

## *Soldiers' Letters from the First Anglo-Boer War, 1880 - 81*

Compared with the newspaper coverage of wars in Zululand or Afghanistan in 1879-80, the British press gave scant attention to the military (as distinct from the political) character of the "Transvaal War" that erupted after Bronkhorstspuit. There were cogent reasons for this, related to the local circumstances of the conflict. In particular, the reporters and correspondents were unable to reach the Transvaal-Natal border in time to cover the early fighting. The first newspaperman to arrive at the front, T.F. Carter of the *Natal Times*, took a week to ride 120 miles on horseback. It poured with rain every day, the drifts were difficult, and he was just too late to report the opening battle at Laingsnek on 28 January 1881.<sup>1</sup> Setting as it did the pattern of defeat for the relieving column commanded by H.E. Major-General Sir George Pomeroy Colley, it is a pity Laingsnek was not witnessed by an experienced war correspondent, home or colonial.

Colley's objective was to force his way into the Transvaal to relieve the British garrisons bottled up at Pretoria and six other towns. The effective sealing off by the Burgher commandos of the capital, and of so many troops scattered through the Transvaal, also made it virtually impossible to put together a coherent story for the reading public in Britain. Another factor was the brevity of the campaign: by the time the reporters arrived, it had entered the tortuous phase of peace negotiation. Melton Prior (his whisky tucked away in boxes labelled "Drawing materials", as in the Anglo-Zulu War), struggled up country through thunderstorms, floods, and mud, but sketches did not appear in the *Illustrated London News* until 5 March, when the fighting was over. Even then, they were not from Prior's pen: his later drawing of the Majuba battle-scene had to be based on the eyewitness description by John Cameron, the London *Standard* reporter whose despatches were the most widely read by dismayed patriots at home.<sup>2</sup>

Another veteran of Zululand, C.E. Fripp, came out to see what was happening, but none of his sketches appeared in the *Graphic* until 23 April. His drawing of the summit of Majuba was done on 24 March, nearly a month after the battle, and was published on 21 May. The *Daily Telegraph* did not print a detailed account of "The Fight at Amajuba", sent by its controversial Fenian correspondent Arthur Aylward until 15 April. He pulled no punches: "Our troops were out-numbered, flanked, driven back at all points by an enemy that had on two occasions shown the stuff they were made of, and hurled down the mountain side more like sheep than anything else I can compare them to". No doubt all this could have been printed earlier than it was, but the assassination of the Tsar and the death of Disraeli had overshadowed all other news, and there was also an over-riding sense of unease at home about bad news from the Transvaal.

This was compounded of shame at yet another military disaster (Majuba, after all, came close on the heels of Isandlwana and Maiwand), and of doubts shared beyond Liberal circles that Britain should be at war with the Boers. Both attitudes are reflected in verses that appeared in *Punch*. First "A Military Ode" to the British infantry:

"Britannia needs instructors  
To teach her boys to shoot,  
Fixed targets and mere red-tape drill  
Have borne but bitter fruit,  
Our blunders are a standing joke,  
The scandal of our Isle,  
And the Boer loud doth roar,  
Whilst our foreign critics smile,  
Whilst the Teuton guffaws loud and long,  
And our foreign critics smile".

Then one of the verses of a poem about Majuba and Colley concluded —

"Today we must praise the slain heroes he led,  
We'll portion the blame on the morrow.  
'Tis scarcely disgrace to such foemen to fall,  
'Tis pity such foemen are foemen at all!"<sup>3</sup>

Given the war was far from fully reported, it follows that letters written home by soldiers on the spot would be especially informative, as indeed they are for most of the Victorian campaigns.<sup>4</sup> Again, however, the circumstances of the conflict, and the small number of troops employed, conspire to keep the letters to a disappointingly low tally.

