

THE EXCEPTIONAL SOUTH AFRICA 1877-9 PAIR TO A YOUNG NCO, N/5 ROYAL ARTILLERY WHO AFTER HAVING SERVED IN THE ZULU WAR DURING WHICH HIS BATTERY WAS DECIMATED AT ISANDHLWANA, SERVED AT LAINGS KEK DURING THE 1ST BOER WAR AND RECEIVED A RARE MENTIONED FOR HIS DEEDS AT THE DISASTROUS BATTLE AT INGOGO RIVER WHEN HE TOOK COMMAND OF THE GUNS AFTER HIS OFFICERS BECAME CASUALTIES AND SAFELY BROUGHT THEM FROM THE BATTLEFIELD DURING THE RETREAT.



SOUTH AFRICA 1877-9, CLASP, 1877-8-9 '1864. SERGT. T. TOOLE. 5TH BDE R.A.' ARMY LONG SERVICE AND GOOD CONDUCT, V.R. '10107. BY Q.M.SGT T. TOOLE. R.A.'

Thomas Toole, from Charlton, Kent, joined the Royal Artillery at Woolwich on 11 April 1874, aged 14. Originally given service number 39990 with the rank of 'Boy', he was briefly mustered as Trumpeter on 10 May 1876 and Gunner on 10 June that year. Transferring to N/5, 5th Brigade and promoted Bombardier on 1 July 1877, he was promoted Corporal on 22 October and still only 18 years of age, to Sergeant on 12 January 1878. Four days previous to his, Toole had embarked to South Africa, he service records noting service during the:

"Kaffir War 1878, Zulu 1879, Transvaal 1880-1" and specially noting 'Present at Laings Nek 28/1/81. Ingogo 8/2/81 (vide Gaz)."

Under 'Special instances of gallant conduct' is written: "*Conduct while in charge of the guns after Lieut Parsons was wounded, mentioned in despatches of Maj Genl Sir G.P. Colley at Mt Prospect 12.2.81*" This being for his gallant conduct at the battle of Ingogo River. The full mention in the London Gazette, 29 March 1881 is as follows:

"I desire especially to mention the conduct of Serjeant-Major T. Toole, R.A., who well seconded Captain Greer and Lieutenant Parsons in working the guns till the end of the action and on whom the charge of the guns and the arrangements for their withdrawal devolved when the latter officer was wounded; also of Serjeant-Major Wilkins, 60th Rifles, who throughout the day was to be seen wherever the fire was hottest, setting an example to the men by his cool and steady shooting and cheerful gallantry."

However, on 28 March 1881, Toole was tried and reduced to Corporal, the reason unknown but this likely had other consequences. Only one other non-Officer was mentioned in despatches for their gallantry at Ingogo River, this being Serjeant-Major Wilkins of the 60th Rifles and he was awarded the only Distinguished Conduct Medal for Ingogo; an award or a significant promotion/Commission usually following such a mention for an NCO or Other Rank. Toole received neither and though his misdemeanour was clearly not of a significant nature since he only received one step back in rank, such a black mark would usually affect awards being put forward. Regardless, Toole received a rare Mention for this disastrous campaign.

Returning home on 31 January 1882, he transferred to a Battery, 3rd Brigade and married Sara Cross at Weedon, Northamptonshire on 24 July 1883. Having been given the new service number 10107, he was re-promoted Sergeant on 17 November 1883, re-engaging on 25 February 1886, to complete 21 years service. On 1 July 1888, he transferred to 58th Brigade on re-organisation and was promoted Battery Quartermaster Sergeant 57th Brigade, 4 December 1889. On 4 April 1895 he was permitted to continue in the service beyond 21 years and shortly after received the Long Service Medal. Battery Quartermaster Sergeant Toole was finally discharged from the army on 6 November 1897; his character being noted as "Exemplary" and he was awarded a pension of 30 ½ d per die for life.

N/5 BATTERY DURING THE ZULU AND 1ST BOER WARS

Lieut. Col. Harness's N/5 Battery Royal Artillery saw more action in South Africa during the conflicts of 1877-81. Initially taking part in the Frontier War of 1878 in support of the 24th Foot, the battery formed part of Glyn's Column during the invasion of Zululand in January 1879. At the time of its entry into Zululand, of 130 all ranks, with six guns, 73 horses, 36 mules, and six mule-carts, with transport wagons. In the disastrous encounter with the enemy at Isandhlwana, the battery lost Bt. Major Stuart Smith, 61 non-com. Officers and men, two guns, 24 horses, 30 mules, and 534 rounds of ammunition, beside the whole of the camp equipment. Sergeant Toole was not present at the battle and would have been with the guns under Colonel Harness that formed part of Lord Chelmsford's force that marched from Isandhlwana on the morning of the battle.

The part of the battery that was with Chelmsford's force, re-crossed the Buffalo River with the remains of the Column on the 23 January. It remained at Rorke's Drift post until the 25th, and then proceeded to Helpmakaar, where it remained until the 17 April. During the second invasion of Zululand, the battery formed part of Newdigate's 2nd Division, with the battery, minus 2 guns, taking part in the battle of Ulundi. The battery subsequently formed part of Baker Russell's Column and took part in search for the Zulu King.

