

THE SOUTH AFRICA 1877-9 TO A CAPTAIN OF THE 2/24TH FOOT WHO AFTER SUSTAINING INJURIES BUSH-FIGHTING IN THE KAFFIR WAR OF 1878, SERVED AS COMMANDANT AT FORT NAPIER DURING THE ZULU WAR OF 1879 AND WAS REPORTED TO HAVE TAKEN COMMAND OF THE 24TH FOOT FOR A TIME DURING THE WAR IN PLACE OF COLONEL PULLEINE



SOUTH AFRICA 1877-79, CLASP, 1877-8-9 'CAPTN. W.R.B. CHAMBERLAIN, 2-24TH FOOT'

Major William Richard Bigsby Chamberlin, born 14 October 1839 at Retford, Nottinghamshire. He was commissioned Ensign, 24th Foot on 1 May 1858 and was advanced to Lieutenant 21 October 1859 and Captain 16 May 1865. Awarded the Brevet rank of Major on 1 October 1877, he served in South Africa during the Kaffir War 1877-8, during which he Commanded 'E' Company. Taking part in various operations, he sustained an injury of some description, his entry in Mackinnon and Shadbolt stating:

"In consequences of injuries received whilst bush-fighting in the Kaffir War, Major Chamberlain was unable to go to the front with the 2nd Batt.."

Chamberlain served in the Zulu War 1879 but as a result of his injury he remained as Commandant at Fort Napier, Pietermaritzburg. After Isandhlwana the panic that hit Natal and in particular the defences prepared in Pietermaritzburg during a most uncertain time would

have meant Chamberlain had a key roll to pay and probably goes a long way to explaining his Brevet Rank of Lt Colonel so soon after the War ended. Interestingly the '79' date on his clasp suggests Chamberlain did actually cross into Zululand but this must have been during the second invasion as he was certainly otherwise employed during the first. Awarded the Brevet of Lieutenant Colonel 18th October 1879, no doubt for his services during the Zulu War, he retired 23rd October 1879.

An order published in the Manchester Evening News, 8 March 1879, records the following:

"Brevet Major Chamberlain succeeds the late Colonel Pulleine in temporary command of the 24th Regiment during the absence of Colonel Glyn."

The above almost certainly should mean the 1st battalion 24th Regiment as this was Glyn and Pulliene's battalion. Exactly how long Chamberlain was in command of the has not been established but given the date of publication, it must have been within weeks of the battle of Isandhlwana and before reinforcements arrived.



OFFICERS OF THE 2/24TH FOOT CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN MARKED WITH 'X'

2ND BATTALION, 24TH (2ND WARWICKSHIRE) REGIMENT.

"On the 21st July 1878, the batt., whose term of active service had come to a conclusion only four weeks previously, with the cessation of hostilities in the Cape Frontier war, received orders at King William's Town for immediate embarkation for Natal. The 2-24th was the first regt. which landed in the Colony after a war with the Zulus became imminent, and it was welcomed by the people of Durban with many and deep expressions of relief. Leaving one co. at Durban, the remaining seven marched to Pietermaritzburg, where they arrived on the 6th August. For three months the regt. was there kept persistently at drill, and all possible preparations for the campaign, which day by day appeared more imminent, were completed. Half the batt. lived in tents, the other half occupying the native huts and barracks inside Fort Napier. At length, early in Nov. orders to march to Greytown were received, and by successive cos. the regt. was concentrated there by the middle of the month. At the end of

Dec. it advanced by half batts. to Helpmakaar. On the 7th Jan. 1879, it marched to Rorke's Drift, and on the 11th it crossed into Zululand with the remainder of the ill-fated 3rd Column. Lieut. Bromhead and one co. were left behind at Rorke's Drift to defend the post and line of communications. How gallantly they performed this duty is written elsewhere.

After the terrible disaster at Isandlwana on the 22nd - in which the batt. lost five officers and 173 men, being every soul left by it in camp that day - all the eight cos. remained in laager at Rorke's Drift, where they were at first engaged in fortifying the old Mission Station, and afterwards erecting a larger and stronger fort (Fort Melvill) on the bank of the river, with accommodation for a garrison of some 300. At first the men suffered considerable hardship from the want of proper clothing, shelter, and food; and several died. As the rainy season passed by, however, the spirits and health of the men improved, and all, having been for many months shut up within sight of the rock where such numbers of their comrades had fallen, became buoyant with the hope of an active life again. The expectations formed were not, however, destined to be fulfilled; the batt., deeply to its regret, was not permitted to join in the advance, and the cos. were scattered along the border at Rorke's Drift, Dundee, Landman's Drift, and Koppie Allein, to protect the line of communications. It hence forward took no active part in the campaign. Later on, two cos., under Major Bromhead and Capt. Harvey, proceeded to Uhundi with Sir Garnet Wolseley as his personal escort, and on their return were engaged under Lieut. Col. Black in completing the burial of the dead at Isandlwana, and in removing all traces of the battle. These two cos. Returned via Helpmakaar and Greytown to Pietermaritzburg, where they joined the remaining six cos. - these having marched down country from Utrecht, where they had first assembled in the month of September. The batt. remained at Pinetown under canvas from Nov. to Jan., 1880, when it embarked for Gibraltar."

The published medal roll mistakenly gives Chamberlain as 'Major', however the original medal roll has his rank at time of award as Captain and this is how his medal is and should have been named.



Condition NVF, edge bruising around 5-7 o'clock or better, attractive patina. A very desirable 24th Officers medal.