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Isandlwana 1879

The great Zulu victory



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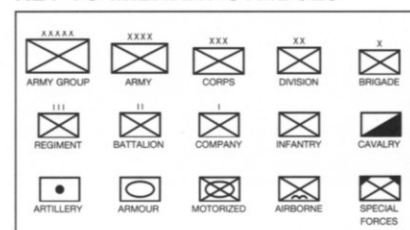
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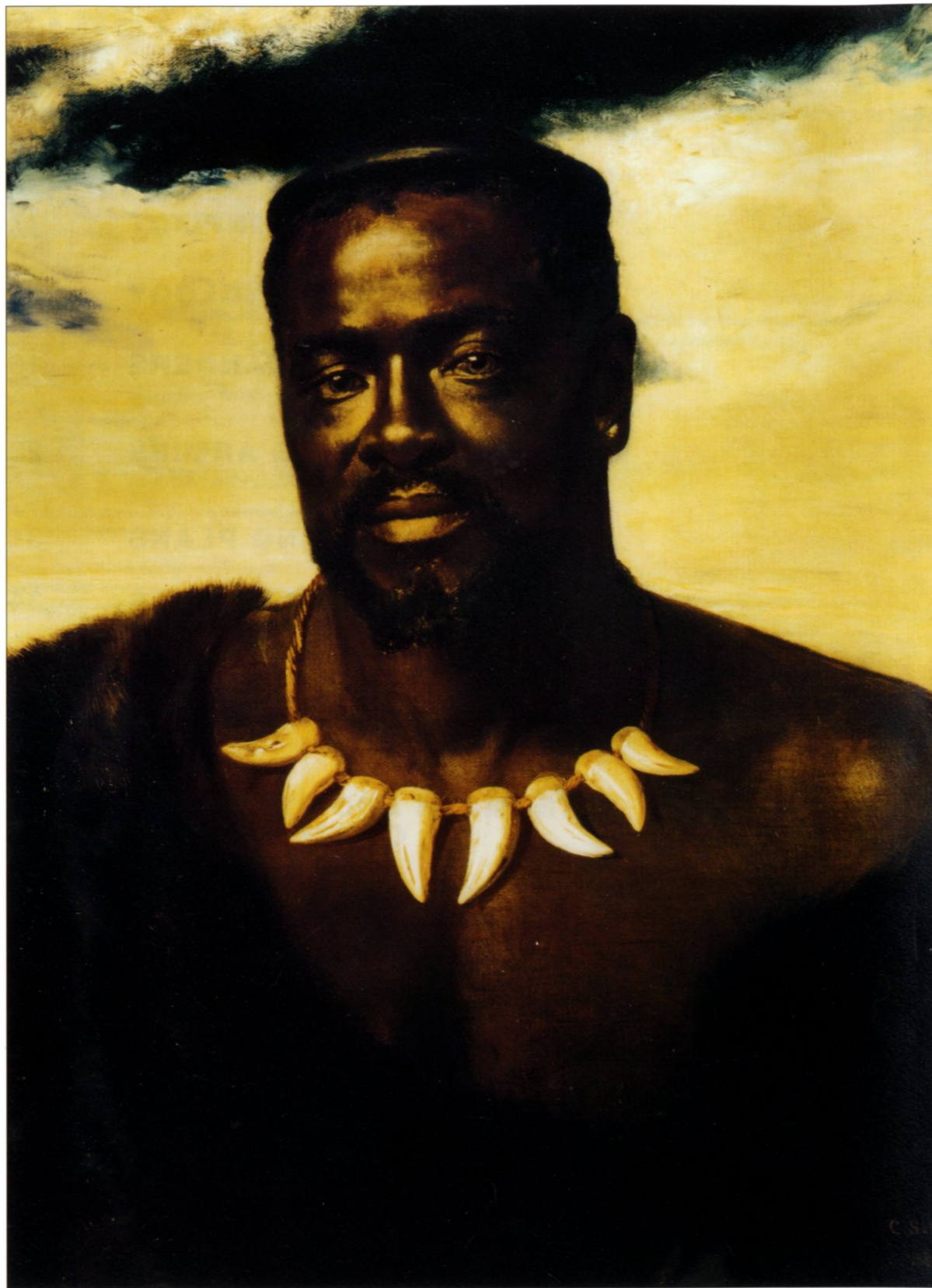
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KEY TO MILITARY SYMBOLS





LEFT King Cetshwayo kaMpande. A marvellous portrait painted at Queen Victoria's request by Carl Sohn, on the occasion of the king's visit to London in 1883. Cetshwayo's reign, from 1873, was marked by growing tension with his British neighbours. (Local History Museum, Durban)

ORIGINS OF THE CONFLICT

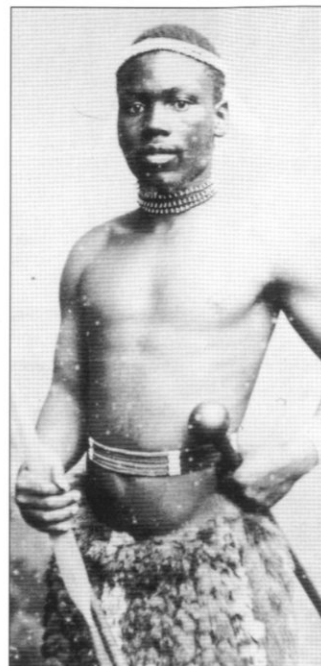
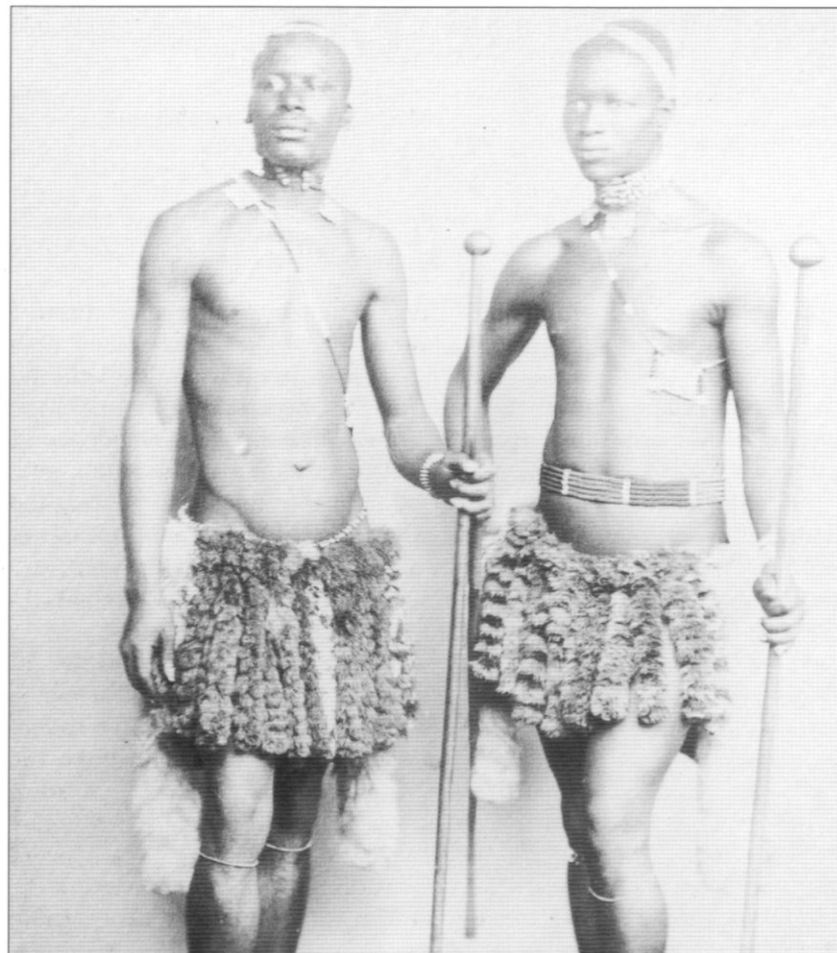
In September 1828, King Shaka kaSenzangakhona, the man who had first established the greater Zulu kingdom, was assassinated in a palace coup orchestrated by his brothers. In a story widely believed throughout Zululand over the next 50 years, he is said to have taunted his killers with a prophesy as he died. 'You will not rule this land when I am gone', he cursed them, 'for white men and locusts will come'.

This was, perhaps, the indignant bravado of a man about to die at the hands of his own family, but Shaka's words would resonate throughout Zulu history. For Shaka had already seen the first of the white men, and he had astutely judged their intentions. And, like locusts, they would one day eat up the kingdom he had created.

The Zulu kingdom had emerged between about 1818 and 1824. Its origins lay in a period of demographic upheaval, the cause of which remains obscure to this day. The area now known as Zululand lies on the eastern coastal seaboard of modern South Africa, between the Kahlamba mountains inland – known to the first white explorers to reach the area as the Drakensberg, or Dragon Mountains – and the Indian Ocean. To the north it is framed by the line of the Phongolo river, the Lebombo mountains, and the Maputaland flats, while its southern boundary, defined by patterns of settlement rather than political geography, is marked by the Mzimvubu river. In the middle of the eighteenth century, it was populated by African groups who spoke broadly the same language, and followed a similar culture centred upon

RIGHT A Zulu group photographed at about the time of the war. The young man, centre, is wearing festival dress, and carrying a personal war-shield; regimental war-shields were the property of the state, and were much larger. The senior men of the homestead can be identified by the *isicoco* headring, which symbolised adult status, and was adopted when permission to marry was granted by the king. (By courtesy of Michael Graham-Stewart)





ABOVE AND LEFT Two splendid studies of young Zulu men in the 1870s. These photos suggest something of the self-confidence of Zulu society on the eve of the war; men of young age groups, such as these, made up the bulk of the force which attacked Isandlwana. Note the stabbing spears and club carried by the individual top right. (Private Collection)

the raising of cattle. They were a polygamous people, and their political structures were characterised by localised authority administered by hereditary chiefs known as *amakhosi* (sing. *inkhosi*).

At some point during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, for reasons still hotly debated among historians today, the chiefdoms in the fertile northern reaches of this region were drawn into conflict, and radical new forms of government emerged. It began tentatively at first, with groups such as the Ndwandwe and Mthethwa extending a loose authority over weaker neighbours to whom they offered protection, but about 1816 the pace of change accelerated dramatically with the emergence of a new group, the Zulu. They lived on the south bank of the central reaches of the White Mfolozi river and were part of the Mthethwa hegemony, and indeed the Mthethwa had helped to establish the young Shaka on his throne. An adroit and ambitious politician, and a ruthless warrior, Shaka had soon emerged as a significant player in his own right. Exploiting the broader divisions between the Mthethwa and the Ndwandwe, Shaka was able to out-manoeuvre both, and by the time he died had extended Zulu control across a wide tract of country from the Black Mfolozi river in the north to beyond the Thukela river to the south.

The rapid expansion of Zulu authority established a pattern of administration which would last until colonial intervention and civil war

The advent of a colonial economy on the borders of Zululand led inexorably to conflict with the Zulu kingdom. White transport drivers and their African employees, c.1879. Wagons such as these provided the basis for most of Lord Chelmsford's transport requirements in 1879. (Private Collection)

destroyed it late in the century. Zululand remained a conglomeration of regional chiefdoms, but the *amakhosi* themselves were made subordinate to the authority of the king. Shaka had not hesitated to use force to break up particularly recalcitrant groups, and sometimes intervened in chiefly succession to raise up junior members of the royal house. Royal homesteads, known as *amakhanda* – literally 'heads', meaning of royal authority – were placed around the kingdom, and the king ruled through a council of the great chiefs. The most obvious manifestation of state authority was the *amabutho* system, by which young men from across the kingdom, regardless of their local loyalties, were required to give periodic service to the king, and thereby provided him, in their most acute form, with a powerful tool for external expansion and internal policing.

In many respects, the spectacular rise of the Zulu kingdom was responsible for its ultimate downfall. Rumours of the emergence of a powerful and rich African kingdom in the hinterland had reached the European world, not only the Portuguese trading enclave of Mozambique in the north, but had filtered as far south as British outposts on the eastern frontier of the Cape colony. While the southern tip of the African continent had been settled by the Dutch as early as 1652, the British were relative newcomers, having only taken control of the Cape in 1806 as part of their global strategy during the Napoleonic wars. By the mid-1820s, the fringes of many rival European empires were awash with adventurous young men made unemployed by the outbreak of peace, and the Cape was no different. In 1824 an ex-Royal Navy lieutenant by the name of Francis Farewell secured the capital to open commercial contact with the Zulus. Under the protection of King Shaka, he established a ramshackle trading settlement on the sand-dunes surrounding the Bay of Natal – now the modern city of





Sir Henry Edward Bartle Frere, High Commissioner to the Cape. Frere was sent to southern Africa to implement the Confederation policy. His belief that the Zulu kingdom threatened this policy led him to embark upon the invasion of 1879. (Ron Sheeley Collection)

Durban – and from this unlikely beginning did all British interests in the region stem.

The British government had no official interests in Natal during King Shaka's lifetime, but the political geography of the region changed dramatically in the years following his assassination. An exodus of Dutch-speaking settlers from the Cape Colony – the Boers – raised the spectre that Natal might pass under the influence of rival European powers, and in 1842 the British acted to secure control of the Bay. British and Boers fought a curious little battle among the sand-dunes, the Boers were ultimately defeated, and in 1843 the British formally annexed the region known as Natal to the Crown. An accord with the then Zulu king, Mpande kaSenzangakhona, established the line of the Mzinyathi and the Thukela rivers as the border between the two states.

The development of Natal remained inextricably bound up with its northern neighbour, however. White settlement grew slowly, while the majority African population were linked to the Zulu kingdom by ties of history which cast them in an essentially hostile role. Many groups who now found themselves under white authority had resisted incorporation into the Zulu kingdom during its expansionist phase, or had once been part of it but had chosen to place themselves under an alternative administration. Conversely, the gradual extension of the settler economy, in the form of trade or commercial hunting, undermined the economic controls which were implicit in the Zulu state system.

Nevertheless, for more than 30 years the relationship between British Natal and the Zulu kings remained amicable, and this situation only began to change when the British adopted a more aggressive policy following the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley in 1868. Hitherto, southern Africa had been considered by successive generations of Imperial strategists as a costly backwater, a cock-pit of local rivalries and a drain on Imperial resources. The prospect of mineral wealth, however, forced a re-appraisal of the region's potential, and the British government came to regard an extension of its authority as an essential



A Zulu induna and his headmen in full ceremonial regalia in the 1880s. Each regiment in the Zulu king's army had a distinctive ceremonial costume of feathers and furs. The men in the centre are carrying izihlangu – the big regimental war-shields.

prerequisite to economic development. To bring the disparate British colonies, Boer republics and beleaguered African kingdoms under one central infrastructure, the British government intended to implement a scheme known as Confederation, and in 1877 an experienced Imperial proconsul, Sir Henry Bartle Frere, was sent to the Cape to accomplish it.

Frere quickly came to the conclusion that the Zulu kingdom – the most powerful African state south of the Limpopo river – was a block on the road to Confederation. The first step in the scheme had seen the annexation of the Transvaal Republic to the British Crown, and with it the British had inherited a long-standing dispute between the Boers and the Zulus along a slice of land north of the upper Mzinyathi river. Frere regarded the existence of the robust Zulu military system as a threat to the Transvaal, and by implication to Natal. He considered that the break-up of the Zulu state would not only crush any lingering African resistance in the region, but reassure the reluctant Boers of the advantages of British rule. In this, his thinking was somewhat in advance of the government at home, who accepted that a degree of force was implicit in the Confederation plan, but who were reluctant to embark on a war in southern Africa in the short-term.

Frere was convinced, however, that the British forces already in southern Africa were sufficient to break the Zulu army. Seizing upon a number of minor border transgressions, which occurred in mid-1878, he presented an ultimatum to envoys of the Zulu king, Cetshwayo kaMpande, on the banks of the Lower Thukela river on 11 December 1878. Frere's ultimatum demanded that King Cetshwayo break up the *amabutho* system, and accept a British residence at his royal homestead. As Frere had calculated, the king could not comply, and on 11 January 1879 British troops invaded Zululand.

CHRONOLOGY

THE ANGLO-ZULU WAR TO 1 FEBRUARY 1879

1878

11 December British ultimatum delivered to Zulu representatives at the Lower Thukela Drift.

1879

- 6 January** British Left Flank (No. 4) Column establishes camp on the left bank of the Ncome (Blood) River, in territory claimed by the Zulu.
- 11 January** British ultimatum expires; British Centre (No. 3) Column crosses into Zululand at Rorke's Drift.
- 12 January** Centre column attacks followers of *inkhosi* Sihayo kaXongo in the Batshe valley. Right Flank Column (No. 1) crosses into Zululand at Lower Thukela Drift.
- 17 January** Main Zulu army leaves oNdini.
- 18 January** Elements of Zulu army under Godide kaNdlela leave the main column to march to reinforce the coastal sector. Remainder of army continues towards British Centre Column.
- 20 January** Centre Column advances to Isandlwana. Lord Chelmsford and staff scout far end of Hlazakazi range. Durnford's Column (No. 2) establishes camp on Zulu bank at Rorke's Drift. Zulu army advances from Babanango to Siphezi mountain.
- 21 January** Mounted troops and NNC under overall command of Major Dartnell sweep through Malakatha and Hlazakazi hills; Zulus encountered near Mangeni late afternoon. Zulu army moves from Siphezi hill to Ngwebeni valley.

22 January Battle of Isandlwana

(Note: All timings given are approximate.)

- 4.00am** Lord Chelmsford advances from Isandlwana to reinforce Dartnell.
- 6.00am** Foray from Colonel Wood's column clears the Zungwini mountain with little opposition. Lord Chelmsford reaches hills above the Mangeni, and begins to sweep through them.
- 8.00am** First reports reach Colonel Puleine at Isandlwana of Zulu movements on the iNyoni hills.
- 8.00–9.30am** Colonel Pearson's column defeats Zulu coastal army at Nyezane.
- 10.30am** Durnford arrives at Isandlwana camp.
- 11.00am** Durnford begins sweep through iNyoni hills.
- 11.15am** Raw's detachment pursues Zulu foragers over Mabaso hill, and encounters Zulu army.

- 11.30am** Zulu attack begins.
- 12.00pm** Mostyn, Cavaye and Durnford's detachments engaged on hills; Durnford retreats before Zulu left 'horn'.
- 12.20pm** Mostyn and Cavaye withdraw from heights; British line established facing north. Zulu 'chest' descends iNyoni ridge.
- 12.30pm** British line retires 50–100 yards to more secure position. Durnford defends donga to right of camp.
- 1.15pm** Durnford abandons donga. British fall back from advanced positions; Zulu chest mounts determined assault. British line collapses.
- 1.30pm** First Zulu elements penetrate British camp; fighting now hand-to-hand. Zulu right horn advances towards rear of camp.
- 2.00pm** Major British concentrations broken up. Lord Chelmsford begins return to Isandlwana.
- 2.29pm** The eclipse is at its height.
- 2.30pm** Last British resistance eliminated in camp area.
- 2.30–3.30pm** Fighting in Manzimyama valley; last British concentrations overrun. Zulu reserve crosses Mzinyathi river.
- 3.15pm** News of Isandlwana reaches Rorke's Drift garrison.
- 4.30pm** Zulu attack on Rorke's Drift begins.
- 5.30–6.30pm** Zulu forces abandon Isandlwana and retire to Ngwebeni valley.
- 8.00pm** Lord Chelmsford returns to Isandlwana.

23 January

- 4.00am** Zulu attack on Rorke's Drift abandoned. Lord Chelmsford retires from Isandlwana towards Rorke's Drift.
- 8.00am** Lord Chelmsford arrives at Rorke's Drift. Colonel Pearson's column occupies Eshowe mission station.
- 24 January** Lord Chelmsford returns to Pietermaritzburg, leaving remainder of Centre Column at Rorke's Drift. Colonel Wood's column attacks Zulu elements on the northern slopes of Hlobane mountain. Wood breaks off the engagement when a messenger brings him news of Isandlwana.
- 26 January** Wood moves camp to Khambula Hill.
- 27 January** News of Isandlwana reaches Pearson at Eshowe. Lord Chelmsford telegraphs news of the battle to the British government. Last Zulu elements abandon Ngwebeni valley to report to oNdini or disperse.
- 28 January** Pearson resolves to defend Eshowe. Mounted troops and NNC sent back to the Thukela line.

OPPOSING COMMANDERS

ZULU COMMANDERS

The speed with which the political crisis had developed had come as a shock to **King Cetshwayo kaMpande**. An able and vigorous ruler, the king was deeply committed to not only the integrity of his kingdom's borders, but to the way of life of his people. He understood that the British demands were driven by something deeper than the border violations cited in the ultimatum, but neither he nor the *ibandla* – the great council of *amakhosi* who advised him – fully understood the British position, nor could they see how to placate them. While the king regarded the political rift with the British as a disaster, and was concerned about the ability of his army to defeat British troops in the field, he was nonetheless fully prepared to resort to military means to defend the kingdom if necessary.

As a young man, Cetshwayo had been inducted in an *ibutho* like every other Zulu male – in his case the uThulwana – and he was not without experience as a warrior. He had taken part in a raid against the Swazi kingdom in the early 1850s, and had commanded his own faction during a bitter succession dispute a few years later. At the battle of 'Ndonakusuka in December 1856 an army under his personal command had defeated the faction of his brother, Prince Mbuyazi, in one of the bloodiest conflicts in Zulu history. Nevertheless, the person of the Zulu king was widely held to be sacrosanct, and it was unusual for him to lead an army in person – King Shaka had been an exception – and throughout the coming war King Cetshwayo confined himself to directing the strategic response to the British invasion. He proved to be a shrewd planner, well aware of the dangers posed by the enemy, and with a realistic appreciation of both the strengths and weaknesses of his own army. The king understood, too, the need to allow his field commanders to exercise initiative to respond to unfolding events, although this meant in practise that the king's advice was often ignored in the heat of the moment.

Cetshwayo entrusted overall command of his army to *inkhosi* **Ntshingwayo kaMahole**, who was head of a section of the Khoza people, who lived along the upper reaches of the White Mfolozi. Ntshingwayo was nearly 70 in 1879, a short man with a powerful physique whose slight paunch and grey hairs belied a commanding presence. Like most of those who held senior command posts in the Zulu Army in 1879, Ntshingwayo was part of a small inner circle of elite individuals who had been associated with the Royal House since the emergence of the kingdom a generation before. Ntshingwayo's father, Mahole, was of the same age-group as Shaka's father, Senzangakhona, and had served him as an attendant throughout much of his reign. Ntshingwayo himself had



A striking study of two Zulu men in regimental uniform, possibly of the uKhandempemvu *ibutho*. Such regalia was worn during national ceremonies and military reviews, but was too fragile to wear into battle. (Local History Museum, Durban)



A warrior in full ceremonial regalia, apparently photographed before the war of 1879. This uniform and shield colour is associated with the uKhandempemvu, who played a prominent part in the attack on Isandlwana. (Private Collection)

risen to prominence under King Mpande, and had been appointed headman by him of the emLambongwenya royal homestead, where the then Prince Cetshwayo had grown up. It was probably at this time that Cetshwayo learned to respect Ntshingwayo's authority and opinion, a relationship which survived the civil war of 1856. At a time when many of the great men of the nation had secretly sided with one party or the other, Ntshingwayo had placed himself above the squabble, and as a result Mpande had relied upon him to serve as a neutral messenger between the two factions. Such was Cetshwayo's high regard for Ntshingwayo that after the fighting he was prepared to overlook Ntshingwayo's reluctance to commit himself, and when Cetshwayo became king in 1873 he confirmed him as a royal councillor. Ntshingwayo's position was second only in the *ibandla* to the king's most senior adviser, Mnyamana kaNgqegelele, *inkhosi* of the Buthelezi.

Ntshingwayo was widely regarded as one of the most able and experienced military commanders within the kingdom. As a young warrior of 19 or 20, he had served with his *ibutho*, the uDlambedlu, during the disastrous war of 1838–40 against the Boer Voortrekkers, and he may well have seen for himself the devastation wrought by Boer firepower at the battle of Ncome (Blood River). Yet in many ways the lessons of that campaign were ambiguous, for while the Zulu army had proved acutely vulnerable to devastating combination of barricades and concentrated firepower, the Zulus had on more than one occasion been able to disperse Boer forces when they caught them in the open. Ironically, the campaign of 1879 would present exactly the same challenges.

In the early 1850s, King Mpande had mounted extensive raids into Swaziland, and it seems likely that Ntshingwayo had accompanied these as an officer of middle rank. Because he had stood aloof in 1856 he had missed the opportunity it afforded many of his younger colleagues to hone their leadership skills, but he was probably involved in a number of minor internal policing incidents in the 1860s and '70s. Certainly, Mpande had entrusted him with rebutting Boer claims on the north-western borders, a task which required both firmness of purpose and considerable political sophistication. When Cetshwayo became king, he made Ntshingwayo head of the kwaGqikazi royal homestead.

Despite his elevated position, *inkhosi* Ntshingwayo was renowned for his insight into the psychology of the sometimes unruly *amabutho*. He was considered a great expert on the long and complex praise-poems, the eulogies by which successive kings' great deeds were remembered, and he often used to declaim them at important national ceremonies. He was a good orator, and in a culture which required commanders to address their men before battle, he was able to play upon their emotions and direct their energies as he wished. Moreover, when the war began, unlike many Zulu officers Ntshingwayo refused to ride to the front on horseback, and instead set the tone by marching on foot with his men.

When the great army marched out to confront the central British thrust in January 1879, it included many of the most important men of the kingdom, a reflection of the concerted national effort undertaken in response to the invasion. As Ntshingwayo's co-commander, Cetshwayo had appointed the younger Mavumengwana kaNdlela, who was a personal favourite of the king, with whom he had served in the uThulwana *ibutho*. Mavumengwana's father, Ndlela kaSompisi, had risen

New and old technologies. A Zulu axe – a symbol of status, carried by commanders and *izinduna* – flanked by an 1853 percussion musket, and powder horn. This particular gun was carried by a warrior in the battles of Hlobane and Khambula in 1879, and is typical of Zulu firearms at the beginning of the war.



through the ranks to become an officer in King Shaka's army, and had been made *induna* over a section of the central Thukela border. Under King Dingane, Ndlela had been the principle commander at the battle of Ncome; Mavumengwana was widely held to have inherited his father's military prowess.

Command of the Zulu scouts – men selected from each regiment, whose duties were not only to gather intelligence, but to skirmish aggressively to keep back enemy patrols – was given to Zibhebhu kaMapitha. Zibhebhu was *inkhosi* of the Mandlakazi section of the Royal House, who traced their descent to one of Shaka's forebears, and who ruled north-eastern Zululand with considerable autonomy. Zibhebhu was a young man, not yet forty, whose links with white traders had made him perfectly at ease with the European lifestyle. He was a good horseman and an excellent shot, and commander of the uDloko *ibutho*. A charismatic leader and intuitive tactician, he would reveal for the first



The road to war; the 2nd Battalion, 24th Regiment, leaves the Eastern Cape to march to Natal. Note the cased colours in the centre.



time in the coming campaign the qualities which would later lead many to judge him the most able Zulu general since Shaka.

Since Chelmsford's column crossed into Zululand through the territory of *inkhosi* Sihayo kaXongo, Sihayo was given an additional intelligence responsibility. Sihayo, too, was a man at ease with whites, and before the war had frequently worn European clothing; most of his scouts were mounted on horses he had acquired from European traders. Sihayo's senior son, Mehlokazulu kaSihayo, who was renowned as a warrior, held a command within the iNgobamakhosi regiment. Vumandaba kaNthathi, one of the king's most trusted officials, who had been among the izinduna who had received the British ultimatum at the Thukela a few weeks before, commanded the uKhandempemvu regiment. Sigwelegcwele kaMhlekehleke, another royal favourite whose own home lay in the coastal belt, led the younger men of the iNgobamakhosi, a regiment of which Cetshwayo was particularly fond. A number of members of the Royal House were present with the army, including Prince Magwendu kaMpande and Prince Ndabuko kaMpande. The latter was the king's full brother, and particularly close to him; a fierce Zulu loyalist and an aggressive leader, he held a command in the uMbonambi *ibutho*. Prince Dabulamanzi kaMpande held no formal command, but accompanied his own uDloko *ibutho*. Like Zibhebhu, Dabulamanzi was a good shot and a good rider, but possessed of a fiery temperament that had made him unpopular with white traders.

