

If the catastrophe at Isandlwana and the heroics of Rorke's Drift had not occurred, then the exploits of the Number 1 Coastal Column might well have ranked with the later sieges and reliefs of Chitral and Mafeking. Instead, the invasion of Zululand by the Coastal Column was overshadowed by the fate of the Centre Column and, until recently, all but neglected by historians. (1) Lord Chelmsford originally planned to invade Zululand with five columns which he later modified to three due to logistical problems. He chose to accompany the Centre Column from Rorke's Drift, with Evelyn Wood's Column on his left flank and Col. Pearson's Coastal Column at the Lower Drift of the Tugela River on his right. He tasked the latter with the role of marching over 37 miles of rough twisting track from the Lower Drift on the Tugela river to occupy the mission station at Eshowe before the Zulus destroyed the buildings. Here the column's supply wagons were to be unloaded and returned to pick up more stores, while defences were built to convert Eshowe into a fortified advanced supply depot. From here it was intended to advance on the Zulu capital, Ulundi, in a converging movement with the other two columns.

The man he chose to lead the Coastal Column was 45 year old Colonel Charles Knight Pearson, late of the 3rd Regiment (The Buffs). He was regarded as an experienced and steady officer whose regiment had served in South Africa for three years. At the planning stage of the invasion, he had resigned from the regiment in order to serve on Chelmsford's staff. Given the command of Number 1 Column, he was re-united with his old regiment who, together with the less experienced 99th Regiment, made up the coastal column's infantry force.

The Royal Artillery supplied two seven pound guns and a rocket trough as did the Naval Landing Brigade. The 136 strong Bluejackets from HMS Active and HMS Tenedos also provided 2 rocket tubes and the American Gatling gun, about to be used in action by the British for the first time. (2) Incidentally, the Buffs and HMS Active had an earlier association. In 1876, when the regiment was sailing to South Africa, the troopship "St.Lawrence" ran aground some 90 miles north of Cape Town. Colonel Pearson managed to evacuate everyone safely to the shore where they waited for two days in the open before being rescued by HMS Active. (3)

In tactical terms, a coastal column in support of the main centre column was a sound enough strategy but one which overlooked the unseasonable bad weather, rugged terrain, prevalent sickness and the constant threat of an enemy whose tactical abilities and bravery were badly underestimated. The early British defeat at Isandlwana effectively halted the whole invasion and made the Coastal Column's position virtually redundant. Because of the slow communications, Pearson only learnt of the full scale of the British defeat at Isandlwana on the 2nd February by which time his advance force of some 1,800 men had reached Eshowe, only to be surrounded by the Zulus. In the aftermath of Isandlwana, Chelmsford made the relief of Eshowe his number one priority. By focusing British attention on extricating Pearson's column, he was eventually able to ameliorate the storm that broke over him and the relief column's ultimate success undoubtedly helped to restore his confidence.

With the column was a force of about 2,000 natives of the NNC who were not expected to fight as infantry but to scout and pursue a beaten foe. The Royal Engineers supplied 85 sappers and the 312 strong squadron of horsemen were made up from the Mounted Infantry as well as the more colourfully named local units from the Natal Hussars and the Mounted Rifles from towns including Durban, Stanger, Victoria and Alexander. The total number of fighting men was over 4,000. In addition, 620 civilians were employed to drive the 384 ox wagons. All in all it was a formidable force and a logistical nightmare.

An intermediate but strong fortification was built on a bluff on the Natal bank overlooking the Lower Drift and named in honour of Colonel Pearson. Its commanding position must have appeared formidable to the Zulus as they looked across the 300 yards of the Tugela River that separated the two countries. Having assembled his forces, Pearson's first task was to move them across the Tugela, treacherously swollen by heavy rain, and establish a base on the opposite bank. This laborious task was accomplished in five days by the use of a large pont constructed by the carpenters from HMS Active. A member of that ship's crew also had the unwanted distinction of being the first casualty of the Zulu War when he fell into the fast flowing river and was drowned.

