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Indigenous resistance in the Anglo-Zulu War

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Abstract

The Anglo-Zulu War, one of the shortest of the Victorian (South Africa) 'small wars', saw the Zulus score a notable victory over the British army at Isandlwana in January 1879. This defeat resulted in the worst single day's loss of life suffered by British troops between the battle of Waterloo in June 1815 and the opening campaigns of the Great War in August 1914. Within months, however, the traditional Zulu way of war had condemned them to tactical and strategic defeat. Their reliance upon close-quarter hand-to-hand combat even when confronted by superior British firepower cost them 6,000 dead and subjected them to a post-war political settlement that dismantled the military system that underpinned the Zulu polity, led to fragmentation, civil war and, ultimately, to British annexation in 1887.

Keywords

Anglo-Zulu, Isandlwana, Victorian Britain, Zulu

Citation

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Overview

The Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 was one of the shortest 'small wars' fought by Britain during the Victorian era. Only seven months separated the British invasion of Zululand on 11 January 1879 from the final defeat of the Zulu at Ulundi (oNdini) on 4 July 1879 and the capture of the fugitive Zulu King, Cetshwayo kaMpande on 28 August. As the war was fought entirely on Zulu territory, it cost the British a relatively cheap £5.2 million (Beckett, 2019); nevertheless, the ramifications were considerable. In addition to totally derailing the British government's policy in southern Africa, the defeat at Isandlwana on 22 January 1879 resulted in the worst single day's loss of life suffered by British troops between the battle of Waterloo in June 1815 and the opening campaigns of the Great War in August 1914. Isandlwana and the Zulu victories at Intombe (12 March 1879) and Hlobane (28 March 1879) were particularly remarkable given the disparity in resources and technology available to the belligerent nations. It came, however, at a significant cost. Victory at Isandlwana, which cost the Zulus 1,000 dead was quickly followed by defeats at Rorke's Drift (22-23 January 1879), Kambula (29 March 1879), Gingindlovu (2 April 1879), and Ulundi. The Zulu reliance upon close-quarter hand-to-hand combat even when confronted by superior British firepower meant that in a little over two months of war, Zulu dead numbered 6,000.

Nevertheless, their battlefield prowess transformed the Zulu in the eyes of the British forces arrayed against them and those who subsequently commented on their ferocity. They were no longer dismissed as just another barbarian foe and instead were worthy military opponents, variously proclaimed the "finest and bravest race in South Africa" by Queen Victoria (Beckett, 2019, p. 15) and the "finest savage race in the world" by Henry Rider Haggard (1908, p. 764). Despite their casualties, it was the peace that followed which wrought the greatest destruction on Zulu society. The actual fighting impacted directly only on a relatively small part of Zululand. In addition, British operations included systematic destruction of military homesteads - *amakhanda* - and the carrying off of livestock, but this did not fundamentally alter the Zulu way of life (Laband, 2009). In contrast, the post-war political settlement imposed on Zululand - division into thirteen petty chiefdoms - and the dismantling of the military system that underpinned the Zulu polity led to fragmentation, civil war and, ultimately, to British annexation in 1887.

British imperial strategy

The Anglo-Zulu War was part of an established pattern of imperial expansion in southern Africa, though in this case strategic imperatives rather than economic opportunities drove British government policy. Using the British colony of Natal as a gateway for European goods into the interior by drawing upon cheap African migrant labour was without doubt an attractive proposition. It was secondary, however, to the tactical importance of the Cape which lay on the vital strategic route to India. To protect it and British interests in southern Africa more broadly required a policy of confederation to end the political fragmentation between the British colonies of the Cape and Natal on the one hand and the Boer (Afrikaner) colonies of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal on the other. The subjugation of independent African entities was also a necessary pre-requisite; during the 1870s the British subdued not just the Zulu but also the Ngqika and Gcaleka amaXhosa, the Pedi, the Griqua, the Balthaping, the Prieska amaXhosa, the Korana, and the Khoesan (Laband, 2014a). It was the Zulu, however, who were perceived to be the greatest threat to Natal. The British High Commissioner at the Cape, Sir Henry Bartle Frere, was easily persuaded by some colonists and by the European missionaries excluded from Zululand by Cetshwayo that the Zulu had been behind the Xhosa disturbances that had promoted the Ninth Cape Frontier War (1877-78). Frere further characterised Cetshwayo as "an ignorant and blood-thirsty despot" who presided over an army of 40,000 "man-slaying gladiators" (Beckett, 2019, pp. 24 - 31). His was not an isolated view; even two decades later Charles Callwell (1896) in his classic *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice* still characterised the Anglo-Zulu War as a campaign "for the overthrow of a dangerous power" (p. 28). These assumptions regarding the

nature of the Zulu polity were a major factor driving the British determination to neutralise the supposed threat to Natal.

