

The 24th Foot in 1879: A Medal Price Comparison

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All medals to the 24th Foot for the Anglo-Zulu War carry a premium over every other unit that served and fought in this war. The premium for 24th Foot medals is quite clear; the minimum price for a 24th Foot medal is £810, whereas most other units are £160 to £515 cheaper (Table 1).

If the first rule of medal collecting is *caveat emptor*, the second should be ‘do your research’ especially when being asked to pay a large premium. This article will examine the history of the 24th Foot during the war to try and explain this large premium. The medal awarded for the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 covers the period 1877 to 1879 to include the campaigns in the eastern Cape and against the baPedi north of Zululand. Various dated clasps were awarded to denote a soldier’s period of service. The clasp ‘1879’ was issued solely for the Anglo-Zulu War of January to September 1879. A medal without a clasp was also issued for service in Natal only from January to September 1879; the recipient did not cross into Zululand.

We are only concerned with the medals awarded solely for the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, i.e. those with the clasp ‘1879’ and no clasp medals. The price comparison excludes medals for service prior to the Anglo-Zulu War because many units that fought in the war did not have prior service, they only qualified for the no clasp or ‘1879’ clasp medal. The 1st battalion 24th Foot had been involved in the eastern Cape wars from 1877, so by 1879 most were true veterans with real service behind them and they would qualify for the ‘1877-8-9’ clasp. The 2nd battalion arrived in 1878 but they were given the wrong clasp, ‘1877-8-9’ instead of ‘1878-9’. A small number of men from both battalions served in the Imperial Mounted Infantry (IMI).

As we are excluding the medals earned by the veterans of the 24th Foot, why are the medals of the relatively less experienced men who earned the ‘1879’ clasp and no clasp medals twice the price of other units involved in the war?

These men of the 24th Foot did not fight at Isandlwana or Rorke’s Drift on January 22nd-23rd. Those that fought at Isandlwana and Rorke’s Drift are well known and their medals carry multi-thousand pound price tags. When the two battalions of the 24th Foot invaded Zululand as part of number 3 column three companies of the 1st battalion were left behind, 2 at Helpmekaar and 1 in southern Natal on the coast, and one company of the 2nd battalion was left at Rorke’s Drift. Of the invading companies 550 were killed, just six survived from the 1st battalion. The majority of the 2nd battalion survived as they had the good fortune to have been taken by the British commander, Lord Chelmsford, on a reconnaissance on the day the camp was overrun. They had, though, to spend the night on the battlefield sleeping, if at all possible, amidst the carnage that results from hand to hand combat.

By January 23rd all that was left of the 1st battalion were the three companies in Natal who were not at Isandlwana or Rorke’s Drift. The 2nd battalion, the majority of which had seen no real fighting on their brief foray into Zululand, had returned to Natal. What happened to the remnants of the 24th Foot after January 23rd is less well known because they were not closely involved in the remainder of the Anglo-Zulu war. Historians have

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focused on the fighting troops and peripheral units, as the 24th Foot became, were lost to view.

The two companies of the 1st battalion at Helpmekaar moved to Dundee where they formed the cadre for the re-constitution of the battalion. Five hundred and twenty men were raised in England from the depot and volunteers from other regiments to re-form the 1st battalion. They nearly didn't get to Natal as their transport HMS Clyde hit a reef off Simon's Bay at low tide. Fortunately the weather was calm and everyone was evacuated safely. When the tide rose the ship sank and all stores were lost. The men re-embarked on the Tamar and eventually got to Dundee on May 4th. Of the 2nd battalion in Natal, four companies garrisoned the newly built Fort Melvill close to Rorke's Drift.

Meanwhile general reinforcements were being sent from England to enable Chelmsford to invade a second time with overwhelming numbers. The second invasion of Zululand began in May and the reconstituted 1st battalion formed part of Lord Chelmsford's column. Chelmsford headed for the royal kraal at Ulundi to fight a single decisive battle. On the way forts were built to secure his supply line (and line of retreat). Companies of the 1st battalion were left to guard these. When the day of reckoning came on July 3rd it was the turn of the 1st battalion to guard camp. They did not fight at Ulundi. The only soldiers of the regiment to fight were those of the IMI. The 2nd battalion did not invade Zululand again. Their only notable activity in this period was to provide a guard of honour and escort for the body of the Prince Imperial on its way back to England. One can argue that for the 2nd battalion the only fighting it saw was some skirmishing in early January and this did not involve the whole battalion.

