

Colour Sergeant Frank Bourne

The 1964 film *Zulu* was based on the heroics in 1879 of a contingent of 122 of the Warwickshire Regiment at Rorke's Drift in Natal, South Africa fighting off attacks by a force over 3,000 warriors seeking to protect their homeland from the British invaders. There is a memorable portrayal of Bourne by the actor Nigel Green perfectly typecast to play the role of the backbone of the British Army – the senior non-commissioned officer.

The Regiment was based in Brecon and later became the South Wales Borderers; thus the haunting use in the film of Men of Harlech to balance the stamping feet and beating shields of the unbelievably brave Zulu warriors who, armed only with their assegais (stabbing shields) threw themselves at the British guns. Nigel Green's memorable portrayal in the film was inaccurate: Green was 40 and tall; Bourne was 5' 6" and 24 years old – the youngest NCO in the battle.



For his part in the defence of Rorke's Drift, Bourne received the Distinguished Service Medal, the second highest award after the Victoria Cross. He was also offered a commission but had to decline for he was the youngest of eight sons and his family could not afford the mess fees and other expenses demanded of the officer class. But he stayed in the army which he had joined in 1872 at the age of 18. After Rorke's Drift, Bourne saw service in India and Burma reaching the rank of Quarter-Master Sergeant in 1884.

Subsequently he became a commissioned officer and in 1901, aged 45, he had reached the rank of Captain and was the Adjutant at the famous School of Musketry in Hythe. Ten years later he had returned to England and in the 1911 Census he was living in 26 Queen's Road, Beckenham when he described himself as Retired Army Officer. By 1914 he had moved to 16 King's Hall Road by when he had become an honorary Major.



During World War One, when 60 years of age, Bourne returned to the colours serving as Adjutant in the School of Musketry in Dublin. He finally retired fully in 1914, with the honorary rank of Lt. Colonel and the award of the OBE, returning to King's Hall Road where he lived until 1930. He died on VE Day, 8th May 1945 and is buried with his wife Eliza in Beckenham Cemetery.

In 2001 the London Borough of Bromley put a blue plaque on Bourne's King's Hall Road home in an international event. See

http://www.rorkesdriftvc.com/events/bourne_plaque.htm