

THE ANGLO-ZULU WAR OF 1879
THE RIGHT HAND COLUMN, WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO THE ZULU PEOPLE DEFENDING
THEMSELVES AGAINST THE BRITISH INVASION

2002

SIBHE HERBERT NTULI

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THE ANGLO-ZULU WAR OF 1879

**THE RIGHT HAND COLUMN, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO THE ZULU PEOPLE DEFENDING THEMSELVES
AGAINST THE BRITISH INVASION.**

by

SIHLE HERBERT NTULI

**SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN THE
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND**

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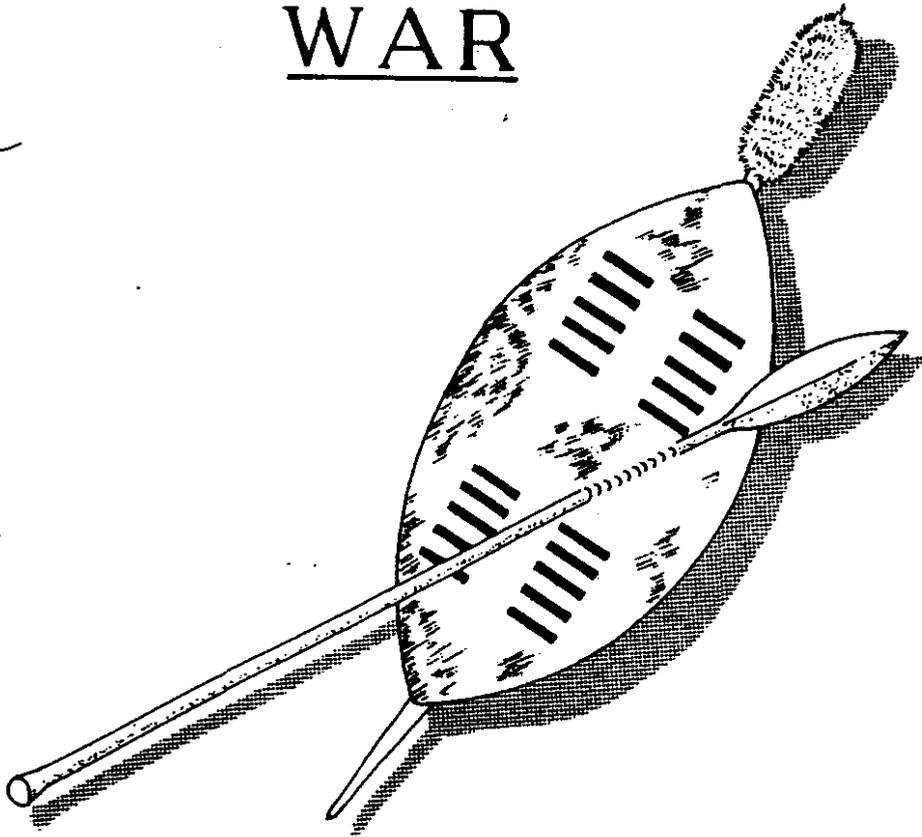
SUPERVISOR: PROF A E CUBBIN

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THE

ZULU

WAR



1879

With acknowledgement to Smail, J.L. : Historical monuments and battlefields in Natal and Zululand

In compliance with the regulations of
the University of Zululand,
I declare that this whole thesis, unless
specially stated to the
contrary in the text, is my work.



.....

S.H. NTULI

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have long since been interested in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. I have come to realise that the many British versions need to be balanced by a more Zulu oriented approach. Therefore the purpose of this thesis is to attempt to present a Zulu perspective which I hope will encourage a popular Zulu involvement both in research and tourism. What is prominent in my thinking is bringing to the foreground the lesser known, but nevertheless, significant, coastal campaign of the Zulu War of 1879. As the campaign unfolds I will attempt to see the developments from the Zulu position as they defended their homeland from British aggression. They, especially the younger warriors, were prepared to die for their King and traditional way of life. They had a proud military tradition and were intent on victory once war broke out on 11th January.

Research for this project required an initial stay of more than six months in Pietermaritzburg, Durban and Ulundi and a subsequent visit as such information was not enough among the local people interviewed in the Zululand area. Professor A E Cubbin (my supervisor) once suggested that two years would be necessary to research this project and he was not far wrong as it has taken three years. But my Pietermaritzburg expedition was exciting and hopefully fruitful. Moreover, Professor Cubbin generously gave me much of his time, his library resources and was most hospitable. In addition to the many meetings I have had with him, Prof. Cubbin kindly helped me in translating Zulu expressions into English. I would therefore like to thank him for his guidance and criticism which greatly helped me in the preparation of this thesis. I am also grateful to Professor John Laband of the University of Natal for providing useful and interesting historical information especially from his synthesis, Kingdom In Crisis.

Assistance away from home also came from Bobby Eldridge, Hloni Dlamini, Nellie Somers and Nomsa Bhengu, all from the Killie Campbell Africana Library (KCAL) University of Natal, Durban. I must pay tribute for the great help given to me from the Pietermaritzburg Archives Depot (NAD), University of Natal library, Pietermaritzburg and also from the Pietermaritzburg City library.

In search of local opinion, I did not find the coastal battles, my main concern very popular. But may I warmly thank those who did assist me. First and foremost was Mr M. Dlamini, an imbongi (praiser) from Nongoma. Accordingly, I invited Mr Dlamini to participate in a discussion held at the University of Zululand. Mr Dlamini, with his traditional knowledge, set forth his views and enabled the listener to decide which interpretation to accept, even if Mr Dlamini differed with the final analysis. Zulu history would have benefited considerably if such people were not ignored.

At home in Zululand, I have had outstanding help from my brothers and friends, especially Mr A V Shongwe (a historian), and Dr E Mkhathswa, without whose help, advice and encouragement, this project would have faltered. I would also like to thank Mr M E L Linda of Uyengo High School for his assistance especially with drawings. Thanks very much to all members and staff of various local libraries and forts, especially Fort Nongqayi at eShowe, which I visited.

I wish also to acknowledge my gratitude to the Department of African Languages at the University of Zululand, in particular Professor L Z M Khumalo and Mr Z Mashiyane for their assistance. I would also like to thank Ms J M Gloss, secretary in the Department of History, for her dedication and patience especially when it came to Zulu spellings. I also thank Dr L M Madondo for his assistance.

Finally my thanks to my dear fiancé, Miss C B Zondi, who after the pains of mastering irregular verbs and other intricacies of the English and Zulu languages, accompanied me almost all the time and shared my privations and my work, as well as my pleasures.

GLOSSARY

I have endeavoured to assist the readers, both Zulu and English, by giving a glossary. It is modern practice to list Zulu words under the stem not the prefix (I, u, isi, ma, etc.): thus *ibutho* is listed after *assegai* and before *donga*.

<i>Assegai</i>	a general term, not Zulu in origin, for a spear. The Zulu equivalent is <i>umKhonto</i> .
<i>Ibandla</i>	the state council of the Zulu nation, the King's advisers.
<i>Ibutho</i> , pl. <i>amabutho</i>	a group of youth organised into a guild by a common age; usually used to refer to a regiment in the Zulu King's army.
<i>Donga</i>	a run-off gully, caused by soil erosion.
<i>Drift</i>	a shallow point in a river where it can be forded.
<i>Isigodlo</i>	the royal household; the top part of a royal homestead (<i>ikhanda</i>) used by the king or his household in person.
<i>ka</i>	the son of, hence King Cetshwayo <i>kaMpande</i> .
<i>Ikhanda</i> , pl. <i>amakhanda</i>	royal homestead, distributed about Zululand as centres of the state power, and used as barracks for the <i>amabutho</i> .
<i>kwa</i>	prefix of Zulu place names, meaning 'the place of'
<i>Laager</i>	Afrikaans term describing a protective circle of wagons. Often used by the British in a more general sense, meaning a fortified camp.
<i>Impi</i>	any body of armed Zulu's intent on warfare.
<i>Impondo zankomo</i>	'the beast's horns', the traditional Zulu attack formation.

Induna, pl. izinduna	a military or civil officer of the Zulu state.
Isangoma, pl. izangoma	a Zulu diviner.
Umuzi, pl. imizi	an ordinary Zulu family homestead. Often known by Europeans as 'kraal'.
Vedette.	a mounted sentry placed in advance of infantry pickets.

Note on spelling: Throughout the thesis the modern spelling for Zulu names has been followed.

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List of abbreviations

AC	:	Alison Collection papers in the Brenthurst Library, Parktown, Johannesburg.
BPP	:	British Parliamentary Papers.
CO	:	Colonial Office, London.
CP	:	Chelmsford Papers.
CSO	:	Colonial Secretary's Office, Natal, papers in Natal Archives Depot, Pietermaritzburg.
GH	:	Government House Natal, papers in the Natal Archives Depot, Pietermaritzburg.
JSA	:	The James Stuart Archives of Recorded Oral evidence, Pietermaritzburg and Durban.
KCAL	:	Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
NAD	:	Natal Archive Depot, Pietermaritzburg.
SNA	:	Secretary for Native Affairs, Natal, papers in the Natal Archives Depot, Pietermaritzburg.
WO	:	War Office, papers in Public Record Office, Kew.

Cetshwayo

KING OF THE ZULUS



CHAPTER ONE

THE READINESS OF THE ZULU *AMABUTHO* ON THE EVE OF THE ANGLO-ZULU WAR OF 1879

In kwa-Zulu the military system was built upon the institution of age – set units called *amabutho* which seemed to have developed from the traditions of the eastern Nguni people. A new regiment was formed as follows:- the boys, when they considered themselves mature enough after circumcision to enlist, say from sixteen to eighteen years of age, collected at the *amakhanda* (military barracks), each going to that to which his father belonged and there they stayed and participated in *bekleze* (milking the cows directly into their mouth). This was a sign that they wished to be enlisted and when the *izinceku* (King's officers) of the *amakhanda* saw that a good many of such boys had collected, one of them reported the fact to the King, who then gave permission for the boys to be brought before him.¹ There was no penalty for those who did not join, although, of course, they were not held in much regard.

Such men might marry whenever they pleased, and they put on the *isongo* (head-ring), with the permission of the *induna* (head man) of their *ikhanda*.² If however a man who has once enlisted, and at some future time failed to appear when his regiment was summoned for any purpose, the circumstances would then be investigated and if he could not give a satisfactory reason for his absence, he might perhaps be killed by his regiment, but not by the King.

The King gave the orders to assemble young men to the *induna* who had reported their readiness. They then delivered it to *izinduna* at the various *amakhanda*. The young men

¹ Vijn.C.: Cetshwayo's Dutchmen, p.189. Also confirmed by M.Mthethwa: Oral Evidence, 19 March 2000, T.Masondo: Oral evidence, 26 May 2000.

² J.Khumalo: Oral evidence, 22 March 2000.

were then assembled at the different *amakhanda*, and at their appointed day messengers were sent to the King to report that they were coming. Thereupon the King had cattle killed for them so that when they arrived they found the meat prepared. The King then gave the new group or regiments a name and appointed one man as *induna* (headman) over them, and ordered them to build for themselves a new *ikhanda* or incorporated them with one of the regiments already formed .³

If however, when the young men appeared and the King thought them too young, he sent them back to their homes to look after cattle until they were ready. When the young men had completed building their *ikhanda*, they dispersed again to their homes, for the Zulu amabutho were not kept collected together but lived at home with their families.⁴

It was a requirement that the young men would spend a certain time each year at their *ikhanda*, thereby indicating their respect to the King. This however, was voluntary and the men went when they chose and stayed for as long or as short as they liked. They, (ten to twenty men at a time), usually assembled at one *umuzi* (homestead). At *koMkhulu* or *Isigodlo* or *Ihlalankosi* (King's Capital) there were usually from fifty to sixty men at a time belonging to different *amakhanda*. The men, while in residence, were occupied in the ordinary affairs of the *ikhanda* e.g. repairing *amaqhugwane* (huts) or *isibaya* (cattle kraal), planting *amabele* (maize) etc. There were no fixed times for the summoning of the amabutho besides *uMkhosi*. (Annual First Fruit Ceremony). But the King called them if he wanted them

³ Vijn. C.: *Cetshwavo's Dutchman*, p.190.

⁴ *Ibid*: p.190. Also confirmed by M.Dlamini: Oral evidence, 3 March 2000.

for particular purposes e.g. one regiment, perhaps two, as he saw fit, to build a new *isibaya* or to move an old one or for hunting parties.⁵

In Cetshwayo's time, boys between ages of fourteen and eighteen would gather at *amakhanda* where they served for two to three years as cadets, herding cattle, working the field and practicing military skills.⁶

Once enough boys of an age group were congregated at various *amakhanda* around the country they would all be brought before the King usually at an *uMkhosi* (Annual First Fruit Ceremony) held at *oNdini koMkhulu* (King's capital). The King then either formed them into a new *ibutho* with orders to build an *ikhanda* or they were incorporated into an old *ibutho* whose strength the King had decided to maintain. Women were indirectly part of the military system in that they performed a major role in Zulu society and produced food to feed their male relatives serving in the army.

There was a considerable greater degree of flexibility in the *ibutho* system by Cetshwayo's time than in Shaka's day e.g. under Cetshwayo, enrolment was no longer compulsory. In 1879 there were 27 *amakhanda* in Kwa-Zulu, thirteen of them concentrated in the Mahlabathini plain including Ulundi, Cetshwayo's great place. The remaining fourteen *amakhanda* were widely dispersed and formed regional centres of royal influence and mobilisation points for local elements of the married *amabutho*. The *ibutho* system formed the basis of the King's power and authority. Through it he exerted a firm control over the

⁵ Vijn, C.: *Cetshwayo's Dutchman*, p.190; Dlamini, M. Oral evidence, 5 March 2000.

⁶ Laband, J. & Thompson, P. S.: *Field Guide to the War in Zululand*, p.3.

men and women of his kingdom and harnessed their productivity and military potential to the service of the Zulu state.⁷

The *ibutho* system was made up of a number of *amaviyo* (divisions). During times of war each warrior was armed with *iklwa* (a stabbing spear) and a number of *izijula* (throwing spears) and one *isagila* (knobkierie). The spears were made by iron-smiths, inter alia, in the regions of the Nkandla forest and the Black Mfolozi and distributed by the King to his *amabutho*. Firearms had entered Zululand in significant numbers from the late 1860's when *Cetshwayo* feared that his position as Mpande's heir might be usurped by one or other of his brothers. This had compelled him to encourage their importation, chiefly via Delagoa Bay.⁸

In times of mobilisation the King sent orders by *isigijimi* (runner) to the *izinduna* commanding various *amakhanda* to collect their *amabutho* and proceed to *isigodlo* (King's great place). Within a week the *amabutho* would have taken up station at Ulundi.⁹

During the *Umkhosi* ceremony, the King and the *amabutho* were ritually strengthened, the ancestral spirits praised and the allegiance of the people to the King renewed. A great military review followed. When the King initiated hostilities the *amabutho* would be gathered at his *isigodlo* to be strengthened with *umuthi* (medicines) and cleansed by ritual vomiting in a series of ceremonies that lasted three days. A further ceremony of ritual sprinkling was generally left until enemy country had been reached or battle was imminent. When they attacked, the Zulus did not always observe these ceremonies in full, as was the case in 1879.

⁷ Laband, J. & Thompson, P.S. : Field Guide to the War in Zululand, pp.3-4. Also confirmed by M.Dlamini, interviewed at the University of Zululand, 4 March 2000.

⁸ Laband, J. & Thompson, P.S. : A Field Guide to the War in Zululand, p.4.

⁹ Ibid., p.5; Also confirmed by J. S Hadebe, interviewed at Yengweni, 06 July 2000.

In such circumstances, when the army had to proceed at once against the foe, a much simpler ceremony was performed yet which one also included external and internal cleansing and the ritual sprinkling.¹⁰

The preferred time of campaign was after the crops had been harvested, so the decision to go to war was often taken at the *Umkhosi*, with which festival the British invasion of Zululand in January 1879 coincided. So, in January 1879 much of the Zulu army was in effect already mobilised and ritually prepared for war. But in this case it did not take the initiative for the King was waiting for the British to reveal themselves as the aggressors and to begin the war they had engineered.¹¹ This was asserted in 1902 when Ndukwana reminded the Natal magistrate, James Stuart, that “Cetshwayo, it is true fought, but if you remember, it was not he who began the war.” Also on March 1881 King Cetshwayo kaMpande wrote a letter to the Governor of the Cape, Sir Hercules Robinson,

“Mpande did you no wrong, and I have done
you no wrong, therefore you must have, some
other object in view in invading my land”.¹²

This was the clear indication that Cetshwayo had no intention or wish to quarrel with the British.

With the expiry of the ultimatum on 11 January 1879, British forces invaded Zululand in five columns headed for Ulundi – *Komkhulu* (King’s greatest place). As news of the British

¹⁰ Laband, J & Thompson, P.S. : A Field Guide to the War in Zululand. p.5. Also confirmed by M.Dlamini, oral evidence, 4 March 2000.

¹¹ Laband, J. : Fight us in the Open, The Anglo-Zulu War Through Zulu Eyes.pp.4-5.

¹² Laband, J.: Fight us In The Open, The Anglo-Zulu War Through The Zulu Eyes. p.1.

advance reached Ulundi, the Zulu army became increasingly impatient to resist the invading British. Young *amabutho* clamoured to be allowed to fight but Cetshwayo and his older statesmen forbade them to cross into Natal hoping that a purely defensive war would win him political advantages.¹³

The King was compelled to call out his entire army and those units still at home marched to oNdini to join those who were already there for the Umkhosi. Fifty years later, Nhlanhlana Ngune of the Ingobamakhosi age regiment remembered how he had been affected by the general muster:

“We were here at Mhlathuzane, when we were-called together by our leader. ‘You must rest quickly at home’, he told us, ‘because next month you will all be wanted’. We had scarcely got home when a special messenger came from oNdini telling us to go there immediately as Cetshwayo, our King, had need of us. The *abelungu* (white men) were even then in their tents at Isandlwana.”¹⁴

¹³ M.Dlamini: Oral Evidence, 3March 2000.

¹⁴ Laband, J.: Fight Us In The Open, The Anglo-Zulu War – Through The Zulu Eyes, pp. 5-6.

Later on King Cetshwayo wrote of his response to the Governor of the Cape:

“My troops, although many with me at my
ikhanda or umuzi, have not yet taken up arms,
but are simply waiting for some settlement.”¹⁵

On 13 April, 1879, Bishop Colenso wrote to Ferguson:

“It was very pleasant to see your handwriting again and to know that you remember us in our troubles which just now are indeed great, through the wicked policy of Sir Bartle Frere. There would have been the greater danger of Cetshwayo penetrating to the colony and overwhelming it in utter ruin, if he had wished to do so. During the last two months nothing could have prevented his doing so. I mean that our forces could have done nothing and his forces were strong enough for anything. But he had never wished to do so, he has stood resolutely on the defensive against a most unnecessary and unjust invasion. Sir Bartle Frere came up here determined to go to war with the Zulus and break down the Zulu power, though the Zulus had never done us any harm during the last 30 years and

¹⁵ Laband, J. : Fight us in the open. The Anglo-Zulu War – Through the Zulu eyes. p.5.

have shown no wish to do so.”¹⁶“But Sir Bartle Frere, though otherwise he came up from Cape Town full of prejudices he swallowed all the rubbish told him by the worthless traders and hysterical Missionaries.

It was useless for Sir Henry Bulwer (Natal Governor) to point out that the statement of the Zulu King having built military kraals (*amakhanda*) in the disputed territory and having killed large number of the Zulu converts was totally untrue, Sir Bartle Frere reasserts their falsehood and a number of others just as unfounded All these would go down with persons in England ignorant of real facts and seeing that they were backed by some of our local journals who glory in Sir Bartle Frere’s policy which I need hardly to say, will be an enormous pecuniary benefit to this little Colony beside freeing them from all fears in future of a Zulu invasion.”¹⁷

Kubheka Gwabe of the Umciyo age regiment who, like Nhlanhlana, was also interviewed by *The Natal Mercury* in 1929 contributes:

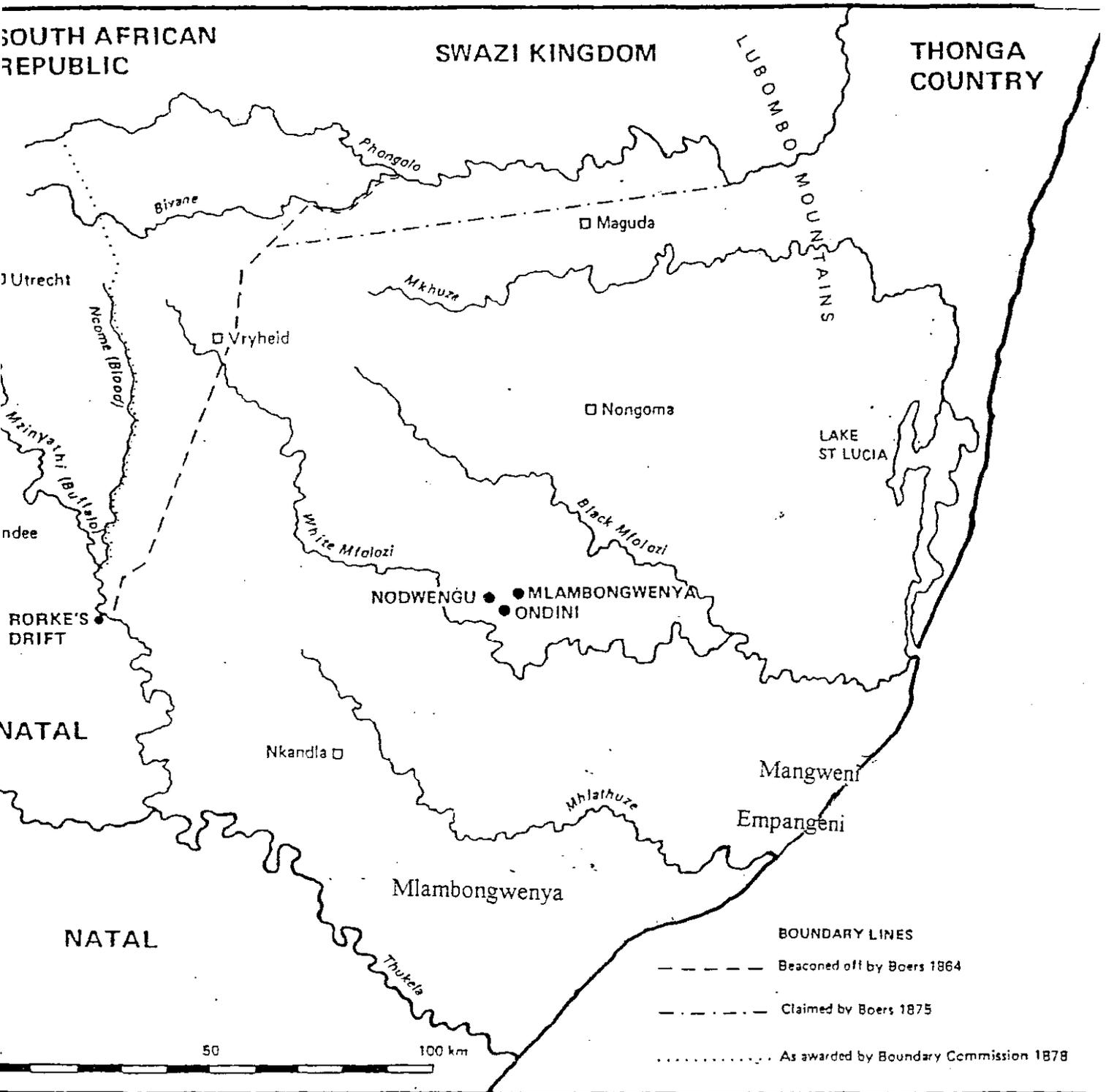
“The whole army was gathered at oNdini. The regiments gathered there had so many men in them that they seemed to stretch right from there to the sea. The first thing our King did was to give us cattle to eat and beer to drink”.¹⁸

So King Cetshwayo had the effective power to attack Natal should he have so decided.

¹⁶ Colenso papers, From Bishop Colenso to Ferguson, 13 April 1879.