After the battle of Ulundi the 1st battalion moved straight back to Natal and in August embarked for England. On arrival 700 men were discharged time expired, medically unfit or returned to their original regiments. The 2nd battalion lingered in Natal, H and F companies crossed into Zululand escorting the new commander-in-chief, Sir Garnet Wolseley, and to garrison forts. On their return they went to Isandlwana to bury their dead; the dead from other units had been buried in May. B company also crossed into Zululand to garrison a fort. By September these companies had been withdrawn from Zululand and the battalion embarked for Gibraltar.

It is clear that the bulk of the 24th Foot men who were awarded '1879' clasp and no clasp medals arrived in Natal after January 23rd and had no part in earlier events, or were not even part of the regiment at that time.

The relative numbers of '1879' clasp and no clasp medals awarded to each battalion bear this out. In a rough count from Holme's *Medal Rolls of the 24th Foot* (JB Hayward & Son 1971) excluding those marked 'dead' and 'no medal issued' the numbers are:

Battalion	No clasp	'1879' clasp
1	32	527*
2	261	131

* Incidentally three of these men survived Isandlwana

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For the prospective purchaser of a 24th Foot medal with the clasp '1879' the likely service the soldier saw in the war was:

- 1st Battalion: if the man wasn't killed at Isandlwana then he wasn't there and is a reinforcement who saw no fighting with the 24th Foot but was certainly part of the second invasion force. As over 700 men left the regiment on its return to England many of these men served less than a year with the battalion.
- 2nd Battalion: this man may have been part of Chelmsford's reconnaissance on the day of Isandlwana otherwise he garrisoned a fort in Zululand but saw no fighting.

No clasp medals to the 24th Foot are easier – the soldier was almost certainly a reinforcement arriving after January 1879. Not only were these soldiers not at Rorke's Drift or Isandlwana, but they never entered the war zone - Zululand.

With '1879' clasp medals to the 2nd battalion it is important to distinguish those who were part of the first invasion force from those who joined the battalion after January 23rd. Given only 131 '1879' clasp medals were awarded I venture the vast majority of these men joined after January 23rd. The way to resolve this question is by reference to the soldier's service papers or muster rolls held at the National Archives. This is not as daunting as it sounds thanks to the work of the late Norman Holme. He published a number of reference works on the 24th Foot during the war. It is his last publication, *'The Noble 24th'* (Savannah Publications 1999) that is invaluable because it is a biographical medal roll for the 24th Foot. Not only does it give the medal and clasp entitlement, but also for many a summary of the man's military career, which comes primarily from the service papers. Holme is not totally comprehensive, he doesn't give career details for every soldier whose papers exist at the Archives, but this book is a great place to start if one can't get to the Archives. No source is infallible, but if it cannot be proved that a man was present with Lord Chelmsford on January 22nd then the purchaser must realise the fact that the soldier in question may not have been there. *'The Noble 24th'* is also very useful for spotting altered or otherwise incorrect medals which given the premium are very expensive duds.

Why should there be a premium for 24th Foot medals with no clasp and the '1879' clasp when the soldier did not fight at Isandlwana, Rorke's Drift or see any action?

The premium is due entirely to 'association'. Some dealers invoke this association without offering any evidence of research, phrases such as "The immortal 1-24th" or "own a medal to the famed 24th Foot" are used as window dressing. Whether 'association' should command a premium is highly subjective and every dealer and purchaser will have their own opinion. In my view it is a tenuous association at best. Is it important that a soldier may have shared a mess with a Rorkes Drift defender or one of those who slept on the ghastly battlefield after Isandlwana? Interesting yes. Important in pricing a medal? Doubtful. The Victorian Army is full of possible associations: the Light Brigade, 'the Thin Red Line', 66th Foot and 21st Lancers to name a few. The price of 24th

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Foot medals seems to suffer in the extreme. Does one buy a medal for the real history of the soldier who earned it for an unproven and tenuous association? Would you pay £1,000 for a Rolex watch in a Bangkok market? It looks like a Rolex and it tells the time but that is merely superficial in the same way a medal is inscribed '24th Foot'.