Once across the Tugela River and in enemy country, Pearson constructed a fortified camp which was named Fort Tenedos. So far, the few Zulus seen had kept their distance, content to observe and report back to Cetshwayo. Leaving a garrison of sailors, two companies of the 99th and some NNC to guard the fort, Pearson set off for Eshowe in two columns. Because of the heavy rains, the track was soon turned into a quagmire and the many dongas and rivers were swollen with rushing water. Progress was slow but steady. The most difficult part was getting the heavily laden wagons across the flooded water courses, which necessitated the native pioneers digging away the steep banks to create a crossing point. Soaked to the skin

and exhausted from each day's slog, the men endured miserable nights in their leaky tents. The inexperienced and nervous recruits of the 99th further tried their comrades' patience with several false alarms when on night guard. Notwithstanding Chelmsford's orders, no attempt was ever made to laager the wagons and, with the two columns stretched out for several miles along the track, they were highly vulnerable to Zulu attack. In fact, a Zulu force of about 3,500 warriors had already been detached from Cetshwayo's main impi and was marching to intercept Pearson's struggling column. As they headed south, the approaching Zulus were joined by increasing numbers of warriors until they totalled more than 6,000.

On the morning of the 22nd January, the column was preparing to march off when it was discovered that the grass surrounding the camp had been completely flattened by a large body of men. During the night the Zulus had surrounded the camp with the intention of attacking at dawn but had been dissuaded by the calling of the sentries to each other and, suspecting the British knew of their position, the Zulus withdrew.

The next obstacle was to cross the Nyezane River. Pearson sent his mounted scouts ahead who reported that a flat plateau on the far bank would make a suitable place to halt for breakfast. Despite having reservations about halting in an area surrounded by thick undergrowth, Pearson decided to halt for a couple of hours to allow the men to breakfast before ordering the first wagons across the river.

The track from the river followed a low ridge that ran up the middle of a valley between two hills that rose steeply either side from gullies which were filled with thick tall reeds and grass. The summit of the hill on the right, known to the Zulus as 'Wombane', was occupied by some Zulu scouts. As they were only three quarters of a mile away, Pearson ordered a company of the NNC to disperse them. Led by white officers, they ascended the track and then crossed the right-hand gully whereupon the Zulus melted away into the thick undergrowth of the hillside. As the NNC climbed Wombane, the natives became apprehensive and tried to warn their white officers that the Zulus were lying in ambush ahead. Unable to understand, the imperial troops pressed on as the levies held back. Suddenly, from out of the tall grass appeared hundreds of Zulus who quickly fell upon the soldiers while the natives fled back towards the wagons.

At the sound of firing, the Mounted Infantry and Volunteer troopers advanced and formed a skirmish line to the right of the track and started firing into the mass of Zulus advancing down Wombane. This was the left horn of the impi who were intending to surround those wagons that had managed to cross the river. Because the NNC had approached Wombane, the trap had been prematurely sprung. Pearson ordered up the Naval Brigade, the Artillery and two companies of the Buffs who quickly came into action, pouring a heavy fire into the rapidly advancing warriors. To the rear, more wagons and men were crossing and joining their comrades in the firing line. The Gatling gun was brought into action to good effect causing the Zulu attack to stall.

The Zulu centre and right horn then advanced into the attack but the soldiers had manoeuvred to counter them and the Zulus soon sustained heavy casualties. As the Zulus gave ground, so the order to advance was given. There was a race between the Buffs and sailors as to who would close with the enemy first. The advance slowed towards the top of the rise as the Zulus made a determined stand and there were several casualties from the column. The sailors made another wild charge and the Zulus finally broke and fled.

The battle had lasted some ninety minutes and a potential disaster became a stunning victory for the British. Pearson had every reason to feel gratified with the way his men had behaved but one wonders about the outcome if the Zulu attack had been co-ordinated against the strung-out column as it climbed the track. The British had lost twelve men killed and some twenty wounded, two of whom later died of their wounds. The Zulus suffered in excess of 400 dead and many hundreds wounded. It was significant that the British tried to help and comfort the wounded Zulus. Attitudes changed after the slaughter and mutilations of Isandlwana were made known and in later actions few wounded were spared or prisoners taken.

The Battle of Nyezane had taken place just a few hours before Isandlwana, which lay only fifty miles to the northwest, but the victory was all but forgotten in the wake of that disaster. Pearson paused only to bury his own dead in a single grave before ordering the march to resume. He did not want to give the Zulus the impression that they had checked his advance in any way; he also wanted to be clear of the very rough bush country. The day became insufferably hot and after a further tough four mile march, Pearson called an early halt for the night.