Able, experienced, and with a natural authority, *inkhosi* Ntshingwayo himself was certainly a good choice as commander-in-chief of the Zulu forces. Only in one respect was he lacking; neither he, nor any of the other Zulu who held commands in 1879, had any first-hand experience of fighting the British army in the field. Although rumours were rife in Zululand of the enemy's capabilities, the small size of the British columns, coupled with a practical ignorance of the destructive potential

The 1/24th in southern Africa; H Company, which was on detached duty in southern Natal at the time of Isandlwana. (RRW Museum, Brecon)



Major F. Glennie and members of the 2/24th, apparently photographed at the end of the Anglo-Zulu War. (Private collection)

of the modern weapons they possessed, had led to a dangerous over-confidence at the middle and lower levels of command. This was a flaw which the Zulu generals would never entirely overcome throughout all the bitter fighting which was to follow.

BRITISH COMMANDERS

The senior British commander in southern Africa on the eve of the Zulu campaign was **Lieutenant-General Sir Frederic Augustus Thesiger, 2nd Baron Chelmsford**. Chelmsford was a product of the establishment in his own culture no less than Ntshingwayo. His father was a Tory member of Parliament who became Solicitor-General and then Lord High Chancellor of England, and ultimately was created first Baron Chelmsford. Frederic Thesiger was born in 1827, the eldest of four sons, several of whom enjoyed successful military careers. He was educated at Eton, and in 1844 purchased a commission as a second-lieutenant in the Rifle Brigade. The following year he exchanged into a more fashionable Regiment, the Grenadier Guards, and in May 1855 he joined his battalion in the Crimea.

The Crimean campaign was to prove a pivotal one for the British Army. Many of the senior officers had learned their trade fighting under the Duke of Wellington against Napoleon, and approached the expedition against Russian forces in the Crimean peninsula in much the same way. In truth, the muddle, confusion and incompetence which characterised the war differed little from the campaigns of 40 years before, but a much-improved press laid them bare before a horrified public at home. The war began a campaign for Army reform which accelerated steadily across the Victorian period, and had a profound effect on the attitudes and careers of many junior officers who had fought there. It not only exposed them to the one true European conflict fought by the British Army in Queen Victoria's reign – and to the potential for mass destruction afforded by modern weaponry – but



Seasoned campaigners; a sketch of two Privates of the 1/24th, reflecting the wear and tear inflicted on their uniforms on the Cape frontier, and which was still apparent when the Battalion crossed into Zululand.



One of the men who defended the British camp; Sergeant 1313 Thomas Cooper, 1/24th, killed at Isandlwana. (Private collection)

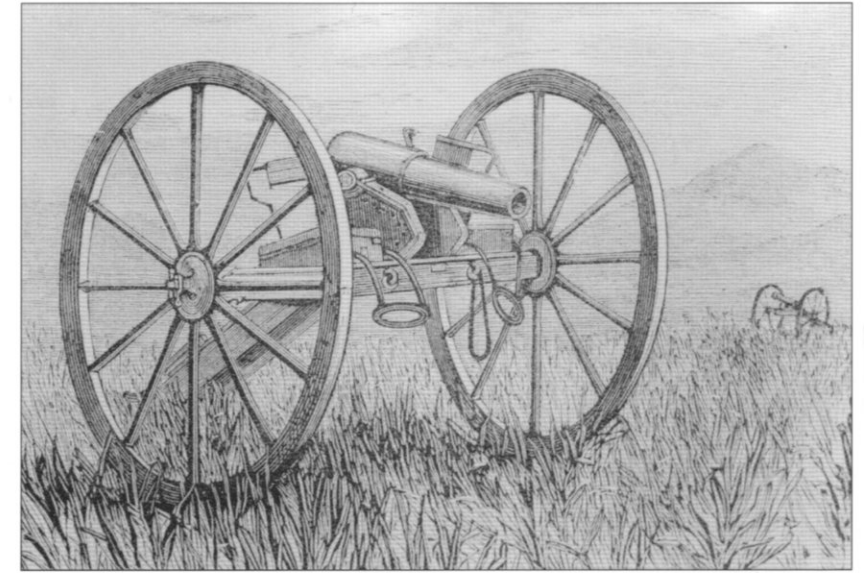
shaped the attitudes towards command, staff and logistical issues that would influence their later careers.

Thesiger remained essentially conservative in his outlook. A thorough and conscientious officer, he nonetheless distanced himself from the reformist school, and remained close to the old elite, represented by the Army's Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of Cambridge. Quiet and unassuming in his manner, he was a thorough Victorian gentleman, and was famously polite to whomever he met, regardless of their station or rank. In his attitude towards staff issues, however, he looked back to the old school; competent enough himself, he failed to appreciate the importance of a trained professional staff, appointing his own staff from personal favourites, and was reluctant to delegate. As a result, throughout the Zulu campaign he failed to manage his senior officers as well as he might, and the strain of assuming too much responsibility found occasional outlet in bouts of stubbornness and uncharacteristic irritability.

Thesiger's career after the Crimea was typical of most Victorian officers. It consisted of colonial campaigns which, because they were often fought with insufficient men and resources, tended to reinforce an inherent tendency to self-reliance. Thesiger fought in the Indian Mutiny, and enjoyed a number of staff appointments in the aftermath. Indeed, he seemed destined for a career in India until Lord Napier selected him as Deputy Acting Adjutant for the Abyssinian Field Force in 1868. This campaign was fought largely by troops despatched from India, and was marked by a struggle against the environment as much as against the Abyssinians. In 1878, after a period of home duty at Aldershot, Thesiger was selected to command British forces in southern Africa.

Chelmsford's early experience at the Cape was crucial in shaping his attitude to the forthcoming war in Zululand. He arrived in Africa to find a doleful rebellion spluttering on in the Eastern Cape Frontier districts. The amaXhosa people had made one last forlorn attempt to halt the

The two 7-pdr guns of N/5 Battery, captured at Isandlwana. They were later recovered in the veld near oNdini, at the end of the war.



encroachment of white authority over their lands – the last of nine such campaigns – and by the time Thesiger took command, the main Xhosa concentrations had been dispersed, and a protracted guerrilla war had begun. Over a period of three months, Thesiger gradually surrounded and beat through the natural strongholds to which the Xhosa had retired, and brought the war to a successful conclusion. Throughout the war, he had displayed a dogged determination rather than any great tactical flair, and he had recognised that the war was essentially one of attrition. It was the first campaign in which he had enjoyed full command, and the experience had a marked affect on his approach to such warfare.

It seemed to Thesiger that the chief danger posed to British troops by black Africans in southern Africa related to their superior mobility and fieldcraft, rather than their qualities in open battle. Arriving too late to witness the few pitched battles of the early rebellion, Thesiger faced only an elusive foe who showed a marked reluctance to engage in decisive combat. Despite intelligence reports that suggested that the Zulu regarded warfare in a different light, Thesiger had failed to rid himself of these preconceptions when he marched into Zululand. He also remained sceptical of the reliability of locally raised colonial troops, whether black or white, who, while they had done good work on the frontier, had been consistently less reliable and disciplined than regular Imperial troops.

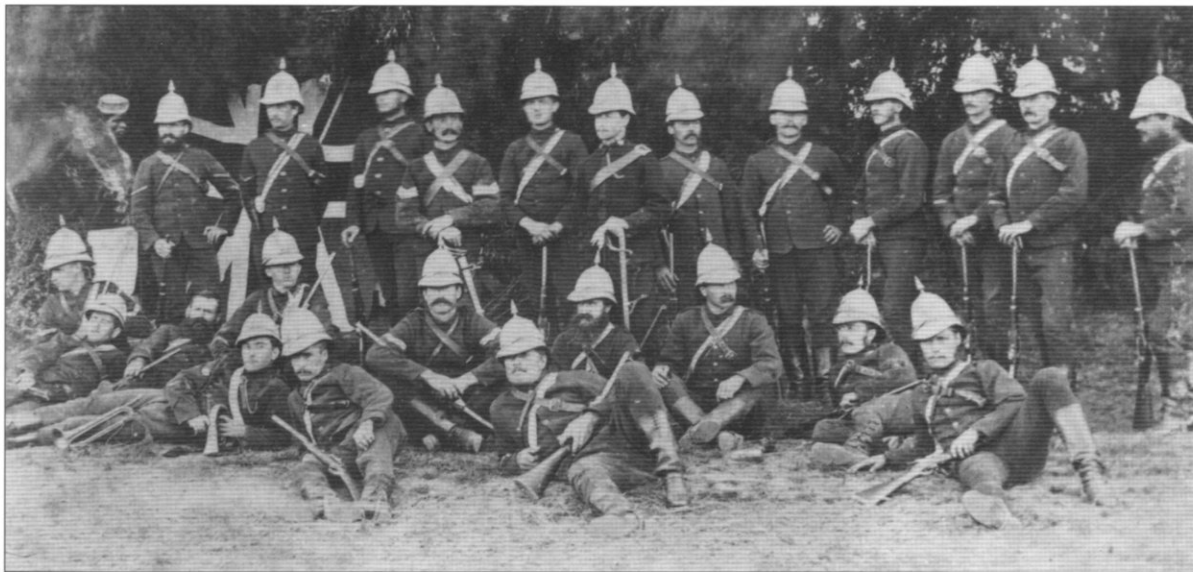
These factors between them combined to reinforce Thesiger's instinctive prejudice in favour of his own professional judgement, and in the superiority of British regular troops. Such a mind-set was to play a significant role in the opening rounds of the Anglo-Zulu War.

Thesiger's father died on 5 October 1879, and Thesiger assumed the title Lord Chelmsford. Three months later, he crossed into Zululand at the head of an invading British army.

Most of the officers who served under Chelmsford's immediate command in Zululand were also veterans of the Cape Frontier campaign, and shared the common outlook to such warfare that it had



LEFT Royal Artillery in southern Africa; men of N/5 Battery, photographed during the Transvaal rebellion in 1881. Many of these men had served in Zululand with the Centre Column. (Transvaal Archives Depot)



An officer and men of the Natal Mounted Police, photographed during the annexation of the Transvaal in 1877. The NMP were a full-time professional body, and one of the most effective of the Natal colonial corps.

fostered. **Colonel Richard Glyn** of the 1/24th, who commanded the Centre Column, was an experienced regimental officer whose qualities were largely wasted by Chelmsford's decision to accompany that column during the invasion. Glyn became largely superfluous, relegated to overseeing the mundane duties of column life while Chelmsford exercised the command decisions. Indeed, the haughty manner adopted by the General's staff was widely resented among Glyn's staff, and led to a friction which marred the column's administration.

Glyn's appointment as column officer allowed command of his battalion to devolve on **LtCol Henry Pulleine**. Pulleine had just turned 40, and had served throughout the Frontier War, where he had earned an enviable reputation as an administrator. He had raised two irregular units among the Frontier settlers, and had later distinguished himself in the field by reorganising supply columns to beleaguered garrisons. His actual combat experience was minimal, however, and at the time Bartle Frere's ultimatum expired, he was in charge of the Remount Depot in Pietermaritzburg; hurrying to the front, he rejoined his battalion just days before it went into action.

Pulleine's inexperience in battle was offset, however, by that of the officers and men under him. Most of the officers of the 1/24th had seen action on the Cape Frontier, often in isolated skirmishes involving detachments of company strength or less which had tested their self-reliance and resolve. Three companies (A, F and G) had taken part in the actions at Nyamaga and Centane, the closest the campaign had come to pitched battles. From top to bottom, the 1/24th were regarded as a seasoned and reliable battalion, experienced in local warfare, used to working under their officers, and acclimatised to the eccentricities of southern African weather and terrain.

The 2/24th, who were also placed under Glyn's command, were less experienced than their senior battalion, but they had nonetheless arrived at the Cape in time to take part in the protracted mopping-up operations on the frontier. They were commanded by **LtCol Henry Degacher**, who had served in the 1st Battalion, and whose brother,

Lieutenant F.J.D. Scott and his brothers, Sergeant-Major D. Scott and Trumpeter C. Scott, of the Natal Carbineers. The Carbineers were Natal's longest-established Volunteer unit; Lieutenant Scott was killed at Isandlwana. (Local History Museum, Durban)



Captain William Degacher, still did. The 2/24th men were generally younger than their 1st Battalion counterparts, having arrived fresh from their home depot. Although the two battalions had not served side by side on the Cape Frontier, they were delighted at the prospect of doing so in Zululand.

The artillery attached to Glyn's column – six 7-pdr guns of N Battery, 5th Brigade – were commanded by the capable and conscientious **Brevet LtCol Arthur Harness**. Harness, too, had served throughout the Frontier War, a campaign which had stretched his resources and required considerable initiative. He had often been forced to split his battery into two-gun sections to meet the demands placed upon it, and as a result his junior officers were also more than usually experienced. **Brevet-Major Stuart Smith**, for example, had on one occasion found himself commanding two guns advancing with a force which was ambushed; Smith's guns had covered the retreat until the troops could safely reform. Even subalterns like **Lt Henry Curling** were veterans of the drudgery and tension of combing the bush for weeks on end in search of lingering Xhosa bands.

Glyn's column included no British regular cavalry, but several small units of Natal Volunteer corps. These were under the overall command of **Major John Dartnell**, a former British regular who had served through the Indian Mutiny with the 86th Regiment. Dartnell had subsequently immigrated to Natal, and at the request of the colonial authorities had raised a white police unit, the Natal Mounted Police. A strict disciplinarian, Dartnell had overcome initial difficulties to turn the Police into the most efficient force maintained by the Natal government. He was widely known and respected among the other part-time corps, to the extent that when the Volunteers were mobilised for war, they objected to the officer appointed to command them – a regular, LtCol John Russell of the 9th Lancers – and refused to serve in

Zululand unless led by Dartnell. Dartnell got the job; as a salve to his honour, Russell was given command of the regular Mounted Infantry.

The last element of Glyn's command – the black auxiliaries of the Natal Native Contingent – had a decidedly mixed bag when it came to officers. The 3rd Regiment's **Commandant Rupert Lonsdale** had been a lieutenant in the Black Watch before immigrating to southern Africa. He had commanded auxiliaries throughout the Cape Frontier War, and had earned a reputation as a dynamic and courageous officer. Lonsdale commanded the 1st Battalion himself; **Commandant A.W. Cooper**, who commanded the 2nd, was also an ex-regular and Frontier veteran. The adjutant, **Lt Henry Harford**, was a regular on special service from the 99th Regiment; he had grown up in Natal and spoke Zulu. Many of the junior officers were less impressive, however. Some, like Captain George Hamilton Browne, were adventurers who had fought in a dozen wars around the globe before pitching up in Africa; others had been recruited among the white farms on the Frontier, among men who spoke Xhosa, but not Zulu. Few of the regiment's white NCOs spoke any African language; some were European immigrants who scarcely spoke English.

Perhaps the most able leader of auxiliary troops was **Brevet Colonel Anthony Durnford, RE**, an independent column commander whom circumstances would contrive to place alongside the men of Glyn's command. Durnford had served in Natal on-and-off since 1871, and knew the country well. In 1873, during a so-called rebellion by a Natal *inkhosi* named Langelibalele kaMthimkhulu, Durnford had led a party of Natal Volunteers who had attempted to prevent Langelibalele escaping through the mountain passes to BaSotholand. The operation had gone badly wrong, several of the volunteers had been killed, Langelibalele escaped, and Durnford had been badly injured, losing the use of his left arm. The incident had exposed him to ridicule in settler society, and Durnford had approached the Anglo-Zulu War determined to restore his reputation. He was personally brave, and displayed a sympathy for Natal's African population which was unusual for the day. For that reason, Chelmsford placed him in command of a column made up almost entirely of black troops, and Durnford's relationship with his men was good. In his eagerness to prove himself in battle, however, he seemed to Lord Chelmsford to be rash and impulsive, and Chelmsford would be forced to act to curb Durnford's independent attitude.

These were the men, between them, who would shape events in the first great clash of the war, and their personalities, preoccupations and prejudices would have a deep effect on the outcome.

OPPOSING ARMIES

THE ZULU ARMY

The two armies that were about to face each other in the field were profoundly different in both their nature and their outlook. The British Army was a full-time professional body, a self-contained institution governed by its own laws and codes of conduct which functioned almost entirely outside the norms of civilian society. The Zulu army, on the other hand, was a part-time body, whose members fulfilled many roles within civilian society, and were only mobilised for short periods at the king's request. It was essentially the manpower of the Zulu kingdom, mobilised for its defence.

At the core of the Zulu army – and indeed of the system of state control – lay the *amabutho* (sing. *ibutho*) system. Before the emergence of the Zulu kingdom, the regional *amakhosi* were entitled to claim occasional periods of service from the young men over whom they ruled. The Zulu kings assumed and extended this prerogative to the extent that all young men, from across the kingdom and regardless of their local allegiances, were required to serve the king directly. A call-up was held every three or four years, and all those who had in that time reached early manhood – the ages of 18 or 19 – were called together and formed into a guild, known as an *ibutho*. They remained enrolled in that *ibutho* throughout their lives, although the period for which they were actively required to serve the king was governed by the complex Zulu attitude towards marriage.

Marriage was an important rite of passage within Zulu society, the true point at which youths passed into the full responsibilities of

Men of the Buffalo Border Guard in the field in 1879. The BBG was drawn from white settlers along the upper Mzinyathi river, around Rorke's Drift, and was attached to the Centre Column. Three men from the unit were killed at Isandlwana.





An unidentified battalion of the Natal Native Contingent. The NNC were drawn from African communities in colonial Natal, many of whom had a history of conflict with the Zulu kingdom. Note their white officers, sitting at the front. (Private collection)

manhood. The *amabutho* system recognised the significant shift in loyalties this entailed, and marriage marked the end of active service to the king. The men were allowed to establish their own family homesteads, and devote themselves to the affairs of their household. As men, they were also required to play a more prominent role within the local chiefdom. They were still expected to assemble at the great national ceremonies, but were only called upon to fight in times of national emergency. Since the king alone granted the right to marry, successive kings had followed the policy of prolonging bachelorhood in order to maximise the time this powerful resource was at their disposal. Regiments were given permission to marry en masse, usually when the men were in their mid-thirties. British propaganda envisaged – in Bartle Frere’s memorable phrase – a horde of ‘celibate man-slaying gladiators’, but in fact Zulu moral codes allowed for limited sexual activity outside marriage, and the importance of marriage within the *amabutho* system had little to do with sexual morality.

The warriors of a new *ibutho* served as cadets at an existing royal homestead for a year or two, before being formally enrolled, when they would be given a regimental name, and instructed to establish their own royal homestead. These homesteads, known as *amakhanda*, served as barracks to the army when mobilised. Provincial *amakhanda* usually consisted of 200 or 300 huts – enough to house an *ibutho*, with three or four men sleeping in a hut – while the largest, such as King Cetshwayo’s favourite residence, oNdini, might contain as many as 1,200 huts. While they were housed in the *amakhanda*, the *amabutho* were fed at the king’s expense, although the fare was notoriously spartan, and members of their families often brought extra food and delicacies.

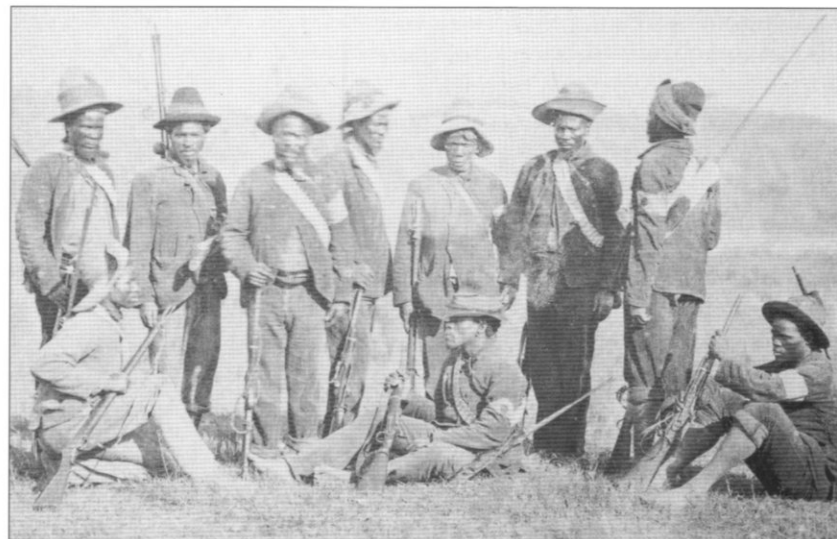
The *amabutho* were only mobilised for a few months of the year, either at the king’s instigation, or to take part in national ceremonies. For the rest of the time, the men dispersed and lived at home with their families. The *amabutho* were the state labour force – they built the king’s homesteads, tended his crops, herded his cattle, took part in hunts, served as an internal police force – and where necessary fought as military units. The size of the *amabutho* varied considerably, according to the fluctuating birthrate, and might be anything between 1,000 and 5,000 men. Each *ibutho* had a recognised internal structure, and was

divided into left and right wings, divisions of companies, and companies. Junior officers were selected from the ranks, while the king filled more senior positions with senior men from more experienced regiments.

Each *ibutho* had a complex and spectacular uniform, consisting of cowtails worn in profusion about the body and limbs and a distinctive head-dress, but this was too fragile and expensive to wear in the field, and was only worn on ceremonial occasions. In battle most warriors wore little beyond loin-coverings, and perhaps a headband, although men of rank and status did retain some ceremonial items. A herd of cattle, carefully selected by the king for their matched hides, was given into the care of the regiment, and from this regimental war-shields were made. These shields were the property of the state, rather than the individual, and were stored in the *amakhanda*, and issued to the *amabutho* when they assembled. In Shaka’s day, the full war-shield, *isihlangu*, covered a man from shoulder to knees, but by 1879 a smaller variant, known as the *umbhumbhulosu*, was more popular. Both types were still carried, however, even within the same regiment. In the early days of the kingdom, when the country was rich in cattle, the regimental uniformity of shield colours was quite precise. By 1879, however, a shortage of cattle, due in part to the impact of European trade, meant that it was increasingly difficult to provide sufficient hides of a uniform pattern to equip all the warriors of an entire regiment. To make up the numbers, King Cetshwayo had therefore directed that some sections of some *amabutho* should carry different patterns to the rest.



Prince Sikhotha kaMpande. Sikhotha was a brother of King Cetshwayo, and had fled Zululand following the succession dispute of 1856. His followers made up three companies of the 3rd NNC, and the Prince himself was attached to the commandant’s staff. He was present at Isandlwana, and survived.



The mounted troops were the most effective of the auxiliary units raised among Natal's African population. They wore yellow corduroy suits, and were distinguished by a red rag around the hat. Units raised before the war began carried Swinburne-Henry carbines; these men are latecomers, and some have been issued with obsolete Sniders. (Private Collection)

Zulu weapons remained primarily intended for close combat, and their battlefield tactics reflected this. The principle weapon was a long-bladed stabbing spear, although most warriors carried two or three lighter throwing spears, which were launched in the final rush to contact. The classic Zulu attack formation was known as *izimpondo zankhomo*, the horns of the beast, and was inspired by the image of a charging bull. One body, the *isifuba*, or chest, and consisting of more mature men, made a direct frontal assault on the enemy, while two flanking parties, consisting of younger warriors and known as the *izimpondo*, or horns, rushed out to surround them on either side. A reserve – the *umuva* or loins, usually consisting of either older men, or cadets not yet experienced in battle – was kept back to fill gaps in the assault. It was not unusual for one horn to mask its attack by good use of the terrain, while for the most part the assaults were carried out in open order, the *amabutho* only drawing together for the final rush.

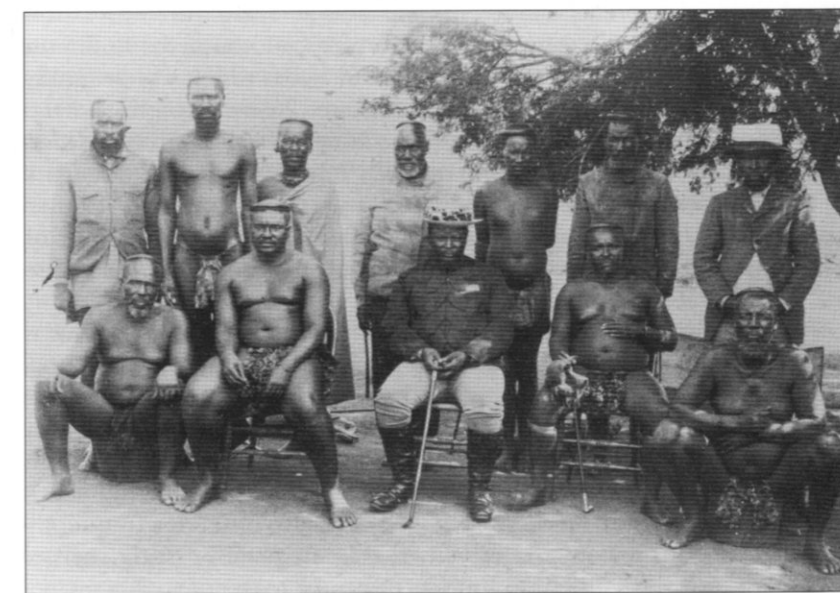
By 1879 firearms were a significant feature of the army. They had first been introduced by white traders in the 1820s, and on the eve of the 1879 war King Cetshwayo had made a determined effort to make more guns available to his men. British sources suggest that there were 20,000 firearms in Zululand in 1879, and this was probably an under-estimate. Certainly, battlefield reports suggest that most Zulus had access to some sort of gun, although ironically it was probably the younger *amabutho* – who bore the brunt of the fighting, but had the least status or wealth in civilian society – who were probably the least well equipped. The guns themselves were usually of poor quality, however, obsolete makes that the technologically advanced powers had dumped on the unsophisticated world market. Old Brown Bess flintlocks were common, and the most popular gun was the 1850s muzzle-loading percussion Enfield. Powder was poor quality and in short supply, and bullets were often home-made. With no system of training, most Zulu marksmen had little hope of achieving even moderate rates of success. The exception were a handful of men who had been employed by the white hunting parties who operated in Zululand before the war, and had been trained to shoot.

A more significant limitation, however, remained the essentially conservative Zulu outlook, which relegated firearms to a minor supporting role. Because they were considered unreliable, most warriors used their guns as if they were no more than an improved version of the throwing spear. Rather than re-assess their tactics to exploit the potential to inflict long-range damage, they preferred to rely on the chest-and-horns formation. They discharged their weapons before the final rush, then threw them down, and charged in with their stabbing spears. In a war which would ultimately be decided by firepower, this would prove to be a fatal flaw.

THE BRITISH ARMY

The army which invaded Zululand in January 1879 was typical of many with which the British expanded their empire in 'small wars' around the globe. Lord Chelmsford was no different from many commanders of the period in that he placed his greatest reliance on trained British regulars, while at the same time accepting that he had too few at his disposal for the task at hand. As a result, he had to augment his forces with local irregulars wherever he could.

The backbone of his force were battalions of regular infantry, each consisting of eight companies, nominally 100 strong. In practise, in the field, most companies were under strength due to sickness or detached duty, and in the early stages of the Anglo-Zulu War it was not unusual for companies to fight with just 60 or 70 men. Line Infantry still wore scarlet jackets, with regimental distinctions confined to 'facings' – coloured tabs on the cuffs and collars – and collar badges. Although dress regulations made little allowance for service in hot climates, most soldiers in Zululand wore the rather more comfortable five-button 'frock' rather than the tighter seven-button dress tunic. Trousers were dark blue with a narrow red welt down the outer seam. A white foreign



A remarkable photograph from the 1880s, showing Chief Hlubi Molife (centre) with Zulu amakhosi. Hlubi commanded a troop of mounted Sotho during the war; he fought at Isandlwana under Durnford's command. In the post-war settlement, he was given the territory which had formerly belonged to inkhosi Sihayo. He is flanked here by two of Cetshwayo's brothers, Prince Ndabuko on the left and Prince Shingana on the right. Ndabuko had fought on the Zulu side at Isandlwana. (Bryan Maggs Collection)



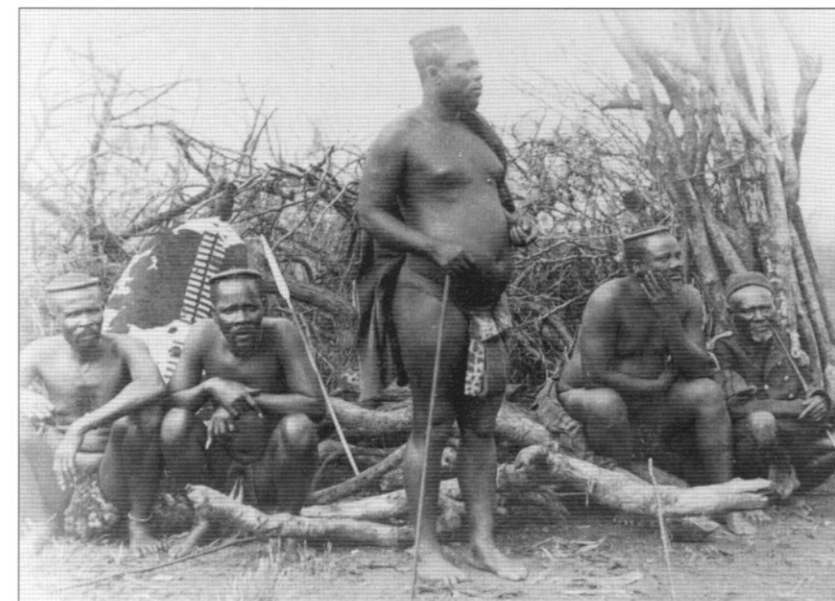
No photographic likeness of *inkhosi* Ntshingwayo kaMahole, who commanded at Isandlwana, has been authenticated; this image is widely held to be him, however, and conforms to written descriptions. Ntshingwayo was the principal Zulu commander throughout the 1879 War; he was killed fighting for the royalists when Cetshwayo's restored oNdini homestead was sacked by *inkhosi* Zibhebhu during the Zulu civil war of 1883.

service helmet was provided for use in southern Africa, and it was authorised to be worn with a brass regimental-pattern badge on the front. Those regiments who had been through the Cape Frontier War, however, had soon learned to make the helmet less conspicuous by removing the badge and dyeing the helmet with tea or coffee to a more neutral colour. Indeed, many of the battalions in Chelmsford's army entered Zululand without receiving a new issue of clothing, and their uniforms reflected their hard service; jackets and trousers were heavily patched, helmets were battered or lost, and replaced with civilian hats.

