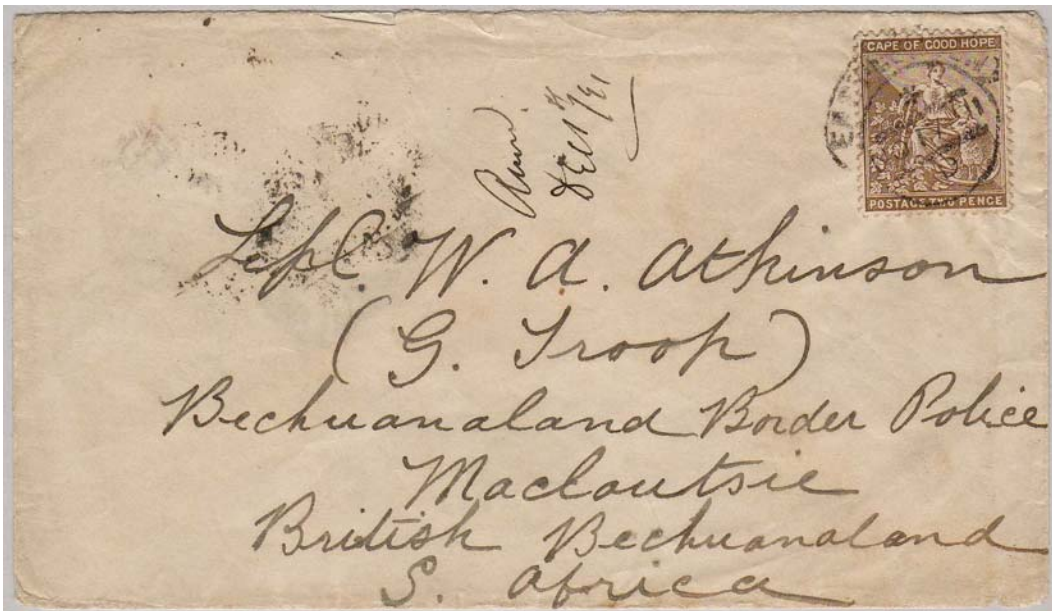


ATKINSON CORRESPONDENCE
Research notes





A number of examples of correspondence from Lance Corporal W A Atkinson (G Troop) have appeared on the philatelic market (2008). First stationed at Macloutsie, and later at Fort Gaberones, he received mail from East London each addressed in the same handwriting.

Peter Thy writes: "Three typical examples are shown here, all franked with 2d and cancelled with hooted or regular Port Elizabeth dated cancellers. The cover addressed to Macloutsie received transit marks at Fourteen Streams, Vryburg, and Mafeking and a receiving mark at Macloutsie and this provide excellent information on mail route and schedules. Many of the covers were taxed at 2d or 4d and may record a 1892 rate change in the Cape for early Bechuanaland Protectorate mail".

The following notes are in support of future research relating thereto.

BECHUANALAND BORDER POLICE (BBP) was an Imperial unit raised on 4 August 1885 by then Lt. Col. Frederick Carrington ¹ of the South Wales Borderers, with a strength of 500 men. Their weaponry included Martini-Henry rifles equipped with a bayonets and Maxim automatic machine guns.

¹ Born Cheltenham, England 23rd August 1844; died Cheltenham 22 March 1913.

In 1887, Frank William Frederick Johnson with Maurice Heany and Henry Borrow (ex-members of the BBP) organized a group known as the Northern Gold Fields Exploration syndicate which won a concession from Chief Khama covering all mineral rights in Bechuanaland.

In 1889, Johnson met Cecil John Rhodes in Kimberley. He was awarded a contract to organize, equip and lead the Pioneer Corps, a group of circa two hundred-odd men whose goal it was to occupy Mashonaland, build a road between Palapye and Mount Hampden (later Fort Salisbury) and essentially prepare the way for colonization and exploitation of the concession ². Of the order of one hundred-and-fifty men from BBP Troops A, B & C were enrolled to escort the Pioneer Column, this force being officially designated the "British South Africa Company Police" ³.

