

## AFTER ULUNDI

The British withdrawal from Zululand – scorched earth and retribution.

By Ian Knight

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On 5 July 1879, the day after the major British victory at Ulundi, Lord Chelmsford received a delayed telegram from the Secretary of State for War, Lord Stanley, informing him that General Sir Garnet Wolseley had superseded him. Chelmsford had, of course, been aware of Wolseley's arrival in southern Africa, and that he was now the senior officer in the field; with potential victory so close, however, Chelmsford had exploited the delays in communication and a certain ambiguity about his position to allow himself sufficient time to fight one last battle. Lord Stanley's telegram was unequivocal, but the timing of its arrival at Chelmsford's headquarters was blissful; after months of trial and tribulation, Chelmsford had at last won the spectacular victory he needed to salvage his reputation. He could now afford to take umbrage at the censure implied in Wolseley's appointment; that same day, Lord Chelmsford offered to resign his command. Within three weeks he had left Africa for London; Wolseley was welcome to whatever remained of the war.

Chelmsford had already planned the break up of the army that had triumphed at Ulundi. Both the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and Flying column had retired from the White Mfolozi valley immediately after the battle, and they camped for a few days on the Mthonjaneni heights. From here, the 2<sup>nd</sup> division was to march back the way it came, into Natal via Landman's Drift, while the Flying Column struck off across country to the south-east, towards the deserted mission station at St. Paul's. From here it was expected to effect a junction with Maj. Gen. H.H. Crealock's 1<sup>st</sup> Division column, which had been slowly advancing up through the coastal districts. In fact, however, by the time the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division reached St. Paul's Wolseley had countermanded Chelmsford's orders in a deliberate attempt to stamp his own mark on what remained of the campaign. Wolseley and his staff had hurried to join the 1<sup>st</sup> Division at the front, and then struck out across country to St. Paul's. Here Chelmsford met his successor, and Wolseley formally assumed command of the forces in Zululand.

To the troops in the field, it seemed that the war was over. On the coast, Crealock's column had made painfully slow progress during the latter stages, but had destroyed two *amakhanda* – royal homesteads that served as a potential focus for Zulu resistance – without opposition. Indeed, it seemed that the coastal districts were feeling the weight of the British occupation more heavily than elsewhere, and were already largely pacified. In the last days before Ulundi, many chiefs living there, faced with the uncomfortable presence of so large an army on their doorsteps, had tentatively begun to negotiate their surrender. Many would not commit themselves to 'come in' openly until it was clear that the power of the king was broken, but the battle on 4 July freed many of them to accept the inevitable. Within a fortnight of the battle, most of the coastal chiefs – including Prince Dabulamanzi, who had led the attack on Rorke's Drift six months before – had formally surrendered.

Certainly, Major Philip Anstruther of the 94<sup>th</sup> noted that after Ulundi ordinary Zulus seemed resigned to the reality of defeat. 'There is no doubt the war is over, the Zulus come in every day bringing guns and cattle and are getting a great deal too friendly'. (1)

Yet, as the British had recognised, by breaking up the apparatus of the Zulu state, they had inevitably allowed a great deal of autonomy to pass to the regional chiefs. While many of these were now prepared to accept the new order, content that they had discharged their responsibilities to King Cetshwayo, some remained steadfastly loyal to the old. This was particularly true of chiefs in regions that had been largely untouched by the fighting, and had yet to be occupied by the British. While some parts of the country seemed entirely subdued, there was a very real danger that the young men in more remote areas were still prepared to resist, raising the prospect of a protracted guerrilla campaign.

Some hint that this might yet occur had been suggested by events at the Middle Drift in the Thukela valley, a week before Ulundi. This area had been the subject of a small-scale cycle of raid and retribution throughout the war, and on 25 June the Zulu chiefdoms living on the northern bank had made a sudden foray across the river, catching the British border posts by surprise, and destroying a large number of homesteads belonging to Africans under Natal authority. Over 30 Africans were killed, forty more captured, and nearly 1400 goats and cattle looted. In the light of such incidents, Wolseley regarded Chelmsford's withdrawal from oNdini as premature. The whereabouts of King Cetshwayo was still unknown, and Chelmsford had made no effort to secure the surrender of the important chiefdoms in central and northern Zululand.

Wolseley's solution was to re-occupy oNdini (2), and to put pressure on those chiefs who had not yet surrendered. Although Chelmsford's army had largely disappeared – many of the battalions were already on the road back to Natal – Wolseley cobbled together two new columns from what remained. One, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel C.M. Clarke, and consisting of the elements from the old 1<sup>st</sup> Division, were to march with Wolseley to oNdini, where he summoned the remaining great chiefs to remain with him. The other, drawn from Wood's old Flying Column and commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Baker Russell, was to march north to the Hlobane area, where the ardent royalists of the abaQulusi section remained defiant.