The standard infantry weapon was the Mark I or II Martini-Henry rifle. A single-shot breach-loader, this was a reliable and durable weapon which was sighted to ranges over 1,000 yards, although its optimum accuracy was much less. It fired a heavy lead bullet which was generally considered a 'man-stopper', although repeated heavy firing fouled the breach, and created a tendency to jam. Experienced soldiers stitched cowhide around the stock to protect their left hand from the dangers of an over-heated barrel. Ammunition was carried in buff leather waist pouches, and in a black leather 'ball bag' on the hip, to a total of 70 rounds. Other Ranks carried a long socket bayonet whose fearsome reach earned it the nick-name 'the lunger'.

For artillery support Chelmsford had a number of horse-drawn batteries equipped with either 7-pdr or 9-pdr steel, muzzle-loading guns. The 7-pdr was originally intended as a mountain gun, but the original carriage was too small and narrow for use in the rough South African terrain, and instead the gun was mounted on a slightly modified version of the 9-pdr carriage. Although this greatly increased its mobility, the 7-pdr was too light for the work required of it, and observers frequently complained of its low muzzle velocity and inadequate bursting charge. Both were transported behind limbers drawn by teams of six horses.

Zibhebhu kaMapitha, *inkhosi* of the Mandlakazi lineage of the Zulu Royal House. Zibhebhu commanded the Zulu scouts during the Isandlwana campaign, and would later emerge as the most dynamic Zulu general of his generation. After the war, he was confirmed in his position by the British, and he became a bitter opponent of the Royal House. He resisted the restoration of King Cetshwayo in 1883, and defeated Cetshwayo's forces at oNdini in July of that year. (SB Bourquin)



Although Chelmsford had a number of support services available in 1879 – Engineers, Commissariat and transport officers – he lacked any regular cavalry. This was a serious short-coming in a campaign in which cavalry patrols would provide his main source of intelligence, and he was forced to rely on the small volunteer units raised by the authorities in Natal for the protection of the Colony. These units were heavily influenced in outlook by the Rifle Volunteer movement in Britain, and consisted of volunteers who undertook to attend periodic training sessions. Natal had a number of these units, and service among them was popular among the sons of the settler gentry, who valued horsemanship and shooting, and enjoyed the adventure enlistment afforded. They were equipped at the Colony's expense, but selected their own uniforms, and elected their own officers. Since the terms of their service precluded fighting outside Natal, it was necessary to canvas among them to secure volunteers to serve in Zululand; most were happy to do so. Nevertheless, even with the services of the regular quasi-military Natal Mounted Police, Chelmsford was still short of mounted troops, and enlisted a number of irregular units. These differed from the Volunteer Corps in that they were full-time bodies, raised by the Army rather than the Colony, for a specific period of service.

The African population of Natal was another potential source of manpower, but here Chelmsford ran into opposition from the civilian authorities. A strong strain of paranoia within the settler community reflected their sense of acute vulnerability in the face of a far larger African population, and the Colonial administration was reluctant to see Africans armed and organised for fear of rebellion. They were also concerned that by adding a new element to existing tensions between Natal's blacks and the Zulus, they would encourage a cycle of violence and retribution which would poison relationships for years to come. In the event, Chelmsford's needs prevailed, but the African auxiliary units were only authorised in November 1878, and were committed to the invasion before being properly trained.

The main auxiliary unit was an infantry force known as the Natal Native Contingent. Chelmsford had initially planned to follow British organisation rather than African, but this was frustrated by lack of time and money. The men were provided by *amakhosi* in Natal, and while not permitted to form their own *amabutho*, men from the same districts were enrolled together in companies. An early plan to arm them with firearms and dress them in uniform was abandoned, and only one man in ten was issued a gun. The rest provided their own traditional weapons, and while some commanding officers did endeavour to provide cast-off clothes for their men, most were only distinguished from the Zulus by a red head-band. White senior officers were provided from the military or from the settler gentry, but there was a chronic shortage of white NCOs, and many of those recruited could not speak Zulu, while a few could not speak English.

Perhaps the best of the African units were the five troops of the Mounted Native Contingent. These men were recruited largely from groups in the Kahlamba foothills – whom the British regarded indiscriminately and inaccurately as BaSotho – or from Christian settlements outside the colonial capital, Pietermaritzburg. Dressed in yellow corduroy clothes from Government stores, they were armed with Swinburne-Henry carbines, and would prove the most effective and cohesive of the auxiliary forces. They, too, were commanded by European officers.

Throughout the war, Chelmsford's strategy was shaped by the need to keep his troops supplied in the field. Unlike the Zulus, who foraged for supplies, Chelmsford's troops had to carry everything with them. Tents, camp equipment, ammunition, medical supplies and food all had to be moved forward to keep pace with the advancing troops, and even before the campaign began Chelmsford faced a chronic shortage of wheeled transport. Although he had a few Army General Service mule wagons available, these had been designed with a narrow wheel-base best suited to European roads, and were unsteady in the African veld. Instead, Chelmsford was forced to hire or buy large quantities of civilian transport-wagons. These were long, steady, sturdy vehicles which could carry a large quantity of supplies across most terrain, but which required a minimum of 16 oxen to pull them. Despite offering inflated prices, Chelmsford failed to procure a realistic quantity of vehicles, a factor which hampered his movements throughout the war, while the attrition among over-worked oxen would reach appalling levels.

OPPOSING PLANS

The British Invasion and Zulu Response

Throughout the Anglo-Zulu War, the strategic initiative lay with the invading British. Lord Chelmsford's political objectives required him to destroy Zulu autonomy as quickly as possible, but while he was aware that the concentrated firepower of his infantry was probably the best way to achieve this, he remained concerned that the superior mobility of the Zulu forces made Natal vulnerable to counter-attack. A single invading column would perhaps be highly effective in the field, but the Zulu might choose to avoid it altogether, and strike across the border at any one of a dozen unprotected crossings.

Instead, Chelmsford hoped initially to invade in five self-contained columns, crossing into Zululand from roughly equidistant points along the border, and converging on the cluster of royal homesteads at oNdini that constituted the Zulu capital. Each column was to consist of a battalion of regular infantry, artillery and supports, and would ideally be strong enough to repulse the entire Zulu army alone if attacked, while at the same time greatly reducing the risk of a counter-attack in between them.

In the event, however, this ambitious plan was thwarted by lack of logistical resources. With too few supply wagons and insufficient Commissariat staff, Chelmsford was forced to relegate two of his original columns to a largely defensive roll, and to mount his invasion with just the remaining three.

All five columns were assembled on the Zulu border by the end of 1878. The No. 1 Column, under Colonel C.K. Pearson, was assembled at the Lower Drift on the Thukela River, not far from the sea. This column was to provide the right flank of Chelmsford's offensive strategy, and was to advance as far as the deserted mission station at Eshowe. From here it was to co-ordinate its advance with the Centre and Left Flank columns as the war progressed. Upstream from Pearson, perched high on the spectacular escarpment overlooking the Middle Drift on the Thukela, was the No. 2 Column, consisting largely of auxiliary troops, and commanded by Brevet Colonel A.W. Durnford, RE. Durnford's role was essentially supportive, and initially Chelmsford expected that he might be needed to pacify the border downstream towards Pearson's command.

Further north, the Centre Column – No. 3 – had assembled at the hamlet of Helpmekaar on the Biggarsberg hills, before moving down to the border crossing at Rorke's Drift on the Mzinyathi. One of the best-established tracks in Zululand, pioneered by white hunters and traders, led from Rorke's Drift towards oNdini, and Chelmsford intended that the Centre Column would be his main thrust. The column was actually commanded by Colonel R.T. Glyn of the 24th, but Chelmsford decided to accompany this column in person, a fact which largely deprived Glyn of a meaningful role.



Prince Ndabuko kaMpande, photographed in 1873. Ndabuko fought at Isandlwana as a commander of the uMbonambi *ibutho*; he took part in the pursuit, and urged the army to cross into Natal, but was overruled by the king's *izinduna*. (SB Bourquin)

THE WAR IN ZULULAND, 11-22 JANUARY



The remaining offensive column, No. 4, constituted Chelmsford's left flank, and was based near the border town of Utrecht in the British Transvaal. It was commanded by Colonel H.E. Wood, who would prove the most self-reliant of Chelmsford's column commanders. The last column, No. 5, commanded by Colonel H. Rowlands, was based at the hamlet of Derby, which lay near the point where the Transvaal, Zulu and Swaziland borders converged. Rowlands' role was to seal off Zululand's northern border by trying to secure the assistance of the Swazi while at the same time keeping a wary eye out for republican dissidents in the Transvaal behind him.

King Cetshwayo was well aware of the troops massing on his borders, and the spectacle was deeply menacing. In addition to the obvious concentrations. Rowlands' presence at Derby raised the disturbing possibility of a Swazi attack, while the British mastery of the sea meant that a landing on the coast could not be ruled out entirely either. Although British intelligence sources calculated that Cetshwayo had a total of more than 40,000 men at his disposal – a figure which was not



Sigcwelegcwele kaMhlekehleke, head of a section of the Ngadini people, who lived near the coast, Sigcwelegcwele was a favourite of King Cetshwayo, and commanded the iNgobamakhosi ibutho. He was present at Isandlwana. (SB Bourquin)

A group of the Zulu *izinduna* who received the British ultimatum, photographed at the Lower Thukela Drift on 11 December 1878. Third from the left, front row, is Vumandaba kaNthathi, a senior commander of the uKhandempemvu. He fought at Isandlwana, and was responsible for recalling the regiments who tried to cross at Fugitives' Drift. He was killed in the battle of oNdini in 1883. (SB Bourquin)



too far wide of the mark as it transpired – this was clearly inadequate to defend the country on all fronts. In consultation with his advisers, Cetshwayo's response was to assemble his army at oNdini, and allow the British to make the first move before framing a response.

The army gathered in the heart of the kingdom in the second week of January, and underwent the rituals necessary to prepare it for war. To guard against sudden British moves, however, the king instructed men living in the most vulnerable areas to remain at home to watch the British movements and be prepared to harass them if they struck quickly. In particular, men from the main *amabutho* who lived in the coastal districts were instructed to assemble in royal homesteads near Eshowe, while a number of men were placed under arms under the command of chiefs living opposite the Rorke's and Middle Drifts. In the north, members of the abaQulusi – a created chiefdom which was ruled directly by *izinduna* appointed by the Zulu king – were directed to resist the advance of Wood's column.

Not until the British crossed the border on 11 January 1879, however, did the King decide on which front to commit the main army assembled at oNdini.

OPENING MOVES

The Centre Column

The column that had assembled at Helpmekaar at the end of 1878 was arguably the most suited to the task ahead of it. The regular troops were among the most experienced, and had served under Lord Chelmsford on the Cape Frontier. They were not only used to his style of command, but to working together in the sometimes harsh African environment.

The infantry component consisted of the two battalions of the 24th (2nd Warwickshire) Regiment. Only the first 25 Regiments of Line infantry had two battalions, and British policy dictated that one should always be on home service while the other was overseas. Such were the demands of Empire, however, that at any given time more battalions were overseas than was considered ideal, and the two 24th battalions had come to southern Africa separately. The 1st Battalion, which consisted largely of men who had enlisted under the old 'long service' system, had been at the Cape since 1874, and had earned an enviable reputation for their adaptability and dependability. The 2/24th had come to Africa straight from the barracks at home, and contained a significantly higher proportion of young 'short service' men, though by the beginning of 1879 they too were both acclimatised and experienced.

The column's artillery consisted of six 7-pdr guns of N Battery, 5th Brigade, under the command of Colonel A. Harness, a competent and conscientious officer who had also served throughout the frontier war. Attached to the column was the 3rd Regiment, Natal Native Contingent, under Commandant R. LaT. Lonsdale. The 3rd Regiment



A remarkable photograph of Mehlokazulu kaSihayo. Mehlokazulu's incursion into British territory in June 1878, in pursuit of his father's runaway wives, was cited in Frere's ultimatum; he fought at Isandlwana with the iNgobamakhosi, and left a detailed account of the battle. He was arrested by the British at the end of the war – when this photo was taken – but later released. (Christies Images).

totalled 2,000 men, divided into two battalions, with each battalion made up of ten companies of 100 men apiece, and they reflected the complex relationship between Natal Africans and the Zulus. Several companies of the 3rd Regiment were Zulus who had opposed Cetshwayo's succession, and had fled to Natal as political refugees. They were led in the field by Prince Sikhotha kaMpande, a brother of Cetshwayo, who had been placed on the Regimental staff. Over 700 men were members of the amaChunu people of Chief Pakhade, who lived in the Msinga hills south of Helpmekaar. The history of the amaChunu had been characterised for 50 years by a struggle to resist incorporation into the Zulu kingdom, and they regarded the present campaign as a continuation of that. The amaChunu within the regiment were led by Pakhade's senior son, Gabangaye.

No less than five of the Natal Volunteer units were also attached to the column. These ranged from the 150 men of the Natal Mounted Police to two small units from the upper Mzinyathi Border, the Buffalo Border Guard and Newcastle Mounted Rifles – just 22 and 30 men apiece respectively. The men of the Buffalo Border Guard, in particular, were locals, many of them hailing from the farms around Rorke's Drift, or from the village of Dundee nearby. The column also included the Natal Carbineers, 60 strong, who had a claim to being the senior Volunteer unit in Natal, having been founded in 1855.

So large a concentration of troops required no less than 302 ox-wagons and carts and 1,507 oxen and 116 mules and horses to transport it. During the first week of January, the column descended from Helpmekaar – leaving two companies of the 1/24th to garrison a supply depot there – and on 11 January, the Centre Column, over 4,500 men strong, crossed the Mzinyathi into Zululand.

The crossing took place on a raw, misty morning. The guns of N/5 Battery were unlimbered, and fired several rounds into the gloom on the Zulu bank. The river was full, and the troops crossed over a front several hundred yards wide, the NNC wading chest-deep through the water, while the infantry were ferried across in flat-bottomed ferries known as pons. Chelmsford had no idea whether the crossing would be opposed, and for an hour the column was acutely vulnerable as the men made their way across piecemeal. When the sun at last lifted, the only Zulu in sight was a solitary herdsman, and the Volunteers set off after his cattle in delight.

The war had begun on a high note.

The attack on inkhosi Sihayo

Chelmsford established a sprawling camp on the Zulu bank opposite Rorke's Drift. Ahead of him, the old traders' track crested a rise before descending into the open valley of the Batshe stream on its meandering route towards oNdini. Chelmsford expected some opposition in the Batshe, for this was the home of an influential border *induna*, *inkhosi* Sihayo kaXongo. Sihayo stood high in King Cetshwayo's favour, and maintained an impressive homestead at the northern end of the valley, to Chelmsford's left. Moreover, Sihayo's sons had been responsible for the border violations cited in Frere's ultimatum; since the King had refused to surrender them for trial in Natal, Chelmsford could equally expect Sihayo's followers to resist. Furthermore, since the official justification

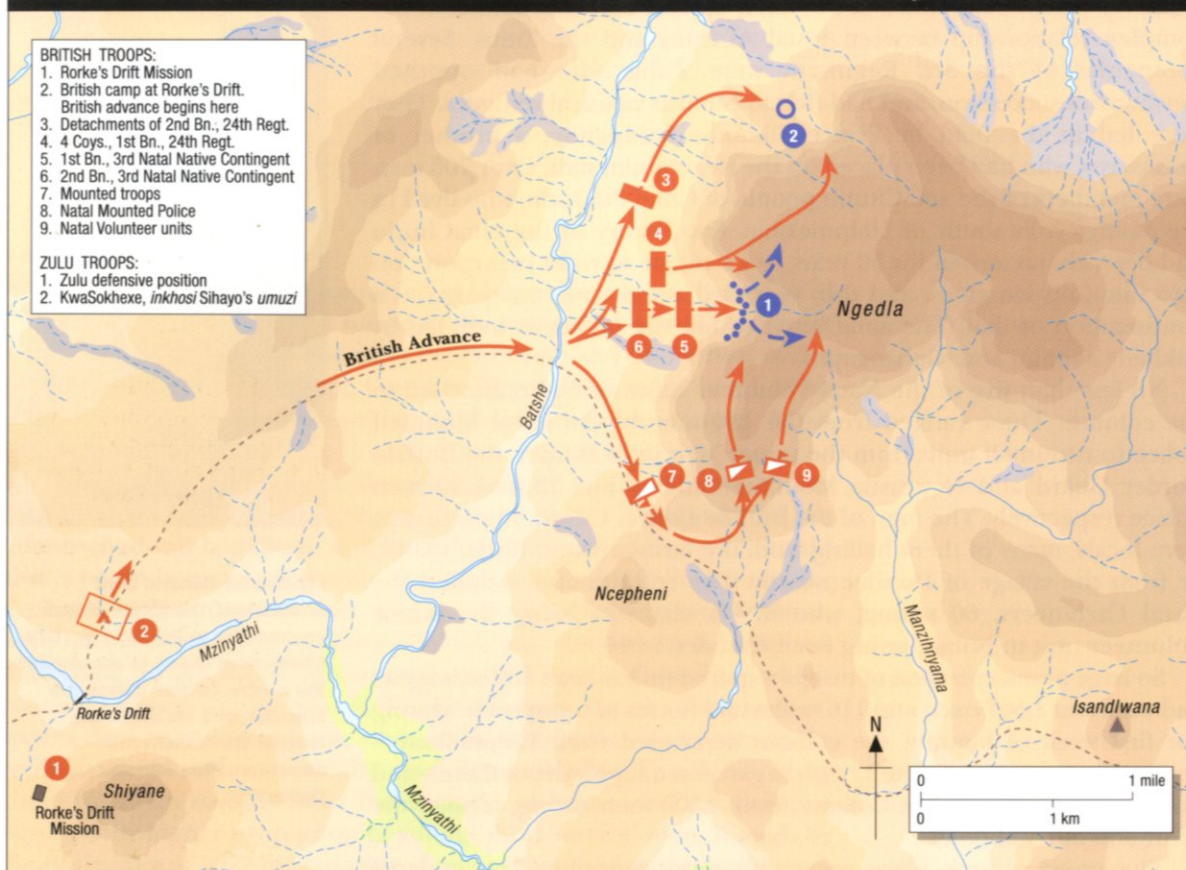


Lieutenant-General Lord Chelmsford, the senior British commander in Zululand in 1879. Chelmsford chose to accompany the centre column during the invasion, and his decisions shaped the Isandlwana campaign. (Ron Sheeley Collection)



Colonel R.T. Glyn, 1/24th. Glyn was appointed commander of the Centre Column, but Chelmsford's decision to accompany the column deprived Glyn of any real role. He was present with the forces at Mangeni on the day of the battle. (Royal Archives; Windsor Castle)

THE ATTACK ON INKHOSI SIHAYO'S HOMESTEAD, 12 JANUARY



for the invasion rested on the pretence that it was a punitive expedition, Chelmsford felt compelled to make a demonstration against him.

Accordingly, on the morning of 12 January Chelmsford and Glyn rode out at the head of an expeditionary force to attack Sihayo's homestead and disperse his followers. As they crossed into the valley from the low ridges to the west, they heard a distant war-song emerging from a jumble of boulders which marked the foot of a line of cliffs opposite. Part of the force was sent up the valley, to attack the homestead, while the rest moved to disperse the Zulu force. The Zulu position was well-placed around the base of a horse-shoe depression scalloped in the hill-sides, and when the NNC attempted to advance into it they were met with a heavy fire which drove them to ground. Chelmsford ordered the mounted men to ascend the hills to the right of the Zulu position, and when the NNC attack was renewed with infantry support the Zulu position became untenable. The Zulus abandoned the rocks and scrambled up through the cliffs, retiring across the top of the hills under harassing fire from the Volunteers.

Sihayo's homestead was found to be undefended, and after marvelling at its secure position and the size of the cattle enclosure – indicative of wealth and prestige – the troops set fire to the empty huts.

Chelmsford's men returned to camp in high spirits that even a sudden thunderstorm could not dampen. In this, their first action of the war, the Zulus had proved to be a skilful and courageous enemy, but had

proved to be no match for the British forces. Although neither *inkhosi* Sihayo nor his senior son, Mehlokazulu, had been present in the action – they were at oNdini, attending the general muster – another of Sihayo's sons, Mkhumbikazulu, had been killed, and his men scattered.

The incident merely tended to reinforce a dangerous air of over-confidence among the British troops, which had prevailed since the end of the Cape Frontier War. Chelmsford might have pondered the lessons implied in Mkhumbikazulu's resistance and extended them to a scenario involving a much larger Zulu force, but he did not; instead, he remarked in his despatches that he hoped the incident would draw the Zulu army down to attack in a decisive engagement. Ironically, this would be precisely the result.

THE ADVANCE TO ISANDLWANA

Beyond the Batshe valley, the track passed across comparatively open ground, below the foot of the Ngedla hills, before dropping into the narrow, rocky valley of the Manzimnyama stream. Beyond the Manzimnyama, the ground rose up again, passing through a broken ridge by way of a nek, a saddle of land beneath a rocky outcrop known as Isandlwana. Isandlwana, an isolated spur of the iNyoni hills which frame it to the north, was a distinctive natural feature which still seems to dominate the skyline for miles around. It was an obvious objective for the next step of the advance, and Chelmsford intended to advance there as soon as possible.

However, the summer rains which had been descending most evenings with monotonous regularity since the end of December had made the track almost impassable for the quantity of traffic under Chelmsford's command. The heavy downpours had turned some sections of the road into a quagmire, while the drifts across the Batshe and Manzimnyama needed bolstering. In order to allow his Engineers to work in relative safety, Chelmsford established a small infantry camp in the Batshe valley, under the cliffs assaulted on 12 January although in fact the countryside seemed largely deserted.

It was not until the 20th that Chelmsford felt able to order the column to advance. The camp at Rorke's Drift was packed away and the site abandoned, and only a small detachment was left at the mission station on the other side of the river to guard the stores accumulated there.

The column followed the road over the nek below Isandlwana, and on the forward slope Chelmsford ordered it to halt. He intended to establish his next camp at the base of the mountain, but since he did not expect to remain there long he paid no particular attention to the details of the camp. He allowed his staff to select the sites to be occupied by the respective units. The 1/24th pitched their camp to the right of the road, with the Volunteer camp facing them on their left, across the track, then N/5 Battery, the 2/24th, and the two NNC battalions.

The tents were placed on an open slope, with the mountain behind them, facing out towards the line of advance. The transport wagons attached to each unit were parked in a neat line behind them, while the supply wagons were parked on an open space on the nek.



Brevet Colonel Anthony Durnford. Durnford commanded No. 2 Column, which was ordered to support the centre Column's movements on 22 January. Lord Chelmsford's orders did not allocate a specific role to Durnford, however, allowing him to act on his own initiative, a factor which had a significant impact on the course of the battle. Durnford himself was killed in action.



Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Pulleine, 1/24th. Pulleine was an experienced administrator who only joined the Centre Column on 17 January. In the early stages of the battle, he was heavily influenced by the officers of his battalion. He was killed during the fighting in the camp and his body was never positively identified.



Major John Dartnell, the commanding officer of the Natal Mounted Police. Dartnell was an efficient and popular leader, and was chosen by Chelmsford to command the reconnaissance to Mangeni on 21 January. (Natal Archives Depot)

After the war, Chelmsford received a good deal of criticism, both for his choice of camp-site, and for his failure to ensure that it was fortified. In fact, the site was as good as any along his immediate line of advance. It offered an uninterrupted view across more than 12 miles of country towards the enemy, while a complex of dongas – erosion gullies – in front of the camp, and the Manzimnyama stream behind, afforded plenty of water for men and animals. Although the countryside was largely free of trees, there was sufficient scrub in the Manzimnyama valley to provide ample wood. Only to the left, where the iNyoni hills overlooked the site just a mile away, was the camp at all vulnerable to sudden enemy attack.

While Chelmsford's own standing orders required all permanent camps in enemy territory to be at least partially entrenched, no attempt had been made to secure either the crossing at Rorke's Drift or the camp there, and Chelmsford certainly did not regard Isandlwana as a permanent halt. He intended to remain there no longer than was necessary to prepare the next stage of the advance, and there is no evidence that he intended to establish a long-term depot there, any more than he had on the Zulu bank at Rorke's Drift. There were, moreover, practical difficulties in entrenching the camp, which had a front of more than 700 yards of rocky ground. To have built a trench around it would have proved time-consuming and exhausting, and Chelmsford did not consider it necessary. Criticised later for his failure to laager the wagons – to form a defensive circle, in the Boer fashion – he replied pragmatically that the wagons were needed for convoy work, and no sooner had they been unloaded than they were due to return to the Drift for supplies.

Yet the real reason why Chelmsford failed to protect the camp was that, at this stage of the war, he simply did not think the Zulus capable of attacking it. There were alternative means to protect it at his disposal, had he wished; in northern Zululand, Colonel Wood had secured his first camp in Zululand, Fort Thinta, with a chain of small stone redoubts. There were plenty of stones available at Isandlwana.

This casualness was despite the fact that Chelmsford's spies had already reported that the main Zulu army had been despatched from oNdini, and was advancing to confront the Centre Column.

The Zulu Response

The news of the Centre Column's attack on Sihayo's followers had reinforced a growing impression at oNdini that this column was the most aggressive and dangerous of the British forces. Ironically, it provoked exactly the response Chelmsford had hoped for; King Cetshwayo and his council decided to direct the full weight of the main Zulu army against this column.

This was a decision which had strategic implications with regard to the other British columns. Clearly, the Zulu could not allow them to advance unchallenged, but the king hoped to 'eat them up' in turn, rather than altogether. Those Zulus who had stayed in the coastal districts were to receive a token reinforcement from the main army at oNdini, and were to attempt to slow Pearson's advance. In the north, the abaQulusi were directed to harass Wood actively to prevent him offering support to the Centre Column.

The main army, fully prepared for war, left the confines of oNdini on 17 January, and paraded through the Mkhumbane valley, across the

White Mfolozi, to secure the blessings of the ancestors before marching to the front. It was perhaps 25,000 strong – certainly one of the largest forces ever assembled in defence of the country – but on the 18th about 3,500 men under the command of *inkhosi* Godide kaNdlela, who had been instructed to reinforce the men on the coast, broke away from the main column. The rest continued to march westwards in a leisurely manner, so as not to tire themselves.

The composition of the army reflected its status as one of concerted national defence. All the great regiments were represented, including the uVe, young men of 19 and 20 who had only recently been enrolled, and a handful of uMkhulutshane, old men in their 70s who had been enrolled by King Dingane. Indeed, it was upon the young men – particularly the belligerent and proud iNgobamakhosi, uKhandempemvu and uMbonambi *amabutho*, whose ages ranged from the mid-20s to mid-30s – that the burden of fighting was expected to fall heaviest, and they were confident they could meet the challenge. Also present were the men who straddled the late 30s and early 40s age-groups, the uNokhenke, uDududu, iMbube and iSangqu, and the senior married men attached to the king's royal residence, the uThulwana, iNdluyengwe, iNd londlo and uDloko. Along the way, the army was joined by local elements who had remained in the field to watch the British movements, so that by the time it reached within striking distance of the enemy, it had largely returned to its original strength of 25,000 men.

On 19 January, the army split into two columns, marching a few miles apart, a standard precaution when approaching enemy territory. That night, it camped near Babanango mountain, and the following day it advanced to the eastern slopes of Siphezi hill. It was now less than 20 miles from Isandlwana; Siphezi is clearly visible in the distance from the site of Chelmsford's camp.