Rising at 3am on the morning of the 23rd, the column moved off with the dawn and advanced the 5 miles to Eshowe which they reached at 10am. Here they were pleasantly surprised to find the mission station in good condition and complete with a garden filled with orange trees. The buildings consisted of a steepled church with a corrugated iron roof and three other adobe built structures. The mission covered an area of 120 yards by 80 yards, sloping west to east and there was a good supply of water from two nearby streams. In addition, there were three more buildings standing a short distance away. Although the site seemed to be an excellent choice, the senior Engineer, Captain Warren Wynne, had reservations. Despite being on high ground, the mission was overlooked by higher ground within firing range. Further more, a deep ravine filled with undergrowth came right up to the perimeter and could conceal an enemy advance. As soon as camp was made, work started on making the area defensible.

Undergrowth was cleared to give clear fields of fire and entrenching began. Stores were unloaded and placed in the outlying buildings. On the 25th January, 48 of the empty wagons were escorted back to Fort Pearson to collect more stores. They passed another convoy en-route to Eshowe and heard the first rumours that all was not well with the Central Column and that Colonel Durnford and his NNC had been annihilated.

It was not until the 28th that Pearson received a message, brought by runner, from Lord Chelmsford. Inexplicably, it did not mention the catastrophe at Isandlwana, but stated that Chelmsford had pulled back to Natal and that Eshowe was to prepare for the whole Zulu army to descend on them. Chelmsford gave Pearson the option of retreating back to Fort Tenedos. In the absence of firm information, Pearson logically concluded that Durnford's No 2 column had been defeated. Pearson took the unusual step of calling all officers to a council of war to decide whether to retreat or stay. Having endured a gruelling journey to occupy and fortify Eshowe, Pearson was reluctant to withdraw. If the might of the Zulu army was heading his way, any returning column would risk being overwhelmed. Having listened to the opinions and suggestions of his officers, it was nevertheless felt that they should try and reach Natal, once there, they could assist in its defence against the likely Zulu counter-invasion.

Then Captain Wynne, who arrived late for the meeting, put forward a strong case for remaining at Eshowe. Pearson and the rest of the officers were persuaded, and so the die was cast. With the arrival of the incoming convoy bringing fresh supplies, all hands worked with a will to build up the defences.

Pearson decided to reduce the number of men in the camp and ordered Major Barrow to take his mounted men and the NNC back to Fort Tenedos. He also sent a note to Chelmsford explaining his position and requested a full tactical appraisal of events along the border. The strength of the garrison was reduced to 1,460 combatants and about 335 civilians. Because of a lack of space, it was decided to drive away about 1,000 oxen of which about a half returned to Natal with their drivers. A cattle laager was then constructed west of the entrenchment which, in the days to come, became a noisome health hazard for the garrison.

After working in the oppressive heat of the day, the men had to sleep the best they could under the wagons, there being no room to erect their tents within the encampment. Their sleep was often interrupted by false alarms which were further debilitating. Large bodies of Zulus were regularly seen, but none approached Eshowe. The hot weather broke and heavy rain added to the soldiers' miseries. With no tents, everyone was drenched and, as a result, sickness broke out. Although the garrison had food and plenty of ammunition, it lacked adequate medical supplies, and, on 1st February, the first man died of fever.

The heavy rains caused the area within the entrenchment to become a sea of deep mud which added to the garrison's discomfort. News brought by runners on the 2nd February plunged everyone into a state of shocked depression. At last they learned the truth of the fate of the Centre Column and it is indicative of the problem of communications that it took 12 days to acquaint Pearson with news of Isandlwana. One wonders if he had known days earlier, whether he would have ordered a withdrawal back to the Lower Drift. Instead, nearly 1,800 men were effectively under siege with no immediate prospect of receiving supplies or reinforcements and, in the light of this news, Pearson ordered the commissariat to put the garrison on three-quarter rations.

Meanwhile work continued on the defences and by the second week of February, Captain Wynne had turned the hastily built entrenchment into a formidable looking fortress. The whole area was now surrounded by a deep and wide ditch and was further protected by a 6 foot high defensive wall. Firing platforms for the cannon and Gatling guns were constructed at the angles of the ramparts and drawbridges were built at the two gates.

