

THE OUTSTANDING AND IMPORTANT SOUTH AFRICA 1879 TO MAJOR J. R. POOLE ROYAL ARTILLERY WHO SAW SERVICE DURING THE ZULU WAR AS A BRIGADE MAJOR AND LATTERLY AFTER THE CAPTURE OF THE ZULU KING, SERVING AS HIS GAOLER FOR A YEAR DURING HIS CAPTIVITY AT THE CAPE. AN OFFICER MARKED FOR GREAT THINGS, DURING THE 1ST BOER WAR, HE SERVED ON MAJOR GENERAL COLLEY'S STAFF BUT WAS KILLED IN ACTION LEADING THE CHARGE OF THE 58TH AT THE DISASTROUS BATTLE AT LAING'S NEK. HIS AND AN OFFICER OF THE 58TH BODIES BEING "FOUND LYING WELL IN FRONT OF WHERE THEIR MEN LAY DEAD IN SWATHES, LIKE GRASS BENEATH A SCYTHE", POOLE HAVING BEEN SHOT THROUGH THE THROAT. HE WAS THE SECOND MOST SENIOR CASUALTY OF THE BATTLE. IT WAS REPORTED THAT ON NEWS OF POOLE'S DEATH "CETSHWAYO'S HEAD DROOPED DOWNWARD AND TEARS ROLLED DOWN HIS CHEEKS."



SOUTH AFRICA 1877-9, CLASP 1879 'MAJOR, J.R. POOLE. ROYAL ARTY.'

Joseph Ruscombe Poole, the son Gabriel Poole and Maria, daughter of Sir Richard Westmacott was born on 27 January 1843, in Bridgewater, Somerset. Educated at the Royal Military Academy, he was Commissioned into the Royal Artillery as a Lieutenant on 18 December 1861 and was promoted to Captain 16th January 1875.



Captain Poole served during the Zulu War of 1879 as aide-de-camp to Colonel Reilly, Royal Artillery, who was commander of Artillery between February and August 1879. Appointed Brigade Major on Reilly's Staff on 7 April 1879, he is listed among Lord Chelmsford's Staff, South African Field Force, at the end of May 1879. Present at General Wolseley's camp when The Zulu King; Cetshwayo, was captured, on 29th August 1879 Captain Poole was given a great honour (and responsibility), when he was ordered by General Wolseley to take charge of Cetshwayo and to escort his prisoner from Ulundi to the Cape Castle. Here Poole served as the king's gaoler during his captivity. Before setting off, according to Wolseley, Cetshwayo;

"...was told that his destination could not at present be communicated to him but that he would be told further on his journey. Captain Poole R.A. was introduced to him and he was told that every care would be taken of him and all his wants supplied by Poole, to whom he should apply if he wished for anything. He has four men and a boy with him, all of whom wish to leave him; indeed, they have to be closely guarded to prevent them from bolting. He also has three women and a little girl with him. I shall send the lot to the Cape with him"

Poole remained with Cetshwayo at Cape Castle until December 1880, acting not only as his gaoler but speaking on behalf of the King and seeing to his needs. During their time together the king and the Poole apparently struck up a friendship, hardly surprising after spending a year in each other's company and it was Poole who taught Cetshwayo to write. It was said that on Poole being removed from his position, Cetshwayo petitioned that he should be permitted to remain. Captain Poole obtained a Brevet of Major 24th July 1880 for his services during the Zulu War (LG 23rd July 1880).



MAJOR POOLE STANDING TO THE RIGHT OF CETSHWAYO

<https://www.rct.uk/collection/2501208/cetshwayo-and-his-attendants-at-the-castle-of-good-hope-cape-town>

THE FIRST BOER WAR

At the outbreak of the Transvaal War, Major Poole was attached to the Major General Colley's Staff (Commander of the Field Force) as his Deputy Assistant Adjutant General. He proceeded with the Field Force from Pietermaritzburg on 10 January 1881 with intention of moving into the Transvaal via Newcastle and then on to Laing's Nek. On 18th January Poole was sent with a escort of 50 men of the Natal Mounted Police on a reconnaissance to map the route to the Boer positions at Laing's Nek and make sure the roads were clear. Reporting his findings the small British force proceeded towards their object.