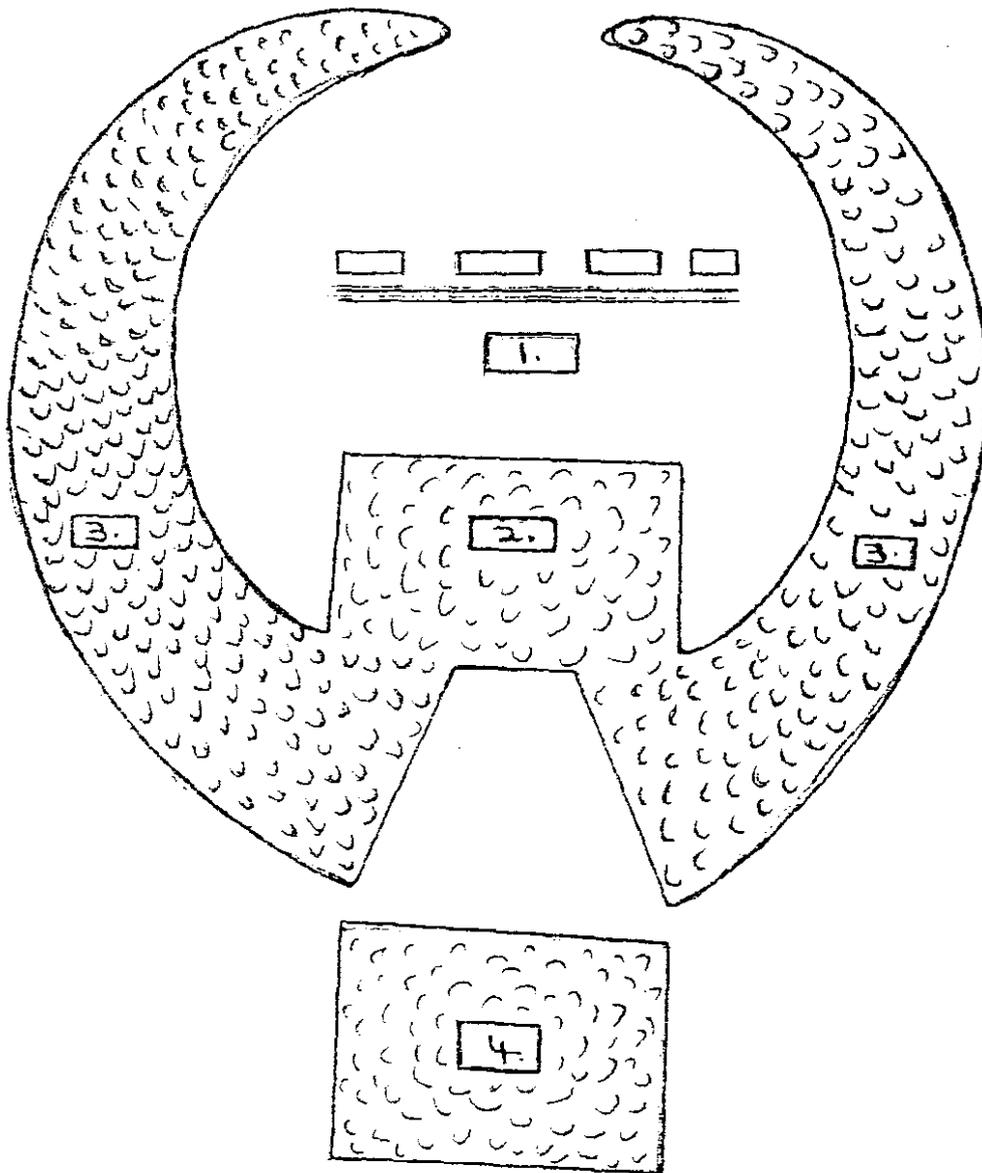
¹⁷ Colenso papers, from Bishop Colenso to Ferguson, 13 April 1879.

¹⁸ Laband, J.: Fight us in the Open, p.6.



The Kingdom in King Cetshwayo's reign, 1873 – 1879

THE ZULU ARMY IN TRADITIONAL ATTACK FORMATION



1. THE SUPPOSED ENEMY
2. THE CHEST OF THE ARMY
3. THE HORNS OF THE ARMY
4. THE RESERVES, OR LOINS OF THE ARMY



Kumbeka Gwabe, uMciyo
Regiment. (*Natal Mercury*,
22 January 1929.)

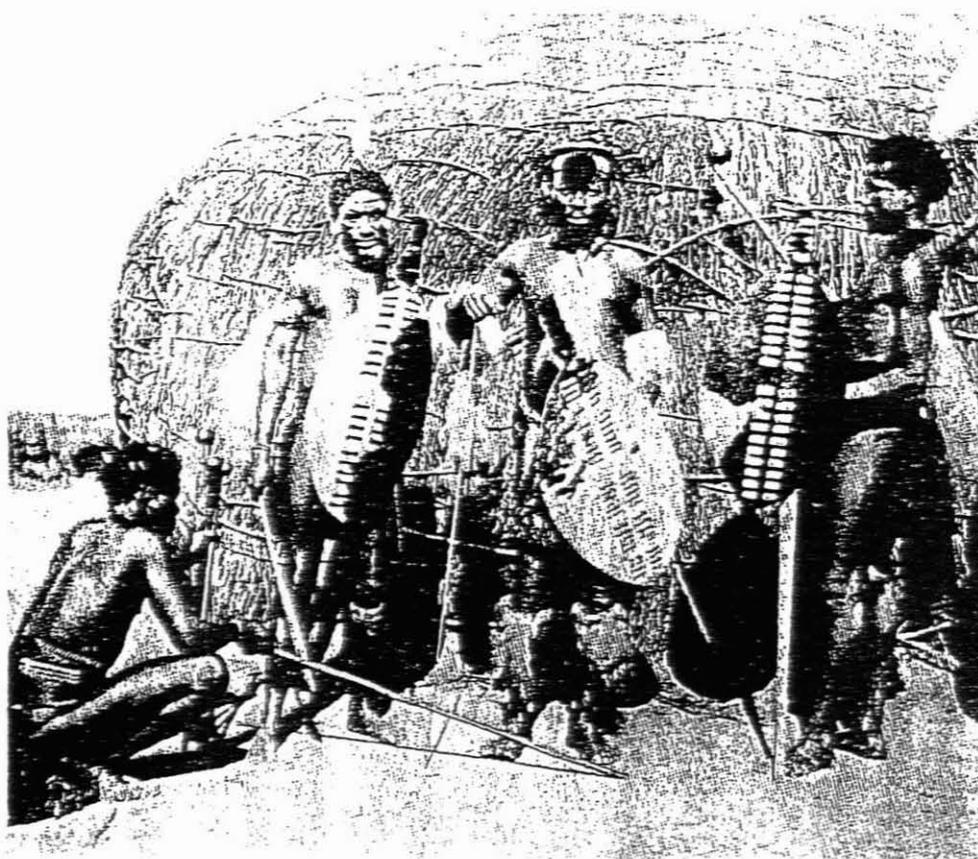
Killie Campbell Africana Library

ZULUS AT WAR - CHARGING THE ENEMY

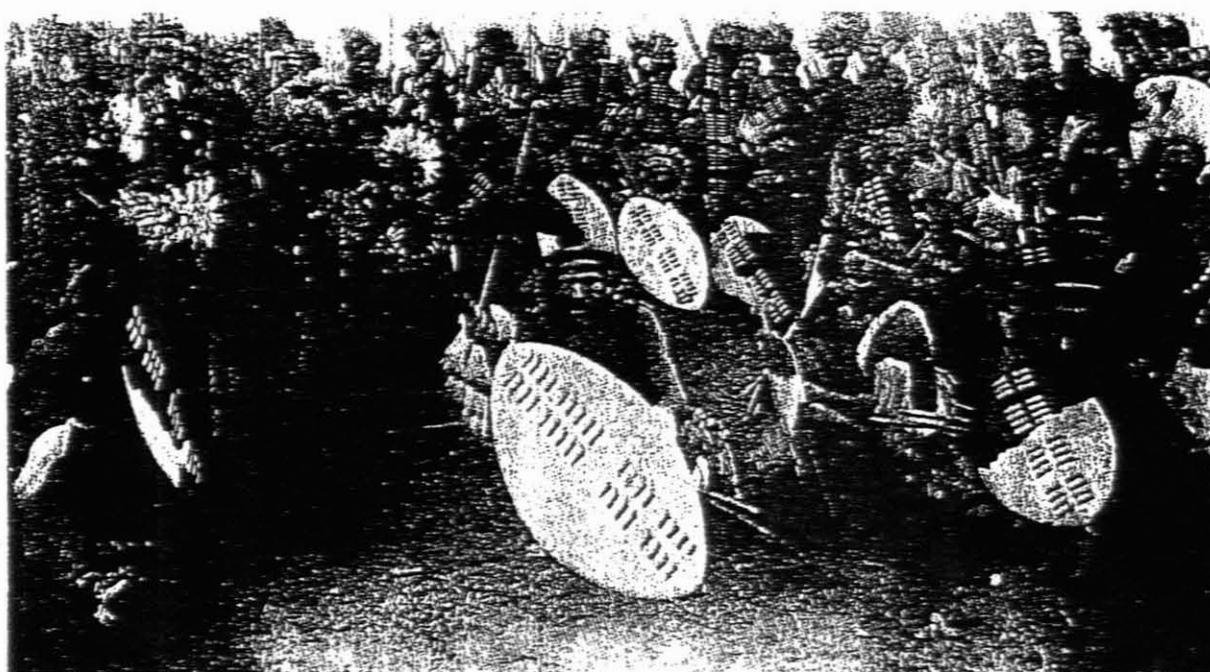


Chas. E. Dripp.
P.M.B.

With acknowledgement to Laband, J. and Thompson, P.: Field Guide to the war in Zululand. n.7.



Zulu Warriors, 1879 *With acknowledgement to Laband, J.: Fight us in the open, p.4.*



Zulu Warriors in ceremonial dress, 1879.

With acknowledgement to Laband, J.: Fight us in the open, p.6.

The King's other immediate concern was with the effectiveness of his army. Mpashana ka Sodondo of the Uve age-regiment told Stuart in 1912 that when the Uve arrived:

“Cetshwayo came out of the inner gate of oNdini.

He said, Is this the whole *impi*? Lift up your guns?

We did so. So there are no guns? Each man with a

beast from his place must bring it up next day and

buy guns.”¹⁹

While the age-regiments were concentrating in the Mahlabathini plains and buying guns brought in by White traders, especially John Dunn, the King called up the men from regiment after regiment to challenge one another ritually at Ondini. Mpashana described one such occasion, which lasted until sunset:

“The King called the Umciyo and iNgobamakhosi into the cattle enclosure, he being present, and directed them to challenge one another. A man from iNgobamakhosi got up and shouted, ‘I shall surpass you, son of so and so. If you stab a White man before mine has fallen, you may take the *isibaya* of our people at such and such a place; you may take my sister so and so’. Having said this he will then start to *giya* (leaping about) with his small dancing shield and a stick (for *imikhonto* are not carried on such occasions in the presence of the King, for it is feared that *amabutho* (warriors) may stab one another with them. The other who has been addressed may now get up and say :

¹⁹ Laband.J.: Fight us in the open, pp.6-7.

‘Well, if you can do better than I do, you will take our *isibaya* (kraal) and my sister.’ He will then *giya* (leaping about). While the *thegiyaing* (dancing) goes on, he is praised by those of his regiment, and, if the man happens to be known to the King and is trusted by the King, the King will hold out his arms toward him and shaking them and the hands approvingly.”²⁰

According to Nzuzi of the Uve, King Cetshwayo addressed his army as follows while standing in the centre of the circle:

“I have not gone over the seas to look for White man, yet they have come into my country and I would not be surprised if they took away our wives and cattle and crops and land. What shall I do?

I have nothing against the White man and I can not tell why they came to me. What shall I do?

‘Give the matter to us, the soldiers (*amabutho*)’ replied.

We will go and eat up the Whites and finish them off.

They are not going to take you while we are here.

They must take us first’.”

The King’s rhetoric disguised the fact that he and his izinduna had already devised a strategy for combating the British, but one that was also conditioned by conventional Zulu military practice.

²⁰ Laband, J.: Fight us in the open. p.7.

Perhaps their most successful strategy would have been to adopt a guerilla – style resistance, drawing out the war beyond Britains endurance. But the Zulu were also unprepared for that type of conflict. The military nature of the age regiment system made it imperative that campaigns be short to release the men for their everyday and seasonal economic functions.²¹

Since the time of King Shaka the Zulu had waged offensive campaigns into neighbouring enemy territory. Their tactics emphasised the pitched battle in the open field. For this reason the King and his *izinduna* or *izikhulu* decided not to remain at Ulundi on the defensive but to confront the advancing enemy (British). Consequently as King Cetshwayo later explained to Captain Ruscombe Poole:

The King sent out three armies to meet the three British columns. He held and was collecting a very large reserve at oNdini, quite equal to the three armies he had sent. He was afraid of a mounted force making a dash past one of these armies into the heart of the (Zulu) country. He also expected an amphibious column to invade him from St Lucia Bay. The people in each district were ordered to keep “look outs” and send information. The border people were told to send *izinhloli* (scouts-men who gathered intelligence) into Natal and Transvaal collecting what information they could,²² and also to Delagoa Bay...Cetshwayo hoped to be able to crush the British columns, drive them out of the country, defend the border and then arrange a peace. He knew the English in Natal could not bring a very large force into the field but he had often been told by White men (traders in the country) that they had a very large army beyond the sea. He knew that if the English perservered in the war he would get

²¹ Laband, J.: Fight us in the open, pp.7-8.

²² Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.54, Laband, J.: Fight us in the open, pp.8 - 9.

the worst of it in the end. "It seems," noted Ruscombe Poole, "that Cetshwayo believed in his power to crush the British columns and that then, by increasing his army on the frontier and so menacing Natal, he might force the English to make peace before reinforcements arrived from across the sea."²³

The King naturally did not discuss these conditions with the great circle of warriors at Ondini. "He told us," said Nhlanhlana, "that he wanted certain regiments to go and eat up the White man at Isandlwana". Elements of some age regiments were to go to reinforce local irregulars disputing the advance of British column up the coast and from the northwest, but the bulk were to go against the British centre column. For as Cajana kaMathandeka, when held as a prisoner-of-war explained to Colonel Wood, it was believed, correctly, that this (central column) was the Britain's "strongest" force and that the chiefs were there.²⁴

King Cetshwayo kaMpande was apparently well informed as to the strength of various invading columns and their intended line of advance. The King gained such information from the effective deployment of *izinhloli* (scouts). *Izinhloli* were no novelty in Zulu society, for the King used them as a means of control and normally were the "eye" of the King in the large *umizi* to keep him informed on what was occurring throughout his kingdom.²⁵ In times of war *izinhloli* were activated on a large scale to gain intelligence of the enemy, and the advancing British were always aware that they were under observation.²⁶ In January there were reports that Zulu *izinhloli* were moving along the Drakensberg (Kahhlamba) towards

²³ Laband, J.: Fight us in the open, p.9.

²⁴ Laband, J.: Fight us in the open, p.9.

²⁵ W.C.F. Molyneux, Campaigning in South Africa and Egypt, pp.196-197.

²⁶ The comment of L.T. Mynors... 'they came and watched us, in fact they knew everything that goes on: A.C.B. Mynors (Margate, 1879), p.25.

Basutoland and Pondoland and Bulwer ordered that any Zulu found in Natal without a refugee pass should be arrested.²⁷ In fact, Zulu *izinhlozi* were sent into all parts of the White man's country.²⁸

There is no doubt that as the crisis intensified and war loomed, Cetshwayo was in search of allies against the British. The irony of the situation was that in the past Cetshwayo had looked to Britain, as the strongest power in the sub-continent, for aid against his enemies, particularly the Transvaal. Now he had no choice but to turn to neighbouring chiefdoms for help.²⁹ Cetshwayo's routine diplomatic relations with his black neighbours (some of whom like the Swazi were potential enemies rather than friends), were consistently misrepresented by British officials and settlers as evidence that he was orchestrating a black conspiracy against white rule in Southern Africa.³⁰

To be on the defensive was the essence of the Zulu King's military strategy in 1879. This conformed to his political programme of presenting himself as the pacific victim of an unwarranted attack. Cetshwayo was determined to fight in self-defence within the borders of his own sovereign country.³¹ It needs to be emphasised that Cetshwayo instructed his people not to attack the British until they had first fired on the Zulus.³² Only when he learned that the British Right Column had crossed the lower Thukela and that the centre

²⁷ GH 1421:Minute, Bulwer to Colonial Secretary, 29 January 1879; Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p. 54.

²⁸ Laband, J.: Kingdom in crisis, p. 54, CP 16, no. 13: Statement by Zulu prisoner Mngudlela, taken by Bengough's men on 13 May, 1879.

²⁹ Monteith, 'Cetshwayo and Sekhukhune', pp. 119, 133, 175-6.

³⁰ See for example, *Natal Witness*, 3 August 1878: Letter by "An old Transvaal Traveller", CO 874114, African no. 162, enc. 1 in no. 103: T. Shepstone to Frere, 6 August, 1878.

³¹ Webb & Wright, Zulu King speaks, pp. 29-31; C. V. Vijn: Cetshwayo's Dutchman, being the private journal of a White Trade in Zululand during the British invasion, pp. 31, 96-97.

³² C. S. O. 1925, no. 343/1879: Fanin to Colonial Secretary, 15 January 1879; Laband, J.: Kingdom in crisis, p. 56.

column had defeated Sihayo's adherents on 12 January at Sokhexe, did the incensed Cetshwayo order his *amabutho*, impatiently assembled at Ondini, to drive back the invader.³³ Nevertheless he insisted that his armies, if successful, were not to follow up their victory with an invasion of Natal. He knew well from his white advisors, such as John Dunn, that the British had endless resources overseas to reinforce their army in Southern Africa until it was ultimately successful. Consequently, the longer the war lasted and the more extensive its geographical area, the less chance the Zulu would have of winning the war. The campaign had therefore to be swift and limited and the hope was that, if the Zulu *impis* were able through success in the field to menace the borders of Natal, the British would be pressured into concluding a peace favourable to the Zulu before reinforcements could arrive from the overseas empire.³⁴

The alternative of a protracted, guerilla-style defensive strategy was not practicable. It could be argued that by withdrawing to traditional strongholds and avoiding conventional engagements the Zulu might have prolonged the campaign and tested Britain's endurance. Yet that consideration worked equally well in reverse. The nature of the *ibutho* system and the Zulu economy of subsistence agriculture, made it imperative that the men be freed at vital times of the year to go about their domestic and economic duties as well as serving the king. The prevention of women and boys from planting and harvesting crops, and tending their precious livestock, would swiftly mean disruption and eventual starvation for the entire nation.³⁵ Moreover, the prospect of permitting the British systematically ravaging Zululand

³³ Webb & Wright: Zulu King speaks, pp.29-30, 56; see also CSA 1925, no.444: Fanin to Colonial Secretary, 20 January 1879.

³⁴ J.Laband: Kingdom in crisis, p.56, Webb & Wright, Zulu King Speaks, pp.30-31.

³⁵ M.B.Mlondo: Oral evidence, 16 July 2000.

was quite unacceptable to a proud and independent people who ever since the time of King Shaka, had raided enemy territory in many successful wars fought far from home.

It is difficult to estimate with any certainty the number of warriors the King had at his disposal. Fynney, in his booklet on the Zulu army which he compiled in 1879, estimated the Zulu army at 41 900 men.³⁶ This does not differ substantially from the Rev. George Blencowe's son's estimate in 1877 of an army of 36 500 men, 3 000 of whom were past service and 4 000 still too young to be effective.³⁷

With the confidence of ignorance, the British always managed to arrive at estimates of numbers of Zulu facing them, but these were normally calculated according to Fynney's unreliable figures, and tended in any case to be exaggerated in order that more glory might be redound to British arms.

Naturally, the full compliment of the Zulu army, which probably did have a potential actual strength of about 40 000, would never have been fully available for active service at a specific moment. Some of the senior *amabutho* were too old to fight, while not every member of an *ibutho* could be expected to muster when summoned.³⁸ The King and his *izikhulu* had consequently to devise a strategy that employed a considerably lower number of men than were nominally at their command. Fannin reported on the eve of the battles of Isandlwana and Nyezane that he had gathered from his intelligence sources that Zulu *impis*

³⁶ Laband, *J. Kingdom in crisis*, p.57.

³⁷ *Natal Colonist*, 14 August 1877.

³⁸ Mpatshana of the Ingobamakhosi recalled that before Isandlwana, "The impi came up well, but not all", *JSA* 111, p.305: Testimony of Mpatshana.

totaling 29 000 men had been deployed against the invader, a figure that seems to be reasonably correct.³⁹

Zulu tacticians were very aware after the disaster of *impi yase Ncome* (Blood River) on 16 December 1838, of the dangers involved in trying to storm fortified positions. The King consequently categorically forbade attacks on entrenchments. Instead he ordered his generals to bypass fortified British positions and, by threatening their defenders line of supply and British territory to the rear, force them into the open in the latter's defence. Otherwise, they should surround the entrenched British at a distance (as was later to occur at Fort eShowe) and attempt to starve them into submission or a disadvantageous sortie.⁴⁰

Yet, sound as this strategy might have been in theory, it did not recognise sufficiently the difficulties involved in supplying a Zulu army in the field, nor the lack of patience and restraint likely to be exhibited by head-strong younger *amabutho* eager for hasty and reckless glory. Besides, there was the usual Zulu practice of dispersing after action for ritual purification and recuperation, to take into consideration.⁴¹ All these factors made compliance with the King's sensible instructions by his generals unlikely and Zulu success in the field dependent on catching the British in the open.⁴²

In 1879 the *amabutho* were carrying both *izikhali zesintu* (traditional weapons) and modern weapons. The basic traditional weapon was *umkhonto*, of which there were some varieties. The most deadly was *ikhwa* (short-handled stabbing spear), reputedly introduced by King

³⁹ CSO 1925. No.488/1879: Fannin to Colonial Secretary. 21 January 1879.

⁴⁰ Vijn, *Cetshwavo's Dutchmen*, p.39.

⁴¹ Laband & Thompson, *Field Guide to The War in Zululand*, p.18, O.Mthethwa. Oral evidence, 16 July 2000.

⁴² M.Dlamini: Oral evidence. 3 March 2000.

Shaka ka-Senzangakhona. It was used only at close quarters. The warriors carried in addition two or three *izijula* (throwing spears) with long shafts. The *izijula* were well balanced in flight and could find the target up to thirty metres. Some warriors might also carry *isagila* (a wooden knobkierie) for close fighting. The *isihlangu* or *ihawu* (a war-shield of cattle hide) which took great care and patience to manufacture was supplied by the King and was kept in a special *indlu* in the *ikhanda* on the account of its ritual properties. Unlike during the day of King Shaka, in Cetshwayo's time the amabutho carried shields of no particular hue. ⁴³

As mentioned in the above paragraphs many Zulus went into battle in 1879 armed, not only with their traditional weapons, but also with firearms. The precise number and quality are uncertain. British consular officials reckoned that up to 10 000 guns a year were entering Zululand during the second half of the 1870's. A correspondent of *The Natal Witness* in August 1878 estimated that there were 20 000 stands of European firearms in Zululand. ⁴⁴

The majority of these firearms were out-dated, inferior weapons, mainly muskets. For with the adoption by European armies in the 1860s and 1870s of breech-loading rifles with metallic cartridges, obsolete firearms were cheaply disposed of and dumped for a solid profit by unscrupulous dealers on the African market. ⁴⁵ The general quality of these antiquated weapons can be assessed from those captured at the battle of Nyezane in January 1879. It was the trader John Dunn who had convinced King Cetshwayo that a royal monopoly of firearm in the kingdom was essential for the maintenance of his power against external

⁴³ See Laband, *J. Kingdom in Crisis*, pp-61-62; *JSA II*, p.243: testimony of Maxibana; *Ibid.* III, pp.318-19; testimony of Mpatshana; also confirmed by, M.Dlamini: Oral evidence, 3 March 2000.

⁴⁴ Laband, *J. Kingdom in Crisis*, p.62.

⁴⁵ *Natal Witness*, 22 August 1878: Letter from 'Rufus', *The Zulu and Special names for the various types of guns*, *JSA I*, p.63: testimony of Bikwayo.

enemies and internal rivals. Consequently, the King became the main source of firearms in the kingdom. When, for example, the Uve mustered at Ondini on the eve of the war and possessed no firearms to speak of, it was the king who ordered that each must exchange a cow for one.⁴⁶

Yet it was the circumvention of Natal's ban of making firearms available to the Zulu by several merchants which provided the main source of firearms in Zululand. Quite legally, they transshipped arms from Durban or Cape Town to Delagoa Bay, where the agent of John Dunn, who was the King Cetshwayo's most favoured and trusted trader, arranged their transportation by porters to Zululand.⁴⁷

By 1878, with the possibility of war with the Zulu looming, the British decided that the wholesale import of arms through Delagoa Bay must be halted. By an agreement in February 1878 with Portugal, the sale of guns and ammunition to Africans was prohibited.⁴⁸ The Zulus were unable to bring about a relaxation of the arms ban, either through negotiations or threat of hostilities and consequently had no choice but to fight the war of 1879 with what outdated arms and ammunitions they already possessed, or with what they could manufacture themselves or seize from the enemy.⁴⁹

There were Zulus who had learned from white traders how to make gunpowder, and the king ensured this skill was disseminated.⁵⁰ He stored his ammunition in the vicinity of his

⁴⁶ J.S.A. III,p.305: Testimony of Mpatshana; see also Laband, J.:Kingdom in crisis, p.63.

