

THE EXTREMELY RARE 2/24TH FOOT SOUTH AFRICA 1877-9 MEDAL TO PRIVATE LIEUTENANT POPE'S G COMPANY WHO WAS KILLED AT THE BATTLE OF ISANDHLWANA DURING THE ZULU WAR OF 1879, A LETTER FROM HIM SENT FROM SOUTH AFRICA BEING PUBLISHED IN HIS LOCAL NEWSPAPER AFTER HIS DEATH. OF THE 173 MEDAL TO 2/24TH ISANDHLWANA CASUALTIES, ONLY APPROXIMATELY 80 WERE TO G COMPANY



SOUTH AFRICA 1877-9, CLASP 1877-8-9 '2038 PTE S. WALKER 2/24TH FOOT.'

Samuel Walker, aged 19, enlisted into the 2/24th Foot at Sheffield on 23 July 1868. He served with his battalion in India from April 1869 and was based at Secunderabad until December 1873, when the battalion returned to England. Serving at Warley, Aldershot, Dover and Chatham between then and September 1877, he was on a number of occasions committed to the cells for minor offenses. Additionally, between 7 August 1877 and 30 September 1877 he was listed at Wandsworth Prison, though it is not clear if this was for an offense, or he was on duty there. The latter is more likely. In October 1877 he sailed with his battalion for South Africa and served with it throughout the Frontier War of 1877-8, serving with Lieutenant Pope's G Company. He was finally stationed in Natal from September 1878 where he spent time in the cells between 22 and 28 of that month.

Walker subsequently took part in the invasion of Zululand in January 1879 and when Lord Chelmsford's force left Isandhlwana on the morning of 22 January, he was left at the camp along with G company, the only company of the 2/24th to be left behind.

G COMPANY DURING THE BATTLE OF ISANDHLWANA

“Lord Chelmsford marched out of the camp at Isandhlwana at about 0430 on the morning on the 22nd January 1879, with 6 companies of the 2/24th Foot, 4 of the 6 artillery 7 pounder guns and various colonial and native troops, to go to the aid of Major Dartnell's force, who, it was believed, had found the advance elements of the main Zulu Army in the area of the Mangeni Valley, some 10 miles to the south-east of Isandhlwana.

Lt Pope's G Company, 2/24th Foot, did not accompany the rest of the battalion because they had been on picquet duty during the night and it was decided that they should remain in camp for a rest. As Chelmsford's column marched out, it exchanged good-humored banter with Pope's picquets who were stationed three quarters of a mile out from camp, in sections of 4 men, spread in a line about half a mile long. The column told Pope's men they were going to miss all the action, as they were off to defeat the Zulus. How wrong would they be! So, by a stroke of misfortune that was to cost them all their lives, they were left in camp.

Lt Pope was 29 years old and commanded the only company of the 2/24th Foot present at the battle, the other 5 companies being from their sister battalion, the 1/24th Foot. Also remaining in camp from the 2/24th Foot were the Regimental Colours, Bandmaster and approximately Officers and men from other companies of the 2/24th who had been left in the camp sick or on other duties.



As the opening skirmishes of the battle developed, G Company were initially posted on the extreme right of the infantry line. However later moved back and more to the right so they were almost facing down the valley with Isandhlwana hill at their back and nearly in line with Colonel Durnford's Donga to their front. The early fighting and manoeuvring of the Zulu army were completed up on the Nqutu Ridge and beyond, which was out of sight of the British camp. The first sight that the troops in camp had of the enemy was about 11.30, with the ominous sight of thousands

of Zulus suddenly descending from the Nqutu ridgeline. The troops in camp were fallen in as the approaching warriors were recorded as “approaching like swarming bees”.

By about 13.30 the camp had fallen and the bulk of the troops were dead, with a trickle of men trying to make their escape down what has become known as the Fugitive’s Trail, where many were killed in their last desperate attempt to escape. There was not one survivor from the 6 infantry companies deployed in the firing line. They were engaged to good effect against the attacking forces and a number of times the Zulu attack seemed to stall, but eventually they worked themselves close enough to the British line to charge home and overwhelm the line and the fate of the British infantry was sealed.



Cairns placed above buried soldiers cover the battlefield, indicating the huge area over which the battle was fought. This photo was taken near where it was thought some of G Company personnel finally fell, with Isandhlwana hill in the background.”