Wolseley had already determined that the country could not be pacified unless Cetshwayo was deposed. On 19 July he had summoned the chiefs living in the coastal districts to a meeting and informed them that the Zulu kingdom was no more, and that they would be informed in due course how the British intended to dispose of it. On 14 August he held a similar meeting at his new camp, pitched just two miles from the ruins of oNdini. Among those who attended to offer their submission were Chief Mnyamana of the Buthelezi, the king's most trusted councillor, and Chief Ntshingwayo, who had commanded at Isandlwana. Over the following few days, several of Cetshwayo's brothers surrendered, together with Zibhebhu kaMapitha, chief of the powerful Mandlakazi section in the north, and Wolseley's troops took possession of hundreds of firearms and spears.

The sight of the battlefield of Ulundi, just six weeks after the fight, was an awesome one, a fitting symbol of the utter destruction of King Cetshwayo's regime. A dozen royal homesteads had once ringed the Mahlabathini plain, with oNdini itself the most impressive. The British had destroyed them all. Although the fires had long since burned out, here and there a hut had survived the flames and was slowly crumbling under the effects of wind and rain, and great circles of ash marked where the homesteads once stood. There were other more grisly reminders of the battle, too, as Captain Alan Fitzroy Hart – ordered to survey the area – recalled;

The frequency with which I have come suddenly upon human skeletons in the grass has been quite forbidding. When one is not alone, the light of one's companion's presence dispels all the gloom of horrors, just as the arrival of a lamp spoils a ghost story!

There is nothing so dead and harmless as a skeleton, yet when you contemplate them in solitude they appear to possess a life of their own, especially when there are so many together. Some look angry, some threatening, some foolish, some astonished, and those that are on their faces seem to be asleep.

These skeletons were Zulus, killed in Lord Chelmsford's fight on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

On arrival here, search was made for the remains of the Hon. W. Drummond, a young man not in the army but attached to Lord Chelmsford's staff on account of his knowledge of the country. He was missing after the action, and so assumed to be killed, for Zulus never take prisoners. We heard from certain Zulus who had submitted to us, that after the action he had ridden forward amongst the retreating enemy, who, of course, killed him at once. They indicated about where this had happened, and after a long search his remains were found, and identified by some hair remaining, but principally by the boots with spurs. His bones alone remained besides, and they were duly interred by our chaplain. (3).

With most of the important chiefs forced to accept the reality of conquest, the king, as Wolseley had intended, found himself increasingly isolated. Wolseley was determined that his capture would provide the final chapter in the whole sorry saga of the war, however, and from oNdini his patrols swept through the country north of the Mfolozi river, following rumours and reports of the king's movements. In the days following the battle of Ulundi, Cetshwayo had made his way north, and had accepted an offer of sanctuary from Chief Zibhebhu, whose territory still lay beyond the reach of British patrols. The king was depressed, and resigned to the fact that he had lost his kingdom; when some of the young men from the uKhandempemvu regiment tried to join him, he sent them away. Then, a week after the battle, he had left his family in Zibhebhu's care – an act which was later to have bitter repercussions – and moved south again to Mnyamana's homestead, north of the Black Mfolozi valley. From here he had attempted to open negotiations with Wolseley, but once it became clear that the British were interested only in his unconditional surrender, and were prepared to hunt him down, he had taken to the bush. He was accompanied by just a few of his most faithful attendants, and by several girls of the royal household. To Wolseley's irritation, however, neither the recently surrendered chiefs nor the people at large seemed inclined to betray him. 'They all want peace badly', noted Anstruther, '[they are] tired of

war and want to sow next year's crops but they are very faithful brutes and can't make up their minds to give up Cetchwayo'.

In the end, it fell to a patrol of the King's Dragoon Guards, under the command of Major Richard Marter, to seize what last glory accrued to the British cause in Zululand. The hunt for the king had aroused the sporting instincts of Wolseley's officers, particularly those who had arrived too late to fight at Ulundi, and there had been a fierce rivalry among those engaged in the pursuit to finally capture him. Lieutenant Amyatt-Burney, attached to the Dragoons, described how an unexpected tip-off from a war-weary Zulu, led to his capture;