⁴⁷ Ballard, John Dunn, pp.115-117,121.

⁴⁸ Laband, J.: Kingdom in crisis, p.63.

⁴⁹ Ibid:p.63; During the Anglo-Zulu War some unscrupulous traders from Britain tried to ship gunpowder in through Zanzibar but with little success.

⁵⁰ SNA 1/6/11, no.11. J.L.Knight to Fynn, 18 November, 1878.

emLambongwenya and KwaMbonombi *imizi*. There he built both *indlu* for the Sotho gunsmith he especially employed and magazine, which was a square, thatched house.⁵¹ His close friend Somopho kaZikalala, chief of the section of the eMangweni ikhanda, (outside present eMpangeni) was his chief armourer and supervised the manufacture of powder. The power and prestige conferred by firearms were acknowledged by Cetshwayo when he armed some of the women of his *isigodlo* with carbines, and kept them by him as a bodyguard.⁵²

The Zulu preferred to rely on the traditional weapons upon which their traditional successful aggressive tactics had been based. They consequently tended to employ their guns only as a secondary weapons in place of *amaklwa*, to be discharged at a distance and then cast aside in favour of *isijula* as they charged home.⁵³ Many of *amabutho* issued with guns had little experience in using them, and it was reported in November 1878 that the king was putting his men through exercises to see how they would cope with them in battle.⁵⁴

After a full session of cleansing the king decided which *ibutho* had the honour of leading the army and the others were to follow according to their status. The *udibi* or carriers (boys of over fourteen) i.e. apprenticed soldiers, accompanied the army. Some girls, who carried food for the *amabutho*, also joined the army.⁵⁵

Before the *amabutho* set out against the British, King Cetshwayo issued the commanders of his *impis* with the clear instructions. They were to drive the enemy back into Natal, but were

⁵¹ Laband. J.: *Kingdom in crisis*, p.63.

⁵² *J.S.A. III*, p.328: testimony of Mpatshana.

⁵³ Laband. J.: *Kingdom in crisis*, p.64; also confirmed by O.Mthethwa: Oral evidence, 29 July 2000.

⁵⁴ SNA 1/6/11, no.11: Knight to Fynn. 18 November 1878.

⁵⁵ D.Dlamini, Oral evidence, 3 March 2000.

not to lead their men into the British territory. The King's reasoning was clear. He was not the aggressor in the war, and wished the whole world to understand that as he himself explained:

“It is the whites who come to fight with me in my own country, and not I that go to fight with them. My intention is only to defend myself in my own country, where they made me a King a few years ago.”⁵⁶

When the main Zulu *impi* set off from kwa-Nodwengu on the afternoon of Friday 17 January 1879 to oppose Chelmsford's main middle column, it was initially accompanied by the smaller and qualitatively inferior force detailed by the king to confront the lesser threat of Colonel C K Pearson's coastal column.⁵⁷

The latter's basic element was the major portion of the uMxhapho *ibutho*, whose members were in the prime of their life. Like all divisions, *izinhloli*, (intelligence scouts) especially selected for their courage, preceded this army.⁵⁸ These bodies of *izinhloli* were intentionally substantial, for they were supposed to trick the enemy into thinking they were the main body and so if attacked to draw him on to the rest of the *impi*.⁵⁹

The smaller contingents of *amabutho* from the accompanying uDlambedlu and iziNgulube *amabutho* were in their mid-fifties, however, and could hardly be expected to be equally effective on campaign. Nor were the reinforcements they were to pick up as they moved

⁵⁶ Laband, J. & Wright, J. : King Cetshwayo kaMpande, p.15.

⁵⁷ See, Laband, J. Kingdom in crisis, pp 114-115; Laband, J. : Rope of Sand, p.243.

⁵⁸ Khumalo, J.N. Oral evidence, 10 October 2000.

⁵⁹ Laband, J. Kingdom in crisis, p.66; Also confirmed by M.Dlamini, interviewed at the University of Zululand.

through the coastal region to be of much better quality. This is perhaps one of the major reasons which caused the coastal Zulu *impi* to suffer severe defeats.

Some small local elements of iNsukamngeni, iQwa, uDududu, iNdabakawombe and other *amabutho* still mustered at the local *amakhanda* as well as local irregulars, who were familiar with the territory, joined the coastal *impi*. The latter made up of about a fifth of the combined Zulu force which probably numbered between 4 000 and 6 000.⁶⁰

In command of the coastal *impi* was the seventy-year-old *isikhulu* Godide kaNdlela, hereditary chief of the Ntuli whom Shaka had settled along the middle Thukela, an *isikhulu* and *induna* of the uDlambedlu *ibutho*. Godide was the elder brother of Mavumengwane, the joint commander of the main *impi*. Godide's lieutenants were like himself, predominantly powerful men of the coastal region. They were all familiar with the region and were expected to assist Godide in devising a strategy that would help combating British forces. They included chief Matshiya kaMshandu of the Nzuza, the aged Mbilwane kaMhlanganiso, *induna* of kwaGingindlovu *ikhanda*, Masengwane kaSopiqwasi an *inceku* (officer) of the king, and Phalane, a royal *induna*.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Laband, J.: Rope of sand. P. 243; Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p. 115.

⁶¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

THE START OF THE BRITISH INVASION

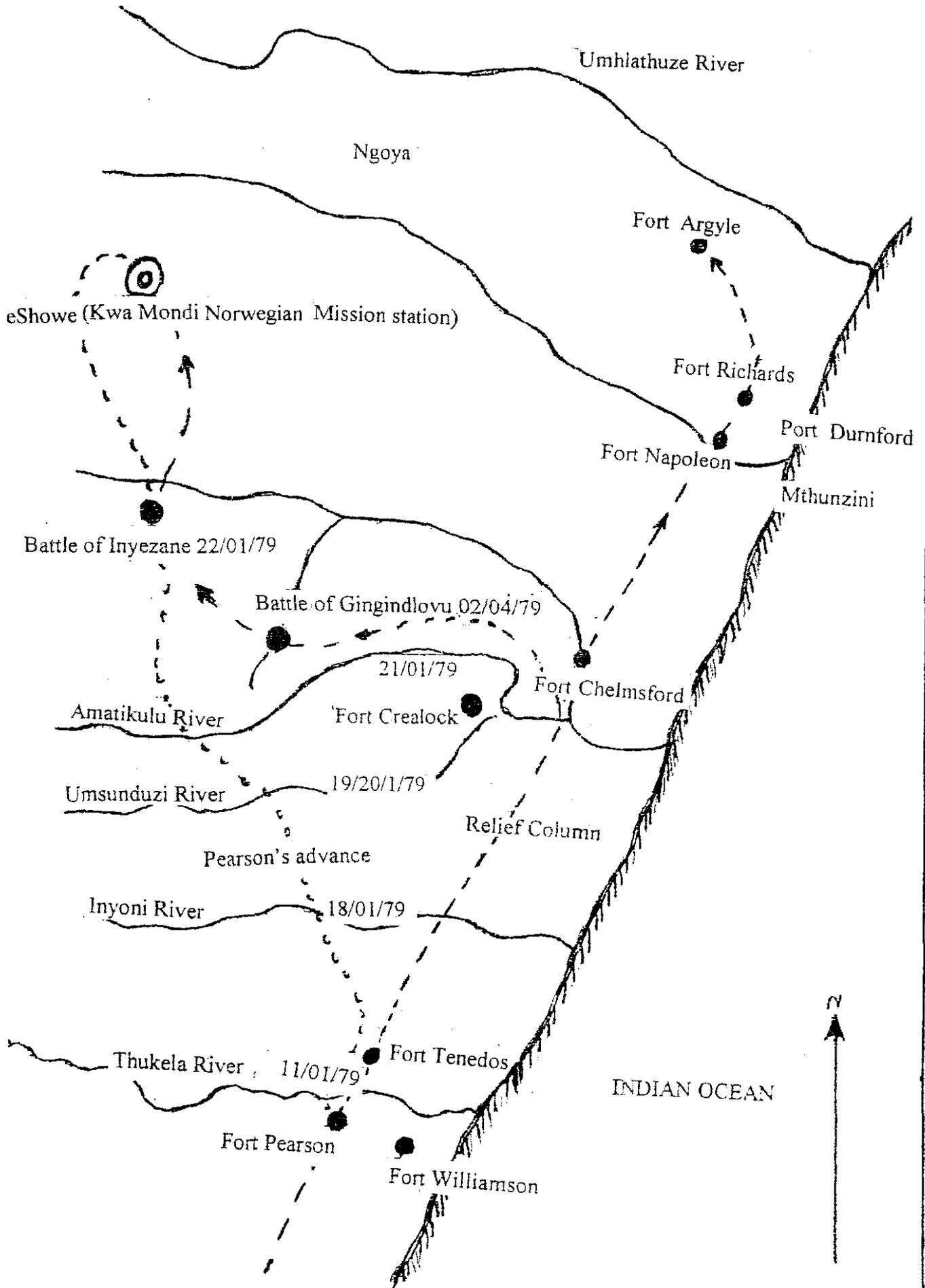
In the first week of January 1879, the Zulu Nation led by King Cetshwayo ka Mpande prepared to receive the hostile British invading army who obeyed the behest of the belligerent British policy makers – the British High Commissioner Sir Bartle Frere, and the Secretary for Native Affairs in the Colony of Natal, Sir Theophilus Shepstone.

British officers and soldiers alike confidently embarked on the war wholly underrating the Zulu's fighting ability. They were over confident after their recent successful campaign against the Gcaleka Xhosa. Indeed, it was their genuine concern that the Zulu would not be prepared to stand and fight, let alone actually initiate an attack.¹

Contrary to the British expectations, the Zulu amabutho, especially the younger warriors were prepared to die for their land and king.

Part of Lord Chelmsford's (the British general commanding officer) plan for the invasion of Kwa-Zulu was that the No. 1. Column would cross the Thukela river at the lower drift then march through the territory of John Dunn (the white trader who had become a

¹ See for example, Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis: The Zulu Response to the British Invasion, p.48; AC. p. 23; Clery to Alison, 18 March, 1879. This background is especially well illustrated in The Frontier War Journal of Major John Crealock, Van Riebeeck Society Second Series, No.19, passim.



Composite map with acknowledgement to Chadwick, G.A. : *The Anglo-Zulu War of 1879- Operations in South-East Zululand.*

confidant of King Cetshwayo after the civil war of 1856) to the Norwegian mission station at eShowe, known to the Zulus as kwa-Mondi and there establish an advance base and then proceed from there to Ulundi the capital of the Kingdom of Kwa Zulu.² This task was entrusted to Colonel Charles Knight Pearson of the Third Regiment (the Buffs).

On the first of January 1879, No. 1 column was encamped at Thring's Post, 40 km from Fort Pearson overlooking the lower Thukela drift. At this time all hope of King Cetshwayo complying with British problematical conditions of the ultimatum had been set aside. The British soldiers at Thring's Post were under orders to march to the lower Thukela drift. Should no compliance on the part of the King be evident by 11 January, they were to cross the Thukela River into Zululand.³

Final preparations for the crossing by the invading British contingent were made before the ultimatum expired on 11 January. At daybreak on the 12th January the first troops were to cross into Zululand from Fort Pearson. Due to heavy rains, the Thukela River was in flood and almost 274 metres wide at the lower drift. To ease the passage across, a large wooden pont was constructed, attached to a hawser which was laid across the river. The pont was large enough to carry a company of infantry. The pont was initially hauled across by a strong party of men (typically black auxiliaries). Later on these men were replaced by oxen. They began the laborious task of ferrying all the stores and equipment which, in accordance with Lord Chelmsford's orders, were to be transported to the

² Castle, I. & Knight, I. : The Zulu War. Then and Now, p.93.

³ Lieut. W.N. Lloyd: The Defence of Ekowe (eShowe), p. 15.

mission station at eShowe⁴ where Pearson and his men would first open communication with the other two columns.

While the mounted men scouted the route ahead, the stores were stockpiled on the northern bank, and a new defensive post was constructed named Fort Tenedos, after one of the ships whose crew formed part of the Naval Brigade.⁵

The Zulus did not oppose the crossing. However the Zulu *izinhlozi*, from their strong and well chosen position, observed the British crossing the Thukela river.

All was ready for the British advance along the coast at first light on the morning of 18th January. Because there had been so much rain over the previous day Pearson split his column, which comprised of 4 750 officers and men, 380 wagons and 24 carts,⁶ into two mutually supporting divisions to make the march into Zululand easier for the huge and sluggish convoy of wagons over the difficult wet sand track.

The first division was under Colonel Pearson's personal supervision, whilst the second, which set out a day later, was under Lieutenant-Colonel W.Welman of the 99th Regiment.⁷ Pearson left a company of the Naval Brigade and several companies of the Natal Native Contingent (NNC) to garrison Fort Pearson on the southern bank of the Thukela River, while at Fort Tenedos he left a company of the Naval Brigade and two

⁴ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: The Zulu War – Then & Now, pp.93-95; Chadwick, G.A. : The Anglo Zulu War of 1879: Operations in South – East Zululand, p.5.

⁵ Castle, I. & Knight, I. The Zulu War – Then & Now, p.95.

⁶ Laband, J. : Rope of Sand, p.243.

⁷ Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.6.

companies of the 99th Regiment to garrison the fort on the northern bank of the river.⁸ The day started fine, but it was not long before the rain resumed, making life miserable for the men of the first division as they slithered their way to their first camp on the Inyoni river, about 6 – 7 kilometres from the Thukela river. Coupled with heavy rain, was the problem of direction. The British forces (including Pearson himself) were not familiar with Zululand as they had never set foot there before. There was a real possibility of losing direction. In addition to this the long summer grass and dense forest also created hindering difficulties for their march. Welman's section arrived at the Inyoni River about noon of the following day, (19th January) at which point Colonel Pearson advanced his division to the next river, Msunduzi. No further progress was made the next day (20 January) while Pearson awaited the arrival of all the wagons, many of which had been delayed by the poor condition of the overburdened track.⁹ The incessant rain of the previous weeks had reduced the track to mud and swollen the rivers so that Pearson's progress was considerably impeded.

The helpless local Zulu native people did not oppose the British advance, for they had deserted the entire coastal plain and driven their cattle into the Ngoye hills. Zulu *izinhlozi* nevertheless diligently observed Pearson's every movement and signaled his approach with beacon fires.¹⁰ False rumours had circulated among the British of a large Zulu force nearby, but the only Zulus in the vicinity were those few plundering John Dunn's

⁸ Smail, J.S. : From the Land of The Zulu Kings, p.115.

⁹ Castle, I. & Knight, I. The Zulu War – Then & Now, pp.95-97

¹⁰ Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, pp.243-244; Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.6. BPP (C.2252) no. 20: Pearson to Frere's Military Secretary, 17 January, 1879; see also anti-slavery papers, G.12 statement of one of the Native Contingent with Col. Pearson's Column, Made to the Bishop of Natal.

abandoned *imizi* or the *izinhloli* King Cetshwayo had directed to observe Pearson's movement.

On January 21, the advance continued across the Amatigulu river while a detachment of two companies of British infantry burnt the deserted kwaGingindlovu *ikhanda* about four kms to the east. At about 05h00 on 22nd January (the same day as *Impi yaseSandlwana*) the British column moved off once again in the direction of Inyezane. Three hours later (at about 8 am) Pearson decided to halt for a breakfast. The head of his column was on the level ground between the Inyezane and the looming hills.¹¹ The area was not very safe as it was populated with thick shrubbery, an ideal situation for a surprise Zulu attack. The track ahead was steep, weaving through dense bush and hills leading to the edge of a plateau on which eShowe was located. Directly ahead lay Majia Hill.¹² Some Zulu *izinhloli* were spotted near the knoll, but the aggressive British soldiers, hungry for war, apprehended no imminent danger. This apparent lack of caution is indicative that they underestimated the strength of the Zulu *amabutho* and, of course, the Zulu King – Cetshwayo's resolve to defend his homeland from the British invaders.

Up to this point Pearson was unaware that the Zulu *amabutho* lay concealed in their strong and well chosen position, awaiting the British advance. Unfortunately for the Zulu *impi*, Pearson noticed some of their *izinhloli* on Wombane and retaliated by sending a company of the natal Native Contingents to harry them on.

¹¹ Laband, J. : *Rope of Sand*, p.244

¹² Smail, J.S.: *From the Land of the Zulu Kings*, p.115

CHAPTER THREE

THE BATTLE OF INYEZANE, 22 JANUARY 1879

On 18 January Godide's *impi* separated from the main Zulu *impi*, and marched south-east, bivouacking the night on the high open high ground at kwa-Magwaza. There the *amabutho* were overcome by cold and hunger, and many began to suffer from diarrhoea, probably brought on by the unusual full meat diet that was provided by the King at oNdini preparatory to the campaign. As a result the army was forced to remain at Kwa-Magwaza until the morning of Monday 20th January, when it was sufficiently recovered to resume their advance.¹

On the night of 20th January the *impi* slept at the old oNdini *ikhanda*, north-east of eShowe. This *umuzi* had been built by King Mpande in the late 1850s for his son Cetshwayo, but when Cetshwayo became King in 1873 he had built himself a new oNdini in the heart of the kingdom. The old *umuzi* still existed, however, and served as an assembly point for the local *amabutho*.²

Up to the 20th January, Godide and his *amabutho* were not sure of the British column's exact whereabouts. They had originally intended marching further south towards the lower Thukela drift to confront the British, bivouacking on the way at the kwa-Gingindlovu *ikhanda*.³ However, when kwa-Gingindlovu was reached after dark on 21st

¹ Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.115. Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, p.243.

² Castle, I & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times, p.55.

³ CSO 1925, no.444/1879: Minute, Fannin to colonial Secretary, 20 January 1879; also see Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, p.244; Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.115.

January, it was discovered to be no more than a smouldering ruin, with the British encamped for the night nearby. The Zulus were shocked and angered and considered this destruction of the undefended *ikhanda*, which had been the pivot of the royal authority in this district, an extremely provocative act which demanded retaliation.⁴ It should be remembered that the *amakhanda* were not only centres of the King's authority and rallying points for the *amabutho*, but were also depots for supplies. That is why the systematic destruction of every *amakhanda*, would ensure the reduction of the King's capacity to resist, and fatally damage his ability to exercise authority.⁵ Above this the systematic destruction of less legitimate military targets, such as ordinary *imizi* and their grain stores, as well as the capture of livestock, was conventionally considered most effective in ending resistance among people whose very livelihood was thereby threatened.

Godide and his *amabutho* pushed on to kwa-Samabela (an area four miles beyond the Amatigulu river and where Pearson's men were camping), and apparently surrounded Pearson's camp under cover of darkness. The Zulus generally avoided night actions, but preferred to attack *kusempondo zankomo* (in the horns of the morning), at that time of the day when a beast's horns were first discernable against the dawn. On this occasion, however, Godide was apparently concerned about the difficulties of launching and co-ordinating an attack in unfamiliar terrain at night, and unnerved by the shouting of the British picket, which convinced him that Pearson was prepared for an attack. Godide

⁴ Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, p.244.

⁵ Major Ashe & Captain E V Wyatt: The Story of the Zulu Campaign, p.306; Laband, J. Kingdom in Crisis, p.52.

pulled his *amabutho* back. He retired to the north, beyond the Nyezane River, and into the hills that lay below eShowe, to await Pearson's column the next day.⁶

It was not King Cetshwayo's practice to issue his commanders with precise instructions and he had left it to Godide to drive back Pearson in the manner he thought best – so long as he did so without fail.⁷ However it seems that in this case the king's familiarity with the terrain, where, in December 1856, he had campaigned against Mbuyazi and the izi Gqoza had led him to suggest the ideal battlefield.⁸ Unfortunately for the Zulu's, the timing was inappropriate, for the night of the 22nd / 23rd January was the night of the new moon, a time when disruptive spiritual forces, known simply as *umnyama* (blackness) were unleashed. In the event, curiously and remarkably enough, circumstances forced the Zulus to give battle on this day in three separate engagements across the country.⁹

From their strong and well chosen positions, the Zulu's observed the British preparing for a breakfast on the morning of 22nd January, at about 08h00. In fact, Godide had already sent his *izinhlozi* to locate the British army, but unfortunately for him Pearson noticed some of *izinhlozi* on Wombane, the eastern of the two hills before him and ordered a company of the NNC to disperse them. This movement had the effect of prematurely springing the carefully laid Zulu trap. The younger *amabutho*, who lacked patience and

⁶ Castle, I. & Knight, I. Fearful Hard Times, pp.55-56.

⁷ See Webb & Wright, Zulu King Speaks, p.30; Laband, J. : Kingdom in Crisis, p.116; Times of Natal, 5 February 1879: Correspondent with Pearson's column, 24 January, 1879.

⁸ Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.116; Laband, J. : Rope of Sand, p.244.

⁹ Castle, I. & Knight, I. : Fearful Hard Times, pp.55-56.

were eager for glory, could not be restrained from rushing into the attack, thus revealing the Zulu position. This premature attack lost the element of surprise for the Zulu army. However, the older men kept to the intended plan and hung back. This seriously dislocated the Zulu battle strategy, which evidently aimed at engaging the column in front while sweeping round both flanks and enveloping it. With Zulu tactics made clear, Pearson was able to take action.¹⁰

The Natal Native Contingent, with their acute hearing ability to understand the Zulu language and knowledge of Zulu tactics, apparently heard a slight buzzing sound of the uMxhapho *ibutho* in the grass ahead, and they began to suspect a trap. But when the NNC tried to tell their white officers, who were carrying out inappropriate orders, the NNC found that none of the whites could understand the danger or was prepared to listen.¹¹

Suddenly from the long grass ahead there was a shout of “*uSuthu!*” the Zulu royal war cry, and in front of the NNC appeared several hundred fully armed warriors. The Zulus fired a volley, then threw down their firearms and rushed forward with their stabbing spears drawn back. H. L. Hall, a civilian wagon conductor with the British column, recalled years later that he heard it said that one of the NNC’s white officers drew his sword, brandished it in the air and shouted “*Baleka!*” thinking it meant “charge!” He was not far wrong, but his imperfect understanding of Zulu cost him his life because:

¹⁰ Turner Letters: Turner to his Parent, 1 March 1879; Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.116; BPP (c.2660) enc. 3 in no.4. Pearson to Hallam Parr, 23 January 1879.

¹¹ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times, p.58; Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, pp.243-244. Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.118. See also Cato papers, MS 160a: Cato to Richards, 2 February 1879.

“*Baleka*” means “run”. The NNC needed no further urging, and fled back down the slope and into the sparse cover afforded by the bush at the bottom of the valley.¹²

Within a very short time the Zulu attack was fully developed. Each and every warrior, especially younger soldiers, wished to “wash his spear” or at least to shoot the British soldiers before others. As the Zulus passed over the fallen men, snatching up their Martini-Henry rifles, they stabbed the bodies time and time again. This was a ritual known as *hlomula*, which had its origins in the *ukuzingela* (hunt) when a particularly dangerous animal was killed, all the men in the hunt were entitled to stab the carcass as proof of their participation. It was a macabre gesture of respect towards a fallen foe, though the British were appalled by it.¹³

It soon became apparent that the Zulus were adopting their usual encircling attack formation, *izimpondo zenkomo* (the horns of a beast). Surgeon Norbury was on the track near the *Nyezane* River when the attack began:

“I looked round and saw the Zulus on our right, running like deer, in a long semicircle; this was the left horn of their army, trying to surround the first part of the column.”¹⁴

It was immediately clear that a major Zulu attack was developing. In fact Godide’s impi had been lying in wait behind the crest of Wombane, presumably hoping to spring the

¹² Castle, I. & Knight, I.: *Fearful Hard Times*, p.58.

