

Notes and Queries

The Ammunition Boxes at the Battle of Isandhlwana

The design of the famous Isandhlwana ammunition boxes which, according to popular legend, could not be opened during the Battle because there was a dearth of screwdrivers, has been investigated by J. A. Verbeek and V. Bresler in an article entitled 'The Role of the Ammunition Boxes in the Disaster at Isandhlwana' published in the December 1977 issue of *The Journal of the Historical Firearms Society of South Africa*. Examination of the evidence, both documentary and material, has convinced the authors that the story is little more than a myth.

Both Morris and Clammer in their popular histories of the Anglo-Zulu War state categorically that the disaster at Isandhlwana was in large measure due to the design of the small-arms ammunition boxes. Both described the boxes but do not agree as to the method of fastening the lids. Morris states, 'The lids were held down by two strong copper bands, each secured by nine stout screws'; according to Clammer 'the lids of the ammunition boxes were held in place by six screws, and by some oversight there was a dearth of screwdrivers.'

From the specifications laid down in the Ordinance Department's 'List of Charges', which they quoted extensively, Verbeek and Bresler described the ammunition boxes used from 1863 to 1880 and suggest that the box in use in January, 1879 was the Mark VI which had a sliding lid held in place by only one 2 inch, cheese-head screw. Fragments of boxes excavated at Isandhlwana and complete boxes examined by the authors appear to be this Mark VI box, or possibly the earlier and similarly secured Mark V. The bands around these boxes were to strengthen them and did not in any way affect the sliding lids.

The contemporary primary literature examined by the authors makes little reference to the ammunition boxes which suggests that the legend grew up later. It may have originated in inferences drawn from the failure to get ammunition during the Battle and from the elaborate instructions on the subject issued before Chelmsford's advance on Ulundi. 'Each wagon and cart with the convoys must have some ammunition boxes placed on it in such a position as to be easily got at. The regimental reserve boxes must have the screw of the lid taken out, and each wagon and cart will have the screwdriver attached to one of the boxes, so that it may be ready for opening those in which the screw has not been taken out.'

'The design of the ammunition box was in no way to blame for the disaster at Isandhlwana' state the authors of this fully documented and clearly illustrated article which can be seen in the Reference Department of the Natal Society Library.

Another view of a possible cause of the disaster is given by Richard Wyatt Vause, who commanded a Sekali [Also spelt Sikali: *Eds.*] troop (Natal Native Horse) at Isandhlwana. Not long after we had read the article by Verbeek and Bresler, Mr. Don Stayt of Underberg showed us a transcript of Vause's diary. Vause was Mr. Stayt's grandfather.

We had a smart ride about 12 miles, arriving at Isandhlwana between 10 and 11 a.m. After riding through the camp we halted for a few minutes to give the men a biscuit as they had started without breakfast and we expected a hard day's work. While giving my men their biscuits Col. D (urnford) sent for me and ordered me to take my troop and ride back to meet our wagons as the Zulus were seen in our rear and he expected they would try and cut them off.

My orders were to see the wagons safely into camp and then join him again about 12. I got back with the wagons and hearing firing about two miles to the front of the camp I at once gave the order to trot and started off to find Colonel Durnford.

I soon came across Captain Shepstone and as he asked me to stop with him I dismounted the men and extended them in skirmishing order. We were soon under hot fire but continued to advance though very slowly as the Zulus were under good cover and we had to expose ourselves every time we advanced.

On arriving at the top of the hill we perceived the enemy in overwhelming force coming from behind and, fearing our ammunition would soon be exhausted before we could regain the camp, Capt. Shepstone gave the order to retire back to our horses.

Fortunately the Zulus were shooting very badly and as yet few casualties had occurred on our side. As soon as the Zulus perceived we were in retreat they came on with a shout and were rapidly gaining on us when we regained our horses. As soon as the men were mounted we retired slowly to the camp, dismounting at every few yards and firing a volley but without holding the enemy in check . . . as they did not seem to mind our fire at all.

After regaining the camp to our dismay it was found that the ammunition boxes had not been opened and the Zulus being so close on our heels we had no time to look for screwdrivers. [Our italics: *Eds.*] Fortunately one of my Kaffirs came across a box with a few in it which I distributed amongst the men. By this time the soldiers had expended their ammunition and the Zulus had cut through them and were in amongst the tents and we were obliged to retire again.

[Vause managed to reach the Buffalo River with about six of his men but lost his horse in trying to ford the river. Assisted by a 'little Kaffir boy' and later by 'Edwards of the Carbineers' he was able to reach Helpmekaar where despite a laager of wagons and mealie sacks, the 38 defenders expected to be defeated.]