Major Poole would be Killed 10 days later at the Battle of Laing's Nek 28th January 1881. He, other members of the Staff and Major Hingeston of the 58th, had lead the charge of the 58th that was shot to pieces before they even reached the Boer positions. All the staff were somewhat inexplicably mounted and all but one; Major 'Lucky' Essex, who had also survived Isandhlwana, were killed or wounded. Major Poole was the second most senior officer killed that day.

Regarding Major Poole's fate;

'The Major Poole and Lieutenant Henry Dolphin, of the 58th were killed, and their bodies were found lying well in front of where their men lay dead in swathes, like grass beneath a scythe. Captain Lovegrove was wounded and nearly every non Commissioned Officer was killed or Wounded'

When Major Poole's body was recovered, it was found he had been shot through the throat

From 'Recent British Battles..' By Grant:

'In Major Joseph Rushcombe Poole, who fell at Laing's Nek, the Royal Artillery lost one of its most skilful and experienced officers – one who was perfect in the drill and technical

details of his branch of service. A bold and able horseman, he was “judiciously selected by Colonel Reilly, R.A, from a host of artillery Officers to act as his aide-de camp; and afterwards as brigade major in the Zulu campaign, Major Poole performed his duties with admirable tact, skill and precision, and at the close of the war was entrusted with the custody of the fallen Cetewayo.” A few years previously, when a subaltern, he had served in the same battery with Captain Slade, R.H.A., afterwards known as the “gunner hero of Maiwand” and a close relationship always existed between them.’

Cetshwayo’s official interpreter, Mr. Samuelson had to break the news to Cetshwayo, ‘...as soon as the bad news had been interpreted by me, Cetshwayo’s head drooped downward and tears rolled down his cheeks.’

Major Poole was buried in Mount Prospect Cemetery, South Africa. He is also commemorated on a Royal Artillery memorial to those who lost their lives in South Africa and Afghanistan 1877-1881 at the Royal School of Artillery, Larkhill, Wiltshire



THE GRAVE OF MAJOR POOLE

THE BATTLE OF LAING'S NEK

'Colley decided to push his way through the Boer positions without further delay and on the morning of 28th gave the order to advance, entrusting the main attack in the centre to the 58th Regiment.

The force that marched out of camp at about 06h00, under the overall command of Colley, with the intention of capturing Engelbrecht's Kop, which feature commanded both the nek and the Boer extreme left flank laager, was made up as follows:

HQ and 5 companies, 58th Regiment, about 480 all ranks;

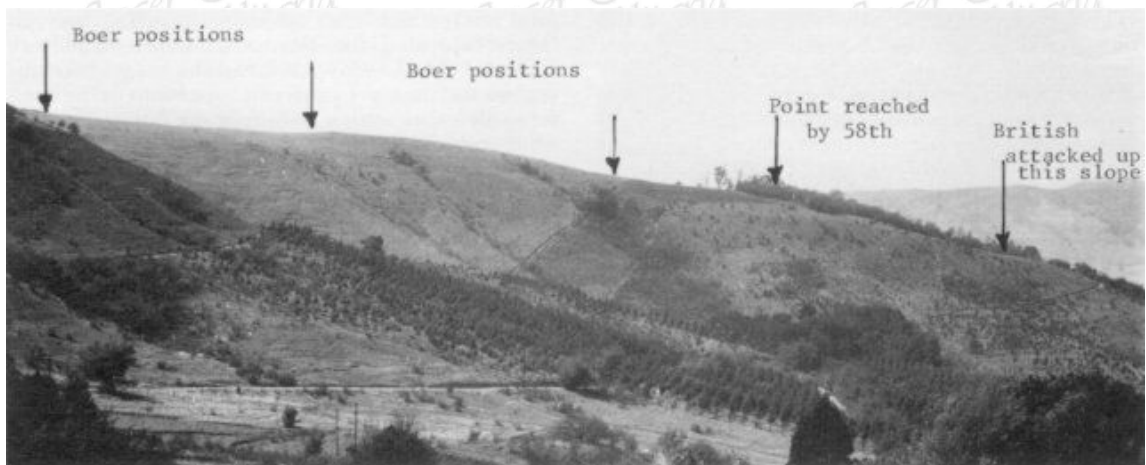
HQ and 4 companies, 3/60th Rifles, about 390 all ranks;

Mounted troops, about 140 all ranks;

Naval detachment of 80 with 3 rocket tubes;

Artillery with 4 x 9-pr guns and 2 x 7-pr guns.