Among the original letters that have been traced are a few from Percival Scrope Marling, then a young subaltern in the 3rd Battalion of the 60th Rifles, later the King's Royal Rifle Corps. It was a unit that had fought in the Zulu War, from the battle of Gingindhlovu onwards, and so still contained a fair proportion of seasoned campaigners, to stiffen the younger recruits, when fighting broke out with the Boers. As against his surviving letters, Marling tells us far more about the war in his autobiography, published in 1931 with the title *Rifleman and Hussar*. The book is heavily dependent on the diaries he kept, but unfortunately Marling does not always clearly distinguish between direct quotation from his diaries, and comment added much later in time, presumably when drafting his book. The letters are often simply an alternative version of what he wrote in his diary, naturally enough, but his book is a spirited record of a young man's approach to African warfare. Marling won the Victoria Cross in the Sudan a few years later, and fought the Boers again between 1899 and 1902.

He tells how the 3/60th Rifles marched up country from Pietermaritzburg, singing *My Grandfather's Clock* to the accompaniment of two whistles and a drum played on a canteen with two sticks. They reached the British camp at Mount Prospect on 26 January 1881, and were plunged immediately into the fighting at Laingsnek on 28 January. With H Company, of which he was second-in-command, Marling advanced to the foot of the ridge in skirmishing order, to support the left flank of the attack, where they sheltered behind a low stone wall. From that forward position he saw the whole desperate business. So steep were the slopes that the horses of the mounted infantry

were soon blown, as were those of the 58th Regiment, whose C.O. and Adjutant (Hingston and Monk) had to ride up on horseback because Colonel Deane and his staff did so. Deane took command out of the hands of the regimental officers, the 58th "were hustled up without being extended", and failed to carry the heights.<sup>5</sup> Deane and three other mounted staff officers were killed; the only survivor of the staff who rode up Laingsnek was Major Edward Essex (75th Regiment), whose charmed life had brought him safely from the slaughterhouse at Isandlwana two years previously.

Marling's narrative may be set aside for a moment to turn to some soldiers' letters about Laingsnek. Only one combatant's account has come to light from a newspaper source, written by Lance-Sergeant W.J. Morris of the 58th. He wrote on 30 January to his mother at Northampton, describing how his regiment, carrying seventy rounds of ammunition and two pounds of biscuit and bully beef per man, were ready for action on 27 January.<sup>6</sup> Torrential rain caused the attack to be postponed to the 28th, when he was roused at 3 a.m. and formed up in column at 6 a.m. in bright sunshine. Having marched to within 2 000 yards of the Boer entrenchments on the ridge, the six fieldguns fired three or four rounds apiece, their shells bursting out of sight behind the crest. This performance was repeated by the three rocket tubes of the Naval Brigade. After an hour had elapsed, Brownlow's mounted force attacked the slopes in skirmishing order on the right; they met strong opposition and were forced to retire, although (according to Morris) only four men had been killed and a dozen horses knocked over. Then, as the mounted troops were retiring, five companies of the 58th skirmished ahead under a very heavy cross fire from the Boers.

"Before we got half way up the hill many of us were mowed down one by one. We got up to the top, when we opened fire, and kept it up for some time till the order was given to fix bayonets and prepare to charge . . . We charged the hill, but could not hold it, as we had no support. The Boers were only about thirty yards away when we reached the top, and they were advancing on us in hundreds. Colonel Deane was shot in the arm. He afterwards got off his horse and used his revolver, and he had not fired many shots when he received the second shot and fell backwards. Someone then said, 'Retire men, retire, as they are too strong for us.' As we were retiring we lost several men under a deadly cross fire. How the remaining few escaped was quite a miracle".

Morris then relates how the regimental colours (never again taken into action by a British regiment) were barely saved from capture by the determination of Sergeant Bridgestock, who scrambled them away on horseback and eventually on foot. The remnant of the 58th, which suffered 34 per cent casualties in killed and wounded out of a strength of 503 attacking officers and men, marched back to where the field ambulances were parked.

"A flag of truce was hoisted and taken up to the Boers, asking permission to bring the wounded and bury the dead, but they would not let us touch them till they had taken all their arms away from them, and when we went up the groans of the wounded were something fearful. In a horrible state we brought all the wounded into camp that day. I am sorry to say our loss is most of the officers and

non-commissioned officers, as it appears the Boers were dead nuts on them . . . I must also tell you we were bringing in the wounded at twelve o'clock at night, and the groans in hospital were shocking. We are not going to attack that hill until we get reinforcements, and then we will pepper them for what they have done".