Fortunately the Zulus were repulsed at Rorke's Drift and did not get as far as Helpmekaar.

I lost 30 men and 10 were wounded so I have not many left out of my original 50.

M. P. MOBERLY

The Preservation and Reconstruction of Fort Eshowe

The December 1975 (No. 5.) issue of *Natalia* included an article by Lieutenant W. N. Lloyd on the defence of Fort Eshowe. It might interest readers to know that, with the permission of the National Monuments Council, the

history department of Edgewood College of Education has for some years now been engaged in a project to protect and preserve this rapidly deteriorating site.

The Fort falls outside the Eshowe Municipal Boundary and for this reason attempts made by interested individuals in the past to preserve the site have always failed. Now, working in close collaboration with Mr. G. A. Chadwick, an executive member of the National Monuments Council, the Edgewood Committee has made significant progress.

After a good deal of initial research to verify and add to, existing knowledge of the Fort, practical steps have now been taken to preserve it. Part of this initial research involved an investigation into the history of the Norwegian Mission Station and cemetery around which the Fort was constructed.

Funds made available by the National Monuments Council will enable the Committee to clear the site, appoint a caretaker and erect a plinth incorporating an accurate plan of the Fort. This plan will guide visitors to points of interest indicated by name plates similar to those at Majuba. The Committee hopes that by removing noxious weeds and shrubs and planting grass the appearance of the Fort will be enhanced and the site preserved.

The Military graveyard is also part of the site and is in such a state of disrepair that it can only be reconstructed by referring to original documents and a number of photographs recently discovered by a Committee member at the National Army Museum in London.

Although there is still much to be done, it is to be hoped that the Fort and Military graveyard will be in a fit state to be seen by the many visitors expected in Kwa Zulu for the centenary celebrations of the Anglo-Zulu War.

JEFF MATHEWS

Maps of the Anglo-Zulu War

“War and its battlefields are not only a testing ground for weapons . . . but also for mapping systems.”¹

While the Anglo-Zulu War generated a vast amount of cartographic activity, the maps themselves show that techniques lagged behind the volume of maps produced. The latter was so great that, within two years, probably as many maps were produced for Natal and Zululand as in the previous forty years, setting aside large scale farm plans. On the technical side however, very little advance was made in 1879 and 1880. Inevitably during the course of the war a great deal of cartographic knowledge was acquired in a spatial sense. For example, Zululand was virtually unmapped by 1878 but two years later a basic framework had been laid. Nevertheless, vast areas were still blank in 1880. A typical map of the period shows relief by means of shading and hachures, rivers, forests, kraals and tracks. Large areas are empty, but a false impression of completeness is given by the addition of annotative detail, fashionable at this time. The use of annotations is in itself an indication of cartographic underdevelopment, for, at a scale of 1:63 360 or smaller, the amount of information to be mapped from a complete survey demands symbolization. The annotations on maps of this period cover topography, drainage and vegetation, with the state of drifts and tracks and additional information on the local populace, especially population figures. It is perhaps true

to say however that a certain amount of such military information could only be mapped with the aid of notes.

By 1878, the state of cartography in Natal was such that the military had access to maps accurate enough for strategic planning, or had the ability to furnish them themselves. One such map² summarizes military thinking on a pre-emptive strike into Zululand by 5 columns — this map is dated 1878. As the war progressed however, it became obvious that the military lacked the large scale maps which could influence tactical thinking. This was the heyday of field sketching and scouts' reports, and both were likely to be misleading if not totally inaccurate in the confusing and contorted terrain of Zululand. The first six months of the war produced a spate of mapping, largely based upon sketches and estimations, but most of these were of restricted areas, as for example the maps drawn of the Isandhlwana battlefield or of the routes followed by the invading columns, and all were for purposes of reporting rather than planning.

The war did however lead to a greater general coverage of Zululand at smaller scales, of about 1: 300 000. Such maps reflect the major concern of the times in that they contain socio-political information such as boundary claims, tribal areas and population. This is true of both War Office maps and those commercially produced. The former are more functional while the latter are more sophisticated and are in colour. The Anglo-Zulu War also prompted the appearance of Natal's first newspaper map, which originally appeared in the *Cape Argus*. This map is clearly based upon official, War Office, maps, but is notable for the fact that it shows the location and date of the battle of Isandhlwana which had been fought only six days before. The aftermath of the war and the activities of the boundary commissions in the early 1880s led to a further spate of mapping, with prominence given to the boundaries between Zululand and the Transvaal Republic and Natal, and the internal division of Zululand into thirteen chieftainships.