Conscious of the danger of sickness breaking out in such an overcrowded area, Pearson gave great attention to preserving their fresh water from becoming polluted and of siting and rotating the latrine area downhill away from the camp. Despite these precautions, the stench of the camp and the nearby cattle laager became increasingly offensive, attracting clouds of flies which infested the garrison's food supplies. The men's general health rapidly deteriorated, the majority of soldiers suffering from serious stomach disorders. By the end of February, seven men had died, including one suicide by drowning. Unsanitary conditions, exposure and a lack of sufficient medicines caused a steady decline in the health and morale of the defenders. Apart from an occasional skirmish with the outlying vedettes, the Zulus kept their distance but constantly made their presence known. An estimated 5,000 Zulus were in the immediate vicinity but, having learned from their experience at Rorke's Drift, were not inclined to attack such a well defended position. Instead, they maintained a loose mobile ring of some 500 warriors to watch and harry the defenders in the hope that starvation would force them into the open where they would be vulnerable to attack.

Frequent heavy storms and strong winds battered the fort and turned the area into a quagmire. During one storm at the end of the month, the Naval Brigade's position was all but washed away by a flash flood, which also seriously damaged the parapet. The livestock had exhausted all the grass near the fort and now had to be sent further afield to graze. This entailed strong escorts drawn from the Buffs, the 99th and the Bluejackets who disliked this tedious detail. The monotony was often lifted by Zulus taunting and shouting insults at them.

As supplies diminished, the meagre rations consisting of hard biscuits, mealies and stringy meat was further reduced. This depressing state of affairs was relieved somewhat by Colonel Pearson ordering the auction of rations left behind by the mounted volunteers. It is a measure of how desperate the besieged troops had become for a change from the monotonous food that certain defenders were prepared to pay highly inflated prices for items like a jar of pickles or a tin of cocoa. Pearson estimated that £7 worth of goods fetched in excess of £100! Looking further to raise flagging spirits, Colonel Pearson led a 500 strong night raid on 1st March to a Zulu kraal a few miles distant. As they manoeuvred into position just before dawn, a lone Zulu spotted them, raised the alarm and the attack falteringly commenced. Although 62 huts were burned and the artillery inflicted some casualties, Pearson's men had to make a fighting retreat for several hours until they reached the fort.

The next day brought a more lasting boost to morale. One of the mounted vedettes noticed a distant bright flashing light coming from the direction of the Lower Drift. It took a while to realise that it was an improvised heliograph sending out a signal to establish communications with Eshowe. At last Pearson and the garrison were informed that the Zulus had not overrun Natal and that help could soon be on the way. (4) It took four frustrating days to get a cloud-interrupted message through to Pearson. It advised that a 1,000 strong column would be setting off on the 13th March to relieve him.

### **Re-invasion**

During early March of 1879, Lord Chelmsford built up a strong enough force to attempt Pearson's relief. He had 400 men from HMS *Shah*, 200 from HMS *Boadicea* with two Gatling guns. Beside the Buffs and 99th left at the Lower Drift by Pearson, the infantry comprised the newly arrived 57th, 91st Highlanders and 60th Rifles. The NNC and Major Barrow's mounted troops made up the balance of the relieving column. The total strength was 3,390 whites and 2,280 blacks, well exceeding the number flashed to Pearson. It was Chelmsford's intention that the column would be commanded by Major-General Henry Hope Crealock, brother of his military secretary, Lieutenant John North Crealock.

As Crealock did not reach Natal in time, Chelmsford took personal command on the 23rd March. Chelmsford wrote to Evelyn Wood in the north, and asked him to make some demonstration to divert Zulu forces away from the south. The result was the debacle at Hlobane on the 28th March.

On the same day, the coastal column was ferried across the Tugela River and began its advance via a route further to the east than Pearson had taken. Chelmsford's new found caution made him choose more open country where he could laager his wagons and entrench each night. He further ordered that the ammunition boxes were to be readily available on the wagons and that the lid screws should be removed. Once he had reached Eshowe, Chelmsford intended to relieve the garrison and replace them with fresh troops and supplies.

The progress of the column was slowed by torrential rain that appeared each evening, swelling the rivers and streams and turning the track into a morass. As Chelmsford wished to reduce the number of wagons, he had ordered that all tents were to be left behind, so officers and men had to sleep on the mud totally unprotected from the regular downpours. Due to the adverse weather, their early attempts at laagering were chaotic and experienced men like John Dunn despaired of the British ever beating Cetshwayo. By the third evening, a simpler system had been devised so that the laager would be a square of 130 yards each side, made up of 30 wagons butted together, and all the livestock placed within. The troops dug a shelter trench 15 yards in front of the laager's sides and sited the artillery and Gatling guns at each corner.