The annexation of the Transvaal in 1877 appeared to offer Frere a pretext for war. The Transvaal had been bankrupted fighting a border war against Sekhukhune's Pedi, which meant that the British inherited a border dispute between the Zulu and the Boers. Frere's desire to provoke a war on the issue was undone by a border commission finding in favour of the Zulu. He then exploited several border incidents and past promises of good conduct extracted from Cetshwayo to deliver him an ultimatum on 11 December 1878. In demanding the dismantling of the Zulu military system, Frere knew he was striking at the basis of Zulu polity, a development that even the more pacifist elements within the Zulu leadership could not accept. He took the precaution of not despatching the text of the ultimatum to London until it was too late for the government to intervene. There was already a war in Afghanistan and London did not want another in South Africa. When the Zulus showed no sign of being prepared to accept Frere's terms, the British invaded Zululand on 11 January 1879. The war that Frere orchestrated was highly unusual in that it was a colonial campaign initiated by the British at a time and place of their choosing.

British and Zulu tactics

Although the British were experiencing difficulties in the ongoing campaign against the Pedi, there were expectations of easy victory against the Zulu. The British Commander-in-Chief, Lord Chelmsford, was certainly aware of the Zulu military system and of Zulu fighting methods. A pamphlet, *The Zulu Army*, was issued in November 1878 as well as *Précis of Information Concerning the Zulu Country with a Map*. Nevertheless, it was assumed that the Zulu would fight much like the Xhosa, who had been shattered by British firepower at Centane on 7 February 1878 in the Ninth Cape Frontier War. By advancing directly to the centre of Cetshwayo's authority at his main homestead at Ulundi, Chelmsford hoped to entice the Zulu into attacking in the open. Superior firepower - not least the breech loading Martini-Henry rifle – would, it was assumed, more than compensate for the small numbers of troops deployed. As Chelmsford wrote in November 1878, "I am induced to think that the first experience of the power of the Martini-Henrys will be such a surprise to the Zulus that they will not be formidable after the first effort" (Chelmsford, 1878). Chelmsford's strategy also recognized other Zulu vulnerabilities. Upon entering Zululand, three separate columns - Nos. 1, 3 and 4 - would divide the Zulu army (*impi*) as well as destroy as many *amakhanda* as possible, thereby systematically reducing Zulu capacity to resist by destroying crops and livestock. Nos. 2 and 5 Columns were held in reserve to watch the borders, although No. 2 Column subsequently joined No 3 Column at Isandlwana on the morning of 22 January. In 1879 there were twenty-seven *amakhanda* in Zululand, thirteen of them close to Ulundi. The three columns would converge on Ulundi, assuming they could be effectively coordinated over the largely uncharted distances involved. The columns would operate along those axes considered most vulnerable to Zulu incursions into Natal.

In its timing the British invasion was well judged. Delaying military operations until the next South African winter (June to August) would mean the grass in Zululand would be too dry and have little grazing value for the vast number of transport oxen needed to sustain any advance. January and February would be wet and uncomfortably hot, but the grass would be fresh, and the Zulu inconvenienced by the need to gather their harvest. The rivers along Natal's frontiers would be high after the autumn rains and impede Zulu incursions. By the time they subsided in March, it was assumed the war would be over. Cetshwayo was also hampered by the fact that he had called up his regiments (*amabutho*) in September 1878 in response to British military preparations when crops should have been planted. It was also the end of an exceptionally dry season that had depleted large tracts of pasture and killed many cattle. Cetshwayo had little choice but to release the *amabutho* to their homesteads, but the harvest would inevitably be delayed. In the meantime, it would be difficult to feed a large number of men kept together for any length of time. Even if the

war was not prolonged, any action would have been followed by dispersion for ritual purification ceremonies, sharing of plunder, and recuperation (Laband, 1992).