Indirectly, perhaps, one can say that Majuba was to be the reinforced second attack on the Boer positions at Laingsnek, but the peppering then certainly did not go as Morris had hoped. The fighting of 28 January was also witnessed by a non-combatant N.C.O., Henry Coombs, a sergeant in the Army Hospital Corps. He wrote to his friends in Sheffield, telling them of the repulse of the 58th.

"The British troops had to retreat, beaten; but, oh, what a retreat it was, they were nothing but marks for the enemy. The Boers were frightened to leave their position, and when out of range all firing ceased . . . I shall not forget to my dying day the whizz of those bullets past my head, and to see those men shot down as though they were dogs. It was pitiful, but only what we expect in war. I was on the field dressing wounded, and could see it all, and we had a large amount of wounded to dress and carry away. We had 40 blacks carrying the wounded off the field. I kept with the doctor all the time, and many a time we thought we were done for, but we escaped all right, and it took us till eight p.m. to clear the field of wounded men".<sup>7</sup>

Whether we accept 8 p.m. or midnight (according to Morris, and the discrepancy may mean the difference between carrying the last wounded soldier off the battlefield and installing the last of the casualties in the hospital tents) as bringing the day to a close, Laingsnek set a pattern of extreme hardship for the wounded men that was to be repeated in the other engagements of this drastic war. Marling of the 3/60th Rifles noted in his diary for 29 January, "All night we could hear the wretched wounded groaning and crying out".<sup>8</sup> He was not impressed with Colley, who had spoken to the demoralized survivors, taking all the blame on himself. "It is an extraordinary thing he made such a mess of it", wrote Marling in a later comment, "As our old man (i.e. the C.O. of the 3/60th) said, 'You don't win a battle by making speeches or writing despatches',"<sup>9</sup> and it was soon the turn of Marling's regiment to be put on the rack at Schuinshoogte.

The scene for that sharp conflict, at least as wretched for the men involved as most of the fights against the Zulu two years previously, is set by Sergeant Coombs:

"On the morning of the 8th February, the native runner came into camp (i.e. Mount Prospect), saying that the Boers had nearly caught him and had taken two of our men prisoners. Some 20 wounded were sent away this same morning, and it was feared that they would harm them, or perhaps steal the ambulances. Sir G. Colley took part of the force out to clear the road, when, after he had gone four miles, the Boer army appeared in force, and a battle ensued".<sup>10</sup>

Coombs tells how Colley was ambushed after crossing the double drift at the Ingogo river, on the road to Newcastle, and it seems from his letter that he was present at, and survived, the British defensive fight on the Schuinshoogte slopes. For a more realistic picture of this sanguinary little

confrontation, however, we should turn to Lt. P.S. Marling of the 3/60th Rifles.

He says that whereas the purpose of Colley's sortie was to safeguard the road for the mails between Newcastle and Mount Prospect, the telegraph had not been cut and was still working. A fight was patently not expected, because Colley did not bother to take along a water cart, and ordered dinner in camp for his men at 3.30 p.m. In intense heat, five companies of the 60th marched out, with thirty mounted men (again under Major Brownlow), two 9-pounder and two 7-pounder guns of the Royal Artillery. The latter pair, together with K Company to which Marling had been transferred since Laingsnek, very fortunately for him, did not cross the Ingogo but stayed on the north bank, guarding the drifts. Suddenly, at about 11.30 a.m., he heard such firing from the main force ahead across the river that he knew "desperate hard fighting was going on".<sup>11</sup> He heard all about it from Lt. Francis Beaumont, who lay hidden behind a rock for four hours; "a very little fellow" who had coxed the Oxford University Eight for three years, Beaumont came through unhurt.