On the conclusion of the Zulu War, the battery proceeded to the Transvaal and was still present at the outbreak of the 1st Boer War. During this conflict, in which they played a leading role, the battery was split up with 2 gun divisions, the division Sergeant Toole was with, taking part in the disastrous battles of Laing's Nek and Ingogo River. A further two guns took part in the heroic siege of Potchefstroom.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Boer_War



MENTIONS OF SERGEANT TOOLE AT INGOGO AND MAJUBA HILL

Below are some mentions of Sergeant Toole in action, extracted from A Narrative of the Boer war by Thomas Fortescue Carter, Times of Natal

At the battle of Ingogo River:

"...Lieutenant Parsons had a chance of putting a shell in amongst a party of the enemy. As he was training the gun, I noticed him leave it alone suddenly, and put his hand inside the breast of his mackintosh. The gun was fired, and then he turned and walked towards the General as coolly and steadily as if on parade. No one imagined that he was wounded, because we all thought he was bullet-proof after what he had gone through that long afternoon. Before he reached the staff, he tottered and would have fallen, had not someone by supported him. A bullet had struck him in the arm, which incapacitated him from further service, and Sergeant-Major T. Toole, who, one of the most conspicuous for his coolness at the guns throughout the engagement, yet was not wounded, had now to take charge..."

During the retreat from the battlefield:

"...Silently the order was passed round for the men to fall in in the centre of the plateau. There they lay on the ground for fully an hour, chewing the wet grass, sucking the moisture of the limbers and guns, and devising other means to quench their thirst. Sergeant-Major Toole collected all the available horses, and then there were only enough to harness the two gun and one of the ammunition wagons. When I found that we were going to

abandon the field, and force our way back to camp, I told the General I would join the march, as I could be of no service to the wounded..."

After the battle of Majuba, Sergeant Toole who was mounted, was sent out of camp to bring in any survivors he could find :

"..I kept on in a straight line for Mount Prospect. Riding out from the camp I saw a mounted man to my left. He beckoned me to come that way. Thinking it was some officious gentleman bent on questioning me, I let him beckon and shout, and kept on my course. When at last I got half-way up the slope leading to the plateau, I was thoroughly done up, and, seeing two of our vedettes high up in front, I called to them to come and bear me a hand. They were two sturdy Highlanders, and, taking an arm each side, they dragged me up to the level. Then it turned out that the mounted man who had been beckoning to me from below to come to him was Sergeant Toole of the artillery. A ravine had separated us, or he would have come straight to my help long ago. To reach the staff lines there was nearly a quarter of a mile of ground to cover yet, and the artillery sergeant insisted on my riding his horse, as he had been sent out to bring in any one he could see. A great, strapping, six-foot fellow, as good-natured as he was tall and brave (he it was who had command of the guns at the Ingogo after the death of Captain Greer and the disablement of Lieutenant Parsons, and who had already done me the service of carrying, on one of the gun limbers, my saddle from the previous battlefield), he helped me up to his saddle, which but for his assistance I never could have reached at that time, and we shortly were within the inner lines..."

THE BATTLE OF INGOGO RIVER

'The Battle of Schuinshoogte, also known as Battle of Ingogo, was fought on 8 February 1881 during the First Boer War. General Sir George Pomeroy Colley's communications with Newcastle were under constant harassment by mounted Boer patrols under Commander J D Weilbach after the Battle of Laing's Nek (another British defeat) and as a result he planned to clear a path along the Newcastle-Mount Prospect Road to better protect the British supply line and receive fresh reinforcements he needed to bolster his ranks.

At roughly 9 a.m. he left the Mount Prospect camp with a force consisting mostly of infantrymen. A company of the 60th Rifles (King's Royal Rifle Corps) and two artillery pieces were left at a ridge overlooking the Ingogo River, while a handful of mounted men and infantry covered the drift.



As Colley advanced up the slope of the Ingogo he received word from his scouting party that a mainly mounted Boer force under Gen. N J Smith and Comdt. J D Weilbach was approaching nearby. The British formed circular/squared defensive positions on the crest of the ridge with 240 infantry, 38 cavalry and two pieces of artillery while the roughly 300 Boers attempted to surround them and cut them off from escape.

From noon until about 5:00 that evening a series of close-range engagements was fought and the British suffered heavily from the accurate and concentrated Boer fire. Although the 60th Rifles wore dark green (in fact, almost black) uniforms, these were still in contrast to the light-coloured South African veldt, the only concession to camouflage being the white foreign service helmet-stained khaki with tea. The gunners and mounted troops also wore dark uniforms, but the gunners in particular were exposed when working their guns. In contrast the Boers wore khaki coloured clothing, and were also expert at fieldcraft, thus being able to blend into the environment.

Afterward heavy rain began to fall and the battle came to an abrupt end. Rainfall swelled the Ingogo river, making it very difficult to ford. Boer forces, imagining that the British would be unable to cross, especially with artillery, waited during the night to resume the battle the next day. Colley's men, meanwhile, made a desperate night march, and managed to escape, horses, guns and all, although several men drowned in the river crossing. The Boer failure to assault and capture the guns during the rainstorm, allowing the British column to escape, probably represents their only major error during the war.'

From a force of approximately 350 men engaged in the battle, British losses on the battlefield, as near as can be determined, were 4 officers and 62 men killed and 4 officers and 63 men wounded - a total, with the drowned, of 142 casualties. The Boers lost 8 killed and 6 wounded of whom 2 subsequently died.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Schuinshoogte

Of the 273 South Africa 187-9 medals were issued to members of the N/5 Battery, 124 of them with the '1877-8-9' clasp.



Condition VF, mounted as worn with original ribbons and double medal brooch bar, reverse pin missing. Lovely patina to both medals.

An exceptional pair of medals to a gunner, mentioned for his actions at Ingogo River