As we were about to move off again, a Zulu appeared coming towards us. Major Marter entered into conversation with him through an interpreter, and just as he was going away the Zulu said to the interpreter, 'Which way is the inkos going?' Major Marter said, 'I am going over that hill in front'. The native said, 'I think you had better go round that way (pointing to the right), as the wind blows from there to-day. I have had my say.' He then turned round and walked off. The hint was promptly taken, and everyone became very keen, as Major Marter told the officers that he thought there was a very good chance of their capturing the King. We then worked due east around the hill, and after a steep climb came to a kraal three miles on. We halted a little distance off, and the Major with the interpreter rode up to the kraal, which by the way belonged to Umnyamane, who had surrendered some days before. Major Marter asked for two guides, and two young men got up immediately, and led the way to another kraal about two miles off, situated on the top of a plateau looking down into the valley of the Ngome Forest. The aspect of the country had now changed altogether. Hitherto it had been very monotonous, nothing but a succession of undulating hills covered with rough grass, a good deal of which had been burnt; now the country was green and dotted here and there with clumps of trees, the Ngome Forest forming the back ground. On our approaching this kraal, the guides signed to Major Marter to halt his men close under the edge of the forest, and they then beckoned to him to follow them, and leading the way through a strip of wood, they pointed to a thick bush overhanging the valley about fifty yards on, signing for the Major to go on to it. This he did and perceived a kraal of twelve huts surrounded by a wattle fence, in the valley below. On his return he ordered all the men to draw their swords and leave their scabbards behind with the led horses and mules. This was to prevent the clanking of the swords giving any warning. He also told our natives to strip, so as to appear as much as possible like Zulus, and he left a Sergeant and eight men in charge of everything. This done he told the men 'that from all he could gather the king was in the kraal below in the valley, and that his capture depended on their obeying silently and quickly any order they might receive; that they would have to lead their horses down the side of the mountain, through the forest; and that when they arrived at the edge of the bush they would have to ride about a quarter of a mile. The right troop under Lieutenant Alexander was to extend on the right side; the left troop under command of Captain Godson to extend to the left, and come up on the left of the kraal – the squadron being under the command of Captain Gibbings. The natives were sent round by a circuitous route to the left, to cut off all chance of escape down the valley. When these preparations were completed, Major Marter told the guides to show the way, which proved a very rough one, being simply a Kaffir path. We all dismounted and advanced by single files, leading our horses down a very steep incline, strewn with rocks and stones; here and there a huge trunk of a tree barred the path; at another place there was a drop of some feet off a rock with a nasty landing; in fact to men in cold blood it would have appeared almost impossible to have got horses down at all. Eventually all reached the bottom of the hill in safety, and, though several horses slipped up, none were much damaged. The forest extended to within four hundred yards of the kraal, and there was a most convenient knoll between it and us, so that the inhabitants were unable to see anyone approaching from our side until we were quite close. Directly everyone was clear of the forest, Major Marter gave the word to mount, and he then waited for the guides, who had crawled through the long grass to see if all was right. On their return they appeared greatly excited, signing the Major to go on; and he accordingly gave the order to advance at a walk as long as we were hidden by the knoll. On arriving at the top he gave the word to gallop, and led the way himself. The ground between the forest and the kraal was rough and stony. One man came to grief through his horse putting his foot in a hole and rolling over him. As the cavalry appeared in sight of the kraal, our natives showed themselves in the very nick of time on the other side. One shot was fired, but it is uncertain from which side. Carrying out Major Marter's instructions we rapidly and completely surrounded the kraal. The inhabitants, who numbered twenty-three, were standing at the very narrow entrance to the

enclosure and armed, some with assegais, some rifles. Major Marter dismounted and went inside the enclosure with the interpreter. Umkoosana, an induna of the Unodwengo regiment, who had stuck to Cetewayo throughout his flight from Ulundi, was told by the interpreter to show Major Marter in which hut the king was. This he did (it was the third hut to the right of the entrance) and was then told to request his majesty to step outside and show himself. The king at first refused to do so, saying he was afraid that directly he put his head out of the hut he would immediately be shot. When assured that his life was safe, he coolly asked 'What rank does the officer hold to whom I am to surrender?' Major Marter replied that he was the representative of the Commander-in-Chief. Mr Oftebro, the interpreter, and son of the Missionary at Ekowe, who had known Cetywayo since he was a boy, then spoke to him. Cetywayo immediately recognised his voice, and called out to him by name, asking if it was safe for him to come out. On being assured in the affirmative he appeared crawling out of the hut in the usual Kaffir fashion, on his hands and knees. He wore a moncha made of otter-skins, and had a ringkop on his head. The upper part of his body was covered with a large red tablecloth, embroidered with green flowers, fastened from the neck in front, and hanging over his shoulders. Directly he stood up, all doubts as to his being the king were set at rest, as at a glance we could see his superiority both in appearance and carriage to all other Zulus. He looked round on everyone with the greatest scorn and stalked majestically into the middle of the kraal. Six Dragoons were immediately dismounted and told off as his guard, with loaded carbines. Cetywayo was informed that if he attempted to escape he would be immediately shot, and he was then marched outside the enclosure, while the huts were searched. Amongst the articles found were several Martini-Henry Rifles, nearly all of which belonged to the 1<sup>st</sup> 24<sup>th</sup>, a battered bugle, and a private's glengarry cap, a few very fine assegais, including two barbed ones which belonged to the king himself, and which were found in his hut, and a double-barrelled central fire gun, which Major Marter eventually appropriated to himself, to the very great disgust of the officer who found it ... (4).