Private Walker was among those killed during the battle, his effects being claimed by his father. His South Africa medal was sent to his parents on 28 March 1882

PRIVATE WALKER’S LETTER FROM SOUTH AFRICA

The following letter was sent from South Africa by Private Walker to his father in June 1878. On news of his death at Isandhlwansa it was published in his local newspaper, the article in full transcribed below (copy of original with research)”

“The Sheffield Daily Telegraph, March 22nd, 1879

A Sheffield Soldier Killed at Isandula

When the 24th Regiment was stationed at Sheffield Barracks in 1868, a young man named Samuel Walker, a file cutter, enlisted “to shun bad companions.” He was then only twenty years of age, and it

was the hope of himself, as well as of his father and mother and friends, that after ten years' service he would return to them hale and hearty, and "firmed" in his life habits by the rigid discipline of the army. His father, Mr. Samuel Walker, who lives at 24, Bine Bay Street (not fully clear), has been over twenty-two years in the employment of Messrs. Kenyon and Co., for which firm his son also worked. When the news of the slaughter at Isandula reached this country, Mr. and Mrs. Walker were deeply concerned for the fate of their son, whose term of service expired in June last. They were in daily expectation of hearing that he had been discharged, and was on his way home; but owing to the state of affairs at the Cape, his services had been required for the extra two years imposed in the event of any military emergency. The last letter received from him was addressed to a relative as follows:-

"East London, South Africa, June 11th, 1878. Dear Bill, - I now take the opportunity of writing these few lines hoping they will find you in good health, as thank God, it leaves me at present. I should have wrote to you before, but we have been in parts of the country where we could not get anything only what we were allowed by Government. Pens, ink, and paper we could not get for any price, but now the scene has changed from fighting to sleeping, we have just come into this place and a good thing too, after been kicked about to long, Bill, ever since we put foot on shore we were bundled off to the Front - and until now we have had a rough time of it, but I am glad to tell you the worst is over. I have had a smell of Powder and Bullets but got through it all right - we have pelt the Kaffir Head Chiefs out of mess and they have just caught Kreli and Sandilli but they give us some trouble. Long marches, no beds for nights together, all for hunting these Kaffirs like hares in the bush they don't fight out openly, all bush fighting and the devil can't get them out only by starvation, and we have managed it at last: and for it I hear they in England has promised us a bit of ribbon, and we have to wait for the medal. Government is very good to her warriors: but I don't care so long as I gets good health, which I am glad to tell you. I have enjoyed at present, and I hope it will continue. I expect by the time you get this I shall be off to Natal. The Zulus is going to tackle us, 40,000 of them, and all tough ones, they say. Living here is very dear, beer is 1s a pot, butter 2s 10d a lb; therefore I can't bank much. And now I will close, hoping you will remember me kindly to all, and with best wishes to yourself and Mrs. and family.

"From No. 2038 Private S Walker,
G Company, 2/24th Regiment,
East London, South Africa

P.S Best love to father and all."

Mr. Walker, immediately after the intelligence of the disaster to Colonel Pulleine's column, wrote to the War Office to ascertain the fate of his son, and a day or two ago the following official intimation was received:-

"War Office, 17th March, 1879.

"Mr Thomas Walker.

"In reply to your application, I regret to have to inform you that from the list of casualties received at this office it appears that Private Samuel Walker, of 2/24th Foot, was killed in an engagement which occurred on the 22nd last.

"Ralph Thompson."

The sad news, as may well be expected, has deeply affected the father, mother and friends of the poor young fellow who died with his companions so gallantly on the fatal field of Isandula."

MEDALS TO 2/24TH FOOT AT ISANDHLWANA

173 Officers and men of the 2/24th were left in the camp at Isandhlwana but only G Company as a whole was left, consisting approximately 80 Officers and men. The balance of 2/24th men were either sick or on other duties that prevented them joining their own companies. It is therefore impossible to know exactly where they were during the battle. However G companies roll in the battle is well documented and therefore medals to confirmed G company men do carry more interest.

As well as being listed as a G Company man in the 'Noble 24th', Private Samuel Walker is confirmed as a member of G Company in the letter to his father



Condition VF, a little polished but no EK's. Ex Spink 1986, Baldwins 2013 (£10,400). Sold with copy research including transcript of service, rolls, Baldwins receipt etc

An extremely fine and scarce G Company medal but very rare to have any sort of personal documentation to a non Officer Isandhlwana casualty