The number of British regular troops available to Chelmsford was limited; the arrival of two more battalions in December 1878 still only gave him six infantry battalions augmented by a naval brigade. Added to this was the lack of mounted troops which was only partially offset by colonial volunteer units. This force - totalling some 6,669 men – was further rounded out by British efforts to capitalise on a general African hostility to the Zulu, which added a further 9,350 men to the invading force. The Natal Native Contingent was formed from African levies comprised of Christian converts, and followers of the Tlokwa subdivision of the Sotho (Thompson, 2006). Added to this were chiefs in receipt of British stipends, many of whom had been driven westward into Natal during the extensive migratory upheaval of the 1820s and 1830s known as the Mfecane, and 6,000 African pioneers, border guards and border levies. Later in the campaign, a carrier corps was also recruited to supplement ox-drawn transport and mules, many of which had been lost at Isandlwana (Bailes, 1980). The Zulu made overtures of their own to neighbouring tribal groups such as the Swazi to the north, the Sotho and Mpondo to the south, and the Mabhundu-Tsonga to the east but were rebuffed. So was an approach to the Pedi, even though Sekhukhune was also fighting the British (Laband, 1997).

The British were aware that they were outnumbered but hoped to offset this disadvantage by exploiting internal divisions among the Zulu themselves. It was believed that the ordinary Zulu were so disaffected with Cetshwayo's rule that there might not be any Zulu resistance once British forces crossed the frontier (Cope, 1999). Although it did not reflect the wider Zulu opinion, several prominent Zulu clan chiefs and *izikhul* (elders) opposed war and counselled appeasement at any price. Among the members of the royal house opposed to war was Cetshwayo's full elder brother, Hamu kaNzibe, heir to his uncle rather than his father under the Zulu system. Hamu was to defect to the British in March 1879. The so-called white chief, John Dunn, who had settled in Zululand and adopted Zulu ways, crossed into Natal with his followers even before the war began. But it would take the imminent prospect of the dissolution of the kingdom after Zulu military defeat to accelerate the willingness of other chiefs to safeguard their positions by negotiating with the British (Laband & Thompson, 1990).

The expansion of the invading force was vital given the fact that though Chelmsford possessed some knowledge of the Zulu system, he did not have precise information on the number of warriors at Cetshwayo's disposal. It was assumed Cetshwayo could call upon almost 42,000 warriors, though in reality the actual number who mustered at their *amakhanda* in January 1879 was probably closer to 29,000. Some 20,000–24,000 warriors appear to have been committed against Chelmsford and No. 3 Column at Isandlwana. A much smaller force was sent to oppose No. 1 Column crossing the Tugela (Thukela) at Lower Drift, and only limited reinforcements assisted the local clans facing No. 4 Column. A token force of elderly *amabutho* was retained at Ulundi as an emergency reserve. Cetshwayo discounted the risk of British use of Portuguese territory or indeed any coastal landing, although the British did in fact briefly consider this option (Laband, 1998).

By instructing his warriors to refrain from attacking unless they were attacked first, Cetshwayo sought to fight a limited war ending in negotiation. Aware that the British had enormous resources at their disposal, Cetshwayo hoped that a victory over the invading columns, especially one accompanied by Chelmsford, would enable him to threaten but not invade Natal and compel the British to negotiate. On their part, the British assumed the capture of Ulundi, the administrative and economic focus of Zululand, would end the war. They failed to recognize that it would at best only diminish Cetshwayo's prestige since there were other royal homesteads. Ulundi had no special significance in the Zulu polity and taking it would be more a signal of success to the British public than to the Zulu. The British, however, were correct in assuming that as the *amabutho* could not be kept together for long, Cetshwayo would be compelled to throw his army at the advancing columns in order to end the war quickly.

Despite his hopes to avoid escalating the conflict, Cetshwayo ordered an offensive when the British entered Zululand and immediately attacked the stronghold of the chief of the Qungebe clan,

Sihayo kaXongo. In order that he might continue to present himself as the injured party and to avoid further provocation, Cetshwayo still made it clear to his warriors that they were not to cross into Natal. Cetshwayo further warned them against attacking any entrenched position and instead bypass it in order to draw the British out into the open. The wisdom of this order was later borne out in the destruction of the camp at Isandlwana where the British had so tragically refrained from building entrenchments.