At the outset the Boers shot nearly all the horses of the mounted troops and artillery, there being no cover for them on the bare plateau of Schuins-hoogte; one of the horrors of later in the day was the trampling of wounded men by wounded horses, galloping over the battlefield. By about 2.30 p.m., pinned down by merciless fire and sustaining heavy casualties, Colley thought the encircling Boers were about to rush his position on the left flank. He sent one of his staff officers to ask Colonel Ashburnham to advance a company of the 3/60th to cover this threat. Only I Company was in reserve, and Ashburnham pleaded that only half of it should be sent, but the staff officer insisted on taking the whole company, and leading it into position himself. He was Captain J.C. MacGregor, of the Royal Engineers, who had served in the Zulu War and at the taking of Sekhukhuni's stronghold, but there was more to his action on 8 February 1881 than a recent account by G.R. Duxbury would suggest.<sup>12</sup>

Many of the soldiers of I Company were young recruits, recently joining their regiment, and MacGregor led them, riding his horse, to a position within 50 yard of the Boers. "There is no doubt that he took them farther than he should have done. Captain MacGregor was himself killed, it was inevitable, considering the mark he presented".<sup>13</sup> A letter written by Lieutenant B.M. Hamilton, 15th Regiment, who was Colley's A.D.C. (and brother-in-law), taking part in the fight, adds more detail:

"Poor MacGregor had gone with one of the companies of the 60th to show them where to post themselves, but, unluckily for him and the whole company with him, he took them too far below the brow and they got detached from the rest of our line, and being on the side of the hill the Boers could see them from the top of the one opposite".<sup>14</sup>

Only nine men of I Company came through unscathed, including Lt. Beaumont, the diminutive Oxford cox; the remaining 56 were killed or wounded, decimated at least in part through MacGregor's ineptitude. Colley knew the full story, of course, but to read his despatch one would think otherwise. It is a sad reflection on the Major-General's powers of judgement and lack of realism. This is what he wrote about MacGregor, his Assistant Military Secretary:



Major-General Sir George Pomeroy Colley

“... a most promising officer, who would certainly have risen to distinction if spared, of soldierly bearing, of distinguished ability, and possessing in an eminent degree all the most valuable qualifications of a Staff Officer. He was killed early in the engagement, while pointing out the ground to Lieutenant Garrett, of the 60th, as the latter brought his company into action”.<sup>15</sup>

Fine words, but empty of meaning in terms of what happened at Schuinshoogte, and far from telling the full story. As the afternoon wore on, thunder and lightning began to accentuate the sporadic firing from either side, and it started to rain heavily just before 5 p.m. — so heavily that, in Marling’s words, “all the old hands say it was worse than anything they had in Zululand”.<sup>16</sup> The Boers, who were being reinforced steadily, then (at about 5.30) showed a white flag. Bugles sounded “Cease fire”, but the Boers simply used this as an opportunity to advance, firing, on the silent 9-pounder guns; Duxbury does not mention this incident.<sup>17</sup> Two officers and 13 men of the Artillery were killed or wounded, out of a total gunner strength of 27; the guns belonged to N/5 Battery, part of which was wiped out at Isandlwana, while the wounded officer, Lieutenant C.S.B. Parsons, R.A., had been out with Lord Chelmsford’s force on 22 January 1879 when the camp was taken by the Zulu.

At Schuinshoogte, the rainstorm continued as darkness fell, and the shooting stopped at last. Most of the wounded were collected together in one spot, getting immediate attention from Surgeon M’Gann and his orderlies, but when Colley decided to quit the battlefield at 9 p.m., it was clear that the wounded would have to be left where they lay. The only

horses fit for work were two for each gun and two for one of the ammunition limbers; the other limber was also left behind when Colley, his staff, and the survivors (in the case of the 3/60th, only 130 out of the 217 actively engaged) plodded off into the darkness. Bad as it was for the wounded, there were still hazards ahead for those returning to Mount Prospect, as Lt. Bruce Hamilton wrote to his sister, Lady Colley:

“About 9 o'clock we marched off in a hollow square, guns in the centre, and remainder of Mounted Infantry Rifles in skirmishing order all around. When we left the hill we all expected a real hand-to-hand fight before we should be able to cross the river, and if the Boers had occupied the drift I don't know how we should have been able to cross, with the water so high from the rain . . . You ask me if Sir G. was in danger that day. He was, and more danger than I hope he will be in again”.<sup>18</sup>

At the Ingogo, danger came from the river itself. When they crossed it on the morning of 8 February, the soldiers splashed across with the water barely above their ankles. Now, after the rainstorm, the Ingogo was almost up to their armpits, and they had to link arms to get across. Despite this precaution, and no doubt because of their exhaustion after a hard day at Schuinshoogte (when none of the troops had anything to eat, and only a canteen of water apiece), six unfortunate men of the 3/60th lost their footing and were swept away by the current. Perhaps the most tragic postscript of all came the next day, when Lt. E.O.H. Wilkinson met his death. Having survived the fight, he went back alone to the battlefield on the 9 February to do what he could for the wounded left there, but on his way home again to Mount Prospect he too was drowned in the Ingogo.