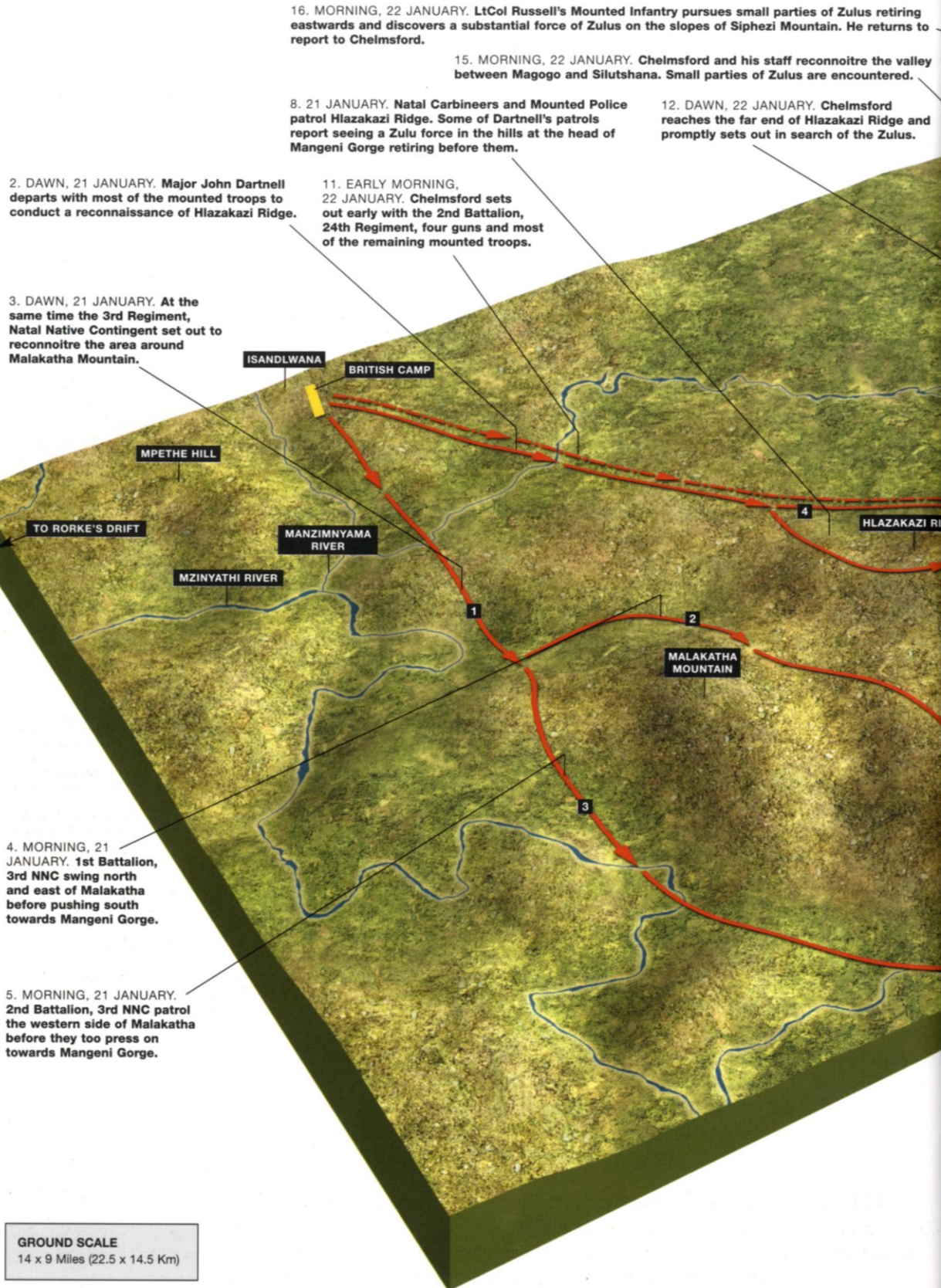
CHELMSFORD'S RECONNAISSANCE

No sooner had he arrived at Isandlwana than Chelmsford looked to the route ahead. He was not unduly worried about the iNyoni heights on his left; the surface of the hills was undulating but open enough, and could easily be patrolled by cavalry vedettes. Rather, he was worried about a more impressive physical obstacle further off to his right. Here, his view downstream through the Mzinyathi valley was blocked by a high, rocky hill known as Malakatha mountain, while a long ridge – Hlazakazi – striking off eastwards from Malakatha, shut in the view south-east towards Qudeni mountain. Even as his men struggled to unload their wagons and erect their tents on 20 January, Chelmsford had ridden out with his staff to scout out the far end of Hlazakazi.

He found that the Hlazakazi ridge ended abruptly in a spectacular feature known as the Mangeni gorge. Here a shallow stream suddenly tumbled several hundred feet into a natural chasm, opening out into a spectacular vista of hills to the south. At the head of the Mangeni, above the waterfall, there was a circle of hills leading north-east towards Siphezi. From the edge of Hlazakazi, Chelmsford scoured the country with his field glasses; it seemed deserted in the afternoon heat. Yet the risk to his advance was obvious. The Mangeni was the territory of two



Brevet Major Stuart Smith, N/5 Battery, RA. Smith had served throughout the Cape Frontier War; on 22 January he had accompanied Lord Chelmsford to Mangeni, but had returned to the camp shortly before the battle began. He had commanded the camp's guns throughout the battle, and was shot in the arm; he was later killed during the descent into the Mzinyathi valley during the retreat. (Ron Sheeley Collection)



16. MORNING, 22 JANUARY. LtCol Russell's Mounted Infantry pursues small parties of Zulus retiring eastwards and discovers a substantial force of Zulus on the slopes of Siphezi Mountain. He returns to report to Chelmsford.

15. MORNING, 22 JANUARY. Chelmsford and his staff reconnoitre the valley between Magogo and Silutshana. Small parties of Zulus are encountered.

8. 21 JANUARY. Natal Carbineers and Mounted Police patrol Hlazakazi Ridge. Some of Dartnell's patrols report seeing a Zulu force in the hills at the head of Mangeni Gorge retiring before them.

12. DAWN, 22 JANUARY. Chelmsford reaches the far end of Hlazakazi Ridge and promptly sets out in search of the Zulus.

2. DAWN, 21 JANUARY. Major John Dartnell departs with most of the mounted troops to conduct a reconnaissance of Hlazakazi Ridge.

11. EARLY MORNING, 22 JANUARY. Chelmsford sets out early with the 2nd Battalion, 24th Regiment, four guns and most of the remaining mounted troops.

3. DAWN, 21 JANUARY. At the same time the 3rd Regiment, Natal Native Contingent set out to reconnoitre the area around Malakatha Mountain.

4. MORNING, 21 JANUARY. 1st Battalion, 3rd NNC swing north and east of Malakatha before pushing south towards Mangeni Gorge.

5. MORNING, 21 JANUARY. 2nd Battalion, 3rd NNC patrol the western side of Malakatha before they too press on towards Mangeni Gorge.

6. MORNING, 21 JANUARY. Main Zulu army breaks into small groups and moves north-west into Ngwebeni valley. A patrol from the British camp is driven off by Zulu scouts without realising the significance of the encounter.

1. NIGHT 20/21 JANUARY. Main Zulu army encamped on the eastern slopes of Siphezi Mountain.

14. MORNING, 22 JANUARY. Dartnell and the mounted troops move off to the right to surround any Zulus remaining in the area.

13. MORNING, 22 JANUARY. The NNC, somewhat nervous after their uncomfortable night, are ordered to clear Magogo hill.

9. LATE AFTERNOON, 21 JANUARY. Having rejoined the NNC on the eastern edge of Hlazakazi, Dartnell leads the mounted men into the hills opposite to investigate the reports of his patrols. A force of several hundred Zulus appears and advances rapidly but, on a command, retires out of sight.

10. EVENING 21 JANUARY. Fearing a trap Dartnell retires to Hlazakazi Ridge and bivouacs for the night, having sent word to Chelmsford of what has occurred. There are several false alarms during the night.

7. AFTERNOON, 21 JANUARY. 1st and 2nd battalions of the Natal Native Contingent reunite in Mangeni Gorge. They march up the gorge and emerge on to Hlazakazi Ridge late in the afternoon. Neither battalion has encountered any enemy forces.

IMPERIAL TROOPS	
1	3rd Regiment, Natal Native Contingent
2	1st Battalion, 3rd Natal Native Contingent
3	2nd Battalion, 3rd Natal Native Contingent
4	Natal Mounted Police
5	Natal Carbineers
6	2nd Battalion, 24th Regiment
7	Mounted Infantry
ZULU FORCES	
A	Main Zulu impi
B	Zulus, followers of inkhosi Matshana kaMondisa

BRITISH MOVEMENTS AROUND ISANDLWANA

20-22 January 1879, viewed from the south-east showing the reconnaissance by Major Dartnell and Lord Chelmsford. Patrols of mounted troops and the Natal Native Contingent scour Malakatha and Hlazakazi Ridge in search of the main Zulu army, but only sporadic contact is made with smaller Zulu units.

GROUND SCALE
14 x 9 Miles (22.5 x 14.5 Km)

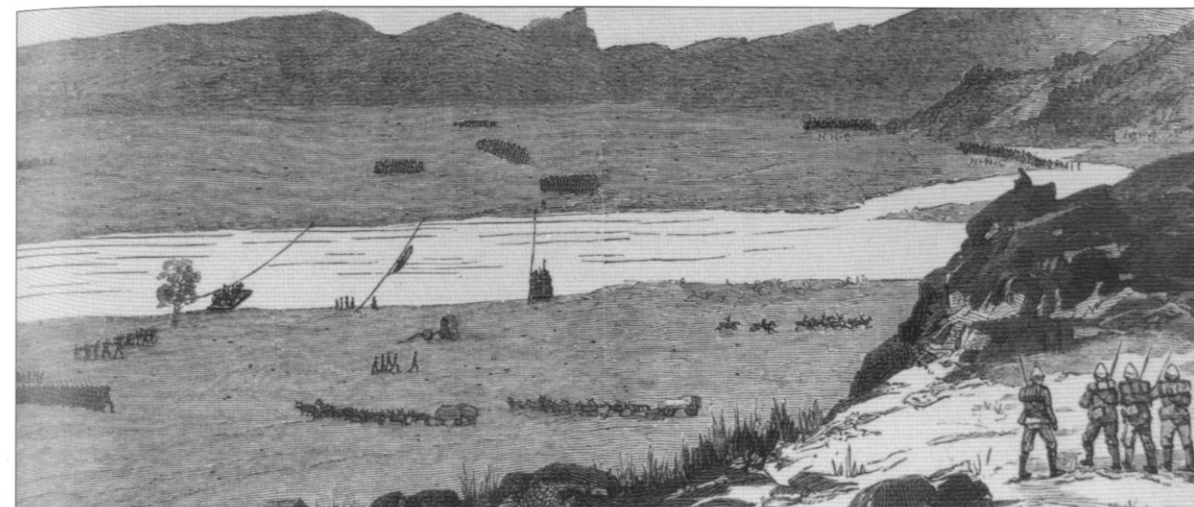


An outpost of the 24th 'in fours', sketched on 11 January 1879, the day the Centre Column crossed into Zululand. Ominously, the distinctive peak of Isandlwana is visible on the sky-line.

amakhosi named Matshana – Matshana kaMondisa and Matshana kaSithakuza – both of whom were rumoured among the British to be potentially hostile. Even without any reinforcement from oNdini, the 'two Matshanas' could provide an irritating threat to Chelmsford's future line of communication, while the main Zulu army, advancing to the south of the Malakatha/Hlazakazi line, could by-pass Isandlwana altogether, and strike across the Mzinyathi into Natal downstream of Rorke's Drift.

Chelmsford's solution was to order a thorough sweep through the hills. That night, he gave orders that some 1,600 of the NNC and most of the mounted men should be ready to march out at dawn on the 21st. Their objectives were to scour through the Malakatha and Hlazakazi range; the NNC were to march due south, beyond the spur of Malakatha, and turn east through the valleys beyond. The mounted men were given the easier task of scouting the summit of Hlazakazi. Overall command of the reconnaissance was given to Major J.G. Dartnell of the Natal Mounted Police. The two columns were to link up at the head of the Mangeni gorge, and were to return to Isandlwana by nightfall.

The men set out in good spirits at first light, and there was a sense among those left in the camp that they were missing out on the fun. It was a hot day, and the NNC, in particular, were faced with difficult terrain; while they stood up to the work well enough, their NCOs found the march a difficult one. The country appeared to be deserted apart from a few Zulu civilians. One NNC officer later claimed to have captured and interrogated a Zulu boy, who told him that a large Zulu



Invasion; the Centre Column crosses into Zululand at Rorke's Drift, 11 January. Isandlwana on the skyline.

army was nearby; yet this claim may have been the wisdom of hindsight. Certainly, by the time the NNC emerged onto Hlazakazi through the cliffs at the head of Mangeni late that afternoon, they had encountered no hostile forces whatever.

The mounted men, however, had had a more uncertain time. Dartnell had pushed scouts into the hills at the head of the gorge, some of whom reported seeing a Zulu force retiring ahead of them. Once Dartnell had affected a junction with the NNC – who remained on the eastern edge of Hlazakazi – he led the mounted men back down from the heights, and into the hills to investigate. He had only gone a mile or two, and was still in plain sight of the NNC, when a Zulu force, several hundred strong, appeared over a crest in front of him. The Zulus advanced rapidly, throwing out 'horns' on either side, but at a shouted word of command they halted, and retired back out of sight. Dartnell, fearing a trap, halted his men, and fell back to join the NNC on Hlazakazi.

He was now in a dilemma. According to Chelmsford's orders, his command should have already been returning to Isandlwana. Yet in the dusk the glow of Zulu camp-fires could clearly be seen in the hills opposite, and to retire under cover of darkness not only exposed his command to the risk of a night attack in the rear, but would break contact with the very force Dartnell had been sent out to find. Instead, Dartnell decided to bivouac where he was, and to send word to Chelmsford that he was in touch with the enemy, and required reinforcements.

Lord Chelmsford's reaction; 2.00am, 22 January

Dartnell's message reached Lord Chelmsford some time between 1.30 and 2.00am on the morning of 22 January. It appeared to confirm everything that he had feared from his personal reconnaissance on the 20th; the Zulus were in the hills at the head of the Mangeni, and, rather like the amaXhosa on the Cape Frontier, they had shown a distinct reluctance to be drawn into a fight. Chelmsford immediately decided to march out to confront them. With luck, he might cross the intervening distance during the remaining hours of darkness, and arrive at Mangeni at first light. He might then be in a position to surprise the Zulus before they could disperse into the hills.



The action in the Batshe valley on 12 January; Chelmsford and his staff watch as 24th companies advance into the cliffs in support of the attacking NNC.

Chelmsford ordered the 2/24th to make ready to march out, together with four of Col Harness's guns, and most of the remaining mounted men. The men were roused as quietly as possible, so as not to alert any Zulu scouts to the movement. Chelmsford also ordered two ambulances to accompany him – he was clearly expecting to fight – but the troops were to leave all their baggage and equipment in the camp. The battalion ammunition reserve for the 2/24th was to be placed in readiness, should Chelmsford send for it. Colonel Glyn was to accompany the advance, and the senior officer left in camp was to be LtCol Henry Pulleine of the 1/24th.

As an afterthought, before he left Chelmsford sent an order to Col Durnford, instructing him to march to Isandlwana. Over the previous few days Chelmsford had dithered about the best way to employ Durnford, but after Durnford had made a move towards the Zulu border at Middle Drift – on his own initiative, and without Chelmsford's approval – Chelmsford had reprimanded him, and moved him closer to his own command. That night, Durnford's command was camped on Chelmsford's old camp-site on the Zulu bank at Rorke's Drift. With his mind focussed on the events unfolding ahead of him, Lord Chelmsford's instructions to Durnford were vague, and merely directed him to move to Isandlwana, hinting that his presence was required to support the movement against the Mangeni.

Chelmsford's order arrived at Rorke's Drift shortly after dawn on the 22nd – at about the time that Chelmsford himself reached the eastern end of the Hlazakazi heights.

THE BATTLE OF ISANDLWANA

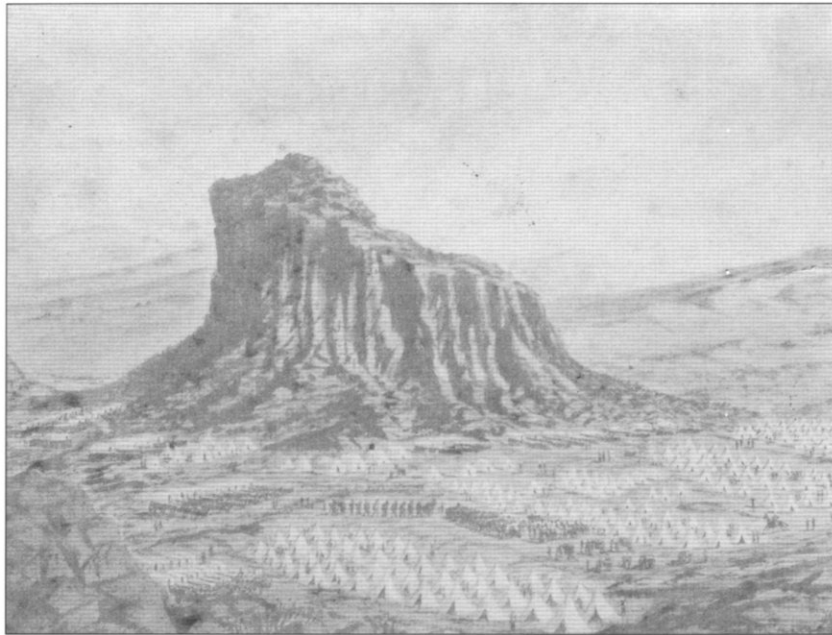
When Durnford received Chelmsford's order, he broke camp and marched to Isandlwana. The imprecise nature of Chelmsford's orders had encouraged him to believe that he was required to join in the offensive against the two Matshanas, and he was delighted at the prospect. Indeed, he was so eager that during the march to Isandlwana he allowed his men to draw ahead of their baggage train, to the extent that he arrived a good half hour ahead of his wagons.

By the time he arrived at Isandlwana at about 10.30am, however, he found that the situation had changed considerably since Chelmsford's departure. Shortly after dawn, as the camp awoke to its daily routine, and the mounted vedettes rode out to take up their day-time positions, a force of several hundred Zulus had appeared on the lip of the iNyoni escarpment. They had made no attempt to advance, and had appeared to be watching the camp. Pulleine had prudently ordered the men to stand-to in front of their tents, but after a while the Zulus had withdrawn. Picquets pushed up to the escarpment reported that they had split into several bodies, and appeared to be retiring across the heights in a north-easterly direction.

The move had caused no great consternation in the camp, for, as one survivor later put it, 'We none of us had the slightest idea that the Zulus contemplated attacking the camp, and having in the last war often seen equally large bodies of the enemy, never dreamed they would come on.'



An aerial photo of the battlefield at Isandlwana from the south-east. The camp was pitched on the open slope across the foot of the mountain. The whitewashed cairns which scatter the site today are suggestive of the heavy fighting which took place there.



A contemporary sketch of the camp, with the tents laid out in blocks according to unit across the foot of the mountain, with transport wagons parked behind. (Ron Sheeley Collection)

Nevertheless, the Zulu presence presented something of a dilemma for Durnford. He was now the senior officer in the camp – although his promotion to Brevet Colonel may not have been known in South Africa, he had in any case several month's seniority over Pulleine – and he might fairly be expected to take command of the camp. He had clearly hoped, however, to retain his independent command, and expected to find fresh orders from Chelmsford to this effect. To his disappointment, however, there were none. Lord Chelmsford would later argue that his orders to Pulleine – to defend the camp – were equally binding on Durnford.

And yet Chelmsford was clearly unaware of the developments at Isandlwana. The Zulu presence on the heights to the left might be no more than a scouting party, or it might represent some attempt to cut between Lord Chelmsford and the camp. If that were the case, Chelmsford's troops would be acutely vulnerable, having left not only their reserve ammunition but most of their supplies in the camp.

Under the circumstances, Durnford chose to interpret his original orders from Chelmsford, with their hint that he was to co-operate in the attack on the Mangeni complex, as giving him the freedom to act independently. He decided to use his own troops to scout through the iNyoni hills in an effort to locate the Zulu forces, and force them away from Lord Chelmsford's rear. Durnford asked Pulleine to lend him several companies of the 24th in support. Pulleine at first agreed, but after discussing the matter with the officers of the regiment, he demurred, pointing out that his orders were quite specific, and that he would not be justified in sending men away from the camp. Durnford accepted this with a casual remark that if he got into difficulties, he would expect Pulleine's support.

Durnford's men left the camp shortly after 11.00am. Two troops of the Zikhali Horse, under Lieutenants Roberts and Raw, and accompanied by Durnford's staff officer, George Shepstone, were sent up



A fascinating photograph of a British infantry battalion camp, photographed later in the war. The 1st and 2nd Battalion camps would have looked much like this; without the reassuring presence of a protective earthwork redoubt, which is just visible in the centre of the photograph here.

onto the escarpment to the immediate north of the camp. They were to sweep across the top of the hills, driving any Zulus they might encounter to the east. Durnford himself rode out directly eastwards from the camp. He had with him two further troops of mounted auxiliaries, the Christian Edendale troop under Simeon Kambule, and Chief Hlubi Molife's Sotho troop. He was also accompanied by a battery of three 9-pdr rocket troughs, under the command of Brevet Major Francis Russell, and its escort, a company of the 1/1st NNC under Captain Nourse.

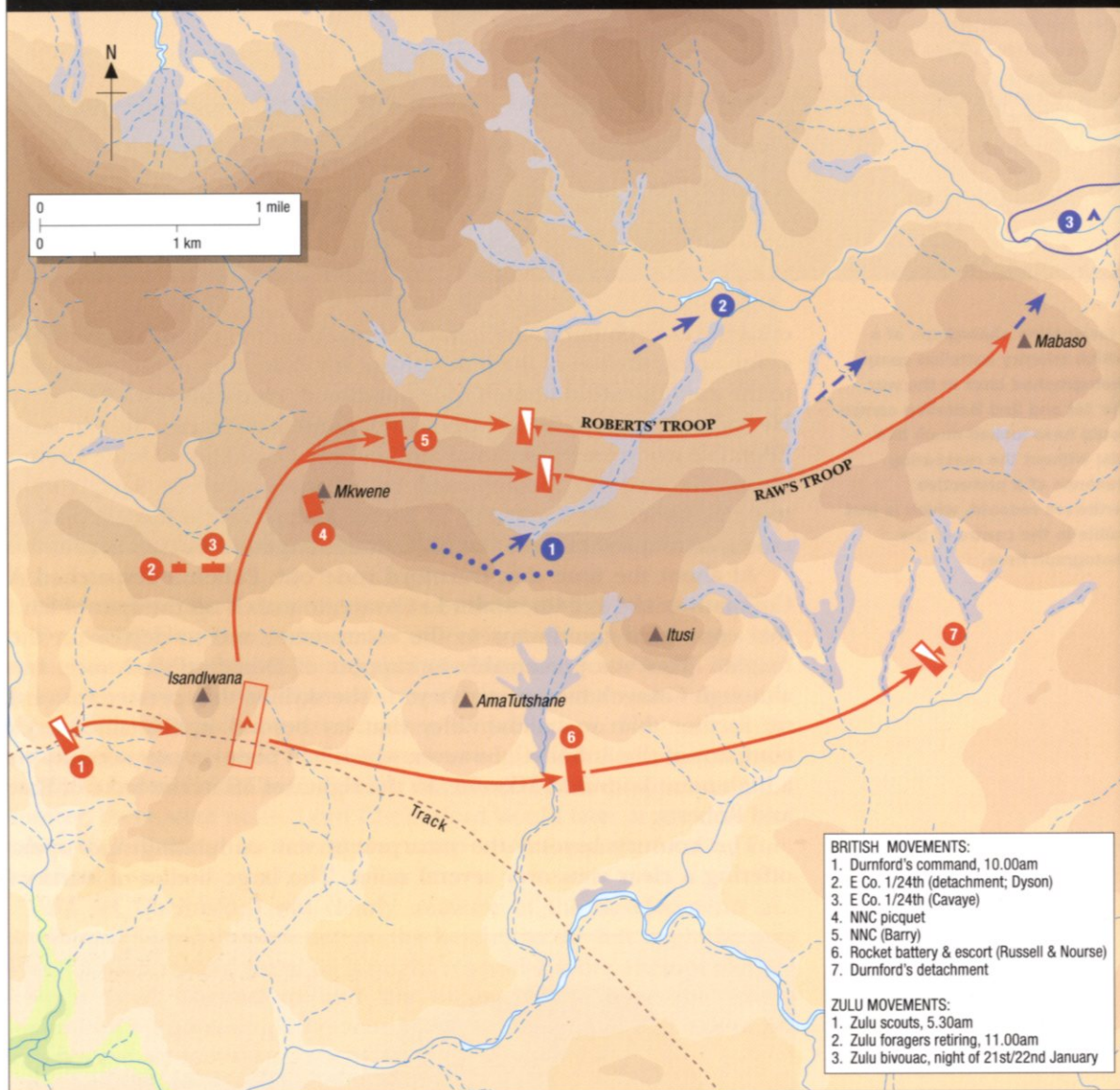
At about the time that Durnford rode out, Pulleine despatched A Company of the 1/24th, under Lt Cavaye, to march up the spur of land that connected Isandlwana to the escarpment, and to deploy on the heights. This was presumably in support of Durnford's advance, but although Cavaye's men passed beyond the skyline, they pressed forward no further than a shallow valley that lay beyond it. Captain Barry's company of the 3rd NNC, however, which had been on picquet duty on a high-point known as Mkwene, to the right, set off in the wake of Raw and Roberts.

The country beyond the escarpment was undulating and open, offering a clear view over several miles. The large bodies of warriors



Isandlwana, photographed in 1879 from the camp site. In the area immediately around the camp, the passage of vehicles, men and animals would have trampled the grass flat; on the approaches, however, the fresh summer grass grew in places knee or even waist-high.

ISANDLWANA CAMP, MOVEMENTS TO 11.00AM, 22 JANUARY



seen early in the morning had disappeared, but there were several small groups still in view, scattered across the grassy heights, most apparently moving towards the northeast. Roberts and Raw gave chase, Roberts' troop extending off to the left, and following the line of a shallow stream. They were over four miles from Isandlwana when Raw's men made contact with a party of Zulu foragers, who were trying frantically to drive a small herd of cattle before them. The foragers fled over a rocky rise, known as Mabaso, with Raw's men in pursuit. Suddenly, the Zulus disappeared from sight as the ground fell away steeply below them. On the summit of Mabaso, Raw's men reigned in in astonishment; down below them, spread out along the valley of the Ngwebeni stream, lay 25,000 men of King Cetshwayo's army.

ORDERS OF BATTLE

BRITISH FORCES

No 2 Column (detachment) – Bvt Col A.W. Durnford
 11 Battery, 7 Brigade – Bvt Major F.B. Russell
 Three 9-pdr rocket troughs, (1 officer, 9 men)

Mounted auxiliaries – Captain Barton
 No. 1 Troop, Zikhali's Horse, Lt. C. Raw
 No. 2 Troop, Zikhali's Horse, Lt. J.A. Roberts
 No. 3 Troop, Zikhali's Horse, Lt. R.W. Vause
 Edendale Troop, Lt. A.F. Henderson
 Hlubi's (BaSotho) Troop, Lt. A.F. Henderson
 (6 officers, 259 men)

1 Battalion, 1st Regiment, NNC
 D Company, Capt. C. Nourse
 E Company, Capt. W.R. Stafford
 (7 officers, 240 men)

No. 3 Column (detachment) – LtCol H.B. Pulleine
 N Battery, 5 Brigade – Bvt Major S. Smith commanding
 Section of two 7-pdr guns, (2 officers, 70 men)

1st Bn., 24th Regt. – Capt (Acting Major) W. Degacher
 A Company – Lt C.W. Cavaye
 C Company – Capt R. Younghusband
 E Company – Lt F.P. Porteous
 F Company – Capt W.E. Mostyn
 H Company – Capt G.V. Wardell
 (14 officers, 402 men)

2nd Battalion 24th Regiment
 G Company, and detachments – Lt C.D'A. Pope
 (5 officers 178 men)

Mounted Troops

No. 1 Squadron, Mounted Infantry
 Natal Mounted Police
 Natal Carbineers – Lt F.J.D. Scott
 Newcastle Mounted Rifles – Capt C.R. Bradstreet
 Buffalo Border Guard – Quartermaster D. Macphail
 (115 officers and men)

Detachments

Staff officers, 5th Company, Royal Engineers
 Army Service Corps
 Army Hospital Corps
 No. 1 Company, Natal Native Pioneers
 (50 officers and men)

1st Battalion, 3rd Regiment, NNC
 No 6. Company – Capt Krohn
 No. 9 Company – Capt J.F. Lonsdale
2nd Battalion, 3rd Regiment, NNC
 No 4 Company – Capt Erskine
 No. 5 Company – Capt. Barry
 (19 officers, 391 men)

1 All figures are taken from official sources, and are approximate. The number of civilians in the camp – chiefly wagon drivers – is not recorded.