¹³ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: *Fearful Hard Times*, p.58; Also confirmed by Ngalozeephela Mthethwa: Oral Evidence, 27/04/2000.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: p.59; BPP (c.2260), enc. In no.3: Pearson to Hallman Parr, 23/01/1879.

trap as the column struggled up the hills. The NNC had blundered into the concealed Zulu advance *izinhlozi*, and as soon as the firing began the main body advanced rapidly from behind the hill.¹⁵

The British were much impressed with the Zulu skills at skirmishing, described by Colour Sergeant Burnett of the 99th :

“They came on with an utter disregard of danger. The men that fired did not load the guns. They would fire and run into the bush, and have fresh guns loaded for them, and out again.”¹⁶

The Zulu confidence had been greatly enhanced by *ukugqiha* (the doctoring) they had received at oNdini; for they had been smeared with *umuthi* which was believed to ensure that British bullets would glide off their bodies harmlessly.¹⁷ It was this *umuthi* (medicine) which made them to be brave to madness. For example those who were coming from behind used to shout “*Uyadela wena osulapho!*” (Happy is the one who is already there), referring to those who were already dead from the British guns. It was a matter of “*qhu saka khilikithi*” (Zulu expression for the sound made by the British guns).. The *impi* was also accompanied by *izinyanga* (the Zulu doctors) with *umuthi* (medicine).

¹⁵ Castle, I. & Knight, I Fearful Hard Times, p.61.

¹⁶ See the following, Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times, p.62; BPP (c.2260), enc. in no.3: Parson to Hallam Parr. 23 January 1879; Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, p.245; WO 32/7708; Report by Commander Campbell. 24 January 1879.

¹⁷ Natal Mercury, 30 January 1879; M.Dlamini: Oral Evidence, 19/07/2000; M.Khumalo: Oral Evidence, 26/10/2000.

This traditional support gave the Zulu warriors supernatural zeal powers in times of battle.

Although the Zulus kept up a heavy fire, much of it flew over the heads of Pearson's men. Lieutenant Knight of the Buffs believed this was due to the close range at which much of the firing was carried out. He wrote:

“... their want of skill (in firing) may be attributed in a great measure to a misapprehension as to the use of the sights of their rifles. Knowing that when a white man wants to hit an object a long way off he puts up his back sight. They concluded that the effect of so doing is to cause the rifle to shoot harder, and wishing to develop the full power of their arms at all times, they invariably used their rifles with the back sight up, a misconception to which many a British soldier owes his life.”¹⁸

With Zulu positions and intentions revealed, Pearson was able to take effective counter-measures. He sent forward the troops at the head of the column. Two companies of the 2/3rd Regiment (the Buffs), and two companies of the Naval Brigade, accompanied by two 7-pounder guns, a rocket tube and a Gatling gun – to a knoll close by the road at the base of the pass. From the Knoll the whole Zulu position could be seen.¹⁹ At this knoll the battle had been at its hottest. The infantry and artillery had been keeping up a heavy fire all around the position, forcing the Zulus to seek cover wherever possible. However,

¹⁸ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times, p.62.

¹⁹ Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, p.245; Hart-Synnot, Letters, pp.107-113:148.

nothing seemed to stop the Zulus. They slithered through the long grass and although they suffered severely as they came nearer and nearer.²⁰

Pearson directed a further two companies of the Buffs, who were guarding the wagons half way down the column, to clear the Zulu left horn from the bush. The Zulus in question, already astonished and unnerved at the concentration of the British fire withdrew rapidly but in an orderly manner before the Buffs determined skirmishing line. They were not yet out of trouble, however, for when their retreat brought them out onto the open they were exposed instead to the shell, rockets and musketry fire directed from the knoll.²¹ “The Zulus certainly regarded the rockets with suspicion, they called them ‘paraffin’, after that combustible material white traders introduced them to, or more poetically, ‘lightning from heaven’. However, the Zulu’s did not allow the rockets to deter their attack in the slightest.”²²

The dispersal of the Zulu left horn brought relief to the British troops who had remained near Inyezane guarding the wagons and enabled them to move forward on the Buff’s right and intercept those Zulus trying to retire across the Inyezane River further down stream. The Zulus though, were not yet beaten and exhibited courage, tenacity and a degree of ordered control, which the overconfident British had not anticipated.²³

About 300 metres to the left front of the position on the knoll, near the top of the spur, elements from the Zulu *isifuba* (chest, or centre), had begun to collect in a nearby *umuzi*.

²⁰ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times pp.63:65.

²¹ Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, p.245.

²² Castle & Knight: Fearful Hard Times, p.65.

²³ Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, p.245.

From here the Zulus opened a troublesome fire on the knoll which effectively threatened Pearson in the flank.²⁴ Heavy fire from the Zulus seemed to be aiming particularly at the British officers who stood out. Both Pearson and Lieutenant-Colonel Parnell, for example had their horses shot from under them.

After the retreat of their left horn, the Zulu's attempted, rather belatedly, to advance their right and outflank the British on the opposite flank and occupied Wombane hill to the West of the road and an *umuzi* about 400 m from the knoll. A part of the Naval Brigade, helped by some of the NNC, checked the Zulu movement. They compelled the Zulus to evacuate the *umuzi* and set it alight, then gained possession of the high ground to the West of the eShowe road dispersing the Zulu right horn.²⁵ The Zulu *amabutho* "were now streaming away all across the battlefield, trying to mask themselves from the British fire by slipping beyond the skyline of Wombane. The naval Brigade and the company of the Buffs on the ridge pushed on as soon as the men had regained their breath, clearing the hill ahead and the northern shoulder of Wombane itself. Some of the Zulus here were so exhausted that they threw their shields and weapons aside and simply fled."²⁶ The last shots died away at about 9:30 a.m. The Zulu coastal *impi* was by this time a spent force.

Officers and men alike were impressed by the Zulu determination and discipline and had the odds been greater – Godide had an uncharacteristically low superiority of 2:1 – and

²⁴ Castle & Knight: *Fearful Hard Times*, p.65.

²⁵ Laband, J.: *Rope of Sand*, pp.245-246.

²⁶ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: *Fearful Hard Times*, pp.67-68.

had the Zulu attacks better co-ordinated, the result might have been different. Only the left horn deployed fully, suggesting the attack had been sparked off prematurely.

For many of the Zulus involved in the battle, this was their first experience of massed fire power, and it certainly made a firm impression on the minds of those who took part in the attack. Chief Zimema, who fought with the uMxhapho *ibutho* at the battle, left an account, which vividly conveys the terrible effect of the British fire power:

“We were told to advance and, grasping our arms,... we went forward packed close together like a lot of bees... we were still far away from them when the *abelungu* (white men) began to throw their bullets at us, but we could not shoot at them because our rifles would not shoot so far... When we were near them we opened fire, hitting a number of them... After that they brought out their *umbayimbayi* or (a Zulu term for artillery) and we heard what we thought was a long pipe coming toward us. As we advanced we had our rifles under our arms and had our *izijula* (throwing spears) in our right hands ready to throw at them. But they were not much good for we never got near enough to use them. We never got nearer than 50 paces to the British, and although we tried to climb over our fallen brothers we could not get very far ahead because the *abelungu* were firing heavily close to the ground into our front ranks while the *umbayimbayi* was firing over our heads into the regiments behind us... The battle was so fierce that we had to wipe the blood and brains of the killed and wounded from our heads, faces, arms, legs and shields after the fighting.”²⁷

Another survivor of the same regiment, Sihlahla, agreed:

²⁷ Castle, I. & Knight, I. Fearful Hard Times p.68.

“We fought hard but we could not beat the *abelungu*, they shot us down in numbers, in some places our dead and wounded covered the ground, we lost heavily, especially from the small guns(rifles). Many of our men were drowned in the *Nyezane* river in attempting to cross at a part of the river where it was too deep for any but a swimmer, in the rush made for the river several men were forced over trees and dongas, and killed that way, the ‘*Itumlu*’ (rockets) killed people but the small guns are the worst.”²⁸

The old men and the women in the vicinity who had been supporting the Zulu army had climbed the hills to see what they could see of the battle. None of these had anticipated a British victory. Though the *amabutho* had consequently made no plans for a possible withdrawal the majority of the warriors eventually collected on a flat-topped hill six kms away, scaling the sides along the different routes in dense files.²⁹ They remained there shouting, singing and dancing. The Zulu *amabutho* were surprised to find they were not pursued, but the British dared not to do so over the broken unscouted country and were indeed apprehensive of falling into a further possible ambush.³⁰

The estimated casualties after the engagement were as follows: British had two officers of the NNC and nine men killed, one officer and 14 men wounded.³¹ By comparison the Zulu casualties were heavy. The British officially estimated that there were about 300 killed, though any accurate figure is impossible to reach.

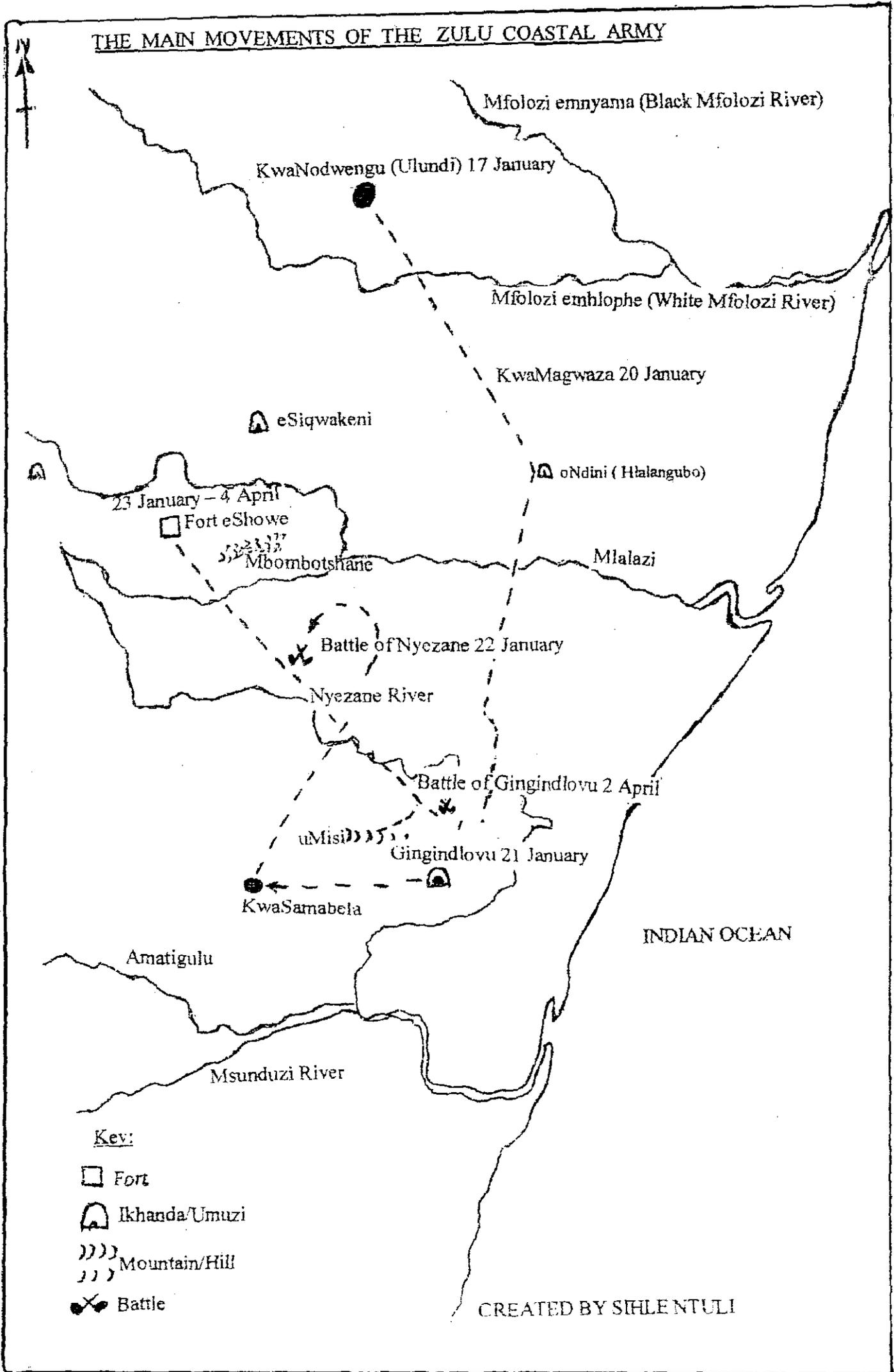
²⁸ Castle, I. & Knight, I. Fearful Hard Times, p.68.-69.

²⁹ Laband, J. : Kingdom In Crisis, p.119.

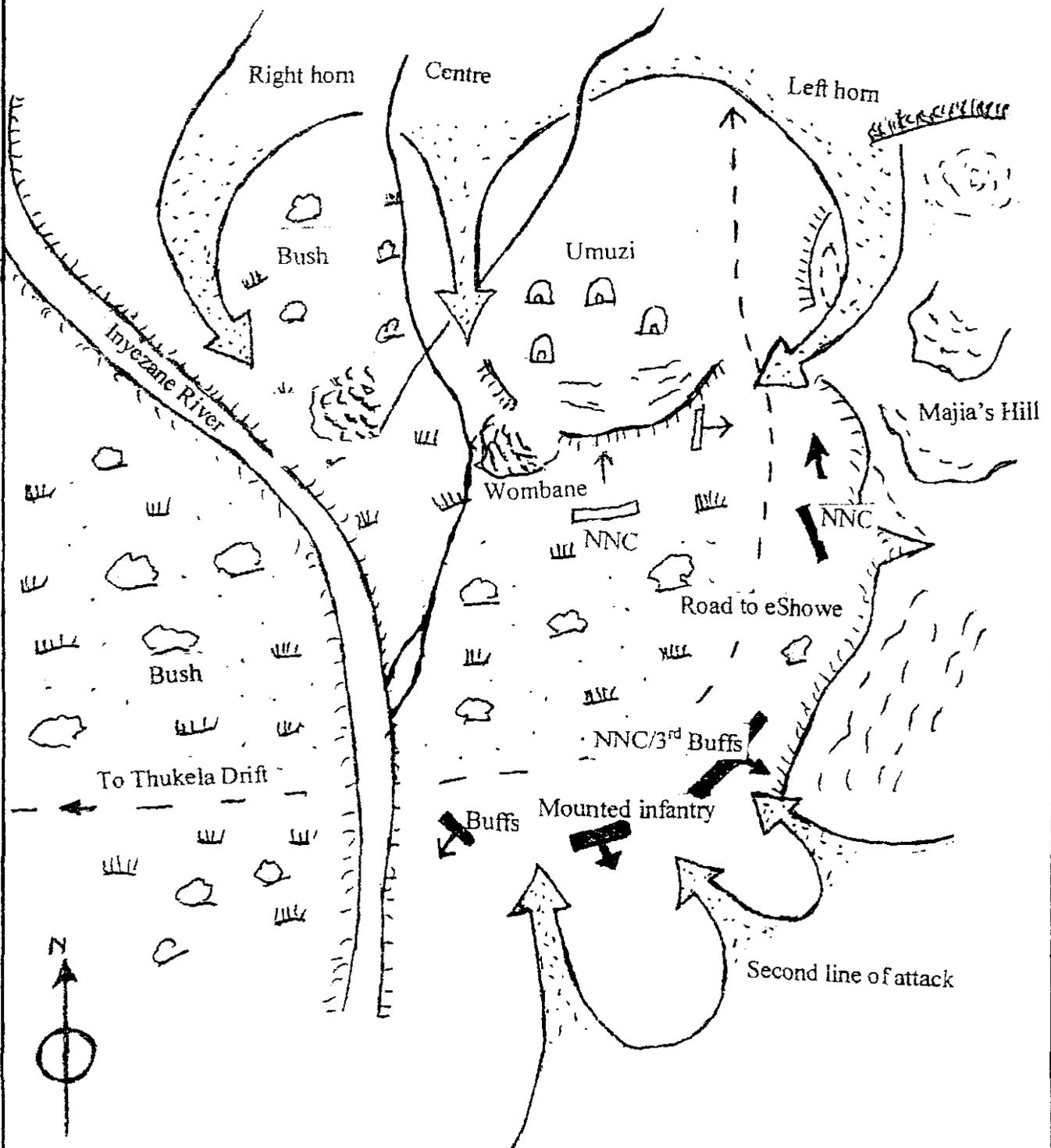
³⁰ Turner Papers: Turner To Ellis, 30 January, 1879; See also Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, p.246.

³¹ Laband, J. & Thompson, P.S. : Field Guide to the War in Zululand, p.39.

THE MAIN MOVEMENTS OF THE ZULU COASTAL ARMY



THE BATTLE OF INYEZANE, 22 JANUARY 1879

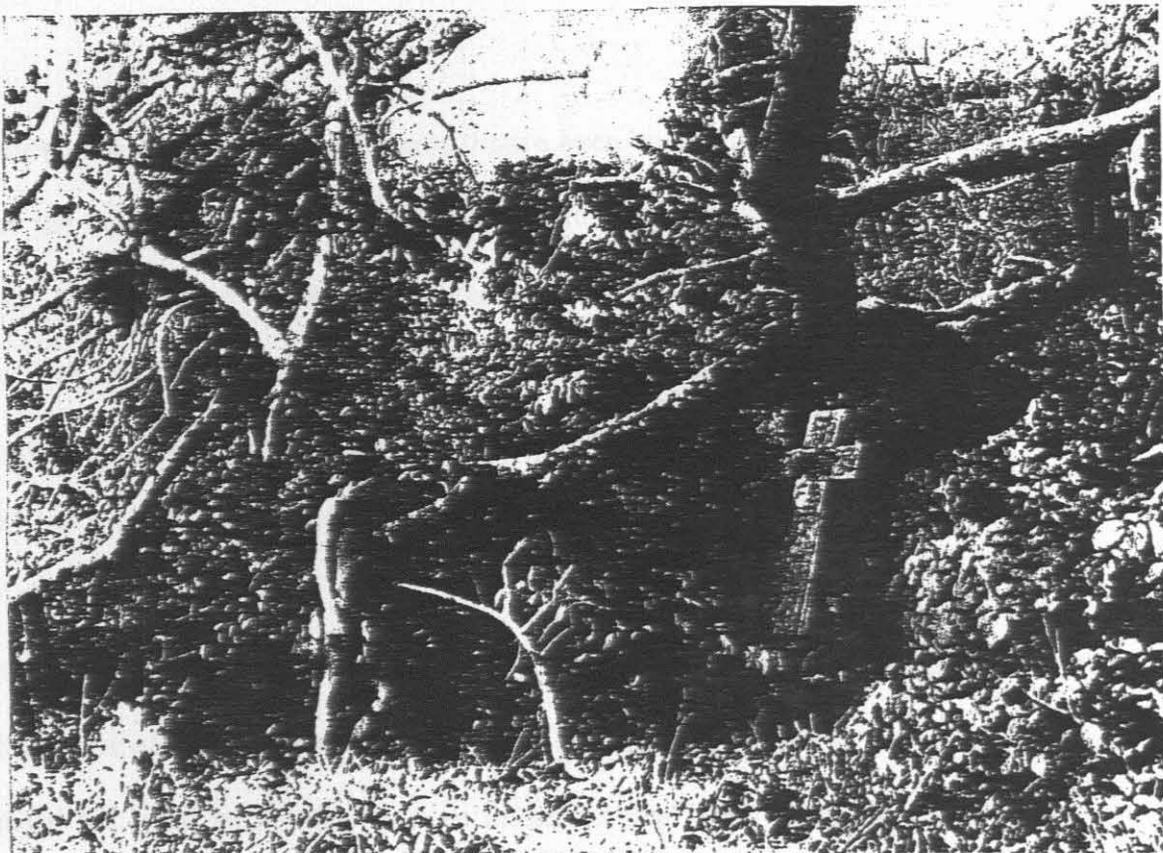


Composite map with acknowledgement to Smal, J.L.: *Historical monuments and battlefields In Natal & Zululand.*



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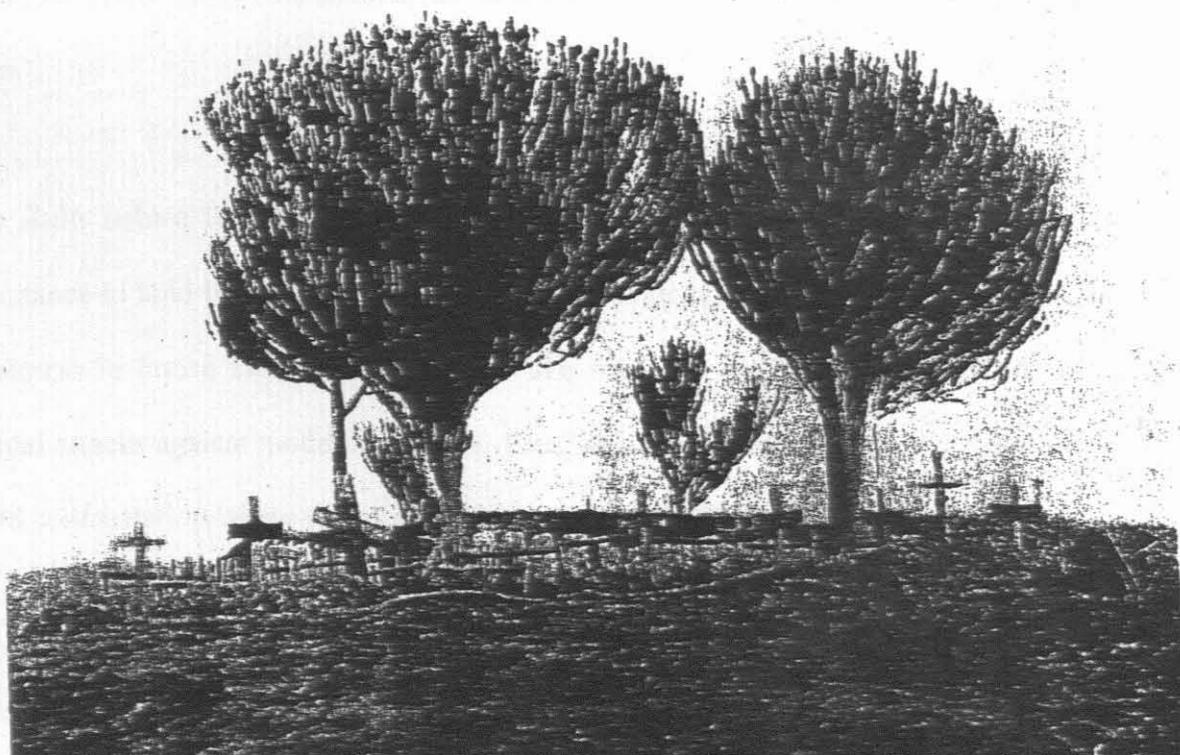
Chief Zimema,
uMxhapho Regiment.
(*Natal Mercury*,
22 January 1929.)



Names of those killed. Grave at Inyezane

Killie Campbell

With acknowledgement to Smail, J.L. : Historical monuments and battlefields in Natal and Zululand.



Graves at Inyezane

Killie Campbell

With acknowledgement to Smail, J.L. : Historical monuments and battlefields in Natal and Zululand.

There is the possibility that more would have been killed than were located by the British since the Zulu practice of disposing of their dead in the thick bush, in holes and between rocks. Most of those who had been wounded were reported subsequently to have died.³² The Zulu learned that the range of their muskets and other inferior firearms was humiliatingly shorter than that of the British, which meant that for much of the day they had been subject to a fire they could not effectively return.³³

What worried the Zulu most is that only part of the British column had been sufficient to defeat them and that British losses were insignificant compared to their own. A report reached the Natal authorities from an informant that 'King Cetshwayo was very angry with Godide, who was commanding the older regiments, for not taking a more active part in the fight. It's said that they merely looked on and took no part at all.'³⁴ The younger warriors of the uMxhupho *ibutho*, who had attacked down the Wombane spur, accused the older uDlambedu and izinGulube *amabutho* of not pressing forward with the right horn.

The Zulu failure to coordinate the attack of the horns and the spirited uMxhapho's reluctance to hold back in the interest of a wider strategy, were to prove a typically Zulu weakness in future battles. Another mistake was their persistence in their traditional frontal attacks against modern weapons. The Zulus would have preferred a more hand to hand confrontation where their traditional weapons would have been more effective.

³² CP 7, no. 32: Fynn to Col. Law, 8 March 1879; Laband, J.: *Kingdom in Crisis*, p. 120.

³³ CSO 1926, no. C 19/1879: Statement of Unxakala & Udhlozi, 4/02/1879; Laband, J.: *Rope of Sand*, p. 246.

³⁴ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: *Fearful Hard Times*, p. 72.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SIEGE OF eSHOWE

After the defeat of the Zulu coastal army at the battle of Inyezane, Pearson and his column immediately proceeded up the hills to eShowe where he intended to form a supply depot based on the Norwegian Mission Station. eShowe was selected because of its situation along the projected line of advance and the buildings offered potential storage for the huge quantities of supplies that would inevitably have to be stockpiled in preparation for the British advance on Ulundi.¹ Pearson's advance to eShowe was painfully slow. Four times the column was forced to halt while the engineers repaired the track ahead. The Zulu presence of the evening before had disappeared and it is alleged that there was no sign of life apart from a few lurking dogs and a young calf found wandering near the track. Any deserted *imizi* along the line of march were put to the torch.