The Zulu way of war

The heart of the Zulu military system was the concept of grouping males according to age. The system appears to have derived from the Nguni practice of bringing boys together in circumcision groups. Between the ages of 14 and 18, youths would gather at *amakhanda* and serve for two- or three-years herding cattle, working the fields and being trained for war. At 18 they would be brought before the King and formed into a new *ibutho* with instructions to build themselves a new *ikhanda.* Led by appointed commanders (*izindunas*), *ibutho* served as army, police, and a labour force until marriage, when allegiance reverted to their clans. At that point a man established his own household (*imizi*). In some cases, an *ibutho* might be linked to a particular locality. In other cases, a new *ibutho* might be incorporated into an older one to maintain the latter's strength if the King wished to retain its identity. Marriage, which was conducted en masse, was not usually authorised until the warriors in a unit reached 35 or 40 years in age, thus maximising its length of service to the King. The *amabutho* reported for specific purposes such as the important and elaborate first fruits of harvest festival (*umKhosi*) held each December or January depending upon the waning of the full moon. Even when assembled at *amakhanda*, women supplied the warriors with food from their own homesteads. The women provided most of the agricultural labour force and were formed into female *amabutho* for marriage. Upon marriage, the warrior had a head-ring of hemp coated with grease (*isicoco*) sewn into the hair, apparently as a substitute for the former practice of circumcision. Married *amabutho* carried white cowhide shields rather than the coloured shields they carried as single men, although some of the conventions were breaking down by Cetshwayo's time. The shields were the property of the state.

The Zulu warriors were a citizen rather than a standing army whose members spent most of their time in a form of labour taxation (Colenbrander, 1981). Most *amakhanda* remained empty for much of the year unless the *amabutho* were mobilised, with the Zulu dispersing to their own *umuzi* (homesteads). Thus, Frere and others misunderstood and misrepresented the Zulu system as a standing army, and as a burden on the Zulu polity with its existence dependent upon "a constant succession of conquest" (Beckett, 2019, p. 24). There was unity and continuity in the Zulu nation but in reality, there were divisions within the polity. The Zulu economy rested largely on cattle, theoretically distributed through royal patronage. In practice, the individual's control over cattle was such that the Zulu were not dependent upon the King for the functioning of individual homesteads. Clan ties remained strong and individual chiefs were granted a measure of autonomy, especially princes of the royal blood (*abantwana*) and hereditary chiefs (*amakhosi*). Chiefs with territory along the borders of Zululand, such as Sihayo, increased their autonomy through contacts with Europeans, with trade goods such as firearms enhancing their authority.

The Zulu preference, in the absence of any actual experience of fighting European regulars, was for a pitched battle utilising traditional Zulu tactics. These were the *impondo zankhomo* (bull's horn manoeuvre) which reflected the ingrained Zulu desire for hand-to-hand combat. Essentially, the younger *amabutho* would form the left and right *izimpondo* (horns) of the impi, racing ahead of the main body or *isifuba* (chest) to encircle the opponents' flanks and draw them into the chest, itself supported by a reserve or *umuva* (loins). The Zulu did not advance in solid masses but in open skirmishing lines, though these could be 10-12 ranks deep. These tactics reflected a cultural approach to war very different to that adopted by British regulars. To a Zulu warrior, firearms appeared to offer no real military advantage over traditional weapons, which the Zulu assumed would give them victory in any fight in the open. The Zulu had not fought Europeans since 1838 and had not engaged in any battle since Cetshwayo had defeated his brother in 1856. They had

not adapted to military changes like the Pedi and the Sotho (Laband, 2008; Laband, 2009). In any case, firearms did not fit the hegemonic masculinity at the heart of Zulu culture. The warrior ethos demanded killing at close quarters as a matter of honour. While using a firearm at a distance did not result in ritual pollution, it was considered an inferior form of killing, unworthy of a warrior (Laband, 2014b). Each Zulu, therefore, carried several throwing spears (*izijula*), a knobkerrie club (*iwisa*), and a short stabbing spear (*ikilwa*), popularly known from the Arabic as an assegai. Despite their undoubted courage and ferocity on the battlefield, throughout the war the Zulu displayed the bankruptcy of their traditional hand to hand tactics. They were indignant at the continuing British refusal to fight them in the open. As one Zulu told the detained Dutch trader Cornelius Vijn (1880) after Kambula, "They are continually making holes in the ground and mounds left open with little holes to shoot through. The English burrow in the ground like pigs" (pp. 40-41).