The Anglo-Zulu War thus significantly influenced the qualitative cartographic coverage of Zululand. Its effect on maps of Natal was quantitative — 5 major maps of Natal were published within two years, distinguished from their predecessors largely by the greater topographic detail they carried. Overall, it is hard to conclude that Natal and Zululand were well mapped by the early 1880s even though the events of the Anglo-Zulu War had been such an incentive to this end. The lack of a general and reliable survey for military tactical planning was to be echoed in a more extensive and longer war, two decades later.

References

1. COBB, D. A. 'Maps and scholars', *Library Trends*, 25 (4), Ap. 1977, pp. 819-32.
2. Distances and various access points to Zululand with routes converging on Undi (Ulundi). In *Correspondence re military affairs in Natal and Zululand*. C 2234, BPP 25, 47 (Natal Archives). Facing p. 3.

CHRISTOPHER MERRETT

The New Cathedral Centre

Natalia I, 1971, featured an article by Rt. Rev. K. B. Hallowes, Bishop-Suffragan of Natal, entitled "A New Cathedral Centre for Pietermaritzburg"

which traced the history since 1946 of the move to build a new Anglican Cathedral to replace the decaying fabric of St. Saviour's. Bishop Hallowes indicated the development of diocesan thinking from the need to build a large hall of worship only, to the concept of a cathedral centre which, with a smaller hall of worship, would also provide facilities for education, shared meals, diocesan administration, non-parochial ministeries and ecumenical co-operation.

The project also envisaged the amalgamation of the two city parishes of St. Peter's and St. Saviour's, thereby healing the century-old schism which had resulted from the Colenso disputes.

This union duly took place at Whitsun, 1976, the united congregation being named "The Cathedral Church of the Holy Nativity". *Natalia* 6, 1976, reported the winning of the Architectural Competition for the new Cathedral Centre by two Cape Town architects, Messrs. H. Kammeyer and N. Rozendal. Their design provided for a drum-shaped hall of worship behind St. Peter's Church (which remained untouched), while the fellowship/education/administration block, three storeys high, was to be erected along the Chapel Street side of the erf, leaving the historic yellowwood trees undisturbed.

During the past two years detailed planning has proceeded with a number of alterations being made to the original brief. By July 1978 overall costs were calculated by the Quantity Surveyors at R1 855 700, a figure inclusive of all fees and escalated to cover all costs, with a target date for completion of the buildings set for September, 1980. In September, 1978, the project was put out to tender, but the lowest tender received for the whole scheme was R2 180 052 (with fees and escalation again added in).

Faced with this disparity, the New Cathedral Building Committee and Diocesan Trustees did not lose their nerve. They resolved:

- to follow the Quantity Surveyors' advice not to accept any of the tenders received,
- to negotiate with one of the tenderers in order to achieve a reduced overall cost,
- to instruct the Architects to investigate a reduced scheme. While leaving the hall of worship more or less intact this would provide for a fellowship building of one storey only, omitting parking basement, lecture theatre and diocesan offices, reducing the size of the halls and providing seminar rooms and parish offices in existing accommodation at 169 Longmarket Street and 163 Loop Street (the old Deanery).
- to restrict expenditure to R1 452 000,
- to proceed with a Debenture issue. This is necessitated by the fact that most of the capital for the project is tied up in property — the St. Saviour's site and a site in lower Church Street — and the state of the market is at present such that neither of these two properties is readily saleable.

These proposals were accepted by a parish Vestry Meeting by a large majority and by the Diocesan Synod unanimously. If negotiations proceed as planned, it is hoped to have a contract signed before the end of the year and to begin building on the reduced and more modest plan at the beginning of 1979.

T. B. FROST

University of Natal Press

Three new publications of the University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, are especially welcome at this time as interest in the Centenary of the Anglo-Zulu War mounts. They are, however, of much more than topical interest and represent important contributions to the literature of Zulu history.

Few of the published accounts on the history of the Zulu kingdom leave any record of events as seen through the eyes of the Zulu themselves. *A Zulu King Speaks* (156 pp.) aims to do something to remedy this situation by reprinting three statements made after the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 by Cetshwayo, the last of the Zulu kings, on the history and customs of his people. The first of these statements was originally published in *Macmillan's Magazine* of February 1880 under the title 'Cetywayo's story of the Zulu nation and the war'. Cetshwayo's letter to Sir Hercules Robinson, the South African High Commissioner, is reprinted from *British Parliamentary Papers C.2950*. The third statement consists of the minutes of evidence supplied by Cetshwayo in 1881 to the Cape Government Commission on Native Laws and Customs and published in 1883. Taken together the statements represent a mine of 'inside information' on the historical traditions and the system of government of the Zulu Kingdom which this reprint makes easily accessible for the first time. The editors, C. de B. Webb and J. B. Wright, have provided an introduction outlining Cetshwayo's life and discussing the documents in the reprint, annotations, an index, maps and a number of contemporary illustrations.