About noon of the next day, the 23rd January, Pearson's column arrived at eShowe. On their arrival they were delighted that the Zulus had not molested the mission station, where everything appeared to be intact. It is assumed that a neighbouring *inkosi* (chief) had directed one of his men to take care of it. This was the station of the Rev. Ommund Oftebro, the resident of the Norwegian Missionary Society.² It consisted of a neat brick built church, with a small tower with a vestry attached, and the whole roofed with corrugated iron. It was a long building containing several rooms, one of which had been used as a school. There was a third building with a verandah which was Mrs Oftebro's

¹ Castle, I. & Knight, I. : Fearful Hard Times, p.38.

² Norbury, H.F. Naval Brigade, p.235.

private residence. The latter was covered with neat reed thatch. In front of the residence was a magnificent garden through which ran a fine avenue of orange trees, leading down to a stream of clearest running water which had its source in a spring about 200 metres distant. Situated about 300 metres off, on the south, and east were two small cottages. This mission station was situated on an extensive plateau high above the sea level and was surrounded every side except the south-west by low hills, distance from 300 metres to 400 metres. Some 1,5 km to the south was a high, rocky ridge, which afterwards was named Observatory Hill. From it could be obtained an extensive view of the whole coast country, from the lagoon at the mouth of the uMhlathuze to far beyond the Thukela River. The entire district was covered with grass, and contained several springs. The hills around eShowe were destitute of trees, which however, grew in profusion along many of the valleys. This mission station must have a pleasant abode when occupied and under cultivation. ³ Around the church was a small graveyard, containing only two or three graves, one of which was marked by a large granite cross, under which were interred the remains of Mrs Robertson, who had been accidentally killed near eShowe some years previously. ⁴

Shortly after the column had arrived, a solitary Zulu came in with a flag of truce and surrendered himself. He was allowed to go. During the night he returned to the camp and was fired on by the sentry. ⁵

³ Norbury, Naval Brigade, pp.236-237; Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times: pp.74-75.

⁴ Norbury, Naval Brigade, pp.236-237.

⁵ Ibid, p.238.

At dawn on 25 January a convoy of 48 wagons were assembled and was dispatched to the Lower Thukela Drift to collect more supplies. While it progressed it found itself approaching the battlefield of Inyezane. Lieutenant Backhouse was present and wrote in his diary:

“... there was an awful stench, and the unburied Zulus were something awful to see. On our way to the place, we picked up a wounded Zulu, who had his arm and leg smashed by a shell. Poor wretch, he had been lying there for three days without food or drink, and was starving. We gave him some biscuits and took him on the wagons with us; I believed we heard two others calling out in the bush, but they were too far off and we had to leave them to their fate.”⁶

King Cetshwayo was infuriated and became exceedingly indignant that Pearson had apparently settled down inside the Kingdom of Zululand as if the country was already defeated.⁷ But Cetshwayo refused to allow his army to make a direct assault upon it. Shiyane (Rorke's Drift) had proved the suicidal folly of storming fortified positions and Cetshwayo therefore forbade his army to attempt it with eShowe. He was aware that such frontal attacks against skilled British firepower were costly and inevitably unsuccessful. As he told his men later, “If you put your face into the lair of a wild beast, you are sure to get clawed”.⁸

⁶ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times: p.77.

⁷ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times: p.123; Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.138, CSO 126, no.1185/1879; Fanin to colonial Secretary, 23 February 1879; Laband, J. Rope of Sand, p.257.

⁸ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times p.123.

The Zulu despised the British for burrowing into the ground 'like wild pigs' and not fighting in the open like men.⁹ The strategy adopted by the Zulus was of blockade rather than assault. The Zulus decided to cut off communications between Pearson and the Thukela river and by so doing sever his supply route. The main intention was to force the starving garrison into evacuating the fort, and then to attack it in the open.¹⁰

At about midday on the 29th January a large body of Zulus was observed moving past the mission some miles off. As the alarm sounded the garrison rushed into the entrenchment, badly damaging parts of the rampart as they scrambled all over it. The Zulus however, seemed oblivious of the garrison and continued on their way.¹¹

That night, about 90 slaughter oxen clambered up out of the ditch at Fort eShowe and disappeared, later on they were reported to be captured by the Zulus. Indeed, cattle gave Pearson a serious problem since it was difficult to contain them and to provide healthy grazing. He decided to ease the situation by sending some of them back to the Thukela River. He was aware of the danger that they might be captured, but he felt the only other alternative – killing them – was impractical, since the carcasses would have to be buried to prevent them spreading disease. Underestimating the strength of the Zulus, Pearson believed that if the cattle were captured, he would recapture them at a later date. Therefore during the 30th January, about 1000 oxen and 28 mules were driven from eShowe by some of wagon drivers and leaders. The mules were captured less than a mile

⁹ Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.138; Vijn, Cetshwayo's Dutchman, pp.40-41.

¹⁰ see CSO 1926, no. C19/1879; Statement by Unxakala & Udhlozi, 4 February 1879; Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.138.

¹¹ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times; p. 85.

from the mission. The Zulus drove them away. One, however, made good its escape and returned to the entrenchment. The other mules were killed, presumably because the Zulus would not decide what to use them for. The oxen managed to get a little further before some of their drivers, frightened by large numbers of Zulus gathered on the track ahead, turned back and returned with about 500 of the beasts. The other drivers disappeared into the bush and the remaining 500 oxen were captured by the Zulus. The Zulus plundered the wagons which had been abandoned, and then tried to burn them, the stores they contained having been strewn all over the place. Some runners were sent to the Thukela, but they likewise returned, saying they would not get beyond Inyezane, as the Zulus "were like the grass."¹²

Lieutenant Robarts wrote to his wife with an open-mindedness rare in the British camp: "A retribution must overtake the Zulus which will destroy them as a nation. However, we must not forget that they are fighting fair, and in a just cause, though opposed to us. They are fighting for their own country, as we are fighting indirectly for ours".¹³

On the 1st February, vedettes watching the approaches to eShowe observed a number of Zulus, and a few shots were exchanged. The vedettes claimed to have seen several Zulus fall, but this was not confirmed. Lieutenant Lloyd mentions in his account of his time at eShowe that in the early days of the siege that the artillery would occasionally fire a shell when groups of Zulus were spotted in the distance. This invariably proved ineffective,

¹² See, Norbury: Naval Brigade, p.242; Castle, I., Knight, I. Fearful hard Times: p.85.

¹³ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times: p.86.

however, because "... as soon as they saw the smoke from the gun they would either lie flat down, or, bending themselves nearly double, would run like madmen." ¹⁴

Inside the fort, life had become very difficult and unhygienic for the garrison. Heavy rains continued and the interior of the entrenchment soon turned into the quagmire of slimy, oozing unhealthy mud. ¹⁵ The Zulus were now in the bush in increasing numbers. The fort had cut all communications with the Thukela except heliograph. The garrison at eShowe was isolated deep inside Zulu country. ¹⁶

The blockade strategy which was employed by the Zulus was certainly an effective strategy and one which almost worked on a number of occasions. This operation was assigned to men of all the *amabutho* living in the coastal country. A force of up to 500 men were constantly employed in keeping watch on Fort eShowe in parties of between 40 and 50, while the remainder, perhaps as many as 500, were distributed in small groups at different local *imizi* and *amakhanda*. They were to form an army to prevent Pearson's relief or to attack him if he formed a sortie ¹⁷ i.e., to attack the garrison if they tried to come out from their besieged position. Mavumengwane ka Ndlela – chief Godide's brother and Dabulamanzi kaMpande – King Cetshwayo's half brother – who lived close by each other in the vicinity of eNtumeni were the Zulu commanders. Dabulamanzi was a young, aggressive man in his thirties, and he had commanded the unsuccessful Zulu attack at Shiyane (Rorke's Drift) on 22 January. He also rode a horse – there are photographs of this. In the lull following the battles, King Cetshwayo had become

¹⁴ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful hard Times : p.87.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.89.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.91.

¹⁷ Webb & Wright: Zulu King Speaks, p.23.

irritated by his brother's foray across the border opening into Natal to attack the hospital at Shiyane (Rorke's Drift). In the meantime Dabulumanzi had returned to his home on the coastal belt.

The frequent skirmishes with the cattle guards and raiding parties were part of a deliberate policy of antagonizing the garrison while avoiding a serious confrontation.¹⁸ They would taunt the cattle guards, who knew their language, on a regular basis, attempting to highlight the vulnerability of their position. It was a deadly game of cat and mouse with the main Zulu body ready to pounce whenever the garrison was provoked¹⁹ to leave the fort. The Zulu used to shout out, referring to the English: "Come out of that hole you old women; we always thought the English would fight, and not burrow under the ground!"²⁰ The Zulu also used to chaff the English herd boys, "Pray that sun shines a long time today, for you look at it for the last time. We are coming to take coffee with you tomorrow morning", and another time: "Why don't you take more care of Cetshwayos's cattle and get them fatter? He will want them soon".²¹

Inside the fort, life was very difficult. However, Reverend Robertson organised a couple of lectures on the history of Zululand, which were very well received, and his Bible classes were also well attended. "You would have been astonished to find," he wrote, "how little all of them knew of the people against whom they were fighting or why they

¹⁸ Castle & Knight: Fearful Hard Times: p. 123.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 123-124.

²⁰ Castle & Knight: Fearful Hard Times: p. 124.

²¹ Ibid.: p. 124.

were fighting".²² Because the British in the fort had little information regarding Zulu movements and were fully employed in developing the entrenchment's or standing guard or foraging in the nearest mielie or pumpkin gardens, they remained almost entirely on the defensive.²³ Every evening all the troops got under arms and lined that part of the parapet which it was appointed to each corps to guard. To the Naval Brigade was entrusted the defense of the south-eastern side of the fort, and the sheen of the long line of cutless bayonets in the moonlight presented a truly formidable appearance.²⁴

Possible starvation inside the fort forced the garrison to embark on raiding. On the 24th February Colonel Pearson himself rode out on one of these raids. The target was an *umuzi* a short distance from the fort. The homestead was positioned down in a valley, and the task of looting was entrusted to the Native Pioneers, possible because they knew the area, and wagon drivers. A short distance off a body of about 200 Zulus watched the British collecting mealies, but made no attempt to interfere. But as raiders set fire to the *umuzi* and began to move off with the spoils, a Zulu shouted out menacingly; "You are eating our mealies today, but we will drink your coffee tomorrow".²⁵

The Zulu generally kept a prudent distance, though they watched the fort day and night and subjected it to long-range fire. *Izinhloli* would creep up undetected to within a few metres of the earthworks or unsuspecting outlying vedettes. Indeed the vedettes,

²² *Ibid*: p.122.

²³ *Ibid*: p.120; Laband J. *Kingdom in Crisis*, p.138.

²⁴ Norbury: *The Naval Brigade in South Africa*, p.251.

²⁵ Castle and Knight: *Fearful Hard Times*: p.120.

unpracticed in commando type operations, were easy prey for the practiced Zulu and on a number of occasions the vedettes were surprised and suffered casualties.²⁶

It was Pearson's aim to keep the remaining several hundred head of oxen close to the fort. However, within a very short time, all the grass close to the fort had been grazed or deliberately burned by the investing Zulus.²⁷ The British were then forced to graze their cattle under strong escort many kilometres from the fort. On 21 February they were sent about a mile and a quarter to the north where the grass was as yet ungrazed. Pearson was among them and there were no signs of Zulu and at the end of the day the cattle were brought back safely to the fort. The following day the cattle were again driven out, but this time the Zulus were expecting them. As the cattle herders arrived with their charges, they came under fire from between 30 and 80 Zulu snipers hidden in the bush.²⁸

What puzzled the British was that, apart from this attack, the Zulu made no attempt to capture the livestock. This failure was as much as a relief to the British as was the relative lack of Zulu activity at night. They never quite understood that the Zulu were merely keeping watch until the garrison moved out into the open, and that the boastful exchanges between the black cattle guards Zulu were simple banter.²⁹

The Zulus had absolutely no intention of storming the fort or suffering unnecessary casualties. It was only the incident, which took place on the night of 2nd, and 3rd February, after the first detailed news of Isandlwana had been received when seven men of the Natal Native Contingent deserted. About three miles from the fort they were attacked by Zulus who opened fire and attacked them with their assegais. Three were

²⁶ See Laband, J. Kingdom in Crisis, p.138; Rope of Sand, p.257.

²⁷ See. Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, p.257; Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.138; Castle I, & Knight I.: Fearful Hard Times, p.96.

²⁸ Castle I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times, p.119.

killed while the other four made good their escape and returned to eShowe. Throughout 3rd February large numbers of Zulus were observed moving southwards past eShowe. Pearson hoped the Zulus would attack the fort, as he believed that “he (Cetshwayo) will find it a very hard nut to crack indeed”³⁰ On Sunday 9 February Captain Shervinton, with his men, went out on a patrol. They came under fire from a group of Zulus on top of a hill a mile to the south-east of the fort. Although no one was hit, the riders returned with the message that the Zulus had shouted to them, “We shall meet tomorrow”. Throughout the day numbers of Zulus were observed lurking about the fort and were estimated to be a thousand. A hill, from which the Zulus fired on Captain Shervinton’s men known locally as Mbombotshone, was again used to attack the vedettes on the following two days.³¹

Pearson’s new confidence manifested itself on 28 February when he announced his intention to make a large scale raid the following day to attack an *ikhanda* controlled by Prince Dabulamanzi ka Mpande. The *ikhanda*, eSiqwaqkeni, was about seven miles north east of eShowe along a circuitous route which the mounted patrols had discovered. One of Dabulamanzi’s personal imizi (homesteads) lay a couple of miles beyond eSiqwaqkeni, and this Pearson had also targeted. Another of Dabulamanzi’s *imizi*, eZulwini, “In the Heavens”, lay west of eShowe, on the slopes of eNtumeni hill, and it was from these three *imizi* that Dabulamanzi had been instrumental in organising the Zulu investment of Pearson’s position.³²

²⁹ See Laband, J.: *Rope of Sand*, p.257; *Kingdom in Crisis*, p.139.

³⁰ Castle, I. & Knight, I. : *Fearful Hard Times*, p.96.

³¹ Castle, I. & Knight, I. : *Fearful Hard Times*, pp.96-113.

³² *Ibid.*, p.123.

Accordingly, Pearson marched out at 02h00 on 1 March with 450 men and a seven-pounder gun.³³ It was a very clear night and the Zulu guides soon found a path, which led, through grassy country which was fringed with bush. The march was slow. The head of the column reached a high point overlooking eSiqwakeni without being spotted. Lieutenant Main wrote “We looked down on the *umuzi* in a hollow and apparently all the Zulus were asleep in the *amaqhugwane* (huts). . . .” Suddenly, a lone Zulu emerged from a small *umuzi* on a hill about 300 metres off to the left of the British position. Initially he had his back to Pearson’s men but on turning around he saw their full force arranged before him preparing to attack. Lloyd wrote that he “fled like a hare”, and four mounted men sent after him failed to cut off before he reached the *ikhanda* unscathed.³⁴

Within a very short time, the Zulus emerged from the *ikhanda* and were flying in all directions, carrying their possessions and driving their cattle before them. The disappointed British burned the *ikhanda*, which consisted of fifty *izindlu* (huts) . Dabulamanzi’s own *umuzi* was close by, but Pearson feared he would suffer too many casualties attempting to burn it.³⁵ The Zulus who had fled were observed moving up a hill about 1000metres off. Approaching the foot of this hill, Pearson’s men came under a heavy fire from the Zulus above, prompting Pearson to sound the ‘retire’ and forcing him to abandon any hopes he had of burning the second *umuzi* as well.³⁶ As soon as these men turned and began to retrieve their steps, the Zulus emboldened by their retreat,

³³ W O 32/7730: Pearson to military Secretary, 9 April 1879. Laband, J. : Rope of Sand, p.258, Laband, J. : Kingdom in Crisis, p.139. Castle, I., & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times, p. 124.

³⁴ Castle, I. & N Knight, I : Fearful Hard Times, pp.124-125.

³⁵ Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.139, Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times: p.125.

³⁶ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times, p.125.

moved down the hill again and opened fire on them. On the way back to eShowe, Pearson's men burnt three more *imizi*.³⁷

The Zulus who had come down from the hill were now observed working their way around the flanks of the column, firing off the occasional long-range shot. The pursuing Zulus maintained a respectful distance, but occupied every hill as soon as the British vacated it, and took advantage of every patch of bush from where they could open fire. Dabulamazi, who was recognised mounted on a black horse,³⁸ directed some 500 Zulu in close pursuit of the withdrawing British, and harassed the column all the way back to eShowe.

The British admired the expert way in which the Zulu skirmished on their flanks. Lieutenant Lloyd wrote: "It was really a pleasure to watch the manner in which these Zulus skirmished. No crowding, no delay, as soon as they were driven from one cover they would hasten rapidly to the next awkward bit of country through which our column would have to pass. Luckily for us their shooting was inferior or we should have suffered severely".³⁹ As it was, Dabulamanzi was not completely wrong in his opinion that they administered a decisive reverse to this British expedition.⁴⁰

³⁷ Castle & Knight: *Fearful Hard Times*, p.125, Laband, J.: *Kingdom in Crisis*, p.139.

³⁸ Laband, J.: *Kingdom in Crisis*, p.139; Colenso and Colenso, series 1, part 2, p.616: *Narrative Account of the Doings of the Coast Column*.

³⁹ Castle & Knight: *Fearful Hard Times*, p.127.

⁴⁰ Laband, J. : *Kingdom in Crisis*, p.139.

On Thursday 6 March Pearson received a message from Lieutenant F.T.A. Law, whom Chelmsford had recently placed in command at the Lower Thukela, and it advised him that a column of 1 000 men, supported by Black auxiliaries would set off from this border post towards eShowe on the 13th March. Pearson was instructed to watch for this column's approach and to rally out to meet it at the Nyezane with his surplus garrison. This was exciting news indeed. As soon as he received this heartening message, Pearson began to prepare for the possibility of rallying out of the fort with part of his garrison. The road up to eShowe was long and dangerous, because it wound through thick bush here and there where the Zulus could assemble for an attack unseen. Pearson, therefore asked Captain Wynne to try to find a shorter route, which would cut off a particular stretch near eShowe itself. Wynne reported back to Pearson who approved the plan, and ordered him to begin instruction without delay. Unfortunately the rain was so heavy the next day, 7th March, that it restricted the work parties to just three hours effort before a storm drove them back to the fort.⁴¹

This new enterprise of the British soon attracted the attention of the watchful Zulu cordon. On the 9th March, no sooner had the work party set out to work, than a group of Zulus appeared some distance off and opened fire on them. The work party returned their fire but no casualties were caused on either side. This however, had not been the only confrontation in the first week of March. Two days earlier a far more serious incident had taken place.

⁴¹ Castle & Knight: Fearful Hard Times: pp.129, 131, 132 & 134.

On the morning of Friday 7th March Corporal Carson had ridden out to take up his position at No. 4 vedette post. As he approached his allotted position, a group of twelve to fifteen Zulus burst from the long grass and rushed towards him. Carson's horse reared up in fright and the first warrior up grabbed at its mane. Carson managed to retain his seat and put spurs to his horse, which leapt forward and away from the Zulus. One of them thrust forward with a spear and plunged it into the rump of the terrified animal as it galloped away, while the rest fired a ragged volley to bring Carson down. Several shots struck him; one passed through the front of his right thigh while another smashed into the right hand almost severing two fingers, and leaving them attached by no more than a thread of skin. A final bullet aimed for the very centre of his back, failed to find its target because it struck the lock of the Swinburn-Henry carbine. Carson managed to reach his fellow vedettes. The Zulus had abandoned the pursuit.⁴²

At about 7h00 on the morning of 10th March, a Zulu runner arrived bearing a letter for Colonel Pearson from Lieutenant Law, written fourteen days before. When questioned, the runner claimed that he had been hunted through the bush for the last two weeks, but had fired off all his ammunition and managed to evade his Zulu pursuers. The garrison was not convinced. The man wore a great coat marked for the 24th Regiment which had no tears or rips, suggesting that it had been looted rather than issued to him and his feet showed no signs of having been in the bush for any period of time. Furthermore his body had been oiled in the Zulu fashion. It was suspected that in fact he was a Zulu spy who

⁴² Castle & Knight: Fearful Hard Times p.134. Norbury, H.F., The Naval Brigade in South Africa, p.259.

had probably killed the real messenger, and taken his place. After much questioning he was imprisoned.⁴³

On 19th March, a flash message was received at eShowe from Law which enquired blandly: "What has happened to my messenger of 24th February? He is Mr Fynney's groom. Have you hung him?" The garrison responded simply, "He is a prisoner." The truth of the prisoner's story was finally confirmed on 23rd March that the man had come from Law. However Pearson was unwilling to take any changes, and refused to have the man released; he remained under penalty of death until the end of the siege when he was set free.⁴⁴

The Zulu throughout the siege annoyed the vedettes and work parties. Bertram Mitford, a traveler and writer who visited Zululand in 1882, only three years after the war, delighted in talking to Zulus about the conflict. One had a convincing story about the siege: "While they were talking, we crept on; when they were silent we lay still as if dead. We got within fifty yards of them, when others came from the fort; we did not like the look of these, so we were obliged to go away again."⁴⁵

The second week of March, indeed, suggested to the garrison that the Zulus were stepping up their military activity around the fort. Not only was the work party constantly harassed, while smaller Zulu bands menaced the vedettes, but on 11th and 12th

⁴³ See: Castle & Knight: Fearful Hard Times: p.136; Norbury,H.F.: The Naval Brigade in South Africa. p.258.

⁴⁴ Castle & Knight: Fearful Hard Times: p.136.

⁴⁵ Castle & Knight: Fearful Hard Times: The Siege & Relief of eShowe. P.139.

March, large numbers were observed skirting the fort and moving down towards the Nyezane. Gunner Carrol claimed to have seen one group which he estimated at being 3 000 strong moving past on the 12th March. It became obvious to the garrison that the Zulus were aware that the relief column was about to march from the Thukela and that they intended obstructing its progress.⁴⁶

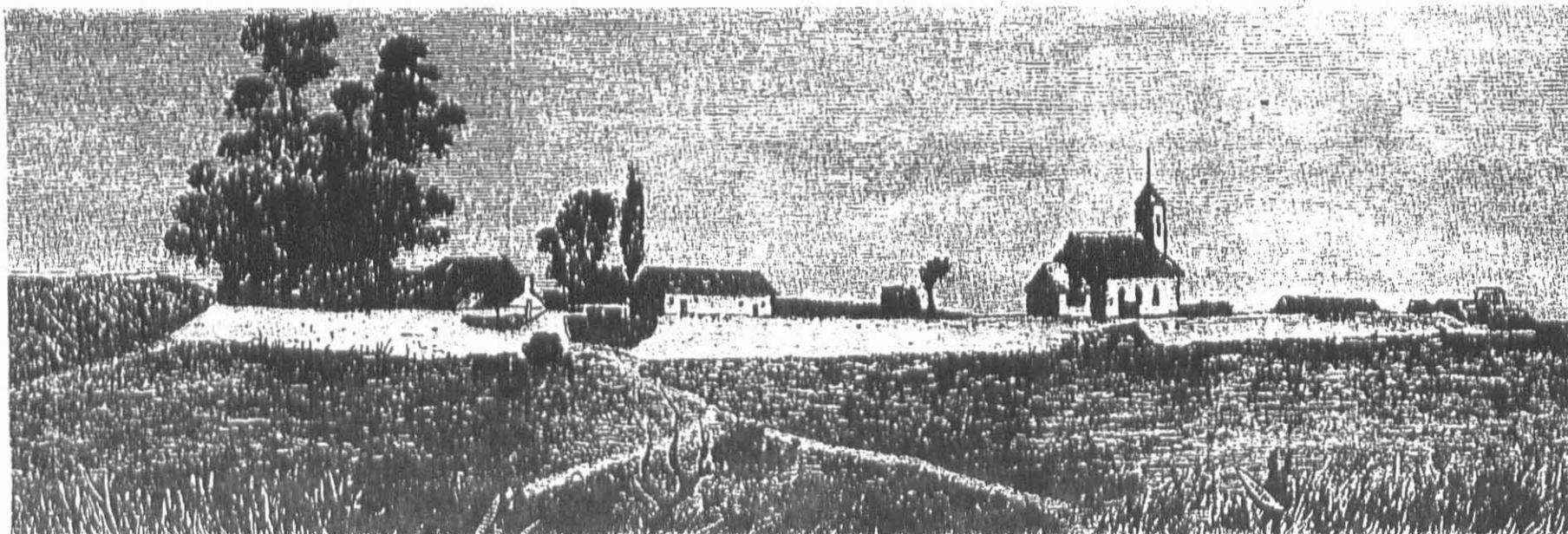
The intelligence network of the Zulu army was obviously working very well. The large concentrations, which had been seen making their way down towards the Nyezane on the 12th March were again seen making their way back on the 15th March. They were clearly aware that the advance had been postponed. Estimates of the numbers of Zulus were as high as 20 000 moving north-west of the fort. This figure is unlikely, but it may be that many of them were in fact heading inland towards the King's capital, oNdini, where a general muster had been called.⁴⁷

On Monday 17th March at about 8:00am, Private Kent of the 99th took up his position at the post. As he settled into his position, five Zulus suddenly sprung up without any warning, and fired a volley at him. His horse was hit, reared up, threw off its rider, and galloped away towards the fort, streaming blood. Kent hardly had time to gather his wits about him before the Zulus were on him. There was a brief struggle, and he fell, mortally wounded, with seventeen or eighteen stab wounds. The Zulus took his gun and ammunition.⁴⁸ On Sunday 23rd March two Zulus arrived outside the fort carrying a white flag. Quite where they obtained this white flag is not explained.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*; p.139.