Colley entrusted the attack to the 58th, with 70 of the mounted troops under Major Brownlow, of the King's Dragoon Guards, to give right flank protection and, if necessary, deal with any interference from the Boers occupying the hill which later became known as Brownlow's Kop. It has never been understood why Colley failed to use the 70 Natal Mounted Police which was a fine body of men, acquainted with local conditions and the Boers, and infinitely better than the majority of the 70 mounted men sent in under Brownlow, most of whom were from the 58th and 3/60th who had probably volunteered for no better reason than to get off their feet for a change. There was of course a great deal of contempt shown in both the First and the Second Wars of Independence by British Regular Army officers for Colonial units - a contempt ill-placed in terms of the outstanding records of such units, but in this case it is possible that there was also another reason. In this connection it might be as well to repeat a sentence from Colley's letter to his sister, previously quoted in full, '...but though I shall want every man I can get, I am so impressed with the desirability of restricting the war, and not letting it become a race struggle between the Dutch and English throughout the colony, that I have refused every offer which could in any way tend to extend the area of the struggle, or array the civil population of the country against one another...'. Was this the reason why Colley did not use this fine body of mounted troops? No one will ever know but his failure to do so probably cost a great number of lives of the 58th who had to advance without flank protection because of the failure of the mounted troops.



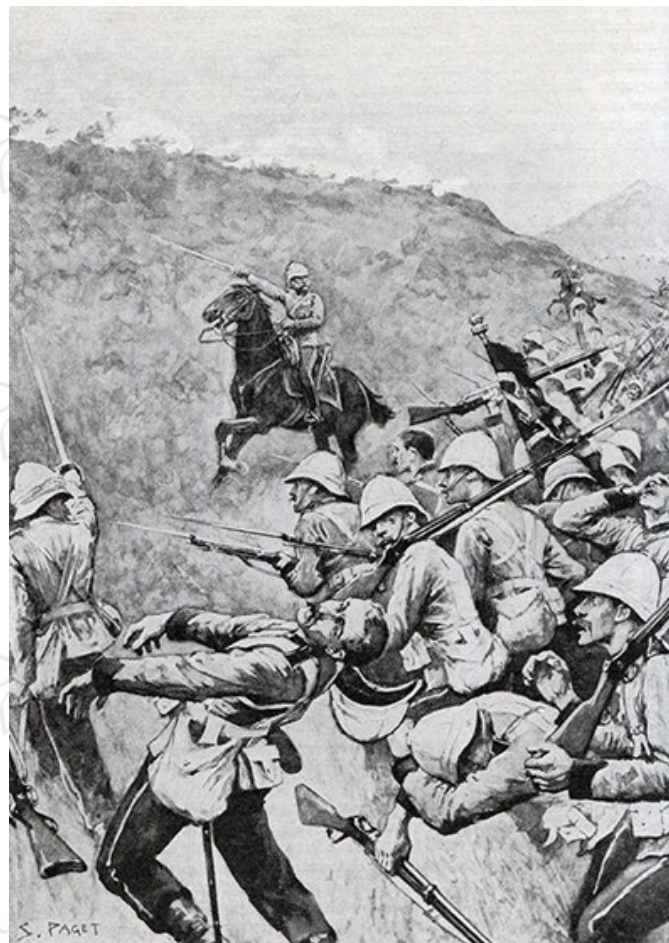
LAING'S NEK ATTACK

The approach march to within about 2 000 m of the objective was completed by 09h15. The naval detachment with their 3 rocket tubes and a company of the 3/60th Rifles were pushed

out to the left flank close behind a kraal wall, just west of the present small dam at the foot of the steep slope up to the objective. The other 3 companies of the 3/60th and the Natal Mounted Police were held in reserve with the guns.

