

A SUPERB AND VERY SCARCE SOUTH AFRICA 1877-9 TO AN 80th FOOT PRIVATE KILLED IN ACTION AT INTOMBE RIVER 12TH



SOUTH AFRICA 1877-9, CLASP 1878-9 '1770 PTE J SILCOCK 80TH FOOT'

1770 Private Joseph Silcock of 'A' Company 80th Foot, was one of 61 men of the 80th Foot killed during the disastrous attack on the British camp at Intombe River (drift) on 12th March 1879.

Private Silcock's body was one of 20 soldiers bodies that were never recovered. He was presumably one of those that made it to the river and was either killed crossing or crossed and was killed trying to escape. A further 41 80th soldiers bodies were found and buried. Silcock's name is engraved on the Zulu shield memorial to those killed at Intombe, St Michael's Chapel, Litchfield Cathedral.

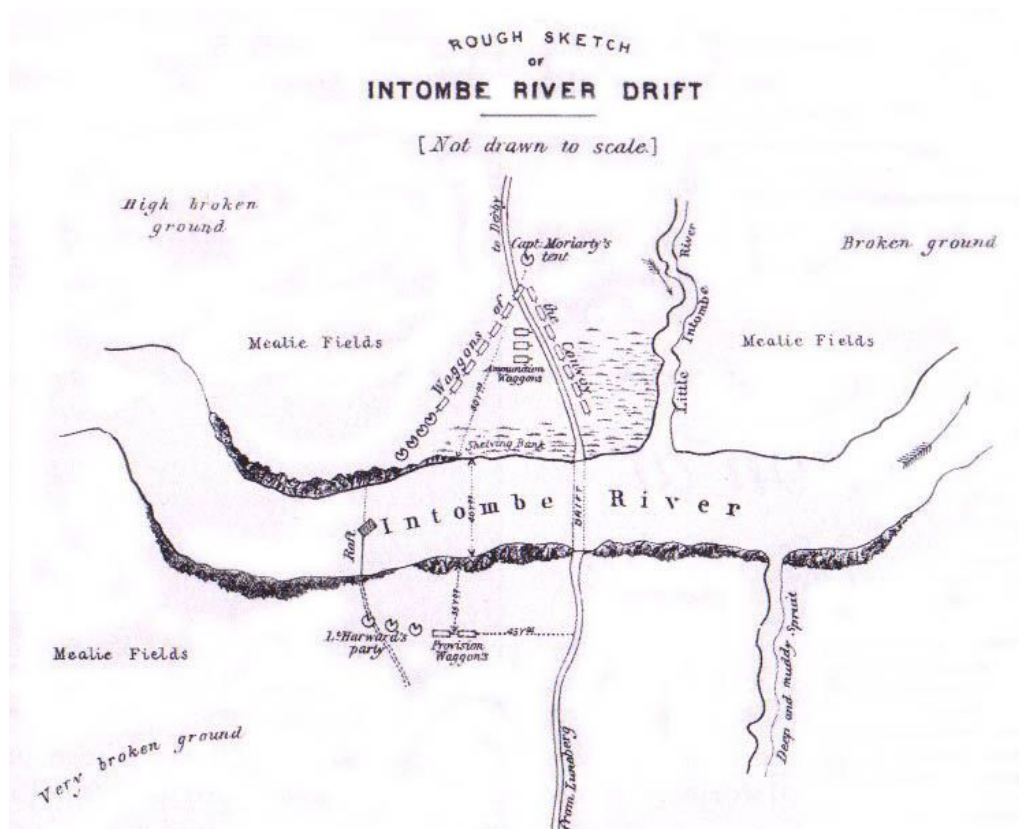
Joseph Silcock, aged 20 from Brampton, Deryshire, enlisted on 11th September 1871, joining the 80th Foot in Belfast 11 days later. He served with the 80th in Perak and served with 'A' company during the Zulu War. Medal roll for Perak has the note 'deceased'. The Perak clasp was not authorised until Sept 1879 but may well have still been issued.