His body was not recovered until the 18th, five miles below the drifts, and he was buried on the 20th. In the auction of his effects the next day — proof positive of how down-to-earth the military have to be — Marling (who calls him 'Peter') bought Wilkinson's soapbox and suit of flannel pyjamas. He had served as adjutant of the 3/60th since the Zulu War, from which he wrote (for his housemaster at Eton) an excellent account of the battle of Gingindhlovu, before he was invalided home through sickness.<sup>19</sup> His remains lie in the Mount Prospect military Cemetery, (grave no. 34), next to three officer casualties of Schuinshoogte — Captain C. Greer, R.A., in command of Colley's artillery, Lt. O'Connell, and Lt. Garrett of the ill-fated I Company, 3/60th.

Marling's company did not get involved in the fighting, but he had an exhausting time of it. K Company went on outlying picquet at 5.30 p.m. on Monday, 7 February. Coming back to camp at 7 the next morning, they marched out an hour later towards Schuinshoogte, and remained on post guarding the Ingogo drifts until Colley's remnant force had made their way back to Mount Prospect. They did not return themselves, escorting the long-suffering wounded, until the afternoon after the engagement. “These men and myself only got a cup of tea from 6 p.m. Monday till 4 p.m. Wednesday. We were hungry”.<sup>20</sup> Such are the incidental hardships of war. Nor was the miserable saga of Schuinshoogte yet brought to a conclusion. On 12 February, at Colley's personal order and in pouring rain, a party of soldiers went out under a flag of truce to exhume the bodies of the officers killed five days previously.

Vultures by the score covered the battlefield feeding on the dead horses and the men, who had been buried hastily in three huge pits, scattered over half-a-mile of ground. "The men would dig for quarter of an hour", says Marling of this disgusting work, "and then be violently sick. To show how fierce the fight had been one helmet had five bullet holes in it, and many had two or three".<sup>21</sup> Only Lieutenant Maurice O'Connell was recognisable. Marling could see no sense in this business, but perhaps Colley was sensitive still to the criticisms made of Lord Chelmsford in leaving the dead at Isandlwana unburied for so long. Morale was at a low ebb after Schuinshoogte. One veteran officer voiced his opinion that Colley ought not to be trusted with a corporal's guard on active service, and Marling wrote in his diary (10 February):

"The General telegraphed home the fight at Ingogo was a success — we certainly did pass the mails through to Newcastle and remained on the field of battle, but one or two more Pyrrhic victories like that and we shan't have any army left at all. As it is, we are not more than 700 strong at the most now, not much of a force to advance in an enemy's country as large as the whole of the United Kingdom".<sup>22</sup>

Colley was powerless, having lost his entire staff except for the indestructible Major Essex (acting as Brigade Major), and his personal A.D.C., Hamilton. Nor was it only a case of depressed morale, at this stage of the fighting, due to Colley's incurring heavy casualties in mismanaged actions. There was also the sense of insecurity because of the low numbers of men he left to defend the base camp at Mount Prospect. It was held by only 200 soldiers, some of them barely effective, during Laingsnek, while no more than 150 men defended it when Colley was so hotly engaged with the Boers at Schuinshoogte. The camp was truly vulnerable to attack on 8-9 February, but perhaps Colley was willing to gamble on his knowledge that the Boers were always hesitant to attack a prepared and fortified position. It puts in a different light G.R. Duxbury's remark that "it should have been apparent to Colley that the Boers were prepared to meet him on any ground".<sup>23</sup>

So, finally, to Majuba. At the very time that the Boers were securing their total success, Marling was writing a letter in camp. He had seen Colley's mixed force set out on the night of 26 February:

"Fortunately the night was very dark and there was no moon. At 9.30 off they marched with 3 days' rations of biscuits and entrenched themselves on a hill to our left front (Majuba). Directly it was light the Boers discovered what had happened and our troops have been engaged since about 5.30 a.m. this morning, firing is still going on as I write. 12 noon. A message has just come in to say that poor Romilly, commander of the Naval Brigade, is seriously wounded. I never saw such a wonderful thing as the Heliograph . . .