The attack commenced with a bombardment by the guns and rocket tubes which soon got the range, at first somewhat over-estimated. The bombardment, judged on the lack of response and movement on the part of the Boers, appeared to be ineffective. After about half-an-hour of what Colley and his staff considered to be ineffectual artillery support the bombardment was halted and the 58th went in to attack at about 10h00.

The mounted troops, according to Colley's report, went forward too soon and too fast to give protection to the 58th right flank. They also bore too far to the right. When fired upon from the high feature (Brownlow's Kop) which was just ahead, but about 800 m to the right of the start line, Brownlow wheeled at right angles up the shortest but steepest route in an attempt to rout his attackers. The slope was far too steep for a mounted attack and the horses were completely blown when they came under heavy and accurate fire. Had Brownlow kept parallel to the axis of the infantry advance, he might have suffered a few casualties but he could have provided the protection expected and, having seen the infantry past this danger area, could have made a 140° wheel and hit the Boers in rear, up a very gentle northern slope. As it was Brownlow had his horse shot from under him - others among the leading men suffered similar fates or worse, being killed or wounded, and the second troop, thinking that the leaders had all been killed or were about to be rendered hors de combat, did a quick turn-about and headed for their start line as fast as they could and left Brownlow and the other survivors to get out as best as they could.



THE CHARGE OF THE 58TH FOOT

The Boers on this position were now free to come forward on to the western slopes and this they did, which brought them within clear view and range of the 58th struggling up the long slope to the objective. They now came under heavy fire from this flank and one company was wheeled right to meet this unexpected menace. The remainder, with men dropping about them, put on all possible speed and arrived at the crest in full view of the main Boer positions in a confused and exhausted condition in column of close companies.



An incredible feature of the whole attack is that Colley entrusted leadership of the infantry to his staff officers, five of whom led the advance of the 58th. This was an error of judgement one would not have expected Colley to make, for even an amateur at the game of war assumes that the Commanding Officer of a battalion is most suited to lead his regiment into battle.

Even more incredible is that the officers led the attack mounted, up a slope that horses could only take in leaps and bounds, which made it almost impossible for the infantry to follow in anything but a crouching, stumbling half-run. That they reached within 150 m of the crest says a great deal for the fitness of the 58th for climbing this slope at a slow walk on a nice peaceful day is bad enough - to have to do so on a muddy surface under fire practically from start to finish must have been a nightmare.

Colonel Deane, who led the attack, realised too late that he should get his men into extended order. He gave the order and then, in a vain attempt to save the day, ordered a bayonet charge. Hardly were the words out of his mouth when his horse was shot from under him. With sword in hand he regained his feet and charged forward well ahead of the rest of his troops. Things now became chaotic - men were breasting the ridge, extending to the left and right and

attempting to fix bayonets - all in full view of the enemy at ranges from as little as 150 m. Deane fell riddled with bullets and those following met with similar fates in quick succession. Major Hingeston commanding the 58th was laid low, as were Lieutenant Dolphin and Major Poole, Lieutenant Elwes and Lieutenant Inman of the staff. Several other officers received severe wounds. The casualties among the troops now became terribly heavy - the momentum of the charge could not be maintained and they started falling back and then retired under the direction of Major Essex, the sole member of Colley's staff to survive. The 3/60th moved forward to cover the 58th during the retreat and the day was saved when Colley ordered the artillery to open fire. The naval detachment with their rocket tubes had come under fairly heavy rifle fire during the main attack, from the Boers west of the nek along the lower slopes or foothills of Majuba. That they suffered only a few casualties is no doubt due to the protection afforded them by the wall of the old kraal. The action was broken off and the 8 km march back to camp set in motion before noon.

British casualties were 198 of which 173 were from the 58th Regiment, including many of the battalion's officers. Boer casualties were 41.'

'Laing's Nek is memorable as the last occasion that a British regiment took its colours into action. The 58th were led up the hillside by Lieutenant Baillie carrying the Regimental Colour and Lieutenant Hill carrying the Queen's Colour. Baillie was mortally wounded while Hill won the Victoria Cross bringing casualties down from the hillside. Hill passed the two colours to Sergeant Budstock for safe keeping; a necessary concession to the realities of late 19th Century combat.'



Condition EF, lovely patina and original ribbon. Sold with copy research. A really quite outstanding medal for both the Zulu and 1st Boer War.