Despite their preference for traditional weapons, the Zulu possessed firearms but did not rely upon them nor did they integrate their use into their battlefield tactics. Controlling Africans' acquisition of firearms formed part of the rationalisation for the British policy of confederation in southern Africa. It remained a concern in the Cape Colony and Natal from the arrest and trial of the amaHlubi chief, Langalibalele kaMthimkhulu, in 1873-74 through the Cape's Peace Preservation Act of 1878, to the Cape-Sotho 'Gun War' of 1880-81. The Xhosa and Mfengu had been effectively disarmed by the end of the Ninth Cape Frontier War (Storey, 2008). Zululand lay outside the control of the colonial authorities, and firearms, which conveyed prestige, had been available to the Zulu for many years. The number of weapons imported into Natal rose sharply between 1872 and 1875. Many were re-exported to Portuguese Mozambique before finding their way back to Natal. The Natal authorities made repeated efforts to prevent direct sales to Zululand and the Portuguese at Delagoa Bay were persuaded to impose a prohibition in 1878, but there was considerable illicit trade. Estimates of the firearms in circulation in Zululand in 1879 differ widely. Portuguese officials suggested 20,000 guns reached Zululand annually between 1875 and 1877. Most of these firearms, however, were percussion and even flintlock muzzleloaders. It is probable that the Zulu only had about 500-1,000 modern breech-loaders. The Zulu were unaccustomed to maintaining firearms in reasonable condition. There were few spare parts available, the quality of powder was decidedly poor, and few Zulu knew how to use their firearms' sights (Laband, 1992; Guy, 1971). A far higher proportion of the Zulu than the Natal Native Contingent, of whom only one in ten had firearms, had firearms at Isandlwana, but they played no part in the Zulu victory. The Zulu used firearms on occasion at Hlobane, Kambula and Gingindlovu. Only five Martini Henry rifles were recovered from dead Zulu at the latter, however, and the 800 or so taken at Isandlwana went largely unused (Hogan, 2013; Storey, 2008). Perhaps as a result of the movie *Zulu*, there is a persistent myth that the Zulu used Martini-Henry rifles taken from Isandlwana at Rorke's Drift. Four of the seventeen British fatalities died from gunshot and ten of the fifteen wounded were also from gunshot. The surgeon who subsequently examined the wounds reported they were "ordinary round bullets fired from smooth-bored guns" with low powder charges. Archaeological investigation in the late 1980s found evidence only of over-firing of bullets from older Zulu firearms (Beckett, 2019).

The clash of armies

The first major encounter of the Anglo-Zulu war on 22 January 1879 at Isandlwana was a decisive victory for the Zulu force. More than 20,000 Zulu warriors, commanded by Ntshingwayo kaMahole Khoza and Mavumengwana kaNdlela Ntuli, attacked and massacred a British force of fewer than 2,000 camped at Isandlwana mountain under the command of Colonel H.B. Pulleine. Contemporaries attributed the British disaster to Chelmsford's decision to leave the camp with the greater part of his force earlier in the morning. In addition, a further division of the defenders by Colonel Anthony Durnford who led much of No 2 Column out of the camp rather than remaining to defend it when the Zulu *impi* was unexpectedly encountered by a patrol led to a further diminishing of the British force. Durnford became a useful scapegoat to cover Chelmsford's

own errors of judgement and refusal to believe the reports reaching him that the camp was under attack. From the beginning, however, many held Chelmsford, responsible, primarily for his failure to entrench the camp. Among several excuses for his defeat, including the collapse of the Natal Native Contingent and the supposed failure of the ammunition supply on the firing line, Chelmsford suggested that the Zulu had prevailed "by force of recklessness and numbers" (Laband, 1994, p. 78). The losses sustained by the Zulu at Isandlwana undoubtedly deeply shocked Cetshwayo. There is still a debate as to whether the Zulu field commanders intended to attack Isandlwana on 22 January and, indeed, the *impi*'s precise location when discovered by British patrols reacting to reports of a Zulu presence. Cetshwayo later suggested that he had instructed his commanders to send a peace delegation to Chelmsford before attacking and that they were debating this when the *impi* was discovered. This appears unlikely although the principal commander, Ntshingwayo kaMahole, seems to have been undecided as to his immediate course of action and was waiting on events. There is equal debate as to whether the Zulu intentionally deceived Chelmsford into dividing his force in the early hours that morning and leading over half of it out across the plain to reinforce elements that had made contact with Zulu the previous afternoon and evening. The balance of evidence suggests that the Zulu had not observed Chelmsford's departure.