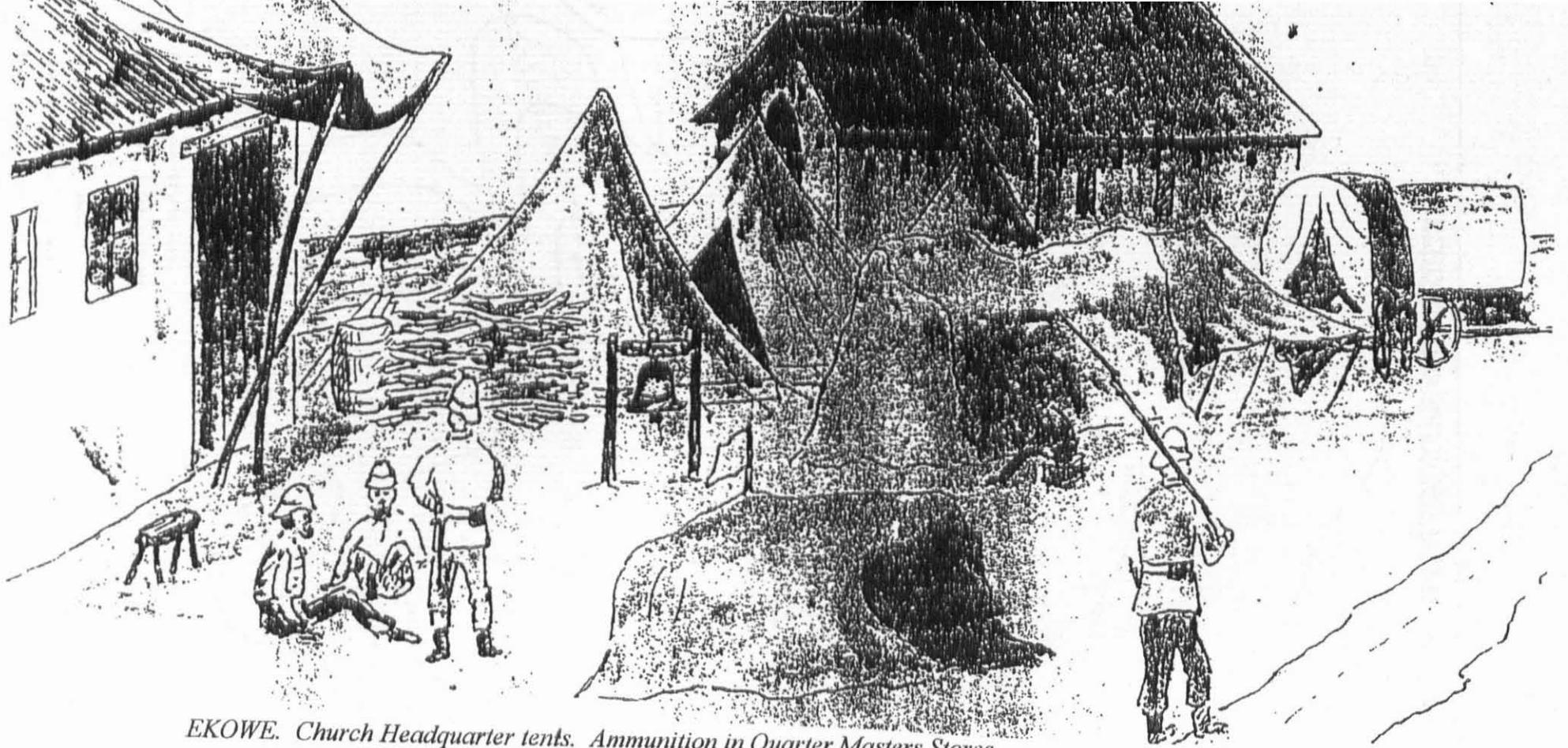
⁴⁷ Castle & Knight, *Fearful Hard Times*, p.142.

⁴⁸ See. Norbury, H.F.: *The Naval Brigade*, p.259; Castle & Knight, *Fearful Hard Times*; pp.142-143.



Fort Eshowe, 1879

*With acknowledgement to Smail, J.L.: Historical monuments and battlefields
In Natal & Zululand.*



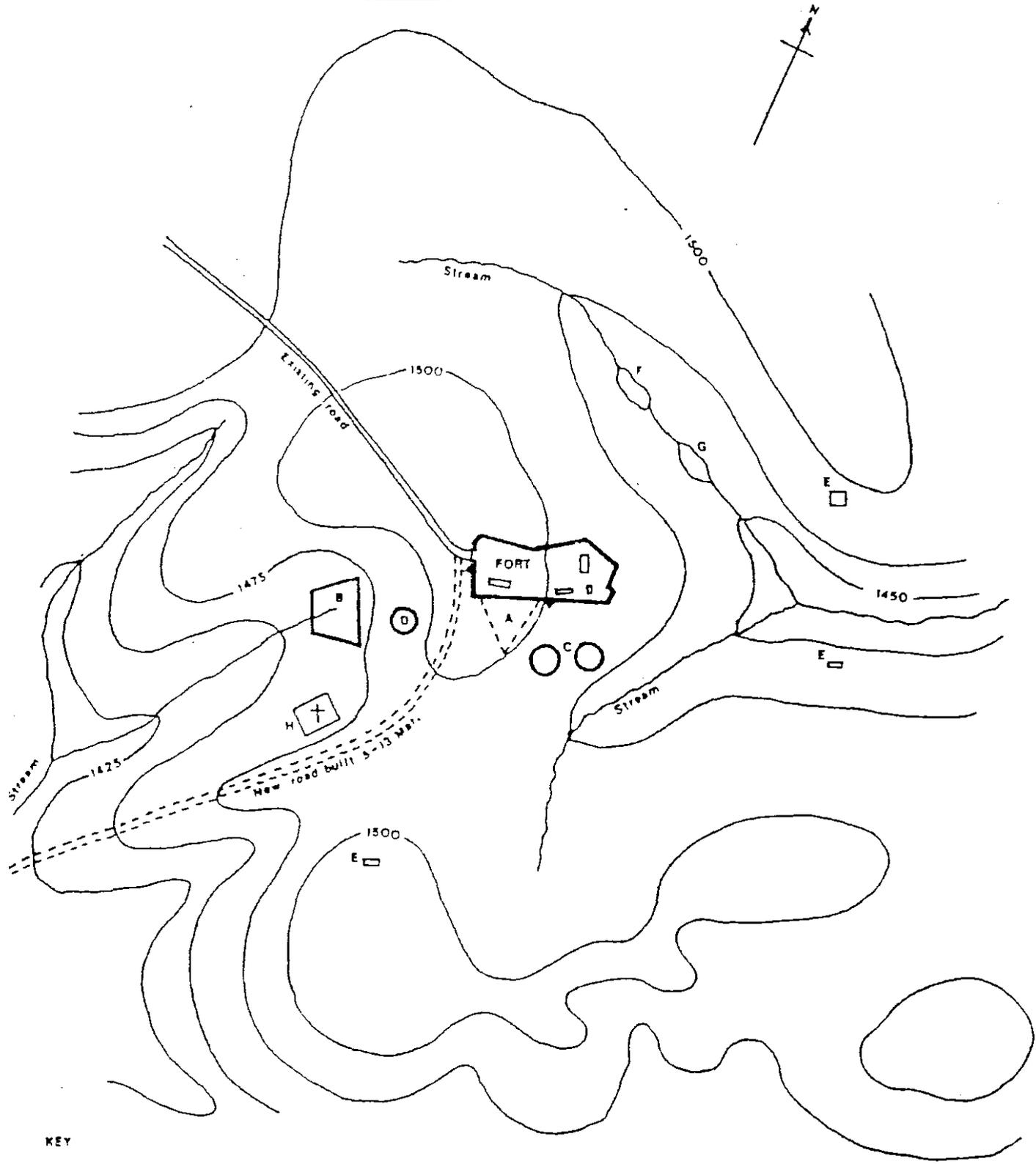
EKOWE. Church Headquarter tents. Ammunition in Quarter Masters Stores.

Sketch of the interior of the Kwa-Mondi Fort at Eshowe by Lieutenant Knight of the Buffs.

With acknowledgement to Castle and Knight: Fearful Hard Times

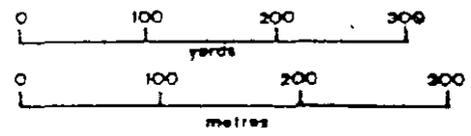
(The poor reprint quality is regretted)

ESHOWE AND ENVIRONS DURING THE SIEGE



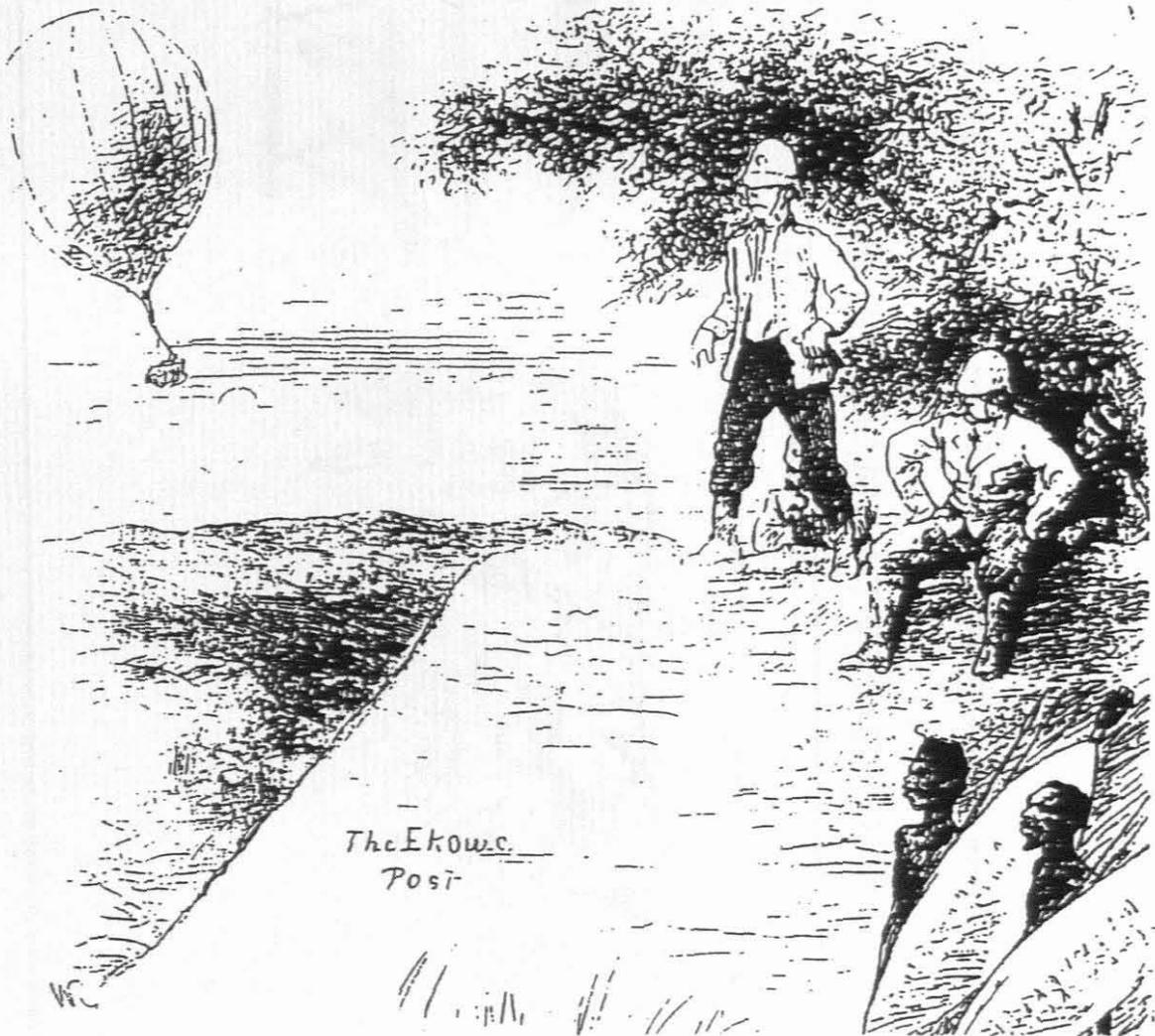
KEY

- A. Cattle laager 28-31 Jan.
- B. Cattle laager 1 Feb. - 16 Mar.
- C. Cattle laagers 17 Mar. - 4 Apr.
- D. Slaughter oxen laager
- E. Houses destroyed 27 Jan.
- F. Bathing pond - Officers
- G. Bathing pond - Other ranks
- H. Cemetery



Heights in feet Contour Interval 25 feet

With acknowledgement to Castle and Knight: Fearful Hard Times, p.95.



Two incidents from the siege. Much of the fighting around the fort consisted of small skirmishes between British and Zulu patrols – here a British outpost overpowers a solitary Zulu scout. Wynne's hot air balloon was an ingenious attempt to send messages to the outside world, but was thwarted by the vagaries of the weather *With acknowledgement to Castle and Knight: Fearful Hard Times p.130*

One surviving Zulu 'white flag' proves to have been nothing more than a white handkerchief skewered onto the corner with a stick.⁴⁹

In any case the garrison was clearly suspicious and the Zulu messengers were blindfolded and taken before Colonel Pearson to whom they explained that they were envoys sent by King Cetshwayo. They had an interesting offer to make; if the British retired to the Thukela without destroying any of the mealie fields along the way they would not be molested. They also assured Pearson that the local Zulu commanders, including Prince Dabulamanzi, supported this offer. The general opinion within the garrison was that this was a trick and that the men spies and they were promptly imprisoned.⁵⁰

In fact, the offer was probably genuine, for as March drew on, King Cetshwayo had realised that a new bout of fighting was imminent. Chelmsford had refused all peace offerings and substantial reinforcements were flooding into Durban on a daily basis, and the King was anxious to make a last diplomatic effort to head off the horrors of a new invigorated invasion.⁵¹

These envoys, so roughly treated were not the first ones. On 1st March two messengers had been sent to the Norwegian Bishop Schreuder's mission station at Ntumeni. They asked that the British troops withdraw from Zululand and that talks on a peace settlement would be initiated. They were told that the British would only accept Cetshwayo's

⁴⁹ Castle & Knight: The Siege of eShowe. p.144.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid. pp.144-161.

unconditional surrender to the terms of the ultimatum, i.e. the British were determined to punish and weaken the Zulu army and King. Acceptance of the terms of the ultimatum by Cetshwayo would have implied treachery towards his subjects, undermine his authority, destroy the strength of his army and thus make him King in name only.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BATTLE OF GINGINDLOVU

It had become clear to the Zulus throughout March that the war was about to enter a new active phase. The King's peace overtures had been steadily rebuffed, and the efficient Zulu intelligence network was fully aware that fresh British troops (reinforcements) were marching up to the frontier daily. For more than a month the warriors who made up the main army had been resting at their *imizi*, recovering from the traumatic experience of Isandlwana, Shiyane and Inyezane. However, by the middle of March, the King felt able to order his district *izinduna* to call the *amabutho*, and the army began to reassemble at oNdini.¹

The King and his *izikhulu* (officers) met at Ulundi and discussed how best to proceed with the campaign. King Cetshwayo was extremely angry that Pearson seemed to have taken root in Zululand, and the arrival of reinforcements at the Lower Thukela Drift in the last week of March clearly indicated that the British were preparing to advance on the coastal front. Despite the casualties they had already suffered, the Zulu army remained convinced that they could defeat the British if only they could confront them in the open field. So, when Cetshwayo and his *izikhulu* resolved to send the main Zulu army against Wood at Khambula, they also decided to reinforce the force already in the vicinity of eShowe with more men raised locally or with the coastal elements of *amabutho* sent from oNdini.²

¹ Castle, I. & Knight, I. :Fearful Hard Times, p. 189.

² CPT, no. 38: Drummond to Chelmsford, 27 March 1879: Report of spy Magunbi; Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p. 172; Rope of Sand, p. 274; See also Castle & Knight: Fearful Hard Times, p. 189.

The garrison at eShowe saw daily evidence during the last week of March of a growing Zulu concentration. Large bodies of Zulu filed down the distant hills towards the Inyezane, and their cooking fires multiplied in its valley. These *amabutho* were under the command of Somopho ka Zikhale, the chief of the Thembu, who was a typical representative of the king's inner circle of trusted commanders; he was a close friend of Cetshwayo, and held the post of *induna* of the emaNgweni *ikhanda*, which lay immediately north-east of eMpangeni. He was also the royal armourer, who also repaired muskets etc., in charge of the King's attempts to manufacture gunpowder and lead.³

He was assisted by his senior *induna*, Bhejane ka-Nomageja inkosi of the Cetsekhulu and *inceku* (personal aide) to Cetshwayo. Somopho's command consisted of about 3 000 Tsonga, augmented by about 1 500 men from the *amabutho* who were attached to the kwa-Gingindlovu *ikhanda*.⁴

Prince Dabulamanzi had remained in command of 1 000 *amabutho* in the immediate vicinity of eShowe, who were based at eNtumeni and who were keeping an eye on the fort. The tall and broad shouldered Sigwelegewele Ka Mhlekehleke, a royal *induna* and a King's favourite, proud commander of the iNgobamakhosi and Ngadini lineage had commanded about 3 000 *amabutho* from the Ngobamakhosi, uKhandampemvu, uNokhenke and uMbonambi *amabutho* who were quartered at Hlalangubo, the old oNdini *ikhanda*. A further 15 000 men of the iNdluyengwe *ibutho* were quartered at

³ Cubbin A., Empangeni, p.2. See, Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.172; Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times, p.191.

⁴ See, SPT, no. 38: Drummond to Chelmsford, 27 March 1879: Report of Spy Magumbi; Castle & Knight: Fearful Hard Times, p.191.

another *ikhanda*, isinPuseleni, nearby. The large and handsome Phalane ka Mdinwa, an *induna* of the royal Hlangezwa section, with his ornaments of beaten brass about neck and ankles, and his 50mm long nails (white as ivory), was Sigcwelegcwele's co-commander.⁵

On 28 March the eShowe British relief column advanced across the Thukela River into Zululand.⁶ John Dunn, who knew the country intimately, rode with the column and suggested a route closer to the coast which would reduce the danger of an ambush. Dunn had realised that there was little to gain by remaining neutral and indeed, Chelmsford had increasingly pressed him to abandon his neutrality. John Dunn had a nucleus of 150 trained hunters among his followers, who were far better shots and scouts than almost any other black auxiliaries to whom the British had access. He considered his options, and reacted with a pragmatism that had characterised his career in Zululand:

“... I knew that in the fighting between the Boers and the English at the Bay (Durban) my father had suffered by remaining neutral, so I made up my mind to go with Lord Chelmsford to the relief of the eShowe garrison.”⁷

This decision was, in many ways, a turning point in Dunn's life. By agreeing to fight with the British, Dunn irrevocably betrayed his substantial friendship for his old patron, King Cetshwayo. He was now serving with a British army in enemy territory for the first time, and found himself singularly unimpressed with their field craft and shouting:

⁵ See. Laband, J: *Kingdom in Crisis*, pp.170-1; Laband, J: *Rope of Sand*, p.279.

⁶ See. WO 32/7727; Chelmsford to Secretary of State For War. 10/04/1879.

⁷ Castle, I. and Knight, I. : *Fearful Hard Times*. p.174.

“We shall have to do better than this,” he commented sharply, “if we are to beat Cetshwayo’s *impi*”.⁸

On 29 March the British formed an entrenched laager / camp at the Nyoni River on their way to eShowe. Thus far nothing had been seen of the Zulu except signal fires burning on the hills, but reports of the Zulu movement on the 30 March suggested they were concentrating to oppose the invaders. The Zulu in the vicinity had been directed to ‘sit still’ for the moment, and are said to have contented themselves with smoking dagga while the British crossed the Amatigulu River.⁹

While pushing towards Ngoye Forest, Major Barrow and some of the mounted men burned the *umuzi* of Makwandu ka Mpande, the King’s half brother and six other *imizi*. The following day the mounted men patrolled about twelve kilometres inland towards eShowe, seeing a good many Zulu in the distance.¹⁰ Their patrols shrouded the movement of the main column from the Zulu scouts, so that the Zulu were left unsure of its strength and movement. It should be remembered that the Zulu strategy had been to invest eShowe and prepare to attack the relief column in the open.

⁸ Castle, I and Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times, p. 183.

⁹ Anti-Slavery Society papers, G12: Statement of one of the Native contingent with Colonel Pearson’s column made to Bishop of Natal; Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p. 171. Also confirmed by Mansizwa Mthethwa (oral evidence) 30/02/2001.

¹⁰ Stainbank Diary: 31 March, 1 April 1879; See also, Laband, J. Kingdom in Crisis, p. 171.

clumps of bush palm and undergrowth, which could provide an excellent cover for the Zulus. The white Zulu chief and British advisor, John Dunn, selected the best position available for the camp on the summit of a slight knoll.¹¹ Darkness fell before it was possible to cut down the tall grass and bush which came to within 100 metres of the camp and which would afford the Zulu welcome cover against British guns on the morrow. A heavy thunderstorm in the late afternoon and rain during the night, made conditions in the crowded and sodden camp most uncomfortable and sleep virtually impossible.¹²

It made sense that the Zulus should attack the relief column at some distance from the fort, for they must have been aware of the danger of being taken in the rear by the garrison forces. The position of the British, camped out in the open plain, was an added inducement for the Zulu to attack them there using their traditional enveloping tactic, which they felt the broken terrain at the battle of Nyezane had disrupted.¹³

The Zulu *amabutho* did not all arrive in time for the battle of Gingindlovu. The more seasoned *amabutho*, who had been in the vicinity of old oNdini only reached the main Zulu camp on the evening of 1 April. Most of them were very tired and hungry and it was too late to probe the British position.¹⁴ It was on that evening that Sigcwelegcwele and Phalane's detachment joined the main Zulu camp on the hills below eShowe. Some

¹¹ Laband, J.: *Kingdom in Crisis*, pp.171-2; Moodie, *John Dunn*, p.101.

¹² Laband, J.: *Rope of Sand*, p.280; Matthews, Chelmsford, pp.251-4.

¹³ Laband, J.: *Kingdom in Crisis*, p.172; See also, Anti-slavery Society papers, G12: Statement of One of the Native Contingent to Clenso: Testimony of Prisoners.

¹⁴ Mthethwa, T.: *Oral evidence*, 13/4/2000. See also Laband, J.: *Kingdom in Crisis*, p.172; Castle & Knight: *Fearful Hard Times*, p.191.

of the Zulu commanders wanted to attack the British immediately, but Dabulamanzi, showing uncharacteristic restraint persuaded them to wait until morning.¹⁵

Sadly, few Zulu accounts of the battle have survived, and it is impossible to determine the disposition of the individual *amabutho*, but it seems that most of the regiments had representatives present and that the total Zulu force numbered in excess of 11,000 men.¹⁶

At 6 a.m. on Wednesday 2 April the Zulu on the far side of the Nyezane, and on top of Missi Hill to the West of the British camp, came in sight of the British. Unlike Isandlwana, the British were in ideal formation for repelling a traditional Zulu onslaught. It was soon clear that the Zulu were intent on repeating their usual tactics, which were first to envelope the enemy before pressing home their central attack.¹⁷

The main Zulu body split into two columns, then crossed the Nyezane at two drifts about a mile apart, and as it advanced up the slopes towards the camp, it fanned out into the traditional two horns and chest attack formation. Their approach required them to shift their line of advance, and the most easterly column, the left horn, curled sharply to the right to attack the north-eastern corner of the camp, while the remaining body, the chest, streamed in a more gentle curve towards the northern face. A separate body, coming up from beyond Missi Hill to the West, formed the right horn.¹⁸

¹⁴ Mthethwa, T.: *Oral evidence*, 13/4/2000. See also Laband, J.: *Kingdom in Crisis*, p.172; Castle & Knight: *Fearful Hard Times*, p.191.

