

THE VERY RARE AND EMOTIVE OFFICERS SOUTH AFRICA 1879 MEDAL TO QUARTERMASTER GEORGE ERNEST EDWARD MAR HITCHCOCK OF THE NEWCASTLE MOUNTED RIFLES WHO WAS KILLED IN ACTION AT THE BATTLE OF ISANDHLWANA. ONE OF JUST FOUR COLONIAL VOLUNTEER OFFICERS KILLED AT THE BATTLE AND ONE OF THE FEW MEN TO HAVE AN INDIVIDUAL GRAVE ON THE BATTLE FIELD



SOUTH AFRICA 1877-9, CLASP 1879 'QR MR HITCHCOCK NEWCASTLE MTD RIFLS'

George Ernest Mar Hitchcock was the proprietor of the Newcastle Hotel. His body is one of the few that has an individual memorial at Isandhlwana and was found on the southern Nek of Isandhlwana with a group of other men that had clearly put up a last stand.

Hitchcock's wife Was Jessie (Osborn) Hitchcock, daughter of Sir Melmoth Osborn of Transvaal and Zululand fame. He was the first British Native Commissioner of Natal . Jessie had just given birth to their daughter a couple of days before Isandhlwana. Her best friend was the wife of Captain Bradstreet, who had helped at the birth. Little is known about Hitchcock's past, though he was born in Taunton, Somerset in 1857. Research suggests he was a 'black sheep' of a UK family who had been sent out to the colonies.

NEWCASTLE MOUNTED RIFLES (1876-9)

This was a Northern Natal regiment raised in 1876, and served in the Zulu War of 1879 under Capt Bradstreet . The unit was present at Isandhlwana with a strength of 14 but of these they lost half these men including Captain Bradstreet who was the senior Volunteer Officer present. Most of the men died in a last stand with Colonel Durnford and other Colonial Volunteers.

38 medals issued to unit, 37 with 1879 clasp. 8 returned unclaimed and broken up



MEMBERS OF THE NEWCASTLE MOUNTED RIFLES IN 1879

COLONIAL VOLUNTEERS AT ISANDHLWANA

Natal Carbineers, 2 Officers (Lt Scott, QM London), 27 men - Both Officers and 19 men KIA

Newcastle Mounted Rifles, 2 officers (Capt Bradstreet, QM Hitchcock), 12 men – Both officers and 5 men KIA

Buffalo Border Guard, 1 Officer, 7 men – 3 men KIA

Also Natal Mounted Police, who were an Imperial unit, 34 men – 25 KIA

REGARDING HITCHCOCK'S GRAVE AT ISANDHLWANA

ALFRED BOAST REPORT REGARDING GRAVES ON BATTLEFIELD 1883

'I commenced operations on the 12th of February on the battlefield and carefully interred the bodies of the volunteers and mounted police, at a spot marked by a monument marked in memory of Mr Hitchcock and in the immediate neighbourhood of Mr Blaikie 's tombstone at this spot there were about 30 graves and nearly all of them have been poached upon by the weather that the remains were exposed from this spot I proceeded to where the camp had stood and was occupied for some days in searching for and committing to earth the skeletons of who had fallen in their advance to meet the enemy in an easterly direction. Having completed this position I returned to the " Nek " and proceeded to perform this duty to those who had fallen at the base of the Isandhlwana mountain.....'



QM HITCHCOCK'S GRAVE AT ISANDHLWANA (the white obelisk)

EXTRACT FROM 'SIR H. RIDER HAGGARD AND THE ZULU WAR' published in the journal of the Anglo-Zulu War Historical Society, December 2001

'Standing on the Nek Haggard looked out over the battlefield and visualised the events of 22 January 1879. "Few relics are left of the struggle now after the lapse of 35 years, some broken medicine bottles, a good many fragments of bully-beef tins, pieces of the bones of men and animals, that is all. Also we picked up the remnants of two Martini cartridges; the one I found on the Nek had not been fired, probably it came from the pouch of some slain soldier, a slate pencil and such sundries." (That night when the party stayed at the store of Charles Evelyn Parr, close to the battlefield, Haggard was given a "number of cartridge cases and the head of one of Durnford's rockets.")

"It was sad for me to stand by the piles of stones which cover all that is left of so many whom I once knew; Durnford and Pulleine and many other officers of the 24th, George Shepstone and the rest. Coghill I knew also very well but he died with Melville by the river bank ... We walked back towards the store past the little graveyard where I see that Hitchcock, the first husband of Osborn's daughter is buried with a few others whom it was possible to identify, and across the dongas and the rough ground about them."

"When I had gone some way I turned and looked back at this lonesome, formidable hill standing there, a fit monument for the multitude of dead; immemorably ancient, stern and grand. The twilight was closing in, the sky was red, fading into grey. Over that savage crest trembled one star: Heaven's own ornament. Near to it gleamed the faint but luminous bow of the new-born moon, that same young moon which once hung above the slain upon this forsaken field of blood. I walked awhile, picking my way over the stony ridge and dongas where the last stand was made against a roaring flood of foes, and again looked back. Now the stark mount had become very black and solemn, the trembling star had sunk or vanished and of the following crescent of the young moon but one horn appeared above the hill. It

looked like a plume of faint, unearthly fire burning upon Isandhlwana's rocky brow. This must be a quiet place for man's eternal sleep. But the scene which went before that sleep!"



QM HITCHCOCK

THE MEDAL

The medal itself has a couple of minor issues

- 1) The disc just before and under the 'QR' has been lightly skimmed, medal named correctly, then lightly sanded or such over the 'QR' (only)
- 2) The clasp pin (only) has been replaced

I spent a good deal of time trying to figure out what has happened and my conclusion is that the medal disc itself has had a minor flaw or such, the engraver has taken a knife over the offending issue and skimmed the tinniest slither of metal off and then naming the medal. He (or a past owner) has then given it a light clean over the 'QR' again with light abrasive paper which has slightly lightened the engraved part of 'QR', taking a little bit of the blackening out, thus making it not stand out as much as the other letters. Obviously it could be blackened again to make it look stronger again but the abrasive marks would still be there. I have various erased examples in my collection to help ID issues and this fits perfectly.

The diameter of the medal is such that its certainly not been corrected and all the naming, including the 'QR' is as it should be.



As to the clasp; claw and suspension/pin are as issued, never touched. One end of pin has been removed and that side of suspension post has very light file marks. Only thing I can think is the medal has been issued either without a clasp or the wrong clasp; both of which I've seen/had at times. A correct clasp has then been added. Nothing else would make sense as bar these issues and a very small EK, the medal is as issued a superb as can be seen by the naming/obverse/reverse shots.

A very rare medal to one of the four Colonial Volunteer Officer's killed at the battle of Isandhlwana. Rarer still that he has an individual grave at Isandhlwana itself.