Certainly, the intended composition of the *impi*'s horns was disrupted by the suddenness with which the action commenced. Some have argued that the *impi* had been sufficiently doctored before leaving Ulundi to require nothing more but there were still some last-minute purification rituals to undertake. Cetshwayo appears to have subscribed to the view that pre-battle rituals had not been undertaken properly and that the *impi* should not had been allowed to disperse so quickly after the battle. The real reason for defeat was that the British firing line was too dispersed, too far away from the camp, with too few of the men available actually deployed to it, so that it was easily outflanked by the Zulu. Of the 1,774 defenders - British and African - at least 1,329 were killed (74 per cent): 858 Europeans of whom 710 were British regulars, and at least 471 African auxiliaries. Only 78 Europeans appear to have survived, just five of them regular officers and ten ordinary rankers of the 24th Foot. Having never encountered such firepower before, it says much for the Zulu's undoubted courage that they overcame it to push home their attack.

Some warriors from the Zulu reserve, who had moved to cut off the retreat route from Isandlwana back to Rorke's Drift, halted their pursuit at the Buffalo (Mzinyathi) River that marked the border with Natal. However, 3-4,000 warriors under the command of Cetshwayo's ambitious younger brother, Dabulamanzi kaMpande, continued into Natal. The Zulu seemingly intended a limited incursion to burn farms and steal cattle but came upon the tempting target of the mission station and supply depot of Rorke's Drift defended by only a handful of redcoats. The Zulu, who were comprised of the more elderly regiments, arrived piecemeal and exhausted. Nevertheless, the fact that 139 defenders of Rorke's Drift were able to fight them off for ten hours at the cost of just 17 British dead points to the tactical poverty of uncoordinated rushes on what were improvised defences, but which were still sufficient to neutralise Zulu superiority in numbers. Rorke's Drift added perhaps another 600 dead to those suffered at Isandlwana and there were approximately 300 more dead from the clash on the same day as Isandlwana between No 1 Column and the Zulu despatched to oppose it at Nyezane. It would be two months before Cetshwayo could summon the *amabutho* again. Fortunately, from the Zulu perspective, No. 1 Column simply sat down behind defences constructed at Eshowe until relieved by Chelmsford in April. The defence of Eshowe from which the Zulu kept some distance, meant that a third of Chelmsford's army "devoted their energies to little besides keeping themselves alive" (Bailes, 1980, p. 93). Isandlwana, meanwhile, had wrecked the invasion and there was no prospect of renewing it until substantial reinforcements arrived from Britain. Once the 'siege' at Eshowe was lifted and it was burnt to the ground, Chelmsford's forces then killed another thousand Zulu at Gingindlovu. Hoping to restore his reputation before his replacement Sir Garnet Wolseley arrived, Chelmsford launched his second invasion of Zululand in May 1879.

The activities of No. 4 Column in the north of Zululand, however, ended any prospect Cetshwayo might have entertained of compelling the British to negotiate. A series of raids were

mounted by the British from the column's camp at Kambula. The local Mdlalose clan were somewhat ambivalent in their loyalties to Cetshwayo, and some had defected, but the Qulusi remained deeply hostile to the British. Whilst well-armed and organised, and holding strong positions on Hlobane Mountain, the Qulusi were worsted in several British raids. Consequently, they asked Cetshwayo for assistance and given the threat posed by No. 4 Column it was agreed to send the main *impi* as soon as it had been reassembled (Laband, 1992). Some half-hearted attempts had been made at negotiation, but it was clear that the British had no intention of accepting anything less than complete Zulu capitulation (Laband & Thompson, 1990). Thus, the *impi* was sent to the north on 24 March 1879, its arrival coinciding with a major British cattle raid on Hlobane on 28 March. The latter went badly wrong with the Qulusi operating from caves and harassing the British as they withdrew down the precipitous Devils' Pass. The withdrawal route was then cut off by the unexpected arrival of the *impi*. The raiders - British, colonial troops, and African levies - suffered almost 200 dead and were forced back on Kambula.