Very heavy firing is going on at this minute".<sup>24</sup>

The first hint of the magnitude of the débâcle came at about 2 p.m. when a wounded sailor reached Mount Prospect with news that the troops had been driven off the mountain. "He said it had taken him five bloody hours to get up Majuba, but he only touched the ground five bloody times on the way down".<sup>25</sup> The summary of events on the summit given by Col. Herbert Stewart (who was Chief of Staff to Colley) deserves more quotation than it gets:

Now say goodbye. Best  
 love dear Grandfather to  
 yourself and all at the  
 Park and Durbidge.  
 I remain  
 Ever your most affectionate grandson  
 Percival Scrope Marling  
 P.S. I hope you  
 will excuse  
 the bad  
 writing, but  
 I haven't time  
 as my lines  
 are of course I  
 have no table.

My Tent  
 Camp Mount Prospect  
 60 miles north of Newcastle  
 Transvaal  
 South Africa  
 Sunday 10.30 a.m.  
 Feb 27<sup>th</sup> 1881

My dearest Grandfather  
 I take this opportunity of  
 writing as I don't know how long it  
 may be, before I have an other. Some  
 very important movements are being  
 made today and I expect we shall  
 fight either tomorrow or the day after.  
 For the last week shots have been  
 exchanged every day and there have  
 been constant alarms, and the guns  
 have been kept ready to start & the  
 troops to fall in at any moment. On

"There was a complete panic in the front line; they retired and, the reserves being advanced at the same time, the greatest confusion resulted. The line then retired behind a ledge of rocks, but it was impossible to get the men steady and to fire properly, notwithstanding the exertions of the officers. The line at last broke and fled. Sir G. Colley was retiring slowly the last of everyone waving a handkerchief when he was shot".<sup>26</sup>

Again, as at Schuinshoogte, it was the wounded who fully experienced the horrors of war. Surgeon Edward Mahon, of the Naval Brigade, narrowly escaped being shot down while attending the wounds of Commander Romilly, R.N., then carried him to where the other casualties lay:

"When about half-way across we were surrounded by Boers, who were with great difficulty prevented from shooting the Commander as he lay, they being under the idea that he was either Sir Garnet Wolseley or Sir Evelyn Wood . . . I had all the wounded, 36 in number, placed on one spot near the well, and luckily we found blankets and just enough waterproof sheets to cover them all. All we had to give them was water and a little opium, the Boers having taken all our brandy. It now commenced to rain heavily, and continued to do so without intermission during the whole night, which much aggravated the sufferings of the wounded. It also became bitterly cold towards morning".<sup>27</sup>

Predictably, letters from survivors of the Majuba fighting are thin on the ground, but an important one comes from Major Thomas Fraser of the Royal Engineers. He served as Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General to Colley, and after the battle he was the senior surviving officer, of all those who saw what happened at the summit, fit enough to write an official report for Evelyn Wood, who praised him in despatches. Fraser also wrote a private letter on 2 March:

"I never had such a climb before, but we (the General, Stewart, and I) knew what we risked if we failed to reach the top in time, and before daylight. So I shoved on, on my hands and knees. Colley was so eager, he followed close behind Stewart. As we neared the top, remembering we had seen the night before a picquet on the point we were approaching, I took a rifle from a 58th man behind, and got on top at 3.40 a.m., feeling rather foolish at finding no one. I at once extended the 58th as they came up . . . The men were very done, and the General too."