Due to appear early in 1979 is *Battlefields and Fortifications of the Anglo-Zulu War* compiled by Paul S. Thompson and John P. C. Laband, who have based their work on a study of contemporary written sources and extensive fieldwork on all the relevant sites. Close attention to the composition and disposition of the Zulu forces throws new light on the standard accounts of several of the engagements. The book will give a brief description of the respective military organizations of the British and Zulu forces and an outline narrative of the military events. The most significant features of the work are: the maps of the battlefields as they are today with troop dispositions superimposed, accompanied by descriptions of the various engagements; and numerous diagrams of extant fortifications. Visitors to the Natal and Zululand battlefields have long felt the need of comprehensive guides and this publication will prove invaluable to tourists, military enthusiasts and scholars.

The Black People by Magema M. Fuze is quite different. Although it places no special emphasis on the war of 1879, its first appearance in English is especially appropriate at this time, dealing as it does with the whole course of Zulu history. It was originally published in 1922 but as it appeared in Zulu only it has never reached more than a limited circle of readers. Harry Lugg, whom many considered to be one of the greatest experts on the Zulu, translated the work into English, while Professor A. T. Cope, of the Department of Bantu Languages of the University of Natal, has prepared it for publication; some pertinent footnotes have been added by Dr Shula Marks of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. The author was one of Bishop Colenso's pupils and later tutor to the Zulu Princes.

He was not a trained historian but his lively account of Zulu history is of the greatest interest and not to be missed.

Two earlier publications of the University of Natal Press deserve another mention. *The Road to Ulundi*, published in 1969 in a limited edition of 1 000 copies, is by now well known to most of the readers of *Natalia*. But those who have not already bought this superb album of the water-colour drawings of J. N. Crealock will be glad to know that a few copies are still available at R24,00. In their search for authenticity the makers of the film *Zulu Dawn* made constant reference to it. In addition a number of copies were presented by the company to the stars as a permanent reminder of their visit to Natal.

In conclusion we commend to our readers what is undoubtedly the most significant publication on the Zulu to appear in recent years: *The James Stuart Archive of recorded oral evidence relating to the history of the Zulu and neighbouring peoples*. (Published 1976, R14,40) Edited by C. de B. Webb and J. B. Wright, Volume I contains the statements, comprehensively annotated, of 39 Zulu informants. Volume II is in preparation.

Conference at the University of Natal (Durban) The Anglo-Zulu War: A Centennial Re-appraisal

The Department of History at the University of Natal in Durban is organising a Conference on the Anglo-Zulu War. This will take place from Wednesday, 7th February, until Friday, 9th February, 1979, and it will be followed by a tour of Zululand for those interested on the Saturday and Sunday.

In the initial notice of the Conference, the list of papers to be presented is given. The titles indicate many interesting variations on the main theme, and the speakers will come not only from South African universities but also from overseas. The latter will include Dr Norman Etherington from the University of Adelaide, who will lecture on "Shepstone's Coronation of Cetshwayo and its Aftermath"; Dr Adrian Preston of the Royal Military College, Canada, whose paper is entitled "New Light on Isandhlwana from the Crealock and Cleary Papers"; Mr. Patrick Harries of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, who will speak on "Delagoa Bay and Mabudu Relations with the Zulu"; Miss Elaine Unterhalter, from the same institution, will lecture on "The Nquthu District of Zululand during the Anglo-Zulu War"; Mr Frank Emery of Oxford University will present a paper on "The Anglo-Zulu War as depicted in soldiers' letters".

Two exhibitions will also be held in conjunction with the Conference: the Killie Campbell Africana Library, Marriott Road, Durban, will mount an exhibition of material relating to the Anglo-Zulu War, and on the Durban campus of the University there will be an exhibition of photographs taken by J. Lloyd, a Durban photographer. They fall into two groups: photographs depicting scenes from the Anglo-Zulu War itself, and those of interesting personalities of the time.

The Chief Minister of KwaZulu, Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, will open the proceedings and address the Conference.

Any enquiries regarding this Conference should be addressed to Professor A. H. Duminy, Department of History, University of Natal, Durban.