Cetshwayo had clearly instructed his commanders on the conduct of the northern operation, the intention being not to attack the entrenched camp at Kambula but to "seize the camp cattle and so draw the white men away from their wagons and tents" (Laband, 1992, 149). Failing that, the *impi* would advance into the Transvaal with the same intent of drawing the British out from behind their defences. On 29 March, however, the Zulu again neglected to use their firearms when they were goaded by feints conducted by the colonial mounted irregulars and instead made mass charges conducted in a piecemeal manner. It may be that the success at Hlobane on the previous day had emboldened the younger warriors to overrule their commanders' instructions (Laband, 1992). Possibly over 2,000 Zulu died in the action and during the ruthless British pursuit that followed. Once more, it would take time to summon the *impi* for any further effort after Kambula and Gingindlovu.

There were further efforts made by Cetshwayo to negotiate as Chelmsford's plodding columns advanced towards Ulundi amid more Zulu defections. Left with little choice, Cetshwayo resolved to fight, although it is clear he held out little hope of success and tried to dissuade his warriors from attacking the British on 4 July 1879. This time the British were in the open but in a defensive square formation with nine-pounder artillery and Gatling guns. As at Isandlwana, the Zulu probably numbered around 20,000, some of whom used firearms with little success. Although they did come close to the square at one point, it is generally agreed that the Zulu no longer displayed quite the same reckless conduct as they had earlier in the war. A further 1,500 warriors were killed and Cetshwayo became a fugitive.

Conclusion

Although the war ended in defeat for the Zulu, the numbers alone can be deceptive. In the Nquthu district, where Chelmsford had originally crossed the frontier in January, menfolk had joined their regiments whilst women, children and the aged had gone into hiding. They had gone into hiding again during the second invasion in May and it was generally reported that the area was still largely deserted as late as October 1879. During the war, however, many parts of Zululand did not even see a British patrol and since most fled when the British approached, civilian casualties may not have been large. From a population of perhaps 250-300,000, the loss of 6,000 males in their prime equated to roughly 21 per cent of those engaged. Nonetheless, the estimated 14,000 cattle, 1,200 goats and 3,000 sheep carried off by the British represented perhaps only five per cent of the whole. Similarly, while 23 of 24 *amakhanda* were torched together with possibly 12,000 huts, the latter was barely one per cent of the total in Zululand. Many Zulu went hungry, but most had returned to their fields by August 1879 (Laband, 2000).

In the west and south-east of Zululand, where the British military presence was felt longest, the Zulu increasingly submitted. The south where there had largely been raiding activity submitted once the British entered it in force in September. Although never entered by the British, the north, centre and east of Zululand gave up once it was clear that the war was lost. Only in the north-west - an area of long-disputed territory between Zulu and Boer - was there any prolonged

resistance despite a heavier British wartime presence. Once it was clear that Cetshwayo's authority was doomed, most chiefs safeguarded their own position by pragmatic accommodation (Laband, 1992). A number found their reward in the post-war settlement, the British having no appetite for annexation and instead resorted to division. By recognising the chiefs and leaving the economic structure unchanged, the British succeeded in making the Zulu monarchy irrelevant to ordinary Zulu and ambitious chiefs alike. It was the latter's ambitions that then led to the unravelling of the settlement and civil war. Cetshwayo was restored to part of his kingdom in 1883 but died in February 1884. There was a Boer intervention on behalf of Cetshwayo's son, Dinuzulu, leading to the establishment of the so-called New Republic, which was then incorporated into the Transvaal in 1888. Meanwhile, Britain had annexed what remained of Zululand in 1887. By that time, the struggle for supremacy in southern Africa was defined by conflict between Briton and Boer, the Transvaal having regained its independence in the Anglo-Transvaal War (1880-81).

The Anglo-Zulu War was a clash of very different cultures, which pitted modern European firepower against traditional hand-to-hand combat. The Zulu had firearms, but for cultural reasons eschewed using even their outdated models in an effective manner. Other Africans had embraced firearms more effectively, although in the longer term, their resistance was also overcome. Nor did the Zulu attempt any kind of guerrilla struggle in the way that the Xhosa had done to prolong some of the Cape Frontier Wars. Whilst Cetshwayo had a realistic view of Zulu prospects in a war against the British and a realistic strategy for survival, his commanders and warriors persisted in the belief that they could overcome firepower through the use of traditional tactics. After the shocks of Isandlwana, however, the British were never going to negotiate short of complete Zulu capitulation. The Zulu way of war simply played into British hands.

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