ZULU FORCES

Commanders: *inkhosi* Ntshingwayo kaMahole Khoza,
inkhosi Mavumengwana kaNdelela Ntuli

Right horn

uDududu, iMbube, iSangqu.
 (Approx. 4,000 men)

Chest

uNokhenke, uKhandempemvu (also known as the uMcijo),
 uMbonambi.
 (Approx. 9,000 men)

Left horn

uVe, iNgobamakhosi.
 (Approx. 6,000 men)

Elements from the uMxapho, most of whom were fighting in the coastal sector, were also present with the army, as were small detachments of *amabutho* from elderly age-grades, such as the uMkhulutshane. Some elements from the reserve broke away to join the left horn. An unknown number of men were present who had joined the army from chiefdoms through which it had marched.

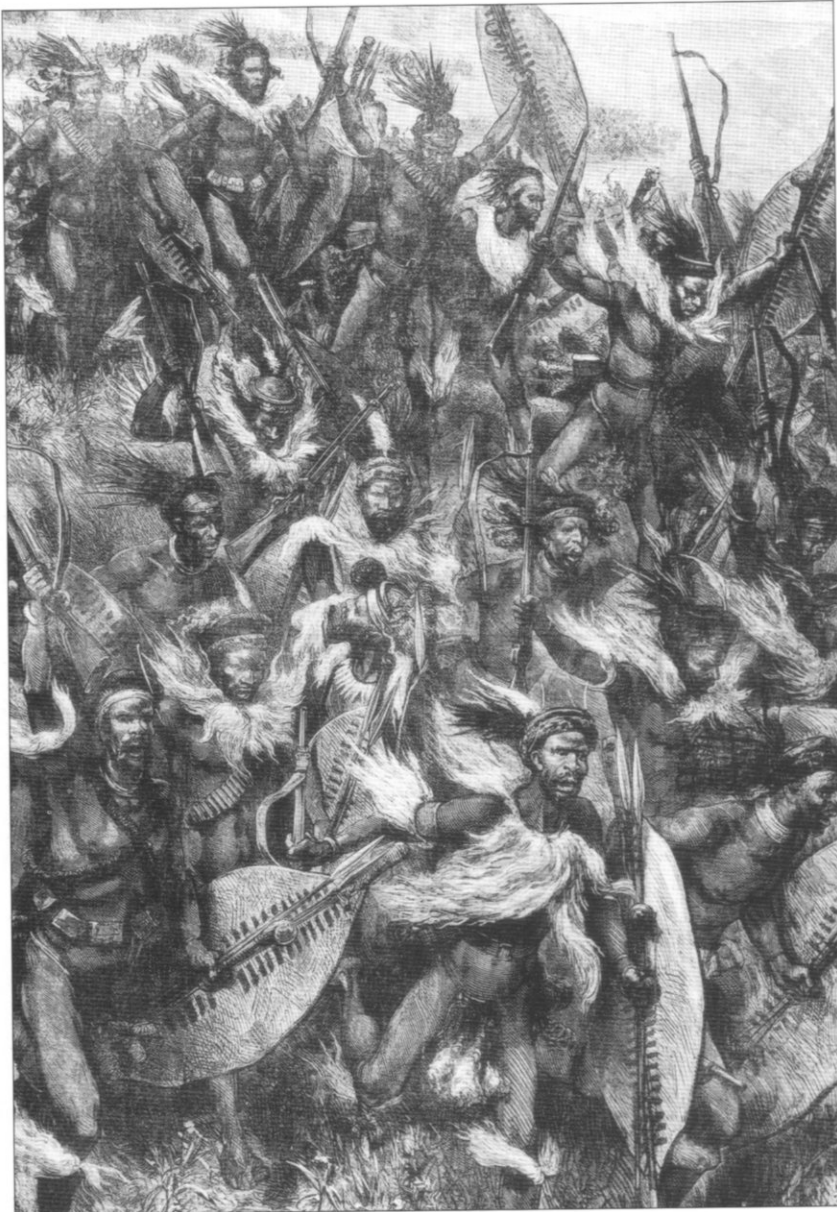
Reserve

iNdluyengwe, uThulwana, uDloko, iNdlondlo.
 Only the iNdluyengwe played any significant role in the attack on the camp; the remaining regiments went on to attack Rorke's Drift.
 (Approx. 4,500 men)

Note: It is impossible to calculate the strength of individual Zulu *amabutho*, because the Zulus assessed numbers in terms of *amaviyo* – companies – present, and the size of *amaviyo* varied considerably. The British had reached an approximation of the total peacetime strength of the various *amabutho*, but it is known that *amaviyo* from various regiments, based in the coastal sector, had remained to fight locally. The total force engaged in the battle numbered some 20,000 men, while a further 4,000 remained in reserve.



Isandlwana, photographed in June 1879. A number of wagons, left by earlier burial details, still remain on the nek, while troops breakfast beyond.



As the Zulu chest advances over the crest of the iNyoni heights, the warriors bunch together in this contemporary engraving. In fact, most of the Zulu attack was executed in open order, with the warriors concentrating only in the final rush. Note the many firearms carried by these men. Although the artist has accurately conveyed the various elements of Zulu dress, it is unlikely that quite so much was retained in action.

The Zulu Movements

Lord Chelmsford's supposition about the Zulu movements had not been entirely incorrect. On the night of 20/21 January the great army had bivouacked on the eastern slopes of Siphezi mountain, directly to Chelmsford's front. It had been followers of *inkhosi* Matshana kaMondisa, emerging from the Mangeni and Mzinyathi valleys to join the main *impi*, whom Dartnell had encountered on the evening of the 21st. That same day, the army had split into small groups, so as to be less conspicuous, and had moved – not south-west, towards Mangeni, as Chelmsford had supposed – but north-west, into the Ngwebeni valley. This had been a dangerous movement, for the country was largely open, and at one point a British patrol from the camp had almost blundered into them, but had been driven off by Zibhebhu's scouts, without



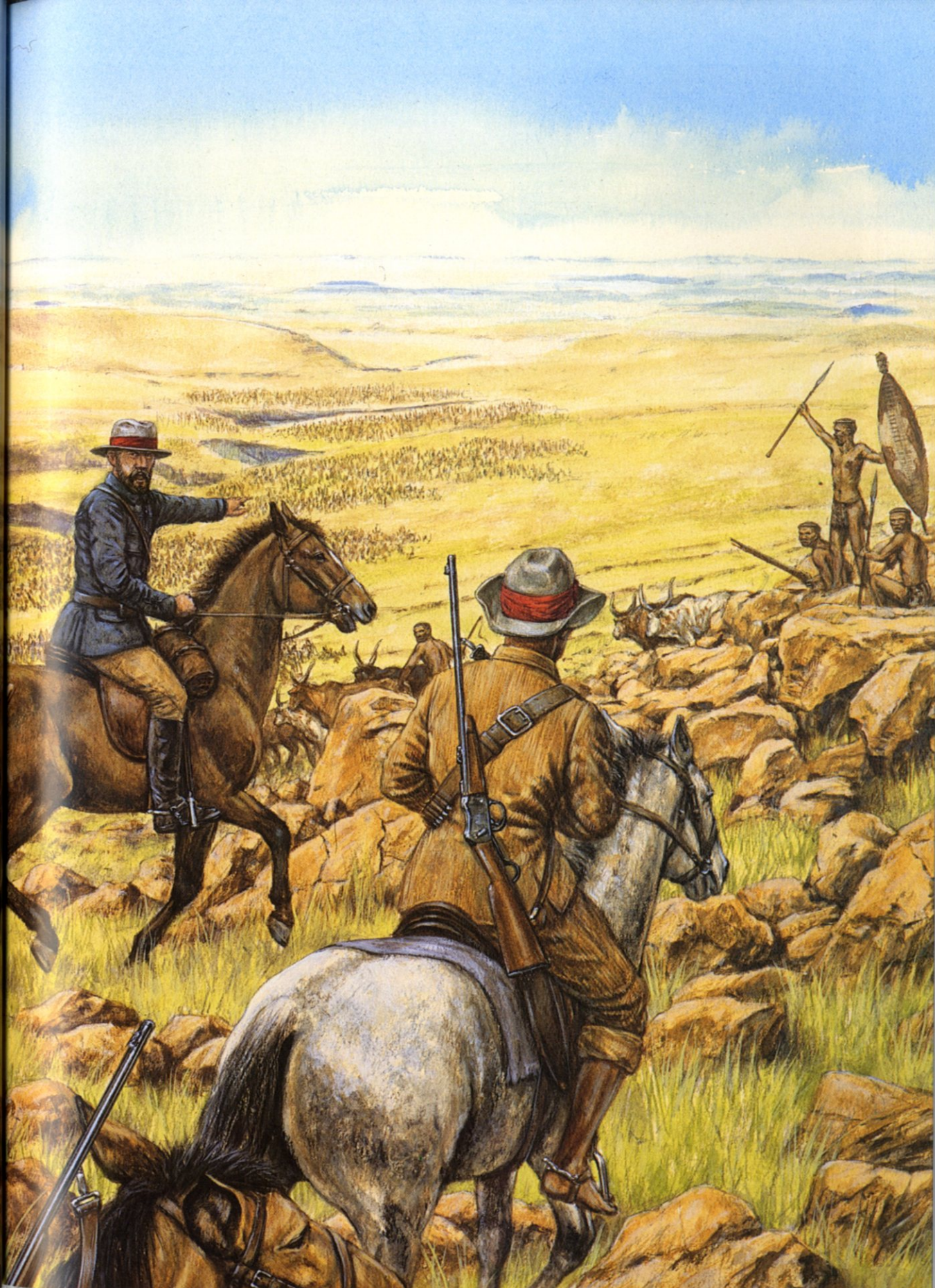
Isandlwana from the air; Pulleine initially deployed his men in extended order on the right of the open space in front of the mountain, facing north. This position commands the hollows where the huts now stand, but was too extended in the face of a sustained Zulu attack.

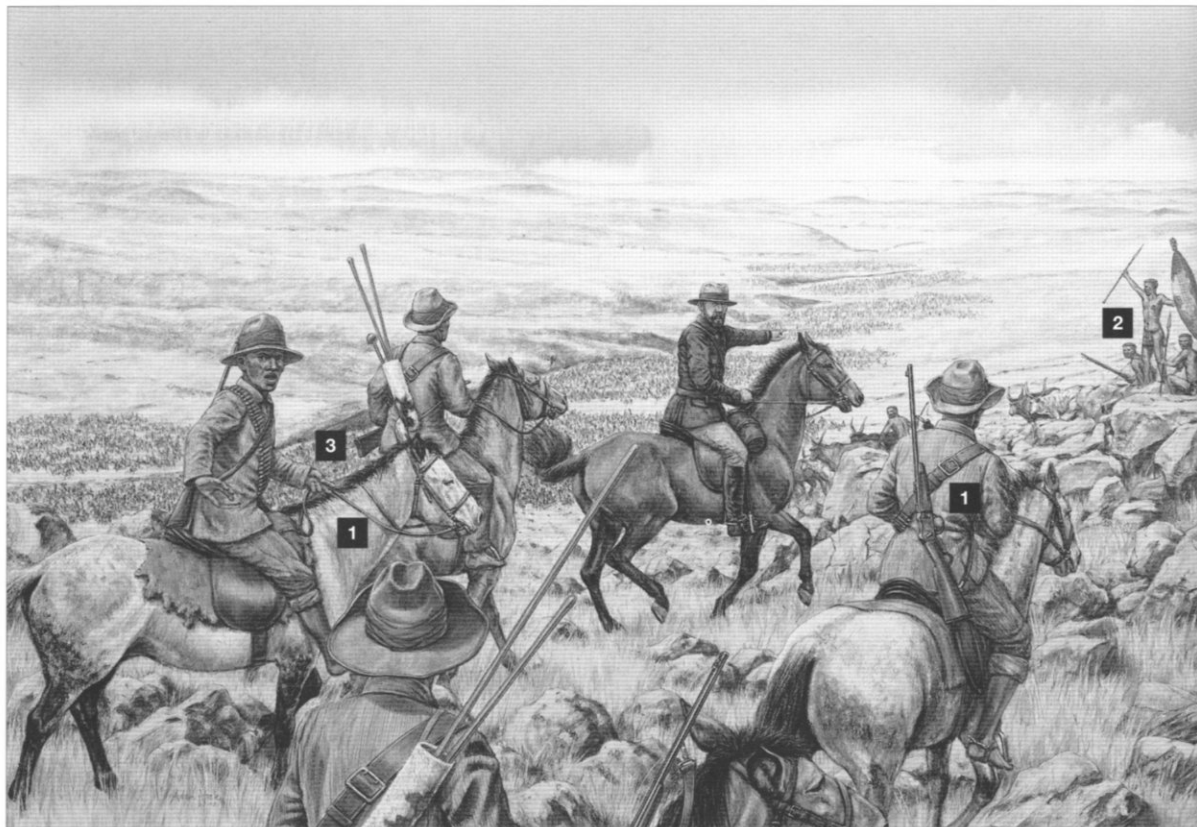
realising the significance of the encounter. The army had spent the night of the 21st in the valley quietly, lighting no cooking fires for fear of detection. The coming night was the night of the new moon, a time when dark spiritual forces known as *umnyama* were close to the surface, and the Zulu commanders did not intend to attack until the morning of the 23rd at the earliest.

The sudden encounter with Raw's men changed all that, however. As the mounted men suddenly appeared on the sky-line, the Zulus in the nearest *ibutho*, the uKhandempemvu, immediately rose up to attack them. As they rushed up the steep slope of Mabaso, Raw's men dismounted and fired a volley at them; the battle of Isandlwana had begun.

THE ADVANCE OF THE RIGHT HORN

The sudden rush of the uKhandempemvu drew the regiments camped on either side of them into the attack. The Zulus streamed up the slopes in some confusion, without waiting for last minute pre-battle rituals, or for the customary address by their commanders. Ntshingwayo and his fellow generals were only able to restrain the *amabutho* associated with the royal homestead at oNdini – the senior men of the uThulwana, iNdlondlo, uDloko and iNdluyengwe, who had been camped furthest from the British incursion. They alone were fully prepared, and were held back to act as the reserve. Nevertheless, as the advancing *amabutho*





DURNFORD'S AUXILIARIES STUMBLE ON THE ZULU ARMY
(pages 52-53)

Late on the morning of the 22 January two troops of mounted auxiliaries (1) from Durnford's command were sent onto the iNyoni heights to investigate reports of Zulu movements north of the camp at Isandlwana. The men were amaNgwane, from the foothills of the Kahlamba mountains in Natal, and formed a unit popularly known as 'Zikhali's Horse' after a former chief Zikhali kaMatiwane. They were commanded by Lieutenants J.A. Roberts and Charles Raw, and were dressed in the same yellow corduroy clothes that were issued to most mounted irregulars and Natal Native Contingent NCOs. While crossing the heights, Raw's troop had spotted Zulu foragers (2) driving a herd of cattle across the heights, and had given chase. The Zulus disappeared into a fold in the ground, and as Raw's men crested a rocky rise known locally as Mabaso, they were suddenly confronted with the sight of the entire Zulu army, as many as 25,000 men, bivouacked in the valley below them. The Zulus had moved into the valley the previous day, entirely undetected by British scouts. They had been camped along the banks of the Ngwebeni stream, and had apparently planned to rest throughout the 22nd, and only attack on the following day. They had lit no fires so as not to betray their

presence, and were camped in regimental masses along several miles of the valley floor. The sight of so many warriors concentrated in such an area was so striking that for years after the battle the Ngwebeni valley was known to the Zulus as *Mahaweni* - 'the place of the war-shields'. As soon as Raw's men appeared on the skyline, the nearest Zulu regiment, the uKhandempemvu (3) - who were only a few hundred yards away - rose up to attack. Raw's men fired a volley to delay them, and sent messages to the camp warning of the Zulu presence. They then retired in good order, pursued by the entire army, which followed the uKhandempemvu out of the valley. The Zulu attack was entirely spontaneous, but by the time the army had crossed the heights and approached the camp, the regimental commanders had re-established control, and the precision of the subsequent attack suggests that plans had been discussed, at least in principle, before hand. Zikhali's Horse took up a position in the British line when they reached the camp, but retreated when the line collapsed. Most of these men survived the battle, including Lt. Raw; Lt. Roberts was killed, however, possibly struck accidentally by British artillery fire as his men retired down the iNyoni escarpment with the Zulus close behind. (Adam Hook)

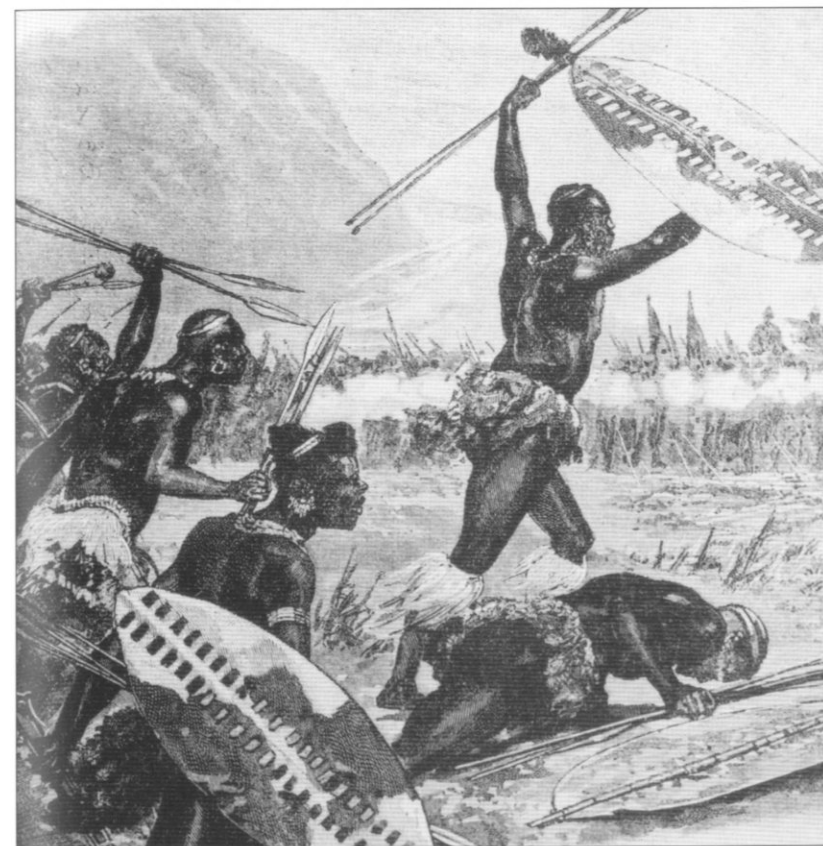
deployed onto the open ground, their regimental commanders ushered them into their traditional attack formation, and the success with which they imposed some order on the initial chaos suggests that a contingency plan for attacking the camp was at least widely known among the *izinduna*. Indeed, the Zulu movements spotted by Pulleine at dawn that morning may have reflected their preparations.

While the uKhandempemvu rushed towards the British auxiliaries, the uMbonambi *ibutho* fell in on their left and the uNokhenke on their right. Between them, these regiments would constitute the Zulu centre, or 'chest'. Further to their right, emerging in long lines from the valley of the Ngwebeni west of Mabaso, the iSangqu, uDududu and iMbube regiments formed the right horn. The youngest regiment with the force, the uVe, who had been on the east of the Zulu bivouac, streamed out east of Mabaso, to form the tip of the left horn. The slightly older iNgobamakhosi followed some distance behind and to their right. Some elements of the oNdini regiments, led by a fiery *induna* named Qethuka kaMaqondo, broke away from the reserve to follow the left horn. Small detachments from other regiments, together with local forces who had joined the army along the way, fell in with the main regimental groups.

Despite being heavily outnumbered, Raw and Roberts fell back steadily across the heights, halting every few hundred yards to fire a volley. The infantry of Barry's NNC company, however, broke and fled, leaving their officers with the mounted men. George Shepstone himself rode back to the camp to warn Pulleine of the unfolding attack.



Brevet Major Francis Russell, RA, who commanded the rocket battery attached to Durnford's command. The rocket battery came into action early in the battle, and was over-run. Russell himself was shot dead. (Royal Archives, Windsor Castle)



In this contemporary illustration, the 24th's line is depicted in close order, with the Colours flying; in fact, the companies were extended, with the men lying or kneeling to take advantage of the cover afforded by boulders. The Colours were not carried on the firing line.



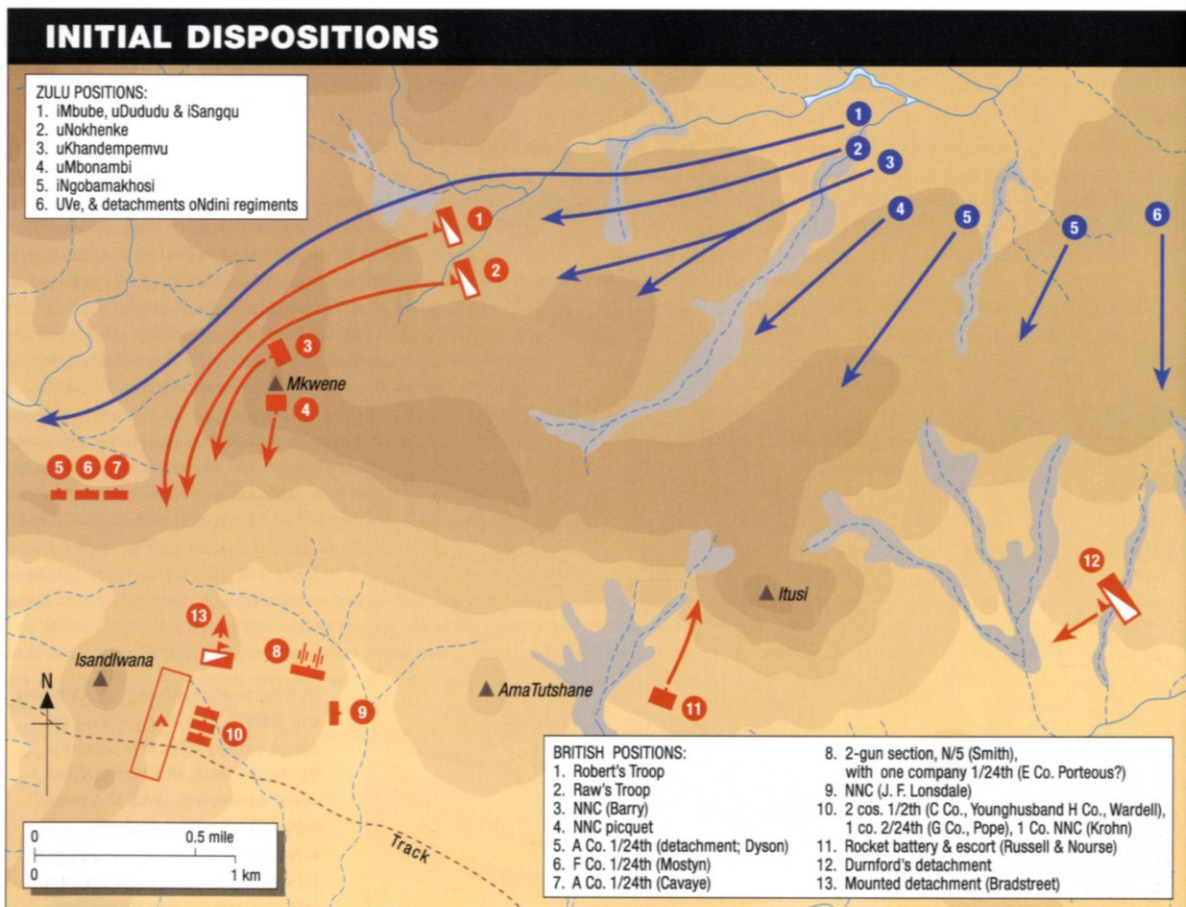
A panoramic view from the iNyoni ridge. The Zulu commanders, Ntshingwayo and Mavumengwana and their staff, are said to have occupied the rocky rise just beyond the fence on the left; amaTutshana, the 'conical copy' is on the plain on the left, while Malakatha mountain and the Hlazakazi ridge frame the skyline in the background. Pulleine initially deployed Mostyn and Cavaye's companies in the shallow valley above the bush on the right; the remaining 24th companies were deployed on the sloping ground above the road which passes across the centre of the battlefield. From this position, the Zulu commanders could see almost everything which occurred on the battlefield, in stark contrast to the limited visibility enjoyed by Pulleine and his officers.

It was by now about 11.30am and although shooting could be heard from beyond the escarpment, no Zulus could be seen from the low ground at the foot of Isandlwana itself. An officer had just arrived with orders from Chelmsford – who had not found the army he was looking for at Mangeni – with orders for Pulleine to break up the camp and advance the column. For the second time that morning, Pulleine, who had only arrived with the column on the 17th, and must have been largely unfamiliar with Chelmsford's intentions, seemed undecided. George Shepstone was so adamant as to the threat posed by the Zulu advance, however, that Pulleine decided to ignore Chelmsford's order

for the time being. Nevertheless, the prevailing opinion within the camp still seems to have been that the Zulu attack was at best a local response to the invasion, and that it was Lord Chelmsford who was most at risk from the main Zulu army.

Pulleine despatched the two guns of N/5 left to him to a position about 300 yards to the right front of the NNC camps. The section commander, Major Smith, had ridden out with Lord Chelmsford that morning, and his subaltern, Lt Curling, had expected to command the guns. Smith had returned to camp just as the Zulu attack developed, however, and to Curling's disappointment he took command. A company of the 1/24th – E Company under Lt Porteous – was sent out to support the guns, and deployed in line behind them as they unlimbered. At this point, the threat was clearly developing to the north of the camp, and Pulleine's intended front faced in that direction. The position occupied by the guns commanded the forward slope of the escarpment – down which the attack must descend – and a line of dongas (erosion gulleys) which drained across the front of the slope. When a crackle of shots suggested that Lt Cavaye's company was engaged, Pulleine sent Capt Mostyn's F Company to support it.

When Mostyn's men crested the slope and deployed into the valley beyond, they found that Cavaye's company was extended over a wide



LEFT As the firing line collapsed, the 24th companies retreated in good order towards the tents. So swift was the Zulu pursuit, however, that by the time the soldiers reached the camp, the fighting was at hand-to-hand, and the British formations began to disintegrate.



ABOVE Lieutenant Charles Pope, who commanded G Company, 2/24th, during the battle. Pope's company anchored the right of Pulleine's line, and was forced to re-deploy to support Durnford's command. The company was later over-run, and Pope killed. (Killie Campbell Library)



ABOVE, RIGHT An incident during the battle; Lt The Hon. William Vereker held a command in the 3rd NNC. Early in the battle, he lost his horse; when the line collapsed, he found another, and was about to ride off when one of the auxiliaries claimed it. Vereker gave up the horse, and stayed to be killed in the camp. This contemporary painting represents the incident in typically heroic Victorian terms. (Anne Ruffell/Vereker family)

area, with a detachment under Sub-Lt. Dyson several hundred yards to the left. Raw and Robert's men had now retired and taken up a position somewhere to Cavaye's right, where some of Barry's infantry had also rallied. Opposing them, a large column of Zulus was moving across their front, from right to left. Later, one of the survivors recalled, without a trace of irony, that the Zulu formation appeared thin at the tip, like a horn, but much thicker as it disappeared behind Mkwene hill. The British were firing at long ranges, but the Zulus made no obvious effort to respond, and seemed intent on moving across their front and round the British left.

As more and more Zulus appeared behind Mkwene, Raw and Roberts retired to the bottom of the escarpment. Here they were reinforced by a further troop of Zikhali's Horse, under Lt Vause. Vause's men had been escorting Durnford's wagons, together with half a company of the 1st NNC. The wagons had arrived in camp just as the crisis broke, and Vause and the NNC had hurried off to the left, in the wake of Raw and Roberts. They met them just as they retired down the spur. All three troops then dismounted, and pushed back up the slope in skirmishing order, forming an extended line to the right of Cavaye. They were apparently supported by a small contingent of Volunteers, under Captain Bradstreet of the Newcastle Mounted Rifles, who had been left in camp when Chelmsford took out the rest of the force. Some elements of the Zulu right horn, who had been threatening to advance down the spur outflanking Cavaye's position, retired as the auxiliaries advanced once again.

All the while this action was going on, the movements of the Zulu chest and left horn were invisible to the men in the camp.

