

A SCARCE SOUTH AFRICA 1834-53 TO AN OFFICER IN THE 7TH DRAGOON GUARDS WHO SERVED AGAINST THE BOERS IN 1845 AND TOOK PART IN THE WAR OF THE AXE 1846-7, HAVING HIS HORSE SHOT WHILE COMMANDING THE REARGUARD AT THE AFFAIR AT TROMPETER'S DRIFT



SOUTH AFRICA 1834-53 'CORNET J. T. CRAMER, 7TH. DRAGN. GDS.'

John Thomas Cramer was born in March 1820, the younger son of John Cramer of Rathmore, Co. Cork; the family was 'of great antiquity, and came originally from Germany, one of its ancestors, Colonel Tobias Kramer, being Governor at the siege of Ostend.' Young John studied law at Trinity College, Dublin and, although called to the Bar at the Middle Temple in 1842, he opted for a Cornetcy in the 7th Dragoon Guards in December 1843. Returning to Ireland in the 1850s, Cramer resided at Ballindinisk, near Kinsale, Co. Cork. and served as a J.P.

Cramer served in South Africa from 1844-5, taking a part in operations against the Boers in 1845 and the Frontier War 1846-47 (War of the Axe). He was advanced to Lieutenant in March 1847. During their service in South Africa, the 7th Dragoon Guards spent a large amount of time on patrol work, convoy duty in small sections at various posts and were frequently under attack or threat of, especially ambushes of which there were many during the conflict.

His Army List Entry;

'Lieut Cramer served with the 7th Dragoon Guards against the insurgent Boers in South Africa in 1845. Also in the Kaffir War of 1846-47, and had his horse shot in the affair at Trompeter's Drift, while commanding the rear-guard'

An extract from the United Service Magazine which concerns the affair at Trompeter's Drift May 1846

'THE PRESENT WAR IN KAFIRLAND 1846 (Written on the spot)

....On Friday, the 8th of May, Lieut.-Colonel Richardson, who was ordered to Bathurst, et a Trumpeter's Post, to co-operate with Colonel Somerset in the protection of Lower Albany, had a rencontre with the enemy on his march through Trumpeter's Drift, one of those frightful passes formed by nature for the lurking-place of the savage or wild beast. I know the spot well: no place could be more favourable for the murderous operations of the Kafirs, or less suited to the movements of British cavalry. On reaching the spot where the Missionary Schulz was murdered last year, Colonel Richardson found Captain Schonswar, 7th, who had the charge of the advance guard of waggons, engaged with the enemy, the waggons being drawn up. The difficulty of proceeding down a steep declivity commanded by a dense kloof, and so bushy, that the waggons could only pass in single file, was represented to Colonel Richardson. His reply was, that he was "ordered to Trumpeter's," and immediately directed the waggons to advance, but from the incessant fire kept up by the enemy from the bush on each side of the defile, and finding his men falling rapidly, he ordered them to dismount, each man of the centre file taking charge of three horses, whilst the rest were extended in skirmishing order. Thus one third of the force was rendered inefficient by the necessary arrangement for guarding the horses. "In this manner they had to fight their way through the bush for the distance of about six miles down to the river, and up the hill on the other side, the whole time exposed to the fire of the enemy, who were generally concealed in the bush. In some places they attempted to stop the passage of the troops by rushing into the road in front, when the dragoons were forced to clear their way through them. Thirty-seven dead bodies of Kafirs were counted by the officers as they passed along the road. The Kafirs approached within five yards to fire and dropped down in the bush the moment they had discharged their guns."



One made a dash at Mr. Butler, 7th, and the latter without having time to raise his rifle to his shoulder, shot the savage dead when close upon him.

"The troops were hotly engaged in this way from nine till twelve o'clock, the object was the capture of the ammunition-waggon, and the enemy shouted aloud they would have it either at that drift or the next. In this affair, several of the dragoons were wounded—two severely—and one artillery-man*."

I have to remark, that while engaged, a party was despatched for a fresh supply of ammunition, which was brought from the waggons by the men while under a heavy fire from the enemy.....'

THE 7TH DRAGOON GUARDS AND THE SEVENTH KAFFIR WAR 1846-47

The Voyage to South Africa 1843

The so-called Kaffir Wars, or Cape Frontier Wars, were waged between the British and the Xhosa people who lived beyond the border of the Cape Colony. There had been 6 previous wars, the last being in 1835. It was decided to have a permanent garrison of regular troops in the Cape to reinforce the local forces, especially the Cape Mounted Rifles. The 7th Dragoon Guards had worked hard to acquire a reputation for smartness and efficiency since the debacle of 1823 and they were chosen to go out to the Cape for a 4 year period. They sailed on 10th April 1843 taking 23 officers and 309 other ranks along with their families, 83 wives and 78 children. Also on the boat were 44 foxhounds, but the Troop horses had been drafted to the KDG and 7th Hussars. The journey took 3 months, following the trade winds, and they landed on 14th July in Cape Town. From there they trekked 700 miles inland to Fort Beaufort where they were given new horses, mostly unbacked stallions which took many weeks to train up to standard.

Boer Confrontation, 6th May 1845

For two years the regiment had no fighting to do, and life was dominated by hunting and shooting parties. Whilst there the CO, Clark-Kennedy retired in March 1844 and was replaced by Lt-Col Robert Richardson but the soldiering did not start properly until a year later. Their first engagement was against Boers who were perpetrating 'acts of aggression and disaffection' just across the Orange River. In April 1845 Richardson took 5 Troops of the regiment, a Troop of Cape Mounted Riflemen and a company of the 91st Foot. They caught up with the Boers at Zwaart Kopjis and drove them off the hill with a volley of shots. As they fled they were chased by Captain Heaton's Troop who took 15 prisoners. After a month's campaigning they rounded up 240 Boers, disarmed them without a fight and settled the problem. There had been no casualties.

