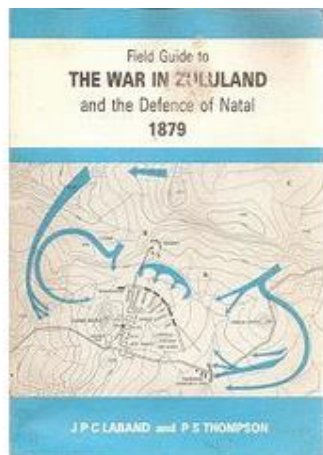


# **'Field Guide to the War in Zululand and the Defence of Natal 1879'**

**By J.P.C. Laband and P.S. Thompson**

## **Review by Rob Morgan**

Our splendid librarian pointed me in the direction of a gift to the library from a student who had returned to South Africa after graduating; this being Wales, he'd obviously immersed himself in the culture of our small nation and seen the film 'Zulu,' from the inscription in the book. It must have impressed him, as it did me when my Dad took me in 1963. When Ivor Emmanuel began the strains of 'Men of Harlech,' the men in the audience stood and sang with him. Of course, most of them, like my father and uncles, had served in the 24<sup>th</sup> Foot, the South Wales Borderers, naturally.



Anyway, the departed student, whom I never met, sent a few books over, and one is a 'Field Guide to The War in Zululand and the Defence of Natal 1879,' published by the University of and written by J.P.C. Laband and P.S. Thompson. It's an A4 paperback book, 125 pages long and very well illustrated. The cartography and line drawings are quite magnificent!

The authors provide a brief background to the war, and a description of the Zulu military system and of the British and colonial system which they faced. Their account of the opposing strategies is interesting, Cetshwayo's being to get the foreigners off his land, and that of the British to grab everything they could, while also fearing a huge attack deep into colonial territory by an army they didn't know or understand! In fact, the Zulu could have raided as far as Ladysmith or Pietermaritzburg, given the nature of their forces and what opposed them. There were raids, of course, such as the 1,000-warrior attack on Middle Drift as late as June 1879. British columns raided too, of course, with mixed success between March and May 1879, across the Buffalo River.

The field operations are dealt with in a short and competent section, and then the sites of the war are classified. There's the best campaign map of the war I've ever seen, and a full list of fortifications built in 1879. Some 26 forts, such as Fort Albert and Fort George, were built in Zulu territory; while over 50 more forts, such as Fort Durnford, and defended laagers were built across the Colonial Defensive Districts. Not Surprisingly, Rorke's Drift became a fort within weeks after the battle there.

If there is an aspect of this book which makes it invaluable to the Zulu War gamer, it's the astonishing detail provided for these fortifications, and apart from a handful vanished under modern development, most survive in a recognisable state! There were many temporary laagers and small stoneworks of a temporary nature too, of course.

After Isandhlwana, the British army fought this war from behind strong walls and powerful ordnance!

Dozens of pages with detailed plans, dimensions and distances are given over to the forts and laagers, and there's enough detail for any competent wargamer to scratchbuild a small example, such as the tiny Fort Cambridge or the less ambitious Strydpoort laager.

There are battle maps, and lists of opposing forces and their casualties for all the engagements, from the very well known, such as Ulundi and Isandhlwana, to the lesser and sometimes inconclusive encounters such as the Battle of Ntombe on March 12, 1879, and the might-have-been-conclusive Battle of Nyezane, in which British rocket batteries proved effective.

The book ends with a truly incredible list of references and further reading. Not surprisingly, they suggest Donald Morris's "The Washing of the Spears" as a core source book and that hasn't changed in my opinion since it was published as long ago as 1966. Laband and Thompson suggest a number of articles, and of shorter publications from the Victorian Military Society, Society for Army Historical research, and Military History Journal. There are numerous South African publications, which are unlikely to become available elsewhere, among them works on the Volunteer Regiments of Natal, and the Mounted Police and Mounted Rifles. There are several titles listed on the Natal Native Contingent and associated units, and so thorough is this list it even suggests a title by Don Featherstone!

An exceptional title, and one of immense value to the colonial wargamer.

10 out of 10!