Durnford's Movements

Durnford had ridden about four miles from the camp when a messenger sent by the cavalry vedettes, still in place on the iNyoni ridge,



warned him of the Zulu presence. Once again, in his enthusiasm, he had allowed his mounted men to outstrip the rocket battery and their NNC infantry escort, who had lagged as much as two miles behind. Durnford had kept close to the foot of the escarpment, following its foot as it curved to the left beyond a high point known as Itusi. Durnford, too, was out of sight from the camp. He was sceptical of the news at first, but suddenly a large column of Zulus – the uVe *ibutho* – appeared over a rise a few hundred yards in front of him. Durnford immediately formed his men into a long line, and began a slow retreat in front of them. At regular intervals, he ordered his men to dismount, and to fire volleys at the Zulus to slow their advance.

In the meantime, the rocket battery had also been warned of the Zulu attack. They had just passed a distinctive conical hill, called amaTutshane, and with Durnford no longer in view, Russell directed them to turn to the left, and climb by the quickest route onto the heights. The ground was steep and broken by dongas, and Russell's men were scarcely half way up the slope when the first line of warriors broke over the summit. They were a line of skirmishers screening the advance of the iNgobamakhosi, and as Russell gave the orders to deploy the rockets, the Zulus ducked into a donga to his left. Russell just had time to loose one or two rockets before the Zulus re-emerged only a hundred yards away. They fired a volley, and Russell's command fell apart. Russell himself was wounded, but as one of his men helped him up, he was shot again and killed. The battery's mules had broken away in panic, and most of the NNC escort fled. Captain Nourse managed to rally just a

As the British formations broke up, small knots of soldiers fought on. Some retreated as far as the banks of the Manzimnyama before being overcome.

IMPERIAL TROOPS

- 1 C Company, 1/24th (Younghusband)
- 2 F Company, 1/24th (Mostyn)
- 3 A Company, 1/24th (Cavaye)
- 4 Natal Native Contingent (Erskine and Barry)
- 5 Mounted Native Contingent (Raw, Roberts, Vause)
- 6 E Company, 1/24th (Porteous)
- 7 Two guns, N/5 Battery (Smith)
- 8 H Company, 1/24th (Wardell)
- 9 G Company, 2/24th (Pope)
- 10 Natal Native Contingent (J.F.Lonsdale)
- 11 Natal Native Contingent (Krohn)
- 12 Mounted Volunteer detachments (Bradstreet)
- 13 Rocket Battery (Russell)
- 14 Natal Native Contingent (Nourse)
- 15 Durnford's auxiliaries

THE IMPERIAL CAMP

- (annotated in black diamonds)*
- 1 2nd Battalion, 3rd NNC
 - 2 1st Battalion, 3rd NNC
 - 3 2nd Battalion, 24th Regiment
 - 4 Royal Artillery
 - 5 Mounted troops
 - 6 1st Battalion, 24th Regiment

1. 12.00PM. Having ridden about 4 miles from the camp, Durnford receives a message warning him of the Zulu presence. Shortly thereafter the uVe *ibutho* appears over a rise in front of him. He forms his men into a line and they begin a slow retreat, dismounting and firing at regular intervals to slow down the pursuing Zulus.

3. 12.05PM. The battery manages to fire one or two rockets. The Zulus fire a volley and Russell is killed. The command falls apart but Capt Nourse manages to rally a handful of men and makes a stand. Durnford's men arrive and cover Nourse's retreat.

8. 12.30PM. Durnford's mounted auxiliaries join Bradstreet's men in the deep donga known as Nyogane. Lining the donga they fire on the pursuing Zulus, driving the uVe *ibutho* back several times.

4. 12.20PM. The British troops form along the line of the dongas at the foot of the escarpment. As the uNokhenke, uKhandempemvu and uMbonambi regiments appear over the ridge the British infantrymen and guns pour a heavy fire into them.

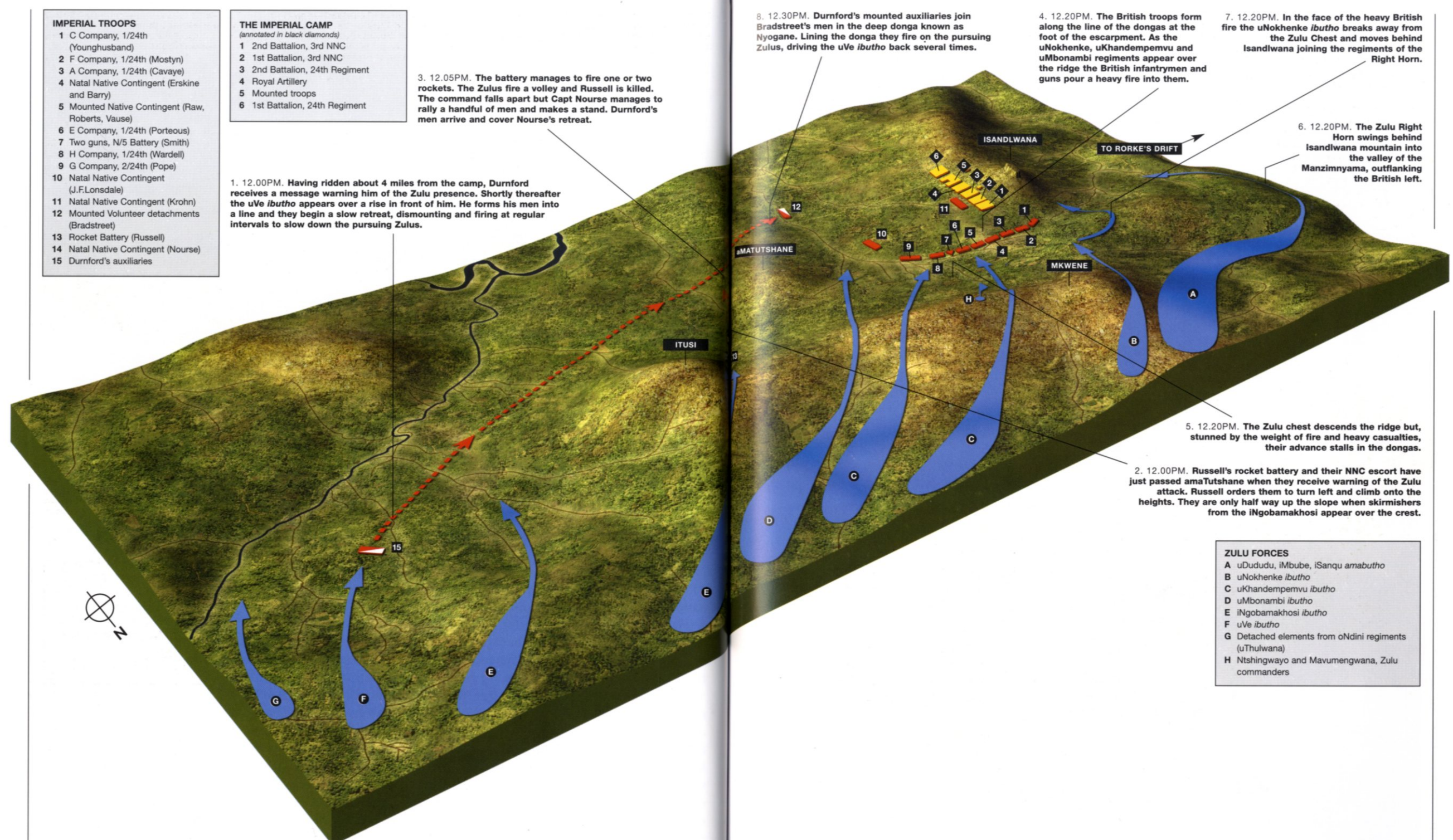
7. 12.20PM. In the face of the heavy British fire the uNokhenke *ibutho* breaks away from the Zulu Chest and moves behind Isandlwana joining the regiments of the Right Horn.

6. 12.20PM. The Zulu Right Horn swings behind Isandlwana mountain into the valley of the Manzimnyama, outflanking the British left.

5. 12.20PM. The Zulu chest descends the ridge but, stunned by the weight of fire and heavy casualties, their advance stalls in the dongas.

2. 12.00PM. Russell's rocket battery and their NNC escort have just passed amaTutshane when they receive warning of the Zulu attack. Russell orders them to turn left and climb onto the heights. They are only half way up the slope when skirmishers from the iNgobamakhosi appear over the crest.

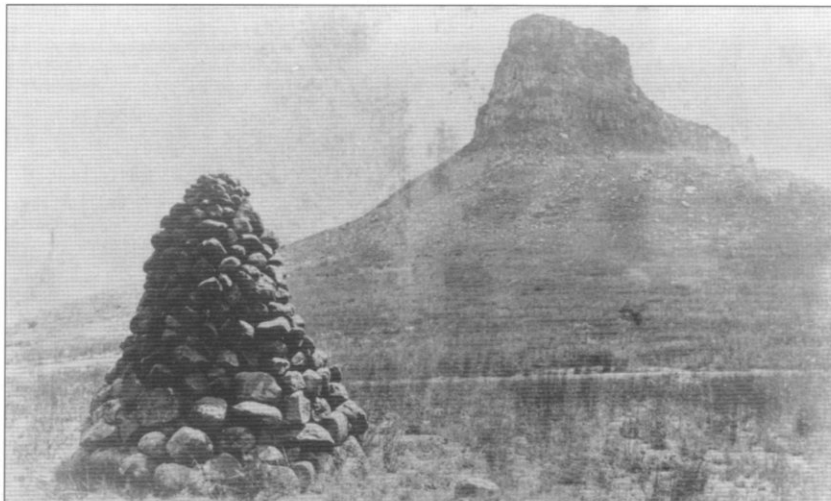
- ZULU FORCES**
- A uDududu, iMbube, iSanqu *amabutho*
 - B uNokhenke *ibutho*
 - C uKhandempemvu *ibutho*
 - D uMbonambi *ibutho*
 - E iNgobamakhosi *ibutho*
 - F uVe *ibutho*
 - G Detached elements from oNdini regiments (uThulwana)
 - H Ntshingwayo and Mavumengwana, Zulu commanders



ISANDLWANA - CLIMAX OF THE BATTLE

22 January 1879, 12.00-12.30pm, viewed from the north-east showing the attack by the main Zulu army and the extended defence line adopted by the Imperial troops in the early stages of the action. All times are approximate.

GROUND SCALE
3 x 1.6 Miles (5 x 2.6 Km)



This cairn, erected in late 1879, marks the site of determined resistance by the 24th; some sixty bodies were found on the spot, and buried in a mass grave where they fell. A number of officers were in the group, and Pulleine may have been among them.

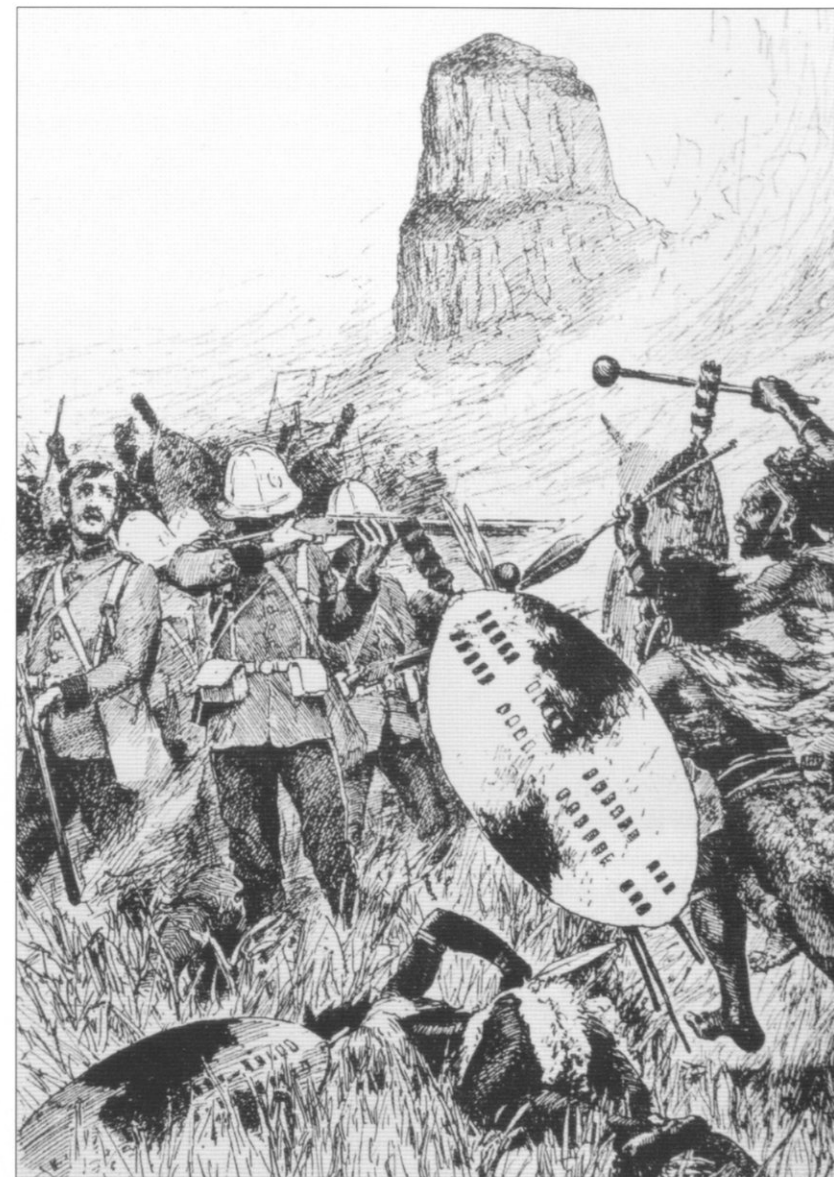
handful of his men, and for a few minutes they put up such resistance that the Zulus, knowing that their supports were close behind, went to ground. Nourse's stand allowed the survivors to escape, and Nourse himself was retiring steadily towards the camp when Durnford's men came into sight, and covered his retreat.

THE BRITISH LINE

At this point in the battle the full Zulu threat was still not apparent. The



The most determined resistance took place on the nek directly below Isandlwana. Here the men of the 24th were able to keep the Zulus at bay until their ammunition at last ran out.



intense activity beyond the skyline to the left was evident enough, but the amaTutshane hill blocked out much of what was happening to the rocket battery and Durnford's men. The Zulu chest had not yet appeared across the iNyoni.

Accordingly, Pulleine had reinforced his guns, sending out a second 1/24th company, H Company under Captain Wardell, to reinforce Porteous. Lieutenant Curling of N/5 Battery – the only Artillery officer to survive the battle – noted that the two companies formed up in extended order on either side of the guns, then advanced about 50 yards. In front of them, the ground sloped gently down towards the dongas which lay across their front, and while their exact position is not yet known, the evidence suggests they pushed forward far enough to use the dongas as a ditch to slow the Zulu advance. Another company of the 24th – Lt Pope's G Coy., 2/24th, which had been on picquet duty the

LEFT 'Fix bayonets, and die like British soldiers do!' This is perhaps the most impressive of the 'last stand' images which appeared in contemporary British newspapers, and which stressed the calmness of the British troops, and the overwhelming nature of the Zulu attack.



night before and so had not marched with the rest of the battalion to Mangeni – took up a position somewhere to the right. At this point the infantry were apparently formed on low-lying ground, with amaTutshane anchoring their right flank a few hundred yards away. From this position, their officers could see nothing of the events befalling Durnford's men.

About this time, the first elements of the uNokhenke, uKhandempemvu and uMbonambi regiments began to appear over the ridge to the British front. They bunched slightly as they began to descend, picking their way through the rough ground, but for the most part they were in open order, deployed in even lines with skirmishers thrown out to the fore.

The appearance of the 'chest' clearly threatened the men still on the hills on the left, and Pulleine sent his adjutant, Lt Melvill, to order them to withdraw. To cover the movement, he deployed his last remaining 24th company – C Coy. under Captain Younghusband – in echelon at the foot of the spur on the left. The withdrawal down the slope took place in some confusion, the soldiers and auxiliaries mixed up together, but they shook themselves out at the foot of the ridge. Some elements of the uNokhenke, who had rashly tried to follow them up, came under such a heavy fire that they were forced to retire again over the skyline.

Pulleine's line was now drawn up above the dongas at the foot of the escarpment. Younghusband was on the left, then Mostyn and Cavaye, then an NNC unit, and the three units of Zikhali's horse. Some of the NNC infantry had fled during the withdrawal down the slope, and it is

Perhaps the most famous image of the battle; C.E. Fripp's 'Last Stand of the 24th, Isandlwana'. Fripp had been present during the closing stages of the war as a special artist for a London newspaper, and this painting captures the appearance of both sides better than most. While the group in the foreground conforms to the conventions of Victorian battle painting, with a sentimental touch added by the spurious drummer boy and the Regimental Colour, the background detail evokes the full horror of the fighting. In fact, the true 'last stands' took place in the Manzimnyama valley, behind Isandlwana.



Lieutenant Edgar Anstey, 1/24th. Anstey's body was found surrounded by about 60 British dead on the banks of the Manzimnyama – the true 'last stand'. Anstey's body was later recovered by his brother, who also served in Zululand, and taken back to the UK – one of only a very few British dead from the battle who were not buried where they fell.

LEFT The fighting continued at close quarters as the British survivors retreated towards the banks of the Manzimnyama.



George Shepstone, the son of Sir Theophilus Shepstone, Natal's influential Secretary of Native Affairs, Administrator of the Transvaal, and advocate of Confederation. George Shepstone was attached to Durnford's staff; he was killed at the centre of a stand on the western slopes of the mountain. (Killie Campbell Library).

less casualties than the gunners hoped. Nevertheless, as the Zulus reached the bottom of the escarpment, and pressed forward towards the dongas that separated them from the British, they came under a heavy and accurate rifle fire. The 1/24th, in particular, were experienced men who took good advantage of whatever natural cover was available, and placed their shots carefully. Once it reached the cover of the dongas, the Zulu centre stalled, stunned not only by their casualties, but by the assault on their senses. Zululand had never before experienced such a cacophony, and the noise of the firing reverberated around the hills like thunder.

Durnford and the British right

Durnford's men had continued their methodical retreat until they reached a deep donga, known as the Nyogane, which crossed the plain about a mile from the camp. Here, a staff officer had realised Durnford's predicament, and had ordered the small detachment of mounted men under Bradstreet, who had earlier fallen back from the ridge, to take up a position in the donga to cover Durnford's retreat. Durnford's men crossed the lip into the donga, dismounted and, leaving their horses in the gully bed, lined the bank to fire back at the Zulus pursuing them.



BELOW LEFT AND RIGHT
The concentrated resistance on the nek prevented the Zulu 'horns' from meeting together, and allowed a number of men to escape from the camp. So difficult was the terrain, however, that no Europeans escaped on foot, while survivors on horseback had to run the gauntlet of Zulu pursuit.



By now the uVe regiment was close to the donga and the iNgobamakhosi had descended from the heights to support it. Elements of the oNdini regiments under Qethuka were also pressing up behind. However, the Zulus had to advance down a gentle slope towards the donga, and were exposed to a withering fire as they did so. Several times the young uVe were driven back, and it was only the arrival of the iNgobamakhosi which prevented the left horn from stalling. Even then, the warriors could only advance in short rushes between the volleys, rising up, rushing forward, then throwing themselves down again in the long grass.

In the donga, Durnford was in his element. It was a situation that suited exactly his need to prove himself heroic; he strode about the gully, ignoring the Zulu fire, and cheering his men on. When several of them came to him with fouled carbines, he clamped the weapons between his knees, freeing the jammed cartridges with his one good hand.

ZULU FORCES

- A uDududu, iMbube and iSangqu
- B uNokhenke.
- C uKhandempemvu
- D uMbonambi
- E uVe
- F iNgobamakhosi

8. 1.30PM. The uNokhenke outflank the left of the British line moving behind Isandlwana to close on the camp from the rear.

9. 1.30PM. The Zulu Right Horn closes on the rear of the camp cutting off retreat to Rorke's Drift and driving fugitives off the road into broken ground.

14. 2.30-3.30PM. Small groups and individual fugitives flee the battlefield. Driven off the track by the Zulu Right Horn almost all are overtaken in the rough ground and killed. One large group of around 60 men under Lt Edgar Anstey, 1/24th conduct a fighting retreat to the banks of the Manzimnyama before they are overwhelmed.

- 5. 1.15PM. The British line is now hopelessly overextended and LtCol Puleine orders a general withdrawal. The British form rallying squares and retire steadily.
- 6. 1.15PM. Emerging from the dongas, the Zulu chest launches a general attack as the British withdraw. They surge forwards with great speed rushing into the camp.
- 7. 1.30PM. Any British hopes of rallying on the nek disintegrate, along with the formations, amid the chaos of the camp.

1. 12.30PM. The Zulu Chest remains pinned down in the dongas by the weight of British fire.

3. 1.15PM. Durnford's withdrawal leaves the British right flank wide open and elements of the uMbonambi rush forwards into the gap.

2. 1.10PM. In the Nyogane donga Durnford's men are in danger of being outflanked on both flanks. Now that his position is untenable, Durnford gives the order to retire on the camp.

10. 1.30PM. The Zulu Left Horn swings south of the camp looking to join with the Zulu Right Horn and cut off any retreat.

4. 1.15PM. The fire from Pope's company holds back the uMbonambi for a while, but elements of the *ibutho* press forwards towards the camp.

11. 1.45PM. Captain Bradstreet, Lt Scott and a handful of mounted men rally in front of the camp. Durnford joins them and for a while they hold back the *uVe* and *iNgobamakhosi*. Once their ammunition fails they are overwhelmed.

12. 2.00-2.30PM. The latter stages of the British collapse take place against the backdrop of the eclipse. A last stand by one larger group of men is made here.

13. 2.00-2.30PM. One of the larger 'last stands' takes place here. This is probably where LtCol Puleine met his end.

IMPERIAL TROOPS

- 1 C Company, 1/24th (Youngusband)
- 2 F Company, 1/24th (Mostyn)
- 3 A Company, 1/24th (Cavaye)
- 4 Natal Native Contingent (Erskine and Barry)
- 5 Mounted Native Contingent (Raw, Roberts, Vause)
- 6 E Company, 1/24th (Porteous)
- 7 Two guns, N/5 Battery (Smith)
- 8 H Company, 1/24th (Wardell)
- 9 Natal Native Contingent (J.F.Lonsdale)
- 10 G Company 2/24th (Pope)
- 11 Natal Native Contingent (Krohn)
- 12 Mounted Volunteer detachments (Bradstreet)
- 13 Durnford's mounted troops

THE IMPERIAL CAMP

- (annotated in black diamonds)
- 1 2nd Battalion, 3rd NNC
 - 2 1st Battalion, 3rd NNC
 - 3 2nd Battalion, 24th Regiment
 - 4 Royal Artillery
 - 5 Mounted troops
 - 6 1st Battalion, 24th Regiment

GROUND SCALE

1695 x 1488 Yards (1.5 x 1.3 Km)

ISANDLWANA - THE BRITISH COLLAPSE

22 January 1879, 12.30-3.30pm, viewed from the south-west showing the collapse of the Imperial firing line and the increasingly disordered retreat through the camp amid desperate hand-to-hand fighting.

Yet for all his personal courage, Durnford's position was a dangerous one. While the Zulus could make little progress directly to his front, elements of the left horn had begun to extend further to their left, hoping to cut across the donga further downstream. Moreover, the uMbonambi regiment, on the left of the Zulu chest, had descended into the same donga further upstream, closer to amaTutshane. There was a gap of several hundred yards between Durnford and the nearest company in Pulleine's line, which was J.F. Lonsdale's NNC company. Cautiously, the uMbonambi began to probe the gap, sending men forward to slip between the two British groups. For a while, they were checked by a cross-fire from both sides, but as they massed in the donga in greater numbers, the threat became more pressing.

THE BRITISH COLLAPSE

For the most part, Pulleine's line was holding its ground well. Some of the 24th were running low on ammunition, and a staff officer organised a fresh supply in a mule cart from the camp. By this time, the infantry had retired perhaps 100 yards, to occupy a line of boulders which – particularly to the right of the guns – offered a formidable line of defence. So heavy was the fire that the Zulu chest remained pinned down in the dongas. One NNC officer, who spoke Zulu, recalled that above the din of the battle he could clearly hear members of the uKhandempemvu calling out '*Qoka amatshel!*' to encourage each other – 'Catch stones!' – a reference to a boast that they would treat the bullets of the enemy as if they were hailstones. When they saw the gunners step back from the guns prior to firing, the Zulus called out a warning, '*uMoya!*' – 'the wind!'



The flooded Mzinyathi river offered a last obstacle for British survivors who had escaped thus far. Many were killed on the banks and in the water; Private Wassall of the Mounted Infantry saved the life of Private Westwood by carrying him across the river under heavy Zulu fire.

Nevertheless, the position must have seemed worrying to Pulleine once Durnford's men and the left horn had come into view. Even as Pope's company turned to refuse its flank to the uMbonambi, there was nothing between it and Durnford's men but J.F. Lonsdale's NNC company. After Durnford's men had been engaged for some time, Pulleine ordered Pope to move to his right in an effort to seal off the gap. The company moved off smartly, past Lonsdale, to take up a position on the open slope above Durnford's left. Even so, there were still dangerous gaps between the units on that side, and while the move served to keep the uMbonambi back, the British right was dangerously exposed.

Pope's company had just completed the move when Durnford gave the order to abandon the donga. After 15 or perhaps 20 minutes, his position had become untenable. The uMbonambi had brought forward a herd of cattle, and had driven it past Durnford's left, a party of warriors sheltering among the animals. Many of them had been killed, but the integrity of the British line had been breached. On the far right, the iNgobamakhosi and uVe had slipped across the donga. The line of their advance kept them far out from the camp, but Durnford was in danger of being outflanked on both sides.

His men were, moreover, in danger of running out of ammunition. They had been fighting steadily since they first encountered the Zulus beyond Itusi, and they needed fresh supplies. When Durnford sent men back to find them, however, no-one, in the confusion of the camp, seemed to know where Durnford's wagons were parked, and the 24th Quartermasters refused to supply rounds to any but their own men. They pointed out that they would be needed there soon enough. Durnford was paying the price of his impatience earlier that day, and his refusal to wait in camp until his wagons arrived. Unable to hold his position any longer, Durnford gave the order to retire on the camp.

Durnford's withdrawal left the British right flank wide open, and elements of the uMbonambi rushed forward to follow him up. For a while, the fire from Pope's company held them back, but some of them pressed forward towards the camp, prompting Quartermaster Pullen of the 1/24th to gather a group of camp personnel to try to check them. Durnford himself rode to try to find Pulleine; it is not known if he succeeded, but shortly afterwards Pulleine ordered a general withdrawal of his line, which was by now hopelessly over-extended. Bugles sounded the recall along the length of the line, and the 24th companies abandoned their positions, reforming into rallying squares, and pausing to fire at the Zulus every 50 yards or so as they fell back.