¹⁵ Castle, I. and Knight, I.: *Fearful Hard Times*, p.191; Laband, J.: *Kingdom in Crisis*, pp.172-73; Norris-Newman, *In Zululand*, p.142.

¹⁶ See, WO 32/7727: Chelmsford to Secretary of State for War, 10/4/1879; Laband, J.: *Kingdom in Crisis*, p.173; Castle I. And Knight, I.: *Fearful Hard Times*, p.193.

¹⁷ Sir F T Hamilton papers, HTN/103; Journal, 2 April 1879; Laband, J.: *Kingdom in Crisis*, p.173.

¹⁸ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: *Fearful Hard Times*, p.193.

All the columns were deployed in open order at the double, so that within ten minutes of their first being sighted they were formed in the classic horn and chest shape around three sides of the British position. Zulu reserves waited on the hills beyond the Nyezane, while the large body of women and *udibi* (supporting body of boys carrying food and sleeping mats) stayed safely away near eShowe.¹⁹

Lord Chelmsford had issued his officers with a pamphlet which described the distinctive uniforms worn on ceremonial occasions by the various Zulu regiments, and those officers who had yet to see them in action had expected to see the Zulu thus attired. On the contrary the Zulu did not wear ceremonial dress, but were generally stripped for action to their loin-covers as they had been at Khambula.²⁰

The British were enormously impressed by the rapidity and courage of the Zulu attack and its professionalism. Captain Edward Hutton marveled at the skill with which the Zulus skirmished:

“The dark masses of men, in open order and under admirable discipline, followed each other in quick succession, running at a steady pace through the long grass. Having moved steadily round so as exactly to face the British front, the larger portion broke into three lines, in knots and groups of from five to ten

¹⁹ H.L.Hall : With Assegai & Rifle: Reminiscences of A Transport Conductor in The Zulu War, Military History Journal, IV, 5 June, 1979; Norbury, H.F. Naval Brigade, p.271.

²⁰ See.Hutton. ‘Recollections’, p.70; Castle,I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times, p.193; Laband,J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.175; Rope of Sand, p.281.

men and advanced towards the enemy.”²¹

The brave Zulus continued to advance, still at a run, until they were about 700 metres from the British forces, when they began to open fire. In spite of the excitement of the moment, the British could not but admire the perfect manner in which these Zulu skirmished. A small knot of five or six would rise and dart through the long grass, dodging from side to side with heads down, rifles and shields kept low and out of sight. They would then suddenly sink into the long grass, and nothing but puffs of curling gun smoke would show their whereabouts.²²

The attack of the Zulu left horn and centre on the north-eastern and northern perimeter of the camp developed a little before the more hesitant one of the right horn on its western and southern flanks, which afforded less cover. The engagement was begun by the Gatling guns at 1000m range and when the Zulu closed to 400 or 300m the firing on both sides became incessant. With cries of *Sebephakathi*, “They are encircled!” and “uSuthu!” the Zulu tried to close in to fight hand to hand.²³ But, despite several desperate charges they never succeeded in approaching nearer than within 20m of the North-east corner of the camp.

The Zulu were unable to break through the wall of fire set up by the massed modern rifles, Gatling guns, artillery and rockets. In their grim determination they ceased to shout, and doggedly held their ground taking cover behind their fallen comrades. But

²¹ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times, p.195.

²² Ibid:p.195.

²³ Anti-slavery society Papers, G12:Statement of one of the Native contingent to Colenso; Mathenjwa, M.:Oral Evidence, 19/01/2000, Laband, J. :Kingdom in Crisis.p.175.

now they were in range of marksmen on top of the wagons and subjected to a double tier of fire. No troops in the world could long have withstood such punishment.²⁴

But even though the brave Zulu went on fighting. They had gone to ground in the long grass, wriggling forward, rising up on their elbows now and then and fired at the British defenders. As the Zulus reached the open space in front of the line, some of them, "brave to madness" charged forward with their *amahavu* (shields) up and their *amaklwa* (stabbing spears) drawn back ready for action. As the attack ground to a halt, the men composing the Zulu 'chest' began to filter to their right, past the corner of the square, and attempted to attack the companies of the 99th on the left face of the British position. The left horn meanwhile, probably supported by the elements of the chest, had pushed forward to where a concealed donga in a hollow allowed them the cover of some dead ground only a few metres in front of the front right corner.²⁵

The Zulu attack seems to have been very determined. Jack Royston recalled years later that one big Zulu had seemed to run right up to the gun, touching it with his arm, before he was cut down. Someone saw an *induna* 'haranguing them'. "As to what the Zulu maidens would say when they heard the Zulu had fled before British dogs," the force came on again, and was literally mown down by the severe and incessant fire power of the British guns.²⁶

The Zulu were erroneously encouraged by the presence of the NNC inside the rear of the camp to believe that there were not enough British soldiers to man the entire position and

²⁴ Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, pp. 175-6.

²⁵ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times, p. 198; Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p. 176.

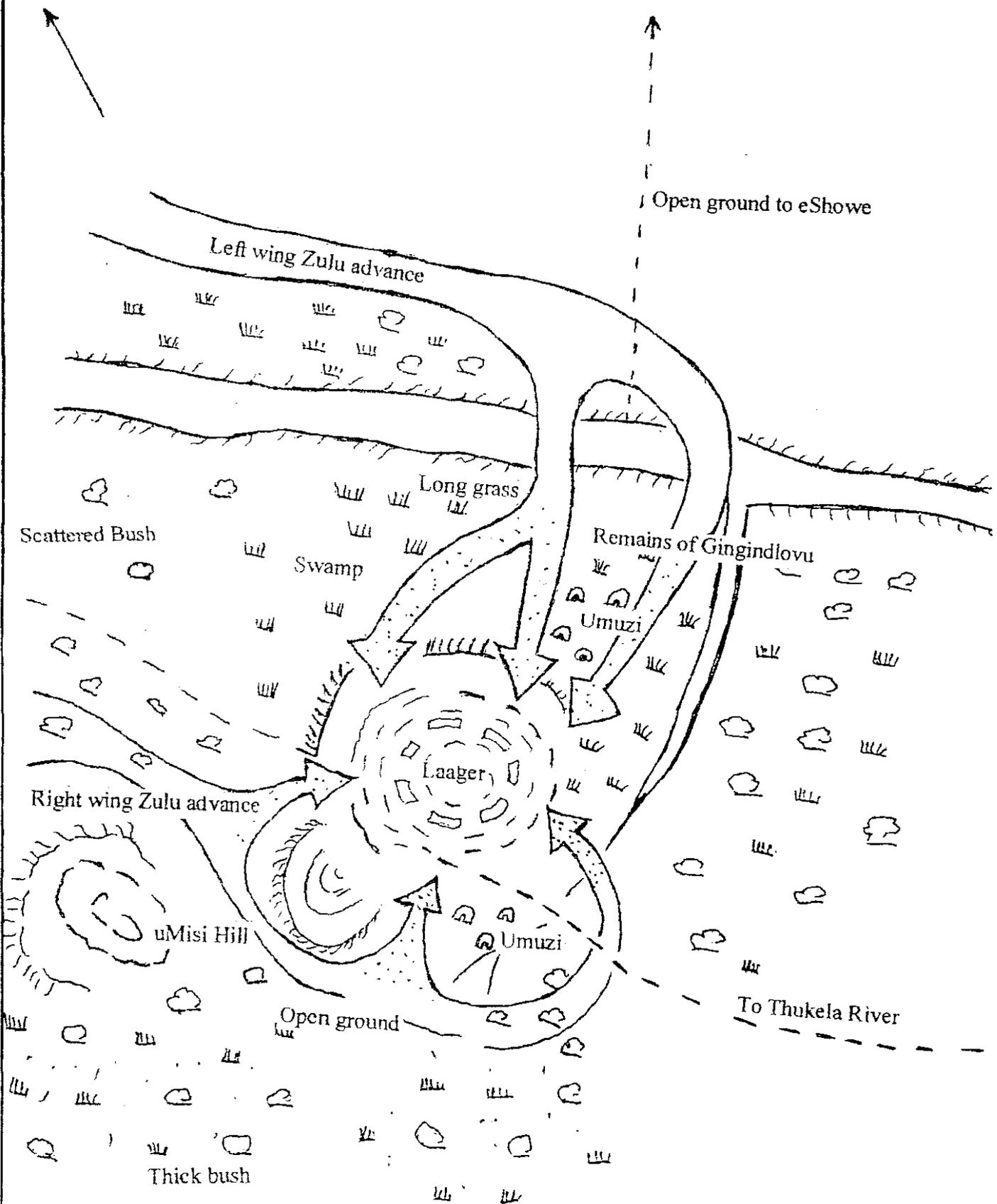
that the southern face must consequently be less strongly held than the others. Dabulamanzi, on horseback, directed this final effort, and he suffered a flesh wound above the left knee as he urged his men on from the thick of the fight.²⁷ However, this attack stalled like the others before impenetrable British fire, and the demoralised Zulu began to retire to the low ground below the rear of the camp.

Lord Chelmsford directed Major Barrow and his mounted men to move out of the camps unengaged eastern face and open fire on the Zulu right horn's eastern flank. Barrow's sortie was enough for the wavering Zulu to give up their last hopes of taking the camp. After standing for a few moments and firing at the mounted men, the Zulus gave up the

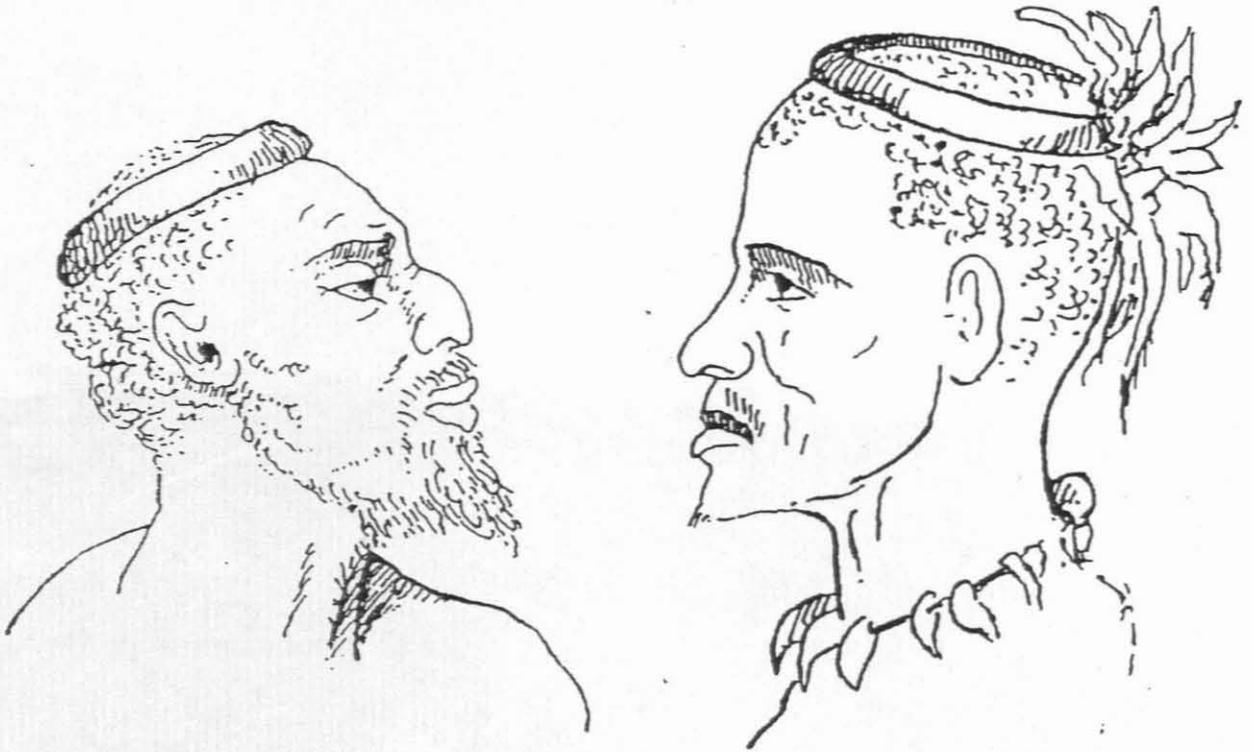
²⁶ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times, p.198.

²⁷ Natal Witness, 19 July, 1879; Correspondent with Crealock's Column, 13 July, 1879; Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times, p.202.

THE BATTLE OF GINGINDLOVU, 2 APRIL 1879



Composite map with acknowledgement to Smal, J.L.: *Historical monuments and battlefields In Natal & Zululand.*

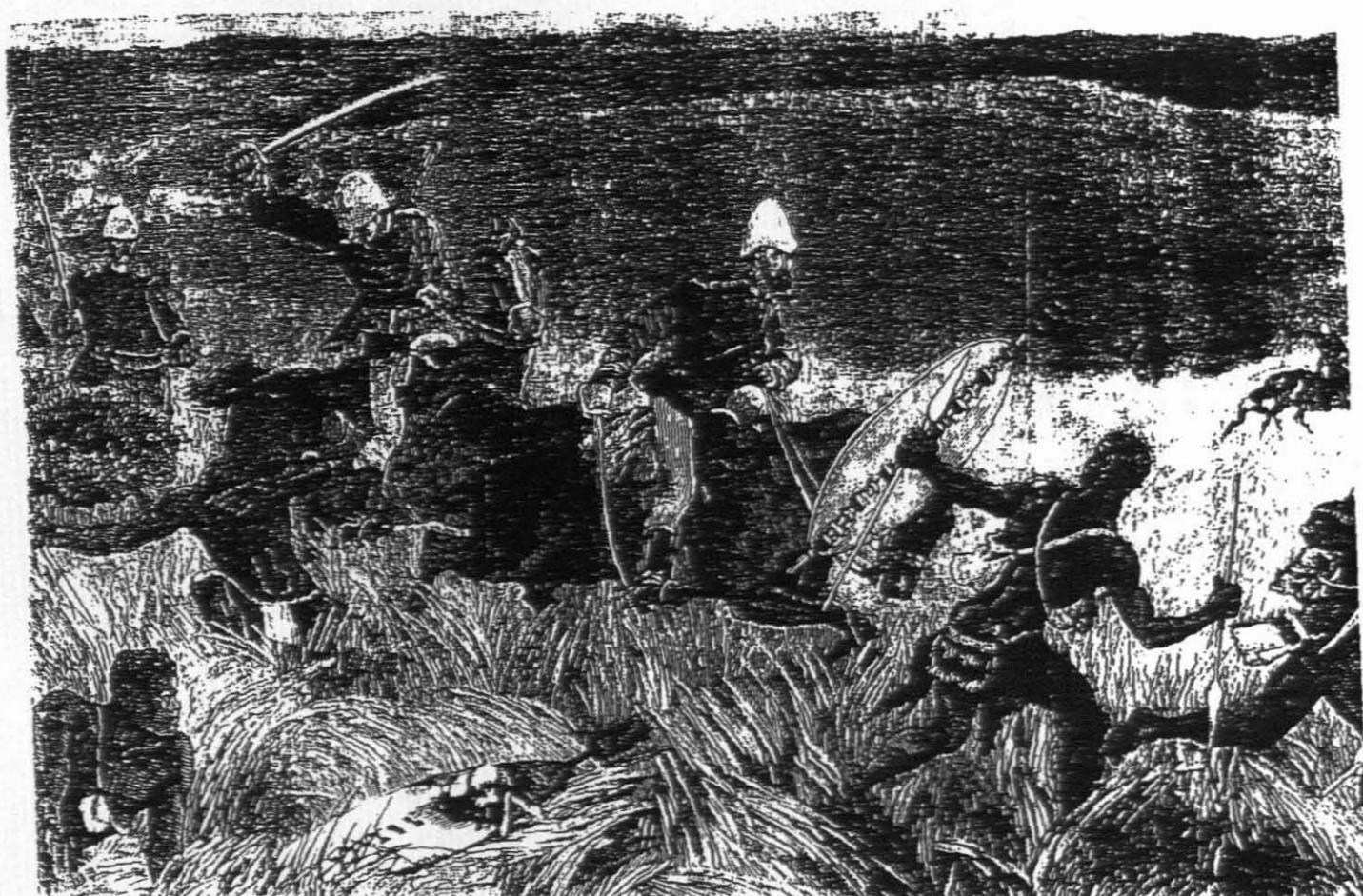


(Left) Sigwelegcwele kaMhlekehleke, the commander of the iNgobamakhosi *ibutho*, and a 'Zulu divisional commander at Gingindlovu. (Sketch by Edward Hutton. Africana Museum, Johannesburg)

(Right) Chief Somopho kaZikhale, the senior Zulu commander at Gingindlovu. (Sketch by Edward Hutton. Africana Museum, Johannesburg)



(Left) An incident during the pursuit at Gingindlovu; this may be Sergeant Anderson's famous duel. (Sketch by John North Crealock. Sherwood Foresters' Museum, Nottingham)



Above: The mounted pursuit after Gingindlovu. The Mounted Infantry who, unlike the Volunteers, were armed with sabres, cut down fleeing Zulus.

With acknowledgement to Castle and Knight: Fearful Hard Times no.53



This dramatic engraving appeared in the extra supplement to *The Illustrated London News*, dated May 24th, and was entitled 'The Final Repulse of The Zulus at Ginghilovo' (sic). Based on sketches supplied by Lord Chelmsford's military secretary, Lieutenant-Colonel John North Crealock, it depicts the mounted infantry under Captain (later Major) Percy Barrow driving the Zulus from the field — a rout

which became a bloody execution as the exhausted Zulus were cut down by fresh, eager horsemen committed to avenging the disaster of Isandlwana. *Opposite:* Today the extensive sugar-cane cultivation in this area has obliterated all traces of the battle. The cattle laager was located along the edge of the right-hand canefield, corresponding with its position in the contemporary engraving.

With acknowledgement to Castle and Knight: The Zulu War: Then and Now

effort and commenced their retreat. In their effort to escape, the Zulus abandoned their weapons and accoutrements. Some of them threw themselves down without any attempt to resist, to be speared by the NNC who attacked enthusiastically. The other part of Barrow's force pursued the Zulus who were retiring from the front of the camp, and followed them up towards the -- *ikhanda* driving them through the flooded Nyezane.²⁸ It should be considered that throughout, the Zulu fire power had been extremely heavy, but, as usual, inaccurate and mostly high.²⁹

The two large bodies of Zulu reserves on the hills beyond the Nyezane retreated when they saw the rest of the army put to flight. Fire from the nine pounder guns dispersed a considerable number of the Zulu right horn who, thinking they had gone far enough to be out of danger, had rallied on Missi Hill. After this bombardment, the Zulus made no further attempt at a stand, but dispersed North and West.³⁰

Long lines of dispirited *amabutho* were seen from Fort eShowe trekking away Northwards along the coast country to the Mlalazi River, where they halted for a while before breaking up. Some elements seem later to have rallied further north in Mhlathuze valley to oppose a possible British advance.³¹ Those who lived further away returned to their homes, while the men of eShowe region took refuge with their families and cattle in

²⁸ Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis p.177; Vijn, Cetshwavo's Dutchman, p.40.

²⁹ Castle, I. & Knight, I. Fearful Hard Times, p.119.

³⁰ See, WO 32/7750: Diary of 2nd Brigade, 1st Division, 21 April 1879; Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, p.283; Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.177.

³¹ CSO 1926, no. 2051/1879: Fannin to colonial Secretary, 17/04/1879.

the Nkandla and Ngoye forest. The dispirited manner in which the Zulu scattered showed that they had suffered a demoralising and significant defeat.³²

Bunny Mynors, who had survived his baptism of fire unscathed, found that once the excitement of the battle had passed, the sight of the Zulu dead, was a sobering spectacle:

“It was a fearful sight,” he wrote,
 “so many of these brave chaps lying
 about covered with blood, and gore”.³³

Backhouse of ‘The Buffs’ was also moved to sympathy :

“I went over the field where the dead Zulu
 were lying in the afternoon; it was a ghastly
 sight, such fine men, too, they were as thick
 as peas in some places.”³⁴

On the day after the battle, Jack Roystone had witnessed an incident which would affect him for the rest of his life. He had been searching the field when he found two Zulus lying wounded in a donga, both shot in the chest. They were able to walk, however, and Roystone led them towards the camp. Before he reached it he encountered a colonial officer who cursed him roundly for his compassion, promptly produced a revolver, and shot both Zulus dead:

“I was at an age when such things leave
 impression”, recalled Royston, “it took me

³² Moodie, *John Dunn*, p.103.

³³ Castle, I. & Knight, I. *Fearful Hard Times*, p.212.

³⁴ *Ibid*; p.212.

a long time to get over it. The man was much older than I, and I was powerless to prevent his action though I knew it was wrong.”³⁵

Because the Zulu army at Gingindlovu was routed and rapidly dispersed, it had no means of assessing its casualties. Chelmsford reported that 471 Zulus had been buried close to the camp, and that another 200 dead had been found near the scene. The total Zulu loss in killed was estimated at 1000.³⁶ Other officers considered Chelmsford’s tally an under-estimation. The war office accepted their opinion and put the figure at 1200.³⁷

At least two Zulu *izikhulu* died at Gingindlovu and great many sons of chiefs and prominent Zulu were among slain.³⁸ Many more were wounded, although it is impossible to compute how many; Dabulamanzi was among them, having been hit in the thigh during the attack of the right horn.³⁹

³⁵ *Ibid*; pp.228-229.

³⁶ Laband, J.: *Kingdom in Crisis*, p.178; Castle & Knight, *Fearful Hard Times* p.211; WO 32/7727: Chelmsford to Secretary of State for War, 10/04/1879.

³⁷ War Office, Narrative, p.65; Laband, J.: *Kingdom in Crisis*, p.178.

³⁸ Webb & Wright: *Zulu King Speaks*, p.37.

³⁹ Castle, I. Knight, I.: *Fearful Hard Times*, p.211.

CHAPTER SIX

THE RELIEF OF eSHOWE, 3 – 5 April 1879

On the 3rd April Lord Chelmsford's force marched out from Gingindlovu camp to relieve Fort eShowe. The British were still considering the possibility of a Zulu attack to be a very real one, while the garrison at eShowe remained concerned that the retreating Zulus might yet rally.¹

That Fort eShowe should be evacuated was a sound and a pragmatic decision, but it was a very difficult one for Pearson's men to accept.

"As you may suppose", wrote one of them:

"We were very sorry to hear that our impregnable fort was to be given up. The fort that had taken us so much trouble to construct, and which we held for ten weeks, was to play no part in future operations, but was to be abandoned to the Zulus after all."

Nevertheless, Pearson's men set about preparing the fort for evacuation. It was decided that any munitions which could not be taken away should be thrown down the well in the centre of the fort, in the hope 'that when covered in', the Zulu would never look for them there'.²

Rather a short-sighted and selfish act in the long run.

The line of march (from Gingindlovu to eShowe) was littered with evidence of past campaigning. Zulu *amahawu* (shields), *imikhonto* (spears) and *izibhanu* (firearms) and other accoutrements were strewn along the banks of the Nyezane, where the long grass concealed

¹ Castle, I. & Knight, I. : Fearful Hard Times. 216.

² Castle, I. & Knight, I. : Fearful Hard Times, pp.116/217.

many dead from the previous day's battle. Beyond the river, no less than eight broad tracks were found in the grass, marking the paths by which the Zulu force had assembled to attack the camp.³

Pearson had, indeed, set out from eShowe on the 4th April 1879, with about 500 white soldiers, fifty black auxiliaries, the mounted infantry and one gun, intending, as Lord Chelmsford had suggested on 31st March, to support the relief column if it were attacked. Even at this late stage those left behind in eShowe were nervous that the Zulus might take the advantage of the absence of half the fighting force, and attack the fort as one of the garrison put it, however, they (the Zulus) 'were not equal to the occasion, and contented themselves with only looking at us'.⁴

Lord Chelmsford had confirmed his orders to Pearson to abandon the post. The General, however, was determined to make one last gesture before he left. It was widely rumored that Prince Dabulamanzi had retired to his eZulwini *ikhanda* on eNtumeni Hill after Gingindlovu. Since Dabulamanzi had remained largely unscathed, despite Pearson's raid on eSiqwakeni on 1st March, the general 'determined' as Molyneux put it, 'to show the King's brother that he (Chelmsford) too, had a long arm to strike with'. While Pearson supervised the evacuation of the fort on 4th April, Chelmsford accompanied a patrol of 225 men led by Major Barrow to destroy Dabulamanzi's eZulwini *umuzi* at eNtumeni, which had escaped burning during the raid of 1st March.⁵ A small force of forty Zulu led by Dabulamanzi kept up fire from a

³ Castle, I & Knight, I. : Fearful Hard Times, p.217.