So to the moment of crisis, after noon:

"The Boers now advanced on us in great numbers, firing with extraordinary rapidity. The two Highlanders on my right and left fell dead, shot through the head as they rose to fire. We could see nothing but rifle muzzles and smoke. I looked to the General and saw him with a cluster of men round him, with his face to the enemy, retiring, about twenty yards from the line. It was just then he was shot dead through the forehead."<sup>28</sup>

In view of what happened at Majuba, it is ironic to read back through Colley's letters; for instance, in early February he wrote: "I hope it will not be long before I have force enough to terminate this hateful war".<sup>29</sup> As events turned out, he did not at any time secure a mastery of the military

situation, while his unfortunate soldiers did not receive so much as a clasp or a medal for their pains, despite the ferocity of the fighting in which they took part.

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NOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> Thomas Fortescue Carter, *A narrative of the Boer War, its causes and results*, 1882, pp. 157-9.
- <sup>2</sup> The war is not included in Peter Johnson, *Front Line Artists*, 1978, but there is a substantial coverage of events in 1880-1 by R.J. Wilkinson-Latham, *From our special correspondent: Victorian war correspondents and their campaigns*, 1979, pp. 159-68. The best concise account is by Brian Bond, *Victorian military campaigns*, 1967, pp. 201-40, 'The South African War, 1880-81'.
- <sup>3</sup> The first poem appeared in *Punch* for 7 May 1881, p. 210, and the other, entitled 'On the Majuba Hill', in *Punch* for 12 March 1881, p. 114.
- <sup>4</sup> See Frank Emery, *The Red Soldier. Letters from the Zulu War, 1879*, 1977, and 'From the seat of war. Letters by Victorian soldiers', *History Today*, vol. 31, June 1981, pp. 26-31.
- <sup>5</sup> P.S. Marling, *Rifleman and Hussar*, 1931, p. 40.
- <sup>6</sup> Morris's letter was printed in the supplement to the *Northampton Mercury*, Saturday, 19 March 1881, under the title 'The disaster at Laing's Nek. A Northamptonshire man's account of the fight'. Details of movements and casualties may be found in Russell Gurney, *History of the Northamptonshire Regiment*, 1935, pp. 260-5.
- <sup>7</sup> Coombs wrote his letter at Mount Prospect on 17 February, and it appeared in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* for 5 April 1881.
- <sup>8</sup> Marling, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- <sup>10</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 5 April 1881.
- <sup>11</sup> Marling, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
- <sup>12</sup> G.R. Duxbury, 'The Battle of Schuinshoogte, 8 February 1881', *Military History Journal*, (South African National Museum of Military History), vol. 5, no. 2, First War of Independence, 1880-1881, Centenary issue, December 1980, pp. 72-4.
- <sup>13</sup> Marling, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-9.
- <sup>14</sup> Sir William F. Butler, *The Life of Sir George Pomeroy Colley, 1835-1881*, 1899, pp. 418-20.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 415.
- <sup>16</sup> Marling, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
- <sup>17</sup> Duxbury, *art. cit.*, p. 73.
- <sup>18</sup> Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 420.
- <sup>19</sup> Emery, *op. cit.*, 1977, pp. 196-9.
- <sup>20</sup> Marling, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- <sup>23</sup> Duxbury, *art. cit.*, p. 74.
- <sup>24</sup> Gloucestershire Record Office, Gloucester: D873, C110; See plate on page 24 of this article.
- <sup>25</sup> Marling, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
- <sup>26</sup> S.G.P. Ward (ed.), 'Majuba, 1881. The diary of Colonel W.D. Bond, 58th Regiment', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, L111, no. 214, Summer 1975, p. 95.
- <sup>27</sup> Mahon's official letter to Commodore Richards, R.N., was printed in full in *The Army and Navy Gazette* for 7 May 1881.
- <sup>28</sup> Fraser's letter is printed on pages 39-40 of volume two of Whitworth Porter's *History of the Corps of Royal Engineers* (1889). The details of his somewhat miraculous escape down the western slopes of Majuba are borne out by the excellent discussion of the engagement by Major G. Tylden, 'A study in attack: Majuba, 27th February, 1881', *Journal of the Society of Army Historical Research*, XXXIX, no. 157, March 1961, pages 27-36.
- <sup>29</sup> Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 315.