The British withdrawal coincided with a fresh Zulu assault along the length of their line. The Zulu commanders, Ntshingwayo and Mavumengwana, had taken up a position above a line of cliffs in the centre of the iNyoni ridge. Below them, they had seen the uKhandempemvu stall in the face of the heavy British fire. Realising that he needed to revive the impetus of the attack, Ntshingwayo had sent one of his attendants down to urge the uKhandempemvu on. This man, *inkhosi* Mkhosana kaMvundlana of the Biyela people, was in his 40s, a member of the iNdlondlo *ibutho* himself, but he had been appointed a commander of the uKhandempemvu. He hurried down the slope, and apparently oblivious to the bullets striking about him, had berated the young warriors crouching among the dongas, calling out King

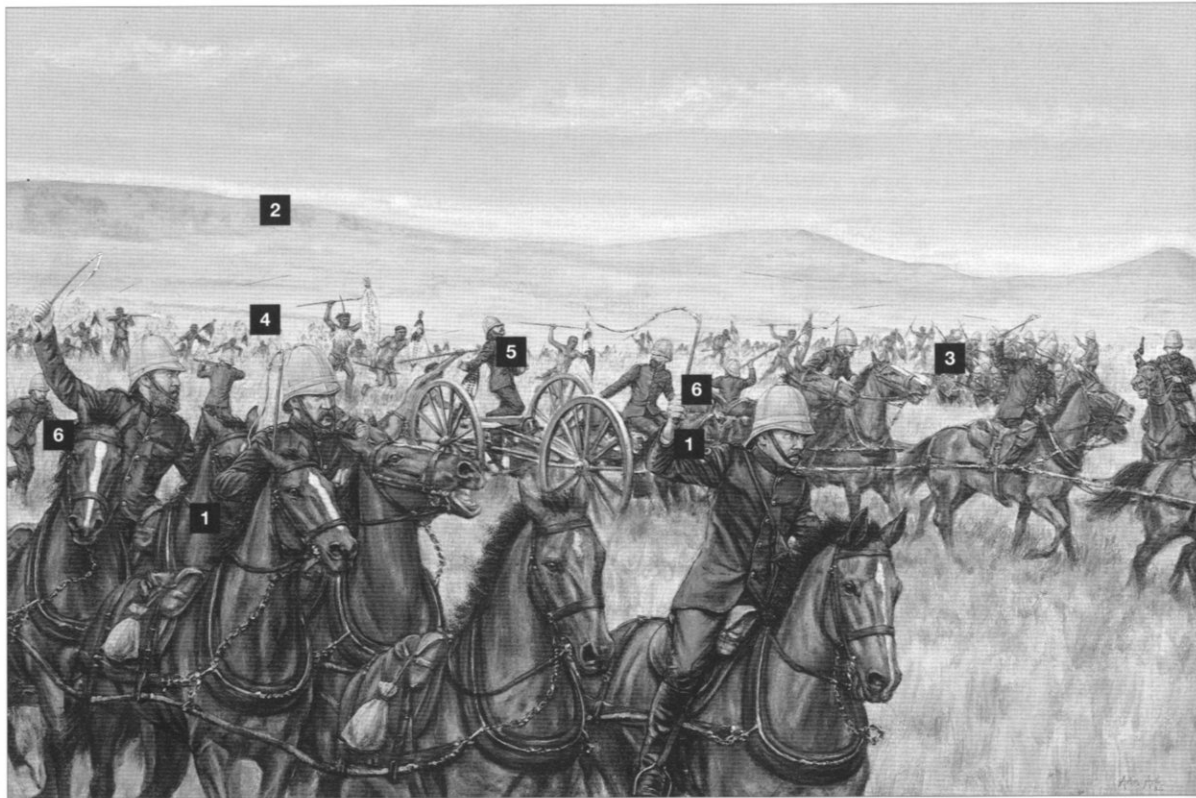


Private Samuel Wassall of the 80th Regiment, attached to the Mounted Infantry. Wassall was the only man at Isandlwana to have received the VC and survive. (Royal Archives, Windsor Castle)



Lieutenant and Adjutant Teignmouth Melvill, 1/24th. Melvill attempted to save the Queen's Colour of his battalion, but was killed in the Mzinyathi valley. (Ron Sheeley)

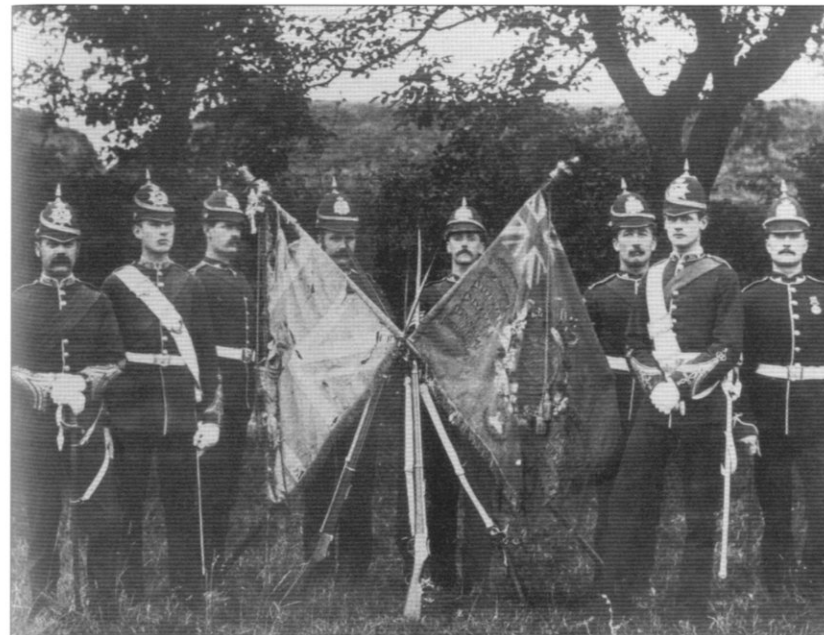




THE BRITISH COLLAPSE (pages 72-73)

Colonel Pulleine had initially extended his men in a screen to the north of the camp, pushing his firing line out to a point which commanded dongas running across the front of the iNyoni heights. The two 7-pdr guns of N Battery, 5th Brigade (1), anchored the centre of the line. The Zulu 'chest' - the uKhandempemvu and uMbonambi regiments - descended from the heights (2) and occupied these dongas, where their attack stalled under heavy British fire. Under intense pressure, however, and with Zulu movements threatening to outflank the line on the right, the infantry companies of the 24th retired 50 or 60 yards to the crest of a low rise. They held this position for perhaps 15 or 20 minutes, during which time one of the gunners was killed by Zulu rifle-fire, and the senior Artillery officer, Major Stuart Smith, was wounded in the arm. With the collapse of Durnford's stand on the far right, however, even this position became untenable, and the 24th were recalled. This scene shows the moment when the infantry began to retire. Zulu evidence suggests that they formed company rallying-squares (3), and halted several times to fire at the Zulus, who immediately abandoned the cover of the donga and charged towards them (4). The two guns in the centre were slow getting away, and the Zulu attack very rapid; in the time it took to limber the guns, the Zulus covered the

200 or 300 yards that separated them from the British, and one of the gunners was stabbed as he mounted the axle-tree seat of one of the guns (5). The teams managed to extricate themselves, but the gunners were unable to mount and had to run for safety alongside the limbers (6). The fire of the retiring infantry delayed the Zulus to their immediate front - the uKhandempemvu - but the uMbonambi regiment, further to the British right, rushed in past the 24th's flank, and secured the honour of being first into the British tents. The scattered companies of the 24th were unable to reform, and were driven back through the camp, fighting hand-to-hand. The retiring guns were struck by members of the uMbonambi as they passed through the tents, and most of the gunners on foot were killed. The guns themselves reached the Rorke's Drift road, but were driven off it by the attack of the right 'horn', and the teams floundered in the rough ground above the Manzimnyama valley. Here they were overrun, the last of the gunners killed and the team horses slaughtered. The two officers, Major Smith and Lieutenant Henry Curling, left them at this point and survived the ordeal of the Manzimnyama valley, but while Curling was one of only a handful of regular officers to survive the battle, Smith was overtaken and killed during the descent into the Mzinyathi valley. (Adam Hook)



ABOVE Lieutenant Nevill Coghill, 1/24th. Coghill came to Melvill's aid during the crossing of the swollen Mzinyathi river, but both men were overtaken and killed on the Natal bank.

ABOVE, LEFT The Queen's Colour of the 1/24th (left). It was later recovered from the river, and presented to Queen Victoria at Osborne House. This photograph was taken after the presentation; the wreath of 'immortelles' placed by the Queen over the pole can clearly be seen.

Cetshwayo's praises, and urging them to move forward. Stung by this slight to their honour, the uKhandempemvu rose up and pressed forward, tentatively at first, until the red-coat companies began to retire, then breaking into a flat run. Mkhosana did not live to see his triumph; as he rushed forward he was shot through the head and killed.

All along the line, the uKhandempemvu's example spurred the Zulus on. Out on the far left, an *induna* named Sikizana kaNomageje called on the iNgobamakhosi, recalling their pre-war rivalry with the uKhandempemvu. 'Why are you lying down?' he berated them, 'What was it you said to the uKhandempemvu? There are the uKhandempemvu going into the tents ... Stop firing! Go in hand-to hand!'

The speed of the final rush took the British by surprise. Out on the firing line, the two guns of N/5 battery had fired 'a round or two' of case at the Zulus emerging from the dongas when the 24th retired on either side of them. Major Smith gave the order to cease firing and limber the guns, a manoeuvre which the gunners had completed many times, on the parade ground and in the field; at that point the Zulus were estimated to be about 300 yards away in front. In the time it took to limber up, however, the nearest Zulus had rushed in so close that one gunner was actually stabbed as he was mounting the axle-tree seats on the guns. The gunners managed to extricate themselves in the nick of time, and cantered back across the open ground towards the tents. While the 24th companies were still in good order at this point, those auxiliary units who had remained in the line thus far were on the verge of collapse. As one of their officers later recalled, 'I then saw the men of the 2nd Battn. N.N.C. running and looking for the 24th men, I saw that they were retreating also, but very slowly. All the mounted men were riding past as far as they could ...' For a few seconds, there was an atmosphere of panic, and with no obvious place to rally, the auxiliaries simply kept on running. Their panic infected the men of Krohn's NNC company, which was drawn up in reserve in front of the tents, and a rush

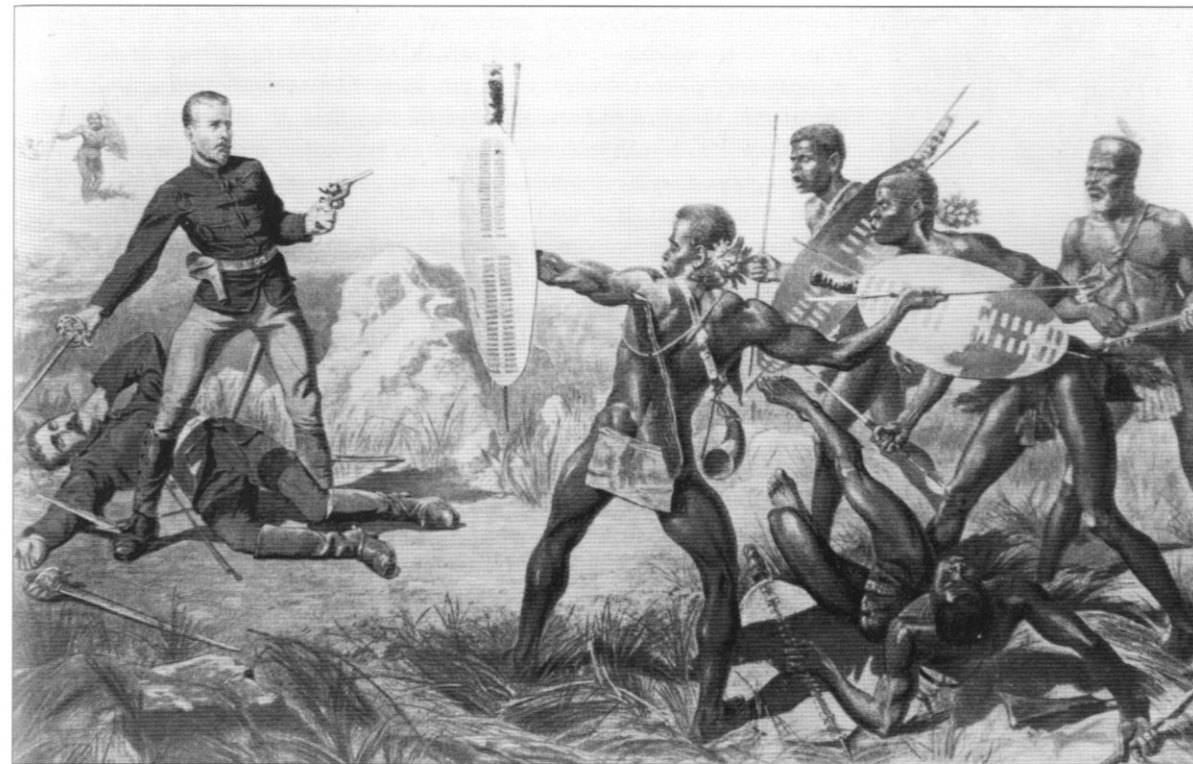
of men fled to the rear, sucking after them the first of the camp casualties from the tents. By the time the two RA guns reached the camp, with most of the gunners running alongside, the Zulus were rushing among them from their left. As a warrior of the uKhandempemvu named uMhoti recalled, 'Like a flame the whole Zulu force sprang to its feet and darted upon them ...'

After the battle, there was considerable argument between the *amabutho* as to which of them had been the first to penetrate the British line, and after discussing the matter with his *izinduna*, King Cetshwayo granted the honour to the uMbonambi. From their position below amaTutshane, they had the shortest distance to go, with the least opposition ahead of them. With the collapse of Lonsdale's NNC, only Pope's 2/24th company rallied to hold them back, and it soon retreated under the pressure. To the right of the uMbonambi the rush of the uKhandempemvu was delayed by Wardell and Porteous' companies, although parties of Zulus pressed between them, preventing them from joining together or rallying on the units further to the British left. Here, the British line also seems to have fragmented, one body of redcoats – probably Mostyn's and Cavaye's companies – passing behind the tents, while another, Younghusband's company, retired across the face of Isandlwana itself, retreating steadily up the slope towards a boulder-strewn shoulder above the nek.

Any hope that the British might have entertained of rallying on the nek was destroyed by the speed of the Zulu advance, and by the confusion which prevailed in the camp. Because of the general complacency which had prevailed before the battle, Pulleine had not ordered the tents to be struck to clear the field of fire, as was customary. As a result, the scattered companies now found themselves struggling to keep formation as they passed through the camp, beset on all sides by panicking camp personnel, civilian wagon-drivers, horses, mules and transport oxen. Moreover, as the battle became more concentrated, the regular volleys fired by the retreating soldiers, mixed with dust thrown up by the seething mass of men and animals, severely limited visibility for both sides, and made any form of command and control impossible.

By the time the 24th companies had reached the tents, the fighting was largely hand-to-hand. The limbered guns passed through the chaos in the camp, but most of the gunners, running alongside, were killed. All the time the 24th still had ammunition to fire, they kept the Zulus back, but any man who was wounded or who became separated was immediately overcome and killed. Camp personnel who had stayed to fight or hide in the tents or among the wagons were over-run in the Zulu rush and killed. The collective tension which had prevailed among the Zulus since they had left oNdini six days before, and which had sustained them through the terrible ordeal of the British fire before the camp, was now unleashed. As they passed through the camp, the warriors stabbed at everything that moved, killing not only men, but horses, oxen, mules, and even the camp dogs. Amidst the dust, smoke, noise, confusion and horror, some young warriors who had never seen a white man before stabbed at the sacks of mealies that were piled here and there about the camp, or not yet unloaded from wagons.

On the right, the handful of mounted men under Captain Bradstreet and Lieutenant Scott of the Carbineers, who had earlier held the donga



The death of Melvill and Coghill, by Charles Fripp. One of the most accurate renditions of the scene, the artist has captured the appearance of both the officers in their field uniforms and the Zulus in the abbreviated 'war dress' they wore on campaign.

next to Durnford, had dismounted and rallied below the 1/24th tents. Here their fire was causing some of the uVe and iNgobamakhosi, rushing up to their left, to hang back. Durnford himself, after the retreat from the donga, had ridden into the camp to find Pulleine; he emerged just as the line collapsed. Seeing that most of his own men had already retreated, he joined Bradstreet's stand, and for a while he directed their fire, until their ammunition began to fail. The Volunteers then fought on, first with their revolvers, and then with their knives; at last, however, they could not hold the Zulus back, and they were overrun and killed. Mehlokazulu kaSihayo of the iNgobamakhosi saw their bodies lying together in a heap; in the middle, he recalled, lay a man with long moustaches, whose arm appeared to be in a sling.

The infantry companies never managed to reform on the nek. On the right, most of Pope's company were overrun as they reached the tents, though some fought on to join a determined stand that was made above the 1/24th camp. Just a couple of hundred yards further north, directly below the crag of Isandlwana, another group of 24th, survivors of Mostyn, Cavaye, Wardell and Porteous' companies who had not been killed as they passed through the camp, rallied. This was the main focus of resistance at this stage of the battle; the Zulus recalled afterwards that for a while the soldiers' fire was so heavy that it prevented the Zulus from closing in and fighting hand to hand. Once the last rounds in the men's pouches had been fired, however, there could be no hope of re-supply, and gradually the fire dwindled. As one Zulu described it:

One party of soldiers came out from among the tents and formed up a little above the ammunition wagons. They held their ground there until their ammunition failed them when they were nearly all assegaid. Those that were not



The first of the five Imperial officers who survived Isandlwana. Captain Edward Essex, 75th Regiment, No. 3 Column's transport officer. Photo c. 1877. (MOD; Rai England)

killed at this place formed up again in a solid square in the nek of Isandlwana. They were completely surrounded on all sides, and stood back to back, and surrounding some men who were in the centre. Their ammunition was now done, except that they had some revolvers which they fired at us at close quarters. We were unable to break their square until we had killed a good many of them, by throwing our assegais at short distances. We eventually overcame them all in this way.

Youngusband's company seems to have retired across the base of the mountain, until it took up a position on a rocky shoulder that stands 100 feet above the plain. For a while, with the troops sheltering behind the boulders, this proved to be a formidable natural bastion. The Zulus were forced to scramble up the slopes, only to be shot or bayoneted by the soldiers above them. Once ammunition ran out, however, it was a death trap, for the mountain itself cut off any line of retreat; Youngusband's men had nowhere to go. Eventually, Youngusband himself led them in a wild charge down the slope, whirling his sword around his head. Most of his men were killed along the way, but a few managed to join the concentrations still surviving on the nek below.

By this time, the Zulu right – the uNokhenke, who had split off from the chest to pass behind the mountain, and the regiments of the right horn – had emerged from the broken valley of the Manzimnyama, behind Isandlwana, and were pouring into the rear of the camp. There was little to stop them; just the fire from the men on the nek, and from a concentration of men who had taken up a position among the boulders on the steep rear slopes. It is not clear who these men were; no doubt there were many men among them from units who had been scattered in the camp, but the presence among the dead of George Shepstone – Durnford's staff officer – suggests that many might have been auxiliaries.

THE BRITISH ROUT

The execution of the Zulu attack might have been perfect, had not the prolonged resistance on the nek prevented the two 'horns' from joining together. As it was, the first rush of fugitives had already passed over the nek as the two wings of the Zulu army drew together. This in itself was a distraction which hampered completion of the movement; elements from both horns broke away to pursue the British survivors. Moreover, as the 'chest' pushed in front of it those British elements who were still fighting, they passed over the nek, and their continued resistance further helped to prevent complete encirclement.

By the time they crossed the nek, few British units retained any cohesion. At best, the core of a few companies still remained, clustered round by individuals from other companies or men from other units. Their officers may have initially hoped to complete a fighting withdrawal down the road to Rorke's Drift, but the right horn had long since cut that route of escape. Instead, the survivors were pressed off the road to their left, trying to find a way round the tip of the right 'horn', and increasingly pressed by large bodies of the left 'horn' coming up behind them. The country here is extremely rugged, a broken slope, scoured by dongas and scattered with boulders, which leads down into

the valley of the Manzimnyama stream, and the terrain itself helped to break up the residual formations. Some groups fought all the way down the valley, halting here and there where the ground afforded them some advantage, checking the Zulu pursuit at the head of a donga, or among a cluster of rocks. One large concentration, over 60 men with Lt Anstey of the 24th among them, managed to reach the banks of the Manzimnyama itself, and here they were brought to bay. With a steep drop of ten or 12 feet down into the river-bed below them, they could probably go no further; their only hope of survival lay as a group, for the Zulus were easily killing off men on their own. And here, by the banks of the river, they were overrun – the true 'last stand of the 24th'.

Most of the auxiliaries and camp personnel had simply scattered across country when the Zulus entered the camp. Some of Durnford's units maintained some cohesion, and crossed the Manzimnyama in relative safety. Most, however, were simply funnelled down the valley by the Zulu 'horns'. The resistance of the 24th delayed the Zulu pursuit, and many of the auxiliaries had crossed the stream and ascended a steep hill the other side – Mpethe – before the struggling knots of soldiers reached the banks of the Manzimnyama. A few redcoats, survivors from the fighting along the banks, struggled across to Mpethe, but most were exhausted and unable to face the physical challenge it posed; the Zulus slaughtered the last few soldiers on foot at the foot of the hill.

Major Smith's guns had somehow managed to pass through the camp, but had hardly crossed the nek when they were forced off the road. They had covered a few hundred yards when the going became too rough; by this time, most of the gunners were dead, and the limbers and teams were covered with terrified survivors from other units. Suddenly, however, the guns slowed as they crossed a donga, and the Zulus were among them, stabbing horses and men alike. When they saw that the guns were lost, the two officers, Major Smith and Lieutenant Curling, abandoned them and rode on.

When the firing line collapsed, the adjutant of the 1/24th, Lieutenant Melvill, brought out the Queen's Colour of his battalion, which had apparently been kept in the guard tent. Each British infantry battalion had two Colours, the Queen's – symbolising their allegiance to the Crown – and the Regimental, which embodied their own traditions and battle honours. The primary purpose of Colours on the battlefield in the 1870s was to serve as a rallying point, and Pulleine had probably hoped to use them to reform the line on the nek. In fact, however, the collapse was so rapid that Melvill must have realised it was impractical; such was the disgrace associated with losing a Colour that he tried instead to carry it to safety. With the Colour, still furled and sheathed in a heavy leather case, perched precariously across the front of his saddle, he rode out across the nek.

He was, perhaps, one of the last Imperial officers who attempted to do so. The officers with the front-line companies had preferred to stay with their men, and many others were clearly reluctant to leave. Nonetheless, when the camp was overrun, there were many without immediate responsibilities to discharge, who felt that they had accomplished their duty and that there was no need to remain. Officers of auxiliary units, individuals from the Volunteer units, civilians, and Imperial transport and staff officers all left once it became clear that the



Lieutenant Horace Smith-Dorrien, 95th Regiment, attached to No. 3 Column's transport department. Photo c. 1879.





THE FINAL STAGES OF THE BATTLE (pages 80–81)

Pushed in by the Zulu 'chest', the 24th companies were steadily broken up as they passed through the camp. They attempted to rally on the 'nek' below Isandlwana hill, where several determined 'stands' took place, but were gradually overwhelmed. Small concentrations of redcoats, joined by survivors from other units including the Natal Carbineers (1) and the Natal Native Contingent (2), attempted to retire down the Rorke's Drift road, but were struck by the uNokhenke (3) and other regiments of the right 'horn', and by the iNgobamakhosi (4), which had swung up from the far Zulu left. By this stage, the British position had collapsed into rout, with those small groups still attempting to fight caught up in the rush of men from broken units, camp personnel and civilian wagon-drivers trying desperately to escape the closing Zulu 'horns'. Hundreds of transport oxen, mules and riderless horses also fled across the 'nek',

disrupting still further any hope of co-ordinating resistance. Once the fighting had reached close-quarters, the smoke generated by both British and Zulu firearms, mixed with dust thrown up by thousands of struggling men and animals, made any clear view of the battle impossible. At about this time, nature added its own apocalyptic touch, and there was a partial eclipse of the sun. Although the sun was only obscured by 65 per cent, the effect on visibility was commented on by many Zulu survivors, and may have been exaggerated in the immediate confines of the camp by the smoke. For many of the infantry, the only hope of survival lay in sticking together, and after the battle many knots of 24th dead were found in the broken country behind Isandlwana. The true 'last stand' of the 24th took place on the banks of the Manzimnyama, where the bodies of Lieutenant Edgar Anstey and some 60 men from his regiment were later found. (Adam Hook)

battle was lost. Together with the auxiliaries, who had had a few moments head start, they would constitute the bulk of the survivors. No European escaped Isandlwana on foot.

The survivors had to run the gauntlet of the Manzimnyama valley, where boulders and bushes unhorsed the unwary, and where the slopes were alive with fit young warriors from the Zulu 'horns'. Many took a wrong turn in the harsh and confusing landscape, and were trapped and killed in the dongas or at the stream's edge. Those who struggled up Mpethe, Melvill among them, were granted some respite, as the Zulus hung back to finish off the last of the infantry. Yet there would be no easy escape. The summit of Mpethe was largely open, broken here and there with patches of bush and marsh, but it dropped sharply on the far side into the valley of the Mzinyathi. This, of course, was the border with Natal, and it afforded some prospect of safety, but the descent was a steep one, and there was no obvious place to cross the river. The survivors emerged above a narrow gorge where before the war a rocky ford, viable only in the dry season, had been dignified with the name Sothondose's Drift. On the day of the battle, the persistent rain of the previous fortnight had given birth to a roaring brown torrent 50 or 60 yards wide. The first men to reach the river had thrown their weapons aside on the banks and plunged in, and many had been swept away or dashed against submerged rocks. Moreover, by the time the last survivors reached it, local Zulu elements – followers of *inkhosi* Sihayo, who were seeking revenge for the attack on their homesteads a week before – had gathered on the riverbank and were attacking stragglers, many of whom were simply too exhausted to resist.

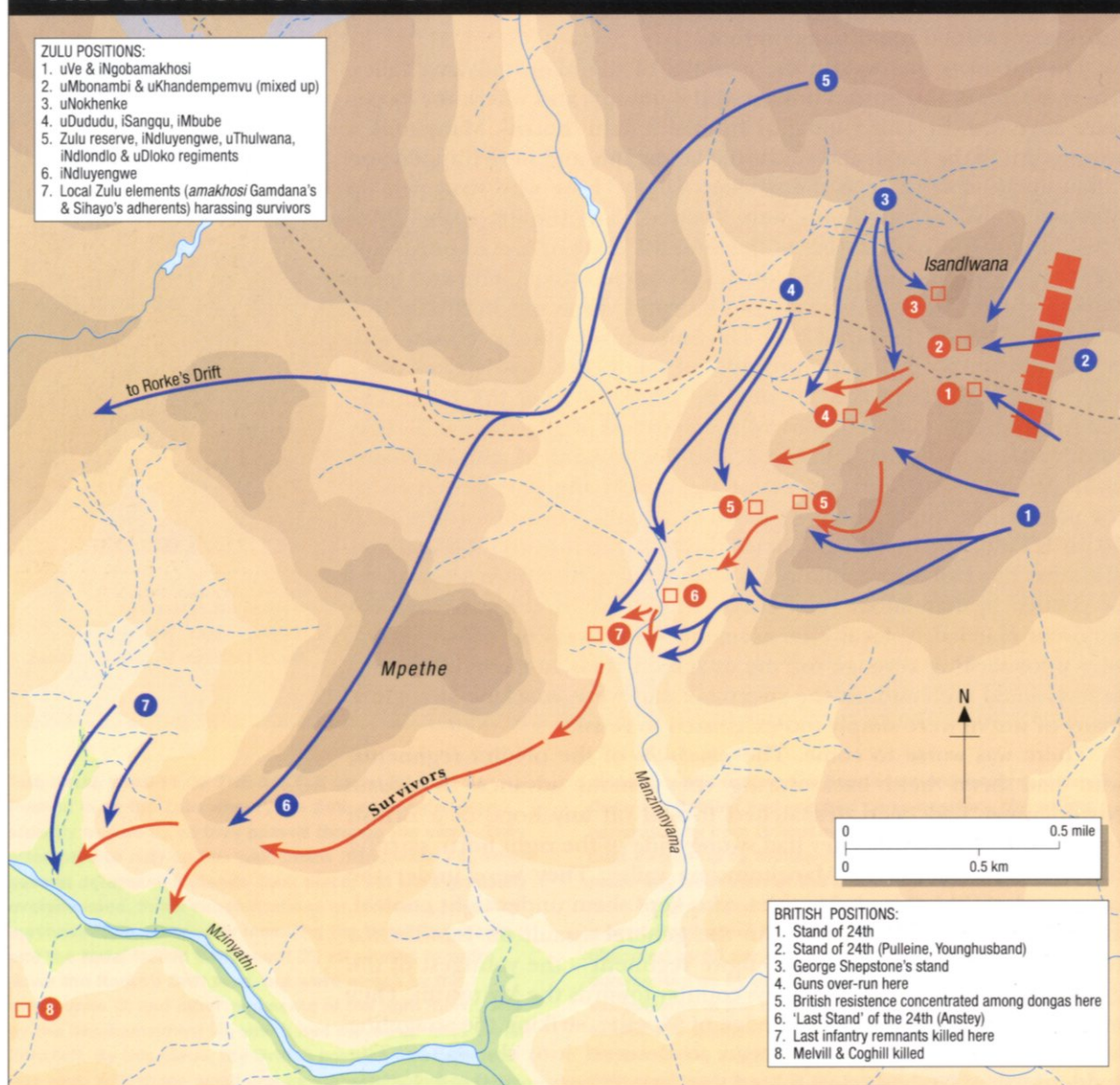
There was worse to come. The *amabutho* of the oNdini regiments, who had been held back during the general advance by *inkhosi* Ntshingwayo, had been despatched to seal off any hope of a British retreat to Rorke's Drift. They had swung wide of the right horn, skirting the western edge of the Manzimnyama valley. They were under the command of Zihhebhhu kaMapitha, who kept them under tight control, and refused to allow them to join the general assault on Isandlwana. Instead, he detached the iNdluyengwe regiment – the youngest of the group – with orders to strike across country towards the Mzinyathi. They moved swiftly along the western edge of Mpethe, striking the straggling line of survivors just as they began to descend into the valley. The sudden rush of fresh warriors forced the last survivors away from the line taken by the forerunners, and down into the steep gorge itself, forcing their horses between the boulders. Many, who had escaped the horrors thus far, were overtaken and killed within sight of sanctuary. Among them was Major Smith, who was perhaps the last British officer to die on the Zulu bank.