INTOMBI DRIFT - 12TH MARCH 1879 (from Rorkesdriftvc forum)

'On the 7th March, a company of the 80th commanded by Captain David Moriarty, marched out of Luneberg to accompany a convoy of 18 waggons bringing in ammunition, flour and mealies from Derby. He was advised that some waggons had

broken down on the little Intombi river and his orders were to bring these waggons or their loads into Luneberg. If this was not possible, then he was to laager the waggons at the Intombi river and wait until he was able to do so. When they arrived at the Intombi, they found that the convoy had arrived there on the 5th March, but owing to heavy rain, the river had risen and stopped the waggons crossing at the drift.

Part of the escorting force, commanded by Lieutenant Henry Harward, camped on the Luneberg side of the river, while Captain Moriarty and 69 men moved into a laager made by the trapped waggons on the north side of the river. By the 11th March, the rains had finally stopped and the river fallen about 4 feet. The flow of the river however, was still so rapid so that nothing could be got across. The defensive laager, in the shape of an inverted letter "V" had become a complete sea of mud, flooded by the river and churned up by the men and cattle.



Captain Moriarty retired for the night in the hope that the following morning would allow him to start moving the stranded waggons across the river.

At about 3.30 am a shot was fired near the camp and the men quickly turned out. It was still dark, with mist and rain in the air. Captain Moriarty decided that it was nothing and allowed his men to return to their beds, after warning the sentries to be extra vigilant. At about 5 am, the mist began to clear and in the first light of dawn, the sentry on the Luneberg side of the river saw Zulus close to the laager. He fired his rifle which alerted the other sentries. The camp began to scramble to their feet when a vast number of Zulus, estimated by some to be in excess of 4,000 men, fell upon the camp and overwhelmed Captain Moriarty's men in minutes. Some men tried to swim

across the river to safety but most of them were swept away and drowned. The Zulus followed the men into the river and a hand to hand fight ensued. The troops on the Luneberg side fired volley after volley into the seething mass of men, but it was a hopeless situation. When the Zulus were seen crossing the river further upstream in an attempt to outflank them, it became a matter of necessity to fall back to Luneberg.



Battle at Intombi Drift

Lieutenant Harward in his official report stated that he attempted to rally his men but that they were much scattered and he found reformation impossible. He saddled up a horse and left the survivors under the command of Sergeant Anthony Booth, while he raced back to Luneberg. Sergeant Booth fell back steadily, stopping his party of 43 men and firing a volley at the pursuing Zulus when they got too close. He was followed for at least three and a half miles, until the Zulus finally gave up and returned to the river. For this act of extreme courage he was awarded the Victoria Cross and promotion to the rank of Colour Sergeant.

A relief party was sent from Luneberg when the alarm was raised. They saw a party of Zulus about 4,000 strong extending for about 2 mile along Umbeline's hill, evidently retiring from the fight. When they arrived at the Intombi drift, the sight that they saw reminded the men of a small scale Isandlwana. The troops had been stripped and disembowelled, the cattle driven off and the laager ransacked. Captain Moriarty was found dead with 41 troops and 17 civilian drivers. A further 20 men of the 80th

were missing believed drowned, although 6 of their bodies were discovered in the next few days. Lieutenant Harward was charged with deserting his men in the face of the enemy, but the subsequent court martial found him not guilty. It did not stop comments about his unacceptable behaviour being read out to every regiment in the British army.

Coming just 49 days after the Isandlwana disaster, it showed that the Zulu was a very formidable opponent and that their military skills were to be respected by all in the future.'

A really superb and very scarce medal. This is the second such medal I've been lucky enough to be asked to sell in the last few months but bar these there have been no more than a couple on the market in the last 10 odd years.



Condition EF, a lovely looking medal, still with its auction tag from Christies, July 25th 1989 where it was purchased by the vendor.