The Dragoons took Cetshwayo under close escort to Wolseley's camp at oNdini; on one occasion, several of the King's attendants suddenly tried to take advantage of the falling dusk to run away, but the Dragoons fired after them hitting two men. The king was led into camp in triumph on the last day of August 1879. For Wolseley, the king's capture marked the real end of the war. In the fortnight he had waited at oNdini, accepting Zulu surrenders, he had decided the settlement of Zululand. Ironically, at home the Disraeli government had fallen, to be replaced by Gladstone's Liberals, and there was no stomach now for the expense and protracted commitment of annexation. Wolseley's instructions were to impose a settlement, which would prevent the Zulu kingdom posing a threat to its white neighbours, and then to withdraw. His solution was to exile King Cetshwayo, and to divide Zululand up among the regional chiefs. In selecting the chiefs to be favoured, he paid lip service to the idea, popular in Natal, that Zululand could be broken down into the constituent parts that had been independent in the days before Shaka. More important, however, Wolseley's choice was coloured by the need to choose proxies who either had a vested interest in supporting the British, or who were opposed to the Royal House. Wolseley's plan was a classic case of divide and rule, and in due course it would produce a crop of bitterness and bloodshed more destructive to the Zulus than even the British invasion.

For Cetshwayo there was only exile. He was taken across country to the beach at Port Durnford – along the way he pointed out to his captors the bush where his uncle, King Shaka, used to sit when judging cowards in his army – and on 4 September boarded the steamer *Natal*, destined for the Cape. A fortnight later, he and his faithful retainers were securely lodged in quarters at the old Dutch castle in Cape Town.

Most of the lingering resistance in Zululand collapsed when news of the king's capture circulated. Only in the north, in the troubled areas around Luneburg, did the survivors of the raiding bands of the chiefs Mbilini and Manyanyoba hold out, until at last the British lost all patience with them. According to Anstruther, whose regiment, the 94<sup>th</sup>, had at last marched out of Zululand towards the Transvaal:

The day before yesterday we hustled the tribe (Chief Manyobo) who did the mischief. They are outcasts, not proper Zulus or Swazies, and live in caves in the surrounding hills which they won't come out of so they were told to send their women and children away and give themselves up. They did the former but not the latter. The women and children came in good quantities to our fort in Luneburg, five miles off where four companies of the 4<sup>th</sup> are so the day before yesterday some of us and the 4<sup>th</sup> from the Fort went up the hills and set to work to blow up the caves with gun cotton. There were a great many tremendous explosions but, I am afraid, very little damage was done. We got 2 prisoners and blew in

the entrance of a lot of caves and the 4<sup>th</sup> unfortunately lost 2 men, their sergeant major and a corporal who went into one of the caves and were shot immediately. It was very stupid. We got all their goats and cattle and I fancy they will give one of the prisoners to Mayobo's head man and the other to his son. They are a very small insignificant tribe but have been doing a lot of mischief. An expedition has gone out against them today and they will be harried til they give in. (5).

And on that inglorious note, the war came to an end. The British troops marched on, to pursue a different quarrel against King Sekhukhune in the north-eastern Transvaal, or to depart for distant garrisons around the Empire. For the Zulu, the repercussions of the invasion had scarcely begun.

## References.

(1) Anstruther papers, National Army Museum, London. All the quoted passages in this article are to be found in Ian Knight, *The National Army Museum Book of the Zulu War*, Sidgwick and Jackson, 2003.

(2) King Cetshwayo's principle royal homestead was variously known as oNdini or Ulundi, from the common root 'undi'. The Zulu generally used the variant oNdini; although the British started referring to it as such in correspondence, they adopted the alternative Ulundi, which was widely used during the invasion itself. By convention, the battle is generally referred to as Ulundi, and the homestead itself as oNdini. At the time the Zulus knew the battle by different names – either kwaNodwengu (from the royal homestead standing nearest the British square) or oCwecweni – 'the sheet-iron fort', from a belief, inspired by the sun glinting on British bayonets, that the square was protected by corrugated iron.

(3) *Letters of Major-General Fitzroy Hart-Synot*, London 1912.

(4) Papers of Lt. H.A. Amyatt-Burney, National Army Museum, London.

(5) Anstruther Papers, NAM.

## Marching out of Zululand *Illustrated London News*.

