

**A VERY RARE AND EMOTIVE MEDAL TO A TROOPER OF THE BUFFALO BORDER GUARD WHO WAS ONE OF THREE MEN FROM THIS SMALL UNIT KILLED WITH NATAL VOLUNTEERS UNDER COLONEL DURNFORD AT THE BATTLE OF ISANDHLWANA 22<sup>ND</sup> JANUARY 1879**



**SOUTH AFRICA 1877-9, CLASP 1879 'TPR. GUTTRIDGE BUFFALO BDR GD'**

Trooper Guttridge of the Buffalo Border Guard was one of three members of his small unit killed in action at the battle of Isandhlwana. Many of the men from the Natal Volunteer Cavalry units who died in this action were killed in a last stand made by them under Colonel Durnford. Their bodies later found grouped together around the Colonel or in small groups with other defenders. Trooper Guttridge's body was found in the camp at Isandhlwana, close to the bodies of two troopers from the Natal Carbineers. Others managed to get as far as Fugitives's drift. Bodies of the two men from the Buffalo Border Guard who were killed; troopers Emry and Wehr, were found here several months after the battle, though both bodies were unrecognisable.

#### **BUFFALO BORDER GUARD (by Brett Hendey)**

*The Buffalo Border Guard (BBG) was the volunteer regiment of the early settlers in the Dundee district of Natal between 1873 and 1879. It took its name from the Buffalo River, which formed the border between the Colony of Natal and Zululand. It was made up of mounted men, who never exceeded 30 in number. Contemporary volunteer units elsewhere in northern Natal were the Newcastle Mounted Rifles (NMR) and the Weenen Yeomanry, while the larger Natal Carbineers (NC), which had its headquarters in Pietermaritzburg, came to serve in northern Natal as well.*

The uniform of the BBG included a black pillbox cap, with a band of black braid on which a silver badge with a buffalo head on a wreath was mounted. The tunic was black cord with black velvet facings and white metal buttons with buffalo head and BBG title. The breeches were also black and were worn with black leather boots. The men were armed with Martini-Henry rifles and Webley revolvers.

The BBG was formed in October 1873 during the Langalibalele Rebellion and was under the command of James Rorke, after whom Rorke's Drift was named. Rorke was succeeded by J S Robson, another of the early settlers in the district. In 1878, Robson was appointed Border Agent for the Buffalo border. He formed and took command of the Border Police, which was comprised of Natal Zulus armed with traditional weapons. The command of the BBG then passed to Lieutenant William Craighead Smith.

During 1878, several disaffected Boers left the BBG and they were gradually replaced by English settlers. By 16/12/1878, the BBG's strength was 20 men, while this regiment's Zulu War medal roll lists 25 men, of which only one received the medal without the 1879 clasp. Three medals were unclaimed and returned to Woolwich.

Fort Pine, which is about 20 kilometres south-east of Dundee, was built in 1878 as a Natal Mounted Police (NMP) post, but by December it became the headquarters for the BBG, which had been mobilised to patrol the adjacent border with Zululand. Further south near Helpmekeer the border was patrolled by the NMR and NC. The NMP and Border Police were also active along the Buffalo River border.

As tensions grew along the entire border with Zululand, Imperial troops were deployed and several battalions of the Natal Native Contingent (NNC) were raised to strengthen the Colonial contribution to the defence of Natal. On 11/12/1878, the British High Commissioner in Natal presented an ultimatum to the Zulu king that essentially required the Zulu nation to forfeit its independence by 10/1/1879. Anticipating that the ultimatum would be rejected, the Imperial forces and their Colonial allies prepared to invade Zululand on 11/1/1879. The British Commander, Lieutenant-General F A Thesiger (later Lord Chelmsford) arranged his forces in five columns along the Zululand border.

The BBG was part of the Colonial force in No. 3 (or Centre) Column that crossed into Zululand at Rorke's Drift under the command of Lord Chelmsford. The NMP and Natal Volunteers, which had been commanded by Major John Dartnell of the NMP, were placed under the command of Major J Russell of the 12th Lancers, while Dartnell was appointed to Chelmsford's staff.



THE BUFFALO BORDER GUARD 1879



*After crossing into Zululand, the Centre Column camped on the eastern slopes of the hill known to the Zulus as Isandhlwana. On 21/1/1879, Chelmsford dispatched a force of Colonials under Major Dartnell and the NNC under Commandant Lonsdale to search for the Zulu army east of Isandhlwana. The Colonial contingent was made up of about 100 NMP, 30 NC and 20 NMR and BBG. Remaining at the Isandhlwana camp were 34 NMP, 26 NC, 15 NMR and 8 BBG. The BBG Officer Commanding, Lieutenant W C Smith, was away on a cattle-buying expedition.*

*The Isandhlwana camp was overrun by the Zulu army on 22/1/1879 and most of the men there were killed, including three from the BBG. They were Troopers Emry, Gutridge and Wehr. Two of the men had died while trying to escape along the route to what became known as Fugitive's Drift on the Buffalo River. Their unrecognisable bodies were found months later in the undergrowth at the foot of a cliff. The surviving five men from the BBG escaped by crossing the Buffalo River back into Natal, after which they sought refuge, first at Rorke's Drift and then at Helpmekaar on the road between Greytown and Dundee. There was a widespread fear that the Zulus would invade Natal, so safety was sought as far from the border as possible. Quartermaster D McPhaill of the BBG went as far as Newcastle.*

Just 25 medals issued to unit, 24 with 1879 clasp. 3 returned unclaimed and broken up in October 1903 (Medal roll confirms).



Condition EF, lovely age toning, with auction ticket from DNW in 1991. A very rare Isandhlwana casualty medal, one of just 3 to the unit.