⁴ Ibid; p.220.

⁵ See. Castle, I & Knight, I. Fearful Hard Times, p.223, Laband, J. Kingdom in Crisis, p.178.

neighbouring hill, but were this time unable to prevent the British from completing their retributive mission.⁶

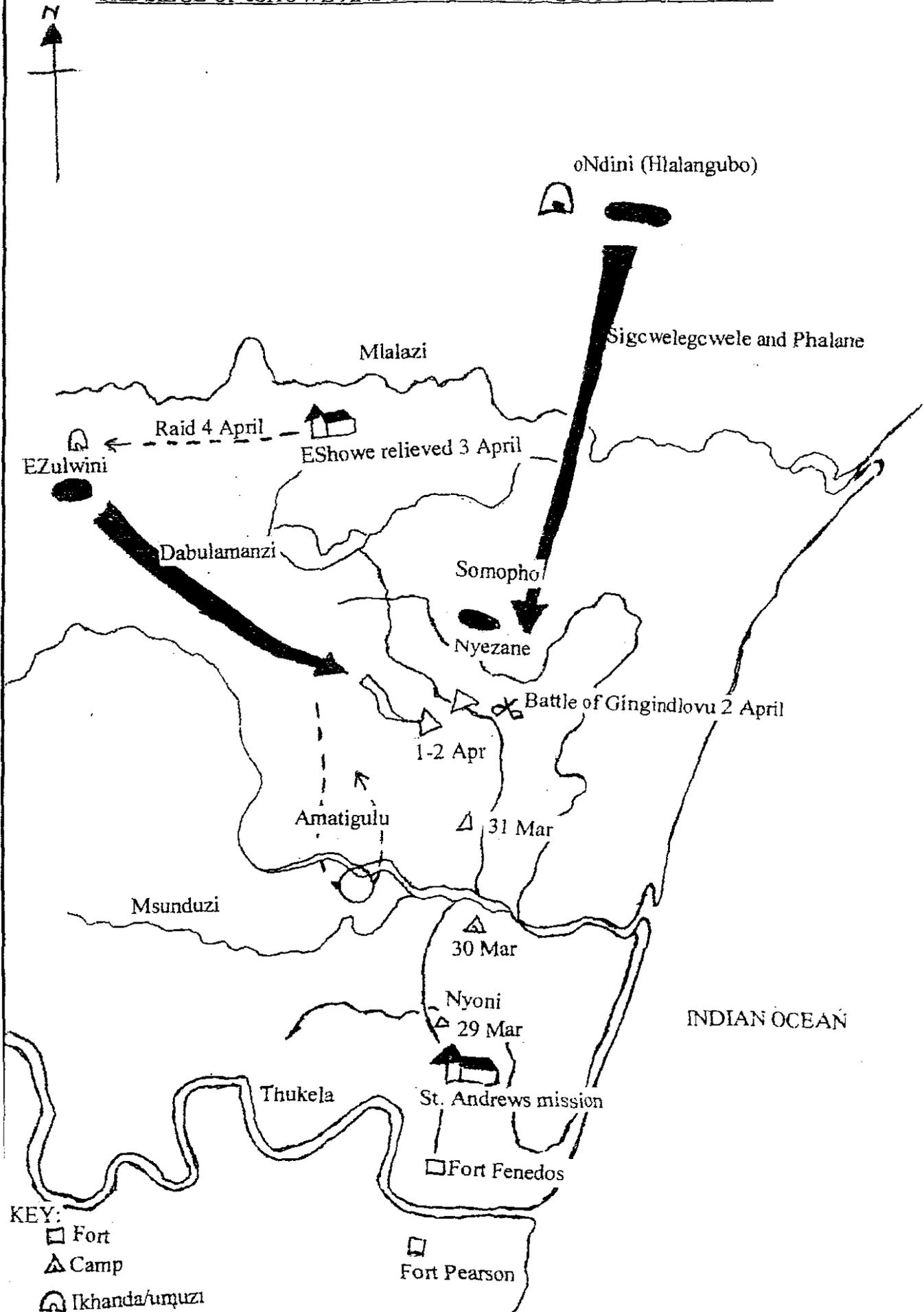
According to Dawnay, the expedition failed to catch the Zulus by surprise. Most had already climbed up to the top of a cliff overlooking eZulwini, about 1 300 metres away. A few stragglers were still climbing up, and shouted a war-cry in defiance. Barrow's men chased after them, shooting two and capturing a third. They then set fire to the *umuzi*. As the flames caught hold, Molyneux noted the splutter of gunfire from within the *amaqhugwane* (huts), and concluded 'there must have been many loaded guns left in them'. The explosion became so frequent that Barrow's men were obliged to move further off, and as long as they bunched together, they presented a tempting target to the Zulus on the cliff top. The shooting was remarkably professional, as Dawnay noted:

“Then came a puff of smoke and a bullet swished over our heads, then came others, and lower and lower till we heard them hit the ground among us, and then we were ordered to separate and not give such a big bull's eye to them. “I led my horse away, a bullet came right between my hand and my horse's head and went into the ground about fifteen feet further on...”⁷

⁶ WO 32/7727: Chelmsford to Secretary of State for War, 10 March 1879; Molyneux campaigning, pp.141-143.

⁷ Castle, I. & Knight, I. : Fearful Hard Times: p.224.

THE SIEGE OF eSHOWE AND ITS RELIEF 28 MARCH - 4 APRIL 1879



Composite map with acknowledgement to Castle and Knight: *Fearful Hard Times*, p. 184

Dunn, with his hunter's eyesight, recognised that the marksman was Prince Dabulamanzi himself. Dunn had taught the Prince to shoot in the happier days before the war and he now took up his rifle to duel with his old friend. Watching through the naval telescope, the staff pronounced Dunn the winner; several times they saw the Zulus duck as Dunn's bullets whistled over their heads. But the range was too long: "As there was nothing to be gained by this sport", commented Molyneux, "we destroyed their mealie fields and made our way back to eShowe".⁸

The next morning, 5th April, the British march was resumed at 07h00. The relieving column and garrison left Fort eShowe for Natal, leaving behind six officers and thirty-five men lying buried in the little cemetery. The Zulu immediately set fire to the buildings and the abandoned fort, but did not in any way harm the British graves and crosses.⁹ The British column passed its old battlefield at Nyezane, and the men were delighted to see that the Zulus had not interfered with the rough wooden cross which marked the resting place of the British dead.¹⁰ As for Cetshwayo, he might have been rid of the detested British presence at eShowe, but that was small compensation for the disastrous defeat suffered by his coastal forces.

As Lord Chelmsford rode back with Dunn, they passed the site of Dunn's old homesteads, at eMoyeni and Mangethe. The Zulus had vented their frustration at his desertion on the buildings, and had looted and destroyed them. Molyneux described Dunn's reaction:

"Dunn's house was a sorry sight. Everything
had been looted or pitched outside. Some things

⁸ Castle, I. & Knight, I.: Fearful Hard Times: p.224.

⁹ Norbury, N.F. Naval Brigade, pp.299-300; Laband, J.: Kingdom in Crisis, p.179.

¹⁰ Castle & Knight. : Fearful Hard Times, p.225.

had been burned but what vexed him most was the destruction of all his journals. He took it very stoically, merely observing, 'I have not done with Zulus yet'.¹¹

¹¹ Castle & Knight, : Fearful Hard Times, p.225.

CONCLUSION

The disastrous defeat(s) suffered by Cetshwayo's coastal *amabutho* was a very terrible blow for the king and his *izikhulu*. No wonder that King Cetshwayo castigated his generals for their inept failure at Gingindlovu.¹ The way to Ulundi was now open.

Lord Chelmsford, for his part, was determined to allow the Zulus no chance to regain their momentum. Consequently, on 7 April, he sent orders from Fort Pearson for continued military raids to be made across the Natal-Zululand border. The flooded state of the Thukela River, however, prevented the border troops from doing more than hover menacingly at the unaffordable drifts. Only by the last week of April the Zulus along the Thukela River considered it safe to return to their *imizi*.²

Lord Chelmsford had intended Major-General Crealock's First Division to play a vital part in his strategy for the second invasion of Zululand. Its specified task was to support the 2nd Division and the flying columns in their advance on oNdini by marching up the coast and forcing Cetshwayo to detach fighting men from the main Zulu *impi* in defence of the south-east of his Kingdom. That is why Crealock's initial objective was to be the destruction of eMangweni and old oNdini Amakhanda. Within sixteen kilometres of each other either side of the Mhlathuze River, for it was presumed that Cetshwayo would not allow them to be burned without making some attempt to protect them.³

¹ SNA 1/1/34, no. 85: Statement of Silahlala, 3 June. 1879.

² Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, pp.284-5.

³ Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, p.293; Kingdom in Crisis, p.190; Cubbin, A.: eMangweni, p.2.

It should be remembered that eMangweni was established by the Zulu King, Mpande, and it was his royal military umuzi strategically situated on the coast near the mouth of the Mhlathuze River. eMangweni was the home of Mpande's wife Ngqumbazi Manzini,⁴ the mother of King Cetshwayo. Here Cetshwayo, born in approximately 1832, lived on and off before his accession to the Zulu throne in 1873. eMangweni played an important launching role in the battle of Nyezane on 22 January 1879.

Accordingly Major-General Crealock was supposed to move as quickly as possible or at least keep up with Lord Chelmsford's plan. Against this, General Crealock encountered transport and supply problems. Consequently he failed to fulfill his primary objective of forcing Cetshwayo to divide his *amabutho*.

There were indications that Cetshwayo had initially planned to *ukugojela* (eat up) the First Division before turning his attention to Chelmsford's joint force.⁵ However when Cetshwayo realised that Crealock would never be able to arrive in time to join Chelmsford in his advance on oNdini, he decided to ignore the First Division's presence and concentrate on Chelmsford's more immediate threat which had the potential for naval assistance along the Zululand coast. Consequently, when he called up his *amabutho* he left only a few irregulars living in the coastal country with their families to protect the cattle and, if possible, to drive them out of reach of Crealock's patrols.⁶

It was not easy for King Cetshwayo to summon his *amabutho* against the likelihood of a final stand against the invader. Mobilization took some time, for it was necessary to send out the

⁴ Cubbin, A. : *eMangweni*, p.1.

⁵ Laband, J. : *Kingdom in Crisis* , p.190. Also confirmed by O.Mthethwa, Oral evidence, 4 February 2002.

⁶ Webb & Wright: *Zulu King Speaks*. p.34.

order by *isigijimi* (runner) or signal to the far corners of the kingdom. Besides, after the defeats of March and April there was a natural reluctance to face the British again,⁷ though many *amabutho* indicated a grim preparedness to do so if it was required of them. Perhaps a factor in their determination was the extraordinary rumour sweeping Zululand that if they were to yield, the whites would take their wives and *bathene* (castrate) all the surviving Zulu *amadoda* (males). This was corroborated in Zulu minds by the fictitious tale that Gamdana who had defected in January, had already been mutilated and sent away to an island.⁸

It was clear to Crealock's patrols at the coast that by the end of May the coastal *amabutho* were retreating to oNdini. By early June there was positive intelligence that the coastal element of the *amabutho* had been called up, as well as those living along the Natal border and in the upper district of Zululand. It was of considerable significance that the great majority of the *amabutho* still seemed prepared to fight on for their King, despite their undeniably lowered morale, and the continuing reluctance of some elements to respond to the King's reiterated command to reassemble.⁹

The First Division moved through the coastal country side clear of people, except for some concentrations beyond Mlalazi and Ngoye forests. Resistance was naturally minimal, even when the British were at their most vulnerable i.e. crossing rivers. Apart from occasionally cutting the First Division's telegraph wire, the only aggressive action the Zulus took was to fire harmlessly now and again from a great range at British forward patrols on the south bank of the Mlalazi river.

⁷ Laband, J.: *Kingdom in Crisis*, p.190.

⁸ Laband, J.: *Kingdom in Crisis*, pp. 190-1; also confirmed by O.Mthethwa, Oral Evidence, 6 January 2002.

⁹ *Ibid*: p.191.

The lack of military assistance from Cetshwayo made the coastal *amakhosi* believe that the king had turned his back on them.¹⁰ On 21 April, near kwa Gingindlovu, *umtwana* (Prince) Makwendu kaMpande, with 130 men, women and children, gave himself up to the advance parties of the First Division. He told his captors that it had been the wish of all his adherents to surrender; as they saw the war could no longer be won, but that the king, learning of this intention, had sent an *impi* to intercept part of his following, killing some and taking his cattle.¹¹

There were persistent rumours that some of the great Zulu *izikhulu* magnates of the southern coastal region including Dabulamanzi and Mavumengwana, were also contemplating surrender. There were reports too, from other parts of the country, that some *amakhosi*, with their homesteads full of wounded and dying, intended to surrender once the British had advanced sufficiently to do it with impunity.¹²

Faced with such wavering, and uncertain how best to prosecute the increasing disastrous war in mid-May, King Cetshwayo summoned the principal men of his kingdom to give him their advice. It was reported that they opposed the continuation of the war and strongly urged peace. Thus, apparently unnerved by the disaffection of his *izikhulu*, King Cetshwayo consented to begin a new peace initiative.¹³ However his *amabutho* were still unwilling to give up without a fight. Cetshwayo consequently assured them that although he was entering

¹⁰ Cubbin, A.: *eMangweni*, p.3.

¹¹ Laband, J.: *Rope of Sand*, p.294.

¹² Molyneux, W.C.F. *Campaigning*, p.136.

¹³ Laband, J.: *Rope of Sand*, 295.

into negotiations with the British, he was uncertain if they would have any effect and was therefore still determined to attack the British if they came on as far as Mahlabathini plain.¹⁴

In early June, just before the First Division was finally ready to commence its full advance, Dabulamanzi began at last to treat with the British, confirming earlier rumours that he intended doing so. On 8 June his messengers arrived at Fort Pearson where Crealock maintained his headquarters until 17 June and stated that he was “anxious to come in”, but that he had been dissuaded so far by messengers from the King who wished him to negotiate peace on his behalf.¹⁵

A further private message towards the end of June from the prince (Dabulamanzi) and Mavumengwane assured the British that it was not out of deceit that they had failed to give up. Ever since Prince Makwendu’s defection on 21st April, they had been closely watched, and were still awaiting a chance to slip away. Two other major figures along the coast hearkened to their people’s yearning for peace and took positive steps to come to terms. Phalane, one of the commanders at Gingindlovu, and the even more distinguished Somopho, senior *induna* of eMangweni *ikhanda* and commander in chief at the battle of Gingindlovu, sent to Crealock on 5th June admitting they were beaten and asking for terms.¹⁶ They took this step openly, for they also informed Cetshwayo that their men would not reassemble at oNdini, as he had ordered them to do so.¹⁷

At eMangweni on 5th July the coastal *amakhosi* tendered their general submission to Crealock. It was also at eMangweni on 19th July 1879 that General Sir Garnet Wolseley, who

¹⁴ Moodie, John Dunn, p.103.

¹⁵ Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, p.299.

¹⁶ Cubbin, A.: eMangweni, p.3.

¹⁷ Laband, J.: Rope of Sand, pp.299-300.

had superseded Lord Chelmsford, addressed some 250 Zulu dignitaries announcing the end of the Zulu Kingdom requiring of them only their arms and royal cattle.¹⁸ These lenient terms encouraged desertion from the increasingly alienated Cetshwayo.

Once the 1st Division crossed the Mlalazi on 22 June, its patrols became as aggressive as those of the 2nd Division and Flying Column. Successively on 23, 24, 26 and 30 June they scoured the countryside bounded by the Mlalazi, Port Durnford, the Mhlathuze and the foothills of the Ngoye range, driving the Zulu and their cattle into the sanctuary of the Ngoye forest. In the course of these punitive sorties, in which the Zulu made little attempt to resist, but fled leaving their stores of mealies intact and their potatoes sown, the British killed five Zulu and captured many others, besides lifting 378 cattle, 27 sheep and 29 goats. They also destroyed over fifty *imizi*, including the principal ones belonging to Sigcwelegcwele and Phalane. On 4th July a strong patrol under Major Barrow fulfilled one of the 1st Division's official objectives by burning the eMangweni ikhanda and twelve *imizi* in its vicinity, as well as capturing 600 cattle. eMangweni consisted of 310 huts, and seems to have been unoccupied for some time. On 6th July Major Barrow and his men burned the 640 huts of the old oNdini ikhanda. Like eMangweni, it was deserted and undefended. At the end of the Anglo-Zulu war eMangweni was scorched, black and empty.¹⁹

Thus it became evident that the Zulu resistance along the coast was slowly being asphyxiated by the growing British army who now found the road to the Zulu capital open for the final showdown in this unfortunate war.

¹⁸ See the following, Cubbin, A.E. : *eMangweni*, p.3, Laband, J.: *Rope of Sand*, pp.326-7; Richards, M.W. *Admiral Richards*, pp. 32-33. This is Admiral M.W. Richards's report from Port Durnford on 13th July 1879

¹⁹ Cubbin, A.E. *eMangweni*, *passim*.

The stunning defeat at Isandlwana, which soon reverberated around the world, arguably ensured the eventual defeat of the Zulu nation. This humiliation to the mighty British Empire united those in government to defeat the Zulu nation on the outskirts of the Empire. Their hurt British pride needed to be assuaged and they wanted to show the world that they were indeed still rulers of their mighty Empire. Sir Bartle Frere, the British High Commissioner for South Africa, did not have to press for his policy of Confederating South Africa. Wounded pride and high resolve focussed on the ultimate humiliation of the Zulu King, his *amabutho* and his nation.

The Empire's resources, fetched and carried by the greatest maritime power in the world, poured reinforcements into Natal. The Zulu *amabutho* had received reverses at Khambula and Gingindlovu and the British military pincer movements were closing in on Cetshwayo's royal capital, Ulundi.

We have seen the details of the collapse of the coastal flank as the relentless British advance and easy peace terms opened up the road to Ulundi. The traditional Zulus could not sustain a prolonged intensive campaign as they had to survive on their fragile subsistence agriculture, cattle which were easily stolen and their *imizi* which were easily torched by the invading army. Their traditional weapons, so effective at close quarters, were no match at Ulundi on 4 July 1879 for modern artillery (12 pieces of artillery – 9 pounders), 2 quick firing Gatling guns, cavalry with horses, sabres and lances, breech-loading rifles and endless ammunition, the cold steel of bayonets and swords in the hands of approximately 4,000 trained basically professional British troops fired up by revenge and patriotism. In addition the approximately 1,000 black soldiers also had a score to settle which they did with vindictive relish at the battle of Ulundi.

As the defeated retreating *amabutho* looked at the flames of their *amakhanda* in eMakhosini, they knew that they had done their best and had lost comprehensively against the British Empire in the open, and that hard times were ahead for them as they attempted to restore their lives as best they could dictated by a British settlement.

In the final analysis there is not a lot of 'black' opinion to utilize when attempting this re-evaluation and this is disappointing. The fact that Zulu people were illiterate and seldom took the trouble to write down their experiences has impacted on this thesis. But this has been the reality of my experience.

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6. INTERVIEWS

- Dlamini, M. Interviewed at the University of Zululand in the History Department, 3-5 March 2000. Mr Dlamini is an imbongi (praiser) from Nongoma. His ancestor, Mpiyonke, fought in the umxhapho *ibutho* during the War of 1879.
- Khumalo, T. Interviewed at his home, kwa Bhekicala, at kwaNongoma, on 8 March 2000. While he was still young his grandfather used to tell stories about the strength of the Zulu amabutho in the war of 1879.
- Mthethwa, O. Interviewed at kwaNgwenya (Chief Mthethwa's umuzi) on 29 July 2000. Mr Obert Mthethwa is the advisor and the mouthpiece of inkosi Ntemba Mthethwa. He is familiar with Zulu ceremonies especially those that involves *inkosi*, e.g. *Umkhosi*.
- Mzimela, D. Interviewed on 17 August 2000 at kwaDlangezwa. His grandfather, Chief Zimema, fought in the uMxhapho *ibutho* during the war of 1879. Mr Mzimela gave information on the role played by the Zulu commanders in the war of 1879.
- Khumalo, J.N. Interviewed at Ndumo in the Northern Zululand area on 10 August 2000. He is the deputy principal at Namaneni High School. Mr Khumalo studied Zulu history a couple of years ago. He gave information on the role played by Zulu *izinhloli* during times of war.
- Hadebe, J.S. Interviewed at oYengweni, next to King Dingiswayo's *ikhanda*, of the same name on 6 July 2000. Mr Hadebe is the headmaster of Uyengo High School. He is a Zulu scholar and presently he is doing a Ph.D. on Zulu history. He provided useful information especially when it comes to Zulu words.
- Mlondo, B. Interviewed at eMpangeni on 16 July 2000. Presently Dr Mlondo is the Director in the Department of Education in the Ulundi Region. He is involved in many Zulu cultural activities and he is familiar with Zulu history. He vividly gave information on the problems encountered by the Zulu army in the war of 1879 that he had gathered in his studies.
- Khumalo, M. Interviewed at eNgodla on 10 February 2001. He is an *induna* and a personal advisor of *inkosi* Ntemba Mthethwa. His grand-father, Manyonyoba, fought in the uMbonambi *ibutho* during the war of 1879. According to Mr Khumalo, Zulu commanders especially along the coast did not utilise Cetshwayo's instructions sufficiently.
- Ntuli, S. Interviewed at Kwa Zulu Monument Council, Ulundi, on 14 May 2001. Mr Ntuli is the previous principal of Umbiya High School. He studied Zulu History at University level and he still has an interest in this subject. Mr Ntuli maintains that the figures given especially when it comes to the death of the British are incorrect.

- Mthethwa, M. Interviewed at his *umuzi*, kwa Nondwayiza, on 13 May 2000. The seventy year old Mansizwa Mthethwa is the half brother of inkosi Ntemba Mthethwa. Although Mr Mthethwa was illiterate but he could set forth his views properly. The old man gave a useful information on the strategies and tactics employed by the Zulu commanders in the war of 1879.
- Mkhwanazi, T. Interviewed at Mtubatuba on 11 December 2000. He is the headmaster of Umbusowabathethwa High School. His father has studied Zulu history and has conducted a research on the Reign of King Cetshwayo kaMpande. According to Mr Mkhwanazi King Cetshwayo was the most brilliant Zulu King after Shaka.
- Mbuyazi, L. Interviewed at eShowe on 17 September 2000. Mrs Mbuyazi was the only 'diamond in a desert' in the sense that she was the only female interviewed during the course of this research. Nevertheless her contribution was very important. Mrs Mbuyazi is a blood relative of Donald Mzimela (Chief Zimema's grandson) who was interviewed on 17 August 2000. According to Mrs Mbuyazi, the Zulu war affected and in some cases disrupted, the lives of the Zulu people.
- Zungu, K. Interviewed at eNtumeni (eShowe) on 13 October 2000. Like Mansizwa Mthethwa, Mr Zungu could not read and write but he was very helpful in his presentation. He was very familiar with the Zulu *amabutho* along the coast especially their movements during the Battle of Inyezane.
- Zulu, P. Interviewed at Ulundi on 9 March 2000. Mr Zulu is a blood relative of His Majesty King Zwelithini kaNyangayezizwe. He is an heir to the Zulu royal family. His extensive knowledge of the Zulu War of 1879 was of great importance. He gave information on the role played by the Zulu Royal family e.g. abantwana (heirs) in the war of 1879.
- Nduli, V. Interviewed at oYengweni on 6 July 2000. Mr Nduli grew up at eShowe. His grand-grand parents were among the victims of the Zulu War especially after the Zulu defeat at Gingindlovu. Mr Nduli gave information on how the Zulu war affected the Zulu economic system in 1879.
- Madondo, L. Interviewed at Imvubu Centre (Richards Bay) on 20 June 2000. Presently Dr Madondo is the Subject advisor for isiZulu at Empangeni Region. He was of great help to me with the Zulu language.
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