The BBP later participated in the First Matabele War (1893) and the Shangani Patrol (November-December 1893); and are reported to have been the first armed force to use Maxim automatic machine guns in skirmishes. In 1895/6, a few BBP men were captured participating in the Jameson Raid ⁴.

The BRITISH SOUTH AFRICA POLICE was formed on or about October 8th, 1896 by an amalgamation of BECHUANALAND BORDER POLICE (Division I), MATABELELAND MOUNTED POLICE (Division II) ⁵ and MASHONALAND MOUNTED POLICE (Division III) ⁶.

² W Ellerton Fry, former Secretary and Computer of the Royal Observatory, Cape Town; and Lieutenant-Intelligence Officer of the British South Africa Company's Expeditionary Force, documented this journey in writing, photograph and diagram. In Murray, R W. South Africa: etc. pg. 167-192, he includes a hand-drawn map of the route taken from Macloutsie River to Fort Salisbury between June - September, 1890. Some of his exceptional photographs were published as a collection entitled Fry, William Ellerton . Occupation of Mashonaland: views by W. Ellerton Fry. Publ: unknown. October 1891. The book is exceptionally rare, numbering of the order of a dozen copies world-wide.

³ Nominal Rolls of those members of the BSAC Police who escorted the Pioneer Column was published in 1982. Named Headquarters Officers & Staff numbered 24; A Troop, 56; B Troop, 58; C Troop, 36; Transport Troop, 12; Civilians, 37. The following remark is made in the text: "Although members of D & E Troops played an important role and were entitled to inclusion in the British South Africa Company's 1890 Pioneer Column Medal Roll, the fact that they did not march with the Pioneers explains their exclusion." Ref: Fry, William Ellerton . Occupation of Mashonaland : views by W. Ellerton Fry. With the addition of maps, new text and captions; biography and a bibliography prepared by Peter McLaughlin. Publ: Books of Zimbabwe, Bulawayo: 1982.

⁴ The Jameson Raid (December 29, 1895 - January 2, 1896). Reeland, Charles John Headingham; Sergt. Greaves, Cecil Goldsmid; Cpl, Dobson, Joseph; Lance-Sergt, Newik, Henry - G Troop.

⁵ This unit was raised and equipped after the Matabele War of 1893 when the columns were disbanded on arrival at Bulawayo. Lieutenant W. Bodle raised 150 men to form the nucleus of the unit.

⁶ This unit was raised and equipped after the Matabele War of 1893. It was organised on the basis of a small cavalry regiment which was supported by an establishment of African Auxiliaries. It also took part in the Jameson Raid.

The RHODESIA FIELD FORCE was an Imperial corps of approximately 5000 soldiers under the command of Lt. General Sir Frederick Carrington, KCMG KCB. The corps was established at the request of the British South African Company, and the troops assembled from many different parts of the world. They arrived in Beira, Mozambique, early April and into May 1900. Initially, they were not allowed to disembark as Portugal had declared itself a neutral party in the Second Anglo-Boer War. However, with the occupation of Bloemfontein, and taking into account the diplomatic pressure that was being brought to bear by the British on Lisbon, the order to prevent disembarkation of the troops was rescinded.

Rhodesia was only 10 years old when the war broke out in October 1899, and its European population numbered less than 4 000. Yet, it is said that more than one-third of the males in that population saw service in the South African Republic (Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek, ZAR). They were in three units: the Mashonaland (No.3) and Matabeleland (No.2) Divisions of the BSAP; the Southern Rhodesia Volunteers (SRV) and the Rhodesia Regiment (RR).

Their initial role was defensive. Some 500 guarded the drifts over the Limpopo and Crocodile rivers, and were engaged in numerous skirmishes in the Tuli area when engaged by a force of between 1 300 and 2 000 boers from Pietersburg. When the Limpopo came down in flood in December 1899, the boers withdrew, never to return.

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