Parley at Block Drift, 30th Jan 1846

When a survey party was menaced by Xhosas from a tribe headed by Chief Sandile in Jan 1846, the Lt-Governor of the Cape, Colonel Hare met with them at Block Drift to discuss a settlement of grievances. Hare's escort numbered 250 soldiers made up of a squadron of 7thDG, a Troop of CMR, a company of 91st and an artillery battery. They lined up opposite a force of 3,000 warriors in a tense day of talking. Sandile refused to allow a fort to be established in the area and insisted that no soldiers be allowed in his territory. The parley ended in disorder and Hare and his escort withdrew at nightfall.

The Death of Captain Bambrick, 16th April 1846

War was declared on the Xhosa on 21st March 1846. Two columns were organised under Lieut-Col Richardson and Colonel Henry Somerset, the CO of the Cape Mounted Rifles, consisting of the 7thDG, CMR, 91st Foot and artillery. They headed for Sandile's laager at Burns Hill but when they arrived the tribe had moved on towards the Amotola Hills. A detachment was left at Burns Hill with the baggage wagons, while the two columns carried on. This detachment was commanded by Major Gibsone and included Captain Bambrick's Troop of 7thDG. Bambrick was a veteran who had served 31 years in the army. He had been

in the 11th Light Dragoons and was at the siege of Bhurtpore in 1826. Bambrick's Troop were sent off to the Keikama River to investigate the sound of shots. When he got there he found some stolen cattle but no tribesmen. He led his men into some dense scrub that enclosed the banks of the river but fell into an ambush. The Xhosa were armed with muskets and Bambrick was shot. He shouted to the NCOs to withdraw, which they did with great difficulty as the thorns tore at the horses and riders. Major Gibsone arrived with men of the 91st and two RA guns which dispersed the tribesmen and they ran off with the head of Captain Bambrick as a trophy to show Chief Sandile.



Attack at Keikama River, 17th April 1846

Major Gibsone was ordered to bring up the baggage and join Richardson and Somerset's columns. There were 125 ox-drawn wagons stretching 3 miles long. The first 6 wagons carried ammunition guarded by 15 men of the 7thDG, a Troop of CMR, a platoon of 91st and one gun. The other end of the column had a rearguard of another 15 men of the regiment and the rest of the CMR and 91st. When the front of the wagon train was crossing the River Keikama there was a hold up and the Xhosa took the opportunity to attack in force. Both the front and rear guard were in danger of being overwhelmed but they held them off. The rearguard soon ran short of ammunition and Sergeant George Gillam volunteered to ride forward and bring some back. He did this 3 times before being shot in the leg. The fight went on for 6 hours during which time the rearguard managed to join up with Major Gibsone. Reinforcements from the main body got through and the Xhosa were forced to retreat. The ammunition wagons were saved, but 52 wagons were removed by the enemy, including the wagon carrying the regimental silver. This was never recovered.

Gwanga River, 8th June 1846

The Xhosa had been clever enough to avoid being caught out in the open. There had been a courageous cavalry charge on 22nd May, near Fort Preddie, when Captain Sir Harry Darrell had led his Troop into a mass of nearly 2,000 tribesmen with great success, and he was to have more success at Gwanga River on the 8th June. Colonel Somerset of the CMR was in command of some artillery, a Troop of his own men and two Troops of the 7th. They came across a large group of Xhosa heading towards Trompetter's Drift, and attacked them. But they disappeared into the Fish River bush and kept the soldiers at bay with musket fire.

Somerset ordered a withdrawal as he was making no progress. However, as they went over the brow of a hill they came across another large force of Xhosa who were moving along the bank of Gwanga River. The tribemen were taken completely by surprise and ran away across the plain. This was ideal cavalry country and Colonel Somerset's men charged into them. The Dragoon Guards (Darrell's Troop of 38 men) slashed with their swords and the Cape Mounted Rifles fired at the fleeing enemy. Out of around 2,000 Xhosas 400 were killed. The 7th lost one corporal killed, seven men wounded, and two officers, Captain Darrell and Lieutenant Bunbury, were wounded.

End of the Kaffir War 1847

The 7th Dragoon Guards were the only cavalry regiment of the British Army to serve in this war. By the end of the conflict there were 16,000 troops involved, mostly infantry and artillery. For the rest of the time the 7th were employed with rounding up Xhosa cattle and capturing prisoners. Chief Sandile finally surrendered on 7th Jan 1847, to the new Lieut-Governor Sir Harry Smith. The 7th then prepared to leave South Africa. They had lost 2 officers and 29 other ranks killed and 30 wounded. Out of the original 309 men that came to the Cape, apart from those that died, 138 chose to leave the regiment. 82 became 'military settlers', 19 transferred to the Cape Mounted Rifles, and 37 took their discharge at Grahamstown. The remainder embarked on 13th April 1847, having handed over their horses to the CMR, and arrived at Chatham on 7th June. They were given their first campaign medal, in 1854, the South Africa medal, and in 1882 the regiment was awarded the battle honour SOUTH AFRICA 1846-47 – the above from <https://www.britishempire.co.uk/>



A scarce medal to an Officer in the 7th Dragoon Guards, with only 150 medals issued to the Regiment. This is far less than most of the 19 British Regiments/corps entitled to the medal, with only the 72nd (129) and 75th (116) being issued less

Condition VF, a little edge bruising.