It was as well they managed to get themselves into order for, as anticipated, the Zulus were about to launch an attack in force. The two forces met early on the morning of 2nd April near a kraal named Gingindlovu where the British had established their overnight defensive laager on a small rise. At 5am, Major Barrow's mounted scouts had ridden out into the mist and soon ran into the advancing scouts of a large body of Zulus. The scouts' firing as they returned alerted the soldiers in the laager who prepared for the gathering onslaught. They were ordered to fire volleys at a range of no more than 300 yards. The account, however, was opened by the crew of the Gatling gun at the north east corner who were given permission to test the range at about 800 yards and a short burst cut a swathe through the advancing warriors.

Undeterred, the Zulus sought to surround the British and steadily advanced through the tall grass. The first flank of the laager to be attacked was the north side defended mainly by young and inexperienced recruits of the 3/60th Rifles, who were about to experience their baptism of fire. What a terrifying moment for boys who had been regaled with stories of the slaughter at Isandlwana now to be confronted with a seemingly irresistible charging horde of fearless warriors. The young soldiers either froze or fired wildly. Those on elevated positions on the wagons saw that the soldiers were firing too high and the order was quickly given to lower their rifle sights. They were further unnerved when their commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Francis Northey, was hit in the shoulder and taken to the ambulance. The wound did not look that serious when it was dressed. As Northey prepared to resume his position in the firing line, the bullet penetrated an

artery and he collapsed, haemorrhaging through his dressing. Northey remained under medical care at the laager at Gingindlovu where he painfully lingered on until he died on the 6th April.

Under the determined efforts of their officers and NCO's, the young recruits were steadied enough to repel the attack. Meanwhile the Zulu centre attacked the west face of the square which was manned by the 99th, whose volleys stalled the warriors' charge. During this furious exchange of firing, Lieutenant George Johnson, who had fought at the earlier battle of Nyezane, was shot dead.

The Zulu right horn then attacked the south wall occupied by the new recruits of the 91st Highlanders, who were much steadier than their counterparts of the 60th and beat off the attack. The remnants of this attack moved round to launch a final assault on the east side of the laager, which was defended by the experienced men of the 57th, whose steady firing prevented any warrior getting close. Due to the main Zulu force advancing through very long grass, those civilians with rifles had a better field of fire from atop the wagons and inflicted many casualties. As the Zulu attack appeared to falter, Chelmsford prematurely ordered Barrow's mounted troops out to drive off the warriors, only to hastily recall them as they were in danger of being surrounded.

By now any assault on the square had ceased and the Zulus sought shelter in the long grass as the shrapnel from the 7 pounders took its toll. Finally, after an hour's fighting, Chelmsford again ordered Barrow's men out of the square. This time the Zulus gave way and were pursued from the battlefield by the horsemen, who were enthusiastically joined by the NNC.

Although the enemy were in retreat, they were still capable of putting up a spirited and deadly resistance. Finally, they were thoroughly dispersed and the task of totting up the casualty lists began. The British had lost sixteen dead, including seven natives, and fifty wounded. The Zulus were estimated to have suffered 1,200 dead and many wounded. The rest of the day was spent burying the dead and reducing the size of the laager. Chelmsford decided to leave a reduced laager and press on to Eshowe with a flying column.

Meanwhile in Eshowe, the battle had been keenly followed by those with telescopes and binoculars. Pearson ordered congratulations to be flashed to Chelmsford and the garrison awaited impatiently to be relieved. (4) Chelmsford's men finally reached Eshowe after a tough fifteen mile march. After the initial euphoria of seeing new faces and catching up with news, the defenders were somewhat deflated by Chelmsford's decision to abandon the fort instead of leaving a fresh garrison; a decision which upset many of the defenders who felt their efforts had been in vain.

Pearson was ordered to take his command from Eshowe on the 4th April while Chelmsford accompanied Barrow's mounted troops to attack the nearby homestead of Cetshwayo's brother, Prince Dabulamanzi. They failed to surprise the Zulu chief who retreated to some nearby heights from where he watched his homestead put to the torch. Collecting the rest of his men, Chelmsford abandoned Eshowe and marched after Pearson's column. As soon as it was deemed safe, the ever watchful Zulus entered the deserted mission and burnt it to the ground. Catching up with Pearson, Chelmsford ordered him to head back by the most direct route to the Lower Drift, which he subsequently reached on the 7th April. Chelmsford marched his column back to his old laager at Gingindlovu, where the stench from the many Zulu dead drove him to remove to a fresh site nearby. There was still the threat that the Zulus would attack again and the troops remained on the alert. Despite their victory, the new troops had seen that the Zulus were a formidable force and were greatly unnerved by them.

