

Royal Lodge of Friendship – Famous Brethren



Bro. Nevill Josiah Aylmer Coghill VC.

(25 January 1852 – 22 January 1879)

Nevill Coghill was the eldest son of Sir John Joscelyn Coghill, Baronet, and his wife, the Hon. Katherine Frances, daughter of John Plunket, Baron Plunket. The painter Sir Egerton Coghill, Baronet, was his younger brother.

Coghill was educated at Haileybury. He was commissioned in the 24th Regiment and served as Aide-de-Camp to Sir Arthur Cunyninghame in the Galeka Campaign of 1877.

As a young Sub-Lieutenant in the 1st Battalion, 24th Regiment, the King's Own Scottish Borderers, Coghill aged 22 years, applied for and was accepted a member of the Lodge of Friendship No. 278. In the Masonic Register of members of our District he is recorded as having been initiated on the 2nd September 1874, passed on the 17th of the same month, and raised just a few weeks later, on the 7th October. Bro. Coghill's rapid initiation into the three degrees in such a short space of time, (including the holding of an emergency meeting for such a purpose) was due to the Battalion's imminent departure from the Garrison early in November.

Only a few months earlier another Lieutenant from the same Regiment had become a joining member of the Friendship Lodge, he was Lt. Teignmouth Melville the man with whom Goghill would later perish.

Coghill was twenty-six years old and a lieutenant in the 1st Battalion, 24th Regiment of Foot (later the South Wales Borderers), during the Zulu Wars, when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the VC.

Lt. Coghill was serving as Aide-de-Camp to Col. Glyn of the 24th Regiment of Foot (2nd Warwickshire Regiment / South Wales Borderers) during the Zulu War of 1879 in South Africa. During the battle of Isandhlwana, January 22, 1879, when the British force was about to be overrun, Lt. Coghill, having a knee injury and unable to walk, cut his way out on horseback. He reached the Buffalo River, where he found his brother officer, Lt. Melvill in the water, attempting to save the Queen's Colour of the 1st Battalion, 24th Regiment. Both men lost their horses and could only struggle to the far bank and up the slope, where they were surrounded and killed by the Zulus, after having exhausted their ammunition. Their bodies were later discovered side-by-side, and they were buried together where they fell.

The thin red line of the Borderers were no match for the thousands of well disciplined Zulu warriors who overwhelmed them at Isandhlwana. All the officers of the 24th and all but two of the men were killed in what was later to be immortalized by the film 'Zulu Dawn'.

A memorandum published on the *London Gazette* stated that:

‘...they would have been recommended to Her Majesty for the Victoria Cross had they survived.’

It would be twenty-eight years later before another *London Gazette* would officially announce the award of posthumous Victoria Crosses to Coghill and Melville.

As for the Regimental Colours, although briefly lost they were later recovered and restored to the 24th. The following year Queen Victoria decorated them with a wreath of immortelles, and to this day the Queen’s Colour Staff of the successor regiment carries a silver wreath of immortelles in memory of the Regiments valour and sacrifice at Isandhlwana.

The heroic actions of brothers Nevill Joseph Aylmer Coghill and Teignmouth Melville brought the total of Victoria Cross bearers from Friendship Lodge to four, a record for the number of Victoria Cross held by members in a particular Lodge.

He was played by Christopher Cazenove in the film *Zulu Dawn*.



Memorial to Lieutenants Coghill and Melville
at Fugitives Drift, KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa