift
	C	Williams	Chelmsford's Column
	D	Penn Symons, Franklyn	Chelmsford's Column
	E	Logan	Chelmsford's Column
	F	Church, Mainwaring, Dobree	Chelmsford's Column
	G+	Pope, Godwin-Austen F, Dyer (Adj), Griffiths (Transport)* Bloomfield (QM)	Isandlwana *Initially with Chelmsford
	H	Harvey, Banister, Curll	Chelmsford's Column
	Band	*Bandmaster Bullard	Chelmsford's Column, *Isandlwana
Mounted Infantry	1 Sqn	Browne	In the vicinity of Chelmsford's Column
	2 Sqn	Sugden	Attached No. 1 Column (Possibly at Fort Pearson)

Glennie invalided at home, returned with draft on 1 March 1879
 Godwin-Austen A, invalided at home
 Mahoney (Paymaster – 2nd Battalion – with Chelmsford?)