It was in this climate of anticipation that a tragedy occurred on the night before they reached the old laager. While on piquet duty in the early hours of the morning, panic seized some of the youngsters of the 60th when they mistook John Dunn's native scouts for Zulus. When the pandemonium had died down two native scouts lay dead, eight were wounded with a further five soldiers wounded. This was the worst incidence of soldiers shooting at their own side in a war that was littered with similar accidents.

Chelmsford's column reached the border soon after Pearson had arrived. He had left a strong force behind at the entrenched campsite just a mile south of the Gingindlovu battle field, which he felt could be supplied comfortably from Fort Tenedos.

Chelmsford was fulsome in his praise for the tenacious Colonel Pearson and his men and well pleased with the outcome of the two battles which had dealt the Zulus a severe blow. The human cost of holding Eshowe was evidenced by 28 crosses in the cemetery below the mission and hundreds of sick, some 200 of these were so ill they were ferried to the hospital at Fort Pearson, one of whom was Captain Wynne whose energy and skill had turned the mission into an impregnable fortress. Sadly he succumbed to typhoid and died on the 19th April. Colonel Pearson, himself suffering the effects of typhoid, was appointed a brigade commander for the new invasion. As he never fully recovered from his ordeal, he was unable to take up this post and was eventually invalided home in June.

The replacement 2nd Division commander for the re-invasion, Major-General Henry Hope Crealock, took charge on 18th April and set about building up the column's strength and supplies. Chelmsford's new plan was to invade with just two columns. He would accompany the main First Division, augmented by Colonel Evelyn Wood's Flying Column for their advance in the north. General Crealock's mandate was similar to

that given to Colonel Pearson except that he was to establish strongly fortified staging posts along his advance and to use these as a springboard to destroy two large Zulu homesteads before supporting the First Division's advance on Ulundi. Having established two forts named Crealock and Chelmsford, he ran into the same problem that dogged the British throughout the campaign, namely lack of wagons and oxen. The new posts had to be laboriously supplied but only at the expense of overworking the already exhausted draft animals, many of which died. The putrefying carcasses left at the side of the busy track made conditions very unpleasant and, as a result, men began to fall sick in increasing numbers.

In order to hurry supplies forward, a pontoon bridge was constructed across the Tugela River and a suitable beach for landing supplies was established 30 miles up the coast and named Port Durnford. A third post, Fort Napoleon, was constructed as Crealock slowly advanced further inland. Because of his logistical problems, Crealock's progress had been painfully slow and he had little influence on the main events happening further north. Even though he destroyed the two large military homesteads and accepted the surrender of many of the enemy, he was inevitably castigated for being slow and ineffective. General Wolseley, who had arrived just too late to prevent Chelmsford from finally defeating the Zulus at Ulundi, dismissed Crealock's efforts by suggesting "...the First Division might as well have been marching along the Woking and Aldershot road."

Of all the different terrains that were fought over in Zululand, the Coastal area was the most difficult. Although casualties from fighting were light, the sick list was extensive. No awards for bravery were made or personal reputations enhanced and the participants had to be content with the campaign medal as the sole reward for their exceptional endurance. Colonel Pearson, though, for leading the Coastal Column for the initial invasion, was made Companion of the Bath.

### References.

1. Fearful Hard Times by Ian Castle & Ian Knight, pub.1994 is the most detailed account of the Coastal Column.
2. At this time, the Gatling gun was used only by the Navy and mounted on board ships to give covering fire to landing parties. In 1873 it had been present during the Ashanti War but not used in action.
3. The coast around South Africa claimed several troopships. The most notable was the paddle steamer *Birkenhead* in 1852, when 454 men perished. (One of the few survivors actually served in the Frontier Light Horse in 1879). Other troopships that foundered during the Zulu War were *The City of Paris*, carrying men of the 21st and *The Clyde*, with replacements for the 24th lost at Isandlwana. Fortunately there was no loss of life in either wreck.
4. Although the heliograph was available, no signalling equipment used at this stage of the war. By using a mirror borrowed from a local settler, the men on the Fort Pearson promontory were able to establish contact. In response, the Eshowe garrison tried a variety of unsuccessful signalling methods ranging from a large moveable screen that sent Morse code messages to a hot air balloon that was expected to drift all the way to the border. In the end, they were able to fashion their own heliograph, which was successful.

### Col. Pearson observing the attack on Wombane Hill (Nyezane)