The premium appears even more unwarranted when one looks at Table 2 to compare the fighting record of units whose medals are less expensive than 24th Foot medals whose soldiers saw no action after January 23rd. Additionally many units stayed on to see service against the baPedi and the Boers in the 1st Anglo-Boer War for which no medal was awarded but included such noteworthy actions as the siege of Potchefstroom, Majuba, Laings Nek and Bronkhorstspuit. Medals for these regiments are a third to half the price of a 24th Foot medal.

At the extreme you can buy three medals to fighting units for one 24th Foot medal for a man who may very well have not seen any action. Some premium rated 24th Foot medals appear in the same lists alongside the more reasonably priced medals.

Of course there is no proof that a soldier with the '1879' clasp did see the service indicated – you need to do some research. But the point is, if you are collecting for a medal with some real war fighting history behind it then one of these is a better bet than a 24th Foot medal at, on average, twice the price.

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Unit	Rank	Clasp	Price (Sterling)
17th Lancers	Private	1879	£1,100.00
1/24 th (3 examples)	Private	1879	£960.00
2/24th *	Private	1879	£950.00
Army Chaplain	Reverend	1879	£900.00
2/24 th	Private	-	£810.00
17th Lancers	Private	1879	£740.00
2/21 st	Lance-Corporal	1879	£650.00
90 th	Private	1879	£630.00
88 th	Private	1879	£575.00
Royal Navy	Midshipman	-	£523.00
88 th	Private	1879	£475.00
94 th	Sergeant	1879	£475.00
1st (King's) Dragoon Guards	Corporal	1879	£465.00
Durban Mounted Rifles	Private	1879	£425.00
Royal Artillery	Driver	1879	£425.00
99 th	Private	1879	£415.00
1st (King's) Dragoon Guards	Private	1879	£395.00
57 th	Private	1879	£395.00
90 th	Private	1879	£385.00
Ferreira's Horse	Corporal	1879	£385.00
Army Service Corps	Private	1879	£375.00
Royal Artillery	Farrier Sergeant	1879	£350.00
Royal Engineers	Sapper	1879	£350.00
Transvaal Mounted Rifles	Sergeant-Major	1879	£300.00
Army Hospital Corps	Private	-	£295.00

* I believe this medal has the wrong clasp. The medal is offered as “bar confirmed on the roll” but the dealer concerned appears reluctant to tell me which roll they are using.

Table 1. ‘1879’ and no clasp medals offered for sale between December 2004 and December 2005 in price order

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Unit	Summary War Service February 1879-1881
Royal Navy	Natal/Zululand: Eshowe & Gingindlovu
17th Lancers	Second invasion: Ulundi
1 st (King's) Dragoon Guards	Second invasion: scouting, buried dead at Isandlwana
2/21 st	Second invasion: Ulundi (4 companies); 1 st Anglo-Boer War
1/24 th	Second invasion: no fighting
2/24 th	Natal/Zululand (3 companies): no fighting
57 th	Second invasion: Relief of Eshowe
88 th	First and Second invasion
90 th	First & Second invasion: Hlobane, Khambula & Ulundi; 1 st Anglo-Boer War
94 th	Second invasion: Ulundi; baPedi; 1 st Anglo-Boer War
99 th	First & Second invasion: Eshowe & Gingindlovu
Royal Artillery	Natal/Zululand; 1 st Anglo-Boer War
Royal Engineers	Natal/Zululand; 1 st Anglo-Boer War
Army Service Corps	Natal/Zululand; 1 st Anglo-Boer War
Army Hospital Corps	Natal/Zululand; 1 st Anglo-Boer War
Chaplains	Natal/Zululand
Ferreira's Horse	First invasion: Hlobane & Khambula
Transvaal Mounted Rifles	First invasion: Hlobane & Khambula

Table 2. A Guide to the War Service of Units in Table 2 February 1879-1881
This has not been easy to compile, apologies for any errors and omissions.