

# RORKE'S DRIFT LECTURE

by Rob Caskie

Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2010

The Anglo-Zulu War began on 11 January 1879 when the British Army, commanded by Lord Chelmsford, invaded the Zulu Kingdom in an attempt to extend British control in South Africa. Eleven days later, after severely underestimating Zulu fighting capability, the British suffered an overwhelming defeat at Isandlwana with the loss of 1,350 men. During the invasion, Lord Chelmsford was camped some 10 miles to the east of Isandlwana near a crossing in Natal known as Rorke's Drift. Opposite his camp was a small Swedish Mission Station had been established as a trading store-cum-mission comprising of a small stone dwelling-house and chapel which Chelmsford promptly appropriated as a field hospital and supply store.

A group of Zulu Impi warriors who had played little part in the battle at Isandlwana, goaded their commander Prince Dabulamanzi kaMapande to disobey orders from his brother King Cetshwayo, to cross the river into Natal and attack the mission. The defence of the mission at Rorke's Drift began on the 22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> of January 1879 and was an epic battle fought against impossible odds by a small force of 139 British Infantrymen and Natal irregulars under the command of Lieutenants John Chard of the Royal Engineers and Gronville Bromhead of 24<sup>th</sup> (2<sup>nd</sup> Warwickshire) Regiment.

Over the course of the action, the British soldiers were mercilessly pinned down by a fearsome and overwhelming force of some 4,500 Zulu warriors. The British were ill-prepared for this attack and to connect the mission buildings they constructed makeshift fortifications using sacks of corn and an inner barricade made from biscuit boxes. They tirelessly repelled the Zulu onslaught throughout the night displaying extraordinary courage and tenacity until an armed detachment arrived from Isandlwana. Through their heroic action the soldiers restored British honour.

In recognition of their valour in what was to become the most famous action of the Zulu War, eleven Victoria Crosses - the highest number ever conferred in a single action- together with five Distinguished Conduct Medals were awarded.

## Event Details

**Time:** 6.30 pm Reception  
7.00 pm Lecture *followed by a Buffet supper at approx 8.15 pm*

**Cost:** Reception & Lecture: Members - £25.00 Guests - £35.00  
Reception/Lecture & Supper Members - £55.00 Guests - £65.00 per person

**To Book:** Kindly complete the booking form below and return with a cheque to the Membership Secretary by 20<sup>th</sup> September 2010. To book and pay by Debit Card, please call Frances Watt on 0207 659 0906 with your debit card details. Payment may also be made by Credit Card however a 2% transaction fee will be charged.

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To: Miss Frances Watt, The Cavalry and Guards Club, 127 Piccadilly, London W1J 7PX

### Club Lecture & Buffet Supper - Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2010

**Name:** [please print] .....

**Tel N°:** ..... **Email:** .....

I would like to attend:  The Reception & Lecture with ..... guest(s)  
(please ✓ as appropriate)  The Reception/ Lecture & Buffet Supper with ..... guest(s)

Enclosed is a cheque (made payable to 'The Cavalry and Guards Club') for £..... or Debit Card details may be inserted on the reverse of this booking form

**Kindly print the names of your guests on the reverse of this slip.**

No tickets will be issued for this event