During the rout, Lieutenant Melvill had met Lieutenant Nevill Coghill, a fellow 24th officer who had been serving on Glyn's staff. Together, the two of them managed to reach the Mzinyathi, and had put their horses into the water. Coghill got across safely, but Melvill, who was still clutching the Colour, was swept from the saddle. He was carried downstream in the churning water until he managed to grab hold of a large black rock that was just breaking the surface. Coghill, emerging bedraggled on the far bank, looked back and saw him there, and turned his horse back to rescue him. By this time, the Zulus were on the bank



Captain Alan Gardner,
14th Hussars, staff officer,
No. 3 Column. (F.W.D. Jackson).

THE BRITISH COLLAPSE



firing at the men in the water, and a bullet struck Coghill's horse dead, and it collapsed beneath the surface. Coghill struggled forward to join Melvill on the rock, and, together with a Lieutenant Higginson of the Native Contingent, they managed to swim to the Natal bank. By now Melvill was exhausted, however, and the heavy, waterlogged Colour slipped from his grasp in the fast flowing river and disappeared.

Others had equally dramatic escapes; Private Westwood, attached to the Mounted Infantry, reached the water safely, but was also swept from his horse. He was trapped in a fierce eddy, downstream from Melvill, until a colleague, Private Wassall, came to his aid. Like Coghill, Wassall had reached the Natal bank safely, but turned back to help Westwood. Wassall swam his horse to the Zulu bank, got out, tied up his horse, dived in and rescued Westwood before climbing back out onto the Zulu

bank. Here he untied his horse and took Westwood up behind him before plunging back into the water again. Given the number of Zulus hunting down survivors on their bank, the escape of the two Mounted Infantrymen was little short of miraculous.

On the Natal bank the situation was only marginally more secure. A detachment of the Edendale Horse – Durnford's men – who had crossed the river in a body made a short stand, firing their last remaining rounds over the heads of the survivors at the Zulus across the river. This discouraged most of the warriors from attempting to cross nearby, but a few bold individuals tried to swim across with their spears. The Zulus returned the fire, killing a few stragglers as they emerged onto the Natal bank.

Melvill and Coghill were among the last to leave the drift. Together with Higginson, they struggled up the steep slopes leading out of the valley. All three men were exhausted, and Coghill was suffering from a knee injury sustained when his horse fell a few days before. Near the top of the hills, according to Higginson, they saw Zulus stalking them through the bush and long grass. Higginson went ahead to beg horses from the Edendale men nearby; he hadn't gone far when he heard a struggle behind him, and Melvill and Coghill were overtaken and killed.

An air of controversy lingers about the deaths of Melvill and Coghill. According to local tradition, they were killed not by members of the Zulu king's army, who had crossed the river, but by Africans living on the Natal bank. These were followers of *inkhosi* Sothondose, and had once been part of the Zulu kingdom, which they had abandoned in King Mpande's time. The story has it that some of them had turned out to watch the battle unfold on their doorstep, and had been spotted by the *izinduna* on the Zulu bank, who had called across urging them to pick off British stragglers. Terrified of retribution if they did not, they had attacked the last few redcoats fleeing the crossing.

THE END OF THE BATTLE

During the height of the battle, after the British line had collapsed, and when the fighting on the nek was at its height, nature had added its own macabre touch to the proceedings. There was a partial eclipse; the moon passed across 65 per cent of the face of the sun, and the sky darkened. The eclipse started at about 1.30pm, just as the line collapsed, and was at its height at 2.29pm, just as the British stands were being broken up. The actual diminution of light levels was probably not great, though it seemed so to many of the Zulus, struggling amidst the smoke and dust. According to a warrior of the uNokhenke; 'The sun turned black in the middle of the battle; we could still see it over us, or we should have thought we had been fighting til evening. Then we got into the camp, and there was a great deal of smoke and firing. Afterwards, the sun came out bright again'.

It is difficult to be precise about the time the battle ended. The stands in the camp were probably largely over by about 3.00pm, although fighting in the Manzimnyama probably continued until some time later. Small groups of soldiers, and individuals, were able to survive late into the afternoon where they had been able to find a place to



Lieutenant Henry Curling, N/5 Battery, RA. Photo c. 1890s. (Royal Artillery Institute)

shelter, behind wagons or among rocks. Able-Seaman Aynsley – the only sailor in the camp, the servant of Chelmsford's Naval ADC, Lt Milne – stood with his back to a wagon-wheel, challenging the Zulus with his cutlass, until a warrior crept under the wagon and stabbed him through the spokes. Some men feigned death, only to be discovered when the Zulus began to strip the bodies. Another man, presumably a survivor of Youngusband's stand, broke away from the main party when it descended the rocky shoulder, and instead clambered up to a small cave at the foot of the cliffs behind. Crouching down among the boulders, he shot or stabbed every Zulu who approached him, until at last the warriors fired a volley into the cave, and killed him.

The *amabutho* forming the 'chest' had become largely mixed up during the storming of the camp. Once British resistance was eliminated, the warriors turned their attention to looting the extraordinary prize that had fallen into their hands. There were nearly 1,000 Martini-Henry rifles lying among the dead, and the Zulus sought them out, together with swords and revolvers. They had captured over 400,000 rounds of modern ammunition, as well as all the desirable impedimenta of camp life – boxes of tinned meat and biscuit, sacks of mealies, bottled beer, tents, blankets, greatcoats, officers' delicacies and personal possessions. Many of the transport animals had been killed in the fury of the attack, but where they survived, the Zulus herded them away. Later, King Cetshwayo would order the two captured guns to be dragged by hand to oNdini.

Some elements of the 'chest', together with the *amabutho* in the 'horns', had been caught up in the excitement of the pursuit, and had followed the survivors as far as the river. Here, some had prepared to cross, encouraged by Prince Ndabuko, who urged them to carry the war into the colony. They were restrained by Vumandaba kaNthathi, however, who sternly reminded them that the king had prohibited them from crossing the border. Most, in any case, were happy to obey, as they were spent from the day's fighting. They thoroughly searched through the bush on the Zulu bank, finishing off any survivors they found trying to hide, then made their way back to the camp, singing a great war-song from Dingane's day.

The great victory had been earned at a terrible price. Of 1,700 British troops and African auxiliaries who had been present in the camp when the battle began, over 1,300 were killed. Most of the survivors were auxiliaries; scarcely 60 whites had escaped. Just five Imperial officers had survived, only one of whom – Lt Curling, RA – had any front line responsibility. Pulleine was dead – someone later claimed to have seen him in the midst of the main stand on the nek – and so was Durnford. Not one of the 24th's officers had survived. NNC losses totalled over 400 men; Chief Pakhade's amaChunu people alone lost 243 men out of 290 who had been present. Pakhade's son, Gabangaye, was among the killed. The Zulu Prince, Sikhotha kaMpande, was lucky; he had survived.

Zulu losses had been almost as heavy. Although it is impossible to say with certainty, at least 1,000 men had been killed outright during the assault, including a number of prominent *izinduna*. These included *inkhosi* Mkhosana Biyela, shot leading the final charge, and Sigodi, a son of Masiphula, who had been King Mpande's great councillor. Two sons of Ntshingwayo himself were also killed. As the victors, the Zulus were left in possession of the field, and the friends and relatives of the dead dragged

their corpses to dongas, ant-bear holes and the grain pits of nearby homesteads. Those who had no-one to perform this duty were simply covered over with their war-shields. Besides the dead, hundreds more had been wounded, many of them with terrible injuries from the heavy-calibre British bullets, which had splintered bone and carried away tissue. Most of the warriors were fit and healthy young men in the prime of life; later British observers noted the number of men who had survived devastating injuries. Yet these were the minority, and many more succumbed to shock or infection on the agonising journey to their homes.

Through the camp, and on the nek, where the fighting had been heaviest, the ground lay carpeted in dead, British and Zulu together mixed up with the carcasses of slaughtered animals. Most of the British dead had been repeatedly stabbed, and the bodies stripped. Any Zulu who had killed a man in battle was required by religious belief to wear part of his victim's clothing, until he had undergone cleansing ceremonies that freed him from the taint of ritual pollution. As part of the same pattern of belief, a warrior was required to slit the stomach of his dead enemy, to allow his spirit safe passage to the afterlife and to prevent it harming the living.

By late afternoon the victors of Isandlwana retired back over the iNyoni ridge, carrying their wounded and their trophies, and wearing the jackets and helmets of the fallen.

Behind them, as one warrior evocatively put it, 'the green grass was red with the running blood and the veld was slippery, for it was covered with the brains and entrails of the slain'.

Lord Chelmsford's Movements

Lord Chelmsford had arrived at the far end of the Hlajakazi ridge shortly after dawn on the 22nd. Dartnell's men, who had spent an uncomfortable night on the heights, which had included several false alarms, were relieved to see him. Yet, to Chelmsford's disappointment, when the morning mist lifted, there was no sign of the Zulus who had seemed so menacing the night before. It seemed a repetition of his Frontier War experience; once again, an African enemy had given way before him and had refused the opportunity to fight.

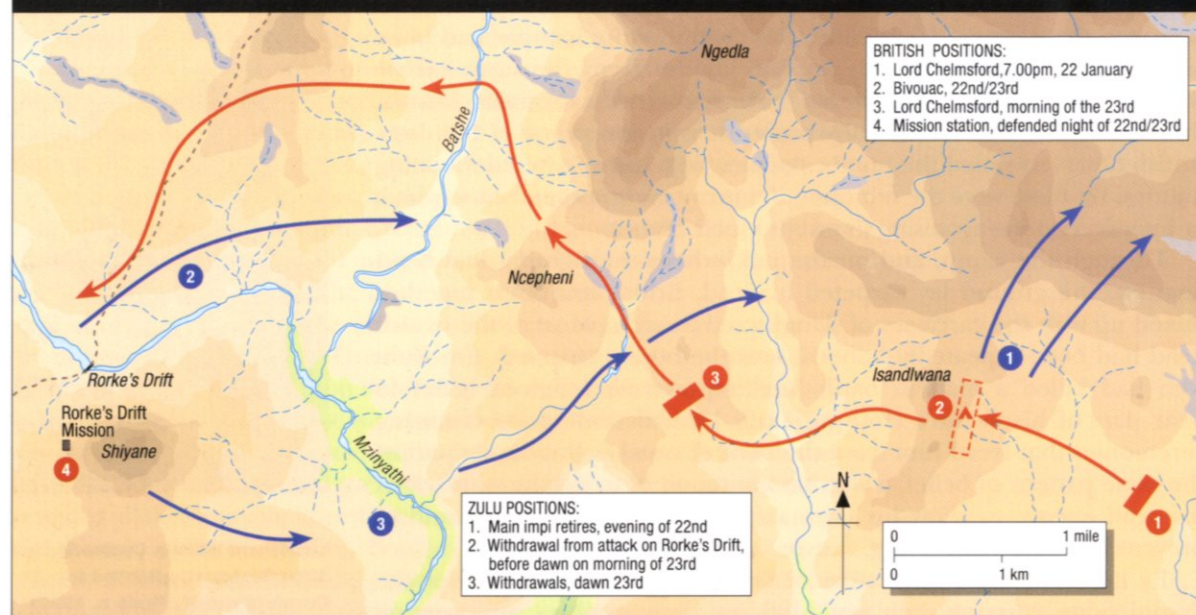
The Zulus had apparently retired through the hills to the northeast, and Chelmsford promptly set out to find them. The NNC, weary and nervous after their exposed night, were ordered to clear the nearest hill, Magogo. Dartnell's mounted men were sent off to the right, in an attempt to surround any warriors who remained. Chelmsford himself rode past Magogo, and with his staff reconnoitered the valley to the north which separated it from the next hill in the range, Silutshana. Now and then these sweeps encountered small parties of Zulus, who took refuge in the rocks, and opened fire. As the 2/24th companies came up, they were deployed clearing the hillsides.

Only the Mounted Infantry, under LtCol Russell, had an encounter of any significance. Sent to scout beyond Silutshana, they encountered parties of Zulus retiring westwards, towards the formidable bulk of Siphezi mountain. As Russell followed them up, he noticed a considerable concentration on the slopes of the hill, and as he came within range, he came under a distant and ineffectual fire. Rather than chance his luck, he returned to report to Lord Chelmsford.



Lieutenant William Cochrane, 32nd Regiment, attached to Durnford's staff. Photo c. 1890s. (Pietermaritzburg Archives Depot).

CHELMSFORD'S MOVEMENTS AND THE ZULU WITHDRAWAL



In truth, the Zulu movements at Mangeni remain the subject of debate. These were not warriors of the main Zulu army, but followers of *inkhosi* Matshana kaMondisa, one of the 'two Matshanas' Chelmsford had expressed concern about earlier. It has been suggested that they had deliberately decoyed Chelmsford away from Isandlwana, in order to split his force and leave the camp open to attack from the main army. Yet such a plan would have made too many assumptions about the British response to Dartnell's encounter, and it seems far more likely that Matshana's people were simply making their way to join the main army, which had been camped at Siphezi two nights previously. Throughout the day on the 22nd, the small groups encountered by the British had all been moving in that direction.

At about 9.30am a report reached Chelmsford which Pulleine had despatched an hour and a half before, and which mentioned those first Zulu movements on the hills above the camp. Chelmsford despatched his ADC, Lt Milne RN, to climb the slope of Magogo, and look back at the camp with his telescope. Milne watched the camp for some time, but it was a hazy day, and he could see little of the detail below Isandlwana beyond the white smudge of the tents. Since the tents had not been struck, he assumed nothing was wrong.

By this time, however, Chelmsford seems to have realised that the big battle he was hoping for would not take place at Mangeni, and he decided to advance the camp to join him. He sent a staff officer, Captain Gardner, back to camp with orders for Pulleine. A number of other officers, including Major Smith of the Artillery, decided to join him. It was an unfortunate decision; they arrived just as the main Zulu attack developed, and only Gardner among them would survive the day.

To help break up the camp, Chelmsford also sent the 1/3rd NNC back to Isandlwana. Hot and tired after their broken night on the Hlazakazi ridge, the NNC covered the return journey slowly, and as they

drew near the camp, they became aware that a battle was in progress. Their officers – who did not trust them to stand and fight – promptly ordered them off the road and up onto a defensible ridge to their left. From high on the ridge they watched, in horror, the battle unfold.

Throughout the day, a number of reports reached Chelmsford which suggested that something unusual was unfolding at Isandlwana. It was not until he received the frantic messages from the NNC, however, that he rode back down the track to see for himself. Even then, he was not easily convinced; only when told by an officer of the NNC who had ridden close enough to see Zulus looting the tents did he appear to accept the news. He immediately gave orders for his men to return to Isandlwana, but they were by that time spread across several miles of hills beyond Mangeni, and it was some time before they could be recalled.

Chelmsford began his doleful return to Isandlwana in the late afternoon. It was evening by the time he arrived within artillery range of the camp; large numbers of Zulus could be seen retiring towards the iNyoni hills to the right. Col Harness's guns unlimbered and sent shells among the tents, to drive off any stragglers. Then Chelmsford advanced his infantry, and shortly after dark on the evening of 22 January, he re-occupied the camp he had left before dawn that morning.

Even in the darkness, the devastation was unmistakable. The air was heavy with the smell of blood and decay, and bodies lay everywhere. Here and there the soldiers came across a few wounded Zulus, and they finished them off with bayonets. The exact whereabouts of the Zulu army was unclear, but a line of burning farms and homesteads marked the border towards Rorke's Drift. Chelmsford's men were exhausted, and he had little option but to spend the night on the battlefield. In the inky blackness, his men lay down on the damp grass to sleep; many found in the morning that they had been lying in pools of blood, or sleeping next to corpses.

Shortly before dawn – to spare his men the full spectacle of the desolation – Chelmsford ordered the column to march to Rorke's Drift. A few miles beyond the Manzimnyama, they saw large bodies of Zulus emerging from the Mziyathi valley to their left. These were the regiments of the Zulu reserve – the uThulwana, iNdlondlo, uDloko and iNdluyengwe – returning from their unsuccessful attack on Rorke's Drift. Having missed most of the action at Isandlwana, they had defied the king's instructions not to cross into Natal, but after ten hours of heavy fighting, had been beaten off by the determined defence of the mission station.

The Zulus passed within a few hundred yards of Chelmsford's column. Both sides were too exhausted to resume the fight, and they watched each other pass sullenly.

Chelmsford's return to Rorke's Drift later that morning marked the effective end of the Isandlwana campaign. The defence of Rorke's Drift at least afforded a positive note at the end of the day's horrors, for it seemed to halt the tide of Zulu victory. Yet the greater truth was that Lord Chelmsford's invasion of Zululand had been spectacularly repulsed, for although the dead at Isandlwana amounted to less than half the column's strength, the effect of the defeat on British morale was devastating, and the loss of the entire column's tents, transport, reserve ammunition and food supplies had effectively immobilised it.

AFTERMATH AND STRATEGIC CONSEQUENCES

The Zulu victory at Isandlwana was part of a concerted response which had challenged all three columns on a single day. Even as the first Zulu scouts had appeared at Isandlwana, local elements elsewhere in the country had confronted both the British flanking columns. Although the British had won those actions – at Zungwini mountain in the north, and Nyezane on the coast – the destruction of the Centre Column left the flank columns unsupported. When news of Isandlwana became known, both Wood and Pearson had little option but to abandon the invasion plan. Colonel Pearson opted to occupy the deserted mission station at Eshowe, while Wood embarked on a low-intensity guerrilla war against local chiefdoms, the only means left to the British to prosecute the war.

Apart from a few minor border garrisons, and the remains of the Centre Column, cooped up in the unsanitary confines of Rorke's Drift, the Natal border lay open to a Zulu counter-attack from the lower Thukela all the way up to the Transvaal border. Panic swept through Natal, and the settler population hastily threw up defences as far away as Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Chelmsford himself was forced to return to the colonial capital in an attempt to restore morale, and to implement plans for defence against a Zulu attack.

Yet King Cetshwayo had neither the will nor the capability to strike into Natal, even after Isandlwana. Politically, he was keen to play the injured party, a victim of British aggression, and he was aware that any raid into colonial territory might only provoke the British to greater retaliation. Moreover, the fighting on 22 January had exhausted the nation, and the news of victory was tempered by the realisation of the human cost. For days afterwards, Natal border guards reported mourning songs and wailing from along the length of the border. Moreover, the army needed time to undergo purification rituals, and to rest. Many of the warriors did not report to the king after the battle, as was customary, and in some quarters the losses were considered so heavy that the battle was talked of almost as a defeat. Some *izinduna* blamed the casualties on the fact that the battle had begun spontaneously, without time to undertake the last-minute protective ceremonies.

Yet the young men who fought the battle were justly proud of their achievement, and the iNgobamakhosi, uMbonambi and uKhandempemvu vied with each other to claim the honour of being first into the tents. The king, after consulting with his commanders, decided the matter, and the claim of the uMbonambi was duly recognised. Members of that regiment who had killed a man in the battle were allowed to cut *iziqu* 'bravery bead' necklaces.

The British also awarded their honours. The paucity of information about the last moments of the camp made it difficult to recognise

heroes, and only one man – Private Wassall – was awarded the Victoria Cross. There was no provision for the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross in 1879, but it was announced that Lieutenants Melvill and Coghill would have received the award had they lived. The Colour which they had tried so hard to recover was later found in the river; it was taken back to England, and presented to Queen Victoria. No less than 11 of the defenders of Rorke's Drift received the VC.

It would be several weeks before the king could reassemble his army, and in that time the initiative passed once more to the British. Chelmsford's response to the defeat was to appeal for reinforcements, and while the home government had been reluctant to sanction the war in the first place, they accepted the need to restore British prestige. Within days of the news of Isandlwana reaching London, the first reinforcements were on board ship, heading for the Cape. They began to arrive at the end of February, and by the middle of March, Chelmsford was confident enough to contemplate the resumption of his offensive.

The Zulus, too, were ready to embark on a fresh campaign by that time. Although Colonel Pearson's column had been effectively isolated at Eshowe by local elements, Wood's column had proved particularly active. Painfully aware of the troops massing again on his borders, Cetshwayo and his advisers decided to try to neutralise Wood before the new arrivals could cross into Zululand. They were too slow; the main army was despatched from oNdini towards the northern borders just as Lord Chelmsford crossed the Thukela with his Eshowe relief force.

The result was a staggering series of battles which took place at either end of the country, just days apart. On 28 March the Zulus caught Wood's mounted men in the open at Hlobane mountain, and scattered them. The following day, they advanced on his camp at Khambula hill. The iNgobamakhosi attacked crying out 'We are the boys from Isandlwana!', but this time the British met them behind defended earthworks and wagon-laagers. After an afternoon of heavy fighting, the Zulus were driven off with catastrophic losses. Then, on 2 April, Lord Chelmsford broke through the Zulu cordon around Eshowe at kwaGingindlovu.

The battles at the end of March destroyed the illusion among the Zulus that they could resist the British indefinitely. Redcoats poured into Zululand in growing numbers, and Lord Chelmsford painstakingly prepared for a new invasion. On 4 July he defeated the Zulu army on the plain at oNdini. The royal homesteads were put to the torch, and King Cetshwayo fled. He was later captured by British Dragoons, and sent into exile at the Cape.

In many respects, the battle of Isandlwana proved a harbinger of doom for the Zulu kingdom. It was the greatest act of defiance by a southern African society against colonial intrusion, and it is rightly remembered as such today. It created an image of the Zulu people that continues to influence the impressions of outsiders, even to this day. Yet the price of that victory was the wrath of the British Empire, and the ultimate destruction – not only of thousands of lives – but of the old kingdom itself. It is a bitter irony that the long-term consequences of the battle of Isandlwana included the dispossession, subjugation and colonial exploitation of the victors themselves.

THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

The dead of Isandlwana remained a feature of the site for a long time afterwards. Throughout February and March 1879 Chelmsford lacked the resources to attempt to bury the fallen, since the battlefield remained hostile territory. It was not until May, when the imminence of the fresh invasion gave rise to a pragmatic need to recover what serviceable military equipment remained, that the first attempt was made to bury the dead. Even then it was hurried and partial, and the remains were hastily covered over. While scavengers and the elements had broken up some of the bodies, others remained surprisingly intact. Few could be identified, although Durnford's corpse was recognised by the long moustaches still attached to the skull. At Colonel Glyn's request, the bodies of the 24th were left on the field until the Regiment could bury its own. This did not take place until June, when burial parties regularly visited the site from Rorke's Drift; the photographs of the battlefield, showing wagons and debris still in place, were taken at this time.

Because of the hasty nature of the burials, the bones were regularly exposed by the summer rains, and work parties continued to visit the site throughout the early 1880s. Eventually, the piles of stones which had been used to cover the remains were piled higher to form cairns, and these are a feature of the site today. They are now regularly white-washed, although it is thought that some cairns are inaccurately placed, while others have been broken down and lost. Almost none of the graves are individually marked; the only exceptions are those of a



A curious composite photograph, published as a souvenir in 1879. A contemporary photograph of Isandlwana has been grafted to an engraved view of the first burial expedition, 21 May 1879. (Private Collection).



An anonymous Zulu veteran of the battle, photographed in the 1930s. He wears an *iziqu* 'bravery bead' necklace he won in the battle. Only members of the uMbonambi *ibutho* – recognised as the first to breach the British line – who had killed a man during the fighting were granted this honour. (Killie Campbell Library).

few of the colonial troops, whose families were able to identify the bodies. Durnford's body was at first buried on the battlefield, but it was later exhumed and buried in the military cemetery in Pietermaritzburg. Pulleine's last resting place is not known. Three particularly large cairns were built up in 1879. They marked two of the largest concentrations of 24th dead, and the site of Youngusband's stand. One of these was replaced in 1914 by the present 24th memorial.

In 1880 a mission church, St. Vincent's, was built on the site, nestling below the iNyoni escarpment next to the spur. When the summer rains exposed the bones of Zulu dead in nearby dongas, the missionaries collected them and re-interred them outside the mission church; a small chapel marks the spot today. It was not until 22 January 1999 – 120 years after the battle – that a formal memorial was erected to honour the Zulu dead. It takes the form of a large bronze *iziqu* necklace, symbolising courage and loyalty to the Zulu kings.

Today Isandlwana is readily accessible to tourists. There are several luxury lodges in the vicinity, and one has been built into the escarpment, below the rocks where *inkhosi* Ntshingwayo once stood. There has been an increase in local settlement, particularly around the old mission, and along the line of the dongas where the uKhandempemvu advance once stalled. Dirt roads cut through the line of the Zulu advance. The area around the mountain, however, including the camp-site, and part of the forward British positions, as well as much of the Manzimnyama valley behind, is now incorporated in a battlefield reserve, which is fenced and policed. A nominal fee is charged for entry.

An access road cuts across the foot of the mountain, through the back of the British camp, and a small car-park stands on the nek. The road has been cut in places between cairns, suggesting that the car park stands where much of the heaviest fighting took place. Nevertheless, the exclusion of settlement from the reserve has allowed the natural fauna to recover, and on a hot summer's day, when the grass is high and green, it is easy to imagine how the battlefield looked at the time of the battle. A small, shy herd of zebra and impala, introduced to the reserve and glimpsed sometimes in the late afternoon, evoke the spirit of an older Africa.

And above it all stands Isandlwana itself, ancient, mournful, mysterious; the most fitting monument of all to the dead of both sides.

FURTHER READING

For the best part of a century, the battle of Isandlwana was examined largely from the British perspective. This was to some extent inevitable, given that Zulu tradition remained largely oral, while the majority of written first-hand accounts were from British sources. To some extent this imbalance has been redressed with the emphasis given, since the 1970s, to exploring Zulu traditions. Historically, however, this process has skewed interpretation of the battle, leading in the past to an over-emphasis on possible causes of a British defeat, rather than a Zulu victory. As a result older general histories often present a version of events which differs radically from modern interpretations, and this disparity lives on in debates about controversial aspects of the battle. Nevertheless, Sir Reginald Coupland's *Zulu Battle Piece*, first published in 1948 (and reprinted in 1991) remains a worthwhile introduction. Ian Knight's *Zulu; The Battles of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift* (1992) is an attempt to analyse the battle in detail from primary sources, and is heavily illustrated (it was published in 1995 without the illustrations under the title *The Sun Turned Black*). Professor John Laband's masterful *Rope of Sand; The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Kingdom in the 19th Century* (1995, published in the UK under the title *The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Nation*) is an essential and scholarly account of the war, including Isandlwana, from the Zulu perspective. A number of British accounts of the battle are included in anthologies by Frank Emery (*The Red Soldier*; 1977), Ian Knight (*By the Orders of the Great White Queen*; 1993) and Sonia Clarke (*Invasion of Zululand*, 1979, and *Zululand at War*, 1984). John Laband's *Lord Chelmsford's Zululand Campaign 1878-1879* (1994) is the most recent analysis of Chelmsford's southern Africa career, and is drawn largely from his personal papers. Robin Droogleever's *The Road to Isandhlwana: Colonel Anthony Durnford in Natal and Zululand 1873-79* (1993) provides a detailed study of the career of one of the principals in the Isandlwana story, and offers a convincing psychological portrait. Philip Gon's similarly titled *The Road to Isandlwana; The Years of an Imperial Battalion* (1979) provides an insight into the life of the 1/24th on the eve of their demise. *The Curling Letters of the Zulu War*, edited by Dr Adrian Greaves and Brian Best (2001) includes the recollections of one of the British survivors, Lt Curling RA. An exploration of the Zulu military system can be found in *The Anatomy of the Zulu Army; From Shaka to Cetshwayo* (Ian Knight, 1994), while the same author's *Great Zulu Battles* (1998) and *Great Zulu Commanders* (1999) attempt to place the battle within the context of contemporary personalities and events. Bertram Mitford's marvellous travelogue, *Through the Zulu Country; Its Battlefields and Its People* (1883, reprinted 1992) offers a description of the field a few years after the fighting, and key interviews with Zulu survivors. *The Zulu War; Then and Now* (Ian Knight and Ian Castle, 1994) provides comparative photographic studies of the sites, while the same authors' *Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift in the Battleground South Africa* series (2000) are handy pocket-sized illustrated guides.

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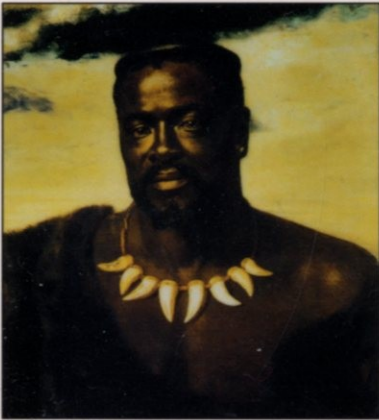
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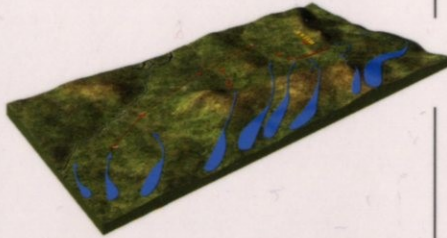
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